

Item 4e

Improvement Programme Board – report from Cllr Peter Fleming (Chairman)

1. At its next meeting on 8 November the Improvement Programme Board will review the LGA Leadership offer to the sector and how it might develop over the next three to five years. The programme currently brings together key offers from the Leadership Centre with key elements from LGID's Political Leadership and Managerial Leadership teams as well as new offers reflecting the LGA's priorities around leadership development. These offers have now been largely consolidated into the new team and the current programme of work is being delivered. It is now a good time to review the overall offer before service planning for 2012/13 starts in detail.
2. More than 40 people, including councillors and member development officers from across the country, attended a seminar to launch a Political Mentoring Toolkit at Local Government House on 7 October. The LGA worked closely with Professor Silvester of City University, London in the research and development of the document which provides guidance for both the mentor and the mentee and for those wanting to set up mentoring arrangements for councillors. The guide will be available as a free download from the LGA website.
3. **Transparency:** The LGA has responded to the Cabinet Office consultations on open data: Making Open Data Real and the Data Policy for a Public Data Corporation. We support the general presumption in favour of open data but have expressed concerns about the overly prescriptive nature of the proposed policy and the potential that open data could add an additional burden. We have reiterated local government's right to self regulate in how far local authorities make use of open data to support transparency, accountability, self-service and improve productivity and efficiencies within local areas. We also call for a harmonisation of legislation and further simplification to licensing and charging. Further information is available on <http://www.local.gov.uk/open-data-consultation>.
4. Work has progressed on the reshaping of the **Productivity Programme**. This has resulted in developing a practical offer to councils that will be presented for approval at the next Improvement Programme Board. Specifically the offer includes:
 - 4.1 an Adult Care Efficiency pathfinder programme working with up to 15 councils to improve efficiency in adult care
 - 4.2 practical services for councils to improve productivity such as productivity Masterclasses and Experts, including holding a Productivity Masterclass with Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire
 - 4.3 requesting Andrew Smith (CE of Hampshire CC) to develop a business case for goods and services procurement hubs

- 4.4 work to improve the productivity of children's services (working with the Children's Improvement Board)
 - 4.5 examination of ways to improve waste collection (working with IESE).
5. The LGA is now supporting and delivering the 2nd wave of the Capital Asset Pathfinder programme. Fifteen councils were selected for this wave, covering 19 per cent of English LAs and representing 16 per cent of the population. Wave 2 Pathfinders will be expected to produce at least one business case by January 2012 and a ten year delivery plan by March 2012. A series of regional meetings have been held with the councils to develop their plans and help them to achieve around 20% saving and 25% CO2 emissions.
6. Further work has been undertaken with the National Fraud Authority on the development of **Fighting Fraud Locally** an approach to tackling fraud in local government. While progress has been made, there is more to be done to ensure that the document strikes the right balance between local autonomy and a consistent national approach, and to ensure that central Government departments collaborate effectively in fighting fraud by sharing information and removing perverse barriers.
7. We are continuing to promote the LGA **Taking the Lead** seven point support offer to councils. A recent dip-stick survey demonstrated high levels of awareness of the offer and key elements of it – but further work needs to be done to raise the profile with leaders and senior members. We have launched a new publication promoting the corporate peer challenge offer and have delivered 42 peer challenges to date (incl corporate adults, safeguarding children & planning) with a further 54 booked/ in discussion to the end of 2011/12.
8. We have responded to the recent **Audit Commission consultation on its work programme and fees** for 2012/13. Our response welcomes the proposal to reduce audit fees for audited bodies by 10 per cent from the published 2011/12 scale fees and the expectation that the current procurement exercise will realise further reductions in the cost of audit, which can be passed on to audited bodies in the form of even lower fees. However we believe it is also important that the costs of key elements of the auditors' work should be itemised – to provide greater transparency – and that there should be a presumption that any additional work agreed between the council and auditor is not chargeable at a higher rate. We are also clear that further reductions could have been made if the balance on earnings from local government activity of £26.8m as at 31 March 2010 had not been exhausted by the high level of redundancies.

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