

Improvement and Innovation Board – report from Councillor Peter Fleming (Chairman)

Innovation

Improvement and Innovation Board

1. I am delighted to announce that at our September meeting, colleagues and I agreed to rename the Board – the *Improvement and Innovation Board*. This is more than a presentational change; it more accurately reflects the breadth and depth of the work we have always been engaged in as well as reflecting my personal belief that innovation in local government is key for its future survival.

Creative Councils

2. I know that councils do far more innovation than we are ever aware of here at the LGA. I know too that councils are keen to try and be more innovative. This was clearly illustrated by my Board's discussion this month following excellent presentations from two of the six LGA/NESTA Creative Councils, Cornwall and Monmouthshire. Other Creative Councils will be discussing their ideas with other LGA Boards over the coming months and there is plenty of creative councils' presence on Knowledge Hub so please keep your eyes and ears peeled and I will continue to keep you updated through this report.

Call for innovation experiences

3. We are also keen to share councils' examples of innovation with colleagues here at the LGA and to a wider audience. I am committed to pushing the message that councils and the people that work in them should have the space and protection, where necessary, to take risks for the benefit of people, places and budgets of the future – but to do this we need to share real stories about the difference such attitudes and actions make. If you have any example from your council please share them with teresa.payne@local.gov.uk or mike.short@local.gov.uk.

Improvement

The future of local public audit

4. The LGA recently responded to the Government's consultation accompanying the draft local audit bill, which was published in July. In doing so we welcomed the proposal for councils to appoint their own auditors. However, we strongly believe that the requirement for independent audit panel with a majority of independent members and an independent chair is unnecessary and we expressed concerns about the proposal for the National Audit Office to have powers to undertake studies for the purposes of identifying 'improvements' which may be made by councils. We are actively discussing these matters with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and NAO with a view to seeking amendments and I will keep you informed of any progress in this area.

Productivity

Realise the savings through shared services

5. I was happy to be recently reported saying that 'councils are the most innovative and efficient part of the public sector and this report demonstrates the kind of steps they are taking to save money and improve services'. I made this statement in relation to our recently released 'Services Shared: costs spared?' report. The report provides a detailed analysis of five

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shared service arrangements and insight into the scale of savings that have been achieved through sharing back office functions like IT and legal, and teaming up to deliver frontline services like waste disposal and road maintenance. In all, the five shared services saved £30 million between them across the lifetime of the sharing arrangements. This research contrasts with the recent publication of the Commons Public Accounts Committee report into Whitehall shared services which showed that such arrangements had cost £1.4 billion to set up – £500 million more than expected – and in some cases had actually cost more than they had saved.

LGA Shared Services Map Refresh

6. To support councils achieve such savings, last year the LGA produced an interactive map of shared service examples across England. I am pleased to announce that we have started our annual refresh of this shared services map. The refreshed map helps both to promote an understanding of the number, variety and depth of local government shared services going on across the country as well as to enable an efficiency figure to be attributed to shared services nationally. I would encourage all councils and partners to refer to the map before embarking on their own new shared services to see if there are any existing arrangements in their area that they can join in with or learn from. Please take the time to look at the map at http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/productivity/-/journal_content/56/10171/3511353/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE and if your council's shared service is not featured or if the savings figures have changed, then please contact Kate Anderson at kate.anderson@local.gov.uk.

Leadership

7. I strongly believe that great leadership from councillors, managers and chief executives is crucial to our shared vision for local government – efficient, accountable, reliable and changing lives for the better. With the role of councils rapidly changing, now more than ever we need to ensure our leading politicians and officers are bold and ambitious leaders; equipped to tackle these challenges and lead local government to make a difference, deliver and be trusted. With this in mind, I am pleased to confirm that the 2012 intake for the leadership development programmes run by the Leadership and Localism Team have made significant progress to increase engagement and participation while at the same time seeking to protect the quality, mix and profile of the participants to ensure they are suitable for the programme.

Transparency

Are you being served? Benchmarking resident satisfaction guidance

8. I am happy to announce that following an extensive consultation, we have launched 'Are you being served?' – a set of resident satisfaction, crime and cohesion questions that councils can choose to use in their local surveys, and guidance on the conditions that must be met to enable the results to be benchmarked against others who follow the same approach. Understanding residents' views is a key element of assessing the effectiveness of an authority, alongside cost and performance information. Furthermore, understanding resident satisfaction and being able to make informed comparisons can strengthen local accountability and be a key part of the sector's approach to managing its own performance. Local Government Inform (LG Inform) will provide the mechanism by which councils can undertake these comparisons. If you would like further information on resident satisfaction guidance or LG Inform, please email research@local.gov.uk.