

Item 3(g)

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

Innovation and Productivity

Joint meeting with the Community Wellbeing Board

1. I was delighted to co-Chair, along with Councillor David Rogers OBE, a joint meeting of the Improvement and Innovation and Community Wellbeing Boards on 2 November. It seems fitting that, as the Board tasked with strategic oversight of the LGA's improvement, innovation and productivity work streams, we should pioneer the first full joint meeting of two programme Boards.
2. The joint Board was an excellent example of the benefits of cross working and how improvement and innovation has been successfully mainstreamed through a particular policy area, in this case, adult social care and health reform. With an update from John Bolton (visiting Professor at the Institute of Public Care) on the Adult Social Care and Efficiency Programme, collectively Members from both Boards were able to push forward the debate on efficiency in adult social care within the context of government spending cuts and demographic challenges. The joint meeting also provided a unique opportunity for Members from both Boards to feed in their views on the future scope for sector-led support on the health improvement role for local authorities, given the imminent transfer of public health responsibilities.
3. Feedback from Members of both Boards was overwhelmingly positive. I hope to work with colleagues from other policy areas in a similar cross cutting manner to further develop and embed the work of the Improvement and Innovation Board within all of the LGA's work.

Local Audit

4. We submitted written evidence to the ad hoc committee established to provide pre legislative scrutiny to the draft Local Public Audit Bill and this was followed at an oral evidence session on 6 November.
5. These were useful opportunities for promoting council's concerns about key elements of the draft Bill proposals – in particular the proposed requirement on all councils to appoint an independent audit panel to recommend audit appointments to councils, the proposed remit of the NAO which would enable it to undertake studies into 'improvement' in local government (potentially duplicating the LGA's role) and councils' concerns that audit fees could rise once the existing audit contracts come to an end.

Transparency

Consultation on code of practice on transparency

6. October has been a busy month with regard to transparency. On 25 October the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) issued a consultation

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on making the code of practice on transparency mandatory – requiring local authorities to publish spending over £500, contracts and tenders, salaries etc. I am sure you will all support me when I say that councils are already the most open, transparent and directly accountable part of the public sector. Board colleagues and I were very clear at our most recent meeting that we believe local transparency should be driven by local needs and demands, and not through central control. We will be seeking views from across the sector to inform the LGA's response to the consultation.

Towards local transparency: learning from each other

7. Cllr Tim Cheetham, the Board's Lead Member for transparency, recently ran a workshop with delegates from within the sector which evidenced how councils are going well beyond the statutory minimum in terms of publishing and using open data. Feedback from the workshop demonstrated that councils are aware that simply putting information in the public domain results in local people becoming swamped with so much information and data that they have real difficulty making anything of it – they become 'information rich but knowledge poor'. That is why I have been so encouraged by the responses to our recent transparency survey and the range of practical examples of how councils are providing the necessary tools to help local people understand and use data. We will be bringing this together in a publication early next year; however there is still time to input your views and examples. To share your story of how open data is used effectively in your local authority, please email transparency@local.gov.uk.

Guidance on voluntary and community sector spending

8. We are currently consulting on practical guidance for publishing voluntary and community sector (VCS) spending. The publication of grants to the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector is recommended in the code of practice on transparency. The LGA is proposing to extend its existing guidance on publishing spending data more generally to include reference to VCS grants which will allow those authorities who choose to use it to compare their VCS spending with that of other authorities more meaningfully. We are seeking views from the sector on this matter. To comment, please email transparency@local.gov.uk prior to 14 December 2012.

GeoPlace Exemplar Awards 2012

9. On 25 October Councillor Ruth Cadbury, Vice-Chair of the Board, attended the GeoPlace Annual Conference - 'Everything Happens Somewhere' - to present a GeoPlace Exemplar Award. The Exemplar Awards ceremony, which forms part of the conference, celebrates excellence in address and street information enabled service delivery across local government.

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