

Environment Programme Board 2010-11

Summary

As part of the *Getting Closer* programme, changes are being made to strengthen the political governance of the LGA Group. This report outlines these changes as they affect the Environment Board. It also presents a draft Environment Programme Plan for 2010-11, which has been drafted in line with these changes.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the report;
- Consider the remit and ways of working for the new LGA Group Environment Programme Board;
- Confirm those aspects of the Programme Plan they wish to consider at Board meetings during 2010/11.

Action

- Officers to incorporate Members' views into proposals for the operation of the new Environment Programme Board.

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Getting Closer – Governance

Background

1. *Getting Closer* is a major change programme across the LGA Group, which aims to ensure that the Group is effective, delivers greater value for money and enhances the reputation of local government, by being more focused on councils and more integrated.
2. Effective political governance is absolutely crucial to this. The LGA Executive has therefore agreed to a number of specific changes to strengthen the LGA Group governance arrangements to give councils more influence and ensure stronger political direction of the Group and better coordination. Specifically, members agreed to:
 - strengthen the Executive to become the new governing body that sets the strategic direction and priorities for the Group, with expanded membership to include regional representatives, the three special interest groups representing district, county and metropolitan councils, and the chairs of the central body boards;
 - replace Strategy & Finance Policy Review Group with a new member briefing, as a more effective means of holding the LGA Group to account;
 - create nine Group programme boards, in place of the LGA policy boards, to deliver the business plan priorities through more active engagement with councils and to strengthen the link between improvement and policy/lobbying (through common membership with central body boards where relevant);
 - maintain the Rural and Urban Commissions and Fire Services Forum and Management Committee;
 - clarify the central body board roles and change the IDeA Board membership to 5 members (one from each group plus Welsh LGA) and 3 other directors (plus a CLG representative);
 - establish a governing body for the LGA, in place of Office Holders.
3. In light of these governance changes, the LGA Constitution, standing orders and political conventions have been significantly amended and will be recommended to the July General Assembly. For further detail see the March 2010 Executive Agenda: <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/9556709>.

Operation of the new governance arrangements

4. From September 2010 the LGA Environment Board will become the LGA Group Environment Programme Board. The purpose of the new Board is to provide strategic oversight of all the LGA Group's policy and improvement activity in relation to the environment and housing, in line with the LGA Group priorities.

How is this different?

5. The boards will have **responsibility for more than just policy**. They will provide oversight of all the activity across the Group in relation to Environment and Housing. This will require boards to have a thorough understanding of council priorities and performance in their areas of responsibility, using strong networks and robust information. Up to now, the Environment Board has from time to time discussed relevant IDeA and LACORS work, so this would be clarifying and formalising existing practice, rather than breaking completely new ground. The proposal is that from 2010-11, one of the Members of the Environment Board would also be a Member of the LACORS Board, given the significance of environment issues for LACORS.
6. The **business plan will determine what the boards do in a much more explicit way** than before. The board will have clear responsibility for overseeing a programme of work to deliver the strategic priorities set by the LGA Group Executive. That also means the board will have a responsibility to shape the LGA Group Business Plan by ensuring the priorities of the sector are fed into the process. Again, this is strengthening and formalising the impact Members have been making in corporate business plan discussions, which have led to the prominence the Board's most important issues, housing, planning, climate change and waste, have in the value for money and economy priorities in the Group.
7. There is a much **stronger emphasis on being more outward focused and connected to councils** (through task groups, Commissions, Special Interest Groups, regional networks and other means of wider engagement). Boards are encouraged to find their own most effective way of working and not be restricted by formal meetings in London on a set timescale (but with a guide of 4 formal meetings a year). The Board has already made some steps in this direction. In addition to the established links with the Coastal SIG, and their speaking engagements, Members have over the last year agreed to the establishment of a Member Campaign Group on Housing Finance, as a forum for discussion between the Board's housing portfolio holders and other Members prominent in the debate on housing finance, and the LGA Inland Flood Risk Management Group, which brings four Members of the Board together with Members from each region and the Chair of the Coastal SIG.

8. The new **Group Executive will be much more representative of local government**, with regional and special interest group representatives. This provides an excellent forum for programme boards to seek views from across the sector on key issues that the board is responsible for.

Issues for members to consider

9. Members might wish to consider the following questions to help prepare for the transition to the new way of operating:
 - How will members ensure they develop an evidence-based understanding of the performance issues, improvement needs and priorities of the sector?
 - How can the board ensure stronger connections to councils? E.g. regional groupings, portfolio holders, use of task and finish groups
 - What might be the most effective way of working for the new board? e.g. annual seminar with all portfolio holders, board meetings outside London, presentations from councils or stakeholders, use of technology to improve communications, connecting with other boards and parts of the Group
 - What subject areas lie within the board's responsibility? Are there areas of overlap/duplication that need to be resolved?

Environment Programme Plan 2010-2011

10. The Environment Programme Plan outlines the range of work being undertaken during 2010/11 in support of the Environment and Housing theme in the LGA Group Business Plan. This provides, for the first time, a comprehensive picture of related activity in all parts of the Group.
11. The programme plan for 2010-11 is at **Annex C**.

Financial Implications

12. The new governance arrangements are one mechanism through which the Group will ensure it focuses its available resources effectively on the highest priorities for the sector.

Implications for Wales

13. The proposals outlined above would strengthen recognition and involvement of the WLGA through a new LGA Constitution, with a seat on the LGA Group Executive whilst retaining its membership of the LGE, LACoRS and IDeA company boards.

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