

Item 4

Environment and Housing Programme Board: Programme for 2010-11

Purpose of report

In addition to this being the first meeting of a Board year, the Board needs to look at its ways of working and programme in the light of:

- it being a Group Programme Board, with formal accountability not just for LGA policy and lobbying, but support and improvement work across the whole Group;
- changes in the performance and improvement landscape, including the abolition of CAA and the likely reduction in central Government and NDPB activities intended to assist councils with know-how;
- discussions currently under way with Government about the funding and priorities of the Local Government Group.

Summary

The May Board meeting discussed working arrangements for the new Environment and Housing Programme Board as programming the light of the changes to the role and operation of the Boards agreed as part of the *Getting Closer programme*. This report makes proposals on the Board programme for 2010-11 which Members are asked to comment on and agree.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Agree the proposals set out in paragraph 15 of the main report for specific activities the Board should undertake to reflect the new context
- comment on the stance the Chair should take in forthcoming Executive discussions on the place of environment and housing work in the Group's priorities and work programme

Action

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

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Background

1. Environment and Housing is one of nine Group programme boards which replace the LGA policy boards. These Programme Boards have been tasked with delivering 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). 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.
2. This will differ from the previous arrangements as follows with regards to Programme Boards:
 - The Programme Board will have formal responsibility for the whole LG Group's work on environment and housing, not just policy;
 - There will be a much clearer relationship between the Group Business Plan and the priorities and work programmes of the Programme Boards;
 - There is a much stronger emphasis on being more outward focussed and connected to councils.

Performance and development

3. Many Boards, including the predecessor LGA Environment Board, have already been taking an interest in sector performance and improvement as part of the work they have been doing. The remit of the new Programme Boards reinforces this responsibility and serves as an invitation to Boards to review their approach and consider the extent to which they should seek to maintain an ongoing understanding of council priorities and performance in their areas of responsibility and how best to do so.
4. Two issues arise:
 - **First:** the Group will need to be in a position to respond quickly to councils that may require support on a range of issues. We will need to be confident that as a sector and as a Group we have the capacity to deal with these issues. This issue is probably most acute in high profile areas such as children's services and adult social care where to date the government has provided significant resources and support to councils that have been identified with challenges in these areas through their use of field forces and service advisors.

- If they have not already done so Boards will want to consider the extent to which they maintain an ongoing understanding of council priorities and performance in their areas of responsibility and how best to achieve this. The Improvement Board is charged with oversight of the performance of the sector as a whole but is keen to work with all the respective boards to ensure that they are fully engaged in the service areas that come under their remit.
 - **Second:** the CAA data will have a relatively short shelf life and the future of the NIS is unclear. A new approach to performance data is needed that makes more use of the data that councils and partners already use to manage their own performance. In due course this should provide an easily accessible resource enabling the sector to monitor its performance across a range of locally important and selected indicators.
 - In the meantime members are invited to offer views and suggestions about the type of performance information they would find helpful in monitoring performance of the sector within their remit.
5. In addition, on 13 August, the Secretary of State announced plans to disband the Audit Commission and refocus audit on helping local people hold councils and local public bodies to account for local spending decisions. In summary:
- The Commission's responsibilities for overseeing and delivering local audit and inspections will stop;
 - The Commission's research activities will end;
 - Audit functions will be removed to the private sector;
 - Councils will be free to appoint their own independent external auditors from a more open and competitive market, regulated within a statutory framework and overseen by the National Audit Office;
 - The powers of the Local Government Ombudsman will be strengthened, making findings legally enforceable;
 - There will be a new audit framework for local health bodies.
6. The new system will be in place from 2012/13 financial year with the necessary legislation being sought in this Parliamentary session. In relation to this Board's remit, the Government is reviewing the role of the Tenant Services Authority in regulating social housing landlords, and the Audit Commission's Housing Inspectorate has been a major player in reviewing housing performance by social landlords in recent years.

Future arrangements for topslice funding

7. The LG Group has reached agreement with CLG for topslice to be paid to a single specified body for a set of agreed high level outcomes, allowing us to allocate funding and decide on the best means of delivery to achieve those outcomes. In return we are bidding for RSG topslice of £31.5m - a 30% reduction. CLG is currently consulting councils on these proposals.
8. Over the summer, work has been underway across the LG Group on the RSG top slice bid, building on a consultation exercise with councils carried out in the Spring by Rob Whiteman, Managing Director of Local Government Improvement and Development, and further discussions with councils at the LG Group conference.

9. Programme Board members are invited to review the priorities in the draft submission prior to this being signed off by the LG Group Executive on 16 September - where Board Chairs will have the opportunity to feed back - and Resources Panel the following week. As well as forming the basis of the submission to CLG, these priorities will be central to the LG Group's strategy and business plan for 2011/12, which will be discussed further with members over the autumn. There is a read-across between this and the negotiations with DECC and a sector offer which is also on the agenda for the September Board meeting.
10. A summary of the proposed outcomes in the RSG submission can be found at **Annex A**. The full draft submission, which will also include information on the LG Group's offer to deliver those outcomes, will be available for circulation to Programme Board members on 7 September.
11. In line with the Group's existing business plan priorities, the priorities proposed do not include environment and housing as separate items. Rather, the Group's work on housing and environment would form part of work on some of the stated priorities, in particular on strong local economies and local performance and value for money.
12. Members are asked to consider whether the outcomes in the submission:
 - a. reflect the overall priorities of local government, based on the experience of their own councils and more general feedback;
 - b. are in line with the specific priorities identified by their Programme Board;
 - c. whether the submission needs to be more explicit about how key themes the Board deals with – physical development, waste and climate change are actually key political, economic and financial issues for councils.

Proposed new approach

13. The Programme Board should seek to influence the high level business plan priorities set by LGX, and in turn actively shape the environment and housing programme within the priorities agreed by LGX, and ensure the programme is being delivered.
14. As part of the new governance arrangements a member of the LACORS Board will sit on the Environment and Housing Programme Board to provide input and information on the substance of LACORS activity on environment.
15. A table of objectives and proposed actions can be found below:

Objective	Proposed action	Timetable
Programme Board members to take greater ownership of Board papers. This would help to ensure that papers are 'owned' by individual Members or groups of Members on the Board.	Members propose and lead discussions, with officers drafting papers and providing advice as appropriate. Lead Members will continue to agree agendas as per the current system.	On-going throughout the Programme Board meeting cycle.
Members agreed that the Programme Board would	Programme Board meetings take place in September,	Dates for meetings for the 2010-11 meeting cycle have

<p>reduce the number of formal meetings from 6 to 4 and use the remaining two dates as opportunities to engage in discussions with the sector on a wider basis.</p>	<p>November, March and late June, to coincide with the Group Annual Conference.</p> <p>The dates confirmed for January and May are used for wider engagement/events with the sector. These events will be hosted by local authorities away from Local Government House and will focus on a specific issue, either in the form of a round-table discussion or a conference with the sector. These will not be Board meetings held in a different venue.</p>	<p>been agreed. Officers to work up proposals for the January and May dates, with the input and approval of Programme Board Office Holders.</p> <p>Lead Members to discuss with Programme Board members in political group meetings with the aim of identifying host authorities and topics for discussion.</p>
<p>The Programme Board needs to consider its remit with regards to performance and improvement.</p> <p>Draft Terms of Reference for this group can be found at Annex B</p>	<p>Officers propose a performance and improvement review panel is created to oversee this work. This review panel would be chaired by one of the Board Office Holders and could, subject to member's views, include a member of Improvement Programme Board.</p> <p>This sub-group would scrutinise the improvement and development work undertaken by LGID, LRR and Local Partnerships and would report to the Environment and Housing Programme Board.</p>	<p>A meeting of the review panel should be arranged early in the meeting cycle. This could be preceded by a 'call for evidence' sent out via the Chairman's bulletin asking members and officers where they think councils need improvement and development support from the LG Group.</p>
<p>Programme Board members are asked to commit to undertake work on behalf of the Board within their regions, such as influencing local MPs or attending pre-existing meetings of environment portfolio holders</p>	<p>All Members are asked to attend a minimum of two regional events during the cycle in lieu of the reduced number of Programme Board meetings.</p>	<p>Programme Board members to report back to the Board on the work that they have undertaken. Dates of regional meetings will be circulated to members.</p>
<p>To take a more strategic approach to the Programme Board's activity on</p>	<p>A map of forthcoming conferences covering the main areas of the</p>	<p>Ongoing throughout 2010-11.</p>

conferences, covering our own LG group and external paid events.	Programme Board's work is attached and speakers for these events will be sought in due course.	
Portfolio holder groups will continue under the new Programme Board arrangements.	Officers suggest that opportunities may arise when it is desirable to involve those outside the Local Government Group's formal structures in discussion. The flooding and housing finance groups are examples of where this approach has already been employed.	Portfolio holder groups to be used as and when appropriate to conduct business, with wider member input from the sector where appropriate.
The Strategic Core Group of officers will continue to meet quarterly.	We propose that one of these meetings is attended by Environment Programme Board members.	The proposed date of the next Core Group meeting is the 11th October . Dates of further meetings to be circulated in due course.
The Programme Board will continue our more active and targeted communication with the sector, through the Chairman's bulletin for example.	LG Group Member Communications team will have a full list of all Environment and Housing related portfolio holders in place by September 2010.	The Chairman's bulletin will continue to be sent out monthly, with other communications circulated as appropriate.

Conclusions and next steps

- Chair to contribute to Executive discussion on 16 September reflecting feedback from the Board. Officers to incorporate Members' views into proposals for the operation of the new Environment Programme Board.

Financial Implications

- See especially 7 to 12 above. 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.

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