

LG Group housing support offer

Purpose of report

For decision

Summary

The Environment and Housing Programme Board agreed at their last meeting to develop a programme of support for Local Authorities in delivering an enhanced leadership role on the housing agenda. This builds on the work of the Environment and Housing Improvement and Development Review Panel which reported in March 2011.

This paper seeks views from members on the issues that such an approach should seek to address, the audience we should target and the outcomes sought. The paper also provides proposals on the role of the Programme Board in supporting a sector led approach to improvement in line with *Taking the Lead*.

Recommendations

1. Members discuss and agree the proposed focus for a support programme in paragraphs 4-10.
2. Members discuss and agree the priority focus areas for a support programme and the outcomes sought in paragraphs 11 and 12.
3. Members discuss and agree the proposed arrangements for sector led improvement in paragraph 17.

Action

Subject to the outcomes of the discussion, officers will develop a detailed programme of support to Local Authorities in delivering an enhanced leadership role in housing.

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Housing support offer

Background

1. The Environment and Housing Programme Board agreed at their last meeting to develop a housing support programme for Local Authorities. This builds on the work of the Environment and Housing Improvement and Development Review Panel which reported in March 2011. This paper seeks views from Members on a draft support programme.
2. The basis on which the LG Group will support the local government sector to meet its challenges has changed considerably. There have been significant changes in the context in which Local Authorities operate. These include:
 - 2.1 Significant reductions in funding
 - 2.2 The abolition of Comprehensive Area Assessment, and the replacement of the National Indicator Set by a Single Data List
 - 2.3 Considerable reform of both the housing and planning system through the Localism Bill, the National Planning Policy Framework and elsewhere.
3. The LG Group's report *Taking the lead: self-regulation and improvement in local government*, set out a proposition of how sector self regulation should be taken forward. This was based on the underlying principles that local authorities are responsible for their own performance, stronger accountability to local people drives further improvement, collective responsibility for the performance of the sector as a whole and that the role of the LG Group is to provide support and assistance. This paper provides proposals as to the role of the Environment and Housing Programme Board in delivering this in relation to housing.

Focus of the support offer

4. Support will need to be focused on the key challenges that Local Authorities face. Drawing on conversations with partners and Local Authorities, we propose that these issues could be grouped into a small number of core themes and a number of cross-cutting issues as follows:
5. Increasing the supply of housing. Getting local plans in place will be essential to a robust understanding of local housing need and to ensure housing development serves the needs of the whole community. Councils will also need to work across boundaries to tackle strategic issues. Councillors will play a key role in developing a positive approach to appropriate growth locally and working with the community and attracting investment in affordable housing supply, through developer contributions, government funding programmes and the new council housing finance regime.

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6. Putting homes to good use. Understanding the changes to tenure, affordable rent and working with registered providers to develop a tenancy strategy for the area. Councils will also need to work with the private sector to bring under utilised or empty homes back into use and raise standards.
7. Improving existing homes. Driving up standards across social and private housing. For stock-owning authorities, developing a sustainable business model for self-financing of council housing.
8. Supporting vulnerable people and communities. Making the links between housing and health including close work with Health and Well-being Boards. Supporting residents in the transition to universal credit.
9. Decentralisation. Ensuring a genuinely local planning system; in particular working together as a sector to develop robust advice rather than a reliance on centrally set guidance and prescription.
10. Cross cutting issues. Linking housing to wider agendas such as economic development, engaging communities and health and well being.
11. **Members are asked for their views on the priority areas for focus. In particular Members may wish to consider the following questions:**
 - 11.1 Are these the key issues for Local Authorities in delivering a leadership role in housing?
 - 11.2 Where in particular should the LG Group focus its efforts?
12. In developing an LG Group offer, we need to ensure our resources are targeted to where we can most add value to the sector. **Members are asked for their views on the following proposals:**
 - 12.1 the main focus of LG Group support activity should be targeted to elected members, chiefly Local Authority leaders and housing and planning portfolio holders, and
 - 12.2 where technical support for officers is appropriate the LG Group looks for opportunities to work in partnership with other professional networks. For example, with the HCA building on the positive discussion at the last Programme Board meeting.

Outline of LG Group package of support

13. Drawing on conversations with Local Authorities we propose that support should be focused to deliver the following outcomes: **Members are asked for their views on the following proposals:**

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- 13.1 Elected Members and senior officers have a good understanding of the housing reform agenda and what it means for the choices they make locally.
- 13.2 Local Authorities share good practice and learn from each others experiences in an accessible way.
- 13.3 Local Authorities experiencing specific performance issues are able to access bespoke support and advice.
- 13.4 Local Authorities benchmark and assess their performance to drive improvement.
- 13.5 A more detailed breakdown of the type of support to be delivered is provided at **Appendix A**.

Sector led improvement

14. The LG Group Improvement Programme Board, working with other Programme Boards will maintain an overview of performance within the sector as a whole – drawing on existing data and intelligence in the sector to share good practice, spot those facing particular performance challenges and offer support. The focus of this activity is to offer support; the Group will not position itself as any form of Inspectorate. In order to contribute to the LG Group approach set out in *Taking the Lead* the Environment and Housing Programme Board will need to consider how it will maintain oversight of the performance of the sector in the areas within its remit.
15. LG Inform will provide a suite of information on housing related issues which could be used alongside intelligence in the sector to provide the Programme Board with periodic updates on performance challenges and good practice. Officers have developed a 'long list' of indicators and are working with the sector to further refine this.
16. The Local Government Development team through officers out in the field and via peer challenges will play a central role in developing a strong body of intelligence in the sector (through political, geographic and service-based networks) to share good practice, spot those facing particular performance challenges and offer support.
17. **Members are asked for their views on the following proposals:**
 - 17.1 The newly formed housing officer network consider the housing related performance information collected by LG Inform and work with LG Group officers to develop a suite of key indicators.
 - 17.2 LG Group development and peer challenges are utilised as a source of intelligence to identify good practice and performance challenges.

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17.3 Housing portfolio holders consider this information at twice yearly intervals and use this information to inform and develop the support offering provided by the LG Group to ensure it remains responsive and relevant to the needs of the sector.

Financial Implications

18. The support programme will be delivered within budgetary constraints and through developing partnerships with professional networks and partner organisations.