

## **Impact Assessment of INSPIRE**

### **Purpose of Report**

For information.

### **Summary**

A short update on the LGA's work on the European INSPIRE directive which regulates the access and sharing of location information to support European member states in implementing environmental policy.

### **Recommendation**

The Board is asked to note the report on INSPIRE and the work that has been conducted to date.

### **Action**

As directed by members.

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## **Impact Assessment of INSPIRE**

### **Summary**

1. The LGA's Improvement Board on 15<sup>th</sup> May considered an item on the European INSPIRE directive under its remit of local government transparency.
2. The European INSPIRE directive regulates the access and sharing of location information to support European member states in implementing environmental policy. Information covered by INSPIRE includes transport networks, addresses, land use, environmentally protected areas, risk and management zones. The purpose of INSPIRE is to allow data to be comparable across Europe to give decision makers reliable evidence about the environment. The regulation came into force in 2009.
3. The implementation of the INSPIRE regulations across the UK is led by Defra and colleagues in the LGA are working closely with to help implement INSPIRE in local government.
4. Local authorities will benefit from being able to use such location data, mainly in planning and transport but also in other service areas, such as flood risk management. But councils are also responsible for meeting the requirements of the regulation themselves, as local authorities create location information as part of their regulatory function.
5. Publishing environmental location data in accordance with INSPIRE has costs, because it requires organisations to provide information to a high technical specification (for example, using web mapping tools to present the data). Defra commissioned the LGA to carry out an impact assessment of implementing INSPIRE in local authorities. The initial assessment estimates the costs to be up to £9m over eight years depending on whether datasets are published nationally or locally. On the other hand, there also potential costs associated with not meeting INSPIRE requirements which are likely to be passed down to authorities.
6. This report presents the draft findings of the impact assessment and outlines the next steps in relation to INSPIRE. It also covers feedback on this from the Improvement Board meeting on 15 May 2012.

### **Feedback from the Improvement Board on 15 May 2012**

7. The above information was summarised at the Improvement Board and in the discussion that followed, Members made a number of comments and questions, which were responded to by officers, relating to issues including:
  - 7.1. serious concerns were expressed regarding the fact that few local authorities currently have the technical capabilities to meet the INSPIRE requirements and the significant costs to local authorities;

- 7.2. A Member expressed the view that the significant financial implications for councils of implementing this directive underlined the need to undertake a holistic impact assessment of the costs incurred by councils as a result of government regulations relating to data publication. It was suggested that the results of the INSPIRE impact assessment be used as a lobbying platform for this wider issue;
- 7.3. A number of different views were expressed regarding the advantages and disadvantages to local authorities of implementing the INSPIRE directive. Members asked for further clarity on the implications of the directive for local authorities, and specifically that a report be brought to a future Board meeting that set out: the advantages and disadvantages of complying with the directive, the involvement of the Environment and Housing Board in the work around the directive and the role of GeoPlace.
8. LGA will continue to work with Defra to:
- 8.1. review and agree the likely extent of burdens on local authorities;
  - 8.2. minimise those burdens by finding the best possible solutions for implementing INSPIRE in local authorities. Options range from local publishing services, publishing through a regional/partnership, or publishing using central services. A hybrid approach between local, regional and national solutions may be the most likely option to take account of localism and local ownership;
  - 8.3. support local authorities and help them understand INSPIRE. The UK Location Programme together with the LGA will revise guidance to meet local authority needs, and run four regional workshops in spring/summer to inform about INSPIRE and take local authority views. The LGA has also established an expert group from local authorities to consult on proposals and solutions.