



Local Government Association



freedom to lead: developing a new accountability framework

a call for evidence



The complexity of the challenges facing our communities, along with pressures on public spending require radically new and responsive ways of working across the public sector. Locally elected councillors, as leaders of their communities, are committed to achieving this – but we need a new framework of accountability that liberates local public sector partners to work together more effectively whilst at the same time ensures they are driven by and responsive to, the needs of their communities.

The Local Government Association (LGA) Group is leading a debate about the shape of that new accountability framework. This consultation brief launches the debate, sets out some of the key issues we will be considering and invites you, your authority and your local strategic partnership to contribute. Alongside this “call for evidence” we will initiate an extensive programme of consultation and discussion with the sector and our partners leading to final proposals in Spring 2010.

“We have a real opportunity over the next few months to streamline the current system of targets, performance monitoring and inspection, to secure real freedoms that will help councils and our local partners respond more effectively to the challenges we face locally. The proposals we develop need to be informed by your knowledge, experience and ideas – they will be the stronger for it”



Cllr David Parsons, CBE
Chairman, LGA Improvement Board

The current economic recession changes everything. From sustained growth in public spending over the last decade most commentators are now predicting a lengthy period of spending constraint and real term cuts.

Nowhere will the impact of this be felt more sharply than at the local level – the point of delivery. Councils are already responding, driving forward year on year service improvements and efficiency savings. Between 2005 and 2009 councils made £5.5bn efficiency savings – way beyond government targets.

But this is not enough. The complexity of the social and environmental challenges we face along with the severity of the economic situation demand radical new solutions across the public sector at local level.

Public services need to be redesigned and reshaped around citizens and consumers. Efficiency gains need to be driven out by greater joined up working at local level eradicating duplication and waste and focusing the totality of public sector resources towards local priorities. Innovation and creativity must be released by putting users and frontline staff at the heart of service design and delivery.

Locally elected politicians are committed to achieving this, but the necessary revolution in local public service delivery can only be brought about if the constraints imposed on councils and their local public sector partners by the current framework of funding streams, targetary, performance monitoring and inspection are radically reformed.

Local public service providers need to be liberated from unnecessary controls so that they can develop tailored responses appropriate to the challenges of their communities in a coordinated, efficient and cost effective way.

Moreover the National Audit Office refer to the cost of monitoring and inspecting local government as being in the region of £2bn. There are similar burdens on other sectors too. So it is neither desirable or affordable to maintain regulation and inspection at its current scale and cost.

The Total Place pilots are already exploring how councils and their local public sector partners can work more effectively at local level and it will be important to learn the lessons from them. Policy thinking continues to develop in parallel in areas outside the pilots.

The main political parties have already understood the need for change. A range of options is already being considered including rationalising and streamlining the existing performance framework, radically reducing the national indicator set and cutting back on inspection and abolishing CAA.

Local Government therefore needs to develop its own proposals - proposals that work for us, for our partners and for our communities. The significant improvements and efficiency gains we have achieved in recent years provide us with a firm basis to do that.

Earlier this year we consulted you on proposals to develop a framework for sector-led help under the title "Setting the Pace". We are also inviting separately detailed views on councils' experience of CAA. But we now need to move beyond focussing on individual components to develop a proposition on a new accountability framework as a whole.

We need a new framework that supports local outcomes, one that is about serving local people rather than serving the machinery of Government. We think this involves:

- Arrangements that reinforce localities' ability to set local priorities, with an emphasis on accountability to local people, rather than performance reporting to government;
- Rebalancing the focus of performance monitoring and reporting with a greater emphasis on locality self evaluation and peer challenge along with a resulting reduction in the burden of performance monitoring and inspection by government and the inspectorates - freeing councils and their partners to focus on local priorities and enhance local accountabilities;
- Local government's direction of its own support to deliver ambitious efficiency savings and drive its own improvement and a real and practical commitment from Government and the inspectorates to the framework for supporting councils in difficulty. As we pursue the arguments for further devolution of improvement funding to localities we must also explore how best to coordinate and deliver improvement support to local partnerships.

Each of these issues is discussed in more detail below – with specific issues and questions on which we are seeking your views.

At the same time we will also take into account the implications from the CAA area and organisational assessment results, to be reported in December and lessons emerging from the Total Place pilots.

How to respond:

We are keen to receive views on the issues raised in this consultation brief from council leaders, opposition group leaders and other senior local politicians, from chief executives and senior colleagues, from councils as a whole, from Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) and from Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and constituent partners.

Please use this consultation brief to promote a debate in your area, in the way that is most appropriate locally.

Please send your views to the LGA Group by 30 November at jointhedebate@lga.gov.uk

In the meantime if you have any questions about this work or wish to discuss any aspect of it then in the first instance please contact: Nick Easton (nick.easton@lga.gov.uk) tel 020 7664 3278), or Adam Benjamin (adam.benjamin@idea.gov.uk) tel 020 7296 6853)

Local delivery, accountability and governance:

Our aim is to ensure successor arrangements to Local Area Agreements (LAAs) that support the achievement of local priorities by strengthening local leadership and delivery through partnership. We need LAAs that are truly local, with an 'outward' focus, engaging local politicians, partners and citizens in a debate about local priorities and how they should be delivered rather than an 'upwards' focus to government.

Issues for consideration:

- Should there be a national indicator set? If so should we press for a smaller set of national indicators that reflect issues of indisputable national concern?
- How can we achieve greater flexibility in the LAA negotiation process to allow more local priorities? Is the bureaucracy associated with the current process sustainable going forward? Can we replace central oversight with greater peer involvement?
- How can we best facilitate the engagement of other local partners in such a way that partnerships are able to align plans and budgets accordingly? Are new powers or incentives required? Are new governance models the answer?
- Would an end to all ring-fenced funding allow greater flexibility to align resources to outcomes and therefore a more efficient use of resources locally?
- What are the implications of a smaller set of indicators and the advent of CAA for the Government Office role in monitoring PSA and LAA delivery? What sort of future, if any, should GOs have?
- Should we develop a way of collecting our own evidence on outcomes and expenditure? Where should this function reside – at local, regional or national level?



reducing the burden of regulation and inspection:

Our aim is to rebalance the focus of performance monitoring and reporting with greater weight given to local self-evaluation and the sector itself having more of a role in providing assurance, challenge and sharing good practice – thereby reducing the burden of regulation and inspection and freeing localities to focus on local priorities and enhancing local accountability.

Issues for consideration:

- has CAA been helpful in driving improved outcomes across partnerships and if not how should it be changed in the short-term?
- whether CAA has a longer term future and if not what arrangements we would like to see in its place. What sort of inspection would be acceptable and in what circumstances?
- whether the current configuration of inspectorates makes sense going forward. Would further streamlining towards a single inspectorate for place be more logical and cost-effective?
- how can we best work with partners who have common concerns?
- should we commit to a systematic role in providing assurance, critical challenge and sharing the learning which could be less burdensome, cheaper and provide a means of scaling back the burden of inspection?
- is there a place for national minimum standards as a way of guaranteeing performance in key areas and if so should the sector itself play a role in establishing and monitoring standards?
- how should we best communicate partnership performance to local people? What sort of support do localities need to do this effectively?
- how can we secure greater progress in reducing the burden of data returns to central government?

For further information please contact the Local Government Association at:
Local Government House, Smith Square,
London SW1P 3HZ

or telephone LGconnect, for all your LGA queries on 020 7664 3131
Fax: 020 7664 3030
Email: info@lga.gov.uk

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supporting sector-led improvement

Our aim is to secure a commitment from departments and the inspectorates to the local government improvement framework (Setting the Pace) and further devolution of resources to localities to support improvement and efficiency.

Issues to be considered will include:

- how best to provide support to local partnerships, including the longer-term role of the sector's improvement architecture, including the Regional Improvement and Efficiency partnerships (RIEPs);
- how to help councils and partners meet the significant efficiency challenges they are facing? What are the barriers to further progress on procurement and shared services and what can we do to help? How can we drive efficiency savings across the public sector at local level?
- the case for a reduction in the number of improvement bodies across all sectors and the scope for further devolution.



Local Government Association

The Local Government Association is the national voice for more than 400 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and five partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.