

LGA Scrutiny Panel
Review of Business Plan 2009/10
Final Report

1. Summary

- 1.1 As part of the Panel's work programme for 2009/10, an investigation into the implementation of the LGA's 2009/10 Business Plan was conducted. The scrutiny was undertaken by Cllr Daniel Cox and Cllr Trevor Jones OBE.
- 1.2 This review focused on:
- Whether the objectives in the 2009/10 Business Plan have been achieved to timescales.
 - Whether the priorities have been met.
 - What the tangible benefits for member councils have been.

2. The Investigation & Evidence Gathered

- 2.1 Discussions were held with Local Government Analysis and Research (LGAAR), which is part of the LGA, who presented an evidence report and summary paper of their findings about priorities and issues for member councils, and Claire Holloway (Corporate Programme Director, LGA).
- 2.2 In March 2009, LGAAR conducted a survey of member councils to identify their priorities and the issues facing local government. The survey collated the LAA targets, a sample of sustainable community strategies, REIP priorities and also drew on previous research conducted by LGAAR. This piece of research formed the initial evidence base for the LGA Group business plan's priorities.
- 2.3 From this initial research, eleven priorities were developed for the LGA Group business plan. These priorities were adopted by the LGA Group after consultation with the relevant officers, and discussions with councillors through a member workshop involving approximately 40 - 50 councillors. Members of Boards, Panels, Board Chairs and Vice-Chairs were also involved in the workshop to map the priorities from local Authorities and Boards together with LGAAR analysis.
- 2.4 Once the high-level LGA Group Business plan was agreed, the LGA Business Plan was developed. The LGA Business Plan outlines LGA activity and outputs which will contribute to, and meet the priorities of the business plan. It also identifies the officers which are responsible for the delivery of each area of work.

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- 2.5 Monitoring of the business plan is currently carried out through a monthly Chief Executive's report to the LGA Executive. However, the Chief Executive's report is a written summary of issues and activities rather than a performance monitoring role, and the narrative does not provide sufficient clarity on performance issues. This has been recognised and the new plan for 2010/11 is to include Direction of Travel and system of red, amber and green (the 'traffic' light approach) to highlight at a glance the performance against target.
- 2.6 In addition to the formal Chief Executive's Report to LGA Executive, the LGA Strategy Team (Chief Executive and Directors) also receives quarterly reports on the LGA finances; membership; HR; and internal communications which incorporate business plan activity.
- 2.7 The 2009/10 Business Plan has a series of target 'outputs' and 'impact measures' rather than SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound) targets. Although a 'log of outcomes' is not used, officers responsible for the business plan outcomes keep track of developments and feed into the final end of year review of the business plan.
- 2.8 The 2009/10 Business Plan measured the 'progress at the year end' for each target 'output'. In a total of 171 target outputs in the business plan, 128 were successfully completed, 23 are underway or were delivered in a different way, and 10 were not delivered. A further 10 target outputs were transferred to another part of the LGA Group, in all cases the IDeA. These statistics demonstrate that the LGA is meeting a high number of its 'target outputs' and for the most targets which were not delivered, this was because of postponed spending reviews.
- 2.9 A key element of the LGA's success is being able to measure and communicate the tangible benefits for member councils. The LGA regularly communicates its lobbying successes through many mediums including First, email alerts, website, boards, panels, and group offices to name a few. More specifically the LGA produces an annual end of year review booklet outlining key lobbying successes, the booklet is sent to all Leaders and Chief Executives in April each year.
- 2.10 The LGA can also produce individual briefings for member councils. These briefings highlight lobbying activity which has had a positive impact on a specific council, and any financial gains that have resulted from the LGA's lobbying activity.

3. Key findings of the investigation

- 3.1 There is a considerable level of evidence gathering, analysis, and input from a wide variety of authorities and lead members to create the basis for the Business Plan.

- 3.2 With regard to the content of the Business Plan, although it is appreciated that it can be difficult to measure the impact of the LGA's work, the business plan does not contain enough SMART targets. The target 'outputs' and 'impact measures' currently used in the Business Plan provide insufficient clarity to measure success.

4. Recommendations:

Set out below are the main recommendations which the Panel has proposed, following discussions with the main participants involved in the LGA Business Plan:

- 4.1 The Business Plan should contain SMART targets, wherever possible, against each objective or target.
- 4.2 Although an officer is already highlighted to be the lead for each area of work, the plan does require ownership from members too – either from the relevant Panel or Chairman to highlight accountability for delivery. The relevant Panel or Chairman should be named against each objective.
- 4.3 The monthly performance monitoring system needs to be enhanced so that the information reports produced include the achievement against targets and direction of travel. Quarterly performance monitoring reports (such as a traffic light system) should be introduced so that snapshot clarity can be provided on how the Business Plan is performing against target.
- 4.4 Improved clarity is required in communicating the benefits for member compared to non-member councils. The LGA should continue to progress the differentiation process on the website and give further consideration on communicating the benefits of lobbying to the individual local authorities.
- 4.5 The LGA needs to be clearer and more specific about its achievements and successes. It is evident that a significant part of LGA's work is in performing a lobbying and influencing role. However, with the recommended improvements to the performance monitoring system in place, there should be identifiable and quantifiable outcomes. A monitoring log of LGA successes should be created to capture successes throughout the year to feed into the end of year review booklet.