

Notes of Decisions Taken and Actions Required

Improvement Board

9 September 2008

Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Present:

Chairman	Cllr David Parsons (Leicestershire CC) (Con)
Vice-Chair	Cllr Sir David Williams (Richmond upon Thames LB) (Lib Dem)
Deputy Chair(s)	Cllr Dame Sally Powell DBE (Hammersmith & Fulham) (Lab)
Conservative	Cllr Peter Hardy (South Buckinghamshire); Cllr Peter Goldsworthy (Chorley BC); Cllr Jonathan Owen (East Riding of Yorkshire); Cllr Ken Thornber CBE (Hampshire CC)
Labour	Cllr David Wilcox OBE (Derbyshire CC)
Liberal Democrat	Cllr John Commons (Manchester City Council); Cllr Edward Lord JP (Corporation of London)
Apologies	Cllr Ray Frost (Teignbridge) (Ind); Cllr Peter Fleming (Sevenoaks DC) (Con); Cllr Richard Stay (Bedfordshire CC) (Con); Cllr Ian Swithenbank CBE (Chair: IDeA) (Northumberland CC) (Lab); Cllr Christine Bowden (Newham LB) (Lab); Cllr Sarah Richardson (Westminster) (Con, Sub); Lucy de Groot (IDeA); Paul Roberts (IDeA); Jan Parkinson (LGE).
Substitutes	Cllr Daniel Cox (Norfolk CC) (Con)
In attendance	Derek Allen (LACORS); Brian Standen (4ps); Andrew Couzens (IDeA); Sarah Messenger (LGE); Stephen Jones (LGA); Corin Thomson (LGA); Neale Clark (LGA)

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1. Membership of the Improvement Board 2008/09

Decision

The new members were welcomed and introduced. The membership and office holders of the Improvement Board for 2008/09 were agreed.

2. Terms of Reference and Appointments

Decisions:

- (i) The Terms of Reference for the Improvement Board were agreed.
- (ii) The following appointments to outside bodies were agreed:
 - Social inclusion and equalities: Cllr Edward Lord JP;
 - European and international issues: Cllr David Parsons;

- Urban Commission Steering Committee representative: A Labour representative to be confirmed in due course.

3. Setting the Agenda for the Improvement Board

Before inviting Corin Thomson to introduce the item the Chairman explained that the Board only had a small number of key topics to consider and it was important that they did them well. Corin referred to the 'Raising our Game' programme where a number of milestones on the performance framework had already been passed. There was a need for the Board to focus on the core work: CAA; LAAs; NIES and RIEPs, and these would feature as regular slots on the agenda. A draft forward programme had also been included in the report to ensure that engagement is made with the relevant stakeholders at the right time.

Members made a number of comments including:

- The structure was helpful with the right approach adopted, however, the paper only explained the 'what' and not the 'why'. It should be more upfront about what the Board is aiming at, and more 'pushy' in setting the agenda, as the Board could be influential on, for example, making the case for autonomy for the sector;
- the Innovation conference had not been included in the plan;
- an awayday had been suggested in the last cycle of meetings, would this be taken forward?
- there should be a formal reporting process for each of the RIEPs to explain to the Board what they had done and for their work to be scrutinised;
- paragraphs 3–5 of the paper which focussed on the building blocks of the new performance framework were welcomed but would like shaping and forming of the devolution agenda included;
- need a preamble/preface to the paper explaining the Board's mission;
- relevant Ministers needed to be invited to attend a Board with senior civil servants being invited separately;
- not enough emphasis on innovation.

Decisions:

- Members would like to receive information about the Innovation conference by email;
- RIEPs not being required to address the Board in person, but regular reports on their performance would be provided to members;
- a paper on a possible awayday to feature on the 25 November agenda;

Actions:

- Send members information about the development of the Innovation conference programme;

Secretariat

- LGA officers to work with RIEPs and CLG to develop appropriate performance management arrangements. LGA officers to ensure the Board is provided with regular updates on the implementation of RIEPs;

Clarissa Corbisiero

- produce a paper on an awayday for the November meeting;

Secretariat

4. Local Area Agreements

The Chairman referred to the headline messages in the paper that the Board had been asked to discuss and agree. Jo Dungey explained that Whitehall had set a new timetable to complete the National Indicator Set and CLG would be consulting on the deferred indicators.

Members' comments included the following:

- the level of the reward grant should not be the driver;
- getting the baseline right was more important than scrutinising targets;
- stability of the National Indicator Set was crucial, and this should be made strongly in the response to CLG;
- need to ensure that the reward grant is included in the next Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and doesn't get abolished;
- would be useful to see a table showing who got what from the reward grant over the last three years to see if there was an underspend on performance;
- LAA performance runs the risk of being undermined by poor work by partner organisations;
- with only £390m across all the local authorities the incentive could be lost unless there was focus on one indicator that best met the needs of a particular authority.

Decisions:

- The National Indicator Set and reward grant should feature in the next LAA report;
- a paper to be produced on what we should look for and what could be achieved in the next CSR;
- responses to the consultations to be made as set out in the report.

Action

Officers to take forward work in accordance with the report and members' comments. **Jo Dungey**

5. National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy

a. Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships

Corin Thomson explained that RIEPs had been given their first year's money from a three year pot. It would be necessary to monitor how they performed and place the emphasis on them to establish credibility with local authorities within their region. Information packs will be provided to aid and strengthen wider engagement and lead members will be meeting the RIEPs Chairmen on 15 October to agree an approach on how this is taken forward.

Comments from members' included:

- Rather than a full report from RIEPs a two page executive summary on achievements against objectives would be welcomed;

- RIEPs should formally report to every council in their area, which would help engage members and raise awareness.

Decision

The Board agreed to receive a report back from the October meeting with the RIEPs Chairmen at the November Board.

Action

Officers to progress work in accordance with the paper and members' comments.

**Clarissa
Corbisiero**

5b. Update on the Beacons Scheme

John Hayes referred to previous reports where the Board had indicated that the scheme was unacceptable in its current form. The latest report provided an update with some characteristics on what the revised scheme might look like. To move things on there was a need for a new panel and members were asked to agree the next step of a joint appointment, with CLG, of a Chair and Vice-Chair.

In the ensuing discussion members' agreed that the new proposals did not represent the radical transformation that was required and Appendix B should be focussing on innovation and what it should look like in the future. It was agreed that to progress this it should be pursued at a political level with Hazel Blears MP and John Healey MP.

Decisions:

- Dame Sally Powell to meet Hazel Blears and John Healey;
- the job description and advert to be revamped to take account of members' comments;
- a view on the Chair/Vice-Chair to be taken in parallel with the meeting with ministers'.

Actions:

- Officers to set up a meeting with minister's asap;
Secretariat

- Officers to revise Appendix B
Hayes

John

6. Comprehensive Area Assessments

Nick Easton explained that the paper was in three parts:

- (i) Proposed approach and key messages for the LGA's response to the joint inspectorate consultation;
- (ii) proposed communications plan and draft member briefing on CAA for approval;
- (iii) progress on the self evaluation tool (which was already available).

The broad view was that it was that the Inspectorate proposals for CAA were heading in the right direction, that a proactive approach to communicating the ambition of CAA to the sector was right and that the draft member briefing would be helpful in raising members' awareness.

Members made a number of comments including:

- Concern that the CAA pilots did not yet appear to have fully engaged elected members;
- Still need clarity about how CAA would work in two-tier areas;
- important not to lose member engagement;
- draft briefing for members would be helpful but would be more welcome coming from members to members rather than officers to members;
- concern that CAA was still a work in progress, with a lot of the detailed methodology still missing, and April was fast approaching;
- CAA must deliver on the ambition to reduce the burden – members were not yet persuaded that the current proposals delivered this;
- LGA response should be informed by relevant evidence from the other CAA pilots (not just Hampshire CC).

Corin Thomson informed members that there would be a number of opportunities to get the LGA's message on CAA across, including the LGA office holders quarterly meeting, on 14 October, with the Audit Commission, which Cllr David Parsons also attended. The three local government audit commissioners would also be made aware of our views.

Decisions:

- Agreed the proposed approach and key messages for the LGA's response to the CAA consultation paper and to authorise the lead members to approve the final response.
- Agreed the proposed communications plan and the member briefing.
- Noted the progress on the self evaluation tool and subject to a further report in November to agree to promote take up of a tool to the sector.
- Consider inviting some members from the CAA trial sites to the next Board to share their experiences and ascertain whether a common theme was developing along with Steve Bundred, Chief Executive, Audit Commission.

Actions:

- Officers to discuss inviting CAA triallists and Steve Bundred to the November meeting with Cllr David Parsons, Chairman of the Board; **Nick Easton**
- Officers to progress work outlined in the report subject to members' comments and decisions. **Nick Easton**

7. Note of decisions taken at the lat meeting 22 July

Reference was drawn to the decision taken about LGA member allowances on page 75. The point was made that members agreed to refer the **actual report** with the Board's conclusions to the LGA Executive.

Action:

Corin Thomson agreed to provide the actual report and comments for the Chairman to take to the LGA Executive.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 25 November at 11am, Local Government House