

Setting the agenda for the Improvement Board 2008-09

Purpose

To agree the strategic direction for the Improvement Board over the coming year, including key objectives, forward programme and stakeholder engagement.

Decisions

- *Agree the role and focus for the board for next year (see paragraphs 3-5);*
- *Agree the board objectives (see paragraphs 6-8);*
- *Provide views on the forward programme and list of key stakeholders, to help develop the forward programme (see paragraphs 10-11).*

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Background

1. Over the last year the LGA Improvement Board has provided the political leadership and oversight of key elements of the Raising our Game programme, to ensure that the new performance framework (NPF) is developed and implemented in a way that maximises the benefits to local government and the people it represents, specially through:

- developing the sector's capacity to lead improvement and innovation; and
- creating the governance structures, capacity and culture to support councils to become leaders of place.

2. Specific achievements include:

- Reducing the burden of reporting and performance monitoring, management and control by government, in particular influencing the 198 indicators;
- Helping councils to seize the opportunity of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) through raising awareness amongst officers and members, influencing governance structures and guidance and influencing support provided by the LGA group;
- Agreeing a National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy (NIES) with government, gaining widespread agreement to the principle of sector-led improvement, negotiating £185m to be devolved to newly formed Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) and supporting their development as a crucial part of the improvement architecture;
- Influencing the development of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) to ensure it evolves into a proportionate, risk-based, outcome focused approach to assessment and inspection that helps councils improve and reduces the burden.

Setting the agenda - Objectives, milestones and stakeholders

3. The building blocks of the new performance framework are therefore now largely in place:

- a. LAAs – the mechanism for agreeing shared priorities;
- b. NIES – establishing the improvement infrastructure for supporting the delivery of these shared priorities;
- c. CAA – the mechanism through which delivery of these priorities will be assessed.

4. It is suggested therefore that the role of the Improvement Board over the next year is to:

Provide political leadership and direction to embed the new performance framework through monitoring, evaluation and further development to ensure it successfully underpins the delivery of better outcomes for local people and is the basis for a new relationship between central and local government.

5. To support members in carrying out this role it is proposed that the Improvement Board maintains a strong focus on the 3 building blocks (LAAs, NIES, CAA), making these a core part of each board agenda. **Members are asked to agree this role and focus.**

Objectives

6. Against each of these 3 building blocks of the NPF, **members are asked to agree the following objectives as a focus for the board:**

- a. LAAs - Embed and develop further the principles of the new performance framework through monitoring, evaluation, promoting success and support for LAA implementation;

- b. *NIES - Design and embed an effective, sector-led and streamlined improvement and innovation support architecture and programme;*
 - c. *CAA - influence the development of and help the sector prepare for a proportionate, risk-based, outcome focused approach to performance monitoring, assessment and inspection that helps councils improve and reduces the burden.*
7. *In practice, achieving these objectives will mean:*
- a. *Monitoring delivery of LAA targets, supporting councils in negotiations with government through the LAA refresh, continuing to raise the profile of LAAs amongst members and unblocking obstacles to delivery by influencing government;*
 - b. *Ensuring RIEPs deliver, ensuring the national architecture is streamlined and responsive through developing understanding of the sector's improvement priorities and influencing the support provided by the LGA group (by contributing to the LGA group development strategy) and lobbying government to devolve further improvement support so that overall sector support delivers maximum impact and value for money;*
 - c. *Shaping the final stages of CAA by drawing on the learning of the pilots, ensuring the sector is prepared for CAA through promotion and support and holding the government to its commitment on reducing data burdens.*
8. *Further details of what will be delivered to achieve these objectives, key milestones and stakeholders are outlined in appendix A. It is proposed that each paper to the Improvement Board outlines which objective it is contributing to and how. This approach is being tested in September and will be implemented/amended subject to members' views.*

Key milestones

9. *A draft forward plan for the Improvement Board (appendix B) is proposed, based on the following key milestones over the coming year:*

LAA review – early 2009

The evidence from evaluation of LAAs and the NFF will need to feed into the LAA refresh, to support councils in negotiation;

CPA final results – Jan/Feb 2009

This will provide the final evidence base from CPA as to the state of local government improvement;

RIEP annual review – Mar 2008

This will be an important opportunity to build confidence across government and councils that RIEPs are delivering. This will contribute to Under State of the Nation report on the impact of sector led improvement support;

CAA commences – April 2009

CAA work will be focussed on influencing the final methodology up until late 2008, whereupon the focus will shift to supporting councils to prepare, monitoring burden and in late 2009, the results.

CSR – July 2009

CSR is an important opportunity to drive further developments in the new performance framework. We therefore believe the service and overall submissions should include arguments on how the NFF can relieve the pressures on councils (e.g. savings from reducing the burden even further through reducing inspections or data collection, improvements to the national indicators, efficiency savings by more flexible use of total public sector resources and

streamlining of improvement support which currently involves lots of smaller initiatives funded by government departments, often through quangos).

Key stakeholders

10. *The following is a list of key stakeholders it is recommended the Improvement Board seek to influence and engage with over the coming year:*

- *LGA group – to develop understanding of sector improvement priorities and whether support is meeting sector needs;*
- *CLG – to ensure CLG continues to be an effective advocate for the new performance framework across Whitehall and continues to develop the NFF in a way that meets local government's needs;*
- *RIEPs (including RIEP member forum, CEXTG, RIEP Directors) – to seek reassurance that RIEPs are delivering the commitment in the NIES and to develop understanding of the sector's improvement priorities, to help shape the national architecture of both central and local government;*
- *Councils – to gauge views on the NFF, understand improvement priorities and shape support;*
- *Audit Commission – to ensure CAA meets the needs of the sector and that the AC studies programme adds value;*
- *Other inspectorates and their sponsoring departments – to ensure CAA is not weakened by failure of other inspectorates to align performance frameworks;*
- *LBRO and other central improvement bodies – to ensure where national improvement bodies continue to exist, overlap and duplication is minimised.*

11. Members are asked for views on the forward programme and list of key stakeholders, to help develop the forward programme further.

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