
National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy - Update on the Beacons Scheme

Purpose

This report outlines proposals for the design and implementation of a new Beacons Scheme to support the board objective 2 - to design and embed an effective, sector-led and streamlined improvement and innovation support architecture and programme.

Decisions

- *Agree that the next step in the development of the scheme should be the joint appointment with the CLG of a Chair and Vice-Chair (see paragraphs 2-4);*
- *Agree initial proposals for the revised scheme (outlined in paragraphs 6-10), to be presented to the new Chair for further development;*
- *Receive a further report on the development of the scheme from the new Chair and Vice-Chair in 9 months time.*

Action by: *John Hayes*

Contact Officer: John Hayes, tel: 020 7296 6445, email: john.hayes@ides.gov.uk

Proposals for design and implementation of a new Beacons Scheme

Background

1. *Following the Improvement Board steer and discussions with office holders, a series of meetings have taken place between the LGA/IDeA and CLG. The discussions have been framed around a set of LGA “givens” presented in a letter (25 April 2008) from Stephen Jones to Andrew Campbell at the CLG (attached at Appendix A), which outlined that to be acceptable to the LGA the scheme must:*

- *identify the leading edge innovatory practice needed to secure the delivery of central/local objectives expressed through the LAAs;*
- *reflect the partnership arrangements between central and local government developed to deliver the NIES and, compared to current governance arrangements, secure greater sector ownership;*
- *be aligned to the new improvement “architecture” taking into account in particular that architecture’s regional dimension;*
- *be less expensive both to operate and participate in;*
- *be more flexible and speedier in terms of capturing and disseminating leading edge innovatory practice;*
- *celebrate successful innovation, promoting that success to enhance the broader reputation of local government.*

Governance

2. *The second bullet above has significant implications for both ongoing scheme governance and the approach to implementation. In order for the scheme to be co-owned by central and local government the existing panel, which is government appointed, will need to be replaced by a new panel appointed by both sides. The new panel will need the skills and expertise to deliver the re-purposed scheme and indeed be responsible for its final development.*

3. *CLG have essentially accepted this point and propose to work with the LGA to appoint a new Chair and Vice-Chair as quickly as possible, with appointments possibly advertised as early as mid-September. (The draft job descriptions are at Appendix B)*

4. Members are asked to agree to the joint appointment with the CLG of a Chair and Vice-Chair to design and implement to new Beacons Scheme.

Implementation of a new Beacons Scheme

5. *If the appointment of a new chairman/vice-chairman is to proceed, it is suggested that the LGA builds on the principles already agreed and sets out its expectations for the new jointly-owned scheme, for the chairman to take forward.*

6. *Of the six principles outlined above, the first, which states that the scheme should concentrate on the outcomes as expressed through the LAAs, has the most radical impact. Using the LAA outcomes as the focus for the development of best practice should mean that:*

- *the current extended process of consultation on “theme” selection can be eliminated with themes no longer the subject of ministerial preferences;*
- *the extent of relevance of the practice to local authorities (and consequent interest) can be predetermined with engagement targeted at those authorities that have signed up to the outcomes;*
- *the criteria defining best and innovative practice can be based on the real issues signed up local authorities are facing in the delivery of the outcomes;*
- *LAA outcomes will mean that the scheme can readily be aligned to the objectives of the RIEPs whose strategies have been informed by the outcomes;*
- *the scheme can be integrated into wider sector self-improvement quickly moving from the development of best practice, the identification of the practitioners associated with this practice (peers) to assistance, through the use of these practitioners, for authorities struggling to reach the levels of the best;*
- *the scheme can be integrated into the wider performance framework, particular CAA.*

7. *By working with a predetermined cohort of authorities known to be interested in a particular outcome it should also be possible to shift the focus of the scheme from the identification, accreditation and celebration of practice to the development/improvement of practice (in particular innovation and next practice) and its transfer across the sector.*

8. *An issue for consideration is whether or not to continue with the award ceremony element of the scheme which for some appears to be a duplication of other events (for example the Municipal Journal or the Local Government Chronicle event). One option for consideration would be the alignment of such an event with the LGA Improvement conference clearly shifting the focus to a celebration by the sector of its own performance.*

9. *Consideration is also being given to the integration of the existing dissemination grant (awarded on receipt of beacons status) with the peer support grant (awarded to some Beacons 12 months after Beacons award). A single, and potentially much larger, grant could then be awarded with much more ambitious sector wide improvement/innovation outcomes attached. Initial discussions suggest that it is this mechanism that could ensure that the scheme delivers both the best practice and innovation aspirations of the sector. Some LAA outcomes present challenges in terms of existing performance and some requiring entirely new thinking. The single improvement/innovation grant could be used to fund both practice development and innovation and practice dissemination and performance support.*

10. *Key to success of the new scheme will be a process which is simpler and easier to operate than the current scheme. Discussion with CLG has developed a new process which can move from practice selection through to dissemination within a year and this compares to the three years associated with the existing scheme. This will also mean that the costs of both participating in the scheme (from the Council's point of view) and managing the scheme (from the IDeA's point of view) will be reduced.*

11. Members are asked to comment on and agree initial proposals for the revised scheme (outlined in paragraphs 6– 10), to be presented to the new chairman for further development.

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