

Notes of Decisions Taken and Actions Required

Improvement Board

22 July 2008

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

Present:

Chairman	Cllr David Shakespeare OBE (Buckingham 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); Cllr Ray Frost (Teignbridge) (Ind)
Conservative	Cllr Peter Fleming (Sevenoaks DC); Cllr Peter Hardy (South Buckinghamshire); Cllr David Parsons (Leicestershire CC) (Con);
Labour	Cllr David Wilcox OBE (Derbyshire CC); Cllr Pauline Lane CBE (Trafford MBC);
Liberal Democrat	Cllr John Commons (Manchester City Council); Cllr Edward Lord JP (Corporation of London);
Apologies	Mayor Sir Steve Bullock (Lewisham); Cllr Jonathan Owen (East Riding of Yorkshire) (Con); Cllr Ken Thornber CBE (Hampshire CC); Cllr Ian Swithenbank CBE (Chair: IDeA) (Northumberland CC); Stephen Jones (LGA); Jan Parkinson (LGE); Chris Wilson (4ps)
Substitutes	Cllr Christine Bowden (Newham LB);
In attendance	Lucy de Groot (IDeA); Paul Roberts (IDeA); Corin Thomson (LGA); Brian Standen (4ps); Cathy Boyle (LGA)

The Group Leaders of the Improvement Board each paid tribute to Cllr David Shakespeare OBE (Chairman) on his enormous contribution to the work of the Board during the past year and wished him well in his future role as Deputy Chairman of the LGA, as he was standing down as Chairman of the Board.

The Chairman responded by thanking Board members for their genuine cross-party working on the Board during his term as Chairman and warmly wished them well for the future.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Improvement Board, welcomed Stephen Taylor, Chief Executive of the Leadership Centre for Local Government, who would attend future meetings of the Board.

1. Future Arrangements for Peer Working

Cllr David Parsons, Vice-Chairman of the IDeA and John Hayes, Director of Services, IDeA, presented a report on future arrangements for peer working.

The Board congratulated officers on what they considered to be a concise and well written report.

Cllr Parsons referred to the conclusions of the working party of councillors and experienced political peers, which he had chaired, which had the task of developing recommendations for the future of peer working. The future changes which the working party had considered were:

- the introduction of “political consultant peers”
- modification of the roles for the IDeA lead peers;
- the creation of a new system to manage the deployment of peers involving the LGA’s political group offices and regional associates
- establishing a review of payment to political peers
- Strengthening the performance feedback on political peers and linking this to annual re-accreditation;
- Accelerating the recruitment of non-local government sector peers into the pool;

Cllr Parsons concluded that these proposals would have a major significance for councils and RIEPs as well as for the wider improvement architecture going forward.

Members made a number of comments and raised some issues of concern, including:

- the need for openness and transparency in this area of work;
- the need for all processes to be trusted by member authorities;
- how any increase in the rates payable to political peers compares to allowances paid currently to LGA members;
- the importance of any review of payments to political peers being carried out by an Independent Panel, (possibly chaired by Professor Malcolm Grant?) who has recently carried out reviews of a number of London boroughs’ members allowances schemes, and chaired an independent panel which reviewed the LGA’s members allowances scheme in 1999.
- the impact on the capacity of the political group offices that any new system to manage the development of peers involving these offices would have;
- ensuring a requirement for continuous professional development for all peers, both new and existing, eg. introducing a requirement that peers receive a minimum number of hours per year training and development;
- the need for political groups to take an assertive stance in relation to ensuring the effective management of the performance of peers and for consideration to be given to a mechanism for “de-selecting” peers who are not performing effectively;
- the need to demonstrate effectively how the intervention of peers has led to improvement;

- the need for the collation of information on the wider activity and skill sets of potential peers to inform the peer selection process.
- there should be a clear separation of roles between peers who are responsible for managing the appointment, performance and deployment of peers and political consultant peers who would provide the peer support within councils.

Decisions

The Board **agreed**

- that there should be an alignment between the rates paid to political peers and consultants across the LGA family and specifically between the IDeA and the Leadership Centre for Local Government;
- in the context of the latest developments with the LGA Group Development Strategy, that the roles proposed for the LGA Political Group Offices and Group Improvement Boards (where relevant) in the appointment and deployment of peers are appropriate.
- to recommend to the LGA executive that LGA member allowances should be examined in light of the proposed changes to peer allowances.
- to receive a report on progress at a future meeting.

Actions

IDEA Board to consider the recommendations in this report and members of the Improvement Board's comments on 23 July and oversee their implementation as part of their responsibility for the governance of the Agency.

Chris Hume/John Hayes

Officers to progress action in relation to LGA member allowances. (*Action: a paper is going to the September meeting of the LGA executive*)

Corin Thomson

Officers to submit a progress report to the next meeting.

Chris Hume/John Hayes

2. Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

Corin Thomson, Programme Director, Improvement and Performance, introduced a report which updated members on the development of CAA, setting out some of the key changes we might expect to see in the next consultation paper to be published in July and updating members on the progress of the LGA/IDEA's joint work on CAA.

Cllr David Shakespeare welcomed Gareth Davies, Managing Director, Audit Commission, who gave a presentation to members and updated them on the Inspectorates' latest thinking on

CAA. Gareth provided two powerpoint presentations which can be accessed at www.lga.gov.uk

Following the presentation, members made a number of comments, including:

- that every local authority should have a link on its website to its inspection report;
- that consideration be given to the next Improvement Board meeting having a more indepth discussion around the experience of being assessed/inspected;
- the importance of understanding that , even within district councils, there can be many different senses of “place”.
- It must be realised that the public are unlikely to try to engage with inspection reports of local government services generally, but more in relation to individual services eg Ofsted inspections of schools.
- an understanding of locality and the quality/capacity of inspectorate staff are important if CAA is to work effectively;
- welcome the fact that CAA will focus on outcomes rather than process;
- the LGA would like to see positive affirmation for those areas local authorities/partnerships who work across the public sector better.

Paragraph 7

- how would CAA work in multi-tier areas;;
- concern was expressed by one member that the proposed reporting arrangements might not provide a meaningful way of communicating to the public;

Paragraph 10-16

- members emphasised the need for a media plan for general communication purposes, and suggested holding regional events and eg using *lg first* as a media tool;

Gareth Davies informed members that that the quality of inspectors would be high and that every potential inspector would have to demonstrate that they met certain important criteria before they were appointed. Inspectors would also receive ongoing high quality training and development.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Board, thanked Gareth Davies for his presentation.

Decisions

The Board **agreed**

- the proposed key messages based on the question set out at paragraph 7; subject to their comments
- the LGA’s role in raising awareness and offered suggestions about how best

to communicate with local councillors and officers

- to note the progress of work in hand to support the sector's implementation of CAA.
- to note that a Conference on influencing and preparing for CAA would be held on **Wednesday, 10 September 2008** in the Congress Centre, Great Russell Street, London WC1.

Action

Officers to progress the decisions set out above

Nick Easton

Officers to circulate a programme for the 10 September CAA Conference to Board members

Neale Clark

3. Implementing Local Area Agreements - roles and responsibilities

Corin Thomson, Programme Director, introduced a report which reviewed the recently concluded Local Area Agreement negotiations and summarised some initial views on the negotiations.

The report discussed the need for clarity of roles in managing performance and delivery of the new agreements, in particular to avoid inappropriate central government intervention. It provided information on the support programme to help councils and partnerships to achieve success in tackling the local problems represented by LAA targets.

Corin explained to the Board that the next steps were for councils to deliver the best possible services to their communities, manage and monitor their own performance and their own improvement and ensure that the LSP has effective performance management arrangements in place and is tackling any areas for improvement.

Members were asked to give their views on the LAA negotiation process, to comment on the definition of roles in implementing Local Area Agreements, to ensure an appropriately decentralised approach, rolling back the role of government offices. The Board was also asked for their comments on the plans of the Improvement and Development Agency for continuing support to achievement of LAA ambitions.

Members' comments included the following:

- there was a role for the Improvement Board in monitoring what LAAs are doing and for identifying opportunities for further development;
- there may also be a role for the Board in monitoring what RIEPs are doing, however, the question was posed as to whether we had the power to do this;
- concern was expressed at the poor relationship with some government offices;
- it was important take a robust attitude towards enforcing the duty to co-operate;

- the role of scrutiny is under recognised;

Decisions

The Board **agreed** that LGA and IDeA staff implement work as detailed in the report, taking into account members' comments.

Action

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

4. Implementing the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy

Dennis Skinner, Regional Associate (National Co-ordination) introduced a report updating members on progress of Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships in establishing governance arrangements and delivery support to councils and partnerships.

Decisions

The Board **agreed**

- that a key aspect of a successful sector led model to improvement is maximising the impact of the sectors' improvement architecture, resources and expertise to ensure it delivers complementary support, maximum impact and value for money at a local, regional (and sub regional) and national level;
- to note the establishment of a RIEP member forum to strengthen relationships between the Improvement Board and the RIEP members.
- that the member forum and Improvement Board should meet twice yearly to share experiences and that the first meeting should consider how to strengthen links with the improvement board more generally;
- that officers should report back to the Board on an approach to manage the options for further devolution of improvement support to the sector to ensure that it is appropriate and in line with local priorities and that this will include a mixture of devolution to councils themselves, the regional or sub-regional architecture (e.g., the RIEPs) or the national infrastructure
- to commission work by cross-sector teams to bring forward a strategy of how the sector wish to see a greater amount of this investment being devolved to the sector and over what timescale.

Action

Officers to progress work in accordance with the decisions set out above. **Dennis Skinner/
Clarissa**

Corbisiero

5. Note of Decisions taken at last meeting 20 May

Local Better Regulation Office (LBRO)

The Board asked that the Chairman's letter to Dr Grace, Chairman of LBRO, of 8 July be circulated to them.

Neale Clark