

Notes of Decisions Taken and Actions Required

Item 7

Improvement Board

25 November 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); Cllr Ray Frost (Teignbridge) (Ind)

Conservative Cllr Peter Fleming (Sevenoaks DC); Cllr Peter Goldworthy (Chorley BC); Cllr Richard Stay (Bedfordshire CC);

Labour Cllr Ian Swithenbank CBE (Northumberland CC); Cllr Christine Bowden (Newham LB); Cllr David Wilcox OBE (Derbyshire CC)

Liberal Democrat Cllr John Commons (Manchester City Council); Cllr Edward Lord JP (Corporation of London)

Apologies Cllr Jonathan Owen (East Riding of Yorkshire); Cllr Ken Thornber CBE (Hampshire CC); Mayor Sir Steve Bullock (LGE); Paul Roberts (IDeA); Helen Newman (LGE); Chris Wilson (4ps); Brian Standen (4ps)

Substitutes

In attendance Lucy de Groot (IDeA); Dennis Skinner (IDeA); Chris Hume (IDeA); Jan Parkinson (LGE); Derek Allen (LACORS); Dominic Rowles (E&I Unit); Stephen Jones (LGA); Annette Madden (LGA); Jo Dungey (LGA) Nick Easton (LGA); Neale Clark (LGA)

1. Local Area Agreements

a. Is the new performance framework working? A survey of councils

Members received a presentation from Jo Dungey who began by explaining why the survey of council chief executives had been carried out. She then gave an overview of the performance framework and summarised survey respondents' views on the progress made in developing the council's democratic role in place-shaping and strengthening local definition of priorities through

LAAs. Two thirds of respondents said their councils were satisfied with their LAA overall but there had been concern expressed that the National Indicator Set did not provide a good measure of the issues they covered. Two thirds also thought that the Inspectorate proposals met the White Paper ambition for CAA, however, there was still concern that it would not reduce the risk of burden or put the citizen at the heart of the assessment.

Members made a number of comments including:

- Remained to be convinced that the LAA targets on issues such as housing and worklessness could be adapted to meet a change in circumstances;
- a breakdown by political control of the councils of those who had responded was required;
- the members dimension needed to be reflected in all surveys, and the LGA should be going out of its way to ensure that, to obtain greater engagement on improvement;
- the political disconnect in the process needed to be addressed, and a good survey would also have looked at the views of the partner bodies;
- because of the differences in the responses of county and district council chief executives, the headline findings might not convey the correct conclusions;
- dissatisfaction with the National Indicator Set needed to be addressed;
- the findings mirrored what we knew already about the need for local people to be supported in providing local solutions.

Decision

It was agreed that members should have been involved from the outset and future work of this nature should not be commissioned without member involvement. The four lead members would look at the report in more detail before consideration could be given to accepting its recommendations.

Actions

- Colour presentation (of this and future presentations, in advance of the meeting where possible) to be provided to members. **Neale Clark**
- Political breakdown of responses to be provided to members. **Jo Dungey**
- Ensure that arrangements are made so the survey programmes run by the LGA Analysis and Research team is approved by members and reflects their wishes. **Stephen Jones**
- Lead members to consider the report in more detail.

b. Reward Grant

Jo Dungey explained that at the September Board members had asked for information on how the reward grant had been allocated to date. The report also looked at the LGA's negotiations on arrangements for the Reward Grant for 2008-11.

In the ensuing discussion it was explained how the formula for paying out the allocated money had been improved compared with the formula for calculating LAA reward grant proposed in CLG's consultation document. Members asked about implications for two-tier areas, and it was clarified that the Reward Grant was paid to County Councils; arrangements beyond that were for local determination.

Decisions/Actions

- The Board noted the report and the negotiations by the LGA.
- It was agreed that members should receive a list, in a form that could be published, that showed the payout per authority against earlier LAA targets. **Jo Dungey**
- This item should feature again at the January Board. **Secretariat**

2. Comprehensive Area Assessment

Nick Easton introduced the item and explained that members were invited to agree the key issues on which the LGA should continue to press for changes in the CAA methodology, as well as their agreement to promote take up of the self evaluation tool. Lucy de Groot emphasised the importance of developing the self evaluation tool with the approach shifting as councils demonstrated their successes in the new performance regime. Lucy also reported back on initial discussions with a range of Inspectorates about the longer term shape of inspection and assessment and recommended that further discussions be pursued at member level.

The Board then received a presentation from Councillor Maggie Clay, Executive Member, Adults and Health, Stockport MBC, and Jane Scullion, Assistant Chief Executive, Stockport MBC, on their experience and the lessons learnt from the CAA trial in Stockport. It was made clear that the trial was somewhat artificial having taken place in a three month period between July and September and that in this context it had primarily been a desk based exercise which did not drill down into the working aspects of the partnership where member issues and concerns were most likely to be picked up. It was unclear from the trial if CAA would be a powerful driver for improvement in the way CPA had been.

Members made a number of comments including:

- more emphasis should be put on member engagement in the formative part of the process;
- crucial to have engagement of member and officer peers in the process;
- LGA should be concentrating on improving the quality of inspection;
- CAA should be 'lighter touch' but this should not be at the expense of engagement with councils and partners in the process through dialogue and conversation;
- preference not to have flags, but if this was the case could it be green, amber and red;
- CAA must be a practical vehicle to drive improvement;
- there was a danger that CAA could be a complete irrelevance to District Councils which could hinder their improvement;
- results of the self evaluation should be reported to scrutiny, as another way of engaging members in CAA.

Members expressed their thanks to Stockport MBC for a very well put together presentation which can be accessed at www.lga.gov.uk .

Decisions/Actions

- Noted the LGA response to the CAA Consultation paper and agreed the key issues which the LGA should continue to lobby on CAA, with the addition of quality assurance. **Nick Easton**
- Agreed to the enthusiastic promotion of the use of the self evaluation tool and IDeA peer reviews by the sector. **Nick Easton/Mandy James**
- Agreed to pursue proposals for member level discussions with the Inspectorates and a meeting between lead members of the Board and the Audit Commission to discuss matters arising from Stockport's presentation. **Julia Bennett/Nick Easton**
- Noted the proposed publication about lessons for improvement and agreed to the preparation of the Foreword on behalf of lead members of the Board. **Nick Easton**

3. National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy

The report provided proposals for national performance oversight arrangements of RIEPs as well as a general update on the key issues including the RIEP member forum, efficiency and transformation fund and ongoing communication activity to support member engagement.

In the ensuing discussion it was expressed that it was critical to have member buy in and it was suggested member involvement could be strengthened by having a forum comprising the elected members chairing the 9 RIEPs with a strong link to the Improvement Board. It was thought the Chief Executive Task Group was working well and its Chair, Joyce Redfern, would be invited to attend future Board meetings. A change to the key contacts list was suggested to include the leader of each political party where these were identified, and a need to ensure the Improvement Board was engaging with the right people at the right levels across government was expressed. Cross party support with RIEP members was important and an annual meeting of the group lead members of each RIEP was suggested.

Decision/Action

- It wasn't clear during the meeting what decision had been reached and clarification was sought from the Chair of the Improvement Board who advised that this is something that should be discussed at the next full RIEP meeting on 6 January 2009. The group can get together and decide on a preferred structure for the future.
- A further discussion paper, reflecting the comments made by members, should be prepared for the January Board. **Clarissa Corbisiero/Keith Beaumont**

4. Procurement

a. Eastern Shires

Members received presentations from David Shields, Programme Director Markets and Collaborative Procurement at the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), and Ken May, Director of Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) & Secretary of the Society of Procurement Officers in Local Government. David explained the background to the Collaborative Procurement Programme and said RIEPs had a key role in championing a clear and consistent approach to collaborative procurement. Ken then ran through the objectives of ESPO and gave a run down of the five procurement centres which covered the whole country. He also explained how the professional buying organisations worked together. Members agreed this

was a wonderful opportunity for the LGA to lead in partnership across the local government sector.

Both presentations can be accessed at www.lga.gov.uk .

Decisions

The Board:

- Noted the report;
- requested a diagram showing the accountability of OGC;
- requested information on the level of efficiency savings delivered by the Regional Centre of Excellence;
- asked officers to present, to the meeting of those chairing RIEPS, proposals to align tendering processes, avoid duplication and competition and maximise efficiency, and to ensure that 4ps and the IDeA were fully engaged in this work; and that procurement experts should be brought together at this meeting.

Action

- Officers to progress in light of the decisions made by members. **Keith Beaumont with LGA**

4b. Reducing burdens on councils and SMEs - LGA work programme on internal market issues for 2009

Decision

Members agreed the E&I unit work programme on EC Market issues for 2009.

Action

Officers to progress the work programme. **Ian Hughes/Dominic Rowles**

5. Towards an integrated programme for leadership development

Decision/Action

It was agreed that this should be referred to the LGA Member Task Group for discussion with input from members of the Improvement Board.

6. Improvement Board Away Day and Innovation Conference

Members wanted an opportunity to network and look at issues outside the Board format. A free standing event using the night before for networking was preferred. Cllr John Commons was nominated as the Board's lead in arranging the away day.

Members who attended the conference thought it innovative and largely successful, but needed parallel sessions for members, and special rates of charge to encourage members to attend. It was agreed that this should feature on the next agenda.

Decisions/Actions

- Suggestions on the Improvement Board away day should be made through Cllr Commons;
- The Innovation Conference and future Improvement Conferences, including the matters raised in discussion, should be an agenda item at the January Board. **Secretariat**

7. Note of the last meeting - 9 September

The note of the last meeting was agreed.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 20 January at 11am, Local Government House