

National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy - Update on Beacons Scheme

Summary

This report sets out the progress that has been made since September 2008, when the Board was last updated on the scheme. It also explains the recommended option for the development of the new award scheme to succeed the beacon scheme to be presented to the new Chair for approval and further development.

Recommendations

Improvement Board members are asked to note the progress with developing changes to the Scheme and to recommend that the newly appointed Chair commend option 2 to the Minister.

Action

Officers to progress Members' agreed direction.

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Context

1. The Improvement Board discussed proposals for the design and implementation of a new Beacon scheme in September 2008 and agreed that the Board should be updated on progress in May 2009. The Board agreed to the joint appointment with CLG of a new Chair and Vice-chair of the Advisory Panel to the Scheme and to initial proposals for the revised scheme to be presented to the new Chair for further development. Members made clear they wanted radical change and a scheme that was less bureaucratic, more sector led and focussed on innovation.
2. Members will recall that making changes to the Beacons Scheme has not been straightforward because the scheme is a **Non-Departmental Public Body (NDBP)** and, as such, outside the jurisdiction of the LGA.

Principles for the review

3. Shared principles for the review of the scheme have been agreed with CLG which are based on the principles agreed by the Board in September 2008, including:
 - **ownership** of the scheme (jointly owned by central and local government, not by the panel)
 - **recognition and profile** (awards will be celebrated and publicized; Ministers will visit award winners and view examples of transferable innovatory practice)
 - **securing a high number of entries** across a large number of councils and their partners
 - **a simpler and cheaper entry process** for local authorities and their partners, requiring less administration
 - **partnership working** across local partners will be key to successful applications
 - a **strong correlation** between award-winning practice and 'green flag' areas within CAA.
 - a **significantly shorter timescale** from application to award (6 months)
 - successful award holders will participate in the **transfer of knowledge and innovatory practice** to others

- **impact** - innovatory practice in key importance areas (as defined by the top 20 LAA priorities) is successfully transferred to less highly performing authorities and their partners so that performance improves.

Recruitment of a new Chair for a new programme

4. CLG has overseen the joint recruitment process, on which Councillor Ray Frost represented the LGA. A formal announcement of the appointment of Dame Denise Platt (formerly Chair of the Commission for Social Care Inspection) as Chair of the Beacons Panel was made on 27 April by the Communities Minister, Sadiq Khan MP. This process has taken longer than expected. An induction programme for the new Chair will include meeting the Chairman of the LGA and the Improvement Board. Recruitment of a Vice Chair of the Panel is still to take place.

Options for development

5. IDeA are continuing to work on initial proposals for the new programme which will be presented to new Chair of the Panel for approval and further development.. The Chair's decision is subject to ratification by the Minister for Beacons. There are two prevailing models:
 - **Option 1** – a scaled down version of the current three stage assessment process. This is favoured by members of the Panel's Transition Sub Group(four panel members entrusted with the development of the Scheme);
 - **Option 2** – a more radical change, which would create a new programme in response to council feedback and needs, to reduce the administrative burden on applicants to a minimum. It would be closely linked to the priorities of the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy and share innovation and peer learning in a timely and creative manner. It would move away from the 'show and tell' style of the current Beacon scheme, to learning and consultancy from peer authorities. the range of peer support from award holders might typically cover extensive learning events (e.g. considering the journey of improvement), to tailored and intensive improvement support (e.g. peer reviews, sector-consultancy or performance intervention).

It is recommended that the Improvement Board recommend Option 2 to the new Panel Chair for commendation to the Minister for Beacons, as it:

- is more sector-led
 - reflects the views expressed by the Improvement Board in previous discussions.
 - agile and lighter touch in assessment of applications
 - the peer learning, improvement support and knowledge transfer is more flexible and designed to have a greater impact
 - more effective in identifying and 'spreading' innovation in response to the sector's own priorities (as identified by the top 20 Local Area Agreement priorities)
 - the most cost effective of the three proposals so far.
6. This level of change will create uncertainty initially, but with appropriate support it could yield the highest level of cost efficiency (e.g. up to 30%/ca £400,000 efficiency saving).

7. This option for the Scheme is currently being market tested, in line with CLG's requirements. The exercise should be completed by mid-May 2009. CLG may then consult for up to 12 weeks on the proposed changes to the scheme, although it is suggested that members seek a 6 week consultation given the delay to date and already extensive consultation. In order for the new awards and programme to be launched at the LGA Annual Conference in June 2009 a development plan has been put in place, the key activities and milestones for which are set out in **Appendix 1**.

Financial Implications

8. There are no direct funding implications for the LGA Group. Funding for the Scheme comes from Revenue Support Grant and income raised from event.

Implications for Wales

9. The Beacons Scheme is open to English authorities. Excellence Wales is the equivalent good practice scheme in Wales.