

## Notes of Decisions Taken and Actions Required

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Improvement Board

Item 6

24 March 2009

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

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### Present:

<b>Chairman</b>	Cllr David Parsons CBE (Leicestershire CC) (Con)
<b>Vice-Chair</b>	Cllr Sir David Williams (Richmond upon Thames LB) (Lib Dem)
<b>Deputy Chairs</b>	Cllr David Wilcox OBE (Derbyshire CC) (Lab) and Cllr Ray Frost (Teignbridge) (Ind)
<b>Conservative</b>	Cllr Peter Fleming (Sevenoaks DC); Cllr Peter Goldsworthy (Chorley BC); Cllr Jonathan Owen (East Riding of Yorkshire); Cllr Richard Stay (Bedfordshire CC)
<b>Labour</b>	Cllr Christine Bowden (Newham LB);
<b>Liberal Democrat</b>	Cllr John Commons (Manchester City Council); Cllr Edward Lord JP (Corporation of London);
<b>Apologies</b>	Cllr Ken Thornber CBE (Hampshire CC); Mayor Sir Steve Bullock (LGE); Cllr Ian Swithenbank CBE (Northumberland CC); Jan Parkinson (LGE); Chris Wilson (4ps);
<b>Substitutes</b>	Cllr Sharon Taylor (Stevenage BC) and Cllr Pauleen Lane CBE (Trafford MBC)
<b>In attendance</b>	Lucy de Groot (IDeA); Dennis Skinner (IDeA); Helen Newman (LGE); Andrew Cozens (IDeA); Derek Allen (LACORS); Stephen Jones (LGA); Annette Madden (LGA); Jo Dungey (LGA) Nick Easton (LGA); Jenny Day (LGA)

### 1. Sector Led Help – consultation framework

Lucy de Groot, Chief Executive of IDeA, introduced this item informing members that the tabled report contained the same wording as the report in the agenda, but had been reformatted as a consultation document. Jo Webb, Regional Associate Yorkshire and the Humber and North West, asked members for their comments on the roles and responsibilities set out in paragraph 24 of the report, and whether 'the ask' in paragraph 25 is pitched at the right level.

Members made a number of comments on the consultation which included the following:

The preface or covering letter should strike the right tone, achieving a balance between demonstrating the sector's confidence and humility.

The issue of how to deal with 'coasting' authorities needs to be addressed.

The consultation should be carried out within the context that local government is constantly improving.

We need to demonstrate to central government how the local government sector can be more effective and faster than central government agencies in helping councils facing difficulties, using a simpler framework, and within tight resources. The strategy does not currently give a sense that we are in more unstable economic climate and that future resources will be even more limited.

Members suggested consulting the RIEP member forum.

## **Decisions**

- Members agreed the consultation process outlined in the report.
- Members agreed that the finalised consultation framework should be signed off by office holders before being published.

## **Actions**

- To draft a new selection of titles for the report for members to choose from and approve.  
Jo Webb
- To draft a preface/covering letter from Cllr Parsons to circulate with the report.  
Jo Webb
- To redraft the consultation framework in light of members' comments.  
Jo Webb

## **2. Members Awayday**

Members were very positive about the away day held on 19/20 March and thanked IDeA, Annette Madden and the conference team for their contribution to its success.

Members were informed that the November Board meeting would occur at the Improvement Conference, but a specific date has not yet been agreed.

In the paper 'LGA Submission to the Inspectorates on member involvement in the CAA', members felt that 'ownership' should be included in section B, Member peer involvement.

## **Decisions**

- Members agreed that they would like a similar event to be organised for January or early February 2010.
- Members approved the letter to Michael O'Higgins, Chairman of the Audit Commission.

## **3. Improvement Activity Update from lead members**

Lead members suggested that the four Groups should consider early information/anticipatory knowledge at their group meetings at the LGA conference in

July. Discussion on this issue was prompted by learning from the case of 'Baby P'. Members also discussed how to deal with major issues such as Safeguarding on an effective cross-party basis.

### **Decisions**

- Members agreed to discuss these issues at their Group Improvement Board meetings.

## **4 National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy**

### **4a. RIEP update**

The Chairman introduced this item, highlighting the success of RIEPS so far. Members discussed the links between RIEP member forums and the Improvement Board, and concluded that we did not want to appear paternalistic or force a link. Instead an informal link should be maintained, outside of the formal links that are already established via the RIEP member forum.

Stephen Jones informed members that CLG now proposed to allocate around £500,000 revenue grant to each RIEP from the £115m Efficiency and transformation fund. This fund had originally been wholly capital, and the new flexibility was welcome.

### **Decisions**

- Members noted the report

### **Actions**

- Officers to again send the list of Improvement Board members to the RIEPs to help facilitate links to the LGA Improvement Board where they wish to.

**Secretariat**

### **4b. Procurement**

During members' discussion on procurement, a number of points were raised. Members felt that in a future report, LGA should include tangible examples of how councils can save money through procurement and quick wins that can be achieved. Procurement is an area where significant savings can be made, and councils need simple information on how to do this.

### **Decisions**

- Members agreed that the Chairman writes to RIEP member chairs about the Roots report recommendations.
- Members agreed the key themes for the implementation of procurement improvement.
- The Chairman agreed to meet with the Chief Executive of OGC, Nigel Smith, to consider how to make faster progress on cross public sector collaboration.

### **Actions**

- A further update report, reflecting the points raised in members' discussion to be provided for the July Improvement Board meeting.

**Stephen Jones**

## **5a Comprehensive Area Assessment update**

The final CAA framework had been published in February and members noted that a number of elements were consistent with what the LGA had been arguing for. Members had held a substantial discussion about the role of members and member peers in CAA at the Improvement board Away Day on 20 March and agreed a further submission to the Inspectorates. Lucy de Groot highlighted the importance of the LGA engaging with the inspectorates, and whether the LGA Audit Commission liaison meetings could be used in a different way.

### **Decisions**

- Members approved the proposed next steps outlined on page 50/51 of the Board agenda papers.
- Members noted the report

## **5b Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2008**

Members discussed the final set of CPA results. Members felt that the results demonstrated councils' success in improving services with no councils now rated poor overall, but questioned what would guide LGA supporting strategies for councils in place of CPA.

Members discussed the need for early warning signs of potential difficulties councils might be experiencing and suggested that councils' use of resources reports could be a helpful indicator, and that issues need to be picked up at political improvement board meetings. Members also suggested the LGA should develop a clear narrative on continuing improvement, publicising examples of good news stories where significant improvements have been made in a council.

### **Decision**

- Members noted the report.

### **Action**

- A report for the next Board meeting explaining how council improvement could be demonstrated in the context of CAA and how early signals of the need for help and support would be identified.

**Nick Easton**

## **6 Local Area Agreements**

Jo Dungey gave a verbal update. Councils and partnerships have now submitted their revised Local Area Agreements after the annual review and refresh. These should be agreed with the Secretary of State by early April. LGA has been heavily involved in discussions with Whitehall about the need to renegotiate targets affected by the recession, and this has now taken place, with scope to either renegotiate or 'freeze' targets until next year.

### **Decision**

- Members noted the update

## **7. Children's Services**

Andrew Cozens, Strategic Advisor (IDeA), presented this progress report on the development of sector-led support for council's work on safeguarding children. He agreed to give an update on those eight councils given an APA grade 1 by Ofsted for staying safe.

Members recognised the need to work closely with the Children and Young People Board on this issue, and discussed the need for a holistic, joined up approach. Members supported the proposed Programme Board but felt there was no single national solution as problems occur at a very local level.

### **Decisions**

- Members noted the report

### **Action**

- A report on how the proposed Programme Board would link with other support programmes in place or put in place following the publication of the Government's Action Plan on Lord Laming's report **Andrew Cozens**

## **8. Note of previous meeting**

Members noted the report. There were no amendments.

The Chair informed the Board that this was Annette Madden's final meeting, and thanked Annette for her hard work and contribution to the work of the Improvement Board. The Chair wished her well for the future.

**Date of next meeting – Wednesday 20 May 2009.**