

Notes of Decisions Taken and Actions Required

Improvement Board

20 May 2009

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

Present:

Chairman	Cllr David Parsons CBE (Leicestershire CC) (Con)
Vice-Chair	Cllr Sir David Williams (Richmond upon Thames LB) (Lib Dem)
Deputy Chairs	Cllr David Wilcox OBE (Derbyshire CC) (Lab) and Cllr Ray Frost (Teignbridge) (Ind)
Conservative	Cllr Peter Fleming (Sevenoaks DC); Cllr Jonathan Owen (East Riding of Yorkshire); Cllr Richard Stay (Central Bedfordshire C)
Labour	Cllr Christine Bowden (Newham LB); Cllr Pauline Lane CBE (Trafford MBC)
Liberal Democrat	Cllr John Commons (Manchester City Council)
Apologies	Cllr Peter Goldsworthy (Chorley BC); Cllr Edward Lord JP (Corporation of London); Cllr Ken Thornber CBE (Hampshire CC); Mayor Sir Steve Bullock (LGE); Cllr Ian Swithenbank CBE (IDeA) (Northumberland CC); Jan Parkinson (LGE)
Substitutes	Cllr Daniel Cox (Norfolk CC); Cllr Sharon Taylor (Stevenage BC)
In attendance	Paul Roberts (IDeA)Helen Newman (LGE); Stephen Jones (LGA); Corin Thomson (LGA); Jo Dungey (LGA) Nick Easton (LGA); Brian Standen (4ps); Alison Miller (LGA); Keith Beaumont (LGA); Cathy Boyle (LGA)

The Chairman, on behalf of the Improvement Board, warmly welcomed Corin Thomson, Programme Director, on her return to the LGA from her secondment in the London Borough of Sutton.

1. Local Area Agreements: new scrutiny powers introduced

Jo Dungey introduced a report which informed the Board about the commencement of new scrutiny powers in relation to Local Area Agreements (LAAs). The report

summarised work to be done by LGA staff, with the Centre for Public Scrutiny and IDeA, to support the effective implementation of the new powers.

Decision

The Board

- **welcomed** the commencement of new powers supporting scrutiny of LAAs, but expressed their concern about the further delay to regulations needed for some aspect of the new powers, particularly on the impact this would have in two-tier areas;
- **agreed** to write to the Minister for Local Government to express robustly their deep concerns about the delay to the regulations, which serve to undermine effective member involvement in LAAs in two tier areas. The letter should also provide examples of where it is causing problems and point to good practice that future guidance should be based on.
- **noted** the proposals for the LGA to work with the Centre for Public Scrutiny to support the effective implementation of these news powers.

Action

Officers to draft a letter to the Minister, as set out above, and circulate to Lead Members for agreement.

Jo Dungey

Officers to implement the proposals detailed in the report.

Jo Dungey

2a National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy: RIEPs

Keith Beaumont, RIEP Programme Manager, introduced a paper which provided a summary of progress across Year 1 of the RIEP programme and a forward look to year two. The paper also provided members with an update on the efficiency and transformation fund. Keith Beaumont referred to a recent, very productive meeting of the RIEP member forum where members shared knowledge on their RIEPs key procurement and safeguarding initiatives. The report also included a copy of "Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs): One Year On".

A draft of the State of the Nation report, which will be published at the LGA Annual Conference in Harrogate in July, had been circulated prior to the meeting and members were asked to provide comments.

Members made a number of comments, including the need for the Board to consider the next steps for the improvement and efficiency agenda, and that improvement and efficiency cannot be achieved at local level without strong partnerships.

Decision

The Board

- **noted** the report;
- **agreed** to provide officers with comments on the “state of the nation” draft publication, as soon as possible.

Action

Board members to provide Officers with comments on the “state of the nation” draft report

Board Members

2b National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy – Update on Beacon’s Scheme

John Hayes, IDeA, introduced a report which set out the progress that has been made since September 2008, when the Board was last updated on the scheme. The report explained 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.

Decisions

The Board

- **noted** the progress with developing changes to the Scheme and expressed concern about the extent to which it reflected members’ views on the scheme requiring radical change if it was to continue;
- **agreed** to defer explicitly supporting option 2 and instead agreed the chairman should meet with Dame Denise Platt to express our concerns and discuss options.

Action

The Chairman to report back on discussions with Dame Denise Platt.

Chairman/John Hayes

2c Setting the Pace

John Hayes, IDeA, introduced a report which updated Board members on the consultation exercise currently underway.

Decision

*The Board **noted** the update on the consultation process and the plans for future reports to the Board*

Action

Officers to bring a further report to the Improvement Board’s meeting on 21 July on the key messages which have emerged from the consultation process.

John Hayes/Jo Webb

3. Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

Gareth Davies, Managing Director of the Audit Commission, gave members a presentation on member peer involvement in CAA. Mr Davies outlined the progress achieved so far with CAA, the proposals for member peer support and issues around implementation.

Nick Easton, Senior Policy Consultant, drew members' attention to some early feedback received from councils on CAA, particularly relating to:

- a possible decline in some council's organisational assessment scores, because the Use of Resources Assessment has become a tougher test, focusing on outcomes and not processes;
- Inspectorate proposals that if an authority disagrees with its organisational assessment score it may request a review of the dispute score and LSPs may request a review of 'red flags' in accordance with the draft procedure - but that the time proposed to request a review was very short.

Members made a number of comments about member peer involvement, including concerns that the process, eg. in relation to inflexible training dates, may prevent some members from seeking involvement. Also reported were concerns that members' workload levels would be unmanageable, particularly if the time commitment is underestimated.

Members also commented that the proposals for member peer involvement did not recognise the political circumstances within which councillors work eg. where a member peer works across a number of local authorities the politics may not align. Members said that some degree of political balance across member peers is important and that the LGA's political group officers should be involved to ensure that this happens. Comment was also made that district councils must assume responsibility for working with CAALs and that there was a need to ensure that there was a sufficient number of district council member peers involved.

Decision

*The Board **agreed** that lead members be authorised to approve the LGA's response to the joint inspectorate consultation on the CAA review process and on the CLG consultation on Freedoms and Flexibilities.*

*The Board welcomed the progress on member peer involvement in CAA, questioned whether the proposals would enable member peers to make an effective contribution to the assessments but **noted** the commitment to review peer involvement in CAA after one year and **agreed** to receive a report in spring 2010.*

Action

Officers to work with the Inspectorates to develop practical arrangements to support member peer involvement in CAA in the light of members' views. **Nick Easton**

Officers to prepare responses, for lead member approval, on the CAA review process and the CLG proposals for the Freedoms and Flexibilities regime. **Nick Easton**

4a and 4b Performance Data for local areas/Place Survey

Alison Miller, Policy Consultant, introduced a paper which responded to the request at the last Board meeting for a report about the comparative performance information that will be available to councils and the LGA group under CAA and concern about the extent to which underperformance can be spotted. The report also outlined LGA Group research to survey the complex range of information and tools available to councils and partners.

During Members' discussion on Performance Data and the Place Survey a number of comments were made, including: the need to process datasets in a timely manner and the value of the place survey. Members asked that the work of the member group should be time limited.

Decision

The Board agreed

- *to note the reports on performance data for local areas and the Place Survey.*
- *that individual members should inform officers, without delay, if he/she wishes to participate in the small group of members who will advise the LGA and IDeA on options for a local government information function, or other support in the area of data and information.*
- *that options for the future of the place survey be discussed with the member grouping;*
- *that the member grouping should report back to a future meeting of the Board on its work;*

Action

LGA and IDeA officers to work with the nominated member grouping and report back to a future meeting. **Alison Miller**

Officers to follow up nominations to the member grouping. **Alison Miller**

5. Review of Improvement Support – follow up to paper to Office Holders

Members received an oral update on the review of support to the work of the Improvement Board. Members were informed that LGA Office Holders had discussed the review at their April meeting and that the review work would, by the end of May,

have developed proposals that will make both the support for the Improvement Board's work and for the RIEP infrastructure more coherent and cost effective.

Members **noted** that the LGA, IDeA, the Leadership Centre and the RIEP Programme Office were working closely together on this issue. The Board also **noted** that it was expected that the review will be completed by the end of May with implementation of the new arrangements over June and July.

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6. Note of the Last Meeting

Members **agreed** the note of the last meeting.

Lucy de Groot

The Board **noted** that Lucy de Groot would be leaving the IDeA shortly, asked that their thanks and appreciation for all the help and advice given over a number of years be relayed to her and wished her well for the future.

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