

Setting the Pace

The Framework for Local Government Led Help for Councils Facing Difficulties

Summary

This paper updates members of the Improvement Board on the consultation exercise currently underway.

The consultation framework 'Setting the Pace', has been informed by previous discussions with the Improvement Board and leading councillors and chief executives across the country.

Recommendations

That the Improvement Board:

- Note the update on the consultation process and the plans for future reports to the Board.

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Developing a Framework for Local Government Led Help for Councils Facing Difficulties

Background

1. Recent events have emphasised the need for the sector to be clearer about the basis on which support is provided for councils facing difficulties. The consultation paper sets out the key principles for the framework, and the critical success factors against which it needs to be judged. It goes on to propose roles for the key players – individual councils, the RIEPs, the IDeA and the LGA – and to ask for corresponding commitments from government and the regulatory regime. Although the focus of the draft framework is councils facing difficulties, some of the thinking is relevant to the broader question of the nature, strengths and challenges of sector-led support with all authorities and partnerships.

Update, Consultation Process and next steps

2. The Improvement Board in its March meeting discussed the draft consultation paper and, after taking into account your comments, it has since been finalised and issued to local authority leaders and chief executives, RIEPs, and other stakeholders. The changes that have been made since the March meeting of the Improvement Board were intended to:
 - Provide a better title, 'Setting the Pace,' which, as members requested, is more aspirational in tone;
 - Increase the extent to which people are likely to engage in the consultation exercise by having questions that encourage more debate;
 - Provide up front in the revised Foreword, a distilled explanation about why this is important – including references to the recession and the introduction of CAA.
 - Provide a better balance between, on the one hand, confidence, about our ability to 'set the pace', and, on the other, humility, in the face of the scale, complexity and changing nature of the task we are undertaking.
3. Taking on comments from members of the Improvement Board about the limited amount of time councillors have to review documents we have also prepared a four page summary paper (**attached** as Appendix 1).
4. An LGA/IDeA officer project group has been set up to manage the consultation process and ensure key stakeholders have an opportunity to comment. By the

time of the Improvement Board meeting Setting the Pace will have already have been considered by more than one RIEP.

5. As well as using traditional consultation methods, for the first time across the LGA group we are undertaking online 'live' consultation using the "Commentariat" approach which breaks down the document into screen sized chunks and enables comments on each page. Consultees visit www.idea.gov.uk/settingthepace and can discuss the detail right where the detail is or they can make a broader comment on an introduction page. It is easy to navigate and easy to comment.
6. The consultation process will run until 1st July and a report will be brought to the July Improvement Board informing members of the key messages emerging. Depending on the nature of the responses and the degree of consensus across local government and across stakeholders we will then prepare a final framework for Improvement Board approval in September.

7. Financial Implications

This work can be carried out within the existing budgets of the LGA and IDeA.

8. Implications for Wales

None direct.