

Received 9/4.



Michael O'Higgins
Chairman

Date: 8 April 2009
Enqs to: 0844 798 2110

David Parsons CBE
Chairman
LGA Improvement Board
Local Government Association
Local Government House
Smith Square
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Dear

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'David'.

Councillor Involvement and the Role of Peers in CAA

Thank you for your letter following up the discussions we had at the Improvement Board Away Day on 19 March. We welcome the continued positive dialogue on this important issue and we are keen to ensure that CAA is valued by local politicians. We have discussed the issue further with our partner inspectorates and I am responding on behalf of all of us.

We all agree with your first point regarding the need for CAA Leads and, if appropriate, the other local inspectorate staff to engage effectively with elected members. This will help them to better understand how local community leadership operates in the area and how it has set local priorities. This clearly needs to cover executive, scrutiny and ward members in a proportionate way but we need to find a practical way of achieving this without overburdening councils or adding unwarranted costs. We will have to prioritise in the first year and then use the iterative nature of CAA to develop a fuller and richer picture over time. As you say, the key will be early local discussions led by the CAA Lead as to how best to achieve this. We will aim to use existing forums as much as possible to avoid the need for separate meetings. In many cases I know this is already underway. We would like to continue to work with you on effective national communications with members on CAA.

We also agree with the principle in your second point of engaging elected members to support our CAA assessments in each area. Having given careful consideration to the various options for this, we now feel that the best approach will be to attach a peer member of each of the CAA Leads to offer advice on questions of local political and community leadership. Building on the helpful proposal attached to your letter, I suggest we ask LGA and IDeA colleagues to work with Audit Commission and inspectorate staff on the details for putting this into operation as soon as possible. There are many practical issues to address including the precise scope of the role, how CAA Leads will access the advice of peer members, achieving a good representation from across the parties, cost and confidentiality. But I am confident that we now have a workable model that will make efficient use of the skills of high calibre peer members and enhance the credibility and value of our assessments.

As we develop the detailed arrangements for this new approach, we will be able to update the guidance to inspectorate staff. I hope you feel that this proposal is a constructive response to our discussions and that you will ask your colleagues to take the work forward with us.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Richard', with a small flourish underneath.

cc: Chairs and Chief Inspectors/Chief Executives of each inspectorate