

Setting the Pace - next steps

1. Summary

This paper updates members of the Improvement Board on the consultation exercise and proposes next steps for developing policy and implementation.

2. Recommendations

That the Improvement Board:

- Note the responses to the consultation; and
- agree next steps for the development of an improvement framework that places greater emphasis on sector-led improvement.

3. Action

Officers to pursue actions as agreed by the Board.

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Background

1. Previous meetings of the Improvement Board have discussed and endorsed the 'Setting the Pace' consultation document and its proposed framework for self-improvement for local authorities in England. It proposed a greater role for local authorities in owning and sharing amongst themselves the responsibility for their own improvement, with a changed role for the regional and national improvement bodies, and a reduction in the role of central government and regulators.
2. The consultation process formally closed on 1st July, following extensive activity to engage council leaders and senior officers, RIEPs, government and inspectorates. We have received almost 100 responses (see appendix 1 for list), including 62 councils and 24 other (e.g. RIEPs).

Consultation Headlines

3. The key headline messages emerging from the analysis of the consultation process are:
 - There is strong support for the Setting the Pace agenda, and specifically for the idea of an enhanced role for local government-led support. Many authorities would be willing to sign up to an appropriately worded statement on their commitment to sector-led improvement (and take action accordingly) but this would need to be matched with a regulatory/inspection process that recognises this and reduces the burden accordingly.
 - There is broad support for the principles and critical success factors proposed in the consultation paper i.e. that primary responsibility for any council's improvement lies with that authority, that local support should precede government intervention where possible, the importance of critical friends and working together to improve reputation, and the importance of peers.
 - There is a broad consensus that an improvement framework should seek to address issues across partnerships (as well as within an authority), given the general direction of public service delivery and reform.
 - There is support for the framework covering the full range of council services together with a belief that it is most likely that in practice this will need to be developed over time and focus initially on key service areas e.g. adults and children.

- There are some concerns about the resource implications for authorities, in releasing capacity to provide peer support if this is not funded, particularly in view of the financial constraints councils anticipate in the years ahead.
4. A selection of representative quotations from the consultation responses is attached in Appendix 2.

‘Setting the Pace’ Next Steps

5. Further work now needs to take place to refine, implement and communicate the framework and consider its links to the future of inspection and regulation. It is suggested that this involves:
 - Developing a communications strategy to continue to raise awareness in councils of the approach to improvement support going forward, get authorities to sign up to the commitment on improvement and provide a route map for support
 - Ensuring sufficient capacity is in place to provide support in key service areas and a model is developed to provide support for other improvement needs through business planning process. This will involve in particular further work with key service groups (e.g. ADCS and ADASS) and consideration of how best to support future efficiency requirements.
 - Working closely with RIEPs to facilitate sharing of approaches to supporting councils in difficulty and providing peer support more generally, to help RIEPs strengthen their offer if required
 - Facilitating a wider debate with RIEPs, Audit Commission, Government Office and IDeA to build on existing work to raise awareness of this new approach to improvement planning and how it fits alongside CAA
 - Continuing to produce examples of effective sector-led support to raise awareness of the approach and build confidence across government.
 - Developing proposals for the future of public sector inspection and regulation, building on the experience of CAA and the development of a sector-led approach and recognising the financial reality facing councils and other public services in coming years.
 - Developing proposals for the future funding of improvement support for the next spending review, to ensure sufficient resourcing to deliver sector-led support in the context of streamlined inspection and regulation.
6. Members’ views on the focus of future work are welcome. Reports on progress in developing this will be brought to the board as appropriate.

Financial Implications

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

Implications for Wales

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