

New Local Innovation Awards Scheme

Summary

This report updates the Board on the latest developments on the new scheme to promote best practice and innovation to replace the Beacon Scheme.

Dame Denise Platt, the Chair of the New Advisory Panel, will be attending the meeting and will set out her initial thinking on the future of the scheme and offer the Board the opportunity to continue to contribute to the scheme's development.

Recommendations

That the Improvement Board:

- Notes the progress that has been made towards a new scheme
- Considers the questions set out in paragraph 17

Action

As agreed by members

Background

1. The Improvement Board meeting in May 2009 noted the progress in developing changes to the Beacon Scheme and expressed concern about the extent to which it reflected members' views that the scheme required radical change. It was agreed that Councillor Parsons should meet the new chair of the scheme's advisory panel, Dame Denise Platt, to discuss the options for further development. At that meeting which took place on 26th May, Dame Denise was invited to attend the September Board meeting to set out her thoughts on the new scheme.
2. As members may be aware, Dame Denise Platt took up her appointment as Chair of the new scheme's Advisory Panel on May 1st 2009. She views the scheme as being jointly accountable to local and central government stakeholders, and therefore values the contribution that Improvement Board members can make.
3. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the Chair's initial thinking around the future scheme and to offer Improvement Board members the opportunity to own, and contribute to, the scheme's development. This year is seen as a transition year when the groundwork for a fully fledged innovation and good practice scheme can be put in place for the future.
4. Improvement Board can be assured that this is not a 'slick re-branding exercise', but a real attempt to create a best practice and innovation scheme that is fit for purpose, led from the sector, and which is both efficient and effective in transferring peer knowledge across the sector and its partners.
5. A radical approach must be driven by encouraging councils and their partners to develop innovative new approaches to the challenges they face and not just to identify and promote best practice. There must be fresh thinking around the learning process itself – not only in testing and identifying what works well and disseminating it - but also identifying the essential characteristics of what makes them work, in practical terms, and in what circumstances. This approach aims to capture emerging best practice and innovation locally, and to facilitate rapid transfer of knowledge nationally as well as regionally. In doing this, the new scheme will be looking at resources support and investment in incubating and dispersing new ideas and practices.

6. Dame Denise has a real belief that local government can generate the much needed solutions to the most challenging - and seemingly intractable - social issues that face councils in their role as place leaders. She is convinced that the sector is best placed to do this because it is closest to its communities, and provides access to services and opportunities for infrastructure and support from a democratic mandate.

Proposal

7. After listening to the Chairman of the Improvement Board and a wide range of stakeholders, Dame Denise has reflected LGA members' views and is proposing a radical process that results in:
- Fewer service-specific themes, and the introduction of up to two new challenge themes
 - A less bureaucratic evaluation framework, reducing the resource and cost burden on applicants
 - A new 'Dragon's Den' style challenge process to a panel of judges drawn from the Advisory Panel, Improvement Board and Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships
 - New awards to support emerging thinking or new untested ideas by front-line teams within councils working with partners and local people, to be given development support to refine and work up the ideas
 - Promoting the notion that 'local government's got talent' through strategic linkage to the LGA Group 11 business plan priorities, working jointly with central government sponsors, to maximize the profile and spread of award holders' practice and innovation.
8. The result will be an 'easy to enter, harder to secure' award that has a peer review element, engagement of local and regional stakeholders in a national best practice process. The Chair is recommending a new name for the new scheme: '**Local Innovation Awards**'. This name reflects feedback she has received from LGA Group officers, and she now seeks member support for the proposed name.
9. Over the past 6 months, LGA Group officers and Office Holders have been consulted on new themes for the first (transition) year of the new scheme. These have now been endorsed by the Minister, and are as follows:

- Building economic resilience
 - Keeping children and young people safe in the community
 - Policing our communities together
 - Taking control of care – empowering adults to control their own care
 - Achieving radical, innovative, value for money, responses to local service needs in Partnership (working title - likely to be a challenge theme)
 - Tackling Challenging Community Issues using talents across the generations (challenge theme).
10. These themes are aligned to the sector's 20 top ranking Local Area Agreement (LAA) priorities, as chosen by councils and their partners.

How this is more sector-led

11. This approach signals a move away from:
- Centrally imposed themes, towards a focus on solutions, emerging collaborative best practice, and innovative ideas from local government, its public sector partners and local communities
 - Centrally-determined criteria towards jointly agreed evaluation criteria and competencies, working with credible professionals in the field, and practitioners from leading local authorities
 - An award based on past performance metrics towards a focus on next practice. The result will be a high level of award to encourage front line teams within councils and their partners to work with local people to develop new ideas, better services, strong local infrastructures and markets through 'co-production' (working in collaboration with local people to create solutions to local problems), and knowledge transfer
 - A bureaucratic application process, towards an 'easy to enter, harder to secure' award that has a peer review element (interrogative visits, Dragons Den); engagement of local and regional stakeholders in a national best practice process, together with the involvement of other improvement, knowledge transfer experts.
12. To make the most of the new ideas that will emerge from local government, the new scheme will aim to collaborate with national **innovation stakeholders** (NESTA/the Lab, the Design Council, Think Public etc), so that innovation can be captured, nurtured and rolled out to boost performance and to sustain improvement in the sector.

13. Similarly, the new scheme seeks to complement the **Total Place** pilots. Efficiency and value for money will be taken into account in the evaluation of who should secure an award. Working in partnership to use all local resources more cost effectively will be a key feature of the efficiency element in year 1 of the new scheme, working towards making this an essential or mandatory element for evaluation of applications for year 2 themes. Co-production – working in partnership with local communities or local beneficiaries of local services to create local solutions – will become an increasingly essential or mandatory element as the scheme progresses.

Governance

14. The current Advisory Panel has been disbanded and the recruitment of a new Vice Chair is well underway. The replacement governance body for the new scheme will be recruited by November 2009. It will be half the size of the panel that steered the Beacon Scheme, cost less in fees and expenses, positioned so that it is more sector-owned and led and integrated into the national and regional improvement and efficiency architecture.
15. To feed ideas and challenge into the Panel, the Chair is also creating an **Expert Knowledge Group** as a reference focus group of opinion formers to challenge and present new thinking, ideas, and evidence to the panel; and this will be available for the rest of the LGA Group to use on behalf of the sector.
16. Dame Denise has made good contact with the Chair of the Chief Executive's Task Group and is meeting with the Chairs and Directors of the RIEPs shortly before the meeting of the Improvement Board; and every effort will be made to ensure that the regional perspective is injected into these governance arms.
17. The Board may wish to consider the following questions in discussion:
- Does this approach sufficiently reflect our shared ambitions and vision for a national best practice/innovation scheme for local government?
 - In this transition year, how can we best work together to shape the future scheme?
 - When the recruitment process takes place for the rest of Panel, how can we target appropriate high level elected members and officers?
 - How can the key themes for year two of the new scheme best be identified?

Financial Implications

18. The current Beacon Scheme is funded by a mixture of government support and IDeA resources. The new scheme will be more efficient and cost effective than the old Beacon scheme. The IDeA has already assumed a saving in Beacon costs of £200,000 in 2009/10. This sum has been redirected to other LGA Group priorities, and in particular, to support the programme that has been developed on children and young people's services. It is hoped that further efficiencies will be realised as the new scheme is developed.

Implications for Wales

19. Wales has its own best practice and innovation scheme, Excellence Wales. Excellence Wales is smaller but is also having to undergo an efficiency review. There is joint working with both teams, and a lot of shared insights and intelligence. Therefore, when the changes to the new scheme are implemented, they will indirectly benefit councils in Wales, where the LGA Group provides representation and direct services on their behalf.

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