



Note of Meeting and Decisions Taken

Improvement Board

23 March 2010

Present:

Chairman	Cllr David Parsons CBE (Leicestershire CC) (Con)
Deputy Chair	Cllr Geoff Knight (Lancaster CC) (Independent)
Conservative	Cllr Peter Fleming (Sevenoaks DC); Cllr Peter Goldsworthy (Chorley BC); Cllr Jonathan Owen (East Riding of Yorkshire); Cllr Richard Stay (Central Bedfordshire)
Labour	Cllr Christine Bowden (Newham LB); Cllr Tony McDermott (Halton BC); Cllr Ian Swithenbank CBE (IDeA) (Northumberland CC).
Liberal Democrat	Cllr Edward Lord JP (Corporation of London); Cllr Sir David Williams CBE (Richmond upon Thames LB).
Apologies	Cllr Jill Shortland (Somerset CC); Cllr Ann Lucas (Coventry); Cllr Andrew Povey (Surrey CC).
Substitute/Observer	Cllr Peter Thompson (Hounslow); Cllr John Commons (Manchester City).

1. Freedom to Lead

Dennis Skinner, Regional Associate, National Co-ordination IDeA, and Jo Miller, Deputy Chief Executive LGA gave a presentation to update the Improvement Board on the Freedom to Lead work. This included the key messages drawn out from the consultation responses, which fall into 4 main themes – stronger accountability to local people, streamlining and reducing inspection, joined-up democratic accountability for place and place-based budgeting and financial freedoms.

Members were invited to comment on the presentation. The following points were made in discussion:

- The importance of the democratic process in ensuring proper accountability, particularly for financial freedoms, was underplayed in the proposals
- The scrutiny process was important to call partner organisations to account
- There should be a clear, well-argued pitch to the in-coming government in order to demonstrate how our proposals could deliver savings in public expenditure
- Assessments should take place every 3 years rather than annually

The next stage of this work would be to develop a proposition for early lobbying with the next government, which lead members will be invited to comment on prior to publication. The work on greater democratic accountability would be feeding in to the separate work the LGA was doing on governance.

Decision

The Board **noted** the report and **agreed** the outline overall LGA Group position. The Board **authorised** lead members to approve the final Freedom to Lead proposition.

Action

Officers to develop the final proposition in the light of members' comments and seek lead member approval for it.

Dennis Skinner/Jo Miller

2. CAA Update

Nick Easton Senior Policy Consultant, presented this item and drew members' attention to a supplementary paper which set out how the Inspectorates proposed to respond to the two evaluation reports they had commissioned and their plans for CAA in Year 2.

Members were pleased to note that the proposed changes to CAA mirrored those previously proposed by the LGA but were sceptical that the Inspectorates would be able to deliver on their promises. In particular the early assessment of district councils was in conflict with how the public sector works in an area. If there was a need to stagger assessments then this should be done by geographic area rather than separating the tiers. There was also concern that the involvement of member peers was very patchy. The Board was keen to continue to monitor CAA to make sure Year 2 was being experienced in the way intended.

Decisions

The Board **noted** the report and asked that the Audit Commission be invited to a future meeting to review the operation of CAA in year 2.

Actions

- Invite the Audit Commission to a future meeting of the Improvement Board.

Nick Easton

3. RIEP developments - update

Keith Beaumont, RIEP Programme Manager, introduced a report which updated members on the latest RIEP developments. RIEP funding for 2010-11 had been confirmed as detailed in the letter from local government Minister Rosie Winterton MP. The Board's support had been instrumental in securing this funding. The Chairman thanked officers for their work and indicated that he would share the 4 key points

mentioned in the letter with the RIEPS at the next RIEP member forum which would be arranged for after the General Election.

Decision

The Improvement Board **noted** the update on RIEP developments.

Actions

A meeting of the RIEP Member Forum to be arranged in late May. (Note, now arranged for 27 May)

Keith Beaumont

4. Total Place

John Atkinson, Managing Director, Leadership Centre for Local Government and Jo Miller, Deputy Chief Executive, LGA, gave a presentation to members to update them on the Total Place initiative. The presentation detailed some of the key findings from the 13 pilot areas, all of whom have now reported back. The findings highlight the need for radical reform of the way public services are delivered and commissioned both nationally and locally to make significant financial savings, and provide better services for people. The Government was expected to publish a Total Place report to coincide with the Budget on 24 March.

Members made a number of comments, including the need to encourage alliances with partner organisations such as the health sector and the police service – and to promote the potential benefits place based working and budgeting could provide with a wider group of local authority chief executives. Members also discussed the need to publish good examples of money saving stories in the press and the need to focus some attention on the benefit of locating several different services in the same premises.

Decision

The Improvement Board **noted** the presentation.

Action

Officers to circulate presentation slides to members.

Jenny Day

5. New Local Innovation Awards Scheme

Dame Denise Platt presented a report which updated the Board on the latest developments on the new Local Innovation and Awards Scheme to recognise, celebrate, promote and support best practice and innovation in the local government sector. The process of applying for an award has been simplified and sets higher standards, and the panel has been reconstituted to half its original size. Citizens are now being involved when their local authority is up for an award, and the Bright Ideas scheme has proved very successful. The 'Challenge' theme suggested by Improvement Board members has been particularly helpful and will continue. The Board Chairman and Cllr Peter Fleming had attended the inaugural Award Ceremony

and thanked Dame Denise Platt and Ruby Dixon for their work in ensuring that the scheme has progressed so effectively.

Decision

Members **noted** the progress that has been made in the inaugural transition year of the new scheme and **agreed to support** the new themes suggested in paragraph 12 of the report.

Action

Future update reports to be brought to the Board when appropriate.

Ruby Dixon

6. The Equality Framework for Local Government

Sara Williams, Strategic Advisor IDeA, updated the Board on the progress councils have made on equalities, particularly how they have used the Equality Framework to support improvement. The Equality Framework is a development of the 'Equalities Standard' and has had a 98% take-up across all types of authorities and regions. There has also been good take up of the diversity and peer challenge which has been very successful.

The Board discussed the Framework and agreed that it was a useful tool for delivering community cohesion, and would enable members to gain a deeper understanding of their local communities in order to serve them better. The Board also agreed that it was important that such frameworks should not be published without appropriate member oversight in the future.

Decision

Members **noted** the progress of councils against the assessment areas of the Equality Framework for Local Government and **agreed** with the IDeA's approach to supporting authorities and strengthening the Framework as a tool to do this.

7. Chair's Report to LGA Executive

Members **noted** the report.

8. Note of the last meeting

The Board **agreed** the note of its last meeting.

Any other Business

Cllr Christine Bowden announced that this was her last meeting as she would not be standing for re-election in May. The Chairman thanked Cllr Bowden on behalf of the Board for her contribution to its work.

The Chairman also thanked Paul Roberts, Managing Director of the IDeA on behalf of the Board for his work as this was his last meeting as he would be retiring shortly

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 19 May at 11.00am, Local Government House.