

## **Freedom to Lead, Trust to Deliver**

### **Summary**

This report reminds the Improvement Board about the background to the Freedom to Lead work and progress so far. There will be a presentation to the Board drawing out the high level messages from the consultation responses and inviting members' guidance on outstanding issues.

### **Recommendations**

That the Board agrees the outline overall LGA group proposition, provides further guidance on key issues and authorises 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.

## Freedom to Lead, Trust to Deliver

### Background

1. At its meeting in September 2009, the Improvement Board agreed that the financial and political environment in the run up to the next General Election presented an opportunity to initiate a major debate about how councils and their partners could be given greater freedom to respond to local priorities. There was growing concern that the way public services were regulated and inspected was no longer affordable. Radical new solutions were needed that emphasised accountability to local people, rather than performance reporting to government.
2. In the light of members' comments a consultation brief entitled *Freedom to lead*, was published at the end of October 2009. This brief set out some of the key issues and invited leading councillors, chief officers, councils, local strategic partnerships and constituent partners to contribute to the debate.
3. In parallel, the LGA group published its own report ahead of the Government's Pre Budget Report that identified a set of straightforward measures to remove unnecessary administration and red tape that could save £4.5bn a year before local services are affected.
4. At the same time, the work of the Total Place pilots gathered pace in order to identify how a place-based approach, using the totality of public spending in local areas, might improve public services.
5. Responses to the *Freedom to Lead* consultation brief generally supported the essence of the proposals, i.e. providing councils with more authority to respond to local priorities, and to take greater collective responsibility for their own improvement.
6. In particular there was a strong feeling that:
  - authorities should be less accountable to central government for its priority setting and performance and more accountable to their own electorate;
  - there should be a single performance framework across the whole of the public sector;
  - greater support being provided to the sector from within the sector, through such means as peer-based approaches and the sharing of best practice.
7. Following discussion at the January meeting of the Board and at the LGA Executive, an LGA Group consultation paper with more detailed proposals for a new accountability framework was published, with a deadline for comment of 10 March 2010.

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8. This consultation paper, *Freedom to Lead, Trust to Deliver* invited views on a series of questions to council leaders and other stakeholders including whether there should be:

- devolved autonomy to shape the total amount of local public spending in any one place
- a slimline set of national indicators relevant to each locality
- three-year area financial settlements for the whole public sector
- new-style area agreements negotiated with local people, rather than central government
- a unified approach to the inspection of public service delivery
- moves towards a single improvement agency for local public services.

9. Extensive efforts to circulate and promote the proposals have been made including a number of presentations to groups of member councils.

10. An initial analysis of responses will be carried in the period between the deadline of 10 March and the Board meeting. The Board will receive a presentation of this analysis together with proposals for the next stage of the work. The presentation will:

- run through the headline messages in the responses;
- set out the key elements of the overall LGA Group proposition for members' agreement;
- identify key issues and seek member views where choices still have to be made.

11. The paper will be developed in the light of the Board's further guidance and lead members will then be asked to approve the final proposition.

## **Financial Implications**

There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

The work sits under the "Leading Local Communities" part of the Business Plan and is consistent with our General Election messages discussed with Office Holders.

## **Implications for Wales**

There is a different approach to performance management in Wales and we will be drawing on the lessons as part of this work.

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