

Improvement Board – report from Cllr David Parsons CBE (Chairman) to LGA Executive

The March meeting of the Improvement Board will receive a presentation on the initial analysis of the responses to the LGA Group consultation on proposals for a new accountability framework. The consultation, *Freedom to Lead, Trust to Deliver* sets out what local government can do to help solve problems and take joint working to a new level. We are aiming to improve accountability to local people, rather than performance reporting to government. Our ideas include reducing inspection and regulation in order to offer the next government a way to save money, cut red tape and provide better services for local people. We have made extensive efforts to circulate and promote the proposals.

The six inspectorates responsible for assessing local public services in England - the Audit Commission, Care Quality Commission, Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Constabulary, Prisons and Probation, and Ofsted have published a national overview of the first year of **comprehensive area assessment (CAA)**. The Oneplace report says that councils, the police, NHS, business and voluntary organisations all need to learn from each other and work more closely together if they are to improve services and increase value for money. The report also supports our Freedom to Lead work by arguing that central government should not restrict flexibility of public sector bodies to respond to local challenges and needs to ensure its rules do "not detract from local efforts to solve local problems".

A liaison meeting between LGA Chairman Margaret Eaton and LGA Office Holders and the **Audit Commission** was held on 17 February. There were two main topics of discussion – CAA in year 2 and the longer term future of inspection and assessment. During positive discussions members pressed the Commission on the range of changes we are seeking for Year 2 – in particular evidence of a reduced burden, greater member involvement, more joined up inspectorate activity at local level and our concerns about the timetable for shire districts in year 2. There was also some consensus about the longer term future of inspection and assessment.

The LGA has strongly opposed the scoring of **triggered inspections** in its response to the Joint Inspectorate consultation. We have argued that scoring is not appropriate where the number of inspections will be small and where the focus of each is likely to be very different and tailored to individual circumstances. In this context scoring will not act as a stimulus to further improvement – a robust narrative would be more effective.

The Audit Commission has invited comments on its draft Strategic Plan "Trust, transparency and value for money" by 21 May 2010. The plan sets out how – in the

23 4

new environment of expenditure constraint - the Commission can best fulfil its role in promoting greater accountability of local public bodies in England whilst at the same time encouraging improvement in the services they provide. The draft plan is available on the Commission's website. <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk>

The first winners of the new '**Local Innovation Awards**' scheme were praised for their work at a reception hosted by kind permission of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, at No 11 Downing Street on 2 March. The Scheme is run in partnership by the Government, the LGA Group and the independent Local Innovation Awards Scheme Advisory Panel. Cllr Parsons made a speech congratulating the award winners and presented the **Achieving more through partnerships award** to Northumberland Council. Tameside, Sunderland, Trafford and their partners were the other main award winners. Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, Northumberland Council and Halton Borough Council also received innovation development awards in the 'Bright Ideas' category. Award winners are required to enter into an agreement with the Advisory Panel and the LGA Group to share learning, provide peer support and timely knowledge transfer across sector. The judging panel for the awards included Improvement Board member Cllr Peter Fleming, Leader of Sevenoaks District Council. The Board is grateful for all the time and commitment given to the rigorous selection process. Members will be given the opportunity to discuss how the scheme can build on this success with Dame Denise Platt at the March Board.

The **Total Place** pilots have submitted their final reports on what they have learned from their experience of working with partners on a 'whole area' approach to public services. The Leadership Centre continues to work with officials at Communities and Local Government (CLG) and HM Treasury on the draft Total Place report. The Ministerial group on which Cllr Parsons represents local government is due to meet before the final report is published alongside the Budget later this month. The LGA Group is holding a one-day conference on Total Place and learning lessons from the pilots on 30 March 2010 in Local Government House.

A guide that brings to life the best support for efficiency and procurement provided by the **Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships' (RIEPs)** was published in February. The 'efficiency casebook' is now on the RIEP website: <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/17190665>. It shows how collaboration unlocks efficiencies for local authorities and their partners. Printed copies have been sent to leading members including the Improvement Board and the RIEP Member Forum and members have been encouraged to promote the casebook amongst their colleagues. The last in series of member procurement guides – this one on adult social care commissioning - was circulated with First and is also available on the IDeA website. The RIEP summary report on year 2 achievements, has been submitted to CLG with the RIEP interim reports. Ministers are considering the case for year 3 funding.

Liz Hobson 020 7664 3229 email: liz.hobson@lga.gov.uk