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## **Innovation Discussion Paper**

### **Purpose of Paper**

To discuss what role the LGA, under the remit of the Improvement Programme Board, should have on innovation:

- Is it about identifying and sharing innovative ideas as they emerge from councils (knowledge capture/exchange)
- Is it about facilitating the sectors' ambition/skills to be more innovative (development offer)
- Or is it a mixture of both?

### **Summary**

The Improvement Programme Board has always encouraged and promoted innovation in local government. For example the Local Innovation Awards programme which replaced the Beacon Scheme was a programme which helped to identify and support councils develop innovative practice. More recently the Board has supported the Creative Councils programme which the LGA are working with NESTA on. This paper suggests that much of the work that is developed under the remit of Improvement Programme Board is already, broadly speaking, innovative. The paper seeks discussion of whether a more explicit and wider LGA approach to innovation would be of value and whether such an approach should be centred on capturing and sharing knowledge or facilitating skills/ambition development or some combination of both.

### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to discuss the ideas in this paper and offer a steer on the role of the LGA in innovation and the future direction of the Improvement Programme Board in encouraging councils' innovation efforts/skills.

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**Background**

1. The LGA has a long involvement in promoting innovation within the local government sector with such initiatives ranging from Beacon Councils to Creative Councils.
2. The former Beacon Councils scheme operated from 2000 and it aimed to improve local public services by choosing a select group of councils to act as centres of excellence for chosen service areas. The scheme ran for eight years and each year saw the introduction of a different theme. However, all successful applicants were required to disseminate their innovative learning and good practice to the wider local government sector via a series of 'open days' or presentations at related conferences/workshops for said themes.
3. The Local Innovation Awards arose from Beacon Councils and it was developed to achieve four aims;
  - 3.1 identify, acknowledge and spread innovation and excellence
  - 3.2 raise standards by promoting best practice through peer learning and knowledge transfer
  - 3.3 improve services to make a real difference to quality of life and life chances for individuals and communities
  - 3.4 give national recognition to local, frontline services and partnerships
4. The former Local Innovation Awards scheme identified partnerships with excellent practice and innovation in service delivery and it encouraged partnerships to develop new approaches to the challenges they face and, in doing so, raise standards for all. It captured the expertise and commitment that lies at the frontline of public services and the real difference this makes to communities across the country. The awards celebrated the important role partnership working plays in delivering services in the community in the most effective and efficient way.
5. The current Creative Councils Innovation programme has been developed by NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts), working with the LGA, to support councils to develop and implement radical innovations in how they deliver local public services in the climate of reduced public expenditure.
6. The ambition over the next two years is to work with a small group of creative, pioneering councils and their partners throughout England and Wales. We will

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develop, implement and spread transformational new approaches to meeting some of the biggest medium and long-term challenges facing communities and local services. The focus of the programme will be on councils prepared to ask fundamentally different questions about how services are delivered and designed.

7. The aim is both to provide practical support to the councils and their partners involved in the programme to successfully develop and implement their ideas, and to generate learning, practical models and inspiration that can be applied throughout local government.

**Innovation**

8. The LGA's involvement in innovation has successfully assisted the identification and sharing of ideas as they emerge from councils and, to a lesser extent, facilitated the sectors' ambition/skills to be more innovative. We are hopeful that Creative Councils can offer more detailed lessons on facilitating innovation in councils (the 'DNA' for transformative council innovations) and in particular support the development of policy within LGA programme themes. With Knowledge Hub at the centre of on-line communication of this initiative we are confident that the Improvement Programme Board's history of innovation knowledge exchange will continue.
9. But what is also clear from the 137 Creative Councils applications is that many councils fall short of demonstrating the key skills or conditions necessary for successful and transformative innovations. Clear and ambitious articulation of the current/future innovation challenges, solid horizon scanning, prototyping, scaling up, good legal advice, new models of raising resources, new models of resource ownership, leadership, all seem to be fruitful areas that NESTA and the Innovation Unit will be working hard with the 17 that are currently progressing in the Creative Councils initiative.
10. The pace of Councils' ongoing challenges to save money, eliminate waste and provide radical solutions to the way that services are provided in the future – is unlikely to subside.
11. It is important to recognise too that many of the Improvement Programme Board's key business areas are already, implicitly, innovative in their focus/approach e.g. work on: productivity; self-regulation, leadership, data-sharing and transparency, peer support and leadership.

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**Innovation within the Improvement Programme Board: Some Key Questions?**

12. The key question for this discussion is would a more explicit and wider approach to innovation better enable the LGA to demonstrate its commitment to supporting councils to radically transform how they lead their communities to face long term challenges and help move the sector beyond improvement?
13. Is enough investment being made in demonstrating the Improvement Programme Board's strategic commitment to innovation?
14. Does the Improvement Programme Board want to branch beyond solid facilitation of councils' innovation knowledge/experiences?
15. If so, how much does the Improvement Programme Board wish to invest in encouraging innovation ambition and developing skills of the sector to be innovative?

**Commentators' Views of Local Government's Innovation credentials.**

16. To aid discussion we have scanned the learning from a number of recent key reports on local governments' innovation capability/potential.
17. These reports raise many questions which if the LGA were to work with councils to address would fall much more in the development genre. Does Improvement Board see this as a valid endeavour? If it does, how much of limited resources would the Improvement Programme Board wish to commit? The reports we scanned are:
  - 17.1 The Audit Commission's 'Seeing the Light'  
<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies/localgov/Pages/seeingthelight.aspx>
  - 17.2 NESTA's 'Everyday Innovation'  
<http://www.nesta.org.uk/library/documents/Every-day-innovation-report.pdf>
  - 17.3 Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Anglo-Dutch Tri-City Study of 'Place based Leadership and Social Inclusion'

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18. The core challenges identified in these reports that the Improvement Board may wish to explore are:

***Workforce***

- I. How can the LGA best assist local government managers to encourage innovation, experimentation and risk-taking in their organisations?

***Leadership***

- II. How can the LGA best assist local government leaders to promote behaviours that encourage radical change?

***Improvement***

- III. How can the Improvement Programme Board work with other LGA Programme Boards to endorse and encourage innovation as an essential part of their contributions to local government sector improvement?

***Collaboration***

- IV. How can the LGA best assist local government to utilise innovation potential within partnerships?

**Conclusion**

19. This brief paper has aimed to prompt discussion on the parameters of LGA's involvement in promoting and facilitating council innovation and the format this should take. We trust that discussing some of the points above members would gain a clearer understanding on whether a more explicit and wider LGA approach to innovation would be of value and whether such an approach should be continue to be focused on capturing knowledge or facilitating development or some combination of both.

**Financial Implications**

20. There are no financial implications arising from this report.