

Note of decisions taken and actions required

Title: LG Group Improvement Programme Board
Date and time: Thursday 8 September 2011, 11.00am
Venue: Local Government House

Attendance

Position	Councillor	Council
Chairman	Peter Fleming	Sevenoaks DC
Vice Chair	Jill Shortland OBE	Somerset CC
Deputy Chair	Ruth Cadbury	Hounslow LB
Deputy Chair	Jeremy Webb	East Lindsey DC
Members	Rod Bluh	Swindon BC
	Richard Stay	Central Bedfordshire
	Teresa O'Neill	Bexley LB
	Helen Holland	Bristol City
	Judith Blake	Leeds City
	Edward Lord OBE JP	City of London Corporation
Substitutes	Tony Jackson	East Hertfordshire
	Theo Blackwell	Camden LB
In attendance	Cllr Paul Bettison	Bracknell Forest DC
Apologies	Michael White	Havering LB
	William Nunn	Breckland Council
	Tony McDermott MBC	Halton BC
	Tim Cheetham	Barnsley MBC

Officers: Jo Miller, Dennis Skinner (LG Group)

Item	Decisions and actions	Action by
1	<p>Improvement Programme Board Membership, Terms of Reference and Appointments 2011 – 12</p> <p>Members noted the Board’s membership.</p> <p>Members said that the Board’s Terms of Reference needed to reflect the Board’s work with sub-national improvement structures.</p> <p>Members agreed the following appointments:</p> <p>Cllr Tony McDermott to represent the Board on the Urban Commission Steering Committee.</p> <p>Cllr William Nunn to represent the Board on the Rural Commission.</p> <p>Cllr Edward Lord to continue as the Board’s Social Inclusion and Equalities Representative.</p> <p>Action</p> <p>The Board’s Terms of Reference to reflect Members’ comments.</p> <p>Officers to inform Board appointments of outside body arrangements.</p>	<p>Paul Johnston</p> <p>Paul Johnston</p>
2	<p>Improvement Programme Board priorities</p> <p>The Chairman introduced the report by stating that reports to the Board should in future directly address at least one of the five priority headings:</p> <p>Leadership Productivity Improvement Innovation Transparency</p> <p>Members stressed the need for the Board to focus on supporting innovation as well as improvement in local government.</p>	

On Leadership, Members sought reassurance of the Group's capacity to deliver a comprehensive offer in light of the Group's reduction in resources.

Members agreed that the Board should continue to have the majority of meetings in London and that outside meetings should only be arranged to coincide with regional events. Strong links should continue to be built with the sub-national improvement architecture.

Members said that the Group should re-examine the arrangements for the Improvement Conference to ensure that the event was more innovative in its format and approach and had a greater focus on outcomes.

Members praised the *Be a Councillor* programme but asked that the tools be made available to all councils.

Action

Officers to revise the proposals on the Board's priorities in light of Members' comments.

**Dennis
Skinner**

3 Public Services by Design

Members received a presentation from Ellie Runcie, Design Council, on the *Public Services by Design* programme. Copies of the presentation are available via the LG Group website.

The Chairman said that the programme represented a different way of working to that normally run by local government and that there would be merit in the LG Group developing stronger links with a wider range of organisations promoting innovation and improvement.

Members sought reassurance that the Design Council's programme did not duplicate work already undertaken by the LG Group on productivity and improvement.

Members said that the current austere economic climate meant that local authorities would need a particularly robust evidence base of the benefits that such programmes would bring prior to investment. Members discussed how best to promote this programme and its derived benefits, and agreed that current learning should be shared and promoted through a variety of channels, including the LG Group's Improvement bulletin.

Action

Officers to include details of the *Public Services by Design* programme in the next LG Group Improvement Bulletin, and to liaise with the Design Council on possible future synergies.

Nick Easton

Mike Short

4 Taking the Lead

Officers introduced the report, which updated Members on progress in implementing *Taking the Lead*.

Members sought reassurance on the Group's capacity to fully implement and oversee proposals given the significant reduction in the Group's resources. Officers stressed that the Group had identified *Taking the Lead* as one of its priorities in going forward and had allocated resources accordingly. The proposals put a greater emphasis on local government having greater responsibility and local accountability, and that the Group's role was to facilitate this transition and to provide support and guidance.

Members felt that greater emphasis should be put on innovation as opposed to managing the risk of underperformance and that more could be done to manage Ministers' expectations about the ability of the LG Group to prevent individual instances of service failure.

Members said that the current criteria for Member Peer appointments needed to be re-examined to ensure that Peers had the full range of skills needed in order to provide advice and support to councils facing new pressures and challenges in the future.

With regard to the transfer of the Audit Commission's in-house practice, Members expressed disappointment that the size of outsourced contracts suggested that smaller audit companies would not be able to bid for contracts.

The Chairman said that the Board's Lead Members would carefully monitor progress on *Taking the Lead* at its meetings.

Decision

The Board agreed the proposed new approach to peer challenge set out at paragraph 6 of the report.

Action

Officers to finalise the peer challenge offer in light of members' comments and continue to promote the offer to councils

Andy Bates

5 Children's Services – Sector led improvement

Liz Railton, Interim Director for Children's Services Improvement, introduced the report, which set out arrangements for a sector led approach to children's services improvement. Liz stressed that proposals were still at an early stage, but that a number of local authorities had volunteered as early adopters.

Members said, in the context of earlier discussions around innovation, that the children's services sector did not easily lend itself to innovation. Officers acknowledged this point, but said that the immediate challenge was to ensure that the basics of good safeguarding were in place across all local authorities.

Members noted that the new system of self improvement was in addition to current inspection arrangements and expressed concern that the proposals would create an additional burden for authorities. In response to Members' concern over potential duplication with Taking the Lead, officers stressed that synergies with existing activities, such as those undertaken by the Performance Support Panel, were being examined.

Members asked how to manage reputational risk, and engage Councils that were underperforming. Officers said that part of the new sector led improvement proposals was to provide additional support to address possible failure, and to promote new ways of working.

Decision

Members noted the key elements of the sector led improvement to children's services;

Members asked the CYP Board to satisfy itself that Ofsted's proposals on inspection will lead to a reduction in the burden of inspection.

Action

Officers to ensure that the new approach to Children's improvement and "Taking the Lead" fit together and that there is no duplication.

**Dennis Skinner
and Liz Railton**

Officers to liaise with officers and Members involved with the Children and Young People Board to ensure a cross-cutting approach.

6 Fraud in Local Government

Members received a presentation from Mike Haley, National Fraud Authority, on the Authority's proposals for a Local Government Fraud Strategy.

Members agreed that it was important the sector improved its response to fraud but said that local government, in comparison with other areas in the public sector, already performed well in combating fraud.

Any strategy should deal with the legal barriers that prevent more effective data sharing at local level and promote better use of technology.

Action

Officers to liaise with the National Fraud Authority, involving Cllr Jill Shortland.

Andy Hughes

7 Local Productivity Programme

Members agreed to defer this item to the next meeting but that in the meantime members' views on the issues raised in the paper be sought.

Brian Roberts

8 Notes of the last meeting

Members agreed the note of the last meeting as a correct record.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 8 November 2011