

Note of decisions taken and actions required

Title: Improvement Board
Date: Tuesday, 17 January 2012
Venue: Local Government House

Attendance

Position	Councillor	Council
Chairman	Peter Fleming	Sevenoaks DC
Vice Chairman	Jill Shortland	Somerset CC
Deputy-Chairman	Ruth Cadbury	Hounslow LB
Deputy-Chairman	Jeremy Webb	East Lindsey DC
Members	Rod Bluh	Swindon BC
	Michael White	Havering LB
	Richard Stay	Central Bedfordshire Council
	William Nunn	Breckland DC
	Tony McDermott MBE	Halton BC
	Tim Cheetham	Barnsley MBC
	Helen Holland	Bristol City
	Judith Blake	Leeds City
	Edward Lord OBE JP	City of London Corporation
Substitutes	Tony Jackson	East Herts
Apologies	Teresa O'Neill	Bexley LB
	John Taylor	Northumberland
Observers/Other attendees	Cllr Paul Bettison	LGA Conservative National Lead Peer
	Philip Sellwood	Energy Savings Trust (Chief Executive)
	Julie Carney	Department for Communities and Local Government
	Cllr John Kent	Thurrock Council (Leader)
	Graham Farrant	Thurrock Council (Chief Executive)
LGA Officers	Dennis Skinner, Brian Reynolds, Nick Easton, Pascoe Sawyers, Juliet Whitworth and Ian Carbutt	

Item	Decisions and actions	Action by
1.	<p>Welcome and Introductions</p> <p>The Chairman welcomed members, observers, guest speakers and officers to the meeting and informed the Board of those apologies that had been received.</p>	
2.	<p>Improvement Board - Priorities for 2012/13</p> <p>The Chair briefly outlined the report, which asked members to comment on and contribute to the 2012/13 priorities for the Improvement Board and the Association as set out in the draft Business Plan. Feedback would be relayed to the Leadership Board, to inform the final Business Plan, which would be signed off by the Executive in March.</p> <p>A detailed discussion followed, in which members made a number of comments relating to issues including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the need for the LGA’s priorities to better reflect the vision for local government in the future; • the significant number of priorities identified and potential overlap between them; • the omission of several strategic issues; • the relationship between the Board’s priorities and performance indicators. <p>In light of the discussion, the Chairman invited Members to submit their comments and suggested amendments in writing to Dennis Skinner (Head of Leadership and Productivity).</p> <p><u>Decision</u></p> <p><i>The Improvement Board agreed that Members’ comments and suggested amendments relating to the priorities in the Business Plan be relayed to officers finalising the Business Plan. .</i></p> <p><u>Action</u></p> <p>Officers to collate and circulate Members’ comments regarding the priorities in the Business Plan, prior to feeding the Board’s views into the Leadership Board to inform the final Business Plan.</p>	<p>Dennis Skinner / Mike Short</p>

3. Order of Business

The Chairman indicated that the presenters for the 'Sector Led Improvement' item would be arriving part way through the meeting. This item would therefore be postponed until later on the agenda.

4. Future Arrangements for Audit

Councillor Stay declared a personal interest in the item.

Nick Easton (Senior Advisor) introduced the report, which outlined the latest position with regard to the Government's proposal for the future of local public audit. Julie Carney from the Department for Communities and Local Government verbally updated Members on the most recent developments, including: the Government's proposals for the future of local public audit in the light of the earlier consultation exercise, the anticipated legislative timescale, engagement workshops with the sector and the processes for outsourcing the work of the Audit Commission's Audit Practice. With reference to potential cost differences between commissioning 3 year or 5 year contracts, Julie Carney asked Members to provide a steer on the sector's preference in terms of contract length.

In the ensuing discussion, Members made a number of comments and questions, which were responded to by Julie Carney, relating to issues including:

- the sector's preference for 3 year contracts over 5 year contracts if there was little difference in cost;
- strong support for the sector undertaking their new role in appointing their own auditors without delay;
- serious concerns that the Government's proposals would not lead to a more competitive audit market in the long term;
- discord between the principles of Localism and the prescriptive nature of the Government's proposals for appointing local public auditors and the need to address this imbalance;
- concern regarding the future role of the National Audit Office above and beyond regulating the register of local public auditors.

Given the cross party consensus and strength of feeling regarding the issue, Members suggested that Board write to the relevant Ministers setting out the Board's concerns and recommendations and ensure that members of the LGA Executive are informed.

Decision

*The Board **agreed** to write to the relevant Ministers setting out the Improvement Board's position regarding the Government's proposals for the future of local public audit.*

Action

Officers to draft a statement, for Members' approval setting out the Board's position on the future of local public audit; and prepare a letter setting out the Board's position regarding the Government's proposals for the future of local public audit.

Nick Easton

5. LG Inform – Progress Report

Juliet Whitworth (Research and Information Manager) and Ian Carbutt (Programme Manager) provided a PowerPoint presentation outlining the progress made with the LG Inform programme, coupled with a live demonstration of the tool. In terms of promoting the tool, officers were regularly travelling to regions in order to meet groups of local authorities. In the ensuing discussion several issues were raised, including:

- that the level of uptake of LG Inform would be a significant measure of its success;
- the need to commit appropriate resources to market the tool effectively;
- the potential scope for training a wider pool of Members and officers with the knowledge and skills to promote LG Inform within the regions;
- the potential long-term implications for public sector practices in terms of buying and selling data;
- scope for improvements to the visual appearance and user-friendly nature of LG Inform.

Decisions

That the Board:-

- **noted** the progress made in delivering the LG Inform programme to date; and
- **asked** that their comments be taken into account in the development of the LG Inform programme.

Action

Officers to continue to develop the programme in line with the progress made and taking into account Members' comments.

**Julie Whitworth /
Ian Carbutt**

6. Update on Transparency and Open Data Measures

Juliet Whitworth introduced the report, which updated Members on the ongoing work on data transparency as well as key developments in this area. In particular, Members were asked to confirm the continued need to address this expanding area of work and agree the proposed work plan set out in paragraph 10 of the report.

Members confirmed their support for the proposed work plan and emphasised the importance of continuing to lobby Government about the costs to local authorities associated with making data publically available and the benefit to councils of Government being more open with the data it holds, particularly around worklessness and child poverty.

Decisions

That the Board:

- **confirmed** the need to address the new and expanding area of work around Transparency and Open Data Measures;
- **agreed** the work programme as set out in the report, subject to the inclusion of a reference to the Department for Work and Pensions in paragraph 10.1; and
- **asked** that their comments be taken into account in the development of this work.

Actions

Officers to continue to develop the programme in line with the progress made and taking into account Members' comments.

**Julie Whitworth /
Gesche Schmid**

Officers to include a reference to Department for Work and Pensions in paragraph 10.1 of the work plan.

**Julie Whitworth /
Gesche Schmid**

7. Sector Led Improvement - Confidential

The confidential item was considered and resolutions recorded.

8. The National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP)

Pascoe Sawyers briefly outlined the report which updated Members on progress made in developing and delivering the programme. Key improvements to the programme, which would also deliver significant cost savings, included a move towards more practical development based modules and a more local authority outcome-based approach.

In the ensuing discussion, Members put forward a number of comments and questions, which were responded to by Pascoe Sawyers, including:-

- that although the cost savings were welcome, it was important that the budget reductions did not adversely impact on the value of the programme;
- querying the rationale behind the accreditation not being delivered by an organisation from within the sector;
- highlighting the benefits of linking the NGDP to the wider leadership offer;
- the need to be clear about the intended outcomes from the programme and what the programme seeks to add?;
- the importance of clearly communicating the benefits of the NGDP to the sector to increase the number of Councils participating in the programme and to address the traditionally London-centric nature of the scheme;
- the need to address the disparity between the number of applicants and the number of places on the programme.

Decisions

That the Board:

- ***noted*** the progress made in developing and delivering the National Graduate Development Programme; and
- ***asked*** that their comments be taken into account in the development programme.

Action

Officers to continue to develop and deliver the NGDP in line with progress made and taking into account Members' comments.

Pascoe Sawyers

9. Productivity Programme – Better with Less - Update

Brian Reynolds (Productivity) briefly outlined the report, which updated members on the progress made in delivering the Productivity Programme. He asked Members to provide their view on the provisional 2012/13 programme priorities as set out in paragraph 19 of the report. In the ensuing discussion, Brian Reynolds responded to a number of questions and comments by Members relating to issues including:

- which local authorities were taking part in the Adult Social Care Efficiency programme;

- queries about joint working across national borders, particularly in relation to the initiative to improve outcomes for children and families;
- the benefit of councils sharing their experiences of addressing particular issues such as troubled families and sharing services;
- the importance of focusing resources on preventative measures to improve outcomes for children and families and to lobby government to commit up-front funding to address long term factors;
- the benefits of local authorities sharing services and the need to promote these benefits appropriately depending on the type of council.

Decisions

That the Board:

- **noted** the progress made in the delivery of the productivity programme; and
- **asked** that the Board's comments be taken into account in developing the 2012/13 Productivity Programme.

Actions

Officers to continue to develop the programme in line with the progress made and taking into account Members' above comments;

Brian Reynolds

To answer Members' questions regarding cross-national joint working and the Adult Social Care Efficiency programme;

Brian Reynolds

To circulate information on Swindon Council's experiences of tackling troubled families.

Frances Marshall

10. Creative Councils Update

The Chairman briefly outlined the report updating Members on progress with the Creative Councils innovation programme.

Decision

*That the Board **noted** the update.*

11. Notes of the last meeting

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

12. Date of next meeting

11.00am Tuesday, 20 March 2012