

Note of decisions taken and actions required

Title: Improvement Board
Date: Tuesday, 20 March 2012
Time: 11.00 am – 1.10 pm
Venue: Local Government House

Attendance

Position	Councillor	Council
Chairman	Peter Fleming	Sevenoaks DC
Vice Chairman	Jill Shortland OBE	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
	Teresa O'Neill	Bexley LB
	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	Peter Britcliffe	Hyndburn BC
Apologies	William Nunn	Breckland Council
	John Taylor	Northumberland
Observers/Other attendees	Cllr Paul Bettison	LGA Conservative National Lead Peer
	Philip Sellwood	Energy Savings Trust
	Richard Priestman	De Montford University
	Shehla Husain	Department for Communities and Local Government
LGA Officers	Dennis Skinner, Howard Davis, Mark Edgell, Rachel Litherland, Marianne Abley, Brian Reynolds, Ivor Wells, Pascoe Sawyers and Gesche Schmid	

Item	Decisions and actions	Action by
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Welcome and Introductions

The Chairman welcomed Members, observers, guest speakers and officers to the meeting and informed the Board of those apologies that had been received.

1.a Sector-led Improvement

Dennis Skinner (Head of Leadership and Productivity) briefly outlined the report, which asked Members to comment on the draft single overarching framework publication for the sector's approach to sector-led improvement. The framework brought together the work of the Children's Improvement Board, the Towards Excellence in Council's Adult Social Care Board and the Improvement Board. The report also provided an update on progress made around Peer Challenge and LG Inform.

Shehla Husain from the Department for Communities and Local Government (Deputy Director, Accountability and Transparency) commented from a government perspective on the sector-led approach to improvement. She emphasised Ministers' support for sector ownership of improvement and pointed towards a cultural shift in the relationship between central and local government. In terms of taking this approach forward, she emphasised the importance of building on the strong foundations of transparency, accountability and trust between the local government sector and Government.

A detailed discussion followed, in which Members made a number of comments which were responded to by the Principal Advisers, relating to issues including:

- There was support for the draft framework and the principle of bringing together the improvement activities of children's and adults services with that of the Improvement Board.
- With reference to the framework's broad target audience, Members discussed the need to tailor the communications and marketing strategy appropriately to encourage buy-in at local authority level. In addition to targeting Leaders and Chief Executives, Members felt it would be important to circulate the framework to audit and scrutiny chairs.
- Cautious optimism was expressed about a gradual shift towards a more interdependent relationship between the sector and the inspectorates (in particular Ofsted and CQC).

- Whilst Members felt strongly that the local government sector should lead on the sector-led improvement agenda, they acknowledged the need to carefully balance the LGA's dual role as a membership organisation and its responsibilities as the national body overseeing the sector-led improvement framework.
- Members discussed the benefits of a combined national and regional approach to sector improvement, noting that the variations in ambition and capacity at regional level meant that how this worked out in practice was likely to differ from region to region.

Decisions

That the Board:

- endorsed** the draft framework publication for discussion with the Children's Improvement Board and Towards Excellence in Councils Adult Social Care Board;*
- asked** that their comments regarding the draft framework be taken into consideration;*
- agreed** that the Improvement Board Lead Members be authorised to approve the final publication; and*
- noted** progress made in respect of Peer Challenge and LG Inform.*

Action

Finalise the framework publication in the light of discussions and seek Lead Members' approval.

Dennis Skinner

1.b Future Arrangements for Audit

The Chairman updated Members on the outcome of an LGA – Audit Commission (AC) liaison meeting, following the results of the AC's process to procure local public audit. Whilst welcoming the savings of £250 million over five-years, the LGA Group Leaders had sought assurances that the 40 per cent saving would apply to all local authorities. Further clarity was still required regarding the arrangements for managing the audit contracts once the Commission had been abolished and for then procuring local public audit after the expiry of the 5 year contracts.

With reference to the abolition of the AC, LGA group leaders had signalled their interest in exploring whether the sector would want to jointly procure audit in the future, and if so how.

Decision

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

1.c Pan-Africa Peer Review Programme

Ivor Wells (Adviser) provided Members with an update on the Pan-African Peer Review Project, which had received high profile national and international media coverage. In doing so, he outlined the overall programme timetable and highlighted the potential role for the LGA in future international peer review projects. Members were invited to comment on the progress of the project and on upcoming activities.

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

- In discussing the peer training programme, Members were assured that the programme included health and safety training as well as information about the wider economic, social and political context of the countries in which the peers would be operating.
- Members emphasised the importance of tapping into existing knowledge and skills within the sector to help support the programme of work.

Decisions

That the Board:

- noted** the report ; and*
- asked** that their comments be taken into consideration in the development of the programme.*

Action

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

Ivor Wells / Andy
Bates

2. Leadership and Localism Progress Report: March 2012

Pascoe Sawyers (Principal Advisor – Leadership) briefly outlined the report which updated Members on progress made in developing and delivering the Leadership and Localism programme of work. In particular he drew Members' attention to the development of master classes as a specific offer for Leadership Academy alumni and the completion of regionally based induction events for new councillors. Members were invited to comment on the delivery of this programme and to make recommendations regarding its future direction.

In the following discussion, Members raised several issues which were responded to by Pascoe Sawyers, including:

- The lead member for Leadership pointed towards ongoing planning for the 2012/13 work programme and noted the intention to bring a report on the future leadership offer to the Board in due course.
- Members discussed the potential for developing 'regionally specific offers' to member councils so that the programme was not seen as London centric.
- Members commented on the 2012/13 work programme and suggested several additional priorities for inclusion in the future work programme.

Decisions

That the Board:

- noted the report;*
- asked that their comments be taken into consideration in the development of the programme; and*
- asked that a report on the development of the future Leadership work programme and 'offer' to councils be brought to a future meeting.*

Actions

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

Bring a report on the development of the future Leadership work programme and 'offer' to councils to a future meeting. Pascoe Sawyers

3. **Productivity Programme: 2012/13 Work Programme and Update**

Brian Reynolds (Productivity) briefly outlined the report, which updated Members on the progress made in delivering the Productivity Programme. In particular, he invited Members' views on: asset management; troubled families; shared service; and the Government's Procumbent Pledge.

A detailed discussion followed, in which Members made a number of comments, which were responded to by Brian Reynolds, relating to issues including:

- Several concerns were raised about the current approach to dealing with troubled families – including whether the ambition was achievable; the problems with payments to councils in arrears and the need to have a better understanding of what best practice looks like and how it can be shared.
- In discussing the direction of the shared services agenda, Members highlighted the need to move beyond shared back office functions and develop a more innovative approach to public service transformation. Suggestions included a 'whole scale change' approach to public service delivery, such as 'whole place' community budgets.
- In relation to the Capital Assets Programme, Members emphasised the importance of supporting local authorities with infrastructure investment as a means for stimulating economic growth and encouraged the use of private sector assets as well as public sector ones.
- In discussing the Government's draft Procurement Pledge, Members raised serious concerns regarding a significant number of issues within the Pledge. There was unanimous support for developing a local government Procurement Pledge that better reflected the strengths and aspirations of the sector rather than sign the Government's draft Pledge.

Decisions

That the Board:

- noted** the progress made in the delivery of the existing productivity programme;*
- agreed** to develop a local government Pledge rather than sign the Government's Procurement Pledge; and*

- iii. *asked that their comments be taken into consideration in the development of the programme.*

Actions

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|---|----------------|
| Develop a local government Procurement Pledge. | Brian Reynolds |
| Continue to develop the programme in line with the progress made and taking into account Members' comments. | Brian Reynolds |

4. Creative Councils Update

The Chairman briefly outlined the report which updated Members on progress with the Creative Councils innovation programme. He commented on the selection process, which would take place between April and May, and outlined the next steps, including disseminating the information to a wider audience. Members were invited to comment on the update and the forward work programme.

With reference to the financial costs associated with disseminating the information to a wider audience, Members discussed the budget for the joint funded project and the potential need for further investment.

Decision

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

5.a Resident Satisfaction Questions: LGA Consultation

Dennis Skinner briefly outlined the report which updated Members on the development of a proposed set of questions and accompanying guidance that the sector could use to collect broadly comparable data on resident satisfaction.

Member discussed the value of comparable data and the costs associated with the proposed work. They wished to be reassured about the demand in the sector for this work.

Decision

That this work be taken forward in the light of consultation responses and Members' views.

Action

Develop the way forward in the light of responses to the consultation and Members' views.

Juliet Whitworth

5.b Update on Transparency: March 2012

Gesche Schmid (Function Lead: Geographical Information Policy) summarised the report which provided an update on ongoing work related to transparency and on the issue of councillor notification under the Data Protection Act. Members were invited to comment on the update.

In the following discussion, Members put forward a number of comments and questions, which were responded to by Gesche Schmid, relating to issues including:

- It was noted that there was some degree of discrepancy between the messages from the Information Commissioner's Office and from Government Ministers regarding the requirement for councillors to be independently registered under the Data Protection Act.
- Members discussed the potential for local authorities to charge a small fee for freedom of information requests.
- With reference to the single data list, Members emphasised the need to move forward with discussions with DCLG officials over setting up a gateway process to challenge future additions to the single data list and review existing returns on the list.

Decisions

That the Board:

- noted** the progress made in the delivery of the Transparency Programme; and*
- asked** that their comments be taken into consideration in the development of the programme.*

Action

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

Juliet Whitworth

6. Notes of the last meeting and actions arising – Confidential

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

7. Date of next meeting

11.00am Tuesday, 15 May 2012