

Local Government Knowledge Navigator

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report provides Members with an update on the Local Government Knowledge Navigator programme and builds on the previous paper discussed at the Improvement and Innovation Board on the 2 November 2012.

Professor Tim Allen, one of three appointed Navigators, will provide a short presentation as well as seek to engage with the Board to learn their views on the key issues facing local government and how the project will help.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- i) nominate a councillor to the Knowledge Navigator Steering Group; and
- ii) offer initial steers for the Knowledge Navigator Team in terms of areas where research, and research derived, knowledge and data will help local government in meeting improvement and innovation challenges in the short and longer term.

Action

Take forward in line with Members' recommendations.

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Local Government Knowledge Navigator

Background and context

1. The Local Government Association (LGA) has been working with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Society of Chief Executives (SOLACE) to develop an approach to ensure that local government both inputs to and benefits from publically funded research programmes commissioned under the auspices of the UK Research Councils.
2. A new approach is required because the Local Authority Research Council Initiative (LARCI) that had been tasked with developing linkage between local government and work funded by the UK's research councils (RCUK) was disbanded in March 2011. Once LARCI closed, the principal funders (LGA, RCUK and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)) commissioned a review by Dr Clive Grace to examine its successes and the challenges it faced, from the perspectives of both local government and the research councils. The review report is available at: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/media/news/2012news/Pages/120702.aspx>.
3. It concluded that:
 - 3.1. local government and the research councils have very different 'research' priorities – the one principally in harvesting existing knowledge and applied research to solve problems, the other in the production of new knowledge;
 - 3.2. a major change was needed in culture and understanding – the 'public' (i.e. not-for-profit) market between local government and the research community is not working; and
 - 3.3. local government needs to be an effective and assertive client in claiming a share of the national research asset to support community well-being and better public services.

Developments since LARCI closure

4. The LGA worked closely with the LARCI funders to consider ways forward by which the original aims of LARCI could be achieved through a different approach. The LGA learnt that, independent of these discussions, ESRC were planning to appoint a one-year fixed-term 'Local Government Knowledge Navigator' post, whose role was to bring together ESRC funded research that might be of benefit to the local government sector. Following discussions with the ESRC in the summer of 2012, LGA and SOLACE reached agreement with ESRC that the navigator post would be extended to two years, with an increase in ESRC funding for this post from £100,000 to £170,000, to make it more likely to deliver outputs and outcomes of value.

5. More specifically it was agreed that the navigator would be tasked with:
 - 5.1. influencing the strategic research agenda within ESRC, other research councils and through other relevant research bodies to achieve better local government leverage on national investment in research, and to begin to shape research agendas to benefit local government;
 - 5.2. working closely with existing networks, boards and events (within and outwith the sponsoring organisations) to scope out the knowledge and evidence needs of the local government sector in both the short and longer-term and therefore, also, to identify those local government challenges that would benefit from investment in research;
 - 5.3. achieving early wins through a series of 12 to 15 rapid evidence reviews on priority areas identified by the sector;
 - 5.4. finding ways to meet gaps in evidence and broker links with academic experts around key issues of sector concern so that the sector both benefits from high quality and reliable research outputs, but can also access experts with a proven track record; and
 - 5.5. identifying and developing networks to ensure that elected members and officials can access and communicate with the research community in ways that are mutually beneficial.
6. With regards to accountability and programme management it was agreed that:
 - 6.1. The LGA and SOLACE would be lead partners in appointing the Navigator in November 2012, and in shaping and signing off the work programme.
 - 6.2. The Navigator would be accountable to a steering group composed of an elected member and senior officer from LGA as well as representation from SOLACE and ESRC.
 - 6.3. The LGA would manage the programme with funds for this (around £80,000) coming from unspent LARCI budgets held by ESRC on behalf of the LARCI funders.

Benefits of the Knowledge Navigator approach

7. The agreed approach has a range of benefits for the LGA in particular and the sector more generally. These are that:
 - 7.1. There will be a Local Government Knowledge Navigator, fully-funded by ESRC and appointed by LGA, SOLACE and ESRC, who will enable councils to get the best from publically funded research and to input to these research programmes. This appointment will be at a minimal cost to LGA.

7.2. LGA will be part of the steering group and provide the programme management.
This will ensure we are able to direct the work to maximise the benefit to the sector.

7.3. Via our Boards, the LGA and the sector will be able to influence the priorities for the work of the Navigator and all associated programme outputs.

Appointment

8. The Local Government Knowledge Navigator was appointed on the 28th November 2012.
The appointment period concludes at the end of December 2015.

9. The appointment was to PRA Consultancy Services Limited, which brings together a consortium of three senior people as the 'Navigator' who have complementary skills and experience in local government and local government oriented research.

10. The three are:

10.1. Professor Tim Allen (previously Programme Director for Research at the LGA between 2006 and 2011);

10.2. Dr Clive Grace (previously Chief Executive of Torfaen Council, Deputy Auditor General for Wales and Chair of Solace Foundation Imprint); and

10.3. Professor Steve Martin (Director of the Centre for Local & Regional Government Research, Cardiff University).

11. The consortium also includes Jill Mortimer who previously worked in the LGA Research & Information team.

12. As noted, the Knowledge Navigator team will account to a Steering Group comprising representatives from LGA, SOLACE and ESRC. The Improvement & Innovation Board is the sponsor for this programme and will therefore influence the work over the navigator team over the next two years.

Next steps

13. Now that the appointment has been made the Improvement & Innovation Board is asked to:

13.1. nominate a councillor to the Knowledge Navigator Steering Group; and

13.2. offer initial steers for the Knowledge Navigator Team in terms of areas where research, and research derived knowledge and data will help local government in meeting improvement and innovation challenges in the short and longer term.

14. Professor Tim Allen will attend the Board Meeting and provide a short presentation and to engage with Board Members to learn their views on the key issues facing local government and how the project will help. Knowledge navigator team members will be attending other LGA Boards in due course.