Note of decisions taken and actions required

Title:	Improvement and Innovation
Date:	Tuesday 19 March 2013
Venue:	Smith Square 3&4, Local Government House

Attendance

Position	Councillor	Council / Representing
Chairman	Peter Fleming	Sevenoaks DC
Deputy-Chair	Ruth Cadbury	Hounslow LB
Deputy-Chair	Jeremy Webb	East Lindsey DC
Members	Richard Stay	Central Bedfordshire Council
	Tony Jackson	East Herts Council
	Glen Miller	Bradford Metropolitan DC
	David Mackintosh	Northampton BC
	Barry Wood	Cherwell DC
	Alan Melton	Fenland District Council
	Tony McDermott MBE	Halton BC
	Tim Cheetham	Barnsley MBC
	Kate Hollern	Blackburn with Darwen
	Sir David Williams CBE	Richmond upon Thames
	Theo Blackwell (for part)	Camden LB
Apologies	Jill Shortland OBE	Somerset CC
	Rod Bluh	Swindon BC
	Helen Holland	Bristol City
	Teresa O'Neill	Bexley LB
	Chris Hayward	Three Rivers DC
	Rory Palmer	Leicester City
	Edward Lord OBE	City of London Corporation
Observers/Other attendees	Cllr Paul Bettison	LGA Conservative National Lead Peer
	Cllr Howard Sykes	LGA Liberal Democrat National Lead Peer
	Philip Sellwood	Energy Savings Trust
	Richard Priestman	Lombard
	Cllr Angela Lawrence	Vale of White Horse DC
LGA Officers	Dennis Skinner, Juliet Whitworth, Gesche Schmid, Pascoe Sawyers, Mike Short, Teresa Payne, Brian Reynolds.	

Item	Decisions and actions	Action by

1   Welcome and Introductions

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

Cllr Richard Stay declared an interest in item 5 as a trustee of the leadership centre.

2   Productivity Programme Update

Brian Reynolds (Productivity) introduced the report which provided an update on the progress being made in the current Productivity Programme. This included the capital and assets programme which the government would be launching in their budget and the LGA had been commissioned to run. Brian informed the board that the LGA would be writing to all councils concerned the next day explaining the process. He also updated the board on the shared services map which now had over 337 councils sharing at least one service, and the tenancy fraud pilot which had chosen its participating councils.

A discussion took place on network rails involvement in the capital assets programme as it was noted by members that they were often slow at bringing assets in. The Ministry of Defence was also discussed with some members noting they often change their opinions on selling assets.

Members put forward various examples of capital asset sales within government departments noting the difference in performance between departments and agreeing that there were often delays and lack of co-ordination.

<u>**Decisions**</u>

That the Board:

   i.   **Noted** the launch of the commissioning academy;

   ii. **Noted** the Launch of the LGA Shared Services Map annual refresh; and

   iii. **Confirmed** the councils selected for the LGA Housing Tenancy Fraud Pilot.

Actions

Agreed to clarify if Norfolk Property Services as a mutual is included in the shared service map.

Brian Reynolds

Agreed to collect examples of blockages to capital asset sales to take as evidence to the officer/civil servant forum

3   **Update on LG Inform**

Juliet Whitworth (Research Information Manager) presented the report which updated the board on the progress of LG Inform. She explained that they were still on track for spring and although they may have missed a few dates. Alongside this they were developing a communications plan to promote the system in councils, through support from top tier officers and councillors. The system could then be used as a springboard to collect up to date local data. There was also the possibility of opening up LG inform to the public in the summer.

Members welcomed development on the new prototype however raised concerns about the ambitious nature of the project saying that it was only as good as the data that was put onto it by councils and for members to engage with the updated system demonstrations were needed.

There was also concern over the awareness levels of LG inform beyond the senior members and policy / performance officer level in councils. Members agreed that awareness of what the system had to offer were low and it was suggested that asking councils why they were not engaging would be useful so the communications strategy could be modified. It was also suggested that principle advisors should be promoting the system in their areas.

Juliet explained that the new system would be slicker with a much higher performance level which should make it easier to promote to councils.

Decisions

That the Board:

i)   **Noted** the progress of the new LG Inform; and

ii)   **Noted** the timing of the Launch of LG inform.

Action

Take forward in line with Members' recommendations.

Juliet Whitworth

4   Update on Transparency

Cllr Tim Cheetham (Lead Member for Transparency) and Gesche Schmed (Transparency) introduced this report which provided an update on the progress being made in the current transparency Programme and asked for comments on the 2013/14 programme.

Cllr Cheetman mentioned the success of the workshops on "Making Transparency work for you" that were happening in London, Bristol and Leeds. He also updated the board on the responses received to the consultation asking whether further guidance should be provided to local authorities on how to publish voluntary, community and social enterprise sector spending data. With the overall responses indicting that light touch guidance would be the best route.

Gesche Schmid discussed the amendments to the Freedom of Information act which would make any dataset that is not exempt under the FOI Act available as open data for reuse if requested and mentioned possible problems. She also updated the board on the progress of the open data and transparency policy introduced in 2010, discussing the positives that were coming out of the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) review including the improvement of efficiencies and driving of growth in local authorities. She explained that BIS were also offering £1 Million grant to the LGA to manage the local government break through grant and fund local authorities projects and encouraged members to take this information back to their Local authorities as an opportunity for funding.

Members raised concerns over the intellectual property rights of the data that was being made open. With a number saying that it was unfair for private companies to be using data owned by councils to make a profit. This was especially true if it was costing the councils money to release this data.

There was a discussion on the need to provide case studies looking at the value for money of open data, the balance between the cost, the intellectual property rights and the impact of the data not being easy to access.

<u>**Decisions**</u>

That the Board:

    i.   **Noted** the progress made and ongoing work of the transparency programme;

    ii.   **Approved** the transparency work plan for 2013/14.

<u>**Action**</u>

Take forward in line with Members' recommendations.   Gesche Schmid

5.   **Leadership Programmes**

Cllr Richard Stay introduced the report explaining how the leadership programmes had progressed and how the LGA were looking to develop the programme for 13/14, including better targeting, more coherent support and a programme for group leaders. He explained that there was an opportunity for members to look at what was needed going forward and to see if what was currently provided was needed.

There was a discussion held and members suggested a number of ways the LGA could move forward with leadership training including:

- Being clear about the outcomes that were sought from each of the programmes and measuring the programme's success against them. It was suggested that the success of previous leadership programmes could be measured by looking at how many of the participants were now council leaders or leaders of the opposition.

- Increasing the e-learning that was provided, which could lead to higher participation rates.

- Targeting training to certain types of councillors such as cabinet members, leaders and opposition members. The less generic the training the more useful councillors were likely to find it.

- Making council communications both internal and external a more significant part of the training.

- Encouraging peer support for opposition leaders.

- Offering training in subjects likely to affect councils in the future rather than being continually reactive.

- Providing training for council groups who lose control or gain control of a Local Authority, including how to be an effective opposition.

- Offering training in joint working, such as sharing services between councils and other public bodies.

- Looking into how to deal with the emergence of the fat middle

whereby there seemed to be very few leadership opportunities available for many very capable councillors.

It was suggested that in order to take these ideas forward a small working group made up of interested board members should be set up to look into future leadership programmes.

<u>**Decisions**</u>

   i. The Board **noted** the report.

   ii. The Board **agreed** to set up a small working group to look into future leadership programmes.

<u>**Action**</u>

Work with Cllr Stay to set up a working group looking into future leadership programmes.

Pascoe Sawyers

6.   Innovation Programme Plan

The Chairman introduced the item updating members on changes to the innovation programme plan. He explained that there would be space for an innovation zone at the LGA conference for the whole of the 3 day period paid for by Nesta.

<u>**Decision**</u>

The Board **noted** the report.

<u>**Action**</u>

Take forward in line with Members' recommendations.

Mike Short

7.   Sector-led Improvement

The chairman and Dennis Skinner (Head of Leadership and Productivity) introduced this item, explaining that the sector led improvement "baseline" evaluation report had been published and circulated, which put forward markers for the future and the progress made so far. There was also work going on with children's services and adults social care with additional funding possibly being made available. There would be an update on sector led improvement in heath at the next meeting. The Chairman noted that of those councils facing performance challenges, a significant number of these related to Childrens Services.   He expressed concerns that changes to the Ofsted evaluation criteria may have an

adverse impact on the number of councils facing performance challenges in the Childrens Services area.

Peer challenges were discussed with Dennis Skinner explaining that 171 peer challenges had taken place since April 2011 and they were in discussion with 100 more. Members noted the ambitious nature of the project and it was questioned if there was double counting, with certain councils having had more than one review, Dennis explained this had only happened in a few authorities. Members' welcoming the success of peer challenge thus far and emphasising the need to build on this success and promote it wider within the sector.

A number of members raised issues of transparency with certain councils having not published their peer review data. There was a discussion that followed where several members explained the need for councils to have control over their own data and for peer challenges to be used as more of a general stocktake for the council rather than a tool for the press. Members debated this issue and there was a general agreement that if more councils were going to be encouraged to take part in peer reviews, then while they should be encouraged to publish their data, they should have ultimate control over the language used and councils should never be forced into publishing.

<u>Decision</u>

The Board **noted** the report.

<u>Action</u>

Agreed to find out how many peer challenges had been on communications and feed this info back.

Dennis Skinner

8.   **Update on the Audit Bill**

Dennis Skinner outlined the report explaining the 40% savings that had been made through the audit commissions procurement of in-house audit practice could be continued for 3 extra years at the same price taking the contract up to 2019/20. The significant savings demonstrated that bulk purchasing of external audit would appear to make the most financial savings.

The options of establishing a sector owned approached to the procurement of external audit on behalf of Local government had been discussed by the chairman and group leaders at a meeting in February. They had concluded that transferring the audit commissions statutory

functions in relation to auditor appointment and fees to a (sector-led) body, either directly or by delegation from the secretary of state was the simplest way to guarantee low fees, this had been communicated to civil servants and ministers and would be taken into account when looking at the draft local audit bill. Dennis also explained there was still discussion over what would happen to the commission's current contracts when it closed in 2015. There were also some issues with the new roles of the national audit office and changes to the clause in the draft bill were being looked into.

Members discussed the issues and concerns were raised over:

- The role of the National Audit Office (NAO), Members were concerned that the NAO may step into the vacancy left by the audit commission and it was felt the board needed to be robust in the way it responded to that. There were also concerns raised over clause 94 in the draft bill, giving responsibility to the NOA to identify improvements in Local authorities. Members were worried this would encroach on the work of the improvement board and it needed to be joint working relationship.

- The cost of any extra work commissioned outside the core audit. Members were concerned that prices may be raised if extra work needed to be commissioned if for example there was a challenge to the accounts.

Decision

The Board **noted** the report.

Action

Dennis Skinner

Officers to canvass councils in order to ascertain how much in additional costs they were being changed for extra work. And bring back an update to a future meeting**.**

Agreed to find out if there was a standard agreement for how much individual audit services cost so that Local Authorities' could hold auditors to account for these extras costs**.**

9. **Notes of the last meeting and actions arising**

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

10. **Date of next meeting**

11.00am Tuesday 14th May 2013