

## **Priorities and Work Programme for 2013/14**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion and agreement.

### **Summary**

This report sets out the Board's current priorities and key areas of work for the 2013/14 year in the light of the LGA Business Plan for 2013/14 and the LGA's *Rewiring Public Services* work and the discussion at the last Board meeting around the end of year report. The 2012/13 Board End of Year Review is attached at **Appendix A.**

The item will include two presentations: one from Councillor Fleming covering the sector's Improvement and Innovation agenda and one from Michael Coughlin, Executive Director, looking at the implications of Rewiring Public Services.

### **Recommendation**

That the Board discuss and agree the priorities for the Board's work programme for the 2013/14 meeting cycle.

### **Action**

Officers to progress the Board's agreed priorities, reporting regularly to the Board. Subject to agreement of the priorities, officers to invite members to express preferences about those they would like to be more involved with.

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## **Priorities and Work Programme for 2013/14**

### **Background**

1. The LGA's policy Boards seek to lead the agenda for local government on the key challenges and issues within their remit and support the overall objectives of the organisation as set out in the LGA's Business Plan.
2. They take an active role in helping to shape the Association's business plan through extensive engagement with councils and oversight of the programmes of work that deliver these strategic priorities.
3. The business plan and Boards' work programmes are underpinned by the LGA budget, which allocates resources to enable the Association to deliver the priorities in the business plan. In light of further reduction to the LGA budget and resources in 2013/14 and beyond, it is important that each Board's work programme is focused on a defined set of priorities on which they can deliver significant impact and demonstrate value to councils. For the Improvement and Innovation Board much of the work currently undertaken is funded by RSG 'topslice'.

### **Priorities for local government**

4. The LGA's Business Plan for 2013/14, (which is available at [http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=e2f772ff-1c5e-4ed5-a35c-20a3d57b97e5&groupId=10171](http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=e2f772ff-1c5e-4ed5-a35c-20a3d57b97e5&groupId=10171)) sets out priorities for the organisation which are based on those issues that matter most to our membership. For 2013/14 the three top priorities for local government are:
  - 4.1 **Funding for local government** – reform of the finance system so councils have confidence their financing is sustainable and fair, the opportunities to raise more funds locally, and greater ability to promote collective working across local public services.
  - 4.2 **Economic growth, jobs and prosperity** – councils are recognised as central to economic growth.
  - 4.3 **Public service reform** – independent councils are at the centre, and seen to be at the centre, of public service reform, delivering more effective services for local people and holding other providers to account.
5. Running through the Business Plan are the LGA's core improvement services which are driven by our belief in sector-led improvement.
6. The Business Plan priorities are supported and underpinned by the *Rewiring Public Services* campaign, which seeks to rejuvenate democracy, transform public services and boost economic growth. The campaign expands on how these priorities can be achieved through ten big ideas which are:

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- 6.1 **Give people a meaningful vote on local tax and spending issues.** A local treasury in every place.
  - 6.2 **Cut red tape.** Bring local services and decisions together in one place.
  - 6.3 **Reduce bureaucracy and Whitehall silos.** Merge six government departments and creating an England Office.
  - 6.4 **Share money fairly around the UK.** Replace the Barnett formula with a new needs-based funding model.
  - 6.5 **Take financial distribution out of the hands of Ministers.** Replace it with agreement across English local government.
  - 6.6 **Strengthen local say.** Reduce Ministers' powers to intervene in local decisions.
  - 6.7 **End flawed tick-box inspections by bureaucrats.** Create local service user champions.
  - 6.8 **Boost investment in infrastructure.** Create a thriving market in municipal bonds.
  - 6.9 **A multi-year funding settlement** tied to the life of the Parliament.
  - 6.10 **Protect local democracy.** Give the local government settlement formal constitutional protection.
7. The full publication being available to downloaded from the LGA website:  
[http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/publications/-/journal\\_content/56/10171/4047947/PUBLICATION-TEMPLATE](http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/publications/-/journal_content/56/10171/4047947/PUBLICATION-TEMPLATE)

**Board 2013/14 Work Programme and Resources**

8. As the LGA Business Plan indicates:

*At the heart of all this work, are our core services to councils which are driven by our belief in **sector-led improvement**. Supporting local government as the most efficient and accountable part of the public sector, the LGA will play a leading role in improvement and innovation so that councils can continue to make a difference in their local areas and to the lives of their residents.*

9. The Business Plan also reaffirms the LGA's role in maintaining an overview of performance and sets our approach to supporting councils and the LGA's role in providing and coordinating the necessary tools to support councils. An extract from the Business Plan is set out below, at paragraphs 10 to 13 inclusive.

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**“Sector-led support, improvement and innovation – our core services**

We will support councils with improving performance, effectiveness and efficiency.

10. Our approach is based on four key principles:

- 10.1 Councils are responsible for their own performance.
- 10.2 Councils are primarily accountable to their local communities.
- 10.3 Stronger local accountability and increased transparency drive improvement.
- 10.4 Councils have collective responsibility for the performance of local government as a whole.

11. The role of the LGA is to maintain an overview of performance and to provide the tools and support to help councils take advantage of this approach.

12. Councils are making good use of the support we offer and a sector-led approach is proving effective in driving improvement, as well as identifying potential performance challenges and opportunities.

13. There is much peer support activity and through this work councils are demonstrating collective responsibility for local government as a whole, networking and sharing good practice and learning from each other. Our role is to provide and coordinate the necessary tools and support to enable this to happen. This includes:

- 13.1 a tailored corporate **peer challenge** to every council, including a core component looking at issues of leadership, corporate capacity and financial resilience;
- 13.2 **leadership and managerial development programmes** which have already provided opportunities for hundreds of politicians and managers, equipping them to deal with the challenges being faced by their councils;
- 13.3 support to help councils with capturing and **sharing innovative practice** including through our Knowledge Hub – a free web-based service providing a single window to improvement in local government;
- 13.4 access to transparent and **comparable performance information** through LG Inform;
- 13.5 **sector-led improvement programmes** in children’s and adults services, planning services and cultural services;
- 13.6 **direct support** to councils through the lead member peers and principal advisers, working to help them access appropriate support, in particular where they are facing significant underperformance challenges – our support will take account of the increasing financial pressure being faced by councils; and

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- 13.7 practical support to help councils continue to develop new and innovative ways to improve **efficiency and productivity** as a major element of public service reform.”
14. Although all LGA Boards have a contribution to make to supporting improvement the Improvement and Innovation Board provides an overarching framework for this activity and works closely with other Boards.
15. Based on the Business Plan priorities, the *Rewiring Public Services* work, and the discussion at the last Board meeting around the end of year report, it is suggested that the Board’s work programme for the coming year continues to be focused on the 5 agreed strategic themes for the Board:
- 15.1 Sector Led Improvement
  - 15.2 Productivity
  - 15.3 Innovation
  - 15.4 Leadership
  - 15.5 Transparency
16. At the last Board meeting, Members received a report which provided a brief summary of some of the key activities and outputs across the 5 strategic themes. Particularly for new members of the Board this report is attached as much of the activity is work that is due to continue to end of March 2014.
17. Of course the LGA’s improvement offer needs to continue to develop and respond to the sector’s needs. In the current financial climate, it is increasingly the case that councils are looking for good practice and support that helps them with aspects of their overall finances. This can range from support in achieving productivity or efficiency savings through to ways of helping them engage with their local communities on prioritising how they spend their reduced resources. It is therefore proposed to develop a new “finance offer” document bringing together a range of new and existing support that could be helpful to councils facing a wide range of financial challenges and which we would like senior members and officers to be aware of as they grapple with the funding pressures. It is proposed that this be developed for publication in the autumn so that it is available as councils are actively considering their budgets and plans for the following financial year. Of course the LGA will also continue to lobby on behalf of the sector in order to achieve the best possible financial settlement for councils.

**Board – Ways of Working**

18. Currently, as a way of providing members with the opportunity to get more involved with the Board’s work between meetings, the Board invites members to express preferences for areas/priorities they would like to be involved in. This allows the creation of a pool of interested councillors from varying political groups under each priority area. The nature of members’ involvement will depend on the pattern of work in each area. From each pool the Board also currently appoints a lead member or “portfolio holder” for each area. The “Portfolio holders” will have a variety of roles, all of which are an extension of the role of members of the board. They might include: representing the Board at external and LGA events (speaking on behalf of the LGA and whole Board, not their political

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Group); engaging at a national level with key stakeholders, contributing to the planning and presentation of items within their portfolio to the Board, etc.

19. In addition, the Board has also sought to engage with the work of other Boards either through the submission of reports covering the improvement work of other Boards or indeed on occasion joint meetings of Boards. Following agreement of the key strategic themes, members will be invited to express preferences for those areas they would like to be involved in.

**Evaluation**

20. As well as overseeing the delivery of the LGA's improvement support the Board has been keen to evaluate the effectiveness of sector led improvement and in November 2011, approved the specification for a programme of evaluation research. The evaluation is running into 2014, with the main aim of understanding whether, in the context of reduced resources within the sector:

20.1 the approach to sector-led improvement has the confidence of the sector and the government, and the trust of the public;

20.2 the sector has been able to strengthen local accountability;

20.3 the sector is adopting the sector-led improvement approach and continues to improve with a reduced burden of inspection, and in the absence of top down performance assessment; and

20.4 the tools offered to the sector have had a positive impact on the sector's capacity to improve itself.

21. The baseline report was published in February 2013. The report draws together some key markers of progress so far and for the future. It can be found here: <http://www.local.gov.uk/research-performance-and-improvement>

22. Overall the sector is both aware and supportive of the approach, as shown by the results of the recent LGA Perceptions Survey of Leaders, Portfolio Holders, Chairs of Scrutiny, Chief Executives, Directors and back bench members.

22.1 90% of Chief Executives had heard a lot or a moderate amount about the approach and 84% agreed or strongly agreed that it was the right one;

22.2 83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their council was making advances in improvement; and

22.3 61% of respondents believe the offer will have a positive impact on their council's ability to improve and 69% believe it will have a great or moderate positive impact on the sector's ability to monitor and improve.

23. In addition, over 85% of all councils have already taken up one of the LGA key offers (leadership support, peer challenge, productivity or direct support).

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24. Research for the final report will be conducted over the course of autumn and winter 2013. This will then be synthesised during the first quarter of 2014 for subsequent publication.
25. Because of the importance given to the successful establishment of sector led improvement, an Advisory Board was established in 2011 comprising representatives from SOLACE, some of the inspectorates that remain and representatives from ADASS and ADCS. The Board was chaired by Steve Freer, Chief Executive, CIPFA.
26. The Advisory Board has met on 10 occasions since its first meeting on 16th February 2011. Six of those meetings were in the first year following the launch of Taking the Lead in February 2011 providing a “critical friend” perspective to the development and early implementation of the support offer and reporting to the Improvement and Innovation Board in July 2011. As implementation became established the focus of the Board’s interest shifted towards the importance of alignment across the various improvement programmes (children’s, adults, and health) which resulted in the LGA establishing an internal group to ensure effective co-ordination across the various improvement programmes. The imminent retirement of Steve Freer, provides an opportunity for members to review whether and how they might like to receive feedback and input from the sector, in addition to that arising from the evaluation research. One option might be to arrange a separate, facilitated, discussion involving the Improvement and Innovation Board with a range of Leaders and Chief Executives to “take stock” of progress to date and consider longer term support needs. This would be along the lines that the then Improvement Board had at the outset of this journey when it held an event hosted by the City of London.

**Communications**

27. Notwithstanding the positive picture painted by the evaluation and much of the feedback received around support and improvement activities, we cannot be complacent and need to continue in our efforts to raise the awareness of the support available and councils take up of it, making the links across the different strands of sector-led improvement. One example of how this is being done is the easy, concise guide to improvement and innovation services, aimed at Leaders and Chief Executives, launched at the LGA Annual Conference. Copies will be available at the meeting.

**Next Steps**

28. Members are asked to discuss and agree the suggested strategic themes set out at paragraph 15. Progress will be reported regularly to the Board and, as the body with responsibility for holding all Boards to account, every quarter the LGA Executive will also receive an overview of all Board’s work programmes and progress.

**Financial Implications**

29. While there are no additional financial implications or costs arising as a result of this report, it should be noted that much of the work set out is funded by RSG ‘topslice’ which, as Members will be aware has been reduced in 2013/14.