

LGA Innovation work programme

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report presents the Board with initial ideas and potential work areas for the next phase of the LGA's innovation work.

Recommendation

Comment on and approve the proposed approach to innovation and the suggested areas of work

Action

Officers to progress in the light of members' views.

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LGA Innovation work programme

Background

1. Following on from the end of the Creative Councils programme and the discussions on innovation at the previous Improvement and Innovation Board, it is an opportune moment to carry out a refresh of the LGA innovation work programme. This report therefore sets out some initial ideas and potential work areas for the next phase of the LGA's innovation work.

A new approach

2. The aim for the next phase of innovation activity at the LGA is a more co-ordinated approach across the organisation with greater focus on dissemination of good practice examples. In many councils, innovation is already happening, although not always seen as innovation. We need to encourage councils to build on these innovations and to understand and share the skills they have already got and how to use them in other areas. Sometimes we need to recognise that small or 'micro' innovation within councils is both the foundation and gateway to other larger pieces of work. There is also a need to strengthen the links and evidence of innovation leading to savings and improved outcomes for local people, shifting the perception of innovation from being "nice to do" to being vital for the future survival of public services.
3. Whilst disseminating good practice council examples is an important task for the LGA, there is also a need to focus on the "how" rather than the "what" of innovation. How for example do leaders of innovative organisations empower their staff to develop and deliver meaningful change? How do innovative organisations in the private sector, such as the Tech City companies in East London, foster a culture of innovation and what can local government learn from that? Many studies on the subject of innovation in the public sector have shown that the ideas are there but that they run into difficulty during implementation.
4. Much like 'transformation' and 'commissioning', the term 'innovation' is popular but unfortunately often misunderstood. Being innovative does not necessarily mean that a council has to focus on the next big thing. Innovation can take the form of a simple solution that is new to the local area but potentially not new to local government as a whole. The latter need not be an issue as the most innovative organisations respond to their customers, rather than the ICT, or staff needs etc. Local needs should drive innovation activity.

Potential areas of work

5. All of the LGA officers leading our innovation programmes could be brought together in an informal cross-LGA innovation group every month in order to join up the different workstreams, share learning and progress, and avoid duplication.
6. The group would have three clear areas of focus:

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Item 6

- 6.1 produce an innovation map along the lines of the LGA shared services map to visually display all of the councils involved in innovative practice in each of the LGA innovation programmes as well as other good practice in each service area and LGA offer – adults, health, children, peer challenges etc.
 - 6.2 arrange speakers and sessions for the three day Innovation Zone at the LGA Conference in Bournemouth for July 2014.
 - 6.3 lead and shape LGA communications on innovation in order to raise awareness of our work and the relevant work of partners to help to scale up innovative activity across local government.
7. There is a need for the LGA to continue working with innovative partner organisations such as Nesta, the Design Council and FutureGov to help ensure that the sector is benefitting as much as it can from the work of these organisations. Could we work together with these and other partners to provide a ‘Safe Space’ for councils to innovate, particularly around work on wicked issues, for example children’s safeguarding? Would these organisations be able to provide the resources to support innovation that the LGA no longer has, post the Creative Councils programme?
 8. In addition, sessions on the subject of how to make innovation happen could be held as part of the planned LGA “Meeting the Challenge” regional workshops for local CEXs and Leaders. These events could feature speakers from local innovative businesses and the voluntary and community sector on the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what’ of their product development. How do, for example, innovative organisations in the private sector foster a culture of innovation and what can local government learn from that?
 9. Another potential area for the work programme could be the Transformation Challenge Award (TCA) and our partnership with DCLG. The LGA are perfectly placed to share the lessons and approaches from the TCA award winners across the rest of local government. As the work of the cross LGA innovation group progresses, the LGA will be in a better position if there are future rounds of the TCA funding to advise both DCLG and our member Councils on innovative practice in the sector.

Next steps

10. Members are asked to:
 - 10.1. Comment on the above suggestions and way forward for the LGA’s innovation work programme.

Financial Implications

11. To be discussed at a later date once decisions have been made on this work programme.