

Minutes of last Improvement & Innovation Board meeting

Improvement & Innovation Board

Thursday, 28 July 2022

Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as [Appendix A](#)

Item	Decisions and actions
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1	Welcome, Apologies and Substitutes, Declarations of Interest
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The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting and noted that this was the final meeting of the LGA year. He thanked members for their work and input during the year.

Apologies were received from Cllrs Carl Les, Alan White, Laura Miller and Alan Connett.

There were no declarations of interest.

2	Minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 May 2022
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The minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

3	Office for Local Government - Update from DLUHC
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Nick Searle and Mark Singh from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) gave members an update on plans for the new Office for Local Government (OFLOG). There followed a confidential discussion on the proposals.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the update on OFLOG.

4	Quarter 1 - Sector Support Programme Performance against KPIs 2021/22
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Henry Butt (HB), Improvement Adviser, provided members with a confidential update on performance against KPIs.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the update on performance of the sector support programme for 2022-23.

5 Public notices

Claire Hogan, Interim Director of Communications, gave members a confidential update on councils' statutory duties around publishing public notices.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the update.

6 LGA Innovation Zone Wrap Up

The Chairman invited Henry Butt (HB), Improvement Adviser, to introduce the report.

HB sought members feedback on how the Innovation Zone (IZ) had worked at the LGA Annual Conference in Harrogate, with a view to assisting planning for next year's event at Bournemouth. Feedback received so far from delegates had been very positive. HB thanked IIB members who had helped deliver some of the sessions.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members felt that the IZ had been a great success and put on record their thanks to officers for delivering such a varied and useful programme. Many reported that they had been able to take learning from events back to their local authorities to implement changes. Using headphones to enable simultaneous events to take place was considered to be very successful although on occasions there weren't enough to meet the demand.
- The location of the IZ in the conference centre had been good in terms of attracting delegates and several members felt that this would not be the case at the Bournemouth conference centre. It was agreed that locating the IZ in the optimum position at Bournemouth would be critical to its success again.

Decision

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the comments made to be taken forward in planning the 2023 Innovation Zone.

7 Levelling Up and Devolution Support to Councils

The Chairman invited Lusi Manukyan (LM), Senior Adviser – Improvement & Policy – and Phillip Clifford (PC), Senior Adviser, to introduce the update.

LM summarised the LGA's support offer on devolution and levelling up. This comprised two main strands:

- Existing devolution support, such as support to councils to develop and communicate an evidence base for devolution deals.
- New levelling up support, developed through extensive engagement with councils to develop a product that is resilient to any potential future change in Government policy. Importantly in the current climate, this includes a new cost of living support hub.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members asked how much of the support for councils was new and how was it being marketed to councils? LM responded that everything in paragraph 5 of the report on levelling up was new support in addition to the support around providing an evidence base for devolution deals. PC added that there were 9 new areas coming forward for devolution deals and so much new support and funding would be targeted at these. The various strands of support are brought together in the devolution and levelling up hubs so that councils know what is available in one place. The support offer is mainly marketed through the devolution bulletin, which has significantly increased subscribers in recent times.
- It was suggested that progress on county deal areas was likely to move quickly after September and so it was important that councils in these areas were able to access support in a timely manner. LM stressed that the LGA only provided support to areas in response to an approach for help and then only when all authorities in that area agreed that support should be provided.
- In relation to county combined authorities, where the district councils would not be constituent members of the combined authority, clarity was sought on whether the LGA's support offer would extend to those districts. It was suggested that this specific issue needed to be resolved by the LGA moving forward.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the programme of support available to councils on devolution and levelling up.

8 One Public Estate programme update

The Chair invited Ellen Vernon, Programme Director, to introduce the update.

EV provided members with a quick synopsis of the OPE programme and what it had delivered to date in its 9 funding rounds, alongside 3 rounds of Land Release funding. Current focus was on the latest round of Brownfield Land Release Funding announced as part of the last Government Spending Review and worth £180m over the three-year period. A contract had recently been signed with the Cabinet Office to deliver this work, providing some certainty for the team. The first wave worth £40m, was formally launched on 8 July and closes on 19 August, with project assessments and funding awards occurring during the Autumn. Further Waves are planned for years 2 and 3, anticipated to be £60m and £80m respectively. The team had been working to make this new funding round more accessible to more local authorities. They were also working closely with local authorities who had decided to review their estates as a result of Covid with a view to future OPE funding bids. Despite the current political instability, EV said that the Government remained committed to improving efficiency in the public estate and both DLUHC and the Cabinet Office remained very supportive of the OPE model moving forward.

Members' comments and questions:

- Cost inflation and skills shortages in the construction industry were

highlighted as significant challenges for capital projects moving forward. Had any feedback been received from councils about these issues in terms of affecting delivery? EV said that they closely monitored funded projects and were confident that contingencies were in place to cover inflationary pressures for the current round. Discussions had been taking place with DLUHC about how this could play out in future funding rounds.

- It was reported that Covid had disrupted work in one OPE partnership and it was proving difficult to get momentum going again. Had this happened more generally across the country and could anything be done to get some impetus back? EV responded that they were aware of the capacity challenges facing councils in terms of putting bids together (particularly those involved in devolution deals) and were working with Government to try and make this process as simple as possible. She offered to speak to members offline about resolving particular local challenges.
- The issue of the Government's levelling up agenda was raised and if this influenced whether bids for funding from particular areas of England would be prioritised over others. EV confirmed that there is a 'place' element to the Brownfield Land Release Fund judging criteria but they are honest about this in discussions with councils considering bidding and are still encouraging bids from right across the country.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the progress of the One Public Estate programme.

9 Any other business

Members and officers put on record their thanks to the outgoing Chairman, Cllr Fleming, for all his excellent work over the previous 4 years at the helm of the Board. Cllr Fleming, in turn, thanked members and officers who had supported him in his role.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Peter Fleming OBE	Sevenoaks District Council
Vice-Chair	Cllr Liz Green	Kingston upon Thames Royal Borough Council
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Judi Billing MBE	Hertfordshire County Council
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Neil Prior	Pembrokeshire County Council
Members	Cllr Philip Broadhead	Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council
	Cllr Phil North	Test Valley Borough Council
	Cllr Asma Begum	Tower Hamlets Council
	Cllr Vince Maple	Medway Council
	Mayor Peter Taylor	Watford Borough Council
	Cllr Alex Coley	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
	Cllr Mike Haines	Teignbridge District Council
	Cllr Kam Kaur (sub)	Warwickshire County Council

	Cllr Anthony McKeown (sub)	High Peak Borough Council
	Cllr Steve Norman (sub)	Lichfield District Council
	Mr Richard Priestman	Independent Member
	Mr Philip Sellwood CBE	Independent Member
Apologies	Cllr Carl Les	North Yorkshire County Council
	Cllr Laura Beddow	Dorset Council
	Cllr Alan White	Staffordshire County Council
	Cllr Alan Connett	Teignbridge District Council
In Attendance	Cllr Jo Beavis	Braintree District Council
	Cllr Marianne Overton	North Kesteven District Council
	Nick Searle	DLUHC (for item 3)
	Mark Singh	DLUHC (for item 3)