

Minutes of last Improvement & Innovation Board meeting

Improvement & Innovation Board

Thursday, 15 December 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 declarations of interest
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The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllrs Brigid Jones and Neil Prior. Their respective substitutes were Cllrs Anthony McKeown and James Hakewill.

There were no declarations of interest.

Members paid tribute to Judi Billing who was the Labour Group Lead Member on the Board from 2014-2022 and who had sadly passed away suddenly at the end of November at the age of 71.

2	Minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 October 2022
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The minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2022 were agreed as an accurate record. There were no matters arising.

3	Update on the Office for Local Government
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The Board received a confidential presentation, followed by Q&A session, with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Local Government and Building Safety, Lee Rowley MP.

4	Verbal update on DLUHC negotiations for the 2023/24 Sector Support Programme
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Dennis Skinner (DS), Director of Improvement, and Matthew Hamilton (MH), Head of Improvement Coordination & Strategy, provided a confidential update on the ongoing negotiations with DLUHC over a Sector Support Programme for 2023-24.

Decision:

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

5	Finance Improvement Programme update
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The Chair invited Alan Finch (AF), Principal Adviser, Finance, to introduce the update.

AF briefly ran through the 3 parts of the current year's (2022/23) programme as outlined in the paper and reported that they were on track to deliver this successfully in full. He then moved on to the proposed programme for 2023/24 and how this was being strengthened in the light of the increasing financial challenges for the sector.

Members' comments and questions:

- The recent finance leadership essentials course at Warwick was welcomed, particularly the opportunity to network with a wide range of members from other authorities. However, more practical examples of help available, such as the newly established sounding board of Chief Finance Officers (CFOs), would have strengthened the course further.
- In conjunction with training for councillors in understanding local government finance and accounts, effort should be put into making the accounts themselves simpler, for the benefit of both members and the general public. It was also considered important for councils to have strong, well-resourced finance scrutiny functions. AF agreed and said that he would consider providing advice for councils on writing financial reports in the near future.
- It was considered important not just to focus support on those councils that were in the most severe financial difficulty but also to continue to provide preventative support to a wider range of councils to stave off more serious difficulties. The budget setting process should be all year round, not just from October onwards for 3 months, and training should reflect this.
- In relation to the research exercise referred to in para 6.4 on councils currently in receipt of Section 114 reports, did the remit include looking more proactively at the wider scale of the problem and hence, councils that may be coming into difficulties in 2023? AF said that the aim of the research was to try and see what the decisions were that councils had made in the 5 years prior that may have contributed to the S114 notice being issued.
- The importance of the LGA trying to find innovative solutions to councils' problems, rather than just reactive short-term 'survival' support (vital though this is) was emphasised.
- The importance of all councillors being involved in budget setting, whether that be directly, or through the audit and scrutiny processes, was emphasised.

Decision:

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

6 Cyber Security, Digital and Technology Programme Update

The Chair invited Rebekah Wilson (RW), Programme Manager, to introduce the update.

RW gave a presentation on the work of the LGA's 3 Cyber, Digital and

Technology Programme teams – Bespoke Support, General Support, and Policy Improvement. Following the presentation, RW asked members to share 3 particular LGA resources with colleagues – (i) 10 Questions on Cyber Security; (ii) Demystifying Digitalisation Councillor Masterclasses; and (iii) the new Local Government Digitalisation Almanac.

Members' comments and questions:

- Feedback was provided on the Digitalisation Masterclass with a plea for greater consistency and capability. Officers were asked to reflect on the level at which the training was pitched and whether this deterred members from signing up. Would it be more effective if cyber training was integrated more generally within CPC for example? RW emphasised that the Masterclass was a pilot programme and so all feedback was gratefully received. She welcomed the opportunity to have discussions offline with members to address the issues raised.
- The importance of all local government staff, members and partners understanding and being alive to the threats facing council systems was emphasised. Was a presentation available that could be circulated to all councillors to highlight the threats? Mandatory council-led training for all members was also suggested as a way to raise awareness.
- Given the ubiquity of Microsoft products in local government, it was considered important to seek regular assurance that they were doing everything possible to address security threats. RW urged members to visit the LGA website for video content on E3 and E5 licences with Microsoft partners.
- Most spending on IT by councils was revenue based. Was there an opportunity to lobby government to enable capital spending on larger IT projects, which would promote greater investment?
- Could a 'jargon buster' be provided as part of the Almanac? This would help build confidence amongst stakeholders. RW confirmed that this was one of the key aims of the Almanac.
- To what degree was the LGA's support offer tailored to new and emerging threats and was learning from councils' experiences being built into the programme?
- Could more case studies be built into the programme to demonstrate the positive practical outcomes of all the support and training provided? RW pointed members to case studies on the LGA's Resource Hub and also flagged up that any Pathfinder projects funded by the programme had to produce reports for sharing as case studies.
- It was considered important to ensure that IT equipment remained as user-friendly as possible in spite of all the security additions. Making it over-complicated could prove counterproductive.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the progress of the Programme.

7 Economic Growth Improvement Programme Update

The Chair invited Rhian Gladman (RG), Programme Manager, to introduce the update.

RG gave a brief introduction to the LGA's Economic Growth Improvement Support Offer centred around 5 pillars (i) Leadership Essentials training for councillors; (ii) the Economic Growth Roundtable series; (iii) the Economic Growth hub; (iv) the UK Shared Prosperity Fund hub; and (v) the Economic Growth Advisers Programme. RG then introduced Matthew Fletcher (MF), Head of Economic Development & Regeneration at Tamworth Borough Council - one of the participants in this year's Economic Growth Advisers Programme.

MF gave a presentation on how Tamworth Borough Council had benefitted from the programme.

Members' comments and questions:

- Had the LGA engaged with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in devising its programme, both in terms of addressing workforce capacity and also providing expertise and advice? RG welcomed the suggestion and agreed to take it forward, particularly in relation to capacity issues in some of the smaller district and borough councils.
- Feedback was provided on the Leadership Essentials course in relation to (a) the high number of signed up delegates who didn't attend; and (b) the skewing of the presenters on the course predominantly to one particular political party. In relation to (a), RG said that they would be trialling a hybrid approach next year to see whether this enhanced attendance, and said she would look into (b).
- How could the clear successes demonstrated by MF at Tamworth effectively be scaled up and replicated across the country? RG said that the programme so far had been targeted at those smaller councils who had real capacity issues that prevented them from delivering growth. This scope would be kept under review.
- How could local economic growth programmes, such as at Tamworth, be integrated into the wider sustainability agenda, particularly with climate emergency and net zero work? Were the two compatible? RG said that green growth featured heavily in the Leadership Essentials course and a roundtable event had also been held on opportunities for green growth. This agenda was vitally important moving forward.

Decision:

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

8 Innovation Zone planning update

The Chair invited Katharine Goodger (KG), Improvement Coordination and Strategy Adviser, to introduce the report.

KG said that applications would be opening early the following week for running sessions at the Innovation Zone 2023 on the theme of 'Challenge and Change', and she encouraged members to apply through their councils. Volunteers were also sought for the member-led working group, chaired by Cllr Peter Fleming, which would be starting work early in the new year. In both instances, members should e-mail Katharine or Henry Butt for further information. Cllr Fleming echoed the invitation and

encouragement to apply.

Decision:

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

9 LGA Plan 2022-25

The Chair invited Matthew Hamilton (MH), Head of Improvement Coordination and Strategy, to introduce the report.

MH confirmed that the Plan had been signed off in October by the LGA Board and was therefore, for noting only. He pointed out that the LGA's improvement role and support work for councils was now laid out very clearly in the new Plan.

Members' comments and questions:

- Would there be scope to incorporate the findings of the LGA's peer review into the new Plan? More specifically, how would the discussions around the LGA moving towards more of an assurance role be reflected? MH reassured members that there was flexibility within the Plan to incorporate any significant findings from the review. On the assurance point, DS said that an action plan would need to be agreed with the political group leaders once the final report was published and digested.
- It was considered important to recognise the fact that, although not statutory deliverers of adult social care services, district and borough councils nonetheless had a key role to play in supporting this area of work.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the LGA Plan 2022-25

Action:

Officers to schedule discussion on assurance at a future IIB meeting

10 Any other business

- Gary Hughes thanked all the members who were involved in the delivery of the Member Peer Conference in November in Sheffield. Attendance was excellent and positive feedback had been received. Planning was now taking place for next year's event.
- The Chair informed members that Matthew Hamilton was leaving the LGA in January after over 3 years working with the Board. She thanked him for all his hard work and wished him well in his new role.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chair	Cllr Abi Brown	Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Vice-Chair	Cllr Liz Green	Kingston upon Thames Royal Borough Council
Members	Cllr Nigel Ashton Cllr Peter Fleming OBE Cllr Phil Twiss Cllr Laura Beddow Cllr Phil North Cllr Philip Broadhead Cllr Jane Mudd Cllr Dr Beccy Cooper Cllr Victoria Cusworth Cllr Vince Maple Mayor Peter Taylor Cllr Alex Coley Cllr James Hakewill (sub) Cllr Anthony McKeown (sub) Cllr Alan Connett Cllr Mike Haines Mr Richard Priestman Mr Philip Sellwood CBE	North Somerset Council Sevenoaks District Council Devon County Council Dorset Council Test Valley Borough Council Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council Newport City Council Worthing Borough Council Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council Medway Council Watford Borough Council Epsom and Ewell Borough Council North Northamptonshire Council High Peak Borough Council Teignbridge District Council Teignbridge District Council Independent observer Independent observer
Apologies	Cllr Brigid Jones Cllr Neil Prior	Birmingham City Council Pembrokeshire County Council
In Attendance	Lee Rowley MP (for item 3) Matthew Fletcher (for item 7)	Parliamentary Under Secretary DLUHC Tamworth Borough Council