

Minutes of last Improvement & Innovation Board meeting

Improvement & Innovation Board

Friday, 13 October 2023

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 first meeting of the new LGA year. All members and officers introduced themselves.

Apologies for absence were received from Mayor Damian Egan and Cllr Alan Connett.

Cllr Tim Pickstone declared an interest in any matters related to the Be a Councillor and Next Generation projects as his employer is contracted to deliver parts of these programmes.

2	Confidential minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 July 2023
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The minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 July 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

3	IIB Terms of Reference and Priorities 2023/24
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The Chair invited Dennis Skinner (DS), Director of Improvement, to introduce the report.

DS briefly set out the purpose of, and background to, the Board including its Terms of Reference and broad priorities for the year ahead – (i) Improvement and Assurance framework for local government; (ii) Peer Support and Development; (iii) The Office for Local Government; and (iv) Wider Sector-led Improvement programmes including Leadership, Transformation and Finance. The Equalities Advocate for the Board had yet to be confirmed by the LGA Political Group Offices.

It was confirmed that Cllr James Hakewill was a substitute Board member for the Independent Group.

Members' comments and questions:

- It was suggested that the Terms of Reference should more

explicitly reflect the Board's role in advocating for improvement and innovation on behalf of the sector. With the Board's agreement, DS agreed to strengthen the Terms of Reference to reflect this.

- Members felt very strongly that in the current financial climate, the Board needed to focus on championing innovation and best practice in member councils, as well as challenging those councils that were more risk averse. The Chairman agreed and referred to the new Transformation workstream that the LGA had launched following renewed emphasis on this in the DLUHC Grant Determination Letter.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board:

1. Noted the Board's membership
2. Agreed the Board's Terms of Reference, with strengthened wording around the Board's advocacy role
3. Agreed the Board's priorities for the coming year, with a particular emphasis on promoting innovation.

Action:

Officers to amend wording of Terms of Reference

4 Improvement update on Q2 delivery

The Chair invited Mia Shelton (MS), Senior Adviser Improvement Coordination & Strategy, to introduce the report.

MS updated members on progress against the KPIs included in the DLUHC Grant Determination Letter (GDL) and highlighted some achievements to date. For the first time, the report also included performance against other programmes, outside of the main DLUHC grant. Following previous feedback from members, the reporting system now included a 'blue' rating which indicates a KPI that has been delivered, with 'green' now indicating on track with limited risk. At the end of Q2, 98% of KPIs were either 'blue' or 'green'.

Members' comments and questions:

- The overall positive performance was warmly welcomed, but members queried how officers reported on areas where performance was off track, and whether this could be included in future reports as standard. Similarly, it was requested that the more business-critical KPIs be flagged up as part of the report and what the financial / other implications were of not meeting the targets. MS informed members that the two areas where officers did have a concern were on (i) viewing of LG Inform; and (ii) take up of Ignite, part of the Leadership programme. (i) was largely due to a change to the way Google Analytics records page views. (ii) was due mainly to the late agreement of the GDL pushing back the start of the programme. DS reassured members that LGA officers monitored the performance against all KPIs very closely. Whilst there were no direct financial implications for failing to meet KPIs, it could impact on future years' negotiations with DLUHC.

- The Chair asked for greater clarity on where responsibility for improving access to LG Inform lay within the LGA. The strategic importance of LG Inform to the LGA, in the context of Oflog, was emphasised. Juliet Whitworth, Head of Research and Information, reported that a Communications Strategy was planned with the aim of increasing use of the tool and to hit the target if possible. It was suggested that some simple promotional material that councillors could circulate to colleagues might increase coverage. However, it was queried whether simple volume of hits on the website was a useful metric to be measuring – could something more meaningful be devised? How could LG Inform be more effectively embedded into members' day to day work? Members agreed that it would be helpful for Lead Members to have a more detailed discussion on how to take some of these points forward and to bring a report on LG Inform to the next Board meeting in December for wider member input.
- Members requested sight of the performance spreadsheet containing all the KPIs. MS said that due to the timing of the meeting coinciding with the end of Q2 there hadn't been enough time to finalise all the detail but this could be circulated to members once it was completed.
- Were there any metrics on LG Inform that could have been used to predict the councils that have either had to issue S.114 notices or who were resistant to having Corporate Peer Challenges (CPC). DS said that whilst the data was important (and officers were looking into this in some detail) it was often the qualitative indicators that could be picked up during CPCs that provided more insight.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board noted the improvement update for Quarter 2 and progress against deliverables in the DLUHC Grant Determination Letter and agreed that a report on LG Inform be brought back to the next meeting of the Board on 15 December.

Actions:

- MS to circulate final KPI spreadsheet to members
- Officers to include more detail of off track KPIs in future reports
- Officers and Lead Members to explore in more detail issues raised about LG Inform and bring a report back to Board on 15 December.

5 Improvement and Assurance Framework update

The Chair invited Heather Wills (HW), Principal Adviser – Improvement – to introduce the report.

HW provided new members of the Board with some background to the project and outlined the initial results of the consultation work carried out to date with the sector and other stakeholders. Common themes were already emerging and were outlined in paragraph 14 of the report. A second stage of engagement was being planned for November 2023 –

February 2024. As well as IIB, feedback on the plans for phase 2 was being sought from the LGA Board, with a request for authority to be delegated to the IIB Chair and Lead Members to approve the final draft set of questions for Phase 2 engagement.

DS highlighted the comments received as part of the engagement to date about the potential to strengthen further the CPC process as outlined in paragraph 20 of the report.

Members' comments and questions:

- The importance of qualitative data obtained during CPCs was emphasised in relation to identifying councils in difficulty
- It was considered important to engage all council members in assurance work within their authorities – not just those on audit or scrutiny committees. Audit Committee reports also needed to contain less technical language to make them accessible to a wider audience
- It was suggested that the LGA could be more robust in following up CPC visits and recommendations with councils to ensure that they were being implemented. How could this best be taken forward and monitored by the Board?
- Could the LGA use illustrative examples of where CPC has demonstrably benefitted a council in order to promote the benefits of the process to a wider audience
- Does the LGA have sufficient capacity to carry out regular CPCs of councils every 4 or 5 years?
- It was highlighted that councils have unique characteristics which may not be shared with near geographical neighbours, or councils proposed for the same combined authority area.
- The next stage of consultation should be more explicit about what the sector needs to improve upon and the practical steps that the LGA should take to facilitate that.
- Concern was expressed about striving for greater uniformity in Schemes of Delegation as it could stifle local innovation. On the other hand, it was felt that national standards needed to be in place in order to keep councils within a statutory framework. The role of members in scrutinising decisions was discussed. HW explained that some inspection reports of challenged councils had identified thresholds in their schemes of delegation as outliers and that this had led to a lack of member oversight of financial decisions.
- The importance of consistent good practice in preparation of Annual Governance Statements was also highlighted.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board:

- 1) Reviewed and commented on feedback from phase 1 of the engagement programme and work-in-progress to revise the draft framework set out in this report
- 2) Agreed to delegate to the Chair and Lead Members authority to approve for phase 2 of the engagement programme: (i) a revised

- version of the draft improvement and assurance framework; and
(ii) questions for discussion
- 3) Agreed that officers prepare proposals for discussion with the sector to further strengthen the Corporate Peer Challenge.

6 Office for Local Government (Oflog) update

Members received a confidential update on the Office for Local Government (Oflog)

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the newly launched Office for Local Government and its proposed scope and **endorsed** the next steps set out in paragraphs 11-13 of the report.

7 New Sustainability Programme

The Chair invited Susan Attard (SA), Head of Productivity, to introduce the report.

SA reported that the LGA had been successful in its bid to the Crown Commercial Service to fund a new Sustainability Support Programme for councils. She stressed that officers were very keen to involve members in the new work.

Members' comments and questions:

- In response to a request for further information from Cllr Costigan, SA promised to circulate details of the funding and any change in focus from the previous programme.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the update on the new Sustainability Support Programme.

Action:

SA/GA to circulate more detailed information about the programme to Cllr Costigan

8 New Procurement Support Programme

Members received a confidential update on the new Procurement Support Programme.

Decision:

Improvement & Innovation Board **noted** the update on the new Procurement Support Programme.

9 Any other business

- Members were encouraged to complete and share with colleagues

the Sector Support Survey 2023.

- The Chair asked colleagues who have a specific interest in an area covered by the Board and who might be interested in speaking engagements, to let officers know.

Appendix A - Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Abi Brown	Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Vice-Chair	Cllr Tim Pickstone	Cumberland Council
Deputy-Chair	Cllr David Baines	St Helens Borough Council
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Alex Coley	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Members	Cllr Jane Mudd	Newport City Council
	Cllr Dr Beccy Cooper	Worthing Borough Council
	Cllr Anthony McKeown	High Peak Borough Council
	Cllr Jane Scullion	Calderdale Council
	Cllr Grace Williams	Waltham Forest London Borough
	Cllr Rory Love OBE	Kent County Council
	Cllr Derek Bastiman	North Yorkshire Council
	Cllr Phil North	Test Valley Borough Council
	Cllr Gwilym Butler	Shropshire Council
	Cllr David Thomas	Torbay Council
	Mayor Peter Taylor	Watford Borough Council
	Cllr Mike Evemy	Cotswold District Council
	Cllr Sarah Rouse	Malvern Hills District Council
	Cllr William Nunn (National Lead Peer)	Breckland Council
	Cllr Adam Paynter (National Lead Peer)	Cornwall Council
	Mr Richard Priestman	Independent Observer
	Mr Philip Sellwood CBE	Independent Observer
Apologies	Mayor Damien Egan	Lewisham London Borough Council
	Cllr Alan Connett	Teignbridge District Council
In Attendance	Cllr Deidre Costigan (Board substitute)	Ealing London Borough Council
	Cllr Jane Gebbie (Board substitute)	Bridgend County Borough Council
	Cllr James Hakewill (Board substitute)	North Northamptonshire Council
	Cllr Paul Hilliard (Board substitute)	Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council