

Improvement and Innovation Board – report from Cllr Peter Fleming

INNOVATION

Working to help SME building firms

1. This month I responded to the report by the Federation of Master Builders (FMB), which said more than 40% of SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) win just one out of 10 public sector contracts. This is obviously a big concern. Since councils have a vital role to play in driving economic growth, it is important that councils help to create the right infrastructure and environment for local businesses to succeed. However, with council funding being cut by more than a third by central government, there is simply less work around, particularly in the construction sector. I explained that the LGA is therefore working with the FMB to highlight local authorities that have streamlined their procurement practices or introduced support for local suppliers, and is using these examples to promote best practice across the sector and help level the playing field as much as possible for SMEs.

Personal Data Stores

2. Open data” and “big data” are all very well, however I believe the sector would do well to focus on personal data, and the emergence of a standard for personal data stores (PDS) controlled by the individual. It’s even more promising.
3. To propose personal control over personal data might seem a bit Galileo - a simple proposition which turns the existing order on its head. It’s unnerving, but sometimes that’s the right thing to do; it promises practical benefits that are immediate and substantial savings. If we put citizens at the centre of our digital architectures – appoint the individual as data controller - it solves problems that bedevil personalisation, online identity (ID) and data quality. The Government Digital Service has included PDS as one ID assurance route.
4. It’s taking hold in housing and education, and councils including Bracknell Forest and Warwickshire opted for it (working with Mydex CIC whose connection is available via G-Cloud, and connecting a citizen costs pennies).
5. This definitely belongs in our innovation agenda. We can start with single high volume transactions (such as blue badge schemes) or clusters of local services that want to provide seamless care around vulnerable individuals.
6. Let’s compare notes on ideas and progress. The outcome we want is a diverse and interoperable group of services to prompt citizens to take individual responsibility and in control of their own affairs, whilst allowing us as councils to offer digital services which are more efficient and appealing. This is the sort of forward thinking approach that will feature at the Innovation Zone in this year's LGA Annual Conference.

PRODUCTIVITY

Social Value Act – One Year On

7. I chaired an event on 24 February, Social Value Act – One Year On in Bevin Hall. The event was very well attended and the keynote speech was provided by the Act’s sponsor and champion Chris White MP. We heard from councils who are doing some great things through including social value clauses in their contracts. The Centre for Public Scrutiny led a workshop on ‘Scrutinising Social Value’, which discussed where opportunities might arise for councillors to inform the discussion of

social value. Councillors were seen as well placed to provide insight about the wider implications of council activity – particularly the knock-on social impacts in communities - which officers (focused on specific service areas) might find more difficult to perceive. Event slides can be found here:

http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/past-event-presentations/-/journal_content/56/10180/5969230/ARTICLE

IMPROVEMENT

Peer Challenge Programme

8. The LGA's peer challenge programme provides the equivalent of millions of pounds of consultancy to councils and supports them to succeed. In this week's edition of First magazine I have written an article about the results of the evaluation of our peer challenge programme. This found that the majority of survey respondents believe corporate peer challenge has led to improvements in the way their council is run. Key reasons for this include the quality of peer teams and their tailored work for each individual council. The evaluation has also highlighted how councils have contributed more than 2,500 days of senior councillor and officer time to corporate peer challenge teams. This represents significant, quality investment by the sector in its own improvement.

Income Generation

9. Income generation has become increasingly important to councils in the current financial climate. In last week's LGC, I wrote a column exploring some of the different methods councils have used to make money and the returns they can expect. This includes steps like investing in property, trading services and selling commodities. We held a successful event looking at income generation at Local Government House and there were some excellent examples of work councils are doing in this area. The LGA will continue to guide councils in the vital components surrounding income generation as they seek the right methods for their authority.

Cuts to Concessionary fares

10. This month I also made a number of appearances discussing concessionary fares and the vital bus services elderly and disabled people face losing because cuts mean councils are unable to keep picking up the bill for free travel. I appeared on Radio 4's Today programme and BBC Breakfast on Saturday 1st March to discuss the issue.

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