

Note of last Improvement & Innovation Board meeting

Title:	Improvement & Innovation Board
Date:	Tuesday 29 October 2019
Venue:	Westminster Room, 8th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item Decisions and actions

1 Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

The Chairman welcomed all members to the new cycle of the Improvement and Innovation Board. Introductions were given around the table, and the Chairman encouraged substitutes to attend all Board meetings, to observe and participate with Board business.

No declarations of interest were made.

2 Public Notices

David Holdstock, Director of Communications introduced item two.

Therein a confidential discussion took place.

3 Sector-led improvement communications strategy and campaign

Item three was introduced by Matthew Hamilton, Improvement Manager, and Victoria Daly, Head of Campaigns.

Therein, a confidential discussion took place.

4 Confidential note of last Improvement & Innovation Board meeting

Members made the following comments for the confidential note of the last Improvement & Innovation Board meeting that took place on Thursday 11 July 2019:

- In the note, it is referenced that Cllr Joy Allen declared an interest in item six (stating they are part of the LGA's facilitation team). This was actually declared by Cllr Liz Green.
- Members questioned why there were two notes of the of the last

Improvement & Innovation Board meeting – a confidential and non-confidential version. Benn Cain, Member Services Officer, confirmed that the confidential version is only for circulation amongst LGA officers and Board members. The non-confidential version is a public-facing document, which can be accessed by anyone online.

Decision

Members then agreed to the confidential note of the last Improvement & Innovation Board meeting which took place on 11 July 2019.

5 Membership, terms of reference , priorities and work programme for 2019/20

Dennis Skinner, Head of Improvement, introduced item five (priorities and work programme), who set out the priorities and purpose of the work programme for 2019/20. Dennis' update included details of the LGA's budget, which is mainly made up of from the grant given by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This grant is based on a very detailed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which makes up the associations core budget. Dennis reminded members that the IDeA Board is in charge of the delivery of the grant, and that the IIB has responsibility of ensuring the MoU's target work is taken forward.

In the discussion that followed, the following points were made:

Members discussed at length the LGA's Leadership Essential courses. Lead Member Cllr Billing (who leads on Leadership work for the Board), spoke of the benefits and emerging themes for new courses, as well as the challenges of engaging with the majority of Cllrs that do not attend the courses (who are not in Cabinet roles).

Members also praised the officers and the LGA for excellent quality of training that makes a different to Cllrs leadership skills. Members agreed that it was key to tailor courses to local area's needs, which, in-turn, will resonate with members.

Members and officers also discussed the benefits of online training, the possibility of developing the Leadership Essential courses onto an online platform, and the current array of online training courses that the LGA currently provide for members.

Discussions also turned to the current funding agreement in-place between the LGA and MHCLG, which is currently a one year agreement. The Chairman stated that in order to provide continued consistent improvement and support for the sector, the LGA should continue to push for a multi-year settlement. This approach was supported by members. Members discussed the possible effect a general election will have on securing the grant; Dennis confirmed that funding for 2020/21 has been confirmed and is in the last stages of being agreed, and that offices will continue to push hard for a multi-year settlement as directed.

Following on from this, the Chairman mentioned Peer Challenges as a core agreement of the MoU with MHCLG, who are putting pressure to ensure more councils take part and meet the quota.

Members noted the importance of ensuring councils deliver more services via digital platforms, and noted the work of the innovation exchange. This work will be led throughout the year by Lead Member Cllr Prior.

Lead Member Cllr Green brought up the issue of the Board's improvement work on supporting councils with climate change, and the need to share best practice cross-party.

Other discussion points that were made by members and offices included the LGA's improvement work on artificial intelligence (AI), members and civility in public life and council's financial resilience. Members also requested that a Board induction day for new members take place in the New Year.

Decisions

1. Members noted the membership of the Improvement and Innovation Board;
2. Members agreed to the Board's Terms of Reference;
3. Members agreed to the Board priorities for 2019/20; and
4. Members confirmed the member leads.

6 Improvement Support to Councils on Climate Change

Item six was introduced by lead member Cllr Liz Green, Vice-Chair of the Board. Following the LGA's declaration of a climate emergency at the annual conference in July and councils requesting support in this area, the Leadership Board set up a Climate Emergency Sounding Board. Over the summer, the board has met to address the challenges that councils are facing, to share good practice and to discuss how the LGA can provide support through lobbying and improvement. This paper sets out the recommendations for the future improvement approach to climate emergency work

Cllr Green stated that she will be leading on this work throughout the coming year, and put the questions to members how councils can make a difference at a local level to tackle climate change and lead on the climate emergency? Cllr Green commented that there is a real need to work out what works well and share best practice within the sector. Cllr Green concluded her introduction of the item by stating the report was a starting point, and that she would like the Board to agree and volunteer to sit on a member working group, to develop a real improvement offer on climate change.

Grace Abel, Productivity Adviser, also stated that the recommendations in the report include a dedicated climate change webpage, a focused peer challenge and self-assessment tool for councils.

The Chairman noted that the challenge will be different types of authorities, such as unitary, county, districts, boroughs and London borough's will all play a different role in this work, and will all have different aims and objectives. In the discussion that then followed, members made the following points:

Discussions were held over the huge amount of information and recommendations out there. Members noted that whilst some of this is quite broad, other aspects are

quite technical, and therefore it is imperative that councils have a way to find the correct information quickly and clearly.

Members discussed the varied interest in climate change – some are active campaigners, others are not interested, and others realise the risks but do not make an active change. With this in mind, members agreed that the sector could play a real, credible role in promoting this, particularly when thinking about how highstreets can become carbon neutral and replacing council's vehicle fleets and innovative ways to improve air quality on highways.

Members also referenced paragraph four in the report, and commented that working across the sector is vital. Members went on to comment that it is very easy for a council just to look at themselves and their own carbon footprint, but there is a urgency to look at leaders in this field in order to get to the same place. This includes government, businesses, the education sector and third sector.

Members also referenced and greatly praised the former Vice President Al Gore's Climate Reality Project, where participants can become a Climate Change Reality Leader.

Members discussed the need for councils to ratify individual ten year plans, a 'how to' plan – not a public relations exercise – that creates buy-in from across the area's stakeholders and sector. This idea was supported across part, and members agreed that it falls in to all portfolio areas held by elected members and parliamentarians. With this in mind, all decisions taken need to have an environmental impact assessment, alongside usual impacts such as finances and so on.

Other points raised by members included:

- Keeping the work flexible for local areas and the type of council to ensure their differing responsibilities and varying challenges can be addressed.
- Keeping the language focused around climate change and environmental sustainability, rather than 'emergency' and crisis-like terms.
- A suggestion to work collaboratively between councils through mass procurement exercises to buy biofuels and electric vehicles was also made.
- Public health impacts (including air quality) should be at the forefront of this work, as well as providing practical examples and best practice on this.
- Sharing of best practice between councils was a strong theme throughout the discussion.

Members asked how the member working group will be formed. Cllr Green confirmed it will be a group of around four members, and nominations will go through the political groups.

Decisions

1. Members agreed to set up a climate change improvement working group to guide this work.
2. Members agreed to volunteer themselves through their political group offices.
3. Officers will continue to develop a pilot climate change improvement offer.

7 Innovation Zone 2020

The Chairman, Cllr Peter Fleming introduced item seven. The Chairman invited members' views on the strategic organisation of the 2020 Innovation Zone at the LGA Annual Conference. The report includes background details about the Zone, ideas for the development of the 2020 Zone and opportunities for Member involvement. The Chairman commented that ideas discussed needs further development, and that these ideas include elements of the Zone should be integrated into the main conference, as well as a local government TEDx style conference, using the Zone to build a house with different rooms, showcasing how local government impacts all of our lives, and speakers from outside and inside the sector.

In the discussion that then followed, members made the following points:

- Members greatly supported the idea of encompassing climate change and innovative ways councils are tackling this into the Zone
- Support was mentioned around the table for a similar, open-mic session.
- Online streaming the Zone was discussed in order to gain a wider audience.
- Member supported the idea of using the TEDx brand, but recognised the limits around fees that this incur. The Chairman stated that there is nothing to stop the LGA building its own brand.
- Members supported the idea of creating a very informal group to feed into this work

Decision

Members noted the report and discussed the ideas for the format of the 2020 Zone. The Board advised offices on the issues outlined in paragraph four to assist the Zone's development for 2020.

8 Audit Consultation (Redmond Review)

Item eight was introduced by Alan Finch, Principal Adviser (Finance). The report provided a summary of the call for views as part of the Independent Review of Local Authority Financial Reporting and External Audit in England led by Sir Tony Redmond who was present. Members are asked to provide a steer on the proposed content of the LGA's response, the detail of which will be cleared by Resources Board. This report will also be presented at the Leadership Board on 30 October 2019.

Alan stated that external audit was part of a complex system of local governance. He advised that there were significant issues around audit delivery, and that audit firms a large number of audits had not been completed by the deadline of 31 July; with this in mind, the Resources Board Chair Cllr Richard Watts as called for the deadline to be pushed back. Finally he noted that the work of external auditors had implications for the sector led approach to council improvement.

Sir Tony Redmond then briefly introduced the review and answered members questions.

In the discussion that then followed, members made the following points:

- Although there were issues for example with the completion of audits the solution is not to recreate the Audit Commission
- The form of accounts councils are currently required to follow is lengthy and hard to understand
- Financial resilience and the issue of going concern is a major issue for many councils
- The National Audit Office is currently reviewing its own Code of Audit Practice and there was a need for consistency across the two reviews.

Decisions

Members noted the report and provided comments on the proposed content of the LGA's response to the call for views.

9 LGA Boards' improvement activity

The Chairman introduced item nine, a progress report on improvement activity undertaken by other LGA Boards. The Chairman encouraged members to contact LGA officers with any questions they may have regarding any on-going relevant improvement work being carried out.

Decision

Members noted the report.

10 Non-Confidential Notes of the last Improvement & Innovation Board

Decision

Members agreed to the non-confidential note of the last Improvement & Innovation Board meeting, that took place on 11 July 2019.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Peter Fleming OBE	Sevenoaks District Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Liz Green	Kingston upon Thames Royal Borough Council
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Judi Billing MBE Cllr Neil Prior	Hertfordshire County Council Pembrokeshire County Council
Members	Cllr Nigel Ashton Cllr Laura Miller	North Somerset Council Dorset County Council

30 January 2020

Cllr Phil North	Test Valley Borough Council
Cllr Alice Perry	Islington Council
Cllr Joy Allen	Durham County Council
Cllr Asma Begum	Tower Hamlets Council
Cllr Rebecca Lury	Southwark Council
Cllr Andrew Western	Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Mayor Dave Hodgson MBE	Bedford Borough Council
Cllr Wayne Davies	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Cllr Alan Connett	Teignbridge District Council

Apologies

Cllr Philip Broadhead	Bournemouth Borough Council
Cllr Carl Les	North Yorkshire County Council
Cllr Damian White	Havering London Borough Council
Cllr Vince Maple	Medway Council
Lord Gary Porter CBE	
Sir Stephen Houghton CBE	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Cllr Mike Haines	Teignbridge District Council
Mr Richard Priestman	Local Government Improvement and Development
Mr Philip Sellwood	Energy Saving Trust (EST)