

## **Improvement & Innovation Board – report from Cllr Peter Fleming**

### **IMPROVEMENT**

#### **Restoring public trust in councils**

1. I responded to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's (CSPL) when it published its annual report recently. Whilst the Committee was pleased to find high levels of member induction events for new councillors and high levels of familiarity with the Seven Principles of Public Life the Committee felt there was no systematic approach to conduct issues and limited sanctions and therefore that inappropriate conduct by members might not be dealt with effectively, eroding public confidence and trust in local government. In my response I highlighted the ultimate role of local elections, saying *"Democratically accountable local councillors are answerable to citizens and it is right that the primary regulator of standards in local government should be the ballot box."*

#### **Finance offer**

2. We have embarked on a series of discussions with members and chief officers about our finance support offer and how we can best help councils ensure they have arrangements in place to maintain financial sustainability. Each authority will need to develop its own approach and we are leaning towards developing a "Financial health check" focusing on how the whole organisation manages its finances, including the vital role of leading members and officers. Recruiting new member peers, especially leaders, former leaders, and experienced finance leads will be essential. Please contact Alan Finch at [alan.finch@local.gov.uk](mailto:alan.finch@local.gov.uk) if you have any thoughts about the future offer or can offer/suggest potential peers.

### **LEADERSHIP**

#### **Highlighting Leadership**

3. Further to the launch of our revised leadership programme over the summer, we have already had 521 bookings this financial year. Due to demand, we have also added some new programmes to our offer:
  - 3.1 finance for leaders and finance portfolio holders – 30-31 October 2014
  - 3.2 additional scrutiny programme - 3-4 December 2014
  - 3.3 additional Main leadership programme to commence 15-16 January 2015
  - 3.4 and an additional fire and rescue programme - 3-4 Feb 2015
4. We are also still taking bookings for our new programme for council leaders which provides a unique space for them to explore new ways of working and leading their organisations, partnerships and communities. The Leaders' Programme takes place at the Wyboston Lakes Executive Centre near Cambridge on 1-2 December (module 1), 15-16 January 2015 (module 2) and 16-17 February 2015 (module 3).
5. Visit our [website](#) to find further information and book places on our Highlighting Political Leadership programme.

## PRODUCTIVITY

### **Commissioning Academy for members**

6. I am pleased to say that the LGA is working with the Cabinet Office to pilot a Commissioning Academy for elected members aimed at equipping and supporting members to improve commissioning practice. The pilot academy will take place in November. Its objectives are to help members:

- Understand the commissioning cycle and the councillor role within it
- Improve and develop the commissioning activity of their council
- Create a safe environment for comparing practice, learning and sharing
- Explore key policy issues and challenges from stakeholders' perspectives in a cross party environment and with diverse areas and regions.

We will then look to see how we can roll it out more widely.

### **Advice on Income generation and Commercialisation**

7. There is a growing interest in the sector about commercialisation and income generation activity. Over the last year the focus of our support to councils has generally been focussed on raising councils' awareness of the ways in which they can take a commercial approach to all activity, including income generation, procurement and contract management. We have done this through regional events hosted in partnership with the private sector in Bristol, Manchester and London as well as the production of a new webpage. We are now bringing a number of leading edge councils together with a view to sharing experiences and learning and to consider the development of a sector led improvement offer on commercialisation. In the meantime there a number of case studies here <http://www.local.gov.uk/income-generation>.

## TRANSPARENCY

### **DCLG Transparency Code**

8. I responded to the publication of DCLG's revised Transparency Code stressing that local government is already the most open and transparent part of the public sector and drawing attention to the wide range of information on budgets and revenues, performance, salaries, assets and annual parking reports that councils already publish. I stressed that the greatest barrier for councils is a lack of resources to prepare and publish data at a time when they are having to protect vital services while managing a 43 per cent reduction in funding, saying *"To bring the deadline forward for publishing this information only adds additional strain and burden to local authorities. Councils now need a firm commitment that they will receive adequate funding to cover these new expectations."*

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