

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

COUNCIL – 12 APRIL 2006

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

12. THE IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (I&DEA) AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (LGA) PROPOSALS FOR A NEW PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

'D' RECOMMENDATION – that the response appended to the report now submitted be approved and sent to the LGA.

1.0 Purpose/Summary of Report

1.1 This report summarises a consultation document issued by the LGA and I&DEA on proposals for a new performance framework for 2008 onwards and offers a draft response at Appendix B (pages 115 - 117).

2.0 Contribution to the Council's Corporate Objectives

2.1 The impact of such a framework would contribute to the Council's priority to improve the health and sustainability of the organisation, as fundamentally this will be used to assess how the council is performing in terms of providing services and value for money.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Audit Commission have recently consulted on the CPA methodology for District Councils for 2006 – 2008, however the Commission, along with central government and other agencies are looking to replace the CPA framework with another model from 2008 onwards.

3.2 A consultation document, setting out the LGA and I&DEA's proposals on a new performance framework was issued to all Councils in March 2006 and circulated to all Members and a selection of officers with an invitation to meet and discuss the document on 4 April 2006.

4.0 Response to the Electoral Commission

- 4.1 20 Members and officers attended the meeting, which was chaired by Councillor M Carver. Nick Easton, Programme Manager from the LGA, gave a short presentation.
- 4.2 Members and officers split into 2 discussion groups to look at the 6 questions and responses were collectively fed back at the end. The consultation questions are listed in Appendix A (page 114) and the recommended responses are detailed in Appendix B (pages 115 - 117).
- 4.3 Following this evening's discussion, the Council's response will be sent to the LGA.

5.0 Consultation

- 5.1 The consultation document was sent to all Members and a group of officers (CPA Steering Group) for comment. 20 Members and officers attended a discussion meeting and further debate is invited at this meeting.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications to this report.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no financial implications to this report.

8.0 Human Resource Implications

- 8.1 There are no human resource implications to this report.

9.0 Risk Management Implications

- 9.1 There are no risk management implications to this report.

Background Papers

The full consultation document is available from the LGA's website at www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Publication/drivingimprovement.pdf

Contact Member: Cllr M Carver

Contact Officer: Ceri Pettit – Head of Performance x2240

Consultation Questions

1. Are there any obvious gaps in proposed framework or specific areas that you would like to see strengthened or developed in order to deliver a robust and rigorous set of proposals?

2. Recognising that the approach will need to be proportionate to risk and performance, does the overall balance between the different elements look about right?

3. We believe the sector is mature and confident enough to tackle its own poor performance. Do you agree with this and do our proposals seem credible?

4. We believe this approach will be less burdensome to operate and more sustainable. Do you agree?

5. Do you believe there are sufficient incentives in the framework to drive improvement? Is there anything further you would seek?

6. Would you be willing to work with us in developing these proposals?



East Herts Council

Response to LGA and I&DEA Driving Improvement – a new performance framework for localities consultation

April 2006

Introduction

East Herts Council welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the LGA and I&DeA Driving Improvement consultation. We are especially grateful to Nick Easton, Programme Manager, for visiting us when we met to formulate our response.

Our overall view of the proposed framework is one of support and we agree that there is merit in taking this proactive and constructive approach, rather than waiting to be told what will replace CPA.

The proposed framework is better than CPA in that it appears to bring less interference and makes authorities more locally accountable, rather than jumping through nationally set hoops. We would appreciate the greater flexibility of this framework and the opportunity to engage with partners on issues that matter locally.

However, we would like to see a framework that brings a constructive, supportive element alongside inspection. CPA identified faults but offered no solutions or examples of best practice, and this framework could address that gap.

We have set out our response under the relevant questions and would be more than happy to discuss any of the points in more detail with you.

Cllr Tony Jackson
Leader East Herts Council

Responses

Question 1

We identified seven gaps in the framework that we would like to see strengthened or developed and they are set out below:

1. A clearer definition of the term 'community'. Is this the District, towns, or neighbourhoods?
2. Clarification on how voters and electors fit in.
3. The role partners would play in the framework was not obvious and therefore their part and how they would fit in should be made clearer.
4. The framework needs to take account of a moderation or quality control process and how this would operate.
5. The membership of the peer challenge team, in relation to 'local politicians' should make reference only to 'politicians', rather than specifying 'local', as it might place individuals in a very difficult position when working with neighbouring authorities.
6. Further guidance on resident engagement is needed in terms of the type of mechanism that will be used to feedback on council performance and how they will understand what it means.
7. The framework needs to be clear as to who is being inspected – the authority or partners.

Question 2

In terms of whether the overall balance between the different elements looks about right, we feel that it does, but propose that the following elements may need to be reconsidered:

Annual Assessment – we recommend that the word 'annual' be replaced with 'self'. We fear that completing a full annual assessment would become an onerous task when in essence the key elements are happening all the time. We suggest that an authority produces a self-assessment every 2-3 years unless triggered sooner by, for example, the external audit and the value for money audit element.

Sector Led Intervention – it was felt that this element of the framework should sit above the others, as it is not bound to happen and would come as a result of the other elements e.g. the external audit and the value for money audit, annual assessment and the periodic peer challenge flagging up causes for concern. This element should be the 'deterrent' or 'threat' of not improving services and performance.

Question 3

Overall yes we do believe the sector is mature and confident enough to tackle its own poor performance, however it is recognised that there would be a learning curve for some. There appears to be an assumption that by 2008 no authorities will remain in the 'poor' category.

Also, would all members on a Peer Challenge have the right skills and knowledge to be able to effectively challenge a poorly performing authority and identify solid actions for improvement? In particular what level of expertise would be available to support the challenge?

Question 4

We don't believe this approach will be less burdensome and will require the same amount of time and resources. The fundamental question perhaps individual authorities need to answer is, whether by investing more resources they would get something more from it. We feel that even if the burden is not reduced, the proposed model could be a better, more useful investment of time.

Question 5

Yes we believe there are sufficient incentives in the framework to drive improvement with the main ones being sector-led intervention and greater local accountability.

Question 6

Yes we would be willing to work with the LGA in developing these proposals. In particular we would be more than happy to work on a 1-1 basis to assess the framework. Also it might be worth setting up a reference group of local authorities, similar to that established for developing the current CPA framework, so that further developments can be tested with local authorities.