



Report to Cabinet

Subject "Taking the Lead: self regulation and improvement in local government"
Local Government Group paper

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1. Purpose of the Report

- To provide Cabinet with an overview of the new proposals relating to performance management and peer review put forward by the Local Government Group 'Taking the Lead: self regulation and improvement in local government'. The full report can be viewed at <http://www.local.gov.uk/lgv2/aio/1233499>

2. Background

The Local Government Group have been advocating for a reduction in national performance reporting and an increased emphasis on self-regulation in the sector over recent years. They have now drawn up a paper setting out their proposals relating to taking performance management forward, providing a mechanism for gathering comparative performance data and for peer challenge within local government. This will come into effect from April 2011.

Authorities are not obliged to use the methods proposed, but there is an expectation that appropriate steps will be taken to enhance local accountability.

The two key principles set out are that local authorities are: -

- responsible for their own performance and for leading of improved outcomes for their communities
- accountable to their local communities through greater transparency

With the removal of the National Indicator set, the emphasis for councils is now self regulation and improvement with stronger accountability to residents rather than an inspection regime, but with an acknowledged collective responsibility for performance in the sector as a whole. However, the continued ability to compare key performance information is also seen as being a valuable tool and something that the Local Government Group is looking to develop and promote.

3. Proposals in more detail

3.1 – Measures councils may adopt - Recognising that councils already engage with local people and provide information, the lifting of national performance reporting burdens is seen as an opportunity to concentrate more on local outcomes.

To continue to improve this, the Local Government Group outlines a selection of measures councils may already have adopted, or may wish to consider. In many cases, Gedling BC has already made progress towards the measures suggested – initiatives already progressed at Gedling are shown in italics.

- Encourage resident feedback via councillor surgeries, satisfaction surveys, complaints, comments, compliments and mystery shoppers – *Gedling will launch a new complaints, compliments and comments system from April 2011 and has used satisfaction surveys and mystery shoppers to help improve front line services.*
- Use social media techniques to gather information – *the use of on-line consultation is being explored and early steps have been taken to promote Twitter and Facebook*
- Use citizens' juries and participatory budgeting.
- Consult with the public on proposals that affect them – *Residents were consulted by Gedling Borough Council with towards the end of 2010 to inform service and budget decisions. A range of services consult on various issues.*
- Publish regular performance information to show how objectives are being met (e.g. an annual report) - *Performance information is published on the internet each quarter and the Council identifies its objectives each year within the Council Plan and publicises progress against this within its Annual Report.*
- Publish all expenditure above £500 on line – *This began in January 2011.*
- Make use of the role of scrutiny to challenge and improve council and partner services – *Gedling has active engagement by its Scrutiny Committees in reviewing and challenging performance and in the development of policy and practice in other public services in the Borough.*
- Assess own performance and identify areas for improvement and risk - *Senior Management Team, Cabinet and the Performance Review Scrutiny Committee review of the Council's performance each quarter.*
- Make use of opportunities to be challenged by peers – *The Council has been actively involved in peer reviews in the past. It has indicated an interest in taking up the offer of a Peer Review under this new programme at some time during the next three years.*
- Seek and welcome support from the sector as and when required

- Develop their councillors to fulfil their role – *Implementation of a Member Charter is now in progress, including a stronger focus on member development. Induction sessions designed largely by members are planned for new councillors following the May 2011 elections.*

3.2 – New Tools being offered - To enable Council's to improve their performance and accountability, the Local Government Group is offering a number of free or subsidised tools including:-

- A new, free, web based local assessment tool to help councils work with local people, partners and communities to jointly assess performance.
- New ways to help gather the views of citizens to be initially piloted with a number of local authorities.
- A free web based budget simulator 'YouChoose', to encourage and help members of the public to consider budget cuts, efficiencies and income generation opportunities, to be made available nationally.
- Support to authorities where a stronger member challenge to performance is needed to strengthen internal council Scrutiny functions. Events are likely to be offered for Scrutiny Chairs and other Members to help develop capacities and skills to effectively challenge performance. These will be free or offered at a subsidised rate.
- A free programme of voluntary peer challenge over a three year period starting in April 2011. This would rely on authorities making available leaders, chief executives and senior experts to take part as peers with commitment sought from individuals to highlight their availability over the next three years. As outlined above, interest has already been expressed in a Peer Review for the council, and the Council has also offered peers to support reviews in other areas.
- For Councils undergoing a change of control, five days of member peer support is also offered to new political administrations at no cost.
- A free web-based service to share knowledge to help councils learn from each other. Councils will be able to share best practice and innovation to help each other develop how they work. The 'Knowledge Hub' is planned to be fully operational by September 2011.

3.3 - Data and Transparency - Within the Knowledge Hub, councils will be able to record and share performance information, compare and improve understanding of their performance and productivity, and share experience and best practice. This will be available for officers and members and will include some contextual and socio-economic information about each area. The performance information can be tailored to present relevant data locally.

The Local Government Group is currently working to identify a core set of measures around cost efficiency, productivity, outcomes/achievements and citizen satisfaction to enable comparisons to be carried out. All councils will then be asked to input their data (e.g. from government data returns) into the Knowledge Hub to capture performance, outcome, resident survey and cost data. This will be made available as an open and transparent source of information to the public. It would also enable benchmarking clubs between councils to be established. Exact details of how this will work in practice are to be confirmed.

3.4 - Leadership support - Development support for political and managerial leaders is offered with one subsidised place offered for every council for each of the next 3 years on one of the Local Government Group commissioned programmes.

3.5 - Learning and Support Networks - Officer and Member networks will be supported to share good practice and to inform the Local Government Group's lobbying role.

4. Taking this agenda forward

The Local Government Group's proposals have the potential to provide valuable support and shared learning for the Council. However, their elective nature means that the Council can choose which, if any, of the products and services on offer it chooses to take up.

The issues raised would seem to impact most significantly on performance management and member development. It is therefore felt appropriate for the Local Government Group's proposals to be drawn to the attention of the Member Development Group and to Performance Review Scrutiny Committee, so that each are aware of the offers being made and can consider which they feel the Council to consider taking up.

Senior Management Team will also keep the offer under review, in particular considering the extent to which the proposals might be reflected in the Council's emergent Performance Management framework, also taking on board member feedback from the Member Development Group, Performance Review Scrutiny Committee and others.

5. Recommendations

Cabinet is **recommended** to: -

- Note the content of the report and the support offered by the Local Government Group
- Refer the Local Government Group's paper to both the Member Development Group and to Performance Review Scrutiny Committee for comments and views on aspects of the Group's proposals that the Council may take up.