Improvement East

Minutes of the Executive Advisory Group Meeting
Held on 12th November, Holiday Inn, Cambridge

Present:

Andrea Hill (Chair)	Chief Executive Suffolk County Council
Cllr Richard Stay	Chairman Regional Improvement and Efficiency Panel
Andrew Good	Chief Executive Mid Suffolk District Council
Caroline Tapster	Chief Executive Hertfordshire County Council
Trevor Holden	Chief Executive Breckland District Council
Kevin Crompton	Chief Executive Luton Borough Council
Richard Elliott	Chief Fire Officer, Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service
Rob Hammond	Chief Executive, Cambridge City Council
David White	Chief Executive, Norfolk County Council
Malcolm Morley	Chief Executive, Harlow Council
Martin Reeves	Chief Executive, Bedfordshire County Council
Nick Bell*	Director of Finance, Essex County Council
Anne Gibson	PPMA
Dennis Skinner	IDeA
Andrew Limb	GO-East
Neil Hayes*	EEDA
Mike Mosley	EERA
Cecilia Tredget	Director, Improvement East
Jane Sullivan	Improvement East
Dan Thorp	Improvement East

***** Substitute

In Attendance:

For Item 5. Presentation from Leadership Centre

Stephen Taylor	Leadership Centre
Diane Neale	Leadership Centre
Lynne Wardle	Leadership Centre

1. Introductions and Apologies

Introductions were made.

Apologies were received from:
Gillian Beasley, Peterborough City Council
John Campbell, North Herts District Council
Jon Ruddick, South Bedfordshire District Council,
Mark Lloyd, Cambridgeshire County Council
Andy Perrin, Audit Commission
Rob Tinlin, Southend Borough Council
Deborah Cadman, EEDA (Neil Hayes substituting)
Joanna Killian, Essex County Council (Nick Bell substituting)

2. Minutes of the EAG meeting 3rd September 2008

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising:

(i) Page 4 – A briefing note on the Regional Empowerment Partnership had been circulated by the Secretariat, it was agreed that this issue would be returned to at another meeting.
(ii) The group was asked if they would like to be copied into Member Panel papers when they are sent out. It was agreed that this would be useful.
(iii) Page 5 – The Chair asked for an update on Thurrock Council where the Chief Executive had recently left. Dennis Skinner informed the meeting that he was expecting to talk imminently to the Director of Finance at Thurrock to discuss the support the sector could provide.

It was agreed that:

(i) The Regional Empowerment Partnership should be discussed by this group at a future meeting
(ii) All members of the EAG shall be copied into papers for Improvement East Member Panel meetings

3. Facing up to new challenges

The Group held a workshop discussion on the questions contained in Annex A of the report for this item, in particular how the economic situation is affecting this region and if there is anything that Improvement East should do differently in response.

The following points were raised:

- Improvement East will need to consider the balance between efficiency and capacity building work, as efficiency is now even more important. It is also seen as a priority by Ministers
- Improvement East could help coordinate a regional effort to look into alternative sustainable financial models for authorities
- With land values falling, regeneration is something that authorities could consider
- Authorities may wish to explore the possibility of becoming a housing provider to address the social housing agenda, Improvement East could support this
- In this economic climate relations with contractors, especially for care homes, are increasingly vulnerable. Some regional working could be done around this, also in relation to supply chains
- Re-organisation and transformational change are areas to consider for opportunities in efficiencies

- Working closer with the wider public sector may be an opportunity for efficiencies
- Staff morale could be an issue and will need to be considered in relation to drives for efficiency targets
- This may be a good opportunity for Improvement East to identify 2 or 3 things it could do to make a difference in this area – there is a need to demonstrate a response from the Partnership in year 1 in order to be in a positive position when funding for further years is agreed
- Use of Resources scores are not strong in the East. More work in this area could have an impact
- Authorities could explore ways to support local businesses

Caroline Tapster informed the Group that she is a member of the Regional Economic Forum which meets monthly. There may be an opportunity for local government to identify areas with central government which would provide authorities with an opportunity to react to the current economic situation. A paper from the Forum will be circulated to the group by Caroline.

It was felt that responding to the economic situation should be a priority for Improvement East in year 1, as funding for years 2 and 3 is indicative and will depend on the performance of the Partnership in the first year.

Dennis Skinner informed the Group of action that is being taken in London on this issue; every borough in London will be engaging in a 12 month process of efficiency peer reviews. The reviews will go beyond a typical diagnostic with peers offering a number of tools and innovative initiatives.

It was agreed that:

(i) Improvement East should support the exploration of a different sustainable financial model for authorities
(ii) Information from the Regional Economic Forum will be shared with this Group
(iii) Improvement East should reassess the efficiency work programme

4. Programme Delivery

The Group received an update on delivery of the Improvement East programme from the cluster leads.

Performance

Caroline Tapster gave an update on the performance cluster as Chief Executive lead.

It was noted that more support may be needed in future for children's services given recent developments nationally.

The group noted the Waveney DC report. An area of concern was raised in respect of the level of funding that has been given to the authority over a long period of time and reservations were expressed about whether any further funding should be granted to the authority if requested. The level of support for Members was questioned and it was confirmed that this, and previous funding, had included both Member peer support and Member development support.

A discussion took place regarding the proposal for funding for Innovations Day, which the Group supported, and agreed that funding should be top sliced.

Following a discussion the Group were in agreement that support should be given to the request of the performance cluster, that approval is given to Chief Executive leads for individual authorities for up to £20,000 subject to criteria.

It was agreed that:

(i) The funding of £65,000 for Innovations Day be supported and that the necessary funding should be top sliced from the whole budget

(ii) The Group supported the request of the performance cluster that approval is given to Chief Executive leads for individual authorities for up to £20,000 subject to agreed criteria

LAAs

In Gillian Beasley's absence Jane Sullivan gave an update on the LAA cluster.

The Group noted the proposal in respect of the regional architecture for LSP, LAA and MAA support. Discussions were held around the added value of the proposal and district authority representation, which the Group were satisfied with.

Efficiency

Malcolm Morley gave an update on the efficiency cluster as Chief Executive lead.

A discussion was held in relation to delegated decision making with allocated budget for the Chairman and Chief Executive champions within clusters. It was agreed by the Group to support the request as it was felt it would enable quicker progress of work.

It was agreed that:

(i) The Group support the request of the performance and efficiency clusters that approval is given to the Chairman and Chief Executive champions of the clusters to make delegated decisions within their allocated budget in consultation with the Chairman and Liberal Democrat and Labour lead Members of Improvement East when the delay caused by waiting for decisions of the Member Panel would impede progress

Skills and Capacity

Cecilia Tredget gave an update to the Group on the skills and capacity cluster.

A need was identified for a Chief Executive lead on economic development. Martin Reeves volunteered for this role.

A discussion was held around the two proposals; one from the South Essex Thames Gateway, and one from RCE to support the CURE programme. The following points were raised in relation to the CURE programme:

- Strong concerns about the extent to which counties are involved in the RCE programme and to what extent the proposed programme is regional, i.e. goes beyond the cities that are part of RCE
- A lack of clarity in respect of the outcomes of the proposal

Given the reservations of the Group it was decided that further work needs to be undertaken, specifically in relation to the outcomes of the programme and how they can be disseminated within the region. It was acknowledged that the proposal did contain aspects which were important.

It was agreed that:

(i) The Group support the request from the South Essex Thames Gateway Partnership for £50,000 to support the implementation of the IDeA economic prosperity toolkit
(ii) Further work is need on the proposal from RCE for £191,000 over three years to support the CURE programme
(iii) Martin Reeves takes up the role of Chief Executive lead for economic development

5. Presentation from Leadership Centre

Andrea Hill acknowledged that some members of the Group have an interest in this item. Caroline Tapster took over as Chair of the meeting for this item.

Representatives from the Leadership Centre joined the meeting and gave a presentation on the work they have carried out in Cumbria and on the proposal for Norfolk and Suffolk.

A discussion was held, the following points were made;

- That lessons need to be learned from the Bedfordshire experience of LGR and that the Leadership Programme approach would put Norfolk and Suffolk in a stronger position to deal with similar challenges.
- That there are opportunities not only to build positive relationships in Norfolk and Suffolk but also to develop more cost effective services through greater collaboration across the Sector.
- That the legacy associated with the programme needs to be clearly documented to illustrate how this model can be replicated across the region.
- It is clear that the proposal is cross cutting in nature and that it will deliver outcomes for Local Area Agreements as well as increased capacity and improved efficiencies. For this reason the funding should be spread across relevant budgets.

The Group also sought reassurance about the procurement of this proposal and whether this was in order. Cecilia Tredget confirmed that this was the case as it is an example of commissioning within the sector, and mirrors activity in other RIEPs nationally.

It was agreed that:

(i) The Group notes the progress made during the Foundation stage of both programmes

(ii) Supports the commissioning of the next phase of the programme to deliver outcomes identified for Suffolk and Norfolk

(iii) Supports the proposal to match fund the Leadership Centre programmes in Norfolk and Suffolk to a maximum of £150,000 for each county area. With this funding coming from across different clusters

(iv) Agrees that Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive champion for LGR reports back to the Group at regular intervals on the programme

6. Update from Partner Agencies

Andrea Hill resumed her position as Chair of the meeting.

GO-East: Andrew Limb reported that he has been asked to report to Ministers on the situation in Thurrock Council, and that a new Regional Director will be starting at the Government Office shortly.

EEDA: Neil Hayes reported that the Chair of EEDA has extended his term to 2010.

7. Performance Management Framework

The Group noted the development and implementation of the performance management framework

8. Any Other Business

The Group agreed to support a joint meeting of the EAG and Member Panel in February 2009. It was suggested that in the future, after February, joint meetings are held as additional meetings of both groups.

Dates of Future Meetings

Executive Advisory Group	Wednesday 21 January 2009 – Holiday Inn, Impington Wednesday 8 April 2009 – Trinity Centre, Cambridge Wednesday 15 July 2009 – Trinity Centre, Cambridge Wednesday 14 October 2009 – Trinity Centre, Cambridge Starting at 2.30 pm
Member Panel	Thursday 27 November 2008 Wednesday 4 February 2009 Wednesday 29 April 2009 Wednesday 29 July 2009 Wednesday 28 October 2009 All at Trinity Centre, Cambridge starting at 9.00