**Improvement East**

**Minutes of the Executive Advisory Group Meeting**
**Held on 21st January, Holiday Inn, Cambridge**

**Present:**

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| 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 |
| Gillian Beasley | Chief Executive, Peterborough City Council |
| Trevor Holden | Chief Executive Breckland District Council |
| Kevin Crompton | Chief Executive Luton Borough Council |
| 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 |
| Andy Perrin | Audit Commission |
| Dennis Skinner | IDeA |
| Andrew Limb | GO-East |
| Paul Wood* | EEDA |
| Mike Mosley* | EERA |
| Cecilia Tredget | Director, Improvement East |
| Jane Sullivan | Improvement East |
| David Ellis | Improvement East |

***** Substitute

## 1. Introductions and Apologies

Introductions were made. The Group congratulated Gillian Beasley on her OBE in the New Year's Honours List.

Apologies were received from:

John Campbell, North Herts District Council
Jon Ruddick, South Bedfordshire District Council,
Mark Lloyd, Cambridgeshire County Council
Rob Tinlin, Southend Borough Council
Deborah Cadman, EEDA (Neil Hayes substituting)
Joanna Killian, Essex County Council (Nick Bell substituting)
Caroline Tapster, Hertfordshire County Council
Richard Elliot, Norfolk Fire Service
Anne Gibson, PPMA
Brian Stewart, EERA (Mike Mosley substituting)

## 2. Minutes of the EAG meeting 12 November 2008

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising not covered in the main agenda:

(i) Page 2: The Regional Empowerment Partnership would be discussed at the Joint EAG/Member Panel meeting on 4 March 2009.

(ii) Page 5: CURE. EAG's comments had been fed back to RCE and those had been addressed.

It was reported that this could now be processed as an urgent proposal.

(iii) Page 5: Mark Lloyd had been updated on progress re Leadership Centre work.

**3. Responding to the Economic Downturn**

Asset Backed Vehicles.

Martin was leading for the East on Asset Backed Vehicles and would capture the learning and feed back to the group. Nick reported on work going on in Essex with European Investment funding. Martin to include the Essex approach in his report.

Mapping the Supply Chain.

Nick and Cecilia were liaising with Spikes Cavell on this issue. Need to be able to answer the question that if the market collapsed what would be the impact on authorities and what are their business continuity plans.

Improvement East Website

Cecilia informed the group that a section had been set aside on the new Improvement East website (**www.improvementeast.gov.uk**) to gather together useful information on helping authorities through the recession.

Richard reported on an a capital fund which could possibly be used to mitigate job losses. EEDA to be approached for further information on when and where this could be utilised and the legality of doing so. This, then, to be circulated to Chief Executives.

**It was agreed that:**

**(i) Martin to write a report on best practice regarding ABVs and to include information on the Essex approach and circulate to the group.**

**(ii) EEDA to be approached for information on the Capital Fund specifically around where and when it can be used and the**

**legality of doing so. This, then to be circulated to Chief Executives across the region.**

## 4. Framework for the Annual Report

All RIEPs were required by CLG to produce an annual report which had to be submitted in draft by 13 March.

The contents of the Report were discussed and the following observations noted:

- Norwich City Housing should not be used as a single Case Study but included under performance..
- The Children's Board work on 14-19s should be included as a case study.
- Case study on supporting individual authorities to be included.
- The focus of the report should be on the future and what we intend to do.
- Emphasis on efficiency was missing. Need to highlight what was going on in the efficiency agenda across the region whether or not IE had an involvement. Members of the group were asked to provide Jane with good examples of efficiency work before 4th March.

**It was agreed that:**

**(i) Additional case studies on 14-19 work and Supporting Individual authorities to be included.**

**(ii) More emphasis to be placed on efficiency with members of the group supplying good examples of efficiency projects to Jane before 4th March.**

## 5. Priorities and Issues for the Year 2 Delivery Plan

Priorities.

It was felt that emphasis on the big spending Departments such as Adult Social Care and Children should be included. This should cover work on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

Year 2 emphasis needs to be on delivery, especially around efficiency.

Norfolk and Suffolk Leadership Centre work – a suggested phase 2 could be "Counting Norfolk and Counting Suffolk" along the lines of the "Counting Cumbria" work highlighted at the last EAG meeting. Possibility of including Essex in this to be considered.

Local Authority Performance should be included as a continuing priority.

Dennis mentioned peer work being carried out on efficiency in the London RIEP and agreed to circulate details of the London model to the group.

Trevor mentioned work going on in Lincolnshire where up to 35% efficiency savings were predicted across back office functions.

**It was agreed that:**

**(i) The above comments be taken into consideration when formulating priorities for the Year 2 Delivery Plan**
**(ii) Dennis would circulate information on the London model.**

Funding.

The issue of what to do with unspent monies was discussed.

**It was agreed that:**

**(i) An Invest to Save Fund should be established now from Year 1 funding,**
**(ii) Children's Board to prepare proposal for use of additional funding.**
**(iii) The rest of the budget to be aggregated and carried forward to Year 2.**

Regional Commissioning.

**It was agreed that the Year 2 programme should be set out and agreed by the end of April. Day to day management of the programmes and responsibility for delivery would be devolved to 4 cluster groups. The role of EAG and Member Panel would be to take a strategic overview of the programme and scrutinise the work of the cluster groups.**

Cross Cutting Issues

It was noted that some activities were cross cutting across the four agreed priority areas and that EAG and the Member Panel should be alive to such issues.

Process

**The process outlined in the paper was agreed and a meeting of the Skills and Capacity cluster to be set up before the Joint Member Panel/Executive Advisory Group.**

## 6. Feedback from Relevant Meetings

This item was taken first due to time constraints of some members of the group.

Performance Cluster

Rob reported on the last meeting of the Performance Cluster where the expeditious process had been agreed for proposals around Great Yarmouth Use of Resources; Norwich City Use of Resources; Uttlesford Use of Resources and Norwich City Council Housing. All these proposals had now received approval. A Chief Executive lead was still required for Great Yarmouth and Norwich and Jane requested volunteers to contact her

Rob had also attended a Chief Executives mentoring group, where the role of Lead Chief Executives was looked at. The proposed roles of Lead Chief Executives are set out in Annex 4 to the report.

There was an expectation that a Joint Agency Group or Improvement Board would be set up for all authorities receiving IE support. and the role of the Joint Agency/Improvement Board is set out in Annex 6 to the report.

**It was agreed that these two annexes should be sent to authorities receiving IE support.**

Waveney DC:

Gillian reported on progress with Waveney District Council. An Improvement Board meeting had taken place on 15th December where Edwina Child from the Audit Commission gave positive feedback on the direction of travel and statement of improvement. This improvement was seen to be a direct result of Improvement East funding. Further support, however, may be needed in the future to ensure continued improvement.

Richard reported hearing comments that the Leader of Waveney has reportedly made that the amount of money IE had given them had enabled them to dampen down their council tax increase.

The group agreed that this was an extremely unhelpful comment and requested Richard, in his position as Chairman of the Member Panel to write to the Leader to express the feelings of this group.

Gillian reported that she had been assured that funding granted by IE had been used properly.

Keeping a track of how much money had gone into individual authorities from IE and, previously BCE was discussed.

There was a discussion on the forthcoming publication of CPA results and the possibility of having advance notification from authorities in the region

**It was agreed that:**

**(i) Gillian to take a positive message back to Waveney recognising their achievements to date.**
**(ii) Richard would write to the Leader to express the feelings of this group around comments on lowering council tax.**

**(iii) Research should take place into the amount of funding given to individual local authorities by IE and BCE and what percentage of the authority's total budget that amounted to. This research also to be linked to the improvement in performance of these authorities.**

**(iv) It was agreed that the Chair would write to all Chief Executives in the region to ask for information on their overall scores/direction of travel/use of resources.**

Thurrock Council

Andrea reported on progress with Thurrock. The first meeting of the Improvement Board was held on 16 January and positive progress was made. The draft plan needed amending to focus on Member/Officer relationships and appointment of new Chief Executive. It was reported that Richard Stay would meet with the Leader and Deputy Leader of Thurrock Council. Andrea commented that it had been extremely helpful to have colleagues with her at the meeting and the group should consider the difficulties Chief Executives leads faced when on their own.

Children's Board

Kevin reported on the Children's Board which had met this week. The notes from that meeting would be sent to the group when finalised. The Board are working on a menu of support for Children's Services. They are trying to establish where the gaps are and align projects with initiatives that are already happening such as the Commissioning Support Programme.

An officer from Suffolk had been seconded to do an analysis of APA self-assessment statements. It had not proved possible to find someone to work on efficiency and Kevin requested the Group to let him know of any suitable candidates.

A league table of APA results had been drawn up showing this region to be at the bottom. It was felt that there may be problems with grading and that we need to find out how better to impress assessors.

Andrea raised the issue of recruitment of social workers who would be heavily in demand given the current situation and Kevin agreed to collate information about vacancies in social work in the region.

Kevin reported that the 14-19 work funded by Improvement East has had a major impact and put the East ahead of the rest of the country on the 14-19 agenda.

**It was agreed that:**

**(i) Notes from the Board meeting to be sent to the group when finalised, together with a copy of the APA league table.**

**(ii) Group members to consider suitable candidates for an efficiency project and to let Kevin know.**

**(iii) Kevin would collate information on vacancies in social work across the region.**

LAA/LSP Strategic Group

Gillian reported that the LAA/LSP Cluster had been replaced by the LAA/LSP Strategic Group supported by a Practitioner's Group. Three priorities had been identified and the Practitioner's group would propose programmes to address these priorities.

There was a need for information generally on how LSPs were working across the region and specifically early warnings of failing partnerships. Andrew confirmed that the best source of this information was the Annual Review of Partnerships. He went on to explain that Local Improvement Advisors are available to work within the region advising LSPs but Improvement East could, for example, utilise them to advise on a regional basis and to help in further developing a menu of support

Efficiency Cluster

Malcolm reported on progress made within the Efficiency Cluster. He welcomed David Ellis as new Assistant Director at Improvement East to lead on efficiency.

PIDs were being developed for the efficiency programme using Price Waterhouse Cooper. Top priorities were Procurement, Joint Commissioning and Resource Mapping and Revenues and Benefits. The Cluster were also looking at the Year 2 Delivery Plan (for further discussion under item 5).

## 7. Update from Partner Agencies – All Partners

**EEDA:** Discussions were taking place with IE on the economic development stream and how working together could take this forward.

**Audit Commission:** CPA, Use of Resources and CAA results to be made public in February. Andy would feed back comments around Safeguarding agenda.

**IDeA:** Dennis updated the group on the current situation at LGA. Work was ongoing on the Business Plan with the priority being working closer together rather than structural change.

## 8. Any Other Business

Bedfordshire LGR.

A couple of proposals for utilising remainder of funding for Bedfordshire were currently being considered by Members under the urgency process. .

Martin had volunteered Bedfordshire to receive the first visit from the peer team consisting of Mark Lloyd, Glenn Sanderson and Stephen Halls. This team would capture the learning which could be applied to other authorities going through the same process. It was proposed that this would be produced before the end of this financial year in order for Bedfordshire colleagues to be fully involved.

**Future Meeting Dates:**

04 March 2009 – Trinity Centre, Cambridge
(Joint EAG/Member Panel) **Starting at 9.00 am**
08 April 2009 – Trinity Centre, Cambridge starting at 2.30 pm
15 July 2009 – Trinity Centre, Cambridge starting at 2.30 pm
14 October 2009 – Trinity Centre, Cambridge starting at 2.30 pm