

Improvement East

Minutes of the Executive Advisory Group Meeting Held on 15 July 2009 at the Trinity Centre, Cambridge

Present:

Andrea Hill (Chair)	Chief Executive Suffolk County Council
Cllr Penny Otton *	Regional Improvement and Efficiency Panel
Nick Bell *	Essex County Council
Kevin Crompton	Chief Executive Luton Borough Council
Andrew Good	Mid Suffolk District Council
John Hill	East Cambridgeshire District Council
Mark Lloyd	Chief Executive, Cambridgeshire County Council
Malcolm Morley	Chief Executive, Harlow Council
Rob Tinlin	Chief Executive, Southend Borough Council
David White	Chief Executive, Norfolk County Council
Anne Gibson	PPMA
Andrew Limb	GO-East
Andy Perrin	Audit Commission
Dennis Skinner	IDeA
Brian Stewart	EERA
Paul Witcombe*	EEDA
Cecilia Tredget	Director, Improvement East
David Ellis	Improvement East
Michelle Nuttall	Improvement East

* Substitute

Apologies were received from:

Cllr Richard Stay – Chairman RIEP (Cllr Penny Otton substituting)
Deborah Cadman, EEDA (Paul Whitcombe substituting)
Joanna Killian, Essex County Council (Nick Bell substituting)
Bob Coomber, Interim Chief Executive, Thurrock Council
Caroline Tapster – Hertfordshire County Council
Gillian Beasley – Peterborough City Council
Jaki Salisbury – Central Bedfordshire
Phil Simpkins – Bedford Borough Council
John Campbell – North Hertfordshire District Council
Trevor Holden – Breckland District Council
Richard Elliott – Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service

1. Introductions and Apologies

Introductions were made around the table and Cllr Penny Otton was welcomed to the meeting, substituting for Cllr Richard Stay who was currently on annual leave.

Andrea explained that the agenda had been split into two sections. The first section covering items for discussion and decision and the second section for items which were for information only. It was proposed to trial this new format at this meeting and, if the group agreed, use as a model for future meetings.

2. 21st Century Councillors

The proposal from the Leadership Centre on a Member Development Programme was presented to the group. This required funding of £150k from Improvement East with the Leadership Centre contributing £50k. However, as there were over 2.5k Members in the region it would be impossible to include them all in the programme.

The proposal had been discussed at the recent Member Panel. Members expressed support for the IDeA Leadership Academy and especially appreciated the mix between formal sessions and non formal networking. The Panel had suggested a survey of all councils to discover needs and aspirations of Members and also to raise the profile of IE and this particular programme of work. The Panel had also recognised that it would need political backing for the programme to work.

The following points arose from discussion:

- The difference between Member training and Member development should be noted
- Any focus group set up should include senior politicians.
- There was an urgent need for a campaign to recruit more people into local politics ie a “Be a Councillor” campaign.
- How to make Members not in Cabinet (especially where there was a one party Cabinet) feel more involved.
- Need to be sure we are procuring in the right way.
- Take on learning from others, nationally and internationally.

It was felt that any programme developed should include:

- Development of concept of leadership of place - what it means to work in a partnership.
- How to operate with reduced budgets
- How to engage with citizens
- How to deal with uncertainty

Cecilia floated the idea of having a Leadership Academy programme tailored specifically for the East of England. Dennis said that whilst the IDeA would be happy to work with the East he warned against having just a regionally based focus as Councillors gain a lot from engaging with other regions.

A problem with reinforcement was acknowledged. This could be addressed by providing action learning sets to reinforce learning at a local level and/or setting up an alumni network. David said that he knew of Members in Norfolk who would be keen to be involved.

Cecilia confirmed that a small team would be set up to draw together information on what was already happening and carry out further research into the options. She requested a volunteer from a unitary authority to join the team.

The group agreed to recommend that the campaign to encourage members of the public to become local councillors should be started without delay.

ACTION: A volunteer from a Unitary Authority was to join the team looking at Member Development was needed contact Cecilia Tredget if interested.

AGREED: The group agreed that a team should be set up to further research into Member Development. They also agreed to recommend that work should go ahead on the campaign to encourage members of the public to become councillors.

3. The Impact of Public Spending Cuts

Members of the group felt that the scale of the predicted spending cuts would necessitate a fundamental re-think on the way both local authorities and the public sector as a whole works. Improvement East had a large amount of money to spend in a short period of time which could be used to put things in place now to prepare for difficult times ahead.

It was felt that partnership working across the whole of the public sector would be essential in the future ie working with other agencies such as Police, Health and Highways Agency. In order for partnership working to be successful it would require “buy in” from leaders and senior officers.

The possibility of extending the “Total Place” project to authorities in the region not already involved and also to the region as a whole was discussed and it was agreed that this was a desirable way forward if there was funding available.

Cecilia reported that funding was available from the Efficiency budget for resource mapping which could cover the counting element but no funding had yet been set aside for an extension of the cultural element. She also reported that a part-time secondee would be joining Improvement East shortly to oversee the counting element of “Total Place” and to ensure that learning and information from this agenda was shared across the whole region.

Anne said that a cultural shift was needed and this would only be realised by the right people having the right conversations. The possibility of Improvement East staging a public sector conference for the region was suggested in order to facilitate those conversations.

AGREED: There was general support from the group for Improvement East to look at taking “Total Place” forward in the ways described above and that the cluster meetings would be asked to consider how they could take this forward.

4. The future of sector led improvement and efficiency in the region

The future of Improvement East post 2011 if no government funding was available was discussed.

Andrea said that at a recent East of England Strategic Authorities Leaders Board (EESAL) meeting, Leaders had intimated that the region might fund any successor organisation and had requested Cllr Richard Stay to write an options paper for them to consider at their meeting in December.

Suggested options were:

- Extending the Invest to Save budget which would provide a rolling fund for the future
- Creating a self-funding Improvement Partnership for the sector.

The importance of communicating IE success to the region and CLG was stressed by Andrew in order to try to assure a future for the organisation in some form.

ACTION: It was agreed that Cecilia would draft an options paper for Richard Stay to take to EESAL. This would be circulated to the group for virtual discussion and feedback to Cecilia.

Brian informed the group that EERA would cease to exist from 1 April 2010 and be replaced by a Leaders Board. It was possible that the Leaders Board would not want to continue with the hosting of Improvement East. He would be writing to Chief Executives in the region asking for expressions of interest to assume the hosting role for Improvement East (and other similar bodies).

Mark Lloyd expressed an interest on behalf of Cambridgeshire for taking over the hosting of Improvement East as did Andrea Hill for Suffolk County Council.

Items for information:

Andrea asked if there were any comments on the information only items of the agenda.

David White referred to election of a Chair and Vice Chair for the group for 2009/10 under Item 6 and proposed that the present Chair and Vice Chair should remain in office for the 2009/10 year.

AGREED: The group agreed that the present Chair and Vice Chair should remain in office for the current year (2009/10).

There were no other comments on the for information only items of the agenda.

David commented that structuring the agenda and conducting the meeting in this way worked well and proposed that this should be adopted for future meetings.

AGREED: It was agreed that the meeting structure used at this meeting be adopted as a model for future meetings.

Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting had been changed and would now take place on 3 November 2009 at 9.00 am at the Holiday Inn, Bridge Road Impington CB24 9PH.