

Improvement East

Amended Minutes of the Executive Advisory Group Meeting Held on 8 April 2009 at the Trinity Centre, Cambridge

Present:

Andrea Hill (Chair)	Chief Executive Suffolk County Council
Cllr Richard Stay	Chairman Regional Improvement and Efficiency Panel
John Campbell (Vice Chair)	Chief Executive, North Hertfordshire District Council
Jo Killian	Chief Executive, Essex County 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
Rob Tinlin	Chief Executive, Southend Borough council
Mark Lloyd	Chief Executive, Cambridgeshire County Council
Caroline Tapster	Chief Executive, Hertfordshire County Council
Jaki Salisbury	Interim Chief Executive, Central Bedfordshire Council
Richard Elliott	Chief Fire Officer, Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service
Dennis Skinner	IDeA
Brian Stewart	EERA
Andrew Limb	GO-East
Paul Witcombe*	EEDA
Cecilia Tredget	Director, Improvement East
Jane Sullivan	Improvement East
David Ellis	Improvement East

* Substitute

In Attendance

Katharine Plunkett, Hertfordshire County Council (Observer, shadowing Andrew Limb)

1. Introductions and Apologies

The group welcomed Jaki Salisbury to the group as Interim Chief Executive of the newly formed unitary council of Central Bedfordshire. Cecilia registered Improvement East's apologies to Shaun Field, Chief Executive of the newly formed unitary of Bedford Borough for not issuing him with an invitation to attend. It had been mistakenly believed that he had stepped down from his position as Chief Executive and the invitation had been sent to Phil Simpkin who would be taking over as Chief Executive following the June elections.

The Chair expressed thanks to Martin Reeves, who had been working as Chief Executive for Bedfordshire in the run up to the change to the unitary system, for the work done for this group.

Apologies were received from:

Deborah Cadman, EEDA (Paul Whitcombe substituting)
Anne Gibson, PPMA
Andrew Good, Mid Suffolk District Council
Andy Perrin, Audit Commission
Bob Coomber, interim Chief Executive, Thurrock Council

2. Minutes of the EAG meeting 21 January 2009

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

Matters arising not covered in the main agenda:

- (i) Page 3. Cecilia reported that Improvement East (IE) had been awarded additional funding of £2.1 million for Efficiency and Transformation from CLG. £1.6m had been ring fenced for capital projects and £0.5 for revenue.

Andrea thanked the IE team for the hard work which had been put into preparing the Annual Report which had now been accepted by CLG.

- (ii) Page 5. Gillian updated the group on progress within Waveney. Good solid progress had been achieved, however, the historical budget deficit could still cause problems and there were Chief Executive capacity issues to be addressed. Ongoing support from IE was still required.

Some concern was expressed about providing such a large amount of funding to one small council. Alternative support eg around capacity issues – getting the right people with the right skills – should also be provided.

Richard confirmed that he had written to the Leader at Waveney and had received a response denying any comments had been made on using funding to keep council tax low.

It was felt that IE should have a role in advising how improvements are made in individual councils and these should be generally harder edged.

Action: Secretariat to ascertain numbers of individual authorities being supported by RIEPS across the other regions.

- (iii) Page 6. Thurrock Council: Andrea updated the group on progress with Thurrock. She reported that a new interim Chief Executive, Bob Coomber, had been appointed and that Bill Roots had completed his financial assessment. She thought that the Improvement Board would be likely to continue to the end of the calendar year. Andrew said that

the effectiveness of this support had been recognised at ministerial level.

- (iv) Cecilia reported on the situation with Norwich City Council who had serious problems within housing landlord services as well as ongoing issues on Use of Resources scores. A Housing Improvement Board had been set up and they had now agreed to a Corporate Improvement Board being established. Rob Hammond had volunteered to become the Chief Executive Lead for Norwich.

3. Chief Executive Peer Challenge

Dennis introduced the paper and attached the report "Nowhere left behind".

There was general support for the principles behind the report but the following points were noted:

- Issues around the difficulties of implementation in this region, which was very different from London, would need to be addressed
- The possibility of providing support to all new Chief Executives in the region had already been discussed at the Performance Cluster.
- Not all Chief Executives would need support in many cases contact would be solely about engagement.
- Improvement East should consider preparing a response to the consultation.
- The same principles of support and engagement should apply equally to the Fire Service.

Action: Cecilia and Dennis to work together on a suitable model to take this forward in the East of England.

4. Year Two Delivery Plan

Cecilia reported that from a budget of around £8.4m in Year 1 approximately £4.4m had been committed which left £4m to carry forward to Year 2. New funding for Year 2 had been confirmed as £7m making a total Year 2 budget of £11m with a proposed Delivery Plan costing £12.5m hence suggestions in the report that some programmes should be spread over 2 years. However, since writing the report, additional funding from CLG of £2.1m for Efficiency and Transformation had been confirmed giving a total budget of just over £13m. In addition several other small amounts of money were likely to be forthcoming over the coming months.

Each cluster lead reported on the budget proposals for their particular cluster.

Performance: The issue of safeguarding was discussed with particular emphasis on recruitment and workforce issues. This would be further discussed by the Cluster.

Andrea informed the group that central government wanted to fund a pilot project in each region on efficiency in places similar to the “Counting Cumbria” model. It had already been agreed that Improvement East would provide funding for this to be carried out in Norfolk and Suffolk. The proposed pilot would be in addition to this work.

Interest in becoming the pilot was expressed for Cambridgeshire, Central Beds and Luton and Essex. The question of how to select which to put forward for the pilot and the possibility of Improvement East funding the other two was briefly discussed.

Action: Andrea and Cecilia to liaise outside of this meeting on how to take this forward.

Dennis pointed out that there were risks as well as opportunities associated with becoming a pilot and that the chosen area would be expected to provide evidence of efficiencies within the first year.

The group agreed the Year Two Delivery Plan as set out in Appendix A to the report.

The group agreed the budget to implement the Year Two Delivery programme as set out in Appendix A to the report.

5. CPA Regional Performance

The contents of the report were noted.

6. Information on BCE/IE Funding to Support Individual Authorities

The information on funding to individual authorities was noted.

7. Update from Partner Agencies – All Partners

EEDA: Paul Witcombe reported that EEDA has appointed John Wilkinson to lead a six month project to develop and implement new place based working structures.

8. Any Other Business

As this was Rob Hammond’s last meeting with this group before his retirement, Andrea thanked him for all the support he had given to Improvement East and this group.

Future Meeting Dates:

15 July 2009, Trinity Centre, CB4 0FN at 2.30 pm

10 November 2009, Holiday inn, Cambridge, CB24 9PH