

## Agenda item No: 4

### EAST MIDLANDS IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY PARTNERSHIP BOARD MEETING: 12<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2008

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#### Report of the Director

#### Implementing the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy

##### 1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To present the report of the LGA Improvement Board concerning progress towards implementing the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy and establishing the 9 RIEPs.

##### 2. Background

- 2.1 The LGA Improvement board oversees the joint Central/Local National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy (NIES) published in December 2007. The NIES mandated Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships to develop Regional Improvement and Efficiency Strategies (RIES) supported by a package of £185m over the CSR07 period ending 31 March 2011.

- 2.2 The **attached** report, considered by the LGA Improvement Board on 22 July 2008, sets out progress of the RIEPs in the following areas:

- Supporting Councils to deliver on ambitious LAA commitments and facilitating a sector led response to areas of risk.
- Communicating the RIEP support offer to councils.
- Establishing robust and transparent Member led governance arrangements.
- Establishing a robust and credible evidence base demonstrating the success of the sector led improvement support over central intervention and control.

- 2.3 The progress report also calls for the establishment of a RIEP Member Forum to strengthen relationships between the Improvement Board and the RIEP members.

##### 3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The EM IEP Board is recommended to consider:

- a) The Improvement Board report on progress
- b) Provide views concerning the proposal to establish a RIEP Member Forum

**Chris Allison**  
Director EM IEP

22 July 2008

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## Agenda item 4 - Appendix 1

# Implementing the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy

## Decisions

1. To agree that a key aspect of a successful sector led model to improvement is maximising the impact of the sectors improvement architecture, resources and expertise to ensure it delivers complementary support, maximum impact and value for money at a local, regional (and sub regional) and national level.
2. To note the establishment of a RIEP member forum to strengthen relationships between the Improvement Board and the RIEP members.
3. To agree that officers should report back to the board on an approach to manage the options for further devolution of improvement support to the sector to ensure that it is appropriate and in line with local priorities and that this will include a mixture of devolution to councils themselves, the regional or sub-regional architecture (e.g., the RIEPs) or the national infrastructure.

Contact Officer: Clarissa Corbisiero, Policy Consultant LGA, [clarissa.corbisiero@lga.gov.uk](mailto:clarissa.corbisiero@lga.gov.uk)  
Dennis Skinner Regional Associate (National Co-ordination), [dennis.skinner@idea.gov.uk](mailto:dennis.skinner@idea.gov.uk)

22 July 2008

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# Implementing the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy

## Summary

1. This report provides members with an update on the progress of Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships in establishing governance arrangements and delivering support to councils and partnerships. The report also provides an update to members on the work of the LGA with the central bodies to take forward and embed the principles of evidence based support, rationalisation, simplification and devolution within the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy across government.

2. The report also considers the relationship between the national, regional, sub-regional and local improvement architecture and how we take forward sector-led improvement. The relationship between the LGA group and the RIEP's is a crucial one. The additional investment the sector has received may be one-off for the period of the current spending review which ends in 2010/11 and so we have a three year window at most to make a difference.

## Background

### Update on progress Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs)

3. The joint central/local National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy (NIES) published December 2007 established the principles of simplification, devolution and rationalization. The strategy also commissioned Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships to develop Regional Improvement and Efficiency Strategies (RIES) supported by a package of £185m over the CSR 07 period.

4. RIEPs have already demonstrated a high level of consultation, engagement and involvement from councils and key partners. The level of ambition set out in the strategies is impressive, as is the alignment with emerging LAA priorities and the efficiency agenda.

5. RIEPs have made considerable progress since the approval of the strategies in March 08, including:

**a. Supporting councils to deliver on ambitious LAA commitments and facilitating a sector led response to areas of risk.** RIEPs are undertaking this role in a number of ways including establishing performance offices to identify areas of potential risk at an early stage and bringing together key players in an area such as the audit commission, government office and the IDeA to discuss areas of concern and share information. RIEPs also participated in a CLG scenario testing session in June 08 to discuss protocols, roles and responsibilities of key players such as GO, Audit Commission and RIEPs within the forthcoming CAA framework. This will be written up as a narrative.

**b. Communicating the RIEP support offer to councils.** All regional and sub regional partnerships are developing detailed implementation plans and developing tailored support

offers around key regional priorities. A number of regions are developing a 'regional prospectus' to articulate clearly the support offer to councils in their regions and sub regions.

**c. Establishing robust and transparent member led governance arrangements.** RIEPs are establishing strong governance arrangements to ensure transparency and accountability to the councils they serve. The LGA is also working to strengthen links between RIEP members and LGA national member structures. This includes a quarterly member newsletter for RIEP members which will be produced by the RIEP programme office and a number of successful member level meetings including one in April 08 and most recently at the LGA conference chaired by Councillor David Shakespeare. These meetings were a useful opportunity to build links, reflect on progress, share innovative approaches and discuss future challenges.

It was agreed at the recent member meeting at annual conference to formally establish a member forum of political leads of RIEPs that would meet twice yearly to discuss matters of common interest, share best practice and strengthen links with the Improvement Board.

The political group improvement boards and the IDeA national and regional member peers will also have an important role in promoting engagement with the RIEPs to members in each region.

**d. Establishing a robust and credible evidence base demonstrating the success of sector led improvement support over central intervention and control.** This will be crucial over the coming months and years; both to ensure implementation of the principles of NIES across government, provide reassurance to councils, LGA and CLG and support the preparation of a strong submission for the next spending review for increased and further devolution.

The LGA with the RIEP programme office is developing proposals for an annual 'state of the nation' type report. The report will provide a platform to discuss and celebrate the improvement of local government and take forward LGA lobbying. It will also provide a useful source of evidence for the LGA group and RIEPs when discussing future support requirements and arrangements.

Equally the RIEPs will need to identify mechanisms to identify impact on performance and efficiency and demonstrate value for money. RIEP's are partnerships of local authorities and not separate organizations, as such councils themselves need to own and play an active role in their RIEP. It is crucial that councils are able to challenge and support each other on a range of performance and improvement issues. This will be important in ensuring accountability and transparency of the RIEP programme. The RIEP programme office is building on RIEP accountability and reporting arrangements developed at a regional and sub regional level to develop a performance management framework that allows collection of robust evidence of impact and provide reassurance at a national level, whilst minimising burden on RIEPs and councils and ensuring scope for local flexibility.

It will remain the case that the IDeA will need to continue to respond on behalf of the sector nationally (and the LGA) to significant performance issues that will no doubt arise in individual councils from time to time. As the LGA's national improvement agency, the agency have access to the inspectorates and government departments with a track record that means they have credibility and expertise in engaging with councils that get into difficulty. Similarly through the work with the LGA Political Groups developed through the Improvement Board the agency have critical links with the national political parties. The IDeA have responded in this way regularly in a range of cases. For example, most recently helping Liverpool but previously Stoke, Hull and South Cambridgeshire, as well as with other

councils where there have been concerns about both corporate and service performance and capacity. As a national agency, it will sometimes have access to support including peers that are simply not available at the regional level. Indeed it is sometime easier to provide that support with a little distance.

The LGA Improvement Board has a key interest in the success of a sector led model. The NIES identifies its role as to “establish and maintain processes to keep in close touch with local authority improvement and performance issues and, where appropriate mobilize national political pressure ...on authorities where councils are not accepting the mechanisms available to drive improvement.” The Improvement Board will need to be kept fully up to date with progress implementing NIES and delivering improvements and only where there are potential political blockages that the RIEP or other improvement infrastructures have been unable to unblock should political support be mobilized. The Regional Associates who are on each of the RIEP’s can provide the crucial officer link back to the LGA Improvement Board lead members supplementing their regional intelligence with that obtained from their relationship with the Political Group Offices and the LGA’s Political Group Improvement Boards.

### Implementing the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy

6. The NIES establishes a number of key principles and commitments for both central and local government.

- To make it easier for councils and their partners to access support at the right time by simplifying support arrangements
- To make space for greater local decision making and devolve resources to the front line

7. The LGA group is taking the commitment to simplify support arrangements forward through the LGA Group development strategy which aims to simplify the sector’s improvement architecture and ensure clear strategic direction. Developing the local, regional and national improvement architecture and the relationship between each level will also be important. All parts of the architecture will need to contribute to and have ownership of the overall objective of sector led improvement. The diagram at the end of this report seeks to demonstrate this.

8. To support this the LGA is also working with the RIEP programme office to develop a cross sector approach to ensure that improvement support is complementary, based on the needs of the sector and drives lobbying for implementation of NIES principles across government. The service focused groups drawn from across LGA group, RIEPs and the sector will be important in developing a clear and shared understanding of the sectors improvement needs and priorities on the basis of an analysis of evidence including the priorities set out in the regional improvement and efficiency strategies but also the key LAA priorities at a regional and national level. These groups will be critical in ensuring that the various parts of the sectors improvement architecture work in a complementary manner to deliver support based on the needs of councils and enable the relevant LGA boards to increasingly place improvement at the heart of their agenda.

9. There will be some important work to ensure that the sectors national infrastructure and sunk investment, practical, electronic and in terms of intellectual property (for example, the work with peers via the Peer Clearing House, the development and maintenance of peer methodology, and on-line systems for knowledge transfer and learning such as IDeA Knowledge) are targeted and focused to support councils and RIEPs in the most effective

way possible. It will be important to ensure that where programmes and support are most effectively and efficiently delivered at the national level this remains the case.

10. The principle of devolution of funding and greater local discretion within the NIES is a key LGA lobbying success. However, the government still control significant levels of improvement activity that is directed to the sector. The VFM review of capacity building estimated that it amounted to at least £1.6 billion over the SR 04 three year period (excluding the investment made by DCSF in their “Field Forces” and Department of Health’s investment in organisations such as the Care Services Improvement Partnerships). In this context it is crucial to maintain pressure on central government to deliver on this commitment.

11. CLG and other government departments have already identified some areas where they are keen for further devolution to take place. However there is a danger in this piecemeal approach by government and it is imperative that pockets of devolved funding do not distract RIEP’s and councils from delivering support for local priorities. The cross sector teams will be crucial in informing LGA lobbying, influence and engagement to ensure that government departments and NDPBs approach improvement (and intervention) within the NIES framework of local determination and devolution.

12. Devolution to the sector is also not just simply about devolution to RIEP’s or to parts of the national architecture. There are potentially strong cases for devolution of much of the current government improvement resource directly to individual councils. On a case by case basis it should be for the sector to reach a view about where in the sector (national, regional or local) resources and support are devolved to.

**The board is asked to commission work by the cross sector teams to bring forward a strategy of how the sector wish to see a greater amount of this investment being devolved to the sector and over what timescale..**

## **Implications for Wales**

13. No implications for Wales

## **Financial/ Resource Implications**

14. There are no additional implications arising from this report

Contact Officers: Clarissa Corbisiero, [clarissa.corbisiero@lga.gov.uk](mailto:clarissa.corbisiero@lga.gov.uk),  
Dennis Skinner Regional Associate (National Co-ordination), [dennis.skinner@idea.gov.uk](mailto:dennis.skinner@idea.gov.uk)

**Our starting point:** 1. The only place where improvement actually happens is inside authorities...

2. Support to the process of improvement can be provided nationally, or regionally; and can be government-, or sector-led (the four quadrants on the chart)...

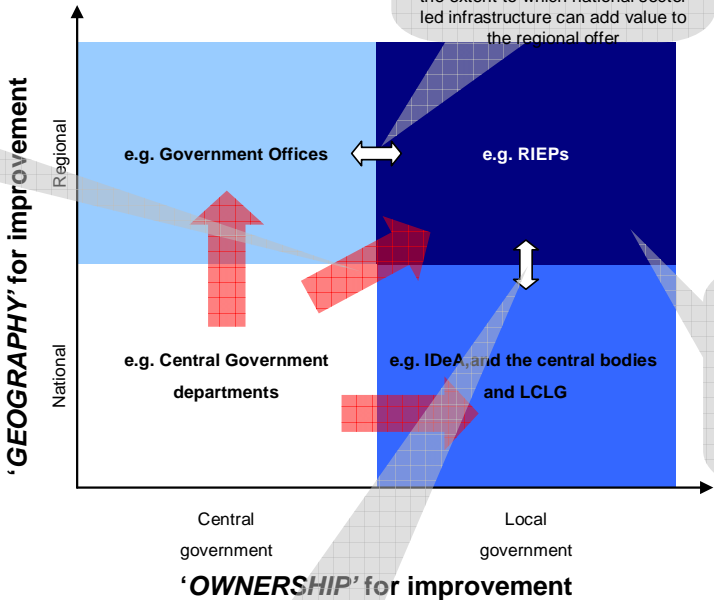
3. Improvement support has always been provided from all four of these quadrants, and from a range of different organisations (some listed on the chart)...

4. Sector led improvement is about shifting the balance from central government to local government - to the 2 quadrants on the right and also to councils but the quadrant in the upper left is also a move in the right direction in the short term.

C. Where a regional solution is most appropriate, there needs to be a mature and open dialogue between RIEPs and GOs about how and if they should work together to provide support and the extent to which national sector led infrastructure can add value to the regional offer

A. The National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy signals a shift: devolving responsibility for improvement support away from central government...

B. But it is not just about shifting responsibility to the RIEPs. **There is a role for partnerships and organisations in all four quadrants; but more responsibility will be taken by the local government sector than before...**



D. Where a sector-led solution is most appropriate, there needs to be a mature and open dialogue between RIEPs and LGA/IDeA about how they should work together to provide support...