

Agencies collaborate in new approaches to peer working

Local government has a long established track record of peer working. The principle behind this is that local government has the talent and energy to drive its own improvement. Helping councils challenge and learn from each other is at the heart of IDeA's improvement support. It also means that lessons learned are shared throughout the sector as well as being fed into national policy. At the heart of this approach is peer review and challenge, which this celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. A team of peers who understand the pressures and issues involved in running a local authority review the practices of another council to provide challenge in identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

Increasingly the focus of improvement support is moving beyond traditional organisational boundaries. Within a local area, organisations are increasingly working together to tackle the issues that are most important to local communities, such as the strength of the local economy, the availability of affordable housing, how safe people feel, the opportunities and support for individuals to improve their health, and the quality of the local environment. These issues are not the preserve of any one public body but can only be achieved by a collective willingness to tackle thorny issues and sustained collective endeavour.

The focus on outcomes through effective partnership working is reflected in the new performance framework and introduction of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) from April this year. CAA assesses how well local services are working together to improve the quality of life for local people. For the first time, local public services will be held collectively to account for their impact on better outcomes. This means that CAA will look across councils, health bodies, police forces, fire and rescue services and others responsible for local public services, which are increasingly expected to work in partnership to tackle the challenges facing their communities.

The nature of peer support needs to continue to develop to continue to drive improvement and to meet the increasing needs of partnership working.

The IDeA has been working with -

National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA)

NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement (NHSII)

Chief Fire Officer's Association (CFOA)

Compact Voice (based at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO))

The aim is to identify peers with the skills, knowledge and experience to provide support and challenge to local partnerships.

Quotes from the organisations:

"The role of peer review remains important but we believe it is right to broaden the approach to involve people from health, police, fire and rescue, the third sector and private sector to really help partnership working and to achieve local priorities" said John Hayes, Director of Services at the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)

"Extending the peer review scheme to include voluntary sector representatives is an exciting moment and a key milestone in the evolution of partnership working between the sectors. This is another step forward towards a more equal relationship between bodies that are all working towards similar aims" said Simon Blake, Chair of **Compact Voice**.

"The National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) is fully supportive of the concept of the strategic alliance and can see real benefits in police peers being included within the wider peer network. With the assistance of police service we are in the process of building, for the first time, a policing peer network. Once this is embedded, and with the consent of stakeholders, we wish to progress the policing peer network towards playing a full part in the alliance". Graham Hooper, Assistant Chief Constable, Interim Director, **NPIA**

"We are delighted that IDeA recognize the third sector's key role in shaping and delivering local public services. This initiative will help to break down barriers between the public and third sectors and enable us to learn from and support each other". Neil Cleeveley, Director of Policy and Communications at **NAVCA**

This new partnership approach to the supply of peers begins in 2009.