

The national context

Communities and Local Government (CLG) published the **National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy** (NIES) on 21 December 2007. It set out a framework for supporting improvement and efficiency work in local authorities over the next three years. Some of this work will continue to be delivered at the national level, but a major focus will be on devolved funding through new **Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs)**.

In each English region, RIEPs are being formed from the merging of existing Improvement Partnerships, Centres of Excellence and e-government partnerships.

Here in the North East, working through the Association of North East Councils, the steering groups of the Improvement Partnership, the Centre of Excellence and North East Connects were merged in early 2007 to form a single **Improvement and Efficiency Steering Group**. This group of local authority chief executives and senior representatives of local government 'family' organisations has led the development of a North East **Improvement and Efficiency Strategy 2008-11** (downloadable from www.northeastcouncils.gov.uk). The strategy was submitted to government on 3 March 2008, along with a draft **Delivery Plan** by way of a bid for funding.

Communities Minister John Healey announced on 16 March that government would provide over £16m funding for the new **North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership**, to deliver the regional strategy.

north east
improvement
and **efficiency**
partnership

What is the North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership?

All councils and fire and rescue services in the North East region make up the North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (IE). Other local government 'family' organisations contribute to and shape its work, including Audit Commission, Government Office for the North East, Unison (via TUC), IDeA and the North East Regional Employers' Organisation (NEREO). More public sector organisations will be encouraged to come on board as the Partnership matures.

Political ownership of and accountability for the IE lies with the Association of North East Councils (ANEC). The Improvement and Efficiency Steering Group will lead the delivery of the regional strategy, with local authority chief executives and directors acting as sponsors/leads for individual programme areas.

Operational arrangements and structures are being set up. The interim delivery team brings together staff from the three pre-existing partnerships (Improvement Partnership, Centre of Excellence and North East Connects) under a new Programme Director. The delivery team will be based with ANEC in the Guildhall, Newcastle upon Tyne.



Quick reference guide

This is a quick reference guide for local authority officers, councillors and public sector partners. It will be regularly updated with news on programmes, contacts, offers and opportunities. Find regular updates at www.northeastcouncils.gov.uk

Our vision for North East local authorities



Our shared vision for the region is that councils and fire and rescue authorities themselves will be the drivers of improvement and efficiency, rather than external inspectorates or national agencies. Over the next three years, we will build on our solid progress so far and our willingness to support each other in driving efficiency savings and service improvements. That means being accountable to each other and the people of the North East for what we deliver. Working in partnership doesn't mean removing the natural competition that exists between places, because that can drive progress. But healthy competition needs to exist within a collaborative environment, where ultimately we all want to succeed.

Government is clear that it is unlikely to make improvement and efficiency funding available beyond the current spending period. This is therefore a unique opportunity to innovate and evolve as a group of authorities and set the conditions for the next ten years of excellent service delivery, leadership and innovation.

I encourage you to play your part in the new partnership, whether by getting involved with a programme board or related networks, or by taking advantage of learning opportunities and facilitating others to do so.

Mick Henry, Chair, Association of North East Councils and Leader of Gateshead Council.



Drivers for change

North East local government is big business. Its total budget is around £6 billion. Councils and FRSs employ over 127,000 people. Over 113,000 adults receive community-based personal support through social care services. Some 163,000 social housing units are owned and maintained. And over 3,000 children are looked after in care. Following a tough 2008-11 financial settlement, budgets are under pressure whilst service users' expectations are rising. The work we do together through the partnership must be focussed on adding value, not adding to the burden.

"...budgets are under pressure whilst service users' expectations are rising"

There are policy drivers that will influence the work of the IE, including the Sub National Review, the anticipated Community Empowerment White Paper and, not least, the huge task that is local government reorganisation.

Of course, North East local authorities are only part of a wider public sector in the region. The whole sector is focussing on service improvement, efficiency and workforce development. The IE will help move us closer to integrated ways of supporting organisational and service improvement, across the public sector.

The improvement and efficiency agenda

Efficiency, improvement and transformation are interchangeable terms for the new IE - and so they should be.

The regional strategy is influenced by the national **Value for Money Delivery Plan**, the **Local Government Workforce Strategy** and **FRS National Framework**. Taken together, these propose particular actions for achieving efficiency and improvement, including smarter procurement, use of business process improvement techniques, asset management, innovation and use of technology, workforce planning, development and diversity, and maintaining a citizen focus.

Working through the IE, authorities will collectively support each other to:

- Secure and deliver value for money
- Innovate and improve service delivery
- Deliver LAA priority outcomes for citizens
- Work with and empower local communities
- Deliver regeneration and improved economic performance

"There must be a greater willingness to support and challenge each other..."

It would be easy to pat ourselves on the back for our recent performance in CPA terms, with the **best results of any region outside London**. This is not a region that faces dealing with 'failing' authorities - our challenge to ourselves is to raise the bar and perform beyond the expectations of the Audit Commission and other inspectorates. There must be a greater willingness to support and challenge each other, be honest about successes and failures, and be open to new learning.

By improving procurement practice, North East authorities have released £10m in cashable savings and £2m in capacity. Other relatively easy wins have come from authorities collectively identifying where changes can be made to existing procurement practice, with better management of non-contract and 'maverick' spend leading to big savings.

There can be bigger wins, however. The challenge now is to take a more strategic and sustainable approach to making savings from the region's £1.35 bn annual spend across 430 categories of goods, works and services.

This is a big and ambitious agenda. It will need the buy-in of all North East authorities and, increasingly, our public service partners. This culture of collaboration is evolving and will need leadership, encouragement and commitment so that it can deliver results. The responsibility lies with everyone - from elected Members, strategic and operational management, to frontline staff.

Building on what we've learned

The IE will bring together the learning from the last three years of regional improvement and efficiency partnership activity, building on what has worked, including vital relationships with the networks and expertise that supported the 2005-8 programmes. Some of this project work will roll on into July this year, so look out for continuing opportunities.

(You can find evaluation reports and other project summaries at www.northeastcouncils.gov.uk/improvement)



The Delivery Plan and programme areas

A draft NEIEP Delivery Plan was submitted to government by way of a bid for funding. It can be downloaded from www.northeastcouncils.gov.uk and is a 'live' document which will be shaped and developed by those involved in leading and influencing its ten key work programmes. Each programme will be led by a local authority Chief Executive, Chief Fire Officer or Director (see Children's Services and Adult Social Care below), and will provide improvement & efficiency support in the following areas:

- Children's Services (lead: Dr Maggie Atkinson, Gateshead Council)
- Adult Social Care (lead: Rachael Shimmin, Durham County Council)
- Construction and Asset Management

- Collaborative Procurement
- Waste and Environment
- Organisational Development and Workforce Planning
- Partnerships
- Community Engagement and Empowerment
- 21st Century Services
- Regional Leadership

A key challenge for the Chief Executive and director programme sponsors and programme management team will be to ensure a cohesive programme so that the whole adds up to more than the sum of its parts.

Your involvement

“From now and through the summer, there will be a process of re-connecting and re-engaging...”

The North East is rightly seen as a region with great strengths in collaboration and cohesion. These are a natural advantage to our partnership but such relationships still need to be fostered and nourished.

Ownership and buy-in from all authorities is vital if our partnership is to succeed. From now and through the summer, there will be a process of re-connecting and re-engaging with

elected Members, senior management teams and the wide range of officers involved in networks and advisory groups.

If you are a senior officer wishing to join a programme board or wishing to support a particular programme area, let us know. Contact details for interim leads are given on the back page.

What will the partnership do?

The IE provides a forum for building positive relationships between authorities so that we are willing to challenge and support each other's improvement journey. We will:

- work with councils, FRSs and partnerships to address their individual and collective improvement priorities
- commission and provide tools, training and development opportunities that support improvement and efficiency
- provide an information hub for sharing good practice
- guide and focus other change and improvement agents in their work with specific service areas
- promote North East authorities' achievements to the rest of the UK
- identify and share best practice from other improvement and efficiency partnerships
- stimulate and facilitate innovation and new ways of working



Making sense of the range of improvement support

Government funds a plethora of agencies designed to support innovation, improvement and efficiency in local government, some with top-sliced revenue support grant such as the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), 4 Ps, Lacors, and through other government departments such as the Department of Health's Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP).

Currently, the national-regional improvement 'architecture' is complicated and confusing. Efforts are under way to streamline this support so that the IE is the 'first point of contact' for help and assistance. Meanwhile, authorities can use the IE to challenge the agencies to tailor the support they provide so that it meets their needs.

Government has produced a prospectus, clarifying the range of support on offer. Download this document, Prospectus 2008: the guide to improvement and efficiency support at ...

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/efficiencysupport>

Information and Next Steps

Keep up to date with developments by signing up to receive bulletins from the new IE (email: jackie.salmon@northeastcouncils.gov.uk) or updates of this brochure can be found at www.northeastcouncils.gov.uk

For details of ongoing opportunities or projects sponsored by the former regional partnerships, please contact:

Jackie Salmon (Improvement Partnership) 0191 261 3945

Jenny Robins (North East Connects) 0191 261 3944

Angela Hotchkiss (North East Centre of Excellence) 0191 433 2257

or look out for the IP and NECE bulletins which will continue in the short term.

Meanwhile, here's a snapshot of where things currently stand....

Current Position

- Seeking nominations for Programme Sponsors and board members
- Recruiting Programme Director

By 31 May 08

- Programme Director appointed
- Programme Sponsors in place

By 30 June 08

- Programme Boards established, and a schedule of dates for Programme Boards agreed
- Draft programme prepared for consideration at inaugural meeting of each Programme Board
- Core programme delivery team appointed
- Ongoing delivery of programmes/projects where approved by IESG

By 30 September 08

- Programme Director and team in post
- IESG approve detailed delivery plans for 2008-9 for each programme and programme overview documents for 2008-11

Further information and interim contacts

For additional information, to get involved with the programme or to discuss a programme area in more detail, you can contact any member of the interim delivery team. They are:

Interim Programme Director:

David Wright

Tel: 07795 542 780

Email: DavidWright@gateshead.gov.uk

Interim programme leads: Adults' and Children's Services

Julie Brown

Tel: 0791 781 3667

Email: JulieTBrown@gateshead.gov.uk

21st Century Services, Community Engagement and Empowerment

Andrew De'Ath

Tel: 0191 261 3903

Email: Andrew.de'ath@northeastconnects.gov.uk

Collaborative Procurement

Duncan Olive

Tel: 0791 781 3669

Email: DuncanOlive@gateshead.gov.uk

Waste and Environment, Construction and Asset Management

Peter Schofield

Tel: 0780 1600 745

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Organisational Development and Workforce Planning, Partnerships, Regional Leadership

Emily Sweetman

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