

Item 11 Overview and Scrutiny Committee 19 June 2023

Note from (Acting) Chair, Independent Improvement Board to CA Board, Audit and Governance Chair and Overview and Scrutiny Chair

Note from Julie Spence, (Acting) Chair, Independent Improvement Board

The Independent Improvement Board met on 22 May. It was a positive meeting, and we recognise that whilst there is more to do – good progress is being made.

The interim Chief Executive updated us on progress to date on addressing the concerns of the External Auditor and the issues set out in the Best Value Notice. He also shared the draft reframed improvement plan to be presented to the CA Board on 31 May.

As Independent Improvement Board members, we were able to share insight from the meetings and interactions we have had over the last month.

The Mayor, Dr Nik Johnson joined us over lunch and the Board welcomed his candour in recognising the journey the CPCA is on, the ambitions for the region and the role the Board needs to take in leading this.

Members of the new CMT were present and it was good to meet them and hear about the joint working they are promoting across the CPCA and with constituent authority management teams. They also shared their ambitions for the CPCA. I previously caught up with Nick Bell who was unable to attend.

Below are the key observations on assurance and further areas of focus for the Combined Authority:

Assurance on progress:

1. The IIB recognised and acknowledged that a huge amount of progress has been made against the Best Value Notice and External Auditors concerns and that a greater sense of trust is in place
2. Feedback from discussions between IIB members and CA Board members indicate a more positive culture, a much greater level of confidence and a sense that things are moving forward; but with still more to do
3. The IIB welcomed the pace of recruiting the new Executive Directors and the calibre of them and the IIB is reassured by the level and extent of experience they bring
4. The IIB believe the arrival of the new permanent CX will bring more stability
5. The IIB is also reassured that the new CMT is spending time together to develop as a team and with management teams across constituent authorities to focus on joint enterprise and representing the region in discussions with government
6. The IIB welcomed that the ambitions for the region are being articulated, as the potential is huge; however, the CA must not lose sight of the improvements that need to be made or embedded
7. The IIB felt the initial work on the development of the SAF was a strong piece of work and were reassured that constituent councils are involved in its further development
8. The Improvement report has been well developed and the reflects the key areas of concern raised by the External Auditor and Best Value Notice
9. The IIB welcomed the fact that progress on improvement activity was reported on a regular basis to the CA Board, O&S Committee and A&G Committee meetings

Areas for further focus:

1. The development of a long-term vision for the CPCA is critical to its success and urgent following May elections
2. The senior officer team need to make sure the right capacity is in place to support the Mayors priorities and the agreed strategic plan
3. There is an urgent need to put in place a CA Board development plan after the elections
4. In line with recommendations and good practice; and LA stability there needs to be urgent consideration of consistency on O&S and A&G membership
5. Training needs to be provided to O&S and A&G members to help them understand what their role and responsibilities are; and for staff to understand better the role of the committees
6. The need to ensure the CA has capacity (and a workforce plan) to deliver on the stated agenda and future ambitions; and needs not to be afraid to reach out to other CA's for support on preparation for further devolution discussions
7. For future reports to the IIB, progress will be reported using a 'RAG rating' to easily identify where the progress is at, highlights and exceptions; and an executive summary will be included
8. The need to manage the outcomes of the standards investigation

Note: The IIB at its meeting on 22 June asked that the reframed Improvement Plan is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure it is fit for purpose and reflects any additional areas of concern that are raised. This request was built into the report presented to CA Board on 31 May and report to be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee on 9 June.