

The Local Improvement Network

Working Together Towards Excellence

Introduction

A key part of Peer-Supported Improvement is setting up and/or developing a local culture and sport improvement network. This provides the basis for sustainable, cyclical:

- self-assessment
- improvement planning
- best-practice benchmarking
- joint improvement projects
- the future development of knowledge, skills and the sharing of resources.

The Local Improvement Network does not have to be fully established before the other elements are developed. The training programme and Peer-Led Challenge will play a significant role in developing the network.

What is a Local Improvement Network?

A Local Improvement Network is a way to bring together like-minded individuals and organisations (within a region, county or another cluster, for example the cities within a region) who share:

- a commitment to continuous improvement and learning
- a desire to improve services for local people
- a passion for working together to pursue organisational excellence.

It is characterised by a programme of practical work to tangibly improve the way organisations operate. It does not focus on discussing and developing policy and strategy, or information updates.

What are the functions of a Local Improvement Network?

The functions of these networks will vary from region to region. Suggested work areas include:

- a. coordinating cyclical (for example, annual) self-assessments, so that the organisations within the network do these within the same window of time (linked to annual service and budget planning)
- b. coordinating Peer-Led Challenge, include agreeing who will work with whom
- c. making the best use of improvement coaching skills
- d. encouraging and enabling joint improvement projects between partner organisations

- e. encouraging and enabling joint service development and marketing projects, linked to increasing and sustaining participation on sport and cultural activities
- f. helping to establish best-practice benchmarking partnerships
- g. sharing and disseminating best practice
- h. organising workshops, seminars and learning events, involving guest speakers
- i. producing best-practice guidance materials and training programmes
- j. promoting and enabling cross-boundary strategic thinking and planning
- k. sharing staff expertise, including secondments where possible
- l. establishing coaching and mentoring relationships
- m. coordinating data collection and analysis to influence improvement and service development
- n. Playing an influencing and advocacy role for sport and culture, including links to:
local area agreements (LAAs), sustainable community strategies, comprehensive area assessments and local authority corporate agendas.

Guidance for establishing Local Improvement Networks

Rather than setting up a completely new group, the Local Improvement Network can be organised so it supports and adds value to a number of existing groups/networks in the county. It is hoped that the wider regional culture and sport improvement networks can link to and support these local networks. The former will play an increasing role in strategically supporting sector-led improvement aligned with the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP).

A key challenge and success factor for the network is to embed the values and habits of excellence and continuous improvement into the work of the organisations. A joint approach to excellence self-assessment is an important foundation for an effective Improvement Network. This involves getting commitment from organisations in the network to carry out self-assessment using the same tool within the same timeframe.

Much of the work should take place through informal networking and sharing of information between individuals and organisations on a day-by-day basis. The meetings, seminars and events organised by the network provide an opportunity to address specific issues and themes collectively.

Key individuals need to take responsibility for establishing the network and maintaining a meaningful programme of work. Ideally this should be a shared role to secure collective ownership and a collaborative approach. One approach is to identify formal improvement champions within each county or cluster. The role should be seen as an exciting professional development opportunity. However, it can be a lot to ask of one person; a small team of improvement champions works well. Funding could be sought from a variety of sources to secure secondments to undertake this work on a more 'formal' basis.

Financial resources are needed to support the activities of the network (for example, for facilities, training events, guest speakers and resource materials). In some cases, funds may be provided by culture and sport agencies and professional bodies for this type of activity or through the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships. Many organisations believe that contributing towards the network's activities is a good use of training, learning and development budgets. It should be possible to cover some costs through 'in kind' support. Certain events and activities might be more widely promoted and could therefore generate income.

Benefits and 'selling points'

- By setting up a Local Improvement Network you are demonstrating a positive response to the Local Government White Paper and its emphasis on self-improvement, collaboration and partnership working.
- The network provides a cost-effective and powerful opportunity to achieve value-adding and sustained improvements to the way services are delivered. This is based on customer needs and expectations, and is a basis for continually generating further improvements.
- The network can enable you achieve credible and robust challenge without using external agencies.
- The network provides a cost-effective and powerful opportunity to design innovative new products and services, and ways of marketing these to target markets.
- Opportunities exist to work with and learn from other Local Improvement Networks around the country in the future.
- Local Improvement Networks provide a very powerful and cost-effective learning and development opportunity, which can be sustained into the future.
- You can raise the profile of culture and sport with key decision makers in the region or county.
- You can achieve improved relationships with regional culture and sport agencies.

Example of a responsibility summary for local culture & sport improvement champions

Overall purpose

To champion organisational improvement, the pursuit of excellence and innovative service development within the county, making the best use of the practices, knowledge and skills of peer organisations, leading to improved outcomes for the community.

Responsibility areas

To work with regional cultural agencies and other relevant bodies to:

- develop and lead the culture and sport Local Improvement Network for the county
- be a role model and advocate of continuous improvement and innovation in culture and sport service provision
- raise the profile of culture and sport services within LAAs, local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and community plans
- help to build an evidence base for the contribution of culture and sport towards council/LSP priorities and cross-cutting themes
- encourage and facilitate a collaborative approach to continuous improvement and service development between councils and key partners
- promote and advocate the use of the Single Improvement Tool and other improvement models/tools by councils
- help to build capacity within councils for self-assessment, Peer-Led Challenge, improvement planning and managing improvement activities
- promote and help to organise best-practice benchmarking:
 - within the county or sub-region
 - with organisations within and outside of the industry
- promote and help to organise joint improvement and service-development initiatives
- work with culture and sport agencies to provide councils with relevant and timely information and advice on improvement matters.