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National Evaluation of the Capacity Building  
Programme for Local Government  
**Overall Final Report**



National Evaluation of the Capacity Building  
Programme for Local Government  
**Overall Final Report**

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## The Policy Research Institute

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Our aim is to provide high quality research that meets the needs of our clients and contributes to the public good and the advancement of knowledge. We seek to combine customer focus with the highest standards of research practice.



# Executive Summary

## Introduction and background

This report is one of a series of outputs from the National Evaluation of the Capacity Building Programme for local government in England (CBP), undertaken by a team of researchers at the Policy Research Institute (PRI) at Leeds Metropolitan University and the Cities Research Unit at the University of West of England. This report summarises the findings from all four key strands of the evaluation. Because of the difficulties associated with quantifying the capacity of local authorities, much less the sector, in relation to the dynamic roles and objectives that they pursue, the report focuses on what has worked, why and in what circumstances, rather than providing a definitive assessment of the extent of change of capacity building enabled by the CBP. The CBP was launched in 2003 as a joint Department for Communities and Local Government/Local Government Association (LGA) initiative to support capacity building and improvement activities within local authorities in England. The CBP has supported four main streams of improvement and capacity building activity in local authorities (see Section 1.2; p13).

## Methodology

On completion of undertaking a substantial literature review on organisational learning, knowledge management, performance management, organisational strategy and capacity in local government, an evaluation framework was established (see Section 2.1; p17). A range of fieldwork was undertaken using various research methods. Case studies were undertaken that focussed on the following: evaluation Pilots (see Section 2.4.1; p20), National Programmes (see Section 2.4.2; p21), Direct Support (see Section 2.4.3; p22) and Improvement Partnerships (see Section 2.4.4; p24).

## Pilot Programme key findings

The Pilots placed a strong emphasis on the importance of locally determined priorities and support mechanisms in effective capacity building and improvement activity. Senior level commitment was also thought to be of prime importance in ensuring successful project delivery. Finally, while the Pilots were undoubtedly facilitating partnership activity, this was widely viewed as difficult and resource intensive, requiring financial incentives and the adoption of a long-term perspective from local authorities (see Section 3; p30).

## National Programmes key findings

The CBP has achieved its objectives in developing a series of National Programmes which are broadly mapped to the types of capacity building needs identified by local authorities. However, there are some qualifications to this finding. Many respondents in local authorities suggested that while there may be apparent linkages between their capacity building needs and the coverage of the National Programmes, in reality their needs are complex and specific to the context of the organisation. Following from this, the extent to which the National Programmes have been able to offer capacity building support is obviously linked to their take-up by local authorities. In some cases, this has clearly happened, however, a small number of programmes have not achieved a level of take-up that might have initially been expected.

In addition to measuring the extent to which the objectives of the CBP had been met the evaluation also sought to look at the added value of the National Programmes. It was found that they added value in a number of ways, including:

- Subsidised and often free support for capacity building.
- The opportunity for shared learning and the transfer of ideas within the sector.
- Retaining capacity building within the sector and enhancing the capacity of the sector to engage in self-help.
- Establishing a national infrastructure for key elements of improvement activity.
- Promoting a positive culture in the local government sector toward staff training and development.
- Contributing to filling generic and specific skills gaps.

Overall the key findings from this evaluation suggest the programmes have had a positive influence and impact on authorities at both an individual and organisational level. Impacts were most pronounced in terms of new skills and increased confidence, the acquisition of new skills tended to be related to generic management and project management competencies. Generally local authorities reported progress on corporate capacity with substantial investment over recent years in strengthening corporate processes and systems, however organisational development was less pronounced than individual development.

## Direct Support key findings

Evidence from both the in-depth qualitative and lighter touch case studies suggests that Direct Support has had a positive impact on improvement at individual, team/department and organisational levels (see Section 5; p55).

Work taken forward through Direct Support was broadly similar in content to that developed in the National Programmes and Improvement Partnerships. However, Direct Support work was more rapid and focused than that enabled through Improvement Partnerships and was of a significantly more extensive scale than that enabled via the National Programmes alone.

There were widespread reports from respondents within the case study authorities – both direct beneficiaries and individuals with an overview of the authority – that the ‘culture’ of the organisation was changing, becoming more focused on improvement, more committed to ongoing development of staff and systems and more open to looking at a range of options. In particular, Direct Support was used to support plans designed by the organisation itself. As a result, the activities funded by Direct Support received the full commitment of the organisation. There was thus a general commitment from senior management level down to ensure that these activities succeeded (for instance in terms of take-up) and that the organisation took full advantage of them, including by being able to make changes as a result of them. Direct Support activities also focused simultaneously on improving systems and on improving the ability of staff to work within them. There was also evidence of conscious attempts to facilitate the translation of individual to organisational development and vice-a-versa. It thus facilitated capacity building at both an individual and organisational level concurrently. The scale of intervention meant that a critical mass of development activity could take place. For instance, management training was able to reach a sufficient number of managers at any particular level to promote group as opposed to individual change.

## Improvement Partnerships key findings

It has been possible to identify significant aspects of added value attributable to the Improvement Partnership approach which have the potential to continue (see Section 6; p73). The establishment of Improvement Partnerships has proved to be time and resource consuming, however respondents from a wide range of participating authorities (including councils, fire and rescue services, national parks and support agencies) have expressed a desire to see them continue and to continue building on their successes (see Section 6.9; p81).

The impacts of Improvement Partnerships are, for the most part, related to improvements in ‘process’ and ‘governance’ rather than service delivery. For instance, by far the most significant impacts had been in relation to strengthening the partnership capacity of partner authorities. There was clear evidence of increased incidences of partnership working between

partners and also the establishment and development of personal networks and relationships between key staff both at the leadership level of the partners and in relation to key functional areas (such as corporate performance and improvement, HR, communications, consultation). There was also some tentative evidence of 'spillover' from cooperation with other forms of partnership – such as shared back office or service delivery – emerging as an indirect outcome from the work of Improvement Partnerships.

There was also some evidence of the potential of Improvement Partnerships to deliver more efficient capacity building support to local authorities and that this might lead in turn to more efficient working practices in councils. However, it was not possible at this stage to directly quantify any specific savings.

## Issues to consider for the future

The findings from each aspect of the evaluation suggest a number of varied lessons for policy development in relation to delivering central government support for local authority capacity building.

Maintaining a mixed market and an appropriate level of delivery (see Section 8.1; p95).

- Targeting delivery mechanisms and incentives (see Section 8.2; p96).
- Moving to an outcome-based focus (see Section 8.3; p96).
- Marketing and promotion (see Section 8.4; p96).
- Appropriate central management and coordination (see Section 8.5; p97).
- The need for caution and careful management of Improvement Partnerships (see Section 8.6; p97).
- Developing a clear rationale for programmes (see Section 8.7; p97).
- Managing expectations (see Section 8.8; p97)
- Respecting local autonomy (see Section 8.9; p98)
- The role of Improvement Partnerships in challenging poor performance (see Section 8.10; p98).

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This report is one of a series of outputs from the National Evaluation of the Capacity Building Programme for local government in England (CBP), being undertaken by a team of researchers at the Policy Research Institute (PRI) at Leeds Metropolitan University and the Cities Research Unit at the University of West of England. This report summarises the findings from all four key strands of the evaluation. More detailed findings from each of these and the methodologies used are available in the separate reports dedicated to each strand. Because of the difficulties associated with quantifying the capacity of local authorities, much less the sector, in relation to the dynamic roles and objectives that they pursue, the report focuses on what has worked, why and in what circumstances, rather than providing a definitive assessment of the extent of change of capacity building enabled by the CBP.

## 1.2 The Capacity Building Programme for Local Government

The CBP was launched in 2003 as a joint Department for Communities and Local Government/Local Government Association (LGA) initiative to support capacity building and improvement activities within local authorities in England. The CBP has supported four main streams of improvement and capacity building activity in local authorities:

- **Pilot Projects:** the CBP supported a large number of pilot projects which were to “trial innovative ways of working and ‘pave the way’ for other authorities”.
- **National Programmes:** the CBP initially focused on the establishment or expansion of several National Programmes, delivered by central bodies (such as the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), Employers Organisation for Local Government (EO), the 4Ps and framework contractors), delivering training and other organisational development support to local authorities.
- **Improvement Partnerships:** Since 2004, the CBP has also channelled financial resources through ‘Improvement Partnerships’; groups of local authorities (including Fire and Rescue Authorities and National Parks Authorities) established on a regional, sub-regional or County-wide basis to undertake collective improvement activity.
- **Direct Support:** the CBP has also provided Direct Support to authorities defined as either ‘poor’ or ‘weak’ through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process.

## 1.3 National Policy Context

The National Evaluation of the CBP is just one of a range of evaluations being undertaken in relation to central government initiatives to improve the performance of local authorities. Looking across these different evaluations researchers at Cardiff Business School (Downe and Martin, 2006) have identified four phases in these central government policies which provide a useful way of summarising the policy context within which the CBP has developed. The first of the Phases that they identify dates roughly to 1999 and culminated with the emergence of the Best Value regime. They identified Phase Two with the modernisation of council structures and constitutions and the requirement to produce community plans. Phase Three included more central direction with the turn away from Best Value and the introduction of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Phase Four was characterised by the shift in emphasis once again toward the role of local authorities as community leaders and ultimately to a more relaxed approach to central government scrutiny and performance management, with enhanced local autonomy.

The development of the CBP has been characteristic of some elements of this changing policy context. The CBP emerged within Phase Three of this model, being developed in the context of the 2001 White Paper (DTLR, 2001) and was developed against the findings of research undertaken by the Office for Public Management in the context of local authorities' attempts to implement the provisions of the White Paper, and which suggested that capacity should be defined in terms of;

“... the right organisation, systems, partnerships, people and processes to deliver against a particular agenda or plan.” (OPM, 2003:7).

The research also identified specific capacity gaps in local authorities, such as authorities' lack of time and resources to pursue modernisation, implement multiple and changing central government initiatives and partnership working with other local public agencies and neighbouring authorities. The research also noted recruitment and retention difficulties and specific skills gaps at leadership and middle management levels.

The CBP thus initially included a strong focus on the development of generic corporate capacity around leadership (elected members and senior officers), middle managers, procurement, performance, project and programme management. The mechanism for delivering support also reflected the central emphasis being substantially provided in the form of National Programmes supplied by central agencies such as the IDeA, the Employers Organisation and the 4Ps. In addition, there was a substantial focus on providing funding for improvement and recovery in authorities that had been rated as 'Poor' or 'Weak' at CPA, through the provision of 'Direct Support'.

Since then, the CBP has developed considerably. The emphasis of the programme has shifted decisively away from the National Programmes and Direct Support, and toward supporting the formation of Improvement Partnerships which are intended to facilitate partnership working between central and local government, both strategically through the provision of central government funding and more tactically through the support from government offices and Regional Directors of Practice. It is also hoped that Improvement Partnerships will help to align government initiatives effecting local authorities by serving as a regional or sub-regional mechanism for bringing together different strands of support. Finally, Improvement Partnerships are intended to be part of the overall effort to devolve decision making, giving local authorities more of a say over how resources to support improvement are allocated. As such, this shift in emphasis within the CBP is characteristic of the general shift in central government policy from Phase 3 to Phase 4 of Downe and Martin's model.

This shift in emphasis was underlined with the publication of the White Paper on the future of local government in October 2006 (Communities and Local Government, 2006), which identifies a number of changes in the policy framework in relation to Improvement Partnerships. These include capacity building to meet new challenges (such as increasing the role of the public and local communities in the planning and delivery of local public services), and changing governance structures and improving the quality of local elected leadership. These changes are likely to lead to significant capacity building challenges for local authorities in restructuring their planning, delivery and performance management procedures so that they can respond to public demands (N.B. Evidence from the last change in elected leadership structures suggest that this presented local authorities with capacity building challenges that are still being addressed today). The White Paper also heralds changes in the nature of local authorities in two-tier areas, including not only re-organisation in some areas, but a wider movement to "improved two-tier models".

Perhaps the most significant change is the suggestion that local authorities should universally take up the challenge issued by the first phase of the Lyons Review (Lyons Inquiry, 2006) to act as 'Place Shapers'. This requires local authorities to take an enhanced role in the strategic leadership and coordination of the wide range of local actors (in the public, private and voluntary sectors) which impact on the nature of 'place' at a local level. Again, this policy agenda is likely to lead to significant challenges to local authorities in terms of capacity and thus require a response from the CBP, most likely through the Improvement Partnership mechanism.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Evaluation framework

The OPM (2003) research which preceded the establishment of the CBP suggested that capacity needed to be understood hierarchically with differentiations between whole sector capacity and organisational capacity; itself differentiated between strategic, operational and service capacity. At each of these levels, the research suggested that a distinction needed to be made between different types of capacity, in relation to managing people, information, facilities and finance, performance and customer relations. After undertaking a substantial review of the literature on organisational learning, knowledge management, performance management, organisational strategy and capacity in local government, an evaluation framework was developed which was substantially influenced by the OPM model. This involved differentiating between individual, team or departmental, organisational and sectoral levels.

The specific types of capacity explored at each of these levels was shaped both by the general expectations of central government stakeholders about the desired impact of the CBP as a whole, and the more detailed expectations and objectives associated with individual National Programmes, Direct Support activities and Improvement Partnerships. The generic impacts expected of the CBP as a whole by central government stakeholders are set out in Table 1.



**Table 1:** Generic Expected Impacts

<b>Generic Impact Expected</b>	<b>Level expected at...</b>	<b>Type of evidence</b>
Development of new skills	Individual	Respondents reporting skills learned & applied in workplace
Increased confidence	Individual	Respondents reporting increased confidence
Increased job satisfaction	Individual	Respondents reporting increased job satisfaction
Better business planning and target setting	Team/ Authority	Respondents identifying changed business planning and target setting. Documentary
Promotion of equality and diversity	Team/ Authority	Respondents reporting increased diversity and equality Documentary
Improved recruitment and retention	Team/ Authority	Respondents reporting that recruitment and retention difficulties have eased Sector level data on recruitment and retention
Improved project and programme management	Individual/ Team/ Authority	Respondents reporting changed and improved project and programme management. Take-up of project management provision. Documentary
Better performance management	Team/ Authority	Changed and improved performance management practices Documentary
Improved learning, more innovation and sharing of good practice	Individual/ Team/ Authority	Respondents reporting improved learning, innovation and sharing of good practice.
Service improvements	Team/ Authority	Respondents Documentary

## 2.2 Evaluation challenges, levels of analysis and attribution

A core challenge for the evaluation related to charting the organisational benefits of individual level capacity building interventions. This is a noted problem in evaluating training courses (UKES, 2004), with traditional training evaluation taking the form of 'happy sheet' completion by beneficiaries and being on the 'Kirkpatrick' (1998) scale of evaluation methods. However, because these most frequently take place at the point of training, they do not provide adequate opportunity for beneficiaries to return to their workplace, utilise their new skills, changed behaviour or new knowledge to drive organisational change. Since a key focus of the CBP was on organisational and sectoral change, this evaluation needed to ensure that such problems were overcome. Moreover, the evaluation team were keen to assess the cumulative effect of participation in different elements of the CBP, such as participation in multiple national programmes or both national programmes and Direct Support. This also involved ascertaining how organisations were attempting to join together the development of perhaps disparate individuals to gain organisational change at the local level.

Other problems were also encountered, the most fundamental of which related to causality and attribution. Again these are noted challenges in evaluation. However, in the case of the CBP these were even more pronounced than is often the case with it being very difficult to objectively measure organisational capacity or changes in it or to isolate the sole or even primary cause of any change. As one senior local government figure noted:

"We have spent an actual fortune on organizational development, and that was always the problem, we are spending a fortune and we know that the right thing to do is to invest in our organisation and to invest in our people. As to what this has caused ... things got better, the authority improved in terms of its delivery and that was very measurable, but what caused it, is it because we invested so much in leadership and management development programme?... even the evidence that an authority will produce... they will necessarily present a picture, that is certainly not true, but it is there to serve particular political purposes..." (Former Chief Executive, Large Urban Unitary).

As a result of the CBP being relatively small scale in relation to the wide range of other initiatives in the local government sector as a whole, and in individual local authorities in particular, this meant that identifying the precise contribution of different CBP funded interventions was extremely challenging. Since the vast majority of CBP interventions had individuals as the primary direct beneficiary, self attribution on the part of case study

respondents was the main means by which this challenge was addressed. Where possible, findings captured through this approach were triangulated with additional interviews, for instance with line managers, or through documentary review.

## 2.3 Key Research Questions

At the outset of the main phase of the evaluation, the following key research questions were set by the client:

- 1) *Is the programme comprehensive in meeting demand for capacity building from local authorities?***
- 2) *How is the national programme being delivered?***
- 3) *To what extent is the national programme meeting its objectives?***
- 4) *What is the added value of the national programme?***
- 5) *How are the various elements of the national programme working in isolation and together as well as with the local and regional work that has been commissioned?***
- 6) *What is the impact of the national programme on the sector, networks of authorities, individual authorities and on individuals who take part in its initiatives?***
- 7) *Is the national programme cost effective and does it offer value for money?***
- 8) *How the CBP promotes equality and diversity; the shared priorities, efficiency and sustainability?***

In addition to these, the work with Improvement Partnerships was subject to additional research questions, as follows:

- 1) What is the range of activities being undertaken by the improvement partnerships?
- 2) How does the Improvement Partnership approach add value to capacity building activities?
- 3) How does the Improvement Partnership approach generate cost and resource savings which can be reinvested in frontline delivery and can these be quantified?

- 4) How does the Improvement partnership approach generate increased quality of local government in terms of leadership, service delivery and responding to local needs?
- 5) What are the key barriers and opportunities to the success of the Improvement Partnership approach?

## 2.4 Case Study Fieldwork

### 2.4.1 Pilots

The fieldwork methods used in the Pilots evaluation included:  
Documentary analysis of data supplied by the pilots;

- Analysis of the pilot's own evaluations where these were available;
- Face to face and telephone interviews with key officials in each of the selected pilots;
- Documentary analysis of data held centrally by Communities and Local Government about the pilot programme as a whole and supplied by the individual pilots themselves; and
- Informal conversations with Communities and Local Government staff about the CBP.

### 2.4.2 National Programmes

Case study fieldwork for the national programmes included a number of different components:

- **Elected leadership** – single or group interviews with elected members who may or may not have participated in CBP programmes. The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain views of the capacity needs of case study local authorities and how these were arrived at, whether the CBP currently meets these needs, their experience of engagement with the CBP and the impact of this.
- **Senior management/leadership** – single or group interviews with senior manager/s (director level) who may or may not have participated in CBP programmes. The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain views of the capacity needs of local authorities and how these were arrived at, whether the CBP met these needs, their experience of engagement with the CBP and any views on impact. These interviews also collected information about the range of other capacity building activities underway in the authority.

- **Sponsoring line managers** – In some cases we were able to interview the line managers of individual participants or beneficiaries of CBP National Programmes. The purpose of this was to triangulate reported findings from individual beneficiaries. The purpose was also to better understand the authorities decision to participate and, where relevant, to put specific staff forward.
- **Individual Beneficiaries** – who had participated directly in National Programmes. This involved individual or group interviews with beneficiaries of specific programmes. The aim was to collect information on the reasons behind participation, how these were mapped to a perceived need, the experience of participating and any impacts of this. Where possible these interviews were undertaken in groups with an additional purpose to promote shared learning among the group and encourage this to take place, through sharing ideas and good practice. Individuals in the group were, for instance, to identify how their engagement with the CBP had led them and others around them to change their workplace practices and develop organisational practice. Where individuals could highlight such impact they were asked to share their experiences and others were encouraged to think about how they may achieve similar spill-over.
- **Documentary review** – of CPA assessments (with specific attention given to the Corporate Assessment), community strategies, Corporate Plans, organisational development and staff training plans. This documentation was used to gain insight into the capacity challenges facing the authority, how these were being addressed through the planning cycle and the progress made in terms of building the capacity of the authority over time. It was thus part of the effort to contextualise the findings regarding participation in the National Programmes and to understand the relative contribution made by them. This documentary review was also useful in attempting to triangulate any reported findings from respondents.

Each category of interview was undertaken against a tailored and structured Topic Guide agreed with the client steering group. The questions in the Topic Guides were derived from and mapped against the key research questions set by the client at the outset of the evaluation.

### 2.4.3 Direct Support

The contribution of Direct Support from the CBP to authorities rated by CPA as Poor or Weak has been assessed in several stages:

- Context analysis
- Scoping consultation
- In-depth case studies
- Lighter-touch case studies

### 2.4.3.1 Context analysis

Initial context analysis considered the take-up of Direct Support and the types of improvement activity that this has supported. This was then mapped against changes in CPA category by authorities that have been rated in the past as 'Poor' or 'Weak' by the Audit Commission. This type of analysis has considerable limitations, particularly because of the difficulty of attributing causality and also because there have been several changes in CPA methodology over time, therefore longitudinal analysis is problematic. In addition, many authorities that have received Direct Support had only been subject to one CPA rating and as such the available sample of Direct Support recipients is considerably limited. Overall, it was not possible to conclude from this evidence whether improvement might have occurred in all local authorities regardless of access to Direct Support.

### 2.4.3.2 Scoping stage

This analysis was complemented by some initial qualitative – scoping – interviews in four authorities which had received Direct Support. These semi-structured interviews were used to aid the interpretation of the wider data on performance change in relation to take-up of Direct Support. They were also used to shape the fieldwork and analysis to be undertaken in subsequent stages. The results of the initial scoping interviews were presented in Initial Scoping of Direct Support in Poor and Weak Local Authorities and Summary of Baseline Findings in Improvement Partnerships (Nunn, 2006) in January 2006.

### 2.4.3.3 In-depth case study fieldwork

Resources allowed only a small amount of in-depth case study fieldwork. Fieldwork visits were conducted in four authorities that had received Direct Support. The research included:

- **Scrutiny of documentary evidence** – such as bids for Direct Support from the CBP, Corporate Plans, CPA reports, Corporate Assessments and Improvement Plans, organisational and staff development strategies, as well as available evaluation materials.
- **Structured interviews with senior officers and elected members** – were used to gain an understanding of wider capacity building and organisational development activities underway in the authority, with a view to assessing the extent to which activities funded by Direct Support were embedded in the authority and their relative importance and leverage. These interviews also helped to frame the context for activities funded by Direct Support and their place in the 'improvement journey'.

- **Structured interviews with beneficiaries** – these included staff and elected members who benefited directly from Direct Support activities, either because they had received training or development or were particularly affected by the introduction or improvement of systems and processes.

Throughout, the emphasis was on understanding the impact of Direct Support activities at the individual, team/department and organisational levels and the linkages that allow the translation of impact between these levels. The number of interviewees per case study was largely dependent on the size of the authority and availability of relevant interviewees. A total of 32 interviews were undertaken across the four case studies.

#### *2.4.3.4 Lighter-touch case studies*

The in-depth case study work was augmented by lighter touch case studies involving structured interviews with one or two individuals in a wider range of eight case study authorities.

#### **2.4.4 Improvement Partnerships**

The fieldwork research consisted of the following evidence collection processes:

- **Analysis of a range of documents** made available by the Improvement Partnerships often including the initial bid to the CBP, delivery and project plans and strategies.
- **Semi-structured interviews with all relevant stakeholders**, identified through negotiations with central points of contact in each of the Improvement Partnerships. These frequently included representatives of partner authorities, representatives of the Department for Communities and Local Government, Audit Commission and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).
- **Semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in the governance** arrangements (Programme/Partnership Boards and Steering Groups).
- **Semi-structured interviews with central staff** appointed to project manage the work of the Partnerships.
- **Semi-structured interviews with representatives** of partner authorities.
- **Semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries** of training, development or other activities funded or provided by the Partnerships.

All interviews were conducted against a topic guide agreed with the relevant research and policy teams at Communities and Local Government. Interviews were recorded and detailed interview notes were used as the basis for the production of separate case study summaries. Throughout, steps have been taken to protect the anonymity of individual respondents.

## 2.5 Case Study Selection

### 2.5.1 Pilots

Seven case studies were carried out; key learning points and good practice lessons from each are presented in the main body of this report. The case studies were selected to provide an overview of the varied approaches used. Maximum variation on the following criteria was thus used in case study selection:

- geographical coverage;
- large (Cumbria, Shropshire, Older People), medium (Worcester, Sussex Training Consortium) and smaller (Portsmouth, Race for Success) grants;
- regional (Cumbria, Shropshire) and sub regional pilots (Portsmouth, Sussex Training Consortium, Race for Success, Worcester);
- single issue pilots (Older People, Race for Success);
- pilots focusing on partnership working and strategy planning (Worcester and indirectly all the other cases);
- pilots focusing on performance management (Shropshire);
- pilots focusing on targeting weaker services (Cumbria);
- pilots focusing on staff development and recruitment (Sussex Training Consortium, Portsmouth); and
- pilots focusing on finding new innovative ways of delivering services (Older People).

Brief details of the case study pilots are given in Table 2.

<b>Case study</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>Type of pilot</b>
Portsmouth City Council "Future Leaders"	Staff development and leadership training	£34,459	Local/ sub regional
Sussex Training Consortium	Staff & management development	£58,183	Local/sub regional
London Borough of Tower Hamlets – "Race for Success"	Single issue BME training and development	£32,000	Local/sub regional



**Table 2: Pilot Programme Case Studies**

Worcester Partnership "improving the effectiveness and efficiencies of community strategies and LSPs in a two-tier area"	Partnership operation and improved strategy planning	£75,000	Local/sub regional
Cumbria "ACE – Achieving Cumbrian Excellence"	Partnership based targeting weaker services	£175,000	Regional
Shropshire district councils "Improvement Programme"	Performance and leadership	£171,300	Regional
Shared Priorities "Improving the quality of life for older people"	Finding new innovative ways for delivering services	£156,055	National Pilot – Locally Delivered

These case studies focused on identifying examples of good practice and learning points that could influence the wider CBP.

### 2.5.2 National Programmes

National Programme Case Studies were selected to satisfy maximum variation across two main and a number of subsidiary criteria:

- **Maximum Participation** – 16 case study authorities to include participation in as many National Programmes as possible, including coverage of all National Programmes with participating authorities at September 2005. Within this group, efforts were made to ensure maximum variation by:
  - Type of authority – County, Districts, City Unitaries and Metropolitan Unitaries.
  - Regional coverage.
  - Performance category – to include representation of the four main performance bands of the CPA that were in use at that time.
- **No Participation** – 2 case studies to investigate the reasons behind decisions not to participate.

Table 3 below sets out the case study local authorities selected.

<b>Table 3: National Programmes Case Studies</b>				
<b>Name</b>	<b>Participating</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Performance</b>
High Peak	✓	WM	District	Excellent
Bristol	✓	SW	City Unitary	Fair
Oldham	✓	NW	Metropolitan Unitary	Weak
Leeds	✓	Y&H	City Unitary	Good
Stoke	✓	WM	Metropolitan Unitary	Good
Birmingham	✓	WM	Metropolitan	Weak
Newcastle	✓	NE	City Unitary	Good
Wakefield	✓	Y&H	Metropolitan Unitary	Fair
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	✓	EoE	District	Good
Kerrier	✓	SW	District	Fair
Watford	✓	SE	District	Weak
Lambeth	✓	London	London Borough	Weak
Oxfordshire	✓	SE	County	Fair
Cumbria	✓	NW	County	Weak
Havering	✓	London	London Borough	Fair
Nottingham	✓	EM	City Unitary	Fair
Broxtowe	✗	EM	District	Fair
Leicestershire	✗	EM	County	Excellent

### 2.5.3 Direct Support

The in-depth Direct Support case studies were chosen to include a split between District and Unitary authorities and to include some variation in geography. The lighter touch case study interviews were drawn from the existing National Programmes case studies, where the authorities had also received Direct Support. Table 4: In-depth case studies and lighter touch case studies below shows the in-depth case studies and the lighter touch case studies.

**Table 4:** In-depth case studies and lighter touch case studies**In-depth case studies**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Performance</b>
Mansfield District Council	EM	District	Weak
Berwick-on-Tweed District Council	NE	District	Weak
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council	NW	Metropolitan Unitary	Fair
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	WM	Metropolitan Unitary	Weak

**Lighter touch case studies**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Performance</b>
Birmingham City Council	WM	City Unitary	Weak
Cumbria County Council	NW	County	Weak
London Borough of Lambeth	London	London Borough	Weak
Northamptonshire County Council	EM	County	Fair
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council	NW	Metropolitan Unitary	Weak
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council	Y&H	District	Fair
Watford Borough Council	London	London Borough	Weak

### 2.5.4 Improvement Partnerships

Fieldwork was undertaken in the following seven Improvement Partnerships as illustrated in Table 5: Improvement Partnerships below:

<b>Table 5: Improvement Partnerships</b>			
<b>Name of Partnership</b>	<b>Regional Partnerships</b>	<b>Sub-Regional Partnerships</b>	<b>Number of partners</b>
The Leicestershire and Rutland Improvement Partnership (LRIP)		✓	8
The Devon Improvement Programme (DIP)		✓	13 (inc 12 local authorities)
The Kent-Swindon Local Government Financing Model		✓	2
The London Regional Improvement Partnership (Capital Ambition)	✓		35 (inc 32 London Boroughs)
The West Midlands Improvement Partnership (WMIP)	✓		49 (inc 38 local authorities)
The Improvement Partnership for Northeast Local Government (IPNELG)	✓		34 (inc 25 local authorities)
The North West Improvement Network (NWIN)	✓		52 (inc 46 local authorities and 5 Fire and Rescue Services)

The selection of these case studies was based on variation on the grounds of geography and between sub-regional and regional partnerships. Selection was also limited by the small number of potential partnerships that had entered the establishment phase at the point of selecting case studies.

## 3. Pilot Programme Summary Findings

### 3.1 The Projects

Fieldwork was undertaken with seven case study pilot projects. These projects had largely shaped their improvement and capacity building work in relation to the results of Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA). CPA was frequently used as a diagnostic tool with CBP funding used to address these to address the problems or capacity issues that were identified. This meant that the pilot projects were addressing a mixture of national objectives and local needs, specifically taking account of local contextual features, such as the particular nature of needs and the type of support required.

For example the Achieving Cumbrian Excellence programme initially used areas of weakness identified by CPA as the focus for capacity building activity in relation to community engagement, partnership working, the community leadership role of elected members, performance management and procurement. Similarly, pilots in Portsmouth, Shropshire, Sussex and Worcester, also used CPA findings to frame their CBP funded Pilot activities.

### 3.2 Take-up

There were 39 Pilot Projects, 22 of which were local or sub-regional, 15 of which were regional and one which was developed jointly by a group of authorities across England.

### 3.3 Impacts

The most notable impact from the pilot projects at the time of the fieldwork was increased partnership working and increased capacity to engage in partnership working. The types of benefits associated with this were learning from shared experiences and the expertise of other partners, realising economies of scale in developing improvement projects and the ability to realise outcomes that would be unachievable while acting individually. For instance, the Sussex Training Consortium had encouraged partnership working around capacity building and had resulted in the joint appointment of a training coordinator and led to further discussions about collaboration between the ten partner authorities. In Cumbria, member development

activity had led to increased networking between members from the different authorities and reduced barriers to partnership working.

Partnership working had also helped to expose the participating authorities to different ways of working. This was thought to be having beneficial impacts in terms of more open and flexible organisational cultures. In Shropshire the partnership had allowed District councils to learn from one another, leading to changed Human Resource, procurement and performance management practices in some partners.

The Pilot projects had also contributed, in a limited way, to promoting cost effective improvement and capacity building, for instance generating economies of scale in commissioning and developing improvement projects. Again, the work of the Sussex Training Consortium is a good example here, allowing the shared financing of training and development activity which would not have occurred without financial support from the CBP and could not have been developed on an individual authority basis.

### 3.4 Reasons for Impact

The flexibility to match capacity building and improvement activity to the specific needs of individual and groups of authorities, as opposed to simply buying into national programmes, was valued by respondents, who thought that this was a contributory factor in the successes and beneficial impacts achieved. The Race for Success programme in London was identified as specifically tailored around the diversity issues of London Boroughs and the Achieving Cumbrian Excellence programme responded to the specific mix of needs in Cumbria.

The role of effective leadership was also thought to be important, both in relation to the partnerships overall and in relation to demonstrating commitment in each of the partner organisations, through, for instance, the commitment and involvement of senior managers in each partner. In some cases, a degree of central coordination was thought to be helpful in overcoming potential tensions between the partners or in finding common ground where authorities might have differing needs. For example, the barriers posed by different improvement starting points were identified as having been problematic among the District councils in Shropshire.

External providers of training and development activities were thought to bring greater credibility and legitimacy, than in-house provision, which was especially important in generating the commitment of participants. This was highlighted as a key aspect of good practice and generating an appropriate learning environment in the Portsmouth Future Leaders Programme.

However, ensuring clarity of purpose and roles as well as developing a good match between provision and needs was thought to be important in ensuring that external provision is well designed and effective. For example, in Worcestershire the Pilot partnership had experienced difficulties and delays as a result of a lack of clarity in the brief provided to external consultants.

### 3.5 Barriers

There were several reported barriers to the achievement of impacts via working in partnership. Partnership working in general was reported to be time consuming and hard to achieve with benefit realisation having long-term horizons, while the time and resource costs are immediate. Pre-existing organisational tensions, particularly in two-tier areas, also acted as a barrier to increased partnership working, as do different internal structures, procedures, systems and organisational cultures. These barriers were evident in a number of case studies, including Shropshire and Worcestershire.

### 3.6 Cost and efficiency issues

The Pilots had acted to facilitate partnership working in ways that might otherwise not have occurred and were providing leverage to encourage economies of scale and rationalisation in improvement activities within local authorities. The development of joint training and improvement activities in several Pilot partnerships, including Sussex and Cumbria were examples of this. However, there were no examples of where any direct or quantifiable cost savings had been identified.

### 3.7 Summary

The Pilots placed a strong emphasis on the importance of locally determined priorities and support mechanisms in effective capacity building and improvement activity. Senior level commitment was also thought to be of prime importance in ensuring successful project delivery. Finally, while the Pilots were undoubtedly facilitating partnership activity, this was widely viewed as difficult and resource intensive, requiring financial incentives and the adoption of a long-term perspective from local authorities.

# 4. National Programmes Summary Findings

## 4.1 Fit between National Programmes and Demand for Capacity Building

At a superficial level, the fit between the capacity building needs reported by local authorities and the coverage of the National Programmes is good. The coverage of the National Programmes broadly fits with the needs of the sector as identified by research commissioned at the outset of the programme (OPM, 2003).

However, there are some qualifications to this finding. Many respondents in local authorities suggested that while there may be apparent linkages between their capacity building needs and the coverage of the National Programmes, in reality their needs are complex and specific to the context of the organisation. Unique features of the authority, such as its budget, history, the configuration of the relationship between senior officers and elected members, between managers and staff and between the organisation and local people were all cited in this regard. So too were other specifics such as the personalities of key individuals, the impact of the local labour market on the types of staff that can be recruited or even the types of accommodation available for offices and public facilities. As such, many respondents perceived National Programmes, by their very nature, as too general and unable to cope with the specific demands of their authority. While there is clearly scope to question at least some of these assumptions, what is true is that this has acted as a barrier to some local authorities participating in some National Programmes.

## 4.2 Explaining non-participation

Several reasons were forthcoming to explain why authorities would choose not to participate in the National Programmes. In some cases, this was cost related. In other cases, the low levels of knowledge and awareness of the National Programmes appeared to be a barrier to wider take-up. However, other more specific reasons were also cited. For instance, in one of the non-participating case studies the authority was in receipt of Direct Support to assist it in delivering its improvement plan. This was reported to be all-consuming, narrowing the potential for engagement with additional external programmes.



In the other non-participating case study, the authority was high performing and well regarded externally. Two factors appeared to prevent it from engaging with the National Programmes. These were a party political antipathy toward centrally designed programmes and a lack of confidence in the capacity of the central bodies like the IDeA and Employers Organisation to deliver them. Second, in this case the authority was large enough to design and implement its own tailored programmes to bridge capacity gaps and this was perceived to limit its need for external support.

There was some evidence that National Programmes were more suited to the needs of better performing authorities. For instance, these organisations were better able to identify a strategic need for a specific form of capacity building, consciously select the individuals that would be best suited to engagement with the programme and best able to internalise the knowledge and development of that individual. They were also often more likely to want to engage in shared learning from other parts of the local government sector. Poorer performers, by contrast, tended to be more focused on their own internal improvement agenda and often had organisational cultures which would make it difficult for a single individual or a small group of officers to effect organisational change on return to their authority. Despite this, the subsidy regime provided benefits in the main to poorer performers meaning that it might have targeted the wrong group of authorities for this mechanism of delivering improvement support.

### 4.3 The National Programmes

The CBP National Programmes can be divided into three main groups; existing programmes which were developed by the central bodies like the IDeA, the Employers Organisation and the 4Ps (Box 1); new programmes commissioned from the Employers Organisation (Box 2); other programmes commissioned through a specially organised framework contract (Box 3).

**Box 1:** Existing programmes which were developed by central bodies like the IDeA, Employers Organisation and 4Ps.

- the Peer Clearing House;
- the Advanced Leadership Programme;
- the Leadership Academy;
- the National Graduate Development Programme;
- Gateway Reviews;
- Procurement Skills Training; and
- Advanced Leadership Programme.

### Box 2: New Programmes commissioned from the Employers Organisation

- Accelerated Development Programme;
- Workforce Remodelling;
- Diversity in Districts;
- Public Protection;
- Strategic HR Coaching; and
- Skills Pathways.

### Box 3: Programmes commissioned through the Framework Contract.

- Councillor Mentoring;
- Future Leadership Programme;
- Performance Improvement and Management;
- Project and Programme Management;
- Organisational Development; and
- Leadership Centre for Local Government.

## 4.4 Delivery of the National Programmes

The different National Programmes were delivered in very different ways. This was to be expected in terms of the specific delivery of improvement support, as each developed against a different set of specific objectives. In this regard, difference was positive, allowing local authorities a menu of alternative provision to allow some element of choice about the improvement support available to meet their needs. These differences covered the following models of delivering improvement and capacity building support:

- **Residential training provision** – Many of the National Programmes are either solely or partly based around the provision of residential training provision to individual officers or elected members outside of the local authority setting.
- **Training staff in-authority** – Several of the National Programmes involve providing training in individual authorities, most usually with groups of staff. These include the Procurement Skills Training programme and the Project and Programme Management programme.
- **Work-based assignments** – Work based assignments or projects were included in several of the National Programmes as a means of facilitating ‘action learning’ and generating organisational benefits through establishing a direct link between individual development and organisational change.

- **Training coaches/mentors/peers** – Several of the National Programmes included elements of training coaches or mentors with the aim that these would then go on to offer coaching and mentoring. These varied between those programmes such as the Peer Clearing House, which aimed to establish a national system of peer support and those that aimed to establish a coaching or mentoring resource within individual authorities, such as the LEAP coaching programme.
- **Coaching/Peer Support/Skills Sharing** – In addition to training coaches and peers, some National Programmes also aimed to provide coaching and peer support or to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and expertise within the local government sector.
- **Diagnostic consultation** – A strong theme across the National Programmes is the provision of some form of diagnostic consultation activity prior to designing the specific shape of delivery. For instance, the work of the Leadership Centre focuses heavily on diagnosing what sort of support authorities need. Likewise, the Diversity in Districts Programme also offered diagnostic activity in order to design specific support for the development and implementation of equalities policies.
- **Sub-regional local authority partnership projects** – The Skills Pathways programme involved establishing local partnership projects. Because of a lack of data it is difficult to judge the success of these activities, but some problems were reported from the provider in terms of generating organisational commitment, given the relatively small level of resource available. However, evidence from other components of the National Evaluation have considered this model of delivering improvement support in much more detail.
- **Organising the supplier market** – The Leadership Centre had established work to organise the market for the provision of leadership support through establishing levels of approval from those simply listed in a database to those officially badged as ‘approved’ after having gone through a defined process.
- **Documents/Resource/Toolkits** – Several of the National Programmes involved more passive provision in the form of establishing toolkits or manuals for the conduct of improvement and capacity building activity. These included the Organisational Development and Workforce Remodelling programmes.

## 4.5 Achievement of objectives

### 4.5.1 The collective objectives of the National Programmes

The overall objective of the National Programmes element of the CBP was:

“...the development of a national framework of capacity building programmes which are focused on developing the corporate capacity of councils to deliver real improvements to their communities” (ODPM, 2003a).

and

“to develop affordable programmes that address councils’ shared capacity building needs” (ODPM and LGA, 2004).

The CBP has clearly achieved its objectives in developing a series of National Programmes which are broadly mapped to the types of capacity building needs identified by local authorities. It is also clear that these Programmes are focused on the corporate and leadership capacity of local authorities. However, the linkage between these programmes and the achievement of improvements to communities were less clear.

Evidence of the extent to which the National Programmes have been successful in providing affordable programmes is also limited. ‘Affordability’ is a subjective question and has mainly been addressed by the evaluation through the views of providers, stakeholders and most importantly, respondents in the authorities themselves. The results of these discussions are reported below (at Section 4.8).

Following from this, the extent to which the National Programmes have been able to offer capacity building support is obviously linked to their take-up by local authorities. In some cases, this has clearly happened and certain programmes have become embedded in the sector, receiving widespread participation from local authorities. These include The Advanced Leadership Programme, Leadership Academy, Procurement Skills Training, Gateway Reviews, National Graduate Development Programme, Future Leadership Programme and aspects of the work of the Leadership Centre. However, a small number of programmes have not achieved a level of take-up that might have initially been expected. Others never progressed beyond an initial pilot stage or only ever aimed to generate lessons and good practice that could be used elsewhere.

**Table 6: National Programme Take-up**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>No of Participating authorities</b>
Advanced Leadership Programme	79 local authorities (by September 2005).
Leadership Academy	223 local authorities (by November 2006).
Project and Programme Management	22 local authorities (by Spring 2006).
Gateway Reviews	116 local authorities, 197 individual participants (by December 2007).
Procurement Skills training	180 local authorities (by September 2005).
Diversity in Districts	9 pilot local authorities.
Public Protection	110 local authorities.
NGDP	108 local authorities, 391 trainees (by December 2006) CBP funded 45%.
Accelerated Development Programme	48 local authorities.
LEAP Coaching	202 local authorities.
Skills Pathways	18 Local authorities.
Future Leadership Programme	Overall: 191 local authorities and 413 individual participants. Subsidised: 163 local authorities and 274 participants (by November 2006).
Leadership Centre	90 Local Authorities (by May 2006).

#### **4.5.2 Achievement of programme specific objectives**

The achievement of specific programme objectives varies by National Programme. A summary assessment of the achievement of objectives is offered in Table 5.

**Table 7: Achievement of Objectives by National Programme**

<b>National Programme</b>	<b>Achievement of Objectives</b>
Accelerated Development Programme	Initial objectives to “develop and implement a regionally delivered nationally led pilot programme providing skills development for 48 talented people” were achieved but pilot has ended without roll-out.
LEAP HR	The objectives to develop a coaching system for senior HR managers to build and share skills and capacity within the sector were achieved as was enhancement of confidence and professional capacity of individual participants.
National Graduate Development Programme	The programme has both established a graduate recruitment scheme and raised the profile of the sector as an employer.
Workforce Remodelling	Objectives have partially been achieved. A model and toolkit has been developed but take-up and impact is less clear.
Diversity in Districts	Most participant authorities have reached level 1 or above on the Equality Standard.
Skills Pathways	Insufficient evidence was available to judge the attainment of objectives.
Public Protection	A contribution has been made to resolving recruitment and retention problems in the target sectors.
Peer Clearing House	The infrastructure for training, accrediting and placing peers has been established and is operating.
Leadership Academy	Has provided a facility for councillor development and shared learning and network building between councillors from different local authorities.
Advanced Leadership Programme	Has established a facility for senior officer development and there is some evidence of achieving the desired impacts.

**Table 7: Achievement of Objectives by National Programme**

Gateway Reviews	Has been successful in providing support to procurement projects and helping them to progress. The project has been less successful in developing a sufficient pool of potential reviewers, though progress has been made.
Procurement Skills Training	Successful in establishing a programme of skills training to elected members/senior managers and procurement officers. There is also some evidence of achieving impact objectives.
Future Leadership Programme	Has established a widely taken-up and well regarded middle management development programme and there was some evidence of the programme achieving its impact objectives.
Performance Improvement	Insufficient time has passed to judge whether the programme has achieved its objectives.
Project and Programme Management	Has established a project management programme and where this has been taken up with commitment there is some evidence of desired impacts.
Councillor Mentoring	Established a widely used programme of councillor mentoring.
Organisational Development	Developed an organisational development manual, though evidence of use and impact is unavailable.
Leadership Centre	Has established a number of initiatives to correct market failure on supply and demand side and to address the informational problems in the market, though not yet clear what the impact of this is.

## 4.6 Added Value of the National Programmes

The National Programmes offer added value in a number of ways, including:

- **Offering subsidised and often free support for capacity building.** In a number of cases it is clear that no other comparable support is available on similar terms. These include Gateway Reviews, the leadership development activity targeted at elected members through the Peer Clearing House, Leadership Academy, Councillor Mentoring and Leadership Centre.
- **The opportunity for shared learning within the sector and the transfer of ideas between individuals and authorities.** This is the key advantage of the National Programmes in comparison with other more tailored capacity building initiatives and was a particular feature of the Gateway Review, IDeA Leadership Programmes and the Future Leadership Programme.
- **Retaining capacity building within the sector and enhancing the capacity of the sector to engage in self-help.** Examples include the development of Peer Reviewers in the Gateway Review programme and the use of peers in the Peer Clearing House and Councillor Mentoring programmes.
- **Establishing a national infrastructure for certain key elements of improvement activity.** For instance, taken together, the National Graduate Development Programme, the Future Leadership Programme and the IDeA officer leadership programmes provide training and development provision across a continuum of career development. Similarly, the IDeA's councillor development programmes provide a range of development opportunities for councillors at all levels from induction to executive member and Leader.
- **Promoting a positive culture in the local government sector toward staff training and development.** Many of the case study authorities had recently made a new commitment to staff training and accessing the National Programmes, especially where subsidised, had been an important aspect of this. In addition, the councillor development programmes had contributed to a new commitment to councillor development. Even just establishing these programmes and awareness that they exist appeared to have contributed toward the general notion that such activities were a 'normal' part of a local authority's activities.
- **Contributing to filling generic and specific skills gaps.** The National Graduate Development Programme and the Public Protection programmes have contributed to providing the sector with different mechanisms of attracting skilled workers. The different training programmes have contributed to improving the skills of the existing workforce, including in relation to specifically identified problem areas such as procurement.



## 4.7 Coordination between the National Programmes and other elements of the Capacity Building Programme

There are some examples of where National Programmes have good linkages with each other, though this is not universally the case and tends to be more likely where several programmes are delivered by the same provider. For instance:

- There were clear linkages between the National Graduate Development Programme and the Accelerated Development Programme with the latter initially seen as a progression and development programme for the former. Both were run initially by the Employers Organisation and had the same project manager. However, the scope for these theoretical linkages to materialise was limited because the decision was taken not to progress the role-out of the Accelerated Development Programme when the two programmes migrated to the IDeA.
- There were good potential linkages between the Skills Pathways project and the Workforce Remodelling project; both of which were operated by the Employers Organisation. However, it is not clear that these were fully exploited.
- There are strong linkages between the Peer Clearing House and the Councillor Mentoring programme and also with the work of the Leadership Centre, with the latter two both sourcing peers from the Peer Clearing House.
- There are strong linkages between procurement skills training and Gateway Reviews. Indeed, participation on one was likely to lead to participation on the other programme. Again both were run by the same provider.

There is also further potential to strengthen the linkages between the different National Programmes as they develop. For instance, there is scope to distinguish a comprehensive suite of individual professional development support beginning with the National Graduate Development Programme, progressing through the Future Leadership Programme and into the revamped Advanced Leadership Programme (now the Academy for Executive Leadership) and further into the elite leadership work planned by the Leadership Centre. There is also some evidence of some of the National Programmes being successful in integrating with Direct Support and Improvement Partnerships. However, this has been much more limited and uneven.

For the most part, National Programme providers have struggled to develop effective links with the Improvement Partnerships, though many report that they have tried to do this and there are some limited examples of the National Programmes having been engaged by the Partnerships. The exception is the IDeA which has been much more successful in achieving take-up of its National Programmes, through Direct Support and through the Improvement Partnerships. Fieldwork in case studies suggests that the IDeA is often the first port of call for local authority officers looking for external capacity building support. It is also highly regarded by many in the sector and is seen as being within rather than external to the local government sector. Changes to the subsidy regime to offer ring-fenced funding to the Improvement Partnerships in order to take-up National Programmes may increase linkages overall but may also have negative sustainability for some programmes, where Partnerships do not choose to apply the ring-fenced funding to them.

## 4.8 Cost effectiveness

At the outset, the methodology for addressing cost effectiveness was to be guided by work underway in the wider Meta-evaluation of Local Government Modernisation on cost effectiveness. However, this work ultimately did not provide any outputs that were usable for this purpose. Since in most cases there was insufficient data to undertake cost effectiveness analysis, the evaluation has sought to address cost effectiveness through discussions with respondents. These discussions identified a number of different aspects to cost effectiveness:

- **Affordability** – this referred to the cost of participating in the programmes in terms of user fees. Several of the programmes were regarded as expensive in terms of user-fees, sometimes even where subsidies were in place, such as the in the case of the Future Leadership Programme, the Advanced Leadership Programme and the Project and Programme Management Programme. Nevertheless, subsidies were thought to be very important in enabling participation and it is not at all clear that the market could sustain demand with the full cost of user fees. Also, while it was not necessarily thought to be currently expensive (because of the operation of the subsidy regime), there was some evidence that the National Graduate Development Programme may also struggle to sustain demand in the event of local authorities having to pay full cost user-fees. If full-cost user fees were implemented then it is likely that some National Programmes would need to be slimmed down or more efficient delivery used to reduce costs.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Some of the residential programmes used very expensive locations and accommodation, which was popular among individual participants.

- **Costs of staff time** – While some of the programmes were fully subsidised, this did not mean that they were perceived as cost free by respondents in local authorities. Some programmes did involve a significant amount of staff time in terms of preparation and participation.
- **Quality of delivery** – while some of the National Programmes were thought to be expensive in terms of user fees, some respondents reported that this was justified because of the quality of delivery and they could clearly identify why the programme was so expensive.
- **Impact on efficiency** – There was little overall evidence of efficiency gains as a result of participation in the National Programmes, though this does not necessarily mean that increased efficiency has not in places resulted from improved working methods and effectiveness. The exception to this was estimated efficiency gains provided by the provider of the Gateway Review programme. According to the Office of Government Commerce, the savings produced by a Gateway Review are on average around 4-5% of the overall value of the procurement project which, because of the high value of many procurement projects, would suggest that the savings produced by the Review programme are considerable.

## 4.9 Impact of the National Programmes

### 4.9.1 Impact at Individual Level

The acquisition of new skills tended to be related to generic management and project management competencies. However, generally, evidence of the acquisition of hard skills was less convincing than evidence around softer skills. These included communication, self awareness, the awareness of emotional impact on others and self management and effectiveness. A further strong theme was around leadership and influencing skills, often couched in terms of 'distributed leadership' or the alignment of individual motivations and objectives among a wide group of staff. Several of the National Programmes also achieved impacts that were unintended, at least in terms of the overall programme logic. These include enhanced career development opportunities, enhanced leadership and soft-skill development.

For example, one participant on the Performance Improvement and Management Programme was able to demonstrate the impact of the programme on them as an individual by explaining that their job role and title had changed as a direct result of their taking part. After completing the second of the three events on the programme they presented a paper to their corporate management team to set up a team of staff dedicated to organisational development. The proposal was accepted and the participant was asked to head up this team. A summary of impacts by each National Programme is included in Table 5.

### 4.9.2 Impact at Organisational Level

Despite the dramatic organisational impacts outlined in the example above, impacts at organisational level were generally less pronounced than those at the individual level, with some respondents reporting that they faced problems in securing the translation of their individual development to organisational change. Problems included a failure of the organisation to establish appropriate mechanisms to share their learning, (as noted in the evaluation of the ADP), an insufficient number of individual officers being trained concurrently, (as noted in the evaluation of the Leadership Academy) or a failure to link individual development to organisational objectives.

The culture of the organisation, and specifically whether it was open to new ideas and changing working practices or relatively rigid in these terms, was a key determinant of the capacity to translate individual development to organisational change. Interestingly, several of the programmes were thought to explicitly equip individuals to challenge such a culture, including the leadership programmes run by the IDeA and the NGDP.

For example in one case study the impact of the NGDP programme was seen by senior management not only in terms of the quality of the work that the graduates produce but also in terms of the impact that they have had on the culture of the organisation:

“I’ve noticed a change in culture here over the past few years and I think it is about just having young people who are quite happy to challenge and have a completely different perspective and if you have people like that in an organisation then you start attracting more of them. If only we could have more”. (Senior Manager, Large Urban Unitary).

Where they were present, the main impacts across the National Programmes was to strengthen project and programme management, performance management and business planning and target setting processes. There was also evidence that the National Programmes, cumulatively, helped to promote the sharing of good practice within and between local authorities, for example through the Leadership Academy, Peer Clearing House and the Gateway Review process.

While evidence of organisational change was often hard to identify and where identified tended to be of small scale, this does not necessarily indicate failure on the part of the National Programmes. These impacts need to be placed in the context of the scale of participation by individual local authorities (generally small) and the range of other influences on organisational change and stasis.

There was generally less evidence of impact on the quality of service delivery from the National Programmes. There were, in places, reported assumptions that the development of corporate capacity, would lead to improvements in service delivery but actual examples of these connections were hard to identify.

A summary of impacts by each National Programme is included in Table 8. The shaded areas refer to where evidence of impact was present.

## 4.10 Linkages between the National Programmes and the wider policy agenda

All the National Programmes were connected in some ways to the wider improvement agenda for local authorities. They were clearly linked to improvement in the corporate capacity of local authorities and addressing gaps and weaknesses in capacity. Many of the programmes were also explicitly and implicitly linked to the Pay and Workforce Strategy for local government. The procurement related programmes in particular were linked to the delivery of the National Procurement Strategy and the wider efficiency agenda. The Diversity in Districts programme and some parts of the Leadership Academy were directly linked to the equalities agenda. However, several of the other programmes might be thought to be indirectly linked to both the efficiency and equalities agendas because of their linkages to improving management capacity and the promotion of systems and procedures which make management practices more open and regulated.

## 4.11 Lessons Learned from the National Programmes

### 4.11.1 Shared learning vs. tailored design

There is clearly a tension in the findings produced between one of the key advantages and beneficial impacts associated with many of the National Programmes and some of the reasons cited to explain why the National Programmes have not achieved higher levels of take-up. On one hand, participating individuals and authorities identify the benefits of programmes that facilitate learning from other individuals and local authorities as a key element of added value. The benefits of a national pool for sharing knowledge, experience and skills was also acknowledged. However, on the other hand, a widely reported concern was that the National Programmes are not able to be sufficiently tailored to the specific needs of individual local authorities. This was felt to limit their attractiveness and, as such, take-up.

**Table 8: Impact of National Programmes at Individual Level**

	Accelerated Dev Prog	LEAP Coaching	NGDP	Workforce Remod.	Diversity in Districts	Skills Pathways	Pub Protection	Peer Clearing House	Leadership Academy	Advanced Leadership Prog	Gateway Reviews	Perf Imp	Proc Skills Training	Future Lead. Prog	Project and Prog Man	Org Devp	
Development of new skills				Insufficient evidence available as take-up of the toolkit has not been monitored		Insufficient evidence available because of lack of data provided by programme provider						Insufficient evidence available at the moment – fieldwork ongoing.				Insufficient evidence available as take-up of the toolkit has not been monitored	
Increased confidence																	
Increased job satisfaction																	
Improved project and programme management																	
Improved learning, more innovation and sharing of good practice																	
Other impacts	Procurement Political awareness		Career Devp outcomes						Career Devp outcomes		Improved working relationships and self awareness		Leadership capability				Awareness of proc issues

The shaded areas refer to where evidence of impact was present.

**Table 8:** Impact of National Programmes at Organisational Level

	Accelerated Dev Prog	LEAP Coaching	NGDP	Workforce Remod.	Diversity in Districts	Skills Pathways	Pub Protection	Peer Clearing House	Leadership Academy	Advanced Leadership Prog	Gateway Reviews	Perf Imp	Proc Skills Training	Future Lead. Prog	Project and Prog Man	Org Devp		
Better business planning and target setting				Insufficient evidence available as take-up of the toolkit has not been monitored		Insufficient evidence available because of lack of data provided by programme provider						Insufficient evidence available at the moment – fieldwork ongoing.				Insufficient evidence available as take-up of the toolkit has not been monitored		
Promotion of equality and diversity																		
Improved recruitment and retention																		
Improved project and programme management																		
Better performance management																		
Improved learning, more innovation and sharing of good practice																		
Service improvements																		
Other	Filling skills haps								Additional staff resources		leadership		Leadership Absence man	Improved procurement projects			Team confidence	

The shaded areas refer to where evidence of impact was present.

#### 4.11.2 Targeting of delivery mechanisms and demand-side incentives

The evidence detailed above suggests that some local authorities may have more to gain than others from the specific benefits arising from the National Programmes, especially where they relate to small numbers of individual beneficiaries in the first instance. Where this is the case, organisational change is most likely where the organisation already wants to change and there is widespread acceptance of learning from elsewhere and experience of and processes in place to internalise the benefits of skills, knowledge or expertise learned through engagement with a National Programme. As such, this may suggest that demand side incentives for these mechanisms for the delivery of improvement support should recognise that the lowest performers may not be able to take full advantages of the potential benefits of National Programmes and that these should rather be deployed further into the 'improvement journey'.

#### 4.11.3 Stimulating capacity building activity in local authorities

Overall, the National Programmes have, in places, been able to address aspects of the perceived market failure in regard to capacity building support to local authorities. Some of the National Programmes have been successful in generating high levels of take-up. There is also evidence that subsidies and advice to local authorities has helped to stimulate demand from local authorities. However, some problems clearly remain. There is some indicative evidence that demand may not be able to be sustained where subsidies are removed and the change in the nature of the subsidy regime will clearly pose significant challenges. This may suggest that the market has not yet matured enough to be sustainable without continued intervention. It may also suggest that intervention may be necessary on a more long-term basis.

Finally, there is some evidence to suggest that the sector is more comfortable with sharing and retaining knowledge, skills, resources and capacity within the sector rather than relying on external support. National Programmes that focused on retaining capacity within the sector and sharing resources to build capacity were often regarded highly, even if this was often difficult to achieve because of barriers to cooperation such as time and resource constraints.

#### 4.11.4 Translating individual development to organisational change

Case study authorities suggested that the key determinant of impact was not necessarily the quality of the National Programmes themselves but how these were utilised by the participating local authorities. Those authorities that had a noticeable 'culture' of openness to new ideas, changing working practices and commitment to flexibility appeared to find it easier to translate the benefits of participation in the National Programmes into organisational change. Where this culture was less embedded individual development could be translated to organisational change but this was less spontaneous.



The ways in which local authorities can maximise the likelihood of translating individual development to organisational change are:

- Consciously choosing to participate in the first place as part of an initiative to fill an identified skills gap and making an active decision that the specific programme chosen is relevant to that gap.
- Consciously selecting individual participants on the grounds that the individual(s) concerned will be willing and effective at sharing their learning and that they occupy a position in the authority where new learning is required and from where others can be influenced.
- Consciously selecting the numbers of participants to ensure that, where feasible, a 'critical mass' can be achieved.
- Providing mechanisms to internalise new learning and development. These can be as simple as reporting back what has been learned to team meetings or sharing printed materials with colleagues. They might also include structured feedback as part of staff development and appraisal sessions. Finally, they include a willingness on the part of line managers to do things differently and apply new skills and expertise in the workplace.
- Linking training and development to the strengthening or use of organisational systems and processes.

#### **4.11.5 Marketing and promotional activity**

There is some evidence to suggest that the low take-up of some of the National programmes may have been linked to the failure of the CBP to effectively address the informational weaknesses in the market for capacity building support. Respondents in local authorities often did not understand which programmes were part of the CBP, how to access them, what they offer or what subsidies were available to them. The marketing material surrounding the CBP has often been confusing and, on this evidence, has not been effective in providing local authorities with the information that they needed. There were also differences in the governance arrangements, marketing, promotions, performance monitoring and reporting between the National Programmes. This made the National Programmes difficult to both manage and evaluate.

#### **4.11.6 Managing multiple and complex national programmes**

Several important lessons can be learned from the evaluation with regard to the management of multiple and complex national programmes:

- Managing a suite of national programmes requires significant central management capacity. The changes of staffing and discontinuities in the institutional structure in central government in the initial stages of the CBP disrupted the development of National Programmes. It may also be the case that central government does not have the capacity to manage the CBP in the future and this may be better administrated by a separate organisation, though it is important that this is seen to be within the sector.
- There is obvious importance in developing and sustaining clear and consistent overall programme logic. The changes, and the perceived changes, in emphasis around what the CBP was intended to achieve, how it was to do this and who it was aimed at hampered communication with implications for take-up and ultimately impact.
- The governance and overall coordination of the National Programmes suffered from a lack of consistency in structures and procedures between programmes and over time. The findings of the evaluation suggest that managing complex and multiple national programmes of this sort requires a degree of standardisation in governance, performance management and reporting arrangements.

#### **4.11.7 Sustainability and intellectual property ownership**

In any intervention that seeks to correct market failure or perceived market failure, early thought needs to be given to the intended nature of the intervention. There is evidence from the evaluation of confusion among providers over this issue, especially with regard to the operation of demand-side subsidies. Such decisions over the nature of the intervention also need to be borne in mind when assessing the extent to which, and how, the supply-side is to be stimulated, for instance in the development of models of delivery and content.

A related issue that needs to be carefully addressed in the management of similar future projects regards the question of sustainability and intellectual property ownership. If some of the National Programmes prove to be unsustainable in the event of changes to the subsidy regime, a clear and uniform policy needs to be adopted with regard to the ownership and use of any intellectual property that has been developed in the course of programme delivery and development. Even where a programme proves to be unsustainable there is clearly merit in considering how this material might be put to best use. The evaluation findings suggest that even programmes that have struggled to generate take-up have produced models of development that are well regarded by the sector and have potential for future beneficial impact.

## 5. Direct Support Summary

### 5.1 Context

The case study authorities were very different in nature. One was a small District Council with fewer resources, in a rural area. Three were unitary authorities in largely urban metropolitan areas, facing significant challenges associated with the decline of traditional manufacturing industries and the communities that these supported.

All Direct Support case study authorities experienced a watershed moment in the publication of their initial CPA rating. Respondents in several case study authorities noted that the poor inspection/assessments were initially challenged within the organisation. A reticence to accept the judgement of external inspectors was associated with an insular and embedded organisational culture. In addition to the issue that many authorities faced of having elected members who had served long-terms, there were a number of common elements to this culture. These were, namely:

- A lack of engagement and capacity in new political structures such as overview and scrutiny.
- A commitment to the delivery of 'traditional' services and a lack of willingness to consider the delivery of services in new ways, even where these are retained in-house.
- A lack of documented strategic vision for the council and/or the local community. This might be through the absence of a statement of corporate vision or lack of engagement with the development of a community vision.
- Insufficient alignment of organisational resources with organisational priorities.
- A lack of trust between staff and management, and between officers and elected members.
- Low staff morale.

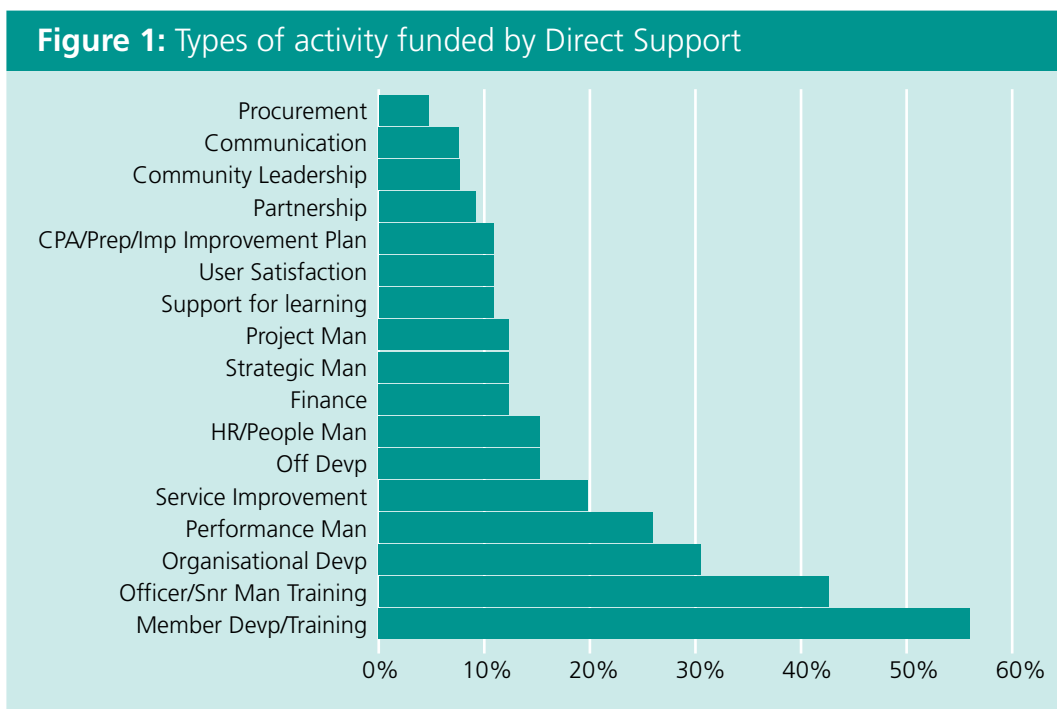
Weaknesses in capacity among staff at middle management level, a lack of leadership capacity among senior officers and a lack of familiarity with modernisation and alternative ways of organising local government among elected members, were strong themes noted by respondents and through scrutiny of CPA reports, Corporate Assessments and Improvement Plans. These were identified in addition to weaknesses in systems and procedures, particularly in relation to financial and performance management, project and programme management.

The resistance to change and defensiveness regarding negative external inspection results had been overcome in most of the case study areas. Nevertheless, this had been a difficult process and in most cases had involved the replacement of all or significant parts of the senior management team. In places, this had also been accompanied by changes in political leadership, such as change in political control, change in leader or a change in political structures, or a move to having an elected mayor, supported by a council manager. For example, one authority had seen a major change in the composition of the whole council, with many new elected members having little or no previous experience of being a councillor. While these changes had in places also created capacity gaps and challenges, they had also generally been associated with the acceptance of the results of external performance assessment and increased commitment to addressing the specific weaknesses that were identified.

## 5.2 Direct Support: Activities

### 5.2.1 Overall

A range of improvement activity has been supported by Direct Support. As Figure 1: Types of activity funded by Direct Support below shows, the most popular type of capacity building activity supported by Direct Support is member development and training, followed by officer and senior management training, organisational development such as improvement of business systems and performance management. Human resources improvement, officer training and the development of corporate and strategic planning were also important.



## 5.2.2 Bidding for Direct Support

Case studies tended to report that the process of accessing Direct Support was positive. Respondents reported that they had understood the process and felt that they had received the appropriate amount of support from central government representatives at regional and national level. Indeed, several of the case study authorities reported that they had been successful with more than one approach for Direct Support. They also reported that the bidding process had helped to focus their activities on organisational impacts.

## 5.2.3 Activities in the In-Depth Case Studies

### 5.2.3.1 Cultural Change

All the case study authorities had attempted to change the 'culture' of the organisation through changes to customer services processes; performance management and learning and development processes. In one case, Direct Support had been used to engage external support in the form of a 'change agent' to support activities to improve the use of performance management and back office support services (i.e. personnel, finance, administration and research). In a number of case studies, ensuring 'buy in' from staff (and thus developing activities with the input and consultation of staff), was seen as important due to the links between staff morale, motivation, recruitment and retention and organisational culture.

### 5.2.3.2 Project Management

Two of the case studies had developed strands of activity around project management. In both cases, this activity had involved raising awareness of project management issues amongst staff and more detailed training on project management techniques to staff likely to manage projects. In both cases, this was also accompanied by implementation of standardised project management procedures across the organisation.

Generally, several features of the activities undertaken were clearly important to the success of project management activities, these being:

- Senior level commitment to, and understanding of, the rationale behind project management and the procedures and techniques that were being implemented. This helped to ensure that these procedures became part of organisational systems and processes.
- Training and development on a wide scale, involving a critical mass of individuals and ensuring that there were less barriers to translating individual development to organisational change.
- Training and development linked to specific systems and procedures being implemented in the authority, meaning that individual development was closely linked to organisational change.

- Development of approaches to project management that were proportional to the needs of the organisation and did not involve excessive bureaucracy or administration.

### 5.2.3.3 Visioning and Priorities

Two of the case study authorities had used Direct Support to conduct work on establishing a vision and an associated list of strategic priorities to guide the strategic direction of the organisation. The initial reaction of these organisations to the CPA identifying a lack of strategic direction, was to resist this change – however, in both cases, changes in political leadership or in political structures had helped to overcome this resistance.

In developing strategic direction, both organisations were encouraged by their central government lead official to utilise the support of the IDeA. IDeA support helped each organisation to establish an organisational vision and statement of priorities through a variety of mechanisms. In one case, this consisted of ‘facilitation’ and other support for a series of consultation and visioning events at which senior managers and elected members from all political parties were encouraged to debate the future direction and core purpose of the organisation.

In another case study authority, Direct Support had been used to access ‘critical challenge’ from the IDeA. While both organisations welcomed the help that IDeA provided, there were some reported concerns about the extent to which they were ‘encouraged’ to use IDeA rather than other providers and the lack of any effective procurement process. In both cases, several features of the activity undertaken were notable:

- Direct Support was used to support activities which would be fundamental to the future direction of the authority.
- Securing this change involved a significant shift in the commitment of the organisation’s leaders.
- Gaining cross party political support for the statement allowed a more substantial degree of organisational commitment, as staff could be more certain that work on achieving change would not be discarded in the event of a change in political leadership.
- The production of the statement of priorities or strategic direction was only the first step and a much longer process of aligning organisational resources, particularly staffing and investment planning, with these priorities.
- External assistance helped to secure organisational commitment, overcoming tensions between different officers and/or elected members.

#### *5.2.3.4 Development of Political Systems and Structures*

Direct Support has been used to develop political structures, in particular overview and scrutiny functions. In one authority, this involved diagnostic support from the IDeA to identify improvement needs. The IDeA officer offered a set number of days to lead an example Overview and Scrutiny review of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). In this authority, the following was notable:

- Where this was successful, this was attributed to ‘learning by doing’ strengthening individual and group confidence by staff and councillors being supported to undertake the task directly.
- Indeed, the limitations of the approach were identified as a lack of engagement of some committee members, thereby constraining their ability to learn by doing.
- There were benefits to be gained by utilising external support with knowledge and overview of the way in which political structures, particularly overview and scrutiny, operate in other local authorities.

In a number of authorities, political structures were strengthened through training of elected members in understanding political structures and helping them to develop their capacity to operate in new committee structures (i.e. chairing and questioning skills).

#### *5.2.3.5 Development of Elected Members*

All but one of the in-depth case studies used Direct Support to develop elected members. The key issues addressed included understanding the roles and responsibilities of different elected members (such as portfolio holders, committee chairs, committee members, ward councillors) and senior officers, understanding council and local government procedures (such as finance and performance management and CPA), and community leadership. This activity most often took the form of visits to other councils, internal workshops, participation on the IDeA Leadership Academy, participation on the IDeA Modern Member programme and participation on the IDeA Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny programme, and individual councillor mentoring undertaken through the IDeA’s Peer Clearing House.

In addition to the development of individual councillors’ skills and knowledge, some case study authorities were developing job descriptions with training plans and skills audits associated with them. The key features of councillor development activities were:

- The recognition of the need to develop councillor training and development activity was precipitated by a change of elected members and problems in political leadership identified by CPA.

- Councillor development activity were targeted both at familiarising new elected members with council procedures and with promoting acceptance of the need for change and the local government modernisation agenda.
- Councillor development was seen as key to successfully adopting modernised political structures, in particular overview and scrutiny.
- The emphasis on learning from other councils and elected members in other councils.
- There was a mixture of single party and mixed party activities. Mixed party activities helped to build closer cross-party working relationships.

#### *5.2.3.6 Management Development*

Management development activity, focused at both senior and middle management levels, was a central element of Direct Support funded improvement projects in two of the case studies. In one authority, this was in response to a recognition that recruitment and retention difficulties meant that the council needed to follow the path of 'growing its own' senior managers. This work included the development of competency frameworks, skills assessments and development activity mapped onto these competencies.

#### *5.2.3.7 Team Awards*

In one authority, team awards were introduced as a result of two considerations. The first was the low level of staff morale, which had been further damaged by successive negative Corporate Governance Inspection and CPA reports. Staff felt demoralised and that examples of genuine good performance were often not recognised by blanket external judgments. Further, it was felt that negative inspections had led to the council having a poor external reputation. The introduction of team awards with a high profile awards ceremony was intended to recognise good practice, motivate staff to celebrate their achievements and promote a positive external image.

#### *5.2.3.8 Dedicated Improvement Support*

Three of the case studies had appointed some form of dedicated support for improvement activities across a range of areas. In two cases this involved commissioning external consultants to support a range of activities and in the third, Direct Support was used to finance the recruitment and initial salary and on-costs of appointing a dedicated Improvement Officer. In one case study a 'change agent' had been commissioned for a period of six months to support a range of improvement activities, described as 'whole council change'.

In the second, a firm of consultants had been appointed to conduct reviews of a variety of services including Special Education Needs, the customer contact centre, strategic planning and development control. In the third authority, a lack of dedicated resource to ensure that projects were



implemented across a range of areas had been identified as a barrier to improvement. They thus used Direct Support funding to secure the full-time Improvement Officer and to establish an Improvement Board, made up of senior managers and elected members.

Across the three organisations, it was notable that:

- Dedicated support, even of a time limited nature, was used to both gain specific expertise but also as a means of ensuring that improvement projects could be sustained without falling victim to other pressures on organisational resources.
- This support was, and is, being used to alter the way that the council operates with the hope that these changed practices are then sustainable.

#### *5.2.3.9 Procurement*

CPA had identified the lack of a procurement strategy in one authority as a major impediment to delivering measurable efficiency savings and service delivery in relation to housing maintenance, cleaning and waste management. The council used Direct Support to employ an external consultant to develop a procurement strategy and support staff through coaching and training to implement this.

In line with the findings of the wider evaluation, CPA was an important trigger and catalyst for improvement activities and for identifying and addressing weaknesses in capacity. Also in line with findings from the wider evaluation, the specific capacity gaps to be addressed were around leadership (including the competencies of elected members and senior managers), business systems (such as project and performance management), the capacity of middle managers to use these and organisational culture.

#### *5.2.3.10 Other Capacity Building Activities*

All the case study authorities were implementing Improvement Plans. As such, a wide range of pre-existing and simultaneous activity was underway in each authority. This covered similar themes to that which was funded by Direct Support. What was noticeable about Direct Support, in contrast to evidence from the National Programmes case studies, was the extent to which Direct Support activities were an integral part of wider improvement activities. For instance, one case study had an Improvement Plan with six main work themes and Direct Support was funding some of the activities under each. This meant that the authority's own funding would often be utilised to augment Direct Support and vice-a-versa. This meant that there was a deep level of commitment to those activities that were funded with Direct Support. It also meant that there were plans for many of the activities funded by Direct Support to be sustained after the funding had been exhausted.

One concern that might arise from this relates to the extent of additionality that Direct Support provided. However, in all case studies, respondents reported that Direct Support had been fundamental to enabling the improvement activity to take place quickly. Some respondents reported that Direct Support allowed a much greater scale of activity to take place. The combination of speed and reach meant that a 'critical' mass of training and development could be achieved and that systems could be introduced simultaneous to complementary training and awareness raising.

## 5.3 Direct Support: Impacts

The impacts of Direct Support funded activities were explored through a consideration of the contribution of the activities developed. This was explored on three distinct analytical levels: the individual, teams and departments; and the organisation as a whole.

### 5.3.1 General Impact of Direct Support

Direct Support was thought to enable positive impacts for a variety of reasons:

- The bidding process for Direct Support helped to concentrate improvement activities on organisational development initiatives.
- The capacity to tailor interventions to meet specific local needs.
- The scale of resources available allowed a level of activity to be developed which could have a significant impact on the organisation.
- Training and development activities could reach a 'critical mass' of officers and members, helping to facilitate organisational change.
- The context in which Direct Support was delivered meant that the need for improvement had been accepted and the organisation had already decided to commit significant resources on improvement activities. Direct Support helped to deliver this programme of improvement activity. This also meant that Direct Support was integrated with the broader development of the organisation in a coordinated manner.
- The context also meant that improvement activity had significant senior management support.
- Because Direct Support bids had to be approved externally, the activities that flowed from them had a level of additional credibility and legitimacy as a result.
- Direct Support helped to fund activities that opened the authorities up to external and alternative ideas and ways of doing things.

### 5.3.2 Cultural Change

The concept of organisational culture is rather ambiguous and difficult to clearly identify. As such, documenting the impact of capacity building activity

is difficult. However, it was clear that in the round, capacity building activity was changing the organisational culture of the case study authorities. What was less clear was the *extent* to which this was achieved as a direct result of those activities funded by Direct Support.

For example, in one case study, Direct Support was funding activities under the banner of 'whole council change'. There was evidence that the prevailing attitude among staff was less fixed, more open to new ways of thinking and more aware of alternatives being adopted elsewhere. In another case study, there had been a clear attempt to inculcate a culture of 'organisational learning', through the use of a range of training and development activities designed to facilitate shared learning, increased communication and a commitment to continual staff training, development and progression. In another case study, respondents also reported elements of culture change. For instance, participants reported that those that had participated in the middle managers development programme had a noticeable 'passion for change'.

### 5.3.3 Project Management

Capacity building in relation to project management had taken place in two case study authorities. In one case study the impact of activity was thought to be extensive. Individuals had learned new skills and were using these in the workplace. However, there was a recognition that there was a danger that staff may leave the organisation diluting the benefits of this individual development for the organisation. In the other case study, initial work on project management had been generally less successful. Because of the smaller scale of the activities undertaken, the impact had been more about awareness raising and subsequent activity had been commissioned to ensure that specific skills were developed and procedures established. Here the contribution of the Direct Support funded activity was to trigger the more in-depth and systematic work.

The factors that were identified as facilitating organisational change were:

- Making training and development courses a **manageable size and duration** to enable widespread take-up.
- Stopping short of full blown Prince2 methodology in the majority of cases. Respondents thought that this would have been too intensive for most projects and would have operated as a disincentive for take-up of the training and utilisation of procedures. **Differentiation of methodologies for smaller and larger more strategic projects** was thought to be useful, with only those managing the latter needing more in-depth Prince2 level training.

- **Achieving critical mass** was also a factor. Only by familiarising a large group of staff with project management approaches, could procedures be fully adopted. This was true even where staff (and elected members) were not themselves managing projects.
- Because of the different needs of different staff groups there was a need to **differentiate training provision for different staff groups**, with sponsors and elected members needing awareness training and middle managers and project leads needing more in-depth training in specific skills and techniques.
- The ability to tailor the approach to fit with the specific needs of the authority was thought to be beneficial. The type of tailoring needed, included to fit with the authority's particular project management procedures, to suit the scale and resources of the organisation (for example, some smaller district councils may be less likely to need widespread Prince2 level provision, whereas some larger authorities are more likely to need a wider group of staff with this level of competency). Other ways in which tailoring is important related to timing and to course duration.

#### 5.3.4 Visioning and Priorities

The impact of visioning and priorities work in both of the in-depth case studies that had used Direct Support for this type of activity was clear. In both organisations, the output – the statement of priorities for the organisation – was being clearly being used to guide the direction of the organisation. In one authority, this statement helped to identify further capacity building needs that became the subject of further bids for Direct Support. In the other, demonstrable progress was being made in the alignment of the corporate plan and service delivery plans with these priorities. While the need for further progress was openly acknowledged, there was evidence that organisational resources were beginning to be aligned with its priorities.

Work on developing sustainable and effective organisational priorities was successful where:

- Substantial agreement on the part of political leadership could be obtained. This included cross-party agreement and where this was the case, staff could be more certain that the investment of time, energy and resources in pursuit of agreed priorities would be worthwhile over the longer-term because of a reduced fear of uncertainty.
- Resources and service plans were aligned with organisational priorities, making them 'real', rather than 'espoused'.
- Where these priorities were well understood by all staff and where the linkages between these and 'the everyday job' were clear.

#### 5.4.5 Development of Political Systems and Structures

In both authorities where work on member development was particularly focused on ensuring that modernised political structures were working more effectively, the impact of Direct Support funded work was to markedly improve their operation.

In one authority, work on strengthening Overview and Scrutiny functions was successful in transforming its focus. Whereas the previous situation had been random and ad-hoc scrutiny activities with a heavy emphasis on looking outside the organisation, the situation now is markedly different.

In the case study authority where member development activity was targeted partly at strengthening the role of scrutiny, mixed messages emerged as to the impacts. On the one hand, committee chairs who had attended Overview and Scrutiny training with the IDeA reported that they thought that there had been little impact on them and that they had little enthusiasm for applying any skills learned in their role as chairs of scrutiny, whereas on the other hand, a recent inspection had given positive feedback on the role of scrutiny in the authority.

The development of political structures was effective where:

- Elected members could see the benefits of change and were able to commit to these. Acceptance of the need for reform was a first step in this direction.
- The benefits of new ways of working could be demonstrated, either through learning from other councils or from 'learning by doing'.
- Where development activity could be made sustainable, through integrating it into the mainstream and planned activity of the organisation in the future.

#### 5.3.6 Development of Elected Members

Generally IDeA programmes for elected members were thought to have had a positive impact. Those individuals that had attended the Leadership Academy were generally very positive about their experience and reported significant individual level impacts such as increased motivation and the development of new leadership skills that they had been able to use in their role as councillors, and specifically as executive members. Participants also welcomed the chance to build networks and to gain from the experiences of other networks. In one authority, participation on the Leadership Academy was thought to have helped to develop strategic priorities and to begin the process of embedding these in the structure of the organisation. However, organisational impact was thought to be impeded in another authority where only one or two members attended the Leadership Academy. Respondents felt that if a larger number of executive or other members had

been able to attend, organisational impact would have been much more significant.

The development of competency frameworks for elected members was thought to have generally raised the profile of member training and development. As a result of member development activity, most case studies reported that individual elected members were more competent.

Overall, the mixture of councillor development activity had led to organisational benefits. There was a general sense of increased cross party working, with the authority benefiting from increased stability in political leadership as a result, meaning that long-term planning, investment and strategising was more possible. Where newly elected members received training this was generally reported to have helped to smooth the transitional period.

Councillor training and development was successful where:

- Councillors were able to understand the need for individual development and valued this enough to invest in it. Cross party agreement on the desirability of councillor development helped to ensure successful and sustainable investment.
- Initial activities could be mainstreamed, for instance into sustainable induction systems, skills audits and competency frameworks. This helps to ensure that the benefits of investment are retained in the organisation, even where there are large scale changes in the make up of the council.
- Councillors appreciated the opportunity to learn from elsewhere, build networks and open their perspectives to new and alternative ways of doing things.
- A balance between cross-party and single party training helped both to build increased political stability and to offer opportunities to be more open about potential weaknesses.
- Sufficient numbers of elected members undertook development activity to make it effective and overcome barriers to organisational change.

### 5.3.7 Management Development

The types of management development activity underway varied between the two authorities where Direct Support was being used for this purpose. In one authority management development formed a large part of their Improvement activities overall. In this authority a management development competency framework had been established and this was clearly well embedded in the authority.

The competency framework also formed the basis for training and development activity, including the use of management development

centres. Participants on these centres were universally positive about their experience and they noted demonstrable positive impacts on them as individuals as well as the ways in which they had been able to change their workplace behaviour, influencing not just other staff but the ways in which their teams and the whole organisation operates. Beneficial individual impacts included increased confidence and workplace effectiveness. Crucially, the management development centres had encouraged participants to share the benefits of their learning.

This case study authority had also used both individual and team coaching. Again, both were thought to be helpful and individuals reported positive impacts such as increased confidence and ability to engage with others more effectively. In another authority, 150 middle managers had undertaken a development programme. This had allowed them to develop a wider understanding of the context for the service area in which they worked. They also reported that they had increased motivation as a result and that this had spilled over into increased innovation among this staff group.

### **5.3.8 Team Awards**

Only one authority had implemented this type of initiative. In this authority evidence of the impact of the scheme was not fully conclusive, but did suggest that at least some of its objectives were being met.

The key features of this scheme appeared to be:

- The esteem which the authority places on the awards, with the commitment of the Chief Executive, Leader and cabinet being key.
- The level of investment in the event needed to be sufficient to ensure that the awards and the presentation evening were seen as serious and credible. However, the authority was also conscious of possible external criticism of this investment and was seeking external sponsorship as a means of offsetting such criticism.
- The participation of external bodies as partners in teams entering projects for the awards as well as on judging panels helped to fulfil the objective of presenting the council positively to an external audience.
- The opportunity to capture successful ways of working and to share these more widely was also key to the success of the scheme, though take-up of these opportunities also had to be secured.

### **5.3.9 Dedicated Improvement Support**

Case study authorities had taken very different approaches to the organisation of dedicated improvement support. However, similar benefits were thought to have arisen from it. Dedicated support for improvement was thought to be helpful in driving improvement activities and maintaining momentum. In all cases, the individual or firm involved were able to bring



new skills and enthusiasm and they were able to support the development of others and enable them to develop improved systems and working methods. In two of the case studies, dedicated resources for improvement officers had been subsumed into mainstream budgets and in a third, the initial role of external consultants had been expanded to other services. In one case, substantial savings were claimed as a result of the work enabled through Direct Support.

#### 5.3.10 Procurement

Work to develop a procurement strategy in one authority had been able to progress much faster than if Direct Support had not been available. The demonstrable impact was the establishment of a procurement strategy and implementation of staff training in support of it.

## 5.4 Evidence from 'Lighter Touch' Case Studies

Qualitative data generated as part of the lighter touch case studies supports earlier emerging findings which suggested that Direct Support activities were an integral part of improvement activities, and therefore fundamental to enabling improvement to take place. Though (as already suggested in the emerging findings documents) the concept of organisation culture is difficult to clearly identify, evidence from the lighter touch case studies provides further evidence of a 'cultural' shift taking place within authorities. The use of skills and knowledge from Direct Support to shape future activities has thus created the opportunity to 'move' the culture of authorities and embed organisational change. The benefits of national capacity building programmes, such as the 4Ps were integral to this.

Arguably, Direct Support has been a facilitator for activities and development within authorities giving them the 'capacity' to tailor interventions to meet specific local needs.

## 5.5 Summary Findings

Evidence from both the in-depth qualitative and lighter touch case studies suggests that Direct Support had clearly been influential as a means of delivering improvement activity. The work funded through Direct Support had helped to improve capacity at individual, team/department and organisational levels. There were widespread reports from respondents in these case studies – both direct beneficiaries and individuals with an overview of the authority – that the 'culture' of the organisation was changing, becoming more focused on improvement, more committed to ongoing development of staff and systems and more open to looking at a



range of options. In supporting councillor development, in particular, Direct Support had facilitated training and development which promoted acceptance of and commitment to the modernisation agenda and increased political stability in terms of investment in organisational and staff development.

Direct Support was so successful in facilitating organisational change and improvement because of the context within which it was delivered, the scale of activity that it enabled and the degree to which it could be integrated with the authorities' specific improvement needs. In particular, Direct Support was used to support plans designed by the organisation itself. As a result, the activities funded by Direct Support received the full commitment of the organisation. There was thus a general commitment from senior management level down to ensure that these activities succeeded (for instance in terms of take-up) and that the organisation took full advantage of them, including by being able to make changes as a result of them. Direct Support activities also focused simultaneously on improving systems and on improving the ability of staff to work within them. There was also evidence of conscious attempts to facilitate the translation of individual to organisational development and vice-a-versa. It thus facilitated capacity building at both an individual and organisational level concurrently. The scale of intervention meant that a critical mass of development activity could take place. For instance, management training was able to reach a sufficient number of managers at any particular level to promote group as opposed to individual change.

Work taken forward through Direct Support was broadly similar in content to that developed in the National Programmes and Improvement Partnerships. However, Direct Support work was more rapid and focused than that enabled through Improvement Partnerships and was of a significantly more extensive scale than that enabled via the National Programmes alone. That said, Direct Support had served as a means of accessing National Programmes on a wider scale than would otherwise have been the case. The expanded scale of take-up enabled through Direct Support allowed these programmes to have a much more significant impact than if just one or two individuals had been able to access them.

# 6. Improvement Partnerships Summary

## 6.1 Governance Arrangements

No common set of governance structures have been put in place across the Improvement Partnerships. It has been common practice to draw on existing strategic structures in setting up the Improvement Partnerships and to establish governance arrangements which best 'fit' within these. In most cases, some form of Board has been established to make strategic decisions, with members largely formed of Chief Executives and other senior officers from partner authorities and regional bodies. Most partnerships have dedicated staff support (seconded in some cases from partner organisations), and most have established Steering/Sub Groups to oversee implementation of specific elements of their work. Potential for joint governance arrangements with other improvement initiatives has been explored in some case study areas, and formal arrangements put in place to join governance structures in some of these. While partnerships acknowledge that there has been only limited input by elected members into the formal structures thus far, most have established mechanisms to secure greater member involvement in the future. For example, Improvement Partnership for North East Local Government has recently established a Member Review Group to enable elected members to engage at a detailed level with the Improvement Partnership, and to undertake regular reviews of outputs and outcomes.

## 6.2 Partnership Processes

There was evidence in all case study areas that the improvement agenda is high in the priorities of local authorities and other participating organisations, which allowed partnerships to focus on the improvement needs of the sector. In most cases, the CPA process was identified as the key driver, while the previous experience of joint working (including pilot CBP funding initiatives) was felt to have enabled partnerships to identify regional priorities quickly and accurately. Having said this, partnerships identified the long lead-in time to establishing IP structures (exacerbated by the lack of clear guidance) as an early obstacle to progress.

Partnerships identified a range of challenges to the IP approach, including: large distances between partners; poor transport and communications links; conflicting political control in different partner organisations; tensions

between County and District tiers; vastly different starting points (e.g. different CPA ratings) among partners; and the difficulty in releasing sufficient (and sufficiently senior) staff time.

### 6.3 Themes in Improvement and Capacity Building Support

The following list summarises the common themes (and examples of practical approaches) adopted by partnerships in their strategies/action plans, with the majority having used CBP funding to design or adopt training programmes to support improvement in all these areas:

- Training and development of elected members (e.g. competency frameworks, training programmes, mentoring arrangements, and training in community leadership, strategic management skills and scrutiny);
- Training and development of senior staff and middle managers (including mentoring, leadership assessment and officer development schemes);
- Partnership Development (including support/training in all aspects of joint working, agreeing shared priorities, network support, and embracing partnership as a means of delivering elements of the programmes);
- Organisational development diagnostic activities (e.g. performance management research consultancies, financial audits, service reviews, and use of findings to inform joint commissioning of CBP projects);
- Developing communication and consultation capacities (promoting improvement message – via websites, newsletters, etc. – to partner organisations’ staff and enhancing the capacity of the sector to promote positive messages to the public);
- Performance management (e.g. enhancing regional PM data collection and analysis, PM systems installation/training, PM skills portal, regional PM conference, and staff support);
- Research and knowledge transfer (including regional hubs/centres of excellence, learning exchanges, portals, and learning events);
- Recruitment and retention (including work to upskill staff in a number of ‘key’ professions, and to make the sector a more attractive proposition); and
- Improving individual authorities’ performance (including tailored support, and pools of funds for local bidding to support improvements in performance of poorest rated authorities).

## 6.4 Delivery mechanisms

Improvement Partnerships have adopted a range of different approaches to promoting and supporting improvement within the sector, giving greater emphasis to those perceived by the partnership as best suited to their needs:

- Use of CBP **National Programmes**: although they have identified concern about the expense and lack of flexibility of some of the national programmes, there are examples (e.g. IDeA Advanced Leadership Programme) where partnerships have bought blocks of places on them for staff from across the region.
- **Regional Variations of National Programmes**: partnerships have also devised their own programmes based on – among others – the IDeA Peer Review model, the 4Ps Gateway Reviews and the Employers Organisation Diversity in Districts Programme, and have negotiated with national providers about local delivery of the National Performance Management and National Graduate Development Programmes.
- **External Consultancy**: partnerships have used CBP funds to engage external consultants, including IDeA, Audit Commission, OPM and independent consultants to facilitate work, particularly on strategic planning and visioning. In some areas, partnerships manage ‘pools’ to enable authorities to access organisational development support, training and consultancy from approved external providers.
- Development of **new tools and programmes**: partnerships have devised innovative approaches to addressing locally-identified needs, including peer mentoring/critical support/coaching, regional centres/hubs/resource libraries, diagnostic tools, competency frameworks, and middle manager/member development programmes.
- **Joint project development**: various initiatives such as a regional consultation project, shared learning events, a web-based training needs assessment product, and the ‘communities of interest’ and ‘challenge and inspire’ workstreams.
- Establishing a **shared infrastructure**: most partnerships have made provision to set up a locus of expertise and good practice, to provide all participating organisations with access to up-to-date and relevant support (examples include the North West’s Centre for Local Governance, London’s Centre for Research and Development, and Devon’s Learning and Improvement Portal).

## 6.5 Challenging and supporting poor performers

Although committed to continuous improvement and challenging poor performance through collaborative working, partnerships' approaches to providing specific support for poor performers has been variable. While it has been a central area of work within some partnerships (e.g. North West Improvement Network, Improvement Partnership for North East Local Government, the partnership between Kent County Council and Swindon Borough Council and Capital Ambition), it has not been focused upon in others (e.g. Leicestershire and Rutland Partnership and Devon Improvement Programme), partly because lower performing authorities in the case study areas were accessing CBP Direct Support. Also, some poorer performers have experienced difficulty in bringing influence to bear on the Improvement Partnerships, partly due to their efforts being focussed on their own improvement needs and partly because of a perceived reluctance on the part of their partners to relinquish control over resources (felt especially by authorities in receipt of direct support).

Some partnerships have developed mechanisms to identify poorly performing authorities which could benefit from support, or which could potentially need support in the future, and have earmarked resources to support them. Provision has been delivered both as a remedial and preventative measure, and includes targeted support (specific service/delivery area) to individual authorities where there is evidence of poor performance, or a negative direction of travel assessment. Support packages have been designed in consultation with failing authorities to address their specific needs, and include financial support, mentoring, peer review, and training, management and leadership development programmes. Other activities include events, workshops and seminars to encourage elected members and officers to focus on new approaches to deliver improvements in front-line services. Some partnerships have also made funding available for failing authorities to commission work to address their own unique improvement needs. For example, both the North West Improvement Network and Capital Ambition aim to ensure that by 2008 there are no poorly performing authorities in their regions: both have mechanisms to identify poorly performing authorities which could benefit from support, and have earmarked resources to supporting under-performing authorities. Similarly, the Improvement Partnership for North East Local Government Action Plan includes an 'Essential Development Support' workstream, which allows local authorities with poor performing services to apply for funding to address specific improvement needs.

The partnership between Kent County Council and Swindon Borough Council is unique among the case studies, in that it has been established specifically to pilot an approach to securing improved performance in a failing authority, using dedicated support from a high performing partner. Support for Swindon Borough Council in addressing poor performance is available via an active mentoring and coaching framework, using a variety of management techniques to encourage staff to challenge existing procedures or workplace behaviours.

This work has highlighted a number of issues for partnerships, including: the need to recognise that low performing authorities have areas of excellence in their practice which they can share with others; the fact that they often lack the spare capacity to engage fully with Improvement Partnerships; the need to provide often basic support to poor performers; the need to accommodate professional sensitivities when challenging poor performance; and the need to strike an appropriate balance in challenging poor performance and offering support in a manner that does not jeopardise working relationships, or hinder partnership working.

## 6.6 Impact

It has proved difficult for Improvement Partnerships to identify impacts (especially where they relate to vague or abstract concepts such as 'leadership' or 'partnership') or to attribute the achievement of these to their work, as causal linkages are complex and there are many potential alternative causal variables. While this is a disappointing finding, it reflects both the complexity of the process being undertaken by the partnerships, and the challenging timeframe within which they have had to operate. Partnerships have identified timescales as the most problematic aspect in measuring impact, with the achievement of impacts being identified as long-term and difficult to measure within the timeframe of this evaluation.

The main impact in the different case studies has been the increased incidence of and capacity to undertake partnership working between partners, and specifically at different levels of the organisational structures of partner authorities. This success has led to the establishment of several joint service-focused initiatives, taking the impact of the Improvement Partnership process beyond its initial focus, although these partnership impacts have been more pronounced than impacts in relation to specific examples of performance improvement in individual local authorities. For the most part this was so because of the early stage of development and delivery of most of the case study partnerships, although several partnerships have made some progress toward achieving some early impacts (such as gains in knowledge sharing, and the establishment of professional networks). Given

evidence from the National Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships this level of impact might be expected at this stage in the partnerships' development.

It has proved easier to identify the impact where partnerships have very specific objectives, as in the case of the partnership between Kent County Council and Swindon Borough Council, which aimed to improve the performance of Social Services in Swindon (as evidenced by an improvement in their Commission for Social Care Inspection rating). However, as most partnerships are still in an early stage of development, they have made insufficient progress to be able to measure their achievement of their own objectives.

Partnerships placed greater emphasis on their own objectives than the national CBP objectives, though there were elements of commonality between them. Some evidence was available of the impact at the different levels of the evaluation framework, including the following:

- At **sector level**, the main impact of the Improvement Partnerships has been in the establishment of an infrastructure to support partnership working, and an increase in partner organisations' capacity to engage in this. Additionally, the IP approach has facilitated the piloting of innovative approaches within the sector, including towards self-regulation and mutual support.
- At **authority level**, interventions and initiatives have improved authorities' capacity in a number of key areas, including: recruitment and retention capacity, strengthened internal systems and processes (and improved the quality of service delivery), increased leadership capacity, improved performance management processes, and project and programme management capacity.
- At an **individual level**, where case study partnerships have commissioned training or development activities, these have enhanced the capacity of individuals (from service areas as diverse as waste, social care, education, housing, environment and fire & rescue) in a range of areas including: leadership, performance management and communications. Additionally, respondents from most case study Partnerships identified the benefits of having established new contacts and developed networks with colleagues from across the region, both of which have enhanced their own performance.

## 6.7 Achievement of Cost Benefits

Although they have yet to achieve many **cost benefits**, partnerships have identified several areas where these may be achieved, including:

- **Organisational efficiencies:** most evident where direct intervention has been facilitated, but partners anticipate these to be rolled out;
- **Joint procurement:** already, partnerships have done some joint commissioning of work and services, and more is anticipated, both around the capacity building agenda and in service delivery;
- **Increased buying power** has enabled partnerships to purchase services that few of the partners would have been able to access without acting together; this has also generated reduced costs through **economies of scale**;
- Development of **shared projects:** it is anticipated that authorities will increase the number and range of functions they develop collaboratively, with work already having been started by partners in Devon and in the Leicestershire and Rutland partnership to develop shared services and back-office functions;
- Some of the case study partnerships have already rationalised **regional level infrastructure** (e.g. merging Regional Centres of Excellence, Improvement Partnerships and e-government initiatives), helping to avoid duplication.

## 6.8 Drivers/Barriers to Progress

The establishment of infrastructure to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and information (e.g. the establishment of a Learning Portal and a Knowledge Hub, and the promotion of Peer Support) has been identified as a useful catalyst for capacity building. Partnerships have tended to rely on expertise from within the sector rather than developing dependency on external consultants, and have sought to ensure that experience is drawn from and targeted at an appropriate level.

While the use/modification of National Programmes in a regional context has produced some significant advantages, particularly in broadening out partnership activities within the authorities by facilitating wider personal networks and relationships, some partners expressed concern that this approach does not always meet their specific requirements. Work with individual authorities appears to have been better suited to the initial phase of Improvement Partnerships, where there was a need to sustain partner commitment through establishing quick wins, and in supporting poor performers who often lack the capacity to engage in the 'lobbying' that shapes joint or shared improvement projects. Subsidising places for partners



on National Programmes or other national training and development courses is not felt to have generated the benefits arising from either developing joint capacity or more specific improvement work in individual authorities.

Securing the appropriate degree of commitment (at all levels of partner organisations) has been identified as an essential element of establishing a successful Improvement Partnership. In most of the case study partnerships, partners got more out of the partnership where they were fully committed to it, for example by shaping the partnership's focus and ensuring that the content of action plans fully reflected their needs and demands. Most partnerships used the inception phase to build commitment and ownership, principally through the collection of data about the needs of the different partner authorities, both at regional and sub-regional level. Commitment has been nurtured in different ways, including the establishment or use of existing officer networks, which has facilitated greater 'reach' into the partner organisations (although there has been some time delay in achieving this, given that partnerships have understandably focused on establishing their core structures first).

In several cases, the central government policy context was identified as a key driver of partner commitment to the partnership. The change toward the new CPA and subsequently the shift towards more sector-based responsibility for performance as well as the wider role for partnerships envisaged in the October White Paper are thought to have given added emphasis to authorities' commitment to the partnerships.

Securing commitment from lower performing authorities has presented partnerships with a particular challenge, essentially because these authorities are often very inward-focused, with resources concentrated on immediate internal improvement projects. Thus, devoting resources to external partnerships can be difficult for such authorities, meaning that they are unable to influence the nature and design of action plans, and may be excluded from the benefits to be derived.

## 6.9 Future role of Improvement Partnerships

It has been possible to identify significant aspects of added value attributable to the Improvement Partnership approach which have the potential to continue, including:

- facilitation of a strategic focus at regional level;
- establishment of the infrastructure to facilitate partnership working and joint project development at regional and sub-regional levels;

- creation of opportunities for shared learning between local authorities, and channelling of learning and experience from elsewhere to inform their work;
- generation of cost efficiencies achieved through rationalisation, economies of scale, joint procurement and shared service delivery;
- sustaining coordinated improvement activities over a sufficiently long period of time, when compared to time limited specific funding streams; and
- facilitation of successful peer support, through commitment to shared development and the use of financial incentives.

The establishment of Improvement Partnerships has proved to be time and resource consuming, and respondents from a wide range of participating authorities (including councils, fire and rescue services, national parks and support agencies) have expressed a desire to see them continue, and to build on their successes. The following were identified as a means of ensuring their continued success, especially in promoting the engagement of local authorities:

- The commitment and participation of elected members and chief officers in the management and governance of the partnership.
- Developing functional links between partner organisations at other levels of the organisational hierarchy, such as through subject specific teams (e.g. consultation officers, performance officers, procurement officers, member services officers, HR officers).
- The input of representatives of key support agencies (e.g. IDeA, Audit Commission) to maximise the relevance of the capacity building and improvement activities undertaken, and to broker access to further national and regional resources.
- The continued devolution of responsibility for resources to regional level, as this has helped to sustain local authority commitment and engagement by offering them the opportunity to shape the development of support activities. By implementing secondary devolution of resources to sub groups, partnerships can ensure further relevance of the support developed.

One of the major impacts of Improvement Partnerships is that they facilitate the development of organisational and individual connections between authorities, not just at leadership level but also in relation to specific functional or service areas. These linkages have been seen to have direct benefits around the projects funded or managed through the Improvement Partnership, as well as wider, indirect, benefits which accrue from the experience of joint working, and help to promote a stronger culture and experience of joint working between local authorities.

Improvement Partnerships have also been shown to facilitate collaborative working in relation to the setting and achievement of common objectives, which could help inform future work on Local Area and Multi-Area Agreements. While most Improvement Partnerships have not yet made these linkages explicit, most recognise the potential benefits of building capacity in support of achieving such outcome-based targets, although it is important to ensure that all relevant parties are included, which may involve extending improvement and capacity building activities to non-local authority partners working, for instance, through Local Strategic Partnerships.

The recent White Paper (Communities and Local Government, 2006) offers added impetus to local authorities' community leadership role, influencing and scrutinising the actions of a wider range of local public, private and voluntary sector actors to pursue a combination of local and national priorities. There is some evidence that Improvement Partnerships might facilitate the development of capacity to fulfil this role, especially as several of the case study partnerships have already undertaken work to support the partnership management capacity of local authorities and other public sector agencies.

The findings of the research has implications for developing the Improvement Partnership approach, and suggests that there is potential for the role of Improvement Partnerships to be expanded in several ways:

- In relation to **building capacity for specific purposes**, for instance expressed through local priorities and outcome targets.
- In relation to a **wider range of partners** engaged in the delivery of local outcome based targets. These might include, for instance, partners in Local Strategic Partnerships.
- In relation to **monitoring and challenging poor performance** and supporting improvement through self-regulation and peer support.
- Through using Improvement Partnerships as a more effective and rationalised **channel of communication between local authorities and their partners and central government departments** regarding capacity building and improvement support.

**However, while there is evidence to suggest that these are possibilities for the future, it is also the case that many of the Improvement Partnerships, though progressing, do not yet have the capacity to immediately take on all of these functions.** Some of the case study partnerships are only just beginning to deliver their initial strategies, and many have only a small central administrative and management team, limiting their potential to challenge chief executives or leaders of the partner authorities about their commitment or performance.

The importance of high level engagement in challenging poor performance in particular is clear. If Improvement Partnerships are to be able to challenge poor performers they will need a leadership with sufficient seniority to fulfil the role. Among the case study partnerships only one (Capital Ambition) is felt to have a structure and a secretariat which is close to being able to fulfil this role, and there is concern in other areas about the impact that challenging poor performance might have on working relationships between authorities.

Similarly, moving toward building the capacity of the wider public service and governance system through Improvement Partnerships will mean that they will need to augment their skills and expertise, as well as resources, to cope with the wider responsibilities and subject areas that this would entail. Again, it is not clear that the Improvement Partnerships yet have the capacity to achieve this.

Finally, the potential for utilising Improvement Partnerships as a single channel of communication from central government to local government may also be difficult to achieve. Using Improvement Partnerships to stop central government policy agendas from becoming fractured would, for example, necessarily change power dynamics within the sector in each region, and might potentially create an additional layer in communication between specific services and their central government department. Any devolution of additional responsibilities to Improvement Partnerships would need to be carefully managed, sequenced and resourced, and would need to be accompanied by a prior assessment of the capacity of each individual partnership to take on additional roles.

# 7. Summary Issues: What Works, Why and In what Circumstances

## 7.1 Overlaps between the different elements of the CBP

There is a large amount of overlap between different mechanisms of the CBP. The National Programmes address areas of improvement activity that have also been highlighted in Improvement Partnerships and which have been the subject of improvement activity funded through Direct Support. An indication of the types of overlap and commonality between the types of improvement activity being supported by the different mechanisms of the CBP is presented in **Table 9**.

In addition, there is also some overlap in the suppliers of capacity building to local authorities through the different mechanisms. For instance, National Programme Providers (especially the IDeA) have been involved in supporting activities in Improvement Partnerships and in authorities receiving Direct Support. Other Programmes are also attempting to engage with Improvement Partnerships.

**Table 9:** Overlap and Commonality between the different mechanisms

	<b>Improvement Partnerships</b>	<b>National Programmes</b>	<b>Direct Support</b>
<b>Training and development of elected members</b>	Association of London Government Partnership, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devon Improvement Programme,</li> <li>• West Midlands Improvement Partnership,</li> <li>• Leicestershire and Rutland Improvement Partnership,</li> <li>• Improvement Partnership for North East Local Government,</li> <li>• North West Improvement Network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer clearing house</li> <li>• Leadership academy</li> <li>• Procurement training: M&amp;SM</li> </ul>	More than half of authorities receiving Direct Support undertook training and development of elected members.
<b>Training and development of senior staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leicestershire and Rutland Improvement Partnership,</li> <li>• Kent/Swindon</li> <li>• Association of London Government Partnership</li> <li>• Improvement Partnership for North East Local Government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer clearing house</li> <li>• Advanced Leadership Programme</li> <li>• Performance Improvement</li> <li>• Procurement training</li> <li>• Gateway Reviews</li> </ul>	More than 40% of authorities receiving Direct Support undertook training and development of officers. Much of this is aimed at senior managers.

**Table 9: Overlap and Commonality between the different mechanisms**

<b>Training and Development of Middle Managers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement Partnership for North East Local Government</li> <li>• Leicestershire and Rutland Improvement Partnership,</li> <li>• Kent/Swindon</li> <li>• Devon Improvement Programme</li> <li>• Association of London Government Partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accelerated Development Programme</li> <li>• Future Leadership Programme</li> <li>• Procurement Skills training</li> <li>• Gateway reviews</li> </ul>	More than 40% of authorities receiving Direct Support undertook training and development of officers. Much of this is aimed at middle managers.
<b>Development and improvement of internal management systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement Partnership for North East Local Government</li> <li>• Leicestershire and Rutland Improvement Partnership,</li> <li>• Kent/Swindon</li> <li>• Devon Improvement Programme</li> <li>• Association of London Government Partnership</li> <li>• North West Improvement Network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills Pathways</li> <li>• Workforce Development</li> <li>• Diversity in Districts</li> <li>• HR People Management</li> <li>• Procurement Skills training</li> <li>• Gateway reviews</li> <li>• Improving Corporate Performance</li> <li>• Performance Improvement</li> <li>• Organisational Development</li> </ul>	11% of authorities receiving Direct Support used the resources to support CPA preparation and improvement, 30% undertook other organisational development, 26% are supporting performance management activities, 12% supported financial management processes; 12% focused on project management, 15% focused on HR/People management systems.
<b>Communication and consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement Partnership for North East Local Government</li> <li>• Leicestershire and Rutland Improvement Partnership,</li> <li>• Devon Improvement Programme</li> </ul>		8% of authorities focused on communications.

## 7.2 Comparative advantages and disadvantages of the different mechanisms

The findings from this evaluation suggest that the different mechanisms for delivering central government support for local authority capacity building each have a variety of advantages and disadvantages as **Table 10** demonstrates.

### 7.2.1 National Programmes

Evidence from respondents suggests that the National Programmes were all well delivered and individual participants were generally positive about their experiences and the quality of the providers. However, as a mechanism for delivering support they are more suited to some aspects of improvement activity than others. Those that have achieved the widest take-up and been most effective include the Leadership Programmes for officers and members run by the IDeA, the Future Leadership Programme, the National Graduate Development Programme and the Gateway Review Programme. The Leadership Programmes were suited to national delivery because they were targeted at participants working in a national labour market, interested in building networks and connections outside the organisation. Both the Leadership Programmes for members and officers had as a major aspect of their 'offer' training and communication of national policy agendas and how to implement them, again making them suitable for national delivery.

Similarly, the Future Leadership Programme was aimed at aspiring future senior managers. Many of the respondents involved in the research who had participated welcomed the opportunity to be perceived in this regard and were interested in learning from experiences outside the authority and again building connections and networks that might be useful in the future.

The National Graduate Development Programme was a national programme but involved the majority of participants' time being spent in a specific local authority. However, it provided a national shared infrastructure to support graduate programmes that many authorities might not otherwise be able to sustain. The national element of the training was also seen as important by authorities and participants alike where the graduates might not be able to access that level of training and expertise or the supporting network of relationships with similar peers within the authority. In larger authorities where this expertise and these networks were available within the organisation, the NGDP was seen to be less advantageous. However, since most authorities are not of that size, the national scope of the NGDP brings valuable benefits to the sector.



The Gateway Review Programme provides authorities with expertise sourced nationally in support of often high risk and strategically important projects. The national scale of the programme has been important and the providers report concerns that regionalisation might hamper their ability to source appropriate expertise by narrowing down the pool from which reviewers can be drawn. Again, therefore, there have been specific benefits associated with the programme that are either not available from other sources at a competitive price or simply not available from other providers at all. Moreover, as the programme is attached to substantial projects within the authority there is little scope for conflict between national and local priorities.

However, where these specific advantages of national provision are not evident, there is some reluctance in the sector to take-up national programmes, especially as many are perceived, whether rightly or wrongly, as being expensive in comparison to local or regional suppliers known to the authorities. There is also some reticence from some authorities to engage with providers that are seen as closely associated with a central government agenda. Moreover, even where there has been take-up, the nature of the national programmes has meant the scale of organizational change that has resulted from it has been relatively small scale.

Finally, there is some scope to conclude that the national programmes may have been targeted at the wrong group of authorities. For understandable reasons, the subsidy arrangements applied to the national programmes were largely targeted at poor performers. However, the evaluation results suggest that effective use of the national programmes was best made where the authority had the existing capacity to understand its own strategic direction and where the decision to participate was aligned with this. Poorer performers were often less able to take such a strategic view or to take advantage of lessons from outside the authority.

### **7.2.2 Direct Support**

Evidence from the case studies suggested that Direct Support had been an important factor in facilitating recovery. Direct Support was successful in facilitating organisational change and improvement because of the context within which it was delivered, the scale of activity that it enabled and the degree to which it could be integrated with the authorities' specific improvement needs. In particular, Direct Support was used to support plans designed by the organisation itself. As a result, the activities funded by Direct Support received the full commitment of the organisation. There was thus a general commitment from senior management level down to ensure that these activities succeeded (for instance in terms of take-up) and that the organisation took full advantage of them, including by being able to make

changes as a result of them. Direct Support activities also focused simultaneously on improving systems and on improving the ability of staff to work within them. There was also evidence of conscious attempts to facilitate the translation of individual to organisational development and vice-a-versa. It thus facilitated capacity building at both an individual and organisational level concurrently. The scale of intervention meant that a critical mass of development activity could take place. For instance, management training was able to reach a sufficient number of managers at any particular level to promote group as opposed to individual change.

Work taken forward through Direct Support was broadly similar in content to that developed in the National Programmes and Improvement Partnerships. However, Direct Support work was more rapid and focused than that enabled through Improvement Partnerships and was of a significantly more extensive scale than that enabled via the National Programmes alone. That said, Direct Support had served as a means of accessing National Programmes on a wider scale than would otherwise have been the case. The expanded scale of take-up enabled through Direct Support allowed these programmes to have a much more significant impact than if just one or two individuals had been able to access them.

**Table 10:** Comparative Advantages of Different CBP Mechanisms

<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<b>National Programmes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong fit to nationally identified priorities.</li> <li>• Learning and sharing knowledge and expertise within the sector.</li> <li>• Facilitation of networks.</li> <li>• Good quality providers and provision.</li> <li>• Strong individual level benefits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often seen as overly centrally directed.</li> <li>• Not perceived by sector as responsive to local needs.</li> <li>• Perceived as expensive.</li> <li>• Sometimes difficult to get scale of take-up within an individual authority that will enable organizational change.</li> <li>• Sometimes difficult for Las to make connection to organizational agendas and priorities.</li> <li>• Reliant on participating authority to be intelligent 'customers'.</li> <li>• Subsidy and marketing arrangements confusing.</li> </ul>

**Table 10:** Comparative Advantages of Different CBP Mechanisms**Direct Support**

- Balance between national and locally defined priorities.
  - Good fit with local plans and strategies leading to strong organisational commitment.
  - Scale of resources involved.
  - Able to effect large numbers of staff and organisational systems simultaneously.
  - Context in which delivered opens possibilities for significant change to cultures, skills and systems.
- Involves large scale resources.
  - Doesn't automatically ensure outward focus or learning from elsewhere.
  - Suited to recovery but necessarily long-term continuous improvement.

**Table 10:** Comparative Advantages of Different CBP Mechanisms

<b>Improvement Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balance between national and regional/local priorities.</li> <li>• Encourages partnerships between local authorities</li> <li>• Can facilitate strategic focus at regional and sub-regional level and provide infrastructure for implementing plans.</li> <li>• Encourage shared learning between partners.</li> <li>• Encourage joint project development and collaboration.</li> <li>• Can help to sustain a focus on shared improvement objectives, through peer pressure, monitoring and support.</li> <li>• Can encourage cost efficiencies through shared delivery, economies of scale and shared back-office or corporate functions.</li> <li>• Potential to encourage partnerships with other public and private bodies in support of outcome delivery (e.g. LAAs).</li> <li>• Potential to act as a channel for communication between local authorities and central government more generally.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on regional or shared priorities can have 'lowest common denominator' effects.</li> <li>• Poorer performers can find it hard to influence the shape and scope of improvement projects.</li> <li>• Establishment and lead in time is substantial.</li> <li>• Resources can be diverted to establishment and infrastructure costs rather than delivery of improvement activities.</li> <li>• Gaining and sustaining commitment of partners can be challenging.</li> <li>• Learning from best practice often requires a national or even international perspective.</li> </ul>
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### 7.2.3 Improvement Partnerships

The impact and suitability of the Improvement Partnership mechanism was difficult to evaluate because many of the case study partnerships had not yet made enough progress to be able to demonstrate organizational change in partner authorities. Most had reached the stage of bolstering partnership and governance capacity at the regional or sub-regional level, but were only

early in their programme of implanting improvement activities in local authorities.

As a mechanism for delivering support, the Improvement Partnerships are relatively slow but there was some evidence (see below at 7.3) that they are well suited to the emerging policy agenda around the future role of local government. However, fulfilling this role will involve the devolution of significant additional responsibilities and this process will need to be carefully managed to ensure that the Partnerships themselves have sufficient administrative and leadership capacity, as well as commitment from partners, to cope with these.

### 7.3 Potential Role of Improvement Partnerships

Discussions with fieldwork respondents and interpretation of their responses and wider evidence from the case study partnerships suggests that Improvement Partnerships might be able to fulfil a wider and more developed role in the future as:

- **Delivering more effective and a wider range of improvement support** to local authorities.
- **Facilitating stronger relationships between councils**, contributing to enhanced partnership working, for instance in relation to shared service delivery, back office functions and in two-tier areas they might be a useful vehicle for delivering more joined up working between District and County Councils.
- Facilitating a greater emphasis on **capacity building to deliver shared objectives** as expressed through outcome based targets, goals and priorities, rather than generic corporate capacity building.
- **Facilitating enhanced community leadership** and helping to build the capacity of the entire governance and public service delivery system at a local and regional level, including potentially offering capacity building support to partners other than local authorities.
- **Monitoring and challenging poor performance** and supporting improvement as part of a greater emphasis on self-regulation in performance management.
- **Acting as a channel for communication** between local and central government.

However, to fulfil these enhanced roles, Improvement Partnerships will need to be considerably more developed than at present and in many cases will require additional capacity. Most of the case study partnerships were at an early stage of development and it will be necessary to carefully manage any increase in the roles and responsibilities placed on Improvement Partnerships.

## 7.4 Conclusions

It is widely acknowledged that the corporate management capacity of local authorities has increased significantly over recent years with CPA being both a driver and a measure of this. The various elements of the CBP have certainly played their part, to differing degrees, in contributing to these improvements. However, it is worth noting that identifying the specific contribution of individual initiatives to organisational development is extremely difficult for reasons of attribution, because of a lack of clarity over causality and because of the role of interests in the presentation of evidence about organisational change.

The proposals put forward in the White Paper, including the changing role of Improvement Partnerships to meet the demands that enhanced community leadership and public involvement will place on local authorities, suggest that the CBP is continuing to develop to reflect the changing policy agenda and capacity building needs of local authorities in relation to the role of local government. The CBP began with a focus on responding to the changes heralded in the 2001 White Paper and was shaped around a strong central emphasis on modernisation and performance improvement. Overtime, especially with the introduction of the Improvement Partnerships, the CBP has evolved to reflect a greater emphasis on local autonomy and devolution. Overall, evidence collected about the capacity building needs of local authorities suggests that the change in emphasis to Improvement Partnerships is welcome and aligned with need. So too, the shift away from building generic corporate capacity toward building capacity to deliver outcomes for the local community is in line with the changing context.

## 8. Issues to Consider for the Future Development of Capacity Building Support

The findings from each aspect of the evaluation suggest a number of varied lessons for policy development in relation to delivering central government support for local authority capacity building.

### 8.1 Maintaining a mixed market and appropriate level of delivery

All three mechanisms of delivery – the National Programmes, Direct Support and the Improvement Partnerships – have proven effective where the type of provision has fitted effectively to the context in which it was delivered. As such, it may be important to maintain this mix of provision to some extent at least. For instance, there are some types of programme that are effective at a national level, while Direct Support may once again be useful where an authority is in severe difficulty. Improvement Partnerships have not yet progressed to a stage where their impact can be fully judged but a decision to end the commitment to them now would mean that the significant resource – both national and local – put into establishing the partnerships would have been wasted.

It is important that programmes of support are developed at the appropriate level – national, regional or local – to the type of support being offered, its objectives, and the needs of authorities. The specific form and targeting of subsidies also needs to be considered in this light.

For instance, it is likely that authorities will continue to want to invest in a variety of different types of capacity building activity with a mix between national, regional and local perspectives. In arriving at an appropriate mix it may be that individual training and development programmes operating at a national level is more appropriate for staff who perceive that their own labour market is national in scope whereas programmes with a regional scope and profile may be more appropriate for staff who perceive their labour market to be regional in scope.

## 8.2 Targeting delivery mechanisms and incentives

The context in which improvement and capacity building support is delivered is very important. For instance, many of the research projects looking at poorly performing authorities suggest that these organizations are often inward looking and resistant to change. Despite this, the subsidy arrangement for the National Programmes appeared to suggest that these authorities had most to gain from them. The evidence from this evaluation suggests that these authorities benefited more from support delivered actually inside the authority and struggled to effectively engage with 'external' programmes of support. As such future subsidy arrangements might be better targeted at middle- and better-performing authorities, with investment in lower-performers reserved for more tailored interventions. There is certainly scope to argue that publicly funded national programmes should only be subsidised where there is reason to think that participating authorities have the existing capacity to internalise the benefits of participation.

## 8.3 Moving to an outcome-based focus

Much of the focus of the CBP, like other aspects of central government improvement support, has focused on building corporate capacity. The success of this, as reflected in improving CPA results, combined with the changing national policy context means that there is now a need to ensure that future capacity building focuses on the delivery of local outcomes. This might involve starting from the point of view of desired local social and economic outcomes, defining what needs to be delivered to achieve these and by whom, before identifying what capacity building is needed and to which organizations (including local partners) this should be applied.

## 8.4 Marketing and promotion

Marketing and promotion are important. There was evidence from the National Programmes in particular that they were poorly understood in the sector, with some persistent misconceptions about the CBP as a whole being solely targeted at the lowest performers. As such any future changes to the programme need to be carefully explained to the sector. In addition, Improvement Partnerships will need to ensure that the support and projects that they develop are clearly explained and publicised with the potential target audiences.



## 8.5 Appropriate central management and coordination

Central management capacity is important in many respects. Monitoring of all aspects of the CBP has been light touch. Monitoring of the Improvement Partnerships in particular will be necessary to ensure that they make the transition from partnership building to delivery of effective improvement projects. The level of monitoring undertaken by central management (whether this is done by central government or another body) will need to reflect this, as well as ensuring that appropriate progress with delivery is achieved.

## 8.6 The need for caution and careful management of Improvement Partnerships

The devolution of additional responsibilities to Improvement Partnerships will need to be carefully managed. It will need to be negotiated with the sector, signalled in advance and then scheduled to ensure that the partnerships have the commitment of partners and capacity to cope with the additional demands that this will place upon them.

## 8.7 Developing a clear rationale for programmes

A clear central rationale for developing programmes of support is necessary. It was sometimes difficult to pinpoint the rationale behind the National Programmes for instance, and this meant that there was often a range of interpretations of what they were intended to achieve which, while not necessarily contradictory, did sometimes confuse the sector and the providers. It is also necessary to ensure that there is a clear and shared understanding of the lifespan of market correcting initiatives and a rationale for pump-priming as opposed to ongoing market stimulus.

## 8.8 Managing expectations

Expectations regarding the impact of capacity building support need to be proportional and framed within appropriate timescales. Individual participants on National Programmes were unlikely, for instance, to lead to substantial levels of organizational change. Equally, expectations about the impact of Improvement Partnerships need to be understood in the context of the length of time that partnerships typically take to become established and function effectively. The experience of Local Strategic Partnerships is useful in this regard and suggests that the time taken so far for Improvement Partnerships to become established is not yet excessive.

## 8.9 Respecting local autonomy

If the commitment to devolution of governance to local levels is to be pursued to full implementation, central management and monitoring of Improvement Partnerships will need to reflect this and ensure that the pursuit of regional, sub-regional and local priorities is not overridden by considerations of national policy.

## 8.10 The role of Improvement Partnerships in challenging poor performance

The expected role of Improvement Partnerships in monitoring, identifying, challenging and supporting low performers is likely to be challenging and some problems were identified in the structure of Improvement Partnerships in this regard. It may be useful to ensure that Improvement Partnerships do place sufficient emphasis on this role through the use of financial incentives. It may also be necessary to ensure that Improvement Partnerships are given the credibility to fulfil this role by guaranteeing funding for a sufficiently long period of time to allow them to recruit leaders with the capacity to sustain effective challenge to poor performers.

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