

CAMBRIDGESHIRE & PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY

INDEPENDENT IMPROVEMENT BOARD: SEPTEMBER 2024

The Independent Improvement Board (IIB) met on 17th September against the backdrop of the decision by Ministers not to re-issue the Best Value Notice that had been served on the Combined Authority. This outcome is an important milestone for the Combined Authority and is consistent with the IIB's assessment of the progress made. Especially for the staff who work within the Combined Authority, it is appropriate that the achievement of this milestone is acknowledged.

In recognising the achievement of the lifting of the Best Value Notice, the Board would urge the Combined Authority to take heed of the clear expectations set out in MHCLG's letter dated 9th September. In particular, the importance of embedding and building on the improvements made over the last two years and of converting the work done on the Shared Ambition into tangible delivery plans. The requirement for a Local Growth Plan is an opportunity to do this, alongside giving thought to appropriate delivery mechanisms and working through the alignment with the Combined Authority's aspirations for further devolution. The link to spatial plans will be important too.

All this is important to both strengthen the region's profile and credibility with Government and investors and to help it to deliver ever greater benefits to local people.

Thoughts will now be turning to the Mayoral elections next May. Throughout this period, the IIB is sensitive to the demands on the Chief Executive and his senior colleagues in maintaining the integrity of the organisation and helping staff understand the nature of political discourse in the run up to an election. In parallel with this, it will be important for officers to prepare for the variety of potential outcomes from the Mayoral elections, not least to ensure that the successful candidate is appropriately supported, including with an appropriate understanding of the Combined Authority's role and the legal parameters that apply to a public authority. During a period of heightened political sensitivity, it is important that senior management is not distracted unduly from continuing to build on the progress achieved to date, albeit that this might need to be pursued quietly and in the background.

The IIB has been asked to remain in place for the time being to support the Combined Authority and it would seem sensible for this to be until after the Mayoral elections. The Board has reviewed our terms of reference, reflecting the priorities for the next period and the expectations set out in the MHCLG letter mentioned already. Given the lifting of the Best Value Notice, it feels that the balance of the Board's role should shift towards support and advice, with a reduced emphasis on assurance, although clearly, we will comment on this if the need arises.

Richard Carr, Chair, Independent Improvement Board