

*Capital Ambition
London's Improvement
and Efficiency Partnership*



**What's in it for you?
Giving and taking
to improve the capital**



Introduction

In the recent history of local government there has been a lot of regulation, inspection and consequent grading applied to local government performance. We have had an era of extensive target setting and monitoring.

Where councils were thought to be falling down in their responsibilities, government departments have itched to intervene and have developed a range of staff designed to 'support', monitor, spread best practice and urge improvements.

On the back of the recent local government White Paper, the government published the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy on 15 January 2008.

In short, this provides a commitment to a more 'sector-led' approach to both efficiency and improvement. It urges local government to take the lead in ensuring that council services improve. Councils have to lead in developing Local Area Agreements. The strategy requires local government to deliver 3% cash releasing savings every year. It also sets up and promises to fund Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships.

London's version of this will build on the previous partnership charged with improvement, known as Capital Ambition; its work will be merged with that of the London Centre of Excellence, previously the separately funded workstream supporting improvements in efficiency and productivity.

The new combined partnership will come together in April 2008.

Given the partnership's role in supporting public sector delivery across London, discussions with other partners are taking place to see what part they wish to play in the partnership.

The brief for Capital Ambition

Along with the eight other English Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs), the brief given in return for the next three-year funding is as follows:

- 1** Ensure that local government services continue to improve and that identified deficits are responded to.
- 2** Assist local councils to ensure that 3% cash releasing savings are achieved in each of the three years.
- 3** Support local economic development.
- 4** Support improvements on local public engagement, capacity building at a local level and neighbourhood renewal.
- 5** Support a positive approach to workforce planning.
- 6** Support the delivery of LAAs.

The London strategy has been developed through open dialogue with interested parties, in the context of trying to achieve consistency both with the Government's expectations and local needs and priorities.

The strategy has been submitted to the Minister for Local Government for approval, and can be viewed at:

www.capitalambition.gov.uk/strategy.htm

The offer to London councils and London LAA public sector partners.

This document seeks to answer the questions:

‘What’s this got to do with me?’

‘What can we get out of it?’

‘What might we contribute to it?’

1 A collective vision

London is a complicated beast and there are many versions of a vision for the capital. The Mayor of London has an important role in setting out a vision and yet local councils now have a more obvious duty to shape their local areas in concert with local partners; we therefore think it is helpful to continue to work on a vision for London which is clearer about the challenges for local government and its partners.

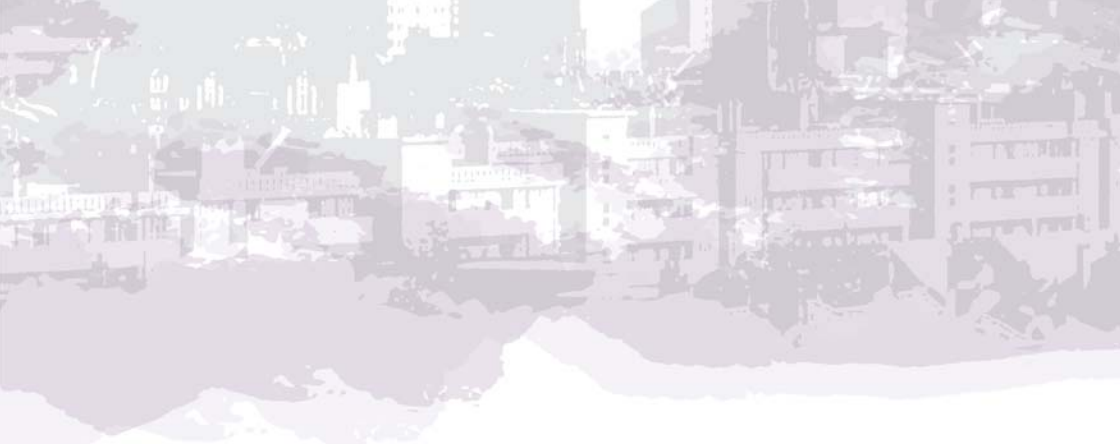
In 2007, Capital Ambition commissioned the London Collaborative to produce such a compelling vision which we hope will clarify new and emerging requirements and help us build the capabilities we need in order to face these challenges.

2 A friend in need

We think it’s healthy if councils and other partners can recognise their strengths and challenges and welcome external insights - peer review; the opportunity to learn from others and external assistance if they get stuck.

You can access these sorts of services from Capital Ambition and in return for this offer, we want you to let your staff join peer support and review exercises elsewhere, and respond positively if they’re asked to lend their expertise to others. We also believe that your staff will gain real insight from such experiences and that your organisation will also benefit – so we all gain

Arrangements for back-filling costs and modest incentives for staff who are willing to do this are in place.



3 More options to collaborate

There is plenty of evidence of collaboration at a local level and in some sub-regions. We exist to try to generate even more options to collaborate across London on particular issues, to reduce particular costs, or by collective procurement of shared services.

We want you to challenge yourselves on whether there might be a different way of getting your jobs done by combining with others and being prepared to invest time and effort in testing such propositions.

We can make funding available for research and development, and for business case consultancy.

4 A spur to action

Local government and its local partners will not be short of external stimuli in the future. Though there may be less volume of inspection and monitoring, there will still be plenty of it.

However, we want you to feel inspired to stretch for the best possible performance because you are proud of your local area and proud of London.

We want a capital city where everybody learns from the best; where failure is swiftly dealt with and mediocrity not tolerated.

We want you to participate in the sharing of information which allows performance to be compared and engage with others not to compete, but to share experience.

5 Smarter options for change management

We understand that taking on large change projects is risky, expensive and demanding of your staff capacity.

We want to help by sharing learning and thinking about how we can reduce the cost of consultancy and expand the capacity for change management at a price which is more affordable for London.

We will want you to make available intellectual property unless there is a very good reason for not doing so. In return, we will try to use our funding to embrace large change projects that affect more than one council area.

6 Local innovation for London

The National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy establishes the broad priorities set out above but we want to ensure we have an agenda which is relevant to London and acknowledges London specific issues, such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games; Thames Gateway; high levels of inward migration; a very diverse population; mass tourism and significant worklessness.

We want to stimulate innovation by supporting networks of professionals who want to think differently about their challenges and their work. We hope you will let your staff get involved in such networks. We hope you will share your innovative thinking.

7 Better budgets for London

We think a concentration on just complying with Government expectations about efficiency savings will not inspire excitement. We want to encourage a commitment to 'better budgets' where we can be confident that we are taking opportunities to move money from overhead costs into valuable services for the public; where there is a transparent self-discipline about costs, opportunities and budget options.

In return, through London Councils, we will continue to make the case for a fair settlement for London as the nation's capital.

8 Research and development for tomorrow's options

Local government and its partners represent a huge business meeting the vital needs of Londoners on a daily basis.

Yet the capacity for true research and development into what might be needed in the future, and alternative ways of meeting the requirements of Londoners is inevitably constrained by a desire to keep on top of Council Tax and commit money to today's requirements.

We want to invest in a research and development capability which explores the future and allows London local public services to be relevant, efficient, effective and well prepared for tomorrow's challenges.

9 Supporting the right to succeed

The Government wants Capital Ambition to support the delivery of stretching public service targets through LAAs and if we can help we will want to.

But we assume that authorities and their partners have entered into such agreements with a spirit of adventure and ambition and we think the Government should assume success not failure.

However the delivery of stretching targets through local strategic partnerships is new territory for some and we want to play our part in sharing learning and, if invited, helping any partnerships that get stuck.

10 Reputation management

We believe London local public services have got a great story to tell. The story on crime and community safety across London is excellent. The recovery of the PCT finances in London has been painful but decisive. Local government performance across the board has improved and is still improving.

And as measured by their perception of councils, Londoners appreciate their local public services more than residents elsewhere in the country.

But this is the capital city and we should expect no less.

We want to promote the reputation of London and its local public services because such a reputation matters.

The minimum offer

Some local areas will think that they can get on quite nicely without any assistance, and may also feel that they'd quite like to keep all their staff focused solely on local activity.

We wouldn't be in a position to interfere with such a stance, though we would regret it. We would prefer that all would see themselves as contributing to this joint endeavour, and all will feel that they can take something from it by way of learning, opportunities, or from periodic peer review and occasional assistance.

The minimum offer is that one of the board members of Capital Ambition will come and see each local area once a year and review what you've been able to give to and take from this collective enterprise. The Capital Ambition Board will consist of representatives of London public services (including the GLA group) and liaison board members will be allocated responsibility for a set of local areas with whom they will keep in contact.

At the beginning of the Capital Ambition work, we asked all councils to sign 'mutuality statements' which demonstrated that they did see themselves as part of London and understood that their success (or failure) contributed to London's success or poor reputation.

All London councils willingly signed such statements and we don't feel we need to ask for these to be signed again, but we would ask for councils to share information about the Capital Ambition offer with their local strategic partnerships, particularly because of our offer to support LAA delivery.

Engaging more

Capital Ambition is now open for business and if there is something that we can do for your area, or you think we can help in stimulating some work between you and your local partners, or you, your local partners and other areas, then do feel free to speak to us.

The contact details are as follows:

Daniel Ratchford

Daniel.ratchford@londoncouncils.gov.uk

020 7934 9972

Suzanne Rose

Suzanne.rose@londoncouncils.gov.uk

020 7934 9968

Capital Ambition

59½ Southwark Street

London

SE1 0AL

The Capital Ambition website holds information about the internal decision making of the organisation and is the place to look to see what others are doing and to be reminded of our product range.

www.capitalambition.gov.uk



What will success look like?

The Government has made it clear that it only wants to fund this activity for another three years. At the end of that period either the activity will be discontinued, or have proved so popular with local public services that they regard its continuation as worthy of being funded from a local subscription.

Success then is that most people agree that a regional dimension to this support and challenge activity has been helpful.

But more importantly we want to be part of a continuing push to ensure that London's services are known as exemplars for innovation, effectiveness, efficiency, fairness and relevance to the diverse needs of our London population and London's visitors and commuters.

The opinion of Londoners will be central to measuring our success, whilst we work to ensure that in other metrics, targets and opinions London's performance is a source of celebration for us all.



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London Councils

59½ Southwark Street

London SE1 0AL

For further information please contact
suzanne.rose@londoncouncils.gov.uk (020 7934 9968)

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