



*Promoting excellence in  
public services in the East Midlands*

## **MINUTES OF THE EAST MIDLANDS SOLACE BRANCH MEETING FRIDAY 14 OCTOBER 2005 AT CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Present:**

Duncan Kerr (DK)	South Kesteven District Council
Hilary Patterson (HP)	East Midlands Regional LGA
Alf Denis (AD)	East Midlands Regional LGA
Mark Edgell (ME)	IDeA
Craig Bonar (CB)	Mansfield District Council
Josie McGuirk (JG)	Rushcliffe Borough Council
Mel Brown (MB)	Broxtowe Borough Council
Brian Hayes (BH)	Charnwood Borough Council
Lynn Aisbett (LA)	Melton Borough Council
Simon Bovey (SB)	Daventry District Council
David Shaw	Chesterfield Borough Council

### **ACTION**

1. **Matters Arising**

None

2. **Appointment of Officers to Posts**

The following appointments were **AGREED**:

Chairman

Duncan Kerr

Vice Chairman

Josie McGuirk

Honorary Secretary/Branch Development Officer

Simon Bovey

Appointments to be advised to national SOLACE.

**SB**

3. **Consideration of presentation given by Robert Hill to SOLACE National Council on 21 September: "The Future Public Finances – understanding and managing the implications of the 2007 Spending Reviews"**

DK introduced the presentation previously given at SOLACE National Council

by Robert Hill (copies previously circulated). Highlights were:

- golden rule of Government is that it will borrow only to invest, but need still to match spending with income
- growth noted at being nearer 2%, than 3% as Government wanted (but noted there has not been concurrent increase in non NHS/Police/Education spending, including local government which is at just 0.1% broadly speaking)
- expect leaner delivery and smarter regulation options
- pooled budgets being promoted, inc LAAs
- re-thinking and re-engineering services expected
- interesting theme of strengthening strategic capacity in local government
- noted Lyons review extended (Council Tax review linked in)
- financial incentives being considered
- writing on wall was: seven years of famine to follow!

Comments on the presentation material included reference to LAA challenges in 2 tier areas. Colleagues highlighted LAA bureaucracy; geo-political needs despite absence of evidence; difficult financial choices; general complexity in reaching agreement; initial skirmishes about local government reorganisation; opportunity for increasing local government's influence on general spending. Overall, there was recognition that LAA theory is right in principle.

Noted that IDeA offering free support to LAs on LAAs, also from LGA, particularly to share learning. Derbyshire, Northants and Notts willing to share experiences to date at next Branch meeting.

**ALL**

Shared services were highlighted by Rushcliffe (JMc), but noted IDeA national website could be developed into East Midlands database

#### 4. **Results of the East Midlands SOLACE Survey**

DK referred to survey results (previously circulated). 30% of Members responded to survey:

- Evident need to increase the attraction of the Branch included ensuring limited time impact of meetings

But, overall mixed messages on current arrangements.

Ideas for the future were then considered:

- 'task and finish' groups, particularly as these would represent practitioners view, which Government would welcome it was considered
- wider engagement of 'senior managers'
- website for EM SOLACE sensible
- joint W Mids/E Mids conference
- advance diary planning

Balance needed due to other opportunities for group work/activities eg Chief Executive Groups locally but there was recognised need for more learning and partnership working.

Noted that national SOLACE has role in encouraging membership as this leads to Branch membership.

Noted that EM is not benefiting as other regions so it needs to have learning and support network, via SOLACE EM Branch.

**ALL**

**AGREED:**

- reinvent Branch as learning/support network, also promoting senior practitioners' contributions to national issues
- hold AGM + 3 other regular meetings incl 1 joint W Mids/E Mids conference (1 year trial)
- invite contributions from Members for meetings
- website be developed for EM SOLACE
- recognise 'succession planning' so 'future CExecs to be encouraged to attend ie 'senior managers' (as SOLACE now encompasses)

**SB**

5. **Future Partnerships/links for the Branch**

Building on from the need for Branch reinvigoration, DK raised the possibility of links with other bodies including De Montfort University as a host and credible research/policy support. **AGREED:** This be pursued.

**DK**

Also considered were potential links with LGA/IDeA. HP referred to meeting with Janet Ward (EMLGA)/DK/SB in summer on possible options. Positive desire to link with LGA was cited.

IDEA was keen to capture linkage potential particularly via voluntary Regional Improvement Forum (currently chaired by Peter Murphy) which can aid support and learning, inc early warning of key issues. To date, impact of the Forum has been limited, so it or something else needs to be in place especially as EMLGA not doing well on Beacon awards or CPA ratings. Forum has ability to tackle underperformance, co-ordination and signposting of opportunities inc capacity building funds. (Noted LGA Regional Improvement Board driven by Members). ME wanted to formalise the partnership, to increase momentum of improvement, and influence funding access – regional allocations of ODPM Capacity Building Funding is done for some eg West Midlands, which means East Midlands is possibly missing out. Evident need is for clear strategy for region; partnership commitment; action plan to tackle change/improvement, to get such regional delegation. Need for "Team East Midlands" ethos to evolve. Proposal was to use SOLACE EM to flag up EMLGA/IDeA Forum for collective sharing and working as a partnership development initiative with intention for Forum to have plans in place by December.

It was considered that LGA and SOLACE work plans could also be more co-ordinated as a result, and more regionally than nationally led. Need for increased local government input into such forum/partnership development, especially given post 2008 CPA and LGA quest for greater local government self-assessment.

**AGREED:** more formal partnership between SOLACE EM and EMLGA and IDeA be supported (see attached paper).

**SB**

**AGREED:** Letter be sent to Regional Improvement Forum chairman to support its principles.

**DK**

**AGREED:** Letter be sent to Branch Members advising of this and its relevance (using HP note).

**DK**

Discussion then moved on to means of communication. Suggested that conventional minutes circulation was limited in impact, therefore better to have own website or website via LGA link.

Idea of having closed/secure areas too eg for notice board and problem solving.

**AGREED:** SOLACE EM Branch website via LGA be supported in principle and thus be further considered at next meeting. Email continue to be used in addition.

**SB**

6. **Proposed Topic Groups for Future Working**

Topic Groups: ideas for next meeting

- Support for new Chief Executives/Senior Managers
- De Montfort be invited to make a presentation to next Branch meeting.

**LA  
DK**

7. **Any other Business**

- Proposed CPA options were considered and proposal made for pursuit of a Self Assessment version instead which Audit Commission would check (via checkers) against accreditation criteria.
- Peer review noted as valuable, via Peer Clearing House (IDeA)

**ALL**

8. **Date of Next Meeting: Rearranged**

Now: 16 December at 10am, Council Chamber, Melton.

**EAST MIDLANDS SOLACE BRANCH MEETING**  
**14 OCTOBER 2005**

**EMRLGA Discussion Paper**  
**Re Future Partnerships/ Links for the SOLACE Branch**

**Purpose of Paper**

East Midlands SOLACE branch is considering its links with other organisations in order to further its purpose of “Excellence in Public Services in the East Midlands” and, as a part of this initiative, has been in dialogue with EMRLGA.

This paper gives brief details of how the Regional improvement agenda is being progressed for the East Midlands, seeking views on how our chief executives should interact with this broad agenda in the future. It also briefly highlights some of the ways in which SOLACE and the EMRLGA might forge better partnership working.

**Implementing the Regional Improvement Partnership for East Midlands**

In June, all agencies in the Regional Improvement Forum (ODPM, GOEM, EMRLGA, IDeA, Audit Commission and now the RCE) endorsed proposals that:

- i. A new East Midlands Improvement Partnership (EMIP) is established, bringing together the Government agencies, representative council chief executives and the various other support agencies.*  
The policy, strategic and practical issues of how we move forward on this Partnership are being addressed and this report forms part of that process.
- ii. Political leadership on the improvement agenda be focused through a new EMRLGA Member Sub-Group and that the EMRLGA consider making improvement its central theme.*  
The EMRLGA has agreed this. Its nominations and its first meeting date are both being progressed
- iii. All the EMRLGA facilitated officer networks of the Region be subject to review to ensure that they are geared towards delivering improvement. Strengthened senior strategic direction will help maximise e-government benefits.*  
This review is currently underway and its findings and proposals will be subject to dissemination and consultation at a later point.

A “Collaboration Overview” is attached, as prepared in June which illustrates the expected interrelationships of the various regional players but as yet does not show the position of the SOLACE branch.

A meeting of the Regional Improvement will have taken place on 13 October and a verbal update of progress towards the Improvement Partnership will be given at this SOLACE meeting. The new Partnership’s remit is expected to be centered around progressing improvement and efficiency support across the Region, and its ambition, priorities and targets will need to be established.

It has been previously agreed that chief executives membership of the EMIP Board be via a representative cross section, along the previously tried and tested approach of:

Chief executive from each unitary council	4
Chief executive from each county council	5
One district chief executive from each county area	5
Total	14

SOLACE may want to give consideration as to how it engages with the Partnership, via these chief executives eg Does SOLACE feel it should be “formally” represented via one or more of the Chief Executives on the Partnership? What does it want back from these chief executives?

There have been various discussions about how chief executives might lead and disseminate information on specific agendas at national, regional and sub-regional levels. These also need further developing and incorporating into this Regional improvement structure. Likewise the issue of the EMIP’s interaction with any sub-regional and local improvement partnerships. Again SOLACE’s views are sought.

Subject to any feedback, EMRLGA will shortly contact authorities to seek nominations for district chief executive representation on the Partnership.

### **Partnership Working with SOLACE**

EMRLGA are pleased to be progressing discussions with SOLACE on new forms of partnership working which between the two organisations, which could potentially make a significant contribution to the improvement of the Region, for instance.

- Web site hosting EMRLGA already has a website which it is currently being reviewed to improve its content breadth, topicality and interest. EMRLGA could work with SOLACE representatives to:
  - Draw up an agreement for the creation and maintenance of the site
  - Translate the SOLACE web site concept into a design
  - Establish and maintain the site

There may scope for designing a common portal for the websites of SOLACE and the regional improvement agencies to help users and add to the sense of Regional joint working.

- Interactions on work streams There is potential for SOLACE topic groups to progress policy issues in partnership with the various regional networks (currently being refreshed to better support the improvement agenda). Alternatively, SOLACE might progress policy issues through its members active role on these networks, using the Regional capacity and infrastructure that already in place.
- Support to SOLACE for organising and hosting events, and communication channels to members and officers via EMRLGA Updates, Bulletins and our existing web site.