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## **Children's Improvement Board**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion and direction

### **Summary**

This report updates the Board on progress of the work of the Children's Improvement Board on sector-led improvement.

### **Recommendation**

The Board is asked to note the progress made and offer guidance.

### **Action**

To pursue next steps in the light of members' discussion.

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## **Children's Improvement Board Update**

### **Background**

1. The last meeting of the Board on 31 May received a report and presentation on the work underway through the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) for a sector led approach to improvement for children's services. It was agreed that an update on the work of CIB should to be a standing agenda item for this Board for the next six months.
2. Ministers have now agreed to provide a further £9.3 million for the remainder of 2011-12. This takes the total to £10.5 million to support the implementation of the model. This includes preventing failure at all points in the improvement cycle where there are identified risks and weaknesses, through a robust system of challenge and improvement support.
3. Ministers have asked for a further meeting with the CIB in July to discuss progress.
4. Procurement advice is that the LGID, as the accountable body acting on behalf of CIB, can issue a contract notice calling for tenders for all the expected work under this programme, using the open procedure. This will fulfil the CIB requirement that there should be a rapid move towards a framework of approved providers to support the sector led improvement system.
5. In the interim, until the framework contract is in place, the terms of the grant from DfE allow for a single tender procedure to be applied for the provision of certain services. Grants are being made for this period to C4EO for the provision of improvement support for councils, including self assessment and improvement planning and to SERCO to support the ongoing development of Sure Start Children's Centres during this interim period.

### **Governance**

6. At the last meeting of the Board, members raised questions about the overall governance of the programme and member engagement at a national and at a local level.
7. As one of the priorities in the LG Group Business Plan, the Children and Young People Programme Board maintains policy oversight on the sector-led improvement of children's services on behalf of the whole LG Group.
8. The CIB is a partnership Board, set up by the LG Group, the Association of Directors of Children's Services, SOLACE and the Department for Education. It is a direction setting and decision making group that is responsible for the overall

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delivery of the programme. Cllr David Simmonds attends the CIB on the Board's behalf.

9. The CIB is aware of the need to establish strong governance for the programme and work is in progress to provide them with options for consideration.
10. There is a specific issue to note with regard to the accountability for the funding that has been approved by Ministers for children's services improvement. CIB provides the strategic direction on how resources should be used and LGID has been the receiving body for DfE Grant monies for Children's Improvement acting on behalf of the CIB. It is proposed that this arrangement will continue going forward. Procurement of services and spend is subject to authorisation by Group officers, with delegated authority, and ultimately LGID's Company Board.

**Taking the Lead**

11. At the last meeting of the Board members said that it was important that there was a clear explanation of the links between the service specific elements and the overall approach to self regulation and improvement in local government.
12. The sector-led programmes for both children's and adult services are being developed within the overall umbrella of the LG Group's 'Taking the Lead' initiative for self-regulation and improvement and the key building blocs are consistent, for example:
  - 12.1 The importance attached to robust comparable data
  - 12.2 The emphasis on self assessment ("Local Accounts" in the adults framework)
  - 12.3 The value attached to challenge from one's peers.
13. The LG Group Improvement Programme Board will be discussing the need for a single narrative that joins up 'Taking the Lead' with developments in adult social care and children's services to provide a single clear message to the sector about how these initiatives and the support provided under each strand inter-relate.
14. It is proposed that this narrative should be agreed jointly by the relevant Boards and **Members are asked to approve this approach.**

**Early Adopters**

15. All councils with responsibility for children's services were invited to come forward to be 'Early Adopters' of the system and/or to be early peer challengers. There was an excellent response with 2 regions, 1 improvement cluster and 24

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individual councils now signed up. A successful launch event for these councils was held on **29 June**. The list is attached at **Appendix 1**.

16. Early Adopters will test specific components of the model, evaluate and share their learning across three broad areas:
  - 16.1 **Universal**. Testing key elements of the universal system, including self assessment, improvement planning, peer challenge and the use of a core set of national data in the form of local profiles.
  - 16.2 **Performance Risks**. Testing the effectiveness of improvement support where councils have identified their own performance risks or weaknesses
  - 16.3 **Intervention**. Testing the effectiveness of sector-led improvement support in councils subject to Improvement Notices as a result of DfE intervention.
  
17. The NFER has been commissioned to look at the various delivery models of the developing sector-led peer challenge and support programme in order to support its further development. The research will explore this with the early adopter local authorities, and report to the CIB to feed into further developments of sustainable arrangements for sector-led improvement and support by April 2012.

**Regional leads**

18. Alongside the recruitment of local authority early adopters the CIB have been working to secure a Lead Member, Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services from each region. Regional leads will support the CIB through providing a link to, and communication with, the sector in their region and will work towards raising the profile of the programme, gathering intelligence to support their understanding of what is happening at a regional level to share with the region and the CIB. The current list of leads in the regions is attached at **Appendix 2**.

**Policy implementation**

19. In addition to the general focus of improvement through peer challenge and support the CIB is also committed to supporting the implementation of national policy through sector-led support. The first areas of focus are Children's Centres and Payment by Results (PBR).
  
20. There has been significant interest from councils in the offer of support with local decision making on provision of sufficient Sure Start Children's Centre services. This might include looking at how the statutory duties placed on local authorities in relation to Sure Start and wider early years provision can best be fulfilled in the context of overall resources available and wider overall priorities. 26 inquiries were received within 2 weeks of the offer of sector-led support being made.

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21. There have also been a number of well attended workshops held recently for those expressing an interest in becoming payment by results pathfinders. The pathfinders will focus on the core purpose of children's centres: to improve child development and school readiness among young children and to reduce inequalities. The scheme will explore the potential to join up with other payment by results schemes being developed across Government.
22. The potential for the sector-led system to drive forward a number of other developments is currently being considered – in particular Community Budgets, which are focused on families with complex needs.