

Children's Improvement Board Update

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report provides Members with an update on the work of the Children's Improvement Board.

Recommendation

That Members note the report.

Action

LG Group officers to action as necessary.

Contact officer: Liz Hobson
Position: Senior Adviser
Phone no: 020 7664 3229
E-mail: liz.hobson@local.gov.uk

Children's Improvement Board Update

Background

1. As reported to the September meeting of the Board, the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) commissioned an independent review of governance arrangements intended to maximise the effectiveness of the organisation of the CIB and its relationships in delivering an effective improvement system. The review which was carried out by Dr Clive Grace and CIB accepted the following recommendations:
 - 1.1. CIB will be established by way of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Local Government Group (LG Group), the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and the Department of Education (DfE). The mission of CIB will be settled in the MOU and will cover the three objectives of the general improvement of the system of children's services in striving for excellence and efficiency; support and intervention in the case of material weakness or potential failure of children's services; and a channel for the delivery of policy initiatives and innovations in pursuit of excellence and better outcomes.
 - 1.2. LG Group, ADCS and SOLACE will be the core members of the Board itself, with a DfE official and an LG Group officer as active and engaged observers.
 - 1.3. Each core member of CIB will nominate representatives at their discretion but having regard to the need to avoid that person having appreciable conflicts of interest. There will be two elected members nominated by LG Group to CIB, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Children and Young People Programme Board both of whom will represent the LG Group on a cross-party basis. ADCS will nominate one member in addition to the Chair (see below). SOLACE will nominate one member. All nominees will be able to be substituted from time to time by a named alternate.
 - 1.4. There will be an independent Chair appointed by the four principal parties jointly, and CIB will work towards appointing that person, in addition to one other independent member on the Board. In the interim ADCS will retain the Chair but the Chair will not represent the position of ADCS and hence there will be an additional ADCS nominee as referred to above.
 - 1.5. The MOU will, *inter alia*, connect CIB staff appropriately into the LG Group's wider internal sector-led improvement machinery and also the wider internal machinery of all partners which is directed to improvement work such as ADCS' Standards, Performance & Inspection Policy

Item 3

Committee.

- 1.6. CIB will produce an Annual Business Plan against which DfE grant would be made to the Accountable Body, the Business Plan to cover the whole business of CIB and not solely business related to DfE. The Plan will be reported to constituent bodies as well as DfE
- 1.7. LG Group will be the Accountable Body and will be charged through the DfE grant letter to disburse it in accordance with the CIB Annual Business Plan and according to CIB choices and changes. The DfE grant letter will provide for liaison and monitoring between itself, LG Group, and CIB.
- 1.8. The governance of CIB will be reviewed in late spring/early summer 2012
2. Further discussion is taking place within CIB in order to pursue recommendations on a reference group and devolution to localities.
3. Arrangements will be made for CIB to consult with key stakeholders about the development of the system but the detailed arrangements for reference group activity are under discussion.
4. CIB has agreed on the arrangements through which some responsibilities and resources for improvement work will be devolved to regions and localities. Detailed communications on this are being prepared.

Universal engagement with self assessment & improvement planning

5. From April to end October 2011, in order to provide continuity of support, CIB has retained existing sector delivery partners, C4EO and SERCO, to provide a number of services and products, including work on developing data profiles for local authorities and to support the ongoing development of Children's Centres.
6. A framework contract has now been established and CIB has re-specified these services and subjected them to competitive tender.
7. Delivery partners have been sought for the following four Lots under the framework:
 - 7.1. Provision and development of data profiles and expand the supply of sector data specialists to support self assessment, improvement planning and peer challenge work.
 - 7.2. Further development of the use of children's services specialists from within the children's services sector to provide targeted support and expertise to support improvement on a bespoke basis.

Item 3

- 7.3. Provision of a proactive, innovative and cost-effective approach to identifying and encouraging sharing and take-up of best practice to add to the body of knowledge on what works to inform improvement planning and policy implementation.
- 7.4. Support for payment by results Sure Start Children's Centres trial areas in their development of financial and project plans and ensure value for money from development funding and appropriate links with other initiatives (particularly on health).
8. Contracts will be awarded for work to commence on 1 November 2011 to 31 March 2012. Contracts may be extended from 1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013, subject to Ministerial approval of further funding.

Early Adopters and Peer Challenge

9. All the councils that have volunteered to be Early Adopters of the new system have had contact from CIB's interim delivery team. The majority of early adopters have discussed how they plan to engage with the system in the light of their particular circumstances. For those councils experiencing considerable performance risks or subject to an improvement notice, comprehensive packages of sector-led support are being scoped and implemented. For those councils that are interested in working with the process of peer challenge, discussions are taking place about the focus of the challenge and the identification of the peer challenger.
10. A number of Early Adopters and potential peer challengers attended a workshop organised by CIB on 15 September in Birmingham. This was an opportunity to have an update on the progress of the model and to hear from Directors of Children's Services who have been on the receiving end of challenge or have experience of peer reviews and other existing challenge mechanisms. The workshop also offered an opportunity for councils to work with CIB's interim delivery team to begin to co-develop the ways in which peer challenge will operate across the country and to think about the skills, knowledge and experience required to be an effective and credible peer challenger.

Safeguarding Peer Reviews

11. Safeguarding peer reviews are now on offer as part of the new sector-led improvement arrangements. Funding from the CIB means that there is now no charge to individual councils. 18 reviews have been scheduled so far in 11/12 and bookings are being taken for November onwards.

Item 3

Brokerage of Improvement Support

12. A small interim team of 'brokers' is already working with a number of 'at risk' councils subject to intervention. The brokerage service is being developed by CIB in order to support the work of early adopters and in particular local authorities with high levels of need and those authorities that are in intervention.

Policy implementation

13. The main thrust of the CIB's policy implementation work has been on Sure Start Children's Centres and the development of the payment by results trial areas.
14. There has been a short term piece of work to provide support with local decision making on the provision of sufficient Sure Start Children's Centres in local areas. Thirty seven local authorities took up the offer initially to access a range of tailored support and work is currently in progress with twenty six authorities.
15. It has been announced that a further 18 local authorities will trial payment by results for Sure Start children's centres. Together with the first wave announced in July, twenty-seven local authorities will be testing rewards for reaching the most vulnerable families, improving family health and wellbeing and raising attainment of children at age five. As part of wider reforms to the core purpose of children's centres, the Government wants to see a clearer focus on reaching the most disadvantaged families and more work to help narrow the attainment gap between wealthier and poorer children that is evident from as early as 22 months. (Support for this initiative is being sought under the CIB framework as outlined in paragraph 7. above).
16. The Government will be consulting on changes to Sure Start statutory guidance and changes to governance arrangements for children's centres later in the year.
17. Discussion is continuing on how the planned DfE support offer on Families with Multiple Problems (in the context of Community Budget initiatives) can be fully integrated within the sector support model. Further discussions are also taking place on how a number of other policy implementation issues, including productivity work and a youth offer and the implementation of the Munro Review recommendations can be delivered through the sector led work. This is likely to drive further requirements for support products and services.

Inspection

18. The CIB met officials at Ofsted on 8 September to discuss how inspection can add value to and draw on the sector led approach to improvement. It is essential that there are links between the new inspection framework and sector-

20 October 2011

Item 3

led improvement .Ofsted have responded positively to the emphasis given to this point by Munro. A number of meetings have been held between the Children's Improvement Board and senior Ofsted officials and further discussions are planned. These are focusing on the following issues:

- 18.1. evidence from the sector that can be taken into account when Ofsted considers the inspection intervals that are proportionate to the performance profile of individual councils
- 18.2. evidence from the sector that can be taken into account as part of Ofsted's judgements about capacity to improve
- 18.3. agreement with Ofsted about when the sector will lead monitoring reviews for councils subject to intervention

Financial Implications

19. There are no financial implications from this report.