

What does the LG Group do for councils?

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

This report sets out the main areas of the Children and Young People Programme Board's joint improvement and policy offer for councils.

Recommendation

That Members discuss the LG Group offer to councils.

Action

Officers to take into account any comments made.

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What does the LG Group do for councils?

Background

1. The LG Group's Children and Young People Programme Board aims to support councils with sector led improvement, lobby for councils continuing role in education and represent the views of councils at a national level through policy and lobbying priorities. This report summarises the main ways in which councils can access and get involved in our work.

Board Priorities

2. The Board has set clear priorities and established a work programme.

Achieving greater devolution for local government through:

- 2.1. Education reforms – lobbying for the powers and funding that councils need to support their strategic role in education
- 2.2. Ensuring children's health is a priority in the planned change to the health service
- 2.3. Working with the Youth Justice Board to support the council role in reducing youth offending and the use of custody

Helping councils tackle their challenges through:

- 2.4. Developing a sector-led improvement programme
- 2.5. Influencing the implementation of the Munro Review of Child Protection
- 2.6. Supporting councils with a strategic role in education
- 2.7. Supporting councils to achieve increased productivity.

Lobbying and policy work

3. At a national level the Children and Young People Programme Board has been actively lobbying on behalf of the sector to ensure that councils have a continuing and strong role in the Government's education and children's services reforms. Highlights include:
 - 3.1. The Schools White Paper set out a 'strong strategic role' for councils in education, as champions of children, parents and the most vulnerable children and young people. We are working through the Ministerial

Item 4

- Advisory Group on the council role in education chaired by the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP to influence government education policy.
- 3.2. The Children's Improvement Board has been set up with £10.5m funding from the Department for Education (DfE) to lead a sector-led programme of children's services improvement.
 - 3.3. We have been helping to implement the findings of the Munro Review by working on revised statutory guidance which Board members have fed into the proposed revisions to the guidance on the role of lead members
 - 3.4. The Children and Young People Programme Board are pressing to ensure that Ofsted's changes to inspection regime are proportionate and linked to the sector-led improvement programme.

Improvement offer

4. We have developed the Safeguarding Children peer challenge, which will be a part of our core offer on improvement to councils as well as a part of the sector-led improvement programme. Peer challenges are fully funded and offered to all authorities at no cost. So far twenty-six challenges have been delivered this year, a further fifteen are booked and feedback from the programme continues to be excellent.
5. There are 153 officer and 25 member peers delivering the programme currently, and to meet the demand for challenges there is schedule of free Peer Assessment and Evaluation (PEA) events for directors and senior officers in social care and health who want to be part of peer challenge team. Undertaking a peer review or challenge is widely regarded as an important personal professional development opportunity. It gives potential peers a chance to share learning and good practice across the sector. These events are a comprehensive two day residential training course combined with an assessment of peer competencies.

Support to lead members

6. We offer support to councillors through a variety of events and activities. Most recently we held an induction session for new lead members, led by the Chairman of the Children and Young People Programme Board with input from other Board members and member peers. This offered new lead members a chance to gain further knowledge on the work of the Children and Young People Programme Board, an introduction to the work of the Children's Improvement Board and the opportunity to discuss the key issues for lead members in children's services. Feedback from this member led event was very positive and it is planned to offer this on an annual basis.

Item 4

7. A number of events will run throughout the rest of the year including a combined Leadership Academy aimed at lead members in children's, adults and health and wellbeing services. We are currently developing a series of master classes for children's services lead members on the key challenges they are experiencing and will be delivering these in the New Year, free of charge.
8. 'Must Knows' for lead members are a comprehensive web based resource that provide information on the new policy landscape and we constantly refresh these.

Support to regional lead member networks

9. The importance of the regional networks has been discussed at the Children and Young People Programme Board, and the Board is working on developing strong links with the regional lead member networks to create a two-way conversation with them. This could include the opportunity for Board members to attend the regional networks and for the chairs or vice chairs of regional networks to have a standing invitation to attend and contribute to Board meetings in a non-voting capacity.
10. The Children and Young People Programme Team has assigned a lead officer to liaise with each regional network. Contact has been made with all nine networks and the team will continue to work to support the links with the networks and the Board by:
 - 10.1. Providing updates on key policy issues, LGA activity and highlighting the support available to lead members; and
 - 10.2. Listening to the key issues being discussed by the networks and communicating these to the Board.
11. So far, officers have attended meetings of the networks in the East of England, East Midlands and South West. All regional networks have been offered a free corporate parenting workshop as part of a project with the National Children's Bureau to update the current toolkit for members.
12. The table in **Appendix A** lists the lead member for each network, date of when they last met, if known, and future meeting dates.

Direct support

13. The LG Group has Principal Advisers working out in the regions who are the key contacts for councils. They provide a contact point with the strategic leadership of an authority and can signpost authorities to support and advice.

20 October 2011

Item 4

They can commission direct support for councils, such as mentoring for members delivered by a member peer.

14. Member peers and our partners also deliver safeguarding on a paid for basis. This training can be targeting to members and as well as tailored to different types of council's needs.
15. The Principal Advisers are responsible for the following areas:
 - 15.1. Howard Davis – South West and West Midlands
(Howard.Davis@local.gov.uk)
 - 15.2. Rachel Litherland – London and East of England
(Rachel.Litherland@local.gov.uk)
 - 15.3. Mark Edgell – Yorkshire & Humber, North East and East Midlands
(Mark.Edgell@local.gov.uk)
 - 15.4. Marianne Abley – South East (Marianne.Abley@local.gov.uk)
 - 15.5. Gill Taylor - North West (Gill.Taylor@local.gov.uk)

Councillors' Forum

16. The Councillors' Forum meets monthly and it has been proposed that it should be opened up to all interested Councillors. Past agendas have included Ministers, or shadow cabinet members as well as updates from each Programme Board on their activities in the past month and a report from the LG Group Chief Executive.

Communication and web based resources

17. The full children and young peoples web content will be available on the new LG Group website from the end of October. Our web-based resources are being revised and new areas of work such as the developing productivity work stream will be included. Updated member workbooks, and other free downloadable resources, on a range of topics and skills will be available on the new website. This is complimented by our various Communities of Practice (CoPs) on such diverse topics as children's safeguarding; the council role in education; child poverty; additional educational needs; youth services and careers. These are all free to join and provide access to publications, guidance and events and an electronic discussion forum.
18. LG Inform provides electronic access to a comprehensive bank of key data sets to enable benchmarking within the sector. The ESD Toolkit is also provided as well as other costing tools to drive service improvement. The ESD Toolkit is a framework of tried and tested tools, guidance and practical examples to support innovation in public service delivery and deliver 'better for less'.

20 October 2011

Item 4

19. On the 27 October the Knowledge Hub will be launched and will provide a single access point for LG Inform, CoPs, blogs, twitter and other electronic media.
20. To inform you of our work in this area a new electronic Children and Young People Bulletin was launched in September and will be issued monthly to a wide audience of nearly 18,000 subscribers, including both officers and members. If you have not already done so you can sign up to it via the www.local.gov.uk website.

Financial Implications

21. All activities outlined are within identified budget.