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Children's Improvement Board Update on Activity – May 2012

Purpose of report

For information and comment.

Summary

This report updates the Children and Young People Board on recent developments on the activities led by the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) and invites feedback.

Recommendation

That the Board consider and comment on the current and planned activities of the CIB.

Action

Officers from the CIB team and the LGA to take forward the CIB's work programme in the light of the Board's comments

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Background

1. The Children's Improvement Board work programme is a major part of local government's push for greater self-improvement and self-regulation. It is delivered through a partnership between the LGA, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives), supported by funding from the Department for Education (DfE). Updates on CIB activity are a standing item at the meetings of the Children and Young People Board.

Highlights of recent activity

2. The Children's Improvement Board met on 23 April and confirmed priorities for 2012-13 as:
 - 2.1. Reducing the number of councils in intervention.
 - 2.2. Establishing an effective system of peer challenge and support.
 - 2.3. Better engagement of stakeholders including adult services.
 - 2.4. Supporting councils in managing the impact of policies.

Reducing the number of councils in intervention

3. Reducing the number of councils in difficulty who are subject to DfE improvement notices and are receiving direct, "targeted sector support (TSS)" via CIB will be particularly challenging for local government this year as Ofsted is introducing a new safeguarding inspection regime and the government is publishing adoption scorecards. Regions will shortly be putting together their delivery plans for the next year and are being asked to give this issue particular focus, together with the need to provide "early sector support" to pre-empt performance difficulties.
4. The CIB's team of regional brokers will move away from a general regional support role and form a smaller team of four Children's Improvement Advisers. They will work closely with councils who are subject to improvement notices or at risk and with the LGA's Principal Advisers. This should provide a better coordinated sector-led offer to councils and ensure specialist children's services input where needed.

Adoption scorecards

5. In terms of support for councils following the publication of adoption scorecards, CIB has committed to offering support notwithstanding concerns about the Government's overall approach. Following the publication of the scorecards and a review of the results by government, some councils may be asked to take part in a further, more detailed diagnostic process. CIB has worked with DfE to commission Outcomes UK and BAAF to carry out this diagnostic with the aim of providing an opportunity for the council to tell the story behind the data and to look at a wider picture of support for children in care and the local context. Where this diagnostic shows genuine concerns about performance and that the council would benefit from additional support, CIB will be in a position to discuss options with the council and link these with support available from peers in other councils.
6. Further information on this issue is provided in the report on adoption scorecards (**Item 3** on this agenda).

Establishing an effective system of peer challenge and support

7. Councils working together in each region are actively engaged in peer challenge which is crucial to making improvement genuinely sector-led. For 2012-13, regions will be asked to build on the substantial progress already made and to set a target of ensuring that every council receives a challenge by 31 December 2012. Because peer challenge is owned by councils and not centrally prescribed, a number of different approaches are developing. In order to allow for the most effective learning from the peer challenges carried out during the year, there will be a full evaluation of peer challenge at the start of 2013.
8. During the first quarter of this year, WS Atkins have been working with 10 pilot councils to develop a data profile which will provide a core of common performance information to support peer challenge. CIB received a report on the project and the piloting and agreed that the profiles would, in future, be supported via LG Inform. This will enable councils to access data on children's services as part of a comprehensive and flexible data resource for local government.

Better engagement of stakeholders

9. The development of a system of sector-led improvement depends on active ownership by councils. As well as upgrading communications to make them more interactive, CIB will have a regular dialogue with regional leads (directors of children's services, Lead Members for children's services and chief

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executives nominated by each region) and will be aiming to hold more meetings outside London. In addition, members of the CIB team are keen to participate in existing meetings and networks of councils. The CIB team met with the nine lead DCSs on 16 April and will meet with all the regional leads including chief executives and lead members on 29 May in Birmingham.

Supporting councils in managing the impact of policies

10. CIB has work in progress and in development to support councils with the impact of a number of different policy changes. In order to develop a more coherent approach, policy support has been grouped to build links between initiatives. For 2012-13 the programmes will be:
 - 10.1. The Munro Review, social work reform and early help.
 - 10.2. Adoption, commissioning for children in care and the Family Justice Review.
 - 10.3. Early and foundation years, commissioning sufficiency and quality.
 - 10.4. And three more discrete issues – data profiles, innovation and commissioning for youth, integrated workforce (legacy of the Children’s Workforce Development Council).
11. Commissioning will be a cross-cutting theme for all programmes.
12. As part of last year’s programme a number of good practice case studies were produced on young people’s services, early help and fostering and adoption. These case studies are now available via the C4EO (Centre for Excellence in Outcomes) website (validated, promising and emerging practice is listed under each of the theme headings on the C4EO home page <http://www.c4eo.org.uk/default.aspx>).