

Children's Improvement Board (CIB) and sector-led improvement for children's services

Purpose of report

To provide background on the work of CIB and inform discussion on the Children and Young People Board's work for 2012-13.

Summary

Promoting and supporting sector-led improvement is one of the LGA's business plan priorities and the work of the CIB is an important mechanism for taking this forward. The support offered through CIB helps local councils respond to some of the challenges they are facing, particularly in terms of children's social care. The work of the Children and Young People Board needs to be considered in relation to the LGA's role in leading sector-led improvement with the other partners on the Children's Improvement Board.

Recommendation

That members of the Board use the report, as the basis for discussion on sector-led improvement.

Action

Officers from LGA and CIB to continue to support the CIB's work programme.

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Children's Improvement Board (CIB) and sector-led improvement for children's services

Background

1. The Children's Improvement Board (CIB) is a partnership between the LGA, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), supported by the Department for Education (DfE). The work of the Board draws extensively upon in kind contributions from the sector, particularly time and expertise. It is also supported by a DfE grant of £8.85 million in this financial year.
2. The LGA has a longstanding commitment to promoting sector-led improvement for local government and reducing the burden of inspection and performance monitoring. Considerable progress has been made towards this goal and the establishment of the CIB in 2011 is one example of the change in emphasis. The LGA's work in support of CIB is linked to its other work on sector-led improvement particularly corporate improvement and adult social care. The LGA report "Sector-led improvement in local government" gives an overview:
www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=f19c68ea-368d-4be9-b1c8-7d085324436e&groupId=10171
3. This report sets out the support available to local councils, led by the CIB, and the sector's response to the challenges it faces in providing the best services for children and young people. It highlights CIB's work particularly on helping councils improve children's social care. Further information on CIB is available on the LGA's website including a regular bulletin which is sent to all members of the Children and Young People Board and all lead members for children: www.local.gov.uk/CIB. There is also a CIB Group on the LGA's Knowledge Hub knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/group/childrensimprovementboard (new users need to register but the group is open access).

How CIB's work programme supports councils

4. CIB offers support to councils across a wide range of issues, both through national programmes and through activities and programmes organised by regions. The need to improve children's social care has been particularly important following the fundamental changes in approach recommended by the Munro Review, the recommendations of the Family Justice Review, recent attention on the timeliness of adoption and concerns about the safety of children placed in residential care. These developments have taken place against a backdrop of high political and media profile and a demanding inspection regime.

Taking forward the Munro review

5. CIB has held discussions with local councils to understand their progress so far in responding to the Munro Review and the sort of support they would need to make more progress. Following these discussions, CIB is supporting a number of councils who will act as "development demonstrators". These councils do not have to show established

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“best practice” but they have to take a whole systems approach to change and be willing to share their learning with others over a period of time. A good response was received to a request for expressions of interest in being a development demonstrator. Follow up discussions are now taking place with a number of councils with a view to launching the development demonstrators in October. Development demonstrators were nominated via regions but will operate as a national resource. (There will be an additional set of development demonstrators for early years and narrowing the gap in achievement. The CIB team will ensure that links are made between the two sets of demonstrators.)

Taking forward the recommendations of the Family Justice Review (FJR)

6. CIB commissioned a number of workshops for local councils on FJR in early summer to provide an update and discuss emerging practice. The outputs of these workshops will be a report of key themes which emerged and a toolkit including signposts to resources and examples of local practice, both to be published on line in early autumn.

Supporting councils on adoption and looked after children

7. Following the publication of scorecards on adoption, CIB offered support to those councils who had been identified by DfE as causing particular concern and made a commitment to offer more general support to any councils who fell below the performance thresholds on timeliness or felt they would benefit from support to improve their practice in this area. A number of councils (identified by DfE) took part in a diagnostic assessment of adoption services, jointly commissioned by CIB and DfE which aimed to allow the council to tell the story behind the data and provide a more rounded picture than the indicators alone. CIB has reviewed the diagnostic assessment process with DfE and will also be meeting with some of the councils who participated to allow them to feed back on their experience.
8. CIB is now working on a wider menu of support to councils which will offer the diagnostic assessment for adoption services as a tool but will also deal more broadly with support for looked after children, permanency and interaction with the family justice system. A full report on CIB’s role in supporting councils will be made to the CIB meeting on 13 September. The next set of updated adoption scorecards is expected in October.

Safeguarding peer reviews

9. CIB now supports the programme of safeguarding peer reviews developed by LGA (and formerly Local Government Improvement and Development). The reviews continue to be in demand from councils and complement the children’s services peer challenges now taking place between councils.

Early sector support and targeted sector support

10. CIB works directly with any council who is subject to a DfE improvement notice, with a view to helping them make changes and move out of formal intervention as soon as possible. In addition, all regions have been asked to work together to understand which

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councils might be at risk of failing an inspection and to offer early support from within the sector. One of the main challenges for councils and CIB at this point is getting better at understanding which councils might be at risk and reducing the need for intensive support at a later point. Due to changes in Ofsted inspections, the number of councils in intervention – and the pressures on CIB's budget – may well increase.

Financial Implications

11. Funding for the programme is provided by DfE. The programme is being hosted by the LGA which claims part of this funding as payment for services provided by the organisation. In addition to this, the LGA provides staff time to contribute to the CIB's work, in support of the LGA's business plan priority to deliver an effective approach to sector-based support in children's services.