

## **Sector-led improvement**

### **Purpose of report**

To provide an update on sector-led improvement and the work of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB), and to highlight current challenges.

### **Summary**

The Children's Improvement Board works with councils to support a programme of sector-led improvement for children's services. This report gives highlights of the work programme including the important work being led by regions in England.

### **Recommendation**

That members of the Board and Lead Members for Children's use the report as a basis for discussion.

### **Action**

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

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## **Sector-led improvement**

### **Background**

1. Supporting sector-led improvement is a priority for the LGA and for the Children and Young People Board. This report summarises highlights of sector-led improvement in children's services and sets out some of the current challenges facing councils.
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 Children's Improvement Board (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](http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=f19c68ea-368d-4be9-b1c8-7d085324436e&groupId=10171)
3. Sector-led improvement in children's services is led by the CIB which is a partnership between the LGA, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE). Sector-led improvement depends heavily on donated time and expertise from councils themselves but CIB has a budget of £8.85 million from the Department for Education (DfE) for this financial year. Of this, £3 million has been allocated to the nine regions to support regionally based sector-led improvement.

### **The role of regions**

4. The regional element of sector-led improvement is crucial and each region has a lead Councillor, lead Director of Children's Services and lead Chief Executive to take ownership of as well as champion the work. Each region also has a programme manager for its work programme. Regions are expected to work on a number of common priority areas but also have their own regional priorities. Some regions have brought their CIB work together with other improvement activity in the region and with the succession planning work which supports the leadership of DCSs. The governance and management of this work is for regions themselves to decide and regions have come to different arrangements depending on what other structures might already be in place to support improvement.
5. A key element of sector-led improvement in children's services is the development of mutual peer challenge between councils, based on gifted time from the DCS or others in the council. Every council is expected to have received a challenge by the end of this year and regions have responsibility for developing a suitable approach to meet this target. As with the governance arrangements the models being used for this challenge vary and are not prescribed. CIB will be carrying out an evaluation of peer challenge towards the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013 to get a better understanding of the variety of approaches and how effective these are. The development of peer challenge is crucial to creating a culture where councils are confident both about challenging

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each other in a systematic way and about asking colleagues in the sector for help where needed.

**Work programme and challenges**

6. The CIB's priorities for 2012-13 are; reducing the number of councils in intervention; establishing an effective system of peer challenge and support; better engagement of stakeholders and supporting councils in managing the impact of policies. Support for improvement in children's social care has been a particularly important feature of CIB's work to date due to the high profile and high level of risk involved in this work for councils.
7. CIB leads sector-led improvement in an area of particularly high profile and high risk. Particular challenges at present are:
  - 7.1. the need to establish ownership of sector-led improvement by councils, including chief executives and leaders;
  - 7.2. understanding how the work programme is making a difference and demonstrating impact;
  - 7.3. the pressure of supporting councils subject to DfE intervention which diverts resource from the broader ambition to help every council raise its game.
8. A summary of current work supported by the Children's Improvement Board is given below:
  - 8.1. Development demonstrators for Munro and early and foundation years – just launched this month, sixteen councils (nine for Munro and six for early years) are sharing learning as part of a national network as they respond to these significant policy and practice challenges.
  - 8.2. Early support for councils – all regions have been asked to prioritise offering "early support" to any councils who may be at risk of poor performance and to improve their collective capacity to identify risk.
  - 8.3. Targeted sector support – CIB works directly with councils who are subject to Government intervention, working with the LGA's principal advisers.
  - 8.4. Leadership – CIB funds free places for Lead Members for Children's Services at the LGA leadership academy and supports the regional lead member networks. CIB also works closely with the Virtual Staff College (VSC) which provides leadership programmes for Directors of Children's Services. A number of regions have chosen to integrate their CIB supported work programmes with regional work on succession planning supported by the VSC.
  - 8.5. Safeguarding peer reviews – CIB supports the well established programme of safeguarding peer reviews. These are available to councils free of charge.

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- 8.6. Safeguarding practice challenge – supported by CIB, London is piloting a safeguarding practice challenge which will provide an external challenge to councils focused on the detail of safeguarding practice.
- 8.7. Adoption – CIB jointly commissioned a diagnostic assessment with DfE to provide a fuller picture of those councils where DfE had raised concerns following the publication of adoption scorecards. Following these assessments, a number of councils have additional support in place facilitated by CIB. It is likely a number of other councils will take part in diagnostic assessments when new adoption scorecard data is published in November. Some regions are also reviewing data on adoption to get a better understanding of improvement needs on their area. Other groups of councils are carrying out work to improve relationships with family courts.
- 8.8. Commissioning and productivity – a number of products designed to support effective commissioning are available on Knowledge Hub.
- 8.9. Data – CIB has developed a data tool for councils which draws on a range of indicators for children’s services and is currently available on Knowledge Hub. CIB is working with colleagues in the LGA to develop a more comprehensive data tool which will be part of LGInform.
- 8.10. Family Justice Review – following a series of workshops, CIB will shortly be publishing a toolkit signposting councils to good practice and useful resources. CIB will also be working with the Family Justice Board and Research in Practice to run action learning sets focused on local authorities interaction with family courts.
- 8.11. Integrated working - CIB hosts a set of resources on integrated working between agencies previously owned by the Children’s Workforce Development Council. These are available on Knowledge Hub.
- 8.12. Payment by results – CIB is working with DfE to support 27 councils who are testing payment by results measures.
- 8.13. Serious case reviews – CIB is working with the Association of Independent Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) Chairs and DfE to pilot the use of peer challenge in supporting learning from serious case reviews.
- 8.14. Youth innovation zones – CIB is supporting 12 youth innovation zones which are looking at innovative ways of delivering services for young people. These zones will be linked to the development demonstrators to support national learning.
9. In addition to this national work, regions are using CIB funding to supporting a number of workstreams on different issues which include: child poverty, early years, health, joint work with LSCBs, schools and educational attainment, troubled families and youth offending.

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10. More information on CIB is available at: [www.local.gov.uk/cib](http://www.local.gov.uk/cib) and:  
[knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/group/childrensimprovementboard](http://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/group/childrensimprovementboard)

**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.