

Children's Improvement Board (CIB) – legacy programme

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report updates the CYP Board on the withdrawal of funding for the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) and seeks the CYP Board's views on the future sector led improvement offer for children's services - the legacy programme - and the future governance arrangements for this.

Views are also being sought from the lead members of the LGA's Improvement and Innovation Board, from chief executives, directors of children's services and lead members for children. All of these views will be reported to the next CIB meeting on 19 June to enable CIB to make informed recommendations to the LGA for the way forward.

Recommendation

That the Board reach a view on priorities for the legacy programme (section 3 below) and governance arrangements (section 4 below) to be communicated to the Children's Improvement Board (CIB).

Action

That staff from the LGA and CIB report the views of the CYP Board to the next CIB meeting on 19 June along with the views of the Improvement and Innovation Board and local councils.

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Background

1. Members of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) were informed on 5 April 2013 that DfE was withdrawing its funding to CIB for 2013-14. This news was both extremely unwelcome and completely unexpected and has necessitated some rapid work by the CIB team to deal with existing commitments and exit from grant funding in a managed way.
2. The LGA has a longstanding commitment to sector led improvement, including in children's services and is committed to continuing to offer sector led support to councils.

Consultation

3. At its meeting of 18 April 2013, CIB agreed to consult with CIB regional leads (one nominated Director of Children's Services (DCS), one lead member and one chief executive in each region) and key stakeholders on a potential legacy programme for the Children's Improvement Board.
4. The potential legacy programme under discussion was based on five activity strands:
 - 4.1 the facilitation of a peer challenge programme based around self- assessment
 - 4.2 an offer of diagnostics on safeguarding and care
 - 4.3 brokering sector support for improvement
 - 4.4 joint work on leadership and professional development with key organisations;
and
 - 4.5 development demonstrators for Munro and early years
5. CIB has engaged in a process of discussion and consultation on these proposed activity strands with individual councils, the LGA, Association of DCS and SOLACE and with a meeting of CIB regional leads held in Leeds on 8 May. The LGA has also sought responses from lead members for children. The responses from these consultations are set out in **Appendix A**. In the light of the feedback received, these proposals have been modified and there is a **menu of options set out below**. CIB would now like to hear the views of the LGA's CYP Board and the Improvement and Innovation board before it meets on 19 June when it will make recommendations to the LGA for the way forward.

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The proposed legacy programme

6. In the light of the views and feedback received, the CIB team has proposed a number of options for a legacy programme which are set out below. **The Board is asked to give a view on priorities from these options.**
7. **In considering options the Board should be aware of views expressed during the consultation with regional leads and others.**
8. At the regional leads meeting on 8 May, the national representatives, including the LGA Principal Advisors, considered that given councils that might be in need of support were unlikely to fall evenly across regions, brokering improvement support should be handled nationally and involve the regions on each case. Similarly, they felt that a funded programme of safeguarding practice and care practice diagnostics was essential as part of any legacy programme to ensure that the sector as a whole improved and that impact and funding could be maximised.
9. Regional leads expressed a strong view that the presumption should be for devolving as much activity and funding as possible to regions. Equally, there was a need for national support for sector led improvement to advocate for a bottom up approach and to defend local government's interests and reputation in this area.
10. Regions expressed strong support for continuing regionally developed peer challenge and the need to make this more systematic in future. The Leadership Academy was seen as valuable but there was view that in future to should be more closely aligned to other leadership programmes for DCSs and chief executives, such as those run by the VSC and SOLACE. There was clear support for the variety of diagnostic tools, but no consensus as to whether these should be offered free to councils or offered on a charged for basis.
11. While there was a recognition of a continuing need to support shared learning, there was not a great deal of support for continuing the development demonstrators programme in its present form and this option is therefore not included in the list below.

11.1 Peer challenge and self-assessment coordination

Peer challenge, based on each council's self-assessment, has developed over the last two years into an essential component of sector led improvement which is valued and supported by councils. Feedback from councils and a recent evaluation by National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) have demonstrated that the programmes of peer challenge, coordinated in regions, have had a significant impact on building a collective approach to improvement and in helping councils to manage difficult conversations about performance where these are appropriate. All regions have confirmed that they are enthusiastic about continuing peer challenge and that they are actively working to

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draw on experience and refine the process to make it as effective as possible. A small element of funding would allow for a structured management of these challenges which councils feel has been important to the success of the programme, but equally regions have expressed a desire to continue this activity whether or not it receives national funding.

11.2 Safeguarding and care practice diagnostics and safeguarding peer reviews

CIB's consultation confirmed that there is clear support from councils for the safeguarding and care practice tools. There would be merits in a funded approach which would allow the offer to be focused on those councils most in need and would be consistent with the other parts of the LGA's sector led improvement offer. It might be possible to offer a core programme at no charge for those councils most in need with the option of other councils or regions purchasing additional diagnostics/reviews.

11.3 Training and maintaining the list of accredited senior peers

While some peer support is organised informally in regions, there is also a need for a pool of trained and accredited peers to take part in more formal reviews and diagnostics and to offer support to councils who are in particular difficulty. The LGA already has a mechanism for doing this and it therefore makes sense to retain this element of activity nationally.

11.4 Early sector support and brokerage

Following on from peer challenge, regional activity to identify and support councils who need help has also developed significantly. Having a resource to help councils who fall into the "*needs improvement*" category will help them to be clear about what they need to do to improve and enable support to be provided with input from peers in other councils with the aim of preventing formal intervention.

11.5 Targeted sector support brokerage fund

Where councils do end up in formal intervention, rapid sector support to help them respond to this situation can enable them to be well prepared for the improvement journey. The proposal is to set aside a fund which could be drawn down by regions, in discussion with the LGA, to ensure five days of sector led support is provided within the first 60 days of receiving an improvement notice and before major engagement with Ofsted and DfE.

11.6 Leadership academy

Consultations carried out by CIB have confirmed that support for leadership is valued by councils. The Leadership Academy pre-dates CIB and is the main way that the LGA supports its lead members in their role. This is the main element of the legacy programme in terms of direct support for members and it seems self-evident that the LGA as a politically led organisation should continue to offer it. The proposal is to hold three Leadership Academies (free of charge to participants) rather than four as last year but to maximise attendance at each of these.

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11.7 Joint focused leadership workshops

In addition, to support for the Leadership Academy, it was recognised that the LGA should continue the close working that CIB has developed with the Virtual Staff College and SOLACE on leadership for DCSs and chief executives respectively. CIB's work with councils has confirmed that the three way relationship between chief executives, DCSs and lead members is crucial to effective children's services and that it is important to build links between these programmes and the leadership academy in order to support a common understanding of leadership across these roles.

11.8 Maintenance of information on the Knowledge Hub and LGInform

Access to good quality up to date information is essential to supporting self-assessment. This element of the legacy programme is to maintain and develop the resources which are available to councils on children's services on the Knowledge Hub and LG Inform.

11.9 Maintaining the Board, national networks and integration with other sector led programmes

All the partners on the Board – LGA, ADCS and SOLACE – have committed to continued partnership working for sector led improvement. Similarly, there is support for regional working and for continued, close dialogue between regions and the national Board and resources for support of meetings and workshops, commissioning small scale, one off specialist advice on children's services and for some expert children's services support to principal advisers in their day to day work with councils. The LGA is also involved in a number of sector led programmes in support of services for adults – on social care (TEASC), public health and people with learning disabilities or mental health conditions (Winterbourne View). Programme management support for children's sector led improvement can be linked to these other programmes to build a more coherent offer for councils.

Governance

12. The partnership between LGA, ADCS and SOLACE was set up to oversee the sector led improvement programme originally supported by funding from Department for Education. However, the Board has provided a means for these three key stakeholder organisations to work closely together and to debate some of the issues affecting improvement. All three organisations have stated that they are committed to continue to work in partnership to support sector led improvement.
13. The CIB team has developed proposals for future governance arrangements but has suggested that the decision on continuation of CIB really depends on the existence of a legacy programme in the first instance and in the value added by engaging all three partners in its oversight. The consultation with regions provided evidence of a strong desire to build on the work of CIB over the last two years and a clear wish to see stronger engagement between the regional arrangements and national board.

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Members of a continuing Children's Improvement Board

14. The current three partners on CIB are all necessary to secure effective improvement action. There is a question whether or not to expand the membership. There are a number of potential candidates. These include:
 - 14.1 the voluntary and social enterprise sector
 - 14.2 the professional development body affecting the key workforce - The College of Social Work
 - 14.3 the Association of Independent LSCB Chairs
15. This does raise the issue around confidentiality and whether it is appropriate to discuss performance issues with stakeholders from outside local government. It might therefore be preferable to engage with voluntary and community sector organisations and others from outside local government on specific occasions rather than include them as full members of a national board.
16. Equally, there seems no rationale for continuing to have a standing DfE presence at Board meetings, given they will no longer be providing funding and more sense in engaging with the Department on an as needed basis.

Chairing

17. After some debate the Board has arrived at a process for rotation of the Chair on an annual basis, with SOLACE taking the chair for 2013-14 and LGA for 2014-15. Continuing this model for the remainder of this financial year has practical advantages of stability and consistency whilst a longer term debate is underway on how sector led improvement might be delivered and governed beyond April 2014.

Board reporting lines

18. If funding is to be largely derived from LGA in future then the reporting dynamic will change. It should be for the LGA to determine how the CIB grant is commissioned and CIB would need to continue to have a reporting relationship both to the CYP Board and to the Improvement and Innovation Board. It will be important to consider whether CIB is allocated a budget or whether different arrangements are made for allocating funding.
19. Other reporting requirements to ADCS and SOLACE (usually to attend specific meetings or events) can be carried out by the programme manager.

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Servicing the Board

20. It is recommended that support for CIB and programme management should continue to be provided by the LGA.

21. Subject to decisions by the LGA on the legacy programme and on arrangements for the Board, the CIB team has proposed terms of reference for a national Children's Improvement Board to:
 - 21.1 Hold a national overview of the whole system.
 - 21.2 Facilitate the governance and engagement of regions in the development of a coherent and integrated approach to sector led improvement.
 - 21.3 Work at a national level with DFE Improvement and Intervention Team and with OFSTED in establishing agreed roles and boundaries in relation to the improvement of children's services.
 - 21.4 Maintain a national draw down fund for authorities receiving an inadequate OFSTED judgement to enable them to commission five days initial sector support (targeted sector support).
 - 21.5 Provide an active and readily available platform through LGA Knowledge Hub, web site or LG Inform as appropriate which supports regional activity and the flow of information on best or innovative practice, effective dissemination, added value and cost management, performance intelligence and horizon scanning. This should allow easy signposting and access to other relevant web based resources from partner organisations
 - 21.6 Co-ordinate work between LGA, SOLACE, VSC and LSCB Chairs on integrated leadership development for members and officers. To include formal training, facilitated observation and mentoring delivered in a flexible and modular manner. The emphasis to be placed on applied leadership for whole system improvement and quality assurance.
 - 21.7 Provide nationally accredited and quality assured courses for practitioners and associates engaging in peer review, challenge or diagnostic activity and maintaining a register of the same.
 - 21.8 Develop, where need is evident, a flexible and responsive offer through the LGA to provide a range of bespoke diagnostic or review tools either to individual authorities or as part of a regional offer or as may be commissioned by DfE for authorities in intervention.

Financial implications

22. The Children's Improvement Board was supported by a grant from the Department for Education and was due to receive £8.5m for its work in 2013/14. Following the announcement to close down the programme, this amount was reduced to £2m to cover contractual obligations and to close the programme in an orderly manner. Included within that sum are grants to regions, equivalent to around 25 per cent of their proposed full year grant, to meet their contractual obligations.

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23. **The recommendations from CIB to this Board include the costs of various options. These proposed arrangements for sector led improvement for children's services can be funded from CIB and LGA resources in 2013-14 and 2014-15 depending on the mix of the offer.**