

## **Future arrangements for sector-led improvement for children's services**

### **Summary**

The Children's Improvement Board (CIB), which has been leading sector-led improvement for children's services, had its DfE funding withdrawn in April this year. This report seeks the Board's agreement to the future sector-led improvement programme for children's services and future partnership arrangements between LGA, ADCS and SOLACE. CIB will meet on 12 July and an oral update on discussions at that meeting will be given to the CYP Board.

### **Recommendation**

That the Board agree the proposals for a sector-led offer for children's services and the arrangements for future partnership working.

### **Action**

That LGA staff deliver the future sector-led offer in partnership with ADCS and SOLACE.

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**Item 3**

## **Future arrangements for sector-led improvement for children's services**

### **Background**

1. In April 2013, the Department for Education announced it would terminate its grant funding to CIB within 3 months. CIB agreed a close down plan and budget for this. The majority of CIB activity will have ceased by the end of July and either be stopped, passed to others or delivered in a reduced format without the need for funding. The programme management functions for CIB have been scaled back and will cease altogether at the end of August. The LGA will take over the programme management arrangements for sector-led improvement for children's services.
2. Regional grants, amounting to about 25 per cent of their proposed 2013-14 allocations, have been paid to all regions in order to cover their own contractual obligations and close down plans. All regions have confirmed their desire to continue with a joint ADCS, LGA and SOLACE approach to regional children's improvement and have developed their own plans to achieve this. In many cases, regions have taken forward existing plans for self-assessment and peer challenge along with the opportunity to link these to other areas of work in the region.

### **The proposed sector-led offer**

3. Since the announcement of the withdrawal of funding, the CIB team and the LGA have consulted with individual local authorities, regions and with ADCS and SOLACE about the future sector-led offer. This has produced consensus around the priorities for a sector-led programme linking to the products already offered by the LGA.
4. In the light of views received, the following key components are recommended to the CYP Board as a sector-led offer to councils from the LGA. These proposals seek to take sector-led improvement forward in a way that is integrated with other national, peer based tools and with the role of LGA Principal Advisers in being the first point of contact with councils on improvement.

### **Components of the proposed offer**

#### **Leadership academy**

5. The Leadership Academy pre-dates CIB and is the main way that the LGA supports lead members for children and young people in their crucial and challenging role. Given the importance of the programme to elected members, and the need for sufficient time to plan and market these events, the continuation of the Leadership Academies, free of charge to participants, *has been confirmed* for 2013-14. There will

**Item 3**

be three academies in September, November and January and an event for 'alumni', who have attended previous academies.

**Peer challenge and diagnostic tools**

6. Regions have re-stated their commitment to peer challenge as a key tool for sector-led improvement and will continue to operate peer challenge programmes and foster robust approaches to self-assessment, drawing on data from LGInform.
7. Two focused diagnostic tools for safeguarding and care have been developed through the CIB programme and can be delivered by the LGA's peer support team. These will replace the current safeguarding peer reviews. The diagnostics are shorter exercises than the safeguarding peer reviews and more focused on front line practice. Diagnostics will be offered free of charge to councils, on the basis of the need identified by the LGA's Principal Advisers. (An adoption diagnostic is also available to councils on a paid for basis; eleven councils have so far decided to purchase this product).

**Joint work on leadership**

8. It was clear from CIB's discussions with councils that the quality of leadership is fundamental to sector-led improvement. There was concern however that leadership support is delivered separately for the three "constituencies" of DCSs (by the Virtual Staff College, VSC), lead members (by the LGA) and chief executives (by SOLACE) and is not brought together in a coherent way which builds the relationship between these groups. At its meeting on 12 July, CIB will be discussing options for a joint approach to leadership work and an oral update will be given to the board.

**Targeted sector support for councils in intervention**

9. 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 make provision for specialist advice and support on children's services to councils where Principal Advisers feel this is necessary. The nature of this support will depend in part on continuing discussion with Ofsted about their future role in improvement.

**Relationships with regions**

10. Establishing and fostering a regional infrastructure has been an important part of CIB's work. This has provided a link between national organisations and individual councils, enabled more efficient use of resources by drawing together different regional programmes and supported stronger relationships both between councils and between DCSs, lead members and chief executives in each region.
11. In the light of this experience, it is proposed that the LGA continues to actively support regional networks of lead members, to maintain a two-way relationship with

17 July 2013

**Item 3**

regional programme managers, or their equivalent and to convene meetings of key players from regions as needed.

**Future partnership working**

12. This will be the subject of discussions at the CIB meeting on 12 July and any further developments will be reported at the meeting.
13. CIB has provided a valuable forum for discussion between LGA, ADCS and SOLACE on improvement. CIB's funding has been withdrawn at a time when the challenges facing local government in delivering high quality services for young people are increasing rather than diminishing and when Ofsted is seeking to extend its role in improvement. LGA, ADCS and SOLACE are committed to continuing to work together to support sector-led improvement and to discuss joint approaches to the improvement of children's services and the role of Ofsted.
14. It is proposed that the LGA support 3 or 4 further CIB meetings during the course of 2013-14 to facilitate these important discussions.

**Financial implications**

15. The recommended future sector-led offer for 2013-14 and 2014-15 set out in this report can be delivered within the LGA's resources.