

## **Safeguarding Children Action Plan**

### **Summary**

This report updates members on proposal for coordinated improvement activity by the LGA Group and key partners, to be offered to councils with low APA scores for safeguarding children.

### **Recommendations**

- To note the overall national picture on councils' performance on safeguarding children, as set out in Appendix 1.
- To agree the proposals for coordinated improvement activity by the LGA Group and key partners, to be offered to councils with low APA scores for safeguarding children.

### **Action**

- To communicate this proposition to DCSF.
- Both this Board and the Children and Young People Board should subject these proposals to review and refinement on a regular basis.

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## **Safeguarding Children Action Plan**

### **Background**

1. Annual Performance Assessments for councils were published last month for all but two councils (though both had a grade 2 in their JAR). The number of councils with an APA Grade 1 for staying safe increased to 8. These are Birmingham, Doncaster, Essex, Haringey, Reading, Surrey, West Sussex and Wokingham. The number rated Grade 2 was 40. 11 councils dropped into that category for the first time. Only Haringey and Reading dropped from Grade 3 to 1. More positively, 12 improved from Grade 2 to 3.
2. Lord Laming is expected to complete his review of progress since his inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié by March. In the light of this it would seem appropriate for the LGA Group to plan an event to bring Leaders and Lead Members together to reflect on the findings and their implications. We suggest this is jointly organised by the Improvement Board, the four Group Improvement Boards, and the Children and Young People's Board. We suggest the format should allow for general input and discussion and for reflection in political groups. This would also provide an opportunity to test and refine the proposals in this report.

### **Co-ordinated support for improvement activity**

3. Recovering from the impact of a loss of confidence in our current safeguarding and child protection services requires a confident, co-ordinated and competent package of support to Local Authorities and their Children's Trust partners.
4. LGA, IDeA, the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in children's services (C4EO), which is a Centre wholly funded by DCSF and run by a consortium led by National Children's Bureau and the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) have collaborated on a range of short, medium and long term initiatives which will avoid duplication as well as support central, regional and local government, to improve services, remodel practice and restore confidence in the ability of children's services to protect children at risk. These will support both general improvement activity and sector based improvement and activity at regional level. All four organisations will be available to provide coordinated and complementary work following the publication of the Laming Review (and associated work on serious care reviews and local children's safeguarding boards), the Social Work Task Force (chaired by Moira Gibb CE Camden), and responses from DCSF. They will work closely with ADCS and with the Children's Inter-Agency Group (currently chaired by the President of ADCS).

### **Medium term proposals for improvement activity by the LGA Group**

5. This report proposes an eight point action plan to support improvement. It incorporates immediate steps to improve intelligence in the sector about what is happening and co-ordinating responses to it, better support for senior members

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and directors (both generally and in difficult situations), and developing peer challenge and review offers.

- (a) **Understanding and promoting what works** – this is central to the mission of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO), the Social Care Institute for Excellence and the Commissioning Support Programme. The LGA Group's role is to ensure this is tailored to meet the needs of senior politicians and decision makers and informs its approach to advocacy on behalf of the sector. C4EO intends to begin work on an additional safeguarding strand of its programme on vulnerable children. They will publish a full knowledge review on child protection. They plan to recruit sector specialists to support councils on action plans after a peer challenge (as below). This will be actioned jointly by LGA, C4EO and IDeA.
- (b) **Develop peer support and challenge** – the IDeA, working with the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes, is developing a benchmark and peer review that drills down below confidence in the framework (the focus of Ofsted work and the Annual Performance Assessment) and looks at practice, supervision, judgement and its interplay with the management of safeguarding. This benchmark will draw on the experiences of the councils with top ratings for safeguarding and evidence of what works. This work will be led by a respected figure from the field and we hope will be able to draw down additional funding from DCSF and RIEPs to ensure it is offered to priority councils, initially those where issues have already been identified (see Appendix). This peer review is being piloted from January to March in four councils. IDeA will recruit peer associates to take part in this programme. All councils will be able to commission a peer review from April 2009. This will be actioned by IDeA and LGA.
- (c) **Supporting Leaders and Lead Members** – this would build on existing offers (Leadership Academy, Lead Member Networks, and the online Must Knows series to equip Leaders and Lead Members with a framework to understand, support and challenge their councils safeguarding work. This will be led by IDeA with the Group Improvement Boards.
- (d) **Co-ordination of activity with RIEPs** – RIEP strategies include support to councils with performance concerns about their children's services. It is important that national and regional resources and support from the sector are well coordinated. This is being developed with the National Programme Office.
- (e) **Customised support** – councils tell us that following an adverse event or a bad inspection report, their need for support from the sector will vary. Councils in trouble often find themselves overwhelmed by attention from field forces, Government offices and inspectorates. There needs to be a repertoire of offers, both immediate and medium term, political and professional, that councils can discuss with the LGA Group through IDeA regional associates and political peers. Sometimes the most useful support may be to strengthen the council as a client and to scope their needs. This will be led by IDeA.

- (f) **Better early information sharing within the sector** – councils know well in advance of the publication of serious child protection cases and forthcoming criminal cases. We propose that the LGA Group should develop a confidential protocol with ADCS and the political group offices to ensure that councils alert LGA and peers to the timetable so that the sector is better prepared. This is being developed jointly by LGA, IDeA and ADCS.
- (g) **Constructive support and challenge to significant** While the scale or nature of media attention is hard to predict, it is proposed that political group offices should routinely offer support from experienced leaders and lead members once the issue is known about. Further we suggest the development of a best practice guide based on councils' experience. There would need to be close links with the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) to parallel their support to directors. This will be led by LGA, Group Improvement Boards and IDeA.
- (h) **Strengthening Scrutiny** – the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) has identified and promoted good practice in scrutinising children's services. They are in a good position to develop further guidance on the role of local authority scrutiny committees in reviewing councils' approaches to safeguarding children. IDeA will commission this from CfPS.
- . These proposals will need regular review and refinement, in consultation with both Boards. The IDeA has identified up to £200,000 to support these activities this financial year (2008/09) and, with Members' support, this will be a priority area for next year's (2009/10) LGA Group Business Plan.
- . The Chair of the Improvement Board and the Chair of the Children and Young People board have jointly written to council leaders, chief executives and directors of children's services confirming the offer of support available from the LGA group. (appendix 2).

## Financial Implications

8. There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

## Implications for Wales

9. There is a different approach to performance management in Wales.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Councils with a current Grade 1 or 2 rating for Safeguarding

<b>Grade 1</b> Birmingham 🇬🇧 Doncaster 🇬🇧 Essex 🇬🇧 Haringey 🇬🇧 (was 3) Reading (was 3) 🇬🇧 Surrey Wokingham 🇬🇧 West Sussex 🇬🇧	
<b>Grade 2</b> Bristol Bury 🇬🇧 Cambridgeshire Calderdale 🇬🇧 Cheshire 🇬🇧 Cornwall Coventry Gloucestershire Herefordshire Hertfordshire Isles of Scilly Isle of Wight Lancashire Leeds 🇬🇧 Manchester Medway Middlesbrough 🇬🇧 Milton Keynes Newcastle	Northamptonshire 🇬🇧 Nottingham Oldham Oxfordshire Peterborough Rotherham 🇬🇧 Salford Sandwell Sefton 🇬🇧 Southampton Southend South Tyneside 🇬🇧 Stoke on Trent Tameside 🇬🇧 Thurrock Torbay Wiltshire 🇬🇧 Wirral Wolverhampton

Yet to be published: Kingston-upon-Thames, Portsmouth, Telford & Wrekin

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## APPENDIX 2

Lead Members for Children's Services

cc. Local Authority Leaders  
Chief Executives  
Directors of Children's Services

11 December 2008

Dear Colleague

Following the summit on child protection which the Chairman of the LGA, Cllr Margaret Eaton OBE, hosted two weeks ago, LGA and IDeA have come together to agree a series of actions, with a view to supporting you and your colleagues in carrying out your responsibilities in this important area.

We are likely to add to this list but for now it comprises the following key elements:

**Understanding and promoting what works** – this is central to the mission of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO), the Social Care Institute for Excellence and the \DCSF Commissioning Support Programme. The LGA Group's role is to ensure this is tailored to meet the needs of senior politicians and decision makers and informs its approach to advocacy on behalf of the sector.

**Developing peer support and challenge** – the IDeA, working with the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes, is developing a benchmark and peer review that drills down below confidence in the framework (the focus of Ofsted work and the APA) and looks at practice, supervision, judgement and its interplay with the management of safeguarding. This benchmark will draw on the experiences of the councils with top ratings for safeguarding and evidence of what works. This work will be led by a respected figure from the field.

**Supporting Leaders and Lead Members** – this will build on existing offers (Leadership Academy, Lead Member Networks, and the online Must Knows series) to equip Leaders and Lead Members with a framework to understand, support and challenge their councils safeguarding work. Further work could strengthen formal and informal mentoring support, assist with induction and contribute to the better coordination of sector activity.

**Co-ordination of activity with RIEPs** (Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships) – RIEP strategies include support to councils with performance

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concerns about their children's services. It is important that national and regional resources and support from the sector are well coordinated.

**Customised support** – councils tell us that following an adverse event or a poor inspection report, their need for support will vary. They often find themselves overwhelmed by attention from field forces, Government offices and inspectorates. There needs to be a repertoire of offers, both immediate and medium term, political and professional, that councils can discuss with the LGA Group.

**Strengthening Scrutiny** – the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) has identified and promoted good practice in scrutinising children's services. They are in a good position to develop further guidance on the role of local authority scrutiny committees in reviewing councils' approaches to safeguarding children. This requires consideration of the interface with the responsibilities of the Local Safeguarding Board for developing safeguarding arrangements and holding partners to account on their performance and co-operation.

**Lobbying for more resources for children's social work and influencing the Inspection regime** - On the day of the summit LGA's Chairman wrote to the Prime Minister to make the case for increased investment in children's social work, to ensure we can recruit and retain high calibre individuals into the future. We are pleased the Government is establishing a taskforce to take forward the need to reinforce the children's social care workforce. We will continue to press the resources issues and, furthermore, we will seek to influence inspection arrangements which are widely agreed to be unsatisfactory, for a number of reasons.

We hope this work will be helpful to you, both now as you review your safeguarding arrangements in response to the request from the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, and into the future.

We will keep you informed as this work develops. In the meantime, if you have any immediate queries please do contact Caroline Abrahams, LGA Programme Director ([caroline.abrahams@lga.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.abrahams@lga.gov.uk)) or Andrew Cozens, Strategic Adviser, IDeA ([andrew.cozens@idea.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.cozens@idea.gov.uk))



Cllr David Parsons  
Chair of the LGA Improvement Board



Cllr Les Lawrence  
Chair of the LGA Children and  
Young People Board

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