

Progress report on Safeguarding Children Action Plan

1. Summary

This is a progress report on the development of the LGA Group's action plan to support councils' work on safeguarding children. The Board will also receive a verbal update on the position of the eight councils with Grade 1 rating, and final arrangements for the conference to reflect on Lord Laming's report and the Government's response to it.

2. Recommendations

To note progress in the development of the LGA Group's Safeguarding Action Plan, the conference on 25th March and the LGA campaign on child protection social work in local government.

3. Action

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

Contact Officers:

Caroline Abrahams Programme Manager Children & Young People, LGA

Email: caroline.abrahams@lga.gov.uk

020 7664 3172

Andrew Cozens, Strategic Adviser Children, Adults & Health Services, IDeA

Email: andrew.cozens@idea.gov.uk

020 7296 6152

Progress report on Safeguarding Children Action Plan

Background

1. Annual Performance Assessments for councils were published in December 2008. Eight councils were given an APA Grade 1 for staying safe. These are Birmingham, Doncaster, Essex, Haringey, Reading, Surrey, West Sussex and Wokingham. All councils are in various stages of discussions with DCSF officials about their improvement plans. A verbal report will be given on these to Members at the meeting.
2. At the time of preparing this report, Lord Laming was expected to publish his review of progress since his inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié around 11th March. The LGA Group has organised a conference on 25th March to bring Leaders, Lead Members, Chief Executives and Directors together to reflect on the findings, the Government's response, and their implications.
3. On 3rd March, the LGA launched a campaign to promote child protection social work in local government, based on three principles: respect, recruitment and retention.

Progress report on improvement activity

4. Interviews for a senior manager, seconded from a local Authority to act as Head of the Safeguarding programme, took place on 9 March. Until s/he takes up post in June, Jane Held an LGA/IDeA Associate and former director of social services, is acting as interim head.
5. The work of the Programme is to be overseen by a Programme Board. This will comprise representatives from LGA, IDeA, Association of Directors of Children's Services, SOLACE, Centre for Excellence and Outcomes, Social Care Institute for Excellence, DCSF and West Midlands RIEP (as the lead for children's services). Its main aim will be to ensure our work complements existing activity. We recognise councils will want to choose the sort of support they find most appropriate. We will fine tune our offers in line with the requests we get and the things councils tell us would help.
6. Progress on the key strands of work underway is as follows:
 - (a) **Understanding and promoting what works:** The key aim here is to ensure that there are simple and straightforward messages to meet the needs of senior politicians and decision makers about best practice and what works. C4EO has begun work on an additional safeguarding strand of its programme on vulnerable children. They will publish a full knowledge review on child protection. We have part-funded this to ensure it is tailored to councillors' needs. We are also developing the idea of a **dashboard of indicators** to help Leaders, Lead Members and Chief Executives get an overall sense of how things are in

23 4

their authority. We are also looking at the use of a **community of practice** in this area. We have secured slots at the National Conference in October.

- (b) **Develop peer support and challenge** – the benchmark for this is complete and will be tested in three pilot peer reviews (Sefton, Kingston, Devon). The reviews are expected to be completed by early May. This experience will help us refine it as an offer to all councils, but particularly those with Grade 1 or 2. A fourth has been commissioned by Surrey for the autumn. We are talking to RIEP leads about their help in promoting and funding this offer. We will be running an accreditation centre of officer and member peers to deliver these.
- (c) **Supporting Leaders and Lead Members** – We have begun reviewing our existing offers (Leadership Academy, Lead Member Networks, and the online Must Knows series). We will complete this after the publication of Lord Laming's review and the DCSF response.
- (d) **Co-ordination of activity with RIEPs** – We are working through the lead RIEP to inform the planning for 2009/10.
- (e) **Customised support** – Regional Associates have made contact with councils affected to explore what might help with their improvement planning. Help in place or planned includes member training; identifying a mentor; involvement with Improvement Boards or advice on who might sit on them; advice on relating to Ofsted and/or DCSF; and specific commissions to study aspects of their services. We plan to increase the number of IDeA associates with specialist expertise that we can deploy.
- (f) **Better early information sharing within the sector** – We are beginning work on how such a protocol might be developed, including with DCSF. This will be a priority for the Head of Programme. In advance of this the LGA media team have been in contact with councils where issues are emerging to offer support.
- (g) **Constructive support and challenge to significant events** - We are exploring the development of a best practice guide based on councils' experience.
- (h) **Strengthening Scrutiny** – the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) has begun work on a study of good scrutiny inquiries in this area, and on a toolkit. The first will be available as soon as possible, the second will be launched in October. We will use the CfPS's relaunched website as a resource to direct members to. In addition we have helped find expert witnesses to support three councils in this work.

Financial Implications

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

23 4

Implications for Wales

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

Contact Officers:

Caroline Abrahams Programme Manager Children & Young People, LGA

Email: caroline.abrahams@lga.gov.uk

Andrew Cozens, Strategic Adviser Children, Adults & Health Services, IDeA

Email: andrew.cozens@idea.gov.uk