

Safeguarding Children Programme Development

Summary

This report gives a progress report on the development of sector-led support for councils' work on safeguarding children. The Board will also receive a verbal update on the formal public 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. It also outlines proposals for widespread consultation on the full programme.

Recommendations

To note progress with the initial phase of the LGA Group's Safeguarding Action Plan and details of the conference on 25th March to consider the implications of the Laming Report *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report*.

Action

- To consider arrangements for consultation with the sector on the shape of the programme, including setting up a Programme Board with key stakeholders to oversee its development.
- To receive a further report on the how this activity sits with the other support programmes in place, or proposed following the publication of the Government's Action Plan next month.

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Background

1. Annual Performance Assessments for councils were published in December 2008. Eight councils were given an APA Grade 1 by Ofsted for staying safe, and a further 40 were rated at Grade 2. The eight were Birmingham, Doncaster, Essex, Haringey, Reading, Surrey, West Sussex and Wokingham. All these councils are in various stages of discussions with DCSF officials about their improvement plans.
2. Lord Laming published his report, *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report* on 12th 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 initial 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: immediate responses

4. The initial phase of the Programme has responded to **immediate requests** for assistance from councils directly affected by the Annual Performance Assessment and CPA announcements and keen to make progress. The support offered has been tailored to their individual needs and includes member training, support to, or participation on Improvement Boards, sourcing experts and mentors, and offering advice on engagement with Government and inspectors.
5. Secondly we have accelerated the development and testing of a **peer review** that we had already been working on with a number of high performing councils. This has been well received and three pilots are booked in Kingston, Devon and Sefton, with a review booked for Surrey in the autumn. We are also following up other requests already received. To support this we will need to increase our bank of specialist peers and associates for the sector. We anticipate all RIEPs will be giving safeguarding support their attention and we are keen to dovetail our offers with theirs.
6. We have also responded to requests to develop **training for members** on safeguarding and corporate parenting. We have revised and updated our offer and tested it in Haringey, where it has been well received.
7. We have also responded to requests to support **scrutiny reviews** by helping identify member peers. We have commissioned the Centre for Public Scrutiny to search out examples of good practice and to develop a toolkit we can offer to councils.
8. We are keen too to be associated with the identification and dissemination of **good practice**, based on evidence of what works. We are supporting the study

by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO) and the work of SCIE on Serious Care Reviews.

Messages from the Laming Review

9. The Secretary of State has accepted all the recommendations of the Review and will publish an Action Plan by April. Most of the recommendations are to Government, but there are some that have implications for the sector itself. These will need to be built into the peer review benchmarks. The review highlights the complexities of councils working with the NHS and Police, new accountabilities to Government, and reinforcement of the role of the Leader and Chief Executive.
10. Recommendations include training on child protection and safeguarding and on leading these services for all senior political leaders and service managers. The Secretary of State has also concluded that both the director of children's services and the lead member will always be members of both the Children's Trust Board and the Local Safeguarding Board (LCSB). Chief Executives and Leaders will be required to confirm annually that their local arrangements comply with the law. In addition two members of the general public will be appointed to every LCSB.

Staffing the Programme

11. This support has been developed towards the end of the year by IDeA from its existing staff team led by Andrew Cozens. This team was depleted in December by the secondment of Jacky Tiotto, Senior National Adviser, to support Lord Laming's review. Our priority has been to respond positively to what councils were seeking immediately from us.
12. The confirmation of this as a priority for the LGA Group for 2009/10, and the allocation of additional funding to support it, has allowed the Agency to recruit a senior figure from the sector to lead this work. After inviting expressions of interest from every council, I am pleased to report that Paul Curran, currently Director of Children's Services for Islington, will take up post from mid-May. Until he takes up post, Jane Held an LGA/IDeA Associate and former director of social services, is acting as interim head.

Developing the full offer

13. Improvement activity for children's services is a crowded field, with field forces, programmes and leadership offers for local government commissioned by the Department for Children Schools and Families. Ofsted and other inspectorates regulate and inspect services. Lord Laming's review identified the absence of a clear focus across Government to support safeguarding work. It will be important to position support from the sector, regionally and nationally, so that it fills gaps, particularly in assisting members with their roles.
14. The fuller programme will be built on widespread discussions on what the sector would find useful and the key elements of sector-led support: identifying and promoting good practice; peer review and challenge; leadership; and good

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governance and scrutiny. It will also be important to discuss proposals with DCSF and with other improvement agencies, including those for the NHS and Police.

15. A key role for the new Head of Programme will be to engage widely with councils and other key partners to develop a **bottom-up approach** in tune with their needs. We know from initial discussions there will be a wide range of issues and needs to address and to prioritise. We know too there will be differences of perception between chief executives and directors, leaders, lead members and scrutiny chairs.
16. LGA Board members have been keen to address how councils can be better prepared for serious cases and the role of Group Improvement Boards to assist members.
17. Another key preoccupation of leaders, lead members and chief executives we have spoken to is the development of a **dashboard of key indicators** of the health of a local child protection system. We are keen to work with partners in councils on this idea.
18. The work of the Programme is to be overseen by a Programme Board. We propose that this should 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. To this end we will also link up with NHS and Police improvement planning.

Financial Implications

19. There are no additional financial implications arising from this report. The IDeA has allocated £200,000 in 2008/09 for immediate responses and £250,000 for 2009/10 to support the core costs of the Programme.

Implications for Wales

20. There is a different approach to performance management in Wales but the key resources will be of relevance and interest to Welsh authorities.

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