

## **“Taking the Lead”: self regulation and improvement in local government**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion and direction

### **Summary**

This report updates the Improvement Board on the progress in implementing “Taking the Lead” and invites members to offer guidance on next steps.

### **Recommendation**

The Board is asked to provide a steer on the direction so far and offer guidance on next steps.

### **Action**

To pursue next steps in the light of members’ discussion.

### **Contact officers:**

Dennis Skinner; Head of Leadership and Productivity,  
Tel 020 7664 3017 Email [Dennis.skinner@local.gov.uk](mailto:Dennis.skinner@local.gov.uk)

Nick Easton, Senior Adviser

Tel 020 7664 3278 Email [nick.easton@local.gov.uk](mailto:nick.easton@local.gov.uk)

## **“Taking the Lead”: self regulation and improvement in local government**

### **Background**

1. Following publication of “Taking the Lead” the Board agreed at its March meeting that the next steps would be to:
  - 1.1 Work with the sector to develop and deliver the key tools that underpin the approach and encourage wide take up in the sector;
  - 1.2 Monitor take up of the approach and tools and evaluate progress;
  - 1.3 Continue to lobby Government to reduce the burden of data reporting to Government and the Inspectorates;
  - 1.4 Influence the future arrangements for audit in a way that supports the Group’s approach to self regulation and improvement.
2. This report updates the Board on progress and invites members to offer guidance on next steps.

### **Developing the key tools**

3. Good progress has been made in developing the tools that underpin the approach. “Taking the Lead” set out a seven point support offer to the sector to help councils take advantage of the new approach. Appendix A **attached** reminds members what we said we would provide and sets out what we have done and next steps. In particular:
4. **Peer Challenge:** The Peer Support Team is in discussion with a number of upper tier and district authorities and is at various stages of planning their peer challenges. In the first batch of peer challenges (the first of which will be taking place in July and will be continuing in to the autumn) we plan to test out the new approach in a range of different types of authority in a variety of locations across the country, including:
  - 4.1 individual district and unitary councils;
  - 4.2 councils with joint management arrangements and shared services;
  - 4.3 a council working with public sector partners within its area;
  - 4.4 a county working in parallel with the first of its districts, looking to develop a countywide approach and to explore two-tier arrangements; and
  - 4.5 a sub-regional approach involving a county and unitary council in the West Midlands.
5. Feedback so far has been very positive.

**Item 2**

Discussions are taking place with a **county and metropolitan authority** about an extended joint Peer Review of the locality partnership arrangements and their effectiveness. This would involve a number of discrete team visits but for shorter durations than has been the norm.

The individual on-site elements would include some developmental opportunities for peers to work with officers and members (as well as garnering insight and intelligence) rather than treating support and development as a discrete follow-on.

The scope of the review is currently under discussion with the authorities and it may be that it also includes a further metropolitan council, but this has yet to be resolved.

A **shire district** will be one of the first councils to undertake the new style peer challenge. As well as the key questions around leadership and corporate capacity there will also be a significant focus on what the council wants to prioritise. A council with significant governance, performance and financial issues three years ago, it has improved significantly with support from LGG. The council has a strong desire to learn and improve in relation to economic development, housing, and the potential of shared services. This challenge will take place in July.

6. **LG Inform:** A prototype of the new data service LG Inform (which was presented to the last Board meeting) was launched at the LG Group Annual Conference. This has been developed in consultation with the sector and the next phase will involve further consultation and engagement with councils to ensure it remains sector-led and delivers what councils are looking for.
7. To access the LG Inform prototype, please register at [www.local.gov.uk/lginform](http://www.local.gov.uk/lginform). To comment on it, please contact [juliet.whitworth@local.gov.uk](mailto:juliet.whitworth@local.gov.uk) or use the feedback button within LG Inform.

**Promoting awareness and take-up**

8. We have undertaken wide ranging marketing and communications activity to promote the LG Group offer to the sector.
9. In terms of next steps we will:
  - 9.1 Evaluate the impact. We are considering options for evaluating the effectiveness of our current communications activity – so that this can inform future work.
  - 9.2 Develop a single narrative that joins up “Taking the Lead” with developments in adult social care and children’s services and provides a

**Item 2**

- single clear message to the sector about how these initiatives and the support provided under each strand interrelate.
- 9.3 Develop a refreshed communications plan from the Autumn onwards – which will be based on promoting the messages and learning that comes from early users of the tools.
- 9.4 Deliver two series of road shows around the country in July and September. These are being organised with the involvement of the relevant Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership and/or Regional LGA and will provide an overview of the “Taking the Lead” and specific workshops on peer challenge, K Hub, LG Inform and accountability and scrutiny support, in association with the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

**Taking the Lead – and other service areas**

10. One of our key objectives will be to ensure that the key elements of sector self regulation and improvement, i.e. the importance of robust comparable data; self evaluation; and peer challenge are built into other key service areas. Good progress is being made in both adult social care and children’s services.
11. **In Adult Social Care:** the Annual Performance Assessment for adult social services has been abolished and the Care Quality Commission is developing a risk based approach to safeguarding inspections.
12. The new joint Commissioning Board (Promoting excellence in Councils’ Adult Social Care) has also agreed the key elements of an approach to sector led improvement.
13. Councils are being encouraged to consider producing “Local Accounts” as a means of reporting back to citizens and consumers on performance. Local Accounts build on work that councils are already doing on local quality assurance frameworks and safeguarding annual reports. They can be used to engage with citizens and consumers around priorities and outcomes and could become a key accountability mechanism to the public and a useful way of informing self-improvement activity locally.
14. **In Children’s services:** The new joint children’s services commissioning Board (Children’s Improvement Board) has agreed a new self-improving system for children’s services, including robust data, self evaluation and peer challenge.
15. Ministers have now agreed funding to support the implementation of the model. This includes preventing failure at all points in the improvement cycle where there are identified risks and weaknesses, through a robust system of challenge and improvement support.

**Item 2**

16. Ministers have asked for further work to be done to ensure customers' views are taken into account - children's and parents' experiences and the views of local citizens more generally on service delivery; ensure sustainable improvement and ensure members play a full part in delivering improvements in their own local authorities and support and challenge their colleagues in other authorities so as to help raise standards across the Board.
17. All councils with responsibility for children's services have been invited to come forward to be 'Early Adopters' of the system and/or to be early peer challengers. There has been an excellent response with 2 regions, 1 improvement cluster and a number of individual councils now signed up. In addition the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has been commissioned to draw out the learning and report to the Children's Improvement Board.
18. Members should also note that there is a high expectation of compliance with the key elements of this approach in the children's services system because of the nature of the services involved.
19. Whilst the sector has always accepted the need for external inspection in high risk areas where the impact of failure is high – such as children's safeguarding - successful take up of the self-improvement system will help the sector make the case for changes in the current inspection arrangements in children's services and ensure that the overall burden is reduced.
20. Ofsted will be consulting on a revised framework for the inspection of some key aspects of children's services this summer, for implementation from May 2012. Legislation is required to remove Ofsted's statutory duty to produce an annual rating for each council's children's services and the Children and Young People Programme Board and Children's Improvement Board are urging Government to find the earliest possible legislative opportunity to do so.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

21. The Self Regulation Advisory Board (see Item 3 on this agenda) is committed to reviewing the experience of the first year of "Taking the Lead" both in terms of the take up of the approach; the use of the tools; and the extent to which this has contributed to improved performance.
22. Officers are currently exploring evaluation options for discussion with the Advisory Board in September and will then be in a position to report to the Improvement Board in the Autumn.

**Item 2**

**Conclusions**

23. Good progress has been made but there is still a lot to be done in terms of:
- 23.1 promoting the 7 point offer and councils take up of the tools (e.g. signing councils up to have a peer challenge);
  - 23.2 finalising the support tools with councils (e.g. some of the accountability tools, LG Inform)
  - 23.3 engraining the approach in other service areas
  - 23.4 strengthening the way we understand performance in the sector as a whole and individual councils facing performance challenges
  - 23.5 developing proposals to monitor and evaluate the success of the approach and the individual tools.

**Financial Implications**

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