

Children's Services – Sector led improvement

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This paper sets out the arrangements being put in place for a sector led approach to improving children's services. Members are invited to consider the arrangements with a view to:

- Ensuring consistency with the overall "Taking the Lead" approach
- Ensuring appropriate links are being made to manage the risk of underperformance and the provision of improvement support
- Commenting on Ofsted's proposals for inspection.

Recommendations

- Members note the 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;
- Members stress the importance they attach to developing strong links between those working in the children's improvement system and LGG Principal Advisers so that information about councils facing performance challenges is shared at an early stage;
- Members ask the CYP Board to satisfy itself that Ofsted's proposals on inspection will lead to a reduction in the burden of inspection.

Action

To be agreed in the light of members' discussion.

Contact officer:

Liz Railton

Position:

Interim Director for Children's Services Improvement.

E-mail:

Liz.railton@local.gov.uk

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Background

1. The Improvement Board has been kept informed about developing a sector led approach to improving children's services in the context of the regular reports to the Board on Taking the Lead.
2. Earlier this year, a partnership was formed between LGID, ADCS, SOLACE and the Department for Education, initially called the Children's Commissioning Board but now known as the Children's Improvement Board (CIB). Cllr David Simmonds attends the CIB for the LG Group Children and Young People Programme Board.
3. Ministers have agreed to provide £10.5 million to support the implementation of sector led improvement. It was agreed by the CIB at its meeting on 19 April 2011 that LGID would be the accountable body for the grant from Department for Education on behalf of the CIB. Taking over responsibility for this funding signals an important shift to a sector led approach.
4. The sector led approach to improving children's services 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. Key building blocks of the system are consistent with the overall approach to sector led improvement in Taking the Lead, for example:
 - 4.1 The importance attached to robust comparable data
 - 4.2 The emphasis on self assessment
 - 4.3 The value attached to challenge from one's peers.
5. Members should 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. Councils' willingness to comply with a more sector led approach will also help to demonstrate that it is effective and that the inspection burden could then be reduced even further. Support from councils themselves will be crucial to its success and all councils are being invited to commit to supporting the programme by offering officer time to peer challenge.
6. This is a transitional year. Subject to Ministerial approval for funding for 2012-13, the new approach will be in place in all areas from 2012. In the meantime key elements of the approach are being developed and trialled through "early adopters".

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Early adopters

7. In mid May councils were invited to express an interest in being early adopters of the new system and, in particular, three aspects of the model (See **Appendix 1**):

Universal. Testing key elements of the universal system, including self assessment, improvement planning, peer challenge and the use of a core set of national data in the form of local profiles.

Performance Risks. Testing the effectiveness of improvement support where councils have identified their own performance risks or weaknesses

Intervention. Testing the effectiveness of sector-led improvement support in councils subject to Improvement Notices as a result of DfE intervention.

8. Two regions, one cluster and 22 individual LAs came forward to test the new system. The full list is in **Appendix 1a**.
9. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has been commissioned to look at the various delivery models. The research will explore this with the early adopter local authorities, and report to the CIB to feed into further developments of sustainable arrangements for sector-led improvement and support by April 2012

Brokerage and improvement support

10. The new system includes a brokerage function to work with a local authority following peer challenge or inspection to agree and commission a support package to assist rapid and sustained improvement. A small interim team of brokers is already working with a number of intervention and “at risk” councils. As the system mobilises, CIB, working through its brokers, will develop a clearer picture of the range of requirements for support products and services. In the meantime LGID, on behalf of CIB, is setting up a framework contract through which it can tender for specific services as and when they are required.
11. Alongside the recruitment of local authority early adopters the CIB have been working to secure a Lead Member, Chief Executive and Director of Children’s Services from each region. Regional leads will support the CIB through providing a link to, and communication with, the sector in their region and will work towards raising the profile of the programme, gathering intelligence to support their understanding of what is happening at a regional level to share with the region and the CIB. The current list of leads in the regions is attached at **Appendix 2**.
12. For the LG Group, Principal Advisers are the key focal point for understanding the performance challenges of councils at a sub national level. It will be

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important that they are aware of performance issues as they arise in children's services, including councils subject to DfE intervention, and therefore that appropriate links are established with the children's sector led improvement system being developed through CIB. This will ensure that wider corporate performance issues are considered and any shortcomings in children's services are not tackled in isolation.

Governance

13. At the last meeting of the LG Group Children and Young People Board, Members raised questions about the overall governance of the programme and member engagement at a national and at a local level.
14. As one of the priorities in the LG Group Business Plan, the Children and Young People Programme Board maintains policy oversight on the sector-led improvement of children's services on behalf of the whole LG Group. Cllr David Simmonds attends the CIB on the Board's behalf. CIB itself provides the strategic direction on how resources should be used and the procurement of services and spend is subject to authorisation by Group officers, with delegated authority, and ultimately by the LGID Company Board.
15. The CIB has commissioned Dr Clive Grace to undertake a full review of governance arrangements and make recommendations for consideration at its meeting on 14 September 2011.

Ofsted consultation on Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services:

16. In July, Ofsted launched a consultation on new arrangements for the inspection of children's services, which will come into effect from May 2012. A number of changes to the current regime are proposed, which take into account the recommendations of the Munro Review related to inspection. It made some powerful points about the limitations and risks of a top-down performance management system and the need for all players in the system to learn from successes and failures.
17. The main elements of the proposed inspection model include:
 - 17.1 unannounced two week on-site inspections of local authority child protection and early intervention services
 - 17.2 focus on the child's journey and experience through assessing and observing the effectiveness of multi-agency working, case tracking and the Local Safeguarding Children Board
 - 17.3 talking directly with children and their families as well as front-line professionals and managers

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- 17.4 four inspection judgements: capacity to improve; the effectiveness of the help provided to children, their families and carers; quality of practice; leadership and management, and an overall effectiveness grade. Ofsted will continue to use the four point judgement scale: outstanding, good, satisfactory and inadequate
 - 17.5 consideration of introducing greater proportionality to universal inspection by varying the period between inspections. Re-inspection could for example be after 18 months for local authorities that are judged inadequate; every three years for those that are satisfactory; every five years for those that are good or outstanding. Inspections will be brought forward if there are sufficient reasons for concerns
 - 17.6 a sample of 20 to 25 local authority services for children in care to have short notice, one-week on-site inspection each year. Inspection will focus on the child's journey and narrowing the outcomes gap between children in care and their peers
 - 17.7 monitoring the progress of local authorities that have been judged to be inadequate for either child protection or children in care services.
18. The consultation on the arrangements for the inspection of local authority children's services runs until 30 September. The new inspection framework will come into force from May 2012.
 19. The LG Group Children and Young People Board will be responding to the consultation on behalf of the Group. Miriam Rosen, the newly appointed Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills in July 2011, will attend the LG Group Children and Young People Programme Board meeting on 6 September to discuss the proposals.
 20. One of the key issues still to be resolved is how the revised inspection arrangements will link to the sector-led improvement work being developed by the Children's Improvement Board. Whilst the consultation makes no proposals on this, it does request views on how inspection can most effectively add value to and draw value from other elements of performance improvement, including local authority self-assessment, supported by sector-based peer review and challenge. In particular, there is a question as to whether the sample inspections for children in care, monitoring inspections or judgements on capacity to improve should be informed by results of peer reviews and to what extent. In addition, moving the focus of inspection to practice may have implications for broader improvement issues on which the sector might wish to take a lead. The CIB is meeting Ofsted on Thursday 8 September to discuss the proposals.
 21. Whilst the move towards unannounced inspections of child protection and early intervention is to be welcomed, it will be important to ensure that new arrangements do truly lead to a reduction in the burden of inspection in practice.

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It is suggested that the Improvement Board ask the Children and Young People Board, when preparing the LG Group response, to satisfy itself that Ofsted's proposals will not lead to an increase in the burden of inspection faced by councils.

Policy implementation

22. In addition to the general focus of improvement through peer challenge and support the CIB is also committed to supporting the implementation of national policy through sector-led support. The first areas of focus are Children's Centres and Payment by Results (PBR).
23. There has been significant interest from councils in the offer of support with local decision making on provision of sufficient Sure Start Children's Centre services. This has included looking at how the statutory duties placed on local authorities in relation to Sure Start and wider early years provision can best be fulfilled in the context of overall resources available and wider overall priorities.
24. Nine local authorities have been selected as pathfinders for payment by results from over forty applications. The pathfinders will focus on the core purpose of children's centres: to improve child development and school readiness among young children and to reduce inequalities. The scheme will explore the potential to join up with other payment by results schemes being developed across Government.
25. Discussion is also underway on how the planned DfE support offer on Families with Multiple Problems (in the context of Community Budget initiatives) can be fully integrated within the sector support model. Further discussions are taking place on how a number of other policy implementation issues, including productivity work, a youth offer, and the implementation of the Munro recommendations on safeguarding can be delivered through the sector led work. This is likely to drive further requirements for support products and services.

Financial implications

26. The programme office for the grant funded programme is being hosted by the Local Government Group. A scoping exercise is currently underway and a detailed delivery plan is being developed. The budget will include a management fee to cover the overheads to run the programme.