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Sector-led improvement

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report provides an update on sector-led improvement since the original publication of "Taking the Lead" in February 2011.

Recommendation

That the Improvement Board note the current position on sector-led Improvement and offer any further strategic direction.

Action

Officers to continue to support councils take advantage of the new approach to sector led improvement.

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Sector-led Improvement

Background

1. *Taking the Lead*, which sets out the sector's approach to sector-led improvement, was published just over two years ago. The approach was developed with the sector over a lengthy period of consultation and engagement and was overwhelmingly endorsed by the majority of councils. Since then we have made good progress in developing and delivering our support offer.
2. At the same time new approaches to sector-led improvement have also been developed in children's services (through the Children's Improvement Board) and in adult social care (through the Towards Excellence in Council's Adult Social Care Board). In each case the approaches have been developed in association with relevant Government departments, the LGA and the sector's representative professional bodies. They are based on many of the core principles and practices set out in *Taking the Lead*.
3. The LGA has been advised in this work by an independent Advisory Board with membership drawn from the National Audit Office, Audit Commission, SOLACE, CIPFA, ADASS, ADCS, CfPS and Solicitors in Local Government/Association of Council Secretaries.
4. At its meeting on 17th September 2012 the Improvement Board considered the early findings from the first stage of the evaluation of sector led improvement. The "baseline" evaluation report was published on 21 February, has been circulated to members and is available on the LGA website.
5. This report draws together some key markers of progress so far and for the future.
6. **Sector Awareness:** Overall the sector is both aware and supportive of the approach, as shown by the results of the recent LGA Perceptions Survey of Leaders, Portfolio Holders, Chairs of Scrutiny, Chief Executives, Directors and back bench members.
 - 6.1. 90% of Chief Executives had heard a lot or a moderate amount about the approach and 84% agreed or strongly agreed that it was the right one
 - 6.2. 83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their council was making advances in improvement
 - 6.3. 61% of respondents believe the offer will have a positive impact on their council's ability to improve and 69% believe it will have a great or moderate positive impact on the sector's ability to monitor and improve.

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7. **Local Accountability:** One of the fundamental principles underpinning sector led improvement is that councils are accountable to their local communities who both elected councillors to represent them and who provide the majority of their income.

As part of the evaluation work the LGA polled 1,000 British residents in Autumn 2012 which found that:

- 7.1. 61% trust their local council either a great or fair amount (consistent with the results from the Citizenship Survey 2010/11). We are using questions about trust in councils as our proxy measure for whether SLI has the confidence of the public;
 - 7.2. 66% felt their council kept them fairly or well informed about the services and benefits it provides;
 - 7.3. 72% say they are very or fairly satisfied with the way their local council runs things
 - 7.4. And 62% stated their council acts on the concerns of local residents (i.e. is responsive).
8. A key part of the "Taking the Lead" offer was to provide tools to support councils strengthen local accountability, including free of charge use of the YouChoose online budget simulator. A total of 135 councils have been set up to use YouChoose.
9. **Leadership:** Effective political leadership is key to sustained improvement. Our leadership programmes have supported over 1,000 councillors in the last 18 months on programmes such as Leadership Academy and Next generation.
10. **Peer Challenge:** Since April 2011 the LGA has completed 171 peer challenges across a wide range of subject areas including 50 corporate peer challenges, 43 children's safeguarding and 7 adult social care peer challenges. We are also in discussion with councils about a further 100 corporate peer challenges and 20 children's safeguarding challenges. Feedback from participating councils is very strong and the programme continues to grow at pace.
11. The interim evaluation of the Corporate Peer challenge offer was undertaken by Cardiff Business School and reported to the Board. We have recently published a set of case studies demonstrating how councils are using and benefitting from the peer challenge offer. <http://www.local.gov.uk/peer-challenge>
12. During spring/summer 2013 Cardiff Business School will revisit some authorities in order to evaluate the longer-term impact of peer challenges.
13. **Comparative performance information (LG Inform):** The prototype version of LG Inform (the on-line data and benchmarking service developed by the LGA) was launched in July 2011 and updated in November 2011.

At present, more than 90 per cent of councils have someone registered to access the LG Inform prototype, with a total of more than 1,700 users. We anticipate usage increasing rapidly once the new version of LG Inform is launched in the spring (which will be a better looking and better performing tool) and made publicly available in the Summer.

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14. **Sharing good practice:** The Knowledge Hub was launched in April 2012. It is a free web based service providing a single window to improvement in local government. It forms part of the new integrated online offer from the LGA and provides tools to help people connect, share and learn from each other.

All councils are making use of Knowledge Hub which has over 130,000 registered users and 1,400 active groups. The LGA's aim, over the course of 2012/13, is to achieve a 25 per cent increase in the number of users and the number of visits the site receives.

15. **Managing Risk:** as part of the approach to sector led improvement councils were keen for the LGA to find a light touch way of understanding where councils might be facing performance challenges so that early support could be offered. This approach has been tested by experience and positive endorsements received at the time from the appropriate DCLG Minister.
16. **Children's services:** Sector-led improvement in children's services is being taken forward through the work of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB). The CIB work programme for 2013/14 will prioritise children's social care, including a new programme to build capacity among social service team leaders (SWAP), together with a new strand of work to support councils respond to changes in Special Educational Needs and Disability. A significant part of the CIB budget will continue to be devolved to regions who will be asked to ensure that peer challenge is robust and engages all councils.
17. **Adult Social Care:** Sector-led improvement in adult social care is being taken forward by the Towards Excellence in Adult Social Care Board (TEASC). 2013/14 will be the final year of funding for TEASC. Its aim will be to work with (and for) councils to ensure that the model is fully implemented and embedded in local areas.
18. **Coordination and Communications:** As approaches have been developed in specific service areas the Improvement and Innovation Board has been keen to ensure the development of a core narrative around sector-led improvement – its underlying principles and core components – so that the sector is able to see how the different approaches are consistent and mutually reinforcing.
19. This led to the publication of the "Sector-led Improvement in Local Government" officially launched at the LGA Conference in Summer 2012 and jointly badged with SOLACE, ADASS, and ADCS – which has been welcomed by the sector.
http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=f19c68ea-368d-4be9-b1c8-7d085324436e&groupId=10171
20. We will reinvigorate our efforts to raise the **awareness** of the support available and councils take up of it, making the links across the different strands of sector-led improvement. We are also seeking to collect and share examples of innovative approaches to engagement and strengthening local accountability.
21. **Evaluation:** From the outset the Improvement and Innovation Board has been keen to ensure a robust approach to evaluating sector-led improvement. The initial "baseline"

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evaluation report was published in February and will be followed up by two further reports – an interim report in late Spring 2013 and a final report in early 2014.

22. Implementation of Health and Social Care Act: Implementation of the Act, with new local government responsibilities for health from April 2013 has been a priority for the sector. The last twelve months have seen intensive work across councils to establish Health and Wellbeing Boards, along with the transfer of the public health function to councils, and the commissioning of Local Healthwatch. A new sector-led support offer is being developed with funding support from Department of Health and with governance arrangements aligned across relevant programme.

23. Conclusion and next steps

Significant progress has been made in delivering our *Taking the Lead* offer and mainstreaming the approach. It is important that this work continues to be taken forward in a way that reflects councils' experience of using the support on offer and that it is communicated to the sector in a way that demonstrates how the different elements and strands are linked together and highlights the benefits of the tools through case studies.

24. Financial Implications

There are no additional financial implications arising as a result of this report.