

Progress report from the Children's Improvement Board (CIB)

Purpose of report

To update members of the Executive on the work of the CIB and to invite feedback.

Summary

This report updates the Executive on the work of the CIB and invites comments on progress.

Recommendations

That members of the Executive comment on the work of the CIB and the role of members in children's services self-improvement and specifically on the questions set out in **paragraph 13**:

What are the Executive's views on the best ways to:

1. Build political support for children's services self-improvement, particularly at regional level.
2. Increase the supply of member peers to provide challenge and mentoring to councils.
3. Build momentum and ensure the engagement of all councils.

Action

That staff from the CIB team and the LGA take forward the work programme in the light of the Executive's comments

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Progress report from the Children's Improvement Board (CIB)

Background

1. The Children's Improvement Board (CIB) is a partnership between the LGA, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), supported by the Department for Education (DfE). The Board is charged with developing a system for children's services self-improvement which engages all councils and provides timely, additional support to those who are in difficulty. The work of the Board is funded by DfE for £9.3 million in this financial year.

Engaging all councils

2. At the heart of the work of the CIB is a commitment to engage all councils in self-improvement. Building on their normal processes of self-assessment and review, councils are asked to open this up to external challenge by their peers. To support this, all directors of children's services have been asked to donate five days of their or a senior manager's time to provide peer challenge support to other councils. This peer challenge will be able to focus on particular areas of difficulty identified by the council or areas at risk of poor performance.
3. Alongside mutual peer challenge arranged between councils, all councils will be able to access both the programme of peer reviews on children's safeguarding and an entitlement to a corporate peer challenge every three years.
4. Work to support peer challenge between councils is underway with around 40 "early adopter" councils. Some of these – London and East Midlands – are working in regions. At this point, it appears that councils are more likely to engage where others in their region are part of a common effort.
5. With this in mind part of the CIB's budget will shortly be devolved to regions to support work on the ground. Peer challenge will be a priority for all regions but regions will also be offering early support to those councils at risk of poor performance and support for local implementation of key national policy initiatives.
6. As part of this, regions have nominated children's improvement leads from among their lead members for children, directors of children's services and chief executives. A list of these regional leads is attached as **Appendix A**.

Supporting councils with good practice and data

7. The CIB is also supporting a number of pieces of work which will help equip all councils with tools to understand their services and their performance. Contracts have been let to:

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- 7.1. Ensure continuation of previous work to validate and disseminate good practice research and evidence of what works.
- 7.2. Secure a supply of specialists from the sector to contribute to policy implementation and improvement support.
- 7.3. Identify the key items of nationally available performance information that councils need at local level to understand their performance. This work will include the development of better information about safeguarding as recommended by the Munro Review.

Implementing policy on the ground

8. The CIB has agreed that as part of its work it will support councils in the local delivery of national policy initiatives. A successful project on children's centres services has involved around 40 councils and, given the level of interest shown by councils, support from the CIB in this area will continue. Twenty six councils are also trialling payment by results for children's centre services.
9. For the remainder of this year, and continuing into next, dependent on funding, the CIB has agreed that policy priorities should be:
 - 9.1. Key aspects of the Munro Review of Child Protection - developing performance data and wider performance information (linked to development of local authority data profiles and knowledge hub); supporting effective social work practice and ensuring that the sector learns from serious case reviews and the evidence base of what works.
 - 9.2. Early Intervention – developing a local 'Early Help' offer; the availability of early support for individual children is likely to form part of the new Ofsted inspection methodology.
 - 9.3. Youth Services Improvement.
 - 9.4. Commissioning and Productivity in children's services including a specific focus on developing new and innovative services for young people.
 - 9.5. Improving Adoption and Support for Children in Care.

Support for councils in difficulty

10. As well as encouraging all councils to take ownership of self-improvement, members of the CIB team are working directly with councils who are in intervention or are requiring high levels of support. The team has been able to pull together packages of support including direct input from other councils

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quickly, making full and flexible use of the first hand expertise of children's services and networks of contacts. The CIB has also been able to offer additional funding to those councils in the greatest need of support and who need to make rapid improvement. These packages of support include peer mentoring by elected members as it is frequently the case that local authorities need development in political as well as professional leadership.

Issues and challenges

11. The programme of work supported by CIB is high profile. Making a difference in this area will be a key test of whether local government can make a reality of self-improvement, moving away from top down control through performance targets and reducing inspection. Ministers are taking a close interest in progress and have high expectations of the speed at which things will change and the impact on councils' performance. In order to be credible, local councils will need to demonstrate that they are moving quickly towards universal engagement, moving beyond the relatively small number of councils who have come forward as early adopters. All this will need to happen at a time when there are huge pressures on children's services and on councils generally.
12. To be successful, the CIB's work programme needs committed political leadership in regions and local authorities and engagement of councillors in providing a political dimension to peer challenge and improvement support. Central government recognises that this leadership can only come from local councils themselves and they will be looking for evidence that councils can provide it.

Key questions for the Executive

13. This is a significant programme of work which is a very visible and challenging test of the sector's willingness and ability to self-improve. Its success will depend on political as well as professional commitment and leadership. In view of this, what are the Executive's views on the best ways to:
 - 13.1. Build political support for children's services self-improvement, particularly at regional level.
 - 13.2. Increase the supply of member peers to provide challenge and mentoring to councils.
 - 13.3. Build momentum and ensure the engagement of all councils.

Financial implications

14. Funding for the programme is provided by DfE. The programme is being hosted by the LGA which claims part of this funding as payment for services provided

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by the organisation. In addition to this, the LGA provides staff time to contribute to the CIB's work, in support of the LGA's business plan priority to deliver an effective approach to sector-based support in children's services.