

Progress in delivering the LGA children's services improvement programme

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This paper provides a brief summary of the progress made in delivering the three key strands of the LGA Children's Services Improvement Programme through 2018/19:

- Leadership Capacity and Development
- Early Years Peer Challenge
- Children's Services Peer Challenge.

Recommendation

To note the progress in delivering the Children's Services Improvement Programme and to inform and support future priorities and developments.

Actions

Officers to action as appropriate.

Contact officers:

Clive Harris / Richard Cooke / Andy Bates

Position:

Senior Advisor / National Programme Manager (Children's Services) / Principal Adviser, South West

Phone no:

02076 643207 / 07766 356320 / 07919 562849

Email:

clive.harris@local.gov.uk / richard.cooke@local.gov.uk / andy.bates@local.gov.uk

Background

1. As part of its wider sector-led improvement programme, the Local Government Association has a well-established offer to local authorities that is focussed on providing effective support and challenge to enable sustained improvement to children's services. Just over a year ago a report came to the two Boards that detailed additional areas of work that the Department for Education had commissioned the LGA to deliver. These were focussed around early years and leadership capacity and development.
2. This paper provides a brief summary of the progress made in delivering the three key strands of the LGA Children's Services Improvement Programme through 2018/19:
 - Leadership Capacity and Development
 - Early Years Peer Challenge
 - Children's Services Peer Challenge.

Leadership capacity and development

3. There has been an ongoing dialogue between LGA, Solace, Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Department for Education (DfE) to develop an effective local, regional and national system to support sector-led improvement in children's services. Funded through a grant from the DfE, the LGA has been developing and delivering a range of activity that support and embed sector led improvement (SLI) approaches and specifically build the leadership capacity in local authorities.
4. Working with the DfE and Ofsted, the LGA, ADCS and Solace have agreed a set of principles that will underpin joint working on children's services improvement, which will be overseen by the Children's Improvement Board (CIB). A regular, national discussion will add value by enabling a shared understanding of what works within Regional Improvement Alliances (RIAs), how to address issues which have been identified and to provide an overview of the support being provided by partners to address them. A refreshed Children's Improvement Board will:
 - Have a key role in ensuring regional and national arrangements are working effectively in providing the right support to councils.
 - Identify trends in performance, including the use of intelligence gained from Ofsted ILACS inspections and focussed visits
 - Be able to advise on the effectiveness of different funding streams to support improvement to inform decisions by Government and others
 - Broker support between regions where necessary and;
 - Hold an overview of children's services performance across the system, including emerging pressures

The CIB is chaired by the chair of the LGA's Children and Young People's Board

5. The development of RIAs provides an important forum to bring together sector led improvement approaches and harness the expertise and skills in a region to support the delivery of improved services. The LGA Children's Improvement Advisors (CIAs), who work to the LGA's Principal Adviser in each region, provide a single point of contact for

RIAs and individual local authorities to access tailored support from the LGA, as well as making linkages with DfE regional leads.

6. We are delivering an enhanced programme of Children's Leadership Essentials, offering additional courses and focussing on those councils that have new Lead Members for Children's Services, as well as promoting the programme to chairs of Children's Scrutiny Committees. Since September 2018, 58 members have participated and almost half of these have been new to their role in the last six months.
7. Ensuring each region has an effective Lead Member network that has good participation and engagement from members that have a responsibility for children's services. Where networks were not already in existence we have worked with regional colleagues to establish these. Every region in the country now has a Lead Member network (the first meeting for the London region will take place in June) and over the next 12 months, further support will be provided to embed this approach and work undertaken to evaluate the impact and share learning across regions.
8. A further strand of the SLI programme is the development of two new peer challenge offers. The first is focussed around the resources within and around children's services and the effective and efficient use of these. It recognises that nationally the context for delivering services for children is significantly challenging with a £3.1 billion funding gap but that locally there is scope and potential to be more effective in how they deliver services. Applying a peer challenge approach and taking a team of experts from the sector to assess a local authority, identifying the strengths and highlighting areas where there is scope for improvement. This peer challenge has now been piloted in West Berkshire and Shropshire and already some common themes have been identified:
 - Effectiveness of contract management oversight, including external placements
 - Use of performance analysis to influence decisions, provision and improvements
 - Recruitment and retention – challenges of retaining and developing staff, regional memorandums of understanding
 - Capacity and expertise to implement manage, monitor and evaluate new projects, programmes and initiatives.

Using the learning from the pilots guidance has been developed ([link to the guidance manual](#)) which will provide the framework for rolling this offer out to Warwickshire, Derby and Middlesbrough in May and June 2019.

9. The second offer will again take a peer challenge approach to evaluate the corporate capacity and leadership in an authority and whether this provides the right environment that enables children's services to deliver effective provision. This offer has been tested in the local authorities in Cornwall and Bath and North East Somerset and will be ready to be deployed from May.
10. We have recently refreshed our series of children's services 'must know' guides, a long-standing source of information and support for lead members for children's services. The suite of information covers the evolving council role in education, Special Educational Needs and Disability (developed in conjunction with the Council for Disabled Children and National Network of Parent-Carer Forums), youth services and what happens if

children's services are judged to be inadequate by Ofsted. Alongside this we have developed a new 'must know' on children's services for council chief executives, which has been shaped by CEXs who are either former directors of children's services or for other reasons have been closely associated with leading improvement journeys in council children's services. We have also published a guide for new Lead Members for Children's Services which sets out key issues for the first ten days in the role.

11. CIAs have facilitated and delivered a range of support primarily focussed on those local authorities with an Ofsted judgement of 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement':
 - Guidance and support – responding quickly to calls for support and providing guidance to Lead Members and Director of Children's Service
 - Providing mentoring/coaching – brokering peer to peer coaching and mentoring opportunities for both members and senior officers.
 - Sharing practice – making the link between local authorities who are facing similar challenges and providing opportunities to collaborate and share practice.
 - Peer challenge – brokering peer challenge activity to provide an external and independent assessment of practice.
 - Training – delivering formal training activity to members and officers on a range of subjects, including, corporate parenting, effective leadership, quality assurance/audit and understanding performance data. Also, targeted promotion of other LGA offers such as the Leadership Essential programme.
 - Shaping a coherent support offer – working closely with Councils, DfE, Partners in Practice, and ADCS to ensure an effective improvement support offer is in place.

12. A programme of evaluation and shared learning is currently being developed to ensure there will be significant reach beyond those councils that are directly involved in the programme. This will maximise the impact of the learning, good practice and innovative approaches identified.

13. A key measure of the impact of this programme are the leadership judgements provided as part of Ofsted ILACS inspections. In 2018/19 there were 41 ILACS judgements published:
 - 51% of the ILACS reports showed an improved 'Leadership' judgement from the previous inspection for that local authority
 - 83% of the ILACS reports showed that the 'Leadership' judgement had been maintained or improved from the previous inspection report for that local authority.

Early Years Peer Challenge

14. On 12 December 2017 the Department for Education (DfE) launched Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A plan for improving social mobility through education. A key strand within this Plan is an early years 'system leadership' programme which is focussed on sector-led improvement driven through peer challenge and support. The LGA has been commissioned by the DfE to design and deliver this early years peer challenge programme.

15. Working with the sector and experts from the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) and DfE, we developed a clear delivery framework with a specific focus on speech, language and communication. This approach was successfully piloted in Wigan, Cambridgeshire/Peterborough and Bexley and the learning from these places has informed further refinement of the framework. A full guidance manual is now in place ([link to the guidance manual](#)) to ensure all subsequent peer challenges are delivered within a consistent and robust methodology.
16. We have delivered five peer training events with 75 peers participating and further training is planned for June and October. Peers have been recruited from a range of backgrounds including local government, health, education, private sector, speech and language therapy and library services.
17. EIF have developed an Early Years Maturity Matrix ([link to the Maturity Matrix](#)) which forms part of the self-assessment process for the local authority engaging in the peer challenge. In addition, some peer challenges include an EIF associate and EIF are actively collecting case studies of good practice from local authority areas.
18. Demand for an Early Years Peer Challenge has far outstripped the capacity in place to deliver this work (41 local authorities applied to be involved in the pilot phase). To manage this, an approach has been introduced that uses early years data to identify a mix of local authorities that would benefit from a peer challenge and then leads to a discussion to gauge their interest in participating.
19. It is expected that the programme will deliver 30 Early Years Peer Challenges by March 2020. So far, we have delivered seven Early Years Peer Challenges and fourteen more have been agreed.
20. There are already some common themes emerging from the peer challenges delivered:
 - Complex IT systems that are often not aligned
 - Not a common understanding of school readiness
 - Joint commissioning not always in place
 - Lack of shared outcome frameworks and data dashboards
 - Evaluation of interventions is not always robust and able to inform commissioners
 - Early Years strategies not in place across the area
 - Community Co-design of services not always achieved.
21. The DfE have agreed to fund a series of follow-up visits with local authorities. This will involve a small number of the original peer team revisiting a local authority 12 months after the peer challenge and reviewing the progress and impact that has been made.
22. Three learning events are being planned with the first taking place in July. Inviting leaders in early years from across local government, health and education to discuss and identify the local, regional and national solutions to common challenges and issues.
23. Feedback from Directors of Children's Services that have already received an Early Years Peer Challenge include:

- “The review helped us gain a strategic overview of where we are, where we need to be and what we need to do to get there”
- “Since this review, ways of working have changed significantly so the review was a definite catalyst for change”
- “The best thing strategically was that the review really did put Early Years education at the forefront of what the Council is trying to do”.

Children’s Services Peer Challenge

24. In 2018/19 there were eleven children’s services peer challenges completed and these were focused on a range of themes including: safeguarding; looked after children; special educational needs and disabilities; early help and safeguarding governance. Over 50 peers from local government, health and education were involved.
25. A refreshed and simplified [guidance manual](#) has been produced for children’s services peer challenges. Working with colleagues in the sector, the offer is better focussed on outcomes and impact for children and is also better aligned to the recently introduced Ofsted ILACS framework.
26. Responding to the needs of the sector we are developing new offers that can provide the framework and catalyst for sector led improvement. These will include a future focus on prevention and early help services, safeguarding scrutiny, school improvement and contextual safeguarding.
27. LGA is also recruiting a Director of Children’s Services, Sector Led Improvement to ensure that the LGA has a credible and influential voice that is able to work with key partners such as Councils, Ofsted, Department for Education, SOLACE, Association for the Directors of Children’s Services and others, to help shape the local, regional and national improvement offer.
28. “We found the LGA peer review process incredibly positive and valuable, the review was led by a very experienced and accomplished Director of Children's Services and they, with the LGA, put together a very effective team who provided reassurance about our plans for improvement and our priorities but also provided challenge and advice on several key issues. Weeks after the LGA peer review we received the Ofsted ILACS call and the peer review provided excellent preparation for all our teams and partners...”
Steve Reddy, DCS, Liverpool City Council

Next steps

29. In 2019/20 it is expected that we will deliver over 40 children’s services peer challenges which will be more than double the number delivered in 2018/19. We will also continue to embed and sustain the developments of the last 12 months but with a specific focus on impact and effectiveness. Ensuring that we are able to demonstrate that the structures, learning and expertise that have already been mobilised, are making a real difference and improving the way services are delivered for children.

30. The Board is requested to note the progress made over the last 12 months, consider how they can inform and support future delivery and priorities and receive regular updates as the programme develops.

Implications for Wales

1. There are no implications for Wales.

Financial Implications

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