

## The future of sector led improvement

### Purpose

For discussion and direction.

### Summary

This report suggests a way to take forward the debate, begun at the Board workshop on 2 June 2014, about the future of sector led improvement.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to discuss the proposed way forward and provide guidance about the next steps.

### Actions

Subject to members' views, officers to:

- engage the sector, including appropriate LGA Boards, on the future of sector-led improvement along the lines indicated in paragraphs 10 and 11;
- implement the suggestions in paragraph 14 giving effect to the Board's proposed "overarching" role.

**Contact officer:**

Dennis Skinner

**Position:**

Head of Leadership and Productivity

**Phone no:**

020 7664 3017

**Email:**

[Dennis.Skinner@local.gov.uk](mailto:Dennis.Skinner@local.gov.uk)

## The future of sector led improvement

### Background

1. The Improvement and Innovation Board held a workshop on 2<sup>nd</sup> June. The workshop was organised in the light of discussions at previous Board meetings and designed to discuss:
  - 1.1. The future of sector-led improvement in the light of the findings from the evaluation and the changing policy context in the run up to the next general election; and
  - 1.2. The practical implications of the LGA Governance review for the way in which the Board works with other LGA Boards.
2. Board members, substitute members, national lead member peers, along with lead member representatives from other Boards were invited to participate along with the LGA Principal Advisers and representatives of the Centre for Public Scrutiny and Local Partnerships. The workshop was facilitated by Phil Swann, Shared Intelligence and the note is attached elsewhere in the agenda papers.
3. This paper reports back on the discussions and invites members to offer guidance about the way forward.

### Sector-led Improvement: next steps

4. The evaluation of sector-led improvement commissioned by the Board has clearly demonstrated the success of the approach:
  - 4.1. Residents remain satisfied with, and continue to trust, their local council, despite the increasing financial constraints being faced by the sector;
  - 4.2. Councils' performance continues to improve when assessed against a set of metrics across the full range of local government activity;
  - 4.3. Take up of the approach amongst councils is high and the LGA's support offer is welcomed and valued by councils.
5. Moreover, an independent evaluation of sector-led improvement compared to central government intervention for turning round a council that is visibly failing, concluded that a sector-led approach is better in supporting councils in their improvement journey, all else being equal.
6. However, whilst senior officials, from government departments and the inspectorates interviewed as part of the evaluation, had increased confidence in the theory of sector-led improvement and local accountability since the "baseline" interviews in 2012, they questioned the apparent lack of transparency and comparability and also how the sector manages the risk of poor performance, given the voluntary nature of the approach. Stakeholders expressed a desire to see more evidence of the approach working in practice.

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7. At the same time, it is clear that the policy context within which the current approach to sector-led improvement was developed is fluid. The continued financial constraints put services under increasing pressure. Failure in key services (e.g. schools and care homes) attracts national media attention. Ofsted and CQC continue to refine their approaches to inspection and regulation. Additionally, the political parties are reviewing their thinking around local government performance assessment in the light of the forthcoming general election.
8. A refreshed and strengthened narrative about sector led improvement and the effectiveness of the approach in supporting councils to continue to deliver efficiencies and improved outcomes will also be helpful in reinforcing the LGA's broader lobbying for further devolution, as expressed in our Rewiring and the 100 days work.
9. This provides an opportunity, and impetus, for the sector to review and refresh the current approach to sector-led improvement. Members aired the following key issues at the workshop:
  - 9.1. How to develop an approach that reflects ever greater integration across the local public sector
  - 9.2. Understanding what "collective responsibility" might mean in practice for individual councils
  - 9.3. The positioning of the approach: whether it should remain as a voluntary improvement approach or needs to "toughen up" and for sector-led improvement to have more of an 'assurance role'
  - 9.4. How to *demonstrate* the sector's continuous improvement. What should happen if a council decides not to engage in sector-led improvement but where there are significant concerns, for example from the public or government?
10. One way to take the current debate forward would be to engage the sector in the issues, in the same way that led to the development of "Taking the Lead" over three years ago. There are a range of possible ways this could be achieved, which are not mutually exclusive:
  - 10.1. Producing a short position statement/consultation document on sector-led improvement setting out where we have got to, the results of the evaluation, some of the current pressures and asking a range of consultation questions;
  - 10.2. Creating ways to discuss the issues directly with councils, at regional meetings or through the existing programme of visits;
  - 10.3. Holding some specific consultation events in different parts of the country;
  - 10.4. Organising a national roundtable or summit involving the professional bodies, inspectorates and government departments; and
  - 10.5. Engaging other LGA Boards leading on specific improvement programmes, for example around children's services, adults and health improvement.
11. The results of this programme of engagement could then be brought together in a revised and refreshed statement on sector-led improvement that the LGA could publish as a companion piece to the 100 days work, reinforcing our arguments for further flexibility and devolution.

### **The role of the Improvement and Innovation Board**

12. The Workshop also considered the practical implications of the LGA Governance review, which had concluded that the Improvement and Innovation Board should take responsibility for all improvement activity across the LGA.
13. Members felt that it was important to retain and build on the knowledge and experience already developed by other Boards in pursuing improvement within their remit and that there was an opportunity for the Improvement and Innovation Board to develop a more strategic or “overarching” approach.
14. Whilst there are a range of ways in which this “overarching” approach might be achieved in practice, members were also keen to avoid any risk of duplication. As a starting point it is suggested that:
  - 14.1. Officers be asked to coordinate the flow of business through the Boards so that the Improvement and Innovation Board is invited to express strategic views about any significant improvement issues before other Boards;
  - 14.2. During the year the Improvement and Innovation Board receives suitably timed progress reports on the major improvement programmes, such as:
    - 14.2.1. Children’s: around the Annual Ofsted report;
    - 14.2.2. Corporate/Finance: around Budget time; and
    - 14.2.3. Adults/Health: around the annual TEASC report of performance in adult social care

Relevant Board Chairs could be invited to attend;

- 14.3 As far as possible, the Improvement and Innovation Board meets towards the end of each quarterly cycle of meetings so it can consider any significant issues put before other Boards and then report back to Boards at their next meeting.

### **Next steps**

15. Subject to members’ views, officers will take forward the work on sector-led improvement and the role of the Board in consultation with Lead Members.

### **Financial Implications**

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