

19 May 2022

LGA Children's Services Improvement Programme

Purpose of report

For information and decision

Summary

This report provides members with an update on the LGA's children's services improvement programme for 2021/22, and highlights future challenges, opportunities and programme developments.

Is this report confidential? Yes No

Recommendations

- The Improvement & Innovation Board is requested to endorse the proposed new areas of support for 2022/23 and highlight further themes of activity that would support the leadership of children's services and to comment on the work undertaken by the Children's Services Improvement Team.

Action/s

- Officers to use any feedback and comments made to inform the approach of the programme going forward.

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LGA Children's Services Improvement Programme

1. Background

- 1.1 In June 2021 the LGA secured a three-year contract (with the option to extend by a further 12 months) from the Department for Education (DfE). The budget for 2021/22 was £1.387m and this will rise to £1.751m in 2022/23. The key focus of this contract is to provide leadership support, diagnostic activity and a range of training, development and mentoring.
- 1.2 Since the start of the pandemic the DfE funded early years peer challenge programme has been paused. During this time, we have agreed with DfE to provide a range of alternative support for the early years sector. The grant for 2021/22 was £247,284.
- 1.3 This report provides an update on the activity that the DfE funding enables to support the improvement of services for children.

2. Delivery in 2021/22

- 2.1 A set of principles has been agreed with the DfE to prioritise support provided through the programme for those councils that either have:
 - A current Ofsted 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' judgement;
 - A written statement of action for SEND;
 - Concern arising from analysis of performance information and intelligence;
 - Leadership inexperience or instability;
 - A specific or challenging issue, for instance, a high court cas3
- 2.2 Using these principles and with the funding provided the LGA Children's Services Improvement Programme has delivered a broad range of significant activity in 2021/22. Highlights of the impact this activity has had are outlined below.
- 2.3 90% of councils with an inadequate or requires improvement Ofsted judgement engaged in the programme (66 out of 73 councils).
- 2.4 All delivery targets set by the DfE for 2021/22 have been exceeded, significantly so in some instances.
- 2.5 16 leadership training events and 26 regional networks have been delivered engaging with 128 lead members or children's scrutiny chairs covering topics such as SEND, corporate parenting, contextual safeguarding, championing children in new health systems.
- 2.6 94% of participants in the universal offer who provided feedback felt more confident about their role in improving CSC/SEND services after completing the course.

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- 2.7 562 days of targeted support for leaders in children's services has been provided to councils through the LGA's children's improvement advisors and using our extensive children's peer pool. This support typically included inspection preparation, diagnostic support, training/development, governance support, regional support and challenge.
- 2.8 In addition, 384 days of support has been provided through 16 peer challenge/diagnostics covering a range of themes from school improvement, youth justice, safeguarding, SEND and financial assurance/sustainability.
- 2.9 Individuals within 47 councils are currently receiving or have received mentoring support in 2021/22. This will equate to approximately 283 days of work when complete and includes support for lead members and chief executives
- 2.10 The programme has collected significant positive feedback across its work. Some examples of this are below:
- 2.11 "My mentor is inspirational, passionate and has walked the talk so I feel not only that I'm learning and being encouraged but I believe we can make the same journey as his local authority did to outstanding." Mentoring for new lead member for children's services.
- 2.12 "I found it extremely thought provoking, exposing many areas in which improvement is clearly needed. [It] has helped us articulate what we see as the position very fully, clearly and in a structured way. It has been worth the time we have spent on it and frankly shows we do have some way to go for the committee to be equipped to be as effective" Children's Scrutiny Chair involved on the pilot scrutiny development work.
- 2.13 "It has given me more confidence and the drive for more innovative approaches with the aim of creating a 'whole council' attitude to children and young people" Lead member participant at the Leadership Enhanced event.

3. Delivery in 2021/22 to support the early years sector

- 3.1 Delivery of 110 online events, workshops and action learning sets that have engaged more than 5500 colleagues who work in the early years sector to build their understanding and share learning about key topics such as workforce recruitment and retention, invisible babies and family hub development.
- 3.2 Provided intensive support for 12 councils to develop their early years strategy. We will be delivering a webinar in June, to share the learning from these areas and tools that have been developed. We are also working with councils to develop some case studies and a short report will be published shortly.
- 3.3 Worked with eight councils, undertaking mini remote peer challenges focusing on their library offer and how it supports speech and language development and fits within the Family Hub model. A final report is currently being compiled sharing the themes from the eight areas and recommendations to take forward. Fifteen case studies from this work have been published on the LGA website. A webinar is being

delivered in May 2022 to share the report and findings and showcase some of the innovative practice identified.

4. Areas of delivery proposed for 2022/23

- 4.1 The DfE has agreed to a variation for an additional £350k per annum for the length of the contract to provide additional leadership support for SEND services. It is expected that the specifics for this support will be agreed in the next couple of weeks and some delivery will start as soon as June 2022.
- 4.2 Launch of two E-learning modules is planned for June 2022 using the LGA's existing platform for councillor e-learning. These will be focused on Corporate Parenting and Children's Services and open to all councillors as self-service interactive training.
- 4.3 An expansion of support for corporate leadership teams, specifically targeting chief executives, to build their understanding of children's services and the roll out of a corporate parenting diagnostic and children's scrutiny support package.
- 4.4 Launch of a training and development offer for children's scrutiny committees.
- 4.5 Roll out of a new corporate parenting peer challenge and support for corporate parenting boards.
- 4.6 Developing materials and resources for council Leaders to better understand and engage with children's services.
- 4.7 Refresh of existing councillor materials and resources about children's services and roll out of the new LGA induction framework for new lead members.
- 4.8 The continued development and delivery of the new Leadership Enhanced programme to provide a next step of training and development from Leadership Essentials and for more experienced lead members.
- 4.9 Continued delivery of the successful early years programme of online events, training, development and action learning sets.
- 4.10 Develop and pilot a remote Early Years peer challenge that will focus on speech, language and communication and how this fits within the Family Hub model and the support for the Home Learning Environment.
- 4.11 Working with the Best Start for Life Team and the DfE to shape and influence their vision and roll out for the Family Hub model.
- 4.12 Supporting NESTA to map early years services and interventions across the country.

5. Challenges and opportunities in children's services

- 5.1 Recruitment, retention, churn and morale across the children's services workforce continues to be extremely challenging – a recent report from the Association of Directors of Children's Services highlighted that in the last 12 months there have been 47 changes of Director of Children's Services across the 152 councils with statutory responsibility for delivering children's services
- 5.2 The increasing demand for services for children is placing significant financial pressure on councils and in particular in the areas of placements and SEND.
- 5.3 Recent cases in Solihull and Bradford have highlighted a need to re-establish robust and effective partnerships between councils and health, police and education.
- 5.4 Turnover of lead members, and other councillors with a responsibility for children's services, following the May elections.
- 5.5 Three significant publications in 2022 (the SEND green paper, Education white paper and the social care review) provide a potential opportunity to reshape children's services in the medium term.
- 5.6 The government announcement of 75 areas invited to participate in the Family Hubs 3 year programme. Early Years will play a key part in the development and delivery of the hubs with the focus on Best Start for Life.
- 5.7 The engagement and expertise of the nine regional Chief Executive leads in helping to shape the LGA children's services improvement programme but also DfE thinking and policy.
- 5.8 The DfE is implementing a new regionally focussed staffing structure that they intend will provide councils with a more effective and coherent link into the Department.

6 Financial implications

- 6.1 All delivery is funded through DfE contracts and grants.

7 Implications for Wales

- 7.1 There are no implications for Wales.

8 Equalities Implications

- 8.1 The children's services improvement team has reviewed its delivery, systems and processes so that it is better supporting the equalities, diversity and inclusion priorities that have recently been agreed across the LGA. The team has committed to collecting all missing diversity information in peer profiles so we will be better able to deploy peers that understand the councils and their communities we are asking them to work with. We are also building an understanding of where gaps in the diversity of

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peer pool exist and developing plans to start to address these. In addition, we have worked with the LGAs Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) lead and colleagues from the sector to refresh the children's peer challenge framework. This has ensured very clear EDI prompts and probes are included and these are emphasised in our peer training and guidance.

9 Next Steps

9.1 This report has provided a high-level overview of current children's services improvement work and proposed priorities and activities for the next 12 months. It is suggested that the Board receives periodic updates on the children's services improvement programme so that members are aware and able to inform this activity but also to ensure alignment with other improvement activity across the LGA.