

Improvement and intervention

Purpose of report

To summarise the performance picture across the country and to seek member views on how the LGA's improvement offer could be developed further in 2015/16 to reflect the needs of member councils.

Summary

Edwina Grant is the national children's improvement adviser working with the LGA and will attend the meeting. The paper sets out Ofsted results to date, provides an update on government models of intervention in councils where performance is deemed inadequate and summarises the improvement support provided by the LGA.

Recommendation(s)

Members are recommended to:

- Consider the performance picture for councils in children's services
- Note the children's improvement work undertaken this year and
- Consider how the LGA's improvement offer for 2015/16 could be developed further

Action

Officers to take action arising out any discussion, as directed by members.

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Introduction

1. Ofsted launched its Single Inspection Framework for council services that care for and safeguard children in November 2013. Since then a total of 34 inspections have been completed with the following results:
 - 9 councils have been found to be good
 - 18 are requires improvement and;
 - 7 councils are rated as inadequate
 - As yet no council has been judged to be outstanding
2. The Single Inspection Framework is onerous and resource intensive and the results to date show that the bar has been raised for children's services. As a result of being found inadequate, the Department for Education has placed 23 councils in intervention. Of these, 13 are subject to an improvement notice, which sets out what the council needs to do to improve. 10 councils have had a formal direction notice from the Secretary of State which means the council must adhere to the actions set out in the notice and must work with officials and government appointed advisers to improve services. 15 of the 23 councils have been in intervention for more than 12 months.

Department for Education models for intervention

3. The Department for Education (DfE) is working to develop alternative models for working with councils in intervention, which go beyond the appointment of an improvement board and chair and, in the most serious cases, the appointment of a children's commissioner and establishment of a Trust. Julian Le Grand was asked by Ministers to commission work on alternative models for driving improvement in children's services and we are awaiting an announcement on the conclusion of that work.
4. The Department has also tendered for children's experts to participate in their commissioning framework to work alongside councils in intervention. DfE officials have described this as a more transparent way of recruiting expert advisers. The tender includes a call for agencies to deliver improvement support such as diagnostics. LGA has raised concerns that we are all looking to recruit from a small group of professionals, and there has been speculation in the trade press about whether this cuts across sector led improvement.

Sector-led children's improvement

5. At the last meeting of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB) it was agreed by the LGA, Solace and ADCS that there was value in a regular meeting to discuss children's services improvement at the national level. A number of issues remain

unresolved and it is proposed that these are the focus of a national meeting with a view to reaching a consensual position on the way forward:

- Performance picture across the country;
 - Leadership and governance;
 - Early intervention and prevention;
 - Innovation and alternative approaches to children's services.
6. The first children's improvement meeting took place on the 2 October and was attended by the Chairman of the Children and Young People Board. It considered how the sector can provide support to councils to ensure they come out of intervention as quickly as possible. It was recommended that LGA develops advice for councils that find themselves in intervention drawing on learning from peer challenges.
7. Further meetings of this group are scheduled to take place in February, April and July 2015.

The LGA improvement offer

8. To support member councils to meet expectations, the LGA has developed a children's improvement offer which includes:
- 8.1 Safeguarding Peer Review - a 5-day review with a multi-disciplinary peer team, covering the context for safeguarding as well as practice.
 - 8.2 Safeguarding Practice Diagnostic - a 3-day social care peer diagnostic focused on practice to support councils in addressing performance risk.
 - 8.3 Care Practice Diagnostic - a 4-day social care and health peer diagnostic covering context and practice for the child's journey from adoption to leaving care.
 - 8.4 Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) Diagnostic - the LGA is piloting a 3 day diagnostic to provide LSCBs with an external view of the effectiveness and impact of the LSCB on safeguarding and protecting children in order to identify areas requiring improvement.
9. A total of 25 reviews and diagnostics were completed in 2013/14 and another 18 have been scheduled or completed up to February 2015.
10. Elsewhere, Children's Improvement Advisers (CIAs) have been appointed to work alongside the LGA's Principle Advisors in each region, strengthening our support to the sector and working closely with regional leads for children's services. Using their knowledge and expertise, CIAs are providing support and assistance to councils, as well as helping with integration of activity and information between regional and national level and across local partners.

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11. To gain feedback from the sector on the children's services offer, the LGA will soon be consulting on the future of its sector-led improvement offer. *Taking stock: Where next for Sector-Led improvement?* will seek the views of the sector on all aspects of the LGA's improvement offer. Children's services specific questions will focus on whether any additional support is needed and how a sector-led approach to inspection could be developed.

Financial implications

12. Any changes to the children's improvement offer would have financial implications for the LGA and these costs would need to be understood before the offer was amended.