

TOWARDS EXCELLENCE FOR CHILDREN
Sector-led improvement and support in children's services

Children's Improvement Board Bulletin 7
4 November 2011

Sector-led improvement and support in children's services

Welcome to bulletin seven from the Children's Improvement Board (CIB). This bulletin provides updates on progress in developing and implementing a sector-led improvement system for children's services.

CIB is a partnership board set up by the Local Government Association (LGA), the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and the Department for Education (DfE). It is a direction setting and decision-making group that is responsible for the overall delivery of a new programme to develop a sector-led improvement system for children's services.

This system will be based on the self assessment and improvement activities of councils reinforced by rigorous peer challenge. It is anticipated that councils will dedicate five days per annum of senior leadership time (DCSs as well as members of their leadership teams) on a reciprocal basis to undertake this peer challenge activity.

More details about the sector-led system can be found in previous bulletins available on our website:

<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=18874583> .

ROUND UP OF RECENT ACTIVITY

Change to CIB chairing

Marion Davis is stepping down from her role as chair of the CIB as she also retires as DCS of Warwickshire County Council. All the partners on the CIB would like to thank Marion for her contribution to children's services self improvement during the crucial early phase of the work programme. Marion's place as chair will be taken by Debbie Jones, Executive Director Children and Young People's Service in Lambeth and Vice President of ADCS. For the future, the Board aims to appoint an independent chair.

Devolution of funding and system leadership to regions

A number of early adopter councils are already actively working with each other and with the CIB to develop sector-led improvement, particularly by facilitating mutual peer challenge. These include London, the East Midlands and a group of four Berkshire councils plus Brighton and Hove and Hertfordshire. The CIB believes that sector-led improvement will work best where this sort of regional and sub-regional working is supported and for this

reason, a total of £2.25m has been allocated to regions for this financial year. The distribution of the money has been agreed by CIB and is based on a flat rate lump sum per region plus a variable sum which is based 50% on the number of local authorities and 50% on the number of young people aged 0-19. While the money will be distributed regionally this does not preclude local authorities working together within and across regions by local agreement.

Building on the work with early adopters, the CIB is now keen to achieve a rapid increase in the participation of all councils in the sector led system. Subject to agreement with the lead chief executive, director for children's services and lead member for children in each region resources are now available for regions to implement local arrangements for:

- peer challenge
- early support for councils identifying performance risks
- policy implementation
- local promotion of good practice and innovation

Discussions between CIB and each region will be facilitated and supported by "lead brokers" from the recently appointed associate broker team (see below), with the intention of having all nine regions signed up before the end of December. It is part of the mandate for the lead brokers to make contact with key people and organisations in the region including the regional lead nominated for sector-led work (chief executive, director of children's services and lead member for children), regional improvement and efficiency partnerships, LGA senior and principal advisers and regional leads on succession planning. The aim is for children's services sector-led improvement to fit coherently with other regional and local improvement work, rather than to set up separate machinery where this is not needed.

The link person for each region will be as follows:

South West challenge)	Oonagh Aitken (who also leads for CIB on peer
London reviews)	Paul Curran (who also leads for CIB on peer
West Midlands	Claire Burgess
East Midlands	Christine Cassell
South East	Andy Roberts
Eastern	Alex Walters
Yorkshire & Humber	Dave Smith
North East	Dave Smith
North West	Howard Cooper

New Contracts for the Provision of Improvement Support Services

Following the establishment of a framework contract CIB has now contracted for the provision of a range of services including data profiles to assist local authorities in assessing their performance, validation and dissemination of good practice, recruitment of specialists from the sector who can contribute to

improvement and policy implementation work and support for the payment by results pathfinders. The contract to take forward the work on data profiles following the recent consultation has been won by WS Atkins, the contracts for validation and dissemination of good practice and for recruitment of specialists from the sector have been won by C4EO and the contract to work with payment by results pathfinders has been won by Serco. These contracts will commence in November and will enable the continuation of services that have formerly been secured by CIB on a short term basis.

Following discussions with councils further contracts are likely to be tendered in the near future to support work on commissioning, productivity and the development of youth services.

Development of CIB's Commissioning & Brokerage Team

CIB is now providing support to a significant proportion of councils subject to improvement notices and is also managing a number of contracts. Following advertisement CIB has now appointed a small team of associate brokers, most of whom will be involved in the support to regional devolution referred to below.

The new team, working with John Harris, are:

Claire Burgess
Christine Cassell
Howard Cooper (joining in January)
Andy Roberts
Dave Smith
Alex Walters

The nature and pace of the work, the need for flexibility and the requirement for a range of specialist backgrounds mean that the team will change as assignments start and finish and as we move towards greater devolution. Further appointments (all on a part time associate basis) are likely to be made in the near future using the pool of applicants identified through the recent advertisement.

Peer Reviews

Safeguarding peer reviews are now on offer as part of the new sector-led improvement arrangements. Funding from the Children's Improvement Board means that there is now no charge to individual councils. 22 reviews have been scheduled so far in 11/12 and bookings are now being taken for January onwards. If you are interested in having a review please contact Paul Curran or Caroline Bosdet.

Free training places are also available for people who wish to join review teams, the date currently available is February 8/9. The events take place at Warwick University. We are especially looking for applications from senior social care managers and NHS professionals, please contact Paul Curran or

Liz Cole for an application form.

Paul Curran 07738 600101 curran56@yahoo.co.uk

Caroline Bosdet 07876 106183 caroline.bosdet@local.gov.uk

Liz Cole liz.cole@local.gov.uk

Children's Centres – Sufficiency and Payment by Results Trials

Serco have been contracted to deliver the sufficiency and payment by results trials work between November 2011 and March 2012.

To date, 38 areas have requested support on sufficiency and there is likely to be further demand for this work as local authorities move towards budget decisions. It is clear from early feedback that local authority senior staff, children's centre managers and staff have found this work invaluable as evidenced from the quotes below:

“The flexibility of the session to address particular needs, together with the opportunity for professional challenge and support. The session was tailored to our specific requirements in particular in regard to commissioning of children's centres.”

“The associate had an immediate and comprehensive grasp of the issues for the programme in the local authority and was able to support thinking through the options but also introduce new ideas and suggestions for how things could be done differently. She provided useful experience from elsewhere and was very quick to respond in providing practical support following the initial meeting. Of particular note was the speed of the process and availability to immediately follow up and then meeting again which enabled the process to be completed in time for an important meeting with children's centre heads and leads.”

A specific action learning set to explore issues raised for children's centres where school providers become academies has also been organised.

The 27 payment by results trial areas have been approved and work is proceeding as planned with all project plans delivered on time. A very successful action learning set for all areas was held in London at the end of October. This was an opportunity for areas to discuss with DfE, Serco and other stakeholders the issues and challenges arising from early work. It was also an opportunity to have further engagement and consultation on the national measures as well as discussion on local measures. More local action learning sets are planned to deal with specific themes as they arise.

An advisory board with representation from a range of stakeholders is being established and will be meeting for the first time on 16 December. It is envisaged that the advisory board will continue to meet, as will the project team, during the life of the payment by results trials.

Contact with CIB

We are working to develop a systematic approach to responding to queries. In the meantime, please contact Alison Miller: alison.miller@local.gov.uk .