



CHILDREN'S IMPROVEMENT BOARD

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE PROPOSED NEW SYSTEM OF SECTOR-LED IMPROVEMENT AND SUPPORT IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Q1) What is the remit of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB)?

A. The CIB is a partnership board set up by the Local Government Group, the Association of Directors of Children's Services, SOLACE and the Department for Education. It is a direction setting and decision-making group that is responsible for the overall delivery of the programme to develop a sector-led improvement system for children's services.

Q2) Who is on the CIB?

A. Marion Davis, Immediate Past President of ADCS (Chair), Rob Whiteman, Managing Director of Local Government Improvement and Development (Local Government Group), Mark Rogers, SOLACE and Paul Kissack, . Councillor David Simmonds attends CIB meetings as a member of the Local Government Group's Children and Young People's Board.

Q3) What are we trying to achieve through the sector-led system?

A. Our ambition to work towards excellence in children's services through the development of a self-improving system will be underpinned by the following objectives

- To secure improvement work that is focused on galvanising children's services to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people, working in particular on the need to avoid service failures, improve performance in relation to the more intractable challenges and sustain progress during a period of significant economic restraint.
- To build on existing capability in children's services, corporately and with partners to diagnose improvement challenges, identify risks to performance and commission effective, evidence based and value for money solutions.
- To be systematic about sharing knowledge about what works across the sector and ensuring that there is effective brokerage of best practice solutions.

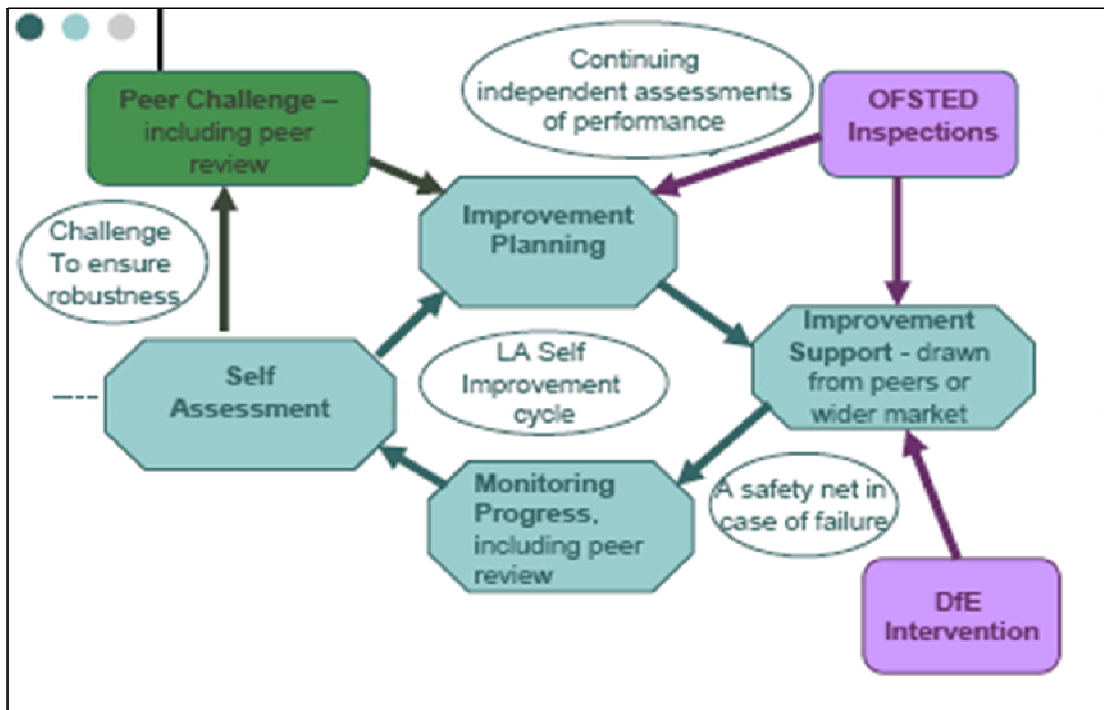
- To contribute to the development and implementation of policies designed to improve the lives of children.

Q4) How will we know whether we are being successful?

A. Ultimately, our success will be demonstrated by better outcomes for children nationally. The CIB also hopes to be able to demonstrate impact through:

- Early breakthroughs in supporting councils to both identify and respond to signs of weaknesses in safeguarding and looked after children services. This work to identify and pre-empt performance decline will be an early priority but not to the exclusion of other improvement work;
- Comprehensive engagement from councils with the sector led system, including being open to peer challenge; and
- Availability of a flexible menu of effective improvement support suitable for the range of performance levels in councils.
- Feedback from participants on the impact of both receiving and donating support. This should include the benefits to peer challengers in developing their expertise and in bringing back learning to their own councils.

Q5) What is the core improvement model that the sector-led system is developing?



A. The diagram above shows the key elements of the model. The sections in blue show the normal self-assessment and improvement activities that all councils will be carrying out.

Q6) What is the universal offer available to all councils?

A. The core of the model is that councils open up their self assessment and improvement planning activities in children and young people's services to a process of rigorous peer challenge. They will have access to five days of peer challenge free of charge each year, based on councils both gifting and receiving peer challenge time. More details are provided below.

All councils will be able to access a free safeguarding peer review once every three years, continuing the successful programme of safeguarding reviews developed by Local Government Improvement and Development. There are also further opportunities for reviews to be undertaken by elected members and senior managers, usually with a more corporate focus, under 'Taking the Lead' (see Q22 below).

Councils will have access to a range of support products and research and other evidence about what works that will be further developed by the sector. as part of the "LGInform" initiative (a free on-line sector owned data service for councils See Q 22 below).

Q7) What support products are already available?

A. The CIB has agreed that the proposed model for sector-led improvement will be supported by a knowledge hub that, from early 2012, enables open access to Local Authority data profiles.

The draft prototype data profiles have been created by C4EO in consultation with DCSs, Chief Executives, Lead Members and other stakeholders. The data profile is accessible to DCSs via the C4EO data hub. Each LA has protected access during this consultation period. The new profiles currently contain a list of potential indicators under the following themes; Early years, Families, Young People, Care and Adoption and attainment. Following the publication of the Munro review and its recommendation for a range of measures, a separate profile is being produced specifically on safeguarding.

Q8) What is a Peer Challenger?

A. There will be a universal offer of peer support and challenge for children's services; it is anticipated that the capacity to make this universal offer will come in large part from DCSs donating five days per year to this peer support and challenge function. This is not necessarily on a personal basis but may include making experienced staff available to share their particular skills. There is considerable emergent support for the idea that the donated 5 days of peer challenge might be whole teams coming together to offer challenge

and that these teams might include elected members and a range of people with corporate as well as children's services expertise. The crucial issue is to ensure that the peer challenge arrangements are tailored to the particular needs of individual councils.

This support and challenge will be available to all councils as they undertake their self assessment and improvement planning activities.

Q9) How will the quality of Peer Challengers be assured?

A. It is essential that Peer Challengers are skilled and credible so the CIB is developing a specification for the role and over time there will be a quality assurance system, based largely on user feedback and an accreditation scheme aligned with the DCS and Aspirant DCS Leadership Programmes.

For the time being and in the absence of an accreditation scheme, the CIB has agreed that it would be desirable, but not essential, at this stage if Peer Challengers had experienced at least one of the current learning and development opportunities available within the sector:

- Local Government Improvement and Development Peer Support training.
- C4EO (Centre for Excellence in Outcomes) Sector Specialist training.
- The National College Mentoring Support training.
- DCS and Aspirant DCS Leadership Programmes.

Q10) Is the system of peer challenge and review reliant on DCSs alone?

A. No - Although DCSs occupy a pivotal role within the sector-led system, council leaders, lead members for children and chief executives also carry substantial accountability for the delivery of effective children's services to their local communities. The CIB is aware that the success of the system will depend on the active support of DCSs but also local corporate and political leaders and that they therefore also need to draw on the skills of elected members with relevant experience. The CIB will be working with councils on how best to draw on members' expertise.

While it is considered likely that Peer Challengers will principally be serving DCSs, we anticipate that appropriately experienced aspirant DCSs and other corporate officers with the relevant backgrounds and skills will also make a contribution. These cadres will need to be supplemented by, for instance, recently retired DCSs and other experienced professionals across the sector. Securing the necessary capacity and capability to deliver an effective, universal peer challenge service will be both challenging and an issue about which we seek to learn.

Q11) Can councils choose their Peer Challenger?

A. Yes. Councils will be encouraged to select their challengers from the available pool but will also be supported to think through how to achieve a good match and secure an arrangement that adds value to their improvement work.

Q12) How does the Peer Challenger inform the improvement cycle?

A. The Peer Challenger will help councils to identify areas for improvement and potential sources of support. The extent to which support is drawn down will be largely a matter for councils to determine. There will be a continuum of engagement that responds to any performance risks identified during the challenge phase with priority being given to councils experiencing either significant challenges or intervention.

The CIB expects councils that identify the most needs and risks through their self assessment and peer challenge process will be the main users of additional support over and above the five days of peer challenge time and web based support products. It is likely that at other stages in the improvement cycle most councils will not need to pull in more external support and challenge to drive the next phases of their improvement work.

Q13) What is the role of regions in the improvement process?

A. It is envisaged that most councils will join with others in the region to form a cluster to work together on challenge and support. However, councils may choose Peer Challengers from outside the region and may choose to work in clusters or pairings that are not regionally based. The CIB is committed ultimately to delegating funds to regions or local clusters, while retaining some funding for policy priorities and intervention.

The CIB has identified leads for each region from amongst chief executives, directors of children's services and lead members for children so that communication and co-ordination of activity takes place on a regional basis. At present the priority is to have communication and co-ordination links in place. This network of regional leads may in due course provide a source from which Peer Challengers seek advice and second opinions – see Q15 below. There needs to be further discussion about how the roles of the regional leads might be developed so that accountabilities and responsibilities are clear

Q14) How is this different to the old system of centrally commissioned field forces and government office monitoring?

A. The approach will be led by the sector for the benefit of the sector building on valued work already done by C4EO, Local Government Improvement and Development and others. The sector-led programme will be less prescriptive, better value for money, will make better use of sector expertise and, crucially, it will better enable learning about what works to be retained within the sector. The CIB will be developing and testing the system with some early adopter councils.

There will not be any expectation that councils should change their local approaches to their self assessment and improvement planning. The only standardised elements will be the expectation that councils will make use of a core set of national data which will be available in the form of local profiles, and that councils will work with their Peer Challenger to further examine their local data and intelligence.

Peer Challengers will not be reporting back to government or to the regulator, Ofsted, on local performance issues identified through the peer challenge process, over and above data collected and published nationally and formal inspection undertaken by Ofsted. The system will be underpinned by agreements on transparency and confidentiality between the Children's Improvement Board and individual local authorities. These agreements will clearly identify in what circumstances and with whom performance information will be shared in order to secure the necessary improvement.

Q15) What are the circumstances in which there might be a less permissive approach?

A. If the system is to be robust and command confidence, its capacity to identify potential performance decline and give effective support to those councils most at risk is an important, albeit highly sensitive, aspect of a sector-led approach. The CIB will want to test out the ways in which the system can develop the necessary bite and rigour.

A less permissive approach may be necessary where the Peer Challenger identifies possible performance issues affecting outcomes for children but considers that the council is unwilling to address the issues and to secure appropriate support. It is envisaged that this will be in a small number of cases. With the full knowledge of the council concerned it will be open to the Peer Challenger to seek advice and a second opinion from within the sector so that further discussion about the situation can take place. The role of regional leads in this process is the subject of further work on roles and responsibilities.

Q16) Given that Ofsted continues to run a significant programme of inspections and will be publishing a further children's services rating this autumn, how does this approach support the sector's overall desire for a much reduced burden of performance monitoring?

A. The sector has always accepted the need for external inspection in high risk areas where the impact of failure is high – such as children's safeguarding. At the same time, we need to move to a system which is proportionate and supports better practice and better outcomes for children. The Munro review final report makes clear that inspection needs to form part of any overall improvement system with the potential for less inspection as the sector-led approach becomes more developed.

This self-improvement system for children's services provides an opportunity for the sector to take responsibility for its own performance and improvement.. There is a high expectation of participation because of the nature of the services involved. Successful take up of this new approach by councils will help the sector make the case for changes in the current inspection arrangements and a reduction in the overall burden on councils. Indeed, Ofsted is currently consulting on a revised framework for the inspection of some key aspects of children's services. This revised framework is due to be implemented from May 2012. Legislation is required to remove HMCI's statutory duty to produce an annual rating for each council's children's services; the CIB is urging government to find the earliest possible legislative opportunity to do so.

Q17) When will the system "go live"?

A. The CIB wants to encourage all councils to get involved as soon as possible particularly as many councils will already have well embedded approaches to self assessment and improvement planning. There is bound to be an element of transition and action learning in any new system, particularly in this first year. A scheme for early adopters is underway which will enable some formative testing of how best to secure Peer Challengers and the likely sufficiency of the pool. The early adopters will also be able to give some early feedback on what works best so that the CIB is in a better position to support full participation from autumn 2011.

Q18) What will the early adopters be testing?

A. Early adopters are testing specific components of the model, evaluating and sharing their learning across three broad areas:

- **Universal.** Testing key elements of the universal system in which it is hoped that all councils will participate. This involves early adopters opening up their self assessment and improvement planning activities to a process of peer challenge, including the use of a core set of national data which will be available in the form of local profiles. Councils will work with their Peer Challengers to further examine their local data and intelligence.
- **Performance Risks.** Testing the effectiveness of improvement support in specific circumstances where councils have themselves already identified performance risks or weaknesses and want to be proactive in addressing them.
- **Intervention.** Testing the effectiveness of sector-led improvement support in councils subject to Improvement Notices as a result of DfE intervention.

Q19) Will there be funding available?

A. Funding has been secured from DfE for the 2011-12 financial year. This will support the free safeguarding peer reviews, support on data profiles and

fund additional peer challenge time where it is required (over and above the five days we are asking councils to donate).

Q20) How will funding be distributed?

A. The CIB is committed ultimately to delegating funds to regions or local clusters but the CIB will also identify some clear priorities for the use of funding both in terms of the needs and risks that councils identify and in terms of policy implementation work. The CIB will want to discuss with regional improvement leads (DCSs, chief executives and lead members) how best to fund their local improvement work. This is something that the CIB and the regions/local clusters will need to develop in the light of experience and local advice so the early adopter work will contribute to our understanding about how to make the most difference with the funds available.

Q21) How will the CIB ensure that the programme remains truly sector-led?

A. The system for self improvement in children's services, is being developed within the context of the significant support for a sector-led approach received when the Local Government Group consulted on this last year and in line with the well established position of ADCS.

Councillor David Simmonds who is Chair of the Local Government Group's Children and Young People Programme Board attends the CIB and makes an important link between the two. The CIB makes regular reports to the CYP Programme Board.

An ADCS elected officer chairs the Children's Improvement Board. ADCS policy committees will continue to scrutinise the development of the programme, providing comments on tools and processes as they are further developed.

The CIB will consult and collect feedback from early adopters and the wider sector as the system develops.

Q22) How does the CIB fit with "Taking the Lead" and other sector-led initiatives?

"Taking the Lead" is the culmination of the Local Government Group's successful campaign to reduce the burden of external inspection and assessment that councils face. It contains details of the free of charge/subsidised support offer the Local Government Group is making available to help councils take advantage of this new approach. This is *additional* to the support offered by the Children's Improvement Board which is specifically focused on services for children and young people.

Peer challenge: a peer challenge available to all councils, free of charge, in the three-year period from April 2011. The areas to be covered will be flexible

to the needs of the council but will include some focus on corporate capacity and leadership.

Peer support: an offer of up to five days free member peer support for all councils which experienced a change of control in the recent local elections.

LG Inform: a free online service allowing councils to access, and if they choose compare, key performance information. A prototype has been developed in close collaboration with local authorities. You can find out more and access the LG Inform prototype (for which you will need a .gov email address) at: www.local.gov.uk/inform.

Further details about Taking the Lead are available from:
www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead

There are similar developments in sector-led support in Adult Social Services. The sector-led programmes for both children's and adult services fit within the overall umbrella of "Taking the Lead". Some councils have developed combined directorates, bringing together adults and children's services and it will be important to keep the children's improvement system well aligned with the one developing in relation to adult social care. The CIB hopes to work with some of the councils with combined directorates through the programme and ensure that learning is shared across service areas.