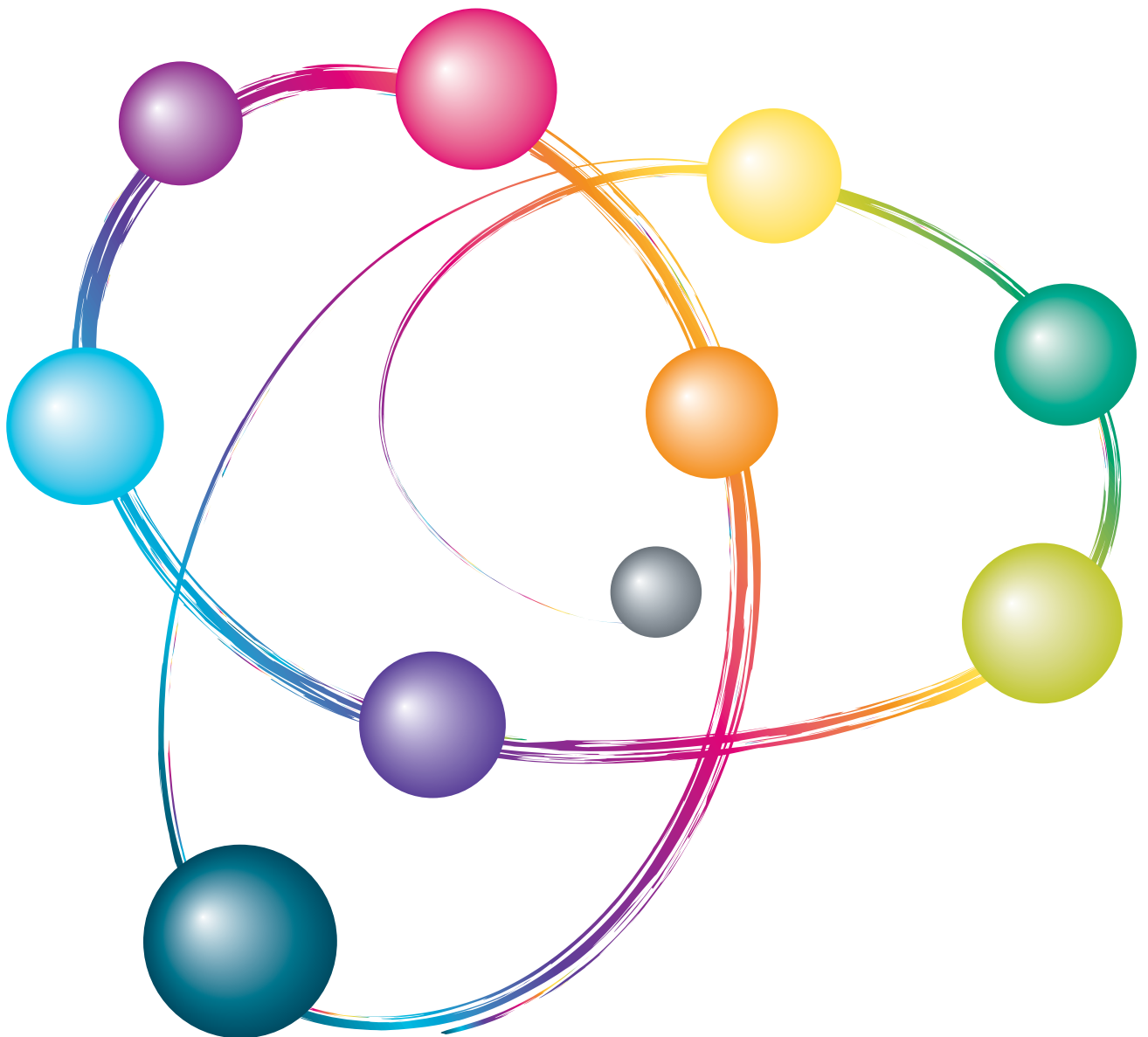


# Taking the lead

Self-regulation and improvement in local government



# Helping councils strengthen their accountability and revolutionise the way they evaluate and improve services

Councils are accountable to their residents, not to inspectorates. Following our campaign to reduce the £2 billion burden of inspection on councils we've seen public service agreements (PSAs), the comprehensive area assessment (CAA) and burdens such as the use of resources and organisational assessments abolished. The annual performance assessment by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) has been changed to a more risk based approach, and following recommendations from the Munro review, Ofsted is consulting on a more proportionate way of assessing a child's journey from May 2012.

From holding councillor surgeries through to formal citizen panels, councils are constantly seeking new ways of engaging with their communities and being held more locally accountable for what they do. Now that the burden of bureaucratic accountability and centrally imposed national targets are lifting, councils can concentrate even more on listening and engaging with their communities to deliver what they want.

The Government has welcomed this emphasis on self-regulation and improvement. Following extensive consultation with the sector, the Local Government Association (LGA) has published an approach to how this will work in practice. In addition, we are working with partners to develop dedicated approaches for children's and adult services.

“Councils are accountable to their local residents, not central government departments. Ultimately, they will be judged by how effectively they deliver services, rather than on whether the right boxes have been ticked on a Whitehall bureaucrat's template form. The LGA's 'Taking the lead' offer is designed to help what is already the most directly accessible and accountable level of government to become even more responsive to local residents.”

**Councillor Peter Fleming**  
**Chairman of the LGA Improvement Board**

# Principles

The underlying principles are that:

- councils are responsible for their own performance
- stronger accountability to local people drives further improvement
- councils have a collective responsibility for performance in the sector as a whole
- the role of the LGA is to provide support and assistance.

Councils were clear though that any support and assistance developed nationally should not be imposed but made available to use as and when required. 'Taking the lead' has been designed with this in mind, creating a light touch system of self-regulation.

# Approach

The LGA will continue to campaign for further devolution and for councils to have greater accountability for all public services in their locality. We will also continue to make the case for further reductions in inspection.

In addition we are offering a range of – free of charge and subsidised – tools and support to help further strengthen local accountability and explore how effectively you are delivering services.

1. Local accountability tools to be made available, including online guidance, a new local assessment tool and support from the Centre for Public Scrutiny.
2. A corporate peer challenge offered to all councils, free of charge in the three-year period from April 2011.

3. An offer of up to five days free member peer support for all councils undergoing a change of control.
4. The Knowledge Hub, a new online platform to help people connect, share and learn from each other, supporting improvement in local government and beyond.
5. Data and transparency enhanced by the LG Inform service to access, compare and analyse performance data and present findings.
6. Leadership support for the development of political and managerial leaders, including one subsidised place for every council for each of the next three years.
7. Learning and support networks of officers and councillors nationally and sub-nationally, working with others, to share good practice and provide timely support.

These tools will be free at the point of use and paid for by councils through the RSG top slice. The more you use them the more useful they will be both for individual councils and the sector overall. We will also ensure, through brokering and market making, that the services councils wish to see developed are made available via the market.

To oversee 'Taking the lead' we have established an independent advisory board drawing on professionals from across local government and beyond.

# An approach to adult services

The new Promoting Excellence in Councils' Adult Social Care Board is developing the key elements of the approach. The board is chaired by Richard Jones, Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and includes the LGA, Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), Care Quality Commission (CQC), the Department of Health (DH) and Think Local Act Personal.

The DH has provided funding to support the development of the approach. This includes:

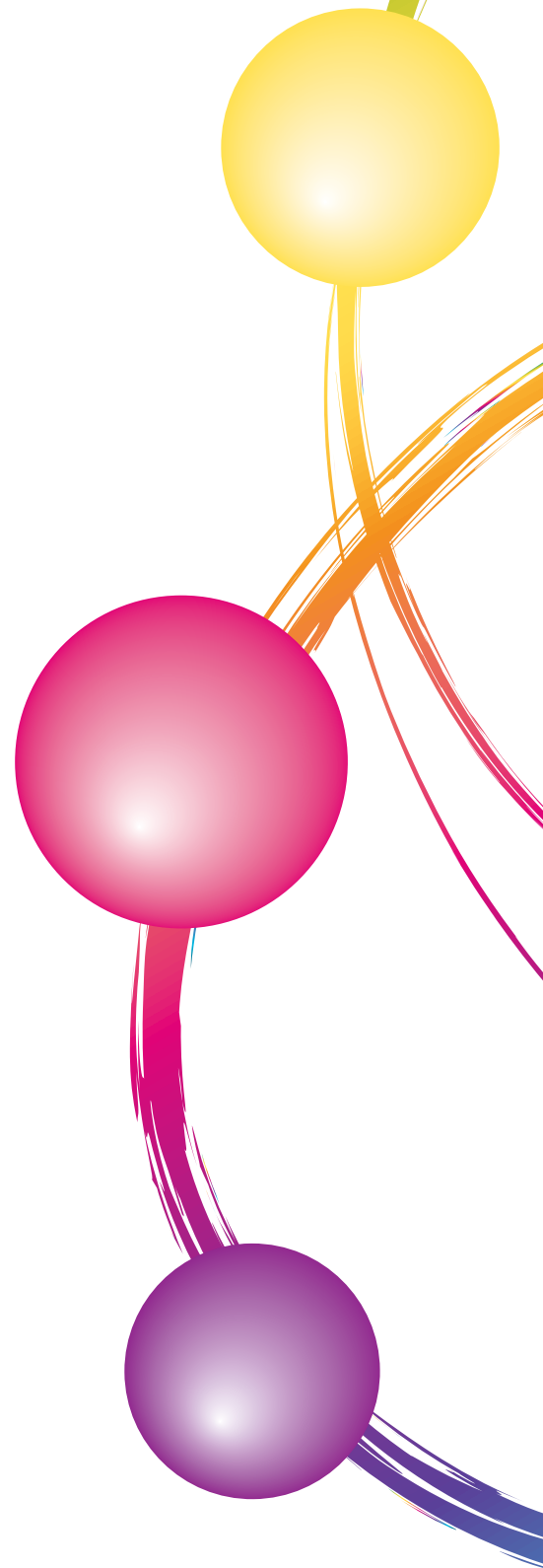
1. Local accounts, an accountability tool building on local quality assurance frameworks and safeguarding annual reports to engage residents with service priorities and outcomes.
2. Support and challenge for the seven councils judged 'adequate' for adult social care under the previous rating system.
3. Discussion and development networks to support the approach regionally, nationally, and share good practice.

Future work is likely to focus on:

- Data analysis drawing on national data sets, market intelligence and the roll out of the excellence scheme, supported through the LG Inform service.
- Sharing intelligence with relevant agencies to inform a national overview of support needs. Developing a commissioned and direct support offer at a national, regional and individual council level, including peer challenge.
- Coordination, with relevant agencies, of national support offers through the Board to assist local improvement planning. Potential for the Board, along with the DH, to act as the lead commissioner of nationally funded activity to provide a consistent model of 'what good looks like'.
- Brokering support between agencies to maintain quality and responding to the risk of council or local market failure, when councils:
  - self-identify support needs
  - have externally evident support needs they are not responding to
  - need tailored support for particular challenges.
- Escalation of concerns, on a case-by-case basis, with councils falling below a threshold agreed with the DH, CQC and the sector.

“The key emphasis of our new approach to support and improvement in adult social care will be on promoting innovation and excellence. Its core elements – robust, relevant performance data, annual progress reports, and peer challenge – will be regularly and transparently outlined to local people. This will mesh both with the sector’s wider approach to self-regulation and will build on what many councils are already doing to ensure that they face outwards to their communities. From spreading good ideas to supporting councils who have challenges, local leaders also will have a role in providing or freeing up expertise to meet our new responsibilities.”

**Councillor David Rogers OBE**  
**Chairman of the LGA Community**  
**Wellbeing Board**



# Towards excellence: an approach to children's services

The approach to improving children's services is being developed by the Children's Improvement Board, a partnership board set up by the LGA, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), SOLACE and the Department for Education (DfE).

The DfE has provided funding to support the development of the approach. This includes:

1. Five days of peer challenge support for each council led by directors of children's services.
2. A safeguarding peer review offered to all councils, free of charge, in the three-year period from April 2011.
3. Publication of research into effective local practice, key findings and evidence of impact.
4. Localised data analysis, supported through the LG Inform service.
5. The development of cost effectiveness tools.
6. Access to a range of improvement programmes, products and tools.

In addition, we are:

- running an early adopter programme for councils to test and evaluate key phases of the improvement cycle
- offering peer-led support to councils where performance is declining or subject to intervention.

To deliver on such a significant commitment we are anticipating that each director of children's services (or in some cases a senior experienced manager) will dedicate five days a year on a reciprocal basis to supporting a peer challenge. The combination of grant funding and a continuing commitment to reciprocity and 'gifted' expertise, will give the system capacity as well as offering value for money.

"Improving the lives of children and young people is one of the most important things that councils do, and one of the areas of highest risk. Councils are often in the spotlight when things go wrong, but we know that the best councils understand their own strengths and weaknesses and step in early to tackle problems, rather than slavishly following guidance. I hope that councillors will take an active lead in children's services improvement, challenging their councils to do better and encouraging directors and senior staff to free up time to provide challenge to others. If we are serious about this, we need to be serious about doing it ourselves, not waiting to be told."

**Councillor David Simmonds**  
**Chairman of the LGA Children and Young People Board**

# Next steps

Self-regulation and improvement is already happening to a large degree and the approaches set out build on this but in a way that does not impose any additional burdens on councils but does reinforce the principle of collective responsibility.

We do not underestimate the challenge of these approaches at a time when councils are having to make significant savings and take some very difficult decisions on behalf of their communities.

We will work with the sector over the next few months to refine the tools that we are making available to ensure that they are what councils want and can be adapted where necessary to local circumstances.

## For more information

Read the full 'Taking the lead' report and consultation analysis at:

[www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead](http://www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead)

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To find out more about our approach to improving children's and adult services, please visit:

[www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead](http://www.local.gov.uk/taking-the-lead)





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