

Evaluation of sector-led improvement

Companion Report: survey of lead members for children's services

February 2014



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Evaluation of sector-led improvement

This report forms part of the Local Government Association (LGA) evaluation of sector-led improvement. Other outputs from the evaluation can be found here:

<http://www.local.gov.uk/research-performance-and-improvement>.

Sector-led improvement

With changes to the nationally imposed inspection and assessment regime, a new approach to improvement has been developed by local government. This was set out in the LGA's document 'Taking the Lead' in February 2011, supplemented in June 2012 by "Sector-led improvement in local government"¹ which describes a coordinated approach to sector-led improvement across local government, the support being provided and where to go for further information and advice.

The approach is based on the following key principles:

- councils are responsible for their own performance and improvement and for leading the delivery of improved outcomes for local people in their area
- councils are primarily accountable to local communities (not government or the inspectorates) and stronger accountability through increased transparency helps local people drive further improvement
- councils have a collective responsibility for the performance of the sector as a whole (evidenced by sharing best practice, offering member and officer peers, etc.)
- the role of the LGA is to maintain an overview of the performance of the sector in order to identify potential performance challenges and opportunities – and to provide tools and support to help councils take advantage of this new approach.

'Taking the Lead' identified a small core set of activities that are commonly undertaken by councils who proactively take responsibility for their own performance and improvement. This common set of activities provides the framework for sector-led improvement across councils' services and activities. It is also the framework around which the LGA's offer of support to councils is based, as follows:

- strengthening local accountability
- inviting challenge from one's peers
- learning from good practice and through regional structures and networks
- utilising transparent and comparable performance information
- investing in leadership.

A specific offer has also been developed to support sector-led improvement in children's services, and it is this work that this report is focusing on.

¹ <http://www.local.gov.uk/sector-led-improvement>

The evaluation

The LGA's evaluation looks at both the overall approach to sector-led improvement and the specific offers of support. It is running over a two year period, with the main aim of understanding whether, in the context of reduced resources within the sector:

- the approach to sector-led improvement has the confidence of the sector and the government, and the trust of the public
- the sector has been able to strengthen local accountability
- the sector is adopting the sector-led improvement approach and continues to improve with a reduced burden of inspection, and in the absence of top down performance assessment
- the tools offered to the sector have had a positive impact on the sector's capacity to improve itself.

A baseline report was published in February 2013. In addition, a number of companion reports, of which this is one, are being published alongside the main evaluation reports, looking at specific issues in more detail. This companion report complements the final evaluation report, which can be found here: <http://www.local.gov.uk/research-performance-and-improvement>.

Summary

Introduction

This survey looked at sector-led improvement in children's services. Responsibility for this previously rested with the Children's Improvement Board (CIB). However in April 2013 the Department for Education withdrew its funding to CIB.

Important elements of CIB's previous work programme are now being taken forward by the LGA as part of its sector-led improvement offer to councils and the three organisations on CIB² are continuing to work together in partnership to support improvement. The purpose of this survey was to help ensure that the approach that has been developed post CIB is meeting the needs of councils, and to shape decisions about the future support offer.

The survey forms part of the two year LGA evaluation of sector-led improvement. A similar survey was also conducted with directors of children's services.³ A baseline survey of lead members for children's services was conducted over the course of January - March 2013 and this report outlines the results for the most recent survey as well as highlighting any changes between the two surveys.

Respondents

The online survey was sent via email to lead members for children's services in all 152 councils with responsibility for this service in England, and was in the field over the course of February and early March 2014. Responses were received from 74 lead members – a response rate of 49 per cent.

Key messages

Levels of awareness of the approach to supporting sector-led improvement in children's services post CIB were varied, although the vast majority had heard at least a little about this. Sixty one per cent of those who were aware agreed that the approach is the right one in the current context, with most others neutral rather than disagreeing with the approach.

The confidence of lead members in the work their authorities are doing to drive improvement and around local accountability remains high, despite a number of challenges such as financial constraints alongside high demand.

Skills and capacity for sector-led improvement

Lead members tended to be confident in the skills and capacity of both their own authority and of the sector to monitor its own performance and continuously improve. Although they were noticeably more confident about their own authority than the sector in general, this was partly due to a higher proportion of respondents (15 per cent) answering 'don't know' for the sector.

² The LGA, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executive and Senior Managers (SOLACE) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS).

³ Other outputs from the evaluation can be found here: <http://www.local.gov.uk/research-performance-and-improvement>

Ninety six per cent were confident in their own authority to a great or moderate extent, compared to 69 per cent for the sector. A further four per cent were confident about their authority to a small extent, and 14 per cent for the sector.

Support for sector-led improvement in children's services

Awareness of the approach

Awareness of the approach to supporting sector-led improvement in children's services post CIB was varied; 62 per cent of respondents had heard a lot or a moderate amount about this, whilst a further 27 per cent had heard a little.

Views on the approach

Lead members who had some awareness of the approach to supporting sector-led improvement in children's services post CIB were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "the approach that has been developed to support sector-led improvement in children's services post Children's Improvement Board is the right approach in the current context".

The majority agreed with the approach – 61 per cent strongly agreed or agreed. Of the remaining respondents, most were neutral (30 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed), with only five per cent disagreeing with the approach. As may be expected following the withdrawal of funding, levels of agreement were lower than when respondents were asked the same question about the CIB approach in the baseline survey, although this was reflected in an increase in the proportion of respondents answering 'neither agree nor disagree' rather than an increase in active disagreement.

Awareness of the elements of the offer

Awareness of the different elements of the LGA support available to help the sector in taking the lead in its own improvement tended to be fairly high, particularly for the safeguarding peer review (89 per cent were aware) and free leadership academy places for children's services lead members (85 per cent). The element with the lowest level of awareness was diagnostics for safeguarding, care and adoption (41 per cent).

Expected impact of the approach

Lead members who had some awareness of the approach and support offer that has been developed to support sector-led improvement in children's services were asked the extent to which they thought that this would have a positive impact on the capacity of children's services, both within their own authority and across the local government sector as a whole, to monitor its own performance and continuously improve.

The majority were positive about the likely impact of the approach; 79 per cent thought that there would be a great or moderate positive impact on their children's services department, whilst 67 per cent thought this for the sector.

Driving improvement

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "My authority's children's services department is making advances in driving improvement". Almost all respondents (96 per cent) stated that they thought that this was the case, with 53 per cent strongly agreeing and the remainder (43 per cent) agreeing. Respondents' views on this were very similar in the baseline survey.

Local accountability

Lead members were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "Accountability to and engagement with children's service users is strong in my authority". As in the baseline, responses were positive: 85 per cent of respondents agreed that accountability and engagement were strong in their authority.

The 47 lead members that did not answer 'strongly agree' were asked whether they see increasing accountability to and engagement with children's service users as a priority for their authority's children's services department. The majority (33 respondents – 70 per cent) stated that increasing accountability and engagement was a high priority.

Introduction

This online survey of lead members for children's services looked at sector-led improvement in children's services.

Responsibility for the programme to develop sector-led improvement for children's services previously rested with the Children's Improvement Board (CIB). However in April 2013 the Department for Education withdrew its funding to CIB.

Following this, the CIB embarked on an extensive period of consultation on the future of sector-led improvement in children's services. Important elements of CIB's previous work programme are now being taken forward by the LGA as part of its sector-led improvement offer to councils, and the three CIB organisations – LGA, Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) – are continuing to work together in partnership to support improvement.

The purpose of this survey was to help ensure that the approach that has been developed to support sector-led improvement in children's services post CIB is meeting the needs of councils, and to shape decisions about the future support offer.

The survey forms part of the two year LGA evaluation of sector-led improvement. A similar survey was also conducted with directors of children's services.⁴ A baseline survey of lead members for children's services was conducted over the course of January - March 2013 and this report outlines the results for the most recent survey as well as highlighting any changes between the two surveys.

Methodology

The online survey was sent via email to lead members for children's services in all 152 councils with responsibility for this service in England, and was in the field over the course of February and early March 2014. Responses were received from 74 lead members – a response rate of 49 per cent – higher than the response of 34 per cent achieved in the baseline survey.

Whilst these results should strictly be taken as a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents, rather than representative of all children's services lead members, this level of response means that the results are likely to provide a good indication of the position of the sector more widely.

A breakdown of response rate by authority type is shown in Table 1. There was some variation across authority types, with a higher than average response amongst counties and unitary authorities and a lower than average response from metropolitan districts and London boroughs.

⁴ Other outputs from the evaluation can be found here: <http://www.local.gov.uk/research-performance-and-improvement>

Table 1: Response breakdown by type			
	Respondents	Total authorities	Response rate (%)
Shire county	17	27	63
English unitary	33	56	59
Metropolitan district	12	36	33
London borough	12	33	36
Total	74	152	49

Table 2 breaks down the response rate by region. The table shows some variation in response rate between regions, with a low response rate from the North West and a higher response rate in the West Midlands.

Table 2: Response breakdown by region			
	Respondents	Total authorities	Response rate (%)
East Midlands	5	9	56
East of England	7	11	64
London	12	33	36
North East	6	12	50
North West	5	23	22
South East	12	19	63
South West	9	16	56
West Midlands	10	14	71
Yorkshire and the Humber	8	15	53
Total	74	152	49

Please note the following when reading the report:

- Where the difference between the results of this survey and the baseline survey is statistically significant, this is stated within the report.
- Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question. The number provided refers to the number who answered each question. Please note that bases vary throughout the survey.
- Throughout the report percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.
- The following conventions are used in tables: ‘*’ - less than 0.5 per cent; ‘0’ – no observations; ‘-’ – category not applicable/data not available.
- Where the response base is fewer than 50, care should be taken when interpreting percentages, as small differences can seem magnified. Therefore where this is the case in this report, absolute numbers are reported alongside the percentage values.

Survey of lead members for children's services

This section outlines the full set of survey results.

Skills and capacity for sector-led improvement

Important elements of CIB's previous work programme are being taken forward by the LGA as part of its sector-led improvement offer to councils, and the three organisations on CIB – the LGA, SOLACE and ADCS – are continuing to work together in partnership to support improvement.

In order to gauge levels of confidence in the sector's capacity to deliver on sector-led improvement in children's services, lead members were asked the extent to which, post CIB, they were confident that:

- their own council's children's services department had the necessary skills and capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve
- the local government children's services sector as a whole (i.e. across all councils) had the necessary skills and capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve.

Respondents were reminded that improvement can include maintaining service levels or service user outcomes in the face of a reduction in resources, as this requires an increase in efficiency and productivity.

Respondents tended to be confident in the skills and capacity of both their own authority and of the sector to monitor its own performance and continuously improve. Although they were noticeably more confident about their own authority than the sector in general, this was partly due to a higher proportion of respondents (15 per cent) answering 'don't know' for the sector.

- Ninety six per cent were confident in their own authority to a great or moderate extent, compared to 69 per cent for the sector.⁵ This level of confidence had not changed significantly since the baseline survey.
- Four per cent were only confident about their authority to a small extent, compared to 14 per cent for the sector. In addition for the sector, three per cent were not at all confident.

⁵ Whilst the individual 'great' and 'moderate' answer options displayed in Table 3 appear to sum to 68 per cent, this is due to the fact the figures in the table have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Please note that this may also occur in other parts of the report where answer categories are combined.

Table 3: Post Children's Improvement Board, to what extent would you say you are confident that:

	a) Your own council's children's services department currently has the necessary skills and capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve?	b) The local government children's services sector as a whole (i.e. across all councils) currently has the necessary skills and capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve?
	Per cent	Per cent
To a great or moderate extent	96	69
To a great extent	55	9
To a moderate extent	41	59
To a small extent	4	14
Not at all	0	3
Don't know	0	15
Total	100	100

Base: all respondents (74 respondents)

Support for sector-led improvement in children's services

Awareness of the approach

Lead members were asked how much, if anything, they had heard about the approach to supporting sector-led improvement in children's services post CIB. Levels of awareness were varied; 62 per cent of respondents had heard a lot or a moderate amount, whilst a further 27 per cent had heard a little.

Table 4: How much, if anything, have you heard about the approach to supporting sector-led improvement in children's services post Children's Improvement Board?

	Per cent
Heard a lot or a moderate amount	62
Heard a lot	31
Heard a moderate amount	31
Heard a little	27
Heard nothing	11
Don't know	0
Total	100

Base: all respondents (74 respondents)

Views on the approach

Those lead members who had some awareness of the approach to supporting sector-led improvement in children's services post CIB were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "the approach that has been developed to support sector-led improvement in children's services post Children's Improvement Board is the right approach in the current context".

The majority of those who were aware agreed with the approach – 61 per cent strongly agreed or agreed. Of the remaining respondents, most were neutral (30 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed), with only five per cent disagreeing with the approach. As may be expected following the withdrawal of funding, levels of agreement were lower than when respondents were asked the same question about the CIB approach in the baseline survey, although this is reflected in an increase in the proportion of respondents answering 'neither agree nor disagree' rather than an increase in active disagreement.

Table 5: Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The approach that has been developed to support sector-led improvement in children's services post Children's Improvement Board is the right approach in the current context"⁶

	2013		2014	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Agree or strongly agree	44	92	40	61
Strongly agree	21	44	11	17
Agree	23	48	29	44
Neither agree nor disagree	2	4	20	30
Disagree	0	0	1	2
Strongly disagree	0	0	2	3
Don't know	2	4	3	5
Total	48	100	66	100

Base: all respondents that had heard at least a little about the approach (2013: 48 respondents, 2014: 66 respondents)

The 40 respondents who stated that they agreed with the approach were asked to explain why they thought this. Among the 35 who provided explanations, the most common reason given was that there is great value in **identifying and sharing good practice, as well as benchmarking** against other authorities. For example:

"It is important best practice is established, which may be shared with all councils. We must also be able to benchmark against each other. Each local area has its own priorities but there will be consistent themes that apply across the board."

County, East of England

"Resources within each local council are limited, but we all need an external eye on what we do. Sector-led improvement enables us to challenge each other and learn from each other's successes."

Unitary, Yorkshire and Humber

Another commonly given reason was that the sector-led improvement approach is **constructive and supportive, and encourages councils to work together**. Linked to this is the fact that the best **knowledge and expertise lies within the sector itself**, and sector-led improvement makes the most of this. For example:

"Peers are absolutely the right people to understand the challenges facing the sector - at both officer and member level."

Unitary, South West

"Peer reviews include elected members and a range of professionals across the sector. This gives a wider perspective and more objective assessment than the former arrangements. They are also seen as more constructive and less judgemental, which is better received by staff and leads to a more open and less defensive attitude."

Metropolitan district, West Midlands

⁶ The question asked in 2013 was "Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The Children's Improvement Board approach to sector-led improvement in children's services is the right approach in the current context."

Other reasons for agreeing with the approach included that it is robust, takes on board learning from a variety of sources, and is highly regarded.

The 20 respondents who said that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the approach were asked to explain why they thought this, and 18 provided responses. A small number said that they need **more information about the approach**, or that they would like to see **more evidence that it can make a difference**. Other comments covered a range of topics but included issues such as the importance of bespoke support, the need to avoid 'silo thinking', and the impact of the withdrawal of CIB funding, for example:

"I think the Children's Improvement Board added incredible value to us when we were given 'inadequate' status... I believe councils need this instant help which guides you in the right direction in the early days and helps you hire in the right help and draw up plans. I don't think help is on offer to this extent any more so I don't really have a view on whether or not it is good or bad, just not as good as it was before!"

London borough

Finally, the three respondents who disagreed with the approach were asked to explain their reasons for this. One response focused on concern around the role of Ofsted in improvement, with the other two concerned about the implications of the withdrawal of CIB funding.

Awareness of the elements of the offer

Awareness of the different elements of the LGA support available to help the sector in taking the lead in its own improvement tended to be fairly high, particularly for the safeguarding peer review (89 per cent were aware) and free Leadership Academy places for children's services lead members (85 per cent). The element with the lowest level of awareness was diagnostics for safeguarding, care and adoption (41 per cent).

	Per cent
Safeguarding peer reviews	89
Free leadership academy places for children's services lead members	85
Direct support for councils following an adverse inspection judgement	68
Events on joint leadership for children's services, bringing together directors of children's services, chief executives and lead members (pilot scheduled for February 2014)	53
Work to share expertise on children's services data and to provide resources that make data more accessible via LG Inform	42
Diagnostics for safeguarding, care and adoption	41
I have heard of none of these	1

Base: all respondents (74 respondents)

Expected impact of the approach

Respondents who had some awareness of the approach and support offer that has been developed to support sector-led improvement in children's services were asked the extent to which they thought that this would have a positive impact on:

- the capacity of their own council's children's services department to monitor its own performance and continuously improve

- the capacity of children's services across the local government sector as a whole (i.e. across all councils) to monitor its own performance and continuously improve.

Respondents' views on this were quite similar for their own authority and the sector more generally. The majority were positive about the likely impact of the approach:

- Seventy nine per cent thought that there would be a great or moderate positive impact on their children's services department, whilst 67 per cent thought this for the sector.
- A further eight per cent thought that there would be a small positive impact on their own children's services department, and seven per cent for the sector.

Table 7: To what extent do you think that the approach developed to support sector-led improvement in children's services post Children's Improvement Board will have a positive impact on:

	a) the capacity of your own council's children's services department to monitor its own performance and continuously improve?	b) the capacity of children's services across the local government sector as a whole (i.e. across all councils) to monitor its own performance and continuously improve?
	Per cent	Per cent
To a great or moderate extent	79	67
To a great extent	33	18
To a moderate extent	47	49
To a small extent	8	7
Not at all	1	0
Don't know	11	26
Total	100	100

Base: all respondents that had heard at least a little about the approach (or answered 'don't know') (Table 4) and/or had heard of at least one element of the support (Table 6) (73 respondents)

Those that answered 'to a small extent' or 'not at all' for their own council or the sector were asked to briefly outline suggestions for any improvements or additional activity that the LGA could support in order to further help their authority and/or the sector's capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve.

Four lead members provided comments and these were varied, covering requests for support in areas such as dealing with the impact of budget cuts (for example, how to redesign services) and help with preparing for inspection, as well as keeping members informed.

Driving improvement

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "My authority's children's services department is making advances in driving improvement". At the start of the survey lead members were reminded that improvement can include maintaining service levels or service user outcomes in the face of a reduction in resources, as this requires an increase in efficiency and productivity.

Almost all respondents (96 per cent) stated that they thought that this was the case, with 53 per cent strongly agreeing and the remainder (43 per cent) agreeing. Respondents' views on this were very similar in the baseline survey.

Table 8: Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: "My authority's children's services department is making advances in driving improvement".	
	Per cent
Agree or strongly agree	96
Strongly agree	53
Agree	43
Neither agree nor disagree	4
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0
Don't know	0
Total	100

Base: all respondents (74 respondents)

Respondents were asked to explain what, if any, were the biggest barriers or key challenges in driving improvement in their authority's children's services department. **Reductions in funding, resulting in very limited resources**, was the most commonly cited challenge, with several respondents also mentioning the additional pressures of an **increase in demand**. Specific challenges related to this included:

"Rising demand along with budget cuts makes it difficult to continuously drive forward improvement."

Unitary, South West

"[The authority has] already driven out a lot of duplication, reduced silos and had strengthened partnership working over the years...so there is little slack to use in a time of diminished and diminishing resources. Everything is being stretched more thinly so it is hard in that atmosphere to reach more families and prevent escalation."

London borough

Some lead members gave examples of how they are tackling these financial challenges in their own areas. Generally these examples were around two areas:

- **actions to ensure improvement was given priority** even during times of financial pressure, for example:

"Key challenge is the ever reducing budget but [the authority] has an extensive Transformation Programme staffed separately but working closely with senior officers in children's services and this builds capacity."

Unitary, Yorkshire and Humber

"The development of a social care improvement professional into the corporate policy unit reporting directly to the director of children's services/lead member rather than in the children's services department. The improvement journey is seen as being owned by the whole corporate body and the senior leadership team..."

Unitary, West Midlands

- **early intervention** work, for example:

“Higher levels of child protection plans than our benchmarking neighbours, led us to introducing [a programme] aiming at early intervention which is showing to be working.”

County, South East

Another commonly mentioned barrier was around **recruitment and retention of staff**, and a high turnover, particularly in relation to social workers but also in management positions. A couple of lead members discussed how their authorities were dealing with these challenges, for example:

“Retention of social workers [has been a challenge]. [We have dealt with this by] re-grading, more mentoring/support/training/improved career progression and pathways, and work on morale/self-confidence.”

County, South West

“We were delivering services with a very high level of agency staff. The market was getting out of control and we have had to improve our HR skills, up the package we offer and introduce things like training academies and grow your own social work staff. We are sending social work assistants back to university to become social workers... We made our searches online produce better, more attractive and interesting information on coming to work in [the authority] and wrote thought leadership pieces in industry magazines.”

London borough

Other challenges included **sharing information** between different agencies and IT platforms, pressures around Ofsted inspections, weak leadership, and the need for culture change within departments and some resistance to this, for example:

“Weak leadership and management led to poor practice across the service. Addressing this early was key to our improvement. A renewed vision to drive for excellence has had a huge effect on how people now work - we are determined to get to Outstanding and all practice has been changed to reflect this. We still have a long way to go but know that we are on track. Barriers have been staff who don't want to engage with the new way of working...”

Unitary, South West

Local accountability

A key aspect of sector-led improvement is engagement with and accountability to children's service users (including children and young people, parents and carers) as a useful way of informing them and allowing them to influence the drive for further improvement. Lead members were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement: “Accountability to and engagement with children's service users is strong in my authority”.

As in the baseline, responses were positive: 85 per cent of respondents agreed that accountability and engagement were strong in their authority. The remaining respondents were split evenly between those who were neutral (eight per cent answered ‘neither agree nor disagree’) and those who disagreed (seven per cent).

Table 9: Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Accountability to and engagement with children’s service users is strong in my authority”.

	Per cent
Agree or strongly agree	85
Strongly agree	36
Agree	49
Neither agree nor disagree	8
Disagree	7
Strongly disagree	0
Don't know	0
Total	100

Base: all respondents (73 respondents)

The 47 lead members that did not answer ‘strongly agree’ were asked whether they see increasing accountability to and engagement with children’s service users as a priority for their authority’s children’s services department.

The majority (33 respondents – 70 per cent) stated that increasing accountability and engagement was a high priority. Four lead members said it was a low priority and none stated that it was not a priority.

Table 10: Do you see increasing accountability to and engagement with children's service users as a priority for your authority's children's services department?

	Number	Per cent
Yes, a high priority	33	70
Yes, a moderate priority	9	19
Yes, but a low priority	4	9
No, it is not a priority	0	0
Don't know	1	2
Total	47	100

Base: respondents who selected ‘agree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’, ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ (Table 9): (47 respondents)

The 46 lead members who stated that they see increasing accountability as a priority were asked to explain what, if any, they see as the biggest barriers or key challenges to increasing accountability to and engagement with children’s service users. Forty provided comments.

The most frequently mentioned challenge was the constraints caused by **a lack of finance and staff time**. Another challenge was around **ensuring an effective methodology and reaching a representative sample of service users**. A couple of lead members also mentioned that the introduction of academies has made this more difficult. The following quote demonstrates the interplay between these issues:

“Many of the barriers we are facing have been exacerbated by local authority schools moving to Academies and disengaging from the authority. Making the engagement meaningful for our young people. Having the right mechanisms in place for different types of engagement, cross age groups, ethnicity, gender, disability. The financial cost of meaningful, consultative engagement – this is hard when budgets are so stretched. Less money has also had an impact on services such as our universal youth services which we have had to cut to just targeted, again this is a barrier to better engagement.”

Unitary, South East

Other challenges mentioned were varied but included encouraging **proactive member involvement** in accountability activities, **managing expectations of services** when engaging with service users and engaging with **users placed outside the authority**.

Further comments on sector-led improvement in children's services

Finally, respondents were invited to provide any last comments they had on sector-led improvement and accountability in children's services. Twenty one lead members provided comments, with many taking the opportunity to welcome the approach or give examples of work they are doing in this area, and of where sector-led improvement has benefitted their authority. For example:

"Sector led improvement has supported children's services and allowed us to move more quickly to a positive position where we are definitely supporting families to stay together which has eased pressure on the service."

County, West Midlands

"All help and co-operation is welcome."

Unitary, North East

"Working as a member with the LGA is a vital part of making this work, accessing quality and independent advice will help complement local work."

Unitary, South East

Annex A: Questionnaire

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. You can navigate through the questions using the arrows at the bottom of each page. Use the back arrow at the bottom of the page if you wish to amend your response to an earlier question.

If you stop before completing the return, you can come back to this page using the link supplied in the email and you will be able to continue where you left off. To ensure your answers have been saved, click on the 'page forward' arrow at the bottom of the page that you were working on before exiting.

Support for sector-led improvement in children's services

The Children's Improvement Board was a partnership approach to improvement in children's services. Funding from the Department for Education for the Children's Improvement Board's work was withdrawn in April 2013. Following this, the Children's Improvement Board embarked on an extensive period of consultation about its legacy programme and the future of sector-led improvement in children's services.

Important elements of the Children's Improvement Board's previous work programme are now being taken forward by the LGA as part of its sector-led improvement offer to councils and the three organisations on the Children's Improvement Board – the LGA, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executive and Senior Managers (SOLACE) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) – are continuing to work together in partnership to support improvement.

When thinking about sector-led improvement, it is worth noting that improvement can include maintaining service levels or service user outcomes in the face of a reduction in resources, as this requires an increase in efficiency and productivity.

To all:

1. Post Children's Improvement Board, to what extent would you say you are confident that:

a) Your own council's children's services department currently has the necessary skills and capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve?

b) The local government children's services sector as a whole (i.e. across all councils) currently has the necessary skills and capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve?

	a) Your own council's children's services	b) Children's services across the local government sector
To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To a moderate extent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To a small extent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

To all:

2. How much, if anything, have you heard about the approach to supporting sector-led improvement in children's services post Children's Improvement Board?

Heard a lot

Heard a moderate amount

Heard a little

Heard nothing

Don't know

To everyone apart from those that answered 'heard nothing' in Q2:

3. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement:

"The approach that has been developed to support sector-led improvement in children's services post Children's Improvement Board is the right approach in the current context"

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

To everyone who answered Q3 apart from those that answered don't know:

4. Please use the space below to briefly explain why you **^insert answer option selected above^** that the approach that has been developed to support sector-led improvement in children's services post Children's Improvement Board is the right approach in the current context.

To all:

5. Which, if any, of the following elements of the LGA support available to help the sector in taking the lead in its own improvement have you heard about?

Please tick all that apply

- i. Free **leadership academy** places for children's services lead members
- ii. **Diagnostics for safeguarding, care and adoption**
- iii. **Safeguarding peer reviews**
- iv. **Events on joint leadership for children's services**, bringing together directors of children's services, chief executives and lead members (pilot scheduled for February 2014)
- v. **Direct support for councils** following an adverse inspection judgement
- vi. Work to share expertise on **children's services data** and to provide resources that make data more accessible via LG Inform

vii. I have heard of none of these

To everyone **apart from** those who ticked 'heard nothing' in Q2 **and** ticked 'I have heard of none of these' in Q5:

6. To what extent do you think that the approach developed to support sector-led improvement in children's services post Children's Improvement Board will have a positive impact on:

a) the capacity of your own council's children's services department to monitor its own performance and continuously improve?

b) the capacity of children's services across the local government sector as a whole (i.e. across all councils) to monitor its own performance and continuously improve?

	a) Your own council's children's services	b) Children's services across the local government sector
To a great extent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To a moderate extent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To a small extent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

To those that answered 'to a small extent' or 'not at all' for their own council or the sector in Q6

7. Please use the space below to briefly outline any improvements or additional activity that you think the LGA should support in order to further help your authority and/or the sector's capacity to monitor its own performance and continuously improve.

Driving improvement

To all:

8. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement:

"My authority's children's services department is making advances in driving improvement"

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

To those who selected 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree' or 'don't know':

9. a) Please briefly explain what, if any, you see as the biggest barriers or key challenges to driving improvement in your authority's children's services department?

To those who selected 'strongly agree':

- b) Please briefly explain what, if any, have been the biggest barriers or key challenges to driving improvement in your authority's children's services department, and how these were addressed?

Local accountability

To all:

A key aspect of sector-led improvement is engagement with and accountability to children's service users (including children and young people, parents and carers) as a useful way of informing self-improvement activity locally.

10. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement:

"Accountability to and engagement with children's service users is strong in my authority"

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

To those who selected 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree' or 'don't know':

11. Do you see increasing accountability to and engagement with children's service users as a priority for your authority's children's services department?

Yes, a high priority

Yes, a moderate priority

Yes, but a low priority

No, it is not a priority

Don't know

If yes:

12. Please briefly explain what, if any, you see as the biggest barriers or key challenges to increasing accountability to and engagement with children's service users in your authority's children's services department.

To all:

13. If there is anything else you would like to say about sector-led improvement and accountability in children's services, please use the space below.



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We consider requests on an individual basis.