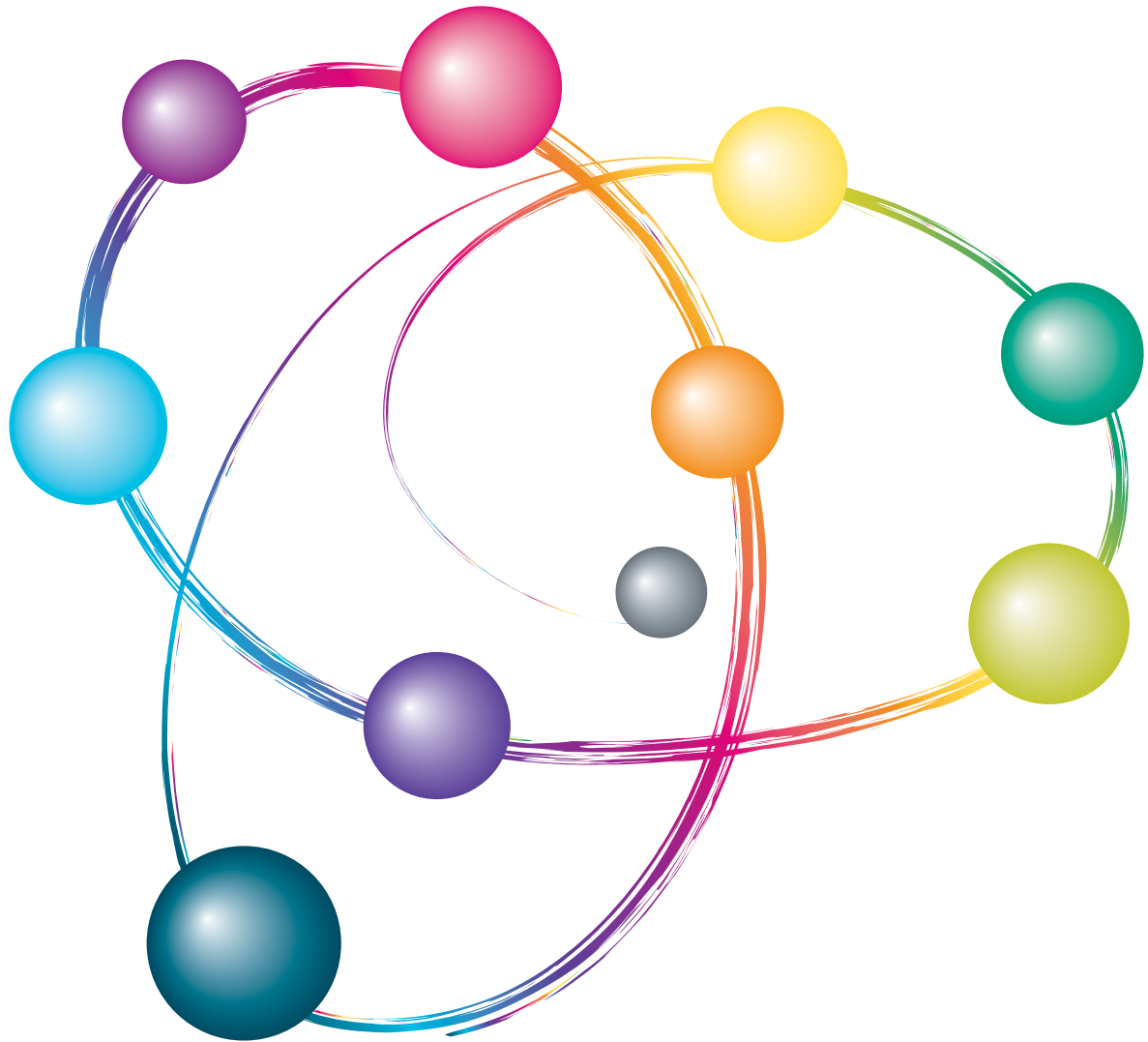


Sector-led improvement in local government





Foreword

We have come a long way since the Local Government Association (LGA) published 'Taking the Lead' over a year ago.

There is now a real momentum around sector-led improvement. Councils are using the support we have offered and new approaches to improvement are being delivered in children's services and in adult social care.

This publication brings it all together. It describes a comprehensive and coordinated approach to sector-led improvement across local government, the support that is being provided for councils, and where to go for further information or advice.

It is primarily intended for council leaders, portfolio holders, chief executives and directors because your active participation is critical to success – to ensuring your council continues its own improvement journey; takes up the support on offer; and contributes to the improvement of local government as a whole. The LGA is committed to helping you achieve this.

The support offer outlined here is of course just one part of the wide ranging support available to councils via the Local Government Association, Local Partnerships, the Children's Improvement Board and the Towards Excellence in Adult Social Care Board.



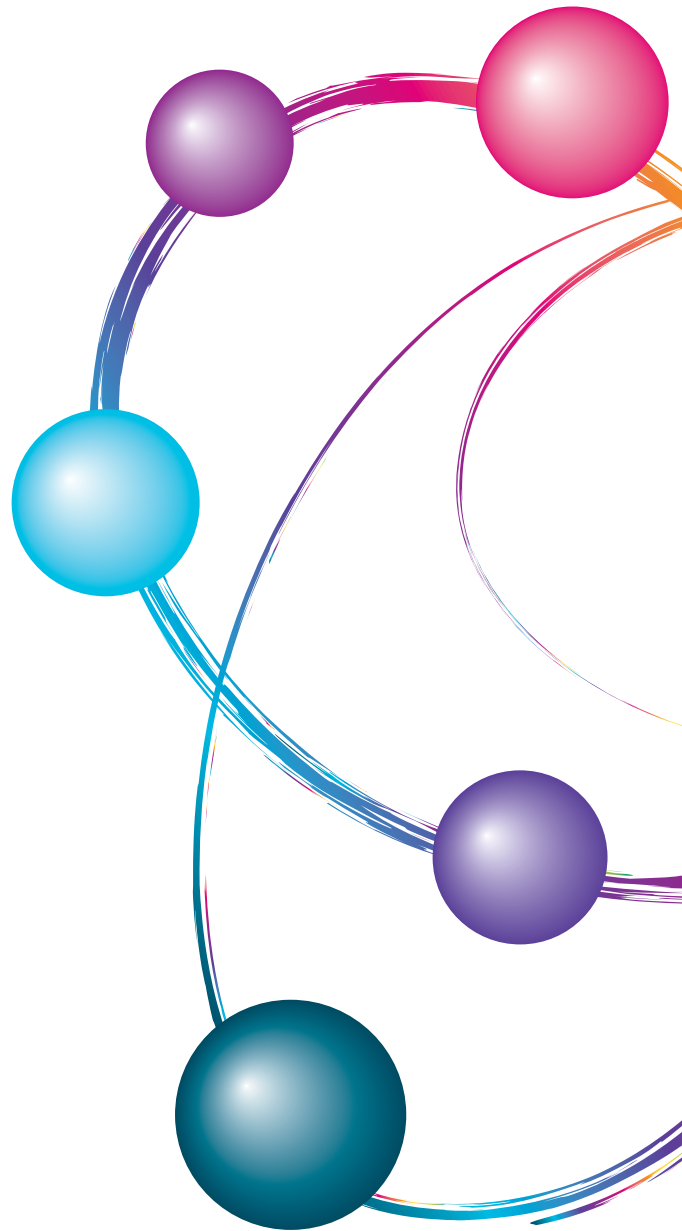
Councillor Peter Fleming
Chairman
LGA Improvement Board

Background and key principles

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. The approach has received high levels of support from councils who overwhelmingly endorse the key principles on which it is based, that:

- 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
- we all need to continue to lobby for further reductions in inspection, assessment and data reporting.

The LGA has developed and started to deliver the support offer set out in 'Taking the Lead', along with the sector-led improvement activity in children's and adult social care services. Feedback has been encouraging.



Implementation and support

'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 offer of support to councils is based, as follows:

Local accountability

Councils already make extensive efforts to engage with their local residents. Exactly how they go about strengthening local accountability will vary from place to place.

Our offer includes:

- stronger online guidance and an updated tool to help councils assess performance against key priorities
- support from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) to make more effective use of scrutiny as a key tool for challenging performance locally.

Transparent and comparable performance information

Being able to compare performance with other councils and areas is an important driver for improvement.

Our offer includes: LG Inform – an easy to use data service for local government which at no cost, provides:

- a single point of access to a wide range of key contextual, financial and performance data
- the ability to share and compare performance information between councils and to manipulate the data and create a range of score cards and reports.

This is a tool for lead members, directors, performance managers and those involved in scrutiny. So far over 301 councils have started to use LG Inform with over 1,380 registered users.

For further information:

www.local.gov.uk/about-lginform

Challenge from one's peers

We know that challenge from one's peers is a proven tool for improvement.

Our offer includes:

- at no cost, a 'corporate' peer challenge to every council over the three years from Summer 2011. The challenge is primarily an improvement tool capable of being tailored to allow individual councils to use it to focus on their local priorities. However, all corporate peer challenges include a core component that looks at issues of leadership, corporate capacity and financial resilience whose absence we know from experience is linked to organisational failure.

So far, we have spoken to more than 100 councils about their potential interest in corporate peer challenge, with 24 councils having benefitted from a corporate peer challenge in 2011/12 and a further 70 are booked in or are being discussed. The feedback from leaders and chief executives following a peer challenge has been very positive, with high levels of overall satisfaction and all of the participating councils saying they would recommend it to another authority. Equally, peers involved have fed back on what a useful learning tool it is for them.

Investing in Leadership

Effective political and officer leadership is key to sustained improvement.

Our offer includes:

- The LGA is committed to continuing to provide development support for political leaders and we are making available one subsidised place for every council for each of the next three years on one of our main programmes. This offer was taken up by 198 councils in the last financial year.
- In addition we are offering, at no cost, up to five days of member peer support for councils undergoing a change of political control. Experience demonstrates this can be of great benefit to councils at a time of change.
- Leadership support is also available to senior officers involved in children's and adult social care services. See Annexes.

Learning from good practice and the role of regional structures and networks

Learning from others in the sector is a key part of a sector-led approach – but it is often difficult to find the time or the right information.

Our offer includes:

- To help councils we have created the Knowledge Hub, a free web-based service providing a single window to improvement in local government. This illustrates the value of retaining capacity at national level to support improvement – creating a single solution that avoids the potential for duplication.

- We are also working with and supporting sub national groupings of councils and member/officer networks as a basis for implementing the new approach and sharing good practice. And we are in discussion with a number of sector owned regional improvement organisations about aligning our national and regional support offers so that we can present our joint support to the sector as a seamless whole.

Children's and Adults Services

Particular issues and challenges can arise with these services and as a consequence, enhanced programmes are being developed in partnership with others.

Our offer includes:

- Sector-led improvement in these areas is developed and delivered through the national Children's Improvement Board (CIB) and Towards Excellence in Adult Social Care Board (TEASC) respectively.
- The CIB is a partnership board involving the LGA, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), and SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives), supported by the Department for Education (DfE). More details can be found at Annex A.
- TEASC is a partnership board fulfilling a similar function for adult social care services and includes representatives from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), the LGA, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the Department of Health (DH), Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and the Think Local Act Personal partnership. More details can be found at Annex B.

Coordination and communication

Our offer includes:

- In instances where councils require and are in receipt of support, the LGA principal adviser will be the key contact and coordinator of input from the LGA, CIB regional leads and TEASC structures. This is designed to provide a single point of contact for councils and a coordinated approach to improvement support.
- In some regions, the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) or their successor bodies/ regional LGAs are supporting sector-led improvement. Principal advisers work closely with these partnerships to share information and provide support in a collaborative way, according to the extent and nature of the role of the regional body in the area.

Managing the risk of significant underperformance

Significant underperformance at a service or corporate level is likely to have a detrimental impact on local people and localities, the reputation of a council and for local government as a whole.

The sector wants councils to feel able to voluntarily signal their need of support and to seek it from sector controlled improvement activities and bodies at national and where appropriate, regional level so that improvement support can be put in place and as a result, help prevent specific incidences of significant service or corporate underperformance and in extreme cases, avoid government intervention.

We have worked with councils to develop an agreed and effective way of understanding where councils are facing significant underperformance challenges and have taken advice on this from a variety of interested independent bodies (including CIPFA, the Audit Commission, National Audit Office, SOLACE, ADCS and ADASS).

In summary our approach, is as follows:

- Our team of principal and senior advisers gather qualitative information about the performance of councils in their areas and act as the key point of contact between councils and the LGA. They work with and are supplemented by our lead and regional member peers, who are drawn from local councils and make use of political networks.
- The principal advisers are supported with feedback from our wider engagement with councils, for example the results of a Peer Challenge, analysis of published quantitative performance data and intelligence gathered from others as appropriate (eg government departments, service specific inspectorates).
- Where information and intelligence is shared about performance challenges, the purpose will, in all cases, be to enable timely, appropriate and effective support to be offered, in accordance with the following general principles:
 - the individual council will be aware information is being shared
 - any concerns should be specific and evidence-based
 - information is treated in confidence.
- Where the information and intelligence gathered appears to identify councils facing significant performance challenges and a potential serious concern, the principal adviser will make contact at the earliest opportunity with the authority involved. How he/she approaches the council and the level of contact will depend on the circumstances and relationships in each case, but would normally be at leader/chief executive level.
- Emerging best practice suggests that where the level, type and extent of support warrants it, (typically signalled by the need to establish a formal Improvement Board) codifying the approach to be taken, is essential. Whilst a number of common characteristics can be identified as being associated with significant underperformance, few such situations are identical. Therefore, a bespoke 'Terms of Engagement' will be created on a case-by-case basis, setting out the approach to be taken.

Making a success of sector-led improvement

As new arrangements for sector-led performance, improvement and assurance are developed and local government is presented with the opportunity to demonstrate its strength and credentials in this respect – to the benefit of councils and the sector as a whole – it is incumbent upon all those in the sector to contribute to their success.

Locally

- Councils should engage positively and proactively with this work, considering how and when they would best benefit from our improvement support offer.
- Leaders and chief executives should take a strong interest in this work raising the profile and widening the ownership of it within their organisations.
- Councils should consider what more can be done to be transparent and accountable to local communities.
- Councils should consider whether their council can contribute by offering senior member/officer peers.

Regionally

- Our principal advisers (see below for contact details) will act as the key point of contact for councils across the various streams of improvement support.
- Regional improvement organisations, CIB regional leads and TEASC structures will work together and with principal advisers to coordinate improvement activity and to ensure effective political leadership.

Nationally

We will ensure (having regard to partnership arrangements with others, eg CIB, TEASC) that:

- the process is led politically
- there is a consistency in the improvement support offer across all council services
- this work is communicated to councils in a consistent and coordinated way.

Contact details for further information

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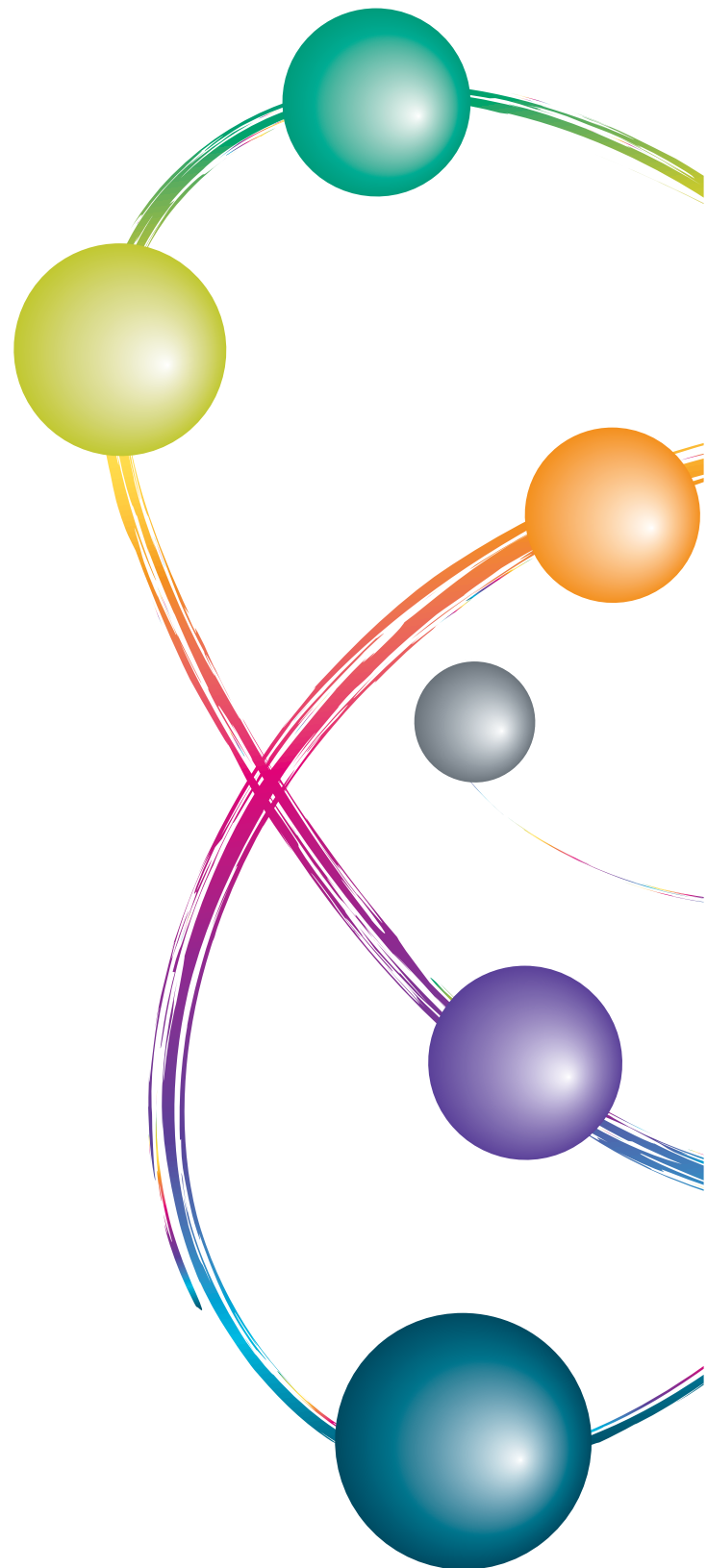
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www.local.gov.uk/sector-led-improvement



Annex A

Sector-led improvement: children's services

Sector-led improvement in children's services is being taken forward through the Towards Excellence for Children work of the Children's Improvement Board (CIB). CIB is a partnership board set up by the Local Government Association (LGA), the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), and SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives), supported by the Department for Education (DfE). It is a direction setting and decision making group that is responsible for the overall delivery of the Towards Excellence for Children programme to develop sector-led improvement for children's services.

The framework for sector-led improvement in children's services and around which our offer of support to councils is based, is as follows:

Local accountability

Self-assessment forms an important basis for understanding and managing performance in children's services and councils are being asked to open up their self assessment to external challenge by their peers in other councils.

Transparent and comparable performance information

CIB is working to develop a suite of common data for children's services. It will provide a single source of key information that councils can use as a way of understanding their own performance and provide a flexible reporting format to allow comparison to statistical neighbours and others. This can form a broad based starting point for peer challenge and discussions around early support. The data and information will be delivered through LG Inform.

Challenge from one's peers

There are two offers in children's improvement:

- An opportunity for council's to receive challenge on their performance from their peers in other councils. A number of different models of children's services peer challenge have been developed by councils working together in regions. Councils have agreed to provide five days of directors' of children's services time to undertake this. It is expected that all councils will have been engaged in peer challenge by 31 December 2012 and CIB will review the learning from the different approaches being adopted in January and February 2013.

- An opportunity for councils to have, at no cost, a children’s safeguarding peer review. This is a nationally organised programme and twenty six such peer reviews have been delivered to date. Whilst this offer is open to all councils it is prioritised for those where it forms part of an agreed package of targeted or early support.

This offer builds on the LGA’s corporate peer challenge methodology – but there are some differences. First we have retained the “peer review” label because this is well recognised and understood within children’s services. Secondly whilst the exact focus for the review will still be discussed with the individual local authority there is less flexibility about the focus and approach because safeguarding is such a high risk area for the sector.

Investing in Leadership

The CIB is working with the LGA to increase the number of member peers with an understanding of children’s services who are available to provide support to councils in particular difficulty. The LGA also supports and makes regular input to regional meetings of lead members for children. An induction event for new lead members is being held in July and free leadership academy places are being offered to children’s services lead members through four two-day Leadership Academy events in the autumn and early New Year. The CIB has oversight of the leadership programmes provided for directors of children’s services through the Virtual Staff College and is working to ensure a close fit between this leadership work and other aspects of children’s improvement.

Learning from good practice and the role of regional structures and networks

The CIB has provided funding to each of the nine regions to support improvement work in children’s services. Within a broad agreement between regions and CIB, each region is being asked to prioritise peer challenge between councils and providing early support to councils who are in difficulty or may be at risk of poor performance. Each region has been asked to nominate three “regional leads” to champion this improvement activity: a lead member for children, a chief executive and a director of children’s services.

For further information about sector-led improvement in children’s services and the work of the Children’s Improvement Board: <http://www.local.gov.uk/CIB>

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Annex B

Sector-led improvement: adult social care

Sector-led improvement in adult social care is being taken forward by the Towards Excellence in Adult Social Care Board (TEASC). TEASC is the Partnership Board established to oversee the development of a new approach to sector-led improvement in adult social care, aligned with the current personalisation agenda. The Board includes representatives from ADASS, the LGA, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the Department of Health (DH), Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), SOLACE and the Think Local Act Personal partnership.

The framework for sector-led improvement in adult social care and around which our offer of support to councils is based, is as follows:

Local accountability

In adult social care it is a key part of the approach that councils undertake and publish a regular self-assessment (called “local account”) setting out progress against their priorities for quality and outcomes in adult social care. Local accounts are seen as a key mechanism for demonstrating accountability for performance and outcomes to citizens.

Whilst not mandatory, most councils have now produced their first local account. How they did this was a matter of local discretion and initial analysis demonstrates that councils have approached local accounts in varying ways but all have built on existing mechanisms for engaging people who use services and reporting back, for example annual safeguarding reports. The Towards Excellence Board is planning to evaluate the exercise and draw out the lessons.



Transparent and comparable performance information

The programme will draw on national data sets and market intelligence to offer comparative data on key outcome areas and productivity through LG Inform.

Challenge from one's peers

The Adult's programme provides a subsidised peer challenge for each of the seven councils currently rated "adequate" under the previous CQC assessment regime. This is part of the Towards Excellence Board's approach to recognising councils' improvement in the absence of any further CQC assessments.

Where the three core elements:

- council's progress report against its improvement plan
- the results of the peer challenge, and
- endorsement from an independent peer director

confirmed by feedback from the DH deputy regional directors and LGA principal advisers all align, then the council is invited to present to the Towards Excellence Board so that its progress can be recognised and potential learning can be identified and shared.

As at April 2012 the board has been able to acknowledge the progress made by Cornwall, Central Bedfordshire and South Tyneside councils, with the ambition to 'sign off' improvement in the remaining councils during 2012/13.

In addition the Towards Excellence Board plans to provide resources to regions to support delivery of regional priorities, which may include peer challenge based on the LGA model.

Investing in Leadership

The leadership programmes will be reviewed with the focus on collaborative leaders as the priority for 2012/13, linking to the LGA's health leadership programmes.

Learning from good practice and the role of regional structures and networks

For adults, the approach to improvement is being developed with and through the ADASS regional branches. Workshops have now taken place in all regions (supported by the Towards Excellence Board) to discuss regional issues and priorities in sector-led improvement. The board plans to provide funding for regions to support key deliverables in 2012/13 as identified by the regions, which may include: supporting the delivery of regional peer challenge; review and development of local accounts; delivery of improvement support and stronger engagement of council leaders, lead members and chief executives.

For further information about sector-led improvement in adult social care and the work of the Towards Excellence Board: <http://tinyurl.com/d8xfyjm>

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