

## Overview

This is the first of a series of regular bulletins which aims to provide colleagues with a flavour of the Sector Led Improvement activity taking place across the West Midlands. The bulletin has been developed on behalf of the newly established **West Midlands Sector Led Improvement Steering Group**, set up to champion and challenge collective performance and progress on behalf of the region.

This also builds upon the **West Midlands Sector Led Improvement Compact**, launched at the LGA conference earlier this year as a demonstration of our collective commitment to the SLI agenda and to offering collaborative and mutual support to improve local public services. So far, just over two-thirds of councils have signed up to the Compact and we have recently sent a reminder letter to those councils yet to do so. Please send your signed Compacts to Sue Banks, [sbanks@westmidlandsiep.gov.uk](mailto:sbanks@westmidlandsiep.gov.uk) by 6<sup>th</sup> December, or get in touch for further details.

The SLI Steering Group will shortly be commissioning a second **Performance of the Region report**; this will be published early next year to aid our improvement planning and crucially will aim to assess the region's progress in improvement terms since publication of the first report last year.

Sector Led Improvement will also be a major feature at our annual conference '**Rewiring Public Services in the West Midlands**' on 6th December at the ICC in central Birmingham, which is being developed in partnership with the LGA, IEWM and CLG-WM. If you have not already signed up, please register at: <http://rewiringwm.eventbrite.co.uk/>

## LGA Update and activity

A key ingredient of success for the Sector Led approach is take-up of the LGA peer challenge/review offer. Take up from councils in the region continues to be reasonably good and a summary of activity since April 2013 is provided below.

Theme	Completed April 2013 to November 2013	Due December 2013 to March 2014
Corporate Peer Challenge	North Warks DC, Rugby DC, Staffordshire, Tamworth DC, Warwickshire FRS	Wychavon DC, Warwickshire
Children's Safeguarding	Telford & Wrekin, Herefordshire	Birmingham
Children's Looked After/ Safeguarding Diagnostic	Staffordshire, Dudley	Dudley
Adult Safeguarding	Wolverhampton	
Health & Wellbeing – New offer (pilots):	Coventry	Solihull

However, 8 of our 14 upper tier authorities are yet to commit to a *corporate peer challenge*, along with 6 of our 19 District Councils. Some of these councils did have challenges lined up but have since had to postpone. All of the region's Fire and Rescue Service Peer Challenges have now been completed. We are really keen to see take up of the *corporate challenge* improve over the next year and if you are interested in finding out more, please contact Howard Davis, LGA Principal Adviser, West Midlands. Email: [howard.davis@local.gov.uk](mailto:howard.davis@local.gov.uk)

Of course, the essence of Peer Challenges is that the team of Peers also gain knowledge to benefit their own authority and their personal development: an increasing number of Leaders, other Member Peers, Chief Executives, Directors and Service Specialists have been team members in Reviews right across the country.

## Adult Social Care & Health

Within Adult Social Care the West Midlands has developed considerable momentum for its approach to sector led improvement over the last 12 months:

- An Adult Social Care SLI Board, chaired by Martin Reeves CEO Coventry has met, agreed ToR and involves partners from the LGA, Department of Health and the Care Quality Commission; Martin Reeves has set the tone by asking the Board to discuss vulnerabilities and challenge in a ‘ruthlessly’ transparent way;
- A Steering group with agreed ToR has been established to coordinate the regions’ Health Integration work, involving LAT, PHE, Clinical Senate, DH, ADASS, DCS, and CX which will be chaired by Nick Bell, CEO Staffordshire. Arrangements are also in place to coordinate the new Health & Wellbeing SLI offer from the LGA;
- There is a re-established lead ASC members’ network and various sub-regional and member/officer groupings;
- The LGA have provided 4 Peer Challenge training sessions for officers and members and the WM has agreed a programme of ‘local’ Peer challenges within the region, where each DASS will both receive and deliver a challenge to/from another peer DASS. The first challenge was completed in July 2013 by Telford & Wrekin Council, followed by Walsall & Worcestershire in October & November 2013, actions arising are now underway;
- A timetable to complete all 14 peer challenges by January 2015 has been agreed and a proposal for a Challenge Workshop for all Councils to receive a mini peer challenge on their self assessment and performance data is to be considered at the next Adult Social Care SLI Board in January 2014;
- The WM Peer Challenge programme involves ‘experts by experience’ as a key element of the challenge and it is intended that their observations of the challenges to date will be written up and shared;
- A common data set has been agreed within the region for benchmarking purposes and the Performance & Standards Network is now collating data on quarterly basis on a variety of data sets; the Finance Leads Network has also agreed to undertake benchmarking work in relation to finance data;
- The West Midlands undertook a review of Local Accounts in 2011/12 the results of which were shared nationally, with the process being cited as best practice. The WM Standards & Performance Network undertook a stock take of progress on Local Accounts in production for 2013/14 in June 2013;
- There is a growing and active social media engagement in the region which is helping to build informal and formal networks across the social care landscape.

To find out more contact Pete Jackson, IEWM/WMADASS Programme Lead. Email: [pjackson@westmidlandsiep.gov.uk](mailto:pjackson@westmidlandsiep.gov.uk)

### Children’s Services

Similarly, there has been significant activity around Sector Led Improvement for Children’s Services:

- All DCSs have agreed to participate in a peer challenge of their self-assessment. In October, all 14 local authorities came together to challenge each other’s self-view of their children’s services, confirming and identifying areas of strengths and areas for improvement and development. A key part of the day was to begin to match sector support to emerging needs, which is now being taken forward;
- A regional ‘data pack’ to support the self assessments has been developed, which brings together key performance information extracted from regional social care benchmarking and national sources. This also provides an excellent basis for a regional children’s performance report and contribution to the next performance of the region report;
- Bespoke support is offered to councils where performance is ‘dipping’ or where they are the subject of a ministerial intervention or direction notice. This involves either brokering support on their behalf or delivering it directly through support and challenge meetings with the regions’ SLI Manager;
- The ‘Auditing the Auditors’ project is underway and 6 local authorities are signed up to receive a peer challenge of their auditing processes in the coming months. The first peer challenge will take place in Stoke in early December, with 20 challengers signed up to support the programme;
- A piece of work is about to begin with the 14 Local Safeguarding Children’s Board chairs in the region, involving the analysis of LSCB Annual Reports to identify good practice and areas for improvement. These will be shared at a workshop in March 2014 for the LSCB Chairs, with a view to identifying priorities for 2014/15;

- We continue to strengthen member engagement and our two Lead Member reps, Cllr Paul Watling (Telford & Wrekin) and Cllr Ann Hartley (Shropshire) are working together to deliver a programme of workshops with Lead Members and Scrutiny Chairs in the region. The first workshop in September looked at ‘Getting to Good’, exploring the importance of data and intelligence for members in terms of assuring themselves of good outcomes for children and young people in their area. The second workshop on 20th December will focus on ‘Signatures of Risk’ and being alert to when performance is dipping. There will be a further session on March 7th 2014;
- A Safeguarding Quality Assurance Framework for Chief Executives has been developed by the Children’s Improvement Board; this is currently being piloted and will be rolled-out more widely early next year;
- The West Midlands ADCS Conference took place on 20th November with a fantastic line up of speakers and workshops generating lots of discussion, debate and ideas to take back to authorities. The key themes and priorities emerging will feature within the 2014/15 Children’s Services Improvement Plan for the region;

To find out more contact Carola Benion, IEWM/WMADCS Programme Lead. Email: [carola.bennion@beaconcandc.org](mailto:carola.bennion@beaconcandc.org)

### Strategic Improvement Challenges

All of our councils face challenges to safeguard children and all upper-tier councils within the West Midlands rely upon the use of agency Social Workers (to varying degrees and in various roles) to help ensure daily safeguarding needs and broader safeguarding obligations are met.

Following concerns recently highlighted by a number of fellow Chief Executives around a series of issues including recruitment, retention, cost and quality etc., a review of the use of Agency Social Workers in Children’s Services by councils across the region has recently been commissioned, led by Jan Britton, CEO Sandwell MBC. Ultimately, CEX are seeking to:

- Improve the quality and consistency of case work and safeguarding outcomes;
- Reduce costs/variability and vulnerability to market forces with a better ability to forecast and control costs – more effective commissioning arrangements;
- Reduce the over-reliance upon agency workers and increase the proportion/quality of social workers employed by local authorities directly.

An interim progress report was recently circulated to all Chief Executives and Directors of Children’s Services and our full report is due to be published on 27<sup>th</sup> November.

For more information contact Sue Banks, Director, IEWM. Email: [sbanks@westmidlandsiep.gov.uk](mailto:sbanks@westmidlandsiep.gov.uk)