

East Midlands Regional Improvement Alliance - Sector-Led Improvement in Children's Services

Memorandum of Understanding 2018

All nine local authorities in the East Midlands are committed to the principles behind sector led improvement through the establishment of the East Midlands Regional Improvement Alliance (RIA). We individually and collectively believe that it is our responsibility to ensure that the services we provide and the approaches we take are rooted in ensuring that outcomes for children, young people and their families are improved and that our populations are better off as a result of the work we do. The Alliance is built upon trust, support and accountability and will serve to provide, for each council in the region, a robust diagnostic, agreed development plan and improvement offer to councils within the region and further afield. Our ambition is that the Alliance will:

- Serve as the primary means by which the sector will address the early identification of concerns before they reach crisis point.
- Build and share good practice.
- Contribute to an evidenced based model for improvement.
- Create the conditions for a learning system which unites all stakeholders from regulation to delivery in a robust and collective approach to improvement.

The alliance is a collaboration across the region of Directors of Children's Services, Chief Executives, LGA and DfE. The relationship across all stakeholders of the Regional Improvement Alliance will be based on trust and co-operation. Information will be shared in a professional way across all partners with the principle being that all information will be shared as this will better safeguard children and young people through the development of a high challenge, high support improvement framework.

The approach we are adopting across the region including, over time, with our partner agencies and organisations, will ensure that we develop reflective practice throughout the system and the necessary skills to embed our vision of self- reflection, self-evaluation and peer challenge leading to a high level regional development plan and targeted support.

We are not naive or complacent. We know that this shift in approach is ambitious and will present significant challenges along the way. To achieve our aspirations we recognise that we need to continue to change culture rather than structure and this takes time, commitment and determination. We believe three characteristics are essential to achieving an effective self-improving system:

- The ability to identify issues early and accurately before they reach crisis point.
- The ability to respond quickly when concerns are identified, to land tough messages and ensure remedial actions are taken swiftly.
- The right capacity within the region to provide the right improvement support when and where it is needed.

We are determined that the ambitious approach we have committed to will lead to the development of next practice, rooted in system change rather than best practice which is so often invested in an individual or group. To ensure that our approach has lasting commitment we have all secured support from our Chief Executives and Lead Members. To root the agreement we all signed this Memorandum of Understanding. This move demonstrates both our commitment and determination to improve outcomes beyond those achieved already.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is between the nine Local Authorities that make up the East Midlands Region namely; Derby City, Derbyshire, Leicester City, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottingham City, Nottinghamshire, and Rutland.
- 1.2. The MoU sets out the agreed areas and activities in which the Local Authorities will work together through the Alliance to support Sector Led Improvement, with the shared aims of:
 - Securing 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 sustains progress during a period of significant economic restraint.
 - Building 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.
 - Systematically sharing knowledge about what works across the sector and ensuring that there is effective brokerage of best practice solutions.
 - Contributing to the development and implementation of policies designed to improve the lives of children.
- 1.3. The MoU is not a statutory or contractual document, it is a statement of commitment to work collaboratively to support the regional sector led improvement model. Its impact will be monitored through a governance board which will meet twice a year involving the Lead Chief Executive, Lead Member, Directors of Children's Services leading on the RIA, Dfe, and LGA.

1.4. The areas that are covered by this MoU include:

1.5. Arrangements for the joint scrutiny of performance and improvement plans

- A common set of core activities, supported by a common core dataset collected and analysed within and by each LA on a quarterly basis.
- A process of peer challenge through the Challenge Conversations.
- Production of a high level regional development plan, focussed upon key common challenges.
- Offer and brokerage of support which is proportionate, matched to need and delivered by the most appropriate person/people. This will include how to broker support from outside of the region
- A voluntary shared accountability for outcomes in the region.
- A duty of care for the region's leaders of children's services.
- Agreement to share data across the region.

1.6. For the duration of this MoU, each Local Authority agrees to:

- Complete and submit an annual self-evaluation (SEF) and Challenge Conversation pack using the agreed template. Each Local Authority will ensure that their self-evaluation is signed off by the DCS, Lead Member, Chief Executive or equivalent.
- Arrange for the submission of quarterly agreed data for in-year analysis and benchmarking.
- Release colleagues who lead on data and performance/improvement activity as required to underpin the agreed regional processes.
- Participate in an annual Triad Challenge Conversation with other Directors of Children's Services. Challenge Teams will consist of DCS's working in Triads.
- Produce a development plan, identifying strengths and areas for development. Each Local Authority's development plan is signed off by DCS, Lead Member and Chief Executive (or equivalent).
Be prepared to both offer and receive support, brokered from within the RIA.
- Drawing from each Local Authority's self-evaluation and development plan, the RIA produces a menu of support offers.
- Participate in the development of a high level regional development plan, focussing on key common challenges, which is signed off by the RIA's lead DCS, Lead Member and Chief Executive.
- Contribute to an annual regional improvement summit.

- Attend regional EM DCS meetings, sending appropriate representatives if required. The proposed meeting pattern for the period of this MoU is: July, September, November, January and March.
- Afternoon meetings in November and March, each followed by themed sessions with additional colleagues, e.g. Lead Members, 2nd Tier Safeguarding Leads.

- 1.7. The SDSA will support and co-ordinate the activities defined in this MoU, following plans approved by the EM DCS group, who will secure the necessary funds.

The main component of the Regional Peer Challenge scheme for the period of this MoU will be Peer Challenge Conversations supported by Safeguarding Assurance visits, regional working groups, regional seminars and regional project work.

2. Challenge Conversation

Challenge Teams

- 2.1. The Directors of Children's Services commit to:
- a) Undertake development to support their leadership of Peer Challenge Conversations including the roles of Peer Challenge Conversation Lead DCS, Host DCS and Triad DCS's.
 - b) Nominate as appropriate senior officers, at second tier or equivalent and those at third tier with a minimum of two years experience, to undertake development as Challenge Conversation team members.
 - c) Release and support officers to participate as a team member in at least one review in a MoU period and in additional training and development activities as identified through quality assurance and evaluation.
- 2.2. The Lead Challenge DCS will form a team, for each challenge conversation:
- a) Using the five steps of the Challenge Conversation process, the lead DCS, Logistical Support Officer and the Data Specialist will request the SEF and challenge pack from the host local authority. The Lead Challenge DCS, 2 Triad DCS's and DATA specialist will interrogate the information provided by the host DCS and formulate and agree KLOE's for the Challenge Conversation. The Triad Challenge Team, may co-opt technical experts to assist in the challenge conversation.

- b) Ensuring that a review team does not include colleagues from the local area being reviewed or any with significant prior experience or relationships that might cloud objectivity.
- c) Ensuring that any critical incidents are reported immediately to the host DCS.
- d) Receive and review (with the 2 Triad DCS's) a follow-up report from the Host DCS 3-6 months after the review that describes their subsequent actions.

2.3. The 2 Triad DCS will, for each Challenge conversation:

- a) Form an early relationship with the Host and Lead Challenge DCS.
- b) Act as coach for the review process.
- c) Ensure that the reflective process is completed at the end of each review process by each member of the review team and the host DCS.
- d) Act as a mediator and final adjudicator should any dispute/complaint not be satisfactorily resolved by the host DCS and the onsite review team.
- e) Participate in additional training and development activities as identified through this Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process.
- f) Receive and review (with the Lead Challenge (DCS) a follow-up report from the Host DCS 3-6 months after the review that describes their subsequent actions.

2.4. The Host DCS will, for each review:

- a) Supply sufficient information to the Lead Challenge DCS for them to formulate and agree the KLOE for the challenge conversation and undertake the review process.
- b) Liaise closely throughout the process with the Lead Challenge DCS, in particular to ensure that an appropriate challenge conversation timetable is arranged and proceeds smoothly.
- c) Supply the necessary permissions and powers to enable visiting peers to fulfil their role
- d) Respond appropriately to the matters raised in the review report.
Submit a follow-up report to the Lead Challenge and 2 Triad DCSs 3-6 months after the review that describes their subsequent actions.

Challenge Conversation Process

2.5. Each DCS commits to:

- a) Lead, host and quality assure an annual Peer Challenge Conversation.
- b) Complete and submit an annual self-evaluation and challenge pack, using the agreed template.
- c) Each self-evaluation is peer scrutinised through the Triad Teams.

- d) Each Local authority then produces a development plan, identifying strengths and areas for development. Each development plan must be signed off by the Local Authority's DCS, Lead Member and Chief Executive.
- e) Each Local Authority development plan is peer challenged.
- f) Drawing from each LA's self-evaluation and development plan, the RIA produces a menu of support offers.
- g) The EMRIA produces a high level regional development plan, focussed on key common challenges, which are signed off by the RIA's Lead DCS, Lead Member and Lead Chief Executive. The final plan to be published on the ADCS website.
- h) Brokering of support for each Local Authority to be via the RIA, but in some instances to address high level common challenges, support may be brokered from outside of the region.
- i) To keep up the momentum of improvement and challenge, a six monthly progress check against the Local Authority's development plan will be built into the challenge process. The Peer Challenge DCS may delegate this to the 2nd Tier Safeguarding Leads in the Triad and the regional data leads to conduct the check in. This may include moderation of audits, case sampling or other agreed activities.
- j) Undertake review activity within the agreed processes as outlined in the scheme.
- k) Deposit reports of reviews with the SDSA to facilitate the extraction of development themes for integration into the regional succession planning and leadership development menu of activities as appropriate.

3. Succession planning/leadership development

3.1. The Director of Children's Services commit to joint work with other DCSs to co-ordinate leadership development and improvement activity to build capacity for self-improvement within the East Midlands. At the start of this MoU, this commitment is exemplified by the following:

- a) Provide leadership for local learning seminars and equivalent regionally-agreed events.
- b) Sponsor and support regional priority projects and the appropriate representation and involvement of their key colleagues within them.
- c) Consider re-embarking upon collaborative leadership development activities should the need arise.
- d) Provide a support offer to newly appointed DCS's

4. Regional accountability

- 4.1 The EMRIA will identify a Lead DCS, Lead Member and a Lead Chief Executive for Sector Led Improvement. For the EMRIA, the Lead DCS is Debbie Barnes (Lincolnshire), Lead Member is Cllr Sarah Russell (Leicester City Council) and Lead Chief Executive is Ian Currier (Nottingham City).
- 4.2 The EM DCS group will exercise a duty of care to each other. They will remain vigilant for behaviours or disengagement from the regional activities that might be symptomatic of denial, pressure or avoidance.
- 4.3 They will monitor Peer Challenge Conversations to assure themselves that proportionate responses have been made by the receiving LA, holding each other to account.
- 4.4 The EM DCS group will follow up any areas of concern from any of the Peer Challenge Conversations, through one-to-one communications with each other, starting informally and then escalating through more formal engagement by the EM DCS Chair or the Lead DCS for Sector Led Improvement. If these communications do not allay the concerns of the group, then the group commits to take their concerns via the Chair DCS to the Chair Lead Member and following this the Lead Chief Executive for the RIA.
- 4.5 Annually the RIA Lead DCS, Children's Improvement Advisor LGA, Lead Member and the Lead Chief Executive to meet to review findings from Challenge Conversations, data sets, development plans, and impact of support provided and any lessons learned.
- 4.6 Its impact will be monitored through a governance board which will meet twice a year involving the Lead Chief Executive, Lead Lead Member, Directors of Children's Services leading on the RIA, Dfe, and LGA.

5. Role Of Local Government Association and Department of Education

- 5.1 The LGA's and the DfE'S policy position is that to have a fully effective system of Sector Led Improvement, all local authorities should be encouraged and supported to improve, and this should be applied to the full range of children's services.
- 5.2 The LGA and the DfE have appointed a Children's improvement adviser (CIA) in every region. For the LGA , this offer will include:
- Intensive political support for children's lead members as well as politicians and corporate leaders more widely, including mentoring and peer support.
 - Support to children's lead members to ensure they have sufficient skills to play an active role in RIAs, enhancing their ability to challenge and scrutinise self-assessments and the effectiveness of regional working more broadly.
 - Providing training and development for all senior leaders and other key individuals, such as scrutiny chairs to ensure they have regular opportunities to offer and receive support at a regional and national level on an on-going basis;

- At a national level access to financial management support, including diagnostic and peer support, to help ensure effective use of resources.
- For the DfE, the offer will include brokering support from outside the region, especially accessing support through the partners in practice programme.

5.3 The LGA also has a range of national peer reviews and diagnostic tools covering a range of specific aspects of service practice, including a care practice diagnostic, an LSCB diagnostic, one focussed on CSE and a new tool looking at Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) These could be commissioned on an on-demand basis alongside the work of PiPs or to support councils which have challenges in specific areas. In order to fulfil the role the CIA will be included in sector led discussions in the region.

6. Implementation

- 6.1 This MoU commences in June 2018. It will continue to remain in force until such time as it is revoked by the parties.
- 6.2 This MoU commences in June 2018. It will continue to remain in force until such time as it is revoked by the parties.
- 6.3 The MoU will be reviewed after June 2020 and may otherwise be reviewed at any time at the request of any party.

7. Commitment

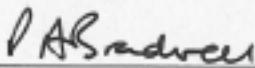
Signatures provided below to show the commitment to this scheme of the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member for Children's Services and Chief Executive of the council.

Name of Local Authority _____

Director of Children's Services

Signed  Date 15.11.18

Lead Member for Children's Services

Signed  Date 15.11.18

Chief Executive of the Council

Signed  Date 27.11.18

7. Commitment

Signatures provided below to show the commitment to this scheme of the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member for Children's Services and Chief Executive of the council.

Name of Local Authority Derby

Director of Children's Services

Signed

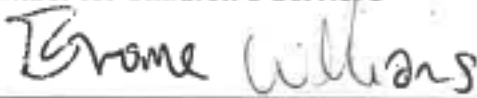


Date

1.11.18.

Lead Member for Children's Services

Signed



Date

7.11.18

Chief Executive of the Council

Signed



Date

2.11.18

7. Commitment

Signatures provided below to show the commitment to this scheme of the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member for Children's Services and Chief Executive of the council.

Name of Local Authority Putnam County Council

Director of Children's Services

Signed  Date 19/11/18

Lead Member for Children's Services

Signed  Date 20/11/18.

Chief Executive of the Council

Signed  Date 10/12/18

7. Commitment

Signatures provided below to show the commitment to this scheme of the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member for Children's Services and Chief Executive of the council.

Name of Local Authority NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY

Director of Children's Services

Signed  Date 5th November 2018

Lead Member for Children's Services

Signed  Date 14/11/18

Chief Executive of the Council

Signed  Date 5 November 2018

7. Commitment

Signatures provided below to show the commitment to this scheme of the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member for Children's Services and Chief Executive of the council.

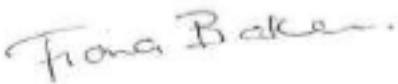
Name of Local Authority _____ Northamptonshire County Council _____

Director of Children's Services

Signed  _____ Date 31/12/18

Sharon Muldoon – Acting Director for Children's Services

Lead Member for Children's Services


Signed _____ Date 28.1.19

Chief Executive of the Council

Signed  _____ Date 03/01/2019

7. Commitment

Signatures provided below to show the commitment to this scheme of the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member for Children's Services and Chief Executive of the council.

Name of Local Authority _____

Director of Children's Services

Signed  Date 12/11/18

Lead Member for Children's Services

Signed  Date 20/11/18

Chief Executive of the Council

Signed _____ Date _____

7. Commitment

Signatures provided below to show the commitment to this scheme of the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member for Children's Services and Chief Executive of the council.

Name of Local Authority Leicester City Council

Director of Children's Services

Signed  Date 27/11/2018

Lead Member for Children's Services

Signed  Date 27/11/2018

Chief Executive of the Council

Signed  Date 15/01/2019

7. Commitment

Signatures provided below to show the commitment to this scheme of the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member for Children's Services and Chief Executive of the council.

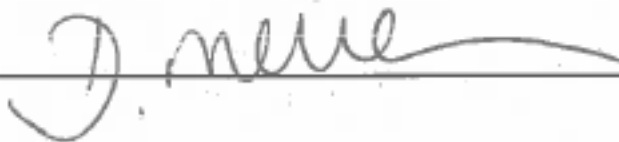
Name of Local Authority Nottingham City Council

Director of Children's Services

Signed 

Date 30 October 2018

Lead Member for Children's Services

Signed 

Date 5.11.18

Chief Executive of the Council

Signed 

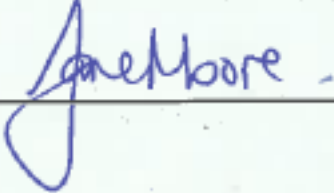
Date 5.11.18

7. Commitment

Signatures provided below to show the commitment to this scheme of the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member for Children's Services and Chief Executive of the council.

Name of Local Authority Leicestershire County Council

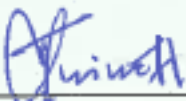
Director of Children's Services

Signed  Date 12/11/2018

Lead Member for Children's Services

Signed Tran Ould Date 12/11/2018

Chief Executive of the Council

Signed  Date 8/11/2018