

# Children's Services **Improvement Support Protocol**

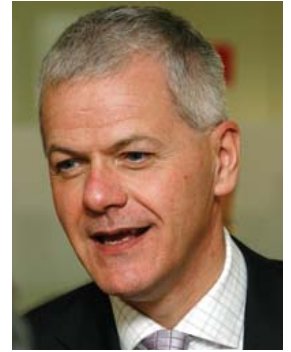


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# Foreword



DCSF's aim is to make this the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up. This is why the Government created the new Department and produced the first ever Children's Plan putting the needs of families, children and young people at the centre of everything we do.

Last year, we introduced the first improvement support protocol to improve the delivery of support and challenge to local authorities following a review of our field forces. One year on, we have assessed people's views and experience of the protocol and are publishing a revised version which applies to an even larger number of improvement support bodies.

I am determined that this revised protocol, developed with the Association of Directors of Children's Services, should deliver the joined-up packages of support that authorities need. I believe that it also reflects the new framework for improvement support set out in the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy published in late 2007.

This will require ever closer collaboration between the Department, Government Offices, the National Strategies and other field forces and wider improvement support bodies, including the new Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships and the new Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services.

I have asked Government Offices to bring partners together quickly to discuss and agree what needs to be done regionally and locally to make the revised protocol a reality.

This protocol is not the end of the story. Whilst we are striving to improve existing systems, I have commissioned a more fundamental review of the support that needs to be available to local authorities. Hopefully, this will lead to the development of a new improvement support strategy to further improve outcomes for children, young people and their families

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Bell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

David Bell  
Permanent Secretary  
October 2008

# Introduction

In July 2007, we published the first improvement support protocol following a review of how the Department's field forces were delivering support and challenge to authorities. This review highlighted the need for changes including a more risk-based and proportionate approach, better coordination, a step-change in the quality of support and challenge, and a stronger focus on innovation and dissemination of best practice.

There have been major changes in the policy and delivery landscape over the last year. The Department has published the Children's Plan, there are Local Area Agreements in place in each area, and there is an agreed National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy (NIES) as well as a clarification of roles and responsibilities in the local performance framework.

We have reviewed the first protocol in the light of these changes and the views and experience of local authorities and our improvement support delivery partners. This revised protocol describes new arrangements to improve further the quality, differentiation and coordination of improvement support. There will be further changes as a result of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) starting in April 2009.

The parties to this revised protocol are bodies with advisers (with the exception of Ofsted) providing improvement support to LAs in relation to children, young people and families, regardless of which Government Department or Non-Departmental Public Body or other delivery partner is responsible for them. This includes but extends beyond those previously defined as field forces. It includes Government Offices, the National Strategies and other field forces but also includes wider improvement support bodies including the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships and the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services.



# Summary

In the second half of 2008-09, the Government Office and the National Strategies will work closely together and with the authority to review performance. The National Strategies will lead on the review and negotiation of the annual statutory education and early years targets and the Government Office will lead on the review and refresh of Local Area Agreements (LAAs). Together, they will ensure that the LAA and statutory targets continue to form a coherent single suite of targets for the area.

The GO Children and Learners Team will lead on reviewing performance against the LAA targets for children and young people. After these reviews, the Children and Learners Team, working with the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP), field forces and other improvement support bodies, will produce a Joint Improvement Support Plan (JISP) for discussion and agreement with the authority. The JISP will provide a concise summary of improvement support tailored to the authority's priorities and needs.

GOs will establish practical arrangements for regional and local advisers to network and share information and ideas about how best to support authorities and feed into the JISP process, taking account of partners' improvement support remits and their capacity for and preferred method of engagement.

GOs will support the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) in their role as the regional hubs for sector-led improvement activity across the whole local authority agenda to help ensure that authorities can access the right support at the right time. GOs will also work closely with Strategic Health Authorities, the inspectorates and the new Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) to help identify and disseminate best practice.

These arrangements are designed to facilitate the targeting and joining up of improvement support resources. They are not intended to constrain direct contact between improvement support agencies and authorities. The aim is to build arrangements for earlier, more effective action to prevent serious failures arising and to support and facilitate the spread of excellent practice in achieving outcomes for children, young people and families.

# The Protocol in Action

## Partnership Working

The key delivery partners will work together to implement the arrangements described below. The GO Children and Learners Team will, in conjunction with regional DCS networks and the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership, maintain a Regional Children and Young People's Forum bringing together the key partners to oversee the delivery of support on children's services for authorities at regional level.

## Strategic Engagement

The Government Office will lead and coordinate strategic engagement with individual authorities over the annual performance cycle for Every Child Matters outcomes, with the National Strategies Senior Regional Directors taking the lead for educational standards as part of the Enjoy and Achieve outcome. The key elements of the annual performance and improvement cycle in 2008-09 are as follows:

- in September/October 2008, the National Strategies will hold Standards Meetings with each authority to review progress in the summer's assessments, tests and examinations and begin the process of setting the statutory targets for 2010. They will also agree their plans for working with LAs for the academic year 2008-09;
- between September – December 2008, Ofsted will carry out the final batch of Joint Area Reviews (JARs) and Annual Performance Assessments (APAs). 2008-09 is the final year of the current inspection arrangements;
- in December 2008/January 2009 GOs will lead the LAA Annual Review process. As part of this, the GO Children and Learners Team will review performance against the LAA targets and wider priorities for children and young people. Conclusions from the review will inform subsequent proposals to revise any LAA targets in Spring 2009. The GO Director for Children and Learners will stay in close contact with the Director of Children's Services before and during the LAA review to ensure continued alignment of targets for children and young people;
- between January – March 2009, the National Strategies will finalise the 2010 statutory targets and GO Children and Learner Teams will lead reviews of improvement support needs leading to revised Joint Improvement Support Plans (JISPs).

There will be a standard template for recording children and young people's priorities and improvement support needs to enable analysis of regional priorities and needs. The JISP will be in two parts. The first part will be co-ordinated by the



Children's Services Adviser in the GO and will contain the offers of improvement support from the range of improvement support bodies locally. The second part will be the previously agreed National Strategies deployment plan. The JISP will provide the authority with a complete picture of the support to be provided.

The GO will ensure that burdens are not placed on the authority and its partners through excessive or poorly co-ordinated requests. The relationship between GOs, improvement support bodies and the LA will be underpinned by openness. LAs can expect GOs and other bodies to share their conclusions with them in notes of visits.

The existing inspection arrangements will be replaced in 2009-10 by new CAA arrangements. The new framework will be published early in 2009. CAA will build on the work of seven inspectorates in an innovative way to report how well residents are being served by their local public services. The inspectorates plan to publish

the first CAA reports in November 2009 enabling their findings to be taken into account in subsequent reviews of the LAA and to inform local processes for setting budgets.

We expect the annual performance and improvement timetable for future years to remain broadly the same as set out above. Because CAA is based on ongoing engagement and synthesis of evidence, inspections and inspection planning will take place throughout the year.

### Targeting and Tailoring

Support and challenge from improvement support bodies will be targeted according to need, with resources deployed where the need is greatest and co-ordinated with the local government sector's own improvement arrangements to avoid duplication and confusion.

The authority's need for improvement support and challenge will be informed by risk assessment.

The Data Interchange Hub (the Hub) and the Local Area Interactive Tool (LAIT) provide performance data based on the National Indicator Set (NIS) and Ofsted performance ratings and will be available to all local authorities<sup>1</sup>.

All improvement support agencies are expected to tailor the approach they take and the materials they use to the authority's needs. The GO will work closely with the authority and improvement support bodies to ensure that improvement support is appropriately differentiated and the GO and authority will challenge where it is not.

1 The Hub and LAIT can be accessed online at [www.hub.info4local.gov.uk](http://www.hub.info4local.gov.uk) and [www.dcsf.gov.uk/localauthorities/index.cfm](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/localauthorities/index.cfm).

## Coordination and Planning

The GO will be responsible for bringing the key partners together to share information about an authority's performance which will inform CAA, and to join up professional knowledge about how to support the improvement of local services.

Acting on behalf of the GO Regional Director and GO Director for Children and Learners (DCL), the Children's Services Adviser (CSA) will take on the role of lead professional for the authority in relation to improvement services for children and young people.

At local level, the CSA will work with improvement support bodies to develop a Joint Improvement Support Plan (JISP) providing a joined-up offer of improvement support for the authority. The JISP may include support packages negotiated with wider improvement support agencies like the RIEP, the C4EO or the new Commissioning Support Programme<sup>2</sup>.

Individual improvement support bodies will have more detailed operational plans covering the deployment of advisers within their area of responsibility and expertise which they will develop and share with the authority and the GO.

At regional level, the GO DCL will work with authorities and the RIEP to help develop a regional improvement plan to tackle regional priorities. This will identify potential areas for sub-regional and regional cross-authority learning. These plans will inform and be informed by the RIEP's Regional Improvement and Efficiency Strategy.

## Innovation and Best Practice

To avoid duplication of effort and ensure that Local Authorities and their partners receive consistent messages around effective practice/ what works, it will be important that improvement support bodies and RIEPs work closely with C4EO – both informing and being informed by the Centre's findings.

The C4EO will develop partnership arrangements with Government Offices, RIEPs and other improvement support bodies to encourage advisers working for different bodies to:

- keep each other informed about all work in which the other has an interest and give consideration to each other's views;
- provide each other with as full and open access as possible to research, data and intelligence about what works;
- help with signposting and identification of examples of effective practice;
- apply learning from each other's work in their contexts/work where appropriate;
- invite each other to participate in relevant local, regional and national meetings and conferences.

In order to facilitate cross-authority learning, JISPs will identify areas of good practice in addition to improvement support needs. CAA will encourage innovation and recognise exceptional achievement which others can learn from through awarding green flags as part of the area assessment.

<sup>2</sup> The Commissioning Support Programme will start in autumn 2008. The programme will be available to all Children's Trust partners and will offer sector-led approaches to supporting improvements in commissioning capacity and skills.

## Accountability

Improvement support bodies will recognise the statutory role of the DCS and the principal accountability of that officer to improve the five Every Child Matters outcomes for all the children and young people in the authority including accountability to elected members. The Children and Learners team in the GO through GO Regional Directors will be accountable to the Department for the development of a JISP for each authority.

The GOs will also be accountable for monitoring the delivery of improvement support in the JISP, apart from that delivered by the National Strategies which is monitored by the Department. They will not be accountable, however, for the support and activity provided by individual improvement support bodies.

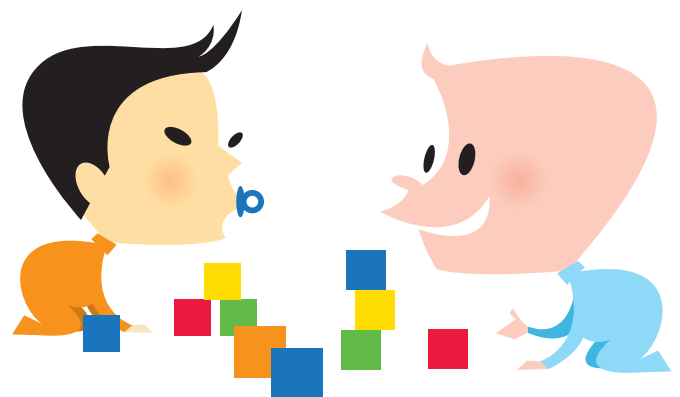
Each body will be accountable to its home agency for the delivery of support and challenge agreed with the authority, summarised in the JISP, and set out in more detail in their work activity plans.

## Underperformance

Our commitments following the Local Government White Paper and National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy are clear that, where appropriate, action in response to underperformance will focus on sector-owned and driven activity. Authorities will react quickly in response to advice and recommendations about how to improve underperformance. The Director of Children's Services (DCS) will initiate action to plan and implement recommendations to improve services. The Department will continue to work with the sector to help them develop their

capacity to do this effectively. Also, following the White Paper, the Department has, since April 2008, been able to issue non-statutory Improvement Notices in cases of significant or enduring underperformance. Improvement Notices specify clearly the issues of concern, the improvement required and subsequent steps that may be taken if improvement is not achieved.

Central government will continue to consider intervening where any services for children are inadequate. Responses will be tailored to the nature and severity of any problem. Government retains its statutory intervention powers and, in children's services, these can be used where an LA is failing to perform any of its functions to an adequate standard. To date, such directions have been used to require that an LA outsource its functions to an external provider and, when it is expedient, the directed solution can be in relation to other functions (for example an external provider holding the whole statutory DCS role). In considering whether to issue a direction, the Secretary of State should be satisfied that the decision is a reasonable and proportionate response to the inadequate performance identified.



In future, it is proposed that under-performance which is not being adequately addressed will be highlighted within CAA reports with a red flag. The red flag will denote that inspectorates' assess that some additional or different action needs to be taken to address the under-performance or risk identified. The CAA flags and supporting narrative will help to focus improvement responses.

## Challenge and Support

Improvement support bodies will endeavour to operate in accordance with the following standards:

- advisers will make first contact with the LA via the DCS' office and the CSA, if appropriate;
- advisers will arrive at an authority briefed about local issues and knowledgeable about its performance;
- advisers will clarify with the authority what their roles and responsibilities are and how they can support service improvement and/or sharing of innovation;
- advisers will focus their attention and resources on where the need is greatest and agree a pattern of support/interactions tailored to the authority's needs;
- advisers will offer support and challenge based on the latest evidence about what works and what doesn't work;
- advisers will encourage and facilitate exchanges of best practice between authorities identifying appropriate high performing authorities;
- advisers will work closely with the GO Network and CSAs in particular and exchange information with other advisers.

## Meetings and Visits

Improvement support bodies will endeavour to adhere to the following standards when holding meetings and carrying out visits:

- advisers will clarify in advance the purpose of any visit or meeting;
- all meetings will have agendas agreed before the meeting takes place;
- the frequency of regular KITs, visits and meetings will be agreed and scheduled in advance. There will be a calendar of key meetings with each authority. However, there will always be a need for ad-hoc meetings especially where an authority is identified as underperforming or is in intervention;
- face-to-face meetings are costly and attendance will generally be restricted to people with a specific contribution to make. Alternatives to face-to-face meetings will be used wherever possible;
- notes and minutes of key meetings and visits will be circulated in draft within 5 working days of the meeting, building in the opportunity for the authority to challenge risk assessments or ratings of performance. The authority will respond to the draft within 5 working days, and a final note of the meeting will be sent to the officer concerned and copied to the DCS within 5 working days of receiving comments on the draft note;

- advisers will seek feedback from the DCS and senior officers about whether their needs are being met.

## New Initiatives and Contract Extensions

When new initiatives and policies are being developed, the Department will involve Government Offices and consult LAs and other key stakeholders about how best to support implementation. Options for delivering support other than the creation of new programmes or field forces, including the devolution of funding to the sector and the role of RIEPs will be considered.

The Department's Star Chamber will scrutinise the business case for any new improvement support arrangement or any extension of a contract to an existing arrangement. The business case will address the following issues:

- the key purpose and functions of the improvement support arrangement;
- how the proposals will contribute to achievement of targets and outcomes;
- the nature of challenge and support that will be provided;
- the competencies required by advisers to fulfil customer needs and expectations;
- the availability of people with suitable experience and skills to fill adviser posts and the likely salary and other costs;
- the demands likely to be made on the time of DCSs and other senior officers in the authority from advisers;
- assessment of whether the improvement support could be delivered by the RIEP or other existing partners;
- accountability and governance;
- stakeholder views on the proposals;
- recruitment and working arrangements;
- costs, funding and value for money assessment;
- launch arrangements;
- arrangements to measure and evaluate impact;
- exit strategy.

DCSF's contracts with improvement support bodies will require advisers to work in accordance with this protocol.

## Feedback

GOs will seek regular feedback on how well the arrangements described in this protocol are working. Improvement support bodies will check regularly with the authority that their support is meeting the authority's needs and helping to improve outcomes.

If any partner believes the processes described above are not being adhered to, they should try to resolve problems and difficulties locally via the GO. If this does not improve the situation, they should approach the Department.

The Department will evaluate the impact of the improvement support arrangements described in this protocol.

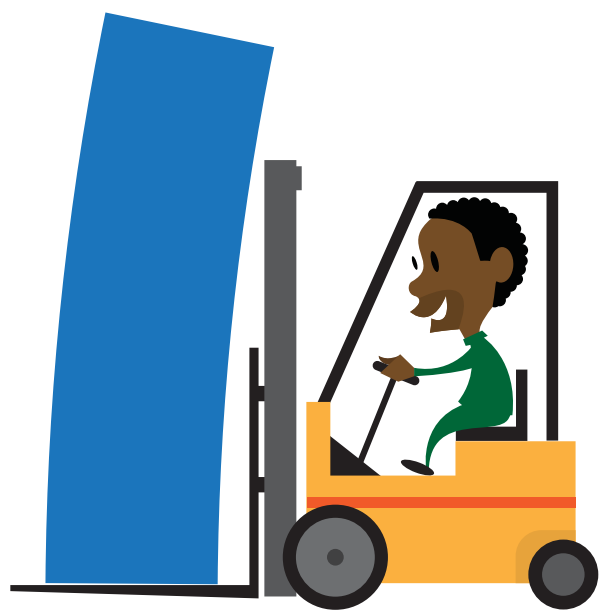
# Key Partners and Primary Responsibilities

## Audit Commission

The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services to deliver better outcomes for everyone. The Audit Commission is working with partner inspectorates to co-ordinate CAA design and implementation. The Audit Commission has appointed a CAA Lead for each area and they will draw on discussions with GOs and RIEPs to help coordinate local authority inspection planning with wider improvement planning, including any plans for sector led support in the locality. The intention is that all key agencies in each area with a role in driving and shaping improvement and inspecting will liaise to develop a coordinated and coherent approach.

## Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services

The new C4EO was launched in July 2008, with the principal aim of identifying, coordinating and disseminating 'what works' in order to significantly improve the outcomes of children, young people and their families. In its first three years of work the C4EO will focus on six national ECM themes starting with *early years* and building sequentially to cover: *children with disabilities; vulnerable children (particularly children 'in care');* *youth; parents carers and families;* and *schools and*



*communities.* The themes will each have three 'key lines of enquiry' (priorities). Local authorities and their Children's Trust partners (including schools and health) will be provided with evidence showing them 'what works' nationally and regionally, and supporting them to determine how to improve practice locally. They will also have access to tailored specialist support from the sector, to help them apply the lessons from elsewhere to their local circumstances. The C4EO will not report on individual authorities' progress. The only time that an individual authority would be named by the C4EO would be if it had formally agreed to be named as an example of good practice. Whilst the C4EO will work closely with the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships

(RIEPs) and other improvement support bodies, and may be included as part of the offer of support in the JISP, Local Authority engagement will be entirely voluntary and they will remain in control of the support they receive.

## DCSF

The DCSF's aim is to make this the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up. As the strategic leader of the system, the Department's key responsibility within this protocol is for the overall design and delivery of effective national arrangements for performance management and provision of improvement support to authorities and their Children's Trust partners.

## Government Offices

Government Offices (GOs) are responsible for maintaining the principal relationship between central government and local authorities and partners, providing assurance about delivery and managing the LAA process. Within GOs the Children and Learners Team will work with RIEPs to provide and coordinate improvement support to local authorities across children's services through the parties to this protocol.

## Local Authorities

Local authorities are responsible, with their Children's Trust partners, for improving outcomes for children and young people and for negotiating improvement support to help achieve LAA and other local targets via RIEPs and GOs. LAs are accountable to locally elected councillors. Authorities will identify priority areas for

improvement and discuss with the Government Office how improvement support can be provided from a range of bodies to help build capacity and improve performance. Authorities will also feed back information to the Government Office and the Department on the support they receive.

## National Strategies

The aim of the National Strategies is to raise standards of educational achievement and rates of progression for children and young people. The National Strategies regional teams will lead on the review and negotiation of the statutory local authority and school-level targets and the delivery of improvement support to authorities to help meet the targets. The National Strategies will work closely with the Government Office to ensure that the LAA and statutory targets continue to form a coherent single suite of targets for the area.

## Ofsted

Ofsted is a new inspectorate established in April 2007 and seeks to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. Ofsted is required by law to promote improvement in the services it inspects and regulates; to ensure these services focus on the interests of the children, parents, adult learners and employers who use them; and to see that these services are efficient and effective. Ofsted has a responsibility with other inspectorates to carry out performance assessment and inspection of local authorities' services for children and young people. It currently discharges this responsibility through Annual Performance Assessments and Joint Area Reviews. From 2009,

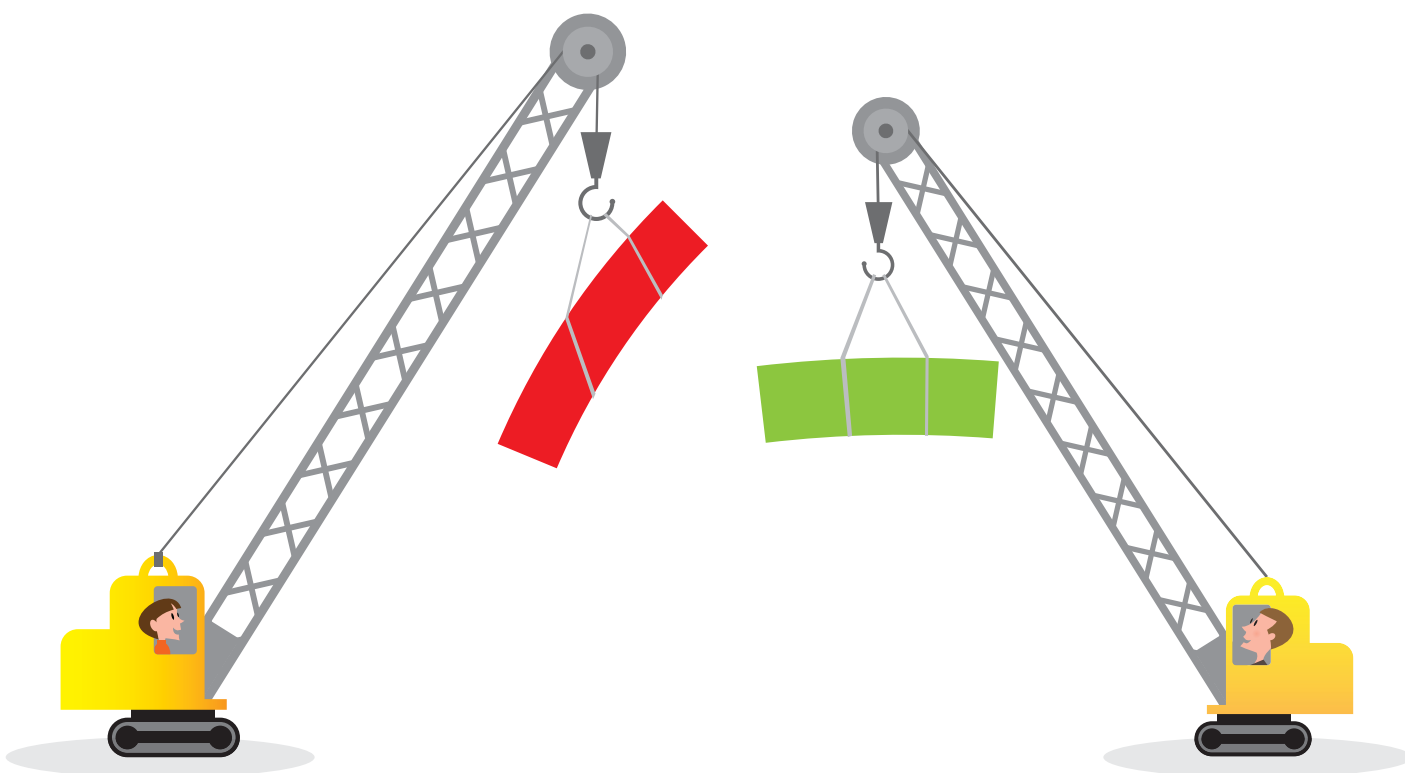
Ofsted and other inspectorates will undertake Comprehensive Area Assessment.

## Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships

Sector owned Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) will work with GOs and Departments to identify, co-ordinate and support improvement in local authorities and local partnerships. RIEPs will encourage authorities to offer support and advice to each other through peer reviews and sharing of best practice. They will set out regional improvement priorities and activities in Regional Improvement and Efficiency Strategies across the whole LA agenda.

## Other Improvement Support Bodies

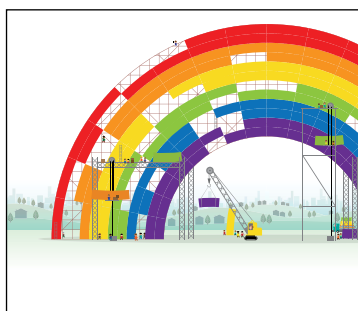
The regional advisers of other organisations/field forces supporting the delivery of the Children's Plan, as set out in *Prospectus 2008: The Guide to Improvement and Efficiency Support* (published by CLG), will provide challenge and support to local authorities in accordance with the principles and practices in this protocol. They will work closely with authorities, GOs and RIEPs to join up and deliver tailored and targeted support to authorities. They will consult authorities, GOs and RIEPs about their plans and GOs and RIEPs will monitor the quality and effectiveness of provision as set out in the prospectus.



# Parties to Protocol

|       |  |
|-------|--|
|       | 4Children  |
| ABA   | Anti-Bullying Alliance   |
| ADCS  | Association of Directors of Children's Services                            |
| AC    | Audit Commission   |
| Becta | British Educational and Communications Technology Agency                   |
|       | ContinYou  |
| C4EO  | Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services |
| CfBT  | CfBT Education Trust   |
| CSIP  | Care Services Improvement Partnership                                      |
| CWDC  | Children's Workforce Development Council                                   |
| DCSF  | Department for Children, Schools and Families                              |
| GOs   | Government Offices for the English Regions                                 |
| NAPP  | National Academy for Parenting Practitioners                               |
| NCB   | National Children's Bureau   |
| NCSL  | National College for School Leadership                                     |
| NS    | National Strategies  |
| PE    | Play England   |
| PfS   | Partnership for Schools  |
| QIA   | Quality Improvement Agency   |
| QiSS  | Quality in Study Support   |
| RHA   | Rex Hall Associates  |
| RIEPs | Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships                           |
| SFT   | School Food Trust  |
| TDA   | Training and Development Agency for Schools                                |
| TDC   | Together for Disabled Children   |
| TfC   | Together for Children  |
| YST   | Youth Sport Trust  |





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