



Association of Directors of Public Health – response to ‘Taking stock – Where next with sector-led improvement?’

The Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) is the representative body for Directors of Public Health (DsPH) in the UK. It seeks to improve and protect the health of the population through DPH development, sharing good practice, and advising on public health policy and legislation at a local, regional, national and international level. www.adph.org.uk

Background to the ADPH response

Directors of Public Health (DsPH) in England (supported nationally by Public Health England) are the frontline leaders of public health, working across health improvement, health protection and health care public health service planning & commissioning.

As leaders for public health, ADPH is fully committed to sector-led improvement (SLI) as the model for improving health outcomes for all citizens.

ADPH response

Whilst we understand that ‘Taking Stock’ came out of a review into Adult Social Service and Children’s Service SLI programmes, we were disappointed to note that the advent of Public Health in Local Authorities had not been mentioned as needing to be considered as part of the system. Existing peer reviews (such as health & wellbeing and childhood obesity) are very much about public health; public health will be a key element of place-based integrated health systems; and below we set out details of our Public Health Sector-led Improvement Programme that has been developed with the Local Government Association (LGA) and Public Health England (PHE).

We would have also welcomed a wider view of SLI approaches rather than the emphasis on peer review, which we would argue is only one of many appropriate methodologies for undertaking SLI. This would enhance the review element (whether regional or national) by providing a more developmental approach which is likely to further support improvement.

ADPH would agree that:

Q.1 The principles on which sector-led improvement is based are the right ones.

Q.8 All Local Authorities should be expected to have a corporate peer challenge on a regular basis.

Q.9 All corporate peer challenge reports should be published unless there are exceptional circumstances. Guidance on producing reports should include giving due consideration to providing a balanced view of the local situation; and to ensuring terminology/language is accessible and appropriate for wider/public audiences.

Q.10 All Local Authorities should be expected to produce an action plan following a peer challenge.

On the whole we believe that there needs to be more challenge built into SLI in order to provide assurance of the quality, objectivity and impact of the SLI programmes. This could be through national impact reviews or local / regional impact reporting or other appropriate sector-led mechanisms. Without this challenge there will be a tendency from government to introduce top down inspection and / or performance management.

A place based approach would be helpful for some issues by bringing in partners into the process and action plans. With the move towards a more place-based integrated health system and devolved health powers, SLI methodologies and processes need to be flexible enough to enable sector-led initiatives across different services and across different geographic foot-prints.

Overview of PH Sector-Led Improvement

Since the transfer of public health responsibilities, Directors of Public Health & public health teams to local government in 2013, ADPH has been working with the LGA and Public Health England to establish a Public Health Sector-Led Improvement Programme – with methodology focusing on collaboration, peer support & challenge (but specifically not inspection or performance management). The Public Health SLI programme is based on the principles set out in the LGA document “Taking the Lead”, which states that:

- Councils are responsible for their own performance and improvement and for leading the delivery of improved outcomes for local people in their areas.
- Councils are primarily accountable to local communities (not government or 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.
- 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.

Within our SLI programme, the underlying principle for ADPH is that each DPH should be fully aware of the performance of public health in their area. This provides a baseline for improvement, which is best achieved when a council’s approach to delivering good public health outcomes is supplemented by collective responsibility for improvement, through sharing good practice and peer challenge, through ADPH regional networks.

DsPH within their regions are working collaboratively as peers to support each other’s improvement. They will bring together local and national support where this is necessary and available. They will make full use of published information and use an evidence based approach. Transparency will also be encouraged.

ADPH is committed to respond when significant underperformance of public health functions within councils is identified. Within available resources, ADPH will arrange offers of support for improvement through the relevant ADPH regional network; and a process is in place if there is evidence of continuing significant performance risk, which would include engagement with appropriate LGA Principal Adviser(s).

ADPH is currently establishing a Sector-led Improvement Programme Board, led by the ADPH President and will include a representative from each of the LGA and PHE.

The ADPH Programme Board should therefore be fully engaged within the LGA’s continuing development of sector-led improvement.

**Association of Directors of Public Health
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