

National Leadership Qualities Framework

For Directors and Senior Leaders of Children's Services

Resource



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Developing senior leadership in Children's Services

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Introduction

The role of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) is arguably unique in the public sector in that it is currently the only role with its own associated statutory guidance. This not only describes the role but also defines clearly its relationship both to national legislation and local accountability. Published in 2009, the guidance remains in force and continues to provide a comprehensive definition of the responsibilities of a DCS. The guidance describes the role as;

"...involves orchestrating and leading a wide range of activities, people and agencies, many of which the DCS does not manage directly, in a joint local effort to improve outcomes and narrow gaps for children and young people. The broad purpose of the DCS role is to provide a clear line of accountability for children's services, promote leadership in improving outcomes for all children, and secure the provision of services which address children's and young people's needs.

*The DCS role is about championing all children, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable, and making improving children's wellbeing a key priority of the local authority. Real improvements, however, can be achieved only through the partnership working of the Children's Trust, facilitated by the DCS. This requires leadership, a child-centred approach, innovation, creative thinking and meticulous use of data and other information."*¹

Since the publication of the guidance much has changed. At national level the government is determining new political priorities whilst, at local level, councils are reviewing and reconfiguring their services in response to significantly reduced resources within the public sector.

As a result, many DCSs are having to adjust to a widening corporate role and, in some cases, an extension of their responsibilities well beyond children and young people.

What remains however, is a continuing commitment to improving outcomes for children, young people and their families together with a renewed focus on the strategic leadership of councils on behalf of their communities. The SEN Green Paper published in early 2011 is clear that "Local authorities have a democratic mandate to champion the interests of their local communities and ensure that services work effectively for children, young people and families. The Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, sets out the strong strategic role that local authorities will play in the new school system, acting as the champions for parents and families, vulnerable children, and educational excellence.

The Green Paper also articulates a significant strategic role for local authorities in "planning for services that meet the needs of local communities: working with local partners (for example, through the Health and Wellbeing Boards in drawing up the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment), local authorities are uniquely placed to maintain a strategic overview of the needs of their local communities and to ensure that local services reflect these needs."²

The emerging key national policy documents do, therefore, indicate a clear expectation that the local authority will continue to play a pivotal role in championing parents and families; promoting educational excellence and the health and wellbeing of children and young people. This role is further reinforced by the new statutory duties on LAs proposed in the Public Health White Paper and, importantly, by the call of Eileen Munro in her interim report that these responsibilities continue to be discharged through a single person, namely the DCS.

¹ Statutory Guidance: The Roles and Responsibilities of the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services. DCSF. 2009

² Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability. DfE. 2011.

“With the extent of current public service reform, the role of leadership and lines of accountability in child protection services need to be clear. The review agrees with Lord Laming’s conclusion on the need for a strong local spine of accountable leaders, with responsibility located in the local authority, as reflected in the current statutory framework. In particular the review considers it important that local authorities ensure that the role of the Director of Children’s Services continues as the key point of professional accountability for child protection services within the local authority and that this is not diluted or weakened.”³

This Leadership Framework aims to make functional sense of the aspirations outlined in the Statutory Guidance and the key children’s social care, SEN and education policy frameworks, together with providing the developmental context for Directors of Children’s Services and those aspiring to the role, to benchmark their knowledge skills and behaviours against a set of functional statements which serve to define their responsibilities within the context of their local delivery.

The Framework aims to complement the formative documents from the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), The Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC), The Centre for Excellence in Outcomes (C4EO), The Department of Health (DoH), Audit Commission and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) which have helped to shape and define the development of children’s services since the Children Act in 2004. It has also been informed by the Interim Report of the Munro Review and the findings from the National College research on *Resourceful Leadership*.

It builds upon the acquired experience and knowledge gained through these publications and from extensive consultation with DCSs and key sector stakeholders. In particular, it seeks to augment the skills knowledge and behaviours defined in *Championing Children*, the *Common Core*, and the findings in the report of the Leadership For Outcomes research “*Resourceful leadership: how directors of children’s services improve outcomes for children*” by providing a specific focus on the leadership characteristics for the successful delivery of services to children, young people and families.

Championing Children was designed to promote a common understanding about the distinctive and different skills, behaviours and knowledge required by all managers of children’s services who are responsible for multi-agency, multi-professional teams.

It highlighted seven aspects of management and/or leadership, which, in the main, mapped directly onto either the Leadership and Management Standards or the Common Core for the front-line children’s workforce. They focus on the skills and behaviours associated with leading change, establishing relationships and developing teams, and on acquiring knowledge. All of these are reflected in this Framework.

The Common Core of Skills and Knowledge reflected a set of common values for practitioners that promote equality, respect diversity and challenge stereotypes, helping to improve the life chances of all children and young people and to provide more effective and integrated services. It also acknowledged the rights of children and young people, and the role parents, carers and families play in helping children and young people achieve positive outcomes. This Framework aims to support these values by placing moral purpose and integrity at the heart of the leadership attributes.

“Leading for Outcomes is a unique study into senior leadership in children’s services in England, drawing on in-depth primary research with leaders in eight local authorities, and 22 directors of children’s services. It concludes that “Leaders in the public sector and children’s services are facing a number of challenges, including a tough financial climate, high expectations of services at lower cost, shifts in demographics, complex and shared delivery and public sector reform. These challenges require leaders to demonstrate a high degree of resourcefulness.”⁴

This new concept of resourceful leadership, which the report suggests is a feature of highly effective DCSs, is also reflected in the leadership attributes and skills outlined in this Framework.

³ Munro Review: Interim Report. DfE. 2011.

⁴ Resourceful leadership: How Directors of Children’s Services improve outcomes for Children. National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services. 2011. p 4.

The 2020 Children and Young People Workforce Strategy outlined,

“The Every Child Matters reforms have brought together responsibility for education and children’s social services under a single Director of Children’s Services – creating a single line of accountability for Local Authority services to children and a strong local figure with responsibility for driving partnership across the Children’s Trust. It is critical that people in these roles, and their successors, are skilled in setting a clear vision and direction for the local workforce, in bridging cultures and in ensuring that local systems and practice are effective and robust”⁵

This Framework is designed to help in this process by providing a clear set of leadership attributes, skills and knowledge drawn from the experiences of those charged with developing integrated working practices and informed by the most recent leadership and service delivery developments within the children’s services sector, as well as the new challenges presented by the changed financial agenda within the public sector.

The Framework also has one final purpose: namely, to act as a sister document to the National Professional Development Framework for Leaders and Managers of Children’s Services and the Resourceful Leadership report upon which it has heavily drawn. Used jointly, these documents should provide those wishing to develop the leadership characteristics of senior and middle managers of children’s services in local authorities, health and the private and third sector with sufficient direction and scope to define suitable exemplars of practice. Achieving this will provide a coherent direction of travel for those starting their careers in children’s services, enabling them to signpost their career development, take responsibility for their personal and professional growth and receive the systemic and organisational support they will need to become the future leaders of services for children, young people and their families.

⁵ 2020 Children and Young People’s Workforce Strategy. DCSF. 2008. p 23.

Purpose

The primary aim of the Framework is to:

- define the key knowledge, skills and attributes needed by those fulfilling the DCS role so they might provide effective leadership across children's services in order to achieve positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The Framework should therefore support, inform and challenge a DCS and those with roles that include this statutory function and serve to provide the developmental context for them and their teams to improve the delivery of services to children, young people and their families.

It is recommended the Leadership Framework should also be used to:

- support DCSs and others in discharging the statutory duties of the DCS role
- influence and promote leadership behaviours linked to effectiveness
- support DCSs in their work and in their performance management process
- inform sector specific assessment and competence frameworks
- inform job descriptions and person specifications

- support continuous professional development for leaders at different levels within children's services (for example, the development of 360 tools, mentoring work with newly appointed DCSs, executive coaching etc.)
- provide a basis for performance review and development processes
- inform sector led approaches to improvement
- inform succession planning initiatives across the sector
- support career progression throughout the children and young people's workforce

The Model

The framework consists of a central core of key leadership attributes and skills. These are considered to be integral to all aspects of a DCS role and also shown by leadership research to be related to highly effective leadership performance. They are central to, and supported by, areas of knowledge which represent the functional aspects of the Director of Children's Services role organised into four areas of strategic leadership.

Leadership attributes

“DCSs have to deliver outcomes by forming effective partnerships with a wide variety of organisations in the public, private and voluntary and community sectors. Leadership in children’s services is about aligning these multiple strategic and delivery agents to deliver effective services for children and young people.

Leadership is not about exercising positional authority – it is about a set of activities which can be characterised as resourceful leadership. Leadership can be exercised by many people across the children’s services landscape. One of the key roles of effective leaders is to create the environment where leadership can thrive.”⁶

Eight attributes have been drawn from relevant publications and research covering leadership qualities in the public and private sectors and corroborated by DCSs. The eight are shown below. In this context the definition of an attribute is “what leaders have the capacity to do” and, whilst difficult to measure, research consistently demonstrates that key attributes play a significant role in highly effective leadership.

The attributes are:

1. moral purpose
2. integrity
3. insight
4. innovation
5. self-awareness
6. resilience
7. adaptability/flexibility
8. courage and passion

⁶ Resourceful leadership: How Directors of Children’s Services improve outcomes for Children. National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services. 2011. p 10

Leadership skills

At the heart of Directors of Children's Services strategic leadership is a passionate commitment to champion and safeguard children, young people and their families. Orchestrating and leading a wide range of activities, people and agencies and combining innovative, creative thinking and resourcefulness with meticulous use of data and other information, DCSs' leadership should ensure effective delivery of partnership working and integrated service provision which places the service user at the centre of practice and delivery.

More specifically, DCSs should have the ability to:

Be strategic

- develop and embed vision and values for children's services
- respond creatively to financial challenges, whilst still maintaining a commitment to excellent provision
- analyse and use evidence and data intelligently
- assess and analyse future challenges
- strategically plan for future service delivery
- provide sector leadership

Communicate effectively

- communicate clearly, openly and persuasively in order to influence outcomes
- set clear, measurable, aspirational and inspirational goals
- build and motivate effective, high-performing and inter-disciplinary teams

Work with others

- manage key relationships across a range of partners
- work collaboratively and in partnership with stakeholders
- involve service users in the planning, delivery and monitoring of services
- create a culture of inter-agency working

Cope with uncertainty

- negotiate and manage ambiguity
- plan, manage and embed change within a complex environment

Promote learning

- create a learning organisation and encourage reflective practice
- manage performance and promote effective professional development

Areas of strategic leadership: knowing the business

In recent years, the roles, responsibilities and ways of working of local authorities and their partners have changed radically. These changes are set to continue with the rollout of the Coalition Government's 'Big Society' agenda, increased localism and the changed relationship with schools called for in the schools White Paper which are all likely to have significant implications for the delivery of public services. As alternative models of service delivery are developed through social enterprises and independent providers, local authorities will need to adapt to a new style of leadership, commissioning a range of services from a much wider pool of delivery partnerships.

The provision of high quality services that improve outcomes for all children, young people and their families remains central to the role of the DCS. This includes working with the Children's Trust, Health and Wellbeing Boards or other strategic partners in local partnership arrangements that are now being developed. It also requires close engagement with, health sector agencies, schools/further education colleges and with work based and third sector providers in order to ensure that there are effective arrangements for service provision for early years, school improvement and the delivery of post -16 education including the transition into adulthood. Critical also is the safeguarding and wellbeing of all children and young people and, in particular, support for children and young people in care across all services. On behalf of the corporate parent, DCSs and Lead Members play a unique role in the lives of looked after children and young people. Improving their outcomes and care experience requires strong leadership from the DCS so that the whole council and its Children Trust partners work together on issues that affect the life chances of these children and young people.

Effective DCSs, working closely with their Lead Member, also promote early intervention and prevention and seek a reduction in child poverty along side an improvement in the health and wellbeing of all children and young people.

DCSs are responsible for ensuring local authority children's services are effective, provide value for money and are readily accessible to children, young people and their families.

A high quality, appropriately skilled workforce and adequately resourced services are critical to successfully improving outcomes and DCSs should build capacity across the children's workforce and ensure resources are deployed to maximum effect and seek to achieve excellence for service users. An effective, well trained and committed workforce is central to improving outcomes for children, young people and families.

To help achieve these aims four knowledge areas have been identified which, collectively, cover the functional aspects of a Director of Children's Services' role which in turn define and contribute to improving outcomes for children young people and their families. These areas have emerged following a review of relevant formal documentation, discussion with DCSs and reference to work undertaken for the Directors and Aspirant Directors of Children's Services Leadership Programmes at the National College. The areas are intended to represent the functional aspects of a DCS role with the recognition that there will be some cross over between areas.

The areas are:

- Integrated system delivery
- Partnership working
- Managing the political and corporate context
- Community engagement and cohesion

These areas have been further sub-divided to reflect the content modules of Director of Children's Services Leadership Provision at the National College and are shown in the diagram at the end of this document.

Each area will specify the knowledge required for effective delivery. Successful Directors of Children's Services are resourceful and responsive to their contexts and maintain a strategic overview that integrates their work into a coherent whole so it is important to regard the four areas as interdependent.

a. Integrated system delivery

At the heart of high quality services for children and young people lies the commitment to integrated working and collaborative endeavour. In practice, there is a significant difference between integrated services and integrated service delivery and it is the DCS who will influence the development and then manage the oversight of the locally agreed model. This will require knowledge of the many aspects of integrated working, including data management, common assessment frameworks, extended services and multi-agency locality team building.

It requires close working relationships with the Lead Member and the Chief Executive, the engagement of the wider statutory and non-statutory partners, the youth offending service, the police, health, sure start children's centres and schools together with services users themselves all working together to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Functional areas:

Resource planning and management

Commissioning, procuring, brokering and contracting services
Ensuring effective financial management across children's services
Delivering effective human resource management across children's services
Achieving integrated management and information systems
Securing effective services for vulnerable groups of children and young people including looked after children

Quality assurance

Managing services for value for money and quality service delivery
Embedding outcomes, focused performance management and interventions
Ensuring governance structures for effective outcomes
Working with the regulators to improve performance
Promoting innovation and risk management
Ensuring challenge and support for improved pupil performance
Monitoring practice and processes for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people

Developing integrated practice

Building and leading a skilled and confident children's services workforce
Managing diversity and inclusion
Promoting organisational and locality team work and delivery
Enabling user centred service delivery
Enhancing the role of the voluntary and community sector, in making the safeguarding and wellbeing of children and young people everybody's business

b. Partnership working

In order to strengthen co-operation across all key services, (public, private and third sector) DCSs play a key role in creating and sustaining effective local partnerships. DCSs also aim to develop and strengthen the Children's Trust Board and wider co-operation arrangements and work closely with the Local Strategic Partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board in order to inform the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. The DCS will also need to forge a new partnership with schools and other educational partnerships including teaching schools as a result of the Education Bill and subsequent Education Act (2011).

Through partnership working, the strategic objectives in the Children's and Young People's Plan or local equivalent, will be embedded across children's services, enabling all stakeholders in the Children's Trust arrangements including third sector partners to demonstrate shared accountability for the positive outcomes for children and young people.

Functional areas:

Governance

Leading and developing effective Children's Trusts or equivalent arrangements including the Children's Trust Board
Maximising duty to co-operate and partnership relationships
Understanding the governance arrangements of all partners
Aligning the aims of the Health and Wellbeing Board with the Local Strategic Partnership
Understanding the role of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the GP Consortium
Overseeing school organisation, governance and leadership, including influencing robust and effective partnerships with and between schools

Culture

Planning, leading and managing transition and change
Developing and promoting new models of service delivery
Agreeing common language and working practices across agencies
Developing partnership working arrangements
Understanding services for children in the National Health Service
Understanding and managing the relationship between the local authority and schools, including brokering and commissioning services for children and young people

Practice

Planning co-operation arrangements across the Children's Trust relationships – ensuring coherence
Promoting the role and effective contribution of the third sector
Managing data across partnerships
Pooling budgets to enhance provision
Facilitating the role of GPs in locality arrangements for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people
Engaging schools in the safeguarding, health and wellbeing of children and young people

c. Managing the political and corporate context

The DCS, as a member of the Council Corporate Management Team, is accountable through the Chief Executive to the local Council and therefore responsible for contributing to local priorities. One of the defining features of the resourceful leader is how effectively he or she forms selective alliances with other senior figures, especially the Chief Executive and Lead Member(s), to deliver their own objectives.

The Chief Executive and the Lead Member comprise the most vital peer relationships for DCSs and these can be both challenges to solve and resources to utilise.

The DCS should work effectively with the designated Lead Member as both are champions of children - working to achieve improved outcomes through better partnership working, integrated planning and mediating potential sources of conflict. This involves commissioning and delivering a full range of services. Working in a professional and managerial sphere, and mindful of their wider corporate brief, the DCS should deliver the systems and processes agreed by the Council whilst, at the same time, meeting their statutory responsibilities for children and young people.

Functional areas:

Contributing to the corporate role

Understanding the role of the Director of Children's Services as defined by the Statutory Guidance and local responses to new national policy directions
Being a champion for children, young people and families across the council
Understanding the principles of scrutiny and corporate accountability
Contributing to the Council's efficiency and value for money priorities in a financially challenging environment
Securing cross Council commitment to children's safety and well being
Ensuring effective multi-agency child protection procedures
Securing effective services for social care and education through an appropriately skilled and experienced children's services management team

Managing the political interface

Understanding propriety and standards in the democratic process
Demonstrating accountability to services users
Managing the political aspects of partnership relationships
Advising the Council on the strategic planning and operational delivery of services to children, young people and families
Managing local priorities and the relationship between local and national government

d. Community engagement and cohesion

The DCS is central to the leadership role of the local authority in promoting increased personalisation of services, working with families and empowering the community to improve outcomes at locality level.

These are all important aspects of the DCS role in addition to being the champion for children, young people and families both across the Council and the local area as a whole.

The role of the local authority in leading its communities, harnessing community resources and supporting the relationship of the Children's Trust with local strategic partnerships are all pivotal to improving the lives of children, young people and families and achieving community cohesion.

Functional areas:

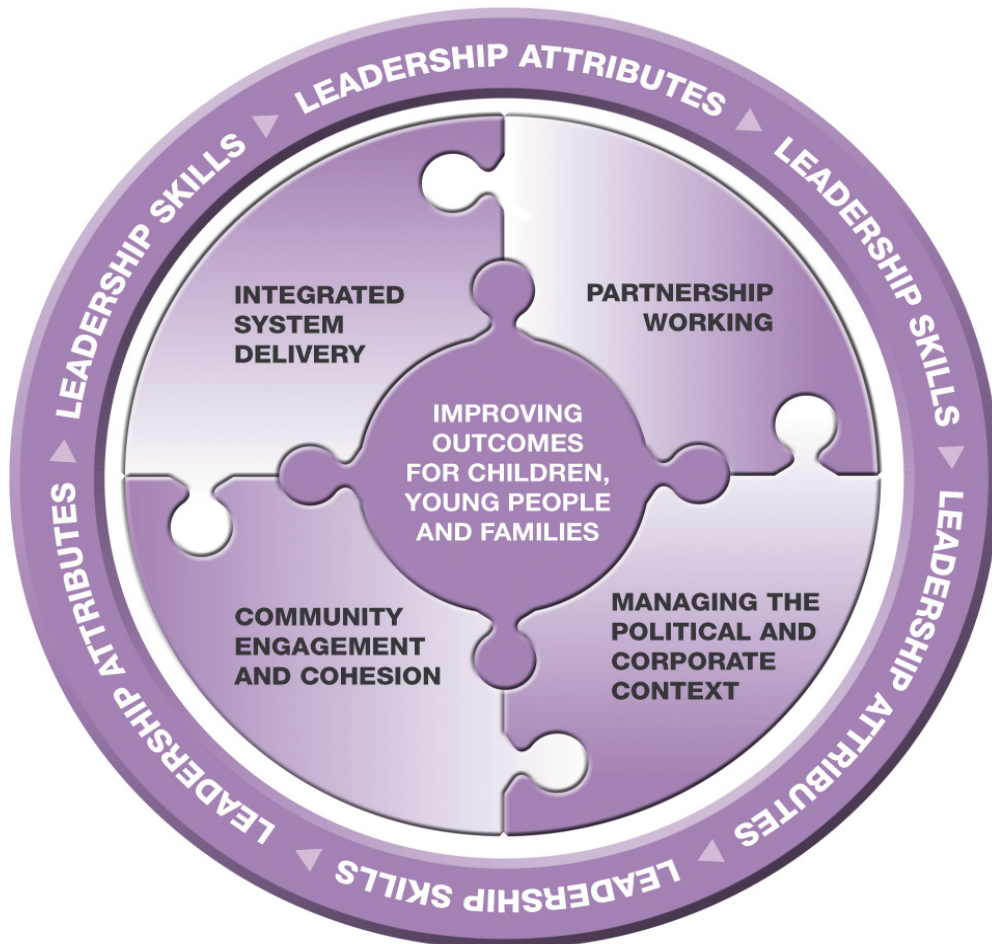
Community leadership

Reconciling political priorities with community needs
Developing the culture of community leadership and the associated skillset
Harnessing community resources
Being a champion for all children, young people and families across the local area as a whole
Managing inter-community tensions
Driving a culture of aspiration for all children, young people and families
Promoting health services within sure start children's centres and extended services arrangements in order to improve community health outcomes

Governance and cohesion

Promoting the role of the local authority in understanding leading and empowering its communities
Supporting locality solutions for greater community engagement
Promoting the engagement of children and young people in community cohesion
Working with families: aligning Children and Adult Services

Annex 1: The Leadership Qualities Framework Model



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VSC provides direct delivery and facilitation of training and development programmes, workshops and action learning sets supported by web based resources and e-learning facilities. All of its leadership and management programmes are rooted in participant co-construction, self-directed, peer supported learning and the principles of adult learning. They are delivered in a highly interactive format and involve a combination of sector expertise, research and the sharing of good practice.

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