



# Leading and Managing Children's Services in England:

A National Professional Development Framework



department for  
**children, schools and families**

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# Foreword by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families

In *The Children's Plan: Building brighter futures*, we said we would publish a national professional development framework for leaders and managers of children's services to provide a basis for the professional development of leaders across all Children's Trust partners. This professional development framework is being published alongside *Building brighter futures: next steps for the children's workforce*, which sets out our ambitions for the whole children's workforce.

Effective and knowledgeable leaders and managers are needed throughout all areas of practice where the outcomes of children, young people and families are affected. In the forefront of this are Directors of Children's Services and their leadership teams and those partner organisations which form the Children's Trust arrangements in each locality. These leaders are the primary focus of this professional development framework and we hope that the contents resonate strongly with them.

This framework describes the knowledge, skills and behaviours relevant to all leaders and managers of children's services. High quality leaders and managers are essential to ensure that the services provided as a result of their actions, whether they are delivered directly or have been commissioned, are focused on improving the outcomes for children, young people and families.

The framework is designed so that pathways to progression can easily be identified and the core competences desired in our key leaders of the system can be shared and understood. It should be used to help managers identify where there are gaps in their knowledge; recognise the value and transferability of their experience; and take time out to reflect on the kinds of development activities that will help them. The system needs leaders and managers with the right personal qualities and for these to be reflected in their behaviours.

We want the framework to contribute to the development of a more flexible, mobile and better qualified workforce, where there is a wide pool of expertise and experience from which to draw for the most senior positions. The vision for leadership offered in this document can be applied to leaders and managers at all levels of management; and the qualities this document sets out are important to leaders and managers wherever they work. I would particularly encourage those in the private,



voluntary and independent sectors to think about how they can use this framework There are many possible ways to the top from the frontline. This framework has been developed in consultation with existing leaders and managers of children’s services in England and has been welcomed by the Association of Directors of Children’s Services and the Children’s Workforce Network.

I am confident that implementation of the framework will support effective succession planning and benefit the individual, organisation and service as a whole.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

**Kevin Brennan**

# 1. Introduction

*Every Child Matters* (ECM) and its resulting Children Act 2004 introduced significant changes to the way in which children's services are planned and delivered. A duty to cooperate was placed on local authorities (LAs) and other organisations with responsibility for the care and wellbeing of children and young people such as health services, the police and youth justice. Schools and voluntary sector providers were encouraged to work in partnership with local authorities to plan and deliver services tailored to the needs of the child and bring about improvements under the five outcomes in *Every Child Matters*, namely:

- being healthy;
- staying safe;
- enjoying and achieving;
- making a positive contribution; and
- achieving economic wellbeing.

Despite genuine support for the principles of *Every Child Matters*, it is the transition from theory to practice where the real challenge lies. Within the local authority context, the Directors of Children's Services (DCS), who are principally charged with delivering these reforms, have begun to make changes to LA services and their Children's Trust partners' structures and processes to support integrated working. Children's Trust arrangements have been put in place to bring the various partners together and commissioning has become recognised as a key process in ensuring the right quantity, quality and type of services are planned and delivered to meet identified local needs. This has provided the conditions for the development of the culture change that is required across all sectors and services to make the delivery of children's services truly integrated and focused on prevention and early intervention.

Senior leaders and managers within the private, voluntary and independent sectors, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and other organisations delivering children's services have also had to adapt to this new world. Many of the challenges they face in delivering services which meet the ECM principles and outcomes are very similar to those of LAs. The impact of a more collaborative style of working and the demands of meeting the needs of children, young people and families which are more personalised and delivered as part of a coherent whole, falls on all those leading Children's Trust partner organisations.

Therefore, it is recognised that the continual professional development of senior managers is a key ingredient for the successful implementation of the ECM agenda and ensuring the continuation of the improvements to services. While much has been accomplished in the past few years, we now need to build on the knowledge being generated about what is effective practice and what skills, knowledge and behaviours are required at the most senior levels to drive forward this challenging agenda. It is through this knowledge from current DCS and other senior leaders and managers of children's services that this framework has been developed.

This document sets out a comprehensive vision for the leadership of children's services which is applicable across all levels of leadership and management, in different settings and in the various sectors that make up the children's services landscape. Building on that vision, it then describes the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attributes that senior strategic leaders and managers of children's services should be expected to have or develop to enable them to fulfil the important and challenging role they have. It graphically illustrates how, wherever an individual enters a senior management post in children's services, there is a process of development – induction to gain an understanding of their role and 'know the business'; becoming a reflective manager with a focus on developing the managerial skills to run the services in an integrated, multi-agency environment; and leading the system, ensuring that the organisation is a learning organisation which is continually seeking knowledge on ways to improve the services to provide better outcomes for children, young people and families. It concludes with some suggestions on how this framework might be used by different audiences.

## 2. Developing professionals: a national framework

While most Directors of Children's Services currently come from a local authority background in either education or social services, in future this may not always be the case. Those working in partner organisations, including health services, youth justice, the voluntary and private sectors have important skills which are transferable to the LA children's services context. They will also be developing their knowledge of the ECM agenda and experiencing the integrated working practices that are fundamental to the ECM principles, thus providing a wider recruitment pool of managers with the potential to take on senior roles. Of course the converse is also true and managers currently working within the LA context may wish to use their skills and knowledge to progress their careers in other areas of children's services.

A fluid, well trained and knowledgeable workforce at all levels, including frontline, middle and senior managers, is desirable and highly conducive to engendering a common culture amongst the children's services workforce. This framework complements and builds on *Championing Children: a shared set of skills, knowledge and behaviours for those leading and managing integrated children's services* ([www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/championingchildren](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/championingchildren))

It also draws on a wide body of knowledge on leadership and management theory and practice, is designed to be compatible with other leadership and management frameworks and ensure that pathways to progression from middle to senior management are identifiable and the core competences desired of key leaders of the system are shared and understood. However, it cannot replicate the volume of work on these subjects and does not attempt to define in any great detail the differences between leadership and management practice. In children's services, as elsewhere, the two are inextricably linked and, while the framework largely focuses on the leadership aspects of the senior manager's role, in places it highlights some of the specific management tasks such as commissioning which are becoming increasingly important at both a strategic and operational level. This does not mean that other, more generic management skills are not required, only that to specify them all would make this a very lengthy document.

This framework document is aimed at employers of senior children's services managers, senior managers themselves and those who aspire to such positions in the near future. This includes those working at a strategic level in local authorities, in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sectors and managing the children's services element of other local organisations such as PCTs, youth justice etc. It will also be useful to organisations providing training and development for senior children's services managers.

The framework aims to:

- a) describe the knowledge, skills and behaviours required of those in senior leadership roles;
- b) enable senior leaders to plan their own development and use the framework to demonstrate their skills;
- c) provide a developmental map for those aspiring to senior roles;
- d) enable those employing senior leaders and managers of children's services to judge suitability for posts and assess performance, based on recognised criteria; and
- e) enable those providing training and development programmes and courses for senior leaders and managers of children's services to tailor their courses appropriately.

While the primary audience for this framework is those who work within the children's services arena, there are others who may not consider their service to be primarily concerned with the five national outcomes for children and young people but whose actions undoubtedly have an impact, e.g. adult mental health and social care, GPs, fire and rescue, police and prison services. We hope that those leading these services, which have an influence (albeit only as part of their overall function) on children's outcomes, will also consider how they can use this framework to influence and shape their practice.

A further element in the leadership of children's services is provided by Lead Members and others such as trustees and school governors who make an important voluntary contribution to the delivery of services to meet the outcomes set out in *Every Child Matters*. While this framework is not designed to meet the very specific requirements of their roles, we hope that it will be of use to them in deciding if there are areas of development that it would be useful for them to pursue to enhance their knowledge and skills.

# 3. The vision for leadership

Having a vision for the way in which a service should be run is the starting point for being able to articulate what it is you want to achieve and influence others to share that vision and work together to achieve it.

The vision for leadership in children's services, which was consulted on in the spring of 2007, is to have:

*"Resilient, well-informed, creative and innovative leaders with the requisite skills, knowledge and experience to ensure the effective delivery of integrated provision for children, young people and families at the local level".*

Although these attributes might be most visible in senior leaders, they apply equally to all members of the workforce who are in leadership positions or exercising leadership functions. The aims will vary for each level of leadership and each project, programme or service but do encompass some generic themes such as ensuring we have leaders and managers who:

- can develop a vision for children's services in their area/sphere of responsibility and communicate that clearly and persuasively to others;
- are able to create a culture of inter-agency working whereby the needs of children, young people and families transcend traditional professional perspectives;
- encourage reflective professional practice through their own behaviour and management style;
- are committed to the personal and professional development of the workforce and the efficient performance management of those within it;
- can set clear goals for their service that are measurable and achievable, as well as aspirational and inspirational;
- are able to plan, commission and deliver services effectively in partnership with others, including statutory, third and private sector organisations;
- are able to use evidence and the experience of team members to understand the needs of local communities and prioritise activities on the basis of evidence and evaluation;
- can ensure that data, where appropriate, is used to inform and improve service delivery;

- are committed to listening to the views of all children and young people including, importantly, those who are looked after, and their families, and ensuring that they are taken into account in policy development and service delivery;
- have a firm focus on improving outcomes for children, young people and families and design, plan and configure services accordingly;
- build and motivate effective, high-performing teams in the context of leading and managing the change required to secure reformed children's services;
- build and motivate inter-disciplinary teams with the ability to work effectively across existing and future organisational boundaries; and
- strive for the continuous improvement of their service that responds flexibly and efficiently to the changing needs of children, young people and families.

This vision provides the principles for leadership for those aspiring to leadership positions within children's services. Development activity for anyone leading and managing services for children, young people and families should build on these themes and reflect the principles of the framework both in style and content of development opportunities.

# 4. The elements of the framework

In order to realise this vision, the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attributes have been identified through consultation with existing leaders and managers of children's services and are underpinned by leadership and management theory. These elements make up the competences which are specific to leaders of children's services.

## 4.1 Knowledge, skills and behaviours

This element identifies the essential knowledge, skills and behaviours required to lead effectively. Leaders of children's services should actively engage in reflective learning to gain greater understanding of core management functions, and in order to:

- a) understand how strategic, commissioning and policy development roles are undertaken;
- b) translate strategic vision into local plans in collaboration with professionals, partners and users;
- c) use the collective knowledge base to challenge the status quo and to do things differently to meet the needs of children and families more effectively;
- d) influence the governance of children's services locally;
- e) build a shared value base and common purpose;
- f) display leadership across the whole system through behaviours such as listening, building alliances and challenging others;
- g) promote the development of leadership attributes at all levels by supporting others to talk knowledgeably about issues in their area of professional expertise and produce innovations in those areas;
- h) make sure that staff understand how their role contributes to the ECM agenda and that they are clear about how their performance and development is measured;
- i) make clear how improved service performance and end user satisfaction can be achieved through a responsive and flexible service that reflects the needs of children, young people and families and delivers across the five ECM outcomes;
- j) continually develop the quality of all services offered, ensuring the clear focus is on improving outcomes for children, young people and families;

- k) work for equality, both within the service and around it, and be a credible and compelling advocate for equality;
- l) develop a culture of, and systems to support, a high level of responsiveness within the service;
- m) influence the environment and local strategy by taking opportunities to share ideas and enthusiasm about children’s services and what can be achieved;
- n) know the legislative frameworks for all services to children and young people, and where to go for detailed information and interpretation if required;
- o) develop a culture of, and systems to support, effective use of data in order to inform strategic planning;
- p) empower the end user;
- q) seek out and promote evidence based practice;
- r) understand and demonstrate how effective resource and finance management can lead to improved outcomes for children, young people and families;
- s) ensure that everyone working with and for children has a high level of awareness of a child’s need and right to be safe, and a clear understanding of how their professional practice contributes to the safeguarding of children; and
- t) ensure that all children, young people and families are involved in ongoing dialogue about their needs and aspirations and their ideas for service improvement, seeking out, in particular, the views of looked after children.

In addition to the knowledge, skills and behaviours, the leadership competences are underpinned by three elements which permeate and support the work of leaders and managers of children’s services:

#### 4.2 Personal qualities and values

This element focuses on the personal characteristics which individuals bring to the leadership and management role. They may be innate qualities and values and/or traits developed through personal experience. It is important that these qualities and values are demonstrated through the behaviours exhibited by leaders of children’s services in their interactions with partners, colleagues, staff and end users in the continual drive to provide an excellent service.

- |              |                      |
|--------------|----------------------|
| Commitment   | Inspiration          |
| Confidence   | Integrity            |
| Consistency  | Motivation           |
| Courage      | Perseverance         |
| Creativity   | Problem Solving      |
| Empathy      | Reliability          |
| Flexibility  | Resilience           |
| Honesty      | Respect              |
| Humour       | Self Awareness       |
| Impartiality | Valuing other people |

### 4.3 Practice characteristics

This element clarifies the diverse practice characteristics leaders and managers draw upon to undertake the core management functions effectively. Through their interactions and behaviour, they should:

- understand and apply frameworks of accountability;
- celebrate diversity and promote social inclusion and equal opportunities;
- challenge and support;
- communicate clear purpose and direction;
- deal with ambiguity and change;
- develop self and others;
- value teams and work collaboratively;
- value expertise outside their own professional sphere;
- understand the position of children within society and challenge negative stereotypes; and
- have a willingness to champion children's rights and promote the participation of children, young people and their families.

# 5. Development activities within the framework

There are three strands of activities proposed by this framework to be able to demonstrate the competences fully. The strands seek both to contribute collectively to the professional development of children's services leaders and managers; and to provide a progression path for the experiential growth of current and future children's services professionals. This is not necessarily a sequential process but is set out as such to provide a developmental order to the opportunities provided for continuing professional development. There will always be new issues or processes which require a basic understanding. Similarly, leadership is displayed at all levels and needs to be developed alongside management skills without artificial divisions between the two. The strands are:

- *Induction: Knowing the Business*

This strand is concerned with understanding the context of the role, in particular their local Children's Trust arrangements. Activities should include an overview of the political and legislative context, partnership working, new models of service delivery, use of evidence and data, outcome measurements, etc, and lead to a greater understanding of why and how integrated provision will lead to better outcomes for children, young people and families.

- *Reflection: Becoming a Reflective Manager*

Throughout their careers, it is important that children's services professionals have opportunities to review, reflect and evaluate their current practice and be able to contrast and compare their experience with those of their peers. They will also need opportunities to develop new ways of working and use their knowledge to improve service delivery through informing innovation in service design and delivery.

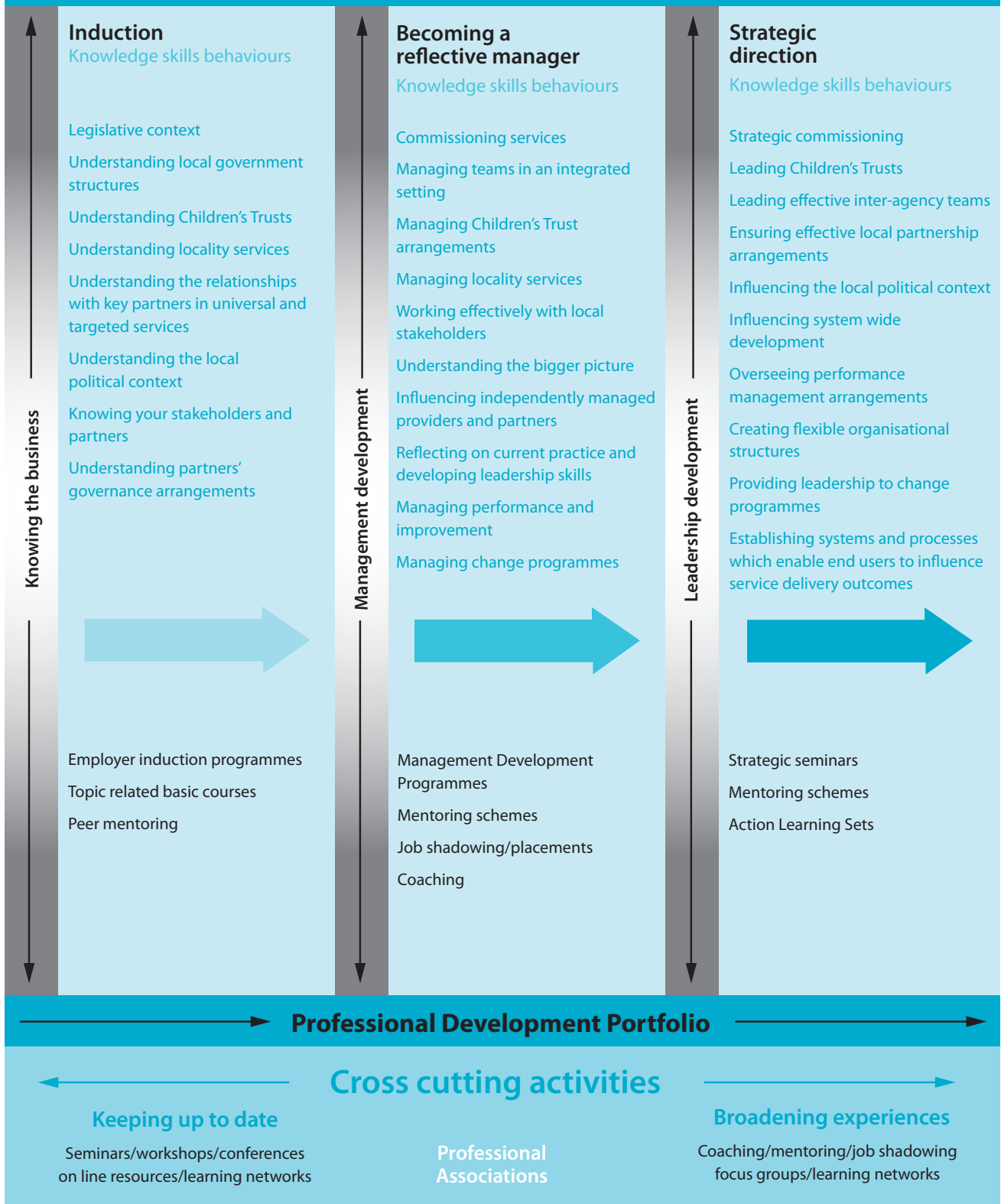
- *Direction: Becoming a Strategic Leader*

Developing both present and future strategic leaders of children's services is the main focus of this framework. Professional development opportunities for existing and future leaders of children's services should provide practical and intellectual challenges to existing practice and extend the knowledge base on what is effective practice in the planning and delivery of high quality services. It should also aim to extend the breadth of vision and, therefore, the focus of the leader to the broader physical, social and cultural environment in which children grow up and, through this, reflect on how within a wider strategic context they might seek to influence these factors positively, in order to improve children's lives and their long term outcomes.

These three broad developmental tracks are set out in the diagram on the following page.

# Practice Development Framework

## Leadership Competences



## 6. Using this framework

This framework is designed to be a flexible resource for all leaders, potential leaders and their employers. While each individual service area will have issues, practices and sometimes legislative frameworks that are particular to them, much of the development activity that is required can be provided on a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary basis. The benefits of this are many. Greater interaction between people working within different disciplines or sectors through shared learning activities e.g. action learning sets, learning networks or formal accredited courses, provides an environment where reflective practice, leading to a shared understanding of the issues and shared language, can be developed and sustained. This leads to better service delivery, focused on outcomes where each part of the system starts to be able to see what and how it contributes to the whole and creative solutions can be developed.

### i. Skills and development planning

The continuous development of existing leaders of children's services is vital to improving outcomes for children, young people and families.

Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services sets out the minimum roles and responsibilities of the DCS post. What is actually required of DCS and their senior management team will vary depending on many factors. Context is all important and local authority structures will be developed to meet the needs of the local area.

For senior managers in other organisations, it is perhaps more difficult in that their roles will be more diverse and not laid down in statutory guidance. However, they require similar skills and knowledge of the *Every Child Matters* agenda in order to work collaboratively across organisational boundaries, to participate in local planning through the Children's Trust partnership arrangements, and to provide the best possible services to children, young people and families which promote the 5 outcomes.

Development activities should aim to promote leadership abilities and attributes. It should also develop knowledge of the less familiar areas of their post and enable them to keep up-to-date with new policy developments and processes to meet the needs of the local population.

## ii. Mapping for aspiring leaders

This framework needs to be interpreted in terms of the skills, knowledge and behaviours required in a broad sense, enabling those working in both the statutory and non-statutory sectors to identify where there are gaps in their knowledge, where their experience is transferable and what kind of developmental activity will be most appropriate to enable them to fill these gaps.

Those currently in Assistant Director or Head of Service (i.e., 2nd or 3rd tier) roles within local authorities and those working at a similar level in the Children's Trust partnership organisations are likely to have been subject to considerable change. They will be operating in a more collaborative, partnership-oriented working environment that may be new to many. Additionally, given the complexity of the ECM agenda, it is increasingly likely that some senior managers may be required to oversee service areas for which they have little or no direct professional experience. They may also need to apply new processes such as commissioning and will need to keep up-to-date with new policy initiatives, processes and developments in research knowledge on effective practice in service delivery.

These groups of professionals will therefore require opportunities to develop their skills for their current leadership and management roles and to enable them to build on those skills in developing a broad understanding of the children's services environment that will fit them for more senior roles. This requires opportunities to:

- meet and share practice through seminars, workshops and long and short management development programmes, particularly ones delivered on a multi-agency basis;
- access work based opportunities which provide periods of work experience, job swaps or work shadowing schemes and/or peer coaching or mentoring schemes in order to address these experiential shortfalls; and
- opportunities to analyse critically and reflect upon the nature of leadership and management in children's services, and, through this, begin the analysis of their current practice and plan for their own future professional development needs.

## iii. Assessing suitability for employment and managing performance

This framework document provides employers with an indication of the skills, knowledge, behaviours and attributes they might look for in a senior leader of their children's service. For those employing and managing Directors of Children's Services, this framework should be read in conjunction with the statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of Directors of Children's Services.

In addition, it provides employers with a framework which could inform a performance management system and assist in both assessing performance and identifying what kind of development activity is most suitable to enhance performance in the role further.

Effective performance management is an essential element of continuous professional development. Three important processes assist in identifying an individual's professional development needs:

- professional development analysis (PDA);
- audit of professional development needs, in order that an individual's targets are linked to those of the organisation; and
- the recording of personal and professional development experiences over time.

This framework aims to support effective performance management by providing the basis for a PDA process which, ideally, would have at its core a rigorous process of audit including 360° review and support.

#### iv. **Guidance for training and development providers**

In setting out the skills, knowledge and behaviours which are most salient to senior leaders and managers of children's services, it is envisaged that the providers of training and development will use this as a means of signposting what they are offering and to whom it will be most useful.

For DCS and their counterparts in partner organisations, activities that are most appropriate may involve short courses or seminars that enable them to keep abreast of new initiatives, enhance their political skills and extend their understanding of the wider local and national agenda.

Mentoring schemes, particularly for those new in post or dealing with specific issues and peer networks, can provide support for continuous development.

For those working at 2nd and 3rd tier levels, e.g. Assistant Directors and Heads of Service in LAs and their equivalents in partner organisations including the PVI sector, an in-depth knowledge of the processes of managing the services for which they are responsible should be complemented by a focus on developing their strategic leadership skills. A good understanding of the commissioning process has also become a requisite skill for aspiring leaders of children's services and is fast becoming a key process within Children's Trusts.

## 7. Conclusion

This framework does not aim to provide an exhaustive list of all the competences required of leaders of children's services. It sets out what is distinctive about the leadership functions within the system of children's services that we are now seeing develop as a result of *Every Child Matters*. It is deliberately designed to be open to interpretation, depending on the particular context, and flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of strategic leadership roles.

The implementation of this framework will not only support effective succession planning but, by encouraging improved access and consistency of training and development activity across local authority children's services and the wider children's services environment, benefit the individual, the organisation and the service as a whole. It will have a positive impact on staff morale and professional confidence and promote reflective practice, exchange of ideas and the transfer of knowledge, all of which will enhance the ability of individuals and organisations to develop integrated governance, processes and services.

Most importantly it will be the start of a process of developing greater coherence and understanding within the new children's services community and, through this, to begin to develop the new paradigm of leadership which will take forward the delivery of the *Every Child Matters* agenda and ensure that, in future, the agreed outcomes for children, young people and families are not only realised but become the accepted norm.

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