



# Leadership Development Framework for Directors of Children's Services





## Purpose

This Leadership Development Framework (LDF) is intended to help leaders of children's services to deliver effective services and improve outcomes for children and young people in these challenging times. The role of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) is set out in statutory instruments but has not previously had an agreed leadership development framework as there is in many other sectors.

The LDF is intended as a tool for individuals, employers and national bodies and can be used to:

- Describe the personal qualities that leaders of children's services might aspire to.
- Provide a framework for baseline assessment or self-assessment of individual leadership qualities and for personal learning and development planning.
- Inform the design of learning and development programmes, such as the upon programme for aspirant Directors of Children's Services, as well as providing a framework for evaluating such programmes.

## Notes to support the use of the framework

The framework sets out 24 key attributes that are considered core to the role of the DCS and these have been grouped into 4 domains that, taken together, aim to improve outcomes for children, young people and families:

- Deliver results
- Build and sustain a successful culture
- Create and nurture effective partnerships
- Achieve positive change and real impact

For each attribute, a description of skills, knowledge and behaviours is provided against a scale of Emergent, Effective and Exemplary. These build on the previous scale i.e. an Effective attribute assumes the description in Emergent is met and an Exemplary one assumes that Effective is also met. They are subjective and there are a number of generic descriptive attributes that are intrinsic across the framework – such as commitment to children, young people and families.

The descriptors used are intended to be aspirational and so should be stretching for an aspiring or new DCS – they are not intended to represent a minimum set of criteria for application or recruitment to the role.

The framework does not claim to offer a comprehensive set of the attributes required to be an effective DCS together with all of the Director-level leadership and management responsibilities that go with such a post, but a set of core attributes that are particularly pertinent to that role.

## Domain 1: Delivering Results

Attribute	Emergent Attributes	Effective Attributes	Exemplary Attributes	Delivers
Ensures all services fulfil statutory duties and guidance.	Actively reviews, monitors and is explicitly clear about expected requirements, standards and professional conduct from all colleagues, managers and staff.	Advocates on behalf of children, young people and families to secure corporate support, cooperation and investment in services to meet statutory duties.	Works effectively with system and community leaders and advocates on behalf of children, young people and families to secure wider support, cooperation and sustainable investment in services to meet statutory duties and beyond.	<b>Better Outcomes for Children, Young People and Families</b>
Analyses, plans and implements strategies to manage demand, meet needs, and enhance capacity of services.	Regularly gathers the necessary data, intelligence and evidence to manage demand, meet needs, and understand the capacity of services.	Actively promotes the development and implementation of plans and strategies across the council to reshape services and approaches. Makes effective use of external sources of support and challenge.	Understands the bigger picture and actively promotes the development and implementation of plans and strategies across the local system to reshape services and approaches. Ensures that the specific narrative of local experience informs regional and national thinking.	
Keeps a close grip on performance and quality of services and instigates action to continually improve.	Personal interest and tenacity in understanding performance information and intelligence, and ability to explain complex data and evidence and link this to overarching priorities.	Proactive in scrutinising, analysing and swiftly learning from performance information and intelligence and evidence Holds service managers accountable for delivering successful outcomes.	Creates and drives a high-performance culture; holds peers and partners accountable for delivering successful outcomes, taking effective preventative action and drawing upon external good innovation and practices considering carefully how to introduce in own context	
Ensures that decisions are made fairly, which promote equality, diversity and inclusion.	Good understanding of, and commitment to addressing inequalities facing children, young people and families across the local system. Sets clear expectations about equitable and inclusive delivery of services provided or commissioned.	Proactively champions interests of all children, young people and families across corporate services. Actively monitors data on inequalities and puts in place strategies to address them.	Understands the bigger picture and proactively champions equalities and the inclusion of children, young people and families across the wider system, engaging a wide range of stakeholders and system partners.	
Ensures services deliver value for money (VFM).	Rigorously monitors progress against strategic objectives, making appropriate changes to consistently achieve improved outcomes and VFM within available resources.	Takes a broad view of VFM when making choices; recognising 'hidden' or external effects and costs and responds creatively to financial challenges, whilst meeting statutory duties. Effectively challenges peers and partner agencies about unintended financial consequences of their decisions.	Takes full accountability for contributing to corporate and system efficiency and VFM priorities in a financially challenging environment, whilst advocating effectively for the needs of children, young people and families.	
Ensures workforce strategies are effective, equitable and inclusive in supporting the delivery of safe and high-quality services.	Possesses a comprehensive understanding and focus upon the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce and key risks to recruitment and retention.	Has the vision to anticipate key, long-term changes and understand the impact that these might have upon the recruitment and retention of the workforce and ensures plans are in place to address these.	Uses understanding and insights of wider contexts, and possible future developments and scenarios to shape long-term sustainable workforce strategies across the local system and in conjunction with wider sector partners.	

## Domain 2: Building and Sustaining a Successful Culture

Attribute	Emergent Attributes	Effective Attributes	Exemplary Attributes	Delivers
Builds a shared view and expectations on organisational culture, behaviour and values.	Promotes and models openness and honesty whilst remaining focused upon interests of children, young people and families. Articulates expectations of culture, behaviour and values and acts consistently with these.	Engages staff in developing a shared view of culture, behaviours and values, and challenges behaviours that are not consistent with this view.	Uses cultural understanding, and an awareness of own and other's behaviours, to create opportunities to improve services and anticipate and mitigate against threats to current and future strategic goals.	<b>Better Outcomes for Children, Young People and Families</b>
Ensures services are fully representative of the community they serve.	Understands and regularly monitors local demographics and profile of both staff and people using services to inform service delivery decisions, strategies and plans.	Proactively shapes service composition and processes to ensure representative delivery and inclusivity.	Builds and leads an inclusive and representative working culture and structure; role models inclusivity consistently and in a high-profile manner.	
Builds effective and systematic ways to meaningfully engage with children, young people and families – to learn from them and act on their advice.	Regularly seeks and listens to the views of children, young people and families to inform decisions. Ensures that the voice of the child is considered in all areas of the service.	Systematically gathers and encourages feedback from children, young people and families at all levels of the organisation and makes sure that the response to feedback is proactive, open and transparent.	Empowers colleagues to be creative and innovative in engaging with children, young people and families and in implementing changes as a result of their feedback. Champions engagement and celebrates its impact.	
Ensures that staffing, and management behaviours and activities promote equality, diversity and inclusion.	Embraces diversity and respects differences, encourages the contribution of others, making them feel valued and included.	Demonstrates inclusive leadership and makes sure that issues and barriers experienced by staff and people who use services are proactively identified and addressed within the organisation.	Works from a strong moral base and models the behaviour expected from others. Uses moral authority to promote equality, diversity and inclusion and challenge unconscious bias across the system.	
Promotes positive forms of interaction including highly visible, knowledgeable, compassionate, inclusive and empathic leadership.	Builds trust by being visible, knowledgeable and passionate about the interests of children, young people and families.	Displays personal responsibility and ownership and trust in others. Gives others full credit where appropriate. Ensures effective two-way communication across the organisation.	Embeds and continually reinforces a culture of inclusive decision-making and empathetic leadership across the organisation and with partners.	
Ensures the right people are in the right roles and are supported to deliver high quality services and professional practice.	Commitment to employing diverse and highly capable staff, who work in supportive environments that facilitate critical thinking and best decisions for children, young people and families.	Effectively harnesses the diverse talent, skills and capabilities across and within the organisation. Encourages constructive challenge and thinking 'outside the box'. Encourages personal development and seeks feedback on how staff feel about working here and the support that they receive.	Ensures transparency in the implementation of talent and succession processes and promoting initiative, encouraging and enabling individuals to develop and succeed to their full potential.	

## Domain 3: Creating and Nurturing Effective Partnerships

Attribute	Emergent Attributes	Effective Attributes	Exemplary Attributes	Delivers
Ensures effective system leadership to help address the challenges and opportunities facing all partners and stakeholders.	Leads across the local community; sees public service as part of cohesive communities and seeks to break down silo thinking and practice.	Promotes, models and encourages collaboration across service boundaries and the local community to proactively address shared challenges and opportunities.	Describes shared future changes in a way that inspires hope and reassures partners. Has the skill and vision to explain controversial and complex plans in a way that different stakeholders can hear, understand and accept.	Better Outcomes for Children, Young People and Families
Operates effectively in a complex and changing political environment.	Recognises where senior local politicians may have different agendas and engages with them to identify their viewpoints. Thinks these through in terms of the impact on proposals and plans to sustain continual improvement.	Has a broad understanding of the aims and agendas of senior local politicians and takes this into account when seeking to influence them in reconciling political priorities with community needs.	Displays exemplary insight and wisdom; anticipates and navigates national and local political agendas over both short and long-term horizons.	
Ensures services are co-designed and co-produced with children, young people and families who use services.	Works empathetically with children, young people and families to identify and understand their priorities and translates these into effective operational delivery models and strategies.	Promotes and models a strong focus on the needs of children, young people and families throughout the planning, delivery and evaluation processes to ensure services are co-designed and co-produced.	Creates an environment where people can build relationships, share experiences and reflect from different value-based and professional perspectives. Champions initiatives put forward by children, young people and families and helps remove barriers to their success.	
Collaborates to achieve strategic goals with internal and external partners and stakeholders.	Actively networks to build and foster new and existing alliances and partnerships within the Council and across the locality that add value to meeting mutual strategic goals. Adapts positively to changes in regulations, organisational structure or personnel that impact on established relationships. Balances DCS duties and corporate role and responsibilities	Brings partners and stakeholders into decision-making wherever possible, listens and genuinely considers and includes their views when making key strategic decisions that deliver mutual benefits. Pays attention to the dynamics of relationships with partners.	Builds and leads a collaborative working culture; consistently role models inclusivity and collaboration in a high-profile manner. Identifies new potential partners and explores innovative opportunities for collaboration. Is comfortable in ceding power to gain influence.	
Is clear about respective roles, accountability and responsibilities of different stakeholders and ensures that each delivers against shared priorities as much as it is able or allowed to.	Understands and sets out clear accountability and responsibilities of partners (and stakeholders) to ensure that children, young people and families benefit from safe, high quality and effective services.	Fully understands the relevant aims and responsibilities of key national, regional and local stakeholders and works collaboratively to align and meet shared priorities.	Uses authority to influence change where system architecture is a barrier to achieving best outcomes.	
Models excellent facilitation and influencing skills to support continuous improvement and innovation.	Shows an effective blend of sensitivity and determination in negotiation, works to resolve conflict should it arise – and is successful in winning over and gaining commitment from partners in the local system without holding or exercising direct authority.	Predicts possible areas of conflict and seeks to resolve these ‘ahead of time’, identifies areas of common interest to use as a platform for discussion and continual improvement. Identifies ways to influence beyond own population or usual stakeholders.	Uses high levels of understanding of others’ agendas coupled with strong self-awareness to effectively negotiate and influence high-level, strategic and collaborative agreements and ways of working. Influences thinking, policy or behaviour at a national scale or in terms of the public narrative amongst the local population.	

## Domain 4: Achieve Positive Change and Real Impact

Attribute	Emergent Attributes	Effective Attributes	Exemplary Attributes	Delivers
Leads others to respond effectively to external factors which may necessitate rapid system wide change and innovation.	Exhibits individual care to others to help empower and build resilience to effectively and innovatively respond to significant change and uncertainty. Appropriately adjusts leadership style to suit the context, eg when leading in the face of an incident or crisis.	Adopts a proactive approach to self-reflection leading to challenging current ways of thinking and working. Communicates the benefits of effective partnership working to inspire changes in attitude and innovative approaches to rapid change and uncertainty.	Sees the opportunities in periods of rapid change and uncertainty to harness the skills of individuals who thrive in that environment and uses the 'burning platform' as a catalyst to achieve lasting and positive transformation.	<b>Better Outcomes for Children, Young People and Families</b>
Encourages continual improvement, promotes the use of digital technology and drives innovation.	Tracks service developments, including digital transformation, and understands the implications of these for collaboratively improving services.	Leads the process of continual improvement of services; promotes the use of digital technology wherever appropriate to enable ongoing collaborative transformation and continuous improvement.	Enables whole systems to shift collaboratively from reactive to digitally enabled preventative services.	
Considers the implications of change across systems and partnerships.	Thinks strategically; considers the longer-term implication of shifts in circumstances and adopts a wide-ranging systems and partnership perspective.	Has the vision to anticipate key, long-term, changes and understand the impact that these might have upon services.	Has in-depth insight and wisdom regarding the contextual issues, locally, nationally and globally that currently impact on strategic goals and are likely to do so in the future.	
Champions decision-making at the highest levels that supports innovation.	Demonstrates trust in the team through empowerment and allowing ample scope for initiative, personal responsibility and opportunity to challenge traditional ways of working and thinking. Encourages practitioners to embrace and debate the latest research and evidence-based practice.	Takes decisive action when necessary, and staff are trusted in their ability to do what is right for children, young people and families. Encourages creativity and innovation, while ensuring there are consistent approaches to service delivery.	Embeds and continually reinforces a culture of inclusive decision-making and shared leadership across the organisation and with partners.	
Focuses on the process of continual improvement to make sure services meet the needs and aspirations of children, young people and families.	Encourages a climate of high expectations in which everyone looks for ways for service delivery to be even better; and displays mental agility and flexibility in adapting to new circumstances swiftly and confidently to drive continuous improvement.	Displays a high level of learning agility; responsive and able to apply knowledge and insight appropriately to rapidly changing situations.	Displays a growth mindset; energising others to be inquisitive, to identify synergies and to deliver integrated solutions that support continual improvement.	
Role models innovative ways of 'thinking and being'.	Reflects on personal style and objective assessment of own performance; actively seeks learning opportunities and feedback and as a result, adapts own behaviour to different work situations and circumstances.	Is mindful and proactive; possesses insight into personal motives, emotions and attitudes, and how these may influence behaviour and reactions in self and others. Promotes and visibly acts on the need to value self for personal resilience.	Displays motivational and inspirational leadership. Leading by example, encouraging staff to perform to the best of their ability and deliberately engaging others in collaborative reflective practice and learning.	



## Background

This framework has been developed by the Children's Services Leadership Consortium (The Staff College, Skills for Care, the Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University and Gatenby Sanderson) as part of the Future Leaders programme commissioned by the Department for Education in 2020.

The construction of the framework was based on research into existing leadership frameworks in the sector and has been evolved with input from key sector bodies such as ADCS and LGA, as well as colleagues in the sector, to recognise some of the challenges evident in the current context of securing good outcomes for children, young people and families.

If you have any comments or feedback on the framework and on your experience of using it, please contact us at [upon@thestaffcollege.uk](mailto:upon@thestaffcollege.uk)



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