narrowing the gap in outcomes:

what is the relationship between leadership and governance?

Pippa Lord
Kerry Martin
Mary Atkinson
and Holly Mitchell

NtG narrowing the gap

Local Government Association

nfer

department for children, schools and families

Narrowing the Gap in outcomes: What is the relationship between leadership and governance?

This short paper sets out the overlapping features of effective leadership and of effective governance for narrowing the gap in outcomes for vulnerable groups distilled from two parallel studies conducted by NFER (Martin *et al.*, 2009 and Lord *et al.*, 2009). Box 1 provides details about both of these studies. The paper goes on to highlight:

- the key features of effective leadership *and* of effective governance
- how leaders contribute to effective governance
- how governance supports effective leadership.

Box 1 About the studies

Both the leadership and governance research projects were carried out in two phases:

- Phase One: literature reviews of empirical evidence of how leadership and governance have contributed to narrowing the gap, including research carried out in the UK since 2002 (with a particular focus on England and on research undertaken since 2004) and examples of current practice obtained through e-mail requests to local authorities.

- Phase Two: in-depth case studies in five local authorities (labelled Authority A–E) to identify practice-based evidence on effective leadership and governance for narrowing the gap, involving a total of 25 interviews with a range of staff including directors and assistant directors of children's services, councillors/lead members, strategic managers, and chairs of governing boards. (The same case-study sample was used for both studies.)

Features of effective leadership and of effective governance

Literature review and case-study findings of both reports highlight a two-way relationship between leadership and governance:

Children's trusts will require strong governance, in particular a powerful integrated governing board or structure through which senior representatives of all key partner organisations can give strategic leadership and direction, and drive through change (HM Government, 2005, p. 21).

Given this two-way relationship, it may be particularly fruitful for children's services to focus their efforts for narrowing the gap on the overlapping features of effective leadership and governance. These are:

- **a relentless focus on the 'core business' of narrowing the gap** for vulnerable groups, with absolute clarity about which gaps, which outcomes and for which groups

- **representing and championing the voice of vulnerable groups**, including dedicated leaders that campaign on their behalf and opportunities for vulnerable groups' participation to really influence decisions

- **using good quality data and information**, including local intelligence, to inform resource allocation and monitor and review progress towards narrowing the gap
- **ensuring that partnership working**, with its frameworks, roles and responsibilities, **imbibes a 'can-do' ethos**, focusing on challenge and support, rather than blame.

How do leaders contribute to effective governance?

The important role that leaders play in supporting effective governance, by promoting interagency collaboration and focusing on local issues and outcomes, is identified in both the literature and the case studies for both reports.

What the literature says

Leaders play an important role in governance (DfES, 2006). They provide 'direction' for governance through fostering a 'shared understanding' (NCSL, 2008a), clarity around roles between local and national actors (Craig, 2005; Lownsborough and O'Leary, 2005; Brookes, 2006), promoting collaboration and joined-up working (Harker *et al.*, 2004; NCSL 2008b; UEA with NCB, 2007), and encouraging commitment at all levels (Robinson *et al.*, 2008).

Effective leadership contributes to effective governance by encouraging interagency cooperation. Indeed, because interagency governance arrangements are relatively new and still evolving around the ECM and children's services' agendas, there is a need for strong leadership for governance. Strong leadership is required to 'manage the difficult task of bringing all parties [of integrated services] to the table' (UEA with NCB 2005, p. 91). The literature also highlights the governing responsibilities of children's services leaders (particularly directors, political leaders and children's trust managers). These are set out in Box 2. It would seem important that these 'top' level leaders have overall responsibility for interagency governance.

> **Box 2 Leaders contribution to the governance of partnerships**
>
> - 'Evidence suggests that the children's trust board needs a strong chair, able to lead the group and manage the difficult task of bringing all parties to the table' (UEA with NCB, 2005, p. 91).
> - 'Within the local authority, the DCS and the Lead Member for Children's Services have the lead role in establishing and maintaining the interagency governance arrangements' (HM Government, 2005, p. 3).
> - 'It is usual for members of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) [which includes political leaders] to be members of Area Child Protection Committees and LSCBs' (UEA with NCB, 2005).
> - 'Children's trust pathfinder managers ... contributed to interagency governance between the local authority and their partners providing services for children' (UEA with NCB, 2007, p. 3).

- 'The chair and the chief executive share in the leadership role. The chair's role is to lead the governing body, ensuring it makes an effective contribution to the governance of the organisation; and the chief executive's role is to lead the organisation in implementing strategy and managing the delivery of services. A good working relationship between the two can make a significant contribution to effective governance' (ICGGPS, 2004).

As well as supporting interagency governance, leadership supports governance within single agencies, in particular within schools (Box 3). In the context of narrowing the gap, school leaders encourage school governing bodies to focus on the ECM agenda and on vulnerable groups.

Box 3 School leadership supports school governance

- In a study of the leadership of extended schools, Craig (2005) found that a new ethos of school leadership meant that there were changing approaches to governance and that many extended schools were loosening the reigns of formal regulation and bureaucracy within school (Craig, 2005).

- Coleman (2006) found some headteachers reported mixed experiences of trying to win commitment of governing bodies in relation to the ECM agenda and that head teachers needed to undertake ongoing awareness raising and information sharing with school governors.

- Kendall *et al.* (2007b), looking at how leaders in extended schools respond to local needs, found that these leaders could promote ECM as a framework against which governing bodies could evaluate school outcomes.

The literature further identifies that leaders are instrumental in ensuring that local issues remain a key feature of governance. Structures and processes need to be in place to support and address issues at the local level (Craig, 2005; DfES, 2006; SQW Limited, 2005; UEA with NCB, 2007). Through activities such as joint commissioning, planning, coordination and cross-cutting initiatives, leaders are able to promote their local agenda (UEA with NCB, 2007).

What the case studies say

The case studies highlight the role of leadership in strengthening interagency cooperation and in the articulation of governance.

The leadership has to set the direction – if you don't have strong leadership that articulates the vision for the governance framework then it will never get delivered (Authority A).

You can't have effective governance without effective leadership. If you had poor leadership you are unlikely to have the clarity about process and accountability that you need for good governance (Authority C).

[It] *comes back to the leadership ... when you are working in a partnership arrangement you don't have any real accountability other than the duty to cooperate. Leadership has improved the way the governance works within organisations* (Authority A).

leadership and governance

Children's services leaders talk about their governing roles, noting that you need 'strong chairmanship of any of the committees that are guiding change for children' (Authority A). Several of our interviewed Lead Members for Children's Services are quasi-chairs or governors of virtual LAC schools. Such leaders need to lead 'through the children's trust arrangements'.

> *You need a leader with the ability to lead and enthuse and be passionate about what they are doing but with that grounding in process, so they understand how they are going to deliver and that will lead to good governance* (Authority C).

Box 4 Leaders' and Children's Trust Board roles

In one authority the children's trust board has a role in reorganising the way health services manage and provide services to reflect geographic areas. Other services are now beginning to see that this is the way they need to focus. The leaders' role was to **articulate the vision** of the governance framework in order for the reorganising to be delivered. **Interagency cooperation** was important:

If you want the vision to be delivered then you need to govern in a way that invites people to take part and commit to the vision, leaving them feeling that their contribution has made a difference. If you can get people thinking and feeling that way, you can move forward positively (Authority C).

The case studies also highlight new relationships between local authority leaders and school governing boards. Local authority leaders challenge school governing boards about LAC for example.

How does governance support effective leadership?

Both the literature and case-study findings indicate that governance plays an important role in providing strategic direction for leaders and helping them to foster commitment, shared aims and accountability.

What the literature says

Governance supports leadership through arrangements and frameworks. These include partnership agreements, 'outcome-based' accountability frameworks (Utting *et al.*, 2008), and the DfES Championing Children Framework (DfES, 2006). Such frameworks support effective leadership by providing strategic direction for leaders:

> *The implementation of good governance arrangements can be important in driving management, and* [changes in] *culture, structure and process* (SQW Limited, 2005, p. 28).

Governance frameworks foster agreed and shared objectives and vision, including clarifying roles and responsibility (NCSL, 2008a; Brookes, 2006; Thompson and Uyeda, 2004). These are features of effective leadership for narrowing the gap (Martin *et al.*, 2009). Governance frameworks also help leaders to establish accountability. Accountability is central to the purpose and function of governance and important for effective leadership (Bond, 2004; Balarin and Lauder, 2008; SQW Ltd., 2005). NCSL (2008b) found that:

Effective leaders think creatively about governance arrangements so that there is shared participation, shared responsibility and accountability, and so that partnerships are sustainable.

Accountability ensures that decision-making is transparent across the collaborating agencies (HM Government, 2005) and it is important in monitoring performance in change management (SQW, Limited, 2005; Brookes, 2006; Thompson and Uyeda, 2004). When managing change, effective leaders work openly with those responsible for the governance of services (DfES, 2006).

What the case studies say

The case studies indicate that governance provides leaders with strategic direction within which to operate. In the context of narrowing the gap, this can focus leaders on outcomes.

I see governance as the structures that are put in place that allow leadership to flourish (Authority A).

Governance structures underpin the leadership focus on improving outcomes (Authority E).

Governance provides direction and strategy for leadership (Authority B).

In addition, the case studies highlight that governance provides important boundaries for leaders.

Governance will prescribe on occasions what you can do as a leader and how much you can do. Your governance directs your leadership and gives you boundaries for your leadership (Authority C).

I can't steam off in one direction if people who are in charge of governance want me to go in another direction (Authority C).

As in the literature, a strong case-study theme is that governance provides a framework of accountability that leaders operate within – for themselves, and to hold organisations or individuals to account.

Governance is the framework for accountability, scrutiny and management of leaders within that framework. You have to have leaders who know to whom they are accountable (Authority C).

Accountability arrangements are part leadership and part governance, when things are taken to scrutiny this is partly leadership and partly governance – the process is governance, the way it is pitched is leadership (Authority C).

Leadership sets the direction and makes sure that it happens ... governance is the accountability for that (Authority C).

Accountability helps leaders to make informed and transparent decisions, and contributes to a leadership style of high expectations and challenge – an area particularly noted as a feature of governance in narrowing the gap (Lord *et al.,* 2009).

People come to those [interagency] meetings knowing that they will be challenged if they haven't made the strides that we need them to make (Authority C).

Summary

There is a two-way link between leadership and governance. In the context of narrowing the gap, particular overlapping features of both governance and leadership are important, especially an unrelenting focus on vulnerable groups. Strong leadership contributes to effective governance by promoting interagency collaboration, shared understanding and clear roles and responsibilities. In the context of narrowing the gap for vulnerable children and young people, this is particularly important for ensuring that a holistic approach is adopted and their varied needs are met. Strong leadership also contributes to effective governance by ensuring that the needs of the local population, including those of vulnerable groups, remain at the forefront of the agenda. In turn, governance frameworks provide strategic direction for leaders, help them to foster commitment, shared aims and to hold people to account. Such frameworks can be particularly important in ensuring accountability for sometimes marginalised minority groups.

References

Brookes, S. (2006). 'Out with the old, in with the new: why excellent public leadership makes a difference to partnership working', *The British Journal of Leadership in Public Services*, **2**, 1, 52–64.

Coleman, A. (2006). *Lessons from Extended Schools*. Nottingham: NCSL.

Craig, J. (2005). *Taking the Wide View: the New Leadership of Extended Schools*. London: Demos.

Department for Education and Skills (2006). *Championing Children: a Shared Set of Skills, Knowledge and Behaviours for Those Leading and Managing Integrated Children's Services*. Non-Statutory Guidance. London: DfES.

Harker, R.M., Dobel-Ober, D., Berridge, D. and Sinclair, R. (2004). 'More than the sum of its parts? Inter-professional working in the education of looked after children', *Children and Society*, **18**, 3, 179–193.

HM Government (2005). *Statutory Guidance on Inter-Agency Co-Operation to Improve the Wellbeing of Children: Children's Trusts*. London: DfES [online]. Available http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrdering Download/1680-2005PDF-EN-01.pdf [3 March, 2009].

The Independent Commission for Good Governance in Public Services (2004). *The Good Governance Standard for Public Services*. London: OPM and CIPFA [online]. Available: http://www.opm.co.uk/resources/papers/ policy/Good_Gov_Standard.pdf [3 March, 2009].

Kendall, S., Lamont, E., Wilkin, A. and Kinder, K. (2007). *Every Child Matters: How School Leaders in Extended Schools Respond to Local Needs*. Nottingham: NCSL [online]. Available: http://www.ncsl.org.uk/ media/AFB/86/ECM-how-school-leaders-respond-full.pdf [3 March, 2009].

Lownsborough, H. and O'Leary, D. (2005). *The Leadership Imperative: Reforming Children's Services from the Ground Up*. London: Demos.

Lord, P., Martin, K. and Atkinson, M. (2009). *Narrowing the Gap in outcomes: What is the relationship between leadership and governance?* Slough: NFER. Martin, K., Lord, P., White, R., Mitchell, H. and Atkinson, M. (2009, forthcoming). Narrowing the Gap in outcomes: Leadership. Slough: NFER.

National College for School Leadership (2008a). *ECM Premium Project: School Leadership, Every Child Matters and School Standards. Identifying Links Between ECM and Improvements in School Standards*. Nottingham: NCSL [online]. Available: http://www.ncsl.org.uk/ecm-premium-project summary. pdf [25 February, 2009].

National College for School Leadership (2008b). *What We Are Learning About: Leadership of Every Child Matters* (Report Summary). Nottingham: NCSL [online]. Available: http://www.ncsl.org.uk/what-we-are-learning about. pdf [3 March, 2009].

Robinson, M., Atkinson, M. and Downing, D. (2008). *Supporting Theory Building in Integrated Services Research*. Slough: NFER [online]. Available: http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/pdfs/downloadable/CYLe-report.pdf [10 September, 2008].

SQW Limited (2005). *Research to Inform the Management and Governance of Children's Centres, Final report to DfES*. London: SQW Limited [online]. Available: http://www.sqw.co.uk/file_download/23 [3 March, 2009].

Thompson, L. and Uyeda, K. (2004). *Family Support: Fostering Leadership and Partnership to Improve Access and Quality*. Los Angeles, CA: National Centre for Infant and Early Childhood Health Policy.

University of East Anglia with the National Children's Bureau (2005). *Realising Children's Trust Arrangements: National Evaluation of Children's Trusts. Phase 1 Report* (DfES Research Report 682). London: DfES [online].Available: http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/ RR682.pdf [3 March, 2009].

University of East Anglia with the National Children's Bureau (2007). *Children's Trust Pathfinders: Innovative Partnerships for Improving the Wellbeing of Children and Young People. National Evaluation of Children's Trust Pathfinders Final Report* (DfES Research Report 839). London: DfES. [online]. Available: http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/ RR839.pdf [3 March, 2009].

Utting, D., Painter, A., Renshaw, J. and Hutchinson, R. (2008). *Better Outcomes for Children and Young People: from Talk to Action*. London: DCSF [online]. Available: http://www.rcslt.org/news/from_talk_to_action [3 March, 2009].