The role of the Lead Member for Children's Services

Final Report

Local Government Analysis and Research

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Contents

Executive summary

Background and aims of the research

- All local authorities (LAs) are required under The Children Act (2004) to appoint a Director of Children's Services (DCS) and a Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS). Briefly, the role of the Lead Member, according to Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guidance (DfES, 2005), is to have political accountability for Children's Services; to communicate with, and engage partners, communities and end-users in meeting children's needs and the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda; and to have particular responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

- The Local Government Association initially commissioned the NFER to explore: whether Lead Members for Children's Services have sufficient information and support to carry out their role effectively, especially in relation to their corporate parenting role; LMCSs' personal knowledge of the educational attainment of children in public care (CiPC); their awareness of issues affecting CiPC; time spent on the corporate parenting role; and engaging wider membership and support for the corporate parenting role. Further work was then undertaken to explore the overall role of the LMCS in more detail, including the manageability of the role; arrangements for continuity; and support and training issues.

Research methodology

The research consisted of three phases:

- **Phase 1:** an audit of the role of the LMCS as corporate parent via the completion of a proforma (March – April 2007). A total of 169 proformas were sent to Lead Members in 151 LAs, and 74 were returned; a response rate of 44 per cent of Lead Members and 49 per cent of LAs in England

- **Phase 2:** telephone interviews with 32 LMCSs to explore the wider remit of the role (May – July 2007)

- **Phase 3:** case studies in five LAs to explore the LMCS role in greater depth (including a focus on good practice relating to various aspects of the role) (August – October 2007). This involved telephone interviews with LMCSs, DCSs and a range of other professionals and partners working and interacting with the LMCS.

The audit of the corporate parenting role: key findings

Information for the corporate parenting role

- Sixty-eight of the 74 Lead Members noted that they received enough information to fulfil their corporate parenting role effectively.

- There was flexibility and diversity in the ways in which Lead Members received their information, reflecting a combination of procedural and regular information flow, as well as the ability to request and receive information on an ad hoc basis as required.

- Information sources included: strategic level meetings (with the DCS and senior officers); meetings with other LA staff and practitioners; corporate parenting panels and other panel meetings; statistical updates; reports and briefings; and LA scrutiny and external reviews.

- Suggested improvements in the information available to LMCS included: the flow and regularity of data regarding the educational results of CiPC (especially at an individual case level); health issues; and clearer information and more guidance regarding the Lead Member's corporate parenting role.

Lead Members' awareness of issues affecting children in public care

- Lead Members were most likely to know about children in public care's attainment levels at GCSE and 'A' level or equivalent and less likely to have an awareness of attainment levels in other qualifications and for younger CiPC.

- The majority of Lead Members had an awareness of CiPC population trends and the actual numbers of CiPC within their LA and they also appeared confident that they knew CiPCs' thoughts on their care.

- Lead Members felt that they had an awareness of other factors affecting CiPC, including their thoughts on their education, their safety and their access to leisure and social activities.

- Lead Members were less confident in their knowledge of how many CiPC had to move school as a result of being looked after. Lead Members also had less knowledge about the numbers of young people who had moved placement.

Time spent by Lead Members on the corporate parenting role

- There was considerable variation in the amount of time LMCSs reported spending on their corporate parenting role, ranging from half an hour to 65 hours per week. Possible amalgamation of total time spent on council duties and specific corporate parenting responsibilities may in part explain some of this inconsistency.

Shared responsibility for corporate parenting

- The majority (70) of Lead Members shared their corporate parenting responsibility. Over four-fifths of respondents shared their corporate parenting role with backbenchers, just under two-thirds with the scrutiny chair or vice-chair and just under half of Lead Members shared the corporate parenting role with another cabinet member. In more than a quarter of cases, their corporate parenting responsibilities were shared between the LMCS, cabinet members, the scrutiny chair and backbenchers.

Engaging the wider membership in corporate parenting

- Strategies to encourage and support other elected members' involvement in, and responsibility for, corporate parenting were described by all but five Lead Members. These included: corporate parenting panels; training and seminars; scrutiny process; visiting children and children's homes; and sharing the role with a cabinet member.

- Barriers and challenges relating to engaging the wider membership in corporate parenting included: low levels of interest displayed by member colleagues; time constraints; and a lack of clarity and information about the agenda for sharing corporate parenting and how the role could be effectively divided into manageable components.

Support for corporate parenting

- The vast majority of respondents (69 out of 74 respondents) felt that the support they received was adequate for them to be able to fulfil their corporate parenting role effectively. Those feeling insufficiently supported, suggested that increased opportunities for meeting with officers to obtain information would be beneficial.

- Despite the overall levels of satisfaction with the support received, more than four-fifths (61) of lead members offered suggestions for improvements. These focused on: greater support, contact and communication with stakeholders; improvements in the nature of the information available; greater contact with care users and carers; additional resources and financial support; more time for the corporate parenting role; more training and development of knowledge of CiPC and the care system; more guidance and good practice information on effective corporate parenting; and better government and public support (such as the need for greater support to raise the profile of CiPC, as well as clarity about the LMCS role).

The wider picture of the Lead Member role: key findings

Backgrounds and experience of Lead Members

- Over a third of interviewees had a professional background in working with children and young people through education or social services. The majority of interviewees with no such professional background noted having relevant political experience (e.g. previously chair of social services/education committee).

- Lead Members were also involved in a range of other bodies related to Children's Services, from the school (e.g. school governor), to the national, and regional level (e.g. regional champion for children).

Factors in portfolio allocation

- In the case studies four major factors were identified as underpinning appointment to the LMCS role: the importance, complexity and status of the LMCS portfolio meant that it was appropriate to allocate it to a senior member e.g. deputy leader of a party group. The relevant political experience of portfolio holders was a key reason for appointing as was the substantive knowledge members possessed (often gained through previous professional experience). In addition, personal attributes, such as an individual's reputation for innovating and being proactive, their capacity to 'engage and communicate', and their credibility amongst colleagues and services users, were also highlighted.

The role of the Lead Member in the integration of Children's Services

- Lead Members described their involvement with integrating Children's Services in terms of greater working with a range of other agencies and services (e.g. the third sector, police, health, the youth service, Youth Offending Teams (YOTs)).

- Lead Members also described their role in integration in terms of the combining of education and social services to form a Children's Services directorate, and improved working across the departments, directorates and districts of a local authority (e.g. housing and planning, regeneration).

- Lead Members reported having a key role in promoting an ethos and culture of partnership working generally through policy, their monitoring capacity, and in identifying opportunities for engaging with partners.

- The nature and level of Lead Member involvement with the integration of Children's Services varied. Most Lead Members were involved in integrating Children's Services at an authority-wide, strategic level (e.g. via the Children and Young Persons Partnership Board/Children's Trust). However, the extent to which they were involved at the local level (i.e. district, Primary Care Trust areas) was less consistent (e.g. working directly with partners and representation on local, multi-agency cluster boards).

The manageability of the Lead Member role

- Lead Members frequently described the Children's Services portfolio as 'wide ranging' and 'the largest portfolio of the cabinet', due in particular to the diversity and pervasiveness of children's issues; the high public profile of children's well-being and achievement; the responsibility for children's welfare; and the large budget associated with the service.

- The manageability of the role was felt to vary, depending on the foci of work at the time. Pressure points were noted around: elections; budget setting; and specific projects, such as school building programmes. Interviewees also noted the ongoing challenge of balancing the demands of the Children's Services portfolio with their ward councillor role. Role sharing was seen as a way of

increasing manageability. Overall, the main challenge specific to the Lead Member role focused on time and capacity issues.

Formal sharing of the Lead Member role

- Just under two-thirds (20) of Lead Members interviewed in Phase 2 noted that they formally shared their Children's Services portfolio and in just under half of these instances, a 'deputy model' had been adopted. This involved up to three non-cabinet elected members carrying out aspects of the role under the Lead Member's direction. In six authorities, a 'division model' (usually dividing the education and social care aspect of the role between two cabinet members) had been introduced; and in five cases, the role had been divided and deputies assigned. There was some evidence that the tendency to formally share the Lead Member for Children's Services role was increasing.

Informal sharing of the Lead Member role

- Two-thirds of Lead Members shared their role informally either with scrutiny (e.g. asking scrutiny members to focus on particular issues/aspects of the Children's Service) and/or 'unofficially' with other councillors (e.g. sharing responsibility for undertaking Regulation 33 visits to children's homes).

Continuity and succession planning

- Three-quarters of interviewees felt there would be someone within their own party who could take on the role if they were to leave. Most of these were confident in the level of expertise of their successor; although others felt training and induction would be necessary. The remaining interviewees suggested there was currently no identifiable successor within their own party.

- A third of Lead Members felt succession planning required attention and improvement.

- Only half of the interviewees felt there were succession arrangements in place if there was a change in party controlling the authority. Reasons for the lack of arrangements included: unlikelihood of a change in party; the successive party would not welcome support/interference; and political disparities.

Training for the Lead Member role

- All but one interviewee mentioned that they had received some form of training for their Lead Member role and more than two-fifths (14) of interviewees detailed more than one source of training. Just under two-thirds (20) of Lead Members stated that they had undertaken Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) training, most notably in relation to leadership, which was generally well received. Approximately a third (11) of interviewees indicated that that they had attended training provided by their authority, which included the induction offered to new members, as well as more specific subject areas, such as issues relating to the care of looked-after children (LAC) in the authority.

- 'Informal training' and skill development accrued whilst operating as LMCS or during their professional and political careers was also seen as effective.

- Nearly half (15) of Lead Members stated that they had attended regional or national IDeA Lead Member Networks. The majority noted that these were valuable opportunities to meet with other members and share information and good practice.

- The need for the LMCS to be proactive in seeking out relevant training and networking opportunities was raised.

Additional support for the Lead Member role

- Nearly a third (ten) of interviewees felt that they did not require any additional support to carry out their role, as their LAs provided everything they needed. Just under a fifth (six) of interviewees suggested that support, in terms of capacity and logistical issues, such as administrative and financial support (for conference attendance), would be beneficial.

- Six interviewees also identified training, guidance and communication as potential areas requiring additional support. National guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the LMCS, as well as training in specific subjects/issues was called for. Mentoring for new Lead Members was suggested as was the development of an email/virtual network of Lead Members that might overcome the time constraints and financial pressures currently preventing some members from accessing the training available. This was corroborated in case-study interviews.

Key messages from the interview phase:

- Consider the manageability and succession of the role.

- Recognise the value of ensuring support, information and training for Lead Members.

- Promote the qualities and characteristics of successful Lead Members.

Concluding comments

- Diversity is evident in the ways the LMCS role is undertaken in different authorities. Variability existed in the accounts of the amount of time committed to the role; the amount of information, training and support Lead Members think they receive and their degree of involvement with national and regional networks. Sharing the role is another notable variable across local authorities as is the extent of LMCSs' active involvement with end-users and frontline teams.

- The effectiveness of the LMCS role can be seen to involve three core elements: *partnership*, *proactivity* and *proximity*. The relationship between an LMCS and a DCS (and other officers) was described in terms of complementary working underpinned by trust, mutual respect and clarity around the two roles. Political skills and experience, substantive knowledge featured prominently in the 'ingredient list' of effective LMCSs. In addition, an LMCS's capacity to 'make things happen', be effective at engaging and communicating and be proactive in seeking out knowledge and information seem key qualities highlighted by officers and partners.

1   Introduction

Background

All local authorities (LAs) were required under The Children Act (2004) to appoint a Director of Children's Services (DCS) and a Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS). Briefly, the role of the Lead Member, according to Department for Education and Skills (DfES, now DCSF – Department for Children, Schools and Families) guidance (DfES, 2005), is to have political accountability for Children's Services, to communicate with, and engage partners, communities and end-users in meeting children's needs and the Every Child Matters agenda, and to have particular responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. As part of the remit for safeguarding children, the Lead Member has primary responsibility for corporate parenting, and ensuring the welfare and educational achievement of children and young people in public care (DfES and Local Government Information Unit, 2003).

A recent small-scale study by Schagen *et al.* (2007, unpublished) investigated the role of the Lead Member in 16 local authorities. The report highlighted the breadth of responsibilities undertaken as part of the role of Lead Member and alluded to some variation between authorities in terms of remit, structure and organisation. The report revealed some challenges for Lead Members, including gathering information from different services and raising awareness within the council of the role and responsibility of corporate parent. Support provided to Lead Members from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and the Local Government Association (LGA) was found to be appropriate, useful and of good quality.

The LGA commissioned this research to explore whether Lead Members have sufficient information and support to carry out their role effectively, including a focus on their corporate parenting role and whether they have any particular support needs. In addition, as the research progressed, the LGA requested details of issues such as the roles and responsibilities of the LMCS (including, in commissioning and engaging with end-users); the manageability of the role; the Lead Member's relationship with the DCS; and continuity and succession planning.

Aims of the study

In this way the study sought to investigate the following questions:

- How do LMCSs view their role as corporate parent and what is their understanding of the role? (e.g. understanding of the wider role of the LMCS and how corporate parenting fits within this)

- How has the corporate parenting role been implemented within LAs (e.g. what are the roles and responsibilities associated with this post? What the LMCS role entails in terms of political accountability, leadership and focus on safeguarding and engaging with end-users)

- What additional support do Lead Members require to fulfil their role? (e.g. support to fulfil the corporate parenting aspect and wider LMCS role; what support they require to overcome any challenges faced in meeting their role, such as engaging with other agencies and portfolio areas)

- How do Lead Members access support in fulfilling their role? (e.g. awareness and use made of IDeA guidance)

- What is the role of the Lead Member more generally, in terms of commissioning, planning (succession and continuity planning), and budget setting?

- Where does the office of Lead Member for Children's Services sit within the LA? Do LAs adopt different models, remits and structures for the Lead Member role? (e.g. the character and arenas of function of the LMCS role, including who LMCS engage with to fulfil their role).

Methodology

The study comprised three complementary phases:

- **Phase 1**: an audit of the role of the LMCS as corporate parent via the completion of a short postal proforma (March – April 2007). Proformas were sent to 169 Lead Members in the 151 English LAs; 74 were returned (providing a sample of 49 per cent of LAs in England)

- **Phase 2**: telephone interviews with 32 LMCSs to explore the wider remit of the LMCS role (May – July 2007)

- **Phase 3**: case studies in five LAs to explore the LMCS role in greater depth (including a focus on good practice relating to various aspects of the role) (August – October 2007). This involved telephone interviews with LMCSs, DCSs and a range of other professionals and partners working and interacting with LMCSs.

For further details about the methodology, instruments used, sample sizes and analytical approach, see Appendices 1–3 on pages 49–57.

Report structure

The report draws on the data from all three phases of the research and is set out in three parts:

- **Part one** draws on data from the phase 1 proforma returns to explore the LMCS role as corporate parent.

- **Part two** presents details from phase 2 telephone interviews examining the wider role of LMCS (with additional case-study interview data inserted in text boxes throughout).

- **Part three** presents illustrative case studies to outline specific aspects of good practice in relation to the LMCS role in partnership working, commissioning and devolved commissioning, corporate parenting and engaging with end-users.

1 The role of the Lead Member for Children's Services as corporate parent

1.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings from the initial audit of the Lead Member for Children's Services's corporate parenting role and is based on proforma responses from 74 LMCSs. It covers issues such as information received by LMCSs on the corporate parenting role, their awareness of the education progress of children in public care and how to improve support for the corporate parenting role.

1.2 About the sample

Responses were received from Lead Members within the following types of LA:

Table 1.1 Responses by LA type

Title	No. of responses (N)	% of total responses	No. of LAs to which proformas were sent (N)	Proportion of responses by LA type (%)
London boroughs	16	22	33	48
Metropolitan LAs	13	18	36	36
County LAs	22	30	35*	63
Unitary LAs	23	31	47	49
Total	**74**	**101****	**151**	

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007

* for the purposes of the analysis the borough council included in the study was counted as a county LA as it was situated within a county LA

** percentages may add up to more than 100 due to rounding

Table 1.1 shows that the most frequent responses were from Lead Members in county and unitary LAs, whilst the lowest response rate was from Lead Members in metropolitan LAs.

Analysis of the proforma responses showed that the majority (three-fifths) of respondents (45/74) were female. When responses were analysed by LA type, Lead Members in county authorities were nearly three times more likely to be female than male (see Table 1.2). The differences in other types of LA were less marked, although it was interesting to note that, in metropolitan LAs, Lead Members were more likely to be male.

Table 1.2 Gender distribution by LA type

Type of LA	Male (N)	Female (N)
London boroughs	5	11
Metropolitan LAs	8	5
County LAs	6	16
Unitary LAs	10	13
Total	**29**	**45**

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007

Respondents were also asked to provide their title, which helped give some indication of the remit of their role. A total of 59 (out of 74) respondents provided a title related to their role within the council. The most common title, as highlighted in Table 1.3, was 'Cabinet or Lead Member for Children's Services'. Other respondents' titles indicated a wider remit, including young people and families, whilst others had a specific educational or learning remit (and in one case a lifelong learning remit) within their title. About one in five (12) respondents provided their generic title of 'councillor'. Three respondents' titles also had a health and/or social services focus, for example 'Cabinet Member for Health and Social Services'.

Table 1.3 Respondents' title

Title	No. of responses (N)
Cabinet or Lead Member children's services / Executive or lead executive member children's services	17
Cabinet or lead or executive member for children and young people or for children	17
Councillor	12
Cabinet member children's services and learning / Cabinet member education and children's services / Cabinet member for children and lifelong learning / Cabinet member education, children and young people	7
Cabinet or Lead Member for children and families / family and children's services	3
Cabinet or Lead Member for children, young people and families	3
Cabinet member / lead elected member	2
Cabinet member for health and social services	1
Executive member children's social services	1
Health visitor borough council	1

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007

In terms of their length of time in office, respondents had varying experience as councillors. The longest serving Lead Member had been a councillor for nearly 40 years, joining in May 1967, whilst the most recently appointed Lead Member had joined the council in May 2006. Table 1.4 shows that Lead Members had most commonly been on the council between six and ten years, although just under a third, particularly from unitary LAs, had been on the council for more than ten years.

Table 1.4   Time on council

Title	London (16)	Metro (13)	Unitary (23)	County (22)	Total (74)
1 year or less		1			**1**
2 to 5 years	6	3	2	1	**12**
6 to 10 years	6	4	9	18	**37**
More than 10 years	4	4	12	3	**23**
No response		1			**1**

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007

Lead Members had, on average, been on the council for 11 years. All had become Lead Members for Children's Services more recently (see Table 1.5), generally between one and three years, although just under a third had only had responsibility for this role for a year or less, reflecting the development in Children's Services within LAs.

Table 1.5 Time as Lead Member for Children's Services

Title	London (16)	Metro (13)	Unitary (23)	County (22)	Total (74)
1 year or less	12	4	5	3	**24**
1+ to 3 years	2	7	11	15	**35**
3+ to 5 years	1	1	5	2	**9**
5+ to 10 years			2		**2**
More than 10 years	1				**1**
No response		1		2	**3**

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007

1.3   Information for the corporate parenting role

Respondents were asked whether they thought they received the information they needed to fulfil their corporate parenting role. Sixty-eight positive responses were recorded, with only one in 12 Lead Members noting that they did not feel that they received the necessary information.

Sixty-six respondents indicated that information came to them through a standard procedure (such as a regular monthly update or a verbal update) and 43 identified a request-based system of information flow.

Lead Members were asked to expand on their responses about how they received the information to fulfil their corporate parenting role by describing the procedure or request-based system in a little more detail. Sixty-three Lead Members responded to this part of the question, some of whom described more than one way they received or accessed information. Table 1.6 presents an overview of the ways in which Lead Members received information to fulfil their corporate parenting role.

Table 1.6   How Lead Members receive information

How information is received	Number of responses N = 74
Strategic-level meetings (Director/Service Heads)	30
Corporate parenting panel/board/group/ forum/committees	21
Meetings and communication as required	17
Other panels and meetings	12
Regular meetings and discussions with staff	10
Data, statistics and information updates	10
Scheduled briefings and reports	7
Scrutiny and external reviews	6
Contact with/information from children and young people	3
LA training sessions on corporate parenting role	2

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007
Respondents could provide more than one option

1.3.1 How Lead Members receive information

Strategic-level meetings

Strategic-level meetings were highlighted by 30 respondents as a key means of receiving information to support their corporate parenting role. Across all LA types, this was the most frequently mentioned means of receiving information. These meetings were generally described as regular meetings, often occurring weekly, with Directors and Assistant Directors of Children's Services. Frequently, these meetings were seen as opportunities for Lead Members to be briefed and informed at Strategic/Director and Head of Service level.

Corporate parenting panels

Twenty-one respondents identified panels, boards, committees and forums as the means by which information regarding corporate parenting was provided. In all but the London Boroughs, these were the second most frequently mentioned source of information in LAs. At such meetings, reports could be generated and findings disseminated as well as providing opportunities for the authority's performance regarding corporate parenting to be monitored and assessed. Such panel meetings were generally identified as taking place on a monthly basis.

Meetings and communication as required

Seventeen respondents (representing all LA types equally) referred to the informal meetings, one-to-one communication, emails and telephone conversations that occurred as and when necessary in order to both acquire and disseminate information.

Other panels and meetings

In addition to corporate parenting panels, committees and forums, 12 respondents (five of whom were from county LAs) also noted that they received information through their involvement with other panels. These included a fostering panel, a special working party focusing on special needs issues and a foster care forum. Respondents also noted working alongside other services and professionals/officers from other sectors of local government, including one authority's Children's Rights service and the LGA.

Regular meetings and discussions with officers and LA staff

Meetings and briefing sessions with officers and staff, often on a weekly basis, were noted as important means of information gathering by ten respondents. This included regular contact with key staff involved with looked-after children. (Only one county council Lead Member identified this as a source of information.) Respondents did not provide any further details regarding these personnel.

Data, statistics and information updates

Ten references were made to the availability of data, statistics and information updates received by Lead Members to support their corporate parenting role. Five of these comments were made by Lead Members from London Boroughs. One respondent noted that they received 'key facts' information on the numbers of looked-after children, ethnicity, gender and placements every two months. Two other respondents noted receiving information regarding key performance measures relating to looked-after children on a quarterly basis. These could include attendance and attainment data for CiPC.

Scheduled briefings and reports

In addition to those Lead Members who noted meetings with staff and service heads, seven respondents stated that they received information through scheduled briefings and reports. No further details were supplied.

Scrutiny and external reviews

Six references were made to the authority's review and scrutiny role in terms of the information relating to looked-after children. Two respondents from unitary and two from county authorities responded in this way. One Lead Member commented that they ensured that work relating to corporate parenting was dealt with by scrutiny. Another referred to the role of an 'Independent Reviewing Officer' overseeing the authority's work with looked-after children.

Contact with/information from children and young people

Three respondents, all from county LAs, noted that they received and generated information either directly, or indirectly, from the young people themselves. In one case, this involved a Lead Member viewing young people's representations contained on a DVD, whilst two others noted visiting residential homes and talking to the young people there.

LA training sessions on corporate parenting role

Two Lead Members suggested that information pertaining to the corporate parenting role was conveyed via LA training sessions at which safeguarding issues were frequently discussed. In one case, training took place during corporate parenting panel meetings.

Summary

Overall, there appeared to be flexibility and diversity in the ways in which Lead Members received their information, reflecting a combination of procedural and regular information flow, as well as the ability to request and receive information on an ad hoc basis as required. This demonstrates the presence of a combination of data/information sources and also reveals communication between Lead Members and others involved with CiPC in the authority, both at practitioner and strategic levels.

Suggested improvements in the information required included the need to improve the flow and regularity of data regarding the educational results of CiPC (especially at an individual case level). In addition, one respondent noted the lack of information relating to the possible health issues, whilst another called for clearer information regarding the Lead Member's corporate parenting role and guidance on how these responsibilities could be fulfilled satisfactorily (this comment was made by a respondent who had held this post for one year or less).

One respondent commented that data protection issues served to prevent obtaining personal knowledge of the circumstances of individual young people. This meant that, without obtaining the child's permission to receive details of the case, corporate parenting could become an interpretation of statistics.

1.4 Lead Members' awareness of the educational progress of children in public care

Respondents were asked whether they personally knew the progress of CiPC at key points in their educational careers, from key stage 1 to 'A' level or equivalent. Table 1.7 shows that Lead Members were most likely to know about CiPCs' attainment levels at GCSE and 'A' level or equivalent. The level of Lead Member awareness in relation to progress at GCSE no doubt reflected the fact that the GCSE attainment of CiPC is a key LA performance indicator and one which receives a great deal of public scrutiny.

Table 1.7 Lead Members' awareness of the educational progress of children in public care

N = 74	Yes	No	No response
'A' level or equivalent	61	10	3
GCSE	66	6	2
Other qualifications e.g. GNVQ, NVQ etc.	46	18	10
key stage 3	45	20	9
key stage 2	44	21	9
key stage 1	41	23	10

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007

Table 1.7 highlights that Lead Members were less likely to have an awareness of attainment levels in other qualifications and for younger CiPC. Just over half of

respondents were aware of CiPCs' levels of attainment at key stage 1 compared with more than four-fifths at GCSE level.

A total of six respondents (one in 12) acknowledged that they were not aware of CiPCs' educational progress at any of the stages identified. There was no apparent pattern between this lack of information and length of time as LMCS and authority type.

1.5 Lead Members' awareness of issues affecting children in public care

Lead Members were asked to respond to a number of questions focusing on their awareness of the issues affecting CiPC. Table 1.8 provides an overview of their responses. Generally, the table shows that the vast majority of Lead Members had an awareness of CiPC population trends and the actual numbers of CiPC within their LA, including the number of out-of-authority placements and the numbers of CiPC placed within their authority by other LAs. They also appeared confident that they knew CiPCs' thoughts on their care. Similarly, approximately three-quarters of respondents felt that they had an awareness of other factors affecting CiPC, i.e. what they felt about their education, how safe they felt and how they felt about their access to leisure and social activities. Slightly fewer respondents, although still more than two-thirds (52), felt that they had an awareness of information relating to CiPCs' mobility. However, the area where Lead Members were less confident in their knowledge also related to mobility; only half of respondents indicated that they knew how many CiPC had to move school as a result of being looked after and more than a quarter did not know about numbers of CiPC placement moves. Given the government's targets to try and reduce the number of school moves for CiPC because of the detrimental impact this is likely to have on their access to education and attainment, this information might be particularly useful for Lead Members in their corporate parenting role.

Table 1.8   Lead Members' awareness of issues affecting children in public care

Do you personally know …. (N = 74)	Yes	No	No response
… whether the children in public care population level is increasing or decreasing in your LA?	69	4	1
… how many children and young people there are living in care in your area, including those placed by another LA?	66	8	-
… how many children and young people living in care who your LA has placed out of area?	65	7	2
… what your children in public care say about their care?	64	8	2
… what your children in public care think about their education?	58	15	1
… what your children in public care say about how safe they feel?	56	15	3
… what your children in public care say about their leisure and social activities?	54	17	3
… how many children in public care have moved placement in the past year?	52	21	1
… how many children in public care have moved placement more than once in the past 3 years?	52	21	1
… how many children in public care have had to move school as a result of being looked after?	37	35	2

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007

1.6 The corporate parenting role

This section describes councillors' views about how much time they spend on their corporate parenting role and how responsibility for corporate parenting is shared.

1.6.1 Time spent on corporate parenting

Respondents were asked to estimate how many hours, on average, per week they devoted to the corporate parenting role. Table 1.9 highlights considerable variation in the amount of time councillors reported spending on their corporate parenting role per week. The amount of time spent on the corporate parenting role was reported to range from half an hour to 65 hours per week. One explanation for this lack of consistency may be that some respondents estimated the amount of time spent on all their council duties, rather than the corporate parent role specifically.

Nevertheless, the differences in the amount of time Lead Members devote to the corporate parenting role may have implications for the manageability and effectiveness of the role.

Table 1.9 Time spent on corporate parenting role

Hours per week spent on role	Number of responses (N = 74)
Half an hour to 2 hours	14
3 to 5 hours	19
6 to10 hours	12
10+ hours	11
Impossible to quantify	14
No response	3
No time spent on role	1

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007

It should be noted that a further 14 respondents felt unable to quantify the amount of time spent on corporate parenting per week. They suggested that the time spent on the role varied greatly from week to week and month to month and so was difficult to average. In addition, some respondents felt that it was impossible to differentiate between the time they spent on corporate parenting and the time spent on other councillor duties, viewing their role more holistically.

1.6.2 Sharing the corporate parenting role

Respondents were asked about whether they shared their corporate parenting role and responsibilities with other members of the council, such as other cabinet members, the scrutiny chair or vice chair, or backbenchers. This section will also describe the strategies respondents adopted to engage the wider membership in corporate parenting, as well as the barriers to engaging wider involvement.

The majority of Lead Members shared their corporate parenting responsibility in some way. Only four of the 74 respondents reported that they did not share the role with anyone. Table 1.10 illustrates that the role was most likely to be shared with backbenchers, followed by the scrutiny chair or vice chair, and finally, another cabinet member.

Table 1.10 Sharing the corporate parenting role

Shares role with… (N = 74)	Yes	No
Backbenchers	61	7
Scrutiny chair/vice chair	44	9
Another cabinet member	35	20
No one	4	-
Cabinet members, scrutiny chair and backbenchers	22	-

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007

In more detail, Table 1.10 illustrates that:

- over four-fifths of respondents shared their corporate parenting role with backbenchers

- just under two-thirds of Lead Members shared their corporate parenting role with the scrutiny chair or vice-chair

- just under half of Lead Members shared the corporate parenting role with another cabinet member

- over a quarter of respondents shared their corporate parenting responsibilities with cabinet members, the scrutiny chair and backbenchers.

1.6.3 Strategies to engage wider membership

Lead Members were asked to describe briefly how they shared their corporate parenting role and responsibilities. Of the 74 respondents, 69 described a range of ways that they engaged wider membership to corporate parenting, as outlined in Table 1.11.

Table 1.11 Strategies to engage wider membership

Strategy to engage wider membership in corporate parenting	Frequency of responses
Corporate parenting panels	54
Training and seminars	15
Scrutiny process	14
Visiting children and children's homes	11
Sharing the role with a cabinet member	10

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007

Each of the strategies Lead Members report using to engage wider membership in corporate parenting will now be discussed below:

Corporate parenting panels

By far the most common response, identified by over two-thirds of participants, was that Lead Members shared their corporate parenting responsibility through a corporate parenting panel, forum or working group. Respondents explained how a corporate parenting panel was usually attended by other cabinet members, backbenchers and scrutiny board members. The corporate parenting panel was likely to have cross-party representation, as well as representation from young people in care themselves. The panels were used to monitor the progress of CiPC and review data on their attainment.

Training and seminars

Over a fifth of respondents indicated that they promoted shared responsibility for corporate parenting by holding seminars, briefings, events and training sessions. Respondents invited and encouraged all councillors and appropriate officers to attend such events. Training, information and briefing sessions on corporate parenting were held as part of the Lead Member's campaign to engage wider membership and shared responsibility for corporate parenting; raising awareness of the issues and equipping colleagues with the appropriate information and knowledge to take responsibility for this important role.

Scrutiny process

Responsibility for corporate parenting was also shared through the scrutiny process, as identified by a fifth of respondents. Members reported to the scrutiny committee about CiPC and corporate parenting issues were reviewed by the committee. In one local authority a sub-scrutiny panel had been established with a specific remit for CiPC.

Visiting children and children's homes

A further way that 11 respondents said that they shared the corporate parenting role was to share responsibilities for visiting children and children's homes with other councillors. Councillors took responsibility for visiting or inspecting care homes, foster families and meeting the young people, often on a rota or geographically divided basis. Although sharing the responsibility for visiting young people in care was noted in a small number of authorities, in other

authorities the role did not appear to be shared to this degree of practical involvement. Some councillors advocated the need for more shared responsibility for engaging with young people in care, as detailed in section 1.8.

Sharing the role with a cabinet member

Ten respondents indicated that engaging wider membership in corporate parenting was also achieved by sharing the role with another cabinet member. Where the corporate parenting role was shared with another cabinet member specific aspects of the role were likely to have been defined and apportioned. For instance, the role of the LMCS was shared and managed in at least one authority by appointing a Lead Member for Education, thus both members would share a remit and responsibility for children and young people in public care. In other authorities, the LMCS took overall and strategic responsibility for corporate parenting, but delegated aspects of the role to deputy portfolio holders.

1.6.4 Barriers to engaging wider membership

Councillors who said that they did not share the corporate parenting role with anyone were asked to identify the barriers to engaging wider membership. As only four respondents indicated that they did not share the role, the amount of information was limited. One respondent noted that engaging wider responsibility was a challenge as most colleagues took little interest in the issue. Another identified lack of time as a barrier to raising awareness and engagement amongst colleagues. The other two respondents suggested the need for greater clarity and information about the agenda for sharing corporate parenting and how the role could be divided into manageable chunks that might encourage wider involvement.

Although the challenges to engaging wider membership were only discussed by a handful of respondents here, the issue was highlighted by other Lead Members as an area requiring further support (see sections 1.7 and 1.8). Respondents called for the need to engage wider involvement in corporate parenting from a range of stakeholders and experts.

1.7 Current levels of support for corporate parenting

Respondents were asked about the adequacy of the support they received from officers for their corporate parenting role. The vast majority of respondents (69 out of 74 respondents) felt that the support they received was adequate. Only three Lead Members felt that they did not receive adequate support from officers. (Two Lead Members did not respond to this question.) These three respondents also identified areas where they lacked sufficient information in response to questions throughout the proforma. Feeling insufficiently supported by officers did not appear to be linked to whether the Lead Member shared their corporate parenting role. Two councillors who felt inadequately supported by officers recommended the need for more information from, and personal contact, with officers. Equally though, several respondents who identified feeling well supported by officers also noted the value of having additional contact with officers, including those from a broader range of services.

Overall, the majority view reported by these Lead Members was that they felt well supported by officers, suggesting that the corporate parenting role was effectively integrated in most authorities. Nevertheless, the data suggested that there may be specific authorities where the communication and support for the role was less effective.

1.8 Improving the support for corporate parenting

Respondents were asked to identify three things that would help them to fulfil their corporate parenting role more effectively. More than four-fifths (61) of Lead Members responded to this question. Despite general satisfaction with the information Lead Members received for their corporate parenting role, a range of suggestions for improvements were offered. Lead Members identified eight areas for development that they felt would help them fulfil their corporate parenting role more effectively. The suggested areas for improvement (and associated frequencies of reference) are summarised in Table 1.12. A more detailed discussion of each of the identified areas for improvement follows Table 12.

Table 1.12 Lead Members' suggestions for improving their capacity to fulfil corporate parenting role

Improvement	Frequency of responses
Greater support, contact and communication with stakeholders	34
Improving the nature of the information available	20
Greater contact with care users and carers	16
Resources and financial support	16
More time for the corporate parenting role	11
More training and development of knowledge of CiPC and the care system	8
More guidance and good practice information on effective corporate parenting	7
Better government and public support	5

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007

1.8.1 Lead Members' suggestions for improving their capacity to fulfil corporate parenting role

Greater support, contact and communication with stakeholders

The most common response, identified by nearly half of respondents, suggested the need for improved support from, and contact with, various representatives coming into contact with CiPC. Lead Members wanted more support from, and contact with, officers, schools, social workers, health officers and neighbouring authorities. Primarily, Lead Members advocated the need for greater support and involvement from other councillors, for instance, in engaging with looked-after children. Generally, there was felt to be a need for greater inter-agency collaboration with increased involvement and responsibility for corporate parenting from all departments and services in order to ensure Lead Members were sufficiently informed. Such inter-agency working was deemed to rely on establishing panels, forums and working parties, and, in several instances where these were in operation, the effectiveness of such an approach was noted. One Lead Member highlighted the need for clarity and structure regarding the positioning of the corporate parenting process within the authority.

Improving the nature of the information available

Suggestions for improving the nature of information received by Lead Members for their corporate parenting role were raised by more than a quarter (20) of respondents in terms of the regularity of the information provided, as well as the type of information and how it should be presented. In particular, some Lead Members felt the information currently received did not tell them everything they needed to know. They wanted more information on:

- the educational progress of CiPC and for this to highlight the young people with special educational needs

- the numbers involved in vocational training

- the numbers of out-of-county placements

- the numbers achieving independence and the types of support offered.

Nine Lead Members requested the need for additional statistical information, more relevant and sensible performance indicators and easier tracking data. Two participants also wanted more regular updates of information.

Greater contact with care users and carers

Over a fifth (16) of Lead Members suggested the need for greater contact with care users (i.e. young people in care), as well as, to a lesser extent, increased contact with carers and foster carers. Respondents wanted more opportunities to meet with young people in care, while one highlighted the need to reach a wider range of children and young people in care.

Resources and financial support

Over a fifth of respondents (16) suggested that in order to improve the fulfilment of their corporate parenting role they required additional resources and financial support. Where respondents provided further details, they advocated the need for administrative support for their corporate parenting role; increased discretion regarding spending; increased finances and resources to support their corporate parenting responsibility; and additional funding for the care service generally.

More time for the corporate parenting role

A number of Lead Members (11) indicated that they needed additional time to fulfil their corporate parenting role. Two respondents emphasised that their corporate parenting role was just one aspect of a wide-ranging portfolio.

More training and development of knowledge of CiPC and the care system

Eight Lead Members (approximately one in ten) suggested that further training about the corporate parenting role was required to widen commitment, understanding and involvement amongst the council. Some respondents also noted that they would appreciate more literature on case studies of CiPC and more information about the care system, such as the process for selecting foster carers. It was felt that this enhanced information would supplement officer briefings, and enable the Lead Member to fulfil their corporate parenting role more effectively. Additional comments made by respondents suggested that the level of knowledge about the care system may depend upon the Lead Members' background and expertise. This was not considered to be a barrier to fulfilling the role, but support information being more available and accessible was seen as advantageous.

More guidance and good practice information on effective corporate parenting

Seven respondents voiced the need for improved guidance on effective corporate parenting. They suggested such guidance could include greater clarity and definition of the role; outlining the level of involvement required and responsibilities; as well as highlighting examples of good practice in the corporate parenting role. The need for greater sharing of examples of effective corporate parenting practice was also raised by participants in Schagen *et al.*'s (2007) earlier scoping study.

Better government and public support

Five Lead Members offered general suggestions for the need for increased government and public support in fulfilling their corporate parenting duties. They referred to the need for greater support to raise the profile of

CiPC, as well as clarity about the role and general positive support from the government.

Summary

The need for greater support, contact and communication with stakeholders and for additional resources and financial support was mentioned less often by Lead Members from London boroughs than other types of authority. These differences were, however, small and may just reflect the uneven sample distribution. The data was also analysed to investigate whether there was any relationship between the nature of improvements suggested and how the Lead Member shared their role and their length of time as a councillor and as an LMCS. However, no relationships emerged from this analysis.

1.9 Conclusions

The findings from the phase 1 audit of the Lead Members' role as corporate parent present a picture of what responding Lead Members know about corporate parenting and the information and support they receive to undertake the role. The phase 1 audit aimed, in part, to identify what additional support Lead Members required to fulfil their corporate parenting role.

The key messages that emerged from the phase 1 audit are listed below.

(i) Improve the information available to Lead Members regarding CiPC.

This may include:

- increasing Lead Members' awareness of the educational progress of CiPC in key stages 1 to 3 and in vocational qualifications, as well as information about the mobility of CiPC (e.g. mobility and special educational needs of CiPC)

- improving the information available to Lead Members about CiPC from a range of stakeholders

- looking at ways of improving Lead Members' and fellow members' contact with CiPC

- improving the nature and detail of information available to Lead Members, including more individual case-based information, as well as comprehensive statistical information.

(ii) Develop and disseminate strategies for sharing the corporate parenting role.

This may include:

- recognising that the manageability and effectiveness of the corporate parenting role may benefit from shared involvement and commitment from other members. Lead Members may require support in securing this engagement

- publicising the successful strategies adopted in some authorities to engage the wider membership in corporate parenting and to help other authorities overcome the challenges that some Lead Members face in achieving this.

(iii) Develop the capacity and effectiveness of the corporate parenting role via additional training.

This may include:

- making more widely available good practice guidance on effective corporate parenting practices. This may be an area where the IDeA and the LGA could provide important additional support for Lead Members' corporate parenting role

- training on corporate parenting responsibilities for key stakeholders, including other members.

Part two of the report will now explore some of these issues in greater depth and examine the wider role of the LMCS through a qualitative interview programme with Lead Members and relevant colleagues.

2 The role of the Lead Member for Children's Services

2.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on data from 32 telephone interviews with Lead Members for Children's Services undertaken between June and August 2007 in order to explore the wider role of the LMCS. Further data is drawn from case-study interviewees in five authorities and inserted in text boxes throughout this section to illustrate additional perspectives in relation to the relevant sections and topics. The chapter covers Lead Members' experiences and roles and responsibilities; the role of the LMCS in commissioning; Lead Members' engagement with end-users; managing the Lead Member role; and training, challenges and support for Lead Members.

2.2 Lead Members' experiences and roles and responsibilities

2.2.1 Background and experience

Over a third (12) of the telephone interviewee sample had a professional background in working with children and young people, either in education or social services (the former was predominant). The vast majority (17) of interviewees with no professional background related to children had relevant political experience in the area (e.g. previously chair of social services/education committee). However, two interviewees noted that having no professional background prior to taking on the role could be valuable, in terms of facilitating the capacity to scrutinise from an objective position.

Case-study data – Allocating the LMCS portfolio

Case-study interviewees highlighted four major factors underpinning the appointment to the LMCS role.

Status of the portfolio

Comments referred to the importance of the LMCS portfolio and hence how it was appropriate to allocate it to a senior member e.g. deputy leader of a party group.

Relevant political experience

Allocations were also based on individuals' experience of undertaking a similar function prior to the LMCS brief. Previous roles cited included: cabinet member for education; chair of Primary Care Trust (PCT); leading education committees; chair of scrutiny for adult social care. Other comments referred to the individual being 'an experienced politician'. In one instance, it was described as being 'a natural progression' from being cabinet member for education and then Children's Services.

Substantive knowledge

Comments here noted the significance of having a detailed knowledge of the requirements of the LMCS role and its brief, 'especially the safeguarding side'. In addition, relevant prior experience such as a background in social care or school governorship was cited.

Personal attributes

Interviewees highlighted personal qualities as a factor in LMCS appointments. Sometimes the emphasis was on an individual's reputation for innovating ('pushing the boundaries') and being able to move things forward (an ability to make things happen and make a difference); or for their capacity to 'engage and communicate' (with schools and other constituents). 'Credibility' was also referenced, suggesting again the value of a known relevant background.

Interviewees identified their involvement in a range of other bodies related to Children's Services, from the school (e.g. school governor), to the national, and regional level (e.g. regional champion for children). Some Lead Members delegated membership of these bodies (e.g. chairing the corporate parenting panel) to other members as a means of succession planning and engaging wider membership support for the role. Those Lead Members who provided information about their employment status were most likely to be retired or not in employment. Only one Lead Member reported being in full-time employment.

2.2.2 Roles and responsibilities

Interviewees described their role with reference to four overarching themes (in order of frequency):

- accountability
- partnership working
- quality assurance
- statutory responsibility.

Those Lead Members with a professional background were more likely to describe their role in terms of its statutory responsibility than those with a non-professional background. These aspects of their role were fulfilled in the following ways (in order of frequency) (see also Appendix 4 for a diagram of a typical Lead Member 'contact network'):

- meeting with the Director of Children's Services and other leading officers (e.g. to receive briefings, review performance indicators, case files and budgets, and 'challenge' performance where necessary)

- liaison with partners (e.g. via formal meeting structures, such as the Children and Young People (CYP) Partnership Board)

- meeting with end-users to ensure representation of their views and experiences

- reporting to cabinet, full council and scrutiny

- liaison with other directorates and parts of the council (e.g. adult services, finance and resources, transport, communities and regeneration, district councils, housing)

Case-study data – The links between the LMCS and DCS roles

Case-study interviewees who were DCSs were asked to talk about how their role linked with that of the LMCS. Responses showed three recurring emphases:

Statutory significance

More than one interviewee first chose to note a distinctiveness of the LMCS role, implying a 'special' linkage: 'LMCS is the only elected role that is statutorily defined'; 'it's a critical relationship, defined in the legislation'.

Partnership

Another type of response focused on the close and shared responsibility that existed between the two roles. Terms like 'partnership', 'mutual accountability', 'a lot of common ground' or 'both have responsibility for leadership' (across the

Children's Partnership) surfaced in these accounts of linkage.

Distinct roles

Some interviewees chose also to highlight the different remits undertaken by DCS and LMCS within the partnership. One noted that 'LM leads on policy, and DCS leads on management and delivery', while another phrased this distinction as the LM's 'political accountability' compared to the DCS appearing to have 'actual responsibilities for the execution of the Children's Act'. The Lead Member as 'an advocate for young people and young people's services within the Council and leading group' was also noted, while LA officers 'guided and supported' this role. Finally, one nominated the link as the LMCS being 'accountable for holding the DCS to account on the Children's Agenda'.

- reading, researching, devising and implementing policy (including, participation in regional and national events)

- addressing the media and press as the public face of the authority.

2.2.3 Lead Members' role in the integration of Children's Services

All Lead Members were involved with the integration of Children's Services. However, the discourse that Lead Members used to describe integration revealed their interpretation of different levels of integration. Lead Members were most likely to describe their involvement with integrating Children's Services in terms of greater working with a range of other agencies and services (e.g. the third sector, police, health, the youth service, YOTs – Youth Offending Teams). This was followed by Lead Members being equally likely to describe integration in terms of the combining of education and social services to form a Children's Services directorate, and improved working across the departments, directorates and districts of a local authority (e.g. housing and planning, regeneration).

In addition, Lead Members appeared to have a key role in promoting an ethos and culture of partnership working generally through policy, their monitoring capacity and in identifying opportunities for engaging with partners. Lead Members were engaged in promoting the concept and benefits of integrated services for children to relevant partners, including GPs, PCTs, the police, the youth service, the third sector and fire and rescue service; Children's Services officers and other service deliverers; and fellow members and portfolio holders. Lead Members employed a range of strategies to encourage integrated working, including:

- communicating with partners via forums, such as a CYP Strategic Partnership Board, and reviewing progress towards its aims

- involvement in establishing children's centres and local multi-agency teams (e.g. representation on respective boards and forums)

- raising awareness of children's issues at cabinet meetings to encourage cross-directorate working

- policy development – identifying and promoting a common policy direction for integrated Children's Services

- visiting frontline teams (i.e. to gauge the extent of, and promote, cohesion and communication with other agencies)

- endorsement of physical reorganisation of services and seconding staff to different agencies

- monitoring the extent of the coherence of services, for instance via consultation with end-users

- engaging with district services (e.g. representation from district councils on partnership boards, local partnerships and council-wide children related initiatives, such as sports partnerships).

The nature and level of Lead Member involvement with the integration of Children's Services varied. Most Lead Members were involved in integrating Children's Services at an authority-wide, strategic level (e.g. via the CYP Partnership Board/Children's Trust). However, the extent to which they were involved at the local level (e.g. district, PCT areas) was less consistent (e.g. working directly with partners and representation on local, multi-agency cluster boards). Where Lead Members were less occupied at the local level, responsibility for involvement with local partnerships, clusters and teams was often devolved to other council members and backbenchers.

2.2.4 Relationship with the Director of Children's Services

Contact between the Lead Member and the DCS occurred via regular scheduled, often weekly, briefings and meetings, as well as more informal face-to-face, telephone and email communication, as and when necessary. All interviewees indicated that they had good relationships with the DCS. The key descriptors applied to these relationships included: 'trust', 'mutual respect', 'open and honest', 'professional' and 'supportive'. Only two interviewees suggested that their relationship with the DCS could be improved by the instigation of more joint meetings and increased understanding of the Lead Member role amongst officers.

Case-study data – The nature of the interaction between DCS and LMCS

The DCS interviewees confirmed the range of communication channels used between themselves and the LMCS, and also highlighted the various degrees of formality underpinning such interactions. Email; telephone exchanges; one-to-one briefings (e.g. before cabinet or council meetings); 'informal and ad hoc communication'; and formal face-to-face meetings on a monthly basis with records kept or decisions formally recorded were all variously mentioned by the interviewees.

The regularity or ongoing nature of this contact was often referenced: 'at least three times a week'; 'face-to-face once a week and more telephone calls'; 'formally every two weeks for two hours' and 'monthly meetings to look at performance issues, budgets and policy' were all cited.

The details of such interaction emerged in some accounts. Besides a briefing to the LMCS prior to cabinet, and big strategic issues being discussed at their regular formal meeting, one interviewee also stressed that they ensured any issues judged to be important were shared and exchanged with the LMCS straightway, including by email. Examples of such communication were: 'if a school was to be inspected' ; any issue with a political or service

dimension (such as the welfare of children) or 'one that might end up in the press'.

Several interviewees noted that 'no shocks', 'nothing should come as a surprise' was the overarching principle of providing information to the LMCS. There was consensus that no formal procedures or guidance exists as to how a DCS should decide on what information to provide the LMCS. However, a 'culture' or 'network' of communication between officers was noted, along with an LMCS being 'aware of what needs to be asked', suggesting implicit and established 'political and professional' sensibility and judgements by both LMCS and DCS. Finally, it was often noted that physical proximity of LMCS and DCS was very helpful, with offices close by, enabling ease of access to each another; 'the day-to-day basis of meeting people in corridors' was an informal support mechanism 'just as important as the formal structures'.

Finally, one DCS interviewee noted that LMCS and DCS interactions were underpinned by 'interpersonal' aspects of their 'partnership across the roles' citing qualities like 'trust, honesty, mutual respect and support, humour' as key ingredients.

2.3 The role of the Lead Member in commissioning

The commissioning of services was most likely to be the responsibility of the DCS or the responsibility was shared between the DCS and the Lead Member for Children's Services. A number of interviewees (five) indicated that responsibility lay with a commissioning officer, director or head of commissioning. This appeared to be a growing trend, as other interviewees indicated that this was something that had just been established, or was going to be implemented within the LA. Increasingly, responsibility for commissioning was being decentralised to the local area to ensure that the services commissioned met local needs.

The role Lead Members played in commissioning varied across LAs, from close involvement and liaison with officers, to a much more strategic role or lead, setting strategic priorities for the LA. Interviewees emphasised their monitoring/overview role, in terms of challenging/reviewing the services commissioned or due to be commissioned. Lead Members were most likely to indicate that they had a strategic or monitoring/overview role in the commissioning process. Challenges were raised in terms of joint commissioning with partners, notably health. All Lead Members were involved in budget setting as part of their role. However, their stated level of involvement/responsibility varied from those who said they played a crucial role in budget setting, to those who felt that although they might have overall responsibility they had little decision-making power.

2.4 Lead Members' engagement with end-users

Lead Members' opportunities for meeting with children, young people and families included visits to schools and youth clubs, as well as meetings with youth representatives. Some concerns were raised that opportunities to engage with young people, especially specific groups, such as CiPC, were not adequate. Time and capacity constraints were seen as the main obstacle. In addition, the quality of these interactions was also questioned by some interviewees. It was suggested that to be more effective, interactions/communication between Lead Member and young people should take place in more natural, 'normal' settings rather than engineered visits, such as award ceremonies, for example.

Information derived from consultation exercises was fed back to the administration via direct reporting, such as presentations made by young people to council/board meetings, or through the Lead Member. Consultation techniques included communication with school and youth councils. Young people presented findings at council and other meetings, including Children's Trust and other partnership boards. Conferences, seminars, questionnaires, surveys and websites were commonly cited as a means of engaging and consulting with end-users. In some LAs, advocates or intermediaries, such as voluntary organisations or a Children's Commissioner provided the means through which views were gathered and reported to the council.

Examples of impact of this feedback on policy included the instigation of a training programme for the police in relation to understanding and interacting with local young people in one LA and the design input of pupils with special needs for a new school in another LA. In addition, young people's views impacted on the construction of LA Children and Young People's Plans (CYPPs). For instance, their perspectives and main concerns influenced the priorities for action outlined in the plans. Hence, in these types of cases, it appears as though face-to-face consultation with young people had been a particularly effective means of translating public views into council policy.

Case-study data – LMCS and other officers/service partners

The case-study phase collected the views of a small number of other officers, often Assistant Directors (ADs), and also partners from health and other services, including the voluntary sector.

Contact between these interviewees and the LMCS was usually in the latter's capacity as chair of various meetings and forum such as cabinet meetings; PCT and Children's Trust boards and team meetings; Children and Young People's sub-groups and strategic partnerships. There were references to the LMCS 'challenging and championing Children's Services issues' in these arenas; being relied on to be a 'voice' or an 'advocate for young people within the leading group, guided and supported by officers' and being 'an enabler and supporter' for the contribution and involvement of voluntary and other services in the ECM agenda.

Assistant Directors sometimes also spoke of their briefing role with the LMCS in this respect, (for instance, going through the agenda of the monthly Children's Trust board meeting 'to ensure LMCS is briefed properly and can exercise his role appropriately'). Just as with the DCS, the 'mutually accountable working relationship' between LMCS and these senior officers was also noted. However, concern was expressed in one case that, due to tight resources, the LMCS could only meet with assistant directors when there were specific issues to follow up, and it was felt that these officers' professional development was being limited by a reduction in opportunities to work with the LMCS. Bringing the ADs to DCS and LMCS meetings was seen as a solution here.

This small sample of interviewees also identified contacts with the LMCS in other arenas, intimating how visible and active their LMCS was in the Children's Services agenda generally. Interviewees spoke of their Lead Member attending events such as stakeholder days; presentations at healthy schools; and service away days. Promotional work around Children's Trust was also highlighted, including the Lead Member's regular contributions to a section in a Children's Trust newsletter.

Case-study data – A commissioning vignette

This vignette highlights the role of the LMCS in devolved commissioning in one case-study authority.

The role of the LMCS in devolutionary decision making

In this authority, the responsibility for commissioning particular services for children has been devolved to 14 local children's partnerships across the LA based around schools. The LMCS chaired a standing group of district councillors and lead officers from the district councils to introduce and develop the idea of local children's partnerships. The LMCS was also involved in discussions with the DCS regarding the issue of slow referrals to alternative provision following exclusion from schools as part of the performance review and briefing process. This issue was identified as an area in need of improvement. The authority subsequently became involved in the DCSF project to pilot devolved commissioning to clusters of schools to commission their own services for excluded students and students with special educational needs (SEN).

The role of the LMCS in devolutionary decision making was felt by officers to add immense value, giving political backing and strength to the decision and helping this actually happen. The LMCS was felt to be well informed, asking the right questions and providing a useful degree of challenge and debate around this decision, ensuring the role added value and was effective.

The role of the LMCS in monitoring devolutionary commissioning

The LMCS was felt to have an active role in monitoring commissioning generally via two main processes. Firstly, the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP), of which the LMCS was a member, had a key monitoring function with meetings centred around needs analysis, setting priorities (e.g. in the form of strategy documents and plans, such as the CYPP), identifying action to meet priorities and monitoring and evaluating the extent to which targets are being met. The LMCS, as a member of the CYPSP, was fully engaged in this process, endorsing the commissioning cycle and the key decisions made. The LMCS was not involved in the procurement aspect of the commissioning cycle.

Secondly, the LMCS monitored commissioning and devolved commissioning as part of a general process of performance management meetings and briefings with the DCS (i.e. reviewing key performance indicators and targets). Regarding devolved commissioning in particular, it was anticipated that the assistant director would meet directly with schools to evaluate the progress of the pilot initiative. Information gathered during this evaluation would then be filtered to the DCS and LMCS to inform performance reviews and briefing meetings regarding how services were being developed (e.g. in this case regarding attendance/exclusions and alternative provision). Given the early stages of the devolved commissioning pilot project, procedures for measuring outcomes and achievement of targets were still being developed and clarified.

2.5 Managing the Lead Member role

2.5.1 Manageability

Lead Members frequently described the Children's Services portfolio as 'wide ranging' and 'the largest portfolio of the cabinet', due in particular to the diversity and pervasiveness of children's issues; the high public profile of children's well-being and achievement; the responsibility for children's welfare; and the large budget associated with the service. There appeared to be considerable variation in the amount of time Lead Members spent on the role as a whole (although not always specified, this ranged from 10 to 60 hours per week). The manageability of the role was felt to vary, depending on the foci of work at the time. For instance, pressure points were noted around elections; budget

setting; and specific projects, such as building schools and establishing Children's Centres. Interviewees also noted the ongoing challenge of balancing the demands of the Children's Services portfolio with their ward councillor role.

At busy times the aspects of the role that interviewees were most likely to find difficult to fulfil were: updating themselves on key external information sources, such as publications, journals and Children's Services networks (e.g. *Children Now*, *Times Educational Supplement*, Children's Services Network); accessing events to network, training and learning about good practice outside of the authority; and undertaking visits. Interviewees identified challenges in terms of finding time to refer to these sources of information; a lack of confidence as to which sources of information were most authoritative and relevant to the Lead Member for Children's Services role; and issues around funding, particularly for attending external conferences. Lead Members felt they could cope in terms of keeping up to date with internal authority data and information. However, many wished they had more time for the external and additional activities. Lead Members also wanted more time to meet young people and focus on vulnerable groups of young people. In this regard, four noted that administrative support (for example, in arranging visits) would be useful.

Although described as challenging, the LMCS role was rarely portrayed as being unmanageable, and Lead Members highlighted a range of factors that made their role more manageable. Almost half of the interviewees identified the formal sharing of the role as being critical to manageability (see section 2.5.3 below for details of frequency and models of sharing the role). A third felt that in order to be able to give the role sufficient time it would not be possible to be in full-time employment. Smaller numbers of interviewees highlighted the importance of support from, and communication with, their professional and political colleagues and the support provided by external training and networking opportunities. Personal qualities were also deemed important factors of manageability, such as the ability to prioritise, time manage and be proactive in finding information.

2.5.2 Information

Generally, Lead Members felt well informed by the DCS and officers about relevant children's issues within their own authority. Several, however, admitted that it was difficult to be aware of information they did not receive. The majority of Lead Members interviewed felt they received sufficient information, both from officers (e.g. regular briefings and performance indicators) and national/government information (e.g. policy documentation, literature, conferences, courses and networking opportunities), to undertake their role effectively.

However, in relation to the information Lead Members received from officers, five interviewees felt that the information was not always adequate, occasionally lacking in detail, clarity, relevance and timeliness. It was not clear whether Lead Members had tried to resolve these perceived inadequacies; at least two of these interviewees felt this was an ongoing issue. Indeed, Lead Members highlighted the importance of establishing clear understandings with officers about what they needed to know, when and how. Effective and regular briefings seemed to be the best way of achieving such communication. Lead Members relied on the DCS and officers to make effective judgements about what information they required, which was obviously aided by Lead Members' own awareness and understanding regarding the information they needed to ask for.

In relation to national and government information, Lead Members often felt overwhelmed by the amount and variety of sources of information. They requested some form of filtering, summarising and condensing of this information. Lead Members also highlighted the need for more information on good practice relating to specific issues, emphasising the importance of learning from other authorities (e.g. reports from pathfinder authorities), as well as better statistical information and national comparators. Lead Members wanted more information on specific issues, such as adolescent mental health, the commissioner role and joint commissioning, finance issues, safeguarding, the effectiveness of academies, school improvement and out-of-authority placements.

2.5.3 Sharing the role and engaging wider membership

Just under two-thirds (20) of Lead Members formally shared their Children's Services portfolio. Of these, just under half had adopted a 'deputy approach' (with up to three non-cabinet elected members carrying out aspects of the role under the Lead Member's direction); six had implemented a 'division approach' (usually dividing the education and social care aspect of the role between two cabinet members); and five had both divided the role and assigned deputies. The remaining 12 Lead Members had sole responsibility for the role ('solitary approach'). There was some evidence that the tendency to formally share the Lead Member for Children's Services role was increasing. One interviewee described how the role had recently been restructured in order to enhance its effectiveness and manageability, and two others suggested the role would require restructuring in the future. Generally, formal sharing of the Lead Member for Children's Services role correlated with authority size (categorised as large, medium or small,

based on pupil numbers), with the majority of large authorities (counties and some metropolitan LAs), formally sharing the role. There was little difference found between small and medium-sized authorities in the tendency to formally share the role.

Two-thirds of Lead Members shared their role informally either with scrutiny (e.g. asking scrutiny members to focus on particular issues/aspects of the Children's Service) and/or 'unofficially' with other councillors (e.g. sharing responsibility for undertaking Regulation 33 visits to children's homes). No correlation was found between formal and informal sharing (i.e. those sharing the role formally were equally as likely to share the role informally).

member with the education aspect of the role, and at other times was part of the social services remit. (In one instance, two members shared the LMCS in a more general way and there was no apparent division of responsibilities in titles.)

Deputy approach

The LMCS had one or more non-executive deputies who could have responsibility for a specific aspect of the role or undertake tasks at the LM's direction. The deputies were usually non-cabinet or non-executive members and thus had no decision-making powers. Where the LMCS role had been divided (as above approach) there could also be deputies assigned to either or both of the executive members.

Informal approaches

Peer review approach

LMCSs were also found to draw on the support of scrutiny committee members in fulfilling their role. LMCSs worked closely with the scrutiny chair and deputy chair. There were examples of specific children-focused scrutiny committees within the sample. Scrutiny members might be present at board meetings and were called upon to scrutinise various aspects of the service, thus supporting the LMCS in their role, particularly in terms of monitoring the performance of the service.

Membership approach

LMCSs unofficially shared their role with other councillors. Here, fellow councillors might take some responsibility for aspects and functions of the role, such as visiting schools and attending events and meetings. Councillors might be given the responsibility of championing children through their involvement and visibility in these roles, thus supporting the LMCS in achieving their remit.

Responsive approach

LMCSs were also found to share their role informally in an ad hoc manner, calling on fellow executive councillors to represent them at meetings that they were not able to attend. As such this responsive and flexible approach provided a further informal way to fulfilling the LMCS role through sharing.

The challenges associated with engaging wider membership support for the role related to members' other interests; time constraints; councillors limited awareness of children's issues and their corporate parenting responsibility (including some stereotyped perceptions of children and young people, lack of understanding of the corporate parenting responsibility and professional terminology and language); and, in one instance, fellow councillors' lack of capacity to influence or make decisions was offered as a challenge.

Examples of good practice were highlighted in relation to engaging wider membership support for the role, including giving councillors aspects of responsibility and informing councillors about children's issues (e.g. training on the corporate parenting responsibility, presentations from officers at council meetings, presentations from, and opportunities to meet, young people, delegate membership/attendance at meetings).

The majority of those Lead Members who commented felt that their council did spend sufficient time considering children and young people's issues and that this was given high profile. However, four Lead Members disagreed, reiterating the issues outlined previously, in terms of challenges in engaging wider support, such as other councillors' lack of awareness and interest in children's issues. Lead Members' relationships with the DCS were not given as a factor in response to this question.

2.5.4 Continuity and succession planning

Three-quarters of interviewees felt there would be someone within their own party who could take on the role if they were to leave. Most of these were confident in the level of expertise of their successor, although others felt training and induction would be necessary. The remaining interviewees suggested there was currently no identifiable successor within their own party. Although not always specified, interviewees appeared to value three distinctive sets of characteristics in potential successors (in order of the frequency referred to): substantive knowledge of, and interest in, children and Children's Services; generic skills pertaining to a portfolio holder position (e.g. leadership, political aptitude, time management); and the capacity to commit time to the role. The evidence suggests that the role may be allocated on the basis of this prioritisation of qualities.

Case-study data – Sharing the LMCS role

Views about formal sharing of the LMCS role were probed in case-study interviews with Lead Members, Directors of Children's Services and heads of service. Contrasting opinions emerged regarding the advantages and disadvantages of sharing the role. Those where the role was shared tended to advocate the benefits of formal sharing and respondents in authorities where the role was not shared were more likely to highlight the potential disadvantages of sharing.

Advantages of sharing the LMCS role (including division and deputy approaches):

- aids manageability and capacity – including increased capacity for politician–officer and elected member–community member contact, recognition of the size of the portfolio and token of LA's commitment to the portfolio by assigning additional capacity

- provides additional accountability – formal sharing of the LMCS role enabled elected colleagues to probe deeply into issues where necessary, providing an additional layer of scrutiny, knowledge and accountability

- facilitates succession planning – formally sharing the role provided a well informed and prepared successor to assume the role of LMCS in cases of changes of position.

Disadvantages of sharing the LMCS role:

- contradicts integration – the importance of reflecting the integration of Children's Services within the authority at leadership and elected member level was stressed as being crucial to successful and thorough integration

- undermines linear accountability – both division and deputy models for sharing the LMCS role were felt to weaken direct accountability to a single position, leaving room for a lack of clarity regarding who was responsible and increased scope for abdicating responsibility.

The potential challenges and disadvantages of formal sharing of the LMCS role were said to be negated by official meeting structures between LMCS and elected colleague(s) to exchange information and identifying an overall leader with the statutory responsibility. The potential challenges and disadvantages associated with not sharing the role, such as manageability issues and succession planning, could be overcome by engaging wider informal support for the LMCS role. Although the numbers of responses from this phase of the research were insufficient to allow a picture of minority and majority opinions, these contrasting arguments give a flavour of the views and may provide points for consideration where authorities and councils are seeking to explore varying approaches to, and models for, the LMCS role.

Where the LMCS role was shared formally (division and/or deputy approach) this provided inherent succession planning opportunities (12 out of the 20 interviewees who had formal structures for sharing the role, identified their fellow Lead Member colleague or deputy(ies) as a potential successor(s)). In contrast, six of the seven interviewees with no planned successor had sole responsibility for the role. Other potential successors identified included those involved with scrutiny/select committee and other cabinet members (e.g. those holding an adult services or community and safety portfolio). Some Lead Members did not identify a specific successor but felt there would be those within their party who could take on the responsibility if

necessary; here, wider membership involvement in the role was valued.

A third of Lead Members felt there were issues with succession planning within their own party and that it was an area that required attention and improvement. This could be achieved through developing interests and experience within the group (e.g. wider membership engagement strategies, training, identifying an 'understudy' or restructuring the role).

Only half of the interviewees felt there were succession arrangements in place if there was a change in party controlling the authority. Reasons for the lack of

Case-study data – Engaging wider membership

Case-study interviewees (LMCSs, DCSs and heads of service) were asked to describe approaches that had been effective in engaging wider membership support for the LMCS role. The following strategies emerged:

- **Working groups** – helped to raise awareness and understanding of children's issues amongst councillors. In addition, they could encourage fellow councillors to have a role in achieving successful services and provision for children and young people through active participation in the development of the service.

- **Monthly briefings and updates** – regarding the Children's Services department circulated widely across the whole council and accessible in a number of formats, including paper and intranet based.

- **Seminars and workshops** – regularly available to all councillors focusing on specific children's issues or groups of children (e.g. CiPC).

- **Signed commitment** – from councillors to take responsibility for meeting the needs of looked-after children or CiPC. Here documentation could be used to outline councillors' joint responsibility as corporate parents and elicit formal obligation from

colleagues to meet the needs of these vulnerable children and young people.

- **Policy consultation and development groups** – were used to engage wider councillor involvement in discussing government consultation documents, and in particular, consideration of the implications of respective policies for the authority and Children's Service. The Lead Member could then use these insights to inform the councils' official response. Discussion and listening to fellow councillors views are key elements to this strategy.

- **Involvement in inspections and reviews** – with particular reference to district councils and councillors, was highlighted as an effective strategy in engaging wider membership and in acknowledging and encouraging the role of their involvement in the success of the service.

- **Using personal attributes** – including patience, knowledge, understanding, confidence, enthusiasm, openness to colleagues' views, clarity about the direction of Children's Services and skills to convey this to the wider council and the ability to highlight the relevance of fellow councillors' role in contributing to Children's Services.

arrangements included the unlikelihood of a change in party; the successive party would not welcome support/interference; and political disparities. Generally, however, the majority of these interviewees were confident in the level of expertise of incoming members. Where arrangements were in place for succession planning across parties, these included (in order of frequency): shadowing; involvement of opposition members in scrutiny; support at the point of transition; and training for all members.

- **Example 1: Shadowing** – Six Lead Members described the shadowing arrangements of the opposition party, where an equivalent spokesperson or shadow to the LMCS portfolio had been identified

as part of a shadow cabinet or executive. Lead Members referred to varying degrees of active involvement of the shadow; where actively involved the shadow appeared to be engaged in discussions with the DCS and Lead Member and provided a useful additional layer of challenge and ideas.

- **Example 2: Involvement of opposition members in scrutiny** – Four Lead Members referred to opposition members' involvement in scrutiny as providing a measure of succession planning. Here the scrutiny members received reports from the LMCS and were responsible for scrutinising the performance and progress of the service.

- **Example 3: Support at the point of transition** – At the point of transition to a successor, three Lead Members described how they would meet with their counterparts to brief them, induct them to the role and help them prioritise tasks.

- **Example 4: Training for all members** – Three interviewees referred to the training opportunities available for all members, which included introductions to Children's Services, training on specific aspects of Children's Services and training on how to fulfil the corporate parenting responsibility (including training on how to visit children's homes and challenge the performance of the administration in an effective manner).

2.6 Training, challenges and support for Lead Members

2.6.1 Training

All but one interviewee mentioned that they had received some form of training for their Lead Member role. More than two-fifths (14) of interviewees detailed more than one source of training. Just under two-thirds

(20) of Lead Members stated that they had undertaken IDeA training, most notably in relation to leadership, which was generally well received. Approximately a third (11) of interviewees indicated that they had attended training provided by their authority, which included the induction offered to new members, as well as more specific subject areas, such as issues relating to the care of looked-after children in the authority.

Over half (17) of Lead Members referred to the informal training they had undergone that supported their role. Of these, 11 noted the value of experience gained through working alongside LA officers, the DCS and other members, as well as serving on specific committees and panels, such as those concerned with fostering and child protection. A further six Lead Members referred to the skills and experience they had accumulated throughout their professional lives as adequate training for their role. Social work, education and management experience were highlighted specifically.

Nearly half (15) of Lead Members stated that they had attended regional or national IDeA Lead Member Networks. The majority noted that these were valuable

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Case-study data – Continuity and succession planning

The issue of succession planning for the LMCS role was explored further with case-study interviewees (LMCSs and DCSs). The following issues were raised:

- Continuity and succession planning for the LMCS role was an area of concern for case-study interviewees, although the extent of this was dependent somewhat on the political context and stability of the council.

- The identification of an 'assistant' to the LMCS role was recognised as providing a dual solution both to succession planning and the manageability of the portfolio. However, the cost implications of this strategy were acknowledged.

- Directors of Children's Services appeared to have a role in discussions with LMCS around succession planning and contributing to decisions around strategy and selection. The

decision was ultimately identified as resting with the council and leader of the council.

- The perception, in some instances, that a successor could be identified to fill the LMCS position as and when the need arose, indicated a lack of long-term planning for the role (although this might be context dependent). It is possible that as a relatively new statutory role, the LMCS position requires additional succession planning in comparison to other council portfolios.

- Interviewees felt that the LGA and IDeA could help to facilitate discussion and the sharing of good practice around succession planning for the LMCS role. However, the need to ensure succession strategies that could take account of varying local political contexts was stressed.

Case-study data – Training opportunities

Case-study interviewees were asked to elaborate on the training opportunities for the LMCS.

References were made to having generic skills training (e.g.chairing meetings, time management) and the 'usefulness' of the member training on offer in this regard from the LA. Interviewees also nominated the IDeA leadership course as valuable, some particularly noting the helpfulness of opportunities for peer mentoring and 'learning from others' experience … sharing good practice'. There was some intimation that more training specific to the LMCS role would be valued, especially in relation to managing the workload.

Beyond that, significantly, most interviewees (both LA officers and LMCSs) highlighted the need for LMCSs themselves to be proactive in acquiring the knowledge and understanding necessary for the role. One DCS noted his LMCS received sufficient training because of 'his own commitment and involvement with IDeA and LGA … he's a very active member'. Another suggested that an important element was 'not the formal training, but the knowledge, experience, awareness and understanding built up over time', citing how the LMCS was 'out there [interacting] … a lot of the time'. Similarly, LMCS interviewees referred to their own responsibility for professional development:

one noted ' you have to go out and get a grip of some of these things, not just wait for someone to send an email about it … you have to go and find it yourself' and another described 'a self-learning programme' when he started the LMCS role that involved 'spending time with each of the individuals, learning from them, building up trust, demonstrating understanding … this included officers, social workers and clients'. Joint discussion between DCSs and LMCSs over appropriate conferences to attend was also referred to in one instance, implying an ongoing and shared interest in the professional development of the role. One LMCS highlighted that 'keeping up to date' with information on the web from the DCSF and about ECM was a self-responsibility also.

Suggestions for enhancing training opportunities included a more regional approach to training events; further profiling and promoting the value of the IDeA leadership courses, and providing online updates for those members who could not attend; a greater focus on managing the extensive workload of the LMCS role; and more generally, opportunities for LMCSs to share practice and issues regionally. Other arenas for training mentioned more than once related to health service issues and the contribution of the voluntary sector.

opportunities to meet with other members and share information and good practice. Most of the remaining interviewees were aware of these networks, but had not attended mainly as a result of time, distance and financial constraints. Several possible improvements were suggested, including holding events for members representing authorities sharing similar characteristics and contexts, as well as timing/scheduling factors (seen as especially relevant for Lead Members in paid employment). Online training opportunities were also suggested as a possible way forward.

Less than a third (9) of Lead Members specifically referred to attendance at conferences. Of these, five suggested that the value of attendance was variable, mainly because of the perceived repetition and conference content not being seen as relevant to the

specific context of their authority.

2.6.2 Challenges

Just over two-fifths (13) of Lead Members identified challenges relating to the contexts, characteristics and issues relating to their specific LAs. These included, for example, the need to maintain levels of provision offered to groups, such as CiPC in the context of reduced funding and public accountability. Relationship and communication-orientated challenges were identified by nearly half (15) of Lead Members. These included the difficulties encountered in ensuring interaction between partners at a local level (including financial commitment to joint working) as well as the need to improve working relationships between central

and local government. Challenges specific to the Lead Member role were mentioned by nearly half of interviewees (15). These included the time commitments faced by working Lead Members.

2.6.3 Additional support

Nearly a third (ten) of interviewees felt that they did not require any additional support to carry out their role, as their LAs provided everything they needed. Just under a fifth (six) of interviewees suggested that support, in terms of capacity and logistical issues, would be beneficial. Areas included: the provision of administrative support; financial support to assist in attendance at conferences and training sessions; and as increased support for the role from other members. A Lead Member from a medium-sized authority, for example, felt that alongside the number of children in the authority, the scope of the role meant that it was not possible to adequately lead on specific aspects of education, such as extended schools, as well as the elements of the Lead Member role. As such, dividing or sharing the role was seen as a way of increasing efficiency and effectiveness. A longstanding councillor from a large metropolitan authority suggested that the division of responsibilities along the lines of the previous sub-committee system could improve the Lead Member function.

Six interviewees also identified training, guidance and communication as potential areas requiring additional support. National guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the LMCS, as well as training in specific subjects/issues was called for. One interviewee with a professional background in education suggested that mentoring should be offered to newer, less experienced Lead Members. To facilitate improved training, an email network of Lead Members was called for by a newly elected member, that might overcome the time constraints and financial pressures currently preventing some members from accessing the training available.

Support in terms of increased understanding and promotion of the Lead Member role (including the issue of sustainability and continuity), was identified by four interviewees. Two Lead Members suggested that they required support in managing and addressing specific needs within their authorities, for example children 'in need' who did not fall into other categories, such as those in public care.

2.7 Good practice

When asked to identify areas of good practice within the LA regarding the LMCS role, interviewees most frequently focused on (in rank order) engagement with end-users; partnership working and integration; and their corporate parenting role. Other areas of good practice identified included effective relationships with the officers of the children's directorate; safeguarding; and commissioning.

Reference to interesting practice regarding the engagement of end-users, included young people sitting on the scrutiny committee; the establishment of a mobile youth café; and the employment of young people (including those in public care) to consult with other young people across the LA and to represent young people's views across all the directorates.

2.8 Conclusion

The findings from the second phase of this research, involving interviews with Lead Members and other LA personnel (the latter as part of case-study interviews), presents a fuller picture of the LMCS experiences and background, their roles and the training or support that might be helpful.

The data suggests that the LMCS role functions across and links three key arenas: the Children's Services directorate and associated partners; the council; and end-users of the electorate (see Figure 3.1 on page 28). Within these arenas, the LMCS works to fulfil a statutory responsibility to children to ensure the quality of services delivered by the authority (along with partners) to children and their families.

The key messages that emerged from this second phase interview programme are listed below.

(i) Consider the manageability of the Lead Member role overall

This may include:

• investigating further successful sharing of the role: (i.e. those strategies that support Children's Services holistic ethos) and recognise the strengths of different ways of approaching the role

- addressing succession planning arrangements: given the importance and pivotal nature of the LMCS role, it may be necessary to facilitate discussion and share good practice around succession strategies.

(ii) Recognise the value of ensuring support, information and training for the Lead Member remit

This may include:

- providing greater information on good practice, and ease of access to a range of relevant information sources

- providing training on the various aspects of the role, and in relation to managing the workload.

(iii) Promote the qualities and characteristics of successful Lead Members

This may include:

- recognising the proactivity of successful and well-regarded Lead Members

- ensuring the value of a partnership with DCS and other officers is recognised, where trust, mutual respect and support are key ingredients.

3   Concluding comments

The surveys (conducted by telephone and by proforma) which form the basis of the study clearly convey a sense of diversity associated with the LMCS role. Responses indicate that there is variability in the amount of time committed to the role, differences in the amount of information, training and support Lead Members think they receive and their degree of involvement with national and regional networks. It is also evident that sharing the role is another notable variable across local authorities as is the extent of LMCSs' active involvement with end-users, frontline teams, working parties and so on.

From the accounts of the telephone sample of LMCSs and their colleagues, a picture begins to emerge of how the remit can be embraced, and how some key qualities or characteristics may influence the way the role is undertaken. Figure 3.1 shows the arenas, relationships and partnerships that an LMCS is linked to, and how their role is a pivotal link in each arena. Considering the remit, responsibilities and roles each arena requires from a Lead Member may be a helpful analysis tool for future training and development needs.

In addition, the study provides some insights regarding what makes an effective and well-regarded Lead Member. These can perhaps be summed up as *partnership*, *proactivity* and *proximity*. The relationship between an LMCS and DCS (and other officers) was described in terms of complementary working underpinned by trust, mutual respect and clarity around the two roles. Political skills and experience, substantive knowledge and certain personal attributes featured prominently in the 'ingredient list' of effective LMCSs. The proactive involvement of the LMCS, their capacity to 'make things happen' and engage and communicate effectively seem key qualities highlighted by officers and partners. Thus, visibility was the third aspect of the LMCS make-up that made the role effective. Whether referring to the ongoing interactions between an LMCS and officers being aided by regular contact (both formal and informal) or the presence of the Lead Member at end-user or service provider events, this ongoing presence in each arena of LMCS activity was a recurring feature of the positive accounts provided by case-study interviewees.

Figure 3.1 the 'pivotal' role/function of an effective LMCS

The LMCS is the pivotal link between these three arenas.

Children's Services Directorate and partners
- Scrutinising, holding the DCS to account/quality assurance
- Ongoing working relationships

The three main features of effectiveness of the LMCS in each of these arenas are:
- Proactivity
- Proximity
- Partnership

The council
- To act as an advocate for Children's Services in the council's decision-making and financial processes.
- To be accountable for Children's Services in the scrutiny process

End-users and electorates
- As an electorate representative LMCS responsible for listening to views of end-users and using these insights to inform policy and service development.

4 Case studies focusing on particular aspects of the role of the Lead Member for Children's Services

This chapter presents illustrative case studies to outline specific aspects of good practice in relation to the LMCS role in partnership working, commissioning and devolved commissioning, corporate parenting and engaging with end-users. Five case studies were conducted in total, each drawing on data from a repeated interview with the LMCS regarding the specific focus of the case study, an interview with the DCS and additional interviews with heads of service and partner representatives as appropriate.

Each case study attempts to draw out findings around the following headings:

- introduction

- structures in the authority (relevant to the case-study focus)

- the role of the LMCS (in the aspect of practice focused upon)

- challenges and issues

- areas for development and improvement

- key effective elements of the LMCS role (in the aspect of practice focused upon)

- overall impact of the LMCS role.

Some of the features identified as being associated with the effective operation of the LMCS role drawn out in the conclusion and recommendation section (chapter 3) are evident in these illustrations.

Case study 1: Partnership working

Introduction

This case study is based on a medium-sized Metropolitan Borough Council in the north-west of England. The authority has 66 councillors representing 22 wards and no party has been in overall control since 1986. The Lead Member for Children's Services has been in post for approximately three years. The case study focuses upon partnership working and integration in the authority.

Partnership structure

Partnership working in the authority was facilitated by a tiered structure of forums: local strategic partnership group; Children and Young People's thematic group (equivalent to Children's Trust); and five Every Child Matters outcomes groups (see tiered partnership structure diagram, p. 32). This structure brought together different statutory and non-statutory partners to focus on achieving outcomes for children and young people in the area. The LMCS in the authority was involved at

each of these levels of partnership, attending and chairing meetings, promoting and supporting a partnership ethos and identifying and reflecting on opportunities to progress partnership working.

The role of the Lead Member for Children's Services

The LMCS's role in partnership working in this authority involved:

- the **identification and development** of pre-existing relationships from the earlier integration of services

- **endorsement and support for the delegation of leadership** responsibilities (and budgets) for major projects/initiatives to other departments within the authority. Here the LMCS was involved in identifying the partners and agencies best placed to lead on meeting particular service-users needs. For instance, responsibility for leading and delivering child and road safety in this

authority was directed to Technical Services along with devolution of the Children's Services travel safe grant

- the **promotion of clarity of communication** to ensure local authority and partner personnel were aware of the aims and aspirations of the Children's Service

- providing **identifiable leadership**, through chairing meetings, for example, the LMCS was felt to have a key role in providing profile to the children's agenda, given their strategic and policy directional role.

The Lead Member for Children's Services's contact with partners

The LMCS was seen to be an active contributor to, and supporter of, partnership working, reflected in his interaction with a wide range of partners and professionals from within and beyond the authority (see tiered partnership structure diagram for details of the range of partners). The LMCS typically engaged with these partners via presence on a range of boards and panels.

Challenges associated with partnership working

- Varying remits, parameters and priorities of partners – Partners' remits and geographical parameters of responsibility did not necessarily map neatly to those of the local authority. Partners may thus have been involved with more than one local authority and could be members of large numbers of partnerships and groups. This raised logistical challenges in terms of the number of meetings partners needed to attend as well as issues in terms of adapting to varying approaches and priorities that different organisations may assume. Nationally imposed and slightly varying priorities and targets placed on individual agencies also slightly constrained the potential and autonomy to engage in partnership working.

- Balance of influence within the partnership – Perhaps reflecting the national context,

possible challenges were identified in relation to potential tensions between statutory and non-statutory agencies' involvement in service delivery. Variability was experienced in the extent of influence over, and contribution to, finances and the direction of the partnership.

- Institutional reorganisations – Recent reorganisation in partner PCTs was not yet fully stabilised, undermining the progress of partnership working to an extent. The chair of the local PCT had recently taken up a role as the Children's Champion, providing increased involvement with Children's Services and a valuable and consistent link between health and Children's Services as partners.

Developments and improvements in partnership working

Partnership working was felt by most interviewees to be well established and functioning effectively in the LA, as this partner provider expresses: 'very well joined up, backed up by good communications'. As can be seen from the tiered partnership structure diagram, a range of partners were involved at each of the three levels, representing strategic through to more operational functions. All of the three levels of partnership boards had a monitoring function, monitoring the extent to which the aims and actions agreed in partnership were being met. The extent of involvement in practically commissioning and delivering on these aims increased downwards through the tiers of partnerships.

Suggestions were also made for how partnership working could be further enhanced, with some specific recommendations where it was felt the LMCS had a role to play:

- The LMCS could continue to work to engage with the different external partner agencies. In particular the role was felt to be well placed to encourage and promote the importance of external providers in meeting the needs of children and young people in the area, endorsing a growth in a mixed economy of provision.

- Continued efforts were required to ensure that the partnerships were sufficiently robust to withstand positive criticism and were effectively evaluated.

- Work was needed to inspire all contributors to the partnership to fully engage and commit to the joint children's agenda rather than maintaining a focus on specific agency/department/service goals, targets and priorities. Restructuring and the creation of a new 'Children in Need' post were seen as effective means of driving the agenda forward.

Work was needed to progress from virtual partnerships to conceptualise and operationalise re-locating professionals from different services and agencies as a means of strengthening the foundations of partnership working. This required joined-up thinking about accommodation and the physical structure of services.

Key elements in the effectiveness of the LMCS role in partnership working

- High level of personal involvement and commitment – The LMCS offered a good personal example and was seen as willing to be involved and supportive; demonstrating personal and visible advocacy for partnership working and relationship building (e.g. presence on partnership boards, attendance at events and celebrations and visiting frontline teams and services). The LMCS's regular contribution to a partner's newsletter was seen as an effective means of raising the service's profile amongst staff and service-users, as expressed by a partner representative: 'endorsement from an elected member gives them back-up in what they're trying to achieve'.

- Leadership and governance – The LMCS represented strong leadership and determination to achieve outcomes for children and young people. This was predominantly expressed via the leadership and governance of the Children's Trust (equivalent) (e.g. LMCS chair of the Children and Young People's group strove for a balanced agenda and attempted to

seek contributions from all partners, devoted time, demonstrated awareness and understanding of issues, recognised and endorsed joint PCT and authority appointments as facilitating partnership working). Here the Lead Member was seen to promote a positive ethos throughout the partnership, conveying to partners the aims of the partnership and overseeing the integration of these aims in policy and strategy development.

- Direct, hands-on and high profile public involvement – The LMCS made an important contribution through informal as well as formal contact with officers, partners and end-users. His presence at numerous meetings and events gave him the opportunity to hear people's thoughts as well as articulate the aspirations and direction of the Children's Service as an effective publicist.

- Understanding of individual partners' perspectives, priorities and potential contributions – The LMCS was seen as having been particularly effective in recognising and supporting the contribution of the local fire and rescue service in meeting the Children and Young People's agenda. This partnership was particularly well established, providing expertise and skills from this sector to improve outcomes for young people. Hence, the LMCS had an important role as an enabler and advocate for such partnership working within the wider partnership structures and processes.

- Monitoring within the partnership – In terms of commissioning and monitoring the effectiveness of service delivery, the LMCS was seen as making essential contributions to evaluating the success of the partnership in meeting young people's needs. The LMCS was involved in the process of identifying and defining targets and priorities for the partnership that were then set out in strategy documents (e.g. Children and Young People's Plan). The LMCS was then involved in the process of monitoring the extent to which the services commissioned were meeting young people's needs and where alternative services might be necessary (whether provided by statutory or non-statutory services).

Impacts of the LMCS role

- Young people and other end-users – The LMCS's role in contributing to effective partnership working within and across the authority, and engaging a diverse range of agencies and partners, was felt to be increasing young people's access to a wider spectrum of resources, activities and opportunities, and better enabling the meeting of a range of needs.

- Partners and service providers – In one instance, the result of the LMCS support and advocacy had encouraged a partner organisation's increased focus on youth engagement activities. This service was then able to develop a role in disseminating its good practice to other services in the region.

- Local authority:

  – Through the inclusion of a range of partners, ECM objectives in the LA were increasingly being met. The LMCS was regarded as having played a key role in supporting the inclusion of one service in particular in the partnership, with this involvement receiving positive feedback during the Beacon Team's inspection process. '[The LMCS's] personal advocacy [for our involvement in meeting children's needs] is very important, that's a lead to the rest of the authority and officers that this is something important that should be supported and embraced.'

  – The LMCS role was also valued in terms of the profile it provided to children's issues. As one officer commented, the Lead Member is 'fighting Children's Services' corner in terms of resources, especially when resources are under pressure'. Also in this regard, the role was appreciated in terms of supporting officers in the political contexts in which they were operating.

Case Study 1 – Tiered partnership structure diagram
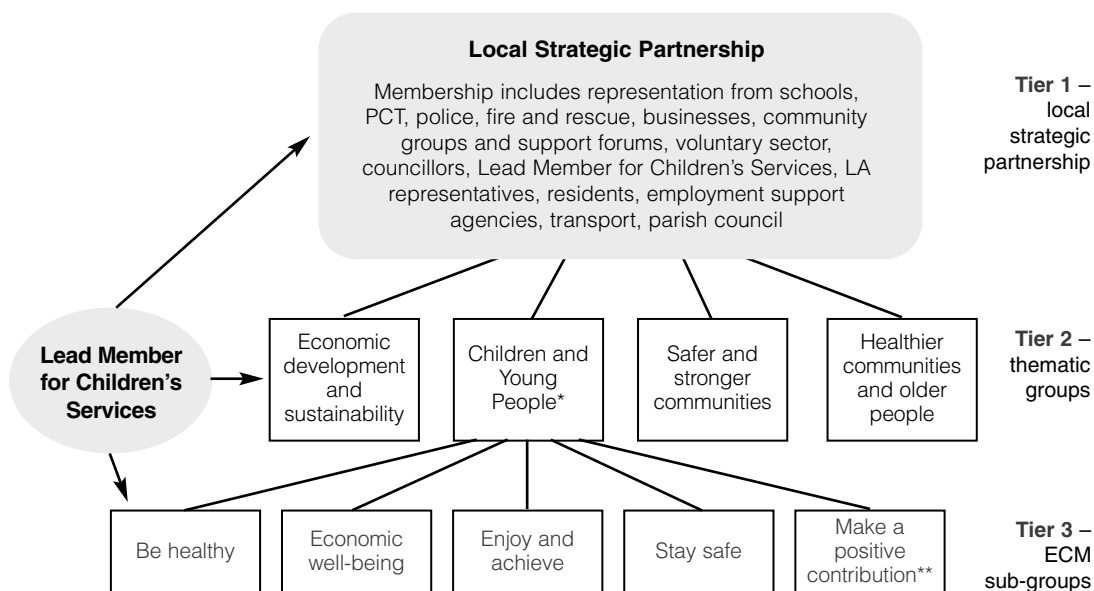
* Children and Young People

*Membership: **Statutory partners** – Lead Member for Children's Services (chair), Director of Children's Services, PCT, Children's Trust Director, police, Youth Offending Team, Connexions, Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Probation Service, Partnership Development Manager. **Non-statutory partners** – community groups, voluntary services, Assistant Director for Schools, Assistant Director for Young People, Assistant Director for Social Care, community empowerment, business partnership, fire and rescue, further education college, school headteacher, school governor.*

**ECM sub-groups

To work with partners to meet targets and performance indicators for the respective ECM outcomes and to coordinate and manage actions required to meet the outcomes. Example membership 'make a positive contribution': Children's Services officers, Connexions, Youth Offending Team, leisure services, Chief Executive, business centre and business partnerships, regeneration, Assistant Director for Schools, PCT, police, youth inclusion, private providers, voluntary services, Children's Fund, assessment and family support service, schools fire service, jobcentreplus. Lead Member for Children's Services's participation in sub-groups (not necessarily membership).

Case study 2 – Partnership working

Introduction

This case study is based on a medium-sized unitary authority in the north-east of England. There are 56 councillors representing 26 wards and the authority has recently moved into a political power-sharing arrangement. The Lead Member for Children's Services has been in post for over three years. The case study focuses on partnership working and integration.

Partnership structure

Partnership working in the authority was supported by a multi-level structure of forums with specific partnership governance arrangements. In relation to children and young people, the relevant partnership boards were: the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP); Children's Trust Board; four thematic groups organised around the five Every Child Matters outcomes (see partnership structure diagram on page 36). The LSP was supported by a public service board which had a decision-making and operational function, making recommendations to the LSP regarding the implementation of the partnership agenda. This structure was replicated at the level of the Children's Trust Board which was supported by a Management Team described as the 'workhorse' of the children's partnership. The LMCS sat on the LSP, chaired the Children's Trust Board and participated in the ECM working groups periodically. The LMCS also attended the Management Team meetings regularly.

The role of the LMCS in partnership and integration

The LMCS's role in partnership working in this authority involved:

- **Public and visible promotion and modelling of partnership ethos** – The LMCS demonstrated a partnership ethos through the chairing of the Children's Trust board and representation on the Local Strategic Partnership. As chair of the Children's

Trust the LMCS valued contributions from all partners and recognised the expertise of colleagues. The LMCS also worked with practitioners within the authority, sharing policy and strategy, so that they understood the implications of partnership working for their day-to-day work. One partner felt that the LMCS promoted a 'whole-system approach' via the Children's Trust Board, suggesting the Trust functioned as a cohesive body with shared goals. The LMCS also met regularly with the chief executive of the PCT, thus having an active role in this partner relationship. It was seen as imperative that the DCS and LMCS actively demonstrated a partnership ethos in their daily working practices both through policy and their personal approach to building effective relationships with partners.

- **Promotion of partnership ethos within the political sphere of the council** – The LMCS had a key role in reporting Children's Trust issues and interactions with the DCS back to colleagues in cabinet and promoting the importance of a partnership agenda amongst political colleagues. The LMCS represented Children's Services in the policy development and decision-making functions of the council, ensuring children were duly considered in all relevant decisions.

- **Political expertise and influence** – The LMCS was valued for bringing to bear on decision making regarding a partnership approach to delivering Children's Services, through, for example, their knowledge of national and local policy and the local context of constituents, contributing to decision making in the Children's Trust Management Team. This decision-making role was particularly valued in the commissioning and decommissioning of services, 'especially where the decisions may be quite political or controversial in nature'. The LMCS understood the aims of the Children's Service and looked to ways of delivering on them through involvement in negotiating finance and development plans.

- **'Figurehead' as the elected representative of the public/community** – The LMCS was valued as being the conduit between young people and parents, as the end-users of Children's Services, and the decision-making functions of the authority. The LMCS role was thus felt to be important in conveying to the public the ethos and aims of Children's Services and, in turn, ensuring the community is represented and considered in the internal workings of the authority. According to a partner interviewee:

  He is the lead elected member and having him sitting there as chair of the Children's Trust Board is actually quite significant in terms of where the LA is driving from. Having a local politician does mean you have the accountability back through to the communities.

The Lead Member for Children's Services's contact with partners

The LMCS was seen to have an active role in supporting partnership working and accordingly engaged with a wide range of partners. The LMCS promoted an ethos of partnership working with these partners formally, via official boards and panels and through knowledge of the policy and strategy of the council, as well as informally through conversation (e.g. conferences and networking opportunities) aided by personal qualities and approachability.

Challenges

- Varying remits, parameters and priorities of partners – Tensions between nationally imposed and local priorities experienced by some partner agencies placed limitations on the development of a common shared vision for the partnership. Strategies for dealing with this challenge referred to the value of clear strategy documents underpinning the partnership (e.g. Children and Young People's Plans), sign-up from partners to collective goals of the partnership, communication, patience and commitment, and jointly funded

appointments. However, calls were also made for national legislation to further support shared target setting and performance management within partnerships. The LMCS was felt to have a key role to play in confronting this challenge, ensuring that they are knowledgeable and aware of the complexities of partners' statutory systems and contexts.

- Dependency of the partnership – The capacity of partner agencies to make decisions and commit finances to services and initiatives within the partnership was felt to be variable, whereby some agencies needed to confirm decisions before making such a commitment – undermining the extent of autonomy of the partnership. Progress was being made towards joint budgets (e.g. supported by Local Area Agreements) which were felt to be a crucial element of joint, partnership decision making. However, changes to government legislation to further facilitate joint budgets would be welcomed.

- Disparity between national and local integration – While the authority was occupied promoting integration at a local level, this was felt to be undermined by a lack of integration of services and departments at the national level. National government departments were felt to be driving slightly disparate agendas, causing tensions in how these are realised by the respective organisations and agencies at a local level. A lack of clarity in the policy and guidance coming from national government regarding integrated targets and performance indicators was also mentioned as a potentially challenging factor.

Developments and improvements

Partnership and integrated working within the authority had developed to such an extent that the 'silos' of distinctive services typical of the previous system were no longer recognisable. Interviewees suggested that the continued development and improvement of partnership working could be facilitated in the following ways:

- undertaking greater work around understanding the complexity of each partner's contexts (in understanding how partnership working can progress, respondents suggested it is essential to understand the contexts in which different partners are operating)

- continuing to build understandings of the joint agenda (underpinned by strategy documents that outline the role and contribution of partners, such as the Children and Young People's Plan)

- integrating with key strategic partners in the form of additional joint positions further down the management structures of the LA and at frontline service delivery level.

Key elements in the effectiveness of the LMCS role in partnership working

- Partnership understanding and approach – The LMCS promoted a partnership approach that had, as its premise, three key features: formal clarity of structures and roles (including a framework of meetings and accountabilities that all partners understand); opportunities and strategies for informal follow-up and operationalisation of meetings and meeting outcomes; and personal commitment from all partners to a shared strategic vision of what all those involved want to make happen.

- The LMCS was identified as bringing particular personal qualities, such as intellectual rigour, to the role. It was seen as vital that the LMCS had a complete understanding of the requirements and importance of the role. The LMCS was also valued for being proactive, committed, persistent, patient and enthusiastic (e.g. celebrating successes of the partnerships).

- A strong working relationship and shared agenda between the DCS and LMCS – This was considered as a crucial feature of the effective role of the LA in integration and partnership working, instilling confidence in officers and partners. Furthermore, it was seen as essential for the relationship between the LMCS and the DCS to involve continual clarification and distinction between strategic

and political components to best ensure the complementary nature of the two roles. However, this relationship needs to be sufficiently dynamic to respond to the context of the situation, for instance, whereby LMCS involvement varies depending on the profile and sensitivity of the issue.

- Good understanding and awareness of the issues – This enabled the LMCS to be fully effective in contributing to the partnership forums and decision making around this aspect of the agenda (e.g. the LMCS was aware of consultation work being carried out with end-users and the issues in local areas).

- Promoting cross-service working and integration – The LMCS encouraged officers to work across areas of responsibility, thus aiding internal integration and cross-service working within the authority. The LMCS also provided support and enthusiasm for the appointment of jointly funded PCT and LA positions, and participated in the decision making that led to these positions as part of the Management Team.
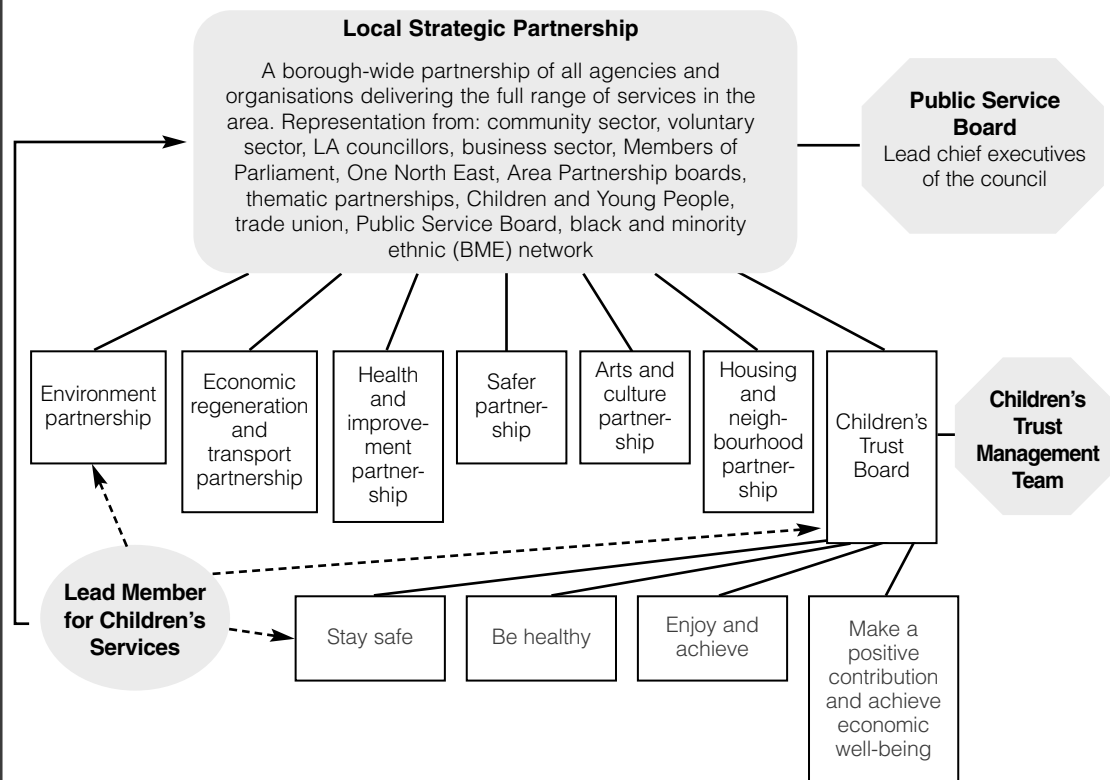
Impacts of the LMCS role on partnership working

- **End-users** – The LMCS had a key role to play in engaging with end-users at events, conferences and workshops as well as visits to young people in service settings. Interviewees suggested that the LMCS achieved a high profile in this role, providing a valuable opportunity for end-users to share their views with the LMCS on a range of issues.

- **Officers and partners** – The LMCS was felt to provide stability and continuity, fighting the corner of children in the competitive political arena where finances were reviewed and decisions made. Here the LMCS was felt to be adept and could exercise political influence to the benefit of the Children's Service. One interviewee added that the LMCS's contribution to partnership and integration had been integral, suggesting that without this involvement the process could not have

happened so smoothly; the LMCS was felt to be key in helping to drive the agenda forward and helping to ensure partner and officer colleagues were working towards the aspirations of the service.

Case Study 2 – Partnership structure diagram

Local Strategic Partnership

A borough-wide partnership of all agencies and organisations delivering the full range of services in the area. Representation from: community sector, voluntary sector, LA councillors, business sector, Members of Parliament, One North East, Area Partnership boards, thematic partnerships, Children and Young People, trade union, Public Service Board, black and minority ethnic (BME) network

Public Service Board
Lead chief executives of the council

Environment partnership

Economic regeneration and transport partnership

Health and improvement partnership

Safer partnership

Arts and culture partnership

Housing and neighbourhood partnership

Children's Trust Board

Children's Trust Management Team

Lead Member for Children's Services

Stay safe

Be healthy

Enjoy and achieve

Make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being

* Children's Trust Board

The Children's Trust has responsibility to deliver the overarching strategy (CYPP and to have an oversight to performance and development). Membership: Lead Member for Children's Services (chair); chief executive, corporate director, Children's Trust Management Team, elected council members, police, PCT, health authority, headteachers, LSC, NHS, voluntary sector, community sector, GP, Chamber of commerce.

Case study 3: Engaging with end-users

Introduction

This case study is based on a county authority which has 48 county councillors representing five districts. The Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) has been in post for approximately three years. The case study focuses upon the engagement with end-users.

Engaging with end-users

Structures and methods have been developed to ensure that the views of end-users, particularly young people, are canvassed. It was suggested that 'the council is very forward thinking and keen to consult with young people'. Most recently, this has involved the creation of the Participation Team, consisting of four young people employed to work with partners of the Children's Trust. The team's role involved arranging consultation events and activities for young people and others, including parents and carers, relating to issues and priorities identified by the partners. The consultation outcomes are reported back to the partners and the council through the team's management structure and also back to the young people themselves in a 'young person friendly' format. In addition, the Speak Out group (meeting on a monthly basis and attended by the Young People's Champion – YPC), has been used widely by the LA as a consultation and feedback mechanism, which also makes annual presentations to the council. Young people's views were also represented through the two elected Members of the Youth Parliament (and their deputies), and a student representative attends Children's Trust meetings. Alongside these structures, the LMCS (as well as the Young People's Champion), takes an active role in meeting with young people in a range of settings.

The role of the Lead Member for Children's Services

Two members supported the LMCS role in this authority, including one who acted to promote and further the engagement of young people as the Young People's Champion. This particular role provides a key link between the Participation Team, (and their consultation with young people as end-users), and the LMCS. The YPC has a regular strategy group meeting (every two months) with the Assistant Director for Youth Division, who also meets with the LMCS. Hence, the LMCS has a central role to play in liaising with other members and officers working with young people. Alongside formalised and scheduled meetings, frequent ad hoc interaction between the LMCS and the YPC takes place.

> It is not an individual effort that we're making. It is related to other members of the Children and Young People Programme. We all feed into a mechanism throughout the directorate and also beyond the directorate. We also engage young people in other areas, especially transport, so we make sure their views are represented there.

The LMCS's role is one of monitoring and overseeing, ensuring that the systems are in place, and working effectively to support children and young people.

The Lead Member for Children's Services's contact with end-users

The LMCS's role in engaging with end-users in this authority involves attendance at a variety of events in a range of settings to meet with young people. This includes: attending award ceremonies, such as the authority's Pride Celebration for children in care (at which the LMCS and DCS awarded prizes to young people); visits to residential homes, schools, Children's Centres, breakfast clubs and youth centres. In addition, the LMCS meets with the Participation Team, the Speak Out group and members of the Youth Parliament, generally on an informal, unstructured basis. Attendance at events and activities where members of these groups are present, such as local democracy week events that bring elected members and young people together, provides the LMCS opportunities to 'see young people in action and interface with them'.

Challenges associated with engaging with end-users

- **Ensuring representation** – Some concerns have been expressed that despite the comprehensive range of consultation activities and opportunities available, 'hard to reach groups' might not be fully involved. To counter this, the LA, via the Speak Out group, endeavours to target young people from specific groups for engagement and involvement in consultation. A young homeless person, a young person living in care and a representative of minority ethnic communities, for example, have been specifically included in consultation events. Although it is agreed that more work needs to be done to include a wider range of young people, the Participation Team always endeavours to access vulnerable groups.

- The LA has previously used Youth Opportunities Fund money to increase engagement with young people with learning difficulties to make certain that they were included in the decision-making process in terms of developing the most appropriate service provision. The Young People's Champion has taken on the responsibility for developing links with hard to reach groups.

- **Maintaining realistic expectations amongst young people** – In terms of consultation, it has been suggested that it is necessary to encourage young people's engagement and involvement despite the fact that their desired outcomes may not always be achievable. Hence, it is seen as important to secure an understanding that just because their views have been canvassed and reported to council, immediate change, policy implementation or problem resolution can not be guaranteed. However, it remains necessary to continue young people's engagement and involvement within this context.

Developments and improvements in engaging with end-users

- **Increased opportunities for engaging young people** – Although said to be effective in terms of the flexibility and ability to meet with young people in a whole range of settings and contexts (from schools, to youth clubs, to meeting in public places), the Participation Team's opportunities for direct engagement with young people could be increased.

- **Increased opportunities for including a wider range of young people in engagement with the LA** – It has been suggested that, although working well in practice, those young people presenting to the full council or to scrutiny on particular issues have no mandate to speak for other young people in the LA. Hence, mechanisms for reporting and presenting issues, as well as feeding back the council's responses are seen to require broadening out to include more young people. The authority is currently working on a strategy to develop a mechanism to facilitate a formal process of communication from representative groups of young people who have been consulted and can then receive feedback on these particular issues.

- **Ensuring that other directorates take account of 'Young People' issues** – There is a need to ensure that young people's voices are heard in relation to issues other than those associated with the Children and Young People directorate.

Key elements in the effectiveness of the LMCS role in engaging with end-users

- **Communication and involvement of the LMCS** – Meeting with the Young People's Champion to discuss issues raised as part of their remit was seen as a key element of the LMCS role. There was a frequent flow of information which the LMCS could use. There was a shared responsibility for engaging with young people and the LMCS took on an important link role, supporting and facilitating engagement and communication between end-users, other members (especially the YPC) and the wider council and LA officers. A vital element of the LMCS role was seen as revolving around alerting other members to their corporate parenting responsibility. Hence, approachability was seen as a key factor.

- **Enthusiasm and commitment** – The enthusiasm and commitment displayed by the LMCS was seen as a key element of effectiveness in terms of engaging with end-users. This was said to have been underpinned by the LMCS's understanding of the value of going out 'into the front line' and listening to people as end-users. This had a motivating effect on staff within the directorate as well as having a positive impact on the young people themselves. The LMCS's 'knowledge and willingness to engage gives everybody a lift when she has been out to meet them'.

- **Visible, active and appropriate involvement and engagement** – The LMCS was present at many of the activities that young people attend, including the consultation events facilitated by the Participation Team, playing a 'supportive role'.

  She attends the activities that we put on but steps back as well. She has a very good way of engaging with young people – she is more active with young people, she is dynamic. That's why they like her, because she doesn't ramble on all the time. She gets straight to the point. She's what the young people want to hear.

- **LMCS has the overall responsibility for engaging with young people** – The LMCS has a knowledge of, and involvement in, everything that concerns young people in the authority. In this way, the LMCS can support the YPC in their work. It has been suggested that the key role of the LMCS is to ensure that the system is in place to support the young people rather than in focusing on face-to-face meetings with them.

- **Borough and district councils' involvement in engagement and consultation** – Borough and district councils were all involved in Hear By Right. Each had its own Youth Champion and there was increasing activity in terms of accessing young people's views. A forum existed where these champions could share the information derived from consultation, thus contributing to strengthening local democracy. Champions

from the districts and boroughs feed information back to the YPC for their regular strategy meeting.

Impacts

- **Young people and other end-users** – Young people in the authority have opportunities to be engaged and involved in the decisions that impact upon them through the availability of various processes and structures for participation. Consultation takes place in a variety of arenas and contexts including schools, youth groups, faith groups, and through structures and events such as Local Democracy Week, the Speak Out group and the Youth Parliament. The flexibility associated with the Participation Team was seen as being particularly valuable: 'We can work with and consult young people anywhere – streets, youth centres, schools, church groups – anywhere.'

- The Speak Out group has a moderating role in terms of considering the decisions that have been made regarding the distribution of Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF) money in the LA. Hence, young people are actively engaged in the decision-making process.

- **Local Authority** – In the longer term, the LA will benefit from having consulted and engaged with young people so that the services on offer have been effectively planned and developed on the basis of assessments of their users' needs and requirements. The Participation Team has been seen as particularly effective as a means of engaging end-users because its members (aged between 16 and 19) have been seen to be able to effectively and appropriately engage with young people in the LA. 'We all have a good understanding of how young people want to engage: they don't want to engage with a questionnaire, they want to do an activity.'

- One particular area of success focused on concerns about young people's alcohol misuse. Via consultation events and activities, the Participation Team reported that young people considered that there was more the LA could

be doing to promote issues of personal safety associated with binge drinking. 'That is the power of using young people – they get others to look at it from a young person's perspective.' Consequently, these findings have informed drug and alcohol policy and practice. The potential dangers faced by young people under the influence of alcohol (such as the risk of being assaulted and robbed, for example) now form a central strand of the LA's message, alongside the long-term health implications associated with such behaviour. Via consultation, the LA promotes a balanced message about the dangers and health implications and has adapted this message to focus on the health issues that are more relevant to young people. In addition, the consultation and engagement of young people revealed a relatively undeveloped concept of safe drinking; their view focusing on an 'all or nothing' approach. As such, these findings informed the LA's education programme, promoting the safety issues associated with drinking.

- Bullying has become one of the three key elements of the Youth Parliament's manifesto and this has been taken on board by the Children's Trust for further development. The LA also reconsidered its library services in the light of findings of 'mystery shopper' activities undertaken by young people as a means of gathering views on the nature of services required by young people visiting these amenities.

- **Partners and service providers** – The partners of the Children's Trust benefit from consultation, especially through the work of the Participation Team as this structure provides them with a means of gathering young people's perspectives on particular priorities.

Case study 4: Commissioning

Introduction

This case study is based on a large county council in the east midlands of England. The authority has 77 councillors representing 77 divisions. The Lead Member for Children's Services has been in post for approximately two years. The case study focuses upon commissioning and devolved commissioning in the authority.

Commissioning

- New arrangements for commissioning were being trialled in this LA, stemming from an identified need to improve the processes and systems by which certain schools access resources, services and equipment. These arrangements were operating as part of a DCSF pilot and centred on the CYPSP acting as the commissioning body for services for children in the LA. A commissioning policy had been endorsed consisting of four elements: an assessment of needs analysis; procurement; implementation; and monitoring and evaluation.

- Within these arrangements, clusters of schools formed the basis of local service delivery whereby devolved budgets enabled schools to commission the services they felt were the most appropriate to meet the needs of their pupils. This was especially the case for SEN and services to excluded pupils.

- Fourteen partnerships across the county will have the responsibility for providing integrated services. The LA has 'devolved resources to local providers in exchange for results' and the achievement of specified outcomes.

The role of the Lead Member for Children's Services in commissioning

The LMCS was involved in discussions with the DCS regarding devolving responsibility for commissioning particular services to local schools and partnerships. For instance, discussions around slow referrals to alternative provision following exclusions, as part of the performance review and briefing process, had contributed to this decision. The authority subsequently became involved in the DCSF project to pilot devolved commissioning to clusters of schools. The LMCS chaired a standing group of district councillors and lead officers from the district councils to introduce and develop the idea of local children's partnerships as a vehicle through which services could be commissioned and delivered.

The LMCS was felt to have had an active role in monitoring commissioning generally via two main processes. Firstly, the CYPSP, of which the LMCS was a member, had a key monitoring function with meetings centred around needs analysis, setting priorities (e.g. in the form of strategy documents and plans, such as the CYPP), identifying action to meet priorities and monitoring and evaluating the extent to which targets are being met. The LMCS, as a member of the CYPSP, was fully engaged in this process, endorsing the commissioning cycle and the key decisions made. The LMCS was not involved in the procurement aspect of the commissioning cycle. Secondly, the LMCS monitored commissioning and devolved commissioning as part of a general process of performance management meetings and briefings with the DCS (i.e. reviewing key performance indicators and targets).

Challenges associated with commissioning

- **Monitoring devolved commissioning** – The case study highlights that a challenge associated with effective devolved commissioning could involve establishing appropriate monitoring structures. This was by no means perceived as a barrier in achieving

this change, rather, processes were being devised and trialled to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of the services being commissioned (see 'developments and improvements' section). Here, systems that enabled the monitoring of devolved commissioning within the overarching monitoring processes of the Children's Service as well as structures to enable direct monitoring of the commissioning work of the partnerships were valued. In addition, the need to identify suitable measures for evaluation was stressed, with procedures in place to support the collection of this data.

Development and improvements in commissioning

- **Monitoring devolved commissioning** – Although it was accepted that the new devolved arrangements for commissioning were still very much in the early stages, it was recognised that further work was needed to develop adequate monitoring processes. It was anticipated that the Assistant Director would meet directly with schools to evaluate the progress of the pilot initiative. Information gathered during this evaluation would then be filtered to the DCS and LMCS to inform performance reviews and briefing meetings regarding how services were being developed (e.g. in this case regarding attendance/ exclusions and alternative provision). Given the early stages of the devolved commissioning pilot project, procedures for measuring outcomes and achievement of targets were still undergoing development and clarification.

- **Expanding the range and scope of locally commissioned services** – Currently schools were responsible for commissioning provision and services for SEN and exclusions themselves. The authority aimed to develop the devolved commissioning model so that health and other services will be commissioned locally. The partnership model, centred around schools, with multi-agency involvement, would provide the structure for this development.

Key elements in the effectiveness of the LMCS role in commissioning

- **Involvement in decision-making process** – The role of the LMCS in devolutionary decision making was felt by officers to have added immense value, giving political backing and strength to the decision and helping this actually happen. The LMCS was felt to have been well informed, asked the right questions and provided a useful degree of challenge and debate around this decision, ensuring the role added value and was effective. 'A well informed Lead Member adds value … it is not a rubber-stamping role.'

- **Providing a political dimension** – The Lead Member's involvement was seen to have contributed to validating the decisions made and added political accountability to the commissioning process.

- **Promotion and leadership function** –The Lead Member was regarded as having provided inspiration and motivation to partners, encouraging their enthusiasm, underpinning their confidence and promoting the value of devolved commissioning: 'it's about going out and selling the benefits' (LMCS).

- **Monitoring** – Through membership of the CYPSP, the LMCS was involved in monitoring the full commissioning process (e.g. needs analysis, setting priorities and reviewing progress towards targets). The LMCS was engaged in this process and contributed to and had oversight of the decisions made. In addition, the LMCS contributed to the monitoring of commissioning as part of a general process of performance management

within the LA. This chiefly occurred via meetings and briefings with the DCS whereby key performance indicators and targets were reviewed.

Impacts of the LMCS role

- **Young people and end-users** – Service delivery has been improved in terms of speed of intervention and the level of multi-agency involvement. Devolved commissioning enables money to be directed to where it is needed and those who are most aware of local needs have greater responsibility for commissioning as part of the model. This was seen as particularly important for vulnerable children.

- **Partners** – Coordination and integration have been increased through the 'merging together' of the previously separate functions of education, health and social services. The LMCS's role in Children's Services was seen as essential to this integration process. For example, there is now the potential for parenting interventions to be commissioned through a single integrated process, rather than through numerous separate routes. As a result there is increased involvement of partners in commissioning and broader ownership of the decision-making process.

- **Schools** – Schools have now become central to the commissioning process and have direct involvement in securing the services they require for their students. Devolved commissioning has enabled schools to commission the services most relevant to meet the needs of their students, increasing the capacity for cost effectiveness and successful interventions and support.

Case study 5 – Corporate parenting

Introduction

This case study is based on a large county council in the west midlands of England. The authority has 62 councillors representing 59 divisions. The Lead Member for Children's Services has been in post for approximately two years. The case study focuses upon corporate parenting in the authority.

Corporate parenting structure and practices

Corporate parenting in the authority was supported by an active corporate parenting panel. The panel was set up by the LMCS, in response to inspection criticism of councillor involvement with CiPC, to simulate the notion of elected members as 'pushy parents' for children and young people in care and fulfil some of the roles that a reasonable, caring parent would fulfil. The corporate parenting panel comprised 12 elected members, representing the range of parties and was further supported by an additional 11 councillors who were active corporate parents. The panel met on a monthly basis and was led and chaired by the LMCS.

The team of corporate parents carried out visits to children in care in residential homes (including homes run by the independent sector) and foster care. They met with young people and listened to their views and reported back to officers and the DCS along with any concerns and suggestions for improvement. This formed a major component of the scrutiny and monitoring of the authority's care of LAC through democratic procedures. In addition, the panel was responsible for reviewing the educational (and other) performance of looked-after children, requesting reports on individual children and questioning the reasons underpinning any problems identified. The panel met with the directorate management team and the Local Safeguarding Children Board to discuss the information collated via these visits and monitoring activities and to identify necessary actions.

Corporate parenting visits

Corporate parents were accompanied by officers in their visits to residential homes and conducted Regulation 33 inspections unannounced. The daily running of the home, records, catering arrangements, building quality and standard of living, unauthorised absences, children missing, staff/carers and young people's perspectives and adequate meeting of the five Every Child Matters outcomes were all inspected as part of the visit. The findings and outcomes from each visit were recorded on a standard proforma which was then presented at the corporate parenting panel for discussion (corporate parents read one another's reports and raised any issues of concern at the meeting). The issues highlighted, action taken and by whom and a date for completion and review were also identified as a result of this discussion. These forms enabled the corporate parents to systematically review progress in addressing any issues identified, calling to the panel officers and care unit managers. The visits were undertaken on a rota basis so that children's homes were visited three times a year.

Officer support

Officers were required to provide regular updates to the corporate parenting panel and were thus allocated time to prepare data and information on policies so that they were able to answer questions from the panel. With this function, the panel was a forum for challenging and exploring the authority's service to looked-after children, providing a constructive and critical eye to ensure the best possible service was delivered to young people.

The role of the Lead Member for Children's Services

The LMCS championed, promoted and led fellow members in their shared responsibility as corporate parents. A number of key features were identified as supporting the LMCS in achieving wider

member involvement in, and responsibility for, corporate parenting:

- **Identification of good practice** – The LMCS initially identified the need for more active councillor involvement in corporate parenting and sought to explore the acquisition of good practice from other authorities. An example of effective corporate parenting was identified through the LMCS's involvement in the IDeA Lead Member networks. The LMCS and a selection of interested fellow councillors visited the identified authority to speak to councillors and officers about effective corporate parenting. The model of an effective corporate parenting panel was subsequently replicated within the case-study authority, underpinned by the observed features of good practice, and introduced with the status of a trialled and tested approach.

- **Endorsement from senior colleagues** – The LMCS initially sought buy-in and support for an improved impetus on member involvement in corporate parenting by addressing cabinet and the leaders of the different parties with ideas and plans. The suggestion for improving corporate parenting in the council was firstly presented to an informal cabinet where formative policy was discussed. A fuller paper, incorporating the implications of the role for the development of improved services for children in care was then presented to the formal cabinet. It was through this process that the LMCS raised the initial profile of corporate parenting and called for member colleagues' interest. The LMCS endeavoured to promote the notion that the role of corporate parent transcended party political groups and ideologies, calling for 'councillors who cared' from across the parties of the council to be involved.

- **Training** – The LMCS arranged training sessions (with support from the IDeA) for corporate parents in order to equip members with the necessary skills in terms of what to look for and the questions to ask of the authority's services for LAC, as well as key issues around ECM. Training for members now

has a higher profile and it was suggested that there is an expectation that members will undertake ongoing training. Training and skill development was supported financially and a wide range of training opportunities were available. The LMCS promoted the view that without training and knowledge/skill development, a member's ability to effectively represent the community will be adversely affected.

- **The promotion of member ownership of corporate parenting** – The LMCS called upon 'interested and caring members' and then together they identified good practice and implemented the panel and defined the role and function of a corporate parent. Member ownership of corporate parenting was felt to have 'given it a greater impetus, if it had been something the officers had thought up and designed and asked members to do it, I don't think it would have had quite the same impact'. Corporate parenting was clearly promoted as the responsibility of all councillors and the LMCS promoted a collective approach to the corporate parenting responsibility, leading with and alongside fellow members, rather than leading them.

- **Sharing the LMCS role** – The LMCS had three deputy members, each taking responsibility for particular aspects of the role, with the LMCS retaining strategic responsibility. This may also have been an effective strategy in engaging wider membership involvement as the deputies were all involved in the corporate parenting panel, providing additional impetus and knowledge from the Children's Services perspective.

- **Engagement of district councillors** – District councillors have also been effectively engaged in the shared responsibility for corporate parenting. There was a district council member on each of the District Trust Boards, forming the main forum for their engagement. Work was being undertaken to develop the role of the district councils in championing the cause of children and considering how their services might relate to and impact on young people. A workshop on

the role of district councillors in Children's Services, delivered by the IDeA, facilitated this development work.

- **Working parties** – Wider member involvement in corporate parenting was also facilitated by a monthly programme of working parties, usually identified as a result of the children and young people's scrutiny process. Councillors were invited to become involved and could increase their knowledge and experience of specific issues relating to children, and develop a more 'hands-on' involvement in achieving effective services for looked-after children.

Members' engagement with children in public care

Corporate parents had a key role in actively engaging with end-users. There were formal processes for gathering the views of young people in care, including a survey carried out three times a year which explored their experiences and well-being. The corporate parenting panel received both qualitative and quantitative data from this exercise. In addition, the panel members met with representative groups of young people in care, the Children's Commissioner who represented groups of young people in care; and a young person who had left care who was commissioned to work with the Children's Commissioner to coordinate thinking around the issues faced by young people in care and those leaving care. Members also engaged with children in care at celebration events and in carrying out visits to children's homes. As a corporate parent, the LMCS was actively involved in engaging with CiPC and promoted this by example.

Challenges associated with corporate parenting

- **New ways of working** – The increased and more active involvement of members in the authority's service for looked-after children was felt to be a relatively new way of working. Although this was seen as potentially challenging, the process was facilitated by identification of procedures and protocols

around the operation of the corporate parenting panel. The remit of the panel was also carefully cast as providing added value as a critical, constructive and objective perspective. The leadership provided by the LMCS was highlighted as being of importance in this process, stressing qualities such as enthusiasm, passion, motivation, dedication and ensuring things happen.

Developments and improvements in corporate parenting

- **Replication of the corporate parenting panel in adult services** – Plans were in place in the authority for a similar panel to the corporate parenting panel to be established in adult services. It was anticipated that the panel would replicate some of the features of the panel within Children's Services, such as an effective rota for elected members to carry out visits to residential homes (e.g. of the elderly) and a similar impetus on member ownership of, and involvement in, scrutinising the care services provided.

- **Ongoing development and specific projects/foci** – The corporate parenting panel will continually be reviewed, identifying possible ways forward and improvements in its function and focus, remaining responsive to the needs of the communities its members serve. Refreshing of skills will also be necessary, in order that the panel does not become static and continues to be able to engage new interest and participation.

Key elements in the effectiveness of the LMCS role in corporate parenting and engaging wider membership in corporate parenting

- Members were confident that the LMCS would listen to their concerns and take them seriously and try and get something done about them (the panel was not just a formality, it had a real function in the Children's Service).

- The LMCS has been determined to become as well informed as he possibly could be about issues around ECM; he was proactive in

visiting young people, services and identifying good practice; was actively involved through the IDeA; and was engaged at a regional level in the children's agenda. The LMCS was committed to being well informed and knowledgeable in order to be in a position to provide effective and valuable challenge to the Children's Service.

- The LMCS was noted for appearing passionate about children's issues and with a strong moral sense of the need to support CiPC.

- The LMCS's leadership and political competence were highlighted: the LMCS had a senior role in the cabinet, was well regarded by fellow senior members and was felt to be adept and proactive.

- The LMCS and DCS have together promoted a positive ethos around member involvement within the directorate (which is based on information and trust) which was felt to have aided the wider uptake and effectiveness of the corporate parenting panel.

- The LMCS carried out his role as corporate parent in an exemplary manner, modelling a caring and 'pushy' parent for other members to follow.

Impacts of the LMCS role

- Young people and end-users:

  - The corporate parenting panel was felt to facilitate the monitoring of looked-after children's progress in education and push additional support to improve young people's attainment. This increased level of monitoring had contributed to a dramatic increase in educational performance of young people in care in 2007 (tripling the proportion of 5 GCSEs A–C).

  - Through gathering young people's views on their care and support, the corporate parenting panel identified an unsuccessful secure residential unit and decided to recommend its closure and specify preferable care based on young people's views.

  - The corporate parenting panel had impacted on the way the family support units were designed to provide outreach services; their intervention was based on service users' views about the most effective ways of maintaining contact between children in care and their families and earlier and preventative interventions.

  - A specific improvement made to the authorities care provision as a result of the corporate parents' role in engaging with young people was the introduction of personalising short-term placement environments in order to enhance the young person's experience of belonging and homeliness.

  - The corporate parents undertook regular visits to children's homes on a rota basis. As a result the young people in care felt that there was a more consistent interest in their care and experiences and felt that they had a 'voice' through to the authority via corporate parents.

- **Officers** – The corporate parenting panel functioned as a key source of information for the running of the Children's Service; carrying out visits to gather intelligence about the quality of service being provided and young people's feedback and providing an objective, constructively critical and questioning perspective on the service. The corporate parenting panel chaired by the LMCS enabled the corporate parents to, crucially, feed back to the LMCS who was then in a position to follow up any issues with the DCS and heads of service in weekly Children's Services management meetings. The LMCS was felt to have 'developed the corporate parenting panel to the point where it is providing a good and valued support to the children and life-long learning section of the authority'.

- **The Children's Service** – Members' increasing role in the leading of the Children's Service has resulted in changes and improvements to the service provided. For instance, councillors raised concerns about individual Personal Education Plans for all

young people in the authority's care and pushed for a change in service policy and delivery in order to ensure these plans were in place.

• **Members** – The council as a whole felt that corporate parenting and care of looked-after children was a cross-party concern. Members benefited from having an active role in sharing the responsibility for looked-after children, undertaking visits and building regular contact with care users, and, getting more involved in and knowledgeable about the workings of the Children's Service. Members were actively involved in 'examining, challenging and leading where necessary, in order to get the best service' for children.

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England and Wales. Statutes (2004). *Children Act 2004*. Chapter 31 [online] Available: http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040031.htm [13 March, 2007].

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Appendix 1: Methodology

The study comprised three complementary phases:

- **Phase 1:** an audit of the role of the LMCS as corporate parent via the completion of a proforma (March – April 2007). A total of 169 proformas were sent to Lead Members in 151 LAs, and 74 were returned; a response rate of 44 per cent of Lead Members and 49 per cent of local authorities in England.

- **Phase 2:** telephone interviews with 32 LMCSs to explore the wider remit of the role (May – July 2007).

- **Phase 3:** case studies in five local authorities to explore the LMCS role in greater depth (including a focus on good practice relating to various aspects of the role) (August – October 2007). This involved telephone interviews with LMCSs, DCSs and a range of other professionals and partners working and interacting with the LMCS.

Phase 1: Audit

A proforma was posted to 169 Lead Members in 151 local authorities in England, identified via the IDeA Lead Members' Network, to audit the role of the Lead Member for Children's Services as corporate parent. Proformas were returned from 74 Lead Members, representing a response rate of 44 per cent of Lead Members and 49 per cent of local authorities in England (see table A1.1).

Table A1.1 Response rates to the NFER audit of Lead Members (number of proformas sent and received)

	Proformas sent (N)	Proforma returns (N)	Response rate (%)
Number of Lead Members	169*	74	44
Number of LAs	151**	74	49

Source: NFER survey March – April 2007

* in 18 authorities more than one Lead Member was identified as being responsible for Children's Services

** in one authority a contact for the county and borough council was provided

Table A1.1 shows that the overall response rate was 44 per cent, representing more than two-fifths of Lead Members across nearly a half (49 per cent) of English LAs. The response rate may well have been affected by the impending elections. A number of respondents, when contacted by researchers, felt that they were unable to participate in the study because of the time pressures they were under in relation to the election and that they might not be in office after May 2007.

The proforma (see Appendix 2) was devised in conjunction with the steering group at the LGA and advisers from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). A letter (see Appendix 3) accompanying the proforma included an endorsement from an LMCS and Chairman of the LGA's Children and Young People's Board. The draft proforma was piloted with three Lead Members, who were asked to comment on the pertinence of the themes, the wording of questions and the layout and design of the document. The proforma was redrafted in light of comments received from Lead Members and the steering group.

Proformas were sent to Lead Members at the beginning of March 2007, with reminder letters and telephone calls at the beginning of April 2007.

The proformas explored the following areas:

- LMCS background information

- the information received by LMCS in order to fulfil their corporate parenting role

- LMCS awareness of the educational progress of children in public care (CiPC)

- LMCS awareness of other issues affecting CiPC

- the corporate parenting role (including the time spent on the corporate parenting role and engaging wider membership in the role)

- current support received by LMCS for corporate parenting role and

- improving the support for LMCS.

The proformas were designed so that responses would be easily quantifiable and open-ended questions were coded to allow for comparison of themes and issues across responses. Data from the proforma responses was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and analysed according to the above categories. Variable analysis was also undertaken, exploring relationships between categorised responses and variables such as LA type and size, and Lead Members' length of time in role.

Phase 2: telephone interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted with 32 LMCSs to explore the wider remit of the role. Participants consented to be contacted for an interview as part of completion of the proforma in Phase 1. Interview schedules were piloted with an LMCS and were subsequently modified according to their feedback and suggestions.

Interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes and were conducted with LMCSs from 12 county councils, nine London Boroughs, six unitary and five metropolitan authorities.

Interviews covered the following areas:

- background
- roles and responsibilities
- role in commissioning of services
- engaging with children, young people and carers
- manageability of the role
- relationship with the DCS
- strategies for sharing roles and responsibilities
- continuity and succession planning
- training challenges and support
- good practice.

Interviews were summarised into Word documents under the above sections. Qualitative, grounded-theory approach was then adopted to analyse the data, coding

the data according to emerging categories and themes. Excel spreadsheets were employed to analyse the data according to the standard variables (list of variables) as well as other findings, exploring any emerging patterns and trends.

Phase 3: case studies

Case studies were conducted in five local authorities to explore the role of the LMCS in greater depth, gather additional perspectives on the role and explore good practice relating to the role. Case studies were selected, from the telephone interview sample of participants willing to be involved in the subsequent phase, according to specific aspects of good practice relating to the role and to cover a range of LA types, decided in conjunction with the LGA and local authorities.

The five case studies focused on good practice around the LMCS role in:

- Case study 1: Partnership working
- Case study 2: Partnership working
- Case study 3: Engaging with end-users
- Case study 4: Commissioning
- Case study 5: Corporate parenting.

The case studies typically involved interviews with the LMCS, the DCS plus up to four further interviews with personnel relevant to the specific focus (including, assistant directors/heads of service, partner representatives and councillors). In addition to the focus on good practice, these interviewees were also asked more generic questions to explore their contact with the LMCS and their views about the role.

The data relating to the good practice foci is reported in detailed case-study summaries. The data gathered from the generic questions as part of the case-study interviews has been incorporated into the main body of the report and is highlighted throughout in boxes to illustrate additional perspectives in relation to the relevant sections and topics.

Appendix 2: Proforma

THE ROLE OF THE LEAD MEMBER AS CORPORATE PARENT

This survey is part of a wider piece of research looking at the role of lead members for children's services. The findings from the research will be shared with policy makers at a national level. This initial phase of the research is exploring lead members' corporate parenting role. Please note that this survey is trying to find out what lead members know about their corporate parenting role at this point in time. It is not intended as a test of knowledge but hopes to identify possible areas for additional support.

We would be most grateful for your help in providing information about your corporate parenting role by completing this short proforma which focuses on: the information you receive in relation to your corporate parenting role; the educational progress of children in public care within your authority; issues affecting children in public care within the authority; the time you spend on this role; sharing responsibility for corporate parenting; and support. It should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. We would very much like to hear your views, they are very important to us.

Please be assured that your answers will be treated in strict confidence and reported only in aggregated form. We would be grateful if you could complete the proforma as soon as possible. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact **Sally Kendall** or **Jennie Harland** on 01904 433435 or email s.kendall@nfer.ac.uk or jennie.harland@nfer.ac.uk.

Please note: In some authorities the executive member for children's services may have made arrangements for another elected colleague to be responsible for corporate parenting on a daily basis. If this is the case, please could you ensure that the individual with this responsibility receives the survey and is asked to respond? Thank you.

ABOUT YOU

We would be grateful if you could provide some additional information about you/your LA:

Your name: (you may remain anonymous if you wish to do so)

Your title:

Gender: **Male**   **Female**   (Please tick as appropriate)

Name of LA:

Date of joining the council: MM/YY

Date became lead member for children's services: MM/YY

INFORMATION FOR CORPORATE PARENTING ROLE

1 **Do you think you get the information you need to fulfil your corporate parenting role effectively?**

Yes ☐ (go to Q1a)   No ☐ (go to Q1b)

1a **If yes, do you ...** (please tick all that apply)

… have information provided through a procedure
(e.g. a regular monthly report or verbal update)? ☐

… have information provided on request? ☐

Please describe briefly below …

[ ]

1b **If no, what additional information do you feel you need or is unavailable to you?**

Please describe briefly below …

[ ]

EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS OF CHILDREN IN PUBLIC CARE

2 **Do you personally know the progress of your children in public care at the following stages of their education?**

	Yes	No
'A' level or equivalent	☐	☐
GCSE	☐	☐
Other qualifications (GNVQ, NVQ etc.)	☐	☐
KS3	☐	☐
KS2	☐	☐
KS1	☐	☐

ISSUES AFFECTING CHILDREN IN PUBLIC CARE

3   **Do you personally know …**

3a   **… how many children and young people there are living in care in your area, including those placed by another local authority?**

Yes ☐   No ☐

3b   **… how many children and young people living in care who your LA has placed out of area?**

Yes ☐   No ☐

3c   **… whether the children in public care population level is increasing or decreasing in your LA?**

Yes ☐   No ☐

3d   **… how many children in public care have moved placement in the past year?**

Yes ☐   No ☐

3e   **… how many children in public care have moved placement more than once in the past 3 years?**

Yes ☐   No ☐

3f   **… how many children in public care have had to move school as a result of being looked after?**

Yes ☐   No ☐

3g   **… what your children in public care say about their care?**

Yes ☐   No ☐

3h   **… what your children in public care think about their education?**

Yes ☐   No ☐

3i   **… what your children in public care say about their leisure and social activities?**

Yes ☐   No ☐

3j   **… what your children in public care say about how safe they feel?**

Yes ☐   No ☐

TIME SPENT ON ROLE

4 **How many hours on average per week do you devote to your corporate parenting role?**

Hours

SHARING CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

5 **Do you share your corporate parenting role and responsibilities in any way with ...** (please tick all that apply)

	Yes	No
… another Cabinet Member?	☐	☐
… Scrutiny Chair/Vice-Chair?	☐	☐
… backbenchers?	☐	☐

If you have ticked Yes for any of the above please go to Q5a.

No one   ☐   Please go to Q5b.

5a **If yes, how?** (e.g. backbenchers attend Corporate Parenting Panel)

Please describe briefly below …

5b **If no one, what are the barriers to engaging the wider membership?**

Please describe briefly below …

SUPPORT

6a Do you feel that you receive adequate support from officers in your corporate parenting role?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

6b What three things would help you fulfil your corporate parenting role better?

[   ]

Please tick here if you do not wish to be involved in the second phase of the research [   ]

Appendix 3: Letter to Lead Members

«Title» «Forename» «Surname»

«Description»

«Address1»

«Address2»

«Address3»

«Post_Code»

Dear «Title» «Surname»

The Role of Lead Member for Children's Services

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has been commissioned by the Local Government Association (LGA), with advice and assistance from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), to conduct a study looking at the role of the Lead Member for Children's Services.

Cllr Les Lawrence, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families at Birmingham City Council and Chairman of the LGA's Children and Young People's Board, supports the research: *'As Lead Member colleagues, I am very keen to hear back from you about your experiences of the role generally, but in the first instance with regard to corporate parenting in particular. You know as well as I do the wide responsibilities, time and commitment involved in undertaking this vital role effectively. LGA is keen to know how we, the IDeA and potentially others, can improve support for you and we very much look forward to receiving your returns and comments.'*

A research outline is enclosed which provides you with some additional information about the study. The research is broken down into three phases. Phase 1, the national audit, asks Lead Members to complete a short proforma focusing on their corporate parenting role. This survey is hoping to provide a snapshot of what Lead Members personally know about their corporate parenting role at this moment in time. It is not intended as a test of knowledge but hopes to provide an overview of the current situation nationally and to identify possible areas for development or additional support.

We would be most grateful if you would take the time to complete the proforma enclosed with this letter, which should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. It would be much appreciated if you could return the proforma to the NFER in the pre-paid envelope provided by the **21st March 2007**.

> Please note: In some authorities the executive member for Children's Services may have made arrangements for another elected colleague to be responsible for corporate parenting on a daily basis. If this is the case, please could you ensure that the individual with this responsibility receives the survey and is asked to respond?

All the information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence and your responses will not be individually identifiable in any feedback or publication. Findings from the research will be made available on the NFER website (www.nfer.ac.uk) and LGA website (www.lga.gov.uk) when the study is complete.

If you have any queries, or require any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Sally Kendall or Jennie Harland on 01904 433435 or s.kendall@nfer.ac.uk or jennie.harland@nfer.ac.uk.

Thank you in advance for your kind assistance with this study.

Yours sincerely

Sally Kendall
Project Leader

Appendix 4: A typical Lead Member for Children's Services's 'Contact Network'

```
┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐
│ Scrutiny │  │ Cabinet  │  │  Policy  │  │   Full   │
│          │  │          │  │development│  │ council  │
│          │  │          │  │committees│  │          │
└────┬─────┘  └────┬─────┘  └────┬─────┘  └────┬─────┘
     ↕             ↕             ↕             ↕
```

┌─────────────┐ ┌──┐
│ External   │ │   **Lead Member for Children's Services**   │
│ networking, │ │   │
│ events,   │ │ (Typical responsibilities: commissioning for   │
│ conferences,│↔ │ Children's Services (CS), Youth Service,   │
│ membership of│ │ Youth Justice, Education, Children's Social Care, │
│ regional and│ │ YOT, early years provision, Youth   │
│ national boards│ │ Participation, BSF, ECM agenda, Extended Schools,│
│   │ │ Children's Centres, CYPs health,   │
│   │ │ integrated services for disabled SEN CYP, school │
│   │ │ attendance, voluntary sector for   │
│   │ │ CYP, play champion)   │
└─────────────┘ └──┘

┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────────────┐ ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Director of │ │ Directors of other   │ │ Partners: PCT,   │
│ Children's   │ │ directorates e.g. chief│ │ voluntary   │
│ Services   │ │ executive, finance, │ │ and community sector,│
│   │ │ improvement and   │ │ police, schools, youth│
│   │ │ performance, transport,│ │ service, probation, LSC,│
│   │ │ adult services, community,│ │ YOT, health   │
│   │ │ environment, health etc.│ │   │
└──────────────┘ └──────────────────────┘ └──────────────────────┘

┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Assistant   │   │ Assistant directors/ │
│ directors/   │   │ Heads of depts   │
│ Heads of   │   │   │
│ service   │   │   │
└──────────────┘   └──────────────────────┘

┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐
│ Contact with │ │ Contact with │ │ Ward duties/ │ │ Local   │
│ frontline   │ │ CS   │ │ school   │ │ partnership │
│ teams   │ │ end-users   │ │ governors   │ │ involvement │
└──────────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘