



# Resourceful leadership: how directors of children's services improve outcomes for children

## Full report

Resource

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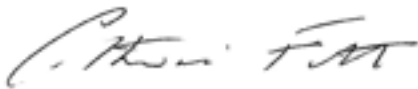
# Foreword

This research is the first time anyone has looked at the nature of successful leadership as a director of children's services (DCS). Since April 2005, DCSs have provided leadership that has sought to transform every aspect of services for families, children and young people. This report offers a way of understanding the job and aims to help future generations to become even better leaders.

Colleagues in children's services across the country have been supremely generous in sharing their experiences and we wish to honour them for their passion, determination and courage, and for the outstanding care they offer for children and young people. We would like to thank the researchers for their consideration, sensitivity and sheer skill in making this report possible. We hope it will be read and used in the same generous spirit that the DCS community has demonstrated.

Best wishes and thanks to all involved.

Catherine Fitt



Strategic Director for Children's Services,  
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Christine Davies



Director  
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# Executive summary

## Purpose and background

Leading for Outcomes is a unique study into senior leadership in children's services in England, drawing on in-depth primary research with leaders in eight local authorities, and 22 directors of children's services. The eight local authorities were selected on a range of factors but primarily to represent existing high performers or rapidly improving authorities in terms of outcomes. The research was commissioned by the National College in partnership with C4EO, and completed by a team comprising Deloitte, Navigate and the University of Oxford. The study was completed during 2010.

The key concept the Leading for Outcomes research has uncovered is that of the resourceful leader<sup>1</sup>. This report sets out a definition of resourcefulness and the eight core behaviours of resourceful leaders. It then discusses resourcefulness within three specific contexts that emerged as part of the research: leading change, leading in a time of shock, and managing the corporate and political landscape.

## The resourceful leader

Leaders in the public sector and children's services are facing a number of challenges, including a tough financial climate, high expectations of services at lower cost, shifts in demographics, complex and shared delivery and public sector reform. These challenges require leaders to demonstrate a high degree of resourcefulness.

Resourcefulness is the ability to:

- assess and widen one's resource-base
- select and apply the best mix of resources to address the type of challenge faced

The concept of a resourceful leader is helpful in thinking about the ways in which DCSs are able to:

- assess their situation, now and in the future

- actively seek to inform and shape the context they operate in to promote the interests of children and young people
- select a range of responses, drawing on both themselves and others as resources
- apply a response and see it through

The Leading for Outcomes research has explored the ways in which leaders have demonstrated resourcefulness in their leadership to improve outcomes for children and young people.

## The eight core behaviours of the resourceful DCS

All DCSs displayed the characteristics of a resourceful leader, which we believe can be distilled into eight key behaviours, each underpinned by a range of knowledge areas, skills and attributes. These eight behaviours support and build upon the National College's leadership qualities framework (the framework; National College, 2010).

The eight core behaviours of resourceful DCSs are:

1. openness to possibilities
2. the ability to collaborate
3. demonstrating a belief in their team and people
4. personal resilience and tenacity
5. the ability to create and sustain commitment across a system
6. focusing on results and outcomes
7. the ability to simplify
8. the ability to learn continuously

All DCSs demonstrate these behaviours to some extent. However, more effective DCSs differentiate themselves in two clear ways:

- They are able to select the right set of behaviours for a given challenge and most importantly know why the behaviours would be most effective.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of the 'resourceful leader' builds on Edwards' notion the 'resourceful practitioner' [2010]

- They are able to draw on a broader and deeper set of the relevant knowledge, skills and attributes to help make those behaviours as effective as possible in their contexts.

This study has highlighted three priority challenges where resourcefulness was demonstrated by DCSs in different ways, drawing on the behaviours to different degrees. These areas are:

- leading change
- leading in a time of policy and funding shock<sup>2</sup>
- managing the corporate and political landscape

## Leading change

A key task of the resourceful leader is to effectively interpret their context and utilise the resources available to them to deliver better outcomes for children and young people. This process is one of change: shaping and transforming their organisation and influencing the context in which it operates over time.

### Resourceful DCSs who are leading change:

- both respond to and shape their environment over time
- expand their resource-base as far as possible
- engage and gain the commitment of others to support the change process
- adopt different approaches depending upon the historical performance of their authority

Resourceful DCSs don't operate solely in the now. While they interpret and respond to their context, they also proactively seek to shape their context over time. The provision of children's services is particularly subject to change and can be viewed as highly volatile.

Resourceful DCSs utilise the capacities of others to support them in leading change; they:

- adopt different approaches depending upon the historical performance of their authority, with

leaders in historically high-performing authorities being more targeted and cautious

- adopt a phased and paced approach to leading change
- expand their resource-base as far as possible
- engage and gain commitment of others to support the change process

Resourceful leaders see change as an ongoing process which is best viewed as a journey. They take deliberate steps on this journey, building and expanding the resource-base of their organisation as they go.

## Leading in a time of shock

Leaders in children's services today are operating in a particularly challenging climate characterised by high volatility and external pressure. Their response has been resourceful in many ways, most notably by viewing the shock to the system as a positive opportunity for reform.

The concept of shock is well understood in economics. It describes an event that, while not unforeseeable, has a profound impact on the system with immediate and far-reaching consequences. Policy changes and funding reform, combined, comprise the most pressing short- and medium-term challenges DCSs face today. The research revealed two types of responses, which are not mutually exclusive:

- pragmatism driven by necessity, ie DCSs recognise the need to make cuts
- viewing external pressures as an opportunity to drive radical reform further and faster

Resourcefulness has been shown in leaders in children's services both with regard to statutory and discretionary services. In particular, the overall tendency is to embed partnership working deeper and more quickly as a means of managing pressures. Furthermore, DCSs in lower performing authorities tend to need to rely more heavily on their own internal resources than their peers in higher performing authorities.

<sup>2</sup> 'Shock' is a technical term that the authors have found helpful to explain the circumstances under which DCSs and senior leaders respond when major, sometimes systemic reform is required quickly. Chapter 4 explains the term in more detail, illustrated with case studies.

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## Managing the corporate and political landscape

Directors of children's services are senior members of the local authority executive team, but they are not the most senior. One of the defining features of the resourceful leader is how effectively he or she forms selective alliances with other senior figures – especially the chief executive and lead member(s) – to deliver their own objectives.

The chief executive and the lead member comprise the most vital peer relationships for DCSs which can be both challenges to solve and resources to utilise.

The response of the DCS is often shaped by the nature of their own experience of working with senior peers, for example whether the experience has been largely positive or negative. Resourcefulness in this context effectively boils down to senior-level collaboration and the formation of alliances to tackle specific problems, for example:

- working with the lead member and chief executive as a resource to deliver the DCS's own agenda, including anticipating lead member requirements and actively engaging with them to shape the local agenda
- being a corporate player and modelling leadership behaviour to other senior officers

The research shows that the more embedded a corporate way of working, and the more stable the political leadership, the more chance there is for deeper, mutually beneficial and reciprocal alliances to develop. Political instability, combined with corporate change, can lead to more procedural-type relationships.

## Conclusions and implications

The Leading for Outcome research has:

- set out the concept of the resourceful leader in children's services, and the key task of expanding the pool of resources – both internal and external – from which the DCS can draw over time
- offered support for the leadership qualities framework (National College, 2010) and built on it, describing the eight core behaviours of resourceful DCSs and the underpinning knowledge, skills and attributes of each (summarised in appendix 2)

- described how the approach to change manifests itself in different ways depending on local context, with DCSs in higher performing authorities tending to adopt a more evolutionary approach to managing change
- set out the different types of resourceful responses to shock and drawn out the relatively greater importance of the DCS relying on the internal resources in those authorities on a trajectory of improvement
- explained how alliances at the senior level in the corporate and local political environment are a crucial resource on which DCSs can draw, and where the local context can have a significant impact on the balance of alliances and their effectiveness

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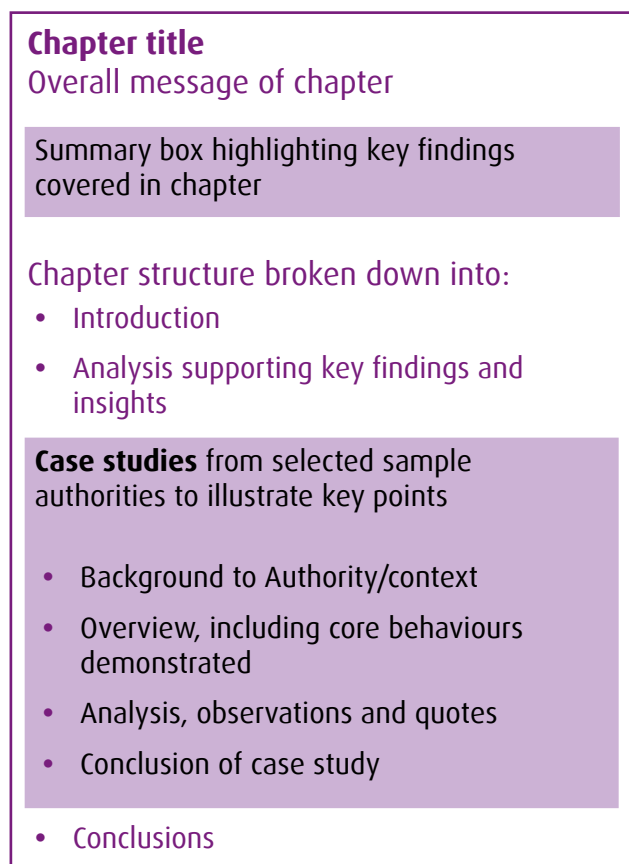
# Chapter 1: How to read this report and method

## How to read this report

Following a definition of the resourceful leader – the key concept emanating from this research – in Chapter 2, and a subsequent chapter on the eight core behaviours of the resourceful leader, the bulk of this report comprises three analytical chapters on change, leading in time of shock and managing the corporate and political landscape.

These three analytical chapters have a common structure (Figure 1) intended to guide the reader through the logic and to provide practical insights into resourceful leadership.

Figure 1: Structure of analytical chapters and case studies



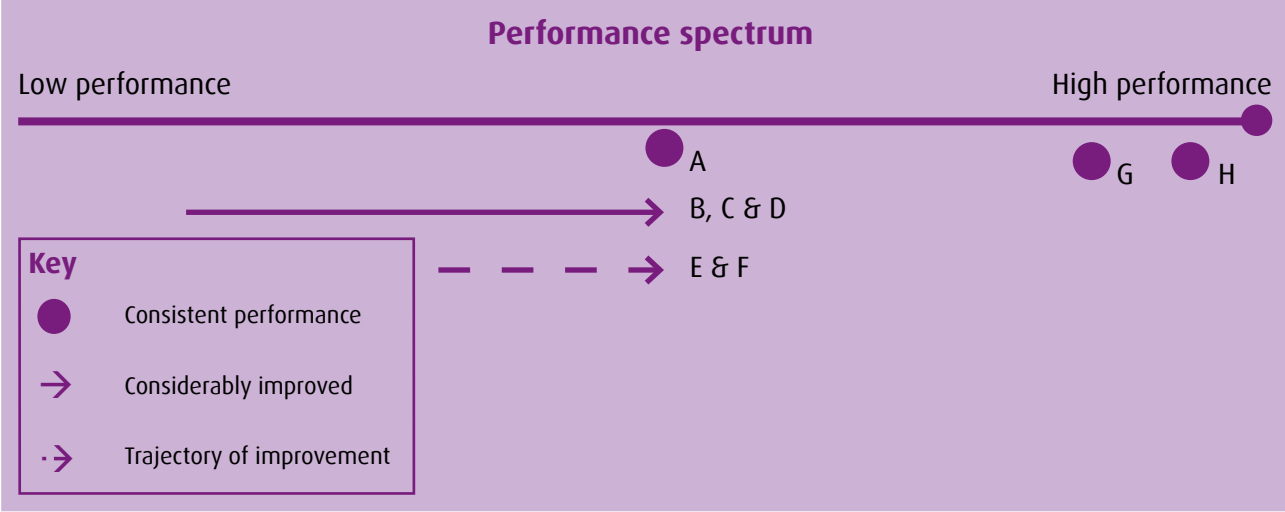
## The eight local authorities engaged in this research

To identify a cross-section of children's services, a review of the publicly available performance and inspection data on local authorities took place. This included the following evidence for each local authority:

- the comprehensive area assessment (CAA): annual rating of council children's services published by Ofsted in December 2009
- the local area children's services performance profile: summary profile published by Ofsted in August 2009
- the most recent national indicator set (NIS) data on outcomes for children and young people available for each local area via the Ofsted website

From this published data we selected a long list of local authorities representing high performers (that is, local authorities with a CAA at grade 4); those on a trajectory of improvement since their annual performance assessment (APA) 2008 grade and those local authorities where there appears to have been limited movement since 2008. Given that there are differences between the APA and CAA processes, this data needs to be treated with some caution. The final eight authorities were selected using a combination of the above coupled with their ability to participate (Figure 2 overleaf).

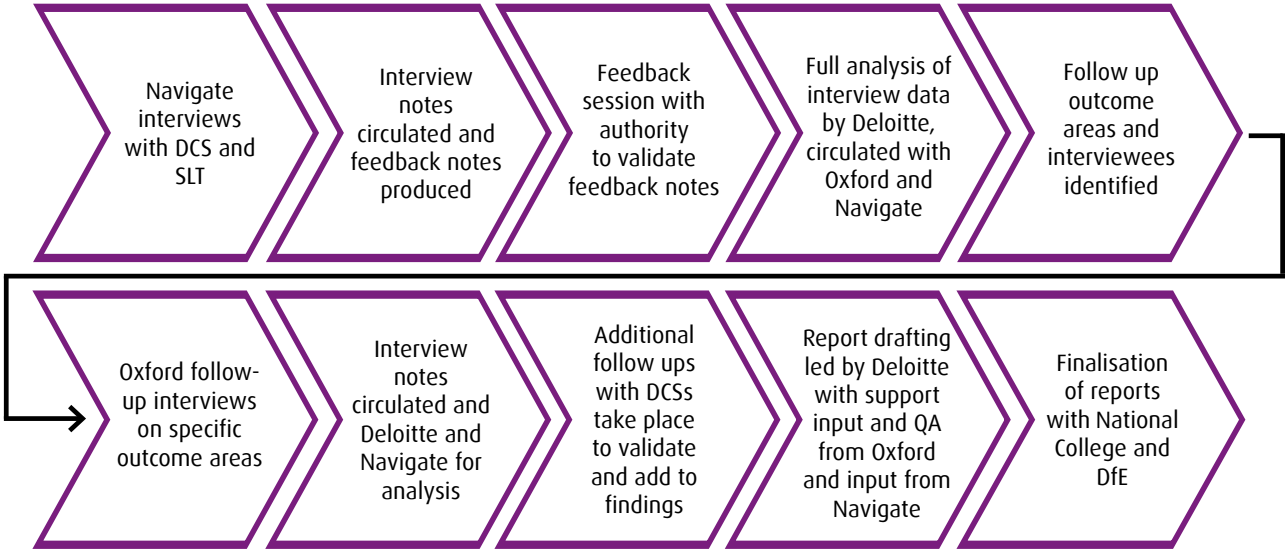
Figure 2: Performance spectrum of local authorities engaged in the Leading for Outcomes research



### Research process

The process illustrated in Figure 3 was undertaken to gather and analyse the interview data. The initial interviews took place between March and August 2010, with feedback sessions in each authority taking place only once all the initial interviews had been completed for the authority. Follow-up interviews took place between June and October. Additional follow-ups took place with 22 DCSs in November alongside synthesis and report drafting. The report was drafted between October and December 2010.

Figure 3 – The process of research and analysis





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## Chapter 2: The resourceful leader: effective local public services leadership

Leaders in the public sector and children's services are facing a number of challenges, including a tough financial climate, high expectations of services at lower cost, shifts in demographics, and public sector reform. These challenges require leaders to demonstrate a high degree of resourcefulness.

### Children's services: in need of resourceful leadership

DCSs need to lead their organisations in complex environments and are continuously facing 'wicked' problems (Grint, 2005 (see Case study 1)). The DCS role is challenging, as it requires practitioners with talent and expertise to fulfil its various requirements. DCSs often have to demonstrate exceptional leadership to be successful in delivering improved outcomes for children and young people. In this section we outline what we mean by resourceful leadership and consider some of the behaviours the resourceful leader requires, as revealed by the Leading for Outcomes study.

- Children's services is a complex environment, facing many wicked problems which require effective leadership.
- The fact that services to children are delivered by many different agencies, within an increasingly resource-constrained environment, means that leaders need to demonstrate resourceful leadership.
- Resourcefulness is the ability to widen one's potential asset base and use the most effective means of addressing the challenge faced.
- The concept of a resourceful leader is helpful in thinking about the ways DCSs are able to:
  - assess their situation, now and into the future
  - actively seek to inform and shape the context they operate in to promote the interests of children
  - select a range of responses, drawing on both themselves and others as resources
  - apply a response and see it through
- The Leading for Outcomes research has explored the ways in which leaders have demonstrated resourcefulness in their leadership practice and continue to work on improving outcomes for children and young people.

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## Case study 1: Technical and adaptive leadership

Along with Grint (2005) and Heifetz (1994) we believe that the term leadership is best defined through activities rather than through looking purely at positional power or traits. Heifetz (1994) defines problems in two broad categories, technical and adaptive, with adaptive challenges being the work of leaders.

Technical problems are those that can be solved by the knowledge of experts, whereas adaptive problems require new learning. When the problem definition, solution and implementation are clear, Heifetz calls this technical change. For adaptive problems, change must come from the collective intelligence of employees at all levels. Together they learn their way towards solutions:

Adaptive work is required when our deeply held beliefs are challenged, when the values that made us successful become less relevant, and when competing perspectives emerge.

At the heart of Heifetz's book is the image of the leader influencing a community to face its problems, mobilising people to tackle tough problems as opposed to a more common view of the leader as someone who influences the community to follow the leader's vision.

## Case study 2: Tame, critical and wicked issues

Grint (2005) defines leadership by the type of problem an organisation faces. He categorises problems as tame, critical or wicked:

- Tame problems are where the causes of the problem are known and can be tackled by applying known processes through conventional plans and projects. Tame problems require management.
- Critical problems threaten the operations of the organisation in the short term. Decisive action is called for and people are required to follow the call for action in a highly disciplined way. With this type of problem a leader takes charge. Critical problems require commanders (often this is confused with leadership).
- Wicked problems involve complex challenges that can rarely be solved and which tend to have multiple stakeholders who have different perceptions of both the problem and the solution. Wicked problems require leadership.

### Leadership of a complex system

Services for children and young people are delivered by multiple agencies and individuals across a complex system. Effective, joined-up delivery of services requires leadership to be exercised across organisational boundaries.

Multi-agency working provides a different way of looking at issues and I appreciate the different disciplines and technical knowledge that people bring.

Assistant director, Lifelong learning, achievement and enterprise

DCSs have to deliver outcomes by forming effective partnerships with a wide variety of organisations in the public, private and voluntary and community

sectors. Leadership in children's services is about aligning these multiple strategic and delivery agents to deliver effective services for children and young people. Leadership is not about exercising positional authority – it is about a set of activities which can be characterised as resourceful leadership. Leadership can be exercised by many people across the children's services landscape. One of the key roles of effective leaders is to create the environment where leadership can thrive.

Working to create an enabling structure and processes that bind people together is important. Reflecting on knowledge and skills of staff and how they can work together to improve our work for children and families is also important.

Assistant director, Integrated services

## Resourcefulness: widening the resource-base

The Leading for Outcomes study revealed a dynamic that marked the leadership of children’s services and existed across all the case studies. The dynamic was between:

- the behaviours of a resourceful leader, that is, how they use knowledge, skills and attributes to work on outcomes
- the contexts they were shaping to take forward their intentions to ensure the effective delivery of services for children, young people and families at the local level

As Moore (2005) suggests, one of the key tasks of a public sector leader is to increase the operating capacity of their organisation, or their ability to deliver services to citizens. Most of the DCSs and their senior leadership teams (SLTs) interviewed for this study gave accounts of leadership journeys in which they had made changes that allowed them to move their local systems forward and develop additional leadership capacity. These journeys can be summarised as:

- reviewing and understanding local practices
- assessing the existing resources that can be used to help the system learn and move forward
- deploying existing or creating new resources needed for the next stage in service development for good outcomes for children and young people

This leadership practice was characterised by the Leading for Outcomes research team as resourceful. As well as using the personal resources of leaders, it involved using a wide resource-base from across the local authority and partner agencies to work on local issues.

Context was a key factor in determining how this resourcefulness appeared in practice and the identification of local priorities. However, the crucial factor for leaders was to be able to recognise the possibilities for action within specific contexts and to be able to bring in the resources necessary to take services forward.

Resourceful leaders were also likely to think developmentally about their key

resources – that is, how to build capacity amongst their managers and front-line staff – to promote integrated working to achieve good outcomes for children and young people. Workforce development was therefore a constant priority for these leaders.

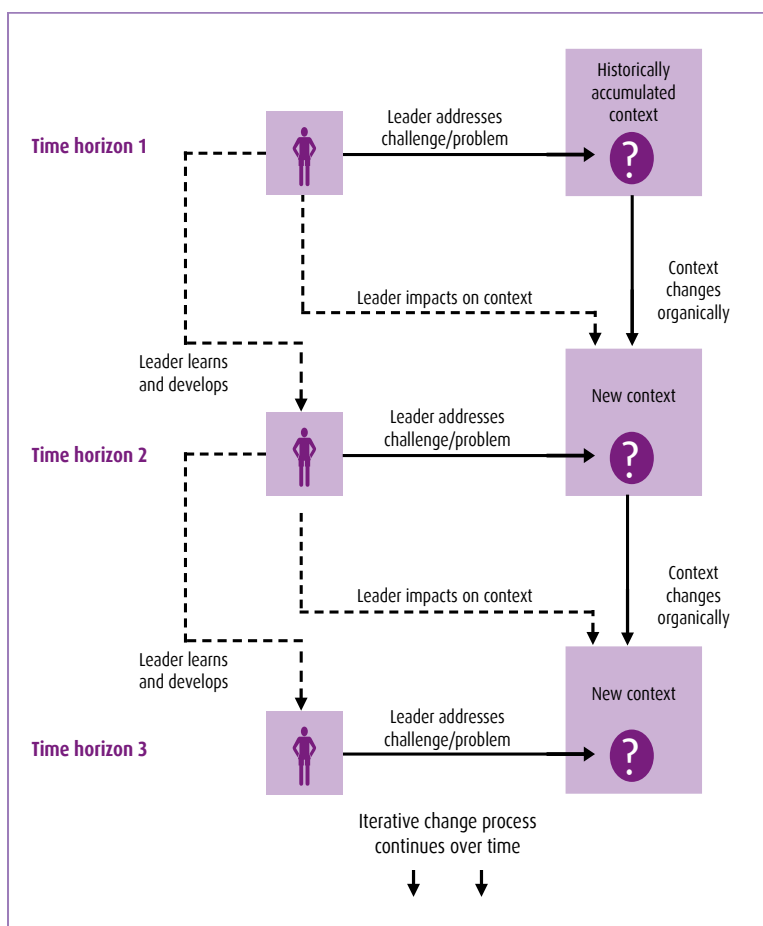
## The resourceful leader

The concept of a resourceful leader is helpful in thinking about the ways in which DCSs are able to:

- assess their situation, now and in the future
- actively seek to inform the context they operate in to promote the interests of children and young people
- select a range of responses, drawing on both themselves and others as resources
- apply a response and see it through
- seek to impact positively on and change the context within which they operate over time

Figure 4 illustrates the concept of resourceful leadership by highlighting the dynamic relationship between leader and context in which leadership both shapes and is shaped by the context:

Figure 4: The dynamic relationship between leader and context over time



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Resourceful leaders recognise the potential usefulness of the resources available to them and bring them into play to create the conditions that allow them to take forward their priorities. In the Leading for Outcomes study, these resources included the strategic support of health systems, engaging headteachers and the resources of schools, or ensuring that a tool such as the common assessment framework was well understood and used as a mechanism for mobilising front-line service integration<sup>3</sup>.

The Leading for Outcomes study focused on identifying the behaviours of the resourceful leader and the characteristics – or knowledge, skills and attributes – that underpin those behaviours. The essence of resourceful leadership lies in strategically deploying resources in response to intelligent interpretations of the local environment.

## Conclusions: resourceful leadership delivers results

The role of the resourceful leader involves the careful interpretation of the organisational context as a basis for assessing the action that can be taken. In selecting the best course(s) of action, the resourceful DCS must deploy his or her own expertise and that of others to shape the provision of children's services to achieve improved outcomes for children and young people. The role involves widening the potential resource-base available to leaders by drawing on and developing the knowledge, skills and attributes of others.

Above all, the research shows that resourceful leadership delivers results. In Chapter 3 we identify the key behaviours that resourceful leaders demonstrate.

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<sup>3</sup> Although it is known more generally that the role of commissioning is important in ensuring effective, value-for-money services are provided to children and young people, the evidence on commissioning from this research is insufficient to provide comment in relation to leadership.

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# Chapter 3: The eight core behaviours of resourceful DCSs

All the DCSs in this study displayed the characteristics of a resourceful leader, which can be distilled into eight key behaviours, each underpinned by a range of knowledge, skills and attributes.

The eight core behaviours of resourceful DCSs are:

1. openness to possibilities
2. the ability to collaborate
3. demonstrating a belief in their team and people
4. personal resilience and tenacity
5. the ability to create and sustain commitment across a system
6. displaying a focus on results and outcomes
7. the ability to simplify
8. the ability to learn continuously

These eight behaviours support and build on the leadership qualities framework (National College, 2010).

This chapter explores these eight core behaviours and the knowledge, skills and attributes that support them.

## Behaviours of resourceful leadership

Chapter 2 discussed the concept of the resourceful DCS as being able to interpret, act on and change local practices through considered deployment of resources.

This research has also shown that a core of eight resourceful behaviours was demonstrated by the DCSs studied in any context within which they were operating. They were common to those working in the higher performing local authorities and those on a trajectory of improvement, regardless of the size of the authority, their length of time in post or whether they had a background in education or social care.

Critically, resourceful leadership in children's services is not solely about responding to contexts. It is also

about drawing on one's own resources to shape the context within which the leader operates. The eight behaviours are:

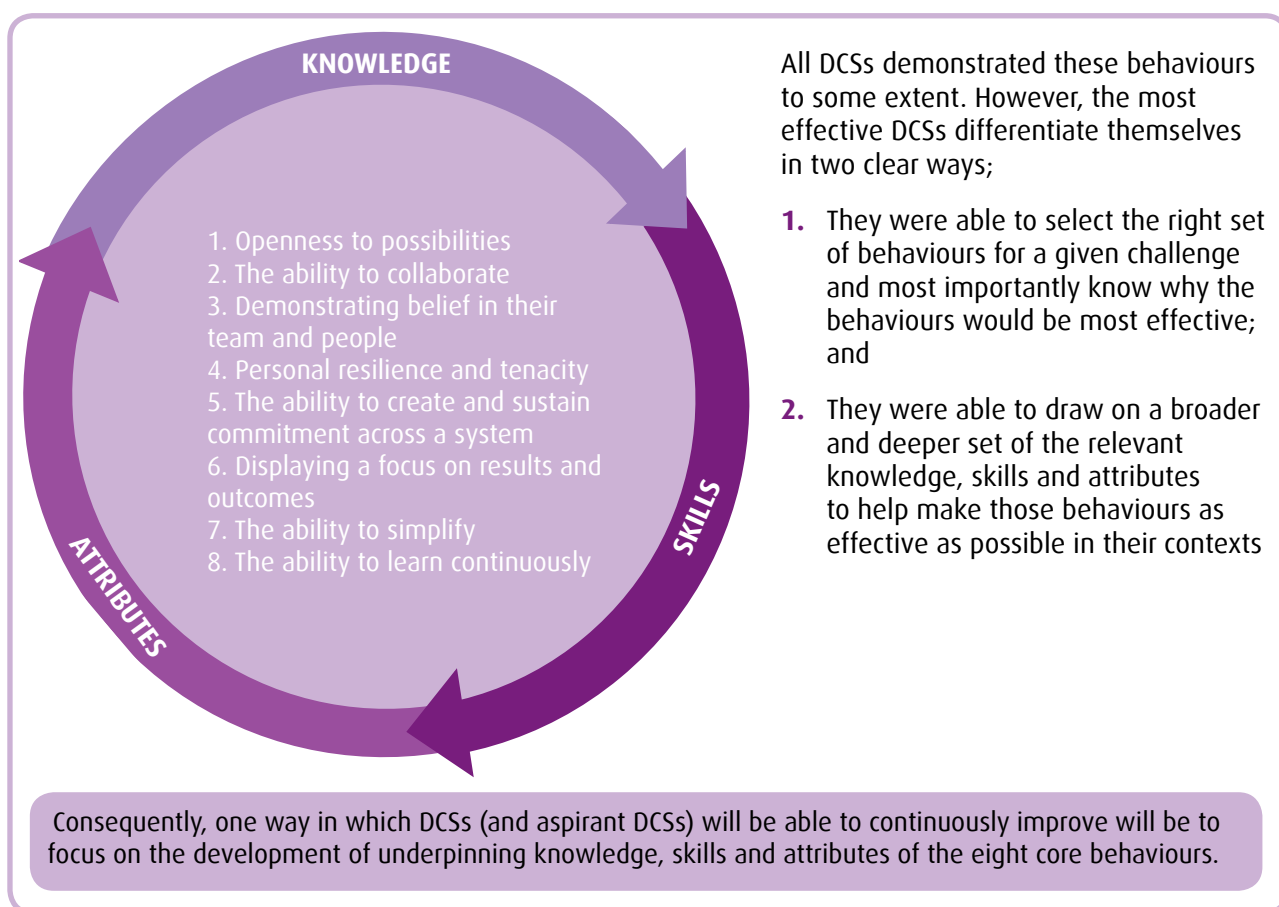
1. **openness to possibilities:** understanding the different options for resource deployment and using the resources available to them in a considered way
2. **the ability to collaborate:** working together with one's team, partners, and political and corporate leaders to work on outcomes and deliver results
3. **demonstrating a belief in their team and people:** fostering a sense of team and practices of team-working to enable working through others
4. **personal resilience and tenacity:** demonstrating the ability to see things through and work through challenges
5. **the ability to create and sustain commitment across a system:** aligning people to work towards a common goal
6. **focusing on results and outcomes:** not only inputs, outputs or the process, and ensuring that the improvement of outcomes is the overarching priority
7. **ability to simplify:** removing unnecessary complexity from systems, and also creating a simple, clear narrative or strategy
8. **willingness and ability to learn continuously:** trying new tools and techniques and adapting them as necessary, learning from the experience of leadership and resource deployment

These behaviours are both discrete and mutually reinforcing. They each emphasise the understanding and application of external or internal resources, often in response to specific problems. Part of the resourcefulness required by DCSs is to know which behaviour, or which combination of behaviours, will be most effective in a given situation.

The behaviours of the resourceful DCS are also underpinned by a set of leadership characteristics, namely, knowledge, skills and attributes (Figure 5). These characteristics form the building blocks of the behaviours, and the next section discusses them in more detail. A summary of the knowledge, skills and attributes is offered in the Appendix.

## Underpinning knowledge, skills and attributes of the eight core behaviours

Figure 5: The interaction of resourceful behaviours and knowledge, skills and attributes



## The knowledge, skills and attributes deployed to enable each core behaviour

The knowledge, skills and attributes deployed to enable each core behaviour

### 1. Openness to possibilities

Resourceful leaders maintain an open culture, where problems are worked through and solutions are found as a team. They demonstrate a willingness to see things differently, work in alternative ways, and collaborate with others. They also have an open and approachable manner.

For example, leaders in one authority used the idea of an issues amnesty to promote openness and collaboration. Leaders and staff were encouraged to be honest about issues with their team and work through them together before the issues become problematic.

Challenge and support are really positive features of [the senior management team]. They enable us to learn about each other's services... We must be prepared to challenge... Doing nothing is not an option.

Head, Teenage services

1. Behaviour: Openness to possibilities		
Knowledge	Skills	Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Knowledge of local needs and practices</li> <li>— Knowledge of effective systems and practices</li> <li>— Knowing what resources are needed and available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Partnership working</li> <li>— Team-building and working</li> <li>— Relationship-building and management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Openness</li> <li>— Adaptability and flexibility</li> <li>— Pragmatism</li> <li>— Positivity</li> </ul>

### 2. Leading collaboratively

In the context of children's services, thinking, acting and leading collaboratively was a key skill in strategy creation and implementation. Resourceful DCSs engaged the senior leadership team, partner organisations and the corporate and political leaders in the authority in strategy development and implementation. Through this, consensus for the solution was reached and more importantly, advocacy from other members of the team gained.

We have excellent partnership working and the trust is well led by the lead member for children in the chair. One example of how this works in practice is the way in which we tackled the huge waiting list for the autism clinic. Our principal educational psychologist worked closely with the lead clinician to develop a series of joint clinics that ensured that we took a consistent approach across the services provided by each partner agency.

Assistant director, Access and support

2. Behaviour: Leading collaboratively		
Knowledge	Skills	Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Knowing what resources are needed and available</li> <li>— Understanding how to access and utilise knowledge from the front-line</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Partnership working</li> <li>— Team-building and working</li> <li>— Relationship-building and management</li> <li>— Strategic thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Shared values and purpose</li> <li>— Adaptability and flexibility</li> </ul>



### 3. Demonstrating a belief in their team and people

As one DCS put it, resourceful DCSs are, by and large, “people people” and possess strong interpersonal leadership skills and emotional intelligence. They recognise that working through others is crucial and that they themselves will be ineffective without a good team around them. Their preference therefore is to have a team they can believe in. Demonstrating their belief in their team creates mutual commitment and loyalty, and also trust. But this is not always possible immediately. Many of the leaders we spoke to – and in particular those on a trajectory of improvement – stressed that replacing or substantially changing their team immediately after their appointment was a prerequisite to developing belief.

As a senior leadership team we have a shared drive and commitment to integrated working. We don’t just expect assistant directors to operate within their area of specialism, but across the whole children’s services agenda.

Director of children’s services

3. Behaviour: Demonstrating a belief in their team and people		
Knowledge	Skills	Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Knowledge of different personality types / communication styles</li> <li>– Due process and employment law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Team-building and working</li> <li>– Relationship-building and management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Commitment</li> <li>– Shared values and purpose</li> <li>– Supportiveness</li> </ul>

### 4. Personal resilience and tenacity

Resourceful leaders in children’s services demonstrate persistence, resilience and the ability to see things through, drawing on their own internal resources, including integrity.

For example, the DCS in one authority sought to encourage rigour in data analysis and problem-solving across his team, using personal resilience and drive to promote the approach. One mechanism through which this was achieved was in setting up a research and evaluation unit to promote excellence in data use and help identify improvements.

resilience is informed by the authority’s context. In higher performing authorities, for instance, personal resilience is potentially less important for DCSs than in those on a trajectory of improvement because they have more confidence in their external resources, such as the SLT.

I am tenacious, and I am organised – so I can make things happen. I work through the people around me and my previous experience in the local authority has given me a wide knowledge of all the senior managers across the council.

Chapter 4 describes how the significance of personal

Assistant director, Strategy and commissioning

4. Behaviour: Personal resilience and tenacity		
Knowledge	Skills	Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Knowing who to ask for support</li> <li>– Knowing when and how best to fight your corner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Data analysis and monitoring</li> <li>– Seeing the bigger picture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Tenacity and rigour</li> <li>– Adaptability and flexibility</li> <li>– Pragmatism</li> <li>– Positivity</li> </ul>



## 5. Create and sustain commitment across a system

This core behaviour was often demonstrated by leaders in driving the leadership team and partners to improve outcomes and keep the end user at the heart of the work. Having a strong set of values based on improving outcomes for children was central to this behaviour.

For example, the attribute of commitment featured within the espoused organisational values of many authorities in this research. Equally, authorities often had a value commitment, such as ‘think child’, which was commonly understood through the organisation and advocated by the leadership. The value commitment helped to promote cohesion in the system by creating a unifying rationale for often disparate sets of activities or objectives.

We use Mark Friedman’s outcomes-based accountability (OBA) model for performance monitoring and reporting. We used that for the CAMHS pilot. We used Friedman’s ‘turning the curve’ methodology to address the issue of the high levels of NEETs [young people not in education, employment or training] and teenage pregnancy. This has been successful in involving partners and there has been a 32 per cent reduction in the teenage pregnancy rate. NEETs have also been significantly reduced.

Assistant director, Strategy and commissioning

5. Behaviour: Create and sustain commitment across a system		
Knowledge	Skills	Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Understanding ways to motivate others</li> <li>— Knowledge of effective systems for incentivisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Relationship-building and management</li> <li>— Strategic thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Commitment</li> <li>— Shared values and purpose</li> <li>— Modelling</li> </ul>

## 6. Focusing on results and outcomes

Resourceful DCSs keep the desired outcome or result in mind at all times. Consequently, they approach problems and priorities with a pragmatic and positive attitude, and a can-do, calm and direct approach to problem-solving, often viewing crises as opportunities.

They also have a direct impact both in:

- setting the corporate priorities for particular children’s outcomes in their local authority – for example in some of those authorities where disability was considered a priority, it was often because the DCS had made it so
- requiring that delivery teams across a range of services rigorously monitor and assess whether results are being achieved, by collecting and analysing formal data
- checking and challenging this data through less formal information-gathering activities, for example from visits to the front-line

I chair the children’s services and the safeguarding children board. I asked my referral and assessment manager to give me a detailed breakdown of referrals – by type/different agencies etc. I put that data to the children’s trust and the safeguarding children board and asked partners to consider the differences across agencies and to ask what’s going on. It sparked lively discussion about CAFs and how they’re used. We commissioned external research on it. It has resulted in changes to practice.

Director of children’s services

6. Behaviour: Focusing on results and outcomes		
Knowledge	Skills	Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Knowledge of effective performance management systems and workforce development practices</li> <li>– Understanding how to access and utilise knowledge from the front-line</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Data analysis and monitoring</li> <li>– Ability to learn from the front-line</li> <li>– Seeing the bigger picture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Tenacity</li> <li>– Rigour</li> <li>– Commitment</li> <li>– Pragmatism</li> </ul>

## 7. Ability to simplify

Resourceful DCSs can get beyond the detail and see the bigger picture. Being able to develop a strategic vision is therefore a key element of the ability to simplify. A further form of this is being able to communicate effectively the vision to stakeholders, internally and externally, so that they can understand what the DCS is trying to achieve, in itself a process of developing joint commitment and advocacy.

You need to be capable of seeing the bigger picture – not just children’s services and the [primary care trust] – but [the] whole council and our partners.

Assistant director, Access and provision

7. Behaviour: Ability to simplify		
Knowledge	Skills	Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Knowledge of effective systems and practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Strategic thinking</li> <li>– Relationship-building and management</li> <li>– Communication</li> <li>– Presentation</li> <li>– Seeing others’ points of view</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Adaptability and flexibility</li> <li>– Pragmatism</li> <li>– Positivity</li> </ul>

## 8. Learning continuously

The resourceful DCS’s commitment to learning continuously is evidenced in two distinct ways:

- Through a commitment to personal learning, focused on addressing their own development needs and enhancing further their knowledge, skills and attributes, DCSs generally had a well-developed understanding of the theory of good leadership which was more advanced than that of many leaders in the private sector.
- There was a commitment to promote continuous learning within their local authority, and to challenge its conceptions of itself and what it

did well. Crucial to this was the direct learning that DCSs evidently valued from the front-line and (especially in authorities on a trajectory of improvement) the high priority given to performance management.

I engaged with a lot of front-line staff [in safeguarding] and got tremendous amounts of feedback about [the] team around the child and what should be the right threshold. This has resulted in changes in practice.

Director of children’s services

## 8. Behaviour: Learning continuously

Knowledge	Skills	Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Knowledge of effective performance management systems and workforce development practices</li> <li>– Understanding how to access and utilise knowledge from the front-line</li> <li>– Knowing what resources are needed and available</li> <li>– Knowledge of local needs and practices</li> <li>– Knowledge of effective systems and practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Partnership working</li> <li>– Team-building and working</li> <li>– Relationship-building and management</li> <li>– Strategic thinking</li> <li>– Data analysis evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Adaptability and flexibility</li> <li>– Openness</li> <li>– Commitment</li> </ul>

We learn from regular team meetings and practice workshops. I'm not precious – but strategy is no good without understanding front-line experience.

Assistant director of children's services

## Conclusions

This chapter has explored the eight core behaviours of resourceful leaders in children's services, and the underpinning knowledge, skills and attributes of these behaviours, building on what has been set out already in the leadership quality framework (National College, 2010). These core behaviours are applied in different combinations at different times to help address a range of challenges in children's services. A key task of the resourceful leader is to know when to apply which behaviours.

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## Chapter 4: Leading change

A key task of the resourceful leader is to effectively interpret their context and utilise the resources available to them to deliver better outcomes for children and young people. This process is one of change: shaping and transforming their organisation and influencing the context in which it operates over time.

Resourceful DCSs who are leading change: both respond to and shape their environment over time; they:

- expand their resource-base as far as possible
- engage and gain others' commitment to support the change process
- adopt different approaches depending on the historical performance of their authority

Children's services is an area that has been subject to many changes. Looking forward, the rate of change does not appear likely to abate. This chapter discusses the change process in three of the eight case study authorities. It will illustrate how leadership expertise has been deployed in response to different contexts at various points of the performance trajectory over time, focusing on what has worked well.

### The change process

Going beyond adaptive leadership (Heifetz and Laurie, 1997; Case study 2), the resourceful leader does not only react to the context, but creates the context in which he or she works, actively creating the right conditions to enable effective work on outcomes over time.

Resourceful DCSs don't operate solely in the now. While they interpret and respond to their context, they also proactively seek to shape their context over time. As described in Chapter 1, there is a dynamic interplay between the context a leader faces and the work that he or she does. First, the leader interprets the context and articulates the challenge it represents. He or she then works to address this challenge and in doing so effectively

changes the context for the future. Thus context is fluid and evolves in response to the actions of leaders.

Adequately articulating the challenge is a critical first step for a leader. Through this, leaders create legitimacy for their actions and widen their access to important resources.

We needed a holistic workforce with a structure which presented a significant opportunity for joining up children and adults on the social care front... I had to talk with staff and make it clear that we were all in it together, that there was to be no cover-up and that I wanted to know everything. I had to lead with integrity. We really worked at bringing things together as children's services.

Director of children's and adult's services

In addressing their challenge, the resourceful leader makes best use of as wide a set of resources as possible:

I draw on the knowledge and skills of key partners all the time. It's my business to build networks and to work alongside our partners in the children's trust.

Assistant director, Strategy and commissioning

We work across children's services and with partners very well. We have Sure Start and children's centres delivering ante-natal care and we bring health service partners into schools. We don't charge them rent and they don't charge us for the services.

Director of children's services

The work that the leader does changes the environment and increases the resource-base available for the next phase of work. Thus leaders in underperforming authorities with relatively few resources were able, over time, to expand their resource-base and make significant progress on the challenges they faced.

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## Leading change in children's services

This research found that resourceful DCSs who are leading change:

- adopt different approaches, depending on the historical performance of their authority and other contextual factors
- clearly articulate the challenge their organisation is facing and adopt a phased approach to leading change
- build and deepen relationships, engaging and gaining the commitment of others to support the change process
- expand their resource-base as far as possible

### 1. Adopt different approaches depending upon the historical performance of the authority

It is important to recognise that the context a DCS operates in impacts on the challenges that need to be addressed and the resources the DCS is able to employ to address them. A number of differentiating factors between authorities were apparent in the Leading for Outcomes study:

- Leaders in higher performing authorities (and authorities that performed well consistently) in the sample displayed a more evaluative, assured and conservative attitude to change compared with leaders in authorities that were changing rapidly.
- Leaders in authorities on a trajectory of improvement necessarily demonstrated a more transformational approach than leaders in authorities that had more consistent performance.
- Leaders in authorities on a trajectory of improvement had less initial confidence in their resource-base than leaders in high-performing authorities. These leaders were able, over time, to expand their resource-base and make significant progress on the challenges they were facing by prioritising collaboration and building relationships across children's services and with partners. For example, leaders in one authority involved partners in developing a values statement to improve relationships and identify common goals. This enabled greater participation from partner organisations in working on outcomes for children's services.

### 2. Clearly articulate the challenge and adopt a phased approach to leading change

Resourceful leaders view change as a journey involving several different stages. It is not necessarily a linear journey, in that one stage ends before another. However there is a distinct focus for an organisation at any given point on this journey. The first part of any of the stages involves clearly articulating the challenge the authority is facing and then mobilising people and resources around this challenge.

Each phase informs the conditions for the next. The Leading for Outcomes study identified a pathway for change in the sample authorities, which broadly involves the following steps:

- securing uniform standards
- improving local processes
- targeting resources
- promoting inter-professional ownership and strategies and their implementation

### 3. Build and deepen relationships, engaging and gaining the commitment of others to support the change process

Resourceful leaders recognise that they need to mobilise collective action to be successful in a complex system such as children's services, which often demands that leaders act through indirect influence rather than direct authority. Leaders are therefore not always able to impose top-down solutions but instead must look to engage and gain the commitment of people across the system.

In all of the case studies, there was a focus on shared values and purpose which lay at the heart of effective relationships. For example, leaders in one authority developed a values statement in collaboration with a number of stakeholders to ensure shared values and a commitment to those principles, encouraging them to work towards them in a tenacious yet flexible manner. Leaders in another authority set aside multi-agency time, where leaders could engage with front-line workers to build relationships and communicate strategic thinking.

Leaders invested time in important relationships which supported their work. These relationships were across the authority (within children's services and also in other areas of work) and outside the authority (other agencies, the media and non-public sector organisations). This was critical work. It allowed progress to be made on the challenge that the authority was facing. It also expanded

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the resource-base available to leaders as they gained extra commitment from other people and organisations.

#### 4. Expand their resource-base as far as possible

The research shows that leaders use a wide variety of resources. They explicitly develop them over time, widening their resource pool for future phases of the change journey. Resourceful DCSs:

- utilise the capacities of others to support them in leading change
- use their knowledge of effective systems and practices and understanding of the local context
- develop and build on new structures and ways of working
- use existing frameworks for their own purpose, for example the common assessment framework (CAF)
- expand their operating base as far as possible by building effective partnerships
- ensure they have political and corporate cover by maintaining good relationships

challenge the organisation faced. In each phase, the leader concentrated on building relationships, selecting appropriate resources and identifying new ones to address the challenge in hand.

In each of the case studies we highlight how the challenge was framed by the leadership, what work was done on relationships and what resources were used to make progress on the challenge.

Chapter 5, in essence, focuses on a third phase that all authorities were undertaking as the research concluded. This centred on dealing with the organisational shock created by the current funding environment.

## Case studies

The case studies compare and contrast leading for change in:

- a local authority that has improved considerably (local authority C)
- a local authority that is on a trajectory of improvement (local authority E)
- a local authority that is consistently high performing (local authority H)

One of the key findings from the Leading for Outcomes research is that leaders who successfully lead change view it as a long-term journey and are able to clearly articulate different phases within the journey. By doing this they allow their organisations to see clear progress and success, building momentum for change as they go.

In the case studies overleaf, each of the leaders identified distinct phases of their overall change journey which they encouraged their organisations to work on. In the cases offered, two distinct phases are identified, each of which focuses on a critical

# Case study 3: Leading change in a considerably improved authority

## Background

Authority C has undergone a journey in transformation since 2007, when a joint area review rated the authority as adequate. When the current DCS came into post, a number of systemic problems were addressed and the authority subsequently has been rated outstanding in a recent safeguarding/looked-after children (LAC) inspection. A strong understanding of how to manage and lead change was pivotal in this process, which was led by the DCS.

## Overview

When the current DCS joined the authority, it was on a downward trajectory. A transformation of the internal operations of the department was critical. People were unclear about their roles and their accountabilities, and systems and processes were not in place to allow people to do their jobs properly.

The first phase of work the DCS undertook was to clarify accountabilities and performance expectations, introducing new working structures so that improvements could be made. Once these systems and structures had been embedded, the DCS embarked on a second phase to improve these systems and to improve data quality and interaction with front-line staff.

Interestingly, the metaphor of being on a journey was used as a motivational tool in this authority – the change process was one where the end goal of creating a single organisation for children’s services was communicated and integrated with the systemic changes in a powerful, enabling way.

The case study illustrates how the DCS and the team displayed the following behaviours of a resourceful leader:

- the ability to create and sustain commitment across a system: they worked hard to build effective relationships in order to ensure they could get important work done
- the ability to collaborate and display a focus on results and outcomes: ongoing relationship-building and embedding of an ethos of high, defined expectations continued to push the change forward
- the ability to simplify: they clarified accountabilities, and improved working structures
- belief in their team and people: trust, support and challenge across the senior leadership team (SLT), and strong modelling from the DCS were central to carry forward this change agenda

The [DCS] is fantastic to work with (and the reason why I’m here); he is very focused, driven, and has a clear vision.

Assistant director, Commissioning and partnerships

## Phase 1 challenge: developing accountability

At this stage for the authority, there were significant leadership and governance problems. The appointment of a new DCS marked the start of a trajectory of considerable change. The key organisational challenge defined by the DCS was accountability: “It’s about being accountable, getting things done and being able to show results”.

## Relationships

- invested in forming new relationship with chief executive and lead member
- formed strong relationships with key partner organisations



## Resources

- The DCS identified performance management as a first step in the change journey. A new performance management system was put in place with accountability better defined and a new agreement on how colleagues would hold each other to account.
- Clarity of governance was also crucial, with a number of new political leaders being elected and responsibilities for children's services clearly defined.
- Additionally, embedding an ethos of accountability across partners through the implementation of local integrated teams (LITs) was important. LITs included workers from social care, family support, youth services and Connexions. By encouraging collaborative working, LITs fostered joint ownership of objectives and work streams and consequently helped to promote accountability for outcomes on the front-line.

## Phase 2 challenge: getting the systems right

Once accountability was embedded in the authority, the next phase was to focus on the quality of systems, data and performance.

### Relationships

- focused on building strong internal relationships: raising performance through role modelling professionalism
- regular meetings, a focus on practitioner knowledge through practice workshops, and a new social work forum helped to embed good working practices and create an ethos of occupational and organisational professionalism

### Resources

- Through appointing an assistant director for children's services as a change agent, the DCS and SLT introduced rigour in data quality and assessment. This was achieved through a number of means including peer file and theme audits, case reviews, a 'team around the child' assessment process and engaging with staff on the front-line.
- Additionally, a number of change management processes were brought in to help lead people through the changes and gather their feedback. These included value for money and restructuring groups, and a bi-monthly change management task group to monitor the effect and impact of change.
- There was a strong focus on using data and using front-line knowledge to inform strategy.
- There was investment in strategic capabilities and the development of strong analytical and monitoring skills.

### Conclusions

The leader explicitly used the journey metaphor to engage people across authority C with the work they are leading. There was a deliberate building of the resource-base available through the journey: building on the foundations created in the first phase.

During phase 1 the focus for the leader was on getting the basics right. There was a focus on building foundations to allow transformative work to be done in later phases of the change journey.

There was also a strong focus on building better relationships to support the delivery of the work done in the change journey. These improved relationships gave the leader greater access to resources across the authority and through the resource-base of partner organisations.



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## Case study 4: Leading change in an authority on a trajectory of improvement

### Background

Authority E operates in a local context of significant deprivation and has made continued improvement over recent years, particularly in the outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. There have been notable improvements in reducing the rate of teenage conceptions, persistent school absence and school exclusions. Additionally, the local authority has a strong track record in effective partnership working, most notably on the 14-19 agenda. This is reflected in the significant reduction in the level of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), partly due to better targeted provision for disaffected students in schools, and the broadening of the curriculum offer for young people. Strong leadership has been highlighted throughout this period of improvement, together with the effective targeting of effort and resources.

### Overview

The emphasis on change in authority E was on building collaborative relationships and defining values. All work on systems and processes appears to have been done with a strong focus on people and a value-led approach.

The first phase of work was to strengthen relationships across the authority throughout children's services, from the SLT to front-line levels, and with partners. For example, all parties were involved in developing a shared values statement to define the priorities and working ethos they needed to work on. Once relationships had been improved the next phase was to raise standards by collectively focusing on professionalisation. The work here enabled children's services and partners to co-produce approaches which would drive improvement further. The approaches were based on shared values and purpose, and jointly developed priorities and strategies.

This highlights the dynamic of the work in the first phase of activity impacting on the organisational environment. This then means that there is a better environment for the change journey in phase 2. Arguably, without stronger relationships, based on trust, it would not be possible to co-produce the improvements achieved in the second phase.

The case study illustrates the DCS and the team using the following behaviours of a resourceful leader:

- the ability to collaborate: developing strategies, values and agendas through collaboration
- belief in the team and people: modelling the commitment, values and tenacity to drive these strategies forward
- the ability to create and sustain commitment across a system: communication, building networks, negotiation and influencing were key leadership characteristics for this phase
- displaying a focus on results and outcomes: focusing on purpose and values rather than inputs or processes

### Phase 1 challenge: building relationships

At this stage for the authority, there were issues in terms of the leadership team and lack of collaborative relationships. The DCS was appointed in 2007 and needed to lead a change from a situation where "nothing was secure and there was no relationship with schools. [I] had to start again". The challenge during this phase of the change was relationships within children services, the authority and with partner organisations.

## Relationships

- building the right team from the start, including changing three assistant directors to bring in the right expertise and changing the chair of the local safeguarding board
- DCS investing time with key relationships (eg, headteachers) to build greater trust across the system

## Resources

- The emphasis was on recruiting people with the right expertise and knowledge to carry the organisation forward, and on building collaborative relationships. This was done in part through establishing effective inter-professional working across localities and using opportunities (for example, weekly champions meetings) to provide a vehicle for training and development on multi-agency issues.
- Drawing on the skills and knowledge of partners was crucial to develop successful, collaborative relationships. For example, Connexions workers were involved in a review of the information, advice and guidance (IAG) provided to young people, which helped to draw in the right expertise as well as demonstrate that partners' input was valued.

## Phase 2 challenge: working together to improve professionalism

In phase 2, the challenge was to improve professionalism. To do this, visionary strategies were created with partners with the aim of aligning values, or moral purpose, and working collaboratively on outcomes at every level.

## Relationships

- Partner organisations and service users were engaged through structured processes and meetings. For example, Building Schools for the Future (BSF) was used as a catalyst for collaboration. As integrated services were required on every BSF site, partners and services needed to work together at the strategic and operational level to achieve this.
- Staff across the organisation were involved in co-producing new collaborative approaches, such as those used in BSF schools, based on shared values.

## Resources

- A drafted values statement was prepared by the chief executive and communicated to employees through an employee group, which helped to shape the thinking in the new corporate plan. "This sort of thing is at the heart of our practice," reflected the assistant director for strategy and commissioning.
- A vision for this – which drew on collaboration between parties to improve educational attainment – was published in 2004 and has been built on through this phase.
- A shared children and young people's plan helped to define the major strategies for the authority, and job descriptions were revised to tier 4 to clarify the purpose of roles in delivering better joined-up services for children and young people.

## Conclusions

In this case study, the leader was faced with the need to lead a large transformation of the authority. She broke up the transformation into bite-sized chunks which the organisation was better able to deal with. She then focused on building relationships in the first phase to start to building momentum.

The dynamic interplay between the phases of a change journey is demonstrated in this case study. Arguably, without the stronger relationships developed in phase 1, based on trust, it would not have been possible to co-produce the improvements achieved in the second phase.

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# Case study 5: Leading change in a consistently high-performing authority

## Background

Authority H is in a borough that is consistently high performing across all of children's services. Safeguarding arrangements and provision for looked-after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been judged outstanding. A notable feature is the success in narrowing the attainment gap for some groups such as pupils with special education needs (SEN) and for children and young people from low-income families, particularly by the age of 19. Strong leadership and effective inter-professional working have been highlighted in performance reports as strengths, resulting in innovative solutions to problems and improved outcomes. A notable factor in this authority was the length of service of members of the SLT: 3 of the 8 SLT members have between 12 and 29 years' experience in the authority and are attuned to the way of working.

## Overview

In this authority, the approach to change by the DCS and SLT was well articulated. It was characterised by a cautious and measured ethos, exemplified by the evaluative process through which changes were identified and worked on. The consistency of performance, longevity of political leadership and the SLT's deep experience of working in the authority afforded a confident and iterative approach to change, which was more evolutionary than transformational in comparison with authorities at different points on the journey.

The first phase of work was to integrate services structurally and introduce collaborative working practices. This was done by defining new roles which resulted from the structural change, and encouraging everyone to take responsibility for the new children's services delivery model. The second phase of work built on the first by embedding collaborative working practices and encouraging high performance. The DCS and SLT sought to drive improvements in working on outcomes to deliver the benefits made possible from the new integrated structure.

The new structures and behaviours created in phase 1 provided the opportunity to improve outcomes for children and young people in phase 2 as the authority focused on where integration could be taken further for the benefit of families.

The case study illustrates the DCS and the SLT using the following behaviours of a resourceful leader:

- the ability to collaborate: walking the talk and building relationships across departments and using the ability to communicate or dramatise the mission
- belief in the team and people – gaining buy-in through building relationships and sharing agendas, and having the confidence to make everyone responsible for delivering the new agenda
- the ability to create and sustain commitment across a system: getting people's views in communicating the vision effectively so as to "win hearts and minds" (DCS), fostering commitment through modelling and displaying strategic leadership for partners
- displaying a focus on results and outcomes: ensuring that standards remained high throughout the change process and that work on outcomes was the overarching priority

## Phase 1: integrating services through integrated working

At this stage the children's services department had just been created and there was a need to mould three different departments into one. The challenge was to get all levels taking responsibility for the new agenda. The DCS and his team modelled integrated working and created a new working environment

where collaboration was prioritised.

## Relationships

- focused on maintaining political support for the new children's services portfolio
- ensured that all was seen as part of the corporate objectives of the authority

## Resources

A trust manager role was created for children's services to oversee the move to the new structure and review the infrastructure, frameworks, processes and cultures in each team. They considered the model, relationships and individual strategies in each before committing to change.

- The team produced a 'What we do' booklet to define the roles of partners and show the part played and respective contribution to children's service to help articulate the new structure.
- Devolved budgets, performance-related pay, and an embedded children and young people's plan (CYPP) needs assessment were introduced, to drive accountability and responsibility down through the organisation.
- The team encouraged high standards and values in the culture in the way that they worked and implemented these systems.

## Phase 2: focus on the child

Building on the structural integration achieved in the first phase, the next phase targeted inter-professional working, and a common approach of 'think child' across partner organisations. This phase focused on delivering the benefits of truly integrated working for children and families.

## Relationships

- regular meetings with the borough council, chief executive, lead member and PCT to build relationships and share the agenda at the strategic level
- work to improve relationships with partner organisations and agencies

## Resources

- A practice transformation manager was introduced along with joint work combining therapists and teachers and families at the operational level.
- A secondee from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (now the Department for Education) was brought in for two years on the 14-19 agenda and narrowing the gap work to improve Early Years provision and children's centres.
- The leader continued to demand high standards in performance management and quality assurance to underpin the above actions.

## Conclusions

There is a notable contrast between the resourceful leadership shown in this authority and that in the Case studies 3 and 4. In the latter, the leader was faced with organisations facing significant challenges and had to focus on getting the basics right as the first steps. The authority described in Case study 5 is more stable. The leader was able to call on more resources and able to trust their use across all levels of the authority. Interestingly, there is a more conservative approach to change. The authority appears less willing to think transformationally, focusing on evolution rather than revolution.

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# Conclusions

Resourceful leaders treat organisational change as a journey. They are able to articulate and lead distinct phases of activity which build on each other and expand the resources available to a leader for future phases of work.

This chapter has shown how resourceful leaders lead change by:

- interpreting their context and identifying areas for change – clearly articulating the challenge facing their organisation
- building and deepening critical relationships
- expanding their resource-base by building relationships with people in their own and other organisations

Local leaders of public services need to think about:

- how well they articulated the challenge that their organisation is facing (eg, reducing cost not an end in itself)
- what key relationships they need to invest in
- what resources are available to help them get their work done
- whether they are thinking widely enough in relation to resources

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# Chapter 5: Leading in a time of shock

Leaders in children's services during the course of this study (ie, 2010) have been operating in a particularly challenging climate characterised by high volatility and external pressure. Their responses have been resourceful in many ways, most notably by viewing shock to the system as a positive opportunity for reform.

- Policy changes and funding reform, combined, comprise the most pressing short- and medium-term challenges DCSs face today. There are two types of responses, which are not mutually exclusive:
  - pragmatism driven by necessity – DCSs recognise the need to make cuts
  - viewing external pressures as an opportunity to drive radical reform further and faster
- Resourcefulness has been shown by leaders in children's services both with regard to statutory and discretionary services. In particular, the overall tendency is to **embed partnership** working deeper and more quickly as a means of retaining a focus on outcomes.
- Rigour and prioritisation are vital elements of a resourceful response, although leaders are often hindered by lack of real evidence about what works.

## A policy and funding shock to the system

The concept of shock is well understood in economics. It describes an event that, while not unforeseeable, has a deep and profound impact on the system with immediate and far-reaching consequences. In the DCS context, this can for example be a high-profile child protection case. During the time of the research, it was an accurate description of the systemic changes required at pace as a result of funding and policy changes.

In the months immediately prior to the survey, there was a strong indication that funding in all public services would be reduced and policy was likely

to be reformed. However, the reality of the extent of the reforms could nevertheless be described as a shock. Many DCSs have been required to make large-scale reductions in service, with consequent redundancies, for the first time in their leadership careers. In addition, the role of the DCS itself has come under additional scrutiny.

## Approach to funding changes

DCS responses to these changes, within the sample authorities and in a great many of the one-to-one interviews, demonstrated a great deal of resourcefulness. In particular, five of the core behaviours discussed in Chapter 2 were demonstrated:

- openness to possibilities, in particular considering innovative approaches to maintaining non-statutory services
- the ability to collaborate with partners to manage the impact of funding reductions, or to realign local services to new national and local political priorities
- personal resilience and tenacity to drive through difficult decisions
- the ability to create and sustain commitment in the team, especially in respect of maintaining morale
- retaining a focus on results and on priorities, and being willing to make the necessary trade-offs between competing priorities

## Drivers of different leadership responses to shock

As set out in Chapter 2, while all leaders often demonstrated core behaviours, the more effective DCSs differentiated themselves in two clear ways:

- They were able to select the right set of behaviours for a given challenge and, most importantly, knew why the behaviours would be most effective.
- They were able to draw on a broader and deeper set of the relevant knowledge, skills and attributes to help make those behaviours as

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effective as possible in their contexts.

This research also demonstrated that when responding to policy and funding shock, a third differentiating factor also drove different types of responses. This was the extent of recent change in the local authority and how well embedded the ways of working were.

If the local authority has well-developed ways of working, the DCS generally has greater confidence in the resources that are available to deploy. In particular, they demonstrate greater confidence in the capability and capacity of the local authority to respond to a new strategic direction. In this study, this manifested itself in how leaders in different local authorities perceived the nature of the challenge facing them:

- Leaders in local authorities with well-established ways of working tended to interpret the problem as a manageable challenge. They largely tackled funding and policy challenges by:
  - applying known processes through conventional plans and projects
  - thinking flexibly in finding solutions and scenario-planning when conventional means fall short
  - drawing on others (horizontally and vertically) to address the problem
- By contrast leaders in authorities that were experiencing greater change tended to interpret the problem as a complex challenge. They largely tackled funding challenges by undertaking less conventional activity for the organisation, including:
  - consulting more widely with partners than usual
  - taking quick, decisive action over priorities
  - reducing headcount quickly and extensively

For DCSs operating in authorities in the former category, having the confidence to approach funding challenges in a targeted, measured way through conventional and known processes, rather than through transformative steps, is highly important. The well-established, embedded ways of working in the authority should underpin this confidence. This should enable the DCS to feel secure in drawing on carefully selected resources across the authority to identify actions to reduce funding or find new solutions to work on outcomes.

For DCSs in authorities that have undergone recent change, the scope of well-established ways of working and the dependability of resources will

necessarily be limited. Drawing on a wide range of resources from across children's services, partners and beyond is necessary in these authorities to make use of as many resources as possible in tackling funding challenges. DCSs should feel able to share the responsibility for finding reductions and innovative solutions with others, and should select approaches based on the most convincing evidence available, gaining buy-in for these approaches from others where necessary.

### **Embedding partnership working as a means of managing funding pressures**

Strikingly, the drive for partnership working, and the requirement for it to be accelerated and made deeper, was a common theme. This was especially true of leaders in authorities on a trajectory of improvement. This movement towards even greater collaboration was often characterised by DCSs as a direct defensive response to resist the urge to retreat into the statutory shell in respect of the services provided or commissioned by the local authority, and for themselves as leaders to maintain a broader conception of the DCS role in improving outcomes for children and young people.

This drive to embed partnership working further also stems directly from the need to broaden and deepen the resource pool available to the DCS. The greater emphasis on partnership in local authorities with less well-established ways of working suggests this may be because the DCSs are less confident that the resources available to them from within their local authority are sufficient, alone, to meet the challenge.

As discussed above, DCSs in this position should feel able to drive collaboration to share the responsibility for identifying cuts and to access a wider range of resources to address the challenge. Thirdly, and crucially, collaboration helps to increase the number of parties responsible for outcomes for children and young people, and helps to draw in a range of services across the authority which can help maintain provision not only of statutory, but of non-statutory services, eg those supporting early intervention and prevention.



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# Case studies: differences in leadership approach

## Case study 6: Leading in a time of shock in a high-performing local authority

### Background

Authority H was consistently high performing with a stable leadership team of seven assistant directors and the DCS. The DCS had 18 years' experience and 2 of the assistant directors had 12 and 29 years of experience of working in the authority respectively. The authority also had long-serving and engaged political and corporate leadership.

### Overview

The overall interpretation of the funding changes by leaders in this authority was one of pragmatism and evolutionary change. The emphasis has been on improving existing services within the authority and prioritising effectively, although there was an openness to considering innovative solutions too. All of the observations below were made before the comprehensive spending review announcement in November 2010, demonstrating a proactive approach to managing shocks.

This case study illustrates how the DCS and her team used the following behaviours of a resourceful leader:

- openness to possibilities: having the willingness to consider a range of solutions and using resources in a considered way
- the ability to collaborate: through pooling budgets, consolidating training programmes and reducing silos
- personal resilience and tenacity: on the part of the DCS, and supported by the SLT and wider authority: "There's a very strong corporate ethos here over getting efficiency savings and better more efficient procurement"
- the ability to create and sustain commitment in the team, especially in respect of maintaining morale
- a focus on results and outcomes through rigorous planning and prioritisation, and a clear focus on maintaining early intervention and prevention services

### Approaches

Having set the goal for reducing spending, and created the expectation of a mutually supportive approach, the DCS in this authority created an environment where the focus on delivery was exceptionally sharp. This focus was supported by an openness to considering alternative solutions, and was characterised by a collaborative and corporate approach to managing pressures:

- Diagnostic approaches to understanding the range of options available were evident: a detailed review of the budget was taking place, with all members of the SLT involved in challenging which spending could be reduced.



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- Scenario-planning was being used as a vital tool in generating alternative solutions to a range of potential outcomes. This helped to anticipate and manage shocks. For example, options were defined so that should a specific grant be withdrawn, alternative ways of delivering outcomes would already have been considered.
  - Prioritisation of all services was also taking place, with the SLT talking with providers to establish bronze, silver and gold priorities. The DCS encouraged a degree of rigour in commissioning, basing this on detailed analysis and a thorough approach to evaluation and use of evidence. To support the analysis and evaluation effort the authority's research and evaluation unit was being broadened.
  - The DCS was encouraging innovative approaches to managing budget constraints, including: refocusing resources into preventative and early intervention activities; consolidating workforce development and training programmes; and deeper pooling of resources. However, in common with the observation on change in Chapter 3, innovation was generally considered on a case-by-case basis and on its merits and was often being trialled before being rolled out across the authority.

In this division, we meet every six weeks and have discussed impact of budget cuts. We're very pragmatic as a management team. We work in a very transparent and open way. It's not about decisions behind closed doors.

Head, Policy, planning, review and information

## Conclusions

In this high-performing local authority, the DCS had access to a broad and deep resource pool from which to draw. The DCS did not therefore need to rely on internal resources as much as might otherwise be the case. Instead, the effort was focused on arranging the external resources to be as effective as possible, for example by focusing on delivery and the use of data. Strikingly among the authorities in the sample, this DCS was also comfortable using strategic frameworks such as scenario-planning to help drive innovative options for managing budgets.

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# Case study 7: Leading in a time of shock in authorities on a trajectory of improvement

## Background

Authority F was on a trajectory of improvement. Its leadership team of 5 assistant directors and the DCS was highly experienced, with the DCS having 8 years' and 2 assistant directors 6 and 12 years' experience respectively in the authority. The other three assistant directors had fewer than three years' experience in the authority. It was acknowledged by interviewees that since 2008 there had been staffing turbulence and a number of interim directors. The authority underwent a political swing in the May 2010 elections. Cultural and structural reform was important in this authority.

## Overview

The overall approach was one of taking some intuitive steps to find efficiencies alongside some bolder moves. Comparatively, there was a greater emphasis on new systems and wider collaborations to achieve efficiencies in this authority than in the high-performing authority discussed in Case study 6. As a result, understanding how to form effective partnerships and build relationships was important, as modelled by the DCS.

This case study illustrates the DCS and his team using the following behaviours of a resourceful leader:

- openness to possibilities: having the willingness to consider a range of options, including resource reduction, and using resources in a considered way
- the ability to collaborate: drawing on existing relationships across the department and with partners to share the responsibility for cost reductions
- a focus on results: recognising that a new role was needed to improve data analysis and drive better budgeting practices

## Approaches

The SLT, led by the DCS, focused on finding ways to reduce costs, including increasing collaboration and considering a number of bolder moves:

- Leaders took a number of approaches to identify areas for cost reduction. These included finding efficiencies in terms of cutting out duplication, and freezing posts across the directorate.
- Improving data analysis skills and providing training in forecasting and managing budgets were identified as important by the DCS and SLT. A role was created to train staff in using a council-wide system for recording performance indicators and planning.
- Work with partners was also seen as a key approach, particularly with schools, although there was recognition that partnership working would be a challenge. Leaders were working with partners to help identify areas in which collaboration could help achieve cost reductions.
- Bolder moves from leaders in this authority included running an alternative pupil referral unit outside the system. Greater outsourcing, maybe to the third sector, and moving to a commissioner rather than provider role were identified months before the big society policies of the new government.

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We are a lean authority and always have been... Now we have to achieve more with less in the context of a recession/reform... It will be jagged and pointy, not neat and tidy, but we shouldn't ever stop being bold.

Director of children's services

## Conclusions

The contrast between the resourceful leadership shown in this authority and that in Case study 6 is illuminative. Whereas in the Case study 6 the leader was able to focus on aligning the resources available within the authority and used targeted approaches to generate specific new solutions, in this authority, the approach is much more transformative and less cautious. Resourcefulness here was shown in the focus on improving skills and performance as a prerequisite to managing shock and by the greater propensity to bring in external resources (ie, partners and outsourcers) to deliver results.

## Conclusions

This chapter has explored the way in which leaders of children's services anticipated, interpreted and responded to policy and funding shock. It has demonstrated that, while particular core behaviours are evident among children's services leaders, the relative emphasis on the behaviours varies depending on the extent of the external resources available to the DCS.

In high-performing authorities and those that had embedded ways of working, funding challenges were perceived by leaders as manageable. They drew on relatively conventional approaches to reduce costs while maintaining openness to innovative solutions. In authorities that had undergone recent change and had fewer embedded ways of working, funding challenges were perceived by leaders as a more complex challenge. Partners were drawn on to help share the burden of reductions, and bolder moves were considered in order to cut costs.

Nonetheless, every authority was fundamentally faced with the same challenges of funding and policy changes. The difference in how leaders selected approaches to address these challenges reflected their different perception of shock. Resourceful DCSs should recognise that this perception directly correlates with the context of the authority in which they operate. Seeking to identify an appropriate course of action for their authority and deploying resources in a considered and confident way are first steps in addressing challenges effectively and continuing to work on outcomes.

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## Chapter 6: Managing the political and corporate landscape

Directors of children's services are senior members of the local authority executive team, but they are not the most senior. One of the defining features of the resourceful leader is how effectively he or she forms selective alliances with other senior figures – especially the chief executive and lead member(s) – to deliver their own objectives

- The chief executive and the lead member are the most vital peer relationships for DCSs which can be both challenges to solve and resources to utilise.
- The response of the DCS is often shaped by the extent of their own experience of working with senior peers.
- Resourcefulness in this context effectively boils down to senior-level collaboration and the formation of alliances to tackle specific problems, for example:
  - working with the lead member and chief executive as a resource to deliver the DCS's own agenda, including anticipating lead member requirements and actively engaging with them to shape the local agenda
  - being a corporate player and modelling leader behaviour to other senior officers

Managing the political and corporate landscape was frequently cited by leaders as critical to leading in children's services, and was often considered crucial in addressing the challenges presented by policy and funding change.

Fundamentally, the DCS is accountable to the lead member (or, sometimes, lead members) and chief executive in the authority and as such must ensure that their priorities and strategies gain buy-in from these parties.

Leaders in all authorities noted the need to maintain positive relationships with political leaders. Local authorities are democratically-led organisations and DCSs need to manage the political environment at a

local level, as well as often being required to engage with central government. The political challenge varied from authority to authority, depending on the longevity of a political administration and, recently, whether the local political leaders agreed with the restrictions imposed on funding.

Leaders in all authorities also demonstrated the importance of being corporate team players and maintaining a good relationship with the chief executive and other senior officers. They did this in two ways:

- supporting the corporate story – especially in funding constraints – and demonstrating that children's services (as an historically well-resourced service) will make a fair contribution to helping the authority meet its funding challenges
- taking a lead role in the development and delivery of the corporate vision, working across service boundaries and modelling within the authority the partnership and collaborative skills that are important to the DCS role in relation to delivering services with external partners

### Behaviours and characteristics of managing the political and corporate landscape

To manage the corporate and political landscape of children's services, DCSs must work collaboratively with the lead member(s), the chief executive, other senior officers and elected members.

In this research, three distinct leadership characteristics came through most strongly in relation to managing the corporate and political environment than in collaborative relationships across services. These were:

- a knowledge of the context in which corporate and political figures work. Understanding the context of work facilitated effective relationship-building as leaders were able to identify with the agendas, challenges and constraints of these figures. This helped them to manage expectations and proactively support political priorities.

- the knowledge of how to establish systems of accountability and responsibility within effective governance systems<sup>3</sup> and the ability to negotiate local political processes. Leaders in all authorities were aware that involving other senior figures in governance of the whole system was crucial to foster accountability, promote agendas successfully and work on outcomes.
- skills in defining and communicating vision, whether working with political or corporate stakeholders. To do this, leaders articulated a clear vision for local children’s services, and were adept in creating a simple and clear narrative to influence and persuade political and corporate figures to support DCS priorities.

## The impact of context

Approaches to managing the corporate and political landscape differed across the authorities according to two interacting factors:

- the stability of political/corporate leadership. Stability here is intended to mean the depth and degree of engagement between the DCS and political/corporate leaders.
- consistency of performance of the authority. Consistency is intended to indicate the degree of similarity in rating between performance assessments. For example, an authority which has performed well at consecutive assessments has greater consistency of performance than an authority that is on an improvement trajectory.

This interaction produced four broad categories of mindsets in children’s services leaders:

- **category 1:** consistency of performance and political stability are low, the corporate and political environment is seen more as a given, and relatively little work is done to manage corporate and political colleagues
- **category 2:** consistency of performance is high and political stability is low, and the corporate and political landscape can be managed cautiously
- **category 3:** consistency of performance is low and political stability is high, and the corporate and political landscape can be managed
- **category 4:** consistency of performance and political stability are high, and the corporate and

political landscape is seen as one to be managed and negotiated

## Selective alliances

DCSs need to form alliances selectively. They should assess the potential alliances available to them and focus on those they believe will obtain most value for them.

This study suggests that where there is a strong corporate centre and supportive political leadership, managing the political and corporate landscape is a relatively straightforward task. In other local authorities, where either the corporate centre or the political leadership, or both, are weak, DCSs may need to be more selective in developing alliances most likely to generate value for them. The first task for DCSs in these authorities is to assess the nature of their authority in these respects, before then deciding how to prioritise alliance-building.

As the research demonstrates, the most effective relationships create value for both parties. They can be transactional, but at a senior stakeholder level, they are more effective where both parties have a personal commitment to developing and maintaining the relationship. There needs to be trust. Each party needs to understand the incentives and pressures the other works under, and be ready to help support the other to achieve their goals.

*I have extended the base of my knowledge across the council – both other service areas and also within the political arena. It is important to understand what politicians want and the pressures on them. Most of all, I have tried to be reflective about what I do and carve out the time to think through the implications of what I do.*

Head, Education development

The three case studies below compare and contrast approaches to managing the political and corporate landscape in:

- a local authority that is on a trajectory of improvement with recent changes in political leadership (category 1, local authority D)
- a local authority that has considerably improved and has stable political leadership (category 2, local authority B)
- a local authority that is consistently high performing and has very stable political leadership (category 4, local authority H).

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this study, this refers to the boards and steering committees set up to oversee activities of and within children’s services.

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# Case studies: managing the political and corporate landscape

## Case study 8: An improving authority with recent changes in political leadership

### Background

Authority D had improved considerably from an overall grade of adequate in the 2008 annual performance assessment, to a judgement of performing well in the 2009 comprehensive area assessment. In the May 2010 elections, the council saw a swing in the political balance of the authority. At the time of the research being undertaken, systems and processes, aimed at helping to link children's services with political and corporate sponsors were being implemented, although they were yet to be fully embedded. The importance of political relationships was acknowledged by the DCS and her senior leadership team; however, limited information was available on how this has played out in practice.

### Overview

This case study illustrates the challenges of building effective alliances in an authority where the political and corporate leadership is new, and barriers can be created by the existing culture in a local authority. The direction of travel was less certain and the resources available to the DCS were less well developed than in some authorities. Although the DCS and her team displayed many of the behaviours of resourceful leaders, the context within which they were operating restricted those behaviours from being as effective as they otherwise might have been. The primary alliance being leveraged, therefore, is at the corporate level, with only tentative steps being taken to develop more effective working relationships with the political leadership.

The core behaviours most demonstrated in this study are:

- the ability to collaborate: by working across children's services and with partners to improve commissioning and pooling budgets
- personal resilience and tenacity: by driving forward strategies and simplifying the solving of problems by working around bureaucratic processes in the corporate centre

### Corporate management

Prior to the appointment of the DCS in 2008, some tension was reported between the children's services department and the corporate centre. The new DCS in this authority prioritised playing a fuller role in the corporate agenda in an effort to bring children's services into the corporate fold and to work more collaboratively across the council. To do this, a number of actions were taken:

- Children's services demonstrated its commitment to achieving council-wide objectives. For example, the department supported the corporate priority on family life projects by collaborating to develop a co-construction approach, particularly in relation to commissioning.
- Leaders demonstrated an ability to see the bigger picture across the whole council and its partners, which is integral to the work across the local administrative area on the local strategic partnership, led by the chief executive.
- The DCS and SLT have been working closely with the corporate centre and chief executive to address

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funding changes. The DCS reflects, “The council-wide work on [specific government-funded initiative] and work on greater pooling of resources across children’s services are essential part of getting more from less”.

A key priority was getting a strategy to raise GCSE attainment, and to maximise the impact of local authority school improvement staff. I went to schools and set up meetings with secondary headteachers, the chief executive and all his corporate board members, and cabinet members. We continue to meet three times per year. These meetings give headteachers an opportunity to express their views and for senior officers and elected members to be part of that discussion. It has helped to develop mutual understanding and respect.

Assistant director, Schools and learning

### **Political management**

Understanding the political agenda and being able to work well with members were noted as important by leaders in this authority. For example the SLT worked most closely with members through the cluster structure which has been established borough-wide. The clusters – or groups formed in particular localities – helped to promote [specific government-funded initiative] across the authority and engage the community in the strategies identified at the political and corporate level.

However, there was limited evidence of more proactive strategies to interpret and manage political expectations. The perspective of children’s services leaders in this authority was characterised as largely reactive.

### **Conclusion**

In this type of local authority, the children’s services leadership needs to be selective about the alliances it makes. While it appears this is happening, it does not seem that it is being done on the basis of informed analysis. There is potentially much greater scope for the DCS and the SLT to engage more effectively with the political leadership, and help shape the local agenda early while priorities are still being formed. In short, the interviews suggest that the full range of the resources available to the leadership team is neither being assessed nor used.



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# Case study 9: A considerably improved authority with stable political leadership

## Background

This authority made considerable improvement from good to outstanding, with notable improvements in safeguarding since the joint area review in 2007. It had stable political and corporate leadership with established working practices. Effective systems and structures are in place to facilitate collaboration with corporate and political figures.

## Overview

This case study illustrates how more embedded ways of working and greater confidence in the resources available to the leadership can help create more structured, formal ways of creating and sustaining senior-level alliances. The expectation that senior leaders should act corporately was clear and well understood.

The core behaviours demonstrated in this study are:

- the ability to collaborate: by creating structures to enable partners to work together, and a common narrative to express shared values
- the ability to create and sustain commitment: by including the chief executive in decisions on budget management
- the ability to simplify key messages and strategies: in particular by utilising local political leadership as a communication channel

## Corporate management

Leaders in this authority considered corporate working itself to be a priority and were well-informed of corporate objectives. They had developed a number of structural mechanisms to ensure that strategies were joined up with those of children's services.

Firstly this authority had a one-council structure which ensured that partners acted corporately within the local authority. This structure promotes consistency of systems across the council for its service areas, for example, the performance management system. The authority's strategic partnership also acted as a golden thread, connecting objectives at the corporate level to the community plan and the young people's plan.

Work to address funding challenges was also being led corporately. Leaders in children's services were working closely with the corporate centre to address budget reductions. The chief executive chaired an efficiency board which had been looking at the cost of delivering council services and exploring ways to reduce costs and make efficiencies.

## Political management

Overall, leaders in this authority understood the importance of working productively with political figures. A number of systems and practices had been put in place to facilitate good communication, agenda-sharing and quality assurance:

- Councillors played an active role in the governance of children's services activities. For example, the lead member chaired the children's trust and also led on partnership working.



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- Councillors were utilised as a resource to help promote good communication channels and targeted work in localities.

An important consultative process that also gives us feedback is the ward assemblies which are chaired by ward councillors. These meet four times a year and within each one there is a young people's ward assembly. Each ward has a small budget to help them tailor activities to their local needs. This is all within the ethos of 'double devolution' and the council has been very active in developing these processes – it has won some awards.

Head, Access and support

## Conclusion

Alliances in this authority tended to have a process-related element at their heart. While this created continuity and stability, it does not in itself promote strength and openness of relationships between leaders. In common with Case study 8, children's services leaders in this authority do not seem to have fully analysed the potential resource available to them in the political leadership. The stability of the political leadership, however, would suggest that there should be potential there. Leaders in similar authorities should assess whether they are fully utilising the political resource available to them.

# Case study 10: A high-performing authority with very stable political leadership

## Background

Authority H was consistently high performing with a strong DCS and SLT. It was the most stable in terms of corporate and political leadership in the sample. Well-established processes and systems had been put in place corporately which were underpinned by strong, long-standing relationships between the DCS, SLT and corporate figures. Political leadership was stable and strong, and engagement from political figures in the children's services agenda was consistent.

## Overview

This case study illustrates how political stability and high performance can create the ideal conditions for developing deep and effective alliances at both the corporate and political level. In this authority, working relationships moved beyond the procedural and became much more akin to a mindset or way of working. The relationships were mutual and added value to all parties. They demonstrate genuine trust and reciprocity, within a clearly defined set of shared objectives and priorities.

The core behaviours demonstrated in this study are:

openness to possibilities: by consulting with service heads and drawing on national policy and corporate priorities when assessing options and making decisions

the ability to collaborate: by working with political and corporate figures to define and work on priorities

belief in their team and people: having the confidence to delegate tasks to the team, knowing the tasks will be turned around quickly, and believing that collaboration with people is key to developing priorities

the ability to create and sustain commitment across a system: by engaging the SLT and corporate and political colleagues to define, commit to and deliver strategy

## Corporate management

The DCS stressed his corporate approach, and a member of the SLT noted that they "had to learn to work much more closely with colleagues, for example, when doing papers for scrutiny. Business gets turned around quickly here". A high degree of communication between the corporate centre and children's services leaders was reported in this authority. Priorities and strategies were often set in collaboration. For example, the corporate strategic objective of gaining better value for money and achieving high-quality services featured strongly in children's services. Each year, priorities for children's services were discussed across the SLT, considering national policy, internal priorities, data etc. Service heads were also consulted and the 12 top priorities were fed up to the corporate centre.

Everything is done in a very corporate way here. We use hard data to bring everything up to the surface. Everyone is critical in the process. There's a very strong corporate ethos here over getting savings efficiencies and better, more efficient procurement.

Director of children's services

## Political management

A high degree of political stability was apparent in this authority and political support for the children's

services agenda was reported to be strong. The political context was characterised by elected members who:

- were well-informed about what goes on in the borough
- had firm priorities, such as safe communities and standards (described as ‘sacrosanct’)
- provided a high level of scrutiny and challenge of written papers and engaged member discussion
- had long-standing planning processes

In return, the officials in leadership positions recognised that helping to shape and deliver political imperatives was an important part of the role of leaders in this authority. Leaders recognised that an understanding what politicians want and the pressures on them was pivotal to maintaining a more personal, mutually supportive relationship.

### Conclusion

The local context in this authority has helped to create the conditions for mutual, reciprocal relationships to develop. However, they have not come about by chance. Even if the context is not so benign, leaders in other local authorities should, in developing their selective alliances, consider what more could be done to deliver their goals by engaging more proactively with their political leaders, perhaps especially if their view is likely to be contrary to the DCS’s own

## Conclusions

Wider engagement with a larger sample of DCSs provided several more examples of this priority of supporting members to meet their own challenges:

- One DCS used his experience of implementing the grant-maintained schools policy to proactively work up a position paper for the lead member in response to the announcements on expanding the academies programme. Doing so enabled the DCS, via the lead member, to shape the narrative of what the policy meant for schools in the authority, and re-established and strengthened the notion of a family of schools working together in the local authority to improve outcomes for children and young people.
- Another DCS was in a less well-performing authority with a long-standing lead member for children’s services who was opposed to reductions in funding and service provision. In this authority, the DCS found it necessary to build an alliance with his chief executive and the wider cabinet to circumvent the objections of the lead member and deliver a programme of reform “rooted in the fiscal and political realities” and not “in the reality we would all prefer to have”.

Although it is understandable that in some local authorities the perception of the political and corporate environment is a given that cannot be

managed to any great degree, the reality is that such a perspective, if carried through into action, risks reducing the resources available to the DCS to deliver their objectives. Neither of the DCSs mentioned in the two examples immediately above were in category 4 (ie, high consistency, high political stability) yet both had taken active steps to manage their political environment, one through constructive engagement and the other by forming alliances with others.

The strategies available to DCSs vary depending on the type of local authority. However, they should all have a common element: they should be built on an objective analysis of the potential relationships available to them, and they should prioritise those relationships most likely to drive value. The key elements of some potential strategies are:

- **category 1:** where consistency of performance and political stability are low, the corporate and political environment is seen more as a given, and relatively little work is done to manage corporate and political colleagues:
  - assess options based on data and evidence
  - be proactive about reaching out to senior stakeholders
  - select those stakeholders most likely to help deliver your objectives
  - engage with those stakeholders, possibly in opposition against others

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- **category 2:** where consistency of performance is high and political stability is low, and the corporate and political landscape can be managed cautiously:
    - assess options based on data and evidence
    - focus on developing relationships with corporate stakeholders
    - seek to reach out to political leadership to understand and shape their agenda
  - **category 3:** where consistency of performance is low and political stability is high, and the corporate and political landscape can be managed:
    - assess options based on data and evidence
    - focus on developing relationships with political leadership
    - seek to reach out to corporate leadership to understand and shape their agenda
  - **category 4:** where consistency of performance and political stability are high, and the corporate and political landscape is seen as one to be managed and negotiated:
    - assess options based on data and evidence
    - work closely within relatively benign environment to build trusting and mutually beneficial relationships with political and corporate leaders
    - be aware of relationships becoming too close and comfortable – relationships should always drive value for both parties and have a purpose

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# Chapter 7: Conclusions

The Leading for Outcome research has:

- set out the concept of the resourceful leader in children’s services, and the key task of expanding the pool of resources – both internal and external – which the DCS can draw from over time. Crucially, this concept does not accept that context is a given that cannot be managed. Resourceful DCSs respond to context, and their actions are shaped by context, but crucially they seek to shape their context over time
- confirmed the leadership qualities framework (National College, 2010) and built on it, describing the eight core behaviours of resourceful DCSs and the underpinning knowledge, skills and attributes of each. The eight behaviours are:
  1. openness to possibilities
  2. the ability to collaborate
  3. demonstrating belief in their team and people
  4. personal resilience and tenacity
  5. the ability to create and sustain commitment across a system
  6. displaying a focus on results and outcomes;
  7. the ability to simplify
  8. the ability to learn continuously
- described how the approach to change manifests itself in different ways depending on local context, with DCSs in higher performing authorities tending to a more evolutionary, targeted approach to managing change
- set out the different types of resourceful responses to shocks and drawn out the relatively greater importance of the DCS relying on his or her own internal resources in those authorities on a trajectory of improvement
- explained how senior-level alliances in the corporate and local political environment are a crucial resource DCSs can draw from, and where the local context can have a significant impact on the balance of alliances and their effectiveness. The research also revealed how a DCS’s own mindset towards managing the

political and corporate landscape can alter depending on context, and set out the building blocks for alliance-building strategies depending on context

## Implications: questions for consideration by directors and assistant directors of children’s services

Looking forward, it is clear that the resourcefulness of leaders in children’s services will be greatly tested in the coming years.

- Change will almost certainly be required year-on-year, even for those authorities more used to doing things their own way. Leaders in local authorities used to taking a more incremental approach may be required to consider a broader range of more transformative options.
- Cost reductions will need to be sustained, requiring attention to detail and rigour from leaders. International evidence suggests that costs can leak back in incrementally and almost imperceptibly.
- Alliances with political and corporate leaders will be tested. The need to cut costs and streamline services is likely to change the role of the DCS significantly and the corporate environment within which they operate.

The Leading for Outcomes research has identified the core behaviours for DCSs achieving outcomes for children and young people. These behaviours should be disseminated and adopted by serving DCSs and developed among aspiring DCSs. We recommend they be built into formal development programmes, peer learning and on-the-job coaching and direction.

Government authorities, whether local or central, may want to consider adopting these approaches to delivering results in a context subject to the shock of major policy and financial change. We recommend that chief officers, chief executives and senior policymakers review their individual effectiveness and their organisational outcomes by addressing these questions for action.

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## Reading local context

What do you do to build an understanding of what the priorities are for the different services, how these are shaped by past practices and where contradictions between service priorities are to be found?

- To what extent do priorities of the different services for children and young people reflect your strategic vision?
- How is knowledge from the front-line brought into play to inform leadership decisions?
- How confident are you that you are drawing on all the available evidence to inform decisions and that you are gathering evidence from all relevant stakeholders?
- Who are the key players and how can you influence and work with them?
- Do you know of legacies of tension where work needs to be done?

## Assessing capability

Are you confident that you have a good understanding of the knowledge, skills and attributes of all members of the SLT and their service leads?

- Do you have a culture of challenging assumptions, drawing on evidence to work with people to challenge their assumptions?
- If you are currently relying primarily on performance management for service development, do you know how to create greater levels of accountability through the system?
- Are you confident that your long-term vision is understood and advocated by others?
- To what extent do you model effective behaviours for your SLT? How do you know this modelling works?
- How effectively do you work with your partners? Do you find yourself doing work that should be done by them?
- How strong is your relationship with the lead member(s) and chief executive? What tactics do you use to ensure buy-in from political and senior corporate figures?
- How well equipped is your workforce to meet the everyday demands of working in children's

services at present?

- How well equipped is your workforce to meet the everyday demands of work going forward, particularly given efficiencies and potential rescoping of work? What development could be introduced to build capability further?

## Identifying resources for the future

Have you defined and agreed priorities with corporate, political and children's services colleagues for the next month? six months? a year? longer-term?

- Do you have a view on resource demands over the next year? five years? How does this inform your decisions now?
- Do you have a clear view of the priorities that cannot be compromised? What work are you doing now to ensure that these priorities are protected?
- Are you confident that you have a clear narrative about where your organisation is going and the key values it has?
- Are you confident that this has been articulated to your lead member? the SLT? through the organisation? to partners?

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# Chapter 8: Looking forward

At the time of writing (December 2010), DCSs are required to be resourceful in a number of different ways, to meet each of the key challenges set out in Chapters 4-6. Substantial change will be a reality for all local authorities over the next few years and may require, by definition, more openness to a transformative approach. Funding pressures are likely to remain a feature over the coming years.

## The short term

### Reductions in funding

The most obvious challenge in the next six months is to define the details of the response to funding reductions and to be austerity ready on 1 April 2011. This will require bold decisions and difficult trade-offs, as DCSs have already demonstrated. It will also require DCSs to retain a flexible response to new policy challenges as they emerge, and as the government's broader priorities for children's services beyond schools continue to develop.

### Change journeys

Leaders in local authorities will need to define change journeys that create sustainable results. Taking short-term cost out that creeps back over time is not an option. Leaders need to think in more transformational terms, and many have begun to do so. For example, reconfiguring local services or joining up back offices across authorities are some of the transformational steps being undertaken.

DCSs will need to continue to demonstrate these behaviours in the future and over the next six months, especially:

- personal resilience and tenacity to drive through difficult reforms
- working collaboratively to achieve economies of scale and tie partners in to child-centric way of managing pressures

- focusing on results and outcomes by seeking out and using evidence about what works to drive value for money

### The changing role of the DCS

The DCS role is itself evolving as local authorities make structural reforms in response to the need to cut costs and refocus services. Alliances within the corporate body therefore are likely to shift and will need to be rebuilt. Our one-to-one conversations with DCSs suggest that one of two broad themes commonly occurs:

- The DCS position itself may potentially morph into a director of people and take on a wider set of responsibilities within local authorities. In this instance, the greater role and remit of a director of people could alter the power balance between the old DCS role and that of the chief executive.
- The children's services function across local authorities could be merged, for instance children's and adult's services. In this instance, the DCS could potentially need to navigate two or more sets of senior stakeholders at both the political and corporate levels, making alliances more difficult to form and potentially less influential.

In addition to these points, it may be important for DCSs to continue to assess the impact and challenges of their changing role in the light of the abolition of many national accountability measures.

## The medium to long-term

### Becoming more transformative

In the coming years, the magnitude of systemic reform required will to some extent level the playing field. Leaders in high-performing local authorities, used to taking a more selective approach to change, may be required to think more about wholesale reform than they are accustomed to. In doing so, some of the core behaviours outlined at the beginning of this chapter will become more salient:

- openness to new ideas, potentially contradicting the local way of doing things



- 
- creating and sustaining commitment to ongoing systemic reform over a period of years

Additionally, retaining a focus on improving their own skills will be crucial. In other words, DCSs should not neglect their own internal resources as a means of acting on and shaping their local contexts.

### **Embedding efficiency, partnership and constant innovation**

- Making funding reductions stick is not easy. Evidence shows that cost pressures can leak back into the system incrementally, often unnoticed. DCSs face immense challenges in retaining a clear and present focus on sustaining funding reductions over the period of this Parliament, finding new savings when older initiatives may not have delivered as much as expected, and responding to the inevitable additional pressures on funding created by new local and national policy priorities. Scenario-planning should not be a one-off exercise, and keeping an up-to-date range of options available to inform responses will be vital if DCSs, working with their chief executives and lead members, are to sustain the changes required in the medium term.
- They will also need to challenge continuously their organisations to be prepared to think differently in every year of this Parliament. The public will be looking for a new relationship with public sector service providers, seeking ever-increasing transparency and the opportunity to co-produce services. Leaders in local public services will have to model a new way of working and challenge their organisations to go further than they thought possible.
- Leaders will need to join up services across the authority and with other authorities and service providers, expanding their resource-base as far as possible.

### **Managing the potential for local political instability**

History suggests that when the country is experiencing economic difficulty, one impact can be increased fluidity in the make-up of local political administrations after each cycle of local elections.

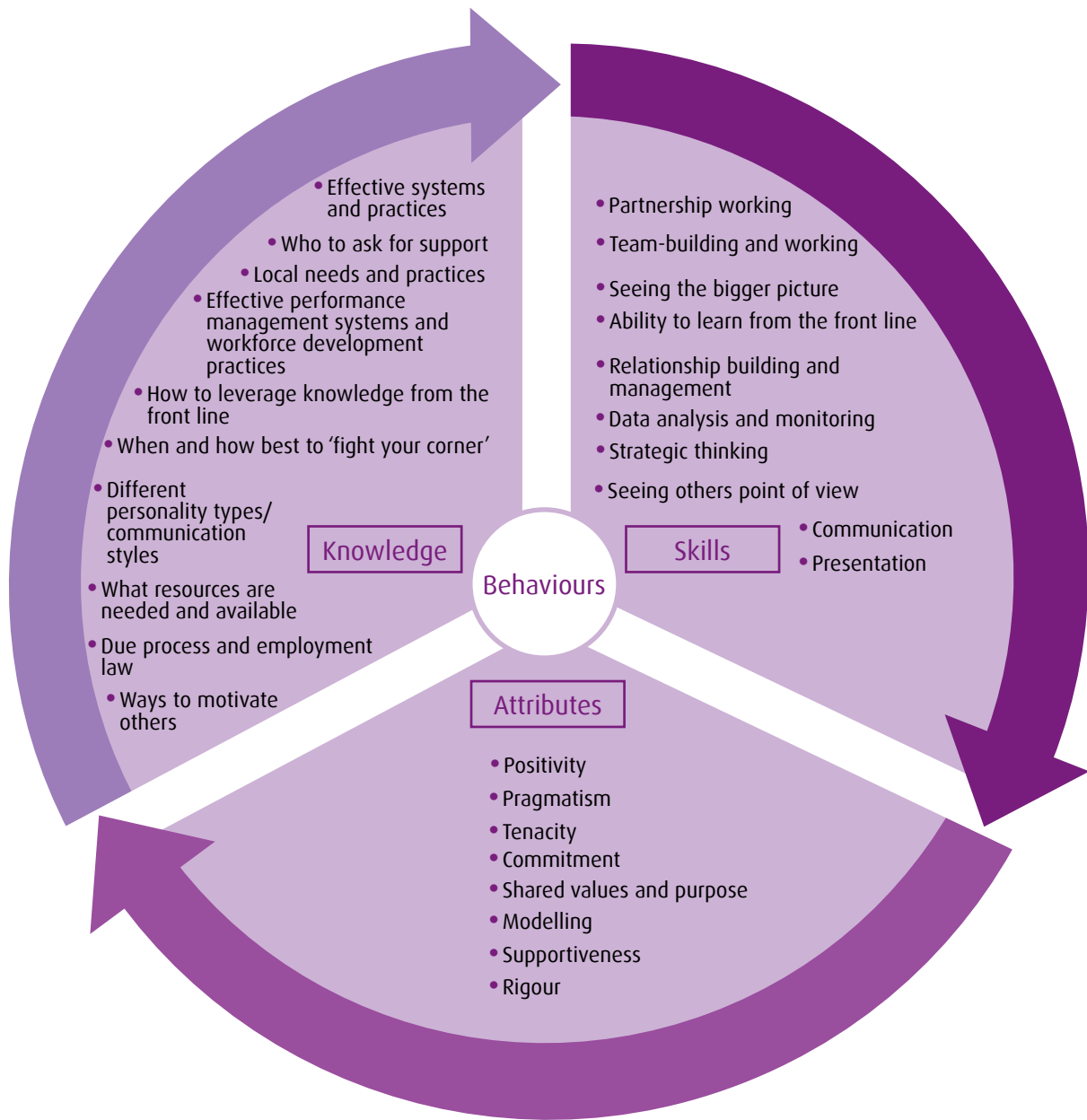
DCSs may therefore experience a degree of political instability not seen for some time. By definition, this will mean that, in combination with the corporate reform described above, it is likely that senior-level alliances may be harder to form, and that the resources available to the DCS will be relatively diminished.

# Appendix

Core behaviour and description	Underpinning knowledge	Underpinning skills	Underpinning attributes
<p><b>1. Openness to possibilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding the different options for resource deployment and using the resources available to them in a considered way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge of local needs and practices</li> <li>Knowledge of effective systems and practices</li> <li>Knowing what resources are needed and available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnership working</li> <li>Team-building and working</li> <li>Relationship-building and management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Openness</li> <li>Adaptability and flexibility</li> <li>Pragmatism</li> <li>Positivity</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. The ability to collaborate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working together with one's team, partners, and political and corporate leaders to work on outcomes and deliver results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowing what resources are needed and available</li> <li>Understanding how to access and utilise knowledge from the front-line</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnership working</li> <li>Team-building and working</li> <li>Relationship-building and management</li> <li>Strategic thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shared values and purpose</li> <li>Adaptability and flexibility</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Demonstrating belief in their team and people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fostering a sense of team and practices of team working to enable working through others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge of different personality types and communication styles</li> <li>Due process and employment law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team-building and working</li> <li>Relationship-building and management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commitment</li> <li>Shared values and purpose</li> <li>Supportiveness</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Personal resilience and tenacity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrating the ability to see things through and work through challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowing who to ask for support</li> <li>Knowing when and how best to fight your corner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data analysis and monitoring</li> <li>Seeing the bigger picture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tenacity</li> <li>Adaptability and flexibility</li> <li>Pragmatism</li> <li>Positivity</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. The ability to create and sustain commitment across a system</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aligning people to work towards, and often advocating, a common goal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding ways to motivate others</li> <li>Knowledge of effective systems for incentivisation</li> <li>Knowledge of effective performance management systems and workforce development practices</li> <li>Understanding how to access and utilise knowledge from the front-line</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship-building and management</li> <li>Strategic thinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commitment</li> <li>Shared values and purpose</li> <li>Modelling</li> </ul>

Core behaviour and description	Underpinning knowledge	Underpinning skills	Underpinning attributes
<p><b>6. Focusing on results and outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Not inputs or the process, keeping the improvement of outcomes the overarching priority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Knowledge of effective systems and practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Data analysis and monitoring</li> <li>– Ability to learn from the front-line</li> <li>– Seeing the bigger picture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Tenacity</li> <li>– Rigour</li> <li>– Commitment</li> <li>– Pragmatism</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. The ability to simplify</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Removing unnecessary complexity from systems, and also in creating a simple, clear narrative or strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Knowledge of effective performance management systems and workforce development practices</li> <li>– Understanding how to access and utilise knowledge from the front-line</li> <li>– Knowing what resources are needed and available</li> <li>– Knowledge of local needs and practices</li> <li>– Knowledge of effective systems and practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Strategic thinking</li> <li>– Relationship-building and management</li> <li>– Communication</li> <li>– Presentation</li> <li>– Seeing others' points of view</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Adaptability and flexibility</li> <li>– Pragmatism</li> <li>– Positivity</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. The ability to learn continuously</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Trying new tools and techniques and adapting them as necessary, learning from the experience of leadership and resource deployment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Knowledge of effective performance management systems and workforce development practices</li> <li>– Understanding how to access and utilise knowledge from the front-line</li> <li>– Knowing what resources are needed and available</li> <li>– Knowledge of local needs and practices</li> <li>– Knowledge of effective systems and practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Team-building and working</li> <li>– Relationship-building and management</li> <li>– Strategic thinking</li> <li>– Data analysis and evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Adaptability and flexibility</li> <li>– Openness</li> <li>– Commitment</li> </ul>

Figure A2: Underpinning knowledge, skills and attributes



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