

Chief Executives' 'must know' for Children's Services



Is your council doing all it can to improve outcomes for children and young people? This document has been shaped by chief executives who are either former directors of children's services or for other reasons have been closely associated with leading improvement journeys in council children's services.

[Children and young people](#)

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LGA

Introduction

If you would like a pdf version of this style guide, go to "Print this page" and choose "save as pdf" as your destination.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive blue-print for guaranteed results. Sadly, no such document exists. Rather, it is intended to be a clear summary guide for chief executives, showing how to avoid some of the more obvious and dangerous errors and challenges involved in leading one of the most sensitive, expensive and high-risk areas of local government.

It tries to make clear that while a chief executive is the most senior professional officer directly accountable, the role of the director of children's services is pivotal in law and in practice. Getting the balance right between these two roles is probably the closest we can get to any key to success.

The second half of the document includes what we hope is a useful check-list based on combined and shared experience. There are a number of clear actions, checkpoints and signals that, if you are aware of them as chief executive, are likely to prove helpful in ensuring your council delivers good outcomes for children through effective children's services. They may at least help your authority avoid an Ofsted failure or, worse still, an avoidable tragedy.

No document like this can be the definitive last word – the authors are happy for it to be amended and improved over time, as is the nature of this work. Indeed, the focus of the document is children's social care/safeguarding and does not cover the full range of a director of children's service's responsibilities, for example education or special educational needs and disabilities.

Apologies in advance if some of the content includes statements of the obvious. Regrettably, experience tells us how much of the obvious has been ignored by some of the authorities that have fallen into difficulties. It is the chief executive who holds the highest level of professional accountability for such failings.

The document is based on children's services being within the council. A number of council's have now established a children's trust to deliver their children's services. Where such arrangements exist the chief executive of the council should alongside this document, have regard to the established governance arrangements between the council and the trust, so as to ensure all statutory responsibilities are appropriately discharged by both organisations.

Key messages

Together with the director of children's services, the lead member for children's services, and the leader or mayor, the chief executive has a key leadership role across the council and through working with other local agencies to improve outcomes for children and young people. This strategic 'quartet' of political and officer leadership is fundamental to effectiveness and sustained improvement. It is the role of the chief executive, as the most senior professional concerned, to ensure the quartet is at least functional, at best, collectively inspirational and transformational.

While the director of children's services and lead member have statutory responsibilities for delivering effective children's services and providing corporate leadership to champion the needs and improved outcomes for children and young people, the chief executive has a crucial role to ensure the whole council supports children and young people and enables the director to fulfil their role. The chief executive also plays the fundamental role in the effective professional oversight and line management of the director of children's services as well as having responsibilities in respect of safeguarding children's partnerships.

Due to the complex nature of running a council, and the challenge of balancing workload pressures, chief executives might not have the time to develop an in-depth understanding of the ongoing performance of complex services. They instead must establish a system of delegated responsibility and performance reporting in order to fulfil their, and the council's obligations. Being in the chief executive position brings with it particular accountability, risks and challenges, especially when that complex service is children and young people, where the risks are high and the cost of failure can be profound, and where the signals of deteriorating performance may be opaque.

Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the director of children's services (DCS) and the lead member for children's services (LMCS)

This statutory guidance (see reference below) was initially published alongside the Children Act 2004 which established the positions as a clear line of accountability for children's outcomes. The legislation and guidance represent an unusual level of prescription for local government roles and structures. The guidance has been reviewed on more than one occasion and the current version is 2013. It remains valid and relevant.

As such, the guidance is a national statutory 'job description' – unique to these roles. As a first step for any incoming chief executive who is new to the task – or any chief executive seeking to refresh their approach, **this statutory guidance is essential reading.**

In particular, the guidance states:

'The DCS and LMCS roles provide a clear and unambiguous line of political and professional accountability for children's wellbeing. The DCS and the LMCS should report to the chief executive and to the council leader or mayor respectively as the post holders with ultimate responsibility for the political and corporate leadership of the council and accountability for ensuring that the effectiveness of steps taken and capacity to improve outcomes for all children and young people is reflected across the full range of the council's business.'

The guidance also explains the duties of the council through these roles for leadership of local partners in delivering improved outcomes for children. It makes repeated references to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to which the UK is a signatory. An interesting first step for any incoming chief executive might be to ask how your children's services and the wider council understand the core principles of UNCRC.

The DCS role structurally

Councils are only required to 'have regard' to the guidance, but a failure to comply requires explicit explanation. It also probably enhances corporate vulnerability in the event of things going wrong following non-compliance. And the legislation, guidance and experience are collectively unequivocal.

The role of the DCS should not be incorporated to that of chief executive. The statutory guidance states "The DCS should report directly to the chief executive (head of paid service), who in turn is accountable to the council for the performance of its chief officers". It is for each council to satisfy themselves regarding the statutory guidance.

The position must also be free to focus strongly on its role for children. It is permissible for councils to incorporate that director of children's services role with other duties, most commonly with adults' services as a 'twin hatter', especially common in smaller authorities. But where such arrangements are in place the council, through the role of the chief executive should ensure there is a local test of assurance so that the focus on outcomes for children and young people is not weakened or diluted. That same point applies in circumstances, allowable by law, where a director of children's services may cover more than one council.

The chief executive should seek to ensure that the corporate management team understands children's services, and that support is provided by colleague chief officers, as necessary.

Appointing a DCS (and head of safeguarding or equivalent)

Over time the effectiveness of any council children's service will probably turn on the effectiveness of the DCS. Most post holders would agree the job is as rewarding as it is challenging, but it remains one of the hardest chief officer roles to fill and retain. Turnover nationally is 30 per cent per year. So while we know it is likely to take over three years to sustainably improve a children's service the average length of tenure is less than that. In some places considerably so.

Consequently, the chief executive has a critical role in appointing, supervising and supporting the DCS and for creating the organisational culture. All successful council chief officers have to be exceptional high performing people with a range of skills from the strategic to the managerial to the operational. This applies particularly to this position given the fragility, sensitivity, and occasional volatility of the services under their direction.

Again, there can be no hard and fast rules – it is not a given that a successful social care manager makes for a good chief officer, or that someone without that experience cannot do the director of children’s services job. But these pointers may assist.

- It should go without saying that any DCS appointment decision should be taken with great care, utilising good professional, possibly external, advice and with a full and verifiable assessment of the candidate’s background.
- That should include an analysis of the candidate’s track record in Ofsted inspection.
- The same applies in the appointment of interims. For various reasons, as permanent appointments become harder to make, so the interim market has tended to expand. While interim appointments may carry less technical risk, they remain critical, and it is remarkable to note when some are made without necessary due diligence on the candidate’s background and credentials.
- It may help, but is not essential, for the DCS to have strong experience in the direct delivery and management of children’s social care. It is more important that they are a strong strategic leader and show an understanding of corporate responsibilities.
- But if the chief officer does not have those children’s credentials it is the role of the chief executive to work with the chief officer to assess and address that gap in their experience.
- If the DCS role is the appointee’s first director role, it is important to encourage them to have a mentoring relationship with another, experienced, DCS. The Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) is the professional association for DCSs. ADCS runs a mentoring scheme for new directors, which pairs new directors with experienced directors. The ADCS Mentoring Scheme for new DCSs is based on the principle of peer mentoring as a means of ensuring that each newly appointed DCS has access to the expertise of established directors; to open dialogue between colleagues; and, to encourage DCSs to seek advice and counsel from each other. Your director can find out further information about the scheme from **the ADCS website** [<http://www.adcs.org.uk/>]. The Staff College also provides training for new directors, including a free 12 month learning and development programme, details of which are on **the Staff College website** [<http://www.thestaffcollege.uk/>]. **SOLACE also offer training** [<http://www.solace.org.uk/>] through various programmes.
- In all circumstances, the next (second tier) line manager with fullest responsibility for children’s safeguarding must have strong credentials in the direct delivery and leadership of children’s social care. All the more so if the DCS does not. Again, it is the role of the chief executive to understand the balance of that key professional partnership between chief officer and the key second tier officer, and to have strategies in place to understand and address the balance of that working relationship, especially its weaknesses.

Ofsted

The Ofsted framework is known as the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) and is expected to be the mainstay for at least the next few years. It offers a stronger continuous and shared commentary on an authority’s performance through annual self-assessment and related ‘conversations’, a wider range of visits. The framework aims not to be dependent on one major single inspection event but to provide insight to Ofsted on the performance and direction of travel for the authority. Nevertheless it retains the capacity to have the most profound impact on children’s services and the wider council and partnership.

The direct role of the chief executive in the different elements of the inspection process is not specifically prescribed. Nevertheless, the general accountabilities of the chief executive as described here remain.

Ofsted condense their analysis into three helpful questions – helpful also to any council chief executive.

What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice with children and families in your authority?

How do you know it?

What are your organisational plans to maintain or improve practice?

Clearly it is the job of the DCS to lead this process and to have the evolving answers to these questions. It is the job of the chief executive to ensure the DCS is doing so. The questions, the attendant live self-assessment and an appreciation of the ILACS process, offer a firm foundation for any chief executive’s supervision of the DCS, their team and the services. In many respects all that follows here is complimentary to that task. (There are references at the end of this document which explain in more detail the ILACS process. They are helpful Ofsted documents and are recommended.)

What you need to know – and how to know it

Some council chief executives may believe that their children's services departments are performing well, only for Ofsted inspectors to arrive and take a very different view, or for a single case to expose systemic problems – or at worst an avoidable child death. If chief executives cannot look everywhere to assure themselves, where should they start?

Theoretically, managing performance should be no different in children's services to other services and the sorts of alarms or early warnings chief executives should be listening for are no different from other services. Chief executives should generally be highly effective in problem-solving, listening to stakeholders, working with partners and absorbing complex information at speed.

However, experience shows us that children's services are different on a number of levels, perhaps because of those issues of sensitivity, fragility and volatility referred to above. Children's social care is complex work that functions in a narrow space between financial and legal imperatives, the sometimes competing rights of children and adults, and the challenges of extreme poverty and human behaviour. There is a vast array of hard metrics that measure various elements of performance. But the best analysts struggle to find any equation or algorithm of those metrics that confidently predicts success or failure in Ofsted or other terms.

In short, there is no short cut to understanding local performance other than through relentless monitoring and oversight through a well-defined and supported line of accountability. It is for your DCS to lead that process. It is for the chief executive to ensure they are doing so.

There are a number of specific questions that chief executives might want to consider when seeking to assure themselves that their children's services department is performing well and some of these questions can be grouped as follows.

However, in addressing these questions any chief executive needs to appreciate the limitations of their own approach to self-assurance. It may well be helpful for the chief executive to engage directly in any of these processes, from case audit to meeting with representative groups of children. But any such exercise on an individual basis will only offer limited snapshots of information, rife with the potential for false positives and negatives. It is far more important for the chief executive to ensure that the authority has in place a robust and systematic approach to assurance and audit through the DCS and across the tiers of management and political leadership.

Chief executives should also be aware Ofsted do from time to time undertake a focused visit of a council which is part of the ILACS framework. As well as Joint Targeted Area Inspection, which also cover partners and include Ofsted, the Care quality Commission (CQC), Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation). Chief executives should be aware of the findings from such inspections as well as any regional sector led self-assessment and satisfy themselves the actions are being addressed. Chief executives should also be aware of the annual conversation letter sent to Ofsted.

Chief executives should also be aware of the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances (RIIA) who provide regional sector led self-assessment which sits alongside peer led challenge, review and visits. These are a valuable source of information to the chief executive. Additionally, chief executives should be aware of the requirement to submit an annual self-assessment to Ofsted and will receive an annual conversation letter from Ofsted, both of these provide valuable information to the chief executive.

The voice of the child

Ofsted expect 'the voice of the child' to be at the centre of the care system and that children can air their views and shape the system that supports them. As a chief executive, are you aware of, and acting on, what children are saying and are there effective forums (these could include children in care councils, fostering forums or youth councils, as well as others) through which children in care can share their views and experiences? Are the officers at the heart of these engagements sufficiently enabled to promote those views, wishes and feelings?

Going further, is there evidence that children are helping to shape the system?

Do case audits clearly show the voice of the child?

Workforce and performance data

Your children's social care workforce, from frontline social workers to the DCS, are all working hard to support children and young people in need of support, but how can you check that your teams are working well? It is important to test whether all of your practitioners can describe which model of social work practice your council uses, whether it is 'signs of safety', 'systemic practice' or any other approach. All models have their strengths and weaknesses. The important point is that there is clarity and ownership by all practitioners about the adopted model in your authority and a shared understanding of how it is applied. This understanding is essential in ensuring you have an embedded approach to good practice and consistency for the children in your area.

A feature of all strongly performing councils is stable social work teams that combine new ideas with seasoned understanding. Is this the case in your council? Do you know and discuss with your DCS the key current workforce issues? These will include vacancy rates and trends, across the authority or in specific areas; the ratio of newly-qualified-to-experienced practitioners; the ratio of agency/interim to permanent staff, as well as your general and managerial turnover rates. A high percentage of agency staff and high turnover rates, when compared to statistical neighbours or other councils in your region, are often signs that children's services performance could be at risk of deterioration. The same applies, perhaps more so, to the vital tier of team managers who are fundamental to effective performance. A stable workforce is vital in delivering good outcomes for children.

You should routinely discuss with your DCS the nature and levels of case load allocation. It is impossible to be definitive about optimum levels because of the variables of structure, capacity and flow. But interestingly Ofsted are becoming firmer on defining their own expectations. Your DCS should be able to confirm that the service has a clear model of case allocation, weighting and monitoring which sets off the appropriate warnings when caseloads increase or become volatile. Are you clear on caseloads that each of your social workers are dealing with and how this differs between newly qualified social workers, those managing complex cases and how this in turn is being managed by team managers? Similar numbers of cases for each of these groups should be a cause for concern. Specifically, there should be no unallocated looked after, child protection or children in need cases.

Do you have feedback, whether from staff surveys or other means, on the visibility and effectiveness of management and leadership, including from elected members but especially from your senior managers? Do middle and senior managers give sufficient time and attention to understand the current experience of front-line staff? Do members have an appropriate level of understanding and involvement in the department and are they accessible and ensuring that corporate parenting is given sufficient profile across the council?

Are your social work staff positive and empowered in their work, or consistently unhappy or stressed? The attitudes of front-line staff are often the best, and earliest indicator of a system that is under unsustainable pressure. That said, this work will never be anything other than highly demanding. Are managers and leaders establishing a supportive culture but one which recognises and tackles under-performance?

Effective data and related benchmarking tools have a key role to play in giving a clear picture of children's services performance. But as described above, there are cautions and limitations to the data set and how it can be used to best effect, particularly from the position of chief executive. Regrettably, there is no 'perfect' data set to indicate the best performance. If no data set exists in your authority, it is suggested you speak with your RIIA. There are, however, trends and inter-relationships between indicators which can assist an intelligent and dynamic analysis of the nature of performance. Before seeking to get into detail about the meaning of any individual pieces of data the chief executive should really satisfy themselves on some broad strategic points. These include:

What is the level and basis of confidence in the data set being used and how well is the data used routinely within and between teams to develop a deep-set culture of performance management within the service? This question may seem obvious, but you would be surprised. Are your numbers accurate and timely?

How effective and well set is your client or children's information system (CIS) upon which much of the data relies? (The children's social services software market is not robust and your authority's dependence on an individual CIS will have a major impact on social work performance – is this a matter you are routinely discussing with your DCS?)

Is your authority using the regional innovation and improvement alliance for benchmarking and is it using comparator data to benchmark effectively which can assist you and the service leaders in better understanding the trends and patterns in your performance?

Do you have a local narrative which helps you and others, including members, better understand how and why your service is the way it is? A simple example will relate to the numbers and proportions of children in your care. These can vary substantially within and between authorities, represent the most significant cost pressure, but also point to the very nature of interventionism deployed by your service. Again, there is no right or wrong answer to the questions posed by these figures – but understanding the questions posed will be key to your and your director of children's services leadership.

Finally, what are the developing trends that the data displays? Whereas it remains the case that the raw data rarely offers a reliable early warning to a failing service, it is also true that many if not all failing authorities will have at least some evidence of significant volatility and variation in some of the key indicators (such as rates of child protection activity) which do signal a deterioration of management grip on the service. How confident are you in your and your director of children's services ability to see and understand such trends? Some specific such issues include:

High numbers of re-referrals can suggest weak initial assessment and decision-making, while high numbers of long-running child protection plans can indicate drift or a lack of impact; can you satisfy yourself that these plans are appropriate?

You will want to have a clear picture of how many children are missing from your council's care, as well as the follow-up action, such as return interviews, which is being taken with these children.

Elsewhere, do you know how many looked-after children are in the criminal justice system? Lives can be blighted not just by lack of oversight but also by youthful criminal records that block access to work.

There is a significant amount of data available both within regions (through the RIIA) and nationally including LG Inform that will help provide a picture of your children's services performance. The participation of your council in data benchmarking exercises will give an indication of comparative levels of performance and spend. There is a renewed focus between Department for Education, LGA and ADCS on the national network of RIAs which have an agreed shared set of indicators for data collection from April 2022. Your region has a lead chief executive representing you in your RIA and you should be satisfied that your director is well engaged with it.

Significant cases and complaints

A further invaluable source of intelligence on the health of your children's service is the evidence from significant cases and complaints. Again, your assessment of this intelligence should be taken in tandem with DCS and in the best working relationships there will be a robust 'triangulation' of your respective judgements of such cases. At its worst, as chief executive you may have little if any awareness of such cases or your dialogue with the DCS is featured by defensiveness or distrust. In that case the service will almost certainly suffer. So:

Do you have an established and effective system for briefing and escalation of serious cases – to the DCS, to the chief executive and to key members? Are you confident that this system is understood and that it works? As a minimum that system needs to include reference to cases that are, or may be subject to, serious case review, media and or political attention. It should include cases which may point to service concerns.

It should also include those cases which exemplify best practice and some of the exceptional work that your staff routinely perform in some of the most demanding of circumstances. Are you directly recognising that best practice?

As well as being aware of the particularly attritional complaints that are a feature of most services simply because of the nature of the work, your DCS should receive an annual report of the complaints service and lessons. Do you see this? Should it be incorporated into a corporate equivalent to be shared across your corporate management team and does your council have annual complaints reporting to members?

If a case is likely to attract significant media attention, including national interest then be on the front foot to respond. Such cases are generally known about several weeks in advance.

Safeguarding is a multi-agency issue

Effective child safeguarding arrangements rely on joint working across a number of different agencies. As outlined in working together 2018, there are three statutory safeguarding partners and as chief executive, you are the lead representative for the council, alongside the accountable officer of the clinical commissioning group (CCG) and the chief constable. Your local safeguarding children's partnership (LSCP) should clearly outline the governance arrangements for chief officers of the lead responsible agencies. Chief executives should consider holding a regular meeting with these leads.

Communication plays a key role in this. Are your partners clear on what the communication and information sharing arrangements are and are they well-used?

The Safeguarding Children Partnership Boards should bring partners together to discuss strategic issues, but are partners sending officers of sufficient seniority to participate and take away actions? Similarly, are you clear that that the right people are attending children's partnership meetings?

The former regulatory framework required the Safeguarding Board to be independently chaired by an individual appointed by and accountable to the chief executive. However, with the new LSCPs that is no longer a specific requirement. You will however need to assure yourself that there are appropriate mechanisms in place for oversight, chairing and for objective scrutiny. If you have an independent chair or scrutineer do you hold a regular meeting with them?

A shared understanding of thresholds is crucial to effective multi-agency working. Failing services are invariably characterised by low levels of either confidence in, or understanding of, the thresholds by referring partners for referral and further action. This will lead to high rates of inappropriate referrals which clog up the system, waste resource, increase tensions between partners, and increase the likelihood of real cases being missed. Have you seen your council's or partnerships documentation that defines local thresholds? Does it make sense to you? Have you tested if it makes sense to partners? Has your director and or the safeguarding partnership led any recent work to disseminate, debate and agree those thresholds across the partnership.

A programme of qualitative and systematic multi-agency audits that result in required actions taking place, are vital tools in testing the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Are you well sighted on this statutory audit process (which also applies to other council services) (Section 11, Children Act 2004)?

Having a clear picture of the number and nature of child safeguarding practice reviews or local learning practice reviews, which deal with serious child safeguarding incidents that are being investigated in your area will also provide evidence on the effectiveness of local arrangements. Do you read and discuss your practice reviews?

When discussing safeguarding with partners it is obviously helpful to consider that, like councils, police, health, education and others are all dealing with finance and resource pressures which will play a part in their decision-making. That should not deter you from emphasising the (particularly current) demands on councils, those agencies' own accountability for children and the collective cost of failure.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 gave local areas more flexibility to create their own multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements. You should assure yourself that these new arrangements are working effectively and also that others such as your health and wellbeing board is working to support children and young people in your council area. Whatever your arrangements, it is difficult to envisage a safe and effective local system which does not include a single partnership arrangement with exclusive focus on joint working arrangements required to safeguard and protect children.

Special educational needs and disability (SEND)

Chief executives should have an awareness of the SEND arrangements in their authority and seek necessary assurances from the DCS. This area of activity is subject to a separate Ofsted/CQC inspection with the CCG, which can lead to a written statement of action. If this arises, the chief executive should satisfy themselves that the action(s) are being addressed. A current concern with SEND is the funding pressure with a number of councils exceeding their allocation. The Government is currently conducting a review of the SEND arrangements and has published a green paper outlining a reform programme.

Assurance tools

Having an early warning system, based on a list of indicators, that identifies potential issues in your children's services department can be helpful. This can use the same approach and tools that you use to identify issues in other services and this, combined with your experiences as a chief executive, will tell you when you need to dig deeper to assure yourself that the department is performing well.

You should expect to receive good benchmarking information which gives a clear picture of what 'too many', 'too high' and 'not enough' means. You may also wish to check the percentage of complaints that are dealt with on time and be clear on how many reach 'stage two' (a formal complaint) and how the department learns lessons from these complaints. You might sample closed complaints to form your own judgement on what the complaints and the responses tell you.

Using procedures and programmes that reduce or remove the amount of subjectivity out of decisions on resource allocations, caseload allocation tools for example, can help ensure you take effective decisions.

What to do if there are clear signs of system problems

Act early. Performance problems in children's services rarely correct themselves, so you need to be clear that measures are in place to address problems. Acting early should almost always mean in concert with your DCS.

Make more space in your diary for an appropriate period. If things are going wrong, you will need to spend more time ensuring the services are heading back to the right level of performance.

Be prepared to challenge the professionals – but based on evidence and respect. Experienced directors and assistant DCS can get it wrong. They will also be working under considerable duress themselves and may have their own doubts about the supportiveness and capacity of their corporate context. That includes their chief executive. Be sure to challenge views and insist on seeing plans and having regular updates on progress. But also check constantly that your leadership is not part of the problem.

Get in touch with your neighbours and/or the wider region. Your regional and related arrangements (such as Partners in Practice and your RIIA) are designed to assist and develop a better framework for genuine sector-led improvement. These arrangements will not work if councils do not engage with them openly and honestly. So don't hesitate to share a concern, if by discussing it with others who may have the experience of already having addressed the same problem, this may assist you in the assurance of doing what is right or necessary.

Finance

Issues relating to children's services funding are complex and this publication is not the place to discuss them in detail. Alongside the general challenges of running children's services, it is now widely understood and accepted that after several years of austerity and compounding issues about need, cost and demand, children's services including SEND, represent one of, if not the, most pressing of local government financial concerns at present. The key issue for chief executives is to ensure that children's services spending is sustainable. That has to be sustainable in service as well as financial terms. Financial volatility within the service may be an indicator of a loss of management grip, but such are the current pressures that is not a given. Chief executives should satisfy themselves as to why budget variances are arising, positive or negative.

It is well evidenced that service failure is hugely expensive, as well as widely damaging to your authority. The cost of recovery from failure will certainly outweigh the cost of avoidance of failure. However, these are fine strategic judgements. It is certain that the quality of effective and embedded financial expertise and guidance, fluent with the professional needs of the services and well connected with regional support, are fundamental to effective financial management. Are you satisfied with the dedicated financial support arrangements to children's services in your council, and does it have the right balance between financial expertise and an understanding of the nature of children's services?

Legal

Through legal services the council will have interaction with the family court, the outcomes of which affect children's lives. Chief executives should satisfy themselves as to the existing arrangements.

Conclusions and useful resources

As stated at the outset, this short document cannot provide all of the answers to chief executives who oversee children's services. You are part of a political and professional strategic 'quartet' that also includes the leader, lead member and especially the DCS. Crucially, your role is in supervising, guiding and empowering the chief officer to get their job done well. It should not be for the chief executive to replicate or duplicate the DCS role. If that is happening in your authority, at least one of you is getting something wrong.

Children's services will continue to be a daunting challenge for chief executives, irrespective of your council's current Ofsted rating. Despite that, the challenge for all chief executives should be to ensure that you add value to ensure that your services are having a positive impact on children in your communities. As well as deeply challenging, many of us would argue that supporting and protecting vulnerable children is one of the privileges and cornerstones of local government. To conclude, the following reference documents may assist. If you read only one, it should be the statutory guidance for the roles of director of children's services and lead member.

Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances (RIAs) are a key resource for accessing improvement support. Each RIA will include a lead chief executive who will be able to discuss any concerns you have regarding your children's services performance and will also be able to signpost you to the appropriate support available through the RIA.

Elsewhere, information on the support available from the LGA is available from your principal adviser and/or children's improvement adviser, via the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) and from the Department for Education from your regional improvement support lead (RISL).

'LGA's Children's services improvement action research'

This project undertaken by the ISOS Partnership and commissioned by the LGA, has sought to answer two central questions:

- What are the key enablers of (and barriers to) improvement in local children's services?
- How can the system as a whole facilitate and support improvement in local children's services?

The final report sets out detailed evidence and case studies about how local areas have brought about and sustained improvement, as well as recommendations about how the national system can support local children's services to improve.

[View the full improvement action research report](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/160621_LGA%20children%27s%20services%20improvement%20action%20research%20report.pdf)

[\[https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/160621_LGA%20children%27s%20services%20improvement%20action%20research%20report.pdf\]](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/160621_LGA%20children%27s%20services%20improvement%20action%20research%20report.pdf)

Alongside this report, a **[short summary has been developed](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/160621_LGA%20children%27s%20services%20improvement%20action%20research%20report.pdf)**

[\[https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/160621_LGA%20children%27s%20services%20improvement%20action%20research%20report.pdf\]](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/160621_LGA%20children%27s%20services%20improvement%20action%20research%20report.pdf)

that draws out the important practical implications for lead members and senior leaders involved in leading improvement in local children's services departments:

[Children and Social Work Act 2017 \[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents/enacted\]](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents/enacted)

[The Children and Families Act 2014 \[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted\]](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted)

[The Children Act 2004 \[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents\]](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents)

[The Children Act 1989 \[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents\]](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents)

[Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services \[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/directors-of-childrens-services-roles-and-responsibilities\]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/directors-of-childrens-services-roles-and-responsibilities)

[Working together to safeguard children](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/729914/Working_Together_2018.pdf)

[\[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/729914/Working_Together_2018.pdf\]](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/729914/Working_Together_2018.pdf)

Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services framework

[\[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018\]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018) and a **slideshare summary of the framework** [\[http://www.slideshare.net/Ofstednews/inspectionoflachildrensservicesilacs\]](http://www.slideshare.net/Ofstednews/inspectionoflachildrensservicesilacs)

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