

# Intervention or prevention?

## The leadership response to performance risk



# 1. Background

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This report deals with the very particular challenges that are faced by senior and middle leaders in local authorities that have been judged 'inadequate' by Ofsted and are considered by the DfE to be in need of intervention. It draws heavily on two presentations, one by Colin Hilton (Director, Sector Led Improvement) and the other by John Harris (Children's Improvement Adviser), at a joint VSC/CIB seminar attended by DCSs and senior colleagues from a representative sample of authorities that are, or have been, in difficulties. Both the 'signatures of risk' and the 'improvement and learning journey' are drawn from the work of the CIB on sector led improvement. Other views included in the report are those of the participants at the seminar. Because the discussions were conducted under Chatham House rules, no specific opinions have been attributed either to individuals or to the local authorities in which they work.

Building on earlier work undertaken when the DCS provision was delivered by the National College, the seminar provided an opportunity to test out the working assumptions of the Children's Improvement Board about the conditions that are most typically associated with poor performance, and to extrapolate from that a set of indicators that might serve as an early warning system for local authorities. Drawing on this, and on the wider experience of the participants, the seminar explored some of the ways in which leaders need to behave when the challenge they face is that of generating and sustaining improvement from a low performance base.



## 2. Context

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The public perception of the quality of local authority provision for children and young people is shaped, almost exclusively, by Ofsted as the quality regulator for the sector. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that the way in which politicians and senior leaders in local authorities think about the services they provide is dominated by the criteria for inspection and the way in which they are applied.

The emphasis on the quality of front-line practice that has been a feature of the most recent inspection frameworks is generally welcomed by local authorities and seen as a necessary corrective to the previous regulatory regime which leaned heavily on analysis of performance indicators and compliance with standard operating procedures. There is now a much more rigorous scrutiny of the reality of children's lives as called for in the Munro Report.

Although clearly a shift in the right direction, this change of emphasis is not without its complications. It demands a different approach to inspection, and, in the judgments that inspectors make about the capacity to improve, it assumes a different kind of leadership by Directors of Children's Services and their senior colleagues.

The most obvious difference lies in the way that inspections are conducted. A process that is based on providing a second opinion about professional judgement has to be secure about the quality of the judgements that it makes itself. In other words, it requires inspectors that know the business, and moderation procedures that do more than add up the numbers. On both of these counts, Ofsted remains vulnerable. Whilst the quality of individual inspections is often high, the inspection system as a whole does not yet have the full confidence of the profession and the feeling persists amongst many DCSs that local authorities are sometimes vulnerable to inconsistently applied standards and processes. Criticisms of a similar kind have also been levelled at the DfE.

These problems have been compounded by the experience of the pilot programme of multi-agency inspections, now temporarily suspended. The framework for the joint inspections of multi-agency arrangements for the protection of children in local authority areas holds the local authority to account in a way that is, arguably, quite disproportionate. The concern is that the consequence of failure by partners is borne, almost exclusively, by the local authority. Whilst this may concentrate the mind on the need for improvements to the leadership of the system as a whole, it is sometimes experienced as an unreasonable demand, given the circumstances in which some authorities are now working.

Just as important is the impact that inspection has on the way in which senior officers in the local authority view their role. An approach to inspection which is unsparing in the way that it attaches responsibility throughout the system for what happens at the front line has significant implications for leadership and some notable strengths. It is unequivocal about lines of accountability, clear about where responsibility lies for operations and, by implication at least, emphasises the role of the DCS as the lead professional.

Therein, of course, lies the dilemma. Leaders do not exist in a vacuum, in which they can devote themselves single-mindedly to the pursuit of a narrowly defined set of priorities. Far from it. The kind of leadership that DCSs need to demonstrate is influenced by a number of factors, of which Ofsted is only one. Equally influential is the combined effect of government policy, the expectations of chief executives and elected members, and pressure on local authority budgets. These all push DCSs away from an involvement in frontline delivery and towards a more strategic and corporate role, with responsibility for a wide range of services, not all of which can be accorded the close attention that Ofsted demands for children's services in particular.

To some extent, this has always been the case. There has never been a time when DCSs have not had to look several different ways at once. That is part of what is involved in being a leader in the public sector. DCSs are not alone in this, but never before has the challenge of managing multiple demands and conflicting accountabilities been quite so acute.

It is not uncommon for DCSs to pick their way through leadership challenges of this kind by measuring their actions in terms of moral purpose, taking the needs of children, young people and their families as paramount. But moral purpose can be a crude device. It is all too easily perceived as shroud waving when deployed in corporate discussions on, say, budget reductions, and it can run the risk of irritating others whose motivation is, by implication, characterised as less noble than that of the DCS.

Where DCSs are successful, it is largely because, either by luck or by good judgement, they have succeeded in finding themselves in a position whereby they are able to reconcile these competing pressures. The key to this lies in the relationship with the Chief Executive and the Lead Member, and the extent to which the corporate centre understands, supports and adds value to the professional context in which the DCS is working. No leader can be successful if they are not allowed to lead, and no leader can shirk responsibility for creating a positive 'authorising environment'.

# 3. Signatures of risk

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Early evidence from the CIB about the reasons for poor performance exemplifies the point that large and diverse organisations, such as local authorities, can sometimes become the enemy of effective delivery at the frontline, when they ought to be powerful allies. Drawing on inspection evidence and the experience of authorities in intervention, the CIB has identified a number of 'signatures of risk'. These are continually being refined and up-dated. Indeed, the list below has already superseded the version which was presented at the seminar. The signatures of risk can be placed into three broad categories:

## **A: The broader political and corporate climate**

- Lack of political focus on safeguarding and care
- Turnover and change in senior leadership
- Service re-organisation combined with challenging budget reductions
- The assumption that performance standards are secure in an environment of service maintenance rather than development

## **B: Leading with others**

- Weak commitment from partners
- Poor workforce development and/or capacity
- Lack of a learning organisational culture

## **C: Leading children's services**

- Limited self-awareness and no external challenge
- Failing to listen to or accept front line feedback
- Inconsistent observation of practice
- Professional weakness in supervision and audit
- Lack of focus on the child's journey or voice of the child
- Not developing a culture of anticipation and early warning of issues

It is important to stress that these are all indicators that, by themselves, may not amount to a serious problem but which, combined, suggest that all may not in fact be well.

The first category of risks, labelled the **broader political and corporate climate** is about where services for children and young people sit in the list of corporate priorities and the kind of potentially damaging assumptions that are

sometimes made about how well children's services can cope when asked to deliver quality outcomes with reduced resources, expertise or leadership. Local authorities that condone lengthy temporary arrangements, leave gaps in the staffing establishment, and expect vacancies to be covered without giving thought to the consequences, put themselves at risk. The current preference for stripping out layers of senior management, and creating chief officer posts that cover a huge span of responsibility, can potentially have the same impact. What is lost, crucially, is the ability to identify risk and anticipate problems before they become unmanageable. The danger is that authorities adopting this approach will become increasingly reactive, and find it difficult to provide effective leadership for the frontline. Authorities that view improvement as a goal rather than a habit, and are unable to maintain attention on key priorities or, even worse, view success as an invitation to reduce funding also put services at risk.

**Leading with others** groups together three signatures of risk which are concerned with the capacity of the organisation to effect cultural change. A key challenge for the DCS is that of providing the kind of leadership that does not rely on the power of their position, but on the authority that they bring to the role. The challenge of collaborative leadership, of course, is that it relies on both parties being able to find common ground and accept shared responsibility. DCSs report some real difficulties in bringing others to the table, with serious consequences for their capacity to improve. Many of their most significant partners, in the NHS, for example, or the probation service, are now involved in large scale structural re-organisation themselves, as a consequence of which they have become inward looking and there is a view that whilst they may say the right things, they are less likely than they once were to follow up with appropriate action. Internal partners can also be intransigent, defensive or simply unresponsive. Where DCSs are entirely reliant on corporate provision for human resources, finance services, performance information and organisational development, and the service that is provided takes little account of the specific needs of the sector, there can be real barriers in the way of creating a learning organisation.

The final group of indicators, grouped as **leading children's services**, are all about risks that DCSs can more obviously address without needing to rely on anybody other than

those who work for them directly. That, of course, makes them the test of a different kind of leadership. Authorities at risk are likely to be isolated, defensive, and unwilling to entertain new ideas or fresh approaches. They are not just closed to external challenge, but are unlikely to make best use of the intelligence that they might gather internally to understand themselves more fully. They are less likely to be creative about the role of the principal social worker, or to encourage professional feedback or to listen to the voices of children, young people and those that care for them. Where others see opportunity, they see only threat.

The way in which these signatures of risk have been grouped is not random. The list is organised according to the degree of control that can be exercised by the DCS and senior colleagues. Spend too much time managing the political and strategic agenda and you risk losing sight of what is happening on the frontline, but focus overmuch on creating the right professional culture, and you risk marginalising yourself and your department. The key to success lies in the way that DCSs reconcile corporate and service leadership, and the arrangements they make for distributing leadership throughout the organisation.



# 4. The modern canary: an early warning system

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If the 'signatures of risk' offers an accurate analysis of why authorities find themselves in decline, then they ought also to provide the building blocks of an early warning system, so that authorities are able to take action sufficiently far in advance to avert problems that might otherwise overwhelm them.

It should be straightforward, but it isn't. There are, and always will be, a number of wicked issues that resist simple solutions. For this reason, they are best expressed as questions which will need to be revisited on a regular basis:

- Is the purpose of an early warning system to improve practice or to be prepared for inspection?
- What are the processes required to make sure that an early warning system does not end up being effective for all but those that really need it?
- Where, within the system does the power lie? Is it vested in the local authority or in some other regional or national body?
- Is it possible to design a system which works equally well with any local authority, whatever its size, organisation or political complexion?

## **Is the purpose of an early warning system to improve practice or to be prepared for inspection?**

Implicit in the question is an assumption that an early warning system has to be one or the other, that it can't be both. The problem is not that the inspection regime is, in some way, hostile towards good practice, but that inspection, by its nature, is a public event which draws attention to weaknesses as well as strengths and it may not always be in the best interests of an authority to be quite so candid about its own shortcomings in public as it might be in private. The risk attached to an early warning system is that, if honest, it may be cited by Ofsted as evidence of failure, if not, it may be used as evidence of a lack of self awareness. If the early warning system doesn't use the same criteria as Ofsted, it looks irrelevant and may miss weaknesses that could subsequently appear worse for having been ignored. If it does use the same criteria, it runs the risk of placing an undue emphasis on compliance, discouraging serious self assessment, and stifling innovation. It also needs to be capable of commanding the attention of the Chief

Executive. There is no comfortable solution that does not involve working through issues about quality in public and building the resilience that is needed to ensure that staff do not become demoralised and see openness and transparency as a strength.

## **What are the processes required to make sure that an early warning system does not end up being effective for all but those that really need it?**

For an early warning system to be effective, it needs to offer more than a statistical profile of the authority, however sophisticated. The experience of the CIB is that data can be a distraction that conceals as much as it reveals, particularly if there is too much of it. Where the engagement with an authority relies overmuch on data analysis, there has sometimes been too little follow through, and early discussions, have had little impact even when, initially, they have seemed very positive. Warning signals are likely to be ignored unless:

- Data is set in context, and tested against other sources of evidence, such as direct testimony from a range of people including politicians, corporate players, frontline staff and service users,
- The profile of the authority includes an analysis of what is going well that is as rigorous as the analysis of what is not,
- Leaders are put in control of their own destiny, by being authorised to ask for help, and not turned into victims,
- Everybody feels that they are part of the solution and not part of the problem and blame is not attached to individuals. This is easier to achieve, of course, when the individuals concerned have played no part in the practice that is unsatisfactory and needs changing.

## Where, within the system, does the power lie? Is it vested in the local authority or in some other regional or national body?

For leaders who have been schooled in a culture that measures quality by inspection, audit and scrutiny and invests heavily in regulation as the guarantor of minimum standards, the idea of a self-improving system is almost a contradiction in terms. The notion of a guiding hand that has ultimate responsibility for the system as a whole and is not compromised by being a part of it, is a powerful one that is deeply embedded. That is the instinct that guides those who, even as they disclaim any wish to see the return of the regional government offices, entertain the thought that they might have been necessary.

And in truth it is genuinely difficult to see who, in a truly self improving system, will take the difficult decisions. Who sets the system in motion and makes sure it keeps moving? Who ensures that self evaluation is rigorous and honest? Who prompts authorities to seek help? Who makes sure that the system is universal and inclusive? Without an answer to these questions, peer collaboration can scarcely be described as a 'system', rather than a kind of improvement club. In some cases, local authorities have been identified as needing assistance, but action has not followed.

A possible answer can be found in the school sector, where the best headteachers are beginning to find effective ways of holding each other to account. They have stepped up to the mark, precisely because they know that if they abdicate responsibility for driving improvement, they are, to all intents and purposes, making themselves surplus to requirements. A system that is not self-improving needs managers, not leaders.

## Is it possible to design a system which works equally well with any authority, whatever its size, organisation or political complexion?

Experience suggests that the differences between authorities are as great as the similarities, and whilst some of those differences, such as size, organisation and political complexion, can be quantified, there are others, such as cultural, historical and socio-economic characteristics that are more difficult to pin down. All of this makes for a degree of variety that can make comparisons difficult and defies the best efforts of even the most flexible early warning system.

It was suggested, at the seminar, that what is needed is a set of tools, rather than a system, the point being that in measuring quality it is just as important to be able to account for difference as it is to recognise excellence. An approach that can satisfy this kind of requirement would need to be:

- Risk based – judging provision by making a professional judgement about whether it is robust rather than by lining it up against a set of standard operating procedures,
- Outcomes focused – using outcomes to judge processes, rather than the other way around and looking at the impact over time, giving credit for strategies that may only deliver in the long term,
- Review driven – assessing provision by reference to the purposes for which it was designed and the circumstances in which it was established,
- User friendly – looking for multiple solutions that are capable of meeting individual needs rather than bureaucratic approaches that assume universal compliance.

An early warning system that genuinely engages with these four questions will be constantly evolving as local authorities learn from experience. That is why it is important not to treat the Ofsted framework as the gold standard for determining service

quality. In a mature system, Ofsted will be struggling to keep up with best practice, rather than the other way round. But that does depend upon the willingness of local authorities to commit to a voluntary system.

“Don't fall in love with the Ofsted judgement.”



# 5. The topography of support

The sector is, in the opinion of some, ‘good at defining the problem but less good at responding’ and it may be true that the greatest challenge is to find an effective way of supporting authorities in difficulties. The CIB has developed an approach to authorities in intervention that offers some pointers to the way forward for authorities that are beginning to get into difficulties.

A summary of the improvement and learning journey looks like this:



The process may look fairly familiar. It is, after all, a plan>do>review cycle, customised for sector led improvement in children’s services. That, however, is only part of the story. The cycle is unlikely to make a difference unless it is used for the right purposes.

At each stage, the real challenge is to address the underlying issues and not simply to massage the figures. ‘Diagnostic and improvement planning’, for example, should be about more than reviewing performance against a range of performance indicators. It should be about understanding the culture of the organisation and identifying ways in which it might need to be changed, using audit tools and peer challenge to find out more about what is really going on. ‘Delivering improvement’ is about trying out new approaches, not tightening the screw through more rigorous performance management. It might, for example, be about looking at the learned behaviour of front line managers and reframing the job they do so that they approach it differently. Sensible

risk taking and innovation must be a part of a self-improving system and the improvement cycle needs to be accompanied by a systems approach to multi-agency service design and early help.

There are three wicked issues associated with deciding on the best form of support.

- Does prevention look different from intervention?
- If an authority knows how to make improvements why hasn’t it done so already?
- Where does support come from? Should there be an integrated and managed approach or a menu of opportunities?

## Does prevention look different from intervention?

A number of authorities that are not in intervention, are nonetheless establishing improvement boards and adopting a similar approach to improvement as those that are. This raises a number of issues. An improvement board is, almost by definition, a short term fix, subject to the law of diminishing returns. The longer it is in place, and the more it is seen as the solution to the problem, the less likely it is to make a difference. Whilst, in the right circumstances, it can clearly be highly effective, it is unlikely, by itself, to provide the answer.

Absolutely fundamental are a number of key principles that should inform every step of the improvement journey:

- The ‘child’s journey’ must be at the heart of the system,
- Multi-agency working and a coherent ‘early help’ offer are essential,
- Analytical assessment should drive outcome-focused care planning,
- There is no substitute for a ‘self-aware’ learning culture and effective use of evidence-based interventions.



It follows from this that there are a number of aspects of provision that are more likely to ensure that high quality provision is the norm rather than some kind of short term exception:

- Strong and visible leadership at all levels,
- An appropriately qualified, stable and well supported workforce,
- Integrated improvement planning based on whole systems thinking,
- Effective partnership working with an influential Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)
- Strategic commissioning of services informed by children and young people
- Regular QA and targeted use of audit with results feeding directly to plans
- A problem solving approach focused on services that need improvement
- Good use of interims and external support
- Regular and meaningful contact with other authorities
- An emphasis on changing behaviour in order to establish the right culture
- Challenge across the system: Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), LSCB, Scrutiny, Leader and Chief Executive

It is significant that structural change did not feature in any list of actions likely to support improvement or provide high quality services. A consistent theme of the seminar, on the other hand, was the importance attached to the training and recruitment of high quality staff, and the support provided for them once they are in post.

## If an authority knows how to make improvements why hasn't it happened already?

Even where authorities realise that there is an issue to be addressed, they may not be best placed to identify suitable solutions. It is much more difficult to know that there is a need to improve services than might be expected. It is now widely accepted that achieving targets is no guarantee of quality, but only more recently has the realisation begun to dawn that it may actually conceal poor performance. The first

“What does it look like when the work on improvement is pro-active rather than reactive?”

challenge for an authority that is genuinely committed to improvement is to recognise that there might be a problem and to know where it lies. That is why, as one participant at the seminar put it, ‘we need tools to measure impact’. The culture that has developed in recent years has been about avoiding risk, rather than making a difference. This distinction is not just a matter of semantics. It is about leadership that is pro-active, visionary and confident rather than reactive, managerial and apologetic.

That is why there is an urgent need to re-create a consensus about what constitutes good practice. The sector should, for example, be making sure that, through sector led improvement and succession planning, there is a renewed emphasis on working across LA boundaries to build a better understanding of what works, and Ofsted reports should be scrutinised for evidence of where it is possible to find good practice. Which authorities, for example, have actually managed to develop and appropriately record ‘reflective supervision’? If Ofsted listed examples of good practice in reports as well as areas for development, this would form a useful contribution to the learning of the sector.

## Where does support come from? Should there be an integrated and managed approach or a menu of opportunities?

Only if an authority is in charge of its own destiny will it make and sustain improvement. Propping up weak provision is not a long term strategy. The dilemma for the system, therefore, is whether there should be a planned, systematic and intelligent approach to support which might run the risk of disempowering local leaders or a menu of opportunities that might not be coherent and could give credence to poor choices.

“Some authorities seem to dip in and out of intervention. How do you sustain improvement?”

At the heart of this issue is the role of the region in providing support. The impact of a regional approach, when it works, is undeniable. Some authorities, however, actively prefer to engage with a wider network, with access to forms of support that may not feature in a purely regional programme. Similar issues and mutual learning opportunities may come from across the country, and some colleagues suggested that networks built through VSC programme attendance are often important sources of mutual support, and that the feeling of collegiality that these have engendered needs to be further nurtured.

# 6. Leadership under pressure

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There is a real risk of 'better leadership' becoming the default solution to every problem, and it is important not to make demands that are simply unachievable. There is no 'magic dust' to be sprinkled over each and every challenge faced by children's services. Just as important as leadership is the quality of the workforce and the effectiveness of the systems that determine the way in which DCSs do business. Only then will the conditions be right to ensure systematic improvement in frontline services and exploit the growing understanding of what counts as best practice.

That said, it is unarguable that leadership is one of the keys to success and, potentially, the one that most likely to achieve rapid results. Despite this, local government is more than capable of celebrating outstanding leadership whilst neglecting fledgling talent. Re-organisations rarely take account of the need to preserve and promote effective leaders, and support for leadership development is, at best, patchy. The VSC needs to continue to develop and support leaders at all levels. For the DCS, the single most powerful support for their leadership has come through the mentoring and coaching programmes offered through the DCS Leadership Provision, and there is a strong feeling that this needs to be extended throughout the system as it is impossible to create a learning culture unless it is built on this kind of professional relationship. This needs to be accompanied by efforts to achieve a much better understanding of the demands of systems leadership, a more open professional culture and a commitment to transformational change. Discussion at the seminar suggested the following.

## At the frontline....

Leadership is not the exclusive preserve of senior officers. It is a quality that is needed by even the most junior front-line social worker. One participant at the seminar described an initiative in which, in the absence of any appropriate scheme in social care, national leaders of education (NLEs) and specialist leaders in education (SLEs) have been linked with social workers to help improve practice. Workforce development should not be solely about improving technical skills.

## For middle leaders...

The CIB SWAP programme is designed to support team leaders, and has the potential to make a real difference if the challenge of releasing staff and providing backfill can be overcome, as well as providing the right kind of

support. There is also a strong feeling from some that the sector should learn from the National College and introduce a leadership support programme that works in the same way as NLEs, LLEs and SLEs. Such a scheme might, for example, start by giving a higher profile to the newly appointed Principal Social Workers.

## For the corporate centre....

The relationship between children's services and the corporate centre can sometimes be a difficult one, particularly where there is perceived to be an excessively officious involvement in professional practice, as when non specialists are asked to audit case files or when performance management becomes so oppressive that it stifles delivery or when meaningless process targets are reinvented at a local level.

What is important is the way that a children's services department describes itself to the corporate centre, so that the response is appropriate and proportionate. If the chief executive is expected to be sensitive to children's services in restructuring the authority and to understand the risks, then he or she has to be confident about the quality of performance management in the department.

## For elected members....

It goes without saying that, as key players in the authorising environment, elected members are important leaders in their own right, but they also have the power to enhance or frustrate the leadership provided by the DCS and senior colleagues. When the relationship works, it can generate much greater engagement from important stakeholders than would ever be achieved by the DCS acting alone in a professional capacity. When it doesn't work it can be disabling for both professional and politician.

Typically, the political environment can become dysfunctional when elected members have other priorities, are focused on political survival to the exclusion of anything else, or define their role as the commander in chief. The challenge for the DCS and the Chief Executive is to find ways of ensuring that the relationship remains positive, despite these constraints. One participant at the seminar spoke of the huge benefits she had experienced by persuading the leader to become a significant player on the regional CIB board. Peer mentoring for elected members offers a powerful way of creating a more enabling political culture.

# 7. Conclusion

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Although it was not one of the aims of the seminar to arrive at a set of recommendations, there was, by the end of the day, a unmistakable feeling that, important as it is to learn from each other's experience, an opportunity would be lost if that was the only outcome. So, although the group has no authority to make any recommendations, the following list is offered as a contribution to the continuing professional debate about how best to move from intervention to prevention.

**1. Strengthen the capacity of the regions to provide effective leadership, whilst ensuring that the DCS group remains the accountable body for sector led improvement.**

In the most effective school partnerships, HTs are being released on fixed term part time secondments to lead improvement work and take responsibility for ensuring that the system is appropriately challenging. The education system is also seeing the emergence of legally constituted partnerships, with appropriate levels of business support. There is some evidence that, where the DCS groups in the regions have moved in this direction, they are able to have greater impact. Developments of this kind would also help to address some of difficult question about where power lies within the system.

**2. Establish the signatures of risk and the improvement cycle as recommended features of a regional approach to peer challenge involving all authorities in regional or sub regional groups.**

For practical reasons, an approach to peer challenge that includes all authorities on a regular basis may have to be regionally based. To ensure that it remains appropriately challenging, it may also need to be informed by expert advice from a third party.

**3. Lobby Ofsted to review the framework for inspection to ensure that it provides incentives for local authorities to look beyond their immediate boundaries for advice and support, and reward authorities that demonstrate a high level of self awareness.**

The default position for most organisations is to deal with shortcomings internally. Local government is more familiar than most with doing business in public, but there is still a need to change the culture to one in which honesty is rewarded rather than penalised.

**4. Ensure that leadership development for children's services incorporates learning about sector led improvement, including the signatures of risk, and develops the qualities needed for effective systems leadership.**

The message from the seminar is that the development of the workforce at all levels should be a priority and that leadership is not just about the performance of senior officers in the local authority. There should be no workforce development which does not incorporate leadership development. There must be parallel provision of a similar kind for chief executives and elected members.

**5. Continue to explore the differences between the leadership that is needed to prevent an authority getting into difficulties and that needed to bring it out of intervention.**

It may be that similar qualities are needed whatever stage of the improvement journey an authority is going through. However, it was clear at the seminar that, unwelcome as it is, a poor inspection and the establishment of an intervention board can help to focus the minds of local politicians, and lever in additional resources. A challenge for the DCS in an authority at risk is that of tackling complacency whether it is located within the department, at the corporate centre or amongst politicians.

**6. Create a support offer that has credibility at a national level and can be accessed as a national resource.**

A number of authorities at the seminar expressed some doubts about the value of an exclusively regional solution and whilst peer challenge may need to be local, access to specialist support does not.



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