



The changing shape of children's services

A survey conducted by the National College and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)

Executive summary

Purpose and background

This survey was conducted during a two-week period in November 2010 by the National College and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) working in partnership. It was undertaken in a context of rapid change within the provision of children's services, prompted by changes in government policy and anticipated reductions in funding for this area. The aim of the survey was to establish more clearly the actual scale and nature of changes taking place in local authorities and their impact on the organisation and delivery of children's services.

The questionnaire was included in the weekly ADCS bulletin, which is emailed to all members on Friday each week. Sixty-five returns were received from a possible 153 local authorities (43 per cent) which is a good response rate for a survey of this kind.

The current position

Although there is statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of both the director of children's services and lead member (DCSF 2005), there are already significant differences between authorities in the way that the responsibilities of the post are carried out and in the organisational structures that have evolved over the last five years to support the delivery of services.

As might be expected, the vast majority of DCSs have responsibility for children's services alone (85 per cent). A significant minority have additional responsibilities, typically adult services (14 per cent).

Currently, structures which combine children's services and adult services are almost exclusively a feature of smaller unitary authorities. Five authorities, four of which combine children and adult services, also include leisure or culture in the portfolio of the DCS, but only in the very smallest authorities in the country has the combined brief been extended further to include communities, neighbourhoods or housing.

In all but two of the local authorities which responded to the survey, the DCS reports directly to the chief executive. In one case, the reporting line is through a group director, and in the other there is a "dual reporting role to the Group Director and the Chief Executive".

On average, the number of second-tier officers reporting to the DCS is four, and 82 per cent of respondents reported that they are line managing between three and five senior staff.

Looking ahead

Fifty-seven per cent of DCSs indicated that their authority is planning to change the way in which services are delivered, with a further 22 (34 per cent) saying that the situation is currently under review. Only six (9 per cent) commented that there are no plans for change, and of these six, two also reported that they had recently re-organised.

Options for change that are being implemented or planned are many and varied. Referred to most frequently in the survey is the option of partnering with the private sector for back office functions, and commissioning for specific service delivery. Sometimes this is accompanied by proposals for structural change; sometimes the changes are taking place within existing departmental structures.

The structural change which is attracting most interest is the option to create a director of people, with a portfolio which includes responsibility for children's services. This does not always mean the same thing in different local authorities. In some it is about combining children's and adult services, while in others it also includes services such as leisure, communities and housing.

Although this option is under consideration in a significant number of authorities, in only a few has the decision already been made. Only six (10 per cent) authorities refer to a 'people' directorate explicitly, and one authority commented that it may decide to separate children and adult services, having only recently combined them.

The changes that are being planned *within* existing departmental structures are equally radical. DCSs are considering new kinds of partnerships and new approaches to service delivery. The full range of options is represented in Table 1, with the ticks in the boxes showing where particular choices were referenced most frequently.

Table 1: Main focus for partnerships arrangements with different service providers

Partnerships with...	Outsourcing or externalisation	Mutualising services	Combining back office functions	Trading services
other local authorities	✓		✓	✓
the private sector	✓		✓	✓
the voluntary sector	✓	✓		
other public sector (eg NHS)		✓		

The survey also invited DCSs to report on the implications of change for their senior teams. 55 per cent of DCSs anticipate that their own post will change, with a further 28 per cent indicating that they are unsure what might happen to their role. A significant majority of responses (60 per cent) reported that there is likely to be a reduction in the number of second-tier posts. This figure rises to 65 per cent if the four authorities that commented that senior posts had already been lost are also included.

Estimates of the scale of the anticipated reduction in senior posts vary between 20 per cent and 50 per cent, with a significant loss of posts at assistant director level as well as amongst middle managers. It seems reasonable to project from comments such as these that most authorities will be losing between one and two senior (second-tier) posts. This translates into well over 200 posts nationally.

If there is an emerging trend in the way that directors are choosing to reduce the size of their senior teams, it appears to be in favour of losing posts that focus on partnership working, inclusion, early intervention and prevention, and to distribute their responsibilities to the assistant directors or service directors with responsibility for the core services such as education or social care. The significance of this is that the responsibilities associated with second-tier posts are likely to become, at one and the same time, both more extensive, and more specialised. Senior leaders are likely to be taking on a wider range of responsibilities within their area of professional expertise, be that education or social care.

The leadership challenge

There is a strong consensus that the role of the DCS will become even more strategic and corporate than is currently the case, requiring more generic leadership skills and greater flexibility. A significant number of responders commented that directors are going to have to be hugely skilled in leading change.

There is widespread concern about increasing workload at all levels, particularly if expectations about performance remain at their current level. Whilst a number of responses make reference to enhanced stress levels, the main concern is about the impact on service delivery. There are fears about a loss of highly experienced senior leaders and an expectation that, as the span of responsibility increases for those that remain, many will find themselves operating more frequently outside their comfort zone.

Despite these concerns, many of those responding to the survey go out of their way to stress the importance of being positive and, as one DCS puts it, "the key requirements for leaders at this time are resilience and optimism – an ability to get people to think about what they can do with the resources we have at our disposal – rather than mourning the loss of the resources that have now gone".

1. Background

This survey was conducted during a two-week period in November 2010 by the National College and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) working in partnership. It was undertaken in a context of rapid change within the provision of children's services, prompted by changes in government policy and anticipated reductions in funding for this area. The aim of the survey was to establish more clearly the actual scale and nature of changes taking place in local authorities and its impact on the organisation and delivery of children's services.

It is hoped that the results from this survey will offer a clearer understanding of the extent of change and transformation in children's services, as a basis for fuller and more informed discussion within the sector and with policy makers. The findings from this work may also help to identify examples of more radical and interesting approaches to change, which may be explored further to offer fuller case studies of change.

2. Methodology

The questionnaire was included in the weekly ADCS bulletin, which is emailed to all members on Friday each week. Sixty-five returns were received from a possible 153 local authorities (43 per cent), which is a good response rate for a survey of this kind. The individual responses were provided in confidence, and the report itself does not make reference to any individual authority.

Table 2 summarises the proportion of responses received by the type of authorities. It suggests that whilst the breakdown of participants was broadly in line with the profile of authorities as a whole, county councils were slightly over-represented in this sample and London boroughs slightly under-represented.

Table 2: Responses received by type of authority

Type of authority	Responses received/ (response rate)	Percentage of total responses	Proportion of authorities
County council	16 (57%)	25	18%
London borough	9 (27%)	14	22%
Metropolitan borough	17 (47%)	26	24%
Unitary authority	23 (42%)	35	36%
Total	65 (43%)	100	100%

Despite this match with the national picture, questions remain about whether the sample is genuinely representative, insofar as the survey may only have been completed by directors who are facing significant change within their authorities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is not the case, though many of those who participated in the survey point out that change is happening very rapidly and, for this reason, the findings should be treated with some care.

3. The current position

Although there is statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of both the director of children's services and lead member (DCSF 2005), there are already significant differences between authorities in the way that the responsibilities of the job are carried out and in the organisational structures that have evolved over the last five years to support the delivery of services.

3.1 Responsibilities

As might be expected, the vast majority of DCSs have responsibility for children's services alone (85 per cent¹). A significant minority have additional responsibilities, typically adult services (14 per cent). At the moment, structures which combine children's services and adult services are almost exclusively a feature of smaller unitary authorities and it is worth noting that two authorities, one unitary and one London borough, have recently moved in the opposite direction, by disaggregating children and adults. One larger metropolitan borough reports that the joint responsibility "may be split" as part of an imminent reorganisation. In four authorities (6 per cent), the DCS is also responsible for health commissioning and/or delivery.

Five authorities, four of which combine children's and adult services, also include leisure or culture in the portfolio of the DCS, but only in some of the very smallest authorities in the country, where the scale of the operation is almost certainly a major factor, has the combined brief been extended further to include communities, neighbourhoods or housing.

Amongst the other responsibilities that are recorded are some that a small number of DCSs may have acquired by virtue of their personal standing, rather than as an intrinsic aspect of the post (ie deputy chief executive) and the DCS who carries an additional responsibility for 'airports, water and sewerage' is almost certainly an exception.

3.2 Roles

In all but two of the responding local authorities, the DCS reports directly to the chief executive. This is, perhaps, not surprising given that the statutory guidance makes clear that this is both advised and expected. In one case, the reporting line is through a group director, and in the other there is a "dual reporting role to the Group Director and the Chief Executive".

3.3 Organisational structures

The number of senior staff with responsibility for children's services who report directly to the DCS is summarised in Table 3. This shows that 82 per cent of respondents are line managing between three and five senior staff.

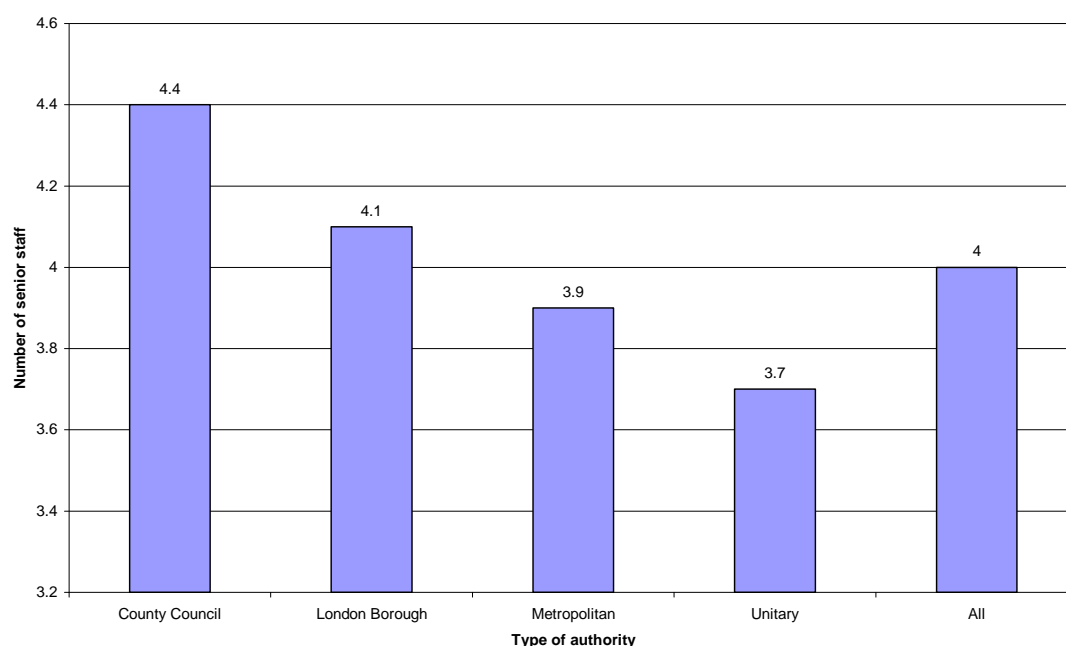
¹ This figure includes a number of authorities that identify adult learning within the children's services brief.

Table 3: Number of senior staff (eg deputy/assistant directors or service directors) currently reporting to the DCS with responsibility for children's services, either wholly or in part.

Number of staff	Responses	Per cent
1	1	2
2	5	8
3	16	25
4	22	34
5	15	23
6	6	9
Total	65	100

Although the mean average number of staff for all authorities was 4.0, there is some variation between different types of authority (see Figure 1). Most notably, the average number of senior staff in county councils is markedly higher than within unitary authorities (4.4 compared with 3.7).

Figure 1: Number of senior staff currently reporting to the DCS with responsibility for children's service either wholly or in part



Many of the comments on the nature of these line management responsibilities make the point that they are not always straightforward. Variations on a theme include:

- **Matrix management** combining locality and professional responsibilities (“We have fully integrated service teams organised on a geographical basis. One Head of Service has strategic lead for social care, the other for SEN and youth” – unitary)
- **‘Dotted line responsibilities’** whereby the DCS is responsible for the day-to-day operation of services but whose senior managers may also report to another senior officer such as the director of resources (“I also supervise the Head of Finance and Head of Personnel for Children’s Services” – metropolitan borough)

- **External commissioning** (“The AD Commissioning has delegated authority to make commissioning decisions jointly in respect of Health provision as it relates to Children and Young People” – unitary)
- **Direct line management of third tier officers** (such as “Children Trust Director and a Director of Business Transformation” – metropolitan borough)
- **Internal commissioning** (“Interim arrangement where DCS is Commissioning Director - senior officers are accountable for performance but not line managed” – county council).

4. The future

4.1 The local authority

The survey asked if authorities are proposing to change the way in which services are delivered. Thirty-seven (57 per cent) DCSs indicated that this was the case, with a further 22 (34 per cent) stating that the situation was currently under review. Only six (9 per cent) stated that no such proposals existed, and of these six, two had recently reorganised. Table 4 summarises responses to this question by local authority type. Although there appear to be some differences between county councils and unitary authorities, supporting information suggests that this may be because a number of unitary authorities have already reorganised in recent months.

Table 4: Extent to which authorities are planning changes or changes are under review, by type of authority

Type of authority	Planning changes	Changes are under review	No changes are anticipated
County council	11 69%	5 31%	0 0%
London borough	6 67%	2 22%	1 11%
Metropolitan borough	9 53%	7 41%	1 6%
Unitary authority	11 48%	8 35%	4 17%
Total	37 57%	22 34%	6 9%

Respondents were offered a number of broad descriptions of change and asked to select those which most closely resembled what was happening in their authority. Table 5 summarises DCSs’ views on whether such changes are being planned or considered. The figures do not add up to 100 per cent because it was possible to tick more than one box.

Table 5: Nature of changes being planned/reviewed by local authorities

Nature of change	Planned change	Under review	Total
Merger or amalgamation of departments (eg children and adults)	13 20%	6 9%	19 29%
Organisational restructure of the whole authority	22 34%	12 18%	34 52%
Increase in shared or joint provision of services within the authority (eg services moved to the corporate centre)	23 35%	13 20%	36 55%
Delivery of shared or joint provision of services with another authority (eg school improvement or HR)	22 34%	17 26%	39 60%
Delivery of services by an external partner (eg in the private sector)	14 22%	8 13%	22 34%
Other	4 6%	7 11%	11 17%

The written comments are very revealing. It's clear that the main trigger for the changes that are currently being implemented or planned is financial. Estimates of the likely loss of senior leadership capacity vary between 20 per cent and 50 per cent with a significant loss of posts at both director and assistant director level as well as amongst middle managers.

Financial constraints and organisational change

"The Council is reconfiguring the organisation of its services reflecting that it will be (a) operating in an environment with 30 per cent less resources which requires a smaller, leaner structure (b) focusing on services the council has to provide ie statutory services and (c) creating a new public service offer that provides a balance between people and place related services." County council.

There is a clear distinction between those authorities where reorganisation is a consequence of wider change across the whole authority ("wholesale redesign" – *county council*), and those where the requirement to make savings has been passed on to directors working within their existing departmental structures ('We are likely to remove one of the Assistant Directors but stay as Children's Services' – metropolitan borough).

The whole authority review takes a number of different forms. At one end of the spectrum is the authority which is "exploring integration across two boroughs with a single CEO and corporate team". It would seem that this kind of radical option is currently only being considered seriously by smaller London boroughs, where communities already cross local government boundaries.

Referred to much more frequently in the survey is the whole authority solution which involves partnering with the private sector for back office functions, and commissioning for specific service delivery. One county council comments "no decision made. Proposal to adopt core council model focusing on commissioning with separate delivery units" and one of the metropolitan boroughs speculates that it is "looking like a commissioner/provider split with significant reduction in provided services".

The organisational change that is referred to most frequently in the responses is the broadening of the remit to one of 'people and places'. In practice this does not always mean the same thing in different local authorities. Sometimes the proposal is about combining children's and adult services ("The review is considering all options but is specifically looking

at creating a 'People' directorate which would encompass children's services, adult services and eventually public health" – unitary), sometimes it would appear to include other services ('The council has moved from 5 Directors to 3. The new directorates are People, Places, Resources' – unitary). Although this form of organisation has all the appearance of becoming the new orthodoxy, there are currently few authorities where it has yet been implemented. Only six responses actually make reference to it, and one other authority which had already moved in this direction comments in the survey that it may revert to a separation between children and adults. One other authority's response notes that the option has been ruled out ("The option to integrate the roles of the DCS and the Director of Adults was considered and rejected on the grounds of the needs and performance profile in the city" – unitary).

Many more of the comments refer to changes that are taking place *within* existing departmental structures. This does not mean, of course, that they are not prompted by organisational change across the authority as a whole.

Changes within children's services

"The review is completely under children's services control although corporate savings will be made in terms and conditions across the council. We are discussing the possibility of joint work with other authorities and a commercial provider in school improvement and we are also exploring greater use of the voluntary sector in social care." County council

Two things are clear. Firstly, there is no single solution to the challenges being faced and many authorities are planning to introduce different kinds of change on several fronts at the same time. This kind of comment from a county council is not unusual – "Reducing from 4 to 3 Heads of Service. Some Business Support functions moving to corporate centre eg Facilities Management, Communications Team and possibly some performance management changes. Consideration also being given to some joint provision of some traded services & possible externalisation of services".

Secondly many of these solutions are still under consideration and, although local authorities are very serious about change, many of them are still only at the stage of discussing options. Indeed, several responses stress that the information being provided is still confidential.

There are two ways of describing the changes being considered within departments. The first focuses on the *partnerships* that are needed to deliver services in new ways; the second focuses on the way in which these new services might be *organised and delivered*. By combining these two approaches in a single table (Table 6), it is possible to get a reasonably comprehensive picture of all the options that are currently being considered. The ticks in the boxes provide a general indication of where options were referenced most frequently.

Table 6: Main focus for partnerships arrangements with different service providers

Partnerships with...	Outsourcing or externalisation	Mutualising services	Combining back office functions	Trading services
other local authorities	✓		✓	✓
the private sector	✓		✓	✓
the voluntary sector	✓	✓		
other public sector (eg NHS)		✓		

Some services tend to be linked more often with particular options. So, for example, partnerships with the private sector are most commonly linked with school improvement, partnerships with the voluntary sector with social care, and partnerships with other public sector services with health.

The following comments provide a good overview of what this all looks like in reality:

- “Given the scale of the reductions required, total restructure will be required with the emphasis being on providing a safety net, and outsourcing or mutualising as many services as possible” (County council)
- “Children and adults merging, medium term plan to put all delivery into arms length trust with PCT” (County council)
- “Proposed shared children’s services with other neighbouring authorities” (London borough)
- “Just reduced the senior leadership team by two posts. Implementing transformation programme in Jan 2011, which has completely revised the structure, based on: multi-agency, safeguarding hub; locality 0–19 teams; inclusion and emotional wellbeing service; and intensive family support service. In the throes of developing proposals to create ‘youth mutual’ for youth services. New School improvement structure went live in early November” (unitary)
- “We are procuring a strategic partner to deliver school improvement activity. We have a shared arrangement with health for children’s health and adult social care” (unitary)
- “Looking to partner with other LAs to deliver Adoption services and some statutory education services such as SACRE, NQT, YOT. Looking to partner with other LA and private sector re school improvement. All commissioning, admin & performance to go to corporate centre” (unitary)
- “Discussing shared school improvement. Sharing foster carers and children’s residential care home” (unitary)
- “We are downsizing our back-office functions by 50 per cent on average and ‘unifying’ them as opposed to centralising them!” (metropolitan borough)

A more detailed consideration of the data suggests some potentially interesting variations in the nature of changes being considered. Table 7 summarises these potential differences. (The relatively low number of responses means that some care is needed in reviewing this data).

Table 7: Options for change by local authority type

Nature of change	More likely to be considering	Less likely to be considering
Merger or amalgamation of departments (29% of all authorities)	Metropolitan borough (41%) Unitary (39%)	County council (13%) London borough (11%)
Organisational restructure of the whole authority (52% of all authorities)	County (63%)	Unitary (44%)
Increase in shared or joint provision of services within the authority (55% of all authorities)	Metropolitan borough (88%)	London borough (33%)
Delivery of shared or joint provision of services with another authority (60% of all authorities)	Metropolitan borough (82%) London borough (67%)	County council (38%)
Delivery of services by an external partner (34% of all authorities)	County council (44%)	Metropolitan borough (24%)

4.2 The director of children’s services (DCS)

The survey asked if the post of DCS was likely to change as a consequence of developments at the directorate and corporate level.

55 per cent of DCSs anticipate that their post will change, with a further 28 per cent indicating that they are unsure what might happen to their role. The written responses confirm that for many DCSs it is still too soon to say with any degree of certainty what the future may hold (“Given the nature of the (local authority) review, there has to be an assumption that the role of the DCS will alter” – unitary).

Most of the responses interpret the question as an invitation to speculate about whether there will be a change in the portfolio of services for which they are responsible. Some choose to comment in very general terms (“Broader role incorporating a completely different aspect of Council services including the economy, regeneration and enterprise” – unitary) but by far the great majority that choose to comment, tackle head-on the question of whether children’s and adult services will be combined.

As in the responses to the earlier question about the reorganisation of local authorities, opinion is very mixed about the merger of children’s and adult services. Twelve responses make reference to the possibility, but often in extremely speculative terms, and two specifically rule it out. Of the 12 responses that identify the possibility of a move in this direction, only one is from an authority with a population bigger than 300,000 and 10 are from unitaries or small metropolitan boroughs.

There are two responses which are of particular interest because they envisage posts which do not comply with the statutory guidance:

- “Looking not to have DCS or DASS but Director of Commissioning and Director of Provision. No clarity about where statutory accountability will be. Some talk of going back to a DSS” (metropolitan borough)
- “The DCS role will be included along with the Director of Adults role in a new post called Strategic Director Communities, although work in relation to schools will be

with a newly created Strategic Director of Enterprise. The Council will reduce its current four Directors to three (the third being a Strategic Director for Shared Services)" (metropolitan borough).

Two responses identify the possibility that the role of the DCS will straddle local authority boundaries, even though the authorities may themselves retain their territorial integrity.

Three responses interpret the question as an opportunity to comment on how the work may change, even if the post remains the same:

- "Unsure yet but role will be certainly be more focused on commissioning/contract/client side management" (metropolitan borough)
- "Unclear but if remains will be one of strategic commissioning as plan is to move to partnership and big society models not direct provider" (London borough)
- "DCS likely to be 'lead commissioner' with separate delivery units" (county council).

4.3 The senior leadership team

A significant majority of participants (60 per cent) reported that there is likely to be a reduction in the number of second tier posts, this figure rises to 65 per cent if the four authorities which commented that senior posts had already been lost are also included. Of the remaining authorities, 11 (17 per cent) felt that it was too early to be certain what might happen and only 10 (16 per cent) did not respond or felt that structures would remain as they are. The scale of what is being planned can be gauged from some of the written comments:

- "Impossible to say at this stage but likely to be at least 2 Ads" (London borough)
- "Senior roles reporting to DCS in Children's will reduce from 5 – 2" (metropolitan borough)
- "Reduction to 4 Ads" (London borough)
- "I currently have 6 ADs, I will be moving to 3" (county council)
- "The number of direct reports (Service Director posts) will reduce from 6 to 4" (county council)
- "Reduction from 5 to 3 Service Directors by the end of the 2011" (metropolitan borough)
- "Have already reduced from 6 to 5, planned reduction to 4" (county council)
- "We have already reduced by 2 assistant directors" (London borough)

It seems reasonable to project from comments such as these that most authorities will be losing between one and two senior (second tier) posts. This translates into well over 200 posts nationally, which will, of course, reduce the size of the talent pool for the appointment of future DCSs. It may also potentially create a blockage in the system for third tier managers who aspire to become DCSs.

Restructuring of second tier posts

"The focus (of the new ADs) will be less on integrated services than previously and more on separately education/child/organisation responsibilities" (county council)

"One of three ADs will be dis-established. This role is the one that covers prevention and partnerships, youth service, the YOT and early years" (metropolitan borough)

"Likely to lose one AD and merge Inclusion and (school) Improvement" (unitary)

"A reduction from 5 to 4 with the likely change being the amalgamation of Inclusion and School Improvement" (county council)

It is difficult to be sure from the written responses which posts are most vulnerable. If there is an emerging trend, it appears to be towards losing posts that focus on partnership working, inclusion, early intervention and prevention and to distribute their responsibilities to the assistant directors or service directors with responsibility for the core services such as education or social care.

The implications of these trends are significant. Two things in particular stand out. Although a lot of authorities are intending to rely much more heavily on commissioning for the delivery of services, one of the roles that appears to be most vulnerable is that of the assistant director with specific responsibility for commissioning. It seems likely that with the expectation that all senior post holders will be much more actively commissioning services, there is no longer any need for a specialist role in this area. This interpretation is borne out by the comment of one county council that "at present we have a team of 7 but the new structure will be entirely different with 2 commissioners and an arms length organisation for delivering. Governance not yet sorted."

The commissioning role

"In order to make savings, I have had to remove a senior transformation role as well as an Exec Head post for commissioning" (unitary)

"One Head of Service post will go at 31/3/11 - Head of Youth Services and Commissioning" (unitary)

"We are planning to move to 2 deputy directors, deleting the commissioning and partnerships role and the deputy director school improvement function being delivered through our strategic partnership" (unitary)

The other significant change is that the responsibilities associated with second tier posts are likely to become, at one and the same time, both more extensive, and more specialised. Senior leaders are likely to be taking on a wider range of responsibilities within their area of professional expertise, be that education or social care. Early intervention could become much more difficult to achieve, and preventative services may be amongst those most likely to disappear. This could have the effect of making the step up to the role of DCS even greater than it currently is.

Finally, what should not be lost in this concentration on senior leaders, is that many authorities are also reporting a similar loss of middle leaders in third tier posts.

5. The leadership challenge

There is a strong consensus that the role of the DCS will become even more strategic and corporate than is currently the case, requiring more generic leadership skills and greater flexibility. One of the smaller metropolitan boroughs even envisages that the authority is 'likely to swap around responsibilities in future'.

Whether this is also going to be true for other senior leaders is less certain. On the one hand, there is a widely held view that the shift towards a more strategic role for leaders will trickle down the organisation, with significant consequences for second tier officers. One county council comments that "Senior roles from Group Manager upwards will be more generic and focused more on leadership and less on management / technical competencies than might currently be the case". On the other hand, there is some concern amongst a small number of DCSs *that* "we could be putting leaders back into silos unless we are very careful" (county council) with the consequence that there will be a "less holistic focus on the needs of children"(unitary).

It may be that these two views are less at odds with each other than might at first appear. One of the new unitaries, for example, takes the view that "Assistant Directors will (become) Heads of Service for strategy and operations", the implication being that although they might have a more specialist brief, they will also be more directly accountable and be taking on a more challenging leadership role. A smaller, more strategic senior leadership team might also mean that, as another authority put it, there will be "more work (both quality and quantity) for those left, but in some ways service integration is made easier" (metropolitan borough).

Whatever happens, the quality of leadership provided by the DCS will be crucial. If there is a single message from the various responses to this question it is that directors are going to have to be hugely skilled in leading change. One unitary comments that "Leadership has to prioritise the delivery of change programme and operational responsibilities".

Leading change

"This will present a challenge to the capacity of the leadership team to lead the organisation through the huge change programme that is ahead. At a time when leaders need to be negotiating and influencing across the city to sustain and develop partnerships with schools and other agencies including the voluntary and business sectors... time will be taken up steering through the implications of budget reductions - developing and refining budget proposals; managing consultations and HR processes." (unitary)

A second theme running through the comments is that of managing risk. There is widespread concern about increasing workload at all levels, particularly if expectations about performance remain at their current level ("With very much fewer resources we will need more realism about what priorities and targets can be delivered" – unitary). Whilst a number of responses make reference to enhanced stress levels, the main concern is about the impact on service delivery. There will be a 'loss of highly experienced senior leaders' (unitary) and as the span of responsibility increases for those that remain, many will find themselves operating much more frequently 'outside their comfort zone' (unitary) with the consequence that there will be less of a 'focus on children's needs and less capacity in areas of high risk such as child protection" (county council).

Whilst DCSs are very sensitive towards the risks presented by the circumstances in which they find themselves, many are also positive, some even seeing an opportunity to make changes that might, in the long run, prove beneficial – “could be really positive as lack of operational responsibility would give more capacity for new model development and clearer focus on commissioning outcomes” (London borough).

Perhaps the most eloquent contributions are from those DCSs who choose to comment on the personal qualities that are going to be demanded of them as they tackle the challenge of change on a scale that is quite unprecedented:

- “We will need wisdom, skills and foresight in changing shape radically, sustainably and safely” (unitary)
- “We are attempting not to panic and to make our savings in a rational and principled way while keeping the door open to new ideas” (county council)
- “The key requirements for leaders at this time is resilience and optimism - an ability to get people to think about what they can do with the resources we have at our disposal - rather than mourning the loss of the resources that have now gone” (county council)
- “This is a time when we need 'buckets of resilience'. Big learning curve... Life is messy and we are certainly faced with a range of wicked issues - time for some very difficult courageous conversations. For our staff, our behaviour, approach and attitude is hugely important and people who are leaving the organisation need to feel that their contribution has been valued even though essentially we are all at risk of redundancy” (county council).

6. Succession planning

The survey asked DCSs to provide a range of demographic information, to help explore issues of succession planning. Sixty-four [95 per cent] respondents provided additional demographic information.

6.1 Length of service

There was considerable variation in the length of time respondents had been in post as DCSs. Almost one half of DCSs had been in their current post for fewer than two years, with more than one quarter having served less than one year. In contrast, one quarter are highly experienced, having been in their current post for more than five years. The mean average length of service in post was 3.2 years.

6.2 Age

The mean average age for DCS respondents was 53.1 years, with the median slightly higher at 53.75 years. Twenty-five per cent of DCS respondents were aged 50 or under, with more than half aged under 55. Only six per cent were aged 60 or over.

Figure 3 compares the age profile of DCSs who responded to this survey with those who participated in a comparable survey undertaken in early 2009 (McKinsey 2009). Both surveys achieved a response rate of more than 40 per cent and are therefore based on a significant proportion of the total population. Figure 2 suggests that DCSs may be increasingly likely to be under 45, although some care needs to be taken when interpreting this data given the relatively small numbers involved.

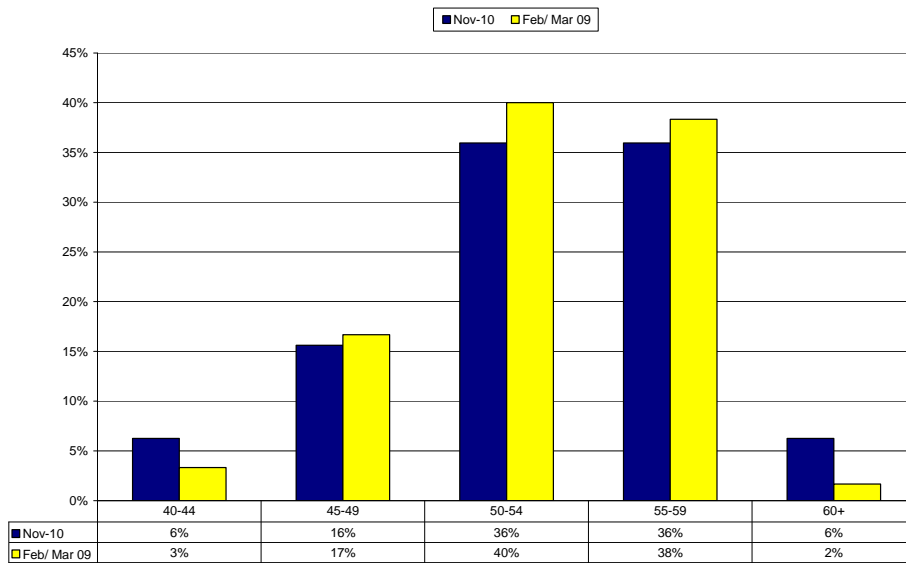


Figure 2: Banded age profile of DCS respondents, 2009–2010

In terms of ethnicity, there is little if any significant change from the previous DCS survey (McKinsey 2009) with the overwhelming majority of DCSs describing themselves as “white British” (88 per cent). Two-thirds of respondents were female and one-third male.

References

DCSF (2005). Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services and Lead Member for Children’s Services. DCSF. London.

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