

# Governance Toolkit

## CHILDREN'S CENTRES & EXTENDED SCHOOLS

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## Background

There is a need to set up governance arrangements for both children's centres and extended schools in order to ensure public accountability. The independent commission report, "The Good Governance Standard for Public Services" 2004 sets out six criteria for assessing governance. These cover the following:

- Purpose and outcomes for users
- Defined functions and roles
- Promoting and demonstrating the values of the organisation
- Taking transparent decisions and managing risk
- Developing capability and capacity
- Engaging stakeholders and making accountability real

Guidance from the DfES and the Audit commission sets out the need for effective governance. This will ensure the needs of the community are met taking account of equal opportunities for all groups, with no one agenda dominating. Without such a group the providers of services could be exposed to risk and without the security of support in any difficult situation. If such a serious situation arose then the issue of liability and accountability would not be clear.

The Audit Commission defines corporate governance in the public sector as:

"The framework of accountability to users, stakeholders and the wider community, within which organisations take decisions, and lead and control their functions, to achieve their objectives".

Good corporate governance combines 'hard' factors, such as robust systems and processes, with 'softer' characteristics such as effective leadership and high standards of behaviour, in particular:

- Leadership that establishes a vision, generates clarity and fosters professional relationships
- An open and honest culture in which decisions and behaviours can be challenged and accountability is clear
- Supporting accountability through systems and processes, such as financial management, performance management and internal controls
- An external focus on the needs of service users and the public



## What governance means for integrated services

Where services are working together in new ways, with new planning considerations and a new environment in which performance is to be measured, it can be helpful to take an equally collaborative approach to governance arrangements.

Experience from existing services suggests that one effective way is to use a steering group of strategic stakeholders who take shared ownership for the service. This may be an existing partnership or it may be a new forum bringing together pre-existing structures.

The type of people it can be helpful to involve in a steering group include:

- Headteacher/nursery school head
- Staff from the school or nursery
- Managers from health, social care, adult and community learning and Jobcentre Plus
- Parent/user representatives
- Local authority representatives such as a member of the Community Team
- Representatives from local private, voluntary and independent providers of childcare/services for young children.



## Models of governance

Governance arrangements for children's centres and extended schools will vary. It will depend largely on the way that services are being integrated:

For new services, this is likely to emerge from a steering group and may be based on the governance arrangements that underpin the lead organisation.

Centres developed around schools have tended to extend the remit and membership of their governing bodies to reflect parental, community and multi-agency participation.

Whichever form of governance is chosen, key elements of its success include:

- A unified structure which works for the centre and the whole range of services to be delivered
- Representation by all stakeholders on a decision-making group
- Support and training for decision-makers
- Unified policies agreed and applied to the whole centre
- Shared organisational development, planning and evaluation

A successful partnership is one that has a clear focus, where partners – particularly senior managers from the major service delivering organisations – are committed to working together with a common purpose towards a common aim. To do this a partnership needs to develop a shared vision of what must be achieved, how this will be done and then to work towards that common goal. In children's centres this vision will be around planning and delivering a programme of services that addresses the national aims and targets and meets the needs of children under four and their families who live within the children's centre community. This vision should be re-articulated as the centre develops to make sure it is still relevant and that all partners continue to be behind it. One way is to review it annually.

In addition, the most effective partnerships tend to display the following characteristics in the way they work:

- **Co-operation** – all partners are prepared to use their knowledge and expertise to work constructively to make the partnership work rather than put up barriers; they are clear about what is and what is not negotiable and agree on the process for resolving disputes.
- **Listening to others** – partners respect the different experiences and perspectives of others and are prepared to change their own views and those of their organisations.



- **Inclusiveness** – no one partner dominates the membership or proceedings; there is a wide level of involvement and all, especially parents, are able to make their voices heard.
- **Accessibility** – the language used is appropriate (it's not overly formal, has no jargon and takes account of English as a second language); meeting venues and times are arranged so that everyone who wants to is able to participate.
- **Open communication** – information is widely circulated to all partners and their views are actively sought; partners make sure they share information with others on the partnership.
- **Transparent processes** – everyone is clear about who makes decisions and on what basis these are made.

These basic principles tend to facilitate the understanding and trust between partners that are necessary ingredients for good partnership working.



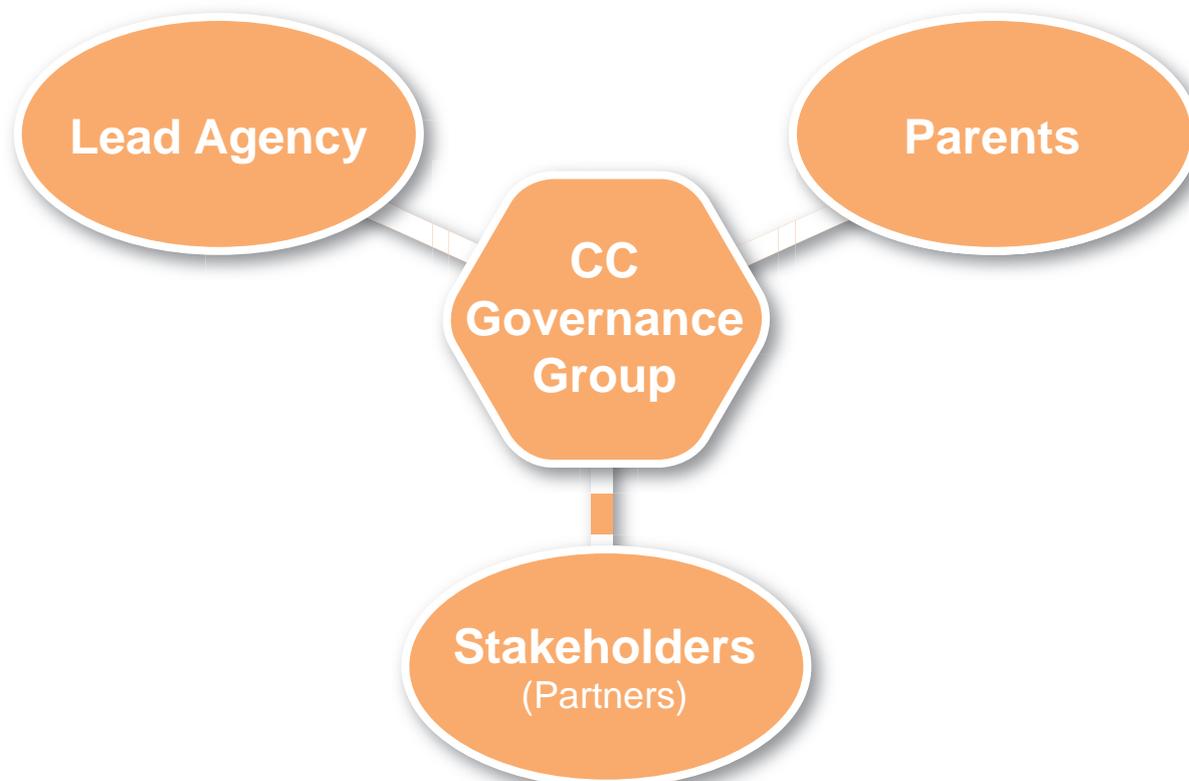
## Proposed model of governance for children's centres

This is based on a stakeholder model, similar to that of a school governing body. The stakeholder model should ensure that stakeholders are engaged and that accountability is real and transparent. This model is recognised as good practice in all public service areas.

### Governance group of nine representatives

- 3 Lead agency
- 1 User representative
- 5 Partner organisations – e.g. Health, district council, voluntary groups, and schools (if the lead agency is not the school)

This group should draw up terms of reference that determine delegated powers, voting rights, election of chairman, numbers of meetings and most importantly reporting systems back to the partner organisations. The group would be a corporate entity with all members being required to take decisions according to the values and act in the best interests of the centre. Each member would take the responsibility to report back to their organisation and feed back their organisations views to the governance group.



## Useful references

### The Good Governance Standard for Public Services

The Independent Commission for Good governance in Public Services 2004

### A Guide to the Law for School Governors – Appendix 1

DfES 2006

### Research to inform the governance and management of Children's Centres

DfES 2006 Ref SSU/2006/FR/019

### Extended Schools a guide for governors 1

NRT March 2006 Ref NRT/0103/2006

Governance and management of extended schools documents can also be found on the Sure Start website:

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/events/newsevents/whatsnew/index.cfm?news=219>

