

Management, Leadership and Governance for Extended Schools and Children's Centres: Pre-school Learning Alliance Response

The Pre-school Learning Alliance welcomes the new guidance *Management, Leadership and Governance for Extended Schools and Children's Centres*. This is a comprehensive document which covers a wide range of guidance relating to a variety of issues around management and leadership which interested parties may potentially face when establishing Extended Schools or Children's Centres in line with current government expectations.

The document does not provide practical tools for implementation, such as model agreements for partnership working between provider and host agencies, for example, which we know from our experience in talking with local authorities and schools would be helpful in some circumstances. However, we recognise that such prescriptive measures may be seen as limiting the options available to schools and children's centres who wish to find their own solutions to management issues that may better reflect local diversity and circumstances. We also welcome the useful case study examples which undoubtedly help to show how schools and children's centres elsewhere have already overcome similar issues in developing working models for governance.

The Alliance does, however, have some feedback on the guidance highlighting a small number of points that it feels have been missed and some areas which it feels may warrant further consideration by the DfES before publication -

- **Charitable law regarding pre-schools:** The Alliance has noted that the document is missing important information relating to the integration of charitable pre-schools / childcare providers into wider school management. Earlier this year the Charity Commission issued guidance in order to clarify the circumstances in which those responsible for a school can provide pre-school facilities and what happens when an existing charitable pre-school association already operates at the school. This guidance can be obtained at – <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/supportingcharities/esi.asp>
It is the Alliance's experience that schools and local authorities are often unaware of the implications of charitable law when planning to transfer the management and / or assets of a registered charity pre-school with a parent-run committee, for example, to a school governing body. All those concerned should ensure that they are not acting outside the law. The Alliance would urge that this information should be included in the final draft of the document.
- **Definition of 'childcare':** The Alliance has noted that there is a continual source of confusion for schools, local authorities and our members around the extended schools initiative is in the definition of the word 'childcare' (in this instance with particular reference to Para 63-70). In this document, as in previous guidance such as *Childcare in Extended Schools* (DfES 2002) and others, no distinction is made between out of school 'childcare' for existing school pupils and 'childcare' for pre-school age children which, in most instances, incorporates early education services. Whilst there are overlapping elements to both types of childcare – indeed some providers will actually be offering both types of care –

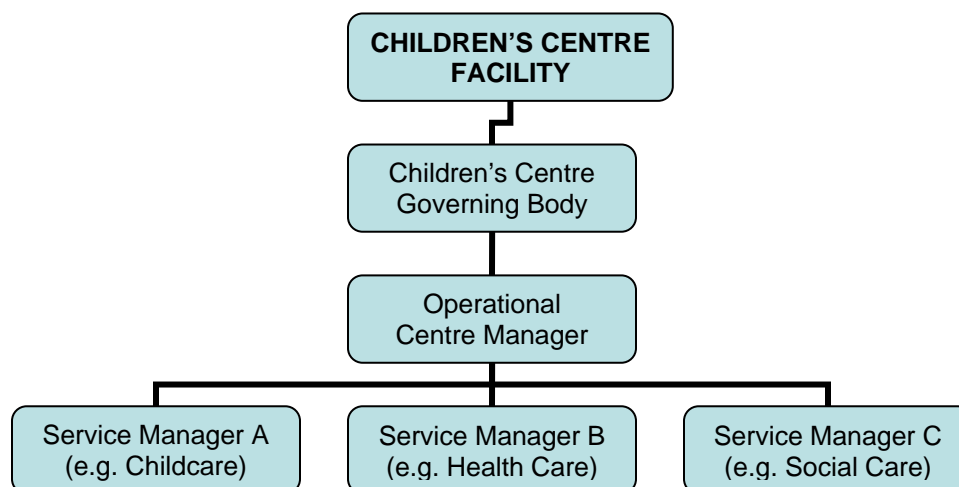
the provision of pre-school childcare by a school is often likely to present significantly different challenges for school management due to the importance of integrating an early education element with the education already provided by a school. The Alliance perceives that the 'childcare' section in para 63-70 is relevant primarily for out of school childcare for school age children, and would therefore recommend that the document includes a separate section focusing on the specifics of schools providing pre-school childcare and early education. The Alliance would be happy to assist in outlining some of the relevant issues for a draft of any such section.

- **Partnership Working:** The Alliance applauds the emphasis that the government continues to place on the importance of local authorities and schools working in partnership with the PVI sector to provide services. However it also fears that without sufficient scrutiny some local authorities and schools will continue to show a disregard for partnership working and elect to provide services themselves, either without consultation or, at worst, directly in competition with existing PVI providers. In contradiction to the assertion around how extended schools should provide childcare - "the most common model is one of hosting the service" (para 64) - the Alliance's experience in many areas is that our member pre-schools have experienced considerable pressure to be 'taken over' and managed directly by schools.

There are also some specific points in the guidance related to partnership working which the Alliance would wish to highlight:

- **Conflict of Interest:** The Alliance is concerned that there may be a conflict of interest where the local authority is commissioning and regulating services from the PVI sector, yet operating its own competitive services nearby, or within the local 'cluster'.
- **Profit Sharing:** Annexe 5 suggests that local authorities may stipulate conditions that they are able to elicit a profit-share of money that is made from contracted services, and indicates such services might include childcare. Whilst this might certainly be appropriate in a small number of high-yield settings, the Alliance would advise that the true picture is that the vast majority of childcare services operate on very slim margins, if there are margins to be made at all. In most circumstances such a stipulation might prove to be a significant barrier to partnership, rendering interest in a tender negligible and wasting time, money and effort in the process. The Alliance also feels that where such a stipulation is included in a contract, local authorities might reasonably be expected to also share the burden of any loss that a service may make.
- **The Role of Head teachers:** The Alliance feels further consideration might be given to the management structure where services, including children's centres, are situated on school sites. The Alliance has understood that the accepted model for the management of services on a children's centre providing, say, three services to be loosely based on the structure in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1 – Standard Children’s Centre Management Structure

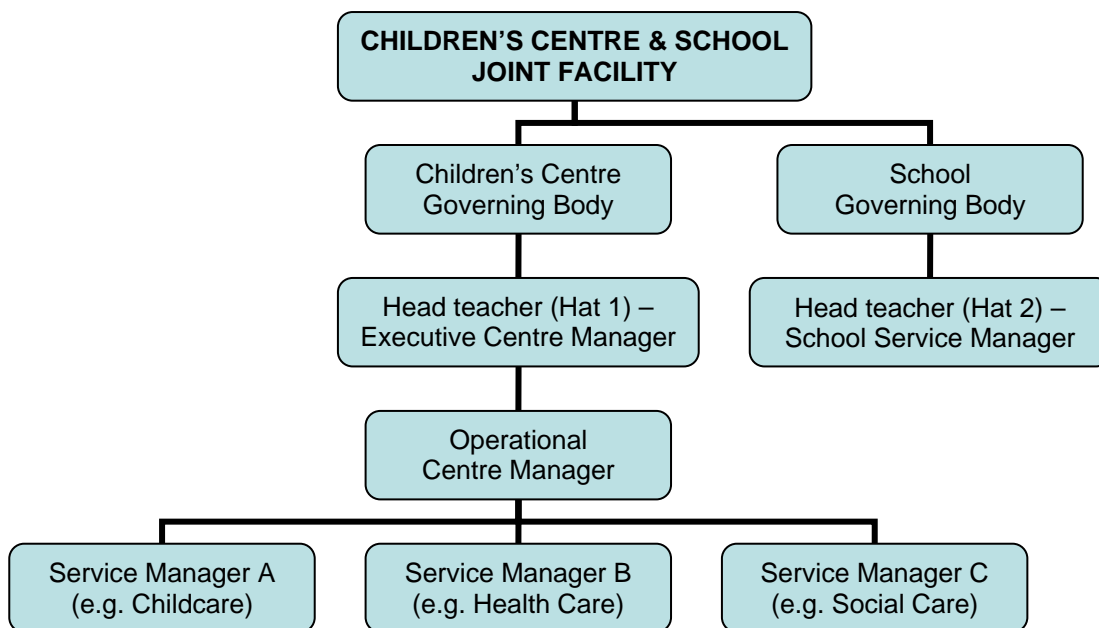


In this model the Children’s Centre Governing Body takes ultimate responsibility for the strategic management of the centre. The Operational Centre Manager then takes responsibility for operational issues on a day-to-day basis and maintains the facilities, whilst also ensuring that services A-C integrate to provide a holistic, joined-up approach to working across the whole centre. Each Service Manager is then responsible for their own service, and in the case of contracted or externally managed services reports to their own governing body or employer for line management.

However, in paragraph 56 the guidance suggests that within a school environment (particularly in extended schools) the Head teacher could be undertaking both the role of a Service Manager *and* an Executive Centre Manager which in practice would look very different – as outlined in Diagram 2 (overleaf). In this model it is worth noting that the education service provided by the school would be on a significantly higher footing within the management structure compared to other services. The Alliance accepts it may well be appropriate within a school environment to organise services this way, but would caution that where services are on an unequal footing this is likely to present significant challenges to services working in equal partnership. Furthermore whilst it may be possible for such a structure to deliver an effective service – such as in case study of Newdale Primary School on page 14 - the Alliance would be concerned that such a system may be confusing, and result in unclear reporting lines. This may be particularly acute where the Head teacher would be reporting to a school governing body on issues relating to the school's services, and a local authority-appointed governing body on issues relating to the children’s centre – how will the two governing bodies interact with each other? For such a structure to work effectively there would need to be sufficient clarity that the Head teacher’s responsibility as Centre Manager was only as a facilitator

- ensuring that the centre itself was operating smoothly - and that the role does not involve the prerogative to interfere with the management of the actual provision of independently managed services provided within the centre. The Alliance's experience is that this is sometimes not the case, particularly where independently managed early education and childcare services are operating on school sites.

Diagram 2 – Children's Centre and School Joint Management Structure



- **Governing Body Membership:** Paragraph 23 of the new guidance states that in extended schools it is “more appropriate” for providers of commissioned services to attend governors meetings from time to time rather than to be offered full membership of the governing body. This is contradictory to guidance issued in paragraph 24 of *Governing The School Of The Future* (DfES 2004) which states “we encourage extended schools to draw governors from the various agencies of the services that they provide...” which allows for a more inclusive model of partnership working. The Alliance recognises that in many cases full governing body membership may be inappropriate or unnecessary for marginal services. However, it is nevertheless concerned that where a governing body may be making key decisions affecting the future of an integral service (such as independent early years provision), the service in question is not unduly excluded from participating in the discussions and decision-making process.

It is also important that parent representation on governing bodies is wider than just those of pupils of the school. It should include the users of other services offered at the children's centre or extended school site so that decisions about the centre / school are made following input from representatives of the full range of stakeholders

- **Participation:** The Alliance welcomes the emphasis that section 4 places on engaging whole communities in the development of children's centres and extended schools. In particular we support paragraph 92 which strongly states how important it is that parents are involved in the development and management of services. The Pre-school movement is borne out of, and fundamentally based on, exactly such principles and we hope that it will be able to play a full role in partnership with schools in engaging parents, particularly in hard to reach families.

We operate 29 nurseries within children's centres and act as lead agency in a number of children's centres. We have a pilot programme running currently to introduce a 'parent forum' into each of these. Our early experience is allowing us to determine a number of models for consideration for 'roll-out' in the forthcoming months. We would be pleased to share our experiences and work with the department on matters relating to parental involvement.

We might also suggest that the government considers establishing a national monitoring and advisory body to evaluate and encourage best practice in this area, and to ensure that all local authorities and schools place this ideal at the heart of their services.

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