

## Understanding Local Government

### Why do Health Visitors need to know this and who are the key influencers of the shape of Children's Services?

Funding for 0-5 years services transfers from the NHS to Local Government in October 2015 and, with it, the responsibility for commissioning health visiting. Managers and leaders within the service need to understand the structures and functions of local government, and who makes the decisions.

This briefing builds on the presentation; "Top to Toe of Local Government" given at the Fellows Leadership Development Programme. This can be accessed here: [bit.ly/1zWafWz](http://bit.ly/1zWafWz)



### Local Government consists of a number of tiers:

Top tier authorities have responsibility for education, adult and children's social care and for public health. These are the councils that become responsible for commissioning health visiting services in October 2015.

#### Top tier authorities are:

- County Councils [bit.ly/1AOqFQs](http://bit.ly/1AOqFQs)
- Unitary Councils [bit.ly/1Kx0Qtu](http://bit.ly/1Kx0Qtu)
- London Boroughs [bit.ly/1JY7Suk](http://bit.ly/1JY7Suk)
- Metropolitan Boroughs [bit.ly/1EZ2Byp](http://bit.ly/1EZ2Byp)

#### What sort of top tier council do you have in your area?

In County areas there are also lower tier councils responsible for a limited range of services. These include Borough, District, Town and Parish Councils.

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For additional fact sheets see [www.ihv.org.uk](http://www.ihv.org.uk)

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### Which council is responsible for which service?

|                        | County | District | Metropolitan Borough | Unitary | London Borough |
|------------------------|--------|----------|----------------------|---------|----------------|
| Waste Disposal         | X      |          | X                    | X       | X              |
| Waste Collection       |        | X        | X                    | X       | X              |
| Education              | X      |          | X                    | X       | X              |
| Libraries              | X      |          | X                    | X       | X              |
| Children's Social Care | X      |          | X                    | X       | X              |
| Adult Social Care      | X      |          | X                    | X       | X              |
| Public Health          | X      |          | X                    | X       | X              |
| Strategic Planning     | X      |          | X                    | X       | X              |
| Local Planning         |        | X        | X                    | X       | X              |
| Housing                |        | X        | X                    | X       | X              |

### Who makes up the Council?

Councils are divided into electoral areas (known as divisions or wards). These are represented by Councillors, elected every four years by local residents.

#### Elected Councillors:

- Most councillors are unpaid, receiving modest allowances to compensate them for their time. Some senior councillors - Leaders and Cabinet members may receive salaries, but these are relatively small and few are full-time.
- The political party or group with the largest number of councillors forms the administration and will put forward their nomination for Leader of the Council. This has to be agreed by the full council.

### Councils can either operate a “Leader and Cabinet” or a “Committee” system.

**Leader & Cabinet:** The Leader appoints a number of senior, experienced councillors from their own party as Cabinet members. Cabinet members are responsible for large areas of policy and services. e.g. The Cabinet member for Children's Services.

**Committee System:** The Council elects Chairs of committees responsible for areas of policy and services. E.g. Chair of Children's Services. These are also senior and experienced councillors usually from the majority political party.

**Each council will have a Cabinet member or a committee chair who is responsible for:**

- Children's services.
- Adult Social Care.
- Finance and Resources.

Other cabinet members/committee chairs vary by council but might include, planning, housing, environment and leisure, libraries and culture.

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### Why are they important to the health visiting Service?

Decisions on the design of local services, the allocation of budgets, and the commissioning of services within their area of responsibility are usually delegated to the Cabinet member or to the Chair and their committee.

### Who are the most influential councillors for health visiting services?

- The Cabinet member for Children's Services (or Chair of Children's Services Committee)
- The Cabinet member or committee chair responsible for Public Health
- The Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Board  
Health & Wellbeing Boards bring together Council and local NHS partners [bit.ly/1dVBcVh](http://bit.ly/1dVBcVh). Usually chaired by the Council Leader or Cabinet member responsible for Public Health, it will be influential in determining the overall approach to health and care services, including any changes in approach to 0-5 years services.
- The Chair of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.  
Councils have scrutiny committees made up of councillors from all political groups. These hold Cabinet members to account, can ask questions or raise concerns, for example on behalf of residents, about changes in services that are proposed.

#### Senior Council Officers:

Councillors rely on the professional advice and support of

officers in exercising their roles. Each Council has a Chief Executive or Managing Director who works closely with the Leader of the Council and has overall responsibility for management and effectiveness of the Council.

Councils must also have a number of "Statutory Directors" – defined in Acts of Parliament. These are Directors of Children's Services, Adult Social Services and Public Health. The following posts are the most significant in relation to the planning, commissioning and delivery of children's services and of public health:

#### Director of Children's Services

In many councils this may be combined with the Director of Adult Social Services and called "Director of People", or "Director of Communities". This person:

- Carries professional and statutory responsibility for services, working closely with the Cabinet member or Committee chair advising them on policy, service design and decisions.

In large councils Directors of People may be called "Executive Director" and be supported by a number of Service Directors covering parts of the service. In smaller councils, similar posts may be called Assistant Director; e.g.

- Service Director/Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Prevention, Children's Social Care, or Early Help.

#### Director of Public Health

Directors of Public Health have overall responsibility for the long - term health and welfare of the population and work closely with Directors of Children's Services or People, and with Health and Wellbeing Boards.

**Getting to know both the political and the professional leaders within your local council is a good investment in ensuring that you can influence their thinking in relation to the future shape of your service.**

#### Reference

A quick guide to Local Government – Local Government Association  
[bit.ly/1HHp1WV](http://bit.ly/1HHp1WV)

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**For additional fact sheets see [www.ihv.org.uk](http://www.ihv.org.uk)**