

What does 'well-led' mean for councils of governors?

NHS Improvement and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) recently have published a revised version of the well led framework. The new framework will be used:

- by the CQC to carry out a well-led inspection of each trust each year as part of its inspection regime;
- by boards to help them review their own effectiveness;
- by boards to help them commission independent development reviews of their leadership and governance; once every three years for most boards.

What is the well-led framework?

The framework is based on 8 key lines of enquiry (KLOE) which are supplemented by descriptions of the characteristics of well led organisations and descriptions of what good looks like. These KLOEs and the supplementary characteristics provide a structure against which the leadership of boards can be assessed.

1 Is there the leadership capacity and capability to deliver high quality, sustainable care?	2 Is there a clear vision and credible strategy to deliver high quality, sustainable care to people, and robust plans to deliver?	3 Is there a culture of high quality, sustainable care?
4 Are there clear responsibilities, roles and systems of accountability to support good governance and management?	Are services well led?	5 Are there clear and effective processes for managing risks , issues and performance ?
6 Is appropriate and accurate information being effectively processed, challenged and acted on?	7 Are the people who use services, the public, staff and external partners engaged and involved to support high quality sustainable services?	8 Are there robust systems and processes for learning , continuous improvement and innovation ?

More information on the well-led framework can be found at: <https://improvement.nhs.uk/resources/well-led-framework/>.

The purpose of the framework is to assess whether boards are able to marshal the necessary information and intelligence to enable them to understand and be assured in regard to current performance, to plan at strategic and operational levels to improve services and to manage effectively the risks to delivery.

It assesses whether the actions taken by boards lead to change within the organisation and that the board is aware of the impact of its own actions. It also assesses whether the board sets and promotes a positive culture in the organisation, so that ways of working and behaviours that are socialised within the organisation are those that the board wishes to promote and have a positive impact on the experience of patients and service users. Finally, it to assesses how well the board exercises its accountability to those who deliver and use its services.

The council of governor's role

Carrying out a full review under the well-led framework is a complex and time consuming exercise and it is not part of the governor role to carry out such reviews. However, councils of governors have several key roles in helping the board to ensure that the organisation is well-led. Councils of governors are key partners who will be involved under characteristic seven in the diagram above in supporting the board in delivering high quality services. The vast majority of the day-to-day activities which governors engage in will contribute to this aspect of helping the board to understand how well it leads.

However, there are also roles for councils of governors when formal reviews are taking place. When the CQC is carrying out inspections they are likely to wish to seek the views of governors on many of the KLOEs. When the board has commissioned a full governance review the effectiveness of the council of governors in carrying out its role is likely to be part of the review. In addition, the views of governors will be most likely be sought on many aspects of the boards work, but just as importantly on how the actions of the board impact on the delivery of services.

Governors will also wish to contribute to periodic reviews on their effectiveness carried out by boards themselves and councils should engage with their boards to discuss how they can best contribute.

Making an effective contribution

In common with many other aspects of governance there is no blueprint for the right approach. However, good relationships between the board and council are key to ensuring effective co-operation in the review process. This will involve dialogue and debate. For boards it involves recognition of the significant contribution that governors can make to ensuring that the trust is well-led. For governors it involves understanding that they are part and parcel of the governance of the trust, not outsiders looking in, so they have a continuing role to play in ensuring that the trust is well-led, and not a one off role at inspection or review time.