

CONFUSION AND CHAOS AT THE TOP: THE IMPACT OF SHIRLEY PORTER AND THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE POLITICAL AND MANAGERIAL BOUNDARIES WITHIN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF WESTMINSTER

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Abstract

During the 1980s Westminster City Council and its then Leader, Shirley Porter were hailed as being model examples of local government in action. The picture portrayed in this article is one of chaos and confusion within the strategic leadership of the authority as the managerial/political interface was constantly ignored by Porter as she sought to implement her own agenda.



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This paper examines the collapse and failure of managerial leadership within the London Borough of Westminster during the 1980's and early 1990's. The evidence presented was collected from in-depth interviews conducted with all serving chief offices in the borough in mid 1991, along with interviews conducted with two former holders of the chief executive/ managing director position within the authority. The paper illustrates how the collapse of traditional managerial and political boundaries led to the collapse of strategic managerial leadership within the authority, and the assumption by the then Leader of the Council – Shirley Porter – of the role of de facto chief executive.

The incoming Labour administration of Tony Blair took a very keen interest in the activities of local authorities. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions under the leadership of John Prescott published a raft of Green Papers dealing with a range of issues affecting local government. There was considerable concern as to the role of civic leadership and the whole issue of probity within public service. Unsurprisingly therefore, the Green Papers dealt with, amongst other issues, both the internal political leadership roles within local authorities and the question of corporate governance. Both these issues, along with a number of others evolved into the Local Government Act (2000). Whilst a number of local authorities had been criticised for the capability of political leadership and/or the probity with which they had conducted their activities, by far the most spectacular failure had occurred in the London Borough of Westminster during the 1980s under the political leadership of Shirley Porter. Following an overview of the legislative changes contained in the Local Government Act (2000) affecting both the internal management and leadership of local authorities and the level of probity, the paper will examine the collapse of managerial leadership within the London Borough of Westminster.

- Organisational Leadership

For over 100 years English local authorities had operated around a committee system which had delegated powers from the full council. By the late twentieth century such a decision making process was deemed to be both anachronistic and grossly inefficient. It was seen as an inappropriate means to run multi-million pound (and in a few cases multi-billion pound) organisations. The Local Government Act (2000) compelled all local authorities with populations in excess of 85,000 to select one of three prescribed modes of internal organisation. These modes were:

- Leader with a Cabinet
- Directly Elected Mayor with a Cabinet
- Directly Elected Mayor with a Council Manager (Rao, 2003)

Whilst the preferred option of the Prime Minister, spurred on by the local government 'think tank', New Local Government Network, was either of the Mayoral options, some 97% of authorities, including the London Borough of Westminster, opted for the Leader with a Cabinet model as the option of least change. The underpinning rationale behind all three options was to provide a much more publicly acceptable and accessible face for decision making within local government. Further, the changes were driven by a desire to move away from a plethora of internal decision making bodies within a local authority behind which decisions could often be hidden. It was argued that by

adopting more open, transparent decision making processes which were seen by the populace to offer increased accountability, then interest and levels of participation in local democracy would increase.

An added factor to the post 2000 reforms was the clear delineation of councillors between those serving in executive positions and those deemed to be fulfilling monitoring or scrutiny roles – keeping the executive in check along the UK parliamentary model. Such a model, it was argued would prevent the excesses witnessed in some local authorities – the London Borough of Westminster included - from happening again. It is interesting to note that the chief executive of one local authority which had adopted the Mayor with a Cabinet model suggested that the Leader with a Cabinet model offered a renegade local authority the opportunity to recreate the chaos evidenced in the London Borough of Westminster chronicled below. His rationale for such a statement was that if Cabinet portfolios were created in such a way as to mirror internal departments, then such an arrangement provided the opportunity for strong Cabinet portfolio/departmental director alliances to develop akin to those which existed in the London Borough of Westminster. Indeed, the writer is aware of one major English city with a similar history of strong Committee Chair/departmental director relationships where an incoming chief executive has purposefully sought to ensure that a Cabinet portfolios and director positions do not match one another.

- Probity in public service.

During the mid 1990s increasing concern was expressed in the UK about the ethics and motivations of a small number of actors in public life. This concern led to the creation in 1994 by the then Prime Minister, John Major of the Committee on Standards in Public Life chaired by Lord Nolan and popularly known as the Nolan Committee (Lawton, 1998). Whilst public's attention was primarily focussed on the actions of those involved in national public life, Nolan's remit was much broader, extending across the public sector. This is indicated by the Nolan Committee's Third Report 'Standards of Conduct in Local Government in England, Scotland and Wales' (1997).

Given the very geographically specific, localised nature of local government, examples of questionable ethical managerial and political decisions rarely received the attention which the actions of national public service actors received. Perhaps the notable exemption here would be the actions of the Militant led Liverpool City Council in the 1980s which received much national attention (Parkinson, 1985), and somewhat later, Westminster City Council.

However, away from Liverpool, in a number of local authorities the actions of both politicians and managers were questioned on grounds of probity and governance. It is however the view of the writer that during the period 1979-1997 these examples were largely tolerated because of the preponderance of Labour led local administrations. Hence, in the case of Liverpool, repeated threats by the Secretary of State for the Environment to intervene in the running of Liverpool City Council in the mid-1980s came to nothing because it was politically expedient to allow a notionally Labour led council, albeit one dominated by the Militant Tendency to remain in power. To allow the status quo to exist in Liverpool provided 'ammunition' for the then

Conservative Governments claim that local authorities, especially those which were Labour controlled, were both grossly inefficient and irresponsible.

The election of in 1997 of the first Blair Administration brought in a new broom vis a vis the actions of those in public life. Given the way in which whilst in Opposition Blair et al had vigorously pursued the Major Government about the questionable ethics of some of its supporters and actions, Blair sought to ensure the same charges could not be levelled against his Administration. In particular, the importance of local authorities in implementing the Blairite reform public service agenda was signified by the Governments swiftly introduced a raft of Green Papers dealing with a range of local government issues which can be loosely grouped around management; performance and governance (Hartley et al, 2002; Newman et al, 2001, Painter et al 2003; Wilson, 2005; Wilson and Doig, 2000). These Green Papers ultimately evolved into the Local Government Act (2000).

On the question of governance and ethics, the Local Government Act (2000) proposed the creation of a Standards Committee within each local authority. However, ultimate responsibility was to lie with the newly established Standards Board which would be a national agency dealing with the policing of ethics and standards within local authorities. Interesting, the Third Report of the Nolan Committee (1997) had argued that this policing role should lie with individual local authorities adopting a national monitoring model developed by the Local Government Association and endorsed by Parliament (Stewart, 2003).

The context

Given the administrative and legal framework created by the Local Government Act (2000) to monitor and police the actions of those involved in local government, the article examines the four key factors which together resulted in the collapse of corporate systems and strategic governance in an English local authority in the 1980s. The factors were: managerial leadership; departmental directors; organisational culture and political leadership.

During the 1980s the London Borough of Westminster was widely lauded as a model of managerial efficiency. The Leader of the authority, Shirley Porter was often compared to Margaret Thatcher – both enjoyed images which portrayed them as people with a mission to shake up and reform what they believed were traditional bureaucracies. In Thatcher's case the target was the public sector as a whole, whereas with Porter, the mission was focussed on transforming, as she saw it, a bureaucratic local authority, in the shape of Westminster City Council. Porter was determined to make more efficient and business like – akin to the Tesco supermarket chain which had been created by her father.

The evidence here is the result of extensive interviews with key managerial actors involved in the strategic governance of the London Borough of Westminster in 1991. All three holders of the office of chief executive/managing director during the period 1989-1991, and all departmental directors in post in 1991 were interviewed. It is perhaps telling that whilst access was sought to all the leaders of the political groupings on the council, the only one to acknowledge such a request, was the

then Conservative Leader, David Weeks, the immediate successor to Shirley Porter. Given the then acrimonious atmosphere which existed between both the officers and opposition parties, it is quite possible that although a request for access went to the then managing directors office, it was never passed on to the opposition councillors concerned (Hosken, 2006; Private Information).

Whilst it is not the intention here to examine in detail the end results of the collapse in corporate governance in Westminster, it is nevertheless useful to briefly examine the three major decisions which were central to the collapse:

- The sale of three municipal cemeteries for £0.05 each and their subsequent repurchase by Westminster
- Gerrymandering through 'Homes for votes' involving the illegal, selective sale of council homes to prospective Conservative voters
- The housing of homeless families in two asbestos riddled tower blocks which had been declared unfit for human habitation.

Cumulatively the three incidents were all deemed to have been illegal after an exhaustive legal process which only concluded in 2004 and were estimated to have cost the citizens who pay council tax in Westminster £48.7m. Of this sum, Porter was adjudged to be personally liable for £12.3m. A detailed account of this is provided by Hosken (2006).

The organisation

Westminster is a central London borough with a population of 170,000. The authority at the time of the fieldwork (during the electoral year 1991/92) consisted of sixty elected members, the majority of whom were Conservative. The council employed around 10,000 staff, organised into seven departments, each represented on the chief officer board. This was led not by a chief executive, but by the managing director. The head of the paid service was given this title to implicitly reflect the 'business-like' approach Porter, the leader of Westminster wished to have at the core of its operations.

During the 1980s the borough had gained a reputation for being very much at the cutting edge of the local government change process, often cited by central government as an example of an 'excellent' or 'model' local authority. Certainly the authority projected an image of dynamism, seeing itself very much as a 'trail blazer' in terms of the way it chose to fulfil its statutory responsibilities (Keenan, 1993). It saw itself not merely as a proactive organisation, but as one which set the change agenda for central government on local reform. Innovation and the desire to challenge the established thinking were central to the philosophy of the former political leader, in charge of the authority throughout the 1980s. A major example of this, frequently cited, was the development and adoption of competitive tendering several years before central government legislated to introduce it.

Throughout this period Westminster therefore had been led by a very charismatic, visible political leader, who was considered to have been instrumental in causing a managerial leadership crisis within the authority. The stability in political leadership was not therefore matched by stability in the officer core. During the period 1989-91,

three individuals had held the post of head of the paid service, the year 1991 finally coinciding with the election of a new leader of the council. This, it was hoped, would provide the officer side of the management/political interface with some much needed stability.

Managerial leadership

The head of the paid service appointed in 1991 was a local government lawyer by training. He had spent the majority of his career as a local government manager in New Zealand, holding posts equivalent to chief executive in two local authorities. During this period he had also spent some time at Harvard University obtaining an MBA degree. This experience had more than anything shaped his managerial style, and transformed him (he believed) from a being a lawyer, or even manager, into a genuine strategic leader. The way in which his colleagues referred to his Harvard education might suggest otherwise.

As observed above, the title of chief executive has been discarded in Westminster in favour of the more business and managerially-oriented title of managing director. This approach was seen to be very much in tune with the model advocated by the Audit Commission (1989). Generally accepted by the controlling Conservative administration, this approach was nonetheless specifically associated with the former leader, who had stepped down in 1991, immediately prior to the interviews being conducted.

Those interviewed in Westminster conceded that the former leader had played a substantial part in the rapid turnover at the chief executive/managing director level since 1989. The leader had played a key role in both the authority's operational and strategic management functions, undermining the previous two heads of paid service. The chief executive who departed in 1989 was 'eased' out of office by the appointment of the first managing director, drafted in by the then leader ostensibly in an assistant chief executive capacity, but with a title which implied an alternative power source. Certainly chief officer interviewees were of the opinion that the managing director was the then leader's means of undermining someone who was strong willed and a skilful strategic leader.

After the chief executive's departure, the managing director took over as head of the paid service until his contract expired in 1991, when he in turn was not reappointed. The feeling from the chief officer board therefore was that the strategic leadership role of the chief executive/managing director had been gradually eroded. Lack of continuity at the top of the officer structure could only be detrimental to the provision of managerial leadership and vision. It was also perceived to have had a visible effect on staff morale throughout the organisation, affecting the capacity of the organisation to accommodate the change that the authority was facing. Clearly, some greater stability in the organisation's managerial leadership was required.

The active involvement in operational management of the former leader was particularly unfortunate. This individual's personal style (echoed by the style of the committee chairs) led to a rapid and uncoordinated change agenda as semi-autonomous power baronies pursued potentially contradictory objectives (Asquith,

1997; Alexander, 1982; Headrick, 1962). This uncoordinated approach made it impossible for employees, especially the street-level operatives at the bottom of the pyramid, continually swamped by change, to comprehend it, let alone achieve ownership of the change. The lack of strategic direction or control by senior officers compounded this, having further adverse effect on the commitment felt towards the change process.

This need for organisational strategic leadership of the paid service was one acknowledged by the managing director appointed in 1991. It was the central issue in an agenda designed to sharpen up the authority's strategic direction. The managing director's ability to lead and to provide this clear strategic focus was aided by two other changes in personnel occurring at approximately the same time as his appointment. This included the previously noted change in political leadership, opening a way to a less charismatic and forceful leadership style (see below).

The second key change was the appointment of a new director of finance, who in 1994 was appointed as chief executive following the decision of the incumbent managing director not to seek a renewal of his contract of employment. The director of finance appointed in 1991 was also designated as deputy managing director, in recognition of the power of the director of finance within the organisation generally, but also as an acknowledgement that the change management agenda which the managing director wished to pursue fell very much within the province of this director. In this way the managing director clearly signalled to both the chief officer board, and to the organisation as a whole, that change was being driven by the two most senior officers within the organisation and not exclusively by the managing director.

Central to the implementation of this change management agenda was reform of the authority's strategic centre. The size of the central organisational bureaucracy restricted the managing director's ability to effectively orientate the organisation to meet the demands placed on it by environmental changes. The managing director inherited a department of some 600 staff from his predecessor, with several functions which were not central to his role within the organisation, including legal services and personnel. This restricted the managing director's ability to fulfil the strategic leadership role, surrounded as he was by operational management functions.

In a note to the chief officer board in June 1991, after five months in post, the managing director analysed the weaknesses in the authority's departmental structure inherited from his predecessor. The authority had no form of strategic planning. Personnel, information technology and finance were not being developed on a uniform cross-authority basis. The approach to these resources was at best piecemeal. The organisation was over-compartmentalised, and the central departments too large to serve their strategic function. Fragmentation resulted in too much bureaucracy, blurred lines of accountability, and led to inconsistencies across the authority. There was a need for all functions within the organisation to be defined as either client or contractor units, to enhance the overall efficiency of the organisation. Also, central to organisational strategy was the necessity to improve staff morale, badly damaged by the persistent tinkering in operational management by leading elected members.

The need to create a lean 'core' to promote the strategic leadership function had, in some respects, been placed on the agenda by the former managing director. Hence the authority auditor's direct reference to the cumbersome size of the managing director's department and the requirement for it to be slimmed down. Such a reform would signal to the organisation that the authority wanted minimal resources tied up in central bureaucracy; resources wherever possible should instead be directed to front-line services. Whilst this philosophy was generally accepted by the chief officer board, a feeling nevertheless existed that a small strategic centre devoid of operational management responsibilities could result in a managing director too far removed from the realities of operational management, surrounded by individuals with inappropriate experience. Service quality might be adversely affected by decisions taken in isolation by the strategic centre. However, the specific nature of the 'tight-loose' principles which were a major component of the managing director's change agenda were designed to overcome this potential weakness.

The existence of a large, cumbersome managing director's department had therefore adversely affected the ability to act strategically. Whilst this had also been hindered because of the role played by the former leader, the lack of clear managerial leadership did not help to ease the situation. The result was a number of often incompatible committee strategies with no central co-ordination. This was one of the significant deficiencies the managing director was now attempting to overcome, by providing the authority with a structured approach.

The position of the managing director in Westminster was clearly in a state of flux. Indeed it was not until the director of finance was appointed to the post of chief executive in 1994 that stability began to return to the organisation, as the authority emerged from a period of unstable strategic managerial leadership, caused by the presence of a strong political leader. The managing director had, in effect, to re-establish this role within the authority. His major tool was to signal a radical review of the organisation, beginning with his own department. This was to reshape the authority, creating a small strategic centre and sending strong messages throughout the organisation regarding the developing culture, the details of which were contained in two reports approved by the policy and resources committee in April and July 1991.

Departmental directors

The lack of previous strategic managerial leadership had allowed the chief officer board at Westminster to fragment. This had been exacerbated by a number of strongly independent committee chairs who, despite the existence of a forceful leader, were allowed to pursue their own particular personal committee agendas. This had led to the creation of several chief officer/committee chair alliances, giving some chief officers a power base in their own right, and undermining the position of the former chief executive and managing director.

To ensure that his own leadership role was not undermined from the very outset, the newly appointed managing director was attempting to unify the management team through team-building exercises. Consolidating his own position with the chief

officer board, it would also serve as a means of introducing an authority-wide strategic planning system, establishing the chief officer equivalent to the 'cabinet' style system which the new leader of the council was intent on establishing on the member side (see below).

During the first managing director's tenure the ability of the chief officer board to function as a team had dramatically declined. As already observed, the dominant position of the then leader of the council undermined the position of the head of the paid service. This was accentuated by the alleged lack of both managerial and leadership ability on the part of this managing director. He failed both to stand up to the leader and establish his own strategic management agenda for the organisation.

This weakness further fuelled the problem of persistent elected member involvement in the authority's operational management. The managing director's failure therefore allowed the fragmentation of the chief officer board along traditional local government departmental lines, as individual chief officers pursued their own piecemeal short-term management agenda, guided by their respective committee chairs, and free from any overall strategic management control.

Central to the creation of an effective strategic team of chief officers was the understanding by the chief officer board that the managing director be recognised as the strategic managerial leader. Such recognition would have a fundamental effect on the distribution of power on the officer side. It meant either the chief officers subscribing to the managing director's change agenda or their leaving the organisation altogether. One chief officer, approaching retirement, chose to leave. What made this particular chief officer unusual was the fact that he had survived what he saw as a number of 'culls' of fellow chief officers by the former Leader. His rationale for his longevity was simply what his department was headquartered some distance from City Hall as was therefore somewhat removed from the incessant tinkering of the former Leader.

The chief officers were therefore entering a period when once again they were able to identify the managing director as their strategic leader. Chief officer board relationships have had to be redrawn to accommodate the new management philosophy that was implied. Central to the aspirations of the managing director was accordingly the establishment of a unified team of chief officers, as opposed to a loose group pursuing diverse, uncoordinated, and ad hoc strategies.

Organisational Culture

Westminster has a public image as a very dynamic, proactive and innovative organisation. However, this reflects the image not so much of the authority itself as that of the former leader who maintained a very high public profile. This image therefore painted a false impression, at variance with the organisational realities.

It was argued that a common culture in an organisation as diverse as a multi-functional local authority is difficult to create, facing as it does the obstacle of departmental sub-cultures. One chief officer likened Westminster to a private holding company which contained many diverse businesses, each with its own independent culture, their only real link with the 'corporate centre' being sound

financial management. Westminster was likened more to 'Hanson plc' than 'Marks and Spencer'. Interestingly, this particular chief officers department was later referred to as 'Fortress Housing' (Private information). Such a fragmented organisational culture was partly blamed on the lack of strategic co-ordination within the organisation.

Despite this, the interviewees argued that within the chief officer board and the controlling group of elected members there was a widely supported set of core beliefs, which served as guiding principles on how the authority should be managed. Central to these is the belief that Westminster's services should be run in an efficient business-like manner, emphasising value for money and high quality service to the customer. Also central to this philosophy was the conviction that where possible the authority should act as an 'enabler' in the narrower sense (Ridley, 1989) rather than a direct provider of services.

Even without continuity of strategic leadership the authority has adopted management principles which are more common-place in the private rather than public sector. More specifically, in accordance with the general policy of 'enabling rather than providing', Westminster embarked on 'contractorisation'. As emphasised above, this entailed the creation of a system of internal contracts for the provision of in-house services, such as support services, turning them into quasi-business units. This places services which were previously protected from the rigours of competition on a more commercial footing. The net effect has been an increase in support service efficiency, the benefits of which will ultimately be felt by those charged with front-line service delivery.

The final guiding 'cultural' principle has been the organisation's apparent desire to equip itself for change, and where possible be at the forefront of this change process in local government. Chief officers gave very different accounts as to how far the organisation was able to cope with the rapid pace of change, some conveying the impression of effective control, but others noting that although senior officers were able to cope with the change process the street-level operatives were 'shell shocked' by the sheer quantity of change. There had arguably been a deterioration in the quality of services as individuals struggled to 'keep afloat', feeling very little affinity with the changes they were being asked to implement.

The persistent tinkering of the elected members did not help, especially that of the former leader, interventions which though often innovative were also very much short term initiatives. The absence of a strategic management system made it impossible to co-ordinate these initiatives to obtain some longer term benefits for the authority.

It is arguable therefore whether there has been an organisational culture which has enjoyed common ownership on the part of the authority's employees. There have been a number of ad hoc approaches. Despite the concept of a common organisational culture being viewed as utopian in some quarters, the managing director recognised that an organisational culture is an important requirement if the authority is to successfully meet the challenges presented by its change agenda. Indeed the existence of such a common culture was seen as essential to the maintenance and improvement of staff morale.

Political leadership

The vacuum caused by the lack of a strategic leader on the officer side was seemingly filled by one of the authority's leading elected members. During the 1980s the leader of the council had presided over a radical shake up in the way the authority was managed. The extent of this transformation can be gleaned by comparing the perceived dynamism in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the comment of one interviewee who joined Westminster in the early 1980s:

“Coming to Westminster was a bit like coming to the dark ages in a way, in comparison with other authorities. It was run on very traditional lines, and it certainly had a great deal of catching up to do.”

This ‘catching up’ process has not however been without cost. It has already been noted that during the period 1989-91 three individuals held the post of chief executive/managing director. Their rapid turnover had led to the council leader, in effect, assuming the role as head of the paid service. To a certain extent this was a problem of the leader's own creation. The chief executive who had been recruited to spearhead the organisation's transformation, with a track record as a strategic leader and organisational change agent in local government, was undermined because his advice clashed with what the leader wanted to hear. His position accordingly became untenable, and he therefore left the organisation. This problem was partly attributable to the lack of definition of the boundaries between strategic and operational management which had been prevalent in the authority. Apart from the attitude of the leader, the committee chairs would attempt to run the relevant department within the authority, usurping the position of the chief officer concerned.

The lack of a clear delineation of responsibilities, enabling elected members to interfere in operational departmental management, was considered by those chief officers interviewed to have had an adverse effect on the overall performance of the authority. As a result of the high profile of the former leader, the change process was generally perceived as having been driven by the elected members, an indication of the lack of managerial leadership within the organisation at this time. The lack of leadership from the chief executive/managing director and chief officer level, together with the absence of coherent strategic policy direction, was certainly perceived to have undermined staff morale.

The role of elected members has been radically redrawn by the election of a new leader of the council. He was recognised as being very ‘hands-off’ in his management style, someone who would allow the managing director and chief officers the freedom to manage without detailed intervention once a clear policy had been established. Furthermore, the new leader's desire to concentrate on the strategic issues facing the authority was seen as complementary to the managing director's agenda. Both were designed to give Westminster a coherent strategic management and policy framework within which to co-ordinate service development in the authority.

The appointment in 1991 of a managing director committed to fulfilling the strategic leader role (and the newly-appointed director of finance) promised to have a positive effect on morale. These appointments had coincided with a change in the leader of

the council. The new leader had a much less aggressive and interventionist leadership style, with little interest in operational tinkering. He was much more concerned with creating a strategic policy framework than his predecessor. He was also very clear about his role as leader in relation to the managerial/political interface, prepared to let the managing director fulfil his designated role. This gave the new managing director much needed leeway to construct and implement his own management agenda.

The new leader of the council was also very aware that for the organisation to function successfully as a strategic unit, the managing director's agenda for change needed to be matched by a coherent policy framework from the elected members. This would entail the redrawing of the existing lines of power for the controlling Conservative group. He had therefore initiated a system of 'cabinet' government, the committee chairs meeting on a regular basis to co-ordinate the many different initiatives emanating from those committees. This concentrated elected members' minds on strategic issues, removing them from the operational management arena, and sharpening up the policy process to match the anticipated improvements in the authority's management structure.

The political leadership of the council had undergone a major change of direction after the election of a new leader with a very different style from his predecessor. Not only was he aware of the need for the managing director to be seen as the strategic leader of the officer body, but also for the organisation to fully develop its strategic management systems to meet the challenges presented by change. A key to this is for the managing director to be given enough freedom to pursue his own management agenda within the overall policy framework established by the council.

Summary

The evidence presented here has demonstrates that the public image of Westminster was far removed from the harsh realities of the managerial and political structures within the authority. For several years it had been devoid of strategic officer leadership, and as a result the strategic management processes had been allowed to drift and the authority undertook a number of activities which were later deemed to have been inappropriate. The leadership void had been both created and to some extent been filled by a very interventionist leader of the council who had sought to drive forward a number of management initiatives and projects. Such actions, however, only served to weaken strategic coordination of the authority's activities because of their ad hoc manner. This seemed to have an adverse effect on staff morale at all levels within the organisation. Only in 1991 following the appointment of a new managing director and the departure of Porter as Leader, was any attempt really been made to come to terms with major strategic issues in Westminster, with a clearer boundaries emerging which sought to identify and allocate strategic and operational management responsibilities, and attempts made to address the institutional probity issues. In clarifying these distinct managerial roles, the managing director and council leader were seeking to overcome the difficulties previously evident in the authority.

As observed above, both quality and direction of organisational political leadership and the collapse of strategic corporate governance within the London Borough of

Westminster (and indeed elsewhere in a few renegade local authorities) was one of the driving forces underpinning the local government reform agenda which culminated in the Local Government Act (2000). It was argued that the creation of the Standards Board would prevent another 'Westminster' (or 'Liverpool') from happening. It is however somewhat ironic that one of the Labour councillors on Westminster City Council who pursued a campaign to expose the illegality of a number of Porter's actions, Paul Dimoldenberg, was himself the subject of a high profile Standards Board investigation surrounding the leaking of information relating to the Porter case to the BBC - the outcome of which saw him vindicated of his actions.

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