

Your Governance Improvement Partner

Shaping Governance: A-Z of Governance

Breaking down key governance concepts into clear, digestible insights

N is for Nurturing Culture: Starting the year with purpose

The New Year often brings fresh plans, renewed focus, and full agendas. But before priorities are set and papers start to flow, it's worth pausing to consider something more fundamental: the culture of the governing board.

Effective governance is not only shaped by what is decided, but by *how* those decisions are made. A nurturing governance culture creates the conditions for clear thinking, constructive challenge, and confident leadership; particularly as boards navigate complex decisions throughout the year.

What do we mean by a nurturing governance culture?

A nurturing board culture is one where purpose guides behaviour and people feel able to contribute fully. It is built on:

- Respectful collaboration: open discussion, different perspectives, and shared responsibility
- Trust and transparency: honest communication and strong working relationships
- Supportive challenge: asking the right questions in a way that helps leaders succeed
- Curiosity and learning: governors who reflect, learn, and grow together
- Child-centred thinking: keeping the experience of children visible in decisions

These elements shape not just outcomes, but the quality of governance itself.

Why culture matters at the start of a new year

As boards plan ahead, culture influences whether priorities feel purposeful or pressured. A strong governance culture helps boards stay focused, avoid reactive decision-making, and maintain alignment with their values; even when the work is demanding.

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When culture is intentional, governance becomes more confident, more consistent, and more impactful.

Gentle New Year prompts for governing boards
These are not actions to *add* to the workload; just quiet questions to hold in mind as the year begins:

- How do we want our boardroom to feel this year? Calm, curious, challenging, supportive?
- What behaviours will help us work well together? And which ones might we need to let go of?
- How will we keep children present in our discussions? Beyond data, how do we stay connected to real experiences?
- Where do we want to grow as a board? In confidence, understanding, or how we support leadership?
- What would 'good governance' look like by the end of this year? Not just in outcomes, but in how decisions are made.

A closing thought for the year ahead

A nurturing governance culture is not about being comfortable; it's about creating the conditions for meaningful challenge, clear purpose, and feeling valued.

In our work, the most effective boards consistently operate as teams; listening well, staying curious, and reflecting together. Tools such as the ***Skills and Confidence Map*** and the ***Shaping Governance Development Programme*** support this by creating shared space for honest discussion and trust.

As the year begins, small shifts in how boards listen, question, and reflect can make a real difference over time.

With best wishes for the year ahead,

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