**Messenger’s message for health and social care**

Two recurring events in the health and care universe overlapped this month with the publication of General Sir Gordon Messenger’s report, *Leadership for a collaborative and inclusive future*. They were the cyclical external review of management in the NHS and the frustrating annexing of care to health.

Hermes the Greek messenger god moved quickly and freely between the mortal and divine worlds, aided by his winged sandals. The authors of this report stay firmly in the NHS world and there are no care specific recommendations in the report. The recommendations for health and care together will need unpacking and contextualising. For example, the recommendations for governance are aimed at non-executive directors in the NHS, but there are parallel issues for the development of councillors, trustees, and board members in the care sector.

 The analysis of the context for change is spot on. External pressures, like performance targets, regulatory requirements, and short-term political demands, combined with staff shortages, budget pressures, sector disparity and pandemic backlogs, are a toxic combination. They lead to a fixation on the task in hand, poor experience in the workplace and worsening outcomes. The needs of the system predominate rather than better patient and public health outcomes. Staff can feel helpless because they believe they lack the tools to put right what they know is wrong.

They make a strong case for investing in leadership and team building with a renewed respect and value towards an empowered workforce, with committed and compassionate leadership from top to bottom.

They suggest this is a generational opportunity to make this cultural shift at all levels in healthcare, social care, and government. Structurally the advent of integrated care systems and the integration white paper reinforces the value of close working at a local level. Culturally, the positive legacy of the pandemic can be teamwork across boundaries, devolved decision making and a stronger sense of common purpose.

They seek to reinforce this opportunity through two new interventions aimed at promoting collaborative behaviours. The first would be at entry level and the second would be targeted at middle managers in mid-career. These need to be backed up by a single set of unified, core leadership and management standards, with training and development to meet them.

The government accepted all seven recommendations, but they need developing for the social care sector. The management task is not seen as an entity and investment in the training and progression of managers is poorly funded and widely dispersed.

If you buy their analysis, there is both an urgent need and a framework for action nationally and at place level to realign workforce and management strategies to build teams and prepare managers for a more closely integrated future.

*Andrew Cozens is an independent social care and health specialist*