



why we did this work

To be effective in any job you need to know what is required of you, and you must also have the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve it. Teachers, doctors, plumbers and chief executives are not born with the knowledge and skills they need to do their jobs well, they are nurtured and learned over time.

Surprisingly little attention has been paid to the role played by local councillors. Yet it is arguably one of the most complex roles that exists, either within the political field (it is certainly more complicated than that of Member of Parliament) or within the work context. The role of local councillor has also undergone many changes and there is little doubt that the breadth and complexity of a councillor's responsibilities has increased considerably over the past few years.

Unfortunately, relatively few people really appreciate how complex the role of local councillors is. The Attracting Members of Talent project was set up with the aim of increasing transparency and understanding: it has explored what local councillors do, captured the breadth of responsibilities associated with the role, and articulated the political skills required to be able to do the role effectively.

By identifying the core knowledge, skills, abilities and values associated with effective elected members the project aims to make more people aware of what local councillors do and ultimately to attract new future 'members of talent'.

Although there have been a number of attempts to define the role of elected member, none have involved a systematic analysis of the role and the person. Though relatively common in public and private sector organisations, until now these techniques have not been used to explore political roles.

One important reason for this may be that political (or elected) roles have been considered distinct from more traditional occupational roles. There are undoubtedly differences, but there are equally important reasons why a detailed, objective and systematic analysis of political roles should be undertaken. Not the least of these is that training and development activities should be tailored to specific needs and informed by detailed understanding of what people need to be effective.



the project

the project has involved three stages

1. role analysis

what are the core responsibilities undertaken by elected members, cabinet members and leaders?

2. person analysis

what are the political skills required by elected members, cabinet members and leaders in order to be effective, and how might these change over the coming 10–15 years?

3. a questionnaire

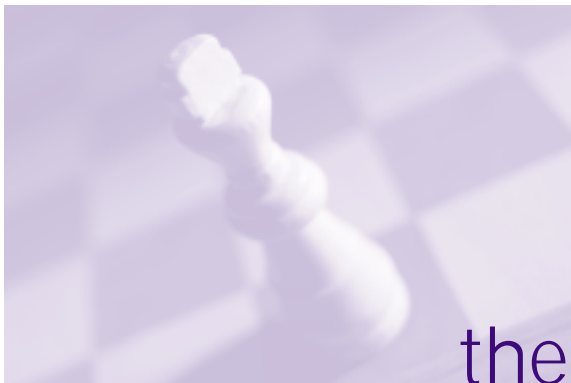
sent to over 300 councillors and officers to determine the validity of the findings from stages one and two

Stage one involved structured interviews with 30 elected members, cabinet members and leaders, plus three focus groups with relevant stakeholders. Stage two involved 37 critical incident interviews and three focus groups, plus a visioning session at the DTI future-focus lab with individuals drawn from key stakeholder groups. All interviews were tape-recorded and then content analysed to extract core tasks and responsibilities. Finally, stage three has involved disseminating a questionnaire to 300 councillors and officers. Preliminary analysis has been conducted on the first responses, although analysis will continue as questionnaires and feedback is received. In addition a full document and literature search was conducted in order to identify relevant research and projects in the areas of political leadership and new local government structures.

Participants were drawn from a range of councils representative of different political make-up and council types (eg metropolitan, district and London borough). This was to ensure that the material collected was as inclusive as possible of different contexts and political structures. To date, 11 councils have participated in the project (see below for list), a further two leaders have been involved in the focus groups, and interviews have been conducted with several key stakeholders within political parties.

participating councils

Daventry DC
East Staffs
Islington
Kent CC
Leeds
Oldham
Newham
South Northants
Torridge
Torbay
Warwickshire CC
(Group of New Leaders from Leadership Academy event)



the capacity framework

political skill sets

all councillors

- **community leadership**

engages enthusiastically and empathetically with the community in order to learn, understand and act upon issues of local concern. Mediates fairly and constructively, encouraging trust by representing all sections of the community

- **regulating and monitoring**

understands and executes judicial role by following protocol, evaluating arguments and making decisions that balance public needs and local policy. Ensures progress by monitoring and intervening where necessary

- **scrutiny and challenge**

acts as a critical friend by seeking opportunities for scrutiny and providing constructive feedback. Analyses information quickly and presents arguments in a concise, meaningful and easily accessible way

- **communication skills**

listens sensitively, uses appropriate language and checks for understanding. Communicates regularly with individuals and groups in the community, speaks clearly and confidently in public, and makes sure that people are informed

- **working in partnership**

builds positive relationships by making others feel valued, trusted and included and by working collaboratively to achieve goals. Maintains calm and focus, recognises when to delegate or provide support and is able to take a long-term view in developing partnerships

- **political understanding**

acts ethically, consistently and with integrity when communicating values or representing group views in decisions and actions. Effectively works across group boundaries without compromising values or ethics.



the cabinet (all above plus):

- **providing vision**

creates a shared council vision by establishing strategic policies and prioritising actions. Actively encourages involvement of others in policy formation and works collaboratively to analyse information and promote understanding. Open to new ideas and ways of doing things

- **managing performance**

works closely with others to develop, promote and achieve objectives and represent council at a strategic level. Encourages scrutiny, monitors performance and responds positively to feed back and ideas

the leader (all above plus):

- **excellence in leadership**

provides visionary and charismatic leadership, is well prepared, able to troubleshoot, and juggle conflicting responsibilities. Works to shape a culture of excellence by acting as the public face of the council and a role model for others. Encourages co-operation and communication across political and council boundaries



behavioural indicators

For each capacity (political skill set) a series of agreed positive and negative behavioural indicators have been identified. These are 'behavioural markers' ie what someone might be doing to demonstrate either effective (positive indicators) or ineffective (negative indicators) performance as a councillor. It is unlikely (but not impossible) that a good councillor would demonstrate every single one of the positive indicators listed, but it is unlikely that they display any of the negative ones.

What these indicators show is that there are lots of different ways of being excellent, and lots of different ways of being poor. The indicators and the framework as a whole are based upon a set of markers that 200 councillors (so far) have agreed are important. They provide a common language for discussing the scope, complexity and challenge of the councillor role.



how can these be used?

this capacity framework is important for a number of reasons

- it provides a common language that can help to foster a shared understanding of what is considered effective and ineffective councillor behaviour.
- it makes transparent the tremendous scope and variability of the councillor role and can help to increase understanding among the public and other groups of what local councillors are expected to do.
- it helps new councillors (and prospective councillors) gain a better understanding of the role and what will be expected of them.
- it provides an easily accessible framework for councillors to consider their own areas of strength and identify those areas that they would like to develop further.
- it provides a basis for a training needs analysis by identifying and making explicit what councillors need in terms of skills and abilities in order to be more effective.
- it demonstrates that individual councillors have unique profiles of strengths – some may be excellent in community leadership and communication skills, where as others may be excellent in the area of scrutiny and challenge. To be effective a council is likely to need councillors with a broad range of profiles.
- it helps to foster a culture of excellence by making explicit what is not acceptable behaviour.
- it contributes to diversity by focusing the attention of assessors on important behaviour rather than stereotypes or assumptions about what individuals from different backgrounds might achieve.
- it provides a framework for the political parties to consider how prospective candidates are selected for future elections.
- it provides the foundation 'bricks' for the development of a range of development tools and metrics, including 360-degree feedback systems, personal development plans, political group dynamics, structured interviews, and self-assessment. Ultimately it provides a first step in evaluating the impact of political systems upon council functioning and effectiveness.



some questions and answers

all these positive indicators look very daunting, aren't they a little unrealistic?

The political skills are idealistic in many ways – they represent a picture of excellence of what might be expected of local councillors, something to strive for. But everyone will have their own areas of strength and areas that they would like to develop further. It will be important for individual councillors to understand their own skill profile. They may decide that they would like to become excellent in all areas, or they may decide that they would like to focus on a specific area. What is important is that all councillors should demonstrate at least some evidence of the positive indicators and little or no evidence of the negative indicators.

why are there negative indicators?

In any organisation it is just as important to communicate what is unacceptable behaviour, as it is to communicate what is desired behaviour. People may have very different assumptions about what is good and bad councillor behaviour, but these negative indicators represent those where there was a consensus that they are inappropriate and ineffective. It is just as important to get over to people other than councillors – officers, members of the community and members of other organisations – that councillors take their role seriously.

can i change some of these indicators?

The indicators have validity and integrity because they are based on the views of over 300 elected members and officers. Changing them could undermine this so we definitely do not recommend it. However, there is considerable scope for councillors to identify examples which illustrate how these indicators might relate to behaviour in their own council.

How do I develop these skills?

All councillors bring to their role the knowledge and skills they have built up in other areas of their lives, including work, managing families and community service. These form an important base for developing further political skills. They can be developed in a number of different ways. Local authorities provide induction and training courses and may help you to create a Personal Development Plan to guide and support your learning. The IDeA and other organisations provide development opportunities (eg the Leadership Academy) and mentoring through peer support (Peer Clearing House). You will also continue to learn on a day-to-day basis from your colleagues, officers and, of course, through your interactions with members of the community.

why is political understanding included?

Most councillors are affiliated to a political party. Even if standing as an independent, values form an important guide for the electorate who may want to determine how to vote. Political systems are at the heart of local government and to be successful, councillors (whether affiliated or independent) must be able to understand the processes by which decisions are taken and influence exerted.

This work was undertaken by the Work Psychology Partnership LLP on behalf of the IDeA, and ODPM. Members of the project team include: Prof. Jo Silvester (Project Director), Prof. Fiona Patterson, Dr. Maire Kerrin, Emma Myring, Anna Koczwara and Helen Wilkin.