

# Leading Places

(Extract from the Local Government Association)



Lord Peter Smith  
Chairman of Local  
Government Leadership

**A new focus on support for members within the Local Government Group's productivity programme will help councillors address the challenges ahead, writes Lord Peter Smith.**

The public sector is facing financial reductions on a scale never seen before, and elected members will need to take tough decisions to meet local people's priorities and balance the books.

To help councils respond to this challenge, the Local Government Group has established a place-based productivity programme, which will help councils develop the benchmarking information needed to drive greater efficiency.

As the elected member lead for the democratic leadership workstream within this programme, I chair a working group bringing together members, chief executives and leadership training providers to identify what support members need in the current climate.

## Member focus

This workstream focuses on member development and will enable us to access a range of training and shared learning to provide mutual support through these difficult times.

We are mapping existing leadership support to promote it more widely and have identified the following areas where we know elected members will need support in the future.

**Promoting democratic accountability and transparency:** we will need to be more transparent in our use of resources and engage residents in tough decisions, making full use of our local democratic mandate to get the best outcomes for local people from our own services and those of others.

**Strengthening our financial skills and taking tough decisions:** we know there is scope for improving value for money through technical productivity, such as sharing back-office costs and collaborating on procurement. Members have asked me to look at support for financial decision

making, to ensure we are equipped with the right information and are able to ask challenging questions of ourselves and officers.

**Working with others:** the coming years will see local government move from providing services to commissioning them and supporting local solutions which may be delivered by others. I know that this will challenge some of the principles that led many of us to become elected members in the first place.

Whatever happens, we will retain our leadership role in promoting local priorities and we will need ever stronger influencing and risk management skills to ensure partner organisations work with us to use our collective resources effectively. As ward members, we will need to advocate for our places and involve local people in the debate.

**Effective scrutiny of place:** as partnerships become more integrated across the public sector, there is no doubt we will need to sustain our focus on effective scrutiny arrangements, ensuring members are able to keep a careful eye on new arrangements based around place - as well as in our new and expanding areas of responsibility, such as public health and local economic partnerships.



**Building personal, political and organisational resilience:** we all have difficult decisions to make which will be testing for us as individuals and within our political groups. We will need to support each other during these times of change and continue to ensure that local residents are at the centre of all that we do.

The place based productivity programme should enable us to learn from, and be supported by, colleagues who are going through the same difficult set of challenges. Councils will emerge in a year or so operating very differently than they currently do. However they must remain driven by elected members on behalf of local communities - and all members must therefore equip themselves for the challenge of this transformation.