



Improvement

The Political Skills Framework a councillor's toolkit



Six core skills for councillors

There are six core skill areas for all councillors, then two more for cabinet members (Providing Vision and Managing Performance) and a further skill area for Leaders (Excellence in Leadership) These skills sets are referred to but not specifically outlined in this document- This tool-kit focuses on the first six core skill areas that are relevant for all councillors:

Local leadership

This refers to the need for councillors to engage with members of their community in order to learn about issues of local concern and help to facilitate a vision for the locality. It involves encouraging trust and respect between individuals and groups by mediating fairly and constructively between different organisations and sections of the community.

Partnership working

This aspect of the councillor role focuses on the need to build good relationships with others (i.e. colleagues, officers, community groups and other organisations) by identifying and working collaboratively to achieve shared goals. It recognises the need for councillors to recognise and value different contributions, delegate or provide support as required, and to take a long-term view in developing partnerships.

Communication skills

This skill area recognises the need for councillors need to demonstrate excellent communication skills across many different settings, including the ability to listen sensitively and use appropriate language with different groups. Councillors must also communicate regularly and effectively with all parts of their community using different forms of media.

Political understanding

This skill set recognises the need for councillors to develop a range of political skills in order to communicate their values, promote a political vision, and encourage democratic processes and public engagement. It recognises that councillors need to work across group boundaries at times, yet still be able to maintain their own political integrity.

Scrutiny and challenge

Scrutiny and challenge is an important day-to-day aspect of the councillor role. Councillors need to act as a critical friend by identifying opportunities for scrutiny inside and outside the council, and by providing constructive challenge and feedback to others. To be effective in this role, councillors need to analyse information quickly and present arguments that are concise, meaningful and easily understood.

Regulating and monitoring

This skill set relates to the more judicial aspects of the role that require councillors to understand their legal responsibilities and follow protocol when evaluating arguments and making decisions. Not only do councillors need to balance public needs and local policy, they must also monitor progress and seek feedback on their own learning needs.

Local leadership

“People can elect their councillor confident in the knowledge that they will be able to act on the issues they care about and have campaigned on.”

(A Plain English Guide to the Localism Act, November 2011, p.5)

Positive

- ✓ Engages with their community, canvasses opinion and looks for new ways of representing people
- ✓ Keeps up-to-date with local concerns by drawing information from diverse sources, including hard to reach groups
- ✓ Encourages trust and respect by being approachable, empathising and finding new ways to engage with others
- ✓ Creates partnerships with different sections and groups in the community and ensures their involvement in decision-making
- ✓ Mediates fairly and constructively between people and groups with conflicting needs
- ✓ Works with others to develop and champion a shared local vision

Negative

- ✗ Doesn't engage with their community, waits to be approached and is difficult to contact
- ✗ Maintains a low public profile, not easily recognised in their community
- ✗ Treats groups or people unequally, fails to build integration or cohesion
- ✗ Has a poor understanding of local concerns and how these might be addressed
- ✗ Concentrates on council processes rather than people
- ✗ Is unrealistic about what they can achieve and fails to deliver on promises



Self reflective learning

How do I see myself as a ward member?	
<p>What do you think are your particular strengths? (eg, what do you bring to the role of councillor that you think is particularly good?)</p>	<p>Prompts...</p> <p>How is my role changing and what is driving that change</p> <p>What sections of my community have I engaged with and canvassed opinion?</p> <p>How have I looked for new ways of representing people?</p> <p>How up-to-date am I on local concerns?</p> <p>Would others see me as approachable?</p> <p>Who have I built partnerships with?</p> <p>When did I last act as a mediator?</p> <p>How do I champion others' needs?</p>
<p>Can you illustrate these strengths by writing down examples of things you think you have done well over the past year?</p>	
<p>In which of these areas would you like to improve and how?</p>	
