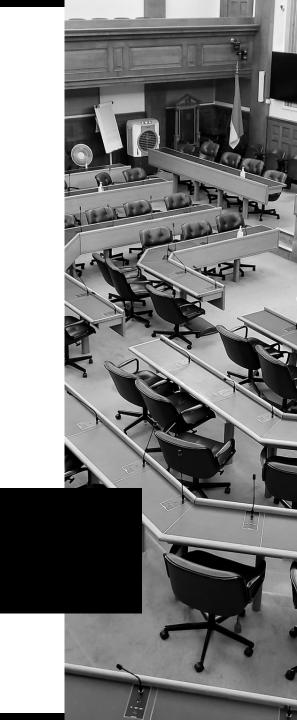A Councillor Tool-Kit

THE POLITICAL SKILLS FRAMEWORK

Local Government Association

WHAT IS THE POLITICAL SKILLS FRAMEWORK AND WHY WAS IT DEVELOPED?

The Political Skills Framework

- Work began on the Framework in 2004.

- Professor Jo Silvester began working with the Local Government Group (at time IDeA) to identify and map the core skills required by councillors.

- By a variety of means voices were heard from several focus group and interviews. This was then validated by surveying 350 elected embers and officers.

- Resulted in production of the Framework.

- Copies were sent to all local authorities to aid development opportunities for politicians and ultimately new 'members of talent'.

- Is under constant review and an updated Framework is imminent.

- Currently Political Skills Toolkit II is the reference point.

Background

- The Framework itself.

- Background information on reason for the Framework.

- Examples from local government of use of the Framework.

- Self-reflection learning reviews examples.

Tool-Kit Contents

Skill 1 – Local Leadership

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.

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

Six Core Skills for Councillors

Skill 2 – Partnership Working

This aspect of the councillor role focuses on the need to build good relationships with others (ie 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.

Partnership working

Positive

- ✓ Works proactively to build good relationships with colleagues, officers, community groups and other organisations
- ✓ Emphasis on achieving shared goals by maintaining focus and mobilising others
- ✓ Knows when to delegate, provide support or empower others to take responsibility
- ✓ Makes people from all backgrounds feel valued, trusted and included (eg, says 'thank you')
- ✓ Understands and acts on their role in building and shaping key partnerships at local, regional and national levels
- ✓ Understands how and when to assert authority to resolve conflict or deadlock effectively

Negative

- ✗ Prefers to exert control and impose solutions by using status rather than through persuasion and involving others
- ✗ Fails to recognise or make use of others' skills and ideas
- ✗ Typically avoids working with people with different views or political values
- ✗ Prefers to act alone and fails to engage or network with others
- ✗ Often uses divisive tactics to upset relationships within their group, or council policies and decisions
- ✗ Defensive when criticised, blames others and doesn't admit to being wrong

10   The Political Skills Framework: a toolkit for councillors

Six Core Skills for Councillors

Skill 3 – 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.

Communication skills

Positive

✓ Provides regular feedback to people, making sure they are kept informed and manages expectations

✓ Regularly informs and communicates with their community using all available media (eg. internet newsletters and email)

✓ Listens to others, checks for understanding and adapts their own communication style as required

✓ Creates opportunities to communicate with different sectors, including vulnerable and hard to reach groups

✓ Speaks confidently in public settings (eg, in council and community meetings, and the media)

✓ Communicates clearly in spoken and written forms (eg, uses appropriate language and avoids jargon or 'council speak')

Negative

✗ Slow to respond to others; tends to communicate only when necessary

✗ Doesn't listen when people are speaking and uses inappropriate or insensitive language

✗ Communicates in a dogmatic and inflexible way

✗ Unwilling to deliver unpopular messages, uses information dishonestly to discredit others

✗ Tends not to participate in meetings and lacks confidence when speaking in public

✗ Presents confused arguments using poor language and style

Six Core Skills for Councillors

Skill 4 – 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 process 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.

Political understanding

Positive

✓ Demonstrates a consistency in views and values through their decisions and actions

✓ Helps to develop cohesion within and between different groups and also between different groups and the council

✓ Clearly communicates political values through canvassing and campaigning

✓ Actively develops their own political intelligence (eg, understanding local and national political landscapes)

✓ Looks for ways to promote democracy and increase public engagement

✓ Is able to put party politics aside and work across political boundaries when required, without compromising political values

Negative

✗ Lacks integrity, has inconsistent political values and tends to say what others want to hear

✗ Puts personal motives first or changes beliefs to match those in power

✗ Has poor knowledge of group manifesto, values and objectives

✗ Fails to support political colleagues in public

✗ Doesn't translate group values into ways of helping the community

✗ Lacks a clear political vision of what they would like to achieve

Six Core Skills for Councillors

Skill 5 – Scrutiny & 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 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.

Scrutiny and challenge

Positive

✓ Identifies areas suitable for scrutiny and ensures that citizens and communities are involved in the scrutiny process

✓ Quickly understands and analyses complex information

✓ Presents concise arguments that are meaningful and easily understood

✓ Understands the scrutiny process, asks for explanations and checks that recommendations have been implemented

✓ Objective and rigorous when challenging process, decisions and people

✓ Asks challenging but constructive questions

Negative

✗ Doesn't prepare well or check facts and draws biased conclusions

✗ Too reliant on officers, tends to back down when challenged

✗ Fails to see scrutiny as part of their role

✗ Too focused on detail, doesn't distinguish between good, poor and irrelevant information

✗ Uses scrutiny resources inappropriately (eg. on issues over which they have no influence)

✗ Overly aggressive: prefers political 'blood sports' to collaboration and uses scrutiny for political gain

Six Core Skills for Councillors

Skill 6 – Regulating & 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.

Regulating and monitoring

Positive

✓ Understands and acts on their judicial role in meeting legal responsibilities (eg, duty of care, corporate parenting)

✓ Uses evidence to evaluate arguments and make independent, impartial judgements

✓ Chairs meetings effectively, follows protocol to make sure all views are explored and keeps process on track

✓ Understands and abides by the councillor's code of conduct

✓ Follows legal process, balances public needs and local policy

✓ Monitors others' performance and intervenes when necessary to ensure progress

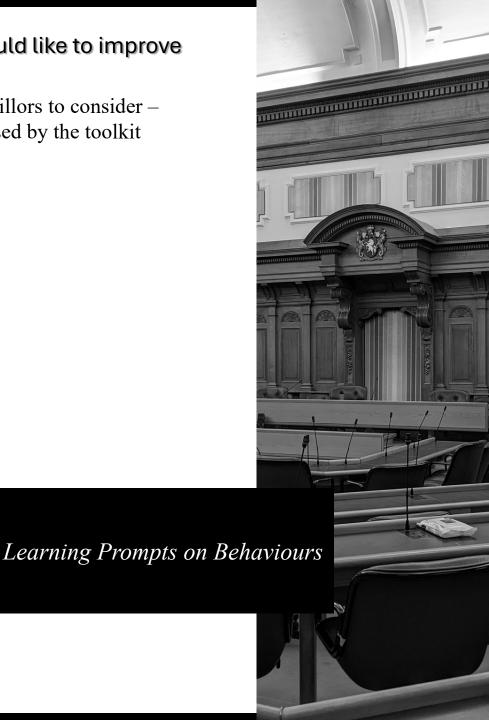✓ Is committed to self-development, seeks feedback and looks for opportunities to learn

Negative

✗ Doesn't declare personal interests, makes decisions for personal gain

✗ Fails to check facts or consider all sides and makes subjective or uninformed judgements

✗ Leaves monitoring and checks on progress to others

✗ Makes decisions without taking advice, considering regulations or taking account of wider issues

✗ Misses deadlines, leaves business unfinished and lacks balance between council and other commitments

Six Core Skills for Councillors

Every Member has their unique areas of strength as well as areas they would like to improve

The Framework provides a starting point and provides some learning prompts for councillors to consider – could we use this as part of our Personal Development Plan process? Key questions posed by the toolkit include:

- Think about the way you perform your role. Focus on one of the skill areas and decide whether you (or others) would rate this as an area of strength. Can you recall any recent occasions when you have demonstrated any of the Positive characteristics for this skill set?
- Have there been times when you have used negative behaviours?
- Are any of the behaviours surprising?
- Take time to think about your own personal values – does your behaviour always reflect what you believe?
- When is it difficult to act with integrity?
- Do you think that some styles of behaviour are not appropriate in politics – or does 'anything go'?
- Think about the behaviour of your political colleagues. How might their behaviour reflect the council's culture?
- For example, do members generally keep up-to-date with community issues and local concerns?

Learning Prompts on Behaviours

Every Member has their unique areas of strength as well as areas they would like to improve

- What support is provided to help them to do this?
- Are there reasons why some members are not as able to keep as up-to-date with these issues as other members?
- How do the political parties in your local authority work together?
- Is there the opportunity for cross-party working?
- In what way does this impact on the success of large council projects?

Some examples of PDP layout incorporating the skills and learning prompts are available in the document - read-revised-version-poli-243.pdf (local.gov.uk)

Learning Prompts on Behaviours

Every Member has their unique areas of strength as well as areas they would like to improve

Self reflective learning

How am I at scrutiny and challenge?

What do you think are your particular strengths in this area? (eg, what do you bring to this area of your role as a councillor that you think is particularly good?)	**Prompts...** • How do I engage in scrutiny as an everyday part of my role? • What new areas have I identified for scrutiny? • How do I deal with new information? • Are my arguments always concise, meaningful and easily understood? • Am I constructive in my criticism? • Am I fair, objective and rigorous when challenging processes or people?

Can you illustrate these strengths by writing down examples of things you think you have done well over the past year?

Which of these areas would you like to improve and how?

PDP Example

The Political Skills Framework
a councillor's toolkit

Created by Professor Jo Silvester
for the Local Government Association (LGA)

Contents

Introduction

Councillors by their very nature have strong leadership instincts and we must continuously develop those skills to ensure that we are able to meet the challenges, opportunities and risks that come with the Localism agenda. Government has given us a set of tools with which to lead and it has never been as important to properly equip Members to take full advantage of these new powers and provide genuine local leadership in our towns, cities and villages.

The landscape is far more complex than it was a decade ago and local government has a democratic right to provide leadership across a geographic area, not confined to local government services, but a right to influence every aspect of services provided locally.

Developing new leadership skills to meet this challenge is vital and it is through shared learning that Councillors can and will maximise the opportunity to provide genuine local leadership of place

At the Local Government Association we believe that great leaders make great places. In 2004 when we commissioned the first version of the political skills framework there had been very little research into what traits and skills define great local political leaders. The aim of this framework is to provide a foundation for the support and development we offer to our elected members. We are proud to be producing the third iteration of the political skills framework as we aim to keep pushing forward the thinking and development of political support for councillors.

Councillor Richard Stay

Lead Member on Leadership Development,
Improvement Board LGA
Executive Member,
Central Bedfordshire Council
Chairman, Improvement East

What is the Political Skills Framework and why was it developed?

To be effective in any job you need to know what is required of you and have the knowledge and skills to achieve it. Teachers, doctors, plumbers and chief executives are not born with the knowledge and skills they need for their jobs – these are learned, practised and improved over time. The Political Skills framework sets out the key knowledge and skills needed to support new and experienced councillors in their efforts to develop the knowledge and skills to be effective in their role.

The framework was originally drafted in 2004 and revised again in 2007 in recognition of the substantial culture change in attitudes towards political roles and how they should be carried out. This included growing recognition of the need for training and development among councillors themselves.

The latest version of the framework reflects the fact that whilst councillors' responsibilities may remain largely unaltered, they have evolved over time and the political and social environment in which they carry out these responsibilities has changed fundamentally. New council structures, vastly increased use of new technology and social media, public sector spending cuts, and rising public expectations (to name but a few) are all having a profound effect on how councillors undertake their role.

Political Skills toolkit II

The Political Skills toolkit (PSF) is designed to support local councillors and those working with them in their efforts to review and support individual development needs. The tool-kit contains:

1. A revised easy-to-access political skills framework that takes account of changes in councillors' roles prompted by recent developments in local government and the wider social context.

2. Self-reflective learning reviews based on each of the PSF skill sets that can be used by councillors to identify their own areas of strength and areas for development.

Six core skills for councillors

There are six core skill areas for all councillors in this tool-kit. Depending upon your specific role as a councillor the circumstances and contexts within which you apply these skills may vary, the core skill areas will remain 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.

Positive and negative indicators

Each of the skill set definitions describe what is expected of councillors if they are to be effective and influential in their role. It is recognised that there is no 'one best way' to be a councillor. Each member will approach their role as a community leader in a very different way from their colleagues, but by discussion with over 350 members and officers the indicators below reflect commonly held views about what might be considered excellent and poor councillor behaviour.

Positive (desirable) behaviours and Negative (undesirable) behaviours are included for each of the skill sets. No member could be expected to demonstrate excellent levels of positive behaviour all of the time, and never demonstrate any Negative behaviour, but excellent councillors generally demonstrate far more Positive than Negative characteristics.

These behaviours are described as positive and negative indicators because they provide an indication of the types of behaviour that councillors associate with excellent and poor performance. They are not meant to be prescriptive – but rather to help councillors and those who work with them reflect on how they perform their role and how what they do fits with each of the skill areas. They also provide a way to foster a shared understanding of what constitutes excellent councillor performance among the wider community.

Why are there negative indicators?
In any role it is just as important to be clear about what we think is unacceptable or poor behaviour as it is to be clear about what we view as excellent. Although there may be some difference of opinion, this work has helped us to understand the views most people share. For example, we know that behavioural integrity is important because most of the people we interviewed considered it unacceptable for members to change their views just to fit with the views of those in power. Neither was it considered appropriate for them to act in a way that did not reflect their values or those of their political group.

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

Partnership working

Positive

✓ Works proactively to build good relationships with colleagues, officers, community groups and other organisations

✓ Emphasis on achieving shared goals by maintaining focus and mobilising others

✓ Knows when to delegate, provide support or empower others to take responsibility

✓ Makes people from all backgrounds feel valued, trusted and included (eg, says 'thank you')

✓ Understands and acts on their role in building and shaping key partnerships at local, regional and national levels

✓ Understands how and when to assert authority to resolve conflict or deadlock effectively

Negative

✗ Prefers to exert control and impose solutions by using status rather than through persuasion and involving others

✗ Fails to recognise or make use of others' skills and ideas

✗ Typically avoids working with people with different views or political values

✗ Prefers to act alone and fails to engage or network with others

✗ Often uses divisive tactics to upset relationships within their group, or council policies and decisions

✗ Defensive when criticised, blames others and doesn't admit to being wrong

Self reflective learning

How am I at working in partnership?	
What do you think are your particular strengths in this area? (Eg, what do you bring to this area of your as a councillor that you think is particularly good?)	**Prompts…** • Do I have good relationships with colleagues and officers? • How do I help others build partnerships? • How do I support and empower others? • Do I value and include people from different backgrounds? • What networks and partnerships have I developed? • Do I stay calm and focused under pressure? • Am I engaging with all relevant groups within my ward?
Can you illustrate these strengths by writing down examples of things you think you have done well over the past year?	
Which of these areas would you like to improve and how?	

Communication skills

Positive

✓ Provides regular feedback to people, making sure they are kept informed and manages expectations

✓ Regularly informs and communicates with their community using all available media (eg, internet newsletters and email)

✓ Listens to others, checks for understanding and adapts their own communication style as required

✓ Creates opportunities to communicate with different sectors, including vulnerable and hard to reach groups

✓ Speaks confidently in public settings (eg, in council and community meetings, and the media)

✓ Communicates clearly in spoken and written forms (eg, uses appropriate language and avoids jargon or 'council speak')

Negative

✗ Slow to respond to others; tends to communicate only when necessary

✗ Doesn't listen when people are speaking and uses inappropriate or insensitive language

✗ Communicates in a dogmatic and inflexible way

✗ Unwilling to deliver unpopular messages, uses information dishonestly to discredit others

✗ Tends not to participate in meetings and lacks confidence when speaking in public

✗ Presents confused arguments using poor language and style

Self reflective learning

How am I at communicating with others?	
What do you think are your particular strengths in this area? (eg, what do you bring to this area of your role as a councillor that you think is good?)	Prompts… • How regularly do I communicate with different sections of the community? • What different methods do I use to communicate? • How well do I listen and adapt to others? • Do I feel comfortable using technology to communicate with people? • Am I confident when speaking in public? • Do I feedback regularly to others to keep them informed?

Can you illustrate these strengths by writing down examples of things you think you have done well over the past year?

Which of these areas would you like to improve and how?

Political understanding

Positive

✓ Demonstrates a consistency in views and values through their decisions and actions

✓ Helps to develop cohesion within and between different groups and also between different groups and the council

✓ Clearly communicates political values through canvassing and campaigning

✓ Actively develops their own political intelligence (eg, understanding local and national political landscapes)

✓ Looks for ways to promote democracy and increase public engagement

✓ Is able to put party politics aside and work across political boundaries when required, without compromising political values

Negative

✗ Lacks integrity, has inconsistent political values and tends to say what others want to hear

✗ Puts personal motives first or changes beliefs to match those in power

✗ Has poor knowledge of group manifesto, values and objectives

✗ Fails to support political colleagues in public

✗ Doesn't translate group values into ways of helping the community

✗ Lacks a clear political vision of what they would like to achieve

Self reflective learning

How am I at political understanding?	
What do you think are your particular strengths in this area? (eg, what do you bring to this area of your role as a councillor that you think is particularly good?)	Prompts… • How have I promoted democracy and increased public engagement? • Are my values clear and reflected in what I do? • How do I build cohesion between members of my own group? • Can I work effectively in other political environments (eg, outside council)? • How have I developed my political intelligence? • How well do I work with people with different views and values?
Can you illustrate these strengths by writing down examples of things you think you have done well over the past year?	
Which of these areas would you like to improve and how?	

Scrutiny and challenge

Positive

✓ Identifies areas suitable for scrutiny and ensures that citizens and communities are involved in the scrutiny process

✓ Quickly understands and analyses complex information

✓ Presents concise arguments that are meaningful and easily understood

✓ Understands the scrutiny process, asks for explanations and checks that recommendations have been implemented

✓ Objective and rigorous when challenging process, decisions and people

✓ Asks challenging but constructive questions

Negative

✗ Doesn't prepare well or check facts and draws biased conclusions

✗ Too reliant on officers, tends to back down when challenged

✗ Fails to see scrutiny as part of their role

✗ Too focused on detail, doesn't distinguish between good, poor and irrelevant information

✗ Uses scrutiny resources inappropriately (eg, on issues over which they have no influence)

✗ Overly aggressive: prefers political 'blood sports' to collaboration and uses scrutiny for political gain

Self reflective learning

How am I at scrutiny and challenge?	
What do you think are your particular strengths in this area? (eg, what do you bring to this area of your role as a councillor that you think is particularly good?)	**Prompts…** • How do I engage in scrutiny as an everyday part of my role? • What new areas have I identified for scrutiny? • How do I deal with new information? • Are my arguments always concise, meaningful and easily understood? • Am I constructive in my criticism? • Am I fair, objective and rigorous when challenging processes or people?
Can you illustrate these strengths by writing down examples of things you think you have done well over the past year?	
Which of these areas would you like to improve and how?	

Regulating and monitoring

Positive

✓ Understands and acts on their judicial role in meeting legal responsibilities
(eg, duty of care, corporate parenting)

✓ Uses evidence to evaluate arguments and make independent, impartial judgements

✓ Chairs meetings effectively, follows protocol to make sure all views are explored and
keeps process on track

✓ Understands and abides by the councillor's code of conduct

✓ Follows legal process, balances public needs and local policy

✓ Monitors others' performance and intervenes when necessary to ensure progress

✓ Is committed to self-development, seeks feedback and looks for opportunities to learn

Negative

✗ Doesn't declare personal interests, makes decisions for personal gain

✗ Fails to check facts or consider all sides and makes subjective or uninformed judgements

✗ Leaves monitoring and checks on progress to others

✗ Makes decisions without taking advice, considering regulations or taking account
of wider issues

✗ Misses deadlines, leaves business unfinished and lacks balance between council
and other commitments

Self reflective learning

How am I at regulating and monitoring?	
What do you think are your particular strengths in this area? (eg, what do you bring to this area of your role as a councillor that you think is particularly good?)	Prompts… • How well do I understand and act on my judicial role? (eg, corporate parenting) • How effectively do I chair meetings? • Do I know enough about legal process? • Are my judgements based on evidence? • Do I monitor others to ensure progress? • When have I sought feedback or looked for opportunities to learn?
Can you illustrate these strengths by writing down examples of things you think you have done well over the past year?	
Which of these areas would you like to improve and how?	

Some questions and answers

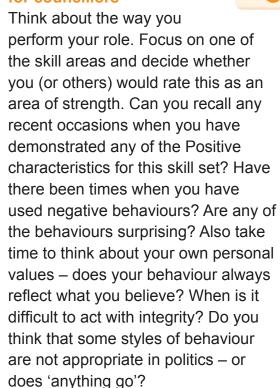**All these behaviours look very daunting, aren't they a little unrealistic?**

There are many different ways in which local councillors can perform their roles well, and no two councillors are likely to perform their roles in exactly the same way. Every member has their unique areas of strength as well as areas they would like to improve.

Councils may of course require different sets of skills at different times – and since a council is a team whilst it may be i desirable for all members to have all the skills it isn't always necessary that they do. For example, if the Leader is not a particularly inspired communicator, s/he could ask a colleague to handle the media or major presentations while the Leader concentrates on using their strengths elsewhere.

The PSF provides a starting point for individual councillors to reflect on their own skill profile, before deciding what they want to develop and how. Some councillors might decide that they want to be excellent in all areas, whereas others might prefer to focus on one or two key areas.

One important message from the work that went into creating the PSF, is that there are common views about what makes a good or a poor councillor and, wherever possible, councillors should strive to demonstrate Positive rather than Negative behaviours.

Learning prompt for councillors

Think about the way you perform your role. Focus on one of the skill areas and decide whether you (or others) would rate this as an area of strength. Can you recall any recent occasions when you have demonstrated any of the Positive characteristics for this skill set? Have there been times when you have used negative behaviours? Are any of the behaviours surprising? Also take time to think about your own personal values – does your behaviour always reflect what you believe? When is it difficult to act with integrity? Do you think that some styles of behaviour are not appropriate in politics – or does 'anything go'?

Can I change some of these characteristics?

These characteristics are based on the views of over 350 elected members and officers. However, they are not prescriptive; they provide a base for members and officers to consider their own unique council structure, culture and context. You may decide that the culture of your own authority influences the way in which members are expected to behave towards officers, for example, or the way in which political groups communicate with one another.

Learning prompt for councillors

Think about the behaviour of your political colleagues. How might their behaviour reflect the council's culture? For example, do members generally keep up-to-date with community issues and local concerns? What support is provided to help them to do this? Are there reasons why some members are not as able to keep as up-to-date with these issues as other members?

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 in deciding how to vote. Political systems are at the heart of local government and to be successful, councillors must be able to understand the processes by which decisions are taken and how influence is exerted.

However, there is also an ongoing need for political skill with a small 'p'. Political skill means being able to influence and persuade others, and the ability to mobilise support to achieve objectives. Members must be able to work in political environments inside and outside the council.

Learning prompt for councillors: How do the political parties in your local authority work together? Is there the opportunity for cross-party working? In what way does this impact on the success of large council projects?

Using the Political Skills Framework

The PSF can be used in many different ways and in many different areas. As part of our reviews we have asked members and officers how they have used the PSF, these were some of the examples they gave:

- member induction
- training and development programmes
- self-review
- 360-review systems
- mentoring
- learning materials
- personal development plans
- development centres.

For example, Irene MacDonald (a former councillor and member peer) has used the PSF for new councillor induction: drawing up and delivering a programme of training linked to the PSF. She has also used it for work with political groups to stimulate discussion. Irene says this works very well because it encourages the political group to share their perceptions of the group's strengths and where they could develop further. This has led to action plans focusing on what is needed to achieve organisational development.

In the full report there are case studies which describe how the PSF has been used as basis for creating bespoke development activities for councillors.

Learning resources

There is also a growing array of learning resources available to councils and councillors and most local councils will already have many resources to draw upon. However, learning and development should be based on a needs analysis and the learning objectives clearly described. The PSF provides a basis for conducting individual and organisational learning needs analyses. Once the needs have been identified the types of development opportunities available might include:

• member handbooks

• new councillor handbook

• induction training

• officer briefings

• guidance notes

• e-learning resource packs

• workshops/seminars

• external training and know-how

• work shadowing

• visits to other councils

• mentoring and coaching

• training

• learning needs analysis

• 360-degree review.

Over to you

This toolkit is a starting point. It can be used with new members to help them understand their roles as well as a base for member reviews and personal development planning. We encourage you to innovate and adapt the materials for your own use. Our ultimate aim is to support and enhance the performance of local councillors in what can be a complex and isolated role.

Useful contacts – update

Councillor development contacts in:

• Local Government Association Political Mentoring Toolkit – download from: http://tinyurl.com/btjk2l4

• SOLACE

• SEEMP

• Work Psychology Partnership: info@workpsychologypartnership.com http://www.workpsychologypartnership.com/