

# COVID-19: The Importance of Opposition Leadership

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& LGA Associate**

# Format & Approach

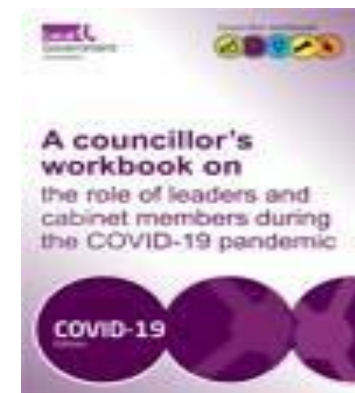
- LGA have produced two **pre-recorded webinars** on the role of opposition during the COVID-19 response & recovery:
    - The importance of opposition leadership
    - What effective opposition looks like
  - **Purpose**
    - to stimulate debate on the importance of the contribution opposition councillors & groups make
    - to support opposition groups in their work on COVID-19
  - **Format**
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# Leadership in an emergency

- Leadership is perceived as crucial to address & manage a crisis successfully
- The public look to political leaders for reassurance, quick decisions, excellent communication
- But what about opposition leaders and groups on councils? What roles should/are they playing?

## Political leadership in an emergency:

- Lead decisively
- Re-frame & adapt
- Recognising complexity
- Effective team management
- Collaborate
- Actively communicate
- Build resilience



# Central dilemma facing opposition leaders in emergencies

Adopt a co-operative, collaborative approach and lose 'clear blue water' between you & those in power?

Adopt a competitive, critical approach & be seen as undermining unity & resolve and 'playing politics' during a crisis?

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# ...the opposition continuum...

Incorporation	Collaboration	Competition	Confrontation
<p>Opposition group/s relationship to the controlling group/s is one of partnership to the point of incorporation</p>	<p>Collaboration &amp; co-operation set tone of opposition &amp; controlling group relationship</p>	<p>Competitive relationship between opposition &amp; controlling group/s</p>	<p>Adversarial &amp; confrontational relationship between opposition &amp; controlling group/s</p>
<p>Opposition groups partially or largely incorporated by controlling group/s</p> <p>Working as close partners. To outsiders it may be difficult to distinguish between the opposition party/s and controlling group/s</p> <p>These groups often achieve their goals through deals with the controlling group/s</p>	<p>Opposition group/s cooperate with controlling party/parties over key aspects of policy</p> <p>In other aspects – where there are policy differences – constructive opposition approaches are adopted</p> <p>Opposition party/parties may emphasise a value-set which is non-partisan</p>	<p>Opposition seek ‘clear blue water’ between their group &amp; controlling groups on key issues</p> <p>Competition is not hostile or adversarial in style</p> <p>Production of alternative policies, budgets, manifestos</p> <p>Wide use of opposition strategies &amp; platforms but scrutiny not used as opposition platform</p>	<p>Routine &amp; vocal opposition to controlling group decisions &amp; policies</p> <p>All internal &amp; external platforms used to further opposition e.g. using scrutiny internally &amp; the media externally</p> <p>Production of alternative policies, budgets, manifestos</p>

Source: Dr Stephanie Snape, New Leadership Foundation

# Restrictions & new relationships during COVID-19

## Restrictions to opposition role

- emergency powers in place
- many meetings in March-May cancelled/postponed
- changed officer-member relations e.g. one email ‘entry’ to officer side re case work & other queries

## Diversity in initial experiences

- variation across authorities in opposition group experiences, access & involvement
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# Role of Opposition 1

***Democracy demands  
an opposition party***

**Ben Manski**

***Democracy can only be measured  
on the existence of an opposition***

**Paul Henningsen**

- Provide 'checks & balance' on executive powers – key element of local democracy
  - Provide challenge & contestability to the development & implementation of council policy
  - Asking powerful questions which probe controlling group/s policies & delivery
  - Hold controlling group/s to account publicly & visibly
  - Holding individual executive members/cabinet members to account
  - Monitor effective implementation of policy
  - Improving policy & decision-making
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# Role of Opposition 2

- Propose amendments to council policy
- Develop alternative policies & budgets
- Ensure controlling group/s work in the best interest of the residents and other communities
- Ensure controlling group/s work across the whole authority area
- Advocating for the communities the opposition represent
- Amplifying voices of parts of community not often heard
- Scrutinising the impact of national government policy on local councils

**Which of these are appropriate or inappropriate for local opposition groups during the COVID-19 response?**

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# COVID-19: Role of opposition

**All of the opposition roles are relevant for example...**

- Emergency powers concentrates decision-making powers further – could be argued that increases importance of active opposition
  - Monitoring implementation of policy is a key role during response to an emergency
  - Asking powerful, probing questions can be an effective opposition approach during an emergency
  - Given that political geography can be marked in local politics, advocating for opposition communities & groups could be critical
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# Reflection exercise: the opposition group

Consider the following questions:

1. How has your opposition group been impacted by your council's COVID-19 response?
  2. How has your opposition group responded?
  3. What challenges have the group faced?
  4. What opportunities have presented themselves?
  5. What resources can you call on as a group?
  6. What has your group learnt about opposition during COVID-19?
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# Reflection exercise: the opposition leader/councillor

Consider the following questions:

1. How has your role as opposition group leader/councillor been impacted by your council's COVID-19 response?
  2. How have you responded?
  3. What challenges have you faced?
  4. What opportunities have presented themselves?
  5. What have you learnt as an opposition group leader/councillor?
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