

Leadership Essentials impact survey report

October 2018



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Contents

- Contents..... 3
- Summary..... 4
 - Methodology..... 4
 - Results 4
- Introduction 5
- Methodology..... 5
- Feedback on the Leadership Essentials course 6
- Annex A: Questionnaire.....11

Summary

During 2018, the Local Government Association (LGA) conducted a survey of councillors who had completed one or more Leadership Essentials courses within the preceding five to ten months, in order to gauge the extent to which the course had had a lasting impact on them. The results will be used to help the LGA to continue improving and enhancing the training it offers to councillors across the country. The survey was administered in two phases.

Methodology

A total of 548 surveys were sent by email to councillors who had attended one or more Leadership Essentials course. A total of 165 surveys were returned – a response rate of 30 per cent. This level of response means that these results should not be taken to be more widely representative of the views of all Leadership Essentials attendees. Rather, they are a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents.

Results

- **Improvement in carrying out role:** Ninety two per cent of respondents said that attending the Leadership Essentials course had helped them improve the way they carried out their role, to either a great or moderate extent.
- **Role progression/taking on additional responsibilities:** Thirty one per cent of respondents said they had either progressed to a new role or taken on additional responsibilities and a further 10 per cent expected to do so soon. Fifty five per cent intended to maintain their current role and responsibilities.
- **Impact on progress:** Eighty two percent of the 51 respondents who had progressed to a new role or taken on additional roles and responsibilities since attending the Leadership Essentials course thought their participation in the course had had a positive impact on their ability to make such progress.

Introduction

During 2018, the Local Government Association (LGA) conducted a survey of councillors who had completed one or more Leadership Essentials courses within the preceding five to ten months, in order to gauge the extent to which the course had had a lasting impact on them. The results will be used to help the LGA to continue improving and enhancing the training it offers to councillors across the country.

The survey was administered in two phases:

- Phase 1) February and March 2018: a survey of councillors who had completed a Leadership Essentials course between July and September 2017.
- Phase 2) August and September 2018: a survey was sent to councillors who had completed a Leadership Essentials course between October 2017 and March 2018.

Methodology

The online survey was sent to:

- Phase 1) 81 surveys were sent to councillors who had attended one or more Leadership Essentials course. A total of 31 completed surveys were returned – a response rate of 38 per cent.
- Phase 2) 467 surveys were sent councillors who had attended one or more Leadership Essentials course. A total of 134 surveys were returned – a response rate of 29 per cent.

A total of 165 surveys were returned (a response rate of 30 per cent). This level of response means that these results should not be taken to be more widely representative of the views of all Leadership Essentials attendees. Rather, they are a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents.

Please note the following when reading the report:

- Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question. The number provided refers to the number who answered each question. Please note that bases vary throughout the survey.
- Throughout the report, percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.

Feedback on the Leadership Essentials course

This section provides full results for each survey question.

All respondents were asked to what extent, if at all, they thought attending their respective Leadership Essentials courses had helped them to improve the way they carried out their role. Nine out of ten respondents (92 per cent) said that it had helped 'to a great extent' or 'to a moderate extent' (see Table 1).

Table 1: To what extent, if at all, do you think that attending the Leadership Essentials course has helped you to improve the way you carry out your role?

	Per cent
Great or moderate extent	92
To a great extent	48
To a moderate extent	44
To a small extent	7
Not at all	1
Don't know	1

Base: all respondents (165 respondents)

All respondents were asked if, since attending their Leadership Essentials course, they had progressed to a new role or taken on additional roles or responsibilities. Thirty one per cent of respondents said this was the case and a further 10 per cent expected to progress or take on additional roles or responsibilities soon. Fifty five per cent of respondents intended to maintain their current role and responsibilities for the time being (see Table 2).

Table 2: Since attending the Leadership Essentials course have you progressed to a new role or taken on additional roles or responsibilities?

	Per cent
Yes	31
No but I expect to soon	10
No I plan to maintain my current role and responsibilities for now	55
Don't know	1
Not applicable	4

Base: all respondents (165 respondents)

Respondents who had progressed to a new role or taken on additional roles or responsibilities were asked to what extent, if at all, they thought participation in the Leadership Essentials course had positively impacted on this progression – 82 per cent of the 51 respondents in this group said this was the case to either 'to a great extent' or 'to a moderate extent' (see Table 3).

Table 3: To what extent, if at all, do you think that participation in the Leadership Essentials course had a positive impact on your ability to progress and/or take on additional roles or responsibilities?

	Per cent
Great or moderate extent	82
To a great extent	35
To a moderate extent	47
To a small extent	14
Not at all	4
Don't know	0

Base: all respondents who had progressed or taken on new roles or responsibilities (51 respondents)

Respondents who said the Leadership Essentials course had a) helped them improve the way they carry out their role and/or b) had a positive impact on their ability to progress or take on additional responsibilities, to either a great or moderate extent, were asked to provide details of how the course had helped with this, including examples of things that they had done differently as a result. A total of 137 responses were received and a summary of the key themes is provided below:

- Greater knowledge and new ideas:** Respondents reported improvements to their knowledge of specific legislation and practice (e.g. planning, finance, children's services, commissioning, scrutiny and Prevent), along with increased knowledge of the councillor role and wider priorities within local government. The courses had generated ideas, filled knowledge gaps, challenged existing assumptions and enabled councillors to explore issues from different perspectives. This new knowledge was welcomed – not least by councillors new in post. A small number of councillors said their course had “confirmed”, “validated” or “reinforced” that their council was “doing things right”. For example:

“It helped me to see issues in other authorities and explore our model further with other councillors from all parties. When I did this training I had little knowledge of health and social care as I held the portfolio for Public Health. However, the knowledge from this course helped me to understand prevention for reducing the demand for health and social care and I now have all of health within my portfolio.” – Leadership Essentials, Adult Social Care

- Informed practice:** Respondents gave examples of changes to their practice including being “less dogmatic”, “better able to ask informed questions” and more able to use the correct language. There were also examples of councillors’ work being “reinvigorated”, as well as accounts of using learning from the course when working on boards/committees/panels – or when working collaboratively in other settings (e.g. being more prepared, participating at greater depth and remaining focused). Aside from personal changes, improvements to wider practice included improvements to a council's communications, committee management and overview and scrutiny agenda. For example:

“...I feel, as a scrutiny councillor, I am now much better able to ask informed questions. What have I done differently? I have asked my own local authorities about their preparedness for an emergency, when their plans are tested and if, for example, they include communicating with councillors and if they have identified shortfalls in skill sets or resources arising from their exercise planning.” – Emergency Planning and Civil Resilience Political Leadership Masterclass

- **Learning from others:** The sharing of practice among delegates and, notably, the authenticity and relatability of this collective learning was praised. This included hearing about the issues facing other councils and the solutions put in place – which was described as “eye opening”. The sharing of case study material was also commended for making speakers’ presentations “very real” and also in aiding in-course and in-council conversations. Also “of great value” was the opportunity to interact with councillors in equivalent roles and widen one’s knowledge of other leaders in the field. For example:

“I have been Lead Member for many years, but there are always new things to learn and the sector is constantly changing. The mix of external speakers, shared experience, networking and discussing different approaches to problems is extremely helpful. I find the workshops help to broaden my knowledge and help me to judge how well we are doing (or could do better) in our provision, as well as understanding whether our pressures/challenges are shared by other local authorities.” – Leadership Essentials, Children’s Services

- **Effective relationships:** More effective relationships between members and officers were described by some councillors. This included having a better understanding of the officer role, holding more efficient briefings, being more effective in challenging and supporting officers and being better at communicating and improving annual reporting. For example:

“Getting the feel of a wider range of ‘higher level’ political views and motivations, discussed on a mature...basis on the Leadership Essentials course, has I’m sure led to an improved ability, in my new role’s involvement in discussions with senior officers of council up to and including Strategic Director of service area, to tease out improved frank openness in those discussions.” – Leadership Essentials, Prevent

- **Increased confidence:** Some councillors reported experiencing a boost in their confidence levels, in relation to public speaking, working with officers, answering difficult questions – and also in their ability to lead and play a bigger role within Cabinet. For example:

“I was the only non-finance lead on the course but from my perspective as Children’s Services Lead and Deputy Council Leader it gave me more confidence in progressing other corporate issues, especially relating to investment priorities. I have been able to contribute more effectively, and earlier, to some investment opportunities and to respond to questioning from other members.” – Leadership Essentials, Finance Programme

- **Time for reflection:** The courses offered thinking time away from the “office” – in order to reflect on one’s own role and contribution therein, as well as time to “re-think” how services were delivered in their local area or to take a “fresh look” at the challenges facing one’s council. For example:

“It made me aware of some good practice going on elsewhere in the country, and for me to reflect on how the cultural offer can be improved and sustained in [my authority].” – Leadership Essentials, Cultural Services

- **Learning from experts:** Receiving advice from expert speakers was mentioned by some councillors, with particular reference being made to their policy and local government knowledge. For example:

“It helped me to understand Sport England’s priorities and the reasoning behind them. I was able to relay this information back to my Officers. As a result we have received considerable grant funding via Sport England which has helped us to improve and increase our leisure offer to our residents, and we are currently involved in a feasibility study to access future improvements. Our leisure centre staff have also been motivated to increase our ‘social’ leisure offer to try to improve the activity of a wider variety of residents.” – Leadership Essentials, Sport and Physical Activity

Finally, respondents were given the opportunity to add further comments about the Leadership Essentials course they attended – 97 of the 165 gave feedback. About one in ten of those who responded were critical in their remarks, focusing mainly on time issues (i.e. more time would have allowed for greater discussion and networking) and/or capacity issues (i.e. fewer delegates would have facilitated better engagement). A very small number said their course was not relevant to their role as a councillor or their area of the country.

About nine out of ten respondents made positive comments, focusing mainly on the quality of their course and/or the opportunity to share knowledge and learn from others, as outlined below.

- **High quality event:** Respondents commented on the impressive quality of the course they attended, for instance, describing it as “excellent”, “invaluable”, “engaging” and “thought-provoking”. For example:

“These [Leadership Essentials] courses are excellent and well worth the funding that I assume is provided by central government. Local authorities on their own would not be able to access such high quality training and I encourage the LGA to continue to offer these free and subsidised places, especially while local authorities have such restricted budgets.” – Leadership Essentials, Working with the Media

“Good course and good facilitators, very knowledgeable. Great course venue and good mix of councillors from other authorities. Will send my Resources Portfolio Holder next time the programme is conducted.” – Leadership Essentials, Finance

- **Sharing knowledge and learning from others:** Respondents praised having the opportunity to interact with other councillors (from a mix of locales and with a range of experiences) – particularly those from areas facing similar issues, in order to explore problems and solutions. For example:

“These courses are invaluable not only from knowledge gained from speakers but the informal conversations with other members from other authorities.” – Leadership Essentials, Cultural Services

“I think the LGA courses are excellent – they help to meet other councillors with similar issues from different parties and give an opportunity to explore problems and solutions. I was able to give information to others and receive information in return. This is really positive.” – Leadership Essentials, Adult Social Care

Other positive feedback mentioned by at least ten respondents included:

- **Leaders/facilitators:** Those leading Leadership Essential courses were described by some respondents as “well-briefed”, “really knowledgeable”, “first class” and as presenting “fresh ways of looking at things”. For example: “As with previous LGA

Events the presenters on this course were excellent.” – *Leadership Essentials, Collaborative Partnerships*

- **Helpful and worthwhile:** Some respondents referred to their course as being “very useful”, a “worthwhile experience” and “a good use of time”. For example: “Hope they [courses] continue as they are not only helpful but also demonstrate the value of LGA membership.” – *Leadership Essentials, Children’s Programme West Midlands*
- **Valuable learning:** Some respondents described their course as “informative” and “well-pitched”. For example: “The course enabled me to come away feeling much more confident about my role, gave me an insight into potential problems and solutions and indicated to me the right sort of questions to ask of my officers in order to feel on top of the role.” – *Leadership Essentials, Children’s Service Programme*
- **Enjoyable:** Some respondents said their course was enjoyable and friendly – particularly meeting other councillors. For example: “The friendly, open and supportive approach was very welcome as it encouraged interaction between all attendees. There is a lot of value [in] learning...from the speakers [and] fellow councillors... I like [the] openness and encouragement provided by the LGA and its staff.” – *Leadership Essentials, Fire and Rescue*

In addition to the above comments, three respondents who attended Children’s Services events suggested adding new material to the course. This included: a more ‘expert or advanced’ session looking in detail at specific areas (e.g. safeguarding or the independent reviewing officer role), material on understanding the National Schools Commissioner role, and a greater focus on schools and education in general.

Q5) If you answered 'yes' to Q4:

To what extent, if at all, do you think that participation in the Leadership Essentials course had a positive impact on your ability to progress and/or take on additional roles or responsibilities?

	Please tick
To a great extent	
To a moderate extent	
To a small extent	
Not at all	
Don't know	

Q6) If you answered 'a great' or 'moderate extent' to Q2 or Q5:

Please provide brief details of how the Leadership Essentials course has helped you improve or progress in your role, including examples of things that you have done differently as a result.

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Q7) If you have any further comments about the Leadership Essentials course you attended, please use the space below.

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