Local Government Chief Executives' Development Framework

The foundations

Local Government
Chief Executives'
DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

The Local Government Association (LGA) and Solace are delighted to present the first Local Government Chief Executives' Development Framework as part of the LGA's Sector Support programme 2023/24.

The framework has been developed through extensive engagement with current local government chief executives and other key stakeholders, including councillors. This engagement with the sector has helped us build a detailed picture of the complex set of accountabilities that local government chief executives hold and has resulted in the creation of this framework, which sets out the core foundations that underpin the chief executive role.

The framework includes seven core themes (the foundations), which form the basis of a new curriculum for local government chief executive training and a set of leadership standards for excellence that will help new chief executives address their development in three stages:

- acquiring knowledge
- gaining experience
- sharpening judgement.

Given the constantly changing environment that local government chief executives work within, we consider this framework to be a living document with the ability to flex and change over time.

We are keen to continue developing this framework and your feedback and comments are welcome. Please email your feedback and comments to us at **leadership@local.gov.uk**

Context — there's no better job in the public sector

The local government chief executive role is like no other — the range of the role is considerable, the demands of the role are stimulating, and the rewards of the role are real and tangible — after all, you will be helping a small but significant part of the UK become a better place in which to live, grow and do business.

We know local government chief executives are self-starters — highly motivated and talented individuals — who can take on a wide scope and remit of work. However, this should not prevent them from having support and development opportunities in place to support them to succeed in this highly complex and visible role.

Equipping new chief executives with a route map which sets out their key responsibilities and accountabilities and a strong set of foundations to start with and develop their role, is essential. Some may be appointed from a specific technical area of expertise. Others may be entirely new to the sector. Whatever their background, the Local Government Chief Executives' Development Framework will give them the best start in the role and equip them with tools to acquire knowledge, gain experience and sharpen their judgement in the role.

The Local Government Chief Executives' Development Framework explained

This framework has been developed to clearly define the standard **foundation knowledge and skills** required for the profession. It will provide a consistent approach for chief executives to develop within their role. The seven themes form the basis of a **curriculum** that will underpin a training and development programme for local government chief executives.

The seven themes have been identified as the essential, core requirements of the role, and each theme is accompanied by:

- a definition
- a set of professional **leadership standards for excellence** outlining the requirements for acquiring knowledge, gaining experience and sharpening judgement.

Through developing the framework, we have identified a gap in that there are no specialist courses or provision in place for local government chief executives on the foundational building blocks of the role and its essential responsibilities, and the likely governance and managerial challenges they may face. We recognise that, in some key responsibility areas, some specialised courses and resources do already exist — for example in emergency / contingency management and returning officer responsibilities. We do not intend to duplicate those. We also recognise that the chief executive role is much broader than the seven core themes we have defined; however, our current remit is to focus on the core responsibilities.

Local Government Chief Executives' Development programme
We will use this framework as the basis for the curriculum of a new programme, which we will develop and pilot in the 2023/24 financial year, aimed at supporting newly appointed chief executives to create a solid foundation to build upon when taking on the role.

The expectation is that they will continue to deepen their knowledge and experience across a broader spectrum of existing and emerging topics over time. This approach is set out as four pillars of support:

- early wraparound support
- a foundations training programme for newly appointed chief executives
- commitment to develop a gateway of accessible resources in one place
- ongoing support for continued development and sharpened judgement.

Acknowledgements

Seven core themes of the curriculum

The core chief executive role — lead council adviser, managerial leader, head of paid service

Managerial leadership

Politics and the political interface

Seven core themes of the curriculum

Resource management

Good governance

Continuous improvement

Public ethics

The core chief executive role

The core chief executive role

The core chief executive role requires acting as lead council adviser, managerial leader and head of paid service.

Coordination: design, delivery, coordination and integration of council functions

Management: management arrangements including accountability of functions and staff

Staffing: the numbers, grades, roles, appointment and discipline of staff

Advising the council: ensuring best advice is available to the council at all tiers

Elections: acting independently as electoral risk manager (ERM) and returning officer for local and national elections*

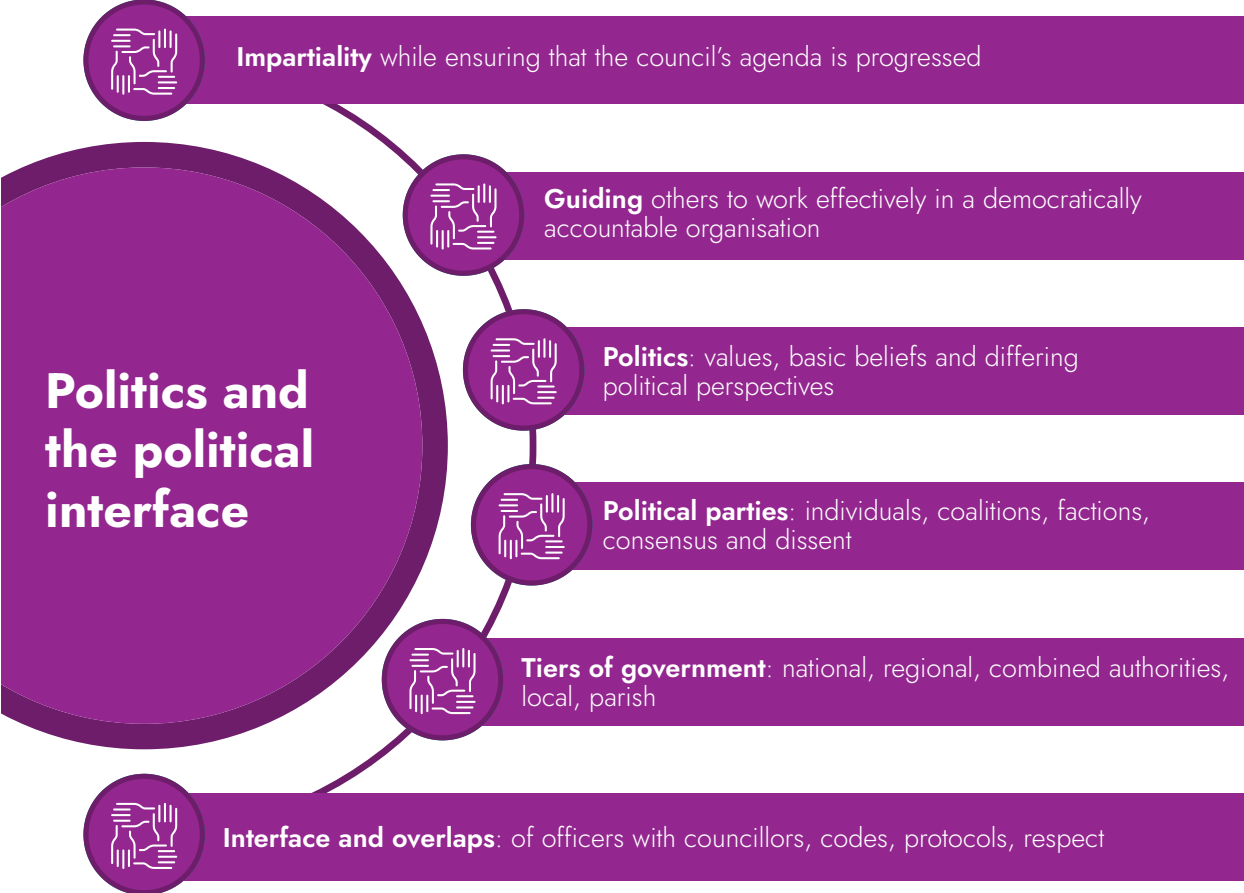**Emergencies**: preparing and leading response and recovery from civil emergencies

* In some cases, councils appoint officers other than chief executives to act as returning officer.

The structure of knowledge, experience and judgement across the core chief executive role

Acquiring knowledge	Gaining experience	Sharpening judgement
• Options for alternative service delivery models	• Continually examine alternative service delivery models for infrastructure investment and service delivery	• Provide well-grounded and impartial advice to councillors of the advantages and disadvantages of alternative models of service delivery
• Principles of organisational design and management and staffing accountabilities	• Discuss with staff at all levels their views on how career development, teamworking, and management can be improved	• Have a confident communication style that motivates staff, fosters team working and improves organisational effectiveness
• Workforce planning, strategies, and service-specific operational workforce plans	• Examine best practice among other authorities and sectors on workforce matters, including equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)	• Provide impartial and correct interpretation of the constitution's 'rules for debate', and develop fora for deliberative and emergent styles of dialogue
• Lead adviser to the council, coordinating advice from others, including the monitoring officer and the head of scrutiny	• Attend council meetings and relevant committee meetings	• Learn to lead calmly and with clarity of purpose in novel, highly visible and accountable circumstances
• Civil Contingencies Act (2004) and local authority responsibilities	• Attend personalised training in other areas, for example, civic contingencies, elections management, statutory services (for example, safeguarding)	
• Representation of the People Acts and relevant guidance from Electoral Commission and the Department of Levelling up Housing and Communities (DLUHC)		

Politics and the political interface

Politics and the political interface

Impartiality while ensuring that the council's agenda is progressed

Guiding others to work effectively in a democratically accountable organisation

Politics: values, basic beliefs and differing political perspectives

Political parties: individuals, coalitions, factions, consensus and dissent

Tiers of government: national, regional, combined authorities, local, parish
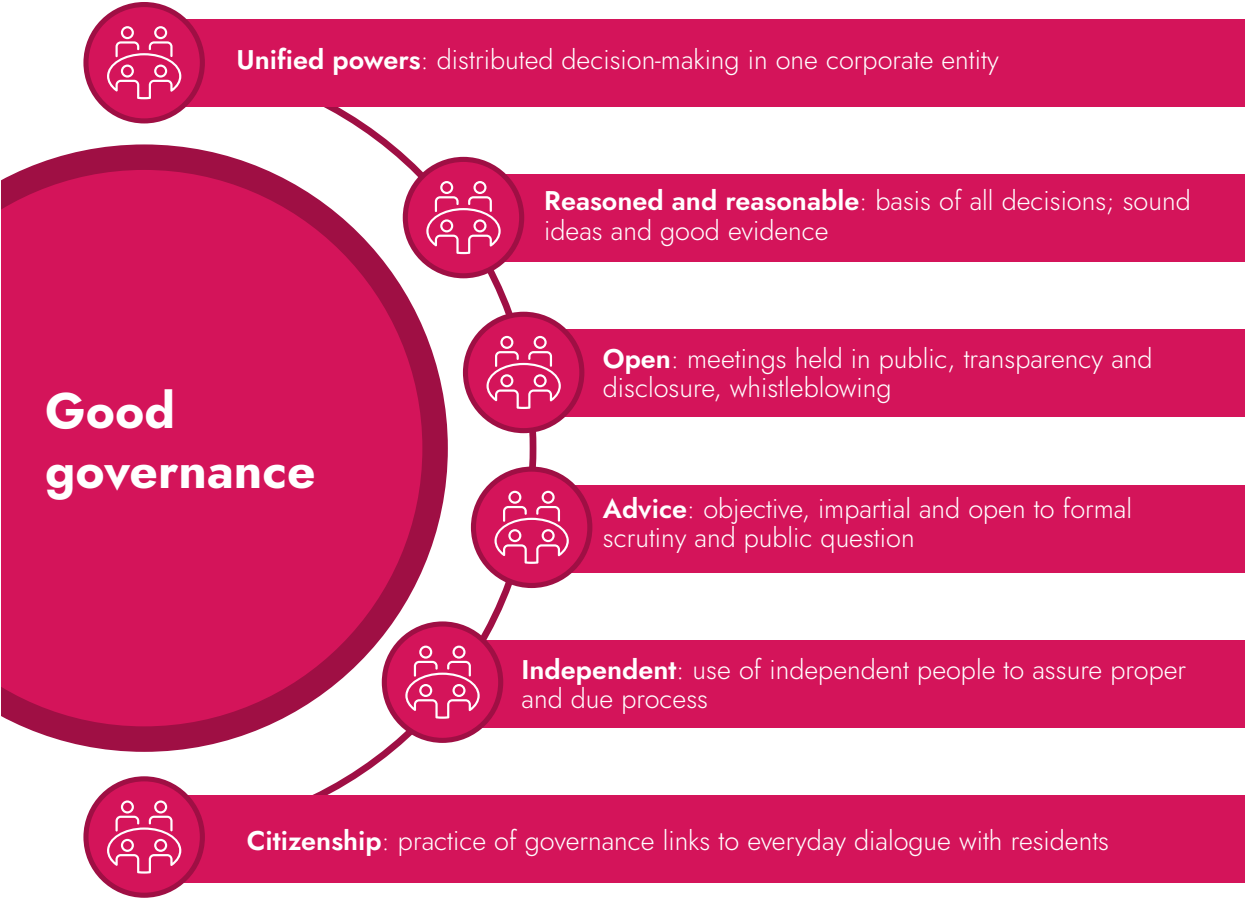
Interface and overlaps: of officers with councillors, codes, protocols, respect

The structure of knowledge, experience and judgement across politics and the political interface

Acquiring knowledge	Gaining experience	Sharpening judgement
• Understand the electoral basis of democratic legitimacy and community engagement in your locality	• Develop a street-level understanding of the local area (its wards, districts, boundaries, and connections)	• Develop a style, tone and timing of advice giving – orally and in writing
• Appreciate the differing and, sometimes, conflicting values between politicians and political parties	• In-depth and regular conversations with the council's political group leaders on the council's priorities for attention and action	• Advise lead councillors, impartially, of the best paths forward on an issue when there is strong contest between individuals / parties about what should be done
• Party politics: its structure, organisation, and its connection with local civil society	• Formal and informal discussions with scrutiny members and all members in their front-line community leadership roles	• Learn how to de-escalate tensions and de-personalise conflict between individuals and parties
• The political make-up of the council and its committees	• Discuss with local MPs, and other political stakeholders, their perspective on the health of the council's functioning	• Enable healthy political discussion, challenge and debate
• Political tensions: personalities, factions and power dynamics	• Regular meetings of core statutory officers and chief officers on changing political landscape locally and dynamics within and between parties	• Not all predicaments can be solved or resolved, working out how to move forward when people strongly disagree
• Tiers of government and political differences		

Good governance

Good governance

Unified powers: distributed decision-making in one corporate entity

Reasoned and reasonable: basis of all decisions; sound ideas and good evidence

Open: meetings held in public, transparency and disclosure, whistleblowing

Advice: objective, impartial and open to formal scrutiny and public question

Independent: use of independent people to assure proper and due process

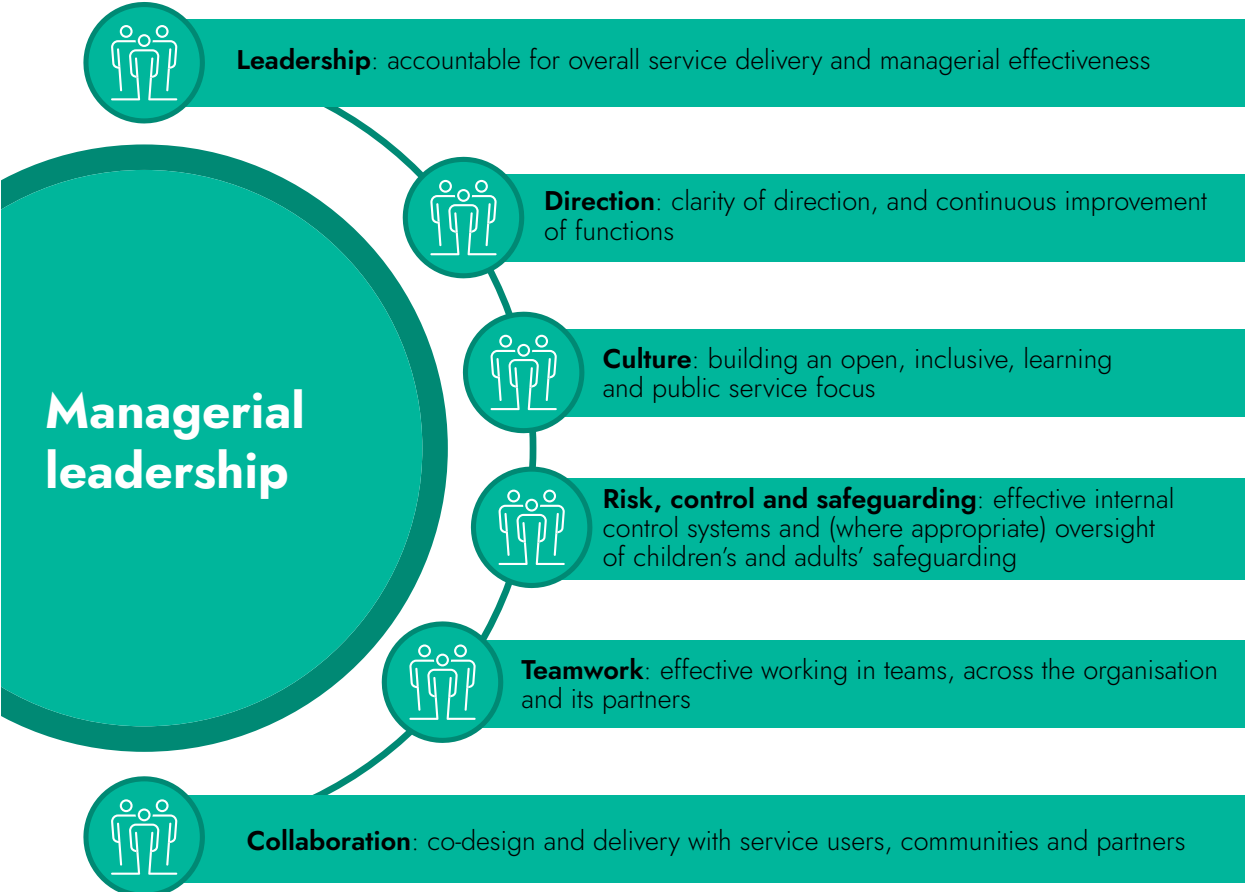**Citizenship**: practice of governance links to everyday dialogue with residents

The structure of knowledge, experience and judgement across good governance principles and practices

Acquiring knowledge	Gaining experience	Sharpening judgement
• Good governance principles in the corporate and public sector	• Conduct annual reviews of governance practice with councillors, advisers and residents	• Help councillors to improve their effectiveness in both executive and scrutiny roles
• Internal processes of scrutiny, formal 'checks and balances'	• Learn from good governance and practices from other councils	• Review instances of failure of due process (judicial reviews, serious complaints, ombudsman, Ofsted and Care Quality Commission reports) with legal support
• Proportionality rules for political parties and locus of decision-making (constitution and statutory regulations)	• Connect good governance practice through local public bodies and local community organisations	
• Responsibilities of councillors in their various decision-making, scrutiny and community leadership roles	• Produce clear, relevant and accessible annual governance statements	• Review the comprehensiveness and thoroughness of a sample of committee reports
• Role of the council's core statutory officers in assuring probity and propriety	• Work closely with the monitoring officer revising the council's constitution and other key documents	• Undertake an appraisal of the ethical considerations of all committee business on a rolling basis
• Audit committees, ethics panels and other assurance committees, such as safeguarding	• Adopt a resident's eye view of governance to ensure practice is meaningful	• Develop a personal reputation for dealing effectively with integrity violations of councillors and officers

Managerial leadership

Managerial leadership

Leadership: accountable for overall service delivery and managerial effectiveness

Direction: clarity of direction, and continuous improvement of functions

Culture: building an open, inclusive, learning and public service focus

Risk, control and safeguarding: effective internal control systems and (where appropriate) oversight of children's and adults' safeguarding

Teamwork: effective working in teams, across the organisation and its partners

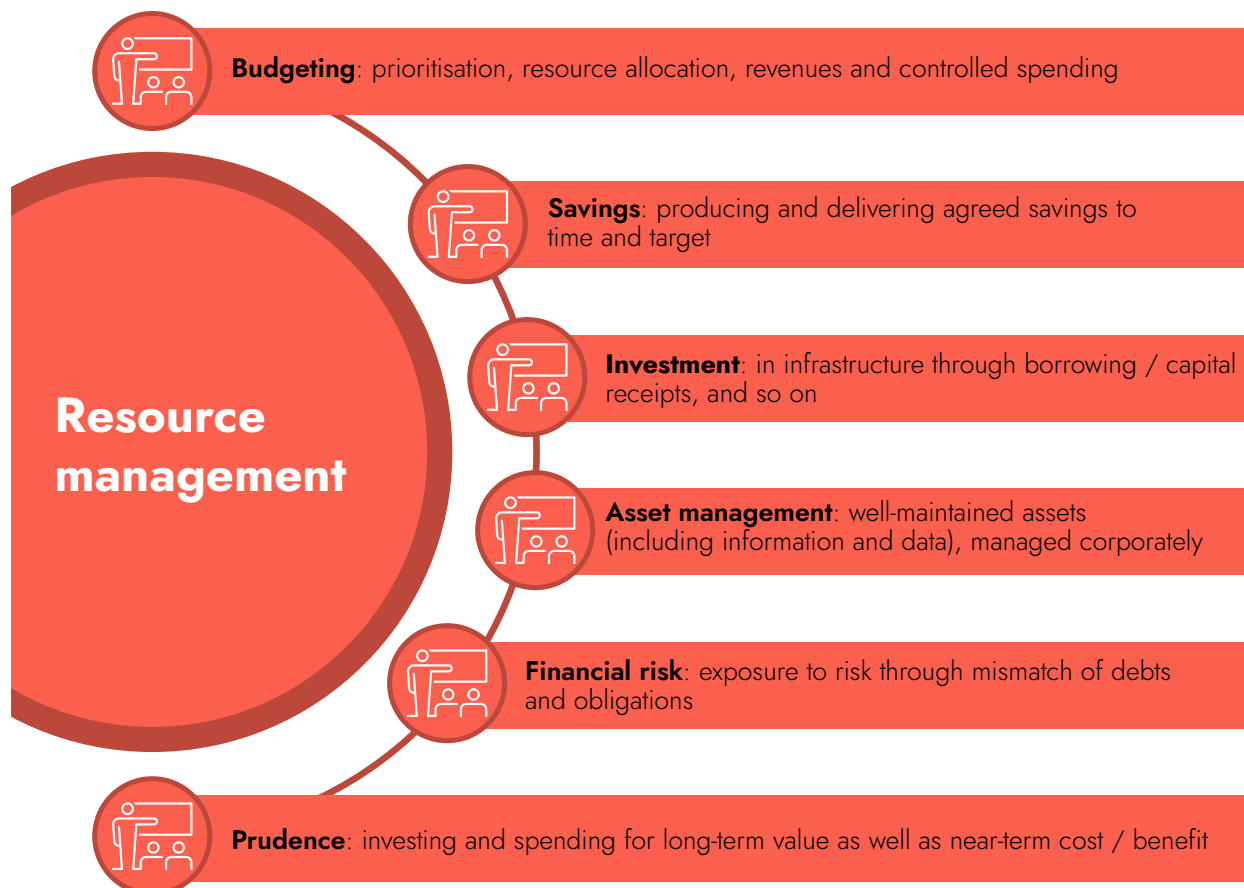**Collaboration**: co-design and delivery with service users, communities and partners

The structure of knowledge, experience and judgement across managerial leadership practices

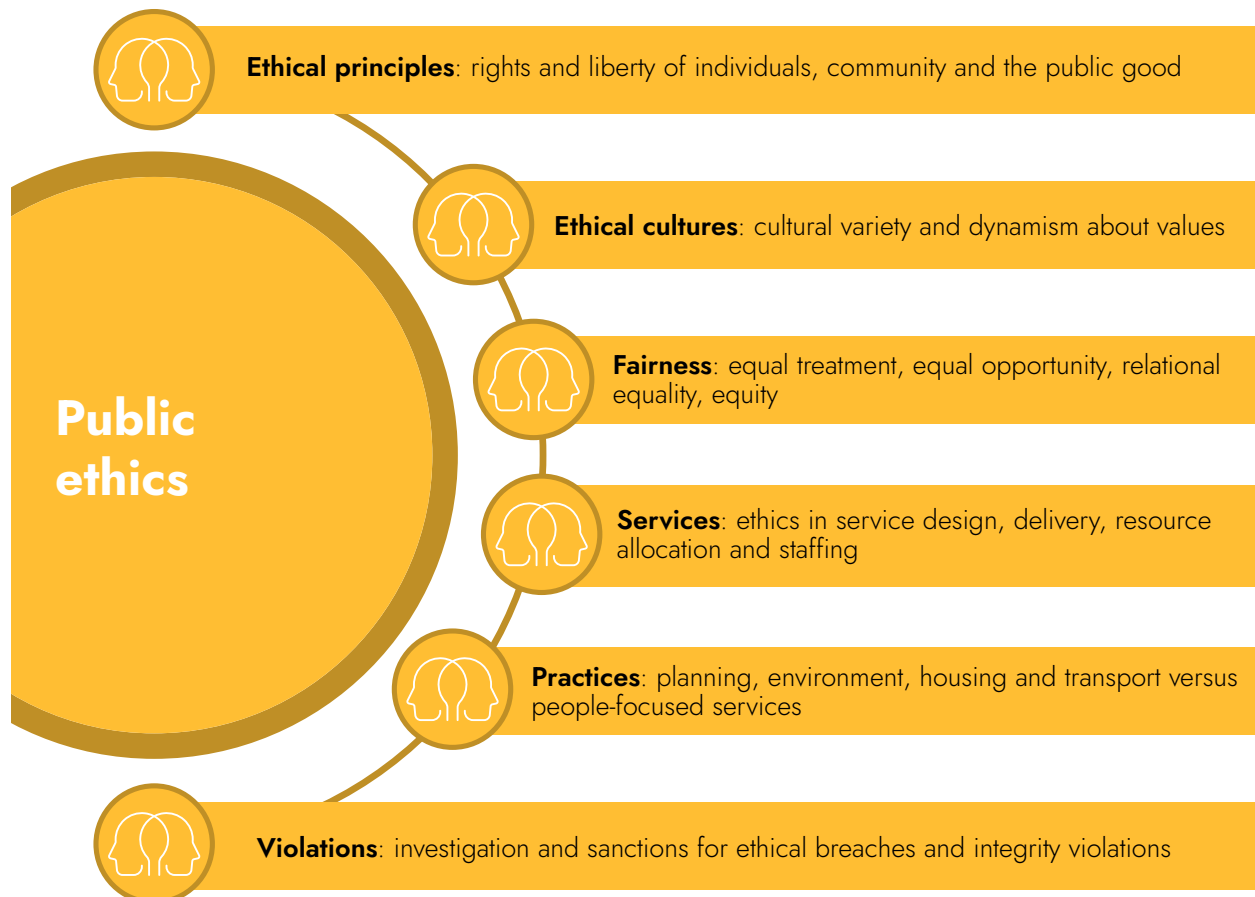| Acquiring knowledge	Gaining experience	Sharpening judgement
• The form and the day-to-day practice of internal management accountabilities • Assure effective teamwork and corporate working • Accountable for what, and accountable to whom? • Formal rules of employment and discipline for all staff • Service plans, council plans, and improvement planning • Create a positive culture of learning and improvement • Management grip and empowerment commensurate with risk and its mitigation through internal controls	• Develop clarity about the added value of management layers, and the specific contribution of top team management • Ensure that all staff can find ways of connecting with the council's overall purposes • Invest and value in staff training and development • Foster a positive managerial climate that supports and challenges staff performance and supplier delivery • Ensure that the roots of any dysfunctional management and toxic staff conduct are identified and eliminated	• Actively listen to staff at all levels: their concerns, their successes and their frustrations • Attend to the mood, the climate of the organisation — especially the extent of psychological safety for staff • Help managers and staff to be more relational and transformative in their connection with service users and with one another • Find ways to foster life-long learning and skill developments among all staff • Encourage the heart, foster hope, and apply individual consideration to all staff

Resource management

Resource management

Budgeting: prioritisation, resource allocation, revenues and controlled spending

Savings: producing and delivering agreed savings to time and target

Investment: in infrastructure through borrowing / capital receipts, and so on

Asset management: well-maintained assets (including information and data), managed corporately

Financial risk: exposure to risk through mismatch of debts and obligations

Prudence: investing and spending for long-term value as well as near-term cost / benefit

The structure of knowledge, experience and judgement across resource management practices

Acquiring knowledge	Gaining experience	Sharpening judgement
• Basic training in financial management – revenue, capital and investment / treasury	• Work closely with chief finance officer (CFO), deputy CFO and corporate staff on budget reviews and the annual budgeting process	• Appraise the perspectives and motivations of different stakeholders to the council's budget and its use of resources and assets
• Knowledge of investment, treasury management and key debt ratios	• Review overall budgeting approach with leader / mayor, deputy leader and CFO as well as with audit committee and lead scrutiny committee members	• Develop healthy scepticism (never cynicism) about the reported efficacy of existing and new services and investments – always enquire of evidence as to what works best?
• Policy and project appraisal – Green Book, investment appraisal (Orange Book), partnering with private sector suppliers (Outsourcing Playbook) embedding social value when commissioning (Social Value Act)	• Review the cost-effectiveness of service areas in comparison to like authorities, using benchmarking and external advisers where appropriate	• Learn how to differentiate between public goods claims (this service is for everyone) and the likely utility of the good to the variety of communities locally
• Sustainability, carbon reduction and policies designed for wellbeing of current and future generations	• Develop internal control systems for risk mitigation to the council's finances, assets and services and ownership / involvement with companies	• Help staff differentiate between near-term outcomes and intended longer term impact
• Outline of pension fund value, contributors, beneficiaries, actuarial judgements and overall strategy	• Appraise community and residents' perspectives on the council's use of resources and assets	• Develop a degree of expertise in equality impact assessments
• Personal knowledge of key budget management staff in service directorates and corporately		

Public ethics

Ethical principles: rights and liberty of individuals, community and the public good

Ethical cultures: cultural variety and dynamism about values

Fairness: equal treatment, equal opportunity, relational equality, equity

Services: ethics in service design, delivery, resource allocation and staffing

Practices: planning, environment, housing and transport versus people-focused services

Violations: investigation and sanctions for ethical breaches and integrity violations

Public ethics

The structure of knowledge, experience and judgement across the practice of public ethics

Acquiring knowledge	Gaining experience	Sharpening judgement
• Essence of public administrative law	• Work closely with the monitoring officer and legal team on basics of public administration law	• Develop a way to help councillors choose a way forward when there are multiple outcomes (for example, when a site in the middle of town can have multiple uses, such as a school, a pool, a housing block or a small- to medium-sized enterprise (SME) incubator)
• Foundations of public ethics: in service design, delivery, resource allocation, supply chain management and staffing	• Review three to five ombudsman cases of maladministration with injustice	
• Ethics across cultures: individualism or communitarian?	• Review the council's compliance with public sector equality duty	
• Utility and cost-benefit analysis, including compensation to those who may lose out	• Present to staff some challenging policy issues that raise ethical challenges	• When there are competing claims from different groups for the same public asset, develop an approach for weighing the claims of each group and choosing between them
• Normative or standards-based approaches to establishing service thresholds, and so on	• Good intentions are not enough; examine consequences — especially who gains, who loses?	• When senior directors are advocating different solutions to a problem you may need to add value to the overall professional advice to councillors to help a rounded judgement to be made
• The common good: what is it? — the ideas of social value and public value revisited	• Bring the voice of those with the most urgent and pressing needs into the town hall	
• The characteristics of a public good versus targeted services		• Sometimes ethical principles are not balanced, they don't involve a trade-off — you may have to make sure that several are taken on board at the same time

Continuous improvement

Learning and curiosity: collaborative, continuous and curious style of learning

Innovation: creative experimentation, trial and error, transform where feasible

Service re-design: customer-centred service design

Digital and artificial intelligence (AI): technology-powered, new media enabled, but human-led

Performance: reported metrics of relative cost-effectiveness to comparators

Impact and results: making a positive difference through impact and results

Continuous improvement

The structure of knowledge, experience and judgement across the practice of continuous improvement

Acquiring knowledge	Gaining experience	Sharpening judgement
• 'Best Value' — its origins and its application — arrangements that secure continuous improvement in the execution of all council functions — Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Best value standards and intervention statutory guide for best value authorities	• Work with senior directors, service and corporate staff on improvement planning and corporate planning	• Adopt the best ways to work with councillors and officers generating a culture of continuous improvement
• Business and management processes to secure continuous improvement in services through service redesign, innovation and digital transformation	• Examine organisation-wide learning and improvement in other organisations including private companies, not-for-profit organisations and other councils	• Prioritise those changes that directly impact on the experience of small numbers of service users, with those changes in process and practice that will affect cost effectiveness targets more generally
• Outward focus on community and the prior impact of public services	• Examine how many improvement targets have external metrics compared to business process improvement metrics	• "Every success feels like a failure in the middle" — can identify when to persist with those changes that have yet to deliver fully, and when to adjust strategy or tactics and change plans
• Research and evidence of comparative, normative and ipsative performance	• Adopt clear messages to focus everyone on a few corporate metrics that compare the council's targets and other councils' targets over time	• Appraise whether change requires transformation boards, top-down drive and strong programme management or whether it is more effectively delivered through bottom-up culture change
• The role of service plans, corporate plans, improvement plans, as well as assurance and re-assurance reporting	• Share your improvement goals and targets with others	
• Focus is on improvement for residents and service users, on better service impact and social results	• Understanding of service re-design, innovation and digital transformation	

Contributors

We want to acknowledge and thank everyone who contributed to our research, and we are grateful to everyone who has spent time helping us to identify the themes for success.

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Local Government Chief Executives' DEVELOPMENT

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