

The councillor mentoring handbook

A guide to mentoring
for member peers



Revised and updated 2016

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Introduction

Welcome.

As a member peer mentor you have been asked to put your skills and experience to work. This handbook offers support and guidance about the practicalities involved in mentoring someone in another local authority, developing your mentoring skills or the qualities that make a good mentor.

The handbook references a range of practical 'tools' and techniques, which you can access in full via the LGA website: www.local.gov.uk

We hope that you find this handbook helpful. If you have any questions or queries, or would like to make suggestions on how the manual might be improved please email: peersupportenquiries@local.gov.uk

What is mentoring?

It is important that we share common terms of reference. As a member peer you will be responsible for communicating the nature of your role and the benefits it can bring to other councillors in their work.

Since its origins in Greek mythology, when Mentor looked after Hercules' son as he grew up, the term has come to encompass a variety of meanings:

- apprentice schemes where the master craftsman would act as mentor to an apprentice
- an older, wiser manager with a young, high flying protégé whereby the manager coaches the mentee and makes sure they are given high profile projects so that other managers will see how good they are and promote them
- a friend or 'buddy' who listens while you talk about your skills and abilities, helping you think about your own development needs.

The role of a peer mentor draws on aspects of each of the above examples. In certain circumstances, mentors become privy to an individual's problems and feelings of frustration in the workplace and might feel obliged to try and help. This kind of informal mentoring forms part of a trusting, professional relationship but should not be the focus of your mentoring.

All member peers are expected to demonstrate the defined peer competencies in any role they play in improvement support work, but these particularly apply to mentors:

1. **Developing others** Capacity to share learning and develop others by providing a supportive and non-judgmental environment in which to work, demonstrating a personal commitment to continual development and learning.
2. **Working with others** Ability to work alongside others to achieve a common purpose through valuing the contributions of others and recognising and including diverse viewpoints.
3. **Providing challenge** Capacity to positively and constructively challenge individuals and groups in an effort to help them improve. Able to perform the role of change agent sensitively and inclusively.
4. **Planning and communicating** Ability to analyse requirements and co-ordinate efforts with others through effective communication and planning, and by providing evidence to support ideas.
5. **Political and organisational sensitivity**
An ability to understand and overcome political and organisational differences in an effort to work collaboratively with different stakeholder groups.

Your peer mentor role builds on your work as a peer; it offers tremendous scope to support individual/group role effectiveness and improvement and demands that you have an open-minded attitude.

1. About mentoring

Councillor mentoring, delivered by our cohort of member peers, is a key part of the Local Government Association's (LGA) programme of sector-led improvement, a way of ensuring that local councils and councillors receive the support they need to deliver services to the public as effectively as possible. Sector-led improvement is peer-led, which means that councillors and senior officers are helping each other to improve.

Sector-led improvement is based on the underlying principles that local authorities are:

- responsible for their own performance
- accountable locally, not nationally.

It acts on the principle that there is a sense of collective responsibility for the performance of the sector as a whole, with the role of the LGA being to provide tools and support, including commissioning member and officer peers to provide that support via regional principal advisers and the political lead peers.

Overview

Many councillors and political leaders have benefited from being involved in peer-based activity, by serving as peers themselves and by working with peer colleagues. Mentoring represents an important way in which we can further contribute to improvements in the quality of political and managerial leadership to build capacity and support, in order to increase the role effectiveness and performance of councillors at all levels.

Benefits

Mentoring aims to benefit all parties involved in the process including the mentor. The primary aim is to build the capability of the individual mentee so that all those involved in the outcome benefit – the specific local authority, fellow colleagues and the wider local government sector. The benefits for the mentor include further developing skills that will make them a more effective leader in their own council and other working environments, including developing new councillors and future leaders.

Common elements

There are common elements relevant to all mentoring activities. Each activity is designed to build leadership capacity and is based around an individual learning agreement, which involves a planned and defined approach and should result in clear outcomes. These outcomes should be robust and capable of review and analysis so that measurable progress of the individual is achieved.

Support and management

National and regional lead peers

The national and regional Lead peers (N&RLPs) help identify mentoring opportunities within local authorities where their help is needed to support and develop member support programmes. They also suggest how the range of mentoring activities can actively support the political leadership of the council.

Principal advisers (for the regions)

The regional principal advisers, with the assistance of their programme managers, scope out and negotiate the programme of mentoring with a local authority, and commissions the relevant LGA political groups to supply suitable potential mentors.

2. The mentoring menu

A member peer mentor may be asked to provide support in different ways, possibly working with colleagues representing other political affiliations, to provide support. Conversations with the relevant LGA principal adviser, programme manager and/or lead member peer will guide you as a mentor on the most appropriate starting approach.

The Political Skills Framework

The Political Skills Framework is a tool that can help identify the key skills required by a councillor to work effectively. It can be used to help your mentees to consider their individual strengths and identify those areas they would like to develop further. Once you and your mentee have identified the skill(s) that the mentee wishes to build upon, details should be put into the Learning Agreement (please see Appendix for an example form, and further copies can be downloaded from [\[add link\]](#). The Political Skills Framework provides a focus to the mentoring relationship and your mentor support will be measured against this. You can download the Framework from [\[add link\]](#)

Mentoring approaches include:

One-to-one mentoring

One-to-one mentoring by external mentors is available for leaders, executive members/ portfolio holders and experienced councillors facing particular challenges, such as moving to new executive or chairing roles. One-to-one mentoring can also be offered to new councillors following induction and in preparation for moving into positions of responsibility.

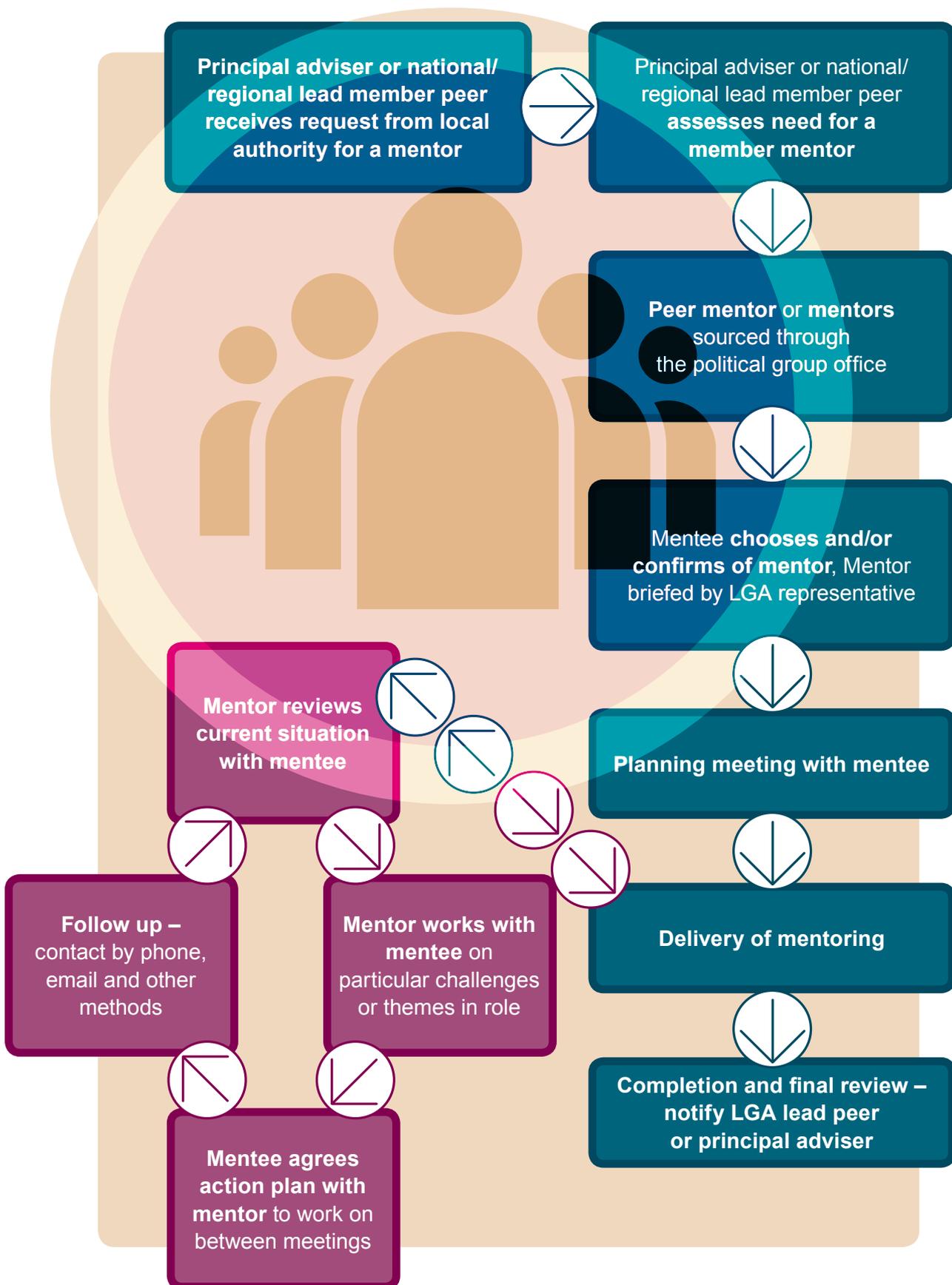
Role mentoring

Groups of councillors from within a council or from a number of authorities in similar roles are brought together to help develop their specialist role, for example as chairs of scrutiny, portfolio holders or committee chairs. This may involve establishing a learning set involving councillors from more than one authority.

Political group mentoring

This applies to all party groups and is particularly useful in situations of changed political control following elections. It is designed to help councillors at all levels cope with moving into control, opposition or into a hung council. Mentoring is also available for underperforming councils where group development would support overall improvement. This option is delivered in-house for whole groups.

The peer mentor commissioning process



3 The mentoring relationship

This section covers your mentoring relationship in more depth. It outlines the principles that underpin your work as a peer mentor and summarises your main responsibilities, skills and qualities required. It also outlines the practical arrangements for starting your mentoring activity. This includes information on planning and the paperwork to help you plan the agreed actions and review the progress you make with your mentee(s).

Mentoring principles

The councillor mentoring model has been developed around a number of key principles. These will help inform the evaluation the programme and underpin your work with the mentee to ensure an effective and productive relationship. Please remind yourself of these principles before you start.

1. Mentees must be in control of their own learning; the mentor's prime purpose is to meet the mentee's needs and benefit them within their environment.
2. The mentee's needs must be met within the context of achieving the council's corporate objectives, building leadership capacity and increasing their effectiveness within their role
3. The relationship requires confidentiality between mentor and mentee and should be based on mutual trust and respect.
4. The scope and structure of the mentoring will be mutually agreed between mentor and mentee.

5. Mentors should manage the mentee's dependency ensuring that disengagement occurs at an agreed time, in accordance with the mentee's needs, but within the scope and duration of the mentoring as agreed by the council and LGA representative at the start.
6. The mentoring relationship should balance both political partisan with objective support to improve the role effectiveness of the individual.
7. Mentors should develop a non-supervisory or performance management relationship with the mentee, it is not the mentor's role to instruct or check up on the mentee's work – rather to guide and support in their work as a councillor.
8. Mentors should support behavioural change where necessary to ensure that political standards, probity and ethics are observed.

Mentor responsibilities

The role of the peer mentor will involve an element of constructive criticism; you should understand the importance of the 'critical friend' ethos particularly where there is a requirement for you to challenge attitudes or behaviour. Providing sufficient opportunities within the relationship for ongoing reflection will also benefit the mentee and the relationship will be helped if mentor and mentee have specified and agreed the mentee's desired outcomes at the outset. The mentoring agreement will help mentor and mentee structure those outcomes at the start.

Mentor skills and qualities

These can be summarised as an individual who:

- is committed to making the relationship work at all levels
- listens as much as questions
- challenges as a 'critical friend'
- encourages reflective learning
- is motivated to feed back and pass on know-how
- is capable of identifying and expressing improvement options
- is able to provide advice on specifics
- is a guide and catalyst for mentee networking opportunities
- is a gateway to other people's experiences and sources of knowledge
- is respected and trusted.

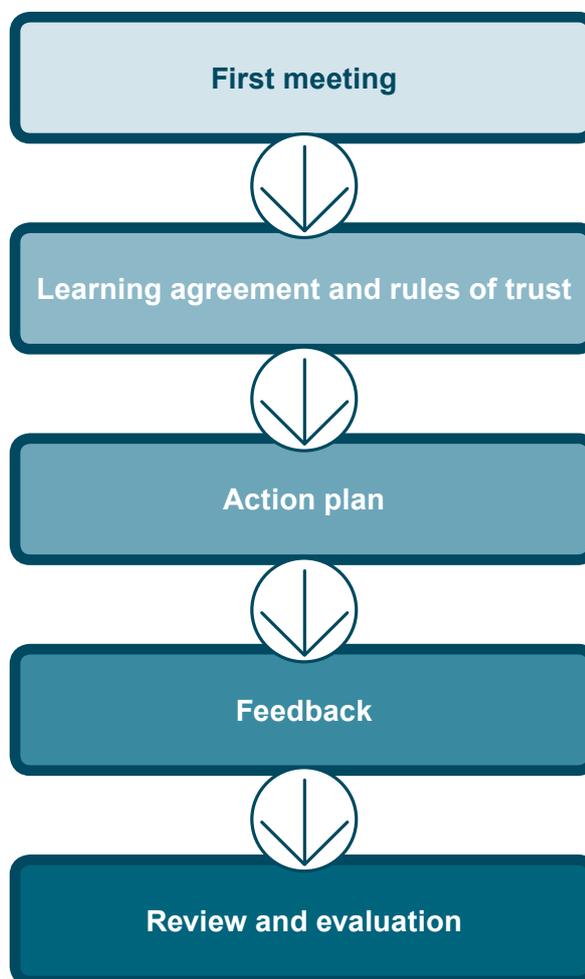
If you have received training in mediation skills and techniques, you can also use this experience to navigate hostile, complex and disruptive political relationships to the benefit of the council, party and individuals concerned.

Planning for mentoring

Careful planning and preparation for your mentoring activities is essential. Gathering as much information about the individual mentee or group to be mentored, their organisation and the environment in which they work beforehand will be of great value. The briefing from the LGA principal adviser, programme manager or regional lead peer will be key to gaining this information and intelligence and will take place soon after you are notified that you have been selected as mentor.

For example, newly elected councillors will have a range of mentoring needs including: getting to know who's who, dealing with officers, constituents and the media, coping with time management, balancing their workload, paperwork and ICT, and keeping proper records.

In addition to making the most of the time available to you, it will help you to prepare for the relationship and think about the desired outcomes before you actually start the activity. This preparation will help you to be more effective and might differ depending on the mentoring option you use. The mentoring relationship ground rules are:



(Please see Figure 1. Planning for mentoring: five stages)

1. First meeting

Your first meeting sets the scene and enables you to begin building rapport with your mentee. It is at this initial meeting that mentor and mentee should also identify the skills set areas that the mentee wishes to develop in order to improve their performance as a councillor. This should be considered using the Political Skills Set.

2. Mentoring agreement

The mentoring agreement is a document that mentor and mentee should use to at the start and during their mentoring relationship to ensure they identify and address what they need to. It should be established with an individual mentee or group and will provide a valuable framework and plan in which development and achievement can be jointly monitored during the stages of the mentoring activity. It establishes the benchmark against which the success of the mentoring relationship is measured.

The mentoring agreement will also help establish the rules of trust that should be inherent to your mentoring relationship and ensure that mutual respect is engendered and confidentiality maintained.

1. The mentor and individuals/groups will establish a relationship based on trust and honesty.
2. Any information obtained as a consequence of the mentoring relationship will be deemed to be confidential unless the parties involved give clear permission for information to be used outside the relationship.
3. It is the responsibility of the person/ persons being mentored to keep the mentor informed of changes of circumstance.

The Appendix to this document is a copy of this form. Blank, editable versions can be downloaded from the [‘Information for peers’](#) page on the LGA website. If you are unable to access this please ask your main political group office.

3. Action plan – mentoring activities

When you have covered all the ground rules and your mentoring agreement is in place you will be ready to proceed with the development of the action plan. It is the mentee’s responsibility to ensure that the plan stays on track and to take the necessary steps along the way to ensure that the agreed actions stay clearly in view. The route you take will be dependent on which mentoring activities you are involved in although there are common factors applicable to each action, for example, keeping to regular appointments and agreeing when the mentor support will be completed.

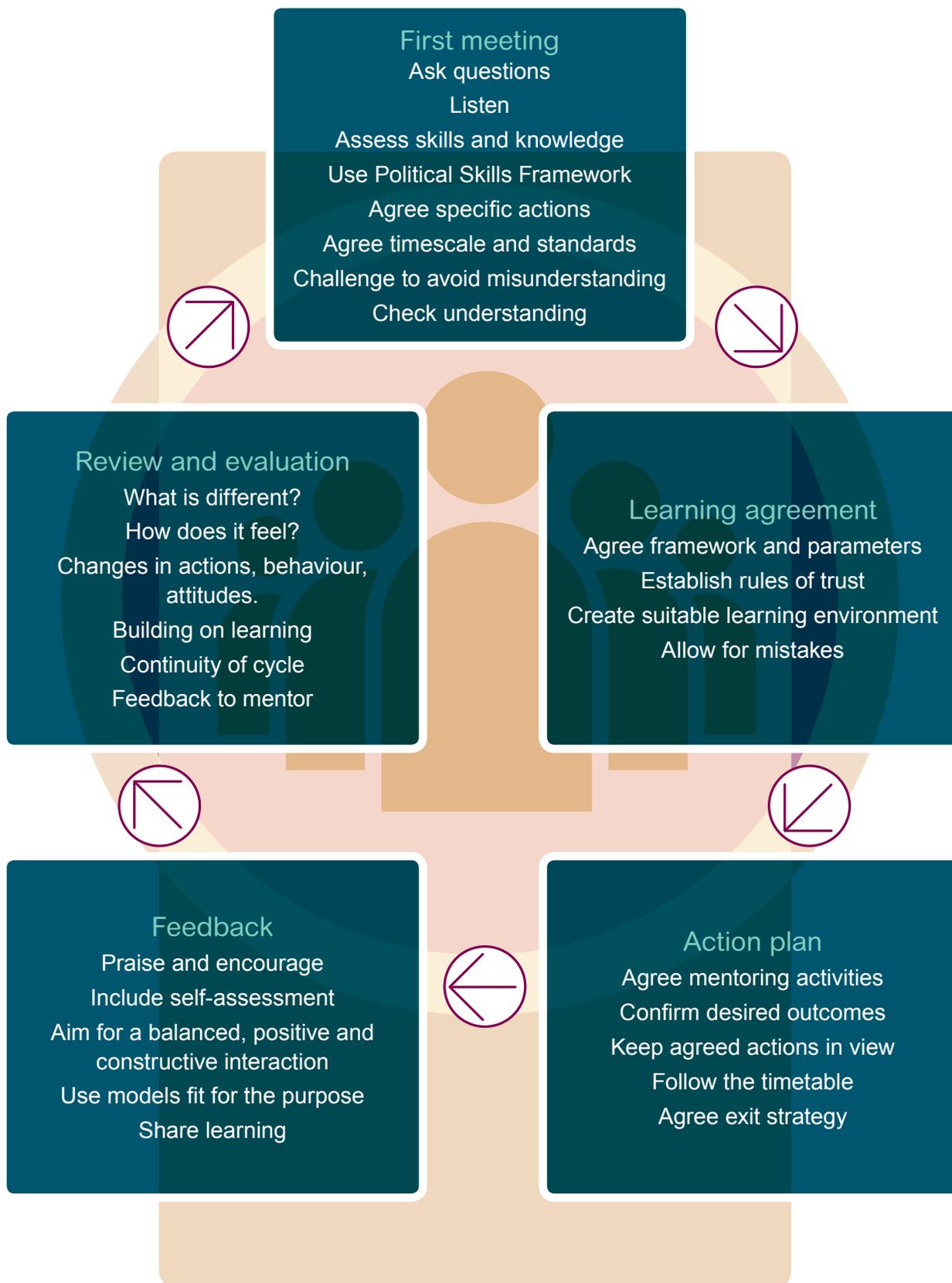
In summary, the action plan should:

- record when and where mentor and mentee/s will meet to set out the learning that all parties feel needed to support the development of individuals or groups and how that may be enabled
- plan and record the exit strategy at an appropriate time as agreed by all parties
- identify a set aside time for the mentor to seek mentee feedback on the process and reflect on the performance of both parties.

4. Feedback

Providing feedback to the individual or group you work with, both positively and constructively, is vital to the success of the mentoring activity. This ensures that you as mentor remain fully aware of how the mentee is finding the process, and if necessary alter your practice to meet their needs. Mentors should also work with mentees to do some self-assessment of progress, as well as reflect themselves on their own performance. An LGA principal adviser or programme manager may also seek mentee feedback on how things are going.

Figure 1: Planning for mentoring: five stages



4. Practical support resources

The resources referred to in this section give you a set of practical learning tools with which to plan, problem-solve, assess skills and analyse individual behaviour. This resource does not preclude you from using other techniques that you have found helpful in your mentoring experience to date.

Experience in practice

The role of mentor is specialised; you not only need to understand the roles and responsibilities of councillors, and guide them in their personal development, but also understand:

- the analytical tools that are available to help assess individual learning styles and preferences and how to use them
- which behaviours will help or hinder learning to take place.

Some councillors you mentor might have experienced using some of these analytical tools and techniques and/or questionnaires before. If so, they should be encouraged to share the outcomes with you. If the questionnaires are new to the councillor/s, you might suggest that one is completed as part of the 'getting to know you' process, in preparation for your second meeting.

The Kolb Learning Cycle, for example, is an accepted and well-regarded model that helps remind us of the importance of learning from experience. The concept of 'action learning', developed by Kolb, forms the basis of many of the techniques featured here.

The Learning Styles Questionnaire (created by Peter Honey and Alan Mumford) has proved to be one of the most popular questionnaires of its type in use today. Many councillors will have had access to this questionnaire in their councils. It divides the way that individuals learn into four learning styles:

1. **Activist** – someone who thrives from challenges and involving themselves in new experiences.
2. **Reflector** – someone who tends to be cautious, standing back and observing experiences from different perspectives and 'chews things over'.
3. **Theorist** – someone who adapts observations into sound theories.
4. **Pragmatist** – someone who searches for new and techniques to see if they will work in practice.

The Political Skills Workbook can help mentees to identify their development priorities in relation to the Political Skills Framework¹.

Once you have completed the Learning Agreement with your mentee and you start work on improving the competencies as agreed, you can use the models and questionnaires to help.

¹ http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=1b5968fa-ae90-49ca-a416-ed94a126721a&groupId=10180

Models and questionnaires

The models and questionnaires are best used in conjunction with the Political Skills Framework to help you decide which technique is most appropriate in a given mentoring situation. They each address a wide range of requirements in the mentoring relationship – the need for structured questioning and listening, behavioural analysis and ‘reality checks’, skills assessment, planning and problem solving.

You can use these tools and questionnaires in your mentoring work and relationships with mentee(s) or they can be used by the mentee on an individual basis to help identify opportunities for personal improvement. The web pages are listed in more detail in the bibliography.

The Kolb Learning Cycle shows that it is necessary to follow through on the learning and development process, building in planning and reflection in order to promote positive outcomes and reduce mistakes. The period of reflection during the ‘think about it’ stage in the mentoring relationship is important to ensure that agreed actions and progress are discussed and that failure to meet agreed learning objectives is avoided.

The Competence Model can be used to reassure mentees that we learn in incremental stages before we are capable of doing things automatically. Explaining the process by which we move from one level of competence to another can help demonstrate that how we learn is as valuable as what we learn.

The Johari Window is a similarly useful tool, which is best used in one-to-one sessions as a means of exploring areas of an individual’s behaviour that affect their professional effectiveness. It is designed to give individuals a picture of themselves in relation to others, so that they can achieve their objectives more readily. It can help explain why, for example, a councillor is not attaining the outcomes that he/she expects – clarifying in simple terms, the difference between conscious and unconscious behaviour and its

impact on working relationships. In addition to working together to identify conscious and unconscious behaviours that affect performance, it can be helpful for mentees to reflect on how they are seen and then compare this with an observer’s perspective.

The managing time questionnaire is designed to highlight areas where time management is an issue. Councillors inevitably lead very busy lives and time management techniques can help them to make the most of the time available and become more efficient. This may be completed by the mentee in preparation for a meeting with you and can help you identify the most appropriate approach for enhancing the mentee’s skills with respect to time management in particular and more broadly.

Radiant thinking or mind mapping, scenario planning or visioning.

Cost Benefit Analysis planning and problem solving techniques can be variously used to stimulate ideas, remove blockages in thought processes, find new ways of expressing ideas through plan for action and to evaluate advantages and disadvantages of a course of action in relation to expenditure, people and time.

The Political Skills Councillor Toolkit, based on the Political Skills Framework, will allow mentees to review their current skill levels and how often they need to use them. This will help them to identify their development priorities.

21st Century Councillor – a guide to the role of councillors in the 21st century and the skills and competencies they need.

5. Further reading

This section provides you with a list of reading materials and points of further reference that may support your work as a peer member mentor. We are not endorsing or recommending any of the publications or sites, but list them as potential sources of helpful information and approaches.

Arnott ,J, and Sparrow, J, The coaching study, 2004, Birmingham, University Of Central England, 2004

Buzan, Tony, The mind map book, London: BBC Books, 1993,

Buzan, Tony, Use your head, London: BBC Books, 1974; revised edition 1989.

Buzan, Tony, with Barry Buzan, The mind map, London: BBC Books, 1993.

Casey D, Roberts P, and Salaman G, Facilitating learning in small groups, Leadership and Organisational Development (1992)

Clutterbuck, David, Counselling adults – making the most of mentoring, London: Channel 4 Television, 1995.

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Clutterbuck, D, Learning alliances: Tapping into talent, CIPD books, reprint 2002

Coates, Jonathan, Managing upwards, Aldershot: Gower, 1994.

Covey, Steven R, The seven habits of highly effective people, London: Simon & Schuster, 1992.

Garvey B, (2004) The mentoring/counselling/ coaching debate. Development and learning in organisations. Vol 18, No. 2 . pp6-8

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Hay, J, Action mentoring, London, Sherwood Publishing, 1997

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Jeffers, Susan, Feel the fear and do it anyway, London: Century,1996.

MacLennan, Nigel, Coaching and mentoring, Aldershot: Gower, 1995.

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North, Vanda with Tony Buzan, Radiant reading, Bournemouth: Buzan Centre Books, 1993.

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Rogers, Carl, Carl Rogers on personal power, London: Constable, 1978.

Rogers, Carl, Client-centred therapy, London: Century, 1965.

Rogers, Carl, On becoming a person, London: Constable, 1961.

Sloman, M, Training in the age of the learner, London: CIPD, 2003

Stewart, Valerie and Andrew, Managing the poor performer, Aldershot: Gower, 1982.

Warner, J and Suff, P, E-learning. Managing best practice. London: Work Foundation, 2004

Woodcock, Mike, Team development manual, 2nd Edition, Aldershot: Gower, 1989.

Mentoring websites

Chartered Management Institute
Website offers a number of facilities including a regularly updated reading list.

Coaching and Mentoring Network
A resource centre also covering mentoring.

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
Has a dedicated learning and development section of the site containing up to date information on coaching and mentoring, e-learning and action learning.

Free Management Library
Further resources and thoughts about mentoring in a management context

Web link bibliography

Kolb Learning Cycle
www2.le.ac.uk/departments/gradschool/training/eresources/teaching/theories/kolb
University of Leicester, UK, web, accessed 25/8/16

Honey and Mumford Learning Styles
www2.le.ac.uk/departments/gradschool/training/eresources/teaching/theories/honey-mumford
University of Leicester, UK, web, accessed 25/8/16

21st Century Councillor work
<https://21stcenturypublicservant.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/21st-century-councillor.pdf> accessed 6/12/16

Political Skills Framework Workbook
www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=1b5968fa-ae90-49ca-a416-ed94a126721a&groupId=10180
Local Government Association, UK, PDF download, accessed 25/8/16

The Competence Model
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newISS_96.htm Mindtools Ltd, UK web, accessed 25/8/16

Johari Window
www.open.edu/openlearn/education/learning-change/content-section-3.2.4
Open University, UK, web, accessed 25/8/16

Managing time questionnaire
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_88.htm
Mindtools Ltd, UK, web, accessed 25/8/16

Mind Mapping and Radiant Thinking
www.tonybuzan.com/about/mind-mapping/
Tony Buzan, web, accessed 25/8/16

Scenario Planning and visioning
<https://www.odi.org/publications/5213-scenario-planning-learning-visioning>
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Cost Benefit Analysis
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_08.htm
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Chartered Management Institute
www.managers.org.uk
accessed 25/11/16

Coaching and Mentoring Network
<http://new.coachingnetwork.org.uk>
accessed 25/11/16

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
<https://www.cipd.co.uk>
accessed 25/11/16

Free Management Library
<http://managementhelp.org/leadingpeople/mentoring.htm>
accessed 25/11/16

Appendix 1

The mentoring agreement and progress review

Forms:

- mentoring agreement
- progress review
- final review

The mentoring agreement

This is the foundation for successful mentoring activities. It should be completed during the individual meetings and used to help create a positive relationship between the mentor and mentee(s).

The progress review form

This form is designed give a structure for the mentor to guide the mentee/s to:

- focus on the actions that have been taken place in the intervening period between meetings, by asking them to describe what went well and what had been difficult
- identify the key areas of learning
- identify with their feelings about the actions
- look at what actions they were unable to take and why
- concentrate on what they would do differently following the actions that they took
- draw up their next action plan.

The final review form

This is designed to help the mentor to guide the mentee/s to:

- reflect on the overall effects of the mentoring support in terms of supporting personal learning and development as well as general progress and key areas of learning
- consider what they would do differently as a consequence of the mentoring.

1. The mentoring agreement

The mentoring agreement is the foundation for successful mentoring activities. It should be completed during the individual meetings and used to help create a positive relationship between the mentor and mentee(s):

- identifying individual/group learning needs, aims and objectives
- setting out expectations and responsibilities
- agreement on what actions will support the mentoring
- identifying any practical resources required
- final review and reflection of learning objectives

Satisfactory matching of mentor to mentee is crucial. If either participant is concerned that after the first meeting the match is not appropriate, they should contact either their political group office or regional principal adviser or the authority's liaison person (in the case of the mentee) so that an alternative mentor can be found.

Completing the mentoring agreement

The mentoring activity will have been agreed within the context of the authority's circumstances and the wider member development. It is important when agreeing actions that both mentor and mentee understand what these are. If these have not already been communicated, the project manager and/or authority liaison person should be asked to supply details.

The progress review section should be used at relevant points during the mentoring relationship to support reflection and agree changes where necessary.

The final review section is to be completed by the mentor at the final meeting with the mentee.

In agreement with the mentee(s), the completed learning agreement and final review will be used to support the evaluation of the mentoring activity and discussed with the client authority.

Name of Mentor: _____

Name of Mentee(s): _____
(if a group, please give group name)

Name of authority where mentoring being delivered: _____

Type of mentoring being delivered: _____

1. Starting out

Context – relevant council objective/s:

Your current role/s:

Your motivation for being involved in mentoring:

2. Where you are now

Your assessment of those aspects of your role you want to strengthen or develop:

3. Where you would like to be

Your learning objectives, ie what you want to have achieved by the end of the mentoring

4. The action plan

What form will the mentoring take
(general elements/structure)

What needs to happen

Who will do what

When will the actions happen
(outline timetable)

What resources are needed

How will we know the objective has
been achieved (evidence of change/
outcomes). What will success look
like/feel like.

5. What we can expect of each other

Our rules of trust:

Timescales (when does this need to happen?)

How we will contact each other and how often:

Anything else we need to spell out:

2. The progress review

This form is designed to give a structure for the mentor to guide the mentee/s to:

- focus on the actions that have been taken place in the period between meetings, by asking the mentee to describe what went well and what had been difficult
- identify the key areas of learning
- explore the mentee's feelings about what had happened
- consider what they would do differently as a consequence
- adjust the action plan if necessary and plan the next phase.

1. Actions achieved – what went well and why?

2. Action not achieved – what has been difficult and why?

3. How do you feel about what has happened?

4. What have been the key areas of learning?

5. What might be done differently next time as a consequence of the learning?

**6. Do you need to adjust the action plan in the light of what has happened?
If so, please return to section 4 of the Learning Agreement to revise as necessary.**

7. What will you focus on in the next phase?

3. Final review

This part of the agreement is designed to help the mentor to guide the mentee/s to:

- reflect on the overall effects of the mentoring support in terms of supporting personal learning and development as well as general progress and key areas of learning
- consider what they would do differently as a consequence of the mentoring.

1. How do you feel you have progressed over the mentoring period?

2. Taking each of your development objectives in turn, what evidence is there of change? Both from your own perspective and also from what others have said or from how they have acted.

3. What have been the key areas of learning for you?

4. What might you do differently as a consequence of the mentoring?

5. Any other reflections?

Appendix 2



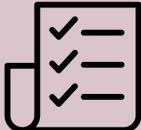
Cass Business School
CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Political skills framework

A toolkit for councillors

Six core skills for councillors

There are six core skill areas that apply to all councillors, with more for cabinet members and leaders. This toolkit focuses on the first six core skill areas. They are defined as:

Core skill	Characteristics
Local leadership 	Engages enthusiastically and empathetically with the community in order to learn, understand and act upon issues of local concern. Mediates fairly and constructively, encouraging trust by representing all sections of the community.
Partnership working 	Builds positive relationships by making others feel valued, trusted and included, and by working collaboratively to achieve goals. Maintains calm and focus, recognises when to delegate or provide support, and is able to take a long-term view in developing partnerships.
Communication skills 	Listens sensitively, uses appropriate language and checks for understanding. Communicates regularly with individuals and groups in the community, speaks clearly and confidently in public and makes sure that people are informed.
Political understanding 	Acts ethically, consistently and with integrity when communicating values or representing group views in decision-making or actions. Works across group boundaries without compromising values or ethics.
Scrutiny and challenge 	Acts as a critical friend by seeking opportunities for scrutiny and providing constructive feedback. Analyses information quickly and presents arguments in a concise, meaningful and easily accessible way.
Regulating and monitoring 	Understands and executes judicial role by following protocol, evaluating arguments and making decisions that balance public needs and local policy. Ensures progress by monitoring and intervening where necessary.

Positive and negative indicators

The skill set definitions show what is expected of councillors if they are to be effective and influential representatives of the electorate. We recognise that there is no 'one best way' to be a councillor – after all, we don't want councillors to be clones of one another.

While one member may approach the role of community leader in a different way from another, the comments of more than 350 members and officers have allowed us to identify commonly held views about what actions are associated with good and bad councillor behaviour. We have included these as positive, desirable characteristics and negative, undesirable characteristics for each of the skill sets.

No member could be expected to demonstrate excellent levels of positive behaviours all the time, but excellent councillors would be expected to demonstrate many more positive than negative characteristics. The key aim is to achieve a shared understanding of what constitutes excellent councillor performance and to help councillors and those who work with them to communicate and celebrate this with the wider community.

It's worth noting that at different times some skills may be more in demand than others. In extreme situations, some that would normally be regarded as 'negative' behaviours could be effective in the short term in getting the council out of severe difficulties.

Local leadership 	Positive	Negative
<p>‘The best...councillors already work closely with citizens and communities.’ Strong and Prosperous Communities, White Paper, volume 1, p.7</p> <p>‘Local councillors should be known by all the key local public services, community organisations and institutions. They should bind people together, broker solutions and be the advocate for their residents and their localities.’ LGA, People and Places, p.29</p>	<p>Engages with their community, canvasses opinion and looks for new ways of representing people.</p> <p>Keeps up-to-date with local concerns by drawing information from diverse sources, including hard-to-reach groups</p> <p>Encourages trust and respect by being approachable and empathising with others</p> <p>Creates partnerships with all sections of the community and ensures their participation in decision-making</p> <p>Media fairly and constructively between people and groups with conflicting needs</p> <p>Acts as a champion for others by campaigning with enthusiasm courage and persistence</p>	<p>Doesn’t engage with their community, waits to be approached and is difficult to contact</p> <p>Keeps a low profile, not easily recognised in their community</p> <p>Treats groups or people unequally, fails to build integration or cohesion</p> <p>Has a poor understanding of local concerns and how these might be addressed</p> <p>Concentrates on council processes rather than people</p> <p>Is unrealistic about what they can achieve and fails to deliver on promises</p>

Partnership working 	Positive	Negative
<p>The essential ingredients of successful partnerships are a common vision, shared values and mutual respect.' Strong and Prosperous Communities, White Paper, volume 1, p.95</p>	<p>Builds good relationships with colleagues, officers and community groups</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Focused on achieving goals by maintaining focus and coordinating others</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Knows when to delegate, provide support or empower others to take responsibility</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Makes people from all backgrounds feel valued, trusted and included</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Understands and acts on their role in building and shaping key local partnerships</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Remains calm and focused when criticised or under pressure</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Is prepared to assert authority in resolving conflict or deadlock</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>Habitually prefers to use status to exert control and impose solutions, rather than involve others</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Fails to recognise or make use of others' skills and ideas</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Finds it difficult to collaborate or work across the political divide</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Prefers to act alone rather than work as part of a team</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Often uses divisive tactics to upset relationships within their group, or council policies and decisions</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Defensive when criticised, blames others and doesn't admit to being wrong</p> <p>.....</p>

Communication skills 	Positive	Negative
<p>‘Councillors have a key role to play in ensuring that people’s concerns are listened to....’ Strong and Prosperous Communities, White Paper, volume 1, p.35</p>	<p>Regularly informs and communicates with their community using newsletters, emails, phone or local media</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Listens to others, checks for understanding and adapts their own style when necessary</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Creates opportunities to communicate with different sectors, including vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Speaks confidently in public – avoids the use of jargon or ‘council speak’</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Provides regular feedback to people, keeping them informed and managing expectations</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Speaks and writes clearly, using appropriate language</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>Slow to respond to others, communicating only when necessary</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Doesn’t listen when people are speaking and uses inappropriate or insensitive language</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Communicates in a dogmatic and inflexible way</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Unwilling to deliver unpopular messages, uses information dishonestly to discredit others</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Doesn’t take part in meetings and lacks confidence when speaking in public</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Presents confused arguments using poor language and style</p> <p>.....</p>

Political understanding 	Positive	Negative
<p>‘Political parties can...help sell the role as ‘political entrepreneurs’ – activists who, with the support of their parties, can work as informed advocates for their local communities and effectively support and challenge a range of local agencies.’</p> <p>Political Recruitment: How Local Parties Recruit Councillors, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, executive summary</p>	<p>Clearly represents the group’s views and values through their decisions and actions</p> <hr/> <p>Helps to develop cohesion within the group and good communication between the group and council</p> <hr/> <p>Communicates political values through canvassing and campaigning</p> <hr/> <p>Actively develops their own political intelligence (eg, understanding local and national political landscapes)</p> <hr/> <p>Looks for ways to promote democracy and increase public engagement</p> <hr/> <p>Is able to work across political boundaries without compromising their political values</p> <hr/>	<p>Lacks integrity, has inconsistent political values and tends to say what others want to hear</p> <hr/> <p>Puts personal motives first or changes beliefs to match those in power</p> <hr/> <p>Has poor knowledge of group manifesto, values and objectives</p> <hr/> <p>Fails to support political colleagues in public</p> <hr/> <p>Doesn’t translate group values into ways of helping the community</p> <hr/> <p>Shows little understanding of central government policy or its implications for council and community</p> <hr/>

Scrutiny and challenge 	Positive	Negative
<p>‘We want to strengthen the ability of local councillors to speak up for their communities and demand an answer when things go wrong.’</p> <p>Strong and Prosperous Communities, White Paper, volume 1, p.42</p>	<p>Identifies areas suitable for scrutiny and ensures that citizens and communities are involved in the scrutiny process</p> <p>Quickly understands and analyses complex Information</p> <p>Presents concise arguments that are meaningful and easily understood</p> <p>Understands the scrutiny process, asks for explanations and checks that recommendations have been implemented</p> <p>Objective and rigorous when challenging process, decisions and people</p> <p>Understands and acts on judicial role to meet legal responsibilities (eg, duty of care, corporate parenting)</p>	<p>Doesn’t prepare well or check facts and draws biased conclusions</p> <p>Too reliant on officers, tends to back down when challenged</p> <p>Fails to see scrutiny as part of their role</p> <p>Too focused on detail, doesn’t distinguish between good, poor and irrelevant information</p> <p>Prefers political ‘blood sports’ to collaboration: uses scrutiny for political gain</p>

Regulating and monitoring 	Positive	Negative
<p>‘The making of bye laws will be fully devolved to local authorities.’ Strong and Prosperous Communities, Summary, p.2</p>	<p>Uses evidence to evaluate arguments and make independent, impartial judgements</p> <p>Chairs meetings effectively, follows protocol and keeps process on track</p> <p>Follows legal process, balances public needs and local policy</p> <p>Monitors others’ performance and intervenes when necessary to ensure progress</p> <p>Seeks feedback for self and looks for opportunities to learn</p> <p>Understands and acts on their judicial role in meeting legal responsibilities (eg, duty of care, corporate parenting).</p>	<p>Doesn’t declare personal interests, makes decisions for personal gain</p> <p>Fails to check facts or consider all sides and makes subjective or uninformed judgements</p> <p>Habitually leaves monitoring and checks on progress to others</p> <p>Makes decisions without taking advice, considering regulations or taking account of wider issues</p> <p>Doesn’t recognise or address limits of own knowledge or expertise</p> <p>Misses deadlines, leaves business unfinished and lacks balance between council and other commitments.</p>



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