



TOMORROW'S COUNCILLOR

Walking Tall

Christina Dykes & Paul Scully



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BOB NEILL MP

More than any time in recent history, local government needs go-ahead councillors who think outside the box and aren't afraid of doing things a little differently. From managing tight budgets, to meeting the ever-growing expectations of local constituents, our elected members are operating in a new and complex environment that demands the very highest levels of commitment and competence. At various times, the modern councillor must be not just an elected representative, but also a community champion, a campaigner, a strategic thinker and decision maker – and sometimes all at once.



Right across the country, it is Conservative councillors who are already rising to these challenges and proving that strong political leadership delivers the best results for communities and for local economies. But there is more we can be doing as a Party to support our base better, and to help ready new candidates for office. From CCHQ, to council group leaders, to associations, this report offers a candid appraisal of where we can all improve while providing some practical steps we can undertake to forge a better relationship between every tier of our organisation.

This report also provides readers with a timely reminder that politics in every sense remains a defining feature of elected

“At various times, the modern councillor must be not just an elected representative, but also a community champion, a campaigner, a strategic thinker and decision maker – and sometimes all at once.”

council activity. It marks them out from the dry and unresponsive quangos that often incense communities. Our councillors must never be shy to articulate and implement the Conservative principles that lead them to stand for office in the first place.

I am immensely grateful to Christina and Paul for their ongoing work at the Leadership Centre and for the time they dedicated to producing *Tomorrow's Councillor*. It is a report that challenges traditional thinking and it will no doubt provoke further debate.

I look forward to hearing feedback from Party members and activists and working with colleagues across local government to put in place more robust political support for our councillors. The changes that follow will be incremental, but they will make a lasting difference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Neill'.

*Bob Neill MP
Conservative Party Vice Chairman for Local Government*



INTRODUCTION

This report was slow to mature. The original idea was to investigate how councillors were adapting to the challenge of the Prime Minister's Big Society. As our study developed it became clear that the majority of councillors are practising Big Society intuitively. They are well plugged in with their communities and are working hard to improve their communities. Big Society is happening.

However, what we also learnt from our studies is that there is something of a disconnect between the government's expectations of councillors and councillors' ability to deliver. Being a councillor is a political role and a vital part of our democratic structure. This political role has been undermined by successive governments, both Labour and Conservative. As a result councillors have lost confidence and assurance in their political role. It is leading not only to a weakening of political leadership but also to a crisis in recruitment of able prospective councillors.

Simply, if the government and the electorate want their councillors to be political then councillors deserve to and should be treated as politicians.

We have found that resources available to councillors to improve their knowledge and political awareness are meagre. More could be done to help them understand political challenges and rise to them.

We have also found, in common with others, that the road to being a councillor is not as transparent as it should be. Political parties control the entry to who will represent them. In the case of the Conservative Party this is through the constituency associations. We do not seek to challenge this. Associations play a valuable role in building the Party's presence in any one area and it is fitting that they should want a say in who should represent the Party. However if they control the access, then they have the responsibility of ensuring that the Party's needs are satisfied. The diversity of Conservative councillors is being openly questioned, so the time has arrived for each and every association to think hard about its own responsibilities for ensuring that the Conservative Party is seen to represent the broadest possible spectrum of the electorate. Associations should be given the tools to do this properly.

We became aware that rarely have the opinions of Conservative councillors been directly canvassed. As we worked on the report we spoke, canvassed, polled and worked with literally hundreds of Conservative councillors. In addition we have relied on our experience of working within the sector for many years. We

trust we represent the majority of opinion in this report fairly. Above all we sought to speak out for councillors. We believe their role is of fundamental importance to future positive development of their local places.

Just as we were preparing our final draft the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee published '*Councillors on the frontline*,'¹ its sixth report of the Session 2012-13. We welcome this publication as it concurs with many of our conclusions. What we attempt to do in our report is complement the select committee's report by giving a Conservative insight. Accordingly we have concentrated on examining the culture and experience within the Party as they affect councillors.

We are indebted to the many Conservative councillors who gave us their thoughts and opinions so freely and their time so generously. We are grateful to Councillor Robert Gordon, Leader of Hertfordshire County Council, then Chairman of the Conservative Councillor Association who encouraged us in the beginning, and Councillor Mark Hawthorne of Gloucestershire County Council and Councillor Theresa O'Neill Leader of Bexley Council, who opened their council groups to our scrutiny.

“Above all we sought to speak out for councillors. We believe their role is of fundamental importance to future positive development of their local places.”

Mari Davis, a leadership development consultant of no political persuasion, supported us in the preparation of this report. We are also grateful to Councillor Kam Chana who helped us in research and analysis, and Ben Walker who has been a councillor and political researcher in Westminster. We would not have been able to prepare or write this report without the support of the Leadership Centre and in particular Councillor Richard Stay who provided us with all the support we could have wanted.

**Christina Dykes
Paul Scully.**

1. 'Councillors on the frontline' Communities and Local Government Select Committee report 17 December 2012, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmcomloc/432/43202.htm>

tomorrow's councillor

42%

councillors surveyed or interviewed for this report are under age 50

24%

surveyed or interviewed for this report are women

5%

involved in this report are from an ethnic minority background

ABOUT THE REPORT

Tomorrow's Councillor: *Walking Tall* is a paper about Conservative councillors who serve on councils in the top two tiers of local government.² It investigates how government policies, particularly the key policy of localism, are impacting on their role and behaviours and how the role of councillor may need to adapt in the future. It looks at councillors as being more than a cog in a policy initiative but as political practitioners in their own right.

In keeping with the ethos of the Leadership Centre, our report concentrates on the context and circumstances of councillors within their political party. This report is exclusively about Conservative councillors. The report includes:

- The culture of the party as it relates to local government
- The relationship between the Conservative Party at the centre and Conservative councillors
- The selection of candidates for election
- Preparation and support offered to potential candidates and newly elected councillors
- On-going political support to sitting councillors

The political trinity is composed of policy, process and people. Very little attention is paid to developing capacity and capabilities in the third, the practitioners, the politicians. It is as if the human resource department of a large organisation is totally missing. We argue that insufficient attention is paid to seeing Conservative councillors as a political resource to be cultivated and managed as true partners rather than as subordinates to Members of Parliament.

“Little attention is paid to developing the capabilities of politicians. It is as if the human resource department of a large organisation is totally missing.”

It is the unquestionable responsibility of national government to ensure the overall economic well-being of the country, a national standard of public service delivery and the defence of the realm from international and national threats. However the coalition government's localist policy requires the government to be willing to devolve a much greater role to local councils for the planning of services and growth in their areas.

A successful transition to a more decentralised system rests on two factors: firstly that Whitehall is willing to let go of some direct authority; and second that local government is willing and, crucially, is equipped to respond. Neither assumption should be taken for granted.

A number of common themes emerged from the survey work undertaken for this report:

- The selection and assessment of councillor candidates could be more rigorous
- There is no systematic preparation for prospective councillor candidates before an election
- There is very little political input or training on political leadership for sitting councillors
- 76% of councillors we surveyed support the concept of voluntary continuous professional development
- The Conservative Party culture operates in silos; cross sector working between central and local sectors is disjointed
- Most councillors grasp the meaning of localism, but they have mixed feelings as to how it affects their own behaviour or the way the council operates

METHOD

The two writers have considerable experience of local government with some thirty years exposure to the workings of the Conservative Party. The report also has 139 further contributors; councillors from across the country whose views we have tried to reflect and do justice to in this paper. We believe this is the first time the opinion of Conservative councillors has been asked on any significant scale.

We sought these views by a number of means:

- An online survey in July and August 2012 - exactly 100 voluntary responses were received
- In depth face to face telephone interviews with a further 39 Conservative councillors
- Comments on our website www.tomorrowscouncillor.org.uk
- Visits and further research undertaken in various places including Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire, Birmingham and Bexley
- Views were requested through a paper circulated by the Conservative Political Centre to Conservative councillors
- A special meeting of Conservative Next Generation alumni

2. That is county, unitary, metropolitan, borough, and district. Parish councils are not included.

14%

surveyed or interviewed for this report are from the West Midlands

8%

whose views are reflected in this report are from the North-West

12%

involved in this report are from the East of England

SETTING THE CONTEXT

The government is expecting much from councillors. On their shoulders rests the responsibility of delivering localism – the keystone in the government's ambition to encourage greater democratic involvement by returning decision-making to the lowest possible level.

With the harsh realities of the economic backdrop and a strong ministerial direction not to raise council tax, all councils are grappling with how to meet their public service obligations. With a view to encouraging the Big Society as well, the Prime Minister is calling for *"a different way of governing, a different way of going about trying to change our country for the better."*³ What the Prime Minister demands is a fundamental change in the way politics is conducted and received; a demand that questions the way councillors understand and conduct their business. A councillor reflected this change when he told us:

"I think people are hungry for a new kind of councillor – not an old school politician – who is representative of the council in the community. They want someone less concerned with position and meetings and more interested in actions and outcomes."
(DISTRICT, EASTERN)

In organisational development terms a change of this magnitude is a tough challenge. It involves a behaviour change in the way councillors operate, not just at an institutional level, but also on an individual basis.

"I think people are hungry for a new kind of councillor ... someone less concerned with position and meetings and more interested in actions and outcomes."

Policy diktat is not enough. To successfully achieve change on this scale, an understanding has to be reached on what is wrong with the present system, why it should change, to what, and how best that change can be achieved.

The work undertaken for this study has revealed that whereas most councillors understand localism, they are perplexed as to what their next steps need to be and there is little agreement on



With the Big Society, David Cameron is looking for a fundamental change in the way politics is conducted

3. David Cameron speech, 14 February 2011, The Big Society

tomorrow's councillor

14%

involved in this report are from the East Midlands

35%

surveyed or interviewed for this report are from London

13%

surveyed or interviewed for this report are from the South-West

SETTING THE CONTEXT

how these might affect councillors' behaviour or the way their council operates.

It is an irony which does not make the government's push for change any easier, that the demand for adjustment has come just when local government has proved itself to be the most successful part of the public sector. Faced with a front loaded 28% cut in their budgets over five years, local government rose to the challenge with innovation.

While central government increased by 3,000 full time equivalent employees in the fourth quarter of 2011, local government employment decreased by 33,000.⁴ Whitehall talks of structural reform while local government is delivering by reducing silo-thinking through partnerships, collaboration, shared offices and piloting of community budgeting.

John Cridland, Director General of the CBI, has pointed out that, *"Of the 353 councils in England, 219 are involved in at least one shared service agreement."*⁵

Local government is also pioneering new ways of tackling intransigent social problems such as problem families that has now found an echo in Whitehall's 'Troubled Families programme'.

Nonetheless, the financial position remains difficult. The anticipated fall in public sector net debt is now forecasted for 2016/17, threatening another year of reduction in the local government grant settlement.

Although ministers may argue that while reducing financial support from the centre they have liberated local government to enable them to raise a greater proportion of their budget from local initiatives, anxiety remains within the sector that there will be a shortfall between grant reduction and the ability to realise new sources of local revenue.

Some councils are tackling the concern with vigour and determination, though too many other councils are not showing the political leadership that is needed to overcome institutional inertia. What is needed to instil confidence and increase capacity is an ability to exchange ideas and share good practice between authorities, so that best practice can be shared and tested by peer review.

Recommendation: The Party should review the information that is supplied to councillors to ensure that it is timely, easy to access and there is space for free exchange of ideas.



John Cridland, Director General of the CBI notes how councils are working together to become more efficient

4. Deloitte/Reform publication 'The state of the State 2012' May 2012

5. John Cridland speech at LGA Conference, 27 June 2012

6%

surveyed or interviewed for this report are from Yorkshire

10%

whose views are reflected in this report are from the South-East

76%

involved in this report stated that they are Christian

SETTING THE CONTEXT



Eric Pickles recognises the changes made by local government in response to difficult financial times

Overall in recent years, the record has shown local government to be functioning well; resilient, experimental, responsive and dedicated to its core purpose of delivering public services. It has earned the praise of the Prime Minister who told councillors attending the 2011 LGA Conference, *"I want to put on record: I think you are doing a brilliant job in challenging circumstances... I know you are all grappling with some really difficult decisions."*⁶

"[Local Government] is the quickest and most adaptable part of our constitution."

Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, acknowledges that, *"Local government remains the friend of progress. It is the quickest and most adaptable part of our constitution."*⁷ An objective voice can be found in the

Economist which carried the headline, *"Long seen as plodding, Britain's local councils are now bold, ideological and on the march."*⁸

"Long seen as plodding, Britain's local councils are now bold, ideological and on the march."

The challenges for local government are not going to be eased anytime soon. Now that it is clear that austerity measures are not for the short term – perhaps lasting as long as 2020⁹, and with the spectre of another tight comprehensive spending review looming, the need for *Tomorrow's Councillor to Walk Tall* is all the greater.

6. David Cameron MP speech at LGA Conference, 28 June 2011: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speech-at-local-government-conference/>

7. Eric Pickles MP speech at LGA Conference July 2012

8. Economist 22 September 2012, 'Political Petri dishes': <http://www.economist.com/node/21563324>

9. Prime Minister interview Daily Telegraph 18 July 2012

tomorrow's councillor

4%

involved in this report have a religion other than Christianity

19%

involved in this report are agnostic or chose not to state their religion

48%

of the 18,158 councillors in England represent the Conservatives (pre May 2013)

CONSERVATIVE CULTURE

Too often, politics is seen as little more than a stream of policy announcements, but for policies to be successfully embedded there has to be more than rhetorical urgings, important though they are. Consideration has to be given to the working circumstances of those who have to implement policies. Organisational theory can help.

We do not argue for full time councillors; but the demands on councillors' time from a more demanding electorate and an increasingly complex political climate are such that we suggest that councillors should be given greater support as political operators. This sentiment was echoed in the select committee's report *Councillors on the frontline* which reported, "Without training and development, councillors' effectiveness and job satisfaction will suffer". Such support should come primarily from within the Conservative Party itself.

“Demands on councillors' time from a more demanding electorate and a complex political climate are such that councillors should be given greater support.”

Support offered at present tends to be fire-fighting and reactive. We argue for greater involvement of local government within policy making so that the impact of any particular policy can be assessed on local delivery at an early stage of policy formulation. In turn there needs to be a greater recognition by Whitehall, outside of the Department of Communities and Local Government, of councillors' political role. It calls for the Party to confront its centralist instinct and embrace a leadership style that is more inclusive.

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

An organisation's culture comes from its history, attitudes and practices. It is the sum of shared mental assumptions – sometimes explicit, sometimes not. In turn it shapes people's behaviours within the organisation and gives it its character. The culture of the Conservative Party has been shaped and honed through the continuous interaction of individual contribution, philosophical interpretation and the passage of time and events. It is worth a brief look at the historical development of each party's approach to local government to understand why the centralising instinct of the Conservative Party has been insufficiently challenged over the years.

The Conservative Party, the oldest political party in the world, has its origins in the Tories of the eighteenth century. Originally a court party and then of landowners it was not until the mid-nineteenth century following the Great Reform Acts that it began to broaden its appeal. Arguably it was not until the twentieth century and the era of the Primrose League and the Young Conservatives, that it can be described as being anything near a populist movement.

The Labour Party roots lay in a strong urban proletarian tradition of co-operatives, mutualism and grass roots activism overlaid by the philosophical justification of democratic socialism. From the party's beginnings, the momentum has been from grass roots upwards.

What had been the great parliamentary Liberal Party of Gladstone and Lloyd George had been reduced by the mid twentieth century to a handful of MPs. Jo Grimond's original pavement politics led to the adoption of 'community politics', the hallmark of what has become the Liberal Democrat party. Community politics is, as a Liberal Democrat historian asserts, "a key factor in the survival of the Liberal Party and in the more recent electoral success of the Liberal Democrats".¹⁰



Liberal Democrat MP, Lynne Featherstone and colleagues demonstrate Liberal 'pavement politics'

While the parliamentary parties that we recognise today were coalescing, so was the structure of local government. The massive urbanization of the nineteenth century demanded the regulation of welfare and cleanliness, which in turn demanded a more efficient means of local governance. A series of Acts brought radical reform to the administration of local welfare; in particular the Local Government Act 1888 introduced democratic elections, incorporated boroughs and towns and created 'administrative' counties.

10. Dr John Meadowcroft October 2003 Liberal Democrat History Group

35%

of councillors in this report are backbenchers without a council leadership role

48%

of councillors in this report are cabinet members or hold a senior position on the council

17%

of councillors in this report are current or former council/opposition leaders

ABOUT COUNCILLORS

The power and authority that local government developed in the nineteenth century is well documented and epitomised by the building of impressive town halls throughout the country: Bradford, Birmingham, Ealing and Eastbourne being just a few examples. The career of Joseph Chamberlain in Birmingham proved what an able local leader could achieve.



Bagehot wrote about power being centralised in Parliament

Such independence was not to last. Once parliamentary processes and political parties took form, the House of Commons became more assertive. The Victorian journalist and constitutional essayist, Walter Bagehot noted that, “*the mere questions which are asked of ministers run over half human affairs: the Private Bill Acts...probably give the*

House of Commons more absolute work than the whole business both national and private, of any other assembly which has ever sat”.

¹¹ These private bills were concerned with legislation for local government, railways and matters such as divorce. By the mid nineteenth century these Bills constituted the main workload of the mid Victorian House of Commons; their volume doubling between 1852 and 1866.¹²

The centralising pull of Westminster grew apace so that by the early decades of the twentieth century the constitutional historian FW Maitland observed that “*every reform of local government has hitherto meant an addition to the powers of central government*”.¹³

The theme has been constant and intensified by the see-saw tendency that has recently led to local government being dominated by the main opposition party to the government of the day. In the late twentieth century the high spending of many Labour authorities provoked Mrs Thatcher's Conservative governments to impose changes.

The Conservative Campaign Guide in 1987 summed up the attitude: “*Like its predecessor, this government has been obliged to concern itself with the levels of local government spending. Current expenditure by local authorities...affects the overall burden of*

taxation in the economy...central government must act to ensure that local authorities discharge their functions with a proper regard to the wider national economic interest.”¹⁴

The tendency to increase regulation and decrease local government discretion continued throughout the last Labour governments as Conservatives became once again the largest party in local government.

The inclination to accept that councillors should be deferential to their Westminster colleagues is also not new. Walter Bagehot wrote disparagingly of local government, referring to those involved being of “*inferior ability*”. However he did credit local government for its part in the “*tradition of conflict*” which characterized English constitutional arrangements. He wrote “*in the struggle with the crown these local centres served as props and fulcrums,*” they were guardians of local sentiment.

Localism seeks to build on this tradition - reversing the centralising habit of national government of which only recently the editor of the Municipal Journal wrote, “*By now, local government should be used to being beaten up and having its school dinner nicked by Whitehall.*”¹⁵

PARTY RELATIONSHIPS

History can create a culture but behaviours maintain one. For the Conservative Party whose development and character were shaped primarily by events on a national stage, localism was always going to be a difficult concept to introduce and instil.

There is still more to do to achieve the political balance necessary for truly effective localism. Councillors need to be recruited, selected, trained and equipped to ensure that they can make the most of their additional responsibilities; politicians in Westminster need to let go and trust their locally based colleagues. For aspiring MPs a spell in local government may be good training for central government, but what is not acceptable is the view that a backbench MP necessarily needs greater competence than a senior councillor.

We have found that those who fail the Parliamentary Assessment Board were encouraged to consider a role in local government. Even though it is arguable that cabinet ranking councillors have greater executive responsibility than those of backbench MPs, there is no equivalent rigour in the assessing and selecting of local government candidates which we shall look at later in this report.

11. This and other Bagehot quotations from *The English Constitution* edited by Miles Taylor Oxford World Classic 2009 edition

12. *ibid* notes by the editor

13. FW Maitland, *The British Constitution* published, page 498

14. Campaign Guide 1987, page 327

15. Municipal Journal, 19 May 2012

tomorrow's councillor

17%

whose views are reflected in this report are at county council level

15%

whose views are reflected in this report are at district council level

35%

whose views are reflected in this report represent a London Borough

CONSERVATIVE CULTURE

One councillor made a simple but telling point in response to our survey, *"Ministers that come to [our council area] tend not to inform the Conservative group or even meet the group leader."* (UNITARY, YORKSHIRE)

One of our interviewees remarked, *"The political divide between central and local government is getting wider. I have absolute confidence in some ministers but others just don't engage and it's noticeable."* (COUNTY, SOUTH-EAST)

The sense of team spirit in the central/local relationship can on occasion be noticeable by its absence. Apart from the Communities and Local Government ministers who are assiduous in their attendance, senior ministers are often noticeable for their absence from the conferences of the Conservative Councillor Association. In 2011 the Conservative-chaired Public Administration select committee published a report on Big Society which was remarkable for failing to mention local government at all.

The official Conservative website provides details of Ministers, Conservative MPs, MEPs, Peers, MSPs, Members of the Welsh and London assemblies, but there is no equivalent listing of Conservative leaders in local government. This is in spite of the fact that the Conservative Party is presently the largest party in local government and thereby holding the chairmanship of the Local Government Association (LGA). Listing leaders, who take an active role in the LGA, would acknowledge the contribution that councillors make to sustaining Conservatism in communities.

An organisation's strength comes from being able to act in unison. Crucially this is needed for the successful execution of ambitious policies. In organisational terms the links between central and local politics within the Conservative Party are not sufficiently developed to ensure that this sort of concerted action is achievable. We would suggest that when there is an official visit by a minister whose department has a relevance to local government then that minister should be able to meet local Conservative councillors.

Recommendation: The Party should undertake a study on how there can be better co-ordination of effort between councillors, the parliamentary party and the central organisation.

LOCAL OR NOT?

When the Localism Act received Royal Assent in November 2011, Eric Pickles MP made a big claim and declared:

"Today marks the beginning of an historic shift of power from Whitehall to every community to take back control of their lives. The Localism Act pulls down the Whitehall barricades so it will no longer call the shots over communities – bug bears like housing targets and bin taxes are gone."

*"For too long, local people were held back and ignored because Whitehall thought it knew best. That is changing for good. Councils have their General Power of Competence and residents have a real power over decisions like council tax, town hall pay, planning, community buildings or local services."*¹⁶

The Localism Act has bestowed a range of powers on local councils and local communities that is designed to give them greater freedom and choice in delivering services: a general power of competence, the abolition of housing targets and regional strategies, the introduction of greater local planning powers, changes to the national planning guidance, and the abolition of the old standards regime. These all combine to offer councils greater flexibility. Moreover local authorities' budgets have largely been freed up by the removal of ring fencing and centralised bureaucracy has been reduced by the abolition of the Comprehensive Area Assessments, the Audit Commission and the Government offices for the regions.¹⁷

"[Localism] frees up the authority to make the best decisions for local people at a cost that we can sustain."

At the same time a power to veto excessive council tax rises, the right to bid, home swaps, the abolition of Home Information Packs, neighbourhood planning, the community right to challenge and the transparency agenda provides the electorate with increased ability to exercise choice.

Two of our respondents summed up a positive attitude shared by many councillors:

"It frees up the authority to make the best decisions for local people at a cost that we can sustain"; (LONDON BOROUGH)

16. DCLG Press Release, 'Power shift from Whitehall to communities gets underway', 16 November 2011,

17. A plain English guide to the Localism Act, Communities and Local Government 15 November 2011, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localismplainenglishupdate>

34%

questioned for this report are from a Metropolitan/Unitary council

82%

involved in this report have a positive or neutral view on the Localism Act

82%

have a positive or neutral view on what the Big Society means for local councils

ABOUT COUNCILLORS

and, *"In my portfolio I am already planning on a number of changes in the future specially enabled because of the Act. It will allow the local population and groups to have more involvement – should they want it."*

(UNITARY SOUTH-EAST)

Arguably more significant are the measures in the Local Government Finance Act 2012, designed to reduce local government's financial dependency on central government. The move to allow local retention of a proportion of business rates means that there is an added financial incentive for councils to drive growth in their area.

Alongside this, other financial levers have been provided such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF), the Community Infrastructure Levy and the New Homes Bonus to encourage councils to manage proactively their own finance.

Finally the creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships from 2010 in place of regional agencies is encouraging greater self-determination in the regeneration of local areas. Together these new reforms represent a genuine rebalancing exercise.¹⁸

However, there is still some way to go before the aims of the government are achieved. As the *Councillors on the frontline* report noted, Whitehall needs a more coherent approach to the possibilities of localism. The CLG select committee view that *"centrally directed localism is a contradiction in terms"* is one with which the majority of our interlocutors agreed.

"There is a strong argument for allowing councillors to engage more in the policy development process."

It is equally true however that localism carries a different value to different people. Local councillors may have set their expectations on the promise of devolution and see themselves as the means of that devolution: whereas the original promise behind the Localism Act was not to stop at local authority level. Instead the aspiration of the government is to see localism as a means to directly increase community activism.

Michael Gove's educational reforms, the Big Society, the incentives to freeze council tax, the introduction of elected police commissioners, local transport bodies and even the LEPs are all examples of pushing decision making closer to residents without being dependent on local councils.

For those councillors whose expectations are that they are the portal for further localism, this leapfrogging over their authority has left a sense of disenfranchisement. Our survey shows that some councillors understand the implications:

"to be less centralised ourselves",
(LONDON BOROUGH)

or *"We need to focus on what is important to individual communities."*
(UNITARY, SOUTH-WEST)

But others have become sclerotic on how localism affects them. 40% in our survey had no opinion or said that it was either *"too early to tell"* or *"very little"*. A councillor from the West Midlands summed up the confused thinking in the remark:

"[Under localism] we feel we have more power to act for communities than in the recent past."
(COUNTY, WEST MIDLANDS).

Our survey concurs with the select committee in *Councillors on the frontline* that there are councillors that find some of the government's messaging muddled. One of our interviewees summed it up:

"We are struggling to get to grips with what it means for us. The message isn't clear. There are mixed messages from government."
(DISTRICT, NORTH-EAST)

Local government reform will not be achieved at the rate the government expects if Conservative councillors are left blinking in the headlights. There is a strong argument for allowing councillors to engage more in the policy development process. This would lead to greater understanding between the sectors. It would also enable debate on the implementation of specific policies and the combined effect with other department's policies on the workings of local government.

Earlier, wider consultation with local councillors is vital. Too often before the LGA can comment, a policy is perceived by local government to already have been presented as a *fait accompli*. We suggest involvement to create a sense of ownership.

Recommendation: The Conservative lead on LGA boards should attend appropriate ministerial meetings in those departments that have direct responsibilities which impact on local government.

18. Localis, 'Can Councils Live Without the Formula Grant', Sept 2012, http://www.localis.org.uk/images/Localis_formulagrant_WEB.pdf

tomorrow's councillor

23%

of councillors involved in this report are still within their first four years of office

27%

councillors surveyed or interviewed are in their second term of office

16%

of councillors involved in this report are in their third term of office

THE VIEW ON LOCALISM

Our survey reveals the huge variety of interpretations of localism amongst Conservative councillors. Of the 100 councillors who took part in the on-line survey under half (39%) expressed a positive attitude to the opportunities localism offers; 18% found it was too early to tell; 22% had no relevant opinion; 9% thought localism was already happening; 8% thought the chief motivation for localism was budgetary and 3% thought it raised unrealistic expectations.

The Localism Act suggests the potential for a much more proactive role for local government. This is not just being active parochial community champions, but acting as the guardians of place ensuring the well-being of their local area in terms of economic growth, environmental and social concerns. In the words of one councillor:

"In many ways the Localism Act has had a powerful psychological impact in that it has reminded all of us about the importance of local decision making and problem solving." (LONDON BOROUGH)

Another councillor from a now Labour-run authority wrote:

"To me it is a really great Act that will really enable us to ensure [my place] gets better and better - obviously it can never be that great until we are in 100% control. I would like to think that it gives us the opportunity to innovate in terms of revenue generation, better services, and better town and cost savings." (DISTRICT, SOUTH-EAST)

On the positive side, Conservative councillors are finding that the Act is providing them with a green light to stretch themselves in ways that have not been possible previously:

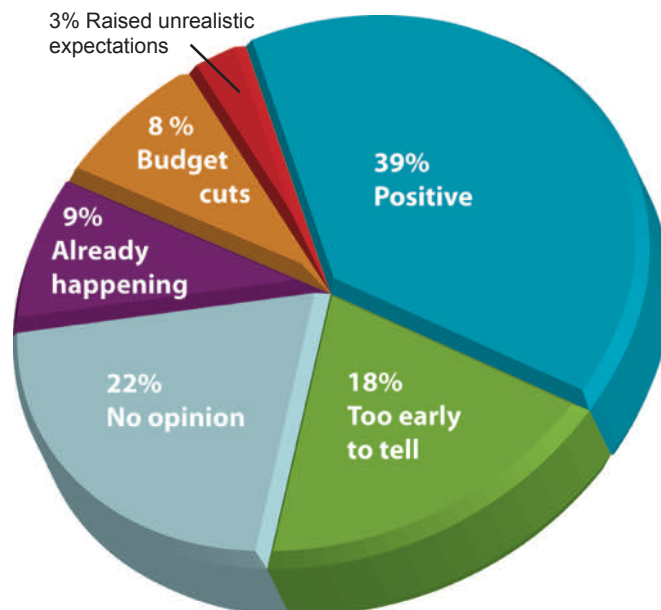
"The Act has given us permission to create local solutions and more freedom to allocate spend to meet local priorities." (COUNTY, WEST MIDLANDS)

More bluntly one councillor told us it was, *"a chance to remove the dead hand of Westminster from the wheel"*. (UNITARY, SOUTH-WEST)

We were told by one of our interviewees, *"Devolved power to permit local policy makes a better fit with the local community than a one-size-fits-all government approach."* (LONDON BOROUGH)

Many Conservative administrations can ably show what they are achieving in the name of localism. Our in depth case studies showed us some of the innovative ways in which greater local determination is being realised. This is particularly apparent in councils where there is stronger leadership from the leader of the council themselves.

Hertfordshire County Council has a cabinet member in charge of *Herts Local*, their branding of localism. Adeyfield, a neighbourhood in Hemel Hempstead, was identified as the lowest rated area in Hertfordshire for residents feeling that they can influence council decisions, so the council ran a successful participatory budget pilot in that area. This enabled 176 residents to decide on how a £50,000 budget was spent locally having heard 20 bids from individuals and groups.¹⁹



Councillors had a wide range of views on Localism

Our survey also shows that planning is the area

where most of our respondents felt localism is providing greater opportunities. The Community Right to Challenge, neighbourhood planning, the creation of local plans and the changing of the rules of predetermination were all quoted as examples of areas of which councillors are using to change their leadership style.

Many of the councillors wrote that they welcome the involvement of residents in decision-making through creation of neighbourhood forums, residents' groups, area consultative forums and other forms of community liaison. We heard too of considerable devolution of highways projects responsibilities and the potential of locality budgets. A councillor in the South-West explained how they were shaping their area through devolving budgets down to parish and community level:

19. Adeyfield Action "You Choose", <http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/case-studies/adeyfield-action-201cyou-choose201d-hemel-hempstead>

13%

of councillors contacted for this report are serving their fourth term

10%

of councillors whose views are reflected in this report are in their fifth term

11%

involved in this report have served twenty years or more as a local councillor

FROM COUNCILLORS

"My council gave councillors locality budgets of £10,000 a year to spend in their community over eight years ago. These have worked extremely well. Recently a new additional scheme has been introduced encouraging two or three parishes to work together to come up with a community project. [The council] has allocated £1 per head for every elector in these areas towards these schemes."

(COUNTY, SOUTH-WEST)

The rewriting of the standards system and the inspection regime were being appreciated for giving councillors more operational freedom. One London councillor concluded:

"There are very welcome aspects that we are using to change our mode of governance and also to modify our code of conduct."

(LONDON BOROUGH)

On the negative side there is concern among those in our survey as to whether communities wanted the role localism is assigning them.

"[Localism is] a chance to remove the dead hand of Westminster from the wheel."

A councillor wrote: "While I acknowledge the [Localism Act's] aims I am concerned that it takes power away from elected local councillors and will put it into unelected and singular issue people."

(LONDON BOROUGH)

A second view given is: "It makes the job significantly harder: whilst its objectives were sound, because of 'ordinary resident' apathy, the changes have generally just handed disproportionate influence to a small number of people who claim to represent the community but are answerable to nobody."

(LONDON BOROUGH)

One group leader in opposition simply said, *"It causes confusion"*.

(UNITARY, YORKSHIRE)

We also found that those in rural areas were concerned that parishes were not ready for the extra responsibility. Although we did not ask any questions about parishes, more than 10% of our respondents voluntarily forwarded their view that further downwards devolution would be difficult in practice as there is no effective apparatus to take the responsibilities.

A rural councillor told us: "Government is going too far in the change as a lot of parishes are not capable."

(DISTRICT, SOUTH-EAST)

Another said: "Many of my parish councillors have resigned as they have been asked to declare their business interests and those of their partners. This is a step too far. There have been rules imposed but no prize."

(DISTRICT, WEST MIDLANDS)

One highlighted an issue in engaging parishes to take on more responsibility in his area:

"[Localism] means a lot of aggravation from Parish Councils now. I tell them it's your chance to shape your community for your children for the future... They resent it as they are volunteers and being asked to do more. Generally they are negative."

(COUNTY, WEST MIDLANDS)

Some councillors remarked that their officers were hindering the transformation. This may be a consequence of leaving officers with too much responsibility for evolving a localist agenda. Council groups range from total distrust of the officers to being officer-led. One councillor in a minority council said:

"Officers [who don't like localism] carry on ruling the roost while finding us grand sounding roles that make us feel important."

(METROPOLITAN, YORKSHIRE)

Another said, "Officers treat it as a nuisance".

(DISTRICT, YORKSHIRE)

One of our interviewees explained when asked how localism was affecting his role:

"Minimal. It is difficult. Looking after the public has been an education for me. Members are agents for change. Officers are agents for consistency. We have to make sure officers have considered all the options. Not many members have enough experience to do this."

(COUNTY, SOUTH-WEST)

The frustration is palatable. Another comments: *"I have tried to bring in a free parking voucher scheme for residents but it is being actively stonewalled by staff. Localism? What localism?"*

(LONDON BOROUGH)

A councillor from a Labour controlled administration confessed that there was little move towards localism as: *"Our council is dominated by Labour and they simply do whatever they like."*

(UNITARY, NORTH-WEST)

From London, a councillor said that his council, also Labour run finds it very difficult to change its *"command and control approach"*.

(LONDON BOROUGH)

tomorrow's councillor

63%

thought overseeing/running the council or making decisions on behalf of residents is a key role

46%

believed that helping constituents was amongst their top two priorities

36%

considered the role of community champion as key to being an effective councillor

THE VIEW ON LOCALISM

Another London councillor in opposition said, *"I have the ability to persuade and encourage officers to make the right decisions. This is obviously more difficult in opposition. However, as a member of the planning committee I do have significant input into planning decisions."*

(LONDON BOROUGH)

On the other hand a unitary councillor remarked, *"In principle, the council seems to be doing quite a lot to ensure members are alert to the opportunities. However I am yet to be convinced that the majority of members are aware where it can be beneficial."*

(UNITARY, SOUTH-WEST)

From the beginning this government was clear that localism is a key policy. The Coalition agreement stated, *"We will promote the radical devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups. This will include a review of local government finance"*.

The Coalition inherited an economic situation worse than anticipated. As Liam Byre's departing note said, *"There is no money left"*. The promotion of localism therefore came at the same time as the sector faced considerable budget reduction. A few view the two policies, localism and budgetary cuts, as being intertwined. An extreme view was expressed as:

"Localism means national government cutting money to local government whilst imposing more regulations and costs."

(LONDON BOROUGH)

Another said, *"[Localism] means nothing without a budget to go with it."*

(COUNTY, SOUTH-WEST)

One councillor spoke for those with a cynical view on the policy: *"Generally speaking a requirement for local government to take on additional responsibilities without additional funding."*

(UNITARY, SOUTH-WEST)

A few councillors questioned the timing of reform: *"I happen to think that at this stage in the economic crisis that people want strong leadership... just get on with it and less talk."*

(DISTRICT, SOUTH-WEST)

The extent and nature of localism by its own logic is defined by the local area. However the shift would be more easily achieved if councillors understood how their role is still a vital part of the policy realisation. Many councillors are accepting localist policies, but the habit of relying on others such as central government or their officers for further thinking has provided an excuse for many not to take personal responsibility for effecting change. With localism, each and every councillor

is now instrumental in encouraging a greater community involvement in their area. Where there is a lack of community capacity then councillors should seek an active role building capacity.

It would be an inconsistency in our approach if we absolved local councillors of the responsibility for making localism work. Local government ministers have sought to give greater freedom to local councillors to plan and fund services. It is for councillors to use that increased freedom to promote change. This will mean a greater emphasis on representation, partnership working and networking and on supporting, building and encouraging community groups. The select committee concurs in their *Councillors in the frontline* report: *"By being visible and active, councillors can also become role models for others in the community and encourage a wide range of people to take an interest in local government."*

Change will be more successful if the case for behaviour change is fully articulated. At the moment the investment in preparing councillors for their role as political leaders is minimal compared to development opportunities offered to officers. Significantly the government is prepared to train change agents to encourage community involvement while their natural change agents, the councillors, are too often left to second guess development or to seek learning opportunities on their own.

Recommendation: The Party should consider what measures it can employ to strengthen councillors' political leadership. This may involve using experienced Conservative councillors to visit less experienced councils to encourage their political role. It may involve ensuring that compelling examples of good practice that can be adapted or used as the seed of an idea should be shared more readily by the Conservative Party for the use of Conservative councils and to showcase the success of localism.

33%

see shaping their area or reconciling different interests as an important role

16%

believe that attending meetings is one of the top two roles for a councillor

3%

stated that representing the council is one of their main roles as a councillor

COUNCILLOR VIEW



Councillor Chris Hayward Executive Member for Herts Local & Libraries Hertfordshire County Council

I know that some councillors are worried that localism is just a fad that will not last. Meanwhile they are doing much as they always did. That has not been our approach in Hertfordshire.

To be honest we started at a fairly low base. We found that fewer than a fifth of our residents could name their councillors. We set out to reverse this.

Community spirit has always been a vital part of identity; now our role is to help communities use that spirit constructively. I see myself as an aider and abettor – being there to advise, support and where necessary lend my experience to guide community effort through the minefield of procedures and regulations. The councillor should be the *'community facilitator'* ensuring that wherever possible, the aspirations of local residents to govern their own lives, can be met.

“Real empowerment means letting go of power and control and this isn't easy. We had to trust the ability of others to get things right.”

In Hertfordshire, we have taken the view that the more we can devolve sensible decision making, the more interested people will be in helping themselves. We had already adopted a member's locality budget scheme and to this we added local highway budgets so together giving each member £100,000 to spend on local needs. We took steps to encourage direct involvement through social media, our *'Take Part'* initiative and our participatory budget scheme; we also instituted a *'think localism'* culture within the council by training our staff as well as my colleagues.

There was no big bang approach. Our approach has been incremental steps built on communications with our residents; speaking from the heart about the challenges that we face and the choices we have.

Real empowerment means letting go of power and control and this is not easy. We had to trust the ability of others to get things right. We have 82 children's centres in Hertfordshire. We channelled our Home Start budget to them to act as commissioners. Similarly we used to run our countryside management scheme that aims to protect the environment. Now the council has backed off, acting as an enabler with the scheme run by volunteers. Often it is a case of instilling confidence in community groups and volunteers but still being there to support and encourage.



Cllr Hayward looks to help focus community spirit

I am finding as a cabinet member that our new role of enabling, encouraging and stimulating is far more satisfying for councillors. We are not elected to dominate people's lives but to help them live in an environment that they want. After the 2013 elections the Conservatives are still in control – we have no UKIP councillors. I feel our trust is being rewarded.

tomorrow's councillor

85%

said that Party Association officers are involved in selection of council candidates

81%

had input from councillors and/or the council group leader in the selection process

76%

allowed branch or ward members to have a say in selection of their local representatives

CHOOSING THE LOCAL

Joe Simpson, Principal Strategic Adviser at the LGA, issued a challenge to the authors of this report. He maintains a report's message should be capable of being summed up in a single strap line. If that is so, then our key message is; recruit them better and use them better.

Local government is operating well and continues to do so. Much of this has been achieved by the industry and sheer determination of councillors to improve the circumstances of their electorate. If it is the expectation of councillors that they can be the lynchpin of localism, then Conservative groups will need to avail themselves of councillors who understand the challenges and opportunities of an age of austerity.

For the last three years the LGA Be a Councillor²⁰ programme has encouraged individuals to consider a role in local government. This professional campaign has done much to demystify the councillor's role by explaining what this entails, how you can apply and by emphasising the rewards of public service. As well as seeking to directly recruit candidates, this initiative has encouraged local political parties to look at new ways of identifying appropriate people through more proactive and transparent methods such as advertising and headhunting.

In this section we will concentrate on the next steps. How are Conservative local councillors selected for election and how are they prepared for office?

THE ROLE

There is no such thing as a typical Conservative councillor. Successful political leadership depends on a combination of three factors. Foremost as with any leader, it involves an individual's ability to combine skills, temperament, experience, knowledge and behaviours to mobilise others.²¹ Secondly political leadership has its own distinctive behaviours – which may be described as politicking.²² This is associated with low integrity and analytical thinking, and confrontation – often thought of as the more Machiavellian aspects of politics.

The positive aspects of political behaviour are those of reconciling, resolving, mediating between often divergent interests, encouraging and motivating others. It involves creating a viable vision and realistic pathways to achieving it; the ability to communicate a vision to a range of different audiences; and it is about helping constituents while preserving their dignity and self-worth.

The third important factor is context. Every councillor needs to be able to respond to a wide range of different demands from differing client groups. These are: the national party, an organisation which brings with it obligations and expectations; members of the local Conservative group and associations; officers and staff of their council which may vary from being a large unitary to a small district; and not least constituents. The successful resolution of these compelling and sometimes conflicting interests contributes to councillors' individualism.



A number of qualities combine in successful leadership

There is no one reason why people stand for council. Peter Allen of Birkbeck College notes in his paper²³ that there could be “*different types of councillors*” depending on the “*choice of activities and 'style' of politics utilised by a councillor*”. He distinguishes between those who work mainly ‘informally’ behind the scenes nurturing contacts and working relationships and others who work ‘formally’ in a more open setting.

PATHWAYS TO BECOMING A COUNCILLOR

People are motivated by many different factors when putting themselves forward for election. Motivation, ambition and behaviours combine to contribute to an individual's expectation of the role, which in turn drives their style of leadership.

Those driven by a specific issue may simply want to roll up their sleeves and tackle that one concern whilst being content to remain in a local environment. They may not be overly concerned with climbing the greasy political ladder. 4% of our respondents felt strongly enough about a particular issue that they felt driven to stand for election.

37% of respondents in our survey of Conservative councillors believed that one of the main roles of a councillor was to be a community champion. Survey comments included,

20. LGA, www.local.gov.uk/be-a-councillor

21. See Jean Hartley “Training and development for political leadership”, Oxford handbook of political leadership, in press

22. Recruiting Political Leaders Professor Jo Silvestre and Christina Dykes IDEA 2009

23. Peter Allen “Gendered candidate emergence – why don't more women councillors become MPs” October 2012

12%

of selection committees involved neighbouring associations where they shared the council

27%

of councillors put themselves forward for selection to be a council candidate

23%

of councillors were approached by councillors and encouraged to stand for election

LEADERS OF TOMORROW

"I felt people's wishes are not being taken into consideration locally,"
(DISTRICT, SOUTH-EAST)

"I wanted to stand up for the community. I didn't have any political aspirations,"
(DISTRICT, WEST MIDLANDS)

and *"I was totally frustrated by the local authority over many years. I kept trying to get things done through my job and every time I wrote to them they said no."*
(DISTRICT, EASTERN)

A significant proportion (31%) stood for the more general reason that 'it is something that I just wanted to do'. Looking at how they came to put their name forward for election, 27% put themselves forward because they were approached. 23% of respondents were asked by a sitting councillor and 46% by their local Conservative association proving the critical role that associations have played in recruiting candidates. Those that put themselves forward were mainly driven by 'getting things done' (27%). Survey respondents varied considerably in their comments from *"Railroaded by the constituency chairman,"*
(LONDON BOROUGH)

to, *"I first became involved in local politics in [my constituency] in 2001. I delivered leaflets, helped campaigning and attended fundraising events which I enjoyed. I learnt how to perform telephone canvassing, speak to possible conservative voters on the doorstep and canvass with local councillors. I then became an LEA school governor."*
(LONDON BOROUGH)

"There should be no automatic right of elected councillors to stand again following their four year term of office. Sadly too many councillors have simply gone past their sell by date."

One councillor in London explained how he came to stand after raising an issue: *"Initially I had a query and I spoke with a local Conservative councillor. I was impressed by the work councillors do and felt I could help too."*
(LONDON BOROUGH)

BALANCING THE SLATE

Our research showed a divergence in opinion concerning how Conservative council candidates should be selected.

They ranged from: *"Selection should be led by [Conservative Central Headquarters (CCHQ)] and not local associations which tend to be sect driven and closed shops",*
(UNITARY, SOUTH-EAST)

to *"[CCHQ] should leave local bodies to do what they believe is the right thing. It's called localism."*
(LONDON BOROUGH)

The contradictory viewpoint continued when looking at incumbent councillors with some believing experience is key:

"If there is a sitting Conservative councillor then he/she should receive automatic selection – unless they have collected unacceptable 'baggage' during their term of office."
(COUNTY, SOUTH-WEST)

Others were concerned about 'bed-blocking': *"There should be no automatic right of elected councillors to stand again following their four year term of office. Sadly too many councillors have simply gone past their sell by date. They are carrying out no council work and they are not involved in day-to-day campaigning. Too many councillors are pensioners and here in [my council] we have an average age of 66 years for the Conservative group."*
(METROPOLITAN, WEST MIDLANDS)

The average age cited for this local authority is nearly ten years higher than the UK average of 58.8 in 2010.²⁴

The differing views may arise from respondents being in different positions within their councils and associations. A council leader who is also an officer of their local association is likely to have a different view from a younger new backbencher. Similarly members of a large association in London made up of business professionals and with competition for seats will have a different outlook from those in a small rural local party which may be struggling to attract enough candidates.

The Economist, quoting Tony Travers, found *"the capital exerts a magnetic pull on ambitious career-makers from across the country"*.²⁵ London councillors, it went on to point out, are younger, more ambitious, more likely to hold a degree and be more *"motivated by political beliefs than their counterparts elsewhere"*.²⁶

24. National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010, Local Government Association, http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/local-government-intelligence/-/journal_content/56/10171/100325

25. Economist, 22 September 2012

26. ibid

tomorrow's councillor

46%

were asked by a Conservative Party member or officer to consider standing

4%

were encouraged to stand for council as a result of a particular local issue

53%

were primarily motivated to stand for election for the welfare of their community

CHOOSING THE LOCAL

There was a common thread in our survey that many associations were not equipped – and in some cases unwilling – to attract and select candidates with the skills required to be effective. One councillor said:

“When I was first elected I asked the group leader if he wanted my CV so he could make best use of my skills and experience. He declined saying it did not work like that. Sums it up really. There is no selection based on skills.”

(METROPOLITAN, NORTH-WEST)

Another added: *“I think associations can often be removed from council life and although they are the lifeblood of making sure we deliver results at election time, they don't really know what councillors contribute at meetings/hours they put in. It depends what kind of councillor you want – some of us are active cabinet members; others are hardworking backbenchers who do lots of local campaigning. We need both to make it work.”*

(LONDON BOROUGH)

A councillor from a local authority often held up as a Conservative flagship believes that selection is the key to their success saying:

“A strong input from the group leader is key in being able to select candidates with the right balance of skills needed to make an effective fighting team. One of the great successes of [our] Council can be put down to the way it selected candidates in 2006.”

(LONDON BOROUGH)

Another councillor from the South-East summed up the need for a balanced approach: *“There should be recognition of the experience of existing councillors but balanced against competencies that need to be demonstrated to be an effective councillor.”*

(DISTRICT, SOUTH-EAST)

In November 2011 the Conservative Party Board introduced changes to the way that councillors are selected or reselected for election. Previously each local association could work to its own rules loosely guided by the overall constitution of the Conservative Party. Then the sourcing and selection of candidates for local government elections were by the informal means of personal or political networks by party activists.

Sitting councillors were also held to account by activists. Again there was no formal means of doing this: judgements might well have been based on attendance of council meetings or committees and on feedback from members of the community.

The initial stages of selection could have been carried out by a delegated central committee or by a committee of the relevant local branch before being approved by the executive committee of the whole association. The candidate then became the official nomination for the Party.

There were no guiding rules on how councillors, officers or indeed the general membership could participate in or influence selection. In smaller associations, councillors may also be senior activists or officers and so serve on the committee by necessity rather than design.



Associations are fishing in ever smaller pools in looking for effective candidates to stand for council elections

The 2011 changes introduced more formality to the arrangements. In particular they gave an official position to the council or group leader on the approval committee and a greater say to Party members in the final decision. It was a positive move to encourage a greater partnership between the association and the Conservative group on the council.

More effort is also being made to find fresh prospective candidates. This is partly inevitable as dwindling membership in associations means there are smaller pools to fish for candidates. It is also partly due to the LGA *‘Be a Councillor’*²⁷ initiative. The reforms move in the right direction. Most of those in our survey felt that the input by the council leader is welcome but that the association officers and branch should still play a major role. As one councillor put it,

“I think everyone has some element to bring to the role”.
(COUNTY, SOUTH-WEST).

Our survey was taken within the first year of the new rules, before they could have any marked effect. Therefore most of the comments from our survey reflect the councillor's own experience of selection which would have been under the old rules. Even taking into account the lag effect, the depth of concern reflects the feeling that the Conservative Party needs to get right the selection and preparation of candidates.

27. Originally an initiative by Leadership Centre for Local Government, www.beacouncillor.org.uk

25%

sought to become a councillor simply because it was something that they wanted to do

13%

of people put their names forward to become a councillor simply because they were asked

6%

stood for election as they thought that this may help further their political ambitions

LEADERS OF TOMORROW

The new rules still leave some association executives with a lot of latitude. The rules specify *“If the membership of any one branch is less than two per cent of the vote obtained at the most recent relevant election, or if there is no relevant election one per cent of the current electorate, or if the membership of the branch is less than 20 then the executive council must appoint a committee... and all references to branch committee shall apply to that committee.”* The rules make clear that in this case the Executive council *“shall take the final decision”*. In reality as most branches have a declining membership many may slip into the exempted categories.

A shrinking membership is common to all political parties. For the Conservative Party where the recruitment and selection of councillors is still primarily in the hands of associations, the risk is that council candidates will be drawn from a reducing reservoir. A contributor to the Tomorrow Councillors' blog found the lack of openness to be a major stumbling block. Having been active with local issues he made the point that:

“No suggestion was made at branch level that I offer myself for selection as a Conservative candidate, after all they could have had the satisfaction of turning me down if so minded.”

“Where then did the constituency acquire its councillors. Seemingly they ‘happened by’ them. Our branch chairman was one. At that time two district councillors also sat as county councillors which effectively blocked the path for others. I see that thirty four years later, one of this pair still sits as a councillor. The mother of a friend became a district councillor on the basis she said that no one else was willing to stand. In an adjoining ward a new councillor was returned unopposed. His first input was to ask his branch secretary if a district councillor had to do anything!”²⁸

“Can [local activists] take strategic decisions to ensure a balance of candidates with the right skills to be effective on the council group?”

Associations need to work more proactively than merely casting a net over party members and their friends to attract more candidates. Improvements in the recruitment for candidates will maximise the possibility of a more diverse list of candidates. In turn, more candidates mean selection committees will have the confidence to reject people. Where there is no choice, ‘Buggins’ turn’ rules.

It is good practice, functional and a sound ‘localist’ approach that the local membership should have a say in who should be their candidate. However this raises the problem, do local activists have the information on what it is that their area and/or council needs in their councillor? Can associations take strategic decisions to ensure a balanced slate of candidates with the right skills to be effective on the council group?

“Improvements in the recruitment for candidates will maximise the possibility of a more diverse list of candidates.”

There is no guidance given as to what skills selection committees should be looking for in candidates, whether aimed at association officers or the broader membership.

The skills needed to be a good association member relate to political campaigning and ‘clubability’ which are part, but by no means all, of the role of being a councillor. Simply asking whether someone is a team player will not provide any meaningful insight, so guidance as to how to look for the skills required is vital. A councillor in our survey put it critically:

“Selection should be on merit not on who a candidates’ friends are or the financial support they offer.”
(DISTRICT, SOUTH-EAST)

ConservativeHome blog recently carried a comment by Katherine Bramson, a member of Conservative Future, on candidates in local government. She wrote *“This year, I came across many new candidates some who were young CF members and some who had toed the party line throughout their lives – the problem is the quality of candidates...there were some who genuinely knew the local area and the problems their ward faced, but had had little or no training on what councillors do. There were also those who thought they were Conservative but lacked their own ideological integrity...in the face of adversity we need candidates who can fiscally manage a budget whilst ensuring that key services remain.”²⁹*

Unless guidance is made available assessors may fail to fully understand councillors’ demanding role. They could be in danger of favouring their prejudices, a tendency often referred to as the ‘halos and horns’ effect. As one councillor and senior volunteer put it,

28. John B Pope Tomorrow's Councillor blog 13 August 2012

29. “Conservative Future members need training to be effective councillors”, Katherine Bramson ConservativeHome, 8 June 2012, <http://conservativehome.blogspot.com/localgovernment/2012/06/conservative-future-members-need-training-to-be-effective-councillors.html>

tomorrow's councillor

14%

of councillors' experience was limited to campaigning for the Party

11%

had party links prior to selection but did not necessarily have campaign experience

18%

of councillors had known or worked with a councillor or seen their own at work

SELECTING CANDIDATES

"Generally, associations tend to be quite closed and tribal. It needs a strong hand either in the association or directly at area level to ensure selections aren't purely on who they liked best."

(DISTRICT, WEST MIDLANDS)

A very experienced councillor observed, *"Too many individuals are selected for the wrong reasons in wards."*

(LONDON BOROUGH)

Another councillor said, *"It appears that those doing the selection are not always aware of the councillor's role."*

(UNITARY, WEST MIDLANDS)

A former group whip agreed, *"I used to attend selection meetings and try to explain what a councillor does and what we need to look for in a candidate but this was rejected as the ward committee have their own ideas (i.e. loyal local supporter, good deliverer of leaflets etc.) and resent intervention by senior councillors."*

(LONDON BOROUGH)

"[Associations should] ensure that those who are placed in seats where they are most likely to win can be assessed on their future councillor skills as much as their political campaigning skills."

Sometimes the relationship between associations and council groups is not what it should be. A group leader told us,

"The mind set of associations needs changing.....as leader over 50% of work is dealing with internal party nonsense."

(LONDON BOROUGH)

Confidence encourages diversity. Those who might not have a footprint in politics need to know that they will be assessed in a fair open and transparent process.

The lack of a rigorous selection process can also disadvantage candidates in that there is no means for them to get to know their skill basis. Good selection with good feedback based on competences rather than subjective opinion sets a benchmark for further personal development. In particular it allows those who have not been chosen to reflect on their learning needs, allowing them to try again on an informed basis. A London councillor believes that associations should:

"Ensure that those who are placed in seats where they are most likely to win can be assessed on their future councillor skills as much as their political campaigning skills."

(LONDON BOROUGH)

Another highlighted the need for self-appraisal saying: *"[A rigorous] selection process is desirable, not least to give the candidates the opportunity of assessing for themselves whether they are up to it."*

(DISTRICT, EASTERN)

Recommendation: Associations should be provided with a councillor selection manual. This could be built on the *Be a Councillor X-Factor* but it should include a specific Conservative approach that stresses the nature of the job of councillor, the skills needed and why the councillor base should be widened. Associations who are unable to find suitable candidates should be given practical advice. Smaller associations should be encouraged to work together to share insights and knowledge.

Many councillors, especially those who attained senior positions, consider that they have experience in service delivery that matches those of backbench MPs. If the selection and assessment of council candidates was put on a more formal footing then the Party should encourage a greater transfer of talent between the two sectors. Not only would this indicate that a period in local government is valuable but it would help address the culture inequality between local and centre and encourage a sharing of talent.

While the disparity in gender numbers in the House of Commons is still causing concern, consideration should be given to encouraging those who have spent some time in local government to move seamlessly to a parliamentary career. Academic research has found that across all parties *"women councillors are less likely to have considered running for Parliament than men"*.³⁰ Networking and mentoring are seen to be instrumental in bridging the gap but there could be a mechanism also to accredit those who have had executive experience in local government.

Recommendation: Consideration should be given as to whether councillors who have served as a council leader or at cabinet level in a first tier council and who wish to progress to a parliamentary selection, can be better accommodated.

30. Peter Allen "Gendered candidate emergence – why don't more women councillors become MPs" October 2012

10%

councillors in our survey who had previously stood for election

61%

had no prior experience of the work councillors do before deciding to stand

37%

would have preferred more information and/or training on the role before their election

COUNCILLOR VIEW



**Councillor Jennie Dallimore
Podsmead Ward
Gloucester City Council**

I wasn't born into a privileged lifestyle. I was homeless and in care until 16. I came to Gloucestershire in 1999 carrying the contents of my life in two black bin bags. But for me poverty is about lack of aspiration and hope. Ultimately I believe we make our own destiny. I have chosen to make mine in local politics.

Now at 30, I am a Cabinet member for Gloucester City Council and juggle this role with bringing up four children with my husband.

“I decided to stand [for election] and just started knocking on doors and saying ‘I live in Podsmead. Together we could create a new story for this place.’”

What brought me into politics? I live in Podsmead, which is considered to be the most deprived ward in Gloucester. One evening no fewer than 30 vehicles were broken into. Nothing new – it had been going on for years and no one did anything about it. Enough was enough. I called a public meeting and 70 people turned up. I stood up and talked from the heart about taking back the streets.

Three weeks later we made front-page news when we set up the Oaklands Park Residents Association (OPRA). Things moved quickly: hundreds of calls to the council and police to get antisocial behaviour measures in place; residents having a litter pick and a fun day that raised over £1,000. We had started to take control of where we lived.

At the same time, an election was looming and all three parties approached me. I knew nothing about politics so read all the manifestos. I liked the Conservative value of working hard and helping yourself. I have always believed in social responsibility and that society should be bigger than the state.

The Conservative MP was fantastic and offered me so much encouragement. I decided to stand and just started knocking on doors and saying *“I live in Podsmead. Together we could create a new story for this place”*.

I was so shocked when I won the vote. I hadn't voted before. The rest is history... I am still Chair of OPRA, Vice-Chair of Podsmead Community Association, Community Governor for Linden School and a volunteer at the Ramblers Youth Club. I also work part time for Richard Graham MP as the city's caseworker. More recently, I have been part of Podsmead winning *Big Local* grant funding of £1M, British Heart Foundation funding of £100,000 and also supporting children in Podsmead to win an Excellence in Youth Involvement award with their performance of 'Snow White and the 7 Anti-Social Behaviour Dwarfs'.



Cllr Dallimore shows the value of team members with different experiences and backgrounds

I intend to remain a grassroots politician and community activist. I will not become detached from the people I represent. There are some fantastic people about who lack confidence and role models. I am trying to support my community to find its confidence so that we can build more community resilience. I feel very humbled to be doing this role. By being a councillor I can be a community activist and serve the people in Podsmead and Gloucester who elected me.

tomorrow's councillor

11%

say they will probably step down at the end of their current term of office

22%

will carry on for one more term of office after their next election

7%

want to carry on for two more terms after their next election

PREPARING COMMUNITY

Identifying and nurturing talent helps to create the stability required to deliver a long-term vision. There is no doubt that the most innovative councils are run by councillors with significant leadership skills and groups that reflects the priorities of the people that they represent.

There is a misplaced fear that the provision of organisational support, by way of training, would professionalise politicians to the detriment of the random, individualistic basis on which democracy is based. However professional development seeks to maximise skills and the potential of individuals: it does not seek to change core personality traits to produce what Boris Johnson once described as a “row of poodles”.³¹

In contrast, arguably the lack of systematic support for councillors has restricted the diversity of councillors, leaving the status quo to advantage the bold, the noisy and those who have had prior managerial training. The ‘old, white and stale’ epithet is a result of dated practices - not the cause of it.

The profile of councillors is of concern. The LGA’s National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010 showed that the average age of councillors is 58.8; 68% of councillors were men, while 31% were women; 96.6% were white and 3.4% were from an ethnic minority background.³² These figures are for all parties: there are no separate figures for Conservative councillors but it is unlikely that Conservatives are more diverse than the average.

“Greater diversity improves the quality of decision making by introducing broader experiences and wider viewpoints.”

Women are more likely than men to dropout after a single term on a council, as are younger and more diverse councillors of both sexes. The problem is not recruitment; it is that young people, women and more diverse councillors once elected are unable to embed in local government’s culture.³³ Challenging traditional practices and encouraging new ways of working refreshes organisational cultures and encourages greater openness to new ideas.

Encouraging diversity is a challenge common to most major organisations, especially those which have a strong prevailing

culture. The Conservative Party is one such organisation. David Cameron has tackled the challenge head-on and under his leadership the Conservative Party has taken great strides in opening itself up to those who believe in Conservatism, irrespective of background. However the Prime Minister’s efforts, particularly in encouraging diversity within the parliamentary party and adopting more liberal policies to promote greater fairness, have been top down.



The profile in the town hall has not changed as rapidly as the community as a whole since Victorian times

As we have noted the demographic profile of councillors is narrow. Local democracy is only healthy if it is seen to be relevant to its electorate. If there is a perception that the local council is remote or unable to connect with local communities then it is not surprising that people become uninterested. In turn this lessens the chance of attracting candidates from a wide spectrum of opinion, experience and backgrounds.

Greater diversity improves the quality of decision making by introducing broader experiences and wider viewpoints. For these reasons every council and association should be working together to improve their demographic profile. The ‘Be a Councillor’ programme can help.

In areas where there is little Conservative presence there is a particular challenge. In such places there is no formal apparatus on which to build. Inner cities and larger towns may fall into this category. When there is a general election a prospective parliamentary candidate arrives to fight the campaign but spends most of his/her time building resources which fall away once the general election is over. Capacity building has to start at the bottom. It is much less likely a Conservative

31. Spectator 2005 – showing a lack of awareness of PD and poodles.

32. National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010, Local Government Association, http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/local-government-intelligence/-/journal_content/56/10171/100325

33. Peter Allen, ‘Local patterns of gendered political recruitment – how does the political activity of local authority councillors affect their political ambitions?’ October 2012

36%

involved in this report will continue seeking election indefinitely

25%

don't know how long they plan to put themselves forward for election

72%

know where to go to get help when asked a difficult question by a resident

LEADERS - TRAINING

parliamentary candidate will be elected in areas where there is a weak Conservative presence on the local authority. In turn it is unlikely that there will be strong Conservative groups on councils if there are weak local Conservative associations, which remain the main vehicle for recruiting and supporting Conservative politicians.

We have found that one of the strengths of the Conservative element of the Next Generation³⁴ programme, which encourages participating councillors to develop their political leadership skills, is that it provides a strong network amongst its cohorts. Through networking, good practice is exchanged, ideas can be tested and confidence is built. These principles should be especially applied in areas where Conservative activity is weak.

Recommendation: Building on the networking strengths of Next Generation, there should be a programme which encourages Conservative political leadership in areas where it is not strong by actively supporting those who are interested in becoming a councillor but have little know-how. Such a programme would provide on-going peer support.

The National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2010 reports that "the majority (91.3%) of councillors had received some training and development opportunities in the previous 12 months". This is down from 93.7% in 2008. Further reading qualifies this claim that most of the training and development is offered by way of conferences and seminars which many councillors find expensive in both time and cost.

Local government has a stronger record than national government on its approach to professional development. Over the last decade, the IDeA and the Leadership Centre and now the LGA, have spearheaded an improvement agenda. Uniquely, Next Generation is run within party groups reflecting the political environment in which elected representatives operate. Although courses run by the LGA are popular, they are limited by restricted capacity and the fact that they are residential.

The attitude that new skills should be encouraged by continuous learning and development opportunities is one that is common to many other professions. Whether run through their own professional bodies or through company schemes; continuous professional development is a requirement among others for: the judiciary (JUDICIAL COLLEGE), barristers (BAR COUNCIL), doctors (GENERAL MEDICAL COUNCIL), architects (RIBA), accountants (INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS),

teachers (NATIONAL COLLEGE FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP) and Boy Scouts (THE SCOUTS' ASSOCIATION). For politicians there are few formal ways to enhance performance. Given the time constraints on councillors many of who also have full time jobs, the demand is for a method of support that is flexible, easily accessed, pertinent and above all not mandatory.

In the CLG select committee's *Councillors in the frontline*

"If there is a perception that the local council is remote or unable to connect with local communities then it is not surprising that people become disinterested."

report, they note that, "Without training and development, councillors' effectiveness and job satisfaction will suffer". It also said, "Training should be seen as a benefit, not a cost, to local taxpayers".

Most councils have a development budget. When resources are short, the temptation arises to cut training programmes. As the select committee acknowledges this could be a false economy. Councillors should make sure that they have access to their fair share of this training resource. However we acknowledge that some training is better than others – and more extravagant.

Recommendation: The Conservative Councillors Association should provide on their website a list of worthwhile training opportunities as a guide so that councillors are not lured into unnecessarily expensive schemes given by people who have no direct experience or knowledge of local government.

PRE ELECTION TRAINING

Our survey showed that there is no systematic preparation for prospective councillor candidates before an election.

As councils or groups do not necessarily provide grounding for their candidates, many find themselves in the situation explained by one councillor,

"In local political associations they don't explain what is involved and what the job entails so you don't find out until you are elected."
(DISTRICT, EASTERN)

34. For more details of Next Generation - www.local.gov.uk

tomorrow's councillor

84%

involved in this report who had no training ahead of being first elected

14%

had some training before their first election arranged by their council group

8%

had some pre-election training arranged by the local Conservative Association

PREPARING COMMUNITY

A councillor we interviewed explained, *"You can't walk off the street and hope to be effective. To be a 21st century councillor you need to have a whole raft of skills that you might not have used in other roles."*

(DISTRICT/COUNTY, EASTERN)

Another councillor echoed this sentiment, *"We ask a lot of modern councillors in terms of understanding budgets and making hard decisions and so they need appropriate training and the skills to do this. Someone can't just come off the streets and expect to be able to do this – the context is different whatever experience they have had. Many are hostile to development though."*

(DISTRICT, EASTERN)

84% of those answering the survey had no pre-training. A mix of council groups, associations and CCHQ provide what training there is. Of those who had some training, 63% had received it through their council group, 36% through associations and 18% through CCHQ, 9% of candidates arranged it themselves.

"You can't walk off the street and hope to be effective. To be a 21st Century councillor you need a whole raft of skills that you might not have used in other roles."

The relevance of training is a growing concern. Most councillors we consulted did not have, nor did expect to have any training. We note that even councillors more recently elected are not being supported before their election. The quality and emphasis of training varies depending on who provides it. Effective support might concentrate on the various roles, how to tackle casework, the time commitment and provide some navigation of the council's directorates. More typically pre training might only be a single trip to the council chamber or attending a group meeting. Training offered by CCHQ and associations tends to concentrate on campaigning, rather than the tasks of a councillor. Given that the main purpose of CCHQ and associations is to win elections this is not a surprise.

Two remarks summed up the poor state of training offered to candidates: *"It didn't prepare us for the wide range of issues which would come to bear."*

(UNITARY, WEST MIDLANDS)

and: *"Our training covered election law. I had no training regarding council activities prior to becoming a councillor."*

(COUNTY, WEST MIDLANDS)

The type of preparation our respondents asked for varies according to their own needs and knowledge base. Some candidates might be very aware of the politics; others may be very new to the political stage:

"I felt that the training session assumed the attendee had a basic knowledge – a very dangerous path to take."

(COUNTY, WEST MIDLANDS)

Only one of all our respondents had training from the association, CCHQ and the group. This mix covered campaigning, getting out the vote, the count, media, and ward issues. A councillor who rated his pre-training highly described it, provided by the group, as:

"What the county does and how it delivered services, in-put and consultation on our manifesto, understanding who can help within the council if elected."

(COUNTY, WEST MIDLANDS)

Another who was satisfied with the training from their association said it covered *"...what was expected from a councillor in terms of hours a week, the various roles played by a councillor, the responsibilities of each Department, canvassing training, trail case work. Excellent and most useful"*.

(LONDON BOROUGH)

Another added: *"Some in advance scrutiny training would have been important. As a new back bencher that is the one area in which you will become involved."*

(UNITARY, WEST MIDLANDS)

Since the launch of the 'Be A Councillor' campaign, Conservative groups are being actively urged to provide key training so that those who are elected can be effective from the start. We have learnt that some Conservative groups make considerable effort to provide comprehensive training to all their prospective candidates. The ones we heard about are Shropshire, Croydon, Bexley, Staffordshire and Sutton.

It may not be practical to provide comprehensive training to all candidates nor to leave the burden of candidate preparation to hard pressed groups whose response can vary according to their own circumstances. However the lack of information on what a councillor does, fails to excite or encourage people who may have had little experience of public service to come forward or crucially to stay involved if not elected the first time.

Lack of preparation also ill serves in-coming councillors. It puts them at a disadvantage during the vital first months in office when impression informs reputation and unhealthy working practices dictate future behaviours and relationships.

7%

had some informal ad-hoc training before their first election

4%

had some pre-election training arranged by the national Conservative Party

2%

arranged their own training ahead of first being elected as a councillor

LEADERS - TRAINING



Mentoring and training are vital to ensure that councillors develop the right skills to be effective leaders

One councillor confessed that on being elected he *“had no more idea then than how to fly on what a councillor did”*.
(LONDON BOROUGH)

A twin-hatter commented: *“There should be compulsory training for all candidates as soon as they are selected to explain to them what the role of the council and councillors actually is. For example, I thought county was all about highways and was shocked and humbled to learn how little I knew.”*
(COUNTY/DISTRICT, SOUTH-EAST)

“Lack of preparation...puts [new councillors] at a disadvantage during the vital first months in office when impression informs reputation and unhealthy working practices dictate future behaviours.”

If we are to encourage a greater diversity of candidates to come forward for political public service then it is only right to support their journey. Easy access and flexibility are vital. Groups should have access to a menu of subjects that can benefit prospective candidates.

Pre-election training should focus on the basic requirements needed by a prospective or newly elected councillor. Our respondents cited canvassing and campaigning, how to handle the press, information on how to navigate council services, key issues facing the council, IT skills and public speaking as priority training requirements. Modern communications methods such as webinars, e-learning³⁵ and wikis³⁶ should be embraced to provide such information.

Recommendation: Preparation for office is not a luxury. It is a necessary tool for encouraging a wider democratic involvement. Capacity for providing support should be developed at a regional level though it remains that group leaders should ultimately decide training priorities. Innovative use of technology should be used to enable individual candidates to access material.

POST ELECTION TRAINING

There is no probation period for a newly elected councillor. A district councillor from the South-West told us,

“You jump on an already fast moving escalator and it doesn't stop unless you jump off.”
(DISTRICT, SOUTH-WEST)

35. A webinar is a lecture or training delivered across the internet to a number of people at the same time in their homes or offices, whereas e-learning typically refers to an online resource which individuals can work through at their own pace.
36. A webpage that can easily be edited and updated by users, the most famous of which is Wikipedia. Examples and up to date news can be added ensuring that the wiki will continue to grow and develop as a useful tool.

tomorrow's councillor

62%

did not believe that their pre-election training prepared them well for the role of councillor

17%

believed their pre-election training went some way to preparing them for the role

21%

believed their pre-election training prepared them well for the role

PREPARING COMMUNITY

A good councillor has to master a number of areas including:

The Leadership role: Being able to distinguish between the various styles of leadership and when to utilise the most appropriate style. Professor Keith Grint has distinguished three types of situations councillors may face: *critical* - needing a commander (immediate control) *response*; managerial - needing a tame (or procedural) response and *wicked* or intractable problems that need an adaptive leadership (or strategic) response.³⁷ Recognising what the situation demands, and how to meet it, is one of the challenges of political leadership.

Understanding the demands of the role: Councils are complex organisations. Their interrelations with other partners and other public services are even more complex. Tomorrow's councillor has to be able to take strategic decisions on the future while safeguarding the well-being of their area from the start. This encompasses creating economic growth, environmental sustainability, protecting health and social provision and ensuring that communities do not live in fear of crime or disorder. It also requires good community knowledge, based on understanding the area, its needs and the people who live there.

Political conviction: Politics is about values and evidencing them by your policies and actions. Principles and consistency are part of the offer. The electorate deserves politicians who know what they stand for and who can produce a manifesto on which they are accountable.

Knowing self: Being a politician invites public scrutiny. It is about visibility, know-how, personal integrity and ability. This includes being able to communicate to a number of different audiences by a number of different means. This demanding role calls for a high degree of personal discipline and management.

“[As a new councillor] you jump on an already fast moving escalator and it doesn't stop unless you jump off.”

Few freshly elected councillors are likely to be accomplished in all areas and development needs can change as new responsibilities and new political ideas are added. Advances too in methods of communication and the potential of social media mean that unwary councillors who do not harness new technology can quickly find themselves at a major disadvantage. 68% of survey respondents who consider that they are not conversant in social media believe that it is important to

understand and use the likes of Twitter and Facebook in their council role.

Asked whether there should be continuous professional development for councillors one of our interviewees told us:

“Yes of course. The big theme at the moment is the councillor working more closely with the communities. Development is needed to equip councillors to do this. The skills are different and are around listening; understanding the context, what is needed in the community and who needs to do it. It's not just the councillor or the council doing it anymore. But this is new for councillors so they need support”.

(DISTRICT, NORTH-WEST)

Once elected most councillors do receive an induction or formative training. This is up to individual councils to provide to a lesser or greater extent. In addition some are provided with a pack, the quality and scope of which varies considerably.

Initial training is usually organised in-house by council officers and tends to cover technical aspects of the councillors' role such as planning, licensing and ethics.

Some personal development is provided on how to tackle casework and where to source help. The council can also provide training on communications although this is by no means widespread.



An effective leader retains a desire to keep learning

Where support is forthcoming, it is often frontloaded. Some of our respondents complained that a great deal of unfocused information was thrown at them in the first instance. One councillor said: *“I was bombarded a bit. I could have done with less more often; it was a bit too much.”*

(DISTRICT, SOUTH-WEST)

37. See Keith Grint, “Leadership: a very short introduction,” Oxford University Press 2010

76%

believe that continuing professional development is important

15%

feel continuing professional development has some role for councillors

9%

believe that continuing professional development is not important

LEADERS - TRAINING

Another said to us: *"We get loads of information. There needs to be more logic and thought to the way information is presented so that as councillors we can inform public opinion."*

(DISTRICT, WEST MIDLANDS)

A Londoner found her induction pack *"useful but cumbersome"*.
(LONDON BOROUGH)

For many of those councillors who have been in post for some time, training was not an issue. A typical response to the question on training from such councillors was, *"I was first elected in 1966. Training was not an issue"*.

(UNITARY, SOUTH-WEST)

Overall the picture remains patchy with some councils taking the responsibility of training newly elected councillors seriously but some are just providing the basic information on what they need to operate efficiently within council offices. There is little provision on equipping councillors with political skills which they might need as their understanding and experience matures.

THE CASE FOR MORE SUPPORT

Our survey asked *"Do you support continuous development"*. The answers were rated as 76% of our councillors thought that continuous professional development was important. A further 15% said it had some value.

Our survey suggested the type of post-election support to which councillors aspired. It ranged from practical skills such as how to chair a meeting to learning about protocol and ethics. In particular councillors felt they would benefit from on-going support on understanding local government finance, financial management knowledge, constitutional issues, leadership skills, as well as policy changes.

In the main, Conservative councillors felt that they needed information that was more tailored and circumscribed to their circumstances. A London councillor said:

"I think my needs have changed over time. Whilst I had some local government knowledge when I was first elected I would have liked to have received training on things like public speaking, how to effectively represent your constituents best."

(LONDON BOROUGH)

One of our interviewees said, *"Yes there is need for some core training, e.g. planning, finding your way around the council. It should be prioritised and development should be there as your role as a councillor changes."*

(COUNTY, WEST MIDLANDS)

'Learning on the job', as our surveys reveal, is still regarded as a time honoured way for learning how to be a councillor. However it could pose difficulties for the public who can expect a councillor to be able to represent them effectively from the beginning of tenure. It creates unnecessary stress for the newly elected councillor who often has 'to fly by the seat of their pants', and it allows officers to organise the delivery of public services without sufficient scrutiny.

Seeds of difficulties between councillors and officers can often be sown in the first few critical months after an election when a councillor, or new administration, is getting to grips with the system rather than providing clear political leadership.



One councillor compared his group to another party: *"The best training is just to get on with it. But what the Lib Dems do is set targets for press coverage, leaflets delivered, voters ID etc. and expect reports back. We just float along at a different pace."*
(METROPOLITAN, YORKSHIRE)

A county councillor used his own initiative to get the support they felt was needed, telling us: *"Next Generation was excellent for leadership, confidence and self-awareness. Some media training I commissioned was very helpful too; no frontline councillor should face the press or TV without this."*

(COUNTY, WEST MIDLANDS)

tomorrow's councillor

17%

have not received any training since being elected to office

73%

have had specific job related training since election such as planning, licensing etc

55%

have had some personal development training post election, eg public speaking

PREPARING COMMUNITY

Another reflected on her early years on the council: *"When I first started out as a councillor I was in desperate need of any kind of personal development training. Public speaking and understanding the council/committee structure would have been very beneficial."*

(LONDON BOROUGH)

One councillor said: *"Councillors have executive decision making powers and with that goes the need for skills. There are very few jobs where you wouldn't have any development to do senior roles."*

(LONDON BOROUGH)



higher grasp of financial knowledge. The plan promises *"at least five days training per year"*,³⁹ to ensure that such skills are inculcated into the civil service.

The arguments in the Plan are as true for councillors as they are for civil servants albeit that the knowledge and skills required for their specific role may differ.

Unless practices are reviewed and refreshed then old habits die hard leading to the danger of a closed shop mentality and ultimately to a loss of confidence by the electorate. A sobering table was produced in April 2011 by YouGov for the social networking site Streetlife which detailed the percentage of voters who cannot name one of their local representatives. Recognition of councillors is weakest in the East Midlands, with almost 80% of voters unable to name their local councillor, followed by the East of England (76%) and London at 73%. Recognition is highest in the North-East, but still just over half (57%) said that they cannot name at least one of their local ward councillors.⁴⁰

The exchange of up-to-date ideas and good practice helps keep an alertness and fluidity of performance that benefits not just the councillor but also officer-councillor relations and ultimately the residents whom they serve.

There is also another benefit, that of providing a transferable skill. Political leadership is increasingly being recognised by companies where complex trading environments have meant that managers are often challenged by unfamiliar markets and behaviours. If the leadership experience gathered from the council and other political activities is captured and put into an organisational language that business leaders recognise, then the skills learnt as an elected representative, would be more easily moved into another environment. It would be a suitable trade-off for public service.

The Civil Service Reform Plan³⁸ argues cogently that with the sustained economic downturn, the policy challenges set by the coalition government on public service reform, the planned for devolution for decision-making and the increasing expectation of the public for quick and convenient services, the civil service needs to upskill and readdress performance issues.

The Plan sets out an ambitious programme to focus on providing the skills and structure required by a modern civil service. These include skills in commerce and contracting, negotiating, leading and managing change, project management and performance management, policy formation as well as a

38. Civil Service Reform Plan June 2012 <http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Civil-Service-Reform-Plan-acc-final.pdf>

39. Lords Hansard, 19 June col 1703

40. "Few People can name councillors" report Allister Hayward 19 April 2011

What little professional support that is available for new councillors is either technical, being the factual information needed to support decisions, or skill based, primarily being the practical information needed to perform in role. We would add a third – political support.

POLITICAL SUPPORT

What is Conservatism in local government? How can it be displayed? What do Conservatives mean by terms such as place shaping and community budgets? These are questions seldom debated by councillors for want of time and opportunity.

30%

of professionals undertake more than 40 hours pa of continuous professional development⁴¹

53%

of professionals undertake some or all of their continuous professional development online⁴²

72%

of professionals make decisions on their own continuous professional development needs⁴³

LEADERS - SUPPORT

Too often we hear the comment that councillors are no longer political. The quip that there is no need to vote as the council always wins the election is nearer the truth than it should be. No company would send out their sales force without briefing them on the product. If we want councillors to portray their political colours more accurately then there should be the means to encourage them to do so.

Democracy depends on elected members understanding and fulfilling their role. This consists of presenting the electorate with a manifesto based on Party values on which they can make informed choices on who they will elect; and it provides a basis from which to judge performance. Too often we hear of people not bothering to vote because they see politicians of all parties, as 'toneless bureaucrats'. Low turnout at elections shows that voters are simply not inspired by the sameness all too often offered by local councillors.

The task of elected councillors is increasingly loaded with responsibility and complexity. In an age of austerity when substantial reductions are being required in local government budgets, councillors still have to deliver on their vision for good government as well as the realisation of the government's political vision for localism and the Big Society.

These abilities are not with us from birth. They come from experience and learning. However, too often politicians have little specific political training to help them do this. There is a gap between expectation and the ability to deliver. Local government representatives should be trying to find ways to embrace the needs of their local community by providing a political vision that resonates with local voters based on their party's principles and traditions, in a language that conveys value and honesty and relevant to their electorate's needs. This takes some skills which we argue, can be developed.

Our investigation suggests that the political material readily available to councillors is meagre. There are LGA briefings but these are written for the sector at large and not from any one party point of view. They cover the facts and provide the collective view of the LGA. The Conservative Councillors Association (CCA) also provides a weekly newsletter which is helpful. This often contains relevant departmental press releases, which like the briefing from the LGA, are designed to be factually informative. For the average Conservative councillors neither the LGA nor the CCA provides a party context or political interpretation that links a specific policy with an overall political vision.

Many councillors commented in our survey that they had a lack of political information. A senior councillor and senior party volunteer commented:

"I run a consultancy in Land and Planning. The little information that comes [from the Party] is not insightful and the more meaningful information comes from the debate generated in the various trade press I connect into. In fact I would go further and say it is no more insightful than the press releases issued by the Department of Local Government and Communities."

(COUNTY, EASTERN)

"No company would send out their sales force without briefing them on the product. If we want councillors to portray their political colours more accurately then there should be the means to encourage them to do so."

Newly elected councillors can find the lack of a political umbilical cord unnerving and disadvantageous. Information is often available but is not pushed out to councillors effectively. Central government and CCHQ are relying on councillors informing themselves about policy announcements whilst sending comprehensive briefings to parliamentarians. A proactive approach to provide clear messages and policy statements to people representing the Conservative Party in local areas is crucial; whether for councillors in opposition or in power, Party representatives should be given political material directly rather than via council officers or the media.

Providing set 'lines to take' will help. Some groups do employ a political researcher who is able to fill the gap – but this is by no means universal. Although there are a number of resources available via the LGA, the concept of a dedicated subscription-funded research team may warrant further investigation.

Recommendation: Every week parliamentary candidates are sent a briefing note; a relevant abridged version should be made available to all members of the Conservative Councillors Association.

41. Professionals Association Research Network study of 4355 professionals in UK, Sep 2008, <http://www.parnglobal.com/uploads/files/592.pdf>

42. ibid

43. ibid

tomorrow's councillor

24%

of councillors believe their voices are not heard on issues within their council

18%

believe that they have a reasonable degree of influence on council decisions

58%

believe they have significant influence and have their voice heard in their council

RETAINING LEADERS

MENTORING

10% of our respondents suggested the use of mentors. One told us, *"I had a short induction when I was elected to the [pre-unitary] Council. We were given mentors from the Group. This was invaluable. You don't have any clue when you are appointed. They give you a good foundation. Councillors need more in the way of mentoring. Support on how to make comments at meetings... It's about developing skills – not being nervous; expressing yourself; not waffling; being heard."*

(UNITARY, SOUTH-EAST)

When asked if they had received an induction pack when elected, a councillor replied, *"Yes, a huge handbook. I would rather have had a mentor for a few weeks."*

(COUNTY, EASTERN)

Another answered the same question: *"The pack was Janet and John. It didn't get underneath the subject – poor. Probably I was a bit critical and expected better. The Leader appointed group mentors and this was very good. When I wanted to know something, I had someone to go to. They were senior people."*

(DISTRICT, SOUTH-EAST)

Peter Allen's research refers to the importance of outside supporters as key individuals who can encourage councillors to raise their sights and profiles. The role of 'enabling' individuals could be vital in breaking down cultural impasses by creating a two-way exchange of opinions and views.

Allen noted that fewer female councillors than male managed to establish enabling relationships. This is a significant reason why a greater number of women, and others from diverse backgrounds, cannot breakthrough the patriarchal culture of local politics.

"The fact that more women are leaving local government after serving a shorter term than men is of concern. The same is true of those from ethnic minorities."

The reasons why councillors stand down are many. Pressure of work, family and none enjoyment of the job affect men as well as women – in fact research is showing that family reasons are cited more often by men than woman as the primary reason for standing down.

44. See Peter Allen "Local patterns of gendered political recruitment". Paper presented to the PSA conference 2011

45. Peter Allen quoting Rallings et al 2008

46. See Prof. Jo Silvester & Dr Christine Menges "Political mentoring toolkit" City University

The high drop-out rate presents more than the obvious problem of losing talent. It has been described as causing a double whammy effect, which is when younger and more diverse councillors are dropping by the wayside; while older and less diverse councillors are almost impossible to remove from safe seats. As local government is seen as a good recruiting ground for entry to being an MP an unhealthy drop-out rate for women and people from ethnic minorities has a knock-on effect which will be felt on participation rates at higher levels of political representation.



Successful companies take care to ensure their salesforce are fully versed in the benefits of their products

Mentoring is one solution. Where done properly and due consideration is given to the pairing, it is popular. Our survey shows that healthy groups do mentor their new councillors.

Mentors can:

1. Be a trusted advisor who will listen and discuss
2. Share knowledge
3. Provide experience
4. Be a critical friend, able to say what might need to be said
5. Mediate and protect.⁴⁶

Recommendation: Mentoring is a key means to encourage confidence and capacity. The Party should establish a mentoring programme which could enable senior councillors to be paired with those who will benefit from extra support.

34%

involved in this report receive a blackberry or smartphone from their council

38%

are supplied with a laptop or PC by their council for use in their role

12%

are equipped with an iPad or tablet to support them on council business

COUNCILLOR PROFILE



**Councillor Kam Chana
Pinner South Ward
London Borough of Harrow**

I moved into Harrow in 2006 and never really considered becoming a councillor and to be honest, didn't really know the work councillors do. I raised an issue, I think about bin collection, with a neighbour and he suggested I contact the local councillors. After speaking with one I remember feeling what valuable work and contributions councillors actually make to the local community.

I am a strong believer of the 'Big Society' concept and feel passionate about bringing diverse communities together. I had recently become a father and all the worries about what we are going to leave behind for our children were coming more and more into my mind.

I became a member of the local Conservative association and initially got involved in canvassing, posting leaflets, etc. I remember talking with a lot of different people about their experiences of being Conservative councillors and the type of work they do. There was no information about becoming a Conservative councillor written down that I could take away and read. It was really about speaking with the more experienced councillors and asking questions.

I enjoy being able to make a positive difference. I remind myself that I became a Conservative councillor to help improve the lives of the whole community. I enjoy being contacted by residents and being able to help them no matter how big the problem. In addition, I'm always looking for opportunities where I can improve the local area.

Looking forward, I would like to continue to support people with issues that I can help with. I think there could and should be more relevant training for councillors to support them. It has to be specific and useful for the councillor's role. Also, more has to be done to recruit suitable prospective Conservative councillors. As Chief Whip of the Conservative group in Harrow, this is very important to ensure we get the right type of people that can represent the Conservative Party to the standard it requires and support local people in their daily lives.

As a new Conservative councillor there is a lot of information available for you. However, working out which is useful, user friendly or a waste of time is very difficult.

The CCA has many exciting features including an option where you can create your own councillor web page. There is a news section that tells you about 'latest news', including information about by-elections.

“As a new Conservative councillor there is a lot of information available for you. However, working out which is useful, user friendly or a waste of time is very difficult.”

I would like to see more political information that can help me answer questions on the doorstep when I'm canvassing.

Even though, I'm a local Conservative councillor, a lot of the questions posed to me on the door step are related to national issues and policies. This detailed political literature is not easily available and it would be very useful if it was. The LGA and its website wasn't an obvious place for me to look for political literature and support as a Conservative councillor.

The support that was on offer was very expensive and as I work full time I could not attend their sessions anyway. There has to be more support for councillors that helps and assists them in their job and it must be up-to-date, easy accessible, representative and relevant.

This knowledge would empower me and I would feel a lot more confident when canvassing and talking to residents.

tomorrow's councillor

24%

involved in this report do not believe they understand social media

33%

have some understanding of using social media

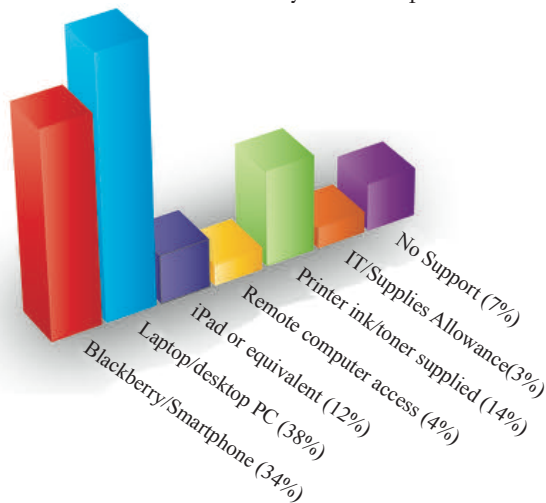
43%

are comfortable using social media in their role

THE TOOLS FOR THE JOB

Councillors should have the opportunity of extra support and the right tools to do the job. Business professionals expect to have access to information and processes that can help them in their work. Politicians who need to encourage economic growth should have such support too.

The chart below, illustrates but does not entirely represent councillors' IT provision, as the results may be skewed by the number of councillors in our survey in senior positions.



Council provision of IT equipment to our councillors

Council IT support tends to be prioritised to cabinet members or committee chairmen. Some large councils do not provide any IT equipment to their councillors, leaving them either to reach into their own pockets or at a disadvantage. On the other hand the proliferation of computers and devices in the home means that the expensive blanket supply of computers is less important than an extranet or a Virtual Private Network connection to the council email system using councillors' own equipment.

Tablet computers will only offer real cost savings to local authorities if coupled with a strategy to provide information to councillors in a very different way; one that is understood across the organisation. Some of the councillors in our survey are using council-supplied iPads as part of a pilot scheme. A councillor shared his successful example:

"I was a pioneer of iPads. I have an IT background and [the council] tried to take me apart but I showed how we would take £100,000 out of the budget. They are eating their words now. At a recent planning meeting we had a question that we would normally have had to have a site meeting for but it was simple as we just looked up the issue on Google maps."

(LONDON BOROUGH)

47. Connected councillors: a guide to using social media to support local leadership published, Local Government Leadership, <http://socialmedia.21st.cc/the-guide/>

There is no one dominant means of communication for councillors. The well-tried and tested methods of connecting to people remain at the forefront of our councillors' activities: leafleting, canvassing, house meetings, surgeries and sometimes an open meeting, are still the main means of connection with residents. These activities allow councillors to get to know their area intimately and thoroughly, giving them an unparalleled knowledge of the area's details which often far surpasses the local knowledge of local government officers.

As people communicate, socialise and live in very different ways, councillors cannot always engage with their entire electorate through any one single method. Younger people and commuters are often missed when canvassing. Leaflets may only be read by a single person in a household. House meetings are often difficult to arrange in urban areas.

Social media has quickly become a crucial addition – not replacement – to the politician's toolkit. Social media means what it says, offering a means of engagement with many people as opposed to a single individual, in an open, consultative and ongoing way. It is therefore an ideal tool for helping councillors in their democratic role of engaging with the opinions and activities of people within their area and something they are well advised to use.

The internet has created a shift in communication from a style which was mainly one to one, individually based and private to those directly involved, to a form that is open to all and with the capacity to attract large numbers.

Our survey showed a gap between the sense that social media is important and the confidence that councillors have sufficient knowledge to exploit these tools.

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and blogs are powerful tools but serve different purposes. They are most effective when users understand the correct fit of audience, message and communication platform.

For councillors, the potential is enormous. A councillor's task is to represent the entire community - not just those who make themselves available by being the 'usual suspects' at community meetings. Social media can, "enhance local democracy through greater transparency and providing both a greater voice and greater responsibility for citizens in setting priorities and delivering public services".⁴⁷ It can be used to connect with those active in online communities who may not be engaged with local politics, to establish their concerns and priorities.

22%

do not believe that using social media is important in their role

37%

believe that social media has a reasonable degree of importance

47%

believe that using social media is important in their role as a local politician

EQUIPPING LEADERS

Simply broadcasting messages only scratches the surface of what these tools offer. A number of councils are moving towards making banks of data open and freely available in a move to transparency, championed by Eric Pickles MP. Open

group, a faith group, a charitable endeavour, an interest group, a sporting group, a book club, a campaigning group. Between them they deliver social benefits that affect many people.

They also contribute to the stability and welfare of the larger community by providing social cohesion, regeneration, and a sense of belonging.

OLD AND NEW FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNICATION

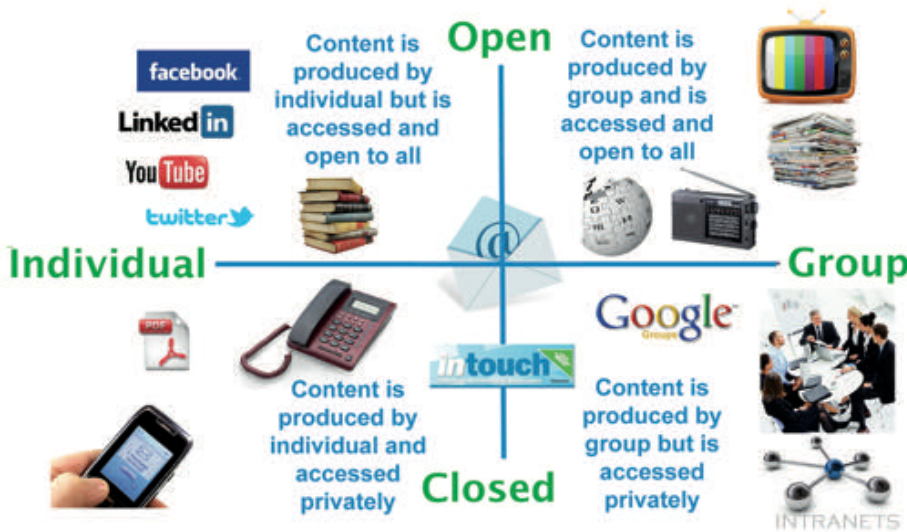


Chart courtesy of Softly Software Ltd

A definition is offered in the RSA booklet *'Connected Communities: how social networks power and sustain the Big Society'*, which warns about seeing communities as rigid geographical identities: "Communities are not areas but systems, not groups with stable demographic data, but networks with unstable patterns of connectivity."⁴⁵

Councillors are in a prime position to link groups. Working with and supporting communities' networking capability, councillors can provide connections that will strengthen community cohesion, a vital part of their local leadership role

Many capable councillors are already aware what and where groupings exist. But as society grows and becomes

data allows 'armchair auditors' to challenge the council having analysed the council, and smartphone app developers to create tools that help residents make the most of local services.

Apps to locate the nearest bicycle to hire in London or to take a photo of a pothole and report it direct are two examples. Open data also allows councillors to work more effectively using datasets relating to the part of the community that they serve. Local authorities need to ensure that councillors are aware of these opportunities and have the capacity to make the most of the data available.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Local authorities collate a significant amount of community mapping information that could be invaluable to councillors. The make-up and challenges within an area are what give the place its individuality. Yet each area has its own different pattern of social networks, both on and offline. There is no single definition for what is 'a community' any more than there is a single defining identity to describe any one person. Often these societies are little more than a fluid grouping which has united around a single interest. They may be a voluntary

more complex it is difficult to keep pace with developments. Councillors cannot be expected to know other local areas in the depth that they know their own wards. Officers have a part to play to support councillors by providing this information.

Mapped data such as consumer information,⁴⁸ community assets, demographic data, service centres and groups and faith centres can allow councillors to ensure that residents are not endangered by social exclusion.

Greater information exchange will allow councillors to avoid pitfalls, to adapt successful schemes to suit their own area and to make direct comparisons with other geographic areas that might have a similar demographic.

Recommendation: Inexpensive or free technology could be used to bolster the CCA website, by building a centralised repository of information in the form of a moderated website or a wiki which would allow Conservative councillors to share their ideas, successful examples of positive change, worked examples and data, in private if required.

48. Such as Mosaic data, collected by Experian and used by commercial organisations as well as local authorities and political parties

36%

are on Twitter and see this as a valid means of communication

25%

use a blog or website to get their message across and engage with residents

20%

use Facebook to keep in contact in their role as local councillor

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

SETTING THE CONTEXT

The Party should review the information that is supplied to councillors to ensure that it is timely, easy to access and there is space for free exchange of ideas.

CONSERVATIVE CULTURE

The Party should undertake a study on how there can be better co-ordination of effort between councillors, the parliamentary party and the central organisation.

The Conservative lead on LGA boards should attend appropriate ministerial meetings in those departments that have direct responsibilities which impact on local government.

THE VIEW ON LOCALISM FROM COUNCILLORS

The Party should consider what measures it can employ to strengthen councillors' political leadership. This may involve using experienced Conservative councillors to visit less experienced councils to encourage their political role. It may involve ensuring that compelling examples of good practice that can be adapted or used as the seed of an idea should be shared more readily by the Conservative Party for the use of Conservative councils and to showcase the success of localism.

CHOOSING THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW

Associations should be provided with a councillor selection manual. This could be built on the *Be a Councillor X-Factor* but it should include a specific Conservative approach that stresses the nature of the job of councillor, the skills needed and why the councillor base should be widened. Associations who are unable to find suitable candidates should be given practical advice. Smaller associations should be encouraged to work together to share insights and knowledge.

Consideration should be given as to whether councillors who have served as a council leader or at cabinet level in a first tier council and who wish to progress to a parliamentary selection, can be better accommodated.

PREPARING COMMUNITY LEADERS

Building on the networking strengths of Next Generation, there should be a programme which encourages Conservative political leadership in areas where it is not strong by actively supporting those who are interested in becoming a councillor but have little know-how. Such a programme would provide on-going peer support.

The Conservative Councillors Association should provide on their website a list of worthwhile training opportunities as a guide so that councillors are not lured into unnecessarily expensive schemes given by people who have no direct experience or knowledge of local government.

Preparation for office is not a luxury. It is a necessary tool for encouraging a wider democratic involvement. Capacity for providing support should be developed at a regional level though it remains that group leaders should ultimately decide training priorities. Innovative use of technology should be used to enable individual candidates to access material.

Every week parliamentary candidates are sent a briefing note; a relevant abridged version should be made available to all members of the Conservative Councillors Association.

Mentoring is a key means to encourage confidence and capacity. The Party should establish a mentoring programme which could enable senior councillors to be paired with those who will benefit from extra support.

THE TOOLS FOR THE JOB

Inexpensive or free technology could be used to bolster the CCA website, by building a centralised repository of information in the form of a moderated website or a wiki which would allow Conservative councillors to share their ideas, successful examples of positive change, worked examples and data, in private if required.

THE LAST WORD

As the largest party in local government the Conservative Party is well placed to influence how the role of councillor becomes ready to match the increased expectations set by localism and we look forward to seeing how this challenge is met.

Suitably the last word is given to a councillor:

“Thank you for completing this piece of research. It is essential that nationally the government of whatever political persuasion understands the importance of good quality local people coming forward to being councillors.”

(UNITARY, WEST MIDLANDS)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

CHRISTINA DYKES



Christina specialises in developing political leadership at the sharp end of everyday politics with those in power and those wanting to take it.

Her direct experience spans many years working as a political insider and includes working with leading politicians at every level of government.

Christina is a former Director of Development and Candidates for the Conservative Party, and has directed the Conservative Next Generation Leadership programme for leading

Conservative councillors. In addition she became a Leadership Adviser and has since worked in a number of first-tier councils with their top teams, helping them understand the need for good political leadership. Christina is an accredited political coach by the Tavistock Institute.

PAUL SCULLY



Following a number of years in business, Paul entered politics and has since gained considerable experience at each level of government.

A former councillor, he was Leader of the Opposition in the London Borough of Sutton. He has worked in Parliament for three MPs giving him a valuable insight into the links between parliamentarians and local councillors.

He is an award-winning blogger and has trained politicians to use and make the most of social media.

Paul is the Conservative parliamentary candidate for Sutton & Cheam and runs his own consultancy, Nudge Factory Ltd, advising businesses on corporate social responsibility and public affairs.

