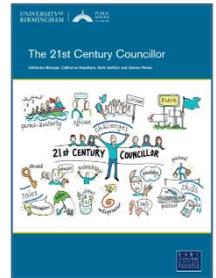


Testing The 21st Century Councillor Framework

Key findings from Jam & Justice, with North West Employers.

Jam and Justice is a Greater Manchester-based action research project, asking what enables greater citizen involvement in decision-making in our cities? **North West Employers** provide training and development activities for 41 local authorities in the north west of England. Jam and Justice partnered with North West Employers to explore what is needed to enable better outcomes for all, by talking with Councillors, council officers and other citizens. Research from Birmingham University (*The 21st Century Councillor*, 2016, pictured) was used to prompt discussion about how Councillors respond to the many challenges and opportunities in their local areas. This document summarises findings from the new research, picking out key themes from the focus group discussions.



Strengthening roles and developing relationships

Communication matters. So does understanding what everyone does, what is important to them and what needs to happen. All groups felt more co-production and collaboration on projects were required.

“Councillors should play a role in strengthening these relationships, but the question is how?”

“Capacity to do this is simply not there. Relying on online solutions is not adequate.”

It was suggested that annual meetings with Councillors involving members of the youth council could take place.

“Create situations that bring people together more.”

Officers and Councillors liked the idea of joint training, it was felt it would work to bring people together around an issue that is relevant in any given local area, including building on what's good, rather than only focusing on the problems.

Community groups said that a lot of outreach work needs to be done to reach all communities.

“The practice of hustings should be reintroduced. Bad news has to be given face to face. Rather than Councillors spending a lot of time knocking on doors, talking to individuals, they should convene a meeting where the whole community can attend.”



Emerging Issues



People described a mixed picture. Some people are **stuck working in the same way**. Established community groups sometimes have traditional expectations that their main role is to lobby for change by others, with councils doing the bulk of the work. Some local councillors use the same model.

In other cases, a **culture shift is visible**, with mixed groups, new and old, working together more. Some emerging community groups work differently, doing things jointly with the council and other partners, with everyone contributing. Collaboration and co-production are happening.

The focus groups suggested:

- Councillors** have to draw on their skills to **enable effective co-production and collaboration**.
- Councils** need to be **less risk averse** to enable innovation.

Learning and development

Discussions about support for Councillors to develop the required skills and behaviours mirrored the relational skills highlighted in *The 21st Century Councillor* research. Pre-election and a more robust focused induction came up repeatedly in discussion.



Focus groups proposed Learning and Development interventions such as:

Recruitment and Induction

- Pre-election training: more robust, Job description, in the selection process
- Identify gaps in Council / party knowledge and advertise
- Values and expectations of a Councillor need to be updated and built into the recruitment and Induction
- Build in appraisal for Councillors

Engaging Councillors in Learning and Development engagement process to clearly show:

- The benefits of the training
- How it links into their role
- How they will use it
- How the training will support the different groups they work with

Learning and Development activities

- 360 feedback tools – linked to the 21st Century Councillor roles and skills
- Skills Audit
- Back to the floor: link in with officers
- Joint training with officers for key areas

Key areas to include in Learning and Development programmes

- Engaging and empowering communities
- Strength-based approach to communication and empowerment
- Asset-based community development
- Strengthening relationships: what's key?
- Understanding what's in their area
- Co-production and collaborative working
- Pitching for funding: what you need to know
- How technology can help the Councillors' roles
- Understanding statutory and non-statutory services
- Business skills

21st Century Councillor roles to be embedded in all training

- Relational Skills – Communication skills around. Influencing. Negotiating. Listening. Connecting
- Reflective skills
- Emotional Intelligence
- Conflict Resolution
- Personal and Leadership Resilience

Next steps and Recommendations

Based on the focus group discussions, we recommend:



Political parties look to refresh recruitment processes for potential new Councillors to ensure these meet the required needs and outcomes of all stakeholders and provide a greater understanding of what is required of Councillors.



Councillors seek out development interventions to understand and make sense of restrictions (why some things cannot happen) and enable an all-round understanding of public sector and communities. Focus groups agreed this is fundamental for Councillors' roles.



Councils look to review induction, learning and development to ensure there is support in place to aid Councillors in taking up the role as soon as they are elected. Focus groups agreed Councillors need a clear understanding of their role, the values and behaviours and what it means to be a Councillor.



All stakeholders work together to create more spaces where people can develop a greater understanding of: what it means to be a Councillor; what communities are looking for; and how council officers can support this.