

Asking the right questions: The need for transformational and new contextual leadership skills for local authority Chief Executives



SKILLS for LOCAL GOVERNMENT
Developing skills for successful public services



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Purpose of Report

This is a report, based on research, into the current and future skills requirements of local authority Chief Executives. The approach taken consisted of a survey of Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) members, structured and informal interviews with local authority Chief Executives and other stakeholders, Master Class discussions and associated desk top research. This project was carried out by Skills for Local Government – formerly known as Skills for Justice – with co-investment from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills through the Employer Investment fund.

The purposes of this report are to stimulate and inform discussion on:

- The views gained during the research on the existing and new skill sets required by Chief Executives and aspiring Chief Executives.
- The key conclusions emerging from the project.
- How Solace and the Local Government Association (LGA) may support the maintenance and development of these skill sets.

Main Findings

The project has identified some very clear findings. The main ones are that:

- Chief Executives have to operate at both transactional and transformational levels.
- Within the transformational ‘level’ there are some key skill sets.

However, the complexity of the environment in which local government is operating and the changes it is experiencing have produced the need for Chief Executives to develop a range of new ‘contextual’ skills that transcend the previous

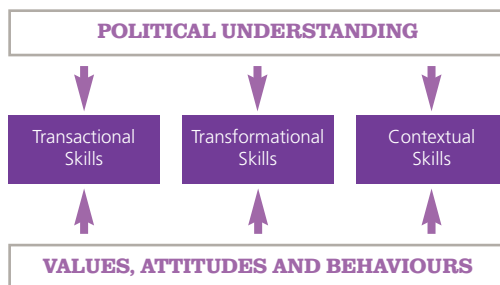
transactional and transformational ones. These ‘contextual’ skills allow Chief Executives to not only operate within the new environment but also to influence the development of that environment.

All the transactional, transformational and new ‘contextual’ skills need to be underpinned by a set of explicit values, attitudes and behaviours that both encapsulate the Chief Executive’s approach to their managerial leadership responsibilities and which generate support and loyalty for them in this role.

Similarly there is an underlying set of political understanding skills that are necessary if a Chief Executive is to perform any of the transactional, transformational and new ‘contextual’ skills effectively.

The preferred development methods by which Chief Executives and aspiring Chief Executives obtain and maintain their skills were identified consistently as being based around the concept of ‘peer support’ rather than formal training.

The diagram below illustrates the relationship between the elements outlined above. These are then discussed in greater detail throughout the report.



This report centres upon identifying the key transformational skills and the new 'contextual' skills rather than transactional skills such as financial management, performance management etc. This is not to underestimate the value of these skills but considerable research and frameworks already exist in these areas and the emphasis requested of this project was on investigating which skills a local authority Chief Executive (as distinct from a senior manager) needs and what new skill sets in this role are required.

Brief Explanation and Expansion of Main Findings

The key transformational skills identified as being required are:

- Vision setting and strategic management.
- Management of change.
- Working with partners, partnerships and other stakeholders.
- Communication and cultural management.
- Democratic accountability and challenge.

In addition to these there is a further transformational skill of political understanding which has a separate status in the layers of skills and is shown separately in the diagram overleaf. This is to recognise that this skill set is fundamental to the effective operation of all the other skill sets when operating at this level.


Arising from the project and, in particular, the discussions and interviews with some of the leading Chief Executives in local government, four new 'contextual' skills were also identified. These overlap with the 'transformational' skills but in

each case the new 'contextual' skills have unique high level elements that transcend previous skill requirements. How each of these operates will depend very much on local circumstances. This will include relationships / role definition with politicians and the interaction between them and the Chief Executive.

The operation of the skills will also be affected by the make-up and vision for the community, the preferred method of operation of the local authority itself etc. These 'contextual' skills also overlap with each other and with the values, attitudes and behaviours outlined, and are summarised as:

Leading place and space: this skill set contains various aspects and is also allied very much to the 'political understanding' and the traditional 'managing partners and partnerships skills'. One aspect of this 'contextual' skill is about developing and being a 'leader of place' and whole system development i.e. facilitation, support of others, as well as direct delivery of the development of the whole community. This includes understanding and respecting the role of others in delivering the vision for the community and respecting the 'space' in which they operate. Leadership in this broader, whole system environment enables influence and empathy across both external and internal stakeholders, partners and colleagues, and benefits from a joining up of learning opportunities.

Leading during complexity and ambiguity: local government is going through such dramatic, fundamental and irreversible changes that entirely new delivery methods, ways of working and relationships are having to be invented. This means



that Chief Executives (and politicians) are now working in areas where there is no previous model they can follow (a phrase coined by one Chief Executive was 'the ability to work without a blueprint'). This skill set goes beyond the management of change as it requires levels of innovation and working with ambiguity never required before.

Leading entrepreneurial organisations: councils cannot meet the requirements of the new environment through bureaucratic and risk adverse strategies. Although 'commercial' and 'business' skills were considered during the project, the concept of the 'entrepreneurial council' fits better the requirement councils have to lever resources, invent new delivery methods, seek investment opportunities, create and operate organisations that empower staff and have a 'can do' culture. An important element of this approach in the current financial climate is that of 'demand management' and taking proactive measures to influence the demands for local authority services.

Leading through trust: the complexity of the operating environment, the scale, fundamental nature and the rapidity of change mean that many Chief Executives are leading organisations where the way forward is not clear beyond the next few steps. This requires Chief Executives to create their own environment where others will have enough trust to follow them even when the way ahead is not clear. Chief Executives during interviews made analogies to leading people through mazes and forests with no clear pathway ahead. A 'contextual' skill of motivating people to follow you when the way is not clear and 'taking the first few steps into the forest' is required.

The importance of maintaining and demonstrating consistently a set of **values, attitudes and behaviours** was stressed by many of those contacted / interviewed. These are so inter-linked with the skill sets discussed in the project that some exploration of them is also provided. However, the scope and timing of the report did not allow for a full exploration of these and this is an area where Solace and the LGA may wish to do further work.

The research has also examined the development methods by which Chief Executives obtain and **maintain** their skills. This is to help inform Solace and the LGA of the support they may wish to offer. Although (as stated above) there is a range of new 'contextual' skills, the preferred development methods for both the new 'contextual' skills and 'transformational' skills are fairly traditional and there appears to be a need to re-launch rather than re-invent the support / development mechanisms required. The preferred support requested by those participating in the research is consistently based around the concept of 'peer support' rather than formal training.

There are already many existing mechanisms for people to obtain the 'transactional' skills mentioned and, to a large degree, the 'transformational' ones as well. It is recommended, therefore, that the focus of future support from Solace / LGA should be upon the 'contextual' skills, 'political understanding' skills and values, attitudes and behaviour aspects discussed in this report.

The vast majority of Chief Executives already hold some form of professional qualification and many have supplemented this with management and business qualifications. Although the benefits of further formal training are not underestimated, the most valued forms of development and support are more informal and 'on-going'. This includes the benefits of 'peer support' and opportunities to share experiences and expertise.

There are also advantages to these development methods in terms of flexibility and cost as well as the development opportunity they give to those 'delivering' the methods as well as those 'receiving'.

As such the following forms of support were the most commonly suggested as being the ones that should form the core of support from Solace / LGA:

- Buddy systems.
- Mentoring and coaching.
- Action Learning Sets.
- Informal half day (or similar) 'sharing events' on specific topics.

There are two related aspects that should be considered:

New Chief Executives: Solace provides a two-day programme for newly-appointed Chief Executives. This is valued by the participants and was reported as being a very useful offering. There is a need to ensure content is regularly reviewed in light of the changing world of local government and this project. Another specific aspect is that attendees of this course are encouraged to form Action Learning Sets amongst themselves. It is strongly recommended that they be encouraged to join Action Learning Sets so that they can both contribute new ideas but also benefit from a wider range of experience.

Established Chief Executives: Solace in particular has an extremely valuable resource in its own members. Solace needs to harness the energies and delivery capability of this resource still further and to make it available to new and aspiring Chief Executives. It is worth noting that the majority of 'established' Chief Executives interviewed also held that they found delivering mentoring etc. a valuable form of development for themselves. Solace supports practicing and recently retired Chief Executives to develop their coaching and mentoring skills and provides a quality assured process for matching coaches to those who are looking for a coach or mentor. This support could be expanded to provide a more significant support to the sector.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

As stated, this is a report primarily designed to stimulate and inform discussion. However, there are some initial recommendations and suggestions that should be considered:

- a)** That this report be considered by the Solace Board and LGA with a view to informing how they may develop a revised support programme for Chief Executives and aspiring Chief Executives of local authorities.
- b)** The focus of any support programme should recognise the whole system environment in which local authorities now operate including linkages to other local partners. There should be a clear focus upon the new 'contextual' skills and 'political understanding' skills, as these are aspects that Solace and LGA are uniquely placed to supply.
- c)** How such a programme may fit with broader public sector leadership development.
- d)** That further research and discussion be considered to develop further the concepts and support for Chief Executives and aspiring Chief Executives in developing and demonstrating consistently a set of explicit values, attitudes and behaviours.
- e)** Any support programme should centre around the principles of peer support and informal learning development through mechanisms such as:
 - Mentoring and coaching.
 - Action Learning Sets.
 - Buddy systems.
 - Informal half day (or similar) 'sharing events' on specific topics.
- f)** A 'skills and willingness' audit be undertaken amongst Solace members to identify both existing skills, such as Chief Executives who have an interest and the relevant experience to be mentors / coaches, are active participants in Action Learning Sets and / or are willing to lead informal sharing sessions.
- g)** The content of the Solace New Chief Executive programme continue to be reviewed in the light of the research.

3

BACKGROUND OF THE REPORT

This report is part of a workforce development programme being undertaken in partnership by:

Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (Solace): a professional body representing and open to Chief Executives, senior managers, middle managers and graduates of all UK local authorities and related public sector organisations

Local Government Association (LGA): a membership organisation representing and supporting local authorities. In total, 423 local authorities are members of the LGA for 2012/13. These include English local councils, Welsh councils via the Welsh LGA, and fire, national park, passenger transport and police authorities, plus one town council

Skills for Local Government: formerly known as Skills for Justice, Skills for Local Government is a licensed Sector Skills Council which covers those local government professions not explicitly covered by other Sector Skill Councils. Skills for Local Government provides support to employer organisations, local authorities and trade unions in identifying and developing the skills and new ways of working to provide first class local services.

The methodology used in the compilation of this report included:

- A survey of all Solace members with 114 responses being received. This response rate can be broken down into 60 Chief Executives and 54 senior managers across all types of local authorities (excluding town and parish councils).
- Discussions at two Solace Master Classes at which interim findings were discussed and which contributed to this final report.

- Structured interviews with a variety of leading local authority Chief Executives and other stakeholders.
- A variety of desk research looking at influences upon local government and leadership requirements.

The partners would like to express their thanks to everyone who completed the survey and put forward their views, suggestions and advice. In particular we would like to thank the following for their time in taking part in the interview stages:

- Deborah Cadman O.B.E., Chief Executive, Suffolk County Council
- Michael Coughlin, Executive Director, Local Government Association
- Jessica Crowe, Executive Director, Centre for Public Scrutiny
- Ged Fitzgerald, Chief Executive, Liverpool City Council
- Manjeet Gill, Chief Executive, West Lindsey District Council
- Ruth Hyde, Chief Executive, Broxtowe District Council
- Martin Reeves, Chief Executive, Coventry City Council
- Lesley Seary, Chief Executive, London Borough of Islington
- Becky Shaw, Chief Executive, East Sussex County Council

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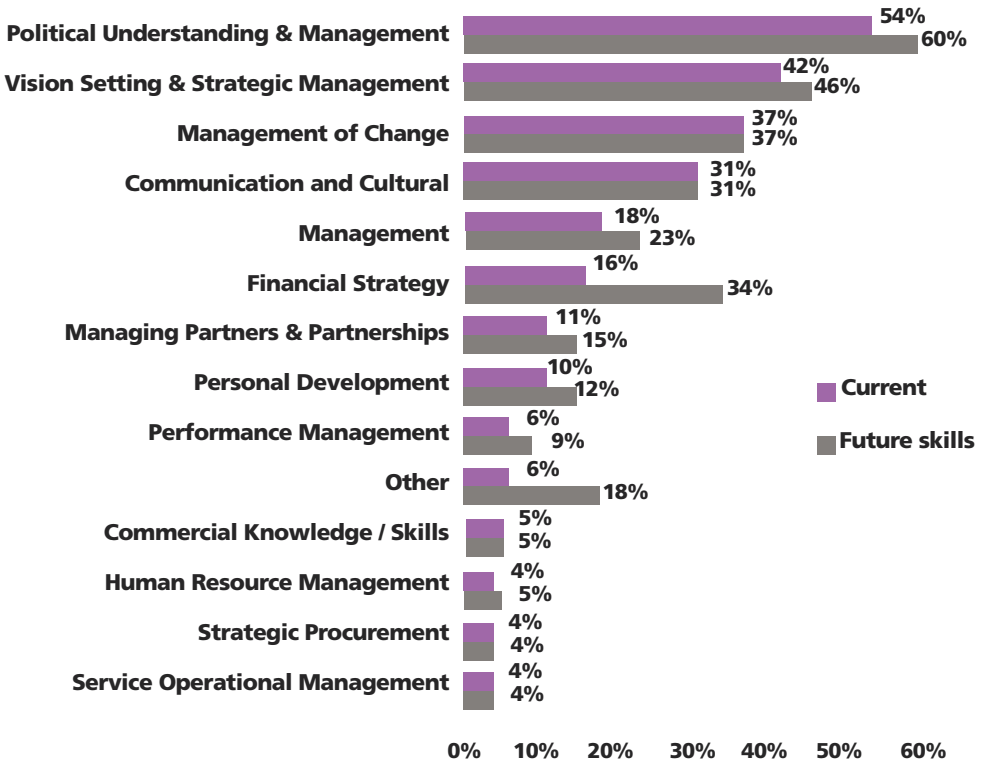
KEY TRANSFORMATIONAL SKILLS


The Solace survey and Master Classes concentrated upon identifying existing and future skills through an electronic survey. The survey itself covered both transactional and transformational skills. Due to it being an electronic survey this limited the opportunity for discussion, comment etc. However, the response rate was good with 114 responses being received and some clear messages could be identified.

Respondents were asked to score the importance of a range of transactional and transformational role elements both now and in three years time.

A list of these role elements was given but respondents were also invited to identify any significant elements not included on the list. The chart below illustrates the role elements from the given list and the percentage of all respondents (Chief Executives and Senior Managers) scoring each element as being of prime importance now and in three years time.

Note: respondents were not asked to rank the elements against each other and so more than one element could achieve a top importance score in an individual return





These responses clearly indicate five elements that are considered to be of most importance in achieving success in a local authority Chief Executive role over the next three years. These five elements are at the transformational level and are as follows:

- Political understanding.
- Vision setting and strategic management.
- Management of change.
- Managing partners and partnerships (retitled Working with partners, partnerships and other stakeholders in the Appendix of this report to ensure it encompasses other stakeholders).
- Communication and cultural management.

In discussions with Chief Executives and other stakeholders a sixth skill set emerged. This was around the topic of democratic accountability and challenge. This is considered important as one of the roles of a Chief Executive is seen as creating a culture where being open and accountable is not only viewed as 'part of the day job' but also recognised as a significant development opportunity for councils, partnerships etc.

This skill set ranges through aspects such as ensuring the basic democratic process of elections, encouraging and supporting effective scrutiny, constructively challenging others, seeking personal feedback etc.

The reasons for including this as a 'transformational skill' are well summarised by Joanna Killian, Chief Executive of Essex and Chair of Solace in her essay '*Why public scrutiny and accountability are good for public sector managers*', published in March 2013 to help celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Centre for Public Scrutiny, and which said:

'[Accountability and] robust scrutiny makes it possible to not only identify failure but source solutions to fix things that are wrong. It enables us to act as the champion for our service users and taxpayers when they receive services from others.

'At its most mature it will mean exploring new and different ways of serving our customers, challenging how things are done, what must stay, what must stop, and what must change. It can provide powerful evidence and arguments to help us deliver new services, target resources and de-prioritise what is no longer affordable.'

An outline of the elements that comprise each of the above skills sets (including democratic accountability and challenge) is set out in Appendices 2 and 3. There is also a separate discussion around the political understanding skill set in section 6 of this report.

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THE NEW 'CONTEXTUAL' SKILLS

Most Chief Executives will be using these skills on a daily basis. However, the structured discussions in particular revealed that, taken on their own, the 'transformational' skills do not fully encompass the changing job roles of Chief Executives, how their councils are operating, the dramatic changes in local government and how councils work with communities and partners. These new skills overlap with the 'transformational' skills but in each case the new 'contextual' skills have unique high level elements that transcend previous skill requirements. Although expressed in different terms across the interviews it was possible to draw out key themes which naturally group into four new 'contextual' skillsets which are discussed below and are outlined in Appendix 2.

It is interesting to note that, although structured and worded differently, these 'contextual' skills are very similar in content to the four new key roles suggested for a new kind of public servant by the Birmingham Policy Commission in their report *'When tomorrow comes – the future of local public services'*.


These skill sets are termed 'contextual' skills in this research report as they allow Chief Executives to operate within the new environment but also to influence the development of that environment. How each of these operates will depend very much on local circumstances. This will include relationships / role definition with politicians and the interaction between them and the Chief Executive. The operation of the skills will also be affected by the make-up and vision for the community, the preferred method of operation of the local authority itself etc.

These 'contextual' skills overlap with each other and with the values, attitudes and behaviours also outlined. The four new skill sets are:

Leading place and space: this skill set contains various aspects and is also allied very much to the 'political understanding' skills and the 'managing partners and partnerships' skills. One aspect of this 'contextual' skill is about developing and being a 'leader of place' and whole system development i.e. facilitation, support of others, as well as direct delivery of the development of the whole community. This includes understanding and respecting the role of others in delivering the vision for the community and respecting the 'space' in which they operate. Leadership in this broader whole system environment enables influence and empathy across both external and internal stakeholders, partners and colleagues, and benefits from a joining up of learning opportunities.

There are, therefore, three key aspects of this skill set identified:

Leadership of Place: a recognition that the role of the council is a 'leader of place'. The council (and the Chief Executive) should be the advocate, hub, facilitator and supporter of all aspects of the development of its community. This means acting in conjunction with partners and the community itself to achieve this development. This also means more than just managing and contributing to partnership working. It requires creating local identity, community cohesion, engaging and representing the community, balancing conflicting priorities within the community, resolving complex challenges and creating 'whole system' approaches.



Partnership Space: there is a dramatic change underway in the role and way in which many councils engage and work with partners. This comes from a variety of influences including:

- Limited council resources which restricts the ability of councils to resolve issues unilaterally and entirely by themselves.
- Many councils accept that others are better placed to resolve community issues and support particular aspects of community development.
- Many council functions and delivery of services have been outsourced and / or are delivered in partnership.
- Many community issues are too complex to be resolved by just one public organisation.

Professional space: Chief Executives require the ability and judgement to know when and when not to involve themselves directly in the work of other stakeholders. This does not only include external partners as mentioned above, but also elected members and professional officers within their own councils.

A new skill for Chief Executives (amongst others), therefore, is to define the 'spaces' between organisations and people fully and clearly and then respect these. Ged Fitzgerald of Liverpool City Council observed when interviewed that Chief Executives should be wary of entering other people's space 'without being invited'. However, joint accountability is also crucial in this respect and should not be overlooked even when such 'spaces' have been agreed. Jessica Crowe of the Centre for Public Scrutiny observed in her interview that one of the key new skills for local authority Chief Executives is to 'help their organisations to feel accountable and welcome this'.

Leading during complexity and ambiguity:

a phrase coined by Martin Reeves of Coventry City Council when interviewed (and echoed by many of those interviewed) summarises much of the skill set required under this heading. This is the ability to 'lead without a blueprint'. It is based on the fact that the world of local government is going through such dramatic and irreversible changes that entirely new delivery methods, ways of working and relationships are having to be invented. This means that Chief Executives (and politicians) are now working in areas where there is no previous model they can follow. This goes beyond the management of change as it requires levels of innovation, 'thinking on one's feet' and working with ambiguity never required before. This is not 'making it up as you go along' but the ability to react quickly to changing circumstances, seek and identify new opportunities, embrace critical situations as springboards for change etc. It also requires the ability to be able to work outside of normal formal structures and create new forms of organisations and 'virtual' organisations.

Leading entrepreneurial organisations:

councils cannot meet the requirements of the new operating environment through bureaucratic and risk averse strategies and within local government there has been much discussion in recent years regarding the 'need' for more business / commercial skills. One of the difficulties encountered during the research is that the phrase 'business / commercial' skills is open to different interpretation. This can range from the need to create trading services, accurate costing of services, more streamlined management of services and, it has even been suggested, the ability not to worry when redundancies etc. are identified.

The new operating environment and social values of councils, however, suggest that a more holistic term should be adopted. The phrase 'Entrepreneurial Council' was suggested by Manjeet Gill, of West Lindsey District Council and this has been adopted by her own council which has the strapline 'the entrepreneurial council with a social enterprise mindset' on its corporate plan. The concept of entrepreneurialism goes beyond trading, efficiency programmes etc. and looks at how a council uses its whole resource base in different ways, creates a culture of empowerment to try new ideas, understands and seeks investment opportunities and has a 'can do' approach. An important element of this approach in the current financial climate is that of 'demand management' and taking proactive measures to influence the demands for local authority services.

Leading through trust: the complexity of the new environment, the scale, fundamental nature and the rapidity of change mean that many Chief Executives are leading organisations where the way forward is not clear beyond the next few steps. This requires Chief Executives to create their own environment where others will have enough trust to follow them even when the way ahead is not clear.

There is, obviously, a huge overlap here with the values, attitudes and behaviours section below. Analogies made during the research illustrate the type of skills required:

a) Treat the future as a maze not a mountain:

This phrase was used by Lesley Seary of the London Borough of Islington during her interview. She used this phrase to illustrate some key points:

- If you see the future challenges as an insurmountable object you will be overwhelmed and increase the chances of failure.
- If you try to move a mountain you will fail.
- Treat the future as a maze (albeit a complex one) and find your way through it with your people.
- The real skill is getting people to follow you into and through the maze, trusting that you will find a way through.

b) Leading through the forest: Michael Coughlin, Executive Director of the LGA, drew a similar analogy in his interview. He observed that some Chief Executives are in a position similar to someone on a cliff edge, with the sea eroding the cliff and the only way ahead of them on land is a forest with no clear path through it. These leaders must take their people into the forest but with no certainty as to where the path leads or how. Again the skill is getting people to take the first few steps into the forest with them.

6

POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING SKILLS

Although listed above as being within the 'transformational' skill set, it is felt that this particular skill set has a separate status in the layers of skills and is shown separately in the diagram at the start of this report. This is because:

- The possession of this skill set is fundamental to the Chief Executive having the ability to understand and influence the context within which they are working, the drivers and motivations of internal and external stakeholders, priorities, relationships etc.
- The fundamental need for Chief Executives to possess this skill set is one of the factors that helps distinguish their role from other layers of management.
- One of the key factors of this skill set is the need for Chief Executives to balance their political understanding and the relationships they foster within their role, with maintaining the independence of their role.
- The skill set is fundamental to the effective operation of all the other skill sets.
- This skill is also vital for Chief Executives if they are to operate at the new 'contextual' level of skill outlined.

There is a wide variety of elements that make up this skill set as outlined in Appendix 2.

Chief Executives also have to maintain flexibility within this framework as arrangements for Chief Executives are becoming more varied and complex. A particular aspect to be borne in mind is that the political operating environment not only varies greatly between different councils through different political make-up, hung councils, shared management teams, elected mayors etc. but can also be subject to rapid and fundamental change within a single council through changes in individual political leaders, elections etc.

What Chief Executives do require is the skill to create and develop within changing circumstances arrangements with their political leaders that fulfil the needs of the council and its community based upon their respective preferences, styles and skill sets.

The political world is also complex in that it has many layers and subtleties. Political understanding in the context of this research does not only refer to council politicians but also partners, the community and other stakeholders and the skills in Appendix 2 should be read with both that and the 'contextual' skills in mind.

7

VALUES, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS

The skill sets outlined above illustrate what a Chief Executive needs to do in order to be effective. However, it is extremely unlikely that he or she will actually be effective and personally survive in their role unless they also pay attention to how they exercise their skills. Success in this respect depends upon their personal values, attitudes and behaviours.

The importance of maintaining and demonstrating consistently a set of values, attitudes and behaviours was stressed by many of those contacted / interviewed. These are so inter-linked with the skill sets discussed in the report that some exploration of them is provided below and in Appendix 4. However, the scope and timing of the research report did not allow for a full exploration of these and this is an area where Solace and the LGA may wish to do further work.

Each Chief Executive will have their own personal style and preferences. They will also generally tailor these to the circumstances of their council and their own personal position. There is no 'one size fits all' model, therefore, of what a Chief Executive's values, attitudes and behaviours should be. However, it was stressed by participants in the research interviews that Chief Executives should explicitly consider what their values, attitudes and behaviours should be, how they affect others and to keep these attributes under constant review.

The lists of values, attitudes and behaviours suggested by participants were large and varied. They ranged from (amongst many others) ethical considerations, leadership styles and personal awareness to the need to maintain a healthy lifestyle. In Appendix 4 a list is given of those most commonly referred to and which best support the effectiveness of the skill sets outlined.

8

DEVELOPING THE SKILLS

Throughout the research consultees were asked what forms of development they used to obtain and maintain the skills they required. Many referred to how their professional training in a wide variety of fields helped give them some fundamental knowledge and / or some specific experiences that had benefitted their development. There was a clear trend that the 'on-going' development methods were not generally based around formal training but through sharing expertise with peers and others.

Most of the delivery methods recommended by consultees are fairly traditional, even though they are valued to produce the new skills required. A key element is the concept of peer support and using experience and resources within the sector as the most valuable means of development as well as having the benefits of flexibility and affordability. Most, if not all, of these development methods have been offered to the sector through Solace and LGA previously and the need seems to be to re-launch rather than re-invent. The methods recommended include:

- **Buddy systems:** the most 'simple' and unstructured form of support. Individuals simply 'buddy up' with another individual(s) to informally share experiences, ideas etc. Little in the way of formal skills is required and Solace / LGA could simply act as an agency to 'pair' people looking for this type of arrangement.
- **Being mentored and / or coached:** having a trained mentor or coach work with an individual. Formal training and skills are required to act as a mentor and / or coach. Solace / LGA will have members who already have these skills, and a quality assured way of 'pairing' people. Additional ways of evidencing success and feedback would be useful.
- **Acting as a mentor:** this is allied to the point above, but it is worth noting that many participants felt that acting as mentor / coach was a development opportunity for themselves.
- **Action Learning Sets:** generally this will require trained skills in establishing and facilitating at least the first meetings of any Action Learning Sets. Solace / LGA may wish to consider how they might provide this expertise.
- **'Sharing' events:** the facilitation of half day events (or similar) to allow participants to informally explore specific aspects of their role, challenges facing local authorities etc. Obviously these events could take many forms.

Although a re-launch rather than re-invention of support / development mechanisms is recommended, there are already many existing mechanisms for people to obtain the transactional skills outlined. It is recommended, therefore, that the focus of future support from Solace / LGA should be upon the 'contextual' skills and 'political understanding' skills.

There are two related specific aspects that should be considered:

New Chief Executives: Solace provides a two-day programme for newly-appointed Chief Executives. This is valued by the participants and was reported as being a very useful offering. There is a need to ensure content is regularly reviewed in the light of the changing world of local government and this research. Another specific aspect is that attendees of this course are encouraged to form Action Learning Sets amongst themselves. It is strongly recommended that they be encouraged to join Action Learning Sets so that they can both contribute new ideas but also benefit from a wider range of experience.

Established Chief Executives: Solace in particular has an extremely valuable resource in its own members. Solace needs to harness the energies and delivery capability of this resource still further and to make it available to new and aspiring Chief Executives. It is worth noting that the majority of 'established' Chief Executives interviewed also held that they found delivering mentoring etc. a valuable form of development for themselves. Solace supports practicing and recently retired Chief Executives to develop their coaching and mentoring skills and provides a quality assured process for matching coaches to those who are looking for a coach or mentor. This support could be expanded to provide a more significant support to the sector. The LGA also still maintains a pool of peers who may form part of this resource.

Appendix 1

KEY ELEMENTS OF EACH 'CONTEXTUAL' SKILLSET

Leadership of place and space

- Has understanding of the 'place' and community needs through a firm evidence based approach
- Works with the elected leadership to create a shared vision for the community
- Is an advocate, hub, facilitator and supporter of all aspects of community development
- Creates effective relationships across all aspects of the community
- Identifies 'whole system' solutions to complex problems
- Defines the operating spaces between organisations / individuals and respects each other's contribution and 'space'
- Is willing to 'give power' to others and create solutions through them
- Identifies the best delivery vehicles for community development – including whether these are through the council or external agents
- Creates joint accountability for community development
- Helps organisations to feel jointly accountable and to welcome this

Leading during complexity and ambiguity

- Understands the changing roles of councils
- Constantly scans and ensures understanding of the external and internal environment
- Interprets the constantly changing environment for others to understand
- Has the ability to live with ambiguity and embrace 'chaos' theory principles
- Can 'work without a blueprint'
- Accepts that risk is part of innovation
- Has the ability to appreciate and balance divergent views
- Ensures flexibility organisationally and personally to meet changing circumstances
- Actively seeks others views to inform understanding of the changing environment
- Navigates successfully through fast and ever changing landscapes

Leading entrepreneurial organisations

- Creates an entrepreneurial culture
- Combines public service ethos with commercial working methods
- Constantly explores new ways of working and being willing to act as a pioneer
- Has the desire to actively seek the 'creative destruction' of existing delivery methods and create new improved ones
- Leverages resources to achieve maximum effectiveness and value for money
- Identifies and encouraging existing talent and hiring others
- Creates results-driven organisations
- Identifies commercial opportunities
- Identifies waste and / or not optimising use of resources
- Understands both systems thinking and lean system approaches
- Creates a balanced approach to risk

Leading through trust

- Provides others with a sense of the future
- Puts the good of the community and the council before parochial self-interest
- Is prepared to lead and be accountable
- Creates a persona of self confidence and decisiveness
- Does what they promise
- Maintains a positive yet realistic attitude
- Uses personal power in open and fair manner
- Is consistent
- Genuinely engages and values others' contribution
- Accepts doubt in others
- Is loyal to others
- Maintains confidentiality
- Demonstrates trust in others

Appendix 2

KEY ELEMENTS OF 'POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING' SKILLS

Political understanding

- Identifies the key stakeholders impacting upon the council and the role of the Chief Executive
- Identifies and maintains knowledge of the aims, priorities, drivers and motivations of these stakeholders
- Monitors change in the political environment in terms of changes in personality, power bases, priorities, structures etc.
- Within the council, maintains good working relationships with politicians whilst maintaining the independence and officer integrity of the position of Chief Executive
- Develops an explicit understanding of the respective roles of the Chief Executive and elected leadership of the council. Does not step into others' operating space
- Maintains the profile of the Chief Executive within that operating space
- Maintains flexibility of profile and positioning so that the Chief Executive can adapt quickly to changes in the political environment
- Represents the political imperatives of the council to partner and other organisations whilst also respecting and empathising with theirs. This includes conveying messages with a different nuance to different audiences

Appendix 3

KEY ELEMENTS OF 'TRANSFORMATIONAL' SKILLS

Vision setting and strategic management

- Working with the elected leadership, creates a shared vision and mission for the council
- Ensures that the vision is understood at all levels and that this is used to stimulate energy and engagement
- Working with the elected leadership, identifies the key priorities for the council in order to achieve the vision
- Creates strategies to achieve the vision and priorities
- Develops and maintains a thorough understanding of the external and internal operating environment
- Deploys financial, physical and human resources to meet strategic priorities
- Acts decisively in a complex environment of ambiguity and multiple stakeholders

Working with partners, partnerships and other stakeholders

- Seeks and identifies opportunities where partnership working will support the vision, priority and strategy of the council
- Establishes and maintains effective relationships with partners and other stakeholders
- Shares performance management and critical friend challenge with partners
- Ensures appropriate and shared governance arrangements for partnerships

- Ensures that the council itself is a good partner to others and fulfils its agreed obligations
- Ensures resources are shared within the partnership as appropriate
- Is selective in which partnerships the council enters into so as not to dilute effort and resources

Communication & cultural management

- Identifies the culture required by the council to achieve its vision, priorities and strategy
- Ensures that the culture is developed and maintained through a variety of mechanisms including structure, working methods, reward, controls, symbols etc.
- Ensures that the council encourages scrutiny and accountability and sees this as an opportunity for development
- Personally handles challenge and scrutiny as opportunities
- Identifies key communication requirements
- Ensures communication is open, delivered through a variety of media and reaches all levels and parts of the council
- Personally engages in and acts as a role model for the desired culture and communication strategy
- Ensures communication is open, two-way and that important messages are being communicated and understood throughout the organisation

Management of change

- Identifies the need for and desired changes within the council and ensures that these are understood
- Actively engages others in the change process and the development of the change strategy
- Encourages challenge to test and develop the change strategy
- Identifies possible conflicts arising from the change process and deals with these
- Monitors the change strategy and its outcomes
- Maintains clear direction and decision making during time of change
- Understands the possible causes of resistance during the change process and develops strategies to deal with these
- Understands the stresses that can affect people during the change process and supports them through this

Democratic Accountability and Challenge

- Ensures appropriate democratic arrangements and effective governance of the council, including election process
- Encourages constructive challenge as a form of both organisational and personal development
- Encourages the use of scrutiny as a means of service improvement, risk assessment and policy development
- Develops clear and agreed lines of accountability with partners in relation to joint working
- Maintains the principles of open government and freedom of information
- Actively seeks and welcomes feedback from a variety of sources, internal and external
- Ensures the organisation actively seeks to learn from customer feedback, complaints and mistakes
- Personally models accountable and ethical behaviour through being accessible, open and honest with staff, elected members and the public

Appendix 4

KEY ELEMENTS OF 'VALUES, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS' THAT UNDERPIN EFFECTIVE CHIEF EXECUTIVE BEHAVIOUR'

- Acts ethically at all times and despite any pressure from others
- Ensures that they have a set of core values which they operate within and that others are aware of these
- Maintains good self awareness both through personal reflection, analysis of performance and seeking feedback from others
- Is open, honest and consistent
- Has personal integrity
- Genuinely values feedback and 'critical friend' challenge
- Has constant curiosity and the ability to see challenges as opportunities
- Has a personal commitment to coaching and developing others
- Maintaining good life work balance and ensuring they have a lifestyle that supports effective performance and personal energy levels
- Maintains an outwardly positive attitude at all times – whilst appreciating the concerns of others
- Maintains a sense of perspective and proportionality
- Is accessible to others and has the ability to 'put their arm around them'
- Is aware of the concepts of and has Emotional Intelligence and sensitivity
- Is willing to assume responsibility and has personal courage and resilience
- Genuinely values and sees the benefits of equal opportunities and diversity
- Maintains a consistency of approach and mood
- Demonstrates passion and commitment

BLUE SKY THINKERS



Skills for Local Government has (since April 2013) been providing a dedicated service to local authorities, employer organisations and trade unions as they seek to deliver first class local services. Prior to April 2013, our work for local government was conducted under our Skills for Justice brand.

We work in partnership with employers to help them to recruit, develop and retain a skilled workforce. We are a licensed Sector Skills Council to the sector, the Issuing Authority for a wide range of the sector's apprenticeship frameworks and the approved supplier for many of the sector's National Occupational Standards.

We have developed quality products and services to meet employer needs within the sector. Specifically, we help with:

- research;
- workforce planning;
- people management;
- apprenticeship development;
- accrediting internal training;
- National Occupational Standards;
- organisational change; and
- improving productivity

To find out more about how Skills for Local Government can help you, contact Bob Ross on 07557 741 776 or bob.ross@sfjuk.com



We love your
ambition.
Let's talk about
getting you there.

Wherever you are on your leadership journey, we can help you enhance existing skills, develop new ones, and get the best out of yourself, your team and your partners.

Learning from and with others

Individual (or 1:1) learning is an important part of any development journey, but it's only one aspect. Even established leaders find it useful to share experiences and ideas to help their development.

Learning together with others (and learning from others' experience) can be a powerful stimulus to really making a difference. And understanding yourself – assessing what will enhance your leadership skills – is the starting point for any development journey.

Support for your learning journey

- Developing top teams: tailored programmes to develop the effectiveness of your leadership team
- Action Learning: exploring real situations and developing possible responses
- Short course programmes: building essential skills and knowledge important to your current or future role, including political skills and developing commercial awareness
- 360° feedback and appraisal
- Executive coaching / mentoring
- Career development personalised to you

To find out how Solace Enterprises can help you, contact our resource centre on **0845 601 0649** or **development@solaceenterprises.com**

