Community Leadership
Councillor workbook

Contents

Foreword

This workbook has been designed as a learning aid for all councillors, regardless of their experience or responsibilities. It makes no assumptions about how long you have been a member or your experience or lack of it as a leader in your community. Those who are relatively new to local government or the practical and philosophical issues concerning their community leadership role may feel there is much ground to cover. This workbook will brief and update you on the key aspects of this role in the context of the opportunities and challenges facing our communities today.

Make your way through the workbook in your own time, in your own way and at your own pace. In all it will take you two to three hours to complete. You might prefer to dip into the book from time to time or tackle it in one go. You could also work through the book with a fellow councillor or councillors, sharing your thoughts and ideas in the in relation to your community.

The important thing is to think about the issues presented in the workbook, their relevance to your local setting, the people you serve and the council as a whole.

Introduction

As you work through the book you will find a number of features designed to help you think about community leadership and the councillor's role:

Guidance – used to indicate guidance, research, quotations, explanations and definitions that you may find helpful.

Challenges – questions or queries raised in the text that ask you to reflect on your role or approach – in essence, they are designed to be thought-provokers.

Case studies – 'pen pictures' of approaches used by councils elsewhere.

Hints and tips – a selection of good practices that you could find useful.

Useful links – signposts to sources of further information that could help with principles, processes, methods and approaches. A full list of useful additional information is also set out in Appendix A of the workbook.

What is community leadership?

The context

What do we mean when we talk about community leadership in the context of local government and the roles and responsibilities of councillors?

Many different people and many varied services contribute to the welfare of local communities. But councillors are uniquely placed to develop strategies, shape thinking and take an active lead locally because they alone have been democratically elected to represent the interests of the people and the council. This gives them a legitimacy and a mandate no other local body or individual has, apart of course, from MPs.

> "Good councillors make sure voters feel involved, creating a buzz of new ideas. Not much happens that they don't know about."
>
> Polly Toynbee,
> 'The Guardian'

Government legislation and guidelines have required and encouraged councils to work in closer partnership with other bodies – such as the police and health authorities – and to empower councillors to take a higher profile as advocates and leaders in their wards.

The idea is to give individual councillors greater influence over the services and facilities available in their wards – and the freedom to prioritise provision according to local needs – so long as they were not acting in conflict with the council's overall interests.

Decentralisation and Localism is an extension of this - giving greater control to local communities and transforming the relationship between central government, local government, communities and individuals. The democratically accountable role of the councillor is uniquely placed to understand the needs of the community and to take a joined up approach to meeting them.

Advocacy and leadership

The publication 'Vibrant Local Leadership'[1], sets out a vision for the community advocate and leadership roles of councillors.

[1] Vibrant Public Leadership, 2005, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, www.communities.gov.uk

It said the role of the community advocate includes:

- speaking up for, and on behalf of, individuals and groups

- encouraging residents to engage and participate

- participating in plan making and planning decisions

- communicating residents' concerns to the council and to other providers such as the police.

But in this role councillors must not, it said, 'lose sight of the strategic context for the council area as a whole'.

It said the role of the community leader includes:

- stimulating local organisations and individuals to take up opportunities to express their views

- representing local level concerns and perspectives

- maintaining a link between the users and the providers of services

- encouraging the community to organise for themselves

- working with other community leaders in the voluntary, community and business sectors

- offering vision and direction to local groups, and building support for that vision

- brokering agreements between different interests and partners

- contributing as an effective partner in neighbourhood arrangements, including those that deliver delegated functions.

Community leadership can be defined as:

- helping communities to identify and deal with problems in the most effective way

- bringing in help from officers and partners

- acting as the voice for the community to the council, partners and others

- communicating the work of the council and partners to the community

- leading the community and others in developing a vision for the area and the steps to achieve it.

Exercise 1

(a) What does community leadership mean to you?

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(b) What does community leadership mean to your council?

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(c) To what extent have you already developed your role as a community leader for your ward?

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(d) Have you identified local problems or ambitions and discussed possible solutions with other local groups and organisations?

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(e) What personal obstacles are there to you becoming a leader in your community?

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(f) What external obstacles are there?

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The meaning of leadership

Leadership in this context does not mean taking centre stage – it is about creating the right environment for others to act. It is less directing and controlling, more stimulating, enabling and empowering. County and district councillors need to explore their respective roles – while at the same time acknowledging the important role of parish and town councils and councillors.

The growth in the number of organisations and agencies active at a local level and the localism agenda has made the task of community leadership more complex, and at the same time more important. Councillors have to demonstrate their ability to fulfil that leadership role whilst also convincing their local partners that there is something in it for them

Community leadership concerns more than the services and functions delivered by the council. The focus of community leadership has to be the whole range of public services delivered locally together with the contribution and impact of the private, voluntary and community sectors.

It is not just about the council's vision for the locality, it has to be framed around a shared vision – and one backed up by a shared commitment to delivering. The task of taking the difficult decisions – on for example issues where consensus cannot be reached – lies with councillors and cannot be easily ducked. This responsibility goes to the heart of your community leadership role.

A three thousand year old philosophy

Go to the People; Live among them; Love them; Start from where they are; Work with them; Build on what they have.

But of the best leaders, When the task is accomplished, The work is completed, The people all remark: "We have done it ourselves".

Lao Tzu,
'Tao Te Ching' (Chapter 17)

Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don't
Find out what groups and organisations are active in your ward – some, like the police, will be obvious, others less so	Try to do everything yourself – your role is to conduit between the various local groups and organizations and between them and the council
Find out what concerns and ambitions they have and look for common ground and possible areas of disagreement	Attend every meeting and event held in your ward – it is not necessary and you will quickly become exhausted
Develop a shared vision for the ward that is achievable and not in conflict with council policy	Try to solve every problem that comes your way – other people and organisations may have more resources and expertise than you have
Develop a plan that will guide you and your partners in making the vision a reality	Forget the needs and opinions of individuals
Tell fellow councilors and residents about what you are doing	Become associated with pressure groups unless you feel that their agendas are compatible with your role as a councilor
Encourage and enable others to take the lead on matters close to their hearts	Hoard information – sharing knowledge about local matters will lead to better working relationships and better outcomes
Remember that as an elected councilor you have democratic integrity and a responsibility to represent everyone in your ward – not just those who voted for you	Expect to agree with everyone or for them to agree with you – some negotiations will be tough and challenging
Understand that some partner organisations will not have the freedom and flexibility you possess	Complain – get things done instead
Involve council offers when necessary and appropriate	
Celebrate success and share your experience with others facing similar challenges	

The future of local leadership

"...leaders must engage communities in a dialogue about the extent of state support available, and about the roles of, and the relationships between, state, individual and community. This dialogue needs to be open, honest and realistic [and] be at the heart of a new way of working where local authorities work together with communities to pursue collective aims".

Councillor Claire Kober,
Leader of London Borough of Haringey

Extract from 'How does direct democracy change leader's roles as local activists'?
The Next Question, NLGN, August 2011, www.nlgn.org.uk

www.nlgn.org.uk/public/section/publications

How is it done?

Leadership characteristics

The Local Government Association, in its publication Powerpack, using the new power to promote wellbeing, suggests there are at least eight characteristics of effective community leaders:

1. **Listening to and involving local communities** - Councillors cannot call themselves leaders if they are not in touch with the communities they purport to represent. They need to be in touch with all parts of their community such as parishes and neighbourhoods, and communities of interest, such as young people and minority ethnic communities.

2. **Building vision and direction** - Local communities face a complex and diverse set of problems and challenges. They want to know that all the relevant organisations in their area – public, private and voluntary – are working together in a common direction. Councillors have to work with the whole gamut of local organisations and interests, in shaping a long-term vision for the areas they serve.

   No single person acting alone can respond effectively to the needs of localities. Effective community leadership involves securing the commitment of partners to delivering a shared vision for their area as well as helping to shape it.

3. **Working effectively in partnerships** - No single person, acting alone can respond effectively to the needs of localities. Effective community leadership involves securing the commitment of partners to delivering a shared vision for their area as well as helping to shape.

4. **Making things happen** - Community leadership involves more than having a sense of direction. It is also about making things happen on the ground – delivering outcomes for local people. Vision, direction and effective partnership are only of any use if they deliver actual change on the ground.

5. **Standing up for communities** - Local people want to know that the people they elected to represent them are doing just that. This 'advocacy' role can involve speaking out for local people on major issues that impact on the community – like hospital or factory closures – and acting on behalf of specific groups of individuals.

6. **Empowering local communities** - Community leadership is not about the councillor taking power for him/herself. It is more about creating the environment in which other leadership roles can develop, and fostering the development of active citizenship. Councillors have both to lead and stand back at the same time, investing in the growth and development of communities so that they are able to govern themselves.

7. **Accountability to communities** - Community leadership involves being accountable to local people – through the ballot box and through the development of active on-going relationships with people such as by listening to and being accountable to local communities through citizens' juries, people's panels and area forums.

8. **Using community resources effectively** - Communities, councils and partners have a wide range of resources they can bring to the table. Community leadership is about ensuring these resources are used effectively to meet local priorities. Community leadership is also about delivering the best outcomes for local people and actively seeking new ways to promote the wellbeing of their area.

Seven behaviours to realise good community leadership

1. **Good communications** – shift from communication to conversations through adaptable style, facilitation and feedback

2. **Openness** – transparency, approachable and open minded

3. **Empathetic** – listening and hearing, being receptive and responsive

4. **Negotiating** – 'holding the space' conflict resolution, reconciliation, mediation

5. **Motivating** – encouraging, stimulating confidence

6. **Managing expectations** – set realistic expectations and meet them

7. **Sharing** – learning to let go, work with different working agencies and organisations

Building Civic Community, LGA, 2010approach to media enquiries. Be honest, concise and helpful.

⏳ Exercise 2

(a) What do you believe are your top three leadership behaviours?

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(b) How have you recently demonstrated those behaviours? Have you personally led members of your community in resolving a particular issue, challenge or opportunity?

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(c) What area represents your greatest opportunity for growth and development? How might you improve in this area?

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(d) How would you rate your council's performance at a ward level – excellent – good – acceptable – poor – non existent?

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(e) Who are the other key community leaders in your ward?

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(f) How do/might you use your leadership behaviours to further develop the leadership skills of others?

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Why does it matter?

Research consistently show that communities that are engaged – that is, where different groups, organisations and individuals from the public, private and voluntary sectors communicate with each other and contribute to the well being of their community – tend to have happier, healthier people and lower levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

At the same time, there is concern about the decline in voting in local elections, more people living on their own, threats to community cohesion and an increasingly detached attitude towards their local area and what is going on there.

Councillors have an important role to play here because they are the interface between citizens and the council and they have the power to demonstrate directly what they have achieved for the people they represent.

Through surgeries, casework, the media, local events, social and voluntary groups, newsletters, blogs and so on, they can effect change and communicate their achievements to local people.

In politics it is often easy to look for the big gesture, the big plan, the big policy statement. But real tangible achievement at ward level need not be like that. Time after time, research and case studies show that little things mean a lot when it comes to improving things for local people.

"For a variety of reasons, life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital. In the first place, networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalised reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust. Such networks facilitate coordination and communication, amplify reputations, and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved. Finally, dense networks of interaction probably broaden the participants' sense of self, developing the 'I' into the 'we'."

Professor Robert Putnam, Harvard.

Bowling Alone

In the USA the number of people who went 10-pin bowling increased by 10 per cent between 1980 and 1993 (30 per cent more Americans go bowling than vote in congressional elections – 80 million people). At the same time, league bowling in teams decreased by 40 per cent.

People were bowling alone, not in company.

Robert Putnam, a political scientist and professor at Harvard University, has taken this as a rather quirky but relevant illustration of the decline of what he calls 'social capital' in the USA.

Putnam points out that research throughout Europe, the USA, and beyond indicates the demise of 'civic engagement' and the growth of passive, if cynical, reliance on the state.

At the same time research in many countries shows that the quality of public life and the effectiveness of social institutions are likely to be significantly better in 'engaged communities' rather than 'disengaged' ones. This applies across the whole spectrum of social policy – from health to education, from drug abuse to unemployment, from crime to housing – all show the same trends.

Things are generally better where communities are 'engaged' and take part in decisions affecting their own lives. Putnam found that local government in Italy was set up the same in each region but that the level of effectiveness varied dramatically. Over 20 years of study Putnam identified traditions of civic engagement – or the lack of it – as the most important factor in explaining this variation.

Seemingly unconnected factors such as voter turnout, newspaper readership membership of choral societies or football clubs were shown to be related directly to the development of a successful region. The mechanisms that lead to this relative success are inevitably very complex but they seem to come down to the idea of 'social capital' – features of social life such as networks, norms, trust, engagement and so on that enable members of a community to act together more effectively and pursue shared objectives.

One way of measuring 'social capital' is to conduct a community or social audit. The idea of audit might seem a bit strange in this context but it isn't really – it means assessing what's already there before deciding how to improve, modify or change it.

Getting things done

"As a councillor, I feel that I have played a part in saving Milton Mount Gardens. This open green space in front of a block of council flats was originally called Worth Park. Over the years, it has suffered neglect and vandalism.

I called out English Heritage, and to my surprise discovered that the gardens were designed by James Pulham, the man who designed the gardens at Buckingham Palace.

I then arranged a public meeting so that local people could get involved in deciding the future of the gardens. Out of the meeting, an active community group got going. They have now put in a £1.5m bid to English Heritage to restore the gardens to their former glory. I am also taking an active role in trying to save areas of special interest within a four-mile greenfield site that is earmarked for development.

It's ironic that I became a councillor because I was opposed to plans to build 2,500 homes on the land that I knew and loved, which is just at the back of my home, and now, a few years later, I'm having to take forward that very same planning application as the portfolio holder for planning and economic development. I'm still trying to preserve the fundamental root of my objections to the development, which are the shortage of green space in the area and the pressure that building many more homes would have on scarce resources such as water.

The way I am doing this is to focus on those areas that it is critical we preserve within the greenfield site. I'm working with local residents and with English Nature and English Heritage to identify areas that are of particular interest to local residents. For example, it could be a street that is the last remaining Victorian housing street, or an area where there are old ditches and boundaries.

We want to get a planning-led heritage policy adopted by the county council as part of the wider development. It's all about balance. I now better understand about housing need.

After I became a councillor in 2004, I went through a period of personal study. I looked at high-density housing and heard personal stories from people who desperately needed a home. Crawley Borough Council is working with the county council and neighbouring borough councils to look at building on more landfill sites, improving the transport infrastructure and trying to get the right level of affordable housing.

The councillors I had got to know when I was a planning objector asked me to stand as an elected council member. I didn't have a strong political viewpoint but I did want to be part of the decision- making process. I had been on the outside saying they're wrong but I really passionately wanted to make things work.

Planning is really exciting.

I'm also very involved in the £800m redevelopment of the town centre. My portfolio position – which I took up in May 2006 – includes housing, community safety and employment. And the town redevelopment is all about welcoming new businesses to Crawley and improving the jobs and skills in the borough."

Councillor Claire Denman, Crawley Borough Council

Working in partnership

Community leadership is about councils, both councillors and officers, enabling local communities to determine their own future. It is not traditional, top-down leadership, but involves councillors and officers using all the tools at their disposal to engage communities in making their own difference. It promotes a partnership of shared commitment to promote a shared vision for the locality. Councillors need to have:

- the ability to build effective partnerships with other local organisations and communities

- a commitment to community engagement and empowerment

- the ability to respond effectively to local priorities

- a sound understanding of local governance arrangements

- an understanding of the local community and the groups and organisations within it

- access to key people in other agencies within that community

- access to officers and key people within local authority.

Community Organisers

500 community organisers will be trained nto enable local people to take action on their own behalf. The community organisers programme will create a new home-grown movement of community organising emerging from the strengths, concerns and hopes of al kinds of neighbourhoods across England.

www.cocollaborative.org.uk

The landscape of partnership working is shifting with new opportunities emerging. However, the central concern for councils and councilors remains to promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their areas, achieving sustainable communities. The key role is to:

- provide for local communities – articulation of aspirations, needs and priorities

- co-ordinate the actions of public, private, voluntary and community organisations

- shape and focus existing and future activities of these organisations to meet community needs.

Whether you are working at the ward or whole council level, to produce a community strategy there must be a process of community planning. key stakeholders must be involved in this process. These could be large groups like the police, health authorities and schools, or smaller ones, such as voluntary groups, local businesses and community groups.

Partnerships of all kinds are at the heart of community planning and neighbourhood renewal agendas. While, multi-agency in their composition, their purpose is to bring together statutory, non-statutory, private, voluntary and community organisations for the purpose of promoting and improving residents' quality of life. Having an agreed strategy can provide a framework for different organisational processes and mobilising a wide range of agencies, organisations and community interests.

Partnerships should:

- build consensus around an agreed vision for the future

- see their own interests in the context of a bigger picture

- encourage the development of sustainable communities

- identify conflicting objectives and needs

- build trust and closer working relationships, where appropriate

- develop a clear understanding of each partner's roles and responsibilities

- review existing partnership and consultation arrangements

- share data and analysis

- share resources and provide a coordinated response to community priorities

- shape and focus existing and future activities of agencies

- produce a community strategy.

⧗ Exercise 3

(a) What have you achieved in partnership with others – as a councillor, in your private
     life or in a job – that you could not have achieved alone?

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(b) What were the advantages of working in partnership?

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(c) What were the disadvantages?

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(d) What lessons have you learnt as a result?

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(e) Partnerships will not necessarily be cosy, friendly affairs where everyone thinks the
    same way – have you thought about how you will deal with representatives of other
    organisation and groups who may have different views and who may even be hostile
    or aggressive?

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Community Budgets –
Cheshire West and Chester Council

Councillors at Cheshire West and Chester Council are changing the way they approach their roles, moving from what was considered inward facing, to a more outward facing and engaging role.

In 2009, Member's budgets were introduced to enhance the ability of Councillors to improve the quality of life and wellbeing of their local communities. In 2010/12 funding of £10,000 was provided to each Councillor to address priorities for action identified within community-led plans. The budgets have been allocated in a variety of ways, including some during Community Forums operating as participatory budgeting events. These events have attracted large numbers of local groups and have helped to bring local people and issues to the table so that they can be discussed with their local councillors. Innovatively, some of these events have taken place outside of a traditional meeting structure and have been incorporated into a summer BBQ, community walks and open days at community centres and buildings. This alternative approach has seen different residents attending and has helped Councillors to engage with the wider community, particularly families and harder to reach groups.

The council has recently secured pilot status for whole-place community budgets. Councillors are sharing their knowledge and experience to influence decisions about services, helping to ensure the work has the greatest impact and delivers the best possible outcomes for communities.

Final word

Summary

Community leadership is essentially about councillors, as democratically elected representatives of their communities, working with local groups and organisations and enabling them the make the best use of their combined skills, talents, expertise, and imagination for the benefit of local citizens.

At one level it is simply about being a good neighbour. At another it could be about driving through major changes affecting everyone in the community involving such things as health, transport, planning, crime and education.

Iit is down to each individual councillor to have the enthusiasm, commitment and vision to seize the opportunities available that will lead to thriving communities.

Next steps

Exercise 4

(a) Does your council actively encourage and support your role as a leader in your community – and if not how will you change things?

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(b) Do you have the encouragement and support of fellow councillors – and if not how will you change things?

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(c) Do you feel you have the support of council officers – and if not how will you change things?

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(d) How good are your relationships with other groups and organisations represented in your ward?

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(e) What three things will you do after completing this workbook to develop your role as a community leader for your ward?

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2 _____

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3 _____

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Appendix
Useful links

Printed publications

Building a stronger Civil Society, A strategy for voluntary and community gropus, charities and social enterprises, (2010), Cabinet Office, www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk

Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: an essential guide, (2010) www.communities.gov.uk

Community engagement and community leadership: a summary, (2007), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, www.jrf.org.uk

Ward Councillors and community leadership: a future perspective, (2007) JRF, www.jrf.org.uk

http://tinyurl.com/6jnucrj

Building Civic Community, (September 2010), LGA, www.localleadership.gov.uk

The Next Question: The future of local leadership, (September 2011), NLGN, www.nlgn.org.uk/public

Creating stronger and more inclusive communities Some lessons for positive action in the context of austerity, (September 2011), NEF, www.neweconomics.org/publications

Keeping it REAL Responsive, Efficient, Accountable, Local services (November 2011), LGA, www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library

Useful websites

www.local.gov.uk
The Local Government Association website has many pages discussing community leadership and a number of publications, a series of case studies, the Knowledge Hub, and development programmes for councillors and council officers.

www.21st.cc
Supporting 21st Century political leadership.

www.involve.org.uk/councillor-in-the-community/
Councillor in the Community - website designed to support London councilors becoming leaders of their communities.

The following organisations' websites have pages discussing community leadership. Some also have publications for download.

Local Government Information Unit
https://member.lgiu.org.uk

New Local Government Network
www.nlgn.org.uk

Joseph Rowntree Foundation
www.jrf.org.uk

Community development foundation
http://www.cdf.org.uk

For a copy in Braille, larger print or audio,
please contact us on 020 7664 3000.
We consider requests on an individual basis.

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