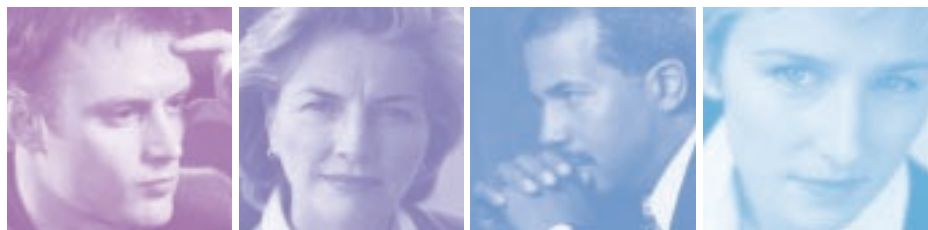




Valuing Political Leadership: the Leadership Recruitment Pack



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Valuing Political Leadership: the 'Leadership Recruitment Pack'

Local political leadership is essential to securing a safe, sustainable and secure future for our communities.

The demands on our local political leaders are wide ranging and complex, and require high level commitment and skills. It was for this reason that leadership development plays such an important role in the £27m joint capacity building fund for local authorities, launched with the LGA on 19th February. The value of this role can never be under-estimated and I am delighted to sign up to this 'Recruitment Pack', which sets out the skills and competencies which we routinely require of our council leaders and reminds us that we are searching for extremely high level candidates for our elected leaders.

The pack also highlights the importance of supporting and developing our council leaders of today and of the future. Identifying and encouraging effective local leaders is a challenge to all the political parties. It is crucial therefore that we all invest time and energy in ensuring that the leaders of the future are able to provide vision for their communities, build consensus around that vision, deliver high quality and responsive public services and ensure that our communities are places where people would want to live and work.

NICK RAYNSFORD

Valuing Political Leadership: the Leadership Recruitment Pack

Introduction

This Political Leadership Recruitment Pack aims to set out the skills, competencies and experience which might be looked for in a council leader, were a leader to be recruited rather than elected. It sets these out in the format of a traditional recruitment pack that might be used for instance to recruit a local authority chief executive. It includes a Job Description and Person Specification and the context of the role, and has been compiled using the methods employed by Veredus Executive Resourcing when defining the role and personal requirements of any senior post.

The Recruitment Pack is based on telephone interviews with a small sample of local government stakeholders, including Leaders, Senior Officers and partner organisations. It includes the interviewees' views on the characteristics of successful councils, the challenges ahead for local authorities, their leaders and their communities, and the skills and experience which might be required of local political leaders in the new local political environment.

The pack is not intended to be a definitive guide, nor to represent the views of Veredus Executive Resourcing, NLGN or The MJ. It is intended to highlight the value and importance of the local political leadership role, and the wide range of expectations we have of effective political leaders.

geographically into 446 authorities for England, Scotland & Wales, local government provides key services including schools, care services, roads, refuse collection and recycling, leisure services, child protection, housing, benefits, parks and transport. Local government also exerts influence and responsibility over other key services such as health and the police.

Local residents elect local people to run their local council as councillors. Councillors represent the views and needs of the citizens in their ward, and lend political vision to the work and direction of the council and the local area. Responsibility for the implementation of this vision lies with council officers, led by the Chief Executive.

Since the election of the Labour Government in 1997, major changes in the role, structure and systems of local government have been brought about. The introduction of new models of governance, including the separation of executive and 'backbench' councillors, the creation of the scrutiny role and the introduction of directly elected mayors, have seen most councils embark on major internal re-structuring. In addition, Best Value has replaced CCT, with the aim of ensuring that services are procured according to value rather than lowest cost, and there has been greater emphasis on partnership working, both within the locality and with the private sector. Most recently the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) has been introduced, creating the first ever league tables in local government and a measure by which to assess performance of local authorities not just as service deliverers, but as community leaders with a corporate capacity to improve.

The aim of these reforms has been both to improve standards of public service delivery, and to enhance the role of local authorities within their communities. They have been designed to redefine the local authority role as a community leader rather than service deliverer - not just responsible for delivering services, but procuring them and working with other local agencies to deliver the best possible local outcomes. They have also been designed to increase the accountability of local government and its leaders to the electorate, with the hope that greater accountability will lead to increased transparency, and local people becoming clearer about who is responsible for their services and their wider community development.

At this crucial time of change for local government, the skills, experience and abilities of local political leaders have arguably become both more important and more complex.

FACTS & FIGURES

	District	County	Metropolitan
Population	87400	1,340,000	468,000
Annual budget	£19m	£1,126m	£605m
Total staff	324	34028	19500
No. residential properties	2,563	499,200	198,905
No. of Cllrs	39	84	99
No. of schools	31	620	203
No. of people in care	N/A	1300	1009

These figures are real figures for 3 different councils and are intended to give a sense of the scale of the responsibilities of local government.

The job of local government

Local government plays a vital role in the provision of public services in the United Kingdom. Split

Context

Traditional Councils

Traditionally, service provision has been the key concern of local authorities. Often the imperative was for authorities to provide services themselves; professional standards defined the type and level of service provision and there was a perception that services were provided *to* rather than *for* local people. While services may have been provided to a high standard, there was often little meaningful consultation or engagement with key stakeholders outside of elections except perhaps with tenants groups. Partnerships were most typically one-sided relationships, where authorities dictated terms and were not inclined to listen closely to the views of their partners.

Changing Councils

This culture has changed. Modern effective local authorities still care about and are responsible for services, but want to make sure that they meet the expressed needs of the local community as understood via detailed consultation. Importance is placed on understanding community needs and aspirations; councils aim to listen to what communities say, and design responses accordingly. Effective authorities are focussed on outcomes not outputs, and understand the value of local partnerships that address issues which are beyond the remit of services which local authorities themselves are directly responsible for. Success on this new agenda is measured by the CPA process and reflected in the effectiveness of community-led partnerships.

The time of councils providing all services themselves without challenge has passed. Effective councils take a pragmatic approach to service delivery, recognising the difference between commissioning and providing services and entering into selective partnerships with

other organisations from all sectors where they can add value.

Local political leaders are therefore potentially judged by local people not simply according to the services that the council provides, but increasingly by issues which affect the whole community, such as the environment, the economy, crime, health and transport. Councils must work in partnership with other organisations - which will have their own sets of aims and aspirations - to achieve agreed outcomes and the priorities of the community.

They must become recognised and respected by the whole community as an organisation capable of giving leadership and forming consensus in order to deliver real and lasting change. With unique democratic legitimacy among local organisations, councils are ideally placed to take this role.

Different councils

The basic skills needed to be a successful council leader are universal across different council types and situations. However there may be differences depending on the precise circumstances of the council.

Some councils are doing well already and will soon have new freedoms. The job of a council leader in such situations has different dimensions to those facing a leader in a council that is mid-table in the CPA assessment and needs to raise its game. Different challenges and skills are required where a council is in free fall and needs to focus on regaining its footing. Similarly some council leaders will be leading a united party in full political control. Others will be running minority administrations or there will be a close political balance. Different sorts of skills may be necessary in each case.

Challenges for the Future

The multiple changes, challenges and barriers facing local councils as described by the respondents to this survey have been outlined to put into context the following definitions of the role and the skills, experience and abilities required for political leaders of modern local government and communities.

From demographics and technology

The communities that councils serve are changing. In general they are becoming more complex so that the meaning of representing the community becomes more difficult. This includes changes in the ethnic mix, changes in household formation and changes in patterns of people at work. In addition the population is ageing, raising major challenges for service delivery and community cohesion.

Information technology and e-government offer real opportunities for re-thinking the way that services are delivered, methods of communication with the electorate and internal council structures. With the Government's 2005 target for all local government services to be online rapidly approaching, e-government and new technologies pose a challenge for local government in the short term and beyond.

From the community

Experience of retail, banking and other sectors is increasing the sophistication of consumers and driving up expectations of public services. The biggest challenge for service improvement comes from the community who increasingly reject the 'take it or leave it' traditional approach to public services.

In addition as communities evolve issues of social cohesion have become more pronounced. The council plays a crucial role in making sure that everyone feels that they have a voice that is listened to and that people perceive there is fairness in public service delivery.

From the Government

➤ Public service reform and modernisation

The Government has made public service reform and improvement the key issue on which it should be judged at the next general election. Local government is either directly or partially responsible for the majority of public services, and the incentive for Government to seek levers with which to drive improvement on the part of local agencies is strong.

The CPA process has put local authorities in the firing

line as never before. Political leaders will be looked to to help their authorities climb the performance league tables.

➤ Localism

However, with a recognition that 'centralist' regimes of top down initiatives and inspection cannot deliver real improvements and locally responsive services, there is a new drive towards finding a balance between the achievement of minimum standards and the enabling of local authorities and other agencies to genuinely make local decisions.

This move towards 'localism', partly enabled by the CPA process in local government through the awarding of freedoms and flexibilities to top-performing authorities, but also being driven forward in other service areas such as health, is undoubtedly a positive direction for local leaders and institutions. However it also brings with it its own challenges as the role of the local authority is once again partly redefined and new opportunities become available, and the underlying drive in the short term is undoubtedly towards real, demonstrable and rapid service improvement.

➤ Regional government

The Government is committed to holding referendums to measure local demand for regional assemblies, and to establishing regional assemblies where demand is demonstrated. While it is envisaged by the Government that powers to regional assemblies will be devolved from central government, rather than taken up from local government, it is undoubtedly the case that the adjustment to a new tier of sub-national government is likely to pose one of the biggest challenges for many local authorities.

➤ Funding

The review of the balance of funding and the possibility that local government will be able to raise more of its own funds, also poses both opportunities and challenges to local government. Finance could potentially be an obstacle to improvement, especially if demand and expectations increase, raising difficult issues for political leadership.

From partners

In local authorities' new role as community leaders, and with the opportunity to be the commissioner rather than the direct deliverer of services, partnership poses one of the most significant challenges to modern ➤

► local authorities. Responding to the demands of the community means the establishment of new relationships, and the appropriate exercising of authority and leadership within those partnerships: local authorities must lead, but must also know when to listen to partners and allow them to take the initiative.

Councils must adjust to an influencing role within the locality, rather than being a direct deliverer of services. More sophisticated and potentially innovative relationships are likely to be developed with the private and voluntary sectors, with councils developing their procurement and client skills and being required to manage relationships effectively over long periods of time. These new models for service delivery are likely to create new relationships with both new and old customers.

From the council itself

A potentially significant problem facing a council leader will be the capacity and attitude of existing staff and councillors. Large scale culture change programmes may be needed to embed new values, new thinking and new approaches, among a constituency of people who can be resistant to change. Training and development for councillors and officers will

be needed, and strong political and managerial leadership will be essential to make transformational change possible.

From the importance of democratic legitimacy

At a time of such significant change, maintaining democratic legitimacy presents both the biggest obstacle and the biggest opportunity to local government. Successfully overcoming a democratic deficit can empower local authorities and re-invigorate local communities. Local political leaders, whether directly elected or appointed from within their group, will need to try and address the question of their own legitimacy and accountability and that of the authority as a whole. This will include trying to make scrutiny a positive force to improve decision making, accountability and openness both within the council and with regard to other public services like health.

In addition, councils are currently unrepresentative of the population as a whole, with low numbers of younger people, women and ethnic minorities. For local authorities to be truly representative and to claim their unique democratic legitimacy, these balances need to be addressed.

The Person

Regardless of background or experience, you will have a deep commitment to, and understanding of, local needs. You will understand the bigger picture - a web of partnerships and relationships designed to strengthen, improve and build a diverse and well-served community, which serves residents, creates opportunities, builds business, celebrates diversity and welcomes change with confidence.

You will bring political leadership and conviction to the job, having a strong sense of direction and of values. You will care about democratic legitimacy and recognise the importance of re-election for you and your group. You will bring drive and energy to the council and will have the courage to follow things through even when this is difficult.

You will develop an ambitious vision for the locality and the community. While you will need to give leadership, you will seek, through the establishment of new relationships internally, locally and nationally, to build consensus around this vision to benefit and reflect all sections of the community.

You will pull together diverse interests and agendas, constantly engaging and actively listening to all stakeholders, and you will recognise that the council alone cannot tackle the range of challenges within the locality.

With colleagues and partners, you will translate the endorsed vision into achievable programmes of action. You will set the standard for the future and drive and encourage others to deliver.

You will establish and support organisational and cultural integrity, while recognising that culture change, new ways of working, risk taking and reaching beyond organisational boundaries will enable you to achieve your aims. You will recognise different leadership requirements in different situations and for different groups. You will be someone who inspires, leads and listens. You are passionate but not dogmatic, engaging rather than confrontational, and you will positively seek and drive change, encouraging a culture where people thrive and opportunities are taken.

With a background in any sector, you will understand the difference between political and managerial leadership; you will inspire the best in your managers and develop effective working relationships with them, while also understanding and respecting the difference in your roles.

Pride, passion, respect and concern about your community characterise your values and vision. You will unleash the ambition of others and embody the aspirations of the community you serve.

Job Description

Summary of role

The political leader of a council must provide leadership to the community and the local authority in designing and delivering solutions that meet the needs and aspirations of the whole community.

Key Tasks

- Develop and maintain effective relationships with the public, local business, and voluntary and community groups in the area
- Engage with and listen to the interests of all those stakeholders
- Form a vision for the community and build consensus around it, attached to plans for delivery
- Bring political leadership and drive to the council
- Provide effective leadership and management of political group(s)
- Develop and maintain a good relationship with the Chief Executive of the authority and other officers, providing a conduit between the political and officer groups, and setting an example to the whole organisation
- Take on the ambassadorial role: represent the council and the community on a local, national and international stage as appropriate
- Ensure the council is open and responsive to the community so that accountability is seen to operate not least through scrutiny processes
- Manage the reputation of the council effectively, taking a lead on media relations
- Ensure the effective management of the delivery of services in the locality
- Be prepared to challenge the status quo, thinking creatively and taking advantages of opportunities and help create an organisational culture which can enable this approach
- Be visible and accessible to all stakeholder groups, internal and external

Part One

Person Specification

The experience and skills outlined in this section are intentionally aspirational, and this pack does not suggest that they will all be present in every effective local political leader. In addition, it is recognised that different leadership qualities are required in different circumstances, and a leader who is effective in one situation may not be ideal in another. It is unlikely that there are many people who possess all these skills and

experiences; however, it could be argued that there is a requirement to be able to adapt and learn quickly.

Background and Experience

- Experience of operating successfully at a strategic level across a diverse and multi-functional organisation
- Evidence of working successfully in partnership with external organisations and stakeholders
- A successful track record of building effective, sustainable and meaningful relationships across diverse sectors and interests and successfully bringing together coalitions of diverse interests to agree and deliver a clear vision and strategies
- A track record of successful involvement and engagement with community/voluntary groups, providing a real understanding of community issues
- Experience of operating effectively at a regional or national level within organisations
- Significant successful experience of operating in a political environment
- A successful track record of managing relationships with the media

Part Two

Personal Competencies

- Ability to lead, inspire and motivate colleagues as well as partners in the wider community, bringing people together and building alliances
- Ability to think strategically, analyse complex and often conflicting information, and develop a clear vision
- Ability to focus on the vision and not get distracted by the detail of day to day events
- Ability to give strong political vision to the direction of the council and the community
- Excellent communication skills, including the ability to manage the reputation of the council, as well as interacting with staff, stakeholders, partners and the community
- Ability to drive the delivery of a corporate vision in an inclusive way, understanding the dynamics and culture of comparable organisations
- Ability to network effectively and act as an ambassador for the council with the ability to identify and exploit opportunities to achieve corporate and community objectives
- Ability to understand the business of local government, including budgets, business planning and performance management
- Ability to think creatively, challenge and generate innovative and effective solutions ➤

- ➔ Ability to lead change, engender trust and empower others to take risks
- ➔ Ability to inspire and motivate others, enabling them to share your vision and inspiring commitment and enthusiasm
- ➔ Ability to listen, step back and delegate
- ➔ Ability to balance needs and demands and adapt to new challenges
- ➔ Ability to recognise and celebrate achievement
- ➔ High level of political judgement
- ➔ High degree of probity and integrity
- ➔ Able to command respect and credibility
- ➔ Robust when faced with challenges
- ➔ Flexible and adaptable
- ➔ A risk-taker
- ➔ A forward-thinker

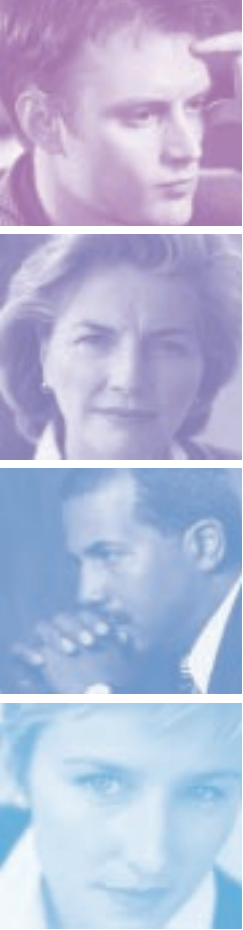
Part Three

Personal Style and Behaviour

- ➔ High levels of energy and commitment
- ➔ Passionate about communities, public services and the role of local government

Summary

The range of competencies and experience required of local political leaders means that this is an extremely challenging and difficult job. However it also has the capacity to be enormously rewarding, and is crucial to the future delivery of high quality public services and effective democracy in the UK.



NLGN is an independent think tank that seeks to advance a new localism through the transformation of public services, the revitalisation of local political leadership and the empowerment of local communities.

NLGN works closely with individual local authorities, national agencies, Government and the private sector to develop and promote innovative ideas about how our objectives can be achieved.

For more information visit www.nlgn.org.uk

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Veredus Executive Resourcing is widely recognised as one of the UK's leading executive resourcing firms, not only the established market leader in senior recruitment advice to the public sector but also a fast growing private sector practice.

Over the past 10 years, our consultants have built a strong national reputation for providing innovative and highly professional recruitment solutions covering search and selection, interim management and consultancy.

We are committed to sourcing the best leadership talent from the widest pool and to driving forward recruitment at the public-private interface, as well as addressing organisational development to help build capacity for the future.

For further information, please contact Hamish Davidson on 020 7932 4299 or by email: hamish.davidson@veredus.co.uk

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