

New Local Government Network (NLGN) is an independent think tank that seeks to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities. NLGN is publishing this report as part of its programme of research and innovative policy projects, which we hope will be of use to policy makers and practitioners. The views expressed are however those of the authors and not necessarily those of NLGN.

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Prepared by NLGN

Holland House, 4 Bury Street, London EC3A 5AW

Tel 020 7469 2660 . Email [info@nlgn.org.uk](mailto:info@nlgn.org.uk) . [www.nlgn.org.uk](http://www.nlgn.org.uk)

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## *Foreword*

**The Government has clearly stated its commitment to decentralisation and it's ambition to distribute power and opportunity to people rather than hoarding authority within government.**

We firmly believe that decentralisation will allow different communities to do different things in different ways to meet their different needs. Lifting the burden of bureaucracy is the essential first step towards decentralisation.

Places need clear vision and strong leadership if they are to deal with constantly changing economic, social, and cohesion challenges. We believe leadership is the single most significant driver of change and improvement in local authorities and the Government will be looking to local leaders to help deliver our decentralisation agenda.

But be under no illusion, this will be no easy job and will require dedication and a wide range of skills to achieve. Leaders will need to be the face of their authorities both regionally and nationally and be able to manage politics both internally and externally.

Local Authority leaders have a key role in driving local economic growth. They have a responsibility for ensuring that the day-to-day services that citizens require are provided efficiently and effectively, but they also have a wider strategic role in securing the long-term prosperity of their community. However, I recognise that this is no easy ask. There is now a need to deliver services with less money and with the involvement of both the private and voluntary sector whilst still remaining accountable to the electorate. The government is moving away from the traditional model of delivery whereby everything has been controlled by central government and placing it in the hands of those who know what their communities need, those people who live there.

This means that the leaders of today will need to engage with their communities in an open and honest dialogue about the new relationship

that will exist between central and local government and its communities. We must be clear about whether the way things have been done in the past best meets the needs of local people in the future, and local authorities working together with communities to pursue collective aims will be at the heart of a new way of working. This dialogue must be based on a realistic and robust understanding of local needs and priorities, and of the full range of resources available that can be used to tackle issues.

Along with the need to communicate effectively, reassuring their communities that their authorities will continue to deliver the best services they can for their areas, Leaders will need to use softer skills when leading people through change. They will need to support and empower citizens, managers and fellow councillors to implement change.

Mastering all of the above is a real challenge but I have no doubt that it is one that our local authority leaders will rise to and contribute effectively to in delivering the Government's decentralisation agenda.

**Bob Neill MP**

*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State*

Department of Communities and Local Government

## *Introduction*

**This collection of essays is one in a number of steps NLGN is taking to explore the changing nature of local democracy and politics. Specifically focusing on the leader in this pamphlet, we wanted to investigate the key demands and issues that would need to be tackled in a local government world that will be fundamentally different in a few years time.**

By their very nature leaders often spend the vast majority of their time getting things done and ensuring others are doing the same. Unsurprisingly this leaves little time for reflection on the role they perform and how it is changing. In an exercise of future-forecasting our contributors have sketched out some of the key elements that will be on the dashboard of future leaders.

Leader of Birmingham, Cllr Mike Whitby, focuses on the leader's role in driving economic growth. The government's business rate reforms have created some space for innovation to occur and leaders will need to be bold to take advantage of the opportunities that are presented. Cllr Simon Henig draws on his experiences in Durham to assess where the leaders of tomorrow are coming from and what skills they will need. It's clear that current leaders will need to mentor more and councils themselves will need to do more to encourage greater participation in democracy.

As the dust from the coalition's localism programme settles new questions will emerge around the future of central-local relations. Northumberland leader Cllr Jeff Reid, sets out some key concerns that exist in the current arrangement and raises the importance of new pathways to emerge between local government and Whitehall.

As the role of the councillor changes more fundamentally, leader of Haringey Cllr Claire Kober assess the challenge for leaders to become more akin to local activists. In advocating this closer relationship between leader and community there can be real developments in democracy and participation. Finally, NLGN's Charlotte Rose explores the role of personality and politics in

the life of a modern leader and suggests that whilst the challenges will only get tougher for council leaders their ability to inspire and motivate has never been more important.

In publishing this collection NLGN hopes to push the debate on the changing nature of local leadership further. Through the work currently being undertaken in NLGN's *Commission on Next Localism* we will continue to explore the shifts in our democracy and advocate new ideas to support and enhance the role of local leaders.

We are immensely grateful to Bob Neill MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, for contributing the foreword and articulating the government's commitment to strong and effective local leadership.

***Liam Scott-Smith***

**New Local Government Network**

# 1 *The leader's role in driving economic growth*

**Local Authority Leaders have long recognised their role in driving local economic growth. They have a responsibility for ensuring that the day-to-day services that citizens require are provided efficiently and effectively, but they also understand their wider strategic role in securing the long-term prosperity of their community – parents want good schools for their children today, and they also want their children to have access to good jobs in the future when they leave school.**

The economic downturn, and the challenges arising from tackling the national deficit, have had a significant impact on the way in which Leaders can secure long-term prosperity. Now, more than ever, we have to ensure there is substantial and demonstrable private sector growth – which can absorb any contraction in the public sector.

In the face of this challenge clearly Local Authorities will have less funding to finance the public infrastructure – and will need to be more innovative when it comes to supporting private investment and job growth.

Addressing these issues in Birmingham means thinking globally - because our city is a major exporter on the world stage. Improving our access to national and international markets is, therefore, a key part of our strategy. In the coming years, we will have transformed access to Birmingham through: a £600m redevelopment of New Street station, the runway extension at Birmingham Airport, and two proposed High Speed Rail interchanges (in the city centre and adjacent to the airport).

It has been my role, as Leader, to put the City Council's support and innovation behind these projects. More than that, however, seen in isolation these projects will only lever in a limited amount of new business, investment and growth for Birmingham. The challenge for the Leadership is to align them strategically to everything that is happening in the City and the Region, and to capture the opportunities they create. In particular to align them to the international links we are developing in China, India and the Middle East.

Similarly, despite the reduced resources available, Leaders must look for opportunities to provide other, non-transport, infrastructure which can stimulate private investment. For example, one of my key roles has been to drive forward the £188m new Library of Birmingham, along with the refurbishment of the adjoining Birmingham Repertory Theatre. Apart from the economic stimulus these projects provide in their own right, they also open up enormous development opportunities in the surrounding area – with the private sector aligning its investment to ours, we expect to lever in schemes worth over £0.5bn which are projected to create over 10,000 new private sector jobs.

One vital new tool for Leaders to use in driving economic growth will be the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). I am a proud member of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP which includes the southern Staffordshire districts of Cannock, Lichfield, Tamworth and East Staffordshire, and the northern Worcestershire districts of Redditch, Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest.

For me, it is a truly exciting partnership. Partly because of the outstanding quality of the business leaders we have attracted to the Board; partly because of the sheer enthusiasm of the LEP's members and their eagerness to work together for the benefit of the whole LEP; but also because the LEP brings together, for the first time, the economic assets of the metropolitan areas of Birmingham and Solihull with the complementary but equally important assets of the shire districts.

The Leaders of all of the local authorities have a vital role to play in building an effective partnership of the willing – along with the business leaders on our Board. This will mean both sets of partners adapting their cultures and modus operandi into a new way of doing things. For example, much of the staff and resources available to the LEP has to come from local authorities in the first instance. There is a role therefore for Leaders to make sure that this resource is made available, but ensure they are aligned to something genuinely new – focussed on delivery, outcomes, and doing things differently.

I believe that no LEP will survive and prosper unless the Leaders, their fellow Members, and the local electorate in each local authority feel that their area is receiving its fair share of the LEP's "growth dividend". In this context,

my responsibility is to ensure Birmingham is a true partner to the other local authority areas who join our partnership. I have always advocated the principle of 'balanced growth, and balanced benefit'. If the LEP is to take the 'tough decisions', we all need to recognise that every local authority area will not benefit from every decision. The principle of balanced growth and balanced benefit ensures that, over the longer term, the tough decisions will even themselves out so that all areas receive their share of the benefits.

A good example of this principle at work is how our LEP responded to the Government's decision in its March Budget to give our LEP one of the 10 "vanguard" Enterprise Zones. It was unanimously agreed that the vanguard Zone would be in Birmingham city centre because of the significant impact it would have on the economy given the number of jobs and developments it will generate.

We also agreed that we would submit an Expression of Interest for a second "Enterprise Belt" covering the areas with growth potential in Solihull, Cannock, Lichfield, Tamworth, Burton on Trent, Redditch, Bromsgrove and Kidderminster. Officers in Birmingham co-ordinated this submission, have helped to prepare the supporting business case, and will continue to support the development of the Belt. Irrespective of the Government's decision on our Belt proposal, business rate growth or Tax Incremental Finance income generated in the Birmingham Enterprise Zone will be available for investment in the wider LEP area.

Despite the enormous financial and economic challenges facing us all, I remain optimistic and confident. In the new environment, and the new style of partnership with business, the role of the local authority Leader in driving economic growth has changed, but is more, not less, important. Vision, together with imaginative thinking on how to bring partners and resources together, can still deliver the infrastructure and other initiatives that will unlock private investment and jobs.

***Cllr Mike Whitby***  
**Leader of Birmingham City Council**

## 2 *Who are our future leaders?*

### Introduction

Local government is changing, arguably more dramatically than at any time in living memory. For example the last few years have seen the development of a 24/7 news culture, which now includes a range of online as well as broadcast and print media, whilst the rise of smartphone technology means that people can be in touch with a global community as they go about their daily business. At the same time, there has been a rise in the public's indifference and sometimes hostility to politicians, officers and public affairs in general, as a result of the MPs expenses scandal in 2009. Local government has also seen a radical shift, with new models of governance such as the change in cabinet systems and introduction of elected mayors, as well as the push for 'double devolution' to give greater powers directly to local communities. On top of all of this of course are the significant reductions in public spending from 2010 onwards, which will radically reshape local councils and how they interact with, and serve their citizens. So what impact will these many changes have on future political leadership? Where will the next generation of Leaders come from and what skills will they need to have?

### Leadership Styles

Some academics suggest that leadership style shapes and is shaped by organisational culture and that 'can do' organisations which focus on clear objectives and goals tend to be led by 'charismatic' leaders, sustaining faith and belief and creating 'followers'.

A survey of public sector leaders in Canada showed that charismatic leaders demonstrated energy and determination, vision, challenge and encouragement and risk taking. So far, so good. But the same study also found that charismatic leaders were not always effective at motivating people or getting them to perform or deliver. Whilst everyone has their own personal leadership style, the best leaders tend to be those who are flexible about the way they do things to suit what they are doing. So from

time to time, the effective leader may need to be a front-man or woman, the hard-nosed task master, as well as the skilled politician, depending on the circumstances and who they are working with.

In a local government context, the Leader of a Council or Elected Mayor will variously need to be the face of that locality on regional or national associations. At the same time, they will need to drive performance within their councils, demanding success and holding senior executives to account. On many occasions, they will need to master the politics within and between organisations as they work with external agencies, and by definition, they need to be adept at managing the politics within their own group.

They will need to communicate effectively, promoting and explaining the council's course of action, building trust, 'keeping the faith' and maintaining the conviction that their organisation is doing the best it can for their area, given the circumstances that prevail.

But more often than not they will also need to deploy 'softer' leadership skills when leading people through the organisational and cultural change which has become almost a given throughout modern local government. They will need to support and empower citizens, managers and fellow councillors to implement change, ensure that they are not overwhelmed and are able to cope with the uncertainties involved.

Mastering all of that is a real challenge. Furthermore many of these tasks are now as relevant to the individual councillor, the ward or community 'champion', just as much as they are to the council leader or elected mayor. But how can such individuals emerge, particularly in the harsher media spotlight of the twenty-first century?

## **A Changing World**

A great deal has already changed over the last decade, which affects all those involved with the running of local councils. We now work with networked, '24-7' bite-sized news and social media, where what we do is reported immediately and relayed and simplified around the world. We can be called upon to provide immediate comment and electronic social media has changed

the way we engage with, and are engaged by, the people and communities we serve. One ill-advised comment can destroy reputations in an instant.

A decade ago, many councillors stood for election because they felt they could make a difference and improve services for their communities in line with their own personal and political beliefs. That ambition is still there today but the job description has now changed. The focus is on doing more with less, which can mean scaling back the very services we spent years nurturing, shaping and developing.

In the past, people in public office were held in high regard. Councillors were ‘persons of standing’, who people were pointed towards, for example, to endorse passport applications. In the last five years, trust and confidence in politicians has collapsed and the reputation of councillors has been tainted by the Westminster expenses scandal, which has morphed into wider media outrage with the costs of almost anyone in public life.

In such circumstances, it is understandable why some people decide it is no longer worth standing for local office. And given that local community leadership has become more challenging than ever, it is imperative that we constantly strive to replenish the stock of councillors and do more to broaden the range of people who stand, by addressing their needs and helping them to manage the significant time and personal commitments involved.

### **Broadening the Councillor base**

When councils were reorganised onto a unitary basis in County Durham, we attracted a record field of candidates and were able to attract younger people into local government and more women too. One of our new entrants, elected at the age of just 21, won this year’s LGIU Young Councillor of the Year and compared with the old county council, the new unitary council is more diverse and includes more councillors who still work in a variety of walks of life. Of the twelve councillors who have served on the council’s Cabinet since 2008, five have been women. Through our pioneering work on Area Action Partnerships we are attempting to widen participation in local decision making and give a broader range of people an opportunity to test their interest in getting more involved. By working with young people we are seeking to whet the appetite of the next generation of leaders.

It is conceivable that we could see more people coming into politics from local community groups, if the localism agenda succeeds in raising the level of engagement.

Perhaps more will emerge from Town and Parish Councils, from other parts of public service/life, for example the voluntary and community sector or those who decide to form mutuals and co-operatives. We might see an increase in candidates emerging from those who have worked in public service but who have retired or been made redundant. There might be more coming forward from a concern for a single issue.

But it cannot be taken for granted that people who are prepared to spend time and effort working to improve their local community will necessarily want to take responsibility for wider and important local government functions, such as child safeguarding, strategic planning or local government finance.

We will still need people with a vision for their locality and the motivation to do something about it - in a word, politicians.

So political parties will remain important in the recruitment of our future leaders. They will need to be flexible and continue to develop – encouraging even more local activism in support of a set of core political and societal values, being more inclusive and embracing to those who want to get involved. It is also critical that our parties and political groups continue to support their representatives after election. This can only be beneficial for the health of our local democratic institutions, and for our political parties as they encourage and foster two-way engagement.

### **Broadening the Skills base**

In the North East, councils have been proactively supporting the development of councillor and leadership skills for a number of years. We have recognised, fostered and encouraged members who have become councillors from whatever background to develop, sought to give them the best chance to succeed in demanding and responsible jobs, and to go on to take on leadership roles. Universities such as my own, Sunderland, have worked hard to support councillor development through for example our

Certificate for Elected Councillors, which has seen almost fifty councillors receive a formal HE qualification.

The aim of this and other national leadership courses is to develop and nurture the skills of our pool of elected representatives. This recognises that councillors are elected for a variety of reasons – for example a burning local issue, family connections, support for a political party – but rarely come into elected positions equipped with a full range of knowledge and skills necessary to reflect the changing world of local government. It is only through continuous learning that the future leaders of tomorrow will emerge – it is quite unrealistic to expect this to happen by chance – and we should continue to support a concept of continuous self-improvement whether through formal learning or other means.

## Conclusion

We hear a great deal from Ministers about decentralising power, providing local government with the freedom to innovate and lead their communities through change. This is potentially exciting but there is rough with the smooth, because we are also expected to implement the most significant budgets reductions in a generation, in line with Ministers' 'reasonable expectations' as to how we should do it, and are under constant 24-hour media scrutiny.

In such circumstances, it is tempting to take a 'managerial' approach to leading and implementing change – particularly if you agree with what the Government is doing, or if you don't, be tempted to give up altogether. But the profound changes we face demand much more. Leading communities and organisations through change and maintaining the focus on doing what's right for your community is more important than ever. It is a task that will demand the full range of leadership skills and the conviction to see it through. I hope that more people see this for the exciting prospect that it is and rise to the challenge.

***Cllr Simon Henig***

**Leader of Durham County Council**

### 3 *The future of central-local relations*

#### **Future of relations between Whitehall and Local Government**

**To understand the future, sometimes you need to look at the past; this is very true of the relations between central and local government, which are fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies that stem from their antecedents. The nation state was born out of the sovereign state, built on the desire of the rich and powerful to defend their territory and further their own ambition, with little regard for those less powerful than themselves. Local government, by contrast, was born out of the desire to improve the lives of town and city dwellers, largely by philanthropic but paternalistic Victorians.**

The future of local government is unclear, in my view, and very much depends on central government deciding what it sees as the function of local government. Most of the 'Localism' bill, in its present form, will weaken local government and damage its role as the authentic voice of the voter. It concentrates too much power in the hands of the Secretary of State as opposed to the will of the voters expressed at the local election ballot boxes. If we are to be set free to make local choices and have real local priorities, then central government will have to accept that there will be accusations of post-code lotteries; they must also resist the temptation to interfere. The problem is that because CLG are supplying most of the money, they find it difficult not to say how it should be spent.

The trouble both historically, and at present, is that local government is at the mercy of national government's 'grace-and-favour' and because of this they still can't help meddling, forcing half-baked 'solutions' on us, for issues that are exacerbated by stories in the pages of our newspapers. For example, forcing major cities to adopt the 'elected Mayor' model, when it has proved ineffective everywhere that has voluntarily opted for it, is anti-democratic. I do not believe that elected Mayors are the answer to the current challenges that we face: local government should be about collective responsibility which is reinforced by the leader and cabinet model of governance. Future leaders will have to have a mature relationship with government ministers

from all departments; the mistakes that will be made will have to be acknowledged and corrected and there will need to be true forgiveness on both sides when things go wrong.

So what are our councils for? Future leaders may be faced with this question in an actual sense rather than just rhetorically. The places we live and the way we live have changed immeasurably since Victorian city fathers set up school boards and sanitation boards; many of the services that are considered vital today may become as obsolete as the lamplighter. Change will continue and is likely to accelerate. The scale of the challenge to local government should not be underestimated. If the financial pressure does not ease in the coming years, we will have to reconsider what a council should be there to provide. Councils themselves could become the provider of last resort rather than first. I believe that councils should enable, develop and maintain the infrastructure of their areas to allow people and businesses to flourish. Whether and how they provide or enable provision within that structure will change over time and in differing local circumstances. The key challenge will be to deliver services with less money, involve private sector partners, and still be accountable to the people we represent. Councils will have to have a mixed basket of sectoral providers and not be afraid to advocate moving services from one sector to another and back again.

Another frustrating central government view seems to be that there are 'real' people and then there are local councillors, with a gap in between that needs filling. This totally ignores the fact that local councillors are 'real people' who have got involved because they believe that they have something to contribute to their communities. The government needs to see councils as a link to local people, not a barrier. Local councillors are well placed to understand the needs of the communities they represent and want to deliver their priorities; in these times of limited resource, councils are listening very keenly to what voters are asking for.

However the digital age has put representative democracy in a difficult position. People feel better informed about politics and want to be more involved in decisions, especially those that have a direct affect on them. So we are being faced with the challenge of a call for a more participative democracy, which is strengthened by the coalition government's localism

agenda. The management of expectations is a skill that future leaders are going to have to hone. For example, the introduction of referenda will appear to strengthen the hands of single-issue groups but is likely to set such groups up for disappointment, as there is no obligation for a council to act positively on the outcome of a referendum; I think this will confuse people and could lead to less engagement not more.

With the demise of regional government offices and the abolition of the regional development agencies, the opportunity has arisen to reroute the pathways between local and central government. I hope this will provide a great stimulus to find new ways to co-operate, to strengthen links and to introduce innovation in the way we communicate with each other. Once new pathways are established, a way has to be found to embed them so that they can survive the ebb and flow of the political eddies that will inevitably wash over them. The real test of any new arrangement will be if it survives a change of government.

A proper accommodation between the two institutions is vital. Local government must not be seen as a pale imitation of the 'real thing' at Westminster but as responsive to our local communities and relevant to the governance of the country.

***Cllr Jeff Reid***

**Leader of Northumberland County Council**

## 4 *How does direct democracy change leader's roles as local activists?*

### How does direct democracy change leader's roles as local activists? Leaders as local activists: the evolving relationship with democracy

**The public sector is responding to reductions in resources and rising need. Services are stretched, and local politicians are being forced to make difficult decisions and to focus on their priorities. The additional grants and sponsorship that have historically facilitated new activity are gone, greatly reduced or harder to access, and while innovation has become an imperative for the public sector, the situation constrains local activism by limiting our capacity to take on new challenges.**

In this context 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. It must signal our movement away from historic relationships where expert services did things 'to' or 'for' communities, and be at the heart of a new way of working where local authorities work together with communities to pursue collective aims. Such a dialogue must be based on a robust understanding of local needs and priorities, and of the full range of resources (financial and other) that can be mobilised to tackle issues. These stretch beyond our ability to make better use of or tailor existing services and budgets, and must embrace our partnerships with stakeholders across public, private and voluntary and community sectors, and the way that we can enable residents to play an active role in securing the outcomes they want in their area. This is a compelling narrative but it is not without its own challenges. Developing capacity and social capital in areas which have been historically disadvantaged and lacking in economic opportunity (and therefore more dependant on public services) requires a sea-change in people's attitudes, both local communities and local leaders, as well as the time to make it happen and the commitment of resources.

Elements of more direct democracy can help us as local activists to mobilise local people to be partners in achieving shared priorities. Where people have more influence on decisions they are more motivated to engage, and where issues are more relevant to them, they are more likely to see themselves as having a stake in what happens and get involved. In Haringey, the Council is devolving power to local areas through new Area Committees. Through these committees communities will be involved in defining local priorities, and in shaping local services and the frameworks that shape the physical place. Our frontline services are growing in sophistication and are able to be increasingly responsive and specific to local need. Neighbourhood planning documents will provide additional levers for community leaders in shaping their local areas. Forums like this give local activists access to real opportunities to work with other residents, businesses and local politicians to influence how public sector resources are deployed in their area.

New approaches to networking, enabled by social media, are also providing new platforms through which people can voice their views, build collectives and self-organise much more effectively than in the past. We see the impact of this across the globe, in the mobilisation of international demonstrations, national online petitions, and hyper-local sites that bring people together around their local area or a key interest. Excitingly, these networks are supporting people to play a more active role in their communities, not just influencing but actively contributing to making the changes they want to see. Networks like 'Bowes and Bounds Green Connected' in Haringey build online neighbourliness by bringing people together around natural interest groups as diverse as local parking and the book club. Our Haringey 40:20 network brings together stakeholders in achieving our carbon reduction aims, mobilising change using tools like pledges and collective purchasing.

These tools and openings are all opportunities for local activists, bringing new dynamism and capacity to our work to secure change in our areas. They also provide an additional conduit through which people can voice their views and debate issues. Interchanges on the web are rapid and multiple and one of the challenges is to define what role a local authority and elected politicians can have in supporting these networks to flourish - one of their key strengths being the fact that they are organically grown and led by communities taking responsibility for themselves. Alongside this our local

populations are increasingly mobile and diverse. There are also voices that are less easily heard, or that articulate their perspectives through other forums and media. To keep abreast of local priorities and needs future leaders will need to be adept at facilitating many concurrent conversations and negotiating a complex web of relationships.

Elements of direct democracy play a positive role in the civic health of a community, however there is also a risk that leaders can be distracted by campaigners who, while sincere in their commitment to an issue, may not be representative and may take up a disproportionate amount of time. Community leadership is about shades of grey. It is about recognising that decisions are not taken in a vacuum but have consequences and knock-on impacts. It is the unique role of the elected councillor to listen to the community in all its guises, and to think about the best interests of the locality in the round. The challenge for leaders is to avoid reactive behaviours, and rather to engage communities and groups in the inter-relationships and inter-dependencies at play, opening their eyes to the debate as a whole and not allowing them to confine their focus to a single issue or immediate concern. The democratic mandate conferred through the local election remains key. This doesn't discount local communities making collective decisions about local areas; it is enriched by the active participation of citizens; and it benefits from growth in the scope and nature of community engagement. However the critical element of accountability, and the opportunity for recourse via the ballot box, enshrines the place of the representative politician at the heart of the community leadership role.

***Cllr Claire Kober***

**Leader of London Borough of Haringey**

## 5 *Politics of Personality: why leadership style matters in an era of flux*

**A media storm in a tea-cup ensued when leaked private papers belonging to Ed Balls revealed an attempt to ‘rebrand’ former Labour Leader Gordon Brown.<sup>1</sup> Code named ‘Project Volvo’, the car which voters most associated with the PM, the rebrand was an exercise by his aides to make him more appealing to voters. Whilst Brown was considered synonymous with such uncharismatic yet reliable vehicles as the Volvo or Rover, his counterpart David Cameron was likened to a sports car or BMW; stylish but perhaps with less substance. Whilst these are somewhat crass and overly simplistic PR and marketing tools, there is no doubt that our national political dialogue is becoming increasingly personality driven, and this is nowhere more apparent than in discussions about effective leadership.**

The same may not yet be true of local politics, although the drive to introduce Mayors in eleven cities across England indicates a move towards a leader-centric model with a resulting focus on individual character. Analysis of personality types and the influence on leadership style usually focuses on a static rather than situational examination of personality type; I want to explore how personality type might affect the way that future leaders approach the challenges that they will face. How will council leaders assert influence outside their sphere of control, and which personality traits will enable them to do this? How will council leaders make the radical changes needed in council structures and service delivery to survive beyond the current financial horizon and how will this be affected by leadership style?

It is clear that future council leaders will need to exert authority beyond their usual sphere of influence, far more so than has been the case in the past. The first challenge will be asserting their authority outside their own council boundaries, as more local authorities look to share both back office and operational services as a way to make the cash savings demanded

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Winnett and Holly Watt, The Telegraph, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2011 (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/labour/8567023/Labour-coup-Gordon-Browns-cabal-hatched-plot-in-midst-of-terrorist-crisis.html>)

by dwindling budgets. Challenge two will be establishing influence across public sector partnerships, as previous boundaries between public services are dismantled. Clearly there has always been interconnectivity between councils, health authorities, fire services and the police, brought to the fore through the Total Place pilots and localised schemes like BeBirmingham. But this will be heightened through the drive to deliver services wrapped around individuals and families, such as through the Community Budget pilot schemes and moves to integrate far more services to cut costs. Finally the emergence of coalitions between local government and the private sector to drive economic development will challenge council leaders to extend their authority beyond acknowledged parameters. Whilst joint working between the public, private and third sector is nothing new, it has often been through codified financial partnerships, whereas less formalised structures like Local Enterprise Partnerships create a space where council leaders may be operating outside their comfort zone, with people who are not their own and where their authority is open to question and challenge.

These situations will force leaders to move from a position of ‘assigned’ leadership to one of ‘emergent’ leadership. Assigned leadership is conferred through formal positioning within an organisation<sup>2</sup>, in this instance, election by their council group. Emergent leaders attain influence and power which become apparent over a period of time through their communication and interaction with others. This will usually take the form of being verbally involved, being informed, seeking other’s opinions and initiating new ideas.<sup>3</sup> Chief Executive of the Common Purpose leadership programme, Julia Middleton describes these people as those who lead beyond authority: ‘Leaders who can take responsibility for problems other than their own, both within organisations and in society at large. Leaders who can still lead when their legitimacy is constantly in question’.<sup>4</sup>

Certain personality traits are linked to emergent leadership, which as mentioned above centres on communication and interaction with others. The Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a 16-type personality indicator

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<sup>2</sup> Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership – Theory and Practice 5<sup>th</sup> ed*; (California, Sage Publications Inc), 2010, p. 6

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.6

<sup>4</sup> Julia Middleton, *Beyond Authority, Leadership in a Changing World*, (London, Palgrave Macmillan), 2007, p. 3

based on Carl Jung's *Psychological Types*, opposing pairs of cognitive functions. The MBTI stresses that no type combination is better or worse than any other, but that within each dichotomous pairing, individuals will have a natural preference towards one or the other. The most relevant pairing when examining emergent leadership is Extroversion versus Introversion. Research carried out by the IDeA, (now Local Government Improvement and Development) showed that councillors are 16% more likely than the general UK population to identify themselves as extroverts; 68% have a natural tendency towards extroversion, whilst 32% tend toward introversion.<sup>5</sup>

Extroverts prefer verbal communication, often in larger groups and talking things through with others. They have a need to initiate projects and involve others and prefer action over reflection. These traits are obviously an asset when building networks, persuading and influencing people outside the Leader's existing sphere of control, and correlate with Northouse's requisites for emerging leaders. However extroverts' desire for action could lead them to become frustrated with the timescales required to build consensus across organisations where they have little experience of the work culture, which may ultimately lead them to withdraw back into their own sphere of control, because they feel they can achieve more. Conversely introverts prefer thoughtful communication and one to one discussions, tend to think things through before making comments and need time to reflect and assimilate before taking action. This makes it more difficult for them to establish broad networks across organisations where they are trying to extend their influence, although they may develop deeper relationships with individuals. They are less likely to assert their influence in meetings or to be the drivers of ideas and projects. However because introverts are more likely to listen and reflect on what others say during discussions and because they prefer a pause before acting, they may experience less frustration at the time taken to initiate programmes or activities.

The current economic situation and prevailing political discourse means that councils must through necessity radically reshape what services they provide, how they are delivered and by whom. This means taking decisions which will

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<sup>5</sup> Mike Green, *Politicians and Personality, a councillor's guide to understanding difference*, (London, Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government), 2007 p. 9.

affect not just the next two years, but the next twenty, as councils rethink the existing municipal models in the biggest shake up since such services were inaugurated. The challenges are multiple; some non-statutory services will have to be dropped altogether, and may be provided only in areas where the voluntary sector can step in. Service delivery is another challenge; some councils may adopt a technological fix, with more services delivered online to save money on physical assets and personnel, whilst others may look for more radical transformative solutions. Council's roles as default service providers will also be contested. Services may be spun out into mutuals, social enterprises or joint venture companies as staff are given the right to challenge their employers to run the services themselves. More services are likely to be commissioned from third sector and private providers, with the associated risks which this may entail. All of these decisions will be driven by the ideological and pragmatic judgments of political leaders and their executive officers, which means that how they come to these decisions is vitally important.

To return then to the MBTI and to the second oppositional pairing, which determines how individuals prefer to receive information and develop an understanding of situations, which the Myers-Briggs tool describes as Sensing versus Intuition. The IDEa research suggests that councillors are evenly split between those who have a preference for sensing, an understanding of the here and now through factual evidence and those who favour intuition, a grasp of the bigger picture, with a more future orientated focus. Councillors are twice as likely to have a preference for intuition compared to the UK public.<sup>6</sup> People classified as 'sensing' like to know specific details, are practical and pragmatic and prefer concrete realistic projects; they need clarity around objectives, roles and responsibilities, and a route map to get from A- B. This approach has some advantages for managing processes of change, whether it is in specific services or across the organisation. Sensing leaders would want to set clear goals and outcomes, calculate timescales and resource implications and try to pre-empt risks. Yet the problem for leaders with a sensing preference is that they could become bogged down in minutiae and lose sight of the overall picture. They could also cause frustration to others, such as service managers who

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<sup>6</sup> Mike Green, p.13

have responsibility for overseeing the process, and may be accused of interference. A sensing leader would be more likely to advocate service change based on modeling existing service data, to try and make the service more efficient and better value.

Intuitive people on the other hand prefer to know the bigger picture, and working on the abstract, conceptual and theoretical levels; they prefer original ideas and innovation and an outline plan with a general direction of travel. The advantage for leaders with an intuitive preference is that they can think outside the box, and can solve problems not based on what exists, but what might be. They can set out the broad vision and ideology and then allow others to implement the change and manage the process. They can keep an aerial view, without becoming overly concerned with specifics. Yet, intuitive leaders could cause problems if they are too vague about how their vision should be implemented, leaving those who are managing the process without a clear sense of direction. An intuitive leader would be more likely to advocate a complete revision or re-design of services, to achieve their ideal of how the service should function. It is important to remember that neither of these preferences is better than the other, they are simply favoured ways of working. Another crucial point about the MBTI is that it only sorts for simple preference, not strength of choice.

So should council leaders emulate the personality branding exercises of national political leaders? Well no, probably not, largely as it frequently seems to backfire (Exhibit A: Ed Miliband's claim to 'speak human', Exhibit B: David Cameron's 'Hug a Hoodie', Exhibit C: Nick Clegg's uncomfortable fall from the pedestal of principle). Local politics is also an entirely different beast to national politics. Whilst local newspapers might seek to exploit a leader's particularly prominent personality trait, on the whole, leaders are most likely to be judged by the public on the success or failure of big projects which become associated with their tenure, or rather unfairly, on the swing of the national political mood.

Yet I still believe that council leader's personalities are significant; having previously worked for a particularly colourful council leader I am very aware of the power of a leader's personality to drive change both organisationally and externally, and to shape the image of a local area by

means of association with them. A leader with energy, motivation and optimism has the ability to change the way people feel about their locality, to give a renewed sense of community, of pride and ownership; that is what charismatic leadership should aim to inspire in its followers. What is most important is that leader's can recognise their personality type and associated strengths and weaknesses. The MBTI states that preferences are inherent, but that is not to say that leader's can't seek to enhance their natural type, whether by improving their communication and negotiation abilities or by learning to delegate tasks requiring extensively detailed knowledge to others and trusting their judgment. This, along with an understanding of their colleagues' personality types will enable them to appoint deputies or advisors who can complement their own skill-set. The demands on our future leaders will be tough, but I prefer to take the optimistic view of Sheffield born author Margaret Drabble: 'when nothing is sure, anything is possible.'

***Charlotte Rose***

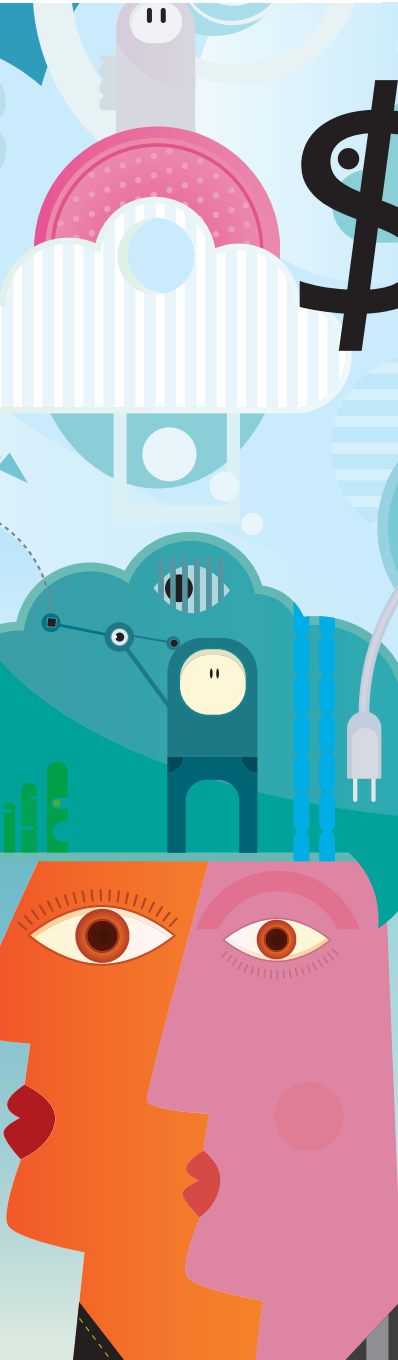
**New Local Government Network**











**This collection of essays is one in a number of steps NLGN is taking to explore the changing nature of local democracy and politics. Specifically focusing on the leader in this pamphlet, we wanted to investigate the key demands and issues that would need to be tackled in a local government world that will be fundamentally different in a few years time.**

By their very nature leaders often spend the vast majority of their time getting things done and ensuring others are doing the same. Unsurprisingly this leaves little time for reflection on the role they perform and how it is changing. In an exercise of future-forecasting our contributors have sketched out some of the key elements that will be on the dashboard of future leaders.