

Political Skills Assessment

Roles, Responsibilities and Indicators of Effective Practice

The Political Skills Assessment consists of six key roles for elected members, some of which will be more prominent and important for you. You should choose which of the roles to complete an assessment of so you can focus on becoming more effective at the roles that matter most to you.

Each role has been broken down into key responsibilities that elected members may wish to undertake when carrying out that role.

To aid your understanding of what effective practice would look like if you are carrying out a responsibility effectively, we have identified 'indicators' to help you.

Please note, the responsibilities and indicators of effective practice are not exhaustive, and you do not have to do all these things in order to be effective at that role. They are there to help you reflect on whether there are actions you can take to become more effective at the role and whether you want to undertake any development to enhance your effectiveness in a particular role.



ROLE - COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP	
Responsibilities	Indicators of Effective Practice
Undertake casework and represents constituents' needs effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engages with constituents and undertake case work on behalf of individuals Ensures operational issues are being dealt with appropriately by officers, while taking care not to overpromise on what the council can do Considers the underlying cause of a casework issue and whether actions can be taken to prevent it from happening in future Represents the community within the Council and to other agencies Campaigns on local issues Wins resources for the ward Represents all sections of the community, irrespective of how they vote Is highly visible in the ward
Have detailed working knowledge of the geography, character of ward and of key public services and contacts in ward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knows and analyses social, geographic, economic and population information for the ward, to enable a good understanding of the ward area and its challenges Knows where to get information about services and who to contact within key services Has established relationships with important groups, community leaders, public service contacts and businesses within the ward
Reconcile differing needs between people and groups within local communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mediates fairly and constructively between people and groups with conflicting needs Works effectively with all sections of the community – e.g. young, elderly, people with disabilities, minority ethnic communities, parents, local business owners etc. Engages with local community activists, such as action groups, community group leaders etc.
Encourage and enable local people to play an active role in their communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads the community in developing a vision for the area. Keeps local people informed about important local issues or council policies and seeks their views (e.g. on spending priorities) Helps local people develop a range of solutions to problems Represents the community's views to the council and Community Planning Partners Encourages local people to play an active role in the community by contributing to community councils, community groups, voluntary organisations etc. Ensures the council has effective community engagement and participation processes (that meet the National Standards for Community Engagement) that empowers local people to get involved in shaping decisions that affect them.
Work effectively with other members in the multi-member ward to offer improved representation to the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works collaboratively with other members in the multi-member ward to share caseload, knowledge and information to support citizens Puts the interests of the ward before political competition, including members of your own political group

ROLE - STRATEGY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT	
Responsibilities	Indicators of Effective Practice
Take part in the policy development process in the council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands what the policy development process is in the council • Is able to sufficiently influence policy development, within any limitations of the political environment • Knows when and how to intervene in the council to influence the development of policy
Identify where policy change is required and is necessary to positively influence outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands what outcomes are and why policy should be aligned to outcomes • Understands the limitations of policy levers on achieving outcomes • Understands the interdependencies of policies and the potential for unintended consequences, and ensures consideration of unintended consequences have been considered during the policy development process • Considers whether the necessary conditions exist for policies to be successful • Ensures policy is focused on making positive contributions to priorities identified in key strategic plans
Take part in the development of key strategic plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes part in the planning process for the development of key strategic plans for the council (i.e. Council Plan, Community Plan etc.) • Understands the importance of prioritisation when developing strategic plans, to ensure officers have a clear understanding of what they need to focus on. • Ensures the voices of communities and those affected by the plans (for example other public services such as the Police or NHS) are included and fed into the development of plans • Ensures strategic plans are informed by evidence of what the key issues are for the local area
Provide officers with a clear sense of strategic direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a clear understanding of the councils priorities • Ensures officers are working to those priorities with clear forward planning • Understands their manifesto and how it links to and informs key strategies the council is working towards

ROLE – DECISION-MAKING	
Responsibilities	Indicators of Effective Practice
Take part in the formal decision-making processes in the council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows the decision-making structures in place in the council • Attends and contributes at full council • Sits on one or more decision-making committees/bodies and contributes to their collective decisions • Knows when and where to intervene to influence a decision • Works effectively with key players within the decision-making process • Understands decisions are taken
Use evidence to support effective decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures officers have a strong evidence base for recommendations for a decision • Assesses what is known and what additional information is required to make a decision • Identifies where and how to access information that is required for a decision • Avoids being rushed into making a hasty decision • Considers all relevant factors, different options and viewpoints prior to making a decision • Identifies the best option based on the evidence that is provided and the knowledge of the situation
Make decisions for the benefit of the whole council area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isn't afraid to make tough or unpopular choices where necessary • Skilfully navigates the tensions between doing what is best for the ward and what is best for the wider council area • Knows when to make decisions that will benefit citizens and local communities but which may not be popular with employees (e.g. re-configuring services) • Prioritises the delivery of some services over others and accepts that this may lead to criticism • Understands when decisions taken in the council will impact on other public services (such as the Police, NHS) and takes into account the impact this will have
Ensure robust decision-making processes are in place to conduct council business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages open discussion amongst those involved in the decision-making process • Ensures that relevant individuals and groups are involved in the decision-making process, both from within and outwith the council • Seeks further information and challenges the views of others in a supportive manner
Accept responsibility and explain rationale for decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stands by a decision and is accountable for its implementation • Justifies why one course of action was taken over others • Ensures a decision is transparent and the public can scrutinise the evidence base and rationale for decisions

ROLE - SCRUTINY	
Responsibilities	Indicators of Effective Practice
Read papers and prepare for formal and informal meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarises and identifies the key issues in council papers, committee papers, board papers etc. easily and accurately Identifies key issues from reading statistical information in performance reports Understands financial information and in particular, the reasons behind any budget variances Prepares questions ahead on formal and informal meetings Knows when to seek clarification from an officer prior to a formal meeting, to ensure the meeting focuses on important matters of detail.
Critically evaluate arguments rather than taking them at face value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looks at the strengths and weaknesses of arguments that are presented by others and to challenge them where appropriate Delves beneath the surface of an issue or an argument Understands own bias when scrutinising arguments and seeks to be as objective as possible
Ensure decisions of the council have been implemented and are contributing positively to outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Checks that business case plans being delivered as scheduled and are aligned to key strategic plans Checks infrastructure projects being delivered as scheduled and are aligned to key strategic plans Checks change projects being delivered as scheduled and are aligned to key strategic plans Ensures implementation of decisions is in line with agreed policy Evaluates whether decisions have had their intended impact or whether unintended consequences have occurred which were not anticipated
Ask constructive questions about council and public service partners' policies and service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands the impact that different questioning techniques can have on the responding person Asks effective questions that aid learning and understanding about the topic at hand Uses the appropriate tone that doesn't evoke a defensive reaction Knows when to ask a question in an informal setting as opposed to a formal meeting
Encourage and support honest self-assessment and learning that drives improvement in the council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures that a comprehensive approach to performance management and self-evaluation is being implemented consistently across the council Monitors improvement plans arising from self-evaluation exercises to track progress Supports services to be honest and critical about their performance during a self-assessment exercise, and refrains from 'holding services to account' for issues outwith their control

ROLE – PARTNERSHIP WORKING	
Responsibilities	Indicators of Effective Practice
Build effective working relationships with a wide range of stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is clear about the purpose of working relationships with different stakeholders and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of these relationships • Resolves any issues which may impact on the effectiveness of working relationships • Openly shares information and knowledge with stakeholders
Work with others to help achieve local outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shares ideas and information with officers, outside bodies, community councils, constituents and help guide their thinking
Identify and nurture partnerships that help deliver better outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secures access to key people in other agencies (e.g. public organisations, third sector organisations, local businesses) that deliver services in the community • Considers arrangements with key partners for joint working and or coordinated service delivery in support of the delivery of local outcomes
Ensure partners have a shared sense of vision and priorities for local communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures partners have, through the Community Planning process, a common understanding of the outcomes they are aiming to achieve • Scrutinises partners' decision-making and contribution to shared priorities • Ensures partners are actively working towards those shared priorities i.e. walking the walk and not just talking the talk
Show sensitivity to the values held by partners and the context in which they are working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognises how the different environments in which partners work and the different challenges they face, impact upon joint working and coordinated service delivery
Keep informed of partner organisations' work and likely consequences to the communities you represent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has working relationships with key leads for partner organisations • Knows how to obtain updates from partner organisations regarding their work • Considers the likely impact of partner organisations work on outcomes identified in community/council plans

ROLE - REGULATOR	
Responsibilities	Indicators of Effective Practice
Abide by Councillors Code of Conduct with regard to regulatory matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands what is and isn't appropriate behaviour in relation to the boundaries outlined in the code of conduct Understands the areas of ambiguity in the code of conduct and doesn't seek to exploit them for short-term gain at the expense of longer term benefits such as being seen to demonstrate integrity, respect and trust
Ensure the audit function is effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands how the audit function works and where it fits within the governance arrangements of the council Understands the local code of governance Understands the national standards for audit the council has to meet Understands the financial statements and asks for regular assurance and evidence that financial regulations are being adhered to Asks for regular assurance and evidence that budget targets are being delivered Examines reports by external auditors and ensures improvement actions are being addressed.
Ensures the Planning function is effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributes to the Local Development Plan (LDP) Understands the Local Development Plan (LDP) and ensures it is being adhered to Understands national planning policy and the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) Ensures the views of local communities inform the Local Development Plan (LDP) Ensures the Local Development Plan (LDP) aligns with the strategic aims of key council/community plans Understands the Development Management and Enforcement functions of the Planning Authority Aware of what good performance is for the Planning Authority and how elected members role in decision-making impacts that Understands the statutory role of the Chief Planning Officer and has an effective working relationship with that officer
Ensure the licensing function is effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands the licensing regulations and whether they are being adhered to Understand the legislative context for licensing in Scotland Has completed mandatory training on licensing Understands the importance of adhering to the Councillors Code of Conduct when taking part in the licensing function

