inside top teams
– a practical guide

I&DeA
improvement and development agency

This guide is for the political and the managerial teams heading local authorities as they work together to provide vision, leadership and organisation.

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preface: why this guide?

Huge demands are placed on local authorities. The onus of meeting these demands falls squarely on the shoulders of the leading politicians and senior managers – a responsibility that they share for the overall leadership and management of the authority.

Each authority has a unique combination of politicians and managers with very varied backgrounds, values, capabilities and views. They have rarely chosen to work with one another. Yet, for the sake of the community they all serve, they must make this relationship work effectively.

The phrase top team is frequently used in local government to define this combined group of leading politicians (in cabinets; executives; mayor plus cabinets; and committee chairs) and leading managers (in small or large senior management groups). Our experience, as others'[1], is that this is rarely a single team. Usually it is two teams with a shared responsibility for working together on joint business. We prefer, and use throughout this guide, the phrase top teams – plural not singular.

This does not reduce the shared responsibility for council leadership of strategy, priorities, short and long term resources and overall performance, which have to be tackled jointly. The two top teams may not always exercise their shared responsibilities through a common forum – but throughout this guide we suggest that physically meeting together is important. Much of the detailed business will, of course, be conducted through the pairings of portfolio holders (chairs) and directors (senior managers), or clusters of more than two, with joint responsibility for a policy area or service. We acknowledge this in the guide (section 12) but do stress that the top teams must make the key decisions.

This guide aims to help the working relationship between the top teams. It sets out various themes that we have found top teams need to work at and suggests different approaches to tackling leadership challenges and problems. We have called it a guide because it offers information about various ways you might do things rather than a manual, which is the single way to do things. We recognise that the huge variety in local roles, responsibilities and relationships makes prescription impossible – but by drawing on our work and discussions with many authorities, we focus on the things that they have demonstrated to work.

The guide is divided into three parts:

- The basics (section 1-4) – themes that underlie all that the top teams do

- The business agenda (section 5-10) – business themes top teams have to tackle

- The development agenda (sections 11-15) – themes that consider how to develop the top teams' basic relationships

You do not need to read this guide from cover to cover. Instead, dip into and use those sections of most relevance to you. We suggest:

- if you are bemused about why it's such hard work, scan section 1

- if you want to get a grip on two models for how top teams work, read sections 2 and 3

- if you want to diagnose the range of leadership capabilities of your top teams, use section 4

- if you have a substantially new cabinet or management team, working through sections 4-10 could be of interest

- if you are unsure whether your top team is strategic enough, look at section 5

- if you have a problem with budgeting or performance, consider the ideas in sections 6 and 7

- if you are facing major change and the challenge of leading it, then section 9 may help

- if you want to improve the top teams' working relationships, then sections 11-15 could help

Above all, try out ways of improving your top teams' working – there are few teams that cannot improve and the ideas in the guide may help.

In each section we have briefly discussed each theme and added a workshop session for top teams to examine the implications for themselves. They vary in length from less than an hour to a half or whole day.

[1] *Inside top teams – the Report* (IDEA, 2006)

While many of the tasks can be self managed by top teams and have been written with this in mind we suggest that you consider using a facilitator. The workshops often need a facilitator because many strong-minded individuals will be involved. An independent chair can steer the group to keep it focused on the task, encourage all to participate, flip-chart the issues, maintain discipline on timescales and keep a balanced record of the work done and conclusions reached. Facilitators may be drawn from within a council – but must be seen as impartial and command respect – or from outside the council, such as from the IDeA.

inside
top teams
a practical
guide

Each section asks a basic question that top teams must answer.

It then suggests a brief workshop format for exploring the question.

Sections:

1. why is it such hard work?
2. who leads and who manages?
3. what tasks are you juggling?
4. what state are you in?

part 1
the basics

section 1. why is it such hard work?
politicians are from … and managers are from …

When local politicians and managers work together there is often a feeling that the other set comes from another planet. There is a cultural gulf between the two. Top teams will only be effective when the two groups make sense of their different views and approaches and find common ground for leading the authority.

So why is working together such hard work? There are at least three reasons. They need acknowledging and working through. They are:

a) you have very different cultures -– the two leading groups come from different places

b) it's not as simple as politicians lead and managers manage – the division of labour is not easy

c) there are shared responsibilities where politicians and managers negotiate as equals

We discuss the first two reasons in this section and the third at greater length in Section 2.

A. cultures are very different

There is potentially much that culturally separates politicians and managers. John Nalbandian, who has been both politician and manager in US city government, provides a way into analysing key differences between politicians and managers[2]. We have adapted and modified it in the chart below, which shows clearly the gulf that may exist.

chart 1
political/managerial cultural differences

characteristic	politicians	managers
values & philosophy	political and party values	professional and managerial values
conversation & language	'What do you hear?' storytelling about real events interests and symbols	'What do you know?' reports based on data, information, money, people and things
authority & career	representatives who make choices political allegiance, experience and promises power conflict, compromise, change rely on votes	experts who organise and deliver professional experience, credibility and fit knowledge harmony, co-operation, continuity rely on position
performance	respond to the public wanting practical results in the shortest time	respond to performance indicators and longer term

[2] Nalbandian, J. (2000); Paper presented to IDeA, London

Many top teams find these four areas of cultural difference difficult and need to address these directly:

- differences of values and philosophy. There can be considerable misjudgment of one another when political and professional values suggest different resolutions to a problem. Strongly–held views are questioned and the feeling is of frustration or being blocked. Top teams need to acknowledge these differences and respect them in negotiations over decisions. Asking top teams to answer the simple question, 'What keeps you in local government?' has raised mutual awareness and illustrated the respective commitments on both sides.

- differences in conversation and language. Politicians and managers can quite often describe a situation, problem or challenge in a dramatically different way. Oversimplified it may be, but politicians quite often prefer the power of the individual story drawn from real life. By contrast, managers often see the elaborateness of their data as the best way to describe the situation. Both can be partial. In our experience, top teams need to put the two together to assess the situation and ensure shared ownership of the policy or action.

- differences of authority and career. Authority arises at least partially from the way in which people are selected or elected to their post and these differ between politician and manager. This has practical implications for an individual's reporting lines, when they arrive (and depart) from the top teams, what agenda they work to and how much they are prepared to negotiate. Narrow political majorities and poorly-performing services can radically affect political and professional clout respectively.

- differences of view about performance. The pressure for performance can differ radically between politician and manager. Delivering to local communities within shorter timescales (often heightened by electoral cycles) can be markedly different from national and professional assessment of performance over longer timescales. We have found that the explicit discussion of performance priorities in top teams has helped broaden the nature and ownership of both performance management systems and the joint management of performance results.

B. the division of labour is not simple

A difference often held to distinguish politicians and managers is that the first lead on policy and the second manage the service delivery. Working in top teams suggests that it is not so clear-cut[3]. The ideas of two significant writers on leadership, Kotter[4] and Pascale[5], help draw a useful comparison between leadership and management:

Management deals with complexity – *making happen what should be happening*

Leadership deals with change – *making happen what wouldn't normally happen*

Both are essential to the well-functioning local authority. But far from these being separate functions for politicians and managers, politicians have a role in management and managers in leadership. While politicians should not be involved in the detail of planning, budgeting and delivery, they must raise concerns about service delivery, be briefed on performance and jointly make decisions about large-scale management issues. Equally, managers have the knowledge, insight and ability to provide leadership – they are in a good position to advocate and jointly lead major initiatives. Rather simply, this is represented below.

	politician	managers
leadership	lead role	negotiated role
management	negotiated role	lead role

The essential point is to be able to spot difficulties, understand and discuss them and take action.

[3] IDeA (2006); *Inside top teams — The Report*
[4] Kotter, JP (1990); *What Leaders Really Do, Harvard Business Review,* May-June 1990
[5] Pascale, R (1996); *Managing on the Edge*, Penguin

suggested workshop session:
understanding working difficulties

purpose

A joint exercise for the top teams to identify where there might be difficulties in the working relationship and devise ways of avoiding them.

time

At least an hour.

programme

1. Introduce the two parts of this section – cultural differences and the division of labour.

Create small sub-groups with mixes of politicians and managers.
(10 min)

2. Each group is asked to tackle the two difficulties identified above:

part A do any of the cultural differences ring true and what specifically are they? As a group suggest ways of acknowledging the value of the other position and how it might be dealt with in practice.
See suggestions above.
(20 min)

part B what areas of leadership should managers engage with and what areas of management should members engage with?
(20 min)

Draw up the results on a flipchart for easy reference.

3. Feedback to the whole group. (10 min+)

- what specific understandings of each other does it suggest are important?

- what action do you agree to take to help address potential difficulties?

section 2 who leads and who manages?
first principle – shared leadership and management

The first principle of top teams is that the most critical aspects of the council's leadership and management must be shared.

In the previous section we suggested it was this feature, alongside very different cultures, that makes the working relationship between politician and manager such hard work. In this section and throughout the rest of the guide, we unpick the key aspects of this working relationship and suggest ways for building a clearer, stronger and more effective way of working.

It should help you think about the development of your top teams' relationship when either the political team and/or the managerial team are new, in whole or in part. In other words, the question of this section needs answering every time there is an election/selection of leading members or the appointment of new senior managers. It also needs examining when too much time is spent haggling over turf and who should take the flack for what turns out badly or doesn't turn out at all.

Who is responsible for leadership and who for management? The answer seems straightforward, politicians lead on policy and officers manage its delivery. This is illustrated in diagram 1(a) (below), with the arrow representing the direction of authority. However, experience suggests the reality is more complicated and it is this complexity that contributes to the hard work of the relationship. Politicians are necessarily involved in management and managers necessarily involved in leadership. The parallel document to this, *Inside top teams – the Report*, suggests this is the case.

Politicians, as well as defining policy direction, are the primary means for conveying community concerns over service delivery – they bear electoral responsibility for it – and are the deciders of resource allocations. They have values about what and how things are managed. They have ideas. For all these reasons they must be part of managing the authority without attempting to do the managers' job.

Managers are the primary conduits for central government policy and directives and for some community pressures. They also have professional and local expertise about what is possible and appropriate. They hold values about what and how things should be changed. They also have ideas. For all these reasons, they must be part of leading the authority without doing the politicians' job.

Effective local authorities ensure that the key parts of the council's leadership and management are a shared responsibility between the politicians running the administration and senior managers running the organisation. It is a unique partnership in any geographical area and requires joint management of the authority's operations and joint leadership of its change. Both are fed by the respective responsibilities of politicians and managers, as shown in diagram 1(b) below.

diagram1
leadership and management of the council

1a) separation and two roles

political
lead and
decide policy

managerial
manage and
deliver services

1b) overlap and three roles

political

managerial

joint

The overlap of responsibilities means there are three arenas of work for the top teams – two separate ones for each team and one joint arena for both teams. The boundaries are not fixed and will vary according to people and the situation but, while they are often implicit, they do need discussion and agreement. The three arenas are:

- political – where politicians in cabinets, executives or administration groups draw their authority from party group selections and public elections. Their legitimacy comes from their manifestos and within the council they have the authority to define the council's strategic direction and priorities, decide budgets and negotiate the relationships between different political parties and partners.

- managerial – where managers individually and in management teams draw their authority from their formal appointments within the council. Their authority stems from the legal, governmental and organisational implications of delivering services and good governance.

- joint – where politicians and managers share responsibility for agreeing overall strategy and managing overall performance. They have to bring together all the essential parts of major decisions so that they meet the political, community, governmental and professional realities of the situation. This arena of joint responsibility has grown, not least because of external pressures such as continuous performance assesment (CPA), which identifies joint responsibilities as much as separate ones.

To be effective, senior politicians and managers must be clear what are separate and joint responsibilities. These responsibilities will vary with new arrivals (managerial and, particularly, political) who will need to learn the ropes. Top teams must be clear, first with one another and then with others within the organisation and with political groupings, communities and partner agencies about who does what.

There needs to be operational clarity about these three arenas at two levels:

- top team to top team for whole council responsibilities

- senior politician to senior manager for specific policy responsibilities (this may take the form of a cluster of portfolio holders and/or managers for a policy area). (section 12)

Many top teams and individual policy pairings or clusters meet to discuss and agree who does what. This can be time well spent. It pays off for day-to-day matters and can be critical when contentious policies are to be taken forward or crises arrive.

How can one discuss these boundaries? The framework below illustrates the boundaries in more practical detail. The framework is one that we have used for a number of years in top teams and which we contributed to the Leadership Development Commission's strategy report[6]. The three columns represent the three arenas of political, managerial and joint responsibility. The six rows represent the key activities of the top teams and their individual team members, namely:

- establishing the council's strategic direction, priorities and resource levels

- monitoring and managing the council's performance

- engaging in community and neighbourhood leadership

- directing partnership working at strategic and service delivery levels

- organising and changing the council to be fit for purpose

- taking responsibility for individual, team and organisational capacity development

The text illustrates rather than defines the tasks in each area of responsibility. The guide will deal in more detail with each of the six key joint activities, as shown in the cross-referenced sections.

chart 2 umbrella framework for local leadership capacities

political	joint	managerial
strategy, priorities and resources (sections 5, 6)		
• defining core political priorities and outcomes – often represented by the manifesto	• devising and agreeing the corporate direction, priorities and resource/budget plans	• establishing work priorities derived from national, community, corporate and service policies
performance management (section 7)		
• scrutinising performance and action	• agreeing targets and outcomes • agreeing performance systems	• achieving results and running an effective performance management system
community and neighbourhood leadership (section 8)		
• setting political values, objectives and commitments	• agreeing the council's leadership and contribution to the community	• establishing corporate values • consulting to establish community priorities
partnership working (section 9)		
• leading through partnerships	• agreeing on partnership priorities, representation and roles	• delivering through partnerships
organising and changing the council (sections 10)		
• working with other politicians and the public • facilitating political change • sustaining ethical and political values	• working across the political/managerial interface • jointly managing capacity and resources	• aligning the work of employees and others • facilitating change and adaptation • sustaining ethical, professional and financial values
developing individual, team and organisational skills and working capacity (sections 4, 11–15)		
• developing self and personal skills • developing the cabinet/executive • developing relationships within and between political group	• developing joint working of team working • facilitating the pairing of portfolio holder and director	• managing self and personal skills • developing the corporate and other management team • developing relationships to staff and organisation

It may help to understand and negotiate these boundaries by thinking in terms of a relay race where the handing over of the baton is a crucial stage in the race.

Any issue hitting the authority can be regarded as a metaphorical baton to be passed on in the relay of getting something done about it. Increasingly politicians and managers are explicitly negotiating who handles the baton at a particular time.

With relay races, the moment at which the baton is passed from hand to hand – when both hold it – is short but crucial, as a recent Olympic final demonstrated. We would suggest this is exactly the same for top teams. The times when things are jointly discussed and decided are relatively short but crucial.

The analogy breaks down because each may come to the joint meeting with a part of the baton and each go away afterwards with a different part but nonetheless it rightly focuses on how and when the issues are jointly agreed and owned.

suggested workshop session:
who is handing the baton?

A practical test of how the principle works out for your situation. The purpose is to use the framework to clarify and agree who is doing what for a particular issue that has shared responsibilities. It may be used with whole top teams or pairings and clusters of politicians and managers responsible for specific policy areas.

Take a typical issue such as a:

- current or upcoming policy or strategy
- performance management problem
- recent crisis

time
Around 30-60 minutes

agreeing shared responsibilities

agreeing responsibilities	joint	managerial
1. what specifically will you bring to the issue? • political objectives • political support • community views		1. what specifically will you bring to the issue? • analysis of data and sources • professional and administrative views • partner views
	2. what mutual understanding of the issue needs to be established? 3. what will be key areas for negotiation? 4. what action, by whom, will need to follow?	
5. what political action will be needed? • within and across parties • with the community and partners	5. what joint action through portfolio holder/director clusters or joint task groups will be required?	5. what managerial action will be required? • further analytical work • negotiation of change within the council and externally with the community and partners

A suggested format:

- in small groups of politicians and managers (preferably clustered around policy areas) decide on one issue (as above).
- individually take five minutes to think through your answers to question 1 and possible answers to questions 2, 3 and 4.
- as a small group take 25 minutes to share each person's answers to question 1 and discuss and agree how you might jointly answer 2, 3 and 4.

How would you each answer question 5? Identify areas of difficulty or disagreement.

- compare the results across the top teams. Identify where acceptable and possibly unacceptable levels of variation exist over joint and separate political and managerial arenas. Where possible, tackle and resolve the difficulties suggested by the discussion and where not possible agree follow-up work to tackle the difficulties.

section 3 what tasks are you juggling?
second principle – juggling the full range of tasks

A second principle runs through the effective working of top teams – it is their ability jointly to tackle change management tasks, from setting and planning the strategic vision, through negotiating with different interests to taking people through cultural change.

A model we devised[7] and frequently use with top teams is one that pictures the task as three-ball-juggling with the leader or leadership team as the juggler.

diagram 2 juggling the leadership of change

developing and delivering a vision and outcomes

spotting and negotiating with the interests of stakeholders

juggler(s)

enabling people to adapt emotionally, behaviourally & culturally

It brings together three familiar aspects of leading change:

- developing a strategic change and organising the delivery of the specific outcomes

- spotting those with a stake or interest in the change and negotiating with them

- enabling people to adapt, with all the emotions involved and the cultural changes necessary

At the centre of the juggle are the leaders of the change with their capabilities – or not – of juggling the three balls. There is no single style of juggling but it must be appropriate to the context: crisis or inspiration. Equally, the ball in the air will vary, much like the dynamics of change. The focus of attention in leadership or management change will vary from planning the delivery to negotiating with various stakeholders, to handling emotions and behavioural change.

[7] Holder, A. et al (2002); *Leading Change. A Juggling Act* www.ahaconsultancy.co.uk

Councils that respond successfully to CPA inspections find they have had to juggle all three balls. Agreeing and planning an improvement or recovery plan may have been the initial focus but all councils we have worked with have had to handle negotiations with those who had interests affected and the, often very strong, emotions and cultural resistances.

The diagram below sets out the basic questions in juggling each of the three balls.

diagram 3 questions involved in juggling leadership tasks

local government context   bigger picture

what outcomes do you want?
how are they to be achieved?

outcomes

- vision
- strategy
- planning & performance framework
- structures, systems, styles, etc

self

what interests and voices are there about this change?

how do you negotiate a way forward?

what challenges, possibilities and dilemmas will individuals & groups face?

how can they be enabled to face the emotionally and behaviourally challenging changes?

interests

emotions

- stakeholder
- identification
- involvement
- drawing together
- diverse views
- negotiating a way forward

- communcating
- defining
- acknowledging
- enrolling
- developing

suggested workshop:
top teams to assess their abilities to juggle change management jointly

purpose

For top teams to review their juggling of a current change issue.

The chart below sets out a series of questions. In our experience, this joint assessment gives a richer and more realistic picture of what needs to happen than merely agreeing a project or work plan.

timing

Approximately one hour.

programme

1. take a significant current issue that is giving difficulties.

2. break the top teams into small groups with a mix of politician and managers.

3. each group is asked to consider the questions in the table below for 25 minutes and report back to the whole combined team – a fuller version of the model (diagram 4), published in the Leadership Development Strategy, may add further thoughts.

4. the whole of the group can then distil what is being currently done and what improvements would help.

chart 4 issues in managing change

developing and delivering outcomes	what vision do you have and what outcomes do you want? how are they achieved?
negotiating with stakeholders' interests	what interests and voices are there linked to this change? how do you negotiate a way forward?
enabling people and organisations to adapt	what challenges, possibilities and dilemmas will individuals face? how can they be enabled to face the emotionally and behaviourally challenging changes?
understanding your personal or team leadership	what characteristics and style will the change require?
aligning with other significant activities and demands	how do the demands of this issue impact on the political, professional, resource and administrative capacity of the council?

diagram 4
the competing demands of leadership

leading outcomes
- scanning the environment
- developing vision, values and strategy
- deciding priorities, resources, performance
- ensuring delivery, evaluation, learning

community

neighbourhood leadership

government

policy directives, CPA, inspections

leading individually and through teams
- jointly partnering – political and managerial
- maintaining personal values eg integrity, trust
- developing self-awareness, knowledge and belief
- coping with complexity, uncertainty, ambiguity and risk
- providing resilience

leading interests and stakeholders
- enhancing democratic engagement
- facilitating the politician/ manager interface
- delivering and improving customer services
- promoting citizen, rights and duties
- involving stakeholders
- incorporating diversity
- partnership working
- championing
- sharing leadership and appropriate power relationship

leading outcomes
- scanning the environment
- developing vision, values and strategy
- deciding priorities, resources, performance
- ensuring delivery, evaluation, learning

partners

LSPs, LAAs, service delivery

section 4 what state are you in?

self-diagnosis

Top teams provide much of the leadership of the local authority and have, therefore, to answer this question not only for themselves but also for the whole authority and how fit for purpose it is. Top teams are uniquely placed to take responsibility, to answer the question at a number of levels for the whole organisation and to take action if the council is not fit for purpose.

Critical features

In order to answer the question about the state of the authority, the top teams need to answer questions at several levels:

- how will the organisation need to change to meet future demands from where it is now? This will require clarity about both the future and present.

- what quality of functioning have the top teams with one another?

- how effective are working pairs or clusters between members and partner officers in policy arenas?

- how suited are the individual capabilities of members and managers to their roles now and as they emerge?

This is shown in diagam 5. Each level represents movement that the organisation and, increasingly nearer home, individuals on the top teams, need to make. Are you aware of them and the implications for you as an organisation, team and individual?

**diagram 5
issues involved in moving from present to future**

current
----
organisation
----
top teams
----
pairs/clusters
----
individual

assessment
current demands
future needs
capability & capacity
development plans

future
----
organisation
----
top teams
----
pairs/clusters
----
individual

This section focuses on the team level but offers signposts to following up within this guide and elsewhere.

suggested workshop:
top teams – diagnosing what state you are in

purpose

For the top teams to assess their capability across the leadership demands of the authority.

As set out in Section 2, we developed and incorporated into the Leadership Development Commission Strategy an umbrella framework for local leadership capacities[8]. This is a useful basis for a diagnostic tool for top teams to determine where the political and managerial interface is working well and where it needs to develop.

timing

At least an hour.

pre-work

The political team and the managerial team should individually use the umbrella framework to rate themselves (and their counterparts) on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being poor, 5 being got it right). This should include the central column where work and decisions have genuinely to be jointly owned.

chart 5 umbrella framework for rating top teams members

political	joint	managerial
strategy, priorities and resources (sections 5, 6)		
defining core political priorities and outcomes – often represented by the manifesto rating	defining core political priorities and outcomes – often represented by the manifesto rating	establishing work priorities derived from national, community, corporate and service policies rating
performance management (section 7)		
scrutinising performance and action rating	agreeing targets and outcomes. agreeing performance systems rating	achieving results and running an effective performance management system rating
community and neighbourhood leadership (section 8)		
setting political values, objectives and commitments Rating	agreeing the council's leadership and contribution to the community rating	establishing corporate values consulting to establish community priorities rating
partnership working (section 9)		
leading through partnerships rating	agreeing on partnership priorities, representation and roles rating	delivering through partnerships rating
organising and changing the council (sections 10)		
working with other politicians and the public facilitating political change sustaining ethical and political values rating	agreeing on partnership priorities, representation and roles rating	delivering through partnerships rating
developing individual, team and organisational skills and working (sections 11–15)		
developing self and personal skills developing the cabinet/executive developing relationships within and between political group rating	developing joint working of team working facilitating the pairing of portfolio holder and director rating	managing self and personal skills developing the corporate and other management team developing relationships to staff and organisation rating

suggested workshop

Stage 1 (20 min) The diagram below should be drawn up on a flipchart or photocopied and blown up and at the workshop each team should present their scores from 1-5, with 1 = low and explain why they scored the way they did.

political	joint	managerial
strategy, priorities and resources (sections 5, 6)		
rating	rating	rating
performance management (section 7)		
rating	rating	rating
community and neighbourhood leadership (section 8)		
rating	rating	rating
partnership working (section 9)		
rating	rating	rating
organising and changing the council (sections 10)		
rating	rating	rating
developing individual, team and organisational skills and working (sections 11–15)		
rating	rating	rating

Stage 2 (30 min) Differences of more than one point between (or within) the two teams should be investigated. Scores where both teams agree on low scores should also be discussed. From this, the top teams should identify what are the priority areas for action:

- jointly

- within the two teams, each taking responsibility for its own team's action

Stage 3 (10 min) Given the connection to other levels:

- organisationally

- policy pairs or clusters

- individually

What needs to be followed up?

Do the identified sections in the guide offer further help?

Ensure there is a note of the commitments and further work to be done.

core processes for diagnosing your state

The introduction identified four levels of analysis. Here we identify a few signposts for further in-depth work by the top teams.

organisation diagnosis

Clearly, each authority should have a good understanding of where it is and what it needs to address. The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), peer reviews and other inspections should also provide good external reflections on the council's current level of efficiency and effectiveness. Employee, stakeholder and external surveys will also add to these. The data needs to be drawn together into a framework for analysis and action by the top teams.

One useful source for this is *An Organisational Development Resource Document for Local Government* commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister[9] and which had some key questions that could help your thinking about where to focus your attention and resources:

purposes – How clear are organisational members about the organisation's purpose and mission? How supportive are they of both of these?

structure – How adequate is the fit between the organisation's purpose/mission and the internal structure that is designed to serve that purpose?

rewards – What are the similarities and differences between what the organisation formally rewards and punishes and what organisational members actually believe they are rewarded or punished for doing?

helpful mechanisms – Which processes and procedures in the organisation (planning, budgeting, information systems, etc.) actually help organisational members do their work, and which of them hinder more than help?

relationships – What is the quality of the relationship between individuals; between and among groups, units, and departments, and so forth; and between the person and the requirements of his or her job?

leadership – What is the leadership capability and capacity within the authority and to what degree is it enacted?

This guide should provide a series of useful exercises to cover each of the dimensions and a further workshop or series of workshops could be arranged to address areas of disagreement or under-performance.

[9] Weisbord, M.R. *Organisational diagnosis: Six places to look for trouble, with or without a theory*, Group and Organisation Studies 1 (pp 430-447)

An Organisational Development Resource Document for Local Government, which uses Weisbord's ideas, was commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now, Department for Communities and Local Government) (www.communites.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1161291). This is a useful resource for top teams, covering in some detail themes such as improving community engagement, improving organisational performance, building better partnerships, cultural change, improving service performance and people management.

team-to-team

A more process-based diagnosis might also be helpful. Glaser and Glaser (1992)[22] identified five elements that contribute to the level of a team's effectiveness or ineffectiveness over time. They are:

- team mission, planning and goal setting
- team roles
- team operating processes
- team interpersonal relationships
- inter-team relations

The top teams can assess themselves and colleagues against the chart set out in detail in section 11 and hold a workshop discussion in a similar way to that set out earlier. Section 11 has another method for assessing team effectiveness. Use whatever method suits your needs but always ask the crucial question: *so what?* Discussion is fine but taking action gets results.

policy pairings and clusters

How do you assess the functioning of what are actually two teams – the cabinet/executive and the chief officer's management team? Of course you can't ignore the dynamic of having the two teams led by two crucially pivotal people and the various one-to-one pairings between the portfolio holders and their respective directors.

This particular dynamic is central to the effectiveness of the council and in particular policy areas. We suggest some ways of building this relationship in section 12: The portfolio holder/director relationship. There is also much more in the recent IDeA study[10].

individual capabilities

We have assumed that there are a number of sources to which you, as individual members and managers, may go:

- section 15 of this guide
- your own authority's competency framework/role profile and, if not, other authorities', such as Essex County Council's combined framework for members and managers
- the IDeA's political skills framework, which has now been supplemented by further work on top teams

A 360-degree feedback approach might be useful where the views of those working all around you are systematically sought.

inside
top teams
a practical
guide

Each section asks a question about the top teams' business.

Each section is structured in six building blocks:

1) the added value top teams can bring to the business

2) the critical features of the business

3) the factors other than the rational that need juggling to get the business done

4) a format for a workshop session

5) a core process in more detail for how to get about the business

6) some key references

Section:

5. where are you going?

6. how well is the budget developed?

7. how well are you delivering?

8. how connected are you?

9. how effective are your partnerships?

10. how well are you managing change?

part 2
the business
agenda

section 5. where are you going?
strategy, vision and priorities

Strategy is the framework of choices that determine the nature and direction of the organisation[11]

added value

Strategy and vision are a key responsibility of both top teams. An old Chinese proverb says the fish rots from the head. A dangerous vacuum can emerge and people and services fall through the gap without an appropriate amount of joint activity and agreement from both teams in devising and agreeing corporate direction, key priorities and supporting resource and budget planning.

A strategic vision enables leading members and managers to make tough choices and decisions in terms of service provision, delivery, resources and development of capabilities. It provides guidance for operational and day-to-day decision-making and, at its most effective, creates a unity of purpose and common culture in the organisation. In short, it is well worth striving for.

But strategy and leadership have to go together. Without the top teams' leadership, strategy will stall – it will fail to get the priority it deserves and allow individual departments and partners to ignore it and work on their own agendas. Without necessary leadership, key stakeholders may not get on board, the overall thrust of the strategy may get diluted, the organisation can get overloaded and initiative fatigue set in.

It is a key role for top teams to provide both strategy and leadership that establish, resource, communicate and deliver a strategic vision for the council.

critical features

Mike Freedman argues convincingly[11] that many top teams fall short of delivering their strategy because they have not delivered against one or more of the following critical features of the strategic process:

- formulating a strategic vision based on facts, informed assumptions, and the best-possible what if thinking (stages 1+2 in the core process outlined after the workshop)

- implementing and communicating the vision throughout the organisation to clarify and align the role of every strategically critical player and process (stages 3+4)

- monitoring and updating the vision to ensure its continued strength, agility and relevance (stage 5)

Crucially, your strategic framework needs to reflect how, as top teams and in your portfolio pairings/clusters, you seek to lead and deliver against each of these features. They are set out as five stages and expanded in core process later.

[11] Freedman, M. with Tregoe, B. (2003); *The Art and Discipline of Strategic Leadership,* McGraw Hill

diagram 6
what else will need juggling?
strategy, vision, priorities

leadership style

how open are you
to challenge?

what styles of leadership
will be needed at
different stages?

interests

how will you build political
and stakeholder support?

what might you have to give
up to build ownership?

what support do stakeholders
need to take the heat and
defend the strategy?

emotions and culture

how will you lead value-
based changes?

how far are you asking people
to move their behaviour?

outcomes:

strategy, vision
and priorities

suggested workshop:
top teams – establishing a strategic vision

purpose

For the top teams to start building a picture of the strategic vision for the council.

The workshop uses a technique called future mapping, which is often used in strategy formulation. Future mapping is a powerful process for creating vision, deciding how to achieve it and generating a motivation to act. It helps creative thinking and the sharing of ideas; and builds a strong sense of common purpose among those who do it together. You may also use the technique to describe what success looks like for a particular strategic outcome.

The idea of future mapping is to imagine already living in an ideal, successful future, describing it in detail as if it were real, and then remembering, step by step, how it was arrived at. Not only is the future ideal mapped out systematically but the steps to making it happen are likewise mapped out.

timing

Initially, 90 minutes but will need follow-through sessions.

preparation

Ask members of the top teams to come prepared to offer ideas about what they want for the council and community at a date chosen by you.

programme

Introduction (5 min) by leader and chief executive to set the context and what and when the results of the workshop will feed into, for example, the corporate strategy programme.

stage 1

Base yourself in the future (25 min)

Break into at least two groups with preferably no more than six per group and a mix of members and managers. Note the results on a flipchart and have someone prepared to feed back results.

set a date and time

Set a date and time *(today is 30 July 2016)* as the basis for your vision, no matter how far ahead, and then choose appropriate headings or descriptions for your success *(education service, regeneration and jobs, quality of life, a responsive council).*

describe your success

The secret of future mapping is that, once you have defined the date and time of your successful outcome, you must then project yourself into the future and describe your success. Talk about it in the present tense as though it has already happened.

For some, this is the most difficult part. They will tend to slip into saying 'We will be doing this' or 'That will have happened' but maintaining the discipline of saying 'We are doing this' or 'That has happened' produces much better results.

how does it feel?

The key to making the vision more compelling is to go one step further and enjoy all the senses and emotions associated with success.

Don't just talk about what has been achieved. Go on to describe the evidence of success that you see, how people are talking about it and how it feels.

stage 2

Look back and see how you get here
(30 min same groups)

Having enjoyed your success, the next step is to look back and identify the major steps that got you there. Just as in conventional planning, examine the major milestones leading to your success, but describe them as if they were in the past and not the future. For example, if your projected success is in 2015, you may want to examine what happened in selected preceding years that led to that success.

Then go to fill in the detail of the steps between the major milestones. These could include new things learnt and systems or procedures changed. All of this should be done as if looking back from an already-achieved success (for example, 'Back in 2008 we agreed to fund a joint service'). Continue flipcharting the results and connecting them to stage 1 results.

stage 3

Return to real time – feedback and consolidation (25 min plenary).

The final step is to return to real time. Briefly hear the results of each group and jointly:

- spot where there is strong overlap in the successes and identify those with limited support – agree where possible what priority to give each
- identify the key milestones for those considered important – treat them as ideas not decisions
- ask what we are already doing that contributes now towards achieving our vision
- agree what will happen to the results

A core process for strategy development

Strategy requires top teams to think and act differently. It requires, as Heifetz[12] suggests, 'getting on the balcony' above the battlefield of the day-to-day. It requires the top teams to handle the time demands and the complexity of the process.

The first challenge for top teams is how to create the necessary space to engage with one another and other key stakeholders in thinking strategically about the future and not be constantly side-tracked by what is happening currently, crucial though this often is. Top teams need to work through various stages in a methodical way over time, typically in a series of half or whole day sessions. As well as the stages set out below, you may need to kick-start the process by the future mapping exercise set out above. It generally creates enthusiasm for the whole process.

diagram 7
the five-stage process for
strategy development

stage 1
strategic intelligence
gathering & analysis

top teams get informed

stage 5
strategy, monitoring,
reviewing & updating

stage 4
strategic
implementation

stage 2
strategy formation

have you got your
communication strategy right?

what key questions do we
need to test strategy against?

have you got the right
feedback mechanisms?

stage 3
strategic outcomes
& targets

[7] Heifetz, R. (1994); *Leadership without Easy Answers*, Harvard

The second challenge is to handle the complexity. As such, the process needs structure and we have drawn on Freedman's work. It is, of course, not the only structure and we suggest you devise your own that is comprehensive, best fits with your existing strategy processes and works well. Diagram 7, followed by a brief explanation, sets out the five-stage process.

stage 1
strategic intelligence gathering and analysis
How do the top teams get informed?

This stage assesses what the present and likely future trends are in the external environment, (often called PESTLE, Political, Economic, Social and Technological, Legal and Environmental). There are many sources of information available to local authorities[13]. Managers will need to generate appropriate summaries of data before the discussion. This stage also includes an assessment of the internal environment and reflects on:

- how current culture, political and managerial, influences or guides strategic behaviour

- how teams have approached and implemented strategy in the past

- the expectations of key stakeholders

Out of this analysis, top team members can begin to develop a set of assumptions and a profile of the environment in which strategic decisions need to be made.

In reality, both teams will have access to separate information sources but much of the work in pulling the detail together will fall to managers. It is in the joint meeting of teams or portfolio holder and leading managers that this information needs to be tested. Is it robust enough? Have all relevant stakeholders been consulted and engaged? How valid are the conclusions?

stage 2
strategy formulation
What success criteria or key questions do we need to test strategy against?

Drawing from the information of stage 1, this stagee seeks to establish two key parts to a strategy:

- the ideas or options open to the authority – future mapping (above) is one of many techniques available

- a set of success criteria or key questions against which these ideas should be tested

Some of this work will be done separately. When working as portfolio pairings or team-to-team there are some key questions to address. For members, did you secure sufficient involvement in the development of strategic vision? For members and managers, did you generate enough options and challenge to your ways of thinking? How robust as a portfolio pairing was your decision-making process? Have you gathered sufficient support for the priorities reflected in the vision? At group level/opposition parties/at council level/from senior managers? What risks have you embraced? How able were you to challenge one another?

stage 3
strategic outcomes and targets/
master project planning
How to convert strategic intent to operational reality

Out of stage 2 a range of tasks and projects will emerge that require detailed planning to ensure their implementation. This stage raises the following questions:

- what are the top level project management requirements that in portfolio pairings or as top teams you need to input/agree/sign off?

- is there sufficient clarity about desired outcomes and key targets?

- have you got sufficient organisational capacity and capability?

Our experience is that for many portfolio pairings the answers to these questions are not at all clear and the default position is often that the senior manager will take the lead.

We suggest that the political lead needs to be very clear about the high level outcomes, the resource requirement and timescales. Inevitably, there will be some kind of prioritisation process in the delivery of key components of the vision and the matching of resource at the business planning stage. The cabinet needs to be as well-informed as possible if they are to influence their key stakeholders on any given priority. Processes may need to be jointly worked up on agreeing priorities, securing the resource (budgets) and monitoring the subsequent implementation and performance of a particular strategy. Section 6 goes into greater detail on the role of the top teams in performance management.

stage 4
strategy implementation
Have you got your communication strategy right?

Key to this stage is the quality of project management and how both teams communicate to those stakeholders critical to the strategy's success. Project management means not only accessing the particular knowledge, skills and motivations of a range of people but also a wide-ranging cultural change. Communication means both teams being clear on the two or three points or messages that they need to get jointly across at each stage of the strategy, to ensure that they are heard and acted upon. These messages and focus need to be reflected back in the workings of the top teams and portfolio pairings:

- are portfolio pairings walking the talk, demonstrating their own commitment?

- are both teams listening, being flexible where appropriate, holding firm where necessary?

- are top teams focused on the right things? Do their agendas reflect this?

stage 5
strategy monitoring, reviewing and updating
Have you got the right feedback mechanisms?

This is continuous and involves how well strategic outcomes are progressing, as well as reviewing the validity of work done under stage 1.
Key questions will be:

- did we make the right assumptions?

- what formal feedback processes have you got in place as top teams and portfolio pairings to manage performance (see Section 6 for further information)?

- what are your staff, constituents and partners saying about the changes?

- what do you need to communicate about progress?

- where does the strategy need revisiting?

Much of the detail of this stage will fall to managers. For top teams it is about identifying the critical indicators on which they jointly need information so that they can take the necessary leadership and managerial decisions.

section 6. where are you going?
strategy, vision and priorities

added value

Nothing focuses the leadership challenge for top teams like the budget. The pressures of real and difficult choices are hard enough, the added possibilities of being or feeling marginalised, wrong-footed and not getting a fair hearing all add to the difficulty of the budget process. It is the forum where political and managerial priorities must be pulled together and resolved. It is where joint leadership is tested the most. The top teams' role is to review past experience, agree the form of the forward budget process, and to lead the negotiation and choice of a final budget.

critical features

The particular value that the top teams add to the council's budget setting process is to:

- agree a 'felt fair' budget setting process which identifies who, how and when different parties are involved

- provide a forum at the highest level to identify and agree political and managerial priorities and practically negotiate their application

- maintain the engagement of stakeholders – this may result in both substantive and process problems which need resolving

- reach realistic and specific choices that will have the commitment of both political and managerial leaders

diagram 8
what else needs juggling?
budget process and settlement

leadership style

leadership which moves from inclusion and adaptability to authoritative and decisive

interests

engagement with all key interests and negotiating ways forward

emotions and culture

recognising the feelings of uncertainty, exclusion, being marginal and loosing out

outcome:
the budget

suggested workshop:
top teams – establishing a strategic vision

purpose

To begin solving the budget equation – what constitutes the particular expenditure, income and savings that equate to a particular council tax level.

It gets to the heart of the difficulties that budgets present – the hard choices between different ways of spending and saving resources. It seeks to limit potential for fudging the decisions and avoiding hard choices.

timing

At least half a day

before the workshop

1. Identify the range of political and managerial priorities – in our experience, this could involve the cabinet/executive and corporate management teams meeting separately to establish their own thinking. Alternatively, the portfolio holders and directors for all policy areas may be asked to work up joint priorities as a proposal to the workshop.

2. Cost the priority ideas from 1, however roughly, for all spending and saving options.

3. Decide on the financial envelope(s) – what level(s) of council tax is (are) acceptable (nationally or locally)? These will involve the financial director's making assumptions but these must be estimated and updated later as information becomes available.

diagram 9
the budget equation

ongoing service base

plus +

growth & service pressures

CPA & development requirements

risk areas

minus -

efficiency savings

charges & earnings

service cuts

equals =

council tax above (or not) government's settlement

workshop

part 1   setting out the equation (45 min)

There needs to be an outline led by leader/portfolio holder and chief executive/director of finance of the various parts of the equation (adapted for your council from the earlier simpler or later more complicated diagram – diagrams 9 and 10). Central to this discussion will be the costing of the priority list (or lists) of growth/savings and agreeing the financial envelope to meet a particular council tax level.

part 2   debate about the key priorities (90 min)

The heart of this debate is to be clear what growth and savings are potentially agreed. There is a real challenge here to avoid the false safety of supposed savings/over-optimistic earnings from charges/under-costed projects. Realism, perhaps on the pessimistic side, is needed. This may need discussion by sub-groups and prioritising as a whole group by voting, for example, each member and manager having, say, five votes. This will deliver an initial set of priorities.

part 3   reconstructing and planning (45 min)

It is important for the initial vote to be restated within the budget equation and further work.

a core process for budget settlement

The basics of the budget process may seem simple but they are often badly handled. There is enough difference between views people hold about what should and shouldn't be spent that we suggest top teams' time is well spent getting the process as right as possible.

The detail will necessarily be different from authority to authority but we suggest there are at least three occasions when the top team must get a grip on the budget process and either shape it or make critical decisions. The three are:

stage 1
a 'before the summer' meeting – planning the budget process.

On this occasion the top teams need to tackle three tasks:

- After elections – provide a collective briefing on the council's financial position and the basic budget building blocks. This will need to parallel individual briefing of portfolio holders by their director(s).

- Review the past year. The finance portfolio holder and the finance director need to lead a discussion about what actually happened in the year, as against budget commitments. This may involve good changes – less money needed/more income – or bad changes – overspend, drastic shortages of funds. The purpose of the review is to draw out the implications and learning for the coming years. The key question is what should be done differently.

- Begin planning the budget process. This often starts from a budget process created by the finance director and chief executive but inevitably needs politicising, in the sense of examining where politicians, the public and partners enter the process and have their voice. The process needs to identify:

  - who is involved, when and where

  - specifically what are managerial and what are political work streams

  - when other stakeholders within and outside the council are involved

  - whether there are likely to be task groups

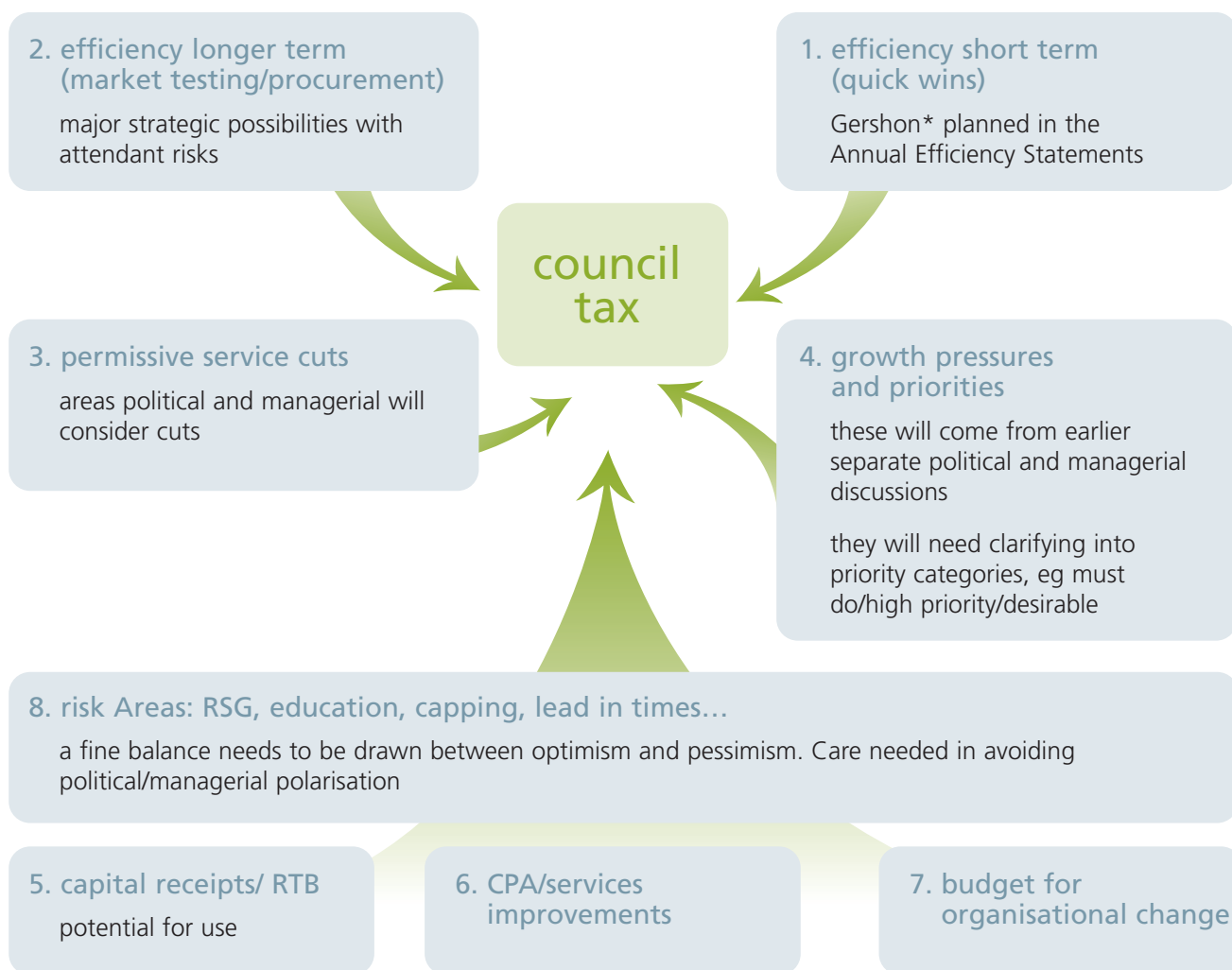 - when are there critical dates, council and governmental

Inevitably, what is used to start the discussion is drastically modified, especially if new people are involved or it is a first discussion. The output will be a commitment to produce a budget process that can be formally agreed and disseminated to all in the council.

stage 2
a September/October meeting – solving the budget equation.

The top team needs to look at the budget equation early in the autumn. Basically, the budget equation tests whether what one is planning to spend is (less savings) equivalent to the council tax.

The first part is the core of the budget process – solving the budget equation through top teams' discussion in meetings but also work between portfolio holder and director. Diagram 10 demonstrates one council's view of the various components (boxes) that go into the budget equation. All need advance preparation and all need debate and interim decisions at this stage if the equation is to find at least an interim answer.

diagram 10
a budget equation
(1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8 = council tax)

2. efficiency longer term (market testing/procurement)

major strategic possibilities with attendant risks

1. efficiency short term (quick wins)

Gershon* planned in the Annual Efficiency Statements

council tax

3. permissive service cuts

areas political and managerial will consider cuts

4. growth pressures and priorities

these will come from earlier separate political and managerial discussions

they will need clarifying into priority categories, eg must do/high priority/desirable

8. risk Areas: RSG, education, capping, lead in times…

a fine balance needs to be drawn between optimism and pessimism. Care needed in avoiding political/managerial polarisation

5. capital receipts/ RTB
potential for use

6. CPA/services improvements

7. budget for organisational change

L.B of Hounslow

* Peter Gershon conducted an efficiency review of public services for the government and made proposals which were taken up and made a requirement of all public bodies.

The heart of the requirement for local government is that they should plan over three years to identify 2.5 per cent a year efficiency savings and that some of these savings are reused to develop front line services.

This is not the definitive list but a list of what goes into the equation. What is crucial is that the top team has:

- a structure (equation or diagram) that all understand and can work with.

- information that is prepared and summarised for each box, preferably identifying key possibilities.

- discussion that is realistic and conclusive – the use of voting to narrow options, at least for an interim assessment, is often necessary if progress is to be made. There will often be a 'final' meeting that brings together the revisions and further work into an interim judgement by the top team.

Once there is an interim solution there needs to be planning of the next stages. These critically need to cover:

- further work

- consultation with services, public and stakeholders

- how the case for awkward choices is to be made

- where support and additional resources might be sought

stage 3
a post-Christmas meeting: finalising the deal

The announcement of the government's final settlement – around Christmas-time – enables realistic figures to be calculated and the implications drawn. This may be better or worse than expected – sometimes much worse – but usually different. The top teams need to convene to:

- assess the emerging situation

- make decisions about variations

- communicate the results to the public and consult on some aspects

- take to cabinet/executive and then council for debate and decision

There is often much political work to be done at this stage as choices become stark and votes become critical.

continuing

Throughout the year, there will be regular budget monitoring throughout the council. Top teams will need the regular reporting of budget out-turns at a sufficiently summarised level. The principles are the same as described in Section 6 on performance – be clear on your plans, build in regular, high-level exception reporting, and ensure that the responsibilities for monitoring and action are held to.

This reporting can be sensibly placed alongside the regular top teams' performance monitoring, typically quarterly. In this way, the budget monitoring checks the out-turn realities against budget plans and, cumulatively for the year, provides a basis for learning at the first stage meeting, when planning the budget process.
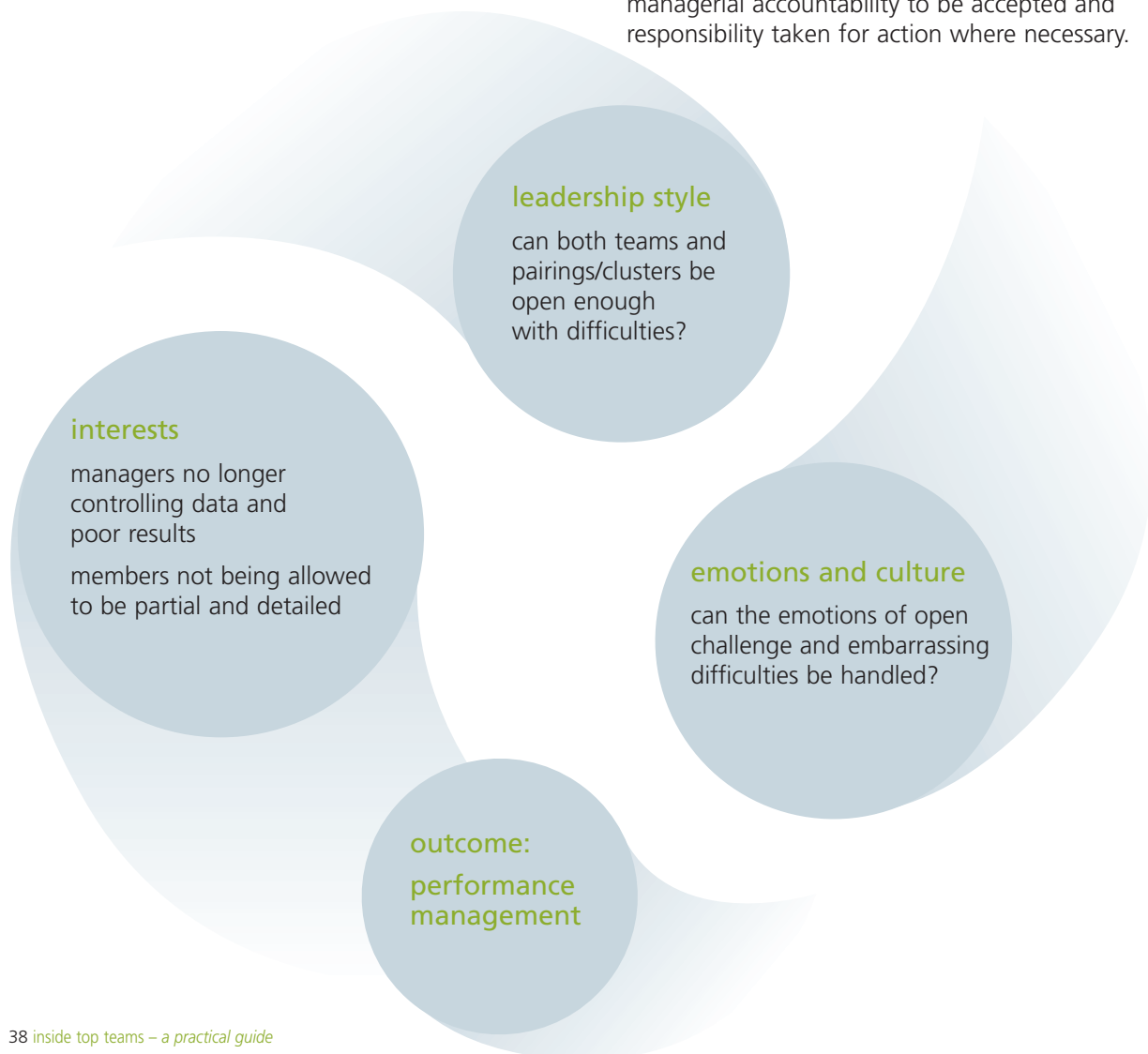
section 7. how well are you delivering?

performance management

added value

Some claim it is enough to leave performance to the council's managers, with their wide range of performance measures, and to other elected members through overview and scrutiny. However, communities, partners, government and especially the Audit Commission, through CPA, expect the council's top teams to take responsibility for performance on the big issues and service delivery. This is precisely the essence of what top teams should be held to account for – the overall performance of the council and its services.

The top teams' joint role is to take responsibility for monitoring of strategic priorities and key service deliverables, accepting responsibility for the results and taking jointly-agreed action.

critical features

In our experience, top teams who effectively manage the council performance do so by:

- establishing a jointly-agreed agenda of strategic and service priorities. Joint ownership of the agenda is critical to joint ownership of the performance results – any weakness here plays out in a lack of commitment to act later when performance falters.

- identifying a small number of critical performance measures or indicators and setting targets or outcomes for each. These must be understood and be a joint commitment.

- regularly and systematically reporting on performance data, usually on an exception basis. A traffic light system can be used for exception reporting, focusing upon the red (unsatisfactory) and amber (causing concern) results.

Holding a regular meeting of the political and managerial teams (at least quarterly) for this reporting and management action. This provides an occasion for joint political and managerial accountability to be accepted and responsibility taken for action where necessary.

diagram 11
what else will need juggling?
performance management

leadership style

can both teams and pairings/clusters be open enough with difficulties?

interests

managers no longer controlling data and poor results

members not being allowed to be partial and detailed

emotions and culture

can the emotions of open challenge and embarrassing difficulties be handled?

outcome:

performance management

suggested workshop:
reviewing top teams' performance management

purpose

To review the current performance management arrangements and identify practical improvements to ensure an effective and jointly-owned process.

timing

Allow at least an hour

preparation

Circulate in advance to all in the top team:

- a timed programme built on the format below

- a short summary of:
  1. current strategic and service objectives

  2. current key targets/performance indicators/outcomes relating to each

  3. sample data currently available against these

  4. A list of accountabilities as to who sees and takes action on the performance information

- the text of this section

programme

Introduction

Leader and chief executive to make brief statement of what they want from the session and any specific improvements. (5 min).

Current state of play (10 min)
Have a brief presentation of the performance process (see diagram 12 in *core process*).

Stage A. agenda – strategic/service/organisational

Stage B. targets – service/initiatives

Stage C. data – measures/data/gaps or exceptions

Stage D. action – close gap/change
targets/accept reality

Connect these to your current state of play in the authority – how strong and how weak is it? Take short clarifying questions.

task 1:
how well-tuned is your system? (25 min)

Allow 15 min for small groups of members and managers to answer the questions:

- do we have clear and brief information for Stages A-C?

- have we a clear and working link between Stages A-C of the framework?

- are there specific improvements we would make?

Put the results onto a flip chart.

Allow 10 min altogether for rapid feedback and summarising. Further work on this will inevitably be needed – pairing of member and manager would be good.

task 2:
how well do we jointly debate and take action on performance results? (20 min)

Allow 10 min in the same mixed groups to answer the questions:

- how well, in practice, do the relevant pairings of portfolio holder and director jointly own and understand the performance of their area of responsibility?

- is there a forum where genuinely open discussion by both members and managers can take place about corporate and service performance?

- are there specific improvements we could make?

Put the results onto a flip chart.

Allow 10 min altogether for rapid feedback and summarising. Further work will be needed to draw the results together.

Agreeing action (5 min). Seek agreement as to what steps should be taken for improvements in the top teams' performance management regime.
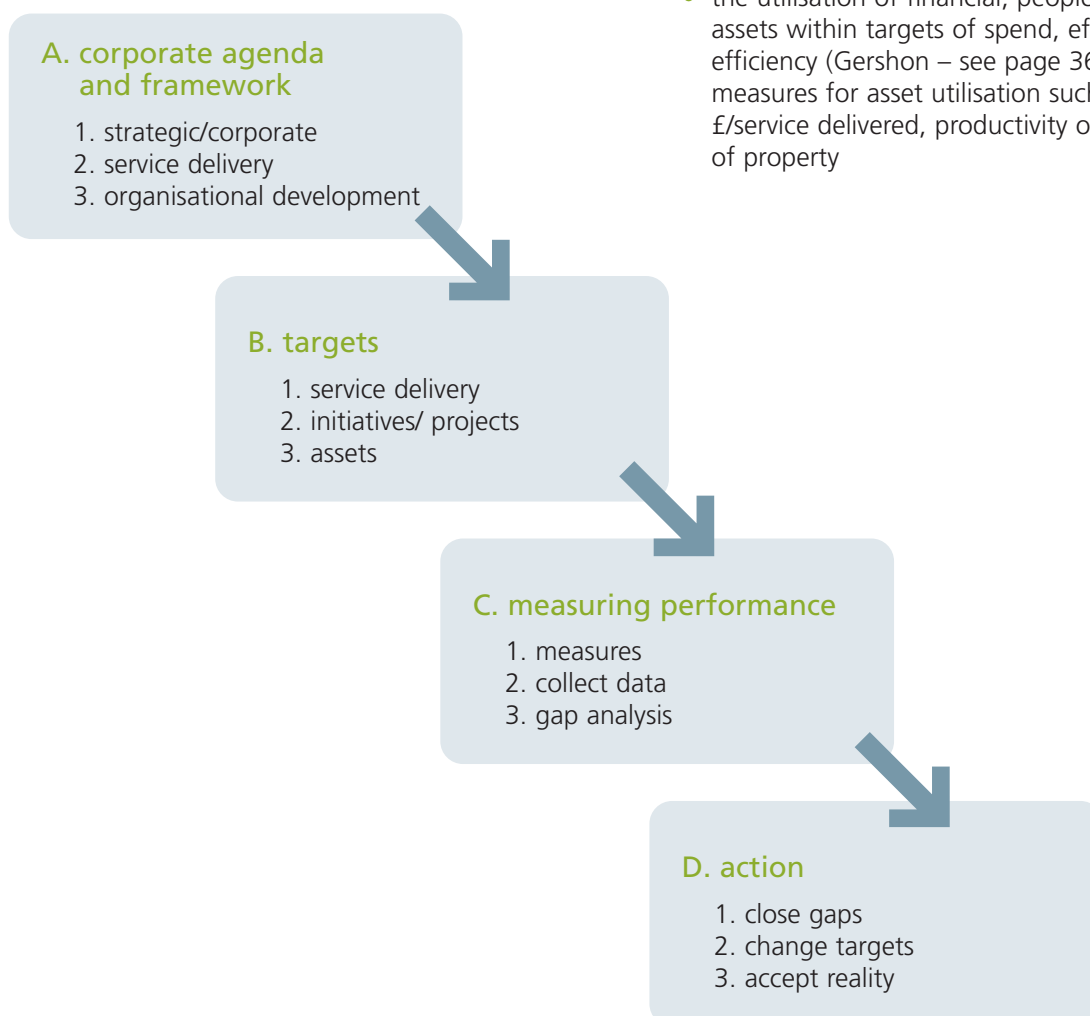
core process for joint performance management

The top teams' responsibilities for delivering on the council's strategy and targets requires them to have a clear grasp on four aspects of performance:

a) the agenda or framework of what needs to be achieved

b) the small number of critical targets, priorities and timings for delivering this agenda

c) regular and reliable data for measuring outcomes against the agenda

d) a forum for taking action on these results

diagram 12
the four stages of joint performance management

A. corporate agenda and framework
1. strategic/corporate
2. service delivery
3. organisational development

B. targets
1. service delivery
2. initiatives/ projects
3. assets

C. measuring performance
1. measures
2. collect data
3. gap analysis

D. action
1. close gaps
2. change targets
3. accept reality

A. corporate agenda and framework

This can be as straightforward as a clear distillation of the key strategic or corporate and service plan priorities, drawn together in summary in one place. It will also often have key aspects of organisational development, such as Investors in People. If there is an absence of joint ownership we suggest you consider some of the ideas in Section 5.

B. targets and measuring performance

Top teams' joint ownership needs to go beyond the council's overall strategic priorities and agreed key outcomes and targets – they need to be jointly accountable for what does and does not get delivered. Typically, these delivery targets can be expressed in three ways:

- continuing service performance standards or indicators set nationally or locally, for example, the percentage of older people looked after at home or the public satisfaction ratings of council services

- completion of initiatives or projects with target dates and quality measures for delivery, for example, new ICT standards and equipment

- the utilisation of financial, people and property assets within targets of spend, effectiveness and efficiency (Gershon – see page 36), using measures for asset utilisation such as spend, £/service delivered, productivity of staff, use of property

If the top teams are not to be swamped, a reduced and strategic set of performance measures is necessary. Typically, this can be fitted onto two or three pages of A4 for monitoring in each portfolio or policy area.

The officers will have considerable detail but it is important that the joint teams, and certainly portfolio holders and directors, have a shared set of performance targets that they both are held to account against and can act upon.

One further point is important for top teams – these performance measures and targets must be credible. Based on our experience with lead members, they must be credible in two important respects if they are to work for the top teams' performance management. These are:

1. they must be jointly understood and seem a sensible reflection of the performance areas. This will vary according to how much they are locally determined. Four types are common:
   - national performance indicators and targets
   - public service agreements' stretched targets
   - local area agreements
   - locally-determined performance targets

2. they must be a genuine reflection of what happens in the authority and throughout your partnerships in the community.

There must be a strong vertical connection down through the organisation connecting the strategic targets to service and departmental teams and individual action and performance. Top teams need to push hard to establish this golden thread from strategic vision to front-line delivery.

There also needs to be a horizontal connection to performance measures and monitoring of the community, health, crime and disorder and many other plans and partnerships.

C. measuring performance and having reliable data

Having good performance measures is one thing, ensuring data is regularly and reliably collected and used is another. There are three key issues:

- regular and reliable collection of data

- systematic comparison of out-turns with targets

- clear presentation

The first two are straightforward, even if difficult to pull off comprehensively. The third, presentation, is also critical in our experience for effective joint management of performance.

Many top teams have found a traffic light system useful:

- green – satisfactory

- amber – areas for potential concern either coming into or out of red

- red – needs attention and action

This convenient shorthand allows discussions, particularly about the reds, to take place and action to be focused.

D. acknowledging good performance and taking action

The performance meeting will need to offer praise and criticism, support and challenge. Achievement of performance targets can be a very satisfying energiser for the top teams and particularly for those who delivered the results – when they are acknowledged.

Action will be required to close the performance gaps, modify targets both upwards and downwards and acknowledge the situations where reality will not fit the aspiration (sometimes government targets appear impossible).

The twin characteristics of performance management meetings are challenge and support. These need balancing. The tenor of the meetings needs to be such that results are taken seriously and, therefore, prepared for, understood by both manager and member and the follow-through jointly shared.

This meeting will inevitably build on much more regular monitoring by managers, by portfolio/director pairs and, exceptionally, by the two teams when needs demand.

references

Much is available on performance management. The following references are worth investigating when you need more detail and examples of good practice. They are mainly written from a managerial perspective.

The Audit Commission provides ideas as to how performance can be managed and through its inspections, not least the CPA, gives many examples of good practice. Use www.audit-commission.gov.uk

The IDeA and the Audit Commission have set up the Performance Management, Measurement and Information (PMMI) Project to provide authorities with resources for improving their performance management. It provides guides for both managers and members and a series of case studies within authorities. Use www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk and search *performance management*.

section 8. how connected are you?
community and neighbourhood leadership

added value

There are many calls for community leadership from local government – a phrase that means many things – and most would see it focusing on the top teams.

One report[14] has recently argued that over the next 10 years it 'will be the single most important governance function at the local level'. The same report also said that although there has been much discussion over the past decade 'the concept has lacked clarity and edge' and they suggest some practical ways forward (which we pick up later). These calls place a crucial responsibility on top teams to be both clear and practical about their community leadership.

Nobody is more appropriate than top teams to focus the council's ability to think, act and lead across its area, services and communities. More than in almost any council activity there is the necessary mix of political and managerial responsibilities in one place.

critical features

One view of community leadership[15] puts it very well and suggests it has the three core elements;

- focusing attention on community priorities
- galvanising a range of actors to contribute to the delivering these priorities
- involving citizens in the process of priority identification and delivery

These in turn mirror the Audit Commission's view[16] of community leadership in its use within CPA.

diagram 13
what else needs juggling?
community and neighbourhood leadership

leadership style

can leading members and managers adopt a style of influencing and enabling?

interests

Are the top teams able to spot and bring together diverse interests and brokering a way forward?

emotions and culture

how much is there sensitivity to the emotions and culture of community groups?

outcomes:

community and neighbourhood leadership

[14] The Tavistock Institute, SOLON Consultants and LGIU for ODPM (DCLG) (April 2006); *All our Futures: The Challenge for Local Governance in 2015*

[15] Sullivan, H. and Sweeting, D. for Local and Regional Government Research Unit, ODPM (DCLG) (September 2005); *Community Leadership: A progress summary... of the local government modernisation agenda*

[16] Audit Commission (March 2003); *Community Leadership: Learning from Comprehensive Performance Assessment*

suggested workshop:
how good is the top teams' community leadership?

purpose

For top teams to review what community leadership they provide and generate a collective sense of what they wish to provide.

timing

60-90 min. session

preparation

Create preparatory papers that cover:

- a summary of the key heads of the community strategy objectives, targets and results so far

- information about the communities' views and needs (such as survey results)

- public sector resource allocations in the council's area

- key community issues as understood at present, who is taking a lead on them and how this is being done

programme

1. **introduction** (5min) Leader and/or chief executive to explain their reason for top teams' getting a better grasp on community leadership. such as current weaknesses, CPA criticism.

2. **outline** (10min) The origins and nature of the framework (see details in next part) and the task. Use the framework set out below to assess how good is the council's community leadership and how aware/unaware are politicians and managers of what is/isn't happening.

3. task **small groups** (20 min) to rate how well (5) or badly (1) the council is performing in the various dimensions of community leadership. Require evidence for the ratings. Make preliminary judgements in the small groups about what are the critical gaps and what ought to be done.

4. **whole group** (30 min) Take feedback from the groups. Explore differences and overall address and agree answers to each of the following questions:

- where are the critical gaps?

- what, if anything, should be done?

- are you clear about your partners' and public's views when making this review?

- should the community leadership process, content and outcomes be changed?

Depending on the time available, there can be agreement about next steps reached at the workshop or on another specified occasion.

chart 6
rating top teams' community leadership

dimension of community leadership	evidence of how well the top teams are in touch	rating (1 to 5)
provide reliable information		
create understanding		
balance different needs		
lead debates		
build and secure consensus		
seek support for regulation		
represent the locality		

core process for community leadership

After the traditional strand of service delivery, community leadership (CL) has become the second emerging strand of the local authority's role and much has been written about it. However, top teams need to get to grips with what they wish to do in leading the community and need a shared understanding and agreed action on CL.

A few contextual points are made in recent reviews of community leadership:

- it is not a new concept; councils have always had some community leadership functions and many councils have been leading their communities effectively for decades[16]
- over the past 10 years it been much discussed but has lacked clarity and edge[14]
- CL has come to symbolise both local government change – from the 'old' to the 'new' local government – and to prescribe a new role[15]
- analysis of the next decade would suggest that it 'will be the single most important governance function at the local level'[14]

A summary of progress on CL[15] suggests that there have been some real advances. Perhaps most fundamentally, it has required the leader/follower (provider-led) model of traditional local government to be turned on its head by first identifying community needs and wants, then a brokering of agreement where there is conflict and, finally, facilitating the collaboration among partners to meet their needs and wants.

The work on CL has been stimulated by the duty to prepare a Community Strategy, the responsibility for Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)[17], Local Public Service Agreements (LPSAs), meet the Comprehensive Performance Appraisal (CPA) and, to a lesser degree, the *Power of Wellbeing* and new constitutions which promote overview and scrutiny.

There are many complex and wordy definitions. An example comes from the report that provides an outline survey of how local authorities have responded to the community leadership[2]. It suggests it can be defined as:

'The pursuit of community well being through the facilitation of strategic interventions that would not otherwise have happened and which are informed by and accountable to the public'

However, it also goes on to put it more clearly as we quoted earlier – CL has three core functions:

- focusing attention on community priorities
- galvanising a range of actors to contribute to delivering these priorities
- involving citizens in the process of priority identification and delivery

In other words, know what communities want; prioritise with them what they want; and seek people to deliver them, including the communities themselves.

This is fine at one level of generality – one could evaluate the council on how well year-to-year it is fulfilling these functions. But most go into more detail. The Audit Commission[16], who have a similar three-way split, have broken the concept down into five critical success factors for CPA purposes. We suggest a modified version of a more elaborate breakdown by the study above, one we believe better suits strategic thinking by top teams.

chart 7
functions of community leadership

provide reliable information	collect, provide and make transparent complex sets of information relevant to the local situation
create understanding	create an understanding across a locality of the different circumstances, needs, concerns and pressures of different communities
balance different needs	balance the different and potentially conflicting needs through allocation of resources and prioritisation of action
lead debates	highlight key issues and suggest action, such as improving educational attainments to meet changing economic circumstances
build and secure consensus	secure consensus around contentious issues, for example, transport, waste and across diverse individual and group expectations, needs and cultures
seek support for regulation	propose and seek support for regulation and enforcement, for example, parking, speeding
represent the locality	have an ability to political represent and bridge differences between communities

We suggest that it is the top teams' responsibility to review the council's overall community leadership through a framework such as this. Clearly there are formal mechanisms, such as the Community Strategy, the LSP, the emerging LAA and many other formal approaches. While these formal plans or planning mechanisms exist and are the primary vehicle for delivering CL, there needs to be a good joint understanding by the top teams of the range of what their CL should and/or does cover. A framework such as that above can highlight where the formal plans are missing out.

section 9. how effective are your partnerships?
partnership working

added value

Partnerships in local government are not new but they have moved centre stage and proliferated under this government. The key drivers for partnerships are generally acknowledged and supported, namely:

- devolving control of policies and services from the local authority to joint bodies better able to represent them

- co-ordinating and joining up the delivery of services that may be fragmented to end users

- better use of resources through co-operation and use of bigger clusterings of providers

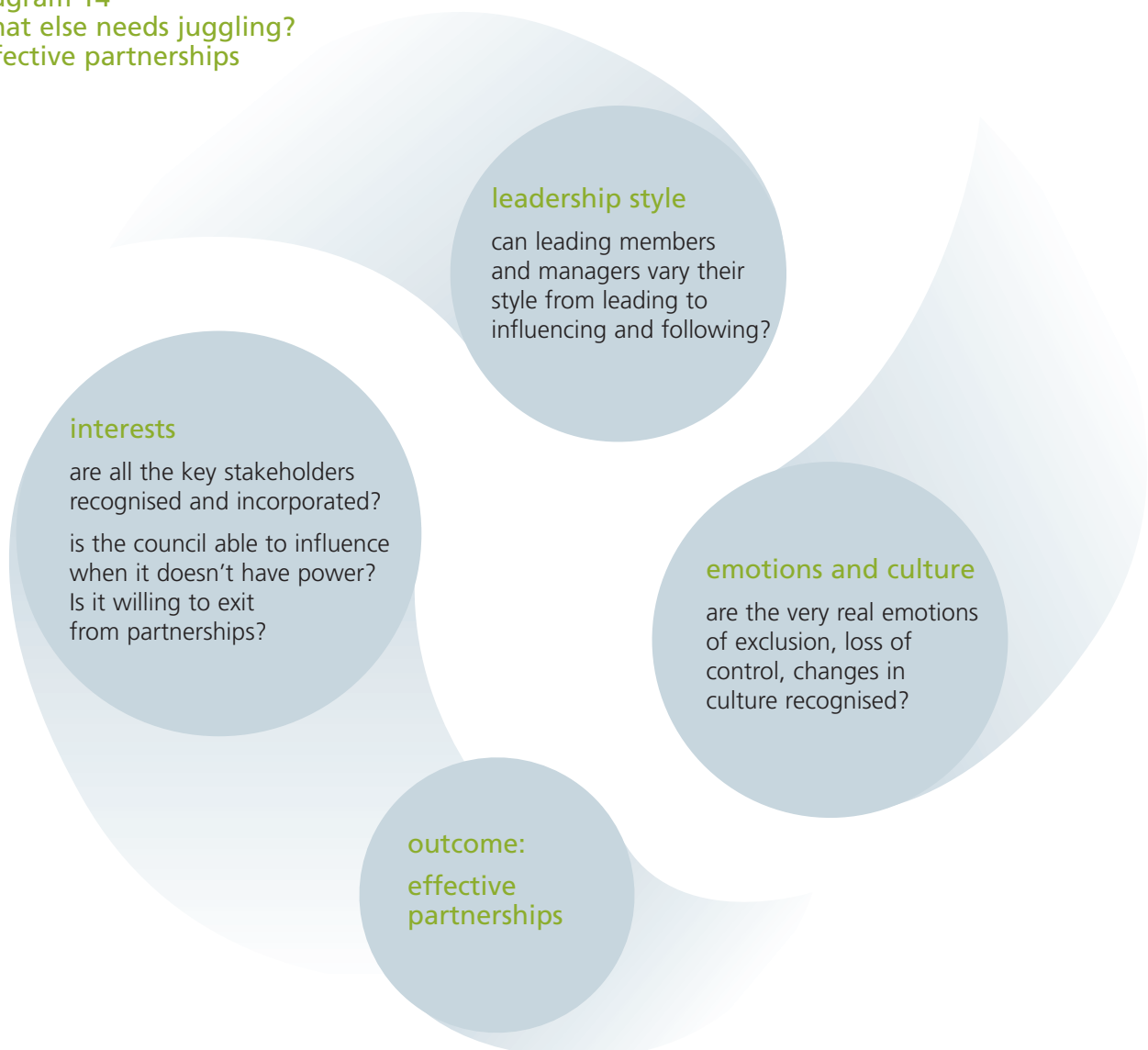Typically, partnerships take considerable time, energy and resources.

For these reasons top teams have a strategic role to align partnerships to council and community priorities and seek effectiveness and efficiency in their use.

critical features

Several top teams we have worked with have taken a strategic view of partnerships and examined three critical aspects. They have:

- mapped the council's use of partnerships and reviewed their alignment to council and community priorities

- assessed the effective use of the council's time, skills and energies particularly in representing the council in the running of, and feedback from, partnerships

- actively assessed how they are spotting the need for partnerships and facilitating their development – many of which will be led outside the council and in the community

diagram 14
what else needs juggling?
effective partnerships

leadership style

can leading members and managers vary their style from leading to influencing and following?

interests

are all the key stakeholders recognised and incorporated?

is the council able to influence when it doesn't have power? Is it willing to exit from partnerships?

emotions and culture

are the very real emotions of exclusion, loss of control, changes in culture recognised?

outcome:

effective partnerships

suggested workshop:
top teams partnership working

purpose

To conduct an initial review of the alignment and effectiveness of the council's partnership working.

timing

Initially 60 min but will need a follow-through session.

preparation

Circulate in advance to the top teams:

- a timed programme for the workshop
- a map of the current partnerships with:
  1. key players
  2. key outcomes (actual/potential)
  3. council contribution and who is involved
- a summary of the council's strategic priorities
- all or part of this section

programme

Introduction (10 min)

Leader and chief executive (or the responsible member or officer) briefly to give views on the range, effectiveness and areas for improvement.

current state of play (30 min)

Divide the top teams as far as possible into strategy or policy sub-groups (mix of politicians and managers).

The task for each group is to take the key partnerships in their policy patch and ask of each:

1. how well does this partnership support the outcomes and advance the council's strategic priorities?

2. how effective is the partnership in delivering its objectives? (Is it more promise than delivery? A rating 0-10 can sharpen the feedback).

3. what improvements in terms of the council's strategic priorities do you want from this partnership in:
   - alignment?
   - effectiveness?

4. what leadership opportunities and challenges does it provoke for your policy area?

Groups will need to keep moving on and not get too deeply into detail. Clearly, this is just a first run at the questions. Keep flipchart records.

feedback and overall conclusions about alignment and effectiveness (10 min)

The results of the sub-groups will need to be typed up rather than reported back in detail in the workshop. Each group should pick up any major points of re-alignment and effectiveness.
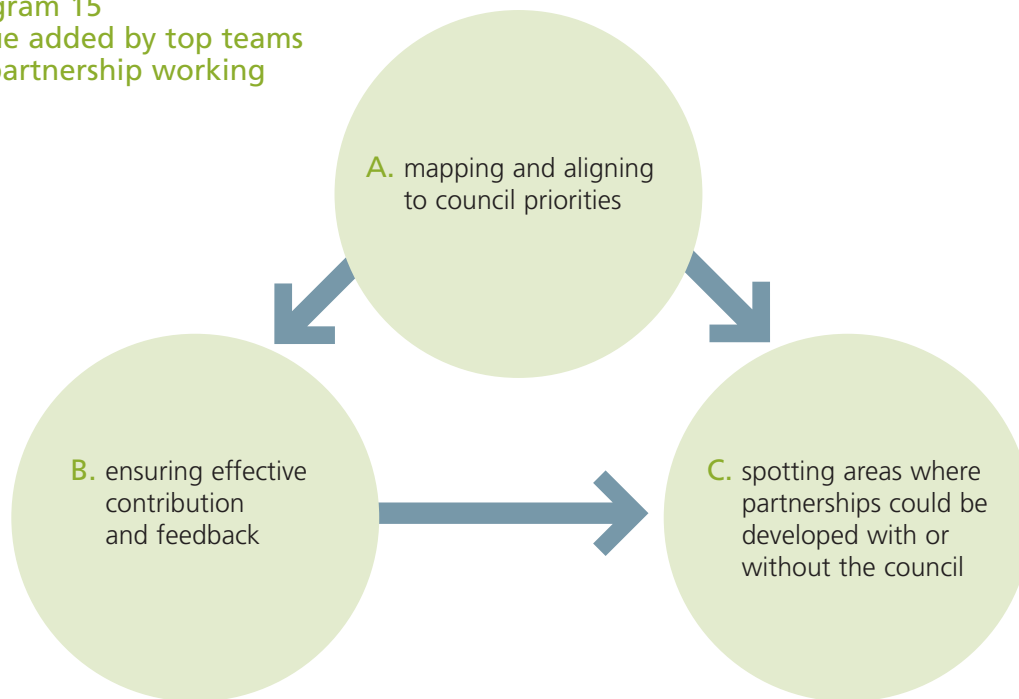
outline of maximising effectiveness (10 min)

Introduction to the challenges of handling change as set out in Part B of core processes (below) on maximising effectiveness. This will trail the work to be done on the top teams' initial review at a later session. Finally:
- promise report by a fixed date
- fix date for follow-through workshop

diagram 15
value added by top teams
to partnership working

A. mapping and aligning
to council priorities

B. ensuring effective
contribution
and feedback

C. spotting areas where
partnerships could be
developed with or
without the council

core processes for a strategic review of partnerships

The distinctive value that top teams can add to partnership working can be represented in three areas.

A. mapping and aligning

There are no shortages of partnerships to which the council contributes (or at least attends). The key question is how these contribute to the strategic priority and ambitions of the council and, as it sees it, the community. To answer this, there needs to be a systematic mapping of what partnerships currently do. This can be done by separating out the different types of partnership:

1. Overarching partnerships that cover an area or large cluster of issues or policies. Key examples are the Local Strategic Partnership working to a community strategy statement, the new emerging Local Area Agreements, which draw together the bodies, policies and resources into an agreement about what will happen, and partnerships dealing with tough issues that cut across agencies and services, such as crime and disorder.

2. Single service partnerships that combine policy and delivery mechanisms. Examples are older people's services where policy and delivery are determined by a combination of council, NHS and voluntary agencies, and 'street scene' where delivery, in particular, can be in partnership with commercial and community bodies.

This mapping can be a daunting task because most authorities have tens if not hundreds of partnerships. The intention, however, is not just to identity what is being engaged in but to what effect. The shape of the map needs to be aligned with the authority's strategic priorities (Section 5). One authority that did this mapping had five overall priorities – service quality, children and young people, elderly people, sustainability and social inclusion – and used them to align all its partnerships. This created a logical thread as illustrated below.

council and community
strategic priorities

LSP/ LAA/
community strategy

policy & service delivery
partnerships

For each partnership the mapping needs to document:

- who is involved in the purpose or critical outcome – actual and promised

- how this aligns with the council's and communities' priorities

- who contributes what and, specifically, what the council puts in

- who represents the council (and is briefed, mandated and feeds back)

- any key improvements that would benefit the council and community

This initial map will lead to a series of versions to refine the data and answers to the questions. Critically, the top teams need a session to take stock of the whole map to identify the key areas of concern of misalignment and results. The priority results can then be agreed and action taken.

B. maximising effectiveness

A partnership, like any organisation, tends to settle into familiar work priorities and ways of working on them. This is inevitable and often functional but it is a key role of top teams regularly to test how the council's people and resources are being used.

There are at least six aspects to this effectiveness.

1. The aligning of work to strategic priorities outlined above (Part A), where there needs to be:

- a change in direction or emphasis

- a change in the amount of time, people and resources devoted to them

Then the change needs to be defined in outcome terms. The way in which the change is handled will probably be best shaped by those involved.

2. The role the council takes in the partnership.

An acronym much used with the leadership of partnerships is that of LIFE:

- lead the partnership – to provide the major contribution to priorities and resourcing and to adopt appropriate leadership styles as situations change

- influence the partnership – to be clear what can be influenced from a more minor role and do so through push or pull

- follow the partnership – to follow the direction taken by others and provide support where most appropriate

- exit the partnership – to leave a partnership that costs more than it benefits the council in a way that minimises ill feeling

Top teams need to make clear with each partnership which role it wishes to adopt and examine the actions necessary to follow that through.

3. The mechanisms for representing, influencing, decision-making and reporting back. These are crucial for partnerships' effectiveness. It is important to make clear:

- who attends

- with what knowledge

- with what mandate

- how they report back on progress

We have seen authorities make crucial changes because of the lack of power, knowledge, impact or effectiveness of individuals. These have greatly improved the effectiveness of the council's contribution and the benefits gained.

4. Briefing council representatives about their role, ranging from chairing to being an effective team member and contributor. A lot has been written about effective partnerships and some councils have put together thorough briefings (background, current issues, politics, desired outcomes).

5. Training and development (covering areas such as influencing, interpersonal skills, respecting others and negotiating).

6. An assessment of the capacity demands of partnership working.

This is no icing on the cake but a significant proportion of the council's political and, particularly, managerial time and effort. The sustainability of current demands must be determined, specially given that partnerships often involve regular partners and put pressure on particular people and teams. Sometimes it will be necessary, if further time and effort are to go into partnerships, to take hard decisions about what doesn't any longer get done or what partnership needs to be exited or become low key.

C. spotting potential new partnerships

Handling existing partnerships may seem more than enough but a real strategic challenge is to provide leadership in spotting the potential for new partnerships, with or without the council's longer-term presence. This can be in several key ways:

- spotting the potential of community interests or groupings who may need limited enabling help to get started and then become a powerful self-managing improvement body for local governance and service delivery – this could link strongly to the government's neighbourhood agenda

- looking for the possibilities – radical and incremental – within a local area agreement

- extending the potential between authorities of joint policies, services and pooled resources – this may link particularly strongly with those areas affected by local government re-organisation

Enabling this will raise workload and capacity issues but the potential gains can be large. Perhaps most important will be the turf concerns, where there is a feared loss of control, influence and status.

All three aspects of the top teams' role – mapping and aligning, maximising effectiveness and spotting the potential new partnerships – are part of the overall strategy and, it has to be said, tactical responsibility of the top teams. Having political and managerial ownership may be demanding but the effectiveness of a joint commitment means that partnership working is well-supported and focused.

section 10. how well are you managing change?
leading and managing the organisation

added value

Change happens throughout a council. Much of this change will be technical in nature – applying improved solutions, systems and procedures already available within the council or translated from best practice elsewhere. The responsibility for managing these changes will rest at different levels within the council: with directors, if large-scale, but more often with heads of service and service unit managers.

These technical problems can be complex and difficult but are of a different order from what Heifetz[18] describes as adaptive challenges or problems. These are not amenable to authoritative expertise but require new personal attitudes, values and behaviours and innovation, development and responses from numerous places within the council or in the wider community. This seems to us to be the territory of the top teams, with its combination of political and managerial leadership. Examples of what may be on the agenda – regeneration of a city, development of civic pride, democratic renewal, the challenge of neighbourhood working, delivery of the *Every Child Matters* agenda, transforming the educational opportunities available, partnering in the Olympics – all require more adaptive than technical leadership.

The role of top teams is to spot and lead the adaptive challenges facing the council; grasp the full range of change it requires in terms of values, culture and innovation; and lead people through the resulting turbulence.

critical features

Top teams who effectively lead and manage change are, in our experience, those who:

1. respond to the adaptive challenges. Top teams who clearly identify where a step change is needed and who set the agenda accordingly.

2. are clear on the direction of change and on the intended outcomes. This involves joint ownership and commitment to the overall vision.

3. engage and connect with key stakeholders at each stage of the process. All too often top teams appear remote and disconnected from both the authority and the community. Ensure the story or key messages you want people to engage with are clear at each stage of the process.

4. ensure the organisation or community has the necessary capacity and capability to deliver and embed the change. Be realistic about what can be achieved in the short term and ensure that sufficient resources are available beyond delivery stage, until the change is really embedded in how people do things.

5. make sense of, and respond to, resistance. Top teams need to be ready to have the difficult conversations about how to make the change. They need to signal when the inclusive and enrolment stage is over and the compliance stage is in operation.

6. stay the course. Adjustments and changes will need to be made en route and there will always be pressure on the time available to meet the adaptive challenge. Top teams need to sustain their own robustness and resilience in leading difficult change as this will have a huge impact on the outcome. These stages are developed in more detail under core process below.

what else needs juggling?

More than in perhaps any other section the three ball juggling model applies here. We would suggest you assess whether Section 3 could be used for all your change management.

[18] Heifetz, R.A. (1994); *Leadership without easy answers*; Harvard; Heifetz, R.A. & Linsky, M. (2002); *Leadership on the line*; HBS Press

suggested workshop:
leading and managing adaptive change

purpose

Top teams to review the adequacy of planning for a current adaptive change (allow 1 hour).

preparation

Agree a specific major change that is about to begin or has just started. Essentially, this is identifying a challenge that will require a fundamentally different response in terms of behaviours, culture – the 'way we do things here' – and the choices to make. It needs to be a change that will have a major impact on key stakeholders, for example, those delivering a change in service and those receiving a change in service.

The workshop will review where the current focus is: how much time is taken up on the technical aspects and how much on the inherently more difficult adaptive nature of the change.

The top teams will use the following model to identify progress in tackling the adaptive nature of change.

The change formula developed by Beckhard and Harris (1987)[19] is a simple but effective way of capturing the process of change and identifying the critical factors that need to be in place for change to happen. We have further developed their formula to build on an authority's capacity and capability:

$$A \times B \times C \times D \times E \geq F$$

A x B x C x D x E ≥ F

A is *pressure for change* – the level of dissatisfaction with the current state. If there's no real incentive to change from the leadership or from the staff then it never becomes enough of a priority for it to move. Politically and managerially, are we giving out clear and compelling messages about the need for what may be perceived as difficult change?

B is *clear shared vision* – the desirability of the suggested end state. If there's no clarity of vision with a shared understanding and tangible outcomes, then the initial motivation will fizzle out.

C is *capacity to change* – whether the organisation has the technological, financial and human resources to perform and deliver. If there are not enough resources then this will lead to higher levels of stress on the implementers and increased levels of frustration within the initiators.

D is *capability to change* – whether the organisation has the necessary skills and competence to perform and deliver. If there is not enough organisational competence and there are no plans actively to develop it, the authority will see heightened levels of anxiety and a greater number of errors being made.

E is *actionable first steps* – an understandable and measurable set of plans to begin the change process. If the agreed actionable first steps are missing, people will go off in different directions and at different speeds. This will be characterised by haphazard efforts and false starts.

All these factors together have to be equal to or greater than **F**, which is the *resistance to change*, in its various guises.

The multiplication implies that if any one factor is low then the resulting product on the right side will be lower. Indeed if zero then the product will be zero and the resistance to change will clearly not be overcome.

So, if the pressure for change is low, or the vision not clear or shared then the chances of success are dramatically reduced. The factors A through E do not compensate for each other. Each one needs substance.

[19] Beckhard, R. & Harris, R.T. (1987); *Organisational Transitions*, Addison Wesley

programme

1. introduction (5 min) by leader and/or chief executive about why handling adaptive change is different and important, relative to technical change, for the council.

2. outline and clarification of the change formula (10 min)

3. sub-groups (30 min) to work through the chosen adaptive change to review and create answers for each factor of the formula (including a review of F – the resistances).

   a) what has been planned?

   b) what is missing?

   c) what is technical and how is it being tackled?

   d) what requires adaptive change and how is that being tackled?

   e) overall, will it bring about the change and what are the key risks?

4. plenary review (15 min) of the results and discussion:

   • did it highlight missing parts to the current plans?

   • how can the top teams strengthen their ability to spot and tackle adaptive change?

Core process for leading and managing change

The adaptive challenge

We build on the ideas of Heifetz and our experience of top teams to highlight a number of key stages for top teams to evaluate themselves against. These are:

stage1
seeing the bigger picture

Linked to the section on strategy, it is important for top teams to analyse the internal and external pressures for change. Often termed 'get on the balcony', how well are top teams and portfolio pairings analysing the whole picture – what trends and connections between changes, pressures and objectives are being identified. The important balancing act here appears to be ensuring that top teams (or policy pairings/clusters), in understanding the technical brief, do not run out of time to spot and understand the adaptive changes that may be required

stage 2
identifying the adaptive challenge

Adaptive pressures, if not acted on, will eventually lead to a decline in the performance of a council and create an impact on the viability/vitality of a community. Adaptive challenges are those that confront the underlying beliefs and culture of an organisation, community or neighbourhood. How we do things in the future can no longer be sustained by, for example, the values that have made us successful in the past. There is a pressure to develop different ways of thinking and behaving. Top teams may need to engage a variety of stakeholders – leaders from business, the arts, sports, community and other disciplines – to help work out what these challenges might be. Manchester City's journey to regenerate the centre provides many such examples. Glasgow City council currently encourages its citizens to send in stories describing their future vision for the city.

Key to top teams' performance is paying attention to where they put their focus. Heifetz would argue that the single most common source of leadership failure is that people treat adaptive challenges like technical problems.

It follows that a key point deals with the adaptive challenge for top teams or portfolio pairings in working on this kind of change.

stage 3
clarity of vision and direction

Have you defined an understandable strategy? Has it got the support? Has it identified some tangible outcomes? How are you going to communicate this strategy? What narrative will you develop in your portfolio pairings that helps people connect with the journey so far and the journey to be made?

See Section 5 for more detail on communicating strategy.

stage 4
engage and connect with key stakeholders at each stage of the change

In adaptive change, people have to give up established ways of working; rethink their roles and work out new behaviours, their sense of identity and place, at a time when, at its best, the overall direction and potential benefits of the change may not be clear and, at its worst, their situation has deteriorated. Top teams have to find ways of reading the situation, of engaging with and withstanding hostility, to be able to hear what people are saying about a given situation.

During this stage it is important to keep your focus on the change you are leading and to give technical work back to those more able and better placed to do it. This stage is all about building trust and supporting people to take on bigger challenges than they have so far experienced.

stage 5
ensure the organisation or community has the necessary capacity and capability to deliver and embed the change

How great is the tension between delivering for today and creating the future? As top teams, what are the political and managerial dilemmas that need to be faced when leading adaptive change? Often there is a requirement for joint priority-setting and decision-making. What might you have to stop doing or postpone to release your capacity?

stage 6
make sense of and respond to resistance

All adaptive work creates risk, uncertainty, potential for conflict and resistance. Though we are arguing for top teams to identify and work with this kind of change, it should not be entered into lightly. Both teams need to work together to understand the impact of change on people and, through stage 5, help people to make sense of the bigger picture, understand the purpose and desired outcomes that change will help deliver. Much work has been done to understand the emotional nature of transitions people go through when having to engage with change – we summarise it in a paper on our website[20]. Top teams have to deal with the emotional impacts on people by modelling appropriate behaviour. This includes enabling individuals to bring contentious issues into the open, so that different perspectives are discussed and top teams have the opportunity to learn something different. New learning can then inform the change process.

stage 7
stay the course

Top teams will inevitably come under pressure during times of change. After all, it is not as if you can abandon all other business. The work of leading and managing the authority has to go on at the same time as major change. Section 6 outlines the disciplines involved in performance management and these have to continue and be the subject of top team attention. So how well have you prepared, in individual teams and together, to think through the pressures you will jointly face in leading and seeing though difficult change? The organisation or community will be ready to test you over the duration of the change. Have the teams got sufficient capacity or do additional resources need to be found? Have you reflected jointly and separately what the tipping point in this change would be for you? How open are you able to be about individual concerns or vulnerabilities about some of the decisions you might have to make? How fit for purpose are you as portfolio pairings and top teams? Where are your strengths and where are the gaps and how will you set about closing them?

There has been much written about managing change, one example is from Cameron and Green[21].

[20] www.ahaconsultancy.co.uk. *Transition*

[21] Cameron, E. and Green, M. (2004); *Making Sense of Change Management,* Kogan Page

inside
top teams
a practical
guide

Each section asks a question about how the top teams are developing.

The structure is:

- outline of the particular theme
- practical approaches that will help top team members focus their development

Section:

11. how well are top teams working together and separately?
12. how good are portfolio holder/director relationships?
13. how well do top teams relate to the politics of the council?
14. how are relationships developing outside the council?
15. are you managing your own development?

part 3
the
development

section 11. how well are the top teams working together and separately?
increasing team effectiveness

outline

Any team, wherever it is in the organisation, needs to be operating effectively on its business-as-usual (managerial) agenda and its change (leadership) agenda. This is even more critical at the top of the organisation. How can we effectively review our effectiveness as top teams on a continuing basis? How do we separately review our performance as political and managerial top teams? How do we review our performance in the joint arena?

This section adds to the approach outlined in Section 4. It suggests two checklists, which are:

1) Team process orientated
2) Task work orientated

approach 1 team process

Glaser and Glaser (1992)[22] identified five elements that contribute to the level of a team's effectiveness over time. They are:

- team mission, planning and goal setting
- team roles
- team operating processes
- team interpersonal relationships
- inter-team relations

The greater the clarity, ownership and alignment across these elements within and across teams, the greater the likelihood of developing high-performing teams. A description of the elements follows.

team mission, planning and goal setting

The most effective teams have a strong sense of their purpose, organise their work around that purpose, plan and set goals in line with that purpose.

Clarity of objectives together with a common understanding and agreement of these is seen to be fundamental. Interestingly, the very act of goal setting is a prime motivator for the team – the more your team sets clear goals the more likely it is to succeed.

When it comes to the cabinet and corporate management team (CMT), clear goals are important for two reasons:

- when teams are involved in change, unless they know where they are going, they are unlikely to get there
- both teams need to be aligned in their focus and their decision-making, separately and when they are together

team roles

Team members need to have clear roles and accountabilities. They need to have not only a clear understanding of what their individual role is but also of the roles and accountabilities of other team members.

Roles need to align to ensure the achievement of purpose and overall vision. Difficulties happen when different rationales are used to construct roles around the overall purpose, for example, the cabinet is structured around cross-cutting themes while the management team is structured around functional areas.

team operating processes

Teams need to have certain operating processes or ground rules in place for people to carry out their work together. Similarly, the joint top teams need to have a set as well. Often these can be derived from the stated *Values of the Authority*.

Typical areas that teams need to address by discussing and agreeing include:

- frequency, timing and agenda of meetings
- problem-solving and decision-making methods
- ground rules
- procedures for dealing with conflict when it happens
- reward mechanisms for individuals contributing to team goals
- type and style of review process.

In difficult times, or at crunch points, these areas will be subject to stresses and strains. How these tensions are managed gives a clue as to how well the teams are performing.

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[22] Glaser, R. and Glaser, C (1992); *Team Effectiveness Profile, Organisation Design and Development*

team interpersonal relationships

Both teams must actively communicate within their own team as well as with one another. In times of change, individual stress levels rise and there is a tendency to focus more on the task than the people. High levels of trust within a team are the bedrock of coping with conflict. Similarly, stress in one team can lead to a breakdown in effective joint team working. This can typically take place at pre- or post-election time or during the budget planning round.

inter-team relations

Teams cannot work in isolation with any real hope of achieving their organisational objectives. The nature of organisations today – complicated, sophisticated and with increasingly loose and permeable boundaries – creates situations where a team's goals can rarely be achieved without input from and output to others.

All the evidence suggests that two top teams working well together will provide the most effective way for managing and leading the authority.

This dimension, though, does not just mean the two teams' relations but the connections with the other significant teams inside and outside the authority. Typically, these would include the overview and scrutiny, service heads and local strategic partnerships.

working in the shared arena

If you haven't already done so, it would be useful to read Section 1, *Top teams – Why is working together such hard work?*, as it provides important clues as to where the points of tension are between cabinet and management team, based on the differing natures of the two teams.

what you could do in an hour

As a cabinet/executive or as a management team, using the template below individually mark at what level your team is operating, based on the brief descriptions given above. Make sure that you have evidence to back up your views. For inter-team relations it is useful to score the other top team separately.

As a team, use a template of the chart on a flip chart to mark everyone's scores and see where there is common agreement and where there are differences. Where there is agreement and the score is less than highly effective (4 or 5) discuss possible reasons and brainstorm some ideas as how to move it on. One or two actions per dimension are fine.

chart 8 assessment of team effectiveness

	team less effective, less adaptive & change orientated	1	2	3	4	5	team more effective, adaptive & change orientated
team mission, planning and goal setting	lack of purpose and unclear goals result in dissipation of energy and effort						clarity of goals and clear direction lead to greater task accomplishment and increased motivation
team roles	unclear roles & responsibilities lead to increased conflict and reduced accountability						clear roles & responsibilities increase individual accountability and allow others to work at their tasks
team operating processes	unclear operating processes increase time and effort needed to progress task achievement						problem-solving and decision-making are smoother and faster. Processes enable task accomplishment without undue conflict
team interpersonal relationships	dysfunctional team working causes tensions, conflict, stress and insufficient focus on task accomplishment						open data flow and high levels of team working leading to task accomplishment in a supportive environment
inter-team relations	team working in isolation or against other teams reduces the likelihood of organisational goal achievement						working across boundaries ensures that organisational goals are more likely to be achieved

When both the cabinet and the CMT have done the exercise separately it makes sense to score the other team and share the results with them. Once again do the scoring individually, but when you put your scores up it may be useful to use different colours as to whether you are from the cabinet or from the management team.

This can increase your awareness of where your team needs to improve (through feedback from the other top team) and where the two teams' strengths and weaknesses are complementary or reinforcing. The analysis can be fascinating but it is the action to improve that counts.

approach 2
teamwork checklist

An alternative exercise or one complementing the use of the template above (particularly where team members rate their interpersonal relationships as low) is to review the elements of teamwork checklist and highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the top teams as they work together. Clearly, it can also be applied to each top team separately.

Individually rate the top teams' relationships (again with evidence) and compare results. Explore difference and agreements about low ratings. What action will you jointly commit to taking?

chart 9 elements of teamwork checklist

element	poor 1	excellent 5
communication	stifled, keeps their cards close to the chest, guarded. Lets the other person start the communication. Hard to draw out.	free and open expression of feelings and ideas at all appropriate times with no fear of embarrassment or reprisal. Easy to understand.
participation	lack of initiative to help the others – not around when needed, begrudging contribution. Withdraws from the task.	full contribution, reaches out to lend a hand, readily available. Engages with the task.
give and take	stubborn. Digs in on own viewpoint, uncompromising, always right, never wrong. See things as black and white.	open to compromise. Flexible – recognition that it is sometimes better to give in than be 'right'. Recognises there is no one right way.
leadership	no leadership initiated. Reacts rather than acts. Generates poor or reluctant support of his/her ideas.	energises the team. Recognises he/she needs the team and lets each member know where they stand. Wins vigorous support for his/her ideas.
organisation	has an unclear definition of responsibilities, overlaps with others and shows a poor sense of role and boundaries.	knows their and others' responsibilities and uses this appropriately. Provides structure and order to accomplish team goals.
preparation	holds team up for lack of own preparation and going back over old ground. Consistently drops the ball.	did their homework. Researches thoroughly, especially when it affects other team members. Has the information needed to contribute to discussion.
process focus	absence of order, operates on their own rules, progresses from crises to crises.	observes the ground rules and agreed ways of doing things, manages things smoothly, works with the team. Follows due process.
capability of team members	mediocre 'class C' player – not interested in becoming 'class A'. Gets derailed with work. Does not follow through on decisions.	top in their own field. Members have confidence in participant and can rely on performance. Innovative and good at problem solving.
commitment to team goal	lack of awareness of, or resistance to, team goals – no team spirit.	participant rallies to the goals. Goals clearly defined in his/her mind.
goal orientation	dead in the water – 'everything is a bother' attitude.	galvanises actions towards goals, creates momentum, suggests steps to overcome obstacles.

Checklist adapted from *Elements of team work assessment* www.rebrown.com/teamwork.htm

section 12. how good are portfolio holder/director relationships?
policy leadership

outline

1. at the centre of any service or policy area there is a pairing of senior politician and senior manager, often the portfolio holder and the director. The quality of this working relationship – good, bad or indifferent – has a profound bearing on how effectively the service and policy are delivered. Few politicians in this position choose their paired manager and no managers we know of have chosen their paired politician.

2. quite often it is more complicated than a straightforward pairing. It is often the case that one or more portfolio holders relate to one or more managers, particularly in cross-cutting policies such as health and safety. Yet chosen or not, tidy or not, this relationship has to work and be continually worked upon for the good of the service or policy for which both have a leadership responsibility.

3. why is the relationship between, for example, a portfolio holder and director so hard to get working effectively? It is, of course, a smaller version of why top teams have difficulties (section 1). The relationship needs to understand its roots.

approach 1
understanding the roots of differences and working with them.

Some key dimensions are set out in the diagram below. Each needs to be acknowledged and worked on. A start can be made by identifying and agreeing what helps or hinders the effective working of the relationship. The top two are formally part of the task, the rest are underlying dynamics of the relationship.

diagram 17
key dimensions of political and managerial leadership

political — managerial

strategic

operational

power/influence

cultural

psychological

capabilities knowledge experience

practical –
time available, energy, commitment

2. The key dimensions (working from the bottom) are:

- practicalities of time, energy and commitment – the majority of politicians are not full-time and yet there is an expectation they will keep up to speed with a manager who is full-time. The energy and commitment vary on both sides but can vary the most for politicians.

- capabilities, knowledge and experience – all three can create major differences. The pairing of a highly-trained, experienced manager to a member who is new to a complicated policy field and needs considerable briefing requires sensitivity on both sides.

- psychological type differences – more influential than is often understood. This is why the Myers Briggs Type Indicator* has proved such a success in the Leadership Academy; it opens up insights about why people irritate one another quite separately from disagreeing on substantive policy.

- cultural differences – these play out as was discussed in Section 1. The differences of approach to priorities, performance, focus and career can lead to tensions, which need discussion and understanding.

- power and influence – the history of how the council has been run, for example, 'an officer-run council', will play into what each expects of one another in each paired manager and politician relationship – even if one or both wish it to be different. A shared frustration will often be the lack of room for manoeuvre when government imposes policies, targets and budget levels.

- operational work – typically the preserve of the manager but increasingly a concern for politicians if performance is not good and is not improving. The deal between the two rests, in our view, on an agreed performance reporting framework that demonstrates the satisfactory, borderline and unsatisfactory (often using a traffic light system) for performance and an agreed forum for discussing what unsatisfactory performance is to be tackled and how.

- strategic work – the heart of what needs to be jointly discussed and agreed. This needs regular, open discussion that draws on the priorities of both. The political agenda comes from the manifesto commitments, political group and personal political priorities; the managerial agenda from the national, professional and personal judgement of the manager.

3. Each of these dimensions plays into the relationship. There is a need to acknowledge the possibility that any or all may get in the way. A practical way forward is to pick up the relevant issue(s) when it produces grit in the relationship. When it does, a brief audit of the relationship (for discussion purposes only) could be carried out using the summary chart below. There will be much difference – the key is to spot where it grates and what can be done about it.

chart 10 differences between the political and managerial leadership

dimension of the relationship	differences present difficulties	how the differences may be discussed, complemented or minimised
strategic work		
operational work		
power and influence		
cultural differences		
phychological type		
capabilities, knowledge and experience		
time energy and commitment		

approach 2
who does what?
vision to implementation

1. the relationship will vary enormously because of differences identified above but there are three areas of responsibility that are familiar to all (section 2):

- purely political, for example, work in political groups, work on promoting a manifesto

- purely managerial, such as day-to-day management of employees, managing service delivery

- shared, where there is joint responsibility for strategy, policy, performance and delivery

Discussion between each pairing or cluster of lead members and managers about what happens in each area can provide clarity and establish mutual agreement. It can greatly affect the effectiveness of the working relationship.

2. we suggest that the politicians and managers responsible for a service or policy, whether in pairings or clusters (where there are more than one manager or politician involved), meet for an hour to clarify the three areas. Although it is feasible for each pairing or cluster to do this activity on their own we have often built the activity into a combined cabinet/corporate management team awayday. The results can then be compared and moderated by the top teams. It may also benefit from facilitation, especially when the two top teams undertake it as a whole.

The process we suggest is:

a) Introduce the framework (5 min)

Ensure everyone is familiar with the three-way framework of responsibility and the representation of the delivery process in four simplified stages: establishing a vision, clarifying and agreeing the specific outcomes, project managing the implementation and monitoring the delivery. Combining the two provides a framework for politicians and managers to clarify who does what and at what stage.

chart 11 a framework for defining top teams' roles

leading vision to implementation
roles & responsibilities

who takes the lead & who is involved?

	politicians	joint	managers
establishing a vision or strategy have you defined an understandable strategy? has it got sufficient support?			
setting outcomes and targets have you clear and timed outcomes? what are the specific, quality, costs, volume and productivity standards?			
shaping the project plan has a project plan been developed? has it clear lead persons, resources and timescales?			
monitoring and review what progress is being made against targets? are the overall outcomes/targets still valid?			

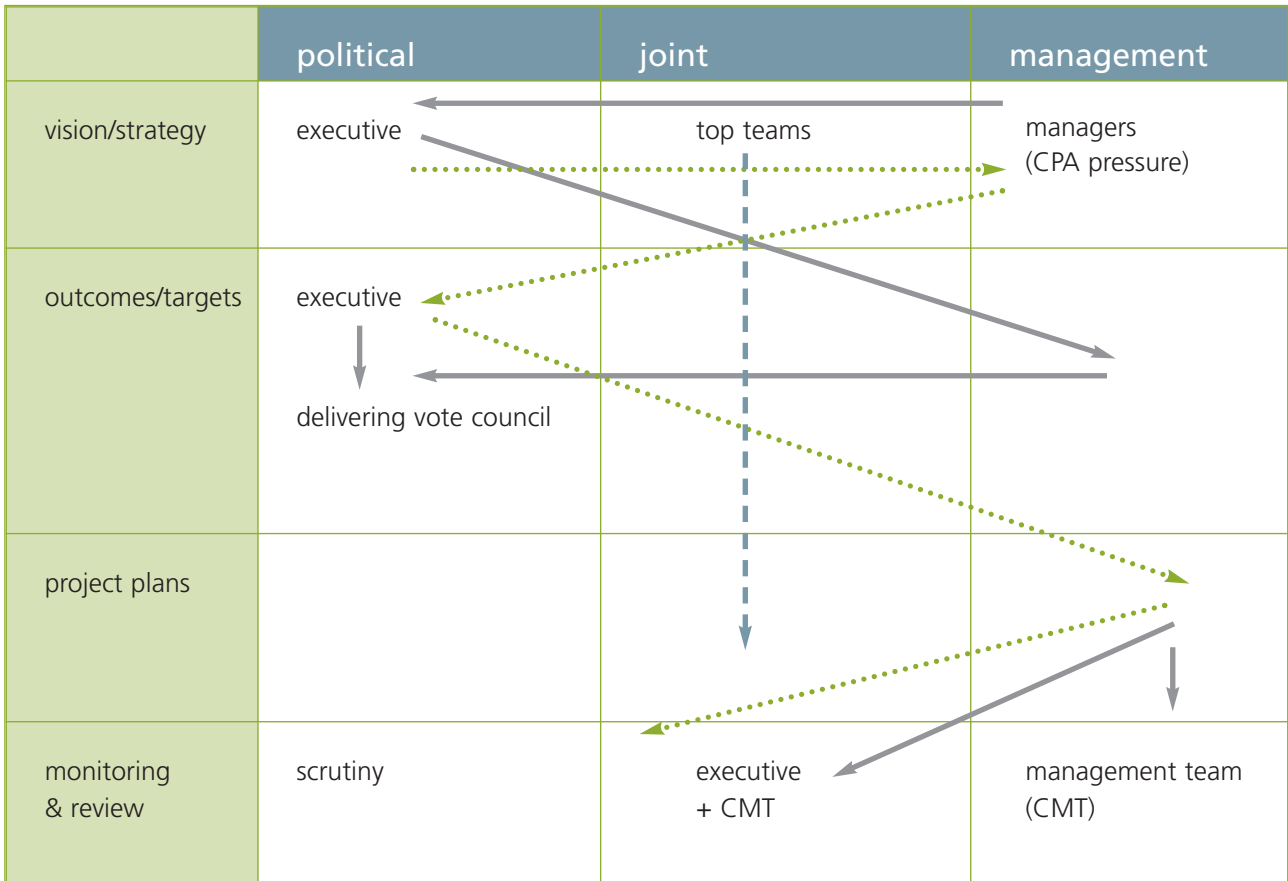### b) agreeing who does what (40 min)

Each pair or cluster to agree a major initiative –
current or upcoming – for which both have
responsibility. This will provide the example for
planning the journey through the four stages and for
each agreeing who does what (the example below,
chart 12, shows how three policy initiatives have
different journeys). Issues to consider for each stage
(chart 13) provide more detail including the sensitive
and not altogether tongue-in-cheek questions about
who takes the credit and who the flack.

The results can often be best collected on a flipchart
as this is open for both or all to see. There will be
clear areas, some will need guessing and some may
cause contention and require further thought. All
should be identified as you run through the process
and agree or not. When key issues are clearly for joint
action, do make sure you are clear how this is to
happen. Labelling everything as joint is not a panacea.

chart 12 examples by particular policy clusters of how politicians and managers lead the process

Examples by particular policy clusters of how
politicians and managers lead the process

Procurement
Communications
Officer re-structure

	political	joint	management
vision/strategy	executive	top teams	managers (CPA pressure)
outcomes/targets	executive ↓ delivering vote council		
project plans			
monitoring & review	scrutiny	executive + CMT	management team (CMT)

chart 13 issues arising in leadership roles

shared and separate leadership roles

some typical strategic issues:

establishing the vision or strategy

1. ensuring sufficient involvement in its development

2. gathering support for the priorities

3. checking there are adequate choices

4. making hard financial choices

5. commiting the council to a vision with key strategic priorities

setting outcomes

6. developing clear outcomes and targets

7. finalising the outcomes and targets

8. checking for adequate organisational capacity

shaping the project plan

9. shaping the project plan for implementation

10. who monitors progress and when

11. selecting the lead people and teams

12. community and selling to those who will deliver

monitoring and review

13. receiving the monitoring reports

14. making descisions when things do not turn out as expected

15. taking the credit

16. taking the flack

c) reviewing the results (15 min)

When only the pairing or a single cluster do this exercise, they need to stand back from the results for the particular initiative and ask themselves:

- does this pattern apply to other initiatives?

- if so, are our current meeting and communication patterns effective?

- are there particular pinch points where pressures produce resentment and difficulties?

- should we meet less or more often? In a different way?

- how differently do we need to include other politicians, managers and stakeholders?

- do we need to communicate our decisions more effectively to employees and other stakeholders?

d) Comparison of top teams and their patterns (15 min)

When the exercise is done alongside other cabinet/corporate colleagues at, say, an awayday, then the results of this stage can be fed back in summary and compared. This extra level of discussion has led to some moderation of more extreme agreements, in particular, pairings/clusters that arise because of typically overbearing politicians involving themselves in detailed operations or overbearing managers being too directive or concealing of policy choices.

While the pattern for each major initiative will be different in detail, the principles and practice of the working relationship will be broadly similar across pairings and clusters and across top teams as a whole. The acid question is whether the pattern genuinely reflects the joint political and managerial leadership you all want. If not, agree specific changes, how they will happen and try them out.

section 13. how well do the top teams relate to the politics of the council?
relationships with the rest of the council

outline

The council will have political influence in all its major decisions, as is appropriate for a democratic body. This poses a challenge for the top teams where one team is political and the other managerial. If the leadership of the council is more complicated than politicians deciding and managers implementing, then how the top teams relate jointly to key parts of the council must be worked out. This is not to say that the management structure should be politicised but recognises the working reality that many key decisions will receive political input from a range of sources and be the combined work of the top teams.

One example of this has been the difficulties of the overview and scrutiny function in establishing effective working relationships with the cabinet (or similar body). Some of this has been straight blocking by cabinet to deny the right to influence decisions, but some has been the difficulty of who to hold to account: politician or manager. We suggest that sometimes both should be held to account, rather than one or the other.
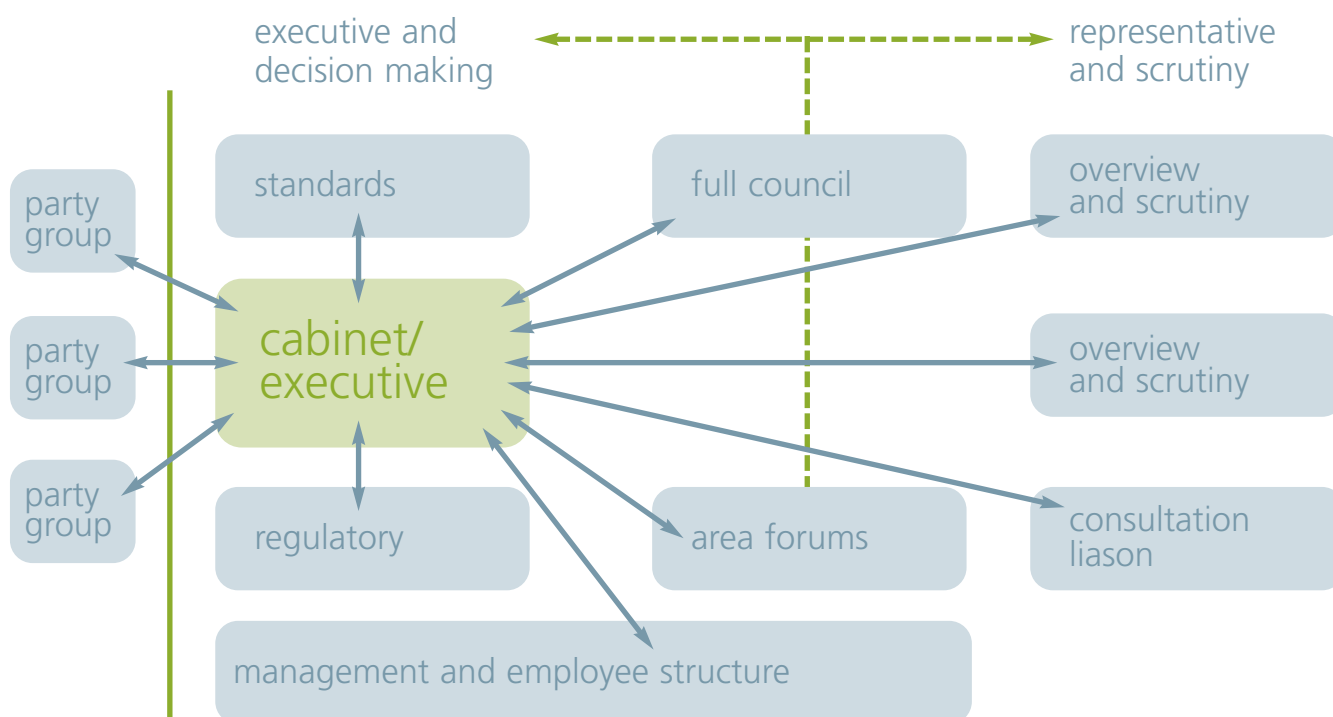
Another example has been the unacknowledged hand of political groups. In some councils, the (party) group is mentioned with lowered voices; in others no decision of merit is taken outside the group. It is our experience that the factoring in of political group consultation in an explicit and defined way is healthier for both parts of the top teams. Political groups are important bodies that, although formally outside the council, quite appropriately have a large influence on it.

We suggest two approaches to begin opening understanding and securing improvement to some of these political relationships.

approach 1
effective relationships across the council

The first approach is for the top teams to examine the effectiveness of their working relationships with the functions of the council and political groups. Diagram 18 is a generalised picture of the functions of the council under the separation of powers brought in by the Local Government Act 2000. It shows the range of relationships of the cabinet/executive. In reality, it is more complicated than that, given that decision making in the cabinet box typically involves the other top team, senior management. Examining the key political relationships, particularly where there are difficulties, must also explore managerial influence. To examine all relationships may be desirable but, given time constraints, top teams should best focus on those relationships that are the most problematic or are radically in need of improvement to be fit for purpose.

diagram 18
council functions under separation of powers, LGA 2000

executive and decision making

representative and scrutiny

| party group | standards | full council | overview and scrutiny |

cabinet/executive

| party group | | | overview and scrutiny |

| party group | regulatory | area forums | consultation liason |

management and employee structure

We suggest you work through this checklist:

is it possible to write down clearly and simply the respective roles at either end of the relationship?	
what is the specific evidence of an effective relationship? Is the other party likely to agree? If not, what would they want?	
how well are you informed by good practice elsewhere?	
how effective is the current relationship against this standard of your ideal, their ideal and good practice elsewhere?	
how is the managerial role factored into this relationship? Is it satisfactory? If not, how could it change?	
what specific improvements could form the basis of re-negotiating an improved relationship?	
what's in it for all parties to ensure a deal can be struck?	

This is a very straightforward look at the difficulties of relationships and finding a basis for negotiating a change. It is worth remembering that the best changes to relationships happen through dialogue and trying something different, not extensive analysis.

approach 2
relating to overview and scrutiny

How cabinets and, more generally, top teams relate to overview and scrutiny has been much discussed because of numerous difficulties in establishing the limits of these two roles. The central issue has been whether to tolerate or minimise scrutiny or seek to develop the function to support the development and delivery of services. Yet as scrutiny has grown, it has become central to council governance. Key issues are:

- getting the culture right for scrutiny to provide added value to policy thinking and implementation

- engaging all members and party groups

- making political space available for scrutiny to develop a significant agenda, to be heard and to influence decisions

- getting the resources and support right

- having a workable protocol with scrutiny

Top teams can jointly address the following questions in their relationship to overview and scrutiny. The format is based on the four principles of effective scrutiny put forward by the Centre for Public Scrutiny[23].

1. provide critical friend challenge to cabinet/executive as well as external authorities and agencies

   how well do we enable this to happen?

   have we got constructive working arrangements supported by clear rules of engagement?

   is there co-ordinated workload planning of scrutiny agendas?

   how well linked-in are they to corporate processes?

   how well do we act on the recommendations and do we provide timely feedback?

   what access do they have to senior officers?

2. reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities

   what access do we give scrutiny in terms of professional communications advice and support and resourcing for public dialogue mechanisms?

3. take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public

   what support is provided for lay scrutineers?

4. make an impact on the delivery of public services

   what resources and support do officers provide scrutiny with in terms of access to performance information, the analysis and interpretation of the data?

   how open are we to taking constructive criticism and acting on it?

section 14. how are relationships developing outside the council?
relationships with the community and partners

outline

A selection of the key leadership challenges for both teams in the community and partnership area includes:

- how to orchestrate resources for a locality, not just an organisation

- how to build alliances that influence the mainstream strategies of other agencies

- how to create sufficient community engagement and ownership to bring about changes in behaviour

- how to create a critical mass capable of upwards influence

Collaborative and partnership working and supporting attitudes, values and behaviours link to the adaptive challenge posed by Heifetz and mentioned earlier in this document (Section 10). People have to absorb more complexity. More staff at all levels in the council, when working in partnership, must be self-initiating, self-managing and self-evaluating. People need to be able to work laterally across networks to solve problems. It is less about power and more about influence.

At the heart of this type of engagement lie some key questions:

- have we prepared our staff and ourselves sufficiently well to engage effectively with this way of working?

- have we recognised the change of culture (internally within the council and externally with key stakeholders and partners) required politically and managerially to become leaders of local coalitions for social, economic and political change?

- are we really delivering collaborative advantage – that is, real advantage – from our engagement with partners, achieving outcomes we could not have achieved on our own? Or are we stuck with collaborative inertia, where output is negligible, progress painfully slow and the relationship characterised by interminable meetings achieving nothing?

We suggest four approaches that help top teams to examine their effectiveness.

approach 1
collaborative advantage or inertia

The following quick checklist can provide some insight into the possible fault lines when relating with a particular partner or partnership. It can be used at a number of different levels. For example, each top team makes their own assessment and then shares it across teams, or at portfolio holder and lead manager level. The outcome is to achieve increased understanding of what it will take from a political and managerial perspective to unblock inertia or support the perceived advantage of working in a more collaborative manner. Answers to these questions begin to flesh out what is required separately and jointly from both top teams and individuals.

[24] Heifetz, R. (1994); *Leadership without easy answers?* Harvard

checklist

1. can we achieve outcomes on our own? Are we and our partners really getting the advantage from this way of working? If yes then move to 2.

2. have we budgeted sufficient time and resources to build and support the partnership? Development of relationships across different stakeholders takes time for meaningful dialogue to take place.

3. have we paid sufficient attention to communication and supported the formation of the community by creating communication and information-sharing support structures? Do some of our existing structures for communication act as a barrier to achievement?

4. how have we supported the development of new roles, developed appropriate leadership and shared power and influence within the partnership? Within the council, have we enabled our managers of partnership alliances to act with a degree of autonomy?

5. are we clear on our agenda, which areas we will work to protect and where we are prepared to compromise?

6. what are the quick wins we need to achieve to sustain longer-term engagement?

7. have we made the work of the partners visible to the council?

8. have we developed and integrated culture change management processes to create the right conditions for the new ways of working, innovation and organisational team learning that working with partners will demand?

9. are we championing the new ethics and values required to smooth the progress of and provide direction to this work?

10. are we partnership-fatigued and allowing ourselves to be pulled in too many directions? How does this link to our vision, strategy and business planning?

approach 2
collaborative skills

There are a number of skills essential for collaborative working. All of these demand time, attention and sophistication. Portfolio pairings or top teams could assess the health of a particular partnership by rating it against the following indicators where 1 is poor/non-existent, 2 is fair, 3 is average 4 good and 5 excellent. It can be used in combination with the previous checklist. Where indicators are scoring 1s and 2s, revisit the checklist to establish what might be causing low scores.

This is a framework that could also be used by top teams to see where they need to improve their own performance and level of sophistication.

		rating				
	collaborative indicators	1	2	3	4	5
I.	development of shared aims					
II.	communication between one another					
III.	bonds of commitment and determination					
IV.	willingness of members to compromise					
V.	development of appropriate working processes					
VI.	accountability between members for follow-through					
VII.	democracy and equality					
VIII.	sharing resources					
IX.	creating trust and wise use of power					

From Vangen, S and Huxham, C. (2005);
Managing to collaborate

approach 3
hot seating

A practical and effective tool to be used towards the beginning of a key relationship/partnership and at intervals thereafter is that of hot seating. Partners are invited to take the hot seat and to talk about the priorities of their organisation and the key one to three developments (current and planned) that other agencies need to understand, recognise and or work with.

Partners can then question further and consider the impact and influence, positive and negative, this may have on the work of the partnership. Although partners may meet each other frequently at meetings, we have found that the type of engagement does not usually take place. Neither does the surfacing of opportunities for engagement, innovation or support. It is our experience that lead partners are beginning to factor this approach into their meeting structure when full partnership meetings take place.

approach 4
getting your message across/ building functional networks

Where is the focus of the top teams in developing and communicating across key networks of stakeholders? This approach diagnoses where you are focusing your communications' efforts and where it might need to change[25].

Each portfolio holder and lead manager reviews their communication strategy with a key partner/ stakeholder against the following matrix:

meta level	macro	micro
communications focused at conceptual and philosophical end of the continuum	communications focused on the big questions, the big issues, the vision and aspirations	communications focused on the detail, the day-to-day, the immediate
past	present	future
communications focused on past experience, decisions made, history of relationship	communications focused on making a difference today, current challenges and issues	communications focused on delivering for tomorrow, what could be, on possibilities
heart	head	hand
communications focused on emotions and feelings, inclusion and involvement of others, values and principles	communications focused on logic, rationale, business case proposals, what's wrong with a current situation	communications focused on tangible deliverables, practical steps forward, action

Which areas are being covered? Where is the partner organisation putting focus and energy? How do we adapt and connect our communication to engage at a more meaningful level with the partner, with ourselves?

[25] Cope, M. (2003; *Personal Networking*; Prentice Hall (Matrix is adapted from this work)

section 15. are you managing your own development?
personal development

outline

We all need to recognise the job is too new, complex and evolving for anyone to avoid their own development. Top team members face many demands. These may arise from:

- challenges top teams have to engage with and respond to

- the roles individuals have to step into and lead from

- expectations of others compared to the realities of what can be achieved

- realisation of their individual vulnerabilities, perhaps by working through some of the exercises in this guide

Individuals need to develop strategies to help them sustain leadership and themselves despite such pressures. Taking your own learning and development seriously is important and matters in terms of the trust others place in you to do a good job.

approach 1

In *Leadership without Easy Answers* (1994) Heifetz adds some more personal advice to those leading change. When feeling particularly stuck around a given issue or lacking in energy, read through the following chart and see whether it gives you ideas and insights into what the next steps might be.

chart 14 suggested strategies for dealing with leadership issues

distinguish self from role	be sure to understand that you are not your role. People will respond to your role with a variety of emotions and behaviours. At times of change these can be quite powerful and sometimes irrational. Do not take these personally. A good tactic is for you to imagine yourself in other persons' shoes.
externalise the conflict	by distinguishing self from role you can externalise any conflict, focusing attention on the issues not the personalities. You can redirect attention back to the challenge, staying strategic and emphasising where you want to get to, what you want to achieve.
use partners	*'The lone-warrior model of leadership is heroic suicide'*[12] Every person who leads will, from time to time, need support and be challenged in distinguishing self from role and keeping the issues impersonal. Find and use people who you can trust both as a confidant (to offload emotionally) and as a critical friend (to test your thinking).
listen, using oneself as data	self-knowledge is key to being able to understand how you might distort incoming communications and how you might interpret data and make decisions based on your personality preferences. Reflecting on daily actions; living with a certain degree of doubt about whether we are making all the right decisions; behaving in the most appropriate ways; using others to feed back to us the consequences of our actions and any blind spots are all examples of strategies we can use to develop this capability.
find a sanctuary	leaders are busy people with multiple demands placed on them by others as well as themselves. Leaders need time and space to reflect upon direction, challenges and actions. Either with trusted others or with themselves they need to build into their schedules space where they can fulfil the inner tasks of leadership.
preserve a sense of purpose	*'Leadership requires a sense of purpose – the capacity to find the values that make risk-taking meaningful.'*[12]. Returning on a regular basis to the question 'what is our purpose?', holding it dear, helps in times of discomfort and, along with necessary reflection on the course of action and consequences of that action, creates a golden thread running through the leadership of change.

approach 2

You may have worked through this guide in a comprehensive manner or you may have dipped into different sections as the need arose. Whichever way you have absorbed the information, there are probably things that you'll need to go away and do differently for yourself.

This part takes you through a process of reflecting on your development needs and drawing up a simple plan for your own personal development which you can work on over the coming months.

getting focused

In thinking about the challenges you and your authority face what key things do you hope to do over the next 12 months, being mindful of your strategic role in delivering the council's vision and priorities?

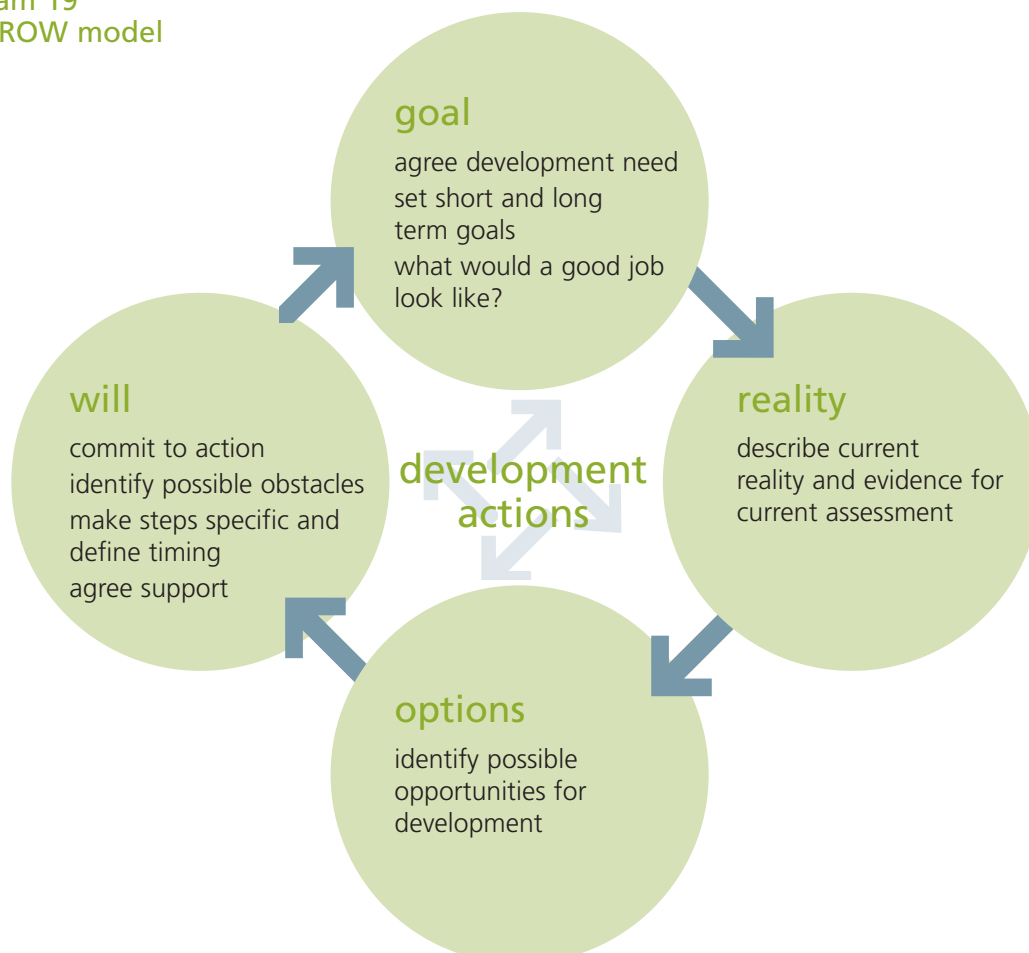'If you keep doing what you're doing you'll keep getting what you're getting.'

Anon

the GROW Model[26]

Once you have established the key areas for development, based on your needs and the needs of the council, the GROW model below will support and challenge you to become more explicit in identifying for yourself a set of outcomes that are motivating and stretching.

The Grow model consists of four steps, as the following diagram illustrates:

goal   clarify and agree a realistic and motivating outcome

reality   raise awareness of what's happening now

options   stimulate ideas and choices of new ways to perform

will   check commitment to options

diagram 19
the GROW model

goal
agree development need
set short and long term goals
what would a good job look like?

reality
describe current reality and evidence for current assessment

options
identify possible opportunities for development

will
commit to action
identify possible obstacles
make steps specific and define timing
agree support

development actions

[26] Whitmore, J. (2002); *Coaching for Performance: Growing People, Performance and Purpose*; Nicholas Brealey

As you work round the cycle it is worth picking out any relevant or appropriate questions for each circle from the following set of thought-provokers (chart 15, below).

It is best to go for between one and three development actions that will really make a difference and have an impact on your portfolio than to develop a scattergun approach of things you could do differently.

chart 15 some useful self-coaching questions

goal (desired state)	reality (present state)
what do you want to achieve (short and long term)?	what is happening now?
what do you want to happen that is not happening now?	how do you know that it is accurate?
what would you like to avoid happening?	what, when, where, how much?
what are the key outcomes you require?	who is involved?
when do you want to achieve it by?	how often does it happen?
how is that positive, challenging, attainable, measurable?	what effect does it have?
is that realistic?	what is happening both internally and externally?
is it possible in the time available to you?	what are the major constraints to finding a way forward?
	what are the obstacles?
	what solutions have you tried so far?
	what resources do you already have?
	what extra resources are required?

will	options
what are the next steps?	what options do you have?
what are you going to do?	what else could you do?
when are you going to do it?	what can you do to change the situation?
will this meet your goal?	what if...?
what obstacles could you face?	what are the alternatives?
how will you overcome them?	any other possibilities for action?
do you have any personal resistance?	what are the benefits and pitfalls of each?
who needs to know?	have you used a successful approach in similar circumstances?
what support do you need?	which option do you prefer?
how will you get that support?	rate the practicality of all options on a scale of 1 to 10
rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 on the likelihood of your carrying out this action	which option will you choose?
what prevents a score of 10?	

meeting learning and development needs

In thinking about how to meet specific development needs, remember there are many ways to learn, including:

- one-to-one with an appropriate officer or member

- in-house briefings

- an observational visit

- shadowing

- discussing the matter with a more experienced member or officer, finding a mentor, peer support from another council

- personal research, such as using IDeA knowledge to learn about procurement

- researching best practice, possibly arranging visits to other councils

- attending an external event, such as a meeting or conference

- attending a training course

Take into account what type of learning best suits you. Some people prefer to read up first, some need time to reflect while others prefer to get on and do it. Also take into account the type of learning that best suits what needs to be learnt.

You may wish to understand your learning styles in more detail. There are a number of ways of doing this. Peter Honey has developed a learning styles inventory, which will help you discover your preferred learning style. Another method uses the Kolb learning model. Use the one you find most accessible for you. Learning styles: www.peterhoney.com or www.businessballs.com/kolblearningstyles.htm

developing a robust plan of action

Developing a personal development plan summarising your intentions and actions and ensuring you get the necessary resources may be helpful.

chart 16 an outline personal development plan

name:	date:	review date:
1.	**goal** clarify and agree a realistic and motivating outcome	
2.	**reality** raise awareness of what's happening now	
3.	**options** stimulate ideas and choices of new ways to perform	
4.	**will** check commitment to options	

5.	**what will you be able to achieve** *The three most important things you hope to achieve in your roles over the next 12 months* *1.* *2.* *3.*
6.	key actions you intend taking as a result of learning from this guide: 1. 2. 3.
7.	**learning and development** *knowledge and skills you want to update or develop, how you will learn them and what support you might need from your council.*

You may find it helpful to discuss the resources required for your personal development plan with an appropriate officer in your council so as to access any necessary support.

Set a clear timetable for planned activities. Schedule a date in three months time when you will review your plan.