

Wyre Councillor Skills Framework

What does it mean to be a councillor?

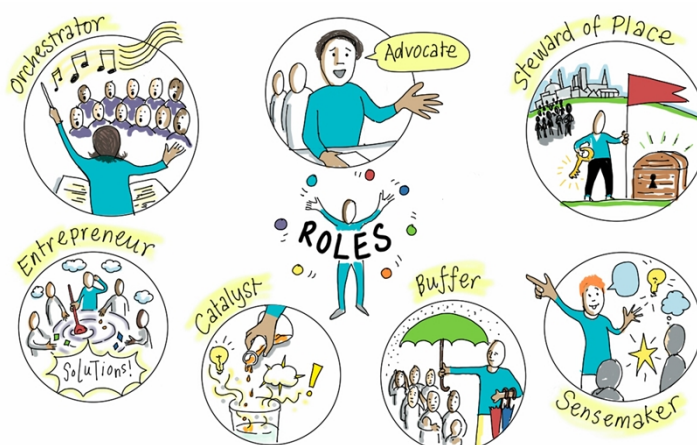
As elected representatives, you have a duty to represent all residents within your ward, as well as everyone within the borough. However, the role and responsibilities of a councillor has changed in recent decades. Councillors are now expected to take a leading role in public resources, representing vulnerable residents, educating residents on changes within local government, convening public meetings and navigating a growing digital world.

It is important that councils support councillors as best they can as expectations placed on them grow and change.

This skills framework will help set out the foundational skills that all councillors are expected to have in order to carry out their duties effectively as elected representatives. It also sets out more specific skill sets for individual committees, Chairs and Vice-Chairs, the Mayor/Deputy Mayor and the Executive.

In setting out the foundational and relational skills for councillors, we hope to support councillors adapt to new challenges and fulfil the seven key roles of a 21st Century councillor. These are:

- steward of place (representing and working across their local area)
- advocate (representing interests of residents)
- buffer (trying to mitigate the impact of the cost of living crisis on vulnerable residents)
- sensemaker (educating residents on the workings of local government)
- catalyst (enabling and encouraging residents to do things for themselves)
- entrepreneur (working with residents and partners to encourage new ideas for their areas)
- orchestrator (helping to build working relationships)



Birmingham University <http://21stcenturypublicservant.wordpress.com/> Illustrations by Laura Brodrick

Councillors are not employees of the council and they do not receive a salary for the work they carry out for the people of Wyre. However, the council does make payments to

councillors in accordance with the allowance scheme set out in the Constitution.

Councillors are also held to the principles of public life, devised by the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Nolan Committee. These seven principles are:

- selflessness
- integrity
- objectivity
- accountability
- honesty leadership

Councillors at Wyre are also held to the standards as set out within the Code of Conduct. One of the most important skills for a councillor is to act as a representative of their residents with fairness, openness and transparency; with respect to officers, fellow councillors and the public.

The Code of Conduct has been designed to protect the democratic role of councillors, to encourage good conduct and safeguard the public's trust in local government.

This framework has been designed with the principles set out in the 2016 publication "21st Century Councillor" and the LGA Local Leadership Framework for Councillors.

Foundational skills

Knowledge-based

It is important that councillors have some foundational, knowledge-based skills in local government and in how their particular council operates, and how this works within and affects their local areas.

The skills are:

- how the council works
- the role of officers
- the roles and remits of committees/groups
- council finances
- the local government tier system
- your local area

Practical

Practical skills are those that are useful for day-to-day responsibilities of councillors, both as representatives of their residents and local leaders, as well as council responsibilities. Being a councillor with their day-to-day responsibilities does also come with many pressures that could affect someone's wellbeing; it is therefore important for councillors to also think about their workload and safety.

The skills are:

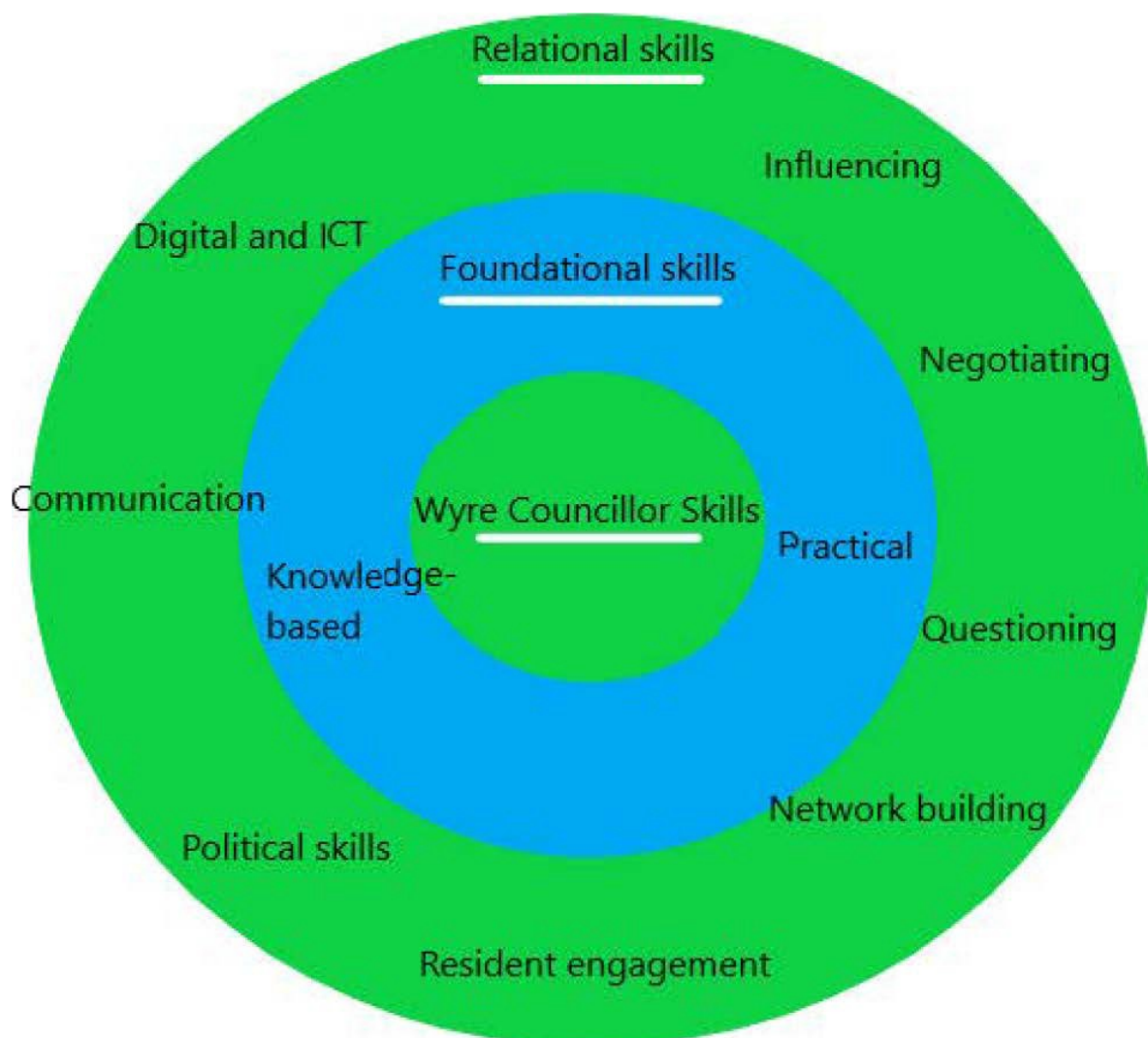
- meeting skills
- communication
- active listening
- organisation and time management
- fostering good working relationships
- personal resilience and safety

Relational skills

Relational skills are those that impact on a councillor's ability to relate and engage with people – particularly their residents. These skills will help foster confidence with councillors on how to bring together resources, engage with their community and developing themselves as local leaders.

These skills are:

- influencing
- negotiating
- questioning
- communication
- resident engagement
- network building
- political skills
- digital and ICT



Roles and responsibilities of all councillors

Overall, councillors are expected to:

- have a good understanding of how the council works, including committees, procedure rules, finance and how Wyre fits into the local government system
- engage with the residents in their local area and ensure their views are represented and represent the borough as a whole
- fostering good working relationships with council officers, local residents, community groups and key stakeholders
- represent the council within the community
- providing community leadership, undertaking casework and managing this to the best of their ability
- communicating with residents, officers and key stakeholders and ensuring you are contactable within a reasonable timeframe
- attending Full Council meetings and committee/group meetings where appropriate and engaging in discussion
- reading agendas and other relevant paperwork to ensure that decisions made are reasonable and well-informed
- acting in accordance with the council's Code of Conduct and the Nolan Principles, both in public, in council meetings and elsewhere when acting as a councillor
- understand and promote the council's values as set out in the Council Plan
- scrutinising the performance of council services and other public services to ensure that they are efficient and effective and provide good value for money for residents
- regularly assess your own development as a councillor and take advantage of learning and development opportunities

Committee-specific roles and responsibilities

Each committee and group of the council will have its own terms of reference, which set out its remit and functions. Every councillor on a committee or group should have an understanding of their committee's terms of reference and general functions.

There are some general skills for each committee/group that councillors ought to be able to demonstrate. These are:

- attending meetings (or tendering apologies via the procedure as set out within the Constitution)
- reading that meeting's agenda, and where relevant, asking questions of officers in advance
- adhering to the Code of Conduct in meetings
- an understanding of the Council Procedure Rules where they apply to committee meetings
- participate in debate and ask questions when necessary
- leave politics at the door

However, some committees do have specific procedure rules due to the nature of their content/ functions. These mainly apply to the two regulatory committees - Planning and Licensing - as well as the Audit & Standards Committee, Employment & Appeals Committee, Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the O&S Climate Change Sub-Committee and their task groups.

Planning and Licensing Committees

The skills that councillors are expected to have, to fulfill the role and responsibilities of a member of either of these committees are:

- understand your committee's terms of reference and functions
- have an understanding of relevant legislation, policy and procedures
- the roles of officers, members and external parties within meetings
- make informed and balanced decisions, within the terms of reference of the committee, which meet legal, constitutional and policy requirements
- ensure the integrity of decision-making within the committee by attending committee-related training events
- act impartially and representing the committee and the council
- attend required training events

The Chair/Vice-Chair role and responsibilities

The Chair and/or Vice-Chair of the regulatory committees will be expected to:

- provide confident and effective management of meetings to facilitate inclusive and robust participation and clear decision-making
- ensure the transparency as to the decision-making process for both members, officers and the public
- demonstrate integrity and impartiality in decision-making in accordance with legal, constitutional and policy requirements
- have an understanding of their committee's terms of reference, specific procedural rules, the council's code of conduct and relevant legal and policy frameworks
- observe and assess the performance of the committee, identify any training and development needs and arrange for these opportunities to be provided

Audit and Standards Committee

Members of the Audit & Standards Committee will be expected to have an understanding and demonstrate the following skills to fulfill the requirements of the role:

- to review the effectiveness of the council's internal audit procedures
- oversee arrangements for both internal and external audit of the council's accounts and records
- ensure that effective and transparent governance arrangements are in place and that resources are used effectively
- review the council's Risk Management policy and contribute to the committee's role in ensuring that adequate controls are in place to mitigate risks
- approve policies in relation to compliance with the Data Protection Act and Regulations made under the Act
- consider any specific matters which have been the subject of an audit report
- review the council's Financial regulations and Financial Procedure Rules
- monitor the council's Anti-Fraud, Corruption and Bribery, Whistleblowing, Gifts and Hospitality and registering Interests, and Anti-Money Laundering policies
- consider key audit documents and systems
- promote and maintain high standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted members
- monitor and advise members on the observation of the Members' Code of Conduct and other relevant protocols
- consider reports from the council's Monitoring Officer on allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct
- conduct hearings into complaints against councillors where an initial investigation has found a hearing to be warranted
- demonstrate leadership on governance and ethical standards issues and have exemplary personal behaviour
- an understanding of the terms of reference and functions of the committee
- act objectively on the basis of evidence
- attend required training events

Chair/Vice-Chair role and responsibilities

The Chair and/or Vice-Chair of the Audit & Standards Committee will need to demonstrate:

- confident and effective management of meetings to facilitate inclusive and robust participation and clear decision-making
- an understanding of their committee's terms of reference and functions and ensure transparency for all members, officers and members of the public
- a good working relationship with the Internal Audit team, Corporate Director Resources (S151 Officer), and the Governance and Legal team
- procedures to be followed at a Standards hearing
- to assess the performance of the committee, identify any training and development needs and arrange for these opportunities to be provided
- objectivity and impartiality
- good communication and questioning skills

Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Climate Change Sub-Committee and task groups

Members of the Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) Committee, its Climate Change Sub-Committee and any subsequent task groups will be expected to demonstrate the following to fulfill the requirements of their role:

- an understanding of the committee's terms of reference, functions and the role of scrutiny
- the O&S procedure rules and concepts of best practice and value for money
- arrangements for call-in and questioning of executive members and guests
- the council's governance and operating arrangements
- ability to interpret information and data from a range of sources, including the council's performance management reporting
- listening, questioning and analytical skills
- an understanding of the Council Plan
- ability to work with all members of the community and council officers and build understanding and ownership of scrutiny
- champion residents' voices and concerns to ensure the council delivers effective services for all residents
- assist in the creation, development, improvement and refinement of council policy
- act objectively and on the basis of evidence
- leave politics at the door
- holding the executive to account by scrutinising decisions taken and proposed by Cabinet, individual Portfolio Holders and officers under delegated powers
- review the Schedule of Executive Decisions on a regular basis
- monitor the performance of internal and external service providers against standards, targets and best value criteria
- investigate and address the causes of poor performances
- build dialogue around priorities, objectives and performance, among the communities and stakeholders
- identify topics for and help deliver the O&S Work Programme

Chair/Vice-Chair role and responsibilities

The Chair and/or Vice-Chair should demonstrate the following skills:

- promote the role of scrutiny both within and outside the council and build good working relationships with members, officers and external partners
- help build and deliver the O&S Work Programme and ensure it takes account of relevant factors such as the council's strategic priorities and risks, and issues of community concern
- evaluate the impact and added value of scrutiny activity and identify areas for improvement
- inspire and enthuse the committee/group and encourage high performance from all members in meetings
- manage the progress of business at meetings, ensuring that meeting objectives are met, and the code of conduct, standing orders, and other constitutional requirements are adhered to
- to maintain a constructive and 'critical friend' relationship with the Executive

Employment and Appeals Committee

Members of the Employment & Appeals Committee will be expected to demonstrate the following to fulfill the requirements of their role:

- an understanding of the committee's terms of reference and functions
- an understanding of corporate policy and any other relevant legal and constitutional requirements
- to act with impartiality and objectivity on the basis of guidance provided by the council's advisors on human resources
- consider and, if necessary, make recommendations to the council on matters that relate to the terms and conditions of employment for council officers, superannuation, pensions and gratuities and retirement pay
- attend training events that will permit members to participate in the consideration of appeals against dismissal, grading and grievances by employees

Appeals panel member, Chair and Vice-Chair

All members of an Appeals panel will need to demonstrate the following, in particular the Chair and Vice-Chair:

- an understanding of the council's Grievances Procedure and appeals panel procedure
- to have attended required training to participate in the consideration of appeals against dismissal, grading and grievances by employees
- analytical and questioning skills
- impartiality and objectivity

Other committees/groups

Members of committees/groups not listed are expected to:

- prepare before meetings by reading the agenda and any other relevant documentation
- have an understanding of their committee/group's terms of reference, functions and remit
- facilitate effective and robust discussion
- good communication skills
- impartiality and objectivity
- adhere to the Code of Conduct and relevant Council Procedure Rules

Chairs/Vice-Chairs of committees/groups not listed are expected to:

- provide confident and effective management of meetings to facilitate inclusive and robust participation and clear decision-making
- promote high standards of good conduct as set out within the council's Code of Conduct
- have an understanding of the meeting's procedure rules

Cabinet/Executive Member/Portfolio Holder

Wyre Council operates under the Executive model of governance; the majority of decisions will be undertaken by Cabinet, either as a whole or as individual members (Portfolio Holders). These members will be expected to:

- be the principal political spokesperson for the council on the activities of the services within the portfolio
- foster good working relationships with council officers, and provide support to these officers in the implementation of programs within the portfolio
- be accountable for decisions taken and performance within the portfolio
- have an overview of the performance management, efficiency and effectiveness on services and activities covered by the portfolio
- work with council officers to formulate and deliver council policy, both strategic and statutory
- carry out consultations with stakeholders as required
- submit a progress report to each ordinary meeting of the Full Council and respond, in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules, to questions and comments
- report as appropriate to the Leader, Cabinet, appropriate Overview and Scrutiny committees, regulatory bodies, and the media
- provide information to and attend meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Climate Change Sub-Committee and their task groups, as requested
- to support fellow Cabinet members
- to give leadership to local partners in the pursuit of common aims and priorities
- to represent the council at a local level
- have an understanding of law, national policy framework, and current issues relating to the services included within the portfolio
- understand the council's key strategic documents, policies, priorities, operations and activities
- good communication and inter-personal skills
- analytical and critical thinking skills
- to act as role models for all members of the council, in particular adhering to and promoting the council's Code of Conduct

Lead Members (supporting the Cabinet)

The Leader can appoint Lead Members who have special responsibilities that involve more than one portfolio. These members will be expected to:

- maintain knowledge and awareness of their area of focus and current activities and developments in relation to this focus
- liaise with Cabinet and the responsible officer
- communicate and represent the views of non-Executive councillors to the Executive on all matters relating to their role
- assist Cabinet in promoting the efficient and effective delivery of the relevant services within

the approved budgets

- provide any other assistance, advice and support Cabinet may from time to time require
- respond to and assist relevant scrutiny committees and task groups as required
- submit progress reports to ordinary meetings of the Full Council in rotation with other Lead Members and respond to questions and comments
- if requested, lead for the council politically and publicly on your area of focus in external dealings and relationships, including with the media

Leader of the Council (and Deputy Leader)

The Leader of the Council (and Deputy Leader) will be expected to demonstrate:

- be a political figurehead for the Council and be its principal political spokesperson on a regional, county and local level
- to act as the focus for the strategic leadership of the council and help build a consensus around council policies
- assign Cabinet members to Portfolio roles, designate the Deputy Leader and allocate Lead Member roles
- act as the council's representative with local partnerships, organisations and external bodies
- ensure the effective running of Cabinet
- ensure the work of Cabinet meets national policy objectives
- advise and mentor other Cabinet members in their work
- chair meetings of the Cabinet (and the Deputy Leader in the absence of the Leader) in line with the Constitution
- work closely with other Cabinet members to ensure the development of effective council policies, the budgetary framework for the Council, and the delivery of high quality and value for money services to local people
- accept collective responsibility and support decisions made by the Cabinet once they have been made
- liaise with the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors, and other appropriate officers on a regular basis
- chair meetings of Management Board
- negotiate and broker solutions in cases of differing priorities and disagreement
- an understanding of community strengths, areas of improvement and key issues
- a good strategic awareness of issues facing the council
- good inter-personal, communication and leadership skills
- an understanding of the Council Plan, the Constitution and other relevant policies
- the ability to constructively challenge decisions and suggest alternatives

The Deputy Leader may be required to fulfil the duties of the Leader in their absence, and assist them in specific duties as required.

Mayor (and Deputy Mayor)

The Mayor of the Council is a civic role. Councillors may express an interest to be Mayor, either themselves or on behalf of a fellow councillor, and a panel formed of the Leader, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Executive will review nominations and make a decision. The Mayor nominates the councillor they would like to serve as Deputy Mayor.

The Mayor will be expected to:

- act as the ceremonial head of the council, to be non-political and uphold the democratic values of the council
- represent the council at civic and ceremonial functions
- attend local community events and engagements in response to invitations, at the decision of the Mayor
- represent the authority to a high standard at local, county, regional and national events
- preside over meetings of the council, so that its business can be carried out efficiently, effectively and fairly
- have a good understanding of the Constitution
- ensure the council conducts its meetings in line with the Council Procedure Rules as set out in Part 4 of the Constitution
- ensure the Constitution is adhered to, and if necessary, seek the advice of the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officers and/or the Chief Financial Officer and to rule on the interpretation of the Constitution
- good public speaking, communication, chairing and inter-personal skills
- have respect for, and desire to work with, different groups and individuals
- have an understanding of the Members' Code of Conduct and the Member/Officer Protocol
- an understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Mayor

The Mayor also may wish to help organise and attend fundraising events in support of nominated charities or local organisations. The decision to attend events and to fundraise is at the discretion of each individual Mayor.

The Deputy Mayor may be expected to fulfil the duties of the Mayor in their absence, and to assist the Mayor in specific duties as required.