Stronger

Political Management

In Local Governme

A Guide for Councillors & Top Officers

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The **Political Management Programme** at Brunel University
is a self-financing and non-profit non-partisan centre
for the study and development of political work in the United Kingdom

Effective Political Management is the Only Guarantee of Local Democracy

This Guide has been produced to dispel some of the misconceptions and to explain some of the mysteries surrounding *effective* political management in local government.

Its purpose is to provide a clearer understanding of how the complexities and difficulties of political work can be approached and overcome.

It also points the way to a more productive and responsive approach to your local community by your own council.

The Guide is only an introduction to the main issues. We will be pleased to help you explore them further, or to assist you in their implementation.

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CHAPTER 1:

Meanings and

Misconceptions

Over recent decades, local government has developed greater political awareness and better political focus. But the tools to channel this political drive into effective action have been poorly developed and are not widely understood.

Many councils have achieved a great deal. However, try asking councillors —or indeed government reports, or management consultants, or academics—what the exact role of the council and its members is. You are likely to get a wide variety of different, imprecise, and misleading answers.

Let us examine some of them.

The councillor is NOT just a party worker

Local council work, some will say, is an opportunity 'to wield power', or 'to fight national policies', or 'to pursue party policies'.

Again, although there is something in these descriptions, they also typify the viewpoint of a party agent or grass-roots activist. Taken to their logical conclusion, they lead to a mentality which focusses on 'winning the vote', submission to the party, and national concerns. This mentality makes it difficult to respond to local needs.

Councillor and party worker roles are distinct—but they are not so different that movement between them is impossible. If local government is to be democratic, it is crucial that this distinction be understood and sensitively observed.

The councillor is NOT an executive

The council, some will say, 'runs the services' or 'sets the policies' or controls the staff', or 'provides the drive to achieve'--in a word 'manages' the Authority. This image of the council is not wholly incorrect, but it just won't do. After all, officers also run services, also set policies, also manage staff, and also provide drive.

Descriptions such as these blur the vital and unremoveable distinction between an elected member and an appointed officer.

Despite current conventional wisdom about blurring of roles, the reality is that there needs to be an unambiguous distinction between member work and officer work—just as there is between the personal qualities and skills of a politician and those of an executive.

The councillor is NOT just a 'man-in-the-street'

Councillors, some will say, are the voice of the ordinary man and woman. So their job must be to listen to people, state their views and apply common sense in deciding what is right and beneficial.

However, although being accessible and reasonable is a virtue and a necessity, by itself it is not enough. The man-in-the-street has not promised to do anything, nor does he have any legal responsibilities for Council performance. But councillors do have a unique and difficult job to perform.

Getting elected should therefore be followed by a lengthy period of education and training to develop the specialized skills and knowledge essential for performing a complex and strenuous role in society.

In a politically well-managed council:

Developing a sense of community, citizenship and democratic participation is accorded a high priority—because this is the ultimate rationale for the existence of local government.

So, what is this political management?

Councillor work is complex and difficult—because it requires tuning into, proclaiming and acting on basic values, desires and interests within a community.

But the community is not, and never will be, a unified entity with a single set of values, desires and interests. The dedicated politician, therefore, has a most difficult task. He must seek a consensus or a way forward in a situation where criticism of any course of action is inevitable and controversy is the norm.

Attempts to avoid controversy or deny its existence are eventually counter-productive. However, attempts to stir up controversy waste time and energy unnecessarily.

Effective political management is demonstrated in the skilful and deliberate recognition and handling of controversy.

In this Guide,
we shall take you through the main steps
in providing **effective** political management
drawing on the analyses, experience and research of
the **Political Management Programme**
at **Brunel University.**

In a nutshell, political management involves:

Governing an executive.....
.....within a framework of constraints.....
..........by applying a set of political attitudes.....
...............to issues of priority or value preference.....
*.....................on behalf of individuals and the community.*

In a politically well-managed council:

Cooperation with councils led by other parties occurs for the common good of local government; and constructive work with national government of whatever party is possible.

✻A New Image

Councils need both **effective political control and effective executive control**: the one cannot substitute for the other.
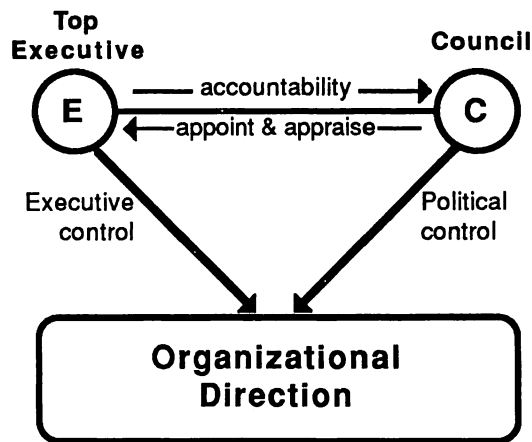
We have found that the above image helps orient thinking about political management. It illustrates two basic ideas:

> ✻ *Councillors do a fundamentally different sort of management work to executives*
>
> &
>
> ✻ *The two types of management need each other: they are complementary, not conflicting.*

An explicit framework must therefore be developed to distinguish councillors' work/roles/procedures/conventions/training &c from top executives' work/roles/procedures/conventions/ training etc; and to explain exactly how political and executive systems should interlock.

[Member-officer relations are mentioned here before such matters as organizing party groups, relating to the public, and handling the national government, because we believe that if members and officers in a council cannot get their act together, little of significance can be achieved on other fronts.]
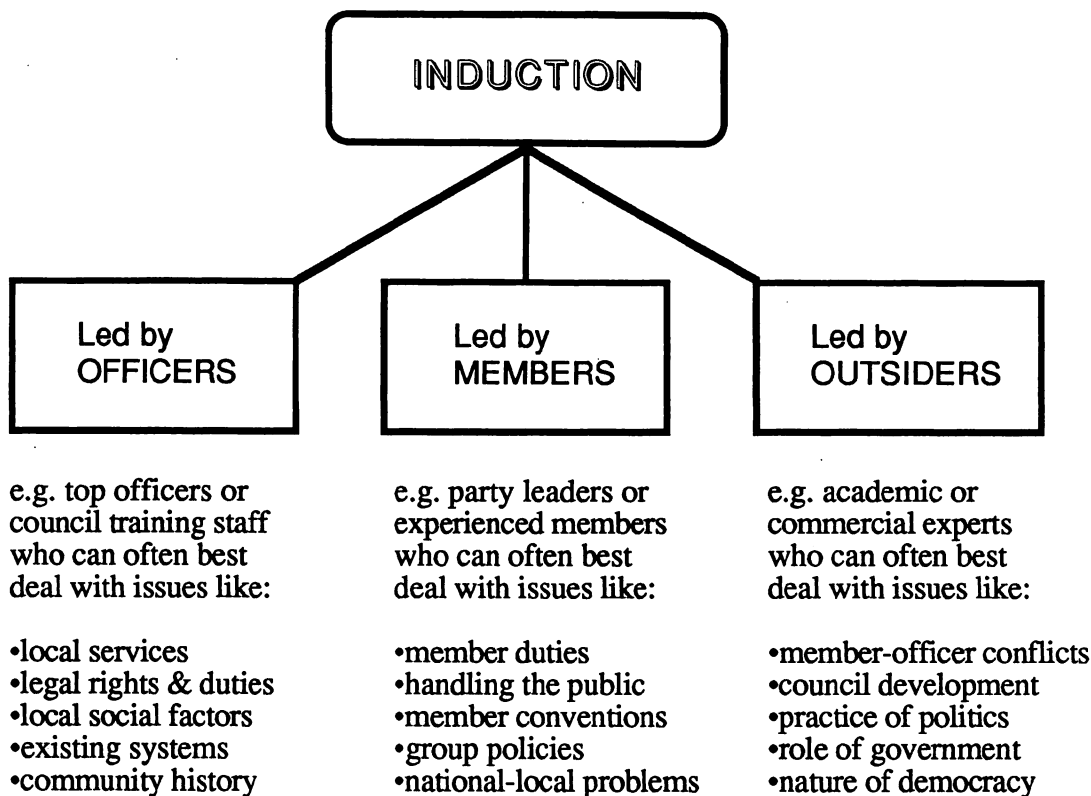

In a politically well-managed council:

A system for policy-making is adopted that overtly enhances the power of both the councillors and the top executive, and positively enables resolution of differences.

✳Implications for Induction

If the image on the facing page expresses a reality,
then induction of new members should be provided
in more than one way.

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              ┌─────────────────────┐
              │     INDUCTION       │
              └─────────────────────┘
        ┌───────────┼───────────┐
   ┌────────┐   ┌────────┐   ┌────────┐
   │ Led by │   │ Led by │   │ Led by │
   │OFFICERS│   │MEMBERS │   │OUTSIDERS│
   └────────┘   └────────┘   └────────┘
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e.g. top officers or council training staff who can often best deal with issues like:	e.g. party leaders or experienced members who can often best deal with issues like:	e.g. academic or commercial experts who can often best deal with issues like:
•local services •legal rights & duties •local social factors •existing systems •community history	•member duties •handling the public •member conventions •group policies •national-local problems	•member-officer conflicts •council development •practice of politics •role of government •nature of democracy

✳Implications for Development

Improvement in council effectiveness depends on
experienced members and top officers
sharpening their awareness of political management,
developing the necessary political skills,
and introducing systems adapted to the work of members.

In the next Chapter, we discuss the requirements of an
effective local framework for a council.

In a politically well-managed council:

Experienced members systematically review their political achievements and errors,
improve their political skills, and work on political solutions for emerging political problems.

CHAPTER 2:

Setting a Framework

for Governing

Political work must be orchestrated

However you conceive of your role and the responsibilities of your council, the task to be faced is substantial. The scope of activities, numbers of people, size of budgets, impact on business and the community, all these contribute to local government being a major undertaking.

Major undertakings must be clearly and simply organized if those involved are to be able to play their part flexibly and effectively.

Who sets the framework for local government?

Part of the framework is set by legislation, including:

✳ overall structural features,

✳ services to be provided, and

✳ financial systems and rules.

However much central control may be exerted on these matters, a considerable degree of local discretion will always exist.

Effort must therefore be put into developing and continually reviewing and updating a local framework.

The framework must be devised so as to suit:

✳ The council and its councillors

✳ Party-political and factional realities

✳ Services and the executive.

Some of the main requirements for the framework for each are listed in the boxes on the facing page.

Mutual understanding is not enough

An appeal to 'mutual understanding' between members and officers is not much more than hot air.

Local government work must be explicitly defined before any mutual understanding is possible. Here is where political management starts.

A fine idea! But what does it involve? Above all, an organizational framework must be devised.

The framework must specify the needed roles, duties, relationships and systems in a way that suits councillors' needs.

Without such a framework, political drive becomes anarchy, is reduced to apathy, or is taken over by a minority.

Remember

➡ A good framework by itself cannot ensure a good decision— only people can do that;

but

➡ A poor framework can make good decisions difficult or impossible to get;

and

➡ Poor frameworks may generate so much distrust, dissension and demoralization that good decisions cannot be successfully implemented.

In a politically well-managed council:

New members are inducted into the local framework, local services and policies, and local community issues, as well as into the general features of the local government system.

Members require:

paperwork which helps them grasp the value issues

committees and working parties geared to their specific role

programmes of political work to orient their activities

secretarial, investigative and creative support in their work

procedures and conventions to allow and control controversy

personal development to assist their effectiveness.

This framework must be developed on a multi-partisan basis.

Executives require:

an organizational structure

planning systems

budgetting systems

information systems

personnel systems

management methods

This framework must be developed by top officers (but sanctioned by members).

Party groups require:

an effective political adversary

leadership arrangements

whipping systems

*political planning systems*

adequate contact with the party

This framework must be developed by each party group itself.

In a politically well-managed council:

Relations amongst members, between members and officers, and between the council and other bodies are handled by developing both formal and informal mechanisms.

The Traditional View

THE PUBLIC

↓ DELEGATE

COUNCILLORS

↓ DELEGATE

TOP OFFICERS

↓ DELEGATE

STAFF
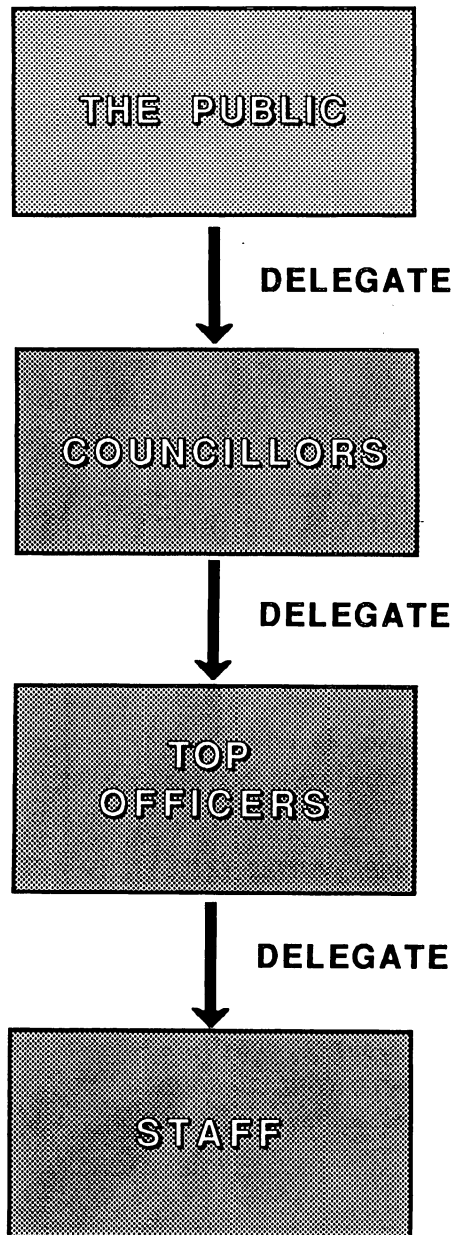
This image has the advantage of simplicity and a sense of hierarchical authority.

Unfortunately, using this image and and the associated language leads to:

*poor focus on the public

*confusion of role

*duplication of work

*waste of talent

*frustration

*battles for control

*delays and ineffectiveness.

We therefore believe that it is time for a new approach, and we have devised a new image to match   ➠   ➠   ➠

In a politically well-managed council:

A multipartisan agreement is developed explaining how the politician and executive systems interlock, and distinguishing between councillors' work and executives' work.

A New Approach
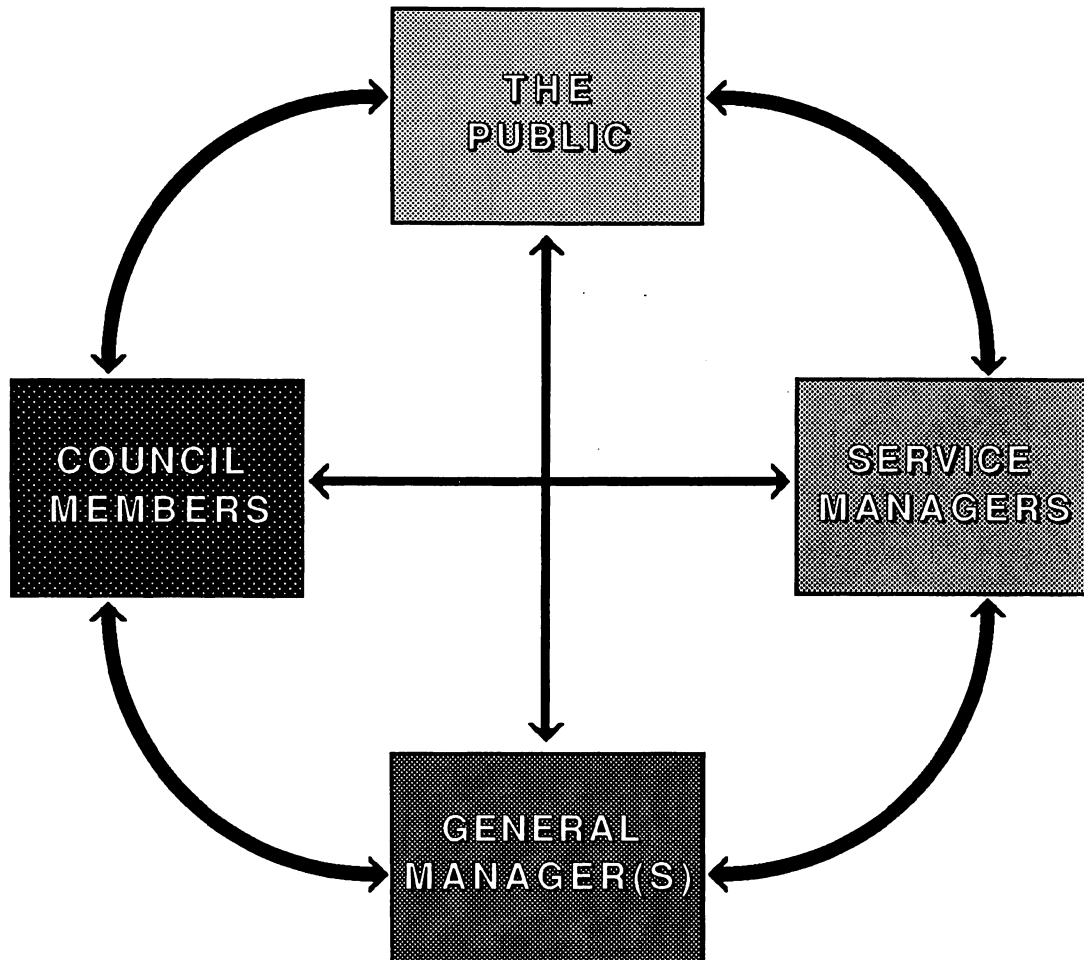
Differences from the traditional view:

The **four roles** are **interconnected.**	Each **role** needs to be defined, and each requires its own structures, procedures and conventions.
The **six relationships** are all **different.**	Each **relationship** needs to be described in distinctive language, and requires its own structures, procedures and conventions.
The **roles and relations** form a **sensible system.**	If roles and relationships are properly devised, then **progress is possible** and **effectiveness can be assessed.**

In a politically well-managed council:

Frameworks are devised to aid the transformation of values into action, because all organizations and public services are created primarily to realize social aspirations and desires.

CHAPTER 3:

Developing

Political Drive

Nothing happens without political drive!

Each council's framework is energized by personal qualities of individual members and officers. Councillors really ought to be in the driving seat, because they must steer officers by resolving controversies over values and interests. Such political issues are inherent in all major decisions. So, although officers can do a great deal, they need to depend heavily on the inputs of councillors.

Councillors make their decisions according to their *political motivations, political beliefs* and *political attitudes*. We will briefly examine each of these in this Chapter.

Political Motivations

All good councillors get worked up personally and want to see things happen. This is what drives them. So, the greatest asset of any council is motivated members.

We have identified **three specific, constructive motivations** oriented respectively towards:

✳ helping individuals

✳ improving management

✳ preserving/changing the community

General drive, whether expressed as initiative or personal ambition, is as essential to political achievement as to any other form of achievement. These drives do need to be checked and channelled by suitable frameworks.

VARIETIES OF USEFUL MOTIVATION

✳ Public Champion ✳
I want to help others, especially those who are being improperly, unjustly or inhumanly treated!!

✳ Management Enthusiast ✳
I want to control and direct services to make sure they provide what is really needed where it is really needed, and do not waste the tax-payers money!!

✳ Societal Activist ✳
I want to preserve/change society to make it better, stronger, and fairer!!

Remember

➠ The tendency to cultivate just one type of motivation and to devalue others needs guarding against.

➠ A good member has some of all three motivations.

➠ A good council or good party-group has members with all three motivations.

➠ Being well-motivated does not permit any action. Action must be based on the socially-sanctioned role of the councillor.

In a politically well-managed council:

The morale of new and backbench councillors is regarded as important; counselling for members is available; and members' particular abilities are sensitively harnessed.

Political Beliefs

If motivation generates drive, then beliefs determine the direction and focus of that drive.

There is probably no limit to the variety of political beliefs that may be held by people. They can be mundane and specific ('a swimming pool in my neighbourhood would be a good thing'), or abstract and grand ('promote greater opportunity for emotional growth in later life').

However, personal political beliefs, like motivations, cannot be simply and immediately converted into action.

Pursuing beliefs and working with others to convert agreed beliefs into council objectives and action is a difficult and crucial responsibility which is characteristic of the political process.

The central importance of beliefs in political life—and the personal values and ethical principles associated with beliefs—cannot be overemphasized. The political role is characterized by a requirement to act publicly on beliefs.

The Necessity for Groups

Governing bodies like councils make their decisions formally by majority voting. This means that *if individuals wish to see their beliefs converted into policy, they must band together with others of like mind to swing the vote.*

So banding together into **factions, is inevitable and essential.** In local government, factions are called **groups.** Groups are the main way that political attitudes are developed and political beliefs and motivations channelled.

Party-political groups are the most sophisticated form of faction because they represent deep currents of well-developed and culturally recognizable political belief and attitude.

The quality and drive of any council largely depend on the quality and robustness of its leading group.

So: improving structures and systems within groups is desirable; and the calibre and training of their key members needs developing.

Once the key role of personal values and beliefs is appreciated, it is possible to develop a clearer understanding of:

✻the significance of debate
(see Chapter 4)

✻the formation of factional groups
(see next column)

✻member-officer differences
(see Chapter 1 and following pages)

✻national-local tensions
(see later Chapters)

✻political leadership

✻splits within parties

Other Types of .Faction
Sensitive topics   e.g. ecology Geography   e.g. Town A vs Town B Culture   e.g. religious/ethnic group Occupation   e.g. farmers Personalities   e.g. would-be leaders

The Balanced Council
Political management skills are more necessary than ever in a council where no faction has an overall majority: In such cases: ✴ councillor leadership is at risk; ✴ compromise is more painful; ✴ frameworks need revising.

In a politically well-managed council:
Staff and facilities to support members are provided; and group organization, structure and planning are actively developed as appropriate to the size of the group.

Turning Political Drive into Effective Action

Political drive is only meaningful if it is converted into action. Such conversion of values into action is the prerogative of top executives, and this should be their particular ability. If councillors diffuse their energy on executive matters, either in a mistaken view that this is the way to get things done properly or to compensate for poor top executives, **political drive will be lost.**

The prime task of councils should be to appoint top executives of sufficient calibre, and then encourage initiative and creativity in pursuit of given council objectives and within the council framework.

The fear of executives being too strong is common but misplaced. Councils have more to fear from weak managers stuck in poorly designed structures and unable to bring about change.

From the outset we have emphasized the need to distinguish between the work of *Councillors* and the work of *Executives*. Now we can examine this in more detail:

Creative COUNCILLORS can:

•Balance conflicting pressures and priorities in social value terms.

•Articulate the mood and state of the community, and the likelihood of achieving public cooperation.

•Sense when and where change is essential and where it is intolerable—according to community values.

•Judge the limits of taxation.

•Envisage the future, have a sense of political timing, persuade the public, gain detailed cooperation of political colleagues
i.e. political leadership

•Choose and use top executives.

Creative EXECUTIVES can:

•Balance conflicting pressures and priorities in feasibility terms.

•Appreciate the mood and state of the organization; and the likelihood of gaining the support of staff.

•Be aware of the state of the art, and have access to expertise and information in relation to possible changes.

•Mobilize resources.

•Envisage the future, have a sense of executive timing, exert detailed sensitive control over employees and the organization
i.e. executive leadership.

•Assist politicians in their work.

In a politically well-managed council:
Suitable top executives are appointed and members trust them. Councillors firmly avoid performing executive tasks or interfering on matters of executive judgement.

USING EXECUTIVES	USING COUNCILLORS
Political drive without capable executive drive achieves little and wastes money. i.e. members are dependent on officers. To the degree that members see officers as a threat (and vice versa), the framework is malfunctioning.	**Executive drive in public services that ignores the feelings of the public is unacceptable.** i.e. officers are dependent on members. To the degree that officers see members as a threat (and vice versa), the framework is malfunctioning.
Officer power needs supporting in every way—and must never be undermined. Members may undermine officers by: ✳ substituting for officers ✳ re-doing officer work ✳ by-passing the top executive Many bad habits of this sort are so ingrained that members and officers can no longer recognize them and do not realize that they are weakening the effectiveness of the council.	**Member power needs supporting in every way—and must never be undermined.** Officers may undermine members by: ✳ overwhelming them with paper ✳ pursuing initiatives in name only ✳ not noticing sensitive issues Many bad habits of this sort are so ingrained that officers and members can no longer recognize them and do not realize that they are weakening the effectiveness of the council.

In a politically well-managed council:

Members focus as much or more on what the community needs and what effects services have (outputs), as on what the council is currently providing or spending (inputs).

CHAPTER 4:

Maintaining Democracy

Effective political management is both an expression of local democracy and a guarantee of its preservation.

Chaotic, absent or authoritarian political management flouts local democracy, leads to officers taking over, and invites intervention by the national government.

Local democracy cannot be reduced to voting and taxation. (Many dictatorships have both!) Nor is it measured by the degree of interest that the general public shows in things political (Most people are profoundly uninterested, or view politics as a spectator sport.)

Local democracy is expressed primarily in the behaviour of those elected and in the process of government.

Democracy & the Community

Once elected, a council has wide powers to affect the community which it represents. The democratic use of these powers demands certain attitudes and behaviours.

Councils and councillors should be actively concerned to:

*respect the community

*consult with the community

*inform the community

*explain to the community

*review effects on the community.

Democracy in the Council

Once a council is elected, democracy is only weakly expressed in the act of member voting—because the result of a vote is typically a foregone conclusion.

Democracy is realized in the council and committee chambers in many ways:

in the expression of opposition

in the vigour of debates

in the way agendas are formed

in the opportunity for questions

in access for the public and media

in internal debate on the issues

In a politically well-managed council:

Council initiatives for change are rooted in identified community values and political ideals. Occasional political embarassment is accepted and excessive secrecy is avoided.

Duties of Citizens

Effective government depends as much on citizens fulfilling their duties, as on the council itself.

These duties include:

* voting
* paying taxes
* obeying the law
* getting informed
* complaining
* lobbying

The public also sets and checks the context of values and needs within which elected leaders must operate.

The media and bodies like the Audit Commission are ways for the wider national public, as well as the local community, to check adherence by councils to basic values.

The public has many channels, including the use of national government to pressure local government to adhere to its set of values.

So politicians do provide leadership for the community—but effective political leadership is less controlling than that of industry moguls or army generals, and far more difficult.

What do the People Want?

The public is not a unitary being and so there is usually no single public view or wish. Furthermore, people usually carry more than one social role in relation to their council:

* *elector*
* *tax-payer*
* *consumer*
* *resident*
* *contractor*
* *employee*
* *representative*

Attempting to get closer to the public, generally means providing more access to sectional pressure groups and lobbies, use of the media, and use of opinion polls and surveys, as well as meetings with constituents.

Officers also have a role in assessing and appreciating the needs of the public which is not always pursued.

In the end, however, councillors must decide for themselves the mood and wishes of the community, and balance trade-offs between competing interests.

When Personal Beliefs Run Counter to Official Duties

Councillors and employees of local government are also citizens with a right to their own beliefs and values.

However, as we have emphasized in this Guide, they have only limited rights to use their position to pursue their own views.

If a councillor or officer feels strongly enough about a particular matter he should therefore exert the democratic right of free association and join (or even form) a campaigning or lobbying organization and work within it.

In a politically well-managed council:

Members of the public are not generally expected to behave like political activists, but they are encouraged to fulfil their duties and to pursue their rights.

Democracy in Party Groups

Party groups have no legal obligation to function democratically, and can operate largely in private.

However, as emphasized in the previous Chapter, groups are crucial to an effective council. The degree of effective democracy in the groups is therefore likely to be reflected in the democratic qualities of council operation.

The major tensions in party groups are in the relations

between the leaders and the led,

and

between the party and the group.

In both cases, active management of the tension is needed rather than simple rules. Without such care and without a framework to aid the balancing of forces, a group can suffer from authoritarian control or dithering and drifting.

Disciplined adherence to a well-designed framework of structures, systems and conventions is no more the opposite of democracy and participation in the group than it is in the council.

An Unhappy Scenario

In the urge to get the vote and avoid embarassment, the leading group uses procedural motions that block debate.

In response, the opposition group indulges in spoiling tactics, and prevents business being transacted.

The leading group then retaliates; and the opposition steps up its guerilla warfare.

As the culture of civilized debate within the council declines, behaviour within the groups begins to fragment.

Eventually internecine hostility makes member life a misery, officers regard members with secret contempt, and the public is poorly served

The final result in some councils has been the complete breakdown of political management, and even illegality.

In a politically well-managed council:

Groups see themselves as mini-organizations whose members have dual loyalties: to the council as well as to their political party (or other factional base).

Preserving our Local Democracy

The tension between national and local government stems from the twin loyalties of the citizen:

✳ to the state .....and...

✳ to the local community.

These conflicting loyalties within the individual cannot possibly be removed, so national-local tensions are here to stay.

Local democracy is therefore perennially at risk. Only skilful political management can ensure that the national government is continually challenged and pressured—without being provoked into a crushing response.

THE BRITISH SYSTEM
of
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

All modern civilized societies set up both national and local government.

The British system operates on the basis that *the local Authority system is a responsibility of the national government of the day* which is accountable to Parliament which represents the British people as a whole, whilst *each individual Authority is the responsibility of its local community so long as it conforms to law and deeply-rooted cultural values.*

The Secretary of State for the Environment is charged with ensuring that each Authority does in fact conform in this way.

Remember

Services and facilities will always have to be provided locally for both practical reasons and to deal with local community differences.

However, if local political management is perceived to be ineffective, or out of tune with cultural values, then elected authorities can be largely removed.

The alternatives include: setting up appointed authorities (like the NHS), decentralizing offices of the national civil service (like social security), and removing the services from the public sector entirely.

In a politically well-managed council:

Strengthening the effectiveness of the lowest tier of community political organization, Parish or Community Councils and Neighbourhood Associations, is actively pursued.

CHAPTER 5:

Taking Political Action

Political opportunities, like executive opportunities, must be seized, and may be created....

BUT

for effective action to result, the structures, systems and procedures referred to in the earlier chapters must be satisfactory; and members and officers must have the talent, knowledge and skills to use them.

The Three Steps in Political Action

1. Identify the Issue

2. Take a Stand

3. Set Priorities

All choice is political....

because all choice embodies values and interests, such that some people will benefit and be pleased, and others disappointed or even harmed.

SO

politics and controversy cannot be wished away or abolished, and opportunities for political action are plentiful,

AND

complaints that the opportunity for political action has been removed, for example by shortage of resources or by legislation, are misleading and may be self-defeating.

REMEMBER

Stick with issues and strategies—don't get lost in a sea of detail.

Agree a strategy or course of action after issues are clarified and priorities set —not before.

All choice operates within constraints....

which are necessary to channel action and limit its scope.

SO

understanding the relevant constraints and not wasting too much energy in attempting to alter them is crucial for effective political action.

On later pages, we briefly examine some commonly misunderstood constraints: *legislation, resources, facts, and being in opposition*. All must be understood and actively managed if political effort is to be effective.

In a politically well-managed council:

Councillor action is based in sound political judgement. Appreciation of political realities is fostered within the groups, and political skills are fostered and valued.

WHERE IS THE "REAL" DECISION TAKEN?

One of the commonest assertions (or complaints) heard is that the 'real' decision is taken:

       in the Groups
or by the National Government
or by the Top Officer meeting
or by the Leader
or by the P&R Committee
or in the City &c &c

The truth is that there is no one place (or person) where the decision is really made.

The reason for this is that in large scale matters **decision-making needs to be distributed.**

Each component of the system, such as those listed above, has its own responsibility for deciding some portion of the process.

If any become 'rubber stamps' or have lost their sense of purpose, then, either it is time for an overhaul of the framework, or better training is required.

The difficult task in developing large-scale organization including governance is:

➡ *To ensure that the decision-making of the various relevant bodies is integrated;*

➡ *To develop the decision-makers' awareness of the extent/limits of their responsibility.*

In a politically well-managed council:

The governance process as a whole is effectively organized and steered by a central committee of the full council which is chaired by the leader of the council.

HINTS ABOUT CONSTRAINTS

1:   Legislation

Local government exists by virtue of legislation. Its powers and duties are conferred in this way and may be similarly removed. These parliamentary decisions are not equivalent to local political decisions. They provide rules and frameworks for all councils indicating what is permissible and what is not.

Councillors need to operate within the law or they undermine their own legitimacy.

Local government is never given legislative powers, so councillors will never escape legislative constraints.

Legislation typically has mandatory and discretionary elements. *If the spirit, rather than the letter, of the law is violated, then further mandatory legislation is likely.*

Fine political judgements are therefore required in the use of discretion and in working around legislation. The price of failure is progressive centralized constriction of local democracy.

2:   Resources

With more resources it is possible to do more (usually). But the sheer amount of resources may not affect steering or priorities. Often a smaller cake can be shared out in the same proportions as a larger cake.

Resource shortage will affect particular actions and strategies in pursuit of a political objective, and councillors are naturally upset if they need to alter such plans.

Nevertheless, this is where top officers should come to the rescue. It is their job, above all, to mobilize resources and to develop new and imaginative strategies to overcome obstacles. Coping in a practical way with uncertainty and with the unexpected is part of the officer task.

Officers can only re-think creatively, if members have done their work in steering them with clear values and explicit priorities.

Members will be particularly upset and unready to act if they have been confused about their responsibilities (see Ch.1). Too much energy put into working out detailed plans (officer work) or too much time spent asserting worthy ideals (activist work) may mean not enough hard thinking has gone into priorities and policies.

In a politically well-managed council:

Members are too busy with their own work to intrude into officer territory. When action is needed in officer territory, the officers actively and warmly welcome this.

MORE HINTS ABOUT CONSTRAINTS

3: Facts

Facts are important, but the common executive view that facts speak for themselves is politically untenable.

After all:
who selected the facts?
who decided what counted as a fact?
who collected the facts?
who organized the facts?
who analysed and interpreted the facts?
&
who presented the facts?

At all these stages, values and biasses enter into the picture—usually unconsciously.

Remember:
The adroit use of facts is normal political practice.

So debates about facts are weak unless supported by debate about the underlying values and principles.

Given all the above, it should be emphasized that facts may be decisive in certain matters. Presentation of the issue from several viewpoints may be useful to take account of the slippery nature of facts and how complicated they become on close examination.

4: Being in Opposition

If politics were only about winning, then the opposition could go home immediately after the election.

However, an opposition is an essential and natural part of the democratic political process. So, where there is no formalized opposition, one commonly develops within the ranks of the leading group.

Hints for the opposition group:

✱don't accept defeat

✱do oppose coherently

✱don't fight lost causes

✱do debate fundamentals

✱don't succumb to spoiling tactics

✱do propose credible alternatives

✱do represent community views

In a politically well-managed council:
The framework of procedures, conventions and standing orders constraining members results in activities in full council and committees which epitomize the democratic process.

A FINAL NOTE:

Council Development

Political management thrives when its framework is subject to regular review.

Given the complexity and size of councils, change is a permanent feature; and the only alternative to positive development is stagnation. Changes in council structures and procedures are required to deal with:

        *new legislation
        *altered services
        *new techniques or technologies
        *changes in the community
        *different personalities.

The development process needs to be built into the council framework.

Management and organization development are well-recognized and useful tool for executives to deal with change, and improve the quality of their work, increase productivity and enhance morale.

This Guide is about **political development**, which is aimed directly at the governance process. Its results can be rewarding. Councillors breathe a sigh of relief as they, at last, get meaningful paperwork; abolish out-of-date committees; work cooperatively with top officers; alter unduly inhibiting standing orders &c.

Political development requires multi-partisan support because the framework of governance developed for a council must serve all members, whatever their party or factional base.

Development may be carried out either by councillors on their own, or with the aid of consultants, expert in political development and sympathetic to the needs and aspirations of councillors. Although officers need to be involved, they must not be expected to take the lead.

In a politically well-managed council:
Changes recommended by framework reviews are followed up by training members and officers to work the new arrangements, and dealing with teething problems.

Act now

to protect

the future

of

Local

Government

and

strengthen

your local

services

and

communities.

We hope that this Guide has clarified the responsibility of formal political work and given you an overview of the challenge posed by the councillor role in local government.

It has been compiled by the:

Political Management Programme at Brunel University.

The Political Management Programme (PMP) is a self-financing consulting and research organization. The PMP is one of the SIGMA Centre group of Research Programmes which develop and test new and clear ideas and methods to help people and organizations grow.

The staff of the Programme have worked in the public sector, and been in active political life, as well as providing consultancy, seminars and conferences nationally and internationally—over the past two decades.

To find out how we can help you and your council tackle existing problems and develop along the path indicated in this Guide, call us on 0895- 56461 Ext. 305 at Brunel. Or call our London office on 01- 794 2445.