

Local Government Association

The roles of councillors

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promoting better local government

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the roles of councillors

- community leaders
- strategic leaders
- challengers and scrutineers
- regulators
- politicians

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Every councillor represents a ward or division

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councillors as community leaders

As ward representatives, councillors should:

- be the recognised champions for their area;
- act as community leaders who provide direction for their area, helping to reconcile competing interests, encouraging people to resolve local problems themselves;
- keep in touch with their constituents through regular surgeries and meetings, email and personal contact;
- foster effective relationships with public, private, voluntary and community organisations in their area;
- actively monitor the performance of local public services in their area, hold poor performers to account and contribute to plans for improvement;
- speak freely as advocates for the area to influence council and other local decisions, including on planning and licensing, and act fairly and judiciously on decisions affecting other parts of the council's area.

(LGWP pp 52-3, edited)

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questions for councils

- how much support do councillors get in relation to their ward role?
- how good is the information they can access about what is going on in their ward?
- how much time are they able to spend on their ward responsibilities?


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councillors as strategic leaders


Leaders of places, not just councils. Leaders who will:

- be the public face of the council;
- create and sustain local partnerships;
- develop and deliver in partnership a long term vision for their area;
- lead their cabinet and LSP;
- take the tough decisions on priorities;
- be visible and accountable to the public and council and hold paid officials to account for their performance;
- support effective scrutiny, challenge and community leadership.

(LGWP, pp 52-53, edited)

issues for councils 

- “they like our services, but they don’t like us”
- low level of understanding of councillors’ roles
- low level of awareness about the provision of public services
- reputation – clean streets and good communications


councillors as scrutineers 

Where we are now:


- some good practice;
- but scrutiny still finding its feet in councils; and
- executive support is crucial.

The future:


- a wider role in scrutinising partnerships and Local Area Agreements;
- a more powerful role in calling the executive and partners to account;
- a more involving role, bring the community and business into the scrutiny process;
- community call for action and neighbourhood enquiries.

councillors as regulators 

- planning and licensing are important roles
- councillors must be free to act both as advocates – and impartial regulators
- the new Code of Conduct – does it get the balance right?

where will we find the councillors to play these roles? 

- the average councillor is a white man aged 58;
- who spends 21 hours a week on council duties;
- 96% represent one of the three big parties;
- 14% are under 45 – half the proportion 20 years ago.

your views? 

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