

# Gaining Altitude

How local government leadership can scale new heights





# Foreword

**For a local government sector under increasing strain, leadership will be the game changer. Over the last fifteen years, GatenbySanderson has supported the sector - and wider government - to find top leaders for its critical senior posts. In that time, change has been the single constant in our conversations with senior leaders. The need to evolve and, in many cases, reform service delivery has led to innovation in new operating models and structures. In turn this has shifted the attributes that local authorities seek in their leaders. So, what are the game changing qualities of the best local government leaders? Which features really make the difference to reaping returns on the investments made in wide-reaching transformation programmes across the sector?**

At the start of 2016, GatenbySanderson set out to find answers – to benchmark what great leadership looks like in a local government landscape that is itself shifting and reshaping.

This report shares our findings and presents a new lens on leadership – a set of leadership archetypes that will define great leaders of the future. This study sits within a wider context of research into the changing nature of local government. It follows the University of Birmingham publication, 21st Century Public Servant, which showcased the changing requirements on today’s workforce. Our study was conducted alongside the New Local Government Network study on requirements of the future local government workforce, published with the support of PPMA: ‘Outside the Box: The Council Workforce of Tomorrow’.

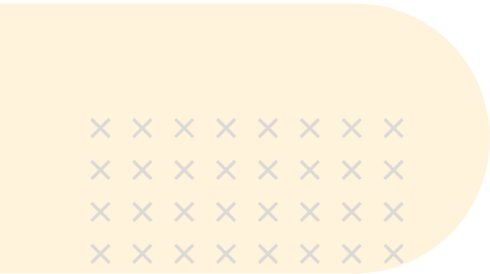
The shared thinking and insight, well evidenced in this report and others, draws some common conclusions in how local authorities must adapt service supply to meet growing demand. Critically, they must address funding pressures with a declining spending power; make sense of fragmented service delivery models; partner/collaborate meaningfully with neighbours and private sector partners; embrace the rapid rise of technology and consequent expectation to innovate delivery as well as facing increased levels of political and public scrutiny.



In responding to change and the growing importance of 'place' over locality, new organisational constructs have emerged. Devolution may be the epitome of a place based solution, but all new models – be they inter-authorities, combined authorities, LEPs or locally grown service centred partnerships – require leaders to shift mind-set beyond their own organisational boundaries and deliver without being in direct control of resources. Succeeding in these environments requires a far more sophisticated repertoire of leadership behaviours and a more versatile style than ever before. Hierarchical authority will carry far less weight in the future Local Government landscape. It remains our view that, far from attempting to categorise and label the abundance of different organisational models, we should support and encourage them to thrive.

As we think about leadership that will enable these new organisational models to succeed, the sector is increasingly asking; 'Our strategy is adapting in response to the forces of change; how fit for the delivery of this future is our current leadership group?' Or, as importantly, 'who are the people in our organisation with the most potential to move into senior leadership roles?' With increasing accountability at the top of local authorities, is it any wonder that the pipeline of individuals wanting to step up for senior leadership roles is becoming more stretched?

In response, the sector has invested heavily, not only in transformation programmes, but in talent initiatives such as leadership and management development. Authorities describe their need for leaders who are motivated to set a direction for change, to develop a vision for the future and have a versatile management style that can flex to the right situation. For example, covering the hard wiring needed to execute goals through great planning, budgeting to the critical, softer side of leadership in bringing teams and people with them.



It has long been our view, however, that there remains a missing piece within this puzzle; how to translate the plethora of future delivery demands into the tangible and measureable things that leaders will actually have to do differently. Be they on the ground, in council chambers or on the frontline out in the community, what are these leadership styles? How does a leader navigate the complexity of the context s/he works within to set a clear direction for change?

Our new model of leadership defines the attributes that will differentiate outstanding leaders from others – codification that could underpin future selection, development, retention and succession strategies. This will allow you to move forward with greater confidence that, across the sector, you are aligning talent to role demands and maximising the collective return on investment in transformation programmes.

We consulted widely with local government HRDs, CEOs and senior leaders in the pursuit of these answers, yet the leadership model we present in this report was never intended to be the end-game. We welcome ongoing conversation around this vital topic of leadership – for us this is a milestone from which we can build further answers together.



**Jon Houlihan**  
Lead for Local Government

# Introduction

GatenbySanderson is the leading executive search and talent consulting firm working with local government and broader public sector. Through our day to day work, we help councils address the many and varied challenges facing them now and for the foreseeable future. We are particularly expert in identifying the skills, behaviours and attributes that councils will need from their senior leaders to tackle a more demanding future.

The backdrop to our study was an ambition to develop a current and future-proof model of local government leadership. Our research base has necessarily expanded into the wider public sector, recognising - as highlighted by NLGN in its report - 'Outside the Box: The Council Workforce of Tomorrow' - that many councils have responded to environmental pressures by commencing root-and-branch change programmes with the aim of launching new delivery models.

Councils are already working increasingly in partnership, with a new focus on commissioning, commercialism and co-operative approaches. The emergence of the 'place' leadership mindset is evident, in response to a future where local government will share responsibility for serving communities alongside businesses, third sector and public sector partners as well as co-producing with those very same communities.

Our report begins by sharing our research findings, taking account of the key challenges which need to be overcome to achieve successful outcomes, and building further on this research:

## **Commercial Shift**

The increased financial pressures, questions of financial sustainability, declining council spending power and shifts in central funding, the need for Councils to be cost neutral and to generate income.

## **Strategic Relationship**

The need for longer term strategic planning, a longer term horizon, responding to demand with new service delivery approaches, encouraging innovation and new ways, increasing strategic and collaborative partnerships, the need for commissioning expertise.

## **New Organisational Models**

Delaying within organisations, broadened remits for senior leaders, new customer-centric operating models, use of technology for efficiency and convenience for citizens.

## **Changing Workforce Dynamics**

Rising diversity in the communities served and in the workforce, divergent needs between generations: millennials with different expectations of services and employment experiences; an increasingly mobile workforce and non-traditional career paths; increasing scrutiny and expectations from citizens, succession crisis in attracting best talent to a sector with high accountability and public scrutiny.



### **How does this paper build on existing understanding of these challenges?**

Much of the existing research in this field has focused on describing the situation and challenges, rather than recommending how existing leaders or those we recruit or promote into future posts are to be best placed to tackle them. As recruitment professionals, consultants and psychologists, this presented us with the clear need for a next step to build upon this academic approach, and take the debate further. We set out to create a model that turns these conceptual theories and ideas into a practical, objective and measurable model of the required behaviours, attributes and skills for leadership success in the new local government environment, supporting robust HR and talent strategies. Only by doing so can this theory be turned into practice and allow councils to recruit, onboard, develop and promote the right leaders to deliver in the new local government world.

We then tackle context and ask if it really matters? There are both commonalities and contrasts in the leadership qualities that distinguish outstanding leaders in different types of councils. We assert that it is important to avoid labelling councils by 'type' and rather embrace the need for the sector to allow different organisational models to flourish. Our purpose, across sector, should be to develop a cadre of leaders with the ability to adapt leadership styles to their current organisational context, and to just thrive when placed in new environments. Actively seeking out innovative models to disrupt the current norm is key to building better futures for communities.

The final section of this paper tackles talent strategies, making recommendations about how councils can ensure that they have the right people in place with these attributes and a pipeline of future leaders ready to step up. Our leadership model is designed to enable the robust assessment of prospective or existing staff, and support the development of individuals to meet the requirements of local government leaders now and in the future.

# Research method

We cast the net of our research widely, incorporating a wide range of data sources:

- Detailed UK and international desk research on sector issues and leadership approaches, which included publications by membership bodies, academic research, sector- and role-specific literature, and global examples of future leadership.
- Inclusion of a specific set of questions on leadership as part of the NLGN's 2016 survey of HR professionals in Local Government
- Data analysis of anonymised executive and leadership behavioural profiles drawn from hundreds of GatenbySanderson recruitment exercises over the last 3 years. We examined the factors that differentiated the most successful local government leaders as well as those in other parts of the public and third sector
- In-depth interviews with HRDs and CEOs across the local government sector, focusing on what is required of effective leaders now, and what will be important in the future given the changes and challenges faced by local government.
- Broader research with senior leaders across the wider public sector, to examine the trends and changes affecting all public services. This step covered central government, education, housing, not for profit, regulation and health.

## **Gaining Altitude:**

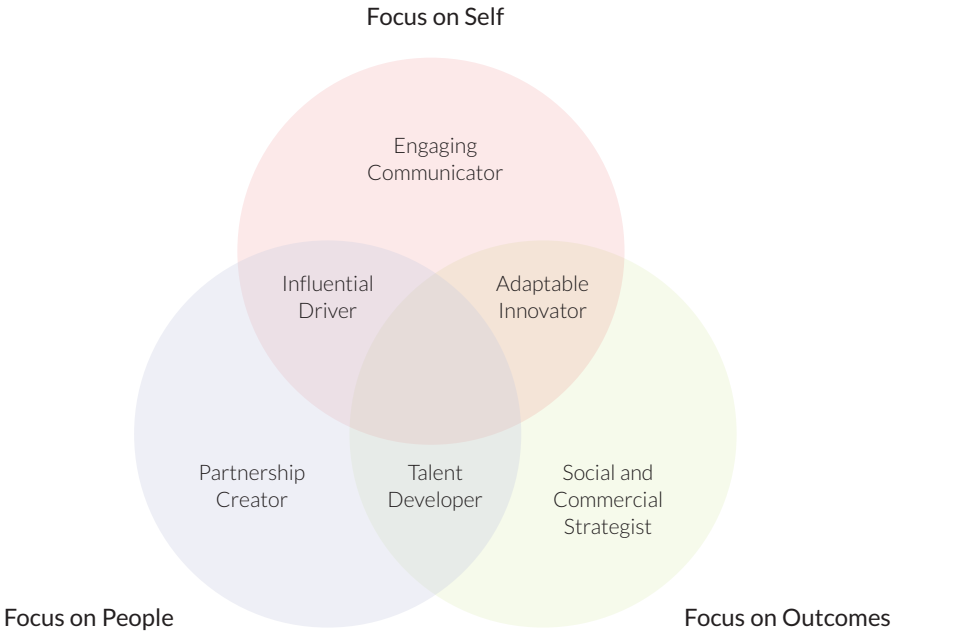
### **a Local Government Leadership Model**

From our research findings, GatenbySanderson has developed the Gaining Altitude model highlighting six leadership archetypes, which incorporate the combination of behaviours, skills and attributes required to deliver effectively across local government. These archetypes are overlaid by three core foci: the need to focus on self, on people and on executing on goals and achieving outcomes for the residents the local government models serve. The labels used in the model are less important. Too often in the debate, we can fixate on these issues and lose sight of what is important. What is crucial, however, is the identification of the required behaviours, attributes and skills to thrive in an evolving future.





# GS Gaining Altitude leadership model



**Influential Driver**  
Resilient, courageous and tenacious in seeing things through. Using sophisticated influencing skills, adapting their approach (be it with employees, members, or external stakeholders), winning hearts and minds and overcoming barriers to drive through new approaches or changes.

**Partnership Creator**  
Networking and using interpersonal skills to create strong, positive working relationships. Taking a collaborative approach to decision making and driving meaningful partnerships with external stakeholders to deliver a better service to residents.

**Engaging Communicator**  
Inspiring, engaging and engendering trust in others through: open, impactful communication and interactions; confidence; managing the Council’s impact and image; role modelling of accountability, trust, sensitivity and honesty.

**Talent Developer**  
Builds an empowering, positive, supportive team climate across boundaries, where conflict and poor performance are dealt with constructively. Proactively creates a more diverse, sustainable and effective workforce to meet future demands.

**Adaptable Innovator**  
Adaptable, innovative, learning focused and self-reflective. Able to flex in response to changing priorities, cultures and demands. Driving continuous transformation and evolution in the way the Council operates, thinks and delivers high quality services in a sustainable and cost-effective way.

**Social and Commercial Strategist**  
Navigating ambiguity and complexity to create a meaningful vision and strategy, and articulating this clearly to others. Balancing commercial awareness and keen financial acumen with a drive to keep residents and excellence in the services delivered to them at the heart of what they do, having social purpose.

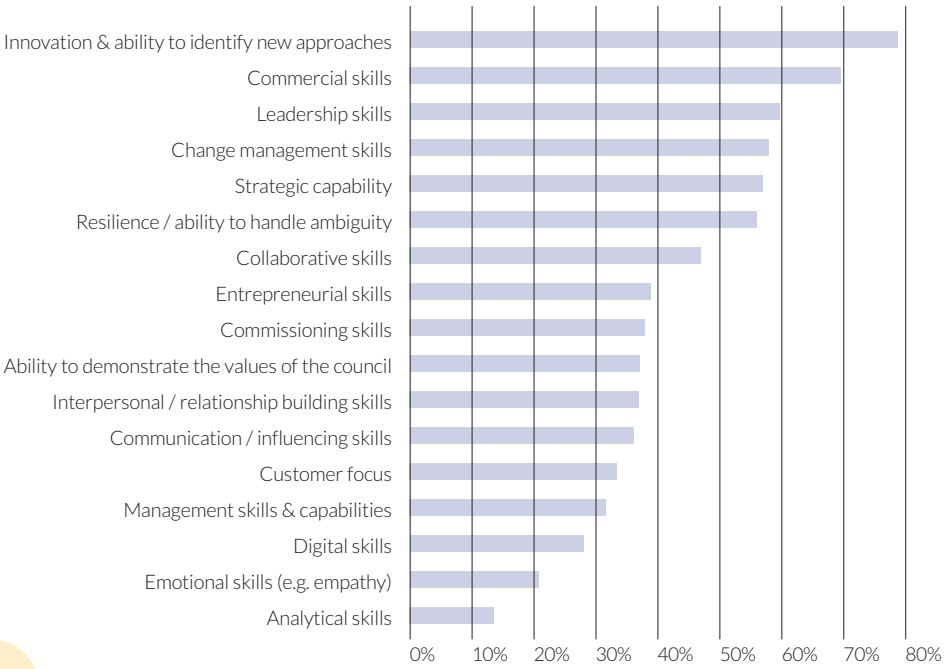
# How does leadership in local government need to change to meet the new challenges?

A key focus of our research was to draw out the skills and behaviours which are relatively new in local government leadership, or which are likely to be required to a greater extent in the future. These emerging skills needs are most likely to cause the greatest challenges, not only for existing leaders who were not always recruited for these skillsets, but to shape the necessary development and recruitment processes needed for successful placement of new leaders within councils.

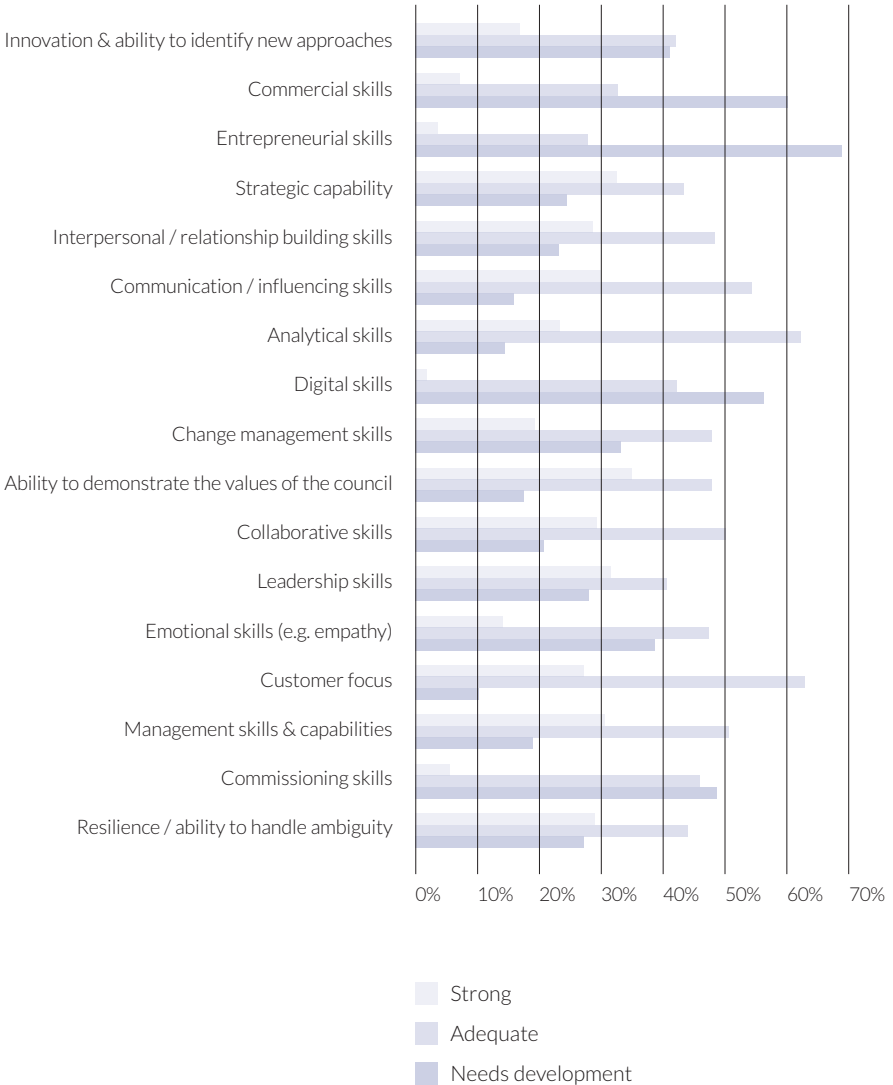
We have outlined our findings in relation to the key headings from our model, in order to ground the behaviours, skills and attributes covered within the model, and linking these to the context and challenges that local government leaders now face.

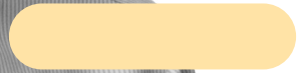


**Recruitment changes:  
Which aspects of senior leaders  
skillset have councils started  
to place greater value on?**



To what extent do current leaders possess these skills / behaviours?





# The Gaining Altitude Archetypes in more detail

## Engaging Communicator

Inspiring, engaging and engendering trust in others through: open, impactful communication and interactions; confidence; managing the Council's impact and image; role modelling of accountability, trust, sensitivity and honesty.

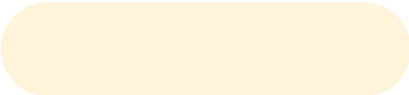
- Change management was seen as a development area for current senior leaders by around a third of respondents. New organisational models and approaches clearly require the ability to drive change within an organisation, motivating staff to be engaged and on-board through transition. Failure to do so is potentially catastrophic.
- Role modelling: leading others through change and encouraging resilience and openness of approach from them is achieved through clear communication, openness and transparency according to those senior leaders we interviewed; employees need to feel informed and involved in change to minimise the risk of resistance or simple misunderstanding of the vision and where the organisation is heading.
- Balancing openness and honesty with a sensitivity and recognition of the fears and concerns that change may bring for employees was a recurring theme from our interviews.
- Building trust amongst employees who may be feeling uncertain and wary in the context of changes to their roles and direction is key.
- The importance of an inspiring vision for the future is evidently a key part of a leader's role in change; communicating this both internally and with (potential) partners is essential if others are to be fully bought into the idea and get behind it.
- At the most senior levels, this engaging communication style extends to engagement with the public and external partners; these qualities required to engage and engender trust in the workforce are going to be increasingly important in managing the Council's impact and image in the context of a more challenging and varied citizen demographic.



## Adaptable Innovator

Adaptable, innovative, learning focused and self-reflective. Able to flex in response to changing priorities, cultures and demands. Driving continuous transformation and evolution in the way the Council operates, thinks and delivers high quality services in a sustainable and cost-effective way.

- In creating new structures and approaches, there will be greater ambiguity and the need to be open to change, open to learning and flexible around doing things differently. If they are to drive change and innovation, leaders need to be personally comfortable with change and able to respond flexibly to changing demands and priorities that a more ambiguous environment will, by definition, bring.
- Innovation and the ability to identify new approaches: 79% of HR representatives surveyed highlighted this as an area where senior leadership recruitment focus had increased – the highest percentage for any area of focus. It was also seen as a development area for existing senior leaders by over 40% of those surveyed.
- Driving an innovative culture and one where people are open to change will be key in the creation of new strategic approaches and models of working. Individuals need to feel free to propose and implement ideas which may have been seen as radical in the past. Risk management strategies, to ensure quality and cost-efficiency, should be balanced with the creation of an environment where considered risk is encouraged and leaders are prepared to back their teams in taking appropriate risks, rather than quashing suggestions or leaving individuals fearful of reprisals if their idea does not work out. Individuals need to feel able to contribute to an ongoing evolution of working approach, continuously seeking greater efficiency and quality in the way that services are delivered.



- Digital and technological skills, and openness to developing these are becoming increasingly important; highlighted as a development need for senior leaders by over half of respondents. This is a timely reminder that when greater innovation and new approaches to work need to be found, technology is often going to be a key factor in enhancing services or developing efficiencies. Awareness of the possibilities available through technology, and an adaptability and willingness to learn about them where appropriate, are likely to be increasingly important in the future, particularly in the context of an increasingly technology savvy population demographic, with the expectation of easy online access to services.

- This is an area where councils are likely to benefit from employees with experience outside the local government arena; be that in senior leadership roles or in other levels within the organisation. Broader experience will by its very nature bring new ideas and perspectives to consider. The importance of encouraging innovation in others and driving an innovative culture, with ideas generated by those ‘at the coal face’ cannot be underestimated. Leaders need to be open to new ideas and learning, and be flexible and adaptable themselves, so that others’ ideas are taken on board and capitalised on where appropriate.

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## Social and Commercial Strategist

Navigating ambiguity and complexity to create a meaningful vision and strategy, and articulating this clearly to others. Balancing commercial awareness and keen financial acumen with a drive to keep residents and excellence in the services delivered to them at the heart of what they do, having social purpose.

- Strategic thinking is an attribute which has always been in demand for senior leaders in local government, nevertheless, 57% of those surveyed in our research flagged this as an increased focus in recruitment. Our interviews and wider research linked this to the need for an increasingly long term perspective, the need to create and communicate an inspiring vision for the future, and handle the increasing complexity of strategic relationships which councils are becoming part of, whether with external commercial partners or other parts of the public sector such as Health Partners. They need to do this whilst navigating (and aiming to reduce) the ambiguity and uncertainty faced by the organisation, creating a clear strategic vision to reach the desired strategic outcomes.

- Commercial skills were identified as new leadership recruitment need by 70% of our survey respondents, and as key areas for development in existing leaders by almost two thirds of respondents. Related entrepreneurial skills were also a high priority. The commercial skillset shift is one which is likely to be felt as radical as compared to the local government models of the past. Income generation rises in strategic importance to ensure continued delivery of services in the context of ever-increasing public funding cuts. Many local government organisations already focus on this expertise when recruiting new senior leaders, and is frequently one of the most challenging requirements to find within those who have worked exclusively or primarily in local government as the historic opportunities to develop these skills to high levels of sophistication have been minimal.
- Aligned skills to support these, include financial and analytical capability, and an ability to conduct complex options-appraisal to identify the most practical, effective and efficient course of action are key.



- Strategic thinking in the context of citizen requirements is essential: outcome focus, balancing a 'social heart' with a 'commercial head'. Working with the needs of citizens in mind was repeatedly raised by our interviewees; planning to meet the current and future demands of citizens (recognising the increasingly varied demands of different generations; from meeting the future needs of the baby boomers as they age, through to generation z as they reach adulthood) is a core part of taking a more strategic approach. The quality of services will increasingly be scrutinised and assessed by how effectively they meet the potentially greatly varying needs and requirements of users. An outcome focus, balancing the commercial and financial pressures already discussed with a 'social heart' and desire to deliver outstanding services to meet citizens' needs is part of the core skillset for senior leaders.



- An obvious source of the commercial aspects of this requirement is to draw leaders from the private sector, at least initially. However, capitalising on this tactic as a means to embed and support an ongoing commercial and entrepreneurial mindset within local government will also require the sector to make compromises. Unless organisations can be open-minded about living with skills gaps that private sector leaders will inevitably have in delivering local government outcomes, it will slow its progress in commercialising. Achieving the diversity of outlook that will enable innovation means shifting our expectations and taking some short-term risks and concessions.

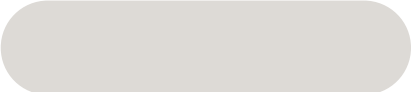
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## Talent Developer

Builds an empowering, positive, supportive team climate across boundaries, where conflict and poor performance are dealt with constructively. Proactively creates a more diverse, sustainable and effective workforce to meet future demands.

- A new style of leadership is required; 60% of survey respondents flagged leadership skills as a key area of change and increased focus for recruitment processes. Leaders are increasingly required to role model new behaviours, and to empower and inspire others to deliver in new ways, and identify efficiencies and improvements, rather than simply directing them. The workforce now contains entry level employees from generation z, alongside millennials through to baby boomers; the differing expectations and approach to work of these different generations has been well documented, and as a result, more than ever a flexibility of leadership approach, adapting to the individual is important in order to get the best out of everyone.
  - Considering the differing expectations and priorities of different generations within the workforce is becoming increasingly important. Developing existing talent to incorporate their strengths and bring fresh insight and ideas from them was a key theme in our research interviews. Consideration needs to be made of the best approach to talent management and how to develop internal talent and encourage them to stay; the concept of a 'job for life' is disappearing, and this will alter the way that both senior leaders and HR professionals need to approach succession planning and talent management within the council.
  - Flexibility of leadership style and new approaches to talent management will be required. Diversity of the workforce will support the innovation and drive for change that is becoming a core part of public service; senior leaders will need to embrace and encourage this, engaging and motivating an increasingly diverse employee base. A 'one size fits all' style of leadership will fail to get the best out of this diversity.
  - Sound performance management will remain as important as ever; but setting clear expectations becomes more challenging and increasingly important in an ambiguous and changing environment; leaders need to establish clear expectations and robust support and performance management processes in relation to these.
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## The Influential Driver

Resilient, courageous and tenacious in seeing things through. Using sophisticated influencing skills, adapting their approach (be it with employees, members, or external stakeholders), winning hearts and minds and overcoming barriers to drive through new approaches or changes.

- Resilience, optimism and tenacity are key in driving new models and approaches and delivering change programmes. 56% of our survey respondents described resilience as an area of increased focus in their recruitment of senior leaders. If leaders do not personally have the tenacity and resilience to see challenging projects through, who will drive them? Courage in the face of resistance, and the ability to bounce back and try a different approach is essential.
- Interpersonal and emotional skills, working effectively with a wide range of partners will be key in building strong and effective relationships, yet 39% of survey respondents felt that emotional skills were an area of development for current leaders. Broader interpersonal and emotional skills replace the old concept of 'political awareness'. An understanding of others, their emotions and how they are reacting to the changes and challenges facing them are core in delivering change successfully.

This understanding of others and how to work effectively with them is also key in partnership working with external partners and in interactions with members.

- Although political awareness has historically been a skillset we have been asked to look for in candidates for senior local government posts, this did not come across strongly in any of our strands of research. Rather, the self-same skills that were often alluded to as 'political awareness' in the local government context of the past are now being turned to a wider range of interactions. Understanding others, their perspective, how this may influence their reactions and behaviours, and how best to work with them in this context are becoming increasingly important across a wide range of interactions, not just when working with members in a political party context. Influencing employees to engage with and actively support the delivery of changing approaches, negotiating and influencing commercial partners, or partners from other public service sectors are just a few of the examples of how interpersonal skills and the understanding of others become vital in ensuring smooth and successful progress. Leaders need to apply these skills in differing scenarios, and be flexible in how they deliver them.



## Partnership Creator

Networking and using interpersonal skills to create strong, positive working relationships. Taking a collaborative approach to decision making and driving meaningful partnerships with external stakeholders to deliver a better service to citizens.

- Commissioning skills were seen as key development areas for existing leaders by almost 50% of respondents. The need to work with external partners, be it in a collaborative way or with a focus on contract management requires an ability to focus on outcomes, and manage contracts effectively, as well as a deeper strategic understanding of the needs of the local community in the council area.
- Broader networking and interpersonal skills were a regular feature of our interviews with existing leaders, and 47% of our survey respondents were increasingly looking for collaborative working skills in their recruitment of Directors and CEOs. Working across boundaries is becoming the new normal in local government. New leaders need to work with each other and encourage their teams to work outside existing silos too.

- Being aware of the needs and priorities of differing stakeholders, and adapting their approach to most effectively influence or work with them will be a core skill in the context of these more complex working relationships if leaders are to successfully work with partners from a wide range of backgrounds and organisations.

The relative weighting and importance of these skills in a given role in a given council will of course vary, but the underpinning skills required hold true across the wide range of councils we have worked with.

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# Does context matter?

When analysing the data outlined above we considered the type of council where respondents were based and found an astounding level of agreement, in terms of the highest priorities. Whilst there was some variation, the same core themes came through clearly. Order of priority and level of concern will inevitably vary dependent on specific context, but this could equally be true of two different county councils as much as when comparing a county council versus a London Borough.

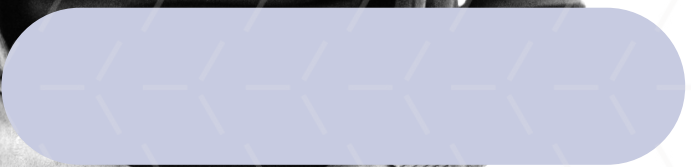
The reality is that, now and increasingly in the longer term, it will no longer be possible to put authorities neatly into categories and nor should we; organisational responses to their changing environment create service models that cross traditional boundaries, embrace joint working and create new models that have not yet been conceived. These are inevitably going to differ from council to council, and as such individual councils are becoming increasingly individual and differentiated in terms of their precise context. The capability to adapt one's behaviour and apply skills, behaviours and attributes in a flexible way to differing contexts will be key for senior leaders, regardless of the 'type' of council they are working in.

In our research we have also drawn upon evidence from senior leaders across the public sector to complement our data from local government leaders, including central government, health, education, housing, regulation and not-for-profit. This is particularly important given the likelihood of collaborative partnerships with these sectors, and the inherent value of understanding them, but also the increasingly mobile careers in this sector. If this is to be taken advantage of, rather than simply becoming a 'brain drain' there is a need to consider transferable behaviours and skills of employees, not just local government specific experience. It is of course essential that people are able to adapt and apply these skills within the local government context, and within different aspects of senior roles in local government.

Although terminology and context may have differed, we found that the underpinning skills, attributes and behaviours needed to tackle challenges faced across all parts of the public sector were strikingly similar. We have outlined our specific model for local government leaders above, taking account of the specific context within which skills need to be used in local government. Nevertheless, the behaviours, skills and attributes that sit underneath this model are also in demand across the public sector, where similar, though not identical, challenges are being faced.



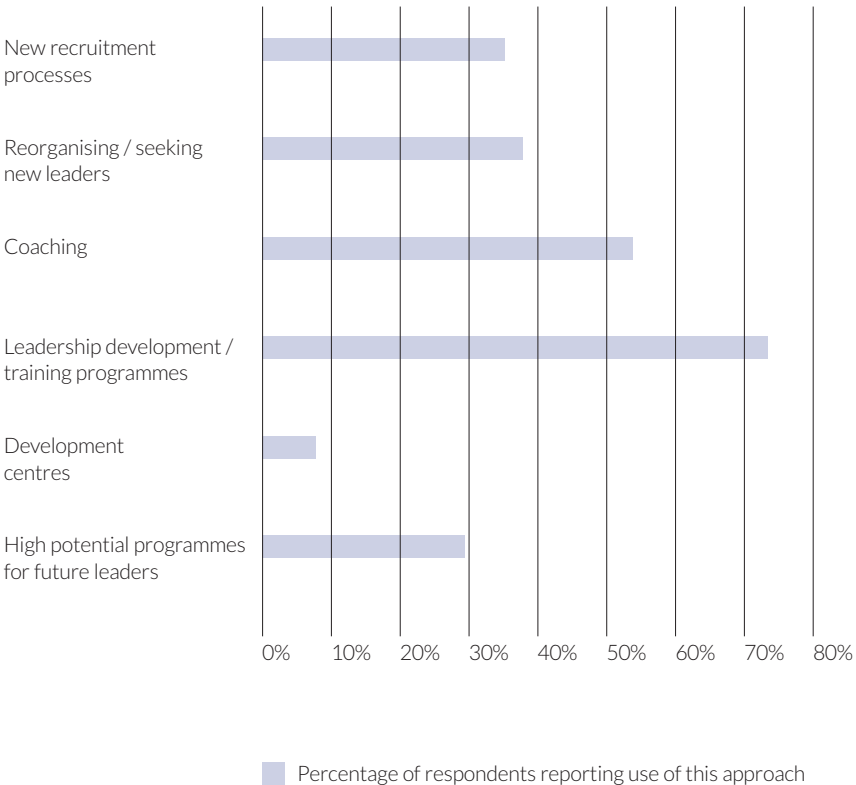
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# Bridging the skills gap

We asked our research participants what approach they were currently taking to address the skills gaps in their senior leadership team, based on the new requirements they had identified to meet the challenges of the future.

## Approaches being used to address skills gaps in current leadership team





By far the most popular option was the use of leadership development and training programmes, used by 73% of the respondents' councils, followed by coaching. Interestingly, the only other developmental option, the use of development centres, was the least popular approach, with only 8% of respondents reporting that their council were using these. Given the importance of ensuring that leadership development programmes and coaching are focused on the right skills, this is an interesting finding. In our experience, development centres are sometimes perceived as being less appropriate for senior posts; however, when pitched correctly this need not be the case, and in the context of changes in requirements of senior leaderships it would appear that this is a technique which may not be being used to its full potential.



Changes to recruitment processes to ensure that they assess the new requirements were being used by just over a third of respondents' councils, whilst slightly more (38%) were going through some form of reorganisation and seeking new leaders to meet their needs.

Finally, 29% of respondents stated that their council was running high potential programmes for future leaders. As such, perhaps unsurprisingly, the immediate focus for most councils appears to be upskilling and development of the existing leadership team. There is some degree of focus on how to develop those at levels below to ready them for leadership posts, as well as consideration of how to bring in new senior talent to fill gaps in the skills required for the future. Key across all of these areas will be having a set of clearly defined skills, qualities and attributes to assess and develop individuals against; Gaining Altitude is designed to provide this structure.

No single leader can be the expert in all of these archetypes. What is critical for any organisation is to consider which component behaviours will differentiate strategic success in their context and also to think beyond the individual to analyse the depth and breadth of leadership skills across a leadership team or cohort.

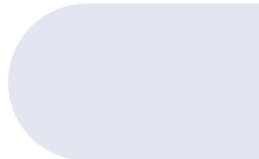
# Best Practice Talent Approaches: it's about more than a leadership programme

The above suggests a significant emphasis being placed on activities to plug future leadership gaps and meet future requirements by HR and talent teams across the sector. The area of most significant investment is in the commissioning of leadership programmes; typically targeted at the executive and next layer, in more forward thinking organisations, at the identification and development of future talent.

What the sector does less consistently - and this is an issue in many other sectors too - is that it jumps straight from 'what is happening with our leaders' to a 'leadership programme solution' without fully exploring or investing in diagnosing the underlying cause of leadership gaps and the implication of failing to act. Unless organisations do their due diligence in commissioning leadership development, they will find that solutions fail to connect the leadership programme to tangible behavioural change in leaders that is pivotal to delivery of the future strategy. Furthermore, they will lack the 'base case' upon which to measure the impact of leadership interventions, missing the opportunity to assess value for money and return on investment in the solution.

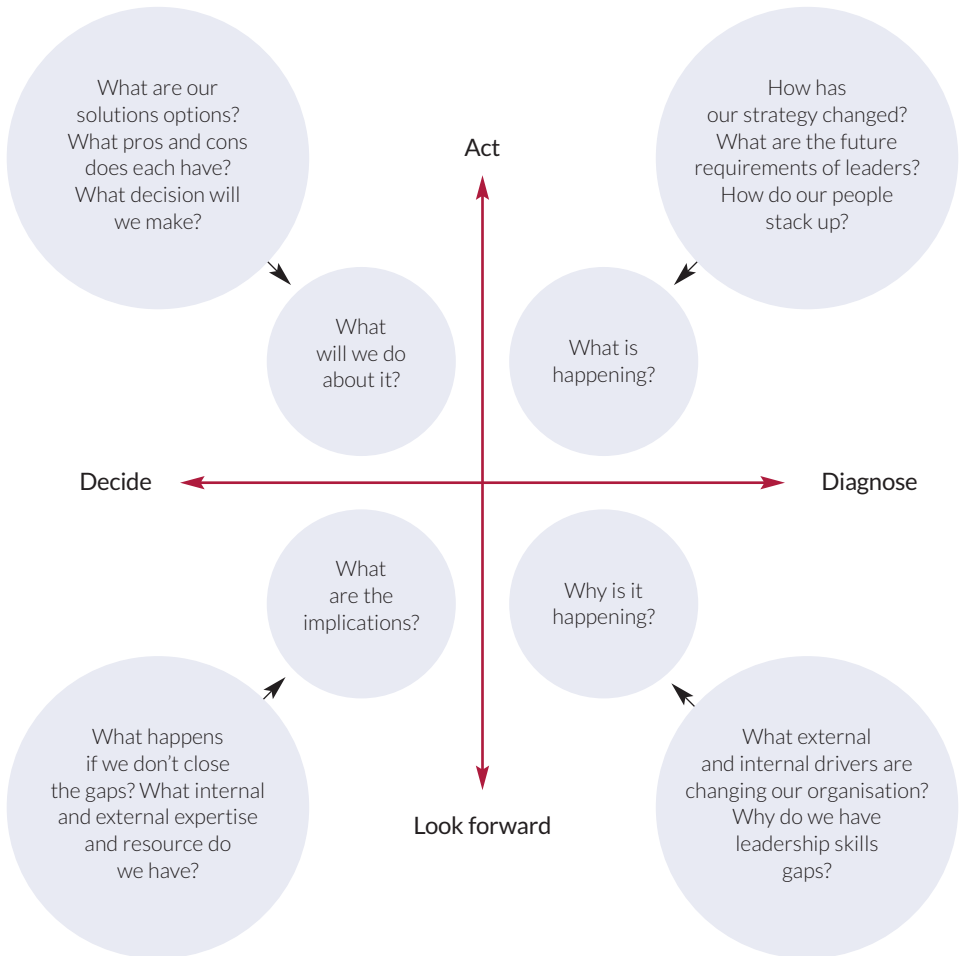
We advocate instead, a holistic approach that places granular leadership behaviour and activity at the heart of the requirement but that also gets to the underlying cause so that the HR and organisational development solutions are able to invest in a longer-term more sustainable solution. Adapting the work of Kolb and his well-documented learning styles approach, we can turn this into a decision-making model:

**“**  
**Unless organisations do their due diligence in commissioning leadership development, they will find that solutions fail to connect the leadership programme to tangible behavioural change in leaders that is pivotal to delivery of the future strategy.**  
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## Approach to talent planning



A best practice and holistic approach to talent strategy and planning will ensure that the following factors are considered:

- Talent strategy and planning: is the organisation's strategy informed and influenced by its talent insights and predictions?
- Metrics based: does the organisation make informed decisions about where to place its talent investments and is it able to predict the returns it will get?
- Reach and diversity: does the organisation take full advantage of the diverse talent market today across public and private sectors and is it well positioned to continue to do so in the future?
- Talent attraction: is the organisation always able to attract the talent that it needs, when it needs it, and in the quantities required to achieve all its organisation's goals?
- Development: do the organisation's talent and leadership development programmes deliver all the benefits that both the organisation and the talent itself demands?
- Retention: is the organisation able to retain its talent all of the time and proactively manage turnover?
- Innovation: is the organisation an originator of sector leading thinking and best practices – do its neighbours and 'competitors' typically copy or look to it as an exemplar?
- Employer brand and value proposition: is the organisation able to adjust its employer brand and employee value proposition to meet its evolving organisation and talent requirements?
- Governance and leadership: do the organisation's executives eagerly devote substantial amounts of their time to talent? Do councillors see the value of talent as a strategic focus?
- Talent processes: does the organisation have talent systems, processes, information and service delivery capability that is flexible and has the right capacity?
- Culture: is talent management and aspiration to behave in alignment with values a part of the organisational DNA?



# Conclusions

Local government remains at the epicentre of sweeping change providing a catalyst for new thinking and a more dynamic workforce. As a result, we see the growing importance of 'place' over locality, new organisational constructs and the metamorphosis of more traditional organisational and role boundaries into those of partner organisations. All new organisational models – inter-authorities, combined authorities, LEPs and locally grown service centred partnerships – require leaders to shift mind-set beyond their own organisational boundaries and to get things done without reliance on direct control over resources. We should allow these different organisational models to thrive and recognise that succeeding in any future context requires a far more sophisticated repertoire of leadership behaviours and a more versatile leadership style than ever before.

The quest to define future local government leadership has inspired this research and has identified the differentiators of success in the new delivery world. These differentiating behaviours are articulated as six leadership archetypes: descriptors that define what the best leaders of the future will do. No single leader can be the expert in all of these archetypes. What is critical for any organisation is to consider which behaviours will differentiate strategic success in their context and also to think beyond the individual to analyse the depth and breadth of leadership skills across the leadership cadre.

If the end game is a leadership 'bench' ready to take on the full complexity that future local government will throw at it, then we need to collectively adopt some new, very practical tactics to get to that result. We advocate a holistic approach to talent strategy and planning that places granular leadership behaviour and skills at the heart and connects talent to other organisational development initiatives to ensure long term sustainable talent solutions.

For future local government leaders, these are exciting times. Perhaps the greatest outcome in meeting the challenges of the sector will be not just the enrichment of individual career fulfilment and purpose, but the longer term augmentation of services to local communities.

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