

# Future Councillors

## Future Councillors – an introduction

Local government is under pressure. Councils are already tackling budget cuts of 28% and face a tough outlook in the next spending review. This is driving an unprecedented process of change as local authorities radically reform their services to meet the challenges of a new age of austerity.

Councillors are on the frontline. They have to make the difficult choices about what services stay and what go, what can be transformed and what be decommissioned. Political leaders have to lead the process of innovation, adaptation and change. They must do so against a backdrop of declining trust in politics.

NLGN has created a unique two day programme to support councillors in thinking about how to rise to this leadership challenge. Combining research and training, we are offering to elected members a unique opportunity to grow their own capacity while working alongside the NLGN team and a panoply of other experts to understand what the markers of success for a councillor in the future will look like.

This will result in a provocation paper on the future of political leadership, shaped by the participants in this programme and including their contributions. NLGN is inviting all of its member authorities to nominate up to two councillors to take part in this programme.

The flow of the programme is simple. Day one is a 'futures day' where we will work collaboratively to understand and sketch out the differing types of new councillor we will need. Day two is a 'proposition day' where will offer members the opportunity to test the range of new roles and skills needed to bring these new models of the locally elected politician to life.

## The Sessions

### *Futures Day*

*Novotel Hotel, London Bridge*

*Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2013, 10.00 – 16.00*

This day will look at the councillor of the future. Together we will work through the core democratic challenges locally elected politicians face. Building on this shared learning we will project forward and sketch out what sort of roles councillors in future can be expected to assume. Should they be community leaders, social entrepreneurs, facilitators? What roles should backbenchers seek to take on and how can the council help them?

Using expert inputs and scenario planning methodology, we will explore the new roles for the future councillor. This is broken to in to distinct parts of the day;

- Trend analysis – what trends are affecting the future of local democracy? How important and uncertain are these? This part of the day will help us develop a list of *critical uncertainties* that we will use as the building blocks of what will be our scenario's.
- Scenario building – what potential futures are there for local democracy? What new demands might be placed upon councillors?
- Role development – how will councillors have to change to thrive in each of these scenarios? This will result in a series of profiles for the future councillor.

## Proposition Day

Novotel Hotel, London Bridge  
Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2013, 10.00 – 16.00

The second session will allow members to test out the tools, insight and ideas available to councillors and discuss where they fit into the profiles we have crafted in session one. The proposition day will scope the challenge. We will cover of the financial and current political conditions in which we're working and what this means for the pace of change in democracy. We will also draw on the experience of existing senior political figures in local government who are leading their organisations through immense change. We will focus on three distinct *undeniable truths* as the basis for the afternoon of this day. These undeniable truths are areas where there is almost universal acceptance that councillors will need engage.

- Scoping the challenge and political leadership – wider context setting and priming for the day. This will also act as the refresher for the first day and walk through that experience.
- Politics and Innovation – most books about innovation in public services tend to assume that it's all done by clever officers and active communities whilst neglecting the role local politicians can play. This session will consider how councillors can play a more active role, using their unique democratic link, to drive positive change in policy. It will include practical tools that you can deploy within your organisation.
- Community leadership – there is a lot of talk about councillors focusing less on making decisions and more on finding ways to help people make decisions for themselves. But what does this really mean in practice? This session will focus on how local politicians can begin to understand how they mobilise the sleeping resource in their communities.

- Digital democracy – many people assume that social media and process such as participatory budgeting can effectively draw local people into local decision making processes. This session will test the limits of technology and explore how far we can use digital channels to connect and engage with communities. It will include practical tools and ideas you can deploy within your own organisation.
- Budgeting for change – many members are keen to take a far greater role in the financial planning of their local authorities. This session will explore what skills and capabilities you will need to effectively manage a process of reshaping budgets. How can local politicians drive transformational change by challenging assumptions and incremental thinking?



## The Final Product

### *Final Report*

The final product of this exercise will be a short NLGN provocation paper of perhaps 5,000 – 10,000 words exploring key issues for the future of local democracy, setting out scenarios for the future and describing the changing roles of elected members. This will be the third in a series of similar papers which has so far included *Future Councils* and *Future Citizens*.

## Contact

If you or are a colleague are interested in attending then please reserve your place by contacting Philip Baker at [pbaker@nlgn.org.uk](mailto:pbaker@nlgn.org.uk) or on 0203 617 9133.

These development and learning workshops are completely free to attend.

We look forward to seeing you there.

*Simon Parker, NLGN, and Guy Clifton, Grant Thornton*



7 Henrietta Street  
London  
WC2E 8PS  
Tel: 020 3617 9130  
Email: [info@nlgn.org.uk](mailto:info@nlgn.org.uk)  
[www.nlgn.org.uk](http://www.nlgn.org.uk)  
 [@nlgnthinktank](https://twitter.com/nlgnthinktank)