



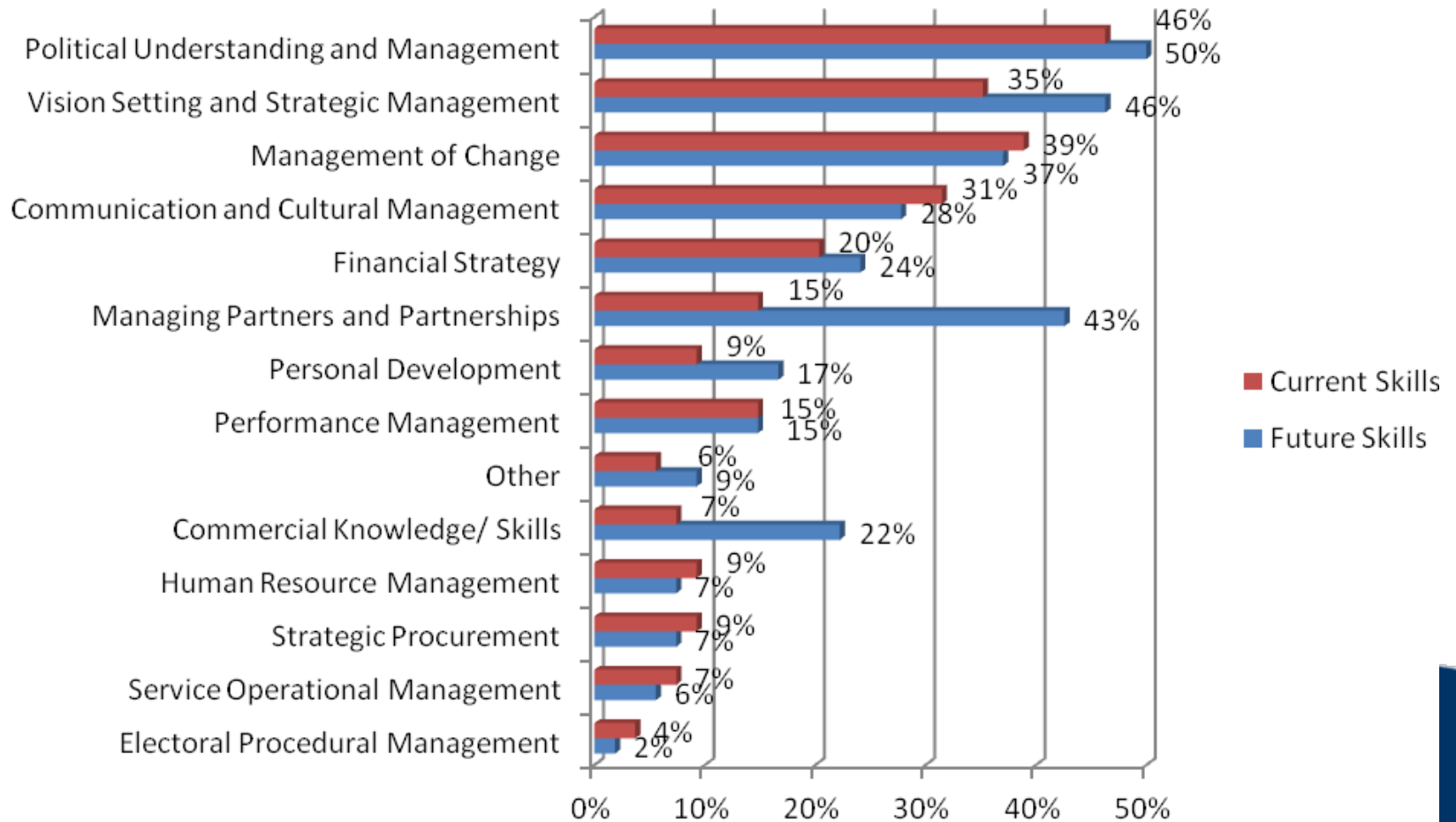
WORKING WITH COUNCILLORS IN A POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

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SENIOR MANAGERS – ALL COUNCILS – KEY SKILLS



Working With Councillors- Programme

- ❖ Clarify the roles and responsibilities of councillors and officers
- ❖ Councillor & Officer relationships, challenges and opportunities
- ❖ Councillor & officers causes of tension
- ❖ The ideal working arrangement between councillors and officers
- ❖ Developing 'Political Astuteness'





COUNCILLOR OFFICER RELATIONSHIPS

“Effective councillor/officer relations depend upon trust and clear and honest communication in both directions. You certainly don’t need to be friends; what you need is respect and understand your distinct roles. My golden rule is no surprises in either direction”

Dave Hodgson (Lib Dem) Mayor of Bedford





KEY ISSUES & CHALLENGES

What are the key issues and challenges when working with Councillors?





Political Awareness- Councillor & Officer Relationship

Councillor

- ❖ Political
- ❖ Lay
- ❖ Often part-time
- ❖ Recruited by party
- ❖ Elected
- ❖ Representative
- ❖ Allowances

Problems are built into the system/relationship because councillors and officers are cast for different roles and because they are drawn from different backgrounds

Officer

- Non-political
- Professional
- Managerial
- Recruited by organisation
- Appointed
- Non-representative
- Salaried

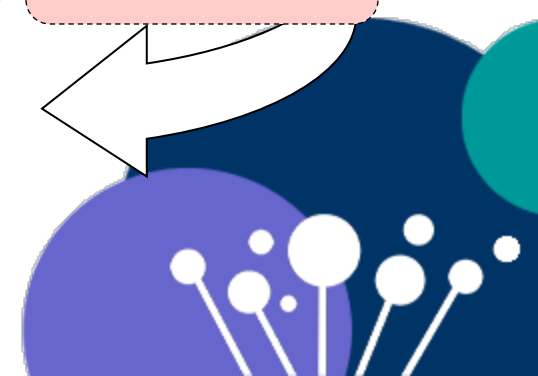
Outsider

•Against this background of difference: conflict is almost inevitable

- Little common language
- Hard to appreciate each others viewpoint

Frustration can build up

Insider





Officer Expectations of Councillors

- ❖ Clear Agenda
- ❖ Vision and Commitment to it
- ❖ Leadership
- ❖ Good communication
- ❖ Decisive
- ❖ Compliance with ethical standards
- ❖ Let officers implement





Councillor Expectations of Officers

- ❖ Anticipate problems and find solutions
- ❖ Understand politics, politicians and the political climate
- ❖ Integrity
- ❖ Professional advice, not influenced by political views
- ❖ No surprises





Potential Causes of Conflict Between Councillors and Officers

- ❖ Demands and expectations
- ❖ Breakdown in communication
- ❖ Personality clashes ‘Leader and CX’
“ The relationship between the leader of a council and its chief executive is a key one. When it is going well, there is very little a council can’t achieve; if there are issues that remain unresolved, the opposite is the case. Like any relationship, it takes time and effort to get the most out of it – it is a complex, multi- faceted relationship”
- ❖ Constraints e.g. financial and political
- ❖ Lack of understanding of each role
- ❖ Change of power
- ❖ Central Govt. policy/legislation e.g. planning





Making the Councillor and Officer Relationship Work Effectively

- ❖ Learn to anticipate potential areas of difficulty and disagreement
- ❖ Where conflict arises be constructive and look for solutions E.g. mediation
- ❖ *Agree Councillor/Officer protocols for dealing with problems (Review protocol in Constitution)*
- ❖ Avoid close familiarity can compromise professionalism
- ❖ Councillors should respect officers' impartiality



SEE Ideal Collaborative Arrangement Between Councillors and Officers?

A clear sense of direction, with priorities set and underpinned with resources

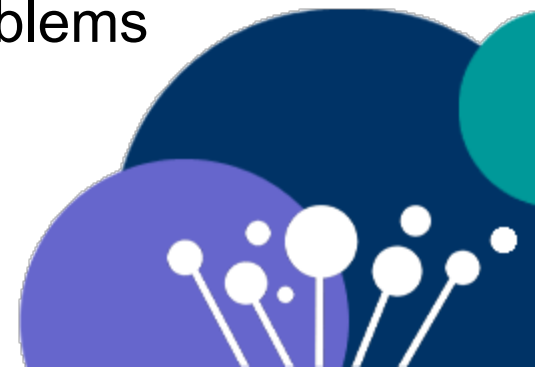
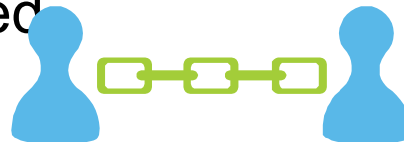
Clarity and understanding about respective roles

Clarity and understanding about sharing/providing information

Trust and respect – 2 way

Councillor/Officer protocol for dealing with problems

Regularly reviewed





Political Astuteness Skills & Attributes

- Personal skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Reading people and situations
- Building alignment and alliances
- Strategic direction and scanning





HOW CAN YOU DEVELOP POLITICAL ASTUTENESS?

Exposure to councillors – on the job experience

Self evaluation- what went well, less so and why?

Get feedback from a your boss/mentor e.g. appraisal

Developing working relationships with councillors

(Refer to the Political Astuteness checklist)

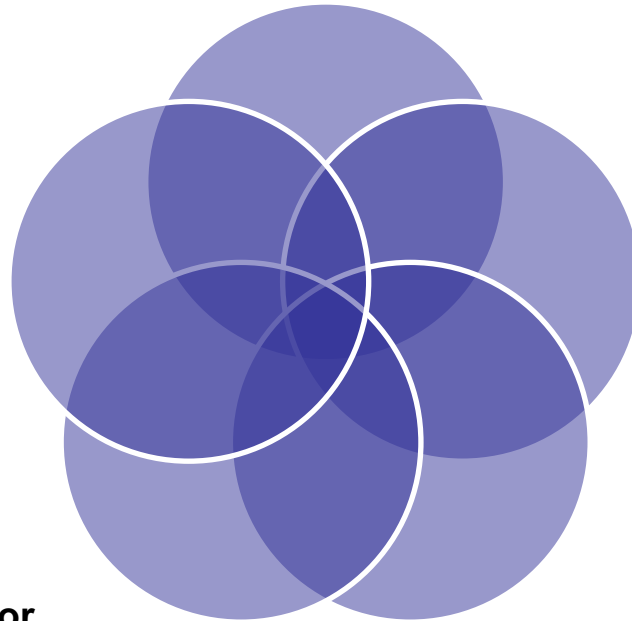




WORKING WITH COUNCILLORS SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Treat Councillors of all parties fairly and even-handedly.

Always confine your advice to council business, not party business. .. Never breach a confidence



Always be alert to issues which are contentious or politically sensitive.

Where conflict arises be constructive-look for solutions.

Learn to anticipate potential areas of difficulty and disagreement.....and try to avoid conflict.

