



Belfast City Council

Elected Members Knowledge and Skills Framework

Councillors by their very nature have strong leadership instincts and they must continuously develop those skills to ensure that they are able to meet the challenges, opportunities and risks that come with the Belfast Agenda.

The landscape is far more complex than it was a decade ago and local government has a democratic right to provide leadership across a geographic area, not confined to local government services, but a right to influence every aspect of services provided locally.

Developing new leadership skills to meet this challenge is vital and it is through shared learning that Councillors can and will maximise the opportunity to provide genuine local leadership. The aim of this Elected Members' Knowledge and Skills framework is to provide a foundation for the support and development we offer to our elected members by providing a mechanism that allows members to assess their own knowledge and skills against the framework to ensure they are fulfilling their role effectively and inform our member development planning process.

“We believe that great leaders make great places”

(The Local Government Association)



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Members can assess their skill levels from section B by completing their Personal Development Plan self-assessment and create a development plan to increase any skill levels required.



A. Knowledge

1. Understanding our city, our council and our customers - understanding the city of Belfast, the political nature of our organisation and the member role in addressing the needs of constituents and customers within the city.

An effective elected member knows and understands:	An effective elected member demonstrates the following skills:	An effective elected member considers:
<p>The various roles undertaken by an elected member.</p> <p>The issues affecting our city and neighbourhoods and particularly within his/her own district electoral area (DEA).</p> <p>The demographic profile of Belfast and the associated socio and economic issues to be addressed.</p> <p>Elected member role in relation to local government finance and budgetary controls.</p> <p>The Belfast Agenda and the wider council agenda in the city context.</p> <p>The priority areas and objectives for service delivery as outlined in the Corporate Plan.</p>	<p>Customer focus</p> <p>Political understanding</p> <p>Research</p> <p>Effective communication</p> <p>Diplomacy</p> <p>Influencing</p> <p>Decision-making</p> <p>Interpersonal</p>	<p>In what ways do I role model the council's values and principles of public life?</p> <p>In what ways do I actively represent party group views and values through decisions and my actions?</p> <p>How do I ensure that I work effectively with party colleagues, member colleagues and officers to achieve a one council approach?</p> <p>In what ways do I work across party boundaries without comprising political values?</p> <p>In what ways do I develop own political understanding of and sensitivity to the local and national political landscape?</p> <p>How do I ensure I am aware of issues which may impact or affect change, services or decisions?</p>



1(cont'd) Understanding our city, our council and our customers - understanding the city of Belfast, the political nature of our organisation; and the member role in addressing the needs of constituents and customers within the city.

An effective elected member knows and understands:	An effective elected member demonstrates the following skills:	An effective elected member considers:
<p>Core processes such as business and financial planning, risk management, health and safety and human resources.</p> <p>The council's decision-making processes.</p> <p>The council's community planning role and how this links to the Local Development Plan.</p> <p>The structure and work of the council, including the remit and plans of the council's committees.</p> <p>The process for identifying and prioritising physical development initiatives including the stage approval process relating to capital investment.</p> <p>Senior officer roles and responsibilities and key contact points.</p> <p>The council culture and values and how these impact on decision-making.</p>		<p>Do I regularly and successfully anticipate future needs to continue to deliver excellent customer service, value for money and efficiencies?</p> <p>In what ways do I invest time in building and maintaining an understanding of the reality, pressures, challenges and opportunities facing communities and constituents?</p> <p>In what ways do I advocate contributions from the community in shaping our ambitions for the city?</p> <p>How do I incorporate constituent feedback into council plans and service delivery where necessary?</p>



2. Strategic leadership - strong, fair and trusted leadership focusing on developing ambitions for the city for better outcomes for those who live in, work in and visit the city.

An effective elected member knows and understands:	An effective elected member demonstrates the following skills:	An effective elected member considers:
<p>The issues to be addressed within the city particularly as detailed in the Belfast Agenda.</p> <p>Knowledge of council aspirations, priorities, objectives, plans and processes.</p> <p>The importance of engaging on a cross-sectoral basis and how this can best be utilised to maximise benefits for citizens.</p> <p>How to work across party political boundaries to influence the Programme for Government and position Belfast as pivotal to the economic success of the region.</p>	<p>Strategic thinking and planning</p> <p>Leadership</p> <p>Effective communication</p> <p>Innovation and creative thinking</p>	<p>Do I act as the public face of the council, championing its needs and ambitions to key stakeholders?</p> <p>Do I demonstrate strong political and personal leadership to achieve outcomes for the city?</p> <p>In what ways do I role model appropriate behaviour, ethical practice and the implementation of the democratic process?</p> <p>How do I influence the council's future aspirations and strategic focus for the benefit of the city?</p> <p>What steps do I take to develop and promote the council's role in partnership with others?</p> <p>Am I personally committed to building, shaping and influencing a powerful strategy to implement the Belfast Agenda?</p> <p>Am I visible in my community, regularly attending relevant groups and meetings of outside bodies?</p>



2 (cont'd) Strategic leadership - strong, fair and trusted leadership focusing on developing ambitions for the city for better outcomes for those who live in, work in and visit the city.

An effective elected member knows and understands:	An effective elected member demonstrates the following skills:	An effective elected member considers:
		<p>Am I visible as a political leader within my DEA, my local community and across the city?</p> <p>Do I look for and maximise potential opportunities which will contribute to the success of our council and the city?</p> <p>How do I ensure I contribute to effective and meaningful consultation and engagement with members and officers in establishing corporate ambitions and priorities?</p> <p>How do I ensure members collective agreed ambitions for the city are realised?</p> <p>In what ways do I demonstrate resilience and integrity when facing challenges?</p> <p>Do I visibly display passion and belief for the Belfast Agenda acting as a credible champion and role model?</p>



3. Community leadership - engages enthusiastically and empathetically with the community in order to learn, understand and act upon issues of local concern; mediates fairly and constructively, encouraging trust by representing their district electoral area and the city as a whole.

An effective elected member knows and understands:	An effective elected member demonstrates the following skills:	An effective elected member considers:
<p>What is required to gain the confidence and trust of communities in order to act as a community leader and deliver tangible results.</p> <p>The current issues faced by their local community and how they can contribute to multi-agency strategies and action plans to address the problems being experienced.</p> <p>Equality and diversity issues including responsibilities under legislation.</p> <p>How to deal effectively with the complex and diverse range of issues faced by individual constituents.</p> <p>How the NI Assembly's Programme for Government and national government developments will affect individual citizens and communities.</p>	<p>Advocacy</p> <p>Interpersonal skills</p> <p>Effective communication</p> <p>Listening skills</p> <p>Assertiveness</p> <p>Leadership</p> <p>Networking</p> <p>Public speaking</p> <p>Negotiating</p> <p>Influencing</p> <p>Negotiation</p> <p>Facilitation</p> <p>Problem-solving</p>	<p>How do I display civic leadership and demonstrate a proactive approach in developing local initiatives?</p> <p>In what ways do I communicate and engage proactively with community, canvas opinion and seek new ways of representing others?</p> <p>Am I approachable, empathetic and understanding when dealing with constituents?</p> <p>In what ways do I effectively communicate political values through canvassing, electoral campaigning and engaging the public in general?</p> <p>How do I ensure I act ethically at all times?</p>



3 (cont'd). Community leadership - engages enthusiastically and empathetically with the community in order to learn, understand and act upon issues of local concern; mediates fairly and constructively, encouraging trust by representing their district electoral area and the city as a whole.

An effective elected member knows and understands:	An effective elected member demonstrates the following skills:	An effective elected member considers:
		How do I evaluate and address the impact of new developments or shifts in the political environment? Do I campaign with enthusiasm, courage and persistence on behalf of others? Do I provide regular feedback, keep people informed and manage expectations?



4. Working with others - Working together with officers, partners and other stakeholders to deliver excellent service delivery and ensure Belfast city is a successful place where people love to live, work and visit and which attracts investment and talent.

An effective elected member knows and understands:	An effective elected member demonstrates the following skills:	An effective elected member considers:
<p>The requirements of the Member-Officer Working Relationship Protocol.</p> <p>The priorities of stakeholders and how these can be aligned to council priorities to deliver benefits for the city.</p> <p>The roles of officers, members and different partners and agencies.</p> <p>How the benefits of collaborative working assists Belfast citizens.</p> <p>The relevant equality and diversity legislation and the importance of advancing the equality agenda.</p> <p>The importance of recognising and embracing the differences between people for the benefit of the council, its employees and stakeholders.</p>	<p>Team working</p> <p>Effective communication</p> <p>Decision-making</p> <p>Partnership working</p>	<p>How do I support a harmonious working environment and a culture of mutual respect?</p> <p>Am I tolerant when others express their views, even when different from my own?</p> <p>Do I assess the impact of my own behaviour on my colleagues and others I interact with?</p> <p>Do I adopt a consultative approach to ensure less well represented groups can contribute to and inform service delivery?</p> <p>Do I have a clear understanding of the distinct yet complementary role of members and officers?</p> <p>How do I successfully build professional and constructive relationships with officers and member colleagues?</p> <p>How do I ensure these relationships are based on open communication, collaborative working, trust and respect?</p>



4 (cont'd). Working with others - Working together with officers, partners and other stakeholders to deliver excellent service delivery and ensure Belfast city is a successful place where people love to live, work and visit and which attracts investment and talent.

An effective elected member knows and understands:	An effective elected member demonstrates the following skills:	An effective elected member considers:
		<p>In what ways do I work effectively with council officers to deliver corporate priorities?</p> <p>Do I work across party boundaries without compromising political values?</p> <p>Do I know when to empower others to take responsibility but also when to provide support?</p> <p>In what ways do I make others feel valued, trusted and included, especially those from different communities and backgrounds?</p> <p>What steps do I take to develop and promote the council's role in partnership with others?</p> <p>To what extent do I demonstrate a commitment to equality through representing all groups equally and impartially?</p> <p>How do I develop and maintain constructive relationships with other politicians and council members, the press, partner organisations whilst dealing with issues of sensitivity and public interest?</p> <p>In what ways do I develop cohesion within the party and contribute to constructive communication between the Party and the council?</p>



5. Good governance and due diligence - Understands and performs the role by following/adhering to standing orders and protocols; evaluates arguments and makes decisions that balances public needs and local policy; acts ethically, consistently and with integrity when communicating values or representing group views in decisions and actions; and ensures progress by monitoring and intervening where appropriate.

An effective elected member knows and understands:	An effective elected member demonstrates the following skills:	An effective elected member considers:
<p>The detail of the council's constitution and the council's governance arrangements, including the standing orders.</p> <p>How the council manages its money including the rate setting process.</p> <p>The requirements of the Councillor's Code of Conduct and planning guidance.</p> <p>The relevant legislation and regulations which determine how the council performs its role.</p> <p>Audit, governance and risk management processes.</p> <p>Performance management and performance Indicators.</p>	<p>Political understanding</p> <p>Analytical</p> <p>Providing constructive feedback</p> <p>Scrutiny and challenge</p> <p>Decision-making</p> <p>Chairing meetings</p> <p>Fraud awareness</p>	<p>Do I adhere to the LG Code of Conduct for Councillors when undertaking my role as an elected representative?</p> <p>Do I evaluate arguments according to evidence, making informed and impartial judgements?</p> <p>Do I chair meetings effectively, following protocol, ensuring business is conducted effectively & efficiently?</p> <p>Do I follow governance arrangement processes, balancing public needs & aspirations with corporate priorities?</p> <p>In what ways do I monitor performance & intervene appropriately to ensure progress?</p> <p>Am I able to quickly analyse & assimilate complex information & data, taking account of the wider strategic context?</p> <p>Am I inquisitive, asking for explanations and check for implementation of agreed actions and recommendations?</p> <p>Am I objective, rigorous and resolute in challenging process, decisions and people?</p>



6. Personal impact - Is self-aware, acts proactively, is responsible for own actions with a focus on continued learning and development and communicates effectively.

An effective elected member knows and understands:	An effective elected member demonstrates the following skills:	An effective elected member considers:
<p>The council's media relations protocol.</p> <p>The council's member personal development planning process.</p> <p>How to access developmental opportunities which will enhance and improve their skills and capabilities.</p> <p>How to best use information and technology to maximise communication and improve personal efficiency and effectiveness.</p>	<p>Emotional intelligence</p> <p>Dealing effectively with the media</p> <p>Effective Chairing</p> <p>Presentation</p> <p>Communicating with Impact</p> <p>Dealing with the Media including use of social media</p> <p>Effective time management</p> <p>IT</p> <p>Personal organisation</p>	<p>In what ways does my communication approach generate commitment and enthusiasm to the council's strategic vision?</p> <p>Do I listen sensitively, check for understanding and adapt my communication style as necessary?</p> <p>What meaningful contribution do I make as a political leader during interactions and dealings with the media to deliver key council messages?</p> <p>In what ways do I seek to improve my own performance?</p> <p>In what ways do I contribute to developing others and share best practice?</p> <p>Do I engage in the member personal development planning process and associated learning and development activities?</p> <p>What learning have I applied from participation in learning and development activities?</p>



6 (cont'd). Personal impact - Is self-aware, acts proactively, is responsible for own actions with a focus on continued learning and development and communicates effectively.

An effective elected member knows and understands:	An effective elected member demonstrates the following skills:	An effective elected member considers:
		<p>How do I ensure I present arguments in a concise, meaningful and easily understood way?</p> <p>How effective am I in juggling numerous, potentially conflicting, professional and personal responsibilities to maintain a good work-life balance?</p> <p>How do I build relationships with local media and create opportunities for communicating key decisions, activities and achievements?</p> <p>Do I speak clearly and confidently in public, using accessible language, avoiding jargon or 'Council speak'?</p> <p>Do I use appropriate language to communicate key points verbally and in writing (including via letters, reports, interviews and presentations)?</p> <p>How self-aware am I of the impact of my behaviour and way of working on others?</p> <p>Am I a participative team-member by providing input and constructive feedback in meetings and group discussions?</p> <p>How do I use ICT to communicate both within the council and in the community?</p>



B. Political Skills for Elected Members

- 1. Regulating and monitoring - understands and executes role by following standing orders and protocols and by evaluating arguments and making decisions that balance public needs and local policy. Ensures progress by monitoring and intervening where necessary.**

Positive indicators	Negative Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• provides civic leadership and demonstrates a proactive approach in the development of local initiatives.• engages proactively with community, canvass's opinion and seeks new ways of representing others.• keeps up to date with community and issues of local concern, drawing information and resources from a range of sources and people.• approachable, is empathetic and understanding and encourages trust.• provides a voice and develops effective relationships with council officers and partnerships with external organisations.• mediates fairly and constructively between people and communities.• campaigns with enthusiasm, courage and persistence on behalf of others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• does not provide leadership and fails to be proactive in developing local initiatives.• does not engage in community activities and can be difficult to contact.• keeps a low public profile and is not known to members of the community.• is exclusive in approach and does not focus equally on community groups or issues.• does not have detailed understanding of local issues and needs.• concentrates more on council processes and meetings rather than constituents; and• underestimates what is achievable and does not deliver on promises.



2. Local leadership - engages enthusiastically and empathetically with the community in order to learn, understand and act upon issues of local concern. Mediates fairly and constructively, encouraging trust by representing their district electoral area and the city as a whole.

Positive indicators	Negative Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• evaluates arguments according to evidence, makes independent, informed and impartial judgements.• chairs meetings effectively, follows protocol and ensures business is conducted effectively and efficiently.• follows governance arrangement processes, balancing public needs and aspirations with corporate priorities.• monitors performance and intervenes as appropriate to ensure progress.• seeks to improve on own performance and engages in learning and development activities.• builds professional and effective working relationships with council officers; and• has a clear understanding of the distinct yet complementary role of members and officers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• does not declare personal interest and makes decisions for personal gain.• does not check facts or consider opposing arguments, makes subjective and uninformed judgements.• leaves monitoring and checks on progress to others.• makes decisions without taking advice or considering regulations and wider development frameworks.• fails to recognise or address limits of own knowledge and expertise.• misses deadlines, leaves business unfinished and lacks balance between council work and other commitments; and• fails to engage with or build professional and effective working relationships with council officers



3. Scrutiny and challenge - acts as a critical friend by seeking opportunities for scrutiny and providing constructive feedback. Analyses information quickly and presents arguments in a concise, meaningful and easily accessible way.

Positive indicators	Negative Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• quickly analyses and assimilates complex information, taking account of the wider strategic context.• presents arguments in a concise, meaningful and easily understood way.• inquisitorial, asks for explanations and checks for implementation of recommendations.• objective, rigorous and resolute in challenging process, decisions and people; and• acts as a critical friend, provides constructive feedback and acknowledges the success of others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• does not prepare thoroughly or check facts, uses selective information and draws subjective or biased conclusions.• fails to recognise or engage in scrutiny as part of their role.• assimilates new information slowly, focuses on detail and does not distinguish between important, less important and inaccurate information.• adversarial in style, aggressive and confrontational when challenged.• and• fails to work collaboratively for the good of the council, abuses scrutiny processes for personal or political gain.



4. Communication skills - listens sensitively, uses appropriate language and checks for understanding. Communicates regularly with individuals and groups in the community, speaks clearly and confidently in public, and makes sure that people are informed.

Positive indicators	Negative Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• communicates regularly with community via advice centres, newsletters, phone calls and local media.• listens sensitively, checks for understanding and adapts style as necessary.• builds relationships with local media and creates opportunities for communicating key decisions, activities and achievements.• speaks clearly and confidently in public, uses accessible language, and avoids jargon or 'council-speak'.• provides regular feedback, keeps people informed and manages expectations.• uses appropriate language to communicate key points verbally and in writing (e.g., letters, reports, interviews and presentations); and• regularly attends meetings of outside bodies and other relevant groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• interrupts, appears not to listen and uses inappropriate or insensitive language (e.g., shouting, being rude or abusive).• communicates reactively and is slow to respond when approached by others (e.g., public, colleagues, officers or media).• fails to listen to others' views and presents rigid and inflexible arguments.• uses information dishonestly to discredit others and is unwilling or unable to deliver unpopular messages.• fails to participate in meetings and lacks confidence speaking in public.• presents subjective and confused arguments using poor language and style; and• fails to attend meetings of outside bodies and other relevant groups



5. Partnership working - builds positive relationships by making others feel valued, trusted and included and by working collaboratively with the council's many stakeholders to achieve corporate priorities. Maintains calm and focus and is able to take a long-term view in developing partnerships.

Positive indicators	Negative Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• builds good relationships with colleagues, stakeholders and the wider community.• works effectively with council officers to deliver corporate priorities.• achieves goals by co-ordinating others, maintaining task focus and persisting in the face of setbacks.• empowers others to take responsibility and knows when to provide support.• makes others feel valued, trusted and included, recognises and is inclusive of people from different communities and backgrounds; and• patient, takes a long-term view in developing networks and partnerships maintains calm and focus when criticised or under pressure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• uses status and position to exert control or impose solutions, fails to involve people in decisions.• exclusive in approach, fails to utilise diverse skills and perspectives of others.• unable to work across political divide and places political gain before collaborative working.• acts alone rather than seeking help or working as part of a team.• uses divisive tactics to upset relationships, council policies and decisions; and• • defensive when criticised, blames others for failure and does not admit to being wrong



6. Political understanding - acts ethically, consistently and with integrity when communicating values or representing group views in decisions and actions. Works across group boundaries without compromising values or ethics.

Positive indicators	Negative Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• actively represents group views and values through decisions and actions.• helps develop cohesion within the group and contributes to constructive communication between the group and the council.• communicates political values through canvassing, electoral campaigning and by effectively engaging the public.• committed to developing own political intelligence and understanding of local and national political landscape.• acts ethically, understands and communicates political values to others.• works across party boundaries without compromising political values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• demonstrates inconsistent political values, lacks integrity and tends to say what others want to hear• has poor knowledge of party values and objectives and council priorities• puts personal motivations first, behaves in a 'maverick' fashion or changes beliefs and values for political self-gain• acts alone and fails to support colleagues in public forums• fails to translate group values into ways of helping the community• lacks understanding of how central government policy impacts on local issues and council functioning.



7. Effective use of Digital Technologies & Social Media – This skill places digital at the heart of what a councillor can do to increase efficiency of public service delivery, making resources go further and meeting the key challenges facing your local area and making use of technology and social media to engage with constituents in a positive way.

Positive indicators	Negative Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• understands the role of digital technology in improving their local area.• Can identify how digital technology can bring about new sources of revenue for their area.• Works in partnership with the private sector to consider investment opportunities.• Uses digital technology to enhance engagement levels via multiple digital channels.• Uses social media effectively as a tool to engage with their constituents and community alongside traditional ways of working.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Needs more knowledge on how digital technologies can be applied and improve their local area.• Requires information and guidance on how digital technologies can bring about new sources of revenue for their area.• Requires support from partners in the community, private & public sector to consider investment opportunities.• Requires more guidance and training on how digital technology can enhance engagement levels via multiple digital channels.• Requires guidance and training on how to use social media effectively as a tool to engage with their constituents and community alongside traditional ways of working.



8. Resilience and Wellbeing – this skill relates to an individual’s ability to effectively deal with the challenges, problems, pressures and setbacks in conducting their role as a local councillor which can be challenging in today’s culture of constant scrutiny by media and the public, enabled by social media.

Positive indicators	Negative Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effectively deals with challenges and pressures of being in the public domain on a constant basis.• Manages stress effectively and proactively takes steps to reduce stress in their working lives.• Evaluates and learns from handling challenging incidents and those of others.• Seeks support to build personal resilience.• Effectively manages the volume and quantity of constituency casework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finds it difficult to deal with challenges & pressures of being in the public domain on a constant basis.• Does not manage stress effectively or know how to reduce stress in their working lives.• Does not handle incidents well to avoid the impact on their wellbeing• Does not have a support network around them to help them cope with the pressures• Avoids seeking support on how to build personal resilience• Has difficulty managing the volume & quantity of constituency casework

Party Leaders

9. Excellence in leadership - provides visionary and charismatic leadership, is well prepared, able to troubleshoot and juggle conflicting responsibilities. Works to shape a culture of excellence by liaising with the party on policy matters and speaking on behalf of the party. Encourages co-operation and communication within the party, across parties and amongst members and officers.

Positive indicators	Negative Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides visionary and charismatic leadership, inspires trust in others and gains commitment to policies and decisions. • shapes a culture of excellence and acts as a role model for appropriate behaviour, ethical practice and democratic process. • builds strong relationships with other party leaders and senior officers based on open communication, co-operative working and trust. • collectively with the other party leaders, acts as the public face of the council by championing council needs to key stakeholders such as the Northern Ireland Assembly • works across political and council boundaries to foster communication and encourage co-operation. • well prepared and able to troubleshoot, judges what to get involved in and when to say 'No' • committed to learning, developing others and sharing best practice. • effectively 'juggles' numerous, potentially conflicting responsibilities. • builds professional and effective relationships and liaises directly with the Chief executive and Chief officers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintains personal control by imposing views and being overly directive. • demonstrates partiality for own party members and uses position to promote party agenda to the detriment of wider council needs. • defensive, avoids making difficult or unpopular decisions and unwilling to admit mistakes. • overly reactive, fails to plan ahead or foster a sense of mission. • does not encourage communication with community or promote the council. • lacks public recognition as a figurehead. • inconsistent in style and behaviour, fails to 'walk the talk' or set an example for others. • lacks detailed knowledge of the council and fails to integrate information to provide an overview of the council functions; and • does not build professional and effective relationships with the Chief executive and Chief officers but rather contributes to fostering a 'them- and-us' attitude.