

Leadership in Local Governance:
Navigating Political and Non-Political Dynamics
Working Successfully with Councillors

Building trust, respect and professional relationships over time

Attendee workbook and reflection pack

About this workshop

This workshop explores how a clerk can develop successful working relationships with councillors from a wide range of professional and political backgrounds. It recognises that councillors change regularly, while clerks often remain, and that working with councillors is the part of the clerk's role where we are all continually learning.

By exploring the roles councillors play, their motivations, and the political (small-p) nature of local councils, the session focuses on practical strategies for building trust, respect and mutual understanding.

The workshop also considers the clerk's professional role in providing advice, supporting good decision-making, scrutinising delivery appropriately, remaining friendly and approachable while keeping clear professional boundaries, staying politically neutral, and handling sensitive situations calmly and fairly.

You will be invited to reflect on your own practice and identify practical tools and approaches you can take back to your council.

4. Self-assessment: credibility, trust and working relationships

Tick honestly. This is for you, not your council or chair:

Councillors understand the difference between advice and decisions

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

I apply rules consistently, regardless of personalities or views

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

I remain calm and professional when challenged

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

My advice is trusted even when uncomfortable

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

I explain the reasons behind advice or rules

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree

Reflection: Which one matters most to you right now, and why?

5. Handling challenge, sensitivity and trust over time

Key idea: credibility and trust are built through consistent, professional behaviour over time, especially when situations feel sensitive or uncomfortable.

“Credibility usually comes after consistency, not before it.”

Reflection: Think of a situation where acting professionally in a sensitive moment paid off later.

6. Action planning and CPD reflection

One thing I will continue doing because it builds trust

One thing I will do differently in the next three months

One reminder I will carry into sensitive or challenging situations

Tip: revisit these reflections after elections or a change of chair and record them as CPD.