

Resilient Member-Officer Relations in a Complex and Changing Environment

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Reflection 1

- Emotional and physical labour of being an elected member and an officer.
 - Acceleration of time and movement.
 - Firefighting and the strategic.
 - Public and private identities.
 - Recruitment, retention and resilience.

Reflection 2

- What are the skill sets for officers and elected members?
 - High demand/low resource environment.
 - Emergence of 'super-departments', generalist or specialist?
 - Moving in and out of different spaces requires capturing scripts, translation of multiple demand, questions of resilience.
 - Collaborative leadership and puzzling.

Reflection 3

- What sits behind ‘officers implement, members decide’?
 - Multiple interpretations across authorities, each with different understandings of roles, responsibilities and boundaries.
 - Questions of different interpretations of for example what constitutes ‘the strategic’.
 - Too often differences and complexities are masked under the mantra of ‘officers implement, members decide’.

WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

Some concluding thoughts:

1. Review the pathways into local government: why be a councillor? And how can local government be an employer of choice?
2. Dialogue over skill sets for both councillors and senior officers: do your job descriptions match your requirements?
3. Question understandings of officer-member relations: accept plurality of understandings, but improve communication and challenge, and reframe dialogues away from roles and responsibilities to debates over how decisions will be made across the authority.

