

Reconnecting Councillors

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recent reports

2014 APSE: *Two Tribes? Exploring the Future Role of Elected Members*

2014 APSE: *The Future of Elected Members in Scotland*

2014 COSLA: *Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy*

2015 *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act*

2016 APSE: *The Final Piece of the Jigsaw: elected members, everyday politics and local democracy in Scotland*



hollowing out

the councillor: uncertain: delegate or trustee; policy making or scrutiny;
manager or politician

the council: 'decentred': networks, partnerships and boards
community planning partnerships (2003)
health and social care: Integration Joint Boards (2014)

politics: participatory and deliberative
community councils (1973)
Citizens' Juries, issue-based activism



work of the councillor

casework: responding to constituency and ward inquiries

meetings: committees, party groups, boards and other fora

documents: associated with meetings

managing: developing and maintaining relationships with officers

source: practitioner diaries, focus groups and interviews with elected members from authorities across Scotland



roles and relationships

multi-member wards: *[constituents] shop around... [other councillors] take credit*

community councils: *are there to shout at councillors*

boards and partnerships: *which hat you wear... forget you are a councillor...*

government and parliament: *float above*

if councillors are corporals, MSPs are captains, and MPs are lieutenant-colonels... sadly, the establishment does not see the role of councillors as being important... just responsible for cutting the grass



workload

*I will leave the council and have a free evening which is quite unusual...
this has been a particularly onerous week for paperwork which I am currently
measuring in reams rather than pages...
first thing you do is check your emails... immediacy [to the role of councillor]
that was not there before...*

*people have a sense of ownership of you... my mobile is available, as is my
address; people regularly knock on my door...
lack of ability to forecast, to rely on what's coming, is attritional, wears you
down...
just too woolly, too much being asked... the 5-hour and the 40-hour
councillor...*



getting hurt and getting better

feeling under-valued... hard choices... harden your heart... did not come into the job to do this [make cuts]...

"I like to see the whites of your eyes when you're telling me lies!"

training just fell by the wayside... technical... going for training is a sign of weakness...



recommendations: challenging the new 'common sense'

- ① assess the need for training, mentoring and peer support;
- ② reopen the debate on councillor allowances;
- ③ review relations between council(lor)s and community council(lor)s;
- ④ take account of party groups in local decision making;
- ⑤ clarify councillors' role and mandate on boards and partnerships;
- ⑥ review governance arrangements in multi-member wards.



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learning project: doing local politics

work is done in worlds: in local politics: the worlds of (i) community, (ii) representation, (iii) administration
effective practitioners work between worlds

the work of (i) the community activist, (ii) the councillor, (iii) the council officer; 3 workshops, based on diaries and discussion; 1 joint conference

- ① research report
- ② programme specification: practice-based and action-oriented



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