

**SHEILA
MCKECHNIE
FOUNDATION**

**UNLEASHING
SOCIAL POWER**

Influencing Locally

September 2022

www.smk.org.uk

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**Local life
matters**



**The local
influences
the national**



WHERE POWER LIES

Everywhere
is different



Local Government in England

Three types of Local Authority in England:

1. County Councils: whole-county, provide about 80% of services in the area including education, transport, care
2. District Councils: smaller area within a county, more local services (housing, planning, waste)
3. Unitary Authority: one level of government responsible for all services (London Boroughs, Metropolitan Districts, UAs)

The rest of the UK

Unitary, single-tier councils

- Scotland: 32
- Wales: 22
- Northern Ireland: 11

Also devolved parliaments and assemblies in the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru and the Northern Ireland Assembly

Parish, Town and Community Councils

Operating at the level below Local Authorities /Boroughs/etc. Varies place to place but usually responsible for:

- Fines for litter, graffiti etc
- Allotments, community centres and play areas
- Bus stops
- Town Clocks
- Small grants

About 10,000 in England, 1,200 in Scotland, 730 in Wales and none in NI

Council Structures

If in doubt, local councils' How We Work or Democracy website pages are useful.

THE LEADER AND CABINET MODEL

- Council Leader - runs the council, appoints cabinet
- Mayor/Provost/Chair - mostly ceremonial, chairs council meetings
- Cabinet - 'portfolio' areas like health, culture, housing
- Committees - issue-focused groups of councillors, often led by cabinet members
- Councillors - vote in all-council meetings, also elect council leaders and mayors

ELECTED MAYORS

- Directly elected political personalities, so usually(!) more flexible/experimental
- Often a louder voice in national policy discussions
- Many are metro mayors, who run combined authorities

Council Officers

Employees of the council. While councillors are supposed to represent the public and provide political leadership, officers:

- Implement policies agreed by councillors
- Organise and deliver services, manage staff
- Advise and support councillors
- Are “politically impartial”

Do some digging on the most relevant councillor and officer to your work, e.g. the Cabinet Member for Communities and the local Cohesion Officer.

HOW TO INFLUENCE

Reaching out

- **Find contact details**
 - Most councillors have to list their contact details on the council website
 - For officers, try googling john.doe@council.gov.uk, j.doe@, johndoe@, etc
 - Most organisations have one email pattern, if you have john.doe@council.gov, try googling jane.doe@council.gov
 - Once you have an email, google again to try and find a number
 - More likely to answer the phone than an email, particularly in the first and last hours of the day
- **Know who NOT to contact**
 - Councils are very risk averse, more so the higher up you go
 - A lot of good projects have been scrapped because an Executive Director found out before it gathered momentum

Reaching out

- **Find your allies** – have you worked with anyone in the council before?
 - Even if your ally doesn't work in your policy area, they can coach you on how to influence the council
 - Is there a campaign that has worked locally? Can you take the campaign organiser for a coffee?
 - What about wider civil society? Existing groups – local unions, community groups, pressure groups, membership organisations etc. Find the organised people on your side

Understanding your leverage

- SOLUTIONS SOLUTIONS SOLUTIONS!
 - Make their life easy. What's the problem, and what can they do to fix it?
- Put yourself in the Council's shoes and do a cost-benefit analysis
 - Where are the power/pressure points? Are you more effective being a collaborator or a pain in the neck?
- If you do take an adversarial tone, give them a way out!
 - Keep inviting them to the table, make sure there's a clear way for them to avoid being a sore loser or get a PR win in conceding
- Create shared wins wherever you can:
 - Read your council's business plan/organisational strategy
 - Read the last local election's manifestos

Engaging the public

Listening exercises

- Street stalls, Presence at local events
- Door-to-door

Local social media groups

- Informal distribution networks for news and event invites
- Sometimes a good way of building a community around your issue

Local media

- The local papers are hugely understaffed. If they get a relatively polished article from a charity or community group, they'll usually just publish it in full
- Even if only 10 people read your free local paper, 1 is a councillor and the other 9 are the sort of people who regularly write to councillors
- Local media is good content to build up a presence on social media

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