



The Role of the Chief Executive

The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) set out in a statement the accountabilities and role of a local authority Chief Executive and the key messages are set out below.

The role of the Chief Executive is situated within the political and organisational context that surrounds it and it is essential to understand that context in reaching an understanding of their proper roles and responsibilities. Although it is not possible to prescribe what every Chief Executive in every time and place should be and do there are central elements to the role. One core element is to provide leadership within a framework. The main challenges in the policy context that surrounds Chief Executives and their changing role include increased emphasis on performance management, organisational change and development, changes in political management arrangements, the increased role of partnerships in service delivery and the need to work with others to transform deprived communities. The common thread through these issues is the need for the Chief Executive to show leadership through complex change. Chief Executives with such qualities are adept at managing organisations more as organic systems, inhabited and experienced by people. High performance is driven by staff rather than more old-fashioned approaches through vertical structures of command and control. Chief Executives:

- Set an example through personal conduct- integrity and openness;
- Champion and display values of public service and excellence in service delivery;
- Set the right cultural tone through relationships with those they lead and influence;
- Show emotional commitment to all staff and services;
- Support, inform and listen to elected members;
- Provide clear guidance on levels of quality that citizens and customers must expect- not just quality of services and processes but also having a clear vision of the desirable outcomes for citizens and communities;
- Advise members on the correct level of resourcing for services;
- Ensure that the conditions exist to support effective interdepartmental and interagency working that minimises risk for vulnerable service users and partner organisations;
- Ensure effective community engagement.

While Chief Executives are required to perform traditional policy, administrative and managerial functions involving high levels of analytical skills their role entails qualities required to achieve the trust and confidence of those they lead. These qualities include the ability to think creatively and the ability to empathise, they include an awareness of self and one's impact upon others, the ability to inspire and to be inspired. They include the ability to lead from the front and the ability to work well within teams. These are quite different to the qualities traditionally ascribed to Chief Executives. The difference is important because we do not hold a model of leadership where Chief Executives do everything themselves. However, we do believe that Chief Executives are leaders of the whole of the staff in the council and they have a responsibility for creating the conditions for others to perform, for others to innovate and for others to provide leadership within their service. Chief Executives are expected to lead organisations that are capable of successful delivery and it is for them to be held accountable and responsible.

The corporate and strategic role of Chief Executives has become an accepted part of the orthodoxy of managing Councils. However, it is seldom made explicit that this role involves more than simply high order service co-ordination and top level policy advice to members. The role demands a thorough and comprehensive managerial approach to the design and delivery of all services and a grounded appreciation of their relative efficacy, efficiency and equity. In relation to safeguarding children, Chief Executives must be satisfied that they have appropriate relationships with the independent auditors and inspectors to ensure they have the right information and that services are being delivered successfully.

Local government is multi-functional in nature with a variety of professional domains which codify knowledge and best practice in respective service areas. The challenge is to create a unifying and corporate managerial approach for the whole organisation. Corporate management approaches that connect service strategies to resources, that align plans to service objectives and outcomes and rigorously monitor performance, are all crucial and Chief Executives play a key role in this process.

Chief Executives are accountable for the performance of their organisations. While they do not appoint statutory officers they must not be merely a spectator in this process. Chief Executives are responsible for the management and leadership of all chief officers and for their delivery to the Council and to the community. SOLACE believes the accountability for providing this leadership of statutory officers is central to a Chief Executive's role. However, for Chief Executives to fulfil this role fully the formality of their authority within the appointments process must be addressed so that they have clearer powers in the recruitment and in the management of officers.