

Adapting leadership to volatility,
uncertainty, complexity, and
ambiguity

Delivering in a VUCA World: Reflections and Strategies for Local Government Leaders

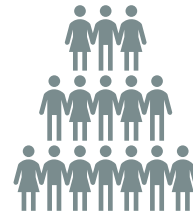
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Chief Executive
Tamworth Borough Council

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www.tamworth.gov.uk



What kind of place is Tamworth

Tamworth is a **historic town** with a strong sense of place – built around its castle, heritage, and community.



81,000
residents

One of Tamworth's **biggest strengths is jobs** – more people are in work here than most places nationally.

The jobs are here – but the **skills gap** means not everyone can access the best opportunities.

Tamworth is a town of contrasts – strong employment but **deep pockets of deprivation**.

Compared to much of the country, the town remains a relatively **affordable place** to live.

The town centre has seen **multi-million-pound regeneration activity** – reshaping the borough for the future.



A little about me!!!



Understanding the VUCA World in Local Government



Why Local Government is a VUCA World

Volatility from Legislative Changes

Local governments face constant legislative changes requiring rapid adaptation and operational shifts.

Complex and Diverse Resident Needs

Councils must address varied resident needs with flexible and innovative service delivery models.

Financial Pressures and Prioritisation

Funding reductions and revenue needs force difficult resource allocation decisions in local government.

Rapidly Shifting National Policies

Local authorities must pivot strategies and communicate effectively amid fast-changing national policies.

The Four Dimensions of VUCA

Volatility: Navigating Shifting Priorities

Emergency Response Challenges

Local councils must rapidly redeploy resources during crises like health emergencies and severe weather events.

Impact of Policy Changes

National policy shifts force local authorities to revise strategies and engage communities on new initiatives.

Funding Variability

Unexpected grants or budget cuts require contingency planning and promote adaptability in local teams.

Agile Leadership and Communication

Embracing agile methods and open communication helps maintain essential services amid volatility.

Political Shifts

Fragmented political landscape, with shifting narratives altering local government relationships.



Uncertainty: Managing the Unknown

Sources of Uncertainty

Uncertainty stems from unpredictable policies, shifting demographics, and changing community expectations.

Scenario Planning

Local leaders prepare for multiple scenarios using data analysis to anticipate future community needs.

Community Engagement

Engaging residents and stakeholders helps identify emerging needs and build consensus despite uncertainty.

Data and Innovation

Investing in data insights and fostering a culture of experimentation supports innovation under uncertainty.



Complexity: Leading in Interconnected Systems

Interconnected Government Services

Local government complexity arises from coordinating housing, transport, environment, and multi-agency services together.

Legislative Challenges

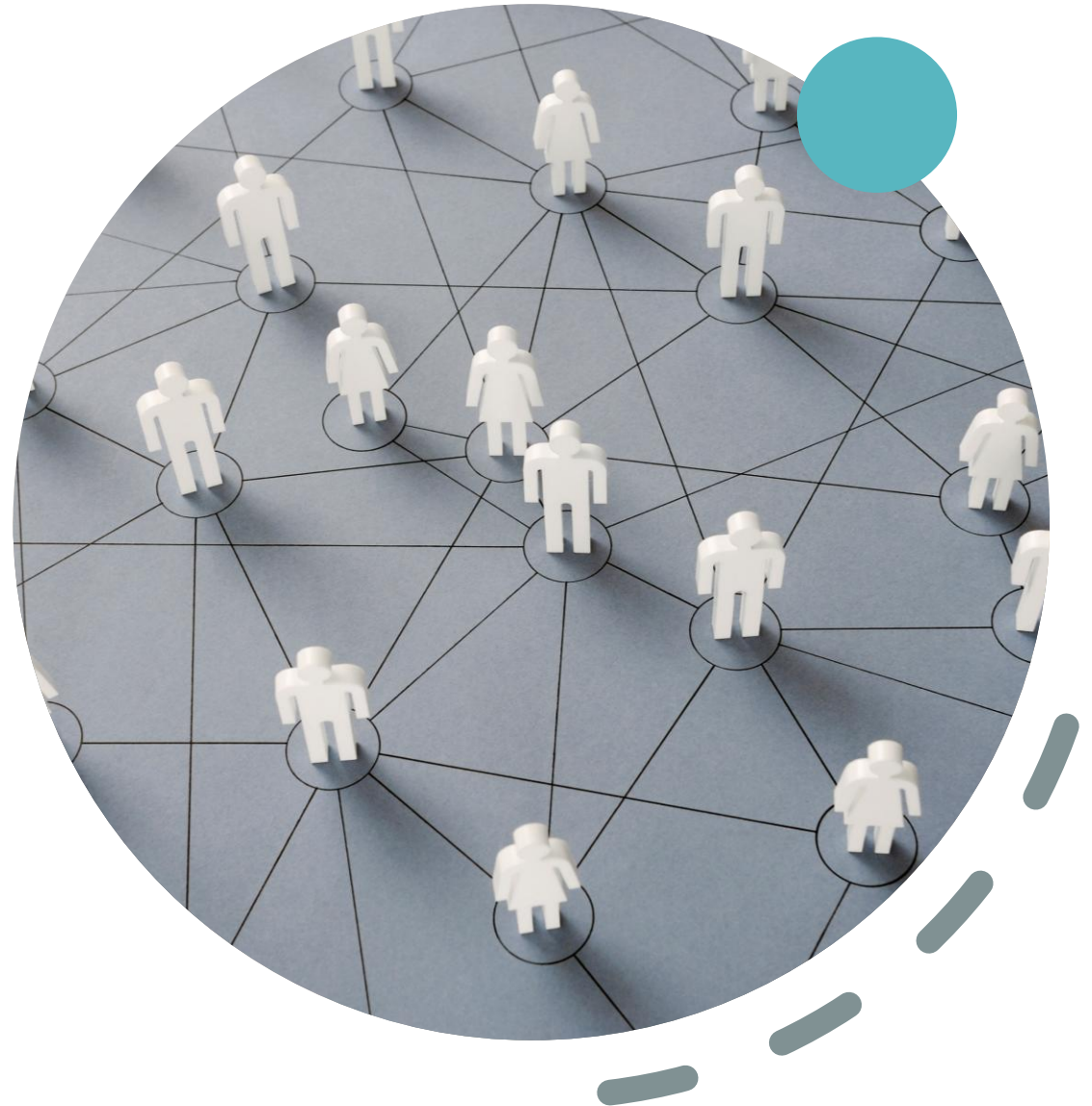
Complex legislation with overlapping roles requires careful navigation and compliance management by planners.

Digital Transformation Impact

Integration of new technologies and data systems adds complexity but improves service delivery efficiency.

Effective Leadership Skills

Leaders need systems thinking and collaboration skills to unify stakeholders and manage complexity.



Ambiguity: Exercising Judgement Amid Unclear Solutions

Navigating Conflicting Priorities

Leaders face ambiguity when balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability and diverse stakeholder values.

Decision Making with Imperfect Information

Effective leadership requires making decisions despite uncertain outcomes and incomplete data.

Fostering a Culture of Experimentation

Encouraging experimentation and reflective practice supports adaptive learning and organisational resilience.



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Adapting and Thriving in a VUCA World

How Tamworth Borough Council Has Adapted and Thrived

Agile Working Practices

Adopting agile working allowed quick adaptation to challenges like remote service delivery during the pandemic.

Digital Transformation

Online planning portals and data analytics have enhanced service efficiency and accessibility for residents and businesses.

Partnership Working

Collaboration with councils, educational providers, health services, and voluntary groups strengthens integrated solutions and knowledge sharing.

Community Engagement

Regular consultations and participatory budgeting ensure services meet residents' needs and aspirations.



Leadership Skills for a VUCA World



Essential Skills for Leading and Managing in Local Government

Adaptive Leadership

Adaptive leadership requires pivoting strategies and encouraging teams to learn from failure in changing situations.

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking helps leaders understand service interdependencies and predict ripple effects of decisions.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence builds trust, manages conflict, and supports wellbeing during organisational change.

Strategic Foresight

Strategic foresight involves scanning trends, engaging diverse views, and preparing for multiple future scenarios.

Chief Planners' Response Strategies

How Chief Planners Can Respond Effectively

Building Resilient Teams

Supporting staff through change, promoting wellbeing, and encouraging continuous learning builds team resilience.

Strengthening Collaboration

Collaborating with internal and external partners shares resources, expertise, and innovative solutions.

Leveraging Data and Insight

Using data enables evidence-based decision-making to identify trends, assess risks, and measure impact.

Focusing on Outcomes

Maintaining focus on outcomes aligns efforts with residents' needs and strategic objectives of the council.



Key Takeaways and Conclusion



Practical Takeaways for Councils

Invest in People

Staff development equips teams with skills and confidence to navigate change effectively.

Prioritise Learning

Continuous learning through training and mentoring fosters a culture of improvement.

Encourage Innovation

Create an environment welcoming new ideas and supporting experimentation.

Embrace Uncertainty

Be willing to adapt strategies recognising not all challenges have clear solutions.

Conclusion: Leading with Clarity in Uncertainty



Clarity and Adaptability

Effective leadership in uncertain times demands clear purpose and the ability to adapt quickly to changing conditions.



Role of Chief Planners

Chief planners and executives shape local government futures by modeling critical behaviors and mindsets.



Building Future-Ready Services

Leaders focus on building adaptive services, fostering collaboration, and ensuring outcomes benefit communities.



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