

How to make friends and influence councillors

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This research was personal...



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I have lived in Flitwick since I got married to my wife 16 years ago (she has lived here all her life), and I care about where the town is going and its future. For 10 years I worked in Highways and Planning at Central Bedfordshire Council, and Bedfordshire County Council before that. I have seen for myself what communities that come together around a strong vision of the future can do in achieving lasting change in their areas. It is this experience that I will bring to the position of councillor.



How we often think of councillors



Purpose of this research and method

- What motivates councillors in making decisions?
- What tools are necessary to help influence decision making in a manner favouring sustainable transport?
- Involved a literature review and series of interviews in 2024, reflecting the general makeup of councils across England, Scotland, and Wales:
 - 3 Conservatives
 - 3 Labour
 - 2 Liberal Democrat
 - 1 Scottish National Party
 - 1 Plaid Cymru
 - 1 Independent



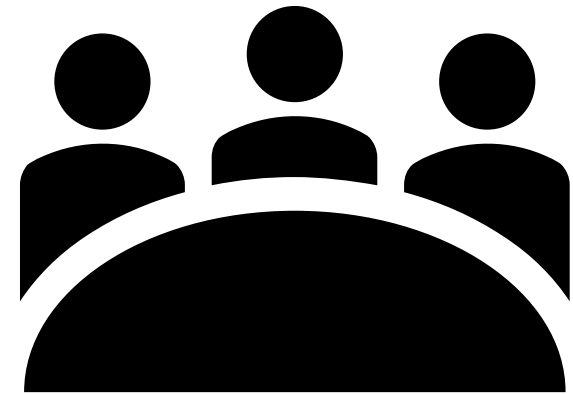
Public acceptability drives everything councillors do, but its complicated

- Of particular importance is **salience at election time.**
- Its hard for politicians to shift attitudes, and so they can focus on getting supporters to be more vocal.
- Social and traditional media can influence their understanding of the salience of issues.



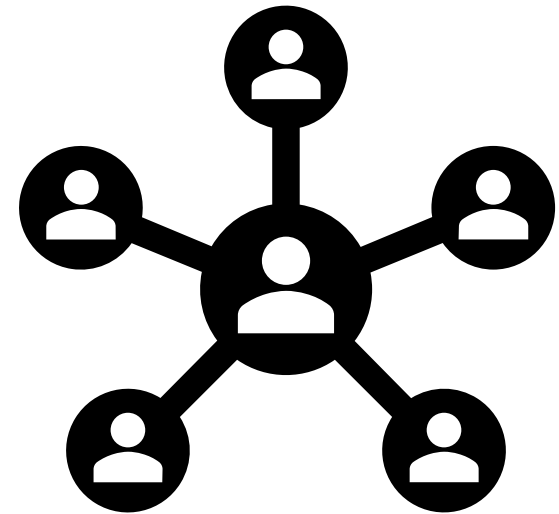
The most critical relationship is that between councillors and officers

- Councillors value their officers at the technical experts who they rely on to make decisions.
- Councillors see themselves as providing strategic direction, and check and challenge to officers on public acceptability
- They are happy to act as champions for officer recommendations

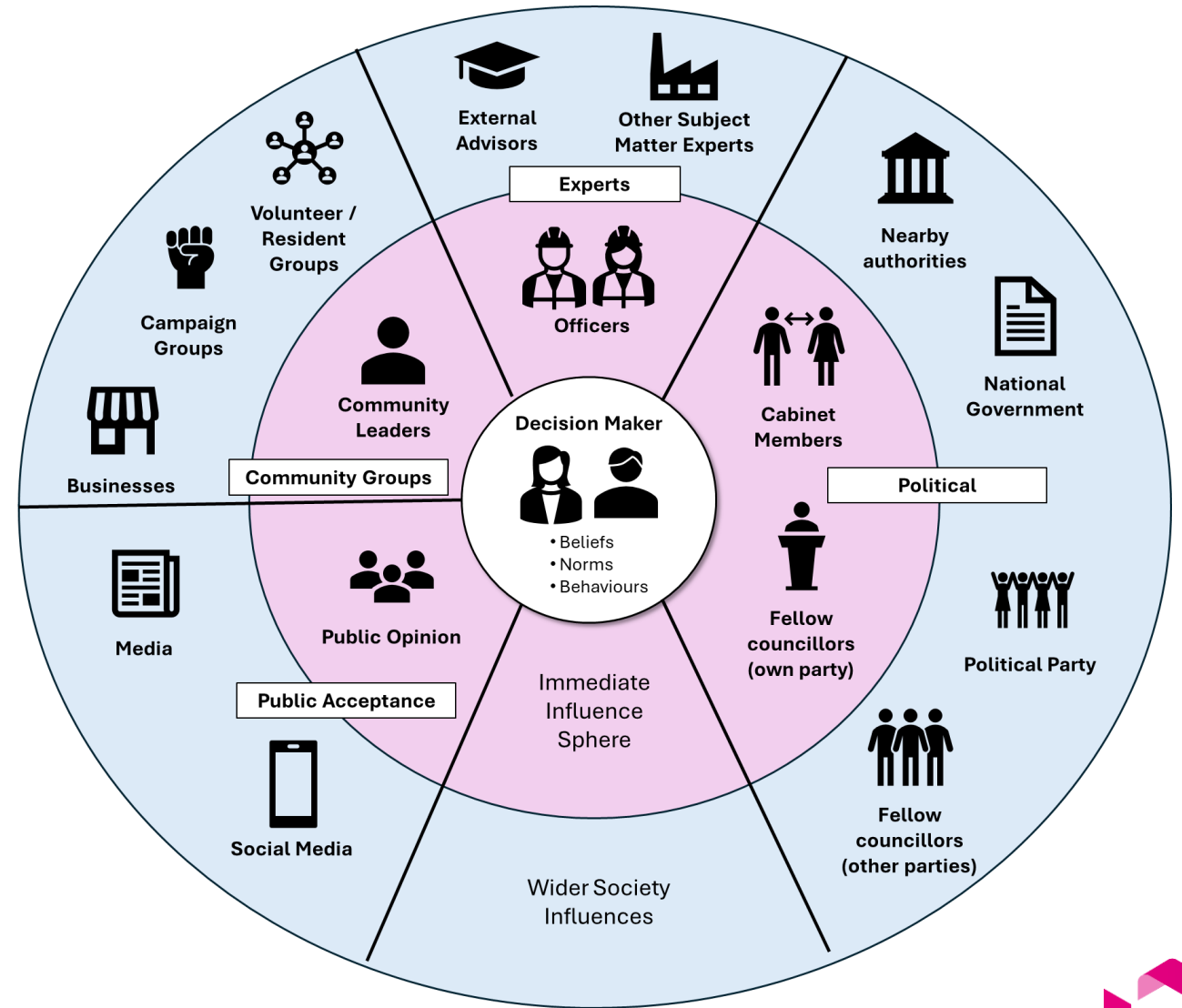


They see their cabinet as peers who are collectively responsible for shared outcomes

- Controversial matters **must be talked about early** to enable councillors to come to a shared view.
- Councillors can use their interpersonal skills to act as champions even if they lack the technical knowledge.
- The dynamics within Cabinet reflects the personalities. Some are a directional form of leadership, others are collective decision making.

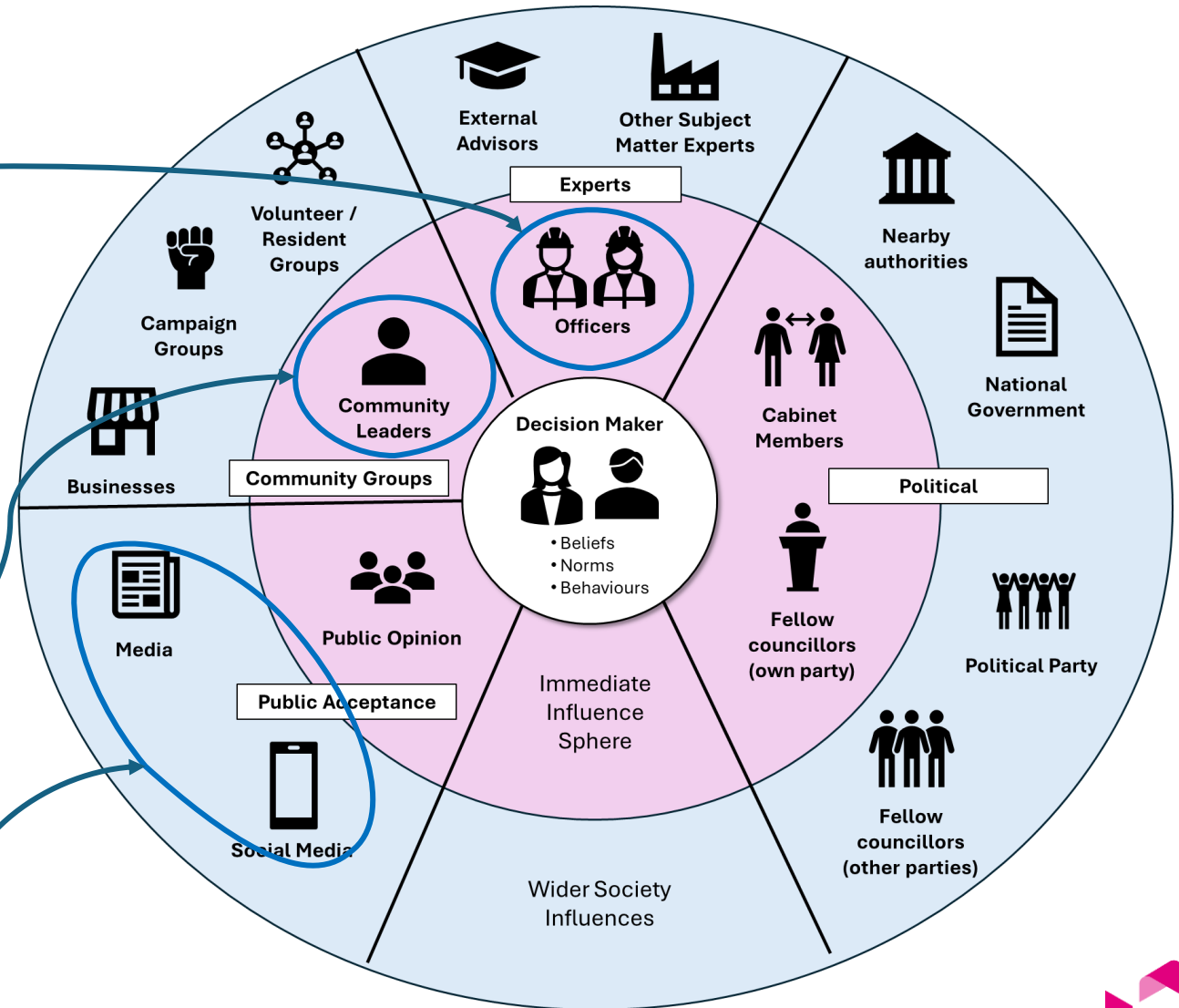


There is a wider sphere of influence on how councillors make decisions



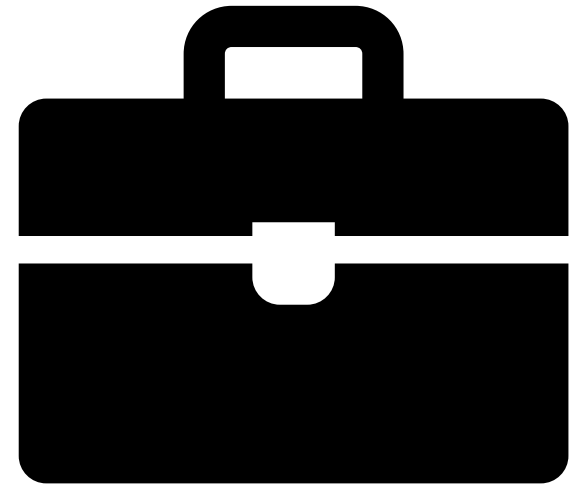
This provides opportunities to influence

- Sustainable transport knowledge being embedded at an officer level
- Sustainable travel advocates being community leaders, including advocating in support of decision makers
- Making sustainable transport issues salient at election time



What can you practically do?

- Present on how your plans can help them achieve their election manifesto commitments
- Support them when difficult decisions need making
- Provide a photo opportunity!
- Understand that it is a learning relationship
- Use clear language and explain things simply.



Thank You

You can download a copy
of the report from here.

