

# Strengthening Selection in the Public Sector

The Keil Centre has been working with three Scottish Local Authorities to enhance and reinvigorate their Senior Officer selection processes. For each client, the aim has been to implement more robust approaches that meet criteria of fairness, reliability, validity and objectivity, whilst also ensuring processes are cost effective and relatively uncomplicated to administer. Of particular importance has been the active involvement of both Elected Members and Officers across all stages of design and implementation, thereby building stakeholders' confidence that their process delivers improved selection outcomes.

## Clear and Concise

The starting point in all cases has been the need to clearly define and articulate the capabilities and qualities demanded of a Senior Officer. In the case of North Ayrshire Council, both Elected Members and Officers participated in a facilitated workshop to collectively consider and agree which specific leadership skills and styles would be most important for managing the

challenges the Authority faces now and in the future. The Keil Centre analysed the data and produced what is now known as the 'SPEED' Competency framework. This framework essentially sets out the criteria against which candidates can subsequently be assessed.

“ The SPEED framework has really helped us all be clear about the behaviours and qualities we need to be focussing on. By having a common language, it reduces the likelihood of subjective factors influencing the quality of our selection decisions. We are also able to extend the application of SPEED to other activities in the organisation. ”

**Murray Macfarlane**, Asst. Chief Executive, Human Resources

## Fair and Objective

Panel interviews are a mainstay of Local Authority selection. Therefore, a key objective is that this element provides a thorough examination of candidates' capability, and that performance is evaluated fairly and

objectively. The Keil Centre developed a suite of Competency Based Interview questions, user-friendly evaluation forms and rating mechanisms. Both Officers and Elected Members on the interview panel were trained in interview and behaviour assessment techniques. This enabled a consistent and rigorous evaluation of candidate potential.

“ The method used by The Keil Centre allows greater opportunity for all involved in the interview process to explore fully candidates' experience, capability and potential. In this way, the panel have a comprehensive picture of each candidate on which to base their selection decision and which contributes to a strengthening of the overall assessment process. ”

**Fiona Lees**, Chief Executive of East Ayrshire Council

## Developmental

Other than the Panel interview, candidates also completed a battery of psychometric tests. Crucially, each candidate received a debrief interview on their test performance with a Keil Centre Occupational Psychologist. This mutual exploration of the key themes within the context of the job role helps the psychologist to be better informed when feeding this data into the final selection decision making process.

In a model of best practice, South Ayrshire Council also recognised the developmental opportunities this feature offered. As a result, the Chief Executive, the Executive Directors and all Heads of Service have participated in a full diagnostic assessment with each receiving a comprehensive Personal Development Report to support the verbal feedback.

“ Having experienced the process both as a candidate and as a recruiter, I recognise the very real benefits of the assessment centre approach and the use of psychometrics. It aids and abets the decision making process and provides candidates with the opportunity to take away some personal learning from the experience. ”

**David Anderson**, Chief Executive at South Ayrshire

South Ayrshire Council's leadership competency framework is used not only as a basis for assessment, but also as a vehicle for reviewing leadership performance and development. Working in partnership with The Keil Centre, a Leadership Capacity learning programme is being rolled out across senior politicians and the corporate management team.

For more information about selection processes, please contact Ken Gray ([ken@keilcentre.co.uk](mailto:ken@keilcentre.co.uk)).

