

# Getting to the heart of what matters

Liz Green  
Hilary Gander

Level Vision

*4<sup>th</sup> June 2024*

Local  
Government  
Association

The logo for the Local Government Association features a purple rectangular background. On the right side of the rectangle is a white silhouette of two human profiles facing each other. To the left of the silhouette, the word "Local" is written in white, and below it, the words "Government Association" are written in a dark grey font.

# Getting to the heart of what matters

## Ground rules

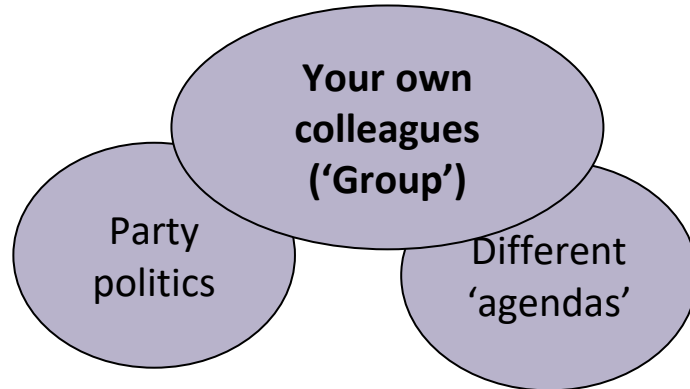
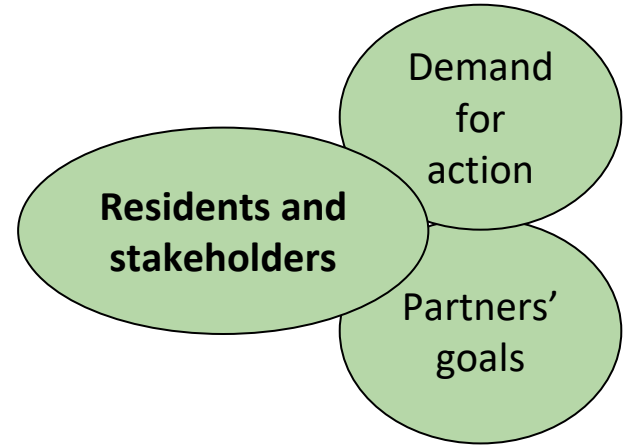
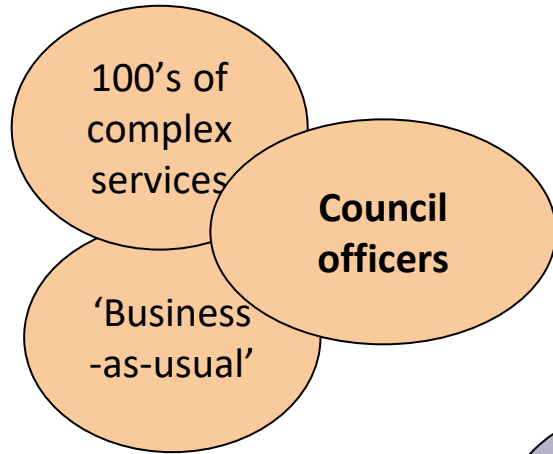
- Confidentiality
- No party politics
- Let's hear from everyone

“Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important”

*Stephen R Covey, Author, Businessman and motivational speaker*



# Council life is complex!



# Are resident demands overwhelming you?

**reginald.percival@hotmail.com**

to CllrSmith, CllrSinger, resident.services, CEO, mylocalIMP, thelocalnewsteam

*My bin hasn't been emptied for two weeks. The council is a shambles!*

**karen.doolittle@hotmail.com**

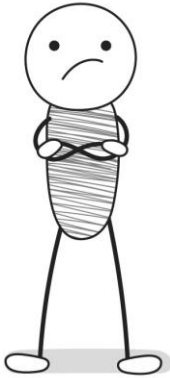
to CllrSmith, CllrSinger, resident.services, CEO, mylocalIMP, thelocalnewsteam

*The planned development is going to cause overloaded services. I wonder if you personally have something to gain?*

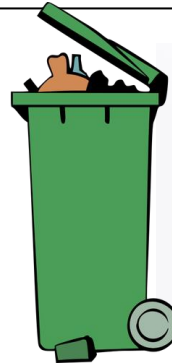
**annie.gethin@hotmail.com**

to CllrSmith, CllrSinger, resident.services, CEO, mylocalIMP, thelocalnewsteam

*Council tax rise! And I can't even get a parking space outside my house!*



[Stick men images](#)  
by freepik



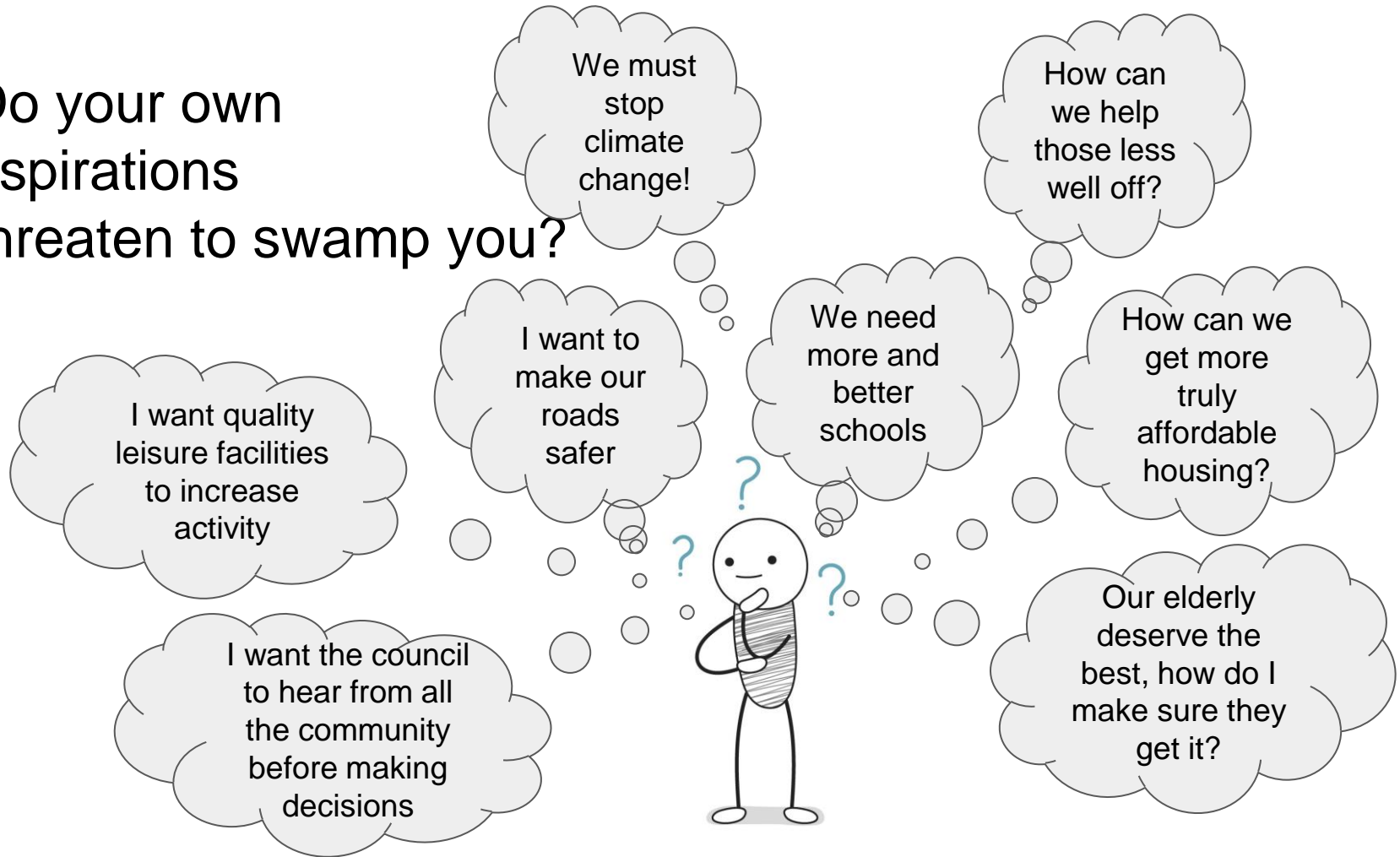
[Image by cookie studio on Freepik](#)

# Is council business getting on top of you?

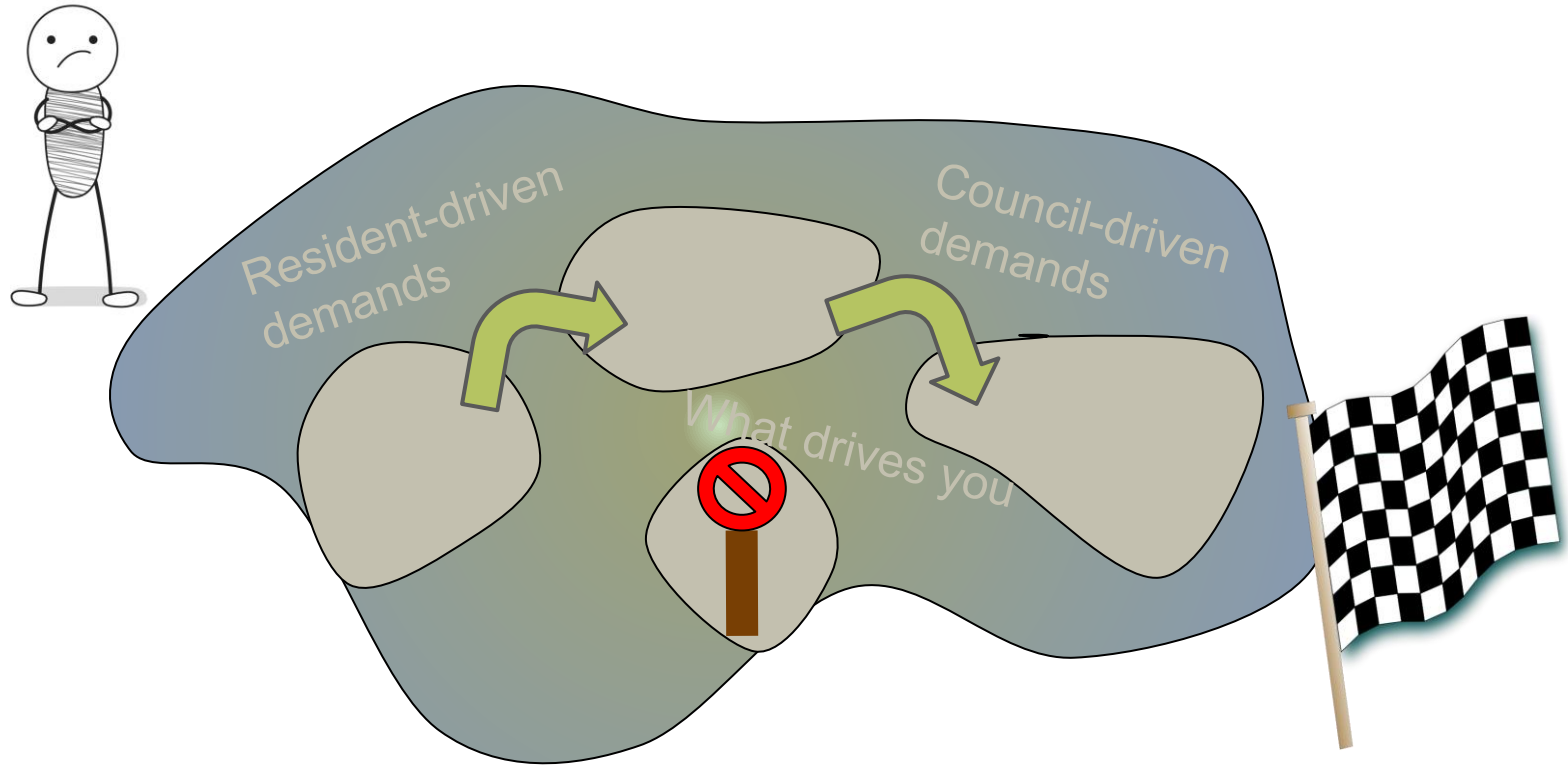


*Image by rawpixel.com on Freepik*

# Do your own aspirations threaten to swamp you?



It's like a swamp gets in the way of you and the finish line



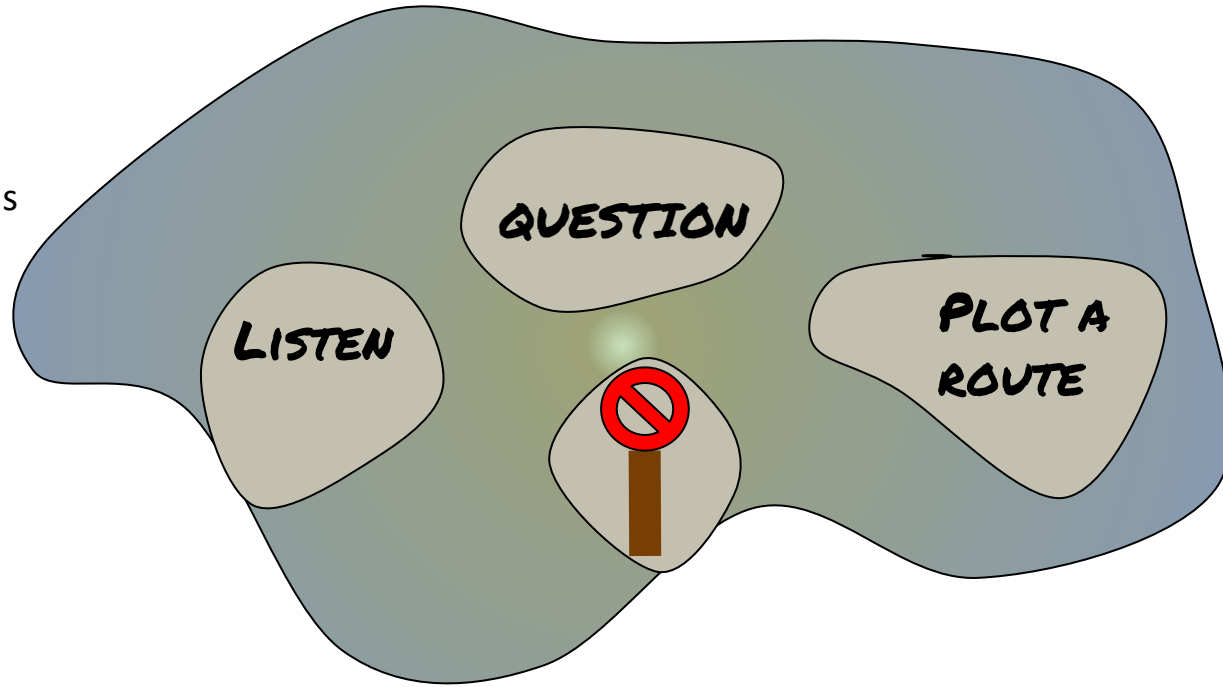
# There is a way through!

Listen well and  
check your  
understanding

Ask great questions  
(fact and feeling-  
finding)

Have a goal; avoid  
assumptions and  
biases

Reach the finish  
line!







# Quiz details - How well do you listen?

## **Quiz Question 1: What did we say your colleagues have?**

Their own preferences and interests

Their own priorities and agendas

Their own skills and experience

Their own targets and constraints

## **Quiz Question 2: What did we say council life is?**

Confusing

Competitive

Complex

Collaborative

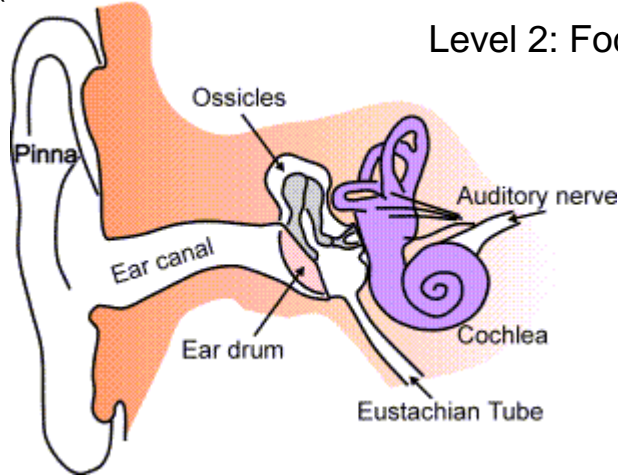
# Listening well isn't just about your ears



## Levels of listening

Level 1: Internal Listening (Focused on Self)

Level 2: Focused Listening (Focused on Other)



Level 3: Global Listening (Focused on context, and what isn't being said)

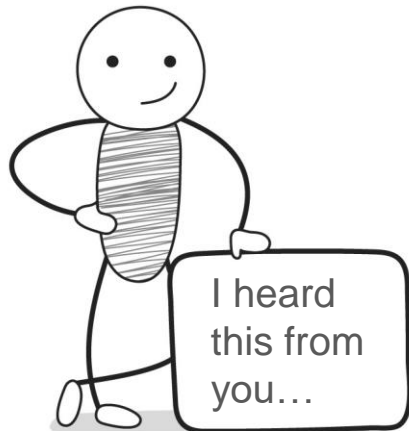
**PEOPLE LIKE TO HEAR THEIR OWN WORDS BACK**

LISTEN

# And it's important to let people know you've heard

## Showing you're listening

Eye contact, nodding, taking notes, 'uh huh' etc



## Feeding back what you heard

'What I heard you say...' 'This is what I've understood...' - is that right?

# What are the pitfalls of not listening?

Put your thoughts in the chat

## Some suggestions

1. You can misunderstand
2. You can offend
3. You can waste time
4. You can lose goodwill



# Ask great questions - find what's important

QUESTION

## Fact-finding questions

*How?  
What?  
Who?  
Where?  
How many?*

## Feeling-finding questions

*What's the risk if...?  
What's the benefit?  
How do you feel about it?  
What do you like?  
What's important?*

**FEELING-FINDING QUESTIONS LOOK TO THE FUTURE**

# Practice: fact and feeling-finding questions

What would be good fact and feeling finding questions for officers?

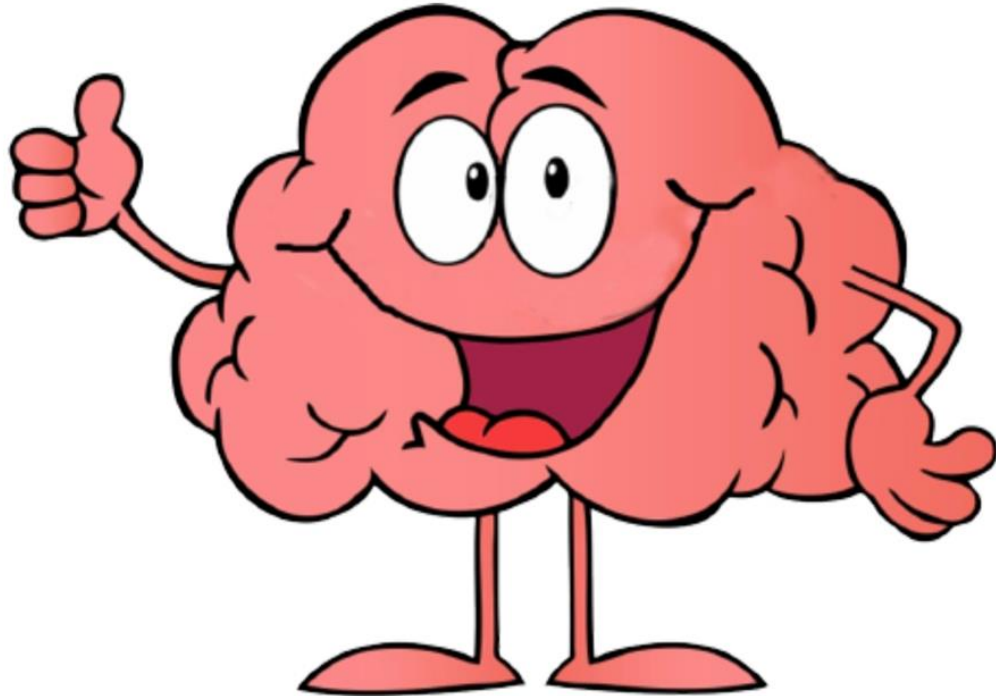
Put suggestions in the chat

**The local plan is about to be put out to statutory consultation and is projecting 3000 new homes**

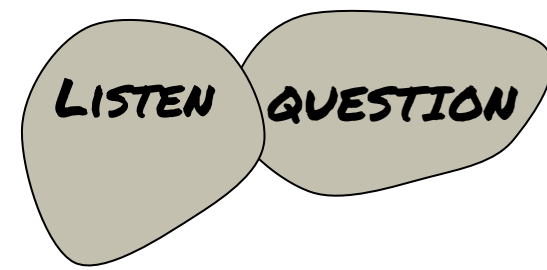
Sample fact or feeling-finding questions for officers:

1. What's the main problem we are trying to solve? (e.g. young people can't afford)
2. How will the plans affect my residents?
3. What are the risks to other key concerns, e.g. biodiversity, school provision
4. What are the statistics for my ward?

# BRAIN BREAK!



# Listening and questioning for what's *not* being said



## *Types of questions*

**Resident-driven:** Can you tell me more? Do other residents feel the same / having the same problem? (etc.)

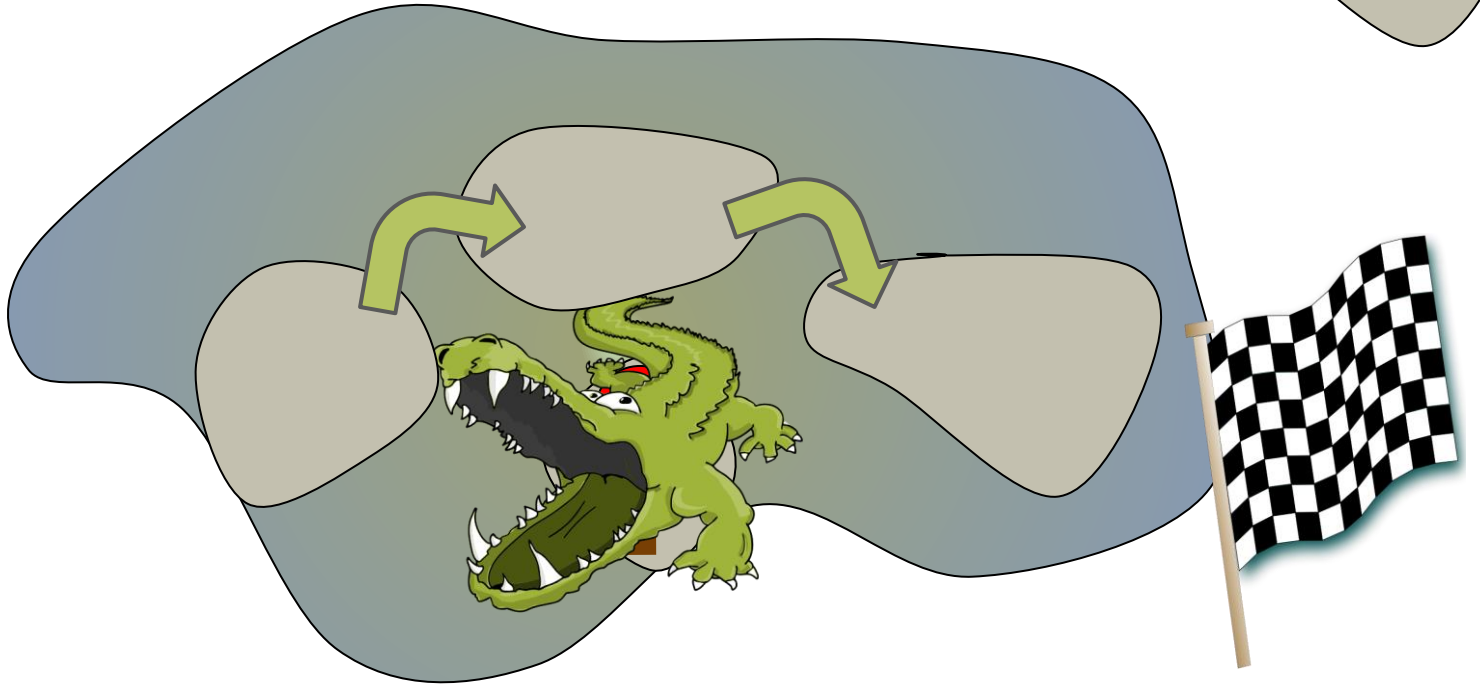
**Council-driven:** What's the driver behind this proposal? What other options have been looked at? How does it fit in with the rest of council business? (etc.)

**What's drives you:** (to yourself) Am I being honest with myself (e.g. will it help my end goal - e.g. carbon retrofit rather than new)? Am I being realistic? Am I being ambitious enough?



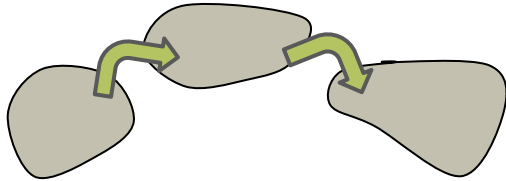
# Finding a way through the swamp

PLOT A  
ROUTE



**CHOOSE THE RIGHT ROUTE + AVOID THE CROCS!**

# Finding a way through the swamp



**PLOT A  
ROUTE**



## **Plot-a-route**

- Have the right people on board (allies / mentors)
- What's the governance? (process)
- Approach stats wisely
- Remember nothing is black & white - shades of grey

## **Avoid crocodiles!**

- Work out the risks and who or what might get in the way
- Don't take things at face value
- Avoid cognitive bias
- Don't make assumptions

# Practice: Finding a way through the swamp



**PLOT A  
ROUTE**

- **There's been a 50% increase in anti-social behaviour in the local park**

What's your route and what are the crocodiles to avoid?

Put suggestions in the chat

# Practice: Finding a way through the swamp

**PLOT A  
ROUTE**

<b>Allies</b>	local police
<b>Cognitive bias</b>	You could assume it's young people - but is it?
<b>Approach stats wisely</b>	Was the anti-social behaviour previously non-existent?
<b>Don't take things at face value</b>	Have you sampled other views?
<b>What are the risks?</b>	How does the behaviour affect other priorities? e.g. social inclusion, residents taking exercise more often

# Key takeaways

## **Maintain your focus!**

Stop doing other things at the same time!  
Confirm what you've heard

**LISTEN**

## **Be curious!**

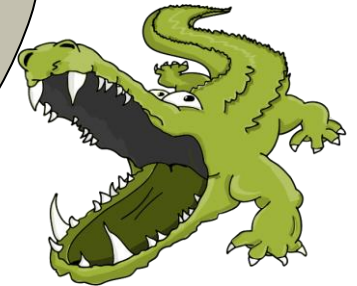
Ask fact questions  
Try out feeling -finding questions

**QUESTION**

## **Guides and crocodiles!**

Identify influencers, mentors, allies  
Query statistics, be aware of cognitive bias, avoid assumptions

**PLOT A ROUTE**



# Our top 10 questions, to get you started

How does this relate to...?

Does this conflict with ...?

Am I being ambitious enough?

What's the most important...?

What's the impact on..?

Am I being realistic?

Does this conflict with ...?

What's the risk of doing this and not doing something else?

Are there any unintended consequences?

Tell me more...

# Poll for feedback

1. Rate the overall usefulness of the course
  - 1(poor)-5 (excellent)
1. Which section did you like most?
  - Listening
  - Questions
  - Plot-a-route
  - All of it
1. Would you recommend this course to colleagues?
  - Yes/No

# Keep in mind

- Rocks, pebbles, sand and beer
- Keeps everyone on track
- Measure your achievements





# Future actions



Write down your rocks  
Keep a list of your achievements  
Identify your shiny pebbles



# Further resources

## Guidance for new councillors

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/councillor-and-officer-development/councillor-hub>

## Workbooks

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/councillor-and-officer-development/councillor-workbooks>

## Examples...

- Being an effective ward councillor
- Community leadership
- Influencing skills
- Councillor / officer relations

## E-learning platform

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/leadership-workforce-and-communications/councillor-development/councillor-e-learning>

Any Questions?