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Local government
can drive local
economic growth

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Can local government drive growth? This is the question delegates in the economy work stream at this year's SOLACE Summit were tackling. The answer was an emphatic YES, but the conclusions gave food for thought to those aiming to take the challenge head on. When it comes to creating jobs, wealth and skills local government is looking for parity of esteem with Whitehall with Central Government recognising the vital role that the regional economies can play in growing our national economy. Council must in turn, win trust by demonstrating consistently how it contributes to a strong economy and by making economic growth a major and visible priority.

Based upon discussion at the summit here are **eight** things for chief executives and senior managers in local government to consider:

The importance of place: Economic growth is generated in places, and every council must have a vision for growth. If local government understands the area and has a vision for its future that is shared with its communities, it is best placed to support local growth. Economic development is about quality of place and human capital, only local government has that overview and can deliver the leadership needed to shape it

Local Government as Conveners: Councils have an enabling role, they can bring together businesses, investors and citizens. Are senior leaders in your area spending enough time meeting businesses, bringing people together, and promoting the area and growth within it? More broadly, labour markets span local authority boundaries, is local government working through those boundaries?

Linking growth to skills: Councils have a critical role in preparing people, particularly the young, for the world of work. Can the council do more to bring businesses together schools, colleges, universities to collaborate on education, training, research and development?

Managing conflict in the planning system: Planning can be both an enabler and obstacle to growth, are you comfortable your council has the correct balance? Are you offering the leadership to make sure that the planning system support economic growth?

Utilising procurement: Is the council maximising the potential of procurement to benefit the local economy? By building in commitments to apprenticeships and a local living wage, or recognising broader social value within the contract, are you promoting growth?

The potential of innovative models of service delivery: Can alternative models of service delivery such as mutual or social enterprises, promote growth in the local area? And as you develop plans around these delivery models are you ensuring that they are part of the local economy and not just an extension of your own organisation?

Addressing the internal skills gap: Does the council have the skills and experience required to take on these challenges, to build partnerships, promote growth and shape activity? Are you able to take advantage on new models of finance or manage major capital programmes in a manner which stimulates local growth?

Being ready for networked leadership: Managing complex and diverse relationships require different skills and also requires that you put yourself at the heart of the network so that you can make the connections and create relationships that will support local economic growth. Leadership should be risk aware, not averse. It requires confidence and optimism, with the knowledge and expertise at close hand to support and inform.