



Planning for the unplannable

Tim Farr of Starfish Search takes a look at the ever-changing political and economic landscape – heavily influenced by events in the US – and how it is currently impacting local government

If, 18 months ago, someone had told you that in 2025 Elon Musk and DOGE would infiltrate UK politics and Reform would hold 677 council seats and control 10 councils, you might have been surprised.

From tariffs to defence spending to national enquiries, there is absolutely no denying that US politics is having a major and disruptive impact on the global economy and policy making at home. As a result, the world stage is more unpredictable than ever.

Polls indicate that trust in UK politics and democracy, and our belief in the ability of government to impact positive change for communities, is continuing to decline. The county council election results evidenced a move away from mainstream political parties and that more change is likely to come in next year's wave of local government elections.

Despite the evolving political and economic

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context, for local government the show must go on. While tough decisions on funding local services continue, how do we find time to reflect on the impact of global politics? How do local government professionals best prepare, at an individual and organisational level, for continued uncertainty?

Over the last five years there has been wave after wave of changing priorities across the sector. Starting with the initial reaction to the 2020 lockdowns, we can track a winding

path through a lengthy and intense period of insecurity and into an era where it has been very difficult to make decisions that will stand the test of time.

In a report Starfish published in 2022, participants were already talking about volatility being here to stay. 'What risks to organisations have we not traditionally considered?' one respondent asked. 'We traditionally have a disaster recovery plan for fire, flood, physical or cyber terrorism, but what about a disaster of national or international proportions?'

As a result, adaptive and resilient leadership is more essential than ever. We are experiencing firsthand that the local government community is exploring what changes are necessary within their organisations to reflect the shifting world order. Councils and combined authorities up and down the country are looking for leaders who can plan for success even when the sands

are shifting every day. Organisations want a more thoughtful, responsive and open-minded approach to best serve their communities.

With the nature of leadership changing across the public sector, and in an age of polarised debate, at Starfish we don't shy away from difficult issues in carrying out our work. We're gearing up to support organisations as they are forced to think differently about their search for talented and influential people who can steer the course. ■

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