

**Extract from ‘Lessons Learned from
Northamptonshire County Council Intervention: Recommendations’**

Recommendations to the sector

1. Choose your leadership team with rigorous care and for the right reasons. Do not compromise simply so that posts can be filled.
2. Recognise that for Members, leading a recovery may be particularly difficult, and many may be new to senior positions. Decisions will never be more tested than at times like this, and must be based on evidence with well-founded, unambiguous recommendations.
3. That ‘challenge’ in the widest sense, whether internal or external, should be regarded as an opportunity to consider and improve, not a threat to leadership. Do not close your ears to messages that you do not want to hear.
4. Plan and plan properly - A clear, transparent and overarching sense of direction is crucial in order to drive forward Council activity and set it up for success. It is central to sensible and rational decision making, other plans flow from it. It should be commensurate with your purpose as a public body. Monitor and measure against delivery.
5. Ensure an unrelenting focus on financial management & discipline and a culture of continual improvement. They are the foundations of every good organisation. Deliver on budget and ensure savings agreed at the start of the financial year are delivered.
6. Dedicate proportionate resources to monitoring delivery of programmes to transform/modernise.
7. Take action, without delay, to address shortfalls in savings targets and do not work under a misguided assumption that ‘it will all be all right in the end’. NCC, during the 7 years prior to the intervention, achieved annual savings significantly below those identified as necessary during its budget setting process (never more than 49%). This suggests that budgeted savings were not systematically or robustly challenged during the budget setting process and no account was taken of historical delivery performance. Local authorities should have robust processes in place to challenge the veracity of savings proposals – a lot depends on them being delivered.
8. Consider carefully what is suitable for out-sourcing and what isn’t suitable – don’t be led by trend or fashion.

9. Ensure robust and equitable contracts are in place with partners for all shared service arrangements in order to avoid subsidy or disadvantage.
10. If financial circumstances deteriorate, the influence of the scrutiny committee should be boosted in respect of financial overview. For example, provide impartial and independent training and advice to Councillors through the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, to enable the committee to scrutinise effectively key decisions on services, income and expenditure and learn how to question without aggression.
11. Where services are under-performing be clear about why before corrective action is taken.
12. Robust scrutiny arrangements reduces the potential for ill thought-through decisions and are an indication of strength and confidence in decision making. Conversely, weak and disempowered scrutiny easily admits the possibility of untested and over-optimistic decisions, and, ultimately, failure.
13. Energise your workforce by supporting what works and changing what doesn't. Nothing demoralises staff more than bad management