

Developing Strategic Leaders: South West

Thinking Strategically,
Leading Locally





Investing in the South West's Future Leaders

This is an exciting new programme designed to support the development of the next generation of strategic leaders in the South West.

This programme, brought to you by the Leadership Centre in collaboration with SOLACE South West, will bring together talented leaders from across the region who have been identified as the next generation of senior leaders in local government.

The challenges faced by local government across the country mean there is an imperative to support leaders at a Head of Service level to develop the skills to operate in contexts which are multi-service, ambiguous, political, and complex.

Typically these leaders will already have demonstrated a passion for leadership and for making a broader contribution to their local area and region.

"This programme is an exciting opportunity for those wanting to become great leaders in our SW region by growing their networks and developing their leadership skills. We're looking for people who share a passion for leadership, a commitment to public service, and who want to make a real difference to our amazing region."

Jon McGinty, Managing Director, Gloucester City Council & South West Solace Regional Chair



Who is it for?

This programme is designed for individuals who are passionate about public service in the South West. They are leaders who demonstrate commitment, curiosity, and a consistently positive approach to their work and to those around them. These are individuals, not only perform to an excellent standard in their current roles, but are recognised as role models, committed to developing others.

We are looking for those who are ready to take the next step in their careers—people who bring a collaborative mindset, think in terms of whole systems, and possess the ambition to embrace future challenges. They are reflective, open to learning, and have already shown their ability to grow and develop through experience and feedback.

Each local authority Chief Executive in the South West region is invited to nominate no more than two individuals for the programme. While we recognise that structures differ across councils, we expect participants to be operating at the level of Service Lead or Head of Service, with the potential and capability to progress to Director or Strategic Director roles.

Ultimately, this programme is about investing in the future of local government leadership in the region—building a strong, skilled, and confident pipeline of senior leaders who can shape and sustain excellent public services for the communities they serve.



What to expect

The Programme will combine the necessary practical and technical skills and knowledge required of strategic leaders in local government with the slightly less tangible skills of systems leadership required for operating effectively in a complex environment where partnership working is required and there are no simple solutions to complicated challenges.

The programme equips leaders to:

- Show integrity, political nous, and judgement
- Understand the region's unique context and contribution
- Support effective systems leadership across the region
- Lead and work in diverse organisations, demonstrating cultural competence
- Develop the perspectives and mindsets essential for collaborative working
- Nurture and develop their own talent and the talents of the people they lead
- Support collaborative, sustainable networks in the region
- Lead in unexpected and previously unknown environments

The programme design is underpinned by five core leadership capabilities:

Navigating contexts

Sorting information from the 'noise' in complex environments

Narrating meaning

Creating a shared story supporting everyone's goals

Convening Conversations

Facilitating disparate groups in a collaborative endeavour

Fostering innovation

Supporting creativity & facilitating experimentation

Personal governance

Trust-building, ethical decision making & personal resilience

The Components

> **Launch & Co-design**

27th June 2025, 9.30am – 1pm

Introductions and begin to co-design the programme with a local and regional focus.

> **Block 1: Self in the System & Working in a Political Environment**

2 day residential, 25th-26th September 2025, 10am-5pm

Day 1: Exploring values, authenticity and integrity, an introduction to systems leadership and practical tools for tackling complex system challenges.

Day 2: Understanding framing, navigating the political mindset and democratic process and strengthening officer-member relationships.

> **Block 2 : Addressing Inequality**

23rd October 2025, 9am - 5pm

Deepening understanding of race, heritage and unconscious bias, exploring lived experiences, and strengthening EDI in leadership.

> **Block 3 : Leading in Communities**

20th November 2025, 9am - 5pm

Leading in and with communities, understanding power and influence, and fostering thriving, high-performing leadership teams.

> **Block 4: Leading in the Region**

23rd January 2026, 9am - 5pm

Exploring regional challenges and opportunities, collaborating with partners to shape place, and respecting diverse perspectives and 'ways of seeing'.

> **Block 5: Leading in a System**

27th February 2026, 9am - 5pm

Enhancing impact as a senior leader, developing skills in values-based storytelling, and consolidating learning with a focus on personal next steps.

> **Celebration Event** (date tbc)

This is a thoughtfully designed development experience that combines strategic insight, peer learning, and personal growth. It begins with a systems leadership questionnaire, completed in advance, to help shape your individual focus and reflection throughout the programme.

You'll benefit from hearing directly from Chief Executive contributors from across the region and wider sectors, offering diverse perspectives and real-world leadership insights. The programme supports you in identifying and addressing your own personal learning needs, providing space and structure for reflection and targeted development.

Joining the programme means committing to holding the dates given in your diary and attending all of the blocks.

To help you engage more deeply, each module will be accompanied by background reading, including leadership texts, articles or videos. Each module will be co-designed by group members and there will be a strong emphasis on understanding the impact of your learning - both personally and professionally - with time dedicated to reflecting on the difference the programme has made to your leadership journey.

This is more than a leadership course – it's a collaborative journey of growth, designed to prepare you to lead with confidence, integrity, and purpose in the evolving landscape of public service.



Programme Directors

Mari Davis



Mari has over 30 years public sector experience particularly in local government, health and the voluntary and community sector. Mari specialises in work with senior leaders and place-based interventions with a focus on collaboration around 'live' issues. Her passion is understanding how communities and public services can work together differently and better.

Her local government background prior to becoming a consultant was in social services, children's services, organisation development and partnership working. Her international work in the last 10 years has included consultancy in Kosova, Mongolia, Falkland Islands and UAE. Mari chairs a charity that focuses on health, education and sustainable agriculture in Kenya.

Steven Pleasant MBE



Steven has a 20 years' experience working at executive levels in Local Government and the NHS, including over 13 years as a CEO. He has a proven history of leading large scale, public service change programmes and delivering performance. As a CEO his Council was awarded LGC Council of the Year and the CCG graded as 'Outstanding'.

He has performed a number of national and regional leadership roles including 10 years as the Chair of iNetwork, the public service practitioner network. He was awarded an MBE for his work supporting asylum seekers and refugees. He has extensive experience of coaching and mentoring at executive and senior management leadership levels. He is currently working as an adviser to the Mayor of South Yorkshire and the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority.

What next?

If nominated by your Chief Executive, please complete the nomination form and return to learning@solace.org.uk by 30/05/2025

Get in touch



learning@solace.org.uk



0207 233 0081



www.solace.org.uk