

• PUBLIC SECTOR & GOVERNMENT · GUIDE

The skills matrix *for public sector teams*

Public sector bodies deliver statutory services that cannot simply be paused when capability runs short, and when it does, the gap is too often filled by expensive consultants and temporary staff. A skills matrix maps capability across directorates and services against the duties each must discharge, so leaders can see where statutory cover is thin, plan development across professions, and reduce the reliance on costly external resource, with the accountability the public purse demands.



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Reading time 12 min · **Method** Upleashed 0 to 5 capability framework · **Updated** May 2026

THE SHORT ANSWER

A public sector skills matrix maps capability across the organisation, directorates, services and professions, against the statutory and operational duties each must deliver, scored on a clear scale. Read it to find where essential services rest on thin capability, where development is needed by profession, and where reliance on consultants signals a gap to close. In short: **it gives a layered view of capability against duty, so thinly-covered statutory services, costly consultant dependence and cross-cutting skill gaps surface, with the evidence and accountability public spending requires.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Map capability against duty.** Public bodies have statutory obligations; the matrix sets capability against the services that must be delivered.
- **Find the thinly-covered statutory services.** An essential service resting on one or two people is a continuity and compliance risk.
- **Cut the consultancy bill.** Capability gaps drive costly reliance on consultants and temps; the matrix shows where to build instead.
- **Plan by profession.** Skills gaps in digital, data, project and commercial skills are best planned across professions and shared.
- **Accountability built in.** Capability data supports the evidence-based gap analysis and accountability the public purse demands.

— START HERE

Capability against *statutory duty*

Public sector organisations are defined by their duties: services they are legally obliged to deliver, to standards they are held accountable for, on budgets under constant scrutiny. That makes the central question not just "what skills do we have?" but "do we have the capability to discharge every duty we hold?" A skills matrix answers it by setting **capability against obligation**, across the whole layered structure of the organisation.

Map the layered organisation

Public bodies are structured in layers, **directorates, services and professions**, and a matrix should reflect that. Capability is mapped against the competencies each service needs, organised by the professions that run through them: policy, finance, digital and data, project and programme management, commercial, and the front-line professional skills of each service. This layered view, from the whole organisation down to the individual service, is what lets leaders see capability at every level, not just in aggregate.

Find the thinly-covered duties

The risk a public sector matrix most needs to surface is a **statutory service resting on thin capability**. Unlike a commercial product, an essential service cannot be withdrawn when a key person leaves, the duty remains. By

showing coverage service by service, the matrix reveals where an obligation depends on one or two capable people, so leaders can build resilience before a departure turns into a failure to meet a legal duty, the kind of gap that draws regulatory and public criticism.

Reduce the reliance on consultants

When capability is short, public bodies fall back on **consultants and temporary staff**, an expensive habit that has repeatedly drawn scrutiny, with spending controls imposed precisely because these costs balloon when in-house skills are lacking. A skills matrix attacks the root cause: by making capability gaps visible, it shows exactly where to develop or recruit permanent skills, so the organisation builds lasting capability rather than renting it at a premium, a direct and accountable saving of public money.

— WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Duties don't pause for *skill gaps*

A statutory service with thin capability is a risk that cannot be deferred: the duty stands whether the skills are there or not. Mapping capability against obligation is how a public body sees the exposure and acts, on evidence, with accountability.

8%

GARTNER, 2024

of organisations have reliable workforce skills data, so most public bodies plan capability without a clear picture.

39%

WEF, 2025

of workers' core skills are expected to change by 2030, as digital and data reshape public service delivery.

63%

WEF, 2025

of employers call skills gaps the biggest barrier to change; in government they read as duties at risk and rising costs.

Public sector capability planning is increasingly expected to be explicit and accountable: gap analyses that describe the baseline and the future end-state, capability and capacity set out by function and profession, and managers held responsible from the highest levels, not just HR, for developing their teams. A skills matrix is the instrument that makes this real. It provides the **evidence base for a credible gap analysis**, shows where

statutory services are thinly covered, identifies cross-cutting skill shortages, digital, data, project, commercial, that are best addressed across professions, and reveals where consultant spend is masking a capability gap that ought to be built in-house. Seeing this lets public bodies plan development deliberately, share scarce skills across departments, reduce costly external reliance, and demonstrate to those who scrutinise public spending that capability is being managed on evidence rather than assertion.

— WHAT IT PROTECTS

Four things a public sector matrix safeguards

In the public sector, a skills matrix protects four things that bear directly on duty, cost and public trust. Each follows from seeing capability against obligation across the organisation.

PROTECTS 01

Statutory delivery

By revealing thinly-covered essential services, the matrix lets you build resilience before a gap becomes a failure to meet a legal duty.

PROTECTS 02

The public purse

It shows where capability gaps drive consultant and temp spend, so you can build permanent skills instead of renting them at a premium.

PROTECTS 03

Cross-cutting capability

It surfaces shared shortages, digital, data, commercial, that are best planned and developed across professions, not service by service.

PROTECTS 04

Accountability

It provides the evidence base for credible gap analysis and for holding managers accountable for developing their teams.

The common thread is **stewardship of public capability**. A public body does not chase profit; it discharges duties with public money, and is rightly held to account for both. Its capability, distributed across directorates, services and professions, determines whether it can meet those duties affordably and well, yet that distribution is usually invisible until a service falters or a consultancy invoice arrives. The matrix makes it visible in advance, so leaders can protect statutory delivery, spend wisely, develop shared skills, and show their scrutineers that the workforce is being managed deliberately, on evidence, in the public interest.

The 0 to 5 capability framework

A public sector matrix needs a consistent scale that works across every profession and service, and aligns with the capability frameworks government already uses. This framework, developed by Dr Alex J. Martin-Smith, provides that common language, with Level 3, delivers the duty unsupervised, as the bar for dependable statutory cover.

-
- 0**

Not required for the role EXCLUDED

The competency is not part of this role. Excluded from the score, keeping the matrix focused on the skills each service genuinely requires.

 - 1**

In training / Developing WEIGHTING 25%

Learning the competency, works under supervision. Up to 75% trained. Building capacity, but not yet able to carry a statutory duty alone.

 - 2**

Developing capabilities WEIGHTING 50%

More than 75% trained; handles routine casework alone, but complex or contentious matters still need senior oversight. Useful developing cover.

 - 3**

Capable WEIGHTING 75% · DEPENDABLE COVER

Delivers the service or discharges the duty unsupervised to standard. The level that counts as genuine, dependable cover for a statutory service.

 - 4**

Subject Matter Expert / Trainer WEIGHTING 100%

Deep professional expertise; handles the most complex cases and trains others. The in-house experts that reduce reliance on external consultants.

 - 5**

Strategic ownership / Leadership WEIGHTING 100%

Sets policy, standards and direction for a service or profession. The senior responsible owners accountable for capability and delivery.

Count dependable cover per statutory service

For each service, count how many people are at Level 3 or above, that is your dependable cover for the duty it carries. A statutory service with only one capable person is a **continuity risk** the organisation cannot afford, because the duty persists regardless. Where cover is thin and the work is being held together by consultants, that is the signal to build permanent capability. The weightings let you express each service's and directorate's overall capability for reporting and gap analysis.

A worked example. Same headcount, very different exposure:

```
Highways  dependable cover across the team → resilient
statutory delivery
Planning  1 capable officer, gaps filled by consultants →
thin cover & costly
both are statutory – planning is the priority to build in-
house.
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— [SEE THE ORGANISATION](#)

Capability, *ring by ring*

Here is the organisation as a sunburst: the inner ring is its directorates, sized by headcount, and the outer ring breaks each into its services, coloured by how well each is covered. A green outer segment is a service with dependable cover; an amber or red one is a service, often statutory, running on capability that is stretched or thin. The outer ring is where the risk shows.



■ dependable cover
 ■ stretched
 ■ thin cover
 Inner ring sized by headcount.

3 services

are thinly covered: planning, commissioning and digital/IT, statutory or critical duties resting on too few capable people

Illustrative council on the Upleashed 0 to 5 framework. Inner ring is directorates by headcount; outer ring is services, coloured by capable cover.

WHAT THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE READS HERE

- **Planning is the priority.** A red outer segment on a statutory service, thin cover, the kind of gap typically held together by costly consultants. Building permanent capability here protects the duty and cuts the bill.
- **Commissioning and digital are thin too.** Both red: commissioning carries significant spend, and digital is a known cross-cutting shortage. These are prime candidates for shared, profession-wide development.
- **Safeguarding and HR are stretched.** Amber, holding but not deep. Worth strengthening before they slip to red, especially safeguarding, where the consequences of a gap are severe.
- **The green services are the model.** Social care, education, highways, waste and finance show dependable cover. Resilient statutory delivery, and the pattern to bring the red services up to.

— READY-TO-USE EXAMPLES

Example areas to map for a public body

A public sector matrix should map the professions and competencies that run across its services, against the duties each must deliver. Here are ready-to-adapt categories, a starting point to tailor to your organisation.

Category	Examples to map (the columns)	Watch out for
Service delivery	The statutory and front-line professional skills of each service	Essential services resting on one or two capable people
Digital & data	Data analysis, digital service design, cyber, information management	A cross-cutting shortage masked by consultant spend
Commercial	Procurement, contract and supplier management, commercial assurance	Weak commercial skills driving poor value from contracts
Project & change	Project, programme and portfolio management, business change	Major programmes dependent on temporary or external resource
Corporate & governance	Finance, HR, policy, legal, risk, compliance, information governance	Governance gaps that expose the body to challenge

Map the professions and competencies your services depend on, scored so Level 3 means someone can discharge the duty unsupervised, and read the result service by service against the obligations each carries. Organise by profession so cross-cutting gaps can be planned and shared across departments. As always, map what matters most to your duties, keep the matrix current as policy and demand change, and use it to evidence gap analysis, plan development, and reduce the reliance on costly external resource.

— AVOID THESE

Six mistakes on a public sector matrix

MISTAKE 01

Capability without duty

Skills mean little out of context. Map capability against the statutory services it must deliver.

MISTAKE 02

Missing thin statutory cover

An essential service on one person is a serious risk. Count dependable cover and flag the thin ones.

MISTAKE 03

Accepting consultant reliance

Persistent consultant spend masks a capability gap. Use the matrix to build permanent skills instead.

MISTAKE 04

Planning service by service

Digital and data gaps are shared. Plan cross-cutting skills across professions, not in silos.

MISTAKE 05

Leaving it to HR alone

Capability is a leadership duty. Hold managers accountable for developing their teams, top down.

MISTAKE 06

A one-off exercise

Policy and demand shift constantly. Keep the matrix current so gap analysis stays credible.

The method is free. A ready-made matrix just makes the thinly-covered duties *plain to see*.

Everything here works in a blank spreadsheet, and that is a fine place to start. A purpose-built template just makes the public sector view effortless: score the workforce on the 0 to 5 scale across services and professions, and the dependable cover per service is counted for you, so the thinly-covered statutory duties, the consultant-dependent gaps and the cross-cutting shortages stand out, giving leaders the evidence for gap analysis and the case to build capability in-house.



The Advanced Excel Skills Matrix counts dependable cover per service across the organisation, the basis for evidencing gap analysis, protecting statutory delivery and reducing consultant reliance, all on the same 0 to 5 framework used throughout this guide.

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<p>£0</p> <p>The online 5x5 builder maps a small team in your browser, with no sign-up. Ideal for a single service.</p>	<p>£199</p> <p>The full Excel template: heat map, cover by service, required levels and analytics, up to 30 people and 30 skills. One-off, yours forever.</p>	<p>£1</p> <p>Upgrade to PulseAI in your first year for a living, web and mobile version with AI skill suggestions and reminders.</p>

— COMMON QUESTIONS

Quick *answers*

Q What is a skills matrix for the public sector?

It is a grid mapping capability across the organisation, directorates, services and professions, against the statutory and operational duties each must deliver, with a level in each cell. Read by service, it shows where essential duties are dependably covered and where they rest on thin capability, supporting evidence-based gap analysis and accountable workforce planning.

Q Why map capability against statutory duty?

Because a public body cannot withdraw an essential service when capability runs short, the legal duty remains. Setting capability against obligation shows where a statutory service depends on too few people, so leaders can build resilience before a gap becomes a failure to meet a duty, which carries regulatory, financial and reputational consequences.

Q How does it reduce reliance on consultants?

Capability gaps are a major driver of consultant and temporary-staff spend, a cost that has repeatedly drawn scrutiny. By making those gaps visible, the matrix shows exactly where to develop or recruit permanent skills, so the organisation builds lasting in-house capability rather than renting it at a premium, a direct and accountable saving of public money.

Q Should we plan skills by profession or by service?

Both, and the matrix supports each. Many critical gaps, digital, data, commercial, project management, are cross-cutting, so planning them by profession across the whole organisation is more effective than tackling them service by service. Mapping capability by profession lets scarce skills be developed once and shared where they are needed.

Q How does it support accountability?

Public sector workforce planning is increasingly expected to be explicit: gap analyses describing the baseline and future state, capability set out by function and profession, and managers held accountable from the top for developing their teams. A skills matrix provides the evidence base for all of this, replacing assertion with data that scrutineers can rely on.

Q Does this work for a small team or service?

Yes. While the layered view suits a large organisation, the same approach works for a single service or team, mapping its people against the duties it carries quickly shows where cover is thin and where development or recruitment is needed. Even a small statutory service benefits from confirming it is not resting on one pair of hands.

— ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Alex is the creator of the Upleashed capability framework that powers Skills Matrix Template, the award-winning Excel skills matrix. A Chartered Manager with an MBA, an LLM and a doctorate in business administration, he has spent more than two decades helping operations, HR and quality teams turn capability from a gut feel into something they can measure, manage and prove.

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A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex J. Martin-Smith".

Dr Alex J. Martin-Smith

— SOURCES

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Build capability, *not* *consultant bills.*

You now have the public sector method. The quickest way to start is to list your services, score who can dependably deliver each, and look for the thin cover, especially on statutory duties. The thinly-covered services and consultant-dependent gaps you find are exactly where building in-house capability protects delivery and the public purse alike.

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