



Changing Places

– how innovation and transformation
is taking place in local government



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Executive Summary

Local government has handled very substantial reductions in government grant pretty well so far. But there is more of the same to come, while an aging population inexorably increases demand for public services – we are moving to a very different world for local government. The result is that there has never been a more pressing need to innovate and transform the way the sector operates, to think big and think radically about what councils do and how they do it, and the sort of relationship they have with their residents.

This report looks at how ready the local government sector is to meet this challenge. It highlights the new approaches councils are taking, and what's standing in the way of further innovation. Below we describe the main conclusions of our research, and our principal recommendations for change.

The first key finding is that the last couple of years have seen a palpable shift in councils' attitudes to change and innovation, in large brought about due to new austerity. That said, although the majority are now thinking radically, a significant proportion of councils are either unwilling to change or, want to, but aren't sure how.

Secondly, councils see working more collaboratively and in partnerships – both with other local authorities and with other arms of the local public sector – as essential and something they are particularly keen to improve. Supplying services across organisational and geographic boundaries through shared services and trading services (e.g. through community budgets), plus more novel joint-venture type partnering is seen by many as only way that local public services can survive.

Key to this is how to control demand, particularly when it comes to cross-public sector working. By spotting those who are likely to become heavy consumers of public services, and intervening early to attempt to prevent problems before they arise, councils working in partnership with others can massively reduce the drain on future public service resources.

Thirdly, the importance of leadership – both our survey and interviews conclusively found that this is the single biggest driver of councils' capacity to innovate. Encouraging a culture of change throughout the organisation was also important, with the most innovative councils citing integration as stemming from the frontline. Mutuals were suggested as vehicles to capture and encourage this innovation as a driver of constant change.

Additionally, there remains a need to invest in commissioning, commercial skills and training across government. Local government is ahead of the rest of the public sector here, and the recently launched Commissioning Academy will bring much-needed training and expand the pool of talent, while only a handful of councils have the skills needed to successfully commercialise and develop, e.g. trading companies.

Fourthly, our research found a distinct lack of clarity over whose role it is to facilitate the sharing of best practice within local government, and to help those councils struggling to innovate and transform. Both the government and the sector itself need to consider how they will address these issues, ever more timely as budgets become increasingly squeezed.

Fifthly, a number of technical barriers remain that can block innovation and more integrated working. Data protection was once again highlighted as a major issue. In addition, technical issues relating to VAT and tax/regulation more broadly were fingered as being responsible for delays in moving to new models of delivery that involved partnership and cross-organisational working.

Finally, while considering innovation in local government, it's very important to appreciate that the sector does not exist in isolation. The attitudes, changing roles and responsibilities, and even the culture of key partners – whether public, voluntary or private sectors – all have a major impact on a council's ability to innovate and transform itself. And because many major changes cannot be made without up-front investment, working with partners is even more likely. We therefore conclude that the underlying themes of partnership and collaboration, whether across geographic, organisation, or sectoral boundaries, will be the essential building block of local public services that are fit for the future.

A full list of recommendations is on page 20, but our key recommendations are, in summary:

- Local government must continue to press the case – both locally and nationally – for greater partnership and collaboration across the public sector, working with partners across geographic and organisational boundaries to secure robust evidence of the efficacy of partnership concepts
- Local government, as a sector, must consider how to assist those authorities that are unable to innovate and transform themselves into authorities fit for the future
- Local authorities should take the best approach for each given service, considering the core needs and drivers, and, based on this, consider who is best placed to deliver them
- Local government as a sector should consider how it could resolve the lack of clarity in sharing best practice
- HM Treasury should work with local government on overcoming barriers to the transition to new delivery models more generally, e.g. the seemingly discouraging wider tax and regulatory framework
- Local government needs to do more to prototype and pilot new models, building up a stronger evidence base. This will improve buy-in from partners and scale up new approaches to increase the benefits
- Local government should continue to investigate and develop the use of customer insight data, as a way of better understanding their residents and complementing other methods of insight/intelligence
- Local agencies and agents of national bodies/departments to consider local information sharing hubs where practical and appropriate
- The Commissioning Academy needs rapid expansion and fast tracking of local government employees, as it is they who are at the forefront of the commissioning agenda

1. Introduction

Policy context

In the 2010 Spending Review, the Chancellor announced that the grant for local government would be reduced by 28% over five years – a total cut of £4.2 billion, by far the largest departmental budget reduction. While this represented a significant challenge in itself, further cuts followed, representing the biggest spending reduction in a generation, with the total budget reductions now in the order of 43% according to the LGA.¹ But it is inevitable that, if governments choose to protect significant areas of spend, such as education, health and international development, while cutting overall spend, then the impact of any spending reductions on other policy areas – like local government – will be even greater.

This negative funding outlook is likely to continue beyond the lifetime of the current parliament, regardless of which party is governing after May 2015. As Hilary Benn MP, the Shadow Secretary for Communities and Local government, told the 2013 LGA Conference: “if we win the election in 2015 then we will inherit the current government’s spending plans, and they will be our starting point”, adding “we all have to plan ahead for a different world.”

And austerity is not the only cloud on the horizon. The Local Government Association has predicted that, if nothing changes, councils will face a £16.5 billion funding gap by the end of the decade. This is partly down to the spiralling costs of social care – a fact made famous by the London Borough of Barnet’s much-quoted ‘Graph of Doom’.

It is against this volatile background that the report looks at how the sector is changing, balancing the dual challenge of budget reductions and increasing demands on services. Local government has delivered a high level of savings to date while maintaining levels of public satisfaction and without a collapse in public service infrastructure. However, if austerity is to continue, councils will need greater freedom to innovate and will need to do things differently if they are to continue delivering efficient and effective public services – allowing them to meet the challenge.

The never-ending road

“Never allow a crisis to go to waste” – Rahm Emmanuel

As David Cameron has said, local government is “officially the most efficient part of the public sector”, having smashed the efficiency savings targets set on the back of the Gershon Review². However the stark truth is that that reputation, hard-won though it may be, is an historic prize, and will count for nothing in addressing the challenges outlined above.

But with challenges come opportunities, specifically in this case, opportunities to think positively and proactively about what the role of local government is, and how it can be realised. Indeed, there is an appetite for senior council figures to think radically: in a Localis survey of council leaders and chief executives, more than a third thought that there was no service that absolutely had to be delivered by the council³. With a plethora of new service delivery models being developed and implemented across the sector, it seems that councils of all political colours are willing to change the way that they do business to meet the national and local challenge.

The time may have come for a new relationship between local government and their residents. With budgets squeezed so tightly, councils are increasingly thinking deeply about their options and presenting the public with realistic choices, while residents in turn will need to think constructively about their priorities.

¹ Local Government Association Press Release – 7 August 2013

(http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/4094313/NEWS accessed 26/09/13)

² Speech by Rt Hon David Cameron MP, *Cutting the Cost of Politics*, in 2009

(http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2009/09/David_Cameron_Cutting_the_Cost_of_Politics.aspx accessed 12/09/13)

³ D. Crowe, *Catalyst Councils – A new future for local public service delivery* (Localis, London, 2012)

Of course local government does not exist in isolation. A major policy shift towards increased direct collaboration represents both a challenge and a major opportunity for local public services. While it may not be at all easy to achieve, the tantalising possibility of improving the quality of services while reducing costs could become a major influence on public service across the wider local landscape.

About this report

This report looks at innovation taking place in councils across the country; examining their capacity and capability to meet the twin challenge of working with a significantly decreasing operating budget, while providing quality public services to residents. The report also looks at whose responsibility it is to share best practice and how the sector sees itself in this regard.

We investigated this through an online survey of 80 council leaders and chief executives from across the country and via a series of face to face and telephone interviews with individuals responsible for driving innovation in and around local authorities and other local public services. We looked at case studies of successful innovation and large-scale transformation, analysed challenges and barriers to this, and have made recommendations to address them.

Structure of the report

Chapters 2-6 constitute the bulk of the report. We start in chapter 2 by examining how ready councils are to face the challenges set out above, we then consider how open councils are to innovation and transformation, including their attitudes and ambitions, before identifying some of the barriers that they face in trying to do things differently.

In chapter 3 we briefly highlight some of the alternative models of service delivery that councils have developed in recent years that are now building momentum, such as shared services, mutualisation and strategic commissioning, and we reflect on some of the initial learnings from these approaches.

Chapter 4 investigates where and how councils are sharing best practice, whose role it is to spread innovation across the sector and what the future holds in this regard.

With technology at the heart of the government's agenda for the future of public services, chapter 5 focuses specifically on what technology can do to facilitate innovation and how councils are using it in practice.

Finally, in chapter 6 we conclude with a reflection of local government's view on how central government can set a framework that supports and encourages innovation and transformation.

Definition of terms

Some of the terms that run through this report are worth defining early.

Innovation

As one of our interviewees remarked, the "definition of innovation varies from place to place" – what's innovative in one authority might be considered "old hat" in another. But, for the purposes of our research, we have taken innovation to mean simply: *doing things in a new way*.

Transformation

When we asked survey respondents to define transformation in less than ten words, some of the examples included:

- Facing the future fearlessly
- Changing fundamentally the way local government works
- Complete change in the way we deliver services
- Adopting a 'change' culture, using innovative methods and sharing insights

What is clear is that transformation represents *radical, forward-looking change*. This is the definition that we will use for the purposes of this report.

2. Are councils ready for the challenge?

Attitudes to transformation

Our research uncovered a variety of attitudes to transformation in local government. One interviewee described transformation as something “no-one was interested in three and a half years ago” because it was “too big and too scary” – now, however colleagues are said to be “much keener.” Equally, in this report, we highlight a number of councils who have been swift to innovate and transform.

Not surprisingly, most of the councils that we spoke to have noticed a shift in their stance towards the idea of transformation over the last few years. Our survey found ‘extracting the most from current resources’ is the biggest driver for change and improvement. The result is, one chief executive suggested, that every council falls into one of three categories:

- Those who need to change and know how
- Those who know that they need to change, but don’t know how
- Those who haven’t yet “woken up”

So what are the councils who are transforming doing to change the way they operate? Our research found that many are looking to further improve customer facing services (nearly 50% of respondents rated their authority as a ten out of ten for this), while new forms of service delivery are slightly less popular, with almost a third (30%) of respondents rating themselves as six or less out of ten for this.

Importantly, councils are very open to improvements in their use of partnerships and collaboration, with more than 50% ranking themselves as a ten-out-of-ten for this. This is a strong theme we picked up throughout our research; it is clear that a number of authorities are starting to see themselves as first and foremost part of a “local public service family”, rather than thinking along purely sectoral lines. However, this is by no means a universal view. To be realised it relies on more than just a change in attitude from local government, but a collaborative attitude from public service partners too. As per the increasing momentum towards integration and community budgets-style approaches, organisational and political collaboration will be required. And with one interviewee describing traditional intra-public sector partnership working as “a busted flush”, and others talking of vested interests preventing radical change, clearly not all other public sector actors are as engaged as council colleagues would like.

The “time and capacity it takes to bring about effective change” was highlighted as the greatest barrier to innovation by 58% of respondents. Clearly there is a perception by many in local government that firstly developing and secondly sustaining innovation through to the realisation of benefits requires investment of resources, which are of course scarce. Indeed, the joint second most popularly cited barrier was cost/budgets.

What – or who – is driving transformation?

As part of investigating how councils are innovating, we attempted to understand who or what are the key drivers of innovation and transformation. Many officer and member colleagues agreed that external pressures can help to drive innovation – as Rahm Emmanuel’s quote suggests, public leaders should never waste a crisis. For example, despite the extreme challenges and pressure of unprecedented budget reductions, two-tier to unitary reorganisation, or a damning performance assessment; a number of authorities acknowledged this as a crucial motivation to aim higher and innovate.

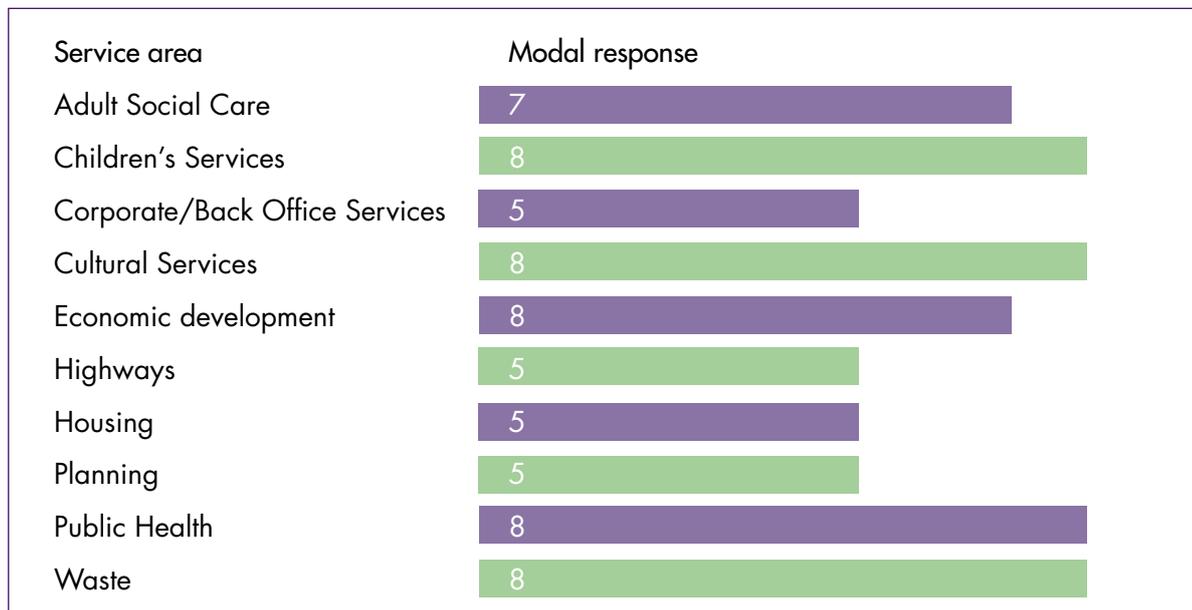
We also found that leadership is overwhelmingly seen as the main enabler for improving public services, highlighted by 96% of respondents. Councils singled out the combination of the Leader and Chief Executive (i.e. not the Leader or the Chief Executive alone) as the key driver of improvements in their authority. A recurring theme from our interviews was that strong leadership at the top of the council tends to lead to a successful and positive organisational culture in which frontline staff are allowed to grow and flourish. This means it is less about innovation stemming directly from these key leading individuals, but more that they set the direction of travel which allows innovation to flourish.

A third of survey respondents also highlighted “organisational culture” as a barrier to service improvements. This, in turn, may flow from not having a leadership team able to create the right environment to encourage improvement and sustain innovation. Indeed, a recent report from the

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that: “Culture change is needed if service transformation is to be realised.”⁴

In which services is transformation taking place?

We also asked our survey respondents to rank their authorities’ approach to service improvement on a scale of 1 to 10 – 1 being incremental, 10 being transformational.



Interestingly, while local authorities see themselves as innovating in particular in services like Children’s Services, Economic Development and Waste, others such as Planning and Housing were seen as more traditional in their council’s assessment. Respondents also view Public Health as a particularly innovative area, though this is perhaps due to the relatively recent transfer of this responsibility to local government.

Local leadership and innovation in Cheshire West and Chester

The importance of local leadership cannot be overestimated in developing a Whole Place Community Budget, as discovered in West Cheshire. It is crucial, however, that this leadership does not emanate from one dominant partner organisation. All agencies have to take ownership for this public service transformation agenda and be comfortable with leading across organisational boundaries.

This has been embedded in West Cheshire by ensuring each partner is accountable for the delivery of a key project. For example, the Chief Officers for two Clinical Commissioning Groups for two Clinical Commissioning Groups in Cheshire have acted as Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) for the Ageing Well project.

Through a collaborative leadership model between partners, including voluntary and community (VCS) and private sector representatives, many barriers to public service redesign have been addressed locally without changes to national policy or legislation.

In addition, many innovative ideas have been developed around the West Cheshire partnership table, including the merger of several similar thematic delivery models into an £8m integrated delivery model for troubled families, domestic abuse victims and children with multiple needs, which incorporates 140 staff. Integrated Early Support is now supporting people with complex needs that would have previously fallen through the cracks of service provision below statutory thresholds.

Recommendations

- Local government must continue to press the case – both locally and nationally – for greater partnership and collaboration across the public sector, working with partners across geographic and organisational boundaries to secure robust evidence of the efficacy of partnership concepts

⁴ *Leading Culture Change: Employee Engagement And Public Service Transformation* (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, London, 2012), p.2

- Local government, as a sector, must consider how to assist those authorities that are unable to innovate and transform themselves into authorities fit for the future
- The local government sector, via bodies like the LGA, SOLACE and others, must continue to invest in leadership as a crucial element in encouraging a culture of innovation
- If change is to take place, local leaders need to be honest and open with staff about what this means, and highlight the positive opportunities that new ways of doing things offer for improving service outcomes

3. Responding to the challenge – exploring new models of service delivery

Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP, the architect of much of the government's Open Public Services agenda, said of innovation and diversity in service delivery in a few years' time "we'll regard it as completely natural to do things that just a few things ago were regarded as immensely radical ... this is a change in the direction of a nation."⁵ Following more than half a century of centralisation, indeed it is.

Underpinning all of this is the need to think outside of ideology and what has come before. As councils try to square the need to reduce budgets and meet resident expectations, they will increasingly need to ask and answer three key questions as they think about how to respond to the challenge and change their services:

1. Is this service necessary; should the council be doing it at all?
2. If yes, what is the right model of delivering the service?
3. Who is best placed to deliver the service – the council alone; the council in partnership with others; or an alternative provider?

In asking these questions, councils will need to consider whether the traditional approach of a single form of service delivery by the council, as the sole provider of all services, is outdated and, if so, what they can do and what they would like to do to address this. This section highlights some the ways authorities are developing and moving beyond being a traditional provider of services.

Strategic commissioning

Local government has been commissioning a range of services – adult social care in particular – from external organisations since the 1980s, with a 2012 Localis survey suggesting that over a third of council services are already provided by external partners (whether by private sector, third sector, or mutual-based organisations).⁶ But this "traditional" commissioning model focused mainly on the quantum of inputs e.g. hours of care being purchased.

In recent years there has been a move to strategic commissioning, defined as "the process of identifying needs within the population and developing policy direction/service models and the market to meet those needs in the most appropriate and cost effective way."⁷ A number of councils, including Essex County Council, North Tyneside Council and others, are increasingly going down the strategic commissioning route, reviewing all services, agreeing the core needs and drivers, then considering who is best placed to deliver them. This trend looks set to continue, resulting in a plethora of different solutions, though questions remain about whether all local authorities have the right skills to enable them to commission effectively. One senior officer described these skills as "absolutely crucial" and was something which that particular authority had invested time and resource in. As they put it, there was "no point changing the operating model unless you have the skills to do it."

One key finding from our interviews, beyond the traditional lessons from commissioning services, such as openness and accountability, is that thorough market testing, i.e. seeing what range of organisations (private, voluntary, etc.) are willing and able to deliver services in a particular locality, is not only essential but something that had to be done "as soon as possible."

⁵ Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP, Minister for Government Policy, speech to Localis, September 2012

⁶ With over 20% of local authority services involving private sector delivery partners, nearly 10% involving voluntary sector delivery partners, in addition to joint vehicles and mutualised services – *Catalyst Councils* (2012)

⁷ *Procurement Strategy: 2011/12-2013/14* (Essex County Council, 2010) p.6

Mutuals

Mutualised services are another long-standing form of service delivery, albeit in rather small quantities, they have now been given increased emphasis by the current coalition government who established the Mutuals Taskforce to support a goal of having one in five public sector employees working in a public service mutual by 2015.

The Taskforce identified both substantial benefits from greater employee engagement in service delivery. Intrinsic benefits relate to the employees themselves, in terms of lower absenteeism and levels of staff turnover, greater scope for autonomy and innovation and better staff performance. Indeed, one interviewee suggested that the “most innovative people are the front line staff” – mutuals try to harness this through “making the worker the boss.” These benefits often engender a “can-do” attitude and behaviour, and improved outcomes through better organisational performance.

As one interviewee put it, when they described a move towards a staff mutual, the “staff are the greatest advocates for it.” While the absolute number of local authority mutuals is small, there are a number of successful examples including Greenwich Leisure, with a turnover of £80million manages, in partnership with local authorities, over 100 leisure centres across London, the South East, and in York, employing over 4000 staff. Some such organisation spun out from councils are even generating funding, with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead’s Our Community Enterprise – formed from the council’s development and funding service – raising £3.6m of additional funding for the council and community projects in its first 15 months of operations.

Councils such as Cheshire West and Chester have negotiated a bewildering tax and regulatory framework in establishing new models of service delivery, such as the move of 500 staff to an employee-owned mutual that delivers adult social care and health provision. However, if more councils are to take advantage of this, the tax and regulatory framework should be actively encouraging councils to innovate, not acting as a barrier. At the same time, myths and misconceptions need to be busted – for example, one interviewee suggested that the transfer of pension liabilities might not be as expensive to transfer as received wisdom might lead industry experts to believe.

Shared Services

Although shared services have also become a more high profile agenda since the 2010 election, it has in fact been a feature of local government since the Goods and Services Act 1970 which enabled councils to enter into agreements with other public bodies to secure joint arrangements for service delivery.

By working across borough boundaries and joining up departments, local authorities are able to secure efficiencies of operations through economies of scale – for example, Localis research suggested that cost savings in some cases ranged from between 20% to 50% higher than initially envisaged.⁸ They can also benefit from the ‘averaging-up’, i.e. a traditionally weaker service in one council benefits from merging with a more effective or efficient service in the other council, drawing on the strengths of both.⁹ One of the leading proponents of shared services, the London Tri-Borough of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster Council, saved just under £10m in the first two years of operation and is on track to deliver £40m of savings per year by 2015/16.¹⁰

Perhaps more critical going forward will be how to scale these shared services solutions, in order to take advantage of increasing economies of scale. Estimations vary, but some authorities have been known to explore the potential of sharing services across four or even five councils, potentially even an entire two-tier county’s worth of services. These are ambitious plans, but are seen by some councils as the natural progression of a successful shared services model. Again, the key is thinking beyond natural administrative borders. Arguably these will become increasingly simply ‘lines on a map’, as councils like Essex CC provide services to share services beyond natural geographic boundaries (for example, by providing Library Services to Slough BC).

⁸ *Crossing the border: Research into shared chief executives* (Localis, London, 2012)

⁹ *Crossing the border* (2012)

¹⁰ *Improving Lives, Saving Money: Practical examples from the first two years since we decided to share major services* (http://transact.westminster.gov.uk/docstores/publications_store/wcc0830triboroeventreportv5.pdf - accessed 07/10/13)

Traded and commercial services

A longer term trend has been towards councils trading services on a commercial basis, through a company wholly owned by the council, with a recent successful example being Kent County Council's traded Legal Services division – which sells services to over 300 public sector bodies and whose profits rose by 20% in 2012/13. Barnet Council has taken a similar approach for adults with learning disabilities, giving service users and carers greater choice, independence and control over the services they buy to meet their individual needs. As councils increasingly prioritise commercial skills, the incidence of trading activity will surely increase.

Co-design



In a future where local public services are more open and honest about what roles they perform and what services they deliver, it will be ever more essential for local agencies to relinquish some of their sovereignty and embrace co-design. At the same time citizens (and the media) will need to embrace the new relationship – more collaborative, less transactional – with their public services and commit to participating in the ongoing redesign of quality local services. As a practical example, Barnet Council is matching families with volunteer Community Coaches who help them develop life skills to ensure they don't fall into a chaotic lifestyle and are less reliant on public services.

While this approach echoes the Big Society messages of the 2010 Conservative manifesto, the devolutionary and co-design agenda crosses political boundaries. Labour too has indicated that “we need to be devolvers, because only by encouraging and freeing local government to innovate in serving your communities, can we in turn enable citizens to take greater responsibility and do more for themselves – a double devolution of power.”¹¹ At the same time, the Labour-led Co-operative Councils movement has attempted to use co-design to move away from designs centered on organisational structures and council provider interests, towards enabling local residents to identify their needs and help design solutions to meet them.

Evidencing these new approaches

While local government is investigating and exploring many options, to demonstrate success it needs to back up change with hard evidence. It's relatively well understood that joint working, shared outcomes and other approaches deliver benefits. However, a lack of cold, hard facts and evidence of success – such as better outcomes, lower cost, or both – is holding back further take up. Indeed, there is a two-step requirement for the sector – firstly to secure buy-in for new approaches through testing the concept works; and secondly, scaling up these approaches once their effectiveness has been evidenced.

¹¹ Speech by Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, to LGA Conference, July 2013

Service transformation and organisational change in Barnet

Over the past three years, Barnet Council has delivered one of the most comprehensive and innovative organisational change programmes seen in local government. It has moved from a council which provides the majority of services directly to one which commissions services from a mixed economy of providers in the market to achieve efficiencies and the best outcomes for residents.

Through its 'One Barnet' programme, the council plans to deliver cumulative savings of £275m over ten years. It also hopes that the flexibility of its new operating model and reformed management structure – which separates strategic commissioning decisions from day to day delivery - will allow the council to respond effectively to the challenges of ongoing austerity and rising demand.

The results have been:

- Innovative joint ventures to deliver: 1) development and regulatory services, bringing together the strengths of the public and private sectors to enhance Barnet's built environment, while including contractual commitments to support and nurture the local economy; and 2) customer and support services, to transform customer experience and access. This provides capacity for future transformation through first class technology (£8m investment), new skills and greater value from the council's supply chain.
- Use of behavioural insight data to design a new in-sourced waste service which focuses on changing residents' behaviours by improving communications, offering new recycling services and bins, and simplified instructions, with the goal of massively increase the recycling rate and delivering ongoing savings.
- Other results of the new commissioning approach include: creating a shared service, with adjoining borough of Harrow, for the provision of both legal services, and for public health services; and forming a trust to provide music services to schools and young people.

The result of all this is a planned cumulative £156m in savings to 2018/19 from the One Barnet programme. Some of the benefits are already being passed on to residents via a five year freeze in Council Tax.

Recommendations

Given the sheer variety of the solutions under development, it's impossible to give a comprehensive set of recommendations taking all of them into account. However, some of the key conclusions from our research included:

- Local authorities should take the best approach for each given service, considering the core needs and drivers and, based on this, consider who is best placed to deliver them
- Where transformation is taking place, councillors need to engage with their communities to explain what the council is doing and why, and consider what this means for the relationship between the council and resident
- Councils should take advantage of specialist advice on establishing new delivery vehicles, specifically with regard to tax (e.g. corporation tax), to get the best legitimate deal for local public services
- HM Treasury to work with local government on overcoming barriers to the transition to new delivery models more generally, e.g. the seemingly discouraging wider tax and regulatory framework
- Shared Services should focus on averaging up to achieve best-quality services, while remaining as locally accountable and transparent as they were when delivered by separate councils
- When developing Shared Service arrangements, councils should consider the ability to scale up to build on existing successful operations and bring in additional partners, as a critical element of getting best value from such arrangements
- Local government needs to do more to prototype and pilot new models, building up a stronger evidence base. This will improve buy-in from partners and scale up new approaches to increase the benefits

4. Sharing best practice

The Audit Commission in 2007 recommended that local government should: “Establish mechanisms for scanning for good ideas elsewhere and forums for creative discussions between staff, external stakeholders and users.”¹² However, the scale of the current challenge makes access to shared learning and innovation fundamental to the viability of the sector.

Whose role is it?

The results of our survey throw up some noteworthy results: while 82% of respondents place a high value on sharing best practice, only 48% see local authorities as individually responsible for stimulating improvements across local authority boundaries. A significant minority (18%) either do not see it as their role to share best practice, or only share it with close contacts. There is broad agreement (80%) that sharing best practice should be a collective responsibility of the sector; although, only 34% see it as the responsibility of the Local Government Association – the sector’s representative body. This lack of clarity is concerning.

How do councils work together in practice?



Despite this uncertainty about who should be responsible for sharing best practice, some individual processes were welcomed. One interviewee praised the LGA peer challenge process, with others mentioning positively online forums such as the LGA’s Knowledge Hub (the future of which is under question), and the government’s new ‘What Works’ Network, although that remains very much in development. Aside from this, many local authorities have been proactive in seeking out new ideas.

As is to be expected, local government has taken a patchwork quilt approach to sharing best practice, different councils have had different kinds of networks – interviewees report a range of improvement and engagement tiers, whether internal to their council, or sub-regionally or regionally. In addition, networks related to specific projects, e.g. those coming out of the Community Budgets programme, are valued regarding specific transformation approaches.

Additionally, some councils are taking advantage of the ‘best of both’ by sharing best practice with private sector companies and other partners to improve the diversity of knowledge. Indeed, in transforming an organisation, best practice should be sought in all sorts of areas across the best of public, private and voluntary sectors (not to mention the ideas of staff and mutualised departments), given the expectations of residents and the experience of receiving customer service from elsewhere. This is linked to what councils know about their residents, which we talk about in more detail in the next section.

Another interviewee suggested that sharing services was actually a mechanism for sharing best practice. In his view, there was an issue in comparing performance – “no one counts anything the same in local government”- with true comparisons only really possible, in his view, when services are being delivered under the same management structure. Of course, once services are shared, it becomes much easier to pick the best from individual approaches. South Worcestershire is one example of the variety of shared service arrangements formed. Running since 2007 the three councils share best practice through a common governance and management structure.

Recommendations

- Local government as a sector should consider how it could resolve the lack of clarity in sharing best practice

¹² *Seeing the light: Innovation in local public services*(Audit Commission, 2007), p.4

5. The role of technology

Do local authorities perceive technology as a force for change?

More than two thirds of the councils that we surveyed rank themselves as eight out of ten or higher in terms of openness to technology-driven improvements to design and delivery. And in the councils that we interviewed there is a general expectation that the usage of technology in public service delivery would increase.

Agile and mobile working is clearly popular within the local government sector, with 88% considering using this approach to support improvements in service delivery and one interviewee describing the potential as “enormous”.

In particular, interviewees highlighted the benefits of linking agile working to rationalisation of local property assets, as Luton BC and other councils have done. Wokingham BC for example, has adopted a 2:1 employee: desk ratio, allowing for a 38% reduction in office space to date. While not the sole solution to the financial challenge, asset rationalisation has the potential to offer significant savings – the government has estimated that £35 billion could be saved across the public sector over ten years. Given the size of the public estate (£385 billion), this could be considered a cautious estimate, so there is the potential for even greater savings. In addition, agile working brings wider benefits in terms of increased productivity – for example, 82% of Wokingham’s staff who moved to flexible working said that they were more productive when working from home, while sickness rates dropped from 5.5 FTE days per person to 3.5. Councils are, in many cases rightly so, exploring estate rationalisation as a source of savings, though interviewees highlighted the necessity of strong interlinks between the technology and property teams in making such changes a success.

The take-up of social media is also high according to our survey, at 81%, although organisations such as SOCITM have sounded a note of caution in suggesting that the ‘game-changing’ potential of social media has yet to be realised.¹³ One interviewee suggested that the future could see a fully-fledged ‘council app’, or even a ‘your public services’ app, allowing residents to pay council tax, apply for parking permits, review care and support options, book public transport, interact with online council customer care officers, etc, all through one mobile phone application.

One interviewee also raised the fascinating prospect of joining up public sector transport assets, with a view to making better utilisation of existing fleets for transporting residents at lower cost. For example, instead of off-duty vehicles that are able to carry passengers being un-utilised, a central management system with a social media application front end could allow residents to quickly and easily enter their requirements and search for nearby transport options, beyond that offered by traditional means.

At the same time however, authorities right now are less universal in their commitment to using technology to support channel shift and moving back office systems online, with 58% of respondents considering this approach. Part of the reason for this may be the perception reflected by some interviewees that local government is slower in its take up of technology and the relatively poor track record of public services in designing technological solutions. This perception may well be holding back local authorities, and local public services more generally, from embracing technological innovation further – in a chief executive’s view the private sector “is way ahead” in this regard. As one interviewee put it: “if you’re used to modern ways of working in your home life, you don’t expect to not have that when you come to work.” It could also suggest that councils are happier to make smaller, incremental, changes in this area, a significant percentage are still less sure about big technology projects – when we asked council leaders to rank how innovative individual services were, for back office services the modal result was 5 out of 10 (significantly less than say public health or children’s services on 8 out of 10).

One important caveat however, was that technology must be deployed to enable and support broader innovation, rather than bought purely as “a new toy that can be controlled” (as one interviewee described it). For example, a number of authorities interviewed described technology as an enabler for change – Eastbourne Borough Council has moved towards whole service officers, completely abandoning silos and building on the technology on offer.

¹³ SOCITM, Press Release – 23 February 2012 (http://www.socitm.net/press/article/196/almost_all_councils_allow_some_access_to_social_media_compared_to_just_one_third_two_years_ago_says_socitm_survey - accessed 13/09/13)

Transformation with technology in Eastbourne, in partnership with Civica

In 2010 Eastbourne Borough Council launched an ambitious council-wide transformation programme called DRIVE, as part of a commitment to make savings of 30% across the board using new digital foundations that would also increase the avenues for citizen and stakeholder input. The programme was set up to address the financial and demographic pressures facing the organisation across a five year period.

The council has developed a customer-centric service delivery model to transform how it manages citizen enquiries. By provisioning a central database of citizen information staff have better access to information and are able to support multiple enquiry areas, increasing staff productivity and flexibility to support wider areas and departments of the council. In April 2013, Customer First was launched, comprising of a team of customer advisors, neighbourhood officers, case managers and professional specialists all under a single management, process and information structure.

By being able to improve responsiveness and staff capability to deal with citizen enquiries, the council has been able to preserve or even improve service levels, while making cost savings of up to 20% compared with the original cost baselines for the departments concerned. In addition, the workforce has been invested in and the council is a much more empowering place to work. Finally, staff absenteeism is very low, and satisfaction levels are higher.

Customer insight – an untapped goldmine?



As one interviewee highlighted, councils have a raft of customer insight data available to them, which could in the future become a crucial part of understanding the needs of residents, how they are using services, where and how, and what they think of them. The public sector lags behind the private sector in this regard – think of companies like Amazon and Tesco who know who their customers are and know their habits, which means that they can tailor responses accordingly. And without this sort of detailed understanding, it is likely that some councils will struggle to design services which meet the preferences of users.

While the length of this report restricts thorough investigation of this issue, such a prospect could represent a significant opportunity for local government and the wider public sector as a whole. For example, greater co-ordination and

analysis of data will enable local authorities to embrace the crucial demand management agenda by spotting those who are likely to become heavy consumers of public services, and intervening early to attempt to prevent problems before they arise. It will also allow councils to demonstrate that they understand the needs of their residents and so help build support for the council brand e.g. by signposting additional services to targeted groups of residents (when a parent enrolls a child in a school, offering vouchers for family sessions at their local municipal swimming pool).

What's the future for channel shift?

Specifically in regard to the government's channel shift agenda, many authorities say they are delivering or considering delivering more customer facing services online (84%). Some councils are moving even further ahead here. Cheshire West and Chester Council for example have fully integrated customer input into their back office systems – if a resident wants to complain about their bins, they are able to interact online directly with the individual refuse collector working in that area without needing to call up their local council office. Examples such as this reduce the number of interactions required, improving the customer experience through a faster, more direct transaction and saving valuable staff time and therefore cost.

But for the wider sector, does this confidence reflect wholesale change in the way that they work, or just a new telephone system? This issue is illuminated by the responses for the consideration of channel shift to broaden service options, which is much lower at 62%, suggesting that many councils are still at the early stages of this journey. Indeed, one interviewee suggested that channel shift was “part of the answer for many different things”.

Councils are more advanced than other parts of the public sector in this regard, but there is plenty of untapped potential. Given the advances, e.g. in the banking sector, where customers can access all of their details online; interact with sales representatives; manage their investments; purchase new products and transfer budgets; there is little reason why council services should be any different. In a 24/7 world, councils are increasingly expected to have services available on demand, outside of office hours, just like online banking and late night supermarkets. Some councils have introduced smartcards to pay for a variety of council services. In Bracknell Forest, for example, residents can pay for library and leisure facilities, load on their concessionary bus pass, redeem discounts, provide proof of age and gain rewards for recycling – all on a single card. Integrating such technology is an early step towards a digital future and channel shift for the public sector, but the public sector as a whole remains far behind other sectors in this regard.

Recommendations:

- Change needs to be service led, which builds on the technology, rather than driven purely by technological solutions
- Councils need to be persistent in their pursuit of transformation, making a strong case both internally and externally
- As elsewhere in this report, councils would benefit from focusing on getting the right governance in place to permit and encourage change
- Local government should continue to investigate and develop the use of customer insight data, as a way of better understanding their residents and complementing other methods of insight/intelligence
- Government should examine some of the technological innovations that have taken place in local government and the wider public sector, with a view to sharing this best practice across the wider public sector
- Government, or groups of councils, should investigate looking into the feasibility of council apps that could help with service transformation, e.g. a ‘public transport app’ that would allow residents to ‘hire’ vehicles from across the public service fleet for local transport purposes



6. Support from central government

Central government has introduced a number of initiatives to help public services to improve and innovate. We asked local government leaders what their view of these initiatives were, with the following results:

- Digital by default / channel shift – were seen as broadly the same by respondents, featuring near identical responses – with almost 45% of respondents for both describing these as “useful”
- Public Service Transformation Network (building on Community Budgets) – seen as relatively useful by the sector, with 42% describing it as “useful”, while 24% suggested it was “too early to say”
- What Works Network – again, responses were predominantly a mix of “useful” (39%) and “too early to say” (36%)
- The Commissioning Academy – 37% suggested that it was “too early to say” just how useful this initiative is, which was the most popular response
- Localism Act – received a completely mixed set of responses, ranging from useful to not useful at all, with respondents perhaps not seeing how the Act is relevant to service improvement

What’s clear from these responses is that local government sees the value in a wide variety of the government’s work programme. However, almost as many respondents take the view that it is too early to say whether a number of these will prove useful in improving local public service design and delivery.

Data protection regulations



Data sharing issues are a perennial point of contention amongst local government colleagues – one council leader said “none of our local partners know what data they can and can’t share with us” – the fact that local partners are either unable or unwilling to share data presents considerable barriers to service redesign.

This applies more generally across the local public sector as different organisations seek to co-design services, but is particularly of concern regarding the integration of health and social care – with the Communities and Local Government Select Committee highlighting an “ignorance and misunderstanding of the current information-sharing arrangements.”¹⁴ This seems to suggest that there is less of an issue with the regulations themselves, but more how they are

interpreted and acted upon – with interviewees suggesting that it was not unknown for public service colleagues to “hide behind” data protection regulations to avoid sharing data.

While the CLG Select Committee recommended a clarification of the guidance, one interviewee suggested that data sharing issues would not be fully resolved until a significant infrastructure shift occurred through the introduction of a single ‘sign-on’ layer for public services.

Commitment to public sector partnership working

Joining up public service delivery at the local level, avoiding duplication and providing a more coordinated and effective service for residents represents perhaps the ‘holy grail’ of public service redesign. Essex County Council was among the first four Community Budgets pilots, re-designing the county’s approach to children’s services, re-offending and economic development. The Community Budget pilots (the others being Cheshire West and Chester; Greater Manchester; and the Tri-borough) and Public Service Transformation Network represent the structured approach to achieving such a redesign, and we urge the government to continue supporting these programmes.

¹⁴ House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee Eighth Report of Session 2012–13: The Role of Local Authorities in Health Issues (The Stationary Office, London, 2013),, p.78-9

Indeed, council leaders have suggested to us that the case for formal place-based budgets was proved and that, at the same time, there was no need to sit around waiting for government permission to act - they believe that a more organic form of bespoke locally-driven public service reform would be widespread long before the end of the decade, regardless of what ministers decreed.

What does good look like?

This theme ran throughout the interview process – when investigating the sharing of best practice, or looking at what government could do to help – councils are often unsure just what true innovation really looks like. The government has attempted to tackle this in part through the creation of ‘What Works’ centres but, as 36% of survey respondents suggested, it is rather too early to tell how effective their establishment will be.

While no one in local government would want to see mandatory adoption of best practice, there is a difference between being prescriptive and setting out expectations. There could be a role for central government, the LGA, or a central grouping.

Recommendations

- Local agencies and agents of national bodies/departments to consider local information sharing hubs where practical and appropriate
- In the long term, the government should investigate the need for a single sign-on layer across the public sector
- Consider a radical expansion, in terms of depth, of community budgets. In the long term, local agencies should also consider how other partners integrate and co-design services
- The Commissioning Academy needs rapid expansion and fast tracking of local government employees, as it is they who are at the forefront of the commissioning agenda
- Government should evaluate how the ‘What Works’ centres develop and, if they do not assist with identifying ‘what good looks like,’ then to introduce a fresh initiative to help the public sector to easily find out what the best ideas and ways of doing things are



7. List of recommendations

Are councils ready for the challenge?

- Local government must continue to press the case – both locally and nationally – for greater partnership and collaboration across the public sector, working with partners across geographic and organisational boundaries to secure robust evidence of the efficacy of partnership concepts
- Local government, as a sector, must consider how to assist those authorities that are unable to innovate and transform themselves into authorities fit for the future
- The local government sector, via bodies like the LGA, SOLACE and others, must continue to invest in leadership as a crucial element in encouraging a culture of innovation
- If change is to take place, local leaders need to be honest and open with staff about what this means, and highlight the positive opportunities that new ways of doing things offer for improving service outcomes

Responding to the challenge – exploring new models of service delivery

- Local authorities should take the best approach for each given service, considering the core needs and drivers and, based on this, consider who is best placed to deliver them
- Where transformation is taking place, councillors need to engage with their communities to explain what the council is doing and why, and consider what this means for the relationship between the council and resident
- Councils should take advantage of specialist advice on establishing new delivery vehicles, specifically with regard to tax (e.g. corporation tax), to get the best legitimate deal for local public services

- HM Treasury to work with local government on overcoming barriers to the transition to new delivery models more generally, e.g. the seemingly discouraging wider tax and regulatory framework
- Shared Services should focus on averaging up to achieve best-quality services, while remaining as locally accountable and transparent as they were when delivered by separate councils
- When developing Shared Service arrangements, councils should consider the ability to scale up to build on existing successful operations and bring in additional partners, as a critical element of getting best value from such arrangements
- Local government needs to do more to prototype and pilot new models, building up a stronger evidence base. This will improve buy-in from partners and scale up new approaches to increase the benefits

Sharing best practice

- Local government as a sector should consider how it could resolve the lack of clarity in sharing best practice

The role of technology

- Change needs to be service led, which builds on the technology, rather than driven purely by technological solutions
- Councils need to be persistent in their pursuit of transformation, making a strong case both internally and externally
- As elsewhere in this report, councils would benefit from focusing on getting the right governance in place to permit and encourage change
- Local government should continue to investigate and develop the use of customer insight data, as a way of better understanding their residents and complementing other methods of insight/intelligence

- Government should examine some of the technological innovations that have taken place in local government and the wider public sector, with a view to sharing this best practice across the wider public sector
 - Government, or groups of councils, should investigate looking into the feasibility of council apps that could help with service transformation, e.g. a 'public transport app' that would allow residents to 'hire' vehicles from across the public service fleet for local transport purposes
- Support from central government**
- Local agencies and agents of national bodies/departments to consider local information sharing hubs where practical and appropriate
 - In the long term, the government should investigate the need for a single sign-on layer across the public sector
 - Consider a radical expansion, in terms of depth, of community budgets. In the long term, local agencies should also consider how other partners integrate and co-design services
 - The Commissioning Academy needs rapid expansion and fast tracking of local government employees, as it is they who are at the forefront of the commissioning agenda
 - Government should evaluate how the 'What Works' centres develop and, if they do not assist with identifying 'what good looks like,' then to introduce a fresh initiative to help the public sector to easily find out what the best ideas and ways of doing things are



8. Annex – survey results

Q1. What are the top three drivers for improvements to public service design and delivery in your authority? (please rank in order of importance, 1 being the most important)

Answer Options	1	2	3	Response Count
New statutory duties	1	2	4	7
To extract the most from current resources	25	19	10	54
To improve service delivery	11	19	16	46
Change in other parts of the public sector (e.g. restructuring)	2	3	6	11
To increase capacity and capabilities	4	11	15	30
The influence of partners organisations	1	5	4	10
The localism agenda	1	3	7	11
Reducing budgets	32	12	8	52
Change of administration	1	1	2	4
Change in personnel	0	3	5	8
Comments				6

answered question 80 skipped question 0

Q2. How open is your authority to supporting improvements to public service design and delivery in the following policy areas (On a scale of 1-10, 1 being 'not open' and 10 being 'open to widespread improvements')

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Response Count
Customer focused services	6	0	0	0	1	0	4	20	9	38	78
New forms of service delivery, e.g. traded services, mutualisation, strategic commissioning	3	3	2	4	5	6	9	16	7	22	77
Mobile and agile working	5	1	0	2	3	2	6	15	13	32	79
Organisational restructures	2	1	1	2	4	4	7	12	14	29	76
Sharing services	2	1	0	0	5	3	9	12	12	34	78
Partnerships and collaborative working	4	0	1	0	3	2	3	9	16	42	80
Technology driven policies e.g. digital by default	2	2	3	1	5	5	7	16	10	26	77

answered question 80 skipped question 0

Q3. Who is the key driver of improvements to public service design and delivery in your local authority?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Leader	10.0%	8
Chief Executive	8.8%	7
Leader AND Chief Executive	65.0%	52
Director of Finance / Resources / Chief Finance Officer (or similar)	0.0%	0
Director of Transformation (or similar)	3.8%	3
Other (please specify)	12.5%	10

answered question 80 skipped question 0

Q4. What are the main barriers for improvements to public service design and delivery in your authority? (tick all that apply)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Getting buy-in from senior management	10.0%	8
Organisational culture	31.3%	25
Ability to stimulate and sustain change	12.5%	10
Cost/budgets	50.0%	40
Service delivery pressures	37.5%	30
The time and capacity it takes to bring about effective change	57.5%	46
Statutory duties	22.5%	18
Regulations (e.g. financial, HR, etc)	38.8%	31
Culture of key partner organisations	50.0%	40
Local/community opinion	18.8%	15
Developing innovation	16.3%	13
Other (please specify)	20.0%	16

answered question 80 skipped question 0

Q5. What are the main enablers for improvements to public service design and delivery in your authority?
(tick all that apply)

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Clear vision and leadership	96.3%	77
Management capacity	48.8%	39
Ability to stimulate and sustain change	33.8%	27
Shared resources	36.3%	29
Strong partnerships	61.3%	49
Technology-based innovation	31.3%	25
Structural change to allow new ways of working	45.0%	36
In-house skills	45.0%	36
Fostering a culture of innovation	68.8%	55
Allocated time to drive change	36.3%	29
Additional funding	20.0%	16
Other (please specify)	5.0%	4

answered question 80 skipped question 0

Q6. When considering your approach to sharing best-practice within your organisation and externally, which of the following statements apply:

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I place a high value on sharing best practice with other local authorities	82.3%	65
I only share best practice with close external contacts where my experience is relevant	15.2%	12
I will only share insights internally	2.5%	2
I am not open to sharing insights	0.0%	0
Comments		17

answered question 79 skipped question 1

Q7. Whose responsibility is it to stimulate and sustain improvements to public service design and delivery across authorities?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Local government (individually)	47.5%	38
Local government (collectively)	80.0%	64
The LGA	33.8%	27
Central government	17.5%	14
Other	7.5%	6

answered question 80 skipped question 0

Q8. How would you describe your authority's approach to using IT and digital services to make improvements in public service design and delivery across your authority?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Incremental: smaller areas of improvement and change	29.1%	23
Innovative: introducing new and leading-edge ways of working that alter specific services or departments	38.0%	30
Transformational: delivering step-change and strategic improvements in the cost, resilience and flexibility of core services	32.9%	26

answered question 79 skipped question 1

Q9. On a scale of 1-10, where 1= incremental; 5= innovative and 10= transformational, how would you rank your authorities' approach to improvements in public service design and delivery across the following areas? (please answer for those services that your authority is responsible for)

Answer Options	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Response Count
Adult Social Care	1	1	1	0	3	4	10	5	4	7	36
Children's Services	1	2	3	3	5	4	6	7	4	2	37
Corporate/Back Office Services	0	1	3	1	15	10	14	13	12	8	77
Cultural Services	4	1	11	7	13	7	7	14	3	2	69
Economic development	2	2	8	0	9	6	8	19	14	9	77
Highways	1	0	5	4	8	3	7	3	3	1	35
Housing	0	3	5	7	12	10	8	8	6	5	64
Planning	0	6	12	4	15	7	11	5	6	7	73
Public Health	0	1	5	4	6	4	9	10	6	2	47
Waste	0	0	3	6	12	7	8	18	14	7	75
Your authority overall	0	0	3	4	10	7	14	18	13	9	78

answered question 80 skipped question 0

Q10. Is your authority using or considering using any of these technologies to meet your organisation's goals for improvements in public service design and delivery?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Delivering more customer-facing services online aka 'Digital by default', rather than through face-to-face contact (e.g. payments, advice, etc)	83.3%	65
Agile and mobile working	88.5%	69
Channel shift to broaden service options	61.5%	48
Moving back office systems online/in to the cloud (e.g. HR, Finance self service)	57.7%	45
Use of social media in engaging with residents	80.8%	63
Comments		11

answered question 78 skipped question 2

Q11. How useful do you think that the following Government's initiatives that seek to support improvements in public service design and delivery will be?

Answer Options	Very useful	Useful	Not useful	Not at all useful	Too early to say	Response Count
Public Service Transformation Network (building on Community Budgets)	6	32	12	8	18	76
The Commissioning Academy	6	18	16	6	27	73
The Localism Act	0	24	22	22	6	74
'Digital by default'	9	32	12	3	16	72
Channel shift to broaden service options	10	32	10	4	14	70
'What Works' evidence centres	2	27	13	3	25	70
Comments						32

answered question 78 skipped question 2