

iMPOWER

2016 Insight Survey

Findings and conclusions from our annual survey of
local government Chief Executives and senior leaders

Are local public services sustainable?

Are local public services sustainable? This question has driven nearly all of iMPower's intellectual spade work over the last eight years. The itinerant steps of our methods - shaped with our clients - have now become well-worn paths. Hundreds of journeys completed, innumerable lives changed. Yet despite that effort, we still face an existential crisis.

Practically, local public services must find a way to fund themselves. This means immediate efficiencies, radically different ways of delivering and an irreversible change in culture. Intellectually, it means addressing some uncomfortable truths about our democracy and the relationship between citizens and their state.

Any response must offer a balance between these two. Crude financial butchery alone is a fix fit to fail. Similarly, the wholesale importing of an 'ism', experience teaches us, offers little more than the noise of progress. What is required is an approach that takes the immediate financial pressure and uses it to propel a programme of change that will create an organisation which reflects the needs of 21st century society.

These are the messages which came from our 2016 Annual Insight Survey that this short report summarises. Underlying it all was a request for a new level in understanding and influencing demand for public services. The financial imperative is making it implausible for public services to retain their 20th century shape, yet there are more forces at work than just the pecuniary.

The orthodoxy of our time is to look at the public sector and see organisational challenges. What is needed is to look at places and see their generational ones. An aging population, migration, poorly paying jobs, housing in disrepair; the reality is that there can be no sustainable public services without a change in society; a change in our behaviours and expectations, of our duties and our responsibilities.

iMPower's work offers politicians and public servants the practical means with which to achieve this ambition. A more sophisticated framework, it helps to atomise the basic interactions between the citizen and their state, re-directing resource to where it will do the most good. By building around behaviours, not lines on an organogram, the connections it creates are real and the improvements it makes can be felt.

iMPower stands alone amongst its peers in asking the public sector to answer bigger questions. To remove all limiting assumptions and work towards building a better society. To see the beauty, competition, virtue and security that communities need and ask how better it can play its part. What makes iMPower different is that we won't settle for second best for our clients. iMPower exists to make the seemingly unattainable, possible.

About the survey

iMPOWER's annual Insight Survey is the first sector-wide polling of senior leaders of the year, asking key questions about the challenges facing local government over the next 12 months.

The 2015 Survey generated insights that led to thought-leading publications such as *The Inflection Point* and *Breaking the Lock* which are available to download from iMPOWER's website (www.impower.co.uk).

In 2016, 98 local government Chief Executives and Directors answered the survey.

About iMPOWER

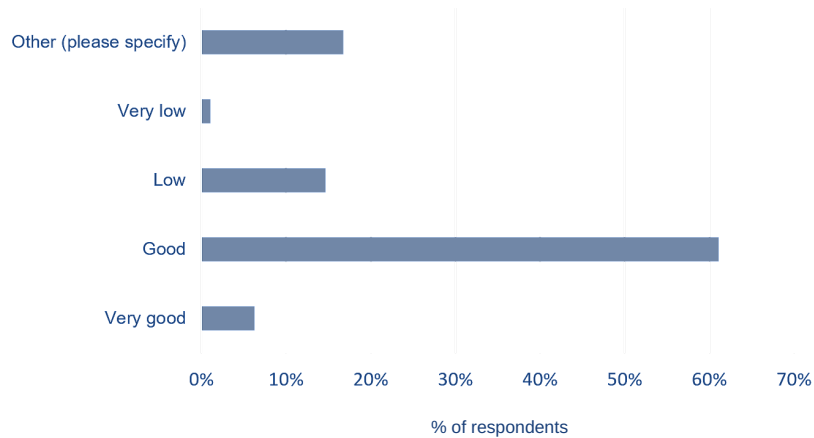
iMPOWER solves complex social challenges through changing behaviours.

We use behavioural insight to understand how and why citizens and institutions act the way that they do. Through uncovering these hidden truths we redesign sustainable public services from the bottom-up, with staff, users and citizens at the heart of design, testing and delivery.

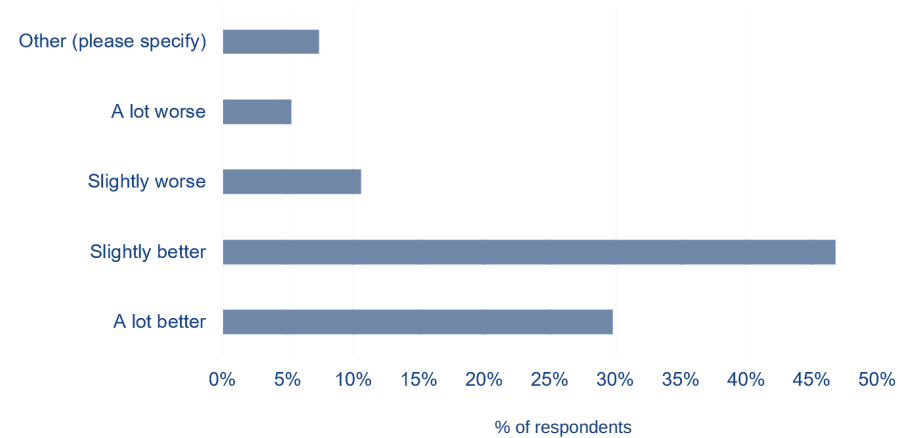
Blurred Lines: Political and Executive Leadership

Senior local government executives have overwhelmingly pointed to increasing encroachment by political leaders on to executive decision making. One Chief Executive argued that elected members are “*still too internally focused on the minutiae and their own parochial goals, but there are some signs of change in the recognition of the need to be more outward focused.*” The general trend was for politicians to be both improving in terms of the quality of political leadership they were providing, but also becoming far more involved in the day-to-day decision making that a Chief Executive and their senior team would expect to be their purview.

How high would you rate the quality of political leadership in local government?

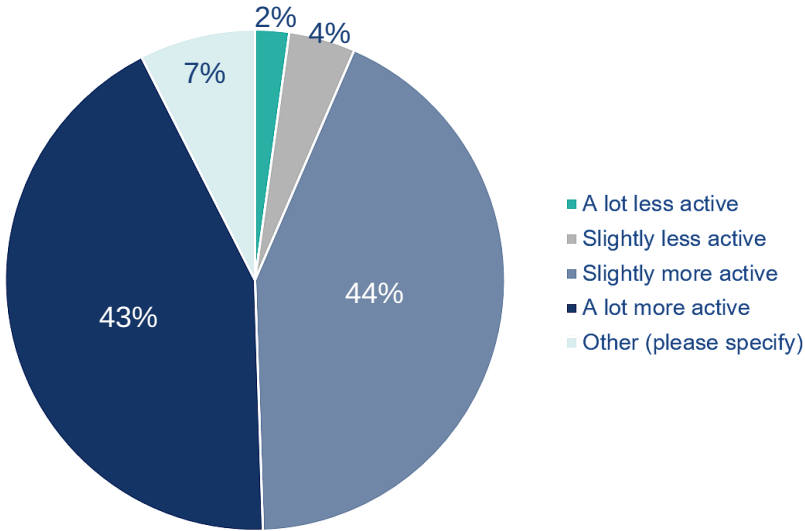


Has the standard of political engagement in your own authority changed in recent years?

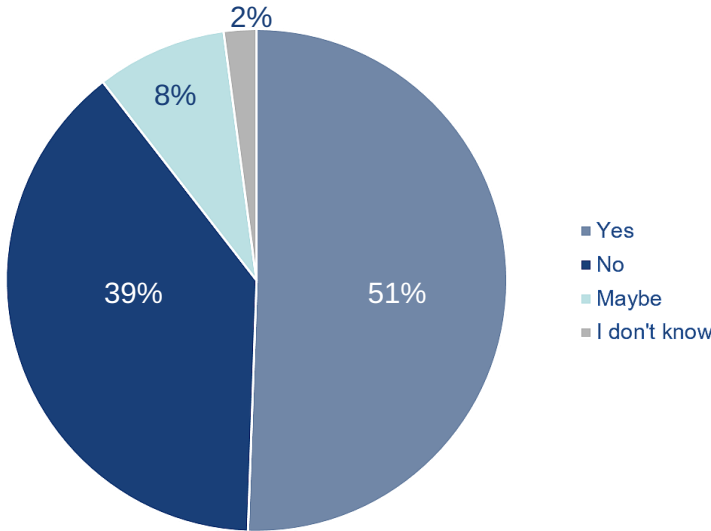


Blurred Lines: Political and Executive Leadership

Have politicians become more or less 'active' in the executive decision making of your organisation?



Thinking about local government generally, do you think that the boundaries between management and elected members have become more blurred?





Are politicians becoming more or less active? And are the boundaries becoming more blurred?

"Awareness and understanding of the scale of financial challenges and the willingness to take/make difficult decisions as a result"

"Members being more operationally-minded as the impact of cuts hit so-called front line services. Officers making alliance with members to protect their areas"

"The money has focused their minds"

"The boundary between strategy/policy and operations is less clear"

"A slightly better focus on strategy and outcomes and less active in terms of the internal operation of the council and oversight of process. A positive change"

"More interference in day-to-day operational matters"

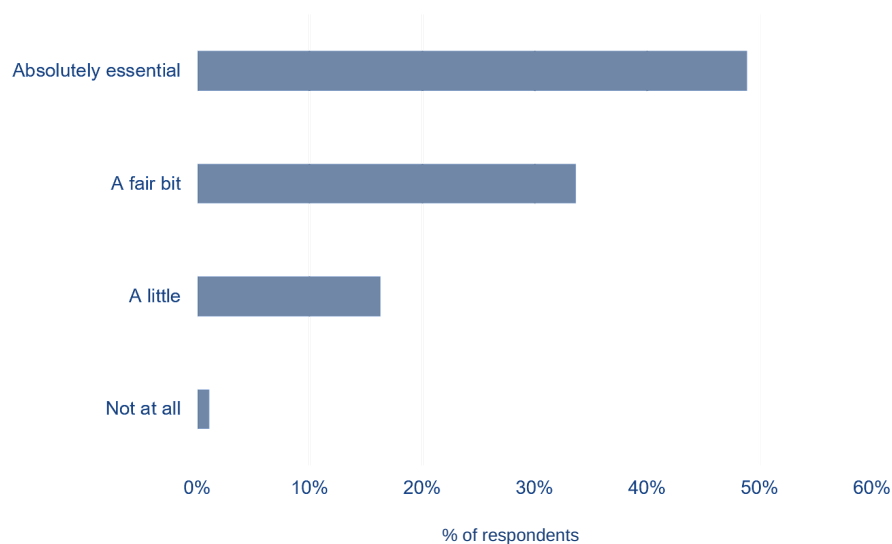
"We have strong political/operational boundaries"

"Now is a time for greater clarity between the roles and responsibilities of elected members and senior officers to ensure effective and productive working relationships"

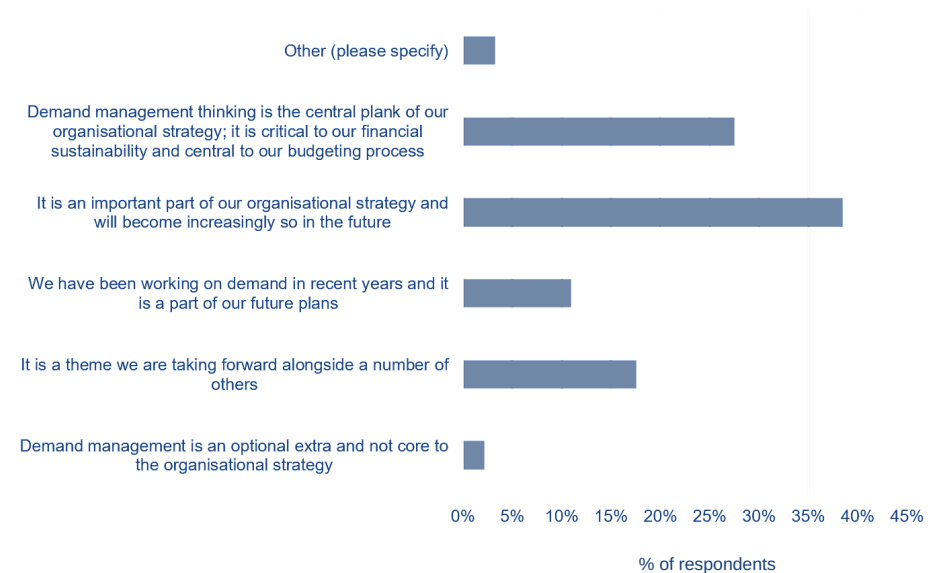
Demand recognition has past the Inflection Point

Since 2011 iMPower has repeatedly made the case for demand-focused transformation. This year's survey has provided the most conclusive evidence yet that local government is collectively in agreement that some form of Target Demand Model is required to drive the next phase of transformation.

How prominent an influence is demand and demand management in your council's budgetary discussions?



Consider your own council's strategic planning for the next five years. In terms of demand management, which of the following would you say best reflects what your organisation is doing?



The Worry List

Children's and adults services remain the most prominent areas of concern for senior local government executives. As both the sector's largest budgets and collection of 'at risk' residents, social care represents the single greatest transformation challenge for the sector. With some councils arguing that "it's too expensive to be good" we can say with confidence that no council can afford to be bad.

Could you rank (with 1 being the least worrying and 10 being the most) the following challenges you believe your organisation is currently facing?





Integration will happen but it needs some help and has impacted on relationships in different ways

"[Integration has] neither helped nor hindered. [It's] created an opportunity for closer working but has also brought tensions around budgets"

"We're going to have a bloody good go"

"Government will need to help much, much more"

"There is a massive cultural divide between the NHS and local authorities"

"Integration by 2020 will happen"

"Transformation *always* trump integration. If two functions are crap and you integrate them then you have integrated crap"

"Still a strong believer in integration. Now unsure of timeframe"

"No real change but lots of time spent in meetings"

"It will take differing forms in different places"

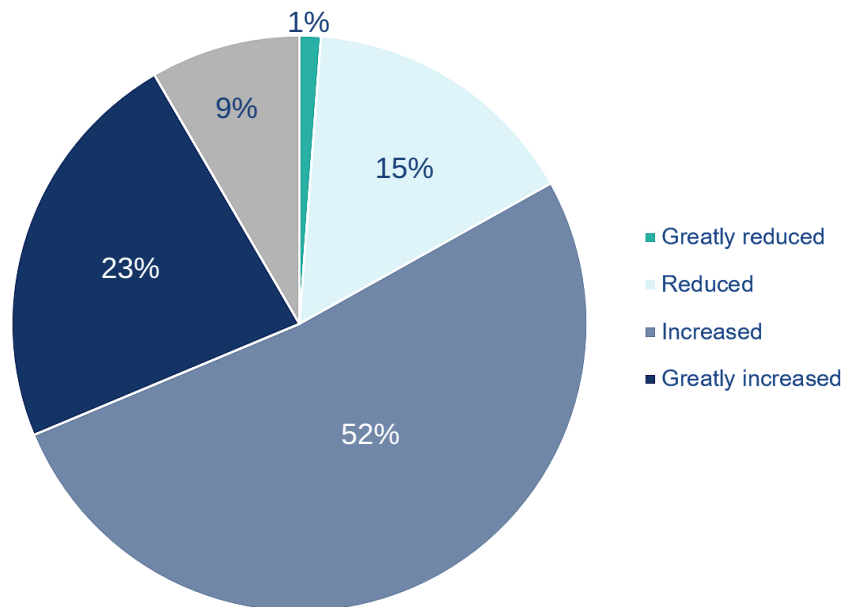
"Better but the hospitals don't play"

"The NHS wouldn't know how to have positive relationships with any partners"

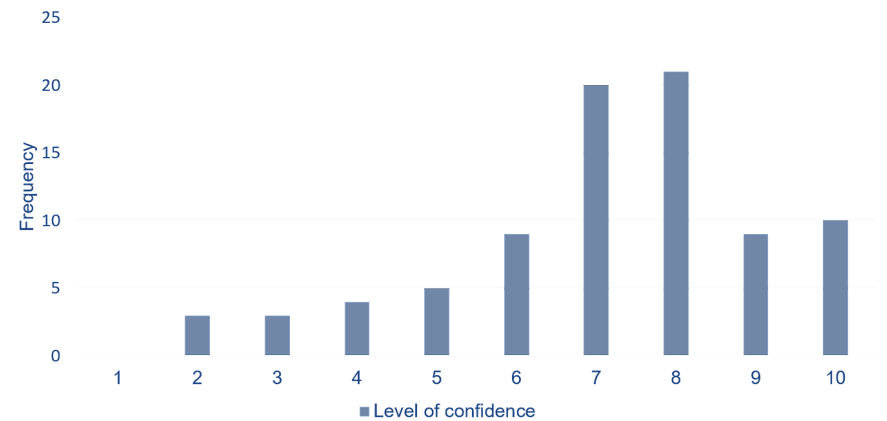
Devolution and Confidence

Local government remains outwardly positive because the devolution agenda offers opportunities. Recent shifts in central government policy, however, have called into question how much the devolution deals really offer local authorities. For sure, councils must take advantage of the opportunities that devolution offers them but the clear message is that without public service reform any devolution is merely a short term distraction.

Has the influence that your council has over its place changed in the last five years?



On a scale of 1-10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) how confident are you that your place will see sustained economic growth in the next five years?



"Very. We want to control our own destiny"

"Because even at our worst, councils and their partners run things better locally"

"It's the only route to securing investment in infrastructure and inventing collaboration across a fragmented public service landscape"

How important is devolution for your council and why?



"Important for skills, employment and housing policy but doesn't really touch other areas so limited importance at the moment"

"Limited: we are working out what the advantages would be, beyond what we can already do collaboratively across councils"

"It is potentially a game changer"

"Important but not essential - we have yet to reach agreement on a deal"

"Of course it's important - it will drive our funding future"

Get in touch

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