

# Local Government 2013

**LATEST RESEARCH FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESEARCH TEAM AT IPSOS MORI**

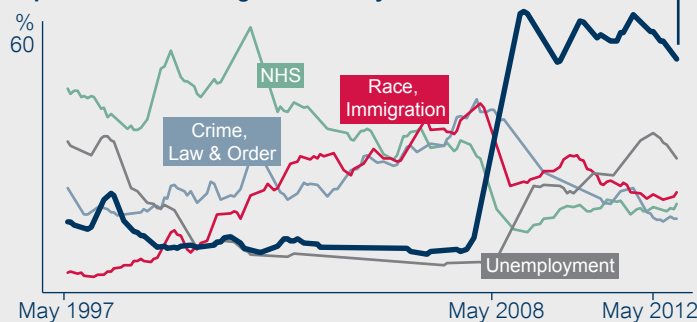
This latest instalment from the Local Government Research Team at Ipsos MORI looks into where the public, and the sector, sit on some of the big issues of 2013, drawing on our most recent data.

Local government faces its third year of an unprecedented programme of spending reductions, and this year will see, among other policy changes, the localisation of council tax benefit and a new public health remit. This all has implications for the research that councils and their partners commission. We share some of our experiences supporting clients through these changing and challenging times.

## Public anxiety about local cuts is growing

The public continues to worry about the state of the economy in 2013. Fifty-two per cent of the general public cite the economy as among the most important issues facing Britain today<sup>1</sup>. A similar proportion is pessimistic about the future of the economy; 48% think it will get worse over the coming year<sup>2</sup>.

What do you see as the most/other important issues facing Britain today?



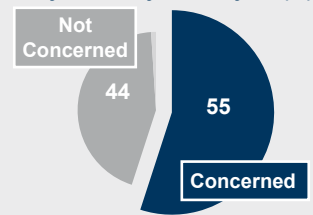
Base: 966 British adults aged 18+ (Mar 2013)

As things stand, it seems most people may not have yet noticed cuts to local services such as social care and refuse collection. Around two in three (65%) agree with the statement "I haven't really noticed any changes to the services provided by my local council". Although significantly, one in three (34%) disagrees with this statement. But, whilst they may not have felt the impact personally, almost half of people (48%) nevertheless agree that

"the cuts to local council services have gone too far and will lead to social unrest"<sup>3</sup>.

The public is growing anxious about the future. A majority (55%) say they are concerned about the impact of council service cuts to come on them and their families over the coming year<sup>4</sup>.

Concern about the impact of council service cuts on you and your family in next year (%)

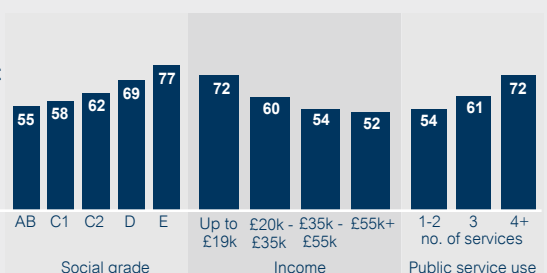


Base: 1,015 British adults aged 18+ (Jan 2013)

What is perhaps more worrying is that people traditionally more likely to be dependent on the state for support are even more concerned about what the future holds<sup>5</sup>; a situation likely to be exacerbated by the introduction of the new 'bedroom' tax and cuts to council tax benefit.

% very or fairly concerned about the effect of government spending cuts on them and their family

**61%**



Base: 1,009 British adults aged 16-75 (Nov 2012)

## Pressures on the local government sector look set to continue

Other sectors are clearly feeling the pain, but Ipsos MORI's Public Sector Leaders Survey<sup>6</sup> suggests that local government is suffering more than most. At the general level, 42% of leaders across the public sector say their organisation has been affected by the cuts in public spending 'a great deal', and this rises to 62%

amongst local government leaders. Funding appears to be the key issue; 51% of public sector leaders say that budget cuts are the most important issue facing their sector today. This is 74% amongst local government leaders.

1 Base: 966 British adults aged 18+ interviewed face-to-face in home. Source: Ipsos MORI Issues Index (Mar 2013)  
 2 Base: 1,009 British adults aged 18+ interviewed by telephone. Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor (Mar 2013)  
 3 Base: 1,015 British adults aged 18+ interviewed by telephone. Source: Ipsos MORI NLGN Poll (Jan 2013)  
 4 Base: 1,015 British adults aged 18+ interviewed by telephone. Source: Ipsos MORI NLGN Poll (Jan 2013)  
 5 Base: 1,009 British adults aged 16-75 interviewed online. Source: Ipsos MORI (Nov 2012)  
 6 Base: 200 telephone interviews with public sector leaders; (50 in each of the 4 key sectors). Source: Ipsos MORI Public Sector Leaders Survey (Feb 2013)

It seems, though, that local government has been doing a good job at trying to maintain services in this tough climate. Over half (56%) of local government leaders say that the quality of the service their organisation now provides is 'about the same' as it was before the cuts. However, 28% say it has got worse.

Anxieties amongst those people leading the sector remain, and there is a sense that things are about to get even tougher. Nine in 10 leaders working in local government say they are concerned about the effects of the cuts on their organisation over the next 12 months.

### % of public sector leaders who said...

Base: 200 public sector leaders (50 in each of the 4 key sectors)(Feb 2013)

	...their organisation has been affected by the cuts in public spending a great deal/fair amount.	...the quality of service their organisation now provides is worse than it was before the cuts.	...they are concerned about the effects of the cuts on their organisation in the next 12 months.
Total	84	21	85
Central Gov.	82	18	68
Local Gov.	94	28	90
NHS	86	8	92
Education	74	32	88

Base: All public sector leaders (200)

Base: all who say their organisation has been affected by the cuts (196)

Base: All public sector leaders (200)

## Residents are confused about what should take priority

"I am personally happy to **accept less** from my local council than I currently get in order to **help pay off the national debt**"

**57%**  
Disagree  
**40%**  
Agree

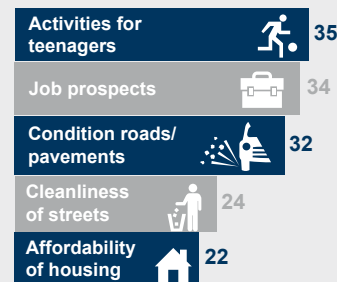


Anxieties about local services, and about the economy more widely, present huge challenges for local authorities. It is important that councils take the public with them as they seek to grapple with reduced budgets. To do this it is necessary to understand their priorities and concerns.

viewpoints are not unusual in research terms, but they serve to highlight the conundrum local government faces in trying to do the right thing by their local communities.

When it comes to specific service areas, nationally, the public would prefer to see cuts focus on overseas aid and benefits. Few want to see cuts to local authority services, in particular, social services,

**Thinking about this local area, which four or five things do you think most need improving? (%)**



schools and care for the elderly<sup>8</sup>. Meanwhile, when it comes to local priorities, councils would do well to reflect on those services which are seen as most in need of improvement. According to Ipsos MORI's Local Improvement Index<sup>9</sup>, the top of mind priorities for the public at the local level include activities for teenagers, job prospects and the condition of roads and pavements.

Base: 986 British adults aged 15+ (Jun 2012)

**64%**  
Disagree  
**34%**  
Agree



"I would be happy to **pay more council tax** if it helped my local council **maintain current levels of service**"

Whilst the public is concerned about the implications of the cuts, a majority (64%) remain reluctant to see their council tax increase, even if this is at the expense of current service levels. At the same time, a majority (57%) are unwilling to personally accept less from their council<sup>7</sup>. These apparently conflicting and contradictory

Base: 1,015 British adults aged 18+ (Jan 2013)

## Ultimately, councils are seen as best placed to deal with the tough challenges ahead

Despite the negative outlook, councils can take some comfort as they grapple with the tough decisions about services and spending ahead. As things stand, it is central, not local, government which is taking the brunt of the blame for cuts in local services. Just over one person in 10 (13%) blames councils

**Who do you think is most to blame for the level of cuts to local council services? (%)**

Local Councils (13)      The state of the global economy (17)

**The Coalition Government (30)**

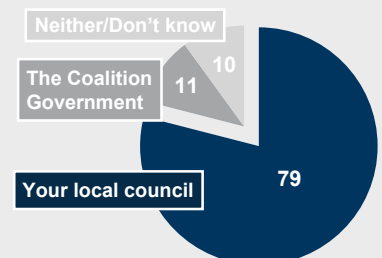
Banks (11)      The previous Labour Government (25)

Base: 1,015 British adults aged 18+ (Jan 2013)

for cuts to local services. Meanwhile, three in 10 hold the Coalition Government responsible, and a slightly lower proportion (25%) believes the previous Labour Government is to blame<sup>10</sup>.

In addition, the public overwhelmingly says that they trust their local council rather than the government to make the important decisions about how services are provided in their local area (79% compared to 11%)<sup>11</sup>.

**Who do you trust most to make decisions about how services are provided in your local area? (%)**



Base: 1,015 British adults aged 18+ (Jan 2013)

In thinking about how to address local challenges, Ipsos MORI polling suggests that councils should feel confident in having an honest conversation with their residents.

7 Base: 1,015 British adults aged 18+ interviewed by telephone. Source: Ipsos MORI NLGN Poll (Jan 2013)

8 Base: 1,018 British adults aged 18+ interviewed by telephone. Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor (Feb 2013)

9 Base: 986 British adults aged 15+ interviewed face-to-face in home. Source: Ipsos MORI Local Improvement Index (Jun 2012)

10 Base: 1,015 British adults aged 18+ interviewed by telephone. Source: Ipsos MORI NLGN Poll (Jan 2013)

11 Base: 1,015 British adults aged 18+ interviewed by telephone. Source: Ipsos MORI NLGN Poll (Jan 2013)

# WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE RESEARCH COUNCILS DO, AND THE INSIGHT THEY SEEK TO GENERATE?

## How to involve residents in difficult decisions about service prioritisation

### Budget-setting research for Kent County Council



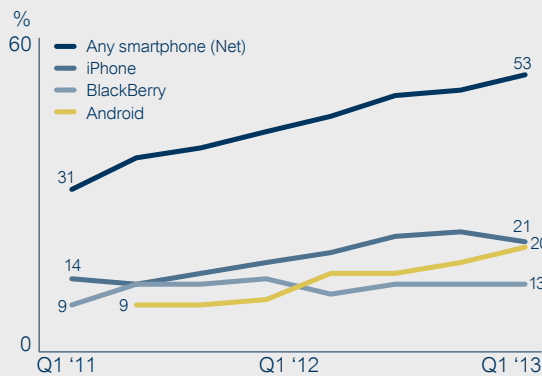
A number of councils are engaging their residents in a democratic debate about spending and service prioritisation. For a number of years now, Ipsos MORI has been working with Kent County Council (amongst other councils) to consult its residents through large workshops about how services should be delivered and budgets prioritised. Whilst small scale and deliberative in nature, these events provide invaluable depth and insight into how residents perceive the situation the council faces and which local services and resources residents feel should be given priority over others. Practical and realistic suggestions on ways to deliver savings are delivered to the council and are an important tool for elected members when it comes to annual budget setting and service prioritisation.

**29%** of people would like a say in decisions about spending cuts<sup>12</sup>



## How to capitalise on the latest in mobile phone technology to reach large audiences

### BlackBerry vs. iPhone vs. Android ownership



In the new digital world there are now opportunities for councils to take the pulse of their residents in a far more cost-effective way. Ipsos MORI's work with EE, one of the UK's leading mobile operators, provides us with an ideal opportunity to explore the journey and actions of people at a particular time or place, drawing on the huge growth in smartphone technology. The mobile operator's network allows us to pinpoint the volume, demographics and mobile web use of anonymised

and aggregated groups of people in a specific geo-location. We are currently working with Manchester City Council to better understand whether their Christmas markets change the profile of visitors to the city centre and whether they attract new visitors or increase the frequency of visits to the area over a specific time period.

**Huge growth in the access of information through mobile technology.**

**53%** now own a smartphone... and rising<sup>13</sup>



## How to work effectively with partners to improve outcomes for local communities

### Public health research for NHS Kirklees and Kirklees Council



Understanding how different resident groups live is key in planning and delivering effective public health services, and is particularly relevant to councils as they engage with their

new public health responsibilities. Our expertise in sample and project design can help councils and their partners address one of the greatest challenges facing public health research, namely gathering accurate data which allows robust understanding of the issues facing relatively small population groups. Our knowledge of questionnaire design goes beyond the questions themselves to methods of encouraging response: we have found that most residents are remarkably frank and honest in providing personal information if they understand why the information is being collected even when using a paper self-completion approach. Our research in Kirklees is being used by the council and NHS to plan and monitor service provision across a range of issues, for example, developing an Expert Patients Programme to help residents manage their own health better.

**66%** of adults think it is the responsibility of individuals to keep themselves healthy and not the job of the NHS<sup>14</sup>



<sup>12</sup> Base: 1,000 British adults aged 18+ interviewed face-to-face in home. Source: Ipsos MORI (Jun 2010)

<sup>13</sup> Base: 1,024 British adults aged 15+ interviewed face-to-face in home. Source: Ipsos MORI quarterly Tech Tracker (Mar 2013)

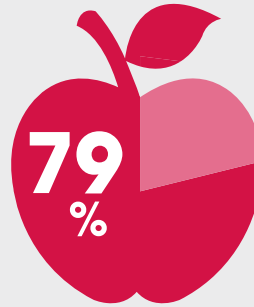
<sup>14</sup> Base: 1,018 British adults aged 18+ interviewed by telephone. Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor (Feb 2013)

# THEMES FOR 2013

The Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute has teams specialising in a number of cross-cutting policy areas relevant to local government: from housing and welfare reform, to health and social care, and to transport, planning and the environment. Together we work to help our public sector clients better understand the needs of local communities.

Here is a snapshot from just some of our work areas, which we think are relevant to Local Government in 2013...

## Delivering on a new public health remit

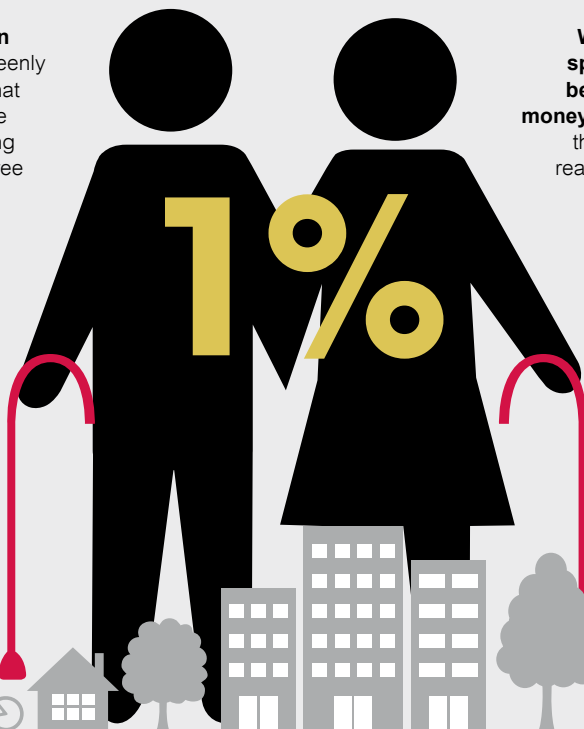


79% of people recognise that their lifestyle has a sizeable impact on their chance of living a long and healthy life<sup>15</sup>. The majority take personal responsibility for their health; 66% think it is the responsibility of the individual to keep themselves healthy and not the job of the NHS. That said, there is little appetite for active involvement in how health services are provided locally; 26% of adults are not interested in knowing how the health service works in their area as long as they do their job<sup>16</sup>.

## Tackling housing problems

80% of people believe there is a housing crisis in Britain<sup>17</sup>. But the sense of crisis is felt much less keenly locally. More of the public disagrees than agrees that there is a crisis locally (49% against 45%) and while most do not think there is enough affordable housing available to buy or rent where they live, 45% disagree (21% strongly) that new homes need to be built there. At the same time, LGA research last year showed that councillors consider public opposition to be the biggest barrier to building new homes<sup>18</sup>.

This and other research underlines the importance of understanding local sentiment<sup>19</sup>.



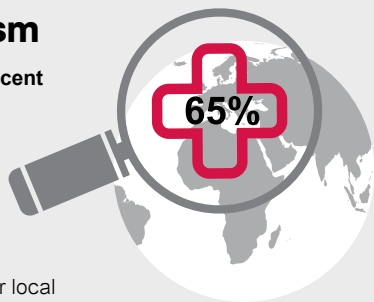
## Addressing our ageing society

When asked to choose from a list of key spending areas, just 1% of British people believe the Government should cut 'most money' from care for the elderly. Just 3% think there should be cuts to state pensions<sup>20</sup>. In reality, 41% of local government lead officers tell us that 'budget cuts' have been one of the biggest barriers to implementing their ageing strategies locally<sup>21</sup>. Longer-term challenges remain. There is a lack of awareness about who pays for people's care in later life, and many wrongly assume it falls entirely to the state.

Furthermore, few are planning financially for their old age; just 34% of people say they have thought about preparing financially to pay for social care services they might need in the future<sup>22</sup>.

## Embedding localism

65% of people believe that, in recent years, Government and public services have tried to do too much, and people should take more responsibility for their own lives<sup>23</sup>. For the public's own part, research shows that some people say they would be willing to get more involved in their local communities, although the reality is often different. When asked directly about what they would be willing to do, people are more likely to mention 'one-off' or less time-consuming roles; 89% say they would be likely to do a quick favour or a chore for a neighbour, whereas 29% say they would be likely to help run or manage a youth club<sup>24</sup>.



## Improving the roads

The Ipsos MORI Local Improvement Index shows that the condition of the roads/pavements is one of the top priorities for people locally (32% say it is one of the things that most needs improving in their local area)<sup>25</sup>. At the same time,

findings from our 2012 National Highways & Transport Survey<sup>26</sup> show that while local residents are on balance satisfied with pavements, buses, street lighting and road safety (among other transport and highways services), 59% were dissatisfied with the condition of their local roads last summer<sup>27</sup>. 60% thought there were more potholes in their local area than previously and just 20% were satisfied with the way the council deals with the problem.



For more information visit [www.ipsos-mori.com/localgov](http://www.ipsos-mori.com/localgov) or contact Head of Ipsos MORI North [nicola.moss@ipsos.com](mailto:nicola.moss@ipsos.com) - 0161 240 2401 Head of Local Government [victoria.harkness@ipsos.com](mailto:victoria.harkness@ipsos.com) - 0207 347 3000



15 Base: 1,994 British adults interviewed face-to-face in home. Source: Ipsos MORI (Aug 2008)  
16 Base: 1,002 British adults aged 16+ interviewed face-to-face in home. Source: Ipsos MORI (May 2010).  
17 Base: 1,015 British adults aged 18+ interviewed by telephone. Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor (Jan 2013)  
18 <http://bit.ly/JOLm45>  
19 <http://bit.ly/XBzycv>

20 Base: 1,018 British adults aged 18+ interviewed by telephone. Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor (Feb 2013)  
21 Base: 39 lead officers across English local authorities who have a strategy in place for dealing with ageing agendas, online survey. Source: Preparing for an Ageing Society: Evaluating the Ageing Well programme Parts 1 and 2. Ipsos MORI / DWP/ LGA (May 2012)  
22 Base: 1,001 English adults aged 16+ interviewed face-to-

face in home. Source: Ipsos MORI/DH Perceptions of the NHS Tracker (Dec 2011).  
23 Base: 515 British adults interviewed by telephone. Source: Ipsos MORI (Jun 2012)  
24 Base: 1,003 British adults interviewed online. Source: Ipsos MORI/NLGN/Groundwork (Apr 2011)  
25 Base: 986 British adults aged 15+ interviewed face-to-face in home. Source: Ipsos MORI Local Improvement

Index (Jun 2012)  
26 <http://nhtsurvey.econtrack.co.uk/>. Entry to the 2013 survey is currently open  
27 Base: 60,624 English adults (75 LAs) postal. Source: Ipsos MORI annual National Highways & Transport Survey (Aug 2012)