apse membership resources

State of the Market Survey 2015

Housing, Building Maintenance and Construction

Briefing 16/01
January 2016

Association for Public Service Excellence
2nd floor Washbrook House
Lancastrian Office Centre
Talbot Road, Old Trafford
Manchester M32 0FP
telephone: 0161 772 1810
fax: 0161 772 1811
email: enquiries@apse.org.uk
web:www.apse.org.uk

LOCAL SERVICES LOCAL SOLUTIONS

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE
ISO 14001 REGISTERED FIRM GB 11409
ISO 9001 REGISTERED FIRM GB 11132
ISO 27001 REGISTERED FIRM GB 14074

The state of the market survey was conducted by Phil Brennan, APSE Principal Advisor for Housing, Building Maintenance and Construction

For any enquires in relation to the survey, Phil may be contacted on:

Tel: 0161 772 1810
Email: pbrennan@apse.org.uk

Housing, Building Maintenance and Construction

State of the Market 2015

The APSE State of the Market survey is conducted on-line and contains a series of questions covering a range of issues of interest to those officers and councillors responsible for housing, building maintenance and repairs, capital projects, construction and related challenges for the future. 34 responses were received from housing and building maintenance providers throughout the UK. This report identifies the key findings of the survey.

This is the fourth time APSE has undertaken this state of the market survey so a comparison with previous surveys is available. This comparison will be highlighted where appropriate.

The surveys are an attempt to understand perceptions of the market amongst people directly involved in delivering services rather than a survey of the same individuals from year to year.

Context

Housing and building maintenance remains a significant issue nationally. It seems that the general message about the need to provide more housing especially in the South East, the capacity of the construction sector to provide these properties and the role of the planning process, and especially the Green Belt, has not changed. Although it is acknowledged that these topics are in need of attention little has emerged in terms of radical policy changes. Welfare changes are well underway and will have an impact on demand over time most likely on the private rented sector. The issue of skills remains of concern with the lack of available skills across the sector likely to hinder the sector's growth. This has also led to an increase in wages as demand for those skilled workers rises. The living wage may also impact on the cost of labour in support services.

Construction News reported in September 2015 that the average national daily pay rate for electricians had increased from £148 in 2014 to £159 in 2015; for carpenters it had increased from £142 to £147; for plumbers from £138 to £154; and for plasterers from £126 to £146. Clearly such pay rises will have an impact on the overall cost of works and on the likelihood of operatives moving between employers as demand increases. There will be differences between different regions of the UK but it seems that those who are willing to move will be able to get better pay. The need for a greater supply of skilled operatives is clear from these figures. Overall the sector will have to pick up the cost and presumably pass that on to clients.

The CITB estimates that 220,000 new recruits will be needed by the sector over the next 5 years and it will take all players in the sector to meet this target Most local authority internal construction teams have an older workforce and it is in the interests of all that they become more balanced in terms of the age with investment made in younger workers, workforce planning, training and support.

Government priorities such as new build housing, road and rail expansion, investment in the Northern Powerhouse, and specific projects such as HS2, Crossrail 2 and investment in highways will see funds come into the sector but the question remains over whether capacity exists to meet demands. The likelihood is that global and overseas firms will fill the void as national and local firms will be unable to expand at the rate needed. The impact for public service providers may well be that they will have work to undertake internally and bid for externally they will be restricted in terms of funding and skills.

Results from the survey

Workload

1) How do you envisage your personal workload changing over the coming 2 or 3 years?

Answer Options	2015 Housing Management %	2015 Housing Maintenance %
Increase significantly	39.1% (9)	23.8 (5)
Increase	47.8% (11)	52.4% (11)
Stay the same	13.0% (3)	23.8% (5)
Decrease	0% (0)	0% (0)
Decrease significantly	0% (0)	0% (0)
Total	23	21

It might be expected that the natural response to this question would be that workload would increase especially noting the general perception of the public sector and financial cuts.

The table above shows that none of the respondees thought their workload would decrease with nearly 40% for management and 24% for maintenance expecting their workload to increase significantly

2) What factors do you think will impact on your workload over the coming 2 or 3 years?

The reasons noted for changes in workload include reductions in managers and staff, re-structures, an increase in voids work and more new build. Anecdotal comments points to the loss of many managers and experienced staff across the sector and it is unlikely they will be replaced in the foreseeable future due to recruitment freezes or redeployment within the organisation. Such policies inevitably lead to loss of expertise within the organisation which forces extra pressure on to remaining staff.

The inability to recruit staff to fill vacancies was noted although, along with other factors, this is likely to be different between regions.
Other factors included:-
Dealing with the impacts of welfare reform, government funding cuts, a reduction in rental income and increased homelessness registered in a number of responses. The general increased need for affordable housing, whilst not being in a position to provide housing directly.

Increasing legislative requirements and changing government policy are expected and the need to do this in a reducing financial envelope will be a further pressure. Changes introduced by the Housing and Planning Bill.

Further factors identified include some which might have been considered wider than the context within which housing management managers and officers traditionally operate but have moved into over recent years. Examples are the health and well-being agenda, fuel poverty and providing support for tenants

Internal issues such as restructuring and re-organisation, consolidation of posts, redundancies, job losses, a smaller workforce, service reviews, reduced budgets and an increasing workload will add further responsibilities to jobs and put pressure on remaining staff. An increased focus on saving money and income generation were noted as were customer expectations, improved services and greater levels of scrutiny. Channel shift was a further issue mentioned. Managing failure demand and increased bureaucracy was also expected to take up time.

HOUSING MANAGEMENT

3) Does your council area have adequate numbers of properties in all tenures to meet CURRENT demand?

Answer Options	Council or HA properties for rent	Properties for private sale	Properties for private rent
Enough homes	9.7% (3)	17.2% (5)	13.8% (4)
Not enough homes	90.3%(28)	82.8% (24)	86.2% (25)
Total	34	29	29

It is clear from the responses given that in the vast majority of areas there is not enough housing to meet current need. There will of course be variation both across regions and even within authorities. Comments note that some authorities suffer a huge shortage of council properties. Others note that being a relatively low cost area in a region of high housing costs creates additional pressures on the stock. One comment noted that the development of a number of rented properties will meet the demand in that area reflecting the dynamic nature of housing supply. Another noted that demand for different sizes of property is different within the same authority so demand for 2 bedroom properties might be high but for 3 bedroom properties and bedsits may be much lower. The quality of rented properties also varies widely. The point being that although there is a significant issue about the supply of properties in all areas, there is variation within areas.
The concern raised in this table is the level of responses who feel there is currently a lack of homes in all tenures – at least 83%.

4) Do you expect your council area to have adequate numbers of properties in all tenures to meet demand in 5 YEARS TIME?

Answer Options	Council or HA properties for rent	Properties for private sale	Properties for private rent
Enough homes	6.57% (2)	27.6% (8)	20.7% (6)
Not enough homes	93.5%(29)	72.4% (21)	79.3% (23)
Total	34	29	29

The message from the table above continues in this one – namely that there will not be enough properties in 5 years in any of the sectors, in general, to meet demand. There is a drop in the number of local authorities where there will be enough council or HA properties. The expectation is that there will be an increase in the number of areas where there will be enough private properties for sale and where there will be properties for private rent. Clearly the development process takes time with few residential developments taking less than at least couple for years from start to finish (and these are those cases where land ownership and assembly issues are settled). Housing as a political issue has had a high profile for a number of years now, certainly for long enough to have developments in place, other issues notwithstanding, which could be counted on to expand supply over the next 5 years. The feedback from this survey is that this is not in place and unlikely to emerge within that timescale. One comment noted that with right to buy far out stripping even the potential for rebuilding (which has all but been abandoned due to Social Housing Rent changes), the situation can only get considerably worse.

5) Although your council may have plans in place to meet future housing demand, do you feel that these plans will come to fruition bearing in mind the range of possible factors which could impact on those plans?

Of the 30 replies to this question received, 18 thought that their own authority's current plans to meet future housing demand would not be fulfilled, whilst 11 thought they would and one was unsure.

One was uncertain, another thought that existing plans were not adequate even if they are fulfilled, two said that whilst they might meet their plans they are only addressing an element of demand and that other landlords need to contribute too, whilst another noted that the plans won't be met due to lack of land and resources/grant to provide affordable housing.

Further comments pointed to concerns about the number of potential S106 properties which may be built and the ability of social housing organisations to acquire them and the impact of budget cuts which have severely affected the existing business plan. Another noted that the success of plans depended on delivery partners. One more commented that population growth in the borough meant that demand will outstrip supply even with existing new build plans.

The fact that more than a third of respondees think their local authority will not meet their own plans is a reflection of the state of the market, the perceived likelihood of policy changes, local political decision making and budgetary changes.

6) Does your council or housing association have plans in place to build more homes?

In response to this question, 25 replied that there are plans in place for the council or HA to build more homes. Comments referred to the 1% freeze on rents and so reduced income to the HRA as well as the sale of high value council houses to support the implementation of right to buy for HAs as having a major impact on the ability of organisations to meet their plans to build homes. Some of these plans were in conjunction with other HAs/RSLs which are also under budgetary pressure and so under threat. Only 2 responses pointed out areas where no council or HA properties will be built.

In terms of the actual number of properties planned, this varied from place to place between less than 30, to 2,700 within 3 years. The average across those who responded was 74 properties per year. Of course this average number hides the difference in context but it does reflect the fact that after many years of not building especially by council, many have plans to expand their stock as a response to local demand.

In November 2015, The Town and Country Planning Association noted that the number of homes needed in England is estimated as being over 220,000 per year starting in 2011 but only 54% of that total have been built since then. As such the research shows that the government is already falling short of its targets to build new homes. To catch up by 2020 with the number of homes suggested by the projections we need to build over 310,000 homes a year over the next 5 years.

The need for houses varies across the UK. Of the new homes needed, a staggering 55% are needed in London and the surrounding area. In contrast, in the north east, the number of new households is expected to only rise by 11% over 20 years.

The solution to this is not a simple one of course but it must involve all who can potentially be involved in the development process playing their part. One of these is local authorities and they are making a contribution but they must continue to do all they can to meet local demand for homes.

7) What factors do you think will impact on the overall housing stock in your area over the coming 2 or 3 years?

A number of reasons were given in response to this question. These include well understood factors such as the extension of Right to Buy; a stock which is already too low to meet existing demand; borrowing restrictions and the 1% rent reduction.

Other factors referred to include access to affordable finance and pressures on existing local authority and housing association finances which will impact on maintenance of existing stock and building new homes. Structural changes will have an impact such as population growth, demographic change as older age groups look for smaller sheltered housing or bungalow type properties or properties that meet other demands of older people. The increasing need for single person and/or shared accommodation is a factor as historically some areas have only provided three bed family accommodation. Shortage of land is an issue raised and others feel that 1 for 1 replacement of Right to Buy properties simply will not happen.

The sale of high value council properties and who will buy them is an issue in that it is highly likely that remote landlords will be the purchasers, transfer them to private rented accommodation and if they are not well managed they will have a negative impact on the wider community.

One response noted that changes to welfare arrangements may mean tenants are less likely to maintain tenancies therefore increasing turnover and the associated costs. Higher turnover of tenants has a negative impact on local communities and is more likely to lead to hard to let properties and estates. The capacity, willingness and ability of the private sector to build homes at the scale necessary is also a major issue.

One response noted housing associations' approach to the homeless which may cause the fracturing of a cohesive local authority/housing association approach.

8) Do you think the private sector construction industry has the capacity to deliver the homes that are needed in your area over the coming 2 or 3 years?

Of the 24 who responded to this question, 14 (58%) thought that the private sector did not have the capacity to build the homes needed in the local area over the next 2 or 3 years.

The remaining 10 (42%) thought the private sector construction industry was able to build the necessary homes.

Comments received noted land availability issues in the area, another noted that it simply was not attractive enough in financial terms for the private sector whilst a further response was that there were thousands of homes with planning permission but that they were unlikely to be built at the rate needed. Another commented that the private sector have significant capacity but that they are reluctant to build in large swathes of the area. One more comment noted that supply should meet demand for homes for sale but the affordable element will continue to be reduced in favour of starter homes, etc.

There has been an ongoing discussion about capacity in the construction industry with reference to shortages of skills (both on-site and professional), bricks, cement, plant and equipment. Of course such shortages cause the price to move up and they are compounded by large scale projects which might come into the pipeline and use large amounts of resources. Such issues are unlikely to be addressed over a 2 or 3 year period so we might expect them to continue in the medium term. Issues of land availability are difficult to solve with a need to look at a more regional picture, the green belt and local approaches to allocation of land for housing.

Some local authorities are building council houses with their own workforce and although this means they avoid issues around skills they are still affected by the other factors noted above.

9) Is there enough available land currently identified to meet future housing demand in your council area for the next 10 years?

Of 23 responses, 11 replied that there was enough land to meet future housing need over the next 10 years and 12 replied that there was not. Needless to say development depends upon the availability of an appropriately designated land supply before any issues of the willingness or capacity of developers to build on it are addressed. Perceptions from this survey show that in about 50% of cases there is not enough land for housing demand.

Likelihood to meet demand is also dependent upon having an adopted development plan in place so that is a further consideration. Government has recently made it plain it expects development plans to be adopted and it will provide support to those authorities who are struggling.

10) What factors do you think will impact on the national housing stock over the coming 2 or 3 years?

In terms of the national context the following are issues raised by respondents.

- The availability of land is a national problem as well as being identified as a local issue although this will vary between locations.
- Affordability of properties both in terms of rent and purchase.
- A lack of affordable homes.
- Supply in areas of high demand.
- The dominance of London in terms of demand for housing and internal migration and realignment of employment out of the S and SE; a lack of low cost housing in the South and East.
- Difficulties for first time buyers.
- Energy issues with overheating potentially becoming a problem in new build and retrofitted properties.
- Skills shortages in construction sector.
- Ability to build to meet demand given that the current model of housing delivery in the country is broken and does not work for the country, only for the developers. They only bring homes forward in a way that supports their delivery model and keeps prices high. Only local authorities have the capacity to build large numbers of houses. The private sector don’t have the capacity even though they are relied upon to deliver homes for the country.
- Right to Buy
- Social rent freeze/reduction. Rent reform. Housing benefit changes.
- Larger role of LA s in housing the least able to pay therefore a two tier approach to housing
- Political will
- Growing executive market and more affordable homes sold to private landlords so a crisis in number of affordable homes
- Planning legislation
- Condition and future legislative requirements on private landlords.
- Govt policy
- Redirection of priorities
- Availability of affordable finance /gearing
- Financial health of the country

11) Do you think the national target of 250,000 new homes will be met in any year over the coming 5 years?

Of the 22 replies to this question, only 3 (13.6%) thought that the national target of 250,000 new homes would be met in any year over the coming 5 years. 19 (86.4%) thought the target would not be met. This feedback reflects the fact that a large majority of this group of housing professionals have no faith in the sector's ability to meet government targets. This is of course a worrying issue. There appears to be total agreement over the level of need, the evidence which backs it up and the impacts of not meeting the targets, yet little belief that what is needed can be delivered. In other words if we were to return to this discussion in 5 years' time, the feeling is that the only difference will be that the level of need will be greater.

12) In your experience what have been the main effects of changes in the welfare regime on your tenants?

In response to this question, there were a number of replies noting that the real implications have yet to be felt as many are just coping and despite concerns most have adapted and a number of long term unemployed are now working. Others said that many tenants do not fully understand the change that will be made when Universal Credit is introduced.

There will be an increased need for single person accommodation whilst there will be more downsizing. There has been an increase in void properties.

Others noted that housing costs have increased for many with many suffering from financial hardship resulting in increased reliance on support and welfare payments. The result will be increased debt, both in terms of rent and other debt, leading to reductions in the level of tenancies being sustained. The initial wave of bedroom tax hit due to the shortage of suitable properties and this will intensify significantly when Universal Credit comes in with people falling further into debt and poverty. It has further impoverished the most deprived.

Some respondents are seeing areas where tenants are having to make decisions about the choice of whether to pay rent, heating or food bills. Another noted that a change in tenants' expectations is beginning to become evident. One reply noted that there has been an increase in demand for affordable homes as the welfare regime has led to private sector landlords moving out of the sector.

13) In your experience what have been the main effects of changes in the welfare regime on the council / HA as the landlord?

Effects for the landlord include increased rent arrears, and the demand for more tenant support and advice from the landlord.

Additional help and advice is needed to ensure rent is paid on time whilst one reply noted that they have created additional posts of tenancy support and financial inclusion to provide more assistance. Overall more intensive management is required which is accompanied by increased costs. One reply noted that increased support has led to increased rent collection. Another has had a look at how they allocate homes to protect rental income and also avoid placing people into poverty traps.

There has been an increased demand for smaller properties which is difficult to meet and changes in occupancy levels.

Local authorities are using the private rented sector in other areas to the detriment of the local residents.

One respondent noted wider effects such as neighbourhood decline and increased social issues.

14) What factors do you think will impact on the relations between the council / HA as landlord and its tenants over the next 2 or 3 years?

One comment noted that landlords will need to know more about their tenants and the issues affecting them, e.g. their income with 'pay to stay'.

Tenants are contacting housing about other problems due to lack of support from other help and advice providers.

Universal credit will have a significant impact.

There will be greater expectation from landlords for tenants to do more for themselves and support each other.

Another comment noted that relations will not improve but become more difficult as the impacts of Universal Credit begin to bite and reductions in other council services have an impact, there may be increased tension regarding rent collection. Further rent arrears will lead to reduced income and worse services being delivered.

Budget cuts will not help the relationship as they will directly hit tenants as service's decline with possible reductions in support. There will also be reductions in regeneration and planned maintenance programmes and so an impact on the physical condition of properties.
The impacts of national budget decisions on the viability of the HRA and potential changes to service levels that will be needed to ensure the HRA remains ‘in balance’.

Another reply noted that The Renting Homes (Wales) Bill if not amended could significantly influence local authorities ability to deal with anti-social behaviour in local communities.

One response noted that they were trialling differing tenure types to provide a market based offer.

15) What future do you see for council and HA housing provision over the next 10 years?

Of the 21 responses to this question, 7 (33.3%) expected the council or HA to experience significant difficulties over the next 10 years whilst a further 10 (47.6%) expecting them to have slight difficulties. 3 replies (14.3%) thought the position would remain similar to the current position and only 1 expected a bright future for the council or HA.

Clearly this relates to organisational, financial, management, tenancy and neighbourhood issues and so perceptions will differ. However, it is important to note the generally negative tone, which is possibly a reflection of the wider sector and national position, as much as local circumstances.

HOUSING MAINTENANCE

16) Is the skill set in your organisation adequate for your needs?

Answer Options	Management/Technical %	Operational %
Yes	69.6% (16)	82.6 (19)
No	30.4% (7)	17.4% (4)

As budget cuts have impacted on staff numbers over the past few years it has been vital for organisations to retain as much knowledge as possible. Many experienced staff have been lost to the sector so workforce planning and investment in training and skills becomes even more important.

Nonetheless over 30% of those who responded thought that the skill set of the management and technical staff in their organisation was not adequate for needs. This is a significant number within individual organisations and if it is a reflection of the wider sector, then a serious problem exists which needs to be addressed.

The problem is less significant for operational staff but remains an area where there is a need to invest in staff on an ongoing basis especially bearing in mind the issues around skills outlined at the start of this document.

17) Do you have adequate plans in place to ensure your organisation will maintain the level of skills it currently has, or increase them if necessary, over the next 10 years?

Of the 21 replies to this question, 16 thought their organisation had adequate plans in place to keep or improve the level of skills whilst 5 did not think their organisation has adequate plans in place.

Comments referred to an ageing workforce with officers retiring, there not being enough capacity to increase numbers at a junior level as this increases costs to the council and multiskilling amongst the operatives as well as references to attempts to take on apprentices.

18) Do you run an apprenticeship scheme?

When asked whether they have an apprenticeship scheme in place 18 replied that they did with the remaining 5 stating that they expect to set one up in the coming 2 or 3 years.

When asked about the number of apprentices taken, the range was between 1 and 100 reflecting the scale of the organisations responding.

19) If the powers and funding were available, does your organisation have the capacity and skills to build council houses?

Answer Options	2015 % (number)	2012 % (number)	2010 % (number)	2008
Yes with current internal staff	56.5% (13)	25.7% (9)	24.2% (8)	15.2%
Yes but would want to work in partnership	n/a	48.6 (17)	39.4% (13)	40.9%
No	43.5% (10)	25.7% (9)	36.4% (12)	43.9%

As councils gain more freedoms to build council houses, albeit in rather restricted numbers, it appears more believe that they have the skills to build within their own workforce. Some councils have retained these skills having continued to build houses over recent years.

Housing has steadily climbed up the list of political priorities as demand has increased in times of reducing supply whilst funding and planning powers have been altered to give councils more freedom although financial resources are extremely tight. This is an obvious area of work for DLOs if they are able to deliver properties either alone or in partnership. It appears from those responding to this survey that a lower percentage feel they have no role to play in the building of council properties, with only about a quarter saying they do not have the skills or capacity to build.

Comments noted that some had completed houses with internal resources and with the help of specialist trades.

20) How do you expect the level of workload of the building repair and maintenance service (housing and non-housing) to change over the next 2 or 3 years?

Housing

Answer Options	2015 Housing %	2012 Housing %	2010 Housing %	2008 Housing %	% change 2008-2015
Increase significantly	4.5% (1)	8.3% (3)	0% (0)	9.2%	-0.9%
Increase	54.5% (12)	30.5% (11)	20.6%(7)	32.9%	-2.4%
Stay the same	31.8% (7)	52.8% (19)	50%(17)	38.2%	+14.6%
Decrease	9.1% (2)	8.3% (3)	26.5% (9)	15.8	-7.5%
Decrease significantly	0% (0)	0% (0)	2.9% (1)	4%	-4%
Total	22	36	34		

Non-housing

Answer Options	2015 Non housing %	2012 Non housing %	2010 Non housing %	2008 Non housing %	% change 2008-2015
Increase significantly	5.9% (1)	0% (0)	7.4% (2)	3.2%	+2.7%
Increase	47.1% (8)	30.8% (8)	18.5% (5)	12.9%	+34.2%
Stay the same	29.4% (5)	50% (17)	25.9% (7)	46.8%	-17.4.8%
Decrease	17.6% (3)	26.5% (9)	33.3% (9)	29%	-11.4%
Decrease significantly	0% (0)	2.9% (1)	14.8 % (4)	8.1%	-8.1%
Total	17	34	27		

In terms of the level of workload of the building repair and maintenance service, more responses fell into the 'increase' category than any other for the first time for both housing and non-housing work. For housing there was a slight rise in the number expecting a decrease in workload but the trend over the 4 surveys is downwards. For non-housing work, the number expecting a decrease is lower, although still 17%, whilst the number expecting an increase or significant increase is much higher than the last survey. In general the trend over the 4 surveys shows more organisations expecting an increase in workload for all types of work.

Comments received referred to more work being reactive with a decrease in routine maintenance with a knock on impact on properties; no signs of repairs decreasing as the WHQS programme has changed tenant expectations, as have a repairs system where appointments are offered on all repairs along with customer satisfaction; with 2,700 additional new build council properties this results in approximately 9,000 additional change of tenancies. The improvement work note matches anecdotes received which point to extra equipment in homes requiring more repairs.

A reduction was expected as a result of expected reduction in HRA income due to the proposed rent decrease.

21) How do you envisage the amount of work your organisation does for external organisations changing over the next 2 or 3 years?

15 of 21 replies (71.4%) expected the organisation to expand the amount of work it does for external organisations over the next 2 or 3 years with the remainder (28.6%) expecting it to remain about the same.

This is a topic that APSE has found a lot of interest and activity in recently. As grant funding reduces all opportunities are being taken to increase income and working for external organisations is one way of doing this. As such this figure comes as no surprise.

22) Do you still retain a bonus scheme?

None of the respondees have a bonus scheme in place. Although some organisations do retain a bonus scheme, these figures reflect the fact that most are moving away from bonus schemes in favour of other approaches.

23) How has your staffing compliment changed over the past 2 years within the building maintenance section?

Position	2015 Increased	2015 Stayed the same	2015 Decreased	2012 Increased	2012 Stayed the same	2012 Decreased
Management				0%	32.4%	67.6%
Technical staff	23.8% (5)	47.6% (10)	28.6% (6)	13.5%	27%	59.5%
Administrative staff				10.8%	40.5%	48.6%
Operatives	38.9% (7)	27.8% (5)	33.3% (6)	11.4%	40%	48.6%

It is common knowledge that local authorities are reducing their staffing numbers and the responses to this survey confirm it to a degree. The average figures show that nearly 50% of organisations' management/technical/administrative staff numbers have remained the same whilst nearly 30% of organisations have kept their operative numbers about the same.

25% of organisations have increased management/technical/administrative staff numbers whilst 40% have increased operative numbers. Similar percentages have decreased their staff numbers in both of these categories.

When compared with the 2012 results, more have increased staff and fewer have decreased. Most of the respondees have DLOs so it might be expected that more would have reduced numbers recently yet the workload (primarily housing) is likely to have remained the same as the number of properties will remain static.

24) Changes in methods of service delivery

	Emergency repairs	Urgent repairs	Day to day repairs	M&E / Gas work	Voids
in-house; likely to continue	18 (64%)	17 (74%)	17 (74%)	12 (52%)	17 (71%)
in-house; likely to be outsourced within 2-3 years	0	1 (4.5%)	0	0	0
external; likely to continue for next 2-3 years	4 (14%)	4 (17%)	5 (22%)	10 (43%)	5 (21%)
external; likely to be brought in house within 2-3 years	4 (14%)	0	0	0	0
Has been brought in-house within the past 2-3 years	2 (7.5%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)	2 (8.5%)
Total	28 (100%)	23 (100%)	23 (100%)	23 (100%)	24 (100%)

	Aids / adaptation	New build	Capital works	Civic building repairs	Civic building capital
in-house; likely to continue	14 (56%)	6 (26%)	10 (45%)	9 (45%)	8 (42%)
in-house; likely to be outsourced within 2-3 years	0	0	0	1 (5%)	0
external; likely to continue for next 2-3 years	6 (24%)	13 (57%)	9 (41%)	8 (40%)	10 (53%)
external; likely to be brought in house within 2-3 years	2 (8%)	2 (8.5%)	3 (14%)	1 (5%)	1 (5.5%)
Has been brought in-house within the past 2-3 years	3 (12%)	2 (8.5%)	0	1 (5%)	0
Total	25 (100%)	23 (100%)	22 (100%)	20 (100%)	19 (100%)

The majority of those responding to the survey represent councils delivering all types of repairs and voids with in-house services and they expect this to continue. Only a very small percentage expect their service to be outsourced in the foreseeable future. A relatively small number have brought services back in-house over the past 2-3 years.

Those elements of the service which are delivered by external providers are more likely to be M&E work, Aids and Adaptations, capital and civic building works, New build works are more likely to be provided externally. This is understandable bearing in mind that many haven't built properties in many years. Nevertheless some authorities are building properties for the first time in a long time. Considering the scale of housing which is required across the UK there is a need for all sectors and builders to make their contribution. As such local authorities should actively consider getting their internal staff to build homes where appropriate

25) Does your organisation use the following?

	mobile comms/PDAs	appointment systems	operative scheduling systems	diagnostic software
Yes	63%	67%	46%	40%
Partial use	18%	22%	27%	25%
No	18%	11%	27%	35%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

	trackers in vehicles	a dedicated call centre for housing repairs	a dedicated call centre for non housing repairs	a corporate call centre
Yes	76%	58%	39%	76%
Partial use	15%	16%	11%	19%
No	10%	26%	50%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

It is clear that the systems taken up by some organisations are not used universally. A substantial number have yet to invest in mobile communications, appointment systems or vehicle trackers. The common approach seems to be a sensible one of applying new technology to part of the service as a pilot for the rest of the organisation to test. However, the pace at which technology is developing often means new versions or products may be installed rather than the versions which have been installed as pilots.

The introduction of the kind of systems noted in the table have undoubtedly led to more efficient working arrangements, financial savings and satisfaction and the appetite across the sector for further innovation does not appear to be reducing.

26) What changes have been made to the operation of the service?

When asked about recent changes made to the operation, the most common response was the installation of mobile working arrangements. Other changes included

- mobile devices also tablets for inspections
- Van trackers
- client ICT
- reorganisation of back office support functions / work planning
- 4 day week for contract staff as incentive
- removal of a management tier and re-allocation of duties
- all operatives on salary
- systems thinking
- a procurement partnership
- use of Framework partners
- productivity targets for trades
- integration of client and contractor
- closure of depots, stores, joiner's and sign shop
- flexible working arrangements
- improved terms and conditions

27) Where do you see growth areas for the service and areas where work may reduce over the next 12 months?

Responses to this question highlighted a number of areas of future growth for maintenance and repairs services included some recently emerging issues such as energy efficiency, renewable technology and renewable energy sources and affordable homes. Clearly areas of growing and falling workload will depend on many local factors. The responses to these questions reflect differing local contexts and the pressures on services.

Growth areas identified were as follows:

- Planned repairs / increased planned and preventative maintenance
- External trading / providing services for other internal departments or external organisations, non-council customers, private sector, regulatory work.
- External market for M&E testing and servicing
- Assisting WHQS programme (kit / bathrooms/ rewires / heating upgrades / external works)
- Private work for local residents
- Charging for additional repairs
- Dealing with fuel poverty
- Public buildings work
- Build on major improvements and planned maintenance following completion of decent homes work
- Bringing capital works delivery back in house, saving money and increasing quality

Areas where work is expected to reduce were as follows:

- Urgent / quick responsive repairs
- Reactive maintenance

- Possible reduction in responsive repairs due to decent homes / WHQS completion
- Planned works following budget cuts
- Specialist services
- Non statutory work
- Civic buildings work
- Painting
- Aids and adaptations
- Back office and administrative tasks
- New office accommodation will see a change in the nature of work
- Don't envisage any decreases in workloads

The Association for Public Service Excellence

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular advisory groups, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The advisory groups are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Advisory groups are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE advisory group meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national advisory groups include:-

Building cleaning
Catering
Cemeteries and Crematoria
Environmental Health
Local authorities commercialisation, income and trading
Housing, building maintenance and construction
Parks, horticultural and ground maintenance
Renewables and climate change
Roads, highways and street lighting
Sports and leisure management
Vehicle maintenance and transport operations
Waste management, refuse collection and street cleansing

If you require further information contact Phil Brennan at pbrennan@apse.org.uk