

Public Attitudes to Local Council Services 2023 – Survation poll for APSE

To: all UK authorities

1 About the survey

Survation were asked by APSE to provide a public opinion survey of attitudes to local neighbourhood services in 2023, covering the range of council services that would appear in their local area. Survation also polled councillors in Great Britain, to gauge their opinion on levels of funding, financial health of councils and their priorities for protecting services.

This is the eighth survey in a yearly series commissioned by APSE. The Polling was conducted via online panel between November 23rd and 27th 2023. Data were weighted by age, sex, region, household income, education, 2019 GE vote and 2016 EU Referendum vote to be representative of all UK adults aged 18+. The overall sample size was 1,659, including booster samples in Northern Ireland & Wales to ensure sub-samples of at least 100 persons in those regions.

This briefing provides a summary of the key findings.

1.1 One in four councillors think their local authority is at risk of bankruptcy within the next five years

When councillors were asked on the likelihood of their local authority issuing a Section 114 notice, over a quarter (28%) reported the risk of bankruptcy as “Likely.” The polling of councillors also found 85% of those surveyed do not believe that their local authority receives adequate funding. When asked about the cancellation or closure of services since 2010, libraries topped the list with 36%.

1.2 The public favours more money for local councils for local services

On the issue of funding, around three-quarters (72%) of the public would like the Government to give more money to local councils to spend at the local level. Up 3% from last year.

1.3 Trust remains high in councils and councillors compared to Government or private companies

The survey found trust in councils and councillors is still high overall compared to trust in Government and ministers. In other findings, the data suggests that climate change remains a priority for the public and they expect councils to take a leading role in responding to it.

It is bad news for Government and ministers with four times more trusting councils (49%) than National Government (12%), and eight times more (51%) trusting councillors over Government ministers (6%).

1.4 Climate change remains a priority for respondents

A majority find that the local communities in the UK will need to respond to the effects of climate change in the next 10 years. 68% of those surveyed find that councils will need to respond, nearly 5 times as many as those who find that they will not need to respond (14%). Over half (52%) support more funds for councils to combat climate change locally.

1.5 Home energy efficiency a top priority for combatting climate change

When it comes to specific steps councils should be adopting in combatting climate change, there is big support for making homes more efficient (60%). This is followed by improving recycling and reducing waste (52%) and improving affordable public transport (48%). Improving flood defences is up 8% from last year, perhaps reflecting the damage extreme weather events are increasingly wreaking on local communities across the UK.

1.6 Road maintenance followed by affordable housing, road maintenance, social care and climate change are the most popular areas for more investment

Asked to allocate a notional budget of new spending across 12 services, the public allocated the most new spending to:

1. Road maintenance – average 11% of notional spending
2. Affordable Housing – average 10% of notional spending
3. Social care – average of 10% of notional spending
4. Local climate action – average of 9% of notional spending

2 APSE Comment

The results from this year's survey make for bittersweet reading for anyone involved in local government. Though many will be cheered by the high level of trust placed in local councils by the general public, that over a quarter of councillors fear risk of bankruptcy reveals just how desperate the financial situation has become for the sector. Based on these findings, it is clear that without urgent Government action, those frontline services millions depend on for our safety, prosperity and wellbeing will collapse.

What is also clear is that we have a job to do in convincing Government that local investment through councils is not only popular but a sensible route to delivering visible improvements at a community level. The polling results show that the public value councils services from school meals to social care but they want to see more money spent locally to see services improve. The polling results suggest that the public do not distinguish between statutory and non-statutory services. They want to see all local services protected and flourishing; this will be a critical issue as more councils warn of the risk of Section 144 notices, effectively limiting local services to minimum of statutory requirements.

For the survey data tables for the public can be downloaded [here](#). The survey data tables for the councillors can be downloaded [here](#).

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