



APSE and Survation 2026 – Annual Polling of Councillors and the Public

To: all UK authorities

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1 About the survey

Survation were commissioned by APSE to undertake its annual polling of both elected councillors and the general public, examining attitudes towards local council services, financial pressures, trust in institutions, and priorities for future investment.

This briefing draws together findings from:

- Councillor survey: Conducted online between 5–18 November 2025, with a sample of 504 elected councillors across the UK.
- Public survey: Conducted via an online panel between 29 October-12 November 2025, with a nationally representative sample of 2,361 UK adults aged 18+.

The results provide a snapshot of how local government is viewed at a time of continued financial pressure, alongside evidence of improving public confidence in council services.

The survey findings were first launched at the APSE Performance Networks Seminar in Blackpool on 4 December 2025, presented by Damian Lyons Lowe, Chief Executive of Survation. The presentation slides from the event are available to download [here](#).

This briefing provides a summary of the key findings.

1.1 Fewer councillors expect council bankruptcy

While concern about long-term financial sustainability remains widespread, the 2026 polling shows a modest improvement in outlook. The proportion of councillors who believe a Section 114 (or S.95 in Scotland) notice is very likely or likely within the next five years has fallen to just over one quarter (26%), down from over one third in the previous year (34%).

1.2 Communities feel welcoming – but do not feel well heard

The polling highlights strong perceptions of community cohesion, alongside weaker perceptions of voice and influence.

- 62% of the public say their local area feels welcoming.
- 62% say people from different backgrounds generally get on well.
- Around one third award their area very strong cohesion scores (8–10).

By contrast, only 46% agree that councils take account of views from all parts of the community, with just 23% strongly agreeing (8–10). Meanwhile, 38% actively disagree (0–5) that councils listen to all voices.

This 'listening gap' represents an important challenge for local government, particularly at a time when councils are being asked to manage complex national policy impacts at a local level and maintain public confidence under sustained pressure.

1.3 Public satisfaction with local services is rising

One of the most significant findings from the 2025 polling is a rise in public satisfaction across a wide range of council services. When asked about specific services, the public were asked to rate them on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning very dissatisfied and 10 meaning very satisfied:

- 40% rate the leisure and sports facilities provided by their council as 8-10 (+10% from 2024).
- 48% report visiting local parks at least once a week, making parks one of the most widely used and valued services.
- 48% rate the parks service in their local area as 8-10 (+5% from 2024).
- 50% rate the waste and recycling collection service in their local areas as 8-10 (+9% from 2024).
- 37% rate the street cleaning services in their local area as 8-10 (+10% from 2024).
- 30% rate the winter maintenance (e.g. gritting) in their local area as 8-10 (+3% from 2024).
- 24% rate the general road maintenance in their local area as 8-10 (+5% from 2024).

There has been a +5% increase from last year in the number of residents saying, overall, services in their area have improved, reversing trends seen in previous years.

1.4 Strong public support for greater local control and investment

Support for greater local control of funding remains strong. 61% do not think enough of their tax is spent on services in their local area (+9% from 2024). Around three-quarters of the public (75%) say they would like central government to give more money to local councils to spend locally, rather than retaining it at national level. This is +8% from 2024. Only 3% favour greater centralisation, with the remainder preferring funding levels to stay the same.

1.5 Road maintenance followed by waste and recycling, affordable housing and school meals are the most popular areas for more investment

Those who stated they would like to see more money given to local councils than is done so currently, were asked to allocate a notional budget of new spending across 12 services. The public allocated the extra spending to:

1. Road maintenance – 12.8% of notional spending
2. Waste and Recycling – 10.2% of notional spending
3. Affordable Housing – 9.5% of notional spending
4. Social care – 9.25% of notional spending

1.6 Economic growth: Focus on practical local outcomes

When asked what economic growth means in their local area, the public prioritises practical outcomes:

- 50% associate growth with more local jobs.
- 39% associate it with new or improved shops and businesses.
- 30% associate it with new housing.

Perceived benefits of growth remain modest, with only around one in five reporting strong benefits (8–10 scores). This suggests residents value incremental improvements that deliver tangible local impact, rather than abstract or national-level growth narratives.

1.7 Trust in local government far exceeds trust in national government

Trust in councils and councillors remains significantly higher than trust in national government. 50% of the public say they trust councils most to make decisions about local services, compared with around one in ten who place the most trust in their MPs and 6% in government ministers. Councils (46%) are also trusted far more than central government (12%) to deliver services effectively in local areas.

This enduring trust provides a strong democratic mandate for councils to lead on service delivery, prevention, and long-term investment in community wellbeing.

1.8 Continued support for housebuilding amongst councillors and environmental measures amongst the public

Despite local sensitivities, a clear majority of councillors (64%) support new housebuilding in their area, beyond current levels.

Public backing is particularly strong for:

- Measures to tackle air pollution (60%).
- Schemes designed to reduce congestion and emissions from cars to improve health (49%)

These findings confirm that practical climate action at a local level continues to enjoy broad public support.

2 APSE Comment

This year's polling provides welcome reassurance for the local government sector. Fewer councillors now expect financial failure, and public satisfaction with local services is improving, despite continued funding pressures.

However, the findings also highlight clear risks. Many residents do not feel their voices are consistently heard, and financial pressures remain acute. It is once again interesting that the public value investment in potholes and road maintenance substantially above social care which is clearly due to the level of day to day interactions with services; whilst most people will drive or be a passenger on a local road, far fewer people have interactions with social care services, creating a disconnect between the levels of spend and perceptions of priorities between the public and councils/councillors.

Our polling with Survation reveals frontline services are clearly valued, with areas such as parks continuing to feature strongly in the public consciousness. At the same time, there remains a disconnect between the national narrative on economic growth and what it means in local areas, with the public wanting to see growth translate into tangible outcomes such as local jobs, thriving businesses, and new homes.

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- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Veterans and Military Champions Network
- Local Government Reorganisation Network
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing

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