

APSE Northern Region – ‘Building from Within’. Insourcing and In-House Services.

To: all UK authorities

1 About the event

On Thursday 4 June 2026, APSE welcomed local councils from across the APSE Northern Region and sector experts to Liverpool Town Hall. The event, themed ‘Building from Within’, explored how local authorities are insourcing services and delivering effective in-house provision.

This briefing provides an overview of the [presentations](#) delivered at the event.

2 Overview of the event

The four presentations demonstrate a clear and practical case for bringing key local authority services back in-house, not as an ideological choice, but as a strategic means of strengthening accountability, operational control and alignment with council priorities.

Across Liverpool, Bolton, Rotherham and East Riding, the common message is that direct delivery can help councils respond more effectively to residents, members and wider place-based objectives, while ensuring that value is retained in frontline services and local communities.

For local government, the overall lesson is that in-house services can provide greater transparency, stronger organisational capability and improved resilience at a time of rising demand and financial pressure.

3 Journey to insourcing – A political and officer perspective

Councillor Liam Robinson, Leader of Liverpool City Council, and Nicola Butterworth, Corporate Director for Neighbourhoods and Housing at Liverpool City Council, set out a structured and well-governed approach to insourcing environmental services from both political and officer perspectives. Their presentation traced the journey through a series of delivery models before returning to direct council control, with the case for change resting on simplified governance, stronger democratic accountability, closer alignment with council priorities, and the ability to reinvest efficiencies in services.

Just as importantly, the presentation highlighted the disciplined planning needed to make insourcing work, including due diligence, stakeholder engagement, TUPE, systems migration and post-transfer stabilisation.

Councillor Robinson and Nicola concluded their presentation with the key message that successful insourcing depends on strong implementation, effective leadership, a clear rationale for changing the delivery model, and a continued focus on the needs of the community.

4 Bringing a Household Waste Recycling Centre in house

Sam Barstow, Director for Communities and Street Scene at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, provided a practical operational example through the authority's decision to bring the Household Waste Recycling Centre service in house.

The presentation demonstrated how political, financial and capability considerations combined to drive change, while also emphasising the need for realism in option appraisal, cost planning and procurement design.

There was a strong focus on shared governance during implementation, clear cost allocation, contractor-supported transition, and planned service improvements, demonstrating that insourcing can be commercially aware as well as locally driven.

For councils managing complex frontline services, Rotherham's experience shows that the goal is not control for its own sake, but better service quality, stronger local alignment and improved long-term value.

5 What the first year of insourcing looks like

Justin Clough, Assistant Director, Corporate Property Services, Bolton Council, focused on what in-housing means in practice for accountability, visibility, and organisational confidence. Rather than treating insourcing as a structural end in itself, Justin stressed the need to rebuild capability, culture, and leadership so that services are more responsive, customer-focused, and strategically aligned.

Bolton's experience demonstrates how in-house models can turn corporate property and related functions into a strategic enabler of wider council ambitions, including regeneration, net zero and organisational change.

In addition, it was stated that the service is a central point of the council and that people, data and leadership matter just as much as governance if councils want direct delivery to achieve lasting improvement.

6 An in-house leisure service

Tim Hicks, Health and Wellbeing Facilities Manager at East Riding of Yorkshire Council, added an important leisure and wellbeing dimension to the discussion. His presentation highlighted the pressures facing leisure services, including rising demand, tighter budgets, higher expectations, and the need to demonstrate community impact, while arguing that in-house delivery gives councils greater control over service design, performance, and alignment with wider public policy goals.

The presentation linked direct delivery to public health, inclusion, active ageing, and community wellbeing, while also stressing the conditions needed for success: leadership, governance, workforce capability, digital systems, financial sustainability, partnerships, data, and customer focus. It was a useful reminder that strong in-house services depend on sustained leadership, clear standards, and a consistent focus on value and impact.

7 APSE Comment

From APSE's perspective, these [presentations](#) offer strong evidence that in-house services remain one of local government's most effective tools for delivering accountable, flexible and community-focused outcomes.

They demonstrate that councils are choosing direct delivery not out of sentiment, but because it can provide clearer democratic accountability, stronger integration with corporate priorities,

better stewardship of public assets and greater scope to reinvest value in frontline services.

APSE's view is clear: where councils invest in leadership, workforce development, robust governance, good data, and a strong public service ethos, in-house models can deliver innovation, resilience, and social value in ways that outsourced arrangements often struggle to match. Taken together, these case studies reinforce the argument that direct delivery should be seen as a confident and strategic choice in the public interest.

APSE welcomes the shared learning from across APSE Northern Region and will continue to support member authorities through networks, training, research and benchmarking as they work to deliver effective, efficient and sustainable frontline services for their communities.

Insourcing Public Contracts: Rebuilding Capacity is a "must attend" course for those looking at alternatives to the limitations and hidden costs of contracted services. This course is based on APSE's research and policy position, and APSE Members can book a place at a discounted rate. For further information and to book your place, [please click here](#).

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Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

APSE member authorities have access to a range of resources to support the delivery of council services. This includes regular network meetings, designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, alongside trade union representatives, to discuss service-specific issues, innovation and continuous improvement. Networks provide an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical issues with colleagues from councils across the UK.

Networks are a free service included within your authority's APSE membership and typically conclude with an informal lunch to support peer networking. If you do not currently receive details of APSE network meetings and would like to be added to the contact list for your service area, please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national networks include:-

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- Catering (School Meals)
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- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
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