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Governance capabilities, local government and austerity

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3 'C's: coherence, consistency and congruence

- Consistency of means - tools deployed reinforce each other and do not undermine each other.

- Coherence - multiple policy goals co-exist effectively and with the means of instruments being used.

- Congruence - capacity of goals and instruments to work in the same direction or offer means of mutual reinforcement.
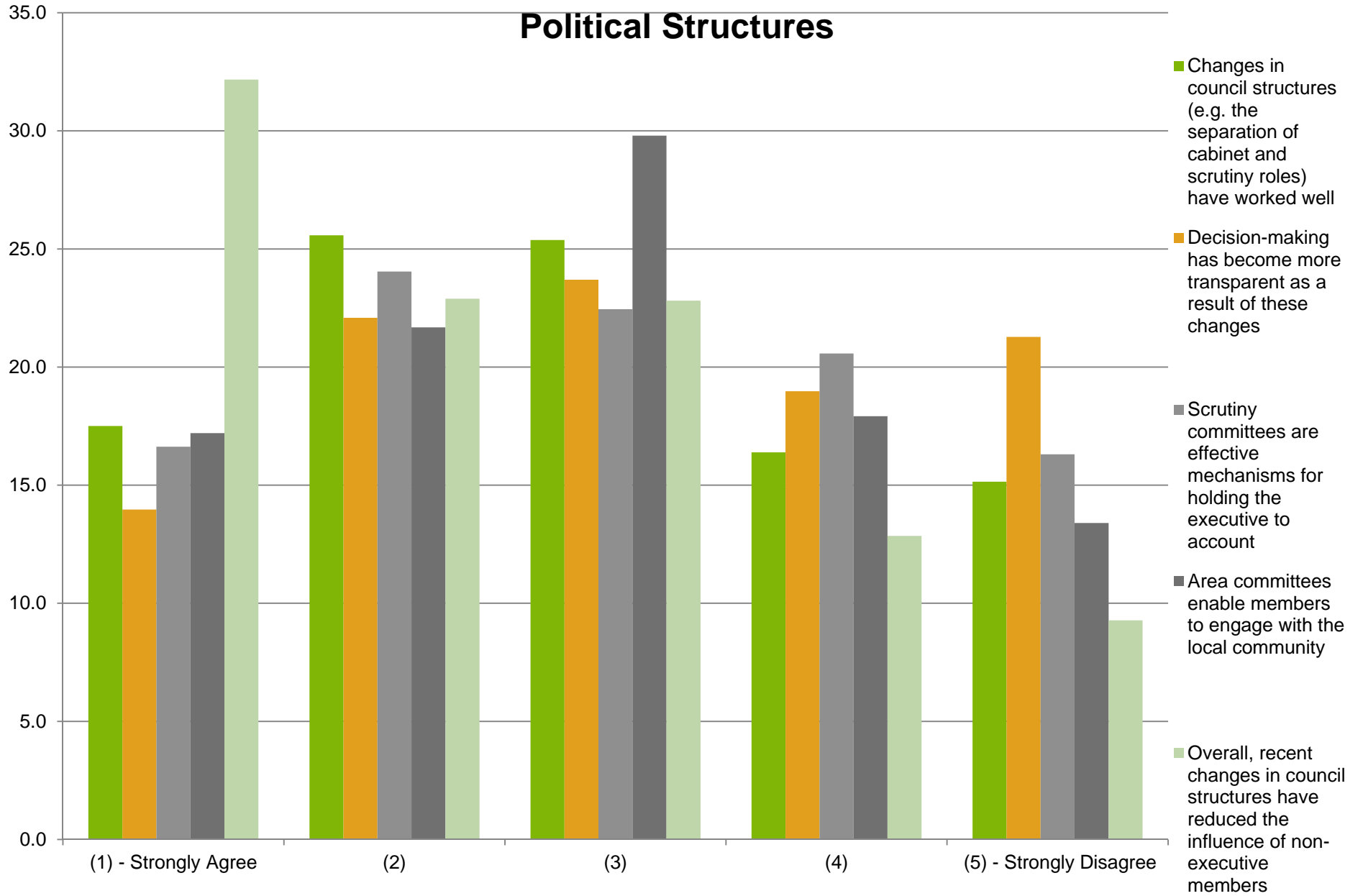
Governance capabilities

- Goodness of fit' to context:

  - 'Fit' between mix of instruments and governance capabilities (not least resource capabilities of local authority and societal actors)

- Do local authorities have the 'right' governance capabilities in place?

- Focus here on political leadership – 2014 survey

- 'There is increased evidence of political tensions and instability which is leading to strained working relationships. This comes at a time when decisions on services are becoming increasingly difficult and require strong political and managerial leadership' (Accounts Commission, 2014, p.7).
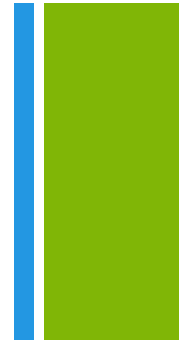
Political Structures

Legend:
- Changes in council structures (e.g. the separation of cabinet and scrutiny roles) have worked well
- Decision-making has become more transparent as a result of these changes
- Scrutiny committees are effective mechanisms for holding the executive to account
- Area committees enable members to engage with the local community
- Overall, recent changes in council structures have reduced the influence of non-executive members

X-axis categories: (1) - Strongly Agree, (2), (3), (4), (5) - Strongly Disagree

Political Structures

- Uncertainty as to how far scrutiny committees hold the executive to account.

- Influence of non-executive members deemed to be on the wane.

- Decline in support for neighbourhood working or area committees as an instrument to engage communities.

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Political Structures

- Partnership working continues to exercise a hold over elected members, BUT

  - Concerns over the transparency of local decision-making in public-private partnerships;

  - Relatively few councillors devote significant proportions of their time to outward facing collaboration with other public bodies, agencies or partners.

  - Time devoted has been reduced since 2003 survey where partnership working concerned.

Collaboration

- Just over half of executive members spent a high proportion of their time working in partnership with other agencies (just over a third of non-executive members).

- Fall from 60.8 % for executive members and 48.9 % for non-executive members since 2003.

- Proportion of councillors indicating that they spend a low amount of time working with regional and national governments rose from 54.2 in 2003 to 85.2 % in 2014 for non-executive members and from 33.3 to 61.9 % for executive members.
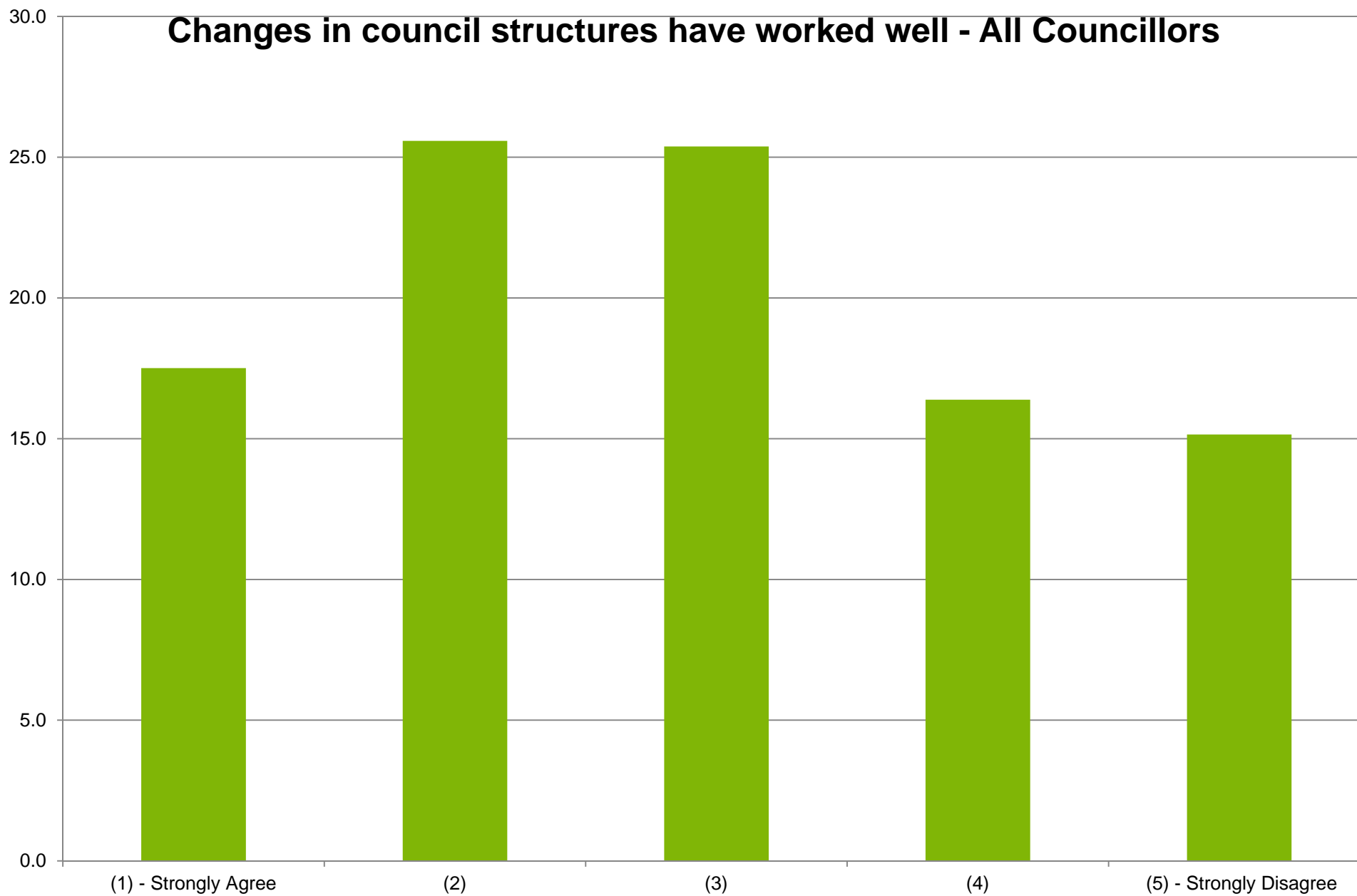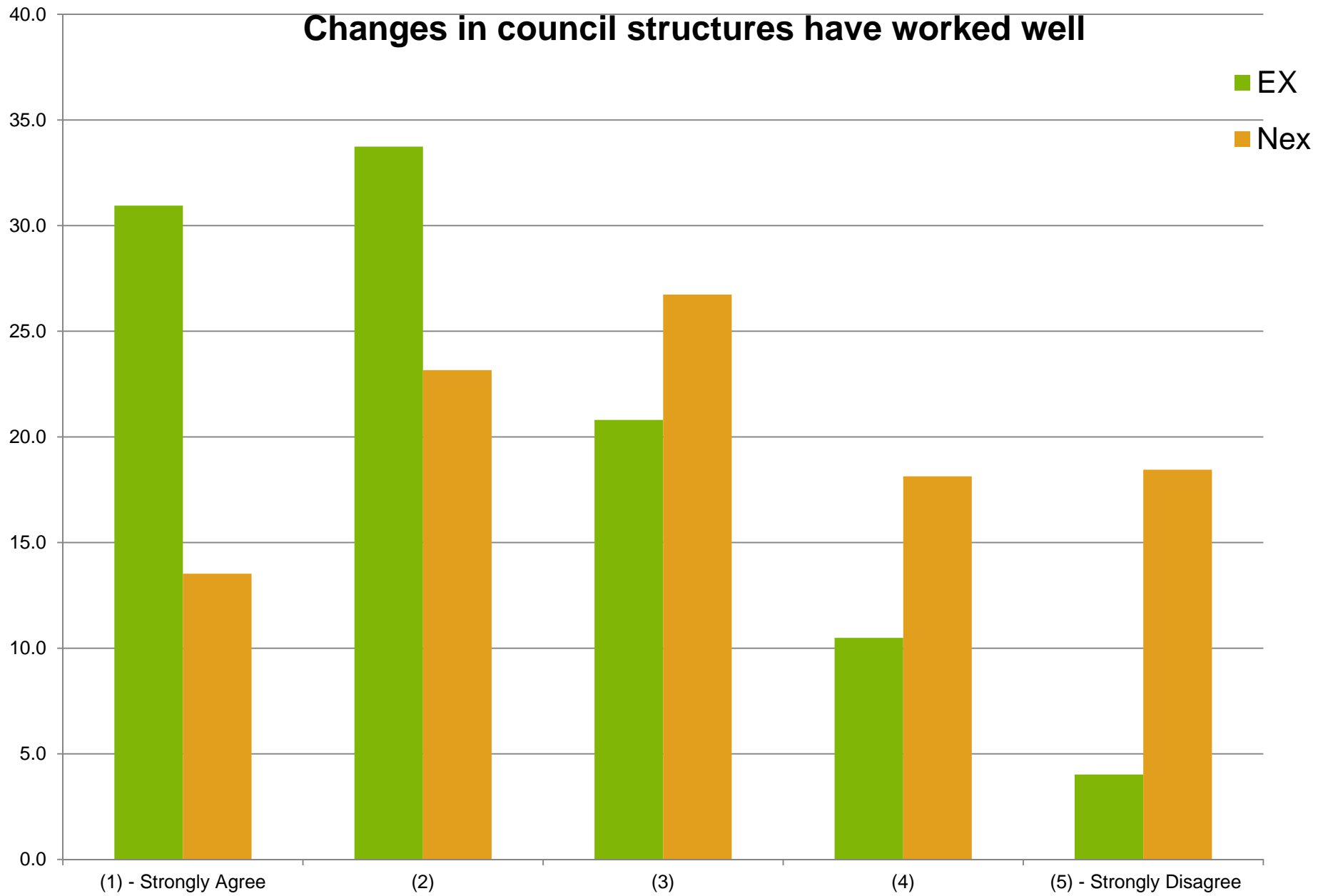
Future Prospects

- Lack of confidence among councillors that the actions plans that authorities have in place will lead to significant improvements in services.

- Only approximately half of councillors judged this to be the case.

- Only half believed that they would be personally able to contribute to such efforts to improve services.
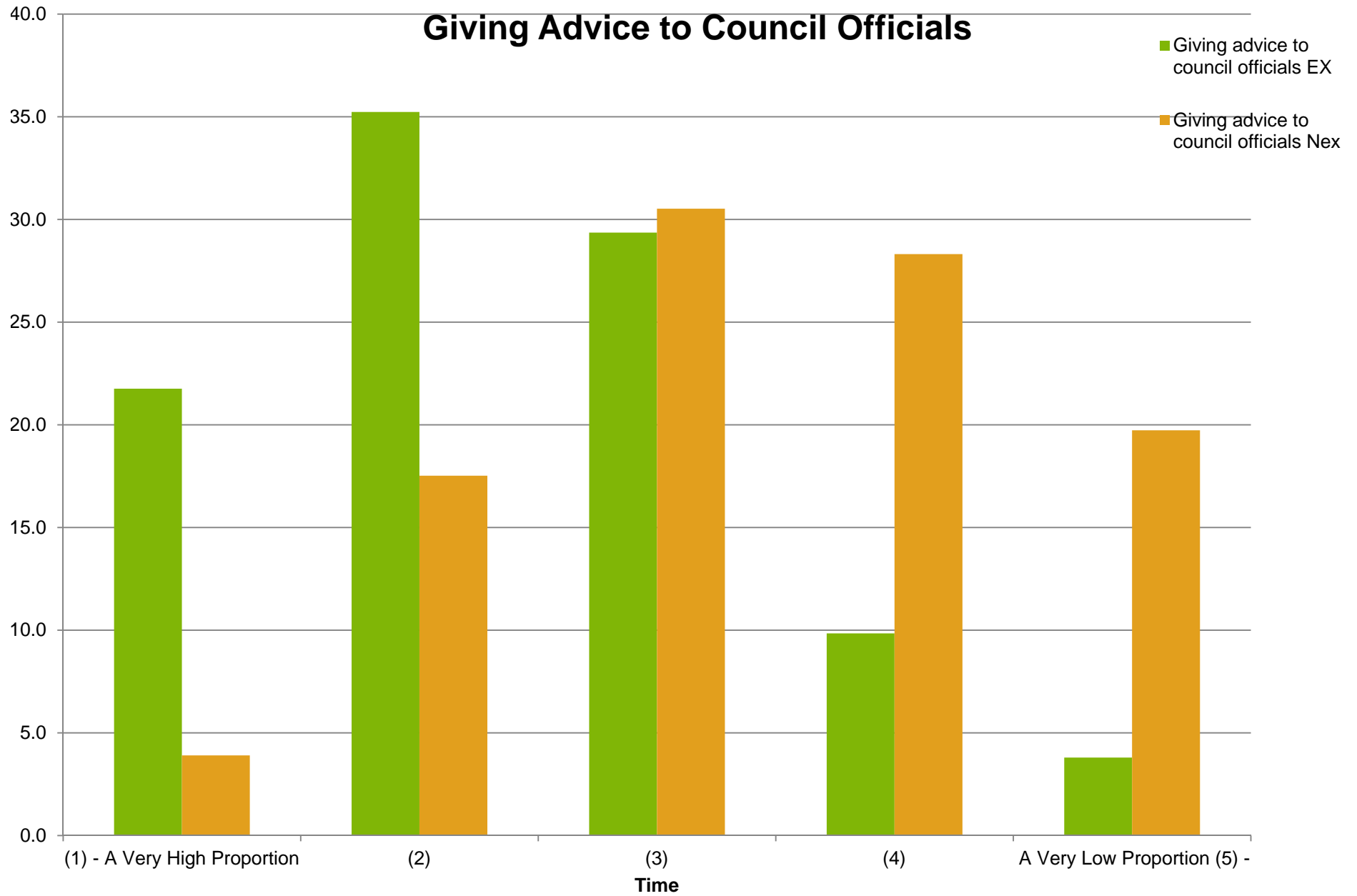
Changes in council structures have worked well - All Councillors

Category	Value
(1) - Strongly Agree	17.5
(2)	25.5
(3)	25.4
(4)	16.4
(5) - Strongly Disagree	15.1

Changes in council structures have worked well

Legend:
- EX (green)
- Nex (orange)

	(1) - Strongly Agree	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) - Strongly Disagree
EX	31.0	33.7	20.8	10.5	4.0
Nex	13.5	23.1	26.7	18.1	18.4

Giving Advice to Council Officials

Legend:
- Giving advice to council officials EX
- Giving advice to council officials Nex

X-axis (Time):
- (1) - A Very High Proportion
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)
- A Very Low Proportion (5) -

Y-axis: 0.0, 5.0, 10.0, 15.0, 20.0, 25.0, 30.0, 35.0, 40.0

Do you act as a representative of your authority on any other outside authorities or bodies?
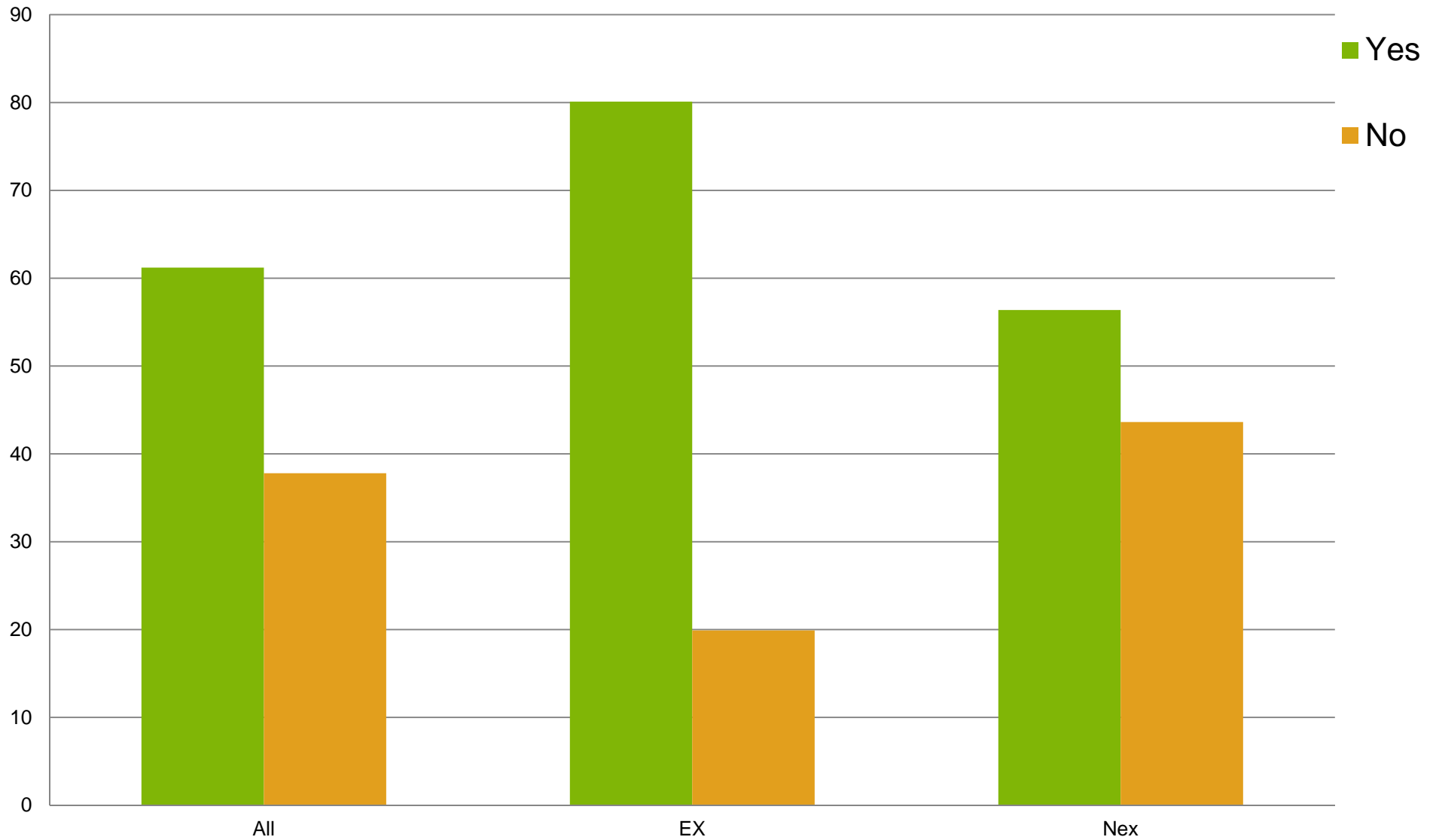
Two Tribes

- Existence of two tribes within local authorities: executive and non-executive members.

- Key is whether elected member sits on the executive or not.

- Across all areas (apart from neighbourhood working) statistically significant differences between the attitudes and views of executive and non-executive members.

Two Tribes

- For example, if executive members are more likely to support recent changes to political structures, non-executive members are more likely to doubt their effectiveness.

- Equally, if executive members are likely to be more optimistic about their capacity to impact upon service improvement, non-executive members are on the contrary more pessimistic.

- Relative dissatisfaction with area or neighbourhood working stands out as an isolated point of consensus.

Returning to governance capabilities?

- Do we have the governance capabilities to address spending cuts?

    - Collaboration

    - Officer-member relations

    - Role of front and backbench councillors

    - Links with regional agencies and national agencies

- Is it time to re-invest in the capabilities of political leadership? Shifting boundaries between managerial and political logics?