Talking Points

The agile council

Creating the change-ready organisation

pwc

Contents

Executive summary

Local authority medium-term financial plans need to be updated now to reflect the new norm of continued austerity and ever increasing demand for services.

We believe that in this climate the key challenge for local government is how to achieve key social outcomes within the constraints of increasing demand and much lower financial resources. There is an increasing recognition that this involves looking beyond the council's organisational boundaries into how the council can work more effectively with customers, suppliers and partners to do this.

Overcoming complexity in the way that outcomes are delivered to citizens and creating an 'agile council' is critical to future success.

The latest UK macroeconomic forecasts paint a gloomy position for the years ahead – delayed growth, lower growth, uncertain growth. This suggests a very strong likelihood of further cuts in funding beyond 2014/15 of a similar magnitude to the current Spending Review.

Many councils are redefining their role and purpose, and new models are emerging (for example, "the co-operative council", "the civic enterprise" etc.)

This debate now needs to move on to focus on how to deliver these models and strategies, through new operations, and how councils can operate on up to 50% less "real terms" financial capacity.

Councils need to re-think the ways in which they work. In doing so they need to look at reducing organisational complexity and creating more flexible operating models that are capable of responding to change, managing demand and operating at lowest cost.

In short, to be successful, councils need to become more 'agile'. Many councils have evolved their current operating model over a period of time and have arrived at a current way of organising by virtue of accident rather than organisational logic or design.

This has often been compounded by the actions they have been taken to reduce costs quickly, meaning that many councils have even more complex and fragmented operating models. This can reduce the ability of the council to mobilise resources to manage demand, slow down organisational responses to change, and increase operating costs.

All of this is happening in an environment where councils are expected to work increasingly with other partners to deliver services directly to citizens. Leading councils have recognised this and are actively seeking to make their operating models more agile.

We believe an 'agile council' is one in which there is robust approach to deciding on, and delivering the **right outcome/ services** by the **right providers** using the **right processes**.

Delivering the 'right outcomes/services' will entail councils not doing some things, or doing completely different things in the future, as the nature and level of demand changes.

Councils will need to be aligned all the way from understanding customer demand, through simplified, standardised ways of working, to a "supply chain" that is efficient and effective at responding to meet demand in a flexible way.

For an agile council the "supply chain" will consist of an integrated network of customers, community groups, voluntary sector, other public sector bodies and private sector organisations alongside the council itself.

While achieving agility may be challenging, the benefits are significant and will ultimately lead to improved resilience, and the ability to deliver better outcomes that improve the lives of citizens.

The benefits of an agile council

- **Reduced costs** – Agile councils have the opportunity to meet the severe financial challenges posed by reduced funding and increased demand.

- **Enhanced customer experience and better outcomes** – Agile councils will proactively manage customer interactions to increase the delivery of the right service, first time, to meet need and demand.

- **Better performance** – Processes and systems are simpler, faster and cheaper to deliver, requiring less managerial support. A common information set across IT systems provides 'one version of the truth' to support the decision making process – leading to faster and better decisions.

- **Increased employee satisfaction** – Agile councils will have more satisfied employees who are no longer frustrated by multiple, overly complicated systems or pointless business processes. They will feel more empowered to drive change, create high performing teams, drive customer value and deliver better outcomes for citizens.

Today, truly agile councils are a rare breed. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to name a single council that embodies all of the characteristics of an agile council, from its strategic foundations to its operational infrastructure and management philosophy. This is not surprising given the scale and scope of the current financial and demand challenges.

Some councils, though, are making great strides toward this goal and offer leading insights into the hallmarks of agility – including a common vision and organisational vocabulary, and a culture of contribution to constant change.

In this Talking Points publication, we provide our thoughts on key trends in the response of local government to the combination of increasing demand and prolonged austerity. We consider what changes are required and how the agile council will actually operate in practice.

Economic backdrop

The global economic outlook remains very mixed, with continuing financial storms in Europe.

The 2012 growth outlook for the Eurozone has deteriorated sharply since last summer – with many Eurozone governments being highly indebted (see Figure 1).

The impact upon the UK economy is likely to be flat or negative GDP growth during 2012, with only a modest recovery in 2013.

This means that growth in the medium term will have a significant impact on meeting public finance targets.

The structural deficit is anticipated to be eliminated by 2016/17, and public sector debt should start falling by 2015/16.

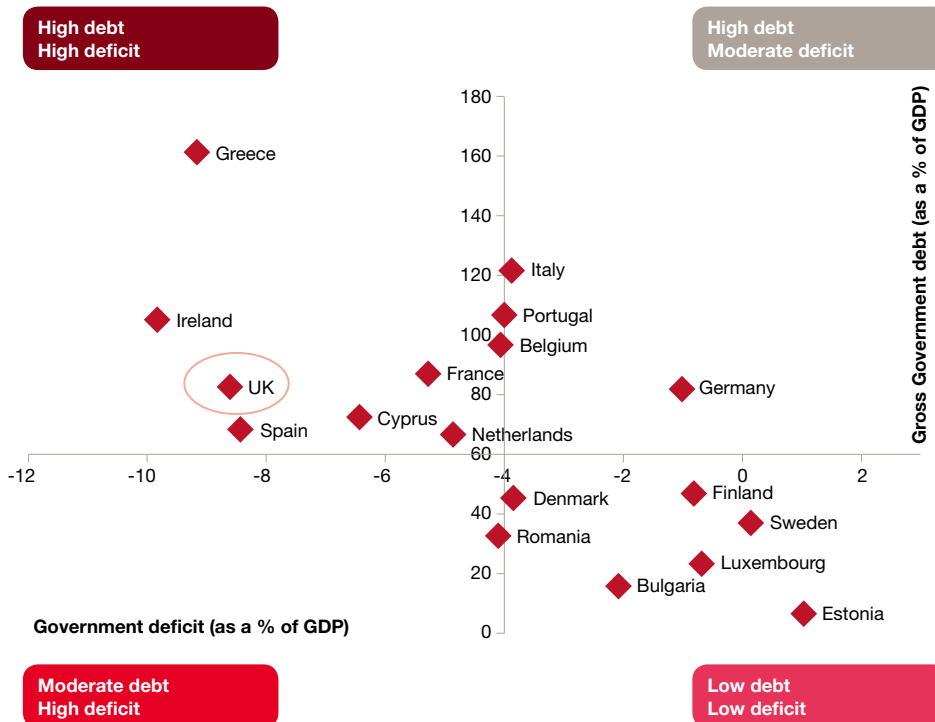However, long-term demographics are against us when meeting these targets.

Figure 1: Gross government debt and deficit (as a % of GDP)

High debt
High deficit

High debt
Moderate deficit

Gross Government debt (as a % of GDP)

Greece
Italy
Portugal
Belgium
France
Germany
Ireland
UK
Cyprus
Spain
Netherlands
Denmark
Finland
Romania
Sweden
Luxembourg
Bulgaria
Estonia

Government deficit (as a % of GDP)

Moderate debt
High deficit

Low debt
Low deficit

Source: IMF (2011 estimates)

> "*Under our definition of unchanged policy, the Government would end up having to spend more as a share of national income on age-related items such as pensions and health care. But the same demographic trends would leave government revenues roughly stable as a share of national income.*
>
> *In the absence of offsetting tax increases or spending cuts this would widen budget deficits over time and eventually put public sector net debt on an unsustainable upward trajectory.*"

'Fiscal Sustainability Report', OBR. July, 2012

The (local) state we're in

1 Latest UK macroeconomic forecasts paint a gloomier position for the years ahead – delayed growth, lower growth, uncertain growth

2 This suggests a very strong likelihood of further cuts beyond 2014/15 of similar magnitude to the current Spending Review

3 Local authority medium term plans need to be updated now to reflect continued austerity and increasing demand, the new norm, which make current approaches unsustainable

4 Most local authority savings plans will also therefore need to be amended to reflect this position

5 Most plans will need to take into consideration a much broader scope of activity and opportunity than previously and to tackle issues of demand reduction and significantly different ways of achieving outcomes
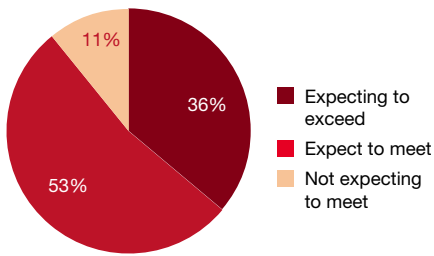
In 2012, we published the results of our survey, *The (local) state we're in*, on how councils have coped with funding cuts, the savings they have made and the impact this has on the communities they serve.

Local government has been remarkably successful so far in cutting costs (see Figure 2).

Government workforce reduction has been achieved quicker than forecast, particularly in local government.

However, the pressures of the tax base and rising spending pressures pose a formidable fiscal challenge.

Figure 2: Achievement of anticipated savings 2011/12

- 11%
- 36%
- 53%

Legend:
- Expecting to exceed
- Expect to meet
- Not expecting to meet

Source: The (local) state we're in, 2012, PwC

Spending	*Revenue*
• Economic under-performance increasing pressure on current public spending	• Tax revenues likely to remain relatively flat to 2015/16
• £10 bn more in savings being sought on the welfare budget in the next few years	• Lower growth would result in lower than expected tax revenues
• Age-related spending to increase by £80 bn in today's terms by 2061/62 (from 2016/17)	
• Long term care will comprise c. £14 bn of this rise	

The Coalition's austerity budgets have been based upon two critical assumptions:

- a rapid return to growth in the UK economy;
- a subsequent sustained period of stability.

A stalled economy showing little sign of growth, and continued upheaval in the Eurozone, suggests the need to plan for a further round of public expenditure reductions into the next Parliament.

With health and education likely to remain protected, and areas such as defence unlikely to be targeted with further cuts, local government is likely to be asked again to make a significant contribution to closing the gap.

This is happening at a time when nearly 50% of councils still have to find at least 50% of their known savings gap to 2015 (see Figure 3).
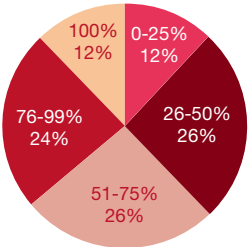
In the worst case, spending cuts may increase by 10%-15% on top of current targets.

"
....
We predict that the next CSR could see central funding reduce by up to 50% compared to pre 2008 levels."

The (local) state we're in highlights the strong appreciation about the limits of securing these financial savings from focusing solely within an organisation.

Figure 3: Amount of future savings identified
....

What percentage of your known funding gap to April 2015 have you identified solutions for in your latest medium term financial plan?

Source: The (local) state we're in, 2012, PwC

The single largest challenge to the sector is the seemingly inexorable growth in demand for services, in particular social care.

For these reasons, councils are increasingly focusing on how to secure significant savings and desired outcomes through effective demand management. But this also is not without its challenges.

To date, local councils have benefited in their programmes of expenditure reductions from a largely benign public attitude towards austerity. The Coalition Government clearly won the debate in the first 18 months of its life about the need for, and virtue of, public spending cuts.

What our survey also highlights is a notable hardening of public attitudes towards those cuts impacting local public services. The national elections in France and Greece further highlighted that there is a limit to the amount of austerity driven pain that the public is prepared to tolerate.

While councils may therefore be seeking increasingly to reduce or divert demand, they will need to be sensitive to a changing public attitude that will be more hostile towards perceptions of reduction than it has been so far.

The survey also highlights that there is much more councils can and should be doing to engage local communities and individuals about the difficult choices they are facing.

There is a marked contrast in views between officers and local councillors on the one hand, and the public on the other, about the effectiveness of local authority communication to date around these choices and decisions.

If demand management is to succeed, local councils will need to find more effective means of engaging communities and individuals than they have to date.

Councils are moving into a period of sustained public expenditure constraint, where the choices will be ever more challenging and the public attitude less forgiving.

Therefore the sector should not let up in the pace of change that it has demonstrated over the last year, continuing to focus relentlessly upon driving out further efficiencies from within, and simultaneously it should be looking to manage demand for services in more innovative and effective ways, and grasping the need to do different things – not just the same things in a different way.

The shape and purpose of local government – what's driving change?

The role of local government is being challenged to the core, as citizen and customer expectations continue to rise alongside the fiscal challenges set out in the previous pages.

Shape and purpose of local government

Leading councils are questioning their core purpose and whether they are a provider of services or if they are commissioners /enablers/facilitators of outcomes. This is leading a number of councils to explore new vehicles like social enterprises and mutuals, alongside more traditional delivery models.

In addition, there is a continuing debate around the relationship between citizen and state: what is local government there to do? The new Localism Act will inevitably have an impact on local social, environmental and economic well-being.

Health, social care and ageing

The demographic time-bomb is a massive issue for local government. This is in an environment where there is rapid change in the relationship with health bodies.

Without a fundamental change in the way services are delivered, the cost of health and social care will rise significantly beyond the anticipated funding available.

Children and young people; families

There has been a significant increase in looked-after children referrals, and analysis of future demand suggests that this number will rise further.

There is also a renewed focus on problem families, and how to integrate across agencies to better meet their needs.

Simpler, more joined up, services that are designed around outcome delivery across multiple partners, and an increased emphasis on early intervention and prevention, are at the core of where leading councils are making in-roads into meeting these challenges.

Regeneration, jobs and LEPs

With job losses in the public sector happening faster than anticipated and growth in the private sector slower, councils will need to bring an increasing focus on job creation.

Having the capacity to engage with Local Enterprise Partnerships, and new models of regeneration, will continue to stretch finite resources.

Environment, planning, housing

With the impact from the Housing Revenue Account reform on the horizon, and an increased emphasis from both government and the public on sustainability, councils will need the capacity to engage beyond purely the delivery of services. Instead they will need to look at new ways of meeting local housing needs, investing in regeneration and growth, and engaging with the Green Deal.

Addressing the change and unlocking the potential

Local government is at a 'tipping point'. The sector is now actively planning and delivering fundamental changes that will reduce operating costs significantly over the next three years and beyond.

At the same time, many councils are considering how to create more integrated arrangements with other public, third sector and private sector partners to secure the outcomes that are required. These changes are being considered in the context of complex social and economic conditions, and with customers who have increasing expectations and a desire for more choice and influence in key decisions.

The leading, strategically ambitious councils are increasingly moving towards new ways of working and adopting new organisational forms – they are becoming more 'agile'. These organisations are looking to adapt quickly to changing circumstances and preserve as far as possible, front line services to customers.

Agile councils think and act differently by breaking down service/professional models in pursuit of joined up, system based, customer-centric solutions.

Agile councils are strong local leaders with a clear focus on place and securing outcomes. They adopt a commissioning mindset seeing themselves as one of a number of players in the local service network and act collaboratively. They are driven by customer excellence which is delivered through intelligence, insight and choice.

Agile councils:

- Adopt simpler and more standard organisational forms giving greater flexibility, scalability and ability to respond rapidly to changing circumstances.

- Have a "whole council", commercially astute and project centred culture; recognising that they need more than a service delivery mindset, to influence the outcomes they desire for their communities.

- Are change oriented, quickly able to spot changing circumstances and respond rapidly and through continuous improvement.

Alongside improving the ways in which services are delivered – the supply side – the agile council also focuses on the demand side of the equation.

This requires councils and their partners to agree on priority outcomes and think about alternative ways to achieve them.

The challenges for agile councils

- **'Statutory' services** – challenging the notion that nothing can be changed.

- **Tradition** – challenging historical delivery and council policy.

- **Demand** – identifying and defining demand through careful analysis of what is supplied and what is needed.

- **Intervention** – identify what causes demand and the points earlier in the customer journey where intervention could prevent future demands arising.

- **Service-failure demand** – identifying and removing activities that are only demanded because the council, or another organisation, has failed in the delivery of another service.

- **Dependency** – managing public expectation through dialogue and communication and identifying and supporting other ways to secure the necessary outcomes.

Creating a change-ready organisation

Beyond supply side efficiency

The approach to designing organisations so that they are more effective has evolved significantly across many sectors, including local government. These changes not only reflect a desire to reduce costs but to do so in a way that also means they can:

- get closer to customers/citizens to improve insight/foresight and improve satisfaction, service interventions and choices;

- release capacity to help to improve productivity and contact time and/or professionalise service delivery; and

- enable the use of increasingly sophisticated technology to share data and intelligence.

These changes often reflect a move in managerial focus from structures to processes to outcomes (see Figure 4).

Typically councils can achieve benefits of up to 10% from changing structures – and if they include processes they can achieve 30%. A further shift to focussing on outcomes could underpin benefits of up to 50%.

Figure 4: Changes in managerial focus: from structures to processes to outcomes

Traditional Direct Provision   *Leading Edge Commissioning*

Lower complexity of change   Higher potential benefits

We have seen that as councils have developed their operations they have increased their ability to be more economic, efficient and effective by changing their focus from structures, to processes and on to outcomes in stages.

It is essential that organisations reach a maturity in their operations at each stage before moving to the next. This critically underpins the ability to share data and build alignment. Simplified and standardised operations, information and processes are a precondition for operating effectively around outcomes.

To meet the current challenges faced by the local government sector, councils will need to deploy ever-more innovative operating arrangements and increasingly focus on outcomes.

30-50%

Operating around outcomes
Securing the outcomes the organisation exists for, regardless of type of service delivery – doing things differently

Removing organisational boundaries – For example, community ownership or self service

Customer

Insight   Outcomes

Suppliers

Operating around process
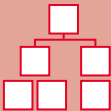**Value chain focus** – on provide value to customers by aligning activities and processes

Moving beyond organisational boundaries – For example, creating shared service centres, or outsourcing
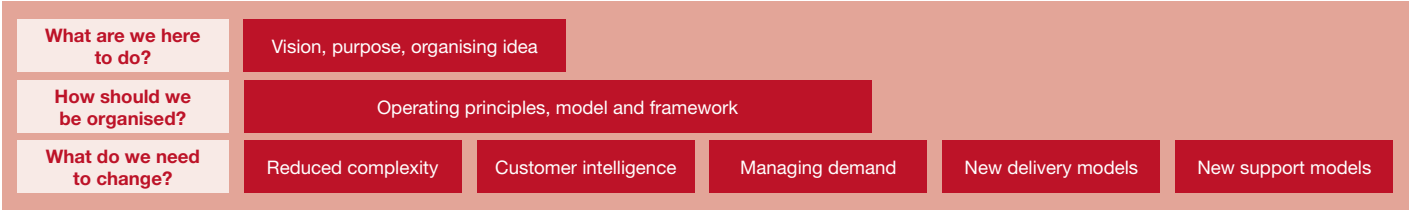
10-30%

Operating around structures
Organisation focus – on organisational structures and spans of control and the manager of capacity and resources

Organisation-centric – For example, creating structures and posts to address particular challenges

5-10%

What are we here to do?	Vision, purpose, organising idea				
How should we be organised?	Operating principles, model and framework				
What do we need to change?	Reduced complexity	Customer intelligence	Managing demand	New delivery models	New support models

Our experience and learning from other sectors suggests that in order to deliver these changes councils will need to:

- be clear about their vision, purpose and strategy;

- maximise flexibility (and avoiding greater complexity) by developing a holistic view on their operating principles, dimensions and framework that provides a consistent backdrop for all operating model changes; and

- commit to the priority changes that are needed to deliver the strategy (shown in Figure 5).

The benefits of creating an agile council

While significant progress has been made in achieving the more obvious savings in councils around headcount, procurement savings etc, the next step is to drive deeper into the heart of improved operations and services.

Developing an agile council delivers significant additional benefits – reduced costs, better customer experiences, better employee satisfaction and improved performance.

Reduced Cost

- Costs are significantly reduced – we believe that the severe financial challenges posed by reduced funding and increased demand can be met by making the right choices.

– Reduce process, information and IT complexity through consolidation, simplification and standardisation.

– Deepen customer intelligence.

– Embed effective commissioning and demand management approaches across the organisation.

– Establish new and cheaper and potentially more effective delivery models.

– Continue to improve efficiency and effectiveness around back office support.

- Focusing on outcomes enhances the potential for better value for money by integrating local public services arrangements.

Customer experience

- Customer behaviour is better understood and predicted through insightful customer and demand information.

- The full range of customer interactions and satisfaction are profiled to proactively manage and develop the delivery of outcomes through new delivery models.

- The day-to-day customer experience is managed to ensure that all contact channels make it easy to get the services or outcome that the citizen requires without duplication of effort or failure demand.

- Customer outcomes are delivered more effectively through targeted service delivery based upon need.

Performance

Processes are simpler, faster and cheaper to deliver, with less need for unnecessary managerial support.

- IT systems are more agile, cheaper and simpler, and support the council more directly, avoiding a range of complicated, underperforming and overlapping solutions.

- A common information set across IT systems provides 'one version of the truth' to support the decision making process – leading to faster and better decisions.

Employee satisfaction

- Employees feel empowered to make and drive change, contributing to a positive, effective and enjoyable working environment;

- Removal of time consuming and repetitive tasks that improve the day-to-day workload of employees;

- Ability to move and develop within the organisation and enhance internal skills and experience through standard ways of working, processes and systems;

- More successful and consequently more stable organisations providing greater long term employment prospects.

Five steps to creating the agile council

We are seeing five key steps that councils are taking to respond and change the way they operate.

....

1. *Reducing complexity*
Achieved by consolidating, simplifying and standardising operations, thereby reducing complexity and enabling clearer organisational choices.

Many councils have started the journey to change the way they serve customers and support business operations with the aim of reducing complexity. This should provide a basis for better service at lower cost (for example, through shared service arrangements, contact centres etc.)

However, there is much more to do to optimise these arrangements and to continue simplify and standardise the

way they work. Many councils have already achieved a significant amount of cost reductions through front office and back office process simplification and standardisation but are now deepening this approach across key areas and services where further benefits have been identified. As a result, these councils are now much clearer about how their operating model underpins the delivery of their strategy.

This in turn allows them to be clearer about the changes they are seeking to make and how different components/ dimensions of their operating models can enable more innovative and flexible ways of working. Being clear about how organisational activities align with these different operating model components/ dimensions is a pre-curser to being able to develop more creative organisational forms effectively.

We have found the most mature organisations have real clarity around their operating model framework (as shown in Figure 6) and are consequently able to consciously manage diversity in the way they work.
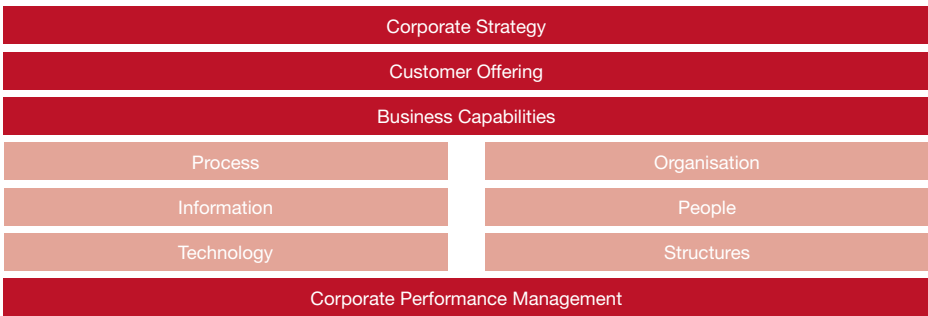
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2. *Enhancing customer intelligence*
Achieved by greater customer/ area insight and foresight achieved through improved business intelligence, use of technology and integrated data management.

Many councils have already enhanced their CRM capability and customer enquiry fulfilment through contact centres providing an enhanced and consolidated view of actual customer demand.

This capability has informed insight and improved service choice. Councils are increasingly using customer personas and segmentation approaches, which have been extensively used in the retail and financial services sectors, to help prioritise both targeted and universal services, which is increasing customer choice and opening up cheaper service channels (for example, web based service delivery).

Figure 6: Operating model framework

Corporate Strategy
Customer Offering
Business Capabilities

Process	Organisation
Information	People
Technology	Structures

Corporate Performance Management

Increasingly we are seeing councils joining up with local public sector partners to manage demand, service choices and outcomes more effectively (particularly with health bodies, to manage care choices more holistically).

The community budget pilots are increasingly focussing on data integration and enhanced data management to optimise and make earlier interventions. Our experience from the private sector suggests that councils will now need to improve their capabilities to co-create and co-design services, including developing new technology platforms and social media.

3. Managing demand

Achieved by more sophisticated commissioning, procurement and contract/supplier management . Approaches should enable outcomes, manage demand and help to create the environment for economic prosperity.

Perhaps the most significant change that follows from a greater understanding of customer needs and demands is the development of intelligent commissioning, better procurement and supplier management. Increasingly councils need to become less focused on procurement compliance and look for more enabling and open relationships to exploit market innovation.

Most councils recognise this and are modernising procurement arrangements and driving value through better category management. However, few have introduced and embedded a

commissioning capacity that is truly council-wide and capable of making a step change in how councils operate, based on real intelligence.

To respond to the severe funding cuts, councils will need not only to reduce costs but also to do things differently. This will require imagination and innovation and it will also mean that councils need new skills and become commercially stronger, making markets and stimulating local supply chains.

They will also need to interpret need and demand more effectively and become much

Figure 7: Managing demand

Increasing demand for services is biggest challenge

60% of Chief Executives and 56% of Council Leaders rated increasing demand for services as their number one challenge in our recent survey.

Strategic demand choices

- Redefining the relationship between citizen and State
- Execution of statutory duties and powers
- Redrawing the standards (policies) and outcomes desired
- Exiting some service provision
- New customer and user experiences

Operational demand choices

- Deeper use of business intelligence and customer insight
- Changing/ earlier interventions
- Encouraging awareness and behavioural change
- Promoting channel shift and self service
- Developing new delivery models
- Co-creating/designing services

Source: The (local) state we're in, 2012, PwC

more sophisticated in their understanding of service pricing and charging.

Many councils are beginning to work with new and different forms of delivery models. Collaboration and co-design with other public and private partners means new ways of working, including managing and influencing this ever-increasing sphere of relationships and networks.

4. Developing new delivery models
Achieved by increasing diversity in service delivery arrangements, new delivery models and/or lower cost models.

There are many new service delivery models emerging that are demonstrating councils' ability to innovate and manage different ways of achieving outcomes. Many are taking bold steps to consider different models of ownership and new working models with different partners. There are clear examples where these approaches can reduce costs dramatically.

This trend looks set to continue with new delivery models focused on desired outcomes and a radically different range of potential participants rather than services provided as a pre-defined standard with no choice.

We expect to see the emergence of much more co-creation and co-design of service delivery arrangements with customers heavily involved in shaping future services.

Personalisation will continue to drive approaches geared towards achieving outcomes based on individual needs and preferences.

5. Creating new support models
Achieved by improving the way in which the organisation is supported through back office and support functions.

Given the significant changes that are taking place in the approach to delivering service outcomes, councils are under increasing pressure to make sure that back office and business support functions are scalable and the right size to accommodate the changes in demand for different delivery models.

Some councils have got to grips with this agenda and already provide a whole range of back office and business support activities and functions on a standard basis. However, there remains a huge task in most councils to create commonly applied standard services on a common basis.

In order to achieve this and to retain flexibility many are looking to bring together a wider set of activities and functions and professionalise service delivery. This will mean services can be provided on a much more scalable basis. Councils need to take more purposeful decisions about how to source such services and whether additional benefits can be gained through sharing economies of scale and/or scope.

Many councils are also taking a more strategic approach to IT and developing a much clearer view of how IT can operate and integrate more effectively across their organisations. This is resulting in major rationalisation but also driving much greater integration potential.

We expect to see a significant shift towards web-based self service and personal IT integration removing the need for double handling of data and information and to reduce costs further.

What next?

Together, these steps are helping councils to address the key 'right outcome/service, right provider, right process' questions that inform their future operating model choices.

Most councils will start this journey as very complex organisations, providing diverse services which are delivered through different organisational and management arrangements. This is made even more complex where different councils and other bodies are collaborating locally around the delivery of better outcomes.

However, as many councils are nearing the end of a first comprehensive savings programme and are starting to consider the next wave of change, they are starting to embrace the next stages of a more intelligence-led, outcomes-based approach which will be challenging to deliver.

Conclusion

The principles of 'simplify, standardise and share' are at the heart of the agile council, helping to reduce complexity by identifying the opportunities for significant improvements in performance, customer services and the delivery of outcomes by enabling the council to adapt to future change.

We recommend this structured approach to deliver these improvements and new ways of working by assessing the existing complexity and the potential for improvement, considering:

- What is the ***right outcome/service*** that will be supported?
- What is the ***right provider*** model?
- What is the ***right process***, people and organisational culture, technology and data.

Only by considering all of these together can long term success by sustained.

We believe that to succeed in the current and future economic climate the creation of the agile council is critical. For this to work, the organisation must move to a process-orientated view of the council and its commissioned supply chain as a whole (rather than as discrete sets of siloed activities). This will underpin the transition to a truly collaborative leadership model that enables the council to share common processes across traditional silos and cross-organisational boundaries.

Agile councils think and act differently – they break down existing models in favour of new approaches that centre on the customer, they base decisions on strong business intelligence and operate through simpler, standardised organisational structures and processes. By embracing a change-ready culture they remain one step ahead of whatever social, economic or political environment is thrown at them, continuing to deliver exceptional outcomes for their citizens.

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As well as bringing our insight and expertise to this sector, we contribute our thinking and experience to the public policy debate through our Public Sector Research Centre. To join this free online community, go to www.psrc.pwc.com and register today for our research and analysis.

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