

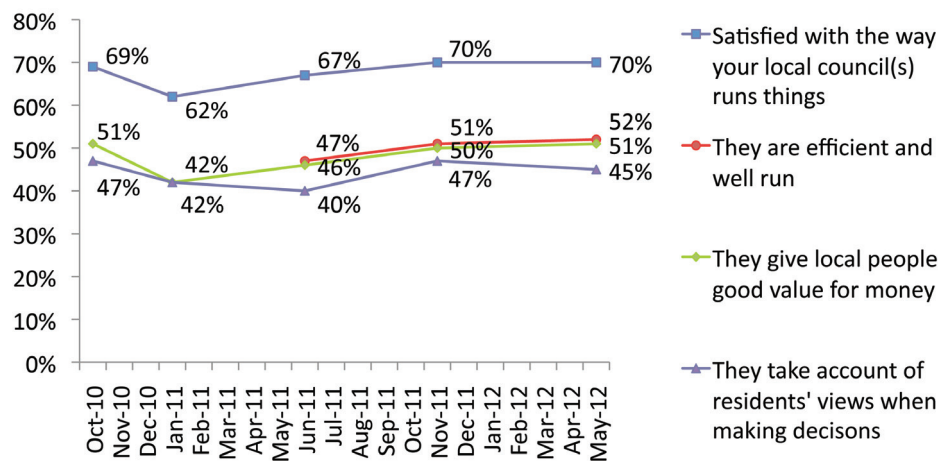
What is the current reputation of local government?

New poll results, new ways of thinking

A local council's reputation is driven by three things; what it tells people about itself, what others are saying about it and what people see the council is doing. The latest poll from LGinsight/Populus puts numbers on these three aspects and shows that actually local government is not doing too badly in maintaining its reputation. In May 2012 seven in ten (70%) Britons say they

are satisfied with the way their council is running things, and this is the same proportion as we saw back in October 2010 when this series of polling started (69%). This is at the same time as YouGov show that approval of what the Government is doing has halved from 42% to 24% from May 2010 to now, and disapproval has increased from 22% to 62%.

Core Council Reputation Measures



Source: LGinsight/Populus, c.1,000 GB participants in each wave interviewed by telephone. The figures for the end of 2011 are for the average of five months of polling from July to November 2011 with in total 5,011 interviews. Latest survey of 1,000 interviews carried out between 11-13 May 2012

So what is local government doing right?

In terms of what people are seeing their council to be doing, service satisfaction is high;

- Satisfaction with street cleansing has gone from 67% to 73% between January 2011 and now. Refuse collection satisfaction has gone from 73% to 85% over the same period. The polling on service satisfaction started in January 2011 which was a low point in service delivery due to the problems in quickly removing ice and the disruption this caused to services. Therefore councils have recovered since then and shown improved resilience as time has progressed.
- There are continued problems with satisfaction with road maintenance, with only 40% of the public thinking that standards are satisfactory, and is an obvious area for improvement if councils are to better meet the needs of

their residents. Pavement maintenance is rated slightly higher at 52% and is therefore another area of improvement.

- Despite deepening controversy in some parts of the country over the delivery of libraries, among Britons as a whole, seven in ten (70%) are satisfied with the quality of these services and there has been no real change since the end of 2011 (68%).
- Not everyone uses services for vulnerable adults but many residents have an opinion. Two in five (40%) think that the services are satisfactory, a fall from 45% at the end of 2011. Sixteen percent are dissatisfied with the service, with 26% neutral and 18% saying they don't know. At the end of 2011 one in five (19%) were dissatisfied

Generally, the council is also doing well in what people are saying about them – in particular the media. Back in June 2011 one in six people (16%) said they thought that the media had viewed their local council positively in the last few months. By May 2012 this has nearly doubled to 29%. At the same time the proportion of those who think that the coverage is negative has gone from 29% down to 22%. The rest are either neutral or say they don't know. This means that the proportion who think the coverage is positive or neutral has gone from 61% to 71% in just under a year. Britons were also asked how the media treated local councils across the country and generally they think they have been given a worse ride. In June the positive/neutral rating was 41% and this has now moved to 55%. Therefore although people do think that councils outside their area are viewed more negatively, again there is a general perception that coverage has become more positive. Bottom of the pile is the Government with only a third of Britons (35%) feeling that they are viewed positively or neutrally by the media, which is very similar to the position back in June 2011 (38%).

The role of the media is important. It helps the public trust an investigative body, reporters, to assess whether an organisation is competent or not. This is measured in the survey by the rise in perceptions among Britons that their council is efficient and well run – from 47% in June 2011 to 52% now. This is not as high as the level of satisfaction, but shows a shift in opinion on something far more intangible than whether services have been satisfactorily delivered. Value for money is also closely related to this measure and has seen an increase from 46% to 51% over the same period. The data for this question is slightly longer and back in October 2010 51% said they thought their council delivered good value for money. Therefore the long-term trend suggests a stable position on both these measures. This is important as despite local councils going through the most fundamental service changes and revisions to their budget in a generation, the general perceptions of competency have been maintained.

Indeed, it could be argued that the discussions that have been held at a local level about the full range of services the council delivers, and how they need to change, has helped engage with the local media. Although not covered by this poll, the suspicion must be that residents better understand what their council offers, as each has been highlighted for review. It certainly has enabled local media to report on a wider range of functions on services which up to this point may not have seemed to be news. Going from October 2010 to June 2011 there was a fall in perceptions that their local council took account of residents' views when making decisions – from 47% to 40%. However, since then it has edged back up to 45%. Councils are maintaining engagement rather than actively increasing it. This is an achievement but one which councils should accept as a challenge to improve on.

Finally perhaps the key measure of the drivers of reputation is what the organisation says about itself. Over half (54%) of Britons feel that they are kept well informed about the services and benefits their council provides, a fall from 60% in October 2010. Similarly the proportion of people who feel well informed about their councils plans to deal with their proposed reductions to their budgets has fallen from 33% in January 2011 to 29% now. Many communication teams have been at the forefront of service cuts and this is probably reflected in these figures. Councils have less resource now to show respect to their residents by keeping them informed about what they do. Luckily the local press has filled some of this gap by being more positive about their role, and also services seem to be either maintained or improved.

The latest LGinsight/Populus poll is one of a series and consists of around 1,000 interviews each wave. At the end of 2011 five waves were completed in a five month period and this larger dataset has also been analysed in depth. What this shows is that the reputation of local government is remarkably consistent and resilient. There are generally better ratings in the South East with Wales, Scotland and the North West at other end of scale. But the differences across different regions and types of local authority, and also across different time periods, are not huge. Councils should therefore use these benchmarks as broad markers to judge their performance. Ideally viewing a range of performance around the average and setting high aspirations for improvement. Around each indicator there is probably a range of up to 10% to 20% for individual local authorities. Therefore although overall satisfaction is 70% the range is likely to be 55% to 85% for individual authorities. Local performance in each authority will be driven by how they keep people informed and perceptions of service delivery and efficiency. These three indicators have come out of analysis of the larger sample of interviews from the end of 2011. Using statistical analysis they account for around a third of the variance in satisfaction. They form a great basis for local authorities to understand and improve their reputation. But they also leave two-thirds of reputation unaccounted for. All authorities need to understand local needs within the national context. There are stars out there really delivering for their public, and there are those who are not. Only local research and understanding will help authorities understand how they perform.

LGinsight encourages local authorities to use public opinion research to help councils aim to be the best, not just comforted by the national benchmark. There is a good story here and great successes, but there are still challenges to be addressed. Councils need to step up the way they engage with their residents and they also need to address concerns about roads and pavements. So far they have guided and supported Britons through a terribly difficult time of public service reform. But expectations change and continually increase and local government can use these findings to pre-empt those issues.

Technical note: LGinsight/Populus have been running a series of national representative telephone surveys since October 2010. There are nine waves in total of around c.1,000 interviews each. Five of these waves ran each month from July to November 2011 and we have merged the data

(5,011 interviews) to look in depth at some of the sub-groups. All the polls have been carried out on the Populus Omnibus survey among British adults 18+ and conducted over the telephone. Data has been weighted to the known profile of the country.

LGinsight/Populus Reputation of Local Government Tracking Survey

% of GB adults (18+)	Oct-10	Jan-11	Jun-11	July - Nov 11	May-12
Satisfied with the way your local council(s) runs things	69%	62%	67%	70%	70%
Agree they take account of residents' views when making decisions	47%	42%	40%	47%	45%
Agree they are efficient and well run			47%	51%	52%
Agree they give local people good value for money	51%	42%	46%	50%	51%
Satisfied with refuse collection		73%		83%	85%
Satisfied with street cleaning		67%		74%	73%
Satisfied with library services				68%	70%
Satisfied with pavement maintenance				51%	52%
Satisfied with services and support for children and young people				50%	51%
Satisfied with road maintenance				41%	40%
Satisfied with services and support for vulnerable adults				45%	40%
Keeps local residents well informed about the services and benefits they provide	60%	54%	55%	57%	54%
Keeps local residents well informed about their plans to deal with any proposed reductions to their budget?		33%	29%	35%	29%
The media has viewed the Government positively or neutrally in the last few months			38%	39%	35%
The media has viewed local councils across the country positively or neutrally in the last few months			41%	49%	55%
The media has viewed my local council positively or neutrally in the last few months			61%	65%	71%
Number of interviews by telephone	1,003	1,002	1,000	5,011	1,000
<i>Dates of fieldwork</i>	<i>1-3 Oct 2010</i>	<i>28-30 Jan 2011</i>	<i>10-12 June 2011</i>	<i>Five waves combined July to Nov 2011</i>	<i>11-13 May 2012</i>

	GB	England	Scotland	Wales	North East	North West	Yorkshire and The Humber	West Midlands	East Midlands	Eastern	South East	South West	London	Two-tier	Met Borough (not including London)	Unitary (not including London)
Satisfied with the way your local council(s) runs things	70%	70%	64%	62%	72%	69%	70%	69%	68%	70%	77%	67%	70%	72%	70%	68%
Agree they take account of residents' views when making decisions	47%	47%	47%	44%	47%	49%	46%	44%	43%	46%	55%	46%	46%	48%	49%	45%
Agree they are efficient and well run	50%	51%	49%	43%	48%	50%	48%	49%	51%	54%	56%	44%	52%	52%	51%	46%
Agree they give local people good value for money	50%	50%	55%	42%	52%	51%	49%	48%	52%	51%	53%	48%	49%	52%	51%	47%
Satisfied with refuse collection	83%	83%	85%	83%	88%	79%	84%	86%	85%	84%	83%	79%	81%	83%	82%	85%
Satisfied with street cleaning	74%	74%	77%	72%	70%	72%	71%	72%	76%	75%	76%	69%	79%	74%	74%	70%
Satisfied with library services	68%	67%	78%	71%	65%	67%	64%	64%	69%	73%	69%	60%	67%	69%	65%	65%
Satisfied with pavement maintenance	51%	52%	47%	49%	53%	49%	49%	51%	53%	52%	52%	53%	55%	51%	54%	50%
Satisfied with services and support for children and young people	50%	50%	54%	48%	52%	47%	54%	50%	52%	55%	50%	48%	47%	50%	50%	52%
Satisfied with services and support for vulnerable adults	45%	44%	51%	44%	48%	41%	42%	46%	44%	50%	44%	42%	42%	45%	44%	44%
Satisfied with road maintenance	41%	42%	30%	41%	41%	38%	38%	48%	42%	43%	39%	37%	53%	40%	44%	38%
Keeps local residents well informed about the services and benefits they provide	58%	58%	55%	56%	62%	52%	57%	54%	59%	62%	61%	57%	59%	59%	55%	58%
Keeps local residents well informed about their plans to deal with any proposed reductions to their budget	34%	35%	31%	31%	37%	32%	39%	33%	34%	40%	33%	34%	33%	35%	34%	35%
The media has viewed the Government positively or neutrally in the last few months	40%	40%	40%	34%	40%	39%	38%	39%	39%	41%	41%	42%	42%	39%	40%	42%
The media has viewed local councils across the country positively or neutrally in the last few months	49%	49%	49%	47%	52%	47%	46%	46%	50%	51%	49%	52%	49%	49%	46%	51%
The media has viewed your local council positively or neutrally in the last few months	66%	66%	62%	62%	74%	65%	66%	63%	63%	63%	69%	65%	68%	66%	65%	66%
Number of interviews	5,011	4,271	469	271	236	565	426	468	357	443	676	468	632	1,796	944	939