



Transformation not devastation, urges APSE

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is urging local authorities to look to service transformation as a way of dealing with budget restraints, rather than slashing services and jobs, as it launches results of a major survey among frontline managers.

APSE released its research on attitudes towards service transformation within local government ahead of Comprehensive Spending Review announcements, which will mean a dramatic squeeze on expenditure.

APSE's chief executive, Paul O'Brien, commented: 'Everyone accepts it is now crucial to deliver 'more for less' but there is debate as to how this can be achieved. Rather than simply reducing costs through job losses or slashing services to the public, the survey suggests that managers are actively exploring ways to drive up productivity, exploit new technologies, apply both tried and tested and new service management tools and take tough decisions on future service delivery.'

He added: 'We were pleased to see that three quarters of respondents believe continuous performance improvement is the best way to transform services as that concurs with APSE's belief as to how to tackle the current financial crisis. This appears to reflect concerns that the level of flexibility in public service provision should be safeguarded and local solutions allowed to develop. We are all too aware of the pressure councils will be under as they face huge budget restraints, but in the interest of people who rely on frontline services, we would urge an approach of transformation, rather than devastation.'

The survey of 369 frontline service providers, predominantly managers charged with delivering in-house frontline services, found:

- 80% of respondents are adopting a 'more for less' approach to delivering services in light of budget restraints
- 76% think continuous performance improvement is the way to go
- 90% consider performance management key
- 81% see themselves as responsible for driving change
- 87% recognise the crucial role technology has to play
- 81% emphasise that change has got to be sustainable in the long term

Views on the extent of forthcoming cuts were varied, with 48% believing budgets in frontline services will decrease by up to 15% and a further 20% thinking they will see budgets decrease by up to 20%. A total of 70% of respondents thought that certain services will be targeted for a greater proportion of cuts overall, rather than

cuts being spread evenly over all services.

When asked about ways in which savings could be made:

- 44% will consider 'de-commissioning' a service there is no obligation to provide
- 69% are considering sharing service provision with another public provider
- More than 42% of respondents will look to see if they are able to provide services to other public bodies as a means to generate income

While the majority of respondents were providing services in-house, a further 21% will consider in-sourcing services currently provided by an external provider to generate savings. This supports earlier APSE research on insourcing services as a way to improve quality and generate cash savings.

Transforming procurement was viewed as a key means of making savings:

- Over 80% of respondents view shared procurement as a means to make savings
- 81% of respondents envisage adopting more environmentally friendly procurement
- 71% will look to use procurement to integrate training and skills needs
- 34% will work towards better use of community benefits in procurement

'The term 'service transformation' has been widely spoken within local government, but it can mean different things to different people and we wanted to scratch below the surface and see what it meant in practice on the frontline,' Mr O'Brien said . Continuous improvement, six sigma, leans systems, systems thinking are explored in the e-publication as management tools to bring about service transformation.

Service transformation measures differed, the survey found:

- The most common approach was through internal service improvement planning with 78% of respondents adopting this approach
- 71% identified some form of business process re-engineering
- 65% identified that the completion of more transactions on line and better use of internet technologies would be the way forward
- 63% thought integration of performance data, performance management and service improvement planning would drive transformation

However, in terms of barriers to services transformation, lack of money to invest to change was regarded as a barrier by 72% of respondents.

Notes to editors

APSE is the Association for Public Service Excellence, a not for profit body working with over 250 councils throughout the UK

APSE supports local councils who deliver frontline public services including refuse and waste collection, highways, winter gritting, street lighting, street cleansing, parks and leisure services, school meals, caretaking and cleaning services as well community venues and civic buildings.

To arrange for interview or for more details about the survey please contact Mo Baines on mbaines@apse.org.uk or mobile 07971 843515. The survey can be accessed [here](#) using page flicker or [here](#) to download as a PDF.