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The recession has brought everyone down to earth with a bump. Value for money and efficiency are of paramount importance in the downturn. And whilst a number of councils have chosen to deliver services through complex outsourcing arrangements, there is mounting evidence that councils are adopting different approaches, including bringing services back in-house.

Latest research by APSE suggests that a return to delivering services through in-house teams is a straightforward, sustainable solution. We examined provision of streetscene, waste collection, grounds maintenance and a host of other services that previously had been outsourced and found a trend towards 'insourcing'.

We found that insourcing is a cross-party phenomenon and decisions to bring services back in house are being taken for pragmatic reasons. The primary reason councils cited was poor performance by external contractors.

Better quality of service, efficiency and value for money were also cited as benefits by the 50 plus authorities studied. Using in-house teams also allows councils to respond flexibly to changing policies, and service users, helping to make tangible connections between who collects their council tax and who cleans their streets, empties their bins and looks after their parks.

Satisfaction with street cleansing in Southwark Council was up from 30% to 70% after insourcing. Other councils featured in the report include Exeter City Council which has used insourcing as an opportunity to apply sustainability principles during building maintenance work. The return of the waste service in-house in Three Rivers has been coupled with efficiency savings amounting to more than £1.5m.

Local authorities must obviously adopt the solution that suits their circumstances. In the current economic climate, however, common sense is crucial. And, in our view, direct delivery makes good sense.

Insourcing: a guide for local authorities bringing services back in-house is available from APSE. Tel: 0161 772 1810 or email: [mbaines@apse.org.uk](mailto:mbaines@apse.org.uk).

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