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Urban Voices:
UK City Leaders' Survey 2018

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About the survey

Centre for Cities and Arup have worked in partnership to develop the first survey of UK city leaders, inspired by the Menino Survey of Mayors conducted by the Boston University Initiative on Cities in the USA.

The survey aims to provide some understanding of what the needs of UK urban leaders are, along with how national policymakers can address these priorities. It approached all city leaders from the Centre for Cities database of 63 Primary Urban Areas and received a response rate of around one quarter.

The questions cover a number of policy areas relevant to economic growth such as housing, labour markets, transport and inclusive growth. It also addresses topics that may be of current interest to city leadership such as Brexit and the upcoming Spending Review.

While the survey sample is not statistically representative of all urban leaders in the UK, it offers some guide to what the priorities are, where the pressures are and what changes these particular cities would like to see.

Centre for Cities and Arup intend to produce this survey annually to provide a benchmark of how the priorities of city leadership evolve over time. By doing this we hope to raise the voice of urban leaders in the UK.

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This survey and its development was inspired by the Menino Survey of Mayors in the USA, developed by the Boston University Initiative on Cities.

0. Summary: Listening to the Urban Voice

Urban policy in the UK has come on leaps and bounds in recent years, and while City Deals and more substantive Devolution Deals have given major cities and city regions some of the powers and resources they need to prosper, there is still a way to go.

Many city leaders in this country are not empowered to directly address the challenges and opportunities facing their economies on their own terms. With uncertainty over how Brexit will play out, as well as changes to the world of work, it is becoming increasingly important that the needs of cities are better heard on the national stage.

The UK City Leaders' Survey has been developed for the first time this year. It aims to provide some understanding of what the needs and priorities of UK urban leaders are, along with how national policymakers can address these priorities. It approached all city leaders from the Centre for Cities database of 63 Primary Urban Areas and received a response rate of around a quarter.

Why is the urban voice important? Cities account for the majority of the UK economy, population and productivity growth. While cities have gained more powers to manage local policy and budgets, this is within the context of the UK being one of the most centralised countries in the OECD. Accordingly, cities are where some of the UK's biggest opportunities and challenges lie, along with the growing political power and leadership to drive change.

Overview of the survey findings

Policy priorities

- Housing and regeneration was identified, unprompted, as the biggest overall economic priority for the majority of leaders surveyed. When asked about their priorities for housing more specifically, almost all leaders chose increasing the supply of social housing or housing more generally. If given additional capital grant, most leaders stated they would allocate some to social housing.
- Among their priorities for improving transport, leaders tended to identify roads within their area and supporting a shift from cars to other modes of transport (such as public transport) as the two key areas.
- Leaders highlighted inclusive growth as another of their broader priorities, and when asked to provide more detail in this area, they tended to specify adult learning as the most important way to promote inclusive growth. In addition, when asked about specific changes that need to be made in the labour market to support the city's evolving needs, leaders tended to identify supporting inclusions – such as supporting those who are isolated from the job markets to access opportunities.

Public service pressures

- Unsurprisingly, social care was identified by almost every leader as being the public service under the most pressure. This was also the policy area where most leaders would wish to see further funding allocated through the upcoming Spending Review. In turn, many were prepared to sacrifice funding in other areas, such as adult skills, to achieve this.
- Leaders identified two main challenges to service delivery – increasing demand for services and revenue funding. In terms of how leaders receive funding for services, they also tended to choose longer-term funding cycles over more flexible budgets.

Devolution and funding

- All leaders demonstrated an appetite for devolution across a range of policy areas from skills to borrowing for housing and transport. A majority of the leaders felt that urban needs are not represented at the national scale. In a similar vein, they also tended to have more positive relationships with their local business and community groups than with national-level stakeholders such as Ministers and civil servants.

After Brexit

- The UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the proposed replacement for former EU funding, was what leaders most wanted more say on after Brexit. Added to that, leaders also wanted a say over inward investment, public procurement and state aid rules.

1: Introduction

The urban policy agenda has gained a lot of ground since the 2010 Coalition Government, first with City Deals and later with the more substantive English Devolution Deals which offered combined authorities strategic powers over transport, skills and planning and a new form of urban leadership – the metro mayor.

While these Deals have allowed many cities to address some of their policy issues on their own terms, there is still a long way to go. There still exist stark and growing divides around the country. The ever-familiar North/South divide still dominates discussion around wages and opportunities. Added to that is a sentiment that there are places around the country that have been 'ignored' by Westminster-based policymakers, leading to a suggestion – accurate or not – that the vote to leave the European Union was driven primarily by residents of those 'ignored' places.

What is often missed from this narrative is the critical role that city leadership can play in addressing these political and economic issues.

City leaders are in the best position to continue to address the urgent and emerging political and economic challenges facing the country for two reasons. First, they are political guardians of the majority of British residents, business and jobs. Second, they are the politicians that govern up-close to the action and know their base well.

But city leaders in this country rarely hold the attention of the national, let alone global media about the stark challenges, and the opportunities that are theirs to take.

The UK City Leaders' Survey, modelled on the Menino Survey of Mayors in the USA, was developed in order to provide more understanding of the needs of UK urban leaders, with the potential to then start addressing these needs.

The survey seeks to uncover an equivalent set of opportunities and concerns and a set of needs that can be understood and addressed by the National Government. In doing this, the survey explicitly asked what the priorities faced by different cities are and what they would do to address them – irrespective of any power or control they hold.

This report sets out the findings of the survey according to different themes and policy areas.
The survey provides a first step into what the immediate priorities are for city leaders. It examines addressing the needs of local businesses and residents, and where the Government can and should provide a clear pathway to more effective city governance and long-term urban economic success.

2: Leaders Surveyed

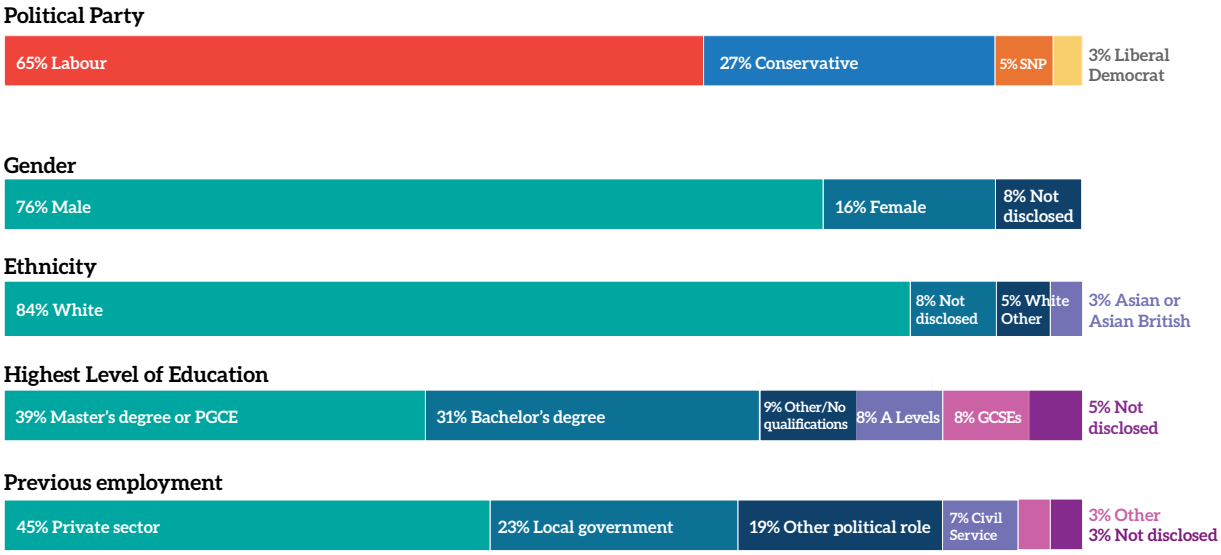
The City Leaders' Survey was distributed to the leaders and directly elected mayors of the local and combined authorities that make up the 63 largest urban areas in the UK – using the Primary Urban Area definition – a measure of built-up area.[1]

This is the first survey of its kind that Centre for Cities and Arup have carried out. Around a quarter of leaders filled in the survey. All responses were gathered between 26 September and 26 October 2018.[2]

The leaders who responded together represent over 13 million people, which is equivalent to 20 per cent of the UK population. Their areas contribute £334 billion to the British economy and are home to 21 per cent of all jobs in the UK.[3]

Of the leaders who disclosed this information, the below charts represent their political party, gender and occupational background.

Figure 1: Demographics and political party of survey respondents



1 More information is available at https://www.centreforcities.org/city-by-city/puas

2 While the survey was in circulation with leaders there were events that may have influenced or affected responses including the political Party Conferences and continued Brexit negotiations. The 2018 Budget took place after the survey closed on 26 October 2018.

3 Population: ONS 2018, Population estimates, 2016 and 2017 data; GVA: ONS 2017, Regional Value Added (Balanced Approach), 2016 data (note Northern Ireland data is not available); Jobs: ONS 2018, Business Register and Employment Survey, 2017 data.

3: Overall Policy Priorities

Leaders were asked for three short, free-text responses to the question: '*On which three policy priorities are you currently most focused?'*

Unprompted, leaders were overwhelmingly focused on a similar set of issues – housing, regeneration, transport, infrastructure and skills.

Figure 2: Overall policy priorities: On which three policy priorities are you currently most focused?

Comparing the responses with the economic data of each city showed:

- Housing is a priority regardless of housing affordability. Leaders of cities with both expensive and relatively less expensive homes identified housing as one of their three priorities.[4]
- Where economic growth was mentioned, the respondent was more likely to represent a city with a lower than the median GVA per worker.[5]
- Places that identified inclusive growth as a priority also tended to have a higher than average proportion of low-skilled workers.
- While a number of leaders identified skills as one of their policy priorities, this did not necessarily match the proportions of low-skilled people in their area.[6]

4 Source: Land Registry 2017, Market Trend Data, Price Paid, 2017 data. Simple average used. Scottish neighbourhood statistics 2016, Mean House prices, 2016 and 2017 data. ONS 2017, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), average gross weekly resident earnings, 2017 data.

5 GVA: ONS 2017, Regional Value Added (Balanced Approach)

6 ONS 2018, Annual Population Survey, residents analysis, 2017 data; DETINI 2018, District Council Area Statistics for Belfast, 2017 data.

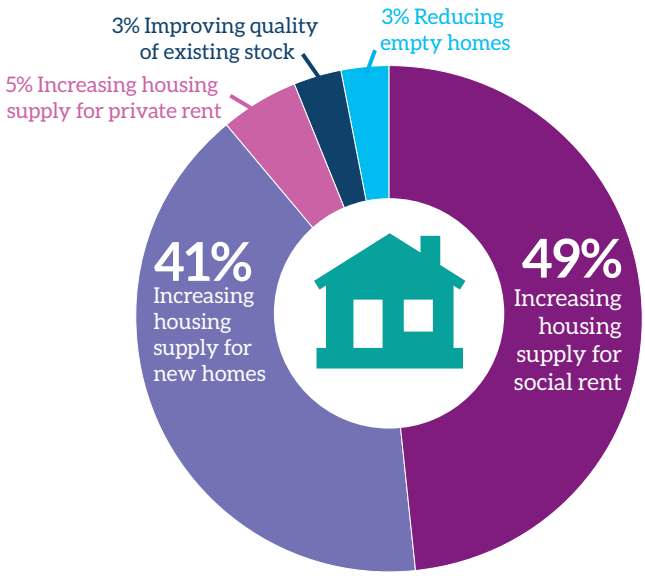
4: Priorities within policy themes

The survey aimed to establish the priorities of leaders within specific policy themes.

Housing

Supply was the overwhelming priority when leaders were asked for their top priority for housing over the next five years.

Figure 3: Housing: What is the top priority for housing in your area in the next five years? (Please select one)



Overall, 90 per cent of respondents chose increasing supply, with almost half of all leaders surveyed wanting to increase supply for social rent over the next five years (49 per cent). The other 41 per cent chose a more general increase in supply.

Of the leaders surveyed, there is no clear relationship between where the city is ranked for housing affordability and the options they chose.[7] Interestingly, those that identified the need for more social housing already tended to have higher than average levels of social housing in their area.

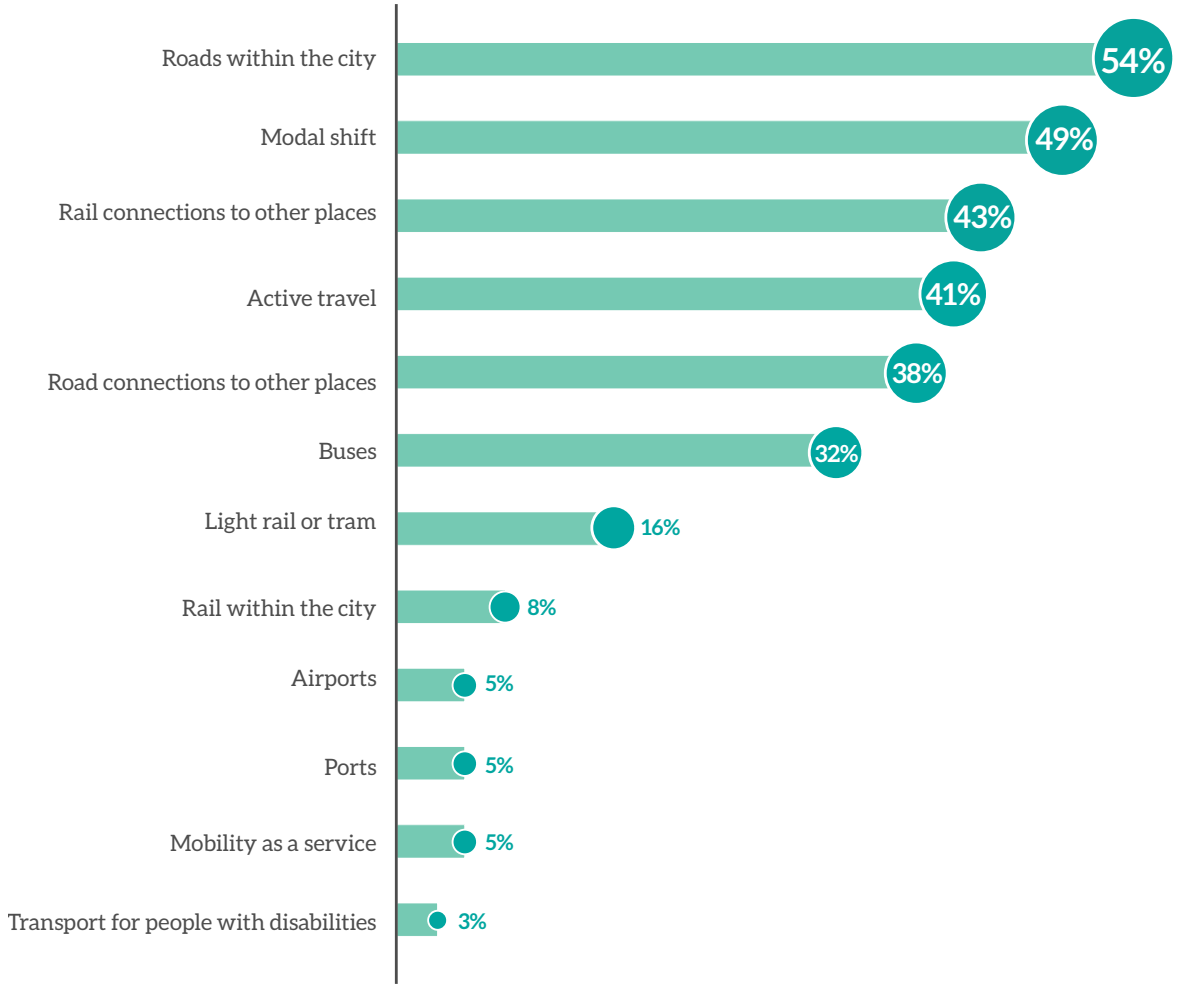
The remaining three options — increasing supply for private rent specifically, improving the quality of existing stock, or reducing the number of empty homes — were much less likely to be chosen. However, they received fairly even support from those who did see them as a priority. All the listed options were chosen by at least one survey respondent.

7 Source: Land Registry 2017, Market Trend Data, Price Paid, 2017 data. Simple average used. Scottish neighbourhood statistics 2016, Mean House prices, 2016 and 2017 data. ONS 2017, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE), average gross weekly resident earnings, 2017 data.

Transport

Leaders were asked to identify their priorities for developing or expanding transport services in their areas from a list of options. They were able to choose at least three.

Figure 4: Transport infrastructure and provision: Of the following options, what are the top three priorities for developing or expanding transport services and infrastructure for your area over the short to medium term? (Please select three)



Roads within the city (54 per cent), encouraging a switch from car use to public transport or walking (referred to as modal shift; 49 per cent), and rail outside the city (43 per cent) were the top three responses.

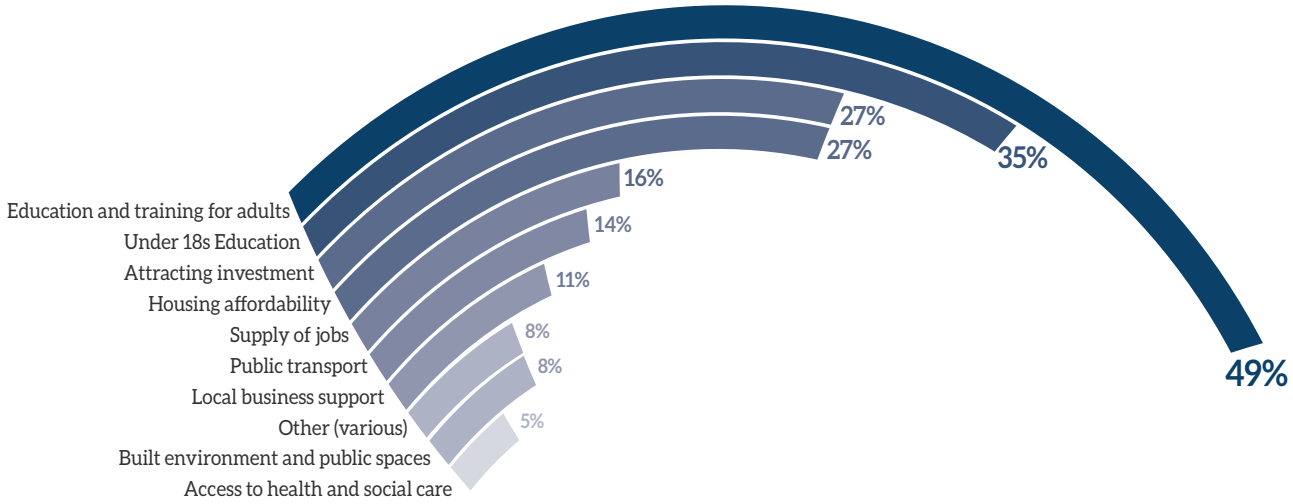
Among those leaders identifying modal shift as one of their priorities for transport, their cities tended to rank relatively highly on car use. A fifth of all leaders surveyed (22 per cent) chose both modal shift and active travel (for example, cycling and walking).

Inclusive growth

In recent years, many cities have aired particular concerns around people's ability to access opportunities, as well as levels of inequality within cities. Similarly, there have been more calls for more balanced growth across the country, so that the wealth of the economy is felt not just in the most successful cities, but in those that are doing less well. These concerns all relate to the notion of 'inclusive growth' in some way.

Leaders were asked to identify, from a list of options provided, which two would be most important to achieving inclusive growth.

Figure 5: To achieve inclusive growth in your area, which of the following options are most important to improve? (Please select two)



Adult education and training was chosen by almost half (49 per cent) of leaders as the most important way to improve inclusivity, followed by under 18s education at just over a third of responses. Just over two-thirds of leaders picked at least one of these two forms of education.

Attracting investment is believed to be important for inclusive growth by just over a quarter of the responding leaders. Alongside this, adding the other response related to the business environment (business support or supply of jobs) raises this figure to 54 per cent.

Housing affordability was selected by 27 per cent of respondents, reflecting the need to manage the negative effects of prosperous cities such as high house-prices.

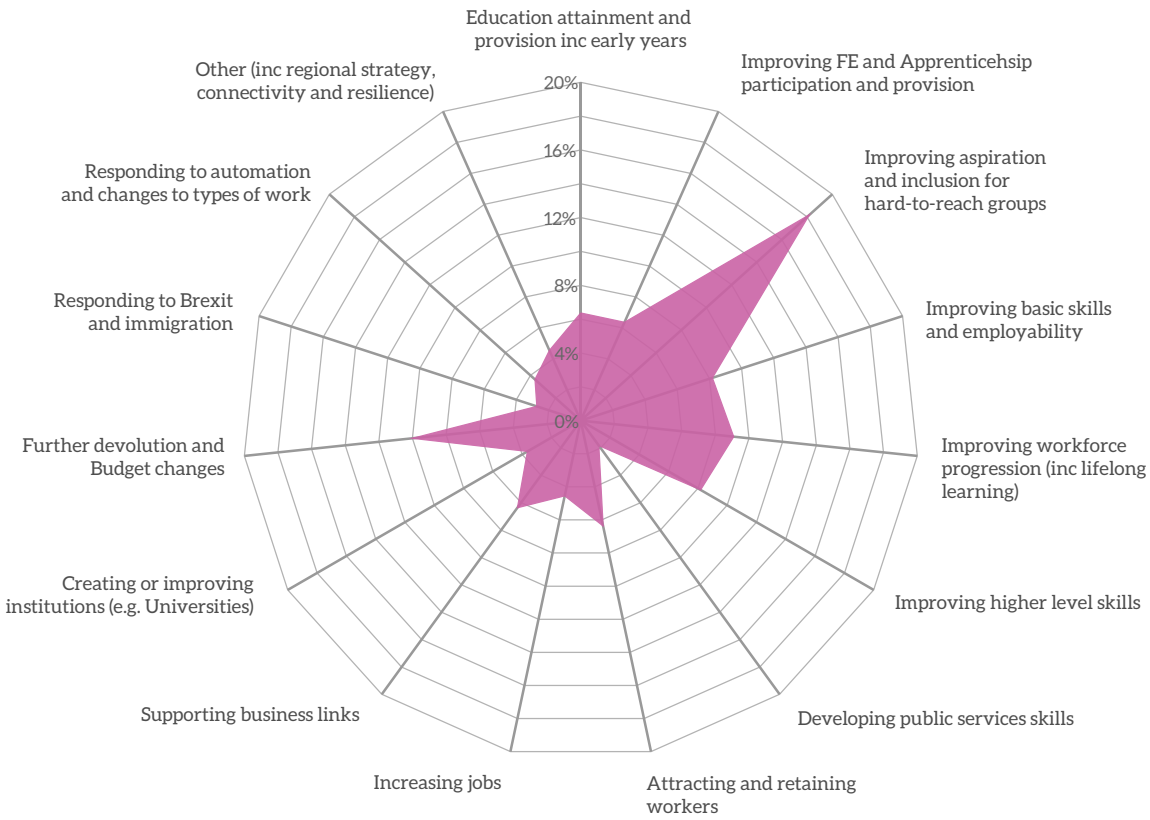
Taking leaders' responses as a whole – there is a strong distinction between measures to stimulate growth and measures to manage the effects of growth as they relate to inclusivity. However, this did not necessarily directly relate to the strength or relative weakness of the economies of the cities.

Finally, although the option to state that inclusive growth was not a priority was provided, no city selected this.

Skills

Skills are the main factor in supporting the prosperity of people and places. This free text question asked leaders what the most important changes would be to enable them to respond to the evolving labour market in the short-to-medium term.

Figure 6: Looking ahead to the labour market over the next 5 – 10 years, what are the three most important changes required in your area to meet your evolving skills requirements?



Leaders were most likely to refer to inclusion and improving aspirations in their labour market as areas that require change; this included helping individuals overcome social and economic barriers to accessing work, supporting basic digital inclusion and improving aspirations and motivation for people across all ages.

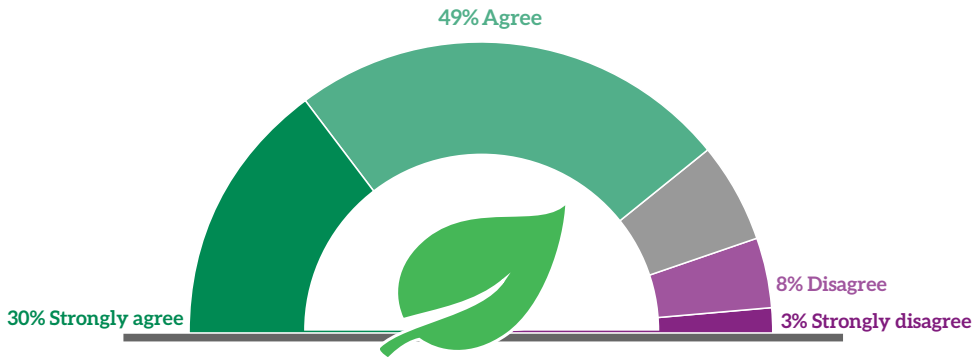
The next most common set of responses was around improving basic workforce skills and employability, such as reducing the levels of those with low or no qualifications and improving overall employability of residents. More broadly, respondents' answers were more likely to be based around improving supply-side factors such as skills and access to opportunities, rather than demand-side factors such as job availability.

A few leaders also highlighted devolution — particularly of apprenticeships — to allow them to meet their evolving skills requirements, alongside an increase in funding and resources for skills provision.

Addressing climate change

Leaders were also asked to set out how far they would be prepared to address climate change.

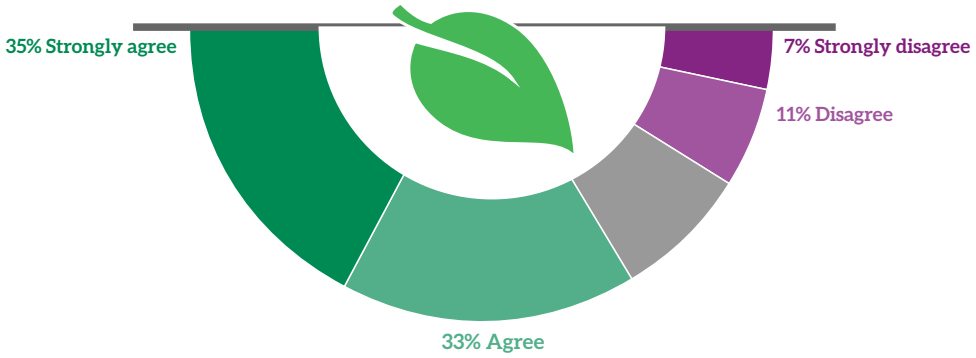
Figure 7a: This question refers to your involvement as a city leader in addressing climate change. Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statement: Cities should play a strong role in reducing the effects of climate change, even if it means sacrificing revenues and/or expending financial resources: (Please select one)



Of the leaders surveyed, 79 per cent agreed to either spending money or sacrificing revenues for the sake of mitigating climate change. Only one leader strongly disagreed with this.

Yet, among those leaders that agreed that they would spend money on tackling climate change, not all would have also allocated a part of a hypothetical additional capital grant (Figure 12) for environmental resilience and air quality (Section 3).

Figure 7b: Response from the USA Mayors



This question was also asked in the USA Menino Survey of Mayors in 2017.[8] While the surveys took place at different times, both show a majority of urban leaders agreeing with the statement. However, in the USA, about two-thirds of mayors agreed that cities should play a role in mitigating the effects of climate change, even if it required sacrificing resources, compared to 80 per cent in the UK. A slightly higher number of mayors in the USA disagreed with the statement at 18 per cent, against 11 per cent in the UK survey.

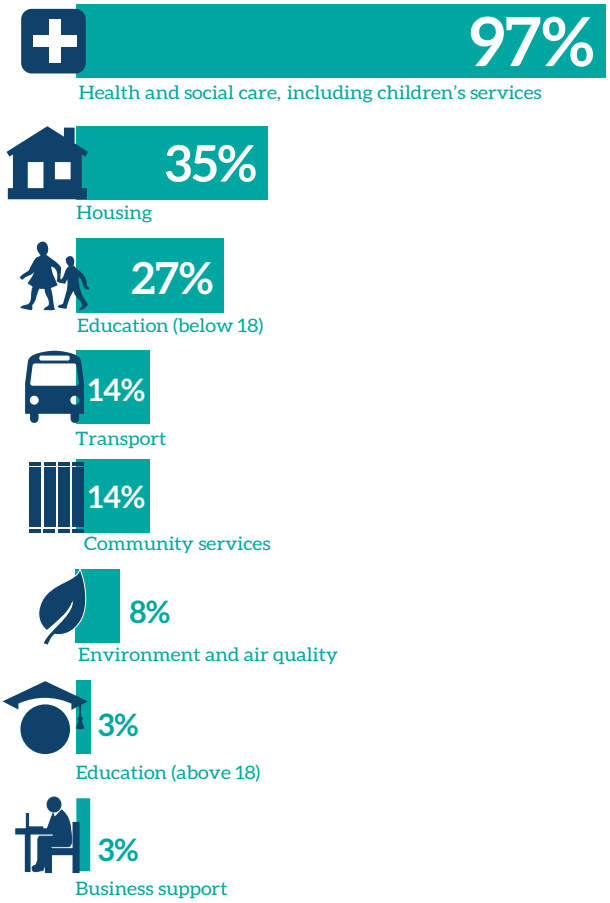
8 Boston University Initiative on Cities (2017) 2017 Menino Survey of Mayors. Details and results of the 2017 Menino Survey of Mayors can be found at: http://www.surveyofmayors.com/survey/2017/

5: Public Service Pressures

Immediate pressures

Encouraging leaders to name their economic policy priorities and how they would address them offered a set of definitive actions. Yet when asked to set out the immediate pressures they are faced with on a daily basis, some challenges of economic growth such as adult education, appear secondary to other areas of service delivery. Leaders were asked to select up to three public services which were under the most pressure in their area.

Figure 8: When delivering effective public services in your area, which of the following are under the most pressure, if any? (Please select up to three)



Health and social care was chosen by almost every leader (97 per cent) as one of the three services under the most pressure in their area. The other services selected tended to reflect the policy priorities in Section 1.

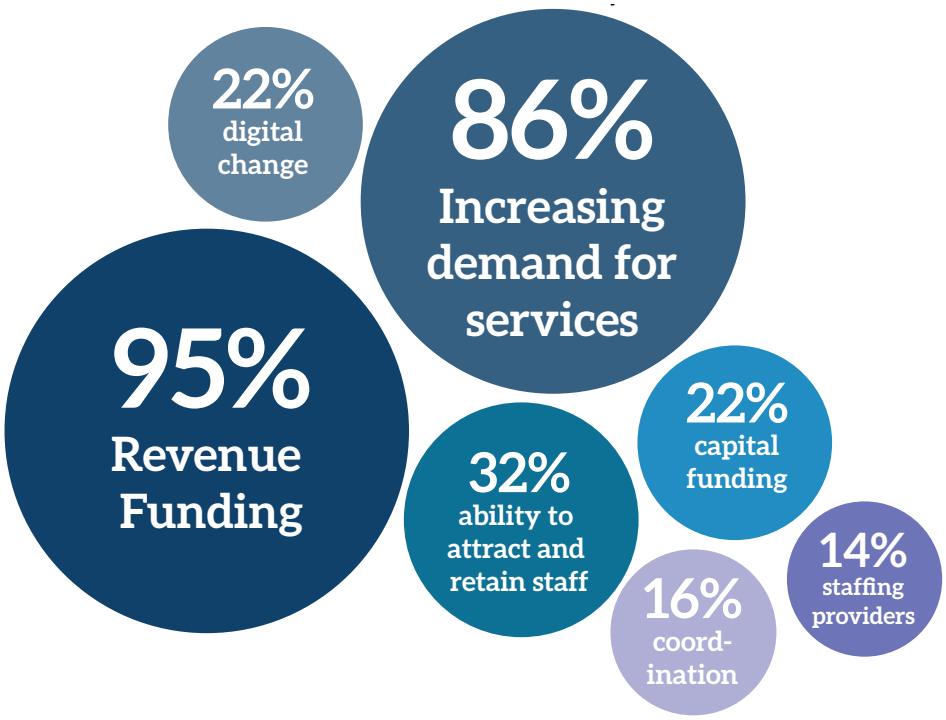
Over a third (35 per cent) chose housing as a service under pressure, and a little over a quarter (27 per cent) identified education for under-18s.

Two services emerged as being under less pressure than the others listed: business support and over-18s education were each identified by only one leader. No service was left un-selected.

Challenges of service delivery

The kinds of challenges leaders face when delivering services tended to reflect their responses to which services were most under pressure.

Figure 9: When delivering effective public services in your area, which of the following are the biggest challenges, if any? (Please select up to three)



3% chose 'other' and no one chose access to data or facilities

Revenue funding (95 per cent of respondents) and increasing demand for services (86 per cent of respondents) were the two most common selections. Every leader selected at least one of these two options, and 81 per cent chose both in their list of three challenges.

In addition, just under a third (32 per cent) of leaders also selected the ability to attract and retain good staff as a challenge, and just over a fifth (22 per cent) had concerns about digital change and transformation.

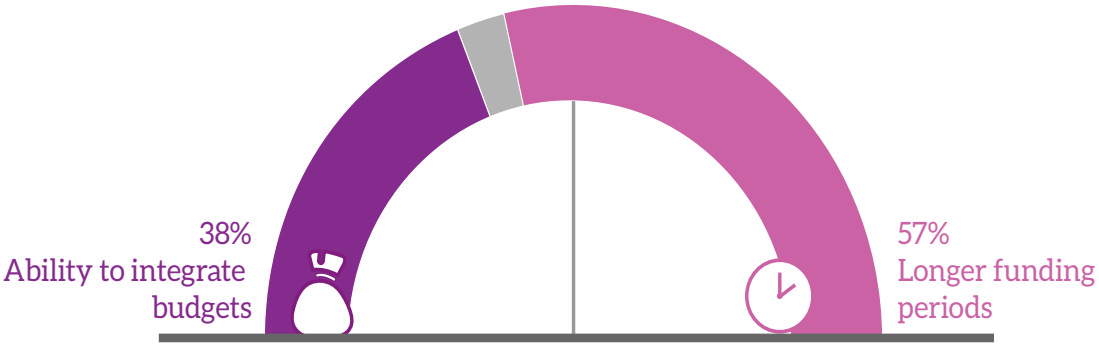
No leader identified facilities or access to data as a challenge, and coordination across departments was also relatively low (16 per cent), against the other options set out.

6: Public service funding

How to spend it – Flexible or Certain?

Revenue funding was highlighted by nearly every respondent as a big challenge to service delivery. In this context, leaders were asked to choose one of two changes to how money could be spent in their area - the ability to integrate budgets; or longer-term funding periods.

Figure 10: If you could make one change to the way money is spent in your area, which of the following, if any, would you choose? (Please select one)

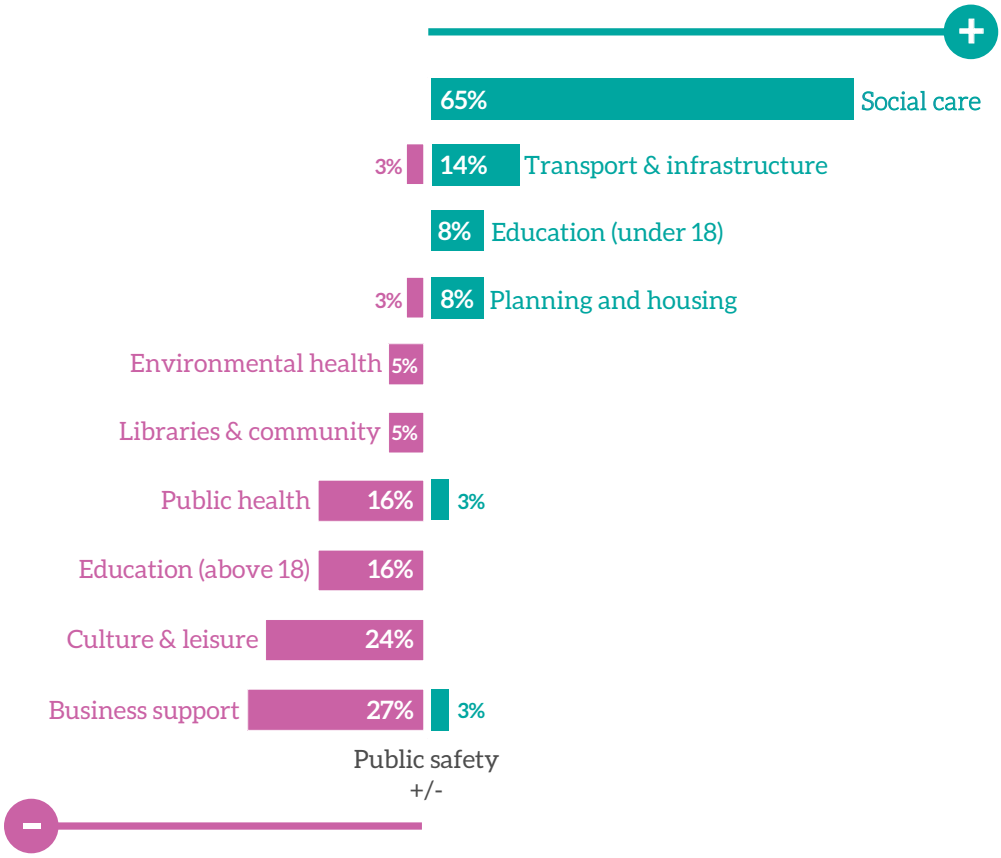


Over one-half of the respondents opted for more certainty through longer funding periods, with fewer than 40 per cent preferring a more integrated approach. Two respondents did not choose either option.

Funding from 2020

In 2019, the Government will announce its Spending Review for funding from 2020 which is likely to cover at least three years. Leaders were asked to offer one area of public service spending where they wanted to see an increase in revenue, alongside one area where a spending freeze or cut would have the least negative impact.

Figure 11: Considering the upcoming spending review. In which policy area would you most like to see additional funding, and in which policy area would a spending freeze or cut have the least negative impact in your place?



Just under two thirds (65 per cent) of leaders chose social care for increased funding, matching their response on services under the most pressure.[9]

The only other relatively significant policy area chosen for further spending was transport and infrastructure, with 14 per cent of participants choosing this. A small proportion of participants chose under-18 education, housing, business support and public health over the other services listed.

There were five service areas that were not chosen for additional funding by any leader: Adult (above-18) education, public safety (including fire and policing), libraries and community services, environmental health, and culture and leisure.

Leaders were also asked which service, if cut or frozen, what would have the least negative impact. Of the service areas that were not chosen for additional spending, two of these were identified as areas that could be cut – environmental health and libraries and communities services. Culture and leisure services were chosen by just under one-quarter (24 per cent) of respondents, while over-18s education would be cut or frozen by 16 per cent of leaders surveyed.

9 Note that this survey was completed by leaders before the 2018 Budget, which gave local authorities increased health and social care funding.

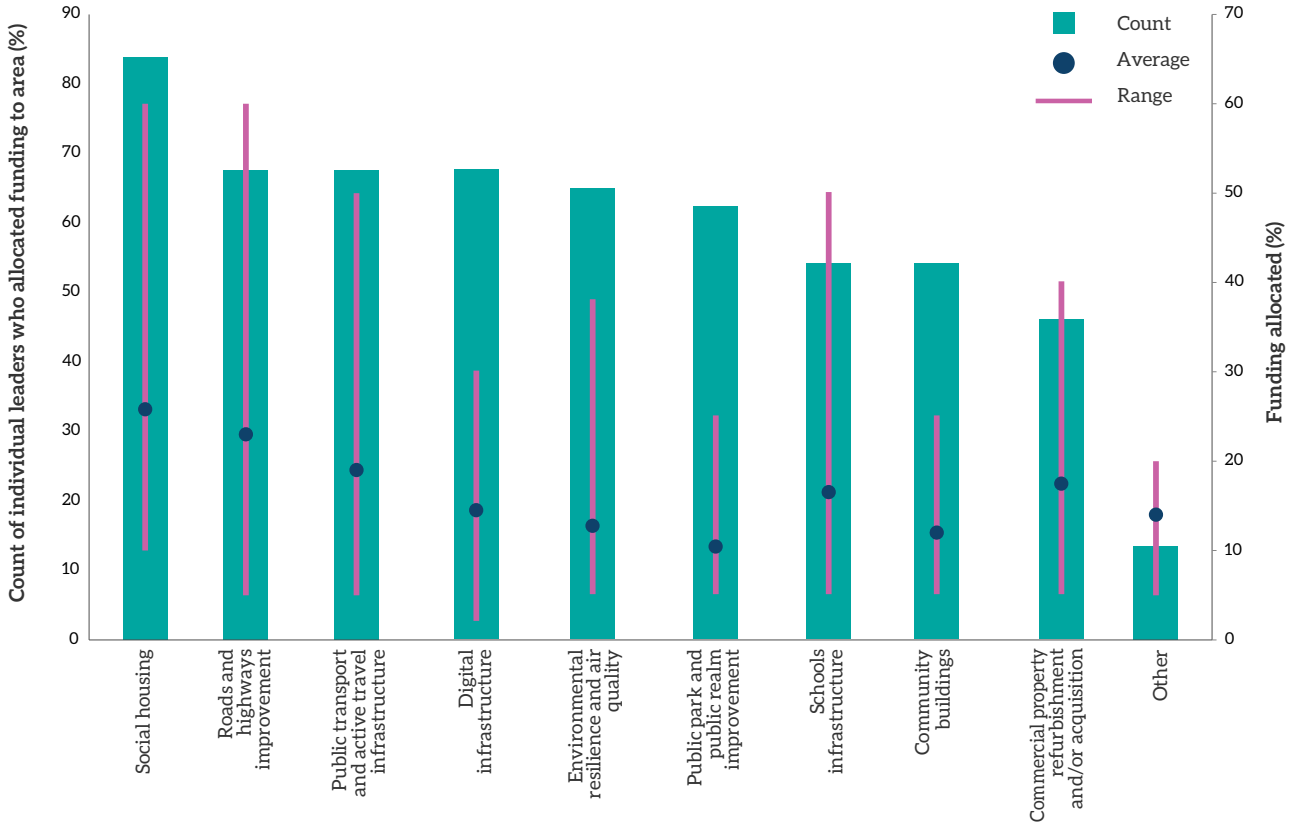
While one leader did identify business support for additional funding, this service was chosen by the largest proportion (27 per cent) as an area that would have a less negative impact if funds were cut or frozen. Similarly, 16 per cent chose public health, although one participant would increase spending here.

There were three service areas that no leader would choose to cut spending in – these were social care, under-18s education and public safety. Public safety was the only service not chosen either for additional spending or a spending freeze.

How to spend it – A surprise capital grant

To establish where cities would put additional funds if they could, leaders were asked to allocate an additional capital grant across a number of areas of expenditure.

Figure 12: You have been given a large capital grant to spend in your area. Of the following, what would you spend it on, regardless of whether you control them? Spread 100% of the funding across the following options:



Most of a grant of this kind would go to social housing, which receives an average 25 per cent of the money. Roads and highways receive 23 per cent of the money on average, followed by public transport with 18 per cent.

Social housing and public transport were also both selected by a high number of participants. 82 per cent of leaders would allocate some of their grant to social housing, and 73 per cent would allocate some grant to public transport. In contrast, fewer individual leaders chose roads and highways, despite having a higher average in spending terms. Those that chose to spend their grant on roads, tended to put more of the fund towards it.

Digital infrastructure was given 13 per cent of the grant on average, but 73 per cent of leaders chose to put some funds here, ranging from 30 per cent to 5 per cent of the grant. The figure for environmental resilience was similar, showing both of these areas are funding priorities, but at lower levels.

Public realm improvement was allocated the least money on average, with 9 per cent, but once again a majority of leaders (62 per cent) put some money towards this area. The least likely areas to receive any money were commercial property refurbishment and community buildings (59 per cent of leaders each). But even where allocation was less likely, all of the options listed received at least some funding by at least one leader.

As well as receiving the most funds on average, social housing also tended to see high proportions allocated to it. At most, it was given 60 per cent of the funds. Similarly, the highest proportion given to roads and highways was 60 per cent, and public transport was given up to 50 per cent.

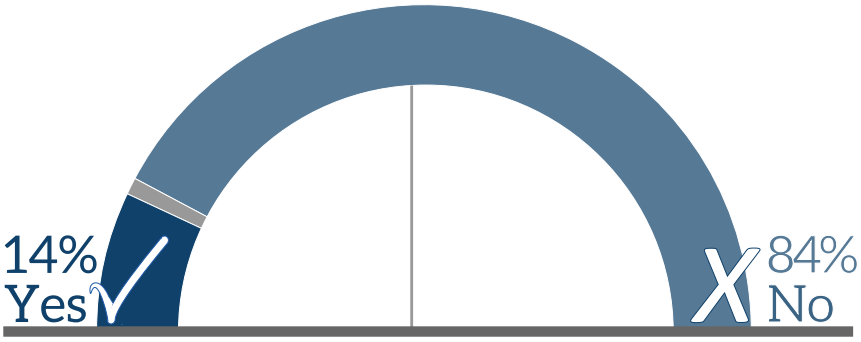
7: Relationships and governance

Cities on the national stage

The attention and prominence given to cities by the National Government have waxed and waned over the years. There was a clear drive from the 2010 and 2015 governments to empower a number of cities with wide-ranging devolution deals in return for electing a relatively powerful metro mayor.

Yet when asked, 84 per cent of city leaders did not believe their needs were represented on the national scale. Of the leaders that responded in this way, there was a range in the size of their administration, level of power, or whether or not they are an elected mayor.

Figure 13: Do you believe the needs of urban areas are sufficiently represented at the national level?

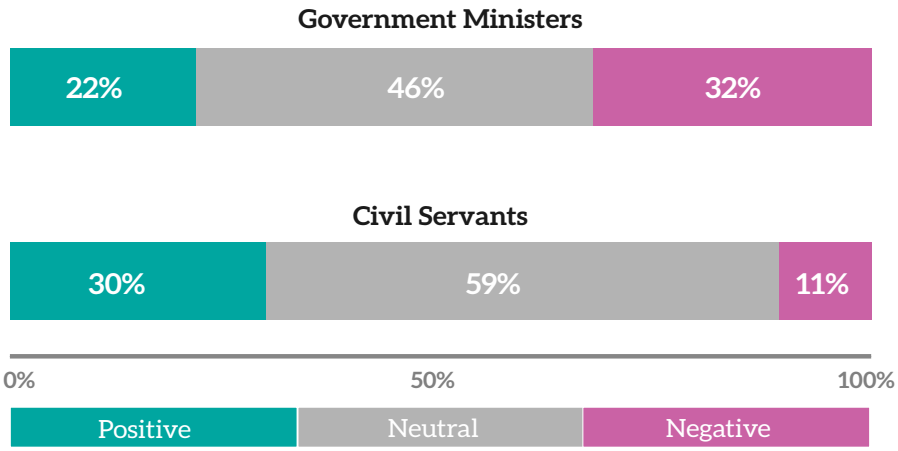


Only 14 per cent of leaders felt they were sufficiently represented nationally. Because some respondents did not represent English cities, this may suggest that leaders' interpretations of the word 'national' included both Westminster, and the devolved administrations.

Getting on with the Government?

While many leaders do not feel their needs are represented at the national level, they do need to maintain a productive relationship with government ministers and national civil servants particularly when responding to national policy priorities at the local level.

Figure 14a: This question refers to the nature of your contact with both the National Government and local stakeholder groups. Thinking about the following stakeholder groups, how would you judge your relationship with them? Consider the level and frequency of engagement; responsiveness to changes in local policy; and support and contribution to local policy development.



When considering their relationships with both national government officials and Ministers, leaders largely identified them as neutral. Under one-half of respondents (46 per cent) chose to define their relationships with Ministers as neutral, and over one-half (59 per cent) said the same for Civil Servants.

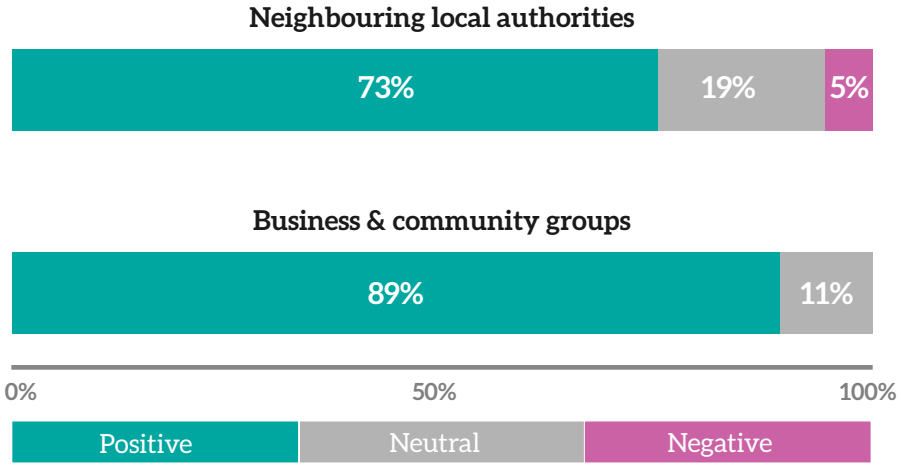
But, for leaders' relationships with Ministers, it was more likely to be negative than positive: 32 per cent selected negative – just under a third of all survey participants.

Conversely, leaders were more likely to be positive toward the civil service with 30 per cent considering their relationship with officials to be positive.

Getting on with the locals

As part of the same question, leaders were also asked to rate their relationship with neighbouring authorities and local business and community groups.

Figure 14b: This question refers to the nature of your contact with both the National Government and local stakeholder groups. Thinking about the following stakeholder groups, how would you judge your relationship with them? Consider the level and frequency of engagement; responsiveness to changes in local policy; and support and contribution to local policy development.



Local relationships were much more likely to be positive than with national-level stakeholders, and leaders were far less likely to say that local relationships were neutral or negative.

Of the leaders surveyed, 89 per cent of respondents felt that their relationship with business and community groups was positive and no leader saw their relationship with these groups as negative.

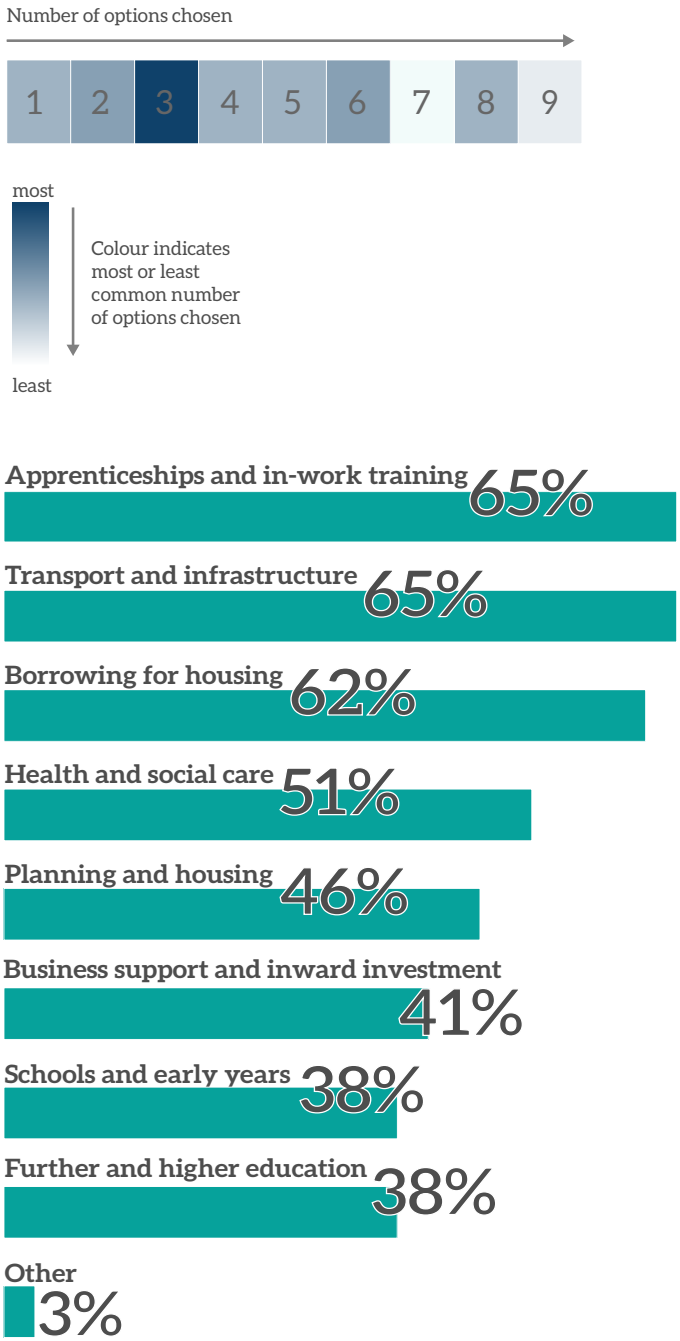
Neighbouring authorities had a similar outcome with 73 per cent of leaders reporting positive relationships, and 19 per cent neutral. While combined authority representation on this survey is limited to a small sample, of those metro mayors that participated, the relationships at both the local and national scale were generally positive.

Revisiting devolution

As new city leadership structures emerge and more places, particularly bigger cities, take up these opportunities, the appetite to continue on this track across all cities remains high.

The survey gave leaders a number of options on what they would hope to see devolved, regardless of what existing powers they have. In this instance, they could choose as many options as they wanted.

Figure 15: This question addresses potential areas for future devolution of powers. Of the following policy areas, where would you expect to see the greatest positive local economic impact with more local control? Some you have much control over, some very little. Please pick all the options where more local control would be economically beneficial. (Please select at least one)



Apprenticeships was chosen by two-thirds of leaders as a policy area which would have the greatest positive local impact with more local control – this was joint highest with transport and infrastructure (65 per cent each).

Just under two thirds (62 per cent) wanted more control over borrowing for housing. Around 76 per cent of leaders wanted some control over housing (either borrowing or planning). Of leaders that identified housing as an area of pressure, 85 per cent also wanted to see more local control.

Of those who identified under-18s education as the public service under the most pressure, 75 per cent believe this would also benefit from local control.

Schools and further education got the lowest proportion of responses with 38 per cent each. Two-fifths wanted business support and investment, and one-half wanted more say over health and social care.

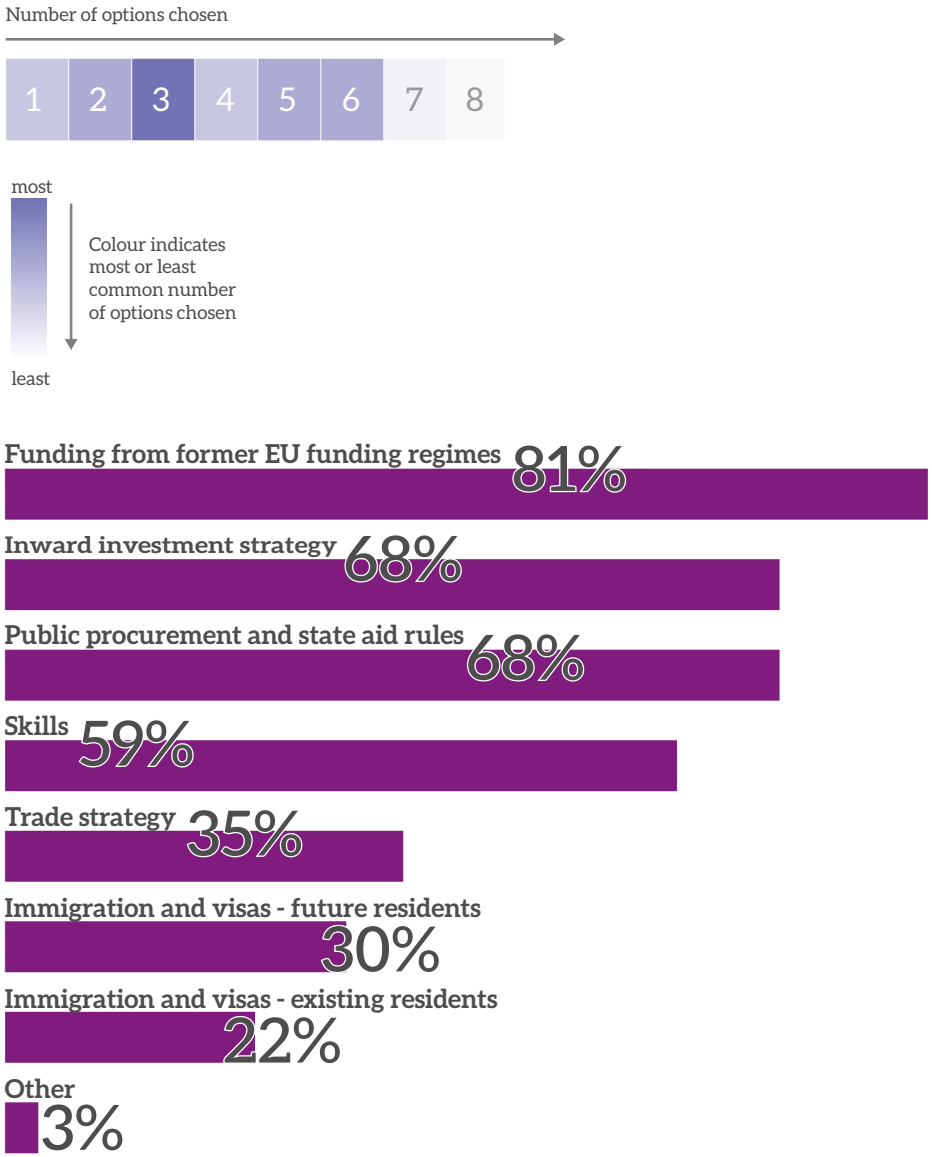
Overall, every option leaders were given was chosen and one leader opted to devolve everything available.

Looking across the responses, there is no specific consensus among the leaders about what exactly should be devolved and everything scored highly. The appetite for devolution did not vary by city size. This response suggests that everything should be on the table for as many places as possible when it comes to further devolution.

8: Responding to Brexit

In the context of Brexit negotiations, leaders were asked to choose the areas that they would most like to have more of a say over after Brexit. In this scenario, leaders were able to choose as many or as few of the options listed as they wanted.[10]

Figure 16: Ahead of the UK's exit from the European Union, this question refers to the policy areas where you would like to see more local contribution or control. For which areas would you like to have more say over with regards to Brexit for your city? (Please tick any that apply)



10 The survey responses were collected between 26 September and 26 October 2018, which was before the agreed Brexit Deal which Parliament will vote on in December.

Of the options given to leaders in this question, nothing was left out and more than a third of leaders chose five or more of the eight options (which included an 'other'). Those leaders that tended to choose more options represented smaller or non-English cities. Similarly, these cities tended to have weaker economies (as measured by GVA).

More than one-half of leaders (54 per cent) chose three options or fewer, with three selections being the most likely number (27 per cent).

81 per cent of leaders wanted more say over funding from former EU funding regimes (UK Shared Prosperity Fund).

Over two-thirds of participants (68 per cent) wanted a say over inward investment strategies and 35 per cent of all respondents chose trade strategies. Looking at individual responses from the leaders, 73 per cent chose either or both of these categories, which together refer to the business environment. These responses did not relate to overall growth patterns or dominance of sectors such as manufacturing in those cities.[11]

Under two thirds (59 per cent) of all surveyed wanted a say over skills and when looking at the individual responses 76 per cent of those surveyed wanted some level of control over their workforce after Brexit (this refers to all respondents who wanted more control over either their skills policy or immigration, or both).

The lowest response rate was for leaders to be given a say over immigration and visas in relation to existing residents. A slightly higher proportion of leaders wanted some say over immigration for future residents (30 per cent).

11 ONS 2017, Business Register and Employment Survey, Employment status: Employment, 2016 data.

9: Conclusion

The objective of the survey was to establish a clearer understanding of the views and priorities of UK urban leaders. While the sample surveyed is small, it offers some insight into where city leaders priorities and concerns lie.

Housing – especially social housing – is a particular priority

Throughout the survey, the leaders that responded clearly identified housing – and more specifically social housing – as an area of priority. On average, leaders allocated most additional capital funding to social housing and identified it as the biggest priority within housing itself. Over one-quarter of leaders also felt that improving housing affordability would help achieve more inclusive growth, and over one-third of all leaders identified housing as the public service under the most pressure. Added to this, with regards to the devolution of powers, the leaders surveyed broadly wanted to have more control over borrowing and planning for housing.

Adult skills are a priority – but not necessarily for funding

With regards to inclusive growth and responding to changes in the labour market, improving basic adult skills, in-work progression and supporting those who are economically or socially excluded from the jobs market tended to feature highly. Skills more generally were also a major feature of leaders' overall economic priorities.

Yet education for over 18s was not highlighted as one of the services under most pressure for most leaders surveyed, and none of the leaders surveyed chose this as their top choice for additional spending when looking ahead to the spending review. Conversely, 16 per cent of leaders saw adult education cuts having the least negative impact among the options given. Devolution of apprenticeships and in-work training was, however, the most frequently chosen of the areas for devolution, demonstrating that there is an appetite for improvement in this area, but not necessarily with regards to budgets.

Social care is under pressure – and needs more funding

Of the public services identified as being under the most pressure, almost every leader chose social care. Similarly, increasing demand for services and revenue funding were seen as the biggest challenges in addressing services. A majority chose this area for additional funding from the upcoming Spending Review.

Local business and community relationships are strong, as is the appetite for devolution

The vast majority of leaders in this survey were positive about their relationships with local business and community groups and neighbouring local authorities. On the other hand, relationships with national-level stakeholders tended to be regarded as neutral or negative, with the relationships with Ministers being the most likely of all to be negative. Similarly, the vast majority of leaders believed that the needs of urban areas are not sufficiently represented at the national level.

In addition, the leaders surveyed were clear about their appetite for devolution, leaving nothing off the table when given a series of optional additional powers. While apprenticeships and in-work training came out ahead, no less than two-thirds of leaders would find more powers beneficial across all areas, including housing, business support and education.

Leaders want a say over how to respond to Brexit

Finally, of the city leaders surveyed, there was a clear interest in having more say over dealing with the outcomes of Brexit. This was particularly focused on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which will replace EU funding, but also around inward investment, local procurement, skills and trade strategies.

Turning up the volume on the urban voice

Centre for Cities and Arup are each committed to working with city and national leaders to improve the economic prosperity of UK cities. This survey and the results in this report take the first step toward actively listening to city leaders about challenges and opportunities they face, their ambitions to act on these and where policy could be holding them back.

The aim is to repeat the survey annually, to develop a longer-term understanding of the needs of city leaders and to grow the participation in — and the prominence of — the survey to help raise the voice of UK urban leadership on an ongoing basis.

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About Centre for Cities

Centre for Cities is a research and policy institute, dedicated to improving the economic success of UK cities. We are a charity that works with cities, business and Whitehall to develop and implement policy that supports the performance of urban economies. We do this through impartial research and knowledge exchange. For more information, please visit www.centreforcities.org/about.

Centre for Cities is always keen to work in partnership with like-minded organisations who share our commitment to helping cities to thrive, and supporting policy makers to achieve that aim. As a registered charity (no. 1119841) we rely on external support to deliver our programme of quality research and events. To find out more please visit: www.centreforcities.org/about/partnerships.

About Arup

Arup is the creative force at the heart of many of the world's most prominent projects in the built environment and across industry. We offer a broad range of professional services, from initial planning and advisory services through to building design and structural engineering, that combine to make a real difference to our clients and the communities in which we work.

Our aim is to be a driving force for development and progression, to ensure cities grow as liveable, sustainable spaces where people and business thrive. In the UK, we're at the forefront of developing new transport systems and helping cities prepare for climate change.

For more information, please visit: www.arup.com.

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