



Beyond the Downturn

A white paper by Civica

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Executive Summary

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- Rapidly declining public finances are causing greater pressure for a revised Comprehensive Spending Review 2008-11, with far tougher settlements expected in the future
- Public sector organisations are delivering ICT-based efficiency and transformation programmes but these innovations could now be at risk given pressure to deliver further savings over a revised spending cycle, particularly where the chief executive's office and ICT function have not shared a strategic vision and its execution
- Heavily regulated markets have placed changing constraints on public bodies' ability to innovate but the drive to single tier government and the New Comprehensive Area Assessment will demand wider partnership working and collaborative arrangements over larger geographies
- As the downturn leads to increased demand for services such as housing and benefits, local authorities need in the short term to put in processes and harness technology to assess demand, build capacity and transform the economics of service delivery which will require change at corporate and departmental level
- Public sector organisations seeking ways to balance finances as well as delivering further savings, are considering renewed operating efficiencies, rethinking staffing levels and transformation of service capabilities, and beyond this, as the local government funding debate is addressed in the years ahead, towards greater local autonomy and radical re-design of local governance and institutions

Introduction:

With the economy in downturn and the low ceiling of the current Comprehensive Spending Review, local authorities are in an ever tighter financial straitjacket. Many have taken drastic action, making job cuts or mothballing development programmes, to rapidly reduce their cost base as the financial situation worsens.

But such cost-cutting approaches could perversely represent an easy decision. The difficult underlying task of re-engineering authorities to deliver a more citizen-orientated service model has yet to be completed and the understanding of how to do so is sometimes lacking.

This Civica white paper brings together expert commentators from inside and outside the public sector to challenge the assumptions surrounding job cuts. It asks if there are other options open to chief executives. Are there ways to rethink the economics of local services in the recession, whether through organisation-wide efficiencies, cultural changes throughout the workforce releasing improvements and the joining of ICT to harness councils' resources and buying power?

In the opening section, **Michael Frater, Interim Chief Executive of Surrey County Council** looks beyond the downturn to the reshaping and the funding of local government and discusses pragmatic approaches available; **Management thinker Rene Carayol** draws on his experience of large organisations to demonstrate how momentum for change can be built in our town halls; **Richard Steel past SocITM President and CIO at London**

Borough of Newham calls for chief executives and CIOs to find a common language for business transformation issues to bridge gaps in understanding. In the final discussion, **Civica's Director of Transformation Strategy, Val Earle** argues that the recession provides councils with a unique opportunity to assess changing service demands and organise resources to meet them to avert further pressure for more from less.





Section 1

Beyond the downturn: what type of public services can we build – and afford?

*Michael Frater, Interim Chief Executive,
Surrey County Council*

Section one – Beyond the downturn: what type of public services can we build – and afford?

By Michael Frater, Interim Chief Executive, Surrey County Council



As “UK plc” moves through the turbulent waters of the worst recession most of us will ever have seen, concern is mounting over the wholly uncharted seas beyond. As Britain’s public finances, particularly borrowing, move way outside previously accepted norms, it is clear that there will be a heavy price to pay, with dramatic reductions in the resources available for public services as a result of the enormous costs of dealing with the recession and its consequences. Whilst every way of securing efficiency will undoubtedly be exploited, it will not be nearly enough. Radical re-thinking will be required.

The situation is compounded by demographic trends, with authorities facing rising demand for adult services to support an ageing population. For the first

time ever over-65s outnumber under-16s meaning not only a growth in the numbers of dependent elderly people but also a reduction in the numbers joining the labour market to help pay for the growing bill for social care. To that can be added the political and moral imperatives to ensure children are safe, the need to maintain our physical infrastructure and to address climate change and sustainability. The combination of these factors on local government is such that we will have no choice but to make some painful and fundamental choices as to the nature and funding of public services we want in the future.

In this extraordinary situation we face a series of dilemmas. Should Britain pare down local service provision to a core of essentials in the way that many have characterized as the Thatcher government’s intentions in the 1980s epitomised by Nicholas Ridley’s famous pamphlet? Or should we accept that maintaining modern services is a vital part of a healthy and civilized society that depends on the higher spending approaches of the ‘Scandinavian model’? If as a nation we were to choose this alternative will it need to be accompanied by radical approaches to local governance, service delivery models and new ways of funding?

The answer probably lies somewhere between several forces: the way the recession and its impact is managed; harnessing governance and regulatory models that affect local services; the rethinking of

services; maximizing the benefits of new technologies and promoting innovation; fundamentally re-assessing and addressing sustainability and climate change; and, most urgently, the way we plan to re-order our economy, post recession.

Local services – post Armageddon

It is clear that the depth of this recession has the power to challenge and undermine our ability to provide the full range of local government services. The third year of the Comprehensive Spending Review is already rumored to be under threat. Audit Commission chief executive Steve Bundred recently warned of financial 'Armageddon' as Britain's public expenditure to address the recession breaches accepted fiscal policy conventions agreed by European governments years ago. From 2010/11, when public expenditure will most likely be drastically cut, we will have to re-think which services we really want to maintain as well as how they will be funded. If we haven't already done so, we need to have our 'Plan B' ready by then.

Britain has a long tradition of providing highly valued discretionary 'quality of life' services such as libraries, and arts and culture and leisure facilities in addition to core services such as housing, education and infrastructure services. The gap in our public finances will challenge our ability to provide such services. Given the unpopularity and visibility of Council Tax, the imminent and dramatic reduction in central funding and a reluctance to raise taxation by any political party it is difficult to see how discretionary services can survive in their current form. At the very least, we will have to view these added value services in the context

of rapidly changing and more pressing local demands. We may have to radically rethink the way all services, core and discretionary, are delivered and paid for. One clear possibility is the re-engineering and outsourcing of both core and discretionary services to the market on a scale never previously imagined. Commissioning, procurement and contract management skills will become ever more important. It will mean re-thinking the roles of, and relationships between the public, private, voluntary and community sectors in meeting needs in straitened times.

New approaches to governance and regulation

Our ability to manage our communities out of recession also depends on the way we adapt and harness governance infrastructures to support change. In the rest of the western world, policy is shaped, decided and funded principally through local democratic structures. Yet in Britain, Central Government and its agents have largely displaced local communities and local politicians both as the arbiters of local priorities and the means of holding public services to account for delivery and performance.

Many years of financial capping and the wholly disproportionate target culture has left local services struggling to meet community needs while diverting resources towards chasing central targets. This is now unsustainable. Councils need the power to act and to raise funding locally. When difficult choices have to be made about which services to keep and which to cut local needs and views must be the determinant not a minister or official in Whitehall who will know nothing

of the circumstances in localities. As the council tax comes under continuing pressure, local communities need to be able to decide whether (and how) their services are to be funded locally, subsidised; run at cost; or in some cases run at a 'profit' to fund other high priority services.

Imaginative re-engineering of local services will not spring from greater central control but rather from local collaboration between partners working together with local communities. Where we still need effective working between the centre and localities a statutory duty to co-operate should be imposed on central departments to match the local requirement.

We need to explore existing or new models for local delivery, building on existing partnerships and developing and supporting trusts, social enterprises, local equivalents of NDPBs, greater voluntarism and better and more certain ways to fund the Voluntary Sector. Our current centralised approach to public services is not appropriate. For images of central control of provision in difficult financial circumstances we only need to remind ourselves of the former Soviet Union.

Constraints on local action have been made more acute by over-regulation. As some of these regulatory bodies have moved beyond their remit to second guess both the management of the organizations they regulate and the market itself, they have placed greater constraints on the way that public and private bodies can deliver, Ofcom and the Rail Regulator to name but two. In the difficult times ahead regulators will prove to be a 'luxury' we can no longer afford. Has anyone costed the total cost of regulation? Who evaluates and regulates the regulators?

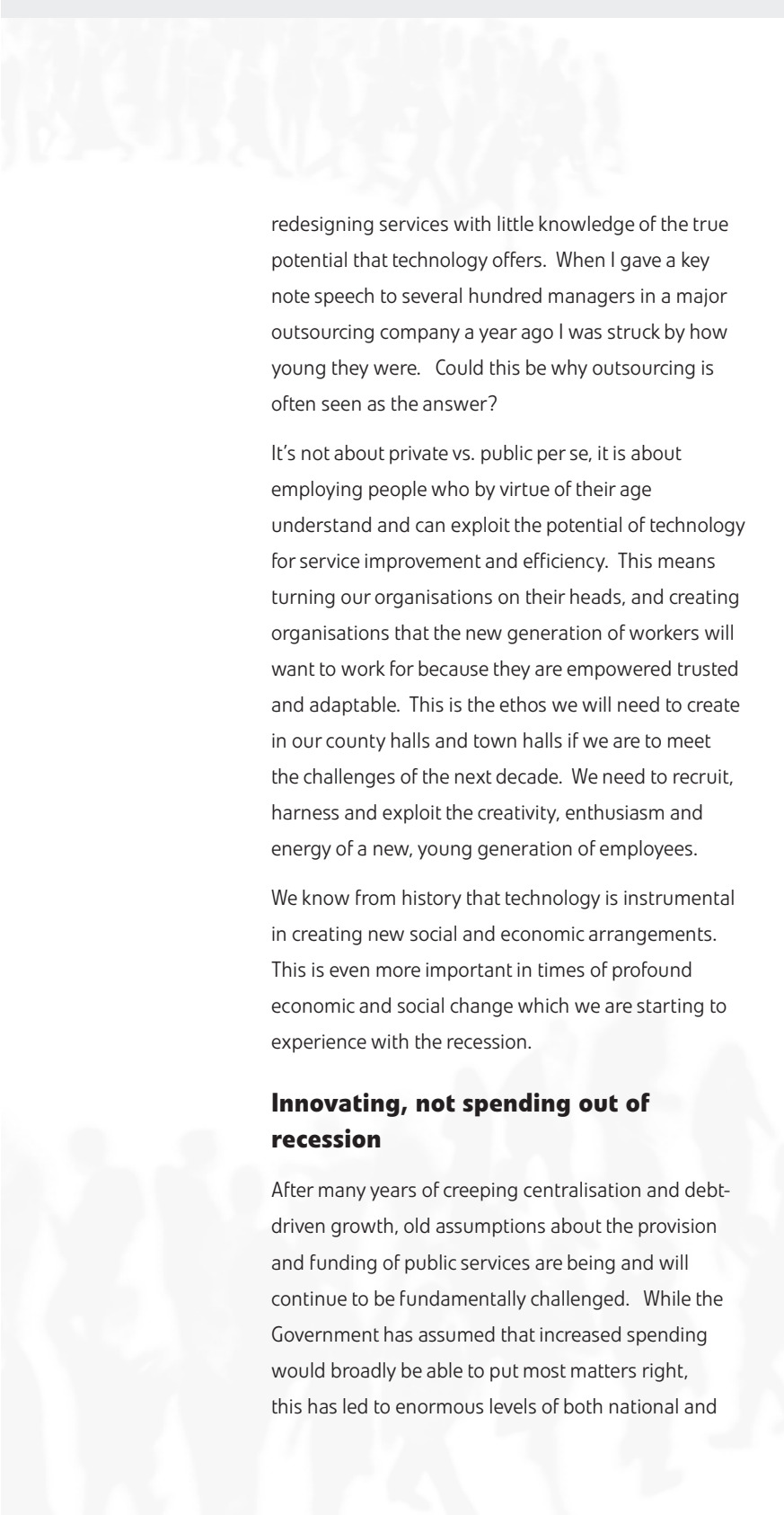
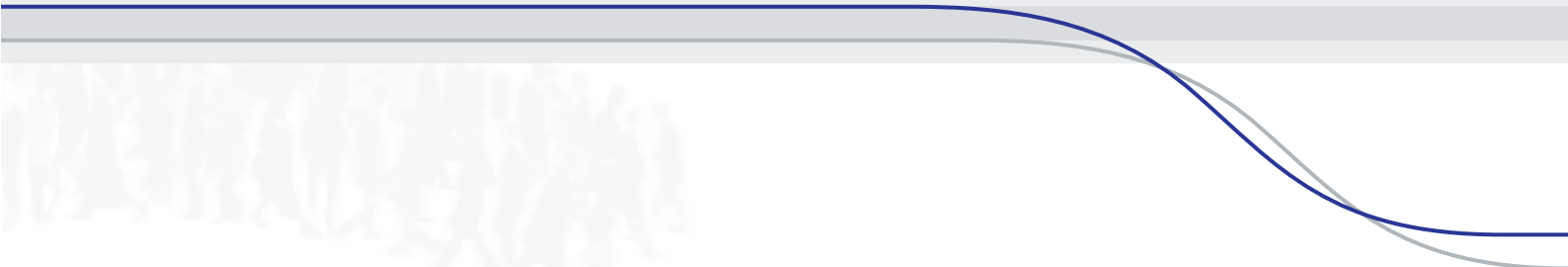
Ministers desperate for cash must now have a long hard look at our massively over regulated public and privatised services. The recent 'stuttering' moves towards unitary local government could well be given new impetus for cost and efficiency reasons, particularly if the new Unitaries just coming into existence deliver on the significant efficiencies they have promised.

Moreover, as expenditure on services is cut, can we afford separate governance arrangements for police, PCTs, FE colleges and so on? New unitary authorities could become the commissioners for these services which could operate in a similar way to NDPBs, but at the local level.

Technology underpins change

The journey into these uncharted waters will demand fundamental changes in the economics of service delivery and a re-energised culture of innovation. For Britain's local public services to be reorganised to meet the massive challenges of the next decade and beyond local government needs to ensure that its staff are empowered to identify the potential for fundamental change and how to make use of suitable technology systems.

To do this we have to overcome a major dilemma, the relationship between age and technology. The average age in most of the big consulting firms (who advise on technology uses and applications) is now below thirty years old. The average age of senior managers (investment decision makers) in local government is around 50 and rising. In other words those who are often techno-phobes or at least technologically illiterate in many cases are making decisions about



redesigning services with little knowledge of the true potential that technology offers. When I gave a key note speech to several hundred managers in a major outsourcing company a year ago I was struck by how young they were. Could this be why outsourcing is often seen as the answer?

It's not about private vs. public per se, it is about employing people who by virtue of their age understand and can exploit the potential of technology for service improvement and efficiency. This means turning our organisations on their heads, and creating organisations that the new generation of workers will want to work for because they are empowered trusted and adaptable. This is the ethos we will need to create in our county halls and town halls if we are to meet the challenges of the next decade. We need to recruit, harness and exploit the creativity, enthusiasm and energy of a new, young generation of employees.

We know from history that technology is instrumental in creating new social and economic arrangements. This is even more important in times of profound economic and social change which we are starting to experience with the recession.


Innovating, not spending out of recession

After many years of creeping centralisation and debt-driven growth, old assumptions about the provision and funding of public services are being and will continue to be fundamentally challenged. While the Government has assumed that increased spending would broadly be able to put most matters right, this has led to enormous levels of both national and

personal debt and unsustainable economic policies such as an inflation-fuelled housing market. As we eventually emerge from recession, we face the question of anticipating what sort of economy we need. We need to decide how radical we want to be in reshaping our economy. Will we take the opportunity to create an economy that is fit for purpose in addressing sustainability and climate change? Or will we be led 'back to the future' by the political, classes anxious to return to the certainties of their comfort zone, aided and abetted by the media?

This challenge can be met through radical new governance, funding and service developments. But more than any specific innovation, local communities will need to reject the burden of central direction and monitoring. Local government in Britain needs to be less passive and resist the central diktat on policy that has undermined local services and engagement. Authorities need less, rather than more guidance, and they need to be brave enough to drive fundamental change themselves. And we need to harness the younger generation who already think we've let them down badly on environmental sustainability and now will be paying into their middle age for the way, as far as they're concerned, our generation have mismanaged the national economy as well.

For its part, any future Government will need to put its prejudices about local government to one side. It will have to accept that re-prioritising and re-designing services in the face of massive spending cutbacks can only be decided locally. This will mean being open to radical new institutional design and governance, harnessing technology and the knowledge and



imagination of young people, cutting out the expensive 'luxury' of wall-to-wall regulation, re-engaging communities about decisions about what services are provided and how they are funded and being open to new ways of providing services.

It will also mean inventing designing and sustaining new more accountable democratic processes to drive the way we respond to these challenges.

We may be in unknown waters but charting the course forward is very much in our hands.



Section 2

Driving Change: execute your way
to success

*By René Carayol, author and
management thinker*

Section two - Driving change: execute your way to success

By René Carayol, author and management thinker



The downturn has forced all councils to become more conscious of driving efficiencies throughout their organisations, on top of the ever-looming efficiency agenda.

But simply streamlining operations and processes, whilst generally overhauling the organisation, cannot be the only solution. Local authorities should also consider a new approach for the long term which requires a shift in attitude. Recently, I've noticed more and more local authorities focusing on actually meeting the needs of their community, with glittering results.


In many cases, all the components needed to turn a good local authority into a great one are already present. Talent isn't an issue and leadership isn't an issue, but approach and execution are two areas that could and should be improved if local authorities are

going to successfully evolve in the long term.

Any successful organisation starts with great leadership; leadership that recognises that "getting out there" is the best thing it can do. A recent conversation with a south London local authority chief executive made me realise that many of the truly successful local authorities understand their core competency is relatively simple: a detailed understanding of the local community. This understanding needs to be combined with a CEO that sees their role as more than just a job – to excel they have to care for and live for the citizens in his area.

There are two steps that many local authorities can take immediately. First, stop focusing so much on internal process and strategy. Second, stop relying on the "one size fits all" approach to meeting community needs. This cannot and will not work on the frontline because each ward and each citizen will have different needs. Internally, however, it is still important that strong processes are in place to ensure efficiency and order.

Effective leadership, which in turn creates an effective local authority, is about not doing everything, but instead about developing a plan and making it happen through an empowered workforce and the necessary external experts. Taking calculated risks, making the most of tremendous local reach and approaching ideas without necessarily conducting research studies are all key here. Many local authorities have struggled previously with the perceived expectation that they need to be good at everything. In fact the reverse



is true; by understanding areas they excel in and focusing resource into those key areas will invariably result in a better service. It's like being perfect at baking cookies and hopeless at making soufflé – why do it unnecessarily?

Where there are areas that a local authority is not so good at, ask for help; approach partners and consultants to outsource services that are challenging, time consuming or where there simply isn't the skill-set in the organisation. This is where technology plays an important part, through embracing shared services and so on.

Local authorities are starting to take calculated risks and embrace change; people are out there on the streets interacting with citizens and appreciating their needs, rather than sitting in the office. In other words "Great players don't win trophies, great teams win trophies". In the best of the best organisations, the CEO is the lynchpin and collaboration is important through trusted partners.

My compelling vision for the local authority of the future is a leadership team that energises and empowers its team to reach out to citizens in a friendly, intimate way. In the back office, leave it to the professionals and focus on executing your way to success.





Section 3

Bridge the CEO-CIO gap and turn the ship around

*By Richard Steel, past SocITM President and CIO,
London Borough of Newham*

Section three - Bridge the CEO-CIO gap and turn the ship around

By Richard Steel, past SocITM President and CIO, London Borough of Newham



It's ironic that even as recession forces severe job cuts on individual authorities, local government is starting to deliver service improvements and savings through real service transformation.

Although huge financial pressures are forcing council chief executives to take a quick, if brutal, route to cost savings with enforced staff losses, CIOs need to urgently communicate their service breakthroughs to their CEOs. This is vital not only to protect their current ICT programmes, but also to convey the power of service transformation to their chiefs in a way their profession has never managed before.


First, here is the evidence for making those arguments. We are seeing three key trends in local government service change – better procurement, sharing of

services and the joining up of internal systems.

Procurement is being rapidly transformed. Led by OGC buying solutions, and backed by the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Programmes (RIEPs), we are seeing joint procurement of goods and services. Buying groups that harness the public sector's £300 billion annual buying power – are becoming the norm.

Second, local authorities are sharing services with public sector partners. This is not the type of "grand model" of shared service envisaged several years ago, but councils consolidating their ICT infrastructures to work with their peers. They are also joining information systems with central government partners, rather than paying lip service to the idea. Innovations such as the Contact Point initiative - sharing benefits information between the DWP and local authorities using the Employee Authentication Services (EAS) ICT platform - provide a template for revolutionising key areas such as housing benefits administration.

Third, local government has had to hold its hands up over traditionally poor interfacing between departments and back office, and lack of awareness of who "owns" what processes and sub-standard data systems. We are now seeing these issues being resolved, with the joining up of internal systems to focus services on the citizen. Councils are now integrating front line services and back office for 24/7 services that challenge best practice anywhere. Consolidating buildings and work teams' locations



will bring added benefits too. Authorities such as Newham have brought many different departments into one headquarters and are seeing enhanced cross-department collaboration and productivity.

But a massive internal communication challenge remains. There is still a fundamental lack of understanding of ICT by chief executives. Sadly, too many CIOs fail to make the case for new technology-based service models either. Old habits die hard: too often, government circulars to chief executives about ICT go straight to the ICT department for deciphering – without the potential business impact being grasped by the CEO. This divide must be bridged if the transformative effects of self-service models, 24/7 availability and streamlined processes are to be properly understood by CEOs and their power properly released.

The transformation of the economics of service and the streamlining of process must be pursued and advocated more vigorously by IT professionals. In the current downturn, local government ICT profession must provide their CEOs with the arguments to resist the “cuts option” and give them a far better appreciation of what fundamental change will deliver and how much time it will take. If the current gulf in understanding is not closed, headcount changes will continue and this will disrupt critical service transformation programmes, just as they start to bear genuine fruit.

Clearly, to deliver the goal of transformation, we ultimately need a pan-government vision, a robust service change strategy and business case for change that is driven home at local authority level. We then

need the cross-partner design of platform and applications to properly realise that vision. Too often, the Cabinet Office appears an isolated voice while local authorities and their representative bodies struggle to balance immediate local needs with the valid, if visionary, agenda coming from the centre. CIOs must help bridge the gaps between themselves and CEOs to help improve the understanding, specification and delivery of service transformation programmes in their back yard and increasingly, on the national stage.

The impacts of organisation-wide improvements in local government are startling. My own borough, Newham, has calculated savings of several hundred thousand pounds alone for void housing transactions. The financial case for services such as TeleSistance or TeleHealth, where older people continue to live in their own homes supported by direct communications to carers, instead of 24/7 institutional care, is also overwhelming.

This level of savings projected across tens, even hundreds, of departments suggests that better processes, self service systems and greater efficiency is possible with cost savings in the millions of pounds for each authority. If ICT can hold its nerve and resist the decision to cut staff and ICT investment, corporate-scale savings and the transformation of local services could be within our grasp in the very near future.





Section 4

Act now to meet increased demand
for local services

*By Val Earle, Director of Transformation Strategy,
Civica UK*

Section four - Act now to meet increased demand for local services

By Val Earle, Director of Transformation Strategy, Civica UK



Media headlines are currently being dominated by council staff job cuts, with local authorities seek to deliver further rapid cost savings as the slowdown worsens. However, as the economic downturn cuts a swathe across Britain's communities, there is conversely, rapidly increasing demand across the country for local support services they provide.

Despite all those gloomy headlines, local authorities have a unique opportunity to use the current economic climate as the impetus for them to move forward, be braver, and act, rather than react. Councils need to build greater capacity and capability to handle change using their existing resources and ICT infrastructures, to meet increased and often highly volatile demand, rather than finding themselves reacting and struggling to catch up with citizens' needs later.

While the Government has continued to put pressure on local authorities to deliver savings under the current Comprehensive Spending Review, chief executives need to be thinking beyond the Efficiency Agenda straitjacket and consider the impact of the economic downturn on local demand - across all the departmental services they provide.

As UK unemployment heads past two million, we know demand for economic assistance is increasing, with growing pressure from citizens for immediate assistance in services such as housing benefits, affordable housing, or discretionary grants for local businesses feeling the strain.

We also know that the downturn is hitting communities that depend on manufacturing or other large employers particularly hard, so forward-looking councils should be forecasting and planning for widely different eventualities. In many localities, councils are the largest employer and are in a unique position to assume their role of aggregating demand for goods and services and ultimately finding ways to support local businesses that depend on them. In some ways this is the converse of the economic expansion of the last decade - where authority services such as housing and education found themselves under pressure, simply because of the massive influx of workers from different regions and countries in a globalised workforce.

In this uncertain climate, one underlying factor must be recognised by all chief executives and their senior management teams. Councils need to take radical

action to change how they provide services to their citizens. They need to streamline, or even transform, the whole concept of processing transactions and change the basic economics of serving the citizen. For example, the 21st century consumer is used to self-administration when they buy or consume many services – councils must adopt the same thinking. This strategic approach will enable services to be transformed, delivery improved, and exceptional local demand to be met.

This should be met with strategies led by the chief executive's office, based on:

- *Assessing demand:* council must achieve deeper understanding of the impacts of the downturn on the local community's demand for services. This depends on an overview from business sources: local Chambers of Commerce and economic development units as well as the community point of view - from revenues and benefits department data, housing department arrears and social housing groups reports; this process can be assisted by unlocking relevant customer intelligence from data in the authorities' own business systems.
- *Understanding capacity and harnessing staff knowledge:* councils must examine their organisation's capacity and the capability to meet changing demand and improve services, based on an assessment of business processes, transactional systems and – too often ignored – staff's expert knowledge of their community.
- *Re-engineering business processes:* authorities need to work on rebuilding and streamlining their core processes so that capacity can be built; once complex transactional processes can then be turned into electronic ones that can extend beyond the traditional boundaries of the council into the community, so local businesses can work more easily with their council. Increased transparency of electronically managed workflows enables improved workload demand management, ensuring that the council can cope with changing demand and expert staff time is freed to manage strategy or handle the complex cases, resulting in improved service outcomes.
- *Delivering outcomes:* authorities need to focus their efforts on building new service strategies with rigorous but realistic delivery targets and benefits management frameworks that enable progress to be monitored and achieved; progress must also be relentlessly communicated to staff and customers alike, so momentum for change is maintained and recognition of results acknowledged.

The time to act is now. Any delay will lead to workload backlogs at the service delivery level and on the citizen's side, growing waiting lists, increasing dissatisfaction and complaints as people struggle to cope. Of course the downturn has unpredictable local impacts, but not ones that cannot be assessed and relevant service transformation action plans executed.





Conclusion - Rethinking local services



Conclusion - Rethinking local services

- Public sector bodies will have to rethink the scope and the economics of local services as escalating levels of public debt are addressed over the next decade
- Local government must rapidly develop strategies that rapidly address growing community demand for assistance in the downturn and changing future needs using information aggregation and transactional systems that identify demand while transforming the cost of local services
- Public sector bodies and their stakeholders must agree acceptable levels of risk and reward to help deliver change, whether in new procurement, efficiency and transformational arrangements
- While transformation requires far-reaching cultural and operational change, local authorities have underestimated their ability to change and adopt new working practices; transformation programmes indicate that personnel that “execute for change” can build irresistible momentum towards service improvement and transformational change
- Civica believes there is scope for local authorities to reorder local service delivery, whether through departmental-level efficiency gains as well as corporate-level redesign of transaction and delivery models, to meet demands for greater efficiency and citizen-centric services
- As the nature of local government changes over the next decade, public sector organisations will need to harness new technologies to continually promote community engagement and underpin local democracy as well as increasing operational efficiency and local accountability

About Civica

The Civica group is a leader in consulting, software and managed services for the public sector. Supplying many organisations in the UK, Australia and the USA, including 89% of the UK's local authorities, the company has a 20-year history of providing software and services to local government, criminal justice, healthcare and education organisations.

From creating and delivering performance plans to implementing effective IT systems that streamline complex tasks and work processes, Civica blends outcome-based advice, planning and service delivery with a range of systems and services to ease the process of change and to help achieve modern and efficient services.

Efficiency is a priority area for Civica, in activities ranging from a consortium project to establish a performance management framework for different local authorities across a wide geographical region to corporate-level transformational programmes for individual authorities.

Consulting

Civica combines practitioner and systems consulting. Led by experienced local government practitioners, its "Authority Solutions" range from corporate support to infrastructure deployment, and focus on:

- Performance management
- Funding and procurement support
- Resource support and optimisation
- Process automation and financial efficiency
- IT strategy and efficiency, including e-government and mobile working

Software

Civica provides a comprehensive suite of local government software. Business areas include finance and income management, revenues and benefits, public protection, parking and traffic management, housing, community safety and legal services, together with practical e-services such as e-billing and e-procurement. The company has developed an integrated enterprise model, providing a platform for the future with an enhanced ability to integrate front office and mobile systems with core systems and back end databases.

Managed Services

Civica offers a proven suite of managed services that can be provided as standalone components or under a full and seamless service. The company takes responsibility for systems and infrastructure on behalf of customers, managing software systems along with equipment such as handheld units for optimum performance and convenience. In addition, and combined where appropriate with Civica's consulting services, the company manages and operates supporting processes ranging from bulk printing and correspondence to business service management.

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Civica has a 25-year history of delivering software-based solutions that help customers in local government, criminal justice, housing, education and healthcare sectors to improve service delivery.

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