

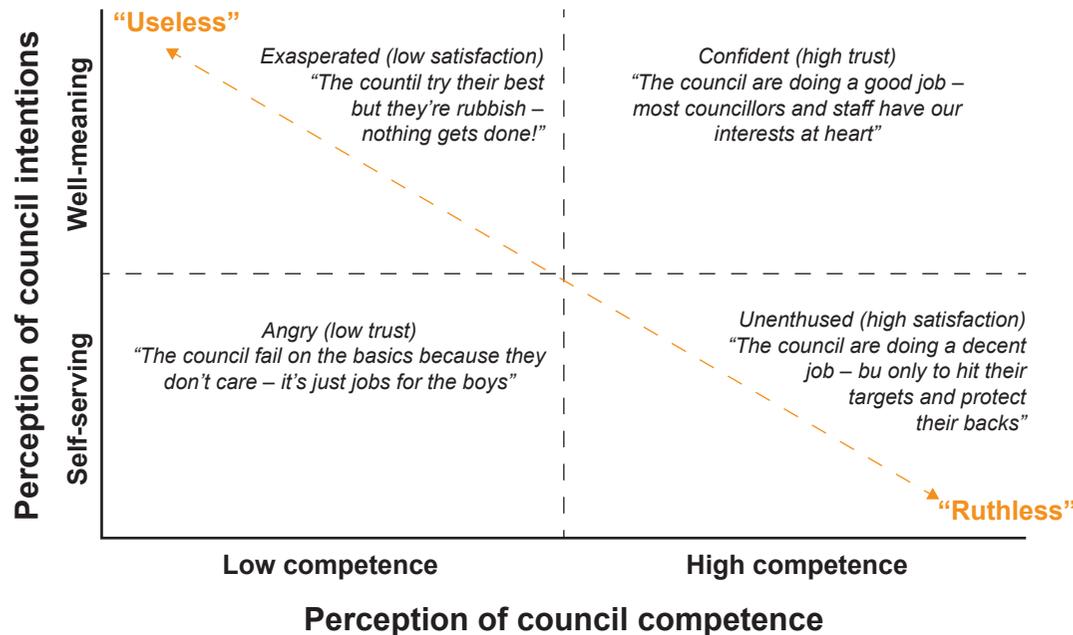
⌚ Test: How is your council perceived on the competence versus intentions axis?

The scale below is a way of testing where your council is when it comes to satisfaction and trust.¹

It uses two axes. One axis is for how your council is thought of in terms of competence – are you seen as able to deliver good services? The other axis is for perceptions of how good your council’s intentions are – do people believe you’re motivated by the right things?²

There are four possible ways you might be perceived, according to the test:

- self-serving and incompetent – leading to anger and low trust
- well-meaning but incompetent – leading to exasperation and low satisfaction
- self-serving but competent – leading to high satisfaction but low enthusiasm
- well-meaning and competent – leading to high trust and confidence.



¹ This chart builds on [2002 research](#) into personality stereotypes, by Peter Glock, Jun Xu, Susan Fiske and Amy Cuddy. Their work charts competence against warmth.

² These things are sometimes known as Cognitive or Affective trust. Cognitive trust is “a customer’s confidence or willingness to rely on a service provider’s competence and reliability.” Affective trust relates to “care and concern”. See Johnson, D and Grayson, K, ‘Cognitive and affective trust in service relationships’, Journal of Business Research 58, 2005

'Useless' or 'ruthless'

The aim is to be both well-meaning and competent. This leads to genuine trust as opposed to just satisfaction among residents.

Most councils will be seen as more well-meaning than competent, or as more competent than well-meaning. The red 'Useless' to 'Ruthless' spectrum in the matrix above runs diagonally between these two extremes.

A council perceived as well-meaning but incompetent may have lost trust, for example, through losing resident details, messing up basic services, or making decisions which make the area a laughing stock. One perceived as competent but self-serving may have lost trust through an unpopular regeneration project, a children's centre closure or a scandal implicating the council in corruption.

Inevitably the two ideas feed each other. A council seen as useless is unlikely to be given the benefit of the doubt on a children's centre closure. An authority seen as ruthless might be tolerated if bins are being collected and streets cleaned, but it'll be given short shrift if things go wrong.

Inevitably, there's a 'chicken and egg' element. Being seen as incompetent increases your chances of being seen as self-serving, and vice versa. As the 'performance paradox' – described in the main Pillar shows, one of the hardest things is transforming basic satisfaction with the quality of services into a deeper trust that your council is on residents' side.

By addressing the issue of competence and intentions, you can start to begin building the sort of genuine trust that is won when people trust both your motives and your competence.

How to test it?

We all have an instinctive hunch about where our council is situated on the matrix, but by using quantitative data from residents we can get a clearer idea.

This can be done by testing satisfaction as well as trust. By asking residents whether how satisfied they are and how much they trust you, you can start to plot where you sit on the axis.

Among residents with low trust you could go further, with questions based on the 'useless' versus 'ruthless' spectrum, to understand why.

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Constructions for questions might include, for example, “How likely would you be to trust the council to make a decision that’s morally right?” and “How likely would you be to trust the council to deal with a technically complex issue?” By contrasting responses to the two you can start to see where the problem stems from.

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