Research Report

Stakeholder Perceptions Survey 2016

Prepared for: Local Government Association (LGA)

Stakeholder Perceptions Survey 2016

Prepared for: Local Government Association (LGA)

Prepared by: Lys Coleman, Research Director

Date: February 2017

Produced by BMG Research

www.bmgresearch.co.uk

Project: 9588

Registered in England No. 2841970

Registered office:

BMG Research
Beech House
Greenfield Crescent
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 3BE
UK

Tel: +44 (0) 121 3336006

UK VAT Registration No. 580 6606 32

Birmingham Chamber of Commerce Member No. B4626

Market Research Society Company Partner

The provision of Market Research Services in accordance with ISO 20252:2012

The provision of Market Research Services in accordance with ISO 9001:2008

The International Standard for Information Security Management ISO 27001:2013

Investors in People Standard - Certificate No. WMQC 0614

Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (IQCS) Member Company

Registered under the Data Protection Act - Registration No. Z5081943

A Fair Data organisation

Cyber Essentials certification

Table of Contents

1 Executive summary

1.1 Background and objectives

BMG Research has prepared this summary report for the Local Government Association (LGA). The LGA's Perceptions Survey is a key measure of: the extent to which councils understand and engage with the LGA and its offer; how they view the LGA and engage with their communications; and specifically their views on and experiences of the support and resources it offers relating to sector-led improvement.

This research aims to:

1. Quantify members' understanding of the LGA and what the LGA currently offers.
2. Investigate what the membership want from the LGA.
3. Assess views of sector-led improvement within local government, and views on support offered by the LGA to assist its members in this.

1.2 Method

A total of 862 interviews were undertaken with a sample of representatives from local authorities across all the English regions (including chief executives, directors, leaders, chairs of scrutiny, portfolio holders, and frontline councillors). The majority of interviews were undertaken via Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI), with 32 completed via Computer Aided Web Interview (CAWI). This sample size has a maximum standard error of ±3.3% at the 95% level of confidence, giving these findings a high level of accuracy.

1.3 Findings

1.3.1 Overview

This report provides a summary of the top-line frequencies and, where relevant, significant findings from cross-tabulations based upon role type, amalgamated role type (officer, frontbench councillor, frontline councillor) and region.

1.3.2 Views on the LGA and its services

- Knowledge of the LGA is high. Just over one in six (16%) feel they ‘know a great deal about it’; whilst 59% ‘know a fair amount about it’; 25% report that they ‘know just a little about it’. Frontline councillors are least likely to know a ‘great deal’ about the LGA (8%).
- There has been a decline in the proportion of respondents who agree ‘a great deal’ with the statement ‘I understand the LGA’s purpose and how it works for local government’, from 43% in 2015 to 36%, although this is largely driven by declines among Frontline Councillors (from 35% to 22%). Overall close to nine in ten (89%) agree ‘to some extent’ or ‘a great deal’, ranging from 98% of Chief Executives to 82% of Frontline Councillors.
- Three quarters of respondents (74%) report that they would best be described as speaking positively about the LGA to others (either spontaneously or if asked), and

significantly more Leaders do so than was the case in 2015 (96% compared to 85%). While close to a quarter (23%) report that they have 'no views one way or another' on this question, only 3% say that they would speak negatively of the LGA.

- Three-quarters (74%) report that they are either fairly or very satisfied with the work of the LGA on behalf of the local government sector, and there has again been a significant uplift in the proportion of Leaders who indicate satisfaction, from 80% in 2015 to 92%, making them the most positive of all roles in the latest survey.
- Almost all respondents (99%) rate at least one of the activities undertaken by the LGA as either very or fairly useful to councils or local government as a whole. Respondents are most likely to find the LGA's role in *providing up-to-date information about local government* useful (91%), and high proportions also believe that the LGA's *lobbying on behalf of local government* and *providing a single voice for local government* is useful (both 89%). However the proportion finding the provisions of *legal advice and co-ordination of legal action for councils* useful has reduced to 64% of respondents, a significant decline since 2015 (72%).
- Consistent with 2015, respondents are most likely to identify *funding for local government* (94% agree), and *economic growth, jobs and housing* (90%) as issues that should be a priority for the LGA. The issue which achieves the lowest levels of agreement is *devolution*: while close to three quarters (73%) do agree that this should be a priority for the LGA, this is a significant decline on the 81% who did so in 2015. Similarly there has been a decline in levels of agreement that *sector-led improvement* should be a priority (from 84% to 77%).

1.3.3 Views on LGA communications

- Over four in five (83%) believe that the LGA keeps them either 'fairly' or 'very well informed' about their work, which maintains the uplift seen in 2015. However, 13% report that the LGA 'gives me only a limited amount of information' and 3% that the LGA 'doesn't tell me much at all'.
- As with previous years, respondents are most likely to find out about the work of the LGA via *'first' magazine* (76%), with a range other forms of communication mentioned by at least half of respondents – *media work/press releases* (67%), *events and conferences* (64%) and the *LGA website* (59%). However, significantly fewer respondents than in 2015 mention finding out about the LGA's work through *publications* (40% compared to 50%)[1], while in contrast significantly more mention *face-to-face contact* (39% compared to 32%) and the *Parliamentary bulletin* (33% compared to 27%).
- The most common method of engagement with the LGA remains responding to consultations, mentioned by 72% of respondents.

1.3.4 Views on sector-led improvement

- Half of respondents (51%) indicate that they have heard about the sector-led improvement approach either a lot (24%), or a moderate amount (27%), maintaining the increase seen in 2015.

[1] This may be in part due to the fact that in previous years the question has included examples of publications issued by the LGA, whereas in 2016 it referred simply to 'publications'.

- Seven in ten (70%) report that they 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that the approach to sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context, again maintaining the increase seen in 2015. However, within this, Frontline Councillors are less likely to agree than they were in 2015 (64% compared to 73%). Nevertheless, across all roles less than one in ten disagrees with this approach.
- Of the resources offered by the LGA to support sector-led improvement, respondents are most likely to have heard (a lot or a moderate amount) about *peer challenges to provide an external view on performance (65%)*. Two thirds (64%) are aware of *training for Councillors*, a new addition to the survey, and the only one Frontline Councillors are as likely as their counterparts to be aware of.
- Awareness of *practical support to help councils save money* is at lower levels compared to other SLI resources, however it has increased significantly since 2015, from 28% to 41%.
- Around half have heard (a lot or a moderate amount) about *access to good practice to help authorities learn from others* (55%) and *supporting, coaching and mentoring for members and officers by their peers* (53%) and one in three (32%) have heard about *access to the LG Inform data service*.
- Of those who have heard about each of the LGA's resources to support sector-led improvement, around nine in ten rate each of them as 'very' or 'fairly useful'. Within this respondents are most likely to feel that peer challenges are 'very useful' to councils (63%). In contrast, respondents are least likely to feel that *access to the LG Inform data service* is 'very useful' (36%).
- Over six in ten (61%) respondents believe that the support and resources offered by the LGA for sector-led improvement have had a positive impact on their authority, either 'to a moderate extent' or 'to a great extent', although there has been a significant decline on this measure among Portfolio Holders (from 73% in 2015 to 59% in the latest survey).
- Nine in ten respondents feel the LGA should continue to provide support in *saving money / making efficiencies* (91%), *training for Councillors* (91%) and *providing peer challenge and peer support* (90%). Around four in five feel they should continue to support *transforming / digitising services* (83%) and *identifying and delivering commercial opportunities* (78%), and three quarters *supporting devolution* (75%).
- Half (50%) have heard of Local Partnerships, in line with 2015, ranging from 90% of Chief Executives to 37% of Portfolio Holders.
- Of those aware of Local Partnerships, 35% are aware that their council has used their services in the last year.
- While seven in ten (69%) of those who have used services provided by Local Partnerships express satisfaction with them, this is a decline on the eight in ten (79%) who did so in 2015.

1.4 Conclusions

This section contains a summary of the main findings and themes emerging from this research, which are in large part consistent with the 2015 Stakeholder Perceptions Survey. Where differences are apparent these have been noted below.

- There continues to be a high level of awareness of the LGA and the work it undertakes, with understanding generally high, but varying by specific job role, with Frontline Councillors, followed by Chairs of Scrutiny, having the least understanding overall and Chief Executives and Leaders the highest.
- Levels of advocacy remain high, particularly for Chief Executives and increasingly so for Leaders.
- Satisfaction with the work of the LGA remains high, maintaining the increase achieved in 2014.
- All but two respondents find at least one of the activities undertaken by the LGA useful, with *providing up-to-date information about local government*, *lobbying on behalf of local government* and *providing a single voice for local government* seen as particularly useful.
- The two areas identified most commonly as suitable priorities for the LGA are *funding for local government* and *economic growth, jobs and housing*. However, a majority agree that *adult social care and health, children's services and education, sector-led improvement* and *devolution* should also be priorities.
- Over four in five believe the LGA keeps them very/fairly well informed about their work, maintaining the uplift achieved in 2015. Respondents are most likely to find out about the work of the LGA via 'first' magazine, media work/press releases, events and conferences and the LGA website, and most likely to engage with the LGA via responding to consultations.
- Awareness of the sector-led improvement approach has maintained the gains achieved in 2015, with just over half now saying that they have heard a lot/a moderate amount about this. Agreement that this is the correct approach has also maintained the gains made in 2015, with seven in ten agreeing that this is the case.
- Awareness of specific LGA resources to support sector-led improvement varies but is largely consistent with 2015 with the exception of *practical support to help councils save money,* which has seen a significant increase in awareness. Amongst those aware of these resources, most feel that they are useful to councils. More generally, a majority also believe that the resources provided by the LGA have had a positive impact on their authority.
- A majority would like LGA support to continue in all key areas, in particular in relation to *saving money/making efficiencies*.
- Half of those interviewed are aware of Local Partnerships, in line with 2015. Of those aware of Local Partnerships, a third are aware that their council has used Local Partnership services, and of these seven in ten are satisfied with them, although this does represent a decline since 2015, where eight in ten did so, returning to the levels achieved in 2014.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

This is the fifth time the Local Government Association (LGA) has undertaken a survey of its members. The LGA's Perceptions Survey is a key measure of the extent to which councils understand and engage with the LGA and its offer, how they view the LGA and engage with their communications, and specifically members' views on, and experiences of, the support and resources the LGA offers relating to sector-led improvement.

2.2 Objectives

The overarching aim of the research is to provide insight into how councillors and senior officers in LGA-member authorities view the LGA and how the LGA engages with them, and to explore their feelings about LGA support for sector led improvement.

More specifically the research aims to explore the following:

- Perceptions of the LGA across the board;
- Views of how the LGA communicates and engages with members:
- Whether there are groups of councillors and/or officers who have different levels of knowledge and engagement, and, if so, in which areas they lack knowledge/have minimal engagement;
- Perceptions of the service and benefits members get from the LGA, and whether there are other services and benefits they would value, or that would promote and improve the sector most effectively in the future.

2.3 Method

The Perceptions Survey 2016 was primarily delivered using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI), which was chosen as it offers the most neutral (and least self-selecting) method of interviewing.

In order to accommodate those who did not wish, or did not have the time available, to complete the survey over the telephone, the CATI element was supplemented by an online version which mirrored the CATI interview. This option was offered only to those respondents who indicated that they would not be able, or were not prepared, to complete a telephone interview within the fieldwork window, those who requested a call back at an unspecified time on five or more occasions, or those who specifically requested this option for completion.

The survey was designed by the LGA in partnership with BMG Research and in most cases retained the questions and wording from previous waves to ensure comparability. However, in order to maximise response rates, and to ensure the quality of the information collected, the 2015 survey was reviewed in detail to identify ways in which the length could be reduced from the average of 25 minutes achieved in the 2015 survey. This process resulted in minor changes to the wording of some questions to minimise the amount interviewers had to read out to participants, and also in the removal of a number of questions that were either of lower priority, or where information needs had already been addressed via previous surveys or other work undertaken by the LGA.

The survey explored:

- The LGA's offer and current provision;
- Its current role and priorities and how these can be developed;
- Its communications and methods of engagement;
- Sector-led improvement within local government, the support offered by the LGA to assist its members in this and how it can be developed/improved; and
- Respondents' experiences of Local Partnerships.

Prior to launching the survey a live pilot was conducted with 20 respondents to ensure the survey was fit for purpose and would last no longer than around 15 minutes. No issues were identified relating to respondents' understanding of the survey content. The survey subsequently took place between 28th November 2016 and 27th January 2017.

2.4 Sampling

As in previous waves the research aimed to consult a range of officers (including chief executives and directors) and both frontbench (leaders, chairs of scrutiny and portfolio holders) and frontline elected members, from a representative sample of LGA member authorities.

Following discussion with the LGA, interlocking quotas were set to ensure the research achieved a broadly representative sample whilst establishing minimum quotas to enable detailed analysis by region and role (a minimum of 30 respondents per region and role group). These were achieved for all sub groups apart from the North East Region, due to the limited number of contacts in that area.

Similar quotas were set by role as in previous waves to ensure comparability. In the majority of instances quotas were achieved however, as in 2014 and 2015, there was a small shortfall in some areas, most notably amongst chief executives and leaders; however, this does not affect overall comparability over time.

A sample frame of 17,249 unique and usable contacts (including 13,637 frontline councillors) was provided to BMG Research by the LGA. Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) were undertaken with 862 respondents[2]. This sample size has a maximum standard error of +/-3.3% (compared with +/-3.1% in 2012 and 2013 and +/-3.4% in 2014 and 2015) at the 95% level of confidence, giving these findings a high level of accuracy. Further details of the standard errors by region and role type are included in Appendix 1.

Due to the smaller sample bases achieved in the North East and Yorkshire and the Humber, the data has been combined for both in the analysis.

Table 1 shows the final sample achieved which forms the basis of this report.

Table 1: Completed interviews

Amalgamated role:	Officers		Frontbench Councillors			Frontline councillors	Regional Total
Role:	Chief Executives	Directors	Leaders	Chairs of Scrutiny	Portfolio Holders	Frontline councillors	
East	12	30	16	12	19	41	130
East Midlands	9	37	11	11	11	32	111
London	4	16	1	9	9	32	71
North East	1	8	1	4	2	13	29
North West	4	19	6	12	10	42	93
South East	10	44	15	17	19	62	167
South West	6	21	12	9	13	35	96
West Midlands	13	26	11	9	11	33	103
Yorkshire and the Humber	4	20	4	7	7	20	62
Role Total:	**63**	**221**	**77**	**90**	**101**	**310**	**862**
Amalgamated role Total:	**284**		**268**			**310**	**862**

[2] 32 interviews were completed online, representing 4% of the total. Most of these were Directors (24) or Chief Executives (5), indicating that this option did help to improve the response within these groups. Differences between telephone and online completion results reflect differences by role rather than method of completion.

Within this sample the research also captured responses from respondents from a range of council/public sector types including:

Table 2: Respondent local authority type

Local authority type	Number	%
English unitary	139	16
London borough	70	8
Metropolitan district	80	9
Shire county	74	9
Shire district	499	58
Total	**862**	**100**

2.5 Analytical approach

This report provides a summary of the top-line frequencies and, where relevant, significant findings from cross-tabulations based upon amalgamated role type (officer, frontbench councillor, frontline councillor) and region. Independent t-tests (within the groups of interest i.e. region) were conducted at the 95% confidence level to identify where findings were statistically significant. Where specific findings from cross-tabulations are discussed in the report it is because they have been identified as statistically significant unless otherwise stated. Significant changes compared to previous waves are also discussed.

In all tables in this report, all figures which are significantly higher than at least one other figure in the same row are **highlighted**. Full tables showing cross-tabulations by region, role, and authority, and individual tables for amalgamated roles and each region have been provided to the LGA separately.

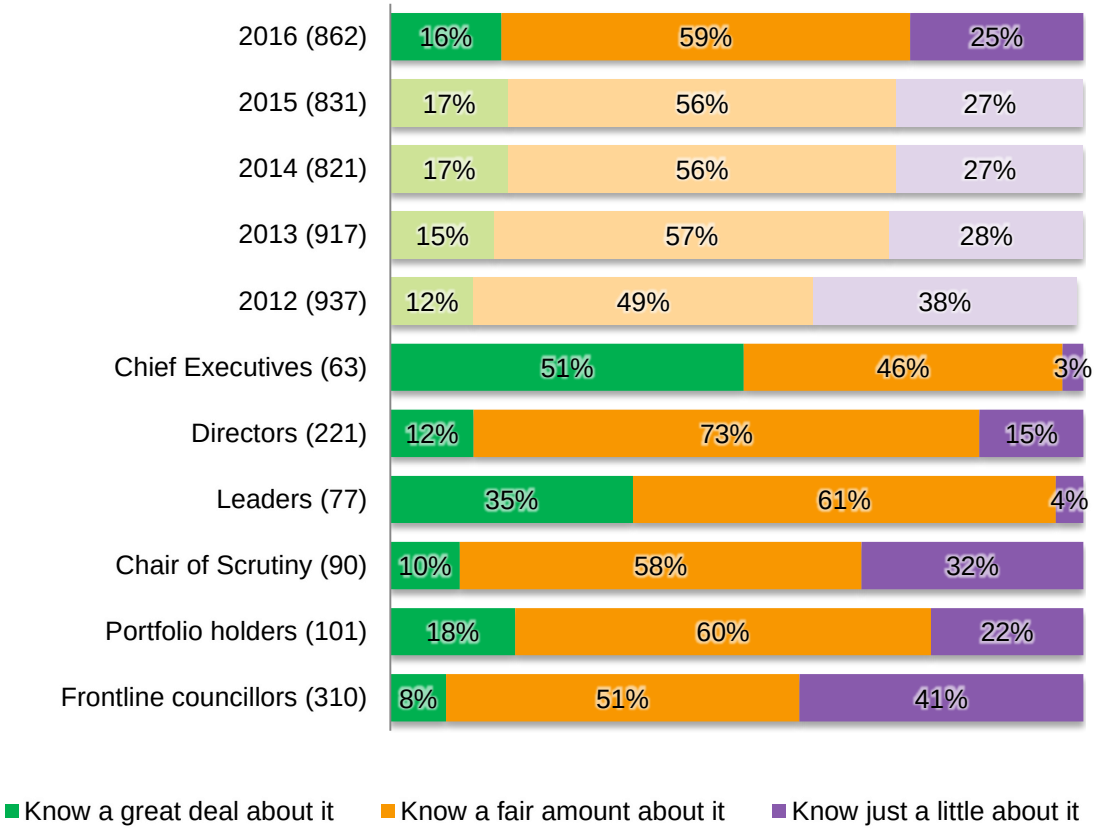
3 Views on the LGA and its services

3.1 Knowledge of the LGA

When asked how well they know the LGA, just over one in six 'know a great deal' (16%) whilst 59% 'know a fair amount' about the LGA. This is in line with the findings since 2013.

As Figure 1 shows, Chief Executives and Leaders continue to be more likely to 'know a great deal about' the LGA (51% and 35% respectively), while Frontline councillors and Chairs of Scrutiny are least likely to 'know a great deal' about the LGA (8% and 10% respectively). Directors are more likely than those in other roles to 'know a fair amount (73%).

Figure 1: How well would do you know the LGA? Do you… (Cross-tabulated by role type)



Bases in parentheses, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

By region, respondents in the North East/Yorkshire and Humber are significantly more likely than the average to 'know a great deal/a fair amount' about the LGA (85% compared to 75% overall).

3.2 Understanding of the purpose of the LGA

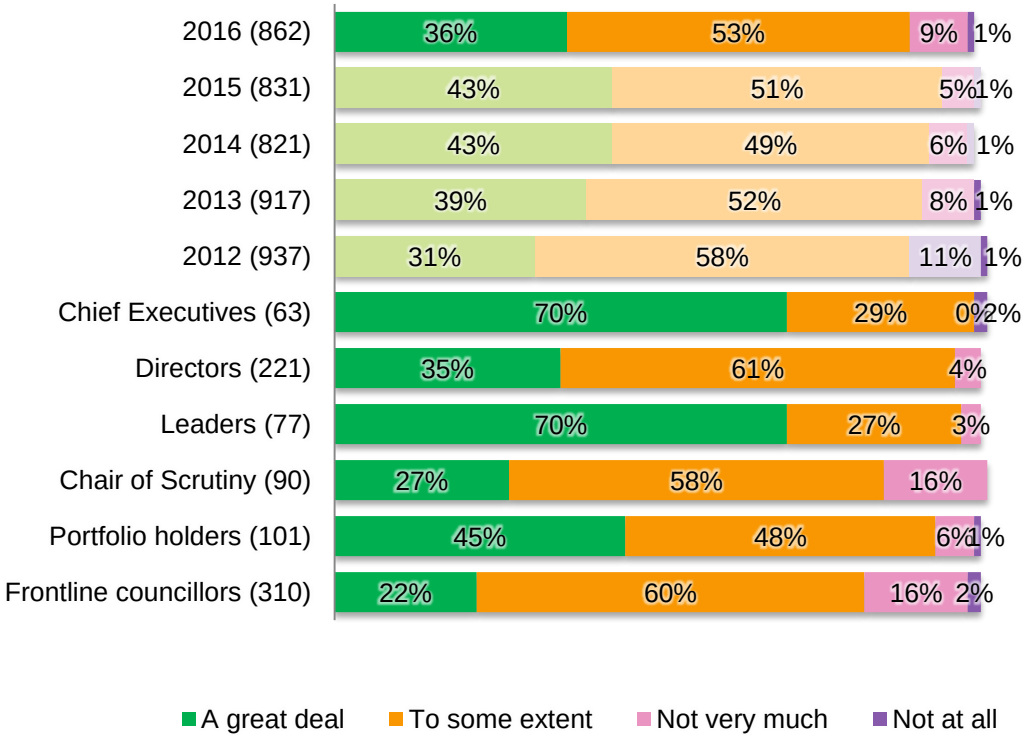
Respondents were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree that they understand the LGA's purpose and how it works for local government.

Overall close to nine in ten agree to some extent that they understand the LGA's purpose and how it works for local government (89%), ranging from 98% of Chief Executives to 82% of Frontline Councillors.

However, the proportion agreeing with this 'a great deal' has declined from 43% in 2015 to 36% in 2016. This decline is driven almost entirely by a significant decline among Frontline Councillors, from 35% in 2015 to 22% in 2016, and by a small decline among Directors, from 44% to 35%. For all other roles the proportion agreeing 'a great deal' has remained consistent over time.

Overall levels of disagreement have increased from 6% in 2015 to 10% in the latest survey, although again this is largely driven by increases for Frontline Councillors (from 12% to 18%). There have also been increases in levels of disagreement among Chairs of Scrutiny (from 6% to 16%).

Figure 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that you understand the LGA's purpose and how it works for local government? (Cross-tabulated by role type)



Bases in parentheses, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

Results are relatively consistent by region, ranging from 86% overall agreement in London to 96% in North East/Yorkshire and Humber.

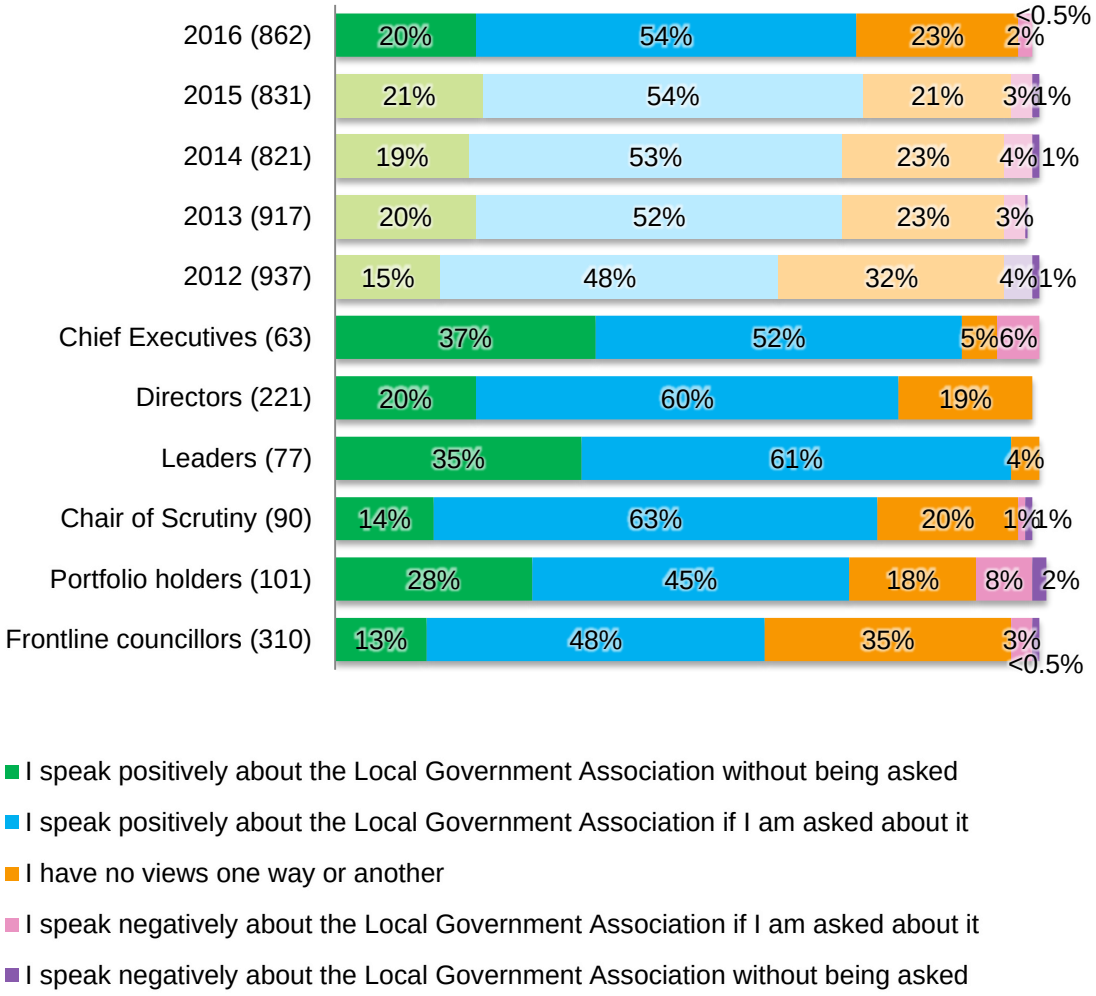
3.3 Advocates for the LGA

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents say they would speak positively about the LGA to others (either spontaneously or if asked), in line with results since 2013, and only 3% would speak negatively about the LGA.

Chief Executives remain particularly likely to say that they would 'speak positively about the LGA' (89%), and Leaders are now significantly more likely to do so than was the case in 2015 (96% compared to 85%).

Frontline Councillors and Scrutiny Chairs remain the least likely to say that they would speak positively about the LGA (61%), although they are more likely to 'have no view one way or another' on this question than to speak negatively.

Figure 3: Which of these phrases best describes the way you would speak of the LGA to other people? (Cross-tabulated by role type)

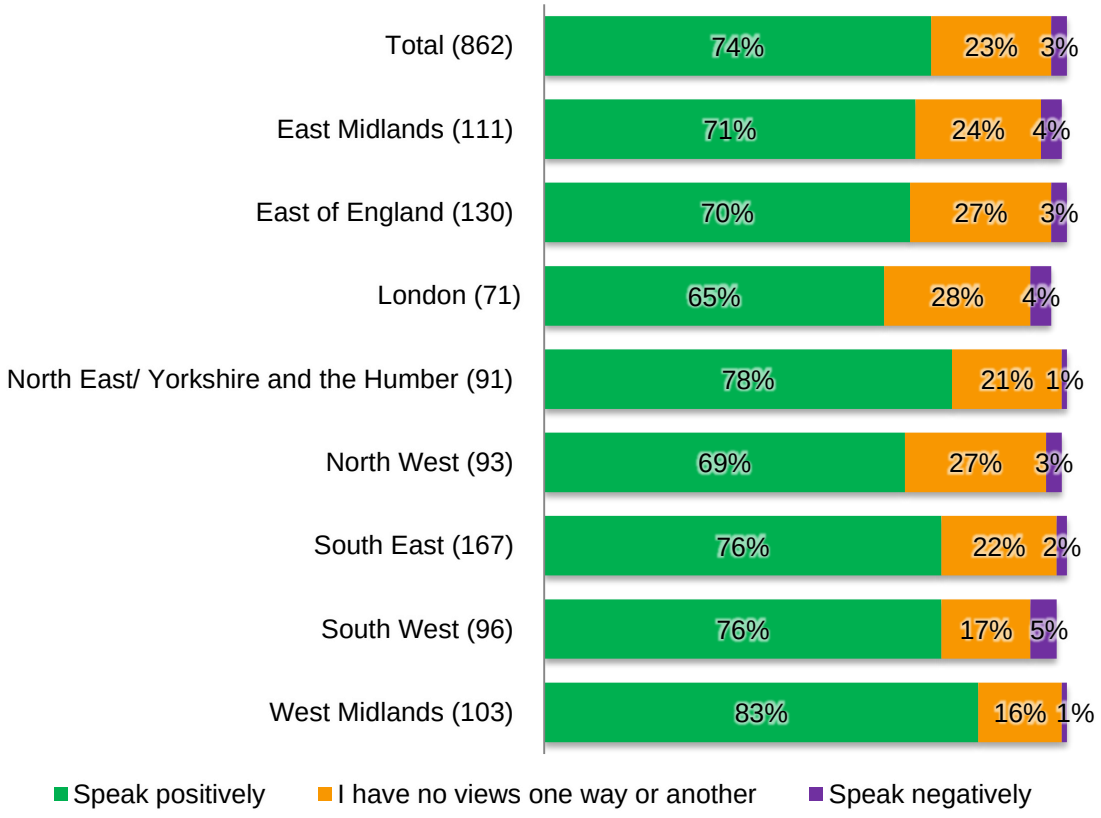


Bases in parentheses, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

Respondents in Yorkshire and Humber and the West Midlands are significantly more likely to speak positively about the LGA compared to the average (84% and 83% respectively compared to 74%).

While those in London and the North West are less likely to speak positively about the LGA (65% and 69% respectively) they are no more likely than those elsewhere to speak negatively about the LGA.

Figure 4: Which of these phrases best describes the way you would speak of the LGA to other people? (Cross-tabulated by region)



Bases in parentheses, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

3.4 Satisfaction with the work of the LGA on behalf of the local government sector

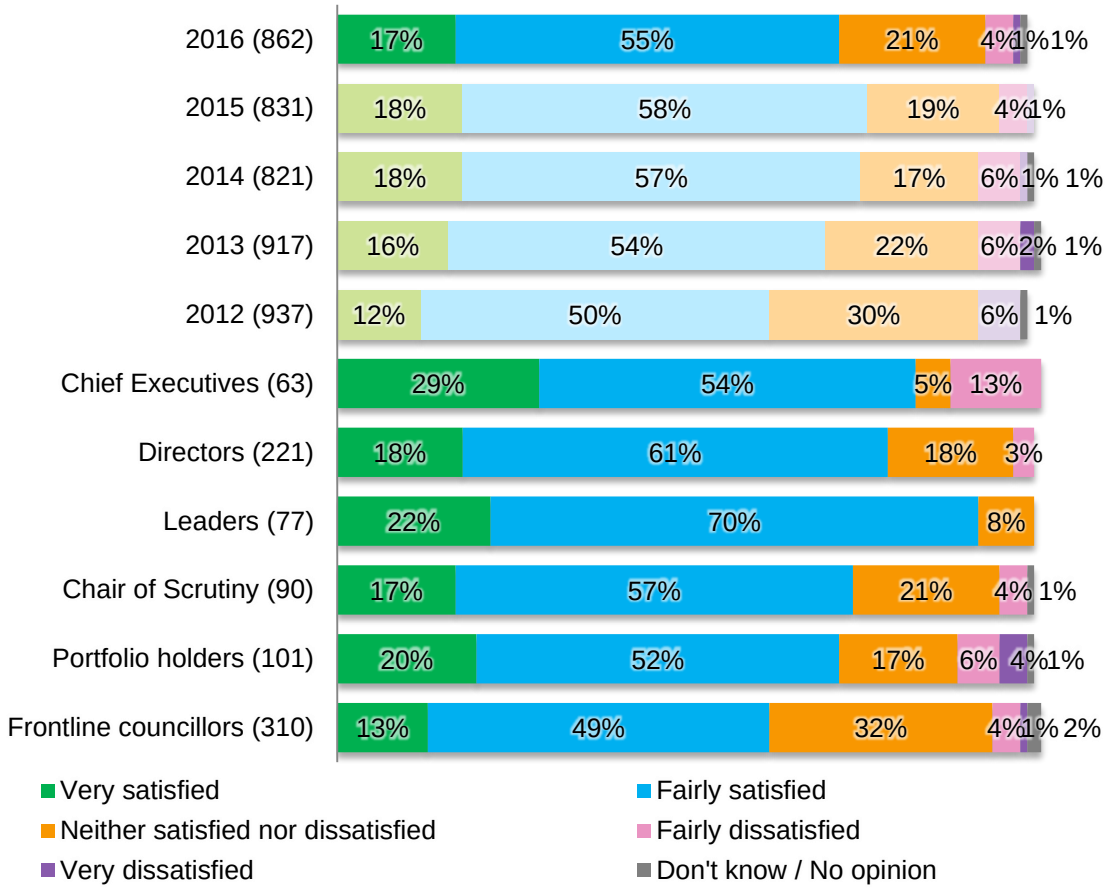
When asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with the work of the LGA on behalf of the local government sector, close to three-quarters (73%) are either fairly or very satisfied, maintaining the increase achieved in 2014.

Leaders are most positive in this respect, with none indicating dissatisfaction at any level, and over nine in ten (92%) either fairly or very satisfied, a significant increase on the 80% for this group in 2015. There has also been a directional increase in levels of satisfaction among Chairs of Scrutiny, from 61% in 2015 to 73% in the latest survey.

While Chief Executives remain largely positive about the work of the LGA, with 83% fairly or very satisfied, in line with 80% in 2015, over one in ten (13%) do indicate a level of dissatisfaction.

In contrast, levels of satisfaction have declined significantly among Portfolio Holders (from 84% to 72%) and Frontline Councillors (from 72% to 62%), although this is due to an increase in the proportion who indicate a neutral rather than a negative opinion in this respect.

Figure 5: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the work of the LGA? (Cross-tabulated by role type)

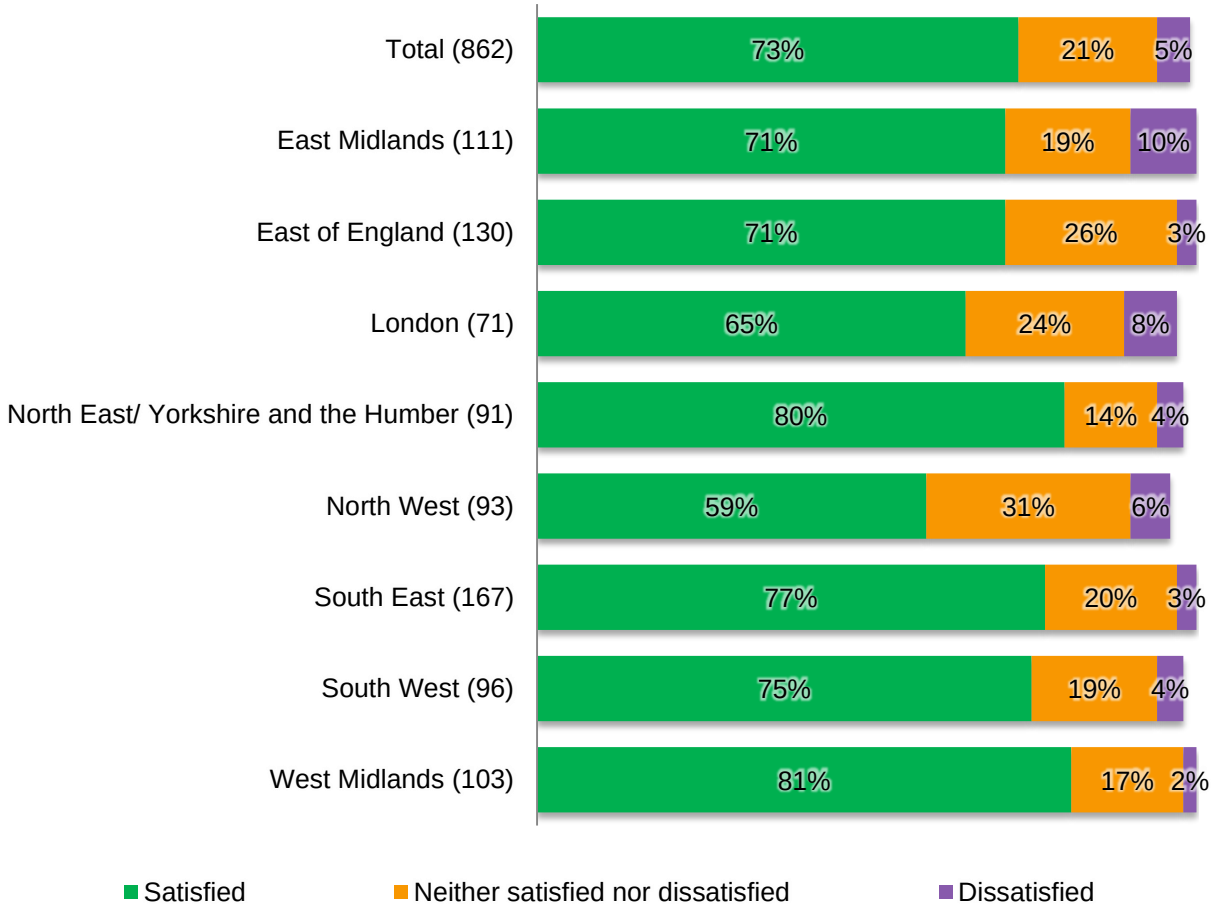


Bases in parentheses, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

*denotes less than 0.5%

By region, respondents in the North West are least likely to be satisfied (59% compared to 73%) and more likely to be ambivalent (31% neither/nor compared to 21%), while those in the East Midlands are most likely to be dissatisfied (10% compared to 5%).

Figure 6: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the work of the LGA? (Cross-tabulated by region)



Bases in parentheses, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

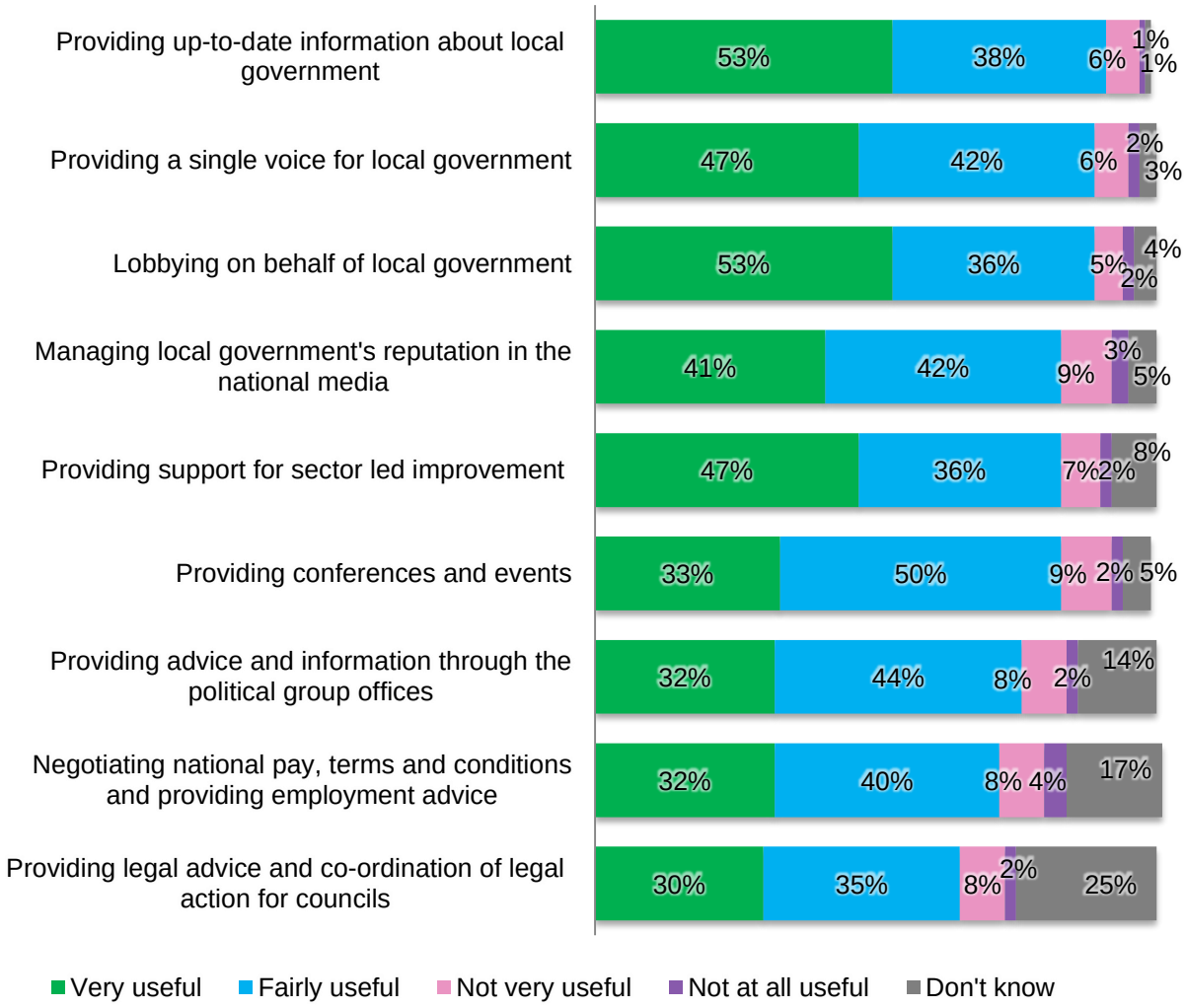
3.5 Usefulness of activities undertaken by the LGA

Almost all respondents (99%) rate at least one of the activities undertaken by the LGA as either very or fairly useful to councils or local government as a whole.

Considering the activities separately, respondents are most likely to find the LGA's role in *providing up-to-date information about local government* useful (91%). High proportions also believe that the LGA's *lobbying on behalf of local government* and *providing a single voice for local government* is useful (both 89%).

Results are much in line with 2015, with the same three activities regarded as most useful. However the proportion finding the provision of *legal advice and co-ordination of legal action for councils* reduces to 64% of respondents, a significant decline since 2015 (72%).

Figure 7: Please tell me how useful or not each of the following LGA activities are to your council or local government as a whole.



Base = 862, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

By region, the following findings differ significantly compared to the national average:

- West Midlands:
  - More useful than the national average: *providing advice and information through the political group offices* (84% compared to 76%), *providing legal advice and co-ordination of legal action for councils* (75% compared to 64%).
- North East/Yorkshire and Humber:
  - More useful than the national average: *negotiating national pay, terms and conditions and providing employment advice* (84% compared to 71%).
- London:
  - Less useful than the national average: *providing support for sector-led improvement* (73% compared to 83%), *providing up-to-date information about local government* (77% compared to 91%), *providing conferences and events* (73% compared to 83%).
- South East:
  - Less useful than the national average: *negotiating national pay, terms and conditions and providing employment advice* (58% compared to 71%), *providing support for sector-led improvements* (78% compared to 83%), *providing conferences and events* (73% compared to 83%).
- North West:
  - Less useful than the national average: *providing a single voice for local government* (83% compared to 89%), *managing local government's reputation in the national media* (75% compared to 83%), *providing conferences and events* (75% compared to 83%).

By amalgamated role, as the table below indicates officers find the following particularly useful, and to a greater extent than those in other roles (which was not the case in 2015, when results were largely consistent by role):

- *Providing up-to-date information about local government* (95%);
- *Providing a single voice for local government* (93%);
- *Lobbying on behalf of local government* (93%);
- *Managing local government's reputation in the national media* (92%).

As was the case in 2015, Frontbench Councillors join Officers in being more positive than Frontline Councillors in relation to:

- *Providing conferences and events* (91% and 86% respectively);
- *Providing support for sector led improvement* (90% and 84% respectively).

Again as was the case in 2015, Frontbench and Frontline councillors are more likely than Officers to find *providing advice and information through the political group offices* useful (82% and 77% compared to 69%).

Table 3: Proportion saying LGA activities are useful (Cross-tabulated by amalgamated role type)

	Officers (284)	Frontbench councillors (268)	Frontline Councillors (310)
Providing up-to-date information about local government	**95%**	90%	89%
Providing a single voice for local government	**93%**	85%	88%
Lobbying on behalf of local government	**93%**	87%	88%
Managing local government's reputation in the national media	**92%**	79%	77%
Providing conferences and events	**91%**	**86%**	74%
Providing support for sector led improvement	**90%**	**84%**	76%
Providing advice and information through the political group offices	69%	**82%**	**77%**
Negotiating national pay, terms and conditions and providing employment advice	76%	69%	69%
Providing legal advice and co-ordination of legal action for councils	**75%**	59%	59%

3.6 Priorities for the LGA

Respondents were asked how strongly they agreed that a range of issues should be a priority for the LGA. Consistent with 2015, the top two priorities were *funding for local government* (94% agree), and *economic growth, jobs and housing* (90% agree).

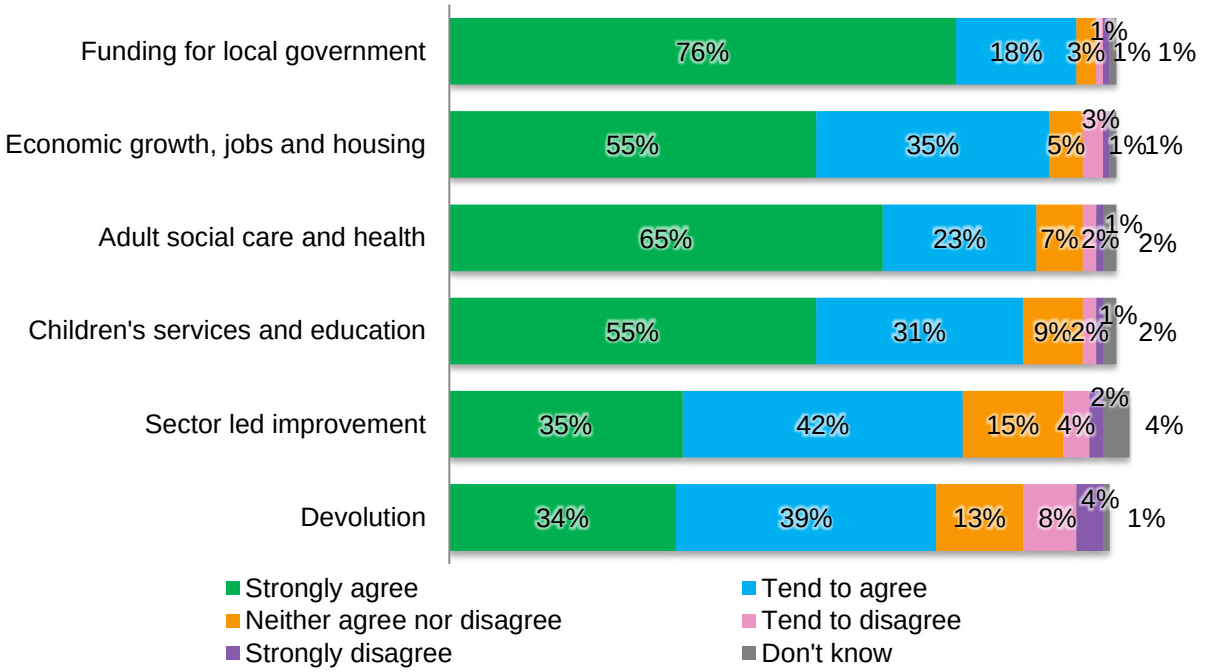
The issue which achieves the lowest levels of agreement is *devolution*: while close to three quarters (73%) do agree that this should be a priority for the LGA, this is a significant decline on the 81% who agreed in 2015. Similarly there has been a decline in levels of agreement that *sector-led improvement* should be a priority (from 84% to 77%).

Officers are more likely than the average to agree that *funding for local government* should be a priority (98%), and the same is true in relation to *devolution* (81%), *economic growth, jobs and housing* (95%), and *sector-led improvement* (86%).

Those in East of England are less likely than the national average to agree that the following should be a priority: *devolution* (65%), *adult social care and health* (83%), *children's services and education* (79%).

Those in the West Midlands are more likely than the national average to agree that *sector-led improvement* should be a priority (85%).

Figure 8: For each of the following I would like you to tell me whether you agree or disagree that they should be a priority for the LGA.



Base = 862, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

%

Close to half of respondents (44%) mention something else they feel should be a priority for the LGA, with disparate responses including *health and social care, lobbying government, promoting local government, improving communication* etc.

4 Views on LGA communications

4.1 How the LGA keeps members informed

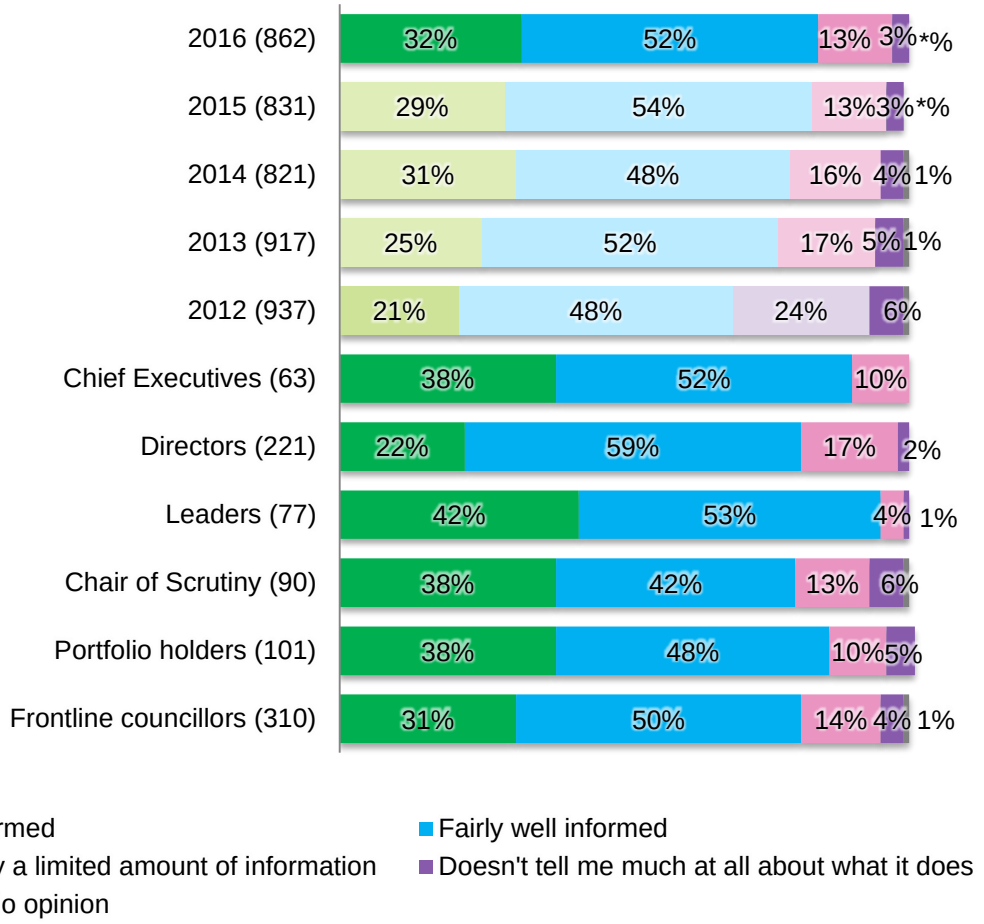
Over four in five (83%) believe that the LGA keeps them very/fairly well informed about their work which maintains the uplift seen in 2015.

Around one in eight (13%) believe that the LGA 'only gives them a limited amount of information' and only 3% believe that 'they are not told much at all'.

Leaders are most likely to feel well informed (95%) and, as the figure below indicates, the most likely to feel 'very well informed'.

Results are largely consistent by region.

Figure 9: How well informed, if at all, do you think the LGA keeps you about its work? (Cross-tabulated by role type)



Bases in parentheses, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

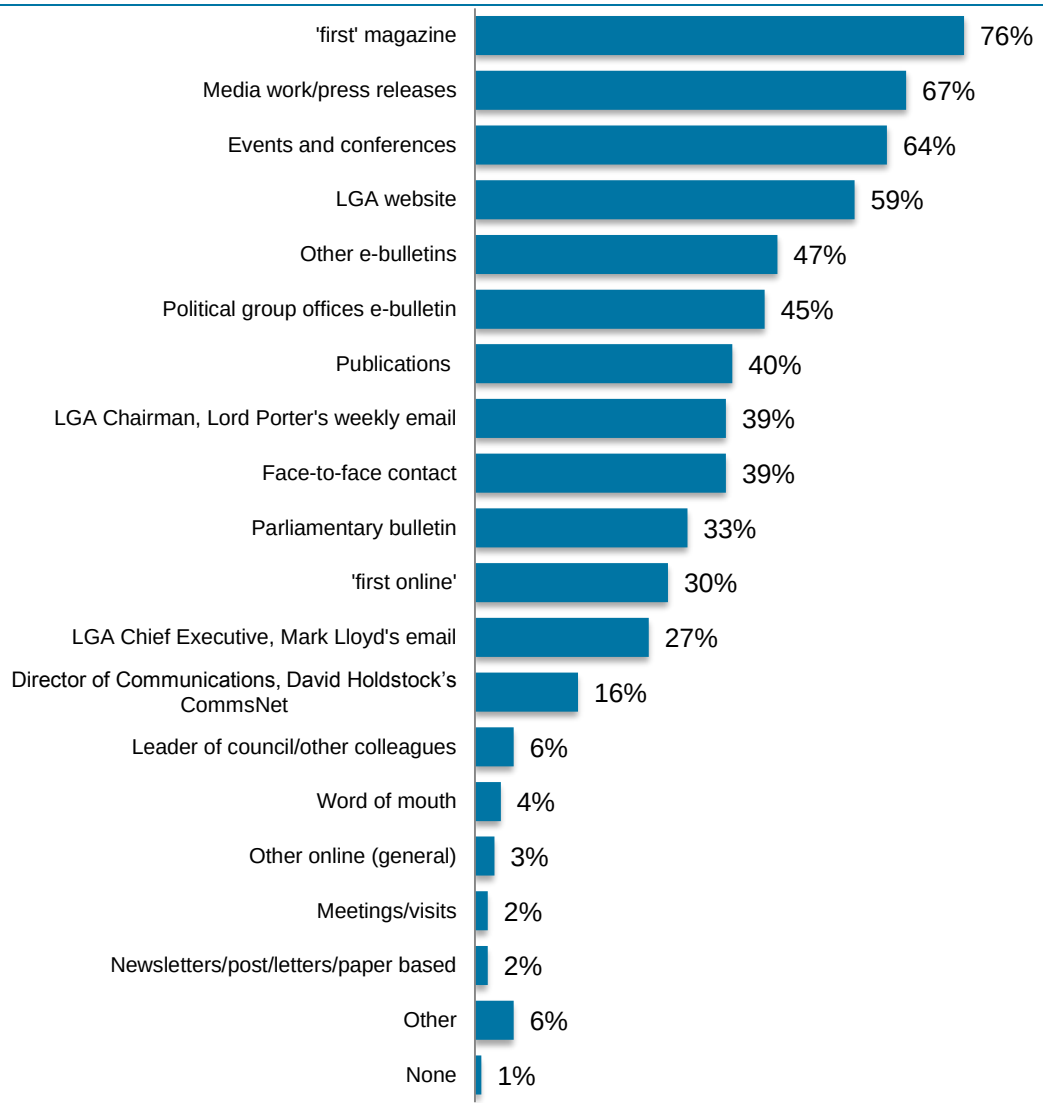
*denotes less than 0.5%

As with previous years, respondents are most likely to find out about the work of the LGA via 'first' magazine (mentioned by 76% of respondents); although media work/press releases; LGA website; and events and conferences are also mentioned by over half of respondents.

Significantly more respondents than in 2015 mention *face-to-face contact* (39% compared to 32%) and the *Parliamentary bulletin* (33% compared to 27%). However, significantly fewer respondents mention finding out about the LGA's work through *publications* (40% compared to 50%), the *LGA Chairman's weekly email* (39% compared to 46%), and the *LGA Chief Executive's email* (27% compared to 33%).

Looking specifically at the target audience for these communications, fewer Leaders than in 2015 mention finding out about the LGA's work through the *LGA Chairman's weekly email* (75% compared to 91%). However, similar proportions of Chief Executive's mention the *LGA Chief Executive's email* (86% compared to 87%).

Figure 10: How do you generally find out about the work of the LGA? (All responses above 2%)



Base =862, multiple response question
Source: survey of LGA members

As the table below shows, when broken down by amalgamated role type, whilst *'first' magazine* is the most mentioned source of information for Councillors, Officers engage with the work of the LGA through a more diverse range of channels. At least eight in ten officers find out about the LGA via *media work/press releases*; *LGA website*; and *events and conferences*.

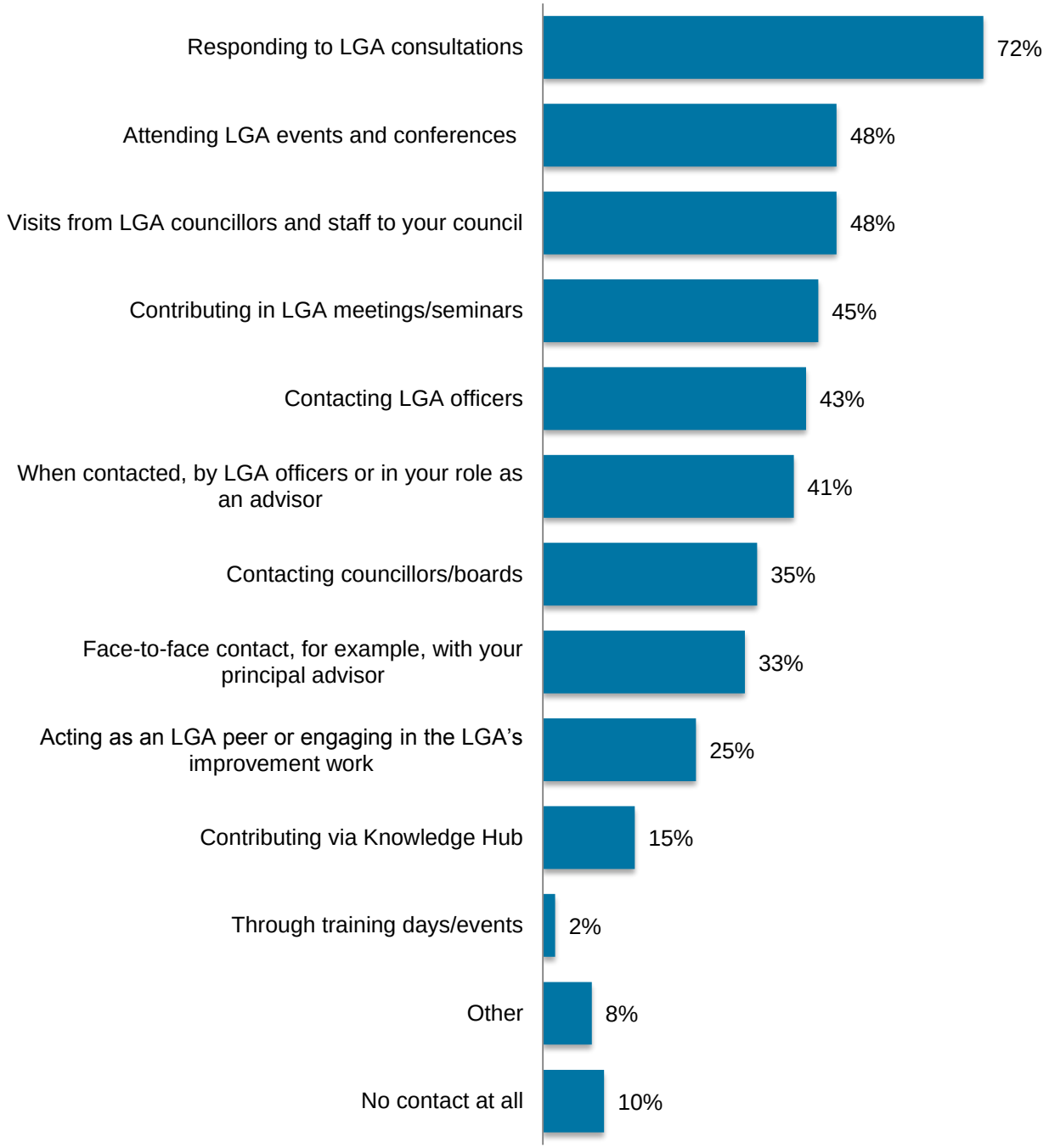
Table 4: How do you generally find out about the work of the LGA? (Cross-tabulated by amalgamated role type; All responses mentioned by above 2% overall)

	Officers (284)	Frontbench councillors (268)	Frontline Councillors (310)
'first' magazine	49%	**86%**	**92%**
Media work/press releases	**84%**	60%	58%
Events and conferences	**80%**	**67%**	47%
LGA website	**82%**	**53%**	45%
Other e-bulletins	**56%**	47%	40%
Political group offices e-bulletin	14%	**66%**	**55%**
Publications	**49%**	**40%**	31%
LGA Chairman, Lord Porter's weekly email	18%	**53%**	**46%**
Face-to-face contact	**50%**	**46%**	24%
Parliamentary bulletin	33%	35%	31%
'first online'	**36%**	28%	28%
LGA Chief Executive, Mark Lloyd's email	**42%**	23%	18%
Director of Communications, David Holdstock's CommsNet	**32%**	9%	8%
Leader of council/other colleagues	5%	6%	7%
Word of mouth	4%	**6%**	2%
Other online (general)	3%	4%	3%

4.2 How authorities engage with the LGA

Respondents reported a range of ways that they engage with the LGA. Consistent with 2015, the most common means of engagement is *responding to LGA consultations*, mentioned by 72%.

Figure 11: How do you engage with the LGA? (All responses above 2%)



Base = 862, multiple response question

Source: survey of LGA members

As was the case in 2015, other than *contacting councillors/boards by email or phone*, other means of engagement are most used by Officers, followed by Frontbench Councillors.

Table 5: How do you engage with the LGA? (Cross-tabulated by role type, all responses mentioned by above 1% overall)

	Officers (284)	Frontbench councillors (268)	Frontline councillors (310)
Responding to LGA consultations	**86%**	**72%**	59%
Attending LGA events and conferences	**68%**	**54%**	24%
Visits from LGA councillors and staff to your council	**56%**	**54%**	37%
Contributing in LGA meetings/seminars	**61%**	**50%**	25%
Contacting LGA officers	**68%**	**40%**	22%
When contacted, by LGA officers or in your role as an advisor	**63%**	**44%**	19%
Contacting councillors/boards by email or phone	17%	**49%**	**38%**
Face-to-face contact	**44%**	**37%**	19%
Acting as an LGA peer or engaging in the LGA's improvement work	**42%**	**24%**	11%
Contributing via Knowledge Hub	**26%**	10%	8%

5 Views on sector-led improvement

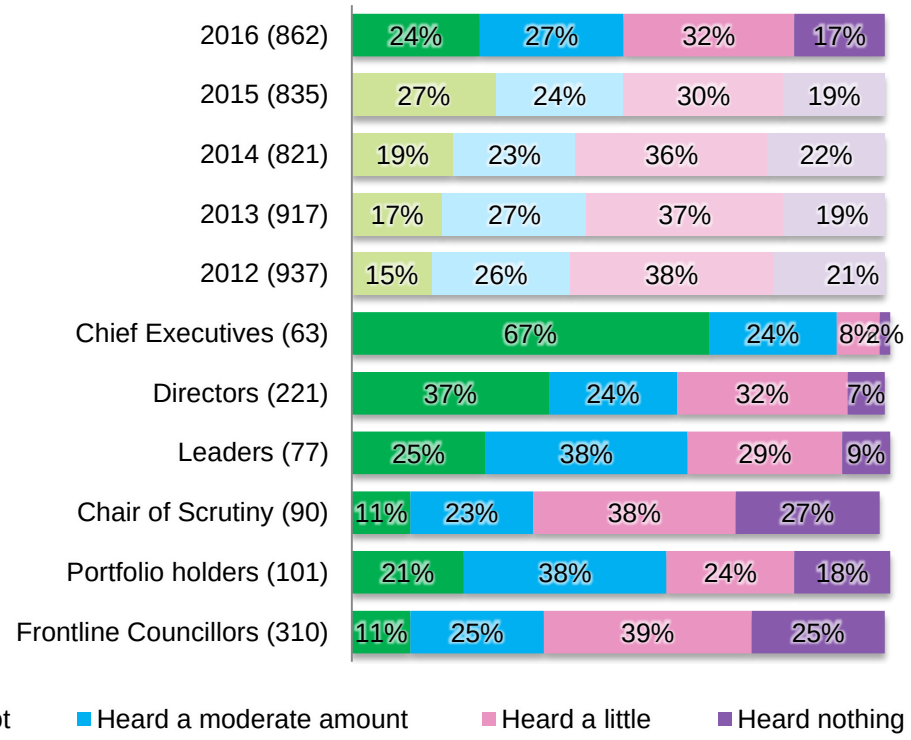
5.1 Awareness of sector-led improvement

One of the key roles of the LGA is to support and facilitate sector-led improvement. Prior to being asked a set of questions on this topic, all respondents were read the following text:

"As you may be aware, the LGA together with local authorities have developed an approach known as 'sector-led improvement', where councils help each other to continuously improve. Improvement can be defined as the maintenance of service levels or service user outcomes in the face of reduction in resources."

Consistent with 2015, half of respondents (51%) indicate that they have heard about the sector-led improvement approach either a lot, or a moderate amount, and within this, Chief Executives continue to be the most likely to have 'heard a lot' or a 'moderate amount' about sector-led improvement (90%).

Figure 12: How much, if anything, have you heard about the sector-led improvement approach? (Cross-tabulated by role type)



Bases in parentheses, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

5.2 Agreement that sector-led improvement is the right approach

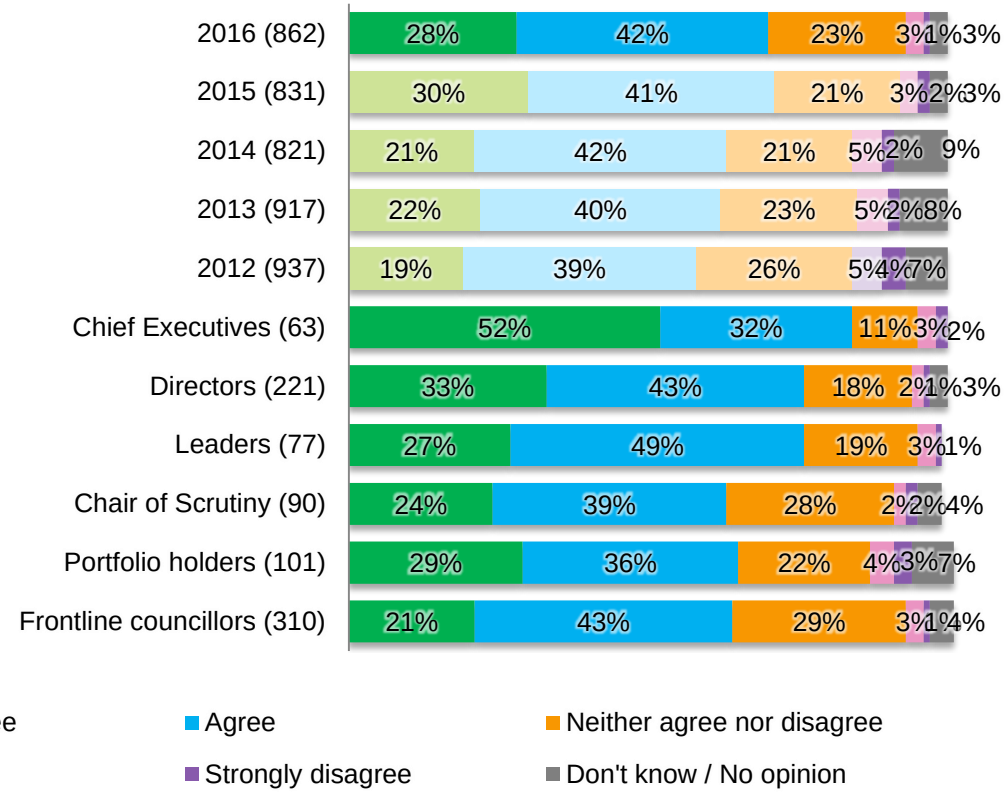
As shown by the figure below, the gains made in 2015 have been maintained in terms of agreement that the approach to sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context, with 70% of respondents 'strongly agreeing' or 'agreeing'. As shown by the figure below, just 4% of respondents disagree with the sector-led improvement approach, and 23% 'neither agree nor disagree'.

By role type, Chief Executives remain particularly likely to agree that the approach to sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context (84% agree), and are significantly more likely than other roles to 'strongly agree' (52%).

While two thirds (64%) of Frontline Councillors agree that sector-led improvement is the right approach, this is a significantly lower proportion than was the case in 2015 (73%).

Across all roles, less than one in ten disagree with this approach.

Figure 13: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the approach to sector-led improvement is the right approach in the current context? (Cross-tabulated by role type)



Bases in parentheses, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

5.3 LGA resources to support sector-led improvement

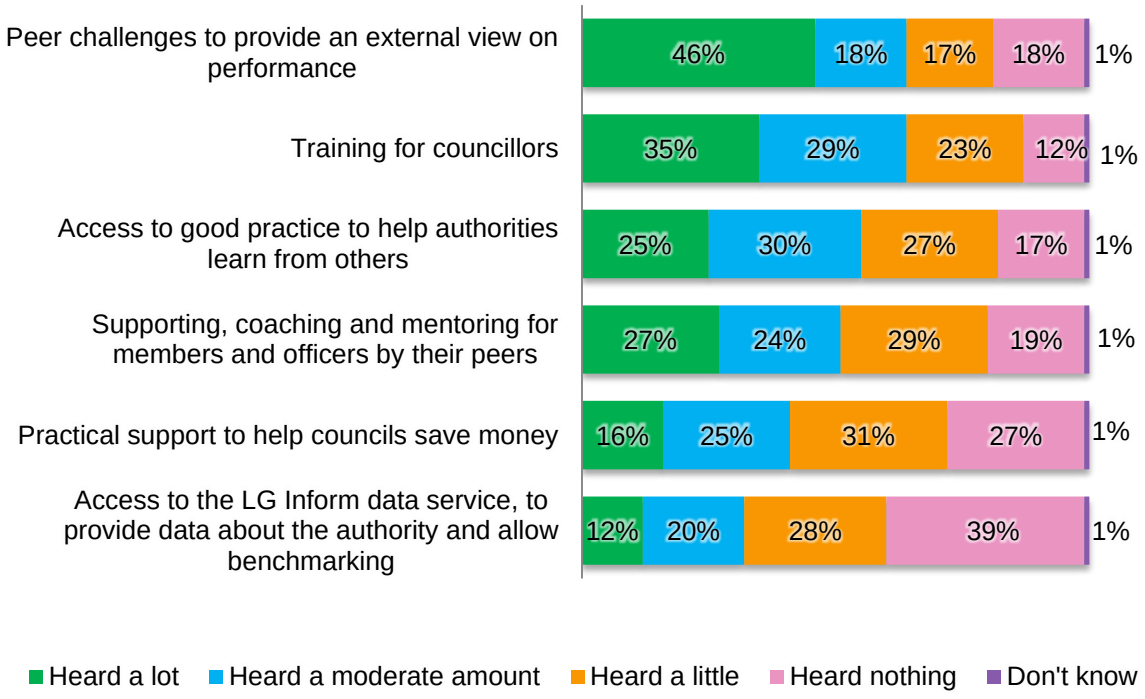
The LGA offers a number of resources to support the local government sector in taking the lead in its own improvement. Respondents were asked whether they had heard of five elements.

Levels of awareness were variable but broadly consistent with 2015:

- 65% have heard (a lot or a moderate amount) about *peer challenges to provide an external view on performance*;
- 64% have heard about *training for councillors*, a new element for 2016, and the only element Frontline Councillors are as likely as their counterparts to be aware of;
- 55% have heard about *access to good practice to help authorities learn from others*;
- 51% have heard about *supporting, coaching and mentoring for members and officers by their peers*; and,
- 32% have heard about *access to the LG Inform data service, to provide data about the authority and allow benchmarking*.

Those who had heard about *practical support to help councils save money* has increased significantly from 28% in 2015 to 41% in 2016.

Figure 14: How much, if anything, have you heard about the following elements of the LGA's sector-led improvement offer?



Base = 862, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

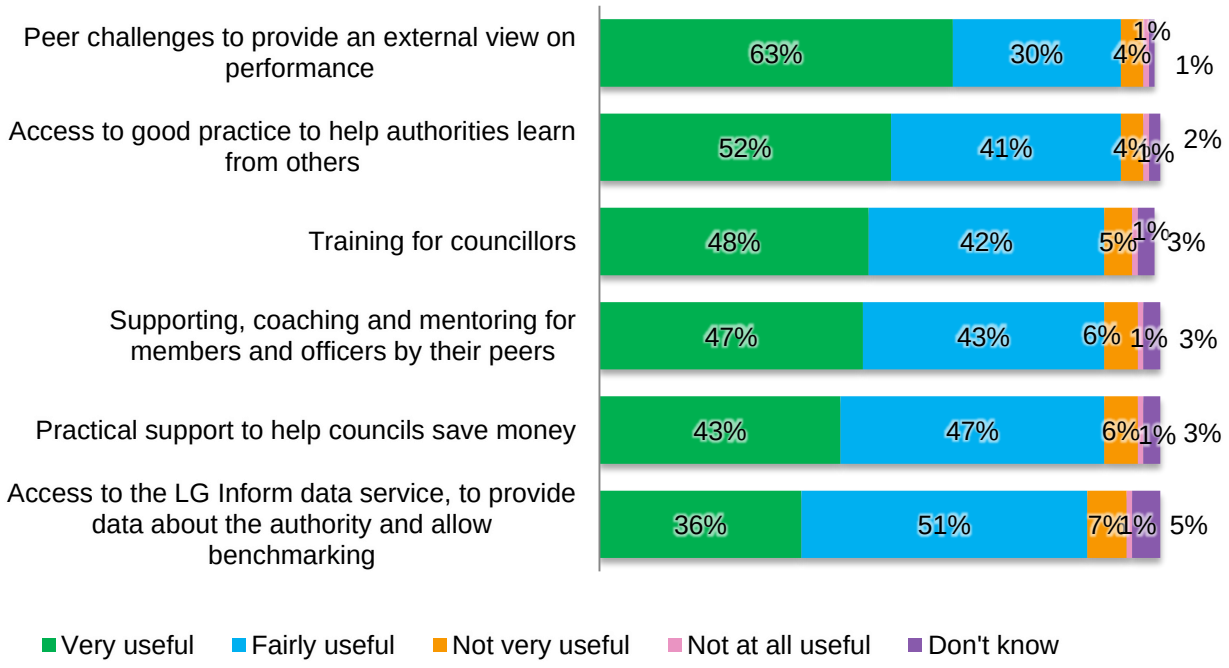
Those that had heard about a specific element were asked how useful it was. The impact of the resources that the LGA offers in order to support sector-led improvement is clearly well received by those in the sector who have some level of awareness of them (heard a lot, heard a moderate amount, or heard a little). As shown by the figure below, and consistent with 2015, all resources are described as useful by a majority:

- 94% state that *peer challenges to provide an external view on performance* are useful to councils;
- 93% state that *access to good practice to help authorities learn from others* is useful;
- 91% state that *training for councillors* is useful (a new element for 2016);
- 90% state that *supporting, coaching and mentoring for members and officers by their peers* is useful;
- 87% state *access to the LG Inform data service, to provide data about the authority and allow benchmarking* is useful; and,
- 90% say the same about *practical support offered to help councils save money* the only significant increase from 2015 where 84% described this element as useful.

Within these overall findings, peer challenge, training for councillors, peer coaching and support and access to good practice to help authorities learn from each other are most commonly described as 'very useful'.

Officers are significantly more likely than the average to view the following as useful: *peer challenges to provide an external view on performance* (98%) and *supporting, coaching and mentoring for members and officers by their peers* (94%).

Figure 15: How useful, or not, would you say the following are to councils?

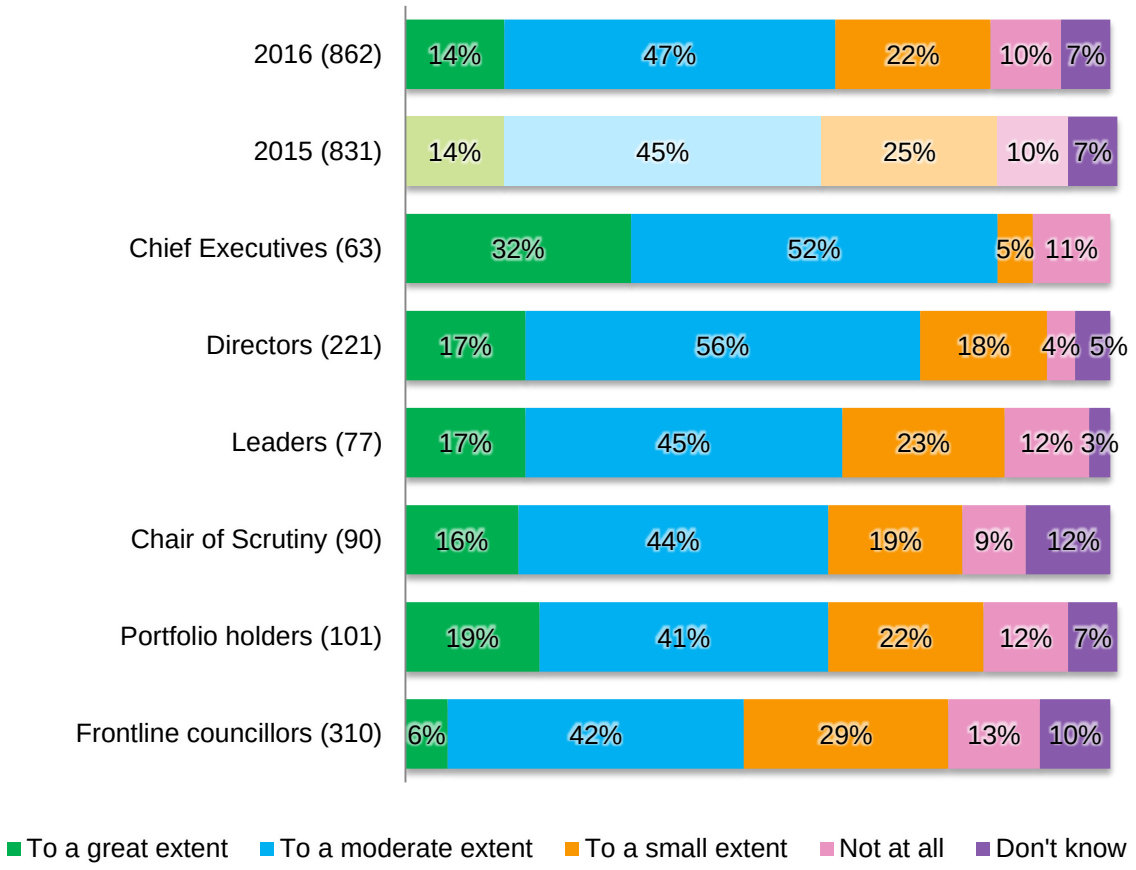


Bases in parentheses, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

When thinking about the resources discussed above, plus others that the LGA offers, 61% of respondents feel that these have had a positive impact on their authority which again is consistent with 2015. Conversely, 32% feel that these LGA resources have had a small impact or none at all.

Results by role are largely consistent with 2015, with Chief Executives continuing to be most likely to view the resources as having a positive impact on their authority (84%). However, Portfolio Holders are significantly less likely to feel this is the case than they were in 2015 (59% compared to 73%).

Figure 16: Overall, thinking about these sector-led improvement resources and any others the LGA offers that you know about, to what extent do you think that these have had a positive impact on your authority? (Cross-tabulated by role type)



Bases in parentheses, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

Analysis by region shows that those in the West Midlands (79%) and North East/Yorkshire and Humber (75%) are more likely than the national average to view these resources as useful, while those in the North West (48%) are less likely than the national average to do so.

5.4 Support

Ongoing support from the LGA is valued in all of the areas outlined in the survey, with at least three quarters of respondents saying they should continue to provide support. There has also been a significant increase in the desire for ongoing support in the areas that were included in the 2015 survey, but it should be noted that the 2015 included a question prior to this exploring levels of confidence in each of these areas, and the removal of this question in 2016 may have caused a general increase at this question[3]:

- 91% feel the LGA should continue to provide support in *saving money/making* efficiencies compared to 63% in 2015;
- 83% feel the LGA should continue to provide support in *transforming/digitising services* compared to 57% in 2015; and
- 78% feel the LGA should continue to provide support in *identifying and delivering commercial opportunities* compared to 64% in 2015.

Figure 17: Do you think the LGA should continue to provide support in the following areas?

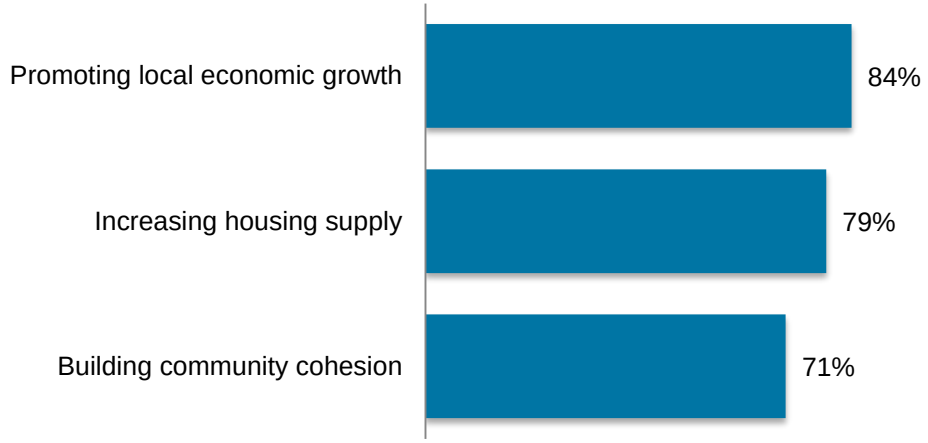
Base = 862, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

[3] In the 2015 survey there was little correlation between the areas in which respondents indicated they were confident and those in which they indicated they wanted ongoing support.

5.5 New areas of support

When asked if they would like to see new areas of support provided by the LGA, there is a high level of interest in each area, ranging from 84% in relation to *promoting local economic growth*, to 71% in relation to *building community cohesion*. While three in ten (31%) indicated other areas of support they would like to see provided by the LGA, these were very disparate, with *health and social care* (6%) the only issue mentioned by more than 2% of respondents.

Figure 18: Which of the following new areas of support would you like to see provided by the LGA



Base = 862, single response question
Source: survey of LGA members

5.6 Awareness and use of Local Partnerships

Local Partnerships is a company jointly owned by HM Treasury and the LGA which provides commercial expertise to public sector organisations on planning and delivering complex projects. Consistent with 2015, a half (50%) of respondents have heard of Local Partnerships. Awareness remains broadly consistent by region, but varies significantly by role, ranging from 90% of Chief Executives, to 37% of Portfolio Holders.

Of those aware of Local Partnerships, over a third (35%) are aware that their council has used Local Partnership services in the last year, which again is consistent with 2015 (31%). Reported use of Local Partnerships is consistent by role, but significantly higher among those in Metropolitan Districts (58%).

Of those who have used services provided by Local Partnerships, 69% express satisfaction with them, which is a decrease of 10-percentage points from the 79% who were satisfied in 2015 although similar to the levels of satisfaction in 2014.

Just 4% of those who have used Local Partnerships services are dissatisfied with them which is consistent with the 3% in 2015.

Sub-sample bases are insufficiently robust to consider this by role or region.

6 Conclusions

This section contains a summary of the main findings and themes emerging from this research, which are in large part consistent with the 2015 Stakeholder Perceptions Survey. Where differences are apparent these have been noted below.

- There continues to be a high level of awareness of the LGA and the work it undertakes, with understanding generally high, but varying by specific job role, with Frontline Councillors, followed by Chairs of Scrutiny, having the least understanding overall and Chief Executives and Leaders the highest.
- Levels of advocacy remain high, particularly for Chief Executives and increasingly so for Leaders.
- Satisfaction with the work of the LGA remains high, maintaining the increase achieved in 2014.
- All but two respondents find at least one of the activities undertaken by the LGA useful, with *providing up-to-date information about local government*, *lobbying on behalf of local government* and *providing a single voice for local government* seen as particularly useful.
- The two areas identified most commonly as suitable priorities for the LGA are *funding for local government* and *economic growth, jobs and housing*. However, a majority agree that *adult social care and health, children's services and education, sector-led improvement* and *devolution* should also be priorities.
- Over four in five believe the LGA keeps them very/fairly well informed about their work, maintaining the uplift achieved in 2015. Respondents are most likely to find out about the work of the LGA via 'first' magazine, media work/press releases, events and conferences and the LGA website, and most likely to engage with the LGA via responding to consultations.
- Awareness of the sector-led improvement approach has maintained the gains achieved in 2015, with just over half now saying that they have heard a lot/a moderate amount about this. Agreement that this is the correct approach has also maintained the gains made in 2015, with seven in ten agreeing that this is the case.
- Awareness of specific LGA resources to support sector-led improvement varies but is largely consistent with 2015 with the exception of *practical support to help councils save money,* which has seen a significant increase in awareness. Amongst those aware of these resources, most feel that they are useful to councils. More generally, a majority also believe that the resources provided by the LGA have had a positive impact on their authority.
- A majority would like LGA support to continue in all key areas, in particular in relation to *saving money/making efficiencies*.
- Half of those interviewed are aware of Local Partnerships, in line with 2015. Of those aware of Local Partnerships, a third are aware that their council has used Local Partnership services, and of these seven in ten are satisfied with them, although this does represent a decline since 2015, where eight in ten did so, returning to the levels achieved in 2014.

Appendix 1: Standard error

The following table shows the maximum standard error for each of the region and role types considered in this report.

Category	Number in sample population	Number of interviews achieved	Maximum standard error (%)
Region			
East	2,390	130	±8.4
East Midlands	1,906	111	±9.0
London	1,745	71	±11.4
North West	2,374	93	±10.0
South East	3,333	167	±7.4
South West	1,827	96	±9.7
West Midlands	1,645	103	±9.4
North East/Yorkshire and the Humber	2,029	91	±10.0
Amalgamated role type			
Officers	1,473	284	±5.2
Frontbench Councillors	2,139	268	±5.6
Frontline councillors	13,637	310	±5.5
Role type			
Chief Executives	288	63	±10.9
Directors	1,185	221	±6.0
Leaders	166	77	±8.2
Chairs of Scrutiny	609	90	±9.5
Portfolio Holders	1,364	101	±9.4
Frontline councillors	13,637	310	±5.5

Appendix 2: Statement of Terms

Compliance with International Standards

BMG complies with the International Standard for Quality Management Systems requirements (ISO 9001:2008) and the International Standard for Market, opinion and social research service requirements (ISO 20252:2012) and The International Standard for Information Security Management ISO 27001:2013.

Interpretation and publication of results

The interpretation of the results as reported in this document pertain to the research problem and are supported by the empirical findings of this research project and, where applicable, by other data. These interpretations and recommendations are based on empirical findings and are distinguishable from personal views and opinions.

BMG will not be publish any part of these results without the written and informed consent of the client.

Ethical practice

BMG promotes ethical practice in research: We conduct our work responsibly and in light of the legal and moral codes of society.

We have a responsibility to maintain high scientific standards in the methods employed in the collection and dissemination of data, in the impartial assessment and dissemination of findings and in the maintenance of standards commensurate with professional integrity.

We recognise we have a duty of care to all those undertaking and participating in research and strive to protect subjects from undue harm arising as a consequence of their participation in research. This requires that subjects' participation should be as fully informed as possible and no group should be disadvantaged by routinely being excluded from consideration. All adequate steps shall be taken by both agency and client to ensure that the identity of each respondent participating in the research is protected.

With more than 25 years' experience, BMG Research has established a strong reputation for delivering high quality research and consultancy.

BMG serves both the public and the private sector, providing market and customer insight which is vital in the development of plans, the support of campaigns and the evaluation of performance.

Innovation and development is very much at the heart of our business, and considerable attention is paid to the utilisation of the most up to date technologies and information systems to ensure that market and customer intelligence is widely shared.