

Frontline service delivery – as important as ever

By **Jonathan Mackie**, Enterprise



So, now we know, the public sector isn't just going on a financial diet, it's having a gastric band fitted.

Whilst most acknowledged the urgent need for spending reductions, few envisaged the magnitude of those cuts. We will have to wait until this Autumn's spending review before the full extent of spending reductions are

fully revealed, but what is now apparent is that Local Government faces a period of unprecedented financial constraint.

The budget presents an opportunity to re-evaluate the role of Local Councils. Localism means that many different solutions will emerge in response to local circumstances and the possible general power of competence will also mean different things to different Councils.

What is certain is that discretionary spending programmes will be those most affected. Where Councils once had programmes focused on stimulating local economies, in the future those will likely be unaffordable.

Unaffordable doesn't of course mean un-necessary. In the new financial climate, more creative solutions to supporting local economies will be required. That's why protecting frontline services will be so important. Features of successful places are excellent frontline services, cleanliness, amenity and well maintained assets and infrastructure.

Broken, underfunded and underperforming services like street cleansing, grounds maintenance and highway and footpath maintenance are cursors to poorly performing local economies with all their associated social issues. Private sector economic recovery is not independent from strong, successful local public services. As spending reductions bite, those setting budgets would do well to remember the vital role of frontline, street-based services in successful local economies.

Enterprise and other companies like us delivering frontline services should be acutely aware of the economic imperative of the services we deliver for Councils. Delivering to contractual specifications is not enough.

We have been conscious of the spatial context of service design. We have never viewed the services we provide; street cleansing, waste collection, housing maintenance and the maintenance of open spaces as only functional, but recognise the influence those services have on the performance of places.

Our neighbourhood approach to service delivery is evidence of this spatial context. By co-ordinating all environmental services and delivering them simultaneously in a neighbourhood, we are able raise performance across all service areas significantly. The result is better places which can support and sustain economic activity.

So the new funding constraint doesn't have to cut off completely local Councils' support for their local economies. Creating successful places through effective frontline service delivery can be as important as traditional business and employment support services. But as those discretionary services are diluted, ensuring successful frontline services is more important than ever.

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