



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

**RTPI
Research
Paper**

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APPENDIX 2: LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY SURVEY

Results from the national online survey



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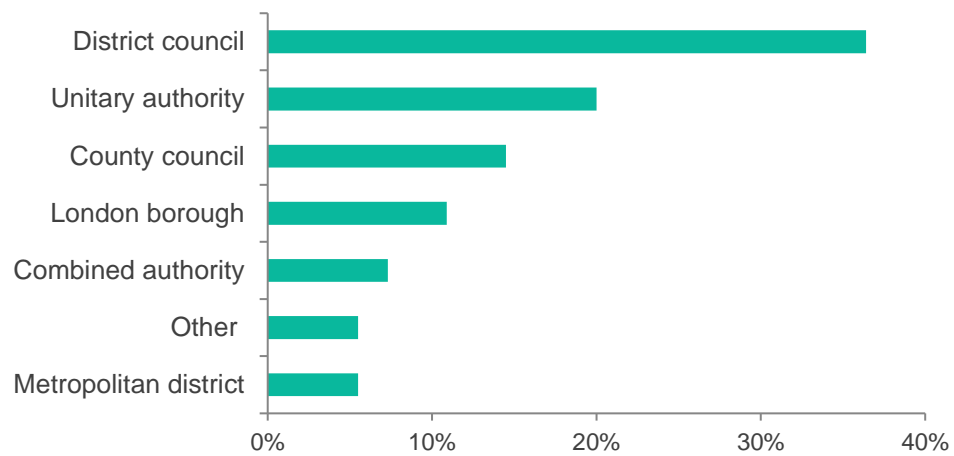
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The survey

The survey questionnaire was posted on www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk between May 5th and June 19th 2019. Responses were sought from local planning authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland by means of an invitation communicated through a range of membership databases. This included those of the Royal Town Planning Institute, the County Councils Network and the Local Government Association.

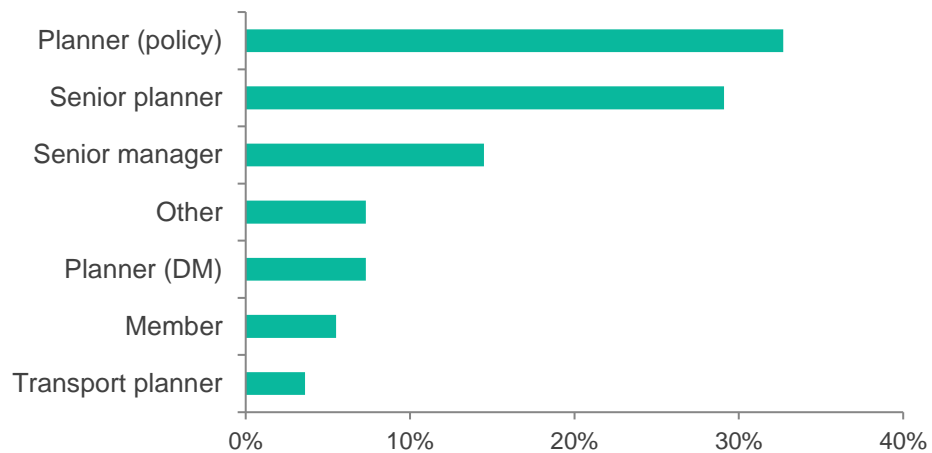
A total of 56 responses were received. The vast majority of respondents (89.1%) were located in England, with a small number of responses received from Scotland (7.3%) and Wales (3.6%). The distribution of respondents by type of local planning authority is illustrated below.

Figure 1: Respondents by type of local planning authority



The majority (two thirds) of the survey responses were completed by planning officers, with other responses returned by elected members and senior officers. The distribution of responses by respondent is illustrated below.

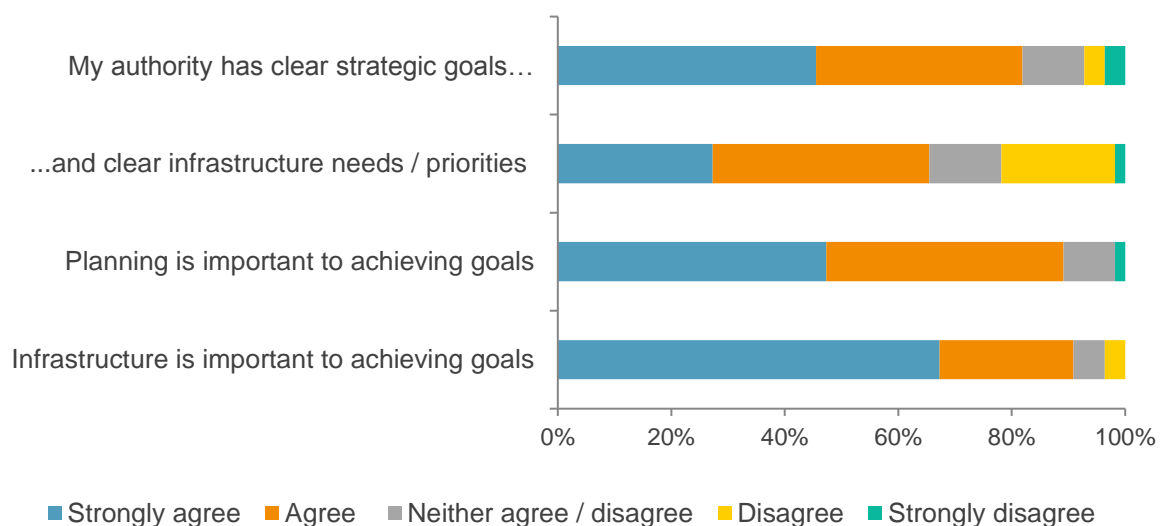
Figure 2: Respondents by job title



Strategic goals, planning and infrastructure needs and priorities

The research team wanted to explore whether local planning authorities had clearly articulated aims and objectives (at corporate level), the importance afforded to infrastructure and planning to achieving these outcomes, and whether the above was informed by a rigorous understanding of local infrastructure requirements. Participants were asked to rank the degree to which they agreed / disagreed (according to a Likert scale) with a set of statements about the strategic goals of the local authority, the extent to which planning and infrastructure were important mechanisms for achieving these goals, and whether the authority had clearly defined infrastructure needs and priorities. Responses are illustrated below.

Figure 3: Strategic goals, infrastructure and planning, local needs and priorities

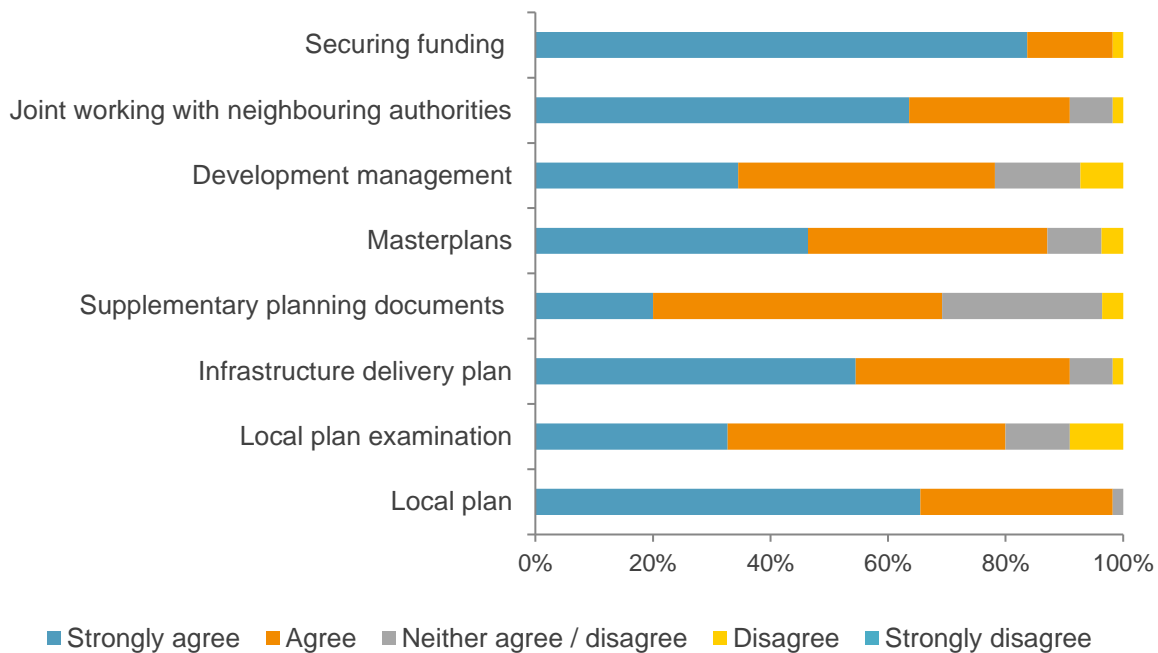


The majority of participants were notably more confident in stating that their authority had clear strategic goals (45.5% “strongly agree”), that infrastructure and planning were deemed important to achieving these goals (47.3% and 67.3% “strongly agree”) than they were that their authority had a thorough appreciation of the area’s infrastructure needs and priorities (only 27.3% “strongly agree”).

The planning process

We wanted to establish which planning processes and mechanisms were deemed to be of greater or lesser importance to the pursuit of integrated infrastructure planning. Participants were asked whether they considered different aspects of planning “important” in achieving their infrastructure goals. The responses are illustrated below.

Figure 4: Importance of tools of planning policy and practice for integrated infrastructure planning

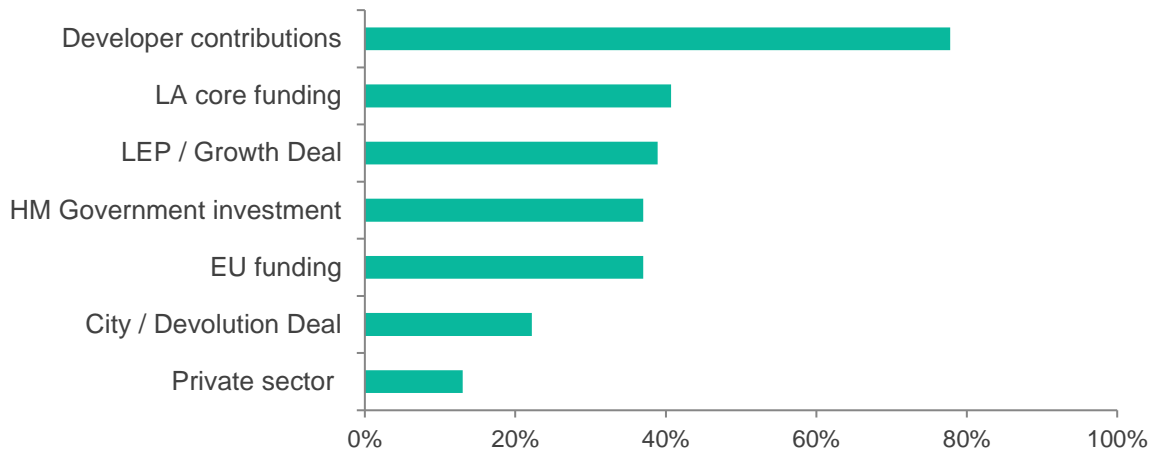


The elements of the planning “toolkit” most frequently identified as being important for integrated infrastructure planning were, in order of importance: **securing funding** (83.6% “strongly agree”), reflecting the imperative to generate income during a period of austerity and the entrepreneurial ‘turn’ in planning that this signifies; the **preparation of the Local Plan** (65.5% “strongly agree”), reaffirming the core role of the Local Plan in ‘place making’; and, **collaborating with neighbouring planning authorities** (63.6% “strongly agree”), demonstrating the importance of working at a ‘larger than local level’.

Funding

The availability of funding is, of course, a key determinant in the delivery of infrastructure projects and the impact of austerity on public expenditure, generally, and planning and development, in particular, has been well documented. Participants were asked to list the principal sources of funding for infrastructure in their area, selecting a maximum of three sources from a given list. The results are illustrated on the following page.

Figure 5: Principal sources of infrastructure funding (% of respondents, multiple responses possible)

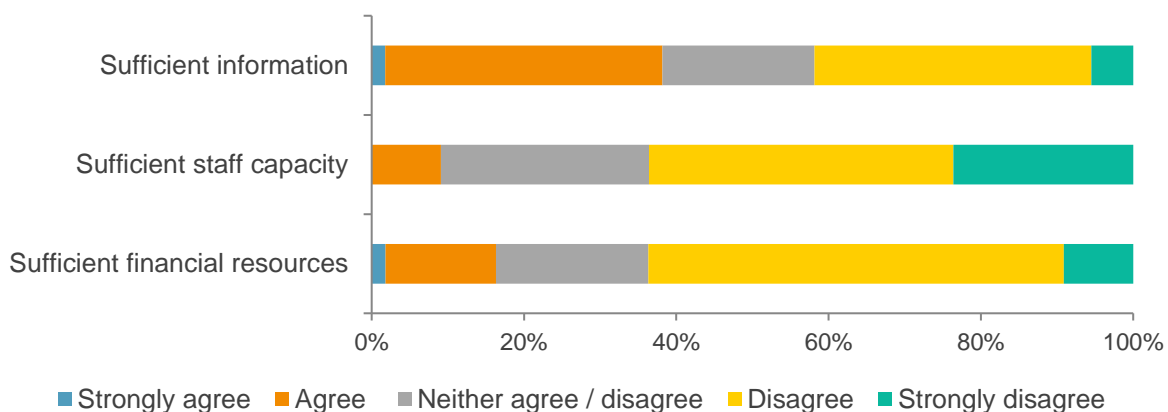


The most common response by far was **developer contributions** which was identified as a key source of infrastructure funding by more than twice as many respondents as any other option. It is important to note that the definition of “infrastructure” is important here as different types of infrastructure are funded through different mechanisms. The figures represent participant perceptions of infrastructure funding rather than the objective reality of different funding sources. In practice, developer contributions are the default mechanism through which the immediate funding deficit for local projects, set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plans, is addressed. Conversely, ‘big ticket’ infrastructure developments – i.e. long planned, major schemes – are funded primarily through programmed, mostly **core local authority or central government, investment**.

Resources

The reduction in central government grants to local authorities has been accompanied by a corresponding contraction in staffing levels, with planning particularly negatively affected. The research team were keen to explore the extent to which the resources (broadly defined) available to local authorities are commensurate to the task of delivering needed infrastructure outcomes. Participants were asked whether they considered their local authority to have sufficient finance, staff and information to support effective infrastructure planning. The responses are outlined below.

Figure 6: Local Authority confidence in resources for infrastructure planning



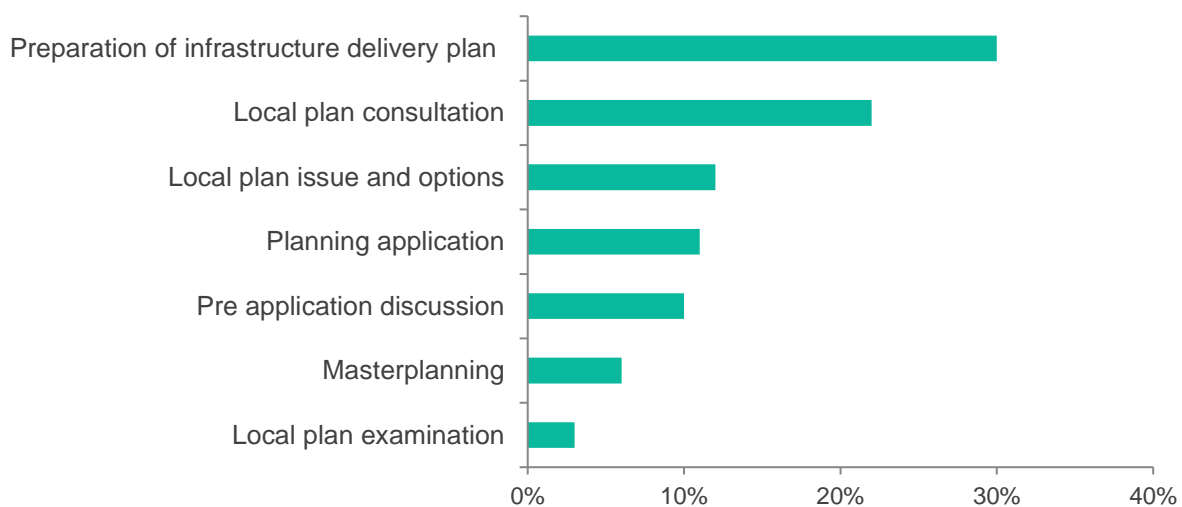
The responses are the most emphatic to any question in the survey. Participants reported that local authorities are experiencing **an acute shortage in financial resources** – only 1.8% of respondents “strongly agreed” that their authority had sufficient monetary resources - and staff – **no respondents at all “strongly agreed” that their authority had sufficient human resources** – to support effective infrastructure planning.

Engagement

The UK is characterised by a clear separation between planning for infrastructure, on the one hand, and infrastructure investment and delivery, on the other. Local authorities are substantially dependent on third party organisations – statutory agencies, private utilities – to meet the infrastructure needs of their area. We were, thus, keen to explore the broad topic of stakeholder engagement in infrastructure planning.

We sought to determine how local planning authorities engaged providers – public and private – in infrastructure planning. Participants were asked which stages of the planning process were important in respect of engaging infrastructure providers, selecting a maximum of three stages from a given list. Responses are illustrated below.

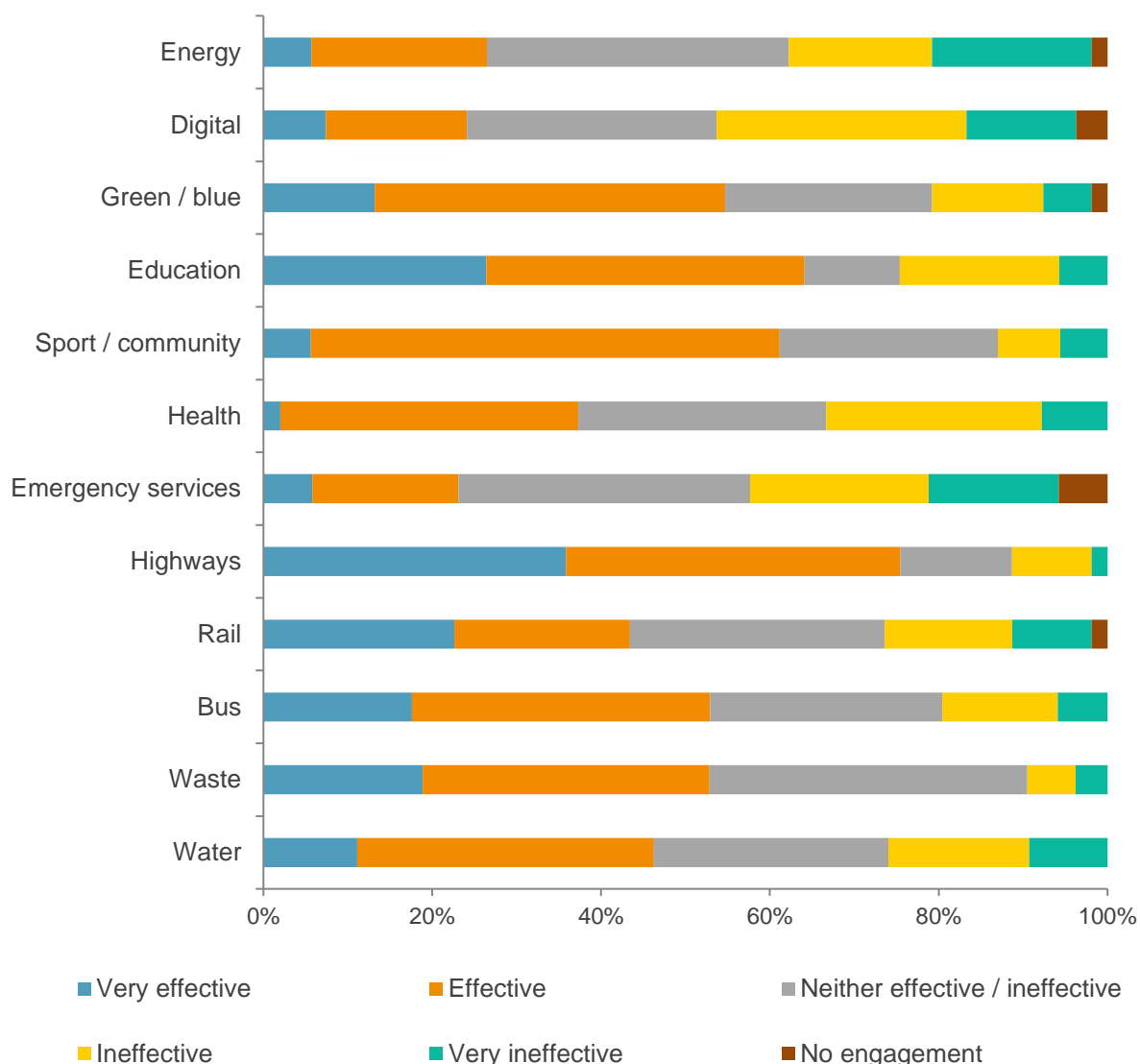
Figure 7: Engagement with infrastructure providers happens mostly at ...



The responses indicate, once again, **the primacy of the Local Plan process to infrastructure planning**. The most common responses were that engagement happens at the local plan consultation stage (22%) and in formulating the infrastructure delivery plan (30%).

It is logical to expect that local planning authorities will engage in different ways with different infrastructure providers and, thus, encounter different sets of challenges in so doing. We were, therefore, keen to explore that differential experience of engagement, by sector. Participants were asked to rate how effective their engagement with different infrastructure providers is. The results are illustrated on the following page.

Figure 8: Effectiveness of engagement with infrastructure providers, by sector



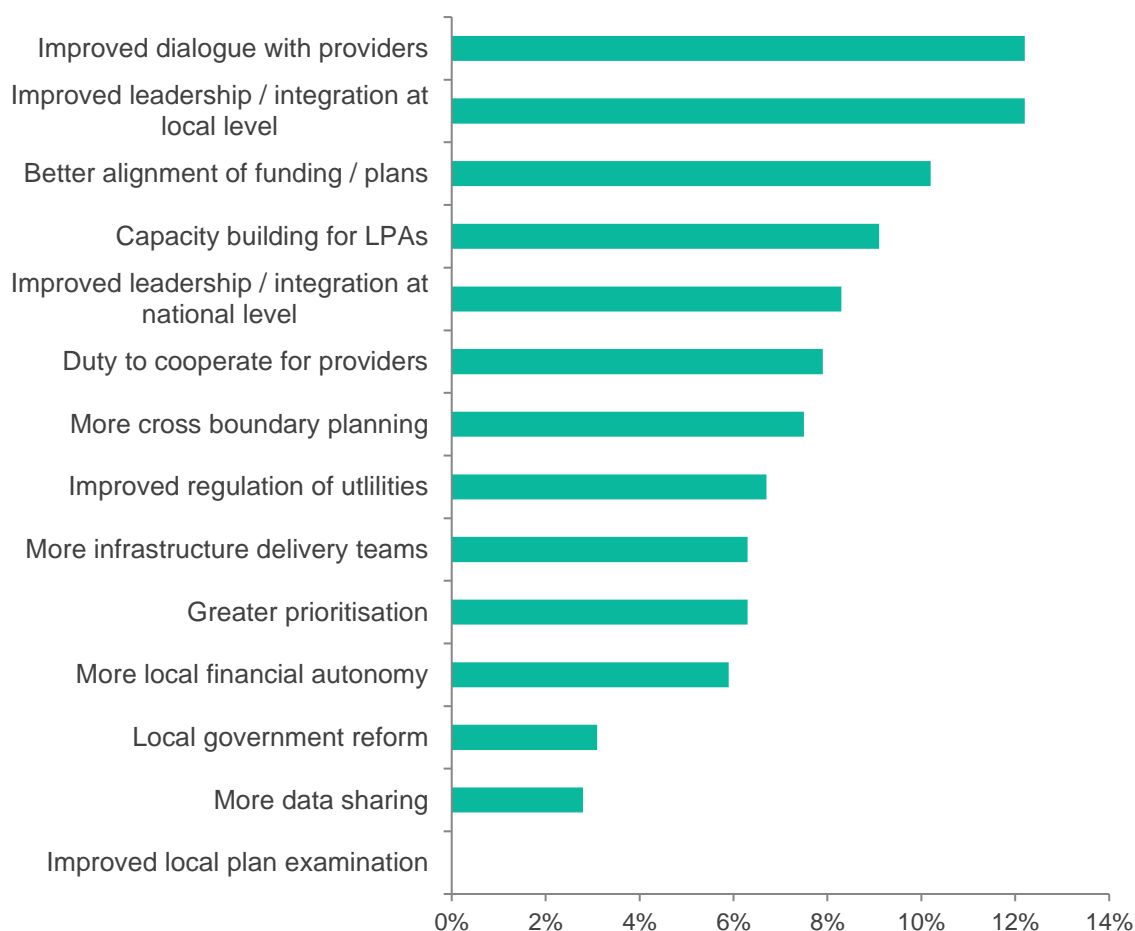
The results are diverse and surprising. It is not possible to draw general conclusions between sectors. In some respects, **local planning authorities experience significant difficulties engaging with other statutory organisations**. The health sector is conspicuous in this respect, with only 2% of respondents rating engagement with the NHS as “very effective”. Conversely, some 35.8% of respondents rate engagement with Highways England as “very effective”, the most positive response for any sector. In the private sector, **energy and digital providers stand out as notably problematic**, whereas **the water sector emerges as a much more effective partner**.

Respondents were given the option to provide some qualitative commentary on the drivers of and obstacles to effective engagement. The key enablers of positive engagement were: an **established networks of contacts** (especially named contacts within each of the key partners); and, **the capacity for local planning authorities to deliver infrastructure ‘in house’** – i.e. where the council is both planner and provider, a role played for some types of infrastructure by the County and unitary authorities. The primary obstacles were, unsurprisingly, the mirror image of these factors: **a lack of effective networks and named contacts**; a problem of capacity and **lack of understanding on the part of infrastructure providers**; and, a fragmentation of different sectors, with **diverse sets of political and regulatory impediments to collaboration**.

What would help?

We were keen to explore what respondents considered would help improve infrastructure planning. Respondents were asked to select up to five priorities from a given list. The results are illustrated below.

Figure 9: Improvements to infrastructure planning



Interestingly, the most common responses are (resources permitting) within the power of local government itself to deliver; **improved leadership at a local level** (12.2% of respondents) and **earlier engagement with providers** (also 12.2%). On the other hand, other key issues are systemic challenges that requires central government commitment to address: **better alignment of funding and plans** (10.2%); **capacity building** for local government and providers (9.1%); and, **improved leadership at national level** (9.1%).

Participants were given the option to elaborate on their ideas by providing a qualitative commentary. The responses were grouped into various clusters: resources – there was **an absolute paucity of funding** but, additionally, **a lack of long term funding**, too much **short term competition** and **inadequate freedoms and flexibilities** for local authorities to raise and spend revenue locally; capacity – interestingly, **capacity** (finance, staff, know how) was identified as **a systematic problem, affecting local planning authorities and providers alike**; fragmentation – the governance landscape was noted to be too complex, a problem compounded by devolution; and, regulation – **a need to incentivise provider participation was widely noted**.



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For more information about this research visit:

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