

Delivering Through Change

Enabling local government
to deliver buildings
and infrastructure



Delivering Through Change

2026 is unfolding as a banner year for local government. As momentum builds behind shifting policy in central Government, and amidst ongoing economic uncertainty, councils across the country are looking to turn national policy into regional delivery across housing, infrastructure and more. Many of them are also beginning the involved process of local government reorganisation (LGR).

For two decades, SCAPE has worked with councils to accelerate procurement, strengthen capacity and de-risk delivery in the public built environment, enabling projects to move from ambition to action with confidence. As part of our ongoing commitment to this work, we speak directly with local government organisations to get a real-time sense of the challenges and opportunities they are facing.

Working with the LGIU (Local Government Information Unit), SCAPE has conducted an exclusive survey of senior local and regional authority officers to understand how they are navigating these changes and where they need support to ensure delivery is not compromised.

Delivering Through Change brings these objectives, barriers and opportunities into focus. The message from councils is eye-opening: as the data captures, delivery capacity is under strain long before construction begins. Early stage pressures (scoping, business cases, commercial expertise and procurement) are where projects most often stall. Inflation and market volatility continue to reshape budgets, and the stop—start nature of national policy adds further complexity. As a result, some of the UK's most transformative ambitions in regeneration, housing and transport are the ones most vulnerable to delay. Amidst pressure coming from central government and honouring commitments to communities, it is more important than ever to understand the impact of these pressures — and for those of us who work in partnership with councils to leverage that understanding to bring stability where it is in shortest supply.

This report provides a snapshot of where local government stands today, but also a potential roadmap for the decade ahead. What do councils really need to overcome these barriers? How are their delivery ambitions evolving in the face of change? And to what extent do they feel ready and supported to take on local government reorganisation — and how can delivery partners best work with them to achieve their goals?



Caroline Compton-James
Deputy Chief Executive, SCAPE

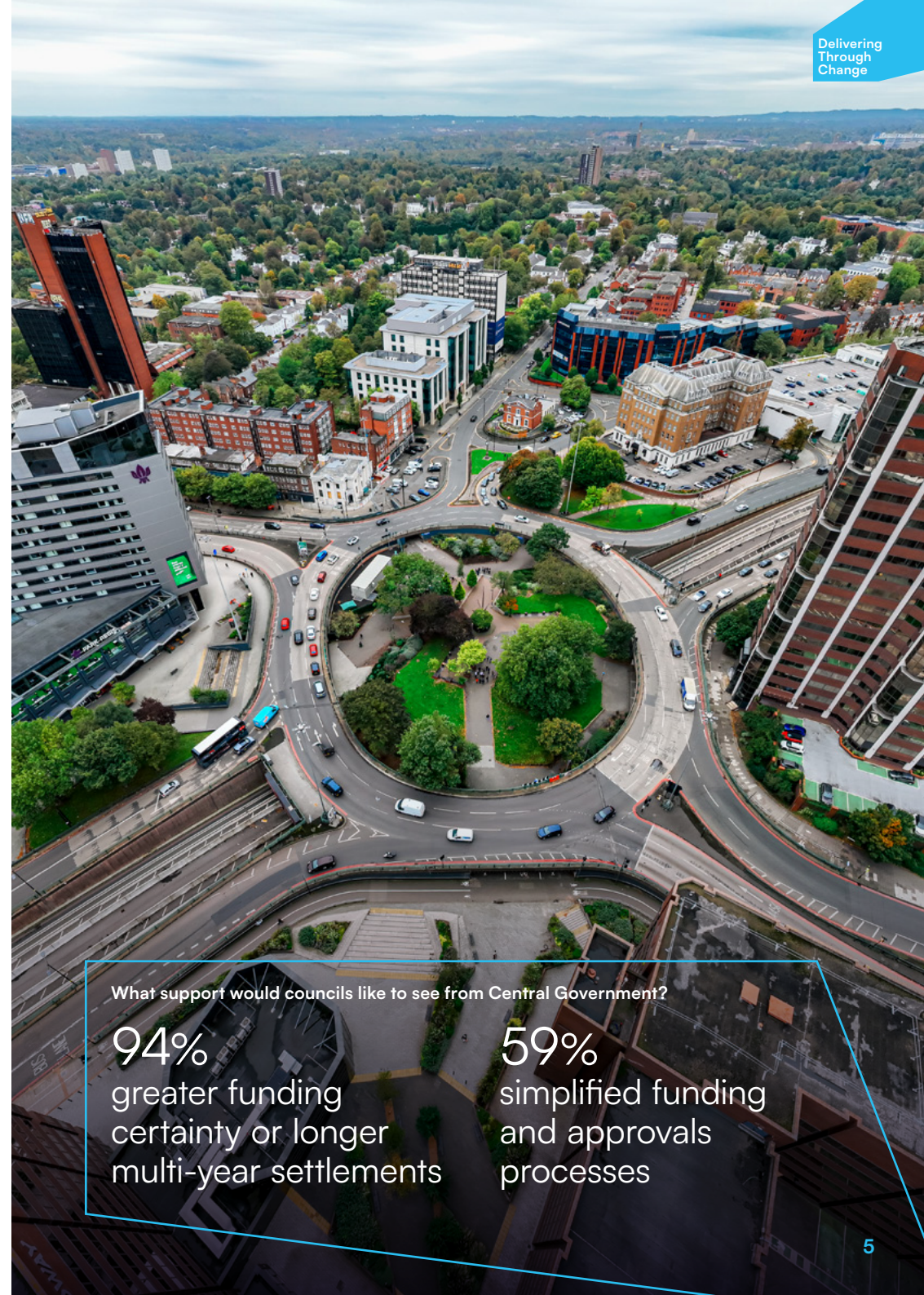
The delivery drag: how turbulence at the centre hits local build ambitions

Local and regional authorities are navigating challenging times: national pressures and circumstances beyond their control are shaping their confidence in their ability to deliver.

This shows very clearly in our survey results, which indicate that the greatest constraints on public building and infrastructure delivery stem from macroeconomic turbulence and uncertainty over national policy and funding. Cost inflation, shifting policy signals and unpredictable funding environments are creating a stop—start cycle that undermines confidence and disrupts even the best developed plans. The data shows this instability is felt most acutely in the early stages of projects: when businesses cases are formed, procurement routes are set, and scoping and planning work takes place.

Given this, it is no surprise that when asked what support councils would like to see from central government to capitalise on current opportunities, an overwhelming 94% said greater funding certainty or longer multi-year settlements. Streamlined or simplified funding and approvals processes came in at a close second, with 59% of respondents citing it as a change that would help.

At the same time, the data reinforces that council teams are still contending with significant gaps around in house expertise, recruitment and retention. The responses align with SCAPE's 2025 insight report, A Year of Change: Public Good, Public Building in which we advocated for regional skills mapping to solve the nationwide skills gaps needed to deliver large scale projects. Those early stage tasks take longer, carry more risk, and are harder to resource consistently when the right skills are not in place. Pressures compound the external volatility, leaving councils stretched just when clarity and certainty are most needed.



What support would councils like to see from Central Government?

94%
greater funding
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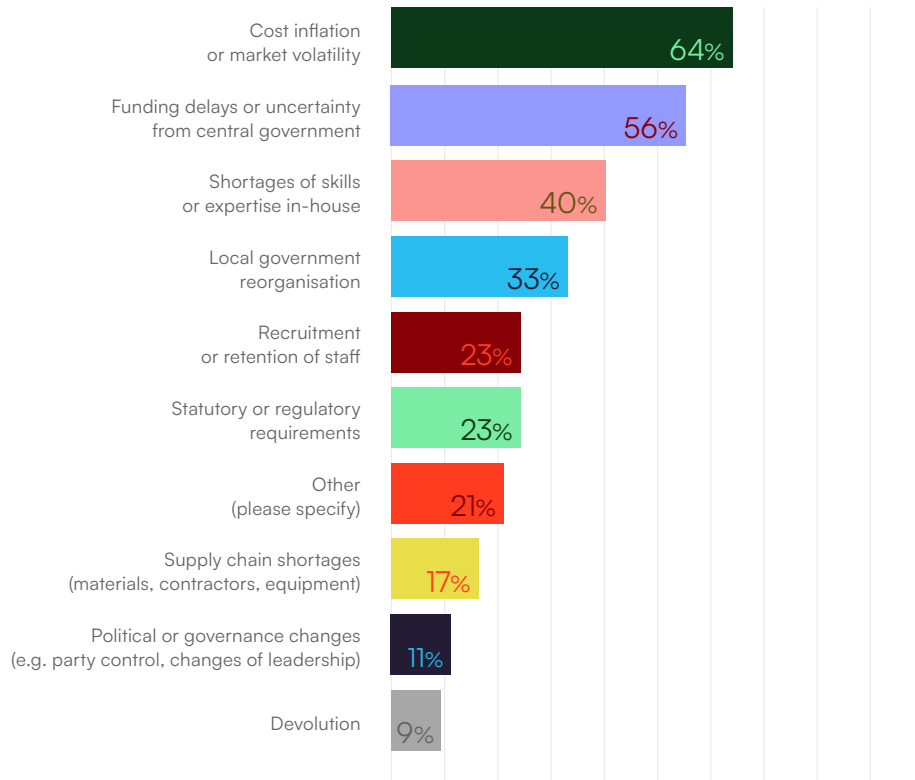
59%
simplified funding
and approvals
processes

What this means for national policy

Delivery challenges are felt earliest in the project lifecycle, long before construction begins. Uncertainty around funding, approvals and policy direction creates risk at the point where business cases are developed and procurement routes are set. Addressing these upstream pressures — through greater certainty, early-stage capability and clear routes to market — is critical to enabling delivery at pace and scale.

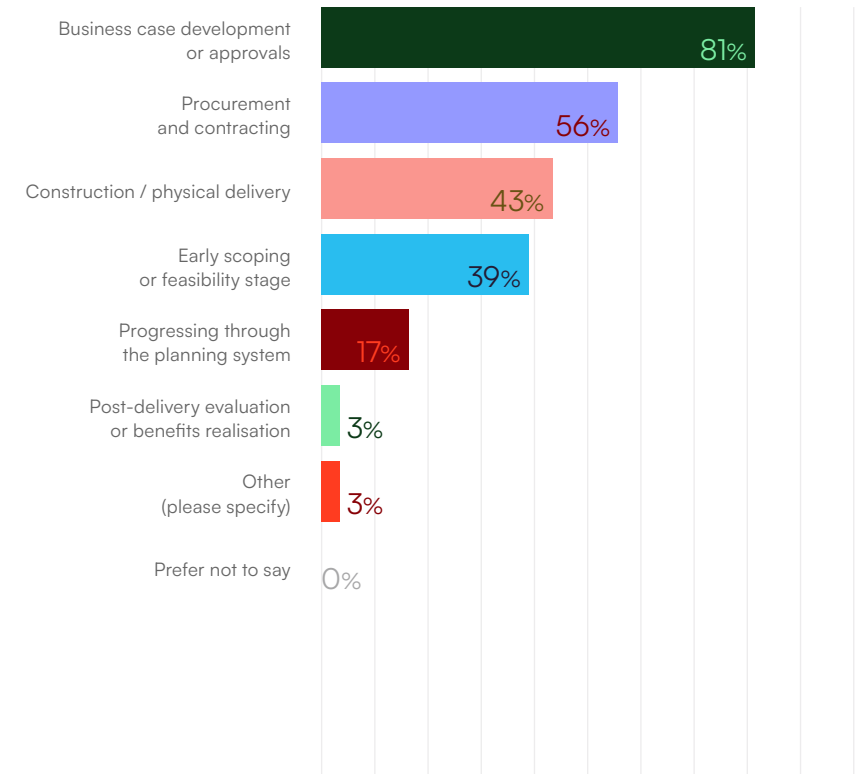
Question:

Which of the following represent the greatest constraints on the delivery of your council's capital and infrastructure projects?



Question:

In which stage of project delivery are these constraints most likely to be disruptive?

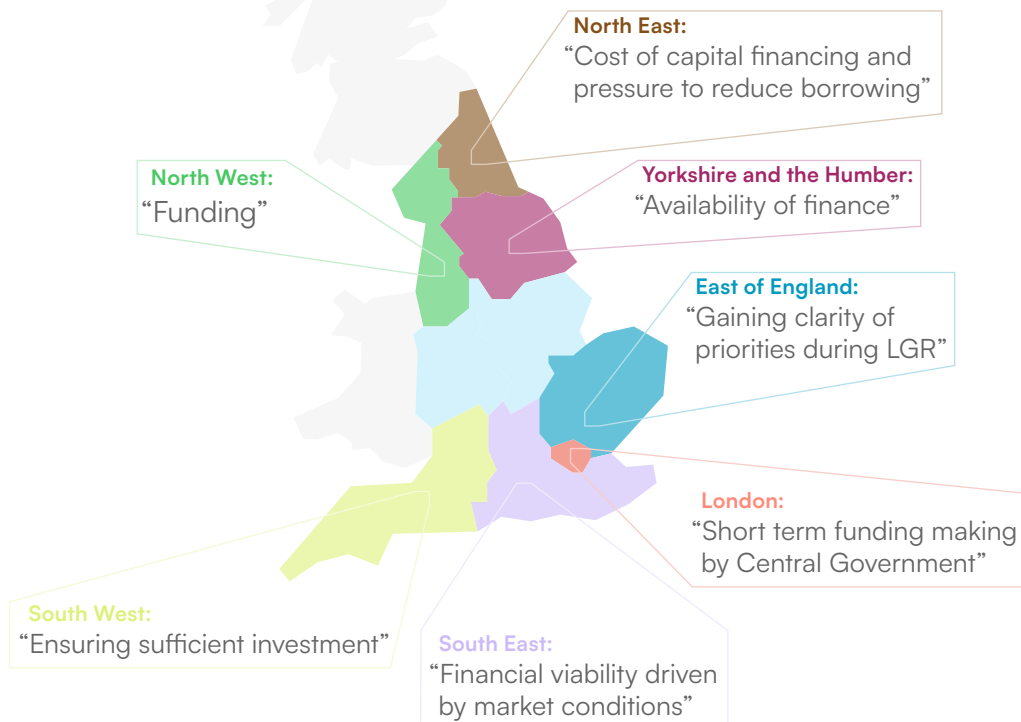


Pressure and potential: mapping England's delivery tests

We asked survey respondents to tell us, in their own words, what the single biggest project delivery challenge and opportunity would be in the next two years. The following answers make up a small selection of responses, but they are illustrative of the type of answer that came up again and again.

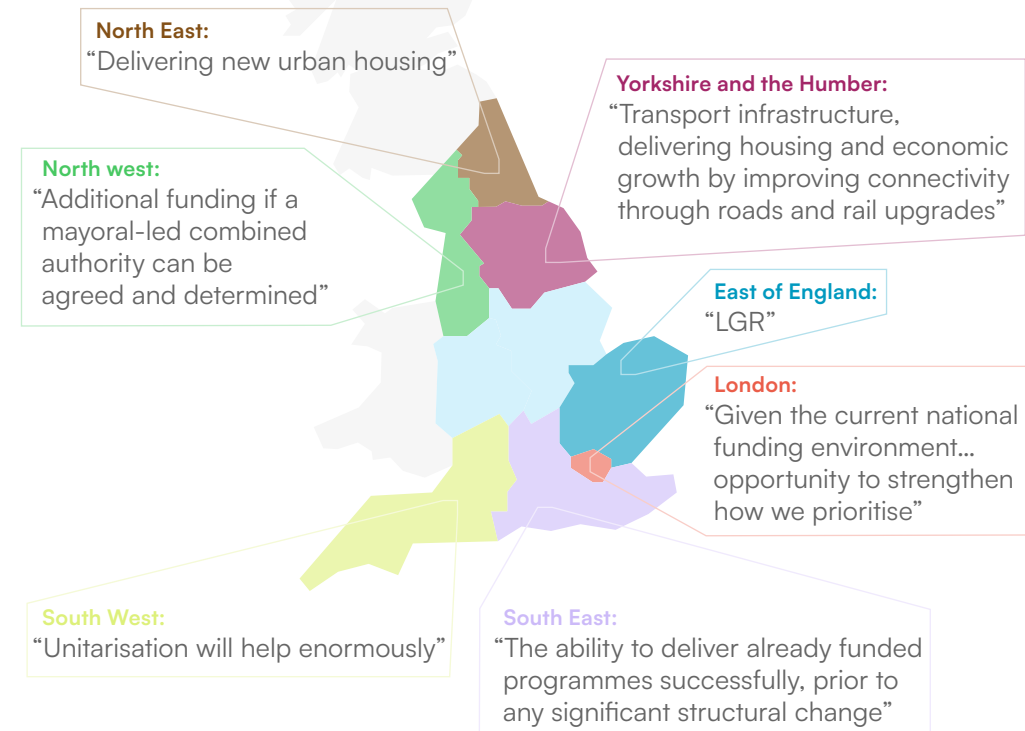
Question:

What do senior council figures think will be the single biggest project delivery challenge in the next two years?



Question:

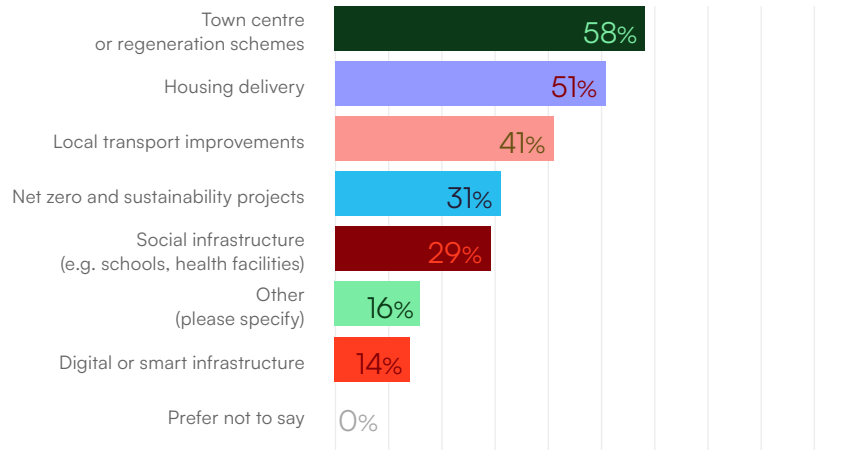
And what do they think is the single biggest opportunity?



Volatility bites: evolving ambitions and innovative solutions

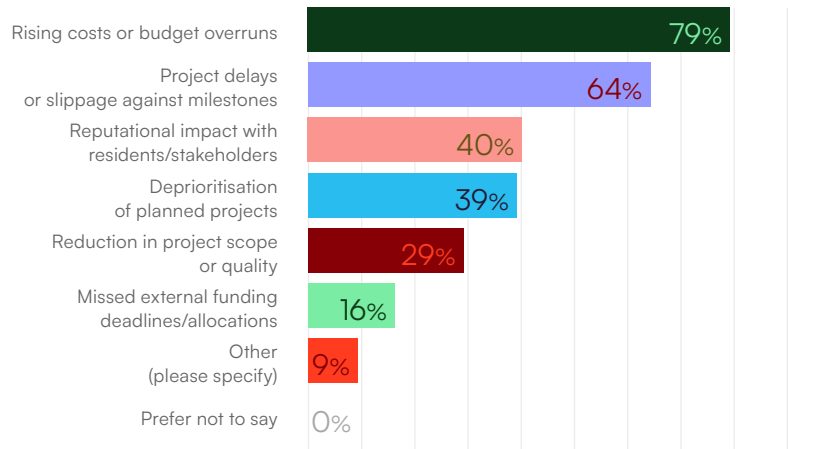
Question:

Which types of projects are most exposed to disruption in your authority?



Question:

What have been the most common consequences of these disruptions for your authority?



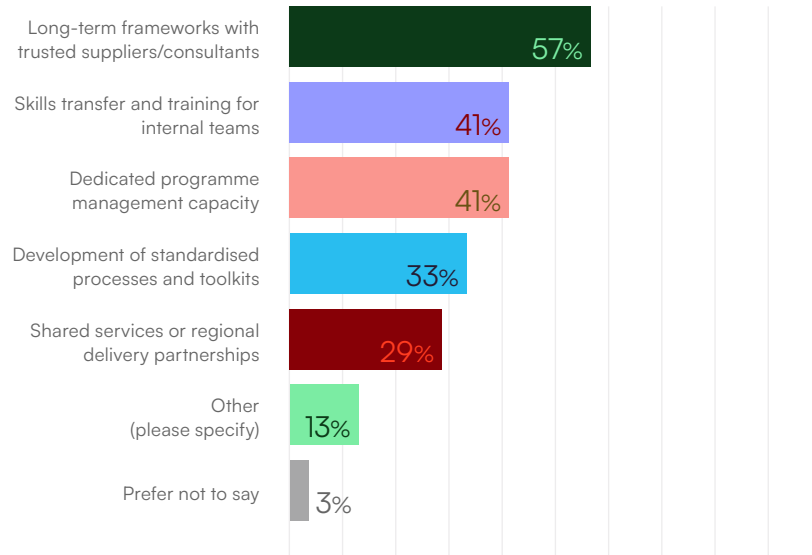
Local authorities are having to make increasingly difficult choices about where to focus their delivery capacity, and the survey shows a marked shift in ambitions.

According to the data, the projects most exposed to disruption are also those with the highest long term value for communities — and those that have been most talked up in central government - regeneration, housing and transport. While they sit at the heart of national policy ambition, they require delivery conditions that are often hardest to sustain at a local level. These programmes tend to be multi-year, capital intensive and reliant on stable funding and specialist expertise, which makes them particularly vulnerable to volatility at a national level. As a result, the data demonstrates that the projects take the biggest hit when it comes to rising costs and budget overruns, closely followed by timeline slips and project delays. With the government’s 1.5 million homes target looming large, that puts councils and their delivery partners under significant pressure.

By contrast, councils report that social infrastructure, technology upgrades and energy schemes are less prone to disruption. These projects are typically more modular, benefit from clearer scopes, and depend less on major external market conditions.

Question:

What type of additional support would be most valuable in building long-term resilience (beyond single project delivery)?

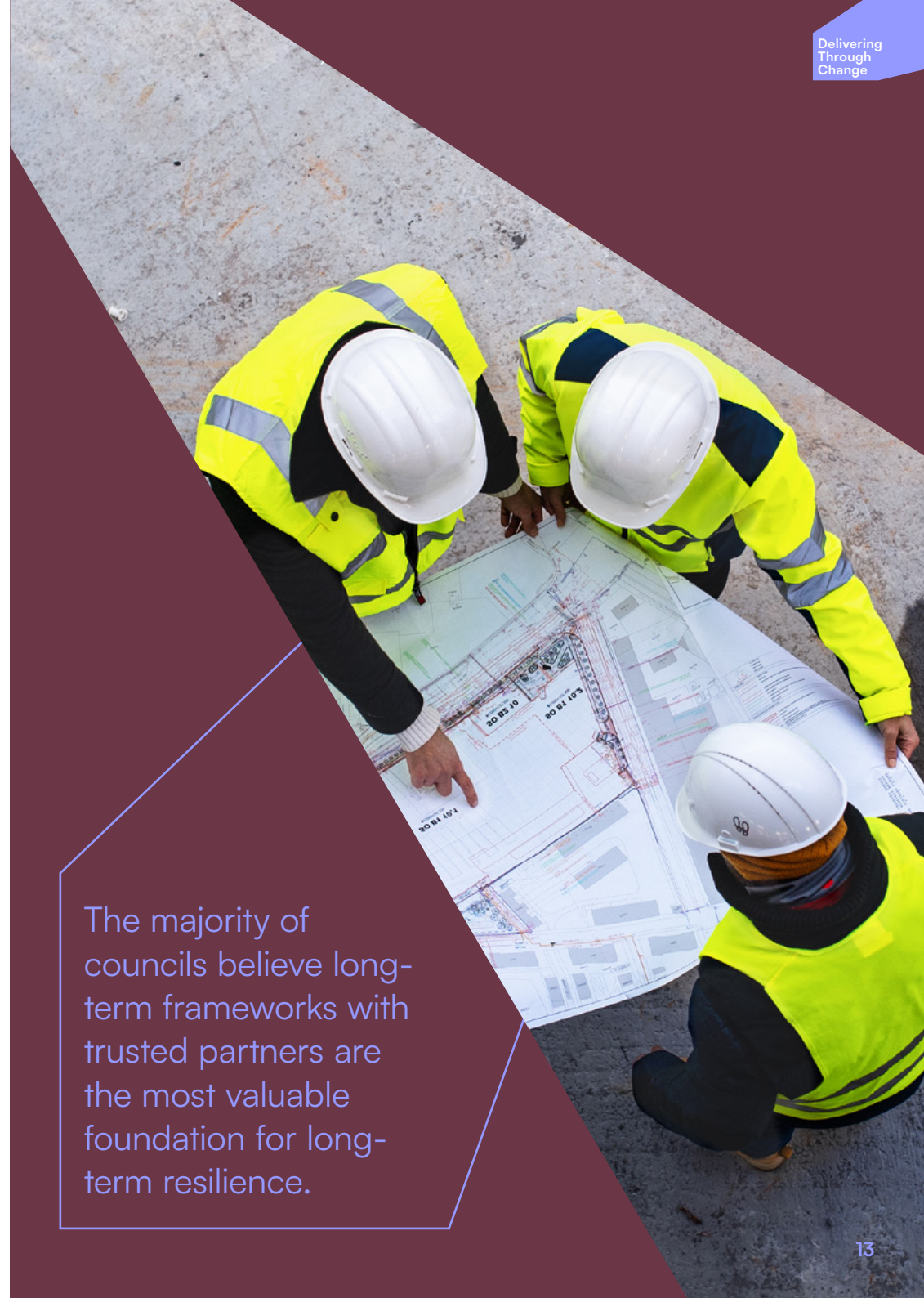


However, the characteristics that drive vulnerability — complex approvals, interdependencies, high commercial risk, and protracted planning — also point towards the solutions. When asked which areas they would most benefit from additional support, those that came out on top for councils were early-stage feasibility and business case development (43%), commercial advice and risk management (40%), and procurement and route-to-market strategy (27%). But councils also recognise that getting the route to market right is foundational to addressing these pressures. The majority of councils believe long-term frameworks with trusted partners are the most valuable foundation for long-term resilience.

These provide continuity at a time of volatility, enabling authorities to access expertise early, reduce risk at the point where projects are most vulnerable, and maintain momentum through periods of change. Used well, frameworks are not simply a procurement mechanism, but a delivery enabler — bringing clarity, capability and confidence into the earliest states of project development, before challenges escalate.

This approach reflects SCAPE's long-standing role in supporting councils to navigate uncertainty and move from policy ambition to delivery with confidence.

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Arc Partnership, a joint venture between Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) and SCAPE, has been fundamental to the success of NCC's service delivery, providing consistent, compliant and high performing full-service capability across its land and property portfolio for a decade.

Its multi-disciplinary services include strategic client advice, estates and development management, design, project and commercial management, regeneration, construction services and planned and reactive maintenance on behalf of NCC.

Through Arc Partnership, NCC has reduced procurement risk, accelerated project delivery and ensured strong value for money.

As noted by Wayne Bexton, Director of Economy, Environment and Assets, at Nottinghamshire County Council:

“To date, Arc Partnership has delivered 3,511 projects — which equates to more than £394 million worth of investment, of which an impressive £344m has been spent locally.”

With 93% of the commissioned work delivered by local SMEs, Bexton adds:

“This is fantastic news for the local economy; Arc Partnership is dealing with businesses here in Nottinghamshire and employing local people — with 95% of its team living locally, which is incredible.”

Through strategic collaboration between Arc Partnership and NCC, using both SCAPE frameworks and the local supply chain to deliver projects, NCC was able to ensure predictable outcomes even during periods of economic and organisational change, including during the pandemic.

This has afforded the Nottinghamshire County Council much-needed early stage confidence, delivery continuity and the capability required to manage complex property and construction programmes effectively, unlocking opportunities that were previously out of reach.

arcpartnership



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Supporting authorities through change



Local government reorganisation and devolution have been a frequent news topic, and we wanted to understand how they are affecting delivery of local authorities' capital and infrastructure projects. What we found was that around one third of council officials listed local government reorganisation among their top three greatest constraints, but fewer than 10% said devolution was a top concern.

This raises questions about why local government reorganisation is perceived as so much more disruptive than devolution. Perhaps some of the answers lie in the fact that authorities report benefits of the preparation for devolution. In SCAPE's conversations with mayoral candidates, for example, even those whose devolution timetable has been delayed, many say the local authorities in the area are talking to each other more than ever before. These discussions are often concerned with agreeing priorities and a pipeline of potential projects to enable the elected mayor to focus on delivery from day one in post.

However, amid this optimism, it is helpful to understand that where local government reorganisation is a concern, it is likely to be the early stages of project delivery that are most likely to be disrupted — potentially derailing or delaying projects at a time when continuity of delivery will be particularly vital. This is where councils facing reorganisation are likely to need most support.

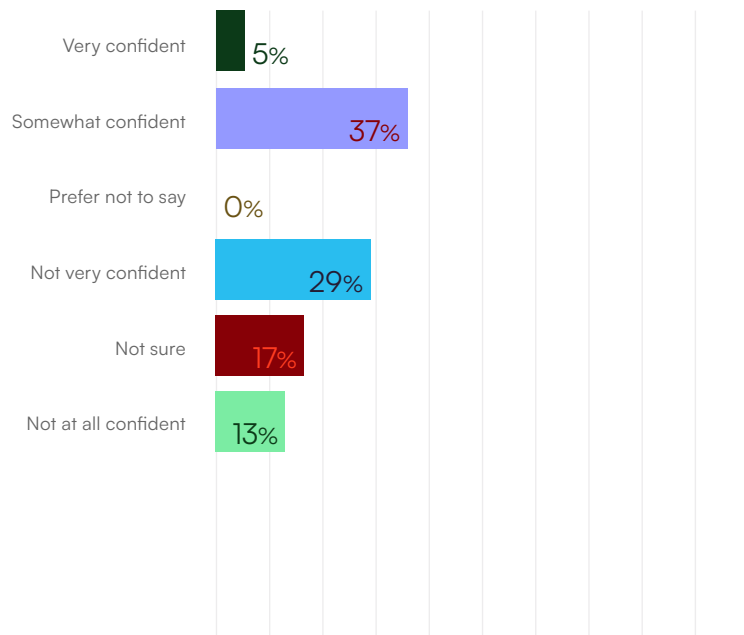
In practice, this means ensuring continuity around project pipelines, procurement routes and early-stage decision-making during periods of reorganisation, so that projects already in development are not paused, reset or lost as governance arrangements change.

Nonetheless, 40% of senior council officers report that they are 'very' or 'somewhat' confident that their authority will be able to maintain delivery momentum over the next two years, compared with 40% who say they are 'not very' or 'not at all' confident, and a further 17% who say they are not sure. Sharing best practice from councils that are confident in their delivery, while working closely with authorities that are concerned about momentum will be a central task of the next few years.

Question:

How confident are you that your authority will be able to maintain delivery momentum over the next two years given the current policy and funding environment?

Please select one:

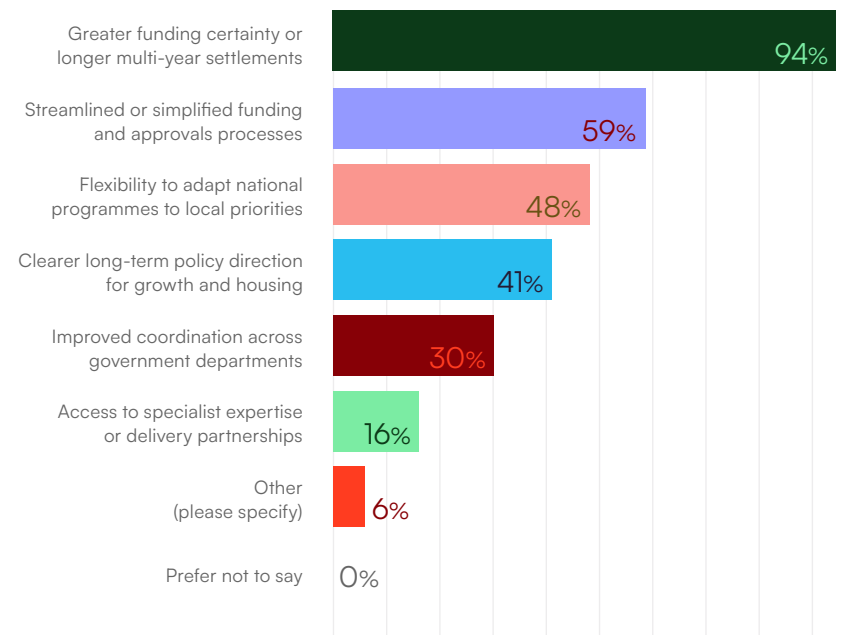


Similarly, supporting authorities to navigate funding options and approval processes will be key to providing practical support, given that this is what senior council officers say would most help their authorities capitalise on current opportunities.

Question:

Looking ahead, what additional support or clarity from central government would most help your authority capitalise on current opportunities?

Please select up to three:



What next?

The next two- to three-years represent a critical delivery window for local government. As reorganisation, devolution and renewed national policy ambition converge, the challenge is no longer defining what needs to be delivered, but ensuring that councils have the capacity, certainty and capability to move from intent to implementation. The ways in which delivery is enabled during this period will have a lasting impact on outcomes for communities.

The insights revealed through this research are striking. They show a public sector that is ambitious, pragmatic and determined to deliver on its public building and infrastructure targets - but also one whose confidence is being shaped by external pressures, and far earlier in the project lifecycle than many might assume. Councils are clear eyed about the challenges as they approach this period of local government reorganisation: volatility in national policy and economics, gaps in early stage capacity, and the complexity of progressing major regeneration, housing and transport schemes against an ever-evolving backdrop. Yet just as importantly, they are clear eyed about the solutions.

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Enabling delivery through change

Councils are clear about what will make the greatest difference in this period of change:

Greater certainty earlier in the project lifecycle, particularly through multi-year funding settlements and clearer approval pathways.

Stronger early-stage capability, including business case development, commercial expertise and procurement strategy, to reduce risk before projects reach site.

Long-term, trusted delivery models, such as frameworks, that provide continuity, reduce friction and enable momentum to be maintained through periods of organisational change.

As momentum builds behind local government reorganisation, it is important to keep sight of this clarity. The coming years will bring significant structural change, new governance models and a renewed expectation that local and regional bodies will be able to convert national priorities into local outcomes quickly and confidently. The survey tells us that councils already know what will make the biggest difference here: long-term frameworks, shared capability, stronger early stage expertise, and more coordinated regional delivery.

What happens next must build on that understanding. Looking to the rest of 2026 and beyond, there is a real opportunity to leverage the momentum building behind local government reorganisation and elevate delivery from a project by project struggle to a strategic, region-wide approach. Combined authorities and new unitary structures can become vehicles for shared services, pooled programme management, and standardised processes that reduce duplication and accelerate decisions. Councils have told us what will work: they want consistency over quick fixes, and support that builds resilience rather than dependence. This includes focusing support upstream, where early-stage decisions, procurement routes and delivery capacity have the greatest influence on long-term outcomes.



As government continues to devolve power and sharpen its focus on economic growth, the need for reliable, collaborative and future focused delivery models has never been greater. At SCAPE, we will continue to focus on being a trusted advisor bringing our experience directly to councils navigating this period of change, supporting them to move from managing disruption to shaping long-term success.

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Methodology

SCAPE commissioned LGIU to conduct an anonymous survey of senior officers in different councils in England, with the aim of gathering quantitative data on the challenges and opportunities facing local government ahead of local government reorganisation.

The survey, which ran between October and December 2025, generated 70 individual responses from senior officers across 63 different councils.

The level of seniority varied across the uppermost tiers of organisational structures, with our sample comprising Top-Level Directors and Heads of Service.

The survey consisted of 14 questions, all bar two of which were multiple choice questions.

70
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63
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About SCAPE

SCAPE is one of the UK's leading public sector procurement authorities, dedicated to creating spaces, places and experiences that leave a sustainable legacy within the community. Owned by, and managed for, the benefit of the public sector, SCAPE provides time and cost-effective support throughout the design, development, and construction process.

Since 2006, SCAPE has supported over 12,000 projects across the UK with their compliant, competitively tendered frameworks. Working closely with 24 construction, civil engineering, consultancy and utilities partners, SCAPE has a buying power of £21bn and is currently performance managing over 1,800 live projects. SCAPE is a contracting authority and centralised purchasing body that offers frameworks compliant with the Public Contracts Regulations and the Utilities Contracts Regulations across England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. New frameworks procured in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will be compliant with the Procurement Act 2023. Its suite of consultancy, civil engineering, construction and utilities frameworks have achieved Gold Standard verification through Constructing Excellence and the highest level of compliance for the Carbon Reduction Code.

 **Constructing Excellence**
Gold Standard Verified



SCAPE is part of the National Association of Construction Frameworks (NACF), the UK Green Building Council (UKGBC) and Build UK, and was named in The UK's Top 75 Best Mid-Sized Companies to Work For list for 2025 by Best Companies.



Supported over

12,000
projects

£21bn
buying power

24
delivery
partners

 **SCAPE**

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