Brave new world?
Different ways of working

Pressure Points
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Today’s pressures, particularly coping with cuts and ever rising demand, will significantly impact on the way public services are delivered in future, whether by public sector organisations themselves or by a mixed economy of other providers.

There is, however, one important difference. For private and voluntary sector providers of services, increasing demand is a source of potential growth and profit. But for many public sector providers, it can present a headache given reduced headcount and budgets. And this is compounded for some where their own innovations, such as new medical treatments, can actually increase demand even further.

So how will today’s pressures determine how tomorrow’s services are delivered? How can public sector providers respond and best manage demand? And what are the organising principles and approaches that need to be adopted?

This publication discusses the balance to be struck between supply and demand and the emergence of agility as the key organising principle for tomorrow’s public services.
Introduction

Since the publication of the Spending Review in 2010, the focus for most in the public sector has been on reducing cost. On top of the £81bn of spending cuts already planned by 2015, it is now clear that those at the centre of government expect the public sector recession to continue well into the next Parliament, perhaps extending to 2020.

The Coalition had originally promised to clear the structural deficit, a persistent imbalance between government spending and receipts, in five years, starting in 2010. Last year, the Chancellor stated that an additional two years would be required and also floated the need for £10bn more in savings from the welfare budget in the next few years.

As the economy has continued to falter, against the background of Eurozone instability, tax revenues have been eroded and welfare spending pushed up, adding to the mounting pressure for further spending cuts. This has culminated in the following chilling commentary from Sir Jeremy Heywood, the Cabinet Secretary, who told civil servants at the Institute for Government in June: “We are 25 per cent through fiscal adjustment. Spending cuts could last seven, eight, ten years,” comments that were more recently echoed by the Prime Minister.3

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3 Comments by the Prime Minister in The Daily Telegraph, 19 July, 2012.
This publication is taken from a chapter in our book, Under Pressure, which sets out our views on the next phase of delivering public service reform – dealing with public services ‘under pressure’. In this extract, we discuss the balance to be struck between supply and demand and the emergence of agility as the key organising principle for tomorrow’s public services.

**Grasping the nettle**

Although some areas of the public sector were relatively protected from the worst of the cuts in the last Spending Review, such as in health and education, others, particularly in local government, have already grasped the nettle. This is evident in our recently published survey on local government, although even in this sector many have yet to identify areas for future savings (see below).

### ‘The (local) state we’re in’

Local government has been remarkably successful so far in cutting costs, suggesting there was ‘fat to trim’. Over 90% of local authorities responding to our 2012 local government survey expected that they would deliver at least their targeted level of savings in 2011/12; indeed just over one third were expecting to exceed their target for the year. And the levels of confidence shown by both chief executives and leaders about achieving their savings targets in 2012/13 are similarly relatively high, although there appears to be more concern from leaders about the impact on the quality of service delivery and achievement of desired outcomes.

**Figure 1: Amount of future savings identified**

![Figure 1: Amount of future savings identified](image)

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Looking further ahead, there is less confidence from chief executives and leaders about the achievement of savings targets in 2013/14 and a number of respondents commented on the fact that they were expecting the situation to become more challenging again. These views are perhaps not surprising when we consider that nearly 40% of chief executives reported that they still had to find solutions to deliver at least 50% of their identified funding shortfall between now and April 2015. This issue was a cause for concern for both leaders and chief executives.

**A smaller state, a willing public?**

The expectation must therefore be that most public sector entities will be smaller in future, employing fewer staff and delivering fewer of their services in-house. The impact of spending cuts can be seen in the speed with which headcount has been reduced already, with over 200,000 jobs lost in local government and a 10% fall in Civil Service staff in the 12 months to June 2012.5

As well as cutting headcount, financial pressures are forcing attention on the extent to which service provision can be curtailed, either by reducing the number of services delivered or by restricting their scope. But our 2012 local government survey revealed reluctance among council leaders and CEOs either to close frontline services or alter eligibility criteria. Most of the ‘easy’ cuts have already been made, and few are willing to contemplate cuts to core services as a next step, particularly as public opinion seems to be hardening, with public acceptance falling for local cuts (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Public acceptance of savings**6

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Barnet’s experience testifies to this strength of feeling: a group of sheltered housing residents scored a very public victory against the ‘easyCouncil’ approach when they successfully appealed against Barnet’s decision to remove 24-hour wardens costing £1.3m p.a., on the basis that it breached the council’s duties under the Disability Discrimination Act.

This is clearly problematic as public bodies cannot deliver the necessary savings by merely cutting around the edges. As the CEOs/leaders in our local government survey acknowledge, the scale of savings required can only be achieved through reducing spend on ‘essential’ (and costly) core services, such as adult social care.

**The challenge of demography**

Even though the scale of the cuts already announced is concerning to many, and has already resulted in action on the supply side, a real worry now emerging for many is the future pressures on demand.

Our population is ageing. The proportion of individuals aged 65 and over continues to increase; in 2010 over 65s made up 17% of the population, and by 2051 it is expected to be 24%, with nearly a third of this group over 85. The ‘old age dependency ratio’, which measures the number of people of state pension age for every 1,000 people of working age, is also expected to rise from 310 in 2008 to 342 in 2051. Without the recent increase in the State Pension Age, the ratio would have climbed to 492.7

At the other end of the age spectrum we have seen a mini baby boom. There were nearly 17,000 more babies born in England and Wales in 2010 than 2009, the equivalent to over 650 additional classrooms when the children start school.8 Without offsetting tax increases or spending cuts, these demographic pressures could increase budget deficits and “eventually put public sector net debt on an unsustainable upward trajectory.”9

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Coping with demand – the new frontier

The findings of our recent local government survey\textsuperscript{10} underscore the significance of the growth of demand for public sector providers – it emerged as the greatest challenge to local authorities, with 69% of council CEOs identifying rising demand as a significant or major challenge (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Barriers to achieving future savings\textsuperscript{11}

How challenging do you expect each of the following issues to be in delivering your savings target for the remainder of the Spending Review period (until April 2015)?

The following factors are driving increasing demand:

- **Statutory duty**: doing things because of the requirements laid down in legislation and/or policy.
- **Public demand-driven spend**: doing things because we've been asked by the public.
- **Failure demand**: picking up the pieces where there have been failures in the delivery of a service that has been a key focus of council activities to date.
- **History**: things have always been done this way.

\textsuperscript{10} ‘The (local) state we’re in’, PwC, 2012.
\textsuperscript{11} ‘The (local) state we’re in’, PwC, 2012, page 18.
Changes in socio-economic and demographic circumstances, alongside rising public expectations mean that demand for many services, such as adult social care, is increasing and shows little sign of stopping. Action therefore needs to be taken to manage demand for those services, otherwise no matter how efficient public bodies become in delivering those services the costs will continue to rise.

**Demanding strategies**

So what can public bodies do to cope with the pressures of demand? It’s important to be clear from the outset that demand management does not mean simply delivering services only to some current service users. Instead, it requires public sector bodies and their partners to think about alternative ways to achieve the same outcomes and challenge the existing orthodoxy (see opposite).

**Managing demand – some key steps**

There are some practical actions that can be taken to influence demand (see Figure 4):

- Challenge the notion that nothing can be done about ‘statutory’ services, which often allow discretion in how they are delivered and ‘to what level’.
- Challenge tradition, for instance, the original public health reasons for local authorities to build and manage ‘public baths’, but this has long since disappeared.
- Understand the causes of demand and need, and identify points in the journey where early intervention could prevent future demands arising.
- Reduce dependency, manage public expectation through dialogue and communication, and identifying and supporting other ways to secure the necessary outcomes.
- In the longer term, work to transform the relationship between citizen and state with more individual ownership and control through greater involvement in co-creating services.
Participants at one of our roundtables with the think tank Reform felt that public sector bodies need to push further in questioning what is really needed, as opposed to accepting demand fuelled primarily by perceived expectations. Some key barriers were identified, such as perceptions of a lack of political will, rigid departmental boundaries and an unwillingness to ‘let go’ and allow local experimentation. In our view, however, there are solutions including changing behaviour, better engagement with citizens and investing in early intervention and prevention as well as improved communications, as discussed further below.

**Changing behaviour**

‘Nudge’ methods, as set out by Thaler and Sunstein and developed in a UK context by the Cabinet Office’s Behavioural Insights Team, hold some promise. Nudges do not constitute a panacea, but it is clear that savings can be made by finding innovative ways of encouraging and enabling people to make better choices for themselves. Two examples help illustrate the point.

In one trial orchestrated by the Insights team, HMRC netted an additional £1m in voluntary disclosures after adapting the letter sent to doctors to chase outstanding tax liabilities. The changes involved simplifying the wording and highlighting key messages. The letter also included a cautionary note, stating that failure to pay in the past was regarded as an oversight but future failure to respond would be seen as a conscious decision.

Similarly, a trial in Bedford cut missed NHS appointments by 31% by simply prompting patients to repeat the time and date of their appointment; asking them to fill in the appointment card; and sending a reminder telling them how many patients turn up on time.

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Engaging with citizens

Closely linked to changing behaviour is better engagement with citizens. Co-design and co-production has been heralded as a means of increasing both the quality and efficiency of services and improving engagement, as discussed in our international benchmarking study with Demos. Advocates argue that by involving citizens in the allocation and delivery of services, public sector organisations can better understand and meet the needs of their users while also exploiting previously untapped community resources. Involvement in the process, it is claimed, also helps manage public expectations by exposing citizens to the realities of allocating a limited budget. The logic behind these contentions is clear, but does the evidence sustain it? Do communities have both the desire and capacity to support service development and delivery?

The evidence so far suggests the answer is a qualified ‘yes’, though the value gained varies depending on the form of user engagement. Personalisation appears to have achieved positive outcomes in the limited contexts in which it has been tested. The NAO’s recent report on personal care budgets found that a majority of users experienced an improvement in mental wellbeing (63%) and heightened sense of personal control (72%), with only 3 – 8% feeling worse off overall. Still, it should be pointed out that roughly a third reported some problems with assuming responsibility for employing staff and managing finances, and take-up was below that anticipated.

Personal budgets have so far been aimed at improving control and outcomes for users rather than reducing the cost of care, so the overall impact on cost has not been fully evaluated. The Department of Health did examine start-up costs in its evaluation of pilot schemes, but longer term costs are not yet clear. Local authorities are, however, relatively optimistic. For instance, 36% of authorities questioned in the NAO study cited personal budgets as a factor in achieving better value for money, and most found that users had better outcomes, made more effective use of the resources they had, and that care packages were structured more effectively.

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14 ‘Making the most of collaboration: an international survey of public service co-design’, Demos/PwC, 2008.
The potential value of participatory budgeting is less clear. The method of involving local people in making decisions on spending priorities has so far been used more as means of improving engagement than generating efficiencies, and has focused primarily on youth activities, crime and public safety, the environment, and sports and leisure. Extensive research by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) found that participatory budgeting can lead to different types of projects getting funding and enhance providers’ understanding of user needs, but that it works only as ‘part of a package of community engagement and empowerment’.18

More focused attempts at drawing users into decision-making processes have had a bigger impact. NESTA’s recent report on creative decommissioning highlights a good example from Thurrock. Recognising the expensive and inflexible nature of existing provision, the Director of Adult Social Care and the Service Manager for Provider Services engaged with service users to design a more effective, personalised alternative to institutional care. Together they built a coalition of support for closing day centres and finding a more effective, community-based solution. Thurrock Council eventually closed all of its multipurpose day centres and moved towards a contracting model, supporting the development of a specially created social enterprise run by and for service users – Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions – to provide more targeted, personalised support for adults with learning disabilities. The financial impact of this change is not yet clear, though savings are anticipated. This inclusive method of decommissioning could also potentially be applied to the seemingly intractable libraries issue. Drawing on community resources in service delivery may also yield results, though again the evidence is partial and slightly anecdotal in nature. NESTA’s Innovation Unit have piloted a promising new model of early years support in Reading, training parents to become mentors and buddies to other families. These mentors help parents to avoid crisis and put them in touch with professionals only when needed, generating better results and achieving savings of 25%.19

There are important qualifiers to add to any argument for co-production. So far there is no evidence that community groups can deliver large-scale, complex services, and as Birmingham University’s report on the future of local public services argues, councils will need to assume a stronger regulatory role to ensure that co-production does not disadvantage those who do not want or are not able to engage.  

Nor do all citizens or communities have the same will or capacity to respond. For instance, direct payments may entail risk in that people with limited financial expertise are required to manage money and procure services. Equally, there is also a heightened risk of fraud. The onus is therefore on public bodies to develop creative ways of involving citizens while ensuring fair and efficient outcomes.

**Early intervention and prevention**

Shifting resources towards pre-emptive action also promises to accrue savings by reducing demand later down the line. By addressing problems before they occur, via ‘upstream’ measures, public bodies can avoid the far greater expense (and damage to wellbeing) of tackling them once they have become manifest. This assumption has been a key driver of Glasgow council’s reforms to homeless provision. In an effort to divert funding from homeless shelters to the root causes of homelessness, Glasgow has scaled back on hostel provision and instead created a new set of services addressing the social and emotional dimensions to homelessness, including more intensive drug and alcohol addiction services, financial advice for those at risk of eviction, and better coordinated information. Since its implementation last year, repeat presentations are down from 23% to 10%.

However, even if the logic of moving upstream is compelling, the practical issues involved are complex, requiring long-term commitment and a major shift in priorities. Attempts at early intervention have not always been tangibly successful – the impact of Sure Start, for example, is hotly debated – and the strategy requires significant investment now while only delivering rewards much later. If and when these rewards do emerge, they can be very difficult to quantify, creating an evaluation bias against early action. This is perhaps why just 4% of the £110 billion annual budget for health is spent on public health and health promotion.

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20 ‘When tomorrow comes: The future of local public services’, Birmingham University, 2011.
Given the need for ‘evidence-based policy making’ and the immediacy of financial pressures, it is much easier to make the case for investing public funds in interventions where the outcomes are certain, and measurable benefits can be reaped quickly. Still, these barriers are not insurmountable and the approach represents one of few options with the potential for making really significant and sustainable savings. Swindon Council’s ‘Life’ programme demonstrates the savings to be made from developing more imaginative and cross-departmental interventions that help reduce future demand (see below).

**Helping Swindon’s troubled families**

Swindon’s Life programme aims to help families with complex needs turn their lives around. It was created in response to a familiar problem: despite considerable investment, local authority intervention seemed to be having little impact on the lives of families in crisis, and demand on local services was only increasing. In conjunction with Swindon’s strategic health authority, the local authority decided to change tack and put families in the driving seat.

Crucially, it is the families who recruit the professionals who will work with them, and they can draw on a range of local services including housing, police, the NHS and children’s and adult services. The families then work with the team to establish their priorities and how they will go about achieving them. This could include sorting out rent arrears, housing repairs, or managing a teenagers’ problem behaviour. The programme is still in its early days but has already been credited with saving hundreds of thousands of pounds and having a radical impact on the lives of those it involves. It is estimated that a further £1.5 million will be saved over the next two years.
Improving communications

The radical changes required to successfully address today’s challenges mean that communication with service users and the public more generally is of increasing importance. However, PwC’s latest local government survey revealed that the public feel ill-informed about the reasons for cuts and the effect changes will have on their experience of services – despite what some officers and councillors may think (see Figure 5). This may explain the reluctance to countenance radical change in the nature and scope of provision.

Figure 5: How informed do you think your residents and communities are of...

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Indeed, any major shift in the nature of service provision will require a concerted communications campaign, firstly to overcome what we found to be the public’s instinctive attachment to the existing situation in Chapter 1, and subsequently to negotiate a new public service agreement. Renegotiation requires intelligent dialogue between citizens and local authorities, and willingness on the part of the latter to facilitate the opening up of debate. Deliberations could, for example, factor in whether to implement local charges (explored further in our Charging Ahead publication) or even raise taxes in order to pay for service retention. Once such issues have been resolved, authorities should outline what the public can expect from the new settlement.

The Government has argued that the introduction of Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners will open up better lines of communication and accountability, but recent mayoral referenda results raise a question mark over their popularity. When considering other mechanisms for improving engagement between the community and local institutions, our Reform roundtable attendees indicated that more could be done to open digital channels, but warned that it could not be regarded as a complete answer, given access limitations and the different preferences of those who do not belong to ‘Generation Y’.

Making the most of new media

The fast-evolving world of social media has helped to transform the way that we as individuals go about doing things – how we socialise, interact with the world of work, contribute to communities as well as purchase goods and services and access and analyse information.

There are multiple potential benefits of applying social and digital media to service delivery and engagement. We believe social and digital media can add value where:

- There is a broad community of interest who would find value in being connected together, having access to information and the advice, support and opinions of others.
- There are tools or useful applications that can be provided to help individuals or groups to make decisions or progress through an activity.
- Support to an individual or group can be delivered through a social or digital media channel, or the connection made between need and service provision.

Social and digital media therefore provides an opportunity to go beyond exchanging information and transform services by rethinking current service delivery, engagement or communication models with a fresh perspective, while recognising that social and digital media can only form part of a way of working. But for the benefits of social media to be fully realised, investment needs to be accompanied by ambitious service and process redesign that genuinely delivers a transformed customer experience while avoiding worsening the digital divide and alienating still further vulnerable groups with no or limited access to the technology that is a core requirement for its success.

**Agility – the new organising principle**

So what does this all mean for the how public bodies need to work in the future? While different models will be needed according to their unique set of circumstances, one common theme is that the public sector will be smaller and employ fewer staff and be involved in significant delivery partnerships with others increasingly in private and voluntary organisations, as discussed earlier. There will also be less in-house direct service delivery and more commissioning of services. But the sheer scale of continued financial pressures for the foreseeable future means that public bodies will need to go further and transform themselves into more flexible, responsive and adaptive entities. We believe the key organising principle for the future will therefore be the emergence of the agile public body, a strategic leader, focused on outcomes not processes, who sees collaboration as a core capability. An example of what this might look like in practice is the agile council (see below).

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**The emergence of the ‘agile’ council**

Agile councils think and act differently by taking a holistic view and breaking down existing service/professional models in pursuit of joined-up and customer-centric solutions. They are strong local leaders with a clear focus on place and securing outcomes. They adopt a commissioning mindset, seeing themselves as one of a number of players in the local public service network and they act collaboratively.

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26 ‘The local (state) we’re in’, PwC, 2012.
In addition, they are driven by customer excellence which is delivered through intelligence, insight and choice. Agile councils adopt simpler and more standard organisation forms, giving greater flexibility, scalability and the ability to respond rapidly to change. They have a corporate, commercially astute and project-centred culture, recognising that they need more than a service delivery mindset to influence the outcomes they desire for their communities.

To become more agile, councils need to tackle organisational complexity, duplication and fragmentation as well as siloed thinking – the attributes that traditionally slow down their ability to react quickly and efficiently to change. Most authorities will start their journey as very complex organisations, providing diverse services that are delivered through different organisational and management arrangements. This is made even more complex where different authorities and other bodies are collaborating locally around the delivery of better outcomes.

One thing is clear, in a sector that potentially faces “death by a thousand cuts”, local government will need to look very different in 2014 and beyond. The emergence of the agile council as a model will help to preserve both the frontline and the focus on strategic capacity.

Agility is as much about a state of mind, an idea, as an actual organisational form. The concept of agility applies to a variety of organisations but another example to which it is especially relevant is the defence sector because of the high-risk and fluid portfolio of threats that governments need to manage.

Agility in defence is the perpetual awareness and ability to be decisive and take action in an expedient and well-coordinated manner. As set out in our recent global report, an ‘Agile Defence’ organisation retains its core tenets while empowering units to evolve in response to the environment. Agility at an organisational level is the strategic mix of standardisation and flexibility, targeted at those organisational pressure points where they are not only needed today, but will most likely be needed tomorrow.

This model provides a consistent vision and structure while allowing for operating flexibility. We defined five characteristics of an ‘Agile Defence’ organisation which are the “threads” which should weave their way through the key processes of an organisation in a complementary fashion:

- **Adaptability**: The ability to adjust and meet changing mission requirements.
- **Innovation**: The ability to generate and utilise new ideas, methodologies, and technologies.
- **Collaboration**: The ability to leverage internal and external knowledge and resources to enhance the mission.
- **Visibility**: The ability to create and maintain transparency to enhance fact-based decision making.
- **Velocity**: The ability to recognise and respond with the requisite tempo to new circumstances and events.

These characteristics can be applied to the Agile Council. Agility also needs inspirational leadership to convert it into its physical and structural manifestation be it in a health trust, a council or a central government department (see below).

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**Cambridgeshire County Council: a different approach to local growth**

In June 2012 Cambridgeshire County Council announced the launch of Cambridge & Counties Bank. Jointly owned by the Cambridgeshire Local Government Pension Fund and Trinity College, Cambridge, the bank was established as a way of securing a better return on pension funds while supporting local growth.

The new bank aims to offer an alternative to existing high-street banks. It will focus on SMEs with an annual turnover of less than £25 million, many of which have struggled to secure investment. Loans of between £50,000 and £1 million will be offered, secured against commercial property. The council hopes this will enable growth and create jobs for the local community.

This pioneering venture demonstrates ‘agile’ thinking in action: the council perceived a need among the local business community and have developed an original and commercially-astute response. Teaming up with a delivery partner again represents flexibility, a willingness to work beyond old organisational boundaries.
Inspirational leadership must be supported by the appropriate organisational structures to ensure the ‘threads’ of an agile council are embedded and delivered. We believe that public sector organisations should ask themselves a number of key questions to ensure that the right governance, risk, control and assurance frameworks are put in place to support these radical changes.

- **Are the right risks being identified and managed?** Fundamentally different strategies will be required to enable public sector organisations to meet their objectives. Boards will need to identify, assess and manage new and emerging risks which could prevent them from delivering their strategy. Organisational risk appetite will have to be assessed and clearly articulated – in many cases this could mean explicitly re-considering risk appetite to enable service provision at lower cost.

- **Is the right information being gathered and monitored?** Reducing costs and innovating can lead to higher risk taking which will increase the likelihood of financial and service distress. Organisations will need the right management information to allow them to measure both success and consider trigger points which could lead to failure. Management information should cover three inter-related elements – Financial, Operational and Strategic, which will all need to be managed.

- **Do you have the right control and assurance structures in place?** Different strategies including increased non-state delivery of public services will require appropriate independent oversight with sufficient power to ensure quality. Oversight, risk, assurance and control structures will need to be re-assessed and refreshed before new delivery methods are implemented.
Conclusion

Today’s pressures will significantly impact on the way public services are delivered in future, whether by public sector organisations themselves or by the mixed economy of other providers. Cutting costs, simplifying and standardising their processes, securing back office efficiencies and procuring for outcomes using payment by results is necessary but not sufficient. Public bodies in future will also need to address financial pressures successfully through focusing on demand management: what their ‘offer’ is and how people access that; what they will not provide; and how individuals and communities can source solutions for themselves.

These profoundly challenging changes will require public bodies to operate much more effectively, corporately and with strong political engagement. And they will need to become more agile, building this as a capability within their organisations. In doing so, there is a significant and continuing need for the public sector to engage more effectively with their users about the challenges they face, the options they need to consider and the decisions they need to take. If public bodies do not do so effectively, they are unlikely to be able to drive through the changes that are implicit in a continued period of severe financial pressure.
About the authors

Andy Ford
Local Government Lead Partner
020 721 35239
andrew.m.ford@uk.pwc.com

Andy leads our local government practice and has managed a range of projects for local authorities focussing on transformation, efficiency and modernisation. Andy specialises in strategic change and performance improvement. Andy has worked with local authorities for the last 18 years and, prior to joining PwC in 1993, worked in local government.

Justin Martin
Government and Public Sector Leader, London
020 721 24269
justin.f.martin@uk.pwc.com

Justin is a Partner and leads our G&PS Business in London as well as overseeing delivery of our Local Government Assurance Business in Greater London. Justin has worked within the local government sector for over fifteen years, providing complex assurance services including business planning, strategy and re-structuring.

Justin has specific expertise in making governance functions work in practice and has direct experience of leading Control and Risk Management services at large Councils.
Chris Brown
Lead Partner, Government and Public Sector Assurance London
020 780 42426
christopher.j.brown@uk.pwc.com

Chris is the Business Unit Leader for Government and Public Sector (G&PS) Assurance London. He also leads our G&PS Risk Assurance team. Within G&PS Assurance London he is the lead partner for IA and RA contracts with BIS (Department for Business Innovation & Skills), DWP (Department for Work & Pensions), the UK Border Agency and The Cabinet Office. Chris has previously been involved in running and supporting complex transformational projects across the public sector. His experience covers many central government departments, with a focus on operational transformation across the Social Welfare and Home Affairs space where he has led a number of change programmes.
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