



Digital leadership, transformation and governance in local government

– a survey of local councillors in England

April 2017

Draft and confidential

Findings

Methodology

Background

- As part of the Sandy Bruce Lockhart scholarship LGIU and Cllr Theo Blackwell undertook an online survey to understand views of local government political leadership towards the impact of digital transformation on public services.

Approach

- An invitation to the online survey was sent to all councillors in England. The survey included 17 open and closed questions.

Sample

- A total of 809 councillors (4.3%) from 279 councils (78%) from all regions of the country completed the survey.

Understanding the data

- Quantitative data is presented here in its totality and also according to whether respondents are Leaders/Cabinet members (160); digital enthusiasts (373) or sceptics/remain to be convinced (118); veterans (241) or first term councillors (284); and self-identified Champions (113).

Overall findings

General
conclusions
from closed
questions

- Local councillors are not ‘digital dinosaurs’: whether veteran or first-term; metropolitan or district; Leadership or non-executive; they mostly hold positive views about technology, automation and data and how public services can benefit from them. However:
 - Digital is not usually led by the very top decision-makers in local councils and is expressed through a variety of approaches and plans.
 - The survey shows that tackling digital exclusion is still the number one issue now and for the future. Connectivity also remains a concern and there is a strong and widespread view that current data-sharing arrangements are not effective.
 - There is clear backing for digital to be included in thinking around devolution and thirst for councillors to be better supported to understand more about technology and transformation in all its forms.

Specific findings (1)

conclusions
from closed
questions

- 1. Approaches** - Most councils currently express digital transformation through one or more means, primarily through a **customer service, transformation** strategy or the **corporate plan**. A significant cohort said **they didn't know** or **didn't have a plan**. Digital transformation may not be led from the very top: only **one-in-five** cited Leader or Chief Executive as their authority's digital champion, with the majority seeing this as a senior director/CIO or Cabinet member.
- 2. Outlook on technology** - councillors had an **overall positive** view about **Big Data, automation** and the **future well-being** of people in their area. Taken as a whole councillors currently rate the use of technology as **important** and see as even **more important** looking to the future.
- 3. Use of technology** - councillors narrowly view digital as also **applying to frontline**, not just back office savings. Digital enthusiasts, first term councillors and Leaders & Cabinet members hold this view more strongly and see the application of digital technology to service delivery. Councillors as a whole tend not to agree that some services are **"too complex"** to use digital technology effectively. Sceptics, on the other hand, see complexity as a major barrier.
- 4. Impact** - Digital is currently seen as important in councils' meeting their objectives and in coming years are seen as having the greatest impact on **making use of services online easier**, a route to **saving money** and **sharing information better**.

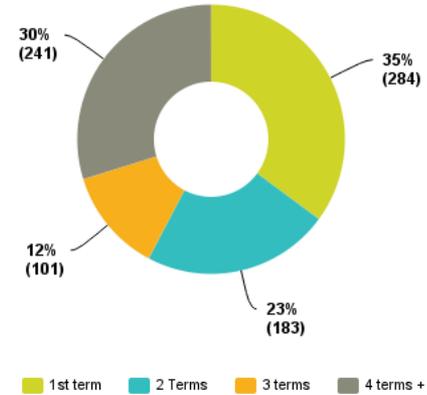
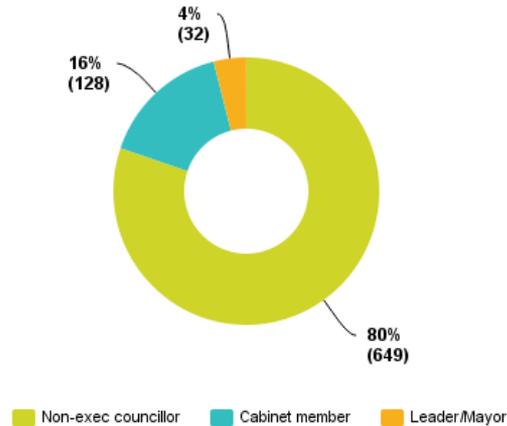
Specific findings (2)

conclusions
from closed
questions

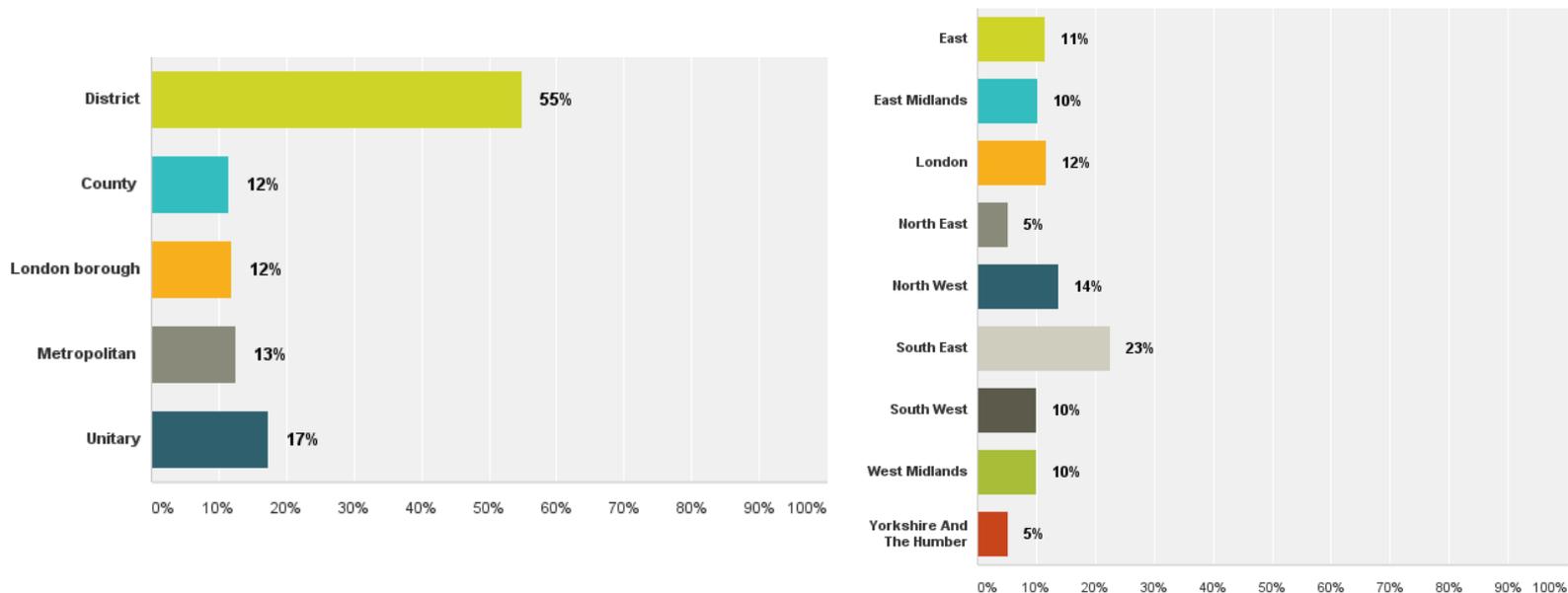
5. **Data and private sector** - Local councillors are evenly split on **private sector using public data** (even with appropriate safeguards) to solve problems. Digital enthusiasts and Leaders & Cabinet members take a much more positive view, while sceptics strongly disagree.
6. **Challenges - Tackling digital exclusion** remains a top priority, followed by **better service design** and **connectivity**. Sceptics/remain to be convinced are likely to view **cyber-security** as an issue. Local councillors of all levels of experience, seniority and outlook on technology overwhelmingly think local public services **do not currently share information effectively**. When asked to prioritise, councillors see workforce skills as less of a priority than others.
7. **Support** – Respondents seek support broadly: the needs are **tackling exclusion, sharing information** with other bodies and **data analytics** – but they also seek support in Internet of Things, digital skills and the Cloud. Sceptics and first term councillors are more likely to highlight **cyber-security** as an issue. All councillors strongly support **training** for senior councillors and **backing from Whitehall**.
8. **Working across public services** - Councillors strongly agree that councils should procure technology functions together. All local councillors surveyed **strongly support better co-ordination of digital transformation** through **devolution** and **Chief Digital Officers**.

The Data

Role and length of service



Type of authority and region



Views on automation and Big Data

Findings

	Big Benefit	Benefit	Any benefits and detriments are finely balanced/ too early to tell	Detriment	Big Detriment	Total
Greater automation (use of computers/machine processes, robots for activity previously undertaken by humans)	25% 194	37% 295	31% 242	6% 49	1% 10	790
The advance of 'Big Data' in public services (e.g. collection, storage, analysis and sharing of large data-sets about citizens and their use of services)	29% 230	41% 318	24% 188	5% 38	1% 11	785

- **+55% net positive** about greater automation in public services
- **+64% net positive** about the advance of 'Big Data' in public services

How will positively digital technology impact on the well-being of people in your area over the next 10 years?

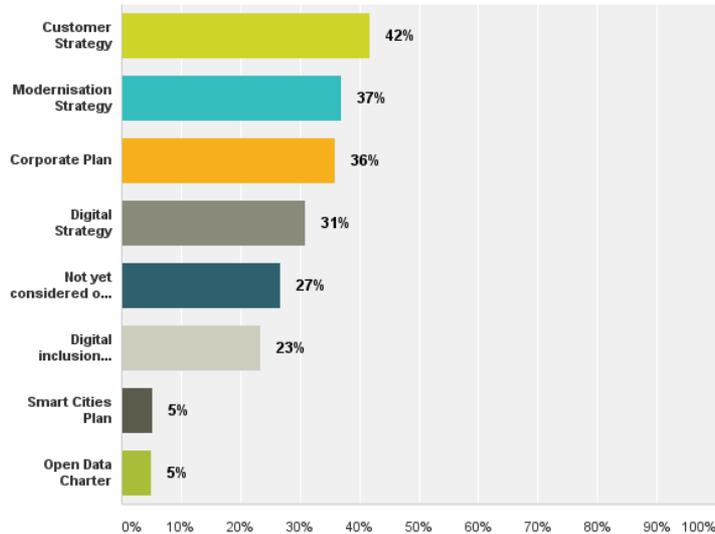
Findings

Answer Choices	Responses	
Very positive impact	21%	166
Positive impact	49%	391
Any positives and negatives are finely balanced/too early to tell	24%	186
Negative impact	5%	39
Very negative impact	1%	8
Total		790

■ **+64% net agree** that digital technology will positively impact on the well-being of people in your area over the next 10 years.

How councils plan for digital transformation

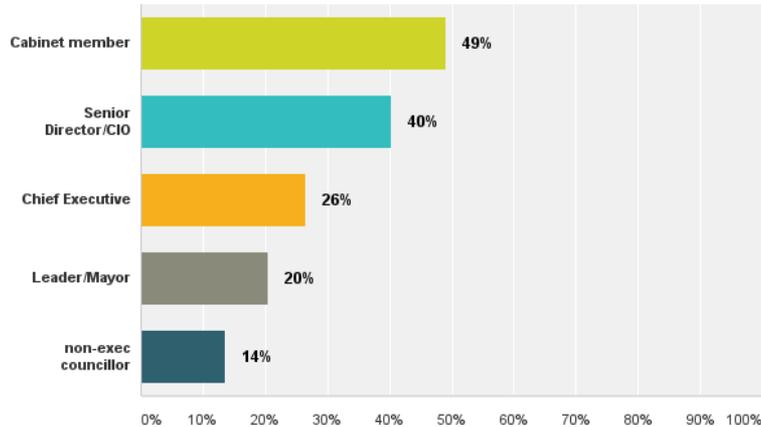
Findings



- Digital transformation more likely to be expressed in customer or modernisation strategy, or in corporate plan (or combination).
- Over one-in-four respondents said they 'had not yet considered this' (or don't know).
- Small numbers adopting Smart City or Open Data charter

Who champions the use of digital technology in your authority?

Findings

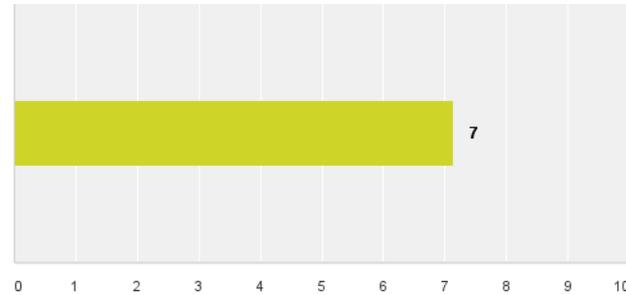


- Champions more likely to be Cabinet or senior management level (or combination)
- Top leadership (Leaders and Chief Executives) less likely to be identified as champions by councillors.

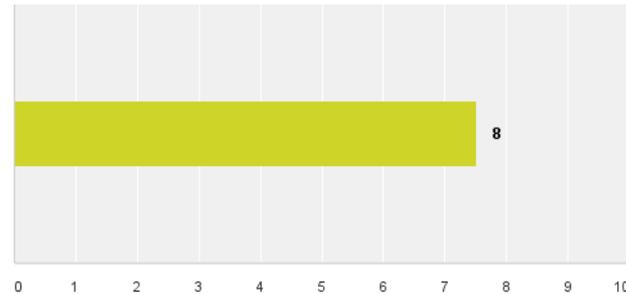
To what extent is digital transformation (using digital technology to redesign and rebuild services to be simpler, clearer and faster for people to use) considered important for your council in achieving its objectives?

Findings

Now

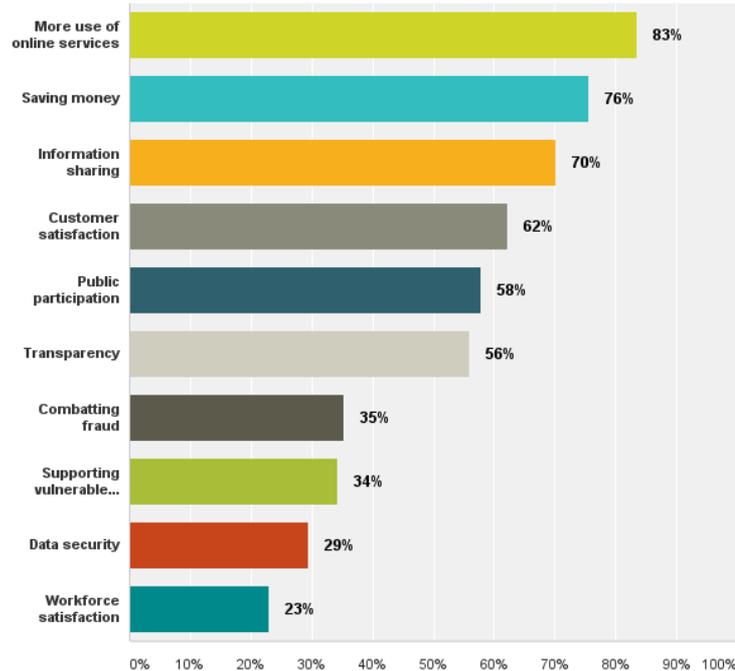


5 years
time



Impact of digital technologies on services

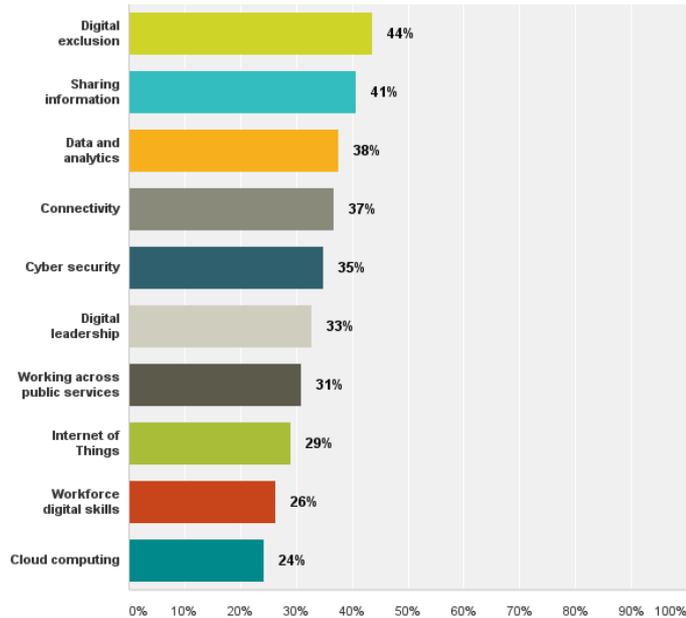
Findings



- Digital is mainly seen as making online services easier, a route to saving money and better sharing of information.
- Councillors were less persuaded by the impacts on data security and workforce satisfaction.

Support for councils

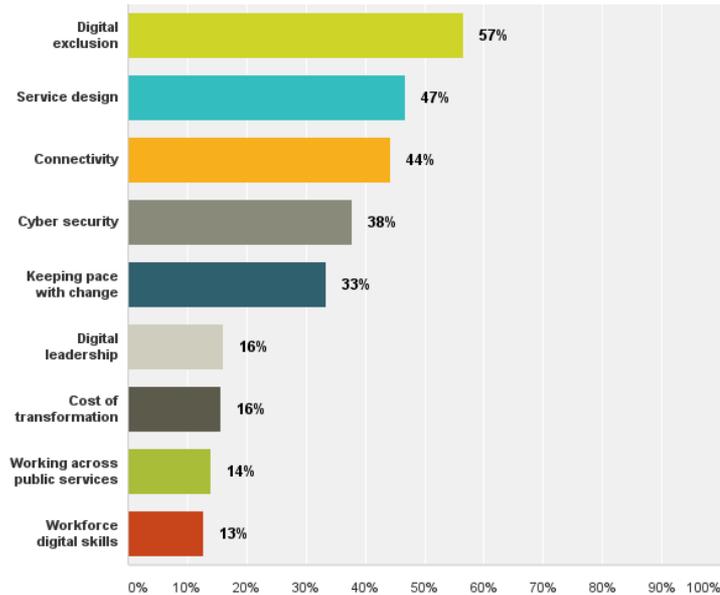
Findings



- Respondents identified a range of support needs.
- Top needs are tackling exclusion and basic skills, sharing information with other bodies and data analytics – but they also seek support in Internet of Things, digital skills and the Cloud.

Top 3 challenges for the future

Findings



- Tackling digital exclusion, service design and connectivity were the top identified challenges for councils when councillors asked what their top 3 priorities were. Digital sceptics and first-time councillors likely to rate cyber-security higher.
- Working with other councils and workforce skills were seen as less of a priority.

Views on application, data-sharing and devolution (1)

Findings

	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure/ too early to say	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total	Weighted Average
Digital technology is largely about making the 'back office' more efficient, not 'frontline' delivery	7% 48	28% 200	18% 128	33% 239	14% 100	715	3.20
Some services are too complex to use digital technology effectively	8% 57	30% 213	20% 142	33% 232	9% 64	708	3.05
Local public services currently share information effectively	2% 17	13% 95	23% 162	39% 278	22% 158	710	3.65
With appropriate safeguards data held by public bodies should be able to be used by the private sector to develop solutions	7% 52	34% 239	22% 158	20% 140	17% 121	710	3.05
Devolution deals between cities/regions and Whitehall should specifically promote digital transformation	18% 125	47% 332	26% 183	6% 41	4% 29	710	2.32
All cities/regions should have a Chief Digital Officer/Technology Officer to develop common standards and data-sharing	18% 126	43% 309	27% 190	8% 57	4% 29	711	2.37
In the future local authorities should procure and share more technology functions together	27% 193	55% 389	13% 91	3% 22	2% 16	711	1.99
Central government should support the digital transformation of local government financially	46% 325	41% 289	8% 58	2% 17	3% 23	713	1.77
Senior councillors and officers should be offered training in digital transformation	42% 300	47% 336	7% 51	1% 10	2% 16	713	1.75

- Net -8% disagree “digital is largely about back office rather than frontline savings.”
- Net -6% disagree “some services are too complex to use digital technology effectively.”
- Net -46% disagree “local public services currently share information effectively.”
- Net +6% agree “with appropriate safeguards data held by public bodies should be used by the private sector to develop solutions.”
- Net +67% agree “councils should procure more technology functions together.”
- Net +49% all cities regions should have CDO to develop common standards and data sharing.
- Net +82% devolution deals should specifically promote digital transformation.
- Net +85% senior councillors and officers should be offered training in digital transformation.
- Net +85% central government should support the digital transformation of local government financially.

Views on application, data-sharing and devolution (2)

Findings

- narrowly view digital as also applying to frontline, not just back office savings
- narrowly disagree that some services are “too complex” to use digital technology effectively.
- They strongly disagree that current data sharing arrangements work.
- much more evenly split on private sector using public data, even with appropriate safeguards, but strongly agree that councils should procure technology function together.
- strongly support reform of current arrangements through devolution and better working with Whitehall

Leaders & Cabinet members

Findings

- See benefits of data and automation more intensely (net +78% and net +67%) as well as changes over next 10 years (net +79%).
- Similar, but more strongly held views on impacts and challenges. Viewed procurement/keeping pace with change as more of a priority.
- Feel (net -35%) that complexity is not a barrier to using digital technology and don't see a distinction between front and back office functions.
- Believe that public services currently do not share data effectively (net -39%). Are more likely than other councillors to think that subject to safeguards, private sector should be able to use public data to provide solutions (net+18%).
- Strongly think (net+59%). that devolution deals should promote digital transformation and that cities should have CDOs (net+53%).
- Overwhelmingly believe in the future local authorities should procure and share more technology functions together (net+82%). and Whitehall should support the digital transformation of local government financially (net+90%).
- Almost all think senior councillors and officers should be offered training in digital transformation (net+91%).

Leaders and Cabinet members (160) hold more positive views about the benefits of technology than councillors as a whole. They strongly feel complexity is not a barrier to transformation and see a role for the private sector with public data. They overwhelmingly back greater sharing of technology functions and think that Whitehall has a role to play in transformation.

Digital enthusiasts

Findings

- Digital enthusiasts (373) held a positive view about automation, Big Data and the impact of technology over the next 10 years.
- Were likely to feel (net -37%) that complexity is not a barrier to using digital technology and don't see a distinction (net -34%) between front and back office functions.
- Believe that public services currently do not (net -48%) share data effectively. Are more likely (net +34%) than other councillors to think that subject to safeguards, private sector should be able to use public data to provide solutions.
- Strongly think (net +72%) that devolution deals should promote digital transformation and that cities should have CDOs (net +60%).
- Overwhelmingly believe (net +89%) in the future local authorities should procure and share more technology functions together and Whitehall should support the digital transformation of local government financially (net +84%).
- Almost all (net +91%) think senior councillors and officers should be offered training in digital transformation.

Digital sceptics

Findings

- Digital sceptics (118) either held negative views about the impact of technology, were unsure or felt that the arguments were finely balanced.
- Sceptics saw (net +29%) digital technology as applying to the back office, not frontline delivery and strongly felt (net +62%) that some services were just too complex to use digital technology effectively.
- Agree with others strongly that public services currently do not (net -42%) share data effectively.
- Strongly feel (net -50%) that even with safeguards, the private sector should not be able to use public data to provide solutions to problems in public services.
- Are marginally in favour (net +11%) of devolution deals promoting digital transformation and agree that cities should have CDOs (net +29%).
- Believe (net +45%) in the future local authorities should procure and share more technology functions together and Whitehall should support the digital transformation of local government financially (net +81%).
- Almost all (net +76%) think senior councillors and officers should be offered training in digital transformation.

Veteran vs. first term councillors

Findings

- 33% (241) of respondents had served 4+ terms (16+ years) and 35% (284) were first term councillors.
- Both held equally positive views of automation, Big Data and technology as a whole, with veteran councillors holding slightly more positive views than their counterparts.
- Both cohorts agreed on the broad impacts, challenges and support needs for councils with new councillors slightly more concerned about cyber-security.
- First term councillors were more likely to see the application of digital technology beyond the back office (**net -29%**), while veteran councillors were almost evenly split.
- Like all other councillors both veteran and new councillors were split (**net -2%**, **net 0%**) on whether some services were too complex to use digital technology effectively.
- Both were split on the use of public data by private sector organisations to develop solutions.
- Otherwise agreed with equal strength on devolution, training and shared procurement.

Champions

Findings

- Self-identified Champions were most likely to be non-executive councillors (57%) than Leaders (10%) and Cabinet members (33%).
- See benefits of automation and Big Data very intensely (net +88% and net +89%) as well as changes over next 10 years (net +84%).
- Similar, but more strongly held views on impacts, but saw saving money as the main benefit. Viewed procurement/keeping pace with change as more of a priority. Highlighted sharing information as the top support need for councils.
- Feel (net -36%) that complexity is not a barrier to using digital technology and reject (net +41%) the distinction between front and back office functions.
- Believe that public services currently do not share data effectively (net -53%). Are more likely than other councillors to think that subject to safeguards, private sector should be able to use public data to provide solutions (net +27%).
- Strongly think (net+68%). that devolution deals should promote digital transformation and that cities should have CDOs (net+63%).
- Overwhelmingly believe in the future local authorities should procure and share more technology functions together (net+91%). and Whitehall should support the digital transformation of local government financially (net+93%).
- Almost all think senior councillors and officers should be offered training in digital transformation (net+97%).

15% (113) of councillors responding identified themselves as digital champions.