

Town Hall, City Hall or Whitehall?



Who should do what?

About the survey



These slides summarise the results of a survey which sought the views of local government practitioners on two questions:

- Are there some public services which don't warrant democratic oversight?
- Where democratic oversight is needed, is it best carried out at a local, regional or national level?

Pinning down 'localism'

There is a growing political consensus that localism is the way forward.

Localism must mean that some services which are currently subject to national democratic accountability should switch to being the responsibility of locally elected representatives.

But the survey also sought views on whether there are some functions that could go the other way, or where there is no need for politicians to have oversight.



Facts and figures



- 43 respondents
- Most respondents were local government officers
- But also respondents from think tanks, consultancies and third sector organisations
- Responses received during October 2009
- Respondents were asked to give their views on 41 services

The services included in the survey

- Building control
- Car parks
- Care and protection of children
- Care for elderly people
- Care for people with a disability
- Cemeteries
- Community safety
- Council tax benefit
- Council tax collection
- Countryside management
- Development control (planning)
- Electoral registration
- Emergency planning
- Environmental health
- Further education
- Housing Provision
- Housing strategy
- Job Centre Plus services (e.g. training and support for the unemployed)
- Leisure services
- Libraries and archives
- Licensing
- Local economy support and development
- Museums and arts
- Policing
- Post offices
- Prisons
- Public and community transport
- Recycling
- Regional Development Agency functions (e.g. promoting business, regeneration etc)
- registration of births, deaths, marriages
- School transport
- Schools
- Strategic planning (e.g. Local Development Framework)
- Tourism
- Trading standards, consumer protection
- Transport planning
- Waste disposal
- Youth services

What should we stop doing?

- Given the spending squeeze are there some functions that the state could stop carrying out altogether?
- Respondents were asked to choose from a long list of public services which ones they thought didn't warrant democratic over-sight.

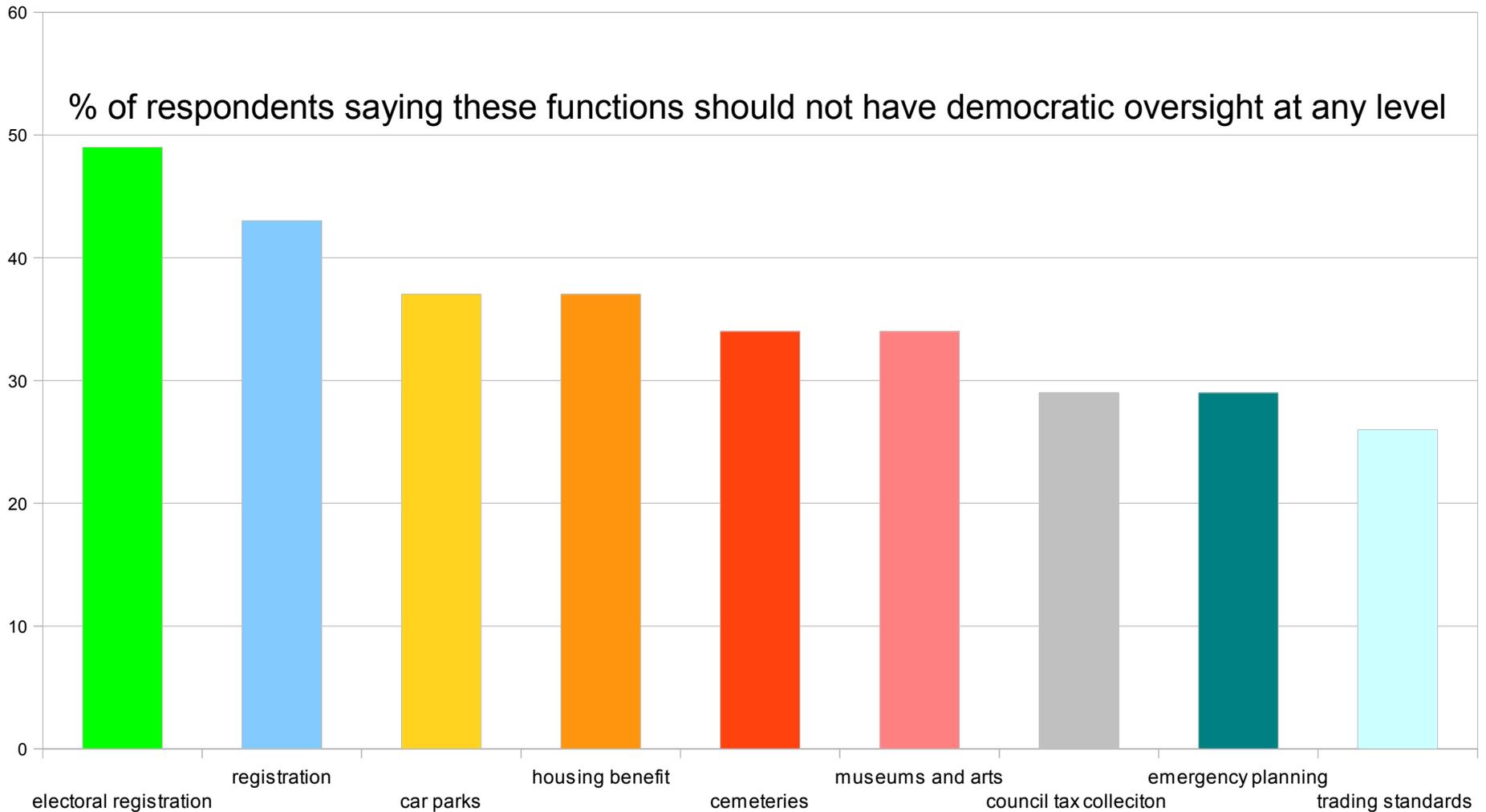


For every service a majority of respondents felt politicians should carry on having a role



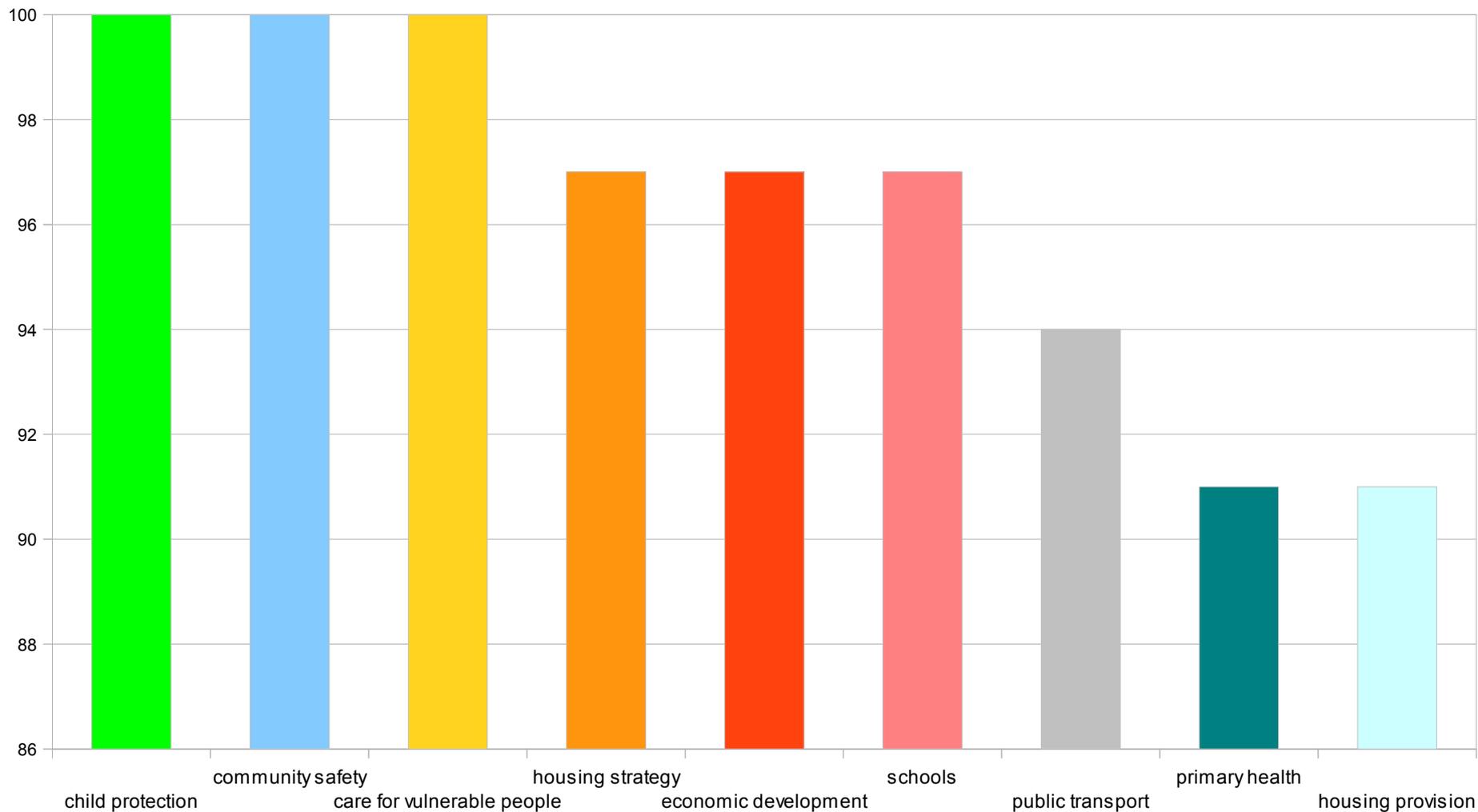
But while almost all respondents felt democratic oversight of some functions was necessary, there were others where a significant minority disagreed.

Democratic oversight of some administrative and regulatory functions is seen as less important



There was very strong support for democratic oversight of social care, community safety, schools, housing and planning

% of respondents favouring democratic oversight at some level



The second part of the survey asked respondents to say for those services where they thought democratic oversight was appropriate, whether it should be at:

- Local council level
- Regional authority level
- National level

Respondents don't see a role for national politicians on planning and libraries

There were five functions where respondents were unanimous there should be no role for Whitehall:

- Car parks
- Cemeteries
- Development control
- Libraries
- Strategic planning

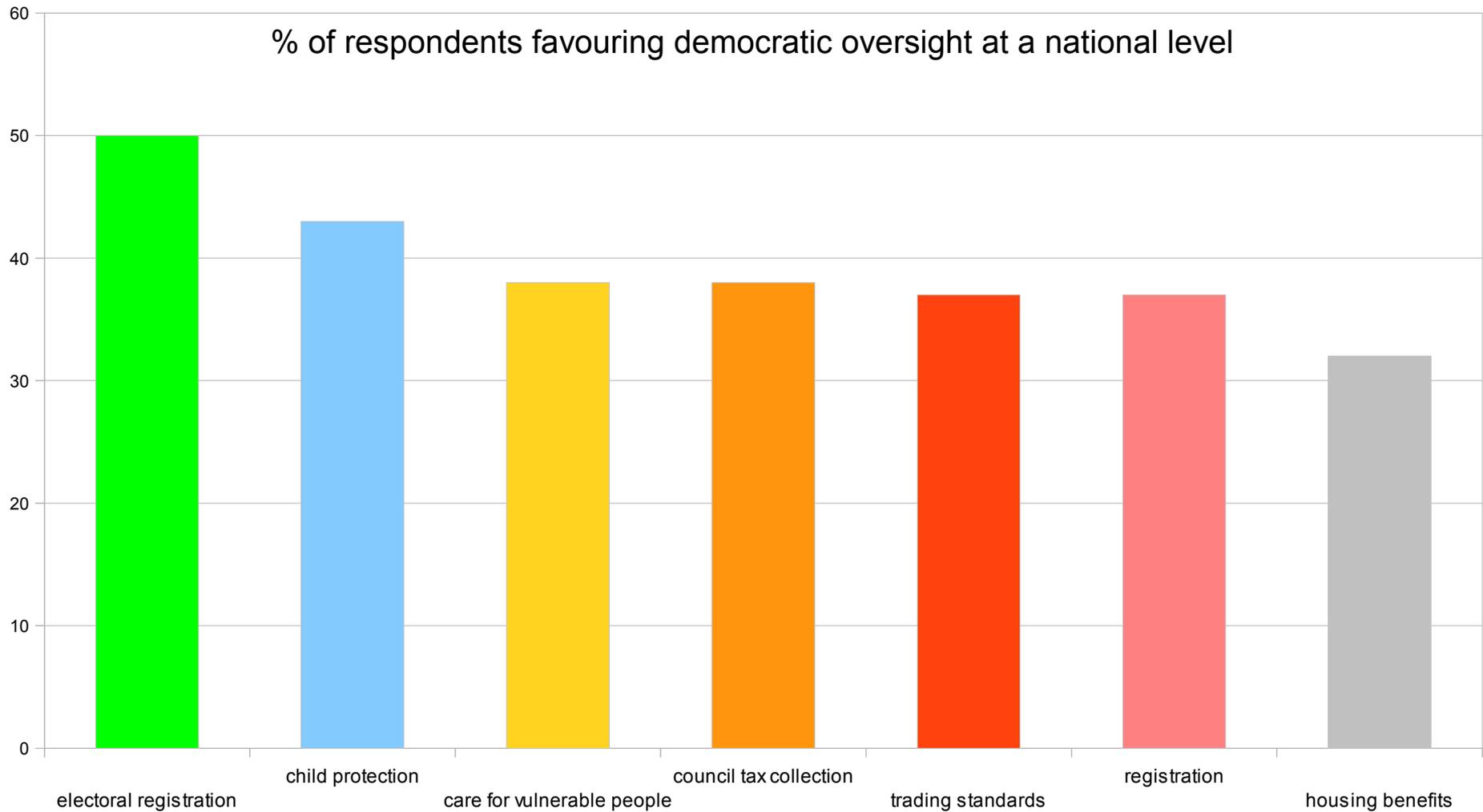


And for each of these services only one respondent thought democratic oversight should be at a national level

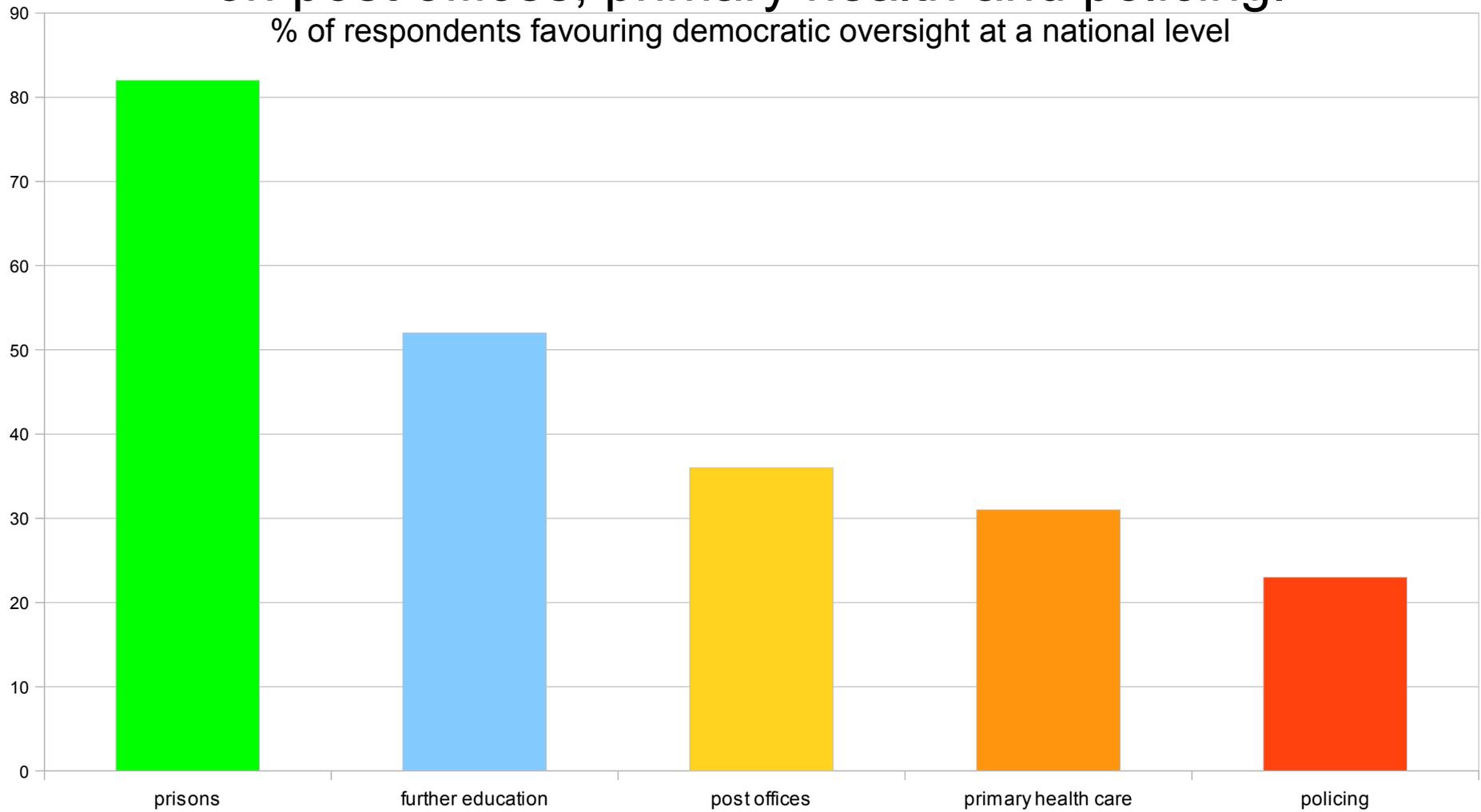
- Building control
- Leisure services
- Licensing
- Regional Development
- School transport



But there are also seven local government services where many respondents favour a transfer to Whitehall

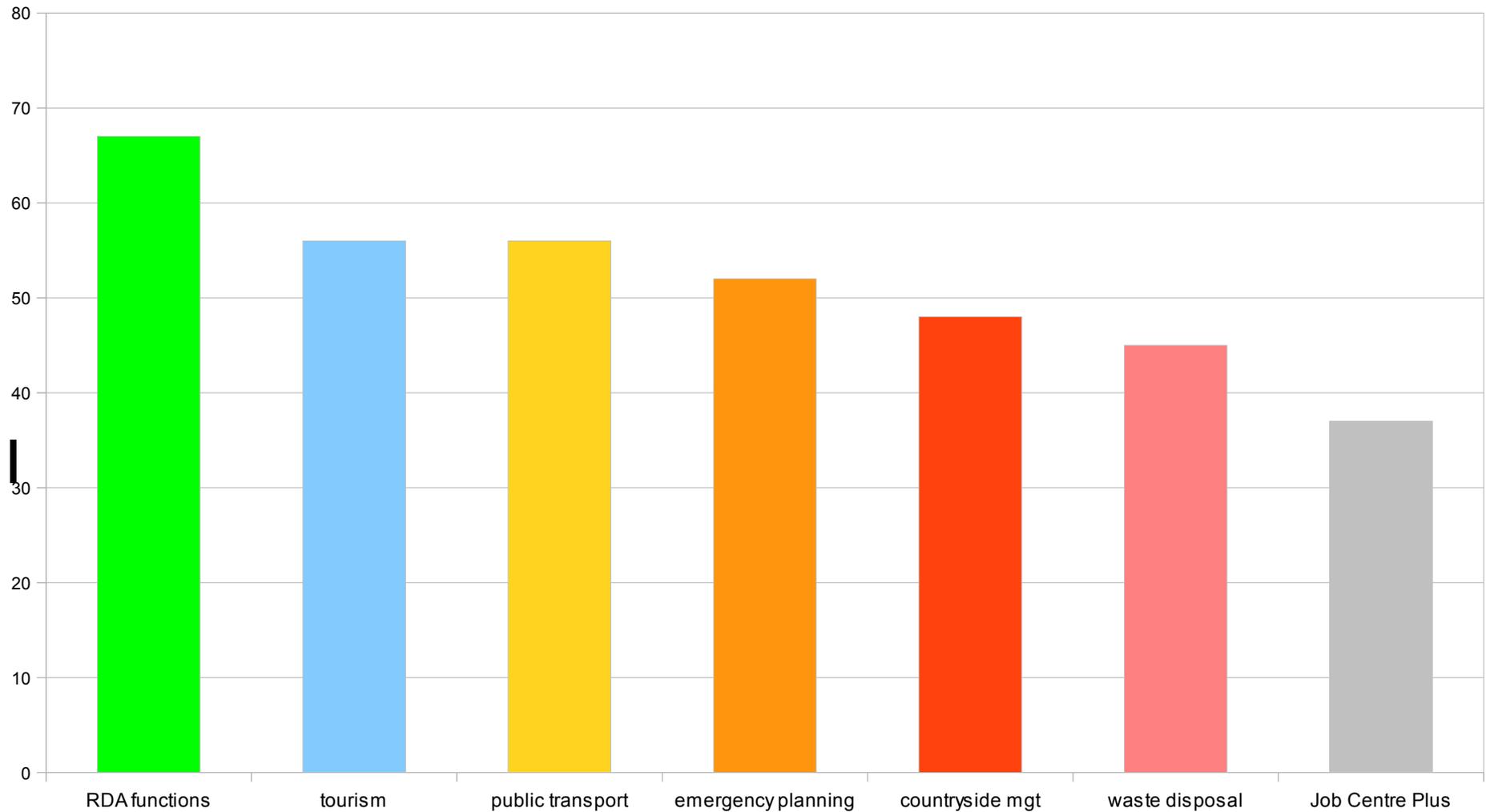


There's no appetite to make prisons nor further education locally accountable but most respondents favour a transfer on post offices, primary health and policing.



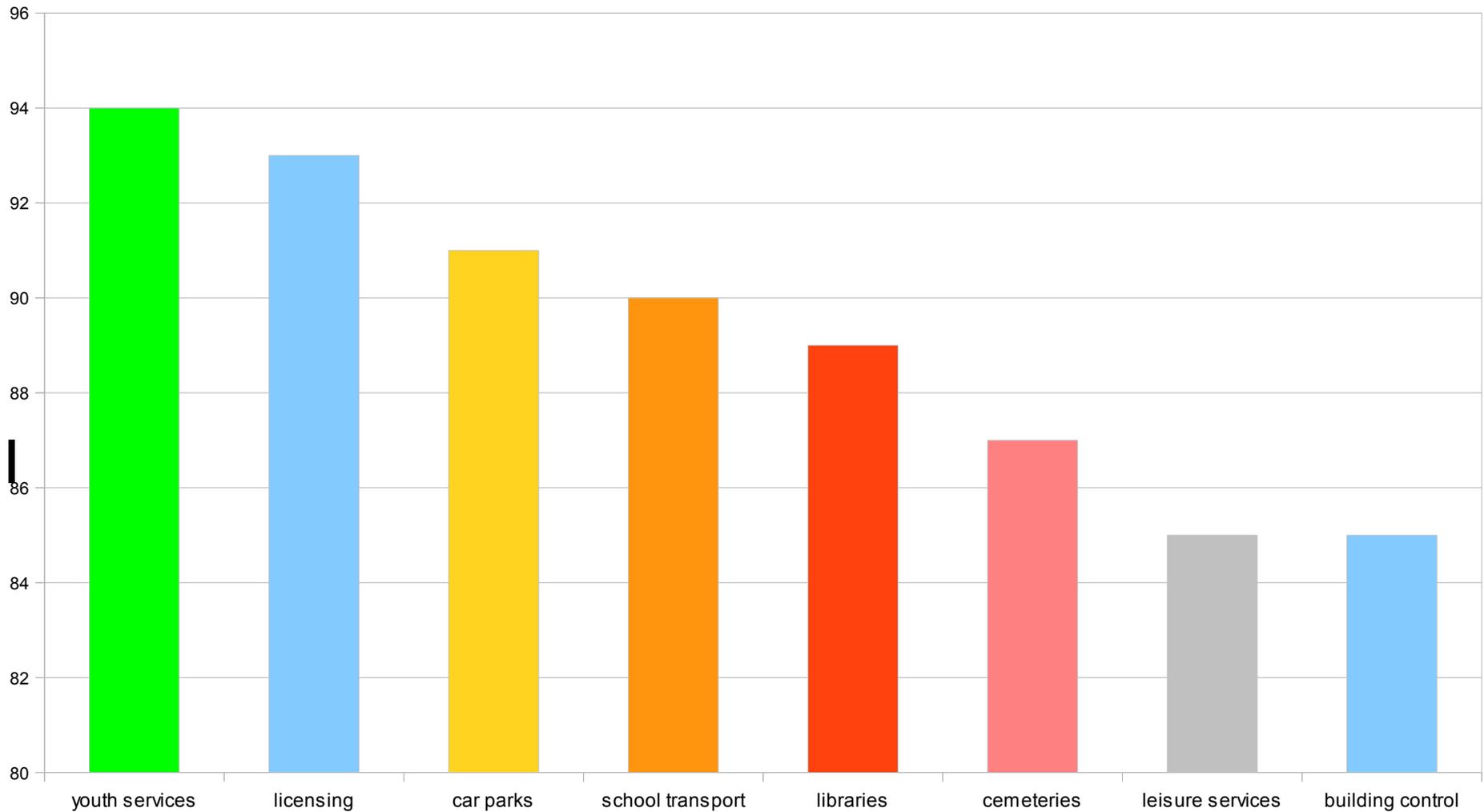
Respondents favour regional democratic oversight for seven services – including some currently done by councils

% respondents favour regional oversight



The 'premier league' of locally accountable services – these are the services with the highest rating for council control...

% respondents favour local oversight

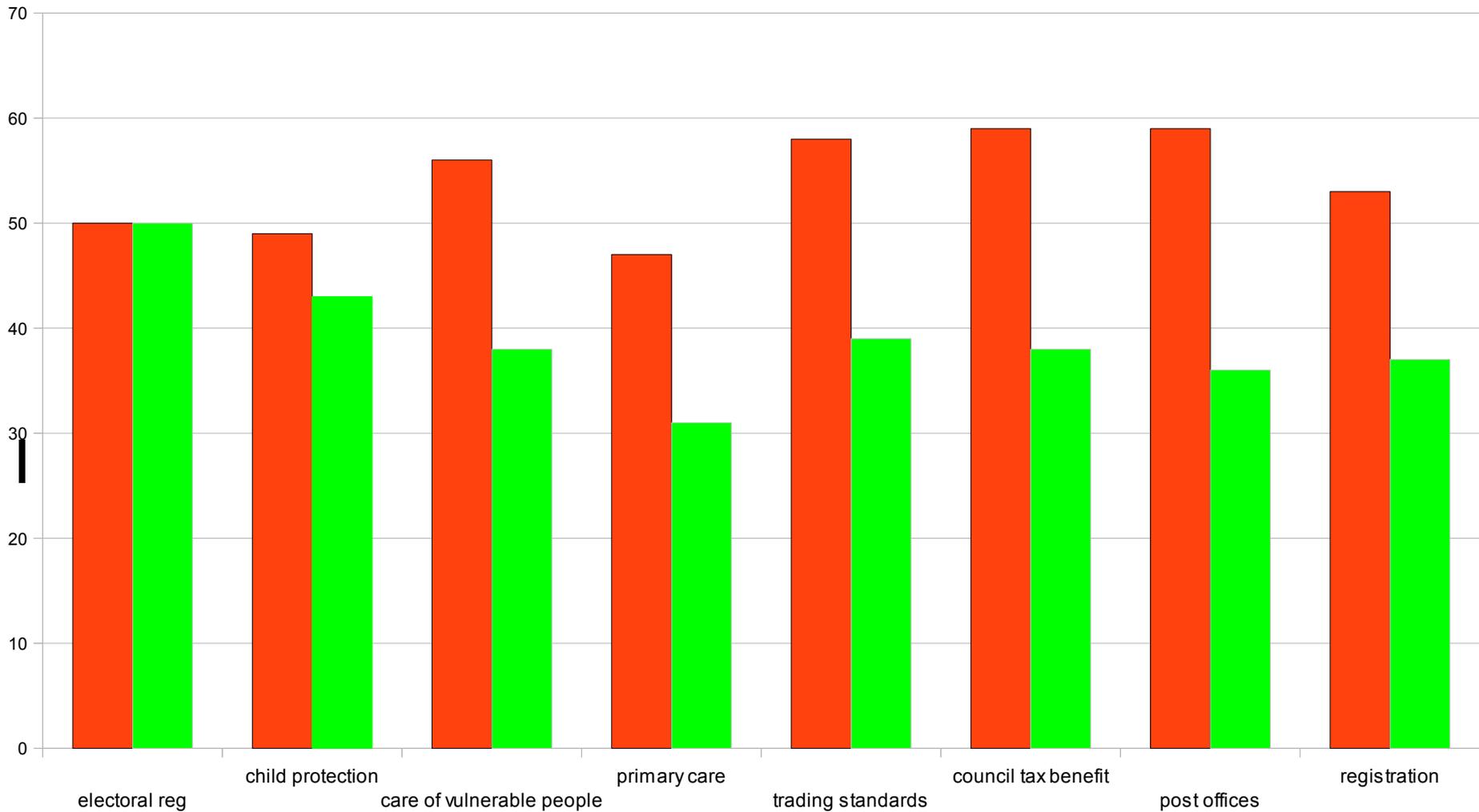


.. but are these the services we most prize?

- Some of these services were amongst those that significant numbers of respondents felt didn't warrant any democratic oversight.
- Other services are discretionary such as leisure and libraries which probably re-inforces a view that there is no need for democratic oversight outside of the local authority

There are eight services where a majority favoured local accountability but a significant number of respondents favoured Whitehall

% respondents favour local (red) or national (green) oversight



There are also mixed views about recycling and waste disposal



- Only 53% of respondents feel council oversight of recycling is appropriate, with 27% feeling this could be done regionally and 20% nationally.
- 45% of respondents favour regional democratic oversight of waste disposal (compared to 41% for council accountability) Some of these services were amongst those that significant numbers of respondents felt didn't warrant any democratic oversight.

The survey suggests a more complex picture of 'new localism'

It may be that new localism isn't simply about devolving responsibilities for policing and primary health to councils. Some administrative functions could go the other way to free-up councils to focus more on local governance.

And the survey suggests that in the context of reduced resources we should be thinking fundamentally about what we do. Are there some services which we can stop doing?

The survey suggests a more complex picture of 'new localism'

The survey suggests that even within local government there remains a belief that national political oversight of social care is appropriate.

So it may be less about double devolution than simultaneous devolution and centralisation of specific functions.

Is this why we don't seem to reach the magical tipping point in the debate about central/local relations?