

FIRST Magazine Survey

Report of findings

May 2018



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Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings of a survey of reader views about **first** magazine and its online version **firstonline**. **first** is the LGA's membership magazine which is published in print monthly. It is sent to all councillors and chief executives of councils in England and Wales (approximately 17,900 and 400 individuals, respectively) and roughly 200 stakeholders, giving a total distribution of about 18,400. The findings of the survey will help the LGA to ensure that the content, structure and distribution of **first** continue to meet the needs of readers.

An online survey was emailed to 17,228 councillors in England and Wales, as this group represents the core readership of **first**.¹ Responses were received from a total of 418 councillors, giving a response rate of two per cent. Due to the size of the sample the results should not be taken to be representative of the views of all **first** readers, but as a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents.

Key messages

Readership rates

- Of the 418 councillors who replied, 82 per cent said they generally found out about the work of the LGA via **first** magazine – a much higher share than observed for other method.
- Most of the 418 councillors who replied (74 per cent) said they always or regularly read **first** – meaning they read every issue, or most issues.
- Of the 56 councillors who indicated that, on average, they rarely or never read **first**, most said this was because they do not find it useful (59 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively).

Feedback on content

- Predominantly, of those who read **first**, most said it was fairly useful in keeping them informed about: what the LGA does (52 per cent); key LGA events and publications (51 per cent); local government news and policy issues (44 per cent) and in supporting them in their role as a councillor (40 per cent).
- The top three content areas which readers would like more of in **first** were: 'council good practice (54 per cent)', 'articles relevant to the councillor role' (53 per cent) and 'national issues affecting local government' (36 per cent).
- The top three content areas which readers would like less of in **first** were: stories about partner organisations (29 per cent), comment from LGA political groups (25 per cent) and letters (23 per cent).

¹ The survey was emailed to 17,275 but 47 email addresses were invalid and removed.

- Of the 392 councillors who answered the question, 82 per cent said **first** political balance was maintained and five per cent said it was not maintained, and 13 per cent were unsure.
- In relation to authors, most respondents felt that there were about the right amount of articles written by LGA officers (60 per cent), local government officers (59 per cent) and LGA members (57 per cent).
- Not enough articles were thought to be authored by 'other councillors' (40 per cent), local residents (35 per cent) and experts/academics (26 per cent), while ministers/national politicians, civil servants and charities wrote too many articles according to between 23 and 27 per cent of respondents.
- When asked about their preferences for additional content, the majority of councillors (51 per cent) selected news from individual councils, 39 per cent chose broad regional coverage, while 35 per cent selected councillor profiles.
- Over the last 12 months, 30 per cent of respondents had drawn their council's attention to a product or service after seeing it advertised in **first**, and 27 per cent had requested/downloaded a publication advertised/featured in **first**.
- Only a small proportion of respondents (five per cent) had bought a product or service in the last 12 months after seeing it advertised in **first**, and only 12 per cent had attended a conference/event advertised/featured in **first**.

Format of first

- Most respondents (66 per cent) would like to continue receiving **first** as a printed magazine delivered by post as now, while receiving it as an email with links to **first** on the LGA's website was chosen by 29 per cent.

Firstonline

- Of the 411 councillors who replied, 63 per cent said they were not aware of **firstonline**, 34 per cent said they were aware and three per cent were unsure.
- Of the 409 respondents who responded, most (72 per cent) said **firstonline** was not something they read. Of the 294 respondents who said they had never read **firstonline**, 80 per cent were unaware of the publication.

Introduction

About the survey

This report outlines the findings of a survey of reader views about **first** magazine and its online version **firstonline**. **first** is the LGA's membership magazine, which is published in print monthly. It is sent to all councillors and chief executives of councils in England and Wales (approximately 17,900 and 400 individuals, respectively) and roughly 200 stakeholders, giving a total distribution of around 18,400².

The survey was carried out to gain feedback on the **first's** current content and possible future developments. The survey also asked readers to comment on the web edition of **first** magazine, **firstonline**. The findings of the survey will be used to help the LGA to ensure that the content, structure and distribution of **first** continue to meet the needs of readers.

Methodology

The online survey was sent via email to 17,275 councillors in England and Wales, as this group represents the core readership of **first**. The email addresses of 47 councillors failed and were removed from the target population (giving a revised population of 17,228). The survey was in the field between 15 March and 23 April. Two reminders were sent out during this period.

Responses were received from 418, giving a response rate of 2 per cent. The composition of the achieved sample is broadly representative of the target population based on authority type, authority region and political party (see Tables 1, 2 and 3).³ Yet, since self-selection bias cannot be ruled out, the results should strictly be taken as a snapshot of the views of this particular group of respondents, rather than as representative of **first** readers overall.

The information collected by the survey has been aggregated, and no individuals or authorities are identified in this report. Throughout the report percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding. Sample size figures are shown in tables to allow readers to see the basis on which the figures have been calculated. Where the sample size is less than 50, figures can be skewed and care should be taken when interpreting percentages, as small differences can seem magnified. Therefore, where this is the case in this report, absolute numbers are reported alongside the percentage values.

² As noted earlier, readership includes LGA-member councils who have signed-up to receiving **first** magazine, thus this figure is less than the total number of councillors in England and Wales (i.e. approx. 19,300).

³ A sample size of 418 is reliable to approximately +/-4.7% at the 95% confidence level based on a total population of 17,228 assuming the sample is random. This level of reliability drops as the base drops.

Response rates

The proportion of respondents from each of the nine English regions and Wales was broadly representative of the target population (see breakdown in Table 1), with a slight over-representation in the proportion from in the South East.

	Population	Population	Achieved Sample	Achieved Sample
	N	%	N	%
East of England	2234	13	62	15
East Midlands	1728	10	39	9
Greater London	1655	10	36	9
North East	744	4	17	4
North West	2187	13	46	11
South East	3124	18	90	22
South West	1732	10	44	11
Wales	1170	7	25	6
West Midlands	1519	9	41	10
Yorkshire and the Humber	1135	7	18	4
Total	17228		418	

There was a broadly representative response across authority types, while more specifically there was a slight over-representation of Metropolitan districts and under-representation of English unitaries. At least one response was received from 218 of the 375 councils in England and Wales, with the number of responses per council ranging from one to eight. Table 2 compares the authority type of our achieved sample with the target population.

	Population	Population	Achieved Sample	Achieved Sample
	N	%	N	%
Shire county	1734	10	42	10
Shire district	7390	43	188	45
London borough	1655	10	36	9
Metropolitan district	2315	13	41	10
English unitary	4134	24	111	27
Total	17228		418	

Conservatives made up 43 per cent of respondents although nationally they make up 46 per cent of councillors, so they are slightly under-represented in the survey responses. Thirty-one per cent of respondents were Labour councillors whereas the national figure is 32 per cent. Fourteen per cent of respondents were Liberal Democrats while this party holds nine per cent of councillor seats meaning they are over-represented. Independent and all other councillors make up 13 per cent of respondents which is the same proportion as the national picture. A full breakdown of these findings is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Response breakdown by political party

	Population	Population	Achieved Sample	Achieved Sample
	N	%	N	%
Conservative	7965	46	178	43
Green Party	157	1	5	1
Independent	1175	7	24	6
Labour	5536	32	128	31
Labour and Co-operative	154	1	5	1
Liberal Democrat	1528	9	58	14
Not specified	66	0	2	0
Other	74	0	3	1
Plaid Cymru	189	1	2	0
Residents Association/Ratepayer	174	1	10	2
UK Independence Party	210	1	3	1
Total	17228		418	

First magazine results

This section outlines the full set of survey results.

Finding out about the LGA

More than eight out of ten respondents (82 per cent) said they generally found out about the work of the LGA via **first** magazine. The proportion of respondents selecting **first** magazine was much higher than the share observed for other types of information (see Table 4). 'Other' responses included Twitter, LGiU daily newsletter and other types of email.

	N	%
first magazine	342	82
Political group offices e-bulletin	160	38
LGA website	128	31
LGA Chairman, Lord Porter's weekly email	102	24
Media work/press releases	87	21
Events and conferences	73	17
Other e-bulletins (e.g. children and young people e-bulletin, finance e-bulletin)	63	15
LGA Chief Executive, Mark Lloyd's email	34	8
Face-to-face contact	30	7
Publications (e.g. Growing Places)	24	6
Parliamentary bulletin	22	5
firstonline	17	4
Director of Communication, David Holdstock's CommsNet	3	1
Other (please specify)	36	9

Base all respondents (418). Respondents could give more than one reply

Reading first

Almost three-quarters of respondents (74 per cent) said they always read **first** (i.e. every issue) or regularly read **first** (i.e. most issues). See Table 5.

	N	%
Always (every issue)	183	44
Regularly (most issues)	127	30
Occasionally (some issues)	52	12
Rarely (the odd issue)	32	8
Never (not at all)	24	6

Base all respondents (418)

The 32 respondents who said they rarely read **first** and 24 who said they never read **first** were asked why this was the case. The most commonly selected reason in both categories was 'do not find it useful' (see Table 6). Respondents who never read

first were directed to the **firstonline** section of the survey at this point. Other comments received were:

- “Not about Wales.”
- “Outdated. Is it really a necessary cost!”
- “I don’t read magazines, everything is online.”
- “Never really relevant to ordinary councillors, all about the very worthy high flyers and their cocooned lives.”
- “The only thing it ever had worth looking at was the cartoon – and now that’s gone.”
- “The LGA is a total waste of money.”
- “Waste of money and better things to do.”

Table 6: Reasons for rarely or never reading first...	If you rarely read first, please tell us why:		If you never read first, please tell us why:	
	N	%	N	%
Lack of time	15	47	10	42
Do not find it useful	19	59	12	50
Not relevant to my role as a councillor	4	13	7	29
I read firstonline instead	2	6	0	0
I get information about the LGA from other sources	6	19	4	17
Other (please specify)	2	6	5	21
Don’t know	0	0	1	4

Base all who rarely or never read first (Rarely, 32; Never, 24)

As show in Table 7, 44 per cent of respondents who read **first** (ranging from always to rarely) said they read most of each edition (i.e. more than half). Twenty one per cent said they read some of it (i.e. a quarter to a half). Seventeen per cent said they read the odd article (i.e. less than a quarter) and 16 per cent said they read all of it. Of the 64 respondents who read all of each edition, 53 had previously said they always read **first**.

Table 7: How much of each edition of first do you read?	N	%
All of it	64	16
Most of it (more than half)	173	44
Some of it (a quarter to a half)	81	21
The odd article here and there (less than a quarter)	68	17
None of it	8	2

Base all respondents (394)

The majority of respondents (52 per cent) said they would prefer to see no change in the frequency in which they received first magazine in the future. There was a fairly

even split in the proportion who said they would prefer bi-monthly (11 per cent), every other month (12 per cent) and quarterly (13 per cent). See Table 8.

Table 8: If we were to change the frequency of first magazine in the future, how often, would you like to receive it?

	N	%
Weekly	14	4
Twice a month	43	11
Monthly, as now (no change)	204	52
Every other month	49	12
Quarterly (once every 3 months)	51	13
Yearly	3	1
Never	15	4
Don't know	14	4

Base all respondents (393)

Most useful content

Respondents were asked how useful **first** was in keeping them informed about various issues related to the LGA and local government. Eighty eight per cent of respondents said the magazine was 'very useful' or 'fairly useful' in keeping them 'informed about what the LGA does' and 87 per cent said it was 'very useful' or 'fairly useful' in keeping them 'informed about local government news and policy issues'. Seventy eight said it was 'very useful' or 'fairly useful' in telling them 'about key LGA events and publications' and 59 per cent said it was 'very useful' or 'fairly useful' in supporting them in their role as a councillor. See Table 9.

Table 9: How useful is first...?

	Very useful		Fairly useful		Not very useful		Not at all useful		Don't know		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
In keeping you informed about what the LGA does	139	35	205	52	33	8	8	2	7	2	392
In telling you about key LGA events and publications	108	28	198	51	58	15	16	4	11	3	391
In keeping you informed about local government news and policy issues	168	43	174	44	39	10	8	2	5	1	394
In supporting you in your role as a councillor	71	18	158	40	110	28	42	11	10	3	391

Base all respondents (see individual totals)

Respondents were asked which sections of **first** they found most useful. The largest proportion of (88 per cent) said they found the news section ‘very useful’ or ‘fairly useful’, while 87 per cent said they found the features section useful to a similar extent. Seventy five per cent said the elections section was ‘very useful’ or ‘fairly useful’. See Table 10.

Table 10: Thinking about the content of first, how useful do you find the following sections of the magazine?

	Very useful		Fairly useful		Not very useful		Not at all useful		Don't know		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
News	159	41	186	48	33	8	6	2	7	2	391
Features	129	33	209	54	35	9	11	3	6	2	390
Elections	126	32	165	42	72	19	16	4	10	3	389
LGA political leaders' comment	117	30	164	42	65	17	33	9	8	2	387
Councillor (help and advice on your role as a councillor)	101	26	159	41	87	22	30	8	12	3	389
Interviews	92	24	181	46	88	23	21	5	8	2	390
Parliament (the LGA's public affairs work with MPs and peers)	90	23	175	45	87	23	21	5	13	3	386
Comment	78	20	203	52	73	19	22	6	12	3	388
Letters	48	12	184	47	105	27	44	11	10	3	391
Sound bites	25	6	159	41	111	29	65	17	28	7	388
Adverts	11	3	67	17	164	42	129	33	17	4	388

Base all respondents (see individual totals)

The majority of respondents (53 per cent) said main reason for reading **first** was because it was ‘an efficient way of getting news about the local government sector’, followed 46 per cent of respondents who said their main reason for reading was because ‘first helps me to better understand what the LGA is doing’. See Table 11.

Table 11: Please tell us, what are your main reasons for reading first?

	N	%
first is an efficient way of getting news about the local government sector	207	53
first helps me to better understand what the LGA is doing	180	46
first gives me information which helps me to do my job as a councillor	134	34
first covers stories I am interested in	107	27
first content is reliable	98	25
first is written in an ‘easy to read’ format	92	23
first gives me timely information	62	16
first news is up-to-date	58	15

Base (all respondents) 394. Respondents could select up to three options

The most commonly enjoyed interview featured in first was with Sajid Javid MP (37 per cent) and the second most commonly enjoyed interview was with John Healey MP (25 per cent), with Andrew Gwynne MP and Paul Johnson from the Institute for Fiscal Studies being selected by 21 per cent of respondents each. See Table 12.

Table 12: Which interviews have you most enjoyed reading?		
	N	%
Sajid Javid MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government	147	37
John Healey MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Housing	100	25
Andrew Gwynne MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government	82	21
Paul Johnson, Director, Institute for Fiscal Studies	82	21
Sir Vince Cable MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats	70	18
None of the above	67	17
Julia Unwin, Chief Executive, Joseph Rowntree Trust	52	13
Simon Stevens, Chief Executive, NHS England	51	13
Angela Rayner MP, Shadow Education Secretary	46	12
Eleanor Schooling, National Director for Social Care, Ofsted	41	10
Stephen Dorrell, Chair of NHS Confederation	39	10
Duncan Selbie, Chief Executive, Public Health England	28	7
Teresa Pearce MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government	26	7
Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive, National Children's Bureau	20	5
Carey Oppenheim, Chief Executive, Early Intervention Foundation	13	3
Gunn Marit Helgesen, President, Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities	10	3

Base (all respondents) 394. Respondents could select up to three options

Further improvements

Respondents were presented with a list of items that currently feature in **first** and were asked which of these they would like to read more of and less of. The three most commonly selected additions to content were 'council good practice' (54 per cent), 'articles relevant to the councillor role' (53 per cent) and 'national issues affecting local government' (36 per cent). The three most commonly selected reductions to content were 'stories about partner organisations' (29 per cent), 'comment from LGA political groups' (25 per cent) and 'letters' (23 per cent).

Table 13: We would like your views about the content currently featured in first. Please choose up to THREE areas you would like to read more about and up to three areas you would like to read less about from the list below:

	More of		Less of	
	N	%	N	%
Articles relevant to the councillor role	207	53	18	5
Comment from LGA political groups	37	9	98	25
Council good practice	213	54	5	1
Expert columnists	43	11	53	13
Legislation and regulation	118	30	19	5
Letters	31	8	89	23
LGA news	29	7	13	3
Local and by-elections analysis	93	24	36	9
Local government news	58	15	7	2
National issues affecting local government	140	36	8	2
Opinion, comment and debate	13	3	65	16
Policy-related features/analysis	54	14	34	9
Interviews	19	5	57	14
Stories about partner organisations	12	3	115	29
LGA campaigns	27	7	41	10
Other	3	1	1	0
Don't know	3	1	31	8
None of the above	8	2	29	7

Base (all respondents) 394. Respondents could select up to three options

'News from individual councils' was the most commonly selected item of additional content (51 per cent), followed by 'broad regional coverage' (39 per cent), 'councillor profiles (35 per cent) and 'research and academic reports' (34 per cent). See Table 14. 'Other' comments, mentioned by 10 respondents were:

- "Town and District level."
- "Good practice and case studies."
- "How about something positive and constructive rather than endless whining about 'cuts'."
- "Most articles are relevant to those running a council. Needs to be more for those that are not."
- "More about ordinary councillors not those holding office."
- "Planning appeal decisions."
- "Good practice."
- "Campaigning for environmental sustainability and welfare advances."
- "Make it relevant to Wales."
- "Civil penalties list properties."

Table 14: What additional content, if any, would you like to see in first?

	N	%
News from individual councils	199	51
Broad regional coverage	155	39
Councillor profiles	139	35
Research and academic reports	132	34
A diverse range of voices from under-represented groups	116	29
LGA membership benefits	89	23
LGA events	76	19
'Big name' writers	63	16
LGA publications	57	14
Obituaries	31	8
None of the above	15	4
Other	10	3
Don't know	9	2

Base (all respondents) 394. Respondents could select more than one reply

As shown in Table 15, more than eight out of ten respondents (82 per cent) said they thought that **first** maintains a political balance in its content, with 13 per cent saying they were unsure and five per cent saying it did not maintain a political balance in its content.

Table 15: Do you think that first maintains a political balance in its content?

	N	%
Yes	322	82
No	19	5
Don't know	51	13

Base (all respondents) 392

Respondents were asked to state if they thought **first** includes enough articles written by certain groups of people. Generally, respondents thought the share of articles, with the exception of 'local residents', was about right. Of the groups deemed to be underrepresented, 40 per cent of respondents selected 'other councillors', followed by 'local residents' (35 per cent) and 'experts/academics' (26 per cent). Those groups thought to be overrepresented were 'ministers/national politicians' (27 per cent), followed by 'civil servants' (25 per cent) and 'charities' (23 per cent).

Table 16: Are there enough articles in first written by the following people:

	Not enough		About right		Too many		Don't know		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Councillors with executive responsibilities	73	20	222	60	43	12	33	9	371
Other councillors	149	40	165	44	20	5	37	10	371
Local government officers	60	16	215	59	40	11	52	14	367
Ministers/national politicians	47	13	184	50	100	27	36	10	367
Civil servants	35	10	146	41	91	25	88	24	360
LGA members	37	10	208	57	40	11	78	21	363
LGA officers	23	6	218	60	52	14	68	19	361
Experts/academics	94	26	147	40	61	17	61	17	363
Charities	45	13	146	41	83	23	86	24	360
Think tanks	60	17	151	42	74	21	75	21	360
Local residents	129	35	106	29	39	11	93	25	367
Partners (e.g. LEPs, housing associations)	77	21	173	48	35	10	77	21	362
Other (please specify)	27	21	23	18	6	5	72	56	128

Base all respondents (see individual totals)

Most respondents (72 per cent) were either 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with the quality of **first**, taking into account the look, feel and content of the magazine. A further 19 per cent were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied', and eight per cent were either 'fairly dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied'. See Table 17.

Table 17: Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of first, taking into account the look, feel and content of the magazine?

	N	%
Very satisfied	98	25
Fairly satisfied	178	46
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	73	19
Fairly dissatisfied	21	5
Very dissatisfied	10	3
Don't know	6	2

Base (all respondent) 386

The majority of respondents (69 per cent) said they did not keep copies of **first** as a source of reference, whereas 30 per cent did. See Table 18.

Table 18: Do you keep your copies of first as a source of reference?

	N	%
Yes	118	30
No	268	69
Don't know	1	0

Base (all respondent) 387

Signposting via first

Respondents were asked about the impact of **first** in signposting them to events, products and services in the last 12 months. As shown in Table 19, 30 per cent of respondents said they had ‘drawn their council’s attention to a product or service’ after seeing it advertised in **first** in the last year, and 27 per cent had ‘requested or downloaded a publication’ because they saw it advertised or featured in **first**. The take-up of ‘conferences and events’ and purchasing of ‘products or services’ generated fewer positive responses (12 per cent and five per cent, respectively).

Table 19: Thinking about the last 12 months, did you...

	Yes		No		Don't know		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Attend a conference or event because you saw it advertised or featured in first?	46	12	333	87	4	1	383
Request or download a publication because you saw it advertised or featured in first?	102	27	274	71	8	2	384
Buy a product or service after seeing it advertised in first?	21	5	354	92	10	3	385
Draw your council's attention to a product or service after seeing it advertised in first?	117	30	261	67	9	2	387

Base all respondents (see individual totals)

Format preferences

Two thirds of respondents (66 per cent) expressed a preference for no change to the format in which they received **first** in the future – that is, they favoured a printed magazine, delivered by post, as per the current format. Far fewer respondents (29 per cent) indicated a preference for ‘an email with links to **first** stories on the LGA website. Various online options were favoured by up to 20 per cent of respondents (see Table 20). ‘Other’ comments, given by three respondents were:

- “Having it in Print and also ONLINE to start with would be good to see how it goes - say 12 months.”
- “ePub – much easier on the eyes. Definitely not a PDF though.”
- “A large print word version text only.”

Table 20: Please tell us, in which format(s) would you prefer to receive first magazine in the future?

	N	%
Printed magazine, delivered by post (as now)	260	66
An email with links to first stories on the LGA website	116	29
Online (viewing it on the LGA website) via my PC/laptop	77	20
Online via my tablet	63	16

Online via my mobile/smartphone	36	9
A tablet app	26	7
A smartphone app	25	6
No preference	15	4
Other	5	1
Don't know	0	0

Base (all respondent) 394. Respondents could select multiple options

Respondents who indicated one or more preference regarding the future format of **first** magazine were asked to select their most favoured. Of the 125 who replied, 40 per cent chose 'printed magazine, delivered by post (as now)'. See Table 21.

Table 21: Which format would you most prefer?		
	N	%
Printed magazine, delivered by post (as now)	50	40
An email with links to first stories on the LGA website	22	18
Online (viewing it on the LGA website) via my PC/laptop	15	12
Online via my tablet	15	12
A tablet app	11	9
A smartphone app	7	6
Online via my mobile/smartphone	4	3
Other	1	1
No preference	0	0
Don't know	0	0

Base (all respondent) 125

Respondents who selected email as a preferred way of receiving **first** in the future were asked how regularly they would like to receive an e-bulletin. Of the 115 respondents who replied, the most preferred frequency was 'monthly' which was selected by 49 per cent of respondents.

Table 22: You selected email as a preferred way of receiving first in the future. If we launch a first e-bulletin, how often would you like to receive it?		
	N	%
Monthly	56	49
Weekly	26	23
Twice a month	26	23
More frequently – as and when new stories break	6	5
Not at all	0	0
Don't know	1	1

Base (all respondent) 115

Additional feedback

Respondents were invited to give further feedback on anything that could be done to improve their experience of **first** magazine. A total of 109 respondents gave comments. Most of the comments (about four out of ten) were about the magazine's content and/or design, and ways it could be improved. Full details can be found in Annex B.

The following themes were mentioned:

- Improve regional coverage/spread (including Wales and rural England).
- Increase focus on ‘ordinary’ councillors.
- Provide more practical tips about the councillor role (including case studies and transferrable ideas).
- Update the content so it is more timely and enliven the material.
- Provide more election news.
- Include more stories about the LGA’s work in supporting member councils.
- Change the colour palette, especially for sight-impaired readers.

Further to comments about improving the magazine’s content, around three in ten respondents gave generally positive or neutral feedback, for instance:

- “Generally very happy with publication. A great asset for reference.”
- “I am happy with First. I read it thoroughly and then take out titbits and keep some of my local residents informed. Good reading mostly.”
- “I have enjoyed reading first and it has helped me to understand some issues and to better understand legislation and how it is being applied.”
- “Fairly satisfied with what’s a topical and informative magazine.”
- “Just keep doing what you are doing.”

A group of respondents made comments relating to the magazine’s physical format, with slightly more respondents indicating a preference for an electronic magazine rather than a paper copy (although the latter was preferred by some others). The plastic wrapper used to distribute the magazine was seen as not environmentally friendly by some respondents.

A small number of respondents raised more negative comments about the magazine, which featured comments about impartiality, disappointing content, lack of time-relevant content, poor presentation and use of Twitter quotes.

firstonline

Firstonline was unfamiliar to 63 per cent of those responding, whereas 34 per cent said they were aware of the website (see Table 23).

	N	%
Yes	139	34
No	259	63
Don’t know	13	3

Base (all respondent) 411

The largest proportion of respondents said, on average, they ‘never’ read firstonline (72 per cent). A further 12 per cent said they read the online publication less frequently than ‘some months’ (see Table 24). Of the 294 respondents who said they ‘never’ read **firstonline**, 80 per cent said they had ‘never’ heard of the publication.

Table 24: On average, how often do you read firstonline?		
	N	%
Every month	17	4
Most months	23	6
Some months	27	7
Less frequently than the above	48	12
Never	294	72

Base (all respondent) 409

Of the 115 respondents who said they read **firstonline**, either monthly or less frequency, 50 per cent said they read the publication on their desktop computer or laptop (see Table 25).

Table 25: When you read firstonline, how do you read it?		
	N	%
On my mobile/smartphone	14	12
On my tablet	40	35
On my desktop computer or laptop	57	50
Other please state	1	1
Don't know	16	14

Base (all respondent) 115

Respondents were asked what, if anything, would make them more likely to read **firstonline**. The highest proportion of respondents said ‘nothing’ would make them more likely to read **firstonline** (40 per cent). Of the other proposals presented to respondents, 20 per cent selected ‘more localised content’, 19 per cent said ‘more detailed stories’ and 17 per cent said ‘publication of relevant regulations and legislation’. See Table 26.

Table 26: What, if anything, would make you more likely to read firstonline?		
	N	%
More localised content (e.g. links to LGA member councils)	85	20
More detailed stories (e.g. case studies)	80	19
Publication of relevant regulations and legislation	69	17
Publication of opinion polls	45	11
More debates and discussions	37	9
More interactivity (e.g. chat, blogs, ask the expert)	34	8
Regular updates (e.g. via an RSS or twitter feed)	32	8
Better online support (e.g. by topic or policy area)	32	8
More digital content (e.g. story archive, hyperlinks)	29	7
Videos	22	5
Nothing	166	40
Other (please specify)	53	13

Base (all respondent) 418. Respondents could give more than one reply.

About you

Sixty per cent of respondents held additional responsibilities as councillors (see Table 27).

Table 27: Do you have any additional responsibilities as a councillor (e.g. council leader, group leader, portfolio holder, cabinet member, committee chair)?

	N	%
Yes	243	60
No	150	37
Prefer not to say	15	4

Base respondent (408)

Household income among respondents, in the last 12 months, was fairly evenly distributed across the income ranges provided, with the highest proportion (16 per cent) sitting within the £25,001-£35,000 bracket. See Table 28.

Table 28: Thinking about the last 12 months, what was the range of your total household income before tax?

	N	%
Up to £15,000	38	9
£15,001-£25,000	39	10
£25,001-£35,000	64	16
£35,001-£45,000	51	12
£45,001-£65,000	53	13
£65,001-£85,000	31	8
More than £85,000	36	9
Prefer not to say	98	24

Base respondent (410)

The largest proportion of respondents (45 per cent) selected the 65 years or over age band when invited to specify their age (see Table 29).

Table 29: Please indicate your age group

	N	%
Under 25 years	3	1
25-34 years	17	4
35-49 years	50	12
50-64 years	136	33
65 years or over	183	45
Prefer not to say	20	5

Base respondent (409)

Most of the councillors who responded to the survey were male (67 per cent), and 30 per cent were female (see Table 30).

Table 30: Please indicate your gender

	N	%
Male	275	67
Female	123	30
Prefer not to say	11	3

Base respondent (409)

Annex A: 2018 Survey Questions

Welcome

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey about first magazine and firstonline. We would be grateful if you would complete the survey at the earliest opportunity and by Monday 23 April 2018 at the latest.

The survey asks about:

- Finding out about the LGA
- Reading first
- Most useful content
- Further improvements
- Signposting via first firstonline

The information we collect will be aggregated, and no individual or council will be identified in any publications, although identifiable information may be used internally within the LGA.

The survey will take about 15 minutes to complete, depending on the answers you provide. If you have any queries about the survey, please email rebekah.wilson@local.gov.uk or karen.thornton@local.gov.uk

Many thanks for your help,

Karen Thornton
Editor, first magazine

Please amend your details if required

Name _____
Role _____
Local Authority _____
Email _____

Section 1: Finding out about the LGA

How do you generally find out about the work of the LGA?

Please select all answers that apply

LGA Chairman, Lord Porter's weekly email

LGA Chief Executive, Mark Lloyd's email

Political group offices e-bulletin

Parliamentary bulletin

Other e-bulletins (for example, children and young people e-bulletin, finance e-bulletin)

'first' magazine

firstonline

LGA website

Media work/press releases
Publications (for example, Growing Places)
Events and conferences
Face-to-face contact
Director of Communication, David Holdstock's CommsNet
Other (please specify)

Section 2: Reading first

Now, we would like to know what you think about first magazine. Later in the survey we will ask for your views on our firstonline website.

How often do you read first?

Please select one option

Always (every issue)
Regularly (most issues)
Occasionally (some issues)
Rarely (the odd issue)
Never (not at all)

If you rarely read first, please tell us why:

Please select all answers that apply

Lack of time
Do not find it useful
Not relevant to my role as a councillor
I read firstonline instead
I get information about the LGA from other sources
Other (please specify)
Don't know

If you never read first, please tell us why:

Please tick all boxes that apply

Lack of time
Do not find it useful
Not relevant to my role as a councillor
I read firstonline instead
I get information about the LGA from other sources
Other (please specify)
Don't know

How much of each edition of first do you read?

Please select one option

All of it
Most of it (more than half)
Some of it (a quarter to a half)
The odd article here and there (less than a quarter)
None of it

If we were to change the frequency of first magazine in the future, how often, would you like to receive it?

Please select one option

Weekly

Twice a month

Monthly, as now (no change)

Every other month

Quarterly (once every 3 months)

Yearly

Never

Don't know

Section 3: Most useful content

How useful is first...?

Please select one answer on each row

	Very useful	Fairly useful	Not very useful	Not at all useful	Don't know
In keeping you informed about what the LGA does					
In telling you about key LGA events and publications					
In keeping you informed about local government news and policy issues					
In supporting you in your role as a councillor					

Thinking about the content of first, how useful do you find the following sections of the magazine?

Please select one answer on each row

	Very useful	Fairly useful	Not very useful	Not at all useful	Don't know
News					
Adverts					
Letters					
Sound bites					
Features					
Interviews					
Comment					
LGA political leaders' comment					
Parliament (the LGA's public affairs work with MPs and peers)					
Councillor (help and advice on your role as a councillor)					
Elections					

Please tell us, what are your main reasons for reading first?

Please select up to three options

first covers stories I am interested in

first is an efficient way of getting news about the local government sector
 first gives me timely information
 first helps me to better understand what the LGA is doing
 first content is reliable
 first gives me information which helps me to do my job as a councillor
 first news is up-to-date
 first is written in an 'easy to read' format

Which interviews have you most enjoyed reading?

Please select up to three options

- Paul Johnson, Director, Institute for Fiscal Studies
- Andrew Gwynne MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
- Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive, National Children's Bureau
- Sir Vince Cable MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats
- Eleanor Schooling, National Director for Social Care, Ofsted
- John Healey MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Housing
- Gunn Marit Helgesen, President, Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities
- Sajid Javid MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
- Duncan Selbie, Chief Executive, Public Health England
- Simon Stevens, Chief Executive, NHS England
- Teresa Pearce MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
- Carey Oppenheim, Chief Executive, Early Intervention Foundation
- Angela Rayner MP, Shadow Education Secretary
- Julia Unwin, Chief Executive, Joseph Rowntree Trust
- Stephen Dorrell, Chair of NHS Confederation
- None of the above

We would like your views about the content currently featured in first.

Please choose up to THREE areas you would like to read more about and up to three areas you would like to read less about from the list below:

Please select up to three answers in the 'more of' column and up to three answers in the 'less of' column.

	More of	Less of
Articles relevant to the councillor role		
Comment from LGA political groups		
Council good practice		
Expert columnists		
Legislation and regulation		
Letters		
LGA news		
Local and by-elections analysis		
Local government news		
National issues affecting local government		
Opinion, comment and debate		
Policy-related features/analysis		

	More of	Less of
Interviews		
Stories about partner organisations		
LGA campaigns		
Other (please specify)		
Don't know		
None of the above		

What additional content, if any, would you like to see in first?

Please select all that apply

'Big name' writers

Councillor profiles

A diverse range of voices from under-represented groups

News from individual councils

Broad regional coverage

Research and academic reports

LGA membership benefits

LGA events

LGA publications

Obituaries

Other (please specify)

None of the above

Don't know

Do you think that first maintains a political balance in its content?

Please select one option

Yes

No

Don't know

Are there enough articles in first written by the following people:

Please select one option on each row

	Not enough	About right	Too many	Don't know
Councillors with executive responsibilities				
Other councillors				
Local government officers				
Ministers/national politicians				
Civil servants				
LGA members				
LGA officers				
Experts/academics				
Charities				
Think tanks				
Local residents				
Partners (e.g. LEPs, housing associations)				
Other (please specify)				

Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of first, taking into account the look, feel and content of the magazine?

Please select one option

Very satisfied

Fairly satisfied

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Fairly dissatisfied

Very dissatisfied

Don't know

Do you keep your copies of first as a source of reference?

Please select one option

Yes

No

Don't know

Section 5: Signposting via first

Thinking about the last 12 months, did you attend a conference or event because you saw it advertised or featured in first?

Please select one option

Yes

No

Don't know

Thinking about the last 12 months, did you request or download a publication because you saw it advertised or featured in first?

Please select one option

Yes

No

Don't know

Have you ever bought a product or service after seeing it advertised in first?

Please select one option

Yes

No

Don't know

Have you ever drawn your council's attention to a product or service after seeing it advertised in first?

Please select one option

Yes

No

Don't know

Please tell us, in which format(s) would you prefer to receive first magazine in the future?

Please select all that apply

Printed magazine, delivered by post (as now)

An email with links to first stories on the LGA website

Online (viewing it on the LGA website) via my PC/laptop
Online via my mobile/smartphone
Online via my tablet
A smartphone app
A tablet app
Other (please specify)
No preference
Don't know

Which format would you most prefer?

Please select one option

Printed magazine, delivered by post (as now)
An email with links to first stories on the LGA website
Online (viewing it on the LGA website) via my PC/laptop
Online via my mobile/smartphone
Online via my tablet
A smartphone app
A tablet app
Other (please specify)
No preference
Don't know

You selected email as a preferred way of receiving first in the future. If we launch a first e-bulletin, how often would you like to receive it?

Please select one option

Weekly
Twice a month
Monthly
More frequently – as and when new stories break
Not at all
Don't know

Please let us know if there is anything we can do to improve your experience of first magazine.

Section 7: firstonline

Now thinking about firstonline (www.local.gov.uk/first), please answer the following questions:

Are you aware of firstonline, our website for first magazine?

Please select one option

Yes
No

Don't know

On average, how often do you read firstonline?

Please select one option

Every month

Most months

Some months

Less frequently than the above

Never

When you read firstonline, how do you read it?

Please select all that apply

On my mobile/ smartphone

On my tablet

On my desktop computer or laptop

Other (please state)

Don't know

What, if anything, would make you more likely to read firstonline?

Please select all that apply

More interactivity (e.g. chat, blogs, ask the expert)

More detailed stories (e.g. case studies)

More digital content (e.g. story archive, hyperlinks)

More debates and discussions

More localised content (e.g. links to LGA member councils)

Videos

Regular updates (e.g. via an RSS or twitter feed)

Better online support (e.g. by topic or policy area)

Publication of opinion polls

Publication of relevant regulations and legislation

Nothing

Other (please specify)

Section 8: About You

Finally, we would like to know more about our readers in order to develop first magazine in ways that would best meet your needs. Your replies will be treated confidentially, and will help ensure advertising and editorial content is relevant and appropriate.

Do you have any additional responsibilities as a councillor (e.g. council leader, group leader, portfolio holder, cabinet member, committee chair)?

Please select one option

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

Thinking about the last 12 months, what was the range of your total household income before tax?

Please select one option

Up to £15,000
£15,001-£25,000
£25,001-£35,000
£35,001-£45,000
£45,001-£65,000
£65,001-£85,000
More than £85,000
Prefer not to say

Please indicate your age group

Please select one option

Under 25 years
25-34 years
35-49 years
50-64 years
65 years or over
Prefer not to say

Please indicate your gender

Please select one option

Male
Female
Prefer not to say

Annex B: Suggestions for further improvement

A total of 109 councillors gave additional feedback on ways to improve their experience of **first** magazine. The comments broadly fall into the themes outlined in the Table A below, with some councillors making multiple suggestions in their feedback.

Table A: Please let us know if there is anything we can do to improve your experience of first magazine.
General positive or neutral
A good magazine, and I read it when I can, but one of the difficulties of being a senior councillor is the sheer volume of information and the endless lobbying by email from many organisations. First is not too long and an accessible read which is a plus.
Carry on the excellent work.
It is OK as it is.
Generally very happy with publication. A great asset for reference
Don't think so.
I am happy with first. I read it thoroughly and then take out titbits and keep some of my local residents informed. Good reading mostly.
Nothing required.
Nothing, thank you.
It's pretty good as it is. Pity you are reducing the cartoons.
Just keep doing what you are doing.
It's still good to receive one good publication in print. Thank you.
I am generally content with first.
I am satisfied as it is now.
Nothing much.
Very happy with current format.
I enjoy it, I feel I don't yet know enough about what I can get from the LGA (although I am fairly recently-elected).
The magazine arrives and gets put on the pile of paperwork to read. It's a low priority item. There are generally interesting bits in it should I find the time for it, but that's usually when it's time for a clear-out. If it wasn't physically there in the pile on my sofa I would never read it. Emails are much easier to discard. You don't have to take them out of the plastic wrapper before they go in the recycle bin.
Overall I am pleased with the current style and content of first.
I think it's basically fine. I don't expect it to be thrilling! Thanks.
Nothing more than I already have indicated in my responses
I think first is an excellent magazine, and I find there are several articles worth keeping in every issue. Very useful for a Councillor and I have had more than one occasion to raise questions at Scrutiny based on the information in first.
As I am a new Councillor I have found it an invaluable reference tool.
Keep it as is.
Currently nothing comes to mind.
About right.
Keep in the present format and take notice of suggested recommendations.
I think first does its best to relay information in a manner that is understandable and in a format that is readable and easy to read. I usually read it on the train.
Nothing specific at the moment other than more need for encouraging disabled to be members and contribute as councillors in local government and policy.

Very informative and up to date information.
It's very good to learn what's going on around the country
I enjoy reading first.
No fairly satisfied with what's a topical and informative magazine.
Pretty good now. Please note that people (including me) are far more likely to read something which they receive in hard copy than electronically.
I have enjoyed reading First and it has helped me to understand some issues and to better understand legislation and how it is being applied.
Content
Please feature more content that acknowledges devolution.
I like the cartoons! More please.
Too many councils in the south a bit like south not north.
More profiles of Councillors at a local level with top Tips for being an effective and respected Councillor.
I am a Liberal Democrat councillor in an award winning Liberal Democrat council. We never get heard in your magazine.
It should show case cutting edge ideas from other councils on a variety of issues that others can copy.
Would like to see more detail regarding by-elections. For example, the number of votes cast, number for each candidate and difference since last election.
As above, needs to be more about the 'backbencher' role. What are councillors doing as community leaders? I like it on paper as get too much email!
Yes, have less from people holding office and more from grass roots councillors. Not interested in interviews and conferences as only high up councillors go to them. More on grass roots issues and election results.
An article on global issues would be interesting. An example would be to compare our health and social care sector with either a European country or the US.
Democratic services in the council and their role.
Readers' questions as part of interviews.
More about Scrutiny please and also it is interesting to see how other councils are investing and becoming more business oriented so we can learn from their experience.
Make it more practical in terms of helping me in the devising of policy, assessment of policy and signposting to successful policy. What works? How does it work successfully? What doesn't work? Why not?
Make sure that the content comes from people within Local Government. You have to be there to understand the pros and cons and difficulties.
More in-depth articles – some just skim the surface and need more facts, leaving analysis to the reader (ONS is a good example).
Give more prominence to the Thrasher and Rallings articles! :)
More views from ordinary Councillors on the day to day of being a Councillor and the special issues which present in our areas, so we can see commonalities and differences in practice and use them to better our practice.
Provide appropriate political balance rather than promoting left wing and civil service priorities.
Sometimes the content of articles is disappointing. The headlines seem to promise some good ideas but having read it I think I could have written that myself!
Discussion on more up dated issues locally and what is being done to resolve these.
More regional news and feature
A more geographical spread on issues and news across the country.
This is a good magazine, but out here in mid wales a lot of it is not relevant. More ways to be lessened to would be helpful, the rural councils have as many problems but I feel they are made worse by a lack of understanding. we need ways to lobby for things and be heard not ignored.

More case histories to illustrate theories/opinions/promotions.
Keep it informative and don't forget the people who are involved in Local Government no matter what Party they belong to.
More information about how scrutiny can improve outcomes for our councils.
Stronger regional content and stronger anti austerity position which is destroying local government.
Generally the magazine is ok. I would like to more information about changes in legislation/rules that affect councils.
It has some merit and needs to be read, but overall, it's dreary in presentation and turgid in content. A complete revamp would be good!
Cut out the maddening quotes people make on social media. Letters should be just that and not added to by copies of ridiculous social media quotes.
Sometimes the articles and features suffer from 'empty talk', where there is tautology and verbiage at the expense of content and clarity. In addition, the social media Twitter posts are usually examples of tedious, self-publicity.
Probably just bring I into 21st century online one way or another.
More information about and from ordinary Councillors, not just leaders.
Too much of it is the 'we should do this' style of political comment with no accompanying evidence or practical information.
More Councillors experience stories and issues.
Make it more interesting, with a few funny stories. Group Leaders columns just repetition of their National Party's views. Explain how the LGA actually helps LAs, which have seen massive cuts in their government grant.
The printed magazine is a complete waste of money – it shouldn't exist in the current world. Ultimately my council tax payers are paying for it. Much of the content is derivative. The tweets on the letter page are particularly awful and of minimal value to anyone. Much of the news is largely out of date by the time the magazine arrives – anyone with any serious interest would know about them long before the magazine arrives. Frankly I would not notice if it ceased publication tomorrow.
I have never asked for it and only skim it and have found nothing useful. I am particularly interested in what Local councils are doing internationally or in what LGA is doing to get better funding for Local councils. Neither seems on your agenda. I am not convinced that majority of ordinary councillors have any say in LGA matters or get a chance to serve on the board.
Too many bland articles; one begins reading expecting to get to something meaty, but doesn't. In fact some such articles often state the absolutely obvious.
I don't understand why you include a section listing a series of uninteresting tweets about how pleased Cllr X was to be at a conference on some mundane topic. Get rid of it.
The magazine is too formulaic. There are no surprises. The interviews take up too much space particularly the endless use of photos of the same person. What I want to see is good practice, case studies and academic work which is going to help me progress as a councillor. I can get comment every month at Council!
Format
Like electronic to save paper. Short easy to absorb articles. No political cant.
I receive two posted copies one to Wychavon District and one to Worcestershire.....you should do a cull of multiple magazines to members
If you have a husband and wife who are both Councillors only send ONE magazine. Likewise ensure where there are twin-hatters only one edition of the First Magazine is required!
Stop wrapping it in plastic. Issue it quarterly or electronically monthly.
Make it all electronic.
Only send one copy to my address.
While the magazine is very professional I do not read very much if any of it. I believe that

given the modern media you could save a great deal of money by using email or similar.

I imagine this publication costs much both in terms of staff costs and publication. I think in this day and age it is no longer necessary. An email or link to website would be cheaper. The waste of paper is completely wrong.

Go online.

Go totally digital and make articles interactive with purl scripts so you can really understand your readers.

Not to receive it so often. Many councillors are so busy and it's having the time to read the magazine. I would normally thumb through the mag and if anything catches my eye then I'd read it.

I receive two copies, as I am a dual hatter. Borough Councillor and County Councillor. There needs to be a system of cross referencing to avoid this wastage. My partner also receives her own copy, so we have 3 coming into the household. Change the wrapping. We should respond to the plastics campaign and make it a paper or non-plastic covering.

Move it to online/email only.

Design

Some information is difficult to read because the text is covered by a highlighted background colour.

Please don't use white print on a coloured background.

Make it accessible for sight disabled people who can't read on line and need hard copy

Negative

First in its current format has had its day. LGC and MJ have cornered the market with their daily news and analysis. The need to present political balance and give a voice to different council types results in much of the content being of no interest whatsoever.

You are not relevant at my level. I have over 44 years of experience at Town and District Council level. I have held every post, except Leader (because I have never wanted to be Leader). I have lead and been responsible for schemes of up to £36m (which we brought in 10% under budget and 3 years before time) Yet I find little if anything of use. A damning indictment. Where is the advice on the OTC attempting to turn us Cllrs into criminals if we do not disclose our private electronic address books? That is my most pressing and immediate issue that may lead me out of local politics. For I would never, never recommend any one to stand if the State has the right to take away your private computer at any time it thinks fit. A major, major issue. As I often say to Committees, particularly at County level, make yourself relevant, then power will follow.

I don't find the printed magazine very useful because most of the content has already appeared elsewhere.

Far too much political opinion especially by Labour politicians that are pure speculation and don't give a true balance especially here in Cornwall. Facts would be more helpful.

Stop sending it.

I would not miss it if you abolished it. I read it just in case there is something interesting in it.

I no longer take my copy out of the plastic cover. I have read it in the past but have never found anything of value to Wales – everything seems to be to do with England. I am a committed and busy councillor with very little spare time. Having found little of interest in the past I no longer open my copy. If things have changed I'm sorry, I had already decided it was not for me.

It's at present a pretty irrelevant waste of money. I don't even open it most months.

More independent, objective comment by First rather than pieces designed to push one viewpoint.

I resent it being used as a Labour platform. It inhibits searching for intelligent new ways to serve everyone, not just the dependent.

Other

I think it would be good to have an email address of every correspondent, I recently

emailed the first editor for that about the item on Taxi licencing Because I wanted to give him our experiences with cross border licencing but got no reply from the ed.

Fortunately, this survey took me 7 minutes or so rather than the promised 15; that would have bored me to death. Please will you make your surveys more concise and 'snappy' - perhaps more readers will be inclined to complete them then.

Give me more hours in the day to read things like this!

When campaigning add a questionnaire for readers to fill in so that all voices can be heard.

I would like contact names for key officers/civil servants who deal with specific LG and council areas of responsibility.

I am sure I have received only one copy of the magazine in the past six months or so. Postal delivery might be at fault.

Take notice of what people are telling you, thank you.



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We consider requests on an individual basis.