



## Parks Open Spaces and horticultural services:

### Trend analysis 2016/17

#### Overview

##### Key Issues

- This briefing provides information on the cost quality and performance of parks, open spaces and horticultural services for the year 2016/17.
- Costs for service provision have fallen, most likely as a result of reducing budgets in the service area, however, regarding quality of sites being recorded, there has been a slight improvement which shows staff are working hard to ensure parks and open spaces are not allowed to decline.
- There have been slight reductions in quality standards, chemical control methods, and maintenance frequencies no doubt due to budget reductions. This reduction is mirrored in a fall in public satisfaction by almost 5%. This concern will be closely monitored by APSE over the coming 12 months.
- The results show something of a mixed message with the impact of budget cuts affecting service delivery standards but, it is clear through the use of the LAMS recording system there are signs that staff are working hard to ameliorate the negative impact of austerity.

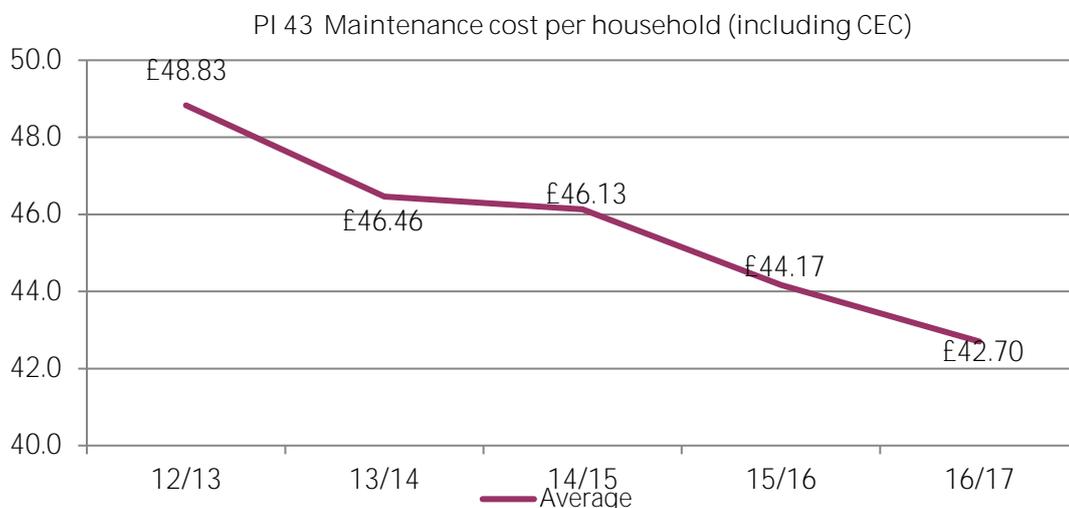
APSE performance networks has been comparing parks, open spaces and horticultural services data from a wide selection of local authorities throughout the UK since 1998/99, reporting results annually across a broad range of performance indicators. The summary looks each year at the continuing trends within the service to provide participating authorities with further evidence of how their performance sits within the broader national picture as well as what the trends infer and what further activity and analysis individual authorities and the APSE benchmarking group could consider. The analysis is based on averages across the whole service and **compares this year's figures (2016-17)** with previously submitted data.

The APSE performance networks service provides performance indicators for various dimensions of performance, particularly cost, productivity, quality and customer satisfaction.

This briefing explores each theme in turn using data from initial returns for 2016/17 against final returns from previous years. As authorities continue to submit data after the publication of the service reports, the averages for each performance indicator will have changed slightly by the end of the current financial year. Depending on the performance of the late returnees, this can sometimes significantly affect the trends.

## Cost

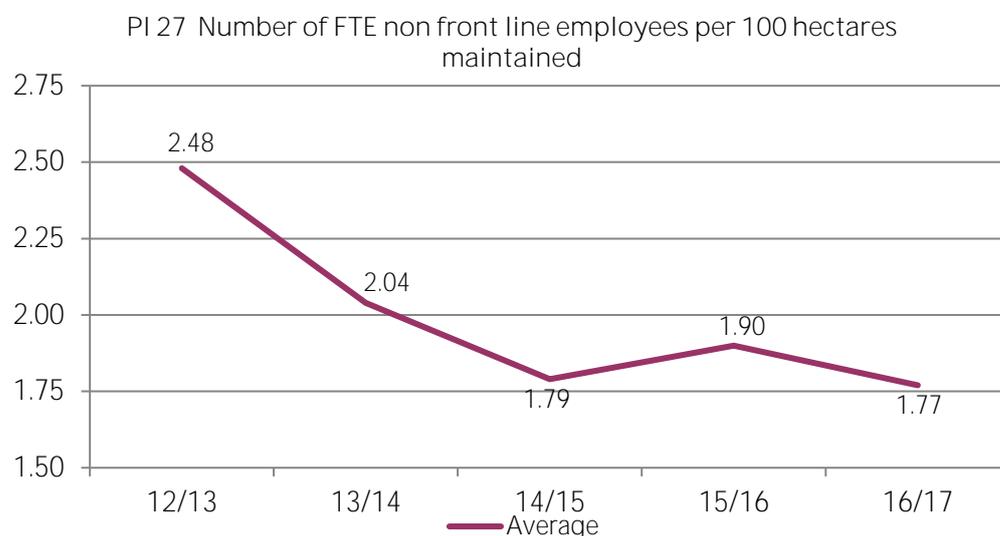
The data from the first batch of returns suggests that the average cost of service (Maintenance cost per household) has decreased by 12.55% to £42.70. This may well be an expected outcome given the widespread budget reductions that local authorities have had to face over the previous years.



## Productivity

The number of non-front line employees has reduced over the last five years by 28.63% to 1.77 full-time equivalents (FTE) employees during 2016/17.

This was felt to be potentially due to the reduced support structures within these services, however, it has to be recognised that such employees are nevertheless attributable to the direct provision of the horticultural service.

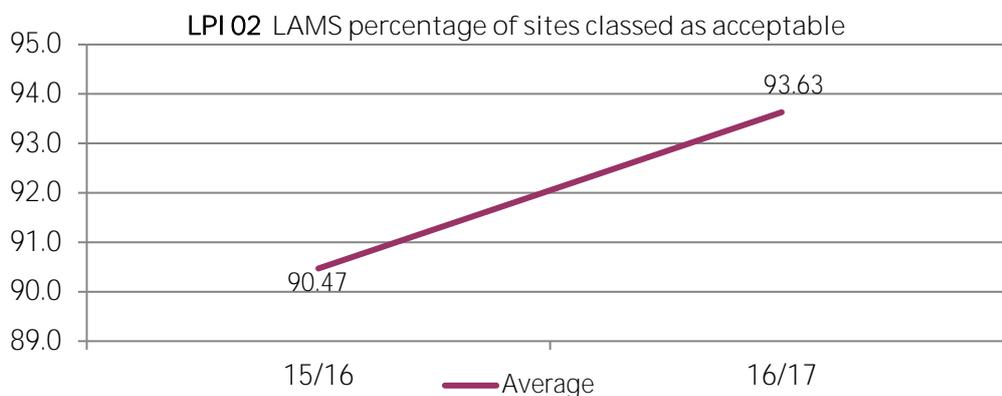


## Quality

As local authorities continue to face drastic budget measures and therefore services have to prove their worth more than ever. Those services which do not have stringent statutory requirements are often at the front of the queue when savings are looked for, services such as parks and open space maintenance. There is therefore a growing

need to identify the value for money such services bring by showing the quality they deliver, and by association, the benefits to the local authority and the people they serve.

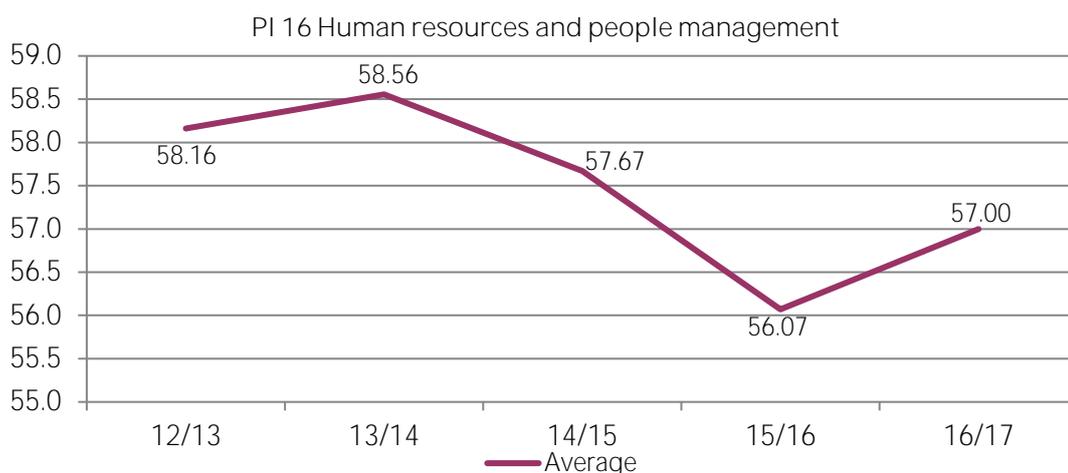
APSE's Land Audit Management System (LAMS) was introduced during 2015 and following the introduction of the system we can already evidence a 3.49% increase in the percentage of sites classed as acceptable from 90.47 during 2015/16 to 93.63 for 2016/17. This two year improvement on service delivery could well be attributed to the introduction of the LAMS quality audit.



Closer analysis of the LAMS data will continue over the coming years and APSE will use their regular benchmarking group meetings to monitor the current trend of improvement.

## Staffing

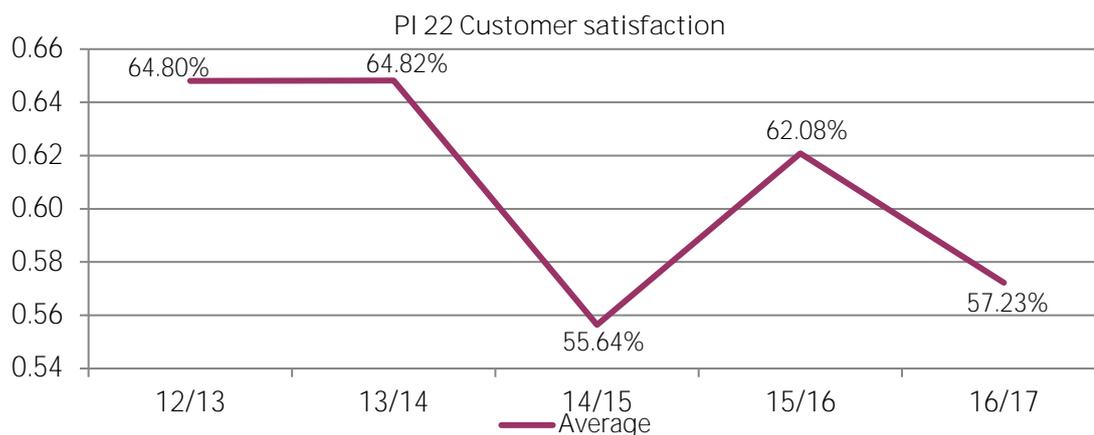
The extent of investment in training, development and health and safety over the last five years appears to again be on the increase when compared with the 15/16 returns of 56.07 to 57.00 for 16/17. The slight increase in average score during year 19 may again be aligned to the benefits of staff development, through initiatives around multi-skilling and role integration etc. as services look to maximise the skill base of their staff resource.



## Customer Satisfaction

Results from customer satisfaction surveys saw a drop of under 5% from 62.08% to 57.23% during year 19 (2016/17). The data shows that the returns reveal a period of change during the last five years; this may reflect many changes in approach around

service delivery standards as a result of the many financial challenges facing these services.

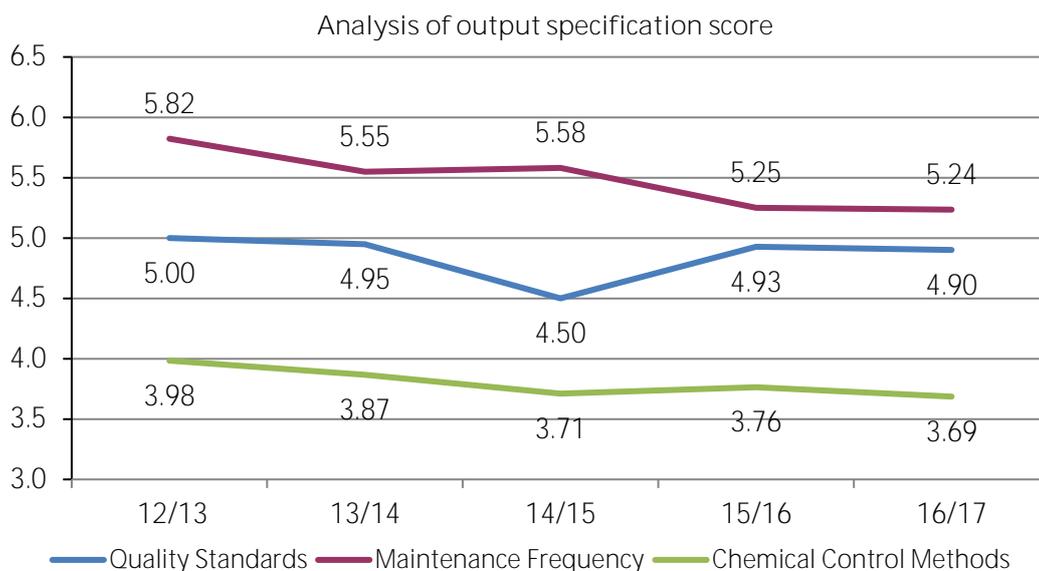


## Interpretation of Data

The performance data for 2016-17 contains both a rise and decline in the first batch of returns.

The reduction in such areas as cost and staff numbers may provide even further evidence of decreasing resources and the increasing associated challenges facing councils of today. However, consideration should be taken in view of the increase in quality, as this may well indicate that authorities are making every effort to deliver the best services possible within the existing level of resources.

An analysis of the output specification score is shown below which provides evidence that the previous level of reduction in quality standards, chemical control methods, and the maintenance frequency continues, albeit very slightly. Concluding; that the implemented reductions to the maintenance frequencies are now at the lowest practical number possible.



Whilst customer satisfaction levels have decreased from 62% to 57% during 2016/17, this is in itself an interesting data return when the improvement in quality data as mentioned above is taken into consideration.

**APSE's 2017 research into the state of the market** for parks indicated that the number of respondents who expect the parks and green space budget to change over the next year has increased significantly from last year rising from 83% in 2016 to 92% in 2016/17. Of those who expected a change in the budget, 86 % expect a decrease in revenue, which is an improvement on 2016 when 93% expected a decrease.

These trends look set to continue for the foreseeable future and APSE will continue to observe, through benchmarking groups, the correlation between decreasing funding and service provision in comparison to customer satisfaction and quality data returns.

APSE comment

Parks, open spaces and horticultural services are amongst the most valued neighbourhood services and are used or noticed on a daily basis by local communities. As parks face funding pressures councils are increasingly using innovative ways to continue to deliver parks services: managing service frequencies and standards differently as well as drawing upon strategies to generate additional income to support quality local public services.

For information about how APSE's Land Audit Management System (LAMS) can not only help measure quality in local areas but engage volunteers and friends of parks groups please use [this link](#) to our 'what's new' page.

Many of the issues emerging from our performance networks data analysis will be discussed at the forthcoming parks seminar which will be held at the Mere Golf Resort Knutsford, Cheshire on Thursday 15th March 2018. [Use this link to book online or to view the full programme.](#) APSE members can also participate in our free to attend Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Advisory Group. [To register your interest please use this link.](#)

APSE continues to represent the views and interests of its local authority members at the DHCLG Parks Action Group and will continue to press the case for investment and fair funding for parks services.

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