



11-70 Cost and quality performance in civic, cultural and community venues

To all APSE main contacts in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Key issues;

- Civic, cultural and community venues are important community based assets
- The running costs of venues and revenue that they generate are important factors in determining the future viability of venues and to sustain valuable community facilities
- This briefing explores performance data collated by APSE through its performance networks service and a commentary on the future focus for civic, cultural and community venues

1. Introduction

Civic cultural and community venues (CCCV) take on a variety of forms as community based assets, usually owned or leased, by the local authority and made available for community use through hire arrangements or as on-going facilities, such as community theatres. Some centres are managed directly by the local authority and some by community boards.

The use of CCCVs is varied, often accommodating meeting places for dance or sports groups, older peoples' activities, debt advice, counselling centres, sure start facilities or play groups, youth groups and entertainment, theatre and party venues.

The CCCV service area in recent years has been under increasing pressure to generate income to offset the costs, or reduce subsidies, in operating facilities including staff costs, maintenance, heating and lighting, and other running costs. However the service often provides hidden value to councils through the social benefits of active community hubs, and as a resource for sign-posting users to council services or agencies and benefitting diverse groups from young new parents to older people. The hidden benefits are often financial in providing low level support that might otherwise transpire into more expensive and formal interventions.

2. How are civic, cultural and community venues performing

This year is the eleventh year of the inclusion of CCCV data to APSE performance networks service. In addition to the analysis of data it is useful, in presenting the data this year, to add trend lines to all of the data graphs. These "linear" trend lines are used where the data set has linear characteristics, in this case the linear being performance over the years of the data collection.

This helps to show whether the general trend for a particular performance indicator is either increasing or decreasing. It is important to note of course that for some

performance indicators an improving situation may be represented by either an increase or a decrease, dependent on the indicator.

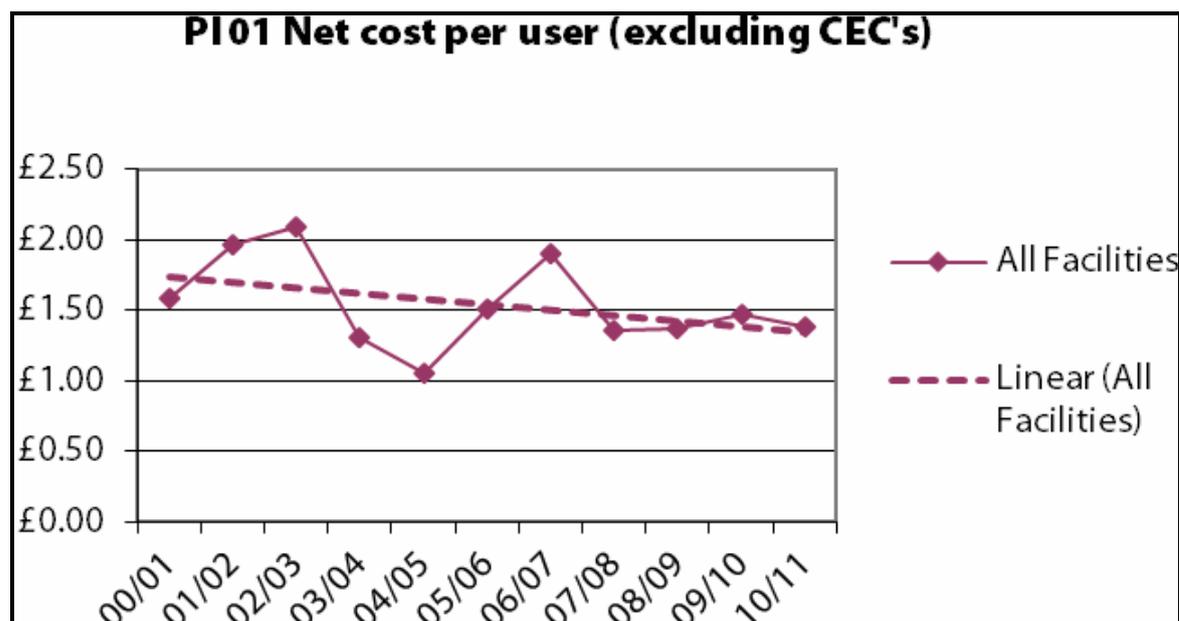
Key performance trends:

Net cost per user (PI 01) - Improving trend = decrease in net cost of the service per user.

This cost indicator measures the net cost (to councils) per user of the service. This performance indicator allows measurement against a number of different factors including the volume of visitors to users to venues, the running costs and any income generated.

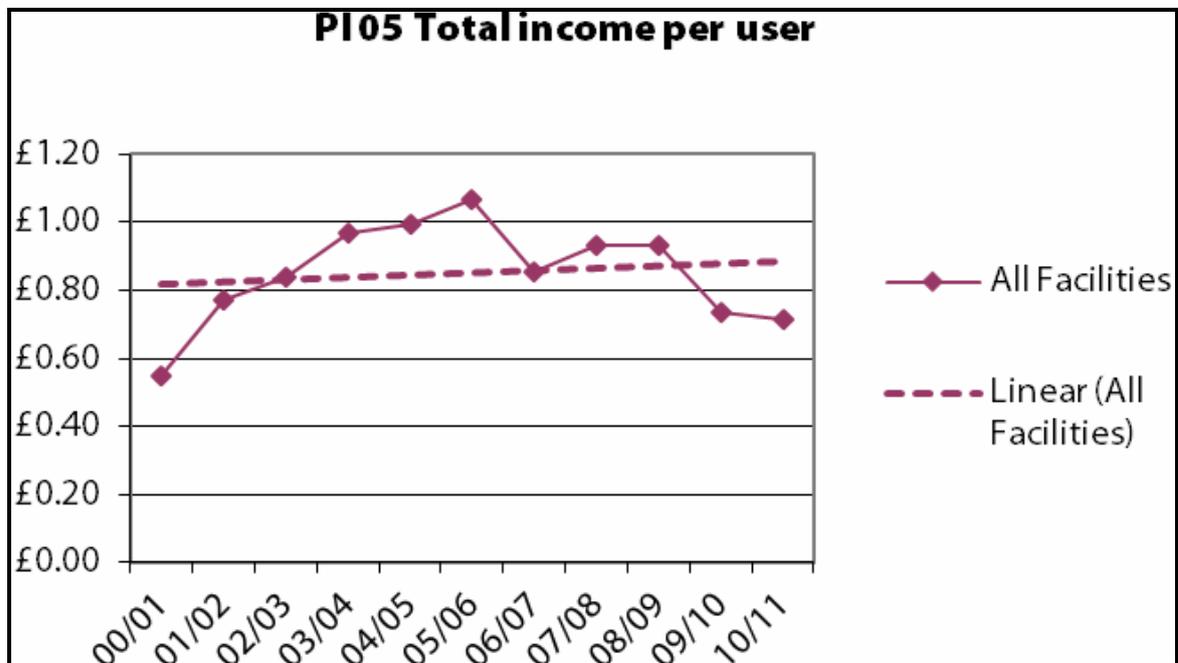
Previous rises in net cost in recent years have turned around this year. This appears to be due to increased usage and decreases in cost as shown in later trends below such as PI08 (recovery ratio) and PI17a (visits per household). This indicates that it is as a result of combination of both these factors of increased usage and decreasing costs that the net costs are decreasing which is a positive trend.

As can be seen from the linear trend, the overall direction over the last ten years is a downward and improving one. This reflects efforts by the service to control costs and generate income and maximise the use of local civic, cultural and community assets.



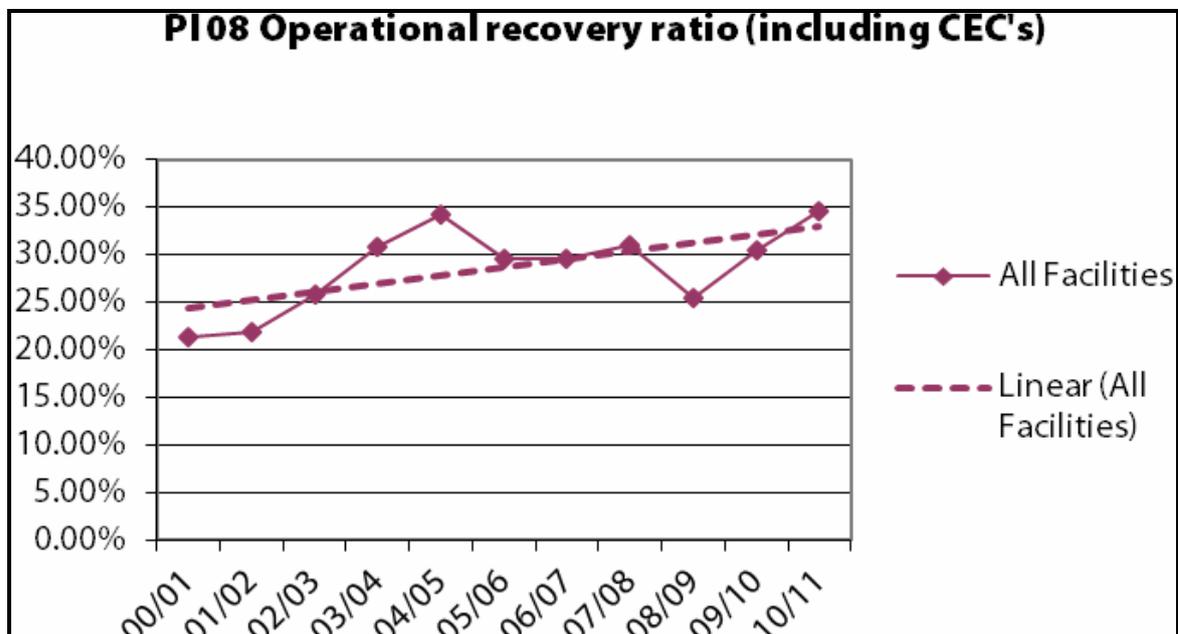
Total income per user (PI 05)Improving trend = increase

The impact of squeezed family budgets and the recessionary environment has seen total income, per user of facilities, struggle though the overall trend shows a slight increase. It should however be stressed that these increases are modest when averaged over the time of the data collection and in the current market increasing (or just maintaining) income levels is a challenge in itself.



Operational recovery ratio (PI 08) Improving trend = increase

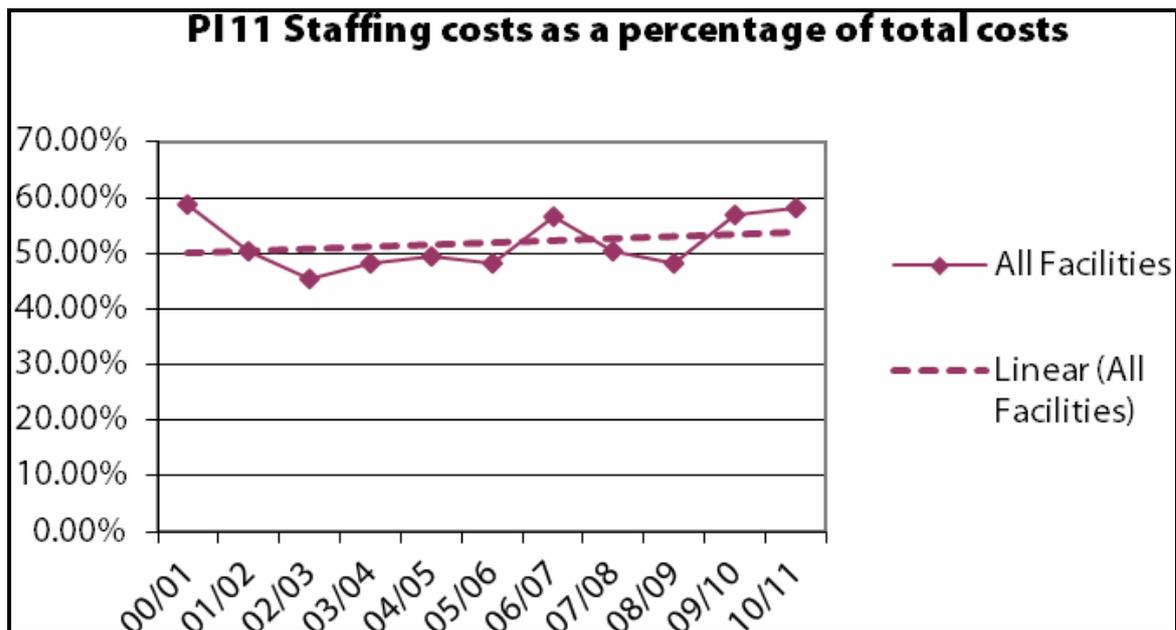
Increases in recent years have continued this year, and is almost certainly a reaction to the economic situation, with the emphasis on decreasing costs, maximising income and use of resources. A clear improving trend can be seen from the linear trend line. Over the last ten years there has been an improvement, on average of around 30% in this indicator.



Staffing costs as a percentage of total costs Improving trend PI 11 = decrease.

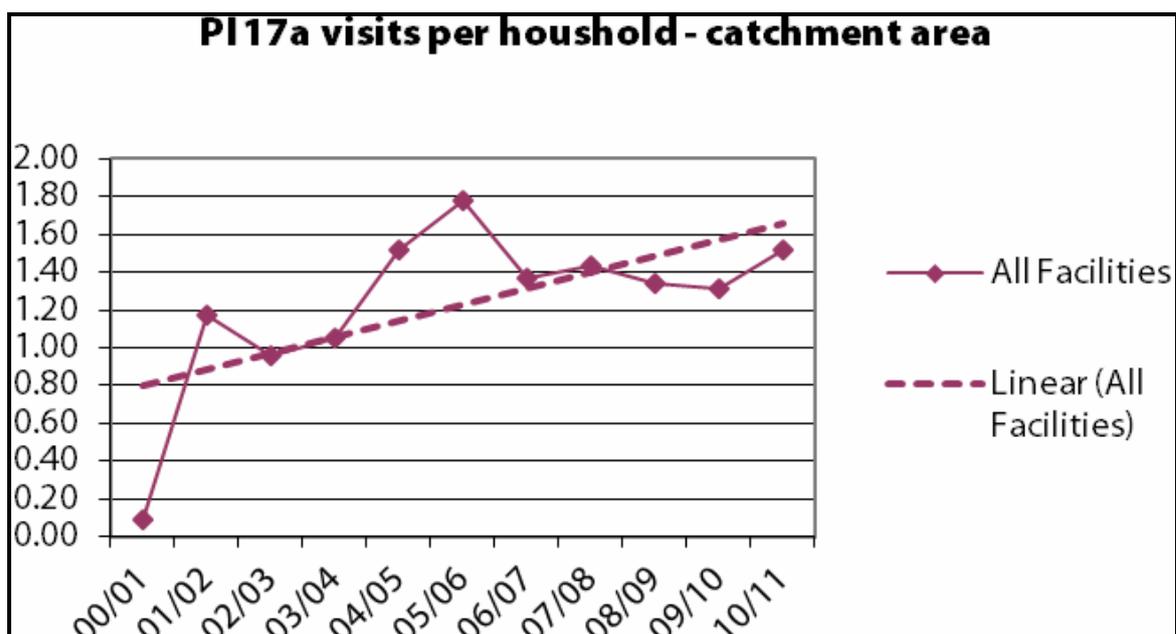
Staff costs have, on average, increased again this year, mirroring the results from year 12. Local arrangements will particularly affect this PI as facilities operate in differing ways (paid, staff, volunteers, caretakers etc). However changes are relatively low but increases will be unwelcome, especially as this is the single largest cost of most facilities. Staffing costs as a proportion of the whole have generally changed very

little over ten years. This may be seen as reflective of good management and appropriate use of staff resources.



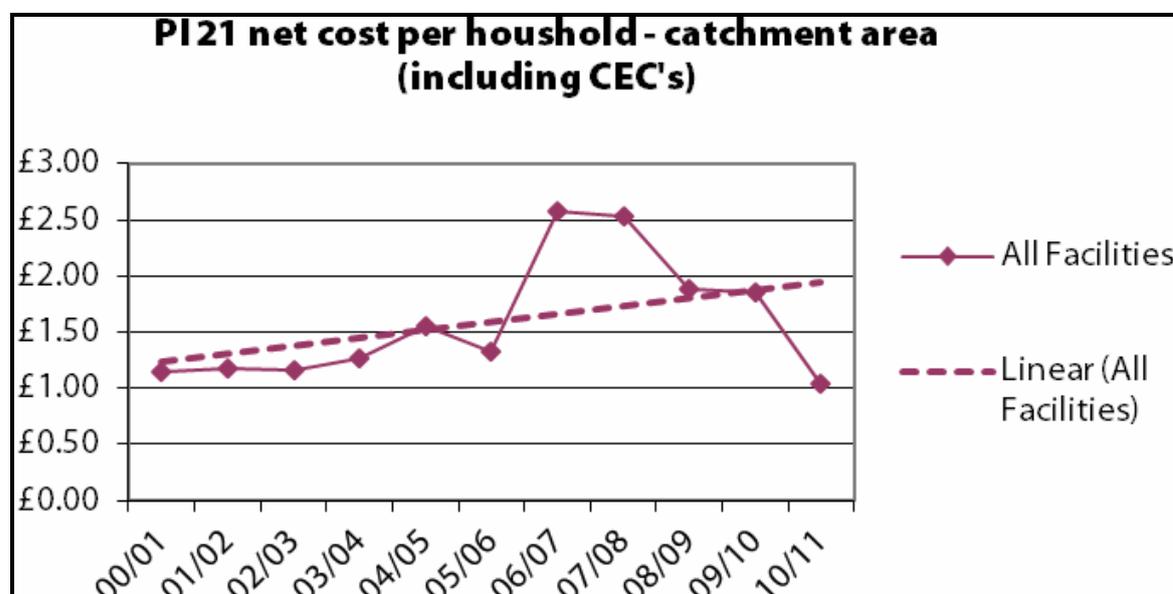
Visits per household (PI 17a) catchment area - Improving trend = increase

This particular performance indicator helps to establish the success of civic, cultural and community venues in serving their respective communities by measuring the usage of the local catchment area. There has been a positive improvement in the numbers of visits per household showing gradual and consistent improvements. Average values have more than doubled and it shows the steepest rise in performance of any of the selected PI's. This could also indicate in recent years that as economic times tighten the public rely more upon accessible and affordable local venues for activities and entertainment than more expensive central venues with ancillary travel costs.



Net costs per household – catchment area (PI 21a) Improving trend = decrease

There is evidence of a continued fall of net cost per household, even taking into account the spike in costs in 2006-07 and 2007-08. It is possible that facilities may have adjusted perceived catchments to achieve these reductions but this is unlikely for the group as a whole. The numbers of overall facilities are accounted for and therefore the trend analysis is adjusted accordingly. This is a positive indicator of improved performance and is consistent with other data findings.



Quality assurance and community consultation (PI 29) Improving trend = decrease

Whilst 'hard' data on cost and usage is essential for community based services quality is clearly also of great importance. Therefore the performance networks CCCV group measures quality assurance and community consultation issues. The results for this year are very pleasing showing an improvement across the service. In overall terms the trend shows a steady increase over time, though somewhat cyclical in nature. This could well be the case as it can be difficult to sustain concentration on these aspects with scarce resources. However during economic austerity with the public looking potentially to more local resources, the increase in quality and customer satisfaction levels supports the view that the service is capable of being both responsive and flexible in meeting local needs.

APSE commentary

With pressure on local services it is easy to dismiss the contribution of less 'headline' services such as civic cultural and community venues, to overall frontline services in local government. However the value of these facilities to local communities should not be underestimated. In the past two years APSE's CCCV benchmarking group has visited a number of best-practice venues to go beyond pure data collection and provide a means to process benchmark within facilities.

Findings from site visits has shown that venue staff are increasingly innovative in the use of space and facilities to maximise the use of resources, generating in many case additional rental income from other public sector bodies. For example, renting rooms

for local health purposes such as counselling, health visitor / baby clinics and a range of other services such debt advice services and crime prevention and youth services.

Increasingly venues are used as 'sign-post' facilities for other council services, helping the public gain better access and understanding about how to navigate local council and other public services. Much of this work is not quantified or quantifiable but demonstrates the commitment of frontline staff. Where there are local management boards the support of the venue or council staff is a vital component in the success of the venue.

Innovation in block-bookings and reviewing loyalty discounts, renewing service level agreements with core groups and determining what work areas remain viable have all contributed to the successful performance of the CCCV service. In addition innovation in concession sales for local theatres and venues have driven up income generation capacity. Use of positive publicity and forward planning on events has also helped to secure income streams.

The sector has also focussed attention on reducing costs, such as utilities, and the benchmarking group recently introduced a new suite of indicators exploring 'green' issues that have an economic benefit. This includes utility cost measurement and control, use of greener energy such as solar panels, replacing old inefficient boilers with new more efficient heating systems and natural ventilation systems rather than costly air conditioning – particularly on larger venues and theatres.

There is on-going pressures as council budgets are squeezed and there is a tendency to either reduce subsidies or to demand full cost recovery. APSE performance networks data can help to contextualise local performance, within a national benchmarking framework, and help to inform decision making at a local level.

For more details about the APSE performance benchmarking group for civic cultural and community benefits and to find out how your local authority can submit data please contact Mo Baines on mbaines@apse.org.uk

Mo Baines
APSE Principal Advisor

With special thanks to Ashley Marriott, [APSE solutions Associate](#)