

December 2013

Briefing 13-51

Street cleansing performance information on cost and service quality

To all APSE contacts in the UK, including Council Leaders and Chief Executives

Key issues:

- This briefing provides details of key performance indicators in street cleansing services including performance on cost, cleanliness levels and customer care
- The service has shown continuous improvement in a number of areas
- Service faces significant cost pressures

1. Introduction

APSE performance networks has been comparing street cleansing data from a wide selection of Local Authorities throughout the UK since 2000/01, reporting results annually across a broad range of performance indicators. This briefing paper looks at the continuing trends within the service to provide authorities with a picture of how their performance sits within the broader national trends. The analysis is based on averages across the whole service and compares this year's figures (2012-13) with previously submitted data.

As economic factors continue to play a highly significant role in service delivery, this analysis shows a breakdown of costs for street cleansing. The table below shows how the latest financial data compares at this stage with the last two years, shown as a percentage of the overall cost of service. As can be seen, staff and transport costs are the largest proportion of costs for this service. However, the costs of delivering services will vary from council to council.

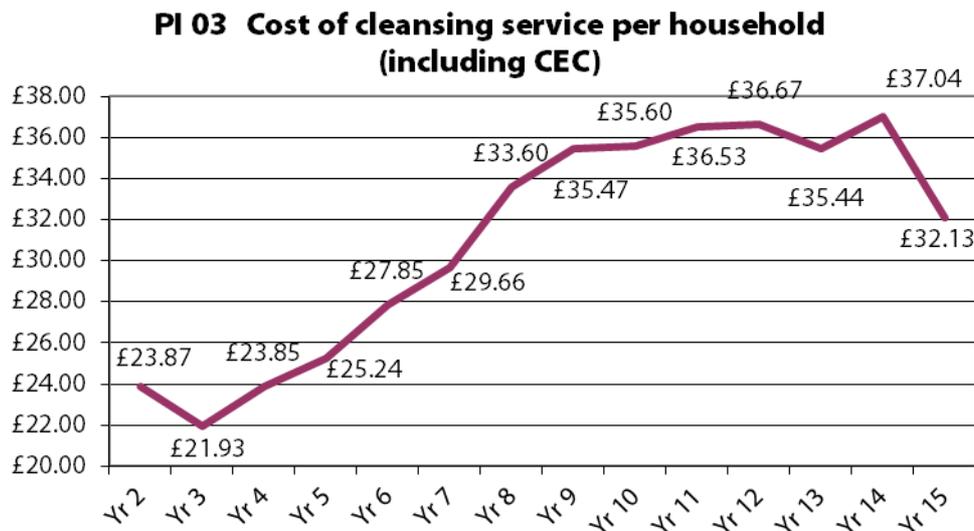
The proportion of staff costs are slightly up this year with transport costs going slightly the other way in a reverse of last year's situation. Once again, the most significant change is in central recharges which have again increased as a proportion of the overall costs. However, as the service costs show significant decreases overall, this is likely to be the result of internal charges not keeping pace with reductions in overall budgets.

Cost area	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Front line staff costs	57.02 %	56.77%	57.30 %
All staff costs	66.09 %	64.99%	66.08 %
Transport costs	21.06 %	21.83%	21.15 %
Central recharges	5.55 %	6.25%	6.65 %

2. Analysis and key findings

2.1 Cost indicators

Last year there was an unexpected increase in the average “cost per household” (PI 03) given the current financial situation. This was put down to a number of authorities submitting for the first time whose costs raised this particular average. However, that has been significantly turned around in Year 15 with a reduction of more than 13%, much more in line with expectations as budgets across the UK are being cut through austerity measures.

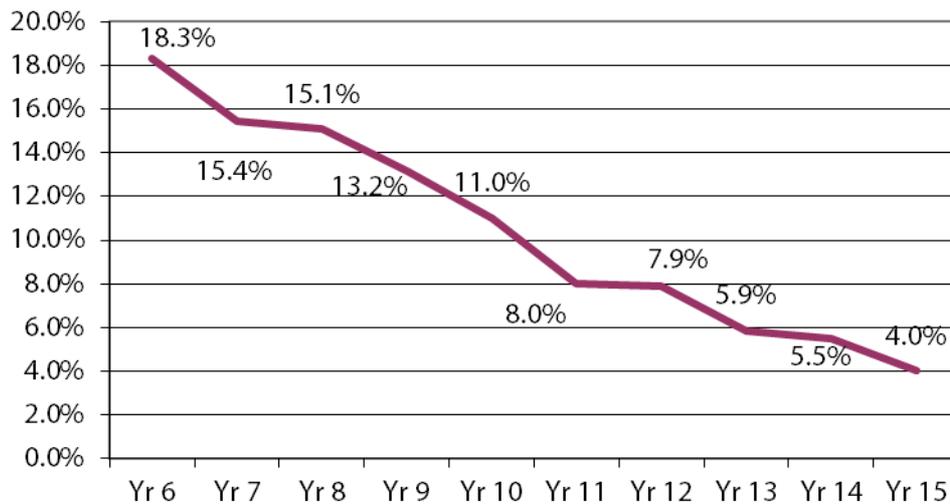


One of the related cost indicators that APSE have been tracking over the past few years is the percentage of overall street cleansing budgets allocated to education and publicity (PI 40), given the importance placed on trying to reduce the demand for the service over time. Originally, the average allocation was around 1.7% but it has reduced significantly since then. However, 2012/13 is the first time in four years when the mean figure has increased albeit fractionally, although it still remains at an average of just 0.50% of the total budget.

2.2 Quality indicators

Although there are no longer national performance indicators in England, including the former NI 195 which measured the percentage of inspected sites that fell below Grade B, APSE continue to use it as a measure of quality for those authorities who have continued to monitor it with a full set of inspections (PI 37b). At this time last year, the average figure had risen for the first time in nine years, from those authorities meeting the first deadline for data returns. However, once all the later submissions were added in, that had been reduced to a level that was once again lower than previous. This trend has remarkably continued for Year 15 with another big reduction, down to just 4%, even at a time when budgets are seen to be decreasing.

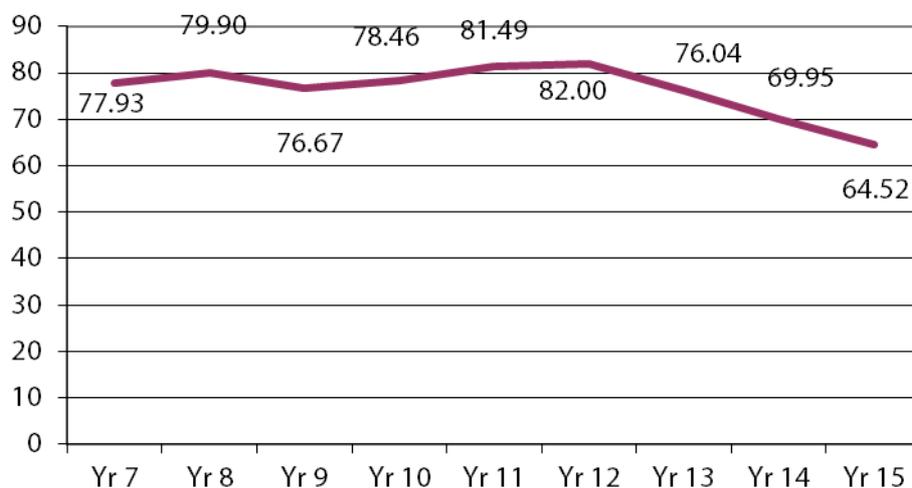
PI 37b BV 195 percentage of sites that fall below grade B (England only)



In Scotland and Wales, Local Environmental Audit and Management Systems (LEAMS) continue to be used to measure cleanliness, and this relates to sites that are graded B and above. In 2011/12, Scottish authorities within performance networks averaged 73.34% from their self-inspections, continuing a slight year-on-year improvement seen over several years. For 2012-13 this increased slightly to 73.71%. In Wales, last year's LEAMS figure from self-inspection averaged 84.00%, again a slight increase from 80.08% previously.

The indicator that APSE use to measure internal quality assurance and customer consultation (PI 17) has shown a reduction for the past two years having previously moved in the other direction for the three years prior to that. There has been an 8% decrease in average score once again this year to the lowest level ever, giving a good indication of where some of the costs are being saved.

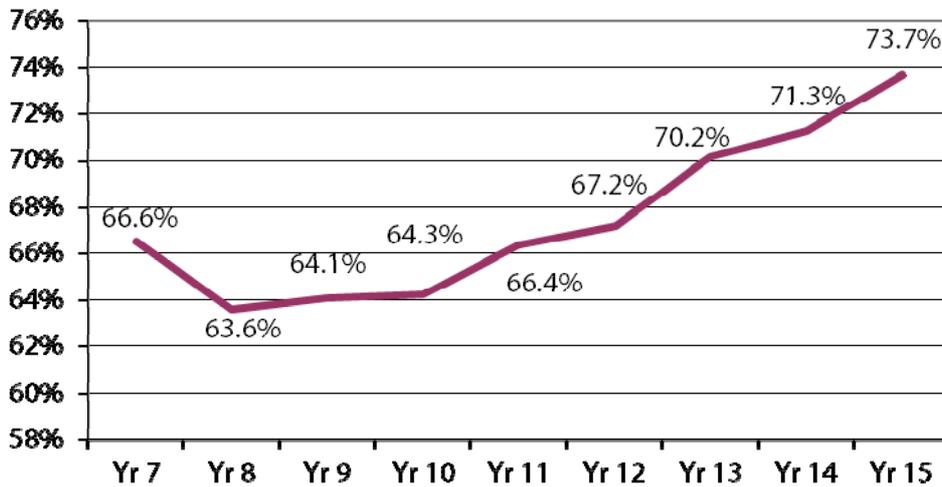
PI 17 Community consultation and quality assurance



2.3 Customer satisfaction indicators

In line with the increases in quality seen in the cleanliness scores above, the customer satisfaction scores being reported show that the public continue to notice the efforts being made. The graph below shows how scores have gone up year on year since 2008, another 3.4% increase in 2012/13.

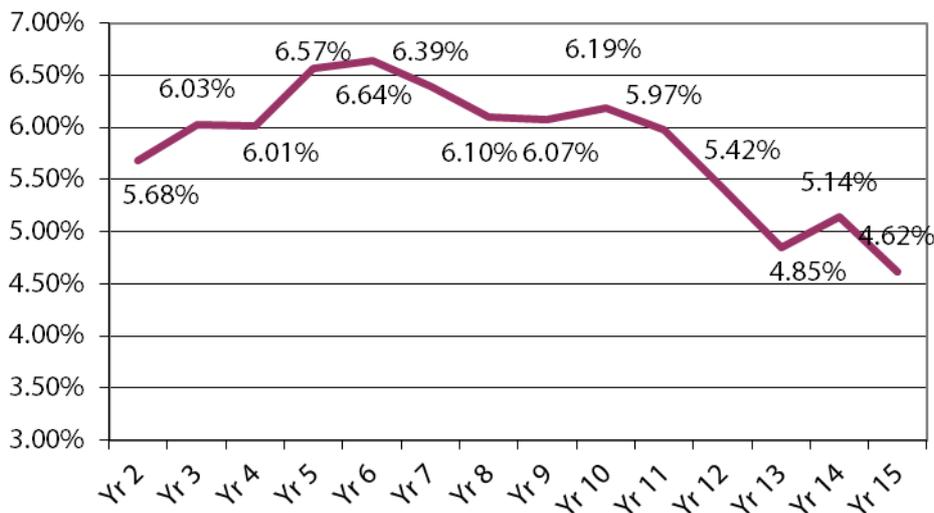
PI 39 Community / customer surveys undertaken satisfaction levels



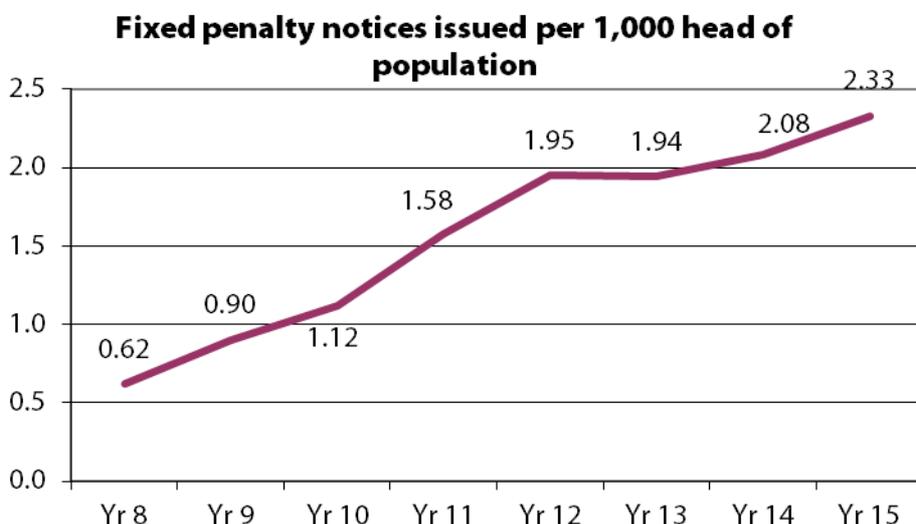
2.4 Other indicators

After several years of improvement as the issue of staff absence was being addressed around the country by the introduction of tighter monitoring schemes and better management of the process, 2011/12 saw the first increase in staff absence since Year 10, although it was still the second lowest level achieved in 13 years. However, that trend has not continued with the average for 2012/13 reducing to a new low level of 4.62%.

PI 22a Staff absence (all staff)



Alongside education, enforcement is considered the most effective way of reducing the amount of litter on our streets and the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued per authority by way of enforcement continues to rise year on year as authorities continue to use their powers to combat environmental crime. Last year saw a further increase of more than 7% on the average number of FPN's issued.



3. Interpretation of data

At a time when council services are being cut, with front-line services taking their share of the pain, it is reassuring that street cleansing standards continue to improve in all parts of the UK, backed up by increasing customer satisfaction levels.

The data returns show that street cleansing budgets are definitely reducing, so authorities are having to work "smarter" to achieve improvements. Many of them have reorganised their management structures to enable them to maintain (and improve) their standards.

The purpose of the street cleansing service should always be to "keep the streets clean" as opposed to simply "cleaning the streets". This infers that efforts will be made to reduce demand for the service through educating people not to drop litter or commit other environmental crime and enforcing against those who do.

The evidence of this year's data returns suggest that progress is still being made in enforcement at least, which will be contributory factors in the improvements being reported this year.

How long these trends can continue in the face of continually decreasing resources remains to be seen of course.

4. Future focus

Local authorities continue to face a squeeze on their finances and resources as a result of public spending cuts. Therefore the focus on efficiency and performance in the delivery of front-line local government services remains essential. Performance measurement is a mechanism for local authorities to evidence competitiveness against other providers, identify achievable cost savings and innovative approaches to service delivery, as well as demonstrating value for money to a range of internal and external stakeholders. It also provides a means to

learn how other similar services are meeting the challenge and the impact that this is making in terms of cost, quality, productivity and customer satisfaction levels.

The abolition of national performance frameworks and the demise of the Audit Commission in England with the transfer of responsibilities for local public audit and value for money to the National Audit Office, has led to a much more decentralised approach to the benchmarking and publishing of performance information. The Rt. Hon Margaret Hodge MP who chairs the influential Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee and who spoke at last year's performance networks seminar has recently said that councils could be subjected to a "deep dive" investigation by MPs as part of broader reviews of local government performance. This in response to the recently published Local Audit and Accountability Bill which sets out the post Audit Commission arrangements.

There is an increased emphasis on value for money and on open data set out in the Government's own "Open Data" White paper published in June 2012 with a focus on data transparency and the use of data to hold public authorities to account. The subsequent Shakespeare Review on public sector information in response to the White paper published in May 2013 explored the growth opportunities of, and how to widen access to, the wealth of information held by the public sector. It is clear that the drive for performance improvement and publishing meaningful data on performance has not gone away, but is being designed around greater data transparency and public accountability at a local level.

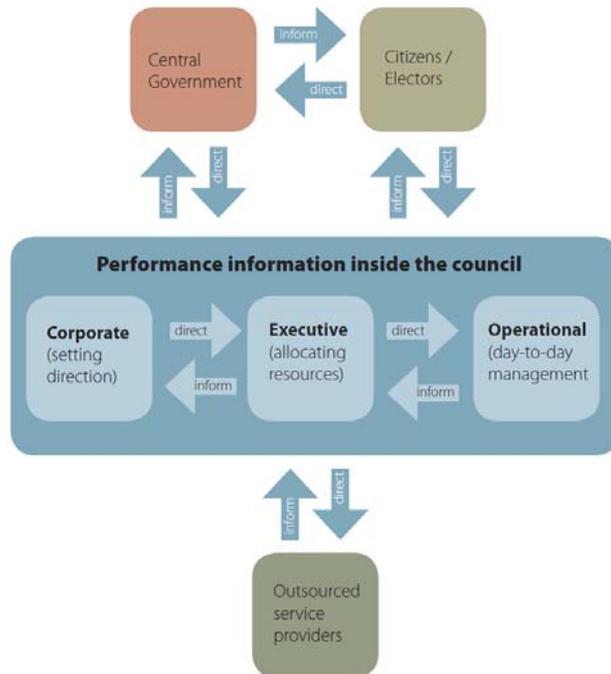
In Scotland, 'Scotland Performs' the national performance framework has been in place since 2007 and there has been a clear emphasis on the use of performance information to drive up the standards in all public services. In March 2013, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and the Improvement Service launched a new benchmarking project for Scottish local government based on 55 indicators across major service areas with recognition that benchmarking can help to deliver *"even better local services for local communities"*. The approach was based on a move away from focussing on *"meaningless league tables"* towards *"efficiency, effectiveness and outcomes"*. Robust and systematic data to support change and improvement based on knowledge and best practice is at the core of this approach and is precisely what a benchmarking and improvement model like performance networks is designed to facilitate.

Similarly in Wales, the Welsh Government publishes National Strategic Indicators (NSIs) to measure the performance of local authorities at a national level and focus on key strategic priorities. But Local authorities also use these performance indicators, along with other indicators that they choose to use and a wider range of information, in order to plan and deliver improved services. Self-assessment and review is a key feature to the Welsh approach to improvement.

Also the Northern Ireland Local Government Bill which sets up the new local authorities in Northern Ireland and is currently progressing through its stages in the Northern Ireland Assembly has a section which specifically talks about a general duty of improvement and refers to the use of performance indicators and standards similar to other parts of the UK. The aim is that the new local authorities in Northern Ireland will collect and publish performance information relevant to service users and to ensure greater accountability for performance across councils there.

An independent study for APSE by Michael Hughes the former Director of Studies at the Audit Commission in 2012 entitled *'How are we doing? Performance measurement, comparison, and review in UK councils'* pointed out that *"Trustworthy performance measures, that are analysed competently and communicated clearly, are*

important for service managers, for service commissioners and client managers, for councillors, and for citizens. The diagram below illustrates the role of performance information in informing people inside and outside the council:



Good performance information supports the decisions that lead to good directions, instructions, and targets. APSE performance networks can assist local authorities by:

- Helping to set a clear baseline on which competitiveness, efficiency and value for money can be measured in a systematic manner.
- Assessing the quality, cost and competitiveness of the services that councils provide on a regular basis
- Helping to report data in meaningful ways to both elected members and the public.
- Identifying direction of travel and pace of change with regard to service delivery.
- Identifying inefficiencies such as poor productivity and high cost.
- Supporting service improvement through process benchmarking and sharing best practice examples.

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