



Environmental Health services: Trend analysis 2018-2019

Key Issues

- This briefing provides information on the cost quality and performance of Environmental Health services for the year 2018/19.
- It is clear there has been slight decreases in service costs in most service areas, but as this follows a rise in costs last year it is difficult to say whether this is an ongoing trend.
- The fall in individual service costs is reflected in the reduction in costs for the whole service per head of population.
- Staff absence levels have also fallen which is a welcome result as 2017/18 saw a rise in absence levels.
- One area which will need to be considered more closely is the continuing fall in income levels reported, as in a period of austerity income generation is an important weapon in staving off the effects of shrinking budgets.

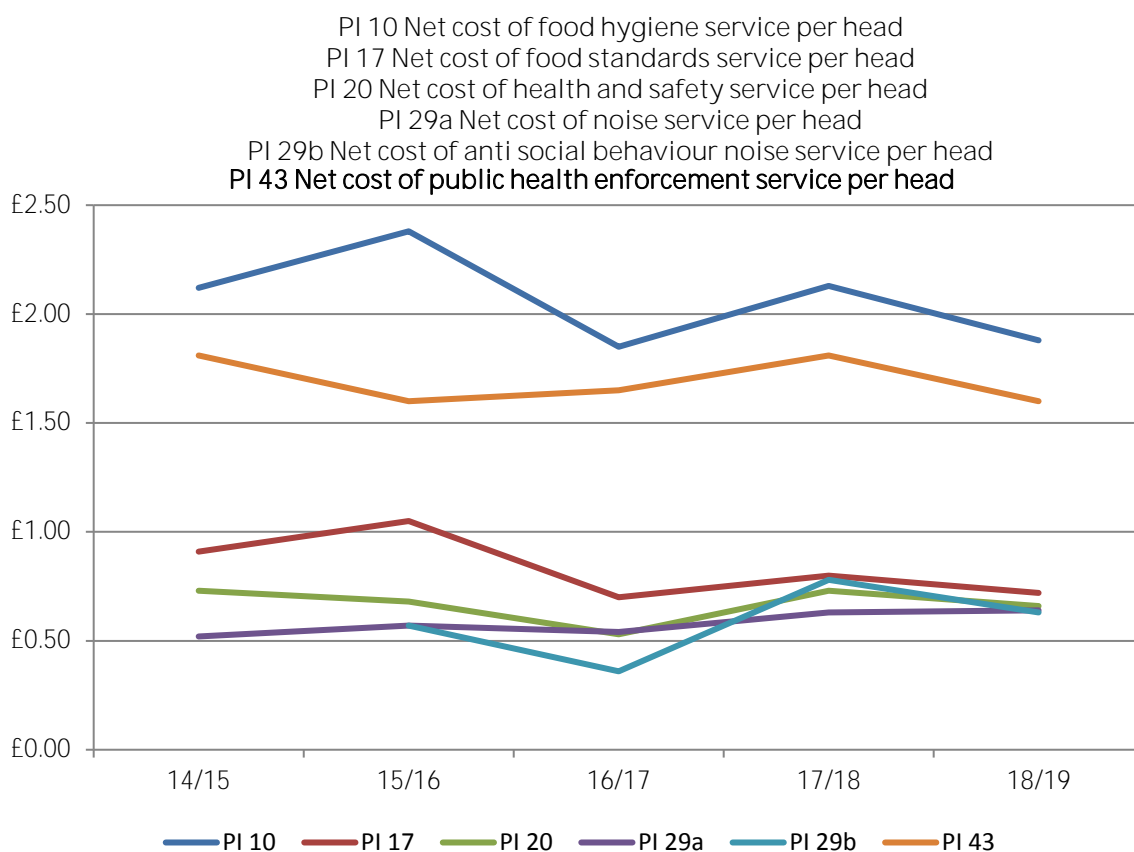
Overview

The environmental health benchmarking model has been developed by APSE performance networks along with the support and guidance of the Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health Scotland (SOCOEHS). The programme provides performance indicators across all major areas of environmental health such as food hygiene and standards, health and safety, noise, enforcement and financial performance for the service throughout the UK.

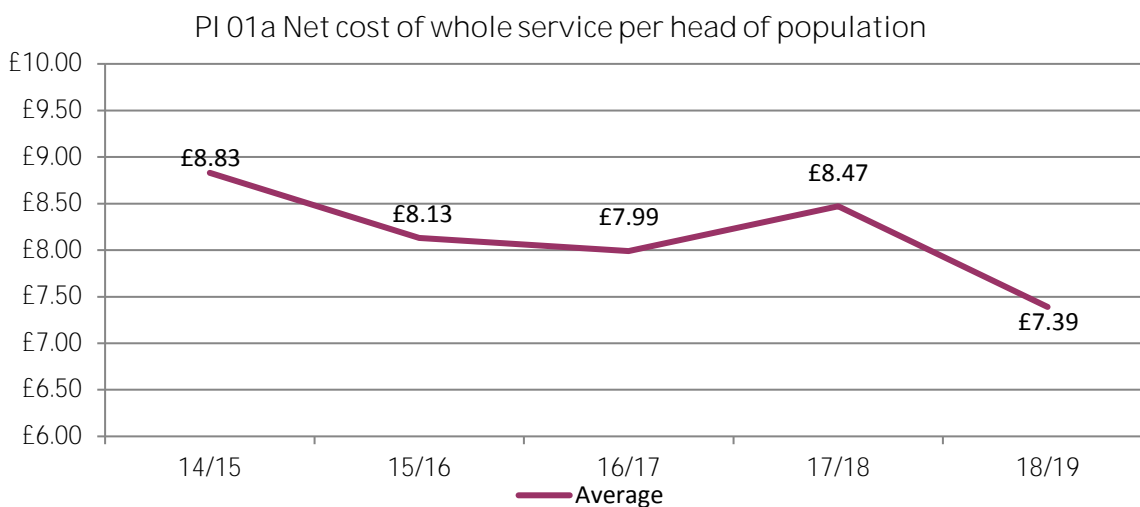
The following summary aims to provide participating authorities with an overview of service trends and what further activity and analysis individual authorities and their benchmarking groups could consider. **The analysis in this summary is based on 'service wide averages' across all participating local authorities for 2018/19.**

Trend analysis

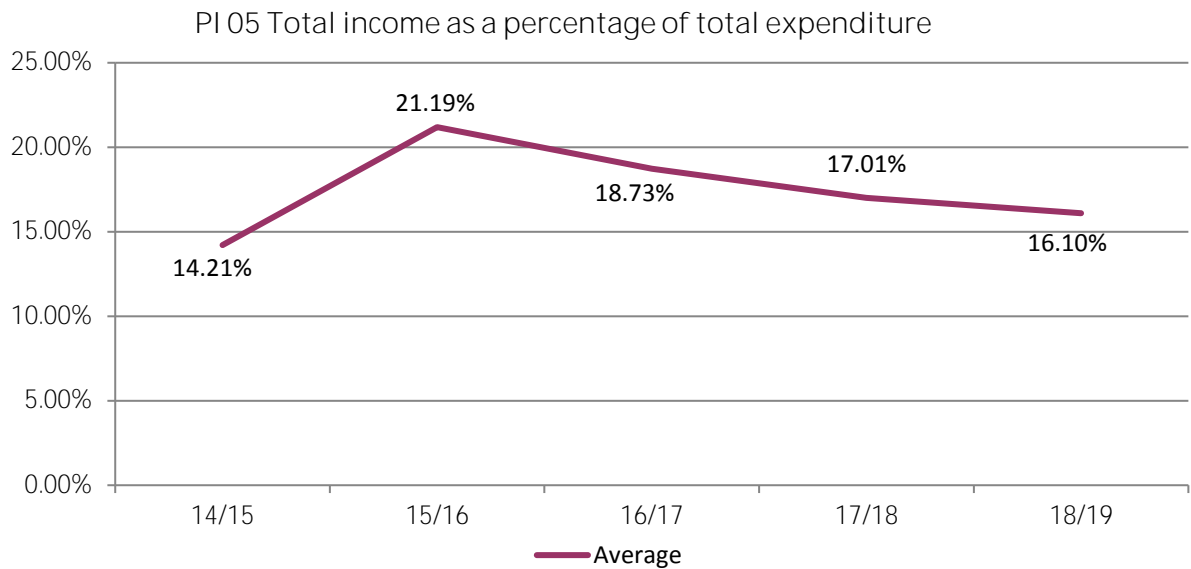
The aim of the trend analysis is to try to predict the future direction of service performance based on past data, with a view that what has happened in the past may help give an idea of what will happen in the future.



The 5 years shown is a relatively short period for identifying cost trends. Any fluctuations in the cost indicators have to be interpreted in the context of the general decline in overall environmental health budgets across the UK. As APSE's report 'Neighbourhood services and sustainable local government' (New Policy Institute) demonstrates services such as environmental health have been the hardest hit of all local government since 2009/10.

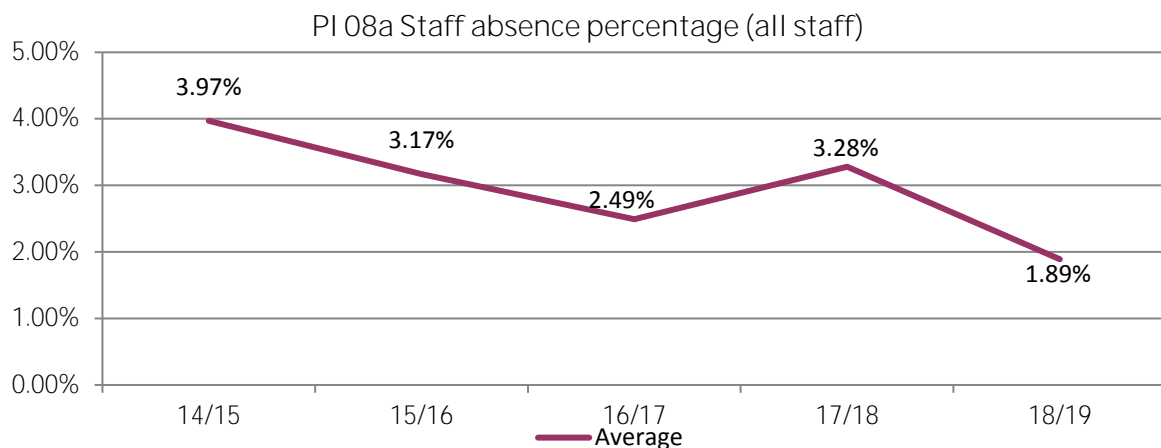


The APSE environmental health performance results show that environmental health services are very low cost, considering the preventative value of these services. The overall trend over the past five years has been a decline in net costs against per head of population. However it should also be remembered whilst reducing costs and driving efficiency, small investments can protect people across the country from hazards in the environment. This preventative capacity is particularly relevant in tackling the health problems associated with obesity and the consequential impact on NHS budgets. It is increasingly recognised that statutory interventions are required to control the food environment which surrounds us with unhealthy food options. Environmental health has a major role to play in dealing with this chronic health problem.



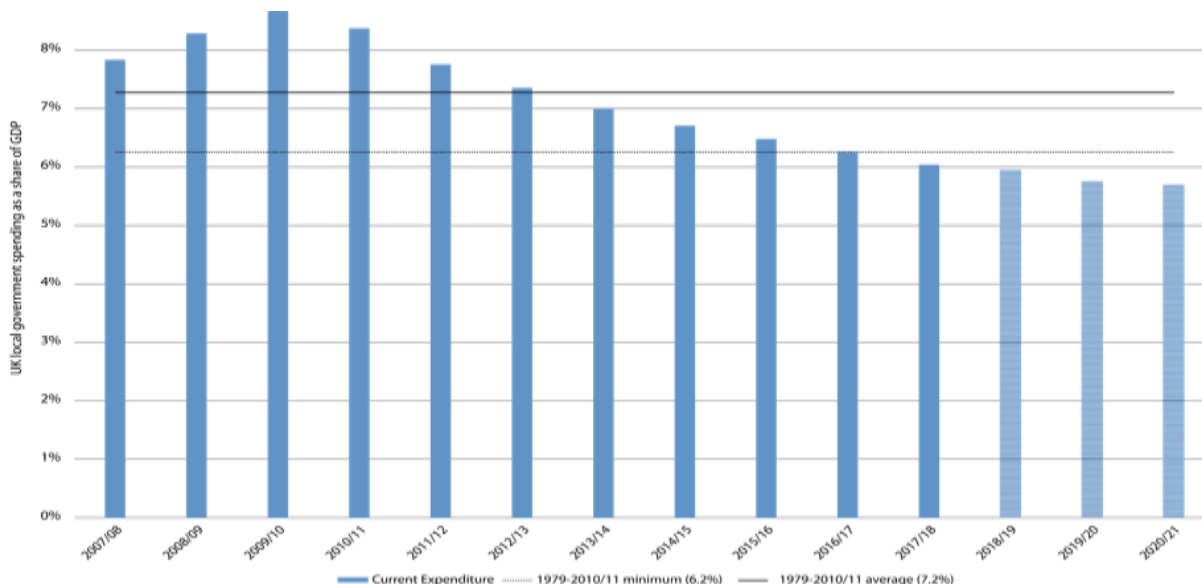
Income levels as a proportion of total expenditure have continued to fall for a third year in a row. This could be due to a number of factors. Whilst some inter-authority variations in cost recovery are due to some councils being able to recover cost for the likes of export certificates many services are provided in common. Equally as a result of staffing reductions there may be fewer resources to raise income, focusing instead on core duties. This situation will be monitored and benchmarked to see if there are common reasons for falling income levels. APSE will look to carry out further investigations as part of the advisory group discussions.

With regards to staff absence levels there has been a significant decrease in 2018/19, which reflects an ongoing decrease in absence levels which is to be welcomed if this trend continues.



Future focus

In 2009/10, local government spending as a share of all spending in the economy reached 8.6 per cent, a high for the post-1979 period and only just below the all-time high (1975). In 2017/18, it fell below the previous post-1979 low of 6.2 per cent (1997/98). Since then, it has continued to head down. Including capital spending, total spending by local government as a share of GDP is now at a record low for the post 1948 period.



Source: *Neighbourhood services and sustainable local government, APSE 2019*

In addition, over the nine years from 2009/10 to 2017/18, the resources devoted to neighbourhood services across England, Wales and Scotland fell 27 per cent, equal to £8.9bn at 2017/18 prices. (*Grouped under the broad headings of highways and transportation, environment and regulation, culture, and planning, neighbourhood services are roughly speaking what councils do that is neither education, housing nor social care*). This is against the background of a real fall in total UK local government spending over the same period of 19 per cent.

Performance management is increasingly being used by public service providers as a mechanism to withstand austerity and demonstrate value for money to a range of internal and external stakeholders. As W. Edwards Deming stated:

“Without data, you’re just another person with an opinion.”

Despite measuring and improving performance being critical to managing services effectively and for accountability purposes, the need for this has never been greater in order to know your own service and to be able to identify achievable cost savings and innovative approaches to service delivery. Otherwise, how do you know you are delivering what you want to deliver?

Information and data provides intelligence on how effective any service change is, to establish a starting point and to identify future targets. Performance measurement is also a mechanism to learn how other local authorities are meeting the challenges and the impact that their service changes is making in terms of cost, quality, productivity and customer satisfaction levels.

Data is also increasingly in demand at a national level as well and as a result, **APSE performance networks' influence at a national level is growing. APSE has been working with** a range of government bodies and professional associations at a national level. This includes Defra (Waste Dataflow and the National Litter Strategy), Scottish Government and Zero Waste Scotland (Litter Strategy), Department for Transport, DMG, SCOTS, CSS Wales and the Improvement Service (Roads, highways and street lighting), the Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health in Scotland, SCOTTS (Trading Standards), NABMA (Markets), Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Parks Action Group), SOLACE (corporate services) and the Department for Communities (Northern Ireland project).

In England, there is a focus on a more decentralised approach to performance improvement following the abolition of the previous national performance framework. This means that local authorities are responsible for their own performance and improvement and are accountable to local communities (rather than government or inspectorates). There is an increased emphasis on value for money, with a focus on data transparency and the use of data to hold public authorities to account. 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, there is a requirement to report the Local Government Benchmarking Framework indicators, which are a set of high-level indicators covering major service areas. APSE and SCOTS have been working with the Improvement Service in relation to collecting and providing data required for the national Local Government Benchmarking Framework, in particular on roads financial data. The purpose of this is to reduce the burden on councils of providing data to multiple national bodies and using existing reliable, established benchmarking models where possible. APSE have also been working with Zero Waste Scotland and Keep Scotland Beautiful on the monitoring system for the revised Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse 2018.

In Wales, councils themselves remain responsible for identifying their own improvement priorities, identifying and mitigating improvement challenges and risks and managing service performance. Local authorities openly and transparently report performance publicly on an annual basis. In addition, there is a small set of nationally co-ordinated performance indicators called Public Accountability Measures which are co-ordinated for benchmarking purposes by Data Cymru. External assurance and challenge is provided mainly through the audit, inspection and regulatory regime coordinated by the Auditor General for Wales. This voluntary, decentralised approach is similar to the approach taken in England which has created a greater need for information at a local level to measure value for money and to ensure accountability. In addition, benchmarking through national organisations like APSE provides the national comparisons for continuous improvement purposes and a mechanism to measure your own performance against changing standards.

In Northern Ireland, under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, there is a duty on each council to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions, to collect information relating to performance and to assess performance in previous financial years and as far as practicable, against the performance of other councils. APSE have been working with local councils in Northern Ireland to ensure that performance networks meets the responsibilities councils have under the Act. As such, existing, relevant modules have been refined and new performance modules have been created in conjunction with the Northern Ireland councils for planning, community development, economic development, arts and heritage, building control and corporate services. APSE continue to liaise with the Department for Communities over this development work. Four sets of reports for the Northern Ireland project have now been successfully produced; for 2015-16 to 2018-19.

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.
- Identifying the impact of service changes and interventions for your own local authorities and for others.
- 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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