

Impact of COVID-19 on local authority Soft FM: 2020 – 2021

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Key Points

APSE introduced a new quarterly data collection exercise in 2020 to assess the impact of COVID-19 on a range of front-line services.

This briefing highlights the key findings as they relate to Soft FM services.

1.0 Introduction

APSE introduced a new quarterly data collection exercise in 2020 to assess the impact of COVID-19 on a range of front-line services. To facilitate this process, APSE established service specific working groups to identify questions under the headings of cost, income, productivity and quality which could be assessed for the first quarter of the year. The findings of the first quarter of 2020 (April – June) were published by APSE, showing the averages for individual services from participating authorities. We received 115 returns for this project from local authorities throughout the UK. The full report can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

Following on from this, the working groups incorporated a number of new measures into the data templates for the full 2020-21 financial year, utilising the performance indicator sets, to show what the impact of COVID-19 has been on frontline services; not just in cost terms but in productivity, impact on staff and service performance. This briefing focuses on the key findings for the data collection year 2020-21 for local authority Soft FM services.

This is the year that was greatly affected by the pandemic and the briefing provides a comparison with the previous financial year, 2019-2021 which enables a snapshot analysis of the impact of the pandemic on the service. The figures quoted are averages across authorities.

2. Income and expenditure

The table below provides an analysis on additional spend over and above usual spend, on PPE and other covid related costs such as materials, equipment, signage, etc.

Average expenditure as a % of total expenditure

Building cleaning	12%
Catering	2%

The data clearly shows that the spend for building cleaning is higher than for catering. This is unsurprising due to the service being required to purchase additional cleaning fluids and materials.

The experiences of the catering service and building cleaning service differed vastly due to building cleaning being a frontline service that was dealing with the pandemic, whereas, schools were either closed or only open for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

The cost per scheduled input hour (LA only, excluding CEC) has shown a 4% increase when compared to 2019/20. The increase could be attributed to factors such as enhanced cleaning required in premises, using different cleaning products that meet the specification required during the COVID-19 pandemic or more extensive use of cleaning materials, for example cleaning touch points multiple times a day.

When making a comparison with 2019-20, the catering service data highlighted that for 2020-21 there had been: -

- An average trading deficit of £4,463,342,
- The percentage change in trading deficit saw a 60% increase,
- Expenditure reduced by 17%
- Income reduced by 42%

3. Impact on staff

The table below provides an overview of the average FTE's lost as a result of COVID related absence.

Average FTE lost as a result of:		
	Building cleaning	Catering
COVID positive test (self-isolating) up to 10 days, Track and Trace / advisory self-isolation, quarantine, business closure	11.42	1.78
Advisory shielding	8.67	0.57

On average building cleaning lost 11.42 FTE posts per council as a result of COVID absence and 9 FTE posts per council as a result of shielding. However, 8% more staff were used to cover the increased demand from the pandemic and the loss of staff due to absence.

Data also suggests changes to staffing such as occasional use of Furlough but more often secondment of staff to support other services; in catering for example the use of staff in preparing food parcels for vulnerable people and support to the children of key-workers in school and community settings, as well as extra support in areas like welfare catering to people who were asked to shield.

4. School meals

The data showed that the average total meals served per pupil (total school roll) was 49 per day for the first quarter of the year and the percentage change in free meal entitlement from day of count increased by 5%.

APSE Comment

APSE would like to thank all the authorities that participated in the working groups and the data collection exercise for 2020-21 on the impact of COVID-19. APSE has a range of services that are designed to support member authorities through this challenging time.

[APSE COVID – 19 Information Hub and WhatsApp groups](#) – The hub has been set up to deal with frontline service issues as they arise; ensuring greater resilience and learning between each other during this difficult time.

[APSE Online Training](#) – APSE Training is designed to help local authorities invest in their greatest asset – their staff. With staff working at home, or remotely, APSE Training can assist staff with developing new skills during this time to help maximise opportunities.

[APSE Performance Networks](#) – The Performance Network teams have developed a variety of ways to support councils with data collection. APSE strongly recommends ensuring the collection of data is ongoing, so changes in service performance are explicable during budget setting processes or when revising business plans.

[APSE Solutions](#) – Providing in-house consultancy and interim management services, available to both APSE members and non-member authorities and organisations.

[APSE Energy](#) – Working on greening frontline councils' services, including energy management issues, which may be critical to saving money in services where budgets have been impacted by COVID-19.

[APSE membership resources](#) remain committed to supporting our member local councils with the ongoing briefings service, network queries, access to Principal Advisor advice and meetings, advisory groups and events. There are opportunities for councils to share best practice and learning through advisory groups and thematic sessions

For further information on the services that are available, please contact **Vickie Hacking** on vhacking@apse.org.uk

Vickie Hacking
Principal Advisor
vhacking@apse.org.uk