



Briefing 22-29

October 2022

#APSE22: Report back from the APSE Annual Seminar 2022

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

Introduction

For APSE members unable to attend this year's Annual Seminar we have put together a summary that captures the two-day programme of presentations, workshops and discussions on delivering for local people and local economies.

The charming and dynamic city of Swansea - famous for its location beside the jaw-dropping Gower Bay coastline – provided a superb backdrop to this year's APSE Annual Seminar.

Hosted in the brand new, state-of-the-art Swansea Arena, over 500 delegates, exhibitors and speakers from across the UK made the journey to the south coast of Wales for over two days of workshops, networking, an awards event as well as expert insight into the latest legislative and technological developments in the sector.

This briefing provides an overview of this very special event.

Opening Symposium: Delivering for People and Places

Day One of the Seminar opened with a very warm Welsh welcome from outgoing APSE National Chair and Deputy Leader of Swansea Council, Cllr. Andrea Lewis. First, delegates were invited to pay their respects to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II given the unexpected news of her death.

Following this tribute, Cllr Lewis moved on to explain the theme of this year's seminar. Cllr Lewis was eager to stress the key role councils play in supporting growth for local people and local economies, but was quick to emphasise that such...

Session One opened with a panel discussion exploring the financial and policy dynamics at local government level. First up was Alison Allen, Chief Executive of NILGA, to talk about the future role of local government in Northern Ireland. For Alison, if the pandemic ought to have taught Stormont and Westminster one thing, it was that more local decision-making and local policy development doesn't just make sense and it is fundamental to the creation of a more sustainable Northern Ireland.

Up next we heard from Tim Peppin, Director of Regeneration and Sustainable Development at the WLGA, who emphasised the importance of supporting a wellbeing and prevention approach within communities, especially in light of the serious hardships endured by people throughout the pandemic and ongoing cost

of living crisis.

After Tim, we were joined virtually by Cllr Gail Macgregor, COSLA, Environment and Economy Spokesperson, for a focus on how councils in Scotland are assisting the transition to a net zero economy. Cllr Archie Dryburgh, APSE Scotland Chair, also joined the panel to provide examples of how his authority, Dumfries and Galloway Council, has been putting words into action on decarbonisation.

Finally, representing the LGA, Cllr Liz Green, Vice-Chair of the Improvement and Innovation Board, asked: "Where to now for English local government?" With a new Prime Minister quickly followed by the suspension of Parliament would Levelling Up become peripheral to other big policy issues or are there things that councils can do anyway? Liz explored the ways councils can use pre-existing powers to help bridge inequalities within local areas and highlighted examples from her work with the LGA.

Future Communities

Future-proofing frontline services formed the basis of Session Two as speakers explored the critical factors for developing the councils of tomorrow. Kindly chaired by Ellen Cavanagh, APSE Northern Ireland Secretary, delegates heard from Swansea Council's Cllr Andrea Lewis, Cabinet Member for Service Transformation and Deputy Leader, and Martin Nicholls, Chief Executive, who outlined the Council's journey of developing the Swansea Standard for low carbon homes in addition to the Homes as Power Stations Initiative (HAPS). The Swansea Standard is a Fabric First approach which uses key principles of Passivhaus design. The HAPS initiative is designed to help the authority achieve its ambition of becoming net zero by the end of the decade.

The small issue of the long-term future of local government was the topic of our next speaker, Paul O'Brien, APSE Chief Executive and Chair of the ALGC2030. Offering a brief summary of each chapter of 'Local by Default', Paul was especially keen to highlight the growing public policy crises impacting the UK, the dysfunctional relationship that exists between central government and councils, and the need to enshrine the role of local government constitutionally to ensure that the many challenges faced by local communities can be met effectively. Paul called for current and future governments to endorse a principle of 'local by default'.

Transforming and Transformative Neighbourhood Services

Creating sustainable neighbourhoods was the theme of Session Three, with the panel discussion kindly chaired by outgoing APSE National Secretary, Chris Cutforth. Sam Dennis, Director of Public Protection and Streetpride at Derby City Council, joined us virtually to highlight how her authority is reimagining neighbourhoods and working with the city in a locality approach. Sam spoke of the importance of capturing data and information to help identify place-based demand; enabling the authority to see that different localities have different issues, demands and skill sets.

Paul Bellotti, Executive Director of Communities and Environment, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, was up next to the podium to stress the value of aligning neighbourhood services to resident's needs, The winner of Overall Council of the Year in Service Delivery back in 2020, Paul acknowledged one of the big secrets to East Riding's success at a neighbourhood level was effective performance management.

Our final speaker for Session Three joined us from the other side of the Pennines, as Mark Davies, Chief

Executive of Lancaster City Council, spoke of bringing climate ambitions to a neighbourhood services level. Mark also touched on the phenomenal efforts and progress of Lancaster City Council in decarbonising the Salt Ayre Leisure Centre. The work has reduced the council's emissions from natural gas by 35%, and along with a new green energy tariff, means Salt Ayre is now one of the first leisure centres in the country to become carbon neutral.

Operational hubs

Day One was capped off with a special strategic forum session which involved three operationally-focused hubs. These forums examined what marks effective leadership in the following frontline services:

Forum 1: Waste, Resources, Parks and Streetscene - Kindly sponsored by Kingdom Local Authority Support

This forum explored the results of the APSE's latest research 'Transitioning RCV Fleet to Cleaner Fuels' and also considered how councils can resource their public parks in order to secure their future. Forum facilitators included Abi Ademiluyi, APSE Principal Advisor and Nathan Horrocks of APSE Solutions provided an overview of their work on the development of Underground bins in Liverpool as a means of cost efficiency as well as reducing the carbon footprint of waste services.

Forum 2: Housing, Civic Assets and Energy - Kindly sponsored by Lendology

In Forum 2, the topics ranged from retrofitting leisure centres to meeting housing need, green jobs and growing local economies. Delegates were also treated to a case study in success with a closer look at the Methil Care Village: A new green community facility for the future in Fife. Forum facilitators included Phil Brennan, Head of APSE Energy, Vickie Hacking, APSE Principal Advisor, and Cllr Judy Hamilton, Fife Council.

Forum 3: Highways, Street Lighting and Active Travel Hub - Kindly sponsored by Multevo

Forum 3 considered the role of effective travel management and street lighting in making neighbourhoods safer as well as the role of active travel in planning for the future. Debbie Johns, Head of APSE Performance Networks, was also on hand to discuss greening performance reporting: What should we measure and why? Forum facilitators included Andy Dunbobbin, Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales, who addressed delegates on the important issue of designing out crime and making residents feel safer. Rob Bailey, APSE Principal Advisor facilitated the session.

The Seminar also ran a training session designed specifically for councillors to support strategic political leadership. Councillors from across the UK joined Fiona Sutton-Wilson, Head of APSE Training, for a bite-size interactive session examining how strategic political leadership can support councils in their drive for climate action. The session asked councillors: "Beyond the climate declarations, can you make your council a carbon-literate council? And if so, by when?" APSE recently became the first dedicated local government organisation to achieve Platinum Carbon Literate status which you can read about [here](#).

Climate change and the ecological emergency

The first session of Day Two - Session Four - explored the contribution of councils to positive action, with a specific focus on the climate crisis. The session was chaired by Ald. Tommy Nicholl MBE, incoming APSE National Chair, and facilitated by APSE English Chair, Cllr Jacqui Burnett.

Our first speaker of the session was Glynn Humphries, Corporate Director of Communities, Environment and

Climate Change at Wakefield Council. In the wake of climate emergency declarations and continuing green policy announcements by central government, Glynn gave examples of how his council was integrating climate change actions across frontline services. Glynn reiterated the importance of engaging communities as well the APSE network in helping to turn the authority's climate proposals into meaningful action.

Up next delegates heard from Mike Cockburn, Lead Commissioner for the Environment at Wirral Council, for a discussion on the necessity of a carbon literate workforce. Mike spoke of how the APSE Carbon Literacy course brought more engagement to Wirral Council's Climate Emergency Declaration and Action Plan. Targeting senior level management and councillors to take part in the course has ensured the authority has been able to increase awareness and knowledge to all service areas of the Council, further supporting the Climate Emergency. This has filtered down through the teams and ensured that all employees are considering the climate emergency in their roles.

Our penultimate speaker of the session, Fiona Horgan, President at the Institution of Lighting Professionals (ILP), highlighted a key challenge for the industry, which is the need for investment in people, particularly in green skills for engineering and lighting. Without investment in people, the sector risks having a workforce that lacks the competency to fulfill the challenges that lie ahead, particularly ominous considering the hundreds of local authority climate emergencies declared in the past few years and their technological ramifications for highways and street lighting services.

'What's car parking got to do with climate change?' asked our final speaker of Session Four, Jonathan Allen, Head of Innovation and Technology at the British Parking Association. Jonathan highlighted the important role car parking sites can play in encouraging active travel. Jonathan provided real world examples of local authorities persuading businesses of positive customer behaviours resulting in a lower carbon footprint.

Workforce Matters: The Resources of Tomorrow

Moving onto Session Five – chaired by the APSE National Secretary Ellen Cavanagh – delegates were treated to an hour of ideas on how to develop a local government workforce fit for the future.

Getting us underway, Mo Baines, APSE Deputy Chief Executive, discussed the latest APSE survey on post-Covid return to office working, as well as the current crisis in recruitment and retention from previous APSE research papers. Mo looked at what the shift to hybrid working amongst many local government 'desk-based' staff means for the future of customer service, but also noted the potential impact this winter's looming energy crisis may have on the 'new normal', perhaps reversing the trend of remote working, albeit temporarily.

Continuing on the theme of skills for the future, our other speaker of Session Five – Anna Markova, Policy Officer, Industry & Climate at Trades Union Congress – highlighted the work of the BEIS Green Skills Taskforce. Anna made the case for a just transition; urging governments – national and local – to ensure those workers in carbon-heavy industries are reskilled for the green jobs of the future.

Local Government Commission 2030

Our final session of the Seminar opened with Nadira Hussain, Chief Executive at SOCITM. Nadira spoke of the need to design services in favour of digital delivery but blended with non-digital for those who need it; and also spoke of the importance of reconfiguring digital and IT strategies to be place-based rather than organisation-centric.

It was a professor amongst the professionals with the Seminar's penultimate speaker, as Steve Griggs of Staffordshire University joined us for a lively discussion on the changing role of officers and councillors. Drawing on the findings of the APSE Local Government Commission, Professor Griggs asked how the sector is going to create effective relationships between officers and elected members, in addition to asking how councillors can channel political ambitions into effective policy actions.

Last but very much not least, Steve Wilson, Director at Seminar sponsor Commercial Services Group, was in Swansea to talk delegates through the Chief Executives' Initiative; a scheme designed to support executive skills development and make a local government career an attractive and ambitious career option.

The Seminar concluded with an inspiring talk from 'The Welsh Wonder Woman' Lowri Morgan. An ultra-marathon runner, Lowri spoke of her extraordinary feats of human endurance.

- *If you would like to view any of the speakers' presentations, please click [here](#). Alternatively, email Megan Butterworth on mbutterworth@apse.org.uk*

Matthew Ellis

APSE Communications Officer

Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits.

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular advisory groups, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The advisory groups are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Advisory groups are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE advisory group meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national advisory groups include:-

- Building cleaning
- Catering
- Commercialisation network: Local authority trading, charging and income generation
- Housing, construction and building maintenance
- Parks, horticultural and ground maintenance
- Renewables and climate change
- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Sports and leisure management
- Vehicle maintenance and transport
- Waste management, refuse collection and street cleansing
- Cemeteries and crematoria
- Environmental Health

Visit www.apse.org.uk for more details.

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