

APSE Environmental sustainability and carbon reduction in local authority Soft FM Survey

This briefing provides an overview of the responses received to an APSE survey conducted regarding environmental sustainability and carbon reduction in local authorities soft FM services.

Key findings

The survey responses highlight that: -

- **35.71%** of building cleaning and **42.86%** of catering services have an environmental sustainability policy or strategy.
- **60.00%** of building cleaning services report that the number of chemicals used has been reduced
- **84.62%** of catering services have reduced the use of single-use plastics
- **60.00%** of building cleaning respondents report that the greatest driver for environmental sustainability is to ensure that the service is fit for the future
- **53.85%** of catering respondents report that the greatest driver for environmental sustainability is because it's a priority of the service leadership
- **33.33%** of building cleaning respondents and **66.67%** of catering respondents cite that the cost of sustainable products and supplies is the greatest barrier.

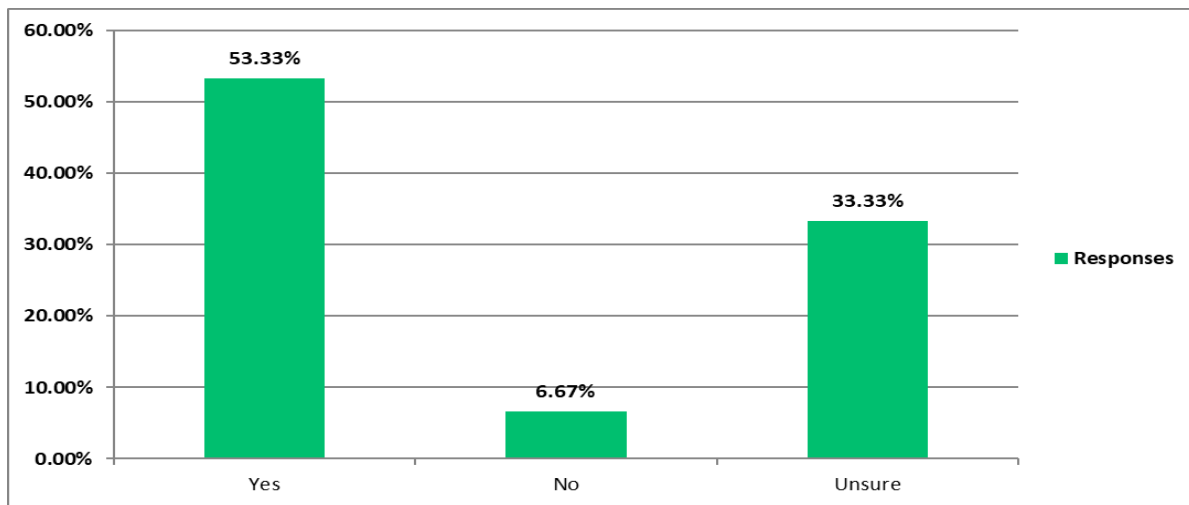
Overview

The survey was undertaken during October and November 2024 to gain a snapshot of the challenges and approaches being taken by local authority soft FM services to increase environmental sustainability and reduce carbon.

Responses received from across the UK, with 46.67% of responses being from England, 40% of responses from Scotland and 20% of responses from Wales.

Has your authority declared a climate emergency?

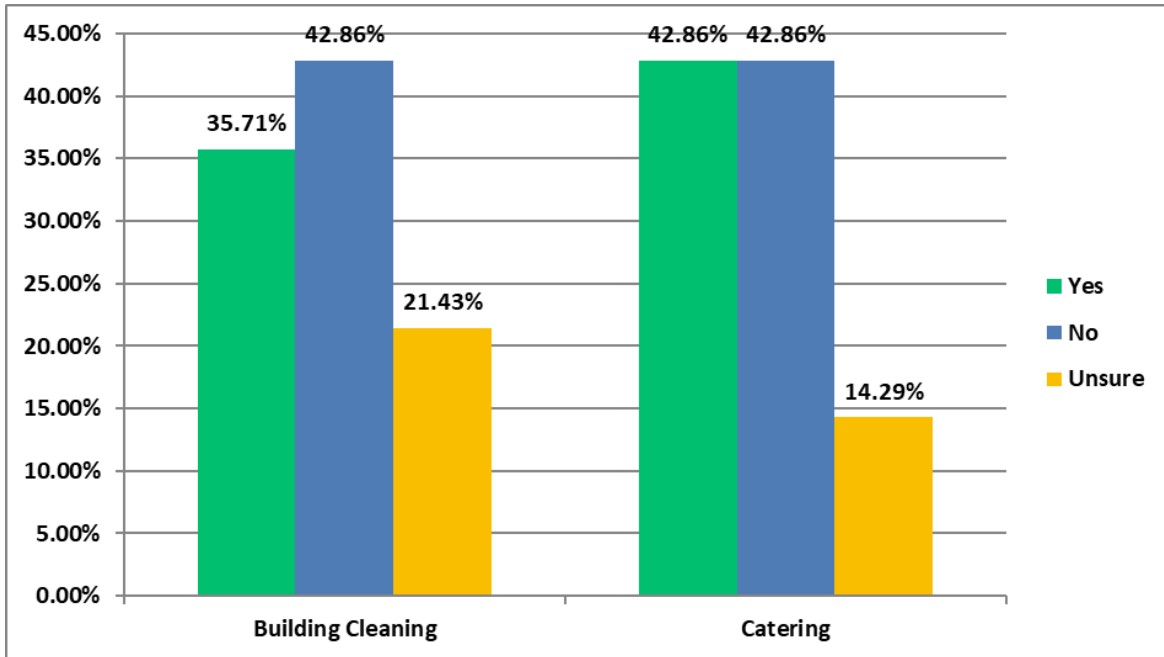
The survey sought to ascertain how many of the responding authorities had declared a climate emergency and the graph below provides an overview of the responses.



Over half of respondents (53.33%) report their authority has declared a climate emergency. With, 6.67% of respondents stating that the authority had not. The 33.33% advising that they are not sure, could be attributed to the fact that the council has made a declaration, but the respondents are not aware of it.

Does your service have a strategy / policy for environmental sustainability and carbon reduction.

The survey asked respondents if their authority had a strategy or policy for environmental sustainability and carbon reduction. The graph below highlights the responses received for building cleaning and catering.

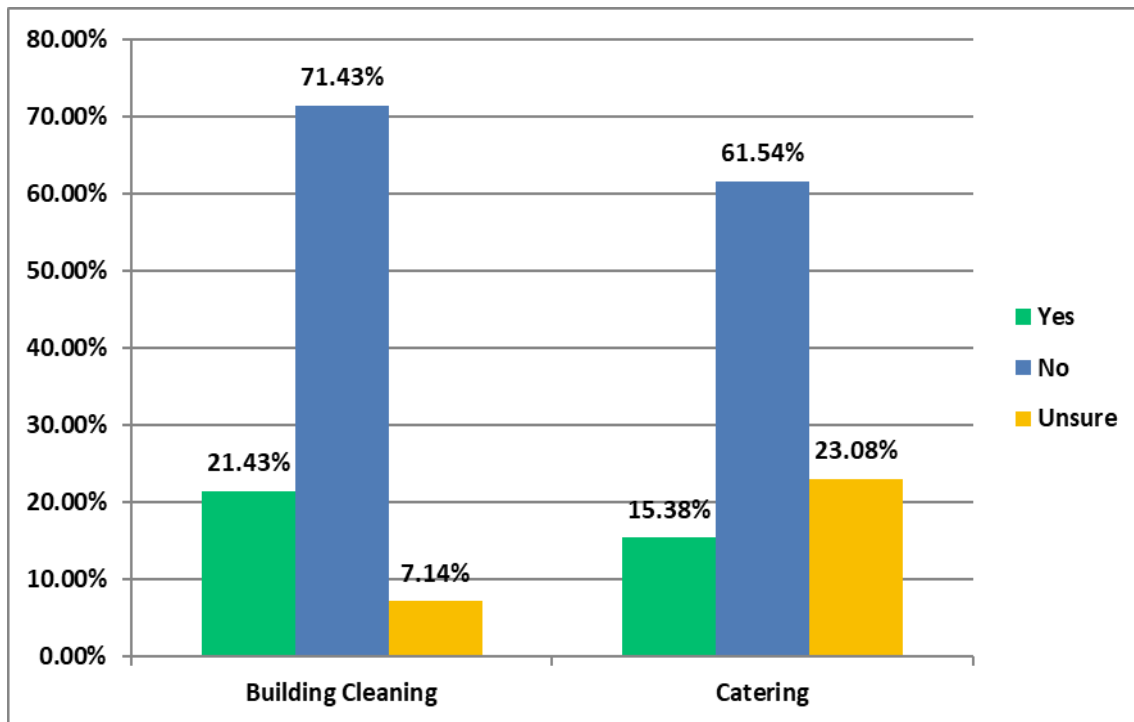


Over 40% of respondents (42.86%) report that there was a policy in place for catering, and this is slightly lower for building cleaning with 35.71% reporting that there is a strategy or policy in place.

For both services, 42.86% of respondents are reporting that there is not a policy in place. However, in the comments for this question respondents report that although there is not a formal policy or strategy in place the service does link into the wider council plan and corporate priorities that incorporate environmental sustainability and carbon reduction policies.

Has your service been set targets related to environmental sustainability and carbon reduction

As part of the survey, respondents were asked if the service had been set targets in relation to environmental sustainability and carbon reduction. The graph below provides an overview of the responses received.

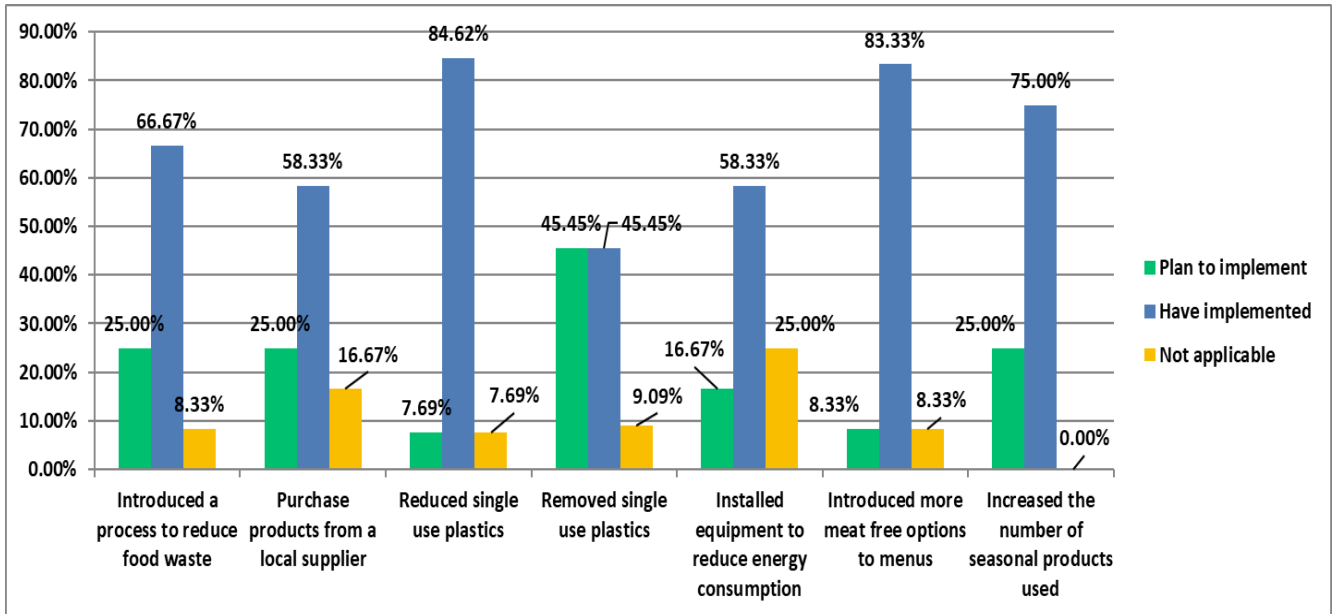


From the responses received, the vast majority of respondents report that targets have not been set with 71.43% reporting this to be the case for building cleaning and 61.54% for catering.

15.38% of respondents report that there are targets for catering and this is slightly higher for building cleaning, with 21.43% of respondents stating targets are in place.

What measures have been introduced to make the catering service sustainable.

To gain an understanding of the measures that have been introduced in the catering service, the survey asked respondents to specify what these are. The graph below highlights the responses received.

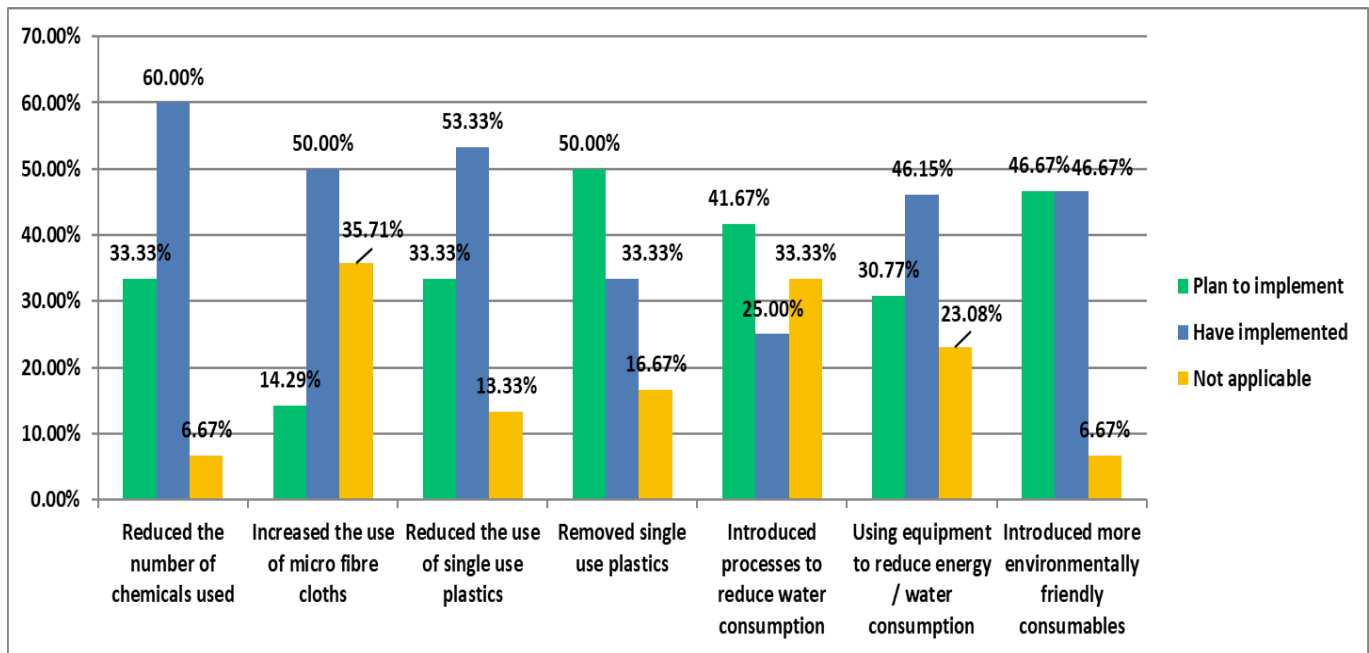


The responses demonstrate that local authority catering services are planning to introduce measures to make the service more sustainable with 45.45% reporting that single-use plastics had been removed from the service, 25% advising that they have introduced a process to reduce food waste, purchase products from local suppliers and increased seasonal products.

In addition, the graph shows that local authorities have implemented several measures to make the service sustainable with 84.62% reporting that they have reduced single-use plastics, 83.33% advising that they have introduced more meat-free options to menus and 75% have increased the number of seasonal products that they use.

What measures have been introduced to make the building cleaning service sustainable

To gain an understanding of the measures that have been introduced in the building cleaning service, the survey asked respondents to specify what these are. The graph below highlights the responses received.



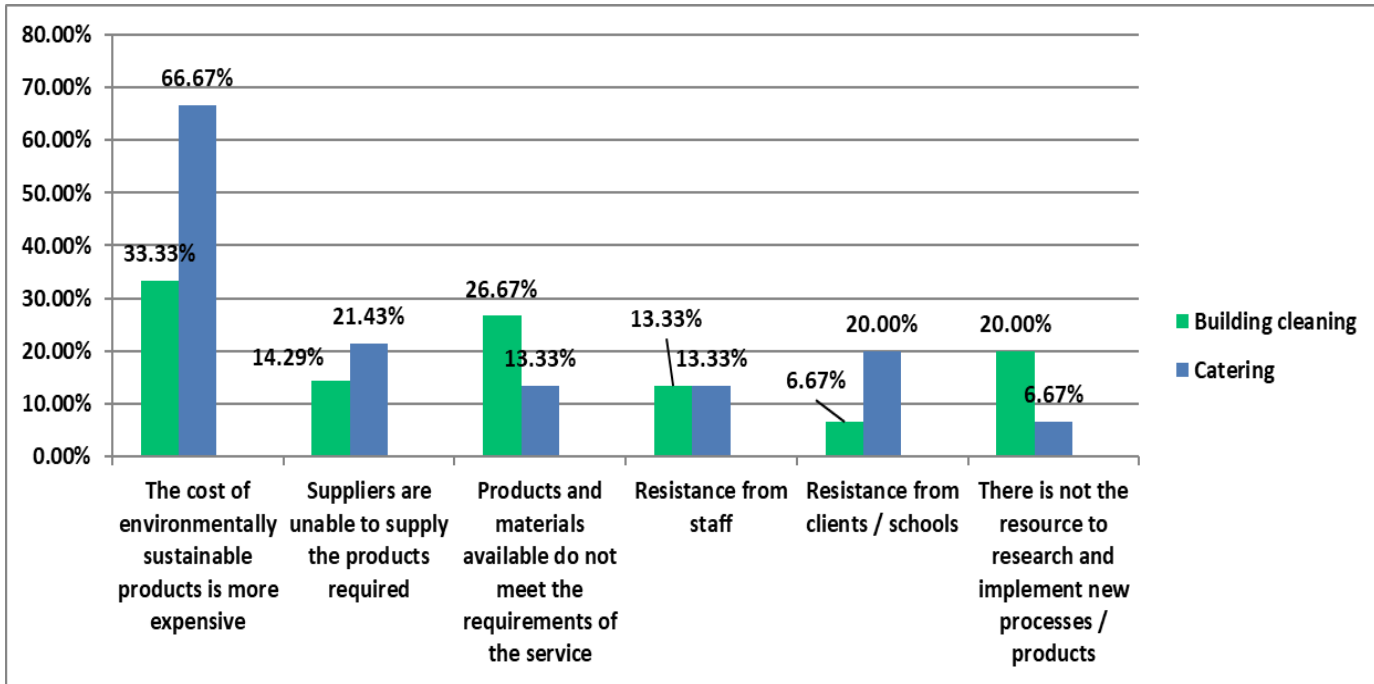
The responses highlight that the local authority building cleaning service is planning to implement several measures to make the service more environmentally sustainable. Half of the respondents (50%) reported that single-use plastics have been removed from the service, 46.67% advised that they plan to introduce more environmentally friendly consumables and 41.67% plan to implement processes to reduce water consumption.

The graph also shows that the local authority building cleaning services have implemented a range of measures, including 60% of respondents stating that they have reduced the number of chemicals being used, just over half of respondents (53.33%) advised that the service is reducing the use of single-use plastics and 46.67% have introduced more environmentally friendly consumables.

What are the greatest barriers to the service becoming more environmentally sustainable

The survey sought to gain an insight into the barriers that local authority soft FM services are facing in increasing the environmental sustainability of the services. The graph below provides, an overview of the responses received.

The graph clearly shows that the cost of environmentally sustainable products is the greatest challenge for both services with 33.33% of respondents reporting this to be the case for building cleaning and 66.67% of respondents stating this is the case for cleaning.

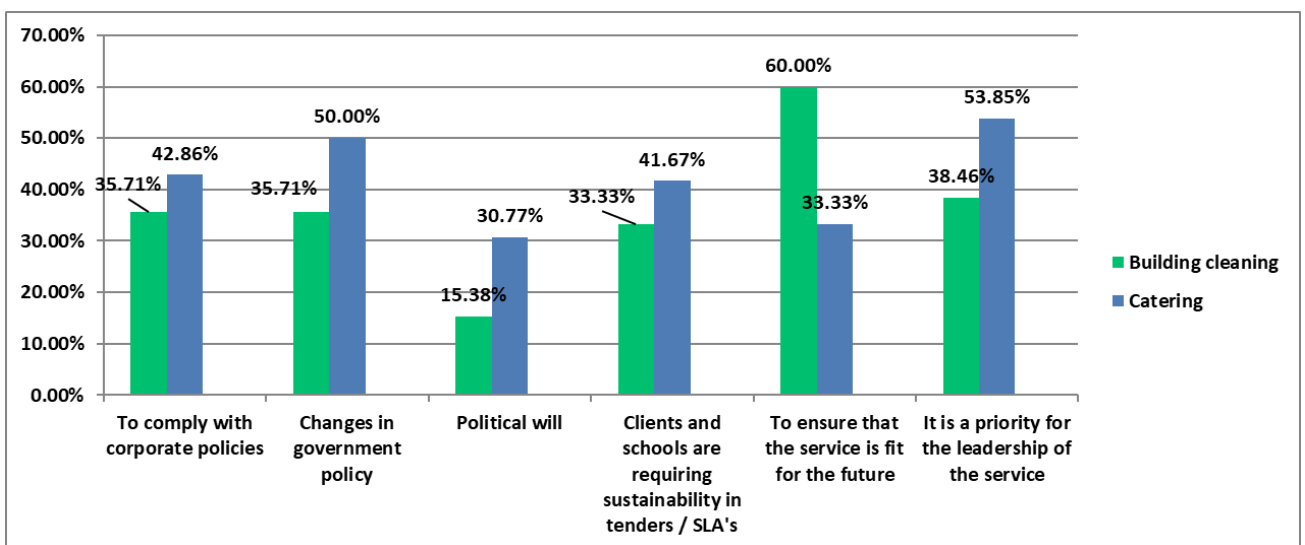


For the building cleaning service products and materials not meeting the requirements of the service and there not being the resource in the service to implement the processes or products are also cited as challenges.

In the catering service, suppliers not being able to supply the products required and resistance from schools and clients are reported as barriers.

What are the biggest drivers for the service becoming more sustainable

The survey explored what is driving the soft FM services to become more sustainable and the graph below provides an overview of the responses received.



The responses for the building cleaning service show that ensuring the service is fit for the future is the biggest driver with 60% of respondents reporting this was the case, 35.71% of respondents also state that compliance with corporate policy and changes in government policy were reasons for becoming more sustainable.

When looking at the responses for local authority catering services the biggest driver for environmental sustainability is that it is a priority for the leadership of the service with 53.85% reporting this was the case, and 50% reporting it is in response to changes in government policy and 42.86% advise that the changes are being made to comply with corporate policy.

What sustainability measures have been implemented successfully.

The survey asked respondents to provide a comment regarding the measures that have been implemented successfully and the below provides an overview of the measures implemented:

-

- Meeting with suppliers to gather knowledge of sustainable products for the future
- Pre-ordering meals has reduced food waste.
- Eco-friendly chemicals, reduced single-use plastics
- Super concentrate cleaning chemicals with dosing measures incorporated have reduced the use of plastics and deliveries to sites
- New cleaning equipment made from 75% recyclable plastics:
- Removed hand towels and replaced with hand dryers
- Introducing vegwear to replace plastic plates, bowls & beakers
- Using bio-degradable bottles and bio-hygiene chemicals,
- Using products with less packaging, reduces the use of chemicals ordered as using smaller doses.
- Implemented low carbon meals on menus

What sustainability measures have been introduced that have not been a success.

The survey asked respondents to provide a comment regarding the measures that have been implemented successfully and the below provides an overview of the measures implemented

- Machines that have been trailed have not met the needs of the service
- Asking staff and customers to bring their own coffee cups to staff cafes and commercial outlets but this is not popular with service users
- Cost and payback period plus technology not being robust enough in new machines.
- New cloths introduced in cleaning, not being to the standard required and resulted in more being used.
- Gardening Clubs had been introduced but had not been successful due to the lack of staff.
- Food waste reduction measures have not got staff buy in therefore continuous monitoring required

APSE Comment

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, local authority soft FM services had started to implement measures to increase the environmental sustainability of the service and reduce carbon. However, during the pandemic, there was a re-focus on delivering in unprecedented times, therefore environmental sustainability became less of a priority.

Local authorities building cleaning and catering services have now returned to delivery models that are representative of pre-covid times and as such service managers are now focusing on ensuring the service is resilient and sustainable for the future.

To achieve environmental sustainability and reduce the carbon footprint of the service clear policies, strategies and leadership are required. Alongside data and targets to measure the outcomes being achieved. [APSE Performance Networks](#) have introduced environmental performance indicators to the data collection templates to allow authorities not only to measure the performance of their own services but also to benchmark their performance in comparison with other authorities.

It is clear from the survey that there are barriers for services achieving environmental sustainability, including the additional cost to the service and effectiveness of products to meet the requirements of the service.

Despite the barriers being faced, service managers are trailing and adopting approaches to achieve environmental sustainability in the service. [The APSE Building Cleaning and FM Network and the APSE Catering Network](#) present the opportunity for local authorities to come together, discuss the challenges and share best practice.

This is the first time APSE has conducted this survey; therefore, no trends can be seen but as the survey is undertaken in future years it will allow a snapshot of the progress that Soft FM services are making to environmental sustainability and to reduce carbon in the sector.

In addition, the [APSE Facilities, Catering and Cleaning Management Seminar 2025](#) scheduled on 30 and 31 January 2025, will bring together expert speakers that will explore the challenges facing Soft FM services and the innovative approaches local authorities are adopting to ensure the service is fit for the future and delivering for their communities.

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 network meetings, 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 APSE networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

APSE networks 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 network meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area, please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national networks groups include: -

- Building cleaning
- Catering
- Cemeteries and crematoria
- Environmental Health
- 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

Visit www.apse.org.uk for more detail

Association for Public Service Excellence
3rd floor,
Trafford House,
Chester Road, Manchester M32 0RS.
telephone: 0161 772 1810
fax: 0161 772 1811
web: www.apse.org.uk

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Gold



NEW MUNICIPALISM

Delivering for local people and local economies