

APSE Scottish Fleet, Waste and Grounds Seminar 2026

Report Back Briefing (Grounds, Parks and Streets)

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

Notice:

On 20th and 21st May 2026, APSE held its annual Scottish Fleet, Waste and Grounds Seminar in Aviemore. This briefing provides a short summary of the seminar’s grounds, parks and streets speakers and the topics covered at discussion forums. There are three separate briefings for the fleet, waste, and grounds sections. Links to all of the presentations can be found [here](#).

1. Presentations


[Keeping Glasgow Clean: Operations, innovation and impact](#)

Frankie O’Rourke, Head of Service – Parks and Streetscene, Glasgow City Council

Glasgow City Council

Vision for Glasgow and how can we contribute?

- Perception issue of cleanliness
- More welcoming City Centre
- Safer and more secure City Centre
- Vibrant more engaging City Centre
- Lobby re Policy/legislation as deterrent
- Continuous Improvement – high quality public services
- Change the narrative
- Lead by example
- Be ambassadors for the City
- Report issues – be pro active



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Supporting a fair and sustainable city where everyone gets to contribute and all can benefit from a flourishing Glasgow
OFFICIAL

Frankie O'Rourke outlined the significant operational and strategic pressures facing Glasgow's parks and streetscene services, setting these within the context of a large urban authority experiencing high levels of deprivation and the natural propensity for such services to face intense public and political scrutiny. The presentation highlighted the cumulative impact of financial constraints, workforce pressures and the ongoing challenge of maintaining public confidence in the cleanliness and appearance of the city. Frankie also pointed to wider social issues, including antisocial behaviour, homelessness and drug-related activity, alongside the implications of emerging legislative requirements such as Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and Waste Upholstered Domestic Seating (WUDS).

A key theme of the session was the range of environmental blight affecting the city, as is often the case in large urban city centres, and the complexity of addressing it at scale. These issues included everyday litter such as fast-food packaging and plastics, smoking-related waste including vapes and associated materials, vandalism, graffiti, weed growth. Collectively, these pressures were presented not simply as operational matters but as issues that shape public perception, civic pride and the city's wider reputation, including its appeal to visitors and investors.

In response, Glasgow City Council has adopted a multi-faceted improvement programme backed by £9.7 million of investment across street cleansing nightshift operations, deep cleans, neighbourhood teams, parks, enforcement and pest control. Frankie described a service increasingly informed by data, intelligence and technology, alongside a broader programme of waste transformation and city regeneration. Partnership working was identified as central to this approach, with collaboration involving registered social landlords, the Chamber of Commerce, the business community, Police Scotland, health and social care partners, Zero Waste Scotland, Keep Scotland Beautiful, SEPA and the Scottish Government. Other measures include the city centre task force, the introduction of Glasgow's Business Improvement District, workforce culture initiatives to build pride and empowerment, enforcement activity, the creation of legal graffiti walls, and lobbying for stronger and more proportionate deterrents.

The presentation also emphasised that lasting improvement will depend on behavioural change and preventative action rather than short-term interventions alone. Frankie argued for a more upstream approach, linking local environmental quality to wider policy and system change, including the circular economy, Extended Producer Responsibility, use of the Recycling Improvement Fund, and the future potential of artificial intelligence. The overall message was that improving urban cleanliness and public realm standards requires a shared effort across services, partners, businesses, communities and government.

Looking ahead, Frankie set out a vision for a cleaner, safer and more welcoming city centre, underpinned by a variety of areas including continuous improvement and proactive service delivery etc. The presentation suggested that local authorities have an important role in changing the narrative around place quality by leading by example, tackling perception as well

as performance, and supporting policy and legislative frameworks that enable effective enforcement and prevention. Frankie concluded on a collaborative note, emphasising that progress depends on collective action rather than any single intervention or organisation.

Electrifying Weed Control: Precision Without Chemicals

Benj Street, Director, Naturavolt



Benj Street set out the case for electric weed control as a practical response to the growing policy, regulatory and public pressures surrounding glyphosate use in public spaces. The presentation positioned this shift within a wider move towards pesticide-free management of parks, playgrounds and other sensitive environments, noting that local authorities are increasingly required to demonstrate visible, low-impact alternatives that meet both compliance requirements and resident expectations. In this context, Naturavolt presented electric weed control as part of a broader transition towards integrated, non-chemical approaches to grounds maintenance.

Benj explained that the technology works by passing a controlled high-voltage current through the plant, using the weed's own resistance to generate heat. This process damages the plant's vascular system and, unlike methods that only scorch or remove surface growth, is intended to destroy the weed systemically from foliage through to the root. The presentation contrasted this with other non-chemical techniques such as brushing, burning, hot water, steam and foam, arguing that electric treatment offers longer-lasting control because it targets regrowth at source rather than treating only visible growth.

A key focus of the session was the Naturavolt eWeeding Roller, which was presented as a sustainable and scalable option for urban hardstanding, including pavements, kerb lines and other areas where precision treatment is required. Delegates heard that the equipment combines a 60cm working width with side-shift capability to allow close treatment along edges and obstacles, while battery operation supports silent, zero-emission use in built-up environments. The machine was described as easy to transport and store, with battery arrangements intended to support a full working day through scheduled changes during operations.

The presentation also emphasised the environmental and strategic benefits associated with the approach. Benj argued that electric weed control aligns with wider sustainability goals by avoiding chemical residues, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and supporting biodiversity protection. These themes were linked to broader ambitions around climate action, sustainable communities and more environmentally responsible service delivery. The session suggested that, for councils seeking to reduce glyphosate use, the technology may offer a means of balancing operational effectiveness with increasing expectations around environmental stewardship and public reassurance.

In operational terms, Benj presented electric treatment as offering greater longevity between interventions than other non-chemical methods. Comparative figures shared during the session suggested average intervals of around 20 days for mechanical brushing, 40 days for thermal steaming or foaming, and approximately 80 days for the eWeeding Roller, particularly when integrated with detritus removal. A field study from 2023 was used to illustrate this effect, showing that repeated treatment of the same neighbourhood over several weeks reduced both weed prevalence and the time required for subsequent visits. Feedback presented alongside these examples indicated potential time savings of 50–75 per cent and the removal of any need for gas or fossil-fuel use during treatment.

Looking ahead, Benj argued that weed management is likely to rely increasingly on integrated approaches rather than single-method solution. Alongside electric treatment, he emphasised the importance of detritus removal to reduce the formation of new seed beds and the wider benefits of chemical elimination for soil health and local fauna.

The overall message was that councils will need to combine effective operational practice with environmental sensitivity, and that emerging technologies such as electric weed control may play an increasing role in helping authorities respond to both regulatory change and public expectation.

Open Space Strategy 2026: East Lothian's strategic vision for community and nature

Jennifer Lothian, Strategy, Policy & Development Manager, East Lothian Council



Jennifer Lothian outlined how East Lothian Council's Open Space Strategy 2026 provides a long-term framework for the protection, improvement and future provision of parks, greenspaces, sports pitches and other open spaces across the area. The presentation positioned the strategy as both a place-based vision for healthier, greener and more resilient communities and a practical tool for meeting statutory planning requirements. Jennifer explained that the strategy is intended to support climate resilience, biodiversity, health and wellbeing, and social equity, while also informing the next Local Development Plan and shaping the standards expected of future development.

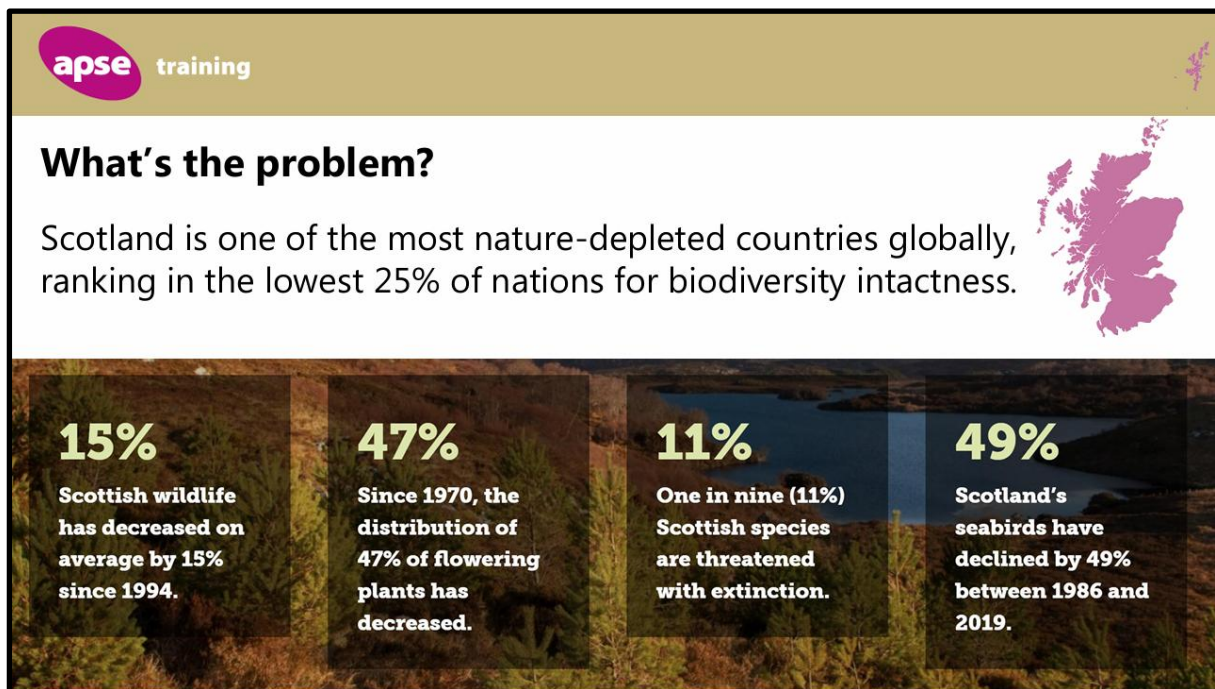
A central feature of the session was the evidence base underpinning the strategy. East Lothian Council completed an audit of 462 publicly accessible open spaces, covering around 1,870 hectares, to assess quantity, quality and accessibility across towns and villages. This work found a generally good range and overall supply of open space, with all cluster areas meeting minimum quantity standards and average quality thresholds. However, the audit also identified areas where targeted improvement is needed, particularly in relation to biodiversity, accessibility, seating and supporting infrastructure. The strategy was presented as a means of directing investment more effectively towards these priorities and ensuring open spaces are fit for purpose over the longer term.

Community engagement was presented as a key strength of the strategy. Consultation findings showed broad support for the draft approach and highlighted strong public interest in nature-rich and accessible spaces, with priorities including wildflower areas and nature trails, tree planting, open grassed areas for informal recreation, seating and good paths. Jennifer noted

that these views are now being reflected in the strategy's proposals, alongside a commitment to co-produced park management plans, improved green infrastructure connectivity, nature-based solutions and more inclusive design. The wider message for local authorities was that robust evidence, community input and cross-service collaboration are essential if open space strategies are to move beyond policy statements and deliver measurable improvement on the ground.

[Biodiversity Net Gains for parks and green spaces](#)

Fiona Sutton-Wilson, Head of APSE Training



Fiona Sutton-Wilson outlined the growing importance of biodiversity enhancement in the planning and management of parks and green spaces, positioning Biodiversity Net Gain as an increasingly relevant issue for Scottish local authorities. The presentation began by setting this within the wider context of nature loss, noting Scotland's continuing biodiversity decline and the importance of ecosystems to public health, climate resilience and economic wellbeing. Against this background, Fiona argued that parks and greenspaces professionals will need to play a more active role in helping councils respond to both the nature emergency and emerging planning expectations.

A key theme of the session was the distinction between the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain regime in England and Scotland's more policy-led approach. Fiona explained that, while England requires a minimum 10 per cent gain secured for at least 30 years, Scotland is currently pursuing biodiversity enhancement through National Planning Framework 4 and wider biodiversity policy rather than an identical legislative model. In practice, this places increasing emphasis on demonstrating positive effects for biodiversity through development,

habitat improvement and long-term stewardship, with local authorities expected to align planning, land management and greenspace strategies more closely.

The presentation also highlighted the significance of the emerging Scottish Planning Biodiversity Metric, which is being developed by NatureScot to support delivery of National Planning Framework 4 policy on biodiversity enhancement. Fiona noted that this work is intended to provide a more consistent way of assessing habitat change and evidencing improvement in the Scottish context, while remaining distinct from the English statutory model. Delegates heard that the metric is expected to support professional judgement rather than replace it, and that councils should begin preparing now by improving their understanding of habitat classification, site potential, land management planning and the mitigation hierarchy.

For local authorities, the presentation suggested there are both regulatory and operational opportunities arising from this agenda. Councils may be required to act as planning authority, landowner, delivery partner and, in some cases, supplier of biodiversity units, creating potential new responsibilities as well as possible new income streams. Fiona emphasised that parks and greenspaces teams can support this by identifying suitable sites, planning enhancements over the long term, working with ecologists and planners, and building internal understanding of tools such as the UK Habitat Classification. The overall message was that biodiversity enhancement is likely to become a more routine part of service planning, and that councils which begin preparing early will be better placed to respond as the Scottish framework develops.

2. Parks and Grounds Discussion Forum

The Parks and Grounds Discussion Forum provided delegates with an opportunity to debate the latest challenges and opportunities facing parks and grounds services. The session facilitated the sharing of experiences and approaches among local authorities, with discussion focusing on issues of common interest and the delivery of parks and grounds services.

The forum also considered a range of routine operational activities and common tasks undertaken across grounds and park operations, providing participants with an opportunity to exchange knowledge and discuss emerging priorities for service delivery. Colleagues within the forum discussed some of the challenges around retention and recruitment as well as the changing weather seasons impacting grounds maintenance duties across Scotland.

3. Litter Managers Network Discussion Forum

The Litter Managers Network Discussion Forum provided delegates with an opportunity to discuss Scotland's National Litter and Flytipping Strategy and consider progress in delivering its objectives. The session focused on the progression of actions being taken under the strategy and provided an update on ongoing work across the sector.

The forum included contributions from Strategic Delivery Partners, enabling delegates to hear about current developments and engage in discussions on the implementation of the strategy. Craig Fraser of SEPA provided an update from an enforcement and regulatory point of view before Brain Rae of Keep Scotland Beautiful provide an update looking at Year 4 actions and the increasing developments with of artificial intelligence.

National Litter and Flytipping Strategy

Year 4 Actions

- Targeted behaviour-based interventions
- Empowering communities
- Scope out flytipping campaign with local authorities
- Developing litter data
- Improving consistency of litter data
- Leadership, management, and facilitation of DMG



The session also provided an opportunity for participants to share perspectives and consider issues relevant to the management of litter and flytipping within their local areas.

4. APSE Comment

The seminar highlighted the breadth of pressures currently facing local authority grounds, parks and environmental services, but also demonstrated the extent to which these services are adapting in response. Across the presentations, a consistent message emerged: councils are being asked to do more with constrained resources while responding to rising public expectations, more complex operational demands and an increasingly challenging policy landscape. Whether the issue is urban cleanliness, pesticide reduction, biodiversity enhancement or long-term open space planning, the direction of travel is clear. Parks, Grounds and Streetscene services are no longer seen simply as operational functions, but as contributors to wider outcomes around public health, climate resilience, place quality and community wellbeing.

A notable theme running through the seminar was the increasing need for strategic and evidence-led service planning. East Lothian's work on open space strategy illustrated the value of robust audit data, community engagement and cross-service alignment in shaping long-term priorities. At the same time, the presentation on Biodiversity Net Gain underlined the need for councils to prepare for a more demanding planning and land management

environment in which habitat quality, stewardship and ecological understanding will become increasingly important. These issues are not separate from day-to-day service delivery; rather, they reinforce the need for parks and grounds teams to be closely connected to wider corporate objectives and local development ambitions.

The seminar also reinforced the importance of innovation and prevention in maintaining service standards. Glasgow's presentation showed that visible improvement in urban environments depends not only on frontline activity, but on partnership working, behaviour change and sustained investment. Likewise, the Naturavolt session demonstrated how councils are beginning to explore new technologies that support environmental goals while meeting operational needs. Taken together, these examples suggest that the most effective local authority responses will be those that combine practical delivery with longer-term thinking, making best use of data, collaboration and new approaches to achieve resilient and high-quality local environments.

For APSE, the overall message from the seminar is that grounds and parks services remain central to the liveability, sustainability and resilience of local places. As councils continue to navigate financial constraint, legislative change and shifting expectations from communities, there is a strong case for maintaining investment in these services and recognising their role in prevention, placemaking and community confidence. APSE will continue to support member authorities by sharing practice, promoting innovation and ensuring that the voice of frontline local government services is reflected in policy and professional debate.

Members may also wish to continue these conversations through APSE Scotland's Parks, Grounds and Street Services Network or Litter Managers Network, which provide opportunities to share experience, explore shared challenges, discuss practical responses and learn from practice across local authorities. Network meetings are free to attend for APSE members. Previous presentations are available online [here](#) and upcoming meetings are listed [here](#).

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APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular networks, 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 networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

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 our contacts for your service area, please email enquiries@apse.org.uk

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- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
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- Local Authority Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation
- Parks, Horticulture and Ground Maintenance
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- Renewables and Climate Change
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- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
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