apse direct news

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Stronger Resource Efficiency for desirable communities:

How local innovation in asset stewardship ensures a green and prosperous economy

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Editorial

We live, as they say, in interesting times. Since early January the detection of horsemeat in supermarket products has led to intense scrutiny, not only of food retailers but also the supply chains in the food industry. Questions are rightly being asked about food sourcing and the unsustainable relationships between consumers, cheaper processed products, supermarkets, farmers, food producers and food transporters; not to mention the whole paraphernalia that sits behind food labelling or rather misleading labelling of products.

You may though ask what has the horsemeat scandal got to do with APSE? Well for a long time APSE has championed local sourcing of food in the school meals service as well as excellent standards in nutritious school foods, wherever possible freshly prepared and cooked on site. However, better ways of doing things does not just extend to school meals. Localising supply chains and reaping the benefits of the public pound within the local economy is something which APSE has advocated. But can we go much further than simply reducing food miles or greening our supply chains? Well, our latest research suggests that not only should we do that, but we must do that!

'Stronger Resource Efficiency for desirable communities: How local innovation in asset stewardship ensures a green and prosperous economy' shows that councils have a pivotal role in ensuring resource efficiency is optimised, which can cut costs and help create desirable, sustainable communities. The research explores why optimising resource efficiency is common sense at a time of financial crisis and environmental challenge. By making best use of products, processes, services, or technologies we can both cut costs and help create more desirable, sustainable communities. The horsemeat scandal has focussed public debate about how sustainable our society is. Many believe we are at a cross-roads in our attitude to the resources we take for granted – whether that is fresh meat or energy supplies questions are being asked about the sense in playing fast and loose with our limited resources.

Taking the example of school meals, locally sourced, seasonal products could help cut both food miles and food costs and crucially deliver some of the 'food spend' by local councils into local economies, helping in turn local communities. But can we go even further with other services? By looking at whole life cycle efficiencies we can expand the message beyond the current 'linear' industrial model of 'take-use-dump' to more efficient approaches to resource efficiency that focuses on a 'circular' method. Through good stewardship, no waste is generated as all materials are valued. This best aids the transition to a green and prosperous economy.

If the time has now come to examine the food industry the time has also come for local councils to explore how, they too, can adopt better resource efficiency into every aspect of council frontline services.

Best wishes

Paul O'Brien, APSE Chief Executive

Being resourceful pays community dividends

Councils have a pivotal role in ensuring resource efficiency is optimised, which can cut costs and help create desirable, sustainable communities. A new APSE toolkit shows how

The argument for optimising resource efficiency is common sense at a time of financial crisis and environmental challenge – and in looking to build a more positive future. Making best use of products, processes, services, or technologies can both cut costs and help create more desirable, sustainable communities.

Resource efficiency = Using limited resources - financial, human, physical or ecological - in a sustainable manner to deliver greater value with less input and minimal impact on the environment.

Statistics show that as a nation we, quite literally, can't afford to ignore resource efficiency. DEFRA has calculated that low-cost resource efficiency 'quick wins' alone could save UK business £23bn. The Confederation of British Industry has concluded that, despite trying economic times, the UK's green business industry continued to grow in real terms by 2.3% in 2010/11 - carving out a £122bn share of a global market worth £3.3tr.

With local authorities spending £42bn a year on external contracts alone - for example £13bn on constructing and maintaining buildings and roads and £3bn on waste management - councils have enormous scope to consider resource efficiencies when procuring goods and services. And the role of local government in optimising resource efficiency goes way beyond wielding their own spending power. Local authorities are pivotal to the delivery of resource efficiency as every aspect of their role shapes how people live their lives – from spatial planning and waste collection through to neighbourhood management and education.

Resource efficiency is an example of APSE's 'ensuring council' model in action, with councils taking a stewardship role and linking strategic vision with day-to-day provision of services. Taking resource efficiency above and beyond immediate cost savings requires local innovation in 'asset stewardship'. This means responsible management and planning of resources – financial, built, natural and people networks – on an area-wide basis across all processes and functions.

'*Stronger Resource Efficiency for desirable communities: How local innovation in asset stewardship ensures a green and prosperous economy'* was produced for APSE by strategy consultancy and think-tank Infrangilis. This report clarifies how councils can contribute to ensuring greater efficiency of resource stewardship in policy and practice, by raising awareness for elected members and corporate managers about their leadership role in this agenda and showing specific services what they can do. This study builds upon APSE's 2012 report, '*The Transition to a Green Economy'*: The Vital Role of the Ensuring Council, which looked to deliver a set of techniques to proactively assist strategy and practice.

Local authority innovation in resource efficiency can boost competitiveness and drive growth by enhancing productive capacity and creating investment and export demand. The new report outlines an approach to resource efficiency that focuses

on a 'circular' method, whereby, through good stewardship, no waste is generated as all materials are valued, which APSE believes best aids the transition to a green and prosperous economy. It provides a practical guide on good practice in stronger resource efficiency across council functions with recommendations about how to reduce operating costs and plug gaps in shrinking budgets. It includes a toolkit showing innovative ways to regenerate economies by stimulating local investment and jobs in low carbon industries and create desirable, sustainable communities.

The report examines ways in which councils are instigating and accelerating the green economy transition through stronger resource efficiency in; leadership, regeneration, transport and logistics, asset management and procurement, environmental services, neighbourhood management, education and schools. Some 60 case studies show local authorities are doing amazing work to promote stronger resource efficiency.

Essex County Council is one of a number of forward thinking councils that has remodelled its use of land, resulting in greater resource efficiency increases to developer value. Essex is finding more productive uses for its industrial space by filling supply chain gaps for Chinese wind turbine manufacturers as a result of a 'clustering; offer around certain supply chain gaps in the offshore wind industry

Northumberland County Council and Plymouth City Council have established low carbon development frameworks to create new wealth. Eastleigh Borough Council and Milton Keynes Borough Council have rolled out electric vehicle charging points. Glasgow City Council and Manchester City Council are pioneering financial mechanisms to liberate assets. Newry & Mourne District Council is developing green skills to support next generation entrepreneurs and the workforce.

The report also features international examples of good practice. As part of the Mayor of Stockholm's vision for the city to be fossil fuel free by 2020, the council has invested in new eco-districts, which allow scaling-up of sustainability benefits from individual buildings to whole neighbourhoods. Milwaukee City Council is facilitating work across every aspect of water management to build a new economic base for the area while improving the local environment and water systems and enhancing residents' quality of life.

In making this case for resource efficiency, APSE appreciates that the system in which local authorities operate is complex, and will vary according to each particular context. The toolkit approach taken in this report enables local authorities to examine their own circumstances and determine what steps are most appropriate in optimising resource efficiency within their specific context.

APSE welcomes the publication of the Government's Resource Security Action Plan to advance thinking and action in this field. However, regardless of the vast catalogue of achievements of councils, this does not attach any great significance to the vital role of local government. Such a fragmented approach undermines collaborative efforts and is damaging to the public purse during an age of austerity. APSE is therefore calling upon the Government to recognise the vital ensuring role that local government has to play. The report sets out steps that could be taken at national level to enable councils to unlock their vast potential to achieve even greater resource efficiency.

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Stronger Resource Efficiency' is available to purchase form APSE at £40 for non-members and £20 for members. Contact wlee@apse.org.uk to order your copy.

You're hired!

Cllr Keith Wakefield, Leader of Leeds City Council explains how Leeds City Council and Leeds City College have developed a unique partnership to boost the employment opportunities for apprenticeships in Leeds

Since 2008 the UK economy has experienced the most severe recession in living memory, followed by an economy that appears to be bumping along at the bottom. Unemployment was at 5.5% before the recession and now stands at 8.3%. Within areas like Leeds we have experienced first-hand the impact of UK youth unemployment which, in November last year, smashed the 1 million barrier. In areas of Leeds unemployment and youth unemployment is sadly a common blight on communities.

As chair of the recent Commission on the Future of Local Government, which reported its findings in July 2012, I was determined to bring a fresh perspective to the role that local government can play in helping the UK meet some big social and economic challenges. I firmly believe that whilst the role of the public sector remains ever-changing councils are well placed to stimulate local economies. By working with local businesses and other partners, and of course our communities, we can help to ensure that local government and public services are able to respond to local economic challenges. With this in mind, and against a backdrop of burgeoning youth unemployment, the idea for the Leeds Apprenticeship Training Agency was formed.

Our relatively recent experiences of the economic restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s has demonstrated that without positive intervention the impact of job losses, on families and communities, goes beyond simply not having a job. Joblessness impacts on education, on health and well-being, on housing, and on crime. The lack of job prospects, amongst young people in particular, is soul destroying for them and their families. So in July 2012 our executive board approved ambitious plans to establish the Leeds Apprenticeship Training Agency (ATA) with a specific aim of helping more young people into work. The ATAs aim is to match young people, who are job ready and want to find careers, into apprenticeships with local businesses. As part of the ATA we also wanted to help deliver further investment in skills to support business growth and create new opportunities for young people and, at the same time, support the growth of businesses within our local economy.

We decided that the best way forward would be for the council to work in partnership with Leeds City College, and operating as a jointly owned and separate company limited through guarantee. The council and the college had already demonstrated their commitment to the project, including joint working on the new 'City Deal' so we were in a fantastic position to progress the ATA.

Through the unique partnership between the college and the council the ATA is able to support small businesses that are unable to take the risk of directly employing an apprentice themselves, and therefore opens up a much larger group of businesses to the apprenticeship market within Leeds. The ATA approach goes beyond the traditional offers from education and employment programmes and offers a wider range of opportunities across the city, with apprenticeship being at the core of what we are able to offer. The ATA therefore represents a major investment in the city's young people as well as supporting our local businesses.

Following initial planning the ATA was formally launched in November 2012; from day one its purpose has been to give hundreds of young people new career opportunities as well as giving the city's businesses an affordable, and low risk, new route to recruit the skills they need.

Through its role as a broker, the ATA aims to match talented, focused young apprentices with local businesses who want to skill and grow their workforce. The council and college have worked closely with the city's businesses and the Leeds, York and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce to develop the ATA model. This has included linking the ATA with the emerging Leeds Apprenticeship Hub developed under the Leeds City Region City Deal Skills Programme to support business growth through investment in skills. The agency is working with businesses to identify their skills needs,

then advertise and recruit talented, focused apprentices - removing some of the risks and barriers which have discouraged many of the city's smaller businesses from creating apprentice opportunities in the past.

However the agency is not just about jobs. It is a vital catalyst to growth in our local economy. All the evidence shows that public spending on apprenticeships produces an excellent economic return – every £1 spent on apprenticeships, delivers a £16-£21 return. As it is SMEs that will drive our local and regional economy forward, it makes sense for SMEs to reap the rewards of taking on talented, enthusiastic apprentices. The ATA will help make that a reality.

We are also delighted that our very first apprentice has now been placed with a local employer. Altman Integrated Technologies Ltd, a software technology company specialising in print and copy control solutions, based in North Leeds, have taken on Shaun Clark as an apprentice for the next 18 months. As part of his work with this Leeds based business Shaun will be working as a technical consultant providing first line customer support for external and internal users. Taking on an apprentice through the ATA has allowed the company to take on someone who is keen to learn and develop their skills, providing them with the opportunity to start a new career without the normal bureaucratic burdens facing SME's when employing new staff directly.

Shaun is undertaking an advanced apprenticeship in Network and Systems Support at Leeds City College whilst working with AIT. This provides him with theoretical and practical learning opportunities and experience throughout the duration of his apprenticeship. Shaun is really enjoying his placement and recently commented that he has been made to feel really welcome at the company and he is looking forward to developing his practical skills. Shaun said that 'The ATA scheme has allowed me to join a company that will support me to establish and develop my career in IT. So I'm excited about the future with AIT.' In Leeds we want all our young people to be excited about their futures; so we would now like to see many more 'Shauns' placed in our local businesses and many more businesses take on our talented young people.

Local government has a vital role in developing job and skills in our local economies and in boosting the success of local businesses. With fairly simple steps there is a vital and ensuring role which local councils can play. We know from past experience that to do nothing is simply not an option. Our young people deserve better and local public services need to demonstrate that they are a force for change, in spite of the harsh economic times in which we live.

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Elvis has left the depot

If you are tired of the same old ways of getting your council message out there you could try impersonating Torfaen Council…..

As councils have struggled with yet another harsh winter and winter gritting teams have worked 24 / 7 to keep roads clear many councils still struggle to let the public know what they are doing. Letting the public know that road grit is not suitable for pavements, or that gritted roads still need to be driven on to crush the grit or that the council has prioritised certain routes can be hard messages to get out to the public. But if the public understand the grit issues they tend to be more supportive of their local council and understand the service pressures. Getting those messages out to the public in an innovative way is where Torfaen Council in Wales has excelled this winter. With a little help from Elvis….

An online winter maintenance video that shows Elvis with frontline staff from Torfaen council has gone viral getting more than a quarter of a million views in four days.

Torfaen council asked local Elvis impersonator Darren 'Graceland' Jones to star in the video which is a take of the King's classic 'In the Ghetto'. Their version, 'In the Depot', shows Elvis explaining how the council operates during extreme winter weather.

The film, which promotes the council's gritting crews and key winter messages went global during January's red weather alert. The video has over 260,000 views - Torfaen has a population of 90,000.

The video was featured in national and international press, news channels, was Radio 2's viral video of the day and was even promoted by YouTube.

The video, that was posted as a thank you to residents for their help in spreading some key messages online during the recent severe weather, was mentioned more than 2,000 times a days on Twitter within days of being published.

It was trending on Youtube along with Rita Ora's new single and just above Call of Duty: Black Ops. Christina Harrhy, Chief Officer for Neighbourhood Services, said: "The response to the video has been overwhelming - we've had messages from people from all over the world.

"The video was made for our residents and as great as it was for it to go viral, we are very pleased at the amount of residents we were able to engage with. Our Facebook page has doubled in a week and we have been able to share some key messages through what has been a challenging few days."

Christina also thanked local Elvis Impersonator Darren 'Graceland' Jones for giving his time to help the important messages on gritting.

The video can be viewed here: http://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/News/2013/January/21-Elvis-helps-spread-gritting-message-in-new-online-video.aspx

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Preparing for snow

Mark King, Head of Streetcare and Transport at South Gloucestershire Council, explains how preparation has been the key to tackling the significant snow fall seen in recent winters

Over three of the last four winters we have seen significant snow events across the Country and South Gloucestershire is no different. This has raised the profile of the winter service both in the public eye and with the links local authority's have with the Department of Transport. We therefore take the matter very seriously and consider the service as priority above many other revenue funded services. Planning is the key to success and in my experience that can't start too soon and is linked into the well know adage 'plan, do, review'.

So we start the process in April; after what we hope will be the last of the snow flakes hitting the ground, but given our weather systems you never can count on that. We review how things have gone but more importantly pick up on what has not gone so well. We make sure we include duty officers, supervisors, and gritter drivers so we get all aspects of our own service.

Usually the first to come under the spot light is communications. If there is one thing I have learnt during my time in the industry it is that despite what we do, what channels we employ, we will never crack that particular nut 100%, but we try! We sit down with our corporate colleagues as well as our own staff. We review the timeliness of our messages, the feedback we have received, negative as well as positive. We explore how we can exploit new channels for messages to our network of users. There is an ever increasing pressure from internal professional corporate colleagues to communicate. In addition the public at large want more information, more quickly and demand a response to the issues they raise, there and then. The Council now subscribes to Twitter and has a Facebook page. This means I have had to come to terms with including these new channels in delivering key decisions with regard to operations. Never too old to learn, my children are very impressed.

Vehicles; I am fortunate that my vehicle replacement fund is (currently), secure and that has allowed me to procure a new, "state of the art" fleet of vehicles. 13 brand new machines were bought last year, built to the operators, not my, specification complete with trackers allowing real time information on locations. This has been key, to getting ownership from the most important resource, the drivers. These vehicles need to be serviced and run through the whole year. It is a costly exercise but one we are compelled to keep going and it remains a priority for my transport team

We also engage with a wide range of supplementary service providers:

• footway treatment is undertaken by a local subcontractor (in summer employed to treat weeds), who utilizes quad bikes with hoppers fitted to the back. They salt on high usage footways and strategic cycleways across the district. It has been a welcome addition to the service for our public over the last three years and a service we have been able to develop within budget by moving client costs to front line delivery

• we use a number of locally based farmers to tackle remote areas, their ploughs are bought in for service and a discussion with them on how they coped, and what support they require going forward

• we are developing a widespread network of, "Snow and Ice Wardens" who galvanise locally based teams to help us to treat ice and remove snow off footways.

This is a developing resource we are tapping into and helps the service respond to what is seen as a high profile issue for our communities; localism in action. However, we don't just give them a spade and a pile of salt and set them free; we work with the group, explain how the salt works, what rate of spread is needed, definitely not the heaps you sometimes see around shopping centres!

It is important to discuss issues with these groups while matters are fresh in their minds and pick up on any issues they may have. The effectiveness of how they work reflects on the service as a whole and in turn the Council; we are only as good as the poorest performer in our chain.

Next - the salt: We proactively manage stocks through the whole of the winter. We track actual usage against planned, weekly usage through the season and take early intervention action if required. We have over a number of years developed good working relationships with our supply chain and it is important to keep in communication with them during the year. We do not wait until the last moment before placing orders; they need to plan as well as us.

We, like most, I suspect, get our slot for restocking early in the year, always one for a bargain me… so an early order is made. It gives me a warm glow to see a full barn in August/September! Our barn can hold well over 5,000t. I recognise the we are in a fortunate position having this vital facility. However, this is not by accident. In a recent accommodation review the replacement of the barn came under the microscope and questions were asked, "why not build a smaller, cheaper to run barn?". It was seen as an, "easy" pot to raid by the bean counters, but by putting together a robust business case we have been able to show its worth, both financially and operationally.

Last, but probably most importantly, the drivers. We run a three shift system in South Gloucestershire and during early summer we review; who is on the list, if anyone is dropping off for what ever reason and any training of new drivers and existing we may need. We take training seriously and have made a management decision to take all of our drivers through CPC training. This is a significant investment but one which I believe will pay dividends over the forthcoming years. The ranges of modules we are using to develop driving skills include:

- Load preparation and banksmanship
- Fuel efficient driving
- Defensive driving
- Driver checks
- Emergency first aid
- Drink and driving awareness and effects of speed

We also put our gritter drivers through skid pan training; a fun course but another key skill for drivers, out and about in adverse weather with 9 cubic metres of salt behind them.

So by October running into November we are all on board for winter, secretly hoping that we get action and can get out on the road to prove our worth. After a good run of snow clearance there is nothing as satisfying to a gritter driver (and their manager) to be thanked for a job well done by both the public and the members, and feeling like a hero.

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Brighton & Hove City Council:

How to achieve cost effective, permanent, right first time, hot patch repairs by Stuart Wilson

Issues and factors to consider

Brighton and Hove City Council is at present a 'Green' Council with not only the Ward Cllr's having a 'Green' majority but also the only Green MP in the country, therefore environmental and more sustainable solutions are always a high priority. The highway network itself (615km) is nearly completely urban in its location and unfortunately has not been well invested in historically.

There have been many reasons for this but fundamentally we all know that highway maintenance is not seen as 'sexy' in the world of transport and schemes, so the network receives little attention until it falls apart and then people are suddenly surprised by this occurrence! It is therefore absolutely essential that the limited funding that is made available for maintenance is used wisely and effectively to keep the network in as safe a condition as possible.

In Brighton and Hove the highway structure itself is often built on top of hogging and even where fully constructed from the outset, because of the extensive utility plant and highway drainage associated with an urban environment, does suffer from repeated excavations and weakening of its structural integrity. The resultant maintenance required becomes increasingly more difficult to carry out in the busy and often heavily trafficked urban environment as this can cause serious disruption to the traffic flows on the network. As an authority we always look for more efficient and quicker ways of carrying out repairs and have trialled many products over the years including other methods of heat induced repair systems but were less than impressed with both the design and functionality of these set-ups, so we reverted back solely to traditional methods.

Set-up and Benefits

After much pestering from the sales manager at Nu-Phalt I agreed to a brief initial demonstration and trial, but then having seen firsthand the quality of the equipment and set-up in operation I had to confess to being immediately impressed by the design integrity and thought that has clearly gone into this product. I arranged for hire of an all-in-one van system on a year's trial through our term contractor RJ Dance. Over that time period we monitored the programme and established the following results for ourselves:

• It is a permanent repair when undertaken correctly, saving on the use of temporary materials

• Once operatives are fully trained and experienced, the work can be done to a very high standard

• Quicker than a normal break-out reinstatement

• Really effective round ironwork with a good bond due to the heat and also a seamless edge

• Much quieter with no breaking-out required, which is a real bonus in an urban authority and gives scope for extended working times

• The operatives prefer the less physical work required compared to conventional blacktop repairs

• It has proved very cost effective, saving over £40k in emergency repairs per financial year

• It has far less of an environmental impact than conventional repairs with improved efficiency and none of the on-costs associated with material waste. Our estimated savings to date in terms of carbon emissions is the equivalent of an average car travelling 1,721,000 km's

Programme and Control

The system offers great flexibility on our roads as our operatives have been trained and instructed to systematically work their way round the network dealing with any self identified appropriate defect as they find them. The current programme is to focus on all the bus routes where the greatest level of deterioration is occurring but at the same time we use this system as a 24hr (phone call) response team for potholes where appropriate and save on temp/perm repair costs and this cuts down on associated liability claims as well. But obviously the flexibility is there to change this at any time.

Future

I am happy to report that we are now in our second year of operation and will continue to use this system for the foreseeable future, seeing it as an integral part of our highway maintenance programme in these austere times. Because of the positive results to date I am also investigating the possibility of either bringing in a second machine or hiring in the 'joint failure heater' (2mx0.5m heater) for a period of a couple of months in order to address some of the many older failed trenches present on our network. Overall the systems great flexibility and environmental benefits are proving its worth as a key asset of our maintenance programme.

What the customer says

'In a time where efficiency and cost savings are the primary drivers in all that local government do, the benefits that this system offers are both measurable and immeasurable to this local authority and the public which it serves. As we are all aware, there are many products and systems out there in the highway maintenance industry but only a few that are truly green, efficient and offer a quality product at the end of the day. This is one of those products.'

Stuart Wilson Highway Maintenance Manager – Brighton & Hove City Council

'Our highways teams had already trialled heat repair systems but had found them to be expensive with limited success. Our budgets were getting tighter and we needed to be more innovative about our safety maintenance repairs. I saw a pothole patch that had been made using the Nu-phalt technique, I was very impressed. It was the neatest repair I had seen, fitting seamlessly into the rest of the carriageway. Furthermore, the repairs have lasted extremely well and make a huge difference to how we respond to repairs, and also to our finances.'

Christina Liassides Head of Highway Operations – Brighton & Hove City Council

Call Nu-Phalt today on 08442 571570 for a FREE, no obligation quote, or email enquiries@nuphalt.com for more information www.nuphalt.com

nu-phalt

Jetpatcher:

The original is back and has gone from strength to strength in its first year of operation.

The introduction of Jetpatcher at the end of 2011 has been a welcome addition to the Nu-phalt portfolio. The facility has gained significant interest from the highways industry, resulting in 8 new Jetpatcher systems being delivered to clients in our very first year of operation.

Our in-house contracting facility has also seen considerable demand from customers looking to hire in Jetpatcher services. To meet growing customer requirements in 2013, we have made significant investment in new systems taking our current hire fleet to 7 Jetpatcher units with a further 4 units on order for Qtr 2 delivery.

This investment will allow Jetpatcher to support a wider customer audience, and through the most competitive rates deliver best value from demanding maintenance budgets. The customers below have experienced our service levels and taken advantage of our competitive proposition.

Essex County Council

Jetpatcher were approached to mobilise a system to carry out spray injection patching for Essex highways in 2012. Within three weeks of the operation, an additional system was requested which was mobilised and fully operational within two weeks of the request. A third Jetpatcher system was drafted in shortly afterwards to support their maintenance program. To address as many areas as possible for as long as possible, Essex CC had a Jetpatcher system in operation through to the middle of December.

Over the course of an 18 week programme, all three Jetpatcher systems had completed a combined total of 821 m3 / 32,840 m2 of patching throughout the Essex highways network. Each Jetpatcher system comprised of a 3-man team, a driver, a skilled operative with a third supporting operative. The third mans primary duty was to ensure a clean, safe and tidy site with compaction of each repair to reduce loose stone chippings.

Northumberland County Council

We successfully secured a tender for Northumberland CC last year. Being a vast rural area, the Jetpatcher system was very influential in the total number of repairs completed over a 10 week schedule. The system was also used to support Northumberland's pre-surface dressing operation.

As a result of the excellent service levels experienced by Northumberland highways, we have successfully secured an additional programme of works, planned to start in February through to April 2013. Jetpatcher prides itself by offering our clients the most competitive hire rates in the industry through quotations or tender arrangements.

"The Jetpatcher system has enabled NCC to increase productivity and become more cost effective in delivering reactive and non-reactive maintenance, we were impressed by the professionalism and customer support throughout. In a predominantly rural network the Jetpatcher system will remain the preferred choice in responding to carriageway defects on our unclassified road network." **Steve Mason** Senior Highways Team leader, Northumberland County Council

Buckinghamshire County Council

"Ringway Jacobs hired in an operated Jetpatcher system to work out of our depot at High Wycombe, to supplement our own self delivery machine. We provided a driver and TM officer to make up a 3 man crew, using the Jetpatcher system to deal with the growing backlog of carriageway defects."

"The facility was new to Buckinghamshire County Council, which created considerable pressure on Ringway Jacobs to make sure the system provided the quality and output required. The end result was an improvement to the network and reduction in the considerable backlog of defects."

"The operation commenced in April 2012 with an initial 3 month hire period. During which time the operation came under close scrutiny from Buckinghamshire CC, resulting in daily visits from the clerk of works. During the first month the Jetpatcher system repaired over 1500 pothole defects, this early success gave us the confidence to extend the original hire period to the end of March 2013."

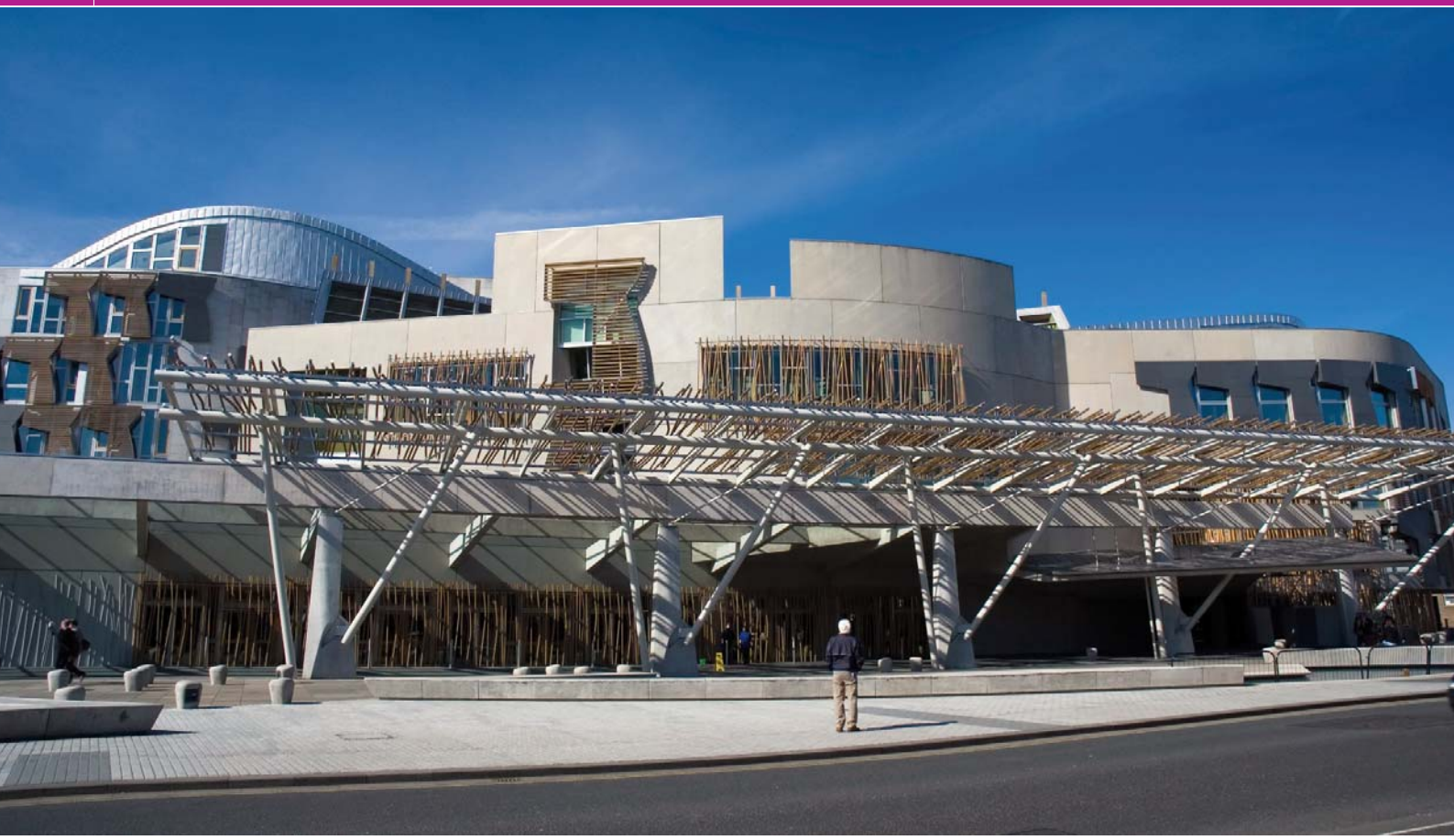
"Due to the high number of defects in the High Wycombe area, coupled to traffic constraints, we decided to double shift the system to gain further improvements in productivity. This proved a huge success with our levels of defects decreased considerably."

"The flexibility of the operators and Jetpatcher has made this process a huge success in Bucks, so much so we have committed to hire the system for another 12 months, up to the end of March 2014." **Steve Jenkins,** Transport for Buckinghamshire

The high service levels delivered to Buckinghamshire during the Jetpatcher trial lead them to consider the Nu-phalt system to support their urban reinstatement requirements. This resulted in a 6 week trial with Nu-phalt's single vehicle solution to hot patch repairs becoming a resounding success with the award of a 6 month hire scheduled for April 2013.

The combined portfolio of Nu-Phalt and Jetpatcher give local authorities the ability to select the right application for the right defect, thereby managing limited resources more effectively. We welcome the opportunity to sit down with you to discuss your future network requirements, and the prospect of supporting your 2013 requirements through our highly competitive rates.

Call Jetpatcher today on 01788 578044 for a FREE, no obligation quote or e-mail enquiries@jetpatcher.co.uk for more information www.jetpatcher.co.uk



Supporting Scotlands move towards zero waste

From January 1, 2014, new Waste (Scotland) Regulations will be coming into force, representing a radical change for the waste management industry. All of Scotland's local authorities will have a significant role to play in ensuring that these regulations are complied with, helping to lead the way in the drive to manage Scotland's resources more efficiently.

The new regulations are a key factor in Scotland's drive to reduce and recycle waste and achieve the Scottish Government's target of 70% recycling by 2025. All businesses will be required to separate key recyclable materials - including paper and card, plastic, metals and glass - for collection for recycling. Organisations in non-rural areas which are involved with food production, food preparation or food retail will also be required to separate food waste.

Zero Waste Scotland is on hand to advise and support all local authorities with managing resources and maximising their value; as well as ensuring everyone who will be affected by the regulations understands the message and knows what action needs to be taken.

These new regulations will bring the value of Scotland's resources to the forefront, prioritising the need to treat waste as an asset with the potential to boost the Scottish economy, rather than something to be discarded, as well as reducing reliance on raw materials.

Achieving the government's target of 70% recycling by 2025 could benefit Scotland's economy by around £175million, relieving the cost of landfill tax and enabling revenue to be generated from the sale of high quality recyclables. Becoming a zero waste society would require waste collections that provide a 'supply' of rich materials, in demand from businesses, to be cycled back through the economy again and again. Increased collection of quality materials as well as clear, motivating communications will be key to this and Zero Waste Scotland is looking to local authorities to support this message.

Household recycling has already made significant progress, increasing to around 40% in the last decade from a starting point of less than 5%. Efforts from local authorities has been a driving factor in this, by making more services available and helping to raise awareness and encourage participation through the 'Recycle for Scotland' brand.

Over the past year food waste collections have been rolled out across the country, representing a significant step towards boosting recycling rates while generating energy and a

nutrient-rich product for Scottish farmers in the process. Zero Waste Scotland is investing further in this area this year, providing funding to help with the initial costs of introducing food waste recycling services and ensuring that good practice is followed.

Zero Waste Scotland is also offering technical and communications support to help councils introduce new services, which will require the separation of key recyclable materials, ensuring they are used correctly to capture the best quality of materials.

As local authorities continue to meet minimum requirements and make great progress on recycling rates, there is increasing interest in exploring more innovative recycling options. In 2012, Zero Waste Scotland helped four local authorities - North Lanarkshire, Fife, Perth & Kinross and Stirling - to pilot the collection of nappies and other absorbent hygiene products (AHPs), helping to tackle the 450,000 nappies which are sent to landfill each day in Scotland. The trials are assessing the feasibility of a full-scale roll out across the local authority areas, which would see these councils offer an almost complete recycling collection; leaving very little waste in the residual bin.

Scotland has seen a tremendous increase in household recycling, and the foundations are now being laid to encourage that to continue. The next challenge is to capture the recyclable materials that are disposed of when people are out and about undertaking their daily activities.

Materials such as newspapers, plastic bottles and cans are commonly discarded 'on-the-go' and could be very high value when separated and collected appropriately. Zero Waste Scotland is keen to ensure these materials are captured and has made over £1million available over the last year to install new 'Recycling on the Go' bins in public places and communicate their correct usage. Many local authorities have already benefited by receiving this funding.

Zero Waste Scotland has also invested £900,000 to trial 'Recycle and Reward' facilities, which reward recycling through a range of incentives such as money back or discount vouchers. These trials assess the feasibility of adopting incentive-based schemes throughout the country and by targeting key quality materials, such as drinks bottles and cans, will harness the value of materials which could otherwise have gone to waste.

Moving forward, Zero Waste Scotland wants to encourage all local authorities to help focus shifting perceptions of waste towards an understanding that these materials are valuable resources, and have an important role to play in our future economy.

The countdown to the new regulations has already begun and it is vital that local authorities work towards compliance and act as champions to promote the value of recycling, the importance of quality, and the requirements of the waste regulations within their communities. Zero Waste Scotland will be there to offer assistance every step of the way.

Contact: For more information, please visit www.zerowastescotland.org.uk or call the helpline on 0808 100 2040. Zero Waste Scotland will also shortly be launching a FAQ and post code finder section of the website, making it easier for users to find answers to the most commonly asked questions and to identify cost-effective and reliable waste resource providers in their area.

Demand management in frontline services

Andy Mudd, APSEs principal consultant explores the imperatives of effective demand management if local government frontline services are to survive budget reductions.

Council services are not essentially philanthropic in nature. They are essential to social and economic well-being and in many cases critical to public health. Crude cuts in provision have the potential to increase the burden on the public purse as well as to undermine prospects for economic growth and quality of life. However, given that government cuts are a fact of life, there is no choice but to reduce expenditure. If adverse and unexpected consequences are to be avoided this has to mean reducing cost whilst maintaining outputs - in other words improving efficiency as opposed to cutting provision. The concept is simple in that it begins by establishing what is 'demanded' by society and then designing or redesigning services to meet this demand in the most cost effective way.

APSE Solutions has been very successful over the last few years in helping councils to achieve efficiency savings through the application of lean management tools and techniques. The approach makes much of the identification and removal of waste from the system of service delivery. This includes work that is only necessary because of a failure to effectively tackle the cause of a problem, rather than its symptoms, so to this extent, the lean approach reduces demand for resources, as well as making delivery processes more efficient. Notwithstanding this though, service providers are fairly passive recipients of the level of demand that they must strive to meet. In an era of ever diminishing resources this requires ever greater efficiency in the way those resources are used if failure is to be avoided. The question now arising, as we move towards the next round of cuts is, what happens if resources are reduced below the level required, even at optimum efficiency, to meet genuine, underlying demand?

What happens, for example, if councils no longer have the resources needed to keep the streets clean? The obvious answer is that they will fail to do so and therefore fail to meet the social, economic and health objectives associated with effective street cleansing. The potential consequences are not difficult to predict; a decrease in quality of life, a

deterioration in public health and a reduction in inward investment. This has clear potential to increase demand for other public services, including the criminal justice system and the health service which are already under budgetary pressures themselves. Overall, the social and economic cost of cutting street cleaning to a point where it is no longer effective would seem to outweigh the savings. This is an argument that can be made in respect of just about all council services but unfortunately does not seem likely to stop the government from making further cuts.

So how can councils face up to the challenge of further cuts? The answer must revolve around a genuine reduction in demand for services. One way to do this is to prioritise resources to concentrate on reducing the need for reactive service provision. The logic of providing those at greatest risk of heart disease with statins to reduce their cholesterol is well understood but the focussing of resources on prevention rather than cure is not well developed as a strategy across all public services. This may be partly due to the difficulties involved in identifying explicit links between preventative activity and a reduction in spending on reactive services. Many council leisure providers for example have received some funding from health service budgets but there are no mechanisms in place for the wholesale transfer of resources that many have argued is necessary to fund the massive increase in physical activity necessary to stave of the obesity epidemic that threatens to overwhelm the NHS in the not too distant future.

On a purely council level and to return to the street cleansing example, it is well understood that education and enforcement, aimed at stopping people from dropping litter, has the potential for reducing the need for street cleaning. In many councils however, enforcement and street cleaning are in different departments and it has proved difficult to demonstrate how an increase in the one can reduce the cost of the other.

In any case, any reduction in street cleansing, regardless of whether it results in a fall in the overall cleanliness of an area, is likely to be unpopular as the public often express demand in terms of wishing to see the street being cleaned rather than wanting clean streets. This illustrates the overriding importance of ensuring that demand management is aimed at a genuine change in public expectation that will not simply be perceived as failure at the delivery level. As ever, effective engagement with service users and the general public will be essential if attempts to cap or reduce demand are to be successful.

The primary mechanism for reducing demand is likely to be prevention but the part that innovation can play should not be understated. Sometime services can be provided in different ways at much reduced cost but the fundamental principle around the need to meet genuine demand cannot be ignored. For example, it is now accepted that, whilst the need to dispose of waste has not diminished, the effective removal and disposal of refuse does not require a collection from each individual dwelling. The shift, 20 years ago, from back door collection of dustbins to the kerb side collection of wheeled bins, greatly reduced the cost of collection but might it be possible to go further? The use of buried, communal receptacles for example, could reduce the frequency and improve the efficiency of collection in many areas but any shift to such an approach would require a major change in the nature of demand that could only be achieved through extensive public and political debate.

There can be little doubt that further reductions, beyond efficiency savings, in the cost of meeting critical public service objectives are possible but these will only be achieved through a genuine shift, or reduction, in demand. In outcome terms the critical importance of maintaining public health, social well-being and supporting economic development will be undiminished but it is possible to manage demand away from dealing with symptoms to tackling causes. It is also possible to achieve outcomes through different means and different approaches but this also will require genuine changes to the nature of public demand for services.

Local government must be prepared to explore all avenues for sustainable cost reduction whilst still meeting key societal objectives if it is not to experience ever greater levels of failure to meet public expectations. Going forward, this means engaging in a far reaching debate about the nature and level of demand for public services that recognises the criticality of achieving desired outcomes but at the same time is able to countenance shifting priorities and radical change to the way in which these outcomes are achieved.

Andy Mudd will be addressing delegates at the APSE demand management seminar in Harrogate on the 14th March 2013. To find out more about the seminar visit www.apse.org.uk or email vstarmer@apse.org.uk

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Excellence in customer services

Derek Trawber, Business Support Manager, explains how Guildford Borough Council has strengthened customer service with a Customer Service Excellence award.

In December 2011, Guildford Borough Council became one of the first councils in Surrey to gain the Customer Service Excellence hallmark and one of the few councils in the UK to achieve this award for the entire organisation.

So what is the Customer Service Excellence award?

Customer Service Excellence (CSE) is a management tool used to continually improve customer service. CSE focuses on:

- customer insight – understanding and determining customers' needs and preferences, and developing services to meet them;
- organisational culture – ensuring staff and procedures are customer focused;
- information and access – ensuring information provided is accurate, detailed, up to date and accessible;
- delivery – optimising service implementation and outcomes, and resolving problems;
- the timeliness and quality of service – responding to customers effectively, and monitoring service speed and quality.

In 2008 our recycling and parking services gained CSE certification. At that time, customer service initiatives took place largely at a departmental level. Some services had achieved other quality standards such as ISO 9001, Lexcel and Green Flag. Investors in People and Level 3 Equality and Diversity were also held corporately. To build on these achievements in 2009, our senior management decided to implement CSE across the whole organisation.

Whilst we didn't have poor customer service, part of the driver for going for organisation wide CSE accreditation was the fact that, like many councils, being a large and complex organisation, we had differing standards and procedures in different departments.

We wanted to use CSE to make the customer experience more consistent, learn from good practice and constantly improve quality and customer satisfaction. We didn't want to add any more individual service certificates – it was all or nothing!

We chose SGS United Kingdom Ltd to carry out our CSE assessment as our two organisations have been closely linked since 1995, when we first achieved ISO 9000 for our operational services.

Assessment and certification

In the pre-assessment period, preparations included appointing customer service 'champions' and organising briefing sessions, a customer services day, and mock assessments.

Held on site, SGS's assessment involved a review of internal documentation, systems and procedures, and interviews with customers, staff, management and partner organisations. In our assessment report SGS said they found a deep understanding of, and commitment to CSE, from senior management through to operational and front-line staff. We found the CSE assessment process very positive, with SGS's staff always saying they were 'looking to catch us in, not out'. At the end of the assessment we thought the assessors had been very fair and correctly identified our strengths and weaknesses.

Shortly after the assessment, the lead assessor returned to provide detailed feedback to each service to help them with their improvements – we found this very useful.

Three months later, SGS's assessor returned again to review the progress we had made with our action plan. This plan addressed the few areas of partial compliance identified in the assessment. In December 2011 we gained our CSE accreditation. Covering the whole council – 15 front-line and support service units – the award is valid for three years, subject to SGS carrying out annual reviews. During this time we must address any dips in performance, constantly improve and consult our customers.

Customer Service Initiatives

The award of the CSE certification has provided a focus and framework to raise the profile of customer service and drive improvement.

In 2010, we established a central customer service centre (CSC) to handle mainly recycling, refuse and street cleaning related enquiries. Since expansion, the CSC is staffed by a flexible team able to deal with enquiries by phone, e-mail, web and in person. Since staff are trained to the same customer care standards, the CSC provides an efficient and consistently good customer experience. Also implemented in 2010, our central complaints system has replaced departmental complaints handling. It is now easier to monitor complaints, identify trends, learn and take action.

In our new Customer Charter, we are committed to customer service standards such as: being approachable, attentive and fair; answering phone calls within four rings; and seeing visitors within five minutes.

Other customer service initiatives include:

- sharing best practice and ideas in meetings, briefings, workshops and events;
- producing a new style guide, using plain English and generally improving written and verbal communications;
- focusing on customer service in staff recruitment, training and development;
- publicising service standards, targets, performance and improvements;
- implementing service-unit annual service plans and, within these, customer service projects;
- encouraging staff feedback and suggestions;
- reducing avoidable contact and, if contact is still needed, encouraging staff to take responsibility for resolving issues quickly;
- encouraging cooperation between different services when they have a shared interest in serving the customer;
- measuring and analysing customer satisfaction.

Continuous improvement

Our greater customer focus is noticeable, and not only by our customers. For example, during our last Investors in People assessment, the assessor said how customer orientated staff are throughout the organisation. Whilst we are proud to achieve the CSE award, this is only the start. CSE is central to our on-going customer service improvement project - part of our 'Better place, better Council' transformation programme.

As part of our drive towards providing first-class services, we will go on using customer insight, promoting a customer service culture, improving information and access to services, setting standards and targets, and measuring and monitoring progress. We also still have a lot to learn from other organisations, both public and private. We are using CSE as a model to raise our standards of service. We have come a long way – we are now a much better organisation - but we still have a long way to go. CSE is, and will be, at the heart of everything we do.

As our Chief Executive David Hill, says: 'The award recognises the work we have put in to improve services to our customers and the systems in place to support them. However, we are not complacent and aim to provide consistently excellent services all the time. We will continue to challenge ourselves to build on our success and meet the developing needs of our customers.'

If you are thinking about CSE I would say 'go for it!' It is a really practical tool that focuses on all the important aspects of customer service. If it's used in a systematic way, it will identify your strengths and weaknesses and give structure to an improvement programme. You might be surprised how much you are already doing that meets the CSE requirements!

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Horse trading in blame

Evidence from APSE shows that far from education caterers being responsible for the current food contamination crisis - as claimed by Iceland's chief executive - school food is of a better quality and from more readily traceable sources than ever.

The mounting evidence of widespread fraud in the pan-European meat industry seems to have escaped Malcolm Walker, chief executive of frozen food firm Iceland, who attempted to shift blame for the food crisis onto local authorities during February media interviews' about the mounting crisis of confidence in the UKs food industry.

Mistakenly Mr Walker claimed that local authorities were responsible for the food crisis because of their low-cost approach to purchasing food served in schools, hospitals and prisons. Leaving aside the fact that Walker was mistaken in his assumption that local authorities purchase food for prisons and hospitals, the central plank of attack from Walker was that the public sector procurement industry is someone how to blame for this crisis.

So let's debunk some of this mythology. Firstly councils in England, Wales and Scotland have applied nutrient based standards to school foods since 2008, on a compulsory basis, in all local authority maintained schools. These standards set out rigorous compliance issues which determine the frequency and volume of vitamins and minerals ensuring a careful balanced diet of carbohydrates, proteins, fibre, vitamin A and C, folate, zinc and calcium is present in school meals. And it is these requirements that drive procurement – not simply price.

Data gathered by the UKs largest voluntary data benchmarking service, APSE's performance networks, which covers front-line services including education catering, shows a seismic shift away from processed products, such as the infamous Turkey Twizzlers, to fresh vegetables, fruit, bread, fish, poultry and meats. In fact, the ratio of food cost to overall meal costs has gone up with caterers now spending more per pupil per meal on food than ever before. In 2006/07, a caterer typically spent 60p per primary school pupil on food and milk but in 2012 this figures reached 77p. Caterers have also reported to APSE an increase in labour costs and the reason for this is, as part of the nutrient based standards applying to school meals, more catering staff are needed to prepare fresh cooked meals – rather than the low-cost low labour option of simply heating and serving processed foods.

This is not to say caterers are not striving to contain the costs of the service. During an economic downturn parents are sensitive to price increases so caterers, and the local authority, still need to secure 'best value' in their purchasing arrangements. Local authority will almost always seek to use a process of 'most economically advantageous tender', which means quality is also taken into account; and even in price only contracts they carefully specify the quality of the product that they expect to receive. In the area of meat purchasing most authorities use farm assured or 'red tractor' products and meat traceability is a key component of their increasingly discerning specifications. This is not just about product quality but an increasing desire for local authorities to recycle their procurement pound supporting local farmers and businesses in their local area.

The initial jump in food costs, following implementation of the new food standards, has forced local authorities to look again at food prices. Like every other consumer on the high street they have been hit hard by food price inflation and have looked to develop savings without compromising on quality. So where have the savings, which are small beer compared to food price inflation, come from? Well the answer is a range of innovative measures taken by local authorities. Many have switched to food purchasing consortiums, realising savings where they are able to increase the volume of food purchased and thus take advantage of the bulk buying arrangements. In some authorities they have re-classified the grading of certain products. Does it matter if a carrot is misshapen if it is ultimately destined to be chopped up and placed in a Shepherd's Pie? It will still contain the same volume of fibre and vitamins and minerals as its more perfect cousin destined to be pristine wrapped and polished for the supermarket purchaser.

Caterers are also keen to buy local which has been shown to decrease food costs which are not subject to the transport costs associated with purchasing from national suppliers. A trial, in north east councils, found that it was actually cheaper to buy local organic milk than standard milk from the larger dairies and yet still be able to pay a fair farm gate price on the milk.

So the idea that the public sector caterers can skew the market to the extent claimed by Mr Walker is fanciful. Whilst public sector catering is a substantial purchaser of food in the UK, it is dwarfed by the day to day spend of UK consumers in supermarkets and of course specialist frozen goods retailers such as Iceland. Indeed had it not been for the vigorous application of nutrient based standards in schools and the quality procurement processes, that insist on product traceability and quality standards in local authority school meals, we may have seen greater contamination issues in school meals which thankfully appear to have been kept to a minimum.

In an APSE survey, local authority caterers were found to be proactively tackling the issue of possible contamination in school meals. A total of 95.7% have already sought reassurances from their suppliers, with 50% having asked suppliers for their own DNA test results and a third overall have either used their own scientific officers or asked their local trading standards officers to arrange for independent tests on school foods, in addition to supplier based testing. A further 11.4% have arranged independent tests. Whilst many are awaiting the outcomes of tests, the vast majority of tests have demonstrated that school food is not affected by equine DNA and in the limited cases so far identified the presence of equine DNA in the samples was of trace value only - in other words not the levels of horse meat found in the likes of Findus lasagne but a tiny trace amount. Clearly the moves to farm traceable products has had a positive impact in the current situation.

Whilst school caterers are placed in much the same position as consumers in supermarkets - in having to trust their suppliers that what they buy is as it is described – we recognise that no system is ever entirely fool-proof. Indeed public purchasers, just like consumers can fall victim to deception and to criminal activity. Defrauding a public sector customer is no different to a high street consumer - the public sector can still be a victim of calculated fraud. What we can say with certainty is that public sector caterers in school meals, welfare and residential catering are doing all they can to safeguard both their customers and the public purse.

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In brief... from Walker Morris Solicitors

Draft environmental permitting regulations 2013

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is consulting on potential changes to the Environmental Permitting regime proposed by the Draft Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2013.

These changes seek to alter the sequencing of planning and environmental permitting for certain waste operators, and to transfer the management of appeals against rejected permit applications to the jurisdiction of the First Tier Tribunal. Other key changes include proposals to remove an obligation on local authorities to maintain public registers containing information connected with permit determinations.

The consultation is open until 4 April 2013, and Defra aims to finalise and bring these amendments into force on 1 October 2013.

Background

The Environmental Permitting regime was introduced in 2007, and incorporated previous measures required by Waste Management Licensing and Pollution Prevention Control regimes. The current regime is contained in the Environmental Permitting (England & Wales) Regulations 2010.

The operator of a facility which undertakes environmental activity falling within the scope of the regime must obtain an Environmental Permit from the Environment Agency, or register an exemption from doing so (where applicable) before it can operate lawfully.

The aim of the regime is to ensure the proper regulation of activities which pose a risk to the environment or to human health, and which have the potential to cause damage to the surrounding area. The regime also seeks to ensure that best practice is followed by operators when managing their facilities, whilst monitoring operator competence through regulatory supervision.

A typical environmental permit will specify conditions relating to the general management of the facility, and will identify those persons responsible for overseeing day-to-day activity at the site. The permit will also establish the extent of any regulated operations which may lawfully occur at the facility, and detail the obligations of operators to monitor and keep records of any environmental activity at the premises.

Operators are at risk of criminal prosecution if they carry out regulated activities, without an environmental permit, that are not exempted, or if they contravene the conditions of a permit that has been issued.

Changes

Waste management activities (other than large waste incinerators and industrial plants) currently require planning permission before an application for an environmental permit can be determined.

The Draft Regulations propose to remove this requirement, so that permits can be awarded even if a planning application has not yet been approved. There is concern that this pre-requisite - to secure planning permission - increases the administrative burden on operators and regulators, and prevents the issuing of permits where planning decisions are appealed or reviewed.

It is also proposed to transfer jurisdiction within the appeal process for rejected permit applications from the Planning Inspectorate to the First Tier Tribunal. The First Tier Tribunal was set up in 2010, and hears appeals against environmental civil sanctions issued by the Environment Agency.

Applications for a permit may be refused on the basis that the operator of a facility is not technically competent to hold such a permit. Permits may also be refused where evidence suggests that an operator lacks the financial means to properly manage the facility, or where there is doubt as to how the site would be supervised. Defra hopes that by allowing such appeals to be heard in the First Tier Tribunal, environmental appeals will be consolidated across a range of laws.

The current regime also requires local authorities to keep a duplicate of the Environment Agency's public information on their own public register. The Draft Regulations seek to remove this obligation, citing that such registers are seldom inspected by the public and that abolishing this requirement would result in significant financial savings.

Analysis

Removing the need for planning permission to have been granted prior to determination of a permit application will bring waste operations into line with other activities subject to environmental permitting. However, it remains to be seen whether such measures would reduce the administrative burden on operators.

Operators will still need to obtain both planning consent and an environmental permit before they can commence environmental activity, and the same delays will be encountered if either is challenged irrespective of which is issued first. It is also foreseeable that there will be an increase in the amount of judicial challenges against the award of permits should these be issued prior to planning permission. Such challenges have the potential to cause significant delays to projects.

In R (on the application of) Edwards & ors v Environment Agency & ors, the House of Lords dismissed judicial review proceedings against the Environment Agency in deciding to grant a permit to a cement manufacturer. However, the

proceedings took a substantial amount of time to be resolved by the courts, and five years passed from the permit being granted by the Agency to the proceedings being resolved.

Transferring jurisdiction of permit appeals to the First Tier Tribunal would provide greater procedural certainty and flexibility in decision-making. The Tribunal's specialist experience in hearing environmental matters will also increase the quality and reliability of appeals, with non-legal environmental professionals or expert assessors able to determine appeal hearings. This expertise was successfully demonstrated by the Tribunal in the determination of its first ever case in October 2012 (Freida v Marine Management Organisation NV/2012/0002)

Local authorities would welcome the relaxation of their obligations to maintain public registers regarding environmental permitting. The Draft Regulations propose that the Environment Agency would make more information relating to permit applications available online, and provide for enhanced public engagement where there is high public interest in an application. These measures ought to ensure that local residents and businesses have sufficient access to information on permit applications which concern them.

Walker Morris has specialist expertise and experience in advising private and public sector clients on all aspects of environmental law, including minerals, waste, energy producers, statutory undertakers and planning authorities. We would encourage all operators who come within the scope of the Environmental Permitting framework to review the Draft Regulations, and to respond to Defra on any matters of concern prior to the consultation deadline.

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LGPS and ill-health early retirement: Beware of insufficent evidence!

A recent determination by the Pensions Ombudsman upheld a complaint by a deferred member of the LGPS, who was denied an ill-health early retirement pension on the basis that the certified independent registered medical practitioner (IRMP) had stated that there were untried treatments available.

The brief facts

Dr Winterbotham was employed by a Yorkshire Council until 2004, and was a deferred member of the LGPS. In 2011, he applied for early payment of his LGPS deferred benefits on grounds of ill-health under regulation 31 of the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations 1997.

In order to qualify under regulation 31, a member had to be permanently incapable of discharging efficiently the duties of his former local government employment because of ill-health or infirmity of mind or body. The former employer, before making a decision, is required to obtain certification as to the member's incapacity under the test from an independent registered medical practitioner.

Dr Winterbotham's GP supplied a letter stating that she fully supported his application for retirement on health grounds and setting out his various medical conditions, which included diabetes and cataracts. In June 2011, the Council's appointed IRMP signed a certificate stating that Dr Winterbotham did not satisfy the incapacity test and that "remaining avenues of medical and/or surgical treatment currently remain unexplored which may typically, otherwise, be expected to improve [his] health status – potentially to a level commensurate with allowing a return to employment at [his] (former) level." The Council wrote to Dr Winterbotham denying his application and enclosing a copy of the IRMP's certificate.

Dr Winterbotham's subsequent appeals under the LGPS's internal dispute resolution procedure were unsuccessful. At stage two of the internal dispute resolution procedure Dr Winterbotham supplied letters from his diabetes specialist, Dr Willis, and his optician, supporting his application.

Dr Winterbotham complained to the Pensions Ombudsman about the Council's decision.

Determination

The Ombudsman upheld the complaint. The evidence indicated that the IRMP might not have known what treatments had been tried, and did not specify the untried treatments. The employing authority should therefore have obtained clarification on these matters from the IRMP. The Council could not follow the IRMP opinion 'blindly' and should also have asked the IRMP if the medical evidence it received during the subsequent IDRP would have altered his opinion.

The Ombudsman remitted the decision back to the Council and directed it to ask the IRMP to review Dr Winterbotham's case, armed with Dr Willis's report and the optician's letter, and to clarify which treatment options were unavailable and untried. The Council was also ordered to pay Dr Winterbotham £250 for the distress and inconvenience caused by its maladministration.

Comment

This determination demonstrates the difficulties involved for employers in ill-health applications and provides an example of a case where there was insufficient evidence to determine the issue of incapacity. Ill-health cases are consistently a very common source of complaint to the Ombudsman. The 2011-2012 Ombudsman's Report highlights that complaints about entitlements to ill-health pensions continue to make up a significant part of the Ombudsman's workload.

Employers must carefully consider the evidence obtained from an expert and seek clarification if it gives rise to any questions. It is important that all dealings with medical experts are fully documented, in case subsequent disputes arise.

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Report back

A round up of APSE advocacy and events on behalf of our members

January and February proved busy months for APSE with a range of conferences, meetings and advocacy activity on behalf of APSE members.

England

APSE on social media

APSE held a successful seminar on the use of social media in supporting local authority services at Elstree Studios in Herstmere on 22 January 2013. The seminar was attended by over 100 delegates and attracted widespread interest around the U.K.

Green in Oxford

APSE's environment and sustainability strategic forum was held in Oxford on 6 February. An intensive workshop was attended by 15 local authorities to look at developing a framework for local authority collaboration around green energy projects and was co-facilitated by APSE and Walker Morris Solicitors. The event was followed by a forum dinner for council leaders and portfolio holders where workshop recommendations were discussed. Councillor Richard Williams chaired the event.

A Hull of a job getting to grips on waste

APSE northern region hosted an event in Hull on the 16 November at Hull's KC stadium on performance management attended by waste and environment managers within the sub-regional area.

Leeds on Assets

APSE's strategic forum on asset management, chaired by Councillor Jim Docherty was held in Leeds on the 28 February 2013 with speakers from Walker Morris and Steve Cirell an associate consultant of APSE looking at maximising the use of local authority assets in renewable and energy efficiency projects.

Civica discussions

APSE's Chief Executive spoke at the CIVICA conference in Manchester on 23 January on service delivery models and shared the panel with Alex Aiken, Director, Communications & Strategy, Westminster City Council, Steve Robinson, Chief Executive, Cheshire West and Chester Council & Paul Bradbury, Group Business Development Director, Civica.

School dinners in Parliament

APSE attended the All-Party Parliamentary Group on School Food on 23 January in London and as a result APSE has been asked to provide secretariat support to the APPG for School Food.

CCA conference

APSE attended the Conservative Councillors Association Conference in Oxford on 1 and 2 March hosting workshops on Municipal Enterprise with a panel led by Cllr Robin Brown of Northamptonshire and Cllr Paul Findlow of Cheshire East Council.

Wales

South Wales Waste

APSE attended the South Wales Waste Managers Group on 12 December 2012 to discuss performance networks and joint working. Plans are on-going for closer working with the group.

FM working in Wales

APSE Wales are organising a Facilities Management Working Group to be held in March/April 2013 to discuss developing new approaches to performance networks reports as part of the ongoing development plan for performance networks.

Forthcoming events

The next APSE Wales building maintenance and housing group meeting will be held on 21 March in Llandrindod Wells. In April, APSE will be holding service transformation events in north and south Wales on innovation and income generation for front line services. Contact Debbie Johns for details on djohns@apse.org.uk

Scotland

Peebles Political Panel

Peebles, once again hosted the APSE Scotland Building and Housing seminar on 21 to 22 February. The seminar hosted a political panel debate with Richard Lyle MSP (SNP), Dr. Elaine Murray MSP (Scottish Labour), Jim Hume MSP (Scottish Liberal Democrats) and Alex Johnstone (Scottish Conservatives), representing the various parties. The seminar included the Scottish Building and Housing Apprentice of the Year Award.

Scottish Fayre

APSE Scotland helped to shape the response to the crisis of confidence in food following the horsemeat scandal by providing information to the Scottish Government on the procurement practices used in the supply of food in school meals.

Hungry for success

APSE Scotland has also nominated Andrew Kennedy of East ayrshire to be its representative to the successor group to 'Hungry for Success'. The new group will explore skills needed to sustain excellent standards in school food.

The APSE Scotland report into soft facilities management services has also been issued to members for consultation and responses. The report looks at performance data and the state of the market issues for facilities management services including catering and building cleaning. The report is available from Louise McMillan, APSE Scotland on lmcmillan@apse.org.uk

Northern Ireland

Performance Management in Northern Ireland; The future?

APSE will present evidence on how performance networks can contribute to better performance management to the DoE Northern Ireland Private Secretary and to the Regional Governance Group for local government, reviewing arrangements for performance management in the new local authorities, during March. For details about APSE performance networks in Northern Ireland contact Phil Brennan on pbrennan@apse.org.uk

Rewarding success

APSE continues to be a leading partner in the Local Government Awards (NI) promoting excellence in local authority services and showcasing the best in contributions from councillors and officers to local public services. APSE's Phil Brennan will be attending the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) Conference in Derry on 28 February 2013 which will incorporate the awards event.

Down town

The new Civic Centre at Down District Council will host an event on 15th March 2013 on the theme of 'Local Government Reorganisation: are we there yet?'. This free event is open to APSE members and all councillors and officers are welcome to attend and contribute. Speakers from DoE NI, NIPSA, SOLACE NI and local councillors will look at strategic and practical issues of relevance to the re-organisation as well as considering progress with the process overall. Meanwhile APSE's Chief Executive continues to chair the Local Government Reform Joint Forum as part of the preparations for local government reorganisation.

APSE people pages...

Goodbye and thank you to Adele Reynolds.....

Adele Reynolds, a shared research associate between APSE and De Montfort University, has now completed her two year programme of research with APSE. Adele has been successfully recruited to work in the field of employment and skills with 'New Economy' which is one of six special commissions set up by the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA). Adele will be responsible for projects within the 'employment and skills' department across Greater Manchester. Congratulations from all at APSE and we wish Adele the very best for the future at New Economy and offer our thanks for her input into the APSE research programme.

And welcome... to Andy Williams

Andy Williams has been appointed to APSE as our new 'APSE Performance Networks Operations Manager'. Having worked in local government for 15 years in various roles for Rotherham Borough Council, which included 7 years as a specialist Rents Manager Andy brings to this post his experience as a manager responsible for producing and reporting upon Key Performance Indicators. A Performance Manager for an ALMO. Andy also brings his experience in creating a performance management framework. Andy will lead the operations side of APSE Performance Networks and as a person previously on 'the other side' in submitting data to the network hopes that this perspective will be a great asset, to the on-going development of the UKs largest voluntary data benchmarking group for local authorities.

APSE briefing notes update

Briefing notes and research reports produced since the last issue of Direct News

13-07	CE Markings	February 2013
13-06	Low Carbon Scotland	February 2013
13-05	Road Markings	February 2013
13-04	School meals and contaminated products	February 2013
13-03	Consultation on Local Authority Enforcement Code	February 2013
13-02	Reducing sign clutter	January 2013

For more information on the briefing notes and research reports, contact the APSE office on 0161 772 1810 or visit our website at www.apse.org.uk

Events diary

Date	Event	Venue
7 and 8 March	Highways, winter maintenance and street lighting seminar 2013	Newcastle●
7 March	Service Delivery Model Advisory Group	Bristol ●
12 March	Managing allotments	Preston●
14 March	Demand Management Seminar	Pavilions of Harrogate●
14 March	Supervisory skills in Building Cleaning	Chesterfield●
15 March	Health and Safety in Amenities and Grounds Maintenance	London ●
19 March	Identifying damp and timber mould	London ●
19 March	Sport & Leisure Advisory Group	Oxford Ice Rink, Oxford●
20 March	Parks one day seminar	Manchester United●
21 March	Handing difficult conversations with frontline staff	Norwich ●
26 March	Train the trainer lunchtime supervisors	Glasgow ●
27 March	Health and safety in leisure centres	Glasgow ●
10 April	Project management	Manchester ●
12 April	Supervisory skills in vehicle maintenance and repair	Liverpool ●
12 April	Catering Advisory Group	Manchester Town Hall●
16 April	Sports and Leisure advisory group	Manchester Town Hall●
17 April	Building Maintenance	Manchester Town Hall●
18 April	Street cleansing seminar	Aston Villa●
23 April	Parks & Ground Maintenance Advisory Group	Conference Hall, Manchester Town Hall●
17 April	Transport Advisory Group	Conference Hall, Manchester Town Hall●
18 April	Building Cleaning Advisory Group	Manchester Town Hall●
24 April	Highways and Street Lighting	Manchester Town Hall●
1 May	Renewables	Manchester Town Hall●
7-10 May	**Scottish Fleet, Waste and Grounds Seminar 2013**	Aviemore●
16 May	Handling Difficult Conversations with Frontline Staff	Glasgow ●
22 May	Managing Contractors Safely	Glasgow ●

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Managing demand:

Responding to budget reductions in local government frontline services

Thursday 14 March 2013 at the Pavilions of Harrogate

Demand management:

- Nudge, nudge: Behaviour change and influencing demand in environmental services
- What factors influence our ability to meet demand for local services?
- Reducing demand or increasing supply? The public service dilemma
- Demand analysis in frontline services; The science bit
- Can demand led reviews assist in service redesign
- Meeting demand beyond service boundaries (in adult social care)
- Generating new demand in a traded service FM context
- An exploration of legal and risk issues

Speakers include: Anthony Zacharzewski, Chief Executive of The Democratic Society, Robin Tuddenham, Director for Communities, Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council, Nick Bailey, Senior Lecturer (Urban Studies)School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow, Peter Cogger, Director of Business Development, Working time solutions, Caroline Davies, Public Open Spaces, Knowsley Council, Andy Mudd, Principal Consultant, APSE Solutions, Bryan Redhead, Service Manager, Gateshead Council, Anita Brown, Business Manager, Stockton-on-Tees Council, Andrew Uprichard, Solicitor Walker Morris Solicitors