



Banishing poor performance from the frontline

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Survation**

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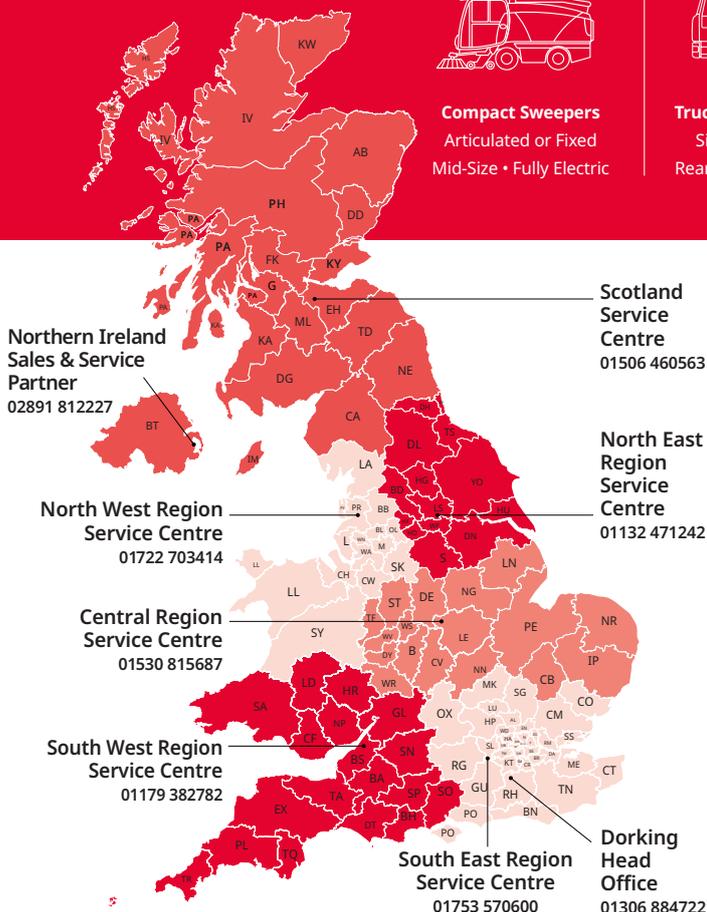
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Editorial



Mo Baines
APSE Chief Executive

New Frameworks, New Duties, New Opportunities

It's a busy few months in APSE. The local government sector is awash with announcements with the new publication of the Local Outcomes Framework. Applying to English Councils, it will require outcomes-based performance measurement against key national priorities.

In Scotland, a landmark Bill has passed its final stages and now awaits Royal Assent. The Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill 2026 will compel local authorities, and other relevant public bodies, to prepare and publish a community wealth building action plan, and to implement that plan.

In Wales the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for Drinks Containers (Wales) Regulations 2026 have been laid on the 12 February signalling a further commitment to the circular economy in Wales and supporting the policy framework 'Beyond Recycling and Net Zero Wales'. The regulations will have practical implications for waste collection, public communications, and partnership working with producers and retailers.

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has set out its draft Nature Recovery Strategy with the consultation running from the 20 January to 18 March 2026. The draft strategy looks at biodiversity amongst other issues.

Across all four nations, the direction of travel is clear: greater transparency, stronger performance expectations, and a renewed emphasis on sustainability, social value, and place-based delivery.

APSE will be working with its member local councils on all of these new consultations and announcements so watch out for the network meetings, free to attend, and with many online, what's not to like!

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Report Back

A round-up of APSE advocacy and events



Mo Baines attends the Public Sector Catering Alliance in Westminster.

Fairer School Meal Funding on the Menu

APSE Chief Executive, Mo Baines, attended a Public Sector Catering Alliance round-table discussion at the House of Commons on 29 January 2026. The discussion brought together voices from across public sector catering to tackle the shared challenges facing the sector.

The conversation focused on how stronger collaboration across public services can deliver real benefits, from fairer school meal funding to workforce development and better representation at a parliamentary level.

Putting Place-based Growth on the Map

Prof Raheel Nawaz, Pro Vice Chancellor of the University of Staffordshire, welcomed researchers and partners together from inside and outside the University to talk about place-based growth, and how research can help improve lives and communities in real, grounded ways.

The opening keynote from Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive and a Visting Professor at the University, opened the conference and sponsored its delivery with Professor Martin Jones responding in the keynote plenary. Place-based work, it was posited, only means

APSE Chief Executive, Mo Baines, delivers opening keynote on place-based growth at the University of Staffordshire.



APSE Energy's event in Westminster.

something if local anchor institutions are place-sensitive, an approach adopted by the University as a civic institution.

Sparking Ideas at the Sustainable Futures: Local Action and Innovation Event

APSE Energy recently hosted the Sustainable Futures: Local Action and Innovation event in Westminster, attended by speakers from across the energy sector.

The event featured fascinating insights from a range of industry leaders, including Dr Sandra Bogelein from the Climate Change Committee, Steven Wilding from London Borough of Hounslow and Katie Reilly from Waverely Borough Council.

Councils Come Together to Discuss Local Growth and Prosperity

Our APSE members recently joined us in Birmingham for our 'Delivering on Growth at a Local Level' networking event in Birmingham on 23 January 2026.

The free event included fascinating insights from Professor Mark Gregory, Professor Steve Griggs and Chief Executive of South Tyneside Council, Jonathan Tew. Members had the opportunity to discuss and debate public attitudes to spending, local growth and regeneration.

Celebrating our Talent at APSE

APSE Finance Assistant, Jay Jowitt, recently celebrated the successful completion of his AAT Level 3 Assistant Accountant Apprenticeship, provided by Total People.

Jay began his apprenticeship studies in late January 2024, alongside working at APSE, and was awarded his Level 3 Diploma in Accounting in December 2025. Congratulations Jay!

Louise Melville, APSE Principal Advisor met Finnie the unicorn, Glasgow's Commonwealth Games 2026 mascot, at the COSLA Conference





APSE Chief Executive, Mo Baines, congratulates Jay Jowitt, APSE Finance Assistant, on the completion of his apprenticeship.



APSE Principal Advisor, Abi Ademiluyi, provides an overview of the Street Cleansing State of the Market Report 2026.

Street Cleansing Seminar 2026: Smarter, Cleaner, Greener

Held at the National Conference Centre, APSE's National Street Cleansing Seminar 2026 brought together local authority professionals, policy leads and industry partners to explore the future of streetscene services. The programme covered public perceptions of frontline services, the growing challenge of waste crime, tougher enforcement measures and the role of technology in improving environmental quality.

Speakers included Mo Baines (APSE), Dan Cooke of the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management, and Andrew Kemp of LitterCam, alongside local authority practitioners sharing innovation in fleet decarbonisation, AI-enabled enforcement and community-led litter initiatives. The seminar reinforced the sector's commitment to delivering smarter, cleaner and greener neighbourhoods.

Scotland

COSLA Conference

Chair of APSE Scotland Cllr Judy Hamilton and our Principal Advisor for Scotland Louise Melville attended the annual COSLA conference in St Andrews. Cllr Hamilton and Louise attended conference sessions, workshops including NESO and Empty Homes and the COSLA Excellence Awards. As an added bonus they met Finnie the unicorn, Glasgow's Commonwealth Games 2026 mascot!!

A discussion takes place at APSE's Full Symposium in Birmingham.



Wales

Housing, Sustainability and Community Support Group

APSE Wales hosted a free online session for Welsh councils examining key pressures across housing and community services. Wendy Dearden from the Bevan Foundation outlined the impact of temporary accommodation on children and families, highlighting both human and policy implications. Craig ab Iago, Cabinet Member at Gwynedd Council, explored local responses to the second homes challenge, while Shannon Nutkins of Lendology CIC demonstrated how renewable energy loan schemes can support housing improvement and energy efficiency. The discussion reflected the interconnected challenges of housing supply, sustainability and long-term community resilience across Wales.

Northern Ireland

Making Space for Nature

APSE Northern Ireland convened members for a practical networking session focused on biodiversity and nature recovery within council operations. Wayne Priestley highlighted how urban greening, rewilding partnerships, revised grassland management and tree planting schemes can be embedded into frontline services, while a case study from Belfast City Council showcased habitat enhancements in burial sites and how biodiversity can be balanced sensitively within cemetery management. The session offered practical lessons and inspiration for councils seeking to strengthen environmental outcomes through everyday service delivery.

Public confidence grows as financial pressures persist

APSE's latest annual polling, conducted by Survation, provides a timely snapshot of public and councillor attitudes towards local government at a moment of continued financial pressure but growing confidence in frontline services.

Survation was commissioned by APSE to undertake polling of both councillors and residents, examining perceptions of council services, financial sustainability, trust in institutions and expectations for the future. The councillor survey was conducted online between 5–18 November 2025, gathering responses from 504 elected councillors across the UK. This was complemented by a nationally representative public survey of 2,361 adults, conducted between 29 October and 12 November 2025.

The findings were first launched at the APSE Performance Networks Seminar in Blackpool in December 2025, where Damian Lyons Lowe, Chief Executive of Survation, presented the results.

Financial outlook improves

While concern about long-term financial sustainability remains widespread, the 2026 polling suggests a modest improvement in outlook. Just over one quarter of councillors (26%) now believe it is very likely or likely their council will issue a Section 114 notice (or Section 95 in Scotland) within the next five years. This represents a notable fall from over one third (34%) in the previous year.

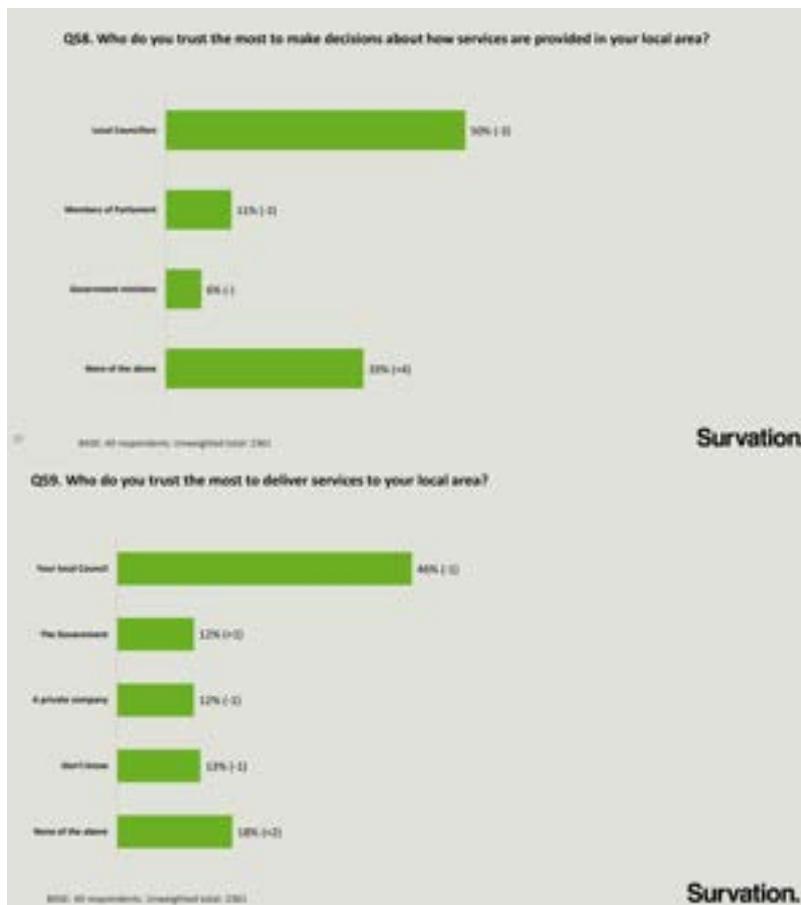
Although this shift should be treated cautiously, it may reflect councils' ongoing efforts to manage extreme pressures, alongside tentative signs of stabilisation in some areas.

Welcoming communities – but a 'listening gap'

The polling paints a positive picture of community cohesion. Almost two thirds of the public (62%) say their local area feels welcoming, and the same proportion believe people from different backgrounds generally get on well. Around one third rate cohesion in their area very highly.

However, this sits alongside weaker perceptions of influence and voice. Fewer than half of respondents (46%) agree that councils take account of views from all parts of the community, with only 23% strongly agreeing. Meanwhile, 38% actively disagree that councils listen to all voices.

This "listening gap" presents a significant challenge, particularly as councils navigate complex national policy impacts locally while seeking to maintain public confidence.



Rising satisfaction with local services

One of the most striking findings is the increase in public satisfaction across a wide range of council services. Ratings have improved year-on-year for many high-profile, everyday services:

- 50% rate waste and recycling services as 8–10, up nine percentage points from 2024
- 48% rate parks services as 8–10, with almost half of residents visiting parks weekly
- 40% rate leisure and sports facilities highly, up ten points

Street cleaning and road maintenance have also seen notable improvements

Overall, there has been a five-point increase in residents saying services in their area have improved, reversing declines seen in previous years.

Strong support for local control and investment

Support for greater local control of funding remains overwhelming. Sixty-one per cent of respondents believe not enough of their tax is spent locally, a nine-point increase on last year. Three quarters of the public would prefer central government to give more money to councils to spend locally, with only 3% favouring further centralisation.

When asked how additional funding should be spent, residents prioritised highly visible services: road maintenance, waste and recycling, affordable housing and social care.

Trust in councils remains high

Perhaps most striking is the continued strength of trust in local government. Half of the public trust councils most to make decisions about local services, compared with around one in ten who trust MPs and just 6% who trust government ministers. Councils are also far

more trusted than central government to deliver services effectively in local areas.

This trust provides a strong democratic mandate for councils to lead on service delivery, prevention and long-term investment in communities.

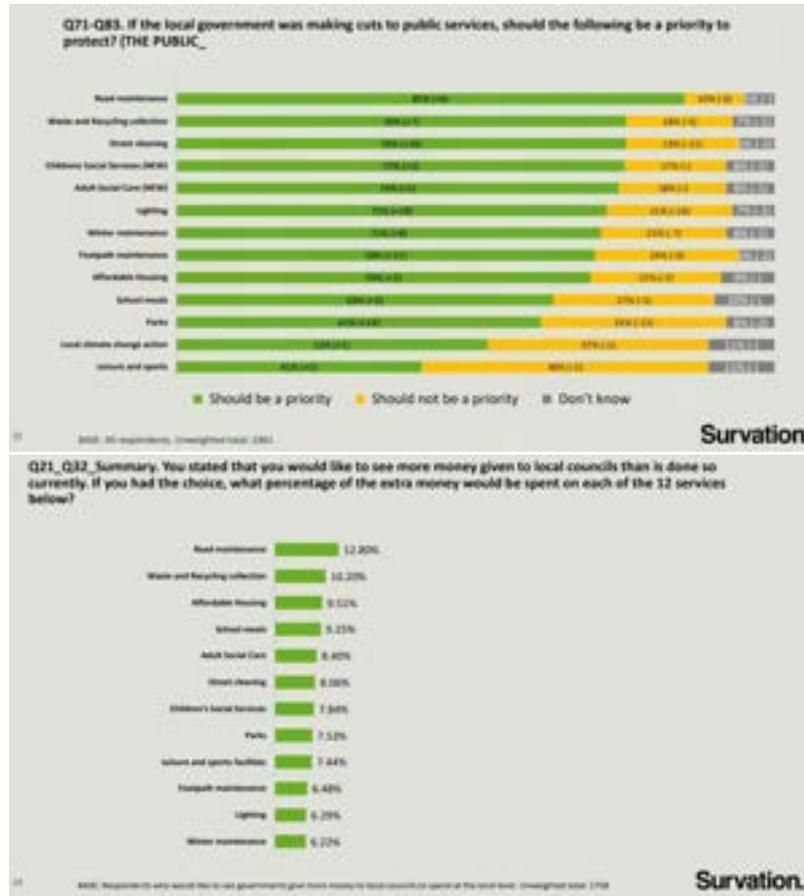
APSE comment

This year’s polling offers welcome reassurance for the sector. Public satisfaction with services is rising and fewer councillors expect financial failure, despite sustained pressure.

However, the findings also underline ongoing risks. Many residents do not feel consistently heard, and the disconnect between public priorities—such as road maintenance—and statutory spending pressures like social care remains stark. The results also highlight the importance of translating economic growth into tangible local outcomes that residents can see and feel.

As councils continue to navigate unprecedented challenges, the polling reinforces a simple truth: frontline local services matter deeply to communities, and local government remains one of the most trusted parts of the public sector.

• *Damian Lyons Lowe’s presentation on the findings of the poll from the APSE Performance Networks Seminar 2025 is available from the APSE website.*



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APSE survey warns of 'triple squeeze' on UK leisure services as demand rises

Local authority sports and leisure services are facing rising demand, ageing infrastructure and increasing pressure to support public health, according to APSE's latest State of the Market in Sports and Leisure 25/26 report.

APSE The survey of councils across the UK shows 83% expect demand on their leisure services to rise over the next year, while 97% believe the future of leisure lies in closer integration with health.

Facilities under strain

The report reveals that 53% of leisure facilities now require refurbishment, with many dating back to the major construction waves of the 1950s–80s. Ageing buildings, rising energy costs and limited capital investment are creating significant operational pressures for councils.

Shift towards in-house delivery

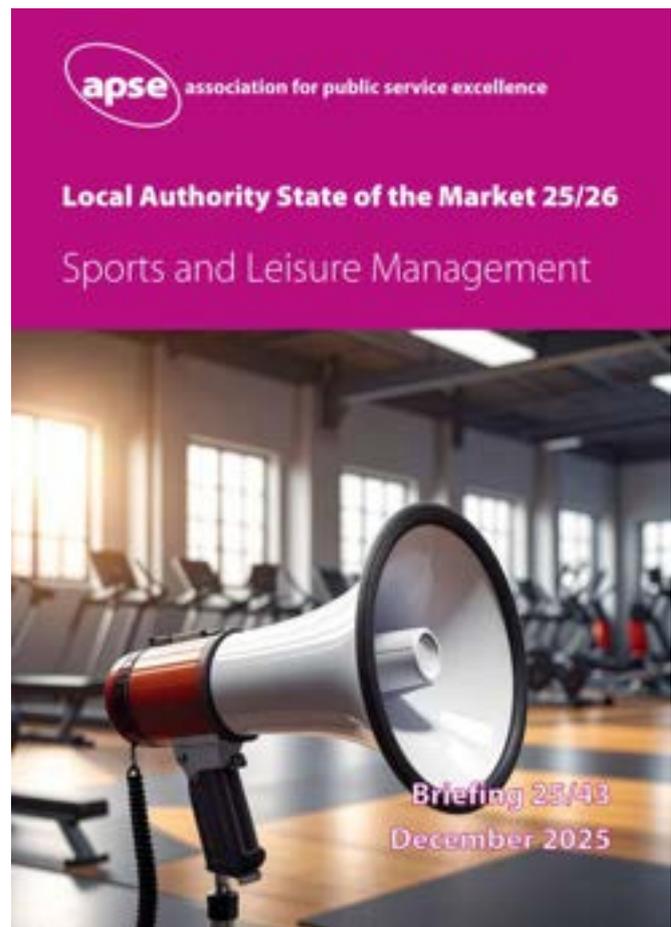
A majority (62%) of local authorities now deliver their leisure services in-house, reflecting a continued move toward models that allow stronger control over finances, integration with health and long-term strategic planning.

Affordability under pressure

To manage rising costs, councils have increased user charges, with the average adult swim now £6.20, up from £5.10 last year. Despite this, authorities continue to offer wide-ranging discounts to support low-income families, older adults and disabled users.

Health partnerships growing

The survey highlights expanding partnerships with Health Boards and Integrated Care Boards, particularly around weight management and exercise programmes.



APSE Comment

Matt Ellis, APSE Principal Advisor for Sports and Leisure, said, "Leisure services are increasingly recognised as essential to public health but they are facing unprecedented pressure. Without renewed investment and stronger long-term funding partnerships, councils will struggle to maintain the facilities and programmes their communities rely on."

The APSE State of the Market in Sports and Leisure 25/26 survey was completed by local authority officers from across APSE's UK membership areas. The survey was conducted online between August and October 2025.

• *For more information, please contact APSE Principal Advisor, Matt Ellis, on mellis@apse.org.uk*

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Using Performance Networks in the national frameworks across the devolved governments

Debbie Johns, Head of APSE Performance Networks

The financial context

Councils are operating in an increasingly fragile financial environment. While recent settlements have provided some welcome funding increases, many frontline services remain below pre-austerity funding levels, with demand continuing to rise. The Institute for Government and CIPFA have warned that public services are now in a weaker position than in 2010, meaning any further cuts would be more damaging and harder to deliver.

The Local Government Association estimates that cost and demand pressures could add £21.4 billion to the cost of delivering council services by 2028/29. Even accounting for new funding streams, councils face a projected funding gap rising to £8.4 billion by the end of the decade. In this context, a continued focus on value for money is unavoidable.

At APSE's Performance Networks Seminar in December 2025, CIPFA highlighted a challenging outlook for local government finances, including unprecedented funding redistribution, continued growth in demand for key services, increased reliance on exceptional financial support, and a growing emphasis on data, benchmarking and scenario planning. For frontline services, the message was clear: understand your baseline, know your numbers and bring performance and finance together.

Using benchmarking to evidence Best Value

Performance measurement is a critical tool for identifying efficiencies and evidencing value for money. APSE Performance Networks enables councils to compare performance with similar authorities, set realistic targets over time, monitor trends across cost, productivity, outputs and outcomes, and identify areas for challenge and improvement.

Benchmarking supports informed decision-making by helping councils understand why performance is changing. For example, whether cost increases reflect inefficiency or deliberate investment. By highlighting good practice that can be shared across the sector, it also provides a strong evidence base for elected members, auditors and the public.

Supporting national and devolved frameworks

Across the UK, new national performance and accountability frameworks are emerging. While APSE Performance Networks is primarily a local improvement tool rather than a mechanism designed to mirror national reporting, its data can increasingly be used as supporting evidence.

In England, APSE has been engaging with MHCLG on the proposed Local Government Outcomes Framework, which is intended to monitor progress against national priorities and the Best Value duty. Given Performance Networks' origins in Best Value, the framework provides an opportunity for councils to use benchmarking data voluntarily to support their reporting.

In Scotland, reform of the National Performance Framework is underway, and APSE will work with councils to ensure Performance Networks continues to support any new requirements. In Wales, APSE has been liaising with Data Cymru on opportunities for Performance Networks data to complement the Self-Assessment Performance Dataset and associated performance profiles. In Northern Ireland, APSE has played a leading role in supporting councils to meet statutory duties around continuous improvement and comparative performance, including the development of new Power BI reports for core indicators.

Looking ahead

Local government reorganisation in England adds further importance to robust performance data. APSE has developed a lighter-touch benchmarking module to help authorities baseline performance before, during and after transition, providing evidence of impact and supporting service integration in new councils.

As W. Edwards Deming famously observed, "Without data, you're just another person with an opinion." In an era of financial constraint, service transformation and increasing scrutiny, APSE Performance Networks remains a vital tool; helping councils understand where they are, where they are going, and how best to deliver high-quality, value-for-money services for their communities.

For further information on APSE Performance Networks, please contact djohns@apse.org.uk.

Established to support the development of the statutory Best Value duty, APSE Performance Networks has been benchmarking frontline local authority services for over 27 years. The service provides robust, well-established processes for collecting, validating and reporting performance data, underpinned by consistency, reliability and rigorous error checking. Today, more than 170 local authorities across the UK participate annually, making Performance Networks one of the most trusted sources of comparative local government performance data. •



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Consultation launched on stronger protections for homeowners on privately managed estates



On 18 December 2025, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published a consultation setting out wide-ranging proposals to strengthen rights and protections for homeowners living on privately managed estates.

The proposals seek to address long-standing concerns about unfair estate management practices and the significant injustices faced by residents.



The consultation takes forward key measures contained within the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024, which established a new regulatory framework for privately managed estates. Under the proposals, homeowners would benefit from greater transparency over estate management charges, enhanced rights to challenge the reasonableness of those charges as well as new powers to hold estate managers to account.

Critically, the reforms would remove the risk of homeowners losing their property due to arrears on estate management charges, addressing one of the most severe consequences of the current system.

The consultation also explores how homeowners could apply to a tribunal to appoint a new estate manager where there is serious management failure, alongside proposals to enable advice to be issued by the Secretary of State to support consistent and fair implementation.



APSE recognises the importance of these reforms. When estate management arrangements fail, residents often turn to their local councillors or councils for support. This, despite many estates, green spaces, play areas and roads being outside local authority ownership or control. This can create frustration for residents and limit the ability of councils to intervene to improve local environments.

APSE particularly welcomes proposals that help rebalance power between estate managers and residents, especially measures addressing opaque charging and punitive enforcement practices. While these estates are not within the direct remit of local authorities in England and Wales, fair and effective estate management benefits communities as a whole.



Responses to the consultation are due by Thursday 12 March 2026.

For more information please contact Vickie Hacking, APSE Principal Advisor, on vhacking@apse.org.uk •

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A Smarter Way Forward: How Councils Can Protect Assets, Cut Costs and Serve Communities Better

Sara Carter, Regional Marketing Director, Brightly Software



How can councils balance rising customer expectations with shrinking budgets, ageing and fast-deteriorating assets, as well as mounting pressure to deliver on net-zero commitments?

The reality is that managing the wide range of assets that shape local communities has never been more complex. With funding from central government continuing to decline, local authorities are being asked to achieve more with less, all while keeping residents informed and services running smoothly.

Increasingly, councils are turning to digitisation to close this gap. Modern digital asset management is offering a way forward as it enables smarter decisions, improved efficiency and better use of limited resources.

As noted by Brightly Software customer Shaun Taylor at Bristol City Council, "There isn't an infinite amount of money or resources, so we need to make sure we're making the right decisions at the right time to get the most out of taxpayers' money. By using asset data to make decisions, we're providing the best value to the community."

Smart asset management

Our intuitive and robust digital asset management platform, Confirm, brings all asset information together in one place. By centralising asset data and streamlining workflows, it helps local authorities work more proactively, strengthen service delivery and build a clearer path toward sustainability and long-term resilience.



Councils can use Confirm for multiple asset types, parks & grounds, highways, drainage, streetlighting and bridges and structures.

Let's take parks and grounds as an example. Grounds and parks management is an intricate ecosystem where soft and hard infrastructures intersect. On the one hand there are parks, play areas, flowerbeds, hedges, trees and sports pitches – the soft infrastructure – and on the other, there are streets, pavements and litter bins and the cleansing of all of the above.

Research has shown that access to green and well-maintained spaces improves health outcomes as well as increases property values. However, with limited money to be able to commit to non-statutory services these areas can rapidly become a breeding ground for vandalism and criminality.

Going one step deeper and looking at playgrounds specifically, there is generally a slower deterioration of assets that go undetected. Play equipment, for instance, could be reaching the end of its life and therefore pose a greater risk to the community. However, with one, smart asset management system in place, council departments can collaborate using cohesive data to stay on top of asset conditions and ensure that appropriate inspections, cleansing programmes and remedial works take place to maintain community areas and improve health and safety standards.

A Step Forward to Digitisation

Being armed with the correct data provides justification at every turn and cross-referencing spreadsheets and filing cabinets full of paperwork will no longer cut it when the need to move to proactive operations is so imperative when working with limited budgets.



The key is to move towards digitisation with a partner who understands the complex needs of all operational departments and who are themselves a team of specialists.

To find out more about how our Confirm software can unite your assets and help you to manage shrinking budgets then [click here](#).

Brightly Software, a Siemens Company, will also be exhibiting at the upcoming APSE Conferences: Parks and Grounds Maintenance Seminar at Manchester United on Thursday 12 March 2026; and Highways, Street Lighting and Winter Maintenance Seminar at St James' Park, Newcastle on Thursday 19 March 2026. •





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Performance Networks Seminar

Report Back

A quick look at this year's innovative speakers and thematic forums

Best and Most Improved Performer Awards

Check out the winners and finalists of this year's prestigious APSE Performance Networks Awards



A Data Remember!

Performance Networks Seminar Report Back

One of the biggest events in the local government calendar, we provide a summary of the speakers, workshops and forums from APSE's annual benchmarking seminar in Blackpool.



The Panel for Session One.

At a time when councils continue to face intense financial pressure, rising demand and accelerating expectations around climate action, workforce reform and digital transformation, the need for robust data and effective benchmarking has never been greater. Understanding performance, productivity and outcomes across frontline services is essential to supporting informed decision making, strengthening business cases and demonstrating value to residents and elected members.

Against this backdrop, the APSE Performance Networks Seminar 2025 once again proved to be a vital fixture in the local government calendar. Held on 4 and 5 December at the Village Hotel in Blackpool, the UK's largest local government benchmarking conference brought together service managers, directors and sector partners from across the country to explore how data-driven insight can be translated into better services.

Over the two days, delegates heard from a range of high-profile speakers, participated in thematic forums and attended service-specific workshops. The programme provided space for strategic reflection as well as practical discussion, enabling delegates to share experiences, challenge assumptions and develop solutions to common operational challenges.

Session one: insight and opinions

The seminar opened with a session focused on insight, performance and public opinion, setting the strategic context for the discussions that followed.

An international perspective was provided by Julie Eeckhoudt from the Association of Cities for Urban Cleanliness (AVPU) in France. Julie explored how neighbourhood services in European cities are performing, with a particular focus on benchmarking urban cleanliness and encouraging responsible citizen behaviour. Her presentation highlighted the value of consistent data collection and comparison across cities. Julie also shared how metrics can drive service improvement whilst supporting public engagement and behavioural change.

Staying with the theme of performance management, delegates then heard from Wing Commander Frank Gmitrowicz and Squadron Leader Steve Spreckley from the RAF's Insights and Analytics team. Their presentation offered a compelling insight into how the RAF manages performance and risk, covering performance reporting structures,

effective risk management and the importance of fostering a strong culture of performance. While operating in a very different context, the session prompted useful reflection on how disciplined performance frameworks and clear accountability can be adapted for use within local government services.

Debbie Johns, Head of Performance Networks at APSE, then provided an update on what is happening in frontline services across local government. Debbie highlighted the latest performance issues affecting councils, including financial pressures, workforce challenges and rising demand, alongside an overview of recent developments within Performance Networks. A key focus was the emerging Local Government Outcomes Framework in England, and how improved outcome-focused data could support greater accountability and transparency in the sector.

The session concluded with Damian Lyons Lowe, Chief Executive of Survation, who shared findings on public attitudes towards public service spending and the economy. Damian explored trends in public satisfaction, what taxpayers value most and the key messages decision makers should take from the data. The presentation reinforced the importance of understanding public perceptions and using evidence to inform communication and service prioritisation.

Thematic forums

Following a networking break, delegates attended one of five thematic forums, each focusing on a pressing policy or operational issue facing councils.

Forum one celebrated the APSE service award winners for 2025 in the category of Best Health and Wellbeing Initiative. The session highlighted innovative approaches to community partnerships and programming across leisure, libraries and parks, demonstrating how services are evolving to support preventative health and wellbeing outcomes.

Forum two focused on monitoring and evaluating climate and environmental action. Speakers explored how councils can demonstrate progress in reducing emissions against carbon budgets, while also improving adaptive capacity in response to a changing climate. Discussion centred on the challenges of measurement, data consistency and evidencing impact in an environment of limited resources.

Delegates take notes during a forum.





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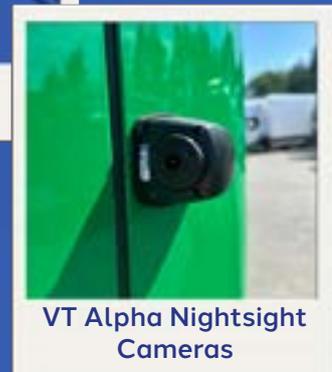
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APSE Principal Advisor, Vickie Hacking, facilitates the catering and cleaning workshop.

Forum three addressed the forthcoming Employment Rights Bill and considered what it means in practice for frontline services. Delegates discussed how services can prepare for legislative change, manage risk and ensure compliance while continuing to deliver essential services.

Forum four examined the proposed new Local Government Outcomes Framework for England. The session explored what the proposals mean for councils, how and when they may be implemented, and the implications for performance reporting, benchmarking and accountability.

Forum five drew on lessons from local government reorganisation, with insights from North Northamptonshire Council. The discussion focused on preparing for unitary status, experiences from the reorganisation journey and the practical lessons learned in managing change at scale.

Workshops and service-specific discussions

Across the two days, delegates participated in a wide range of workshops covering all major frontline service areas. Workshops explored topics including recruitment and retention, sustainability, digitalisation, income generation, enforcement, decarbonisation and the use of new technologies such as AI.

The workshops provided an opportunity for in-depth discussion, allowing delegates to share best practice, explore benchmarking data and consider practical solutions to common challenges. Facilitated by APSE advisors, associates and service experts, the sessions reinforced the value of peer learning and data-led problem solving.

Delegates take notes during day two



Performance Networks Awards

The first day concluded with the Performance Networks Awards evening, a prestigious event recognising both the best performing and most improved authorities across a wide range of service areas. The awards celebrate the achievements of councils that actively participate in Performance Networks and use benchmarking data to drive service improvement. The evening also raised funds for Parkinson's UK, APSE's chosen charity for the event.

Session two: technology and the future

Day two of the seminar focused on the use of technology and the future challenges facing local government frontline services.

Delegates heard from Ben Cheetham of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, who explored digitalisation and the use of AI within local government services. The session highlighted both the opportunities and the risks associated with new technologies, and the importance of ethical, transparent and outcomes-focused implementation.

The seminar concluded with a panel discussion chaired by Mo Baines, Chief Executive of APSE, examining what lies ahead for frontline services. Panellists discussed climate change and net zero, workforce issues, local government finance and managing demand and productivity. The discussion underscored the scale and complexity of the challenges facing councils, while also highlighting the critical role of data, collaboration and innovation in responding effectively.

Conclusion

The APSE Performance Networks Seminar 2025 reinforced the central role of benchmarking and performance data in supporting better services. At a time of continued uncertainty and constraint, the seminar provided a valuable forum for reflection, learning and collaboration. By bringing together insight from across the UK and beyond, the event demonstrated how data-driven decision making can help councils navigate current pressures while planning for a more resilient and sustainable future.

If you would like to view any of the speakers' presentations, please visit the APSE website. Alternatively, email Megan Butterworth on mbutterworth@apse.org.uk

The panel discussion for day two.



Best and most improved performer 2025

In aid of
PARKINSON'S^{UK}
CHANGE ATTITUDES.
FIND A CURE.
JOIN US.

APSE Performance Networks is pleased to announce the winners in the most improved and best performer categories for the Performance Networks Awards for 2025. The awards ceremony took place at the Performance Networks Seminar at the Village Hotel, Blackpool on the evening of Thursday 4 December 2025.

Commenting on the Awards, Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive said, "With the continued pressures on council finances, the effective use of data to improve performance is more important than ever.

"It is fantastic to see so many local authorities successfully utilising APSE's benchmarking to develop their frontline services and achieve excellence. Congratulations to all winners and finalists."

The awards were announced by Emma Jesson.

The charity awards dinner is a special event in the local government calendar and in recent years has raised over £50,000 for Parkinsons UK.

Congratulations to all finalists and winners!

Building Cleaning

Best Performer



Finalists

- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- East Ayrshire Council
- East Renfrewshire Council
- Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
- Moray Council
- South Lanarkshire Council

WINNER: EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

- Aerdeenshire Council
- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
- Inverclyde Council
- Moray Council

WINNER: GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Building Maintenance

Best Performer



Finalists

Conwy County Borough Council
Durham County Council
Fife Council
Moray Council
North Ayrshire Council
South Ayrshire Council

Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: SOUTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

Dundee City Council
Fife Council
Flintshire County Council
South Ayrshire Council
West Dunbartonshire Council
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: WIGAN METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Catering

Best Performer



Finalists

Denbighshire County Council
Derbyshire County Council
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
South Lanarkshire Council

WINNER: GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

City of Doncaster Council
Denbighshire County Council
Dumfries and Galloway Council
East Renfrewshire Council
South Lanarkshire Council
Tayside Contracts

WINNER: DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY COUNCIL

Cemetery and Crematorium Services

Best Performer



Finalists

Aberdeen City Council
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Flintshire County Council
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
Herefordshire Council

Northumberland County Council
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

WINNER: FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

Durham County Council
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
Nottingham City Council
South Lanarkshire Council
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: SOUTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

Parks, Open Spaces and Horticultural Services

Best Performer



Finalists

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Chelmsford City Council
Colchester City Council
East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Nottingham City Council

Stafford Borough Council
West Lothian Council

WINNER: CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Chelmsford City Council
Kirklees Council
West Lothian Council
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: WEST LOTHIAN COUNCIL

Refuse Collection

Best Performer



Finalists

Bolsover District Council
Huntingdonshire District Council
North Ayrshire Council
North East Derbyshire District Council
North Lincolnshire Council
Telford and Wrekin Council

WINNER: HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

East Ayrshire Council
Kirklees Council
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
North Ayrshire Council
Sevenoaks District Council
Stirling Council

WINNER: NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL



Roads, Highways and Winter Maintenance

Best Performer



Finalists

- East Renfrewshire Council
- Falkirk Council
- Milton Keynes Council
- North Ayrshire Council
- Scottish Borders Council
- South Ayrshire Council
- Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: NORTH AYSHIRE COUNCIL

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

- Angus Council
- Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- Kent County Council
- Scottish Borders Council

WINNER: EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

Sports and Leisure Facility Management

Best Performer



Finalists

- Ards and North Down Borough Council
- Ards Blair Mayne Wellness and Leisure Centre
- Chelmsford City Council
- Riverside Leisure Centre
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- East Riding Leisure Hornsea
- North East Derbyshire District Council
- Dronfield Active
- North Northamptonshire Council
- Lodge Park Sports Centre
- Uttlesford District Council
- The Mountfitchet Romeera Leisure Centre
- Wyre Borough Council
- Poulton YMCA Leisure Centre

WINNER: NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

- East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- East Riding Leisure Haltemprice
- North East Derbyshire District Council
- Dronfield Active
- North Lincolnshire Council
- NL Active, Live Well Isle of Axholme
- North Northamptonshire Council
- Lodge Park Sports Centre
- Nottingham City Council
- Harvey Hadden Sports Centre
- South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
- Hebburn Central

WINNER: EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE COUNCIL

Street Cleansing

Best Performer



Most Improved Performer



Finalists

Bolsover District Council
Huntingdonshire District Council
London Borough of Hounslow
Oxford Direct Services Ltd
Stafford Borough Council
West Lindsey District Council
West Lothian Council

WINNER: OXFORD DIRECT SERVICES LTD

Finalists

Blackpool Council
Falkirk Council
Kirklees Council
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
North Ayrshire Council
Oxford Direct Services Ltd

Preston City Council
South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: BLACKPOOL COUNCIL

Street Lighting

Best Performer



Most Improved Performer



Finalists

Conwy County Borough Council
Denbighshire County Council
Newport City Council
Pembrokeshire County Council
Perth and Kinross Council
West Lothian Council
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: DENBIGHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Finalists

Denbighshire County Council
Dundee City Council
East Ayrshire Council
Perth and Kinross Council
South Ayrshire Council
Telford and Wrekin Council

WINNER: EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

Streetscene

Best Performer



Finalists

Bolsover District Council
Cambridge City Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
Newcastle-Under-Lyme Borough Council

Stafford Borough Council
Telford and Wrekin Council

WINNER: NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

Transport Operations and Vehicle Maintenance

Best Performer



Finalists

Mansfield District Council
Nottingham City Council
Plymouth City Council
Sheffield City Council
Shetland Islands Council
Tayside Contracts

WINNER: PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

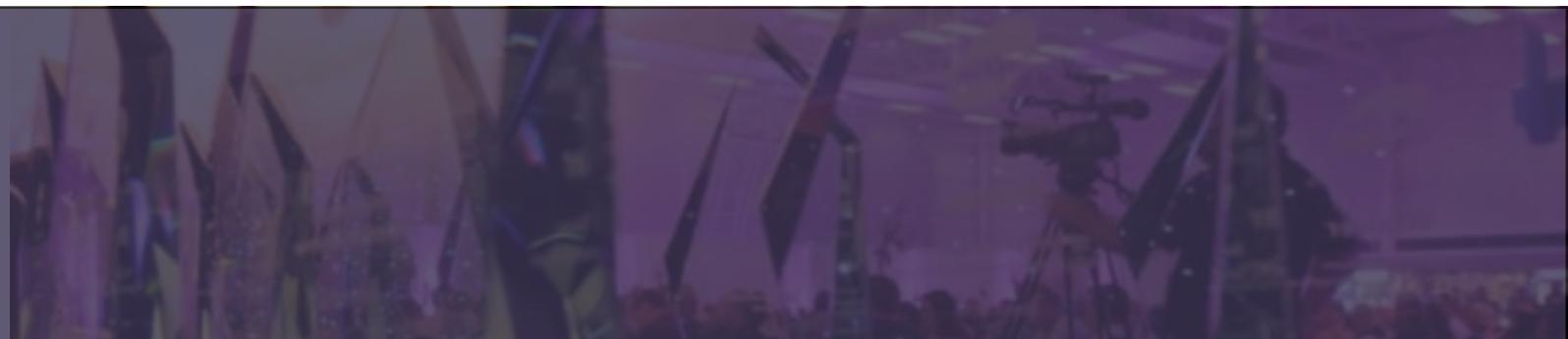
Most Improved Performer



Finalists

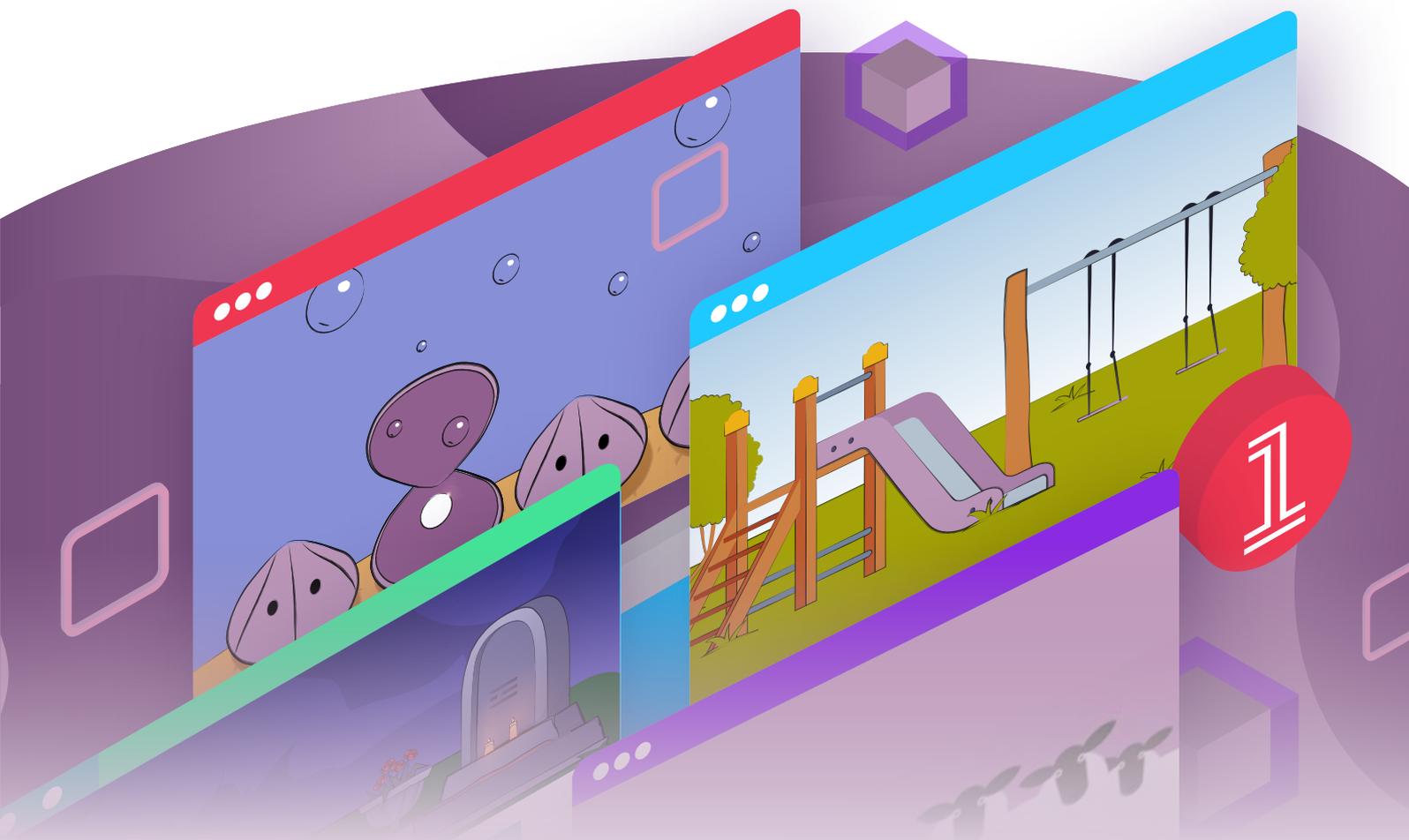
Bolsover District Council
Plymouth City Council
Sheffield City Council
Shetland Islands Council
Tayside Contracts
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: TAYSIDE CONTRACTS



Performance Networks Apps

A modern and efficient way to carry out quality inspections



Performance Networks are pleased to offer a suite of Apps to enable members to use modern and efficient ways to carry out inspections. Compared to paper-based systems, the Apps reduce the duration of inspections, automatically identify the inspection location through GIS, include a photo facility and allow inspections to be submitted by the click of a button. The results from participating authorities can be benchmarked throughout the year, so that you can compare the quality of service, thus becoming an invaluable management tool producing meaningful data. This can be used to prove value for money and to promote how effective your service is. Not only is this data available 'live' via the cloud but also feeds into the performance indicator reports and can contribute to the Awards criteria.

- » **LAMS – Land Audit Management System**
- » **CLAMS – Cleaning Audit Management System**
- » **PIMS – Play Inspection Management System**
- » **MIST – Memorial Inspection Safety Tool**

Scan to learn more or visit the APSE website.





Strategic Feasibility
0

The Planning Team

We've done **400+** feasibility studies!

1 Preparation & Briefing

Submission of pre-application

Schedule, CLIENT REQUIREMENTS, REMEDIATION SURVEY, ECOSYSTEM

2 Concept Design

Structural and Civil

The Design Team

3 Detailed Design

Transport Consultant, Planner, Archaeologist, Ecologist

Public Consultation

Tree Consultant, Air Quality Consultant and many more specialist consultants may join!

CLIENT REQUIREMENTS

4 Technical Design

Project Manager

PLANNING APPROVED

Mechanical and Electrical

Specialist CDS partners

5 Construction

Project and Cost Manager

Progress is monitored against the Construction Programme

6 Handover

Contract concluded

It's yours!

7 Use

Ongoing monitoring and evaluations

We support a smooth transition to a fully operational facility

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consultancy
specialising in
bereavement
design, planning
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Over the last two decades, we've honed a comprehensive development process, enlisting best-in-class specialists at every stage. The process comprises eight distinct phases:

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- 1 Preparation & Briefing**
We record your aspirations in a brief and complete feasibility studies, ensuring the site can meet your needs.
- 2 Concept Design**
With a positive feasibility outcome, we develop concept design ideas to meet the Client Design Brief and budget. We find ways to minimise energy use, saving money and promoting sustainability.
- 3 Detailed Design**
At this Stage, we coordinate all architectural, engineering and specialist consultant information to formulate the planning application submission.
- 4 Technical Design**
The technical intricacies are worked into your beautiful architectural and engineering designs to finalise the tender pack. CDS will manage a specialist consultancy team to produce this pack and guide you through the tender process to find the right contractor.
- 5 Construction**
This is when you see your plans materialise with construction on site. CDS will oversee the building works to ensure the delivery of the scheme to the highest standard, as per the brief, and minimise environmental impact as we go.
- 6 Handover**
The contract is concluded and CDS can support you through to formal opening of the site.
- 7 Use**
After handover, we continue to ensure the development operates as intended and is efficiently maintained.

Choose CDS for a seamless project from inception right through to completion.

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Keeping you in the loop: Councils leading on the circular economy in 2025



In our latest APSE State of the Market Survey, almost 40% of authorities who responded identified circular economy and reuse as a growth area in their service over the next year.

Bonni Jee, Principal Advisor at APSE, explores how local authorities continue to innovate in all things circular economy.

Most of you reading this probably go to a HWRC (household waste recycling centre) or 'the tip' at least once a year if not more, and almost certainly conscientiously put your items into the right skip for recycling. That is all very well, but increasingly local authorities are now embracing reuse at the heart of their HWRC offer, and beyond, across the community.

While these are challenging times financially for local authorities, and 'reuse' may not be a statutory service, reuse hubs are becoming par for the course as part of the local authority offer. Look at local news and it seems like almost every week this year a new reuse shop has opened at a council's HWRC, from Kent, to West Northamptonshire, up to Teesside to name just a few this year.

It's a win-win situation, as HWRC skips and bins do not fill up as quickly with perfectly good stuff, reducing disposal costs, and items are resold at affordable prices to help local people with the cost of living and can be donated to those most in need in the community.

Many will be aware of the pioneering Greater Manchester Renew Hub, celebrating its fourth anniversary this year, which since it opened has reused over 400,000 items and raised more than £3 million for the Mayor's charities in the process. Now authorities of all shapes and sizes have been following suit.

It was great to visit Lancashire County Council's EcoTown earlier this year with its innovative interactive walkway, which also included reuse as part of its first-class educational experience demonstrating the recycling journey, raising awareness of three reuse shops across the county.

Councils' education teams are well-versed in educating pupils on correct recycling, now is the time to tell them about reuse and to challenge their parents when they think of chucking items into the skip, and indeed for them to think twice once they are bored with this year's Christmas present (probably by the time the HWRC opens in the New Year!).

Holistic approaches to circular economy

It's not only about HWRC reuse centres, as great as they are. Back in October, I was delighted to be part of the judging panel for our APSE Innovation Awards where we introduced a Circular Economy category for the first time. We received a high number of applications, the breadth of approaches taken was impressive, and in this era of doom and gloom and tough choices, the effort, innovation and fresh approaches we saw were heartwarming.

The well-deserved winners were Derry City and Strabane Council in Northern Ireland whose embedding of Circular Economy principles in a massive community event, the city's annual Halloween festival, was holistic and transferable to many other festivals and scenarios



Chief Executive Opportunity at arc21



Location: Belfast, Northern Ireland

Salary: £107,590 - £113,059 per annum

Closing date: Monday 16 March at 10.00am

The well-deserved winners were Derry City and Strabane Council in Northern Ireland whose embedding of Circular Economy principles in a massive community event, the city's annual Halloween festival, was holistic and transferable to many other festivals and scenarios nationwide, demonstrating a real 'ripple out effect', changing mindsets.

Costume swaps and community drop-off points were in place – combatting the previous single-use waste of costumes and decorations – something that can easily be transferred to Christmas! Social media campaigns proved a huge success promoting repair and reuse of costumes, and on the day, recycling champions were on hand at recycling stations to ensure correct recycling of waste including food. The council also eschews the use of single-use cups at all its events, providing refill stations and cup deposit return.

Electric reuse dreams – now a reality

Other worthy finalists include North Tyneside Council, who have been leading the way this year in making reuse even easier for residents by offering a free bookable doorstep collection service for small electricals which will be taken to a community repair hub for PAT-testing, repair and redistribution to the community, saving people from a trip to the HWRC.

Meanwhile, in London, North London Waste Authority have been partnering with ReLondon and the Restart Project to deliver the UK's first repair voucher scheme, offering residents up to £50 off the cost of repairing their broken electricals. This 'nudge' incentivising repair over buying new, has proved a great success with over 2,000 users, demonstrating real behaviour change and fostering a reuse economy in that part of London which can hopefully be rolled out on a wider basis.

Warwick retrofit solar panels to the roof of their RCVs to make them more energy efficient, reducing fuel usage.

While local authorities work hard to deliver the Simpler Recycling and food waste collection requirements in time for next year, the circular economy is here to stay and is increasingly becoming part of the mainstream local authority waste management offer.

Our task ahead is to ensure that the voice of local authorities is represented as part of the ongoing Circular Economy Strategy and Taskforce that is underway.

arc21 is a regional waste management partnership for six Northern Ireland Councils, established in 2003. We work collaboratively to deliver statutory waste obligations, drive innovative programmes, and develop essential infrastructure, supporting sustainable and efficient waste management for our communities.

The Role

We are seeking an experienced leader to serve as Chief Executive, leading our team, shaping arc21's future, and providing strategic guidance to the Board and partner Councils while representing the organisation at all levels.

At a pivotal time of transformation, the role will drive service expansion, commercial opportunities, and delivery of our Corporate Plan, ensuring arc21 remains innovative, resilient, and impactful.

We are looking for someone who can:

- Bring strong leadership and a clear vision to the organisation.
- Inspire, motivate, and support multi-disciplinary teams.
- Build and maintain excellent relationships with internal and external stakeholders.
- Oversee a budget of £10m and ensure efficient financial management.
- Introduce fresh perspectives, ideas, and innovation to help arc21 grow and thrive.

Experience:

- Experience as a senior leader is essential.
- Experience in waste or environmental services is not essential, though a keen interest in sustainable practices and innovation is desirable.
- Demonstrated ability to manage complex programmes and influence across multiple stakeholders.

Why join us?

This role offers the opportunity to shape an organisation that makes a real difference across Northern Ireland, using your expertise to drive innovation and lead arc21 into its next phase of growth and excellence.

How to Apply

To apply please visit GetGot™ Portal - Register - GGSP239 Chief Executive to begin your online application form through the job platform GetGot.



Our work at FBCA

High quality cremation services rely on skilled people, trusted processes and strong professional support. While FBCA training is widely recognised as central to professional development, it represents only one part of what the Federation provides. Membership offers a wider framework of learning, guidance, representation and peer support, designed to strengthen both individuals and services.

This guidance is reinforced by the experience and credibility of the Federation's Executive Committee. The FBCA Board consists of 16 elected members, equally drawn from the private and local authority sectors. Eight private sector members collectively manage 99 sites and oversaw 178,503 cremations in 2024, while eight local authority members manage a further 10 sites, delivering 12,089 cremations in the same year. Together, the Board represents 36 percent of the cremation market across 109 sites, ensuring that Federation advice and advocacy are firmly grounded in real operational experience and reflect the diversity of the sector.

FBCA's CPD accredited programmes, including the Training and Examination Scheme for Cremator Technicians and Refresher Training and Recertification, are developed and delivered by experienced professionals with a deep understanding of operational, technical and regulatory challenges. The Federation remains actively involved throughout the learning process, providing guidance, clarification and ongoing support to help individuals and teams build confidence and competence. Courses are regularly reviewed to reflect legislative change, best practice and evolving sector needs.

Membership also provides access to the online Learning Academy for all authority colleagues, supporting continuous professional development across entire teams. This is complemented by online and in person webinars and events, enabling members to share experience, learn from peers and build professional networks.

All members are enrolled in the Federation's three yearly inspection scheme, covering eight key areas of service delivery. The scheme reviews compliance, recognises good practice and supports continuous improvement. The in person inspection element provides independent validation through direct assessment by an experienced industry professional.

At a national level, the Federation represents cremation services with key bodies including the Ministry of Justice, DEFRA, Local Government and, where appropriate, Local Resilience Forums, ensuring the sector's voice is heard.

Together, FBCA training and membership represent an investment in people, services and the future of cremation provision, supporting excellence and helping members deliver trusted, high quality services to the communities they serve.



FBCA Training & Development

TEST - Training & Examination Scheme for Cremator Technicians

- ▶ Certificate of Proficiency | 100 CPD hours
- ▶ Referenced within the recently updated DEFRA Crematoria Guidance Notes, our training supports operators in developing competence, maintaining compliance, and delivering services to the highest standards.
- ▶ Coursework | 50 cremations | Dedicated online module | Practical assessment

Refresher Training & Recertification

- ▶ CPD-accredited | Delivered by accredited mentors
- ▶ Maintain best practice, safety & operational standards
- ▶ Ideal for returning staff | pre-legislation qualifications | 5+ years since certification | those not operating regularly | refresh & improve skills and confidence

Online Learning Academy

- ▶ Free for members
- ▶ Bite-sized learning modules
- ▶ Stay up to date with best practice guidance

accredited by



For more information, please contact:

Training & Development Manager - Liam Bennett

E. training@fbca.org.uk T. 07305 358839

How low-carbon can you go?



The sixth edition of APSE Energy's 'Energy across the authority' gives insight into some of the pioneering energy related projects that are being carried out

by local authorities. James Jefferson, Energy Principal Advisor, provides snapshots of the trailblazing projects included in the report.

The projects highlighted in this document are real life examples of how different councils are committing to the urgent need for drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

There are lessons to be learnt for all local authorities within this publication, from insight into relatively small-scale projects, to substantial and expensive carbon reduction programmes.



Passivhaus EnerPHit office – Westmorland and Furness Council

Westmorland and Furness Council completed the retrofit of Voreda House, the first council office building to secure a Passivhaus EnerPHit certificate. The project incorporated insulated cladding, triple glazing, roof insulation, and air source heat pumps, delivering measurable energy and cost savings since opening.



Solar microgrid on social houses – Hackney Council

The Residential Solar PV Pilot, launched by Hackney Light and Power, aimed to reduce carbon emissions and tackle energy poverty. The pilot delivered 1 MW of solar PV across three estates using microgrid technology to provide locally generated, affordable solar energy directly to residents. Participating households will save between 10–20% on their energy bills and the scheme is projected to cut carbon emissions by 300 tonnes each year.



Climate ready park – East Dunbartonshire Council

East Dunbartonshire Council have revitalised two parks, creating new habitats, improving access and introducing natural flood management measures. The 'Climate-Ready Park' has established nearly 10,000 m² of new water storage capacity, 20,000 m² of wildflower meadow, and a 33-plot allotment site, as well as a new pump track for local BMX riders — enhancing both climate resilience and community wellbeing.





Solar powered pothole machine – Dorset Council

Dorset Highways procured the UK's first all-electric asphalt storage hot box, replacing a traditional propane-fired unit. The machine has delivered annual carbon savings of over 80 tonnes and financial savings exceeding £10,000 in propane costs, demonstrating how innovation in day-to-day operations can contribute to wider decarbonisation goals.



Biochar on council owned land – Lancashire County Council

Between 2022 and 2024, Lancashire County Council trialled annual biochar applications across two agricultural sites, totalling six hectares. The project demonstrated how biochar can lock carbon into soils for thousands of years while improving fertility and productivity. Initial analysis has shown increases in soil carbon and nitrogen, supporting both sequestration and land health.



Solar farm on closed landfill – Bedford Borough Council

Bedford Borough Council constructed a 4.2 MW solar array on a closed landfill site, transforming a brownfield site into a productive clean-energy asset. The installation generates enough electricity to power around 1,000 homes annually, saving over 900 tonnes of carbon each year and generating over £500,000 in income during its first year of operation.



Solid Recovered Fuel from non-recyclable waste – Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

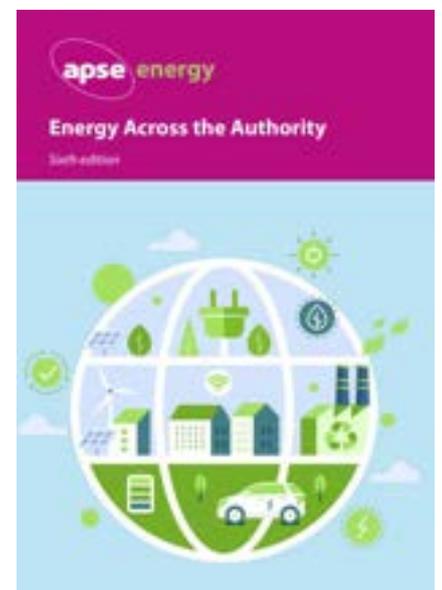
In 2023, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar became the first UK local authority to use Advatec's XO22 digester. The system converts non-recyclable household waste into Solid Recovered Fuel, which replaces coal in industrial use with 95% lower carbon emissions. The scheme diverts 100% of non-recyclable waste from landfill and saves around 4,400 tonnes of CO₂e annually.



Energy benchmarking tool – Highland Council

Highland Council developed an innovative online energy benchmarking tool to better manage energy use and carbon emissions across its estate. By considering factors such as building age, function, occupancy, and heating system, the tool enables more targeted energy-saving actions. Early use across schools and offices has already delivered measurable reductions in energy consumption and utility costs.

- The report 'Energy across the authority 2026' is FREE to download for APSE Energy members. For more information, contact James Jefferson on jjefferson@apse.org.uk





Serving Better Together.

Bereavement Services Management Platform.

Seamlessly connecting
Cemeteries | Crematoria | Families

A complete cloud-based back office solution, seamlessly integrating all of your essential functions. Your digital assets in one place, secure and easily accessible online.

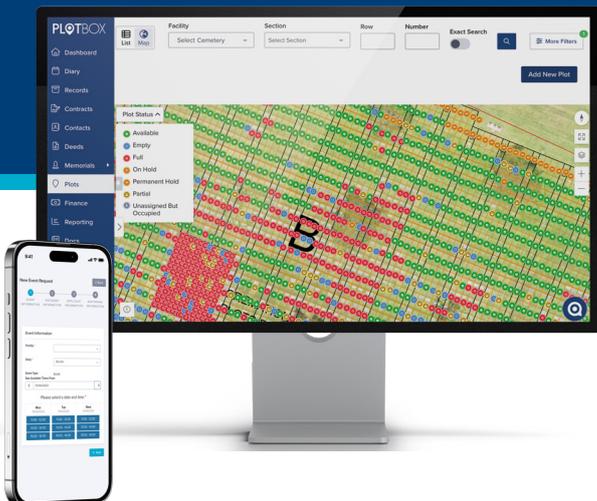
Your entire operation streamlined, for smarter workflows, increased efficiencies, greater compliance, and better customer service.



Created by individuals who clearly understand the complexities associated with administering burial and cremation services.



Cardiff Council



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