



# Digesting food waste

## The view from local government

### Swindon's food waste service

Cllr Chris Watts

**p8**

### Growing and expanding recycling services

Dan Smyth, London Borough of Hounslow

**p24**

### Latest Survation Poll

One in four planning committee members  
oppose additional housbuilding

**p32**



# Bereavement Services Management Platform.

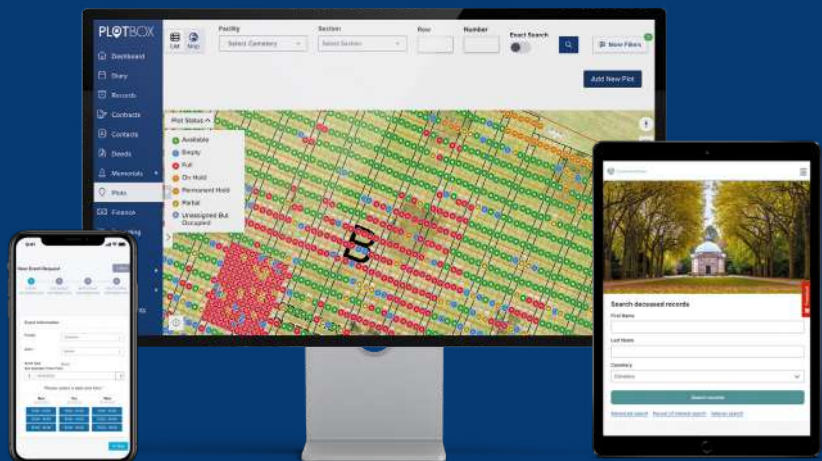
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# Editorial

## A year of change



Mo Baines,  
APSE Chief Executive

The end of 2024 saw the launch of the English Devolution White Paper, 'Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth'. Whilst the headlines have been focused on local government reorganisation and devolution, there are some tantalising messages, promising new powers over housing, transport, planning, energy, skills and employment support. All areas which local government has insisted are central to local delivery of growth and opportunities for local businesses and residents.

2025 also promises a raft of new legislation and powers. Housing is clearly a top priority with consultation on changes to Compulsory Purchase Orders, the Renters Rights Bill, which is set to abolish section 21 evictions, deliver a new Private Rented Sector Landlord Ombudsman service, and strengthen local authority enforcement. A focus on remediation is also key, with new data and reporting bringing a laser focus to those premises which remain a risk to life.

However, for local councils, the pressures in adults and children's services, SEND, homelessness, and temporary accommodation are immediate. The resource issue claws through to all other local services. Whilst many welcome the idea of a Commission and gaining cross-party consensus on reform, councils will be focused on phase one of the social care programme, bringing some immediate relief to care budgets.

In the not-so-distant past local government has, quite rightly, complained bitterly about its position in the pecking order of Treasury and government policy priorities. This time around it is clear that the department has started to punch its weight in the resource queue. It is reasonable to draw a comparison to

the days of the late Lord John Prescott, who was not only the deputy prime minister but also the secretary of state for local government and the regions. The office bringing with it the golden thread of the wider policy ambitions of government at a central level and the delivery of change through local government and the regions; now replicated in the current Ministerial structures. The focus on devolution is of course not accidental or incidental. Whilst this approach does not entirely help some local government services, with different government departments setting funding and priorities in areas like waste management, parks and public realm, and leisure services to name a few it should be broadly welcomed by the sector as a more cohesive approach.

Of course, draft Bills, and seismic policy changes now seem a bit like the buses; they have all come at once. Some have indeed commented on the volume and pace of announcements -the capacity to deliver will be a question on everyone's lips.

I am a little more optimistic. Throughout the challenges in public policy local government and local councils are at their best when delivering change. Leaders in local government, both officers and councillors, are highly skilled in scrutinising and delivering change programmes. They are adept at collating and using datasets. They are pragmatic in engaging with the wider workforce and trade unions. They work with communities and partners with a regularity that others do not.

We are already seeing the sector sharing information and insights. Indeed, APSE's Full Association meeting in a stormy Edinburgh, on the 24 January, heard the experiences of colleagues in Scotland and Northern Ireland about their own direct experiences of reorganisation. APSE's networks of course stand ready to provide the opportunities for our member councils to engage with each other, sharing and learning, and knowing what is worth a punt and what should be avoided when managing and implementing change. Look out for our spring series of online roundtables providing bitesize sessions for officers and councillors alike.

As local government comes into 2025 with some seismic challenges it is worth remembering Roger Crawford's saying: "Being challenged in life is inevitable, being defeated is optional." I am sure local government has no intention of being defeated!

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## APSE is pleased to announce our Annual Service Awards 2025

These prestigious awards are open to all local authorities - including non-members - and their public-sector partners across the United Kingdom recognising frontline services teams and special initiatives.

### Deadlines

Notifications due in by Friday 28 March 2025

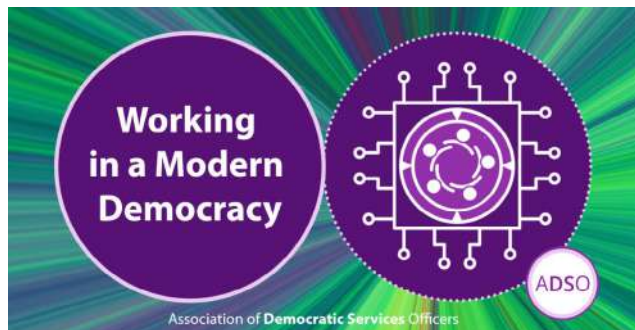
Submissions due in by Friday 11 April 2025

[Click here to find out more and submit an application](#)



# Report Back

A round up of APSE advocacy and events



## ADSO conference

Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive was pleased to attend the Association of Democratic Services Officers National Conference on the 26 November and welcomed their new report 'Working in a Modern Democracy'. The conference also welcomed their new and first ever Chief Executive Charlotte Eisenhart. APSE looks forward to working with Charlotte and her team.

## APSE National Council

The APSE National Council met in Belfast in December to agree the association's budget for 2025-2026. The National Council also received updates on APSE's business performance, finances and research programme and members were pleased to fit in a visit Belfast Castle!

## Public Sector Catering Most Influential

Mo Baines has been nominated to receive top 20 public sector catering 'most influential' award by the Public Sector Catering magazine. Mo was pleased to accept the award on behalf of all APSE members working hard to ensure the value of school meals to child health and nutrition are recognised and promoted in public policy.

## Civic Unrest roundtable

On 2 December, APSE hosted a special roundtable on the civil unrest during the summer of 2024, discussing the role of local authorities in rebuilding community cohesion. The roundtable was led by Cllr Richard Wright, North Kesteven District Council and Cllr Graham McAndrew, East Herts District Council.

## Announcing the APSE Annual Service Awards 2025

We are thrilled to announce that our prestigious Annual Service Awards are back for 2025, recognising local authority frontline service teams across the UK. Notifications of interest are due in by Friday 28 March and full submissions are due in by Friday 11 April. The Awards Charity Dinner will take place in Scotland in September. For more information and to submit an award application, please visit the APSE website.

## National Air Quality Conference

On 6 November, Abi Ademiluyi, APSE Principal Advisor, attended and exhibited at the 2024 National Air Quality Conference at Prospero House in London. Speakers discussed the health threats posed by air pollution and the progress of policies to tackle it, as well as the challenges of dealing with indoor air quality in mouldy and damp housing.

## APPG on School Food

On 19 December, Vickie Hacking, APSE Principal Advisor, attended the APPG for School Food meeting at Portcullis House, London. Sharon Hodgson MP, Chair of the APPG, updated delegates on the latest government policy regarding school food. Other speakers included Baroness Walmsley, Committee Chair and author of the House of Lords Food, Diet and Obesity Committee Report; Nikita Sinclair, Co-Head of our Children's Health and Food Programme at Impact on Urban Health; and Fiona Fearon, Head of Policy and Research at the National Governance Association.

## New public attitudes survey

A new poll by Survation - conducted on behalf of APSE - has found that one in four planning committee members oppose the building of new homes in their local area. Another standout finding from the poll was that one in three councillors now believe their local authority is at a risk of bankruptcy within five years, up from one in four in last year's survey. Additionally, the survey found that the majority of the public support low-emissions and traffic reduction measures, such as ULEZ and congestion charges. Find out more on page 8.

## Scotland

### Living Wage

On 5 November, APSE sponsored a Living Wage event focused on recruitment and retention. Cllr Lynne Short, APSE Scotland Chair and Lousie Melville, APSE Principal Advisor attended the event at Glasgow Caledonian University, with Cllr Short taking part in the expert panel.





Matt Ellis, APSE Principal Advisor, and Dave Hughes, Leader of Flintshire County Council, hold APSE's "Taking ownership of your improvement" report at the Welsh Labour Conference 2025.

## ASSIST FM conference

On Thursday 21 November, APSE attended the the ASSIST FM conference at the City of Edinburgh Chambers with Debbie Johns, Head of APSE Performance Networks, spoke at the event highlighting catering and cleaning trends and insights, as well as giving an overview of Performance Networks apps.

## APSE - Heriot-Watt AI Survey

APSE in partnership with Heriot-Watt University Edinburgh and GO-LLM, a company dedicated to improving the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital innovation in the public sector, are conducting a survey to gather information on local authority AI journeys. The findings will be compiled into a detailed report, which will be shared to aid APSE members in their strategic planning and implementation of AI solutions. [Click here to complete the survey.](#)

## Local Government Reorganisation Symposium

On 24 January, the city of Edinburgh hosted an APSE policy symposium on finance, devolution and reorganisation with many attendees and speakers switching to online attendance due to Storm Eowyn; hopefully not an omen for new councils! The policy discussions received contributions from Professor Steven Griggs, and Professor Mark Gregory of the University of Staffordshire, Adrian Phillips, Chief Executive of Preston City Council. Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive also contributed to discussions with the symposium sessions chaired by Cllr Archie Dryburgh. MBE and Cllr Lynne Short, APSE Scotland Chair. The key note address was provided Glynn Humphries, an expert speaker on managing change and service transformation.

This year's APSE policy symposium was hosted in Edinburgh.



## General Power of Competence consultation

The Scottish Government has announced consultation on introducing a General Power of Competence. APSE will be hosting an online event on the Tuesday 11 March 2pm – 3.30pm, to collate a response on behalf of APSE Scotland members. For more details contact Louise Melville on [Imelville@apse.org.uk](mailto:Imelville@apse.org.uk)

## Wales

### Welsh Labour conference

APSE exhibited at the Welsh Labour Conference at Venue Cymru in Llandudno on 16-17 November 2024. At the Conference, APSE contributed its research and briefing findings to workshop discussions on local government finance as well as fair rents and adequate housing.

### Collaboration with Audit Wales

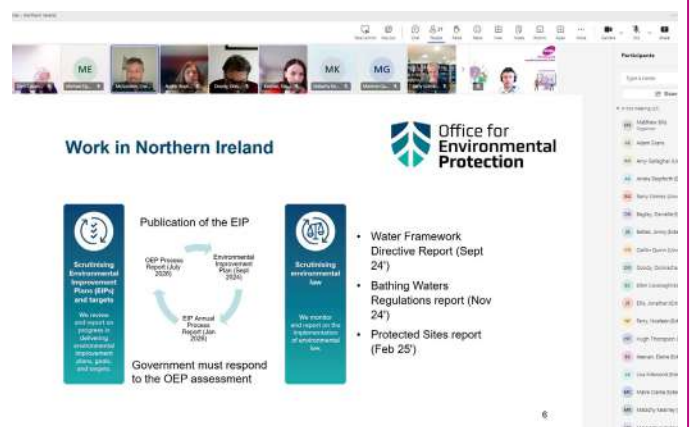
On 11 December, APSE held a special online meeting in collaboration with Audit Wales on collecting service-user information. The meeting was prompted by Audit Wales' summer 2024 report which found few councils are putting the views of those who use local services at the core of their reporting. Gary Emery, Director, and Sara-Jane Byrne, Audit Manager, at Audit Wales spoke on the report's findings. Debbie Johns, Head of APSE Performance Networks, and Dave Clark, Senior Business Development Officer of East Riding of Yorkshire Council, presented on the benefits of using APSE's customer satisfaction surveys. Presentations are available to download from the APSE website. For more information about how APSE can help you accurately monitor public perception of services, please contact [performance.networks@apse.org.uk](mailto:performance.networks@apse.org.uk)

## Northern Ireland

### Nature recovery in NI

On 27 November 2024, APSE held an online meeting on nature recovery attended by 10 of the 11 Northern Ireland councils. Speakers at the meeting included: Donnacha Doody, Head of Analysis - Northern Ireland, Office of Environmental Protection; Andra Stopforth, Nature Recovery and Biodiversity Lead Officer, North Northamptonshire Council; and Rosemary Mulholland, Head of Nature Recovery, Ulster Wildlife. Presentations are available to download from the APSE website.

The online nature recovery in Northern Ireland meeting.





# Recognising Affinity Bias in the Professional Space



Hannah Winstanley, General Manager, Brightly Software UK, discusses the Female Local Authority Roads Engagement group, a virtual platform created by Brightly.

Recently I have been reflecting on the role of affinity bias in shaping my career and the connections I build within the industry. A few years ago, while preparing a guest list for the CIHT Christmas luncheon, I realised that all my invitees were women. It wasn't a deliberate decision, but it highlighted an unconscious preference for those whose experiences mirrored my own.

Affinity bias is a natural tendency to gravitate toward people with similar traits, experiences, or backgrounds. It's common in professional networking too. Women often form smaller, more personal networks, driven by shared experiences and emotional connections, while men are more likely to expand their networks strategically to progress in their careers. While neither approach is better, women's networks can sometimes lack the breadth needed to unlock certain opportunities.

Recognising this, I've sought to create initiatives that empower women in the transport sector, enabling them to overcome barriers and engage with those who do not mirror their own traits in important industry conversations.

One of these initiatives is the FLARE Group, a virtual platform for women working within highways departments in local government. It's a space where women can openly discuss challenges, share advice, and learn from one another. Another is the CIHT Women's Table, an idea I introduced three years ago. This initiative provides an opportunity for women who wouldn't usually get an opportunity to attend the traditionally

male-dominated industry luncheon, allowing them to connect with senior leaders, gain visibility, and broaden their professional networks. Additionally, Brightly Women's Day events serve as a platform for women in the sector to meet in person, exchange ideas, and form lasting professional relationships.

These initiatives are not about excluding men – on the contrary, my male colleagues at Brightly have shown tremendous support. They recognise the importance of fostering a more inclusive and balanced industry. These efforts aim to ensure that women feel seen, heard and confident in spaces where decisions are made and futures are shaped.

However, the journey toward inclusivity isn't without challenges. Women often face external pressures, like family responsibilities, which limit their ability to network in the ways that men traditionally do. Additionally, settings like informal discussions over drinks can unintentionally exclude women or make them feel less welcome. By tackling these barriers head-on and creating environments where women feel comfortable and supported, we can drive meaningful progress.

The transportation sector thrives on innovation and diverse perspectives. By empowering women to contribute fully, we ensure a stronger, more inclusive future for the industry.

To learn more about FLARE Group, [click here](#).



FLARE   
Brightly



# Swindon's Food Waste Service

Cllr Chris Watts, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, discusses the ups and downs of Swindon's food waste service.

The argument for implementing food waste collection is academic and driven by a legislative imperative with the new deadline of 2026 fast approaching. Swindon has approximately 100,000 households and at its peak, the food waste collected is likely to produce power for the equivalent of 300 households, with a fertiliser by-product distributed to local farms. Using food waste to produce electricity via an anaerobic digester facility is a greener alternative to incineration for power with a financial upside of approximately £150 per tonne for hard-pressed councils.

However, this additional revenue will not solve your financial challenges - food waste collection will come at a cost. Food waste must be collected weekly, and the whole vehicle fleet must have provision for separation, not just curb-side wagons. The opportunity is not food waste collection in isolation but using the change as a catalyst to refresh the fleet, implement more efficient systems, and increase recycling figures while driving down costs and realising additional revenue.

In October 2024, I was pleased to be invited to present the case for food waste collection at the APSE Waste and Recycling Seminar held in Nottingham. For my purposes, not only did I find this an incredibly useful and informative event, but it also gave me a platform to share our successes - tempered heavily with the

**“The food waste collected is likely to produce power for the equivalent of 300 households.”**

opportunity to impart knowledge of the many and varied challenges that we had to overcome.

Whilst councils are content to herald from the rooftops when projects are delivered on time, on budget, and on message, it can be said that culturally we are less inclined to feel the need to broadcast details of our setbacks and challenges, let alone share this invaluable information with our peers in other local authorities. Political expediency and the consequence of reputational damage often lean into a municipal bunker mentality when things go wrong. This is unhelpful and ultimately wasteful, and in this context, waste is defined as the missed opportunity to share knowledge of costly shortcomings and understanding the absolute value, monetary or otherwise, of information for those authorities that would seek to follow suit.



*One of Swindon's 22-strong fleet of kerb sort recycling vehicles.*

The problems Swindon faced soon after the rollout of the new system, at a high level, included insufficient vehicles purchased, efficiency of the vehicles with respect to volume and design, narrow access vehicles that were not narrow enough, a poorly implemented back-office system that struggled when under pressure and a depot design that impeded workflow with the inability to process recycle streams to maximise return and value for money. The pressure was compounded by the need to roll out over the Christmas period due to a delay in the delivery of vehicles, the suggestion primarily pointing to the lack of a claw-back provision for late delivery.

In philosophy, Occam's razor is the problem-solving principle that recommends searching for explanations constructed with the smallest possible set of elements. Applying this principle to Swindon's roll-out



of food waste collection, the single and most prevalent element of deficiency would point to a lack of required and appropriate resource and finance support allocated to managing the project from inception in 2021 through development in 2022.

Within the project, the heavy lifting was tasked in tandem with those who were already working hard to deliver the day-to-day running of the waste and recycling service. Not having changed its waste and recycling system for fifteen years the expertise did not fully reside in-house. The expertise required for a successful transition needed to have been brought in at the earliest point. Expecting an already lean department to deliver such a project was unrealistic, but likely driven by the financial pressures that most unitary authorities are wrestling.

To right-side the service after rollout has been an avoidably expensive and resource-heavy operation that has arguably incurred greater cost compared to front-loading the project with sufficient resources. Back ordering curb-side wagons on a six-month lead time, redesign of the depot and the appropriate deployment and training on the back-office systems represent a herculean effort by officers, managers, supervisors and crews that has brought the service back in line with expectations. It's been tougher than it should have been but testament to the dedication of all those who work in the service of local authorities.



A module the recycling vehicle being removed.



The problems Swindon had to overcome were systemic - but with good upfront planning and learnings from those who went before issues can be reduced to the realms of teething and tinkering.

Finally, I will leave you with the absolute certainty that throughout the deployment, the press will seek out click-bated headlines, politicians will politick, and social media will rampage into the darkest hours. I say to fellow lead members: do not succumb to the noise and understand the effect it has on those working to resolve the issues. Support your managers, supervisors and crews and they will surely get you through to the promised land where the noise will be silenced as quickly as it appeared.



# The Big Energy Summit

## Includes expert speakers:

Margaret Read, Director of Policy, National Infrastructure Commission

Alison Smith, Senior Research Associate, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford

Emma Lower, CEO, Lendology

Chris Brierley, Senior Stakeholder and Impact Advisor, Energy Systems Catapult

John Sharp, Energy Team Manager, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council

Ollie Pendered, Chief Executive, Community Energy South

Steve Gummer, Head of Net Zero, Sharpe Pritchard



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# Performance Networks 2024

## Report Back

### **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 from this year's prestigious APSE Performance Networks Awards*

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# All about the stats

## 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.



Jonathan Pertot, Head of Street Operations, Sofia Nordström, Communications and Sara Alves, System Administrator, City of Stockholm, open session one.

On the first day of the Seminar, delegates heard from expert speakers who discussed the ways councils can use their data to improve performance across their service areas. In the afternoon, delegates could attend one of five informative and engaging forums and then one of seven service-specific workshops. The forums and workshops allowed delegates to discuss issues of local concern and develop solutions with colleagues through problem solving surgeries.

The opening session of this year's event began with a presentation from the Stockholm Street Operations teams. Jonathan, Sofia and Sara covered a wide range of Stockholm's street operations, including snow clearance, the bicycle network team, road maintenance, reporting apps, litter, communications and data analysis. Jonathan charted the development of Stockholm's road maintenance monitoring from requiring "heavy administration" with "inadequate documentation" to providing a "coherent overall view" by developing effective monitoring tools, providing system support and gathering data from a range of sources.

Jen Woolford, Director of Public Policy Analysis for the Office for National Statistics, followed with an overview of the 'Local Service' offered by the ONS, providing users with a range of granular statistics for local area through 70 separate indicators. Jen used Blackpool to demonstrate the insights the service can provide, including small area Gross Value Added, Gross Domestic Household Income, educational outcomes and card spending data.

### A snapshot of APSE's benchmarking service

APSE's Debbie Johns was up next to provide an overview of performance within the UK from the data sets in Performance Networks.

Debbie explored a variety of data over different service areas and shared her findings, which showed that despite the funding challenges faced, local government has risen to the challenge and improved performance beyond pre-pandemic levels in many service areas.

Debbie first looked at the impact of inflation on the costs of services over the past three years - with the total annual expenditure of building maintenance services increasing by 22% since 2021-2022. The total cost per lunchtime meal in primary schools has increased by 13%, while the cost of refuse collection and street cleansing services

per household increased by 18% and 19% respectively. Street lighting was an outlier due to improvements to equipment and roll out of LED resulting in a reduction in energy usage and faults - the cost per streetlight fell by 7%.

Regarding carriageway maintenance, 2023-2024 saw a 33% reduction in square metres of planned maintenance compared to 2021-2022, with an 11% reduction in budgets.

Since 2021-2022, income received by councils from discountable / non-contract sources increased by 38% in parks and 3% in refuse, as councils seek to generate income to offset their constricted budgets.

Focusing on income from refuse collection services, over 65% of councils now charge for replacement bins and 49% charge for green waste collection.

For street cleansing, there has been an increase in demand on the service in terms of bin emptying and litter pick requests. The provision of bins has increased, as has the number of requests from members of the public. Flytipping has continued to reduce from the highs of the Covid period, which was linked to the closure of civic amenity sites. For refuse, the number of missed bin collections has improved across the board, especially in the April to September period over the past couple of years.

In terms of burials and cremations, even though the pandemic is essentially over, there have been continuing demands on cemetery and crematoria services, although the 2024 winter death rate is significantly lower than previous winters.

Financial challenges in leisure services have continued - expenditure has increased by 7.8% since last year and overall energy cost has increased by 106% over the past three years. However, there is also a recovery in both usage and income following the pandemic - with usage having increased by nearly 50%.

Compared to last year, the condition of roads in England and Wales (both principal and non-principal) has fallen slightly, whereas road conditions in Scotland have improved. This is likely linked to levels of investment.

Looking at customer satisfaction, Debbie noted that average overall satisfaction for a large number of services including education catering, building cleaning, highways, pavements and refuse collection had all dipped - indicating that reductions in council budgets may now be being felt by the public.



A packed hall listens Damian Lyons-Lowe, Survation Chief Executive, discussing the findings from their latest opinion poll commissioned by APSE.

Dealing with customer complaints and enquiries has also fallen over the past three years - with the score for building cleaning dropping from 65% to 55%.

She added that there have been continued difficulties in recruitment and retention across a number of services, with the highest levels of vacancies in leisure recreation assistants and street cleansing services. Building maintenance services in particular are struggling to fill vacant posts - only 55% of new staff stayed beyond probation, induction and training.

Debbie then updated delegates as to the progress being made by the Performance Networks service, including the launch of a new online video library to help members use the large range of data templates available to them.

Since the last Performance Networks Seminar, APSE has rolled out Power BI reports - initially piloted for building cleaning inspections - across a range of working groups, including a new module on climate change.

Debbie closed her address by noting the range of collaborations and partnerships that APSE is currently engaging with. These include government bodies such as Sport England with their Moving Communities, where APSE is gathering and assessing leisure usage and financial data, and Defra, where we are contributing to their Waste Dataflow on recycling tonnage.

### What do the public think?

Damian Lyons-Lowe, Chief Executive, Survation, closed session one with an overview of public attitudes to local council services. He revealed that public trust in local councils is still significantly higher than national government, with people trusting councils to make decisions on, provide, and deliver services in their local areas. 67% of people surveyed stated that they wanted councils to get more funding, as opposed to just 8% who would prefer the government to keep more.

Additionally, 69% of the public stated that they wanted more of their tax spent on services in their local areas, up 17% from last year's survey. You can find more insights from this poll on page 8.

### Forums and workshops

In the afternoon, delegates attended thematic forums that honed in on pressing issues and a range of local government frontline services. In the APSE Service Awards Winners 2024 session, Chris Keane, Head of Highways, Nottingham City Council and Fiona Sutton-Wilson, Head of APSE Training, looked at Nottingham's 'Streets for People' programme and how effective traffic management, pavement upgrades and tree planting have brought significant benefits to neighbourhoods.

Scott Butterfield, Strategy, Policy, and Research Manager, Blackpool Council, Glynn Humphries, APSE Associate and Phil Brennan, Head of APSE Energy, presented the climate change forum, which focused on Blackpool's approach to environmental sustainability and energy matters. Scott highlighted Blackpool's exposure to more extreme weather as a coastal town, as well as opportunities for renewable energy including wind and tidal.

The 'Workforce Matters' forum, led by Chris Cross, Chair and Nicky Joiner, Vice Chair of Assist FM and Lindsay Airey, Head of Business Resources, APSE, looked at Assist's latest recruitment campaign focusing on facilities management recruitment. The panel discussed the importance of employee benefits, workforce development and industry accreditations for attracting new staff.

Other forums looked at the importance of providing value for money in financially difficult times, as well as an in-depth discussion on the



*Delegates attending the new Climate Change and Sustainability workshop facilitated by Phil Brennan, Head of APSE Energy, Glynn Humphries, APSE Associate, and Andy Derbyshire, Senior Data Analyst, APSE Performance Networks.*

use of inspection apps and new Power BI report in supporting the delivering frontline services.

After lunch, day one of the seminar ended with eight highly informative workshops. With various frontline service experts facilitating the discussions, each workshop looked in depth at ways frontline staff can identify and overcome challenges, and thereby improve their effectiveness.

These included:

- Building cleaning and catering
- Building maintenance (housing and non-housing)
- Cemetery and crematorium services
- Parks, street cleansing and streetscene
- Refuse collection, recycling and transport
- Roads/highways, winter maintenance and street lighting
- Sports and leisure
- Climate change and sustainability

### What's next for local government finance?

The second day of the Seminar opened with David Philips, Associate Director, Institute for Fiscal Studies, who gave a detailed overview of current trends in local government finance. He highlighted how recent challenges had been driven by surging costs rather than funding cuts, and explored the future financial outlook, emphasising the key role council tax will play in future funding decisions.

The Seminar concluded with a panel discussion, made up of a number of senior managers from across the UK, who discussed the direction for local government front-line services following the election. The panel included: Patrick Allcorn, Head of Local Net Zero Delivery and Demonstration, Department for Net Zero and Energy Security; Pam Parkes, President of the PPMA; David Phillips, Associate Director, Institute of Fiscal Studies; David Ogden, Engagement Director, SOCITM; Mike Cockburn, Assistant Director – Climate Emergency and Environment, Wirral Council and Iain Varah, Chief Executive, Vision Redbridge, Culture and Leisure - the panel was chaired by Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive.

If you would like to view any of the speakers' presentations, please visit the APSE website. Alternatively, email Adam Evans on [aevans@apse.org.uk](mailto:aevans@apse.org.uk)



# Best and most improved performer 2024

In aid of  
**PARKINSON'S<sup>UK</sup>**  
CHANGE ATTITUDES.  
FIND A CURE.  
JOIN US.

The APSE Performance Networks Awards 2024 recognised 'Best Performers' and 'Most Improved Performers' across frontline local government services on a range of cost and quality performance indicators, promoting excellence and continuous improvement. This year's finalists were excellent examples of how measuring and comparing services can lead to real change.

The Awards were announced at the Village Hotel, Blackpool on the evening of Thursday 5 December 2024, at the APSE Performance Networks Seminar.

A charity dinner was hosted as part of the awards evening, which raised years has raised over £70,000 for Parkinsons UK.

APSE Chief Executive, Mo Baines, said: "I am thrilled to see so many local authorities using APSE's benchmarking to innovate, develop their services, and achieve excellence. This is especially impressive at a time when council finances are facing unprecedented pressures. Congratulations to the winners and finalists - you are a credit to your communities."

The awards were hosted by Emmanuelle Lhoni, BBC Weather Presenter.

## Congratulations to all finalists and winners!

### Building Cleaning *kindly sponsored by BBITS*

#### Best Performer



#### Finalists

Dumfries and Galloway Council  
East Renfrewshire Council  
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council  
Lancashire County Council  
Moray Council  
South Lanarkshire Council

**WINNER: East Renfrewshire Council**

#### Most Improved Performer



#### Finalists

Dumfries and Galloway Council  
East Ayrshire Council  
East Renfrewshire Council  
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council  
Orkney Islands Council

**WINNER: Dumfries and Galloway Council**

## **Building Maintenance** *kindly sponsored by the Office for National Statistics*

### Best Performer



### Finalists

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council  
Moray Council  
North Ayrshire Council  
South Ayrshire Council  
West Dunbartonshire Council  
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

**WINNER: Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council**

### Most Improved Performer



### Finalists

Aberdeenshire Council  
North Ayrshire Council  
Shetland Islands Council  
South Ayrshire Council  
West Dunbartonshire Council  
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

**WINNER: North Ayrshire Council**

## **Catering services** *kindly sponsored by APSE Training*

### Best Performer



### Finalists

Denbighshire County Council  
Derbyshire County Council  
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council  
East Renfrewshire Council  
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council  
South Lanarkshire Council

**WINNER: Denbighshire County Council**

### Most Improved Performer



### Finalists

Denbighshire County Council  
Derbyshire County Council  
East Ayrshire Council  
East Renfrewshire Council  
Moray Council  
South Lanarkshire Council  
Torfaen County Borough Council

**WINNER: South Lanarkshire Council**



## Cemetery and Crematorium Services *kindly sponsored by Obitus*

### Best Performer



### Finalists

Aberdeen City Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council  
Northumberland County Council  
South Lanarkshire Council  
Warrington Borough Council  
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

**WINNER: Flintshire County Council**

### Most Improved Performer



### Finalists

Belfast City Council  
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council  
Herefordshire Council  
Orkney Islands Council  
South Lanarkshire Council  
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

**WINNER: South Lanarkshire Council**

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## Parks, Open Spaces and Horticultural Services *kindly sponsored by Kersten*

### Best Performer



### Finalists

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council  
Eastleigh Borough Council  
Gelding Borough Council  
Hull City Council  
North Northamptonshire Council  
Nottingham City Council  
Stafford Borough Council

**WINNER: Eastleigh Borough Council**

### Most Improved Performer



### Finalists

Hull City Council  
Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure  
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council  
West Lothian Council  
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

**WINNER: Hull City Council**

## Refuse Collection *kindly sponsored by RSK*

### Best Performer



### Most Improved Performer



### Finalists

Bolsover District Council  
Huntingdonshire District Council  
North Ayrshire Council  
North Lincolnshire Council  
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council  
West Lindsey District Council  
West Lothian Council

**WINNER: West Lindsey District Council**

### Finalists

Bolsover District Council  
North Lincolnshire Council  
Shetland Islands Council  
South Kesteven District Council  
West Lothian Council

**WINNER: South Kesteven District Council**

## Roads, Highways and Winter Maintenance *kindly sponsored by Brightly*

### Best Performer



### Most Improved Performer



### Finalists

East Ayrshire Council  
East Renfrewshire Council  
Milton Keynes Council  
North Ayrshire Council  
South Ayrshire Council  
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council  
Wokingham Borough Council

**WINNER: South Ayrshire Council**

### Finalists

Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar  
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council  
Hull City Council  
North Ayrshire Council  
Pembrokeshire County Council  
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

**WINNER: Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council**



## Sports and Leisure Facility Management

### Best Performer



### Finalists

Chelmsford City Council: Riverside Ice and Leisure Centre  
East Riding of Yorkshire Council: East Riding Leisure Beverley  
North East Derbyshire District Council: Dronfield Sports Centre  
North Lincolnshire Council: NL Active, Ancholme Leisure Centre  
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council: Aston Cum Aughton Leisure Centre  
Wyre Borough Council: Thornton YMCA Leisure Centre

**WINNER: East Riding of Yorkshire Council:  
East Riding Leisure Beverley**

### Most Improved Performer



### Finalists

Chelmsford City Council South: Dovedale Sports Centre  
East Riding of Yorkshire Council: East Riding Leisure Beverley  
Halton Borough Council: Brookvale Recreation Centre  
North Northamptonshire Council: Lodge Park Sports Centre  
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council: Aston-Cum-Aughton Leisure Centre  
South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council: Hebburn Central

**WINNER: East Riding of Yorkshire Council:  
East Riding Leisure Beverley**

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## Street Cleansing *kindly sponsored by Bucher Municipal*

### Best Performer



### Finalists

Eastleigh Borough Council  
Exeter City Council  
Gedling Borough Council  
Hull City Council  
Huntingdonshire District Council  
Oxford Direct Services Ltd  
Stafford Borough Council  
West Lindsey District Council

**WINNER: Eastleigh Borough Council**

### Most Improved Performer



### Finalists

Bolsover District Council  
Hull City Council  
Huntingdonshire District Council  
Nottingham City Council  
Oxford Direct Services Ltd  
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council  
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

**WINNER: Hull City Council**

## Street Lighting *kindly sponsored by Brightly*

### Best Performer



### Finalists

- Cheshire East Council
- Denbighshire County Council
- Dundee City Council
- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
- Orkney Islands Council
- West Lothian Council
- Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

**WINNER: Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council**

### Most Improved Performer



### Finalists

- Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar
- East Ayrshire Council
- East Renfrewshire Council
- Milton Keynes Council
- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
- Pembrokeshire County Council
- Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council

**WINNER: East Ayrshire Council**

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## Transport Operations and Vehicle Maintenance *kindly sponsored by Vision Techniques*

### Best Performer



### Finalists

- Sheffield City Council
- Shetland Islands Council
- Tayside Contracts
- Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

**WINNER: Sheffield City Council**

### Most Improved Performer



### Finalists

- North Ayrshire Council
- Sheffield City Council
- Sunderland City Council
- Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

**WINNER: North Ayrshire Council**



**Environmental Health** *kindly sponsored by Socitm*

Best Performer



Finalists

- Herefordshire Council
- North Ayrshire Council
- Shetland Islands Council
- Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

**WINNER: Wakefield Metropolitan District Council**

**Streetscene** - Best Performer *kindly sponsored by REEN*



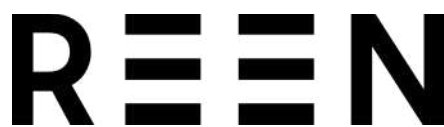
Finalists

- Aberdeen City Council
- Cambridge City Council
- Conwy County Borough Council
- Eastleigh Borough Council
- Gedling Borough Council
- Stafford Borough Council

**WINNER: Eastleigh Borough Council**

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APSE would like to thank all sponsors of the Performance Networks Seminar and Awards 2024 for their support



# Do natural burials contribute to ecosystem services? Understanding the risks and benefits

Dr Mark Pawlett, Senior Research Fellow in Soil Biology at Cranfield University, explores how natural burials could transform the way we view death and our place in the natural world.

It is important that people have the right information to make informed funeral choices. In the modern world, choices are often led by marketing and misconceptions rather than individual preferences or science. Concurrent with individual needs and beliefs, the funeral industry faces many challenges that must be addressed for a sustainable future.

Some of these challenges are more generic, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing biodiversity. However, a lot are specific to the industry, such as space available for burial, the use of sustainable materials for coffins, and the release of potentially damaging substances into groundwater (e.g. preservatives such as formaldehyde, and biochemical products of decomposition such as nitrogen).

Natural burials give individuals the choice of returning their bodies to the earth and offer benefits to both above and below-ground ecosystems. Preservatives are omitted as they impede natural decomposition processes, grave depth may be reduced if planning permission permits as shallow burial increases connectivity with surface ecology, grave markers are usually omitted, and burial containers and materials are biodegradable and sustainably sourced. Natural burial cemeteries are also managed for habitat creation and biodiversity generation - providing more greenspace, especially in urban environments which has been linked to improved mental health and wellbeing.

Despite the benefits, risks also need to be recognised so they can be mitigated. There is a substantial deficit of peer-reviewed literature that compares the unseen risks and benefits of natural burials to other funeral practices, with groundwater contamination and the production of greenhouse gases posing clear challenges.

Rejection of natural burial applications at the planning stage is often due to fears of groundwater contamination. Clay soils may mitigate and diffuse pollution but conversely may reduce the rate of decomposition if the grave becomes anoxic. Aerobic decomposition releases CO<sub>2</sub>, but when graves become waterlogged anaerobic decomposition releases methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O). N<sub>2</sub>O is about 298 times and CH<sub>4</sub> about 84 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub> as a greenhouse gas, both are increasing globally.

Furthermore, there is a lack of information related to the implications of decomposition on soil ecological processes - with the public frequently asking how long a body remains in the ground following a burial.

Decomposition starts almost immediately upon death; in the absence of a protective grave and preservatives, decomposition usually reaches its final stage after about 200 days. The duration is dependent on environmental factors, particularly soil type, moisture content and temperature. In certain conditions (e.g. hot dry conditions of sandy soils, wet peaty soils, freezing conditions of permafrost) biological processes are reduced and the body can remain in the soil for centuries. Decomposition requires sufficient water and oxygen to facilitate aerobic decomposition; hence it tends to be faster in loamy sand soils due to increased gas diffusivity.

Biochemical products of decomposition (e.g. ammonium-NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup>, nitrate-NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> and nitrite-NO<sub>2</sub><sup>-</sup>) result in nutrient hot spots that may benefit plants and other soil organisms. These nutrient hotspots may contribute to biodiversity and terrestrial biochemical cycling. Not all decomposition products are biologically available, grave soil can accumulate legacy constituents such as P, Ca, Na, Fe, Pb, Mn, Cr, Cu, and Zn. The combination of labile and recalcitrant nutrients may influence pedogenesis (soil formation processes). It has been hypothesised that these localised conditions contributed to the formation of Terra Preta (Amazonian "black earth" soils with high organic matter). The ecology of grave soils (Necrosol) soils is largely unknown.

For sustainable burial practices to be implemented on a large scale, we need more information to compare risks and benefits. The scientific knowledge gap is reflected in the lack of regulation in the UK. For example, the Ministry of Justice (2009: England and Wales) states that burial depth should be 0.92 m (3 ft) "unless soil is considered to be of suitable character", when the depth can be 0.61 m (2 ft). However, there is little information regarding what constitutes soil of suitable character. More detailed research is required to identify the risks and benefits of funeral options (for example lifecycle analysis studies) to develop fit-for-purpose regulations and legislation, to understand the benefits to ecosystem services, and to describe the cultural incentives of choice.

Innovative cemetery management needs to be considered, alongside its ethical and cultural implications. Speeding up decomposition may benefit grave re-use and increase the working life of a cemetery. Natural burials could also become integrated with other land management practices such as rewilding, or incorporated into biodiversity corridors for town planning. Gaining knowledge from research will also contribute to civil resilience measures associated with mass death events, such as disease outbreaks and conflict. Ultimately, we must ask ourselves whether changing the mindset of society to recognise the 'value' of the deceased, would benefit the living.

[The full paper can be viewed here.](#)

For more information contact: [m.pawlett@cranfield.ac.uk](mailto:m.pawlett@cranfield.ac.uk)





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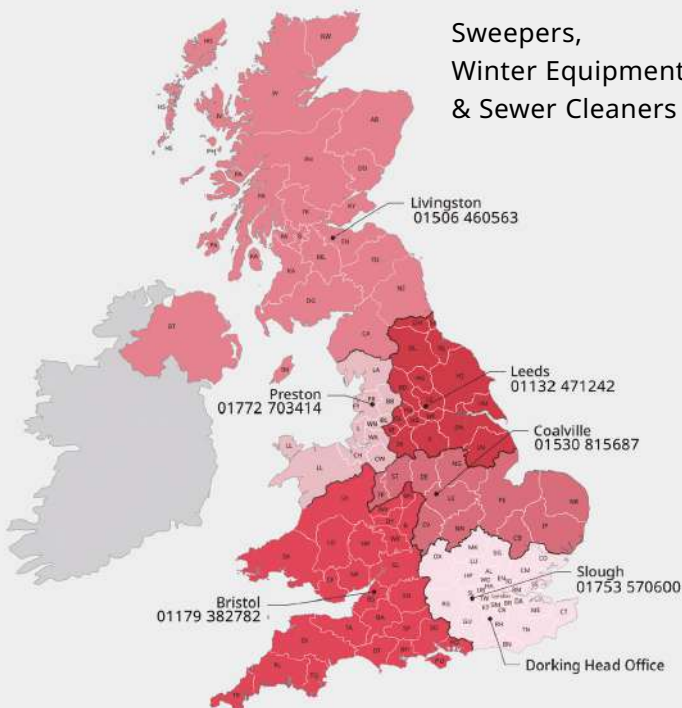
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# Stevenage Nightlight Crisis Café: A lifeline for mental health support

Following their success at the APSE Service Awards 2024 for Best Health and Wellbeing Initiative, take a deep-dive into the story of the Stevenage NightLight Crisis Café.

The Hertfordshire Mind Network (HMN) delivers a countywide out-of-hours mental health crisis service called Nightlight. This initiative offers five essential components: the Nightlight Crisis Helpline, the Nightlight Crisis Café, and Nightlight Crisis House (Overnight), A&E Link Workers and a Daylight Crisis team. Each of these services plays a vital role in supporting individuals experiencing mental health crises.

## A Safe Haven in Stevenage

The Stevenage NightLight Crisis Café operates every day of the year, including bank holidays, and is situated conveniently next to the Healthy Hub Stevenage. Designed to be a welcoming and secure space, the Café provides vital support for those feeling distressed or in crisis. Staffed by a dedicated team of skilled non-clinical mental health workers—many with lived experience of mental ill-health—the Café offers empathetic, informed care.

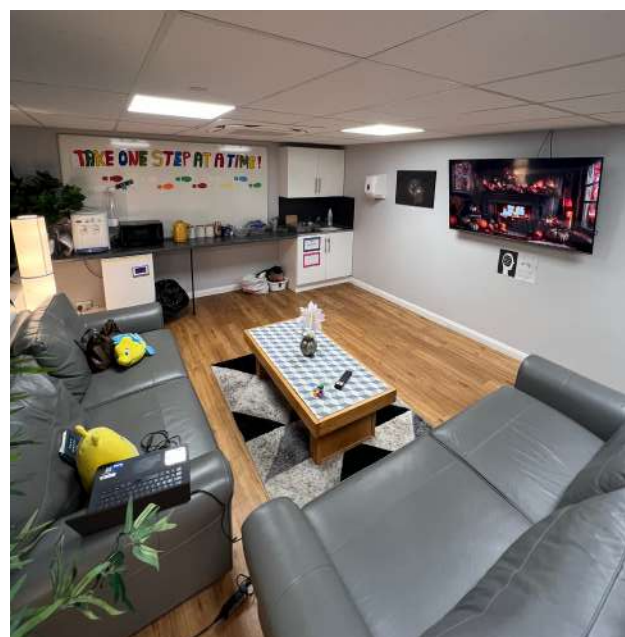
At least two staff members are on duty during every shift, ensuring visitors receive the support they need. Services provided include:

- A safe and comfortable environment.
- Peer and one-to-one emotional support.
- Assistance with crisis resolution and coping strategies.
- Practical advice and information.
- Signposting and referrals to relevant health, social care, housing, and community resources.
- Access to specialist mental health services when necessary.

## Addressing a Critical Need

The Café's establishment was spurred by Stevenage Borough Council following a worrying rise in suicide attempts and fatalities at Stevenage train station in 2021. This tragic increase led local stakeholders—including Hertfordshire County Council, HMN, and train operators—to advocate for a proactive solution.

Located within the Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, adjacent to the train station, the Café is accessible to both residents and visitors in need of immediate mental health support. Open from 7pm to 1am daily, the facility offers a non-clinical, relaxed environment where individuals in distress can talk to someone who understands.









# Evolving and expanding recycling services for a greener London Borough of Hounslow



Dan Smyth, Director of Recycle and Sustainability Services at Lampton Group, gives an overview of the work done in Hounslow to improve greener recycling.

Efficient recycling services have the potential to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by minimising the amount of waste sent to landfills or incinerators while extending the lifespan of existing materials. As the London Borough of Hounslow works towards its goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030, Lampton Services is providing vital support through the delivery of high-quality and cost-effective recycling and waste management services.

Part of Lampton Group, a council-owned business operating under the Local Authority Trading Company (LATCo) model, Lampton Services delivers an efficient, flexible service with an unparalleled understanding of the local area. Providing both a domestic and commercial waste management offering, our Recycle function aligns closely with Hounslow Council's agenda and broader sustainability roadmap. Since launching in 2016, we have achieved a 6.1% increase in recycling rates, diverting over 145,000 tonnes of waste through our state-of-the-art Materials Handling Facility (MHF).

## Overcoming barriers to Food Waste Capture

Food Waste Capture (FWC) poses one of the most significant challenges in recycling for local authorities and waste management services, both operationally and behaviourally. Representing a substantial portion of overall waste, the effective management of FWC is critical to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, however, it has historically seen lower uptake when compared to other recycling streams.

At Lampton Services, we identified communal properties as a key area where FWC had been largely ineffective due to being underserved by local authority recycling and waste management schemes. Barriers to communal FWC include concerns around pests, odour and hygiene. To tackle this, we launched an innovative weekly clean bin-swap for communal properties in 2022, addressing residents' concerns with the reassurance of a cleaner, more hygienic process. This resulted in a drastic increase in FWC across the borough.



By continuing to develop this initiative, we have provided 80% of Hounslow residents living in communal properties with access to food waste recycling, up from 30% in 2022. FWC has experienced a massive 80% uplift since the project launched, increasing from 25 tonnes per month in 2022 to 45 tonnes per month in 2024.

## Diversifying our service

To effectively minimise waste, it's important for recycling services to continue expanding and introducing new solutions which drive recycling rates up and carbon emissions down. Leveraging Hounslow Council's partnership with Podback, we launched a new coffee pod recycling service last year. Available to all



kerbside properties in Hounslow via weekly collection and to communal properties via a central drop-off point, the service has seen strong uptake, outpacing similar efforts in other London boroughs.

As local authorities strive towards net zero goals, the need to look beyond domestic waste grows stronger. By launching our Commercial Recycling and Waste collection service in 2022, we are supporting Hounslow-based businesses in reducing the carbon impact of their waste and recycling, whilst delivering a commercial return to the business and the council. With over 1,000 tonnes of waste diverted through this service since launch, our Commercial Recycling offering has scaled rapidly and further emissions reductions have been achieved through the transition from diesel to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) in our collection truck, slashing its carbon output by 90%.

### Driving resilience

The waste management landscape is evolving rapidly, with new regulations requiring businesses to segregate waste scheduled for April 2025, and similar legislation for domestic waste on the cards for 2026. These changes underscore the urgency for local authorities and recycling providers to adapt and innovate. As one of the only recycling teams in London to deliver a successful kerbside segregated waste collection, we are well-positioned to meet upcoming legislation head-on. Our segregated waste approach delivers significant benefits compared to commingled recycling, including producing higher-quality recycling materials by preventing contamination. These superior-quality materials are also higher value, generating additional revenue for the business and ultimately the council.



As changes to the recycling industry continue to accelerate in response to net zero targets, local authorities and waste management providers will face both challenges and opportunities. At Lampton Services, our commitment to a greener, cleaner Hounslow goes beyond meeting recycling targets. Our focus is creating a resilient, innovative waste management service that caters to the specific needs of Hounslow's residents and businesses, while keeping sustainability and, crucially, collaboration, at its core.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of our success. By working closely with key stakeholders including the council and wider community, we are building strong partnerships that enhance service delivery and ensure alignment with local priorities. These working relationships are vital as we strive to deliver meaningful waste reduction, improve recycling quality and contribute to Hounslow's net-zero aspiration.

**Lampton**  
Services

## When you think EV - think ER!

Expert Roadcraft Ltd (ER) is a professional, modern driver training company, focusing on tackling Road Safety and Sustainability issues.

The EV training on offer was created by the Energy Savings Trust (a government initiative) offering a cost-effective solution, whilst minimising operational disruption.

In an era of rapid automotive innovation and growing environmental awareness, ER has developed a training programme that ticks all "educational & compliance" boxes. Designed to equip drivers with the skills and confidence needed for a safer, greener future.

With the surge in electric vehicle adoption, many drivers face a learning curve when transitioning to EVs. ER bridges this gap with expert EV training that covers everything from understanding regenerative braking systems to optimising battery efficiency, charging strategies and managing any resistance to change and much more. By reinforcing positive behavioural change and coaching techniques, it empowers both individual drivers and corporate fleets to maximise the benefits of EV technology. This approach helps in the reduction of costs and contributes to sustainability goals.

Beyond EV there's a range of other training services available from assessments (standard or tailored), defensive driving, fleet safety management, slow manoeuvring and advanced road safety techniques. By combining innovative technology and personalised coaching ER ensures drivers are well prepared to navigate today's roads with confidence and competence.

"Transitioning to electric vehicles requires more than just learning how to drive; it's about adopting a whole new mindset. Our specialised EV training, combined with our broader driver educational services are all focused on creating safer, more efficient and environmentally conscious drivers" - Nick Dunn, Director.

ER is dedicated to empowering drivers by instilling a more conscious focus on sustainability, safety, and skill enhancement. Join the movement towards safer roads and a cleaner planet.

For more information visit [www.expert-roadcraft.co.uk](http://www.expert-roadcraft.co.uk) or contact [nick.dunn@expert-roadcraft.co.uk](mailto:nick.dunn@expert-roadcraft.co.uk) or by mobile on 07708 706140.

**Expert-RoadCraft**

# The value of swimming



Andy Salmon, CEO, Swim England, gives an overview of challenges faced by the leisure sector, as well as the multitude of health and wellbeing benefits offered.

As a national governing body, we are enormously proud of the fact that swimming is one of the most widely participated sports in the country and that it has far reaching societal benefits. Swimming and water safety is so much more than just a physical activity though. It is a life skill that could save not only your own life but the life of someone nearby who may find themselves in difficulty in water.

That's why we want every child to leave primary school in England being able to swim and being safe and confident around water. That's a non-negotiable from our perspective and we will continue to work tirelessly to make that a reality.

Swimming also stimulates cognitive development in children, boosting brain function, concentration and, as a result, boosting learning potential which will stand them not only in good stead for school but later life when they set out on their chosen career path.

Swimming is a skill that has such a positive impact on a person's health and wellbeing – research conclusively shows that being in water is good for people, regardless of their age or background. The figures show that swimming is especially popular with older people and those living with one or more long term health condition.

Last year we published our Value of Swimming report, and our research showed that aquatic activity generates £2.4billion of social value in England every year, prevents more than 78,500 cases of ill health and saves the NHS hundreds of millions of pounds each year.

Those are startling statistics and make a compelling case for our aquatic sports and activities, but it's a sad reality that the swimming sector is under threat like never before and people who want to be active in the water are being denied the opportunity.

Spiralling energy and staffing costs – including recent changes to Employer National Insurance Contributions (which swimming

pool operators have estimated will cost them around £90 million) and financial pressures on local authorities are putting a squeeze on blue spaces across the country ... and then there's the issue of ageing pools.

Since 2010 we have already seen a loss of around 480 publicly available swimming pools and almost 1,200 pools currently operational in England are more than 40 years of age and coming towards the end of their natural 'shelf life'.

Pools are expensive things to build – there's no getting away from that – but we need to take a place-based approach to ensure that we have the right mix of water space to support the needs of local communities.

Local authorities, both as place leaders and large investors in public leisure, clearly have a crucial role to play.

Financial and environmental sustainability need to be at the core of any future network of pools and at Swim England we have the expertise to be able to support local authorities and operators. We can help from the outset with facility planning advice right through to ongoing operational backing.

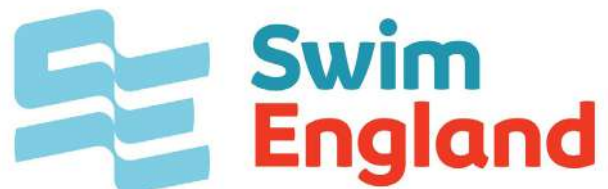
We have led the way in researching green technologies that can make the country's pool stock more sustainable in every sense. Pools and leisure centres are already precious community hubs where people meet to take part in an activity that will benefit their health and wellbeing but by reimagining their purpose, strengthening the links between the health and leisure systems and structures – including through the co-location of services, it is clear they can do so much more and benefit even more people.



As our Value of Swimming reports have shown, swimming is a powerful preventive healthcare tool. Regular swimming can help prevent and manage a wide range of health conditions, including obesity, cardiovascular disease and mental health disorders, reducing pressures on our already stretched health and social care system.

We envisage a future where swimming is universally recognised for its health benefits and where every citizen of England has the opportunity to swim regularly at a leisure centre or facility close to where they live.

Swimming can do even more to help people to lead happier, healthier lives but to enable that requires the investment to deliver a sustainable network of pools for the future.







# **Plymouth City Council: Delivering our urban community forest**

Following their win at APSE's Annual Service Awards for Best Grounds Maintenance and Horticulture Service, take a deep dive into Plymouth's tree planting scheme.

Plymouth City Council's tree planting programme has been delivering in spades over the last 5 years. Since 2019, PCC has directly delivered and supported partners to plant over 18,000 trees across the city, through a range of funded schemes. The programme has been widespread and involved partnership work with operations teams, developing precise datasets, utilising new digital platforms, new management approaches, and staff training. It has been hugely successful and provides a great case study for others with similar ambitions.

Integral to this successful delivery has been internal and external collaborative working, and notably the formation of Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest (PSDCF). PSDCF was an initiative born from Plymouth's Plan for Trees which sets a mission for thousands of trees to be planted, bringing woodlands and green space back into use for both people and wildlife, creating resilient, nature rich places for communities in Plymouth and the surrounding areas. PSDCF is a unique partnership consisting of Plymouth City Council (lead partner), National Trust, Woodland Trust, South Hams District Council, West Devon Borough Council, Devon County Council and Dartmoor National Park Authority and has been delivering since 2021 facilitating Defra's Trees for Climate funding.

The creation of PSDCF has led to large-scale woodland creation across South Devon and Dartmoor, whilst also importantly supporting and enhancing a strong, collaborative service delivery model for Plymouth City Council's own Parks, Grounds, and Horticultural service. This work is shared between our own Environmental Operations and Environmental Planning teams respectively and is driven by Plymouth's Plan for Trees.

The city's Plan for Trees was signed by a partnership group in 2019 and set the vision to value and care for the City's urban forest so they can play a fundamental role in the city's future. Its strategic framework is underpinned by a delivery programme which is reviewed at regular intervals, to respond to change and need within Plymouth, and for its trees. Following the partnership's work, in 2019 the city embarked on the Plymouth Tree Challenge which amongst other things kickstarted the city's enhanced tree planting programme and provided the foundations for a successful application to become England's 11th Community Forest, among





an England-wide network of Community Forests located in and around our largest towns and cities. The spatial designation of Community Forests means they are not a single woodland, but a growing number of distinct trees and woodlands, in PSDCF's case across a 140,000-hectare programme area, weaving through urban areas, towns, and villages, and reaching from moor to shore.

PCC has successfully planted over 18,000 trees within the city of Plymouth, impacting an area equivalent to 85 football pitches across 102 individual sites. Working alongside community groups, schools and social housing organisations has allowed an opportunity for people from different communities to get involved, and across the last three years, over 51 urban community-led events have taken place, instilling a sense of care and appreciation for nature and how it can benefit society.

An array of planting types including but not limited to memorial trees, community orchards, schools, grass verges, street trees and parks have been part of our delivery in Plymouth, embodying our Plan for Trees and employing the principles of 'right tree right place' has been key to ensuring optimal planting conditions. During so, important relationships have been developed, allowing constant consultation to inform a holistic approach to how we manage and regenerate urban green spaces within the city.

A total of over 5000 people have engaged with the programme since its launch, and we are delighted to support the engagement of young people in particular; creating a sense of ownership over the city's trees and inspiring the next generation to continue stewardship of nature for generations to come, advocating its importance in addressing the climate emergency. These achievements in Plymouth are highlighted by our pioneering young person programme, 'Forest Rising'. Designed for the next generation of leaders, Forest Rising harnesses youth power, and puts young people at the heart of the project allowing them to sit at the table with decision makers and to implement their ideas in relation to nature recovery where they live.

This year we will be planting tree schemes in the city that have been designed by our Forest Risers. The programme is inclusive of direct learning about the natural environment, tree planting, and the benefits of increased tree numbers across the UK, as well providing skills development and support with routes to employment within the green industry. We have so far supported 61 'Forest Risers', which has this year led to the creation of a youth forum, which has engaged with 50 practical sessions to upskill and empower young participants. Other headline figures achieved and celebrated by PCC & PSDCF are

5,857 metres of hedgerow created, more than 10,000 volunteer hours gifted, 26,292 m<sup>3</sup>/year of water storage created through tree planting and increased carbon sequestration capacity by 1,568 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> annually – equivalent to removing 1140 cars from the road each year.

The PSDCF partnership is excited to continue delivery into 2025 this winter within the city working with Plymouth City Council's grounds and horticulture team. However, external partnership working will also be instrumental in the success of the planting season ahead, with other organisations leading on schemes supported by PSDCF. We aspire to be supporting the planting of 'Miyawaki' forests in primary schools across the city in partnership with a local Community Interest Company, which will see multiple high density micro-forests being introduced in playgrounds and parks. Additionally, we will be working alongside a trusted Plymouth Plan for Trees partner to plan and deliver the implementation of hardscape street trees in future months, enabling the introduction of nature and green infrastructure in places PSDCF has not been able to reach before.

Finally, collaboration with the Green Communities team to address tree inequity in the city to ensure more people have access to trees, whilst our recent, but ever-growing Community Tree Nursery will benefit the program through the provision of 7,500 whips every two years, omitting the need to outsource trees for a substantial part of delivery. So far 20 native species tree species have been collected and grown, almost 50 sessions have been hosted and 45 volunteers have helped grow the next generation of trees in Plymouth. Trees nurtured and grown by the CTN and its volunteers will be planted out across the city, standing for decades to come.

Chris Avent delivered a presentation at a Parks Network Meeting on 18 October, slides are available to download [here](#).







# Winning in Wakefield

Following Wakefield Council's victory at the APSE Performance Networks Awards, Jill Edmonson, Environmental Health Service Manager gives a deep dive into the work of the award-winning environmental health team.

Wakefield Council Environmental Health team provides regulatory services including food hygiene, health and safety, infection control, community protection (noise and other nuisances and public health protection), land quality, air quality, permitting and animal health. The team also operates Commercial Services that protect health and the environment, and serve businesses and the public - all delivered by our talented team of 63 people.

Our five experienced pest control officers and an environmental health advisor support regulators in food hygiene and community protection, respond to customer and business pest control requests, and service 350 commercial contracts. All this work brings in income to cover costs ensuring the team can provide free treatments for public health pests to those on council tax benefits.

The commercial team has three strategic business units linked to our "Here for Business" brand. The Health Development Team provides classroom, blended, and online training to learners on regulatory and health protection issues. At the same time, Consultancy gives local business advice and Primary Authority delivers national regulatory advice to businesses. Primary

Authority services over 40 business contracts and shares 51 with West Yorkshire Joint Services offering trading standards advice. We use this add-on to our regulatory service to do more to protect public health including developing AllergyPAL to support SMEs and supporting the British Frozen Food Federation to find footwear to prevent frostbite in freezers used by their members.

Our vision is to be the "go-to council in the country for business advice".

This was the first year APSE has had a performance award for environmental health - Wakefield was keen to support the process to have relevant benchmarking to learn from other councils and review our performance. The opportunity to network and learn from hundreds of councils on how they have addressed key service issues of succession planning, prioritisation, technology improvements, and public health work opportunities was a key driver to engagement.



*The environmental protection team*

## Improvements made and good performance

Our Retain, Recruit and Develop Strategy 2022 - 2025 aimed to embrace succession planning, talent management, and relevant job descriptions in recruitment. We now have nine apprentice or student environmental health officers in service, and a new job description allows the recruitment of final year students on tiered grades to full qualification. Our team culture recognises the need to train new people and support their journey to become qualified officers, as well as giving something back and gaining confidence as mentors.

The new apprentice trainer in the Commercial team was highly commended at the National Apprenticeship and Skills Awards 2024, with Wakefield being the only council nomination from the Yorkshire and Humber region. Our apprentice trainer has brought so much innovation to the team, who have fully supported her development and learning.

Evidence-based management techniques have been widely adopted throughout the commercial team, which has used Management Gap analysis to build a conceptual framework from researching issues covering financial performance, communication and strategy. Additionally, the commercial team, manager and accountant built a solid data set to ensure the costs and income of each business unit were known.

The team also undertook Enterprise Risk management focusing on increased learners and income in the training team and a SWOT analysis to review external opportunities using innovation and the ideas of team members. Good growth and demand mean we will soon be recruiting a new HDO and PA Officer.

Team success is due to the people in the team and the culture we have that embraces our core values.

### **How has using performance networks data improved your performance?**

It has ensured that we have access to valuable benchmarking data to compare with other environmental health teams - giving positive reinforcement that our strategy is on the right lines. Benchmarking is not the end; we have used the APSE network to learn from other councils' performance improvements, IT software solutions, and ideas for income generation.

It would be brilliant if other environmental health teams joined the network to support performance comparisons, share learning, and develop our services. Environmental health is a fantastic service that does great things for public health. We need to work together to improve and promote all we do to serve our communities and businesses. APSE's events and performance monitoring have been a fantastic resource this year.

### **Your future areas of focus**

We want to develop the success of the community/environmental protection customer satisfaction survey, which gives brilliant feedback on officers linked to a good net promoter score for a service dealing with neighbour complaints. In many cases, it has shown we have made a difference to people's wellbeing and health, but where we couldn't help demonstrating customers still valued our service and would promote it. Using customer satisfaction surveys in other parts of the service allowed for excellent customer care, expectation management, and environmental health team values.

We also wish to improve our links with public health by developing key health priorities and using evidence-based management to demonstrate health protection and improvement. This will include looking for opportunities for further funding of prevention work and learning from APSE network members. Finally, we plan to review our pest control commercial service to mitigate peaks and troughs in reactive work income, through gaining insight from other APSE members on income generation and cost reduction.

For more information about Performance Networks, contact Debbie Johns at [djohns@apse.org.uk](mailto:djohns@apse.org.uk)



# Building and Housing Seminar 2025

## Speakers include:

David Sim, SHNZS, Scottish Government

Colin McInnes, APSE Associate

Mike Rollo, Building Services Manager, Moray Council

Helen Shaw, Director of Regulation, Scottish Housing Regulator

Gillies MacDonald, Board Director, Morgan Hunt

Louise Burchart, Head of Housing and Construction Services, Dundee City Council

Marjory Mackie, Housing Strategy and Development Manager, West Lothian Council

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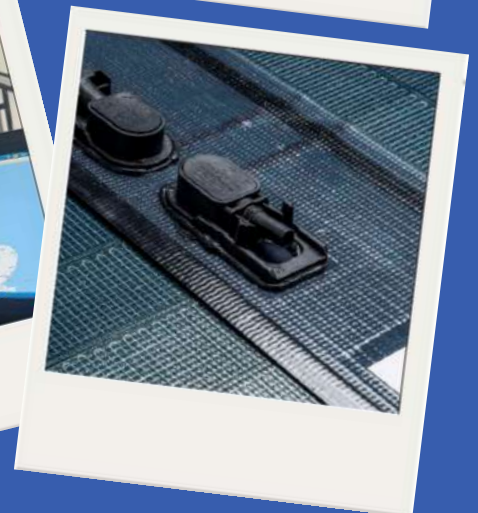


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# One in four planning committee members oppose additional housebuilding

A new Survation poll conducted on behalf of APSE, has also found that one in three councillors now believe their authority is at risk of bankruptcy - with 87% stating funding from central government is not enough to meet demands.

Survation were asked by APSE to provide a public opinion survey of attitudes to local neighbourhood services covering the range of council services that would appear in their local area. Survation also polled councillors in Great Britain, to gauge their opinion on levels of funding, financial health of councils and their priorities for protecting services.

## Key findings

In line with the new government's target to build 1.5 million homes over the current parliament, a majority of Councillors support new homebuilding in their local authorities. However, a significant number (1 in 5) are opposed to any new building development over current levels including one in four (25%) of council planning committee members.

## One in three councillors think their local authority is at risk of bankruptcy within the next five years

When councillors were asked about the likelihood of their local authority issuing a Section 114 notice over the course of this parliament, over a third (34%) reported the risk of bankruptcy as "very likely or likely"

## Adequacy of new funding announcements

Reacting to the additional £1.3 billion in financial support for local councils announced in the recent budget, 87% of councillors surveyed do not believe their authority will receive funding adequate to their needs from central government. When asked about the cancellation or closure of services since 2010, culture and events and libraries have suffered the most - topping the list with 39% and 35% of councillors noting cancellation or closure.

Regarding the additional £1.2 billion earmarked for adult and children's social care, 85% of councillors said it was not enough.

## The public wants more money for local councils and local services

On the issue of funding, 67% of the public would like the Government to give more money to local councils to spend at a local level.

## Trust remains high in councils and councillors compared to the national Government

The survey found trust in councils is still high overall compared to trust in Government – 49% are more trusting of councils, compared to 14% for the Government. The difference was even more stark between trust in councillors (53%) and Government ministers (6%) - while 29% of the public said 'none of the above'.

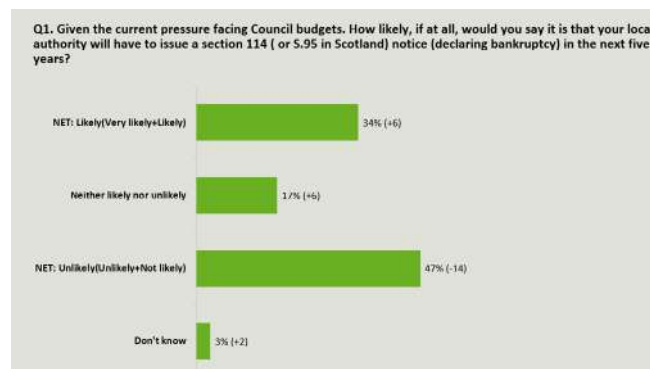
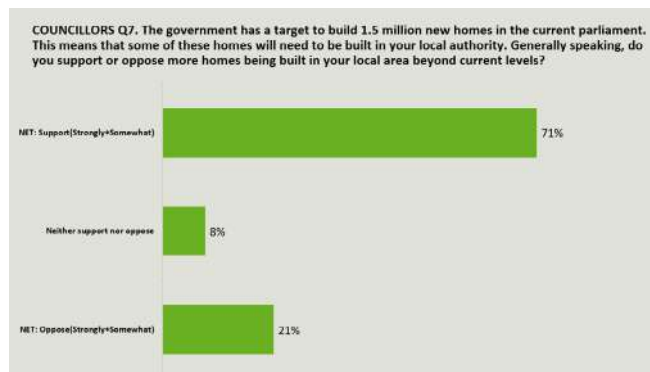
## The majority of the public support low-emissions and traffic reduction measures

Over half of the public (52%) support schemes designed to reduce congestion and emissions from cars, such as the ultra-low emission zone and congestion charge – a quarter (25%) oppose them. 61% supported measures to reduce air pollution and improve health.

## Road maintenance, followed by affordable housing, adult social care and children's social services are the most popular areas to receive more investment

Asked to allocate a notional budget of new spending across 12 services, the public allocated the most new spending to:

1. Road maintenance – 12.7 % of notional spending
2. Affordable Housing – 10.6 % of notional spending
3. Adult social care – average of 10.3 % of notional spending
4. Children's social services – average of 9% of notional spending

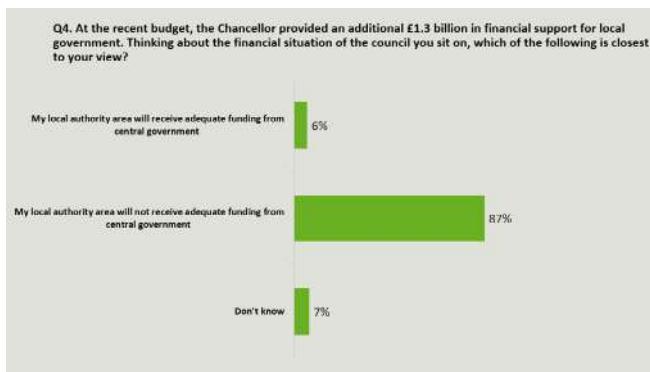


Speaking about the poll results, Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive, said: "It is a concern that objective approaches to planning consents and reforms, to turbocharge new homes, could be frustrated by the apparent one in four planning committee members who oppose new developments in local areas. Clearly more work needs to be



done to reassure local planning members. This could of course create friction with planning officer advice and the view of the committee members.

“The results have also demonstrated how much the public value council services and that they want to see more money spent locally to see services improve. With one in three councillors now predicting their authority will be in financial distress in the next five years – demands for further financial relief will intensify in the lead up to the Spending Review in 2025.”



Damian Lyons Lowe, Survation Chief Executive, added:

“Despite the financial issues, councils continue to deliver well, with public satisfaction in key services like waste, street lighting, and cleaning remaining strong.

“However, urgent action is needed. Councillors and the public agree that adult and children’s social care are top priorities for investment, yet 87% of councillors say the latest funding announcements fall short of what’s needed.

“With 67% of the public supporting more funding devolved to councils, and trust in councils far outstripping that in national government, the message is clear: local authorities need more resources to meet rising demand and deliver for communities.”

Read the full report on APSE’s website.



## New APSE Approved Partners: Welcome **Bucher Municipal**

Bucher Municipal are proud to announce its acceptance into the UK APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) Approved Partner Scheme. This prestigious recognition highlights Bucher Municipal’s commitment to providing innovative and sustainable solutions for local councils across the UK.

As a leading manufacturer of municipal vehicles and equipment, Bucher Municipal has been dedicated to supporting local authorities in their efforts to deliver high-quality public services. By joining the APSE Approved Partner Scheme, Bucher Municipal aims to strengthen its partnerships with local councils, ensuring they have access to the latest technology and expertise in the cleansing, winter maintenance and sewer cleaning sectors.

“Becoming an APSE Approved Partner is a significant milestone for us” said Martin Starkey, Managing Director.

“This partnership underscores our dedication to the public sector and our mission to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of local council operations. We look forward to collaborating closely with APSE members to meet their unique needs and challenges.”

The APSE Approved Partner Scheme is designed to help local authorities identify trusted suppliers who can offer quality products and services. As an approved partner, Bucher Municipal will work alongside councils to deliver tailored solutions that promote operational excellence and contribute to the improvement of community services.

Local councils interested in exploring Bucher Municipal’s innovative products and services are encouraged to reach out for advice, consultations and demonstrations.

For more information, visit <https://www.buchermunicipal.com/gb/en> or contact [enquiries.uk@buchermunicipal.com](mailto:enquiries.uk@buchermunicipal.com)





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Our team of highly qualified specialists - field surveyors, engineers and designers - are committed to creating beautifully landscaped and thoughtfully constructed developments. Ones that have distinctive spatial qualities but also offer excellent commercial value, and that are low-maintenance environments with minimal operational costs.

Our Green Agenda also ensures that our developments are environmentally friendly, offer reductions in emissions and pollution whilst helping improve biodiversity.

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# Announcing the APSE Energy Awards 2025 finalists

## Sponsored by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

We would like to say a huge thank you to all of the councils who submitted an entry for this year's awards. It is amazing to see the dedication and creativity shown by local authorities in the pursuit of net zero.

We appreciate all of your hard work and we look forward to recognising these important achievements!

## Supporting Innovation

### Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) has partnered with Advetec to become the UK's first local authority to process 100% of non-recyclable waste into Solid Recovered Fuel (SRF). Using Advetec's innovative XO22 bio-thermic digester, the council is eliminating landfill dependency, reducing transport emissions, and creating renewable fuel with 95% less CO<sub>2</sub>e than coal. This £1.2m initiative supports Scotland's 2026 landfill ban, advances energy security, and sets a benchmark for sustainable waste management in remote areas.

### Gateshead Council

A ground-breaking solution using heat from disused mines to provide low cost, low carbon heat and hot water to the people of Gateshead. Our project has not only decarbonised our heat network, but then developed further, bringing in renewable power sources and dynamic energy trading to get even closer towards both our own net zero goals, but also proving this technology for other potential users across the UK.

### London Borough of Hackney

Hackney Light and Power's Residential Solar PV Pilot will deliver 1 MW of solar power across council housing estates using innovative microgrid technology, offering residents affordable clean energy while advancing Hackney's net-zero goals. This pioneering UK-first model emphasises cost savings, fuel poverty alleviation, and carbon reduction through renewable energy, creating a scalable solution for other local authorities to follow.

### Northumberland County Council

We have innovated in the delivery of Government funded grant schemes and created 'Warmer Homes' delivery methods

including: Bespoke IT system for CMS/contract management and 'batching' tool; fully trained internal retrofit team, using social value in contracts to train other internal teams on retrofit and PAS2030 processes. The IT products are being prepared to be suitable for commercialisation to assist other local authorities deliver energy efficiency schemes with the aim of combatting fuel poverty and towards net zero goals.

### Walsall Council

Walsall Council is working with Achieve Your Goals CIC and Hillary Primary School, to act as a 'catalyst' in process of reaching out to parents/carers (householders). Via engagement with local school children, we reach hard-to-reach households and find hard-to-treat homes. We have delivered bespoke energy and renewable energy education package to 200 children leading to £1.5m of grant-funded retrofits, with £78,500 energy savings. We are working with teachers and Nash Dom CIC to promote and provide translation services.

### Westmorland and Furness Council

Voreda House is the UK's first council office building to achieve Passivhaus EnerPHit accreditation following the retrofit of an ageing office building. The newly-formed Westmorland and Furness Council took the scheme through to completion in May 2024 and its positive certification in June 2024. Voreda House is now a modern, fit-for-purpose and sustainable hub for staff and the public and an embodiment of Westmorland and Furness Council's commitment to providing leadership in the drive to becoming carbon net zero.

## Assessing and Managing Finance

### Bedford Borough Council

Bedford Green Energy Park delivers low carbon, clean energy generation technologies on a closed restored landfill site, as a model to provide an education resource, training and encourage others to reduce carbon emissions, adopt innovative technologies, and improve air quality. The project represents the significant amount of work by the project team in developing and securing SEMELP funding for sustainable investment opportunity for the Council, whilst also satisfying the aspirational pledge by the Council to become carbon neutral by 2030.

### Lancashire County Council

Local authorities across England have identified tree and woodland planting as a key part of their response to the climate change and biodiversity crises. A lack of capacity to develop and design planting proposals, to consult widely, apply for capital grants and organise planting has been identified as a key barrier to progress. LCC's Treescapes team have successfully accessed significant amounts of finance to accelerate the amount of tree planting in Lancashire.

### Salford City Council

Salford City Council has secured funding from public sector funders to deliver projects across Turnpike Depot, a strategic operational council site. Turnpike has benefitted from installations of air source heat pumps, roof mounted solar panels, battery storage and solar car ports to decarbonise and generate electricity at the site. This is in preparation for the renewal of the council's fleet and move towards electrification. Without accessing these funding mechanisms these works would not have been possible within current council budgets.

### Southwark Council

Southwark Green Investment is an ambitious local green bond, aiming to raise £6m by 2030 and connect with residents, businesses and charitable foundations. The first two raises smashed targets for locally-raised investment: of a total £1.5M raised, £468,000 came from 149 local investors. Targeted

communications, strong political championing and partnership working have created excitement in Southwark about climate action and connected locals with transformative projects. This has helped to highlight the challenges of financing climate solutions and build an investor base that can be leveraged for future initiatives.

#### **Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council**

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council has put accessing and managing finances at the centre of its priorities to deliver excellent public services and its 2030 carbon neutral aspiration. In tackling its largest source of carbon emissions, Larkfield Leisure Centre, the council has landed funding from the Swimming Pool Support Fund capital scheme, and the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, with renewable, efficiency and decarbonisation measures co-funded through prudent reserves and returning savings from renewable investments to fund future initiatives.

### **Working in Collaboration**

#### **Blackpool Council**

With its genesis in a project aiming simply to decarbonise a library building, the Blackpool Eco Hub has quickly evolved into a multi-faceted partnership service and delivery model helping people to be wealthier, healthier and greener. By taking a flexible approach, and seizing the opportunities arising from building new relationships with partners, the service now has the potential to re-shape public services in Blackpool around our common need to tackle the Climate Emergency.

#### **Bolsover District Council**

Bolsover District Council, East Lindsey District Council, and Birmingham City Council partnered with leading independent construction and property consultant, Rider Levett Bucknall (RLB) to deliver a step change in green skills delivery through Regional Retrofit Skills Roadmap and Pilot project, funded and supported by the Midlands Net Zero Hub and DESNZ. Dozens of organisations collaborated to successfully deliver nearly 30 funded pilot activities in less than four months, with outcomes that will upskill over 765 people per year across the Midlands.

#### **Cambridge City Council**

CERP is a considerable success story. This Cambridgeshire Council partnership has collaborated for over a decade delivering retrofit support to communities. Currently HUG2 is being delivered in significant numbers across Cambridgeshire and is supporting our wider strategic partnerships and aspirations towards net zero.

Our success is a direct result of our strong collaborative approach and Officer commitment. We are passionate about the work we do and proud of the difference we are making for both residents and environment.

#### **North Yorkshire Council**

North Yorkshire Council and the York and North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (now the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority) worked collaboratively with community representatives to both develop and deliver the £2.2million Shared Prosperity Fund Decarbonisation Theme, delivered between January 2023 and March 2025.

#### **Pembrokeshire County Council**

Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC) is working closely with Egni, a local community energy cooperative, to install 1.5MW of rooftop PV across 20 schools and leisure centres. 530kW of which has already been delivered. This builds on previous work which installed 265kW on six schools in the county. Alongside this work, PCC and Egni co-op are delivering an educational

engagement program to support the schools with a variety of curriculum enrichment activities related to energy efficiency and sustainability. This includes access to Energy Sparks, which has reduced energy demand by up to 20% in some schools.

#### **Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council**

Seven West Midlands local authorities have shattered traditional boundaries, uniting in partnership with West Midlands Combined Authority to deliver a groundbreaking cohort of Net Zero Neighbourhood projects. By choosing collaboration over competition, this innovative cohort has secured critical funding to launch seven unique demonstrator projects that reimagine how communities can achieve a Just Transition. Their approach has transcended local ambitions, sparking national interest. Regions like Greater Manchester, Greater London, and Scotland are now looking to the West Midlands as a blueprint for transformative climate action.

The awards will be taking place on the evening of Wednesday 26 February 2025, at the Birmingham Conference and Events Centre as part of the APSE Big Energy Summit in partnership with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

The summit is the only event of its kind focused primarily on the local government sector, covering the energy, climate change and sustainability agenda.

If you have any questions about the Summit, please get in touch with Phil Brennan at [pbrennan@apse.org.uk](mailto:pbrennan@apse.org.uk) or James Jefferson at [jjefferson@apse.org.uk](mailto:jjefferson@apse.org.uk)



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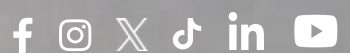


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