

## Two Tribes

APSE

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## Wheels of Success

Knowsley Council

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## Biomass for Schools

Northamptonshire County Council

PAGE 16-17

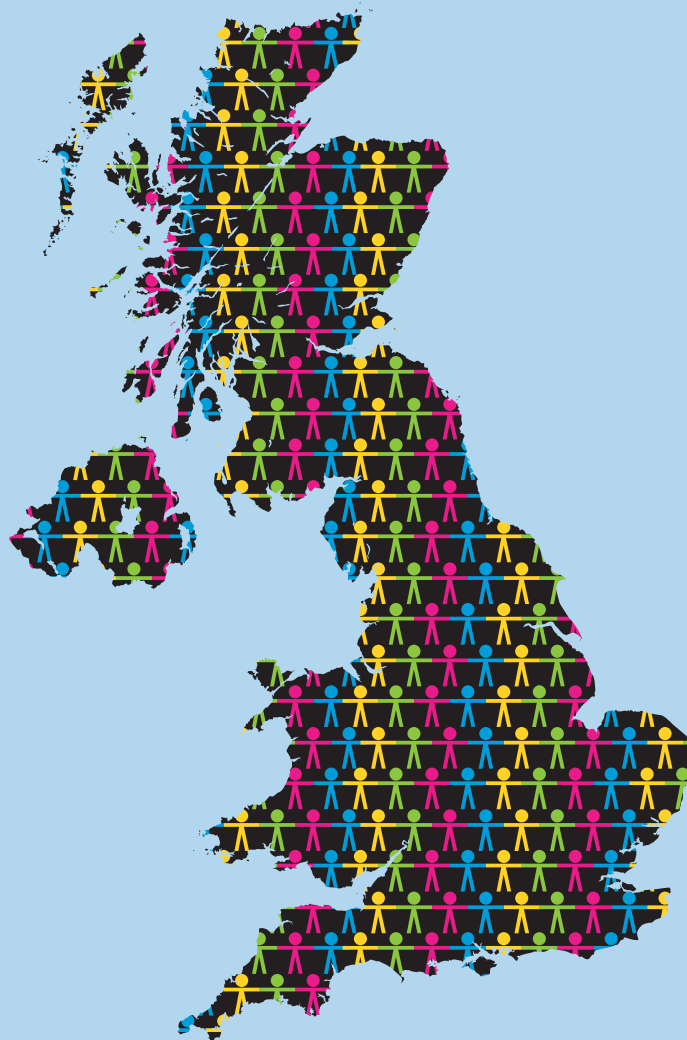
## Civic Energy

University of Leeds

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# Two tribes:

## Exploring the future role of elected members



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APSE Direct News

January/February 2015

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## Editorial

### Modernising political systems is ironically an age old debate

This year is the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta and whilst it was subject to reaffirmation in many different guises in today's modern political systems we can see the foundations in the Charters' role in 1215 in placing King John under the rule of Law.

In years to come reformists looked to the Great Charter to safeguard and observe the liberties of England and eventually the principles enshrined in the Magna Carta gave birth to Parliament as a permanent political institution. Fourteenth-century parliaments often placed as their first item of business a public reading and reaffirmation of the Charter, and indeed sought royal confirmation of the Great Charter, with subsequent statutes reinforcing its promises.

Fast forward to 2015 and we are now debating the geographic boundaries of the votes of parliamentarians, with politicians across the spectrum claiming to address the vexed West Lothian Question. However for many local councils' political accountability and governance issues are much closer to home. More recent reforms than the Magna Carta in the guise of the Local Government Act 2000, introduced new structures in the name of modernisation to English authorities, with similar measures put into place in Wales and within Scotland

Cabinet style executive, and non-executive, models have now become the norm, but is this good thing for local political structures and does it lead to good governance? Arguably not according to APSE's latest research conducted by De Montfort University and Cardiff Business School, alongside an APSE Scotland study with De Montfort University and Edinburgh University. The research has consistently identified the existence of 'two tribes' - those within the executive and those outside, who consistently reported that this left them feeling weakened in terms of political influence and less able to effectively scrutinise decisions.

In recent appalling cases unfolding in a number of councils the issues of good governance, leadership and effective scrutiny of decision making has been called into question. Perhaps it is time for us to question the political structures that inform how local councils are governed and scrutinised. We must now ask are cabinet / executive models of leadership and governance of themselves fit for purpose or is it time for a radical rethink on how we structure the decision making and governance of our local councils?

Best wishes

Paul O'Brien, APSE Chief Executive

# Ensuring a stronger democratic voice

*New research has identified 'two tribes' of elected members, with non-executive councillors feeling marginalised from decision-making. Paul O'Brien discusses how an Ensuring Council ethos can help revitalise local democracy*

Research involving elected members, published by APSE, has revealed sharp contrasts in attitudes between those in executive and those in non-executive roles. The report ***Two Tribes? Exploring the future role of elected members*** suggests that many 'backbench' councillors who are serving their communities solidly at grass roots level feel marginalised from decision-making.

Almost 2,600 councillors took part in the research, which brought APSE together with the Local Governance Research Unit at De Montfort University and Centre for Local and Regional Government Research at Cardiff University. The resulting report compares findings from a recent survey of councillors, carried out in late 2014, with a poll that was conducted in 2003. Posing the same questions eleven years on enabled the research team to evaluate long term changes in opinions among councillors.

The initial survey was carried out shortly after the introduction of Labour's modernisation programme, which aimed to streamline decision-making and increase transparency. This replaced the existing committee system in England with a cabinet and overview and scrutiny system where the cabinet and leader, or directly elected mayor, could be held to account by councillors acting in scrutiny committees and by communities acting in neighbourhood arenas. Local authorities in Wales also moved towards cabinet systems, whilst Scotland and Northern Ireland retained committees, although a number of Scottish councils have recently adopted cabinet-style executive systems.

The results from our latest survey reveal a sharp difference in views on how well modernisation has worked between councillors who are cabinet members and those in non-executive or 'backbench' positions. Researchers found 65% of executive councillors thought local government modernisation measures had worked well, compared with 37% of non-executive councillors. And while 58% of executive members believed separating decision-making powers from scrutiny had increased transparency, less than 30% of backbenchers agreed. Significantly, two out of three non-executive members thought the modernisation agenda had marginalised their role.

What was striking was that opinions were split very much according to councillors' roles rather than their political persuasion – shadow executives had more in common with executive members than non-executives within their own party. This led Professor Steve Griggs of De Montfort University, one of the authors of the report, to comment: 'From the results of this survey, local government appears increasingly structured by a polarisation akin to a tribal affiliation whereby executive and non-executive members hold different viewpoints and undertake different tasks. This cleavage is a cause for concern.'

The report also suggests that fiscal austerity has taken its toll on backbench councillors' confidence. A total of 87% of cabinet members said they thought that they personally could contribute to service improvements but only 43% of backbenchers believed they could do so. Although the party group offers some checks and balances, the report raises important questions as to whether the efforts and opinions of non-executive members, whose focus is on serving their local ward, is properly recognised.

There are, of course, no easy answers to complex governance issues and this latest poll of elected members needs to be understood in the broader context within which they are operating. But this research indicates clearly that it is time to revitalise local democracy and consider how all elected members can be better connected with decision-making across the multiple arenas of local governance.

This highlights a need for collective dialogue on governance, which moves beyond narrow discussions of political structures and considers the fundamental purpose of local government. The report suggests that the 'Ensuring Council' ethos, the model developed by APSE and our research partners during our 2020 Vision project on the future of local government, could ultimately help to underpin democratic accountability. The Ensuring Council ethos suggests the fundamental role of local government in future should be to ensure the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the local area. It also suggests that a way to achieve this is by linking strategic decision-making with retention of a core capacity to deliver frontline services.

Meaningful dialogue on the future of local government needs to be grounded in a set of principles that genuinely advances local political leadership and democratic accountability. The Ensuring Council ethos offers a way of triggering that constructive dialogue. Councillors who exercise executive decision-making powers, or those in waiting to occupy such roles, expressed persistently different views from non-executive members, regardless of political persuasion. This study therefore shows there is a need to find a way to better recognise the contribution of those councillors who are focused on serving their communities but feel disconnected from decision-making. We believe that taking an Ensuring approach can help place service provision at the heart of local democracy - and thereby place local democracy at the heart of local communities.

For copies of *Two Tribes? Exploring the future role of elected members*, please contact Wai Lee: [wlee@apse.org.uk](mailto:wlee@apse.org.uk)



## APSE National roads, street lighting and winter maintenance seminar 2015

### Highway operations: The practice of highways and lighting services

**Thursday 5 and Friday 6 March 2015**

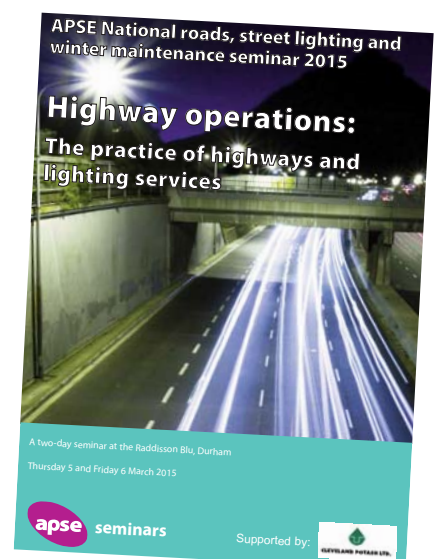
This seminar will focus on operational issues because remaining up to date with developments across the roads, highways, winter maintenance and street lighting sectors is vital for those responsible for day to day service delivery.

Lead industry speakers including:

- Department for Transport
- Institute of Lighting Professionals
- CIPFA
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- Transport for London

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**To book online go to [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk) and click on 'Events' or email [pbrennan@apse.org.uk](mailto:pbrennan@apse.org.uk) for more details.**



# Upcoming events

Date:	Event:	Location:
03 March	S/SW Renewables and Climate Change Advisory Group	Oxford
4 March	Refuse and Street Cleansing Advisory Group	Manchester
04 March	Scottish Parks, Grounds & Street Services Advisory Group	TBC
<b>5 &amp; 6 March</b>	<b>Roads, Highways and Winter Maintenance Seminar</b>	<b>Durham</b>
10 March	S/SW Housing and Construction Advisory Group	Cambridge
<b>11 March</b>	<b>Sports and Leisure Seminar</b>	<b>Manchester</b>
18 March	Scottish Transport & Mechanical Advisory Group	TBC
<b>20 March</b>	<b>Parks and Grounds Maintenance Seminar</b>	<b>Harrogate</b>
20 March	Scottish Waste & Recycling Advisory Group meeting	TBC
26 March	S/SW Soft Facilities Management Advisory Group	Taunton
15 April	Housing Advisory Group (Building Maintenance)	Manchester
21 April	Leisure Advisory Group	Trafford
24 April	Catering Advisory Group	Trafford
24 April	Scottish Building & Housing Advisory Group	TBC
29 April	Scottish Renewables & Energy Efficiency Advisory Group	TBC
30 April	Cleaning Advisory Group	Trafford
06 May	Renewables Advisory Group	Manchester
12 May	Scottish Soft FM Advisory Group	TBC
13 May	Highways Advisory Group	Manchester

# Briefings

**For more information on the briefing notes and research reports, contact the APSE office on 0161 772 1810 or visit our website at [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk)**

Briefing number:	Subject:
15-07	Potential Influences on the United Kingdom's floods of winter 2013/14
15-06	APSE response to The National Pollinator Strategy 2014
15-05	New Waste Collection Requirements and TEEP issues for local authorities (England and Wales)
15-04	Evaluating universal free school meal provision for P1 to P3 in Scotland and how local authorities can get involved
15-03	Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy
15-02	The Elphicke-House Report From statutory provider to Housing Deliver Enabler. Review into the local authority role in housing supply
15-01	Scottish House Conditions Survey: Key Findings 2013

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# Enabling councils to deliver more and better homes

**Local authorities can play a full and active role in planning, delivering and managing social and affordable homes. A new study by the Town and Country Planning Association, on behalf of APSE, is looking at what might need to change in order for councils to do even more. Kate Henderson, Chief Executive of the TCPA explains.**



The housing crisis touches every part of the UK and is a pressing issue for every local authority. Parts of the UK face a chronic undersupply of homes: we have failed to build enough new homes to meet demand for decades. In other parts of the UK the challenge is regeneration of our existing communities and the quality of existing social housing.

Last year we built 140,880 new homes across the whole of the UK of which 112,400 were in England. Set against the formation of 240,000 new households each year in England, we are currently building less than half the homes needed. In addition central investment in housing across the UK fell by 35% between 2010-2015, with funding for new social housing cut by 44%.

By the end of 2013, mortgage lender the Halifax reported house prices across the UK were rising at nearly ten times average earnings. Our inadequate supply of housing impacts on the social wellbeing of communities as well as reducing labour mobility thereby undermining the ability of our towns and cities to attract new business.

Local authorities pioneered the planning and delivery of high quality social housing in the 20th century. For much of the period between 1948 and 1978, local authorities were responsible for building more than 90,000 homes a year. In 2013 that figure had fallen to just 2,000 homes across the UK and of these less than a thousand were in England. Housing Associations have helped fill this gap, building on average 18,800 new homes per year between 1978 and 2013. This is, however, only a fraction of what the public sector built in the post Second World War era.

In response to the housing crisis the Coalition Government has been to introduce radical legal and policy changes to housing, planning, benefit provision and regeneration funding. These measures have important cumulative effects on the ability of local authorities to deliver affordable homes and the wider role of place-making.

The objective of this research project is to understand whether the current policy framework supports local authorities in taking an active role in planning, delivering and managing new social and affordable homes, and if not, what might need to change.

Through case studies, an online survey and roundtables the research aims to demonstrate that local authorities can deliver more and better housing. Councils are a fundamental part of the solution to meeting the nation's housing need.

*Contact: To get involved in the research study contact Phil Brennan at APSE On [pbrennan@apse.org.uk](mailto:pbrennan@apse.org.uk)*



*Have your say! This short survey will take no more than 10 minutes and will underpin our research:*

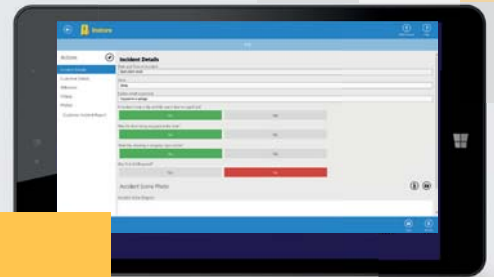
*[www.surveymonkey.com/s/TCPAandAPSEhousingresearch](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TCPAandAPSEhousingresearch)*



# TABLET TECHNOLOGY PRICE DROP FUELS LOCAL COUNCIL OPPORTUNITIES

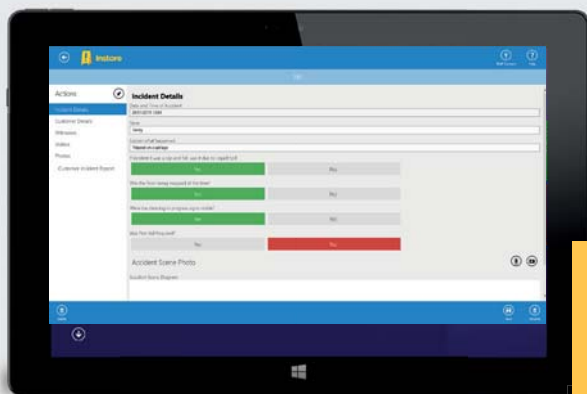


**Organisations such as local councils and associated companies who undertake building, repairs & maintenance or social landlords, can now all benefit from low cost mobile workforce technology. Thanks to the introduction of lower cost tablets, workers are now able to access the power and functionality of a Windows PC whilst out of the office.**



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- has released a configurable app platform which is available to run on a variety of new Windows 8.1 tablets from top hardware manufacturers such as Linx, Acer, Nokia, Dell, HP, along with a rugged tablet range from Panasonic.

**The platform can be configured to eliminate any existing paper-based processes and also add rich data such as photos, videos and signatures as part of your form, not as separate attachments.**

#### **Examples of available forms:**

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- Estimates - quotes and invoices
- CP12 - gas certificates
- Vehicle checks - VOSA daily checks
- Timesheets

#### **Key features of the TAAP platform include:**

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Local authorities can trial TAAP's software applications right now - pre-configured applications are available to download from the Windows Store directly onto your Windows 8.1 tablet or laptop: <http://apps.microsoft.com/>

Contact TAAP for further details on applications for local councils on 0845 230 9787 or visit our website for an overview: [ontaap.com](http://ontaap.com)

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# Making the wheels of success turn in Knowsley

***Damian Walshe, Fleet and Logistics Manager for the fleet management services at Knowsley council explains how the adoption of a business growth strategy has helped with both balancing the service budget and improving customer satisfaction, leading to an all-round improved service offer.***



For those of you that don't know us Knowsley is a Metropolitan Borough within Merseyside comprising of the towns and districts of Kirkby, Prescott, Huyton, Whiston, Halewood, Cronton and Stockbridge Village, with Kirkby, Huyton, and Prescott being our main commercial centres. However, we are perhaps most well-known for Knowsley Safari Park, which sits within the borough. So far we haven't managed to get a contract for the maintenance of their jeep safaris but with our approach to business growth in Knowsley's Fleet and Logistics service we haven't ruled that out either!

Within Knowsley I have responsibility for a fleet of 150 vehicles and 300 items of plant. We also maintain a number of external fleet maintenance contracts for over 250 vehicles; and we have two large operational depots including a central fleet maintenance workshop, along with stores, depot and delivery operations, run by 22 full time staff.

Having reviewed the service in 2009 it was clear to me that there were a number of areas where we needed to improve our service offer. It was also obvious that part of our business strategy would be to develop a more commercial offering to generate income for the service as well as squeezing greater value out of our assets. However, before we could embark upon that strategy, we needed to make sure that our services were customer focussed which meant that some basic improvements were needed.

First perceptions matter, so we set about improving our public areas for clients, to create welcoming business-like spaces and we mirrored this approach within the organisation of work planning, supplies and materials management and our overall operations. We also needed to

make sure that we had the foundations of good business practices in place; timeliness of supply lines, invoicing and payments mechanisms and a complete review of our stock items and delivery arrangements.

We are now reaping the rewards of our efforts with some measureable successes for the service. We now host Knowsley's PFI Street Lighting Contractor SSE in our depot, which has generated much better asset use of our floor spaces and within the contractual arrangements we have agreed a five year Service Level Agreement for maintenance of their vehicles. Included within the agreement is a five year lease agreement for a depot office and external compound, all of which helps with managing the cost and usage of our property based assets.

We have also been successful in securing over 30 Service Level Agreements for the maintenance of our local school minibuses. This not only helps us generate new income but it also helps the schools as well, as they have reassurance that they are complying with their legal obligations. As well as ensuring the safety and wellbeing of their pupils travelling in the minibuses, they are also complying with the stringent legal requirements on the roadworthiness of minibuses.

As well as more obvious clients like schools, we have successfully collaborated with other public sector organisations such as Knowsley Probation Service, signing a five year Service Level Agreement for the maintenance of six vehicles, storage and parking spaces, plus rental space for the placement of two storage containers (used by the probation service during community pay back activities).

Knowsley is now also home to the regional division of the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) with a five year lease agreement for an office area, workshop and car parking. This has brought significant investment by DVSA in developing the office and workshop facility. The DVSA is now able to carry out initial on-site roadside checks using Knowsley's depot and weighbridge and we are currently exploring the possibility of night time rental of our LGV test lane and vehicle maintenance facilities.

All of this has delivered much needed external income – achieved whilst also improving the service for both our in-house and external customers. We have so far achieved approximately an additional £60,000 of income per year from fleet maintenance contracts together with a further £130,000 per year from office and depot rental. We have also expanded our customer base, mitigating the risk relating to

any potential future loss of internal work and we are successfully utilising our spare capacity.

The journey has not been without its challenges. We have had to make improvements to our operational procedures for work orders, invoicing and documentation; whilst also competing with, or indeed being better than, main dealer repair times. We have also had to ensure that we develop our workforce skills for the more diverse fleet range we service; from a hand-held grass cutting mower, light vans to winter gritting and refuse collection vehicles! This additional training is money well spent as it builds up our future capacity and helps to retain our unique selling point of being able to maintain a complex and diverse fleet.

There has also been a need for new and additional stock and supplier accounts in the fleet maintenance stores, given the increased number and types of vehicles we now maintain. We have been mindful to calculate the benefits of increased income against any risk to the council as well as achieving a balance between the competing priorities of our internal and external clients.

Moving forward there are future opportunities that we would wish to explore, such as additional private MOTs including minor repairs, additional school coaches and minibuses and of course working for our neighbouring authorities- but only where we are welcome - we don't have any plans to engage in aggressive cross-boundary tendering!

So if others are considering a business growth strategy in fleet and logistics services then my advice would be to explore the options and opportunities - but don't view it as a fast-track road to riches. You will need a measured and steady approach to develop your service offer and your client base, and to make sure the basics are in place. Keep your additional work as local as possible, the nearer it is, the easier it is to manage and respond. Take enough time prior to and at the start of any new contracts to make sure that you have everything in place to make a long term success of the project; if you start badly it will be difficult to recover your reputation.

In many ways the public sector can be the best place for local collaboration between other public, private or quasi-public sector agencies. Very few businesses or services operate without some transport requirements; so don't be afraid of the challenges! The potential to reap rewards and improve your in-house service is an opportunity that is well worth exploring.

Contact: Damian Walshe, Fleet and Logistics Manager,  
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Email: [damian.walshe@knowsley.gov.uk](mailto:damian.walshe@knowsley.gov.uk)



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# Conwy County Borough Council implements Symology's Insight solution for its Public Right of Way System

*Conwy County Borough Council has been expanding the use of Symology's Insight System across its infrastructure since 1998, a careful and gradual adoption that includes UKPMS, Customer Services, Gazetteer Maintenance, Highways Maintenance, Bridges & Structures and Street Lighting. The expansion of the Insight System is set to continue as Conwy looks at incorporating many additional features, such as recreational areas, tree management, gritting routes, tramways and cemeteries. One area that has moved into full operational use is Public Rights of Way – a significant milestone as it heralds full operational integration between Conwy's departments. We talked to Sophie Birchall-Rogerson, Asset Management Technician, and Andrew Wilkinson, Head of Neighbourhood Services at Conwy County Borough Council, to get the background on this implementation.*

## Introduction

Conwy's Public Rights of Way (PRoW) team is responsible for the overall management of all the area's rights of way, including dealing with obstructions, diversions and maintenance, modification and creation or rights of way applications and maintaining the County's Definitive Map and Statement. Recently, it became a legal requirement to include PRoW in the monthly Local Street Gazetteer (LSG) submissions to the GeoPlace Hub.

According to Sophie Birchall-Rogerson, Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC) were running well ahead of the new requirement to get their PRoW network into a system capable of managing, maintaining, importing and exporting the LSG in the standard BS766 DTF 7.1 format. "In 2008, CCC was one of the first Authorities to integrate their PRoW's into the Local Street Gazetteer (LSG) courtesy of the Insight System. A major driving force was Streetworks Notification as we appreciated that without the PRoW's being integrated into the National Street Gazetteer (NSG), there was no mechanism for the notification of both Internal and Utility works. Also, we were in the middle of implementing Insight for Bridges and Structures and a great many of these assets within Conwy are located on PRoWs. This meant that without a LSG record they could not be linked into the system."

Although additions and improvements were made to PRoW handling, new corporate efficiency drivers recently emerged that spurred on new developments and led to today's integrated system as Andrew Wilkinson explains. "Conwy has recently implemented a radical organisational change, merging three departments into a new Environment, Roads and Facilities (ERF) service. The restructuring completely changes how front line services are managed, supported and delivered,

with a focus on area-based working and improving the way our assets are inspected and maintained. Incorporating a comprehensive Public Rights of Way system into our asset management system was a logical and necessary step and leads to a better service for our residents, businesses and visitors."

The benefits of using the integrated solution were immediate, says Sophie Birchall-Rogerson. "Every record within Insight is linked to the Street Gazetteer which includes Works, Assets, Customer Service Requests, and Streetworks Notices. Insight provides us with a mechanism for capturing the whole life cycle of a street/right of way and the associated infrastructure. This allows for a customer service request to be received in our centralised call centre, logged into Insight against a specific PRoW or a PRoW asset, which automatically generates an inspection. Mobile working is also facilitated, with customer service inspection requests being directed to the appropriate Rights of Way Officer's mobile device automatically. The inspection is recorded and sent back to the main system with any associated works being raised direct from the inspection and, if required, the Streetworks Notification can be created automatically in the background. If necessary, a works requests is generated and sent to the Contractor and, when the job is closed, the original Customer Service request is updated and closed, having captured the full life cycle of the request."

## Streamlining the Solution

Sophie Birchall-Rogerson says, "The ERF department incorporates 3 former departments – Highways, Environment and Property Services, which is a massive service area. Insight was initially only used for Highways related operations, but we are starting to use the system across other operational areas within the new department."

## Advertorial

The combination of Insight's expandable base and the good support structure we have in place, means we can move away from just traditional highways usage and maximise the cost-efficiency of the system. Gap analysis has been undertaken in an effort to rationalise the number of additional systems, software licences and functions within the new department. There are obvious advantages in creating a single point of source data, and ensuring all sections are operating to the same procedures via shared ideas, shared knowledge and shared reports."

On the management of the PRow assets, integration of other structures, and also the new mobile solution, Sophie Birchall-Rogerson says, "CCBC undertook a 100% survey of the PRow Network to record the location and condition of PRow assets which are all recorded within the Asset Register.. All assets are referenced geographically which allows us to report on and interrogate the assets both spatially and non-spatially. In terms of coverage, flexibility and efficiency, the coverage from the mobile solution for the inspectors is generally very good. At first, the mobile mapping was found to be very slow due to the sheer volume of data being downloaded to the device, so this was split into smaller geographic areas which worked much better."

### Updating and Implementing the System

From the beginning of the project, CCBC's PRow management team were at liberty to perform a phased implementation process completely in-house, with no strict deadline, enabling them to take extra time to perfect the new system. The specific timescale involved was to undertake a 100% survey of the PRow network which involved surveying all the routes and picking up the entire asset inventory. Conwy's PRow network covers a massive space, due to the fact that Snowdonia National Park is located within its geographical area. After two years, approximately 90% of this survey was completed.

Once the survey of Conwy's PRow network was completed, the implementation process was performed in stages over the course of several years. Sophie Birchall-Rogerson explains, "The implementation was all done in-house and was not a formal project so it took longer than it would have under a strict project. Phase 1 was adding the PRow's into the LSG which we did as a manual process as it allowed us to check that the data was correct. Phase 2 involved using the Customer Service Module to log and record customer service requests and to help manage enforcement issues/notices. Phase 3 involved creating a PRow Network to enable us to undertake inspections and Phase 4 was the mobile working which involved undertaking inspections and asset collections on the handheld devices. Overall, the project has taken a few years to complete as Rights of Way Officers were actually surveying and collecting the data whilst out on site but this method allowed us to ensure our data and assets are as up to date and as accurate as possible."

### Training and User Experience

On the subject of training for the new system, Sophie Birchall-Rogerson says, "We phased the implementation of the project and any associated training. Conwy has a dedicated asset management support team, so the majority of system development and training is done in-house. We provide on-site training for mobiles and classroom style training for the main system. All system users are provided with comprehensive training documentation and manuals. Training is individually tailored for new staff who are completely unfamiliar with the system, this is usually dependant on their ability and the individual requirements of their role."

As with any shift to a new software solution, the transition to the new system has also suffered some minor issues. However,



these problems were quickly taken into account and addressed by Symology. Sophie Birchall-Rogerson explains, "The only real issue we had with the software was the mobile mapping. The large PRowdataset impacted quite heavily on the performance of the mobile mapping and the time to both upload and download data to and from the mobile devices was unacceptable. This was reported to Symology who revamped the mobile software to provide a better, more enhanced solution. Conwy are eager to get the most out of the system, so we always maintain a list of enhancement requests that we send off to Symology for consideration. More often than not these requests are seen to be good developments and are actioned by Symology within good time. There will be lots of future developments as Conwy will continue to actively develop the system. We encourage system users to suggest new and better ways of working daily in order that we are getting the maximum benefits from the system."

### Working with Symology

Sophie Birchall-Rogerson comments, "Conwy's longstanding relationship with Symology and the urge to constantly improve the way we deliver services has led to many system enhancement requests being logged with Symology, many of which have been delivered. This has allowed Conwy to drive the system and use it more innovatively in ways in which haven't been considered previously by other systems or Authorities. The close working relationship is key to our operations, allowing us to have input into the direction of the product roadmap. At times, Conwy are quite demanding customers as we want to continually strive to do better and to do this we need to develop the systems we use and get the most out of them. Symology will take on board any enhancements that are practical and will be beneficial across the board and that it is very important when you are using a system that is driven by continual change and it is adaptable service-wide."



# Acting against the deluge

## *Phil Brennan and Lorna Box consider how councils can help mitigate risks and ensure effective community-based responses to floods*

Local authorities were at the heart of emergency responses to the severe floods that hit the UK last winter, bringing misery to families, businesses and entire communities, and they have a crucial role to play in both helping mitigating risks and ensuring effective responses to future incidents.

APSE's Flooding and Water Stewardship seminar in Oxford examined possible causes of the floods that occurred between December 2013 to February 2014, highlighted commendable examples of local authority flood management leadership and considered lessons that can be learned to guide future actions.

The question of the impact of human behaviour upon extreme weather events has been hotly debated and was considered during the seminar. Dr Chris Huntingford, climate modeller at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, reviewed current research analyzing whether there is any possibility of a human influence on events of the type experienced in winter 2013-14 – that is whether it is a result of burning of fossil fuels. Dr Huntingford is among the authors of an article on the topic, which was published in the academic journal *Nature Climate Change* shortly after the seminar. He discussed the scale and significance of last winter's floods, when the total flow for England and Wales as a whole was the highest for a three month period in records stretching back to 1961 and described meteorological conditions, ground saturation and coastal erosion that occurred during this time.

Dr Huntingford told delegates that that no single extreme weather event can be directly attributed to raised levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. However, much research is being undertaken to understand if carbon dioxide enrichment could trigger higher probabilities of unwelcome meteorological occurrences. He outlined research from sources including the United Nations and an EU study, which suggests that the majority of the expected increase in flood risk is due to expected socio-economic development rather than changes in atmospheric conditions. This raises the issue of the importance of careful planning of housing and business developments when near to flood-risk areas. Further information on the work of Dr Huntingford and his colleagues is contained in APSE Briefing15/07/January 2015.

The seminar also featured a presentation on developments in property level flood protection for homes and businesses by Peter May, technical director at JBA Consulting. Association of British Insurers figures showing that claims for flood damage had reached £426m by January 2014, not to mention the stress of damaged homes and property. While sandbags and improvised protection have been used in crisis situations, the Government is keen to encourage more local authorities to set up property level protection schemes, he said. He described how manual and automatic measures such as flood proof doors, door barriers and air-brick covers can be used for flood protection. He also discussed how resilience measures such as raised electric sockets and storage of paperwork and valuables above flood risk level can help reduce food damage.

Raising flood awareness and empowering communities to take action is also an important aspect of ensuring adequate preparation for severe weather events. Paul Hendy, operations director of the Scottish Flood Forum, gave a presentation to the seminar on supporting flood risk communities. He discussed rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating communities following emergencies. He stressed the importance of multi-agency working in helping communities bounce back from disaster and cope better in future.

APSE's research publication, '**Local Water: The challenge and the prize for the ensuring council as a steward of water**', was also launched at the seminar. This contains case studies showing

effective local water stewardship in practice, which include: Belfast City Council's multi-agency flood resilience forum, Cheshire East Council's strategic approach to flood risk assessment; Glasgow City Council's measures to conserve, recover and reuse water; North Tyneside Council's water cycle strategy; Oxfordshire County Council's flood forum and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's response to a huge tidal surge.

The report shows how APSE's 'Ensuring Council' model can help join up local government's responses to water issues affecting their localities. The stewardship role of local authorities and maintenance of core capacity to provide services are among the guiding principles of the ensuring ethos, which has been developed as part of APSE's research partnership with De Montfort University. APSE's chief executive, Paul O'Brien, commented: 'The ability to manage flooding and other extreme weather crises is increasingly important as experts believe these will become more frequent in future. It is therefore vital to ensure councils are able to plan for water related events, respond to emergencies and manage and maintain infrastructure in a way that minimises risk and maximises benefits. Effective water stewardship is a way in which councils can properly co-ordinate their strategic responsibility for environmental sustainability, their day to day delivery of environmental services and their emergency planning remit.' Ways in which local authorities can maximise their water stewardship role include: establishing a pan-council project group to oversee integrated water management; collaboration with other authorities and organisations and identify opportunities for shared services, considering how assets such as parks and other public spaces can be water stores during flooding; and regular performance reports to monitor progress on water stewardship.

APSE is continuing to explore all these themes in advisory groups, with partners and through briefings and seminars and by supporting our members to achieve their aims in the delivery of flood defence and resilience schemes. We believe that the Local Water that the National Planning Policy framework should include that all new commercial and residential buildings in water sensitive zones are required to be flood and drought resilient. We have also argued that all budgets and job-roles related to flood or drought defence should be ring-fenced in the event of any re-structuring of environment agencies or other support organisations.

Local authorities face severe financial constraints and are not in a position to act in a global manner despite the global nature of extreme weather events. Councils are, however, in a strong position to influence practical elements of people's day to day lives. As such they can use their stewardship role and consider ways in which they can influence the impacts of severe weather events in their locality and over the short and longer term. This means asking a series of questions, such as: 'What do you want your locality to look like in 10, 50 or 100 years' time? What does your council need to do now to ensure it will look that way? How can the Ensuring Council help in making this happen? What are the strategic and front-line steps that need to be taken towards effective water stewardship and how can these be joined up in a meaningful way?'

Addressing the challenges that flood risk and other impacts of climate change pose will require long term action plans, which in turn will require cross-party support and collaboration between various sectors in the local, regional and national arena. Those local authorities brave enough to take tough decisions should see themselves as being at the vanguard of an inevitable process. The alternative of sitting back and agreeing to act only when others have agreed to do the same is a far more ineffective and expensive option.

Contact: [pbrennan@apse.org.uk](mailto:pbrennan@apse.org.uk) or [lbox@apse.org.uk](mailto:lbox@apse.org.uk)

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# Engaging and delivering biomass installations in schools:

## A Northamptonshire Case Study

**N**orthamptonshire County Council is one of 11 partners within the European funded project ZECO2S which aims to develop a community-focused zero carbon certification scheme for use across Europe. Within ZECO2S Northamptonshire County Council has implemented a series of practical projects contributing to CO<sub>2</sub> reduction across the communities, mainly focusing on schools, including behavioural change activities and the installation of biomass boilers in four selected schools.

From October 2012 the Energy and Carbon Management Team at Northamptonshire County Council worked to select schools suitable for biomass boiler installations by combining technical feasibility analysis with an intensive communication and engagement strategy, through which four oil fired schools were finally selected. The engagement process proved to be challenging, with schools withdrawing from the project along the process due to several concerns on the technology and the day to day running of the systems.

Northamptonshire County Council has facilitated the whole project on behalf of their schools. The Council ran a procurement process for full feasibility studies and installations and worked with the supplier to finalise the design for each site. This had involved intensive consultation between the supplier, the schools and the Council. Planning permission had to be sought by the relevant authority; for the containerised units proposed for some sites this has required a planning consultation process involving different local authorities, residents and relevant stakeholders.

As part of the process the Council has also considered the development of a biomass supply chain that could be as local and as sustainable as possible. The focus was not just on the carbon savings but also on the best solution for the school and the local communities, in line with the objectives of the project ZECO2S. A study was commissioned to research the biomass resource available in the county, existing biomass suppliers, the financial viability of using each fuel type, the carbon balances associated with the possible supply chains and the wider benefits of using each fuel.

The first biomass installation has now been completed at Yelvertoft Primary School and another three are ongoing and expected to be delivered by the end of 2014. This is the first Biomass retrofit project on a school site undertaken by Northamptonshire County Council.

Fitted at no cost to the school, as entirely co-funded by the Council and the European Union, the estimated savings on fuel bills for the school will be about £1,000 each year on this specific site with an additional reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 20 tonnes annually, an 85 per cent reduction on previous output.

The biomass boiler installed at Yelvertoft is an Austrian KWB Pelletfire boiler, housed within an Ashwell Bio Heat Cabin. KWB are a leading Austrian boiler manufacturer whose boilers offer advanced patented technology resulting in high efficiency and reliability, together with low emissions. Ashwell Bio Heat Cabins are assembled in Leicestershire and offer a complete and cost effective solution. They incorporate the



biomass boiler, fuel store, pumps, pipework and electrical connections and are ready to 'plug in and go'. They can be easily incorporated into an existing heating system enabling the old boiler to be kept as a backup. The cabins are built within standard shipping containers and covered with wood claddings, enabling the heat cabin to blend in with the environment and the existing school buildings. In the case of Yelvertoft the oil boiler has been kept as a back up system, and the school have asked to enclose the oil tank and waste bins within a wood fence attached to the boiler cabin.

The proposed boilers for the other three schools are still Austrian KWB Pelletfire boilers, in one case a containerised unit will be delivered as for Yelvertoft, while an internal installation within the existing boiler room has been chosen for the other two schools, where space allows.

An opening ceremony was held at Yelvertoft School, to celebrate the commissioning of the biomass boiler. The event was an opportunity for pupils, parents, school staff, residents

and representatives of different local authorities to see the biomass running and to learn more about the biomass installation and what it means for the local school and community by talking directly to the Council and the biomass installer. The Council Waste and Energy Education Team were also at the event to provide educational activities and games to the pupils on the day. The event was really successful and all attendees confirmed their enthusiasm and satisfaction about the new system. The same opening event will be organised for each schools once installations are completed.

*The installation of the biomass boilers is being co-funded by Northamptonshire County Council and the European Regional Development Fund through the Interreg IVB North West Europe Programme. For more information on this case study please contact the Energy and Carbon Management Team at [lowcarbon@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:lowcarbon@northamptonshire.gov.uk)*

## Becoming a zero emission community

The European Commission has committed to ambitious long-term targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Those targets foresee to hold global warming below 2°C compared to pre-industrial temperatures and to ensure Europe's transitions towards becoming a low-carbon competitive economy. To meet these targets, it will be necessary to apply energy efficiency measures as well as to produce local low-carbon (renewable) energy.

Innovative communities take advantage of these developments. They implement suitable governance structures and management systems and commit to sustainable economic growth, through a significant and continuous improvement of the communities' GHG balance. Reducing dependency on fossil fuels and utilising local potentials for efficiency and renewable energy lead to increased employment and greater economic performance within a community's own boundary.

Against this background an international partner consortium including 10 scientific institutes, private enterprises, and local authorities from 4 North Western European countries, led by the Institute for Applied Material Flow Management (IfaS), Germany, began the ZECOS project in 2010. Within this project a Zero Emission Management System (ZEMS) was developed which may be adopted by communities throughout the EU. The feasibility of the ZEMS has been successfully trialled in 5 partner communities: Morbach in Germany, Seraing in Belgium, Peterborough City Council and Northamptonshire County Council in the UK and Ballynagran Community in Ireland.

The Management System is based on the following crucial pillars:

- A Zero-Emission-Concept including a material flow analysis for identifying energy efficiency and renewable energy potentials, an Energy and GHG balance in accordance with internationally acknowledged standards, an economic action plan for measures to be implemented, as well as "green" financing schemes with particular focus on citizens' participation.
- Specific guidelines to successfully establish, implement, maintain and continuously improve the community's development. In addition, the guidelines include specifications on the requirements applicable to GHG emissions (including measurement, documentation and reporting) as well as creating Regional Added Value and employment.
- The appointment of a Zero-Emission manager within the community, encompassing a broad field of functions and responsibilities related to the ZEMS.
- A platform for member-communities for the purpose of networking and exchange of experiences.
- An Award and Certification System for marketing purposes

The ZEMS follows the Plan-Do-Check-Act management cycle, which is the key element of continually improving the community's development.

If you want to reduce GHG emissions, strengthen your local economy and environment and become a certified Zero-Emission-Community, we would be glad to send you further information on how to initiate successful future development for your community.

Contact: Sebastian Menze marking your email 'Response: ZECOS Project and ZEMS Management System' and email to : [s12daa@umwelt-campus.de](mailto:s12daa@umwelt-campus.de)

# Report back

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

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

## England

### Crystal ball gazing

On 27 February will see APSE's central region explore the future of local government with a panel of political speakers including Labour's Shadow Local Government Minister Andy Sawford MP, the Conservative leader of Kettering Borough Council, Cllr Russell Roberts, alongside Cllr Tom Beattie, leader of Corby Borough Council and David Cook Chief Executive of Kettering Borough Council. The panel will be joined by Professor Steven Griggs and Dr Melvin Wingfield of De Montfort University. To attend please contact Rob Bailey on [rbailey@apse.org.uk](mailto:rbailey@apse.org.uk);

### Thank you and welcome

APSE's central region passes on its thanks to Alistair Merrick for his time as Regional Secretary, including APSE National Secretary, during the past year and welcome back to Caroline McKenzie of Gedling Borough Council, who has stepped in as our new Regional Secretary. Welcome also to Warwick District Council as new members of APSE in Central Region. We look forward to your involvement.

### London Transport

APSE's South and South West region hosted a day seminar exploring compliance issues in Transport operations on the 29 January 2015 with speakers including Nick Denton, Traffic Commissioner for the South East and Metropolitan Area, and with contributions from the Freight Transport Association and the Haulage Association.

### Conservative Councillors Association Conference 2015

APSE ran two workshops at the CCA conference 2015 on the role of local authorities in reimagining the local high street. The Workshops were addressed by Cllr Paul Findlow of Cheshire East Council and chaired by Cllr Robin Brown of Northamptonshire Council. APSE also addressed one of the main plenary sessions on the theme of Municipal Entrepreneurship and income generation. Contributions to the debate came from Cllr Jonathan Owen, Deputy Leader of East Riding of Yorkshire Council, who spoke about East Ridings' innovative approach to health and well-being through its leisure centres work with GPs' and commissioning boards, and Mo Baines, APSE Head of

Communication and Coordination who outlined the legal powers and freedoms available to councils to take an entrepreneurial approach in service delivery.

## South and South West Events

APSE now has a host of new events in the South and South West and recently held a Highways and Street Lighting group in Oxford with Andy Stephenson from Cornwall Council providing an interest presentation on finance issues for Highways managers distinguishing between capital and revenue expenditure. Phil Brennan of APSE updated the group on APSE work stream on highways efficiency projects.

Forthcoming events include a South and South West Renewables and Climate Change Group which will be held in Oxford on 3 March with speakers including Cornwall, Peterborough and Southampton Councils. A Housing Construction and Building Maintenance advisory groups will take place on 10 March in Cambridge. For details about APSE in the South and South West of England please contact Lorna Box, APSE Principal Advisor for the South and South West on [lbox@apse.org.uk](mailto:lbox@apse.org.uk)

## Wales

### Renewables and climate change

APSE Wales has now launched it's new Renewables and Climate Change group and a further group meeting is planned in the coming months. This new group will look at the issues of how climate changes impacts on local authorities from flooding through to municipal energy schemes. To get involved in this group contact the new APSE Principal Advisor for Wales, Wayne Priestley on [wpriestley@apse.org.uk](mailto:wpriestley@apse.org.uk)

### The Local Government (Wales) Bill

APSE is continuing to work on the reform agenda for Wales and has prepared a briefing note on the Local Government (Wales) Bill. This was introduced on 26 January 2015. The Bill enables preparations to be made for a programme of local government mergers and reform, and includes provisions to facilitate the voluntary merger of 2 or more principal local authorities by April 2018. APSE would welcome the views of APSE members in Wales on the draft Bill. To get involved please contact Wayne Priestley on [wpriestley@apse.org.uk](mailto:wpriestley@apse.org.uk);

## Scotland

### The Road to 2020: The Future of Elected Members in Scotland

APSE Scotland played host to a fringe event on Friday 14 November during the course of the SNP conference to explore the findings of its research publication 'The Road to 2020: The Future of Elected Members in Scotland' with a panel of speakers including Kevin Stewart MSP, Richard Lyle MSP, Paul O'Brien of APSE and Dr Melvin Wingfield of De Montfort University with Councillor Craig Melville, of Dundee City Council in the chair.

Labours' Spring Conference in Scotland will also host a fringe event on the same theme exploring the future role of elected members. For details please contact Louise McMillan on [lmcmillan@apse.org.uk](mailto:lmcmillan@apse.org.uk)

### Building for Scotland

APSE Scotland will host its annual Building, housing and renewables seminar in Dunblane on 12 and 13 February including a panel of political speakers from across the Scottish Government. For more details contact Louise McMillan on [lmcmillan@apse.org.uk](mailto:lmcmillan@apse.org.uk)

### Creating a recipe for success

Work continues in APSE Scotland working with partners to take forward the implementation of the free school meals initiative. APSE has continued to look at the practical and operational implications of the policy whilst supporting the endeavour to improve child nutrition and health. For details about this work stream or to get involved in the project please contact Louise McMillan on [lmcmillan@apse.org.uk](mailto:lmcmillan@apse.org.uk)

## Northern Ireland

### Are you ready ....

That was the question posed to APSE Northern Ireland delegates attending a high level conference on all things performance management which was held at Lisburn on 20 January. Attended by over 60 delegates this event explored the new performance management framework in Northern Ireland stemming from the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The event was addressed by Teresa Donaldson of the new Lisburn and Castlereagh Council. APSE's Head of Performance Networks Debbie Johns outlined developments specifically for the new authorities to include data collection on a new Northern Ireland Suite to potentially include, Planning, Economic Development, Building Control, Culture and Corporate Performance.

### Cemeteries and Crematoria

APSE held an event, on the issues of Cemeteries and Crematoria looking at a range of issues and examples of best practice management of this service with speakers from Wigan, Dacorum, Glasgow and Carlow Councils. The event was kindly sponsored by Plotbox.

#### **Conservative party conference**

*Below centre: APSE workshop, discussing the role of local authorities in reimagining the high street*





# Energy and democracy

***Municipal energy represents an opportunity to reconnect politics and democracy to citizens and communities argues Mark Bramah***

**T**he major global struggle of the second decade of the 21st Century, despite what commentators may say, is not the struggle against extremist Islam and the emerging so-called Islamic Caliphates, but is rather a struggle for control over scarce natural resources. It is an enduring theme which was expounded many years ago by the late author and activist Richard J Barnett in his book "The Lean Years: Politics in the age of scarcity" (1980). Energy represents the most precious of commodities on which all modern economies and societies depend and without which they could not function. Overreliance on fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas not only threatens the future of the planet's delicate eco-system, but also continues to thwart attempts to move towards a more balanced and sustainable energy system. The recent collapse in oil and gas prices simply puts off the day of reckoning and could lead yet again to increasing complacency across the spectrum. But we know that despite virtual U.S. energy independence as a result of fracking and a slowdown in the growth of the Pacific Rim economies including China, that prices will eventually begin their inexorable march upwards once again with all of the

disastrous implications for people, communities and businesses.

We live in an age of apathy where people are disengaged from democratic politics and declining turnouts at national and local elections is leading to a narrower and narrower franchise. Whilst the recent Scottish referendum bucked the trend in engaging citizens in the political process, nonetheless disillusionment with mainstream politics and political parties is rife. Only nationalist politics of the left and right seem to have any appeal to the concerns of the electorate and that is set to have a seismic impact on the duality of the British political system at the coming General Election.

It is my contention that in order to reconnect people to politics and to make politics matter, government, both national and local, has to engage people much more fundamentally in the democratic process and that is about alleviating the feeling of powerlessness in the face of unseen and unaccountable global forces. It is no great surprise that pan-national energy companies and the banks top the list of public grievances about corporate greed

where democratic institutions and the regulators are seen as helpless to do anything about it. But municipal and local energy has the potential to be one of the key drivers in a renaissance of democratic governance, not exclusively, but certainly a significant component in reconnecting the public to the polity.

Why should this be so? Well if you consider for a moment the costs and pressures on public services, the impact on business of rising energy costs, and the increasing numbers of fuel poor in our communities driven by the onward rise in fuel prices and the monopolistic practices of the big energy companies; regaining control through decentralising and democratising our energy system and infrastructure has the potential to put people at the heart of new distributed energy networks giving them a stake and a say in the management of the energy resources at our disposal. This is in addition to the wealth of economic, social and environmental benefits that greater energy efficiency and meeting more of our energy needs through renewables sources can bring.

Municipal energy is not only desirable it is essential in tackling the blight of fuel poverty, building sustainable local economic growth and establishing a more pluralist and competitive energy market. Rather than wind turbines and solar farms attracting opposition from the Nimbys and being criticised as damaging to local amenity, they could instead become the catalyst for people owning a stake in

their own local energy economy whether that is community or civic led. Energy democracy therefore should be the slogan and watchword for the new architects of a municipal energy future.

The first industrial revolution was based on coal and steam and led to great social upheaval and constitutional reform in the early 19th Century. It coincided with a period of unparalleled economic growth and rising relative incomes. The second wave of industrialism linked coal and electricity in the early 20th Century coincided with the birth of mass democratic politics and the emergence of the welfare state. Both these stages of economic development were driven by 'dirty' energy. Consider for a moment the potential of a 'clean' energy revolution in the early part of the 21st Century leading to a new era of growth and prosperity in which democratic institutions are revitalised and regenerated and democratic politics flourishes once again through investment in a municipal energy future.

And there is another positive by product, that it might just help us mitigate climate change and meet our international obligations to reduce carbon emissions and save the planet in the process.

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Contact: [mbramah@apse.org.uk](mailto:mbramah@apse.org.uk)



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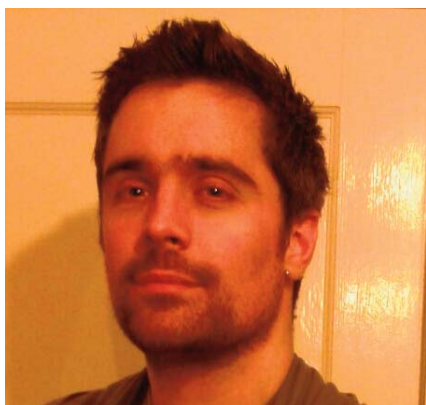
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# What is 'Civic' Energy and why is it important now?



**T**here has been a great deal of interest recently in local authorities and the energy sector. It seems as though government, industry, and civil society have woken up to the notion that local authorities have

sufficient capacity, local knowledge and a desire to 'do something' about energy futures. Exactly what this might be remains elusive. Are local authorities there to reduce fuel poverty, plan renewable energy development, own renewable energy assets, become energy suppliers or manage the carbon emissions of an area? Research at the University of Leeds is interrogating exactly what the opportunities for local authorities are in the energy system, and how these opportunities might be captured.

Up until WW2 municipalities had a large stake in the energy sector. Post-war reconstruction and modernisation in the UK was achieved by Nationalisation and standardisation. This meant that, cometh the

ideological moment; there was a standardised system to privatise. The entire edifice of system privatisation was built on the notion that large, centralised fossil fuel and hydro stations in a competitive market would reduce systems cost. In the supply market, the idea was that rational customers would select the supplier that could offer them the best deal. This led to substantial early investment in gas fired plant and a notionally competitive supplier market.

Incumbent utilities argue this has provided a stable and largely affordable system which has underpinned the economy reliably since the 1990's. However, critics argue the generation and supply markets are not delivering either decarbonisation

or local value, the supply market is moribund and consumers are not getting a fair deal, fuel poverty remains intractable, and trust in energy utilities is as low as ever. At the same time, new technologies in distributed generation, smarter electricity grids, and smart meters are offering new opportunities in the energy sector for local stakeholders. There has been a steady growth in micro-generation and community energy, new interest in the ownership and management of the electricity grid, and innovative business models for local supply and demand management are being trialled.

Many of these new market entrants are co-operatives, communities and municipalities looking to take a stake in the energy system. Recent rhetoric from Government has looked to support this with the Community Energy Strategy. Importantly however, local authorities, larger charities and housing associations have been less of a focus of government attention, this is a missed opportunity.

My research is principally concerned with urban energy systems. I investigate the economics of urban energy finance, generation, distribution and supply. I research how cities can interact with different levels of the energy system.

I would argue that the values of community generators, energy co-operatives, charities, housing associations and municipalities are compatible. By working together, there is a much better chance of these non-state, non-corporate organisations being able to do something meaningful in the energy sector.

Taken together these organisations are more than just 'community energy'; I argue a new concept is needed for this sub-sector in the energy system. I think it is useful to think of these non-state, non-corporate organisations as a 'civic' energy sector because they have compatible values of local economic development, self-governance, energy equity, and decarbonisation. I use the term 'civic' energy sector as the classical roots of the word are tied to the citizen of a particular place, and their role in civic participation.

This isn't (just) the vanity of an academic hoping to draw on classical references; geography and place are profoundly important to energy futures. There are some opportunities in the energy sector that can only be delivered by local actors. The linking of local generation to serve local needs and the aggregation of load and demand response make much more sense if done geographically. Also, local authority led energy efficiency schemes are more trusted than those of private providers.

Some commentators have called for local authorities to become full energy utilities, others favour partnership approaches with local communities and others still would see local government running much more ambitious energy efficiency programmes. What is important going forward is a clear understanding of the scale of these opportunities, how they can be implemented, and what needs to change to make them happen.

I work with a team of researchers at the University of Leeds trying to answer these questions. The 'IBuild' project brings together researchers on urban infrastructure systems to identify new business models for the delivery of critical infrastructures in developed cities across the UK. In this project we are researching the options for local authorities to use local energy infrastructure as a tool for economic development.

My work on urban energy systems is part of the 'Realising Transition Pathways' consortium which undertakes forward-looking analysis of energy system transitions and the role of state, market and civil society actors. This research consortium is investigating the institutional and governance needs of distributed, urban energy systems and their incorporation into existing centralised energy networks.

I also work with the 'Climate Smart Cities' project which has demonstrated up to 10% of regional GVA is wasted in UK cities in the payment of the energy bill. This work is important as it demonstrates just how much energy is a factor of local economic performance, and the opportunities for re-localising energy value.

Building on the outputs from these research areas, we have also been working closely with national Government, bringing these messages up the agenda of DECC and the regulator.

How we both reduce the energy wasted in the regional economy, and find ways to recapture value from the energy that is used, is a fundamental question for 'civic' energy systems. APSE is running a Big Energy Summit this month to deepen the debate on local authorities and energy futures. There is momentum in this area and officers and elected members in all local authorities can get involved. Yes energy is a complex sector, but it isn't beyond local authorities to affect substantial change. I was a waste and environment policy officer at a large unitary authority in the mid 2000's when municipal waste recycling went through a revolution, from a very low base to over 50% of waste reused or recycled. I wonder how involved municipalities can be in the 'civic' energy revolution.

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# Reviewing grounds maintenance with a 2020 vision

***Glynn Humphries, Director of Environment & Street Scene, and Ian Jones, Street Scene Manager at Wakefield District Council, explore the operational practicalities of reviewing street scene services as councils grapple with tough budget choices.***

**N**ever before has the cost and efficiency of local service delivery been so closely scrutinised, and the Grounds Maintenance service area is no stranger to these tough times. Within Wakefield we wanted to explore the true costs of the service and include individual service accounts that collectively make up the core budget for the Grounds Maintenance service. As the information available was a little patchy we set out to undertake a more comprehensive review of the service and we decided to do this using a four stage action plan.

Our four stages were in effect firstly quantifying our land and feature volume; secondly identifying appropriate method and maintenance regimes; thirdly establishing our resource requirements and then as the last stage establishing our cost of service following the review of the other areas.

Perhaps our service review is best taken in the context of how we arrived at our then current operating model. Up until 2004 Wakefield's Grounds Maintenance service was an 'in-house' standalone Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) providing services to the majority of the Council's departments, such as Parks and Leisure Services, Education, Housing and Highways. Our 'contract' arrangements were driven through Central Government initiatives such as

Compulsive Competitive Tendering (CCT) and Best Value and so on, which is a familiar story in many council frontline services.

The service had annual income targets of circa £6,000,000 brought in through delivering these contractual arrangements and in addition continually raised further money through small development projects. All in all, a robust service model delivering what was required, to meet the standards identified, within the contractual documentation.

The service had both contractor and client sections within the structure of the business, and a key function of the client section was to produce the contract documentation through the preparation of a large number of Quality Specifications and Bills of Quantity. Schedules were generated based on the Bills of Quantity and distributed to the operation teams who functioned within an area based approach.

As a result of this structured approach the delivery of the service could be organised and monitored in a methodical and consistent manner, leaving the whole of the district in receipt of a uniform product.



However, during 2004 in a bid to improve efficiencies the Grounds Maintenance service was merged with Street Cleansing which gave birth to the Neighbourhood Environment service. This new world of service delivery stripped out the then deemed 'stupid' elements of CCT, these elements contained tasks such as Schedules and Monitoring and were replaced with the new idealism of 'Empowerment'.

The 'Empowerment' model was expected to result in the teams working within their designated geographical areas to generate a sense of ownership and pride within their neighbourhoods, we even offered 'transfers' to staff to allow them to work within the neighbourhoods in which they resided. This approach simply didn't work and the result of this led towards a service delivery model with no consistency of service and no method of measuring the anticipated improved levels of service delivery.

Initially the income target of circa £6,000,000 was offset via budget devolvement from the differing departments, who had previously commissioned our services, but over the years this figure has been reduced by approximately 50%.

Unfortunately this non-prescriptive model of 'Empowerment' stuttered along for 9 years and as part of the review we were determined that this should not continue.

We were tasked with identifying the breakdown of cost associated to the individual service departments for whom we deliver the service. This sounds straight forward but the budgetary detail around the devolved revenue budgets was no longer available for varying reasons so we set about a wide scale series of work studies; although like many authorities the work study skills were hard to find - in the name of modernisation this is a skill set which had been gradually eroded within the public sector! However we found a practical solution in revisiting our old Quality Specifications. Although these were largely remnants from the days of CCT, these documents had survived as advisory documents and although they held no reflection on current maintenance practices, what they did hold was valuable work study detail on 'Contracted Hours' and 'Standard Minute Values' for previous contractual agreements. This level of detail held all of the required factors to identify workload profiles, so our challenge was on the basis of turning the old Quality Specifications, which numbered 2020 documents, to 'marry-up' to current maintenance regimes.

To enable this to proceed we initiated a working group containing a cross section of staff, from the frontline through to assistant managers, Trade Union Convenors and Shop Stewards. The working group undertook an enduring process of going through the 2020 QS documents, line by line, to rework the task requirement in a bid to reflect the agreed level of service delivery identified by the working group. These reworked documents provided the service with a true and 'up to date' profile of workload, cost per feature type, cost per service area and thus generating our much needed total cost of service.

Following the reworking of the QS documents and our newly updated information, which identified accurate workloads, we were able to explore the numbers of staff required. This again was new territory for the service, as previous staff numbers were based on work load profiles

compiled from old data containing spurious activities and thus providing establishment figures from a non-robust source. Conversely the new model identified a requirement for a core number of 90 staff, previous establishment figures were at 103, and this element of savings alone provided the service with a year on year revenue saving of approximately £267,170.

The lower establishment figures have also lead us to enable efficiencies in Fleet Transport including vans and mowers which has also achieved a substantial saving of £ 147,000 per annum.

Thus providing a collective year on year saving of £414,170, which is evidenced in the successful outcomes of the review, and in these days of ever reducing operation budgets, is a more than useful amount of savings and efficiencies.

The reworking of the QS documents has provided us with data on each of the generic tasks, this detail in turn was placed within each of the thirteen four weekly periods which make up our grounds maintenance year.

The next stage of our process was to work towards retaining a consistent level of service delivery, which had been lacking since the move towards the 'Empowerment' model. As previously stated this model has been far from a success and in these days of constant scrutiny the continuation of this approach could well have put the in-house service in jeopardy.

To support demand for a consistent level of service delivery as we move forward we are introducing a monitoring process based on the principles of the NI 195 (DELEQS) surveys, in which we have devised an image based approach on levels of acceptability in line with the ABC&D principles within the DELEQS model. This monitoring framework will work in conjunction with newly produced prescriptive work schedules and together will generate the appropriate quality information much required by the team delivering the service.

We feel our structured approach to undertaking the grounds maintenance review at Wakefield; involving the frontline staff, Trade Union Convenors and Stewards, plus Officers, has enabled us to build a model of service delivery which is lean, efficient and well positioned to answer any future questions on the cost and quality of our service.

We now have a service which is fit for purpose, lean in demand, reduced in cost, and ready to meet the future challenges as we travel on the turbulent financial journey towards 2020.

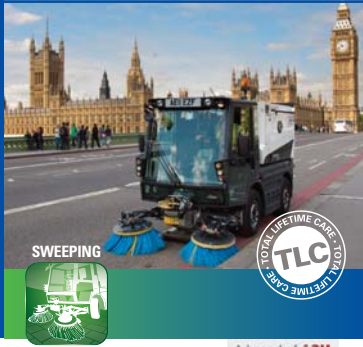
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