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Editorial

Summer lovin' with Greg Clark

At the recent LGA conference in Harrogate Greg Clark, the new Secretary of State for Local Government, told councils that they are "on the brink of a once in lifetime opportunity to be masters of their own destiny". It was a message received with slightly more enthusiasm than the funny, but indifferent speech, delivered last year by Eric Pickles who warned that he wouldn't be 'firing up the DeLorean' to accommodate any moves towards what he described as the 'Prescott vision' of transferring powers from Whitehall to simply create more bureaucracy. Mr Clark is keen to suggest that the devolution now on offer to English Councils will be about devolving powers down and not creating new strands of regional government or structures. But what exactly is on offer?

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill is already being marshalled through the House of Lords; but it is clear that for all the talk of Localism this is a piece of enabling legislation. It is the Secretary of State who will decide what is included within any new Combined Authority Orders, leaving the legislation open to charges of favourable application to those areas or councils most able to romance the Minister. Whilst the much vaunted devolution deals are craved by many in local government it is now questionable whether this form of devolution will bring about summer lovin' with the new Secretary of State or whether we end up with the tardy ends of a lost holiday romance.

Either way APSE wants to see devolution enhance and nurture the capacity and capabilities of local government frontline services. If we truly believe in a localism agenda then the people in the know about the gaps in services, and what we could do better, are those interacting each and every day with our citizens. Delivering better services locally is not the preserve of policy wonks; it is the bread and butter of local governments' frontline. From leisure services that are increasingly part of a 'health and leisure' solution to housing services that aim to meet the complex, inter-generational and support needs of some of our most vulnerable people, it is an imperative that frontline services are at the commissioning table. The frontline needs to be regarded as part of the solution, not a barrier to improving outcomes at a local level. May be then we can truly have a summer of love for local governments' frontline.

Best wishes

Paul O'Brien, APSE Chief Executive



Housing the nation

Kate Henderson, of the TCPA and Paul O'Brien of APSE explain the findings of a new research report 'Housing the Nation: Ensuring councils can deliver more and better homes' which looks at the barriers and opportunities for local councils to renew its social housing stock.

Just a few decades ago housing was regarded as such a cornerstone issue that all main political parties openly competed, promising voters that they would deliver more homes than their political rivals. However since the late 1970s we have seen a steady decline in new homes being built from a high then of 300,000 new private and council homes per year to less than half this number today. In 2013 just over 2000 new council houses were built, and of those just a 1,000 council houses were built in England. What these figures demonstrate is that the UK is suffering from a chronic

under-supply of new homes, and the lack of council homes is having a detrimental impact on our local neighbourhoods and indeed local economies.

Within our research we set out to explore the barriers to local councils building more homes. Whilst many councils reported that they were seriously concerned by growing housing demand, being outstripped by supply, we also found that homes classed as 'affordable' are often beyond the reach of those on increasingly long housing waiting lists, estimated to have now reached around 1.7 million in England alone. Housing services are also

stretched by well reported changes in our population demographics, struggling to accommodate the specific needs of an ageing population and disabled residents. And with rising tides of homelessness we still find too many homes lying empty. So with demand increasing what are the barriers to supply and why are councils unable to meet these rising demands?

We found a number of barriers to building new homes. First of all the supply of suitable land for development is a major barrier with some areas suffering from the constraints of land supply, due to Green Belt classification, and in other areas available land that is derelict comes with high remediation costs. Lack of development activity was also identified where low land values have led to limited viability for new developments. Notably, given recent policy commitments from the Conservative Government made in the Queen's Speech and Summer Budget, many councils cited the impact of Right to Buy on both housing stock availability and finances for new homes.

What rapidly became clear from our research is that we need to fundamentally shift the way in which housing is both planned for and financed. It is also clear that one size will not fit all. Arguably we don't have one housing crisis in the UK but a multiplicity of local housing crises, with different factors, that need localised planning and solutions, but crucially within a national framework. We have made a series of recommendations including a coordinated approach to both land assembly and planning for new homes, at a local and sub-regional level; this will enable better long-term planning on where and how we can develop land for much needed new social and affordable housing. Whilst we welcome the recent focus on housing, as part of the Chancellors announced devolution plans, details so far are scant. Changing decision making structures will not be enough on its own if we do not address the lack of funds available to councils to do more to develop new homes.

To fund new homes the report calls upon Government to lift the Housing Revenue Account borrowing cap which would, even as a single measure, enable councils to significantly increase their capacity to build new homes. We are also calling for a review of the treatment of housing investment against the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR). The UK is at odds with the rest of Europe on this issue and by taking housing investment out of this archaic categorisation we could exempt housing spending from the deficit reduction strategy. This measure would create more bang for the public buck, by using housing and construction to kick-start local economic growth and bolster jobs and skills.

The report highlights that the reduction in funding available to councils for social and affordable homes, through planning obligations, is currently being eroded. Over two thirds of councils surveyed identified that the dominant model for delivering social and affordable housing is currently through the planning process, via

developer contributions. However, measures such as the central deregulation of permitted development, the introduction of the Vacant Building Credit and exemption of small sites of 10 homes or less from section 106 contributions – along with the overarching viability test set out in national planning policy – all mean that the funding available to councils has been diminished. We are calling on Government to look at a more balanced approach to the viability test, to reserve the Vacant Building Credit and small site exemption from Section 106 agreements, and to hand control of permitted development back to councils.

In spite of the immense pressures councils are taking innovative approaches to local housing need. Flintshire County Council has set up North East Wales Homes and Property Management, a council owned company that owns, leases and manages properties across Flintshire. It is the first local authority in Wales to set up its own housing company. A key issue that the new wholly owned company has sought to address is improving choice to people over 55 who may wish to downsize, freeing up family homes for younger and growing families. In Birmingham their Municipal Housing Trust is now the largest provider of new housing - both for rent and market-sale across the city. The Council allocates homes for rent with a priority for existing secure tenants who want to move home. Private sector delivery partners market the homes for sale to the general public. Birmingham have a great ambition to build 80,000 new homes by 2031, and a lifting of the HRA means the council could build 18,000 of these new homes.

The cross-boundary issues of planning for housing is given context when we look to West Lothian Council in Scotland. Its proximity to Edinburgh is reflected in its Local Plan which commits to meeting not just the needs of West Lothian but 'to meet both local requirements and requirements generated from Edinburgh and elsewhere'.

As George Osborne promises a process of devolution, including housing responsibilities, now more than ever local government must make its voice heard. We cannot and should not settle for a half-way house 'fix' on the housing crisis. Council Housing helped to rebuild the nation after the Second World War. With the right national framework and local financial freedoms, coupled with strong and determined local leadership, we will be in a great place to take forward the mantle of social housing and once again councils can be at the heart of building homes for the nation.

Contact: Paul O'Brien is the Chief Executive of the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) and Kate Henderson is the Chief Executive of the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)

To order copies of 'Housing the Nation' priced at £20 for APSE members and £40 for non members please email wlee@apse.org.uk



Challenging the compensation culture in Highways claims

Merv Murphy of Halton Council explains their new approach to fairly challenging highways claims.

Halton Borough Council is a unitary authority in the north-west of England covering the towns of Widnes and Runcorn. The Council manages approximately 1,500km of highways network. Like most other highways authorities, the Council receives large numbers of claims each year relating to damage or injuries allegedly caused from potholes and other highway defects.

Our approach in Halton is to consider each claim on its merits and to fairly compensate those individuals with genuine and meritorious claims. However, we take a robust approach to defending any claims that we believe to be suspect. Many claimants clearly exaggerate the extent of any damage or injury suffered. Worse still are the claimants who seek compensation from the Council for an injury or loss suffered as a result of some other cause.

It is a sad fact that local authorities are often considered to be 'fair game' by claimants and their solicitors. As the number and total cost of claims against the Council continued to increase we decided to review our approach and get tougher:

- In 2013 we took the decision to manage our casualty claims in-house. We have an enthusiastic insurance team who were up for the challenge. Their local knowledge and determination to do the best for the Council has helped us to defend claims more rigorously. It also delivered the Council a substantial saving on external claims handling costs.
- We started working more closely with our Highways Department and introduced regular meetings to jointly agree a strategy for dealing with each claim.
- We developed an excellent relationship with our legal advisors, Weightmans, who provide regular training sessions to officers from the insurance team and the Highways Department. We also introduced regular claims surgeries with Weightmans to discuss our litigated claims.
- We were keen to send out a message to claimants and their solicitors emphasising the Council's zero-tolerance of fraud. We included fraud warnings on our claims correspondence and have

made extensive use of social media as part of our routine fraud checks.

I firmly believe that the best deterrent to fraudulent claims is to take action against the fraudsters themselves and make an example of them. The problem is that it is usually very difficult to prove that a claim is fraudulent. However, in 2014 an excellent opportunity presented itself to pursue a claimant whom we believed had tried to defraud the Council.

The facts of the case are that the claimant alleged he had fallen off his moped as a result of a pothole in the highway. He brought a personal injury claim against the Council seeking damages of up to £50,000. With legal costs this sum could have easily exceeded £75,000. There was no dispute that the claimant had fallen off his moped. However, police records suggested that the accident had taken place some 30 metres before the alleged pothole and that the claimant had simply lost control of the vehicle and hit the kerb. A witness statement from the police officer was obtained and following exchange of statements the claim for damages was discontinued.

We could have closed the claim and left it as another successfully defended claim. However, we discussed the matter with our legal advisors and recognised that there was very good evidence that the claim was fraudulent and an opportunity for the Council to pursue proceedings for contempt of court against the claimant. This was possible because he had verified a statement of truth on court documents that contained facts that were untrue.

We realised that contempt proceedings would involve considerable work and expense. However, we took the view that it was in the public interest to pursue the matter. We firmly believed the claimant was guilty of fraud and that pursuing a contempt action would send out an important message to potential fraudsters in Halton and across the country.

An initial hearing was held where the Council successfully obtained permission to bring proceedings for contempt against the claimant. A final hearing took place in the High Court in Liverpool on 28 April 2015. At the hearing the judge held that the contents of the claimant's Particulars of Claim and witness statement were false. He stated that the claimant thought "he could make a bit of money by asserting that the cause of the accident was a pothole" and it was "plain as a pikestaff" that his false account was intended to (and did) interfere with the course of justice. In sentencing the claimant to six months in prison, the judge reiterated the compelling comments of Moses LJ in *South Wales Fire & Rescue Service v. Smith* [2011] that fraudulent claims undermine the justice system, impose a burden on honest claimants and that those making false claims should expect to go to prison. He added that dishonest claims have "a pernicious effect on the insurance industry, local authorities and society as a whole".

The decision was a major success for the Council, which we sought to capitalise on by generating publicity in the local and national press and various professional publications. It

is too early to see what impact it will have on claim volumes but I feel it has sent out a strong message. Fraud is not a victimless crime and local government can't afford to continue to sustain the losses of recent years.

A few key pointers for any authorities planning on prosecuting insurance fraudsters:

- Pick your battles carefully. The Council must be able to prove contempt to the criminal standard, i.e. beyond reasonable doubt.
- Ensure that you have the support of senior management and elected members (if in a local authority environment);
- Ensure that you have experienced and competent legal advisors;
- Have your Communications people on board and ready to publicise the story should you succeed!

Contact: Merv Murphy is the Divisional Manager for Audit & Operational Finance at Halton Borough Council
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Churchyards and Cemeteries – teeming with life?

What do you associate with churchyards and cemeteries? Death, burial and remembrance come to mind. These are of course the principal functions of burial sites and it is important not to lose sight of this. They are and can be so much more however.

Burial sites are a fantastic source of local history. Monuments tell us a great deal about how people lived; their occupations, life spans and the styles or fashions of the time. They give a picture of human migration and immigration; showing the prevalence of particular surnames in a parish, migration from the countryside to towns or cities and immigration of different races and cultures into an area. The rise and fall of particular industries and occupations may be traced through monuments as well as providing a tangible link to prominent and powerful people through time.

Burial grounds are also excellent refuges for wildlife. Whether within a built-up, urban setting or a rural, agricultural one they encapsulate a fragment of our

country as it was prior to the recent land use changes that have caused such dramatic losses in plant and animal species. Have a think about how Britain would have looked when the cemeteries and churchyards in your area were consecrated. Many cemeteries date from the mid-nineteenth century and churchyards are often far older than that, in fact some churchyards are thought to have been sited on pagan places of worship and pre-date Christianity in Britain. Species once widespread can remain within the refuge of a burial ground and the unchanging nature of these special places allows populations to build up. An old churchyard can contain hundreds of lichen species, some of which may be nearly as old as the monument or wall on which they are growing. Species-rich, flowery grassland has declined by

about 98% since WWII but may well be present within a Victorian cemetery or an old churchyard. Look out for an array of wild flowers in areas with long grass or for waxcap fungi where the grass is closely mown. Waxcaps have a range of colours from yellows and pinks through to scarlet and brown. Butterflies, grasshoppers, bees, hoverflies and solitary wasps may well be present along with birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals such as shrews, voles, weasles and foxes. Burial sites truly are arks for biodiversity with some species living entirely within a single site whilst others, such as hedgehogs, travelling nightly between gardens, hedges, parks and, of course, burial sites. You may be lucky enough to have an ancient or veteran yew tree in your local site. Treat this with respect and marvel at its longevity. Britain contains a fabulous number of these green monuments which can be thousands of years old. Current site managers form a link in a long chain of people who have cared for these trees back through the centuries.

So, full of wildlife but also full of human life? People really enjoy and value churchyards and cemeteries. We go to them to find peace and tranquillity, to see nature, read inscriptions and gain a sense of our place within the history of our community. They are usually fully accessible, within walking distance of most people and have a great deal to interest. They are great places for volunteers to get involved in a wide range of ways. Monument recording is particularly popular at present and digital databases can make these records accessible to all. They are great places to get to grips with wildlife recording, learning to separate the different birds contributing to the dawn chorus perhaps. Their size makes them particularly pleasing places for practical tasks, you can spend a few hours clearing scrub or raking up grass cuttings and be able to see a real difference at the end of it.

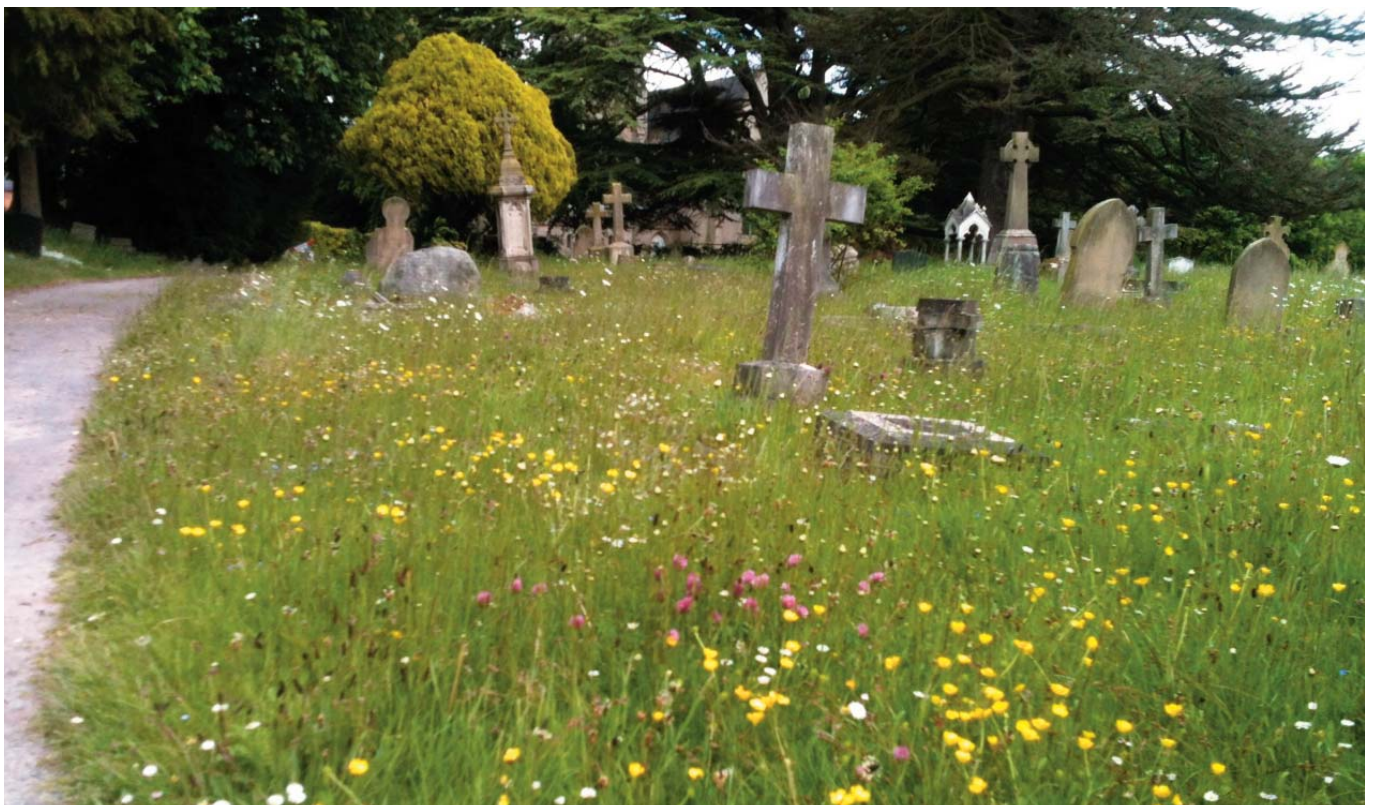
Burial sites also make great outdoor classrooms where children can investigate local history, mini-beasts, signs and symbols and a great deal more. Within walking distance, children can get out of the classroom without the need for an expensive bus trip.

Caring for God's Acre is a conservation charity dedicated to burial grounds of all types. We are funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and are here to support site managers with information and advice and to encourage more people to get involved in discovering these fantastic places. Have a look at our website; www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk and you will find a great many resources. There is an Action Pack and an Education Pack both of which are available in English and Welsh. There are case studies to give you inspiration, a Botanical Companion to help you find out if you have species rich grassland and lots more. Get in touch with us either by phone or email or else by attending one of our conferences which are taking place in Norfolk, London, Warwickshire and Lincolnshire in 2015. We would love to hear from you, how you are currently looking after your sites, what your aspirations are, and whenever possible we will advise and help.

Web: www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

Contact: Harriet Carty

Email: harriet@cfga.org.uk





Changes are on the menu in Plymouth school meals service

Brad Pearce, Managing Director of newly formed CATERed, a new company owned by Plymouth City Council and its' schools explains how this innovative new company was formed.

CATERed is a new company that has been formed by schools and Plymouth City Council. It is different to many arms-length council companies because of our unique partnership with schools. Whereas many council owned catering companies are wholly owned by the local authority, selling services to schools, we are jointly owned with schools holding 49% and the council holding 51% of the company. Staff from the Council's Education Catering Service transferred out of the Council on 1 April 2015 under TUPE and are employed by the new company.

The company is run as a co-operative trading company with all surpluses reinvested back into the company to be used for the ongoing development of the company and management of the

school kitchens and services to children. We have a Board of Directors made up of 8 Headteachers, 2 council officers and one managing director. The Board will make decisions on behalf of all schools in the Company.

So why did we feel the need to create CATERed? Well a primary reason was to ensure that children and young people in schools across the City could have access to great tasting, high quality food whatever their background or school they attended. CATERed enables all schools to have an affordable and sustainable school meals service without impacting on other school budgets and also for Headteachers and Governors to support the service but for it to be delivered by people best placed to do that – experts in school food delivery. As 49% of

the company is school owned this means some 61 infant, junior or primary schools and 5 special schools, and one complementary education, service are all shareholders in the business as well as maintained schools and academies. Whilst 51% of the company is Council owned it is not funded by the Council because of the way in which we are structured as a trading operation.

The company operates using schools' budgets which they have, for the last two years, "pooled" informally in an entirely altruistic, shared and co-operative manner to support each other for the greater good of all schools and all pupils.

The company pooled budgets include: -

- Budgets for free school meals (FSM)
- Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)
- Equipment maintenance, repair and replacement
- Income from paid for meals (junior pupils)

Surpluses achieved through economies of scale, food purchasing, staffing and management along with increased income from paid meals is retained by CATERed but can then be reinvested in the service.

We see the benefits of CATERed as being able to create support to all schools to ensure that high quality school meals can be provided right across the City. We also feel we can ensure those with the expertise and ability to deliver the service are the ones who are responsible for that delivery.

The work to create the company has taken over two years of planning and has come about through the work of the School Food Steering Group which was made up of Headteachers, Governors, School Business Managers and other Council officers. Schools were clear that they wanted a service that had the child at the centre of everything it did and to make food fun.

The principles that the group worked to were: -

- 1) Children need to be involved in shaping the offer
- 2) Building on strengths and what the majority of schools have said via their decisions to pool
- 3) Collaboration and cooperative model values
- 4) Vision for a longer term sustainable City wide offer

CATERed delivers because it ensures all schools have an affordable and

sustainable school food service without impacting on other school budgets and also for Head teachers and Governors to support the service. Importantly, the service to customers is delivered by people best placed to do that – experts in school food delivery. We think our delivery model is unique because this is the first time schools have agreed to share their budget and resources in an open and altruistic way for the benefit of children and young people; And if we needed further proof of that we only need to consider 67 head teachers and 67 governing bodies along with the Plymouth Association of Primary Headteachers (PAPH) all voting for the same thing at the same time. Now that's what we call unique!

Schools have recognised that the way schools are funded, through delegated budgets, create winners and losers. Many schools simply didn't have sufficient funds to maintain the service or were too small to be able to cover fixed costs such as labour, maintenance on kitchens and equipment, and food purchases.

Through the Board, decisions will be made about how to spend the pooled funds to ensure great tasting food, made from scratch every day using fresh, local, seasonal and organic ingredients in safe and clean environments and individual school production kitchens across the City.

CATERed and our staff work closely with the individual schools, tailoring the service, wherever possible, to their unique set of values and share ideas with them all. This is a huge part of the ethos of the new company because we firmly believe that every child should be entitled to, and have, access to high quality, great tasting and affordable school meals. Whilst the provision of school meals is a statutory requirement, and responsibility lies with School Governors, as catering professionals within Plymouth City Council we were acutely aware that the benefits of school meals, health and nutrition, go well beyond ticking any box to simply say we have met the basis standards. The shared vision from the start was one that was steeped in quality, but also recognising that if we put children and young people at the heart of what we are trying to deliver this would bring about its' own successes, with increased uptake of school meals.

Meal numbers in Plymouth have increased significantly over the past two years. With the introduction of Universal Free School Meals we are forecasting that we will serve around 2.5 million meals in this full academic year (Sept 14 – July 15) – an increase of around 1 million meals



per annum. We are very proud of our across the board uptake on free school meals which is up 73% from March 2014.

Alongside the encouraging meal uptake figures we also make every effort to cook meals from scratch, procuring, wherever possible, locally sourced ingredients from our South West region and using fresh, local, seasonal and organic ingredients. We make over 86% of our meals from scratch each and every day and of course we work with our schools to ensure special dietary needs can be met wherever possible and provide details of allergens. Through our food procurement we also support initiatives such as 'Sustainable Food Cities', 'Sustainable Fish Cities', 'Fair Trade' and 'Food: Plymouth and the Plymouth Food Charter'. We know for every £1.00 spent the school meals service generates over £3.04 into the local economy. That is a tangible value to what we do and shows the value of our progressive food procurement policy. This positively supports local and regional food producers, growers, farmers and distribution alongside the 274 people who we employ directly.

We at CATERed know that we have a successful economic footprint and in the longer term we hope that we can demonstrate a healthy eating footprint for generations to come.

Contact: Brad Pearce is Managing Director of CATERed Ltd



Metal packaging key to recycling success

Recycling metal packaging is good news for council budgets, and with help from the metal packaging industry it's easier than ever to make a positive impact on recycling performance and the bottom line, says Rick Hindley, Executive Director of MetalMatters project managers, Alupro. Having already helped 50 local authorities to boost their recycling performance they are calling for more local authorities to work with them and discover the benefits.

The story of metal recycling is relatively simple to communicate to residents. As all metal packaging can be collected together in the home in the same bin, explaining the 'transformation' that used food tins, drink cans, empty aerosols and foil containers undergo when recycled reassures people about the value of recycling, so they engage easily and in turn recycle more.

MetalMatters is a partnership campaign that educates and motivates residents to recycle their metal packaging. Developed and

funded by the metal packaging manufacturers, reprocessors and fillers, MetalMatters works in partnership with councils and their collection contractors to promote metal packaging recycling at the kerbside.

The campaign can be delivered to every household in a local authority area, targeted to specific rounds or even across an entire Waste Partnership, as happened in Kent for example:

The Kent Resource Partnership worked with Alupro to roll out the

MetalMatters campaign over three months in 2013, increasing the recovery of metals by 9%, and aluminium by 35%. The high value of the metals resulted in £411,000 additional income for the Partnership, giving a complete return on investment in just 4.5 months.

A MetalMatters campaign is based around two leaflet drops, typically six weeks apart, which inform and then remind householders about what and how to recycle and explain what happens to metal packaging after it is collected.

The leaflet is tailored to fit with existing local authority or waste partnership branded campaigns. A wide range of template materials is also available to complement and reinforce the message, including livery for collection vehicles, newspaper, radio and outdoor advertisements, and materials for websites and social media channels – all helping to create a fully integrated marketing campaign. To help get the message out 'on the ground' Alupro helps to organise press launches and provides displays for roadshow events.

Project managers Alupro provide assistance at every stage of the campaign, providing a professional and stress-free solution to boosting recycling rates.

Paul Vanston, Kent Resource Partnership Manager, said: "Of course, for some households, this campaign may have started their recycling activities for the first time. For others, the recyclability of products like aerosols and foil may have been news to them. Either way, the communications successes have translated into tonnage increase, which is good for the councils and good for the reprocessing economy."

MetalMatters was first piloted in 2010 and since then 50 councils have benefitted from the MetalMatters campaign, reaching 3 million households.

In 2014 the MetalMatters campaign was delivered in the London Borough of Lewisham, which has a high density of flats and estates using communal bins. Recycling participation was low and contamination rates were high, so the Council looked to MetalMatters to help improve the situation.

Two MetalMatters 'Transformation' leaflets, adapted to reflect the Council's recycling service, were delivered to every home in the Borough six weeks apart. A launch event was organised in Lewisham Shopping Centre where Council Officers could meet local residents and talk to them about the tins, cans and aerosols in their shopping bags.

The messaging was backed up with vehicle livery, local newspaper coverage and social media activity over the three month campaign period.

At the end of the campaign, the amount of cans collected for recycling had increased from 5.9kg per household per year to 6.6kg, generating an additional £31,000 for the Borough. The positive impact on recycling behaviour has lasted well after the campaign ended, and it paid for itself in less than nine months.



Councils up and down the country are boosting their recycling rates with a little help from industry. With long-lasting impacts and excellent return on investment, it's a proven way to educate and motivate residents to recycle, without costing the earth.

MetalMatters is funded by the metal packaging and recycling industry and leading brand owners. It is supported by the Waste & Resources Action Programme and managed by Alupro

Contact: If you would like to run a MetalMatters campaign in your local authority please visit www.metalmatters.org.uk, call 01527 597757 or email metalmatters@alupro.org.uk



Working with Volunteers in Gedling

Jane Richardson, Parks Development Manager at Gedling Council explains the importance of training volunteers.

We all know parks development and maintenance is changing rapidly with huge budget reductions, as a result the public are increasingly becoming aware that services are being reduced, yet expectations remains high. In our authority we have encouraged new community 'friends groups' to form and have a 'hands on' role with the development and management of our parks and open spaces. In association with APSE training and the Institute of Groundmanship (IOG) we developed two courses to assist our volunteers and the staff working with volunteers.

Volunteer Training

I work in partnership with twice as many parks friends groups now compared to just a few years ago and recognised a need to provide basic training for the volunteers in terms of safe tool use, event management, flora and fauna identification and visual tree inspections. Our volunteers were keen to undertake this training particularly members of newly formed groups, who weren't quite sure what was expected of them. It's great to be able to give something back to our volunteers, which in turn helps them to feel valued. As a result of their training the volunteers are now organising

their group to have a lead volunteer for basic maintenance activities on our parks and in some cases the groups are able to work unsupervised which frees up valuable officer time to develop new groups or offer more support to the newly formed groups.

Using Volunteers

Along with the volunteer training I think it's also important to focus on how we as local authority officers can support them in their role and get the most from their donation of time and energy. Whilst it's great we have more volunteers in our parks, staff

need to be aware of how to work with volunteers in a productive way, taking into account health and safety and meeting the expectations of the volunteer requirements. Being able to understand why people volunteer and retaining them is so important so I would recommend that if you work with volunteers both courses are very relevant and useful.

We have had great feedback from course attendees

'Good overall discussion of issues arising from engaging volunteers.'

'Enjoyed the amount of sharing ideas and general discussion. Good to hear how others put this into practice.'

'Very interesting course and good deal of practical and relevant information learnt.'

'A great opportunity to network with similar officer roles from other authorities and share best practice.'

Contact: Jane.Richardson@Gedling.Gov.uk

APSE training is looking for authorities to host future courses on 'Using Volunteers'. If you would like to follow the approach from Gedling you will receive 2 free places for staff to attend the event in lieu of providing a room and light refreshments. Please contact jkennedy@apse.org.uk for more details.

If you prefer to attend a public course please note we have the following courses available:

- 05 August 2015, Manchester
- 22 October 2015, Southampton

Do you need to provide direct training to your volunteers in parks related services?

APSE and the IOG - Institute of Groundsmanship - have developed a 1 day course that can be delivered on site at your authority in a parks setting on a mutually agreed date. This involves part classroom and part outdoor training on:

- Volunteering
- The requirements of managing events
- Health and safety and risk assessment
- The need for basic tree inspection
- Flora and fauna identification

Email Jan Kennedy on jkennedy@apse.org.uk



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Don't miss the boat on solar farms

Stephen Cirell explains why its still not too late to build a solar farm by next April and generate significant income for your authority



Over the past five years, my work with APSE has struggled to get over the message that solar farms are a credible way of both earning income for the authority, but more importantly changing (readily available) capital into (quickly diminishing) revenue. Fortunately, this message is now getting through and many authorities up and down the country are looking at the potential

of putting solar on their land assets. The policy agenda has been a bit of a rollercoaster during this time as well, with FIT rates changing and the Government starting to curtail the Renewables Obligation. But without going into detail, provided a solar farm is built by the end of March 2016, good rates of return are still assured.

But surely there is not sufficient time to do this if an authority has not yet got off the starting blocks?

Surprisingly, there is - with a little help from APSE Energy.

The reason is that APSE Energy is currently running a local authority procurement collaboration for land based solar PV. The contract notice has been published and the process will lead to a four year framework, of four contractors, being operational from September. The costs of establishing the framework are to be divided between the dozen or so authorities that have currently joined, meaning a cost of below £5k, with no further charges for using the framework thereafter.

The publicity surrounding the collaboration has led to a number of new authorities joining, even though they have not yet started work on their projects.

The major benefit of the collaboration is that any authority can use the framework and this means that no procurement or contractual work needs to be done. A simple mini competition to identify a contractor and price from the four is all that is required, and a huge part of the work, time and expense of a normal project has been removed at a stroke.

But that does not mean that there is not still much to do. The key elements of any solar farm project are planning consent and grid connection. Pre planning inquiries need to be made and a view taken on how easy it will be to gain planning consent. Discussions with the Distribution Network Operator need to be held to see what the position is with the grid. Many projects have floundered just because an affordable grid connection could not be secured. For this reason, you need a selection of potential sites.

But before these stages can properly be addressed, there is much preliminary work to be done. The key areas here are that sites need to be chosen and business cases prepared to show what the benefits to the Council will be.

APSE Energy has been undertaking this work for some time now. A local authority can draw up a list of land owned fairly quickly and the application of a series of requirements for solar farms will bring this down to a long list. Site inspections can be quickly undertaken to get the list to a shortlist. There may be ownership queries, other legal issues or the like to be considered but this is normally within the knowledge of the authority.

The Business Cases need to take into account the income and expenditure expected and this is normally what helps the executive decide to proceed. This is a complex task but the costs are available from the

market and other sources.

It is best to have a programme, rather than a project, as if there are difficulties in relation to a particular site that cannot be overcome, then the site can be dropped from the programme with the authority continuing with the others in the short list.

This work usually takes only a short time to undertake and then allows officers to present members with a report that makes definitive recommendations, based on a robust financial appraisal.

From the dozen or so authorities in the collaboration, over two dozen new solar farms will be built in the period to April. Considering that only three civic solar farms have been built in the five years to 2014, this demonstrates considerable commitment.

The solar PV industry can build solar farms incredibly fast now. This is illustrated by recent reports of projects achieving a build rate of a MW per day - that is 5,000 panels connected together in a field. This being the case, provided that an order is placed this side of Christmas, the contractors will still have time to construct all of the sites by the 31 March deadline.

Which means that if you have not yet considered a solar farm there is a window of opportunity and it is still open. The position becomes much less clear post April 2016. So what are you waiting for?

Stephen Cirell is an Associate with APSE Energy. He is the author of the book 'A Guide to Solar PV Projects in Local Government' which is available from APSE. Mark Bramah is Director of APSE Energy and can be contacted on MBramah@apse.org.uk.

APSE Scotland Fleet, Waste and Grounds Seminar 2015: Report Back

The Scottish Fleet, Waste and Grounds seminar is an annual event which allows local authorities the opportunity to listen to an excellent panel of key note speakers as well as view the largest trade exhibition in Scotland. This year's event was another roaring success with over 150 delegates attending from 31 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland and with over 110 trade exhibitions the delegates had no shortage of machinery and latest technologies to view during the refreshment and lunch breaks over the course of the seminar.

Miss Joan Aitken, Traffic Commissioner for Scotland opened the event to a full house, outlining the latest issues and responsibilities for Transport Managers. During the speech as well as emphasising the importance of licence checks for drivers, Miss Aitken also highlighted some key lessons for all to be taken from a recent public enquiry of Aberdeen City Council. The opening session was closed by Derek Mackay, MSP, Minister for Transport and Islands who addressed delegates with a review of the key areas for the transport sector as well as highlighting the strategic overview for the year ahead.

With delegates debating everything from fly-tipping to MOT testing, and from the financial pressures to recycling regimes, the days were filled with debates, ideas and innovation. Delegates were clearly also impressed by the trade show exhibition which allowed manufacturers and suppliers to highlight the latest technological developments to save councils time and money. All of the presentations from the seminar are now on the APSE website and can be viewed on www.apse.org. Go to our events page and click on past presentations.

The seminar ended with the announcement of the finalists and winners in the APSE Scotland 'Striving for Excellence Awards 2015'. Designed to recognise the successes of local government services in Scotland, these awards celebrate innovation in service design and delivery in the areas of Waste and Recycling Services, Fleet Services and Grounds Maintenance, Parks and Streetscene Services.

The awards are kindly sponsored by Zero Waste Scotland, SMA Vehicle Remarketing and Denis Eagle.

For more information about next years' awards, please contact Garry Lee on glee@apse.org.uk

The finalists and winners of the APSE Scotland Striving for Excellence Awards 2015:

Gold Award Winner for Waste & Recycling Services: Falkirk Council

Kindly Sponsored by Zero Waste Scotland

Waste and Recycling Silver Award Finalists

- East Dunbartonshire Council
- Falkirk Council
- North Ayrshire Council

Waste and Recycling Bronze Award Finalists

- Aberdeen City Council
- Angus Council
- Inverclyde Council
- North Lanarkshire Council
- Scottish Borders Council
- Stirling Council
- West Dunbartonshire Council

Gold award winner for Fleet Services: Dumfries & Galloway Council

Kindly Sponsored by SMA Vehicle Remarketing

Fleet Silver Award Finalists

- Dumfries and Galloway Council
- Falkirk Council
- Fife Council

Fleet Bronze Award Finalists

- Glasgow City Council
- North Ayrshire Council

Gold Award Winner for Parks, Grounds and Street Services: Aberdeen City Council

Kindly Sponsored by Dennis Eagle

Grounds, Parks and Streetscene Silver Award Finalists

- Aberdeen City Council
- Inverclyde Council
- Stirling Council

Grounds, Parks and Streetscene Bronze Award Finalists

- East Renfrewshire Council – Barcoding System
- East Renfrewshire Council – Rouken Glen Park

APSE: A living Wage Employer

APSE knew over a number of years that we paid a living wage but like many employers it was not something that we sought to ratify formally. However being a living wage employer is more than what we pay our own staff; It is about having a social conscience when we procure goods and services from our suppliers, like those we use on APSE events and seminars. It is also about ensuring that we keep pace with wages and inflation and regularly review pay rates.

Whilst we know that not all of our contractors and suppliers are yet paying a Living Wage this is part of our journey. APSE will continue to strive for other suppliers or contractors to adopt a living wage through our own processes and it is this kind of social pressure that we hope will nudge other employers in the right direction. The pyramid effect of questions being asked along the supply line is part of the Living

Wage Campaign's success which has nudged employers to reflect fairness in their wages.

More details about the campaign can be found on <http://www.livingwage.org.uk/>



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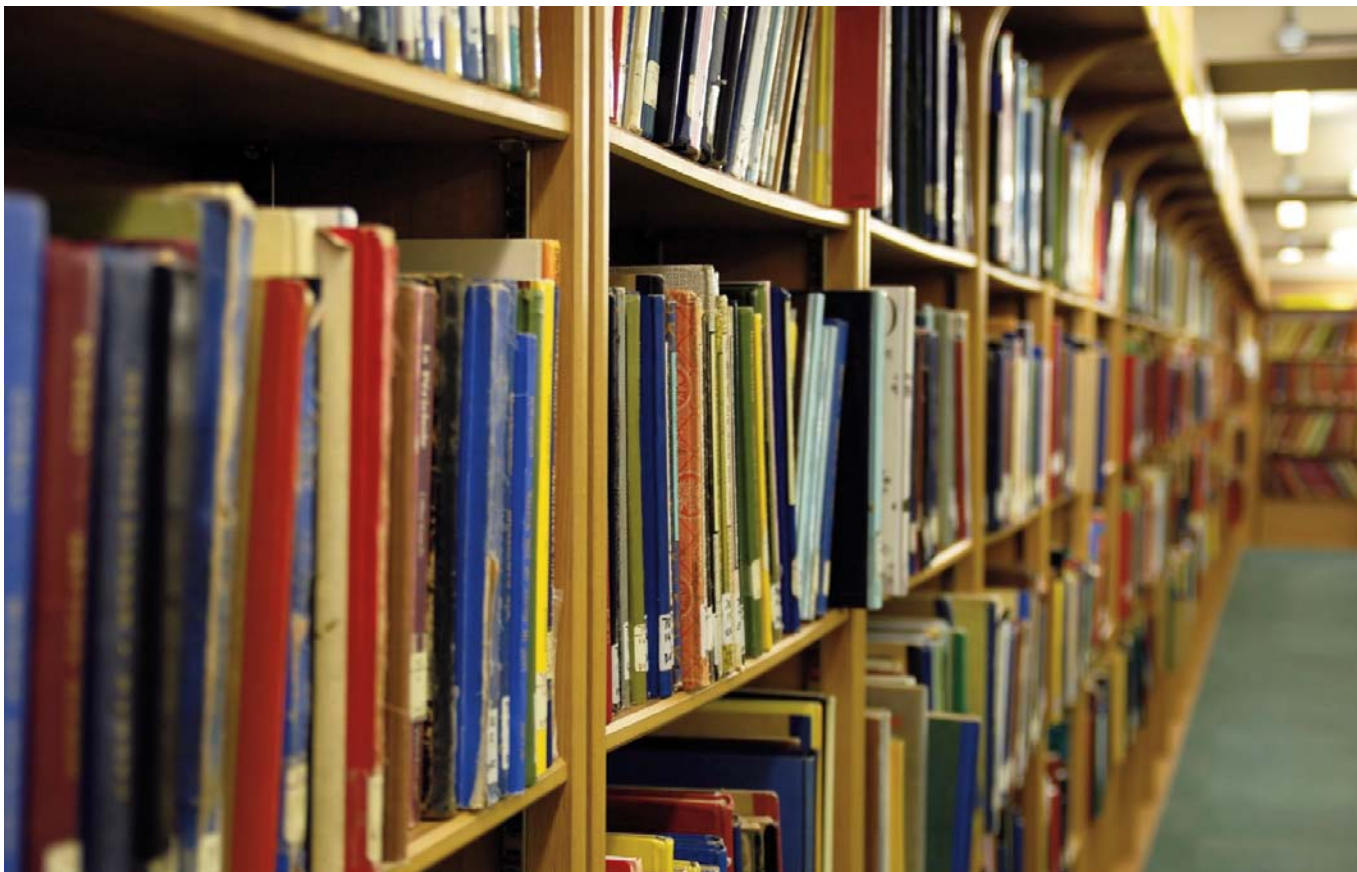
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24 Hour Book Worms.....

Peterborough Council adopts new technologies to help keep local libraries open

Peterborough City Council have approved and implemented a new way of delivering library services in Peterborough which will see all ten libraries stay open and for longer using self-service technology.

The new model has been developed by the city council and Vivacity using feedback received during a first round of consultation last summer and a second round which took place during the spring of 2015.

Under the new model, people will be able to access libraries for 375 hours per week as opposed to the current 261 through Open+ technology - that's 114 hours longer, the mobile library service and at-home service run by volunteers will continue as usual.

The model results in a reduction in staffed hours from the current 261 to 149. Staffed hours have now been matched, where possible, to when activities are taking place such as rhyme time and reading groups.

Councillor Lucia Serluca, cabinet member for city centre management, culture and tourism, said: "I believe that the model we have implanted offers people an enhanced service, without us having to close any of our libraries. At a time when many other councils are having to close libraries, I am delighted that we have managed to develop a service that meets the needs of our residents whilst making the savings that we have to in order to continue meeting the needs of the whole city."

Under the new model, individual libraries will be open for a set number of staffed and self-service hours each week. For example, Central Library, which is currently staffed for 40 hours a week, would be open for a total of 55.5 hours - 33 of which would be staffed and 22.5 using Open+ and assistants.

Open+ is free to join and existing library members will be invited to opt-in. Customers that are Open+ members will be able to borrow books

and other library materials, use library computers, take part in existing activities such as reading groups, knit and natter, story time and rhyme time and set up new groups to meet within the libraries.

Open+ technology can automatically control and monitor building access, self-service kiosks, public access computers, lighting, alarms, public announcements and customer safety.

There was a one-off cost of £170,000 to introduce the technology at all ten libraries, with an ongoing cost of £10,000 per annum. The library service currently costs £1.52million to deliver. It is managed by Peterborough's independent culture and leisure trust, Vivacity. The new model will save the council £305,000 a year and safeguard the libraries for the future.

Contact: mbaines@apse.org.uk

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Report back

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

Spring and early summer proved busy months for APSE with a range of conferences, meetings and advocacy activity on behalf of APSE members.

England

London Launch

APSE launched its housing research 'Housing the Nation: Ensuring councils build more and better homes' with a high level debate and event at the TCPA headquarters in London on the 2 June with speakers including TCPA chief executive Kate Henderson, Paul O'Brien of APSE and Cllr Matthew Bennett, Cabinet Member for Housing, Lambeth Council, Simon Bevan, Director of Planning, Southwark Council, Cllr Bob Price, Leader, Oxford City Council, Jo Mills, Director of Planning and New Communities, South Cambridgeshire District Council and Mary Parsons, Group Director, Place-making & Regeneration, Places for People. The full press release is available on the APSE website. Go to the news pages.

Raising the game

Manchester United Football Club played host to a policy seminar on the theme of Devolution, Transformation and Frontline Services on Friday 10 July with speakers from the Greater Manchester Public Service Reform Team, New Economy, Centre for Local Economic Strategies and TCPA. Contributions to the debate in involving frontline local government services were also made by Walker Morris Solicitors, APSE Energy, Vision Redbridge and Gedling Borough Council.

Presentations from the event are on the APSE website go to events / seminars / past presentations.

APSE secretariat to all party parliamentary group

Following the general election the All Party Parliamentary Group on School Food, chaired by Sharon Hodgson MP, has once again appointed APSE to provide its' secretariat support. Rob Bailey is the lead advisor for APSE on supporting this work with the parliamentary group. Contact rbailey@apse.org.uk

LGA in Harrogate

APSE attended the LGA conference in Harrogate in July running two strategic forums during the course of the event with one on Housing to explore the findings of APSE's latest research publication 'Housing the Nation: Ensuring councils can build more and better homes' and a further forum on using 'Nudge, Budge, Reduce' techniques to reduce demand on services.

Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors Conference 2015

APSE attending the ALDC conference 2015 held in Manchester with a workshop attended by over 50 liberal democrat councillors exploring housing issues with Mo Baines addressing delegates on behalf of APSE alongside Eastleigh Council Leader Cllr Keith House.

UNISON 2015

The UNISON local government conference was held in Glasgow on the 13 -14 June with delegates taking the opportunity to visit the APSE exhibition area within the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre.

Centralist agenda

The APSE Central AGM was held on 8 July at North West Leicestershire District Council, who were welcomed as new members to APSE. The AGM incorporated a seminar on 'Commercialism in Local Government' with speakers from Nottingham City Council and APSE exploring good practice case studies as well as the legal issues of trading and charging. To get involved in future APSE Central events please email Rob Bailey on rbailey@apse.org.uk

At the AGM Cllr Mark Pengally of Corby Council was elected as the Central Region Chair with Cllr Elias Mattu of Wolverhampton elected as Vice Chair of the Region.

All go in the South and South West

APSE's South and South West region is a rapidly growing area for APSE and in response to increasing membership within the region a series of exciting new events have taken place with up and coming events through to the Autumn and Winter.

Dates, venues and details can be found on the APSE website but groups open to APSE members in the area include:-

- Highways and Street Lighting Advisory Group
- Sports and Leisure Management Advisory Group
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport Advisory Group
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing Advisory Group
- Soft Facilities Management Advisory Group
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Advisory Group
- Renewables and Climate Change Advisory Group
- Housing and Construction Advisory Group

For more details on events in the South and South West check the APSE website or contact Lorna Box on lbox@apse.org.uk

Newcastle Gateshead Quays

Newcastle Gateshead Quays provided a stunning setting for the APSE Northern Annual General Meeting and Seminar with a theme on 'Neighbourhoods, Housing and Public Realm' with contributions from Andrew Marshall, Service Director of Housing and Economic Growth, Gateshead Council Cllr David Rose, Cabinet Member, Stockton on Tees Council, Isobel Nicholson and Nicola Wardle of Northumberland County Council and Charlie Tindill, Street Scene Manager, Wakefield Council.

Wales

Wales AGM

The APSE Wales AGM and annual seminar for Wales took place at Llandrindod Wells on the 15 July with delegates debating the changes facing Welsh Local Government. Speakers included Steve Thomas, CBE, chief executive of the WLGA and also Professor Colin Copus from De Montfort University

Talking strategy

The APSE service transformation strategic forum set off on a mini tour of Wales with two forums held on the 19 May at Swansea and 20 May Flintshire. The forums discussed the impact of the potential changes to the structure of Welsh local Government and the viability of other modes of reform.

Scotland

The Aviemore Show!

The Scottish Fleet, Waste and Grounds seminar proved to be a successful event hosting a huge trade show for the sector in Scotland. As well as the headline industry speakers the event was addressed by Derek Mackay MSP, Minister for Transport and Islands.

All presentations from the event can be found online within the APSE Scotland web pages. Go to www.apse.org.uk member's area/Scotland then events where you can download the presentations.

Performance networks

APSE Scotland's principal advisor Louise McMillan has been working with a number of Scottish authorities on gearing up for data completion training to enable the fullest participation in APSE Performance Networks. If your authority has training needs on data completion or making the most from your performance networks in Scotland please contact Louise for help on lmcmillan@apse.org.uk

Partner meetings

APSE Scotland continues to work closely with its partners and other public sector bodies and June and July has seen a further round of meetings with Zero Waste Scotland, on waste strategy and with Scottish Government on issues of health and nutrition in school food.

A day in the life of a councillor

The APSE Scotland AGM agreed a new piece of dedicated research on Governance and Democracy within Scotland looking at what a Scottish councillor does on a day to day basis. APSE Scotland is now looking for Scottish councillors who would like to get involved in this research. To find out more contact Louise McMillan on lmcmillan@apse.org.uk

Northern Ireland

Beyond 100 days...

The APSE Northern Ireland AGM and seminar took place in Ballymena looking at Northern Ireland Local Government following vesting day for the new authorities. Themed on 'The First One hundred days and beyond' the seminar held on 2 June included Derek McCallan, Chief Executive of NILGA and Anne Donaghy, Chief Executive, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, Dr. Joanne Murphy, Queens Management School, Queens University, Brendan Bonner, Head of Health and Social Wellbeing Improvement (Western), Public Health Agency and Paul Tripp, Environmental Services Group Manager, East Riding of Yorkshire Council alongside Sue Finnigan, an APSE Solutions associate. All speakers focused in on the different approaches to improving services and bringing together different cultures in a new organisational context.

Cllr Gerard Diver of Derry City and Strabane was elected as the proposed APSE National Chair and Ellen Cavanagh also of Derry City and Strabane elected as the proposed APSE National Secretary.

Below: Newcastle Gateshead Quays



apse annual seminar 2015

2-3 September 2015, Swansea

Brangwyn Hall, The Guildhall, Swansea, SA1 4PE

The Ensuring Council: Time to move forward on frontline services



Bookings for this event are now being taken!
Contact Vicky Starmer on vstarmer@apse.org.uk or
visit www.apse.org.uk to reserve your place

- Devolution and governance
- What it means to be an Ensuring Council
- Nudge, Budge, Reduce – demand management
- Channel Shift your citizens
- Using Behaviour Change to reduce demand
- A commercial strategy for the frontline
- Delivering on social justice
- Stewarding the local economic recovery
- Delivering on Transformation
- Jobs, skills and infrastructure
- Transitioning to a Green Economy
- Re-imagining school meals
- Municipal energy schemes
- Regeneration
- Environment and Public Realm
- Income generation
- Building new council homes