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Association for Public Service Excellence

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# Think Big Act Local

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# A message from APSE National Chair 2025/2026

**Cllr Tracey Dixon**

It is my great honour to accept the role of APSE National Chair for 2025-2026.

It would, of course, be remiss of me not to thank my dear colleague and friend Archie for his sterling leadership over the past year. Archie has steered APSE over the development of a new trading company, doing so whilst battling a serious threat to his own health, which we are immensely proud of. Of course, Archie could not have achieved these outcomes without the support of Andrew Kennedy as our National Secretary for the past year. I think it is fair to say they have been our 'A Team'.

I would also like to thank the wonderful Anita Brown for so kindly agreeing to act as my National Secretary for the coming year.

For those of you who know me, you will be aware that I am passionate about education and skills, and how we can support our young people and our local economies. In fact, I am enormously proud that in my own council, South Tyneside, for its work in this area. We now have the spades in the ground to start work on the relocation of South Tyneside College and South Shields Marine School, not only providing new regional skills opportunities but also supporting the regeneration of South Shields town centre.

Of course, skills will be needed if local government is tasked with the delivery of 1.5 million new homes - without a serious investment in the skills needed to build them, they will remain a pipe dream. We must not let hard working families down – I therefore want APSE's housing network to be laser focussed on the skills to deliver these targets.

My commitment to the skills agenda is also why I am excited by the opportunities for APSE member councils presented by the devolution agenda. The English Devolution Bill provides an opportunity for collaboration between strategic, sub-regional, and regional, collaboration on skills, transport, health, and wellbeing alongside local economic growth; however, we must ensure that this is not done 'to' local government but done 'with' local government.

I am also mindful that this should not be an Anglo-centric agenda. There is a compelling case for greater devolution and strategic level working in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland and I will be working with my colleagues across the UK to explore what actions can be taken by APSE in furtherance of these aims.

For our colleagues in England, we face the prospect of reorganisation into Unitary authorities. A process already experienced by our colleagues in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, with the overall reduction in councils experienced in the last decade. My pledge to you is to ensure that APSE will support those member councils facing the disruption and uncertainty of reorganisation, with APSE's new LGR Network formed to support

members undergoing this transition - helping to ensure those charged with delivering our frontline neighbourhood services are best supported to deliver from day one.

Of course, one of the supposed drivers for LGR is efficiency, which leads me to the vexed issue of fair funding. Whilst I am sure many of us will welcome the commitments made to improve local government finance and the introduction of multi-year settlements, the issue of fair funding is far from settled. The new formulae set out in the most recent announcements have not created the outcomes intended and I will be asking APSE to continue to represent the interests of our member councils in calling for a smoothing approach to ensure councils are able to fairly adapt to changes and for the formulae to be revisited.

I am sure everyone reading this will appreciate that whilst funding pressures continue in social care, we risk the very fabric of our neighbourhood services. For too long, the funding of our parks, leisure centres, highways, school meals, waste and recycling, and streetscene services have been low-hanging fruit when it comes to budget cuts. APSE will continue to focus on restoring the value of our neighbourhood services.

Throughout the past year, our communities have been under pressure from increasingly fractious debates and protests, which are sometimes sadly turning to violence. Community cohesion must not be allowed to deteriorate. There are sensitive issues, and across our society, people have a right to be heard and for their concerns to be addressed. However, we all have a duty, as leaders within our local communities, to ensure that debates are informed by facts, not fiction, and to raise the level of debate, avoiding hysteria and the 'othering' of individuals and groups in our society. My pledge to you is to lead a piece of research on cohesion and best practice – we need to ensure kindness and integrity in public life, making space for sensible, informed debate within our communities.

Finally, I am proud of APSE's history of extensive engagement on environmental sustainability. This tradition of policy into action continues as we support our member councils on sustainability and biodiversity – from grassland management through to rewilding cemeteries and, of course, our annual allotments survey. At a higher level, we will continue our work on ensuring new homes are insulated and address fuel poverty, and for our local authority assets, we will push the case for investment to reduce energy costs, including through transitioning to greener and cheaper energy supplies.

We have a busy year ahead, but I am absolutely honoured to be your chair – a tough act to follow from Archie - but I will be doing my very best to fly the flag for our wonderful member councils.

Thank you again for your support!

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# Report Back

A round up of APSE advocacy and events

## Cllr Tracey Dixon Elected as APSE National Chair 2025-2026

Cllr Tracey Dixon of South Tyneside Council has been elected as APSE's National Chair for 2025-2026. She takes over the role from Cllr Archie Dryburgh OBE of Dumfries and Galloway Council.

Cllr Dixon will be supported in her year of office by Anita Brown, who was elected as APSE's National Secretary for 2025-2026.

You can hear more about Cllr Dixon's priorities for APSE on page three.

## The latest APSE briefings...

APSE has a dedicated team of Principal Advisors providing regular updates via briefings. Our latest include:

- Play England's ten-year national play strategy
- Amendments to the planning and infrastructure bill
- tRESP consultation
- Highways authorities responses to the raise the flag campaign
- Visitor levy becomes law (Wales)
- Northern Ireland peatland strategy to 2040 launched

## APSE at the Labour Party conference

From 28 September - 1 October, APSE representatives attended the Labour Party Conference in Liverpool - showcasing the wide range of services and expertise we offer local authorities. On Monday 29 September, we hosted a strategic forum event at the Crowne Plaza IHG Hotel, exploring a public interest test in procurement and routes to insourcing local council services.

On Tuesday, Mo Baines attended the 'Bringing our streets services in-house' event, alongside Cllr Liam Robinson Leader of Liverpool City Council and Paul Nowak, General Secretary of the TUC.

## RWM Expo

On 17-18 September, APSE were pleased to exhibit at the annual RWM (Resource and Waste Management Expo) for the first time, with a stand at the heart of the local authority lounge. It was wonderful to engage with many member councils and reach out to potential new members and suppliers, with significant interest in our training and solutions offer as well as how we can support on all things simpler recycling.

Principal Advisors Abi Ademuliyi and Bonni Jee, plus Solutions Client Coordination Officer Lucia Gervis, and APSE Associate, Nigel Trueman, all staffed the APSE stand.

In addition, Bonni spoke as part of a panel session on 'Strength in Diversity: Building Sector Attractiveness', raising the awareness of APSE and the local government sector alongside his role as CIWM Early Careers Ambassador.



[L-R] Bonni Jee, APSE Principal Advisor; Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive; Lindsay Airey, Head of Business Resources; Vickie Hacking, APSE Principal Advisor; Matt Ellis, APSE Principal Advisor.

## School Food Review Group

Vickie Hacking attended a meeting of the School Food Review Group, a group designed to look at improving the quality and accessibility of school meals. The meeting focused on looking at establishing key asks to feed into the review of School Food Standards currently being undertaken by the UK Government. Vickie is involved in a steering group for research that is being undertaken by the University of Bristol into the provision of Meals on Wheels.

## APSE Armed Forces and Veterans Network

The inaugural session of the Armed Forces and Veterans Network included contributions from a range of expert speakers, discussing how local authorities can support the armed forces community and veterans in their locality. Speakers included: Marie Crombie, CEO, Vector24; Cllr Jane Dowson, Leeds Armed Forces Champion and Cllr Tom Hinchcliffe, Chair of the Armed Forces Covenant Board; and Patrick O'Brien, Armed Forces Covenant. [You can sign up to the Network here.](#)

## APSE at Conservative party conference

On 6 November, APSE hosted a strategic forum dinner at the Conservative Party conference in Manchester, exploring the intersection between local government reorganisation and increasing efficiency within councils. The discussion was chaired by Cllr Richard Wright, Leader of North Kesteven District Council, with contributions from Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive and Bonni Jee, APSE Principal Advisor.



[L-R] Bonni Jee, APSE Principal Advisor; Abi Ademuliyi, APSE Principal Advisor; Lucia Gervis, Client Coordination Officer - Attending the RWM conference in Birmingham

## Charting the course for waste, recycling, and the circular economy

On 23 October, APSE convened in Nottingham alongside a range of experts from across the waste and recycling sector, with the keynote address delivered by Mary Creagh MP, Minister for Nature and Circular Economy. The event also included the APSE Waste, Recycling and Circular Economy Awards, celebrating outstanding local councils who have used innovative ideas and solutions to tackle the current challenges facing the sector.

The winners were:

- Making hard-to-recycle award: Bristol Waste Company
- Circular economy: Derry City and Strabane District Council
- Behaviour change: Preston City Council

Congratulations to all! [You can view the full list of finalists here.](#)

## APSE in the MJ

Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive, shares her thoughts on the joint panel session that took place at the recent APSE Annual Seminar, that explored the challenges facing local government across the UK. [You can read the full article here.](#)

## Wales

### Taking ownership of your improvement - Wales

This free event for APSE Wales members, hosted in collaboration with APSE Performance Networks at the Newport Mercure Hotel on Friday 10 October, looked at the growing use of data across services, with a special focus on climate change and renewables. Speakers included: Cllr Jason Hughes, Newport City Council; Tracy McKim, Head of People, Policy and Transformation, Newport City Council; Paul Flint, Performance and Programmes Manager at Newport City Council; Suzanne Draper, Head of Data Insights and Engagement, Data Cymru; Jonathan Roberts, Senior Policy Officer (Waste Improvement), WLGA; Debbie Johns, Head of APSE Performance Networks; and Dave Knapman, APSE Associate.

### Unpacking waste and resources

On Wednesday 24 September, APSE Wales hosted a webinar exploring how local authorities and partner organisations are helping Wales transition to a circular economy, with a focus on the challenges facing waste and recycling teams. Speakers included Jemma Bere, Policy and Research Manager, Keep Wales Tidy; Lucy Paterson, Service Manager for Waste and Cleansing, Newport Council; and Matt Ellis, APSE Principal Advisor.

## Scotland

### National Building and Housing Apprentice Awards

Apprentices required! APSE have launched our National Building and Housing Apprentice of the Year Awards for 2026. The awards ceremony will take place at the Glasgow Hilton on the evening of Thursday 5 March 2026, as part of the Building and Housing Seminar (5-6 March 2026) which is being kindly sponsored by Morgan Hunt.

### SNP Conference

On 13 October, APSE hosted a fringe meeting at the SNP conference in Aberdeen, looking at what a General Power of Competence could mean for Scottish local government. The session provided

an opportunity to examine the potential benefits, challenges, and practical applications of a GPoC - sharing views on how it could support more effective, innovative, and responsive local authorities. The speakers were Cllr Lynne Short, Dundee City Council and Vice Chair of APSE Scotland; Cllr Katie Hagmann, Dumfries and Galloway Council and COSLA Spokesperson for Resources, and Louise Melville, APSE Principal Advisor for Scotland.

## APSE Energy in Glasgow

Over 21-22 October 2025, APSE held its annual Scottish Energy Summit in the city of Glasgow. A key date in the calendar for officers and councillors from across the UK, the energy team covered a range of topics through presentations, workshops and panel discussions. The summit also gave delegates the opportunity to keep abreast of a vast and innovative agenda, network with colleagues, and share important insights and best practice from their service areas. Presentations are now available to download from the APSE website.

## Northern Ireland

### Building a resilient workforce

On Tuesday 16 September, APSE Northern Ireland hosted a webinar focused on innovations within the local government workforce. Speakers included Hannah Bartram, ADEPT Chief Executive; Professor Steven Griggs, Professor of Public Policy and Director of the Centre for Business, Innovation and the Regions, Staffordshire University and Emma Taylor, Executive Consultant, APSE Solutions. [You can view the presentations here.](#)

### Taking ownership of your improvement - NI

This free event for APSE Northern Ireland members, hosted in collaboration with APSE Performance Networks at the Theatre at the Mill in Mossley Mill, explored performance across Northern Irish councils and the digitisation of local authority services. Speakers included: Richard Baker GM MSc, Chief Executive, Antrim and Newtownabbey; Councillor Billy Webb, NILGA President; Josephine Kelly, Chair of the Local Government Performance Improvement Working Group; Debbie Johns, Head of APSE Performance Networks; Cormac Quinn, Customer Development Manager, Belfast City Council; Ciaran McLogan, Account Manager, NI Public Sector, Amazon Web Services; and Liam Faulkner, Head of Environment, North Northamptonshire Council. [You can view the presentations here.](#)



[L-R] Cllr Katie Hagmann and Cllr Lynne Short presenting at the APSE fringe during the SNP conference on Monday 13 October.



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# Transforming adult social care delivery with generative artificial intelligence

Through the innovative adoption of Generative Artificial Intelligence tools, Neath Port Talbot Council has been able to transform the way its Adult Social Care team engages with residents.

It is well documented that all local authorities are under extreme financial pressure at a time when service demand in key areas is increasing exponentially. Neath Port Talbot Council is no exception.

Adult Social Care is a service area identified as experiencing extreme delivery pressures. Challenges around the recruitment and retention of social workers, at a time when there is increased demand for various reasons, including an ageing population and residents presenting with more complex needs, are resulting in a significant strain on an already stretched workforce.

To address these issues, the council is integrating Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) into operations. It became clear that social workers spend a considerable amount of time on administrative tasks and back-office engagements.

Through engagement with our wider local government networks, we identified Magic Notes, an AI transcription tool specifically designed for social workers that generates detailed assessments from an audio recording, which had some impressive claims regarding time savings and service improvements.

We were the first local authority in Wales to engage with the supplier, agreeing on an initial three-month pilot of the technology for our adult social care team. A project team was established within the service area to complete the necessary Information Governance requirements and deal with the contract.

At the outset of the pilot, we identified three key metrics to test the product against:

1. Time savings - reduced time spent on admin tasks and meeting write-ups.
2. Quality and Accuracy – Work submitted should be of high quality, with a transcription accuracy rate of over 90%.
3. User sentiment - Social workers involved in the pilot adopt and enjoy using the tool.

## Time Savings

Practitioners saved an average of 25 minutes per assessment write-up, totalling about 7.5 hours a week each. Assessments were submitted 8 hours faster with the product, and all participants reported significant time savings from the technology.

## Quality and Accuracy

Throughout the pilot, practitioners remarked on the impressive accuracy of transcriptions produced and found them to be 97% + accurate, far higher than other products that had previously been tested, which built further user confidence in the technology. Feedback also showed that the quality of the conversations whilst using the product was significantly higher than when carrying out traditional 'pen and paper' assessments, as it allowed a more open, flowing conversation with clients.

## User sentiment

Given the significant time savings and high levels of accuracy, the practitioners involved unanimously endorsed the product and wanted to continue using it. Managers commented on the real headway being made into the backlog of cases, as well as being

able to rebalance the work allocation across the workforce, all of which had a positive effect on the health and well-being of our social workers. Additionally, users were invited to share feedback throughout the pilot and discuss their experiences with the project team, allowing for learnings to be fed directly into the product roadmap and user support plans.

The pilot process required engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including practitioners, councillors, trade unions, and the wider workforce, which was conducted through webinars, product demonstrations, and in-person workshops. This ensured that the project team established a shared understanding of the pilot's scope and provided communication channels where any concerns could be openly discussed and addressed.

#### Challenges and considerations

Despite the success of the pilot, the adoption of new technology and methods of working is never without challenges. Staff experienced occasional technical issues with the product, such as connection outages and the need to keep the recording device battery charged. And although the transcriptions were found to be accurate, the need for proofreading remains.

We also found that the use of Magic Notes was most effective for experienced staff – manual notetaking is an important foundational skill for new starters in terms of building knowledge, over-reliance on technology, with all the potential issues that can occur, is something managers must be aware of and consider in training plans. Finally, ethical considerations such as data protection and responsible use are essential.

#### Outcomes, Future Targets, and Goals

The use of Gen AI tools across service areas in Neath Port Talbot Council continues to grow from strength to strength. Through our investment in additional capacity to support the user base, provide training, and develop case studies, we're seeing the understanding of how these tools can be successfully deployed to support service redesign gain significant traction.

In our social services directorate alone, given the success in adult services, we're already developing specific pilot projects with the children's, housing, and community teams, where they anticipate significant time savings and service enhancements using these technologies.

We've already undertaken extensive engagement with other local authorities in Wales, not only sharing our approach and pilot findings, but also helping give colleagues a head start by openly sharing our data protection impact assessment, solution assessment, standard operating procedures, and more, allowing them to expedite their consideration of the product. This has led to ten local authorities in Wales now signing up to their own pilots.

Our experiences of Gen AI are already demonstrating the fundamental impact that the use of these technologies is having on our ability to innovate service delivery. To meet the pressures currently faced in local government, we must continue embracing these technologies and develop use cases to showcase the art of the possible, all while balancing and managing the risks presented through appropriate governance frameworks, continuous monitoring, and a commitment to ethical AI practices.



**Neath Port Talbot**  
**Castell-nedd Port Talbot**  
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## Greening the past

### Decarbonising historic buildings

Join us for Greening the Past: Decarbonising Historic Buildings, a free online APSE members' networking session exploring how councils can cut carbon while protecting heritage.

Hear from experts on working with listed buildings, fabric improvements, low-carbon infrastructure and renewable technologies. Get practical guidance, real-life examples and the chance to connect with peers facing similar challenges.

#### Our APSE Associate speakers:

Alan Barber, Chartered Energy Manager, and Mike Keating, Director at Salvis Group Ltd, share technical expertise, case studies and lessons learned from decarbonisation projects across the public sector.



**Thursday 18 December 2025**

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# Personnel working waterside? Is your route to compliance a minefield...?

The Blue-Light Sector, Volunteer Search and Mountain Rescue Team, and Environment Agency Contractors working in the wider flood resilience sectors have their route to water safety and rescue compliance fully mapped out and widely accessible, with established training policies and procedures in place.

Those organisations, such as Councils, Trusts, and their Contractors, who fall outside this remit, detailed in the Government document the 'Flood Rescue Concept of Operations' have had to try to fit into this 'Con-ops' scheme, often not a great fit, or not quite suitable.

Both the HSE and CDM Regulations state that training in water safety and APPE (Aquatic Personal Protective Equipment) are required for persons at risk of an accidental immersion. This has resulted in an increased need for a professional training course tailored to the wider commercial sector, including those persons working waterside and potentially on boats in a non-tidal environment.

This requirement was fulfilled by the commissioning of a new bespoke course, by 'British Marine', the Trade Association for the commercial marine industry, who had the foresight to see that a swathe of the wider commercial sector had an obligation to both their staff to keep them safe at work, and to become compliant with legislation.



The British Marine 'Inland Waters Safety Management' course was developed for them by Birmingham & Midland Marine Services, an established specialist water safety and rescue training and services company, as a niche course which is both HSE & CDM regulations '15 compliant for personnel working on and around the entire inland waterways and open water environment.

Cienteles with little or no involvement in commercial operated boats, benefit by the Inland Water Safety Management course being modular; available in 'Bank', 'Boat' and 'Bank & Boat' format. Clients book courses for a set number of candidates ensuring that training can be tailored to their specific enterprise. Training can be delivered at the main training centre in Staffordshire, or remotely at a venue more suitable to the client.

Encompassing elements from both the DEFRA 'Con-Ops' and the Maritime & Coast Guard Agency 'Personal Survival and Water Safety' courses, the 'IWSM' provides a level of training gauged to meet the needs of employers and their staff attending as candidates. Trainers hail predominantly from Military, Lowland Rescue and Fire & Rescue Service backgrounds. Directors are from commercial vessel, and rescue backgrounds, our chairman is the former Chief Constable of Staffordshire Police.



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# **APSE Facilities, Catering and Cleaning Management Seminar 2026**



**Thursday 5 and Friday 6 February 2026**

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The background is a collage of various photographs from the seminar, including a large audience in a hall, speakers on stage, and groups of people in discussion. The entire image has a magenta/pink color overlay.The APSE logo, consisting of the word "apse" in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font, is enclosed within a white, horizontally-oriented oval shape.

**apse**

# Annual Seminar 2025

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## **Report back**

*A quick look at this year's excellent speakers*

## **Service Awards**

*Check out the winners and finalists of this year's prestigious APSE Service Awards, which celebrate excellence in local government*

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# Annual Seminar Report Back

Missed this year's annual seminar? We've put together a summary that captures the two-day programme of presentations, workshops and discussions on delivering greener, cleaner, healthier and wealthier local places.



[L-R] Cllr Susan Aitken, Leader, Glasgow City Council; Paul Bellotti, Chief Executive, East Riding of Yorkshire Council; Richard Baker, Chief Executive, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council; Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive.

The historic city of Glasgow was the location of this year's APSE Annual Seminar, giving delegates the chance to experience the regeneration and vibrant culture of the most populous city in Scotland.

Hosted at the Marriott Hotel, over 450 delegates, exhibitors, and speakers from across the UK made the journey to hear from a range of experts on how local councils can ensure their frontline services are green, clean, smart, and sustainable.

## Session one: Local placemaking - cleaner, greener, resilient neighbourhoods

The first day was opened by outgoing APSE National Chair, Cllr Archie Dryburgh OBE. Archie reflected on the challenges local authorities have faced over the past year, including the rapid development of AI, the continued increase in homelessness, and issues with financial sustainability. He discussed how the UK Government's push for economic growth via major infrastructure projects and relaxed planning regulation had created some tensions in councils, as they balance the need for economic growth with the concerns of their communities. Cllr Dryburgh concluded by thanking the APSE membership for their support and wished delegates an enjoyable and productive conference.

Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive, kicked off the first expert panel session looking at the challenges and opportunities facing local government in the upcoming year. She was joined by Paul Bellotti, Executive Director for Communities and Environment and soon to be Chief Executive, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Cllr Susan Aitken, Leader of Glasgow City Council, and Richard Baker, Chief Executive of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council. The discussion touched on a range of issues, including community cohesion, the housing of asylum seekers, how to deliver local services as efficiently as possible, reorganisation, and planning reforms.

Richard Baker expressed his desire for Antrim to undergo a digital transformation that would allow residents seamless access to council services, whilst Susan Aitken discussed the need for a pragmatic and practical approach to the challenges facing local government. Finally, Paul Bellotti spoke on the need for a prioritisation of staff and skills, which he argued would enable local authorities to more effectively "design their way out of problems."

## Frontline roundtable discussions

In the afternoon, APSE held several discussions designed around securing best practice across the following areas:

- 1: Local Growth: What is the role for local councils in economic growth, jobs, and skills?
- 2: Environmental services
- 3: Communities, housing, and homelessness
- 4: Leisure, Parks and wellbeing – Sponsored by Sixis Technology
- 5: Technical services, highways, transport, and fleet – Sponsored by Dymonon

## Keynote address: Local government finance and economics in a changing world

Closing day one, Professor Mark Gregory, Visiting Professor at Staffordshire University and former UK Chief Economist for Ernst and Young, gave an insightful presentation on where local government finance fits into the wider economy and how it can be used to counter the national and global challenges that have emerged. Mark outlined the UK's "challenged economy" – with poor growth, rising public sector debt, and rising income inequality since the 2008 financial crisis. He then compared the increases in public spending following the last budget with the decline in consumer and business confidence.

Mark then went on to argue for an increase in productivity through labour market reforms, including enhanced worker rights, support for AI, skills policies and welfare reform – all of which can be delivered by place leaning policies, including devolution, industrial clusters, planning reform and house building. He asked delegates to consider how local authorities can further leverage their unique position as local placemakers to support this productivity increase, arguing that more local revenue raiding to support growth was "economically sensible" citing the potential for local digital taxes.

The APSE Annual General Meeting took place after this, where Cllr Tracey Dixon was confirmed as APSE National Chair for 2025 / 2026. It also announced the introduction of two new Networks – the Armed Forces and Veterans Network and the Local Government



The local growth roundtable discussion, facilitated by Professor Steven Griggs, Department for Business and the Regions, University of Staffordshire.

Reorganisation Network – as with all APSE Networks, these are free to join for members.

## A view from across the UK

Opening day two, John Wood, Director of Membership and Resources, COSLA, discussed how local authorities in Scotland are delivering on their priorities, including ensuring a just net zero transition and supporting fair growth in communities. He outlined the financial pressures that Scottish councils face, which disproportionately impact neighbourhood services with significant cuts in street cleansing and culture and leisure in the past 15 years. Despite these pressures, he reinforced the importance of placemaking, especially to improve wellbeing, resilience, and community identity. John concluded by saying that although Scottish councils face a multitude of challenges, there was much to be proud of, with a resilient and adaptable workforce continuing to serve their local communities with gusto, and pointed to the possibilities the transition to net zero holds to transform local economies for the better.

Alison Allen, Chief Executive of NILGA, followed with an overview of the local policy challenges faced in Northern Ireland. She noted issues with infrastructure and budgetary pressures but was hopeful of the potential of city and growth deals, emphasising the need for local authorities to 'co-design' with their communities to ensure they are focusing on citizen level outcomes.

Pivoting to discuss the range of opportunities presented by the rapidly advancing digital landscape, Lisa Trickle, Digital Advisor at the LGA, looked at local government sector readiness for artificial intelligence and more comprehensive digital transformation. Lisa explained that although 95% of councils in England were piloting or adopting AI, many were at a very early stage, detailing the creation of a commissioning guide on how to responsibly procure AI technology, given its rapidly advancing nature.

Paula Walters, Head of Corporate Policy and Services WLGA, wrapped up the session by summarising the work being done with councils in Wales on wellbeing, prevention and sustainable neighbourhoods. Much of this is centered around the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, which ensures public service bodies work towards a set of well-being goals enshrined in the act. She explained that a long-term, preventive approach was key, with no more "short-term fixes" and an aim to rebuild trust in public services through investment, ringfencing prevention funding, and "supercharging" actions that have multiple benefits, such as decarbonisation and buying local.



*Ben Wilson, Divisional Director – Development and Regeneration, Glasgow City Council, delivers his keynote address on placemaking.*



*A networking opportunity for delegates*

## Keynote address: Glasgow City Council - A case study in placemaking

Our second keynote address of the seminar was delivered by Ben Wilson, Divisional Director – Development and Regeneration, Glasgow City Council, on the placemaking and development work that is transforming the city. He spoke on the "placemaking components" key to the work being done across Glasgow, including connecting areas through active travel, developing green infrastructure, and creating 20-minute neighbourhoods. Ben emphasised the focus on design quality and the integration of the city's heritage, including a proactive, co-creation with communities and working to make the city more inclusive for women and children.

## Rising to the challenges: Devolution, local government reorganisation, and future models

The next session looked at the changes, challenges, and opportunities posed by upcoming local government reorganisation, with Cllr Richard Wright, Leader, North Kesteven District Council and Chair of the District Councils Network, giving the district council perspective in the opening presentation. He noted that, as the biggest change of local government since 1974, there were a multitude of factors to consider, including the potential impact on democratic oversight and delivery of services. Richard said that the new authorities must seek to follow a preventative approach, supporting social care and the NHS, whilst ensuring that "everyone has a seat at the table".

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive of South Kesteven District Council, was up next, offering a leadership perspective on LGR's implications for finances and resources. She also highlighted the need for workforce upskilling and taking council employees on a "transformation journey" to ensure they are happy and in the best position to deliver for their community.

Looking at the opportunities of a new unitary council Cllr Lisa Hinton, Deputy Leader, and Colin Cox, Director of Public Health and Communities, Cumberland Council, presented on how the council – formed in 2023 out of four legacy councils – has worked to embed a uniting culture and deliver sustainable public services. They outlined the 'Cumberland approach', which puts accessibility, trust, engagement, prevention, and sustainability at its core, whilst also pursuing workforce cohesion and becoming an 'employer of choice' in the region. Over the past two years, Cumberland has pursued a 'pre-front door' prevention model, using early analytics for early intervention alongside community hubs.

## Climate innovation shorts

The final session of the seminar looked at case studies of best practice, innovations, adaptations, and mitigations in the climate and renewables sector. These 'shorts' exemplified the wide range of work being undertaken across local government to not only decarbonise,



# Northern Region Webinar - Building Resilient Communities

Free for APSE Northern members

## Expert speakers include:

Dr Luke Munford, Senior Lecturer in Health Economics at The University of Manchester

Caroline Bird, Community Services Manager (Programme), City of Lincoln Council

David Calland, Apprentice Co-ordinator, Wigan Council

David Trousdale, Principal Advisor – Climate Change, Newcastle City Council

Laure Renault, Pathways to Work Projects and Contracts Manager, Barnsley Metropolitan Council

Vickie Hacking, APSE Principal Advisor



**Tuesday 16 December 2025**

Online via MS Teams



*Robert Shoebridge, Group Manager - Traffic Enforcement, Derby City Council, discusses the pioneering School Safe Haven Zone initiative.*

but to harness the net zero transition to improve citizens' lives. Margaret Enstone, Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer at Darlington Borough Council, opened the session, looking at the solar pv on refuse collection vehicles project. She explained how the TRAILAR system applies ultra-thin solar mats to the roof of the vehicles, which helps to power electrics such as the radio, heating, sat-nav and lifts – helping to save fuel and reduce costs.

Delegates then heard from Robert Shoebridge, Group Manager, and Kerry Griffiths, Digital Enforcement Manager, Derby City Council, on their pioneering School Safe Haven Zone programme – winner of the MJ Best Council Services Team of the Year Award 2025. The initiative uses moving traffic powers – enforced by cameras – to stop traffic outside of participating schools during the start and end of the day. You can read more about the programme on page 30.

Julia Kerr, Technician Zero Waste, and Janice Ireland, Neighbourhood Services Officer, Dumfries and Galloway Council, were up next, discussing the council's kerbside battery collection service. It aims to offer a new and easier method of recycling to citizens, remove batteries from other waste streams, and reduce the risk of fire and injuries posed by batteries.

Concluding the 'shorts', Sarah Duley, Co-Director of Soil Association Scotland, delivered her organisation's annual impact report – including the work done to build new supply chains for organic Scottish peas and venison to be served in Scottish schools. This has not only provided healthy, ethically sourced meals for school pupils, but has also reduced carbon emissions by using locally sourced ingredients. Following this, delegates were invited to attend the 'grill in the grill' to network with the exhibitors and innovation presenters, covering a wide range of products and services. A full list of exhibitor profiles is available online here.

*If you would like to view any of the speakers' presentations, please visit the APSE website. Alternatively, email Mike Egerton at [megerton@apse.org.uk](mailto:megerton@apse.org.uk)*



*Julia Kerr, Technician Zero Waste and Janice Ireland, Neighbourhood Services Officer, Dumfries and Galloway Council discussing kerbside battery recycling.*



# Annual Service Awards 2025

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Celebrating outstanding achievement and innovation  
within local government service delivery





## Best Workforce Initiative

Kindly sponsored by Unison



### Hackney Council's innovation in staff retention

Being a Parking Civil Enforcement Officer is one of the most challenging Local Government roles, involving all-weather work and dealing with customers. Historically, the Council faced high turnover, costly training, and low performance.

## Finalists

Assist FM  
Dumfries and Galloway Council  
East Ayrshire Council  
East Renfrewshire Council  
Kent County Council  
London Borough of Hackney  
Mid Ulster District Council  
Renfrewshire Council

## Winner: London Borough of Hackney

Recent efforts have reversed this: staff turnover is now just 1.8%, retention leads the industry, staff morale is at an all-time high, and performance has reached record levels.

## Best Building and Housing Initiative

Kindly sponsored by Made Snapy 360



### Abbey Lodge conversion to temporary accommodation for homeless families

Derby City Council has undertaken a significant initiative to purchase and remodel vacant student accommodation with the objective of providing 13 much-needed affordable housing to reduce the use of unsuitable overnight accommodation. These homes will provide

## Finalists

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council  
Derby City Council  
East Riding of Yorkshire Council  
Fife Council  
Renfrewshire Council  
Stevenage Borough Council  
Telford and Wrekin Council

## Winner: Derby City Council

temporary accommodation which will be the stepping stone into settled accommodation. The project is split into two phases with the first being the recommissioning of the property to bring it back into use and the second being the conversion from 49 apartments of 95.

## Best Efficiency and Transformation Initiative

Kindly sponsored by Northgate Vehicle Hire



### Ageing Well: Focus on frailty collaborative

South Ayrshire HSCP and partners Ageing Well: Focus on Frailty program takes a whole system approach from primary prevention through to coordinated acute care and everything in between. It is designed to empower older adults to enhance their quality of life, and address the challenges posed by frailty whilst also skilling teams to provide more

## Finalists

East Ayrshire Council  
London Borough of Hackney  
Pembrokeshire County Council  
South Ayrshire Council  
Tewkesbury Borough Council  
Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure

## Winner: South Ayrshire Council

coordinated and proactive support. Through preventative interventions, cross-sector collaboration, and community-focused strategies, they have delivered measurable improvements in outcomes, efficiency and whole system sustainability including 20% reduction in hospital admissions and building over 200 fully accessible homes.



## Best Health and Wellbeing Initiative (incl. Social Care)

Kindly sponsored by Unison



### The death positive library

The Death Positive Library initiative, launched by Redbridge Libraries in 2017, encourages open conversations about death and dying and grief, tackling societal taboos. With over 15,000 participants engaged through events like Grief Cafes, creative workshops, and the annual Redbridge Festival of the Dead, it fosters understanding and support

### Finalists

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council  
Dundee City Council  
Outcomes Matter  
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council  
Plymouth City Council  
Renfrewshire Council  
Swansea Council  
Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure  
Wirral Council

### Winner: Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure

for the end of-life discussions. Through community partnerships and innovative programming, the project enhances emotional wellbeing and establishes Redbridge Libraries as a leader in promoting health and wellbeing dialogues in public libraries.

## Best Public/Private Partnership Working Initiative

Kindly sponsored by Amey



### Harnessing data for climate action in the Education Authority

The Education Authority (EA) is using data to deliver real environmental impact. Our groundbreaking Climate Change Initiative is transforming Energy Management and Sustainability across our schools, shaping a greener future and reinvesting savings into the education of children and young people. An innovative central data platform integrates

### Finalists

Falkirk Council  
Gloucestershire County Council  
London Borough of Hackney  
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council  
Northern Ireland Education Authority  
Renfrewshire Council  
Stevenage Borough Council

### Winner: Education Authority Northern Ireland

historical and live data to engage Senior Managers, School Leaders and Pupils, using predictive modelling and machine learning, to guide smarter decisions on targeted interventions that balance cost, savings, sustainability, and school comfort.

## Best Collaborative Working Initiative (with other public sector or third sector)

Kindly sponsored by Lendology CIC



### Collaborative Spirit – Transforming Lives Together in the Activity Champion Network

The Activity Champion Network, a dynamic collaboration between Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and care staff from across 53 residential care homes, is transforming lives! By creating engaging activities and fostering connections, this initiative brings joy and excitement to vulnerable individuals. With innovative events and

### Finalists

Aberdeen City Council  
Belfast City, Derry City and Strabane District Council  
Outcomes Matter  
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council  
Oxford City Council  
South Ayrshire Council  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Swansea Council  
Tayside Contracts

### Winner: Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

dedicated champions, the network ensures every participant feels valued and empowered. It's a shining example of community spirit, making a profound impact on the well-being of those who need it most.



## Best Commercialisation and Entrepreneurship Initiative

Kindly sponsored by JCB



The most advanced MRF in the UK – a sector first!

A sector first – with the waste sector changing at a scale not seen since the 1990's and need for local government financial sustainability. A partnership of eight local authorities came together and created the most advanced material recycling facility in the UK, using AI technology

### Finalists

Belfast City Council  
Belfast City, Derry City and Strabane District Council  
Ipswich Borough Council  
London Borough of Hackney  
Sherbourne Recycling

Winner: Sherbourne Recycling

to process residential DMR kerbside recycling in the most sustainable and efficient way possible. This raises the bar for recycling and provides the councils with necessary resilience to impending industry change and financial pressures.

## Best Community and Neighbourhood Initiative (incl. Community Safety)

Kindly sponsored by Milne Security Services



ERIC the energy van

An innovative new mobile Energy and Retrofit Information Clinic, known affectionately as ERIC, has revolutionised community advice and support services in East Lindsey. The programme seeks to tackle social and digital isolation by taking advice and funding support services to residents in

### Finalists

Bassetlaw District Council  
Caerphilly County Borough Council  
Dumfries and Galloway Council  
Highland Council  
Renfrewshire Council  
South and East Lincolnshire Councils  
South Cambridgeshire District Council  
Telford and Wrekin Council  
Wyre Forest District Council

Winner: South and East Lincolnshire Councils

their local communities rather than relying on them finding information by social media or picking up the phone. They have developed an integrated partner referral network to ensure that we can also address a range of other social issues.

## Best Innovation or Demand Management Initiative

Kindly sponsored by Wilsons Auctions



Transforming adult social care delivery with generative artificial intelligence

Through the innovative adoption of Generative Artificial Intelligence tools, Neath Port Talbot Council has been able to transform the way their Adult Social Care team engage with their residents. Significant impact has been realised across several areas, including reducing the amount of administration time spent on writing up case notes by 7.5 hours per

### Finalists

Dumfries and Galloway Council  
London Borough of Hackney  
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council  
Neath Port Talbot Council  
Outcomes Matter  
Renfrewshire Council  
South Ayrshire Council  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Winner: Neath Port Talbot Council

week, speeding up the submission of case assessments by 8 hours, and generally improving the overall detail capture and quality of the conversations with residents.



## Best Climate Action or Decarbonisation Initiative

Kindly sponsored by Gul-e by ODS



### Torfaen school caterers sustainable school meals roadmap

Producing and following an innovative sustainable school meals roadmap allowed Torfaen school caterers to stay on track in addressing the key issues in climate change and decarbonisation. With resultant reductions in carbon emissions validated by academics, the roadmap

### Finalists

Brent Council  
Calderdale Council  
Cambridge City Council  
Northern Ireland Education Authority  
Shropshire Council  
Suffolk County Council  
Tayside Contracts  
Torfaen County Borough Council

### Winner: Torfaen County Borough Council

has raised the profile of the school meals service and is the first of its kind in school meals. Far from finished yet, remain committed to ensuring that they meet the needs of today's pupils without damaging opportunities in the future.

## Best Service Team: Soft Facilities Management

Kindly sponsored by SchoolGrid



### East Renfrewshire catering team and service excellence

East Renfrewshire Council (ERC) Catering Team is committed to high-quality, inclusive, and sustainable service. Regular reviews are carried out to maintain standards. Recent initiatives include the "Leo the Lunch Hero" programme to boost pupil engagement, addressing staff recruitment and retention challenges, and implementing eco-friendly practices.

### Finalists

East Renfrewshire Council  
Renfrewshire Council  
Salford City Council  
Shropshire Council

### Winner: East Renfrewshire Council

Additionally, the team collaborated with the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to create the Mini Master Chefs educational resource, promoting healthy eating habits and engaging young people with the school lunch service.

## Best Service Team: Technical Services

Kindly sponsored by Enterprise Mobility



### Improving service delivery while contributing to sustainability goals

The team at GCC Fleet Services is the first local authority in Scotland to achieve IRTEC accreditation, for both technicians and workshop standards, ensuring GCC can maintain an integral standard for both ISO 9001 and 14001. By training staff in vehicle fault-finding and multiskilling, they ensure the ability to maintain a wide range of vehicles, from cars to

### Finalists

Glasgow City Council  
Gloucestershire County Council  
Highland Council  
Midlothian Council  
Wigan Council

### Winner: Glasgow City Council

44-tonne trucks. This initiative reduces reliance on external contractors, supports local skills development, and improves service delivery while contributing to sustainability goals.



## Best Service Team: Waste, Recycling and Streetscene

Kindly sponsored by REEN



### Improving Recycling Services for the Residents of SKDC

The Waste and Recycling team at SKDC have undertaken two successful service improvements since January 2024. This includes the roll out of a twin stream recycling system and kerbside battery collections. Despite facing multiple obstacles, the team showed resilience and creativity; this

### Finalists

Amey Ltd on behalf of Sheffield City Council  
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council  
Eastleigh Borough Council  
London Borough of Hackney  
South Kesteven District Council  
South Tyneside Council  
Wigan Council

**Winner: South Kesteven District Council**

resulted in improved recycling services for the residents of SKDC. Key to the success of the service improvements was a renewed focus on partnership working and creativity.

## Best Service Team: Parks, Grounds and Horticultural Service

Kindly sponsored by the University of Staffordshire



### Creating an urban forest for people and nature

Cardiff is one of the greenest cities in the UK. Their extensive network of over 550 parks, woodlands, and green spaces (including 22 with Green Flag status) shapes the city's character, contributes to its economic and environmental wellbeing, and plays a pivotal role in positive

### Finalists

Aberdeen City Council  
Cardiff Council  
Eastleigh Borough Council  
Highland Council  
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council  
Wyre Forest District Council

**Winner: Cardiff Council**

health outcomes and social cohesion. Our Coed Caerdydd programme is central to addressing climate and nature emergencies through community supported tree planting and aftercare to ensure their green spaces are fit for the future.

## Best Service Team: Cemetery and Crematorium Service

Kindly sponsored by PlotBox



### Changing for the future, changing for the better

Post Covid, the service needed changes to move into a more commercial market, transitioning from a traditionally run council entity to one that can compete with private sector crematoriums and cemeteries. The team and way of working have responded outstandingly to this commercial need, managing increased budget pressures and emerging

### Finalists

East Riding of Yorkshire Council  
Gravesham Borough Council  
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Walsall Council

**Winner: Walsall Council**

from a 'hidden service' to one at the forefront of operational efficiency and good practice.



## Best Service Team: Sports, Leisure and Cultural Service

Kindly sponsored by Space & Place



Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council leisure team: Leading the way in in-house leisure excellence

The Leisure Team at the UK Council of the year 2024 Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council (ANBC) delivers exceptional services, positively impacting residents. With 150 staff and six state-of-the-art centres, ANBC is an industry leader, recognised nationally. The service

### Finalists

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council  
Derry City and Strabane District Council  
Rugby Borough Council  
Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure  
Wakefield Council  
Walsall Council  
West Lindsey District Council

### Winner: Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

holds the UK Active Regional Centre of the Year (Ballyearl LC) and NILGA Service Innovation award 2025, boasts an 89.3% customer 35 satisfaction rating. Their team delivers award-winning services, embracing innovation to combat rising costs and inspire positive change.





# Overall Council of the Year in Service Delivery

*Kindly sponsored by Brightly*



Winner:

Renfrewshire Council

Finalists:

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

Dumfries and Galloway Council

Highland Council

London Borough of Hackney

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Renfrewshire Council

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

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APSE would like to thank all sponsors of the  
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ARCHITECTURE FOR HUMAN BEINGS

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# **APSE Building and Housing Seminar 2026**



**Thursday 5 and Friday 6 March 2026**

Glasgow Hilton Hotel, 1 William Street, G3 8HT





# The UK's most advanced MRF – a council collaboration

Richard Dobbs, managing director of Sherbourne Recycling, explains the facility's journey from inception to operation, touching on the challenges faced, the barriers overcome and Sherbourne's vision for the future.

With targets tightening, the environmental landscape changing and a raft of new policies now committed to law, the waste sector is developing at an astonishing pace. While this momentum will play an important role in accelerating national recycling rates, it's safe to say that progress isn't without its complications.

Indeed, the burden of change – whether legislative, market volatility or changing consumer habits – often falls to collection authorities, who are ultimately responsible for delivering upon legislative requirements. However, the scarcity of long-term collection contracts, the restructuring of public services and escalating prices often leaves councils in a precarious position, not always having the control, capacity or agility to flex to meet changing needs – and all at a time where budgets are stretched.

This, alongside geo-political pressures, circular economy ambitions and increasing stakeholder demand for new, sustainable and technologically-advanced solutions for recycling and recovery, is turning up the pressure on council waste management, finance, legal, and procurement teams.

The idea behind Sherbourne Recycling was born from this frustration, with eight forward-thinking local authorities of different sizes, communities, and representing a broad political spectrum choosing to take back control of their waste processing. The vision was to create a world-leading material recovery facility (MRF) that could not only provide a robust, reliable, long-term solution to effectively process recycling, but also offer the flexibility to adapt to changes in the regulatory landscape, consumer habits, and material composition. As the first project of its kind in the UK, it was a case of building entirely from the ground up.

The project started in 2016, with a feasibility study to review opportunities, challenges, and barriers. Soon after, a full project team was formed, who collectively led the necessary modelling work to build a comprehensive business case. This was quickly supplemented by financial modelling, a robust procurement strategy and bespoke governance structures – a critical part of ensuring long-term model sustainability, value for money and return on investment potential ensuring it matched the growth and appetite of the partner councils.

With the aim of delivering maximum value, a contractual mechanism was developed between the partner councils, which included a 25-year waste supply agreement, shareholding arrangements and loan terms to fund the project. Throughout the process, providing absolute assurance on legislative resilience and financial pressures was essential. This was no simple process, with the complexity of the procurement exercise taking 18 months alone.

Construction of the facility began in May 2021, with the main body of civils work completed within 12 months to coincide with the delivery of processing equipment from specialist MRF contractor Machinex. With the plant designed to set new



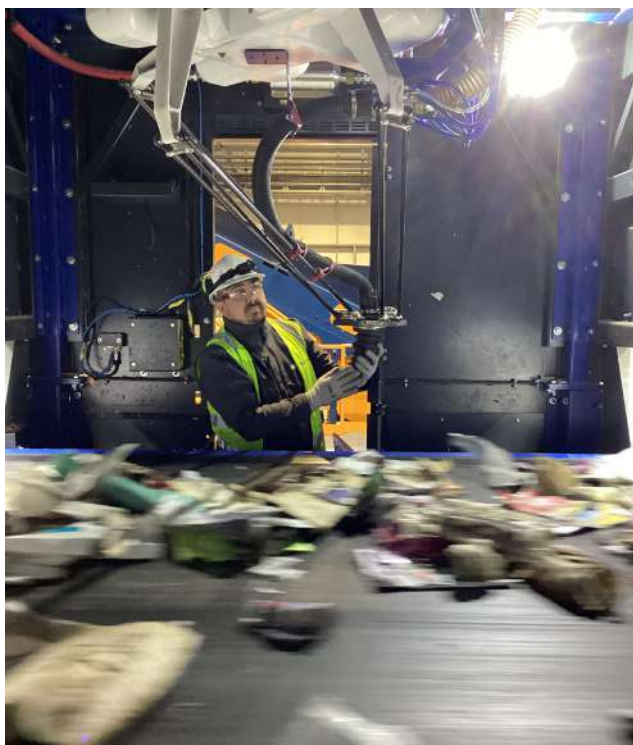


standards in efficiency and accuracy, it was critical that this technology performed better than any other site of its type in the world.

This posed its own challenges – creating a new model from scratch, finding the staff to operate a first-to-market site, aligning with expectations from eight very different local authorities. Pioneering thinking was key.

Thanks to a pioneering combination of AI and robotics, the facility processes waste in the most sustainable way possible. Capable of handling 250,000 tonnes per annum, the purpose-built plant combines 18 sorting robots and 14 optical sorters to separate dry mixed recycling (DMR) and produce high quality recyclate. Unique to Sherbourne Recycling is that 100% of the output can be supplied exclusively to UK reproprocessors, thanks to the outstanding quality of materials it achieves.

Following a comprehensive commissioning and testing phase, the site became fully operational in Q2 2024 and the results since have been clear to see. Indeed, not only has the programme changed the local authority perception of risk placement, but the site has also broken boundaries with end markets – developing materials that are up to 99% in purity.



Across the partner councils and other contracted local authorities, the facility is not just providing a sector-leading service, but helping to drive a significant uplift in recycling rates. DEFRA's latest annual report on local authority collected waste management results, for example, saw Stratford-on-Avon become the 3rd best performing authority in the Country, achieving a 61% recycling rate. Elsewhere, six of the remaining seven partners all increased their recycling rates by moving to Sherbourne – four of these being named within the UK's top 20 most improved local authorities for that year.

Importantly, the unique model of ownership and control has meant that incremental improvements can quickly be made to further improve returns and adjust to the needs of the market. This includes recalibrating equipment to eject nappies from the stream (lowering contamination rates to less than 0.3%), as well as removing PET trays from the PET bottle line (increasing resale values).

The plant has even been designed to process flexible plastics – two years ahead of legislative requirements. Best of all, investment in state-of-the-art technology means that this can be achieved via a fully comingled collection model – making recycling easier and more accessible for residents and more straightforward and cost-effective for waste collection authorities.

The partner councils are benefiting from the financial security achieved through their control over the Sherbourne facility, and the 25-year agreement in place to process their recycling. This security is boosted by the commercial growth of the company



through securing further contracts and tonnage, alongside working with packaging manufacturers on product recyclability and testing viability through its innovative 'Living Lab' capability.

As a result, Sherbourne is already gaining sector and national recognition, having hosted the likes of DEFRA, The National Infrastructure Commission and LARAC to better understand how the facility is supporting its partner councils and what opportunities for other local authorities may exist. We were also recently presented with the Best Commercialisation and Entrepreneurship Initiative award at the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Annual Service Awards, 2025.

Over the coming years, Sherbourne will continue to explore opportunities to expand the presence of the company in the waste landscape and generate further return to its shareholders. Its main objective will be to fill the site to its processing capacity. This goal is already in motion with Sherbourne having secured two further local authority DMR processing contracts, and further tonnage volume in 2024-25.

With a replicable model, experienced team and proven systems, the sky really is the limit!

For more information about Sherbourne Recycling, or the site's unique approach to creating value through waste management excellence, visit [www.sherbournerecycling.co.uk](http://www.sherbournerecycling.co.uk).

You can view the full list of APSE Service Award 2025 winners on pages 18-23.



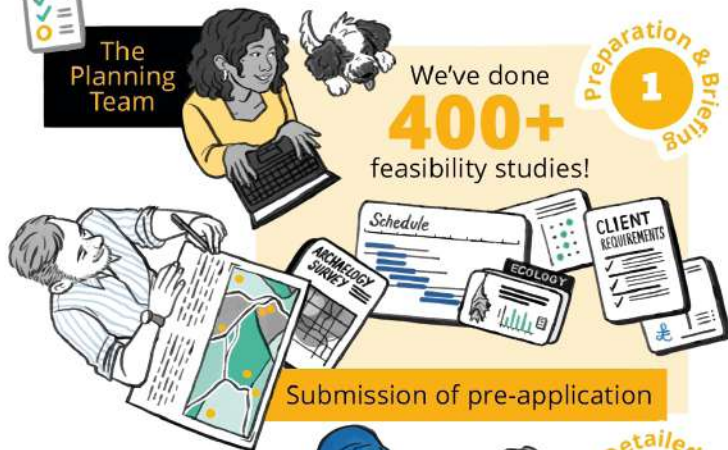




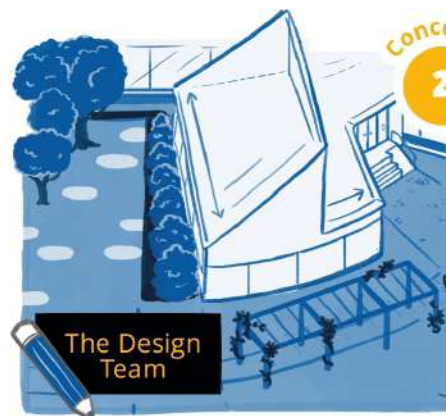
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feasibility studies!

**1**  
Preparation & Briefing



Submission of pre-application



**The Design Team**

**2**  
Concept Design

Structural and Civil



**3**  
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Archaeologist

Ecologist

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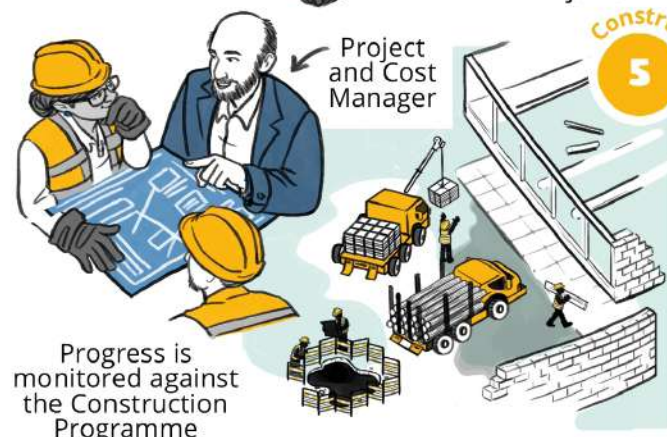


**Project Manager**

**4**  
Technical Design

Mechanical and Electrical

Specialist CDS partners



**5**  
Construction

Project and Cost Manager

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**6**  
Handover

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**7**  
Use

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

Fresh from winning the MJ Achievement Award for Best Council Services Team, Rob Shoebridge, Group Manager, and Kerry Griffiths, Digital Enforcement Manager, Derby City Council, reflect on building a showcase traffic safety scheme.

Derby's years-long journey began in 2019 with the concept of School Safe Haven Zones. The council was receiving complaints about vehicles parking on the yellow zigzag lines outside schools, which are meant to serve as crossing points for children. However, the traffic and transport team found that they did not have the resources to enforce the rule effectively; they had access to a couple of 'camera cars' – but these could only cover a very limited number of areas, and in-person, staff monitoring often faced non-compliance from parents, and in some cases, aggression or abuse, which was ineffective and unsustainable.

This presented an issue, as, except for enforcement officers or camera cars, there was no other method or technology available to enforce the zigzags. Seeking a new solution, Rob and Kerry worked with SEA (now Intelliscape) to implement a new traffic

management system, the ROADflow attended camera, which would be placed outside schools to enforce the regulations. "When we first presented the idea, we were laughed at. People said, "You'll never get a camera outside schools, parents and councillors won't accept it", said Kerry.

Privacy was a huge concern, especially due to the presence of children – the team had to work through complex GDPR issues with the council's information governance advisors. To make them compliant, the camera had 'privacy filters' included, so officers could only zoom in and view the road and yellow zigzags, just enough to see if a contravention was occurring. The introduction of the cameras was very transparent, with letters hand delivered to residents explaining the reason for the cameras, as well as the fact that they would only be operated during school times.

The impact of introducing the cameras was far greater than the team could have predicted.

"It wasn't just enforcement. Parents stopped parking at school gates. The air was cleaner. Children crossed more safely. The camera presence reduced anti-social behaviour - people didn't know exactly what it captured. That's why we called it a Safe Haven", said Rob.

"We began with four cameras. By the end of 2020, despite Covid, we had 22. Schools wanted them. Councillors liked them because complaints dropped. And it wasn't displacing parking, vehicles shouldn't have been there in the first place", he added.





In 2021, the introduction of moving traffic enforcement powers for councils in England was on the horizon. Previously, apart from London Boroughs, moving traffic offences were only enforceable by the police – with the new powers, the team saw an opportunity.

Working at pace, the team began a public consultation, engaging local communities and identifying potential sites to employ the new powers. Rob explained how a model of evidence-based enforcement was planned, one that was “justified and proportionate” with sites carefully selected by traffic engineers based on data.

On 23 September 2022, Derby City Council became the first authority outside of London and Wales to use the new powers in earnest. The School Streets initiative – initially beginning with six schools – meant that entire streets could be kept clear at drop-off and pick-up times, rather than just enforcing the zig-zag lines. This encouraged walking, cycling, and scooting, improved air quality, reduced idling, and gave residents their streets back.

## % Average reduction of vehicles accessing Safe Haven School Streets

Year 1 : 66%

Year 2: 79%

Year 3: 84%

“Other councils have tried school streets, but without moving traffic enforcement powers, they’re less effective. Police don’t have the capacity to enforce”, Rob explained.

“Our advice: enforcement powers are essential. For the first six months, we only issue warnings. That changed 88% of behaviour without penalties. Only 12% reoffended. This isn’t about making money, it’s about behaviour change.”

Income that has been generated through fines is reinvested into the project and other related services, including cycle training for school children and school crossing patrol teams.

With an increase in demand and interest for SSHZs from schools and parents alike, the council successfully bid for funding from Active Travel England to implement six additional locations. Due to the level of interest from schools across the area, the team had to build an implementation criteria, looking at traffic levels, resident access, current measures and work already done by schools to reduce levels of traffic – Rob pointed out that, in some cases, Schools trying to achieve the criteria introduced their own measures which is making a real difference, even before the introduction of enforcement cameras.

Feedback from teachers whose schools qualified for an SSHZ said that children were arriving more alert, ready to learn, and more social because they had walked in a group rather than being driven. Working parents benefited too, with ‘crocodile walks’ – walking buses – being introduced with a volunteer parent collecting children on a route to school. And with more attention being paid to the health impacts of vehicle emissions in recent years – especially amongst children – the initiative has had a clear impact on levels of Nitrogen Dioxide around participating schools, with levels nearly halving in some cases.



As ‘first movers’ in using moving traffic enforcement powers, the team was asked to present nationally, even being used as a best practice case study by the Department for Transport and Active Travel England. Seeking to help other local authorities, the team now supplies and installs cameras across the UK, including Walsall, Coventry, Hull, and Cheshire East – trading under the Localism Act.

On why the SSHZ team has been so successful, both Rob and Kerry agreed that a mix of personality, creativity, and the council’s culture. They cited support from Derby’s leadership as crucial, in particular the then Deputy Chief Executive Rachel North, who told them to “seek forgiveness, not permission”, giving them the freedom to push boundaries. Rob, a former referee, explained a sports-like mentality of seeking marginal gains and 1% improvements by empowering staff to suggest ideas, further motivating the team to strive for the best possible results. “Because we’re a council, we understand the same challenges other councils face - procurement, revenue, complaints. Private companies would charge far more. We’re here to provide a service, not make a profit”, he said.

“That culture of innovation, plus the results, has allowed us to build something unique and valuable for the council and community.”

*Rob and Kerry presented at the APSE Annual Seminar on 11 September in Glasgow, and the APSE Central Region ‘liveable and healthier neighbourhoods’ event on 14 October in Derby.*



**Derby City Council**

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# Culture eats strategy for breakfast



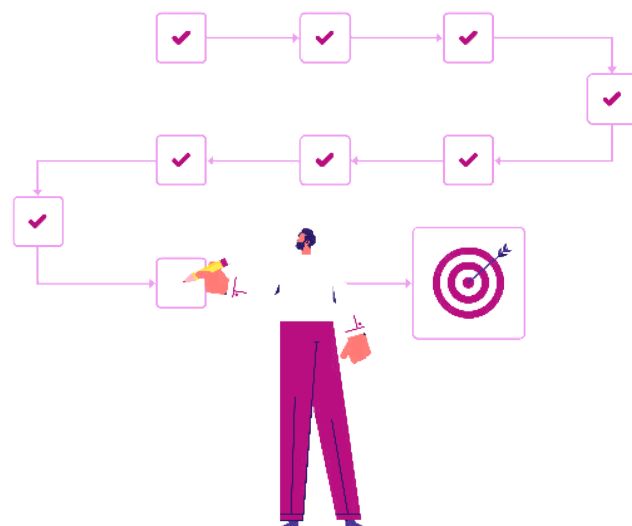
Fiona Sutton-Wilson,  
Head of APSE Training.

Peter Drucker's poignant phrase, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast", has been used by many global corporations to promote the idea that it's our behaviours and actions which drive success; the things we do and say, on a daily basis, really matter. The language we use shapes our understanding of the world and our daily actions shape how we connect with other people within our world of work. Arguably, Drucker's phrase speaks to the idea that organisations only function well if the people within them work well. By working well, people are fulfilled. They have the tools and the skills they need to do their work. They are productive and positive, greeting challenges as opportunities to deliver differently and better. If a council's culture is one of production and innovation, it is easier to meet the demanding challenges of the day

Being productive is essential to meet increasing demands, but innovation is crucial when coupled with the need to outsmart decreasing budgets. In the dynamic and changing environment of local government, we need the capacity to think outside of the box to do things differently and to be ready for the next challenge... to innovate!

For many authorities, this is a critical time, with budget pressures leading to record levels of debt and uncertainty. When the pressure is on, it's often training budgets which are the first to go, but this is exactly the time to invest in people. Training is an excellent way to gain and distil knowledge, skills and aptitudes. The investment might not quite be as economists intended when using the phrase, "you've got to speculate to accumulate", but the sentiment is the same. By investing in the development of skills and knowledge we acquire the capacity to grow, develop and innovate. These are important steps to developing an organisational culture which can cope with the impending changes and challenges ahead.

[A full list of APSE's training courses and masterclasses can be found here](#), or via the QR code, but the following selection may be particularly useful for those looking to create a culture of success during times of significant change and reorganisation. We have dates running up to the end of March 2026.



[Advanced Contract Management \(CPD\)](#)

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[Developing and Delivering a Commercial Strategy](#)

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[Managing Change in Local Government](#)

[Managing Programmes in Local Government](#)

[Non-executive Director: LATCo and Public Services](#)

[Principles of Contract Management \(CPD\)](#)

[Project Management in Local Government \(CPD\)](#)

[Psychometric Testing](#)

[Social value and the Public Interest Test: Procurement Act 2023](#)

[Time Management Skills](#)

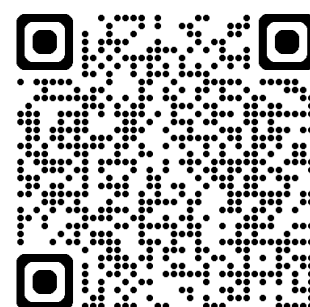
[Turning Complaints into Compliments](#)

[Working with Elected Members to Improve Frontline Services](#)

All of the above can be customised to meet the needs of your team, service or directorate. Similarly, we can create new content to address the specific needs of your authority. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you would like to find out more about these as an in-house offer. For convenience, please complete our webform with your in-house enquiry or contact [training@apse.org.uk](mailto:training@apse.org.uk).

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# Social value and the public interest test: A review



Amy Caldwell, Senior APSE Training Officer.

I had the pleasure of attending the first delivery of APSE's newest course, Social Value and the Public Interest Test: Procurement Act 2023 on the mornings of Tuesday 30 September and Wednesday 1 October.

As a Senior Training Officer, I'm not directly involved in procurement; however, I was keen to gain a deeper understanding of how social value is defined under the Act, to broaden my understanding of this legislation and its intended impacts.

Our highly experienced trainer, Matthew Baqueriza-Jackson, did an excellent job of facilitating productive discussion between participants of varying experience and understanding, using practical exercises throughout the two sessions to help translate policy into measurable procurement outcomes.

Social Value is critical for local government as it guarantees every decision and investment delivers wider community benefits and offers an insightful look at how local authorities can align procurement decisions with broader social outcomes.

This training has been designed to guide local authorities through the six steps of the 'Procurement Cycle', providing practical advice as to how social value can and should be considered. As a cross departmental consideration, the

content served to support a variety of roles ranging from Data Analysts and Researchers to Economic Development Officers, and a selection of case studies effectively illustrated expected challenges and examples of best practice for those in attendance.

Comments from others on the course included:

*"Social Value is something that is becoming an increasingly important aspect of the procurement process, especially since the introduction of PA23, so having a broader view of how to maximise and promote it within the authority is really useful."*

Senior Procurement Officer, Lee Valley regional park Authority

*"You will understand the context of social value and be inspired to embed it in your work."*

Policy Officer, Preston City Council

Beyond a foundational understanding of the legislative background, this training helped me to gain a broader understanding of how to maximise and promote social value within the procurement cycle. I would consider it an essential piece of learning for anyone who wishes to deepen their understanding of how to balance commercial priorities with community impact, so they can apply the Public Interest Test with greater confidence.

The next course is being delivered on the mornings of Tuesday 02/12/25 and Wednesday 03/12/25. [Click here to book your place!](#)



# Coed Caerdydd – Cardiff's urban forest programme

With the 100,000 tree planted this year, Cardiff Council's APSE Service Award winning urban forest programme is bringing the benefits of nature to local communities and help the city reach its net zero target.

With an extensive network of over 550 parks, woodlands, and green spaces, Cardiff is one of the greenest cities in the UK – shaping its character, driving positive health outcomes, and contributing to the well-being of its residents. It is from these strong foundations that Cardiff Council's One Planet climate strategy is built on – an action plan to make Cardiff a carbon-neutral city by 2030.

As part of the strategy, which includes the development of the low-carbon heat network, new cycleways and a solar farm – amongst many others – the Coed Caerdydd programme is a ten-year strategy to increase tree coverage across the city from 18.9% to 25%, helping to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and make Cardiff a greener and healthier place to live. Alongside these climate and health goals, Coed Caerdydd also seeks to address the increasing risks to trees across the city, including pests, diseases, and aging stock.

First devised in 2019 and developed into a successful pilot project with funding from the Welsh Government's Enabling Natural Resources and Wellbeing Scheme, the Woodland Trust, Cardiff's Local Nature Partnership, and Trees for Cities – the programme has now been integrated into the Council's revenue funding.

Although directed by a central project team of rangers and staff within the council, volunteers have been crucial to Coed Caerdydd's success. Community involvement has been central to the project from the start, helping to achieve the ambitious tree planting targets and deliver on the needs of local people.

Participation from volunteers of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds – including significant involvement from BAME communities, children and adults with learning, physical, and/or mental disabilities, and groups working with refugees and asylum seekers. Local communities have also played a vital role in the Tree Guardian network, supporting continued care of the trees, including watering and monitoring.



Since the first planting season in 2021, the project has seen over 16,000 hours donated to plant and care for approximately 115,000 new trees across every Council ward in the city. Volunteer participation has grown year on year, from 730 volunteers in 2021 to 2,942 in 2025, while planting has taken place in over 160 parks and open spaces, 80 street verges, 50 schools, nurseries, or university settings, 5 farms, and 20 other community spaces such as scout halls, churches, allotments, and hubs.

However, the project has not been without its challenges, with its implementation being delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Issues also emerged following the first planting season due to a heatwave and lack of rainfall. Planting sites also experienced some vandalism and negative public feedback.

In line with UK averages, the average successful establishment rate of new planting across Cardiff is 82%. Around 40% of sites have a 100% success rate. Nearly two thirds of newly planted sites have registered





**“Since the first planting season in 2021, the project has seen over 16,000 hours donated to plant and care for approximately 115,000 new trees across every Council ward in the city.”**

Tree Guardians that help with site monitoring and maintenance, such as watering and weeding, including over 158 individuals, 42 schools, and 24 community groups.

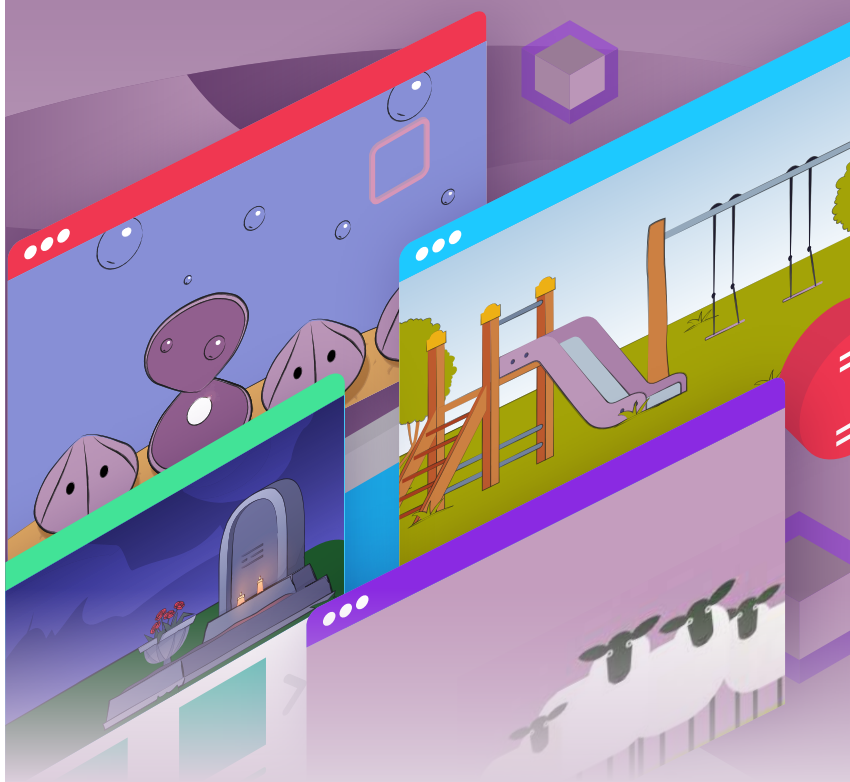
Now in its fourth year, staff have learnt a lot throughout the course of the programme and have embedded this throughout planning and delivery. For example, certain tree species and the planting methods used to reduce watering demands and overcome competitive vegetation – allowing for more healthy trees to successfully grow and develop. Additional community engagement has also been introduced prior to planting – including working with schools and young people to embed respect for the trees, as well as engaging external landowners including farms and universities.

Looking to the future, the council will continue to work with a diverse network of stakeholders to identify and deliver upon opportunities to expand the tree canopy across Cardiff, including planting trees at scale across housing estates in areas of multiple deprivation, working with more farmers to create and restore hedgerows and fruit tree planting, create community green corridors of hedgerows in front gardens, and continuing to work with the highways team to replace street trees lost to age, disease or storm events.

On 26 November the APSE Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Network, focused on how councils are managing, maintaining and planning for the future of their urban and rural trees. [Sign up here.](#)



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## **Innovating with Nature: Stronger Shores Approach to Coastal Resilience**

Emily Ross, Project Delivery Officer at South Tyneside Council, details their marine restoration project, including engaging with the community and supporting academic research.



Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of presenting at APSE's Really Rewilding seminar - a fantastic event bringing together practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to explore rewilding across landscapes. The seminar offered a valuable opportunity to show how marine restoration can lay the groundwork for future rewilding by rebuilding habitats, restoring ecological function, and creating conditions for nature to thrive.

Stronger Shores is one of 25 projects funded through Defra's £200 million Flood and Coastal Innovation Programme, managed by the Environment Agency. This innovation funding allows us to trial new techniques, and we are investigating how kelp forests, seagrass meadows, and native oyster reefs, can provide nature-based solutions that reduce coastal erosion and provide wider benefits to coastal communities and beyond.

Risk Management Authorities (RMAs), including councils, are under growing pressure to rethink traditional coastal defence strategies. Hard engineering, such as sea walls, groynes, revetments, have long been the default, but these solutions are often carbon-intensive, costly, and ecologically disruptive. Policy is now shifting toward more sustainable, integrated approaches, with nature-based solutions playing a central role in achieving climate resilience, net zero, and environmental net gain.

Stronger Shores is testing these solutions in real-world conditions along the North East coast, from Lindisfarne in Northumberland to Skinningrove in Redcar and Cleveland. Hosted by South Tyneside Council, the project is driven by a strong delivery partnership including Newcastle University, University of Plymouth, Tees Rivers Trust, North Sea Wildlife Trusts, the Zoological Society of London, and Groundwork North East and Cumbria (Wild Oysters Project). Together, we bring expertise in marine ecology, academic research, community engagement, and environmental monitoring to build a more holistic and adaptive model for coastal risk management.

Our restoration work is hands-on and evidence-driven. For example, the Wild Oysters Project is trialling two oyster reef deployment methods - scattering cultch (a mix of shell and stone) along with oysters over an extensive area of seabed, and the placement of artificial reef structures with oysters attached to assess which best supports long-term native oyster reef recovery. Our seagrass restoration, led by Tees Rivers Trust and North Sea Wildlife Trusts, involves seed processing and nursery development to address limited seagrass seed availability in the region, and the planting of seagrass at different sites in the study area.

Our kelp work, in partnership with North Sea Wildlife Trusts and SeaGrown, uses floating units seeded with local kelp and fitted with sensors to monitor biodiversity, water quality, and wave attenuation. We're also supporting PhD students at Newcastle University, whose research is helping us better understand wave attenuation, remote sensing, and in-situ monitoring. In addition, the University of Plymouth is leading a PhD on natural capital accounting, helping us quantify the broader environmental and economic value of restored marine habitats. These academic partnerships strengthen the project's scientific foundation. They also help build the next generation of coastal resilience experts.

A key theme at the Really Rewilding seminar was the importance of community. Stronger Shores isn't just about science - it's about people. Marine habitats are often out of sight and mind, making it harder for people to connect with their value. We're using creative methods to help communities engage with life below the waves and understand the role marine habitats can play in coastal resilience. As part of our project outputs, we'll share case studies that highlight the importance of involving communities in flood and coastal erosion risk management. We aim to make a strong case for future funding to include community engagement as a core component of effective, inclusive, and lasting resilience strategies.

As we enter the final phase of the project, our focus is on legacy. We're developing the Stronger Shores Toolkit - a comprehensive resource that will consolidate our data, learning, and case studies to support other RMAs and policy makers in adopting nature-based solutions. We want to ensure the learning from Stronger Shores is impactful turning innovation into practical tools that will ensure our insights continue to shape coastal resilience strategies across the UK.



Collaborating with APSE and participating in events like Really Rewilding is a vital part of our journey. These platforms allow us to learn from others working to protect and enhance our environment. They also help us share our own lessons, raise awareness of Stronger Shores, and ensure our research reaches the right audiences. By connecting with like-minded professionals, we can accelerate progress, avoid duplication, and build a stronger, more informed community of practice around nature-based solutions. These approaches offer a cost-effective, sustainable, and community-friendly way to manage and communicate coastal risk. They align with national policy priorities and provide opportunities for local leadership in climate adaptation.

To learn more about Stronger Shores, visit:  
[www.strongershores.co.uk](http://www.strongershores.co.uk)  
@StrongerShores on social media  
Email: [strongershores@southtyneside.gov.uk](mailto:strongershores@southtyneside.gov.uk)

Emily presented at the Really Rewild seminar on 3 September, [her presentation and others can be viewed here](#).



**South Tyneside Council**

# Developing a local area energy plan for Lancaster District

Susanna Dart, Principal Climate Policy Officer, Lancaster City Council, details the authority's journey to being one of the first in England to create their roadmap to a cleaner energy future.

In 2019, Lancaster City Council declared a climate emergency, with the ambition of reaching a corporate net-zero target of 2030. As the Government's 2021 Net Zero Strategy outlined, an estimated 82% of the UK's carbon emissions are "within the scope of influence of local authorities". The threat posed by the climate crisis means that reaching net zero within the council is not enough. At Lancaster City Council we consider it critical to lead the way in setting a long-term vision for energy decarbonisation across the district to secure best outcomes for communities, local organisations, businesses and industry and critically the planet.

Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) were first conceived in 2018 by Energy Systems Catapult as a way for local authorities to understand and plan their local energy system's transition to net zero, identify the changes needed to the built environment and set out a master plan for the transition. Energy Systems Catapult began working with our council in June 2023. As well as setting out the changes required to transition our local energy system to net zero, they also identified several 'priority projects' that could deliver immediate progress and catalyse decarbonisation efforts.

## Working approach

Our LAEP was led by members of both the Council's Energy and Sustainability, and Climate Change teams, and was created with input from many different departments including planning,



Lancaster City Council received the award for Leadership in Responding to the Climate Emergency at this year's MJ Achievement Awards on 20 June.



housing, property, engineers, and sustainable travel. From the start, there was a lot of focus on getting the right people around the table. We worked extremely hard to integrate the diverse needs of our services, representing views and needs from everything from planning policy to home improvements for vulnerable residents, to teams delivering major capital projects. We did this to ensure that the LAEP we created was practical, workable and aligned with the Council's priorities and plans, and to avoid a siloed environment which could result in something less practical in the real world.

We sought to foster joint working between teams, ensuring that people were aware of what others were doing, which created a feedback loop of engagement, encouraging staff to discuss and showcase their work. A relatively flat management structure in our organisation allowed for more joined-up strategic thinking and effective cross-service engagement. Because the LAEP is designed for the whole district we also brought together a large stakeholder group representing the diversity of players in the net zero transition including district network operators, skills providers, the NHS, retrofit suppliers, local businesses, community energy and more.

Our six priorities for the LAEP were:

1. Provide the base for a just net-zero transition.
2. Deliver an ambitious, data-driven net zero target for Lancaster District's energy-associated emissions.
3. Build on existing workstreams and suggest new ones.
4. Support funding, projects, and policy.
5. Provide data in a usable and interrogatable format.
6. Deliver a LAEP which anyone across the district could use.

## Focus Zones

Lancaster's LAEP is divided into 12 separate 'focus zones'. Dividing Lancaster District into Zones for the LAEP was a key step, not only in terms of basing them around substations for practical reasons, but also in recognising and matching the hyper-local priorities of urban, peri urban and rural areas. As a district, Lancaster has a diverse, unique and varied landscape, with settlements reflecting distinct local identities and needs.

Focus zones provide an outline of the solutions required at scale to meet the challenges and deliver the co-benefits of net zero. These solutions include everything from domestic fabric upgrades to renewable deployment and account for local characteristics such





as socio-economic factors, environmental constraints, network capacity, population density and building stock – all of which can bring specific advantages, learning opportunities and challenges to delivery in that location.

#### Importance of a local and just transition

We sought to ensure that the LAEP was not dependent on major external factors outside of the local authority influence, which is why, for example, we chose heat pumps as the primary heat source, rather than Hydrogen, whose roll out and viability depends greatly on large infrastructure projects controlled by central government. This meant that the roadmap was united to the needs and realities of the district.

The future cost of energy bills was also a significant consideration, with additional modelling conducted to look at how to ensure a just net zero transition, mitigate potential impacts on fuel poverty,

as well as identify the impact of electrification of heat on various housing types. The LAEP has identified fuel poverty focus zones, which prioritise the transition to low carbon heating coupled with reducing energy demand, aimed at helping inform priorities for future decarbonisation action and ensuring no one is left behind on the journey to net zero.

#### The plan

The LAEP was adopted by cabinet in October of 2024, setting out an ambitious roadmap to net zero by 2040 for the local energy system. It identified the most cost-effective plan for the district to contribute to timebound national and local net zero targets whilst maximising co-benefits to society. It identified around 60,000 dwellings that require interventions such as new heating systems and about 38,500 homes needing building fabric improvements, which amounts to a £1.7 billion investment required by 2040.

To meet trajectories for transport decarbonisation, 1,250 public electric vehicle charging points will need to be installed. It also identified approximately £400 million in investment potential in local renewable energy generation and projected multiple benefits, including supporting more than 500 jobs in the local area and saving 3,000 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e relative to not taking action. The plan is available for anyone to use, with maps and datasets soon to be available on the website.

#### Tips for other councils

Allow enough time for stakeholder engagement and the data review. You need a good group of stakeholders around you to make sure the LAEP really represents your local area and has the information your stakeholders need to help drive net zero. Data was particularly important for us, and having time assigned across staff in different services to look at the data and outputs in detail allowed us to spot where we had not provided enough information to support modelling. This enabled us to refine the draft LAEP and ensure that it matched the policies and priorities of the local area. Also make sure to take the time to build a collaborative relationship with the consultant team. This will help everyone gain a deep understanding of what a local area energy plan can do, what the potential for your local area is and together create a plan that reflects your area's unique circumstances.

Thanks to the effort put into making the Lancaster LAEP a dynamic and actionable plan, we're now seeing real progress across projects, policies, and priorities. Work is already underway on an exciting EV charging hub with a solar canopy for residents - one of the flagship projects identified in the LAEP. Our Local Plan review is embedding LAEP principles across policy areas, ensuring alignment with our net zero ambitions. And, with our strong commitment to energy justice, the upcoming regional retrofit event in our District will spotlight the communities needing the most support, driving an inclusive transition to net zero.

To learn more about Lancaster District's Local Area Energy Plan visit: <https://www.lancaster.gov.uk/LAEP>

Susanna presented at the APSE Energy Warrington event in May, presentations can be viewed here.



Lancaster was recognised as the best performing district council in the country for climate action in the 2025 Climate Emergency UK scorecard, published in July.



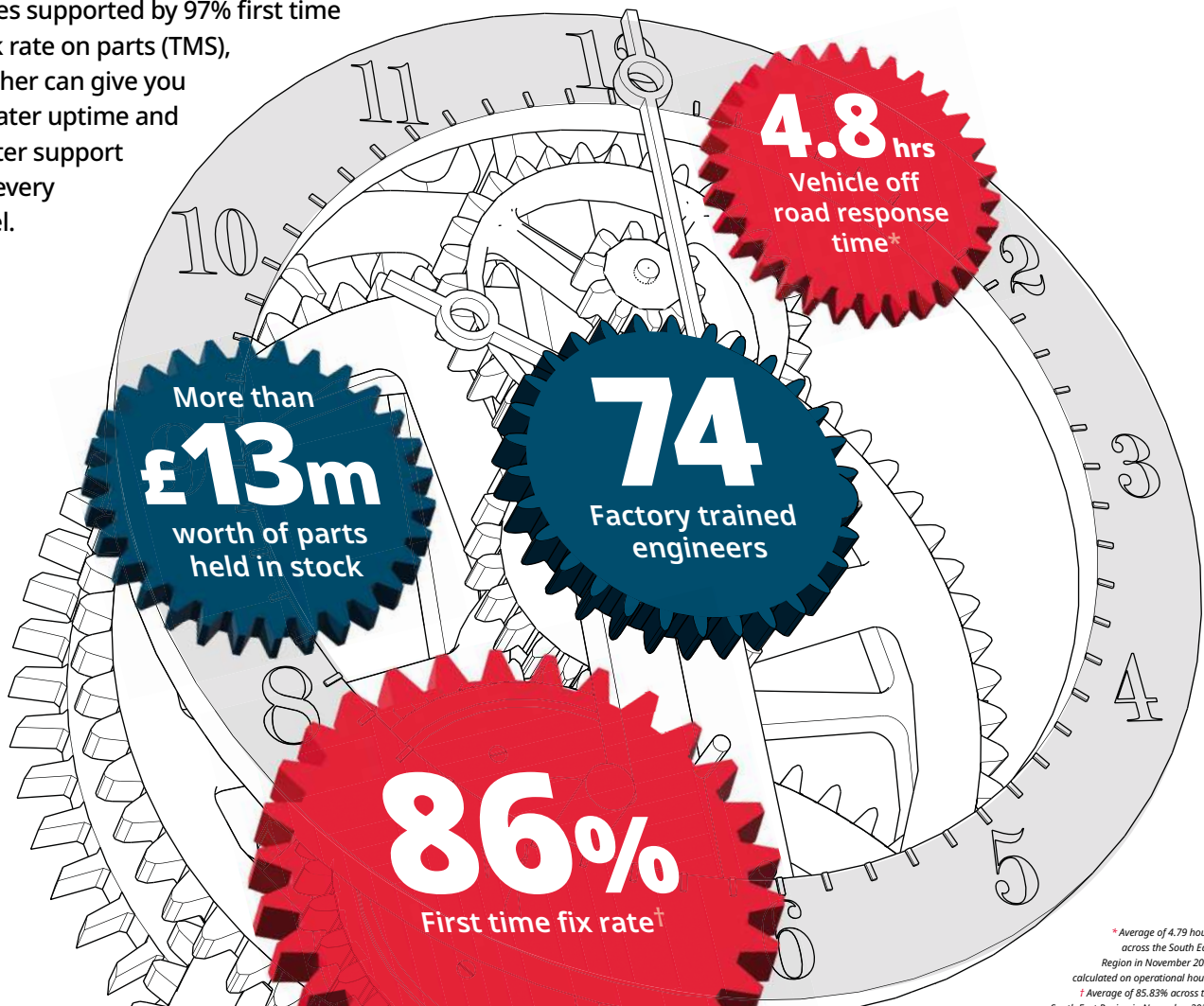
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# A positive response to plot size adjustments amidst acute demand for allotments

APSE's latest 'State of the Market Survey on Local Authority Allotments' demonstrates that councils are successfully adapting to sustained demand, Matt Ellis reports.

A new national survey has revealed how local councils are successfully adapting to the intense and sustained demand for allotments by creating smaller and more manageable plots, whilst embedding biodiversity and accessibility into their services.

The 'State of the Market 2025' report from APSE found that 76% of local authorities have now reduced the size of standard plots to create smaller options, a 12% increase since 2022. This innovative approach is widely welcomed by new tenants and is a key factor in helping to manage the UK's lengthy waiting lists.

Despite the high demand, with 63% of councils reporting average waiting times of more than 18 months, the survey indicates this critical pressure may be starting to plateau. The proportion of authorities with over 1,000 people on their waiting list has remained steady, suggesting that council strategies to increase supply are beginning to have an impact.

Matt Ellis, APSE Principal Advisor for Parks and author of the report, said, "This year's findings tell a story of innovation and resilience from local councils. In the face of acute demand and budget pressures, they are not just maintaining allotment services but actively reimagining them. By creating smaller plots, they are making them accessible to a new generation of gardeners with busy modern lifestyles, all while championing biodiversity and inclusivity."

The report also highlights a strong and growing commitment to environmental sustainability. A significant 80% of councils are now setting aside areas for wildlife on allotment sites, a 5% year-on-year increase. Furthermore, the promotion of pollinator-friendly planting has seen a 15% rise since 2023.

Councils are also making strides in ensuring their services are inclusive. Over half (57%) now make specific provisions for people with disabilities, such as providing raised beds and accessible pathways.

60% of authorities also continue to offer concessionary rents to support vulnerable groups, including pensioners and those on low incomes.

While financial pressures remain, with 63% of councils still subsidising their allotment service, the trend is moving towards cost neutrality. Many are carefully balancing necessary rent increases with the need to keep plots affordable, ensuring they remain a valuable community resource.

Other key findings from the APSE 2025 report include:

- **Meeting demand:** 37% of authorities now manage over 30 allotment sites, an increase rise from 27% in 2019, demonstrating a concerted effort to expand provision.
- **Fair access:** For the first time, a majority of councils (55%) now restrict plot ownership to one per person or household to ensure fairer access for all.
- **Strategic importance:** Over half of all local authorities (57%) now include specific policies for the protection and provision of allotments in their Local Plans, recognising their strategic value.

The full report provides a comprehensive analysis of allotment management, costs, waiting lists, and strategies across the UK. You can access it [here](#).



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# Securing the Future of Public Swimming Pools: A Collaborative Campaign for Investment

In recent months, Swim England has been part of a collaborative campaign to secure vital investment for the nation's swimming pools.

With the future of public leisure facilities under increasing threat from rising costs, ageing infrastructure, and funding pressures, the national governing body for swimming has joined forces with local government and sector leaders to make the case for targeted grassroots sports funding.

At the heart of this campaign is a simple but urgent message: swimming pools are not just places for recreation - they are essential community assets that support physical and mental health, tackle inequalities, and reduce pressure on the NHS. Yet, since 2010, more than 500 pools have closed, representing a loss of over 34,000 square metres of water space. Alarming, nearly half of these closures occurred in the last five years, and 60% of remaining pools are now beyond their expected lifespans or in need of refurbishment.

Recognising the scale of the challenge, Swim England formed a coalition of influential partners - including the Local Government Association, Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA), Community Leisure UK, Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE), and ukactive - to urge the Government to ensure that the £400 million announced in the Spending Review for grassroots sports facilities reaches the swimming pools and leisure centres that communities rely on every day.

This united front has been instrumental in shaping the narrative around public leisure. The coalition argues that local authorities are best placed to identify where investment is most needed and to ensure funding delivers maximum impact. Councils are already the largest funders of public fitness and leisure services, and directing investment through them would safeguard and enhance the infrastructure that supports physical activity across the country.

Swim England's campaign has not only been vocal in the media but also strategic in its engagement with policymakers. A recent meeting with the Minister for Sport and senior civil servants at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) provided a critical

opportunity to present the case directly. During this meeting, Swim England highlighted the findings of its updated Value of Swimming report, which revealed that aquatic activity generates £2.4 billion in social value annually and prevented 78,500 cases of ill health in 2022 alone.

The Ministerial engagement reinforced the importance of swimming pools in delivering on the Government's 10-year health plan and its ambition to get 3.5 million more people active by 2030. It also underscored the need for a place-based investment approach—one that channels funding through local government to reach the communities most in need.

Andy Salmon, CEO of Swim England, has been clear about the stakes: "Swimming is particularly popular amongst older age groups, and those with a disability or long-term health condition. If we want to tackle health inequalities and best support a healthier and happier nation, then it's vital we have a network of sustainable pools for people to access".



*Andy Salmon, CEO, Swim England, attending a meeting at DCMS to present on the economic and social value of swimming.*

The campaign has also drawn attention to the growing demand for health and fitness facilities, with a record 11.5 million people now members of health and fitness clubs in the UK. However, economic conditions and rising energy costs continue to hamper growth. Without intervention, physical inactivity could rise by 35% by 2030, placing further strain on public health and finances.

Local government's role in this campaign cannot be overstated. Councils are not only the primary funders of public leisure but also the stewards of community wellbeing. Their involvement in the campaign has been pivotal in demonstrating the real-world impact of swimming pools - from dementia-friendly swims and rehabilitation programmes to school swimming lessons and family sessions.

As Swim England and its partners continue to advocate for sustainable investment, the message to Government is clear: invest in public leisure, and you invest in the health, happiness, and resilience of the nation. The campaign is a shining example of how collaboration between national bodies and local government can drive meaningful change and secure the future of vital public services.

Swim England presented at the APSE Sports and Leisure Network meeting on local authority pools on 8 October. [Presentations are available to view here.](#)







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# Conversion of vacant student accommodation to provide temporary accommodation for families

Fresh from winning the APSE Service Award for Best Building and Housing initiative, find out how Derby are using empty student housing to support families in their time of need.

Derby City Council has undertaken a significant initiative to purchase and remodel long term vacant student flats to use as an alternative to overnight accommodation. The site consisted of 49 seven bedrooomed flats over 16 blocks.

The project is split into two phases. The first was the site purchase and recommissioning of 46 flats to provide self-contained temporary family accommodation and the second phase is the conversion from 49 to 95 apartments.

The purchase completed in June 2024 with families moving in between September and November 2024. Once the families were living there the cost savings were evident within a short period of time. There was a reduction in the weekly amount the Council had to pay for each family in overnight accommodation and an improvement in the housing benefit subsidy loss, even allowing for the Council meeting any additional cost to those families subject to an Under Occupancy Charge (as their flat technically had 7 bedrooms).

Prior to purchase the decision was made for the property to be held in the General Fund (GF) rather than the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The financial model included Un-ringfenced Right To Buy receipts as well as external grant funding via MHCLG, unallocated Section 106 receipts for affordable housing and corporate borrowing. Although the GF is subject to a higher borrowing rate than the HRA, plus the need to set aside a Minimum Revenue Position (MRP), the significant saving achieved within the subsidy system was factored in so the project achieves an early operational surplus and will have generated a surplus greater than the outstanding debt by year 19.

If the property were to be held within the HRA, any saving achieved within the subsidy system cannot be used towards an operational loss within the HRA, so although the HRA can borrow at a more competitive rate than the GF the project would not break even or produce an operational surplus.

The financial model incorporates an inflation factor as the project is delivered over 3 financial years as well as property management and maintenance and borrowing costs. The rental income also increases as additional apartments are brought into use.

Site work re-commenced in April 2025, after detailed design was complete, remodelling the 3 vacant flats into 3 two-bedroom and 3 three-bedroom apartments. These will be used to vacate other blocks to allow a rolling programme of refurbishment and conversion of the remaining flats over a 2 year programme.

To date the refurbishment work has been more complex than originally anticipated in relation to technical matters rather than the layout design. As the work is considered a substantial change the Building Regulations are applicable so some additional work has been included, such as replacement of all unvented windows, to meet ventilation requirements and as part of a longer term maintenance strategy. There has also been a change from a full evacuation to a stay put fire strategy so an upgraded fire system, different fire doors and additional fire compartmentalisation have also been included in the scope of works. It has also become evident that additional external works are needed to make the area more family friendly so gravel areas are being removed and replaced with soft landscaping.



Extensive work has also been required to convert from communal boilers to individual heating systems, with separate service metering, requiring extensive additional service runs – challenging when the site has a blanket Tree Protection Order and there are trees all around the perimeter where the service runs where needed. The impact of additional loading on the service infrastructure has necessitated different solutions in different apartments to prevent the need for an increased service capacity or new sub station which would have incurred significant cost.

The project remains on budget despite the extra work being included due to the inclusion of a contingency and robust budget monitoring by a single dedicated Project Manager for both phases of the work. In addition a Delivery Team, consisting of representatives from all disciplines involved with undertaking the works, managing the property and providing support has also been created. A governance structure is also in place for reporting, monitoring and any potential escalation required.

The impact of this initiative extends beyond simply providing housing. By offering stable, high-quality homes, the project contributes to improved health and educational outcomes for families, particularly children, who previously lived in unsuitable overnight accommodation.

The success of this initiative has highlighted the potential for similar large-scale acquisitions, which could provide a more cost and service efficient alternative to purchasing or building individual properties. Delivery can be fast paced resulting in the benefits being evident quicker.



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