

On Notice

Why the government must act urgently to prevent further s.114 notices

-Findings from the latest Survation poll on public services-



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A new year message from APSE National Chair

Cllr Jacqui Burnett

2023 saw a year of change for APSE. We put in place a new establishment structure to support the delivery of the Association's Business Plan for 2023-2026. I am very proud that by the end of the year, we had achieved the new establishment structure, including the appointment of two new modern apprentices; something which I have championed for many years.

For our member councils we have continued to campaign for fair funding for local government across the UK and in doing so we have explored public opinion on frontline services. Yet again, our survey work with respected polling company Survation, finds that the public value their local services which they receive from local councils, rating them highly across all demographic groups. From parks to school meals, the public satisfaction ratings remain consistently high in spite of the challenges.

“From parks to school meals, the public satisfaction ratings remain consistently high in spite of the challenges.”

However, we should not remain complacent. We also asked the public: If their local council were to face a S.114 notice, leaving them only able to provide essential services, what services should be protected from cuts? The answers are very stark. The public does not differentiate between statutory and non-statutory services.

“The public does not differentiate between statutory and non-statutory services. In reality, they want to see all local services protected.”

In reality, they want to see all local services protected, and they have a strong connection between greening local areas and the role of local councils in being local environmental champions. And yet it is often the case that there is a disconnect between the local expectations within our communities and the resources that they have at their disposal.

This leads me to my message for 2024. The constant seesaw of funding rounds with no ability for councils to plan in the long

term is both damaging and dangerous. The services we provide as local councils are too vital to be left to wither on the vine. My wish for 2024 is that we see a recognition that local council services are every bit as vital to a functioning economy as those of police, fire and, of course, health. We provide the services that are the glue to good communities.

Parks are the lungs we rely upon for exercise, relaxation, and social spaces. Our local road networks are the key to transport links to employment, health services and education. Our school meals are a vital line of defence for both child nutrition and child poverty.

“The services we provide as local councils are too vital to be left to wither on the vine.”

Our leisure centres are fundamental to moving towards a prevention agenda rather than services that must mop up the impact of ill-health. We are desperate to deliver better housing run and owned by local councils.

We have responded to the UK-wide initiatives on waste and resources to improve recycling and reduce waste. But none of this is possible without well-funded and respected local services.

My good wishes to you all for 2024 and my thanks to all the local heroes who carry on delivering for our local communities.

Best wishes,

Jacqui

Cllr Jacqui Burnett is APSE's National Chair 2023-2024



Editorial



Mo Baines,
APSE Chief Executive

Systemic failures in local finance must be addressed in 2024

There is always a lingering accusation that local government cries wolf. That there will never be enough money for everything councils desire. That good government means managing the public finances. How true these pearls of wisdom have proven to be over the decades is a debate for another day. But as we step into 2024, we are facing arguably the biggest crisis in local government for decades.

It is unfair, unjust, and untrue to blame the slew of S.144 notices and warnings on financial mismanagement. This latest round of dire warnings of more councils facing de facto bankruptcy is not simply a case of poor management. To say so is to ignore the plethora of cuts that followed the era of austerity that has yet to see council funding return to sustainable levels.

This attitude also ignores the growth in demand for council services from the young and old alike - with demands on children's services and adult social care having increased exponentially. The prolonged impact of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and endemic child poverty will strain council resources even further.

However, whilst we all understand the need for a delicate balance between demand and resources, we are witnessing ignorance on a mass scale

in the failure to recognise fundamental flaws in local government finance. Councils are effectively debarred from raising local revenue except through council tax that remains under central control. Furthermore, local economic growth is rarely rewarded - even when regeneration opportunities provided by businesses do arise, they do not always equate to people spending more money in the local economy or living there. Too often, the 'beneficiaries' of growth are commuter towns far removed from the seemingly undisputed narrative of trickle-down economics - which has frequently been an abject failure across Europe and beyond.

And this is all before we consider the extraction of public monies. We are now witnessing profits from care - the area where councils have the least headroom - going to offshore tax havens. Markets were created long before globalisation, yet we have failed to adjust the perceived wisdom of outsourcing such services. Only a complete restructuring of local government finance and rebuilding capacity in the public sector with spend-to-save investments will resolve these issues.

In 2024 we need to challenge the narrative on local government finance and demand a step change in the debate to one that is an honest reflection of the issues faced.

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Report Back

A round up of APSE advocacy and events



APSE in the MJ

“At the heart of government, in an unprecedented crisis, we hear not of integrity and compassion, but of an excruciating lack of self-awareness by a group of unelected advisers shouting and messaging expletives to each other.” On 8 November, APSE Chief Executive Mo Baines wrote for the MJ on the recent revelations uncovered by the Covid inquiry into the handling of the pandemic. Mo contrasted the chaos of top government decision-makers at the time, to the “warmth and grace” shown by local authorities to each other and their communities. The article is free to read via www.themj.co.uk.

Bees, Trees and Communities

On 23 November, APSE Southern Region hosted its annual Parks and Open Spaces Seminar in the picturesque surroundings of St Anne’s Manor, Wokingham. The event explored the importance of parks services in tackling the climate crisis, with discussions on biodiversity, street greening, nature recovery and the financial viability of the parks and open spaces sector.

L’APSE en France

On 30 November, Debbie Johns, Head of APSE Performance Networks, attended an event in Metz, France, which looked at how cities across Europe are trying to improve their environmental standards, such as tackling street litter and reducing carbon emissions.

The Future of Councillor-Officer Relations : New APSE research

A new report by APSE has explored the working relationships between elected members and council officers, and how these impact on decision making, policy implementation and overall delivery for citizens. The report was informed by wide-ranging research carried out by a team of academics, and puts forward a number of recommendations to strengthen councillor-officer dynamics. For more information on the report, go to page six.

Sports and Leisure Seminar

Loughborough University was the site of the APSE Sports and Leisure Seminar on 2 November, where delegates discussed the current state of local leisure services. With recent external shocks including Covid-19, the energy crisis and high inflation – this event was a welcomed opportunity to evaluate the state of the market and consider the range of challenges faced by the sector.

Mo at the House of Commons

APSE Chief Executive Mo Baines has been named by Public Sector Catering in their top 20 ‘Most Influential’ people list.

The list is comprised of the industry’s leading lights, chosen based on their ability to represent the concerns of people working in the sector and their capacity to drive change.

Mo attended a round table discussion with the rest of the cohort at the House of Commons on December 14, where they discussed a range of issues from free school meals to carbon reduction and decided on the key action points for the Public Sector Catering Alliance to tackle in 2024.

The Power of Digital

A new report, produced in collaboration between APSE and the Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation (Socitm) has explored how effectively local authorities are adopting new technology in their service delivery. The report found that whilst the majority of service managers and workers were enthusiastic about the use of new technology, local authorities need to make sure they recognise and support the needs of less digitally-literate members of staff. Read more about the report on page 28.



APSE Chief Executive Mo Baines, with Jamie Starr, Business Development Manager at Kress UK and Ireland, and Les Cork, Commercial Business Development Manager.

Rob Bailey, APSE Principal Advisor, looks at the impact of climate change on local authority fleet services.



Scotland

Living Wage Scotland Awards

On 9 November, Cllr Lynne Short, APSE Scotland Chair and Lousie Melville, Principal Advisor attended the Living Wage Scotland Awards 2023, which celebrated individuals and organisations that have made an outstanding contribution to the living wage movement. APSE sponsored the Employee Choice Award category, with Lynne presenting a trophy to the category winner, KURA.

Wales

APSE Wales redevelopment

APSE Wales has approved a new redevelopment plan. The plan involves the creation of three new advisory groups on an interim basis: Neighborhood Services; Health and Wellbeing; and Housing, Homelessness and Community Support. Should this new interim arrangement prove a success, the APSE Wales Executive will ratify these amendments at a future meeting of APSE Wales at its AGM in 2024.

The first of the new advisory group meetings - Housing, Homelessness and Community Support - will be held online on Friday 2 February, and include speakers from Swansea Council, Community Housing Cymru and The Wallich. Information on how to book can be found online. For more details about APSE Wales please contact Matt Ellis on mellis@apse.org.uk.

Northern Ireland

Active Communities

On Thursday 30 November, APSE Northern Ireland held a special online event - "Active Communities". The event explored the ways local councils are encouraging and sustaining physical activity opportunities in communities across Northern Ireland for people of all ages, including those with a long-term health condition, who need support and motivation to start and stay active. Chaired by Northern Ireland Chair Cllr Terry Andrews, the event was attended by delegates from each of the 11 Northern Ireland local authorities.



Grace Anderson, Senior Human Resources Business Partner at KURA, accepting the Employee Choice Award from Cllr Lynne Short, APSE Scotland Chair.

Highway Resilience Forum

Rob Bailey, Principal Advisor for Highways and Transport, hosted APSE's Highway Resilience Forum on 13 October in Bradford. With record high temperatures and rainfall, local authorities are having to deal with the increasingly varied demands of climate change. Flood resilience was also at the top of the agenda, with 2023 having seen several extreme weather events in the UK.

APSE in LAPV

"With milder winters causing greater rainfall, councils are making changes to the gully emptying regime. Previously, this service had suffered because of local authority budget cuts. However, because of increased rainfall, it has become critical to ensure the highway drainage network remains unobstructed - this has seen increased investment in plant and contracts to remove debris and silt."

Published on 18 December, Rob wrote an article of LAPV (Local Authority Plant and Vehicles) on the impact of climate change on local authority fleet services. You can read the article for free on the LAPV website.

New public attitudes survey

A new poll by Survation - conducted on behalf of APSE - has found that one in four councillors think their local authority is at risk of bankruptcy within the next five years. Another standout finding from the poll was that the public are four times more trusting in their local councils than central government, and are eight times more trusting of councillors than government ministers. Find out more on page 28.



Damian Lyons Lowe, Chief Executive of Survation, presented the findings of the survey at the Performance Networks Seminar in Blackpool on 7 December 2023.



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One in four councillors think their local authority is at risk of bankruptcy

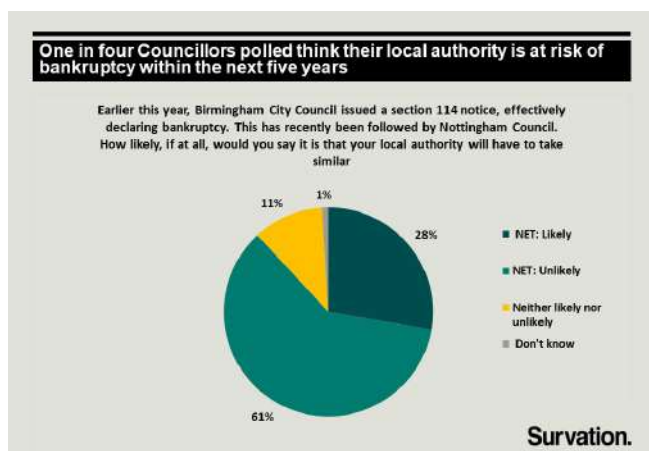
A new Survation poll conducted on behalf of APSE, has also found that the public favours more money for local councils, with eight times as many people trusting local councillors than Government ministers to make decisions about how services are provided in their local area.

APSE asked Survation to provide a public opinion survey of attitudes to local neighbourhood services in 2023, covering the range of council services that would appear in their local area. Survation also polled councillors in Great Britain, to gauge their opinion on levels of funding, financial health of councils and their priorities for protecting services.

These are the key findings:

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

When councillors were asked on the likelihood of their local authority issuing a Section 114 notice, over a quarter (28%) reported the risk of bankruptcy as "Likely." The polling of councillors also found 85% of those surveyed do not believe that their local authority receives adequate funding. When asked about the cancellation or closure of services since 2010, libraries topped the list with 36%.



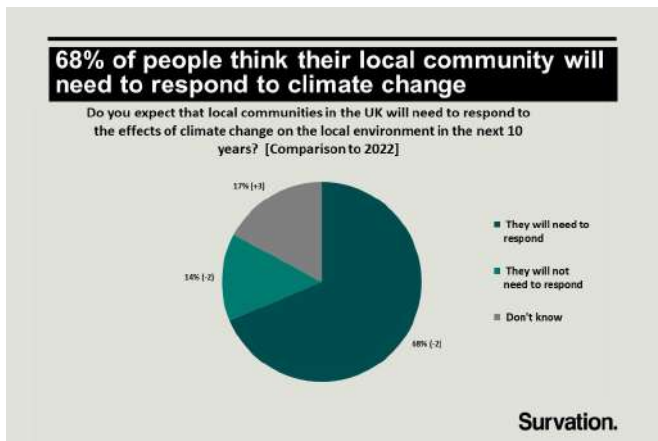
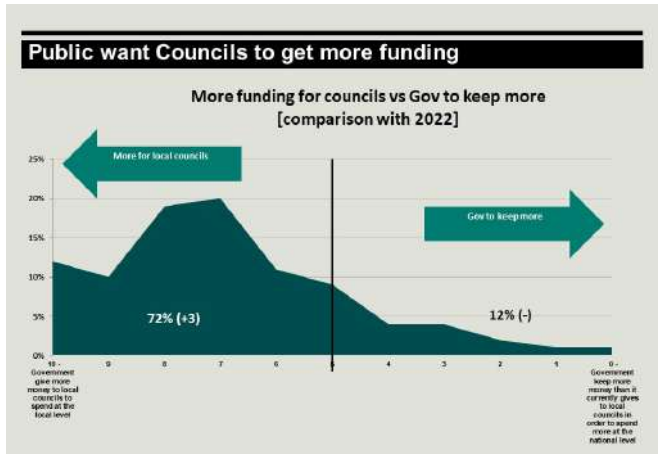
The public favours more money for local councils for local services

On the issue of funding, around three-quarters (72%) of the public would like the Government to give more money to local councils to spend at the local level, up 3% from last year.

Trust remains high in councils and councillors compared to Government or private companies

The survey found trust in councils and councillors is still high overall compared to trust in Government and ministers. In other findings, the data suggests that climate change remains a priority for the public and they expect councils to take a leading role in responding to it.

It is bad news for Government and ministers with four times more trusting councils (49%) than National Government (12%), and eight times more (51%) trusting councillors over Government ministers (6%).



Climate change remains a priority for respondents

A majority find that the local communities in the UK will need to respond to the effects of climate change in the next 10 years. 68% of those surveyed find that councils will need to respond, nearly 5 times as many as those who find that they will not need to respond (14%). Over half (52%) support more funds for councils to combat climate change locally.

Home energy efficiency a top priority for combating climate change

When it comes to specific steps councils should be adopting in combating climate change, there is big support for making homes more efficient (60%). This is followed by improving recycling and reducing waste (52%) and improving affordable public transport (48%). Improving flood defences is up 8% from last year, perhaps reflecting the damage extreme weather events are increasingly wreaking on local communities across the UK.

Road maintenance followed by affordable housing, road maintenance, social care and climate change are the most popular areas for more investment.

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

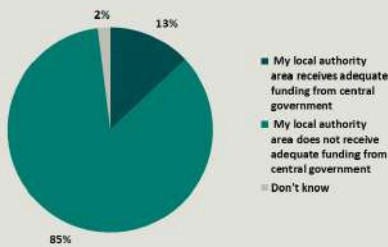
1. Road maintenance – average 11% of notional spending
2. Affordable Housing – average 10% of notional spending
3. Social care – average of 10% of notional spending
4. Local climate action – average of 9% of notional spending

Speaking about the poll results Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive, said: "The results from this year's survey make for bittersweet reading for anyone involved in local government. Though many will be cheered by the high level of trust placed in local councils by the general public, that over a quarter of councillors fear risk of bankruptcy reveals just how desperate the financial situation has become for the sector. Based on these findings, it is clear that without urgent Government action, those frontline services millions depend on for our safety, prosperity and wellbeing will collapse."

"What is also clear is that we have a job to do in convincing Government that local investment through councils is not only popular but a sensible route to delivering visible improvements at a community level. This means delivering on public priorities in partnership with councils, especially in areas like climate change, where councils can make a real difference in greening local

Councillors do not believe their local authority receives adequate funding

Which of the following is closest to your view?



Survation.

transport, and investing in making homes more energy efficient." Damian Lyons Lowe, Survation Chief Executive, added: "This comprehensive Survation poll underscores the resilience and trust that local councils have cultivated among the public. Despite the financial challenges indicated by a quarter of councillors foreseeing the risk of bankruptcy, it's heartening to see the public's confidence in local authorities, particularly in critical areas like climate action and community services.

"It's clear from these findings that our local councils are not only deeply trusted by the public but are also effectively addressing key community issues. This reinforces the need for continued support and investment in local governance, ensuring they have the resources to sustain and enhance the vital services they provide to our communities."

Read the full report on APSE's website.

Survation



Health and Social Care Forum 2024

FREE for APSE Members

Includes expert speakers:

Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive

Anna Kear, CEO, Tonic Housing Association

Sam Brandman, Chief Operating Officer, Two Generations CIC

Justine Carter, Director, Unseen UK

Shantanu Kundu, CEO and Founder, Be Free Campaign

Tina Tate, Strategic Resourcing Manager for Adult Social Care, East Riding of Yorkshire Council

Sarah Teague, Strategic Manager, People and Organisational Development



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Performance Networks Report Back

Report back

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

Best and Most Improved Performer Awards

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

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All about the stats

Performance Networks Seminar Report Back

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



Patrick Allcorn, Head of Local Net Zero Delivery and Demonstration, DESNZ, opens session one.

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

The opening session of this year's event began with a discussion on one of the most pressing issues of our time: climate change. Patrick Allcorn, Head of Local Net Zero Delivery and Demonstration, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, discussed the importance of data benchmarking in monitoring progress, comparing performance and identifying good practice in the transition to net zero.

A snapshot of APSE's benchmarking service

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

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

Debbie drew attention to that fact that the recent high levels of inflation had resulted in increasing costs in a variety of sectors. For building cleaning and catering, there was a 6% increase in the past year. This impact is also shown in carriageway maintenance costs, with a 21% reduction in maintenance schemes in 2022-2023 despite a similar budget to 2021-2022.

Income received by councils from external sources (known as discountable income) has increased by 7% in parks and 2% in refuse in the past year, as councils seek to generate income to offset their constricted budgets. Notably, over 40% of councils now charge for replacement bins and green waste. Additionally, charges for collections may be affected by the Simpler Recycling plans for England, which the Government announced in October - although local authorities will be able to continue charging for garden waste collections.

For street cleansing, there has been an increase in demand on the service in terms of bin emptying and litter pick requests. The provision of bins has increased, as have the number of requests from members of the public. Flytipping has been reducing from the high of the pandemic period (peaking at 4500 flytipping incidents in 2020-2021), which was associated with the closure of civic amenity sites. The increase of the upper limit for on-the-spot fines, and ringfencing the proceeds for clean-up and enforcement operations will have an influence on these trends in the future.

In terms of burials and cremations, despite peaks during Covid, particularly in April/May 2020 and Feb/March 2021, current levels now show a similar trend to pre-covid levels, although demand on the service continues.

Not unsurprisingly, we are seeing financial challenges in leisure services - a significant factor being the 129% increase in energy costs since 2019-20. However, there is also a recovery in both usage and income close to pre-pandemic levels. Councils have attempted to combat leisure expenditure issues through reducing opening and staffing hours, which have contributed to a 4.75% reduction in energy consumption.

For refuse, the number of missed bin collections have improved across the board over the past couple of years, especially for residual collections.

Continuing from last year, the improvements on roads, highways and street lighting compared to pre-pandemic levels have continued. In 2022-2023, the number of calls/contacts from the public to report street lighting faults have fallen to 1346, down from 3388 in 2019-2020.

Debbie also identified some changes in terms of the number of front-line local authority staff, some services which had previously shown increases in the number of staff have since seen reductions. For example, building cleaning has seen a 16% reduction in staffing numbers, whilst cemetery and crematoria staffing has decreased by 6%.

She added that there are difficulties in recruiting and retainment across a number of services, with the highest levels of vacancies in leisure recreation assistance and building maintenance services.

Debbie then updated delegates as to the progress being made by the Performance Networks service in launching new projects, expanding its influence and improving user experience.



A packed hall listens to the opening panel discussion on using performance data intelligently.

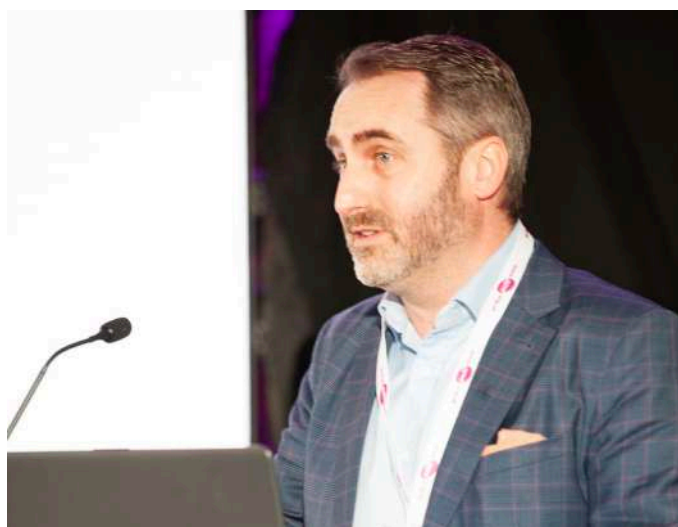
Artificial Intelligence and frontline services

Our penultimate speaker of the session, David Ogden, Engagement Director, Socitm, considered the best way for local authorities to make use of innovations in Artificial Intelligence within their frontline service delivery. David discussed the diversity of AI applications and way it could council services, as well as the possible risks posed by the technology. APSE and Socitm recently partnered to produce a new 'Power of Digital Report', which paints a picture of the challenges and opportunities presented by new technology across the local authority sector.

Damian Lyons-Lowe, Chief Executive, Survation, closed session one with an overview of public attitudes to local council services in 2023. He revealed that public trust in local councils remains significantly higher than national government, with people trusting councils to spend their taxes much more than central government. Additionally, 72% of people surveyed stated that they wanted councils to get more funding, as opposed to just 12% who would prefer the government to keep more.

Forums and workshops

In the afternoon, delegates attended thematic forums that honed in on pressing issues and a range of local government frontline services. In the forum "Applying digital solutions efficiently and effectively", Gemma Hancox, Customer Contact Group Manager, Telford and Wrekin Council, and Matt Ellis, APSE Principal Advisor, discussed how technology can provide smarter, leaner ways of working that benefit both authorities and the service users.



Damian Lyons Lowe, Chief Executive of Survation, takes delegates through the findings of APSE and Survation's latest survey.

Sandy Anderson, Service Manager, Fife Council and Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive, presented the "Workforce Matters Forum", which focused on promoting a mentally healthy workplace for frontline operatives. Sandy discussed the steps that Fife Council have made to help their staff, including the implementation of training programmes, Mental Health First Aiders and Employee Wellbeing Roadshows.

In the forum 'Monitoring climate change' Phil Brennan, Head of APSE Energy, explained how APSE's new climate benchmarking module can be used by councils to monitor their carbon footprint. Phil detailed the three 'scopes' of emissions, and how APSE Energy can help local authorities to make a significant impact on emissions output.

Other forums looked at the whether 'lifelong learning' was still a valid concept for frontline workforce training, as well as an in-depth discussion on the use of inspection apps and Power BI in delivering frontline services.



Delegates assess recruitment and retention insights at the Building Maintenance workshop, facilitated by Charlotte Banks, APSE Energy Principal Advisor.

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

These included:

- Building cleaning and catering
- Building maintenance
- Cemetery and crematorium services
- Parks, street cleansing and streetscene
- Refuse collection, recycling and transport
- Roads/highways, winter maintenance and street lighting
- Sports and leisure

Climate change

The second day of the seminar opened with Mark Davies, Chief Executive, Lancaster City Council, who gave a detailed overview of the wide range of projects across Lancaster to meet the authority's pledge to achieve net zero by 2030. Mark emphasised the importance of consultation with local people, engaging with partners, and maintaining a high level of ambition.

The seminar concluded with a panel discussion, made up of a number of senior managers from across the UK, who discussed how their respective areas are responding to the climate crisis. The panel included: Cllr Tom Ross, Leader, Trafford Council; Mark Davies, Chief Executive, Lancaster City Council; South Kesteven Council; Paul Wright, Operational Director, Halton Borough Council; Louise Marix Evans, former advisor to the Committee for Climate Change and expert in decarbonisation, the panel was chaired by Cllr Jacqui Burnett, APSE National Chair.

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



Best and most improved performer 2023

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The APSE Performance Networks Awards 2023 recognised 'Best Performers' and 'Most Improved Performers' across frontline local government services on a range of cost and quality performance indicators, promoting excellence and continuous improvement. This year's finalists were excellent examples of how measuring and comparing services can lead to real change.

The Awards were announced at the Village Hotel, Blackpool on the evening of Thursday 7 December 2023, at the APSE Performance Networks Seminar.

A charity dinner was hosted as part of the awards evening, which raised years has raised over £1,500 for Parkinsons UK.

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

Congratulations to all finalists and winners!

Building Cleaning *kindly sponsored by BBITS.*

Best Performer



Finalists

- Dumfries and Galloway Council
- East Ayrshire Council
- East Renfrewshire Council
- Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
- Orkney Islands Council
- Shropshire Council

WINNER: Gateshead Council

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- East Ayrshire Council Education Authority (Northern Ireland)
- Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
- Knowsley Metropolitan Borough
- Moray Council

WINNER: East Ayrshire Council

Building Maintenance kindly sponsored by Survation.

Best Performer



Finalists

- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Fife Council
- Moray Council
- North Ayrshire Council
- Shetland Islands Council
- Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: Wigan Council

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

- Aberdeenshire Council
- Fife Council
- Moray Council
- North Ayrshire Council
- Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: North Ayrshire Council

Catering services kindly sponsored by APSE Solutions.

Best Performer



Finalists

- Denbighshire County Council
- Derbyshire County Council
- East Renfrewshire Council
- Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- South Lanarkshire Council
- Sunderland City Council

WINNER: Gateshead Council

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

- Aberdeenshire Council
- Conwy County Borough Council
- Education Authority (Northern Ireland)
- Falkirk Council
- Moray Council
- Oxfordshire County Council
- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
- South Lanarkshire Council

WINNER: Oxfordshire County Council

Cemetery and Crematorium Services *kindly sponsored by Fraser and Fraser.*

Best Performer



Finalists

Aberdeen City Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Lancaster City Council
Middlesbrough Council
North Lincolnshire Council
Northumberland County Council
South Lanarkshire Council
Warrington Borough Council

WINNER: Middlesbrough Council

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

Flintshire County Council
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
South Lanarkshire Council
Warrington Borough Council

WINNER: Knowsley Council

Parks, Open Spaces and Horticultural Services *kindly sponsored by Helping Hand Environmental.*

Best Performer



Finalists

Bolsover District Council
East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Eastleigh Borough Council
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
Gedling Borough Council
Hull City Council
Stafford Borough Council
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
West Lothian Council

WINNER: Eastleigh Borough Council

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

Bolsover District Council
Cambridge City Council
Eastleigh Borough Council
Gedling Borough Council
Hull City Council
South Lanarkshire Council
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: Hull City Council

Refuse Collection *kindly sponsored by Future Street.*

Best Performer



Most Improved Performer



Finalists

Blackpool Council
Bolsover District Council
East Riding of Yorkshire Council
North Ayrshire Council
North Lanarkshire Council
Telford and Wrekin Council
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
Warrington Borough Council
West Lindsey District Council

WINNER: West Lindsey District Council

Finalists

Blackpool Council
Cardiff Council
Huntingdonshire District Council
Newcastle-Under-Lyme Borough Council
North Ayrshire Council
North Lanarkshire Council
Telford and Wrekin Council
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: North Lanarkshire Council

Roads, Highways and Winter Maintenance *kindly sponsored by Tarmac.*

Best Performer



Most Improved Performer



Finalists

Caerphilly County Borough Council
Clackmannanshire Council
East Ayrshire Council
East Renfrewshire Council
North Ayrshire Council
Plymouth City Council
South Ayrshire Council
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: South Ayrshire Council

Finalists

East Ayrshire Council
East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Northumberland County Council
Pembrokeshire County Council
South Ayrshire Council
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
West Lothian Council
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: East Ayrshire Council

Sports and Leisure Facility Management *kindly sponsored by Alliance Leisure.*

Best Performer



Finalists

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Your Space Royston
Chelmsford City Council
Chelmsford Sport and Athletics Centre
East Riding of Yorkshire Council
East Riding Leisure Haltemprice

London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Mile End Park Leisure Centre and Stadium
North Lincolnshire Council
NL Active, Ancholme Leisure Centre
North Northamptonshire Council
Lodge Park Sports Centre

WINNER: North Northamptonshire Council

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

Chelmsford City Council South
Woodham Ferrers Leisure Centre
East Riding of Yorkshire Council
East Riding Leisure Withernsea
North Lincolnshire Council
NL Active, Ancholme Leisure Centre
Nottingham City Council
Djanogly Community Leisure Centre

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Aston-Cum-Aughton Leisure Centre

WINNER: East Riding of Yorkshire Council

Street Cleansing *kindly sponsored by Bucher Municipal*

Best Performer



Finalists

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Bolsover District Council
East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Eastleigh Borough Council
Gedling Borough Council
Hull City Council
London Borough of Hounslow
Stafford Borough Council
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
West Lindsey District Council

WINNER: Eastleigh Borough Council

Most Improved Performer



Finalists

Bolsover District Council
East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Eastleigh Borough Council
Hull City Council
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
West Lindsey District Council

WINNER: Bolsover District Council

Street Lighting *kindly sponsored by Tarmac.*

Best Performer



Most Improved Performer



Finalists

- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Denbighshire County Council
- Dundee City Council
- Kent County Council
- Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
- North Lincolnshire Council
- Northumberland County Council
- South Lanarkshire Council
- West Lothian Council
- Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

WINNER: Wigan Council

Finalists

- Aberdeen City Council
- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- City of Edinburgh Council
- Denbighshire County Council
- Dundee City Council
- East Ayrshire Council
- East Lothian Council
- Falkirk Council
- Northumberland County Council
- Oxfordshire County Council

WINNER: Falkirk Council

Transport Operations and Vehicle Maintenance *kindly sponsored by MOBA.*

Best Performer



Most Improved Performer



Finalists

- North Ayrshire Council
- Plymouth City Council
- Sheffield City Council
- Shetland Islands Council
- Tayside Contracts

WINNER: North Ayrshire Council

Finalists

- Aberdeenshire Council
- Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
- Moray Council
- North Ayrshire Council
- Plymouth City Council
- Shetland Islands Council

WINNER: Shetland Islands Council

APSE would like to thank all sponsors of the Performance Networks Seminar and Awards 2023 for their support

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The APSE Highways Innovation Awards 2024 are now open for entries!

These awards celebrate outstanding local councils that use innovative ideas and solutions to tackle the current challenges facing their frontline services. The awards provide participating authorities with an opportunity to showcase their expertise, alongside the results that they have achieved.

The Innovation Awards are split into three categories:

- Winter maintenance and winter resilience services
- Street lighting
- Highways maintenance services

The ideal submission will contain a description of the problem or challenge faced, and the innovative approach taken to remedy it. This could be, for example, a service redesign, new training techniques, use of new materials or equipment, or new methods of responding to/communicating with the public. The submission should also include the outcomes that have been achieved. As a helpful guide, a brochure featuring the successful submissions for the 2017, 2018 and 2019 Innovation Awards is available to download.

Winners will be announced at an awards ceremony held as part of the annual APSE Highways, Street Lighting and Winter Maintenance Seminar on 20 March 2024.

Member and non-member authorities are welcome to submit an application.

Entries will be assessed on a submission basis by an independent judging panel.

Send your expressions of interest to George Barton at gbarton@apse.org.uk by no later than Wednesday 31 January 2024.



New APSE Approved Partners: Welcome **Cyclomedia**

cyclomedia

Cyclomedia is a world leader in geodata technology; helping both the public and private sector assess outdoor infrastructure and plan improvements through advanced 3D mapping systems.

Using state-of-the-technology, CycloMedia captures and processes over 400,000 km's of 360° panoramic images every year. This colossal amount of data is used by public bodies and businesses working across a range of sectors including telecoms, utilities, construction, renewable energy, real estate, and insurance.

Elizabeth Evans, UK Sales Manager at CycloMedia, said: "Through our data-gathering, we can create a 'digital twin' of a city, making it possible to digitally navigate through a place and assess locations without visiting them.

"The digital twin can be used across various teams within local authorities – including highways, revenue, planning, smart cities and GIS. Local authorities can use our solution to reduce site visits, which saves time and money as well as helping towards sustainability goals."

She added that: "We are also working with multiple London Boroughs, including Harrow, who have saved £15k using our insights to update their Traffic Regulation Orders."



Screenshot of the 'digital twin' system.

The digital twin allows users to respond quickly to changing demands and developments, such as population growth and the impact of climate change.

Speaking about our new Approved Partner, APSE Chief Executive Mo Baines said: "Through the use of cutting-edge technology, CycloMedia have made it easier than ever for local authorities to access in-depth insights and data about their area. I am pleased to welcome them as an Approved Partner; they will make a strong addition to the APSE family."

For more information visit: <https://www.cyclomedia.com/uk>



(L-R) Director of Parks and Leisure Matt McDowell, Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey Councillor Mark Cooper BEM and Head of Leisure, Deaglan O'Hagan.

The renowned leisure team at Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Northern Ireland, just added another trophy to their collection thanks to an APSE Annual Service Awards win. And yet the driving force behind their success is powerfully simple: a belief that leisure excellence can make a real difference to citizens' lives.

Their Best Service Team: Sports, Leisure and Cultural Service win joins their Ukactive Regional Centre of the Year achievement and comes at a time of major investment running alongside ambitious programmes all geared towards providing world-class leisure facilities to every user regardless of age.

But it's not just the team's latest range of leisure options making waves in the Borough. While these include an impressive six leisure centres plus golf courses, a running track, pitches, a spa and one of the UK's largest skate park facilities, excellence in how those services are delivered is key.

That's because the leisure team's dedication to customer service and efficiency, used to help keep costs for services low and availability high, is a big part of the leisure team's achievement.

The Council's Antrim Forum Leisure Centre just launched a £2.4m fitness suite refurbishment, complete with Inclusive Fitness Initiative accreditation. In addition, a £1.5m investment including two fitness studios and an athletics facilities upgrade as well as a transformed swimming pool and changing area are all on the way. And despite investment on this level, 'MORE'-branded membership costs haven't risen in over five years.

The reason for such a clear belief in top quality, accessible leisure facilities for all? Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey Councillor Mark Cooper BEM summed up the Council's passion for leisure when he explained that "we have seen countless lives transformed through the use of our leisure facilities over the years".

An Active Borough

With a Council-wide belief that leisure-services should be affordable, accessible and universally available to all, the Council's 150 leisure colleagues are charged with an area of work specifically chosen by Elected Members as one of the Council's key priorities.

That's why targets for usage, memberships and subsidy per visit were set along with goals for efficiency, excellence in service, energy consumption, participation and health outcomes as well as continuous innovation.

For the end-user, evidence of the final goal can be seen through the launch of new leisure products and programmes such as the SkatePark urban sports centre, Toptracer golf and MyWellness technology.

And an emphasis on life-long leisure, and how it can support real needs at every life stage, is shown through the PARS (Physical Activity Referral Scheme) introduction to exercise project, Macmillan Move More Cancer rehabilitation support, Live Long age-friendly classes and Exercise for Mental Health.

All of the team's delivery has, of course, been achieved in the face of a common challenge for many organisations in 2023: providing excellent, affordable services during a time of both rising operating costs and tighter household budgets for service users.

Thankfully, rising year on year MORE membership of 21% and a falling subsidy per visit of 8% has helped create a membership price freeze since 2017 possible and even allowed substantial investment in upgraded facilities.

Leisure makes a difference ethos brings home APSE award

A deep-dive into how Antrim and Newtownabbey Council have created an award-winning leisure service that supports the local community at every life stage.



Offering access to sporting facilities and fitness classes across five state of the art leisure centres, a range of MORE memberships across individual, family, concession, golf and corporate options have helped making the decision to join easier than ever for a huge range of people within the Borough.

Measuring Success

The leisure team's 'bottom line' stats reflect the hard work and dedication of a highly-ambitious leisure team. After all, a 19% penetration rate has risen 3% showing just how popular their leisure offer is in the Borough.

Listening to users also reveals the out workings of service excellence:

- A Net Promoter Score of 63%
- 'Courtesy' (94%) and 'staff' (80%) appearing as major factors in this score
- Quest Plus accreditation across all six leisure centres

Meanwhile, with sustainability a major focus for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council its leisure team have been playing their part through an Energy Action Plan for each leisure centre and an on-site Energy Champion.

The resulting 5% decrease in consumption has meant centres have been able to keep full opening hours, including for swimming pool facilities, despite the cost of living crunch.

Ambitious Plans for 2023/ 2024

As a team with no intention of resting on their laurels, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council's leisure experts have set some big goals for the remainder of 2023/ 2024, including:

- A Net Promoter Score increase of three points to 66% across leisure
- Membership of 14,000
- New post/ pre-natal, alcohol and substance abuse and pulmonary programmes plus swimming lessons for those with a disability.

Meanwhile, in addition to the further upgrades planned for Antrim Forum, £50,000 has been earmarked for enhancements to fitness facilities at the Valley Leisure Centre.

In the words of Mayor Cllr Mark Cooper, who welcomed his team's APSE awards win as "well-deserved success for our leisure team who have been recognised for the excellent services they provide", the Council's commitment to deliver a world-class leisure offering is "very evident through the multi- million pound investments across our leisure facilities".

He added that "greater use than ever of our superb facilities, as well as such an impressive range of leisure offerings and programmes for so many people, make our leisure services the pride of our Council and the recipient of multiple awards for good reason".

While very high standards to maintain have been set by this now-acclaimed team, their insistence on demanding the best from leisure, and belief in its value for all, means their track record of finding new ways to provide best-in-class services is showing no signs of abating.

Watch this space!

Deaglan O'Hagan, Head of Leisure Operations, and Matt McDowell, Director of Parks and Leisure, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, spoke on the Council's achievements at the APSE Northern Ireland event "Active Communities" on 30 November. Their presentation is available to download from the APSE website.



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Meals on Wheels Report 2023



Vickie Hacking, Principal Advisor, looks at the state of Meals and Wheels provision in the UK, and positive impact the service has on the NHS, social care, and beyond.

The National Association of Care Catering (NACC) – the leading organisation representing caterers working within the care sector – recently commissioned APSE to conduct research into the provision of Local Authority Community Meals on Wheels services in the UK.

Meals on Wheels supports older and disabled people to live independently in the community by reducing the risk of malnutrition, loneliness, and social isolation. Alongside at least one nutritious meal every day, regular caring contact helps reduce avoidable health and care costs, as well as providing support for carers.

APSE found that only 29% of UK local authorities, and less than 18% of English authorities, still offer a Meals on Wheels type service. This is down from a UK average of 48% and an English average of 43% in 2016.

Looking at the costs of maintaining these services, there has been an average increase of 34% in the cost of providing a meal in 2023 – reflecting food price inflation, fuel costs and labour market pressures. Of the local authorities surveyed, the two main reasons given for why they have stopped providing a Meals on Wheels service, were budgetary pressures and the overall cost of provision.

“Meals on wheels services serve as community assets”

In August 2021, UNISON reported that Councils across England, Wales, and Scotland face a £3 billion funding black hole for 2023. The Local Government Association in September 2023 have similarly raised a £3 billion funding gap. These massive budget deficits mean local authorities will be forced into a position where they are required to make difficult decisions regarding what services they provide – with the remaining Meals on Wheels services potentially on the chopping block.

Despite the sharp decline in the number of local authorities providing the service, there is mounting evidence of the benefits that Meals on Wheels provides.

Firstly, Meals on Wheels serves to help ensure a good nutritional intake for users, not only benefiting individuals, but wider health and social care services by decreasing malnutrition risk, supporting recovery from illness and promoting good health. Secondly, it helps to tackle food insecurity, a pertinent issue during a cost-of-living crisis. Research by the University of Hertfordshire found that Meals on Wheels services serve as community assets, having a positive impact in supporting food practices and security.

Finally, in an era where loneliness permeates throughout society - especially in older people - Meals on Wheels provides opportunities for interaction



that service users might otherwise miss. The delivery of a meal brings regular social interaction which, for many, may be the only human contact they enjoy. It also provides a well-being and safety check, again, crucial for those who may not see anyone else each day. Research conducted at the University of Bristol, which looked at the interaction between service providers and clients, suggests that Meal on Wheels provides significant benefits beyond nutrition.

Although the provision of Meals on Wheels will not solve the ongoing crisis in the NHS and social care, it should be recognised as an important part of a wider solution; helping to achieve priorities set out by local authorities - such as a food strategy - reducing the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and reducing social isolation. With further local authority budget pressures on the horizon, there needs to be a greater recognition from government and council leaders of the positive impact that this vital service provides.

“An absolute lifeline to people who need care and support”

With successive governments extolling the virtues of ‘independence, well-being and choice’ for older people, it is farcical to believe that this can be achieved without an effective Meals on Wheels service. In a time when the NHS, community care and social care services face an unprecedented level of strain, solutions that allow people to live at home for longer are indispensable.

Those who deliver the meals and coordinate the service in local authorities are an absolute lifeline to people who need care and support – I hope that this report will emphasise the urgent attention that is needed to maintain this vital service.



YPO's flood solutions

The UK is famous for being damp and blustery. **Still, it is 9% wetter than 50 years ago,** meaning we are battling with more prominent, regular flooding, whether winter downpours or streak surges during drier summers.

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Speak to our team of experts

- ✉ agnieszka.gajli@ypo.co.uk
- ✉ sarah.sesum@ypo.co.uk

Find out more





Going above and beyond in bereavement services

Jacqueline Landy, Head of Bereavement Services at Lambeth Borough Council, details how her team clinched their first APSE Service Award

At the APSE Annual Service Awards 2023, Lambeth Bereavement Service triumphed with our first nomination, and first win, for Best Service Team for a Cemetery and Crematorium Service.

We were delighted to be invited to this year's dinner. Our Head of Service and Funeral Services Manager had the privilege of travelling to Belfast, where they had the opportunity to meet and learn from all the amazing council members driving their boroughs forward. It was a very humbling, and exciting surprise to find that we weren't only nominated, but won in this category.

The foundation of our service is the hard work of our dedicated team, who have gone above and beyond to implement a range of innovative initiatives within the last few years despite working (as many others in the industry) through a pandemic.

Our innovation and project management streams are managed alongside the day-to-day running of our essential service. Our service is operated by a small team spread across five sites.

Recent initiatives have been driven by a clear community-focused approach, doing as much as possible to address industry-wide issues impacting bereaved persons at all levels. Particularly, we have been working hard to address funeral poverty as well the industry's broader impact on the environment.

Daily, our staff witness firsthand the effect of funeral poverty. Having absorbed our council's Public Health Funerals in 2017, we noticed how many of the referrals we received were not due to a lack of family or friends willing to conduct the funeral, but due to a lack of accessible funds – families who have some money, but not enough to meet the quote of their local funeral director.

In response, in 2019 we introduced the Lambeth Simple Funeral. The first of its kind in London, this service bypassed the need for traditional funeral directors, and offered families an in-house, reduced-cost basic funeral service at almost £3,000 less than the average cremation in London. We can now offer dignity to families who can remain in control of their loved one's arrangements at a reduced price.

To do this, our team have been working hard to integrate horizontally, undertaking rigorous cross-training, and navigating limited budget, equipment, and transportation. Team members who have previously never been in contact with the deceased learned to collect, encoffin, remove pacemakers and conduct services. At no point have we seen a lack of enthusiasm or commitment from any member of staff.

We are now unique in that most of our team are not only cremation and cemetery accredited but mortuary trained. This allows us to offer a funeral from beginning to end.

The operations team have been extremely proactive in making suggestions and finding the time in their schedules to implement them. In 2022 we were proud to have achieved double Gold under the ICCM charter. After this win, we are only more determined to continue striving for excellence in our day-to-day work and beyond.

Addressing harmful carbon emissions, we installed London's first electric cremator at Lambeth Crematorium in 2022. This will effectively reduce carbon emissions by up to 90%, and nitric oxide emissions by 50%. Careful planning was required to reconfigure the existing chapel so that the new cremator could be installed and get the chapel open as soon as possible.

We closed for 3 months during this time and as we are fortunate enough to manage two sites, we were able to offer West Norwood as an alternative site and continue with burials as usual.

This has not been our only move towards carbon neutrality. We have also implemented a range of vehicle management changes to secure FORS Bronze for our fleet, utilising green deliveries, and switching from plastic 'Cremfilm' lining for our coffins to fibre sheets.

We would like to issue a huge thank you to our staff for their resilience and dedication during these changes. We are determined to continue onwards, working towards complete carbon neutrality, and looking to expand what we can offer with the Simple Funeral.

Thank you to the APSE for their recognition and for the wonderful visit to the Titanic Museum!





An energy system fit for the future

Following their win at APSE's Annual Service Awards, read the inside story of Oxford's ambitious energy mapping project.

Oxfordshire County Council is committed to reaching net-zero across our operations and estate by 2030 and to working collectively and at pace with partners to enable Oxfordshire to be net-zero well ahead of 2050.

Transformations in how we use, generate and store electricity will underpin the transition to a net zero energy system. Smart local energy systems will make best use of existing network capacity and help avoid costly network upgrades. Using, generating, and storing electricity flexibly will help to match demand and supply over time, and support the predicted rise in electricity demand (forecast to treble by 2050) as heat and transport decarbonise.

Oxfordshire County Council recognised the key role local authorities could play in this transition, through using our assets and supporting local energy planning.

In 2019 Oxfordshire County Council along with Oxford City Council, Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, Low Carbon Hub, University of Oxford, Oxford Brookes University and a number of commercial partners came together to create Project LEO, a multimillion-pound initiative, part funded through the Prospering from the Energy Revolution programme, ran over four years to gather evidence to support policy changes and the investment needed to create the technological, financial, and social conditions for successful systemic change.

The project aimed to:

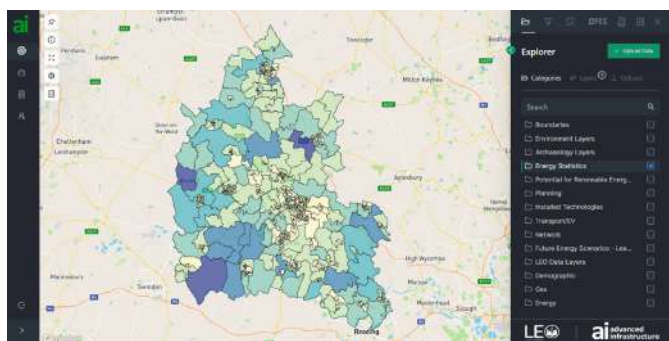
- Test new market and flexibility models – exploring products and services that create new opportunities to benefit from the way we generate, store and use energy in our homes, organisations and communities.
- Advance network capabilities to manage smart flexible energy systems – learning what needs to happen to our electricity networks to make them ready for a change to a local energy system.

- Facilitating local participation in the energy system – ensuring that individuals, households, and organisations are part of the energy transition.

Roles and responsibilities of each of the players were clearly defined at the project outset: Oxfordshire County Council led the development of a Strategic Energy Mapping Platform to support local area energy planning and provided assets to participate in the flexibility trials.

Trialling the future energy system

Project LEO ran a series of increasingly complex trials to explore the potential of various of energy assets (eg, battery, solar PV, buildings) to provide flexibility at a very local level. After reviewing our buildings for suitable electricity loads, Oxfordshire County Library was selected as the best fit for the LEO trials. Here we could shift the time of day the chillers were used away from the evening peak to reduce overall demand on the network, although we needed to make a few changes to our building management system to enable fine control of different parts of the cooling system and incorporate a remote scheduling programme to switch the chillers off and on during the flex trials.



Screenshot of the LEO Strategic Energy Mapping Tool

Despite challenges, the trials successfully demonstrated that council assets can participate in local flexibility markets, and if scaled up across the area could make a significant contribution in the transition to a net zero energy system.

Mapping Oxfordshire's energy transition

Accessing granular data to understand not just how but where energy is used or generated and how this might need to change as we transition to net zero was identified as a significant challenge for local authorities generally, including Oxfordshire County Council. A strategic mapping tool was needed to bring together geospatial data and support teams across Oxfordshire working to decarbonise.

Drawing on expertise in the wider partnership (and beyond), the County Council commissioned Advanced Infrastructure to help. The resulting LEO Strategic Energy Mapping Platform (built on Advanced Infrastructure's LAEP+ platform) draws together multiple key datasets (publicly available, held or commissioned by the County Council or other LEO partners, or provided by the Energy Systems Catapult) into a single space to give an accessible overview of energy use and assets in Oxfordshire. New data identifies areas which may be suitable for installation of additional renewables, further datasets identify opportunities for roof top solar, heat pumps and batteries, whilst heat loss imaging helps show areas where energy efficiency programmes may be best targeted.

To ensure the mapping tool was fit for purpose user testing was prioritised throughout development. Colleagues across Oxfordshire's 6 local authorities identified data, determined functionality, and tested outputs. Their feedback was used to refine the system

resulting in the platform being well-received by stakeholders and generating significant interest outside Oxfordshire.

Outcomes and next steps

Project LEO has succeeded in providing a blueprint for the energy system of the future. The project findings have been disseminated widely by the project partners. The team were delighted to be invited to Westminster by Chris Skidmore MP, Chair of the Net Zero Review, to discuss the learnings from the initiative.

One of LEO's key messages highlighted the vital role of data and mapping for Local Area Energy Planning and recommended LAEPs should be mandatory, convened by local authorities (supported by appropriate resourcing), and dedicated to a 'whole systems' approach to identify the best place-based solutions, informed by the priorities of the local community.

The transition to net zero remains a priority for Oxfordshire County Council. We continue working in partnership to develop a Local Area Energy planning approach that makes this priority tangible and manageable.

The LEO energy mapping tool will play a key role in this work. The LAEP+ platform on which it was based continues to be developed by Advanced Infrastructure, working with SSEN and UK Power Networks.

Oxfordshire County Council is proud to have played its part in this successful collaboration. The work we have delivered around energy mapping and energy flexibility has demonstrated the crucial role local authorities can play in the transition to a zero carbon energy system.

Inga Doherty, Climate Policy & Programmes Team Leader, spoke on this topic at a recent Climate Change and Renewable Energy Network meeting on 2 December. The presentation is available to download from the APSE website.

apse energy

Department for Energy Security & Net Zero

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The Power of Digital

A new report, produced by APSE and Socitm, explores the current 'state of the market' on the use of digital technology in local authorities.

Local authorities are not renowned for their successes in big IT projects. It is often assumed that delivering true service transformation using the power of new digital technology, is either too difficult or too expensive to achieve.

However, our report has found this assumption to be wrong. Through surveys and roundtable discussions, APSE and Socitm have found that many local authority services are embracing a variety of new technologies to better deliver for citizens. Many service managers suggest that they are making progress with digital developments on the frontline.

Unsurprisingly, the research has also found that resources are stretched. New software – whilst removing demand for some workers, places it on others, particularly within council IT departments. The growing financial pressures on local authorities, reductions in resources, and recruitment problems threaten to undermine the innovative solutions adopted in the sector.

- **83% of those surveyed identified funding as a barrier to improving their digital capacity. 61% identified a lack of skills.**

- **72% said that their workforce feels life is easier due to new technology.**

- **85% of respondents said that some of their traditional workers have struggled to adapt to new technologies.**

- **67% said technology worked well for their frontline services.**

Although our research indicates that most frontline workers feel as though they benefit from the use of new technology – there are still problems with embracing technology by some parts of the workforce, especially among older people. As a solution to this, multiple service managers explained how they consulted with frontline workers whilst designing new systems, helping to make the technology as intuitive and useful as possible.

Our research also revealed increasing concerns within local authority IT teams about the widening gap between the cybersecurity industry and the public sector. Although increasingly sophisticated cybersecurity measures are being developed in response to new threats such as AI, these updates and improvements can sometimes be too expensive for local authorities to implement, increasing the risk that ageing systems will be vulnerable to breaches or attacks. The thread that runs through the concerns about technological adoption is a lack of funding. Echoing the point made by a roundtable participant: "The need for technology often does not match up with our resources." Without the necessary funding from

national and sub-national governments, councils will not be able to invest in new technology, leading to a lack of innovation, inefficiencies, and a decrease in the quality of services they provide.

Local councils are sometimes accused of being too slow to adapt to technological change. The findings from our state of the market report paint a different story. Though progress is uneven, there is a strong appetite for digital/new technological adaptation within the sector. From predictive technology identifying mould in social housing to drones delivering infant school meals, the survey findings and roundtable discussions reveal a dynamic sector transforming frontline service delivery and securing greater efficiencies and cost savings as well as better customer service for local communities.

However, the report also reveals that adaptation is not without challenges. Whether it is a lack of resources or resistance to change, the report highlights how much work there is still to do for councils to ensure the ongoing shift to digital is as inclusive as possible. Failure to do so would be an abdication of the local authority's role as a "steward of place". •

The full Power of Digital report can be viewed online by visiting www.apse.org.uk



The Power of Digital

Understanding new technology in local government





Local Government Recruitment and Retention – A Vision for 2030

On 30 November 2023, the PPMA hosted a roudntable discussion on the possible recruitment and retention challanges that could be faced in the future by local authorities. The Commercial Services Group - partners of PPMA - report back on outcomes of the session.

We were delighted to hold another roundtable with our partners PPMA following on from London and Manchester earlier this year. Our hosts Sheffield City Council welcomed CSG, APSE and our Chief Executives and Human Resources colleagues from councils across the country to their stunning council buildings in the city centre. Our objective was to take forward some of our discussions exploring what local government can do to raise a more positive profile, attract new candidates particularly the young into the sector and plan for the changes that are undoubtedly coming. We wanted to explore how we could ensure the sector is fit for the future and take advantage of developments such as further automation and AI.

Whilst acknowledging that councils are working hard to fill roles, for many it can feel like an ever-increasing merry-go-round being forced to adopt unsustainable practices simply to fulfil short-term needs. All councils have limited resources therefore the question is how to make the most impact not just for now but to allow for planning for the future.

The group saw it incumbent on Human Resources Directors and their teams to look for ways to help break the cycle contributing to this but they need the council to support them. Some of the themes explored included the limitations of the existing recruitment process – post a job and they will come! One colleague challenged that surely this is now a broken model.

The discussion also explored broadening the horizon of both job seekers to consider local government and hiring managers to be open to different types of candidates. Hiring managers find comfort in detailed job descriptions with essential criteria but this often limits the number of likely interested candidates. The group discussed other options such as bringing people into the organisation not necessarily into a fixed role and letting them discover what opportunities were available within the council.

This could be a much better way forward and some of our councils are looking to explore this option for certain roles. Innovations in apprenticeships and attracting more graduates were other areas explored in the two-hour discussion.

“There is no doubt that councils face challenges in the recruitment and retention space but it certainly isn't for a lack of creative ideas and different ways of thinking. We discussed several approaches that can help take councils forward in this competitive environment. It is clear however that CEs and HRDs need the trust and support of their wider teams to try innovative solutions to attract more diverse candidates,” commented Steve Wilson, Commercial Director CSG and facilitator on the day.

Thank you to all our attendees. The roundtable will be written up in full and shared via the PPMA, APSE and CSG. We hope that by supporting these events we help create more opportunities for councils to collaborate, share their experiences and support one another. The role of collaboration specifically and the opportunities to work at regional level were highlighted as something that certainly our attendees were keen to do more of.

We will share the outputs as soon as they are published.

The Sheffield Roundtable was attended by APSE Head of Business Resources Lindsay Airey

About the PPMA

The Public Services People Managers Association (PPMA) is the first choice association for people professionals in public services.

For more than 40 years they have been a collective voice for a highly qualified, passionate, committed and diverse public services Human Resources (HR) and Organisation Development (OD) community. They play a critical role in influencing key decision-makers and stakeholders involved in people management and workforce issues.





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Energy Act 2023: The Apse Energy View



The biggest piece of energy legislation in the UK's history seeks to bolster energy security, stimulate new investment and protect consumers - but does it go far enough? Phil Brennan, Head of APSE Energy, investigates.

Brennan, Head of APSE Energy, investigates.

The Energy Act 2023, which received Royal Assent on 26 October this year, seeks to ensure that energy is affordable for households and businesses, while securing the UK's energy security in the long term by making it more self-sufficient. This will be done by unlocking £100 billion of private investment in energy infrastructure, scaling up jobs, increasing growth and accelerating the development of offshore wind – helping to deliver our net zero commitments.

The main announcements include:

A specific merger regime for energy networks under the Competition and Markets Authority – this will minimise the risk of mergers between energy network companies having detrimental effects on consumers and is estimated to save households up to £420 million over the next decade.

New measures for Energy Smart Appliances – prioritising safety, increasing consumer confidence, and helping them to reduce their bills. A smart electricity system could reduce system costs by up to £10 billion a year by 2050.

Expanding Ofgem's remit to regulate heat networks - allowing the regulator to set rules on excessive pricing and improve the quality of service.

A licensing framework for CO2 transport and storage – supporting the delivery of the UK's first carbon capture sites, and up to 50,000 jobs by 2030.

Provisions aimed at boosting the nuclear sector – enabling developers to plan new facilities and drive ambitions for a prototype fusion power plant by 2040.

Establishment of the Future System Operator – a new independent body enabling consumers to access a secure and decarbonised energy supply.



APSE Energy's response:

This is a wide-ranging Act and the added focus to the energy sector is welcome by all those involved. However, it raises questions regarding how the situation we now find ourselves in – an energy supply that is highly vulnerable to external shocks - was allowed to develop in the first place. There are also questions around the level of ambition within this Act – does it go far enough to ensure that we do not find ourselves in the same position in the future?

The Government statement accompanying the news of the Act said "The Act will help the government deliver net zero by 2050 in a pragmatic, proportionate and realistic way." This mirrors the wording in the Prime Minister's speech on 20 September when announcements such as moving the ban on buying new ICE vehicles 5 years into the future and ending plans to force landlords to upgrade the energy efficiency of properties were made. These attracted significant criticism by many in the low carbon sector as a of dumbing down of ambition.

It also remains to be seen whether the Act will deliver. The investment and skills boost it promises - there is a desperate need to train the people required to take a low carbon economy forward and resources must be found to enable it. Without this, the UK will not meet its energy and climate targets.

The introduction of a merger regime for energy networks is welcome. Minimising detrimental effects on customers should include fair pricing as well as protecting them from having to pay for future costs of network upgrades. It is vital to ensure a position where energy network companies are held responsible for maintaining the network, and a merger regime will help enable this.

The elements of the Act dedicated to sectors such as hydrogen, carbon capture and storage, nuclear and infrastructure provide some certainty for those looking to invest, which is welcomed.

Overall, the strategy and ambitions set out by the Act are encouraging, but it is down to public sector organisations - including local authorities - and private companies to take the agenda forward. •

If you have any questions about this briefing or want to know more about how APSE Energy can help, please contact Phil Brennan, Head of APSE Energy on 0161 772 1810 or at pbrennan@apse.org.uk, Charlotte Banks, Principal Advisor at cbanks@apse.org.uk or James Jefferson, Energy Research and Project Officer at jjefferson@apse.org.uk



Under Pressure: The Future of Councillor-Officer Relationships

A new report by APSE has delved into the dynamics behind the working relationships of councillors and officers.

The traditional role of political leaders setting direction and policy, with senior local government officers presenting the operational solutions to implementation, has, in many cases, transformed into much more nuanced, and on occasions, strained relationships. Whilst there remains an overriding respect for each other's roles, the confines of resource limitations, and regulatory duties, which govern how that political vision can be turned into a legitimate reality, can test the parameters of this traditional arrangement.

Studies in this field are therefore vital; exploring these relationships which influence decision-making, the implementation of policies, and how well local government delivers for its citizens. This research was carried out by a team from Staffordshire University, Birmingham University, Essex University, Leeds Beckett University and the University of Urbino Carlo Bo. It draws on the results of a Q-method study design to map and analyse different viewpoints on a particular issue, as well as conversations with councillors and officers from across local government, notably through two detailed case studies: Swansea and Lancaster Councils.

The report's findings confirmed the continued resonance across authorities of the traditional division of labour between councillors and officers, that of 'councillors decide, officer implement'.

Speaking about the report, Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive said, "Overall, the research finds that the status quo of member-officer relations is still respected and followed, despite growing external pressures such as austerity.

The research finds that there remains general agreement that officers and members both bring complementary traits to

decision-making processes, along with an understanding it is the officers' duty to give professional advice to councillors. However, some areas of knowledge, understanding and behaviour were contested by the participants and additionally, the financial issues facing local authorities can stoke such tensions."

She added that: "The spectre of Section 114 notices was identified as a potential flashpoint for future officer-member tensions, and this is hardly surprising given the relentless pressures on local government resources."

Recommendations to emerge from the research suggest that to strengthen the officer-member relationship, political leaders need to communicate a clear strategic direction to officers, ensure regular meetings between both groups to discuss expected behaviours and values, a 'no surprises' policy whereby officers inform councillors about potential challenges in any decision, and a review of induction programmes to ensure behaviour expectations are clear.

Professor Steven Griggs commented: "This new report concludes that while most officers and councillors display allegiance to the 'politicians decide, officers implement' mantra – the realities of these relationships vary, and the sector risks missing out on the benefits of new working practices and positive change by ignoring dissenting voices. Constructive challenge is good for democracy and in an ever changing local government world having the confidence to explore the pressures of the working relationships between council and officer leaderships role is essential to the functioning of local councils."

The full report is available on APSE's website. •

Notes to editors

The research was commissioned by APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence). The report authors are Neil Barnett, Leeds Beckett University; Arianna Giovannini, University of Urbino Carlo Bo; Steven Griggs, Staffordshire University; David Howarth, University of Essex; Stephen Jeffares, University of Birmingham and Craig Love, University of Essex.



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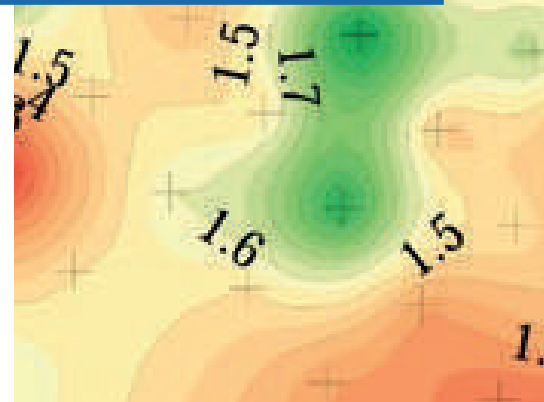
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Discover what's beneath.

How do we strike the right balance in public sector workforce training?



Shailen Popat, Assistant Professor in Public Policy and Management, Birmingham University, explores

whether current training practices are suited to the realities of the public sector in 2023.

I was delighted to be invited to attend and speak at the APSE annual seminar in Belfast in September 2023. For us at the Department of Public Administration and Policy, connections with elected members and council officers are an integral part of our research and teaching, so I had no hesitation about accepting the invite and being with you.

I took the opportunity in my talk to share some questions I've been asking myself. The first is: do you feel that your education prepared you for a role in public management?

This is an important starting point for those of us who plan continuing professional development (CPD) for others. There is no shortage of master's degrees and CPD courses, but we must continuously consider their pertinence and relevance. Sometimes educational courses are good learning experiences that are worth having for that reason alone, however we must reflect on whether a good learning experience is also useful in the field.

Since 2008, the public service mantra has been to 'do more with less'. As we all know this places burdens on organisations and their staff. Having to do more with less often entails operating across multiple roles and skill sets, requiring a lot of flexibility. For example, a local authority may decide that it is more efficient to have one person covering multiple roles, whereas previously, there may have been two. This can compel public service workers to try and act as experts in areas where they are not. Similarly, elected members often have to make decisions on matters that they are not experts in, whilst engaging with those who are.

"Since 2008, the public service mantra has been to do more with less."

Both officers and elected members need to be able to assimilate, synthesise and communicate the rationale behind policy positions and decisions that they are not experts in. This not only poses a challenge for them but also for those who support their training.

We must ask ourselves, what skills do we need to train non-experts in? And how do we train them?

A further complication is that the culture, norms, and political boundaries of an organisation may not be flexible. Even though an employee may have to work and think flexibly, the structures they operate in may be very rigid. Trainers need to consider whether they are educating people with this need for flexibility in mind.

Neuroscience tells us that learning occurs incrementally – the brain's neural networks are constantly being revised and refined as we repeat actions. The science tells us that experience matters. However, an important part of experience is making mistakes.

Therein lies the problem, for elected members and senior executives, mistakes are a luxury that they cannot afford and are unlikely to be tolerated. This puts us in another quandary: we know that learning requires mistakes, and therefore we have to train practitioners and decision-makers to be reflective, however, if decision-makers fear making mistakes, this will hinder their learning.

"For elected members and senior executives, mistakes are a luxury that they cannot afford."

I also wonder whether this fear of making mistakes stops us from challenging ourselves to think, decide, and act differently from the norm. How much do our cultures and structures empower public service workers and elected members to be genuinely innovative? A lot of our learning occurs when we are exposed to new materials that challenge our previous beliefs and understandings.

There is also a concept called disfluency which means that not only should we learn something new but when we use and explain it to others, it begins to become clearer as to how we could enact it ourselves. 'How much do we practice disfluency and how can we educate for it?' I would welcome anyone who would like to continue the discussion to email me. •

Shailen Popat, works as an Assistant Professor at the University of Birmingham Department of Public Administration and Policy where he is Director of the full-time MSc in Public Management. In 2022, he was awarded the accolade of the University outstanding Teacher of the Year, and in 2023 was awarded a Senior Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.

He can be contacted via email at: s.popat@bham.ac.uk

Shailen speaking APSE's Annual Seminar 2023 in Belfast.





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Sharon Hodgson MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on School Food

Victoria Hacking, APSE Principal Advisor

Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive

The APPG Excellence in School Food Awards and the APSE Innovation in Soft FM Awards ceremonies will take place in the evening.



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New APSE Approved Partners:
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ER Ltd are delighted to announce that they are joining the APSE family.

Founders Nick and Lawrence, have been involved with Driver training for many years and at all levels from under 17s, learners, foreign licence acquisitions, advanced driver training and Fleet, not to mention skid pan training, 4x4 off-road and Supercars! However, they are also both EST (Energy Savings Trust) approved trainers with ICE (Internal Combustion Engine) and EVs (Electric Vehicles).

In early 2019, Lawrence and Nick were approached by the Institute of Advanced Motorists to submit a proposal for a new training centre. Although in the words of the IAM, "the proposal blew all the others out of the water", it sadly never progressed, but Expert-Roadcraft Ltd was born out of this idea.

"Our approach of is one of developing a strong understanding of a client's needs, rather than a simple standard training programme. This underpins the ethos of the company", said Nick Brydle, Director.

"We operate primarily in the Home Counties, although we plan to develop into other counties too. Although our main emphasis is EV training, we can also integrate into that driver assessment, filtering out those that need further development rather than blanket training for all. We also offer a range of further services from PCT, MiDAS, UK licence acquisition, bespoke courses and consultation.

"We are very excited to join this vibrant community and look forward to working with some of you very soon", added Nick.

ER currently have a close working relationship with three councils, and are developing accredited training modules to allow drivers to gain a VRQ and for employers to access more long-term financial benefits.

Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive, said: "From fleet training to advanced driving, Expert Roadcraft provide a world class driver training. I am in no doubt that they will deliver a quality service to our members and are an excellent addition to the APSE family."

For more information visit: www.expert-roadcraft.co.uk



Nick Dunn, Director



Lawrence Beazley, Director

CSSC's 'Active Wellbeing' returns to break down barriers to physical activity

CSSC CEO Matt Brazeley explains how the organisation is inspiring the Civil Service and public sector to get active in one of the biggest collaborative campaigns of the year.

Specifically designed for civil servants and public sector workers, CSSC is an exclusive not-for-profit membership organisation inspiring over 140,000 people to explore new ways to be active and healthy through everyday savings, offers to get active and things to do.

CSSC's commitment to championing good physical and mental health through physical activity, recreation and community remains as strong as ever. In February, the organisation will once again run Active Wellbeing in partnership with Government People Group, its biggest annual campaign to get the Civil Service and public sector moving.

Registrations for the campaign are open from 9-26 January 2024 at: <https://bit.ly/41ICYb9>

CSSC CEO Matt Bazeley explained: "Active Wellbeing is a February-long, engaging programme of sports, challenges, funding, prizes and teamwork, designed to help everyone, develop healthy habits, grow in confidence and feel the physical and emotional benefits of increasing their activity, no matter their experience, ability, or circumstances.

"In 2024, it will be the sixth year we've jointly delivered this campaign with Government People Group. Each year we have seen increased engagement and participation, helping thousands of people to positively impact their physical health and wellbeing. In 2023, nearly 10,000 participants from over 2,000 teams clocked up 3.8 billion steps in our movement challenge, and we'd like to make 2024 our biggest and most inclusive Active Wellbeing yet.

"This year, the campaign centres around our virtual 'Around-the-World' step challenge, encouraging offices to team up and join the entire Civil Service and public sector to get active as they walk, skip, hop, jump roll and ride between historic sporting venues and their host cities in February. We'll also have weekly prize draws to keep participants motivated throughout the month, so make sure you sign up before 26 January and keep your eyes peeled."

Active Wellbeing is specifically designed to be comprehensively inclusive, anyone can take part, and everyone will benefit. Whether senior leaders, junior staff, office based, hybrid or working from home, permanent or contractors, the whole of the Civil Service and public sector are encouraged to join in.

Matt continued: "This year's theme focuses on eliminating various barriers to physical activity, such as financial constraints, time limitations, and emotional, cultural, or practical obstacles. Participants will be offered tools, tips, techniques, and opportunities for individuals to prioritise their health.

"Participants can engage in the challenge at work, with others, individually, or with family. All forms of exercise, from running and walking to household chores, contribute to the daily target. By logging daily activities through phone apps, smart tech, or the website, participants' time spent on each activity is converted to steps and added to the team total. The collective goal is to accumulate enough steps to virtually travel around the world, visiting key cities along the way."

To find out more about CSSC and whether you are eligible for a membership, and for more information about Active Wellbeing 2024, please visit: <https://bit.ly/41ICYb9>

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