

Briefing 16-53

December 2016

Street Cleansing: Trend analysis 2015/16

This briefing provides details on the performance information available from APSE's performance networks service looking at performance indicators and current policy issues for councils who deliver street cleansing services.

Key issues

- Service costs continue to fall as budgets are reduced. However it will be interesting to see for how much longer costs can be reduced without having significant impacts on the service.
- For the first time in 5 years the number of sites falling below a Grade B has risen.
- Surprisingly despite more sites failing to achieve Grade B, satisfaction levels have risen, but also it is noticeable that education and enforcement activity has increased which may also be influencing this greater appreciation of the service.
- In spite of service cuts and increasing workloads on staff it is interesting to see that staff absence levels have continued to fall.

Overview

APSE performance networks is now in its 18th year of providing benchmarking for a wide cross-section of Local Authorities from throughout the UK. Street Cleansing data has been part of the comparison process since 2000/01 with results reported annually across a broad range of Performance Indicators. The continuing trends across the service are examined each year to provide further evidence for participating councils of how their own service compares against the national picture. The analysis is based on averages across the whole service and compares **this year's figures (2015-16)** with previously submitted data.

Performance Indicators for Street Cleansing continue to be banded, with a balanced set of headline indicators identified across the triangulated themes of cost, quality and customer satisfaction as Key Performance Indicators.

This Executive Summary deals with each theme in turn using data from initial returns for 2015/16 against final returns from previous years. Consistent with last year, the data supplied by 53 authorities makes up the averages for this summary.

As authorities continue to submit data after the publication of the service reports, the averages for each Performance Indicator will change slightly by the end of the current financial year. Occasionally this affects the overall trends but in the main the direction of travel tends to remain constant.

Council finances all over the UK are under immense pressure which has led to the cost elements of performance networks taking on increasingly meaningful significance. The table below draws from average costs from the last four years showing the breakdown of expenditure within the service and how it changes year on year.

Cost area	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Front line staff costs	56.77%	57.30 %	57.26 %	57.99 %	57.75%
All staff costs	64.99%	66.08 %	66.55 %	66.69 %	67.67%
Transport costs	21.83%	21.15 %	22.22 %	21.81 %	21.51%
Central recharges	6.25%	6.65 %	6.67 %	7.35 %	7.89%

As can be seen above, there has been a slight increase in the percentage of staff costs over the past five years, transport remaining fairly constant as overall budgets reduce but central charges increasing pro rata.

Trend Analysis

Cost indicators

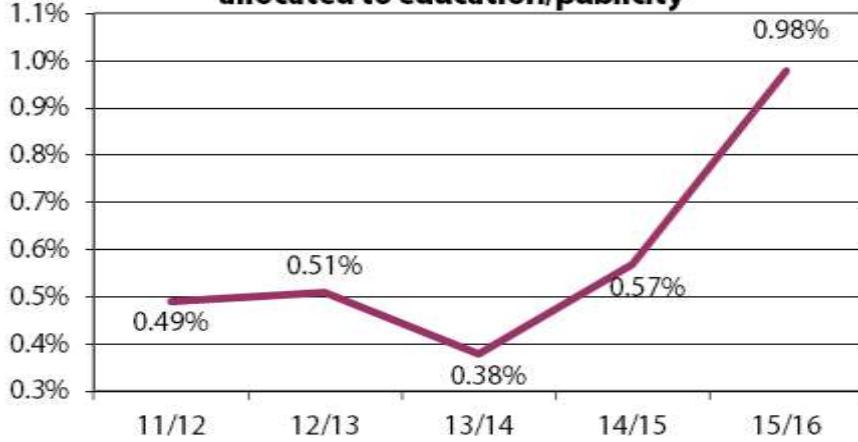
As expected, the overall costs for delivering the street cleansing service have reduced on average across participating authorities over the past year. As shown on the chart below, there was a significant decrease in the **average "cost per household"** (PI 03) in 2012-13 (Year 15) which was then reversed slightly the following year leading to a slight rise in the average which was a little unexpected at the time.

**PI 03 Cost of cleansing service per household
(including CEC)**



The amount of the overall cost that is allocated to education and publicity has been tracked for the past ten years (PI 40) starting out in Year 8 (2005/06) at 1.71% of the overall street cleansing budget, but declining steadily (other than for a brief reversal) in the intervening years. This was considered to be an inevitable consequence of national cost cutting, but nonetheless unfortunate at a time when the need to reduce the demand for the service hasn't been greater. Interestingly however, the past two years have seen real increases in the budget for education and publicity.

**PI 40 Percentage of street cleansing budget
allocated to education/publicity**

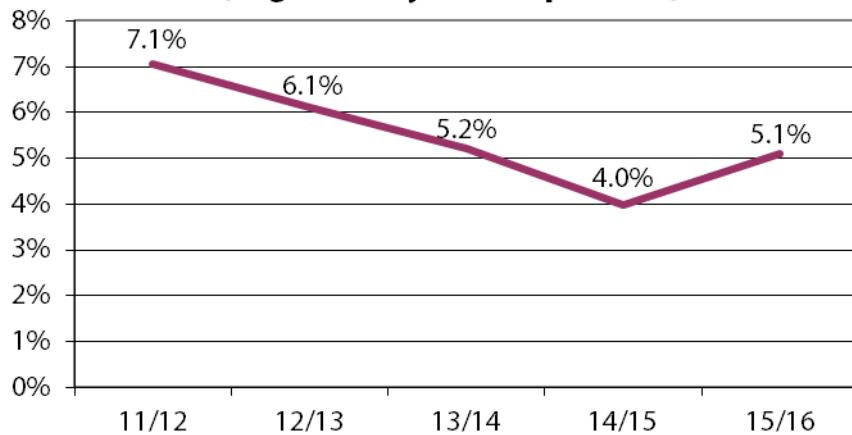


Quality indicators

It has been several years since the government removed the need for local authorities in England to report their cleanliness standards as a national performance indicator. However, APSE have continued to use the former NI 195 as a measure of quality for those authorities who have continued the process with a

full set of inspections and reporting those sites that fell below grade B (PI 37a). Surprisingly given the well documented drop in funding for the service, the quality of cleanliness continued to improve up to Year 14/15, which was a credit to those who were juggling reducing resources and still managing to make a difference to one of the areas that the general public always consider to be one of the most important public services. The concern was how long this level of improvement could be sustained against budgets which were continuing to be cut. Year 15/16 has seen an increase in sites falling below Grade B and whilst this may be a blip it is something APSE will be monitoring closely in future returns.

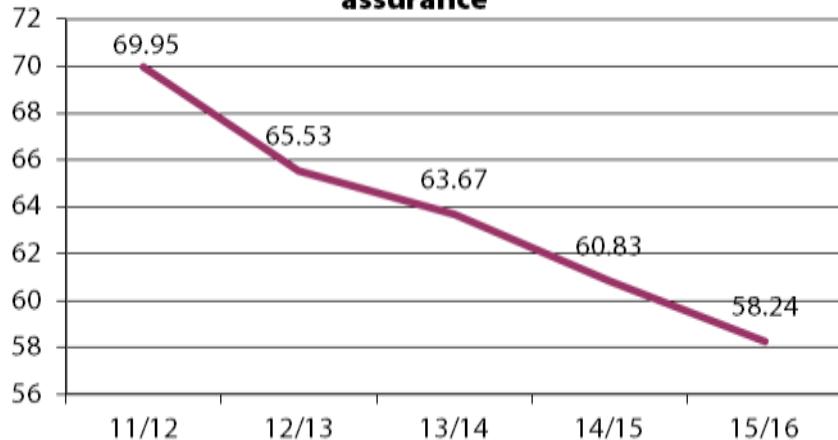
**PI 37a NI 195 percentage of sites that fall below
grade B
(England only - full inspections)**



In Scotland and Wales, LEAMS (Local Environmental Audit and Management Systems) continue to be used to measure cleanliness, and this relates to sites that are graded B and above. Both countries report the results of both their own inspections and those independently carried out on the same basis by Keep Scotland Beautiful and Keep Wales Tidy respectively, but the numbers of participants are much lower than in England making trend analysis less reliable. However, in Scotland for 2015/16 the trend for both urban and rural/mixed authorities which are separated for reporting purposes, is that the results from self-inspections produced averages that are slightly reduced from the previous year where the Keep Scotland Beautiful assessments went the other way with urban up by 14% (a cleanliness score of 77.98) and rural/mixed increasing by 20% to a score of 84.97.

The trend for APSE's other quality measure, the combined score for internal quality assurance and customer consultation (PI 17 overleaf) has been in a downward direction for several years and, as the chart below shows, further reduced by 4.3% last year to a combined average score of 58.24, the lowest level it has been. There has been a 16.74% reduction from 2011/12, a reflection of reduced staff structures and budgets for continuing quality awards and carrying out consultation levels established under best value.

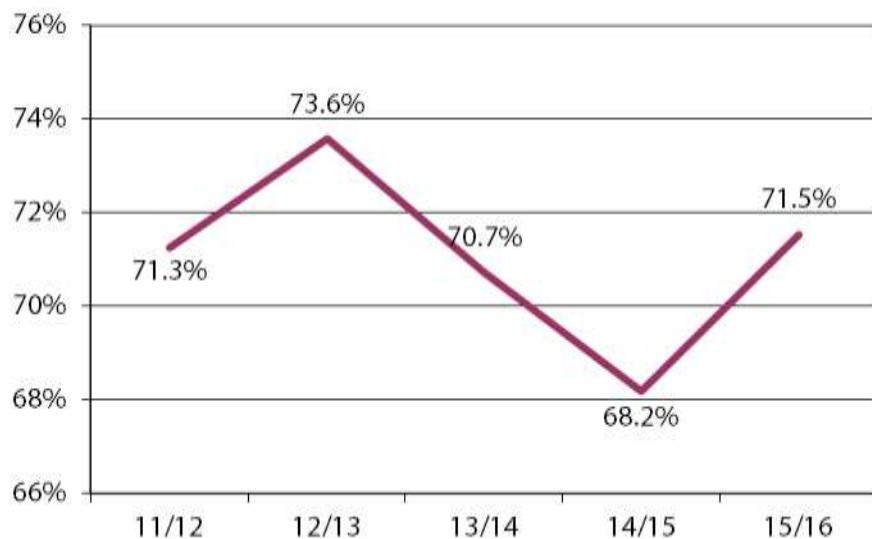
PI 17 Community consultation and quality assurance



Customer satisfaction indicators

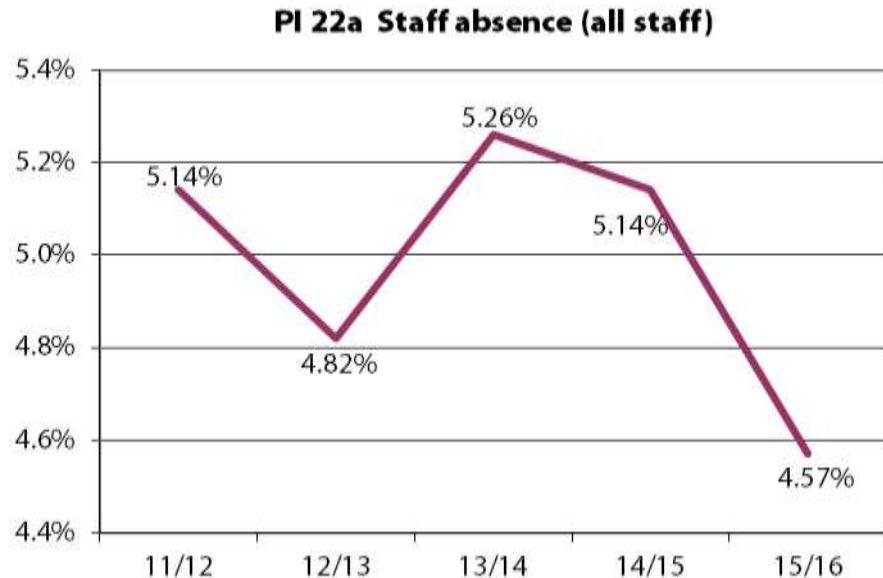
Following 7 years of average annual increases in the level of satisfaction recorded from customer surveys, the first reduction was recorded IN Year 13/14, perhaps the first indication that the austerity measures and subsequent reductions in some aspects of the service are starting to be noticed and this was repeated in Year 14/15. However of note is that in Year 15/16 customer satisfaction levels have risen perhaps a reflection of a growing public awareness of the pressures local authorities are under to deliver these publicly valued services.

PI 39 Community / customer surveys undertaken satisfaction levels

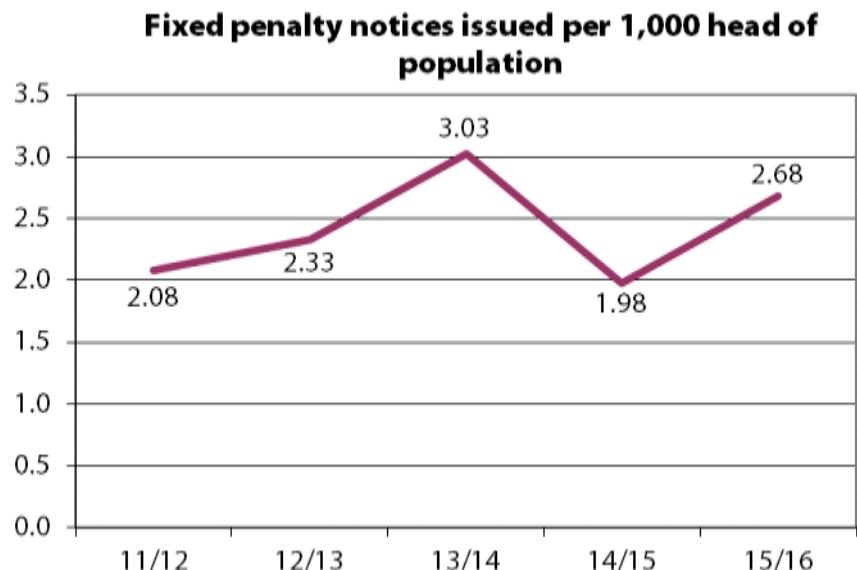


Other indicators

Staff absence levels have fluctuated year on year, 2013/14 seeing a fairly significant increase, despite many authorities embarking on more rigorous monitoring and managing of absences. This problem now may have been resolved as for the second year in a row staff absence levels have reduced.



APSE have been collecting enforcement statistics through Performance Networks for the past 10 years and have seen the use of Fixed Penalty Notices issued by local authority play an increasingly more prominent role in the battle against those who drop litter and commit other environmental crimes on our streets and public areas. There was a 30% rise in the average number issued per 1,000 population in 2013/14. So it was therefore a little surprising to see a significant decrease in the average numbers in the issuing of penalty notices in Year 14/15. However this slight blip has been reversed in Year 15/16 with issuing of fixed penalty notices per 1000 head of population rising significantly.



Interpretation of data

The effects of service cuts had started to be noticed in Year 16 and Year 17 data returns with the reversal in the levels of customer satisfaction of particular note. This year's returns have shown that customer satisfaction has risen which suggests greater appreciation of the work councils are doing in a time of austerity. This is perhaps a little surprising as the number of sites failing to score an acceptable level has increased, but again perhaps this is a sense of public realism as to what realistically can be delivered with the budget reductions being an annual problem.

As an alternative to cleaning streets, APSE continue to advocate methods for reducing demand for the service, in particular changing people's habits around litter through increased education and the use of powers such as the Clean Neighbourhoods Act to enforce where necessary through the issue of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's). Previous years' data returns had shown a continuous reduction in the budget allocated to education and publicity campaigns, presumably as part of cost cutting measures. However increases in education budgets and the number of fixed penalties being issued in Year 15/16 suggests that this approach is now being more vigorously followed. As a consequence of greater enforcement and its publicising this could be one reason why public satisfaction has risen in that it is being made much clearer that people littering will be prosecuted.

Future focus

Where local authorities face severe pressure on public realm services APSE firmly believes that good performance information supports the decisions that will impact upon the future direction of public realm services. As often these services support other council ambitions and outcomes for local communities such as the quality of the local environment, health and well-being.

Good performance data can :-

- Help to set a clear baseline on which competitiveness, efficiency and value for money can be measured in a systematic manner.
- Identify the impact of service changes and interventions for your own local authorities and for others.
- Assess the quality, cost and competitiveness of the services that councils provide on a regular basis.
- Help to report data in meaningful ways to both elected members and the public.
- Identify direction of travel and pace of change with regard to service delivery.
- Identify inefficiencies such as poor productivity and high cost.

Supporting service improvement through process benchmarking and sharing best practice examples is an excellent starting point for local authorities seeking to improve local services.

Whilst public satisfaction with council services has remained high there is now a worrying trend, as noted at the start of this briefing that quality levels and public satisfaction are beginning to fall, which would suggest the impact of some service cuts in the public realm are starting to have a negative impact on citizen satisfaction with such services. It is imperative that this trend is reversed and through the use of benchmarking data local authorities can gather information on how other are dealing with service cuts yet still retaining quality of service.

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