



Briefing 16 -60 December 2016

Parks, open spaces and horticultural services: Trend analysis 2015/16

Key issues

- This briefing provides information on the cost quality and performance of parks, open spaces and horticultural services
- Public satisfaction with the services remains high but the service continues to reflect budget pressures
- Overall performance in the sector remains good across all indicators.
- The sector is set to develop further the LAMS (Land Audit Management System) which will provide further opportunities to improve and share best practice in quality public spaces.

Trend Analysis

The following provides a summary of the trend analysis based on the 2015 /2016 submissions to APSE performance networks for parks, open spaces and horticultural services.

Cost

The data from the first batch of returns suggests that the average cost of service (per hectare of maintained land) has decreased by 1.6% to £5,370. This decline in spend is to be expected, given the widespread budget reductions that local authorities have had to face.

Closer analysis over the previous five years reveals that **this year's figures are** following the trend of previous spending, opposed to the increase during year 16 (2013-14). APSE will use their regular benchmarking group meetings to monitor the second batch of reports, in order to establish whether the return to the declining trend is maintained.

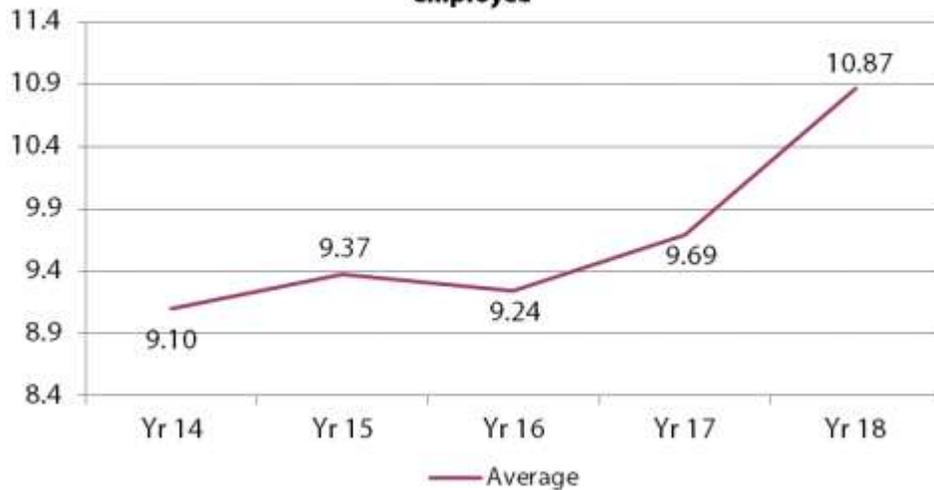
PI 02 Cost of service per hectare of maintained land (including CEC)



Productivity

The number of hectares maintained per full-time equivalent (FTE) employee has reached an all-time high of 10.87. This is potentially due to the more efficient use of labour through improved training and use of technology.

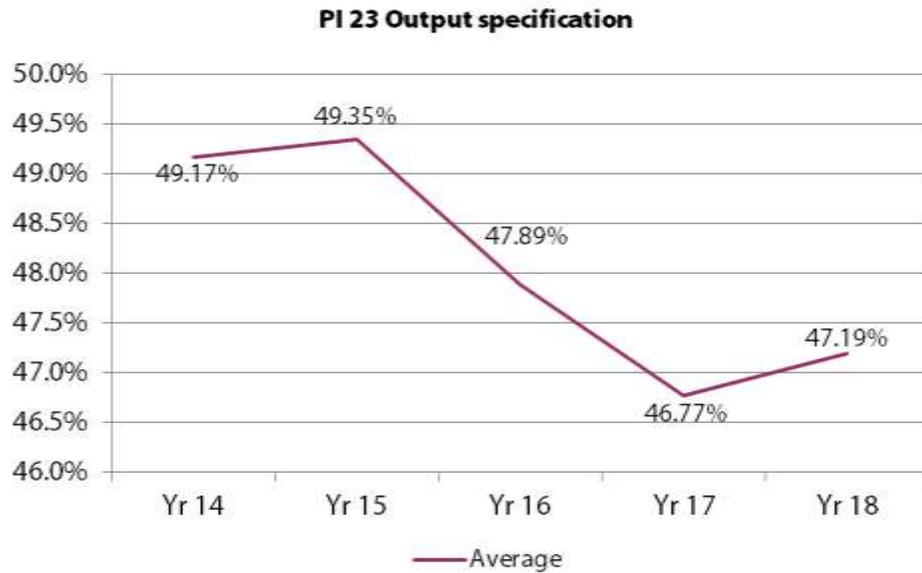
PI 12 Number of hectares maintained per FTE front line employee



Quality

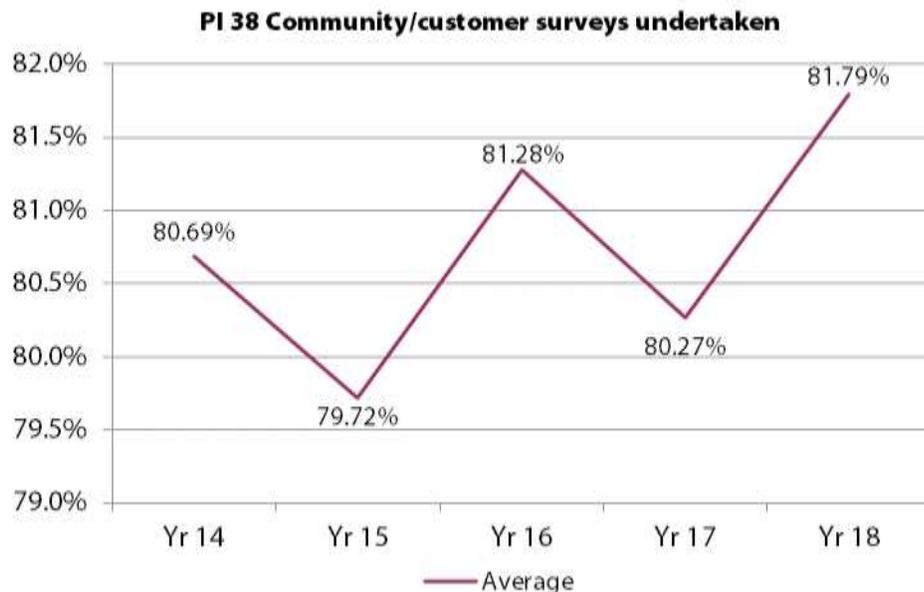
The output specification indicator, which measures maintenance frequencies, quality standards and chemical control methods, has shown an increase of 0.9% to 47.19% on data returns during year 18.

Trend analysis evidences a level of consistency on this data field as the variances are contained within only a 4% differential over the past 5 years data returns.



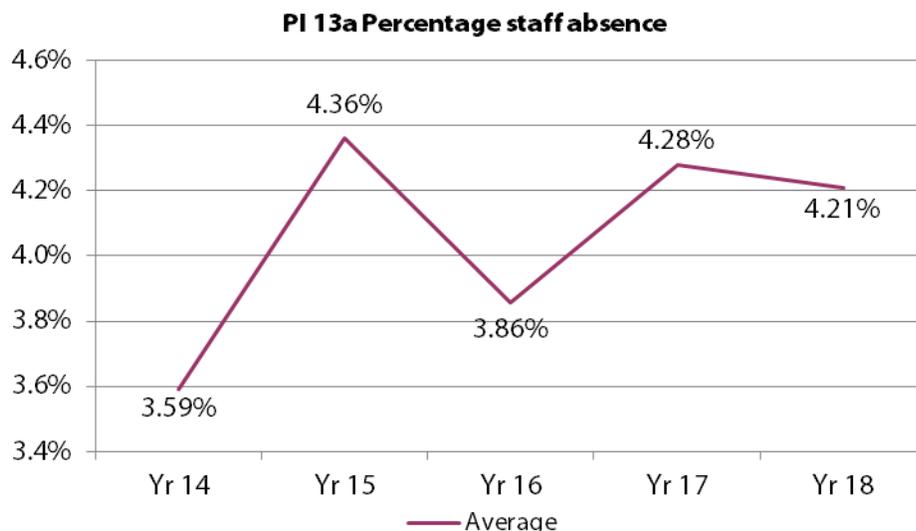
Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction levels have increased from 80.27% during Year 17 to 81.79% in Year 18. This is perhaps surprising considering the ongoing budget cuts parks and greenspaces are suffering.



Staff Absence

Whilst showing an increase from last year's data returns, this year's average percentage of 4.21% still remains well below a recorded high of 4.36% during Year 15 (2013/14). A thought-provoking point of interest is that even as a result of the many demands placed on staff through the streamlining of workforces at many authorities, this year's return of 4.21% is lower than the peak figure of 5.57% recorded in Year 10 (2007-08).



Human Resources and People Management

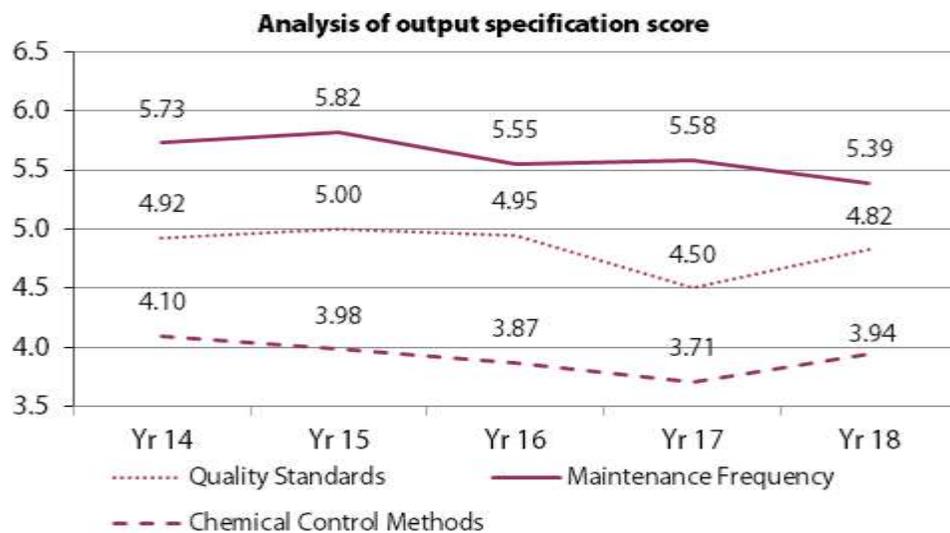
This performance indicator measures the extent of investment in training, development and health and safety. The average score has increased by 1.1% during year 18 against the previous year's decline. This is an indication of councils realising the benefits of staff development, through initiatives around multi-skilling and role integration and therefore continues to invest in the personal development of their staff.



Interpretation of Data

The performance data for 2015-16 reflects predominantly increase based data returns which has bucked the trend of the last few years where performance levels have progressively fallen. However what is noticeable is that maintenance frequency standards have continued to fall which suggests that reducing resources and the increasing associated challenges facing councils of today are still impacting on local authorities.

A further analysis of the output specification score is shown below. It provides evidence of improvements in quality standards and chemical control methods which does seem contradictory when considering maintenance frequencies are still falling. This will be investigated more fully over the coming months to allow a greater understanding to be developed.



Customer satisfaction levels have increased from 80.27% during Year 17 to 81.79% in Year 18. This is in itself an interesting data return when all of the factors mentioned above around park budget reductions are taken into consideration. This increase may be a reflection of the greater public awareness which has occurred regarding funding threats to public parks. The recent Government Inquiry into future parks funding has received a great deal of media coverage and an equally prolific level of responses from interested stakeholders and the public alike.

Many local authorities are now actively involving the public in both helping to physically manage and strategically plan for the futures of their parks and as such nurturing a greater understanding and appreciation of these vital public assets.

However, **APSE's** own 2016 research into the 'State Of The Market' for parks indicated that over 90% of respondents expected a reduction in revenue budget over the coming year. Of this figure, the majority expected a decrease in their parks revenue budget of between 5% and 20%.

Areas of decreased service provision were listed as bedding/flower displays and shrub bed maintenance (53%), and amenity grass cutting (41%).

A new feature for Year 18 will be that APSE will for the first time be including the results of its Land Audit Management System (LAMS) in the Performance Report which will identify levels of environmental quality and cleanliness amongst participating members.

The trend of reducing local authority budgets looks set to continue for the foreseeable future and APSE will continue to observe, through their benchmarking groups, the correlation between decreasing funding and service provision in comparison to high customer satisfaction data returns and the various ways local authorities are managing these circumstances.

Get involved

APSE hosts a 'Parks Advisory Group' where councils are able to share best practice, ideas and innovation in the parks, opens spaces and horticultural sector. The meetings also regular host discussions on the latest performance benchmarking information within the sector.

To get involved in the group you can register online using [this link](#) or email Wayne Priestley wpriestley@apse.org.uk

Wayne Priestley
Principal Advisor