



Building cleaning

A trend analysis of local authority performance on cost, quality and productivity within the building cleaning sector for education establishments, offices and other premises

Key issues

Local authority building cleaning is a major service looking after public and civic buildings and school and leisure buildings.

APSE performance networks for building cleaning is now in year 8 of data collection examining cost, quality and productivity issues.

This briefing highlights the key findings and looks at the future direction of building cleaning services in local authorities

1. About performance networks for building cleaning:

APSE performance networks programme for building cleaning provides performance indicators for price, service uptakes, key cost indicators, and productivity and qualitative measures for the service throughout the UK. This briefing aims to provide participating authorities with a picture of what the service trends are what this infers and what further activity and analysis individual authorities and their benchmarking groups could consider. The analysis in this briefing is based on 'Service Wide Averages' across all family groups for the past 7 years (from 1999/00 to 2004/06). Particular points of interest are as follows:

2. Charge out costs

The average cost per square metre cleaned, excluding central establishment charges, for 05/06 was £11.96. Prices have risen between 99/00 and 05/06, but less than inflation. There are no significant regional variations that appear to feature in terms of the average costs per square metre cleaned.

3. Key Cost and Productivity Indicators

PI 16 shows a decrease in the total square metres cleaned per FTE from 1341 in 2001-02 to 1263 in 2005-06. With the exception of an improvement in productivity in 2002-03 this PI indicates a steady decline in the total number of square metres cleaned per employee. This decrease in productivity correlates to a rise in the cost per square metre cleaned (PI 01 below).

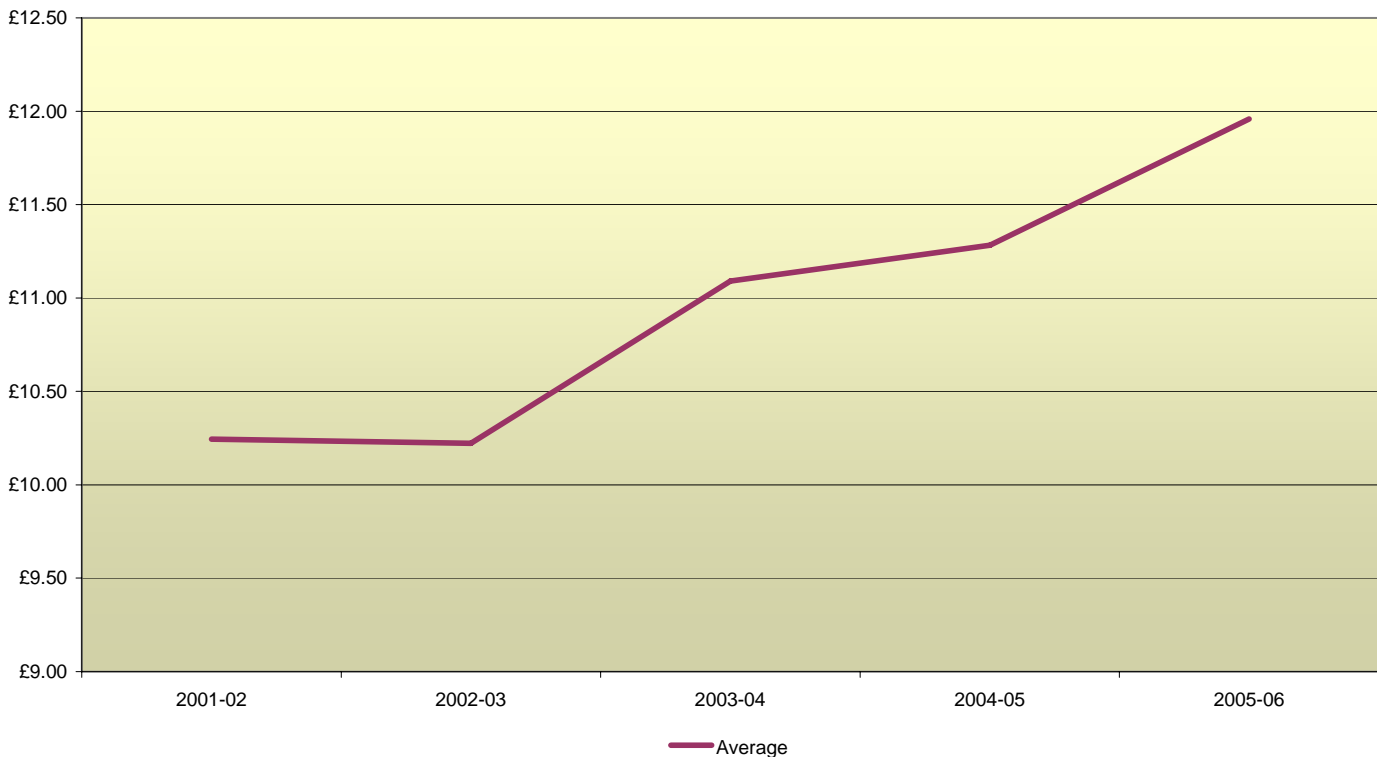
PI 04 shows a slight increase in the paid hours per measured square metres cleaned but does not create any significant increase to take the average figures back to the highest levels in 2001-02 at 1.54.

PI 31 shows an increase in central establishment charges. This could be as a result of the efficiency agenda within local authorities whereby recharging costs to direct service or direct labour organisations could focus on increasing income in order to ensure cost recovery for back office functions such as pay roll. A rise of 0.81% of overall service costs is attributable to central establishment charges.

PI 01 shows a steep rise in costs per square metre cleaned (excluding central establishment charges) rising from £10.24 in 2001-02 to £11.96 in 2005-06.

The graph below demonstrates the sharp rise in costs for 2005-06.

PI 01 - Cost per Square Metre Cleaned (excl CEC)



4. Starters and Leavers

PI 25 (a) shows a big improvement in leaver figures to the lowest ever figure of 18.68%. This figure has been in steady decline since the start of data collection in 1999-00 which saw leavers at 21.85%.

A new PI 25 (b) has collated data on leaver's figures for those in employment for more than 12 weeks. The average for 04/05 was 15. 21% based on figures for first and second batch data. This

has reduced to 13.22% for 2005-06. This appears to suggest that authorities are getting better at retaining staff within the building cleaning service area.

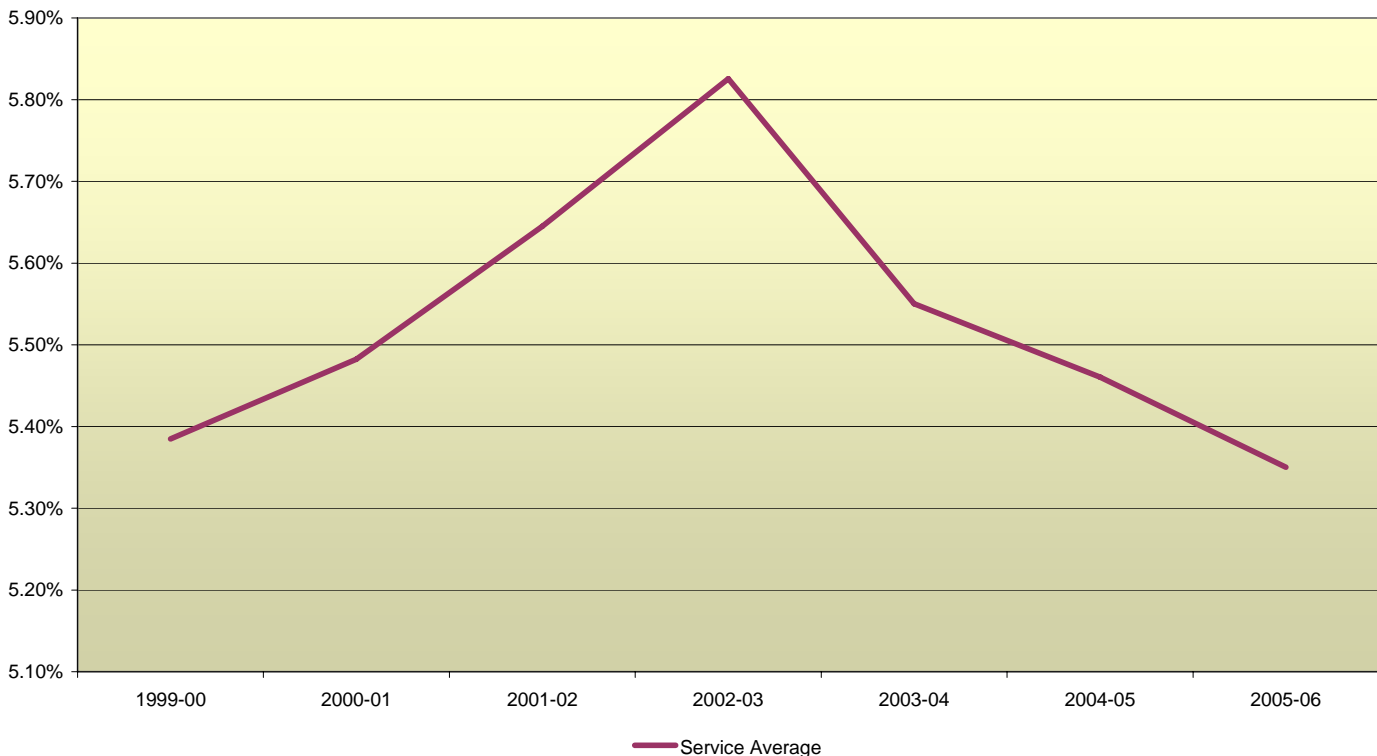
PI 21(a) for new starters as a percentage of the workforce is down to a new low of 15.66% which reflects the decrease in leavers. PI 21 (b) shows a decrease in the number of new starters present in the workforce after 12 weeks from 14.66% in 2004-05 to 11.81% in 2005-06.

5. Staff Absence

The average score for PI 24(b) staff absence excluding long term sickness absence (all staff) shows staff absences have remained for the last three years at a static 2.84%. This year shows a marginal increase to 2.85% for 2005-06 but is not out with previous trends.

Staff absence figures for front line staff (PI 20a) show that the figures overall are in decline on a steady basis over the last three years. Shown in the graph below these figures highlight the continued improvement in staff absence management.

PI 20a - Staff Absence (Front Line Staff)



6. Interpretation of data

Analysis of these trends and other data tends to support the following key observations:

2005/2006 has shown a significant improvement in the figures for both starters and leavers with leavers decreasing and new starters being recruited. However the 11.81% of new starters in the service with less than 12 weeks of employment completed suggests that retention continues to be a significant problem. This may be addressed by looking at any individual authority trends in the nature of the employees leaving, and closer examination of exit interviews (where authorities use this process) could help to establish why overall we see as high a figure of approximately 1.5 in every 5 employees who leave the service doing so within the first 12 weeks of being recruited. There is clearly a 'revolving door' problem with a significant percentage of new recruits.

The number of new starters is again closely matching the volume of leavers, indicating that improvements have been made on staff recruitment, although retention appears to be an on-going problem as highlighted above. This may be due to the age profile of the building cleaning workforce, where employees reaching retirement age are being replaced by less stable staffing resources looking for 'stop gap' employment measures, rather than a long term job opportunity including use of students to fill in gaps in service hour coverage for colleges and other establishments .

Staff absence levels at 5.35% are the lowest recorded in the data collection process and demonstrate that the spike shown in 2002-2003 appears to have been a one off 'spike' that generally bucks the overall trend of decreasing staff absence.

7. Future focus

As a service building cleaning continues to employ female part time staff. The sector has been developing strategies to implement equal pay and single status within local government. It is generally recognised as being one of the service areas likely to face increased wage bills as single status and job evaluation is implemented across local government in advance of the implementation deadline of April 2007.

However the likely increases in labour costs is not reflected in any significant price increases in terms of the building cleaning service and costs, though notably increasing, have been generally well contained.

Services to schools are a key work stream for building cleaning direct service providers and the impact of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme, the Scottish Schools PPP initiative and the Wales Programme for Improvement will have a critical effect on the future operation of building cleaning services. It will be necessary in future years to examine the involvement of building cleaning direct service providers in schools built under the BSF programme and indeed the involvement of direct organisations in new Academies. These areas, if not properly addressed, could see a decline in work in the schools portfolio. Member authorities have successfully utilised performance networks data and the support of APSE's best value consultancy to examine value for money and fitness for purpose aspects of the building cleaning direct service providers in bidding to or working within a BSF framework.

Following on from the impact of investment in school meals the building cleaning service needs to also look at the impact of the reduction in cleaning hours provided to schools. It may be prudent to consider minimum standards for school based cleaning to stem the decline in hours purchased by schools as a cost saving measures. Any reductions in hours allocated to schools could have an adverse impact on the quality of the cleaning provided to school children and create the potential for a negative impact on health. This will be a key area of work for building cleaning services in the near future. Indeed within Scotland the first Minister for Health, Andy Kerr MSP, has already implemented a health improvement programme strategy aimed at school children through a hand washing campaign. APSE members providing school cleaning services in Scotland's schools can be a key instrument in effecting the campaign by raising standards within school cleaning specification, particularly within toilet facilities.

Future areas for detailed analysis will include:

- Recruitment and retention of staff
- Impact of Job Evaluation on labour costs
- Regional variation on labour costs
- Renewed investment in staff training and qualifications
- Impact of BSF/ and school improvement programmes
- Impact of hours allocated to schools

- School brokerage services
- Effect of education procurement efficiencies programme and increases in central establishment charges

For further details on this topic or to access APSE's email query network, performance networks information or best value consultancy please contact Mo Baines on mbaines@apse.org.uk

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