



# Building cleaning trend analysis

This briefing provides details of the latest trend analysis of local authority performance on cost, quality and productivity within the building cleaning sector. It is provided to local authority chief executives, councils leaders and all APSE building cleaning contacts

## Key issues

1. Local authority building cleaning is an important public service looking after the cleaning of local council buildings and civic amenities, schools and other establishments
2. The building cleaning service has come under increasing cost pressures through budget delegation within the schools sector as the building cleaning budget can be limited without any safeguards as to standards.
3. APSE performance networks for building cleaning is now in year 9 of data collection examining cost, quality and productivity issues relating to the building cleaning service.
4. This briefing highlights the key findings and looks at the future direction of building cleaning services in local authorities
5. Analysis referred to in this briefing is based on first batch data returns. Summary reports will be published in March 2008.

## 1. Introduction

Building cleaning services are often under-recognised across all sectors of the economy unless something goes drastically wrong. The focus on cleaner hospitals as a result of the rise in hospital acquired infections has led to the dramatic reconfiguration of cleaning contracts within the NHS and the issuing of model specifications and guidelines. However, elsewhere within the public sector and the wider economy the service is still very much price driven. For schools with delegated budgets there is no regulatory control on cleaning standards leaving specifications, and the quality of cleaning services, very much open to determination by individual schools. This has led to significant cost pressures on the service despite improvements in the local

government building cleaning sector in the management of sickness absence, productivity improvements and the considerable investment that the service makes in the training, development and secure employment of part time females, often living within the locality in which they work.

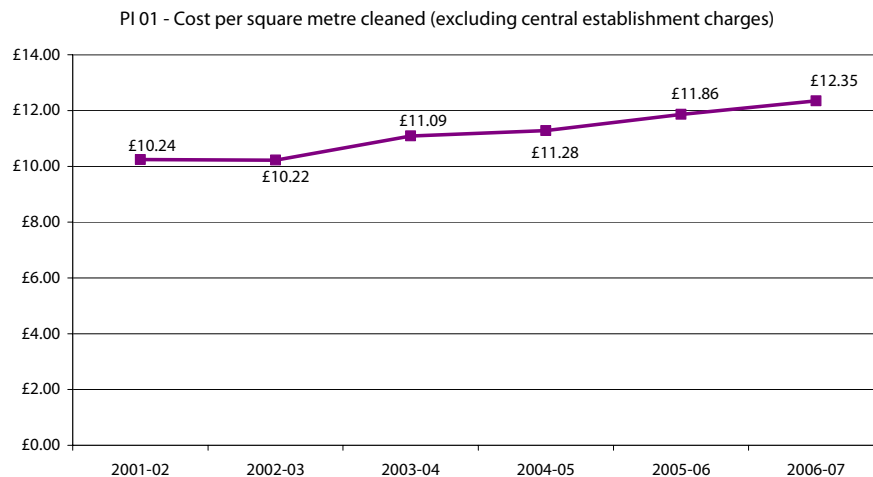
This briefing highlights the key findings of APSE performance networks data on building cleaning services and provides an analysis of the state of the sector within local government.

## 2. Overview of trend information

The APSE performance networks service 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 executive summary is based on service wide averages across all family groups for the past 8 years (from 1999/00 to 2006/07).

## 3. Key cost and productivity indicators

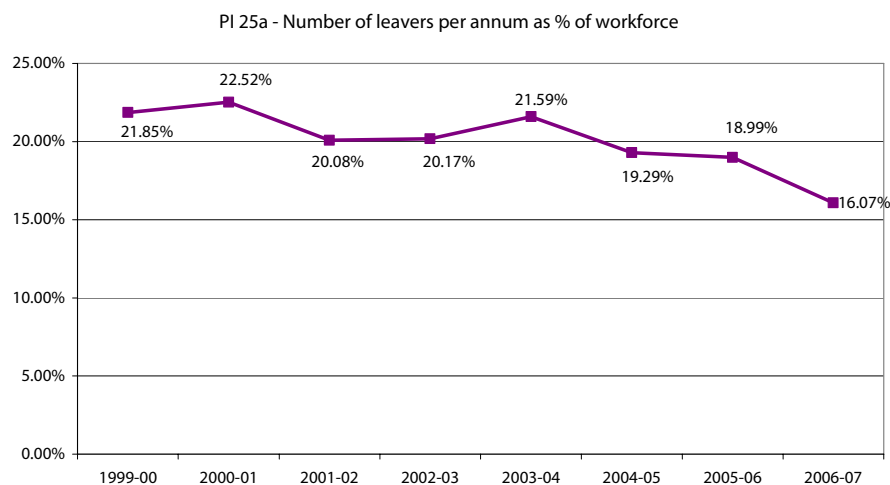
The average cost per square metre cleaned, for all buildings including schools, and excluding central establishment charges for 06/07 was £12.35, which is an increase from £11.86 last year, although some of this increase will be due to inflation. This is shown in the graph below:



PI 16, which measures the numbers of square metres cleaned per full time employee,(FTE) had in previous years shown a decrease in the total square metres cleaned per FTE from 1405 in 2002-03 to 1273 in 2005-06. However, this figure has shown an increase this year to 1294, suggesting an increase in productivity. Correlating to this, PI 04 shows a slight decrease in the paid hours per measured square metres cleaned from 1.52 last year to 1.50.

#### 4. Employment issues - figures for 'starters and leavers'

Building cleaning as an industry has suffered significant turmoil in that it often operates on a 'revolving door' basis recruiting new staff to replace a high proportion of leavers on an almost continuing basis. PI 25 (a), which collects information on the numbers of leavers as a percentage of the workforce shows a big improvement in leaver figures to the lowest ever figure of 16.07%. This figure has been in steady decline since the start of data collection in 2000-01 which saw leavers at 22.52%. This is shown in the graph below:



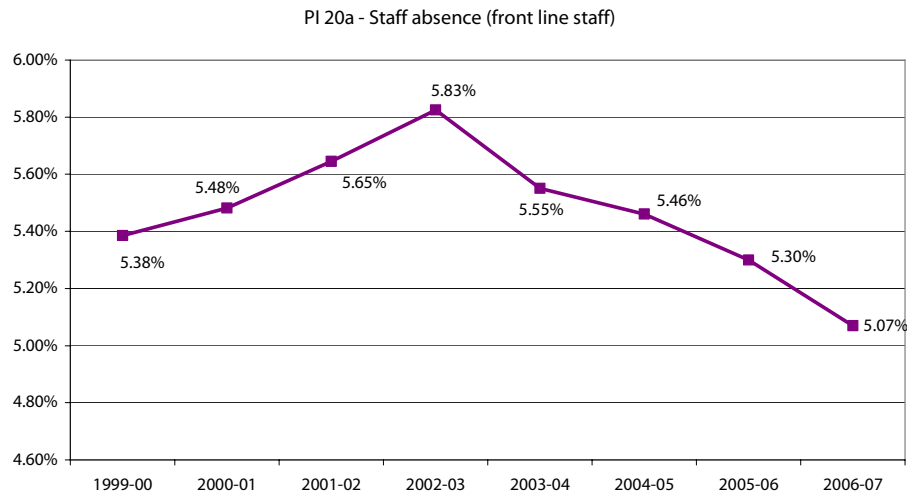
PI 25b shows leaver figures for those in employment for more than 12 weeks. The average for this performance indicator has marginally increased this year from 13.04% to 13.16%, although this is still a lower figure than that recorded in 2004-05, 15.21%. This reflects the difficulties in gaining recruits to the sector who are prepared to stay with an employer on a longer term basis.

PI 21a for new starters as a percentage of the workforce is down to a new low of 13.51% which reflects the decrease in leavers.

#### 5. Employment issues – 'staff absence'

The average score for PI 24b staff absence excluding long-term sickness absence (all staff) shows staff absences have reduced this year to 2.57%, which is the lowest figure recorded in the last 5 years.

Staff absence figures for front line staff PI 20a show that the figures overall have been in decline on a steady basis over the last four years. This is shown in the graph overleaf.



## 6. Interpretation of data

From the above analysis, it is noticeable that there is strong evidence of improvement within the sector despite a number of on-going pressures. Staff absence levels at 5.07% are the lowest ever recorded in the APSE performance networks database and are demonstrably lower than those cited on an industry wide basis. Productivity has improved this year as evidenced in performance indicators PI 04 and PI 16. The improvement in the figures for leavers and the correlating reduction in new starters highlights that building cleaning services are using new and innovative practices to help recruit and retain employees.

Despite cost increases demonstrated in performance indicator 01, which represents an increase of 4.13% from last year's figures, this is still a lower percentage increase than in previous years (8.15% between 2002-03 and 2003-04 and 5.14% between 2004-05 and 2005-06). This suggests that despite cost pressures on the service such as equal pay and on-going costs for recruitment, training and retention of employees the service is being well managed by local authorities. Further analysis suggests that since 2002-03, there has been a greater increase in cost per square meter cleaned in educational establishments as opposed to other types of cleaning which could indicate that clients are recognising the need to properly specify the cleaning service that they receive.

## 7 Future focus of performance management in the building cleaning sector

Government considered that performance management arrangements have in the main been successfully embedded into local government. As part of the Best Value agenda, it was considered a vital tool to help improve the quality of public services. One implication over recent years has been a general move to lessen the amount of performance measurement which has to be reported back to Government as well as a reduction in terms of audit and inspection of the better performing local authorities. This focus has been consistent across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The focus on accurate and robust data is important but is seen as only the first stage in a performance management framework. Data must be used to track performance, inform priorities, and highlight particular issues and direct resources. There is also a responsibility on local authorities to inform people about the level of performance so they are aware of changes and can make the link between how the council is managing and providing services and what they are experiencing as service users. This can also be implied to individual clients in the building cleaning sector such as schools or other establishments.

The ability of building cleaning managers to measure and compare their performance with others provides valuable data to inform both internal and external clients that they are conscious of both cost and quality in the delivery of the service.

## **8. APSE comment**

Directly provided building cleaning services continue to face cost pressures from clients. In addition, the moves towards efficiency savings, with reductions in out-goings, has anecdotally been a factor in clients seeking to reduce the level of spend on building cleaning services as a means to generate an efficiency gain. This is often a false economy leading to long term deterioration in the quality of public buildings. For school and residential establishments it can also be a risk to the health and safety of individuals using the facilities.

Moreover APSE has been a long standing supporter of the 'Bog standards campaign' to improve the cleaning and overall toilet facilities within school buildings which requires recognition, by headteachers and governors, of the importance of the level of cleaning. More recently press reports in 'The Observer' highlighted the deterioration in public toilet facilities in town centres as a direct result of under investment in the service and de-prioritisation of building cleaning budgets. Building cleaning services may therefore wish to consider how effectively they are able to lobby on behalf of their service users.

It will remain of critical importance that building cleaning services are delivered in local authorities to provide both a cost effective and quality service. However building cleaning managers have a role in educating clients about the importance of the service and the impact of service depletion on the overall quality of public buildings and perceptions of services users.

The service has responded well to labour cost increases as a result of equal pay and is recognised for providing a fair wage localised employment solution for female workers, particularly those seeking part time posts to accommodate child care responsibilities. The service must continue to demonstrate both to parent local authorities and individual clients its intrinsic value as a public service.

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