



# Highways, winter & street lighting trend analysis

This briefing provides details of the latest trend analysis of local authority performance on cost, quality and productivity within the highways, winter maintenance and street lighting sectors. It is provided to local authority chief executives, councils leaders and all APSE highways, winter maintenance and street lighting contacts

## Key issues

1. Local authority highways, winter maintenance and street lighting are vital public services which contribute to wider agendas of neighbourhoods, crime and disorder, sustainability and healthy living.
2. These services have come under increasing cost pressures through increases in energy costs, the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 settlement and efficiency savings.
3. APSE performance networks performance indicators for highways, winter maintenance and street lighting cover dimensions of performance, such as the cost, productivity and quality, which have been collected for 7 years and the number of authorities collecting data has again increased this year.
4. This briefing highlights the key findings and looks at the future direction of highways, winter maintenance and street lighting 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

High quality roads and street lighting and effective winter maintenance have a huge impact on public perception of their neighbourhood, public safety and on reducing crime and the fear of crime. Also, if procured sustainably, they can address environmental goals and save money through energy efficiency. This briefing highlights

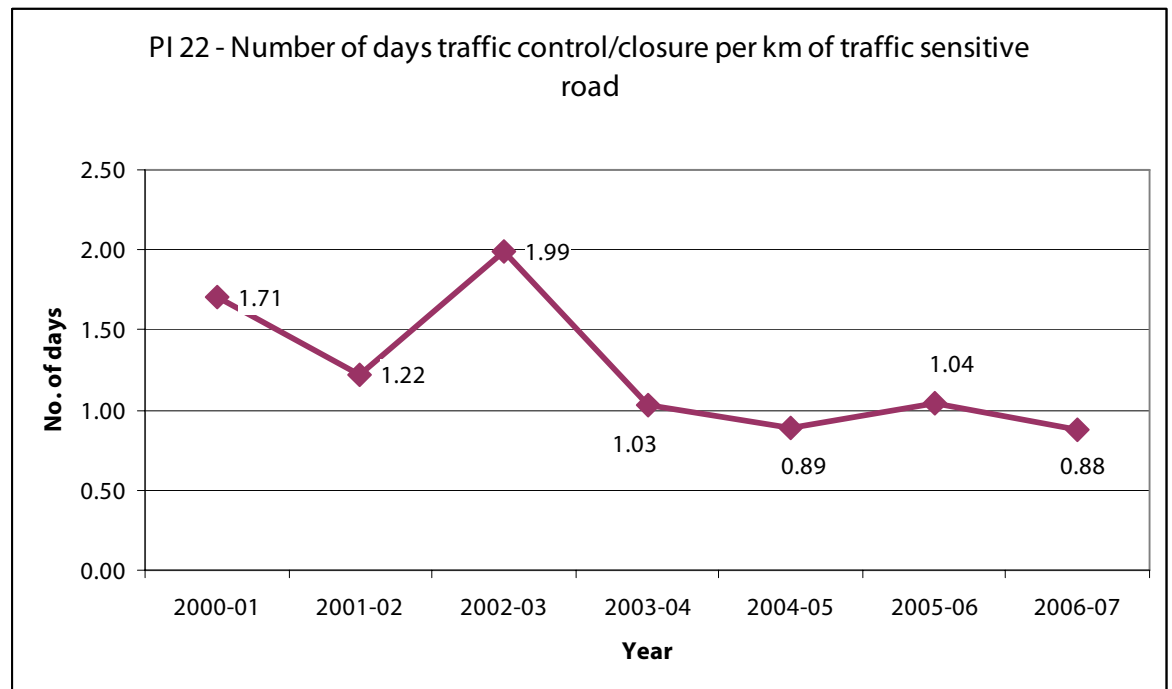
the key findings of APSE performance networks data on highways, winter maintenance and street lighting services and provides an analysis across the sector.

## 2. Overview of trend information

The APSE performance networks service for highways, winter maintenance and street lighting provides performance indicators for cost, productivity and quality for local authorities 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 7 years (from 2000/01 to 2006/07).

## 3. Key indicators – highways maintenance

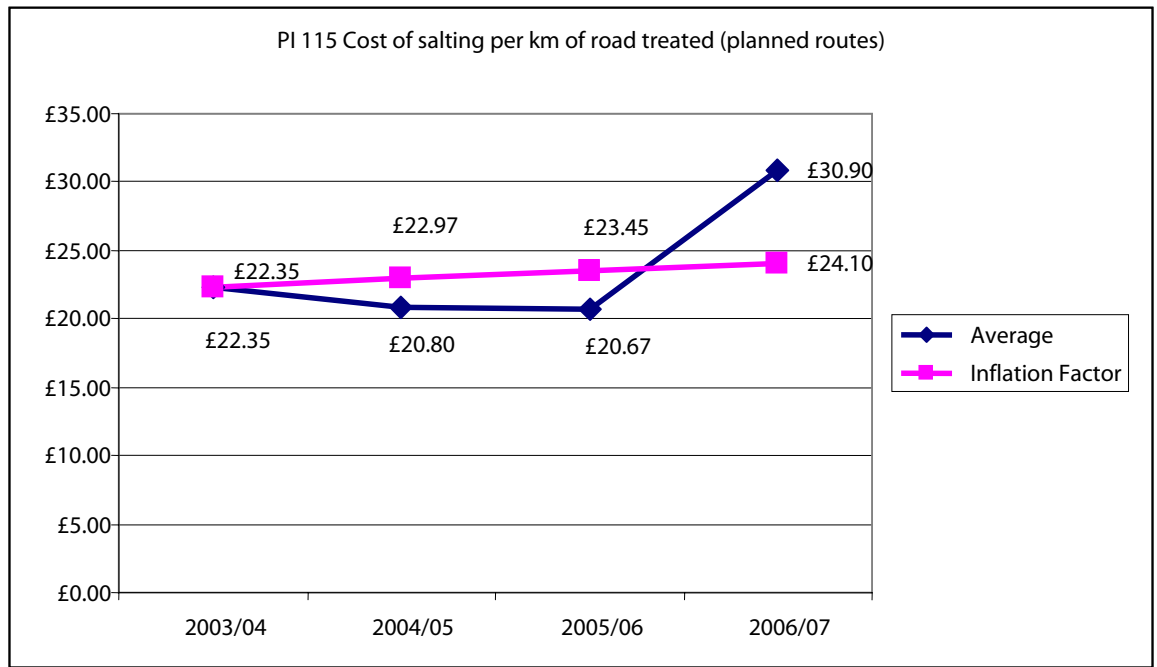
The number of days of traffic control/closure per kilometre of traffic sensitive road has decreased since 2000/01 from 1.71 to 0.88 and is now the lowest that this has been for 7 years. This trend is shown below.



For PI 31, the percentage change in third party claims, 69% of authorities have shown a reduction in this figure.

## 4. Key indicators – winter maintenance

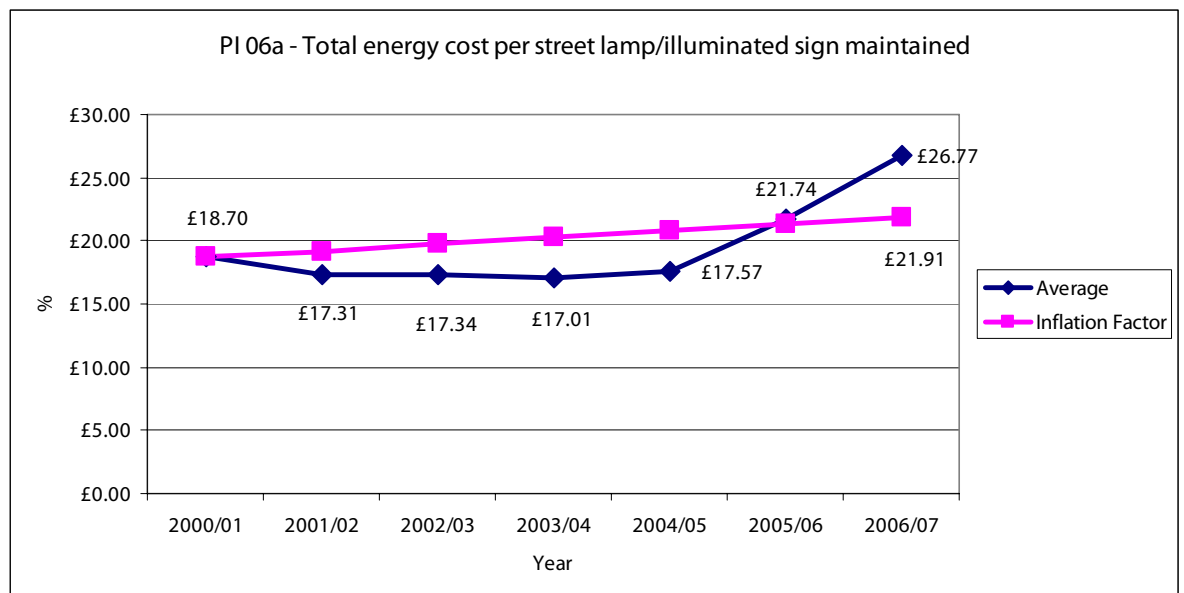
In relation to winter maintenance specifically, the cost of salting per km of road treated (planned routes) has increased during the past year from £20.67 to £30.90.



The average actual response time in hours for completion of planned pre-salting has reduced over the past 2 years from 2.87 to 2.73. In addition, there has been a reduction in the average response time (including allowed mustering time) for non planned salting for priority routes over the past 2 years from 3.47 to 3.41.

## 5. Key indicators – street lighting

After being fairly stable for the previous four years, total energy cost per street lamp/illuminated sign maintained has increased from £17.57 in 2004/05 to £26.77 in 2006/07. The increase is shown graphically below:



The percentage of lamps restored to working condition within 7 days has remained stable - above 90% in the last five years. In addition, the average time for the local authority to repair lamps has remained fairly stable over the past 5 years at about 4 days

whereas the average time for the electricity supplier to repair lamps has increased since last year from 18.94 days to 23.83 days.

Following on from an increase in the percentage of staff absence for front-line staff last year, this has decreased this year from 5.31% to 4.84% and the percentage of staff absence for all staff has decreased from 4.54% to 4.24% over the same period.

## **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. Again, there has been a reduction in third party claims, reflecting the proactive approach that local authorities are taking in making roads safer. In addition, in terms of the accessibility of the public highway, there has been a reduction in the number of days of traffic control/road closure per km of traffic sensitive road. However, this performance indicator is likely to be superseded with more sophisticated performance measures around the traffic management act in due course.

Response times for winter maintenance have improved, which will also have an impact on the safety of roads. Members of the highways workshop at the performance networks seminar (6-7 December 2007) thought that the sharp increase in the cost of salting per km of road treated for planned routes was due to the mild weather during the winter and therefore fewer roads being treated.

It is noticeable that energy costs are having an impact on the cost of street lighting services and this has been increasing over the past 4 years. This trend may well continue due to increasing the use of lighting to reduce crime and the fear of crime. Local authorities are maintaining their high level of performance for restoring street lamps to working condition, which obviously has an impact on public safety and the quality of the environment. However, even though local authorities' performance on repairing lamps has remained fairly stable, there has been an increase in the time taken by electricity suppliers which will obviously have an impact on the public's perception of street lighting.

## **7. Future focus of performance management in highways, winter maintenance and street lighting**

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 and the different contexts in each country. 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, 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.

The need to consider outcomes, reflecting the impact on people's lives of services provided, as part of a performance management framework (as well as inputs and outputs) has gained momentum. As such, the performance networks templates will be

developed further to incorporate more outcome focused performance indicators as they arise. In addition, APSE has been working with the Local Government Data Unit in Wales on developing a common customer satisfaction survey for highways, winter maintenance and street lighting for all councils in Wales to use.

Over the past year we have been working on proposals for the development of a comprehensive local performance framework for neighbourhoods, which utilises the vast array of data contained in the performance networks model, including highways, winter maintenance and street lighting data. We have held discussions with ENCAMS, CABE Space, the Local Government Association National Environmental Officers Network (NEON) and others about developing a flexible local performance framework that takes into account processes, standards and outcomes. An interim report was produced in July 2007 and a pilot with four local authorities is currently underway.

The move towards more regular performance management reports has fuelled a call for more frequency in comparison across the local authority family. The practicalities of developing performance networks in this way will also be investigated. The requirement to collect, analyse and compare performance will remain with local authorities meaning the benefits of using benchmarking arrangements such as those provided by performance networks will continue to increase.

## **8. APSE comment**

Highways, winter maintenance and street lighting services continue to face cost pressures; this is evidenced in the APSE data and has been due to a series of external influences including increases in energy costs, the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 settlement and efficiency savings. However, the need to provide quality highways and street lighting services is vital in terms of public health and safety, the liveability of a neighbourhood and community safety. The 'invest to save' in these services argument is very clear but current options to raise funds are limited. APSE has been lobbying that, given the limitations in the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and absence of a wide choice of alternatives, Prudential Borrowing is a route that should be considered by more councils.

Despite these cost pressures, there is clear evidence of improved performance by local authority highways, winter maintenance and street lighting services. The performance networks model for street lighting has monitored the performance of electricity suppliers over the past few years. This is because local authorities' performance on street lighting is heavily monitored, yet it can be beyond their control if electricity suppliers let them down. At present, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM) stops short of genuine sanctions when the Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) who provide and maintain electricity connections fail to deal with street lighting faults or carry out connections and disconnections on time.

The decision from OFGEM last year to expect DNOs to surpass key performance indicators; paying particular emphasis, for safety reasons, to resolving emergency fault repairs is a step towards monitoring performance, but APSE would argue that this is a first step only. APSE hope that OFGEM will go further if necessary and if all else fails, it may be necessary to introduce financial penalties for DNOs' unmetered supplies. After all, this will have not only an adverse effect on the council's performance indicators, but this can have a clear effect on public satisfaction with the services being provided.

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