



Briefing 08/29

June 2008

Customer satisfaction survey pilot

This briefing provides a summary of work undertaken by APSE and Vision Management Systems (VMS) on developing outcome measures. It is provided to Council Leaders, Chief Executives and service contacts in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Key issues

1. The importance of citizen engagement and outcome performance measures has been highlighted in recent government papers.
2. APSE has been working with VMS to develop outcome measures which can be used in conjunction with performance networks.
3. APSE and VMS have undertaken a pilot scheme involving grounds maintenance and street cleansing surveys
4. The surveys can be used in conjunction with data from APSE performance networks to gain a fuller picture of performance
5. This briefing paper summarises some of the work undertaken to date

1. Introduction

Over the past year, APSE has been working with Vision Management Systems (VMS) on developing outcome measures which can be used in conjunction with the performance indicators contained in the performance networks models for parks and street cleansing. The importance of outcome measures such as customer satisfaction has been highlighted in recent government papers including the new national indicators for England, Transforming Public Services in Scotland, the New Performance Measurement Framework in Wales and the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland. The national audit body have also demonstrated their increasing focus on the customers' view of services and performance.

In 2006/07, APSE and VMS undertook a pilot scheme, which asked for volunteers from APSE member authorities to carry out a grounds maintenance and/or street cleansing survey. The survey results would then allow these authorities to monitor and understand the views of their customers and local residents on services provided. The survey used identifies areas for

improvement from a customer perspective, so that the authority can use the information gained to direct resources to improve services.

This briefing paper summarises some of the work undertaken to date and concentrates on comparative information for grounds maintenance and street cleansing.

2. About the pilot scheme

Six APSE members participated in the pilot scheme for grounds maintenance and 4 in the pilot for street cleansing. Each organisation selected up to 300 service users to undertake the questionnaire; including councillors, residents groups, area forum members or customers selected at random. Taking into account return rates this was expected to provide around 100 responses, which was considered sufficient to ensure valid conclusions but not too large to administer in the available time. Each service user was sent an explanatory letter along with the questionnaire to be returned by post. The average return rate across all of the pilot authorities was 38.87%. The results were analysed and a hard copy report of those results was produced for each organisation.

3. Outcomes

Both surveys consisted of 9 questions relating to service provision and the responses to each question were scored out of ten. A final question gave an overall rating score out of ten. A target score of 7 out of ten was set for each question, with a high score being desirable. The target is a SMART target based on benchmarking evidence from the VMS database.

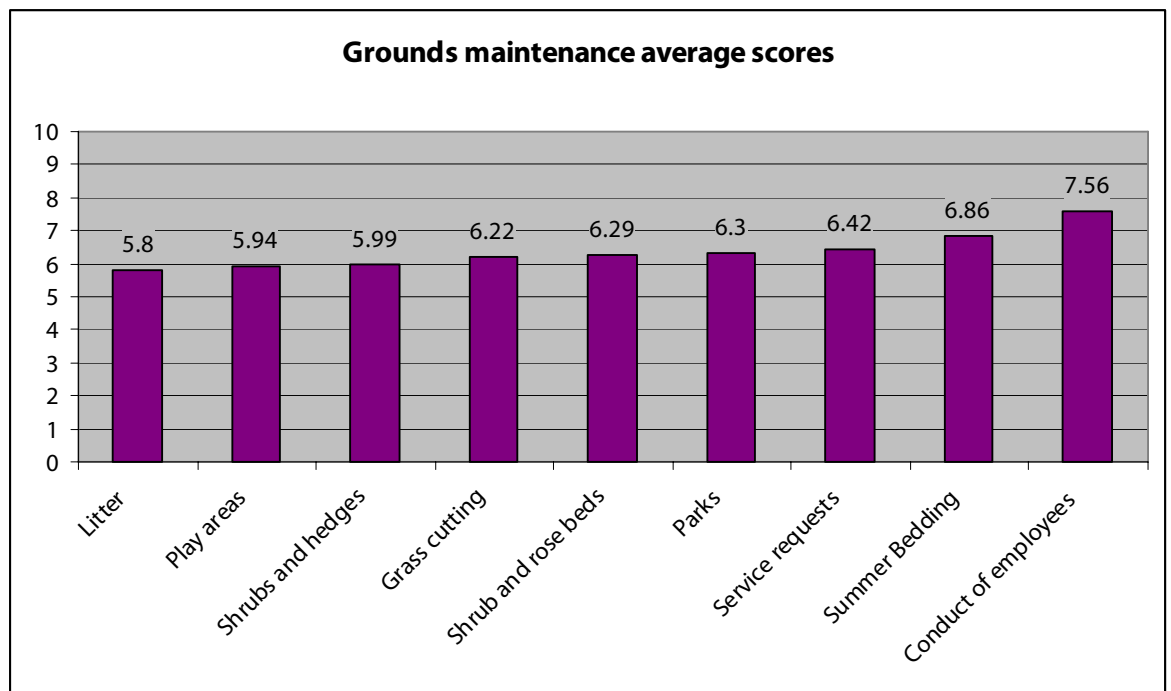
3.1 Grounds maintenance survey results

The average score for the six pilot authorities for overall satisfaction with the grounds maintenance service was 6.45. All authorities scored between 5.89 and 6.84. Extended analysis into the individual questions of the survey does highlight strengths and areas for improvement across functions and provides a future focus for each authority involved. This survey focused on the following functions:

1. Grass cutting
2. Summer bedding
3. Shrubs and hedges
4. Parks
5. Shrub and rose beds
6. Litter
7. Service requests
8. Conduct of employees
9. Play areas

Customers were extremely satisfied with the conduct of employees. Five out of six authorities scored higher than the target score of 7. The remaining authority narrowly missed out with a score of 6.90. Another area showing high levels of satisfaction was the quality of summer bedding. Three authorities scored above the target of 7 and only one authority achieved a score below 6.

The scores for customer satisfaction with parks ranged from 5.43 to 7.23, with an average score of 6.30. None of the authorities achieved the target score for dealing with litter and the average score was 5.80 – the lowest average across all categories. Therefore litter is obviously an issue for improvement for all the pilot authorities. Other comparatively lower scoring areas included play areas where the average score was 5.94 and shrubs and hedges with an average score of 5.99. The average scores across the 6 participating authorities are displayed graphically below:



The above scores demonstrate that there is a comparatively high level of satisfaction, on average, with the conduct of employees and the service delivered by the local authority in the form of service requests (where the customer requests a service such as clearing a fallen tree and the authority responds to this request). Further investigation into the results may reveal different levels of satisfaction in different geographic locations and satisfaction with certain functions such as play areas may be affected by the time of the year, day of the week and time of the day that the survey has been carried out on.

3.2 Grounds maintenance – a comparison with APSE performance networks data

APSE has drawn on some of the average performance data from the performance networks databases for grounds maintenance and a summary of this is below.

The trend analysis from performance networks for 2006/07 has shown that local authorities have performed well in controlling costs of grounds maintenance services. However, the output specification (quality standards, frequency of operation and chemical control methods) has dipped slightly in comparison with previous years as has customer satisfaction. Therefore, there is an obvious need to consider longer term investment requirements in the service.

The pilot survey results above demonstrated that a comparatively lower scoring function was play areas where the average score was 5.94. However, the performance networks data shows that the National Playing Fields Associations play value average score across all local authorities who submitted data, has increased from an average of 22.01 in 2005-06 to 26.52 in 2006/07. This play value score reflects site and equipment features as well as play co-operation. Therefore, further investigation is needed into the survey results to identify any specific reasons why satisfaction with play areas is comparatively low in the survey results.

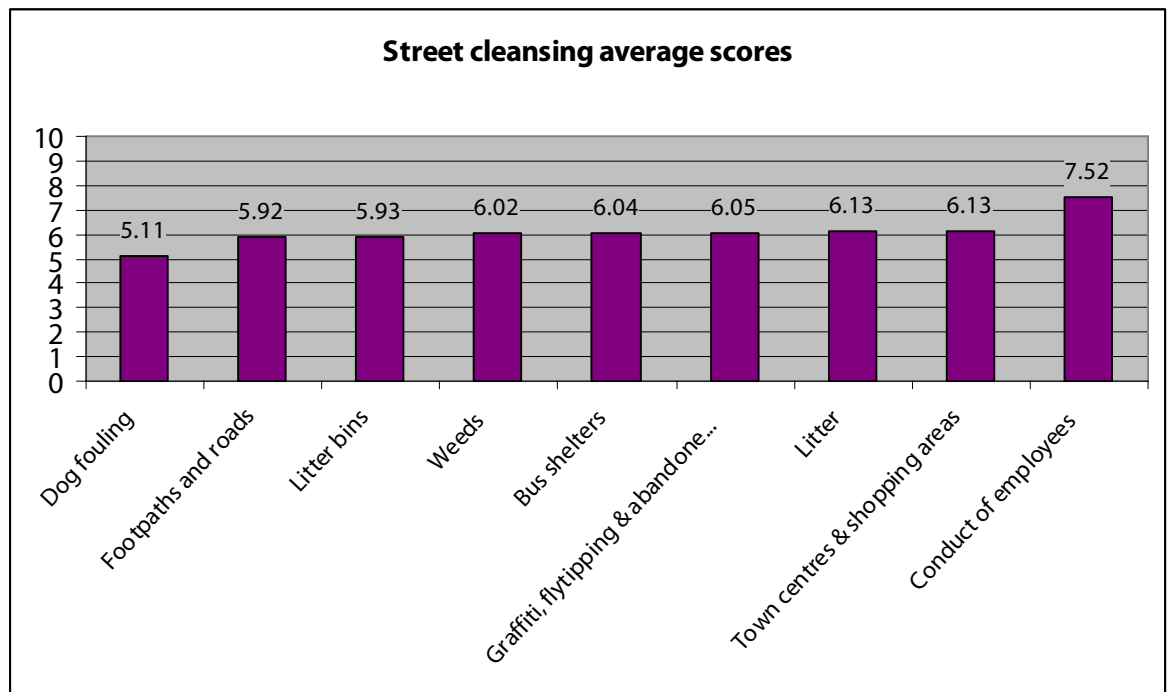
3.3 Street cleansing survey results

Four authorities participated in the pilot for street cleansing and the average score for the overall satisfaction of street cleansing services was 6.18. Extended analysis into the individual questions of the survey does highlight strengths and areas for improvement across functions and provides future focus for each authority involved. This survey focused on the following functions:

1. Dog fouling
2. Footpaths and roads
3. Litter bins
4. Weeds
5. Bus shelters
6. Graffiti, flytipping & abandoned cars
7. Litter
8. Town centres & shopping areas
9. Conduct of employees

The highest scoring question on this survey was again the conduct of employees (as was the case for grounds maintenance above). All the authorities scored above the target of 7, with one authority scoring 8.16 and the average score was above the target at 7.52. Other relatively higher scoring areas were litter and town centres and shopping areas both with an average score of 6.13.

The most obvious area for improvement in this service for the pilot authorities was the local authority response to dog fouling. All authorities scored below 6 on this category, with the lowest score being 4.85. Another comparatively lower scoring area was the provision of litter bins. The average scores across the 4 participating authorities are displayed graphically below:



Again, the conduct of employees was highly rated by service users which will be pleasing for local authorities. Further investigation into the results may demonstrate that expectations need to be taken into account when interpreting the results. For instance, the satisfaction score for footpaths and roads may reflect the condition of the roads and footpaths and levels of investment needed in the infrastructure as opposed to its cleanliness. In addition, the pilot authorities may wish to further disaggregate the scores of some of the functions; for instance, to look at levels of satisfaction with graffiti alone.

3.4 Street cleansing – a comparison with APSE performance networks data

APSE has drawn on some of the average performance data from the performance networks databases for street cleansing and a summary of this is below.

Whereas the performance networks data showed a containment of costs for grounds maintenance, it is a different picture for street cleansing. The average cost per household shows an increase by 6.58% from 2005/06 to 2006/07 to £35.01, which reflects the emphasis the liveability agenda has put on the public realm and street environment. However, the overall satisfaction level with street cleansing was lower than that of grounds maintenance; 6.18 for street cleansing compared to 6.45 for grounds maintenance. Therefore, perceptions may not be

reflective of levels of resources in the service but other factors such as expectations. This is supported by the fact that the cleanliness of sites, as measured by the percentage of sites that fall below Grade B continues to improve from over 18% in 2003/04 to 12.71% in 2006/07. In addition, the indicator measuring the acceptable levels of cleanliness has risen for the second consecutive year and now stands at 91.41%.

In terms of dog fouling, the performance networks data showed that dog fouling penalty notices issued has increased by 15.5% to 25.05. However, the above survey results have demonstrated that this is an area with comparatively low satisfaction. This may be due to high expectations or a need to educate service users on measures being taken by the council. Dog fouling remains one of the key issues noted by citizens responding to surveys.

The performance networks data for litter offence fixed penalty notices issued has increased from 187.20 in 2005/06 to 235.58 in 2006/07. This effectiveness of this enforcement may be reflected in the comparatively high level of satisfaction shown in the surveys with litter.

5 Conclusion

The strength of the initial findings has been as a comparative data set for those local authorities who are involved in the pilot to identify both the strengths and areas for improvement. By using outcome data in conjunction with other dimensions of performance such as cost, productivity and quality, this allows for a fuller picture of performance. A comparison of the survey results with performance networks data will allow authorities to interpret their results in more details and in the context with their inputs and outputs and this, expected outcomes.

At the moment the survey results are limited to those authorities involved in the pilot. The expansion of the pilot to other authorities would provide a larger sample size and this would allow for like-for-like comparisons to be made. In addition, further value would be gained from the survey results when trend analysis is available for year-on-year comparisons.

APSE recognise that there is no standard survey that is used for customer satisfaction and that authorities use different approaches to measure this; whether they use their own survey or employ other organisations. The performance networks model draws data in from various customer satisfaction surveys, including the survey used by VMS in this pilot, although it is not limited to the pilot data. This will allow for comparisons to be made across the many types of surveys used by local authorities. To do this, APSE will be asking performance networks participants for further details on the type of surveys used, the sample size, the methodology and questions asked to ensure that a like-for-like comparison is being made.

We fully intend to build on this work done so far in order to ensure that performance networks continues to facilitate meaningful comparisons and can draw on a range of data being used at local authority level to inform service improvement. APSE has also been working with ENCAMS and the Local Government Association Environmental Officers Network (NEON) to develop a voluntary local performance management framework for neighbourhoods. A key dimension of this framework is customer perceptions, alongside service efficiency and service delivery standards. These developments are to ensure that performance networks will continue to play a key role in providing local performance management information.

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