



Briefing 08-63 December 2008

# Street Lighting: Trend analysis

This briefing provides details on the performance information available from APSE's performance networks service looking at performance indicators and current policy issues for councils who provide street lighting services

## Key issues

- Energy costs remain a significant issue for the delivery of street lighting
- There have been continued improvements in the time taken to repair columns
- This briefing highlights some of the key performance indicators collected through APSE's performance networks services including cost, productivity and performance issues.

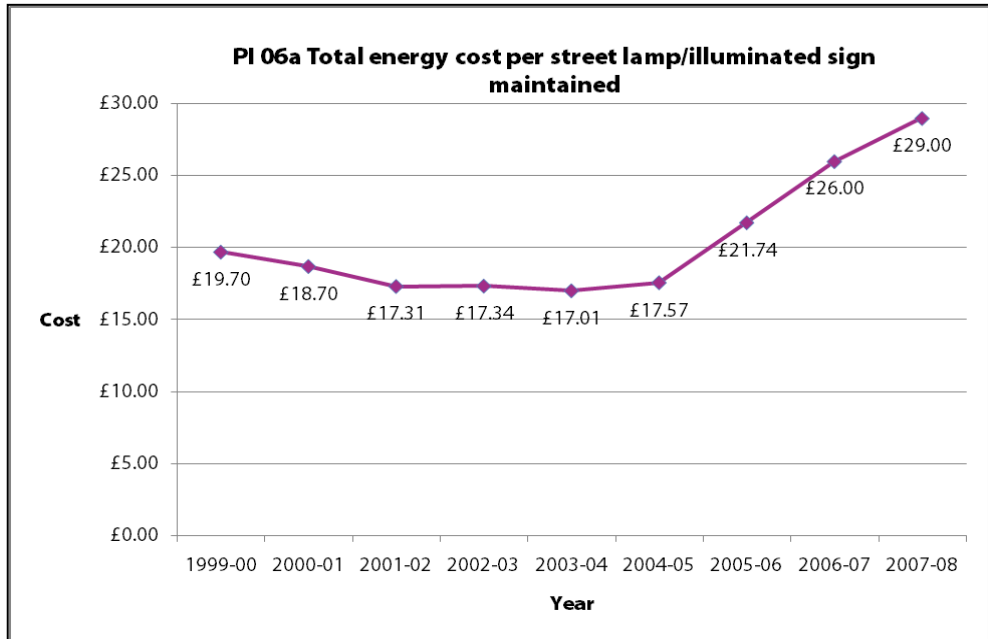
## Introduction

The APSE performance networks performance indicators for street lighting cover the cost, productivity and quality elements of the service. This executive summary aims to provide participating Authorities with an overview of service trends, what this infers and what further activity and analysis individual authorities and the APSE highways, winter maintenance and street lighting benchmarking group could consider. The analysis in this executive summary is based on averages across all family groups for the last seven years (2000/01 to 2007/08).

## Trend analysis

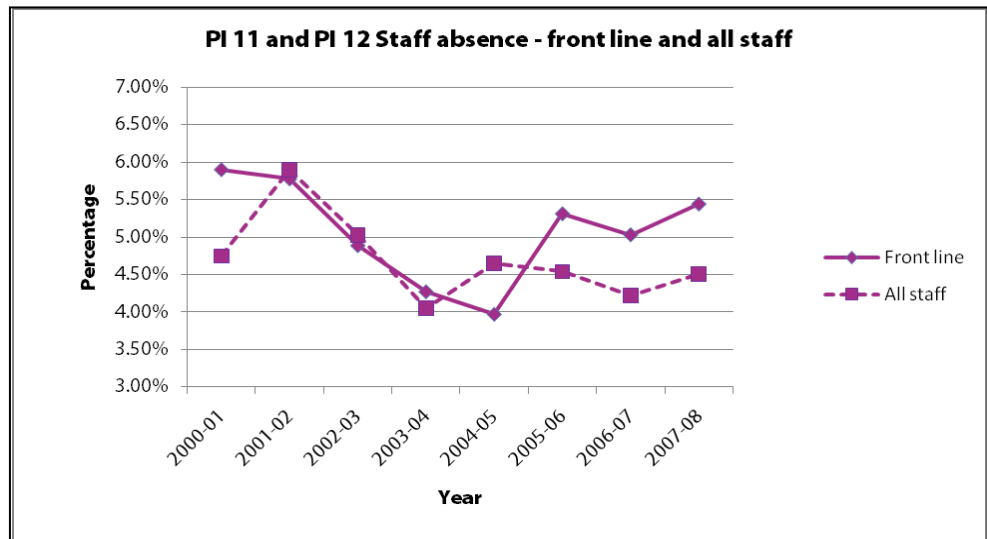
Particular points of interest are as follows:

There has been a further increase in the energy cost per street lamp/illuminated sign from £26 to £29 an increase of over 8%. This is the third year of significant increase after a period of relatively slight changes in this PI.



PI 04 tracks the average time to repair street lamps and this figure has reduced from 4.26 days to 3.66 a significant reduction. The average time is now the lowest it has been over 6 years of collecting this PI. The results from PI 03 show that the % of lamps restored to working order within 7 days has remained stable now for a number of years at between 90% and 93%.

The average cost of maintaining street light has risen from £54 to £57 over the past year which is the lowest increase since 2004-05. The cost excluding bulk/capital replacement has increased from £43 to £45.



The two staff absence PIs tracking frontline staff absence (PI 11) and all staff absence (PI 12) both show a slight increase from last year. Both of these absence rates have been at 4% within the past 4 or 5 years. The frontline staff absence rate now stands at nearly 5.5% and the all staff absence rate at 4.5%.

## **Interpretation of data**

The increases in oil and energy production costs over the last year have clearly contributed to the rising energy cost per street lamp/illuminated sign. The fact that some council's have been tied into relatively long term energy contracts has helped some avoid the increased costs but this may be unavoidable in future. Managing energy costs will be a major issue not only for street lighting and highways functions but for the entire council.

Climate change issues must also be considered when delivering the service – energy saving is a high profile topic and night time switch off has been piloted in some areas whilst light pollution is also a factor. Energy management remains a priority for councils corporately and street lighting figures high on this agenda.

Minimising staff absence rates is a constant aim for all services and the fact that current rates in street lighting are above the lower rates of 4 or 5 years ago is a further prompt for action. This will be further explored in the benchmarking group.

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 has an impact on the public's perception of street lighting.

The focus on community safety as an area of improvement both across council departments and within partners of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships has brought attention to a number of services and encouraged them to work together. Street lighting is one such service area and the delivery of a good service has obvious implications for crime and the fear of crime within communities, appropriate conditions for safe driving as well as related issues such as anti-social behaviour and prostitution.

Direction of travel statements have been produced for the first time in 2007-08 and show 5 year trend information based on the performance levels of a selection of PIs from the service area. These are available on the web portal. Bespoke reports can also be requested from the PN database for example looking at cross tabulations between specific PIs.

## **Future focus**

APSE will continue to provide services to address the need to move from data to process benchmarking such as advisory groups, e-mail queries as well as developing the Performance Networks template

The requirement to collect, analyse and compare performance remains with local authorities throughout the United Kingdom.

The statutory guidance issued by CLG in July 2008 'Creating strong, safe, prosperous communities' stresses the need for local authorities to "regularly and rigorously assess and review the competitiveness of services against similar

services”, including those externally provided. There is also an emphasis on service improvement and the need to address under-performance within the guidance.

Audit Scotland are also highlighting the importance of effective performance management to corporate plans in recent audit reports, and councils must demonstrate that service outcomes have been maintained or improved to claim efficiencies under the Efficient Government initiative.

The consultation paper issued in 2008 by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), ‘Delivering a shared responsibility; performance improvement and community planning’ reinforces the importance of benchmarking and the WAG has stated an intention to legislate for performance comparison amongst local authorities.

The Department of Environment in Northern Ireland has also pledged support for the development of appropriate performance management systems to deliver modern, high quality and efficient public services.

The fact that all the relevant assemblies and governments have emphasised the importance of undertaking benchmarking indicate that the benefits of using benchmarking arrangements such as those provided by performance networks to evaluate service performance and to assess competitiveness will continue to increase.

Data collection and statistical comparison, as provided by performance networks, is a necessary but only first stage of benchmarking. The opportunity for process benchmarking provided by APSE advisory groups takes the process to the next stage by enabling the sharing of experience from real life best practice examples. The chance to keep abreast of new developments, innovations and legislation offered by APSE training courses is a further stage and support offered by APSE best value consultancy associates is another stage. Ensuring customer satisfaction levels are monitored is an element in maintaining service improvement and is also part of the benchmarking process and this is also something APSE can help with via APSE survey solutions. The various stages of benchmarking should be pursued if it is to be used as a service improvement tool.

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