



Briefing 08-69 December 2008

Civic, cultural and community venues: 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 civic, cultural and community venues

Key issues

Civic, cultural and community venues provide:-

- Critical front line services to communities
- Assist in promoting community cohesion and social interaction between different community groups
- Act as both official and 'unofficial' gateways to other council services
- Are managed on a variety of management models

Introduction

The civic, cultural and community venues (CC&CV) performance networks service provides an essential performance analysis tool in the area of civic, cultural and community venues. This briefing concentrates on the trend analysis of a range of the key performance indicators and covering a range of financial, usage and quality criteria. This analysis is based on trends from 2000/01 to 2007/08 which is the period over which data performance has been collected.

There is significant differentiation between public and community venues in terms of both the nature and scope of the facilities, the catchments they serve and their position in the service provision continuum.

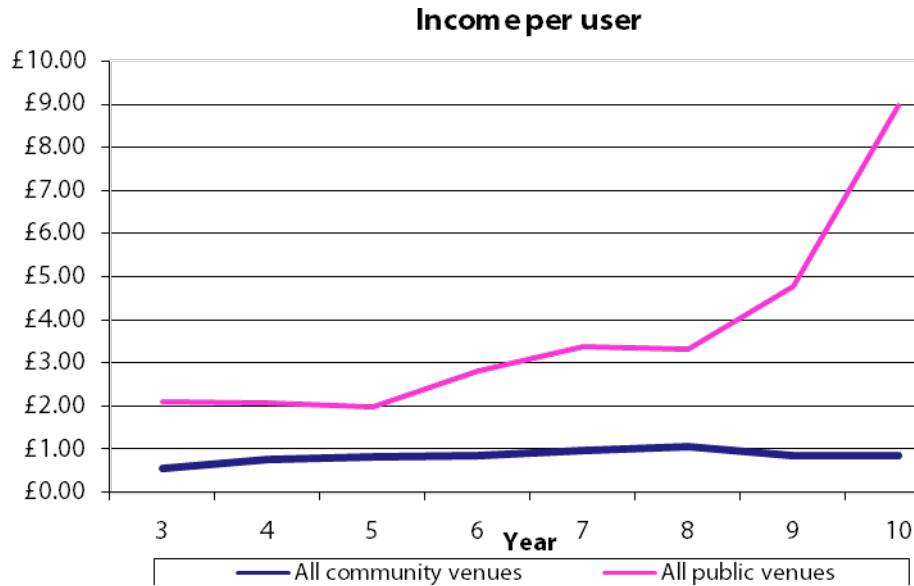
The performance networks model for civic, cultural and community venues has been streamlined and improved for this year and now includes major venues, town halls, community centres, multi-use venues (including 'super community centres'), arts/cultural venues and libraries. Whole venue usage is also now collected, as opposed to usage solely from the number of bookings taking place within a venue.

This trend analysis is based on key performance indicators that have remained consistent.

Analysis

Primary income per user (PI 05)

The growth trend in income per user for public venues has continued to rise significantly, showing the increasing commercial focus of these venues. By contrast the income per user for community venues continues to remain stable, having shown no increase over several years. This appears to reflect community venues being used more for social activities and events where price sensitivity remains a critical issue and reflects charging policies that allow low cost or occasionally free use.

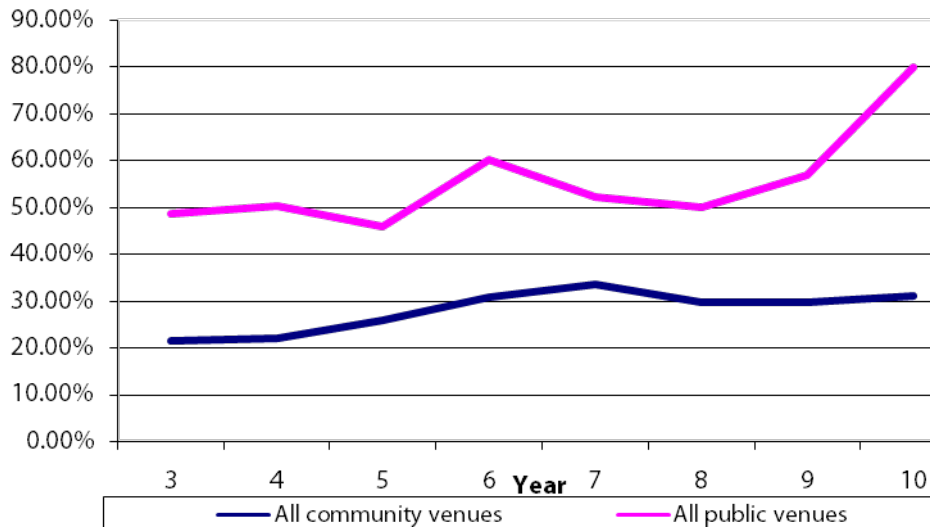


Operational recovery ratio including central establishment charges (PI 08)

This particular performance indicator provides an overall general financial health check and looks at the amount of expenditure recovered through income. There has been a long term trend of increasing recovery for both community and public venues showing a 50% increase for both over the last 7 years. The last year has seen a significant increase for public venues, now close to 80%. Whilst the next set of returns for 2008/09 will include a period of significant economic turbulence, it is unlikely that the overall trend will be reversed.

Indeed the current climate, within local government, where greater operational efficiency savings will form part of the budget and service planning processes, could see greater pressure on community and public venues to strengthen commercial trading and achieve higher rates of operational recovery. Other areas have also shown increases in central establishment charges as internal services such as pay roll and personnel functions have sought to recharge further costs to 'client' departments.

Operational recovery ratio

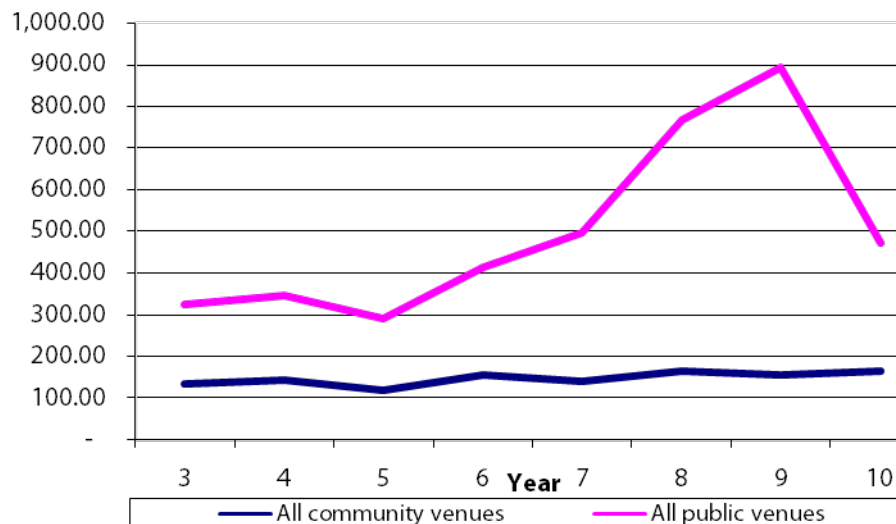


Visits per 1,000 head of population (PI 15a)

The number of visits per head of population for community venues has remained remarkably consistent over the last seven years and this pattern has continued in 2007-08. Public venues have shown a significant downturn in 2007-08. This downturn may be a reflection of commercial activity displacing less lucrative usage as demonstrated by the rising income per head referred to earlier. The underlying data, not unsurprisingly, shows large differences between venues.

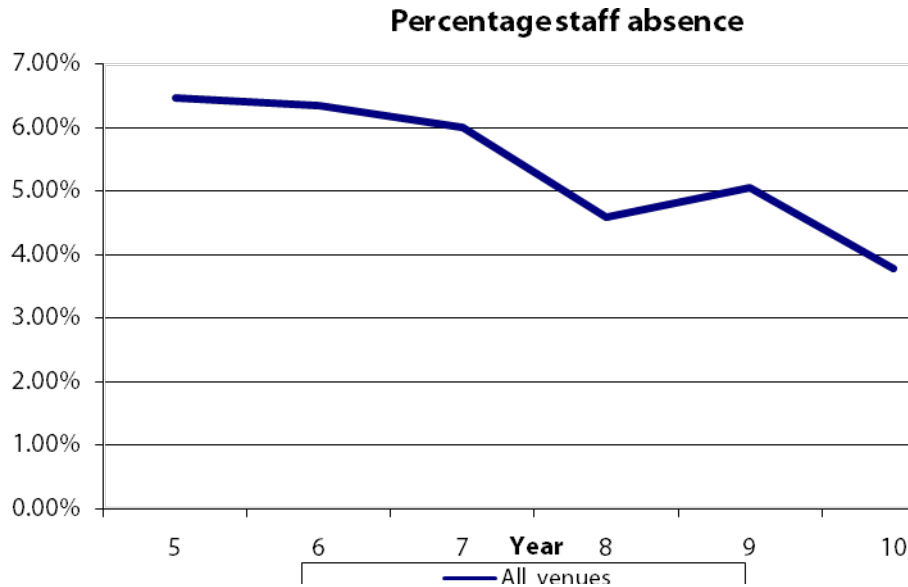
This is an interesting reflection on the way in which commercially based targets can displace overall efforts in policy terms to increase community engagement and community participation, with one appearing to gravitate against the achievement of the other.

Visits per 1,000 head of population



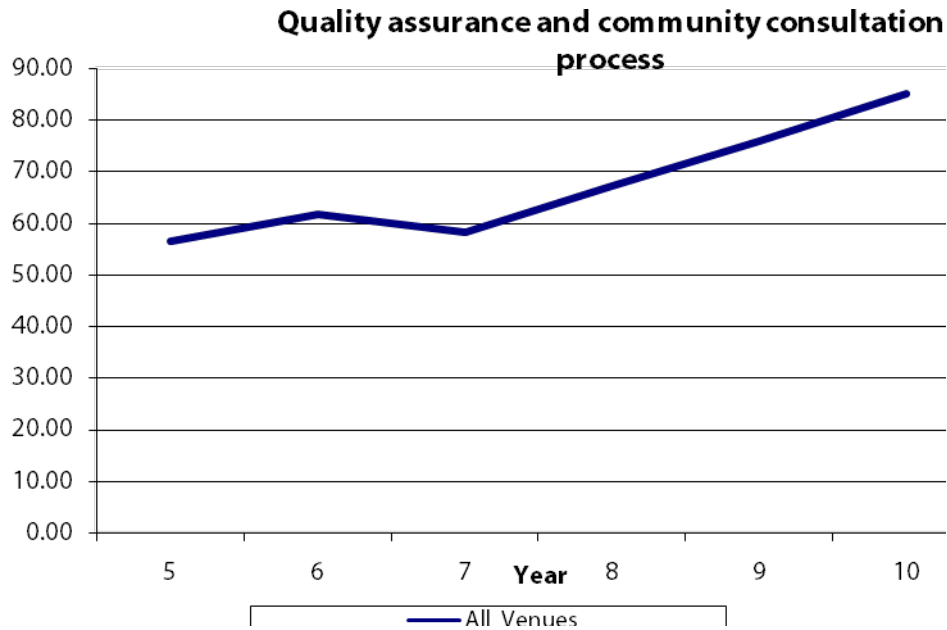
Staff absence (PI 27)

Staff absence at 3.79% continues to decline. This is the lowest ever recorded since 2002/03. This is a positive reflection of efforts across the sector to address the negative impact of sickness absence on the cost and quality of the service. The figures for civic cultural and community venues reflect favourably with other services.



Quality assurance and community consultation PI 29

Quality assurance and community consultation measures factors such as customer consultation, awards, quality processes and complaints. The year on year increase demonstrates continuous improvement in management systems and a sustained effort to get closer to the 'customer'.



Future focus and linkages to the national policy agenda

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.

Accordingly in order to further assist those APSE members who participate in the performance networks service performance indicators collected through the performance networks service are now available for download on the APSE web portal as well as direction of travel statements to assist in demonstrating an authorities individual performance levels.

Policy issues for civic, cultural and community venues

As a service area civic, cultural and community venues are often under-played as a public sector resource. Nationally governments throughout the UK have recently emphasised the need for councils to be at the heart of communities and to promote community cohesion and a 'sense of place'.

Civic and community venues offer councils ideal locations in order to meet the challenges of meeting and listening to citizens as part of the citizen engagement agenda. Moreover the activities on offer within such venues often provide a community based focus that carries real and positive benefits. For older people such venues regularly host activities that support 'independence well being and choice' allowing participation in physical activity such as dances and social events, and addressing issues of isolation and loneliness. They also provide participative events for disabled citizens.

Civic and community venues are also a core resource for youth groups and activities such as drama groups which help address issues of anti-social behaviour and provide a focal point for new parents with many homing groups jointly with health professionals.

Staffs within the sector often act as stage one signpost for other council services, replacing in some cases the services formally provided by local housing offices, and acting as a gateway to other agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau or local health services.

APSE would therefore encourage local authorities to explore the expansion of the use of community venues which often provide good local sources of services as well as the flexibility through various community models to deliver more proactive citizen engagement and a sharing of some services with the third or voluntary sector. Local authorities should also explore whether in tough economic times the increasing commercialisation of venues is a positive or negative experience for local communities. Whilst it is clear certain services do need to be operated on a cost recovery basis the often unquantifiable value of these venues as a community resource should not be underestimated.

As part of the ongoing development of the APSE performance networks civic, cultural and community venues model we will consider whether there is scope for a new suite of indicators relating to the use of the venues under the general theme of citizen engagement. This will explore the ability of such venues to respond to current policy priorities such as:

- Use of venues for community engagement purposes
- Use of venues in addressing 'independence well being and choice' as part of the overall council 'offering' to older people
- Positive use of community venues to address anti-social behaviour strategies
- Use of venues to engage with public sector and third sector partners such as police, fire and charity groups
- Use of community venues to address social cohesion and inclusion strategies

This will be an on-going work stream during 2009 and the views of APSE member authorities in developing this area would be most welcome.

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