



Environmental practices

APSE issued a survey in 2009 to authorities throughout the UK on their environmental practices. This briefing outlines the responses received to date. It is provided to local authority chief executives, council leaders and all APSE environmental services contacts in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Key issues

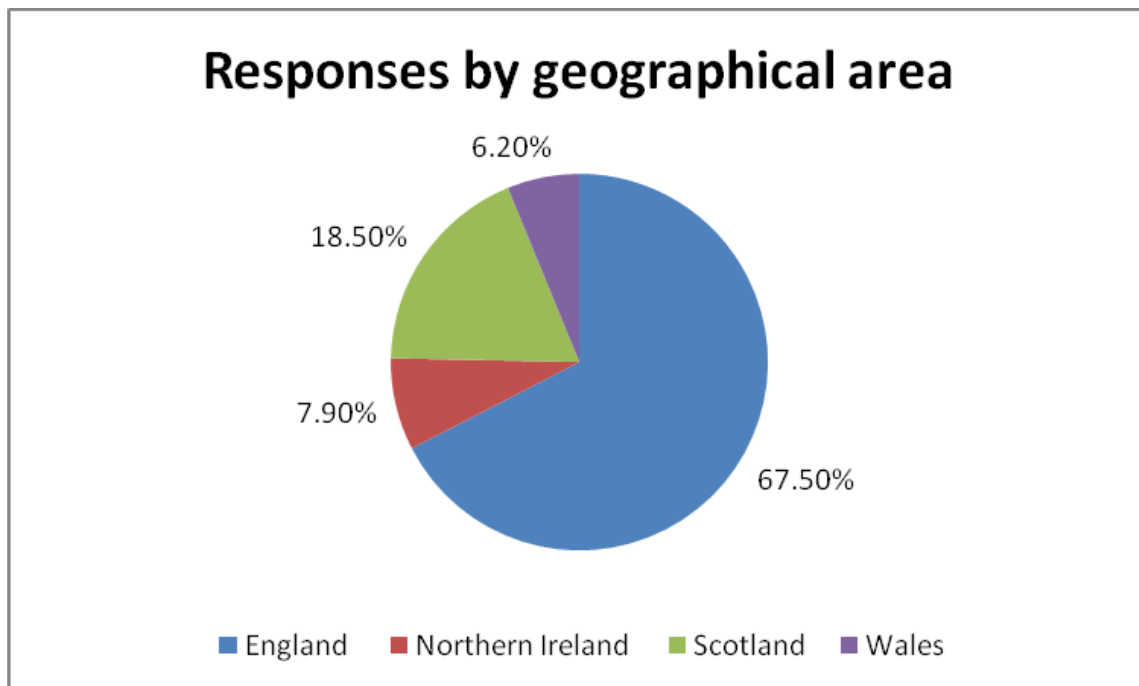
This briefing sets out key findings including:

- How far down the line are authorities on implementing an Environmental Management System (EMS)?
- Assessing environmental impact
- How authorities will meet environmental challenges

1. Introduction

APSE issued a survey on environmental management systems in November 2009, which was part of a wider research project that APSE were conducting, examining the importance and growing impact of environmental issues for local authorities. We received 293 responses to the survey and have summarised the key findings below in this briefing paper. This covers formal Environmental Management Systems (EMS) as well as environmental impact and how local authorities intend to meet environmental challenges such as the Carbon Reduction Commitment. Also included in the analysis is some cross-referencing with APSE's performance networks data (<http://www.apse.org.uk/performance-network.html>), which is benchmarking data collected on an annual basis across 14 service areas from nearly 200 local authorities. Some of the benchmarking questions from APSE performance networks relate to environmental management (in addition to cost, quality, productivity and outcome data) and can be used for additional analysis and correlation purposes.

Both elected members and officers responded to the survey with a higher proportion of respondents being senior managers (44%) and officers (44%). The breakdown of responses by authority type was as follows: unitary council (55%), county council (8%) and district council (38%). In terms of geographical breakdown, this is shown in the chart overleaf:



2. Key findings

The survey found that the majority of respondents had either already implemented an Environmental Management System (EMS) (38.2%) or were in the process of implementing one (17.6%). 23.6% have no plans to or have not implemented an EMS. When asked which EMS their authority is implementing, the majority were either ISO 14001 (42.5%) or EMAS (21.9%). Similar questions are asked in APSE performance networks for certain service areas and this shows how adopting an EMS can vary from service to service. For instance, when asked if the service has been awarded ISO 14001 for Environmental Management Systems, the results were as follows for 2008/09:

- Building maintenance services – 12%
- Highways – 23%
- Street lighting – 23%
- Parks (*the benchmarking question here asked whether the service complied with a formal, documented EMS including ISO 14001*) – 22%

Please note that the performance networks questions are different from those asked in the survey as these relate to whether the service has been awarded an EMS as opposed to which EMS they are implementing.

All of these percentages have increased since 2007/08 data by +4% in building maintenance, +3% in highways, +8% in street lighting and +4% in parks, demonstrating the priority being given to environmental management in local authority front line services. APSE performance networks data also shows that the majority of councils have a formal, documented environmental policy with 62% of those councils who completed the parks data answering 'yes' to this and 59% of councils in the street lighting module stating that they have an Agenda 21 Sustainable Environment Policy.

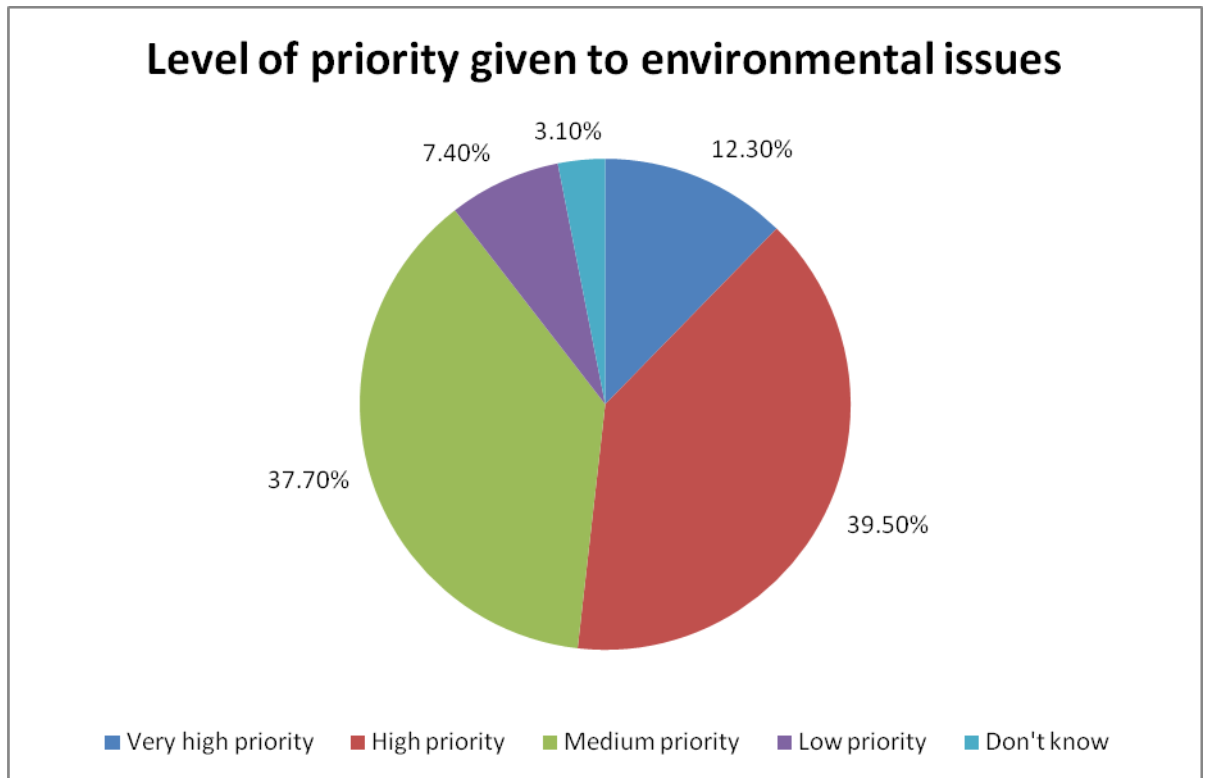
The survey found that for the majority of councils (56.7%), environmental management or EMS is managed at an individual department level as opposed to being managed

corporately (37.3%). However, this does not preclude the possibility that some EMS's are corporate systems but simply managed at a department level.

The survey also showed that 44% of councils assess all new policies, developments, activities and projects for environmental impact. This compared to 20% stating that it is left to the discretion of the senior responsible officer, department or member and 20% stating this only applies to major new policies, developments, activities and projects that are likely to have a significant environmental impact.

In terms of how environmental factors are taken into account in decision making (other than for developments covered by the statutory EIA process), the most common (35%) was for an environmental impact summary/short report being included in the officers recommendation/decision. However, 28% answered that there is no system in place and it is left to the discretion of the senior responsible officer, department or elected member. Only 5% answered that a separate report on the environmental impact/issues is produced for the decision taker(s) and 19% use an environmental impact assessment procedure which involves an initial environmental screening process, followed where appropriate by an environmental study and report.

The majority of respondents stated that environmental issues are given a very high priority, high priority or medium priority by their authority:



In terms of how prepared their authority was to meet environmental challenges, the responses were as follows:

	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Don't know
Carbon Reduction Commitment	15.4%	39.9%	30.1%	8.4%	6.3%
Waste, Recycling & Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS)	36.1%	41.0%	14.6%	0%	8.3%
Adaptation to Climate Change	4.8%	31.0%	44.8%	14.5%	4.8%

There was overwhelming support for the following statements in the survey about the Council's attitude towards improving the local environment and tackling environmental issues:

- There is strong elected member support and commitment (78.3% either agreed or strongly agreed).
- There is strong senior management support and commitment (86.6% either agreed or strongly agreed).
- We have a good environmental policy statement which is regularly monitored and progress reported (71.5% either agreed or strongly agreed).
- There is strong public support from the community for improving the local environment and tackling environmental issues (69.7% either agreed or strongly agreed).
- Staff are encouraged to think about how they can make a positive impact on the environment through their actions at work (83.9% either agreed or strongly agreed).

However, there were mixed opinions on the following statements:

- We have a good environmental management system (EMS) in place (29.1% agreed, 30.5% disagreed). This may, though, reflect the fact that not all councils currently have an EMS in place as noted above.
- Tackling environmental issues is seen by the Council as a way of making financial savings (42% agreed, 39.9% disagreed).
- Complying with the legal minimum environmental standards and requirements is the Council's most important consideration (40.1% agreed, 36.6% disagreed).

3. Comments

Climate change represents the most important challenge to our environment, economy and society and APSE believes that local government has a leading role to play in combating climate change and building a more sustainable future for our communities. Local authorities should have a 5-year plan to meet the requirements of the Climate Reduction Commitment (CRC) and deliver the targets for reducing CO2. They should also have an effective environmental management system in place that integrates environmental management into their daily operations and long-term planning.

The survey results show that even though the majority of councils have either implemented an EMS or are in the process of implementing an EMS, there are some authorities who will need to learn from other councils' experiences and pursue with

implementing plans to meet the forthcoming challenges including the CRC, LATS and adaptation to climate change. Performance management tools such as APSE performance networks can be helpful in not only establishing a baseline for how a council is comparing against similar authorities and over time, but also to identify good practice from other councils to learn from. In particular, the parks, open spaces and horticultural services module contains a specific indicator on environmental practices which was developed to cover a range of activities and policies such as recycling, use of green fuels, chemical control methods, environmental policies, and habitat and biodiversity action plans.

The survey results are encouraging in terms of the level of priority and level of support for environmental issues at an elected member and senior management level, as well as from the public. The survey also shows that the methods used by different councils vary greatly in how they assess environmental impact and how they take environmental factors into account in decision making.

APSE provides a range of services to support its member authorities on environmental service and environmental management. For more information on this, please email [djohms@apse.org.uk](mailto:djohns@apse.org.uk)

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