

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Length of review: 15 days Benefit: optimised working levels

The Council engaged APSE to carry out a time and motion study on the domestic refuse element of its waste collection service as it had been some time since one had been carried out. The aim was to examine the current operational performance and determine whether the achieved productivity levels were realistic and sustainable. A realistic appraisal of productivity was relevant to the Council in evaluating its future service options and resource requirements.

Objectives:

- **Test performance levels**
- **Provide a comparison of the number of properties that could be collected weekly by crews under varying controlled conditions.**
- **Time and motion studies**

Outcomes:

- **Optimised working levels, including analysis of productive and non-productive work elements for each employee**
- **Performance measurements**
- **Observations on operational improvements**

APSE carried out two time and motion studies each consisting of one full working week on two collection rounds. The method used was rated activity sampling which provides indicative data on the levels of performance seen and the amount of productive / non-productive time. The studies concentrated on two of the rounds selected by management in consultation with the trade unions to provide an indicative mixture of demographics and properties across the authority area.

In addition to the on-site review, APSE took advantage of its vast UK-wide membership to undertake a comparison of authorities offering a like service, as identified through its benchmarking service. APSE used the demographic information stored by Performance Networks to establish a list of comparable authorities, then engage with these to put together meaningful comparisons including methods, cost of operation, and numbers of properties collected.

This information was invaluable to Dudley Council in the ongoing evaluation exercise following the study, as it provided validated comparative data. The Council provides black sack collections, and at the time gave out new bags at the weekly

collection. APSE's comparison of authorities on black sack collections using Performance Networks' data showed that the Council's current performance compared favourably with the majority of other authorities, although none of the sample authorities issue replacement black sacks on the day of collection as they do and therefore have lower crew sizes as a result.

One of the study outcomes, as a result of the comparison information provided, was a suggestion by APSE that a pre-delivered sack service could be a more efficient option. The Council has evaluated this option and is now in the process of changing to a pre-delivered bag service.

One of the key aspects of direct observation studies is the ability to identify the amount of time spent between productive and non-productive activities. Productive activities observed included driving and manoeuvring the vehicle during collection operations, pulling out refuse sacks to kerbside piles, loading bags to the vehicle, operating the compaction mechanism and issuing empty bags to each property. Where loaders are out of sight pulling out bags ahead of the vehicle, this has been classed as productive time (but is not rated, as it is unobserved). Non-productive time is made up of personal breaks (including enforced breaks where driver hours are greater than 5.50 in one shift), driving and travelling as a passenger between sites and to the tip, waiting to tip and other enforced waiting time during the operation.

APSE concluded that a "Task and Finish" scheme could provide an incentive for crews to complete their day's work in a timely fashion. This reinforces the need for good management and supervision to ensure service standards, performance, and safety are not compromised.