



news update

Welcome to the special parks, grounds maintenance, cemeteries and crematoria edition of the consultancy newsletter. This deals with projects which APSE is currently undertaking or has completed

Cost saving grounds maintenance review

APSE has been working with a Council to reduce the cost of cyclical grounds maintenance operations by in excess of £210,000. A full operational appraisal has been undertaken, which includes:

- A review of working practices, resource deployment and working hour arrangements
- An independent seasonal working hour and optimum resource analysis based upon bills of quantity, work specification, indicative frequencies of work provided by the Parks Section and industry standard productivity times
- An assessment of vehicles and machinery costs and levels of utilisation



A cost appraisal was also conducted with an independent assessment of all cyclical grounds maintenance activities undertaken by the Parks Section based upon current market rates. Following this, a qualitative assessment provided a balanced cost/quality appraisal of grounds maintenance service which included:

- A review and assessment of customer satisfaction focus
- A review of complaints procedures and management processes
- An analysis of the APSE performance benchmark performance indicators
- Stakeholder input
- Independent qualitative studies

Street Scene and Grounds Maintenance review

APSE has been engaged to save an authority around 20% on their service costs. The methodology we use operates on the principle that those who are closest to a problem are most likely to have the solution to it. This is one reason why APSE has placed emphasis on the use of diagnostic workshops to quickly generate and verify data but also to begin to determine the extent to which the culture of an organisation is capable of driving change. The workshop will be followed up as necessary with additional interviews and data collection to allow for the production of a high level report indicating opportunities for generating costed efficiency savings.

The output will be a diagnostic report indicating the key areas that are likely to benefit from further work as well as an initial identification of options for future service delivery. It will look to identify where improvements can

be made and consideration of the high level benefits of bringing together the grounds maintenance and street cleansing functions.

Once the diagnostic is complete the authority will have a clear view of what further work will be needed to take the process forward. This approach reduces the prospect of the authority paying for unnecessary consultancy support and creates a clear link between consultancy fees and savings.



Redesigning Parks and Street Scene services

An APSE interim manager was commissioned by the Authority to undertake a fundamental review of Parks, Street Scene and Countryside Services. The review encompassed five key stages, including an initial gap analysis, establishing current position, proposals, improvement plan and project management.

The situation required someone who could come into a highly sensitive and complex area and hit the ground running, whilst providing the leadership and communication skills to ensure the



hearts and minds of the employees were fully appreciative of the changes that were needed.

The APSE interim manager was required to undertake the review and present his proposals for the redesign of the service to both the Council's Scrutiny Panel and the Executive Board for their approval. All the recommendations that were put forward were agreed.

The review required a full consultation exercise to be undertaken with employees and their Trade Union representative and, again, the APSE interim's expertise in this area helped the Authority to move through this process in a highly professional manner. Full Trade Union backing was received for the significant changes proposed.

The review made a number of proposals that would need to be implemented to ensure the services made significant improvements in service delivery and this required the introduction of a revised management structure, new working practises and the formation of multi-tasking teams working on an area basis. These changes have already delivered major improvements in service delivery and many complimentary remarks have been received by the Council from the community and various stakeholder groups.

Interim Parks Contract Manager

APSE has been engaged to provide a contract manager to assist a Council with the procurement of a partner organisation for the grounds maintenance section. The interim manager is helping with tender evaluation, as well as examining the budgets. He is just

starting to look at the contract management procedures.

Parks and Open Spaces survey

APSE carried out on-site surveys on behalf of the Council, which are to comprise part of the peer review process supporting the Council's Evaluation Framework. Six representative sites nominated by the Council were surveyed by APSE to assess their current status and, where appropriate, the potential for further service development.

The survey involved unannounced, anonymous site visits by APSE, adopting the "mystery shopper"/service user perspective. The on-site survey sought to:

- a) verify, in terms of service outcomes on the ground, from a service user perspective, the high performance of the parks
- b) assess the effect, if any, of the changes made by the Council in 2010, on service delivery on the ground, since the latest Performance Networks statistical returns, which cover to March 2010.

APSE found that all sites visited gave clear indications of being well maintained and managed, to a level that was appropriate to their use. All were being appropriately used by members of the public. Where applicable, the relevant "Green Flag" criteria were clearly being met or exceeded. All sites demonstrated evidence that the Open Spaces Services understood their assets and responsibilities, performed their duties proficiently, and had thus established a platform to develop

and improve the service and its assets, within available resources.



Economic footprint

APSE is working with a member authority who have requested consultancy support to assess the local economic footprint of their street care service, incorporating highways, street lighting, street cleansing, grounds maintenance and transport. In particular the research will look to drill down to focus on the highways aspect of this service.

The local economic footprint will be calculated to cover both the Council's own geographical boundaries and the sub-region. This work will enable the Council to demonstrate how and where it spends its resources and the benefits to the local economy. This pioneering research has delivered some remarkable results in other authorities and demonstrates the vital role played by local public services in helping to anchor the local economy against external shocks brought about by global economic forces, financial crises and recession.

APSE, along with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) has pioneered this approach to measuring the local economic



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multiplier effect of council front-line services in terms of both procurement and employment spend.

Multi service review - £800k savings

Like many local authorities in this current economic climate this Council is under significant pressure to demonstrate that its services are providing value for money, and consequently they are looking at possible ways to make further efficiency savings.

As a result APSE was commissioned to provide consultancy support to review their cemeteries and crematoria, street cleansing, refuse collection, transport and grounds maintenance services.

This review included a value for money analysis and appropriate recommendations for ways in which savings could be identified. Our methodology for the review was to examine the baseline position, analyse operations, consult with staff and stakeholders, identify the options for future service provision, and lastly a service improvement plan, including recommendations for making efficiency savings.

In total APSE has identified around £800,000 worth of savings through efficiencies and other operational recommendations.

Diagnostic level bereavement service review finds 28% service savings

APSE has been working with a member authority on a diagnostic level review of 10 services, including bereavement services. For each

service area a diagnostic workshop has been facilitated by two consultants. All of our consultants are experienced local government practitioners and have a good understanding of specific service areas. A follow up high level report has been produced following on from the workshop identifying key areas for change or improvement within each service area.



The report identified a number of potential areas for efficiencies, leading to a 28% saving on current service costs. The bereavement service cost indicators demonstrate that the service is performing relatively efficiently with burials and cremations making a significant surplus. The diagnostic work identified an anomaly in the way that the costs of burials are accounted for in that the cost of grave digging is not charged to the service. APSE also identified that income per burial is well below that recovered on average and made various recommendations to improve this.

Diagnostic workshops have been one way in which the consultancy has successfully been able to work with Councils to effectively identify ways in which to improve processes within services, identify benefits of holistic working and realise efficiency savings. The bereavement

service workshop was attended by a number of key staff from within the service who are responsible for a range of services including:

- Burials and cremations
- Administration
- Grounds Maintenance (including grave digging)

The model looks to identify different processes within an authority and identify possible duplication of resources, wasted effort as well as avoidable demand. By deploying a range of techniques this can cut dramatically the steps in the supply chain, make significant savings and improve the public's interaction with the service. The logic of the approach is that it is essential to properly understand the way in which a service currently works before it is possible to determine how it might work more effectively and efficiently in the future.

Diagnostic workshops are undertaken using the principles of lean thinking that APSE have adapted for local authorities and also seeks to raise awareness of the part that Council services play in the delivery of a wider, complex social policy. Exercises include process mapping which looks to identify areas where potential efficiencies can be realised.

Review and development of options for Bereavement Services

APSE was commissioned to undertake a fundamental review of the bereavement service to ensure that the borough can continue to benefit from a high quality bereavement service. A number of issues facing the service signal this as an opportune time to review how



it is provided. These issues include:

- the departure of key staff members
- legislation on mercury abatement
- under-recovery of operating costs
- a reducing number of burials and cremations and the consequences of this
- a need to ensure management and operational skills and continuity
- availability of future burial land / grave re-use
- value for money
- competitiveness

The APSE review included a review of workforce deployment and job scheduling along with an analysis of workforce productivity was undertaken. Utilising established work study techniques APSE gained a clear view of the effectiveness of current work systems.



APSE uses a work study technique for recording and rating directly observed tasks, breaking them down into component work elements and separating out effective and ineffective time. Consequently one of the key aspects of this kind of activity sampling is the identification of the amount of time spent between productive and non-productive activities.

Scottish Parks, Grounds and Street Services - process benchmarking

In the past few years there has been a demand to develop an approach to process benchmarking through the Scottish Advisory Groups. Process benchmarking is a way to look beyond the data, identifying specific areas of performance to examine in more depth and to tease out the different processes/activities that took place across different councils. Whilst it is not necessary for the various groups to engage APSE to progress process benchmarking, experience has shown that without the consultancy input such projects tend to grind to a halt early on due to a lack of resources, which is why these groups have opted for a consultancy project.

The Parks, Grounds and Street Cleansing group (14 authorities participating) is comparing processes used in the management of Workshops, Machinery & Vehicles, Cemeteries and Street Cleansing.

The group has just completed the Cemeteries questionnaire, entitled "Cemeteries Owned and Managed by the Local Authority". The questionnaire covers the following topics:

- Population & Employees
- Finance
- Gross Expenditure
- Central Establishment Charges (CEC)
- Budgets
- Training
- Plot Availability
- Investment Levels for Cemeteries
- Maintenance - Memorials
- Customer Satisfaction
- Quality

Following ratification of the questionnaire, it is issued to the participants by the APSE Associate Consultant, thereafter the information provided is collated and

analysed by the Associate Consultant who will lodge a final report on the PN web portal of the APSE web site.



The reports are discussed at benchmarking meetings that follow on from the Advisory Groups. At these meetings any issues for follow-up and or clarification along with the next tranche of topics are identified and a decision made as to whether the groups themselves or the Associate Consultant will progress the identified issues.

It is at this point that post project support for any non-finite projects is offered to participating authorities by APSE's Performance Networks and an opportunity is given to the groups to decide on any topics they wish to have reviewed on an annual basis through the PN templates.

To find out more about how the consultancy can help you, contact:

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