

Local environmental audit management systems

Here David Sneddon of South Lanarkshire Council explores how APSE member authorities have used performance data to support the development of a 'land audit management system' (LAMS) that scores local environment quality allowing councils to compare performance

South Lanarkshire Council has participated in APSE's performance networks for parks and open spaces since the pilot project in 1999. The information generated by APSE's performance networks includes a set of key performance indicators, agreed by the network members, which is gathered from both financial and management data. This is then used to generate performance indicator scores and statistical information allowing managers to then follow this up with sharing best practice amongst the network. However some member

authorities in Scotland felt it would also be useful to have some local supplementary data to counteract some of the diverse methodologies that each council applies to their services. For example, the variations in specifications used in grounds maintenance work, the type of machinery deployed and so forth to make more meaningful comparisons of the end performance scores.

In 2002 South Lanarkshire Council began work on putting together a Quality Performance Indicator which would relate directly to what could be seen on the ground. Borrowing heavily

from the principles of the Local Environmental Audit Management System (LEAMS) used in street cleansing a similar system was piloted during the summer of 2003 for grounds maintenance work in parks and open spaces. Using LEAMS as a basis not only saved a fair amount of work but also ensured consistency with a measurement system already known to elected members and council officers.

Initial discussions on the preparation of the new Land Audit Management System (LAMS) were conducted at manager level. Much of the detailed work however was completed by senior chargehands and supervisors. Training was organised for all grounds maintenance staff so that all had an understanding of the system and were aware of what the information would be used for. Emphasis was placed on the fact that the information would be used to look at how we carried out our business, how we could improve and in particular to inform such issues as staff resources, training requirements and machinery utilisation.

LAMS is a quality based performance indicator focusing on service delivery. Like LEAMS the system is based on a series of monthly surveys of randomly selected locations. In order to ensure that the surveys are realistic the list of the areas to be surveyed are not released until the morning of the survey. In order to ensure consistency and objectivity the surveys are a simple



visual inspection which can be used in any location irrespective of the nature or amenity of the area being surveyed e.g. cemeteries, public parks or areas around civic buildings, housing estates, road verges, general open space, wild flower and biodiversity areas.

When surveyed each location is graded as shown below:-

- A** 3 points – target or aspiration
- B** 2 points – acceptable
- C** 1 point – unacceptable
- D** 0 point – expect a call from the director!

Again for consistency the scoring is based on what the average person would perceive as a quality job not necessarily horticulture excellence. In general the score is based on:-

- No grass arisings strewn around - especially on paths
- Edges strimmed/treated
- No litter
- Weed free beds
- Site generally clean and tidy
- No vandalism

Each scoring sheet has a comments box and in most cases photographs are attached.

Benefits

A number of benefits have been identified through the implementation of LAMS.

Customer satisfaction levels have improved as identified by the results from the services regular customer satisfaction questionnaires. The system also allows the demonstration of continuous improvement in meeting the terms of Best Value.

Achieving results

Surveys carried out by assessment teams from other grounds maintenance areas within the council have generated a healthy air of competition to achieve good results and instilled a sense of pride for the staff located in the area.

The system has also been used to identify training requirements and resource implications such as staff allocations and equipment requirements as well as enabling the best use of any investment opportunities.

Current Position

South Lanarkshire Council's Land and Fleet Services have now used the system since 2003. Results from LAMS are collated and reported regularly through the Council's performance reporting forums.

Following a presentation on LAMS to the Scottish Parks Grounds and Streets Services Advisory Group, a number of other Scottish Authorities have expressed an interest in the system. A sub group has formed with 9 authorities now working to develop the system further as well as organising inter authority surveys on a regular basis.

The group continue to promote LAMS to other authorities as an acceptable quality indicator and hope to extend the scope of inter authority surveys over the coming months. Work is now taking place to incorporate this project into the main performance networks model.

Contact: For further information on LAMS please contact David Sneddon at david.sneddon@southlanarkshire.gov.uk



performance networks

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