

Street Cleansing: Trend analysis 2018/19

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 deliver street cleansing services.

Key issues

- Service costs have surprisingly increased for 2018/19 as opposed to a declining level of costs for the last three years. It will be interesting to see in these times of continuing budgets cuts, if this increase in costs will continue to occur in the coming year.
- It is interesting to see spend on education /publicity has risen against 2017/18 when a slight fall occurred. The number of FPN's issued has also increased slightly, which suggest both education and prevention are now being pursued with equal vigour.
- Service cuts and increasing workloads on staff may now be having a detrimental effect, as staff absence levels have risen. This rise has now recorded the second highest level of absence over the last 5 years.
- Falling levels of satisfaction are mirrored by the increase in the number of unacceptable sites now being recorded, although the increase is minimal.

Trend analysis

Overview

Street Cleansing data has been collected separately for comparison purposes for APSE's Performance Networks benchmarking service since 2000/01. It is used to populate a set of robust indicators and was created to show performance over a broad range of the service provision, including cost, quality and customer

satisfaction. These indicators have been continuously streamlined over the years to ensure the most relevant data comparisons for street cleansing. Every year, APSE has reported on the ongoing trends of these key indicators.

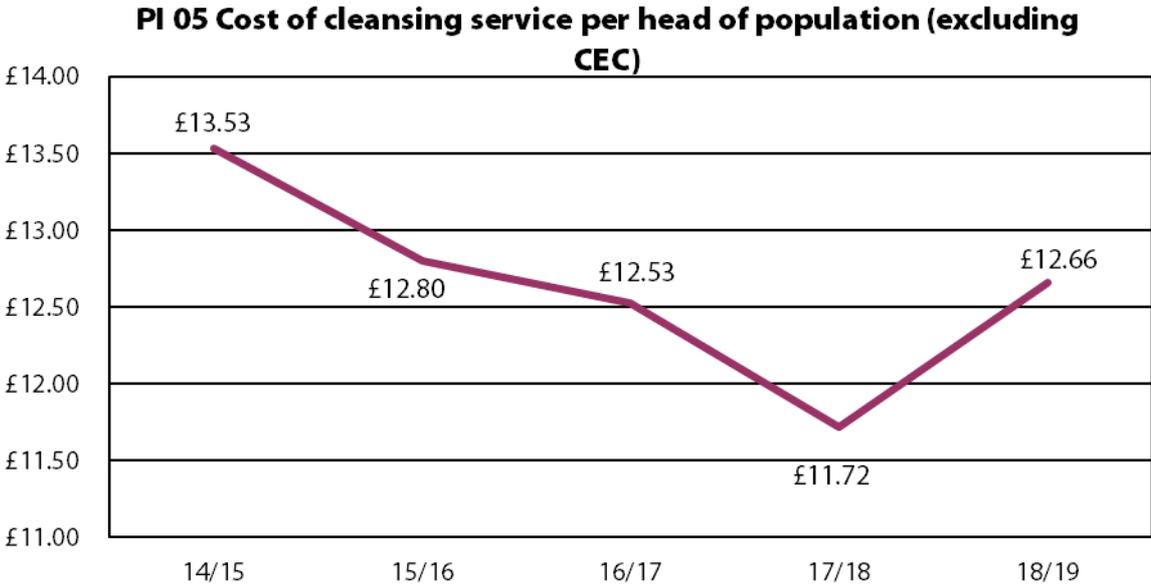
Against the backdrop of austerity measures and diminishing budgets, councils had initially managed to continue to maintain standards of cleanliness and customer satisfaction, but in recent years some reversals have been seen.

Trend analysis

Trend analysis carried out annually has shown average performance improving and reducing over the years, reflecting internal changes made by local authorities to negate budget reductions through service reviews in an attempt to maintain standards and provide more innovative ways of managing and operating the street cleansing service.

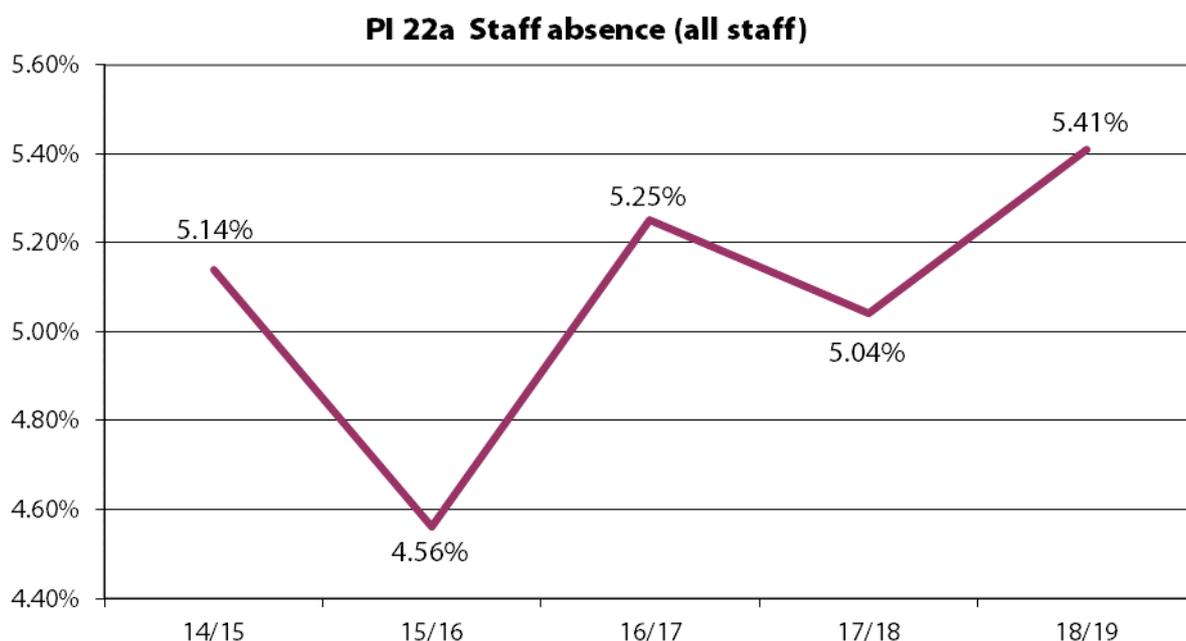
Cost

With the pressures on council budgets, the cost of street cleansing per head of population had reduced annually (as expected) for the previous 4 years by an average of £1.81 per person, equivalent to more than £110 million if taken across the whole of the UK population. However, as can be seen on the graph below, there has been an increase in the average cost of slightly over 8% since last year, the first time we have seen the figure rise since 2014/15.



It will be interesting to see if this is just a one-off, or through deeper analysis it may prove to be partly due to an increase in more high cost participating authorities. A further reason for the cost increase may also be the result of a recognition by local authorities of the importance of cleanliness in supporting other economic factors, such as business investment, which councils require in order to fill some of their funding gaps. Streetscene departments are becoming increasingly more commercial to negate the cost savings that they have had to find by bringing more funding in from outside the council to assist them in meeting cleansing obligations.

Other possibilities regarding the increase in costs could be a corresponding rise in sickness absence levels in 2018/19 which, as shown in the chart below, is the highest level for several years following an increase from 4.56% in 2015-16 to 5.41% in 2018-19.

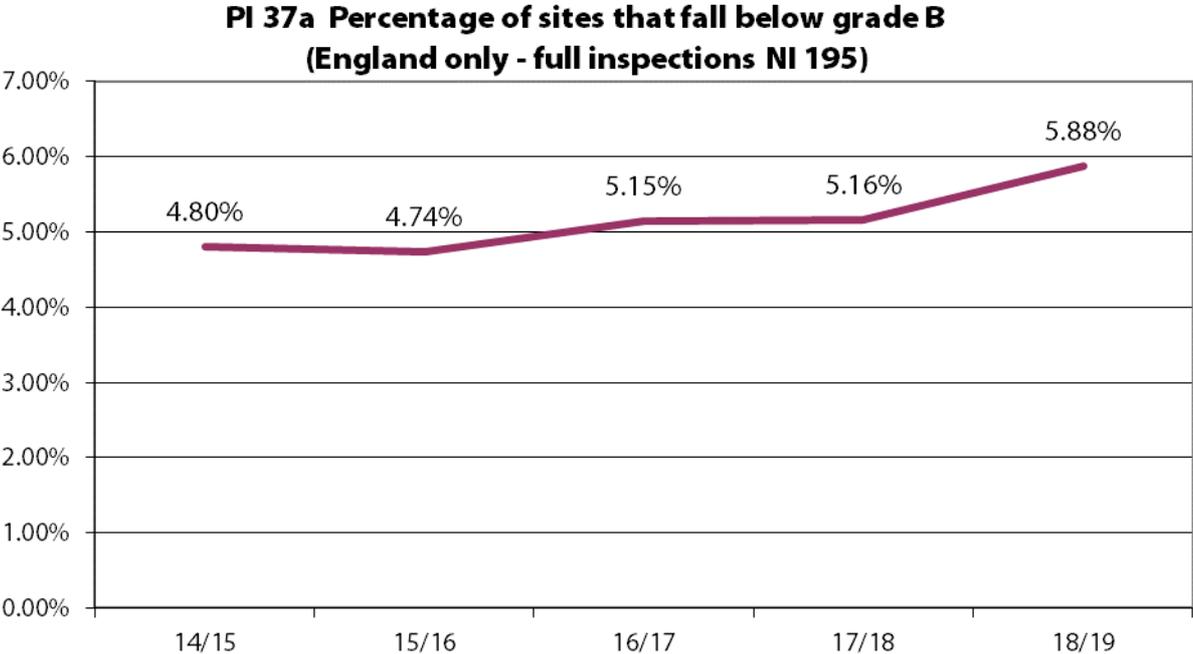


Quality

Councils continue to monitor cleanliness levels in different ways, mostly as a legacy of the demise of the national indicator NI 195 in England, with Scotland and Wales generally continuing to monitor using established LEAMS inspections systems. APSE's introduction of LAMS (Land Audit Management System) has added another system, but it is hoped that the increasing use of the system across all countries of the UK will enable robust comparison nationally over time.

For now, the results of the different inspection methods continue to be captured and reported as part of street cleansing benchmarking. For those councils still undertaking the minimum 900 inspections required under NI 195, the graph overleaf

shows that there has been a decline in cleanliness from last year regarding the number of inspected sites falling below the acceptable grade B standard, the highest average figure for a number of years.

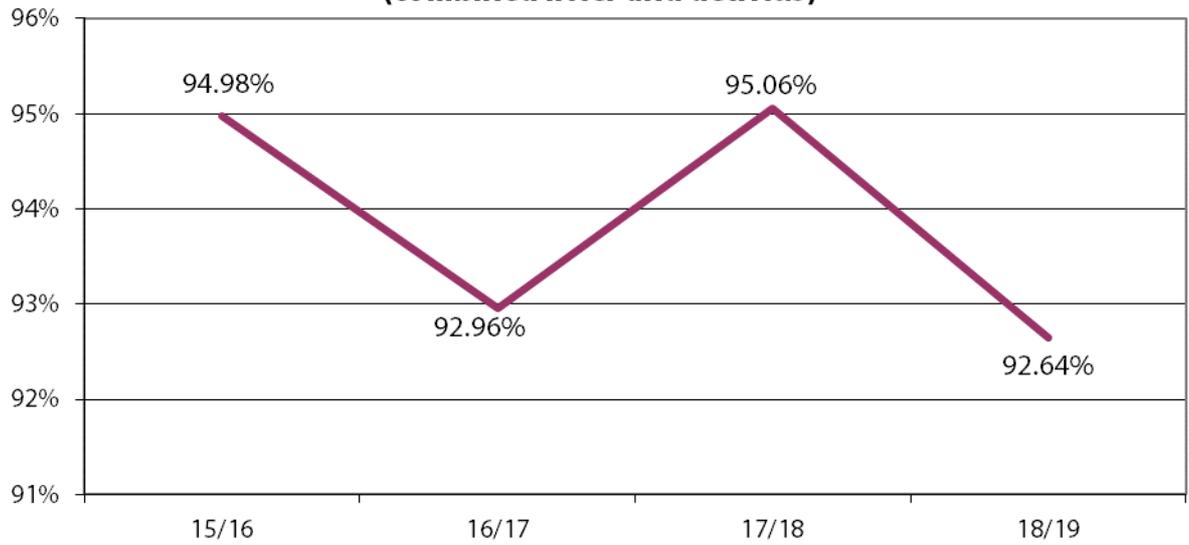


For the second year running, APSE have provided data for Defra’s litter dashboard through monitoring the percentage of sites meeting an acceptable standard for litter in England.

In Wales, the self-inspections under LEAMS (Local Environmental Audit Management System) showed a similar decline, with acceptable standards down by 8.53%, albeit that this continues to be a small sample. In Scotland where there is a slightly greater participation level, the self-inspected LEAMS scores increased for both Urban and Rural/Mixed areas, 1.51% and 2.28% respectively.

The LAMS process has now been operative for 4 years and participation continues to grow at a fast pace making year on year comparison a little skewed. However, the graph below shows the average results for inspected sites that are of an acceptable standard which will provide a baseline for analyses in future years. It does show that the trend of results has mirrored the general decline in cleanliness in England and Wales results elsewhere.

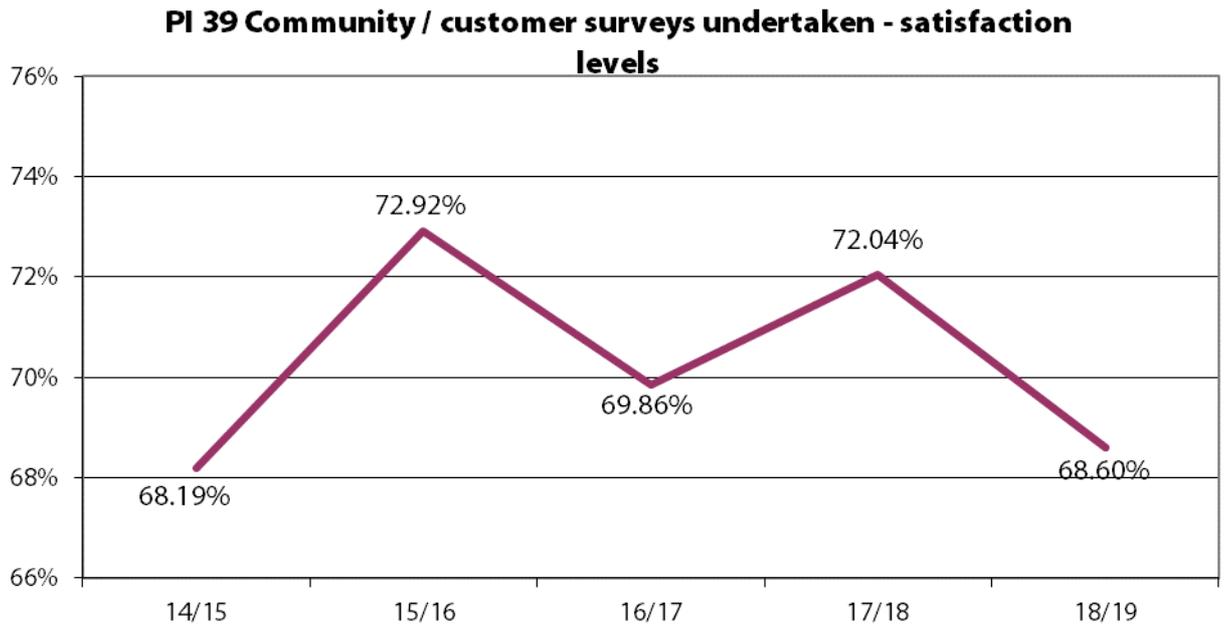
PI L02 Percentage of sites classed as acceptable (combined litter and detritus)



Customer satisfaction

Given the overall decreases in the inspected levels of acceptable cleanliness, it would be envisaged that there would be a corresponding decrease in levels of customer satisfaction and that has proved to be the case.

The chart below shows the 4.78% difference from last year, although it can also be seen that satisfaction levels have tended to be up and down in the past. Whilst many services delivered at a neighbourhood level have suffered a decline in customer satisfaction, year on year volatility surrounding the levels of customer satisfaction levels continues.

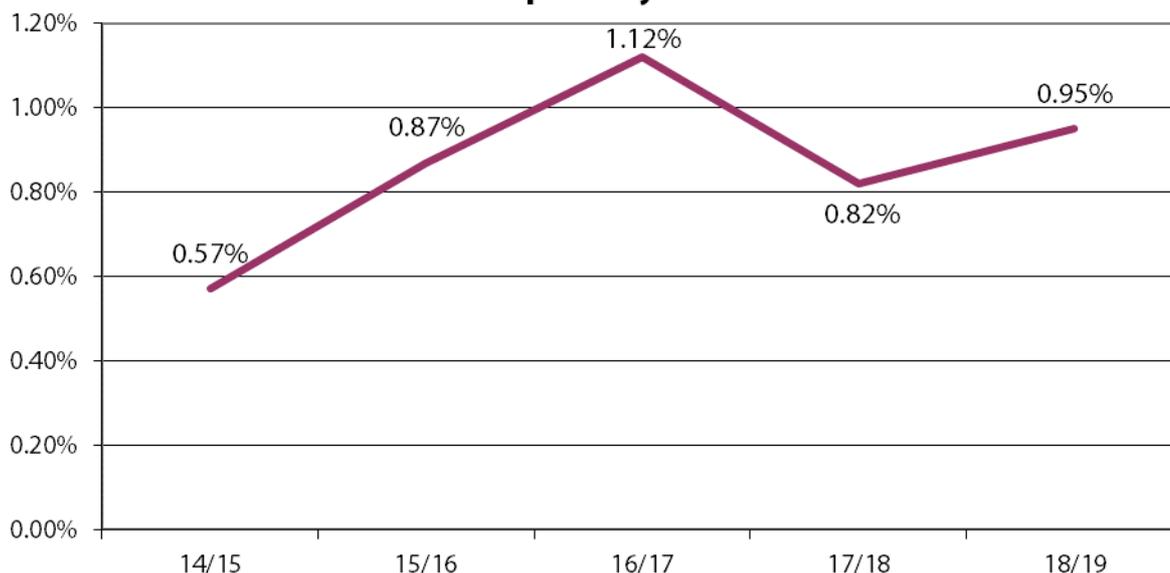


Education & Enforcement

APSE continue to make the case for an effective mix of education and enforcement to try and reduce demand on the street cleansing service, the argument being that reducing the amount of littering and other environmental crimes will have a corresponding reduction in the costs for cleansing.

APSE continues to monitor this through two performance indicators. The first is concerned with the education side and looks at the percentage of street cleansing budgets that they dedicate to education and publicity (see overleaf). Over several years there had been small annual increases in this figure, taking it up from just 0.57% in 2014/15 to 0.95% in 2018/19. Last year had seen the first reduction for some time but, as the graph overleaf shows, that has proved to be just a blip as 2018/19 saw a rise in proportions of budget spent in this area.

PI 40 Percentage of street cleansing budget allocated to education and publicity of initiatives



Cross-referenced against this is the amount of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) that councils issue. Intriguingly the trend appears to have followed education in that there was a reduction last year after continuous yearly increases. However, this fall appears to be a one-off, as the data for 2018/19 again shows an increase.

This increase is the result of higher numbers of FPNs being issued by a number of councils at the top end of the range (ten councils issued more than 1,000 with the highest being over 5,000 in the year). The average is still deflated by the number of authorities who issue significantly less (38 councils issued less than 100).

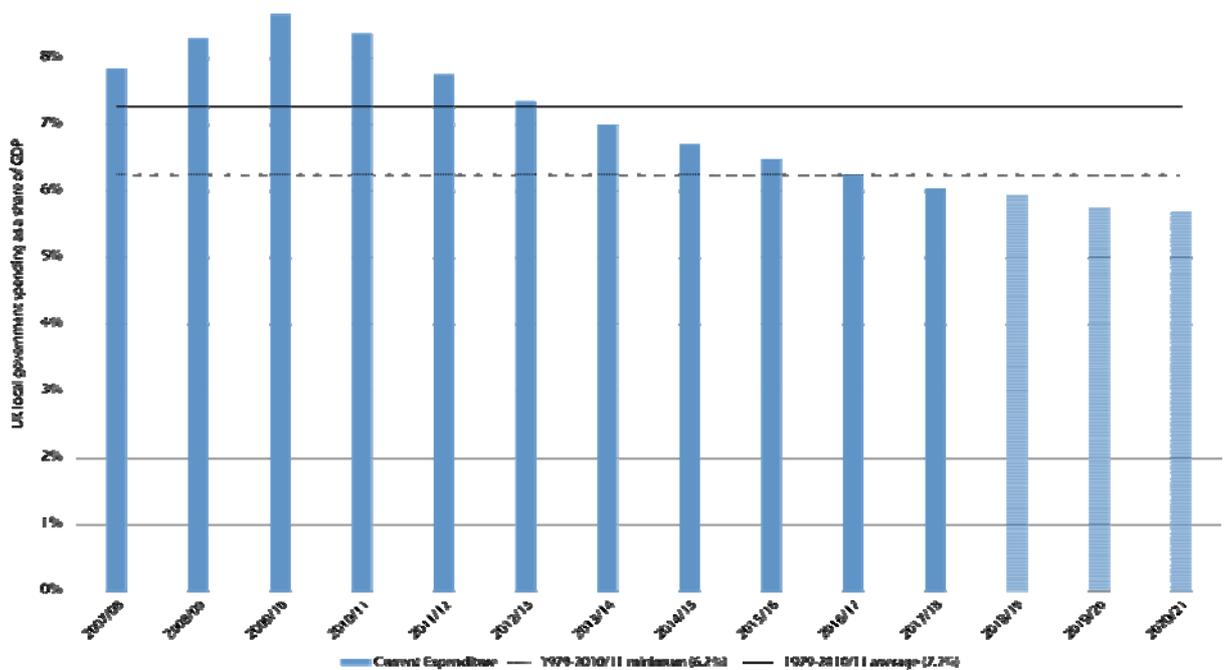
Interestingly, two of the authorities with the best quality results from their cleanliness inspections are amongst those with much-reduced enforcement activity, although equally two of those in the top end of FPNs issued are also amongst the best for quality, showing how hard it is to make a general judgement on how effective enforcement might be, particularly if consideration is made of the fact that cleaner areas are less likely to attract litter offenders anyway.

PI 25a Fixed penalty notices issued per 1,000 head of population



Future focus

In 2009/10, local government spending as a share of all spending in the economy reached 8.6 per cent, a high for the post-1979 period and only just below the all-time high (1975). In 2017/18, it fell below the previous post-1979 low of 6.2 per cent (1997/98). Since then, it has continued to head down. Including capital spending, total spending by local government as a share of GDP is now at a record low for the post 1948 period.



Source: *Neighbourhood services and sustainable local government, APSE 2019*

In addition, over the nine years from 2009/10 to 2017/18, the resources devoted to neighbourhood services across England, Wales and Scotland fell 27 per cent, equal to £8.9bn at 2017/18 prices. (*Grouped under the broad headings of highways and transportation, environment and regulation, culture, and planning, neighbourhood services are roughly speaking what councils do that is neither education, housing nor social care*). This is against the background of a real fall in total UK local government spending over the same period of 19 per cent.

Performance management is increasingly being used by public service providers as a mechanism to withstand austerity and demonstrate value for money to a range of internal and external stakeholders. As W. Edwards Deming stated:

“Without data, you’re just another person with an opinion.”

Despite measuring and improving performance being critical to managing services effectively and for accountability purposes, the need for this has never been greater in order to know your own service and to be able to identify achievable cost savings and innovative approaches to service delivery. Otherwise, how do you know you are delivering what you want to deliver?

Information and data provides intelligence on how effective any service change is, to establish a starting point and to identify future targets. Performance measurement is also a mechanism to learn how other local authorities are meeting the challenges and the impact that their service changes is making in terms of cost, quality, productivity and customer satisfaction levels.

Data is also increasingly in demand at a national level as well and as a result, APSE performance networks’ influence at a national level is growing. APSE has been working with a range of government bodies and professional associations at a national level. This includes Defra (Waste Dataflow and the National Litter Strategy), Scottish Government and Zero Waste Scotland (Litter Strategy), Department for Transport, DMG, SCOTS, CSS Wales and the Improvement Service (Roads, highways and street lighting), the Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health in Scotland, SCOTTS (Trading Standards), NABMA (Markets), Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Parks Action Group), SOLACE (corporate services) and the Department for Communities (Northern Ireland project).

In England, there is a focus on a more decentralised approach to performance improvement following the abolition of the previous national performance framework. This means that local authorities are responsible for their own performance and improvement and are accountable to local communities (rather than government or inspectorates). There is an increased emphasis on value for money, with a focus on data transparency and the use of data to hold public authorities to account. It is clear that the drive for performance improvement and

publishing meaningful data on performance has not gone away, but is being designed around greater data transparency and public accountability at a local level.

In Scotland, there is a requirement to report the Local Government Benchmarking Framework indicators, which are a set of high-level indicators covering major service areas. APSE and SCOTS have been working with the Improvement Service in relation to collecting and providing data required for the national Local Government Benchmarking Framework, in particular on roads financial data. The purpose of this is to reduce the burden on councils of providing data to multiple national bodies and using existing reliable, established benchmarking models where possible. APSE have also been working with Zero Waste Scotland and Keep Scotland Beautiful on the monitoring system for the revised Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse 2018.

In Wales, councils themselves remain responsible for identifying their own improvement priorities, identifying and mitigating improvement challenges and risks and managing service performance. Local authorities openly and transparently report performance publicly on an annual basis. In addition, there is a small set of nationally co-ordinated performance indicators called Public Accountability Measures which are co-ordinated for benchmarking purposes by Data Cymru. External assurance and challenge is provided mainly through the audit, inspection and regulatory regime coordinated by the Auditor General for Wales. This voluntary, decentralised approach is similar to the approach taken in England which has created a greater need for information at a local level to measure value for money and to ensure accountability. In addition, benchmarking through national organisations like APSE provides the national comparisons for continuous improvement purposes and a mechanism to measure your own performance against changing standards.

In Northern Ireland, under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, there is a duty on each council to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions, to collect information relating to performance and to assess performance in previous financial years and as far as practicable, against the performance of other councils. APSE have been working with local councils in Northern Ireland to ensure that performance networks meets the responsibilities councils have under the Act.

As such, existing, relevant modules have been refined and new performance modules have been created in conjunction with the Northern Ireland councils for planning, community development, economic development, arts and heritage, building control and corporate services. APSE continue to liaise with the Department for Communities over this development work. Four sets of reports for the Northern Ireland project have now been successfully produced; for 2015-16 to 2018-19.

Good performance information supports the decisions that lead to good directions, instructions and targets. APSE performance networks can assist local authorities by:

- Helping to set a clear baseline on which competitiveness, efficiency and value for money can be measured in a systematic manner.
- Identifying the impact of service changes and interventions for your own local authorities and for others.
- Assessing the quality, cost and competitiveness of the services that councils provide on a regular basis.
- Helping to report data in meaningful ways to both elected members and the public.
- Identifying direction of travel and pace of change with regard to service delivery.
- Identifying inefficiencies such as poor productivity and high cost.
- Supporting service improvement through process benchmarking and sharing best practice examples.

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