



APSE Soft FM services remobilisation report



About this report

The restrictions implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are being lifted and local government services are now looking to remobilise, to ensure that they are able to safely welcome back and serve local residents. It is also critical that services ensure the safety of all council personnel, as well as other users, including those services which serve external clients such as schools.

A key service area within local authorities is Soft FM services; the collective description for catering services, including school meals, building cleaning, caretaking and janitorial services and other ancillary services.

To facilitate this report, APSE established a Soft FM remobilisation working group to highlight the plans that councils are implementing to remobilise Soft FM services over the coming months.

This report therefore details the plans for the service and focuses on four key areas: -

- Budget, finance and re-establishing commercial activity.
- Operational activity
- Regrouping the workforce
- Technical Considerations

Whilst these reports may only provide a snapshot of the remobilisation issues at any given point in time it will support our member councils ensure that what they are doing is 'sense-checked' against the actions of others, within their specific service sector.

This report was facilitated by Vickie Hacking, APSE Principal Advisor, working with APSE member councils, and was written by Vickie Hacking following the remobilisation working groups.

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1. Introduction

APSE has established groups from frontline service areas to provide an overview, and share information, regarding the plan's councils are implementing to re-mobilise services, as the COVID-19 restrictions are amended and lifted.

The Soft Facilities Management (Soft FM) group is made up of over 30 representatives from councils across England, Scotland and Wales with responsibility for catering, building cleaning and facilities management.

A series of scoping sessions were held which focused on the challenges and opportunities that needed to be taken into consideration for remobilising the services. These sessions were followed by a series of meetings that highlighted the plans that councils are implementing to remobilise the service over the coming months.

2. The current position

Following the imposition of the restrictions put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, local authority soft FM services were required to implement business continuity plans at very short notice and adapt these plans, sometimes daily, to provide a service that meets the needs of the service users and the local community.

To gain an understanding of how services were currently operating, and the position that they would be remobilising from, the group highlighted how the services were being delivered in their local authority. Although, it was clear that different approaches had been adopted in response to local need, there was also some commonalities highlighted; these key aspects to how each service area is currently operating are outlined below.

Catering Services

Operational activity

The number of pupils attending education provision was severely reduced, with schools either staying open for a minimum number of children or children attending a dedicated hub school. In the early days of the restrictions local authority catering services provided pack lunches, or weekly food bags, for children attending schools and those children eligible for free school meals. There were also examples of hot meals being provided for the children in attendance at school but this was a limited provision, such as soup and a sandwich, or in the case of designated hubs, a more comprehensive meal was provided.

Where it was not deemed possible to offer a catering provision, local authorities put in place a voucher scheme to provide eligible children with a supermarket gift card. In England, the government introduced a national voucher scheme whereby schools could apply for vouchers on behalf of the eligible families. However, many schools reported challenges in receiving the vouchers, through the government scheme in England therefore local authorities have continued to support schools by offering a local voucher scheme. As the same policy was not introduced by the devolved government(s) local authorities in Scotland and Wales have put in place and are operating a local voucher scheme.

It was also noted that all civic and event catering had completely ceased.

Staffing

Due to the reduced number of meals being prepared and served, the number of staff to deliver the service has also reduced. Therefore, rota systems have been implemented. In many councils, although, the numbers of staff working at any one time varied from authority to authority, looking at the information supplied, this can be put at approximately 10 to 30 percent of the workforce continuing to make school meals at any one time.

However, in other authorities the catering service has taken on additional roles to support the council's response to COVID-19, therefore the catering staff who were not self-isolating, identified as vulnerable or reported symptoms were allocated alternative roles. Some examples provided include the following: -

- Preparing and delivering food to those in the community identified as vulnerable and shielding. This also includes carrying out welfare checks.
- Preparing food parcels for the vulnerable.
- Working in other services in the council.
- Delivering pack lunches to eligible free school meal children.
- Providing support in the community hubs.

In the scenario where frontline staff are not required to carry out their standard role, or cannot be re-deployed to other duties, they are not able to work from home as their standard duties are not compatible with remote working. However, there are examples of local authorities offering online training to staff during these restrictions.

Building Cleaning

Operational activity

Many of the commercial sites have been closed due to social distancing measures and therefore, for these sites, the routine cleaning has in most circumstances ceased. For schools, hubs and civic buildings that have remained open cleaning specifications have been amended to provide an additional focus on infection control cleaning, which includes cleaning touchpoints on a more regular basis, and increasing the presence of staff and increasing the frequency of cleans.

In addition, there has been more responsive cleaning taking place to react to where suspected cases of COVID-19 are reported in buildings, and carrying out deep cleans in buildings that are closed, to aid in the preparation for them coming back into use.

There are also examples of local authority cleaning services supporting other areas of the council, these examples include: -

- Cleaning voids and other identified accommodation to support the homing of the homeless.
- Additional cleaning for social housing communal areas
- Providing advice and support to schools and other community stakeholders.
- Taking responsibility for purchasing PPE, hand sanitiser and soap due to the connection the service has with suppliers.

Staffing

It was clear from the remobilisation groups that the impact on the building cleaning workforce is dependent on the facilities that the service cleans. These fall into two categories: -

1. The majority of civic buildings and schools are closed due to central hubs being used.

In this scenario, the number of staff required to deliver the service is much reduced, therefore skeleton staffing numbers are in place and rota systems have been adopted to assign staff to the locations that are open and for reactive cleaning. Staff are supporting other service areas to assist in the council's wider response to COVID-19

2. Buildings are remaining open

Although buildings are being utilised less frequently, there is still a requirement for cleaning. Therefore, the workforce is providing a cleaning service albeit with a revised specification. Cleaning operatives are in some cases being assigned alternative locations to clean to cover for colleagues who are isolating or cannot travel to the facility safely.

As with catering, in the scenario where frontline staff are not required to carry out their standard role, they are not able to work from home as the duties are not compatible with remote working. However, there are examples of local authorities offering online training to staff during these restrictions.

Facilities Management

Operational Activity

Facilities Management operations are continuing to different degrees, for buildings that remain open the day to day duties have been reduced but there are still the normal statutory requirements to fulfil. However, the service has been focusing on revising risk assessments and implementing procedures, in line with guidance, to mitigate the risks of the spread of the virus and keep the workplace as safe as reasonably possible for employees and other users of the building.

For buildings that have closed, the facilities management team have had to put in place security arrangements and protocols for staff needing to return to the premises. In addition, planned maintenance has been brought forward and a reduced team are carrying out duties to satisfy statutory requirements.

Staffing

Due to the reduced use of buildings, there are examples of councils that have reduced the number of staff operating in buildings and where possible staff are working at home.

However, many councils Facilities Management teams are relatively small in comparison to other services, therefore they are continuing to perform their roles albeit with a revised focus.

3. Scoping sessions.

The remobilisation group attended various scoping sessions, in which the challenges and opportunities for remobilisation were identified.

Details are outlined in the Scoping report attached as Appendix 1 of this report.

4. Remobilisation of Soft FM Services

The remobilisation groups met in various sessions, each of which focused on one of four key areas: -

- I. Budget, finance and re-establishing commercial activity
- II. Operational activity
- III. Regrouping the workforce
- IV. Technical Considerations

The groups met in the week commencing 4 May 2020, which was prior to the Prime Ministers announcement regarding the revision in restrictions. Therefore, the plans councils have put in place are only in draft and could be subject to change but the group felt that the information provided could assist other authorities in the considerations for remobilisation and a range of potential mitigation and solutions to the challenges.

In addition to the information highlighted in the sessions, this report also provides details regarding guidance that has been published and written submissions from the group.

Budgets, finance and re-establishing commercial activity

From the evidence provided by the group, it is clear that the full impact on the budget of the individual services is not currently known. However, the impacts from COVID-19 are going to be substantial for the short and long-term. Therefore, many of the remobilisation plans relating to budget and finance are limited to consolidating the services' current position.

From the list of challenges outlined in the scoping report, there were various examples and approaches discussed with the key points being highlighted as follows: -

Loss of revenue

Across the Soft FM services a range of situations had been provided to highlight areas where the service was not able to generate the income that was forecast, examples of these include: -

- Rent reductions or suspensions being agreed for commercial units
- Commercial work being suspended due to the client not requiring the service during lockdown.
- Event and meeting facilities not being used
- Severely reduced demand for services

To remobilise from the loss of revenue in these areas many authorities report that they are currently working with the service accountant to quantify the loss in revenue and will continue to do this whilst the response to the pandemic continues.

The next stage that councils are reportedly taking is to review aspects of the services that they provide and assess whether it will be viable to provide them under the prescribed restrictions in the short-term. If it is determined that the service can restart the local authorities are reviewing the way that the service will be delivered. It was commented on several occasions that the rapid transition to home working has highlighted new ways of working, and mitigated some of the previous barriers and preconceptions. For example, can more work be undertaken remotely and will small businesses require a physical presence?

It is important to note that the group raised the point that decisions regarding what services the council continues to offer, the charging policies, and so forth, would not be solely based on financial considerations, but also included aspects such as social value and the impact any changes to the service would have on the community.

The group reported that details of the revenue losses and the information gained as the situation progresses will be reported at a directorate level, and fed into the corporate centre to inform the wider council's budget impact assessment and the future budget setting process. Two APSE briefings support this workstream

[APSE Briefing 20-33 COVID-19 and commercial income losses](#)

[APSE Briefing 20-37 COVID-19: Local Government Finance New Announcements](#)

Maintaining relationships with schools and clients.

It was clear from the remobilisation groups that the divergence in policy between England and the devolved governments has had a major impact on the relationships between the service and schools. In England, where schools have devolved budgets, English authorities advised that they were very conscious that they needed to balance charging for the service and maintaining the relationship with school clients, as they could give notice to the local authority provider and potentially seek an alternative provider. This is a clear example of the marketised approaches to Soft FM services to schools withing England.

Examples have been provided by councils where schools have queried charges or requested a reduction in what is charged. These authorities have responded by providing details of the government guidance and are currently looking at developing an approach for charging for contracts for the coming months as the wider opening of schools is phased over a period. Councils are aware that there needs to be a balance struck in how the relationship is managed, especially in England where the school can opt to terminate the service contract. This is a link to the referred to guidance.

[School funding: Exceptional cost associated with COVID-19](#)

Seeking opportunities for new contracts.

Many of the attendees of the remobilisation groups reported that how local authorities have implemented the business continuity plans to continue to provide catering and cleaning services has highlighted the value of council service providers.

Therefore, this has resulted in local authorities receiving contacts from schools, and other public sector organisations, regarding engaging the council in delivering the service for them. Service managers are following up on these contacts and there are discussions taking place regarding how the contracts can be facilitated in terms of scope, capacity, and viability.

In addition, some representatives of the Group reported that they are in dialogue with existing customers regarding providing a wider offering, e.g. enhancing the current cleaning contract and providing additional services.

APSE's research, [Selling Services to schools](#), written in collaboration with CIPFA looks at the position regarding the provision of a selection of discretionary support services to schools by local authorities.

During the discussions on contracts, councils highlighted that there was the potential for existing suppliers in the market to withdraw from the market or go out of business in the future. This would place at risk the services within schools that are fundamental to the well-being of children and schools-base staff with services such as school cleaning and school catering. In summarising the discussion in relation to the potential of suppliers leaving the market, it was commented that a plan to react to the risk needed to be established and lessons could be learned from the collapse of Carillion in January 2018. Following the collapse of Carillion many authorities insourced the catering services, stepping in at short notice to maintain services to schools with many also taking on additional facilities management roles in schools.

APSE's latest guide to Insourcing 'Rebuilding capacity: the case for insourcing public contracts' can be downloaded [here](#).

Recharging corporately and costs relating to COVID-19

Many local authorities have assigned COVID-19 related expenditure to a central cost code that sits outside of their budget area as the spend will be reported corporately. It is envisaged moving forward that this will continue or alternatively, individual services will be allocated a COVID-19 cost code allowing the service to track specific COVID-19 spend.

The majority of the budget for Soft FM services can be attributed to staffing costs. At the time of writing this report many of the staff in catering, cleaning and facilities management are being paid in accordance with their contracted hours. However, due to the restrictions, the way the staff operate has changed considerably, with staff working on a rota basis, being deployed to support other services, working to changed duties, locations and to amended

specifications. Also, staff from other services have been seconded to support service delivery. These changes are not captured in the amount staff are paid. Therefore, there are examples of councils requesting staff to keep timesheets which are used to recharge other services for staff time, and to track what hours are worked and where staff are working. These timesheets are now being used to identify potential service gaps and highlight areas of increased demand especially as the situation changes. The evidence gained from the timesheets is not only being used to identify actual costs but to identify potential future staffing costs for budget purposes and pricing contracts.

There were comments raised regarding the potential for price increases for products such as food and cleaning products due to the increase in demand as businesses start to reopen. Therefore, councils are looking to mitigate these price rises by introducing flexibility to their menus, working with suppliers and reviewing requirements.

During the discussion it was highlighted that there are going to be ongoing costs associated with COVID-19 in the short and longer term that are not as easy to quantify such as productivity e.g. number of meals served, or square metres cleaned. The associated productivity costs were difficult to identify currently due to the changing picture and uncertainty regarding future restrictions. The group indicated that they felt that it was not possible to quantify these costs but were planning on reviewing performance reporting systems to ensure these changes can be evidenced. However, this was at an early stage.

To support local authorities in establishing the impact of COVID-19 in terms of cost and productivity, APSE Performance Networks are currently developing a data template with a concise list of performance indicators that will allow local authorities to have their COVID-19 data independently verified and make comparisons with other councils.

Operational Activity

Operational activity was the area where the greatest number of challenges were identified and this is to be expected as this area of remobilisation focuses on how the service will be operating in the short and longer-term. With the government announcing that schools in England will re-open to reception, year one and year six children councils have been required to outline plans and options for re-mobilising operational activity.

The services within Soft FM are very varied in the way that they operate therefore for each section of the report will highlight what remobilisation plans the group has identified for each service area. Regardless of the differences in timescales for reopening educational facilities many of the areas for consideration will apply across the UK.

Operating under social distancing restrictions

The group highlighted that it was not just a case of maintaining the 2m distance specified in the government guidance but consideration had to be given to any part of the operation where there was contact. For example, using biometrics to pay for school meals, or using equipment that someone else has handled.

Catering

As schools open on a phased basis, there is going to be a phased approach to the remobilisation of the catering service with provision being increase in England in the first instance. In the group discussion, it was clear that there was not a one size fits all approach, therefore local authorities have a range of potential plans to accommodate the need of the school. The first step in the process is to undertake a review of the school facilities which includes all aspects of food service provision, whether this be break time or lunchtime service, examples of things that are to be included in their reviews are as follows-

- Kitchen size – how many people can the kitchen accommodate with social distancing, how do the spaces function e.g. how are kitchen staff going to move around the kitchen to perform their role.
- How are meals served?
- What method is used to take payment for?
- How do pupils' queue for meals?
- How do pupils get from the classroom to where the food is served?
- Where is the food consumed – how many children can be accommodated?
- What will the food be served on?
- How are plates, cutlery and rubbish to be cleared?

This list is not exhaustive and there are many other considerations but this provides an overview of the extent of consideration.

Following the assessment and working with the school, the catering service are looking to determine how they will be operating to meet the situation. In general, councils have commented that they are looking to do the following in the short-term: -

- Prepare meals off site and deliver to the schools
- Provide a reduced menu or a packed lunch
- Children remain in the classroom and lunch be brought to them
- Operate a one in one out policy or restrictions once capacity is reached
- Use tap payment cards, or online payment facilities
- Phased sittings with a thorough clean in between
- Utilise outdoor areas
- Introduce prepacked options and cutlery
- Provide bottled water as accessing water fountains or refill stations will not be possible
- Rotating the staff working in the kitchen
- Introducing screening
- Reviewing staff uniforms and assess if changes or additional PPE

- Introduce sanitising / hand washing points throughout the dining process
- Putting in place staff to advise and control the service

For some authorities, they are providing schools with a packed lunch and the school is determining how this will be distributed.

Caterers are currently working with suppliers to establish the food producers and other supplies that are available. The availability of supplies is one of the factors included in the review of menus to ensure that the food can be produced and served in the current restrictions.

The group also highlighted that they would be looking at strategies to recover uptake levels as the current situation has monetised free school meals, children have lost the habit of eating a school meal and there has been an increase in the number of children eligible for free school meals.

A checklist for school caterers has been produced by the School Food Alliance to support schools with re-mobilising their catering service. Details are attached at Appendix 2 of this report.

Cleaning

During the lockdown restrictions the cleaning service has been integral to supporting buildings that have remained open, which are being used for key workers and vulnerable children. As the restrictions are lifted the group has provided details of how the service will continue to support the wider opening of these buildings. In the first instance cleaning teams are being remobilised to conduct deep cleans of facilities, such as offices and kitchens. The service managers are then working with the school or building managers to establish the repopulation plan for the building.

This enables the previous specification to be reviewed and amended accordingly, for example identifying times and areas of high use. Following the agreement of the cleaning required, teams are put in place to carry out the specifications. From the examples provided by the remobilisation group, these cleans require additional cleaning products and materials to meet the

revised specifications, therefore these are being ordered in advance, and stored to be used as and when required, as it is recognised that suppliers are not always able to deliver materials on next day terms and it is envisaged that this could become more of an issue in the coming weeks.

Guidance has been published regarding cleaning in non-healthcare settings. Details can be accessed by the following link:- [APSE Briefing 20-22 COVID-19 Cleaning in non-healthcare settings](#)

Facilities Management

Many of the facilities management teams have continued to ensure that buildings remain safe and that statutory duties are carried out, for example flushing water systems. As buildings are opened, or the occupancy is increased, it is the role of the facilities managers to put in place measures that will mitigate the risk of the disease being transmitted in the workplace or school.

To facilitate the opening of the buildings risk assessments are being carried out and as a result, the managers are been provided with a checklist that they need to go through with associated actions that are required. This includes establishing the number of people that an office / building can accommodate under the social distancing guidelines. This information is provided to service managers to allow them to put in place plans for their staff returning, this could include staff returning on a rota basis and staff identified as high risks being allocated a desk in a place deemed to be lower risks. The FM team will then assess other matters, such as the communal areas, how the building and offices are accessed to establish mitigation such as changing layouts, implementing one-way systems and screening.

In addition, facilities management teams are responsible for communicating the changes in building usage, and this is being done in a variety of ways which includes additional signage, posting information on staff intranet sites and putting in place building monitors to provide advice and support.

Changes that are being identified as being required to buildings, for example installing Perspex screens, and changing biometric entrance systems require

products to be sourced and amendments to systems that need to be in place as the building is re-occupied. This work is currently being undertaken to ensure the transition back to the workplace is as smooth as possible.

In addition, there are examples of facilities management teams implementing a fast reporting system which is similar to the accident and defects reporting systems already in place. The system allows employees to report issues and concerns to be reported and actioned.

An overview of the government guidance on [working safely in offices and contact centres](#) can be viewed via the following link:- [APSE Briefing 20-46 COVID-19 Guidance on working safely in offices and contact centres](#)

Regrouping the workforce

For all services areas, re-grouping the workforce represents one of the biggest challenges for remobilisation and this is one area of remobilisation that plans are more developed than other areas. During the scoping session the group highlighted a variety of challenges which are detailed below, with examples of the approach local authorities are taking.

HR policies and procedures

Councils have very well-established HR policies and procedures and in the main the remobilisation group advised that these had been robust enough to manage the workforce during the lockdown period. However, there have been some changes that have been implemented temporarily. Examples of these include: -

- Extending the amount and period that leave can be carried over
- Not authorising any leave cancellations during the lockdown.
- Those that are unable to work due to being identified as vulnerable, or display symptoms of COVID-19 are not being included in the sickness recording figures but is being recorded separately so it can be tracked, and monitored but not included in absence management.

The group advised that it was not envisaged that there would be a need to introduce wider and permanent changes to the HR policies and procedures.

However, the group commented that this would be reviewed as the situation progresses.

Communication

Effective communication with the workforce is a key component of remobilisation. Many authorities have been keeping in regular contact with their staff with weekly phone calls, texts or using social media applications such as WhatsApp and Yabba.

Councils are putting in place strategies to communicate with staff regarding details of how the service will be remobilised and details of ongoing changes. Although email may seem appropriate, not all frontline staff have access to email. Therefore, service and area managers are being tasked with cascading plans to staff and identifying how this should be done effectively at a local level.

Staff Safety

All employers have a duty to ensure staff work safely and the workplace is a safe place to work. The measures required to ensure this form part of the risk assessments which will take into account the guidance issued by the government and other organisations including social distancing requirements, if and what PPE is required, and how to use new chemicals, etc.

As per the guidance, consultation should be undertaken with a staff representative / union to ensure the safety arrangements take into account the needs of the staff.

Once the arrangements have been agreed, details need to be communicated to staff regarding the new working arrangements. The group has provided a variety of ways to do this including utilising the short video clips on the HSE website, providing guidance over the phone, updating training manuals, displaying posters and signage.

Service and area managers will be providing support to staff, and doing on-site checks once staff are deployed to assess how effective the measures are being implemented and whether further training is required

Councils have also indicated that they will have in place a reporting process so staff can highlight any issues to enable the service to respond quickly.

The HSE has published guidance regarding talking to workers about preventing the spread of COVID-19. Details of this document can be found via the following link: [Talking with your workers](#)

Working with unions and stakeholders

As the workforce is remobilised, to meet the demands of the service, employees may be required to undertake revised tasks, change the way they work and the location they are based in.

Prior to changes being made to working practices, the group recognised the need to give due consideration to employment legislation. However, many of the changes being made don't fall within that scope but in these circumstances, it was highlighted that the unions, staff and other stakeholders need to be in agreement with the changes and have a platform to input into the plans. Councils advise that they have regular contact with unions and stakeholders. However, there are a couple of examples of local authorities who have set up stakeholder groups, to bring all parties together regularly and act as a forum to discuss plans, issues and agree on the approach moving forward.

Motivation and wellbeing

Throughout the current restrictions, services have been making regular contact with their staff and as part of the contact, any concerns highlighted with regards to wellbeing have been recorded. Where the required action has been taken. In addition, there have been social media groups established so teams can contact each other informally to keep people connected.

As staff are remobilised the group has highlighted that there has been some nervousness being expressed in the workforce regarding returning to work. Therefore, in addition to the practical measures in place, services will be using the wider council well-being resources and managers to identify areas of concern and assist the employee in addressing these issues on an ongoing basis.

Training

The majority of frontline training is classroom based, which under the current restrictions is not possible. Therefore, services have reviewed how this can be done effectively and in a way that will not prevent staff from being remobilised.

The group identified a range of training requirements including: -

- Effective use of PPE or new equipment
- Preparing meals to a new menu
- Changes in cleaning specification

The examples provided by the remobilisation group of how the training is to be provided included adding new e-learning courses to the councils e-learning platform, circulating paper copies of training manuals / workbooks, small group demonstrations in the workplace (ensuring social distancing), providing pictorial instruction cards or signage.

It was also stated that records of the training will be added to personal development plans and records will be kept for audit purposes.

APSE Training is currently providing a range of on-line training courses with additional courses being created and added. Details are outlined on the APSE website –[APSE online training](#). For staff who may remain for the time being in a home working environment, delivering other organisational training now, by staff taking part in online learning, may prove to be a way of enhancing productive time at present whilst saving time on training once services are remobilised.

Managing levels of absence

As the workforce remobilises absence levels could have an impact of service delivery with standard sickness, COVID-19 related absence and parents and carers experiencing care issues. The services have already been monitoring vulnerable staff isolating, so there is already a picture of the staff who are unavailable to work. In preparation for remobilisation, it has been reported that councils are undertaking a more in-depth audit of the workforce to

identify availability to work and identify any barriers to returning to work; this may include details of how staff travel to and from work and identification of staff with caring responsibilities.

For the catering service, there is going to be a phased increase in demand, therefore it is anticipated that absence can be managed. However, due to the high demand for the cleaning service there is more of a challenge.

The group provided examples of the plans that they have in place to mitigate the risk to service delivery, these include: -

- Utilising testing for staff that display symptoms
- Redeploying staff from other services that are not currently remobilising such as the leisure service.
- Using contracted staff to cover – there are examples of councils that have continued to pay contract staff an average of the previous three months hours worked to enable them to be retained. Therefore, these staff can be utilised to manage demand during remobilisation.

The group also highlighted that since the lockdown restrictions have been in place, they had received several inquiries regarding the availability of jobs in the service. Therefore, it may be easier to appoint to vacancies in the future.

The Society of Occupational Medicine has produced a toolkit for returning to work. Details can be accessed via the following link: [Return to work/](#)

Technical considerations

There are a variety of technical considerations that have been highlighted by the group. The key areas that have been identified are outlined below: -

Risk Assessments

There is a high level of emphasis on revising risk assessments to incorporate the risks associated with COVID-19.

In the first instance, councils have reported that they have reviewed their existing process for producing and reviewing risk assessments to ensure that it is still practical and robust, including confirming that there is enough resource assigned, the person reviewing the risk assessments has all the relevant information and the design and size of the documents is suitable.

Discussions with the group highlight that a variety of different approaches are being used, for example, the service revises and signs off the assessments or the central Health and Safety team are taking the lead.

Some of the comments that have been made by the group in relation to risk assessments are as follows: -

Where a measure has been added the guidance / reason for the decision should be referenced.

Additional resources are being added to support the process

Guidance that has been published does not supersede legislation

The current guidance requires employers to publish their risk assessments, therefore there will be various examples available and the HSE have published information and templates for employers, details can be accessed via the following link: -

[Managing risk and risk assessments](#)

Supply chains and procurement

The group highlighted several examples of issues that they had experienced regarding receiving supplies at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, as the services move forward and remobilise, there is work being undertaken with regards to maintaining adequate supplies at an acceptable price. This includes the following: -

- Conducting a review of current suppliers to establish who else they supply, where they source their products and what procedures they have implemented in response to COVID-19. All these aspects are being assessed to understand the risk of interruption to the council for example, where a supplier is supplying to the local authority, care homes and the NHS. As priority is being given to the NHS and social care it could result in delays or product availability.
- Looking to source products locally and support local businesses
- Changing processes so ordering is done in advance rather than just in time and products are being stored until needed.
- Work with companies to identify any experiencing financial issues.

The speed at which councils have had to respond to COVID -19 has highlighted that procurement was not flexible enough to respond as required. Therefore, councils have indicated that as part of the lessons learned exercise, procurement frameworks will be reviewed, this will also include a review of tender documents and contracts.

Furlough issues

As APSE has identified, in other briefings and advisory work, the application of the Furlough scheme to local government has led to complexities and confusion. Soft FM services have been clearly impacted by their reliance upon externally sourced income, such as the income from charging for school meals, or cleaning contracts with schools and other buildings. Initial advice and statements on Furlough from Government departments led to questions as to the application of the scheme. It would now appear that around 1 in 6 local authorities have made some use of the scheme, allowing

some recovery of wages, up to 80% with many 'topping up' the scheme by 20% to enable staff to receive 100% of their normal pay. The scheme is being revised further with employer contributions increasing, changes to the rules on part-time working / Furlough hours and other measures. In many cases a view has been taken that applying to the CJRS will leave some services no-worse off than they already are, even if the application is unsuccessful since wages are still being met in situations where staff are unable to be otherwise gainfully employed.

APSE would suggest that any consideration of Furlough matters should be taken corporately to enable consistency of approach and adherence to equalities duties, alongside consultation with trade unions. However, traded services with schools, including the income mix from paying clients or parents, public funds (such as universal infant free school meals) or situations where the local authority is acting as a purchasing client for a school, are often not fully understood. This has led to confusion on related matters such as the supplier payments, under the [procurement policy note 02/20](#). Therefore Soft FM service managers are advised that a breakdown of the service income / budget costs and the sources of the income streams, as a percentage of the overall service costs, may be helpful in exploring both the issues of Furlough and the supplier payments at a corporate level.

APSE Comment

APSE would like to thank all the authorities that participated in the remobilisation group for Soft FM and contributed to the information contained in this report.

APSE has a range of services that are designed to support Member authorities through this challenging time. These include the following: -

[APSE COVID – 19 Information Hub and WhatsApp groups](#) – The hub has been set up to deal with frontline service issues as they arise; ensuring greater resilience and learning between each other during this difficult time.

[APSE Online Training](#) - APSE Training is designed to help local authorities invest in their greatest asset – their staff. With staff working at home, or remotely, APSE Training can assist staff with developing new skills during this time to help maximise opportunities

[Performance Networks](#) – The Performance Network teams have developed a variety of ways to support Councils with data collection. This includes a new suite of indicators which will explore the impact of COVID-19 on service cost, quality and productivity. The reports will be produced in June but APSE strongly recommends ensuring the collection of data is on-going so changes in service performance are explicable during budget setting processes or when revising business plans.

[APSE Solutions](#) - Providing in-house consultancy and interim management services, available to both APSE members and non-member authorities and organisations.

[APSE Energy](#) which is working on greening frontline councils' services including energy management issues, which may be critical to saving money in services where budgets have been impacted by COVID-19

APSE membership resources remain committed to supporting our member local councils with the ongoing briefings service, network queries, access to Principal Advisor advice and online meetings, advisory groups and events.

There are opportunities for councils to share best practice and learning through virtual Advisory Groups and thematic sessions. Details of these sessions will be communicated APSE Members as the sessions are arranged.

For further information on the services that are available, please contact Vickie Hacking, vhacking@apse.org.uk

Vickie Hacking

Principal Advisor

[Appendix 1 – Service remobilisation – Soft FM Scoping report](#)

[Appendix 2 – School Food Plan Alliance – School Catering Checklist](#)

NEW MUNICIPALISM

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