



APSE Transport and Fleet Services remobilisation report



About this report

Following the outbreak of coronavirus and the declaration of a pandemic, the government implemented a series of measures to mitigate the impact of the outbreak on the population. As a result of these measures, local authority services have adapted and implemented alternative approaches to service delivery to respond to restrictions and challenges presented by the health pandemic. Now that restrictions are beginning to be eased, local authorities are considering the remobilisation of services.

To assist its member local councils, APSE convened a series of remobilisation groups for each of the frontline services to establish challenges and opportunities for remobilisation, the steps that are being taken to remobilise the service and share best practice. The APSE Transport and Fleet remobilisation group has identified a number of challenges and opportunities that can be categorised into the following areas:

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

This report outlines some of the plans and scenario options which local authorities are considering as part of their remobilisation of services.

1. Remobilisation Group

APSE convened a series of remobilisation groups for each of the frontline services to establish the challenges and opportunities for remobilisation, outlining steps that will be taken to remobilise the service and share best practice.

The Transport and Fleet remobilisation group was made up of representatives from local authorities across the UK and met in four virtual sessions, the first provided information for the [scoping report](#) which outlined the challenges and opportunities within the service. The remaining three sessions provided a particular focus on each of the following categories:

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

These four broad headings have helped to highlight approaches and best practice being considered by local authorities to overcome challenges identified.

This report provides information on plans being developed and options being considered in relation to the areas identified within the scoping report to progress the remobilisation of services. It was recognised that as devolved UK Governments are amending/lifting restrictions at different points in time and through various means, recovery plans may differ across the UK but it continues to be vitally important to share learning and experiences.

The sections below outline potential options and plans being considered and developed within Transport and Fleet services:

2. Budget, finance and re-establishing commercial activity

From the discussions held as part of the remobilisation sessions, as with all other frontline services, it is clear that the full extent of the impact on finances and budgets remains unknown. Like all other areas of the economy, the longer restrictions are in place, limiting the services which can be undertaken, the bigger financial impact for service budgets and service delivery.

The projected losses across the UK are being recorded in a number of ways, including feeding into corporate finance in order that Council-wide budget impacts can be assessed. Also, for example, in Scotland, local authorities have been submitting their projected losses due to COVID-19 to COSLA for discussion with the Scottish Government. These figures, similar to local authorities across the UK, will continue to change as services move forward and will be dependent on which services can be re-established and when. As detailed below these figures will also be collated by APSE Performance Networks to provide comparative data for Transport and Fleet Services.

It was also highlighted during discussions that, as well as income being affected, so too will costs. Potential costs include any increased costs for parts and equipment, as well as the potential costs associated with having to hire additional vehicles to help with social distancing requirements, e.g. minibuses for schools or additional loader vehicles within refuse collection.

Local authorities reported that they have assigned COVID-19 related expenditure to a COVID-19 cost code allowing the service to track specific COVID-19 spend. With one authority outlining their process of marking every duty that is 100% COVID-19 related with a COVID cost code (e.g. additional vehicles, agency workers, overtime) and keeping daily log spreadsheets, to keep track of internal recharging. The authority noted that these logs will be important once the pandemic has passed, and analysis needs to take place of spending during this period.

There were some concerns about how vehicle replacement budgets will be affected by the number of furloughed vehicle sales teams (amongst suppliers) and the increased lead-in times for delivery of new vehicles. The lead-in times for HGVs were reportedly between 9 and 15 months. Local authorities are generally discussing whether budgets could continue to roll over for an unspecified extra amount of time so that transport services do not lose out on those budgets in the future.

There was, however, also a recognition that moving forward there could be potential gaps in services provided by private organisations to communities, due to those companies going out of business or withdrawing from particular markets. Therefore, there may be potential commercial opportunities for local authorities to meet the increased demand to ensure these services continue to be offered to local communities. In addition, there may be an opportunity for councils to employ some staff from companies which have been affected by closures increasing the talent pool for any future vacancies.

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. This will also assist sector-wide analysis of the impact of the pandemic on frontline services as well as allowing the data to be used to explain the variations in predicted and actual budgets.

3. Operational Activity

As with all services which have continued to be provided during the pandemic, social distancing was introduced into transport and fleet workshops in line with Government guidance and most have remained open. For one of the authorities work continued as normal in 4 out of their 5 workshops with the introduction of staggered start times and other distancing measures; the remaining workshop is smaller which presents difficulties for social distancing. Another authority only reported having social distancing issues with larger jobs like a wheel replacement on a large vehicle which requires more than one member of staff to undertake the work. Therefore moving forward transport and fleet services will be reviewing processes to consider alternative working practices to overcome these challenges.

Transport and fleet services have been an important part of the COVID-19 response, with vehicles being re-deployed to different areas in order for services to continue or new services to be provided. In order to ensure this was able to be achieved, some authorities reported needing to obtain additional vehicles from wherever possible, with one authority reportedly pulling in minibuses from every school and utilising all available pool cars for internal hires. Vehicles have been used for tasks which are not within the normal remit, for example, small vans following behind refuse vehicles carrying additional crew members around the collection routes, as numbers of staff within refuse vehicles have been reduced to meet social distancing requirements.

Conversations with regards to fitting screens into vehicles are still ongoing in many local authorities, as while they may enable more people to travel in vehicles maintaining social distancing, they could also present other problems in the event of an accident, or creating an additional surface to clean. Those within the sessions noted that the guidance from governments has been unclear on the way forward in relation to this.

Another area of consideration for the group was in relation to remobilising buses/minibuses for use. One local authority that works closely with local bus operators reported they were operating at no more than 50% of their occupancy, are only accepting contactless payments and have taken a range of measures to protect drivers, these include covering talking holes, giving drivers the options to wear gloves and cleaning materials for touchpoints. They also removed all vehicles without screens and replaced them with vehicles containing assault screens. The council confirmed they are also working with operators to monitor passenger numbers in order to be able to adapt and try to work on ways to build confidence in travelling on public transport.

As part of these discussions, school transport was highlighted as an area which could bring potential challenges for the service. This included what potential maximum class sizes would be and whether classes would be running part-time/staggered throughout the day; this sparked discussions on the impact on school transport in relation to potentially transporting a smaller number of young people in larger numbers of vehicles to adhere to the social distancing guidelines. Discussions are ongoing on how this might be achieved and who would have to pay for the additional vehicles, as noted earlier within this report. It was noted by the group that the home to school travel does not seem to have been considered in any great detail by governments and that a large majority of the guidance has been in regards to getting individuals back to work. Although some of the challenges will be the same, such as the impact of more vehicles on the road network, maintaining social distancing on school and SEND transport will bring a number of different considerations.

In terms of remobilising taxi inspections and the DVSA extending MOT expiry dates, there was agreement that operators at this time must still keep their vehicles under the MOT and licensing conditions, whether the authority was currently conducting inspections or not.

Finally, there were also concerns raised in relation to the logistics, storage and use of PPE with supplies being exhausted quickly and long lead-in times from suppliers being reported.

4. Regrouping the workforce

Part of the process for regrouping the workforce has been to ensure the safety of staff by putting in place procedures to inform and remind employees to follow Government distancing guidelines. Some authorities are asking employees to sign to confirm that they have received toolbox talks, staff briefing sessions, emails and memos to ensure that the members of staff can carry out their tasks in a safe working environment. This is also to help provide protection to local authorities from any potential claims of negligence related to COVID-19 as services continue or start to recommence. It is clear that councils are going to great lengths to try and ensure safe distancing of their employees and safe working practices.

Another consideration in relation to the regrouping of staff includes undertaking individual risk assessments for members of staff with underlying health conditions; this is to establish which tasks they will be able to perform when returning to work. All within the group confirmed that this would be carried out in line with current government guidance (which may vary across the UK) ensuring the safety of staff. Currently and during the early stages of an easing of lockdown measures, local authorities are looking to utilise rota systems and employees with no health conditions to undertake any additional services being introduced in the first instance.

As part of these discussions, it was confirmed that plans are currently being put in place with regards to understanding what services will look like when they fully start back up again, this is likely to include measures such as less staff in offices and no face-to-face meetings. It was confirmed that Health and Safety colleagues are already preparing plans to enable staff to return to buildings and depots safely. Some of the plans include risk assessments and safe systems of work which will look to cover:

- Reviewing the capacity of buildings and making adjustments to ensure numbers within, at any given time, allow for social distancing

- Looking at the entry and exit points within buildings, including the necessity of touchpoints/entry systems and suspension of systems at the busiest times
- Introducing one ways systems within buildings
- Staggering staff start times and utilising rota systems
- Looking at the current guidance from governments to consider options with regards to the number of operatives within a vehicle. This includes taking into consideration what the guidance deems as 'reasonably practicable'
- Reviewing restroom facilities/lift access and washing facilities
- Any additional PPE requirements including the potential need for face coverings

One transport manager remarked about seeing the benefits of working from home with reduced hours of travel and the use of technology to carry out online meetings. Digital meeting tools such as Microsoft Teams and Skype are being utilised. With some reporting the use of WhatsApp to conduct apprentice interviews, and video conferencing to deal with HR issues; though it was recognised by all that this would have to be carefully considered to ensure rights to representation are not undermined. It was reported that staffing had generally remained static, with one authority reporting that a few new starters had begun working remotely and another has temporarily frozen recruitment and the use of agency workers during this period.

Staff are being encouraged generally to take their leave as normal and to report general absences while working from home. Normal sickness procedures are being followed with additional categories and processes for COVID-19 related absence. Those within the sessions highlighted that these policies and procedures were being dealt with corporately. In addition, it was also noted that local authorities were communicating with Trade Unions on a regular basis in order to discuss any potential policy or procedures being introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some have started to look at whether some members of staff could now work exclusively from home, and how this would affect their health and wellbeing policies, and mental health policies as well as organisational issues.

5. Technical Considerations

Risk assessments and potential revisions/enhancements to incorporate the risks associated with COVID-19 are being undertaken within local authorities. As outlined earlier in this report, this may include additional PPE requirements but also cover areas such as potential marshals for SEND and school transport. Some local authorities, considering potential issues on a service-specific basis, are passing these issues to their corporate Health and Safety teams for consideration and discussion. Other councils reported that they are reviewing their existing processes for producing and reviewing risk assessments to ensure that these are still practical and robust.

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 to use ([Managing risks and risk assessments at work](#)).

Procurement and supply chain robustness also form part of the considerations for remobilisation. Local authorities within the sessions highlighted they are and would be continuing to monitor these, contacting contractors and suppliers to build a picture for when services resume. Those involved in the working groups reported generally having good access to parts suppliers (albeit with less access to official main supplier parts). Procurement frameworks were also discussed with reports of PPE shortages from an authority, and another highlighting that many of their suppliers for others goods were now supplying other useful products with contracts being set up overnight, such as drinks companies making hand sanitiser.

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the introduction of mass working from home across all services wherever possible and moving forward, as restrictions ease, social distancing measures will mean the number of staff permitted to work within a building will reduce. As highlighted earlier in this report, local authorities will, therefore, be reviewing their working from home policies as the number of staff undertaking duties remotely will increase. It is likely that this will, in turn, lead to council-wide reviews of assets to consider if rationalising any buildings and depots is feasible or desirable.

APSE Comment

APSE would like to thank all the authorities that participated in the remobilisation group for transport and fleet and contributed to the information contained within 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.

[APSE Performance Networks](#) – The Performance Network team 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 ongoing, 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](#) – 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](#) remains 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 to APSE members as the sessions are arranged. For further information on the services that are available, please contact Louise Melville, Lmelville@apse.org.uk

Louise Melville, Principal Advisor

Garry Lee, Research & Coordination Officer

NEW MUNICIPALISM

Delivering for local people and local economies

Association for Public Service Excellence

3rd Floor Trafford House

Chester Road

Stretford

M32 0RS

Telephone: 0161 772 1810

Email: enquiries@apse.org.uk

www.apse.org.uk



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**

Gold
Until 2020