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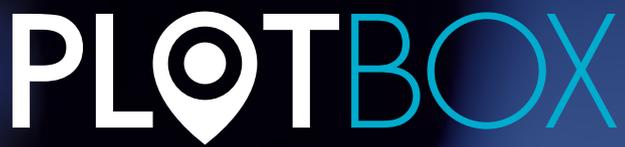
Association for Public Service Excellence

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The background features a soft, watercolor-style gradient from light pink at the top to light blue at the bottom. Several hands are illustrated in various colors (orange, brown, yellow, blue) and positions. Some hands are clapping, with yellow lines radiating from the point of contact to indicate motion. Other hands are giving thumbs up. The central text is in a bold, purple, serif font.

Clap for councils

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Editorial



Mark Pengelly
National Chair,
APSE

A message from our National Chair

I don't think any of us every imagined the scale of change that COVID-19 would bring upon councils. Just a few short weeks ago we were in the bubble of local government finance, anticipating a budget which was widely trailed as the end to austerity, but which was something of a damp squib. The calls for fair funding continued and the promised reform of social care pushed ever further into the distance. Then the world as we know it turned upside down.

The onset of the biggest health pandemic, beyond living memory, has relied upon a seismic response from local councils. A dawning realisation that actually frontline local government services are what makes our communities function; catering services swung into action to feed vulnerable people whose numbers have grown due to the shielding measures; cemetery and crematoria services have faced immense challenges in continuing dignified funerals for COVID-19 victims and their families; waste and refuse services have changed how they operate to safeguard staff, but at the same time ensured public health, as they have continued to deliver a world class service; parks have been recognised as part of our national DNA, providing much needed green-space to our communities, and leisure assets repurposed as hubs to ensure help gets to where it is needed.

I could not begin to tell you how proud I am of our APSE member councils. The efforts have been extraordinary from the loaders on refuse routes to chief executives. There has been a coming together of operational expertise and strategy. We know that this was only the first phase of our response. The efforts to remobilise services are already being shaped as we await the

next stage of our response as the gradual lifting of the lockdown starts to take shape.

Within APSE we ensured all of our resources were quickly deployed into supporting our member councils, setting up a COVID support hub, a special briefings services, COVID network query response service and our popular WhatsApp groups, allowing service managers instantaneous access to share questions, advice and solutions. We have transitioned support on line with Teams meetings acting as forums in place of our physical advisory groups and allowed access to training, performance networks and solutions through online and telephone support to ensure there is no break in service for our member councils. I hope that these initiatives have all proved useful to you.

I know that the APSE family is a gregarious group committed to local government and I know I for one have greatly enjoyed our networking over the years. Many often say to me that it is not necessarily the formal parts of meetings, or seminars, that make them so worthwhile but the formal part of the event coupled with the opportunity to meet other councils and share thoughts, ideas and innovations over a coffee. Learning in the formal setting but making the connections through networking that in the long run help the APSE family to help each other deliver better services. So when all of this is over, I hope we can celebrate our achievements face to face. Who knows we might need more than a coffee by then!

In the meantime... stay safe and see you on the other side!

Contents

- | | | | |
|-----------|---|-----------|---|
| 4 | What now for local government finances?
Paul O'Brien, APSE Chief Executive | 24 | Energising energy management
Phil Brennan, Head of APSE Energy |
| 6 | Income, fees and charges: What does the future hold post COVID-19?
Mo Baines, APSE Head of Communication and Coordination | 26 | How are bereavement services coping?
A look at APSE's latest survey |
| 8 | Building maintenance and COVID-19
Louise Melville, APSE Principal Advisor | 28 | A fitness test for leisure facilities
Rob Bailey, APSE Principal Advisor |
| 10 | Why we need data
Debbie Johns, Head of APSE Performance Networks | 33 | Vehicle maintenance and COVID-19
Rob Bailey, APSE Principal Advisor |
| 12 | Assessing the impact on parks and greenspaces
Wayne Priestley, APSE Principal Advisor | 35 | Ensuring organisational resilience
Lindsay Towler, APSE Head of Business Resources |
| 14 | Refuse and recycling: A priority service
Abi Ademiluyi, APSE Principal Advisors | 36 | Building cleaning and COVID-19
Victoria Hacking, APSE Principal Advisor |
| 17 | Responding to the frontline
Andy Mudd, Head of APSE Solutions | 37 | Citizens must be protected from massive consequences as councils on the brink
Derek McCallan, NILGA |
| 20 | Catering services: How councils have adapted
Victoria Hacking, APSE Principal Advisor | | |
| 22 | Every day's a school day!
Fiona Sutton-Wilson, Head of APSE Training | | |

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What now for local government finances?



Could the impact of COVID-19 on local authority finance be the straw that finally breaks the camel's back for many frontline services already emaciated over the past decade by austerity? APSE Chief Executive Paul O'Brien urges the Government to fully support the services that have been fundamental to local public health and mental wellbeing.

APSE has written extensively in the past about budget reductions which have seen authorities lose 60p in the pound from funding provided to them by Government since 2010. English local government in particular has also seen a significant shift from central Government grant funding; from a general taxation pool to one that is hugely dependent on locally based taxation from council tax and business rates, alongside fees and charges. In 2019/2020, 88% of the average English local councils' core spending power was made up from council tax and business rates, with a significant part of the rest coming from commercial income fees and charges.

The additional cost to English local government of COVID-19, at present, has been put by the LGA at some £12.8B. Whilst some of this is based on modelling for significant drops in council tax collection rates, business rate yield and the fact that revenue from commercial income fees and charges has all but disappeared, it's not clear as to whether this fully takes into account the unknown length of the current crisis. So far, English councils have received £3.2B from Government, with appropriate Barnett consequentials passed on to the UK's devolved administrations. There have also been some short term measures taken to ease cash flow for councils but this is only temporary.

It has been well documented over the past years that many local authorities have been under huge pressure. Following a decade of austerity, the additional gap created by COVID-19 will probably mean that a number of authorities will be forced to issue S.114 notices stopping all non-essential spend. For local economies fundamentally dependent on the public pound, this could prove catastrophic.

What does all of this mean for those frontline neighbourhood services which have already had to deal with the worst consequences of austerity? These huge cuts, compounded by significant rises in demand across council activities, have squeezed the life out of these often non-statutory services.

With the demand for social care budgets increasing considerably in the current period, this will squeeze other frontline services even further. And whilst the public recognise the importance of social care, to many of the most vulnerable and needy people at present, the vast majority don't experience social care in their daily lives.

APSE's own public opinion polling carried out with Survation shows that most people really value refuse collection, public realm, parks, roads and street cleaning. It is my belief that this love of the frontline

has only been enhanced over the past weeks when these weary warriors have stepped up to the plate yet again and delivered, when everyone else has been placed in a state of suspended animation by lockdown. It would be a real tragedy for local government if this greatly increased recognition of the role it plays in keeping society functioning in the toughest of circumstances is quickly lost by a failure to fund properly these very services in the future.

It would be a real tragedy for local government if this greatly increased recognition of the role it plays in keeping society functioning in the toughest of circumstances is quickly lost by a failure to fund properly these very services in the future.

These already really scarce resources, which have had to be juggled about in a creative manner over a prolonged period of time, are now eventually being recognised as being enormously fundamental to local public health and mental well-being during the coronavirus crisis.

It is unthinkable that at the other side of this, that the public, who have already seen sharp increases in their council tax bills in recent years, will not be asked to pay even more in taxation to try to rebalance the economy. If they see less and less for their money on the ground, amongst the services they value the most, then public opinion could shift very quickly and will be unforgiving. Government would be well advised to remember this when budgeting for life after the current crisis.

APSE knows that there can be no solution for the frontline that doesn't deal with the overall funding of councils. We are therefore calling for Government to underwrite fully the funding that local government was expected to receive this financial year from council tax and business rates, alongside the revenues they were dependent on from fees and charges. Additional costs of protecting local communities from the impact of COVID-19 should also be covered by central Government. The Government said they would, it's vitally important that they do so. •

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Income, fees and charges: What does the future hold post COVID-19?



As councils have become increasingly reliant on sources of additional income to support revenue budgets

Mo Baines, APSE's Head of

Communications, explores what the future may hold for council commercial strategies.



A number of years ago APSE established its Commercialisation Network, bringing together councils who were developing strategies to address a more commercial approach to services. Reflecting on losses in revenue, in the main due to changes in local government funding, from the point of the global downturn income from fees and charges is no longer additionality but a vital part of council budgets. The National Audit Office (NAO) estimated Government funding for local authorities fell by over 49% in real terms from 2010-11 to 2017-18, equating to a 28.6% real-terms reduction in 'spending power'. It was therefore inevitable that councils looked to make up the budget shortfalls through income generation.

Sources of Income

There are many different ways to raise income and as a result of this the impact across different income streams will be affected differently by COVID-19 changes. In summary these are:-

Income from assets and investments – This is where councils have invested to generate, for example, rental income from commercial property or invested in other assets, to generate interest payments, or share dividends, with the value of such investments potentially decreasing as a result of the expected post-pandemic economic downturn.

Income from contractual or service level agreement related work – This income could be from the sale of school meals, hire of a venue or park for a wedding of a festival, or an ongoing maintenance contract for buildings or roads for example. The client may be another council, another public body, a private business or an individual person, for example a local resident. This would also include gym membership fees which are not chargeable given councils are unable to offer access to the leisure facilities during the lockdown.

Income from fees and charges and selling bespoke services – This will often be related to services such as car parking, but it could also relate to ad-hoc 'sales' such as consultancy support on construction or highways contracts to developers, handyperson services, gardening schemes to residents, garden waste charges or other arrangements, or sales of advertising spaces.

However, Government support for local councils is not the same as Government support for businesses. Whilst business support packages are of course vital, and councils have welcomed these measures to support both local and national economic recovery, in general terms the business loans, and furlough funding, are not designed to support 'council operated' businesses. This has led to confusion about the Government funding available to councils, which appears to only support the extra expenditure that councils have incurred in dealing with COVID-19, and not the losses due to the closure of facilities, sales or indeed investment income.

Whilst good record keeping will not ameliorate the losses, it will at least mean that the changes within budgets are explicable to the council Treasurer. This will also help in the ongoing calls for a fair settlement on the impact of COVID-19 on council budgets.



So where does all of this leave council commercialisation strategies? There is much uncertainty about how this income could be recovered, if at all, but minimising losses is an important first step. However, in some areas of income generation, the ability to minimise losses will be very limited. In the short term there may be very little that can be done to offset seismic shifts in investment markets, and whatever the economic landscape post-COVID the impact of a downturn in construction, hospitality and tourism, and new office developments, may be areas where there is a need to accept a longer-term recovery plan. However, some areas have done very well out of COVID-19. There has been a big boost in retail in supermarkets, so some retail developments may fair less badly than those with offices as the main source of rental, as the anticipated contraction of office space owing to new ways of working may be further embedded in the national psyche.

Contractual issues

In other areas it is worth considering how losses could be minimised. For commercial areas involving contractual matters it is important to involve the council's legal team at the earliest opportunity. It may be possible to minimise liabilities by exploring a number of contractual issues, that may provide some opportunities to both reduce the financial loss and assist the councils own clients who, in many cases, may be local residents, businesses or business ventures that have otherwise provided opportunities for jobs in local economies. The council as the guardian of the local economy will want to ensure that its own actions are ultimately supportive of a good outcome for the local area; including its own finances. It may therefore be worth considering:-

Contract Frustration - Is there scope to rely on the English common law doctrine whereby a 'frustrating event' means that the parties to the contract are no longer able to carry out their contractual obligations to one another and therefore the contract is in effect terminated. This is a complex matter and thorough legal advice should be sought before relying upon this argument.

Force Majeure - A further option for consideration would be where a contract includes an express 'Force Majeure' clause. The parties to a contract cannot imply that they are subject to a 'Force Majeure' provision – it must be evidenced within the contract itself as a specific clause. As with contract frustration above this is dependent on good legal advice so don't 'go it alone' ensure you consult with your council lawyers beforehand!

Reviewing or renegotiating a contract - Renegotiation of a contract or other arrangement might be an option if the parties are willing to do so (or it is provided for under the contract) which could allow for changes to be made. For example, amending the dates or the method of delivery to enable the agreed obligations to be fulfilled or set aside or postponed. Again seek legal advice.

Insurance provisions - Are you insured for any losses? It is worth checking this as a possibility.

What about non-contractual or more ad-hoc income arrangements?

Many councils rely on ad-hoc sales or income from fees and charges. For example, car park fees, facilities hire, cafés or other sales such as licence or franchise arrangements or fees generated from gym membership. Much of this may not be recoverable and this will mean a substantial loss from service budgets. In these scenarios APSE is suggesting that recovery plans and reviews need to be considered now alongside ensuring proper record keeping of the anticipated budget income against the revised figures.

This will be important from a departmental budget angle because income projections are heavily embedded into service budgets. This means that in many cases central resourcing will already have been reduced to align with income predictions pre-COVID-19. Accordingly, whilst good record keeping will not ameliorate the losses, it will at least mean that the changes within budgets are explicable to the council Treasurer. This will also help in the ongoing calls for a fair settlement on the impact of COVID-19 on council budgets.

What about Teckal companies or non-council funded posts?

There has been much confusion on whether the Furlough scheme could apply to trading companies or to posts not included within council budgets, but supported by external income such as gym-membership fees or parents who ordinarily purchase school meals. The scheme states, "In a small number of cases, for example where organisations are not primarily funded by the government and whose staff cannot be redeployed to assist with the coronavirus response, the scheme may be appropriate for some staff." So, although the Government wants to discourage reliance upon the Furlough scheme for people generally employed by the council but funded through income elsewhere, there may be some opportunities to recover costs through the use of Furlough. That said, this is a sensitive matter and care should be taken on how the scheme is applied if there is a genuine opportunity to recover funds under the scheme and of course a non-discriminatory approach to any selection process. Some Teckal companies have now adopted this approach.

Conclusion

The potential loss of income in commercial areas may need different solutions in the short, medium and long term. APSE would suggest that a headline analysis of income losses, by income category, and options for recovery or damage limitation should be undertaken as soon as is reasonably practical. It is also worth considering the need to review and revise income projections as well as ensuring plans are in place to remobilise income generating services, including supply chains and client communications.

Any APSE member council can make use of the APSE commercialisation network which is a FREE service to members including online forums during the lockdown period. [To join use this link.](#) Alternatively email Mo Baines on mbaines@apse.org.uk

- APSE issued a briefing on COVID-19 and commercial income losses on 20 April which you can read about [here.](#)

Building maintenance and COVID-19



As local authorities try to navigate the current COVID-19 pandemic ensuring our communities across the UK keep functioning, building maintenance, similar to other services, are focussing their attention on those deemed to be critical. APSE Principal Advisor Louise Melville provides a summary of the impact of COVID-19 on the sector.

From a recent APSE survey the majority of local authorities have been referring to their pre-prepared Business Continuity Plans at this time, with the vast majority putting on hold all existing appointments as well as not scheduling any new appointments for reactive or planned work. Instead some authorities have been redeploying these operatives to work on voids and external work.

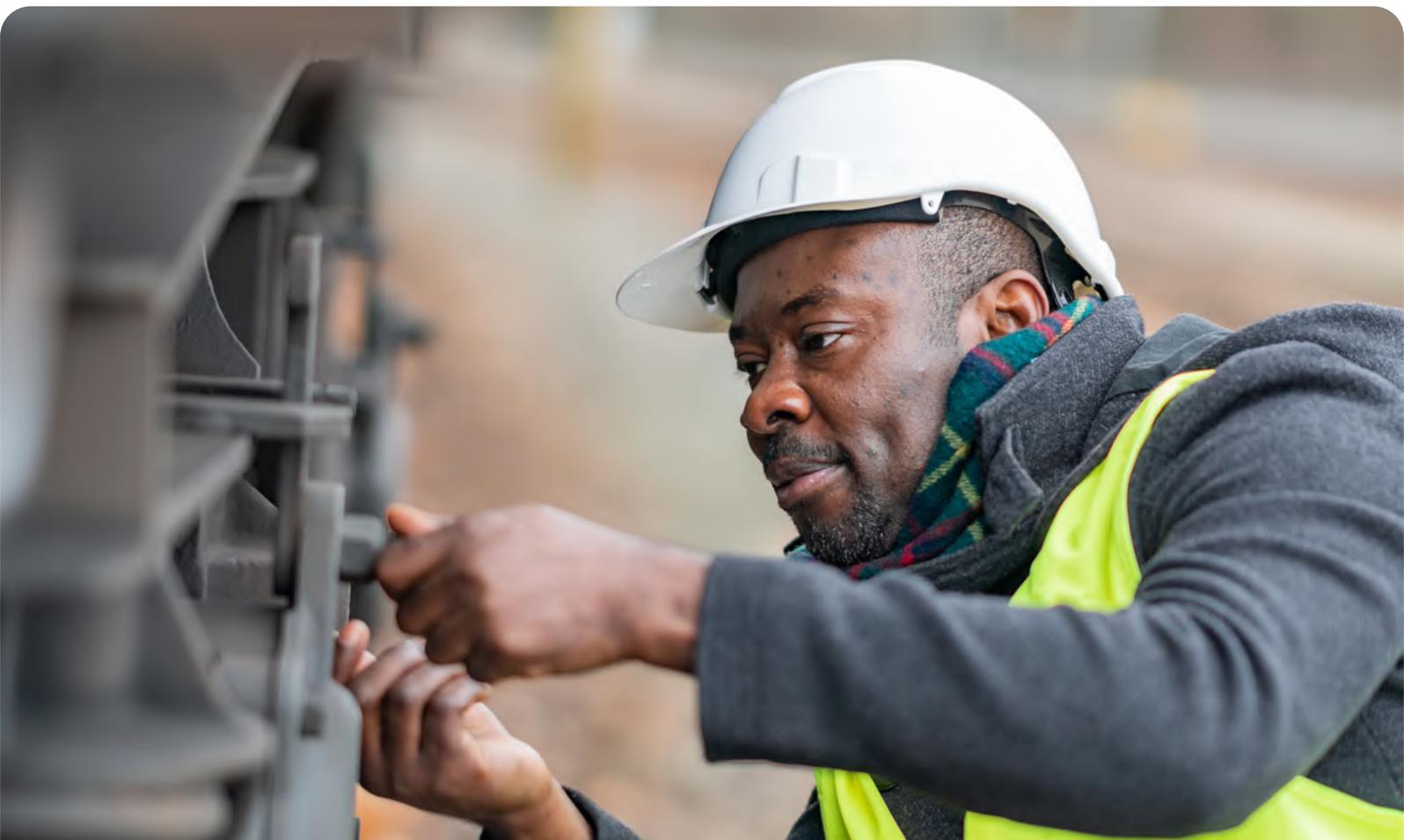
One of the biggest priorities for building maintenance services during these unprecedented times is the continued safety of operatives and tenants. This is being undertaken through a number of measures including risk assessments and method statements prior to entering properties as well as additional PPE such as wipes, plastic gloves and waste sacks, as well as employees with underlying health issues being asked to remain at home to minimise their risk of contracting the virus.

However, there is also a large challenge with an increasing number of no access responses being recorded by local authorities in relation to gas safety checks, with some witnessing no access rates of over 40%. A number of scenarios are leading to this challenge including tenants self-isolating or currently having the virus therefore refusing to grant entry or if this work is contracted out, the contractor being unable to carry out the work due to a reduced number of staff available for work. The Health and Safety Executive have provided guidance on this issue which includes stating that “a landlord has to show that they took all reasonable steps to comply with the law”. The guidance also confirms landlords should ensure they keep up to date records and regular communication with tenants, retrying as soon as possible and as appropriate.

There is a large challenge with an increasing number of no access responses being recorded by local authorities in relation to gas safety checks, with some witnessing no access rates of over 40%.

Coming out of lockdown and with social distancing potentially set to continue for the foreseeable future, there are some further challenges ahead for building maintenance services. These include the potential large back log on repairs, with the length of time required to get everything back on track potentially taking even longer given the social distancing measures which all may continue to have to adhere to. In addition, for some there is a potential increased risk emerging in terms of the impact on capital works including bathroom and kitchen programmes, as well as ensuring all records and reporting information throughout the COVID 19 pandemic are completely up to date and well documented.

- *For more information please contact Louise Melville on lmelville@apse.org.uk*





Jamie Adam
Performance and Quality Officer
Berneslai Homes Construction Services

“Unprecedented times” is an often-cited phrase describing the still unfolding impact of COVID-19. These events continue to redefine normality, upset the pattern of ‘business as usual’, and create challenges and opportunities. Berneslai Homes’ staff efforts are focussed on three themes; ensuring tenants’ and staff safety, ensuring that what needs to be done is done, and envisioning what the future of service provision in Barnsley may look like.

In particular, COVID-19’s impact comes at a time when Barnsley’s property maintenance contract was due to change. This has presented challenges where a contractor due to hand over provision needed to be retained as a provider. This, alongside hard short and long-term staffing decisions as well as the critical need to adapt effective wellbeing and support practices into a predominantly remote-working environment have called for dedicated efforts from all.

Challenges have come from questions such as “How do we best ensure effective communication with all stakeholders?”, “What key messages need to be made?”, “How do we keep motivation and morale up?” and “How do we demonstrate that safety is at the forefront of our minds and that both staff and tenants see this?” The team ensures regular communication and the building up of willingness, confidence and skills in handling concerns around mental health. These aim to strengthen relationships, build future resilience, deal with concerns around job security (including making sure that furloughed staff know this will be on their full salary), motivation, the deficit in social aspects of the working environment whilst ensuring a vital vision for the future is nurtured.

The team ensures regular communication and the building up of willingness, confidence and skills in handling concerns around mental health. These aim to strengthen relationships, building future resilience and dealing with concerns around job security (including making sure that furloughed staff know this will be on their full salary).

Staff have (virtually) got together and created themed photo and memory sharing events online, providing unique opportunities for interaction and strengthening the team dynamic, amongst other events. These, along with the staple diet of assuring, supporting and encouraging frontline staff, helps try to balance the needs of essential service provision in an environment challenged by COVID-19 along with the ongoing vitality of the service and those who provide it. The future is still being written but Berneslai Homes aims for it to be built including the valued experiences being learnt.



Approved
Partners



These are challenging times for local councils and we recognise that they are also of course challenging times for those who supply goods and services to the public sector. In many cases ‘normal’ business has been side-stepped on a temporary basis to enable frontline services to respond to the public health pandemic. Indeed many of APSE’s own services have been directed towards supporting our member councils as they respond to unprecedented challenges.

That being said councils are already working with APSE on remobilisation of services, post COVID-19. That means suppliers remain an important part of the picture for local councils, and in some areas, there has been an increased reliance on suppliers in dealing with COVID-19.

We would therefore like to make you aware, once again, that as an APSE Approved Partner you are welcome to submit your company update together with web links to your products or services for upload onto our COVID-19 web hub supplier page. This is a FREE service to APSE Approved Partners. We hope that this service will keep your company at the fore of those decision makers within APSE’s member local councils. Please send your hub wording, logo and a company web link to Caitlyn King at APSE on cking@apse.org.uk if you wish to make use of this service. This could be a simple message to councils that you are still there for them or details about what you can offer by way of online or telephone services, or news about how you can still deliver products and services in spite of the lockdown.

We are continuing to work with our partner agency Spacehouse to reschedule seminar event dates and we are hopeful that our existing Autumn programme of events will go ahead as scheduled as well as the new dates for rescheduled events.

From all the team at APSE and Spacehouse we hope that you and your team are staying safe and well.

[We hope that you make the most of the supplier pages on the APSE COVID-19 web hub](#)



Why we need data



At this current time, it's never been more crucial to collect data to understand fully the impact and consequences of COVID-19 and how this has impacted on resources and performance across

council services writes APSE's Debbie Johns, Head of Performance Networks.

Post COVID-19, in the recovery period that will follow and in assessing the longer term effects this has had, analysing the impact on frontline services will be critical. And good quality data may well be key in getting fully reimbursed from Government for local efforts in the current emergency.

Many of you may consider that with the service pressures created by responding to the health pandemic the last thing you want to think about is data! Preserve of the Geeks and the Bean-counters – how could data possibly help you now? Well think again!

Let's start with the evidence. Data is the evidence. At this point in time councils are being offered a promissory note by the UK Government – except in this case the fixed sum doesn't exist. The financial support that councils will receive will be determined in the future. The Treasury has not offered a blank cheque to local councils but an offer to deal reasonably with the extra expenditure incurred in dealing with the pandemic. Whilst in some areas we have seen very specific funding pots in very many areas the financial hit of the pandemic will be in the pockets of the frontline budgets.

So now is the time to ensure that you keep good records with the opportunity later to support your expenditure claims; and with that evidence as to how you have mitigated extra costs. When APSE Performance Networks reports next year's data we will be analysing some key data lines to show what the impact of COVID-19 has been on frontline services; not just in cost terms but in productivity and service performance. So here are some things to think about now when it comes to the frontline:

What impact have changes to operational methods had on your operating costs?

For example, social distancing measures, such as separating or reducing loaders from drivers in refuse cabs or providing follow on vehicles for collection points? How has this measure increased fuel or travel costs? What about funeral procedures? Have you purchased disposable webbing to avoid contamination issues at the graveside?

What about the impact on service delivery and performance measures and staffing costs?

Have you prioritised certain waste streams in order to preserve collection of residual waste? What has been the impact on recycling? You will have had to effectively suspend normal school catering services as schools closed so what has been the impact on the numbers of meals served compared to your staffing resources? Where staff have been working differently, possibly seconded to a different department, what will be the impact on your budget?

Clap for councils



What about consumables and new purchases?

Many of you will have had to purchase additional safety equipment or supplies such as gloves, face-masks or even hire in additional fleet or fuel. Some will have incurred additional costs in closing facilities and will incur these again when facilities are re-opened with deep cleans or for example in Leisure legionella testing in wet facilities.

With all of the above it is essential that we understand the impact of COVID-19 on performance; it will not take away the funding issues, which will need to be resolved, but this information will be essential to inform the remobilisation of services. Post COVID-19, in the recovery period that will follow and in assessing the longer term effects this has had, analysing the impact on frontline services will be critical. And good quality data may well be key in getting fully reimbursed from Government for local efforts in the current emergency.

So in the short term, councils are receiving some reimbursements from Government for supporting vulnerable members of the community and keeping key services going with reduced staff levels and delivering a range of services remotely. Performance data will demonstrate the impact during the emergency. However in the longer term, councils will need evidence to predict what resources are needed and evaluate the impact on budgets moving into this and next financial year. Chief Financial Officers will be looking at getting costs under control, such as reducing spending in 'non-essential' areas or by increasing income. To be able to ensure their resilience, councils will need additional support from the Government in the long term, which will rely on good evidence of performance across council services.

As W. Edwards Deming stated "Without data, you're just another person with an opinion."

Information and data provides intelligence on the impact of service changes, 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.

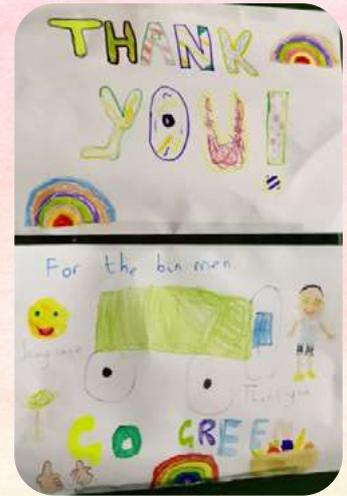
We want to reassure you that APSE performance networks are still here to assist our members in any way that we can. We are working on Year 22 data templates, simplifying and reducing data collection down in a number of areas. We are highlighting again on the data templates any non-essential data and will be publishing a document, to sit alongside the data templates, which shows what data you need to complete to qualify for a core set of performance indicators and the awards performance indicators. We are also giving those authorities who operate an integrated street scene service the option of submitting combined cost and resources data, to further assist the members of APSE Performance Networks. This means that councils operating fully integrated street scene services can qualify for measures for the individual service areas (such as cleanliness of streets and hectares of parks maintained) at the same time as aggregating their cost and resource data for comparison with others operating a similar service.

We know that the spring of 2020 will be a time that none of us forget, but hopefully we will also remember this as a time that local government frontline services came into their own.

- Contact Debbie Johns on djohns@apse.org.uk



Wow! Our waste crews have been blown away by these cards left on bins while out collecting, and one crew reporting being clapped down one street in Narborough yesterday. Thank you so much for every card, compliment, sign and message. We think our crews are awesome too!



Thank you to all the dustbin men
It's much appreciated!
Raha Sedra

Tonight let's clap for all the amazing NHS staff, carers and key workers who are working hard to support the most vulnerable in our society, save lives and keep our country running.
#ClapForOurCarers
#ClapForTheNHS
#ClapForKeyWorkers #TeamSuffolk



Assessing the impact on parks and greenspaces



Local authorities are having to constantly adapt to shifting government and other agency advice, regarding how best to deliver their services in light

of the current pandemic. A hot topic that has sparked fierce debate in the media and amongst the public, APSE Principal Advisor Wayne Priestley analyses the impact COVID has had on parks and greenspaces.

48%

of respondents stated that they had seen increases or at least no reductions in visitor footfall



Taken from APSE's COVID-19 Parks resilience survey



The promotion of the use of greenspaces is seen by Government and health practitioners as an important part of the response to COVID-19, by providing recreational and well-being opportunities to the population who were finding their daily ability to move freely more and more compromised in an attempt to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus

However, within the parks and greenspace service areas there are conflicting demands of making sure such areas are open, but also trying to manage the social distancing of those who are using these spaces. If social distancing cannot be achieved, then many parks and greenspaces could face closure, as has occurred on several occasions. Furthermore, a recent government ruling is that if large gatherings do occur then the police now have the authority to disperse crowds or even fine offenders.

In order to promote social distancing, many have erected notices informing users of the need for social distancing based on government guidance and are supporting this with social media campaigns and use of the local press. A large percentage have also roped off play areas and benches. To back up these moves local authorities are liaising closely with the police and community support officers regarding the ability to enforce social distancing if required.

One area which is being implemented strongly is the closure of car parks; many councils are locking main entrance points to prevent vehicular access and managing entrance points for purely pedestrians and cyclists.

In spite of the need to close all of these facilities, parks and open spaces are still accessible, and regularly being used by the general public.

The findings of an APSE survey issued on 28 April showed that 48% of respondents stated that they had seen increases or at least no reductions in visitor footfall; many reported that new visitors were using parks many for the first time. Where decline in usage had taken place, many commented that this was due to the reduction in tourists who would normally have made up a substantial element of the users and now mainly local people are the main visitors. Also, the closure of car parks will have meant that those who travelled to the park by car were probably now using more local green spaces.



The issue of social distancing does now seem to be more readily adhered to. The recent APSE survey showed that over 90% of respondents stated that the majority of park users were observing the need to socially distance. Where problems did occur, some reported street drinkers were gathering, groups of people taking exercise such as cyclists, runners and dog walkers and occasionally people forcing their way into playgrounds, in particular skate parks.

To help take some of the visitor pressure off the larger parks and open spaces, local authorities are also promoting the use of local green spaces more, particularly in light of the restrictions now being imposed on the amount of time the public are being told to spend outdoors.

The recent APSE survey showed that over 90% of respondents stated that the majority of park users were observing the need to socially distance.

However whilst it is acknowledged that the use of parks and greenspace is important to the nation's health and wellbeing, there are other services which are critical to the public health of residents such as refuse collection. This service area has been designated as a key service and, as such, services such as parks and greenspaces have had to, in some instances, reduce certain areas of their normal work, to allow the redeployment of parks staff to support the collection of domestic refuse.

The types of service reductions include grass cutting in parks, country parks and highway verges, provision of services in country parks, reductions in the maintenance of sports pitches and less frequent cuts/maintenance of golf and bowling greens. Indeed in some instances reduced frequencies have not been enough to allow the redeployment of staff and in these instances, service delivery has

ceased altogether. The most reported examples being the provision of bowling greens and golf courses, provision of car parks, provision and maintenance of sports pitches, cutting of highway verges, cutting of grass in parks and open spaces and the general maintenance of country parks.

Of those staff who remain to look after the parks and greenspaces local authorities have had to ensure that they are being properly protected against Coronavirus. The most common measures taken to ensure this, have included: issuing hand sanitisers and enhanced access to hand washing facilities, reducing numbers in vehicles, enhanced information to staff on the need for social distancing. A small minority have also been issued face masks.

Other initiatives have included: spreading staff more widely across parks when working, introducing week on week off rotas and staggering finishing times to prevent staff congregating at depots.

Despite the reductions in facilities and reduced service delivery in many of the UK's parks, they are still acknowledged as providing a critical service to maintaining the mental and physical health of the nation and will continue to remain so during and after the Coronavirus pandemic.

- APSE issued a briefing on our COVID-19 parks and greenspaces survey on 28 April. [You can read the full briefing here.](#)

For more information please contact Wayne Priestley on wpriestley@apse.org.uk

Refuse and recycling: A priority service



The need to maintain refuse collection has been seen as critical both by the UK Government and the World Health Organisation. APSE Principal Advisors, Abi Ademiluyi, explores the impact of COVID-19 and how the service is now looking towards remobilisation.

The findings of an APSE survey issued on 15 April showed that all local authorities are collecting residual domestic waste, 83% are collecting recyclables. Approximately, 11% were collecting residual waste only.



Acknowledging the importance of parks is crucial, but the need to keep refuse collection operational has been given priority, both by local authorities and by Government itself due to the potential public health issues and secondary negative impacts such as increased fly-tipping which has resulted as a consequence of many local authorities closing their Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC's).

As with parks and open spaces the need to maintain refuse collection (including the collection of recyclables) has been seen as critical both by Governments across the UK and the World Health Organisation. Waste services are identified as being 'essential public services' with regards to not only dealing with infected waste created by practices designed to minimise the spread of COVID-19, but also in relation to preventing possible secondary impacts upon health and the environment, most notably the fly-tipping of waste, caused by the potential for reduced waste collection services.

Therefore key decisions in relation to which service elements will be provided have had to be made in light of potential reductions in available staff affected directly by the Coronavirus or through the need to self-isolate.

Priority ratings have been allocated by many local authorities to the different service elements. General waste collections are clearly being given the highest priority, followed by dry recycling collections, food waste and clinical collections. Ancillary services such as green waste collections and bulky waste collections have already been ceased by some local authorities. The findings of an APSE survey issued on 15 April showed that all local authorities are collecting residual domestic waste, 83% are collecting recyclables. Approximately, 11% were collecting residual waste only.

With regards to garden waste, 48% have ceased collections, whilst 66% had stopped all bulky waste collections. Therefore it does appear that contingency plans have been successful in maintaining a high level of service in relation to waste collection, mostly by a mixture of improving staff safety and re-deploying staff from other services such as parks, Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC's) and street cleansing.

The ability to move staff from HWRC's has been possible due to the decision by many local authorities to close these facilities very early on in the lock-down period due to concerns about the ability to guarantee social distancing. The aforementioned APSE survey showed that 80% reported they had closed their HWRC facilities and this will also be the case with many other providers of HWRC's outside the local authority. Only 3% of local authorities reported that their HWRC's were fully or partially open.



There has been a good deal of debate about the decision to close HWRC's, caused mainly by the increase in fly-tipping. This has been attributed to people having clear-outs, undertaking DIY and increased gardening activities. APSE's survey showed that 36% of local authorities have stated that they are experiencing increased fly-tipping levels.

As APSE direct goes to press we are of course aware that Local Government Minister Robert Jenrick MP is pressing for HWRCs to open. At a recent online forum organised by APSE with Waste Managers to discuss remobilisation many of course share the Minister's ambitions to enable residents to make use of these valued facilities however before that can happen, there are concerns on issues of social distancing and the vexed question of whether a journey to the local tip is considered 'essential travel'. A further concern is around onward reprocessing, suggesting in many areas there will be a need to limit the waste streams collected, at least initially.

There are also concerns as to managing demand, ensuring that eager residents do not block local roads, so traffic management is a major concern alongside making sure that everyone does not turn up on the same day! Some ideas coming forward suggest the use of 'permit' systems, based on local post-codes, called out on the council website, car registrations, such as those ending with an odd number one day and an even number the next day, and allowing just one person per household who must be able to unload safely without assistance.

The success of maintaining service delivery has had a great deal to do with both ensuring the safety of staff in work, as well as covering staff absence. Including in this has been the need to make sure that existing stringent health and safety conditions are maintained and that any redeployed staff are being given the necessary training in what is recognised as a high-risk industry.

Some of the measures taken to ensure staff safety which were identified in the APSE survey have included:

- Enforcing social distancing at depots and canteens (100%).
- Issuing of hand sanitisers and cleansing gels (95%).
- Deep cleaning of vehicles (80%).
- Revised arrangements for numbers of staff in refuse collection vehicles (70% with 63% of respondents stating they were operating a driver plus one loader policy).
- Double gloving for operatives (45%).

- Allowing hand washing stops and providing keys to public conveniences (31%).
- Issuing face masks (17%).

Other initiatives have included the provision of plastic screens in cabs, allowing loaders to travel in their own cars or council vehicles to collection meeting points and as far as possible keeping the same crew together to reduce the number of opportunities for cross-infection.

The APSE survey showed that sickness levels are currently under 20% amongst those who responded to the survey and this included those who were self-isolating.

As well as having enough staff to collect waste, the need for vehicles and an end point for the waste collected is vitally important and these were two areas the APSE survey asked questions on. The findings showed that 70% reported that sufficient fleet was available for the refuse collection service with only 8% said they had any future concerns about vehicle availability in the coming weeks.

The findings showed that 70% reported that sufficient fleet was available for the refuse collection service with only 8% said they had any future concerns about vehicle availability in the coming weeks.

Regarding the availability of landfill and reprocessing capacity, 94% reported that their landfill facilities were operating as normal and 83% stated that their reprocessing end points were operating as normal.



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It was also re-assuring to know that 71% of respondents to the survey had contingency plans for collected recyclables.

Undoubtedly it is those actions taken by local authorities, together with practical advice provided in documents such as the WISH guidance on '[COVID-19 and Waste Management Activities](#)' to which APSE contributed, that have and are helping to maintain higher levels of waste collection service than were initially anticipated.

It was also re-assuring to know that 71% of respondents to the survey had contingency plans for collected recyclables.

At the time of writing, it is clear that the pandemic is still impacting on the daily lives of millions of people across the UK and globally. Changes to everyday routines are becoming the norm, as we try to live our lives in the face of the current pandemic. However it is comforting to know, that despite all these changes and dangers we are facing, our local authorities are still providing the services we depend upon in order to maintain both our health, and well-being, in what are very strange and challenging times.

- *For more information please contact Abi Ademiluyi on aademiluyi@apse.org.uk*

[Click here to see the results of APSE's COVID-19 Refuse Resilience Survey.](#)

**Doug Sharp
Head of Waste Management
Hull City Council**

We've managed to cope reasonably well on the whole with our response to the COVID-19 emergency through what we'd probably say is a combination of good proactive and pragmatic management; and local circumstances! We have a front line establishment of 149 staff to deliver the collection services and cover sickness absence, holidays etc. In anticipation of services being stretched and in line with our business continuity plan we initially stopped any further bulky item appointments to prioritise other collection services. To add further resilience we recruited, trained and retained 20 new agency workers. We also reviewed service criticality across streetscene with waste collection being prioritised ahead of non-essential highways, grounds maintenance and street cleansing services. Although our aim was to continue delivering the waste service without impacting on other service areas, a further 75 streetscene staff were trained on waste collection with a focus on HGV drivers as a contingency.

Like all authorities, besides the provision of supplies and reiterating the need for good hygiene practices, the biggest challenges have been coping with the level of self-isolation and the introduction of social distancing measures both at the depot and in-cab. To date, our level of self-isolation has peaked at 13% on top of a prevailing sickness absence level of 7-8% and no staff were in the most vulnerable group that needed to self-isolate for 12 weeks, so the impact of staff absence has not been on the scale we feared may happen.

To date, our level of self-isolation has peaked at 13% on top of a prevailing sickness absence level of 7-8% and no staff were in the most vulnerable group that needed to self-isolate for 12 weeks

Managing social distancing in the depot proved to be the biggest challenge. Even with 'supermarket style' queuing arrangements at the start and end of shift we reluctantly decided to move to a 'task and finish' approach to working which I believe has been the signal most important decision. Whilst culturally it goes against everything we've tried to move away from over the last 10 to 15 years, it (not unsurprisingly) resolved the depot social distancing issues and boosted staff morale, a significant contributory factor in maximising attendance.

Although we didn't initially move to limit the number of staff in cab, we have since introduced restrictions with a maximum of 2 in-cab with all loaders allowed to travel independently to the collection round, after reporting for duty at the depot. The combination of 'task and finish' and independent travel to the collection round has created a 'work/life balance' the staff are very happy with (whilst the emergency period lasts) but also demonstrated to our workforce that we were listening to their concerns. It's not an ideal situation but a case, in our view, of weighing up the different risks, whilst maintaining service delivery. At the time of writing, we've managed to keep all waste collection services (with the exception of bulky items) fully operational, without disruption. APSE along with LARAC, NAWDO, WISH and others have demonstrated what a great sector network we have in place that's proved invaluable in the absence of early formal guidance.



**COVID-19
Information Hub:
APSE's frontline
service support
network**

CORONAVIRUS
PROTECT YOURSELF & OTHERS

Responding to the frontline



Head of APSE Solutions, Andy Mudd, explores the issues of reality that will face frontline services and the help that is at hand from experts in the field.

The extraordinary resilience and adaptability of our public services, even after a decade of austerity, is once again to the fore. For some councils the challenge of keeping services going in the face of lockdown comes on the back of weeks of dealing with unprecedented levels of flooding. Financial insecurity and the long-term crisis that is climate change have not gone away. At best they are on hold but once the immediate issues thrown up by the COVID-19 crisis have been responded to there will be little time to relax. The changed short, medium, and long-term realities create new challenges that will test our ability to adapt and respond like never before.

The immediate focus for council leadership teams is to ensure that vital services are maintained. With large numbers of staff working from home and the risk of COVID related absences through illness, self-isolation or shielding measures, there is a need for agility and swift decision making. As some services are put on hold, others are under huge pressure but it is not always possible to simply move people around. Leisure centre staff cannot be expected to turn their hand to social care or refuse collection without a significant level of retraining, and there is neither the time, nor capacity to provide it. In any event, once the lockdown period comes to an end, the on-hold services will be under immediate pressure to remobilise and, in some cases can be expected to see a swift increase in demand, as society and the economy seek to make up for lost ground. Registrars, planners and leisure providers, amongst many others can expect to be run off their feet once Britain emerges from isolation.

It is always difficult to predict what will happen in the longer term but it would be foolish not to expect and plan for a serious economic downturn and all that implies in terms of an increase in social problems. Councils will, as ever, be the frontline response and questions remain as to what resources will genuinely be put in place, both to compensate for the additional expenditure attributable to COVID-19, and to recalibrate our neighbourhood level services, back to realistic levels of funding. If COVID-19 has taught us anything it is the risk to services presented by hollowed out local government. This suggests a renewed emphasis on efficiency and in many cases exploring the ongoing viability of commercial income generation, particularly as some stable clients, such as schools, have been forced to close through the COVID emergency. And let us not forget climate change. Whilst that emergency may have been temporarily pushed down the agenda it is in the end still the greatest existential threat

mankind has ever faced. The global experience of the pandemic may prove to be something of a wakeup call and prompt a renewed emphasis on carbon reduction. Councils will continue to lead the way in pushing for a sustainable future.

The challenges are immediate, pressing and unrelenting. APSE, as always, will be there to support and encourage UK local government to respond positively and effectively. For its part, APSE Solutions will continue to offer expert advice and support through its extensive network of interim managers and consultants. From filling gaps in current capacity through to help with planning the services of the future, APSE Solutions aims to be on the journey with the APSE membership. We are also aware that your exhausted staff teams may need additional support when remobilisation efforts kick-in, and again we have people here to help.

From filling gaps in current capacity through to help with planning the services of the future, APSE Solutions aims to be on the journey with the APSE membership. We are also aware that your exhausted staff teams may need additional support when remobilisation efforts kick-in, and again we have people here to help.

As part of APSE's not-for-profit family of services, we are confident that we can support our vital frontline services rise to the challenges. Many of these services can of course be offered remotely using online access through Microsoft Teams, conference calls, Skype or Zoom. Whatever works for you as a client. We know that inevitably many recovery plans will need to consider the financial impact on service budgets, particularly as many neighbourhood services are heavily reliant upon income generation as part of their business plan. This may mean an independent review of the business plan looking at anticipated income against revised projections and anticipated losses. We know that this alone will not reinstate those losses but it will at least ensure your budget changes are explicable to the Treasurer! Moreover we also have legal expertise with some associates who specialise in public administration and contract law who stand ready to assist on those more complex commercial matters.

So please do not hesitate to contact me or one of the team if there is anything, we can do to help you. In the meantime, its hats off to the frontline once again!

Contact, Andy Mudd, Head of APSE Solutions on email amudd@apse.org.uk

- *APSE Solutions has developed a specific new service to help local councils with a dedicated COVID-19 Helpline. This includes sourcing interim managers and call off consultancy support; offering new flexible ways to help you cope with the new challenges. [Click here for more information.](#)*

Delivering returns of 20-25% better than a live auction

What to do for the best, when it comes to selling your old equipment, plant and vehicles has always been a challenge for the local authority fleet manager.

The move towards more sustainable fleets has been with us for a while now but, add in the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak and there is plenty of uncertainty about both the nature of future vehicle fleet operations and the size and profile of future budgets. After years of local authority budgetary austerity, a further re-think about where every penny can be saved is needed.

I recently caught up with Simon Morley, Business Development Director for GPSV, the specialist vehicle reseller. The GPSV team has recently completed a buy-out of GovPlanet UK from its parent company, and re-branding it as GPSV Ltd, reflecting its focus on government, plant and specialist vehicles.

GPSV manages many re-sales contracts with clients in the public sector, which includes numerous local authorities waste, highways and ground care teams and a range of commercial fleet providers. They also manage disposal contracts for over 25 fire, police and ambulance services, plus handle all the UK MoD's plant and heavy specialist vehicles disposals. I asked Simon what the outcome of the management buy-out and re-branding would mean for the sector. Here's what he had to say:

"Our team remains the same and our service commitment, together with achieving the best re-sale prices, remains the cornerstone of our client proposition. We do this by brokering a direct sale to the end user and not charging buyer fees, thereby passing the maximum amount, back to the seller. We also offer online auctions, which reach a substantial number of overseas buyers."

Simon went on to say... "We leverage a huge data base of buyers from the UK and overseas, refined over four years as GovPlanet and from our links with our sister company, APSV Ltd, which has over 15 years' experience in the local authority, grounds and agriculture sectors. We utilise this knowledge every day, routinely returning better prices than would typically be achieved from traditional auctions or indeed from trade-in pricing."

I asked Simon how in a crowded market place, they differentiate from a traditional auction house or trade buyer.

"We like to be able to sit down to plan disposals with our clients so we can advise on optimum disposal timing and likely returns. This differs from

a conventional pricing exercise, which tends to look at historical UK live auction data and ignores future market conditions and overseas markets. We work closely with customers to support de-fleets or new equipment acquisition plans; our aim is always to achieve the best sale prices, not just rely on on-the-day live auction dynamics.

Secondly, we use multiple sales channels: if we can sell direct we will, since that always yields a better price. Alternatively, our online auctions reach a substantial overseas buyer base, reducing the variations often seen in local UK auctions. Our approach gives fleet and budget managers greater assurance about disposal cash flows and it also delivers returns of 20-25% better than a live auction – and often much higher than that. The GPSV team believes our service levels and price performance present a very compelling offer to the public sector."

If you would like to know more about how GPSV can work with you in planning and executing a more cost effective strategy for disposing of your ground care vehicles, plant and machinery, contact Simon Morley on 07914 093187 or email him at smorley@gpsv.co.uk

Further information is also available by:

- calling the office on 01539 267267
- emailing info@gpsv.co.uk
- or visiting the web site at www.gpsv.co.uk

Our online auctions reach a substantial overseas buyer base, reducing the variations often seen in local UK auctions



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smorley@gpsv.co.uk



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Catering services: How councils have adapted



Following the government announcement on 20 March that schools would be required to close for all except the children of key workers and those children identified as vulnerable, local authorities had to adapt their catering services and implement business continuity plans. APSE Principal Advisor Victoria Hacking offers a summary of the changes that have taken place across the UK.

The catering service has implemented a variety of solutions to supply lunches to children eligible for free school meals. The most common solution reported has been to provide daily packed lunches that can be collected from the school or designated hub in the community. Other catering services have opted for a weekly food bag containing either the ingredients for lunches such as bread, butter, cheese. An alternative approach has been to supply enough ingredients for basic meals with recipe cards, for example, pasta, soups etc. There have been a variety of challenges such as ensuring the children in most need receive the food, allergen control and gauging the uptake to allow the correct number of meals to be prepared.

The figures show that approximately 2% of children are attending school at the current time, a figure which differs in local areas. In addition, to the councils that are opting to supply these children with pack lunches, authorities have reported that they are providing a hot meal for the children attending school. This service is much reduced with minimal staff in the kitchen and one option menu such as soup and a sandwich. In some cases, the lunches are being made in a central kitchen and distributed to the schools using a non-contact delivery method.

In England, the government launched the National Voucher Scheme where schools could supply vouchers to their pupils eligible for Free School Meals at a value of £15 and this provision was extended to cover the Easter Holidays. Local authorities in Wales and Scotland are not covered under this scheme and are encouraged to put in place local solutions; implementing voucher schemes of their own. These are similar to the scheme in England but are being administered by the council themselves. Since the introduction of the National Voucher Scheme there have been reports from schools that the system is struggling to cope with the demand and, as such, schools are currently looking to work with councils and other catering providers to put in place alternative provision.

Excluding the National Voucher Scheme, catering provision is agreed at a local level. There is therefore a range of provision in place for the holiday period which ranges from nothing through to a provision that is consistent with the approach being taken in term time.

There is an increasing number of people registering for Universal Credit due to their change in personal circumstances and in some areas the number of eligible children for free school meals has seen significant increases which is presenting an additional challenge due to initial business continuity plans reportedly being based on existing numbers.

The provision of food for vulnerable people self-isolating is, in many instances across the UK, not being administered by the catering service. The procedure implemented by the government involves large food suppliers delivering food parcels to a central council-owned site such as a warehouse and volunteers delivering the food to vulnerable people.

- For more information contact Victoria Hacking on vhacking@apse.org.uk

Voices from the frontline



James Holmes **Head of Commercial Services** **Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council**

The decision to close schools to the majority of pupils from 23 March marked a huge change in delivering a school meals service for the 12,000 pupils we serve on a normal day. Established Business Continuity Plans sprang into action quickly and we were soon preparing 7500 packed lunches to be picked up from Children's Centres and other public buildings across the Borough to all pupils who would normally receive a Free School Meal. This support in providing food to pupils was essential in a borough where means tested Free School Meal eligibility was 38% prior to COVID-19 taking hold - a figure which has no doubt grown during the crisis due to the increase in Universal Credit applications that have been experienced.

However it was soon apparent that to maximise social distancing and to cut down on unnecessary journeys it wasn't going to be sustainable to offer packed lunches in the Borough. So whilst this continued, and in anticipation of the Government's announced voucher system, the School Meals Service pro-actively sought out a voucher scheme for our school customers to use. Through working collaboratively with our elected members – who were particularly determined to see that no child who accessed a Free School Meal went hungry, education colleagues and schools in the Borough we were able to issue c.11,000 vouchers to those eligible for a free school meal by Monday 30 March and maximise a safe working environment for our c.350 school meals staff.

This safe working environment incorporating social distancing remained in place over the Easter period when, traditionally, schools are shut. Almost half of our school kitchens remained open - making sure that pupils and staff in school had access to a freshly prepared meal each day. There were still staff working in kitchens on Good Friday and Easter Monday with a quarter of kitchens open providing food for pupils and staff. The commitment of our frontline staff to play their part in supporting the fight against COVID-19 was evident with large numbers of our workforce volunteering to be in work.

The commitment of our frontline staff to play their part in supporting the fight against Covid-19 was evident with large numbers of our workforce volunteering to be in work.

At the same time as frontline staff playing their part and showing great flexibility by adapting to different situations on a daily basis, the management team has also had to significantly adapt. As a geographically compact borough home working has never really been required on a day to day basis, the team of 8 who manage frontline and back office functions for the 700 staff employed across School Meals and Building Cleaning Service have been meeting remotely via video conferencing and other platforms such as WhatsApp to keep in touch with colleagues who in some instances they have seen most of their working days for the past 20 years. Whilst everyone has adapted to these challenging times, the entire team have already started to think about the lessons we have learnt in the past four weeks and how we can adapt our service when the country starts to return to a degree of normality.

Mark Hunter **Service Manager – Food and Catering** **East Ayrshire Council**

Within days of the lockdown being announced, 11 Food Larders were up and running, including a central delivery point for Fareshare (our third sector partner) to drop off food deliveries and membership costs being picked up by East Ayrshire Council to provide our local partners with less financial burden.

The food is being distributed by a mixture of volunteer drivers and our own employees, from the central depot and to date providing 730 family packs weekly and over 2011kgs of food! The food is being supplemented with Catering Services own supplies with Fareshare struggling to cope with the demand due to the pandemic.

Simultaneously the Catering Service and an army of volunteers has been providing 'Emergency Family Meals' on a daily basis for families with children in receipt of free school meals or changed circumstances. The first day saw them provide nearly 2500 meals and to date they are providing almost 6000 meals a day delivered out to families from 18 production kitchens across the Authority. In just short of three weeks they have provided over 75,000 meals!

The daily packs include sandwich, milk and a yogurt or cookie for children and a chilled meal that can be reheated for example beef stew and potatoes, chicken curry and rice, macaroni cheese, chicken casserole.

For the Easter weekend 1,600 boxes with food provisions for over 5,000 meals were prepared for every family to cover the four day public holiday period. The boxes, along with recipe ideas, ranging from eggs, bread, fruit and even pizza bases!

For the Easter weekend 1,600 boxes with food provisions for over 5,000 meals were prepared for every family to cover the four day four

There are 66 Families - including 86 children - who have been nominated by a school to receive a 'Magic Breakfast' parcel every fortnight which includes for example bagels, cereals and porridge.

Whilst 'Shielding' parcels are being provided by the Government to all those who have received a letter from them as they are high risk, some cannot wait for these parcels to arrive and emergency parcels are being sent out to support in the interim.

Our team have received many messages of positive feedback from families during this period.

Every day's a school day!



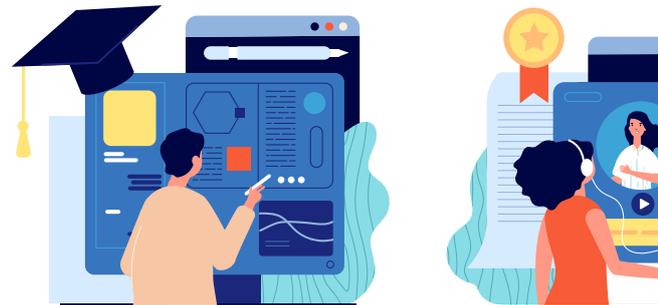
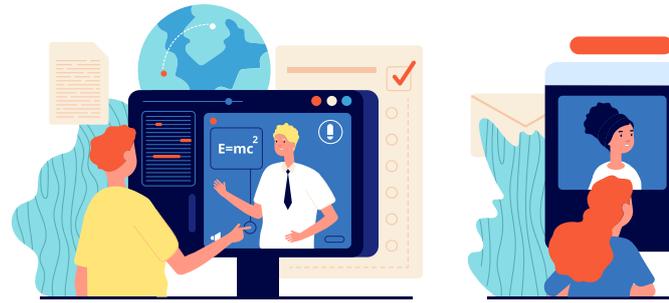
Just a few short weeks ago the UK like other countries in Europe was looking forward to the spring. After a long dreary winter new plans would be forged and many service managers started

to look forward to developing services and their workforce to meet the challenges of 2020-2021. Then the world changed. Fiona Sutton-Wilson, APSE Head of Training, shares her thoughts on making the most out of a very different situation and ensuring we capture the opportunities for learning and development.

As the saying goes 'every day's a school day' and haven't we all learned that in the past few weeks! Going from 'business as usual' to local councils deploying staff to home working, seconding staff to new roles, and being thrown in at the deep end to manage unique situations, from emergency closures of public facilities, to ensuring welfare provision for the most vulnerable people in our communities, it is once again local government frontline services that have donned the metaphorical capes and come to the rescue.

Whilst the speed of response is commendable there is also a risk that the 'day job' gets forgotten, and alongside that well thought-through training needs and staff development plans that create the very resilience within frontline services that are carrying communities through this crisis. Like all local authorities, you will no doubt have staff who are actively engaged, as key workers, carrying out vital services. However, you may also have staff who are working at home, or remotely, and with that space away from the usual office or depot environment, could usefully engage in developing new skills during this period; and you may be using the time to refresh your training and development plans to address whatever the future holds.

APSE Training has been developing its online offer to support authorities as we move through the current challenging climate towards the new normal. APSE can help you with emerging training needs within your workforce. Now is an ideal time to learn new skills, refresh old ones, build capacity and reinforce resilience in the workforce.



APSE training is offering the following on-line services to support you during this time:

Training

We provide a varied range of useful and engaging courses to help councils deliver efficient and effective services across departments. We are delivering most of these online for small groups, within the comfort of your own home or where ever you are working remotely.

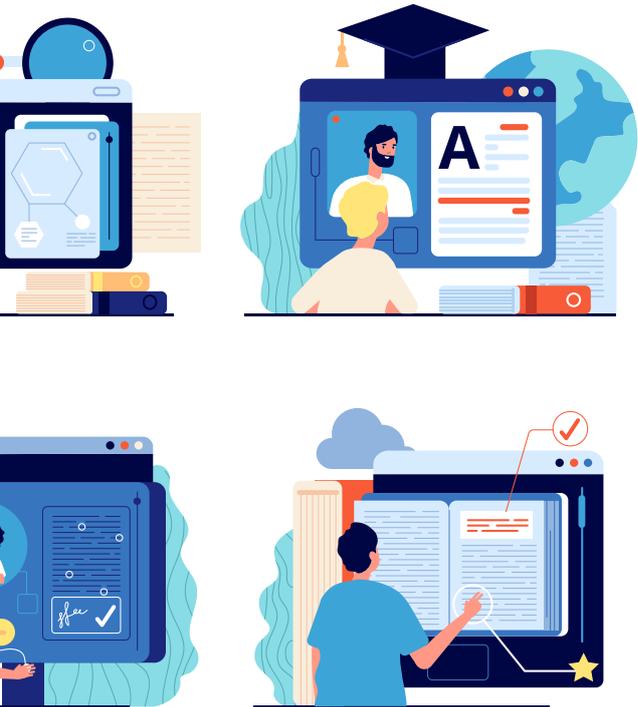
One-to-one coaching

If you are looking for professional development as you move through your career or want to hone your skills to meet emerging challenges, we can support you through this process, with bespoke packages tailored to your needs.

Psychometric Testing

Our on-line service is incredibly helpful for authorities looking to recruit new staff or redeploy existing staff to new teams or roles. In addition, if you are setting up a new task force, or project team, our supportive assessment processes can help you to shape the ideal team. If you would like APSE Training to help you with your recruitment process as we move out of lockdown, please contact us to find out more about our on-line assessment centre. We compliment this with our brand-new training course "Induction to Local Government".

Our online programme:



The Practice of Lone Working (including working at home)

This course explores best practice in the health, safety and welfare of lone workers, to protect local authority staff in the current climate, whether working remotely or at home.

Carbon Literacy for the Frontline

Whether your council has declared a climate emergency or not, we need to foster a low carbon culture. All officers and councillors will be expected to contribute to a corporate climate emergency or climate change action plan. This Carbon Literacy training will provide support and information which will help in making a meaningful contribution.



Project Management in Local Government



This introductory course is designed to take participants through a six-step project management methodology that they can confidently and effectively apply upon their return to their authority, to make a real difference to the projects with which they are involved.

Presentation Skills

This course is designed to equip you with practical takeaways and deliverable techniques to give confident verbal presentations, in front of a live audience, online or as a recording (e.g. podcast).



Principles of Contract Management *Masterclass*

This course aims to give a practical overview to operational managers seeking to improve their skills in this area and help them face the challenges of managing contracts in a local authority context.

Improving Your Written Communication Skills

APSE Training has developed this communication skills toolkit to help local authority staff improve writing skills for many forms of communication, such as reports, briefings, emails, press releases and leaflets.



Training Needs Analysis

If you are refreshing your training and development plans and need specialist support to help you, in a friendly advisory capacity, we can assist you with this. If you are looking to conduct training needs assessments, we can support you using a methodology which asks the right questions, analyses responses and identifies solutions which embed learning.

APSE training is a responsive service – if you identify a need, we will do all we can to meet it. We are here to support and champion our amazing local authorities, across the UK. Whether you want to explore on-line training for people working at home or remotely, or you're thinking about your HR or organisational development needs, as we move towards the new normal, our flexible approach can help you build resilience and capacity across your authority or in a specific service area.

Please complete this [Expression of Interest form](#) or if you would prefer to discuss our offer in person, please don't hesitate to contact Fiona Sutton-Wilson, Head of APSE Training: fsuttonwilson@apse.org.uk.

Energising energy management



Head of APSE Energy, Phil Brennan explains why COVID-19 responses within local authorities should not exclude the role of energy managers and those tackling climate change and

renewable energy initiatives.



Whilst quite rightly councils have focused on the immediacy of a response to COVID-19 there are longer terms issues which are emerging from the debate around the pandemic and our response to it. The Government has acted quickly to promote support from the big energy suppliers for those on pre-payment meters and those in danger of fuel poverty for example. From a wider perspective, re-assurances were given about the national grid's ability to cope with extra demands on it as a result of changes in working arrangements for many. As it turns out overall demand has dropped and renewables are making up a much greater portion of generation due to recent weather conditions.

Energy, climate and sustainability are intrinsically linked of course. Looking globally. It has not taken long for images to circulate on social media of the world's hidden views, from previously smog obscured images of the Taj Mahal, to the normally traffic congested streets of Rome, now clear in spring sunshine. If there is a small glimmer of positivity coming from COVID-19 it is that we can do things differently and make a real difference to the world in which we live.

There has been a huge shift in behaviours over the past month in the UK mirrored across the world. The nature of the dramatic changes we are seeing in order to stop the spread of the virus is leading to empty streets, people restricted to home, changing work arrangements, huge public sector spending and a knock on effect on local and global economies – a situation very few would have imagined pre pandemic. It is the imminence of the threat which has prompted the response and a good thing too.

Those with responsibilities in the energy and climate change field will be thinking ahead. How can we apply the actions and lessons from the current emergency to a climate emergency which many perceive to be too far into the future to need such radical responses? Perception is vital here – the message about climate emergency is spreading but it needs to happen more quickly.

In terms of energy the actions we take now must fit with our future plans and it is vital that in our post-COVID-19 period we re-energise climate emergency action plans.

Clap for councils



Leicester City Council



Have you made a rainbow for your window? Lots of children in #Leicester have - and we love seeing their pictures when we're out and about, doing our jobs or enjoying our daily exercise.



Thank you to everyone who's posted a #SoTRainbows picture. Here are some more fantastic photos from across #StokeonTrent - including one thanking our bin men. Have you uploaded yours? Use #SoTRainbows and tag @SoTCityCouncil so we can share the virtual trail of positivity



Inverclyde council

Thanks to the residents of Skye Road for their brilliant message to our refuse collectors. It made their day. #InverclydeCares



Local authorities manage in the here and now as well as looking to the future. In terms of energy the actions we take now must fit with our future plans and it is vital that in our post-COVID-19 period we re-energise climate emergency action plans. In the short term there are really benefits to managing energy more efficiently and spreading that message to local businesses too.

So, if like many other councils COVID-19 has distracted you from focusing on the climate emergency, in terms of the larger scale projects, we would suggest that you can still make a difference to your goals by focusing on energy prices and energy consumptions.

In discussions with Mike Chan from APSE Energy partners Beond group, we have looked at the responsibilities councils have to keeping their local businesses informed on energy matters. The main issues we spoke about included:-

- The need for business to check renewal dates for contracts – many will end at this time of year and the 'deemed rates' that kick in if renewal is missed are very expensive;
- Some contracts have minimum usage levels which will result in penalty charges – check your contracts for these;
- Read your meters if your demand has reduced – relying on estimates will put money in the suppliers' pockets and impact your cash flow;
- If you have to cancel direct debits you may be charged security deposits to continue supply thereafter – be aware;
- Avoid short terms contracts if that is all your supplier is offering – they are expensive;
- Some suppliers are not quoting for certain sectors – don't panic there are plenty of alternative suppliers out there.
- Some of the above advice is directly applicable to local authorities as large energy users.

It is also highly relevant to large and small businesses in local areas. Many of these do not operate with any capacity to manage energy use on a regular basis – they agree on a price they like for the term of the contract and sign up. When their focus is elsewhere, they can fall into the kind of trap noted above so this kind of advice is very helpful to them. By spreading this message local authorities can support their local economies especially the SME sector and hopefully contribute to a stable national economy post COVID-19.

There will be a renewed focus on risk management and emergency planning once we are past the pandemic stage – energy and climate change will be at the heart of that debate globally, nationally and locally with councils having a fundamental role to play

- *The municipalisation of energy will enable local authorities to contribute to tackling climate change as well as a number of other outcomes and is an essential approach for any council that is declaring a climate emergency and setting a carbon neutrality target.*

For further information about how your council can become more energy efficient, please visit the [APSE Energy web hub](#) - the unrivalled online resource for all things municipal energy-related. For more information contact Phil Brennan on pbrennan@apse.org.uk

How are bereavement services coping?

APSE conducted a resilience survey which attracted 79 respondents from council cemetery and crematoria services, which explored how these vital services are coping during the pandemic, which has sadly, but inevitably, increased demand.

The vast majority of services are continuing including grave digging, operation and maintenance of cremators and continuation of chapel services. However, a number of services have been suspended with 69% suspending books of remembrance, over 60% suspending the scattering of ashes, with over 42% saying they have reduced onsite office facilities and 21.3% having closed onsite offices completely.

72.6% of respondent say that all of their facilities remain open to the public, for example with cemetery grounds open to the public to tend graves, however 7 respondents reported that they have closed all grounds. This reflects the differences, in Northern Ireland where initial instructions were much more vigorous meaning cemeteries were closed to the public. However, changes in guidance in Northern Ireland and clarification in England essentially means that cemeteries can remain open if social distancing is adhered to.

48% of respondents felt Government guidance had been confusing on whether or not grounds should remain open with a further 42% stating that they were not confused or had adopted their own policies within the framework of the guidance.

71% reported that they had not experienced any violent or aggressive behaviour towards staff but just over 19% said they had experienced this but very infrequently however 5.1% said this was a frequent occurrence.

30% have closed chapel services for burials but 48% have continued services with 2.6% reviewing their operation. 65.7% offer graveside only services. 20.5% have offered direct cremations only but the majority continue to offer full cremation services.

When it comes to social distancing near to 95% are liaising with funeral directors and faith leaders to reinforce the message of social distancing and over 65% have introduced notices and public messaging to reinforce this.

32% of respondents are limiting mourners to 10 or less, 10.3% are limiting mourners to 15 or less and 7.3% to 20 or less. In the range of 'other responses' some have adopted a parameter approach to say 'immediate family only' and enforcing social distancing by removing benches within chapels. Other issues arising is when large numbers turn up at the graveside or outside of building in spite of social distancing being observed within built facilities.

66.2% of respondents suggest that 80% or more of visitors are observing social distancing. 16.8% of respondents say only around 70% of visitors are observing social distancing with 10.3% suggesting less than half of visitors are observing social distancing

The full survey results will shortly be available on the APSE COVID-19 web hub.

- *For more information please contact Wayne Priestley on wpriestley@apse.org.uk*

Voices from the frontline



Andy Bond Bereavement Service Manager Wigan Council

"I'd describe the current situation as a war like effort, as we stand in awe of the lead by other front line staff especially in the NHS we have to reflect on the sterling job by many unsung heroes in the public sector. Wigan Council staff consolidating behind our new addition to the Wigan behaviours of 'Be Kind' which set the scene for how we deal with the challenges coming over the hill.

Within bereavement services the lack of accurate projected numbers, the hourly changing advice and guidance from multiple sources although aimed at helping, ultimately creating confusion and frustration, thank goodness for our Council strategic leads and our developed local e-mail networks and WhatsApp groups.

Personally, I would have lost my mind without the support, advice and understanding of my colleagues from the Greater Manchester authorities sharing information, interpretations and courses of action.

Locally the additional challenges of ensuring staff safety through social distancing whilst still delivering a critical service creates a logistical nightmare. Nevertheless, as expected staff with bereavement services rise to the challenge with flexibility, understanding and an active contribution to the contingency planning. The surprising thing for me was the support received by other colleagues outside of the bereavement industry, street scene operatives, estate caretakers, admin staff from other section of the council volunteering to move across to support burial and cremation capacity.

The surprising thing for me was the support received by other colleagues outside of the bereavement industry, street scene operatives, estate caretakers, admin staff from other section of the council volunteering to move across to support burial and cremation capacity.

One of the greatest ongoing challenges I find is the monitoring and sustaining the health and wellbeing of staff, I found that regular contact and a little light relief in the dark times serves to lift the spirits, who would have thought that a 'TikTok' video circulating on social networks of someone dancing to a well-known record would offer that moment to smile or laugh before a return to the serious stuff.

Just when you think you've seen it all and nothing else will surprise you, you receive a WhatsApp from your boss, a poem supporting the NHS staff that caused the colleagues in the office around to cry, WOW. The day after the poem goes viral, gets picked up by Radio 5 live, is read by Christopher Eccleston and hits the national news. If you've not yet experienced the poem, then google Matt Kelly Poem. This just goes to show that local authority workers are not just good at their day jobs but have some very special hidden talents. Remember we are all special.

The CDS Group are a fully integrated multi-disciplinary service provider. CDS are committed to the Green Agenda in all elements of design, engineering and planning, to deliver a seamless experience from inception to completion.

Cemeteries & Crematoria



CDS are a team of highly qualified and dedicated specialists - field surveyors, engineers and designers - with an outstanding network of partners including architects and construction consultants. This enables CDS to offer an unrivalled service in the design and development of cemeteries and crematoria.

We are committed to creating environments that provide tranquility for visitors but also offer excellent commercial value and facilities that can be managed and operated on a day-to-day basis at

- Pandemic Planning
- Groundwater Risk Assessments
- Cemetery Design and Development
- Cemetery Drainage Assessments
- Crematoria Design and Development
- Mausoleum development

Environmental Solutions



The CDS Group undertakes environmental assessments including groundwater monitoring, contamination sampling and environmental investigations to access the suitability for re-use of parcels of contaminated land.

This enables a valuable resource to be repurposed and regenerated in the form of parks and open space, communal or commercial development. Following the results of investigations, the CDS planning, design and engineering team will aid the regeneration of underused and unutilised sites into valuable public asset.

- Groundwater monitoring
- Contaminated land
- Drainage management
- Land regeneration
- Project management

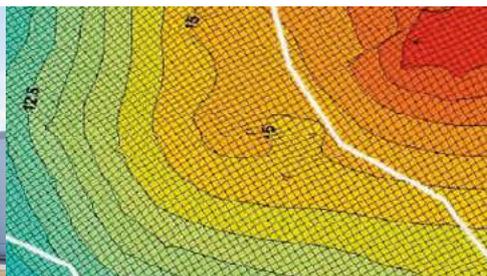
Parks & Leisure



The CDS Group have an in-house team of planners, designers, drainage engineers and environmental consultants who can provide an unparalleled capability in ensuring the highest level of project delivery.

CDS offers extensive experience in the development and delivery of parks, sports grounds and public open space. Innovative ideas and technical expertise can help to transform tired and old areas of land into new and vibrant open spaces for local residents and wildlife to enjoy.

- Parks and open spaces
- Sports grounds
- Sports facilities
- Country parks
- Project management
- Drainage management





Vehicle maintenance runs at the heart of any council; a poorly functioning fleet can adversely impact other council services quite significantly. APSE Principal Advisor

Rob Bailey considers the impact of COVID-19 on local government fleet and transport crews.

Without vehicle repair and maintenance, the ability of frontline services to continue to function diminishes rapidly. As lockdown commenced, most local authorities have focussed attention on those services deemed essential. This has included refuse collection services, housing emergency repairs and some aspects of social care.

Many workshops also undertake Taxi MOTs and 6 monthly testing. The Government has extended MOTs by 3 months for HGVs and PSVs and 6 months for light vehicles and cars. Councils are taking differing approaches to taxi testing. Some have provided an extension whilst others continue with an increased hygiene regime.

All have reviewed the potential COVID-19 contamination of vehicles, Coronavirus can last up to 3 days on plastic and metal surfaces, abundant within any vehicle. A range of processes have therefore been implemented to limit interaction between drivers and maintenance staff, with some using 2 sets of keys and cleansing surfaces prior to carrying out any work. Where smaller vehicles are used daily, drivers are encouraged to take them home and shifts have been staggered to reduce the numbers appearing at the depot each morning for operations like refuse. Additional vehicles are being used to reduce the numbers of operatives in the cab at any one time.

A range of processes have therefore been implemented to limit interaction between drivers and maintenance staff, with some using 2 sets of keys and cleansing surfaces prior to carrying out any work.

A vehicle maintenance depot is usually large enough to allow sufficient social distancing, however some have altered shift patterns to reduce the numbers of technicians and many, Wakefield being a great example, continue to provide a 24/7 service.

To date, few problems have been experienced in the supply chain, with spare parts continuing to be available. This situation could change if international shipments are disrupted over a longer period. Staff absence is running above normal, due to self-isolation, however many dealerships appear to have laid staff off meaning that in a worst case scenario there are external fitters available.

Coming out of lockdown, there appear to be couple of challenges. The number of MOTs could be doubled as the 3/6 month extension disappears and taxi testing recommences in full. Also driver medicals have been disrupted and will need to be rapidly renewed.

apse service awards 2020

CALL FOR ENTRIES



DEADLINE EXTENSION



Open to APSE member and non-member councils from across the UK



They are also FREE to enter



Closing date 15 May 2020

• For more information contact Rob Bailey on rbailey@apse.org.uk



Voices from the frontline

**Councillor Archie Dryburgh MBE
Dumfries and Galloway Council
councillor**

Our in-house fleet maintenance team has been magnificent; ensuring not only our waste wagons are kept on the road but our fleet that support delivery of meals to school children and vulnerable people both at home and at school for those that are children of key workers happens. We are currently in the process of a total new fleet procurement -26 vehicles with our APSE Partners - as our youngest waste wagon is 8 years old now. We have 11 buses on the road keeping our most remote communities connected. Again, these are being used to deliver food parcels to those areas. On 8 April, 1119 deliveries were made, and on top of that 1964 meals were delivered by Council staff to those most in need.

You can view Cllr. Dryburgh's full report on the action Dumfries and Galloway Council has taken throughout COVID-19 by clicking [here](#).



MULTEVO LAUNCH THE **Multihog**[®] CV SWEEPER

A Superior multi-purpose sweeper designed to outlast and outperform similar sized compact sweepers whilst offering added comfort, operational efficiency and unmatched versatility.

The Multihog CV Sweeper enters the market with the highest possible EUnited PM10 and PM2.5 rating available, showcasing its superior suction performance.

The articulated all-terrain hydrostatic machine's full spring and damper suspension and independent multi-disk breaking systems provide a smooth ride in a superbly comfortable working environment.



A SUPERIOR MULTI-PURPOSE SWEEPER



- **TOP ★★★★★ RATING** - Highest Possible EUnited PM10 & PM2.5 Star Ranking
- **STANDARD LICENSE** - Type 2 Tractor Type Approval
- **STAGE V EMISSIONS** - Cleanest Engine Available & No Ad Blue
- **3.5 OR 4 TONNE CVW** - 1.5m³ High Capacity Hopper
- **365 ATTACHMENT UTILISATION** - Demountable Hopper & Brushes
- **SMOOTH DRIVE** - Independent 4 Wheel Spring Suspension
- **SAFE STOP** - Hydrostatic Front & Rear Multidisk Breaking



MULTEVO

Protecting road workers and users whilst repairing our ramshackled roads



Multevo explain their experiences of supporting local authorities during the covid-19 crisis from a highways perspective and how technology has helped.

2020 marks a decade milestone for Multevo working with local authorities – however, COVID-19 has scuppered any anniversary plans.

The horrendous flooding in February 2020 was the wettest on record for the UK leading to misery for many and the months that follow poses an unprecedented threat to the most vulnerable in society and agonising strain to key services.

To combat the devastating deterioration of our country's road network and the inevitable impact to these key workers, the Lancashire based SME's response to the crisis demonstrates ingenuity of the supply chain and their essential role in supporting council's to fulfil their duty to maintain the highways network in as safe a condition as practically possible.

Multevo (formerly known as Multihog UK) are the UK distributor for sales, hire and service of the versatile Multihog product range and call around a third of all councils customers.

However, since 2017 and subsequent rebrand, Multevo also deliver an award-winning highways maintenance contracting service, leading on best-practice principles tailored to support Council DLOs. Multevo have shared their experiences of the crisis...

The right thing to do - should I stay or should I go?

Like many organisations, as the situation escalated, Multevo were, like many, unsure of the future for the business' existing operations but chose to act in the manner they have become accustomed to.

"In early February, during our senior management meeting, we saw that this could have an impact on us and our customers. Whilst at the time we didn't foresee the enormity of the disaster unfolding; we made sure we would be best placed to continue to serve our customers safety should they need us to." Explains Josh Sweeney, Director of Marketing & Growth at Multevo.

Response timeline – Multevo's response to the crisis

Josh Sweeney, Multevo: "We wanted to do the right thing. As we approached March and the situation grew more severe and lockdown was announced we wondered whether standing down would be the right thing to do."

Advice from Government, industry associations and customers started to stipulate some highways services, including pothole and patching

works, were vital to maintain the nation's infrastructure. In the following weeks, Multevo sought to implement a phased risk management strategy to protect their workforce and demonstrate this commitment to customers:

- 13 March – Issued the first Covid19 toolbox talk
- 17 March – All office staff were told that they should work from home where they can
- 20 March – Health questionnaire was sent via the Multevo app to establish vulnerable workers and workers who have vulnerable people in their household
- 23 March – Boris Johnson PM announced new lockdown measures
- 26 March – New notification reminders and daily checks were changed to include stock levels of sanitation products and other new safety procedures
- 27 March – A letter was sent to all employees outlining government and NHS guidelines, reminding them of their obligations to follow them and what Multevo are doing to help
- 28 March – All daily toolbox talks were updated to incorporate a 'topic of the day' to keep it simple whilst getting the message across to workers sent via the Multevo app.

"In many ways, we approached the crisis like any event, identifying the risk and looking at ways to best serve our people and customers. Because we are of a modest size and already use technology to manage the safety of our workers, we could act quickly to do the right thing" says Josh Sweeney.

Click to play



Safety is the priority – the call to action

Nick Leadley, one of the business owners, issued a call to action to all their highways operatives still expressing a want to work:

“Our main responsibility is to our workforce, their families and the members of the public that we ‘may’ come into contact with, so first and foremost that is the priority, everything we do starts there.”

The decision was made to continue to serve customers, having been granted key worker status by several council customers. With this in mind Multevo implemented a firm series of measures to maximise safety which have been adopted as best practice:

- Sanitation only vehicles on all sites
- Additional PPE, hand sanitiser and safety accessories
- Staggered breaks & eating arrangements
- One person one vehicle
- Multevo app – daily covid 19 toolbox talk
- Daily vehicle / tool decontamination
- Operative social distancing body sensor (trial)
- Low risk opt in workers only
- Critical worker signage for public perception
- Social distancing supervisor visits
- Multevo app - weekly client audit report

Technology – communicating covid-19 to workers

Unlike, many contractors of Multevo’s size, the company always strive to use the best equipment, methods and technology to try and set a precedent in pothole and patching repair process.

Josh Sweeney explains: “When we started to deliver a service using the Multihog we wanted to be different from the usual pothole repair contractors on the network. All our gangs use a Multihog, which is a proven method for increasing repairs at reduced cost but we needed to go further.”

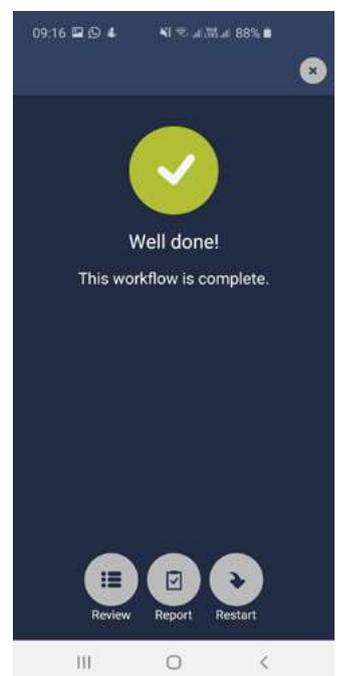
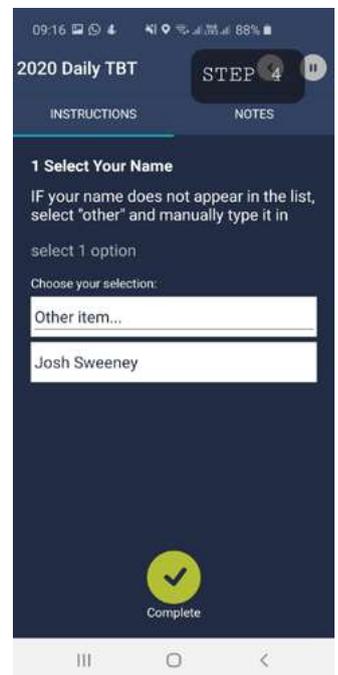
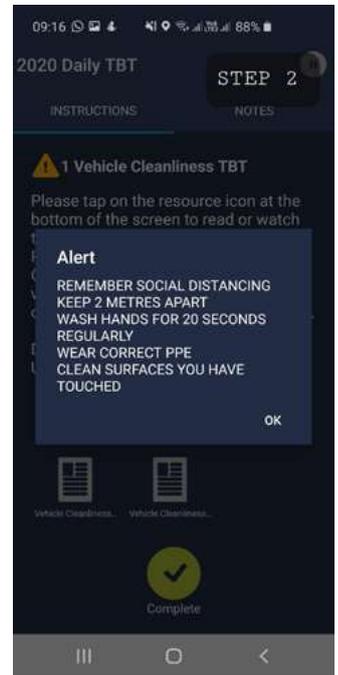
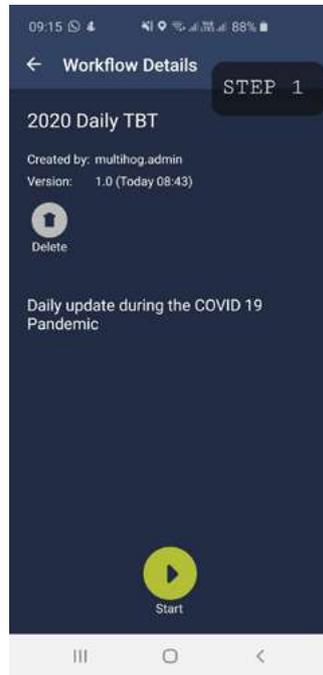
The Multevo app is a bespoke piece of easy to use, simple software which allows the company to create workflows according to a task. This means Multevo operatives can carry out RAMS, Site Surveys and Tools Box talks using a mobile phone handset and report back to the client in real time – this was used to communicate the COVID-19 measures to people on the front line:

This enabled the company to communicate to their key workers, and integrate daily notifications to ensure safe working whilst measuring operatives responsiveness to these suggestions to maximise safety.

Comments from one Performance Manager with a Highways Term Maintenance Contractor: “I have been watching with interest the communications coming from your company, they are really good, fresh and use technology brilliantly. I am very jealous!”

Multevo like most businesses assessing each day as it comes, but their adaptability to the circumstances has enabled them to keep providing a key service to council customers.

Whilst this is challenging time for everyone, the business continues to serve customers and more recently has helped support under resourced councils to maintain vital areas of the network as safely as possible.



Clap for councils



A wonderful poster made for our waste collection crew by a #rdguk resident's daughter, just one more of our wonderful #ReadingHeroes doing their bit to help us during the #coronavirus crisis. Share the love for our #ReadingHeroes - post and tag us so we can share!



On behalf of @DeriViewPrimary Hub children and staff, thank you to all the Key Workers / NHS staff for your hard work. You are all doing an amazing job #StayHomeSaveLives



Our refuse collectors would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has left them a note or gift, or given them a wave as they carry out their work!



In these challenging times we are all facing, a little kindness goes a long way.



Council's new dynamic duo will keep streets clean during current pandemic



Cheshire West and Chester Council will be the first council in the country to use two new zero emissions street-cleansing machines to spray disinfectant on streets in the borough.

The Council's StreetCare team will be using the dynamic duo, which are fully-electric, to clean streets with high pressure water and disinfectant during the current pandemic.

The new vehicles do not use hydraulics to operate, so are quieter, as well as being much lighter and easier to operate; they also needs less servicing.

The machines spray high pressure water through a bar at the front and can have disinfectants mixed in with the water from on-board chemical tanks. The machines also have a high pressure hand lance so staff can wash down and disinfect street furniture and bins.

The Council's Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Strategic Transport, Councillor Karen Shore said: "These new electric street-cleansing machines will be used across the borough to spray disinfectant around our streets and town centres, removing ingrained dirt from pavement surfaces. They are a valuable addition to our teams, as we continue to keep our streets clean during the current Coronavirus pandemic.

"Using the new machines means our CO2 emissions will also be reduced and we can carry out more timely and targeted responses to street washing issues.

"We believe we are one of the first councils in the country to use this technology."



A fitness test for leisure facilities

Leisure facilities are essential for health and wellbeing. As we gradually exit lockdown, these services will be vitally important to the nation's recovery. APSE Principal Advisor Rob Bailey provides an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on leisure and sports facilities.

On 20 March all Leisure facilities were required to close their doors, leaving large numbers of staff unable to continue in their roles as pool attendants and gym instructors. It also meant that thousands of gym members were paying Direct Debits for a service that was no longer available. The response has been twofold. Those facilities that have sufficient space have been repurposed as community hubs supplying food and essentials to those residents deemed vulnerable. (Nottingham City Council being a great example) A significant number of leisure staff have been redeployed into support roles.

In the main, regular maintenance and servicing has continued as normal, ensuring that showers are sluiced to prevent legionella, swimming pool plant is run regularly and PAT testing completed. Some have taken the opportunity to repair and service gym equipment and deep clean their facilities. The Government's arrangements for furlough were initially unclear for local authorities, but staff appear eligible to be furloughed where their salary is covered by visitor and membership income, rather than grant or council tax, though this is clearly a sensitive issue and both appropriate HR and legal advice should be sought about local circumstances.

Membership retention and recruitment is an on-going challenge for any leisure facility. Most suspended direct debit payments immediately and notified their members. They have since used email and social media to offer free on-line classes, often using their own instructors and tips on continued fitness. This has helped stall any mass exodus to cancel direct debits and maintain existing membership until such time as the gyms and pools reopen.

A different set of issues arise where the service is managed by a trust or contractor. Industry body, Community Leisure UK, estimates that most trusts only have 6 to 8 weeks reserves and without any income, some may not survive. Whilst they have furloughed staff, the situation for some remains precarious and APSE advocates local councils considering how they may assist such as paying forward any management fees and providing holidays on any income normally received as per Policy Procurement Note 02/20, notwithstanding of course the emerging cash flow issues in councils' own finances. At the same time, it's crucial to maintain an open dialogue to help where possible but also determine the exit strategy should the supplier become insolvent.

Post lockdown, most in-house operators are confident that they can bring their facilities back on stream within a few days. There may have to be a phased approach if some of those centres continue to serve as community hubs and redeployed staff are still required for other duties. The bigger challenge is getting members back into the gyms and pools after a period when some may have developed alternative fitness regimes. Many are planning a range of incentives and marketing to boost that process. On a brighter note, COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of fitness and a healthy lifestyle, which should increase interest and usage of our leisure facilities. •

Voices from the frontline



Click on the Tweet to play

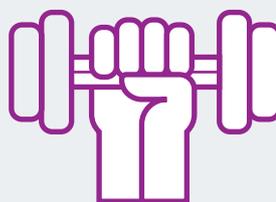


Our teams have been helping to get food to people over Easter:

- 1250 food parcels delivered so far
- 300 over the Bank Holiday
- 7000 extremely vulnerable people contacted to check they're ok

Thank you to everyone who is helping to make this possible #NottinghamTogether

Keeping Nottingham Fed During This Easter Weekend Lockdown #NottinghamTogether



Oxford serves as a great example of corona community kindness

ODS (Oxford Direct Services) and Oxford City Council have settled into a new way of working and thank the public for its help in adapting so rapidly and supporting our key workers.

ODS is the largest employer of skilled trade workers in Oxford and unusually many of its staff are either still working outside or have switched to new volunteer roles.

In a letter sent to staff, MD Simon Howick wrote "We are currently in business-critical mode. Broadly, that is waste, emergency repairs, cemeteries, rapid response on highways and streets, estates services, jetting, fleet, and various support services around these carry on. I am proud of you and of the collective effort we are all putting in at ODS. It would be unthinkable if these services stopped."

The focus of ODS' normal programme of building works, maintaining over 7,000 homes and building new ones for the City Council, has switched focus rapidly.

While emergency home repairs such as essential work on gas, electricity or water are taking place, all other construction activity has now stopped. What work now goes on is specifically to safeguard either the NHS or the community.

Ian Batchelor, Director of Construction for ODS is also coordinating the use of ODS vehicles and staff for the Oxford Hub community service.

"We've got carpenters, joiners, plumbers, electricians and a host of people who can't do their normal job for us, delivering a service for the Oxford Hub. The city is divided into five hubs and we've given a team of four people and four vehicles to each hub, working with members of the public to deliver food and medical supplies across the city.

"Everyone is a volunteer - they could just stay at home if they want - but people want to do good and make a difference, and I can't thank them enough for their help."

However, many ODS staff are still carrying out essential services on behalf of the City Council. Fifteen disabled adaptations are currently underway across the city, while sixty staff are working on emergency repairs. Disabled adaptations allow people to return to their homes and free up hospital beds.

There are also thirty voids which are being completed as a matter of urgency.

Ian explains the importance of 'void' housing work at the moment:

"Voids are where we prepare a property to make a new home for someone when it becomes vacant. For example, cleaning the house and garden, making any repairs, testing the gas, electricity and water. We are prioritising work on homes that we can make good as quickly as possible; a fire damaged home for example takes much longer



to work on. We're working as fast as we can; taking someone off the streets has an even greater urgency now."

Work on Floyd's Row is also continuing with renewed urgency. Phase One was handed over in January and Phase Two will create up to forty new beds for homeless people.

All ODS' staff have had health and safety training and are following government advice about social distancing with, for example, one person working upstairs and another downstairs where possible.

Other operatives such as waste collectors or those cleaning streets have to continue working outside. MD Simon Howick said:

"When you see us out and about carrying out these essential and critical services, emptying your bins, keeping your properties maintained and streets clean, clear and safe, please help us to work safely and keep both our families and yours safe by respecting the social distancing requirements."

Cllr Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services said:

"Staff at both the City Council and ODS have stepped up to the mark to keep essential services going and help the most vulnerable members of our community. They are showing great flexibility and commitment, as in just a few days, in partnership with Oxford Hub and are now staffing them.

Officers have also been redeployed to support our call centre, now operating as a virtual network from people's kitchen and sitting rooms. The redeployment effort has involved a number of teams including planning, HR, policy, economic development and so on.

I know our staff and the 4,000 members of the public who have stepped forward as volunteers will continue to support people through this crisis and I want to thank them for their continuing efforts." •



Ensuring organisational resilience



A message from APSE's Head of Business Resources, Lindsay Towler.

Like many other organisations within APSE we recognised early on that changes to how we operate would be an inevitable part of responding to the health pandemic and ensuring the continuation of APSE's services. We already had remote working plans in place for senior staff, an inevitable part of the flexible environment in which we have always worked, delivering services on a UK wide basis. However, we quickly expanded this capacity to all levels of the organisation, and with new software we were able to quickly deploy staff to home working. We rolled this out to ensure, in line with PHE advice, our most vulnerable staff members were protected the soonest which I am sure has been the exact same experience within councils.

A key part of my own role is to ensure the physical safety of staff but also the mental health and wellbeing, so as well as the checks on home working in a safe environment, we have actively encouraged staff to keep in touch; this has included using chat functions on Microsoft Teams but also using online video conferencing for some downtime including quizzes and a remote 'cocktail games' night. APSE staff have supported each other in learning new tools and techniques in this brave new world of remote working, with a good dose of humour, particularly when the IT gremlins have inevitably paid the odd

APSE staff have supported each other in learning new tools and techniques in this brave new world of remote working, with a good dose of humour, particularly when the IT gremlins have inevitably paid the odd visit!

visit! It has also been fun to witness the growth in beards! If only we had suggested that as a sponsorship opportunity for our corporate charity Parkinson's UK!

APSE had in place a robust business continuity plan and whilst we will review this, as all business operations should after an event such as this, it has served us well. However, I am pleased to report that during the midst of all of this we were also lucky enough to receive positive affirmation that we have maintained our IIP Gold status (celebrations to follow shortly!).

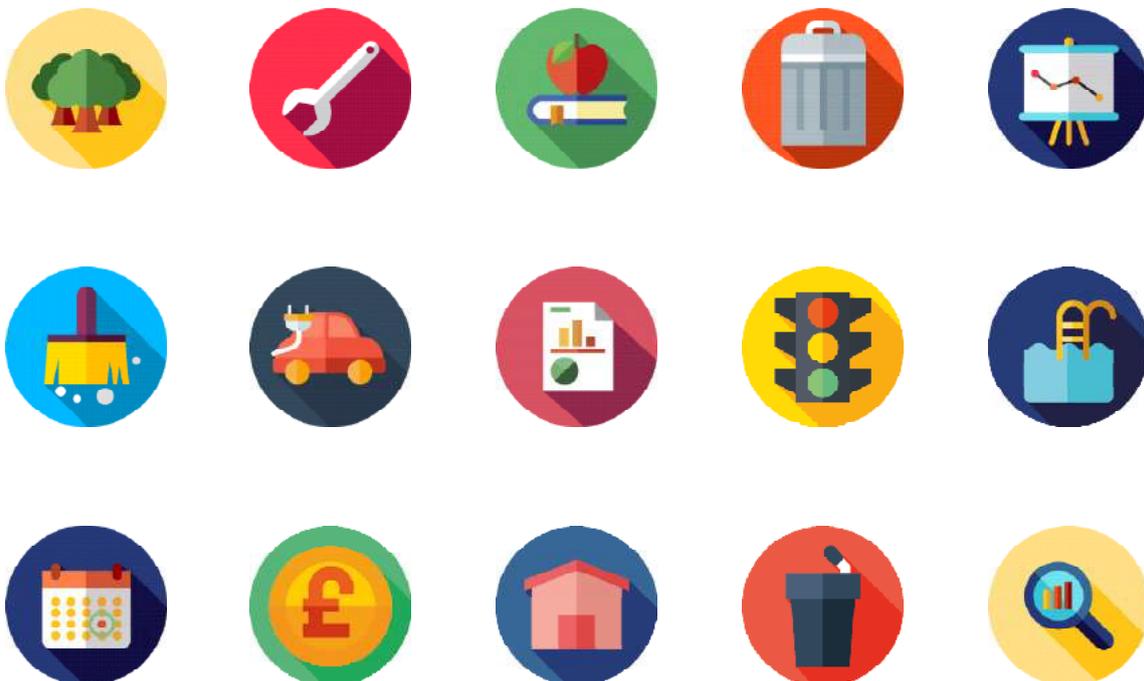
Organisational resilience is a goal that we share with our member councils; whilst I doubt any of us would have chosen this health pandemic as the test of that resilience I think it has brought APSE even closer to our members as we have embarked on this epic journey together. •



Congratulations!

APSE National Chair and Corby Councillor, Mark Pengelly, celebrates 25 years as a local councillor this year. That's some innings Mark.

Congratulations!



Building cleaning and COVID-19



For many years cleaning has been a service that is often forgotten and there has been a race to the bottom across the sector with cleaning being a low paid, low hours role. Cleaning operatives carry out their role often unseen, at times when other staff are at home or children have left the classroom for the day. APSE Principal Advisor Victoria Hacking offers a summary of the changes that have taken place across the UK.

During the COVID-19 outbreak local authority cleaning services have mobilised their army of cleaning operatives, to work on the frontline; reducing the spread of the virus in buildings and facilities that remain open for key workers and their children.

From the outset of the outbreak councils have adapted to a rapidly changing situation and responded to the changes in government guidance. To achieve this the service has implemented different ways of working to keep both the workforce and the public safe.

The cleaning specification for buildings has changed to infection control cleans with a focus on cleaning touch points such as doors, taps, and high traffic areas. This change in specification has been relatively quick to implement due to the service being able to draw on the wealth of experience that already exists, in terms of infection control cleaning, and having to respond regularly to other health risks, such as outbreaks of Norovirus and other highly infectious illnesses.

In addition to the change in specification the frequency of cleans has greatly increased and cleaning operatives now maintain a visible presence, which is, in many cases acting as reassurance for building users.

For sites such as council offices that have a higher occupancy, councils have put in place an onsite team that are able to respond to any issues throughout the day, and undertake ongoing cleaning routines with additional staff cleaning during peak times. Extra resource is also being assigned to respond quickly and conduct deep cleans when a case of COVID-19 has been suspected.

Inevitably, there are less buildings to clean, therefore staff are being deployed on a rota basis in the buildings that remain open or are being re-deployed to locations that they would not normally work in to cover for operatives that are self-isolating or shielding. Councils have also taken opportunity to undertake additional deep cleans in buildings that are closed to ensure, when they come back into operation, the workspace is clean and ready for the users.

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Local authority cleaning services are diverse in nature and in many cases this work has continued and increased with the cleaning teams providing support for other council services, such as cleaning void properties and accommodation allocated to house homeless. In the early stage of the outbreak many cleaning managers became the central point for the sourcing and purchasing of PPE.

As focus is now turning to the lockdown restrictions being lifted, local authority cleaning teams are now turning their attention to how the service is re-mobilised and there is no doubt that the army of cleaners will play a key role in giving the wider workforce the confidence to come back into the workplace.

- For more information contact Victoria Hacking on vhacking@apse.org.uk

Citizens must be protected from massive consequences as councils on the brink



NILGA's Chief Executive, Derek McCallan, has called for National, Stormont and Local Government to "come together as one public purse" and invest in the workforce,

services and planned recovery work that NI's 11 councils are delivering daily including on the front line, since lockdown.

On Friday 1 May, during both a NILGA 11 council virtual meeting and then a further engagement with the 11 council chief executives, it is clear that local government's response to Covid-19 has saved lives, kept essential public health services going and brought together extraordinary community and business partnerships at local level everywhere, but at a massive cost.

To say the situation facing councils is perilous is an understatement.

NILGA has, together with all councils and their senior officer teams, presented the short and long-term finances required to keep councils open beyond the summer to the Treasury and to Stormont. The Covid 19 response by councils from March to June has over £40 million invested in it, money that is simply irretrievable as income losses alone sit at £30 million.

A non-payment of domestic and business rates, forecast at 25% by many English local authorities and yet to be determined here, would lead to around £175 million of income obliterated.

Taking these things together, when you consider the budget of about £800 million for local government annually, a small amount of the NI Public sector budget of over £23 billion, you realise that this model is unsustainable.

It is heartening to hear and read letters of support from Ministers, the public and councils' many partners. However, this must transfer into cash, on the same proportionate basis as English, Scottish and Welsh councils, in what is called "Consequential Losses".

Consequences means talking about impacts – which are massive. As a citizen, imagine no or reduced public health, planning, regulatory, community development, business support, leisure and wellbeing, preventative health, sports and local cultural funding stopping or being drastically cut. Recovery would be halted. Emergency provisions would be called for. We have had enough emergencies. This emergency can be avoided with funding.

Consequences means, also, rewiring how we do business – not just in councils, but as NILGA has reiterated since the new councils formed in 2015, establishing a completely new model of resource distribution of our entire public purse, because the institutions providing them are far, far less important than the people delivering and the people receiving these services.

We will need a transformed public sector and councils are part of the solution, but only if brave, radical, decisions leading to cash for councils to survive is provided. Because communities need reassurance like public services security at this time, and government depends on local authorities to be the hubs of these communities, drawing on their information to make better decisions based upon local need.

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Since the new councils were formed almost exactly 5 years ago, our colleagues in Stormont could not legislate in any substantial way for 3 of them. Thank goodness we have a Legislative Assembly operating, but now we must sustain the 11 councils, which kept Northern Ireland locally governed amidst a different type of crisis altogether.

It is time to be brave, to transfer resources and challenges via councils to local people and places, but they too will change, beyond the emergency financial planning all 11 are engaged in right now.

I believe that Northern Ireland's public services, government departments and the 11 councils have innovative, change ready, committed, entrepreneurial people at every level, capable of delivering radical change. We must unlock that talent, sit down with community and business leaders too, on an East – West and North – South basis and co-design our recovery.

Neither politics nor bureaucracy, neither silo budgets nor short termism should be barriers.

The heroes in our health service and other front-line workers, and the public itself, deserve changes for the better, as well as hope. Investing in our councils, now, is not only the right thing. It will make recovery happen faster and provide the hope we all need in a secure, effective, local democracy.

There is no time to waste. •





Clap for councils

All across the UK, communities have been showing their appreciation for the tremendous efforts of local authorities as they continue to deliver to the vulnerable, empty the bins, ensure the public realm remains accessible and safe, and provide meals to children and vulnerable older people and families.

Social media has been awash with these tokens of gratitude for our member councils. From claps to cards to cakes, we've highlighted a small selection of these messages of support from the general public for our invaluable frontline heroes; the glue that keeps our communities together.



The support & gratitude for our refuse collection crews keeps on coming. Thank you for brightening their day when they are out of the frontline delivering a critical service at this time.

Please keep on leaving them messages & cleaning your bin handles before & after collection.



Our bin crews are working hard to run a full service. Thank you for your support and if you see your bin crew please give them a wave #wavetoyourbincrew #keyworkers

The rainbows and thank you notes that our bin crews, care workers and other council key workers see on their rounds are really lifting their spirits.



Thank you to everyone who's sharing the love. We'd love to see your pictures.



Our thanks to the many councils who helped to contribute to this addition including the lovely pictures from children!

Berneslai Homes Construction Services
Blaby Council
Cheshire West and Chester Council
Cornwall Council
Dumfries and Galloway Council
East Ayrshire Council
East Renfrewshire Council
Hull City Council
Inverclyde Council
Ipswich Council
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Leicester City Council
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
Monmouthshire Council Sir Fynwy
Nottingham City Council
Oxford Direct Services
Reading Borough Council
Stoke on Trent City Council
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
Wigan Council

