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State of the Market Survey 2013

Local Authority Allotment Services

Briefing 13/61

December 2013

The state of the market survey was conducted by Debbie Johns, APSE Principal Advisor for Environmental services

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Local Authority Allotment Services State of the Market 2013

APSE conducted an on-line allotment survey during December 2013. This follows on from a previous survey which was conducted in January and February 2012 (click here to access the briefing paper from the previous survey), a briefing paper compiled from an APSE email query which was sent out in December 2010 and a survey which was conducted in December 2008. The 2013 survey asks similar questions to the previous surveys which allows for comparisons to be drawn from previous years. In total, 129 responses were received from local authorities throughout the UK. This report identifies the key findings.

Results from the survey

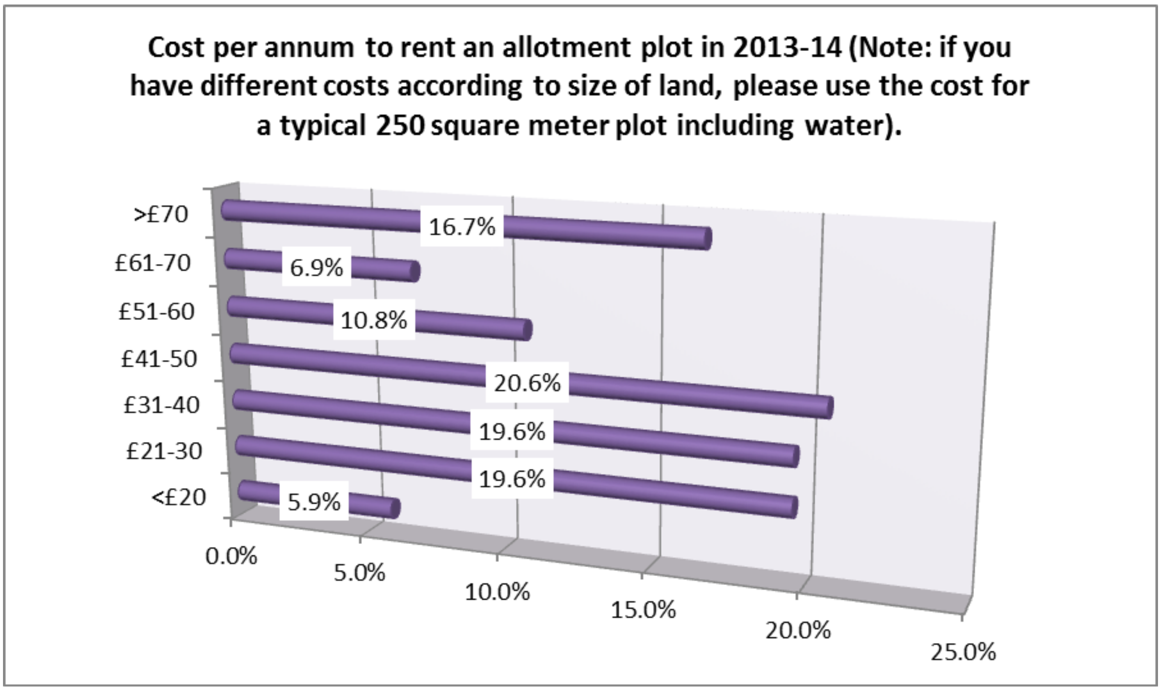
a) Number and management of allotments

94.5% of respondents answered that they have council owned allotments within their authority. From the respondents that answered 'no' to this question; 100% stated that demand has been expressed for these.

In terms of management of the allotments, 30.5% answered that they have allotments which are directly managed by a council officer, 12% stated that these are managed through a site committee or association and 57.5% stated that there is a mix of council and site committee/association managed sites.

b) Cost of allotments

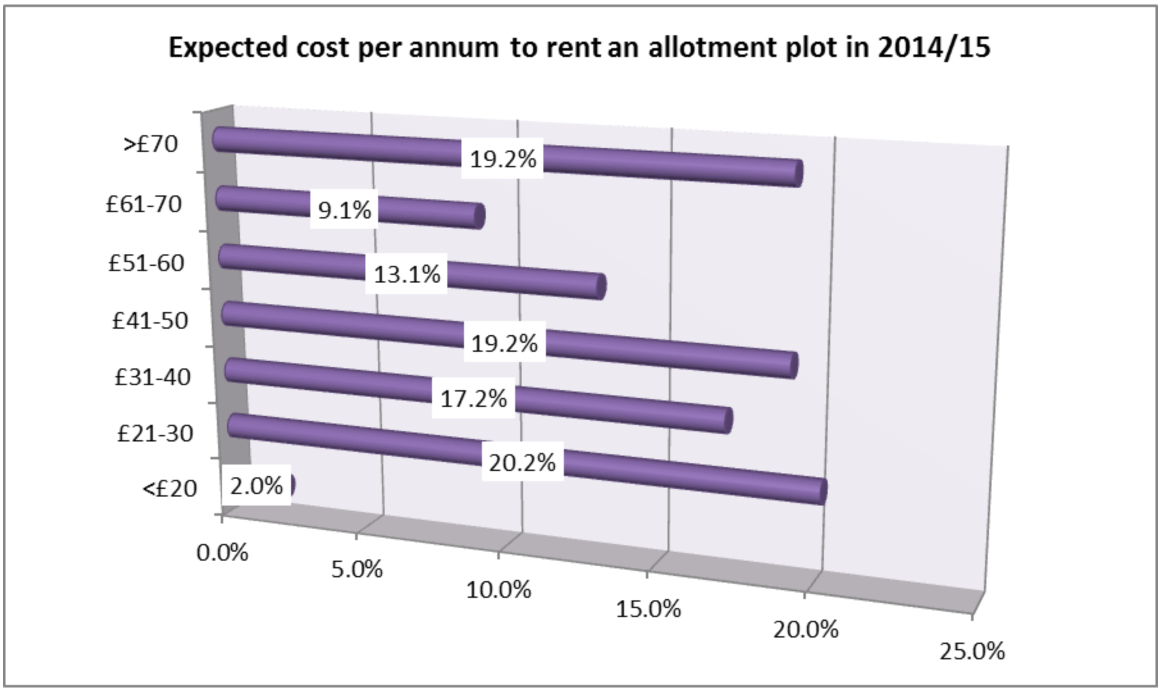
The majority of respondents stated that the cost per annum to rent an allotment in 2013-14 was between £21 and £50. The full breakdown is as follows:



70.6% of respondents are reporting a cost of between £21 and £60. In 2011-12, the cost band which received most responses was £31-£40 (23%) and in comparison, for this survey it is £41-£50 (21%).

The 2013 survey asked about previous years increases in the rent of an allotment plot and 43% of respondents stated that there has been an increase in this (beyond an inflationary increase) during the past 2 years.

When respondents were asked about the expected cost per annum to rent an allotment next year (in 2014-15), 69.7% answered that they expected this to be between £21 and £60, with 19.2% expecting this to be over £70. The full breakdown is as follows:



The majority (68%) of respondents claimed that the charge is directly related to the area of the allotment (e.g. square meters) and 22% stated that this is standard regardless of the size. There was also a split in the respondents who answered that concessionary prices are offered (61.5% yes, 38.5% no). From those who offer concessions, the breakdown is as follows:

- 98% offer discounts for pensioners, over 60's and/or retired people. The majority of these (56%) offer a 40-50% discount.
- 70% offer discounts to the unemployed or those on income support. The majority of these (54%) offer a 40-50% discount.
- 61.5% offer discounts to people with disabilities. 50% of these offer a 40-50% discount.
- 33% offer discounts to students. Of these, 33% offer a discount of 20-30% and 39% offer a discount of 40-50%.

c) Size of allotments

In terms of the size of plots available, 38% stated that they have a standard size for a plot, and out of these, the most common sizes were 200-249 square meters (29%) and 250-299 square meters (26%). When asked for the total number of allotment sites in the local authority, the majority was 1-30 (80%), but this ranged to over 40 (14%). Again, there was a range of responses in terms of allotment plots, with 75% having 1250 plots or less, but 4% having over 3,000 plots.

Waiting lists have proved the demand for allotments with 43% of respondents stating that they have 100-400 people on the waiting list for an allotment and 4% claiming over 1,000 people on their waiting list. The majority of respondents (83.5%) stated that the waiting list is regularly updated (e.g. names of people who are no longer interested or those who have moved are removed). 76% of respondents stated that new tenancies are restricted to people living within the local authority area.

d) Future increases in the number of allotments

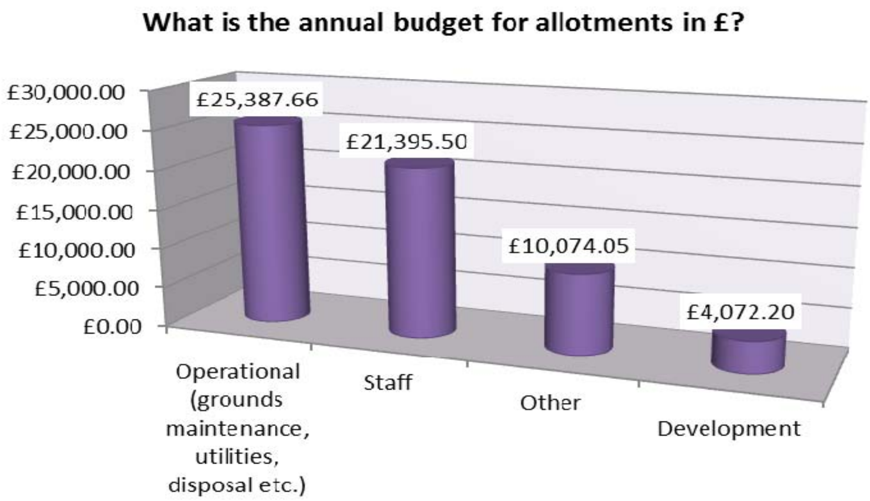
48.5% of respondents stated that their council plans to increase the number of allotments, which is a decline from 64% in the 2012 survey. From those respondents who stated that the number of allotments is planned to increase, the method of doing this is shown in the table below:

Direct provision by the council for additional plots	65.2%
Provision by builders/developers as part of a housing/planning policy	47.8%
Provision by community groups supported/facilitated by council	34.8%
Provision by other council departments (e.g. Education, Social Work) as part of a healthy lifestyles/eco-schools/health type project	17.4%
Other	6.5%

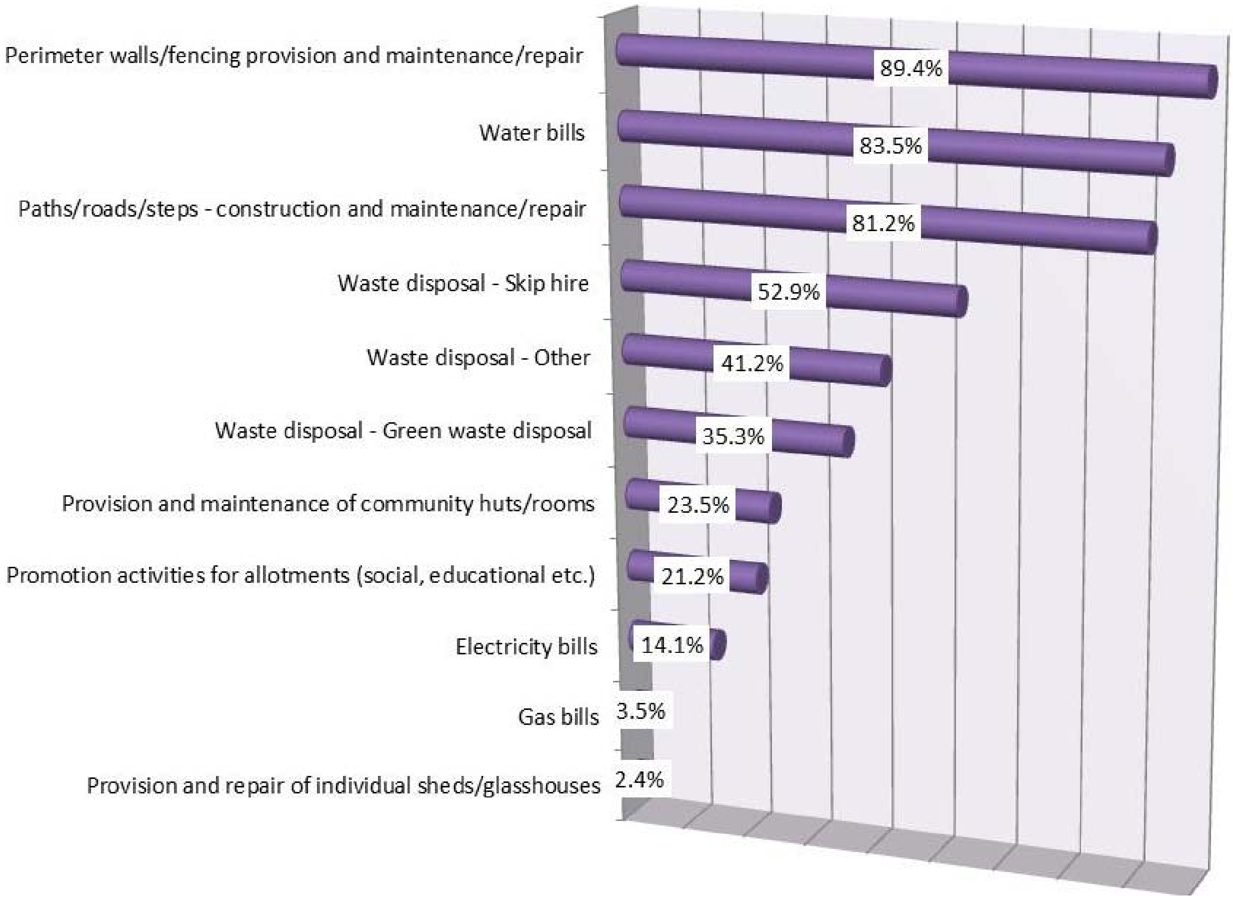
This shows a decrease across all of the different methods since the 2012 survey (particularly in the percentage provided by community groups supported/facilitated by the council from 56% in 2012 to 35% in this survey), except for provision by builders/developers as part of the housing/planning policy which has increased from 44% in 2012 to 48% in this survey. This may be a reflection generally of the reduction in the number of respondents planning to increase the number of allotments since the 2012 survey.

e) Budget for allotments

The average annual budgets for allotments were stated as follows:



The largest difference in the average budgets allocation above compared to the survey results in 2008 and 2012 is in the area of development; a reduction from an average of £34,373 in 2008 to £8,479 in 2012 to £4,072 in 2013. This may reflect a focus on maintenance as opposed to developments in allotments as a result of budget reductions in local authorities. Respondents stated that their budgets include responsibility for the following:

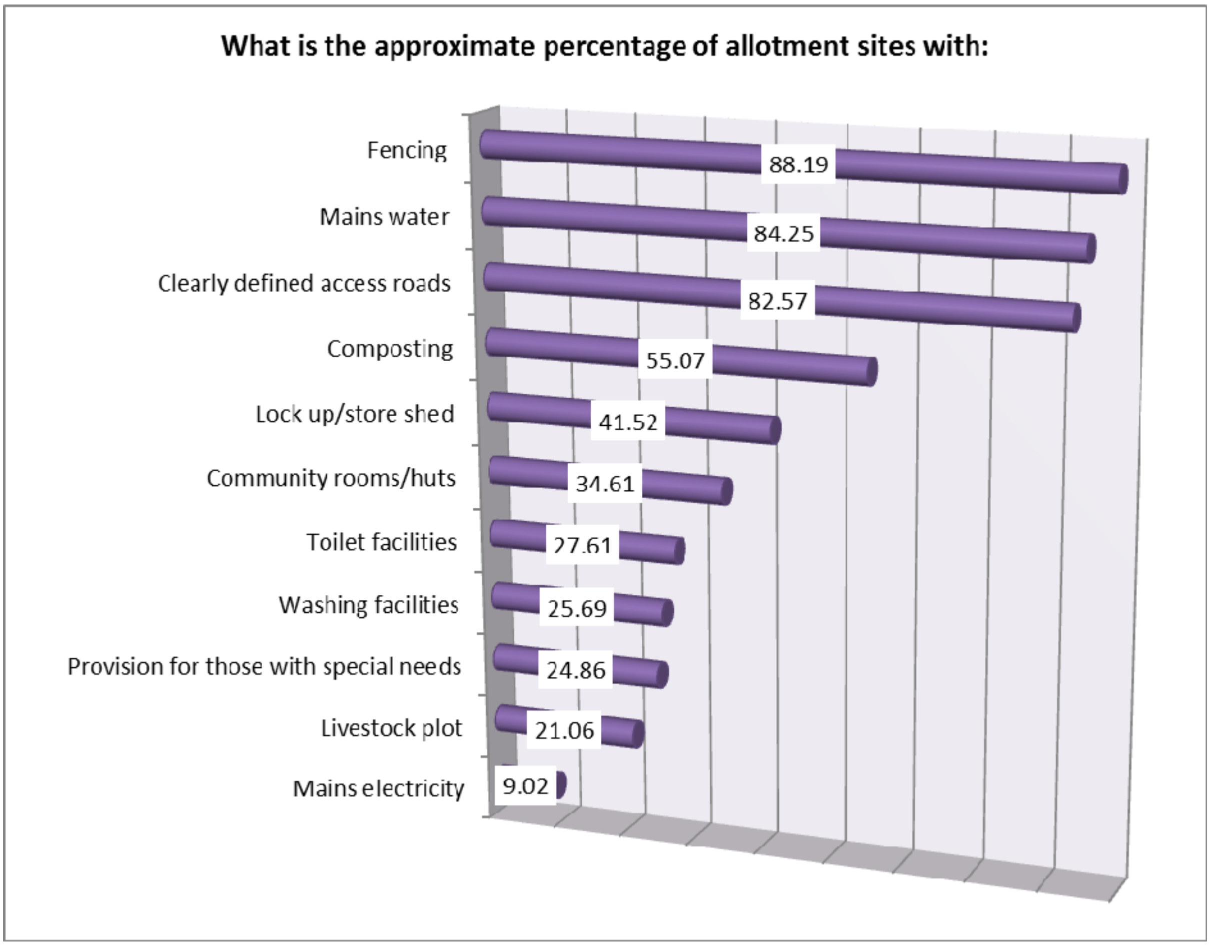


There has been a reduction in the number of respondents who stated that it includes responsibility for water bills from 91% in 2012 to 83.5% in this year's survey and an increase in the percentage of respondents who stated that their budgets include responsibility for perimeter walls/fencing provision and maintenance/repair from 85% in 2012 to 89% in this survey.

80% currently subsidise managing allotments (they do not recover full costs from managing these), which is a decrease from 87% in the 2012 survey. Of the other respondents, 18% break even and only 2% make a surplus. When this is compared to the 2012 survey, the reduction in the proportion of respondents subsiding managing allotments is mainly as a result of an increase in those breaking even rather than an increase in those making a surplus.

f) Facilities at allotment sites

Most allotment sites have the provision of water, fencing, clearly defined access roads and composting. Some allotment sites have other services such as livestock plots, community rooms, lock up/store sheds, washing facilities and toilet facilities. The full breakdown in terms of the average % of allotment sites with other facilities is as follows:



There has been an improvement in the average percentage of allotment sites with composting since 2008 with an increase from 44% in 2008, to 50% in 2012 and then to 55% in 2013, as well as an increase in the percentage of allotment sites with community rooms/huts (from 23% in 2008, to 28% in 2012 and to 35% in 2013) and toilet facilities (from 17% in 2008, to 20% in 2012 and to 28% in 2013). The average % of sites with washing facilities has increased from 15% in 2012 to 26% in 2013, as has the average % of sites with lock up/store shed, from 31% to 41.5% and provision for those with special needs has increased from 16% to 25%. The average % of allotment sites with mains electricity is 9%.

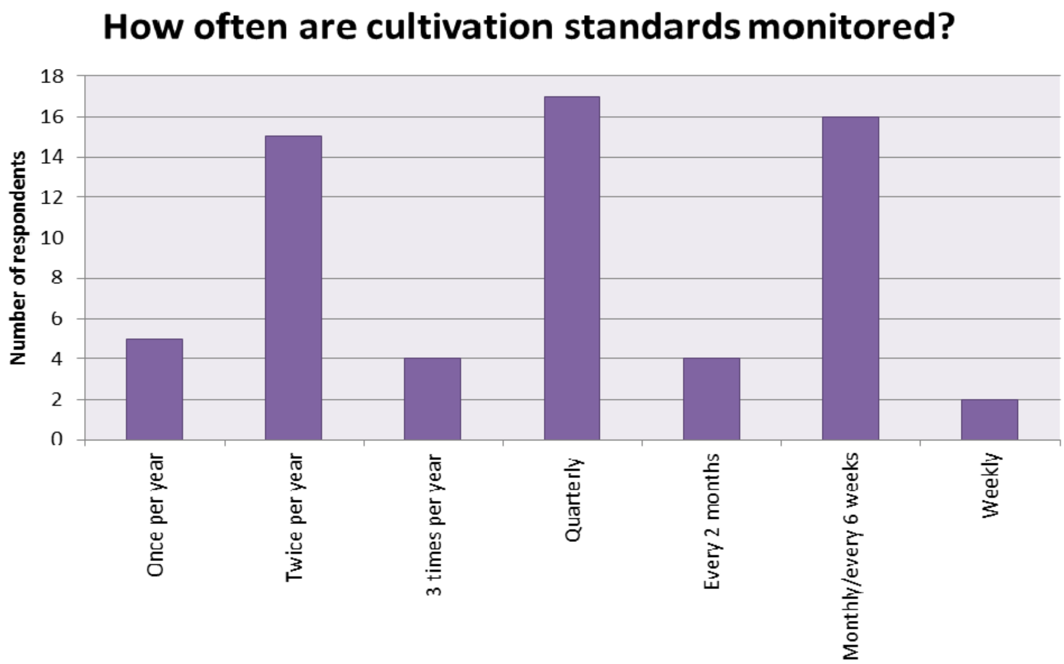
The majority of respondents stated that grounds maintenance is carried out either at allotment sites as an integral part of grounds maintenance operations/contracts (60%) or by plotholders/site association (64%). The full responses are below:

By the plotholders/site association	**63.6%**
As an integral part of grounds maintenance operations/contracts	60.2%
By volunteers	21.6%
As part of rehabilitation programmes (health, offenders etc.)	14.8%
By a dedicated allotments team/person	9.1%
No grounds maintenance is carried out on the sites	4.5%

(Please note, respondents could choose more than one option on the survey for this answer).

When asked how grounds maintenance is monitored, the majority stated that this is through inspections/site visits by an allotment officer, council officer or a site representative.

This year, the survey asked how often cultivation standards are monitored and the most frequent responses to this question are displayed in the chart below:



Other comments included that this is done by the site association members.

g) Security

Plotholders themselves generally manage the security on allotment sites (65.5%), with 42% of respondents stating that they don't actively manage security. 9.5% stated community wardens manage security, 4% stated park rangers and 15.5% a 'plot watch' scheme or similar. The majority of respondents have an allotment forum, friends group or something similar (63.5%).

h) Allotment strategy

55% of respondents stated that they have an allotments strategy and of the 45% that haven't currently got a strategy in place, 49% stated that the council is planning to develop one within the next 2 years.

39% stated that they are intending to increase the price of allotment plots within the next 2 years and a further 8% within the next 5 years. 29% are reviewing this. There has been a marked decrease in the percentage of respondents who are intending to increase the price of allotment plots from 56% in 2012 to 47% in 2013 and a reduction of those reviewing this from 34% in 2012 to 29% in 2013. This may be a reflection of local authorities already having gone through the review process on the price of allotment plots.

Of those who are intending to increase the price of allotment plots, 60.5% stated that even though they are increasing the price, the council would still have to subsidise the service; 37% stated that this would make the service cost neutral and only 3% stated that this would result in them making a surplus. When the responses to this question are correlated with the responses in section *e) 'Budget for allotments'* above, the main change from the current situation is an increase in those councils trying to make the service cost neutral as opposed to an increase in the number of councils trying to achieve a surplus.

The Association for Public Service Excellence

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular advisory groups, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The advisory groups are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Advisory groups are a free service included as part of your authorities membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE advisory group meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national advisory groups include:-

- Building cleaning
- Catering
- Housing, construction and building maintenance
- Parks, horticultural and ground maintenance
- Renewables and climate change
- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Service delivery models
- Service transformation and performance management
- Sports and leisure management
- Vehicle maintenance and transport
- Waste management, refuse collection and street cleansing