

Efficiencies in Building Cleaning

The pressure continues to find further savings in Building Cleaning. This paper attempts to highlight the main areas where costs reductions may be sought in cleaning. It is not possible to compile a complete list and further ingenious ways of saving money will be found and technology will produce new opportunities. This is the second issue of this document and it will be reviewed and reissued when appropriate in the future.

Service providers should also be encouraged to diversify and maximise income by selling their services to a wider set of customers. (Visit the APSE Trading and Charging web portal <http://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/members-area/special-interest-portals/trading-and-charging/trading/> for further details)

1.0 Accounting structures

The structure of building cleaning in most local authorities consists of three elements, school cleaning, civic cleaning and outside contracts with other public bodies and the private sector. Both School cleaning and outside contracts are delivered on a contractual or quasi-contractual basis through service level agreements. They are income generating and should not be confused with internal council budgets although budget cuts are often requested on the entire turnover of the cleaning organisation which is clearly absurd. It should be argued that overall budget cuts be determined only on that aspect of cleaning directly attributable to the civic buildings and offices only

2.0 Expenditure

Whilst income may come from multiple sources, expenditure and opportunities for cost reduction apply across the service. Cost of delivering building cleaning will obviously differ between authorities but as an average, APSE performance networks details the following structure:

Cost area	% total cost
Front line staff costs	73.88%
All staff costs	85.26%
Central establishment changes	4.78%
Cleaning materials	3.59%

Cleaning equipment	1.10%
--------------------	-------

Clearly staff costs are by far the largest item and therefore the element where small improvements will produce the largest savings. Staff costs equate closely to number of staff cleaning hours worked and therefore cost savings rely heavily on a reduction in hours with an assumption of an accompanying higher productivity. The other items have still produced demonstrable savings at some authorities and these are also detailed later:

3.0 Front line staff costs

3.1 Productivity

By way of example APSE has established through its members an average productivity rate for schools of 186 m²/hour and offices 239 m²/hour. If the school is a non-standard design, size or still has mainly wooden floors then this may differ.

Productivity rates, whether those established by APSE or other organisations should be compared against those used internally. It is apparent that internal productivity rates maintained by authorities differ widely and have often been adjusted for arbitrary reasons to include absence and perceived inflation. A return to the base figures should be made in the first instance to provide a base requirement for the number of cleaning hours. (See APSE briefing 10/03)

3.2 Timing

Traditionally most cleaning has been completed out of hours, either early morning or after 5pm. Some authorities have successfully implemented day-time cleaning in offices (Birmingham) and for schools (Scottish Borders). (see APSE briefing 10/18). Cleaning jobs can be remodelled into full-time roles with closer customer contact, better performance and substantially higher customer satisfaction whilst reducing overall cost.

3.3 Frequency

Many older contracts were first taken out with a fixed specification which could be closely monitored. Clearly if one office is used less than another it will not require the same level of cleaning and a commonly used corridor will need more attention than a second floor dead-end.

A crude method of cost reduction being pushed in several authorities is to reduce the number of cleaning cycles from 5 days to 3 days per week. Whilst it will certainly reduce costs, it will also adversely affect cleaning standards. Better to refine the specification to one approaching output based and reapportion the number of hours to obtain the best clean within the new hours available than just not clean on 2 days. Communal facilities are unlikely to remain acceptable over 48 hours and toilets will still need cleaning daily (see APSE briefing 12/15)

3.4 Term Time only

Many schools cleaning contracts include provision for cleaning during the holiday period. To accomplish this older staff contracts include an element of holiday cleaning of up to 20 days. Many authorities have removed this or reduced it down to nearer 10 days. Results from APSE network queries suggest that an allowance of 6 days per school is sufficient to complete the need for holiday cleaning. Whilst some schools are used for community use during holidays, for those that are not, a reduced cleaning regime should be considered during the closed period.

3.5 Specification

Specifications are commonly written as part of the tender process and rarely remain an entirely rational basis for delivering the contract (SLA) over an extended period of time. Acceptable levels of cleanliness after and between cleans are detailed in the BICS guidelines which can be used to manage customer expectations of what constitutes clean. A more proactive approach is to work with the client to identify opportunities to reduce costs whilst maintaining an acceptable standard and to share any savings on an agreed basis.

3.6 Real data

It is essential that the Authority holds an up to date database of all those properties it cleans and the dimensions, floor coverings and agreed specification. Too often the details are never amended as schools add extra classrooms or change the floor coverings to carpets.

This can lead to instances where a school is being considerably undercharged or conversely charged staff hours are in excess of those required. It is not in the interest of the service provider to supply the service below cost and where appropriate a new SLA should be negotiated with the customer to reflect real circumstances. It is rare that this causes the school to seek an alternative provider although this is often held as the excuse for not seeking to challenge the cleaning charge made. In extreme circumstances the cleaning provider should consider withdrawing from the service rather than continue to lose money.

3.7 Sickness absence

Average sickness in cleaning is 4.33% according to APSE performance networks data. When long-term sickness is taken away from this figure the average is nearer 2.7%. There are examples of cleaning services who have managed to reduce the overall sickness figure down to nearer 3%. This has been achieved through combination of strict adherence to the Bradford method for managing absence and timely management enforcement. The system for monitoring sickness needs to highlight absences immediately and action to follow very shortly afterwards. Too often action is taken many days after the absence and ceases to act as a deterrent or capture the cause.

A reduction in sickness absence reduces the need to arrange cover which has additional cost, often involving transport and management time. A 2% reduction in sickness absence can equate to a £20,000 saving per £1 million turnover.

3.8 Technology

Options for the use of technology have increased in the last 5 years. The availability of rechargeable batteries at reasonable cost that do not degrade with frequent recharges has made portable appliances more available and robot technology a reality.

Portable appliances alleviate the need for wasted time in plugging in equipment and trailing wires. Robot cleaners can clean a sports hall overnight without supervision and thereby save substantial paid cleaning hours.

3.9 System thinking

Previously called business re-engineering and now lean/systems thinking is a useful technique to identify waste and remove costs from the workplace. All start by process mapping the system of working. APSE has discussed systems exercises within their performance networks benchmarking groups and found cleaning to be an area that is usually already quite 'lean'. Time savings however through staff coming to work already in uniform rather than getting changed on site, ensuring equipment is stored close to the location of use and not over-cleaning can all save tens of minutes per day and increase capacity allowing the potential to remove staff costs in the future. Removal of personal waste bins in favour of communal recycling bins has provided significant savings

3.10 Upcoming cleaning methodologies

Although not a universal solution, larger buildings may benefit from the use of Team Cleaning. This typically uses 4 staff members to cleaning the building with one preparing the way ahead of 2 more vacuuming and the last replacing furniture etc. Increased productivity of up to 30% has been observed (See APSE briefing 12/14). The greatly increased use of hot-desking has required a re-evaluation of cleaning methodologies where used and an alternative cleaning regime may be appropriate (See APSE briefing 13/20)

4.0 Management Costs

From a customer point of view the value of the area managers, administration and senior management is often hidden. The number of intermediate staff in the management structure will reflect the geography and makeup of the cleaning estate but benchmarking with other authorities will identify whether numbers are appropriate. As a guide, if the ratio of supervisors to establishments is below 1 to 45 then a managed reduction may be appropriate

Similarly training is an essential but often significant cost when run exclusively internally. Basic cleaning training is available at low or zero cost from government training schemes through local colleges. Full utilisation of the opportunities available (or even better be paid to deliver the courses through the cleaning department itself) should be made

4.1 Facilities management

Facilities management has become something of a panacea in recent times, driven perhaps by the requirements of the now abandoned 'Building Schools for the Future' programme and PPP schemes elsewhere. Facilities management can provide an opportunity for a single management structure with area supervisors acting a single point of contact and responsible for cleaning, catering, grounds maintenance, building maintenance and potentially other services including waste.

APSE research on soft FM is inconclusive on the benefits to the service provider and the loss of focus from being part of a diverse operation can reduce customer satisfaction levels in catering and cleaning. If however better utilisation of management staff is possible then the arrangement should be considered

5.0 Central establishment charges (CECs)

CECs are probably the most contentious area of cost. They are frequently apportioned in an arbitrary fashion or on the basis of head-count. Clearly for a service utilising significant numbers of relatively low paid and part-time staff this can have perverse consequences. If IT for example is recharged on the basis of headcount this will massively inflate the cost to cleaning service. Charges based on actual usage should be argued.

6.0 Cleaning materials

Bulk purchasing of consumables should produce savings. The number of different products should be rationalised to as few as possible allowing bulk purchasing and higher discounts to be achieved.

Often chemical cleaning solutions are distributed to schools and stored on-site. There have been instances where hoarding occurs which ties up chemicals which could be used elsewhere. One authority gave the caretakers/cleaning staff 3 months to return all excess chemicals ahead of it becoming a disciplinary matter. The

amount of chemicals returned to central stock saved in excess of £50,000 from the need for future purchases.

7.0 Cleaning equipment

Bulk purchasing of a standard set of equipment should provide significant savings discounts. Some authorities maintain their own equipment and reuse parts from broken machines to keep others running. Often the necessary equipment for PAT testing is also obtained allowing saving on the testing and an additional service that can be sold across the customer base.

APSE Comment

APSE exists to support in-house local services and recognises there will be pressures to seek cost reduction as a consequence of the current and anticipated squeeze of local authority funding. The substantial budget cuts of the last 4 years has forced most Councils to reduce staff numbers and consolidate the number of offices and corresponding reductions in cleaning staff numbers may be necessary. Any staff reductions should be managed sensitively and the Trade Unions fully involved, using the full range of options including redeployment, early retirement and reduced hours ahead of compulsory redundancy.

Should a member authority have a pressing difficulty, APSE has a range of assistance available to inform the search for efficiencies. This ranges from average productivity figures, benchmarking information from APSE performance networks through to full consultancy support through APSE Solutions.

Rob Bailey

APSE Principal Advisor