Briefing 15-63 December 2015

Street Cleansing: Trend analysis 2014/15

This briefing provides details on the performance information available from APSE's performance networks service looking at performance indicators and current policy issues for councils who deliver street cleansing services.

Key issues

- As is perhaps expected, following ongoing reductions in service budgets, service costs have fallen and this has been further emphasised by a reduction in cost per household for service delivery
- A welcome change has been the increase in spending on educational and behavioural change which is particularly important to support the desire to manage and reduce demand for services such as litter, fly-tipping and dog fouling removal.
- Quality of street cleaning continues to improve despite reducing budgets with the number of streets falling below a grade B standing at 5%. Unfortunately, for the second year public satisfaction levels have fallen, which may be a result of perception rather than reality as residents hear of further budget cuts being imposed on services such as street cleansing.
- Enforcement activities such as issuing fixed penalty notices is increasing which it is hoped together with educational activities will support the improvements still being made by street cleansing services despite budget reductions.

Overview

APSE performance networks is now in its 16th year of providing benchmarking for a wide cross-section of Local Authorities from throughout the UK. Street Cleansing data has been part of the comparison process since 2000/01 with results reported annually across a broad range of Performance Indicators. The continuing trends across the service are examined each year to provide further evidence for participating councils of how their own service compares against the national picture. The analysis is based on averages across the whole service and compares this year's figures (2014-15) with previously submitted data.

Performance Indicators for Street Cleansing continue to be banded, with a balanced set of headline indicators identified across the triangulated themes of cost, quality and customer satisfaction as Key Performance Indicators.

This Executive Summary deals with each theme in turn using data from initial returns for 2014/15 against final returns from previous years. Consistent with last year, the data supplied by 50 authorities makes up the averages for this summary, 39 of them having supplied data to the process last year as well.

As authorities continue to submit data after the publication of the service reports, the averages for each Performance Indicator will change slightly by the end of the current financial year. Occasionally this affects the overall trends but in the main the direction of travel tends to remain constant.

Council finances all over the UK are under immense pressure which has led to the cost elements of performance networks taking on increasingly meaningful significance. The table below draws from average costs from the last four years showing the breakdown of expenditure within the service and how it changes year on year.

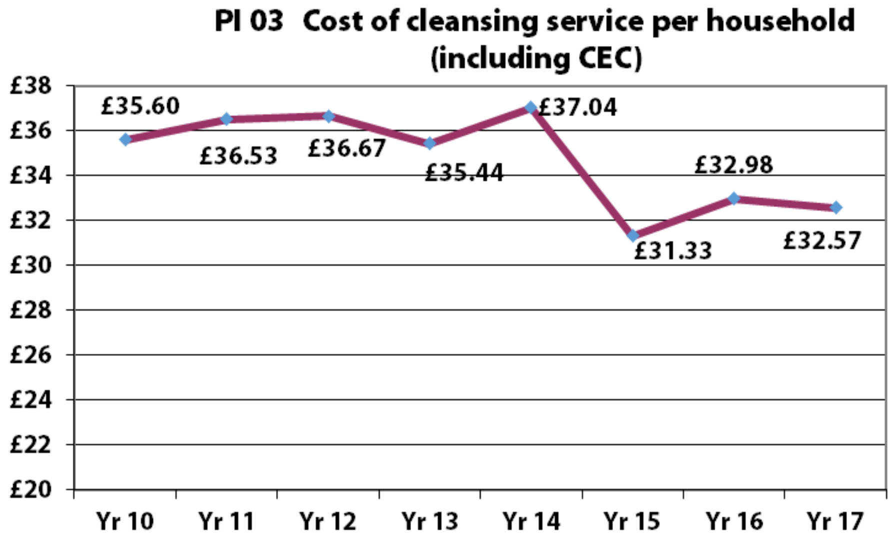
Cost area	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Front line staff costs	56.77%	57.30 %	57.26 %	57.99 %
All staff costs	64.99%	66.08 %	66.55 %	66.69 %
Transport costs	21.83%	21.15 %	22.22 %	21.81 %
Central recharges	6.25%	6.65 %	6.67 %	7.35 %

As can be seen above, there has been a slight increase in the percentage of staff costs over the past four years, transport remaining fairly constant as overall budgets reduce but central charges increasing pro rata.

Trend Analysis

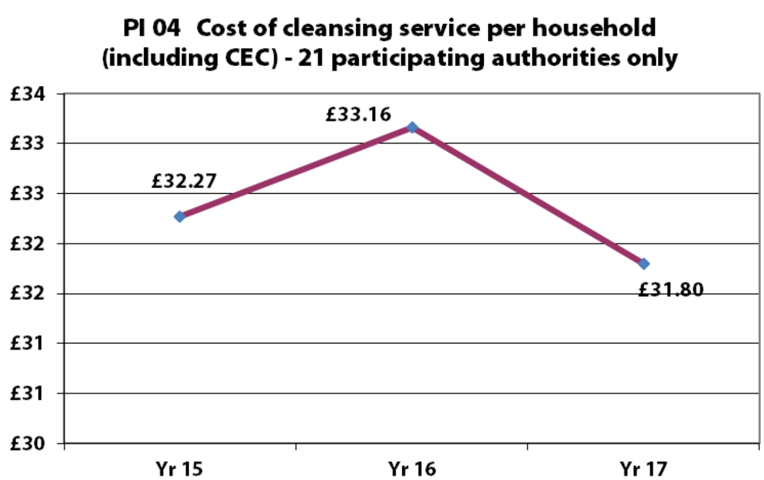
Cost indicators

As expected, the overall costs for delivering the street cleansing service have reduced on average across participating authorities over the past year. As shown on the chart below, there was a significant decrease in the average "cost per household" (PI 03) in 2012-13 (Year 15) which was then reversed slightly the following year leading to a slight rise in the average which was a little unexpected at the time.

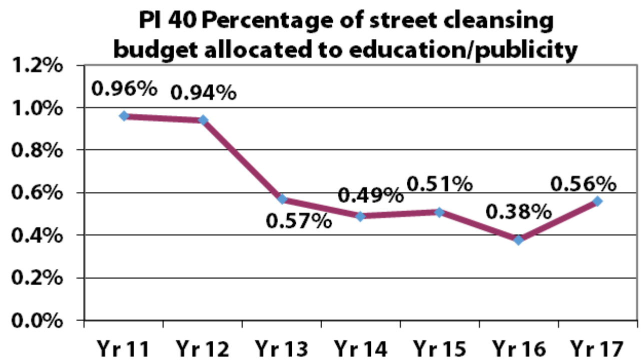


While this was probably influenced to a degree by changes in the participating authorities, a separate analysis of just the 21 councils that have consistently participated across the past 3 years shows the same trend (see overleaf) with an average 3% increase in costs in Year 16, with more than 50% of them seeing their costs increase. This appears to have been reversed last year with the average cost per household for this group reducing by 3.7%.

In keeping with the expected trend, the overall costs of street cleansing for 39 local authorities who participated this year and last has reduced by a net £9.3 million (an average of £238k per authority although there were still 36% of them for whom their costs actually increased).



The amount of the overall cost that is allocated to education and publicity has been tracked for the past ten years (PI 40) starting out in Year 8 (2005/06) at 1.71% of the overall street cleansing budget, but declining steadily (other than for a brief reversal) in the intervening years, with last year's figure just 0.38%. This was considered to be an inevitable consequence of national cost cutting, but nonetheless unfortunate at a time when the need to reduce the demand for the service hasn't been greater. Interestingly however, this year has seen the first real increase in the budget for education and publicity for the last 6 years, an increase of 47%.

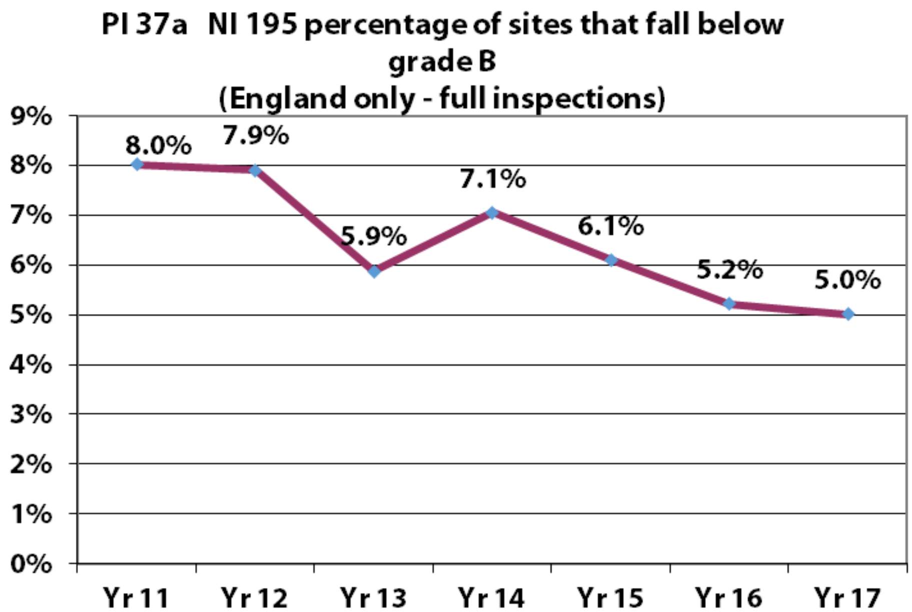


Quality indicators

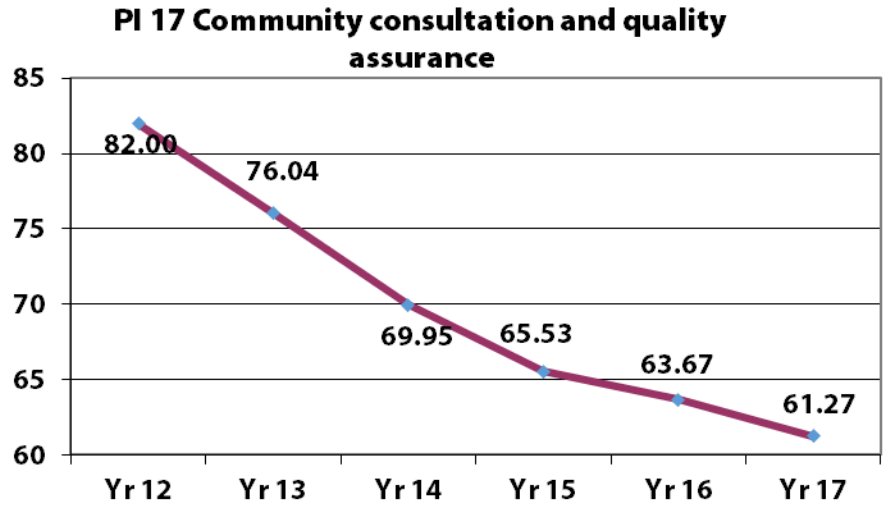
It has been several years since the government removed the need for local authorities in England to report their cleanliness standards as a national performance indicator. However, APSE have continued to use the former NI 195 as a measure of quality for those authorities who have continued the process with a full set of inspections and reporting those sites that fell below grade B (PI 37a). Surprisingly given the well documented drop in funding for the service, the quality of cleanliness continues to improve, albeit the smallest change for several years (4%), but still a credit to those who are juggling reducing resources and still managing to make a difference to one of the areas that the general public always consider to be one of the most important public services. Just how long this can be maintained remains to be seen.

In Scotland and Wales, Local Environmental Audit and Management Systems (LEAMS) continue to be used to measure cleanliness, and this relates to sites that are graded B and above. In 2013/14 (Year 16), Scottish authorities classed as urban within performance networks averaged 76.43% from their self-inspections (with rural and mixed returning an average of 83.32%), continuing a slight year-on-year improvement seen over several years.

This increased again in 2014/15 to 81.03% mirroring the improvements in cleanliness quality seen in England. However, in Wales, last year's LEAMS figure from self-inspection dropped to 77.42% from the average 84.00% from the previous two years, which has been exactly matched this year to date.

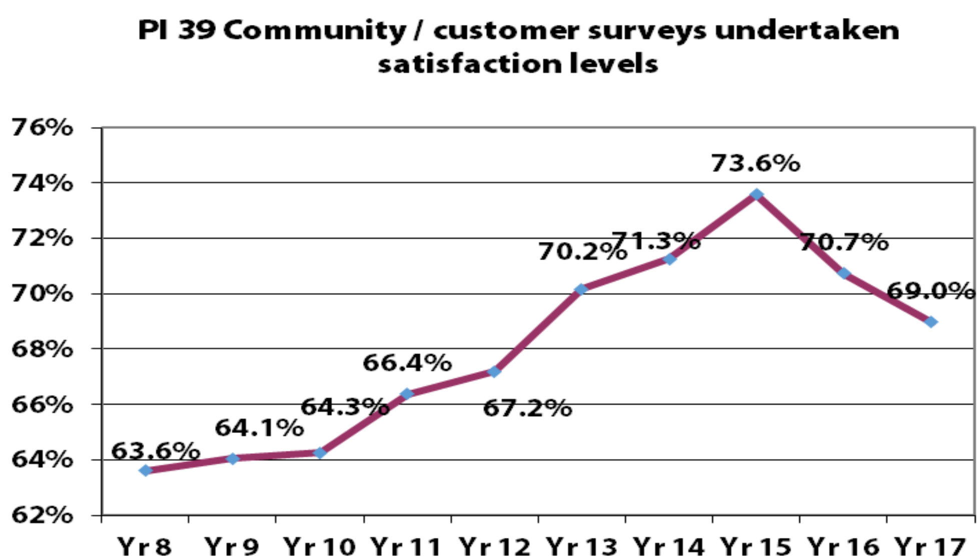


The trend for APSE's other quality measure, the combined score for internal quality assurance and customer consultation (PI 17) has been in a downward direction for several years, again endemic of the budget balancing exercises being undertaken around the UK. Last year's first submissions suggested that the decline may have been arrested but the later returns lowered the average again and there has been a further 4% reduction last year as more formal accreditations appear to being sidelined to save money. That is not to say that the ISO 9001 and Investors In People ethos is not still being followed by those who had the awards, but formal recognition appears decreasingly to be being sought.



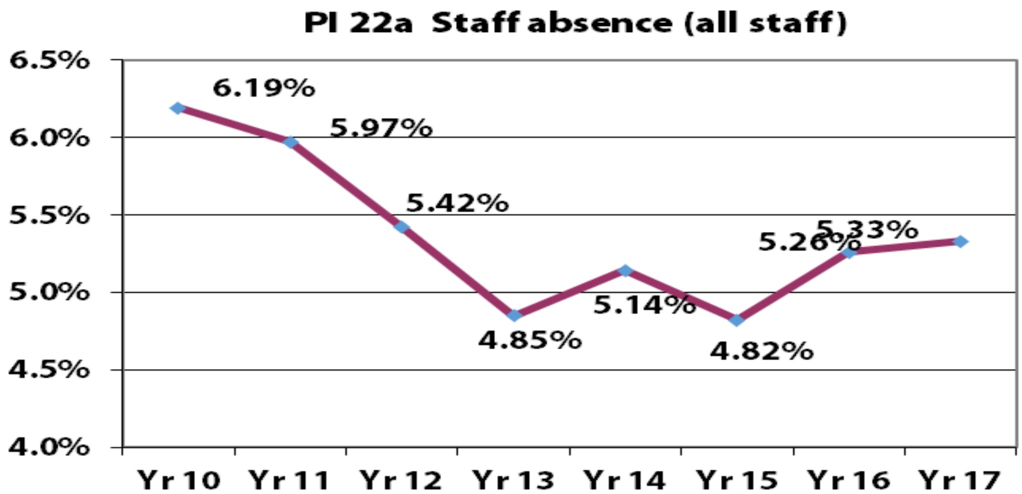
Customer satisfaction indicators

Last year, following 7 years of average annual increases in the level of satisfaction recorded from customer surveys, the first reduction was recorded, perhaps the first indication that the austerity measures and subsequent reductions in some aspects of the service are starting to be noticed. It is interesting to note that despite the increases in cleanliness scores still being reported, customer satisfaction has again fallen, this time by 2.4%.

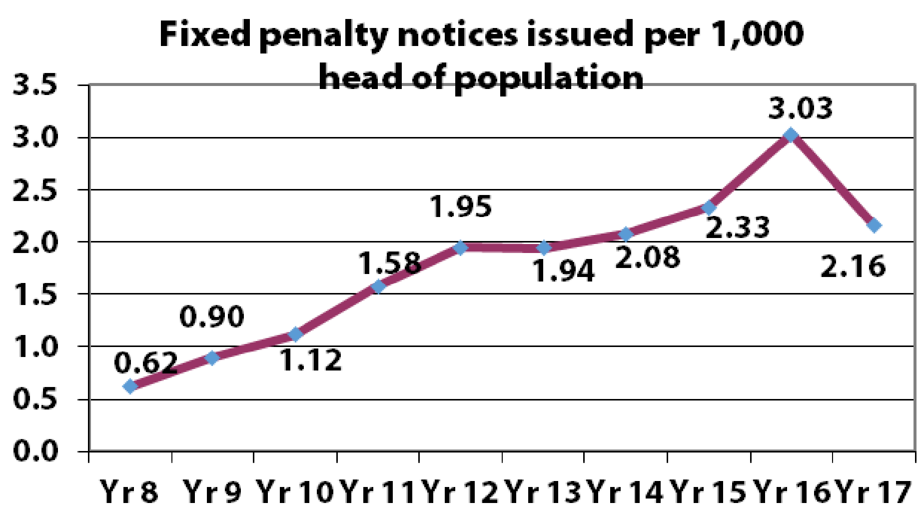


Other indicators

Staff absence levels have fluctuated year on year, 2013/14 seeing a fairly significant increase, despite many authorities embarking on more rigorous monitoring and managing of absences. Year 17 has seen a further increase, albeit a modest one.



APSE have been collecting enforcement statistics through Performance Networks for the past 10 years and have seen the use of Fixed Penalty Notices issued by local authority play an increasingly more prominent role in the battle against those who drop litter and commit other environmental crimes on our streets and public areas. There was a 30% rise in the average number issued per 1,000 population in 2013/14. So it is therefore a little surprising to see a significant decrease in the average numbers in the first batch of returns for Year 17.



Interpretation of data

The effects of service cuts had started to be noticed in Year 16 data returns with the reversal in the levels of customer satisfaction of particular note. This year's returns have shown that downward trend repeating next to significant reductions in the average cost of delivering the service. However, as previously, the cleanliness quality indicators continue to show that improvements are still being made despite the pressures that the service is under.

As an alternative to cleaning streets, APSE continue to advocate methods for reducing demand for the service, in particular changing people's habits around litter through increased education and the use of powers such as the Clean Neighbourhoods Act to enforce where necessary through the issue of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's). Previous years' data returns had shown a continuous reduction in the budget allocated to education and publicity campaigns, presumably as part of cost cutting measures. This was balanced by increased use of enforcement measures in each of the 9 years that statistics on the issuing of FPN's had been collected.

However, 2013-14 has seen a reversal in these two trends, with an increase in budgets for education campaigns but a reduction in the amount of FPN's issued. APSE will continue to monitor this and other correlations resulting from austerity-driven changes.

Future focus

Where local authorities face severe pressure on public realm services APSE firmly believes that good performance information supports the decisions that will impact upon the future direction of public realm services. As often these services support other council ambitions and outcomes for local communities such as the quality of the local environment, health and well-being.

Good performance data can :-

- Help to set a clear baseline on which competitiveness, efficiency and value for money can be measured in a systematic manner.
- Identify the impact of service changes and interventions for your own local authorities and for others.
- Assess the quality, cost and competitiveness of the services that councils provide on a regular basis.
- Help to report data in meaningful ways to both elected members and the public.
- Identify direction of travel and pace of change with regard to service delivery.
- Identify inefficiencies such as poor productivity and high cost.

Supporting service improvement through process benchmarking and sharing best practice examples is an excellent starting point for local authorities seeking to improve local services.

Whilst public satisfaction with council services has remained high there is now a worrying trend, as noted at the start of this briefing that quality levels and public satisfaction are beginning to fall, which would suggest the impact of some service cuts in the public realm are starting to have a negative impact on citizen satisfaction with such services. It is imperative that this trend is reversed and through the use of benchmarking data local authorities can gather information on how other are dealing with service cuts yet still retaining quality of service.

Wayne Priestley Principal Advisor kindly assisted by Dave Henrys APSE Associate