



association for public service excellence

Trend Analysis 2021/22

Refuse Collection



Briefing 23/29

May 2023

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Trend Analysis 2021/22

Local authority refuse collection

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About APSE

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is a not-for-profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK.

Promoting excellence in public services, APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority frontline services and operates one of the UK's largest research programmes in local government policy and frontline service delivery matters.

1 Overview

Year 23(2020/21) saw the biggest change in data returns caused by the measures which local authorities had to introduce to address the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic. The effects were felt across all service aspects including costs, performance, quality assurance, people management etc. Because of such measures the Year 23 trend analysis was skewed, mainly in a negative manner by these changes and responses to dealing with the pandemic.

Local authority refuse and recycling collection services coped admirably with the challenges through pragmatic and innovative approaches and as a consequence gained considerable public support, ranking highly in public opinion surveys.

Year 24 (2021/22) has seen the impacts of the pandemic recede and the extreme measures taken in 2020/21 have been able to be put aside with a degree of normality returning. However, the effects of the continuing budget reductions which began pre-pandemic will again continue to present an increasing challenge for local authorities to be able to continue to provide a high level of service delivery.

This report provides information from authorities who have submitted data returns for the refuse collection service. It is a summary of the information collected this year and, in conjunction with the information obtained from previous years, indicates how the trends change from year to year. The analysis is based on averages across all family groups and is therefore service-wide.

2 Trend analysis

The trend analysis examines the refuse collection submissions that have been returned for 2021/22 (Year 24) and compares them with the previous four years to see how the trends are developing. Again, it needs to be pointed out that the years 2020/21 and to a lesser degree 2021/22 will still have performance costs and levels affected by the demands placed on the service during the pandemic.

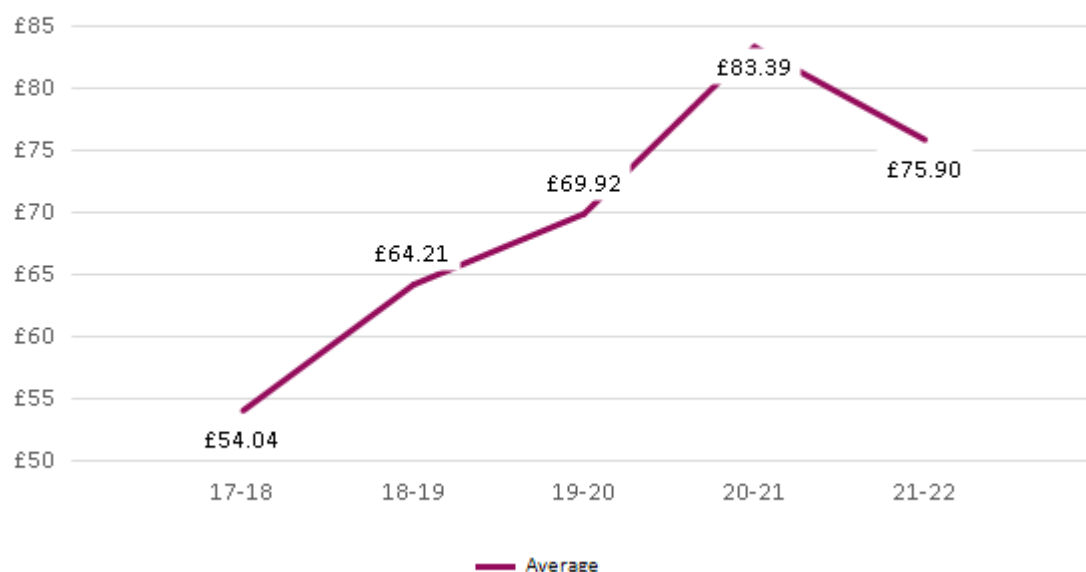
3 Cost

Clearly from the graph below, there has been a fall in the cost of refuse collection during 2021/22. It is perhaps not unexpected that following the pandemic, the cost of service has decreased.

The need to provide additional refuse collection vehicles and PPE, and possibly the need for agency staff to cover absences, will have proved largely unnecessary in 2021/22 as the pandemic waned, thus reducing overall service costs.

By association, the return to work by large sections of the population will have resulted in lower levels of domestic waste tonnages going through the system and consequently domestic waste treatment and disposal costs will have reduced.

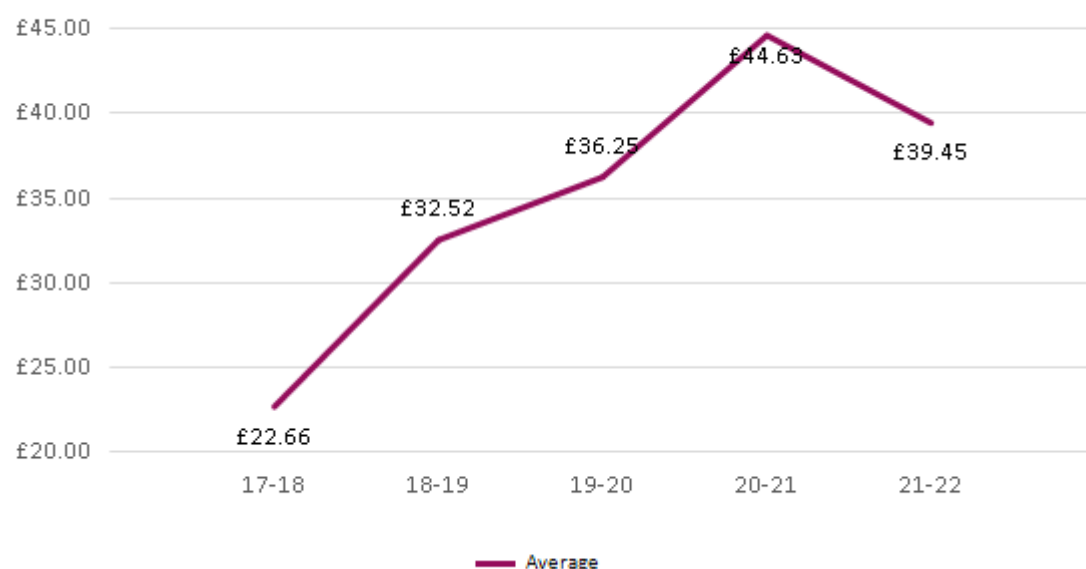
PI 02c Cost of refuse collection service per household (excluding landfill tax, waste disposal and CEC)



The net costs of recycling per household (PI 03i), as with residual waste collection costs, have also reduced. This is likely to be due to the removal of many of the pandemic requirement (additional vehicles, PPE, suspension of services etc.)

Also, the reintroduction and normalisation of recycling services has meant income from recyclables will have returned to at least pre-pandemic levels once again helping to offset recycling collection costs.

PI 03i Net cost of recycling per household (excluding CECs)

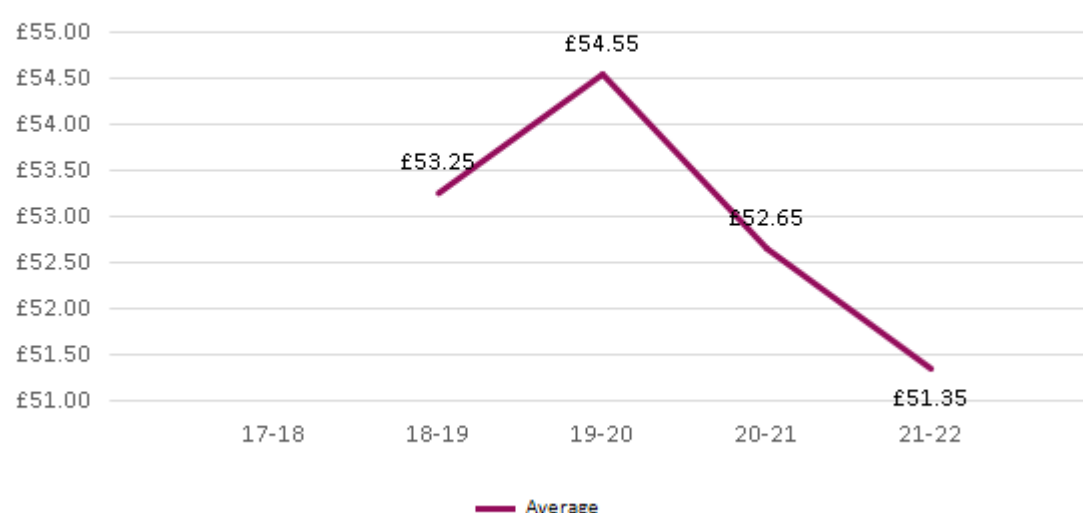


There has been a slight fall in labour costs. This is due in some part to absences within the workforce due to illness and social distancing reducing in 2021/22.

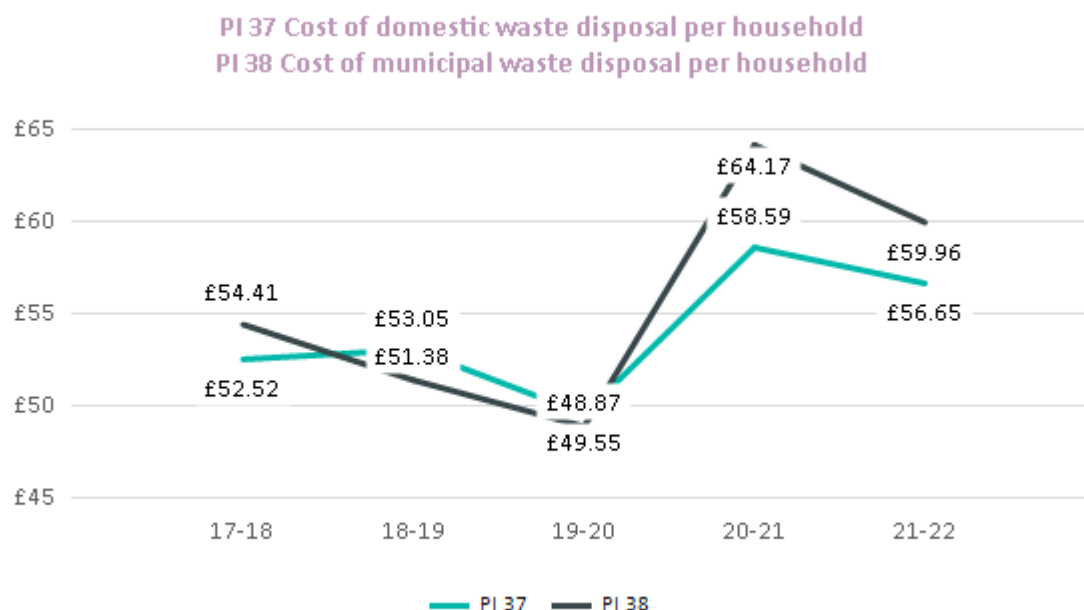
However, it should be remembered that this indicator is labour costs as a percentage of total service expenditure, therefore as we seen a gradual reduction in other service costs such as additional vehicles, extra uniform requirements, cleaning materials both personal and vehicle hygiene etc. as the effects of the pandemic decreased, then there must be other reasons why labour costs have still fallen against overall service costs. It is likely to some extent that the increase cost of fuel and to some degree the increased costs of parts and supplies during 2021/22 may have added extra costs to the total service costs, and therefore caused the continuing fall in labour costs as a percentage of overall service costs.

It is possible that following the pay rises implemented in 2022/23 and the gradual fall in fuel costs, that 2022/23 may see a rise in labour costs as a percentage of overall service costs.

PI 08c Total labour costs as a percentage of total expenditure (excluding waste disposal costs and CEC)

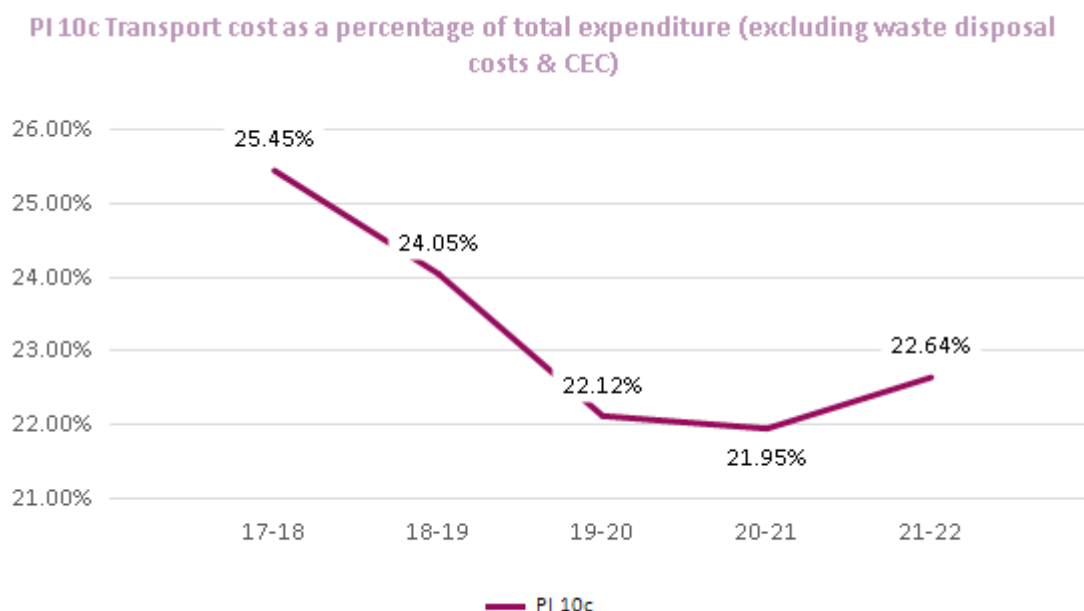


Year 24 has seen a decrease in both costs, which is likely to again be a direct result of the reducing impacts and extra service requirements caused by the pandemic. As people have returned to work less waste has been generated in the home and therefore less waste has been presented for disposal. In addition, the re-introduction of recycling collections will also have taken large amounts of domestic waste out of the amount needing to be disposed of. This reduction will also have meant the total amount of municipal waste needing to be disposed of, which domestically generated waste usually forms the largest amount, will also have fallen.



This result is undoubtedly a reflection of increases in fuel costs occurring world-wide in 2021/22 when prices rose by over 20%. Added to this has been the reintroduction of many of those services which were suspended during 2020/21, such as bulky waste collections and recycling collections and their associated vehicles.

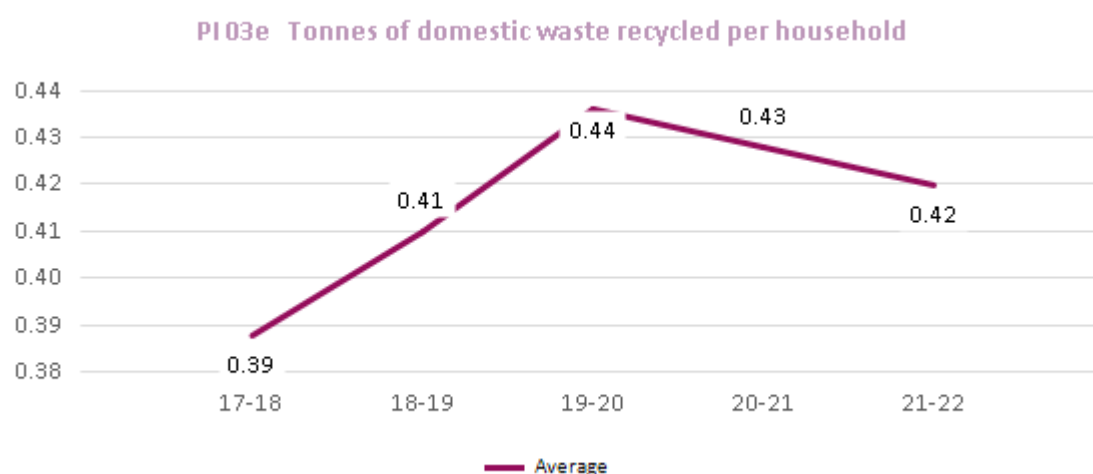
This rise may be less in 2022/23 as fuel prices have begun to reduce and stabilise.



4 Recycling

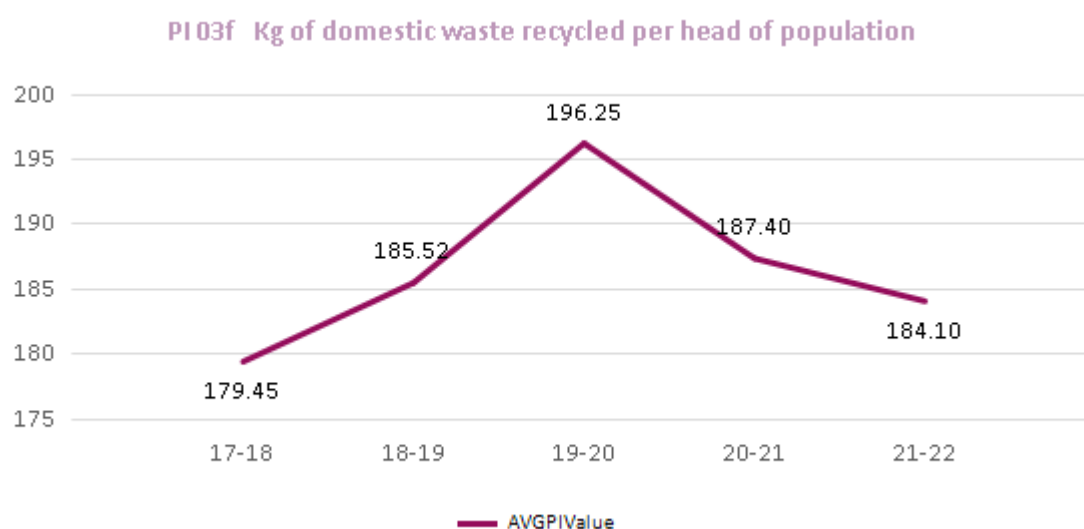
There has been a very slight fall in the amount of waste recycled per household. This reduction is likely to be due to the continuing suspension of recycling related services as late as 2021 caused by

the latter stages of the pandemic still being felt. However, the fact the fall is so small, shows that the drop is likely to be halted in 2022/23 when all services were back to pre-pandemic levels of delivery and where the trend for tonnes of waste collected for recycling was on the rise.



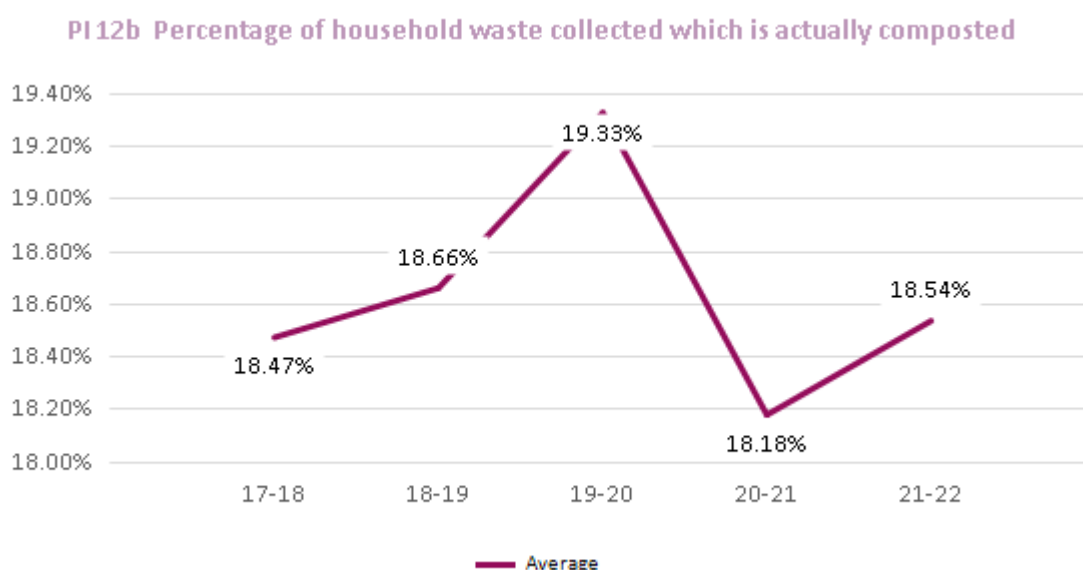
As mentioned previously, the suspension of many recycling services during 2020/21, caused by the pandemic, led to reductions in waste recycled per head of population, and although there has again been a fall in 2021/22, the decline has been less marked.

Although 2021 was still a period where restrictions in service delivery were being caused by the pandemic, the early parts of 2022 will have seen normal service levels introduced, thus explaining why recycling declines have been less extreme as more materials were once again being collected. It is anticipated that 2022/23 will see recycling levels rise once again.



This decrease in 2020/21 in the amount of household waste collected 'which is actually composted', reflected the suspension of the number of green waste and food waste collections itself caused by the need for councils to cancel these services to ensure their residual domestic waste collections could be delivered. This obviously resulted in less compostable waste being collected. However, 2021/22 has seen a notable increase, in amounts of household waste being

collected for composting due to the reintroduction of green waste collections once again.

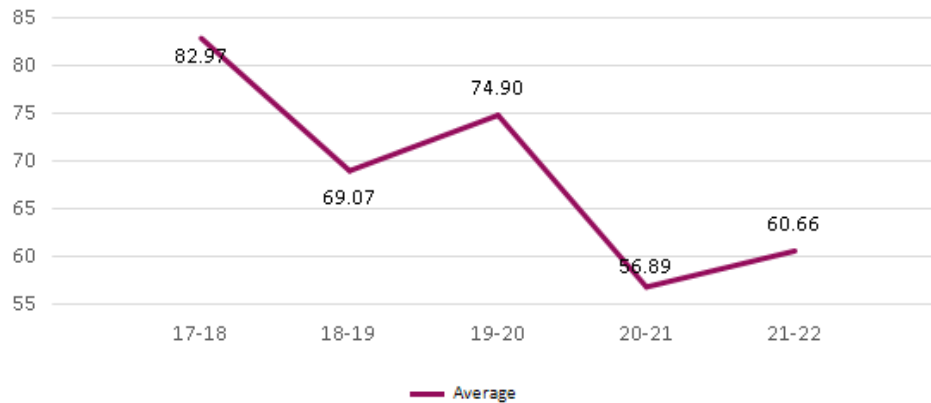


There has been a slight rise in the amounts of waste being sent to landfill in 2021/22. Although a small increase this is not a trend local authorities would want to see in the future. One possible explanation could be that many recycling processors may have taken a longer time to re-start up post pandemic and may not have been able to accept the increases in recycling when services were re-introduced. By association there may have been difficulties re-establishing markets for recyclables post-pandemic, causing some materials to be landfilled which previously would have gone to market.

In fact, official figures¹ show that in 2021/22, total local authority managed waste increased by 0.9 per cent to 26.1 million tonnes. Of that 8.1 per cent of all local authority waste (2.1 million tonnes) was disposed of via landfill. This was an increase of 0.1 million tonnes (4.6 per cent) from 2020/21. Despite this slight rise it is anticipated that 2022/23 will see the progress being made pre-pandemic to reduce the amount of waste being landfilled.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-collected-waste-management-annual-results-202122/local-authority-collected-waste-management-annual-results-20212>

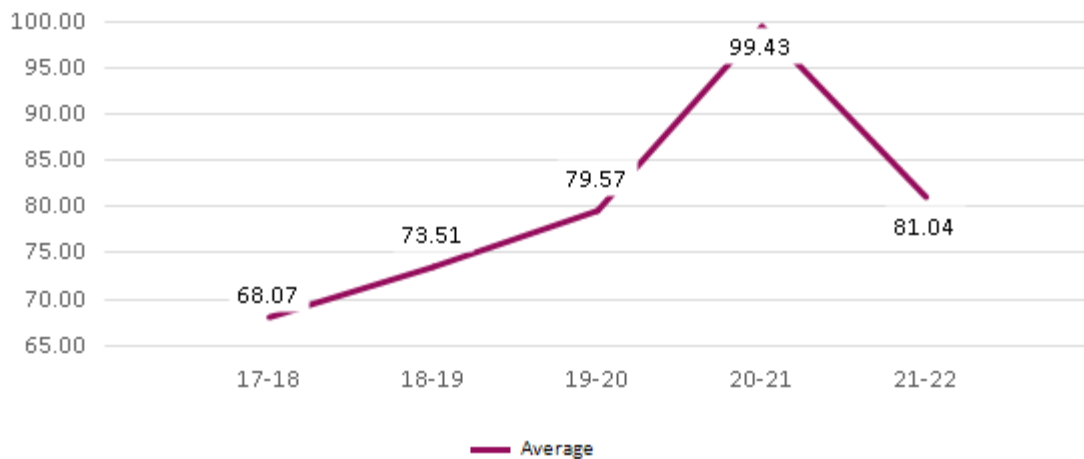
PI 32a Kg of residual household waste landfilled per annum per head of population
(Unitary authorities only)



5 Efficiency

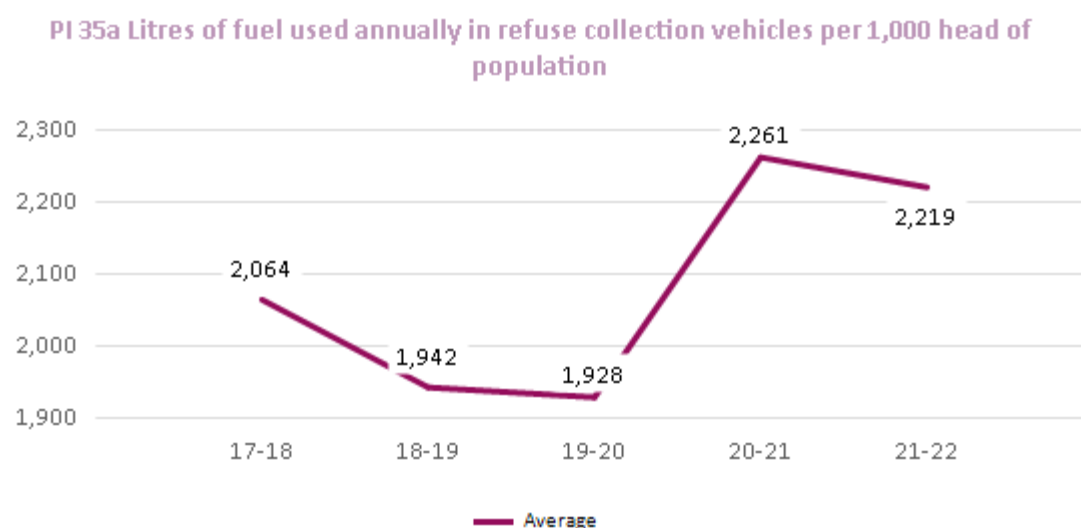
2020/21 saw a disproportionate increase in missed bins. No doubt much of this could be due to the fact many refuse collection services were using redeployed staff or agency staff to cover absences from within the normal refuse collection staff many of whom may have been sick or voluntarily shielding or quarantining because of track and trace notifications. However, in 2021/22 there has been a decrease in the number of bins, as regular crew members have returned to work and with them a more accurate knowledge of bin collection rounds.

PI 22a Missed collections per 100,000 collections (full year)



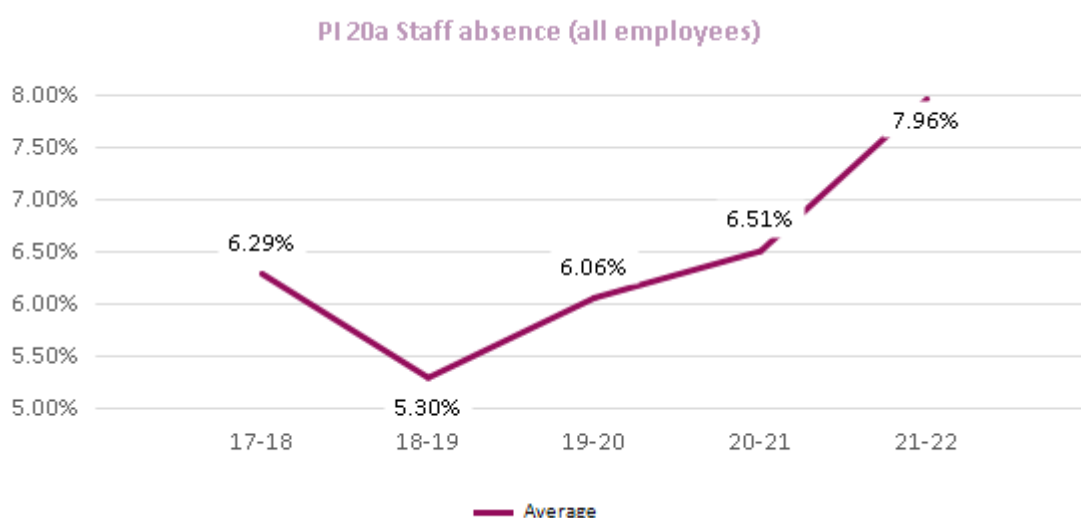
The increases in the litres of fuel used in 2020/21 was in no small part due to the need to provide additional vehicles to support refuse collection staff in delivering the waste collection service. Many councils adopted a two in a cab rule which considering most refuse collection crews are three in number, meant additional vehicles being needed to ferry the third member of staff in accordance with the requirements of social distancing, hence the increase in litres of fuel used during 2020/21. Now this practice is no longer required the litres of fuel used has fallen.

However, what also be considered is the use of alternative fuel vehicles now being introduced, which will also reduce the litres of fuel being used.



6 Staffing

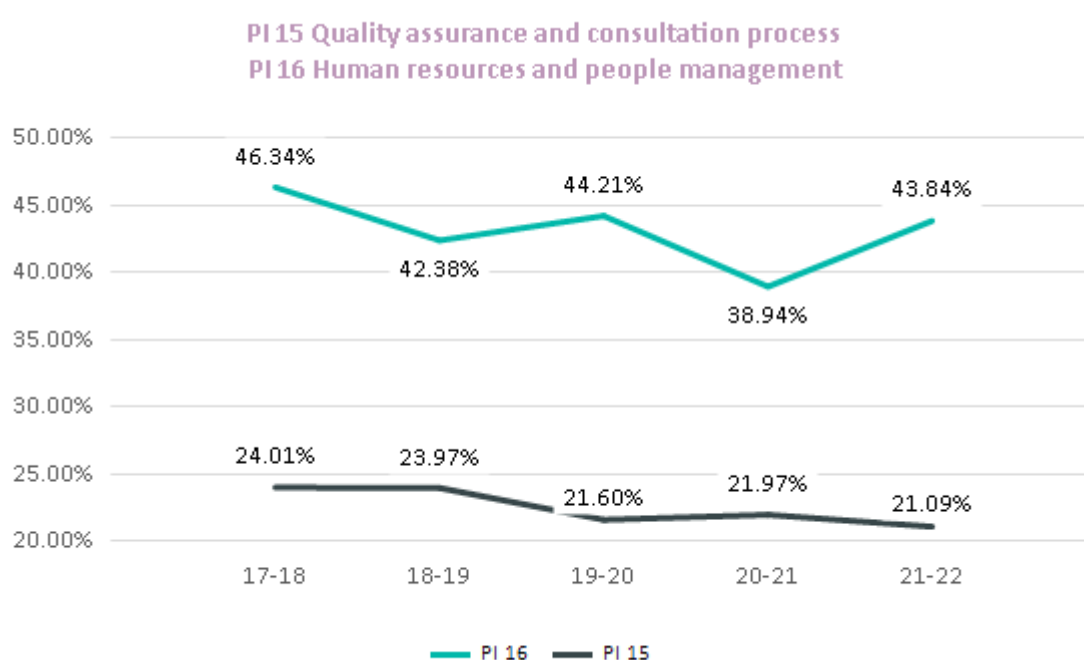
2020/21 saw the worst pandemic to hit Europe and the rest of the world in living memory. As such workforces were being severely affected by increasing absence levels. Although there has been an increase in staff absences it is perhaps not as high as would have been expected. It is estimated that in the refuse collections service across the UK the average increase in days lost was only 1.11. However, perhaps it would be unreasonable to expect absence levels to fall immediately as the impacts were still being felt after the worst of pandemic had passed, with many vulnerable staff suffering from on-going symptoms well into 2021/22. Therefore, before we can obtain a truer picture of staff levels, we may need to wait for the 2022/23 results before we can address any concerns about rising staff absence levels.



Throughout this analysis, the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic during 2020/21 have been

apparent. It is therefore not surprising that there was a fall in quality assurance and consultation. With many people working from home in 2020/21 there would have been difficulty in the ability to improve on these areas. However, 2021/22 has seen an improvement in this area as people have begun once again to interact with service users and colleagues to improve service quality and service delivery.

With regards to human resources and people management we have seen a slight fall in these areas, which could partly be explained by the need to remove some of the pandemic provisions which were necessary at that time e.g., providing additional training to cover the work of absent colleagues. This would result in a slight fall in scores but the level we are now at seems to reflect pre-pandemic levels of 2019/20.



7 Interpretation of data

This last year's data (2021/22) has delivered scores and levels of performance that are more reflective of the pre-pandemic years. The ability to measure these results against the years prior to the extremities caused by the pandemic is more helpful to judge performance more accurately, although it should be remembered that 2021/22 would still have some elements of the problems caused by the pandemic with regards to service cost and performance..

What should be acknowledged and celebrated however, is the manner in which refuse collection and recycling services dealt with the challenges of the pandemic and has moved onwards to return and improve service quality and reinstate expected service level required by service users.

The short-term changes of 2020/21 and the moving forwards post-pandemic will no doubt lead to further discussions within the performance networks benchmarking groups. Indeed, some of the

changes introduced may well become the new way of working and again these will be areas for further work to be entered into in the working groups.

For more information on these meetings or to get involved in these groups, please contact performance.networks@apse.org.uk.

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