



# Taking ownership of your improvement

How APSE can help councils in Wales meet statutory requirements on performance



**Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021**  
2021 as c 1

An Act of Senedd Cymru to make provision about local government; local government finance; local government elections; electoral registration and electoral administration: [20 January 2021]

Having been passed by Senedd Cymru and having received the assent of Her Majesty, it is enacted as follows:

**PART 1**  
**ELECTIONS**  
Overview of Part

**1 Overview**

This Part—

- (a) provides for the extension of the right to vote in local government elections to new categories of person (sections 2 to 4);
- (b) provides for two systems for the election of councillors for principal councils (the simple majority system and the single transferable vote system) and makes provision about which system applies to any particular council (including a power for any councils to decide which applies) and the powers to make rules for such elections (sections 5 to 13);
- (c) provides for change to the electoral cycle for local government elections from four years to five years (sections 14 to 16) and extension of the power to change the ordinary day of local elections in Wales (section 17);
- (d) provides for registration of local government electors without application (section 18);

**Archwilio Cymru**  
**Audit Wales**

## Use of performance information: service user perspective and outcomes

A summary of findings from our review at Welsh councils

July 2024

**apse**

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**apse Reports**

APSE performance networks highways data

Case study report 2022

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## About APSE

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The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) are a not-for-profit association committed to ensuring excellence in local public services. Working with over 300 UK councils, and owned by our members, APSE maintains and develops a highly active network of local government officers, managers and councillors.

Supported by our sector-leading UK-wide benchmarking data, as well as our rich database of consultants, interim managers and data analysts, APSE works to ensure our member councils deliver the most economic, efficient and effective services for their communities.

An ethical low-cost network dedicated to excellence in local services, APSE are exceptionally well placed to support your council on its improvement journey and meet the Welsh Government's statutory requirements on local authority performance.

*As a not-for-profit organisation, any financial surplus that APSE makes is reinvested into the association. This means that we are always working solely for the benefit of our member councils.*



## **Statutory performance requirements**

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The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 makes it a requirement that local councils exercise their functions effectively and use their resources economically, efficiently and effectively.

To achieve this, the Act lays out duties councils must fulfil. These duties include:

- Keeping performance under review.
- Consulting on performance.
- Reporting on performance.
- Arranging a panel performance assessment.
- Responding to the report for the above panel assessment.

A number of these duties are ongoing monitoring processes or form part of the annual financial reporting of councils. The exception to this is the duty to have a panel performance assessment.

## **Panel performance assessments**

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The Act states that a panel performance assessment must happen at least once between two consecutive ordinary council elections.

It is intended that the results and recommendations of the panels will give councils an external perspective on their services and how they are performing.

The Act requires that a council appoint an independent panel to review how it is meeting the performance requirements set out in the Act.

## The process

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Under the guidance provided by the Act, councils are given a degree of flexibility on how to conduct performance panels. However, the guidance encourages councils to split assessment into 3 distinct stages:

### Stage 1

The council draws up scoping documents, identifies the panel, establishes terms of reference, provides the panel with the required information, and makes practical arrangements.



### Stage 2

This is the actual assessment and will be led, chiefly, by the panel based on the requirements of the scoping documents. Stage 2 is likely to include a mix of desk-based reviews, interviews and workshops with elected members, officers and stakeholders, as well as a verbal presentation of the panel's findings.



### Stage 3

Involves the production of a final report. The council then reviews the report and responds to it. The council ought to involve any governance and audit committees in the consideration of recommendations coming from the panel report.

Whilst there is no strict timetable for these reviews to take place within the election cycle, the council is required to publish a panel assessment report at least six months before the date of the next ordinary election.

## How APSE can help with panel assessments

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As an independent, not-for-profit organisation whose mission is to embed excellence in local public services, APSE is ideally placed to support councils through their performance panel process, helping to drive up service delivery outcomes and standards both at a corporate level as well as an individual service level.

### Strategic level support

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APSE have associates who have worked in the highest levels of local government and are able to provide support on a strategic basis within council services. Most of our senior level associates have worked at various levels of management - from service manager to chief executive.

This experience can be brought to assessment panels to not only provide a well-informed independent view of the council at a corporate level, but to also guide the panel through the assessment process.

### Operational support

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*“Peer reviews on specific services or on particular themes or issues... can complement the corporate, organisational level, statutory panel performance assessment required by the Act.”*

*Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021*

APSE’s rich database of associates covers the full range of individual council services, and each associate is highly experienced in the day-to-day running of their specialised services. Informed by this experience, as well as APSE’s comprehensive UK-wide performance benchmarking data, our associates will provide robust and comparative reviews on operations, policies and procedures within your local authority.

*How APSE associates can help you meet broader performance targets*

## Peer reviews

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Not only are APSE associates a safe pair of hands when recruited to manage operations on an interim basis, they also provide a fresh pair of eyes when your council needs to identify improvements in performance. Experts in conducting peer reviews, APSE associates specialise in:

- Policy reviews
- Staffing performance reviews
- Service reviews
- Operational reviews
- Strategic and forward planning

APSE associates can also review the commercial aspects of departments, drawing on previous experience working in the private sector as well as the wider public sector.

## Critical friend

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APSE associates have worked at all levels within local government, from chief executive to frontline operational roles. Because of this range of experience, APSE associates can perform the role of a critical friend or mentor for senior staff members and management team.

Our associates can provide specialist advice and assist with creating and implementing action plans, including supporting staff involved in these action plans.

This critical friend support can be delivered on an ad-hoc, call-off basis or can be provided on a more structured basis.

## Diagnostic workshops

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APSE associates have a proven track record in facilitating open and highly engaging diagnostic workshops for council staff. These workshops allow your workforce to share their thoughts on service improvements freely and constructively.

Any feedback developed as part of these workshops will be provided without bias, due to the independent nature of the facilitating APSE associate.

To better understand the profiles of APSE associates – their experience in local government and the frontline services they specialise in – please go to the Appendix on page 14 for examples on our database.

## Data analysts

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A number of our senior associates specialise in working with APSE's benchmarking service - APSE Performance Networks – and so are able to provide detailed and comparative data analysis with other council departments across the UK.

You can learn more about how benchmarking against your council peers in UK local government, via membership of APSE Performance Networks, can ensure your authority uses its resources *“economically, efficiently and effectively”*, overleaf.

*“Both consultants offered great support throughout the process and kept us up-to-date on all progress.”*





*How APSE Performance Networks can help*

## **Benchmark your performance against peers**

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APSE Performance Networks are the largest voluntary public sector benchmarking service across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Used by over 200 local authorities, we lead the way in local government benchmarking.

Recognised as *“well established and trusted to deliver information”* by the Institute of Local Government studies at the University of Birmingham, the size of our membership gives added benefits to members by being able to offer a wide variety of comparator groups.

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APSE Performance Networks covers a diverse range of frontline services:

- Building cleaning
  - Building maintenance
  - Cemetery and crematorium services
  - Catering services
  - Climate change
  - Core highways
  - Environmental health
  - Parks, open spaces and horticultural services
  - Refuse collection
  - Roads, highways and winter maintenance
  - Sports and leisure facility management
  - Street cleansing
  - Street lighting
  - Trading standards
  - Transport operations and vehicle maintenance
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*“Performance Networks allows us to benchmark our services on a national level, improving the way we report on our successes and helping us network with our UK council peers.”*



## Identifying your areas for improvement

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APSE Performance Networks provides a range of outputs that can be used by participating councils to inform decision-making on the current performance of service areas as well as plan for future operations.

Some of the resources provided to members by the Performance Networks team include:

- Full performance reports
- Performance indicators
- Direction of travel reports
- Best practice case studies
- Bespoke analysis - on request

## Use of APSE data by UK governments

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APSE data has been used by Defra in the litter dashboard for England, in national studies by Audit Scotland on unit costs, and by the Welsh Government on the cost of school meals.

*"The evidence of our standings within Performance Networks continues to inform our decisions on staffing, function, pricing, training and product development."*



## Helping you collect service-user information

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*"Most councils provide limited performance information to enable senior leaders to understand progress towards the outcomes they are seeking to achieve, and the perspective of service users."*

*Audit Wales, July 2024*

A 2024 report by Audit Wales found few councils are putting the views of those who use local services at the core of their reporting, casting doubt on whether many councils have proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the use of their resources (therefore failing in their statutory performance requirements under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021).

This is where APSE's Performance Networks team can help.

Our customer satisfaction surveys allow you to measure the perceptions, opinions and preferences of service-users. The surveys provide a critical feedback loop for continuous improvement in your service's quality and value.

The Performance Networks team will design the survey under your instruction, consolidate responses and send you a report at the end of the collection period. You also have the option to access the live responses so you can view feedback in real time.

# Cost schedule for review work

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The cost for any review work will depend on a number of factors. These include:

- Number of days work.
- Level of work to be undertaken – higher level work could incur higher costs due to the cost and experience of the associate involved.
- APSE membership status of the local authority.
- Levels of data available for Performance Networks (where applicable).

For any work to be undertaken as part of a review, a full proposal will be drawn up and provided to the enquiring local authority. The proposal will include an overview of what is required, details of how the associate plans to conduct the work, as well as a cost for the work.

A typical scope will include quality assurance measures on the final report, an opportunity for review and final edits on any reports with the clients and substantially discounted rates for APSE member councils.

*“Both consultants were excellent and provided a first-class piece of work within a very tight timescale.”*



**Belfast**  
City Council

*Take ownership of your improvement with APSE*

## Contact us

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To enquire about how APSE associates can support your council with panel assessments, peer reviews, consultancy and interim management, please contact:

**Matt Miller – Executive Consultant**

[mmiller@apse.org.uk](mailto:mmiller@apse.org.uk)

**Emma Taylor – Executive Consultant**

[etaylor@apse.org.uk](mailto:etaylor@apse.org.uk)

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To enquire about how your council can get involved with APSE's UK-wide benchmarking service – Performance Networks – please contact:

**Debbie Johns – Head of APSE Performance Networks**

[djohns@apse.org.uk](mailto:djohns@apse.org.uk)

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To enquire about how your council can join the APSE network, please contact:

**Matt Ellis – Principal Advisor for Wales**

[mellis@apse.org.uk](mailto:mellis@apse.org.uk)

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## **Profiles of APSE associates**

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Below is a small selection of APSE associates who work within an environmental and waste service area. These associates can provide a range of peer review related services; from high-level strategic overviews to assessment of 'on-the-ground' services. This is just one service area of many in which APSE have experienced associates that can support your reviews.

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### **Associate 1 – Senior Leadership Coaching and Mentoring**

This associate has held a variety of roles in local government spanning 37 years, during which time he has led major regeneration projects, helped establish one of the country's first housing ALMOs and a thriving leisure trust. He was a chief executive for 11 years before retiring in 2019 and has a background in housing. He has worked alongside APSE both before and after his retirement from direct local government employment. He is a mentor and coach to many local government professionals, devising and delivering leadership training programmes. This associate has conducted governance reviews at board level and is currently involved in a central government task force.

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### **Associate 2 – Senior Level Waste and Recycling**

An experienced professional, this associate has worked in local government since 1993 in a variety of waste and recycling related roles up to Corporate Director level. His roles have covered a wide range of service areas including: area working and engagement; domestic, trade and clinical waste; street cleansing; parks and open spaces; highways; environmental health; transport services; waste PFI; emergency

planning; climate change; and health and safety. The associate is a qualified coach and mentor and has supported internal and external senior staff in this capacity. This associate has recently completed a peer review project with a local authority in the North East of England and is continuing to support them on an ad-hoc basis as a critical friend.

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### Associate 3 – Street scene, Grounds Maintenance and Waste

With over 40 years' experience in local government, this associate has been offering a consultancy service to the public sector in the areas of Management Services and Business Support since April 2006. In particular, he provides solutions in the key areas of efficiency, productivity, manpower planning, improvement and performance management, as well as interim and change management solutions across a range of different areas. This associate has worked at local authorities across the UK and is a life member of the Institute of Management Services. He has been working as an APSE Associate since 2006 but has been involved in Performance Networks since 1999. His projects include whole service reviews around street scene, neighbourhood working and facilities management as well as carrying out a range of benchmarking projects.

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### Associate 4 – Waste and Recycling

This associate is a highly experienced environmental services professional with 37 years' experience in local government, 27 of which have been spent in both operational and strategic environmental services management roles within five local authorities. His experience includes completing domestic and commercial waste service reviews, health and safety reviews, and feasibility studies. He has worked with local authorities across England in both permanent and temporary roles.

**Carbon Literate  
Organisation**  
Platinum

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™**  
We invest in people Gold

Association for Public Service Excellence  
3rd floor,  
Trafford House,  
Chester Road, Manchester M32 0RS.  
telephone: 0161 772 1810  
fax: 0161 772 1811  
web: [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk)

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