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# Powerful Impacts;

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## Editorial

In this edition of direct news I am delighted to highlight the work of a new inquiry into affordable housing. As council housing has declined waiting lists have grown and yet the issue of housing scarcely merits a mention in national political debate. This is an astonishing situation given in the not too distant past politicians were proud to compete in elections with boasts as to how many homes they would build. As Lord Whitty says in his article housing needs to rank alongside health and education on the political agenda.

I am equally pleased to showcase APSE's latest research 'Powerful Impacts; Exploring the economic and social benefits of renewable energy schemes'. Our research measured the environmental and social impact of renewable energy schemes when led by a local authority and it demonstrates tangible economic benefits in terms of the return on investment but more importantly perhaps the social return of jobs and skills and the vital role of local councils in providing much needed local economic boosts to communities.

Both housing and renewable energy are of course linked. Both provide an opportunity for intervention in the local economy and address deep-seated social needs; whether that is the lack of an affordable, warm, safe place to live or whether it is fuel poverty; or the wider global impacts of our reliance on fossil fuels and our collective failure to address energy security alongside vital environmental improvements. Councils can, and have led the way before, out of economic decline by intervention strategies in our local economies.

Amongst the debate about 'granny tax' and regional pay in this years budget, it was perhaps easy to miss that even Chancellor George Osborne has provided explicit recognition about how important local government is for growth and jobs. Housing and renewables are just two areas where local government has already proven its ability to deliver. We must press on with investment to truly realise the very powerful impact of our local government endeavours.

Best wishes

Paul O'Brien, APSE Chief Executive



# Time to make the housing recovery a political priority

*An innovative new campaign 'Housing Voice' has launched an independent inquiry into affordable homes. Here Lord Larry Whitty explains why housing remains a critical issue which politicians need to prioritise.*

**H**ousing Voice is a fairly new campaign but it is nevertheless one that we feel is critical to the future debate about affordable housing in the UK. Supported by a breadth of organisations including Citizens Advice, the National Housing Federation and The Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS), amongst others, we are determined to bring forward a meaningful debate about how we can tackle the chronic shortage of affordable homes in the UK. And we are not alone in our desire to see housing back at the top of the political agenda.

At the start of our campaign, with the help of Citizens Advice, we surveyed more than a 1000 people and we found that more than 50% of the people surveyed reported that they have had difficulty paying their rent or mortgage and 85% thought that housing should be given a higher priority by politicians. These are statistics that no politician should choose to ignore. However, as a new campaign, we recognised that we needed not just the evidence of failure, in terms of affordable housing, but ideas as to how we could take the debate forward, so we launched our independent housing inquiry.

We have begun to generate evidence, seeking answers from tenants, from house builders, from charities and from local authorities, indeed anyone who has an interest in housing issues, to inform our campaign.

Although we have further evidence to receive and then lots of work to do in terms of identifying our recommendations, some strong themes are emerging which demonstrate the political and human dimensions of the shortage of decent affordable homes.

First of all it is increasingly clear that we won't close the gap between the hopes of those who are in different kinds of housing need and the political action necessary to assist them until housing ranks alongside health and education on the political agenda. Time and again during the course of our work we have seen the way in which housing suffers from being seen as a priority political issue for those at the sharp end – but not for a sufficient number of voters in swing seats to put the issue the front rank. It is, in effect, an issue that has been taken out of collective politics. This won't do. We need policy makers to take responsibility.

Second, there is no silver bullet policy solution. There do appear, however, to be a number of policies that could make a genuine difference to the supply and availability of decent affordable homes, and to the quality of life of people, young and old, in housing need. We have heard a number of new ideas, such as housing enterprise zones and channelling pension funds into affordable housing. And we have also been told about the continued relevance of more traditional options hit by spending cuts, such as increased public investment in local authority and housing association homes. Some options (those that involve

higher public investment) would clearly cost more than others (such as tenure reform and proper regulation of the private rented sector). But solving the problem can't be restricted to low cost options.

Third, incomes and housing costs have to become reconnected. To do this we do need a clear definition of what we mean by affordable housing. The new affordable rent model (homes provided by housing associations at up to 80 per cent of the market rate) clearly means something different in London, where the average rent for a two bedroom home is over £2,000, than in parts of the north, where 80 per cent of the market rate is typically lower than the standard social rent offered by housing associations and local authorities. At our hearing in Exeter we learned that the South West is the only region in which the average regional wage is below the national average and the average house price is above the national average. People looking to buy a home face a house price/income ratio of 11/1. The human costs of the affordability gap can't and should not be ignored. In addition to the effect on already squeezed household budgets. In Manchester we heard about the increasing number of families with grown up children living at home because they cannot afford to move out.

Fourth, solving the affordable housing crisis is indivisible from the economic recovery. At one level this is about job creation. Evidence we received from the Northern Housing Consortium made the case clearly in terms of the size of the economic multiplier generated from construction, and the longer term importance in terms of decent jobs and skills. Its also closely linked to regeneration, which in many places. But affordable housing also has to be at the heart of any attempt to rebalance the UK economy. If the UK is to avoid another housing bubble, and reduce household debt we need to ensure that supply balances demand.

At the current time new household formation is out running the number of new homes at a rate of about two to one.

Do we think there will receptive audience to our message at the conclusion of our work? As a non party aligned civil society campaign we do want to give policy makers the benefit of the doubt. We acknowledge the coalition parties do want to make a difference on housing. There are true champions of affordability in the Lib Dems, the Conservatives do still have a strong tradition on housing and Labour do want to make amends for not having built more when they were last in power. But you could say we have something of a paradox. We have a consensus that action is needed, but no real competition between the parties in terms of a tangible forward offer of the number of affordable new homes to be delivered. Would this be helpful going onto the next election – whenever that may be? This is one of the issues we will be thinking about as we draw all of our evidence together over the coming months. But our priority remains, supported by the evidence, housing needs to be at the top of the political agenda.

Organisations and individuals wishing to submit evidence to the enquiry should make contact via the housing voice website <http://www.housingvoice.co.uk>

Lord Whitty is Chair of Housing Voice, the affordable homes alliance.

Contact: Steve Barwick, Connect Communications,  
[s.barwick@connectpa.co.uk](mailto:s.barwick@connectpa.co.uk)

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# Bringing home community benefits

***Shaun Aldis, director of property services at Wolverhampton Homes, describes how its spending is being used to maximum effect in generating jobs and skills for the local community***

**W**olverhampton Homes is the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) that manages 23,210 properties, including 1,932 leaseholds, on behalf of Wolverhampton City Council. Like most professionals responsible for spending public money with suppliers, my colleagues and I are constantly on the look out for ways in which that spending can provide wider benefits for the local community.

As part of our Decent Homes work, we consulted tenants and many said that fencing was a priority; both to provide extra security and to improve the look of gardens. We therefore established a programme to put fences in place for 13,000 homes with the panels expected to last for between 15 and 20 years. The Decent Homes programme has led to many local young people gaining construction skills through working with Wolverhampton Homes or one of three partners. The fencing programme was also identified as an area through which we could offer some training opportunities for special needs students in local schools.

When looking for someone to supply panels for its fencing programme, we turned to Timken Training Centre. The centre is run by Andrew Morris whose interest is in linking functional skills to the real world. It is a fantastic set up at Timken and Andrew and his staff are doing great work to support the local community. It is a social enterprise providing vocational training for 14–19 year olds and support for adults with additional needs. They include people with autism, mental health problems, alcoholism, children who are having trouble at school and adults who have never previously had a job. Manufacturing commenced in December 2009 and from April 2010, 400 fence panels are produced each month. The initiative is provided on a commercial basis, but with a social goal. It provides individuals with skills and helps them to move forward and build confidence. One particular success story is one of the students at the Centre moving on to the graduate scheme at Thomas Vale Construction.

The Timken Centre is now working with a number of companies in ways which benefit the community. Continental Landscapes, has awarded Sunbeam Community Enterprises, the charity arm of Tinken, with a small contract for voids work. Labourers are supplied from the centre with 12 people involved, who in some cases will be the first people working in their families for a generation. Morse Kitchens sends its flat pack kitchens to the centre for assembly prior to installation in Wolverhampton Homes' void properties. Bowaters door and window suppliers use the centre for storage and is looking to employ a store manager. The centre has also gained work colour coding scaffolding knuckles for a local firm. And another large housing association, which was impressed by the quality of the fence panels, is interested in purchasing panels.

Local schools use the centre, which will work with nearly 200 school children this academic year. It can provide formal qualifications to



some of the children who take part in courses which include painting and decorating, brickwork, carpentry, motor vehicle maintenance, catering and textile design. Many of the students will go on to further qualifications having started their learning journey at Timken and gained the confidence to go into subsequent education through their time at the Centre.

But the work doesn't stop there. Travis Perkins PLC, another partner of Wolverhampton Homes, compiled over 100 Build Skills leaflets for tenants who want to take on some of the maintenance responsibilities for their own homes. Staff from the ALMO attended training to teach tenants the basics of looking after their properties and give them an opportunity to get hands-on experience as well as a health and safety briefing. This has provided skills to tenants, helped cement the relationship between them and us as the landlord and promoted the role of the centre.

Partnership working is nothing new to Wolverhampton Homes either as we have been working with Frank Haslam Milan, Bullock and Thomas Vale Construction to ensure the housing stock reaches Decent Homes standard. The contractors were selected partly on the strength of their commitment to employment and training issues. Together with our partners we have won the APSE Best Housing and Regeneration Award 2011 for work in transforming empty homes in the All Saints area. Wolverhampton Homes was also the first ALMO to achieve National Skills Academy for Construction status in July 2008.

It takes a commercial mind to get good fencing panels at an attractive price, but it takes wisdom to see that it can be life-changing for those making them and we are pleased to be using our funding to deliver such wider benefits locally.

*Contact: Shaun Aldis, Director of Property Services, Wolverhampton Homes, email: [shaun.aldis@wolverhamptonhomes.org.uk](mailto:shaun.aldis@wolverhamptonhomes.org.uk)*

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# Powerful impacts

***New APSE research shows that Council led renewable energy schemes deliver economic and social benefits as well as helping to tackle climate change. Paul O'Brien, APSE's chief executive, explains.***



In an ideal world local authorities would be leading renewable energy projects for environmental reasons alone. However in the current economic climate justifying doing things for altruistic reasons alone is often not enough; that's why APSE decided to work on new research that would prove the economic case for local authority involvement in the renewable energy market.

The case for renewables becomes all the more compelling when there is a clear business case for investment and tangible benefit in the form of jobs, skills development and stimulation of local economies and supply chains. Our new research explores these very issues looking at renewable energy schemes from an economic and social perspective.

As our member authorities know APSE has long been an advocate of both sustainable energy supply and using public procurement effectively as a local economic development tool. We commissioned the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) to consider these two agendas in tandem in relation to renewable energy projects happening across the UK.

The research utilised specifically designed methodologies to quantify the benefits of renewable energy projects and unlike other research strands we set out to quantify some hard economic, social and environmental outcomes. We wanted tangible evidence on savings in carbon emissions; payments from Feed In Tariffs (FITs); numbers of people

employed in renewable energy schemes; value to supply chains; and training and skills development.

The result of our research has now been written into a new report 'Powerful Impacts: Exploring the economic and social benefits of renewable energy schemes'. The tangible evidence we sought has led to some hard-hitting findings which really spell out the value of local authorities engaging in renewable energy schemes. A typical scheme, fitting solar photovoltaic panels to 500 homes, can save 650 tonnes a year in carbon emissions and also create 12 full time equivalent jobs. Researchers calculated that £1 investment in those local renewable energy schemes that were early to get off the ground could deliver an average £2.90 in cashable benefits.

The report also features case studies from around the UK showing how council led renewable energy projects are delivering environmental, economic and social benefits. One example is that of Swindon Borough Council's Core Strategy which provides a supportive planning backdrop for development of renewable energy infrastructure. Elected members and officers have worked with the council's wholly owned company Swindon Commercial Services Ltd (SCS) to pioneer renewable energy projects. Photovoltaic panels have been installed at SCS premises and on council owned buildings at Waterside, Thamesdown Transport Depot, Civic Offices in Euclid Street and Catherine Wayte School.

Swindon was able to deliver the schemes quickly, which allowed them to take advantage of the FIT levels before the Government's review. The cost of debt repayments, associated with buying and installing panels, will be broadly matched in the early years by FITs income. Further savings and income will accrue to the building occupiers as a result of the electricity generated by the panels. Typical returns on investment from the schemes range from 7% to 14%, with a typical payback period of 7 to 10 years.

The Swindon approach demonstrates the value of solar programmes as a means to work in partnership with energy companies to develop expertise and additional skills for the organisation and its workforce. The scheme has allowed electricians and other craft workers to gain accreditation through the Microgeneration Certification Scheme. One of its next priorities will be to use its workforce for commercial and domestic renewable energy installations across Swindon and further afield.

Changes to FITs rates have obviously caused uncertainty for local authorities involved in renewable energy projects. But

all is far from lost in my view. Despite the reduction in FITs panels have reduced in price from earlier schemes and local authorities are getting much smarter on installation. Moreover the forthcoming Green Deal entails £1.4bn spending per annum, which means there are further opportunities that councils should not miss. By councils 'doing it themselves' on renewable energy schemes they can make the most of all the available opportunities, giving local economies a welcome boost and creating a legacy of local skills and intelligence.

Our research model built in sensitivity tests for factors that are liable to fluctuations; principally FITs rates; borrowing rates, equipment costs and energy costs. CLES researchers recalculated return on investment in light of latest announcements on FITs and found this falls to £1.50. While this is less attractive than the return on trailblazing projects, it still represents a strong business case. Coupled with the anticipated reductions in outlay as supply prices fall this demonstrates that solar schemes remain very attractive.

It must also be remembered that solar is not the only game in town. While our report features examples of councils that have used solar technology, similar benefits can be gained from wind, biomass, electric fleet and energy efficiency projects.

It is promising that the latest indication from the Department for Energy and Climate Change is that it seems

prepared to recognise that social housing is different to purely commercial schemes and exempt it from the lower multi-installation rate proposed for solar FITs.

This distinction between renewable energy programmes that are purely for profit and those that have broader advantages for local communities is a very important one. And if 'rent a roof' schemes inspired by the profit motive are now less attractive, there is all the more reason for local authorities, which have a more rounded approach to the needs of local places and people, to be taking the lead. Altruistic reasons are of course good but the economic case provides a much needed powerful impact.

Paul O'Brien is chief executive of the Association for Public Service Excellence

Contact: Phil Brennan at APSE on [pbrenna@apse.org.uk](mailto:pbrenna@apse.org.uk) and for details about the APSE renewable energy advisory group.

**Powerful Impacts: Exploring the economic and social benefits of renewable energy schemes** is available to order from APSE priced at £20.00 for members and £40.00 for non-members. To order please email Wai Lee on [wlee@apse.org.uk](mailto:wlee@apse.org.uk)

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# Nottinghamshire springs into warmer weather tasks

*Nottinghamshire County Council's gritting teams who did such sterling work throughout the winter are about to hit the road again – this time maintaining the county's grass verges. Andy Oscroft, the County Council's seasonal works manager, explains the changes to direct news.*

**T**he teams, who have been on 24/7 standby since November 1 onwards salting the county's A and B roads throughout the night, are about to turn their hands to warmer weather tasks.

The Council is responsible for cutting more than 5,000 kilometres of grass verge right across the county and from April 1st we will be swinging into action as the cutting and spraying season officially begins. From then on it's all hands on deck until the end of September – and possibly into October, depending on the weather.

Andy Oscroft is the County Council's seasonal works manager with responsibility for winter maintenance, grass cutting and spraying.

And he says that after nearly six months on salting duty his crews are ready for a change. "They're ready for a change in routine, the warmer weather and the smell of freshly-cut grass," he says. "Equally, by the time the gritting season comes round again they're ready for the adrenaline buzz you get, doing your bit to keep the county on the move."

Grass cutting takes place across the county in both rural and urban areas – the difference between the two being the speed limit (anything inside a 40mph zone is classed as urban) and the machinery used. In rural areas, the Council carries out what are known as full and vision cuts – the former being exactly what it says on the tin; the latter being carried out specifically at junctions where it is vital that undergrowth is kept to a minimum, allowing motorists a clear view in all directions. With cutting carried out just four times a year, the pattern followed in Nottinghamshire is vision only on the first cut, followed by main and vision on the second; another vision only and a final main and vision to round off the season.

The cutting heads on the tractors are a metre long, though a vision cut might entail going up and down the verge several times and cutting back as far as any roadside hedges. An ordinary main cut would simply be a metre width in from the kerb. "It's important to remember that none of it is done for aesthetics," says Andy. "It's all done in the name of maintenance and safety – especially the vision cuts. "It still has to be done though, as without it you would get the

natural regeneration of shrubs and trees which would grow surprisingly quickly and you'd end up with overhanging branches and all the work that that entails."

Surprisingly, perhaps, grass grows at different rates in different parts of the county – depending on the soil. In the Bassetlaw area of Nottinghamshire, for example, much of the ground is sandy so it dries out quickly and the grass grows much more slowly. In other areas, however, the ground is mainly clay, which retains the water, helping the grass to grow quicker. Nowhere is this more apparent than between the town of Southwell, built on clay, and the village of Farnsfield, on sand – just four miles apart. Although the season kicks off in April, it is May and June which are the busiest months and once the teams get started, says Andy, "it's like painting the Forth Bridge".

For the rural cuts Andy currently has a team of seven on tractors fitted with side arm flails. For urban areas the task falls to a team of eight on sit-on mowers with flails which are a lot more manoeuvrable. Numbers in both teams are set to rise shortly as highways staff from three district councils come under the County's umbrella in a transfer of services. In urban areas it's a straight four cuts – there's no such thing as vision and full – and a trim around obstacles such as seats and signs on the second and fourth cut.

Whether it's a rural or an urban cut, the Council's mowers are set to a height of two and half inches which, according to Andy, is about right. "You can't have verges looking like bowling greens. Highway grass is not of very good quality and there's a lot of undulation in the underlying ground," he says.

"Set the blades any lower and you'd scalp some areas. It doesn't look good too short and you'd end up having to re-seed."

Not surprisingly, it's in the urban areas where the Council receives most complaints about its grass cutting – or lack of it. "The most frequent complaints we get are why don't we do it more often and why don't we collect the cuttings. The answer to both is cost," says Andy. "We operate a cut-and-drop policy, so we don't collect the cuttings. In order to do so we'd have to buy different mowers and we'd also have to tip the green waste which would require an extra lorry to take it all way. "You'd then have extra manpower and other on-costs – just imagine how much grass you'd collect. When all is said and done, it does no harm and soon rots down."

And residents can rest assured that the Council's highways teams, after the long dark winter months spent gritting, will be doing their best to make the Nottinghamshire's verges are kept at their best. "Some of the guys have been doing both the salting and the cutting in the same area for years and know their patch really well," says Andy. "Some of them love it like it was their own back garden."

So with local knowledge and an eye on cost effective methods Nottinghamshires seasonal teams are ready to spring into action and for another year moth-ball their winter working.

Contact: Ian Wheeler, Communications and Marketing, Nottinghamshire County Council, [ian.wheeler@nottscc.gov.uk](mailto:ian.wheeler@nottscc.gov.uk)

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# The Road to Successful Partnerships

***Ian Douglas, Operations Manager (Property Services) for South Lanarkshire Council, describes how they have approached a major capital investment programme on retained housing stock and aging primary school infrastructure***

**S**outh Lanarkshire Council is the fifth largest Council in Scotland, with a population of over 300,000 and covering an area of 1772 sq km.

In 2003, the Council faced two major challenges in delivering their Capital Programmes in the next 10 to 12 years. Significant programmes of work had been identified for both the Council's retained housing stock and its ageing primary school infrastructure.

Following consultation with tenant groups, the Council agreed to address the first of these issues by embarking on a major refurbishment programme, mainly comprising the replacement of kitchens and bathrooms throughout its tenanted properties in a range of construction types, ranging from multi-storey properties to those of a rural non-traditional construction.

In addition, the Council agreed to replace or refurbish all 124 of its primary school buildings, many of which were in a declining state having been built during the 1970s. The required investment, which has been funded through the Council's borrowing facilities and internal funding, amounted to more than £400million for the Housing Programme and in excess of £830m for the Schools Modernisation Programme.

The challenge facing South Lanarkshire Council's Housing and Technical Resources was how to develop and deliver these two major programmes of work within the required timescales to achieve the housing standards agreed with the tenants and the provision of new facilities within the Schools Modernisation Programme. The Council's solution to these challenges centred on utilising their own in-house resources within its Projects and Building Services Sections, as well as partnering with the private sector.

To date, the Council has now installed almost 26,000 kitchens and bathrooms within its housing stock to an extremely high standard and to consistently high customer satisfaction, and has delivered an impressive 63 new primary schools with a further 28 currently on the drawing board and 12 under construction.

This was achieved by developing what was believed to be a unique approach to projects of this scale, by utilising partnering framework contracts in conjunction with a number of private sector organisations, permitting the allocation of work and the continual assessment of best value and open book auditing.

In order to achieve these demanding programmes, South Lanarkshire Council needed to totally review the manner in

which both procurement and construction design was implemented. This involved the creation of an organisational culture which totally embraced the benefits of partnering between public and private sector, and was prepared to accept and utilise best practice across different organisational entities.

In both the Housing and Education programmes, the procurement process involved the identification of suitably qualified and experienced organisations able to provide a design and build capability whilst totally embracing the open and transparent cost processes required to demonstrate quality and best value to the Council.

Danny Lowe, Head of Property Services at South Lanarkshire Council's Housing and Technical Resources, said: "Since then, all of the organisations selected during the various tranches of the delivery programme have totally embraced the sharing of best practice, systems and procedures with the staff in both Project and Building Services and across other private sector partners.

"Within the Education Programme, the Council has implemented a procurement process which permits extremely quick development of projects from a greenfield or tandem-build site to completion. To date, all projects have been delivered to meet the required timescales to allow the movement of schoolchildren to the new premises as required by the Education Resource client.

"With regard to the Housing Investment Programme, the upgrading of kitchens and bathrooms and the associated internal works, external fabric upgrades and insulation works has permitted the Council's housing stock to significantly progress towards meeting the requirements of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015.

"In addition to practical targets, the programme has a people-focused aim to deliver significantly improved housing environments for Council tenants, and testament to the success in this respect has been the consistently-high product and service satisfaction rates – in excess of 98.5% – throughout the duration of the work."

In terms of the Primary Schools Modernisation Programme, the beneficial effects on both staff and children in attending schools fit for the 21st Century have been evidenced by the increased levels of educational standards and achievement and overall respect of the new properties.

The successful delivery of these major programmes over the last nine years has ensured that the foundations for successful project delivery of future capital works can be achieved utilising best practice and a partnering ethos when applied to traditionally-procured construction projects.

As for the future of the partnering contractors, the main part of the Kitchen and Bathroom Replacement Programme has now drawn to a close with the Council's own internal contracting organisation having delivered 70% of the overall project.

The Education Programme is now in its final four-year tranche with three constructor partners who have been involved with the Council for more than six years. Lend Lease, Kier Construction and Morgan Sindall continue to deliver high quality buildings on time and within budget – and the partners themselves have proved to be delighted with the way that the contracts have been created.

With a further 40 primary schools either at design or construction stages, the overall programme is on schedule to complete by 2016/17, at which point all primary school pupils will be taught in high quality and highly efficient school buildings.

Such results may have been achieved by devising an entirely new view on setting up contracts for programmes of this scale – but such results are also vindication of adopting such a radical approach.

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Contact: *Dougie McMillan, Business Development and Support Manager, [dougie.mcmillan@southlanarkshire.gov.uk](mailto:dougie.mcmillan@southlanarkshire.gov.uk)*

*Pictured left: Brian Lafferty, Derek Craig, Ian Douglas and Frank McCafferty at Canbarra Primary School. Below: Law Primary School*



# Street trends

**Debbie Johns, principal advisor for environmental services, discusses the results of APSE's latest State of the Market Survey on street cleansing**

**T**hanks to everyone who took part in APSE's latest State of the Market Survey on street cleansing. Our latest poll follows on from surveys in 2009 and 2011, when we asked similar questions, and allows us to compare statistics and analyse trends.

The first message that emerged from our recent survey is that managers in street cleansing, like all other services, are feeling the pinch – with 83% of respondents anticipating budget changes over the next year. This is compared with 66% in 2009 and 77% in 2011, representing a growing trend. Of these 83% who are expecting budget changes, 89% expect their street cleansing budgets to reduce. The main reasons cited were budget cuts requiring service efficiencies. Other respondents are seeking opportunities to generate income to offset budget reductions.

A total of 37% expect to implement a recruitment freeze within the next 12 months, 37% expect that voluntary redundancies will occur and 14% compulsory redundancy. These figures have decreased since the last survey was conducted in 2011, suggesting that some of these measures have already been implemented.

Budget and staff reductions appear to be impacting on standards of cleanliness, according to our respondents. A total of 19% stated that standards have decreased over the past year, which is a 10% increase since the 2011 survey.

Almost half of our respondents currently sell their services to the private sector and 35% sell their services to other public bodies and the provision of specialist street cleansing works to the private sector and other public institutions is likely to increase according to managers. Comments on other areas of growth for street cleansing services in the next year included; allotments, parks and open space; graffiti and gum removal; an enhanced town centre service; and on street litter and recycling bins.

Comments on future decreases in work due to financial constraints include: levels of cleanliness; assistance and advice to community groups; number of operational hours; less frequent cleansing of rural roads; and less non statutory work. The amount of scheduled zonal cleaning is likely to decrease as diminishing resources dictate a more reactive approach. Late shift or voluntary overtime to deal with the night time economy will also reduce in some authorities, as will seasonal maintenance and gully emptying.

The survey shows that authorities across the UK are looking at ways in which their street cleansing services are being delivered with a view to making efficiency savings. When asked if respondents had undertaken a service review recently, 36.5% stated that they have, 46.5% stated that a review is underway and 14% stated that they will be doing so in the next one or two years.

The clear emphasis on undertaking service reviews reflects the efficiency drive in local government and the need to try and meet these challenges. Route optimisation was the most common factor

to be reviewed and this was named by 86.4% of respondents. Utilisation of machinery and transport was named by 84.8% of respondents, followed by review of working time and rotas in 83.3% of cases. Productivity was being looked at in 69.7% of authorities, followed by service redesign in 63.6% and use of technology such as handheld devices in 53%. A total of 28.8% of respondents said systems thinking management tools were being applied in their authorities as a means of improving efficiency.

When we asked about service delivery, the poll showed that integration is a continuing trend for street cleansing and 77% of respondents are part of an integrated streetscene service, an increase from 74% in the 2011 survey and 66% in 2009. Of those who were not already part of an integrated service, 52% expect to become part of an integrated street scene service in the near future, which is an increase from 37.5% in APSE's 2011 State of the Market survey.

A total of 88.5% of survey respondents managed their street cleansing services in-house. When asked how they expect their service to be managed in the next two to three years, 83% expected it to be provided in-house, which is an increase since 2011. This supports APSE's research, which has found that councils have been bringing a broad range of services back in-house and are continuing to do so in response to drivers including the need for efficiency savings and flexibility.

Street cleansing managers were already engaged with communities and volunteers through clean ups, litter picks and community pay back schemes before the current national government emphasis on 'Big Society'. Community sector involvement in street cleansing is increasing with 71% of managers saying it was occurring, compared with 52% in the 2011 survey.

Education campaigns remain popular, with 82% of authorities planning campaigns in the next two years, the most popular being onlitter, dog fouling and awareness raising in schools. In addition to campaigns, 65% of respondents believe there will be an increase in enforcement in the next two to three years, a sharp increase from 51% in 2011. When asked about why certain powers have not been used, reasons cited included insufficient resources, other priorities, political reasons, or that it is covered by other agencies or departments.

APSE undertakes regular State of the Market Surveys to uncover and analyse trends in front-line services. As with other services, managers of street cleansing are working hard to attempt to maintain service quality in the face of budget cuts and APSE is here to support its members in doing so.

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*Contact [djohns@apse.org.uk](mailto:djohns@apse.org.uk) to register for APSE's refuse collection and street cleansing advisory group (free to attend for APSE member authorities)*

# Shared services and collaborative working in a Welsh context: Applying theory to practice

New research in response to the Simpson review of public services in Wales has found that for shared services to work successfully it is critical that collaboration reflects local circumstances. 'Shared services and collaborative working in a Welsh context: Applying theory to practice' has been produced by APSE in partnership with De Montfort University. The research also found that Welsh councils would achieve better outcomes using existing powers to work on a shared basis, which could help to avoid costly and complex contractual arrangements.

Commenting on the research APSE Wales chair Cllr Arwyn Woolcock, said "This research will act as a good source of guidance for Welsh local authorities who are struggling to determine the best way forward to achieve better outcomes for local communities within Wales"

Lead author and researcher Adele Reynolds says that it is clear from the research that there is no 'one size fits all' answer. In many cases the research findings evidence that good outcomes can often be achieved by concentrating on what works best at a local level and utilising existing local government powers to work collaboratively.

## The research highlights

- The policy context within Wales, which is driving collaboration;
- An outline of the Simpson reform agenda and the Welsh Government's approach to collaboration
- The advantages and disadvantages of the different types of shared services;
- What case study evidence from APSE member authorities tells us about successful approaches to sharing services;
- The advantages and disadvantages of in-house services and alternative models of service delivery;
- Key issues for local authorities to consider when embarking upon shared services;

APSE Wales is in the process of delivering some complimentary copies of the research to all APSE member authorities within Wales and further copies can be ordered by contacting Wai Lee at apse on wlee@apse.org.uk

A Launch event. 'Innovation, income generation and efficiencies' which will feature some of the shared services case studies will be held at the Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells, Friday 22 June 2012. Contact Keisha Swaby on kswaby@apse.org.uk to register your interest.

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# Sports performance raises your game

*The East Riding of Yorkshire Council Beverley Leisure Complex was an APSE best performer winner in the 2011 performance networks awards. Here we explore the secrets of their performance success.*

**B**everley Leisure Complex is one of eleven sites managed by East Riding of Yorkshire Council's Leisure team. The Complex is situated in Beverley town centre and has a sub regional 8 lane 25 metre pool and learner pool with a 250 spectator viewing area, 6 court sports hall, fitness gym, and multi-purpose function room for exercise classes/social activities, café and bar. Outdoor facilities include 5 grassed pitches, floodlit multi-sports area, skate park and bowling green. The Complex was refurbished in 2005 with a new swimming pool, gym, and village style wet side changing facility. Beverley Leisure Complex is part of a National Award winning Leisure Team including APSE Leisure, Sport and Cultural Team of the Year 2009 and 2011, highly commended finalist in the Local Government Management Team of the Year 2010, and finalist in the ICS UK Customer Satisfaction Award, Quality Service Provider 2011, and winner of the Customer Innovation of the Year 2012 award.

East Riding Leisure offers a quality gym service which competes with the private sector in a highly competitive market with membership increasing from 50,000 members in 2009 to 67,000 in 2011. Membership offers easy access to all our sites throughout the East Riding. Corporate memberships have increased significantly by partnership working with other services outside the Council including Police, fire service, health service, local businesses etc. Coupled to this East Riding Leisure has been tackling the Health agenda in innovative ways including a customer centric training approach which includes motivational interviewing and nutritional

training for front line staff including gym instructors, receptionists and senior managers improving the customer experience and retention. Customers now quote this as the single most influential contributor to their successful behaviour change.

Another area of high importance is our swimming lesson programme. Beverley Leisure Complex leads the way with junior swimming lessons up from 67,000 in 2008-09 to 78,000 in 2010-11. In 2012 we are adding value to this important income strand by offering free swimming to all children on our swimming lesson programme to encourage greater usage of our pools.

There has been a drive throughout the Leisure team to provide quality services to our customers by sharing best practice and benefitting from the experience and expertise gained from management tools within award processes. These include Institute of Customer Service ServiceMark where the service received a classification of World Class Service, Customer Service Excellence, Quest Quality award, and Investors in People. The customer centric approach, coupled to a programme of refurbishments has seen an increase in user numbers across the service from 3.5 million to 4.3 million visits. We have robust service standards which are measured and acted upon through our APSE annual survey.

East Riding Leisure has a robust system of monitoring individual site performance indicators through APSE. Discussions are then held with site managers looking at a range of performance indicators for areas they can improve on and subsequent actions built into facility

business plans, cascading down to individual action plans. This process creates clarity of roles and responsibilities. We have also kept our costs in check, including staffing. Beverley Leisure Complex has undertaken a staffing review resulting in annual savings of £20,310 from 2008-09.

East Riding Leisure has subsidies which are reducing year on year and are looking at an ambitious three year plan to bring costs down to a breakeven point and to recuperate any losses from income. This will be achieved by focussing on all areas of the business, including a review of opening times, further reducing expenditure, but also reinvesting, particularly in our gyms which are seen as a main income stream for the business. This will help ensure we can continue to compete in a changing and highly competitive market. East Riding Leisure has also developed a training arm to include First Aid courses, food hygiene, swim teaching, and pool plant operators, which has a projected additional income of £40,000.

To support the customer journey East Riding Leisure Unit has leading edge IT systems developed in-house and in partnership with a local private sector partner. The development of innovative and ground breaking technology, helps us to understand customer needs whilst helping them achieve their goals and aspirations. The technology includes customer contact bars in all of our gyms which can track customer visits and offers a highly personal service to all customers. Using a traffic light system allows for timely interventions which is showing through a 35% increase in retention levels. New technology linking GP surgeries direct to the leisure centre for exercise referrals has led to an increase attendance from 41% up to 100%, nowhere else in the UK has achieved this level of performance on exercise referrals. Also, a new dashboard provides managers with live time information to manage services effectively. This has been a key contributor in increasing income and customer satisfaction. Working hard at customer retention is a crucial part in all of this.

East Riding Leisure has a unique and positive effect on the local health agenda working with the local Primary Care Trust on our 'Livewell Scheme' winning a contract against stiff opposition to deliver a service for 280 Bariatric patients (Bariatrics is the branch of medicine that deals with the causes, prevention, and treatment of obesity). With over 4,500 individual interventions to date, we are on track for 84% finishing the course this is a marvellous result given the PCT had set an initial target of 20%. We have implemented a unique motivational interviewing training for all gym instructors, which will help prepare the team for further commissioning works.

The team has raised the bar substantially since 2009, delivering services which are self-financing, ensuring sustainability and delivering value for money to East Riding of Yorkshire residents. At the heart of our success is the customer centric approach to our services. Our mantra is 'Go beyond what our customers expect'. And it seems to be working!

**Contact:**

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## Leading the way in customer services

East Riding of Yorkshire Council's Leisure Service has become the first ever local authority-run service to win the Innovation of the Year accolade at the Institute of Customer Services (ICS) Annual Awards.

The council beat a list of heavyweight submissions for the award, including BUPA International, Asda and Capital One Europe.

Kevin Hadfield, leisure service manager, and Dave Clark, senior facility manager, were presented with the Lithium Customer Satisfaction Innovation of the Year Award. The judges felt the leisure service demonstrated great and innovative strategies to improve their customers' health and well-being. Particular emphasis was focussed on the Health Plus Programme, the GP referral scheme, the Live Well Programme and the various software packages that support them.

**Pictured left: Darren Stevens, Head of Culture and Information being presented with the award by Councillor Jane Evison, portfolio Holder for Leisure, with leisure staff.**

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# Seeing into the future?

***As Aberdeen City Council completes the second year of its five-year business plan, Stewart Carruth, Director of Corporate Governance explains the pioneering, long-term approach taken by the authority in planning its future.***



In 2010, Aberdeen City Council elected members asked officers to develop a five-year business plan, realising that a radical, longer-term and fundamentally new approach was needed to address the serious economic challenges currently affecting the entire UK public sector.

As the second lowest-funded council in Scotland, the financial situation was particularly challenging for Aberdeen. With demand for services predicted to rise and the cost of providing those services set to increase significantly over five years, scenario planning indicated a potential funding gap of up to £120 million.

This early scenario planning highlighted that the council could not afford to do nothing and that percentage cuts were simply not an option. The council needed to become a leaner organisation; it would have to work with others to manage delivery of some services and it would have to work more effectively with partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors. It was also clear that some services may not be available in five years time.

Changes in the way we plan financially have been vital in ensuring Aberdeen is able to rise to these challenges now and in the future. The Next Five Years, a rolling five-year business plan which is updated annually,

became the framework to manage this change.

A fully inclusive approach to financial planning was crucial from the outset of the business plan's development and the council adopted a priority-based budget approach. This approach evolved from the council's vision for the city of Aberdeen as well as its key priorities.

As the project was ambitious for an organisation as large and diverse as Aberdeen, it was essential that the planning process was supported by leadership at senior officer level and by having the right resources to deliver.

A dedicated, fully resourced PBB project team was put in place and a number of workstreams including service interface, financial, workforce planning and communication and engagement were developed.

The priority-based budget approach involved a number of key stages. The accurate and actual cost of each council service was identified and used to forecast the cost of services in five years' time. Services led and then developed options that would transform, make more efficient or reduce their service range to the levels of funding required. It represented a move away from percentage cuts.

To ensure that the council was allocating funding to essential services, the options were prioritised by applying the vision, priorities and core objectives and finally, service accountants comprehensively tested the proposals to ensure the robustness of the models over a five year period.

Using this approach, more than 200 council services were reviewed and over 750 options identified to transform services and service delivery. A total of £127 million potential savings were put forward to elected members for discussion and debate.

Another crucial aspect of the development of the priority-based budget options and the five-year business plan was engaging with the people of Aberdeen. The council had to be honest and open with citizens about the changes to the way services are delivered and it had to make sure citizens were given opportunity to have their say and participate in the planning process.

To support the engagement with citizens, a 'have your say' campaign and a programme of engagement

which included several ways for people to get involved was created.

We held a number of public meetings in partnership with community councils and business briefings which involved over 250 of the city's key influencers. The council's directorates also briefed individual organisations and service users on the priority-based budget options in day-to-day business meetings.

The draft business plan was mailed to some 200 organisations seeking comments and panellists of City Voice, the council's established community planning consultation tool, were sent questionnaires on the budget.

Internally, senior council officers attended corporate staff briefings and all directors and line managers held briefings with their teams to discuss the business plan options and emerging themes.

Over 1,000 responses were received from the public to the 'have your say' questionnaire which was published by a local evening paper in a special pull-out budget report and circulated through 100 council open doors.

Hundreds of people gave their views on budget options through the council's website which was used to provide contextual information on the business plan and to encourage citizens to participate in the process.

Every piece of feedback received from our stakeholders was collated in an engagement report for elected members to inform their decision making on the priority-based budget options.

It was found during the development of the five-year plan, that the priority-based budget approach and the engagement process was welcomed by members of the public and by many of our key influencers. More recently Audit Scotland recognised Aberdeen City Council's approach as an exemplar for other organisations to follow.

The council is now entering the third year of its rolling five-year business plan and priority-based budget. Not content to rest on its laurels, there is now further refinement arising from lessons learnt which will continue to improve the approach.

Further information on Aberdeen City Council's five-year business plan and the priority-based budgeting process can be found at:  
[www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nextfiveyears](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nextfiveyears)

Contact: Stewart Carruth, Aberdeen City Council,  
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# From Wigan to Africa school meals matter

***Wigan Council's Metrofresh service supports the charity Mary's Meals and proves that the value of nutritional food for young people is not governed by international boundaries. Direct news talks to Metrofresh Service Manager Debbie Clarke.***

**W**igan Council's award winning in-house schools catering provider is driven by a mantra of 'eat well, do better' and Debbie Clarke knows better than most that what we eat contributes to a better quality life.

"Food and drink bring enormous pleasure to our lives, and play an important part in the health and well-being of people of all ages," says Debbie. "At MetroFresh, we recognise that good quality, nutritious food isn't simply an essential building block for a healthy life style. It also helps our children and young people reach their full educational potential.

"Whilst enjoying tasty food and experimenting with different menus from around the world, we want children and young people to learn the importance of nutritional values from a young age, so they can develop a healthy relationship with food and a pattern of healthy eating that stays with them for life."

This vision led MetroFresh to become one of the first businesses in the borough to gain Wigan Council's Healthy Business Awards for their civic and commercial catering operations. They are currently working closely with organisers

to develop a version of the award for schools.

And this over-arching vision is also one of the main reasons why Debbie and her team at Metrofresh support Mary's Meals, a Scottish charity which works in Third World communities where poverty and hunger prevent children from gaining an education.

"The idea behind the Mary's Meals is simple," explains Debbie. "By providing one daily meal in a place of education, the charity knows that it will attract chronically poor children into the classroom, and in so doing, give them access to an education which could free them from the cycle of poverty.

"Back in October during National Schools Week, we organised a fundraising event with students at Abraham Guest High School in Orrell, and raised £125 for the charity. It was so well received by schools and pupils, we decided to roll-out the scheme boroughwide and in December launched a campaign in 16 high schools and 4 primary schools."

Selling tasty designer cupcakes, complete with edible Mary's Meals logo, the high school students raised £835.40, the primary pupils a further £232.80.

Debbie proudly explains: "Altogether, students and staff raised more than a thousand pounds, which will cover the cost of 26,705 meals in Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia and the Caribbean. It equates to just 4 pence per day to feed a child but that tiny investment can make the difference between a life lived in a cycle of poverty, and one lived in hope."

Tony Begley, Education Co-ordinator for Mary's Meals endorsed the campaign "We at Mary's Meals are passionate about education and we're delighted that in addition to the fantastic amount of money raised, this initiative has allowed us to further raise awareness of the daily challenges faced by so many children in the developing world. Also, it's a great opportunity to demonstrate that we can all make a real difference to the life chances of some of the world's poorest children."

But even as they consider the impact their fundraising efforts have across the globe, the team at MetroFresh are equally mindful of the role the organisation plays in communities much closer to home.

A community project popular with parents and children alike is the 'farmers market', pioneered by MetroFresh in schools across the borough to support families in their effort to eat '5 a day'.

As part of the scheme, local fruit and vegetable suppliers, MA Forshaw, provide a bag of vegetables at cost price that is then sold on to parents. The £2 bag consists of enough vegetables to feed a family of four for a weekend and also includes cooking hints and tips, recipe ideas and information on where the food came from.

After just twelve months in business, the company - which also provides caretaking, in-house cleaning and school crossing support services throughout Wigan Borough - was recognized by peers when it was voted the best local authority catering service in the country at the Annual Public Sector Awards' ceremony in 2008. Since then it has gone from strength to strength. MetroFresh currently provides more than 17,000 meals a day in over a 100 primary and special schools, and 18 high schools, across Wigan Borough - that's 3.23 million meals every year. But at no point does the company rest on its laurels.

In line with national objectives around healthy lifestyles, MetroFresh works in partnership with schools to increase both paid and free school meal uptake. According to the School Food Trust and LACA [Local Authority Caterer's Association] the average uptake on primary school meals was 44.1% in 2011. MetroFresh has managed to increase its uptake across the borough year on year for the past three years, and has now set itself an ambitious minimum target of 60%.

Debbie says "We have involved the children in the design of our new menus and we have also involved our school cooks. Cashless catering has already been introduced in 13 of Wigan Borough's high schools, and is currently being piloted in 3 local primaries. This will help increase the uptake of free school meals and is proving popular with staff, parents, pupils and head teachers alike".

Cashless systems also speeds up back-office functions. "After our first pilot, processes taking 4.5 hours were reduced to just over 1 hour. Whilst a little apprehensive at first, our staff now love the system because it takes away so much of the hassle. And of course they're acquiring new IT skills into the bargain."

Given the number of meals delivered every day, attention to detail on menu design and development is critical. MetroFresh operate a rolling system of menus which offer a balanced choice of flavours from traditional to spicy, and a variety of healthy options which cater to all nutritional and dietary needs. Debbie says "We listen to what our customers want and liaise with the student council, hold tasting sessions and find out what our customers prefer".

This level of pupil engagement was clearly in evidence during the appointment of the new Executive Chef at Abraham Guest High School.

When he applied for the post, Mark Holmes never expected he would be in for such a thorough grilling... from the pupils. But that's exactly what he got when members of the school council put him and three other candidates through their paces in a TV-inspired Ready Steady Cook-off.

"The cookery demonstration not only enabled me to show what I could do within budget and against the clock," says Mark, "it also gave the chance to meet the people I would be working for, to engage with them and ask them questions. What really appealed to me was the way MetroFresh opened up the application process to the kids, because essentially they are the customers - it's their dining room, their kitchen."

And according to Debbie, encouraging the children to have a 'hands on' interactive approach extends through to new initiatives such as the Chef's theatre - which let pupils see the raw ingredients of food as they're prepared in a 'theatre style' setting; and DELicious, the new mobile salad units which give them the chance to create their own sandwich from scratch.

Clearly, a passion for food is the thread which runs through the fabric of MetroFresh. "Ensuring the quality of our raw ingredients is critical. We work hard to carefully select and monitor our food suppliers to make sure we're getting the best that money can buy," explains Debbie. "It's also to ensure their business ethics and policies align to ours and Wigan Council's, for example in terms of food safety, animal welfare and environmental protection."

Through an effective collaborative procurement process and improved efficiency measures, the company is able to deliver a competitively priced service - this in spite of food inflation which is currently running at 6%. Offering value for money, particularly at a time when both school and household budgets are stretched, is a top priority for MetroFresh.

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# Snow wardens give cold comfort

***Bath and North East Somerset Council's highways manager, Kelvin Packer, explained details of its snow warden scheme at APSE's Highways and Street Lighting Seminar in Newcastle***

**H**arsh winters combined with budget reductions have focused highways engineers' minds on developing the most effective winter maintenance services possible. There has been a lot of publicity about raised salt stock levels, new storage barns and investment in gritting vehicles. But other changes that involve mobilising local residents have been put in place too, as delegates heard at APSE's recent Highways and Street Lighting Seminar.

Winter maintenance was one of many topics considered at the event, which took place in Newcastle on 8 and 9th March. Among the informative speakers was Kelvin Packer, service manager for highways and parking at Bath and North East Somerset Council (BathNES).

BathNES is one of a number of councils that have put snow wardens schemes in place. These schemes have been headlined under a 'Big Society' banner, but really they are a formalisation of the kind of community minded self-help that has been going on for years across the UK. Mr Packer told delegates at the APSE event: 'We have always had many individuals across the Authority willing to get out in the snow and clear footpaths for the benefit of their community.

We thought the time was right to give them some help and support.'

The BathNES scheme started small to make sure it was heading in the right direction prior to looking to spread it across the whole area. The first stage was an open evening at the highways depot for prospective wardens. This might not seem an especially attractive night out and many of the residents who had shown an interest didn't really know what the Council did, the breadth of responsibilities it had, or the scale of the operation it undertook. This meant that Council officers had to start from scratch to explain what the Council's duties were and how they fitted in with its wider priorities.

'It was a real eye opener, both for us and the potential wardens,' said Mr Packer. 'We expected them to be far better informed about what we did and they certainly left knowing a lot more about the Council than when they arrived'. In his opinion, it was a worthwhile exercise from a winter service point of view and from the point of view of getting a positive image of the Council over to local people.

The BathNES team provided training on health and safety issues, such as how to avoid back pain from shovelling and manual handling injuries from lifting. They provided small bags of salt so that they could be moved around easily and the wardens were given manual spreading equipment and high visibility vests. They were under no obligation to clear snow but were left to make their own judgements about how much to clear, when and for how long.

A notification mechanism by email and SMS text was set up to allow warnings to be issued to wardens following information provided through the Council's forecast provider. They were encouraged to contact the highways department if they had any queries and this direct access to highways officers who could answer queries immediately was one of the factors which has helped most. However there is a need to ensure the Council has enough cover for the phones if there is a significant snow fall.

The scheme has been piloted in 16 community areas with each having a snow warden and deputy with a cost of approximately £2,000 for each area. Insurance is always a big issue in this type of scheme and the council was keen to ensure that all those who were involved were covered. 'Snow wardens and their deputies were covered under the Council's existing insurance but any other volunteers were not covered. This was a message we had to put over clearly to all who signed up' noted Mr Packer. The Snow Code (issued last winter by the Department for Transport) was also a help, according to Mr Packer: 'Although the code didn't

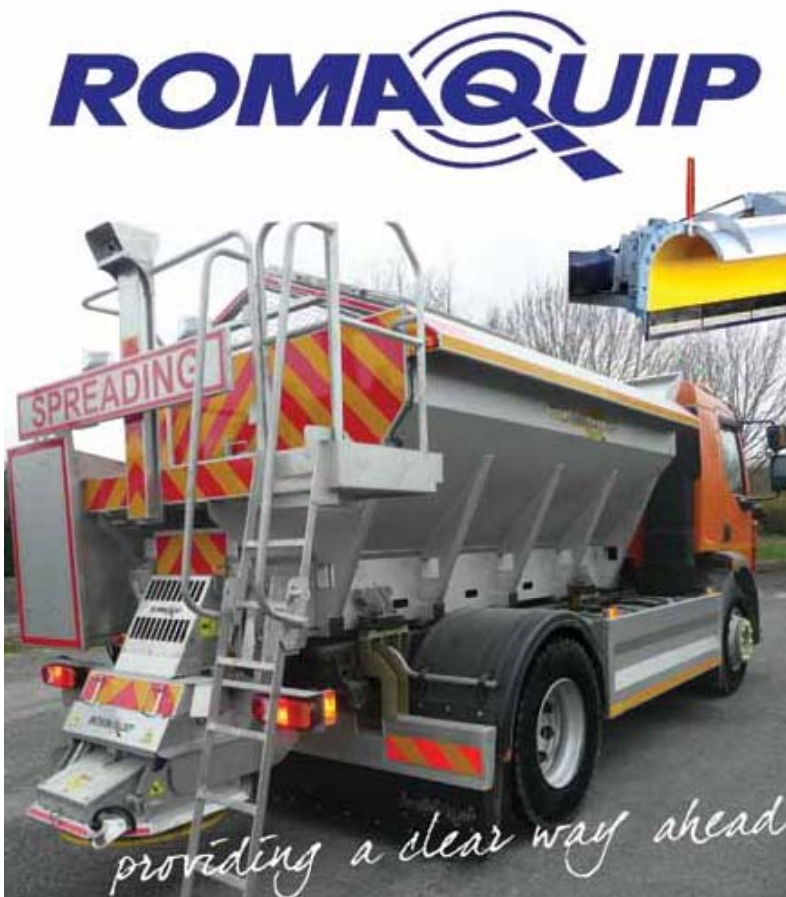
definitely rule out people being sued or held legally responsible for any injuries following snow clearance, it did help to reassure people.'

One further issue which emerged during the process concerned understanding weather forecasts. The wardens needed help with how to interpret the forecasts, knowing when snow was likely to come and whether ice would form and when was best to clear the snow. Once again officers were able to advise on this.

This is only one of the changes made in BathNES. The authority has increased salt stocks and storage facilities, developed plans for reducing the gritting routes and the rates of spread as well as putting in place processes for a more flexible approach to staff deployment if necessary. As well as snow and ice, engineers at BathNES say that standing water has a significant impact on the deterioration of the road surface and this is an issue they address through annual planned drainage programmes.

'Although we have done a lot of work with the snow wardens, this exercise remains a pilot until we have to deal with a heavy snow event – only then we will see if it has been worth the effort and whether our other changes have been effective,' Mr Packer explained to APSE seminar delegates in Newcastle.

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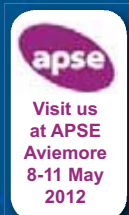
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# Report back

## *A round up of APSE lobbying and events on behalf of our members*

February and March proved busy months for APSE with a range of conferences, meetings and lobbying activity on behalf of APSE members.

## England

### Renewables in Edinburgh

APSE hosted a Strategic forum on environment and sustainability on the 26 January in Edinburgh chaired by Cllr Richard Williams. The forum debated the role of local authorities in renewable energy schemes.

### Serving up the answers

Mark Bramah, APSE's assistant chief executive, addressed the LACA conference on the 17 February 2012 at Lemington Spa on managing education catering services in challenging times.

### Evidence at Westminster

APSE chief executive Paul O'Brien provided evidence to the Associate Parliamentary Corporate Responsibility Group, which aims to promote debate and understanding of corporate responsibility in the community, environment, marketplace and workplace on the 14 March 2012.

### Racing for answers in social care

APSE hosted a strategic forum on social care at York Racecourse debating the issues and challenging in Adult Care services and looking at the Northamptonshire Social Care Trading Company Model, presented by Fiona Seymour (pictured). The event was chaired by Cllr Robin Brown.



### Central Streetscene

APSE central hosted an event on February 14th on Parks and Streetscene at Birmingham Town Hall on the 14 February with contributions from the HSE, APSE Solutions and Greenspace.

### County Cricket

Derbyshire County Cricket Ground was the scene for an APSE central event on the 16 March

Deciphering the Localism Act' with speakers including the DCLG select committee member Heather Wheeler MP, Frances Woodhead, Eversheds and Claire Richmond, Policy Director from Nottingham City Council.

### Brunel's transport strategy

Brunel's old station Bristol was a fitting scene for an APSE debate on local carbon vehicles and future transport strategies which received presentations from DAF trucks, APSE solutions and the Freight Transport Association latest survey.

## Wales

### Everyone loves a sharer

At the APSE Wales Annual General Meeting of 2011 it was agreed that a piece of research would be conducted on shared services and the collaboration agenda in Wales. The main objective of the research was to provide member authorities in Wales with the practical knowledge to respond proactively to the collaboration agenda and appraise the options for future service delivery. The research has now been completed in partnership with De Montfort University and copies are available from APSE. A launch event will take place on 22 June 2012 to showcase some of the case studies featured in the research. Contact [djohns@apse.org.uk](mailto:djohns@apse.org.uk) for more details.

### Entrepreneurial spirit in Wales

APSE held a service transformation strategic forum in Llandrindod Wells on 7 March 2012, which was chaired by the Leader of Flintshire County Council and attended by APSE's Chief Executive and Principal Advisor for Wales, Wales main contacts and chairs/secretary's of APSE Wales. The event focused on both shared services and entrepreneurship. The outcomes from the meeting will be written up and circulated to all APSE Wales members.

## Finding SOLACE in Wales

The Chief Executive presented on transformation and change at the SOLACE Wales conference in Wrexham on 22 March 2012.

## Scotland

### Robert Burns

The APSE Scotland Regional Council meeting was held on 10h February 2012 at the Robert Burns Centre, Kilmarnock with the Fiona Lees, Chief Executive of East Ayrshire Council providing a key note address, providing an overview of the challenges facing the area, and the organisation and how they are proactively dealing with and managing the challenges of change.

### Building up to Housing

APSE Scotland hosted its Building and Housing Seminar in Peebles on 16 and 17 February including a 'Question Time' session with three MSP's Elaine Murray, Richard Lyle and Jim Hume providing the political context for social housing in the 21st Century. They were joined by expert speakers from central and local government and the construction sector. The highlight of the seminar was the annual Apprentice of The Year Awards which were kindly sponsored by Morrison Construction, Scotland.

### Scottish Parliamentary Local Government and Regeneration Committee Inquiry

The Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Regeneration Committee is conducting an inquiry into a range of issues associated with

- Community Planning Partnerships and the delivery of outcomes via Single Outcome Agreements
- Benchmarking and Performance Measurement
- Developing new ways of delivering services

APSE took the opportunity to respond to the inquiry particularly with regard to benchmarking and performance measurement. A full response was made on benchmarking and performance measurement given members experience in this area.

## With thanks and best wishes...

Cllr Jim McGuigan APSE Scotland Chair and also Chair of the APSE service improvement and performance management advisory group, and member of APSE National Council is retiring after many years of service to APSE and our predecessor organisation ADLO. We wish Jim the best of luck for a well-deserved retirement.



Congratulations also to Cllr John Stewart who steps down from his role as APSE Scotland Deputy Chair and as former leader of Aberdeen City Council will take on a new role as Manchester Pride's first Chief Executive. John will have overall responsibility for Manchester Pride, including delivery of the Pride Festival and Big Weekend. Thank you to you both and our good wishes from all in APSE.



## Northern Ireland

### Templeparick hosts major local government awards

APSE continued our support for local authorities and for individual councillors and officers in Northern Ireland through the Local Government Awards – Northern Ireland. The awards dinner was held on 23rd February in Templepatrick with an audience of over 240. APSE sponsored the Service Team of the Year award which this year was won by the Building Control Team at Lisburn City Council. There are plans to highlights some of the award winners and finalists at a future event. Congratulation to Lisburn!

### Raising performance

Interest in performance networks across Northern Ireland is growing with the Environmental Quality Group and Technical Advisors Group having presentations from APSE about performance management and measurement.

# Another Interim Success for APSE Solutions in the North West

*Albert Light one of APSE Solutions' associates explains a typical approach*

**A**n APSE interim manager has recently completed a 19 month commission to provide interim support, three days per week, to a metropolitan borough council in the North West of England.

The original commission was as an interim manager to provide maternity cover, managing the council's £29 million/annum waste and environmental services from August 2010 to June 2011. The Council subsequently extended the commission to provide support to the Council's parks modernisation project during the period from June 2011 until February 2012.

Working only three days a week, the APSE interim successfully managed the Council's Waste Services and was able to meet and exceed all the key objectives that were set as part of the original appointment.

A key task was to support the ongoing development of the Council's waste strategy working in conjunction with other waste authorities as part of the joint waste partnership for the region.

During the period of the appointment the Council's waste recycling performance increased from around 35% to just over 40%. As well as providing strategic input and guidance, the interim was able to use his experience to make recommendations on system changes to provide improved waste modelling projections for the authority. This will allow for better in year projection of recycling performance and associated budgets, along with a facility to easily run scenarios based around the introduction of new or improvements to existing waste collection/recycling services.

Another key area was to take forward and further develop service value engineering projects working in partnership with the Council's waste services provider. This resulted in measurable improvements to street cleansing performance arising from the introduction of a new weekend street cleansing shift and a move towards an area based approach to

cleansing, which was designed to encourage cleansing crews to take ownership and hopefully develop pride for their 'own patch'.

The winter of 2010/11 proved to be one of the worst in living memory, resulting in considerable disruptions to waste collection services during the December and early January period. Prior to and during the period, the interim was responsible for introducing, further developing and leading on the Council's waste services severe weather working plan.

This initiative was a key factor in helping to minimise service disruption during the period and ensure a return to normal service within a prompt time scale. A 'lessons learnt' exercise was subsequently undertaken by the interim and a review report produced. This in turn led to recommendations being produced and accepted by the Council, around the use of winter tyres for vehicles and safety footwear for operatives. This should enable more work to be completed during any future periods of severe winter weather and lead to further improvements in service delivery.

As well as developing and introducing service improvements the interim was also able to introduce improvements to budget monitoring and control which lead to savings in the region of £200,000 for the year in question.

Working in conjunction with key budget holders and the Council's accountants, the budget was restructured with the aim of improving understanding and accountability at all levels. Regular meetings were held with the aim of developing improved awareness of budget responsibilities, accountability and ongoing budget performance. Additionally, the interim was able to directly identify a contract saving in the region of £130,000 arising from potential overpayments linked to deferred payments of annual RPI increases in contract rates.

The approach to budget management outlined above is now being promoted by the service Director as a template for an improved approach to other services budgets within the

Directorate.

Follow the success of the original commission, the Council were keen to retain the services of the interim to provide selective input into a major, two year, modernisation exercise that was just being started for the Parks & Countryside services.

After providing some initial advice and guidance into scoping the overall project plan, the interim was responsible for project managing the integration, mobilisation and return to in-house delivery of a £1.3 million highways grounds maintenance service.

Following Council approval, the project started towards the end of October 2011 with a start to the new 'in-house' integrated service on the 2nd February 2012.

Working to this extremely tight timescale, which included the Christmas/New Year holiday period, the interim was responsible for; project managing the TUPE transfer of 30 staff, securing a suitable depot, procuring plant and vehicles worth around £0.5 million, assessing and producing a working service budget and ensuring that all the necessary systems and procedures were in place, to ensure a seamless transfer back to the Council and continuation of these key services.

The project also included for an initial assessment of future plant and vehicle renewal requirements, for the whole of the Council's Parks & Countryside services, estimated to be around £4.0 million.

All of the above was completed to time and budget and the interim was able to secure a firm foundation which allowed the Council to commence and further develop these services in the future.

Both of the above projects clearly demonstrate the value and flexibility of approach that our experienced interim managers are able to bring to your authority. Please contact our Client Coordination Officer, Davina Rai on 0161 772 1810, to discuss any requirements that you may have for interim support.

# Events diary

Date	Event	Venue
April 18	Transport Advisory Group	Manchester ●
April 19	Building Cleaning advisory group	Manchester ●
April 20	Catering Advisory Group	Manchester Town Hall ●
April 24	Green Deal Masterclass	Birmingham ●
April 24	Leisure advisory Group	Manchester Town Hall ●
April 25	Leisure, sports and culture supervisory skills	Barnsley ●
April 25	Parks Advisory Group	Manchester Town Hall ●
April 26	Tools for efficiencies and savings in Street Cleansing	Manchester ●
April 26	Renewables seminar 2012	Stockton on Tees ●
April 27	Scottish Building & Housing Advisory Group	Venue TBC ●
May 2	Renewable Energy Masterclass	Leeds ●
May 8 – 11	Scottish Fleet, Waste & Grounds Seminar	Hilton Coylumbridge ●
May 15	Biomass Masterclass	London ●
May 16	Waste Advisory Group	Manchester ●
May 16	Scottish Soft FM Advisory Group	Venue TBC
May 17	Preparing for a street cleansing or grounds maintenance in house bid	Manchester ●
May 23	Identifying damp, timber mould and structural problems	Edinburgh ●
May 24	Cemeteries and Crematoria supervisory skills for team leaders	Manchester ●
May 30	Building Maintenance Advisory Group	Manchester Town Hall ●
May 31	Renewables advisory group	YHA Manchester ●
June 1	Scottish AGM	Venue TBC ●
June 6	Highways Advisory group	Manchester Town Hall ●
June 13	Transport Advisory Group	Manchester Town Hall ●
June 14/15	APSE National Council	York ●

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