

Innovation on the frontline

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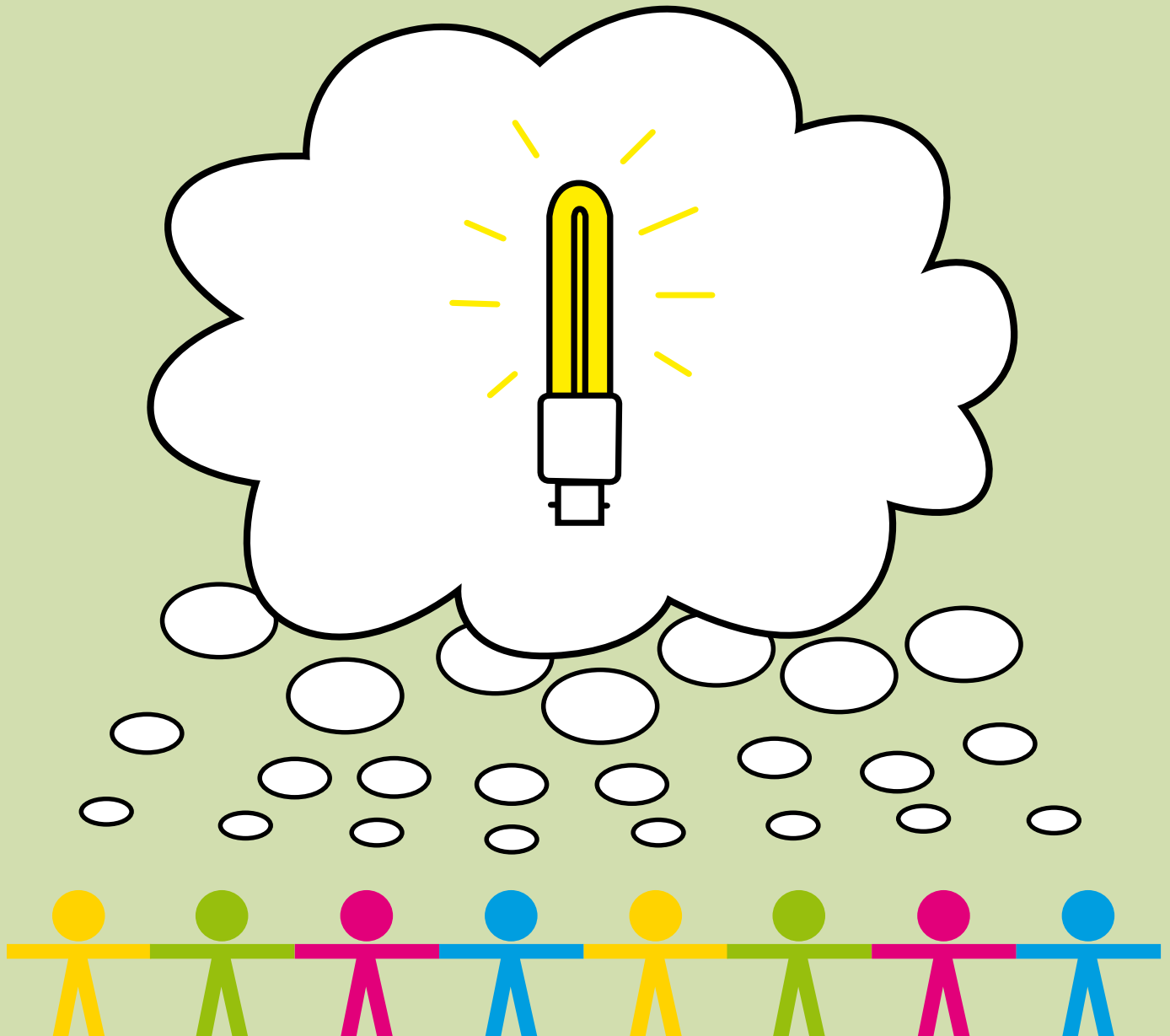
Keeping school nutrition high on the menu

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Innovation on the frontline



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June / July 2013

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Save! Save! Save!.....?

Few in local government were surprised by the spending review 2013 as the local government trade press had already trailed the 10% cuts headline weeks before the formal announcement. Financial modelling by the LGA suggests that the latest round of cuts will lead to a funding shortfall of £14.4bn; we know that this will not be evenly spread. With the widest gaps in funding falling on the most deprived areas of England, where demand for services is likely to be highest, has given rise to warnings that councils may be reduced to providing simply skeleton levels of statutory services. APSE members have made it clear over the last year that this is something which they wish to avoid.

But with demand for services increasing, with an aging population and the impact of welfare reform yet to be fully accounted for, councils face what many are now describing as a near impossible task. Sir Merrick Cockell has described the funding situation as being "unsustainable".

One of the factors in the spending review is based on assumptions that councils will increase charges for local services, raising an estimated additional £1.6bn. APSE has, and remains a keen advocate of charging and trading strategies being one of a number of measures that can help sustain local services.

However, APSE would be really concerned if fees and charges become the main stay of finance. Firstly, this could do what Mr Pickles once pledged to avoid which is soaking local communities with additional fees and charges. Secondly, it is not sustainable in the long term and could lead to greater inequalities in access to local services. Income from charging will be arguably greater in those authorities with communities able to pay for additional services or in areas with vibrant local economies, where there are opportunities for councils to both develop and sell services whether to other public sector bodies, private individuals or to businesses. However, the ability to raise income in this way will not create a level playing field and will not therefore plug the funding gap.

APSE supports the concept of longer term financial autonomy for local councils but this should not be based on an argument that all councils can somehow be self-sufficient on local income generation alone. So whilst the recognition of councils being innovative in income generation, whether through fees and charges, new services or even generating local green energy, is welcomed we should not let central Government off the hook at present. Local councils need to continue to press the legitimate need for adequate funding for council services, which remain the life blood of local communities. It is time we got our fair share of the public sector spend not our massively disproportionate share of the cuts.

Best wishes

Paul O'Brien, APSE Chief Executive



Boosting innovation on the frontline

Paul O'Brien and Bill Davies discuss the results of research undertaken in partnership between APSE and IPPR North, which shows how encouraging innovation among frontline staff can help improve council services

APSE and IPPR North have worked together to look at ways in which councils can encourage innovation among frontline staff as a means of responding to the challenges local government faces.

'Innovation on the Frontline: How engagement with the local government workforce can improve service delivery in austere times', challenges the myth that innovation is not the exclusive domain of the private sector. This research shows how local government can encourage innovative ideas from its workforce and use this to make services more efficient.

Council employees who are delivering services to local communities every day have the detailed, local knowledge that can help make those services as

effective as possible. Given the severity of fiscal pressures faced by local government, innovation alone is not enough to respond to austerity. However, this research shows that, within a broader strategy for future services, using the frontline workforce to initiate ideas for service reform may help in offsetting some of the worst damage of unprecedented budget reductions.

A survey conducted among local authorities as part of the APSE/IPPR study found that 80% of respondents felt their council regards it as important to encourage innovative behaviour among frontline employees at the current time. A total of 47% of respondents cited increased productivity, 47% cited service improvements and 38% cited improved employee

satisfaction as benefits of engaging frontline employees in innovation.

Activities to encourage frontline innovation described in the survey include: award nights; one-to-one innovation sessions; suggestion schemes; regular briefing sessions; and, in some cases, financial rewards. Respondents believed that making innovation a requirement in a job description would help embed a culture of innovation. They also identified the need to offer personal or team incentives.

The survey also found, however, that support for frontline innovation was patchy in some authorities and dependent upon individual managers. Action is therefore needed to embed frontline innovation within the culture of local authorities.

This new piece of research follows on from APSE's study of 'municipal entrepreneurship', which showed that innovation is alive and well in the UK's town halls. We found examples of 'intrapreneurs' in councils across the country who are bringing innovative improvements to their daily working practices and those of their colleagues. We also identified a number of common factors that are key to creating an environment in which frontline innovation can flourish, including culture and leadership, workforce development, and procedures to connect frontline staff with management.

The frontline innovation landscape is not uniform and the research also highlights barriers that need to be addressed for frontline innovation to flourish. Our report outlines methods to enable more councils to use their workforce's on the job knowledge to maximum effect.

We found that encouraging innovation on the frontline cannot be simply a one-off event. It will require a comprehensive strategy and a package of incentives, such as: involving innovation within the regular workload; using innovation as part of employee development through explicit training; and using innovation as part of the appraisal process.

Our researchers found that top-down management structures can be a barrier to encouraging innovation among staff. Managers need to be accessible to frontline staff to discuss potential improvements to services. At a minimum, councils need to establish methods for formally and informally sourcing ideas from their staff.

Boosting frontline innovation can be a valuable tool, which does not require financial investment. But it calls for a mindset that enables innovation to flourish right across - and up and down - the organisation.

Examples of flourishing frontline innovation

The report features case studies of local authorities across the UK that have harnessed their own workforce's ideas to deliver more efficient and effective services. Examples are:

Blackburn with Darwen's formal training to encourage innovation in service effectiveness has resulted in workforce initiatives such as an accident prevention scheme in environmental services.

Ealing Council's programme of innovation in environmental services took on board ideas taken from the street cleansing staff.

Monmouthshire County Council has developed an Intrapreneurship School and Intrapreneurship 'Cookbook' among other measures, as methods for encouraging its workforce to think about innovation in service delivery.

South Lanarkshire Council has encouraged innovation through a variety of processes, including a matrix for scoring ideas, resulting in a number of innovative projects to reorganise services.

Staffordshire County Council encourages innovation through a variety of measures including forming part of new employees' induction and training programmes.

Positive steps towards frontline innovation

Recommendations arising from the research include:

- ♦ Developing cultures of innovation in local authorities requires effort to construct and maintain therefore promoting innovation must be regarded as a whole process rather than an event.
- ♦ To embed a culture of innovative thinking on the frontline will require a comprehensive strategy and a package of incentives to encourage frontline employees to participate.
- ♦ These measures may include: involving innovation within the regular workload; using innovation as part of employee development through explicit training; using innovation as part of the appraisal process; and financial incentives to encourage the promotion of ideas if appropriate.



Championing healthy lifestyles

Sharon Hodgson MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on school food and shadow minister for children and families explains the work of the APPG in championing school food.

In spite of the recent furore about All Party Parliamentary Groups and the access that they can provide to Parliament for lobbyists, in reality, for the most part they are a way to champion issues which cut across party lines, and in my opinion there are few more worthy cross party causes than the health of our children.

The APPG on School Food was formally created in January last year, but already has a large membership of MPs, Peers and sector representatives, who come together four times a year to discuss the manifold and important issues surrounding school food and the wider role of schools in championing healthy lifestyles.

The group contains members of differing political persuasions, yet we all agree that what our children are eating and learning about food in school is a crucial public health concern for the future of our nation. And because of the caché that being a Parliamentary group brings, we are able to attract top speakers from across the field to help develop our thinking. Recently we've

had presentations from Public Health England (PHE), the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, and Minister Liz Truss MP is scheduled to address us in July.

Since the 'Jamie Oliver revolution', there has hardly been a more eventful twelve months for school food. We have witnessed Michael Gove's one man mission to deregulate schools since May 2010, undermining hard-fought-for nutritional standards, with serious concerns being voiced that junk food is creeping back into canteens and vending machines, but last year's announcement that Leon founders John Vincent and Henry Dimbleby had been given the intense task of constructing a 'School Food Plan' to direct his Department's policy was a welcome, if unexpected, development.

The School Food APPG has engaged with John and Henry to inform their assessment of the key issues facing the sector, as well as the policy priorities shared by Members. I believe the group has played a big role in the Leon Review, and I'm confident that our

recommendations have influenced their outcomes. We are currently on the edge of our seats waiting for the formal release of the Plan, anxious to start pressing Mr Gove to get a move on and begin to implement what we hope will be recommendations which will spread and build upon some of the great work already going on in schools across the country, and possibly go even further than that.

As the membership and influence of the School Food APPG has widened, we recently decided to produce Statement Papers on current issues which we would distribute to Parliamentarians, Government Ministers, and key bodies such as Ofsted and PHE.

The first paper was on the Pupil Premium, which has just risen to £900 per pupil from April 2013, a significant sum of money, but one for which there is little guidance on how best to spend it to meet the stated aims of improving educational outcomes for the most disadvantaged children. As a result of that lack of guidance, an Ofsted report published last September highlighted that the funding was having little of the desired impact on the pupils it aimed to help.

Our paper suggested that outcomes for these pupils could be improved by encouraging schools to invest in the nutrition, health and wellbeing of pupils, especially as it is those pupils who receive Free School Meals who also attract this payment. Initiatives such as free breakfast clubs have been strongly linked with greater attainment at school, and should be championed by government as a way of schools meeting this important objective; I was pleased to see that

Blackpool Council recently started to provide Free Breakfasts for a trial period and that they have just committed to extending the trial.

Our second paper concerned Health and Wellbeing boards, recently established within all top tier local authorities to assume the public health role which previously rested with the NHS. Our paper outlined our concerns that, given the major risk to public health of childhood obesity, there is no requirement for boards to have a member who has specialist knowledge in the area of children's diets, something we believe is unacceptable.

For me, it's a no-brainer. Making sure that we give children nutritious and filling meals while they're at school, and the skills to feed themselves when they're not, would play a significant part in reducing academic inequality, and save the NHS billions of pounds in the future.

The APPG was pleased that the Prime Minister personally acknowledged our Statement Paper recommendations in a letter we received last month, although there were no promises that he would act upon them. You can be sure that we will be pressing the Minister to address them in greater detail when she appears before us, and will continue to be a champion for child health and nutrition in Parliament and beyond.

Contact: Rob Bailey is the APSE principal advisor for school meals. APSE is the secretariat for the APPG. Email Rbailey@apse.org.uk



Keeping school nutrition high on the menu

Nutritious school food is more important than ever, says Anne Bull, Head of Catering and School Facilities Services at Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and LACA National Chair



There's a lot to talk about as we bring LACA members together with equipment, food and drink manufacturers and suppliers and others who supply services to the education catering sector for 'The Main Event' at the NEC in Birmingham. This is from 10th to the 12th July and the theme for this year's event is 'Beyond the Boundaries'.

Eighty per cent of the education catering services in the UK are provided by LACA members, with around three million lunches being served every day in 22,000 schools. The LACA network is the country's largest provider of school catering. With more families living in hardship and the rising costs of ingredients, we face greater challenges than ever – and the programme features speakers who have broken through organisational and geographic boundaries and thought outside of the box in order to meet those challenges.

We have a lot to be proud of as a profession. The campaign by TV chef Jamie Oliver pushed school food higher up the political agenda and we were pleased to see both food and nutritional standards put in place for school meals. School caterers have embraced imaginative ways of marketing school meals to both pupils and parents and children are now learning about healthy eating. LACA is pleased to see the recent announcement that compulsory food education is set to be included in the National Curriculum for pupils up to year nine.

There is strong evidence to show the links between healthy eating, school attendance and educational attainment and all the excellent work to make sure school food is tasty, nutritious and accessible to all must be maintained.

Last summer, education minister Michael Gove commissioned restaurateurs Henry Dimbleby and John Vincent, who run the Leon chain, to conduct a review of school food. I have represented LACA as part of the Expert Food Panel that is contributing to the review and it is anticipated that the details of the new School Food Plan will be launched this summer. LACA has told the review that we want to make sure there are mandatory standards for all schools – including academies – so that every child has equal access to good, nutritious food.

Eating a healthy, filling school meal is more important than ever as more families are living in hardship. In these tough economic times, a nutritious school lunch may be the only hot meal that some children eat in a day and it is therefore essential that free

school meals are available to all children who are currently entitled to them. Whilst free school meals are a 'passported' benefit at present, we are very concerned about reports that under welfare reform proposals, children whose families earn more than £135 a week may lose out on their entitlement. This news is even more alarming when coupled with the report from the Children's Society in March this year, it was noted that in 57 of the parliamentary constituencies studied, more than six in 10 children in poverty are not getting a free school meal.

We are worried, as ever, about the rise in childhood obesity. A recent study by researchers from Imperial College London found the number of children admitted to hospital for problems related to obesity in England and Wales had quadrupled between 2000 and 2009. But unfortunately we are also seeing reports of malnutrition and identifying a growing trend of statistics showing that childhood malnutrition is on the increase.

While there is therefore greater need than ever for a nutritious meal at lunch time that is good value for money, inflated food prices have driven up the cost of preparing school meals. Education caterers around the country are thinking beyond boundaries in responding to this challenge however - by working collaboratively on purchasing and doing our best with limited resources. This means using our knowledge as caterers to use different cuts of meat and buying seasonal fruit and vegetables, for example. Education caterers are also supporting their local economies and considering sustainability issues by using as much local produce as possible.

An issue that has dominated the press in recent months has been the horse meat scandal. Local authority food procurement is very stringent and has rigorous and robust quality checks built into the procurement processes. Rather than it being a food safety issue it was clearly an abysmal issue of food fraud within the food chain and labelling and regulation issues have to be strengthened. The scandal has resulted in few changes to menus however, and I am not aware of any children whose eating habits have changed as a result. Safeguarding halal meat is being addressed by local community groups and local authorities working together.

Despite the many challenges we face as education caterers, we are very encouraged that local authorities are realising the benefits of healthy eating for children and this can link positively with their new responsibility for public health improvement.

Blackpool Council, for example, is running a £1.3m scheme to provide fruit, yogurt and bread to 12,000 pupils in the town's 33 primary schools. A study has found children are happier and more alert and had the potential to improve attendance and punctuality as a result. This is just one of many great children's eating initiatives nationally.

With reports of children arriving hungry at school, the food services in schools is more vital than ever before. Making sure all children have the opportunity to eat well is essential for a healthy society – and as education caterers we will go beyond boundaries to make this happen.

Contact: admin@laca.co.uk

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John Williams, Production Manager at Lower Hurst Organic, Derbyshire



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Binformation is power

Corporate Director of Environment Reena Owen, describes how social media will help the City and County of Swansea Council increase recycling rates while cutting costs

Latest technology offers huge opportunities to change the way councils communicate with residents, enhance efficiency and cut costs in the process. At Swansea, we are launching a tailored mobile phone application to improve the way information on refuse collection services is provided to our residents – with an aim of increasing recycling rates and improving customer satisfaction while also saving resources.

Swansea Council employs around 120 staff to collect refuse/recycling from 110,000 households. Our annual budget for refuse collection, recycling and disposal is over £24m and we are looking at making up to 15% efficiency savings in the next year or so. At the same time, the Welsh Government has targets for 52% of all waste to be recycled in 2013 and this rises to 58% in 2016. In working to achieve these targets, the Council will reduce the costs of landfill, not to mention the environmental benefits that recycling brings.

Swansea currently offers a weekly collection service and a full range of recycling collections at the kerbside. This includes weekly food waste, bi-weekly plastic, tins, glass, paper, card and garden waste. Residual black bag waste is also collected fortnightly. These collections are on different weeks in different bags, requiring residents to be conversant with the arrangements.

“We decided to use the latest technology to better communicate with residents because having the right information readily available will encourage them to use the right bags on the right days and thereby optimise the

efficiency of our collection rounds.” said Reena. With an average on-line transaction costing 15p, compared with £2.38 by phone and £8.26 face to face, according to Socitm, using latest technology to provide up to the minute information will also reduce the transactional costs of dealing with residents’ enquiries.

Our current recycling rate is approx 49% and we need to increase this in order to meet our statutory targets. Having mapped participation in recycling, we identified that certain areas of the county were bringing down overall rates by not taking part fully and/or using incorrect bags or putting things out on the wrong days. We also have a large student population in Swansea and our data showed that students were often unfamiliar with the local arrangements. This is because transient student residents often don't understand local recycling arrangements as they differ from their home towns. While we have used Fresher's Week and other events to get information to them, we recognised that young people are more likely to use smart phones and respond to social media.

We expect our new system to go live at the end of July, which means it will be up and running for students when they return for the autumn term.

The refuse recycling collection information system we have chosen is called 'Binfo'. This allows us to send people real time information on collections in their street, including what to put out when and any changes to the services, for example on Bank Holidays or weather-related disruptions.

The information will be on a website and accessed free to anybody who has an iPhone or Android phone. Whereas SMS messaging has a cost, this allows us to send messages to phones without a cost to the council or the resident. A Welsh language version has been developed in accordance with our policy for all our information to be bilingual.

People need to register to receive the information in this way, and achieving a 'channel shift' means using traditional media to spread the word. So we are planning a major campaign to publicise Binfo via local media and our own council newspaper.

We have corporate commitments to be both more cost efficient and citizen focused. Having analysed feedback, we found people want more flexibility in communications with the council rather than a traditional approach, so we have created a refuse collection information system enabling people to access information in a way they choose at any time and in any location.

People can already access Swansea's services on-line and there are a range of communications systems available on the market. But the simplicity of Binfo convinced us it was the right option for our waste service. It provides specifically tailored collection information and it has been tested in other councils with good feedback. As well as information on refuse collection, the system can be extended to cover reporting on potholes, fly-tipping and information on a range of other environmental issues if required.

Binfo has been developed by U6 Media, which provides web design and development, mobile apps and online management services to help organisations communicate with residents more easily. This means people can have two-way conversations with their council and report issues such as fly-tipping, graffiti, dog-fouling and broken street lights, as well as refuse collection, with the ability to link this to organisational databases and customer relationship management systems. Local authorities using the company's services include; South Oxfordshire, Vale of White



Horse, Nuneaton and Bedworth, Blackpool, Lancaster, Pendle, Chorley, Fylde, Wyre, Teignbridge, West Devon, Mid Devon, Torridge and South Hampshire. U6 Media is also currently developing a mobile enabled website and customer relationship management system for APSE.

Binfo was introduced in South Oxfordshire a year ago and 25% of refuse collection transactions in the district are now by mobile phone and the council has achieved a 68.8% recycling rate and saved £10k a quarter on the cost of SMS messaging.

In Swansea, we are hoping to replicate such positive results and use latest technology and enhance our relationship with our residents as well as improving efficiency and cutting costs.

Contact: reena.owen@swansea.gov.uk

Driving at work: Occupational road risk

15 August 2013, Glasgow



APSE, in conjunction with Pinsent Masons, is pleased to announce the creation of a one day course to address the health and safety issues of driving at work and occupational road risk.

Course content:

- To understand the legal responsibilities of driving at work
- To appreciate the benefits of managing work related road safety
- To understand risk assessment
- The crucial role of information management, including co-operation and communication
- What you don't need to do
- Current case law updates
- Case study examples of good practice

Duration:

1 day event: 9:30am - 4:30pm

Costs of attendance:

APSE members:	1 delegate:	£219 + vat
	3 or more delegates	£189 + vat
Non members:	per delegate	£225 + vat

Contact Sarah Kay skay@apse.org.uk for a flyer and booking form or to book on-line, go direct to <http://www.apse.org.uk/lifelong-learning/training.asp>

Are you keeping your private contractors to account?

APSE is well known for its work with in-house service providers and in particular, for banging the drum in favour of efficiency in these times of austerity. What is perhaps less well known is that the knowledge and expertise we have built up can also be applied to the management of external contracts. A couple of recent examples of how APSE's consultancy arm, APSE Solutions, has helped with reducing the cost of outsourced services illustrate how Performance Networks data, coupled with a bit of commercial savvy, can lead to huge savings.

The first example concerns a District Council Leisure contract that is due to expire at the end of this year. The Council is happy with the performance of the contractor but like everybody else is under enormous pressure to reduce its expenditure. In the first instance they asked APSE Solutions to review the service. This was followed up with an option appraisal and ultimately a recommendation to renew the contract with the existing supplier. Along the way the APSE team engaged in direct discussion with the contractor to assist them to make an offer that was genuinely the best value option. The result is a saving of 40% on the bill for running the leisure centre and a clear direction of travel towards a strategy for physical activity that is able to make the most of the commercial potential for facilities based activity to generate income that can be used to meet wider need.

The key to this mutually beneficial outcome was the ability of the APSE team to see where savings could be made and income generated. Underpinning this was the rich data set provided by the Performance Networks Leisure benchmarking module. Information about the cost of managing leisure facilities throughout the UK was used to assess key cost centres and establish potential for savings. This understanding, coupled with the service specific expertise of the Solutions consultant, placed the Council in a strong position and ensured that elected members were able to make an evidence based decision. One week's worth of the savings generated will pay twice over for the Performance Networks subscription and one month's worth will pay for the cost of the consultancy input. More importantly, the savings generated on this one contract will help the Council to avoid cuts in critical front line provision.

The second example is a local authority cleaning contract which, as is often the case, includes provision for periodic benchmarking. In many cases

benchmarking clauses are either ignored in favour of RPI uplifts or are carried out by the contractor using data that is impossible to verify. In this case the parties had failed to agree the results of an earlier exercise and jointly asked APSE Solutions to act as an 'independent bench-marker'.

The contractor was already supplying data to Performance Networks and there was no necessity to collect additional performance or cost information. Verification of key data was undertaken and a methodology was established to allow for the particular mix of building types that make up the contract. This methodology is both logical and transparent and draws on underlying information supplied as part of the return to Performance Networks. The outcome of the exercise is a benchmark price that is nearly 40% lower than the current charge which, if implemented, will save the Council around £1.2m per annum. A single day's saving will cover both the cost of subscribing to Performance Networks and the consultancy input.

These two examples are amongst several pieces of work undertaken by APSE Solutions where Performance Networks data has been used to drive better value from contracts. Discussions with contractors indicates that whilst they may, as in the second example, sometimes lose out, they welcome the robust data and analysis that the Performance Networks model provides. It is in their interest to test themselves against benchmarking data as this can only help improve their competitiveness over time. The advantages of using data this way to local authorities are obvious and sometimes spectacular.

Performance Networks members have been using comparative data to drive improvement in the performance of direct services for many years. APSE Solutions also makes full use of the data in the work it carries out for in-house teams. The examples above, along with others, show just how effective benchmarking can be in improving contract management and assisting contractors to remain competitive. The message is simple, Performance Networks is not just for in-house services and APSE Solutions can help with meeting the challenges posed by government cuts - regardless of who the provider is!

Contact: Andy Mudd: APSE Solutions on
amudd@apse.org.uk or ring the APSE Solutions team on
0161 772 1810

East Staffordshire Business Development Fund helps local entrepreneurs

Cllr Richard Grosvenor, Leader of East Staffordshire Borough Council, explains the council's innovative approach to encouraging new businesses and tackling unemployment especially amongst the Borough's young people.



To help meet the Council's priority of 'Encouraging Local Enterprise', East Staffordshire Borough Council has agreed to launch a two year business development funding scheme. The new Business Development Fund will be aimed at local small and medium sized businesses located in East Staffordshire who wish to grow and expand their business and local entrepreneurs who need some financial support to make their business idea a reality.

The key aim of the Business Development Fund is to support the East Staffordshire economy by providing targeted financial assistance to help local companies and entrepreneurs. One of the key challenges facing local businesses in the current economic climate is accessing the necessary finance to fund investment and growth plans, whether this be through bank loans, equity or personal funds. This is a particular problem for entrepreneurs who wish to start up a new business venture, who can often struggle to attract finance at a commercially attractive interest rate or even be offered finance at all.

Like many local councils we are concerned that many businesses, and young entrepreneurs in particular, in our local economy can face difficulties in accessing traditional forms of financial support. A key objective of the new fund developed by East Staffordshire Council is therefore designed to help local businesses address these challenges. The fund will help by

providing access to much needed finance and enable them to realise ambitious growth and investment plans, thereby creating new employment opportunities for local people.

Existing small and medium sized business will be able to apply for a grant of up to 50% of total eligible project costs with a maximum grant totalling £10,000. For new start-up companies that have been trading for less than twelve months, a slightly lower maximum grant of up to £5,000 is available, although a grant rate of up to 50% would still be available. So whilst this is about innovation we are also managing risk to the public purse.

The Business Development Fund was approved by the Council's Cabinet on 10th June and will be open for business during June. The Fund will be open until the available funding is fully allocated or March 2015, whichever is sooner.

I firmly believe that by East Staffordshire Borough Council making a significant investment in the local economy we are supporting our local businesses allowing them to grow and prosper. This investment will provide local small to medium enterprises with an opportunity to deliver their business plans, create new jobs and invest in the local area.

There will be a simple two stage application process. The first stage will require businesses to complete an application form to summarise their project, set out how much funding is required for their business project and how many jobs will be created. The second stage will involve the business presenting their proposal to an 'Investment Panel' consisting of Council and business representatives.

Our Business Development Fund is putting support into the heart of our local economy and in tough times we know that small to medium enterprises can be at the heart of jobs and growth. But we are also keen to stress that there are no losers; each applicant – even if they are unsuccessful in their initial application for funding, will still gain feedback and advice from the panel as part of the process, which will be important to budding entrepreneurs.

Contact: dean.piper@eaststaffsbc.gov.uk

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Is the Public Sector Ignoring HAVS Risk?

Jim O'Hagan, Managing Director of Reactec

Through our on-going work with local authorities and other public bodies across the UK, we've become aware of a major oversight in the tender processes for projects and services involving power tools.

Having reviewed a number of these tender documents over the course of the past year, it's evident that the current procurement process fails to take into account any Hand Arm Vibration (HAV) risk management, despite the fact that all contractors are required by HSE regulations to address this risk if present.

The downsides of ineffective HAV risk management have a significant impact on an organisation, resulting in prolonged project timelines and increased tool and operator overhead costs. This was clear to see when Reactec started working with Dorset County Council, which was looking for an efficient way to monitor HAVS. As a result, the Council implemented a trial of the HAVmeter system in 2010 to replace a paper-based monitoring system used by staff.

Steve Maros, Arboriculture Manager said: "The HAVmeter helped staff remove the guesswork from estimating how many minutes' trigger time the operators had used a machine for. The reports generated from the system identified tool utilisation to help manage and cut tool and operator costs. We would normally replace all strimmers every two years, but as a result of using the HAVmeter we have identified variations in tool utilisation resulting in a number not required to be replaced for an additional year. This has equated to a saving on that particular item of approximately £4,500.

"If we roll this out across hedge-cutters, leaf blowers and chainsaws then the size of the cost savings can exceed £18,000 on an annual basis, which is a significant cost saving for the authority."

Reactec has worked with 70 local authorities across the length and breadth of the UK to identify and reduce HAV risk.

Advertisement editorial

One of these, Norfolk County Council, started working with the HAVmeter in 2008. Not only does the system save money and improve time efficiency, it also makes it clear that the organisation takes health and safety seriously, and cares about the health of its workers.

Colin Tibbenham, from the Council's Environment Transport and Development department was project manager for the roll-out of the new equipment. He said: "The HAVmeter system allows any workers using vibrating tools to easily and accurately monitor their exposure levels to Hand Arm Vibration.

"This is a system that will be with us for some time because, like all public bodies, we are accountable, and huge claims and employees with illness are not good for anyone. The system is helping us to monitor exposure to HAVS and look after the safety of our men and women."

Awarding bodies could quite easily be helping local businesses avoid these unnecessary costs simply by including, within their tenders, a requirement for electronic monitoring and management of HAVS risk.

Why should contractors bother shifting from paper to electronic if the current system is working just fine? Well the whole point is that paper monitoring really isn't working. The traditional method of managing HAV risk using paper-based monitoring is both time and cost consuming and proven to provide highly inaccurate data. HSE regulations require actions to be taken based on data collected in lowering HAVS exposure, which can frequently misguide companies into actions that incur unnecessary cost and time. Such actions can include removing operators from

tools during a project or replacing tools.

The upsides of electronic monitoring stand in stark contrast to the downsides of paper monitoring. Electronic monitoring of HAV exposure not only removes unnecessary costs by more accurately monitoring operator and tool activity, but it also improves tool workforce efficiency by an average 25%. Electronic monitoring is lower cost than using a paper system and helps contractors pass on further cost savings through improved identification of redundant or poor performing tools plus unnecessary maintenance cost.

And what are the benefits for the procuring organisation? By addressing HAVS risk through the tender process, public organisations can ensure that they are supporting best practice for HAVS worker welfare and helping to reduce carbon footprint due to reduced tool inventory and project duration. And finally, it offers recognition to those contractors who have taken the time to switch to electronic management of assets, operators and HAVS risk as a means of improving both worker welfare and their own business intelligence.

Only by reviewing these tender processes will contractors be incentivised to switch from paper to electronic monitoring. And only then will they realise the true business benefits of an effective HAV risk management plan.

www.reactec.com



Benchmarking cemetery and crematorium services

New APSE performance networks service launched!

Although it may seem slightly insensitive to discuss performance management in the context of local authority cemeteries and crematoriums it is nevertheless a public service that needs to be budgeted for; and like all other council services the statutory duty of 'best value' applies. Having effective performance data assists local authorities and those who commission and manage services to make difficult decisions about priorities, budgets, value for money and service levels. In sensitive bereavement services having effective data to drive evidence based decision making is all the more important. As councils across the UK face common challenges of reduced funding, greater demand for services and the need to generate income, sharing practices and benchmarking against other providers is an increasing necessity.

APSE has therefore introduced a new benchmarking service this year for Performance Networks members on cemetery and crematorium services. This follows on from a successful pilot last year, commissioned by 10 local authorities from England, Scotland and Wales. APSE already has nearly 50 authorities signed up for this service for the coming year. The new service has been incorporated into the existing package of APSE's benchmarking services for Performance Networks which means that those authorities who are signed up to all Performance Networks services with APSE will be able to participate in this exercise and receive the



performance reports, performance indicator standings reports and training free of charge.

The new benchmarking model covers a range of cost, income, efficiency and quality indicators including cost of the cemeteries and crematoria service per head of population, memorial income, price of cremations and burials, efficiency of cremations, hectares of land maintained, quality assurance and productivity information such as staff absence levels. The other advantage of the model is that you do not need to have responsibility for both cemeteries and crematoria to participate in the exercise; you can submit data if your authority is burial only, cremation only or includes both burials and cremations.

A free training course will be provided this summer to those registered for the service. Data collection for the service will take place over the summer and autumn and the performance reports will be produced in October 2013. APSE will also be introducing an award for the best performing cemetery and crematorium service this year and qualification for entry for this award will be based on data submissions.

If you need any further information, or to see the full list of performance indicators, please contact a member of the performance networks team.

Contact: performance.networks@apse.org.uk

apse annual seminar 2013

4-5 September 2013, St George's Hall Liverpool

St George's Hall, St George's Place, Liverpool, Merseyside, L1 1JJ

The Road to 2020: Moving forward on frontline services

The Road to 2020 will explore:-

- Income generation, commercialisation and successful examples of charging and trading in services
- New public sector management tools and techniques that work for frontline service providers
- An exploration of how frontline services can tackle the big issues of welfare reform, unemployment, housing shortages and stimulate local economies
- Development of new models of services, such as municipal energy companies
- Demand management, behaviour change and service planning techniques
- Cross public sector working opportunities and partnerships
- Workforce development, productivity and skills
- Social media and new technology for frontline services

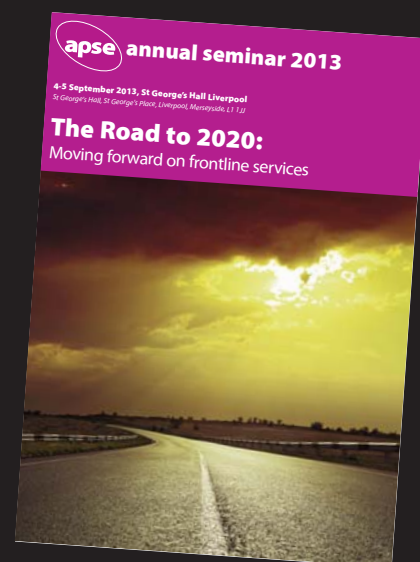
Reserve your place now!

Complete the booking form at www.apse.org.uk or email kswaby@apse.org.uk for more information

Key note speakers from leading organisations include:

- Joe Anderson, Elected Mayor of Liverpool
- Heather Wheeler, MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Committee on Local Government
- Daniel Goodwin, Executive Director of Policy and Finance, LGA
- Professor Steve Fothergill, Sheffield Hallam University
- Michael Ward, Chair of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies
- Heather Wakefield, UNISON, Head of Local Government
- Richard Crouch, President, PPMA
- David Kilduff, Partner, Walker Morris Solicitors

This seminar is a timely and cost effective opportunity for management teams and elected members to get to grips with the challenges facing local councils and more importantly find out about innovative and practical solutions.





One-Stop Recycling: Now One-Stop Workshop!

Developing Thurrock Council's approach to improving its environmental services whilst at the same time ensuring effective support services are delivered to the frontline

During 2009, Thurrock Council's environment department made a business decision to submit an in-house bid for the refuse and recycling collection service. The bid, if successful would have a major impact on fleet services both in terms of the procurement and on-going maintenance of an additional 30 refuse collection vehicles.

During 2009, Thurrock Council's environment department made a business decision to submit an in-house bid for the refuse and recycling collection service. The bid, if successful would have a major impact on fleet services both in terms of the procurement and on-going maintenance of an additional 30 refuse collection vehicles.

Being awarded the tender the Council faced the enormous challenges of implementing an effective and efficient waste collection service whilst at the same time making sure all support services were in place to deliver an improved service to residents and

businesses of the borough.

Fleet Management has been recognised as a major contributor in supporting additional vehicles alongside continuing to provide what is regarded as an extremely efficient service; to existing customers. However, at that time the existing vehicle and repair facilities were located in a small two-bay workshop in an already overcrowded depot at Curzon Drive, Grays.

Thurrock Council has a reputation for its 'can-do' culture and therefore developed short-term emergency third party repair and maintenance support from local suppliers, whilst making plans to develop and increase the in-house repair and maintenance capacity.

Faced with these challenges, and energised by the underlying need to produce efficiencies, the Environment Department Management Team made the decision to restructure and expand the fleet service operation. Without a dedicated and

knowledgeable transport manager to drive the changes forward Geoff Gladwin, business services manager at Thurrock Council, called on APSE Solutions to provide the much needed expertise to relocate the service and provide essential project management skills to reshape and develop the existing fleet management team into a cohesive and much improved service.

The Council's in-house project management team, led by Len Ward, were tasked with the design of the new facility. However, the project team required the expertise of an experienced and well respected transport professional to develop the needs of the new premises to accommodate the new service. APSE Solutions therefore turned to Don Allison, an APSE Associate who has spent many years in public sector transport operations.

The refurbishment of the Council's obsolete civic amenities site in West Thurrock was recognised as the answer to accommodate the expanding fleet management service.

A detailed cost analysis of existing Fleet practices was undertaken and the decision to replace all spot hired vehicles with outright purchase commenced and when completed will realise significant savings of £700,000 over a five year period.

To further drive efficiencies within the fleet, all vehicles and high value items of plant have Road Angel GPS trackers fitted. Consequently, the vehicles activities can be monitored in real time and usage trends identified. This has already improved efficiencies throughout the

Council. An example of this has been the rescheduling of mechanical sweeper routes to improve performance whilst reducing duplication and waste of resources. Additionally, the data from the tracker system has been used to improve the efficiency of the waste collection teams. The service specific weekly usage and exception reports produced for fleet customers are an invaluable tool in the Council's drive to reduce waste and improve efficiencies.

In the past 8 months the fleet team has worked with existing customers to understand their vehicle needs and a ten year vehicle replacement programme has been produced and implemented. A new agreed service partnership agreement (SPA) is designed to enhance the services provided to customers whilst at the same time outlining customer responsibilities. Due to these and many other initiatives during 2012, the Council was a finalist in APSE's annual awards for the best and most improved transport and vehicle maintenance performer – an accolade they are keen to improve on during 2013.

As the pictures demonstrate the transformation from the old to the new site is remarkable!

Contact: Davina Rai at APSE Solutions on drai@apse.org.uk to discuss your consultancy or interim management needs. APSE Solutions is part of APSE's ethical not-for-profit services

Top left and below: Before and after shots of the workshop



Rising Stars

APSE's first ever 'Rising Stars' awards for up and coming managers in local government was hosted during the APSE Scotland Fleet Waste and Grounds Seminar 2013. Following both written submissions and interviews before a panel and a vigorous scoring round the winners were announced. Congratulations to all the finalist and winners...



Waste (Kindly Sponsored by Zero Waste Scotland)

Winner: Fiona Munro, Scottish Borders Council

Fiona Munro is a Waste Strategy Assistant with Scottish Borders Council

Fiona was the Project Leader for the introduction of Recycling on the Go bins across the Scottish Borders. Zero Waste Scotland funding for the installation of 97 on-street recycling bins resulted in a project team crossing two sections of the new Neighbourhood Services department namely Waste Services and Neighbourhood Operations.

After identifying funding and determining project viability, Fiona took a lead role in all project management activities. Fiona organised meetings with the representatives from the two key sections. Once it was established that there was capacity to carry out the project and suitable sites were agreed Fiona helped determine the way forward and roles and remits. Discussions with the recycle processor were key and reassurances were given regarding contamination procedures. Fiona took responsibility for the funding bid to Zero Waste Scotland, including a comprehensive project plan, timescales and quotes, with liaison with Zero Waste Scotland and the Councils legal team to agree the funding contract.

Fiona took responsibility to undertake all procurement and financial activities associated with the project. Neighbourhood Operations Managers were assigned the task of identifying preferred bin sites however she ensured there was consistency between the four areas and that bins were distributed evenly, considering population, geography and politics! Developing and implementing the communications plan was key and bin site consultation took place with Councillors and local

Community Councils. Staff training was also organised. Following bin installation, the funding claim was submitted.

The Recycling on the Go project helped the council work further towards reaching the Scottish Government's recycling targets; reduce waste to landfill; capture valuable resources in line with the Scottish Government's priorities; access external funding; provide a new service to the public and improve cross-section working in the new department.

For the newly re-structured department, where a number of staff were in new roles, working together and having clearly defined roles was extremely important. There were some barriers initially, with the two departments having competing priorities and some negative feedback from one Community Council, however the council now finds that they have some communities who did not originally receive any bins seeking them!

Fiona says 'I personally found the experience enjoyable and interesting and it has further developed my skills in many areas. The process was however more intensive and took longer than I expected. As my first solo project, this was also my first experience of task delegation. My knowledge of finance and procurement procedures has been improved, in addition to my negotiation skills. I am also keenly aware now of the benefits of member support. I look forward to applying these skills and knowledge to future projects.'



Transport (Kindly Sponsored by Verve)

Winner: Graham Hodgkins, Fife Council

Graham Hodgkins is an Asset Manager for Fife Council's Building Services based at the Hayfield Depot in Kirkcaldy.

Graham joined Fife Council from the private sector in 2006 working in Corporate Asset Management as a Strategist. Moving to Building Services in June of 2011 Graham was tasked with re-structuring the asset base and support processes of Building Services. The asset base of Building Services is extensive supporting a £110m turnover business with 1100 staff.

Stratified Asset Management is being used to inform a number of business strategies under four broad themes, Fleet Assets, Flexible Assets, Fixed Assets and Workforce. Re-defining the asset base in this way has provided a fresh perspective and is informing efficiency initiatives, capacity planning, carbon reduction, fleet utilisation and emerging business needs, with appropriate sustainable investment and support.

Managing a small number of specialist teams within the broader Business Unit Graham co-ordinates the production of options appraisals, cost benefit analysis, whole life costing and business cases for many of the operation divisions with the Service. Graham says "the key aim is to create a fully interfacing model that informs intelligent business decision making to the benefit of all the Services' Clients. This approach demonstrates embedded value for all".



Parks (Kindly Sponsored by Zero Waste Scotland)

Winner: David Crighton, Stirling Council

David Crighton is currently a Land Services Team Leader for Stirling Council having responsibility for Street Cleaning, Grounds Maintenance, Grass Cutting, Play Maintenance and Countryside Maintenance teams for the Stirling Council area.

David started his career with Cumbernauld Development Corporation as an apprentice landscape gardener before fulfilling a number of roles including; craftsman gardener, YTS Landscape & Forestry trainer and Landscape Inspector before moving to Stirling District Council in 1994.

Whilst at Stirling Council, he continued develop his career by taking on an integrated Grounds Maintenance Client/Contractor role having both Client and Contractor responsibilities after the demise of CCT. Thereafter, moving to the position of Stirling Councils Cemeteries Officer post, during which time developed the Councils first Woodland Burial site at Killearn and a new cemetery for the community of Strathfillin (Tyndrum).

Over the years, David and the Land Services team have

delivered improved efficient and effective services resulting in recognition from APSE and Keep Scotland Beautiful; including being an APSE Finalist Award for Best & Most improved Council Street Cleansing 2008 along with; KSB People & Places Winner for Best Environmental Quality & Innovation Award 2012, KSB People & Places Programme Manager/Team of the Year 2012, KSB People & Places Winner for Best Environmental Quality & Innovation Award 2010, KSB People & Places Finalist for Support to Communities Award 2011 and 2009 and APSE Service Award Finalist Best Community & Neighbourhood Initiative 2012 for Edible Borders.

Over the years David has continued his own personal development by undertaking an HNC in Management, BASIS Certificate in Amenity Horticulture and most recently being awarded his CMI Diploma in Management.

The Rising Stars finalists were:

Waste Management Category (Kindly Sponsored by Zero Waste Scotland)

- Jeff Halkett, Dundee City Council
- Lyall Rennie, East Renfrewshire Council
- Ross Fenwick, Falkirk Council
- Roddy Sneddon, Fife Council
- Gerard Hannah, Renfrewshire Council
- Fiona Munro, Scottish Borders Council
- Maggie Cripps, Scottish Borders Council
- Julie McPhee, Stirling Council
- Roz Smith, Stirling Council
- Frank Maguire, West Dunbartonshire Council

Winner: Fiona Munro, Scottish Borders Council

Transport Category (Kindly Sponsored by Verve Van Centre)

- Gordon Bryce, Dumfries and Galloway Council
- John McElhinney, East Renfrewshire Council
- Graham Hodgkins, Fife Council
- Andrew Foy, Renfrewshire Council
- Alan Brown, Scottish Borders Council

Winner: Graham Hodgkins, Fife Council

Parks (Kindly Sponsored by Zero Waste Scotland)

- Fraser Marshall, Dumfries and Galloway Council
- David Crighton, Stirling Council
- Donald Petrie, West Dunbartonshire Council

Winner: David Crighton, Stirling Council

Contact: lmcmillan@apse.org.uk



Portsmouth's biggest plans for new homes in a generation

With many councils continuing to face the pressures of housing waiting lists an exciting development in Portsmouth is meeting both housing needs and creating new community facilities.

Portsmouth City Council has announced its biggest plans for new homes in a generation. The transformation of housing in Portsmouth continues after a £19m programme of council homes was agreed by Portsmouth councillors. The Council now plans to provide 170 new homes for local people over the next five years – 122 to be built from scratch and the rest to be bought. The new wave of housing will replace council homes that have been bought under tenants' 'right to buy'.

The Leader of the council, Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, said: "This is something we should be extremely proud of – the biggest programme of council-house building in the city for a generation. "These are much-needed homes for local families. The look on people's faces, when they get their new house, is just great. This programme will also mean a boost for the local construction industry, creating jobs."

The programme will help meet a high demand for affordable homes in the city. This significant investment comes after successful council housing projects across the city including £17m spent on the construction of new family homes and community facilities in Somerstown - one of the most deprived areas of Portsmouth, where more than 80 per cent of residents lived in one and two bedroom flats.

The Somerstown Regeneration Project includes a landmark community building, spanning a dual carriageway, and including health, youth and community centres and an area housing office. Work on the iconic tube structure is progressing well and services will transfer to the building in the summer of 2014.

Jan Dod, a Somerstown resident and director of community group PATCH, which has long campaigned for improved housing and community facilities in the

area, said: "This building will bring together a lot of very important facilities to give a strong heart to the community."

Delighted residents have moved into two eco-friendly Somerstown family housing developments, which have been completed over the last two years. Project manager Kevin Hudson said that handing over the homes to the people who needed them was what regeneration was all about.

"We are delighted to be able to deliver high quality family homes, built to the latest environmental and energy efficiency standards, which will be enjoyed by our tenants for many years to come,"

The construction work was supported by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH), as part of their investment in new council homes across the city.

Residents threw a party at an existing housing scheme where the regeneration team built a brand new community room. Tipton House Residents Association chairman Les Dembrey said: "This has made a big difference to the block. We can do so much more and

welcome so many more people to spend time together which makes it a better place to live for everybody.

"I think the regeneration of Somerstown is making the area look better and we look forward to seeing what other improvements can be made."

The regeneration project has also seen the construction of an adventure playground, which welcomed more than 1,000 local children through the gates within a week of being opened by the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth. The playground is now a buzzing hive of activity used by youngsters from all over the regeneration zone.

And the ambitious works are far from finished. The bulk of the proposed new homes, in the next wave of development, is also planned for Somerstown, and will help regeneration of the area, but other Portsmouth sites will also be developed, and acquired, in a bid to help residents living right across the city to benefit from the lessons learned in the successful transformation of Somerstown.

Contact: tim.raw@portsmouthcc.gov.uk



Report back

A round up of APSE advocacy and events on behalf of our members

May and June proved busy months for APSE with a range of conferences, meetings and advocacy activity on behalf of APSE members.

England

Leeds the way

APSE northern hosted its annual general meeting and a special member event 'Neighbourhoods and Environmental Performance: delivering services, generating efficiencies' with guest speakers including Susan Upton Chief Officer for Waste Services, from Leeds City Council and Ian Jones and Charlie Tindill of Wakefield Council alongside Alec Cropper of Walker Morris Solicitors

ALDC comes to Manchester

APSE hosted two workshop events at the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors conference held in Manchester in June discussing with delegates latest APSE research on Youth Unemployment and its Ensuring Council model for service delivery. The conference was addressed by Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and Business Secretary Vince Cable. Alex Howley of New Economy addressed delegates at the Youth Unemployment fringe event hosted by APSE.

LGA Conference 2013

APSE hosted a series of events at the LGA conference 2013. Promoting APSE's latest research on Youth Unemployment Mark Bramah, APSE's assistant chief executive addressed a special networking zone urging delegates to ensure that councils 'pull the levers of employment opportunities' by using frontline services to support unemployed youth in their local areas. APSE Chief Executive Paul O'Brien, also addressed a networking zone promoting APSE's vision around municipal entrepreneurship and innovation which was followed by a strategic forum event chaired by Cllr John Kerr Brown APSE's national chair and addressed by Derbyshire County Council leader Cllr Anne Western

and Paul O'Brien on the ensuring council.

Public health was also high on the agenda with a strategic forum discussion chaired by Cllr Paul Findlow of Cheshire East Council with guest speakers Cllr Robin Brown of Northamptonshire and Mark Bramah of APSE. As well as exploring the issues surrounding the return of public health to local authorities delegates debated the measurement of performance outcomes whilst avoiding replication of the vast amount of health data. A focus on outcomes was the group agreed imperative to public health issues.

Show me the money

APSE central will host a seminar on income generation and innovation in service transformation in Nottingham at the Albert Halls on 17 July which will also include the Central region AGM. For details contact Rob Bailey on rbailey@apse.org.uk

Food matters!

APSE provided secretariat support to the All Party Parliament Group on school food for an event held on 12 June at the House of Commons which focussed on the effect of the long term effects of obesity, nutritional needs of school children and the raising awareness of food supply and origins. A further meeting of the APPG will be held on 16 July with Liz Truss, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education.

Royally Regent

'No going back: Creating self-sustaining and outcome generating parks and green spaces' was the theme of a special event in Regents Park London including an address by Kate Lowe, Editor of well-regarded trade magazine Horticulture Week.

Bristol on Waste

APSE's South and South West region continues its programme of events with Waste Management, Refuse

Collection and Street Cleansing being the focus of a regional Advisory Group held on 20 June in Bristol. For details of APSE activity in the South and South West of England contact Helen Burkhalter on hburkhalter@apse.org.uk

Wales

Rising challenge

The Wales AGM and member seminar 'Meeting the Rising Challenges' was hosted in Wales at Llandrindod Wells in June with delegates debating the challenges of efficiencies and income generation.

Conwy catering collaboration

The Wales FM advisory group was held in June in Llandrindod Wells with guest speakers including Dafydd Williams of Conwy Council and Dave Knapman of IQSS. As a result of the FM meeting a collaboration project has been launched on marketing catering services and the inaugural meeting will take place on 9 July. Contact Debbie Johns for details on djohns@apse.org.uk

Scotland

Scottish Labour

APSE attended the Scottish Labour party conference held in Inverness using the exhibition as an opportunity to promote its recent research work on Youth Unemployment amongst MSPs and other delegates.

Rising stars spotted at Aviemore

The APSE Scotland fleet, waste and grounds seminar hosted the first ever 'Rising Stars' awards as featured on pages 20-21 of this edition of direct news.

The apprentice

The focus was on apprenticeships at an APSE Scotland seminar held in Fife 'Got no job? What's the council doing to help?' looking at apprenticeships and training opportunities offered by local authorities in response to local economies and unemployment.

AGM

The APSE Scotland AGM 2013 was held on the 21 May at Hamilton and confirmed the APSE Scotland Chair as Cllr James Docherty and the secretary as Dougie McMillan both of South Lanarkshire Council. Dr Steve Griggs and Paul O'Brien presented APSE's research on the Ensuring Council.

COSLA

Work is underway within APSE Performance networks to develop a new service strand of 'protective services' including environmental health and licencing. APSE met with COSLA to develop this work strand and a number of local authorities in Scotland are now working towards a pilot of a new suite of performance indicators in this area.

Northern Ireland

Annual general tweeting

APSE Northern Ireland hosted its AGM and a free member event on Social Media and Digital Technology exploring ways in which social media can be used to enhance public service delivery. Paul O'Brien opened the conference with a key note address. The well attended event was held on the 5 July and forms part of a new series of events in Northern Ireland to support APSE member authorities as they move towards reorganisation.



Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg addressing the ALDC conference in Manchester

Myth Busters!

HSE's Myth Busters Challenge Panel allows individuals or organisations to challenge decisions made in the name of health and safety that they believe are disproportionate or inaccurate and will be a useful tool for local councils.

HSE has analysed the first 100 cases from their challenge panel to identify useful lessons to share with local authorities. They have distilled these into five tips – and set them in the context of real Challenge Panel cases.

Tip 1: Find out if it really is a health and safety concern

Many of the Panel's cases were simply not about occupational health and safety at all – by making enquiries to check if there really is an occupational health and safety issue or a work activity that affects the public, you can quickly stop some of the more common myths about health and safety.

'No partners allowed'

The myth – that there were health and safety grounds for a local authority to ban teachers and school staff from taking their partners and children on school trips.

The reality - There are no health and safety regulations that ban schools from allowing partners and children to join teachers and school staff on school trips. This local decision was based on a misunderstanding about the law.

Tip 2: Look for health and safety solutions that help you deliver your services – not for health and safety obstacles to stop them

Many of the panel's cases concern decisions to ban or curtail sensible activities where those decisions were not about health and safety. In some cases, the decisions were to avoid adverse publicity, or to limit financial risk. Sometimes perceptions and fears of litigation were behind over-cautious decisions. In practice, straightforward health and safety precautions are readily available to make sure the benefits of activities are not lost through excessive risk aversion – and often help to manage those wider issues too.

'No volunteers allowed'

The myth – that volunteers could not prune back overgrown vegetation on a public footpath on health and safety grounds.

The reality – There is no reason that volunteers cannot be involved in local community projects. Whilst the council has to consider its health and safety responsibilities, there is nothing that stops a council accepting sensible offers from the local community. The council could have loaned out suitable tools and given advice on sensible precautions. That way it could have supported these willing volunteers rather than stand in their way.

Tip 3: Ensure that all your health and safety precautions pass the test of being sensible and proportionate

Many of the panel's cases were about precautions that appeared unwarranted for the risks involved. By thinking carefully about the type of incidents the precautions are supposed to prevent – and how likely they are to happen – it is much easier to make sure the precautions match the level of

risk and that you focus attention on the significant safety and health risks facing your council.

'Hanging baskets banned'

The myth - that hanging baskets could not be fixed on lamp posts for the annual Village in Bloom competition without an engineer checking the lampposts in advance.

The reality - The council was demanding precautions out of proportion to the health and safety risks involved as there was no significant loading involved. For conventional hanging baskets of a modest size all that was needed was a simple visual check.

Tip 4: Communicate all your risk management decisions clearly and honestly

Finally, the HSE reports that the panel receives many cases where clear messages would have prevented a lot of ill-feeling and reputational damage. They suggest that local authorities should not allow 'health and safety' to be used as a catch-all excuse. In other words if you do need to stop or restrict activities, make sure you explain the reasons clearly. Remember people no longer accept 'it's because of health and safety' as an excuse for an unpopular decision.

'Traffic cone hazard'

The myth - that there were health and safety grounds for a local authority to refuse to put cones in the street to reserve a parking space.

The reality – Deciding not to put cones in streets is unlikely to be justified on health and safety grounds. In this case, it appears that health and safety has been used as an excuse for an unpopular decision. The local authority may have had other perfectly valid reasons for refusing this request, in which case it should have stated these. It should not have hidden behind the convenient excuse of "elf 'n' safety".

Getting the most out of these tips

- Use them as a basis for challenging decisions made within your local authority.
- Incorporate them into training and briefing materials for senior managers, staff and councillors.
- Use them as a way of involving health and safety representatives in challenging over-the-top decisions.
- Share your ideas for tackling myths with Heads of Service, Chief Executives and Councillors.

Ultimately, what is required is a balanced approach to risk, which steers a middle path between an unnecessary policy of risk aversion and at the other extreme an inability to identify genuine risks and address them. Taking this route will help you influence your authority in positive ways, so that it adopts a culture where sensible, proportionate decision-making in health and safety is second nature.

Contact: mbaines@apse.org.uk or visit www.hse.gov.uk

Events diary

Date	Event	Venue
24 June	Event Management	Stafford ●
1 July	Health & Safety in Amenity Services	Leeds ●
9 July	Driving at Work - occupational road risk	Edinburgh ●
16 July	Fleet Administration	Manchester ●
25 July	Gas Safety Awareness	Dumfries & Galloway ●
29 July	Performance networks data completion training	Hamilton ●
7 August	Supervisory Skills for Team Leaders	Gateshead ●
14 August	Cemeteries & Crematoria Supervisory Skills	Glasgow ●
15 August	Driving at Work - occupational road risk	Glasgow ●
16 August	Asset Management in Scotland – Parks & Greenspace	Perth ●
20 August	Event Management	Glasgow ●
21 August	Identifying damp, timber mould and structural problems	Edinburgh ●
27 August	Scottish social media seminar	Hampden Park
30 August	Managing Allotments	Edinburgh ●
3 – 5 September Annual seminar, exhibition & service awards 2013 Liverpool ●		
9 September	Waste and Street cleansing	Belfast ●
10 September	Project Management in leisure services	Belfast ●
12 September	Chairing Skills	London ●
12 September	Handling Difficult Conversations with frontline staff	Manchester ●
13 September	Managing Cemeteries & Crematoria	Birmingham ●
18 September	Street scene and street cleansing supervisory skills for team leaders	London ●
18 September	Renewables Advisory group	Room 3, YHA ●
19 September	Transport Advisory Group	Manchester Town Hall ●
20 September	Health & Safety in Amenity Services	London ●
23 September	Catering, cleaning and FM service supervisory skills	Cardiff ●
25 September	Parks & Ground Maintenance Advisory Group	Manchester Town Hall ●
25 September	Renewables Advisory group	Room 3, YHA ●
26 September	Customer Care in Cemeteries & Crematoria Services	Manchester ●
27 September	Supervisory Skills in Building Maintenance	Birmingham ●

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