

Local placemaking - Cleaner, greener, resilient neighbourhoods

A preview of APSE's Annual Seminar 2025

**Restricting the appeal and
availability of junk food**

APSE and the TCPA

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Exploring waste and recycling in Gambia

Bonni Jee, APSE Principal Advisor

p10

**Growing the disabled staff
network**

Emily Randall, East Riding of Yorkshire

p34

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Editorial



Mo Baines
Chief Executive,
APSE

Municipal Histories

One of the great things about being part of an organisation like APSE is the opportunity to see so many places across the UK. Getting out and about to visit our member councils has always brought about a fascination for local history, its traditions and the often rather splendid Town Halls and Civic Chambers that criss-cross the UK.

The role of local government, not just in supporting local communities, but in being the engine room for local, national, and even global growth, is in its DNA. So much of what we would term 'social progression' stems from municipal level activity. The originators of school meals to support child welfare; the development of clean water and social homes to tackle the slum housing created through industrialisation; the seismic changes brought about by access to libraries, gas supplies and public lighting are just some of the historic milestones that lifted millions out of squalor.

One such city renowned for its localist activism is Glasgow. A city built upon its history of colonialist wealth, not least from sugar and tobacco, but divided by areas of abject poverty, leading to Glasgow in the late 1800s being regarded as one of the richest and finest cities in Europe but marked by social deprivation.

By the late 1890s, Glasgow had more municipal services than any other city of its size as it rose to tackle poverty, ill-health, and education.

It is perhaps therefore fitting that in 2025 APSE is taking its annual seminar to Glasgow, which will be celebrating its 850th year with its journey to the great city we know today, beginning with the granting, in 1175, of the status of a burgh, including the rights to trade, hold markets and to some extent self-governance. Of course, the 'granting' of rights to local councils is a debate that still rages on in today's municipal world. What models of local governance deliver more for local people and local economies?

The APSE Annual Seminar is focused on 'Local placemaking: Cleaner, greener, resilient neighbourhoods', which captures the spirit of municipal services and governance. Under the heavy weight of an 850 legacy of local municipalism in Glasgow I hope you will be able to take some time out of the diary and join the APSE team as we look to the future for local councils – perhaps not a future spanning 850 years, but at least for the foreseeable!

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- APSE Direct is published by*
Association for Public Service Excellence
3rd Floor Trafford House,
Chester Road, Old Trafford, Manchester M32 0RS
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Report Back

A round-up of APSE advocacy and events



Association for public
service excellence



tcpa

Town and Country Planning Association
Working to secure homes, places and
communities where everyone can thrive

Restricting the appeal and availability of junk food in England *The role of local councils*

A TCPA – APSE report
June 2025



APSE's latest report. Download at www.apse.org.uk

The latest APSE briefings...

APSE has a dedicated team of Principal Advisors providing regular updates via briefings. Our latest include:

- Restricting the appeal and availability of junk food in England
- Managing the inspection of trees
- Supporting city and town centre recovery
- Housing (Scotland) Bill Scottish Government consultation
- National action plan for the sustainable use of pesticides
- Rewilding for the future: Insights and best practice from local council
- State of the market 2025 - Local authority catering services

APSE runs one of the largest briefings and research programmes in local government. All briefings can be accessed via the APSE website.

Save the date

Wednesday 10 – Thursday 11 September 2026

This year's APSE Annual Seminar and Service Awards will be held in the historic city of Glasgow, at Glasgow Marriott Hotel. The venue will also host the APSE AGM. Bookings are now open online! Information on what to expect at this year's event can be found on page 12.

Congratulations Derby City Council! Winner of the APSE-sponsored 'Best Council Services Team' category at the MJ Achievement Awards 2025

APSE was proud to once again sponsor the Best Council Services Team category at the MJ Achievement Awards 2025. APSE member authority – Derby City Council – fought off stiff competition to be crowned this year's winner. The award was presented by APSE National Chair, Cllr Archie Dryburgh MBE, at a ceremony which took place on 20 June in London. Many congratulations to the team at Derby!

How can council fleet services stay on the road to efficiency?

In the latest edition of LAPV magazine, Matt Ellis and Bonni Jee, APSE Principal Advisors, discussed the implications of local government reorganisation for fleet services. You can read the article [here](#).

The APSE Transport Network – free for members – allows local authorities to share best practice in an informal setting. Contact bjee@apse.org.uk to find out more or sign up for the network [here](#).

Southern AGM

APSE Southern held its AGM, incorporating a free half-day seminar, in Oxford on 18 June. The event looked at the challenges and opportunities for local authorities surrounding regeneration, local economies and community wealth building. Speakers included: Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive; Conrad Parke, Birmingham Anchor Network Co-ordinator, Centre for Local Economic Strategies; Cllr Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for a Healthy, Fairer Oxford and Small Business Champion, Oxford City Council; Rowenna Davis, Associate Partner, Global Future; Steve Wilson, Commercial Director, Commercial Services Group; Kay Roberts-Lister, Public Open Space Officer – Events and Filming, Cornwall Council; Amy Caldwell, APSE Senior Training Officer.

Central AGM

Coventry was the setting for the APSE Central AGM, incorporating a free half-day seminar on 4 June. Chaired by Central Chair Cllr Mark Pengelly, delegates from across the area arrived in the city to explore the latest developments in environment, sustainability and climate change policy. Speakers included: Alex Gordon, Energy Projects Officer, West Midlands Combined Authority; Tim Hornsby, Building



Sally Philips and APSE National Chair, Cllr Archie Dryburgh presents the 'Best Council Services Team' Award to the team from Derby City Council at the MJ Achievement Awards in London on 21 June.



[L-R] Vickie Hacking, APSE Principal Advisor, Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive, Bonni Jee, APSE Principal Advisor at the LGA Conference 2025.

Climate and Energy Manager and Kaiyi Gu Senior Energy and Carbon Advisor, Warwick District Council; Samir Mamun Senior Manager – Engagement and Knowledge Exchange, Zero Carbon Innovation Centre, University of Nottingham; Andy Hills Climate Change Group Manager, Derby City Council and Bonni Jee Principal Advisor, APSE.

The view from Gambia

APSE Principal Advisor Bonni Jee, recently visited Gambia as part of a delegation of waste professionals in a trip organised by WasteAid and the Chartered Institute of Waste Management to provide advice to Kanifing Municipal Council. You can read his reflections on page 34.

Midlands Park Forum

At a recent West Midlands Parks Forum event hosted at the scenic Rosliston Forestry Centre in South Derbyshire, Matt Ellis, APSE Principal Advisor, presented on local government reorganisation. It was an opportunity to share insights and reflect on the complexities that come with restructuring local authorities.

Top marks Iqra Ali!

Congratulations to Iqra Ali, APSE's Business Support Officer, who has completed the Level 3 Business Administration course!

Iqra said: "From project management and communication to problem-solving and professional development, the course has strengthened my skills and confidence in a big way. A huge thank you to everyone who supported me along the way - mentors, colleagues, and classmates. Your encouragement made a real difference. I'm excited to take these new skills forward and continue growing in my career. Here's to the next chapter!"

The proof is in the pudding: APSE's advocacy delivers

APSE welcomes the Government's announcement on extending the eligibility for free school meals to all children in families receiving universal credit in England from September 2026. Our Principal Advisor for School Catering, Vickie Hacking, has worked tirelessly on school food policy for many years, including with the APPG. You can read more about our response [here](#).

APSE is also proud to host the annual APPG Excellence in School Food Awards - celebrating the commitment to delivery and innovation in the sector. For more information about how you can get involved with the awards, please contact vhacking@apse.org.uk

Associates annual away day

Over 10 - 11 July, APSE held its annual associates away day in Tameside. The event included interactive discussions looking at how APSE associates can assist local authorities going through reorganisation, led by Emma Taylor, APSE Executive Consultant and Bonni Jee, APSE Principal Advisor.

Lindsay Airey, Head of Business Resources, led a session on business intelligence, covering APSE's own journey of utilising data to support our members. To find out more about what our expert associates can do for you, contact Emma Taylor at etaylor@apse.org.uk or visit the APSE website [here](#).

LGA Conference

APSE was delighted to exhibit once again at the recent LGA Conference in Liverpool, connecting with both familiar and new faces across the sector. On Tuesday 1 July, we held a fringe meeting on protecting spending on frontline services, considering the potential impact of local government reorganisation and the ongoing concerns around social care.

On Wednesday 2 July, a capacity room at our fringe meeting discussed the public interest test in public procurement, with contributions from the TUC and Salford Mayor Paul Dennett. Chaired by Leader of South Tyneside Council, Cllr Tracey Dixon, we enjoyed a great discussion on how the test could work to enhance social, employment and environmental outcomes.

APSE at the RWM expo

Bonni Jee, APSE Principal Advisor for Waste and Recycling, will be speaking at this year's RWM conference at the NEC in Birmingham on Wednesday 17th September at 12:30 in the Future Talent Hub. He will be part of a panel alongside the ESA on 'Strength in Diversity: Building Sector Attractiveness'

Wales

Building a resilient workforce

On 17 June, APSE held its Welsh AGM in at the Swansea Guildhall. The event focused on one of the most pressing challenges facing local councils in Wales: Attracting, recruiting, and retaining a skilled, motivated workforce. Discussion also covered the importance of strong industrial relations. A free event for APSE Wales members, speakers included: Hannah Bartram, ADEPT Chief Executive; Professor Steve Griggs, Professor of Public Policy and Director of the Centre for Business, Innovation and the Regions, Staffordshire University; Maria Hand, Lead - Employment Liaison Officer, Swansea Council; Simon Dunn, Regional Manager, UNISON Wales.

Cllr Andrea Lewis, APSE Wales Chair, presenting at the APSE Wales AGM at the Swansea Guildhall on 17 June.





Hilton Glasgow

Scotland

Scotland AGM

On 8 July, APSE Scotland held its AGM at Hilton Glasgow. The AGM provided an opportunity for APSE in Scotland to review its activities over the last year. The meeting also brought together local authority leaders, policy experts and frontline voices to discuss the General Power of Competence, including the current legal powers and the potential introduction of a General Power of competence for Scotland, as well as how Scottish local authorities are currently using their legal powers to regenerate their communities. During the AGM, Cllr Judy Hamilton was elected as APSE Scotland Chair and Cllr Lynne Short was elected as Vice Chair.

Northern Ireland

Cleaner Councils / Greener Future

On 10 June at the Galgorm Hotel in County Antrim, APSE held a special seminar for Northern Ireland councils committed to driving sustainability and environmental leadership. The event incorporated APSE Northern Ireland's AGM, and was delivered in conjunction with APSE Energy. The seminar explored key strategies for decarbonising assets, enhancing biodiversity, and advancing circular economy initiatives. Delegates heard from Eimear Montague, Executive Director, Northern Ireland Resources Network; John Kelly, Project Manager, National Biodiversity Data Centre; Andrew Mowat, Climate Change and Sustainable Development; Michele Murphy, Net Zero Innovation and Delivery Officer, Derry City and Strabane District Council; Connor O'Dornan, Net Zero and Innovations Delivery Manager, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council; Paul Mawhinney, Head of Parks, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and James Jefferson, Principal Advisor - APSE Energy.

Delegates at the APSE Northern Ireland AGM in Ballymena, County Antrim.



Annual Seminar and Service Awards 2025

10-11 September

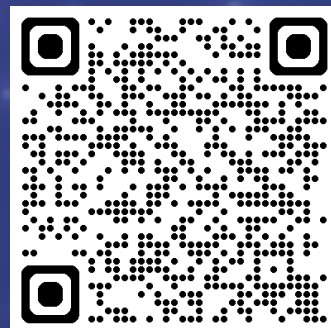
This year taking place in Glasgow!

Hear from a range of local government experts, including:

- Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive
- Alison Allen, Chief Executive, NILGA
- Professor Mark Gregory, University of Staffordshire
- Karen Bradford, Chief Executive, South Kesteven District Council
- Paul Belotti, Executive Director of Communities and Environment, East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- Simon Aitken, Director of Communities, Derby City Council
- John Wood, Director of Membership and Resources, COSLA
- Lisa Trickey, Digital Adviser, LGA
- Paula Walters, Head of Corporate Policy and Services, WLGA
- Cllr Richard Wright, Leader, North Kesteven Council and Chair of the District Council Network
- Cllr Lisa Hinton, Deputy Leader, Cumberland Council

Plus many more!

Booking information
and exhibition
opportunities >>>



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*Richard Evans, Highways, Transport and Planning Systems & Data Manager
West Sussex County Council*



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Restricting the appeal and availability of junk food

A new report by APSE and the TCPA is calling for an update of planning rules to empower councils to limit the proliferation of fast-food outlets, particularly in areas of economic and social deprivation.

The places where people live and work shape the decisions they are able to make: in areas where unhealthy food is readily available and highly promoted it is harder for people to make healthy choices. Many councils are working to ensure the healthy choice is the easy and affordable choice – and the planning system is one of many ‘tools’ they have to do this. However, throughout the UK councils are keen to do far more.

The government’s cross-cutting health mission has an ambition for ‘a fairer Britain where everyone lives well for longer’. For this to happen, councils must be empowered to ensure that hot-food takeaways and advertisements for unhealthy food are not unfairly concentrated in communities with the poorest health. The report recommends that:

1. National planning policy should be updated to empower councils to apply the ‘precautionary principle’ to decisions about restricting the number of hot food takeaways and advertising hoardings in an area. The burden of proof regarding local health impacts should be shifted from councils to businesses – reflecting the national priority of reducing obesity rates. Businesses should be required to prove that their presence does not harm public health, rather than councils having to prove that it does.

2. Define ‘fast food outlets’ in planning law. Although the update to the National Policy Planning Framework states that ‘local planning authorities should refuse applications’ for ‘fast food outlets’ in some circumstances. ‘Fast food outlets’ are not defined in planning policy or regulation, creating significant uncertainty and exposing local authorities to the threat of legal challenges.

3. Currently, outdoor advertising can be refused planning permission on the basis of ‘public safety’. This definition should be expanded to include public health grounds, as well as updating the ‘amenity’ reason to refuse permission for new sites in deprived areas.

The report also includes several case studies as practical

examples of how local authorities across England are approaching the challenge of fast-food outlets and junk food advertising within the current planning framework.

Mo Baines, APSE Chief Executive, said: “Obesity and overweight have long been identified as a national health priority, and are now estimated to cost the NHS and the wider economy £98 billion a year. Limiting new outlets opening that sell ultra-processed, highly calorific junk food – especially in deprived areas that already suffer from health inequality – will help to reduce the social and economic impact of the obesity crisis. The impact on children and young people is particularly acute – with knock-on effects on children’s and dental services often landing at the door of local councils, as well as street scene teams having to deal with increased amounts of litter around takeaway outlets.

“Currently, councils are limited in the tools they can use to effectively challenge the opening of new fast-food outlets – especially in the case of large multinationals, where legal challenges to planning application denials can incur significant fees for local authorities. Although some local authorities have developed successful strategies, they require significant political will and resources. At a time when councils are facing unprecedented financial pressures due to historic underfunding and ballooning social care costs, the current situation is unsustainable.

“The onus should be placed firmly on businesses to prove that they will not harm public health – rather than local authorities having to use their limited resources to prove something that has now been widely accepted. Additionally, planning laws should be updated to reduce uncertainty and risk for councils and allow them to refuse planning applications for fast food outlets more easily – recognising the damaging impact that they have on the health of local communities.”

[You can view the full report here.](#)



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An international delegation to explore waste and recycling in Gambia - Bonni Jee shares his experiences

Last month, Bonni Jee, APSE Principal Advisor at APSE, was part of a technical delegation of waste professionals from the UK organised and funded by the charity WasteAid and CIWM (Chartered Institute of Waste Management) to visit and provide advice to a local authority in the Gambia. He shares his reflections on the week-long visit there.

When I discovered that I was selected to join the technical delegation of four people to represent the UK and CIWM on the visit, I couldn't believe it! I was also proud to represent APSE and our ethos of helping local authorities. I was joined by three other fantastic and experienced members from across the country.

One of the first things we did on arrival was to visit the existing 'dumpsite' operated by the Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC), where all the district's waste goes. The district has a population of almost 400,000 and sits to the west of the capital Banjul, and is the country's second largest. Mostly urbanised, it also has a beautiful coastline facing the Atlantic.

It is a waste facility like no other. It is not an engineered landfill, but a former quarry that has effectively been filled with waste over the years and is now building up over the surface. The scale is massive. The district has made strides over recent years to improve this situation through the purchase of compactor bin lorries, for example, but many of the densest areas of the district are too narrow for trucks to enter, so they do not have a kerbside waste collection. Private collectors and donkey carts carrying waste are still commonplace. What was stark was that there are no formal separate waste collections for recyclables that we are used to.

Still, there are pickers who will sort through the mixed waste to find valuable plastics, metals, cardboard etc for sale to merchants, but market conditions and rates of the materials, and unscrupulous brokers dictate the price of materials, with huge fluctuations and low prices, leading to a challenge in shifting material at decent prices.

*One of the interventions on site through an EU-funded project in conjunction with **Peterborough City Council**, is the building of a large shelter designed to be a sorting and holding area for recyclables, similar to a small transfer station and to improve conditions for workers.*

Work is ongoing to find more ethical local plastic recycling initiatives. Peterborough has done a lot of great work with KMC over the years providing knowledge and advice. But one thing I was not expecting to see here was Peterborough City Council's logo proudly displayed on signs and flags across the district!

Another area of progress for the council is the diversion of organic waste to composting. The odour on the site in the 30 °C heat was not as strong as one might have expected, and that is thanks to the work with markets and vendors to divert food waste to make fertiliser. There is probably not a lot of food waste from households either. Hence, the main problem and bulk of the waste here is unsurprisingly plastic, and lots of it, along with tyres.

Following the dumpsite visit, myself and the CIWM delegation delivered workshops and activities over the following days to the key stakeholders from across the council. Many of the issues they face are similar to what we face here, which they were surprised to hear, from fly-tipping and illegal dumping to littering.



We also met the Lord Mayor of Kanifing Municipal Council, who was enthusiastic and incredibly passionate about improving the environment and wanting them to be the cleanest and greenest district in the country. He also talked about the challenges of being an opposition party-led council compared to the national government!

They know the need for behaviour change and are striving to improve. So I shared examples of best practice and behaviour change communications from the UK, in true APSE fashion, giving a mix of approaches from hard enforcement and the use of social media to community-led approaches, from Wolverhampton to Bradford.

There was also a willingness to set out proper monitoring, evaluation and standard operating procedures for frontline staff. There are innovations they were proud to share, including route optimisation software and workforce monitoring. I shared how our LAMS app is used in the UK to track and monitor litter and fly-tipping here. There is a council-wide Zero-Waste Strategy in development, started with the work with Peterborough, and much of this isn't dissimilar to a council waste strategy here; looking forward to separate recycling collections in future.

Our job here was to motivate the team and help refine this, and I shared how Newcastle City Council's waste strategy is a good example of a well-set out and ambitious strategy.

Finally, it was over to local people to share with us the work they have been doing, through the local Circular Economy Network that WasteAid have set up. This was a truly inspiring event to see the ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit of local people who are changing mindsets to see waste as a resource, not a problem that is out of sight and out of mind. Something we could learn from here.

Initiatives that were showcased included turning waste plastic into jewellery and other useful products, textile recycling, tyres into street furniture and selling fertiliser made from food waste to farmers, creating a true circular economy. Even simple things like collecting water bottles to give to fresh juice makers at markets to clean and refill rather than recycle.

All in all, this was a fruitful visit and unforgettable experience where the great team and I felt we made a difference and also learnt a lot from ourselves. Too many people over here take for granted the kerbside waste collection they have, and see waste as out of sight and out of mind and of no value, when millions do not have access to a kerbside waste collection at all, and many are salvaging valuable materials out of this. The warmth and friendliness of the local representatives was also something I will not forget. I am proud to have played a part in the journey of WasteAid and the CIWM, supporting the municipality and look forward to seeing their progress over the coming years.



Waste and Recycling Seminar 2025

The world of waste management has been in a constant state of flux in recent years, with delayed changes to waste legislation and continued uncertainty regarding changes agreed and set to commence. Despite these challenges, local authorities strive to provide a high-quality waste management service with limited budgets.

This seminar will look at the future of waste collections and challenges of new waste legislation, including simpler recycling collections, extended producer responsibility and mandatory food waste collections. We will also hear case studies and shared best practice from local authorities striving to meet targets within the scope of the new waste legislation.

The event will also shine a spotlight on safety in collections, reducing environmental impacts through decarbonisation, a better use of resources and providing services more sustainably. Innovation and best practice across local authorities and their partners remain key themes in this APSE Seminar.

A fabulous opportunity for elected members, officers, and other key stakeholders to share thoughts and views on how they are meeting the growing environmental agenda, operational and financial challenges to create a better, safer and more sustainable environment for present and future generations.



Thursday 23 October 2025

Nottingham Belfry Hotel, Mellors Way,
NG68 6PY

Local placemaking - Cleaner, greener, resilient neighbourhoods



annual seminar 2025

Glasgow, 10-11 September



The event, unique in the local government calendar, will focus on all the big issues and challenges facing the sector. Taking place in Glasgow, delegates will enjoy an opportunity to explore this historic city whilst gaining unique insight into the challenges and opportunities local councils face with the advent of a new government.

Cleaner, greener, and resilient

This year's Annual Seminar promises to tackle the big issues currently facing UK local authorities and our communities. The event provides a unique chance to network with leading figures in public policy and acquire the skills and knowledge to navigate a new government.

Speakers will join us from across the public policy landscape – governmental departments, non-departmental public bodies, local authorities and universities – to consider diverse topics:

- Rising to the challenges: Devolution, reorganisation and local economies - how can local authorities meet the future head-on?
- Climate change: Views from central government, an exploration of the emissions trading system and delivering net zero at a local level - including best practice case studies.
- A tour of UK policy differences and similarities across administrations: with COSLA, NILGA, the LGA and WLGA.
- Interactive roundtable discussions across a range of frontline services areas.

A rich suite of market-leading products and services

The annual event features one of local government's largest trade exhibitions. Delegates will have the unique opportunity to question suppliers about their latest products and pricing. Contact Matt Paton on m.paton@spacehouse.co.uk for more information.

APSE Service Awards 2025

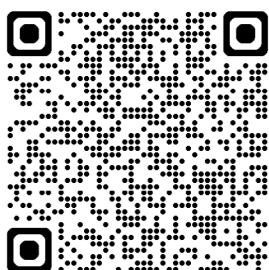
The Seminar also includes the prestigious APSE Annual Service Awards Charity Dinner, in aid of Parkinson's UK, APSE's corporate charity. The Awards celebrate outstanding achievement and innovation within local government service delivery.

Interest and recognition in the Awards has grown year on year. Judged by a panel of distinguished sector leaders, the local authorities who are winners and finalists receive publicity, both nationally and locally, as well as being exemplars in service delivery from the wider local government family.

Join us in Glasgow

This highly interactive conference is the must attend event for all those looking to future-proof the frontline including recovery for local economies, those seeking to develop strategies to and implement climate change objectives. Please note, at this time we are unable to accept dinner only bookings for the Service Awards. Dinner places will be prioritised to seminar delegate packages. •

Don't miss out!



For more information about the event and to book your place, scan the QR code [or click on this link](#) •

The Seminar also includes the prestigious APSE Service Awards 2025, in aid of Parkinson's UK

Around the seminar:

Tuesday 9 September: Welcome reception.

Wednesday 10 September: Day one of the seminar followed by the APSE AGM with an evening reception at the Glasgow City Chambers.

Thursday 11 September: Day two of the seminar followed by the APSE Service Awards Charity Dinner.



Glasgow City Chambers



Glasgow Marriott Hotel

Northumberland's innovative energy saving initiative

How Northumberland County Council's award-winning in-house strategy is transforming the delivery of Government funding for home energy upgrades.

Through a designated in-house delivery team and a new bespoke management system Northumberland County Council is providing a more efficient, streamlined service that is cutting energy costs and improving quality of life for residents across the county.

This initiative is also reducing greenhouse gas emissions from housing, driving the council further towards its goal of making Northumberland a net zero county by 2040.

New approach

In spring 2022, Northumberland County Council introduced the Warmer Homes programme which is made up of a dedicated internal team of retrofit advisors, assessors, a coordinator, a senior data analyst and architect—all fully trained in energy retrofit standards, including PAS2035.

While many local councils rely on the traditional 'turnkey' model—outsourcing the entire project to an external company—Northumberland County Council has instead opted for a split delivery model that allows the Warmer Homes team to work alongside trusted external partners, maintaining close involvement with projects at every stage.

The result is a more hands-on, flexible, and customer-focused approach that ensures high standards and strong community engagement throughout the process.

Bespoke system

One of the team's most impactful innovations is a custom-built platform designed by the senior data analyst which refines communication and coordination between internal teams and external partners.

The Contractor and Customer Management System (CCMS) tracks everything from health and safety documents and asbestos surveys to project timelines, contractor communications, and customer feedback—all in one place – ensuring projects are seamlessly delivered on time, on a need-to-know basis and to budget.

Benefits

Over the past year, Warmer Homes has delivered energy efficiency improvements to over 300 privately owned homes through the government's Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2) and has facilitated retrofit installations through Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) and Great British Insulation schemes.

Through HUG2 alone the Warmer Homes team has coordinated the installation of 264 insulation upgrades, 50 solar PV systems, 113 air source heat pumps, 18 heating control upgrades and 17 low-energy lighting upgrades.

These upgrades are not only helping reduce household emissions but are also helping to drive down the cost of energy bills and improve home air quality thanks to more efficient heating and ventilation systems.

The programme has also earned a customer satisfaction rating of over nine out of 10, underscoring its success and popularity among residents.

Through the council's Safe and Resilient Communities team 1,390 households have received energy vouchers via the Household Support Fund.

Meanwhile, the Warmer Homes team has provided advice and guidance to over 900 homes, helping residents make informed decisions about energy use, grants, and efficiency measures.

Wider work

The council's ambitions extend beyond private homes. It is currently in the process of installing similar measures in schools and commercial buildings across the county such as fire stations, council offices, and depots—including the upgrading of electric smart meters which will significantly improve energy performance and reduce running costs.

At a regional level the council is collaborating with the Energy Saving Trust, which administers the Home Energy Advice North East service and Community Action Northumberland which provides in-person home visits, ensuring those most in need are not left behind.



Looking Ahead

Northumberland County Council's strategic in-house delivery, use of modern technology, and strong community partnerships with a people-first mindset offers a blueprint for other local authorities looking to streamline the delivery of government funding for more efficient home retrofitting.

The Warmer Homes programme is blazing a trail for a more effective, resilient and sustainable future, proving that local leadership and innovation can truly make a difference.

Emma-Kate Moraitis, Warmer Homes Programme Manager, Northumberland County Council, spoke at the APSE Energy Warrington event on Wednesday 28 May 2025. You can view her presentation [here](#).



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County Council



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Working in partnership with
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New APSE Approved Partners: Welcome **Procurement Partnership Limited**

The Procurement Partnership Limited (TPPL) is proud to announce its new status as an Approved Partner of the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), strengthening its commitment to supporting local authorities and the wider public sector.

Their journey began in 2004, with the aim to enhance the combined fleet purchasing power of the public sector. In 2011, they developed framework agreements, by partnering with contracting authorities to ensure suitability for the wider public sector. Now with over 20 years of experience, TPPL has steadily built its reputation as a trusted procurement framework provider, working with more than 900 public sector bodies across the UK. They work with fleet, grounds maintenance, building materials, and waste supplies. TPPL delivers compliant frameworks that are underpinned by professional guidance, strategic insight, and sector-specific expertise. They provide specific cradle-to-grave procurement support, helping deliver efficient, compliant, and cost-effective outcomes for the public sector. The company aims to remove barriers enabling SMEs to engage with large public sector contracts.

James Brennan, Managing Director at TPPL, said:

"I am delighted that The Procurement Partnership Limited (TPPL) have become an approved partner of the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE). As an organisation built on collaboration with the public sector, we pride ourselves on the delivery of professional guidance & advice to serve as a dependable procurement partner for local authorities, and the wider public sector. We recognise APSE shares a number of core principles to help deliver public sector excellence for frontline services, which are at the heart of all our lives and communities."

As an Approved Partner, TPPL will engage with APSE member authorities through events, publications, and knowledge-sharing initiatives, helping to drive improvement and innovation in frontline public sector services.

To learn more about TPPL and its services, visit www.tppl.co.uk



The Procurement
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Making the West Midlands an exemplary region for disabled people

Dr Mark Fosbrook PLY, Disability Inclusion Manager, WMCA, explains how his region is championing coproduction and inclusive growth.

The ambition to make the West Midlands an exemplary region for disabled people is a transformative endeavour that aims to address systemic inequalities and create a more inclusive society. The first of its kind at a regional level, the WMCA are hoping for others to join them in their journey of change. Rooted in the principles of coproduction, this initiative seeks to involve disabled people in every step of the process, ensuring their voices and experiences are central to shaping policies, services, and infrastructure. The final report, "Making the West Midlands an Exemplary Region for Disabled People 2024," outlines a comprehensive approach to achieving this vision and highlights the importance of collaboration between disabled individuals, local authorities, disability organisations, businesses and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

Significant levels of inequalities in the West Midlands

Disabled people in the West Midlands face significant inequalities that span all aspects of their lives. The region has the second largest disability pay gap in England at 14.7%, with disabled employees earning notably less than their non-disabled counterparts and are in fact the lowest paid in the Country. Additionally, 24% of adults with a learning disability do not live in stable and appropriate accommodation compared to 19% across England.

Disabled households are less likely to have access to a car or van, only 9% of public transport journeys are undertaken by disabled people and they are less likely to walk or wheel in their local communities. Moreover, disabled individuals in the West Midlands score worse on all wellbeing indicators than non-disabled people and experience higher levels of loneliness. This data underscores the necessity of addressing the systemic barriers that prevent disabled people from thriving in the West Midlands.

The importance of co-production

Co-production is at the heart of this initiative, demonstrating a commitment to listening to and valuing the insights of disabled people. By actively involving them in decision-making processes, we can better understand the barriers they face and develop more effective solutions. Co-production goes beyond mere consultation; it is about creating true partnerships where disabled people have a meaningful role in shaping their own futures. This approach not only helps address the root causes of inequality but also ensures that policies and services are tailored to meet the diverse needs of disabled people. This is the start of the journey and the report demonstrates the value of this approach.

"This comprehensive approach addresses the various determinants of health and wellbeing, ensuring that disabled people can live fulfilling lives."

Potential benefits to disabled people

The benefits of making the West Midlands an exemplary region for disabled people are multifaceted. Firstly, it aims to improve access to good jobs, affordable and accessible homes, reliable transport, and the skills needed to thrive. This comprehensive approach addresses the various determinants of health and wellbeing, ensuring that disabled people can live fulfilling lives. By creating environments that support independence, health, and personal safety, this initiative helps reduce isolation and fosters greater social inclusion.

Moreover, the initiative aims to address the disability pay gap and increase employment opportunities for disabled people. By championing inclusive recruitment practices and providing support through initiatives like Disability Confident and Thrive at Work, the WMCA and its partners can help disabled people access meaningful work and career development. The potential economic benefits are significant, with increased employment among disabled people contributing to the region's prosperity.

Value for local authority partners and WMCA

For local authority partners and the WMCA, this initiative represents an opportunity to collaborate and share a common goal. It wants to see this model as a leading example and set a benchmark for other regions to follow. By adopting a strategic approach to disability inclusion, these organisations can enhance their reputation as champions of social justice and equality. The collaborative efforts required to make the West Midlands an exemplary region also foster a sense of shared responsibility and commitment, strengthening relationships between various stakeholders.

The enormity of the challenge

- There are 780,000 disabled people in the WMCA region - 26.7% of the region populations compared to the 24% England average.
- Disabled employees in the West Midlands are paid the **lowest** in England.
- 24% of adults with learning disabilities are not living in stable and appropriate accommodation.
- Disabled people score **worse on all wellbeing indicators** compared to their non-disabled counterparts.
- 17% of disabled people in the West Midlands feel lonely all or most of the time.
- 188,000 WMCA residents receive PIP. 21,000 are aged 16-24, up 79% in last five years.

Additionally, the economic benefits of improved accessibility and inclusivity cannot be overlooked. The spending power of disabled people and their households in the WMCA region amounts to £30.9 billion annually. By improving accessibility and customer service, businesses can tap into this significant economic potential, boosting the region's growth and prosperity.

“Advocacy and systemic change are at the heart of this initiative, ensuring that disabled people are actively involved in shaping their own futures.”

The WMCA are committed to achieving this ambition and has appointed a permanent full-time dedicated disability-focused role, a first for any Combined Authority. This role will drive work to improve services, change systems and influence societal attitudes and behaviours. As a disabled person, they will also advocate for disabled people and create opportunities for other voices to be heard.



Making the West Midlands an exemplary region for disabled people is a deeply important cause that requires collective effort and commitment. Advocacy and systemic change are at the heart of this initiative, ensuring that disabled people are actively involved in shaping their own futures. By championing coproduction and inclusive growth, the WMCA and its partners can create a region that sets the standard for equity, inclusion, and empowerment for disabled individuals.

This is the start of a long journey that will be hard, but will make a future where the West Midlands truly exemplifies what it means to support and uplift all members of society, ensuring that everyone thrives.

Dr Fosbrook presented at the online APSE Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Seminar, you can [view his presentation and others here](#).

[You can find out more the WMCA's work here.](#)



**West Midlands
Combined Authority**



Ageing Well Swansea: Connecting people, building relationships, changing lives

Rhys Ananicz, Ageing Well Partnership and Involvement Co-Ordinator, Swansea Council, outlines the authority's approach to supporting social wellbeing in adults.

Swansea's "Ageing Well Engagement Programme" is an initiative devised to combat loneliness and isolation and to positively impact on the physical and mental well-being of the city's senior residents.

By actively seeking input and suggestions from community members, we have tried to ensure that all sessions are not only relevant but also meaningful and enriching for those in attendance.

The programme started back in August 2021, under Welsh Government's Age Friendly Wales: Strategy for an Ageing Society. There are four main aims and objectives which shape our work, these are:

- Enhancing well-being of our older community members
- Improving local services and environments
- Building and retaining people's own capabilities
- Tackling age related poverty

How have we implemented these aims and objectives?

We started with the creation of an Ageing Well Steering Group, designed to bring together individuals and organisations who work with or support older people. The aim was to create a space for networking, collaboration, and the development of new working relationships. Today, the Steering Group includes over 80 organisations and charities from the private, community, and public sectors. We meet bi-monthly to shape our collective

efforts in the community and support Swansea's ambition to become a WHO-recognised Age Friendly City.

As a result of this collaborative approach, our team has established ongoing partnerships with a wide range of local businesses, organisations, and charities. These relationships have enabled us to deliver a diverse weekly engagement programme, offering activities that span physical fitness, mental stimulation, creative expression, and opportunities for social interaction. These sessions help individuals build confidence, form new connections and engage more with community life, services, and projects.

Weekly Engagement Sessions

Alongside our regular, long-standing sessions advertised on the flyer included, some of the other engagement sessions available on either a weekly or fortnightly basis to our older community members include:

- Tai Chi
- Reminiscing & Ancestry Group – Local History
- Cuppa with a Copper
- Tech Tuesday with Gower College – Combating Digital Exclusion
- Dance to Health
- Ageing Well Choir @ Swansea Arena
- Aches & Lanes Bowling
- Disability Social
- Purls of Wisdom Knitting Group
- 60+ Dance
- Upcycling Clothes Group with Gower College
- Boules on the Beach

We work very closely in partnership with Swansea Council's Sport and Health team. Colleagues within this team co-ordinate the 60+ Active Leisure Scheme. Some of the activities available to older people through this scheme include:

- Nordic Walking
- Trampoline Exercise
- Aerobics
- Paddle Boarding
- Mountain Biking
- Rock Climbing
- Pickleball
- Canoeing/Kayaking

All of these sessions are fully booked on a regular basis and there is a huge demand for more!

How do we promote these opportunities and increase public engagement?

Our Ageing Well newsletter is distributed every Friday via email and serves as a key tool for sharing information with the community. It highlights not only Swansea Council's Ageing Well engagement sessions but also a wide range of activities for older people taking place across the city. Many of these opportunities are submitted by partners from the Ageing Well Steering Group. With nearly 3,000 subscribers, the newsletter consistently generates strong community interest and uptake in the events and initiatives it promotes.

We also manage an Ageing Well WhatsApp Group, which now includes over 700 members. The group is set to "admin only," meaning only staff can post updates, making it an effective method of sharing timely and accurate information. It has proven especially useful for notifying community members about changes to session times, venues, or, on rare occasions, cancellations. As a team, we regularly inform older community members about both the newsletter and the WhatsApp Group, and we're always happy to support anyone interested in signing up to either.

We recognise that not all older community members are active online - for a variety of reasons. Some may lack access to technology, others may not feel confident using it and some simply prefer not to. As a result, we continue to rely heavily on printed flyers and perhaps most effectively, good old-fashioned word of mouth!

Every week, we meet and speak with new people, many of whom tell us they heard about our work through a friend who already attends. This reinforces that word of mouth remains a powerful tool for community engagement, working hand in hand with our digital communication efforts.

Visible, Approachable and Accessible!

A key factor in our success is that a team member is always present at our engagement sessions. This consistent presence helps build trust, familiarity, and strong relationships with community members. As a result, conversations are more meaningful, and we're often approached for advice or support on other issues. Thanks to our collaborative approach, even when we can't help directly, we're usually able to connect individuals with organisations that can.

To enhance our visibility, approachability and accessibility further, in August 2023 we opened a small office space inside the National Waterfront Museum. Located in a high-footfall area of this beautiful and accessible venue, the space offers a

welcoming environment where community members can drop in for advice, or as often happens, simply for a cup of tea and a chat. The space was named by members of the Ageing Well Community, and so, the Collaboration Station was born.



Building on the success of our space at the Waterfront Museum, we opened a second, significantly larger venue in the city centre in November 2024 - The Collaboration Station @ St David's. This new space gives us the opportunity to host engagement sessions in our own dedicated venue, marking an exciting step forward. Designed with the entire community in mind, it aims to provide a safe, welcoming, and relaxing environment for people of all ages.

Since opening, the space has hosted over 50 events, delivered by both internal Council teams and external partners. Several of these have been dedicated to the Ageing Well initiative, all of which have been warmly received. The most recent, a Mid-Summer Party, welcomed 150 attendees, making it one of our most successful events to date!

The Future?

We currently welcome between 500 and 600 community members to our engagement sessions each week. Our hope is not only to maintain this strong level of participation but also to expand our reach and continue welcoming new faces in the months ahead.

Whilst the Ageing Well initiative is facilitated by staff, it has always been led and developed in close collaboration with people aged 50 and over in Swansea. Listening to and learning from those who attend our engagement sessions has been central to its success. We remain committed to a "do with, not for" approach, and we look forward to continuing this journey together for many years to come.

Rhys presented at the APSE online Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Seminar, his presentation and others can be [viewed on the APSE website here](#).



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Supporting city and town centre recovery

In a new report, Matt Miller, APSE Executive Consultant, explores how local authorities can help their urban centres to thrive through regeneration.

Historically, city and town centres have played a fundamental role in local economies. They have traditionally been places where different sectors merge to create a hive of activity and support each other in the local economy. However, since the turn of the century, the traditional high street has been in decline.

A combination of social and economic upheavals, including the 2008 global financial crisis, the proliferation of online shopping, the coronavirus pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, has contributed to a decline in our city and town centres. In many places, it has become common for a cycle of closures in retail due to people not visiting city and town centres, as there is not enough to do in them, which then makes it harder to attract big names and independent retailers due to the lack of footfall, which leads to more closures. This lack of choice then leads to reduced footfall, with customers looking elsewhere to spend their money.

The loss of big-name high street brands such as Woolworths, Debenhams, Topshop, Burton and Dorothy Perkins has led to a proliferation of discount stores on our high streets, which do not attract the same levels of footfall. In addition, changes in working habits since the COVID-19 lockdowns have damaged businesses that relied on office trade, such as sandwich shops, cafes and bars.

Whilst larger cities have a natural buffer to some of the changes, in part due to a greater office worker population, they are not immune. Using Oxford Street as an example, the Centre for Retail Research, citing various sources, states that the retail vacancy rate on Oxford Street in March 2023 stood at 16% compared to a UK average of 14%. They also report that cumulative sales fell from £10bn pre-COVID to £2bn in 2020 and only recovered to £5bn in 2021.

Whilst local councils are restricted somewhat in what they can do in terms of financial support for retail and hospitality recovery in town and city centres, they do play a crucial, wider role for the centres. Local government is the key stakeholder for any hope of recovery and plays a vital role in strategic, long-term planning, improvements in infrastructure and public spaces, working in partnership with developers to bring regeneration projects forward and securing funding from central government to support these projects.

It is also important to remember that any recovery cannot be restricted just to retail. Whilst traditionally city and town centres have been strong retail hubs, they have always had a commercial, cultural, hospitality and city centre living element as well. Developers are increasingly focusing on mixed-use developments that incorporate previously unoccupied heritage buildings, many of which are enabled by local authorities leveraging central government funding.

“Thriving places will be dependent not just upon businesses as single entities or a single component in the local economy but upon quality affordable housing, leisure, and culture.”

Examples of these projects include the 'Goods Yard' development in Stoke-on-Trent, a mixed-use neighbourhood incorporating 174 rental homes, 30,000sqft of workspace and a food hall incorporating independent bars, cafés and eateries due to open this year. A successful city council bid for £16 million of Levelling Up funding enabled it to support the development by socially conscious developer Capital & Centric.



Leeds Kirkgate Market Hotel 1 - Courtesy of Leeds Council



Leeds Train Station, Bishopgate Street - Leeds Kirkgate Market Hotel 1 – Courtesy of Leeds City Council

It is increasingly clear that for town and city centres to thrive in the current economic environment, they need to diversify their development mix away from what is 'traditional'. While a mixture of retail, commercial and residential stock has always been the case, the ratios of each development type are now moving in different directions. With the continued decline of the retail sector being compounded by the change in many company working policies reducing the need for large capacity, city centre office footfall needs to be increased in other ways, including taking greater consideration of the culture and heritage of development sites when planning their projects.

The Aire Park site in Leeds is a prime example of retailing a culturally significant building as part of a wider area regeneration project. Home to the old Tetley Brewery, the Aire Park site will redevelop The Tetley Building, opening up its space into a leisure, office and events space whilst keeping the façade of the building built in 1931. The wider Aire Park development is mixed-use site of homes, offices and retail whilst also providing over 8 acres of green space for occupiers to enjoy.

Another important reconsideration of the 'traditional' is in nighttime economy strategies. Less disposable income, higher drink prices, a growing propensity for consuming low or non-alcoholic drinks and the impact of the COVID pandemic mean that gross value added from the UK nighttime economy in 2022 was estimated to be £43bn compared to £47.5bn in 2019. With an estimated £95bn lost since before the pandemic. Evening and nighttime visitors to town and city centres are increasingly seeking alternatives to the traditional drinking culture associated with bars and clubs, such as escape rooms, indoor crazy golf, axe throwing and retro videogame arcades.

Alongside the more obvious means of support through local regeneration teams and support for business start-ups, the holistic offering of a place has to be a primary consideration; making places attractive in which to live and to work as well as creating the conditions for new businesses to look to set-up and creating the conditions for mature businesses to invest. This means, in practice, thriving places will be dependent not just upon businesses as single entities or a single component in the local economy but upon quality affordable housing, leisure, and culture for the future workforce and, of course, an attractive local environment.

However, over many years, local authority frontline neighbourhood services have been squeezed by budget constraints, making services such as parks, streetscene and public realm often fall into the 'nice to have' category when it comes to spending priorities. These services should not be an add-on or an afterthought, but should be developed and baked into local growth plans. Supporting local growth and the regeneration of local high streets and town centres needs to embed high-quality and sustainable local environmental quality.

You can contact Matt a mmiller@apse.or.uk

[Click here to read the full report.](#)



Active menopause programme

Emma Knight, Health and Well-being Team Leader, North West Leicestershire District Council discusses the success story behind their menopause support programme and the importance of individual choice in health interventions.

In 2024, a survey conducted by Active Together and North West Leicestershire District Council's (NWLDC) Health and Wellbeing Team, found that 57% of women aged 45-64 were not meeting the Chief Medical Officer guidelines for physical activity, 30% of these women are managing one or more health conditions. Menopause and Perimenopause occur on average between the ages of 45 and 55, with evidence suggesting that physical activity can help women manage the impacts of menopause and cope better with symptoms.

Menopause not only affects those who are experiencing it directly, but also partners, family and friends, potentially impacting work and relationships. It's a topic that women are increasingly comfortable discussing, with more open discussions on its impacts. Because of this, we at NWLDC felt like it was the right time to offer a comprehensive support programme to women in the district.

There is a reasonable amount of research into menopause symptom management through physical activity, so much so that we know what types of activity can help manage specific symptoms. During and after perimenopause, the reduction in levels of oestrogen can increase cholesterol levels and blood pressure, thus increasing the risk of things like heart disease and stroke. Aerobic exercise is one of the best ways to reduce cholesterol and blood pressure, maintain good heart health and reduce this risk. Other benefits include increased energy expenditure, helping weight management, improved sleep quality, and reduced severity and/or frequency of hot flushes.

Lower oestrogen production can also affect bone density, balance and flexibility, to name just a few impacts – all of which can be improved through exercise, increasing mental and physical health and people's quality of life. Women experience menopause in different ways; therefore, we sought to build a programme that addressed a range of symptoms and would allow people to make an individual choice about what approach was right for them.

The Active Menopause programme delivers 10 weeks of sessions – all free of charge – which act as 'taster' sessions for activities that happen regularly throughout the local area. Participants are able to pick and choose which sessions they attend; they are not required to attend the whole programme, allowing them to access the sessions that they think are right for them.

We recognised that some clients would not be able to, or be less inclined to continue participating in activities, because of future costs, especially because of the squeeze on personal finances over the past few years. Therefore, we included sessions that attendees can take away new skills and gain the confidence to be active without the need for future sessions, such as core and floor exercises and mindfulness.

Following feedback, we also included outdoor activities in the programme to reap the mental health benefits of connecting with nature. We also recognised how important clinical support was to help attendees understand the change in their bodies, and as a result added a Q&A session with a clinical pharmacist as part of the programme, providing medical advice on how to manage symptoms.

Although Active Menopause is a community programme, Everyone Active, who manage our leisure centres, have been very supportive – hosting our pilot event, some clinical aspects of the programme and providing a number of activities. We are also lucky to have a community group operating in North West Leicestershire – 'Me Myself and Menopause' – with whom we have worked closely with throughout.

Responses collected from a post-programme survey, which showed a positive response from participants, helped us to secure funding for programmes two and three, which the North West Leicestershire GP Federation funded as part of their Women's Health Clinic. Data from the programme two showed that 98% of participants rated the programme five out of five, with 86% more physically active since completion.

As a colleague of mine would say, we had "the right jockey on the right horse", as our programme coordinator, Caren, is herself a woman of perimenopausal age, helping us to select the right activities and right providers. Her relatable and welcoming attitude helped participants to feel comfortable and more inclined to remain in the programme. Thank you, Caren!

Of course, as with any programme, we came across some challenges on the way. Being free of charge, there is a higher risk of non-attendance if somebody booked onto a session – we overfilled sessions to mitigate against this. There was also some difficulty in getting post-programme evaluation data back from participants. We now ask them to scan a QR code before they leave, which has improved our feedback data.

My advice for other local authorities considering providing a similar programme would be to make sure that it is sustainable – there must be 'exit routes' into existing provisions to ensure that the participants can continue to benefit, otherwise, long-term lifestyle changes will be far more difficult to achieve. Take a collaborative approach by building relationships with primary care, clinical pharmacists, charities such as MIND, local providers and community groups - this will help to increase the impact of your programme by providing participants with a more complete and holistic approach to symptom management.





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Introducing the APSE Armed Forces and Veterans Network

APSE is pleased to announce its new Armed Forces and Veterans Network. This new network will support Councillors and Officers who hold responsibility for ensuring support to Veterans and Armed Forces in their locality, with guest speakers from dedicated organisations including the Ministry of Defence and specialist topics including housing, employment and skills. This network is a service to all APSE member councils, and we would especially encourage councillors with responsibility for veterans and armed forces to sign up to receive invitations and updates from the network. APSE's lead advisor for this network is Debbie Johns.

The network chair is Cllr Archie Dryburgh MBE, Dumfries and Galloway Council. Archie has been the Armed Forces Champion for Dumfries and Galloway Council since 2009.

He received an MBE for services to Local Authority and the Armed Forces in the Queen's New Year's Honours list in 2019. In 2024, he was awarded Role Model of the Year at the Scottish Veterans Awards. Archie also received the LGIU Councillor of the Year Award for Special Contribution to the Armed Forces from Local Authorities in 2018.

A former Gordon Highlander, Lowland Scotland Territorial Army Soldier, and Army Cadet Force Instructor, he has dealt with many veterans' issues over the past 16 years in his councillor role, including establishing an Armed Forces Housing policy in partnership with Housing Associations in 2011.

Archie is the Area Secretary for Glasgow Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway Legion Scotland. In his role at the Annan branch, he covers multiple roles including Secretary, Treasurer, Welfare and PR as well as being Vice Chair for Southwest Scotland RnR, a charity that provides training, medical, and CPC for ex-service personnel to obtain HGV licences.



Upcoming network meetings: Friday 26 September 2025 - Online via MS Teams

Speakers include:

- Vector24: Removing barriers to support - Marie Crombie, CEO, Vector24
- How Leeds City Council support the armed forces community – Councillor Jane Dowson, Leeds Armed Forces Champion and Councillor Tom Hinchcliffe, Chair of the Armed Forces Covenant Board
- MOD Update on guidance, best practice and reports Patrick O'Brien, Armed Forces Covenant

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Embracing diversity: Attracting and retaining talent in Neath Port Talbot Council

Sheenagh Rees, Head of People and Organisational Development, Neath Port Talbot Council, sets out how her authority has sought to create a modern, agile, and inclusive workforce.

At Neath Port Talbot Council, diversity and inclusion are more than just buzzwords - they are the foundation of our workforce strategy. Our Strategic Workforce Plan 2022 - 2027: The Future of Work Strategy places these principles at its core, demonstrating our commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce. This not only widens our talent pool but also ensures we remain an employer of choice.

The Strategic Workforce Plan 2022 - 2027: The Future of Work Strategy

A key pillar of the strategy is our strong partnership with trade unions. By fostering open dialogue and genuine collaboration with unions, we ensure the voices of our workforce are heard and valued at every level of strategic decision-making. The partnership acts as a safeguard and a catalyst, protecting employees' rights and well-being while driving positive change across recruitment, retention and workplace culture. Through this enduring relationship, we reinforce our commitment to fairness, equity, and respect—core values essential to attracting and retaining diverse talent and building a resilient public service for the future.

Our strategy aims to create a modern, agile, inclusive workforce that can effectively respond to the needs of the community and deliver high-quality services. The plan aligns with our Corporate Strategy 2022-2028 and focuses on these four well-being objectives:

- Ensuring all children get the best start in life.
- Creating thriving and sustainable communities.
- Preserving the local environment, heritage, and culture.
- Providing high-quality, green jobs.

These objectives are supported by workforce actions co-produced with service managers, the strategic leadership team, employees and our trade union partners with all this set out in the annual Future of Work Delivery Plan.

Our commitment to inclusion is further demonstrated through our active support and promotion of employee forums and networks. These provide safe spaces for dialogue, support and advocacy. The Ethnic Employee Network, the LGBTQ+IA Employee Network, and the Disabled Employee Forum are vital platforms empowering staff from all backgrounds to share experiences, raise concerns and influence positive change. By encouraging staff to engage with and lead these networks, we ensure diverse voices contribute directly to shaping workplace policies and practices. This approach enriches our culture and strengthens our resolve to tackle inequalities.

Our commitment to people-first values and fair treatment is underscored by our designation as a CIPD People Development Partner (PDP). Being recognised by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development—the professional body for HR and people development—signals that we not only aspire to but actively achieve high standards in people management and development.

The PDP Status is awarded to organisations that demonstrate a commitment to developing robust fair working practices, champion continuous professional development and create a culture of opportunity, learning and respect. This recognition affirms our approach to workforce development is not just progressive in intent but validated by a leading authority in the field. It adds an extra layer of assurance to current and prospective employees that we are serious about nurturing talent, supporting well-being and upholding the highest standards of fairness in every aspect of working life.

“The partnership acts as a safeguard and a catalyst, protecting employees’ rights and well-being while driving positive change across recruitment, retention and workplace culture.”

Widening the talent pool through diversity and inclusion

We understand a diverse workforce brings a wealth of perspectives, ideas and experiences driving innovation and improving decision-making. To this end, we've implemented several initiatives to attract and retain talent from diverse backgrounds.

Inclusive recruitment strategy: Our Talent Management Team works with internal and external partners to support our inclusive recruitment strategy. This involves implementing strategies to broaden our recruitment outreach. This has led to an increase of more than 40% in job applications to the council over the past four years, and a 16% rise in appointment rates, with 98% of advertised positions being filled.

Creating an inclusive workplace: We're committed to developing a workforce reflecting our communities' diversity and to remove barriers to employment or progression in our workplaces. In our last Employee Survey more than 80% of employees said they feel accepted for who they are at work and that they are free to be their 'authentic self'. Our 98% retention rate suggests a positive working environment that keeps employees from leaving.

Initiatives—including the Menopause Champions Network, Employers for Carers, Mental Health Champions, the implementation of the National Autism Training Framework, the Salary Finance financial well-being platform, as well as our Gender Equality and Mental Health Action Plans and Employee Assistance Programme—are designed to provide targeted support when it is most needed. These efforts reflect our commitment to translating pledges and statements of intent into meaningful actions that drive positive change.

Talent management and career development: Our Talent Management Team support services with succession planning, talent management, and career development. It provides career coaching services, delivers workplace career events and links with a range of external partners to both promote the council as an employer, but also to help shape the flow of future recruits into our workforce.

Leadership development: Our Leadership Development pathway offers a structured progression from pre-leadership to senior leadership, increasing engagement and boosting ILM programme attendance. It is supported by a coaching network and the Ment2BeNPT mentoring programme.

Digital transformation and skills development: We aim to be smart and connected, using data to improve understanding of employee and citizen needs and creating new digital services. This includes developing the skills needed for a digital world and addressing skills gap in the council. The introduction of Magic Notes, Co-pilot, Robotics Process Automate, are examples of innovative approaches we are developing.

Our Strategic Workforce Plan 2022 - 2027: The Future of Work Strategy is a testament to our commitment to diversity and inclusion. By widening the talent pool and creating an inclusive workplace, we are not only attracting and retaining top talent but also ensuring we can effectively serve our community.

Sheenagh presented at the APSE Wales AGM in Swansea on 17 June. You can view the Strategic Workforce plan [here](#).

New APSE Approved Partners: Welcome **Switch Software**

Switch venue management and booking software

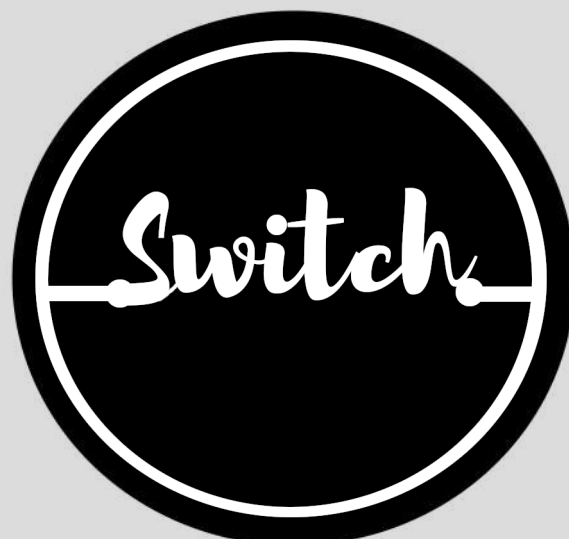
Switch is a modern, cloud-based booking system that helps local authorities manage a wide range of services through one easy-to-use platform. Designed with councils in mind, it handles everything from internal bookings to public-facing services. You can use Switch to take bookings for community rooms, outdoor spaces, parks and pitches, events, activities, holiday clubs, sports sessions, and appointments. Whether it's supporting a business meeting, summer holiday club or a weekly yoga class, Switch makes it simple to manage.

Switch is already trusted by councils across the UK and is available on G-Cloud 14, making procurement fast, secure and compliant. It's built to handle the realities of local government — tight budgets, busy teams, and growing demand for services. By increasing the visibility of your spaces and services, Switch helps councils do more with what they already have. On average, our council clients see a 25% increase in income from bookable services and save a day a week through automation of routine admin. Local people get access to 24/7 self-serve booking tools. Switch delivers more revenue, improves access, and helps teams work smarter.

We don't just supply software — we work in partnership with you. Our team supports setup, training, and ongoing improvements so Switch continues to meet your goals. We adapt the system as your needs and communities change, making sure you get long-term value.

Whether you're starting with one service or rolling out across your council, Switch gives you flexibility, simplicity, and results.

To learn more about TPPL and its services, visit www.tppl.co.uk





APSE Training Symposium - building on the best with training for a better tomorrow

By Fiona Sutton - Wilson, Head of APSE Training

APSE Associates come from many walks of life, with decades of experience working in their sectors as subject specialists. On 22 and 23 September 2025, they came together for two highly interactive days, in York, at APSE's second Training Symposium. In a series of collaborative sessions, the Symposium explored diverse ways in which training and development can build council capacity and address some of the key challenges of the day, in a rapidly changing landscape.

Topics included best practice in delivering outstanding training, the differences between training delivery onsite and online, the use of technology, how people learn, synergy between APSE's services and key challenge and opportunities for local government, including reorganisation, AI and decarbonisation.

As well as engaging with local government officers and elected members on a regular basis, APSE's trainers continue to develop their professional practice as subject specialists and in learning and development.

According to APSE Associate Peter Hollinshead: "There's strength, in depth and broad range of skills and knowledge in the team and it felt good to be involved in providing input and ideas that can further enhance the APSE offering. The whole experience was very inclusive and an atmosphere in which everyone could participate."

APSE's courses are highly interactive and usually follow the [Chatham House Rule](#), which provides participants with the confidence to explore critical operational, strategic and policy issues affecting their council.

Working alongside APSE's other services, APSE's trainers' signpost and support local authority colleagues to find the best solutions to address operational and strategic issues effecting the frontline.

Please get in touch to find out more about the ways in which our trainers can support your team, service or authority: training@apse.org.uk

Managing your fleet in a rapidly changing environment

By Amy Caldwell, APSE Senior Training Officer

Throughout some of the harshest conditions in recent years, communities have looked to local government to provide outstanding and responsive frontline services. Despite challenges ranging from rising expectations to ever tightening purse strings, local authorities have consistently demonstrated their ability to deliver a well-coordinated and customer-focused delivery.

However, with Local Government Reform on the horizon for many, rising operational and managerial pressures mark the beginning of a new era of challenges. To address this and other challenges head-on, training for staff to navigate change should not be considered a luxury, but as an essential tool to developing strong, adaptable frontline services.

The benefits of targeted training can be limitless. Courses like [Turning Complaints into Compliments](#) empower staff to design strategies that address expectations and transform customer experiences. Addressing operational competency leads to a more confident and autonomous workforce, subsequently enhancing service delivery.

[Leading a Customer-Focussed Culture in Local Authorities](#) explores ways teams can build on an existing service culture, encouraging participants to learn from dips in performance so they can harness an appetite for customer-focused improvement. Training like this can absolutely develop and strengthen staff initiative through practical, place-based activities.

As we look to the future, evolving demands such as meeting net zero targets, navigating social care reforms and embracing digital transformation requires more than just existing knowledge. It demands continuous learning and adaptability. APSE Training boasts a range of courses that can help equip staff with the latest insight and essential skills to respond effectively to shifting policies and emerging technologies. Our training empowers teams to experiment with new approaches and build resilience against future uncertainties, driving innovation in service delivery.

We can demonstrate we value and appreciate our staff by investing in learning and development. It's proven that when employees receive training, they feel more competent and capable, which has a direct impact on their morale and sense of purpose.

It cannot be overstated that training must be considered essential rather than optional to ensure the successful future of local government. Leaders across all tiers of local authorities must prioritise learning and development as a part of service transformation because a skilled workforce is the foundation of future-ready public services.

Click here to view the full range of APSE Training courses

Embedding social value and a future public interest test across local authority functions

With the Procurement Act 2023 now in force and an increased emphasis upon embedding Social Value, local authorities and public sector bodies are exploring ways to maximise the impact of effective procurement, in the public interest and to the benefit of their local economies. In APSE's new course, Social Value: Procurement ACT 2023, APSE Associate, Matthew Baqueriza-Jackson uses the 'Cycle of Procurement', to work through six key steps, in which local authorities and other public sector bodies consider local economic, social and environmental considerations, when embedding Social Value in procurement practice.

Matthew is a policy advisor who has been working across the UK and Europe, for the last 18 years, specialising in social value and procurement. With a background in social research, Matthew has worked with municipalities across the EU as part of 3 URBACT Programme Networks.

"Whilst having been a legislative requirement of the Public Services (Social Value) Act since 2012, local authorities and other public bodies have sometimes struggled to include Social Value."

Through his work with APSE, this training will provide practical advice as to how Social Value can be considered during the six steps of the 'Cycle of Procurement', including during spend analysis, in the design of services, in tender processes and evaluation, and during contract monitoring.

If you are exploring ways to practically embed Social Value through procurement or need to further your knowledge of the new procurement requirements, this course could be an ideal opportunity to shape the future action of your authority. APSE recognises that Social Value should be a cross-department consideration and not restricted to the procurement function alone.

To support councils with this, the training is designed for a wide variety of roles, including:

- Data Analysts and Researchers.
- Those with responsibility for developing strategy.
- Service Heads and Managers with responsibility for commissioning goods, services and works.
- Economic Development Officers.
- Procurement Heads and Officers.
- Contract Managers.

Delivered over two half-days, the inaugural course will be held on: **Tuesday 30/09/25 + Wednesday 01/10/25 | 09:30 – 12:30**

[Find further information and book your place here.](#)

The challenge of managing rising costs and increasing demands for quality, in public sector catering

As rising food and supply costs add pressure to existing targets and stretched budgets, many councils report the need to increase both capacity and capability to not only balance the books but also realise the potential of their assets and opportunities. Reduced portion sizes, less choice and inferior quality often stem from the challenge of meeting financial targets with rising costs, but with penny-conscious customers wise to shrinkflation, the pressure is on catering managers to create the right balance and exceed expectations.

Balancing nutritional value with effective resource management can help to achieve the council's objectives. That being the case, APSE is offering a newly revised online skills development workshop for all those within public sector catering that need to manage and control food, payroll and other operational costs in a variety of settings and for catering events: Managing catering Costs for Councils.

The course will focus on the current issues faced by catering providers during these challenging times for the service sector, including strategies for managing food and packaging waste. Participants will have an opportunity to share best practice and gain the knowledge, skills and techniques to manage the income and expenditure to meet budget targets.

Are you responsible for controlling food and beverage cost in busy operations aiming to cover costs or deliver a surplus? This includes food service managers and supervisors in public sector catering operations, budget holders, supervisors in catering with responsibility for costs, catering staff new to finance, catering operations expanding into new markets such as conferences and events and procurement officers.

As well as applying best practice techniques to purchase, receive and store food and retail products effectively and efficiently to minimise waste and cost, participants will also implement strategies to manage the cost of sales and gross profit percentage to meet business targets, understand the sales mix and the impact on cost and profitability, use menu engineering techniques to optimise revenues, develop strategies for managing and monitoring payroll and energy costs, deduce food and packaging waste via measuring and reporting and ensure compliance and effective monitoring to improve business performance.

The course is being led by APSE Associate Debra Adams, who is the founder of arena4finance. Debra is a Chartered Management Accountant (CIMA) and the author of a highly acclaimed textbook on management accounting for the hospitality sector.

Delivered over two half days, the first course will be held on: **Tuesday 04/11/25 + Wednesday 05/11/25 | 09:30 – 12:30**

[Find further information and book your place here.](#)



Strategic Feasibility
0



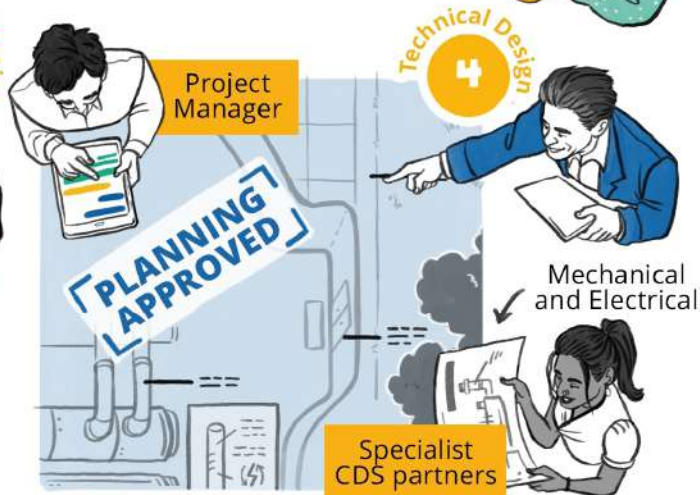
Preparation & Briefing
1



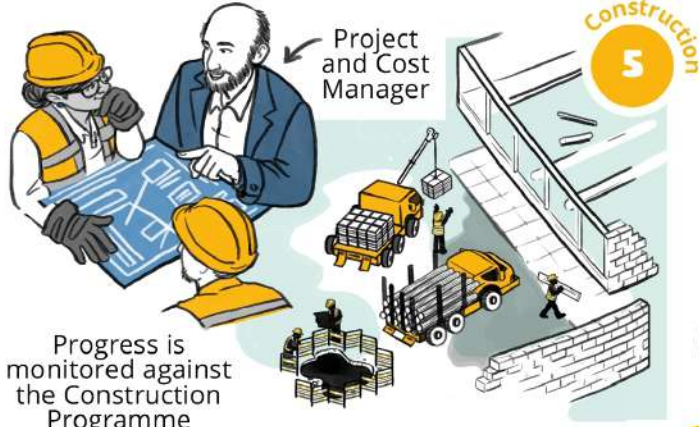
Concept Design
2



Detailed Design
3



Technical Design
4



Construction
5



Handover
6



Use
7

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- 1 Preparation & Briefing**
We record your aspirations in a brief and complete feasibility studies, ensuring the site can meet your needs.
- 2 Concept Design**
With a positive feasibility outcome, we develop concept design ideas to meet the Client Design Brief and budget. We find ways to minimise energy use, saving money and promoting sustainability.
- 3 Detailed Design**
At this Stage, we coordinate all architectural, engineering and specialist consultant information to formulate the planning application submission.
- 4 Technical Design**
The technical intricacies are worked into your beautiful architectural and engineering designs to finalise the tender pack. CDS will manage a specialist consultancy team to produce this pack and guide you through the tender process to find the right contractor.
- 5 Construction**
This is when you see your plans materialise with construction on site. CDS will oversee the building works to ensure the delivery of the scheme to the highest standard, as per the brief, and minimise environmental impact as we go.
- 6 Handover**
The contract is concluded and CDS can support you through to formal opening of the site.
- 7 Use**
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Mentoring with APSE Solutions

Lucia Gervis, Client Coordination Officer, outlines APSE's executive mentorship programme and the benefits it has brought to mentees.

APSE Solutions is currently halfway through delivering a year-long senior-level mentoring programme for newly appointed Assistant Directors and Directors across Northern Ireland's 11 councils and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). The initiative, commissioned by the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC), is designed to strengthen leadership capacity by pairing rising senior managers with experienced mentors from a network of former Directors and Chief Executives.

NI Mentoring Programme

The core objective of the mentoring programme is to support personal and professional development for new senior managers as they transition into demanding roles. Over 12 months, each mentee receives six confidential mentoring sessions.

APSE Solution's key deliverables for the programme include:

- Matching mentors and mentees based on need, experience, and expertise.
- Providing the initial training (delivered by APSE Training) and ongoing support from mentors.
- Facilitating programme logistics, such as introductory meetings and final debriefs.

APSE Solutions hosted a half-day launch event, which brought together mentors and mentees for an initial introduction to the programme, expectations setting, and peer networking.

With an established track record of working with public sector organisations, APSE Solutions was able to draw from a strong pool of associates who are seasoned professionals with deep knowledge in leadership, resilience, organisational culture, and strategic development.

Richard Baker's story

While the NI mentoring programme is still ongoing and formal feedback is yet to be collected, the value of mentoring in local government leadership is already well recognised by senior figures such as Richard Baker, Chief Executive of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council.

Richard was mentored by John Mundell and Helen Newman, both experienced APSE associates, as he stepped into his role as chief executive.

“John is a brilliant mentor – he established a strong relationship with group leaders,” Richard said. “He was a crucial second voice in applying a number of change processes and key changes in how the council operates.”

Richard also spoke highly of Helen Newman's approach. "Helen is an incredibly supportive coach, helping me to dig into the challenges of the chief executive position - she wants you to identify the challenges yourself and figure out the solution."

Speaking on his leadership style, Richard explained: "If I'm not challenging others to question what we are doing, why we do this, or why we spend money as we do, for example— then I'm not doing my job. I always want to ask 'why,' and I want everyone throughout the organisation also to be asking why."

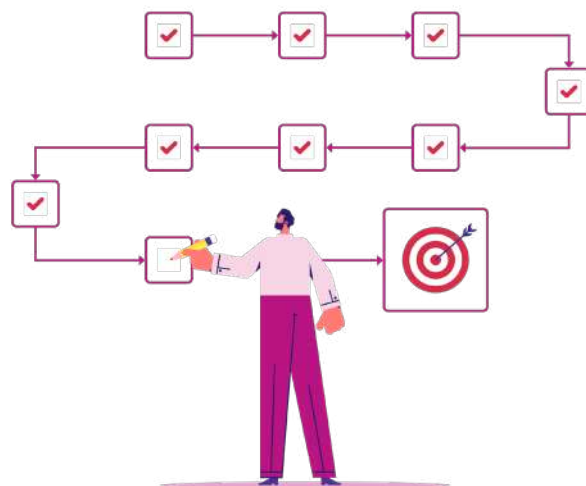
He follows what he terms “post-heroic leadership,” describing it as “being completely collaborative in your approach, staying humble and curious. It’s a 90/10 split – 90% listening and 10% talking.” His main aim is: “To be best in class in everything we do, and to build trust throughout the organisation.”

Speaking about local government mentoring itself, Richard said: “What people need to ask themselves is this: why wouldn’t you want a mentor, particularly in the role of Chief Executive? It can be a stressful and anxiety-inducing role. Having trusted people who can help you take a minute, work through your thinking, and come to a decision is invaluable.”

He continued, "I've never had formal mentoring or coaching in previous roles in the public or private sector, and I think that was to my loss. You have to find your own path."

Richard noted, “If you look at Silicon Valley and the billion-dollar companies that inhabit it, executive coaching is very common. If the CEO of Apple or Google has executive coaches and mentors, why wouldn’t a local government Chief Executive?”.

A significant benefit, he says, is in times of crisis. "You often go into 'fast thinking' – which is panicked and emotion-driven. Being able to pick up the phone to someone, talk through the situation, and slow your thinking down is incredibly helpful."



Richard's final thoughts on the mentoring experience: "Overall, Helen and John helped me focus on what's important in my role and remove distractions, giving me core goals to concentrate my efforts on. They have helped me come to my own conclusions about what priorities the authority should be focusing on – it has been an absolute game changer for me personally".

APSE Solutions

If you feel you could benefit from the mentoring offered or if you want more information, then please contact APSE Solutions on solutions@apse.org.uk or call us on 0161 772 1810

Rethinking Urban Landscapes: The Role of Designed Meadows in Modern Greenspace Management

Pictorial Meadows is the result of a long-standing collaboration between the University of Sheffield and The Green Estate Community Interest Company. Originally developed through the research of Professor Nigel Dunnett, the project has been shaped by landscape designers, greenspace managers, ecologists and horticulturalists working together to create naturalistic and sustainable planting systems.

Designed for both ecological function and visual appeal, Pictorial Meadow mixes combine British native species with carefully selected wildflowers from around the world. These mixes provide extended flowering periods and high floral diversity, benefiting pollinators and people alike. Unlike ornamental hybrids bred purely for show, these species retain the traits that support biodiversity – providing nectar, pollen, habitat and oil-rich seeds through the seasons.

From a maintenance perspective, meadows can offer long-term savings. Once established, they require significantly less mowing, irrigation and chemical weed control. Annual cuttings can be composted on site, improving soil health and reducing inputs across the wider landscape. The versatility of Pictorial Meadows means they can be used in a range of settings – from formal parks and civic spaces to rain gardens, roadside verges and green roofs. Whether used as temporary displays or permanent planting, each mix is tailored to suit site-specific conditions, ensuring resilient and attractive outcomes.

With over ten years of consultancy experience, our team continues to work with landowners, local authorities and developers to integrate designed meadows into broader landscape strategies. These approaches are a practical, tested response to growing environmental and budgetary challenges.

For public greenspace managers, designed meadows offer a compelling solution – supporting biodiversity, improving visual interest and delivering measurable efficiencies in maintenance and resources.



Planting for the Future with Pictorial Meadows Turf
Beautiful and robust plants that provide considerable climate resilience

Botanical Skyline



Purple Haze



Patchwork Quilt



Explore Our Turf Brochure

For detailed information about each turf, including plant lists, flowering details, recommended usage, shade/sun tolerance, plus installation and maintenance tips.



Growing East Riding of Yorkshire Council's disabled staff network: Building an inclusive and supportive community

Emily Randall, Public Health Lead - Commissioning, East Riding of Yorkshire, gives an overview of her personal experience helping to grow the Council's disabled staff network.

In addition to my role at East Riding of Yorkshire Council, I've had the privilege of being involved in the growth and development of our Disabled Staff Network (DSN). The DSN was established to improve peer support for disabled staff, promote inclusivity, and give disabled staff a platform to advocate for their needs within the organisation. It's been incredible to see how this network has evolved over the years, growing its membership from just around ten people to over 100, including disabled staff, allies, carers, and colleagues whose roles connect with supporting disabled people.

One of the principles that guides the network is "nothing about us without us," ensuring that lived experiences are at the heart of everything we do. Members actively shape workplace support, influence policy, and contribute to decisions that impact everyday working life. The network provides a safe, supportive, and understanding environment, offering peer support, co-designed resources and organisational guidance on issues such as reasonable adjustments, accessibility, and mental health.

Our achievements as a network have been wide-ranging. We've worked to improve physical accessibility, assistive technology, and internal communications. We've also co-produced a bespoke intranet page tailored to support disabled employees and collaborated with teams across the council to produce awareness campaigns and forums on equality, diversity, and inclusion.

One initiative that stands out for me personally is the ADHD workstream. Initially inspired by my own diagnosis and delivered alongside my colleague Tracy Petersen, it evolved and grew to combine the support and lived experience of many members. This project included peer support sessions, awareness-raising campaigns, and the creation of a neurodivergent sub-group. It has also informed a redesigned ADHD pathway with the Humber and North Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership, showing how the DSN's work goes beyond the council to affect local services.

Being part of this network has been an incredibly rewarding experience. It's a community where members support each other, foster a sense of belonging, and contribute to creating meaningful change. The DSN is now led by a broader group of members, not just me and Tracy, but the approach remains entirely member-led and grounded in the lived experiences of disabled colleagues. This ensures that the initiatives we pursue genuinely reflect the needs and priorities of those we represent.

I have loved combining my personal and professional experience to help more staff and learn from an amazing group of people. There's a quote that I often think of: 'Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn't require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are'. Through the DSN, members support other members to be who they are, feel a sense of belonging, and contribute to something special.

Feedback from our members highlights how collective efforts to raise awareness of visible and invisible disabilities has made a difference in our workplace — not just for those within the network, but across the organisation as a whole. This is testament to the power of lived experience, collaboration, and a shared organisational commitment to equity within the public sector. It's a powerful example of how inclusive networks can drive real change, and I feel so proud to have been a part of this journey. I'm excited to see where the network goes next, with new leadership.

Emily presented at the APSE Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Seminar. You can view her and other's presentations [on the APSE website here](#).



What our members say about the Disabled Staff Network:

"Every time I attend, I know that I will either be able to learn something or contribute something."

"Everyone listens and is really supportive."

"It's important to talk about these things because they haven't always been spoken about."

"In this room I can be myself"

"All the little steps we make towards increasing understanding, and the changes we suggest to make our workplace a better place, add up over time. But this also makes life better for everyone at work, not just our members."

"The network has supported my self-discovery; it's a constantly evolving journey of understanding myself and others better."

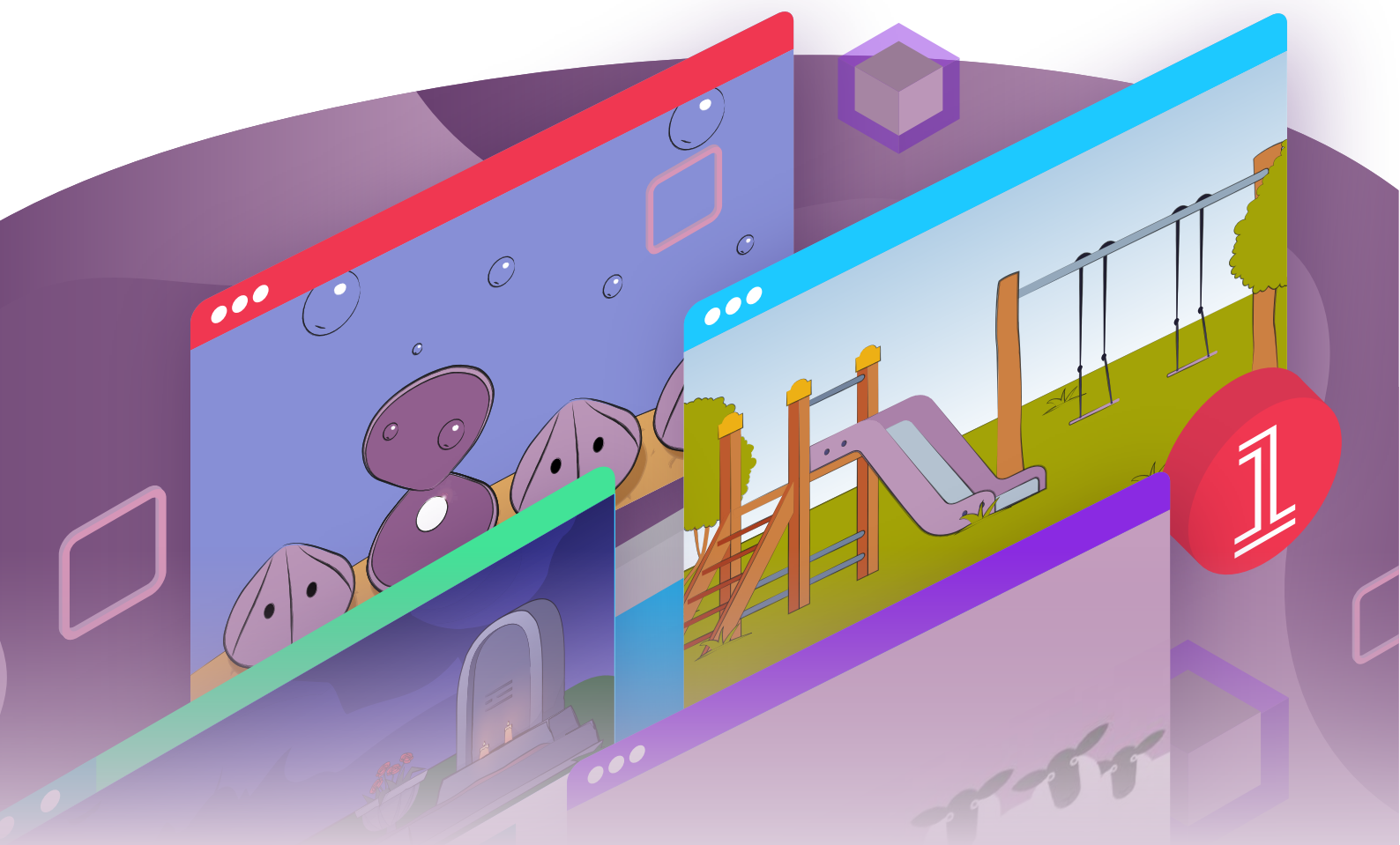
"It helps develop our awareness, some people have multiple diagnosis/conditions, everyone brings different things to the group so it's not a one-size-fits-all space."



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The people behind the progress



With Steven Ford,
Corporate Director -
Strategy, Performance and
Sustainability, Dorset Council

1. What interests you most about your work in the energy, climate change and sustainability agenda? This beautiful world that we inhabit often can't speak for itself and needs advocates who are prepared to match a passion for our natural systems with the complexities of decision-making in an increasingly polarised world. I feel this passion every day in my work, and while things are often challenging, a commitment to make a difference keeps me both interested and motivated.

2. What are you looking to achieve through your work? Challenging perceptions. Working on climate change and nature recovery should be seen as a social movement; it creates jobs and opportunity, it cleans the air that we breathe, it can support community cohesion and resilience, focuses support on the most vulnerable in society and enhances mental health and supports the broader principle of the democratisation of energy. There is a pervasive narrative that categorises climate work as an ideology; through my work, I aim to foster an understanding that utilising scientific information in a strategic and balanced way can deliver social benefits on a mass scale, moving away from narrow categorisations.

3. What is the main factor supporting/driving your local authority's work in this agenda? Very strong political leadership. The leader of the council is the portfolio holder for climate and nature, and climate and nature recovery taken together form one of the four key priorities of the council. I would also point out that we are blessed with committed colleagues who believe passionately in the role of local government as a convenor and place leader and its key role in delivering the changes required.

4. What is the main factor acting as a drag on your local authority's work in this agenda? While there is always more that can be done in terms of funding, Dorset Council has been very brave in its decisions to support the staffing and capital resources required to accelerate delivery. The main drag from my perspective is a lack of join-up between national policy, infrastructure investments and recognition of the role that local government plays and how this could be enhanced. There are signs of positive steps in this direction, such as the development of RESPs, the continuing evolution of the net zero hubs and the emergence of GB Energy's interest in local schemes, but much remains to be done to deliver a consistent and joined-up policy landscape.

5. Give an example of something (a project/policy/initiative) that your local authority completed that others can learn from. Dorset Council completed a Salix building retrofit programme with

a value of circa £20m that has taken around 45% of our emissions out of our operational estate. This involved installing over 5MW of roof-mounted solar, measures installed on over 200 buildings, including air source heat pumps, building management systems and many other innovative technology solutions. We have a lot of learning from this scheme, including managing a large complex programme at scale, realism on timelines, working with contractors, managing expectations and a whole lot of other lessons that we'd be happy to share!

6. What do you think can be done at national government level to make the biggest change to outcomes in this agenda?

Consistency of policy and understanding that different solutions are best delivered at different levels as part of an overarching commitment to deliver change. Also, the narrative on climate and nature needs to be strengthened; they need to be seen as social movements, removing the artificial divide between climate and nature action and what can support our communities to prosper. These agendas are not mutually exclusive; they never have been, but government should be stronger on the narrative, as ultimately this will head off some of the negativity around net zero that is being heard in some quarters.

7. How did you get to where you are now? It was part personal interest but also a fair bit of luck! I came into local government via the Impact scheme, and through a variety of roles, ended up leading on the climate and nature agendas at Cornwall Council without necessarily having that as a defined career pathway. I am so pleased that it worked out that way. When I first started on this journey, I was essentially a lone voice, but over time, I was lucky to be joined by amazing colleagues and had support that enabled me to develop the roles into major programmes of work. My role at Dorset Council now enables me to still focus on the climate work, along with a wider portfolio of work that enables me to join the dots.

8. What do you do personally to support the agenda? I have completely decarbonised my house with solar PV, an air source heat pump, battery storage, and drive an EV. My garden is largely wild by design, with lots of wildlife thriving in it, and I have planted many trees during the last few years. I also will not fly domestically or when there is a viable alternative, and I have made changes to my lifestyle to try to reduce my environmental impact wherever I can. My family has also adopted many of these behaviours and technologies, although to be fair, they have adopted them at differing rates and with varied degrees of enthusiasm! I'm also plugged into lots of networks working on climate and nature recovery, where there are opportunities to share stories, best practice and support outside of our professional spheres.

9. What's next on your list to change personally? I would like to get more involved in my local area, which has a really strong climate network, with some amazing and committed individuals. I would also like to make a little more time to explore nature, as there is nothing like spending time away from it all to remind me why I must redouble my efforts when I am back in the workplace. If you are interested in featuring in the next 'Who are ya?', contact Phil Brennan at pbrennan@apse.org.uk

Did you know? APSE Energy provides consultancy support for a range of projects, including ground-mounted solar, solar on buildings or carports, wind, heat pumps, EVs, and charging infrastructure, among others. We conduct energy audits and develop heat decarbonisation plans.

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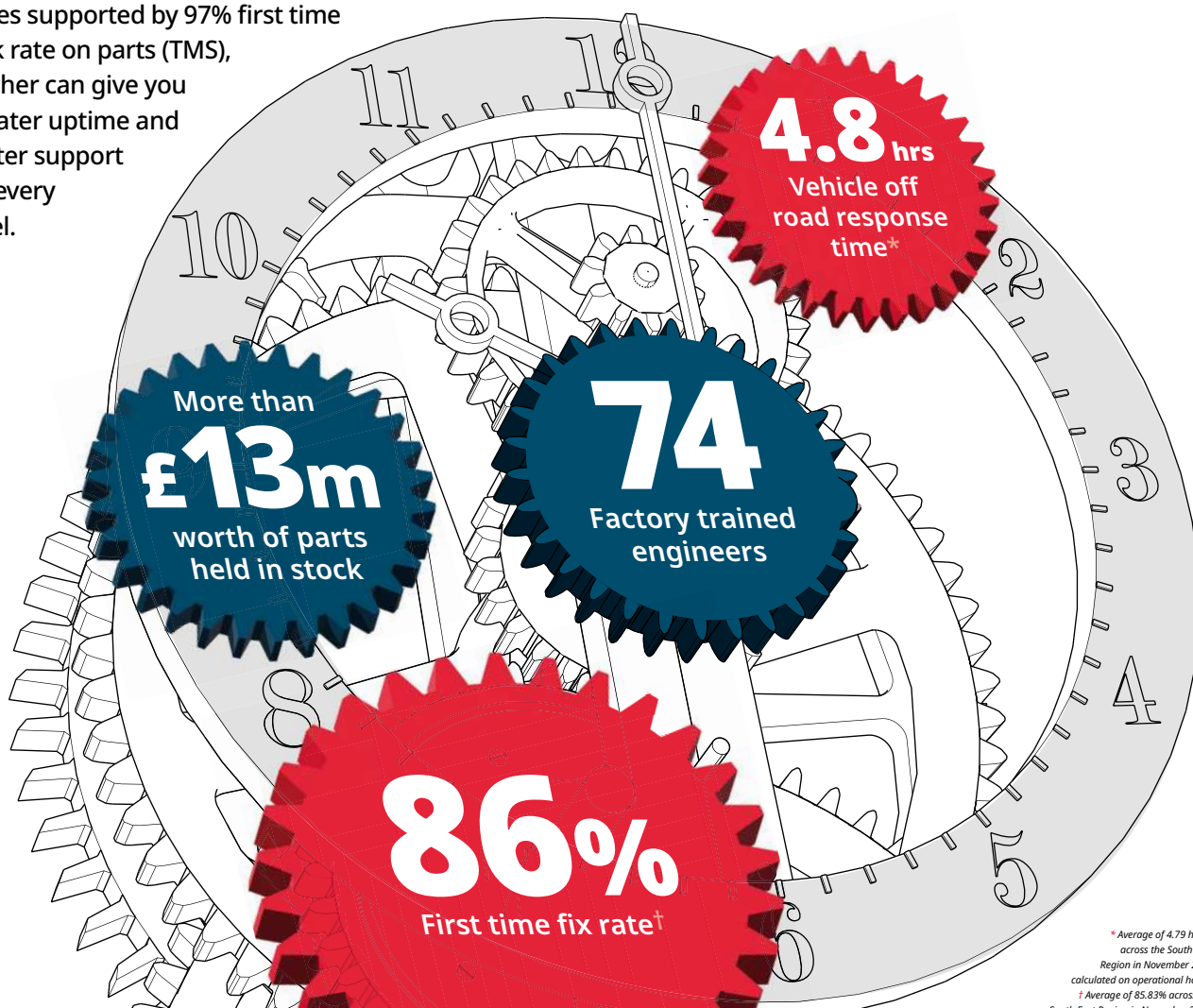
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* Average of 4.79 hours across the South East Region in November 2024 calculated on operational hours.
† Average of 85.83% across the South East Region in November 2024.

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