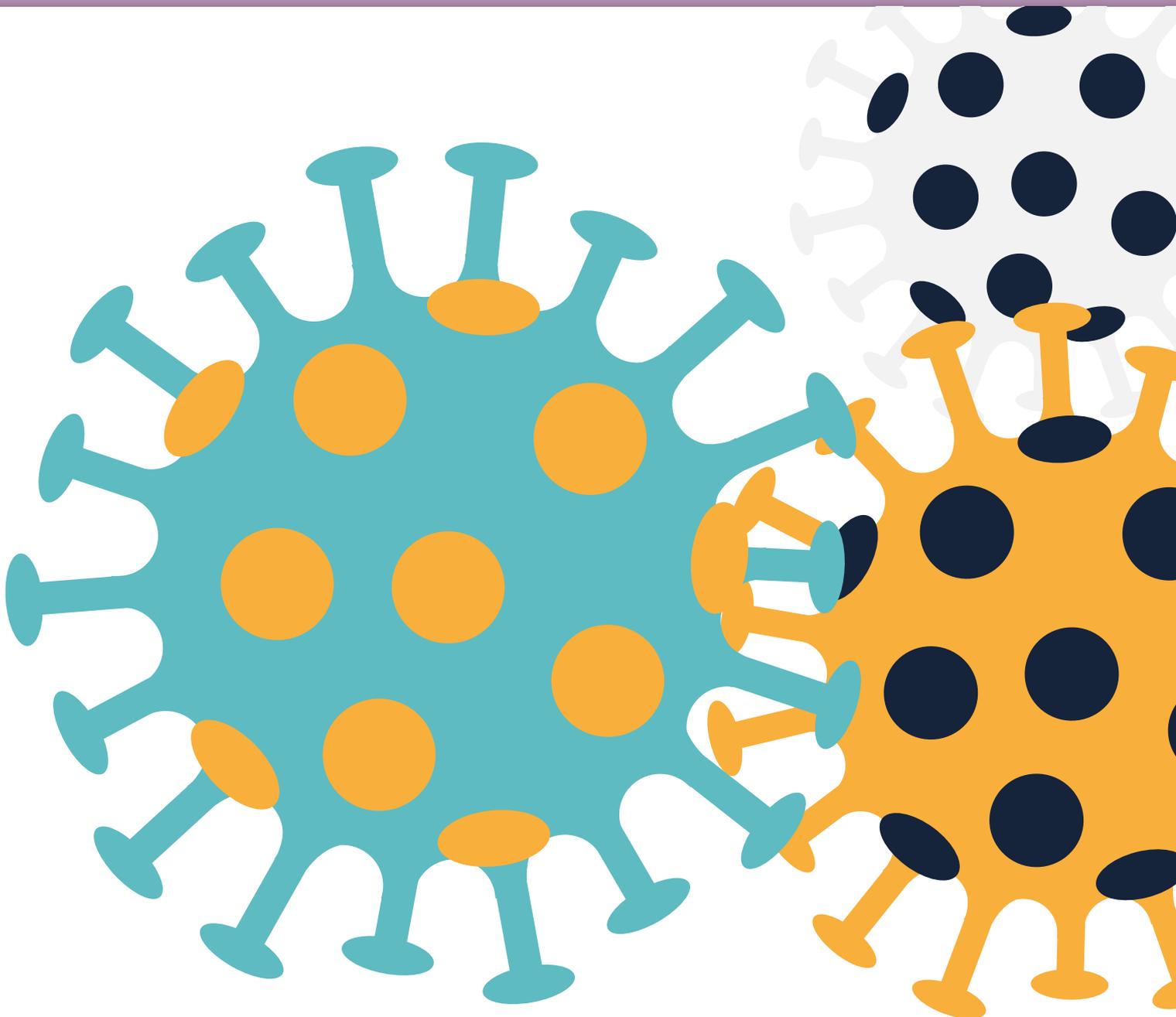


The impact of COVID-19 on performance management in UK local government

December 2021



Introduction

APSE has recently published the results of the APSE Local Government Commission (ALGC) 2030, which was set up to explore what the next decade could hold for a revitalised local government. The report has called for a system reset and at its heart a new constitutional settlement for local councils.

The ALGC 2030 received hundreds of pieces of evidence, including oral witness testimonies, during the course of its 18 months of work, and found that UK local government is facing its biggest economic, political and social challenges since the Second World War. Alongside multiple public policy crises in finances, adult care, housing and climate change the Commissioners found that the system itself was hindered by a lack of powers and resources, and the centralisation of decision making, which mistrusts and hinders local councils and ignores their democratic legitimacy. 'Local by Default' makes 28 recommendations which centre upon:

- A new relationship with local government
- An alternative: The principle of local by default
- Revitalising local government
- The roles and powers of local government
- A sustainable financial settlement for local government
- Local democracy, representation and accountability
- The local government workforce
- Addressing inequalities and engaging communities

The ALGC 2030 report outlines the public policy crises in finances and climate change and the need for council finances to be radically altered in order to change the current lack of powers and resources which hinders local councils.

APSE has previously reported that in 2009/10, local government spending as a share of all spending in the economy reached 8.6 per cent, a high for the post-1979 period and only just below the all-time high (1975). In 2017/18, it fell below the previous post-1979 low of 6.2 per cent (1997/98). Since then, it has continued to head down. Including capital spending, total spending by local government as a share of GDP is now at a record low for the post 1948 period. The impact on neighbourhood services has been huge, APSE estimated that we need for a further £3.2B per annum just to take us back to minimum sustainable level which we passed in 2015/16.

In 2020, a new challenge faced local government – COVID-19. The pandemic arrived at a time when resources are already significantly reduced for local government. COVID-19 has placed an enormous strain on our public services. Local councils are working tirelessly, responding to this unprecedented public health emergency.

At this current time, it's never been more crucial to collect data to understand fully the impact and consequences of what has happened and how this has impacted on resources and performance across council services. Good quality data will be key in getting fully reimbursed from Government

for local efforts. Councils should be looking now to ensure that they can evidence the impact of COVID-19. This includes changes to operational methods due to social distancing measures such as drivers in cabs or funeral procedures, and reductions or closure of service such as leisure centres, car parks and school meals.

APSE introduced a new quarterly data collection exercise in 2020 to assess the impact of COVID-19 on a range of front-line services. To facilitate this process, APSE established service specific working groups to identify questions under the headings of cost, income, productivity and quality which could be assessed for the quarter. The findings of the first quarter of 2020 (April – June) were published by APSE, showing the averages for individual services from participating authorities. We received 115 returns for this project from local authorities throughout the UK. The full report can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

Following on from this, the working groups incorporated a number of new measures into the data templates for the full 2020-21 financial year performance indicators, to show what the impact of COVID-19 has been on frontline services; not just in cost terms but in productivity, impact on staff and service performance. The key findings for the full data collection year 2020-21 are included within this publication. This is the year which was greatly affected by the pandemic and by comparing it with previous years, we can see what impact the pandemic had. The figures quoted are averages across authorities.

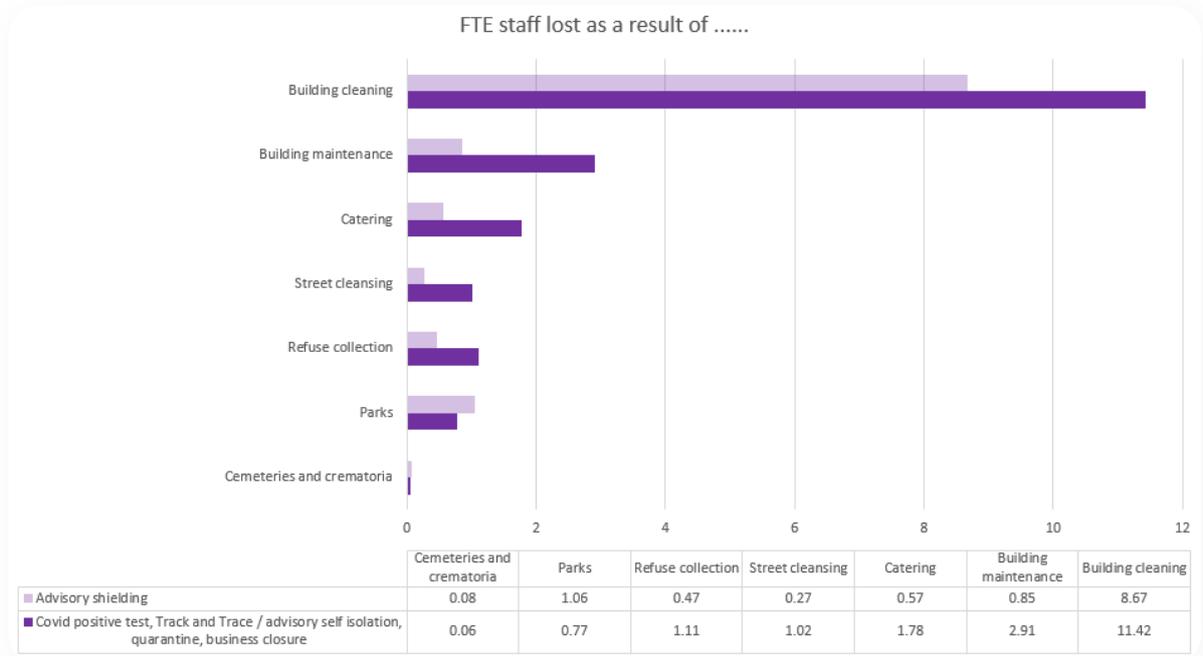
This analysis has focused on the following key areas across the service areas:

- Expenditure
- Income
- Impact on staff
- Additional vehicles
- Housing vs non-housing
- Cemeteries and crematoria
- Changes in service provision
- Street cleansing LAMS
- Grounds maintenance LAMS

This data and analysis will support our member councils to assess their performance comparative with others, within their specific service sector. Individual comparator reports have also been produced for councils participating in the benchmarking. This report can be viewed in conjunction with other reports that have been produced by APSE, such as resilience surveys and remobilisation reports. These can be found on the COVID-19 support hub on the APSE website. Please click [here](#) to access the hub.

Expenditure

Analysis on additional spend over and above usual spend, on PPE and other covid related costs such as materials, equipment, signage etc, the average percentage spend varies service by service. This is unsurprisingly high for building cleaning with the purchase of cleaning fluids and other materials.



Overall, the services have had different experiences in terms of whether they faced an increase or decrease in spend. Building cleaning and parks, both front line services dealing with the pandemic, experienced very small increases which really reflect inflation and additional PPE expenditure. Therefore, there was no real significant impact on these services other than that they appear to have managed the additional expenditure really well.

Catering and leisure spend was obviously driven by school/leisure centre closures. The increase in refuse spend reflects the increase in demands on the service.

Increases in....

Building cleaning

Cost per scheduled input hour 4% increase

Catering

% change in trading deficit 60% increase

Parks

% change in cost per household for maintenance 3% increase

Refuse collection

% change in net operational expenditure 12% increase

Roads experienced a reduction against budget on planned maintenance which will have an impact in the future. Street lighting costs continue to reduce which is associated with the rollout of LED.

Decreases in....

Roads and highways (planned maintenance)

Spend on carriageways	26% less than budgeted
Spend on footways	16% less than budgeted

Street lighting

Cost of maintaining street lights	3% reduction
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Sports and leisure

% change in expenditure	39% reduction
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Income

The data shows the impact on income from closing and suspending services. The reduction for Building maintenance will be the inability to access houses and building closures. For refuse, trade waste income will have been restricted from business closures.

Changes in income

Building maintenance	-13%
Catering	-42%
Refuse collection	-7%
Recycling income	3%
Sports and leisure	-77%

Income figures for leisure reflect reduced usage of the centres which is on average an 87% decrease. This is having a real impact on the headline cost data. Whereas in 2019-20, 93% of expenditure was recovered through income, only 31% was recovered during 2020-21 on average.

Sports and Leisure

87% decrease in usage

	2019-20	2020-21
Operational recovery ratio	93%	31%
Subsidy per visit	£0.13	£16.51
Cost per head of population	£0.71	£1.92

Impact on staff

On average building cleaning lost 11 FTE posts per council as a result of Covid absence and 9 FTE posts per council as a result of shielding. However, 8% more staff were used to cover the increased demand from the pandemic and the loss of staff due to absence. There was a very small loss of staff on cemeteries and crematoria as a result of Covid absence and shielding and a 3% increase to deal with demand.

Change in front line staff numbers

(includes agency and casual)

Building maintenance	-6%
Parks	-5%
Refuse collection	-1%
Street cleansing	0%
Transport	1%
Cemeteries and crematoria (total staff)	3%
Building cleaning	8%

In leisure, half of the councils retained staff and 70% paid retainers to casual staff.

Leisure – what happened to permanent posts?

Retained	50%
Furloughed	37%
Redeployed	13%
Plus 70% paid retainers to casual staff	

Additional vehicles

For refuse on average 22% of the fleet during this time were additional vehicles and in roads and highways there was an average increase of 8 vehicles. This will be the impact of social distancing measures such as restricting numbers in cabs and changes in demand for the service.



22% of fleet additional vehicles



Increase of 8 vehicles

Housing vs non-housing

There is a very different picture emerging between housing and non-housing building maintenance work.

Due to the closure of buildings such as schools and leisure centres, non-housing services have faced a larger reduction in employee and vehicle costs.

Housing services have seen an increase in employee costs despite the reduction in the number of jobs done. The increase in employee costs ratios is possibly due to social distancing and necessary control measures in place due to the pandemic.

In the housing sector, we saw an increase in emergency jobs. This will be due to the public being at home more during the lockdowns as well as the reduction in routine jobs will have had a consequential impact on emergency jobs. Planned maintenance job reductions will obviously have a long-term effect.

% change in costs

	Employee costs	Vehicle costs	Sub contractors	Income
Housing	7%	-5%	-33%	-5%
Non-housing	-4%	-10%	-28%	-33%
Both	6%	-4%	-22%	-20%

% change in job numbers

	Routine jobs	Emergency jobs	Planned jobs	Void jobs
Housing	-31%	1%	-30%	-8%
Non-housing	-27%	-5%		
Both	-37%	16%	-22%	-26%

2020-21 saw less voids as there was less movement of tenants during this period. However, where there were void properties, there was an opportunity for a lot more work to be done which may count for the increase in re-let times and costs.

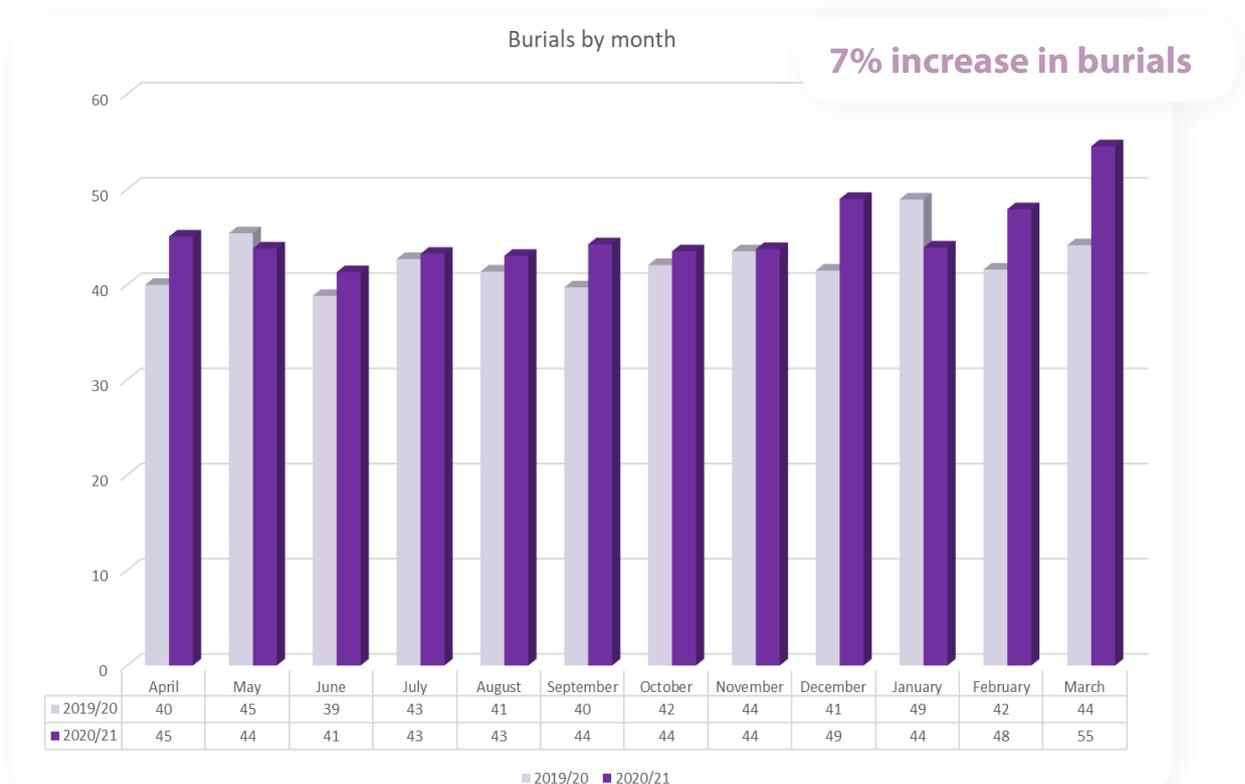
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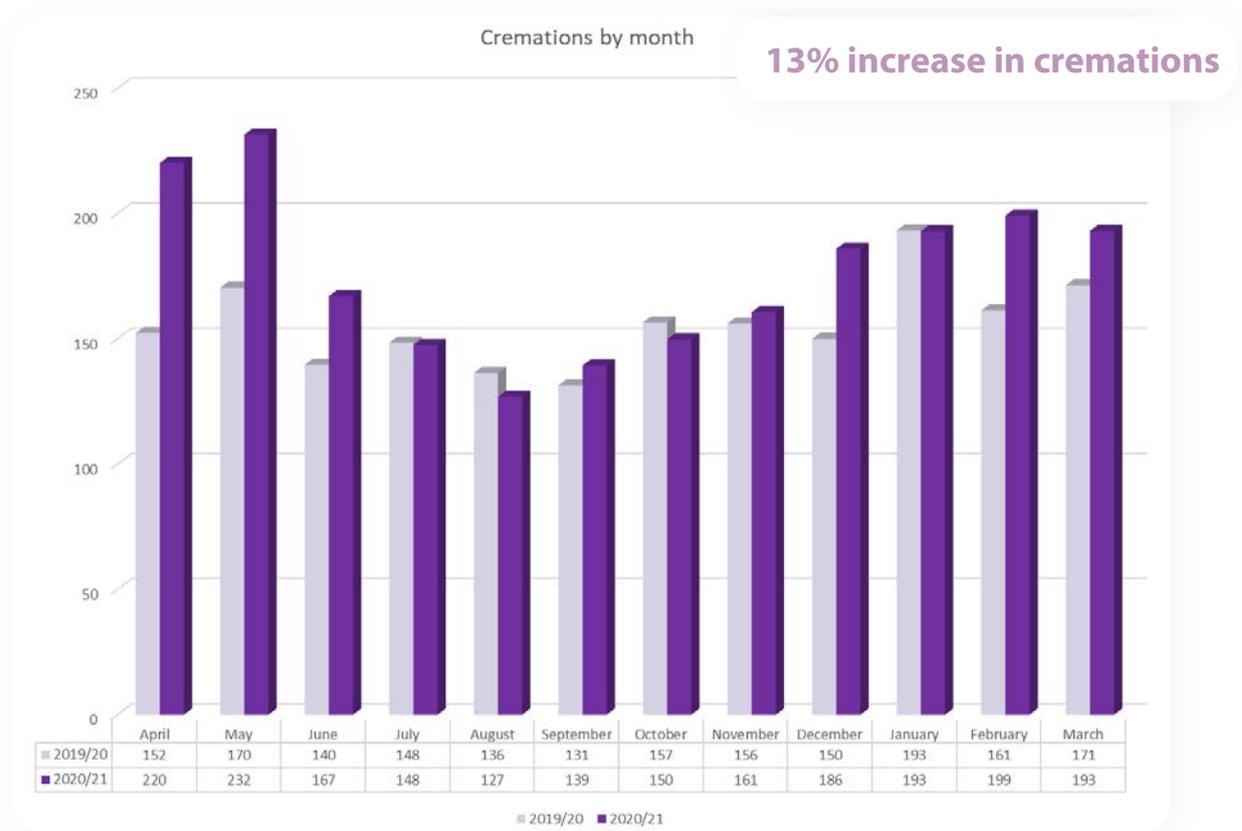
Reduction in occasions that properties were vacant	20%
Increase re-let times for local authority dwellings	27 days
Increase in voids turnaround	9 days
Increase in average cost/charge per void property	34%

Cemeteries and crematoria

We saw an increase in demand for cemeteries and crematoria but this was higher for cremations (13%) as opposed to burials (7%). The graph below shows the month-by-month analysis with this year's results against 2019-20. Numbers are affected by spikes in the pandemic. This includes spikes in April and May 2020 and in February and March 2021 which follows the Office for National Statistics (ONS) analysis on deaths during the last couple of years.

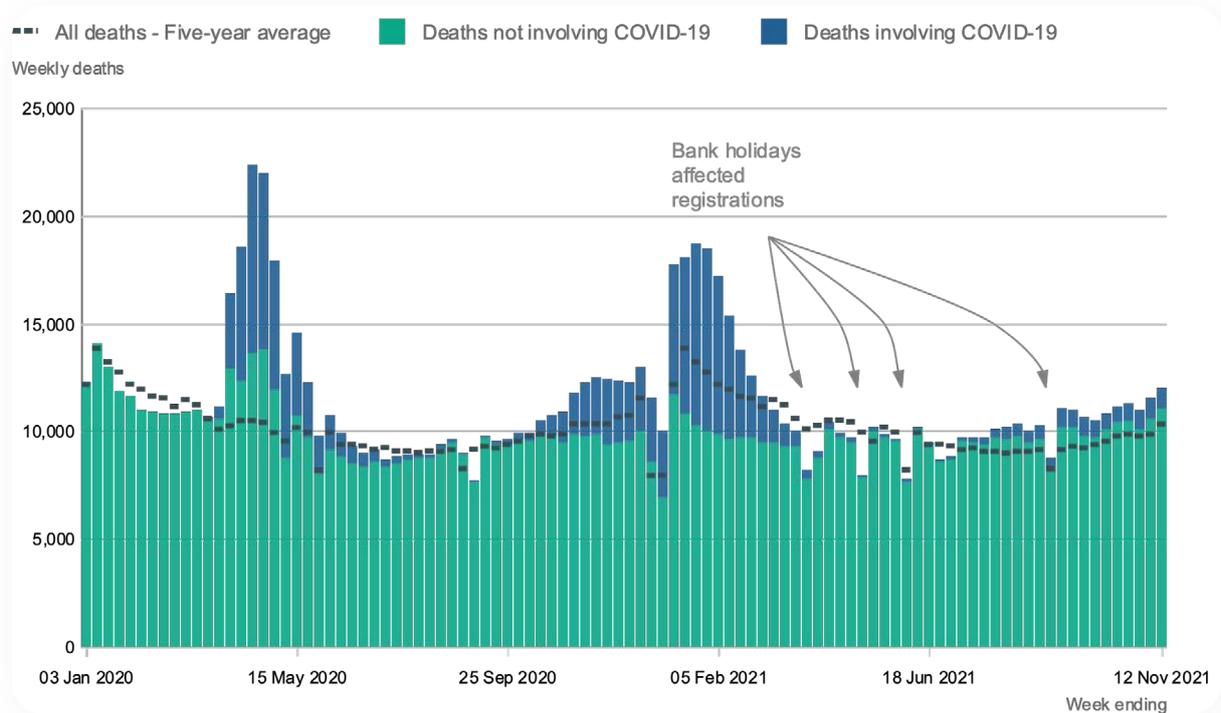
The number of deaths from the winter 2019-20 (pre-pandemic) were already recorded by ONS as excessively high and this graph shows the pandemic equalizing these figures.





The data follows the same pattern as the ONS analysis below with those two peaks in the number of deaths from all causes. The blue bars show the additional deaths due to Covid.

Number of deaths registered by week, England and Wales, 28 December 2019 to 12 November 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales

Changes in service provision

Overall, two-thirds of councils suspended any refuse collection services. However, these were predominantly very short suspensions. On analysis, the suspensions in collections listed below were due to planned suspensions or temporary suspensions due to outbreaks, rather than any resource issue or weather-related reasons. There were no suspensions of residual household collections due to COVID-19. The only suspensions of residual household collection, which were very limited, were those for weather-related reasons such as flooding.

Service Suspensions

Refuse collection

Overall % councils who suspended any services	69%
% suspended green waste collections	50%
% suspended food waste collections	17%
% suspended dry recyclables collections	17%
% suspended bulky household collections	46%

There is no surprise in the large increase in service request changes for street cleansing, with additional demands being faced by the service in dealing with flytipping and emptying litter and dog bins.

Service Requests

Street cleansing

% change in:	
Fly tipping	45%
Emptying litter bin requests	32%
Emptying dog bin requests	31%
Litter pick requests	2%

Despite school closures, the education catering service was still providing an average of 49 meals per pupil (compared to 105 meals in a completely normal year on average), which shows how well the service coped in meeting new demands such as delivering meals to vulnerable or key worker pupils, home deliveries and holiday provision as well.

Only 4 councils closed any playgrounds for the whole year.

There were examples of innovation such as on-line leisure classes being provided by over half of the councils.

There was also an improvement in servicing vehicles on the scheduled day, again obviously to meet the demand for vehicles.

Changes in Services Provided

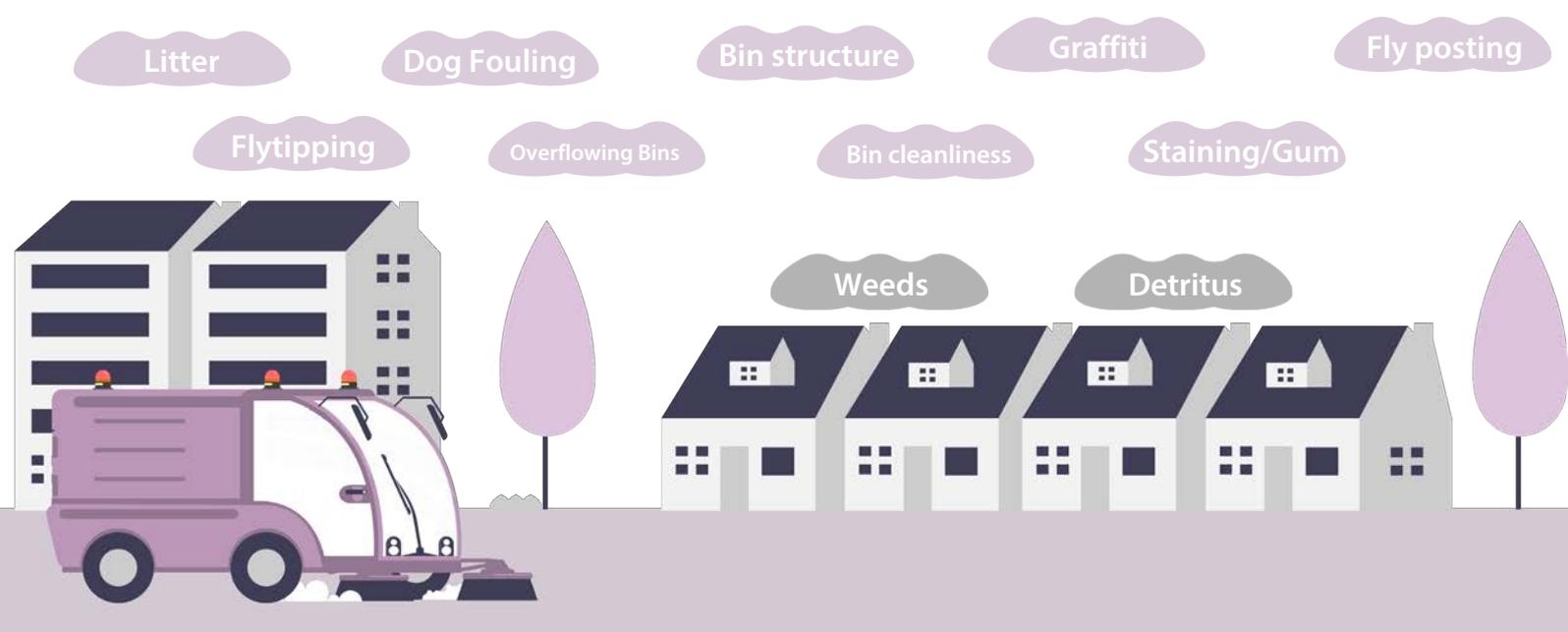
Average school meals served per pupil	49 meals
Closing playgrounds for the whole year	Only 4 councils
Offering on-line leisure classes	52%
% improvement in servicing vehicles on scheduled day	5%

Street cleansing LAMS

The LAMS (Land Audit Management System) is an inspection system to monitor the quality of grounds maintenance and/or street cleansing. We've extracted the results from LAMS for street cleansing and grounds maintenance for inspections undertaken during the 2020-21 financial year.

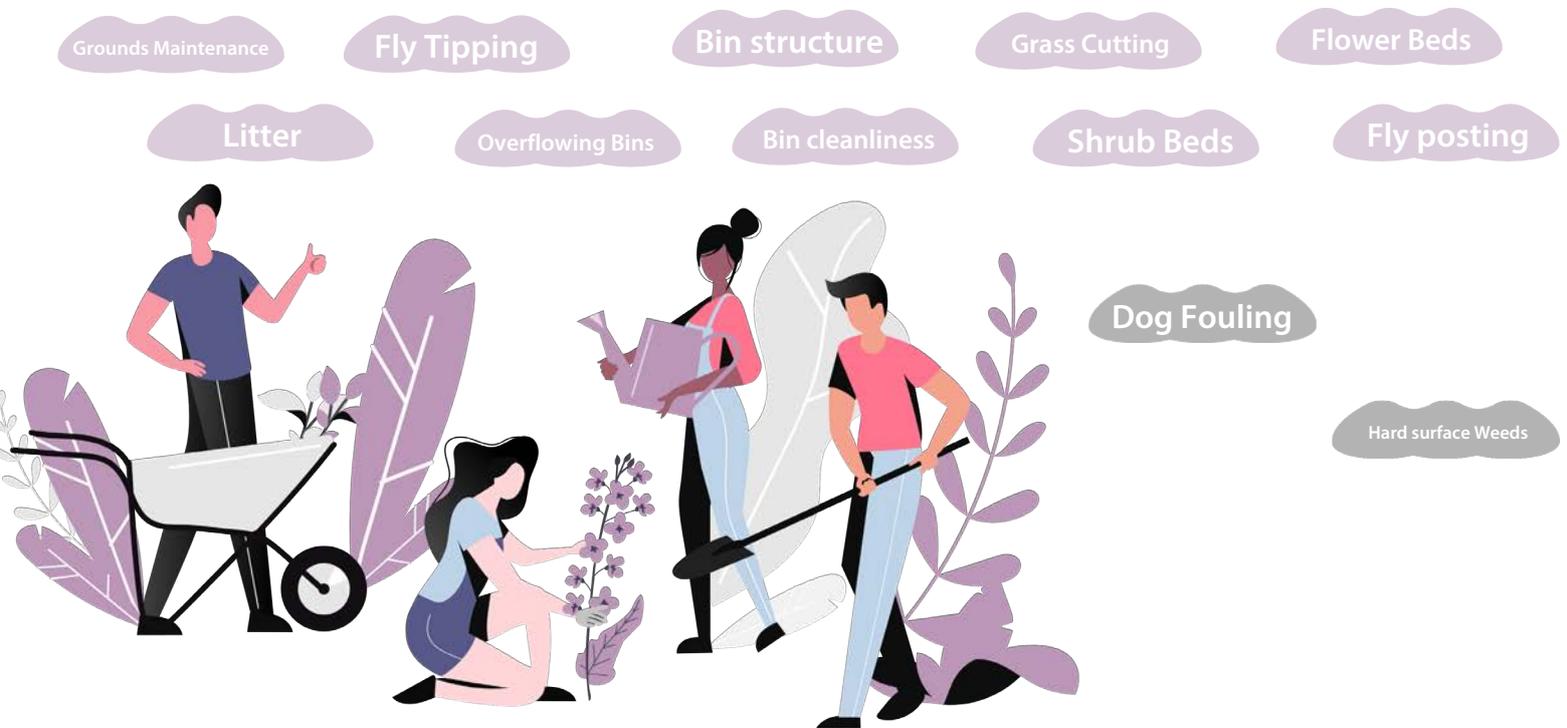
There have been improvements in all of the averages for all of the issues in the picture below except weeds and detritus compared to the previous year. This is despite the demands of the pandemic. This improvement will have been aided by monitoring tools such as LAMS helping to identify and rectify environmental issues.

The deterioration for weeds and detritus are more likely to have been affected by weed control measures and weather-related issues than the pandemic itself.



Grounds maintenance LAMS

A similar picture emerges for ground maintenance although dog fouling also deteriorated, which is likely to be a result of increased dog ownership and dog walking.



APSE Comment

APSE would like to thank all the authorities that participated in the working groups and the data collection exercise for 2020-21 on the impact of COVID-19. APSE has a range of services that are designed to support member authorities through this challenging time.

[APSE COVID – 19 Information Hub and WhatsApp groups](#) – The hub has been set up to deal with frontline service issues as they arise; ensuring greater resilience and learning between each other during this difficult time.

[APSE Online Training](#) – APSE Training is designed to help local authorities invest in their greatest asset – their staff. With staff working at home, or remotely, APSE Training can assist staff with developing new skills during this time to help maximise opportunities.

[APSE Performance Networks](#) – The Performance Network teams have developed a variety of ways to support councils with data collection. APSE strongly recommends ensuring the collection of data is ongoing, so changes in service performance are explicable during budget setting processes or when revising business plans.

[APSE Solutions](#) – Providing in-house consultancy and interim management services, available to both APSE members and non-member authorities and organisations.

[APSE Energy](#) – Working on greening frontline councils' services, including energy management issues, which may be critical to saving money in services where budgets have been impacted by COVID-19.

[APSE membership resources](#) remain committed to supporting our member local councils with the ongoing briefings service, network queries, access to Principal Advisor advice and meetings, advisory groups and events. There are opportunities for councils to share best practice and learning through advisory groups and thematic sessions.

For further information on the services that are available, please contact

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