



membership resources

State of the Market Survey 2020

Local Authority Highway Services



March 2021
21-24

State of the Market Survey 2020

Local Authority Highways services

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About APSE

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is a not-for-profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK. Promoting excellence in public services, APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority frontline services and operates one of the UK's largest research programmes in local government policy and frontline service delivery matters.



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Results at a glance

Service delivery

% whose service is delivered in-house	73.53%
% who currently sell their services to organisations external to the council and expect to continue	51.72%
% who are fully prepared for the introduction of Well managed Highways Infrastructure	35.71%
% who have seen an increase in the number of claims referring to vehicular damage as a result of highway condition over the past 3 years	84.62%
% who have seen an increase in legal claims for slips, trips and falls over the past 3 years	53.85%
% who estimate the existing damage to roads in their council area will never be repaired to an acceptable standard	48.00%

Budgets

% whose budget decreased from the last financial year	21.88%
% whose highways maintenance training budget has stayed the same over the past 12 months	82.14%

Staffing

% who personally feel staff absence levels are at an acceptable level	81.48%
% who run an apprenticeship scheme for the service	72.41%
% with difficulty recruiting operatives	40.74%
% with difficulty retaining operatives	18.52%
% with difficulty recruiting technical/managerial staff	57.69%
% with difficulty retaining technical/managerial staff	11.54%
Average age of highways maintenance staff	46 years

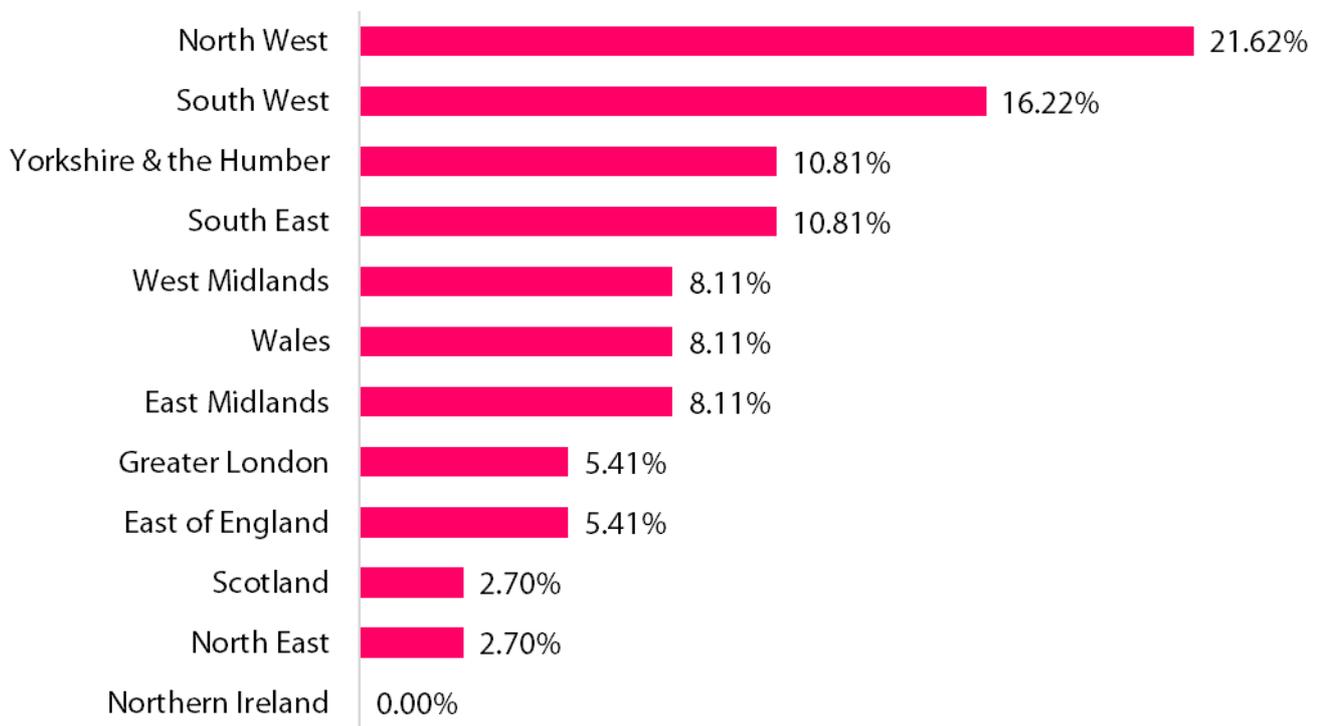
Introduction

APSE conducted an online survey during November 2020 to December 2020. A series of questions were asked covering a range of issues of interest to those officers, managers and councillors responsible for Highways services.

State of the Market surveys are an attempt to understand perceptions of the market amongst people directly involved in delivering services.

None of the questions were mandatory, so the total amount of responses differs from question to question. Individual details of respondents have been kept confidential. Results of the survey should be treated as a snapshot of current opinions of those working in highways services rather than a thorough analysis of change over time.

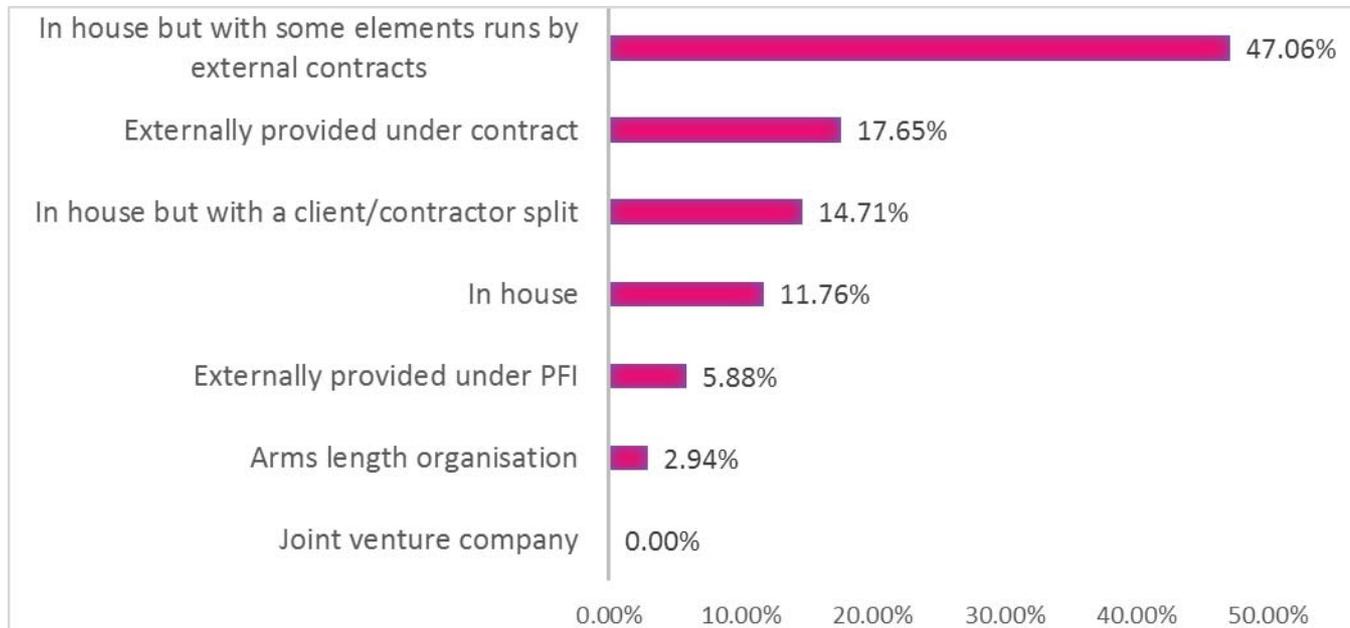
Where in the UK do you work?



The table above shows the breakdown of where the respondents to the survey are located in the UK.

Section 1 – The Service

How are your highways services currently delivered?



73.53% of highways services are currently delivered in house, 23.53% are delivered externally, 2.94% by an arm's length organisation and none had services delivered by a joint venture company.

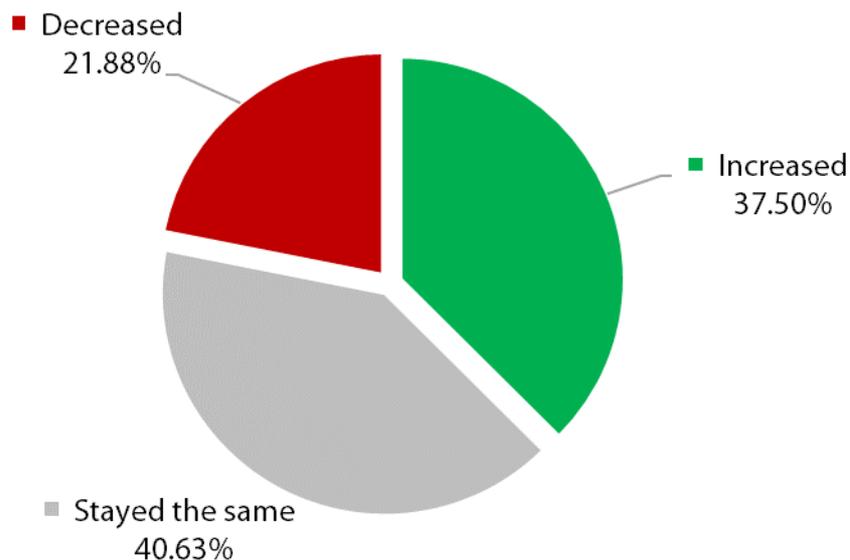
If the service is currently provided in-house, do you expect the service to remain in-house over the next 12 months?



All respondents with in-house services expected their service to remain in-house over the next 12 months.

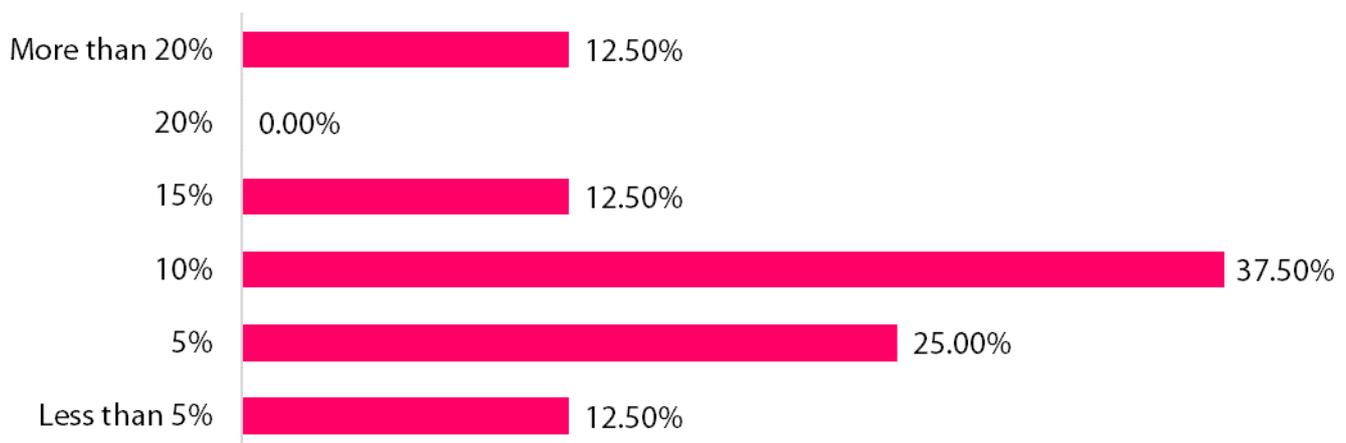
Section 2 – Budget

How has the budget for the highways service changed from the last financial year?



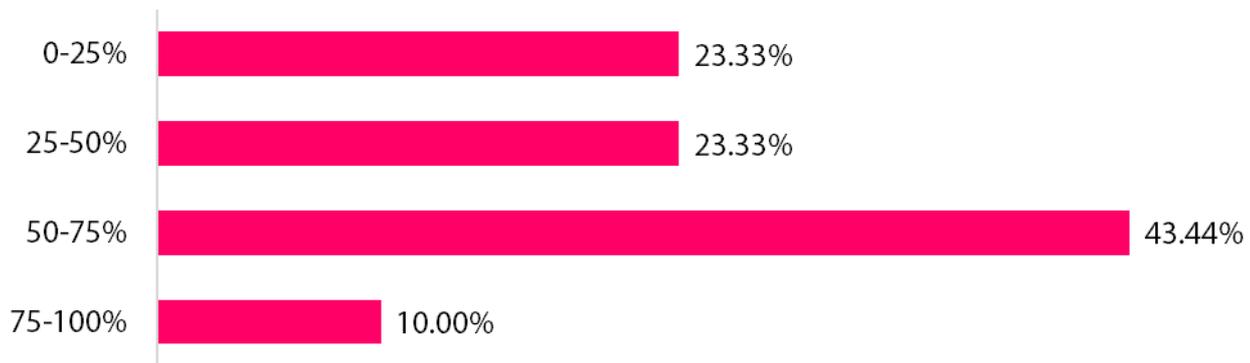
For the majority of respondents, the budget for the highways service stayed the same from the last financial year (40.63%); 37.50% said it had increased, and 21.88% said it had decreased.

If your budget has decreased from last year, how much has it decreased by?



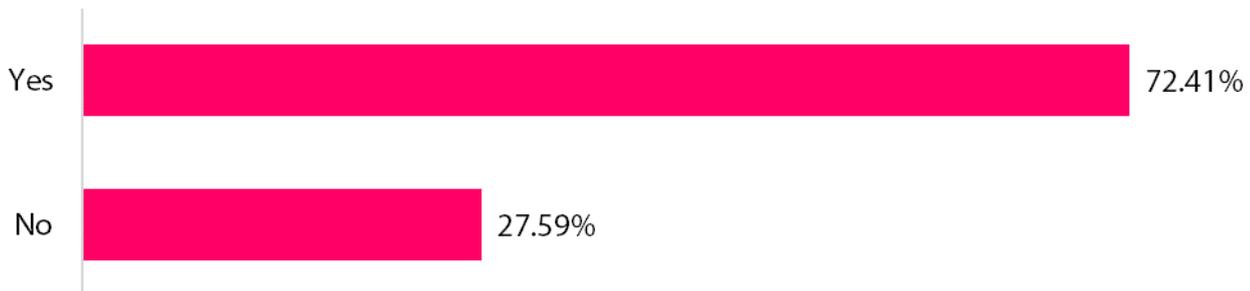
For the respondents who experienced budget decreases, most experienced a decrease of 10% (37.50%).

To what extent will this year's budget for highways maintenance meet the need to fill potholes and resurface where necessary?



The extent to which this year's budget for highways maintenance met the need to fill potholes and resurface where necessary varied from authority to authority, but most respondents felt that it would not cover all of their needs, with 90.01% answering between 0% and 75%.

Do you run an apprenticeship scheme for the highways maintenance service?

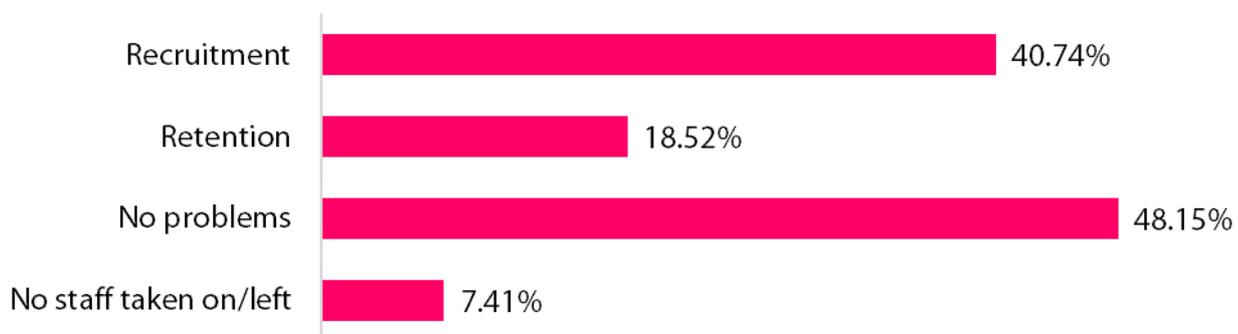


Most of the responding councils (72.41%) do run an apprenticeship scheme for the highway's maintenance service.

Section 3 – Staffing

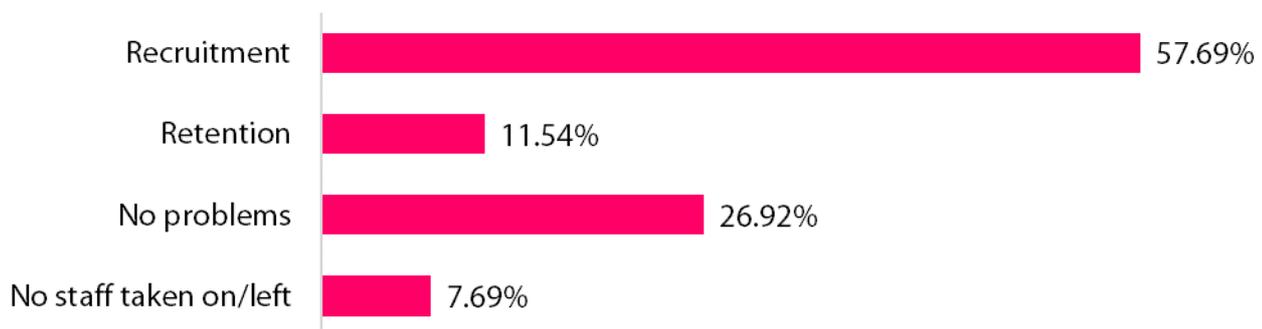
Where have you had difficulty recruiting or retaining staff (over the past 12 months)?

Operatives



40.74% of respondents have experienced difficulty recruiting operatives, and 18.52% have experienced difficulty retaining them.

Technical/managerial staff



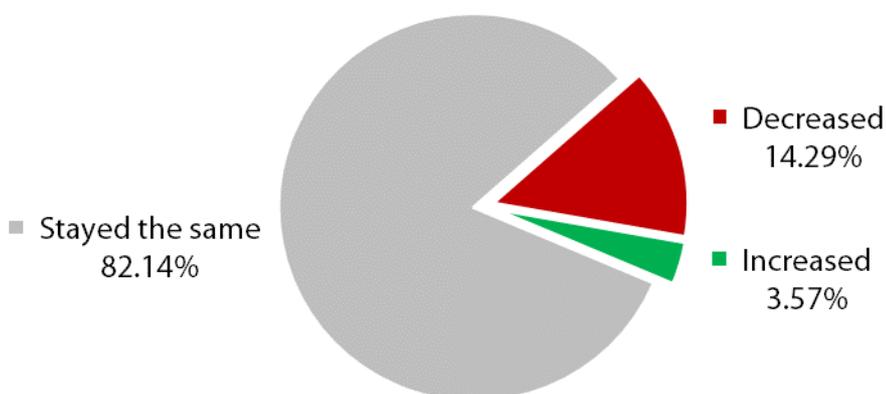
57.69% of respondents had experienced difficult recruiting technical/managerial staff, and 11.54% had issues retaining them.

Do you personally feel staff absence levels are at an acceptable level?



The majority of respondents felt that staff absence levels are at an acceptable level (81.48%).

What has happened to your highways maintenance training budget over the past 12 months?



Over the past 12 months, the majority of highways maintenance training budgets have stayed the same (82.14%), 14.29% have decreased and 3.57% have increased.

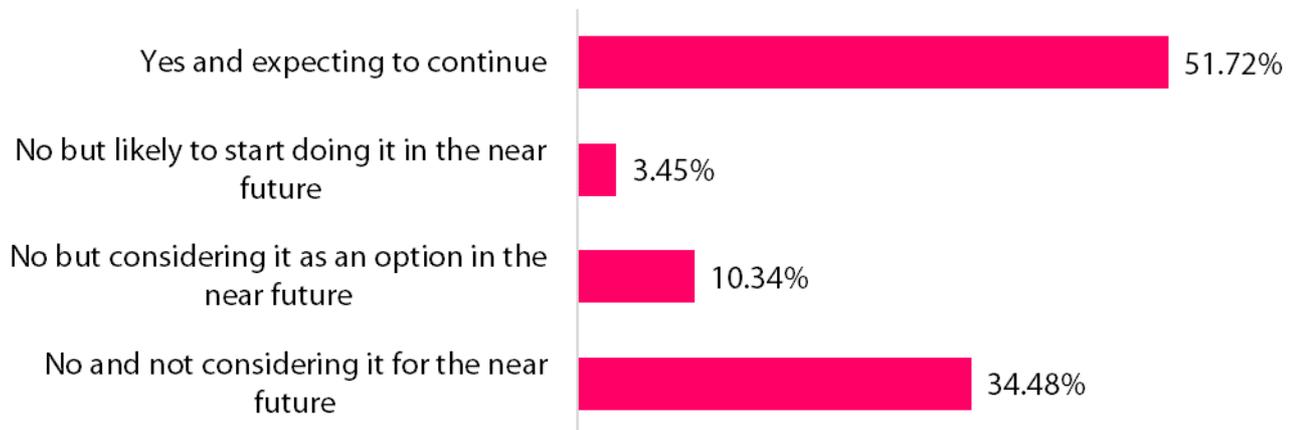
What is the average age of your highways maintenance operational staff?



The average age of highways maintenance operational staff among respondents was 46, with a lowest of 29 and a highest of 53.

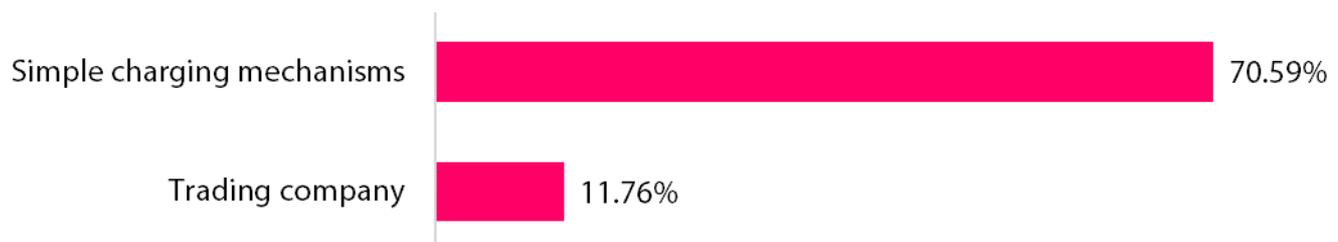
Section 4 – Service Delivery

Do you currently sell your services to organisations external to the council?



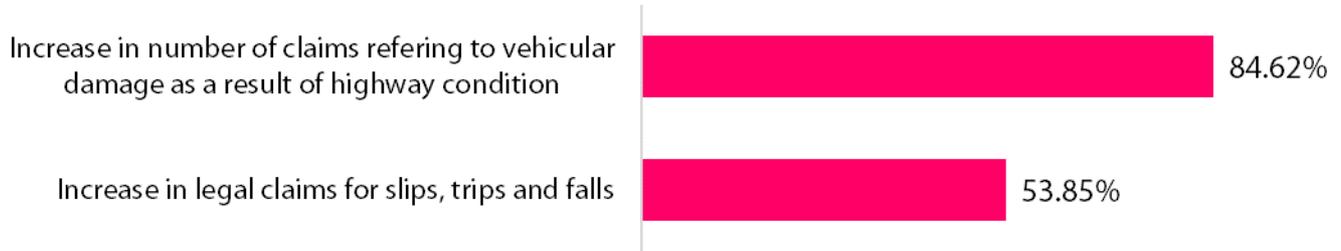
51.72% of those who currently sell their services to organisations external to the council are expecting to continue doing so. Among those who do not currently sell their services, 3.45% are likely to start doing it in the near future, 10.34% are considering it as an option in the near future and 34.48% are not considering it.

If you do currently sell your services to organisations external to the council, do you use:



70.59% of respondents sell their services to organisations external to the council through simple charging mechanisms, and 11.76% use a trading company.

Has the severe weather over the past 3 years led to any of the following?



84.62% of respondents have seen an increase in the number of claims referring to vehicular damage as a result of the highway condition, and 53.85% have seen an increase in legal claims for slips, trips and falls over the past 3 years.

Section 5 – Opinions

Where do you see growth areas for the service over the next 12 months?

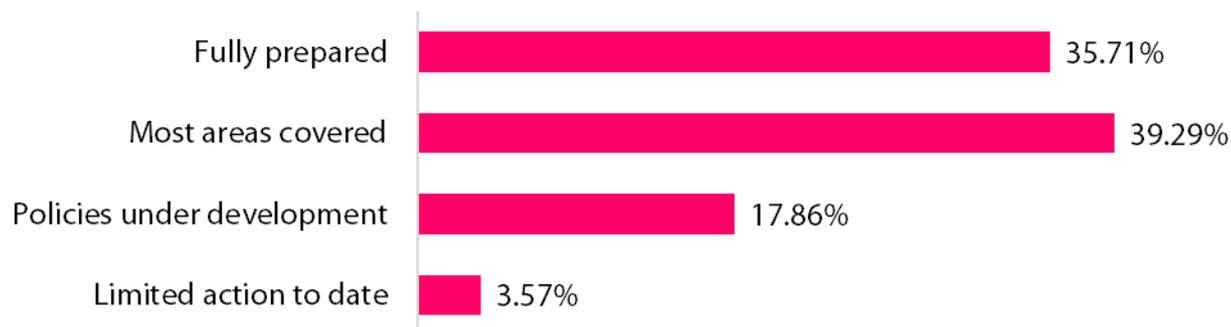
- Drainage
- Private development work
- Cycling and walking schemes
- External income generation
- Active travel management
- Street lighting
- Installation of vehicle crossings
- Housing associations and similar bodies
- More preservation treatments
- Building capacity / competency of workforce

Where do you see areas where work may decrease over the next 12 months?

Several respondents noted that reduced budgets will limit many different types of work.

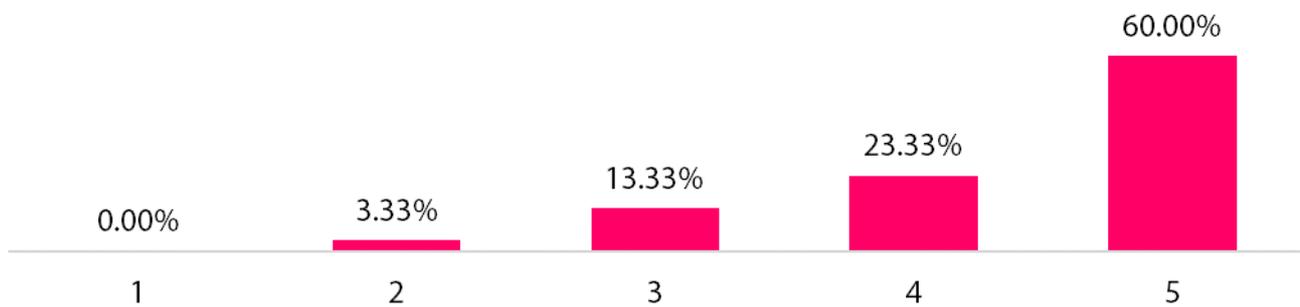
- Reactive maintenance
- Planned maintenance
- End of life replacement
- Delivery of S106 and CIL funded schemes
- General maintenance
- Support to civic events
- Capital and revenue funding
- Work impacted by Brexit

How prepared are you for the introduction of the New Code of Practice “Well managed Highways infrastructure”?



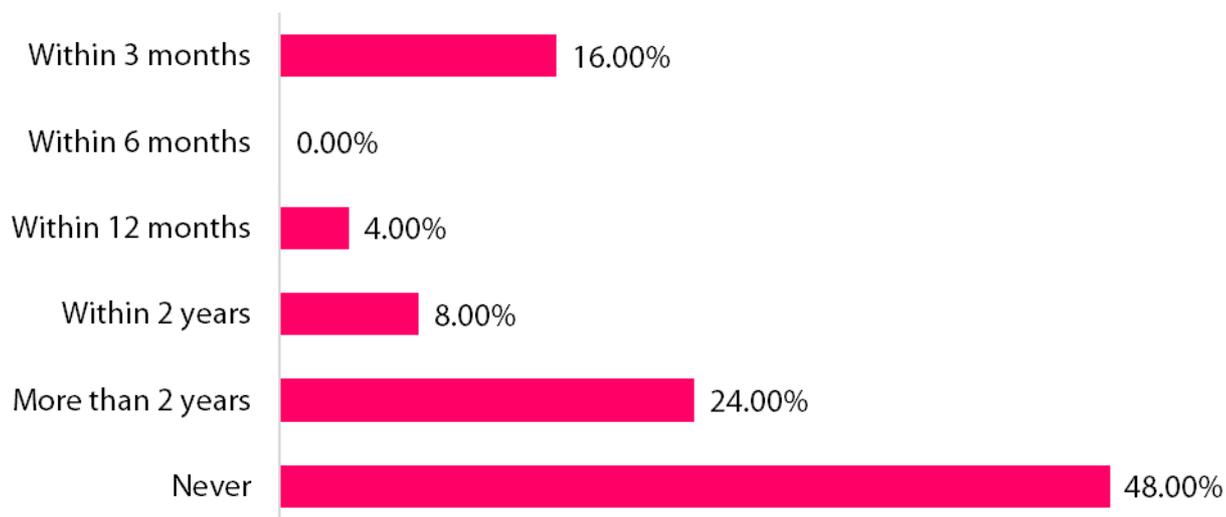
Most respondents felt that they had “most areas covered” for the introduction of the New Code of Practice “Well managed Highway’s infrastructure (39.29%). Only 3.57% felt their authority had taken limited action to date.

How strongly do you rank your council’s approach to defending claims? (from 1 weak to 5 strong)



Most respondents ranked their council’s approach to defending claims on a scale of 1-5 as a 5 (strong – 60.00%). None of the respondents considered their approach to be weak.

When do you estimate the existing damage to roads in your council area will be repaired to an acceptable standard by?



Most respondents estimated that the existing damage to roads in their council area will never be repaired (48.00%), with many also believing the roads would be fixed in more than 2 years (24.00%).

What is the most innovative development in highways maintenance you have seen in recent times?

Answers to this section included

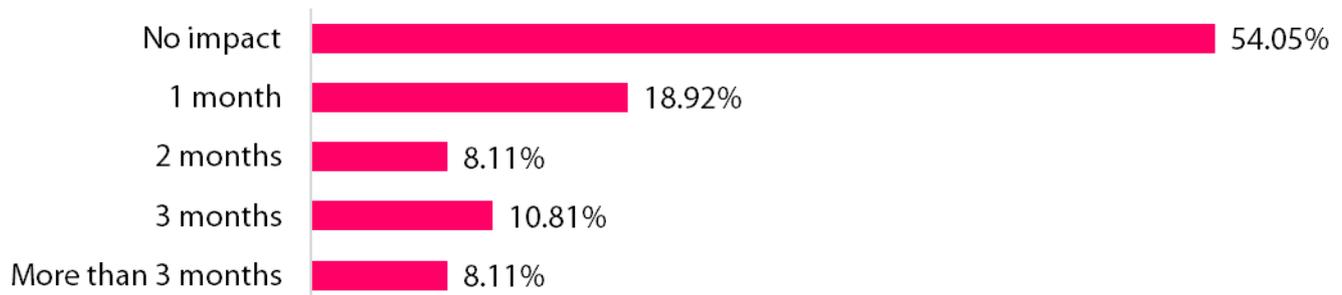
- Use of AI and video in defect identification
- Multiple use of gritting vehicles

- Surface preservation techniques
- Plastics in bitumen materials
- Jet patching and infra-red patching
- Material waste and embodied carbon

Section 6 – The Pandemic

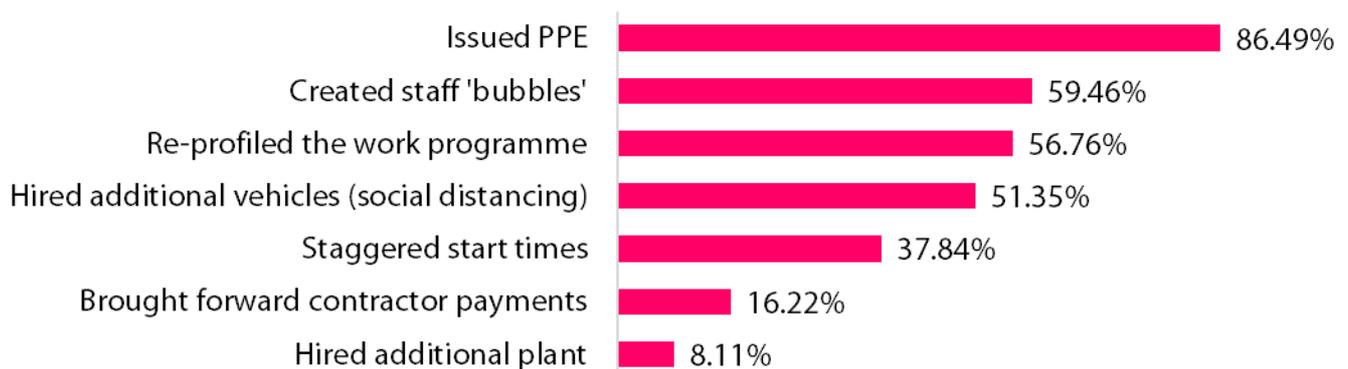
Section 6 has been added to the survey to determine how COVID-19 has impacted on the resurfacing schedule and the practices that have changed.

How has COVID-19 impacted on your 2020 resurfacing schedule? How many months behind schedule are you?



The majority of respondents (54.05%) felt that COVID-19 had no impact on the 2020 resurfacing schedule.

Have you changed practices for COVID-19? (Please tick all that apply)



Local authorities have had to change many different processes due to the impacts of COVID-19. The most popular changed practices by the majority of respondents were: issued PPE (86.49%), created staff bubbles (59.46%), re-profiled the work programme (56.76%) and hired additional vehicles (51.35%).

Local Authority Highways Services

State of the Market 2020

The Association for Public Service Excellence

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular advisory groups, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The advisory groups are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Advisory groups are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE. Due to Covid-19, these are held online, at present, approximately four times a year. If you do not currently receive details about APSE advisory group meetings, and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area, please email: enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national advisory groups include: -

- FM & Building Cleaning
- Catering (school meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Environmental Health
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing Construction and Building Maintenance
- Local Authorities Commercialisation, Income and Trading Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change Network
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing