



Cemeteries and Crematoria: Trend analysis 2014/15

This briefing provides details on the performance information available from APSE's performance networks service looking at performance indicators and current policy issues for councils who deliver cemeteries and crematoria services.

Key issues

- Increases in maintained cemetery land suggests that local authorities are releasing or acquiring more land as existing cemeteries and in some cases churchyards are becoming full.
- Management and administrative staff costs are reducing, which may be a result of the integration of cemeteries and crematoria in other service areas such as grounds maintenance and street scene.
- Whilst income from burials and cremations are rising there is a fall in memorial income which is likely to be a result of the rising costs of burials and cremations.
- The fact memorial safety inspections are falling could be a reflection of reductions in frontline staff, it equally may have health and safety repercussions in the longer term.

Overview

A new APSE performance networks benchmarking model for cemeteries and crematoria services was launched two years ago. The programme for cemeteries and crematoria provides performance indicators for time efficiency, human resources, maintenance, memorial safety, absenteeism and financial performance for the service throughout the UK. This briefing note provides participating authorities with an overview of the 2014-15 service benchmarking data compared to the two previous financial years. The analysis in this report is based on 'service wide averages' across all family groups and currently covers returns made by 40 local authorities across the UK.

This new performance report on cemetery and crematorium should help to inform local councils and provide assurance that bereaved families are treated with dignity

and respect, through the stringent performance indicators which relate to service quality measures. The report will also ensure that during difficult times for local residents, coping with bereavement, the local authority is providing a good quality and appropriately costed service for its residents through the range of performance indicators. Whilst many matters relating to the service may be outside of the control of the local authority, such as fees charged by the Clergy or funeral directors, those elements of the service within the scope of the local authority are able to be measured on a UK wide basis to ensure the service is provided effectively, and on an improving basis, using the APSE performance networks data.

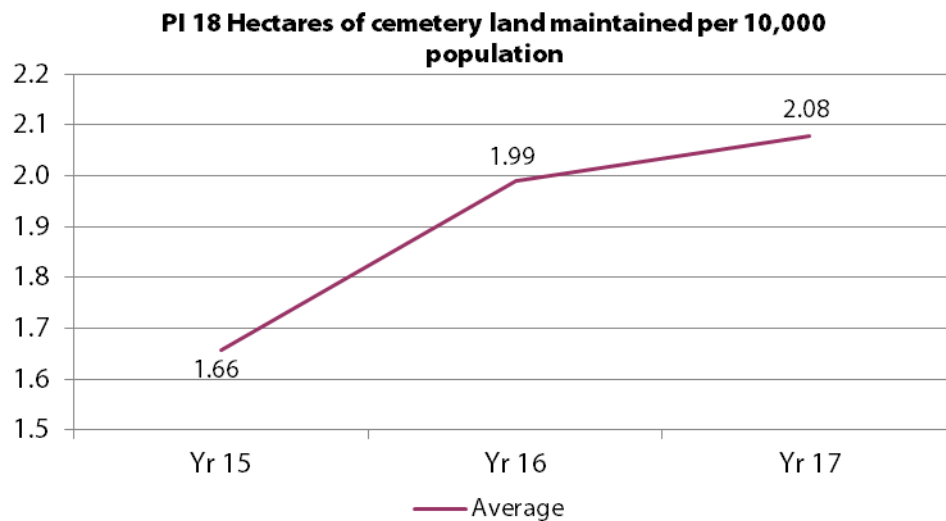
Trend analysis

This being the third year of the cemeteries and crematoria performance networks scheme, a meaningful trend analysis can be produced for the first time. Key highlighted trends cover from years 15 (2012-13) to year 17 (2014-15). Particular points of interest are as follows:

Interpretation of data

Maintained cemetery land

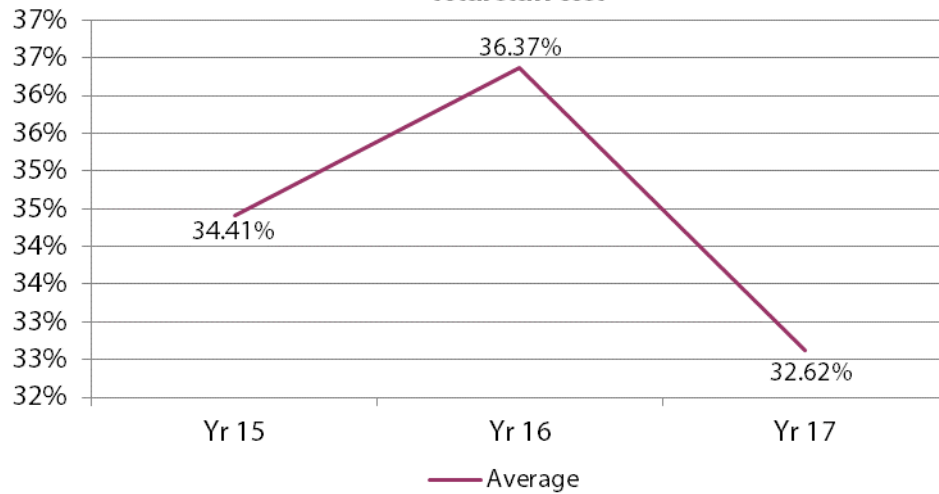
A 25.37% increase in maintained cemetery land can in some part be explained by more burial land being acquired and made available to augment that of aging and full cemeteries nationwide.



Costs

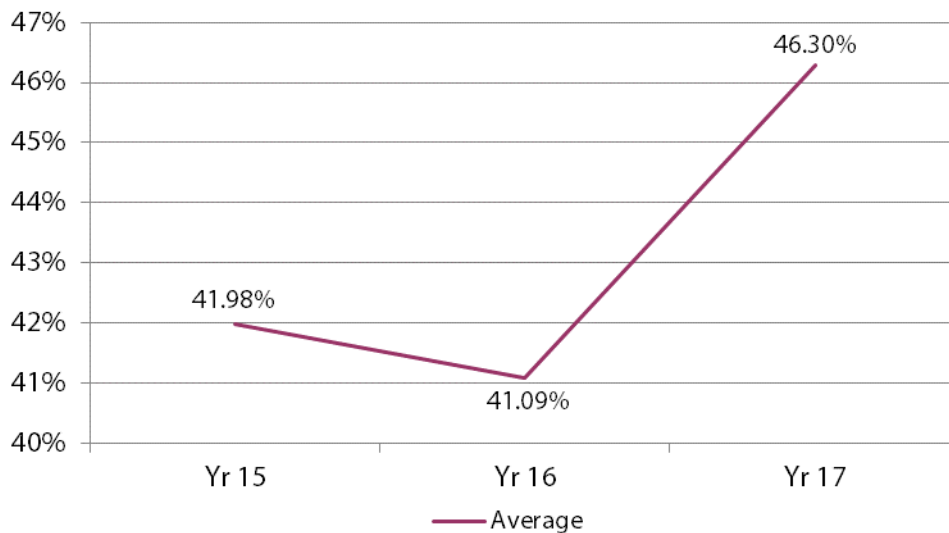
A 3.75% drop over the last year in the management and admin staff costs percentage in total staff costs and a 1.75% reduction since year 15 indicates a move towards directing resources to front-line activities.

PI 06b Management and admin staff costs as a percentage of total staff cost



There has been a surprising 4.32% increase in the proportion of total costs being attributed to staffing since year 15. This may be because of reducing costs against other budget heads or greater investment in employees.

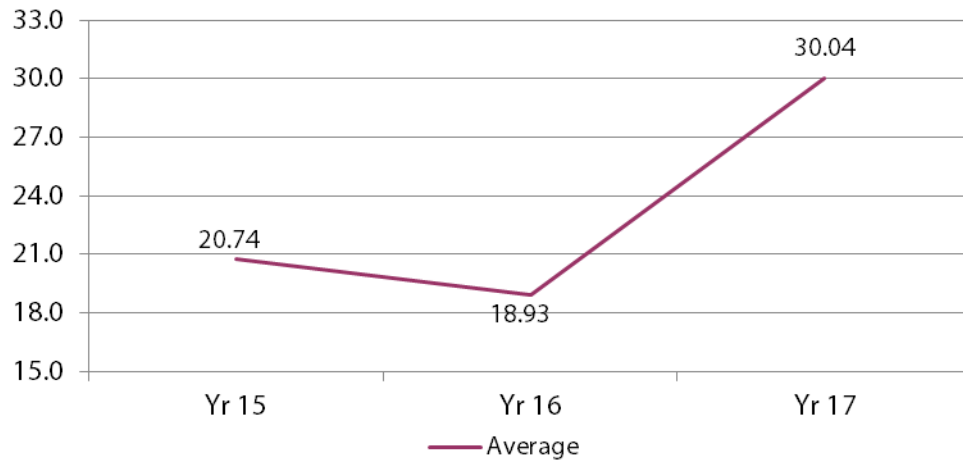
PI 05 All staff costs as a percentage of total cost



Human resources and people management

A 45% rise in the human resources and people management score shows a stronger performance on the management of people in the sector.

PI 02 Human resources and people management



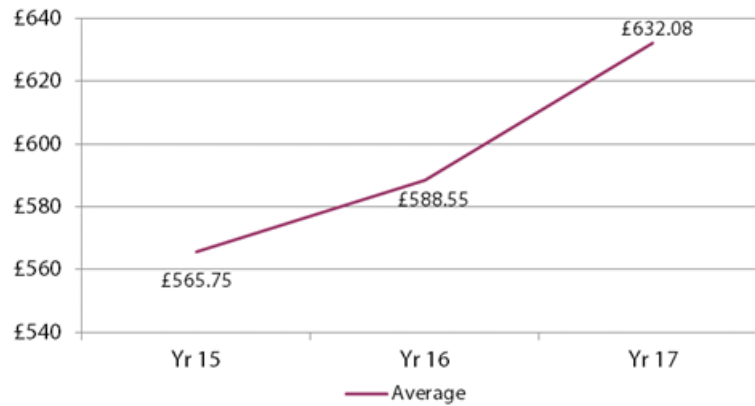
Income from all disposals

Burial income has risen 13.2% since year 15 which confirms the additional fee levels being applied to cover losses. The 11.72% increase since year 15 of income from cremations reflects a significant upward surge in cremation fees in that time.

PI 11b Average income from all disposals (burials)

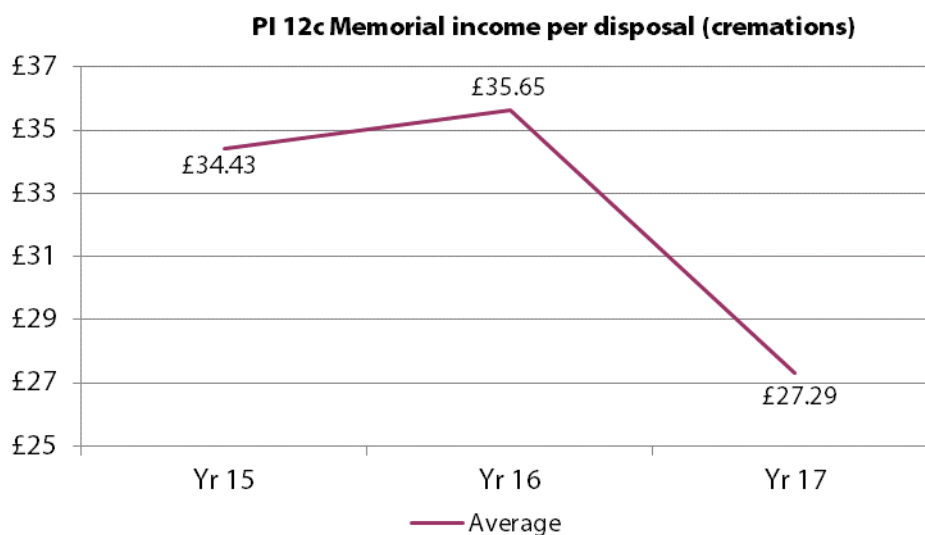
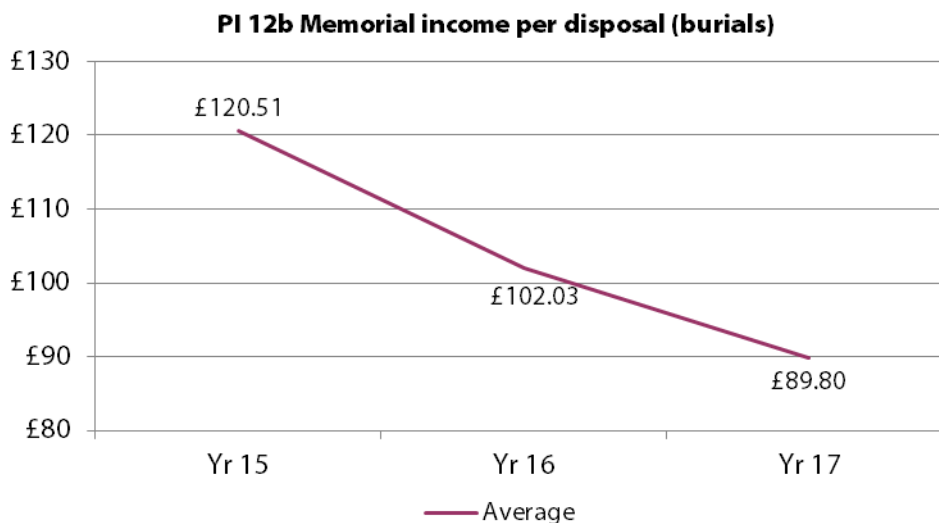


PI 11c Average income from all disposals (cremations)



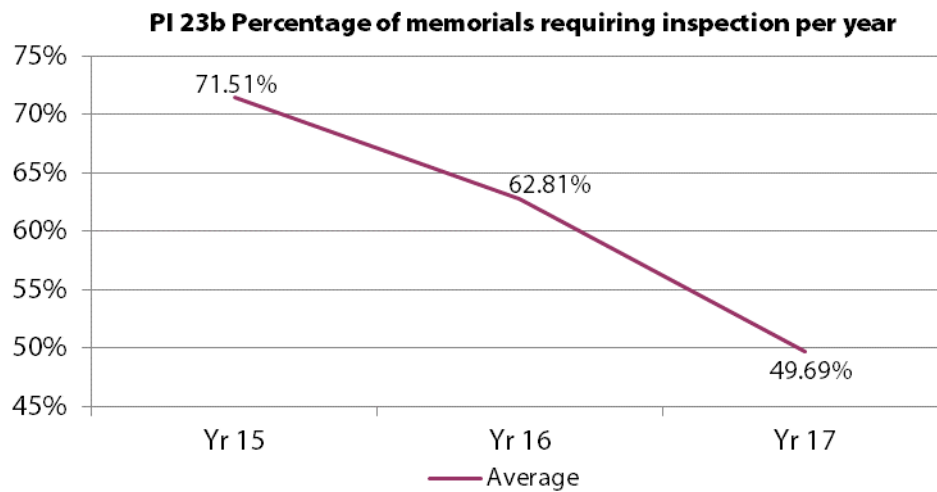
Memorial income per disposal

The 25.49% downward shift in memorial income per burial possibly reflects a choice to use disposable income on other items of expenditure. Memorial income in crematoria dropped by 20.75% since year 15, potentially as a direct result of more careful spending on optional memorials by the bereaved.



Safety inspections

Finally, the less zealous approach to memorial safety inspections is shown in the 21.82% lowering of the annual number required since year 15.



Future focus

As local authorities continue to focus on efficiency, demand management techniques, income generation and innovative working to meet the challenges, performance measurement and management continues to be at centre stage. The need to know your own service and to learn from others has never been greater.

Performance measurement is a mechanism for local authorities to identify achievable cost savings and innovative approaches to service delivery, as well as demonstrating value for money to a range of internal and external stakeholders. Any effective service change needs to be underpinned by data intelligence, to establish a starting point and to identify future targets. Performance measurement is also a mechanism to learn how other local authorities are meeting the challenges and the impact that their service changes is making in terms of cost, quality, productivity and customer satisfaction levels.

Within APSE a number of authorities are looking towards developing their cemeteries and crematoria services to both provide additional services and value for bereaved families as well as generating income to support the cost of the services. This includes exploring the provision of flower-shops, hospitality services (wakes) memorial works, pet cemeteries and supporting local environmental quality. APSE Solutions is currently developing a business plan with a number of member authorities who are looking to further develop the offering within cemeteries and crematoria. For details about this work please contact Andy Mudd on amudd@apse.org.uk.

Wayne Priestley

APSE Principal Advisor with kind assistance from Peter Linsell, APSE Associate