

The logo for apse, consisting of the lowercase letters 'apse' in white, set against a dark red, rounded rectangular background.

The Association for Public Service Excellence

# State of the Market Survey 2019

## Local Authority Highways Services

**NEW MUNICIPALISM**

Delivering for local people and local economies

Briefing 19 - 45  
December 2019

## State of the Market Survey 2019

### 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	<b>68.33%</b>
% who currently sell their services to organisations external to the council and expect to continue	<b>56.25%</b>
% who are fully prepared for the introduction of Well managed Highways Infrastructure	<b>29.17%</b>
% 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	<b>84.21%</b>
% who have seen an increase in legal claims for slips, trips and falls over the past 3 years	<b>28.95%</b>
% who estimate the existing damage to roads in their council area will never be repaired to an acceptable standard	<b>26.67%</b>

### Budgets

% whose budget decreased from the last financial year	<b>50.85%</b>
% whose highways maintenance training budget has stayed the same over the past 12 months	<b>73.58%</b>

### Staffing

% who personally feel staff absence levels are not at an acceptable level	<b>33.96%</b>
% who run an apprenticeship scheme for the service	<b>66.04%</b>
% with difficulty recruiting operatives	<b>51.11%</b>
% with difficulty retaining operatives	<b>24.44%</b>
% with difficulty recruiting technical/managerial staff	<b>69.81%</b>
% with difficulty retaining technical/managerial staff	<b>33.96%</b>
Average age of highways maintenance staff	<b>47 years</b>

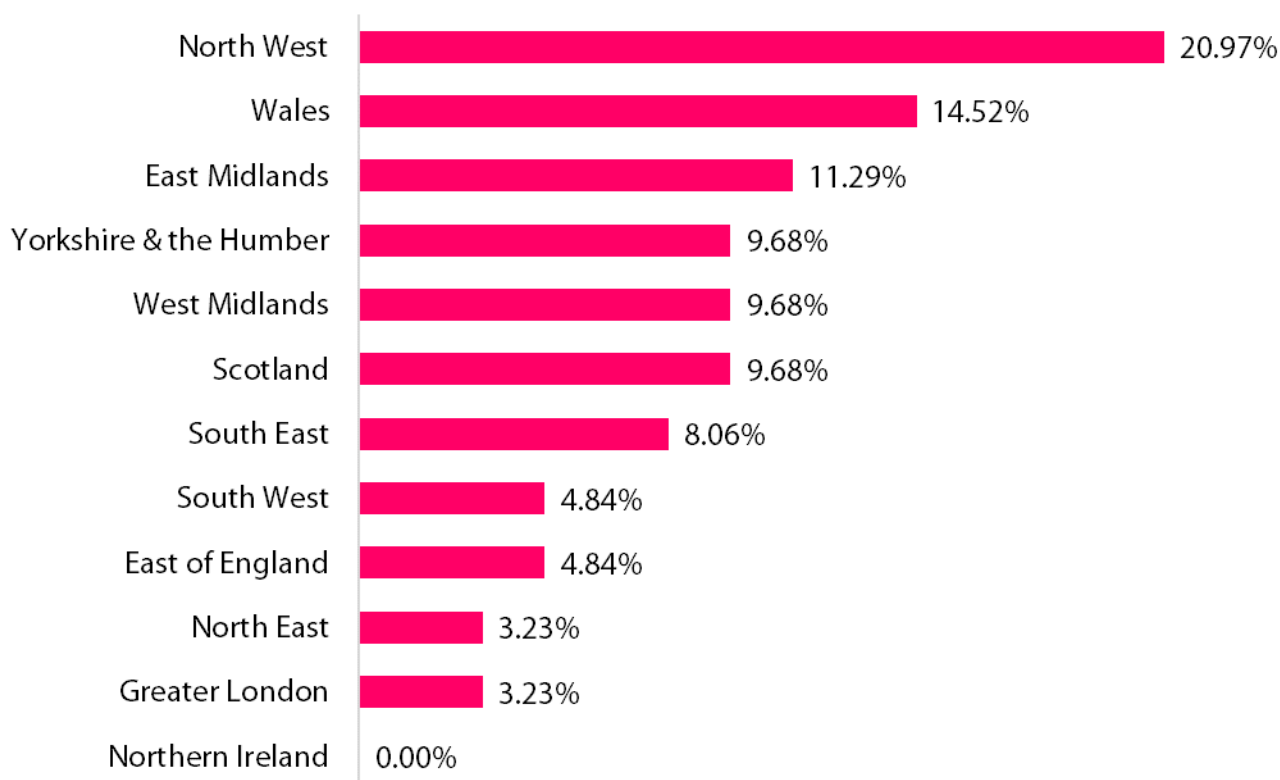
# Introduction

APSE conducted an online survey during June 2019 to August 2019. 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.

There were 62 responses from local authorities to this survey. 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.

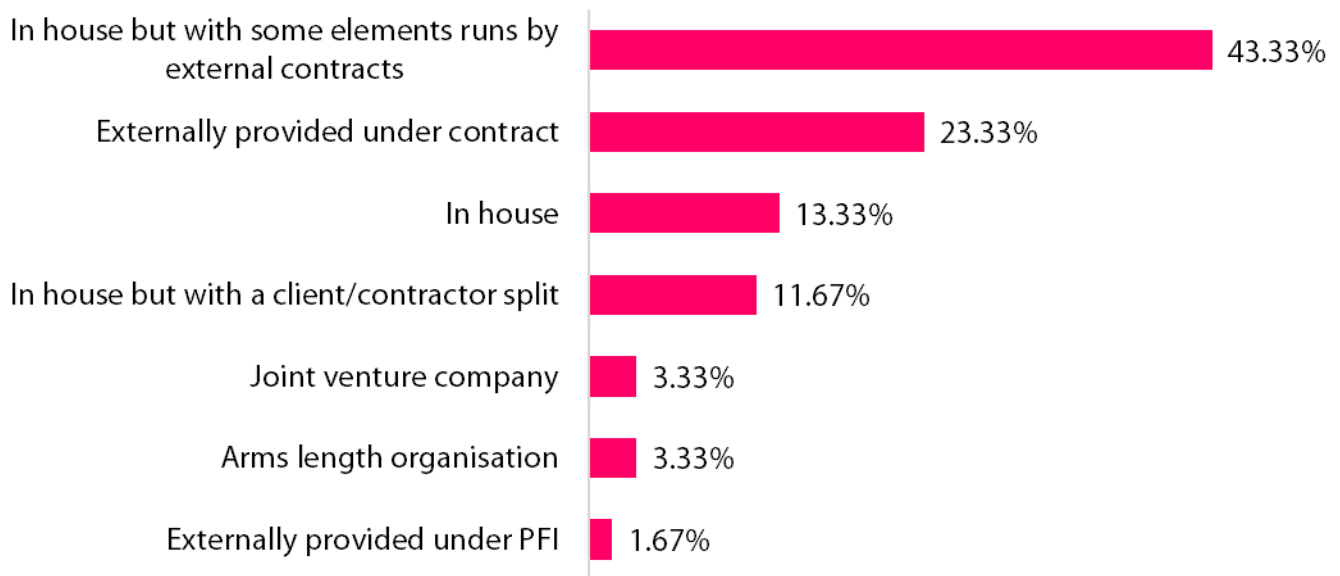
## Where in the UK do you work?



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?



68.33% of highways services are currently delivered in house, 25.00% are delivered externally, 3.33% by a joint venture company and 3.33% by an arm's length organisation.

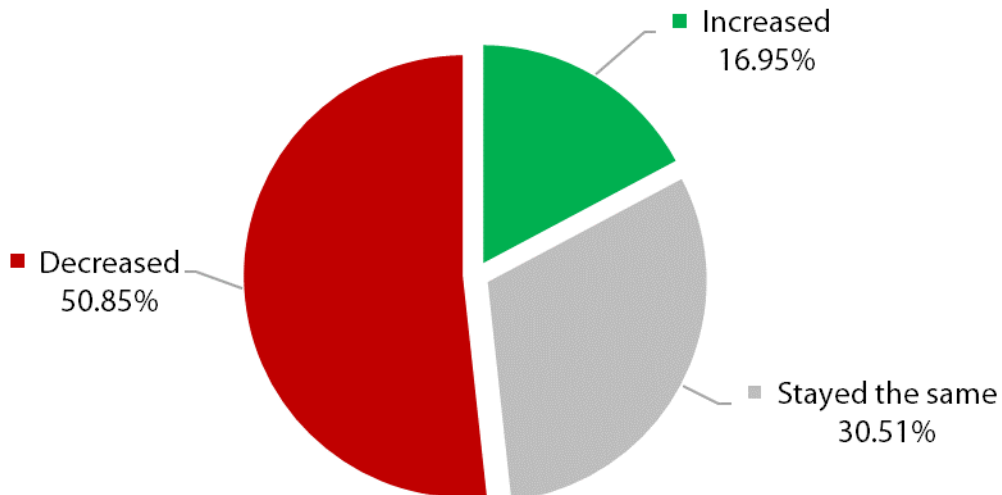
## If the service is currently provided in-house, do you expect the service to remain in-house over the next 12 months?



Only 7.50% of those with in-house services expected their service not to remain in-house over the next 12 months.

# Section 2 – Budget

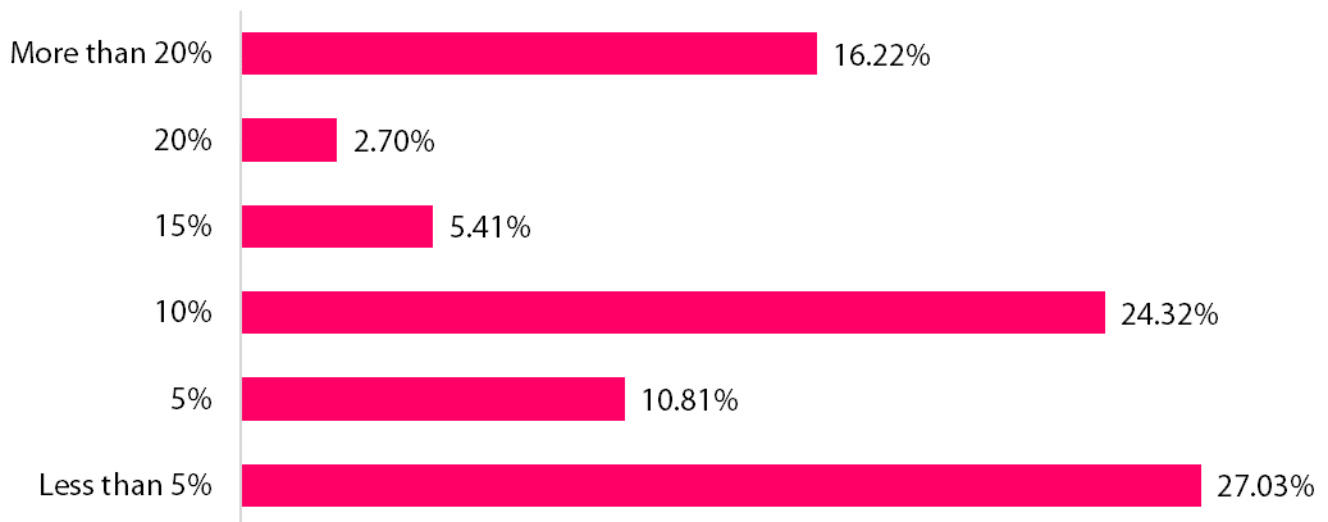
**How has the budget for the highways service changed from the last financial year?**



For the majority of respondents, the budget for the highways service decreased from the last financial year (50.85%); 30.51% said it had stayed the same and 16.95% said it had increased.

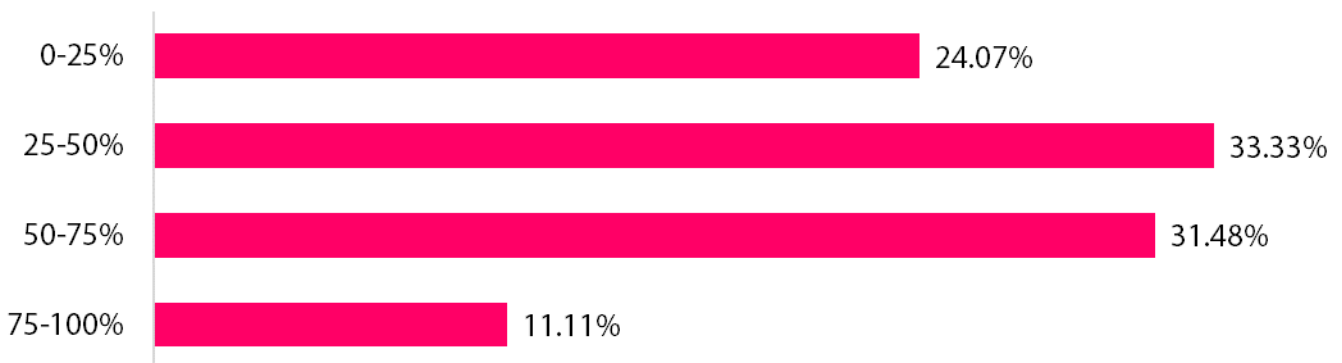
**If your budget has decreased from last year, how much has it decreased by?**





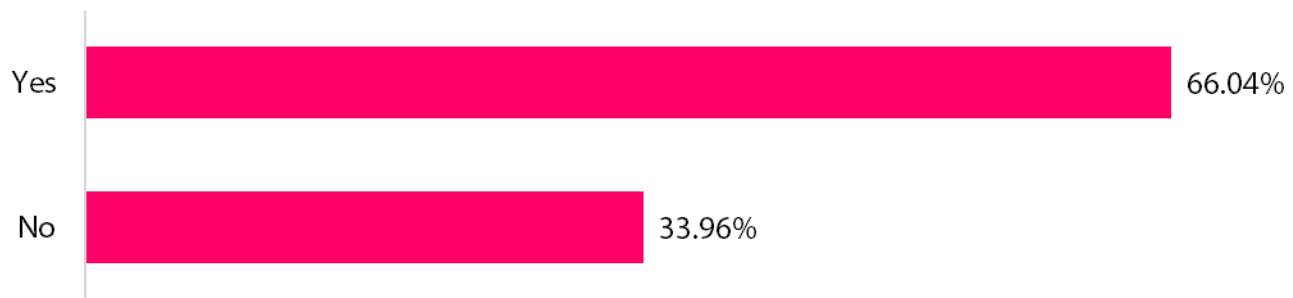
For the respondents who experienced budget decreases, most experienced a decrease of less than 5% (27.03%).

**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 88.88% answering between 0% and 75%.

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

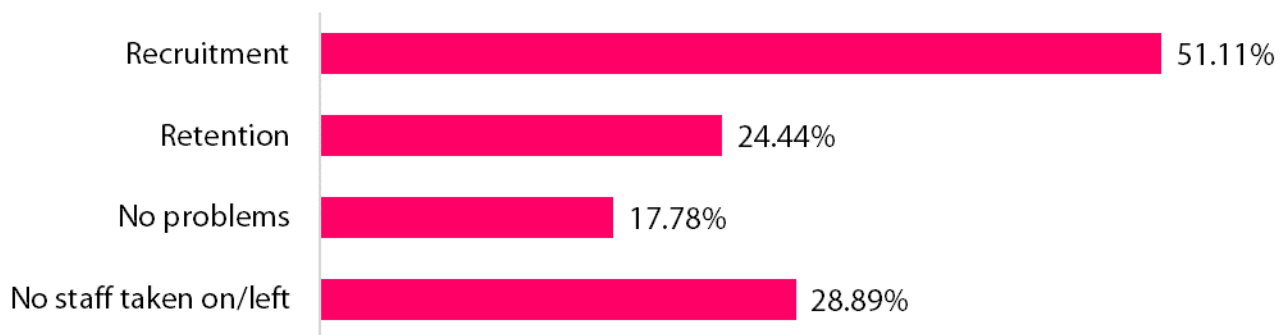


Most of the responding councils (66.04%) do run an apprenticeship scheme for the highways maintenance service.

# Section 3 – Staffing

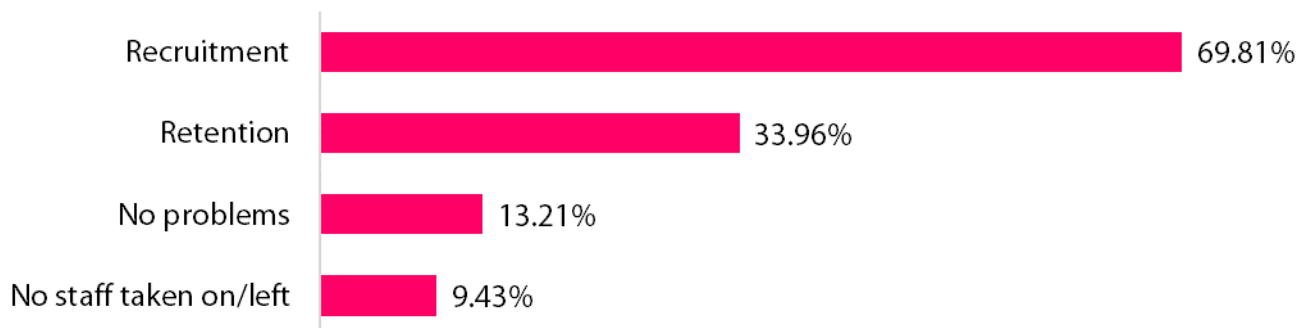
**Where have you had difficulty recruiting or retaining staff (over the past 12 months)?**

## **Operatives**



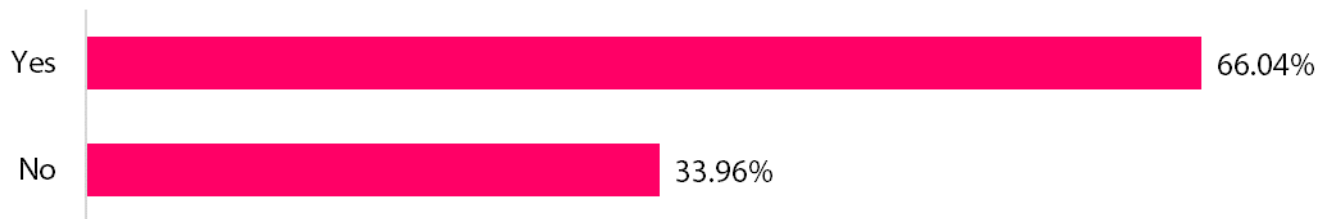
51.11% of respondents have experienced difficulty recruiting operatives, and 24.44% have experienced difficulty retaining them.

## **Technical/managerial staff**



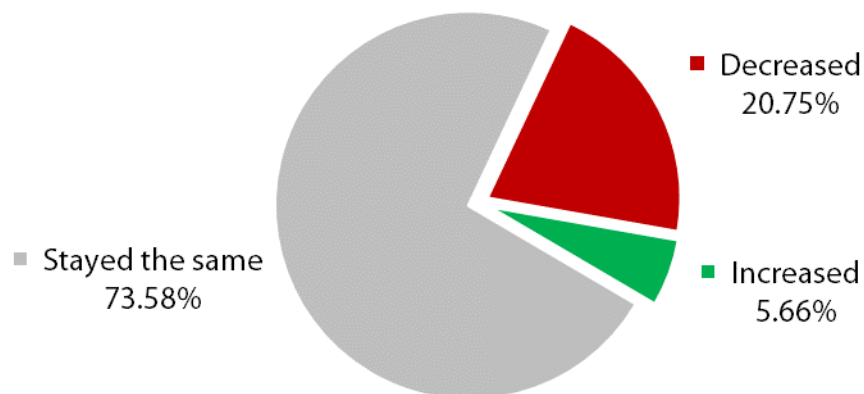
69.81% of respondents had experienced difficult recruiting technical/managerial staff, and 33.96% had issues retaining them.

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



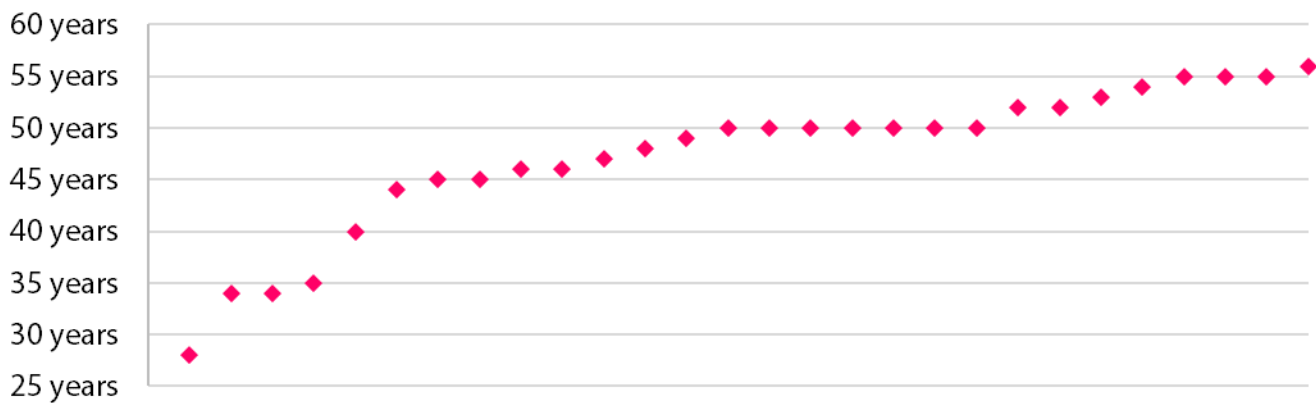
The majority of respondents felt that staff absence levels are at an acceptable level (66.04%).

## 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 (73.58%), 20.75% have decreased and 5.66% have increased.

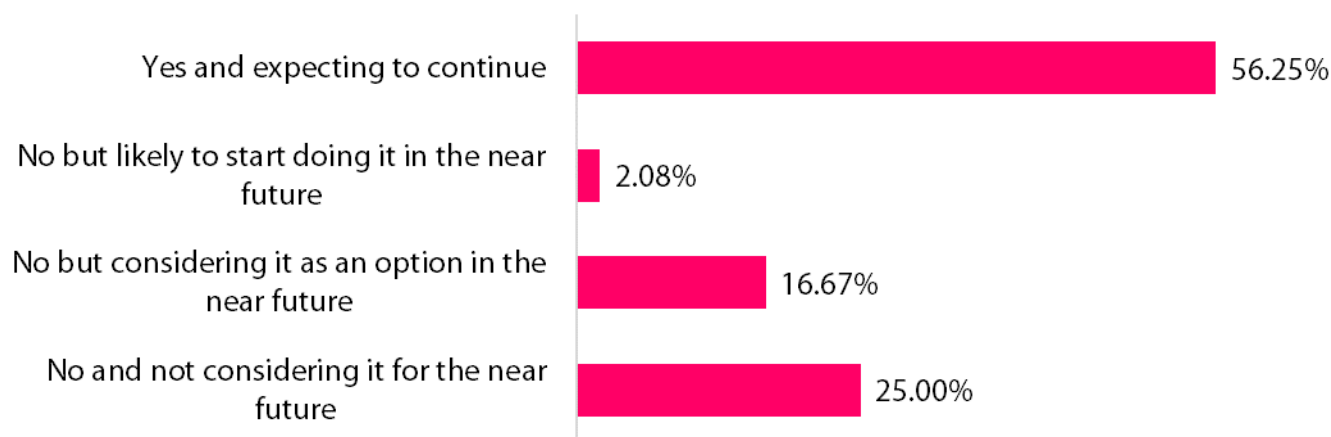
## What is the average age of your highways maintenance operational staff?



The average age of highways maintenance operational staff among respondents was 47, with a lowest of 28 and a highest of 56.

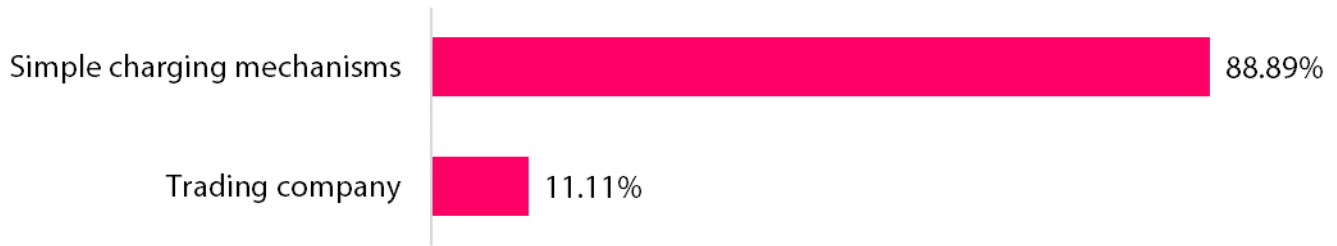
## Section 4 – Service Delivery

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



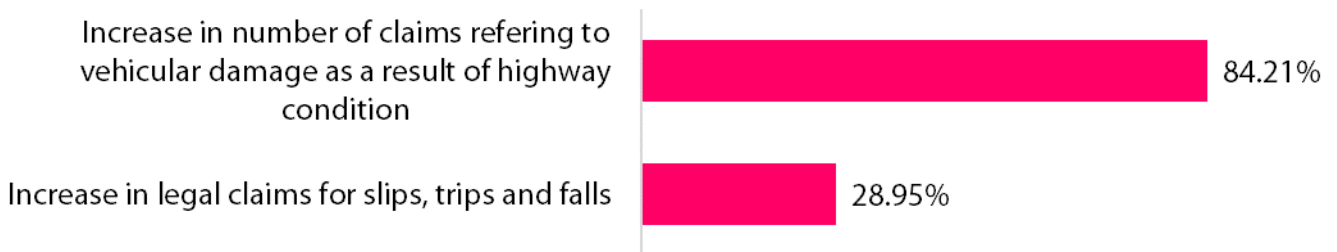
56.25% of those who currently sell their services to organisations external to the council are expecting to continue doing so. Among those who do not currently sell their services, 2.08% are likely to start doing it in the near future, 16.67% are considering it as an option in the near future and 25.00% are not considering it.

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



88.89% of respondents sell their services to organisations external to the council through simple charging mechanisms, and 11.11% use a trading company.

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



84.21% of respondents have seen an increase in the number of claims referring to vehicular damage as a result of the highway condition, and 28.95% 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?

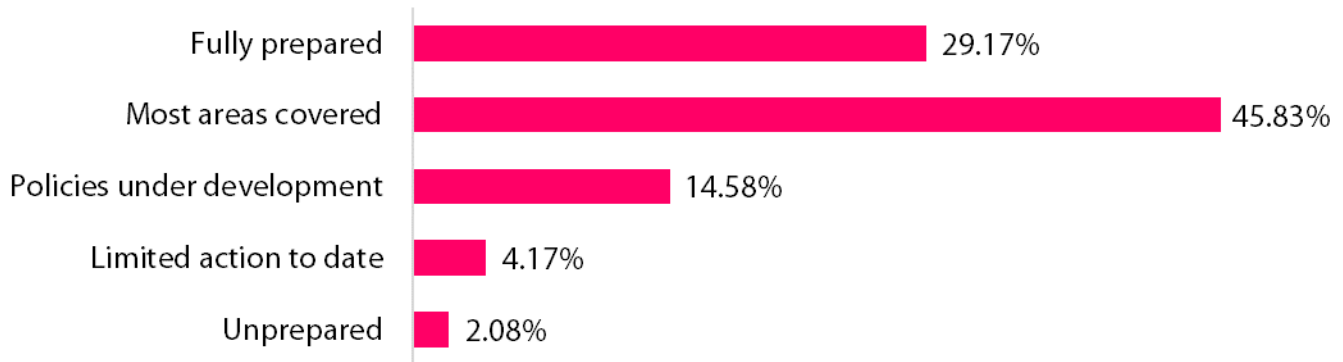
- Commercialisation / External work for other authorities
- Town Centre development
- Technical expertise
- Shared service arrangements / economies of scale
- S38 and S278 schemes
- Street lighting
- Road markings
- Environment and sustainability
- Project management
- Preventative / proactive maintenance
- Reactive maintenance
- Drainage maintenance
- Cycle schemes
- Car parks
- Vehicle crossings
- Footpaths

## 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.

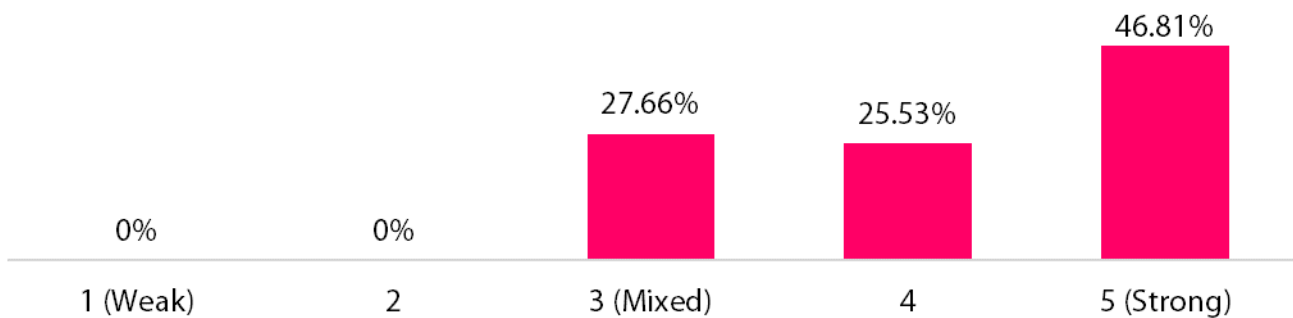
- Carriageway resurfacing
- Footway resurfacing
- Preventative maintenance
- Minor maintenance
- Statutory functions
- Lighting asset repairs

## 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 Highways infrastructure (45.83%). Only 2.08% felt their authority was unprepared.

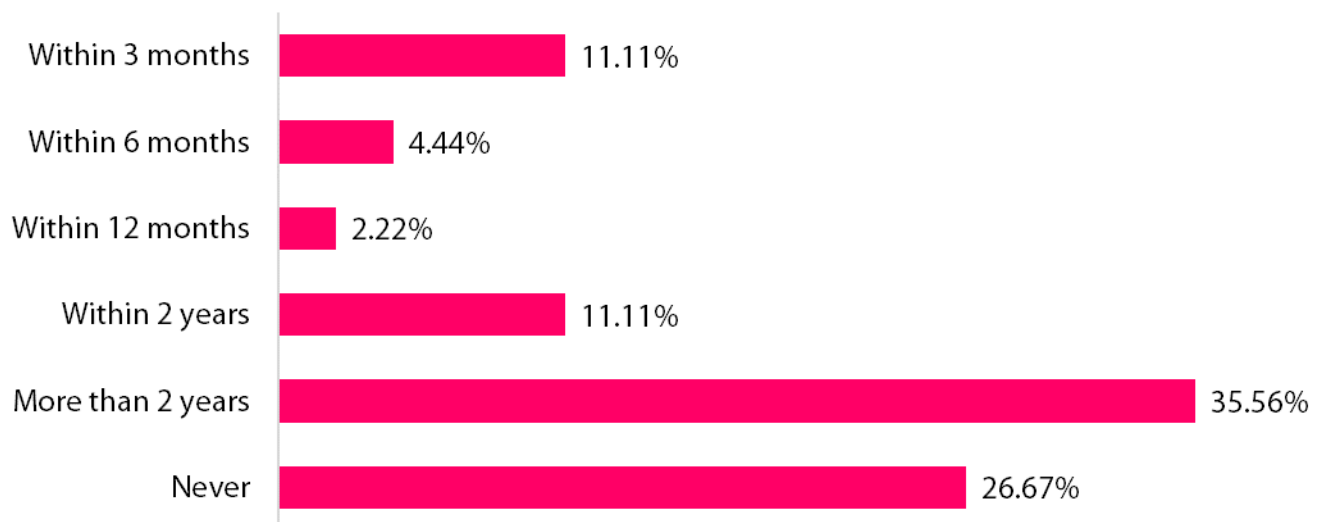
**How strongly do you rank your council’s approach to defending claims?  
(from 1 weak to 5 strong)**



Most respondents ranked their council’s approach to defending claims on a scale of 1-5 as a 5 (strong – 46.81%). 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 be repaired to an acceptable standard in more than 2 years (35.56%), with many also believing they would never be repaired to an acceptable standard (26.67%).

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

Answers to this section included:

- Thermal mapping for winter maintenance efficiencies
- Utilising alternative materials within pavement designs
- Adaptive lighting based on vehicle/pedestrian levels
- Artificial intelligence for processing road condition data
- A polymer modified binder to improve quality of road surfaces
- Use of robots for complex white lining
- Use of drones
- Tar recycling
- An innovative surfacing material which reduces noise on the carriageway

## Local Authority Highways Services

### State of the Market 2019

## 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 and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. 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](mailto: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
- Climate Change and Renewable Energy Network
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing