

Trend Analysis 2021/22

Cemeteries and Crematoria



Briefing 23/09
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Trend Analysis 2021/22

Local authority cemeteries and crematoria

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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.

1 Overview

This briefing provides information on the cost quality and performance of cemeteries and crematoria services for the year 2021/22. Data is collected at year end (21/22) to provide a reflective analysis, and relies upon data submitted by local authorities to the service. The data is then triangulated through discussion groups at the APSE Performance Networks seminar held in December each year.

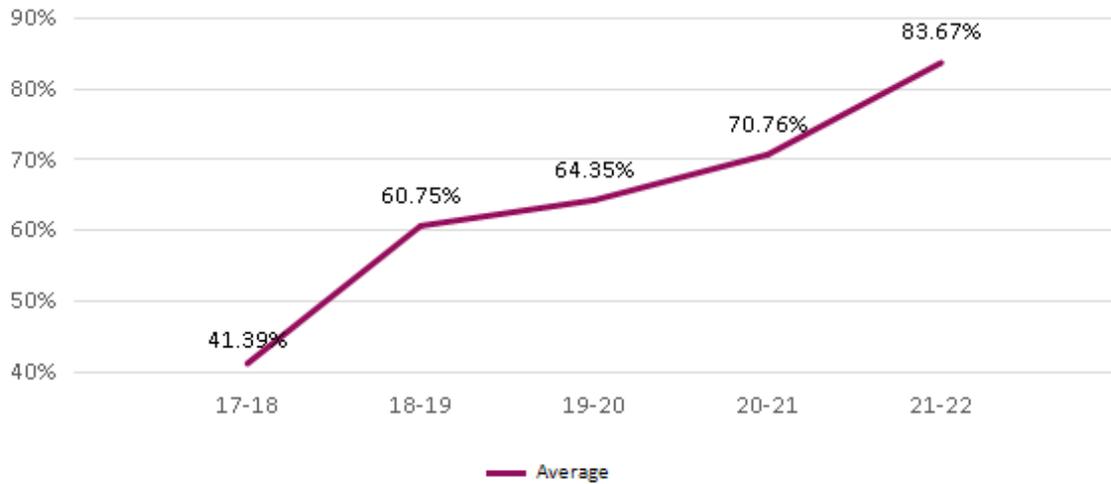
Undoubtedly the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic has been most keenly felt within Bereavement Services. The effects have been felt across all service aspects including: costs, income, performance and services provided. Because of this, the trend analysis has been skewed by these changes and responses to dealing with the pandemic. It is anticipated that many of these changes in data will revert to more normal data lines in the next year. As referenced above this is a reflective analysis of end of year data allowing a long-term assessment of performance in the sector.

Local authority cemetery and crematorium services have coped admirably with these challenges through pragmatic and innovative approaches. This report provides information from authorities who have submitted data returns. It is a summary of the information collected this year and, in conjunction with the information obtained from previous years, indicates how the trends change from year to year. The analysis is based on averages across all family groups and is therefore service-wide. However, because of the exceptional circumstance presented in 2020/21 and to a certain degree continuing through to 21/22, consideration should be given to some of the unexpected results and increases particularly with regards to service costs and quality.

2 Quality

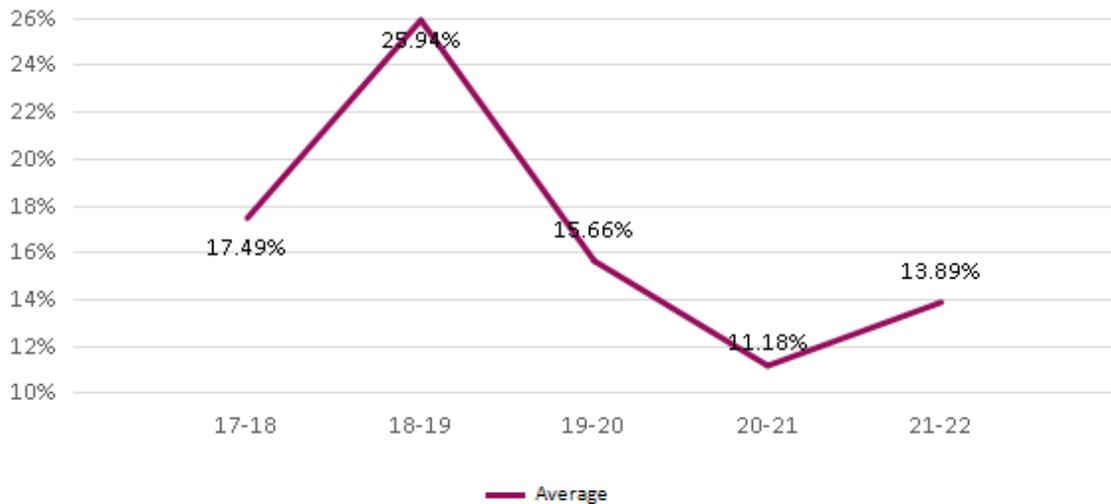
It is apparent that the number of memorials requiring inspection is continuing to rise, whether this is a result of a growing backlog, identifying new memorials as cemetery memorials increase or possibly even a result of new software programmes helping to create better maps of cemetery grounds including the locations of memorials. This is perhaps an area for investigation as most local authorities now carry out a rolling five- year programme of memorial inspections which should theoretically ensure a manageable memorial inspection regime is met each year. However, as stated previously the digitisation of memorial inspections could mean better data on actual numbers rather than estimates which may have been the case in the past when paper-based systems were used.

PI 23b Percentage of memorials requiring inspection per year



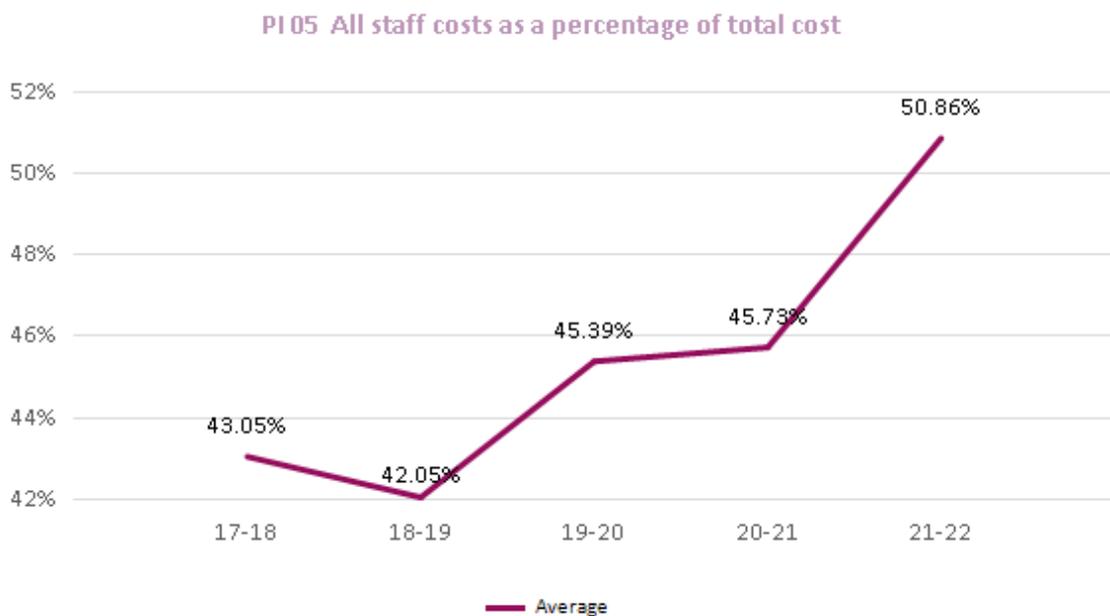
This result shown in the graph below, clearly links to the previous indicator which showed that the number of memorials requiring inspection each year is growing. The fall in the number of memorials being inspected cannot be placed solely at the door of the pandemic, as there has been an ongoing decline in the percentage of memorials being inspected each year. This is an area where further investigation needs to be carried out to ascertain the causes of this decline, although it has to be noted that the decrease in 2020/21 and 2021/22 will certainly have been affected by the increased workload caused by the Coronavirus pandemic. However, as the Coronavirus eased in 2021/22, we can see the number of memorials in this reporting period has risen slightly. APSE piloted a memorial inspection app in 2022 and will be rolling this out during 2023 to assist councils in assessing memorial safety. The app is called MIST (Memorial Inspection Safety Tool). For more information on this please contact performance.networks@apse.org.uk

PI 23a Percentage of memorials inspected per year



3 Cost

A slight increase has occurred in staff costs as a percentage of total costs. This increase is possibly due to additional working hours or extra staff costs to deal with the extra number of burials and cremations caused by the pandemic. Possibly as a result of redeployed staff returning to their original positions additional works are now being taken up by Bereavement Staff as higher levels of burials and cremations may still being experienced due to Coronavirus still being present if not having the same impact it did in 2020/21.



This indicator shows a continuing increase on what had been a falling cost. Again, due to the increased need placed on Bereavement Services during the pandemic it is likely that additional working hours were required caused by the increased deaths which occurred during 2020/21, and clearly again in 2021/22, thus accounting for the increased cost of management and administration as a percentage of total staff costs.

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



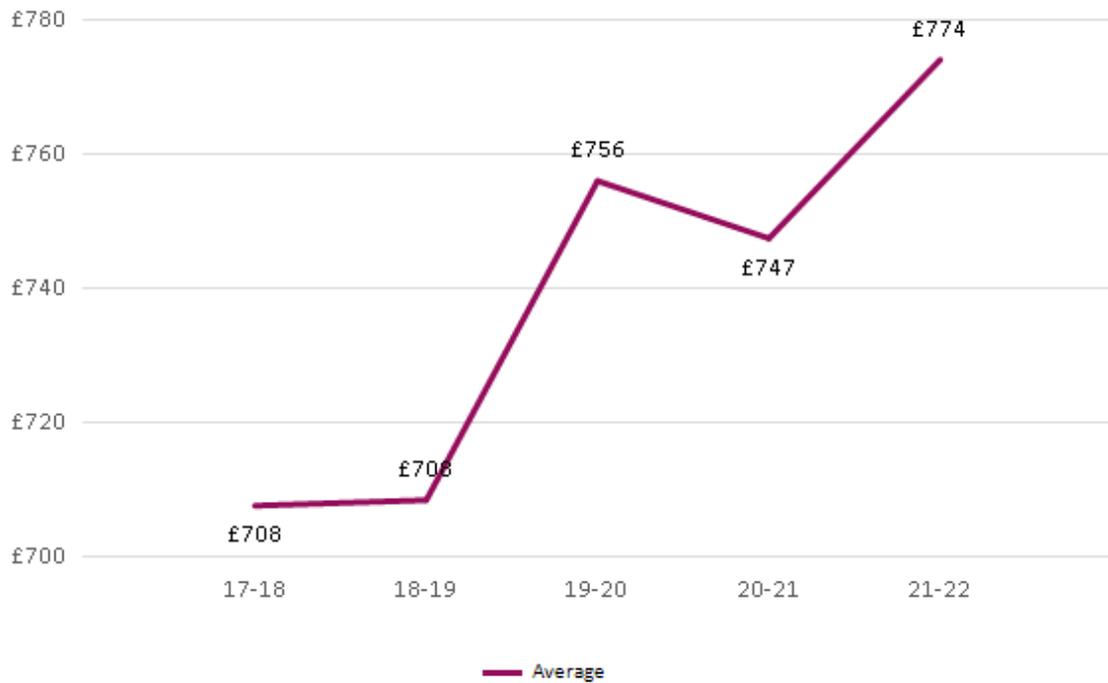
Although on an upward trend, it is not surprising that there has been an increase in income from burials due to the rise in deaths during 2020/21 as a result of the pandemic.

PI 11b Average income from all disposals (burials)



Average income from all disposals (cremations) has risen slightly, which is perhaps not surprising as the easing on mourners attending funerals means those options previously used when numbers were restricted such as direct cremations, which were a much cheaper option, are no longer being used to the same degree and there has been a return to traditional approaches to cremations.

PI 11c Average income from all disposals (cremations)



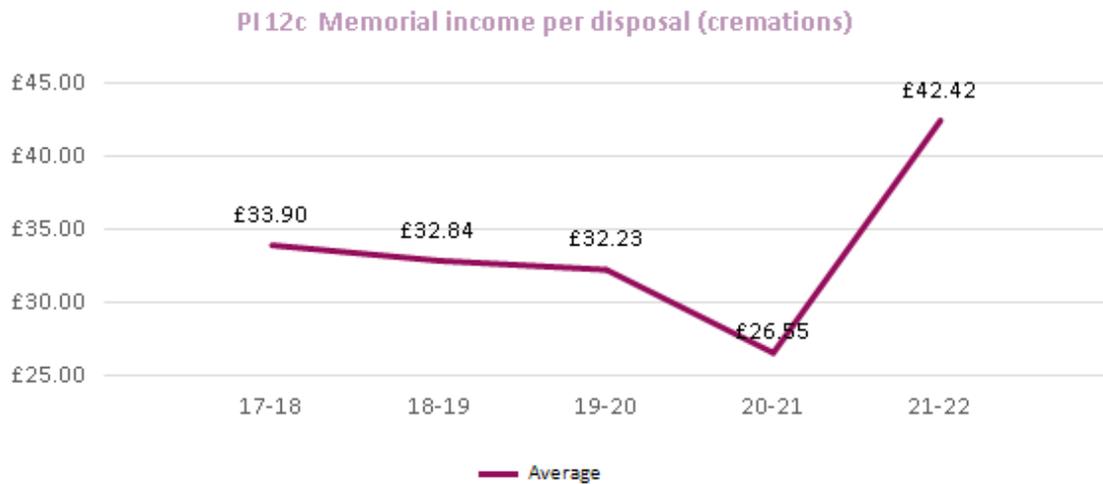
The graph below shows a significant increase in income from memorials compared to 2020/21. This may not come as a surprise, as a result of so many unexpected deaths in 2020/21, families may have struggled to meet costs of funerals and may not have been able to afford to provide memorials at that time, but considered purchasing them in the future. This together with a return to a higher degree of normality in 2021/22 may mean that memorials were purchased both for current disposals as well as some for disposals in 2020/21.

PI 12b Memorial income per disposal (burials)

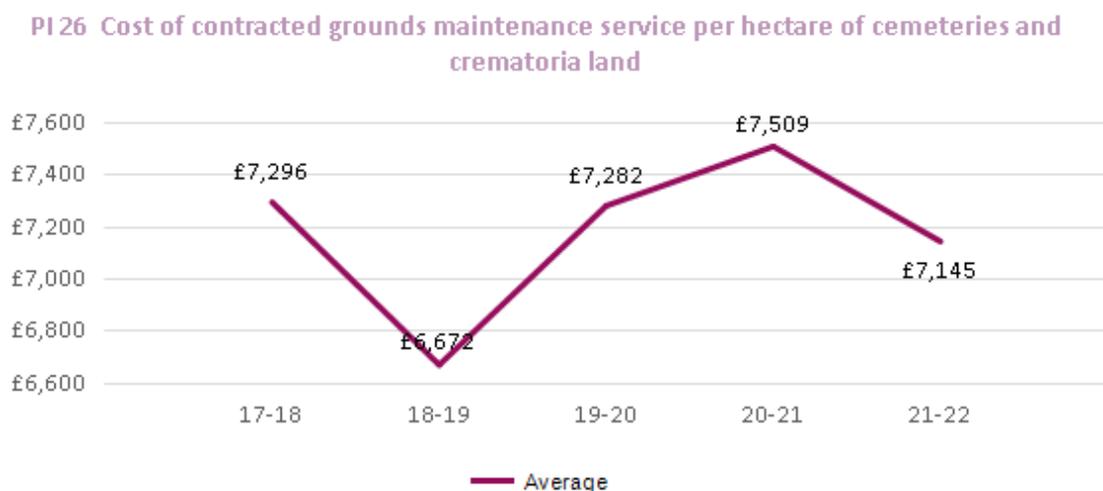


A similar reasoning may be behind the increase in income for memorials relating to cremations. Certainly, interment of ashes and scattering of ashes have seen significant decreases in 2020/21 due to social distancing and some of these services being suspended. It may well be that there will

has been an increase in income in 2021/22 as families have had time to grieve and have now bought memorials.

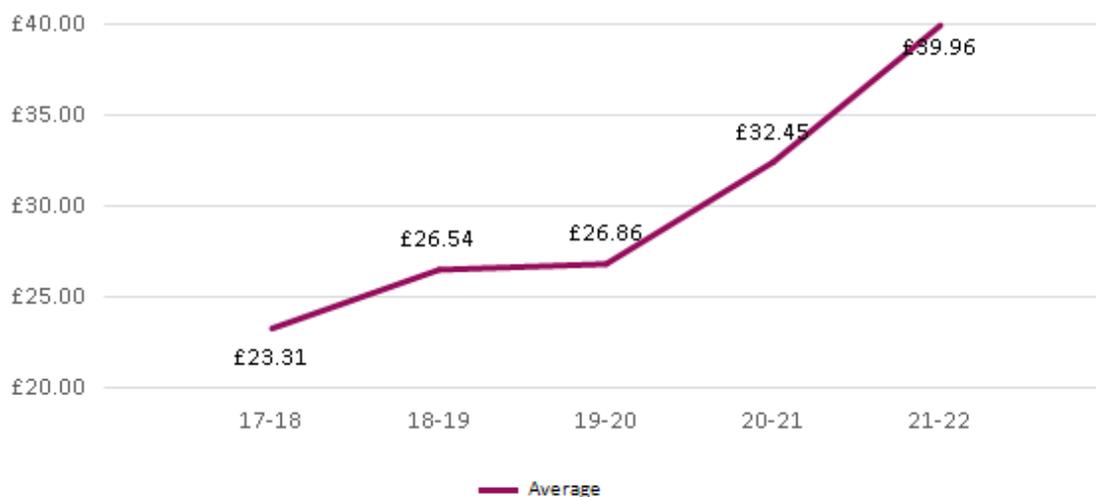


The costs for maintaining cemeteries and crematoria land had seen an upward trend for 2 years, but in 2021/22, there has clearly been a decrease. The decrease over the last twelve months may be a reflection of reducing maintenance levels in cemeteries in a move to naturalise some of their grounds to promote biodiversity, this would include reduced chemical costs also. It will be interesting to see whether this reduction in costs continues, but from an APSE survey which looked at the amount of cemetery land being managed in this way further reductions in maintenance costs may not be unexpected. It should be noted that naturalising cemetery grounds does not mean abandonment, but rather a different approach to the way land is maintained, one in which making space for nature is placed at the forefront of grounds maintenance practices.



Cremator maintenance costs have been increasing over the past three years and in 2021/2022 we see this trend continuing. What is noticeable is the large increase which have occurred in 2020/21 and again in 2021/22, which is 49% over 2019/20 costs. This is an area where further investigation is required, but with increasing energy costs perhaps further significant increase can be expected.

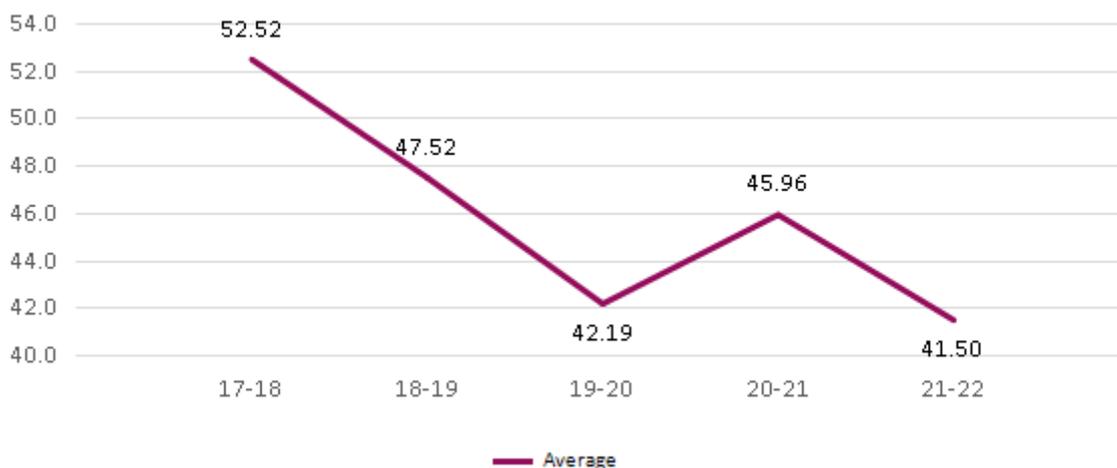
PI 32 Cremator maintenance costs per cremation



4 Productivity

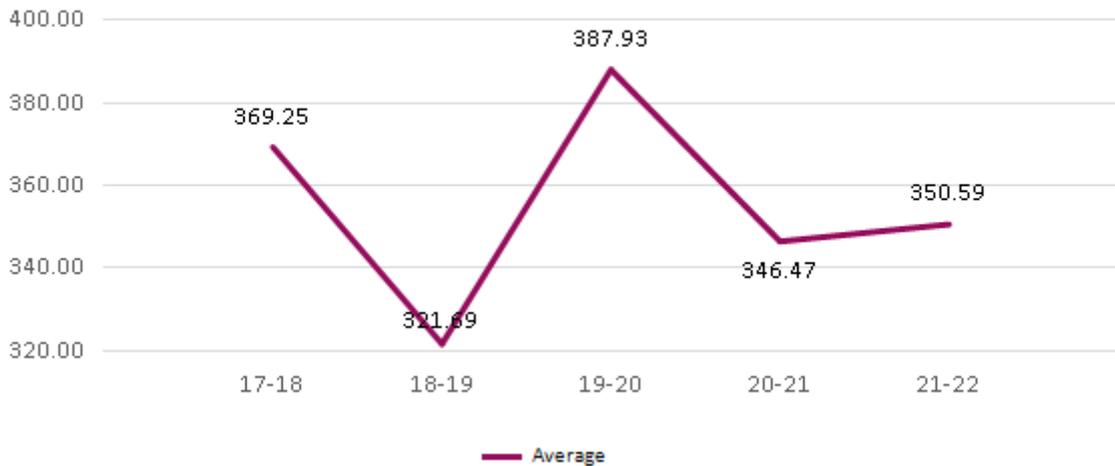
As expected there has been a fall in the number of burials per FTE in 2021/22 as opposed to the higher number of burials per FTE caused by the pandemic. Burial numbers per FTE have now returned to 2019/20 figures.

PI 31a Number of burials per FTE (all staff)



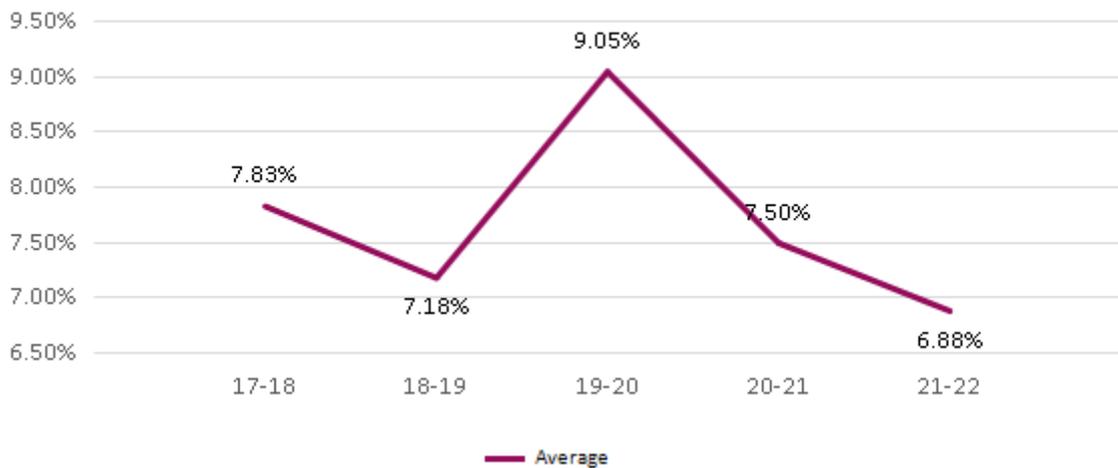
Cremations per FTE have risen slightly this year compared to 2020-21 but are still above 2018-19 levels. This slight rise is likely to be a result of more staff being employed in early 2021 when the pandemic was still very active and therefore numbers of deaths were still higher than would be expected.

PI 31b Number of cremations per FTE (all staff)

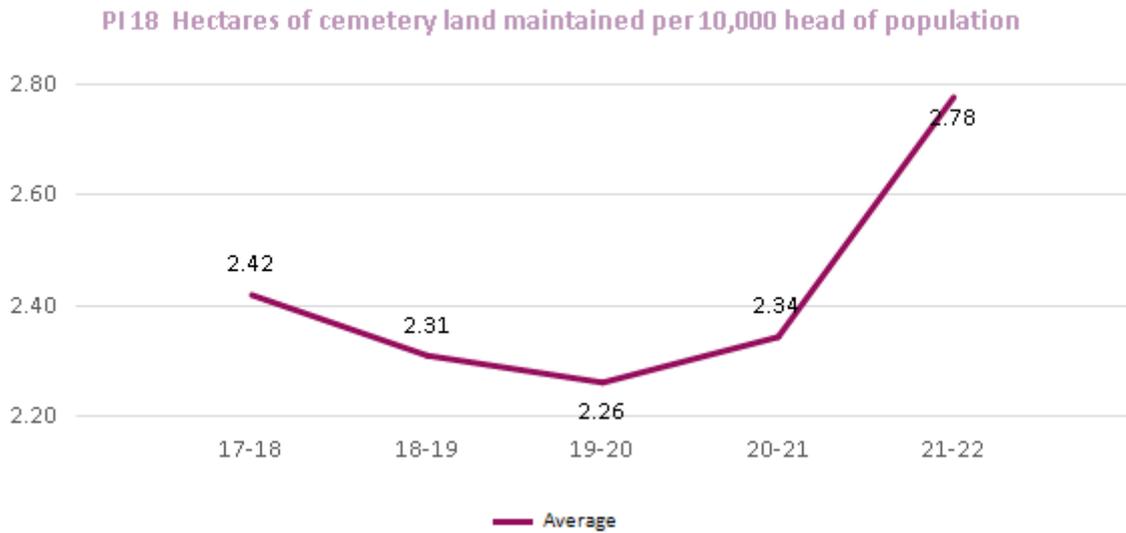


It is likely that because of the numbers of cremations required during 2021/22 there has been less need to hold bodies over as there would be larger numbers requiring cremation thus ensuring the efficiency of cremators during a full working day.

PI 01d Percentage of bodies held over for cremation on a following day



Due to the ongoing need for new burial sites caused by many of the older Victorian and early 20th century sites now being at capacity, then there is a need to develop new sites and these are adding to areas requiring maintaining. Despite the seemingly sharp rise in the graph below, this increase is relatively small, as the population now being served by these areas is also increasing. It is also possible that the increase in deaths caused by the pandemic has increased the amount of cemetery land being brought into use which was previously not maintained, but this may be a more localised issue.



5 APSE comment

It is clear that the findings of the trend analysis have still been affected by the impacts of the pandemic and as such some of the figures and performance levels have been affected either negatively or positively and care needs to be taken when reading this briefing note. It is likely that it will take another twelve months before a more stable picture can be ascertained.

Wayne Priestley
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