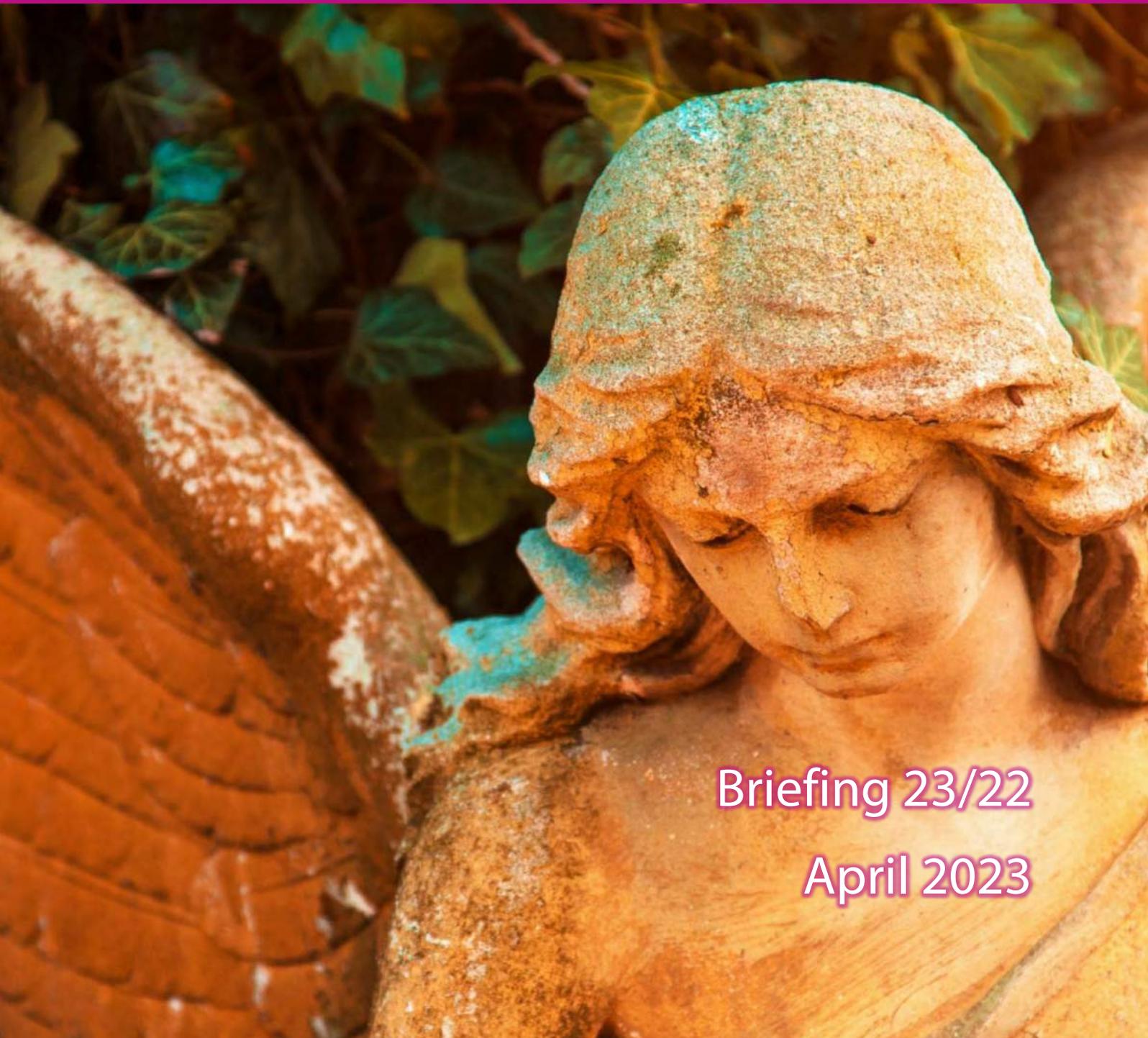


Local Authority State of the Market 2023

Cemeteries and Crematoria



Briefing 23/22

April 2023

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Local Authority State of the Market 2023

Cemeteries and Crematoria

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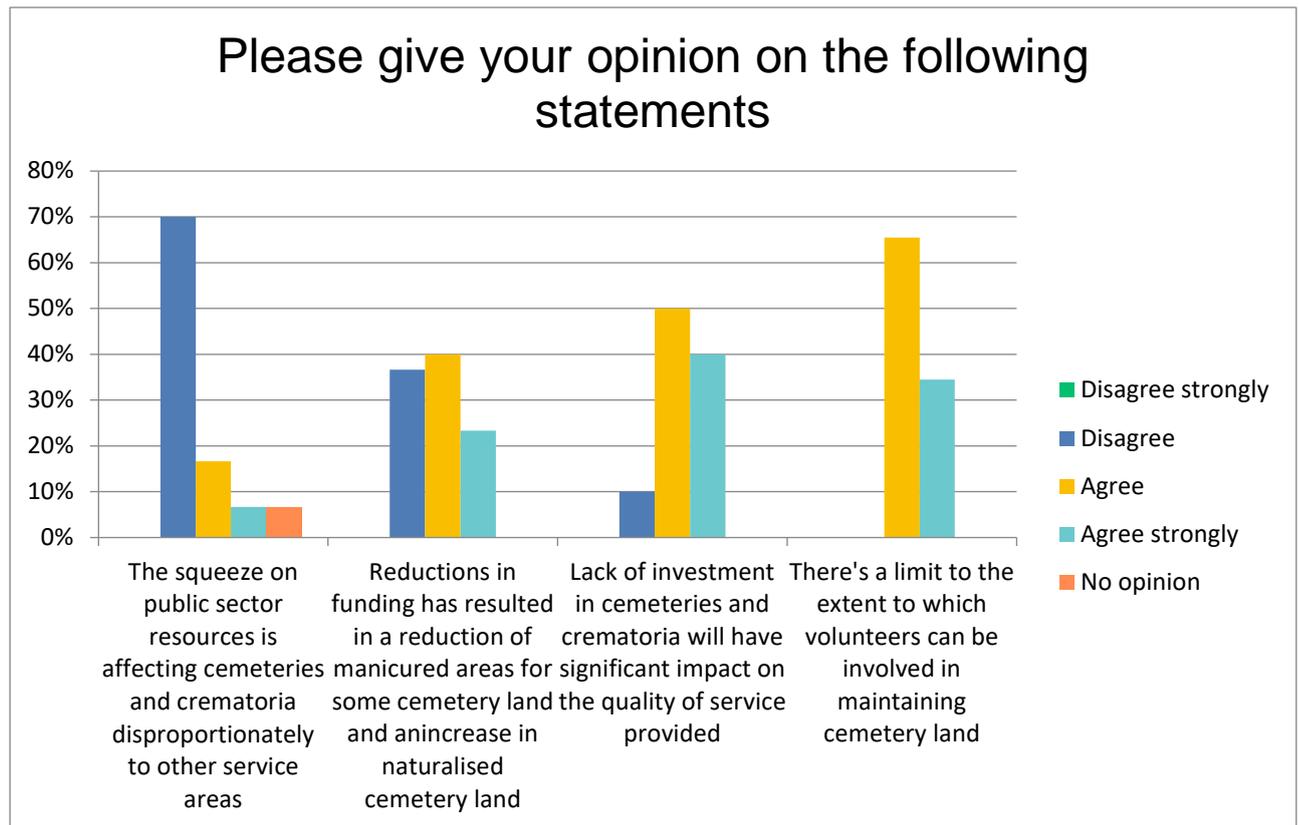
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APSE conducted an online survey from February 2023 to April 2023. The questions contained within the survey have been formulated to allow future trend comparisons to be made on the key issues affecting Cemetery and Crematoria services. The questions have been written in co-operation with local authority bereavement services managers.

This report identifies the key findings of the survey.

Survey Results

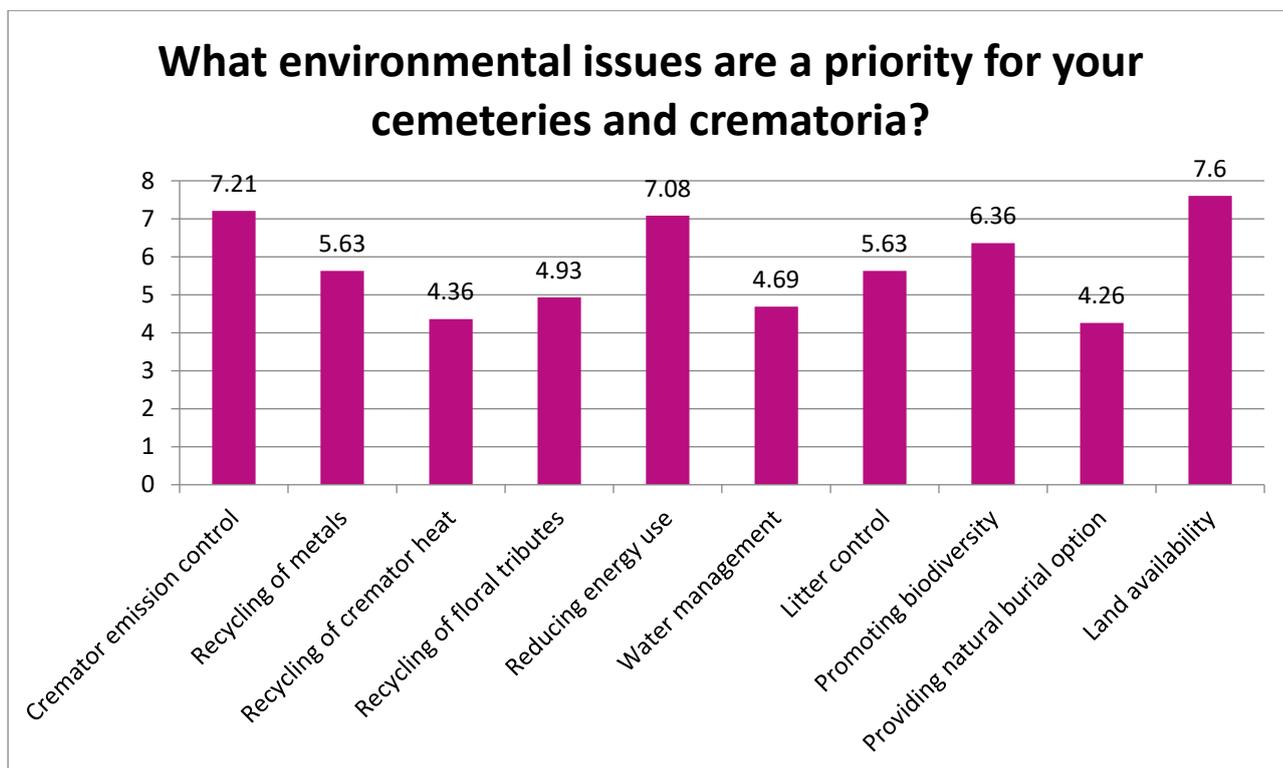
1 Your opinions



From the opinions received, only 24% felt that bereavement services have had disproportionate funding cuts compared to other services, which is a fall of 16% on 2022 when 40% felt this was the case. This may reflect some marginal improvements in spending allocations to local authorities albeit budget pressures remain across most services. However, despite this understanding, a high proportion of respondents at 90%, feel that the lack of investment in cemeteries and crematoria will impact on the quality of future service delivery. To some extent, this concern over the decline in service quality, is reflected in the fact 63% of respondents have experienced reductions in the manicured quality of their grounds.

Interestingly with regards to the use of volunteers, in 2022, 92% felt that there was a limit to involving them in grounds maintenance, in 2023 this has risen to 99%. Whilst there is a strong belief that volunteers do have their limitations, they are seen as bringing added value to services rather than being able to carry out core service work and importantly, their ability to bring in extra funding is widely recognised.

2 Environmental issues



Regarding key environmental priorities, since last year there has been some change. The importance of land availability is now at the top of the ten environmental priorities in 2023. This may be partly linked to land being used more quickly through the impacts of COVID, but also increasingly, new housing targets are resulting in any available land being at a premium. Growing environmental requirements mean that controlling cremator emissions are very high on Bereavement Managers agendas. The increase in energy prices has led to the need to control and where possible reduce energy use.

The importance of managing cemetery land for promoting biodiversity, is still an important consideration remaining as being the fourth highest environmental priority.

The visual appearance of cemetery grounds is also well represented, with litter control again highlighted.

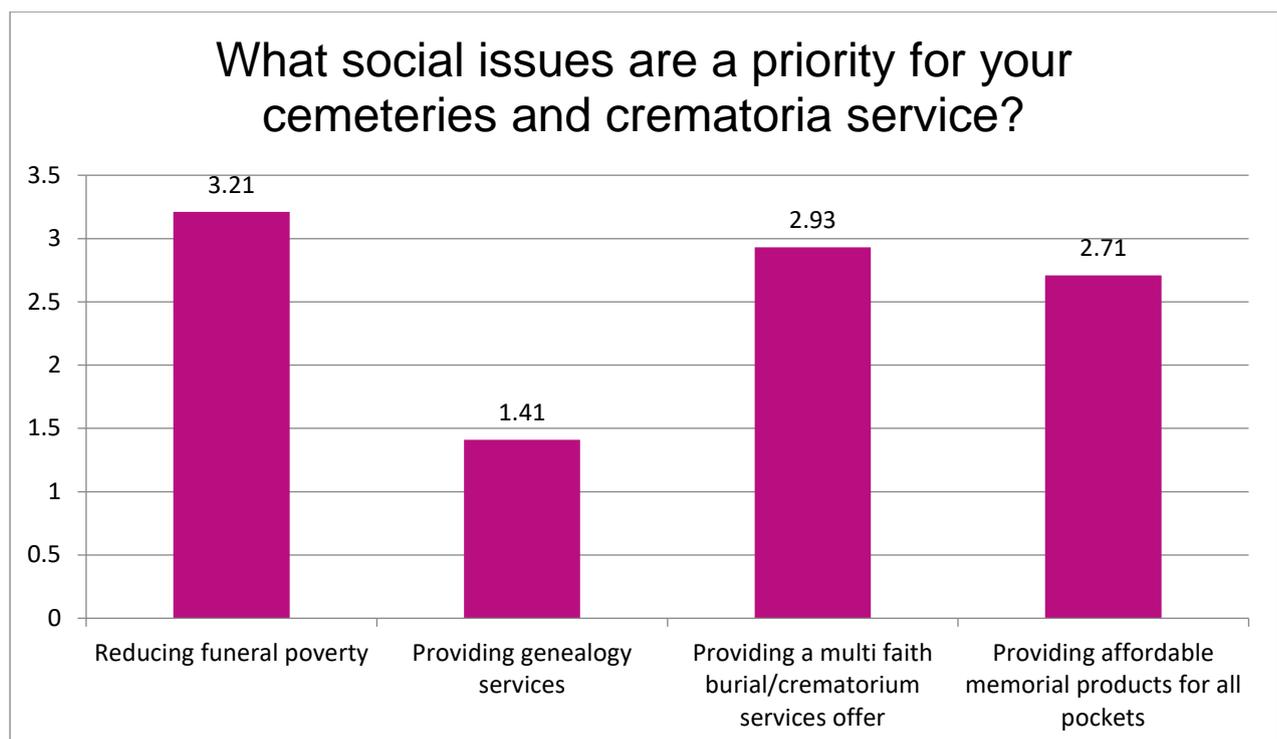
It is therefore clear from these results that cemetery and crematoria managers are building environmental considerations into their service delivery as much as financial and social aspects.

Because of the nature of the service and its strong connection with the physical environment, there are a wide variety of environmental issues which can impact on the service.

Bereavement Managers have highlighted the following as areas of concern:

- Tree management – including safety and aesthetic maintenance requirements.
- Re-use of soil from graves.
- Scottish Environmental Protection Agency guidelines in relation to burial ground, including ground water pollution.
- The lack of space for new burial grounds caused by both land availability, increasing population pressures and the competing demands for local housing construction.
- The increased need for cutting grass due to a warmer wetter climate and increases in rainfall due to changes in climate have been causing issues for re-opening graves in some areas due to waterlogging.
- Reducing the use of chemicals whilst actively looking for alternatives.
- Weed and Moss control.
- Noise pollution from surrounding industries which may be a localised issue but may also reflect the need to consider the impact of land use near to cemeteries.
- Increased rainfall which may be attributed to climate change causing increased incidents of waterlogging.
- Mourners planting non-native invasive plant species in naturalised burial areas.
- The increased need for re-instatement after extreme weather events
- Increased requests for carbon neutral funerals.
- The Impact of badger activity on cemetery grounds.
- Alternatives to the traditional gas-powered cremator e.g., electric cremators, or water cremation.
- A move towards using more electric vehicles and battery powered tools rather than the usual petrol/diesel powered ones.

3 Social issues



Regarding social priorities there has been little change on 2022 results. It is apparent that there is still a growing need to design service provision to meet the growing demand for affordable funerals which clearly is the key social issue. This may have a financial impact on Bereavement Services from a cost perspective and this is perhaps trying to be addressed through the adoption of greater levels of income generation via the sale of genealogy services and memorialisation products highlighted in the chart above. However, the importance of providing multi-faith burials and cremations caused by the UK population becoming more ethnically diverse has now risen considerably on respondents' agendas.

Ensuring residents are dealt with in a sympathetic manner is key to quality service delivery, and as such Bereavement Managers must consider ways in which to help vulnerable families at their time of loss.

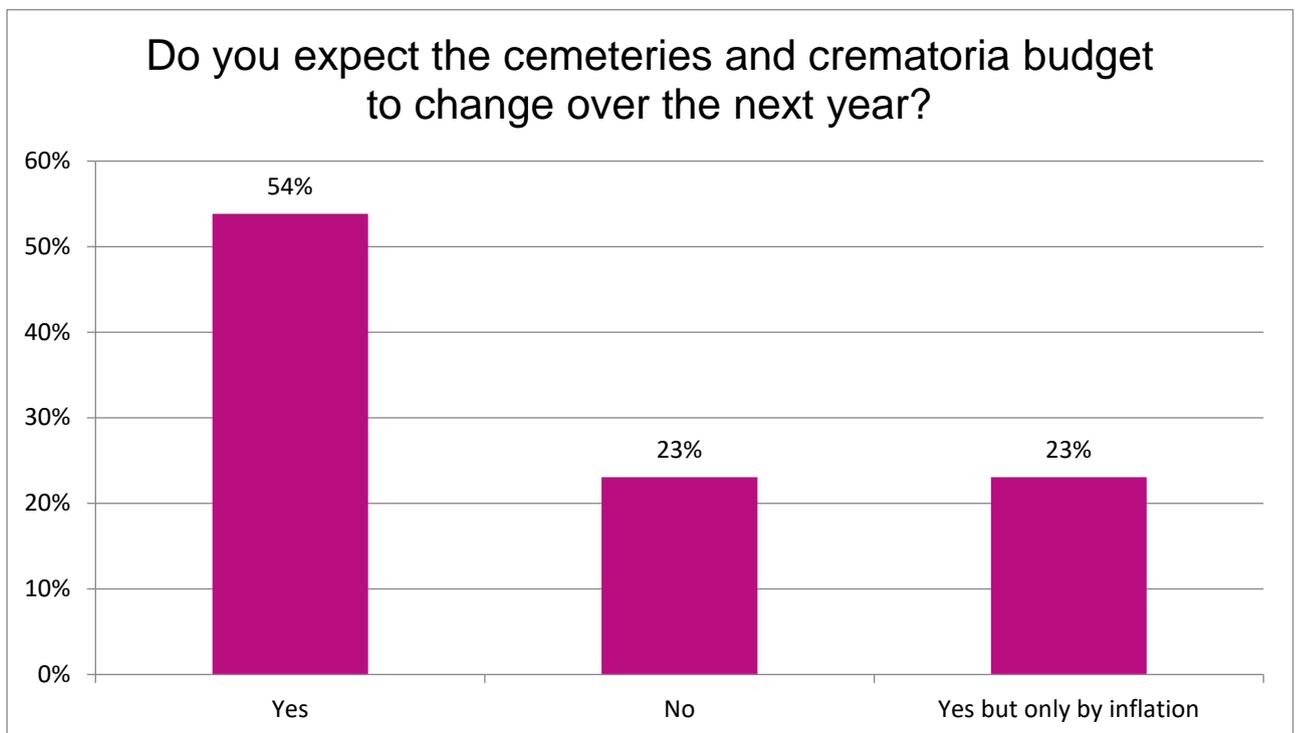
Some of the survey responses received over the past few years have highlighted the following:

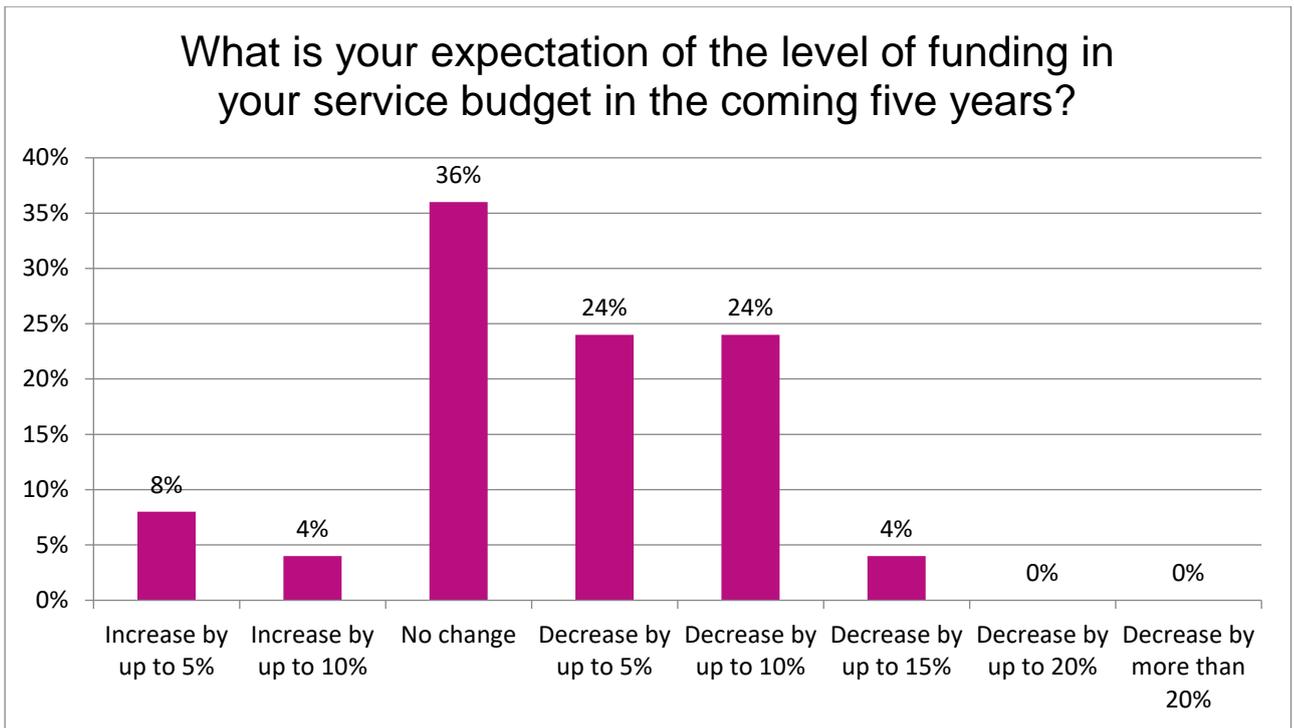
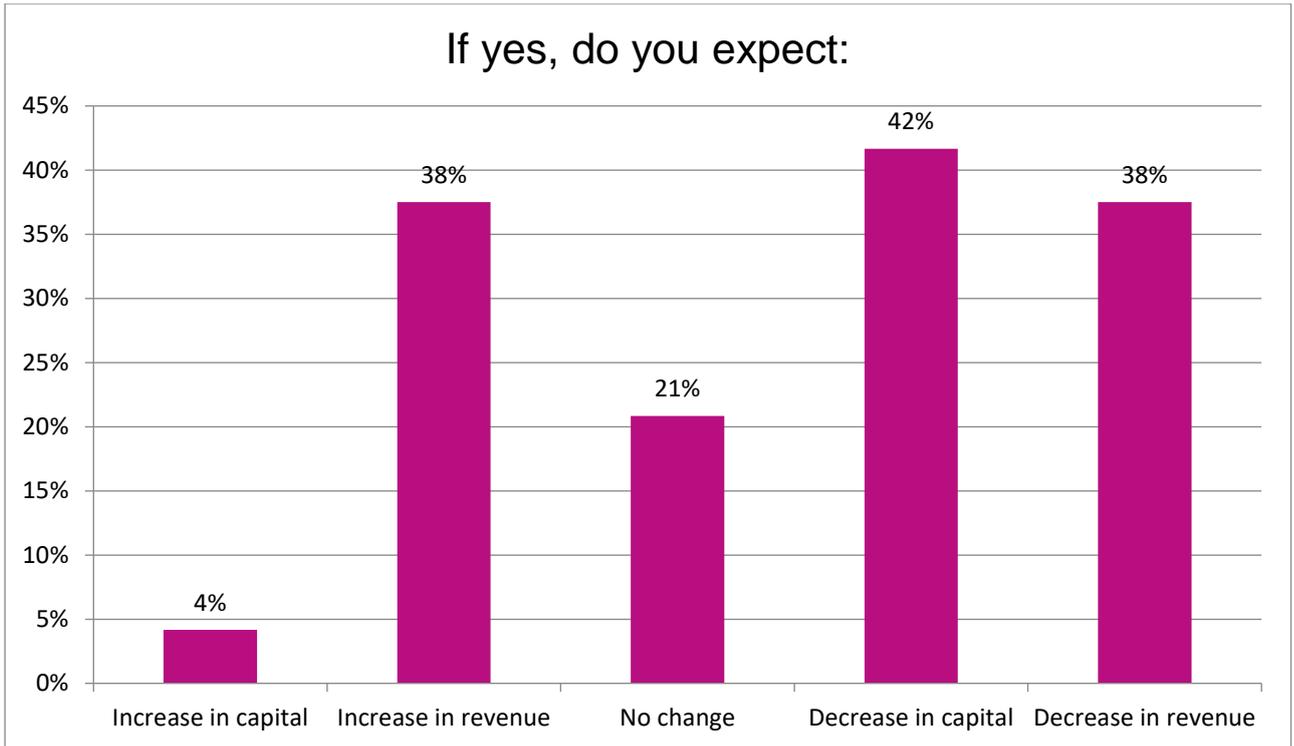
- The need to ensure the availability of local cemeteries to remove the need to travel outside the area to visit departed family members.
- The need to provide free child funerals.
- Providing more celebratory services with more personal content.
- Coping with the responsibility for providing the increasing number of Public Health Services both where the deceased has no family, but increasingly where a family does exist but are unwilling or unable to take on the funeral costs.
- Working with NHS colleagues to deliver best quality service for foetal and babies funerals.
- Dealing with changing demographics and cultural needs, some of which are proving challenging as they are outside cemetery regulations and guidance.
- Meeting the needs of low-income sections of the community.
- Dealing with the demands on Bereavement Services to provide revenue earnings for local authorities, which is not always reinvested in the service. There was a view that if fee increases were kept to what was necessary for the service, then it would ease the financial strain on bereaved families.
- Unauthorised memorials are growingly becoming problematic, as are the different styles/suitability of memorials being requested/installed.
- Anti-social behaviour appears to be increasing.
- Bereaved reporting government-funded funeral grants are insufficient and overly complicated.
- Transfer of ownership of exclusive rights of burial are causing problems for some.
- Increasing number of requests for information on DIY funerals.
- Unauthorised burial of ashes in cemetery grounds.
- Need to improve information about funeral options, so that the bereaved can make more informed choices.
- The need to improve accessibility around cemeteries, particularly memorial gardens.

4 Budgetary matters

From the following three charts, over half of the respondents are expecting changes in budgets over the next 5 years, however, there does not appear to be any great threats to the long-term viability of service provision with a rough balance between those expecting increases and those expecting some level of decrease.

However as opposed to last year the third chart does show a decrease in those who are expecting increases 24% in 2022 as opposed to only 12% in 2023. Similarly there is an increase in those expecting decreases to budgets, 27% were expecting decreases in 2022 as opposed to 52% in 2023. This change may reflect worries, and extra costs anticipated by the pandemic now subsiding, and any proposed increases in budgets identified in 2022, now being deemed unnecessary or reduced.





5 Service efficiencies

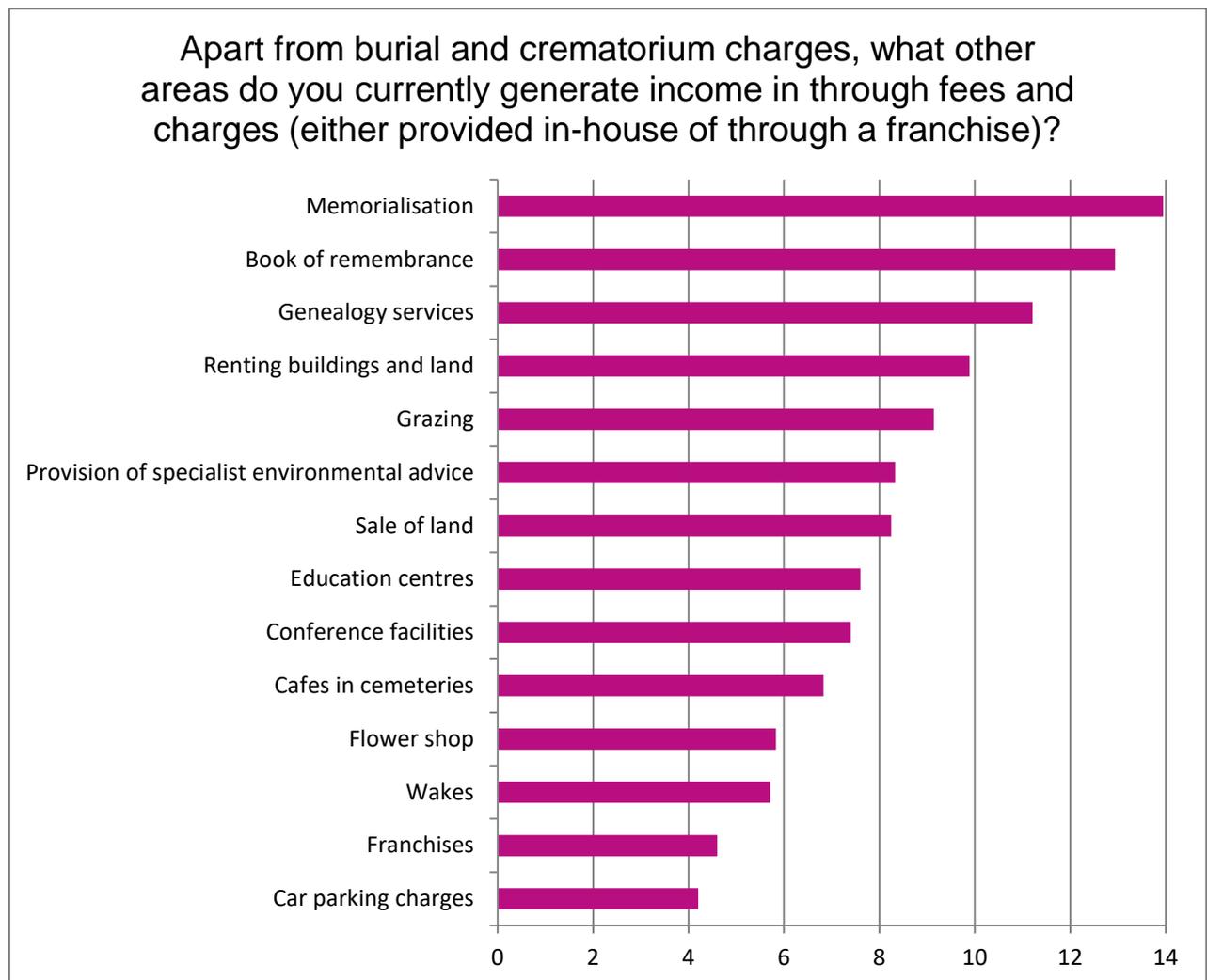
We asked our members how they expect to achieve any efficiencies required (e.g. increased income levels/introducing new services offers)?

- As with the 2022 results, improving service efficiency is an area where there is a great deal of focus. With budgets across many local authority services being reduced the need to income generate to plug these funding gaps is paramount. From collating the responses received over the past five years, it is evident there is no shortage of ideas being considered, and implemented, which are helping address these problems.
- Increase existing fees and charges.
- Charging differential rates e.g., for non-residents
- Additional fee for pre-purchase
- Charge for products previously free
- Introducing new and increased memorial offer and memorial mason services.
- Re-engineering of management of burial and grounds maintenance
- Reviewing and altering staffing levels
- Replacing existing cremators to improve efficiencies and bring in an additional income through more efficient usage levels.
- Utilising unused cemetery land to develop burial vaults, sarcophagi, and mausoleum plots. This has led to increased revenue, additional burial provision and greater choice for local families.
- Creation of new woodland burial service and reviewing fees and charges by benchmarking the market.
- Service review, rationalisation, growth, and diversification.
- Letting-out vacant cemetery buildings
- Full cost recovery dependent upon political agreement.
- Reducing ground maintenance
- Utilisation/consultation with local friends' groups
- Better utilisation of current facilities, including expanding into the undertaker / funeral Director side.
- Introduction of pet cemetery
- Attempt to increase income levels through the provision of new services such as Municipal Funeral Service.
- Introduction of a memorial service, headstones etc. and created several new memorials/graves combined.
- Introducing new service with additional fees (e.g., Saturday and weekend service provision).
- Introduction of digital solutions to manage workflow, the staff resource can then be utilised to provide the new services and ancillary items.
- Use of heat exchange to reduce heating/energy bills.
- Parks Services are taking the biggest hit to reduce pressure on the cemeteries section.
- Using the ceremony rooms for other things other than funerals (outside funeral service times).

- Seven-day working.
- Offering pre-purchasing of burial plots.
- Greater market-testing of suppliers rather than using traditional suppliers.
- Decreasing utility costs via green initiatives such as solar panels.
- Rainwater collection and LED lighting in chapels.
- Application for grants to improve cemetery buildings of historical importance.
- Offer more options such as reduced rates for funerals taking place on early mornings and late evenings.
- Reduce grounds maintenance costs by carrying out less grass cutting and creating more wildflower areas.
- Providing cremations for neighbouring authorities.

6 Income generation

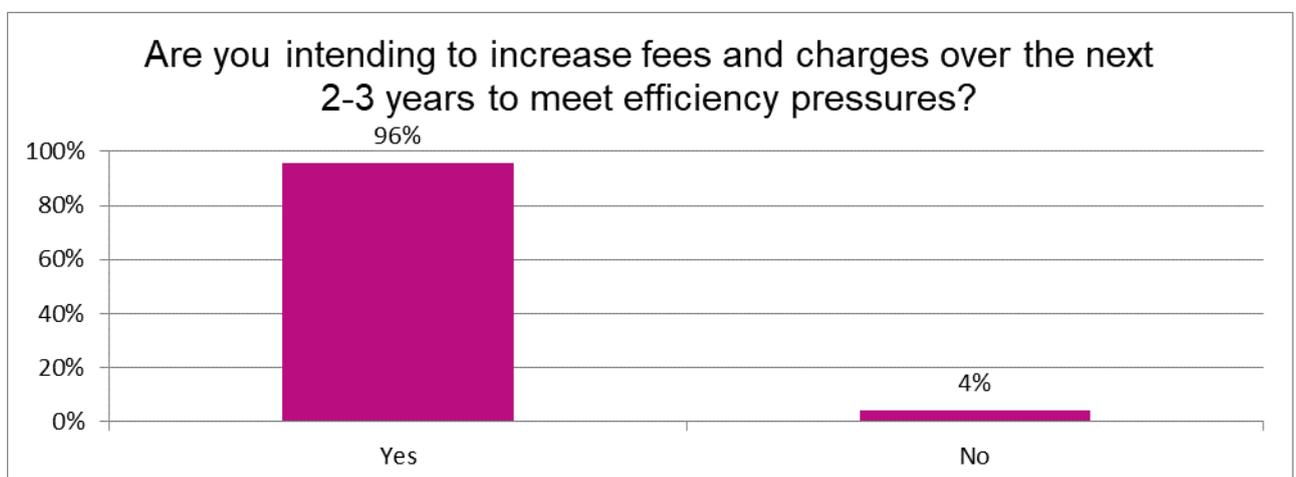
Areas where respondents currently generate income through fees and charges (either provided in-house or through a franchise), include the following as shown in the graph below:



There has been a continuing reliance being placed on memorialisation, genealogy services, Books of Remembrance and the rentings of buildings and land as the main income generators, the provision of conference space has grown in importance. In 2023 franchises have also appeared as new sources of income e.g. cafes and flower shops..

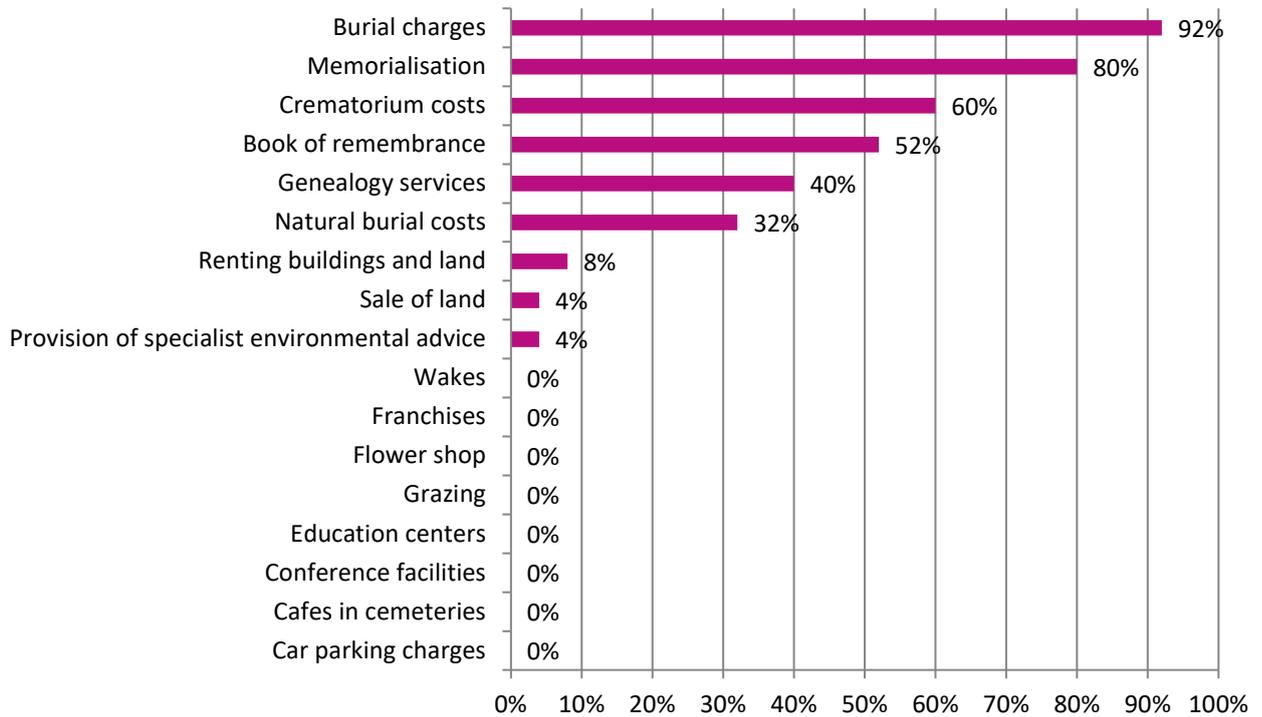
Do you have any other sources of income which are not included above?

- We make income from memorialisation and genealogy and providing burial service to local parish council cemeteries.
- Sports Pitches
- CAMEO mercury trading payments
- Provision of officer time in assisting other authorities to process Public Health funerals.
- Profit share with music partner.
- Pre-paid cremation service for future use by families.
- Grave digging services for adjoining local authorities.
- Leasing of memorials (benches, trees, rose bushes etc.)
- Creating a pets cremation offer.
- Provision of webcasts and recordings of services.
- Provision of jewellery containing ashes.
- Charging for the transfer of ownership,
- Allowing weddings in funeral chapels
- Cave tours in a closed cemetery.
- Personalised grave maintenance and flower planting.

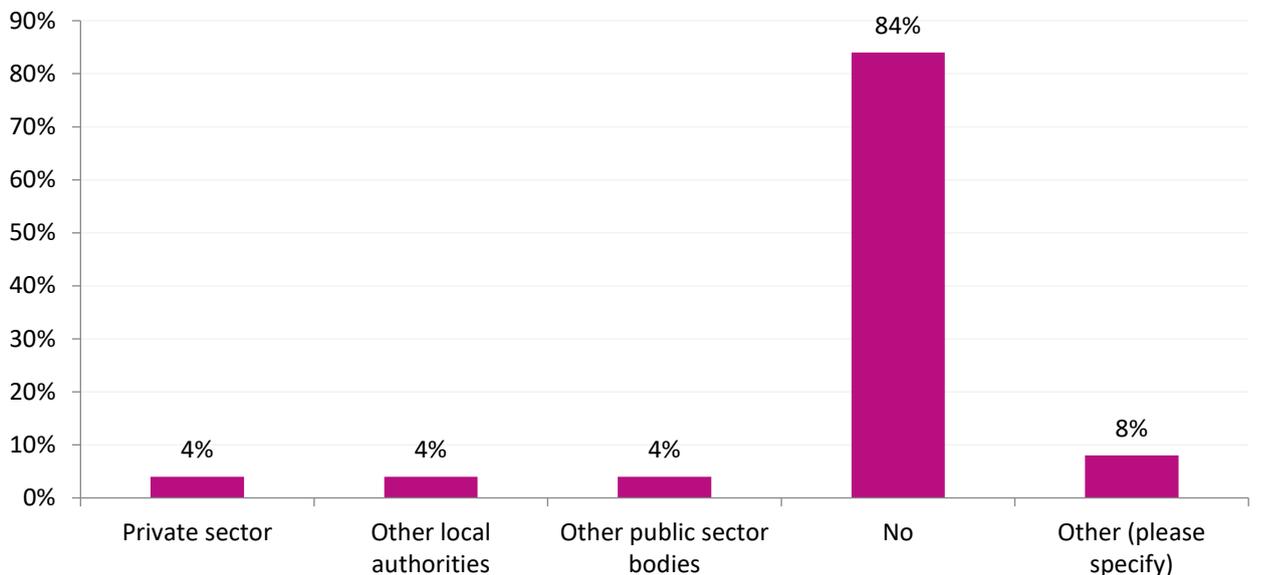


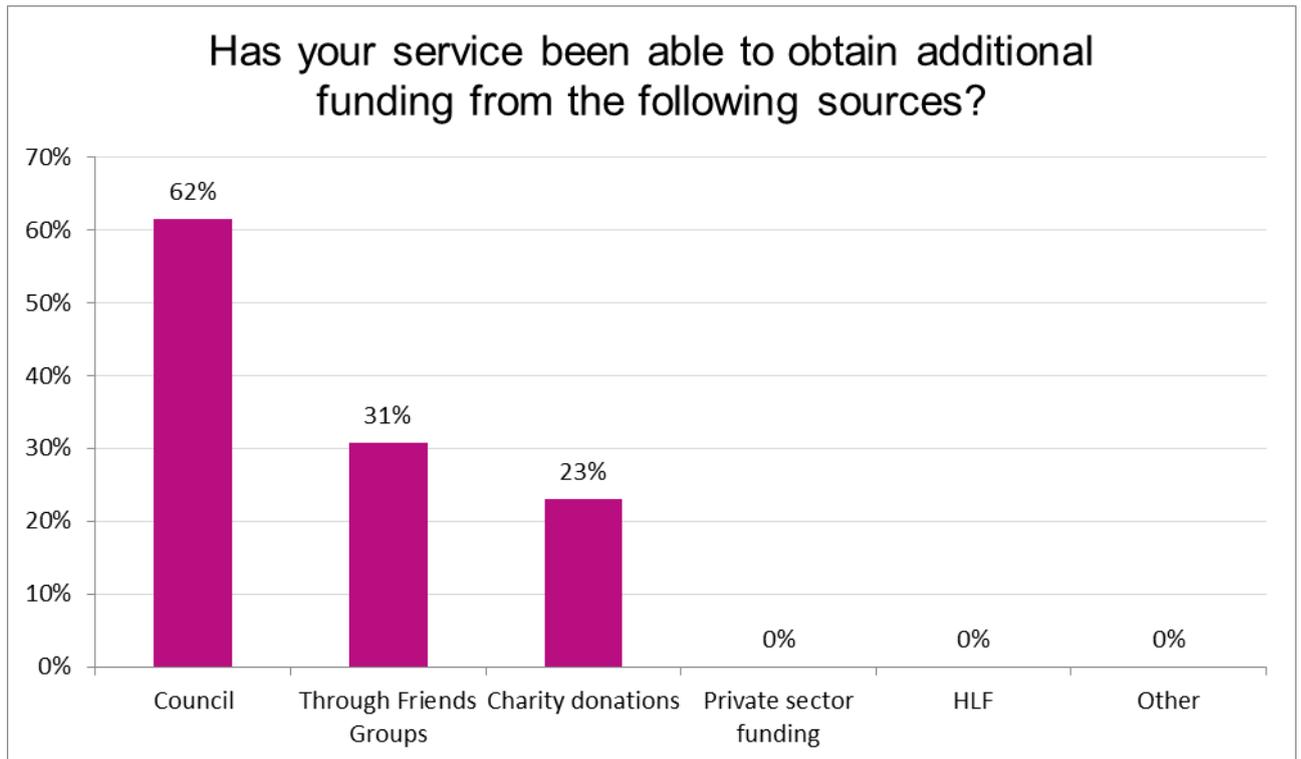
Responses in 2023 show that the percentage of local authorities intending to increase fees and charges has changed significantly, with over 96% intending to increase fees and charges as opposed to only 84% in 2022. This reflects the higher levels of costs to running the services, including the NJC pay award, which was welcomed was in many cases an unplanned for rise in costs given the lump sum settlement and the impact on relatively lower paid workers, such as gravediggers, and the rise in energy costs. With inflation continuing above 10% even with minor increases in funding from central governments there is still a sizeable gap in budgets.

If yes, what areas do you intend to increase fees and charges in over the next 2-3 years?



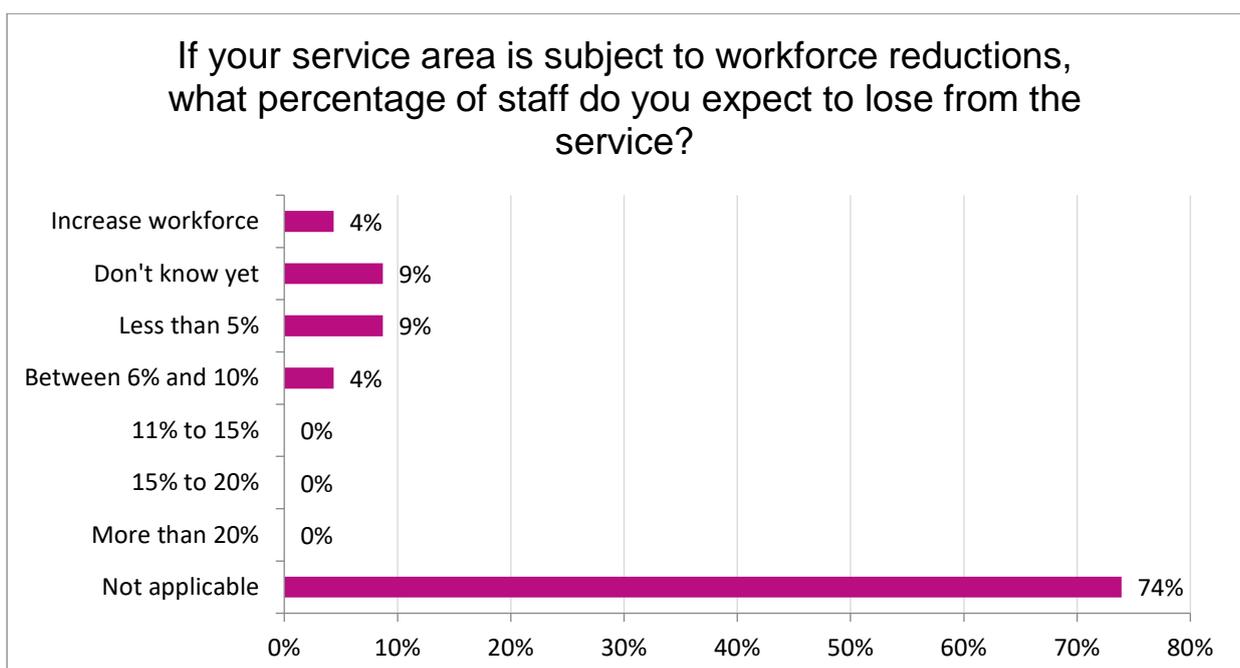
Do you sell your services other than burial and cremation to customers outside of the Local Authority?

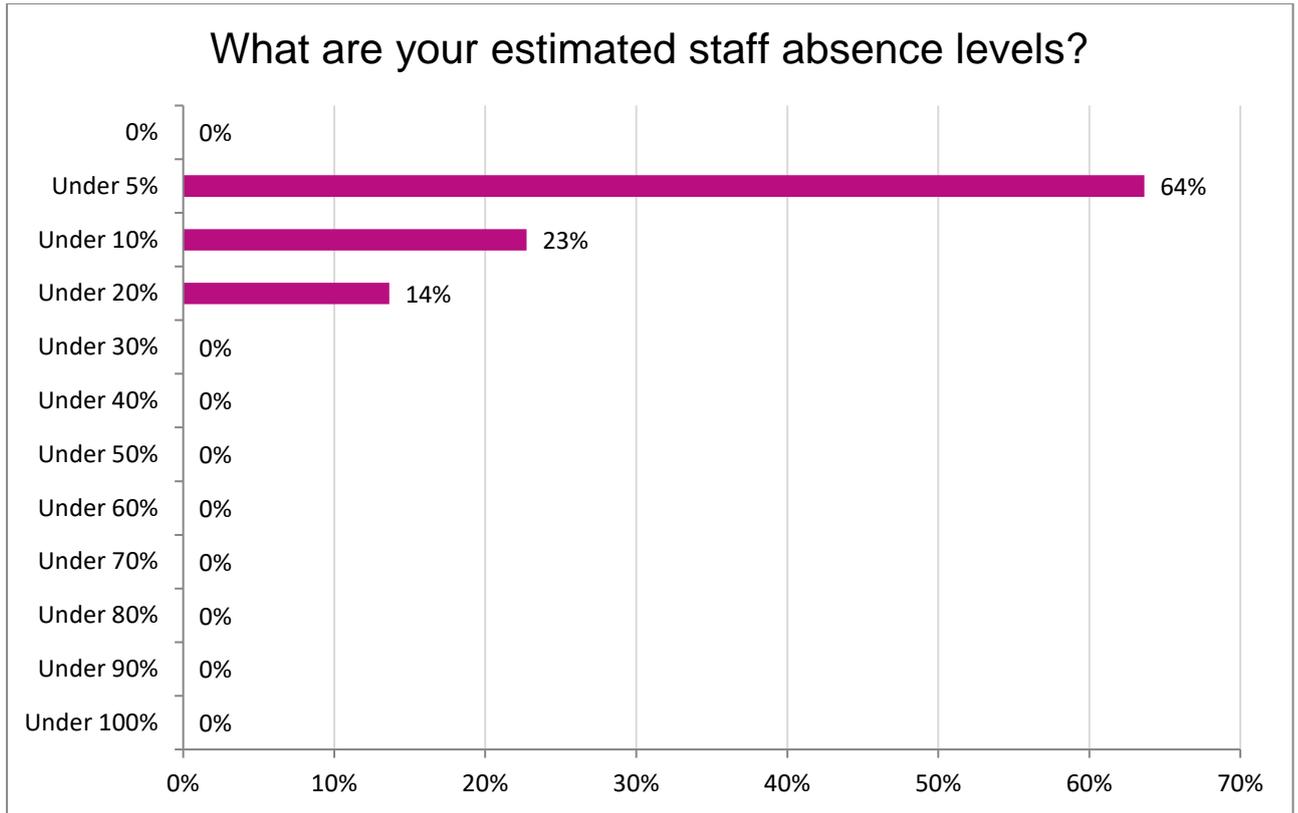




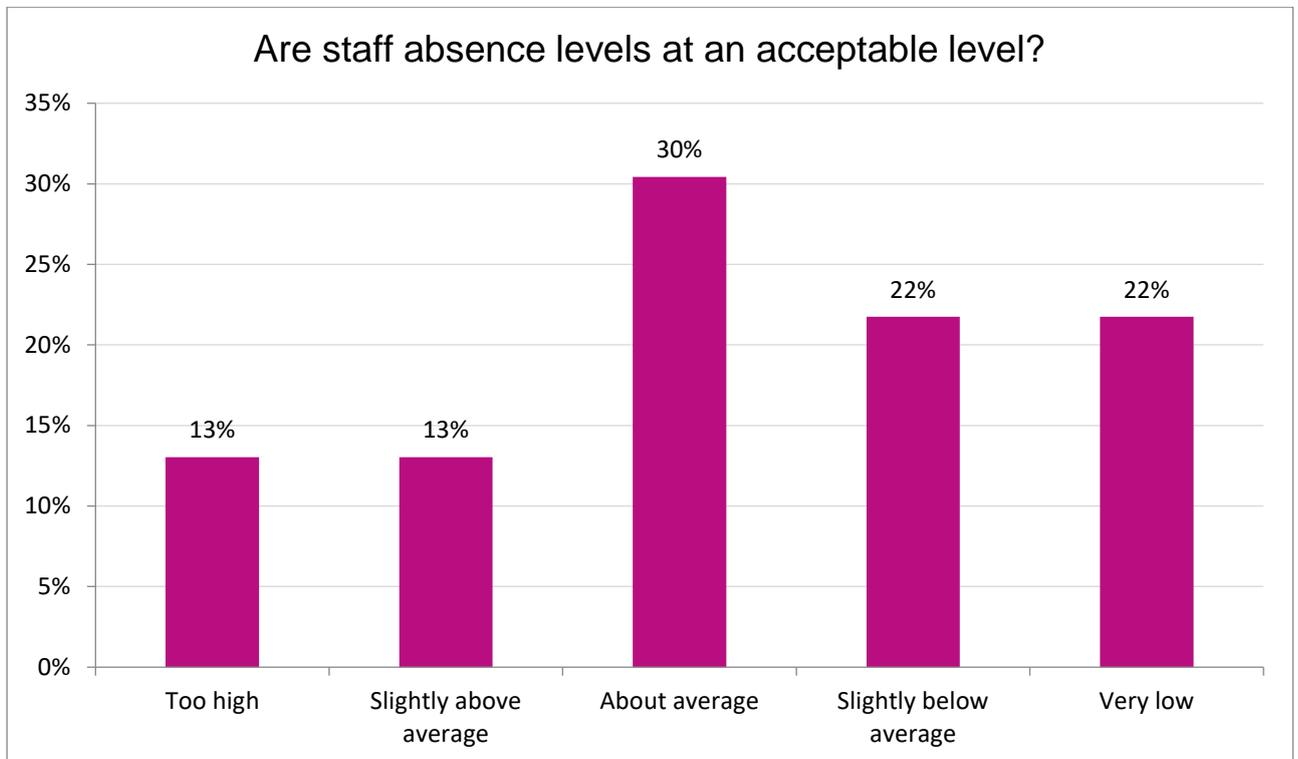
7 Staffing

With regards to staffing levels over the next 12 months, 74% of respondents declared they were not looking to lose staff (70% in 2022). It is perhaps slightly disturbing that compulsory redundancy as an option has made a reappearance albeit at a low level compared to 2022 when it was completely absent. However, overall, fewer respondents are looking to lose staff during the coming 12 months.





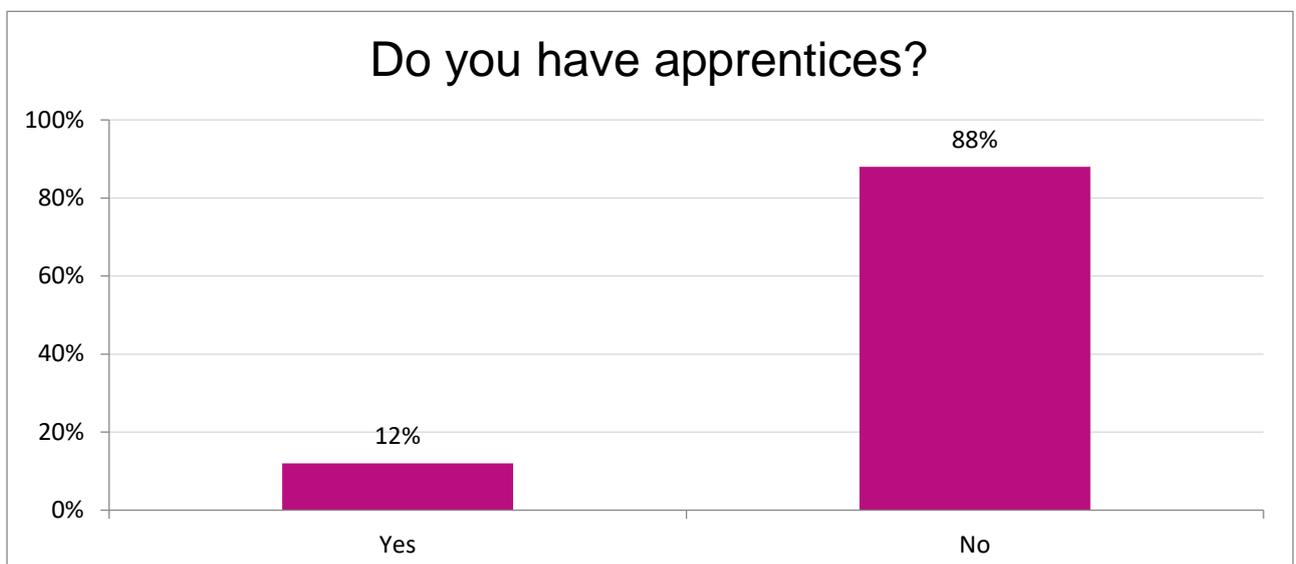
The figures show an increase in those reporting staff absence levels of under 5% , 59% in 2022 as opposed to 64% in 2023.



8 Training



The relative lack of budget reductions in training levels, may suggest that because of service reviews, multi-skilling of staff and new job requirements such as developing new sources of income, then the need to up-skill staff has been recognised and funding provided accordingly. 2023 sees 76% keeping their budgets the same and 12% increasing training budgets which is an improvement on 2022 when only 3% stated that they were increasing budgets. APSE training's bespoke course on the bereavement journey has proven popular with APSE member councils as they seek to improve the understanding of bereavement and bereaved families through frontline bereavement staff. [You can view details of upcoming courses using this link.](#)

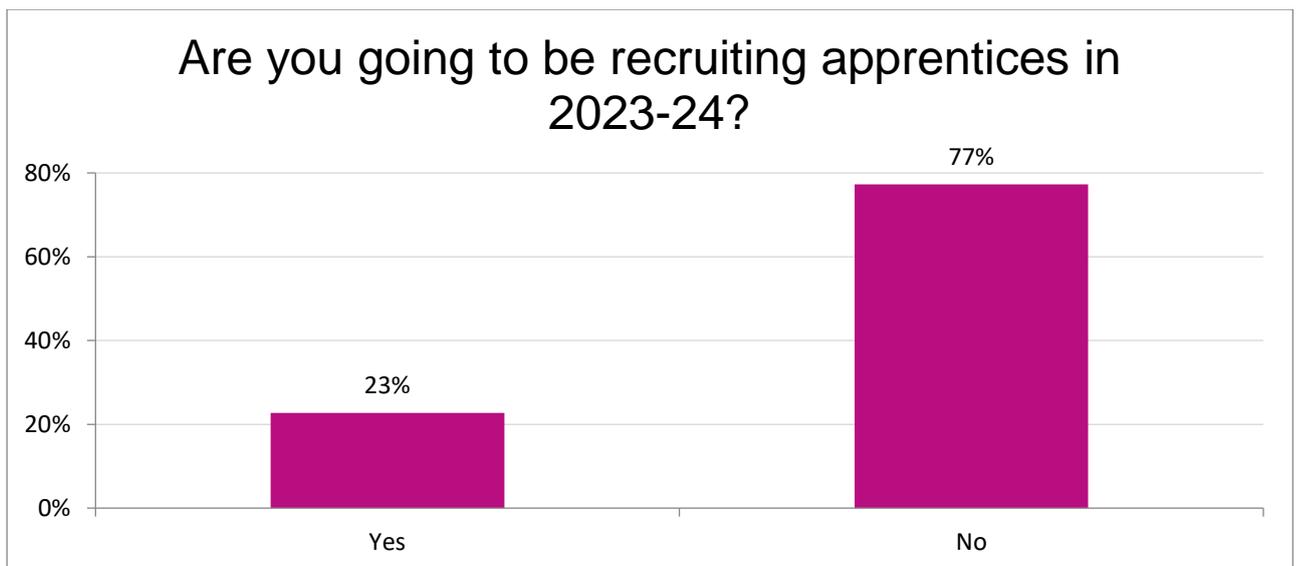


The numbers responding positively to having apprentices has fallen significantly from 33% in 2022 to just 12% in 2023, a worrying statistic. There could be several reasons for this, for example services are sharing apprentices and therefore do not see them as their apprentice, difficulties in recruiting apprentices, but also a lack of funding to offer apprenticeships.

We asked our members: How they are retaining all apprentices from the last recruitment round? If not, why?

Those who are employing apprentices all seem keen to retain staff wherever possible. The following responses were received:

- Our intention is to do so if there is a vacancy to fill. We will keep apprentices employed temporarily for as long as we are able.
- Unfortunately, due to poor performance we will not be retaining the current year of apprentices.
- Any vacant posts will be filled by redeployed staff rather than by apprentices.
- Where no position is available within service posts are often found in other council services.
- Difficult to retain staff on low salary levels.



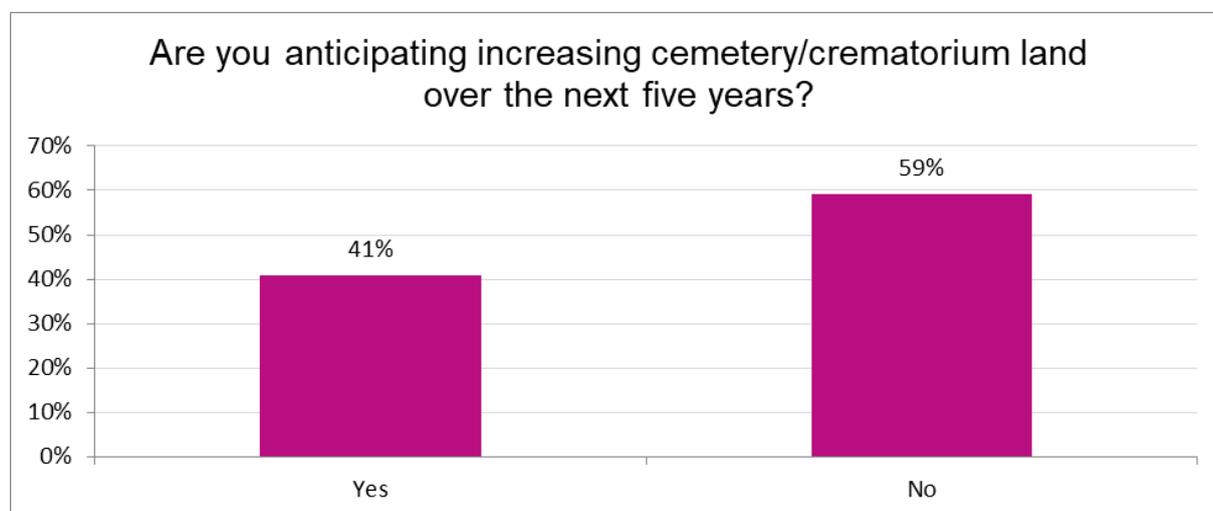
The results for 2023 survey are concerning with a decrease of 38% in those responding who say they will be recruiting apprentices in 2023.

9 Visitor numbers and cemetery management

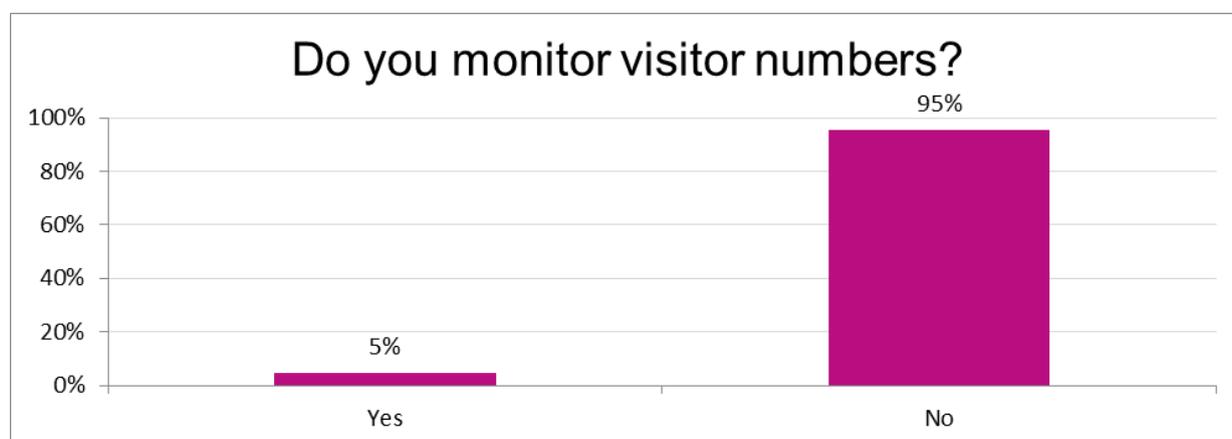
The following results were received:

- Most local authorities who replied manage between 1 and 10 cemeteries (70%).
- 4% manage 11-15 and
- 26% manage 16 or more.

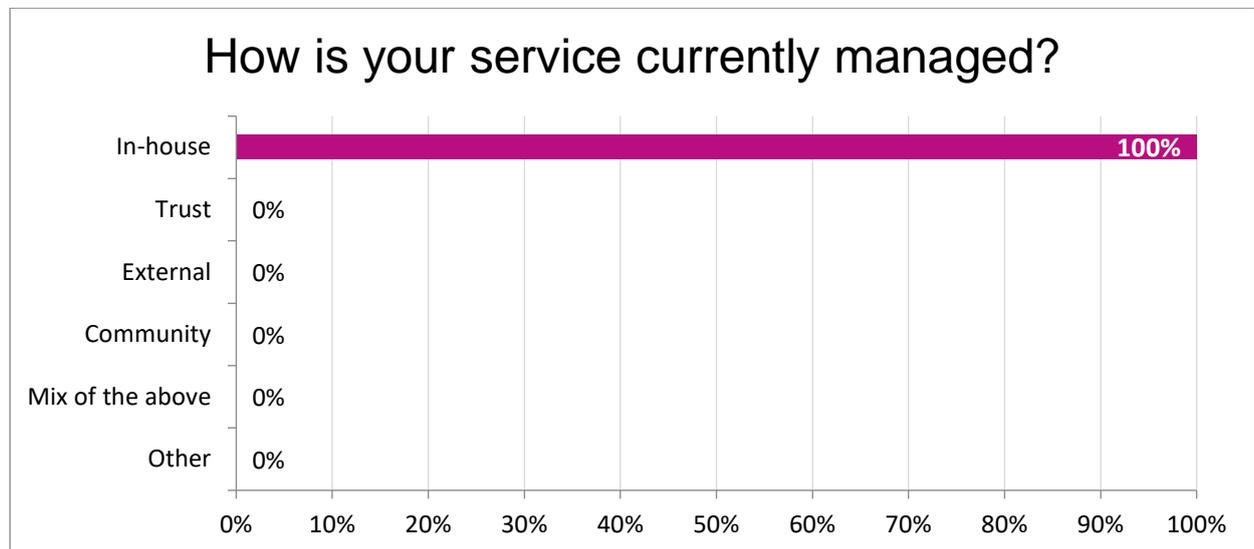
When asked about the percentage of cemeteries that would run out of burial space over the next 10 years there was obviously mixed replies, with a few respondents reporting issues within the next few years with a proportion of their cemeteries. However, half of all respondents seemed to feel that significant problems will start to arise after the next five to ten years when the largest proportion of respondents said they would face significant problems with finding burial space in existing cemeteries. Coupled with a lack of available land space, as identified in an earlier chart, there may be problems ahead in finding suitable burial spaces.



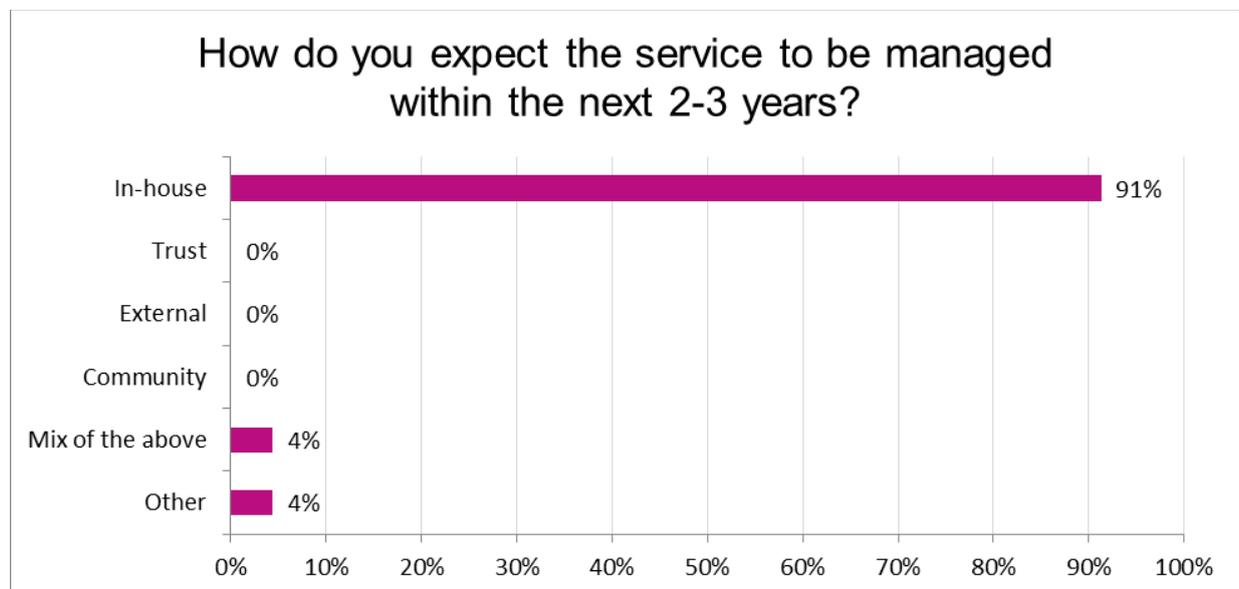
There has been a decrease in the number of authorities looking to increase cemetery land over the next five years from 62% in 2022 to 41% in 2023. This is perhaps in some part a reflection of the ending of the pandemic and pressure for immediate burial space subsiding. With regards to the way new land is being sought varies, from purchasing adjoining land, including future provision within the Local Development Plan and even looking to purchase land in neighbouring authorities.



Interestingly only 5% of respondents appear to measure the number of people who visit their cemeteries. This statistical data would be very useful information when justifying the importance of the service in future budget setting as high footfall would prove the need to ensure high standards of physical features and grounds maintenance levels need to be maintained, particularly from a health and safety perspective. This type of information would also be useful when considering the provision of on-site cafes or florists by allowing a footfall estimate to be established and therefore helping establish the viability of such facilities.



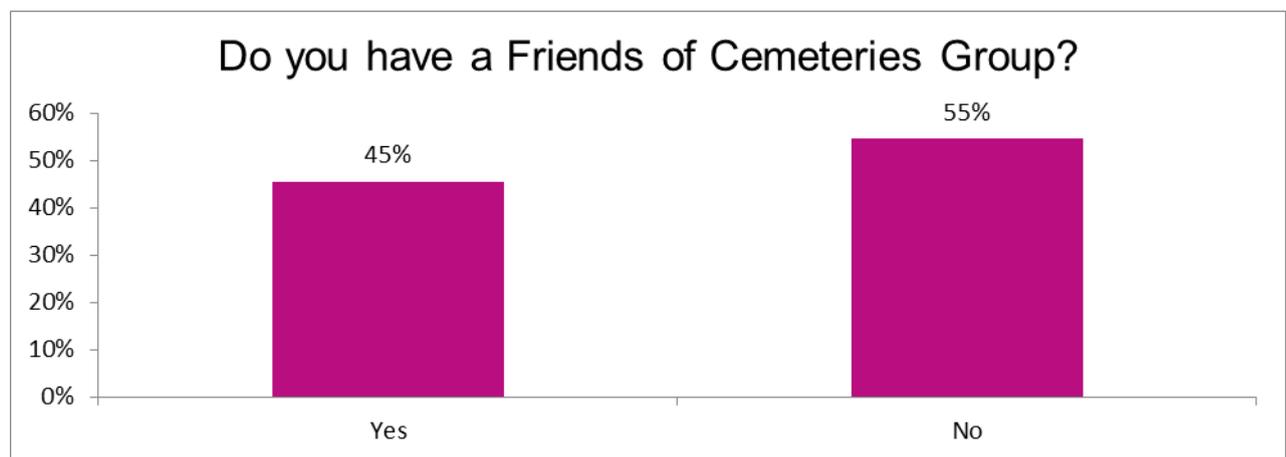
From the responses received, the percentage of services being managed in-house has remained at 100%. Although this suggests no services are being provided externally, this clearly is not the case nationally, but rather all those who have responded are running cemeteries as a purely local authority provision.



From the above two graphs the future provision of Bereavement Services does appear to be remaining firmly in control of local authorities. Over the next few years, the majority of councils anticipate that services will be managed in-house. From previous State of the Market surveys, it does appear that there is a strong commitment to in-house delivery.

10 Friends of Cemeteries Group

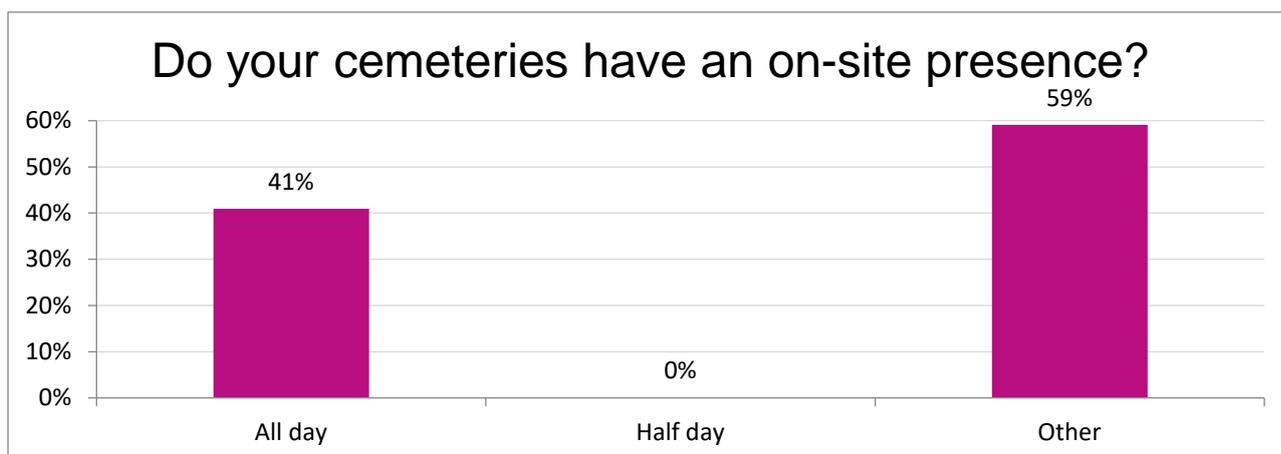
There has been a slight increase in the number of authorities saying they have Friends Groups from 43% in 2022 to 45% in 2023, perhaps a reflection that Friends Groups are more able to operate more effectively following the social restrictions caused previously by the pandemic. Whether the support from Friends Groups is strategic, operational, or financial, the role of such groups seems to be common place across several local authority services.



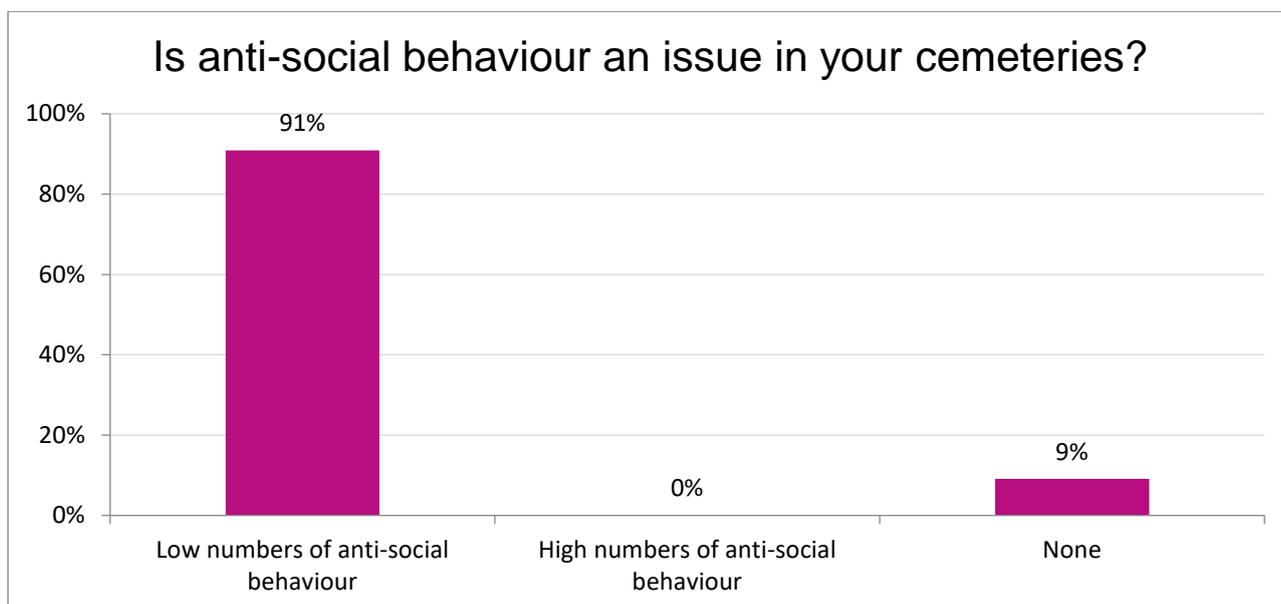
We asked our members: If you have a Friends of Cemeteries Group, please give a brief description of their roles and activities.

- Grass cutting, painting, general grounds maintenance.
- Fund raising for memorials to be reinstated - working groups clearing leaves and carrying out general gardening works.
- Seeking funding opportunities and policing cemeteries to manage anti-social behaviour and control of pets.
- Roles highlighted include staffing a visitor centre, providing guided walks/talks, arranging remembrance services, educational visits, recording all memorial inscriptions, fundraising, horticultural and environmental maintenance tasks, helping visitors find graves.
- Accessing funding and assisting with promoting the facility as a visitor resource.
- Genealogy advice
- Running bereavement cafes and baby loss awareness events.

11 On-site presence and anti-social behaviour



In 2023 there appears to have been an increase in the number of local authorities which have an all day presence in their cemeteries (23% 2022 to 41% in 2023). There is a growing number of councils who have some type of presence in their cemeteries, no doubt as a response to ensuring visitor safety against the threat of anti-social behaviour and also as a result of the growing number of Friends Group who often provide on-site presence throughout the year with regards to the variety of works they carry out.



2023 has seen an increase in the low number of ASB incidents reported with 91% reporting low level incidents of ASB as compared to 71% in 2022. This increase may be linked to the fact as more cemeteries now have all day presence, more incidents are being noted and reported.

11.1 Descriptions of any anti-social behaviour incidents

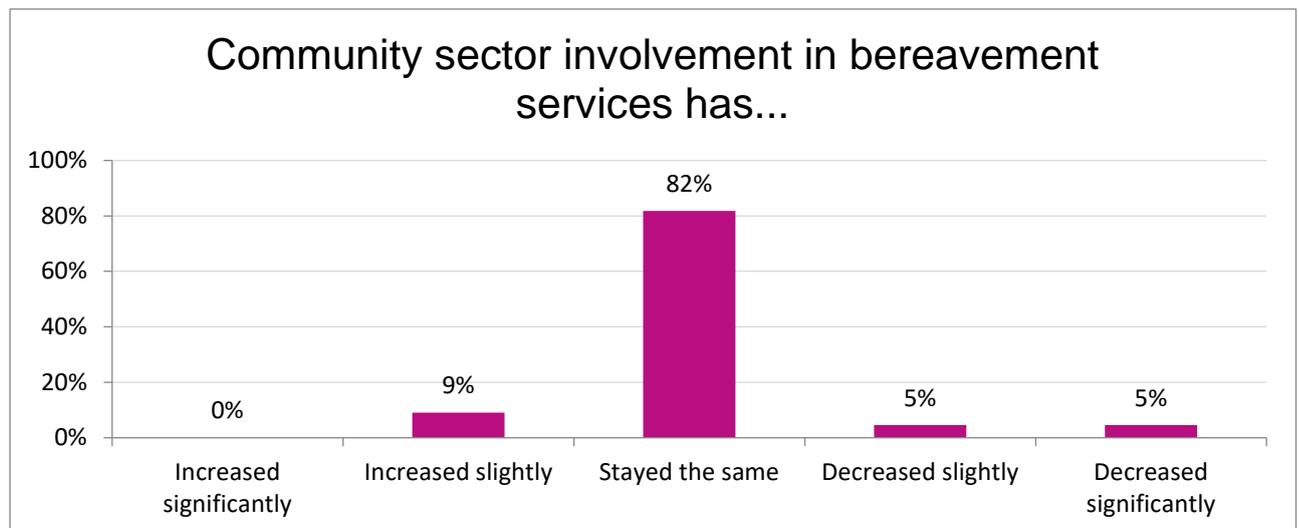
It appears incidents of anti-social behaviour in cemeteries rising, but the majority of these do seem to be in specific cemeteries rather than across an authority's area.

Incidents which seem to be common across all respondents, include:

- Drinking alcohol and leaving bottles/cans etc.
- Interference with memorials, drinking, pushing headstones over, unauthorised felling/damage to trees, fly-tipping.
- Removal of items from graves
- Vandalism, littering, drug taking, drinking.
- Dog fouling/Dogs off leads at all sites
- Dog walkers, youths causing a nuisance.
- Anti-Social Behaviour particularly related to Toilet areas
- Break-ins
- Thefts from cars
- Rough sleeping
- Un-authorized access

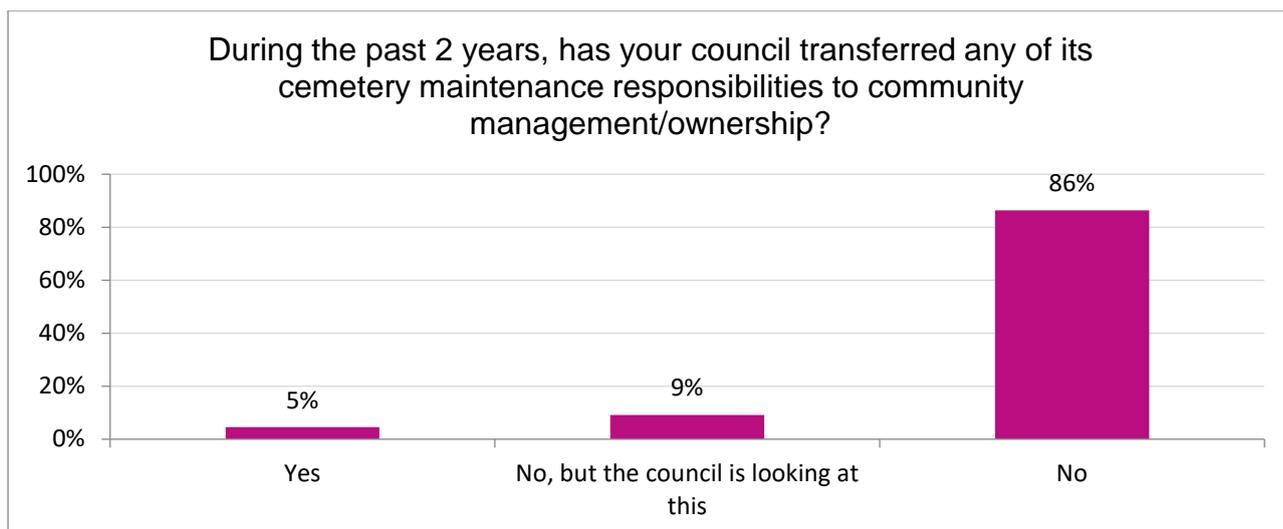
There has been a welcome reduction of high numbers of anti-social behaviour incidents as compared to 2019, when 10% of respondents reported high levels, in 2023 as in 2022, no high levels of ASB were reported..

12 Community sector involvement



Where there is community involvement, in what areas is this increasing?

- Grass cutting, clearance of fly-tipping, and dog fouling.
- Cemetery maintenance
- Vigilance
- Joining Friends group meeting and participating in local community meetings
- Voluntary group helping at our Victorian Cemetery.
- Genealogy
- Maintenance of closed cemeteries/churchyards

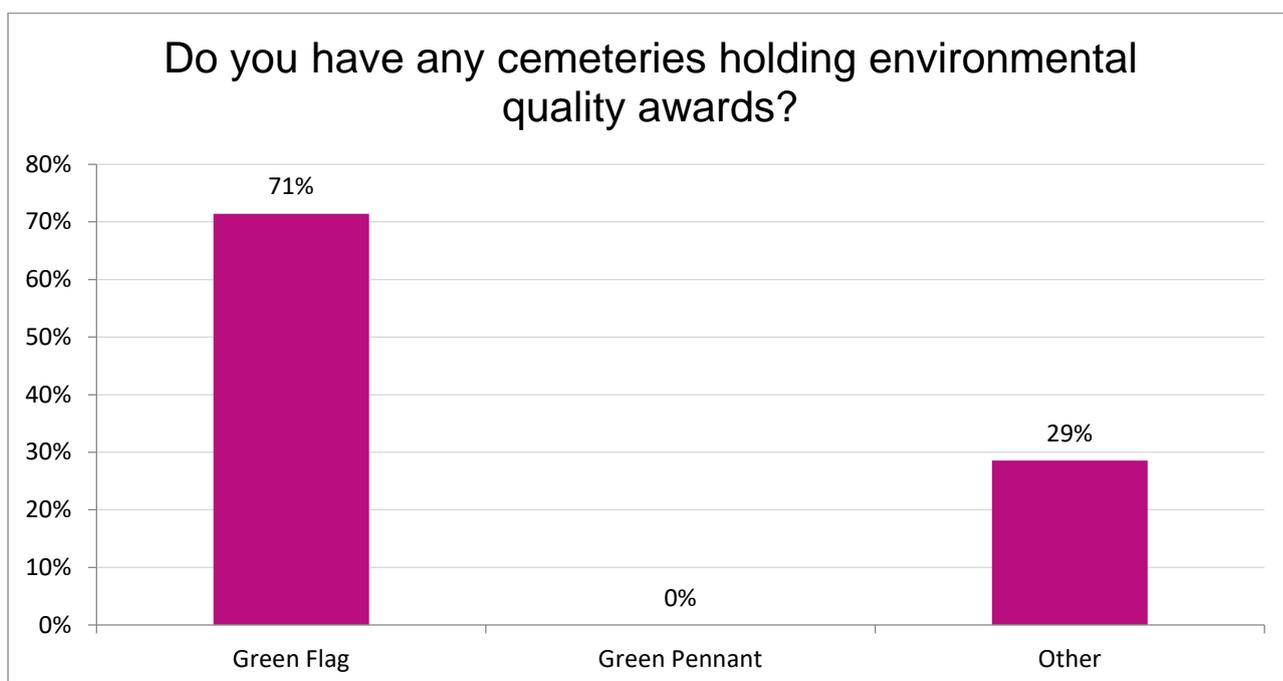


There has been a noticeable fall in the transferring of cemetery maintenance to community management from 93% in 2022 to 86% in 2023.

If yes, what elements have been transferred to community management/ownership?

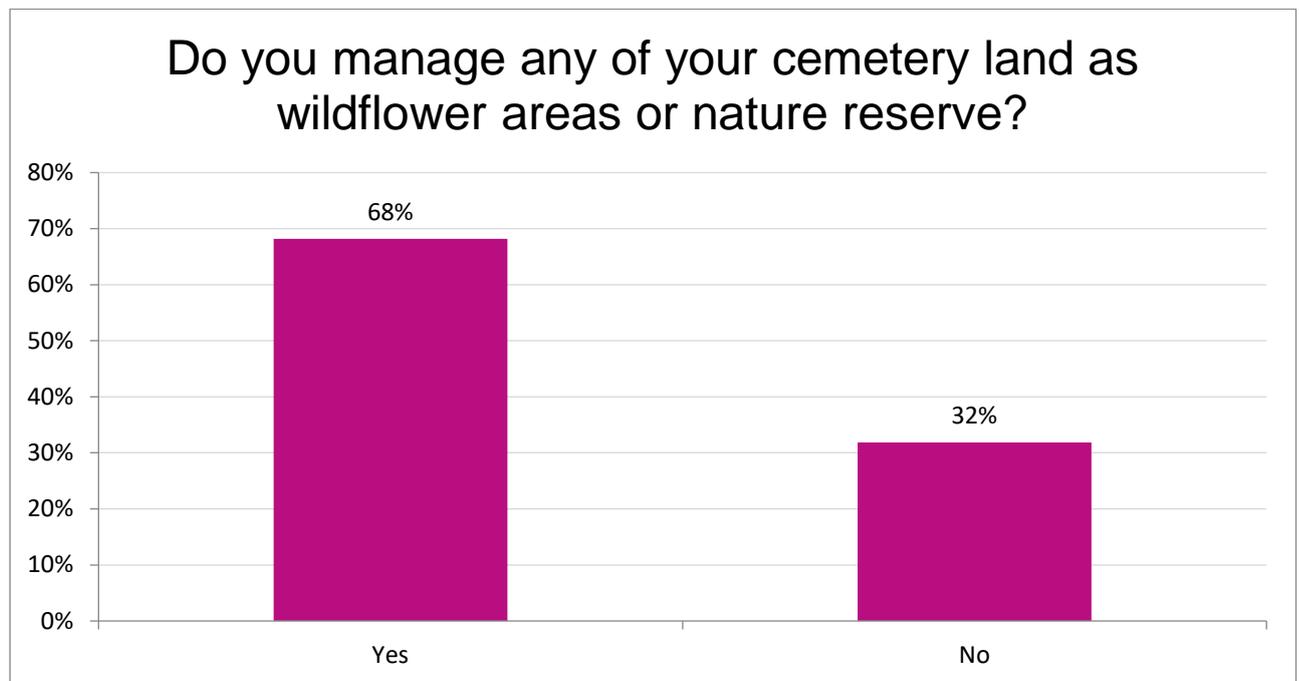
This still appears to be a very rare occurrence, in fact from the responses received in this survey, no-one recorded that they had transferred any cemetery maintenance to community groups apart from one which was allowing a community group to use an Old Chapel building for community events.

13 Environmental Quality Awards



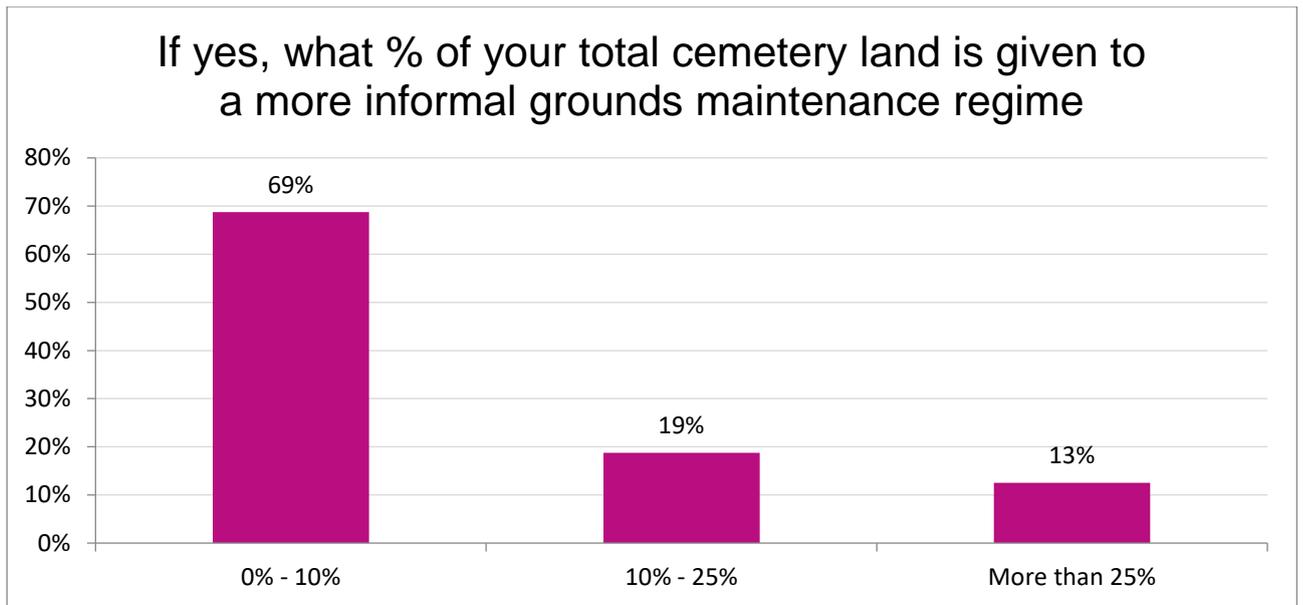
This result is welcome, even though there has been a significant increase in the number of authorities holding the Green Flag Award, 42% in 2022, rising to 71% in 2023. In some case's cemeteries are the only greenspaces to which many people have access therefore monitoring their quality is an important aspect to keep standards high. In addition, well-kept grounds are a clear signal to visitors that their loved ones final resting places are being well cared for.

14 Biodiversity

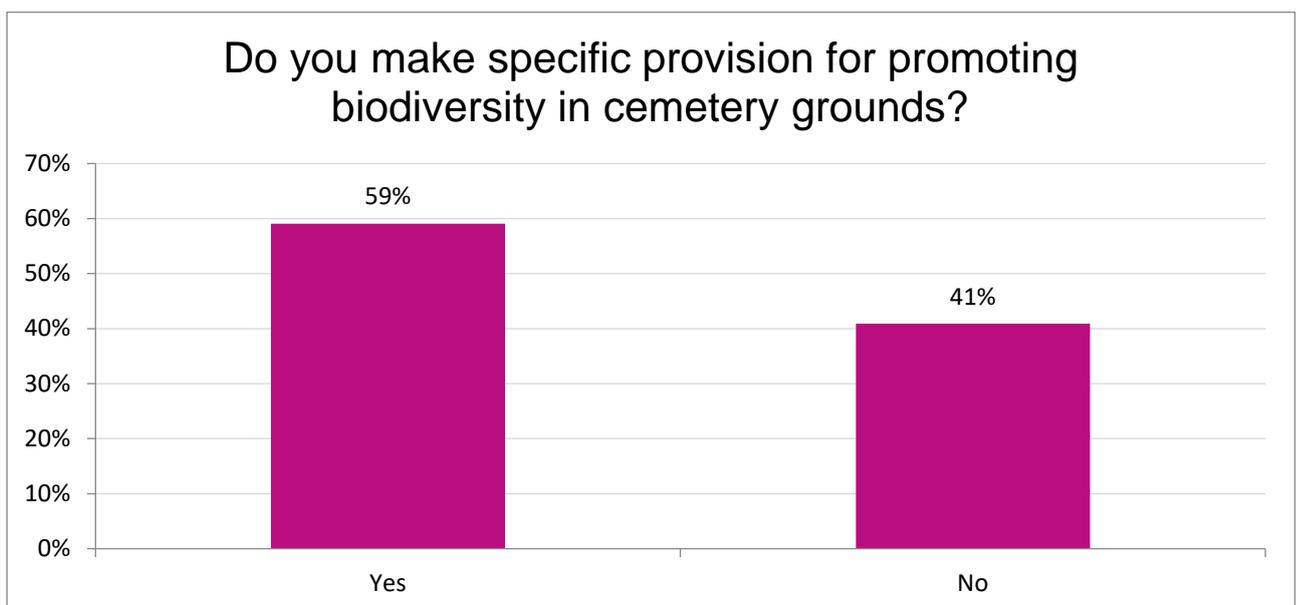


This year has seen a continuing trend in most respondents stating that they manage areas of their cemeteries for wildflowers or nature reserves. This is likely to reflect the growing interest in adopting a more naturalised maintenance approach, allowing greater opportunities for biodiversity as well as potentially reducing costs. Many areas of older cemeteries are now being managed in a way which provides both an aesthetically pleasing appearance for cemetery visitors and provide havens for pollinators and local wildlife. There are many advisory leaflets available on how to make the best use of such areas in promoting wildlife [such as this link provided by 'Caring for God's Acre'](#).

APSE is currently preparing a report on how to manage the naturalising of cemetery grounds, including closed churchyards, citing case studies where such an approach has been successfully implemented.

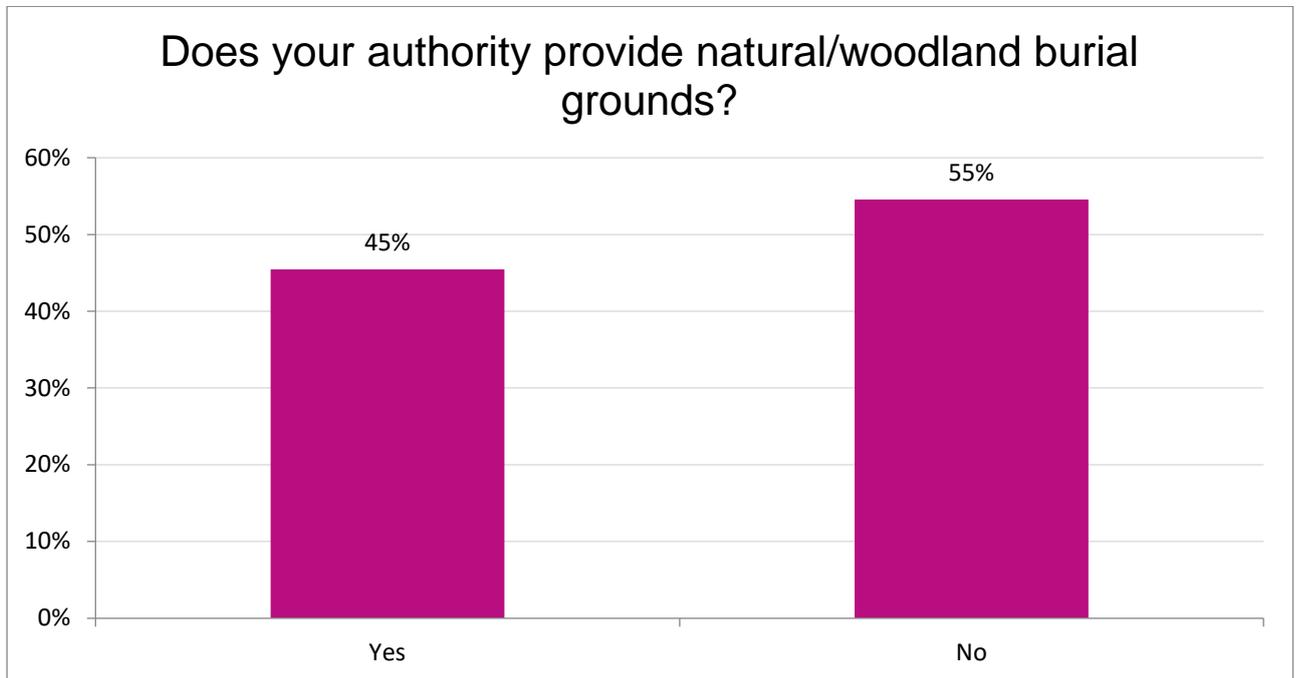


There has been a significant rise in the number of respondents who answered that they provide a more informal maintenance regime on their land within the '25% or more' category which was reported as 0% in 2022, rising to 13% in 2023. There has also been a rise in the 0-10% category from 60% in 2022 to 69% in 2023 suggesting new schemes are being introduced in areas previously not managed in this way. This seems to show that there are an increasing number of cemetery managers now beginning to incorporate more informal grounds maintenance schemes into their cemeteries, particularly within the older, less well visited areas of their cemeteries. It is important that visitors see that these areas are not neglected, therefore mowing paths through these areas and perhaps installing information boards outlining the benefits to local wildlife and increasing biodiversity in general is recommended.



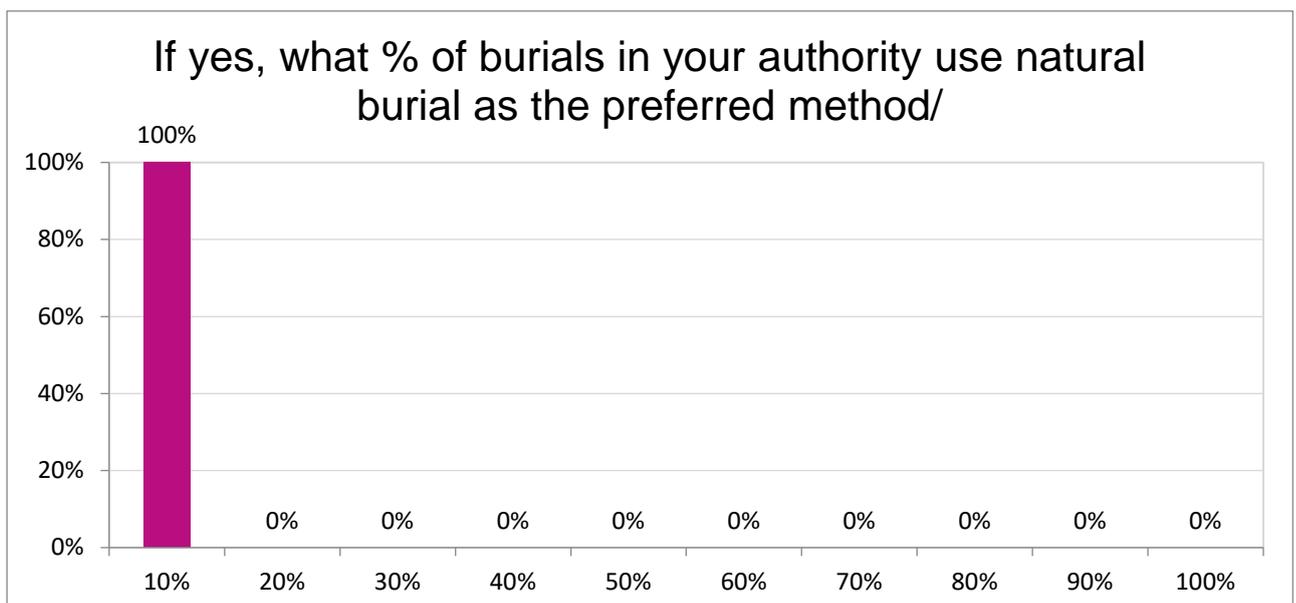
This above chart again shows wide support for making provision for wildlife within cemetery grounds. Whether this is because of reduced maintenance, or a deliberate policy to promote

wildlife, is unclear, although from the comments received there does appear to be clear indication that the main reason is for the promotion of biodiversity. Such actions can only be applauded when local biodiversity is under such pressure.



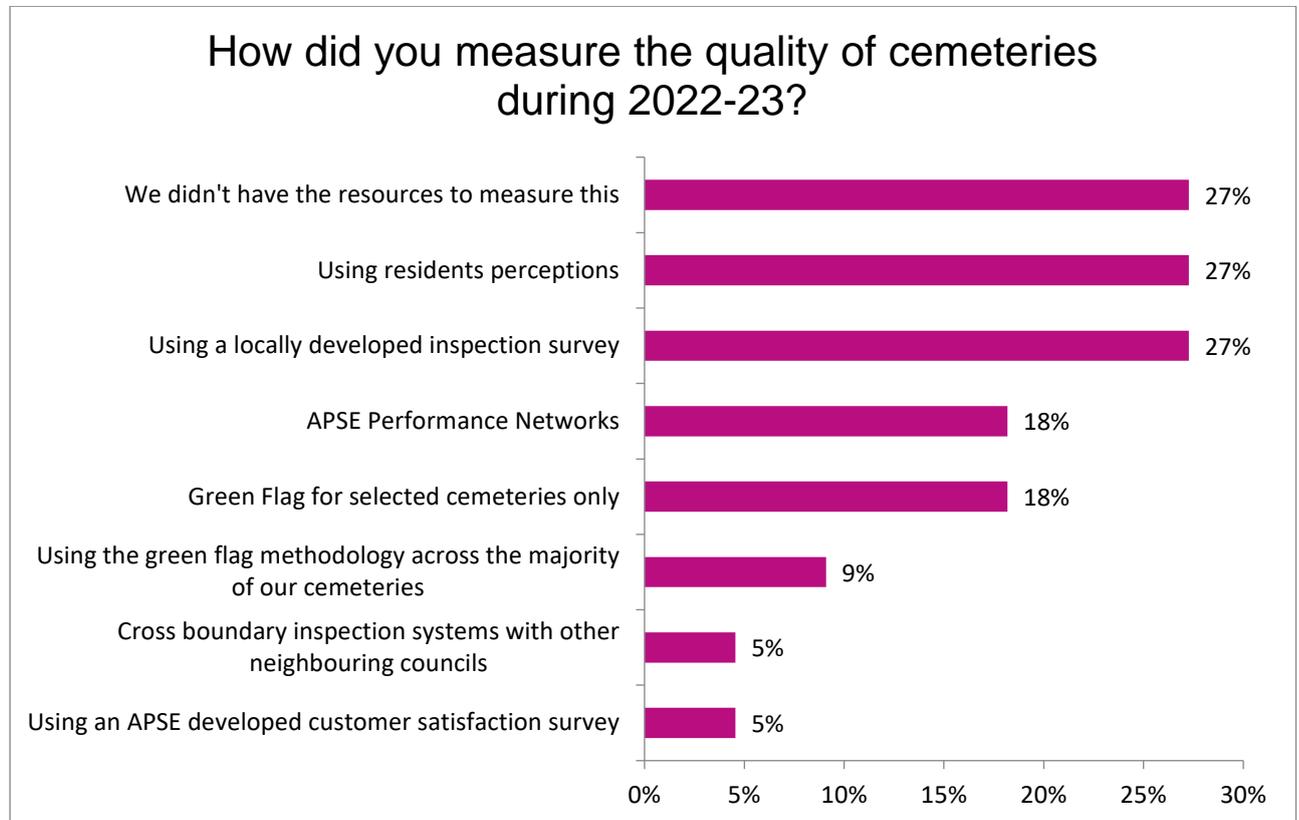
The use of natural/woodland burial in 2023 has increased from 36% in 2022 to 45% in 2023. Showing growing popularity for this to be included as an alternative option for the deceased. It should be noted however that the quality of such areas is still a vital element of the service provision rather than simply providing an area which receives little or no maintenance on the pretext that it is a 'natural area'. There is government guidance available for those local authorities providing or considering such an approach in the future.

[Natural burial ground: guidance for operators](#)



Of the respondents who replied to this question, the average response was that 10% of customers were choosing natural burial/woodland burial as their preferred choice.

15 Measuring quality



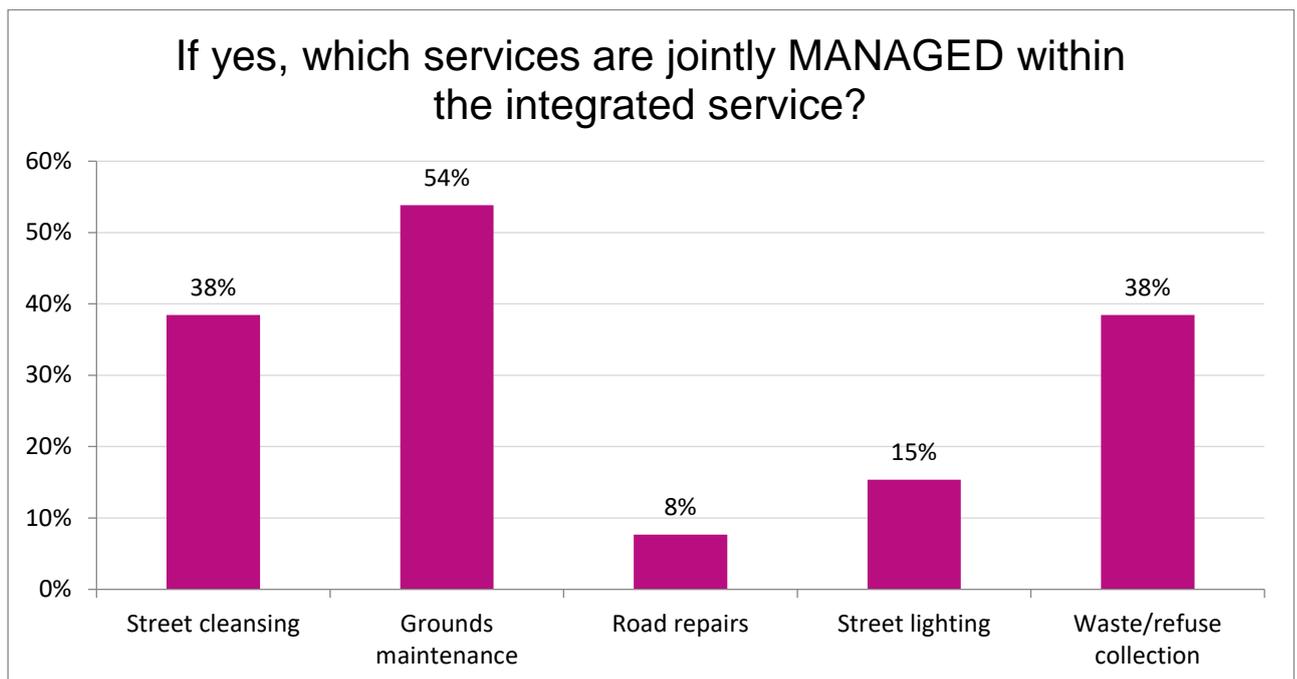
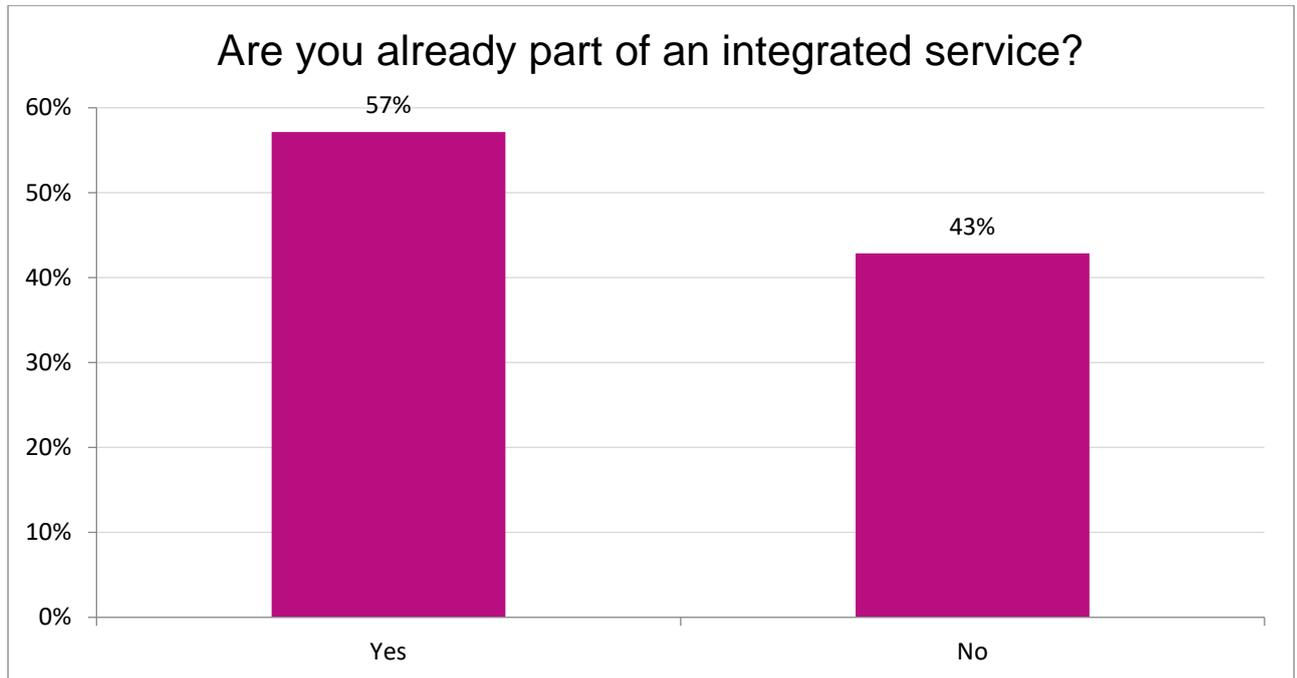
This year has seen a significant decrease in the number of authorities who state they do not have the resources to measure quality (48% in 2022).

The need for a consistent and measurable quality standard has been an area APSE has been considering for a while. As such it has now introduced a separate element of the Land Audit Management System (LAMS) which can now be used to measure the quality of cemeteries.

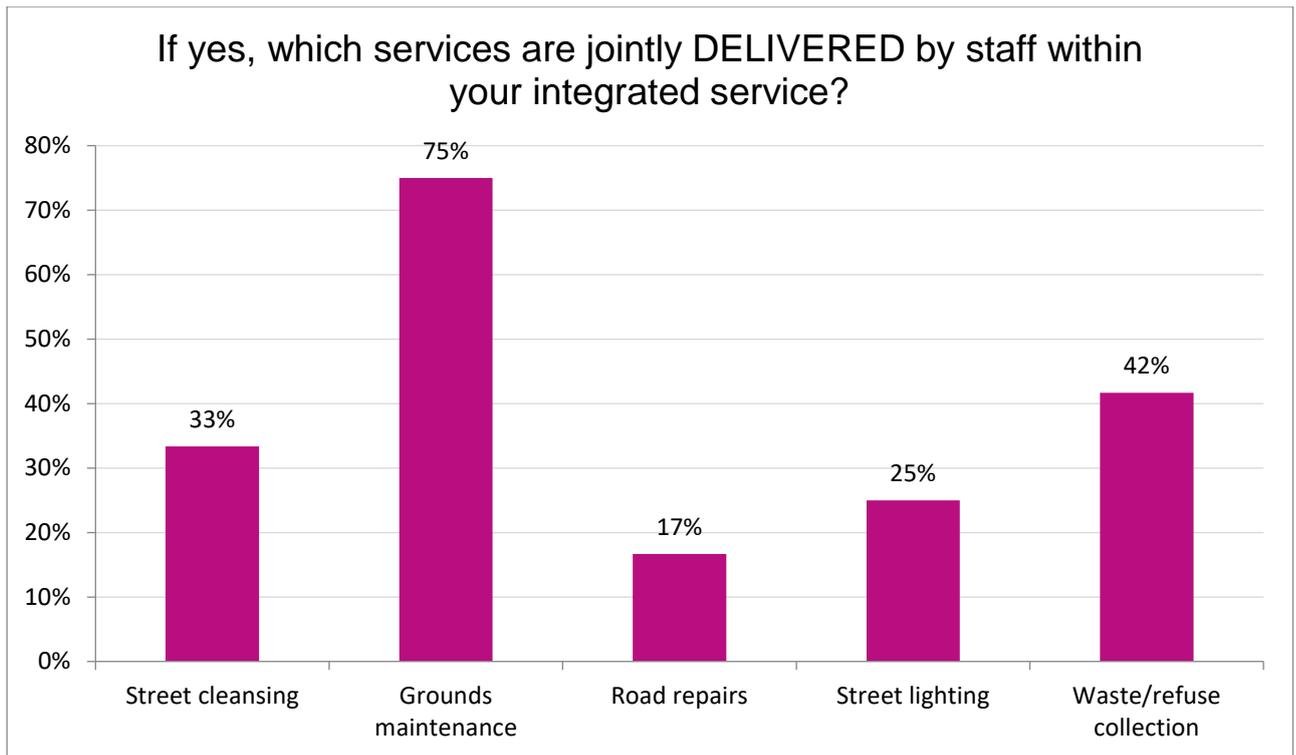
For further information on the general land audit management system please click the link below.

[Land Audit Management System \(LAMS\)](#)

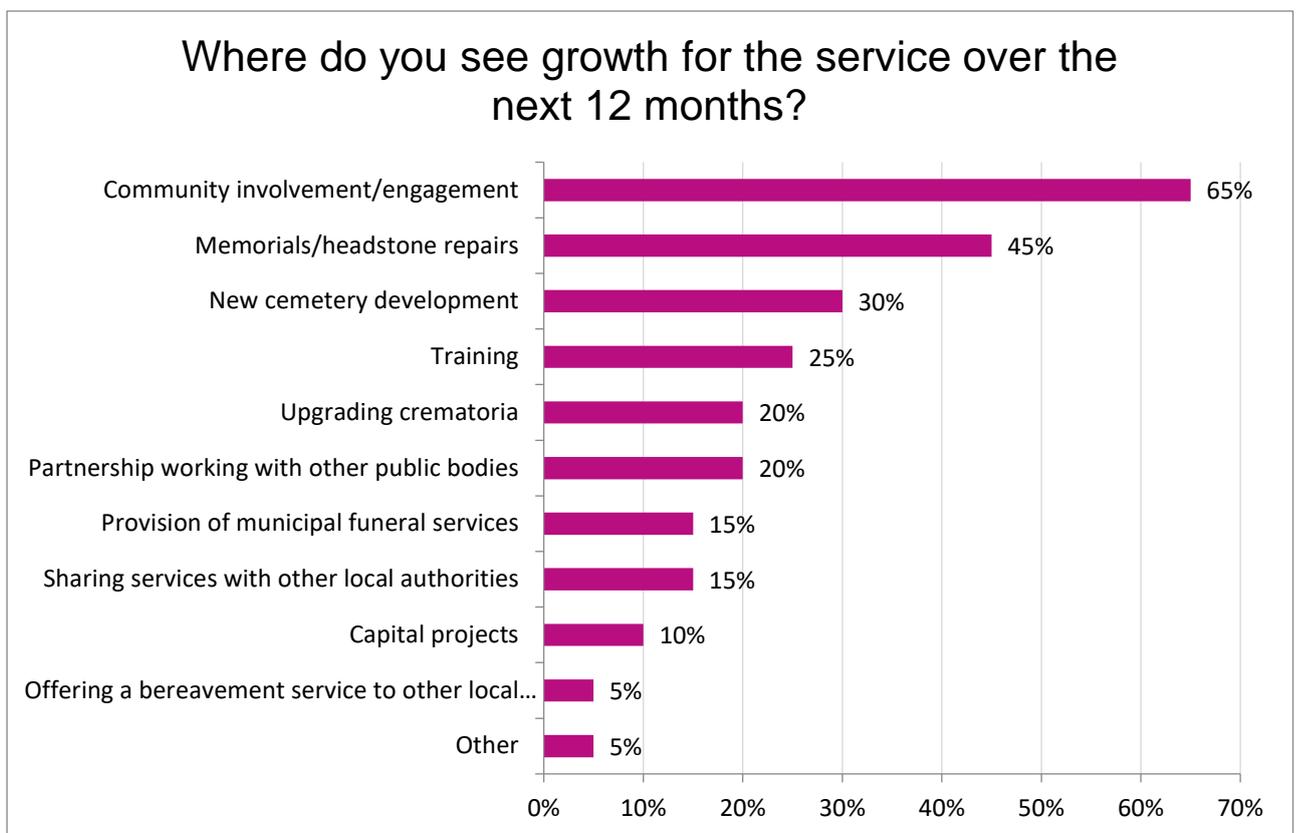
16 Integrated service



Currently a half of the local authorities responding to this survey, run their cemeteries and crematoria services as part of a wider integrated service provision, usually linked with grounds maintenance but to a growing degree street cleansing and other environmentally-based services, where there is often multi-tasking between street cleansing, refuse collection and to a degree grounds maintenance staff.

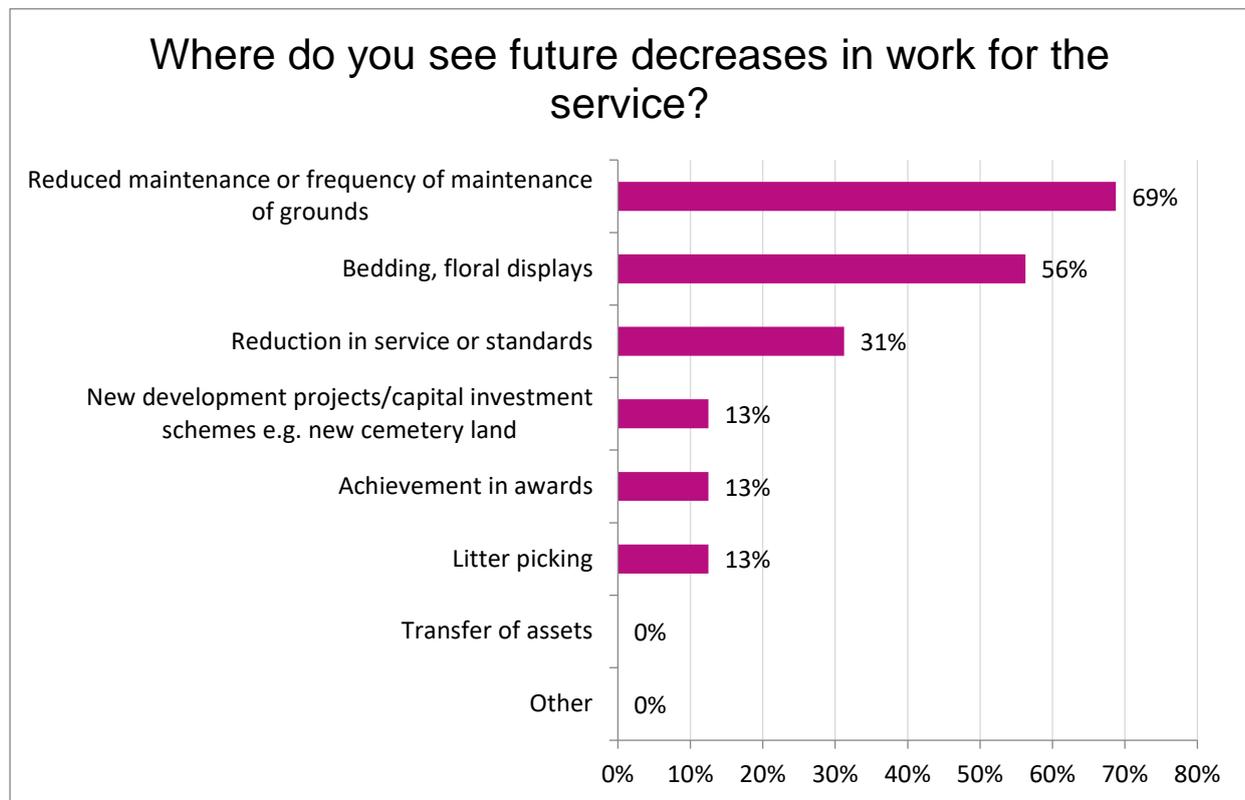


17 Areas for growth



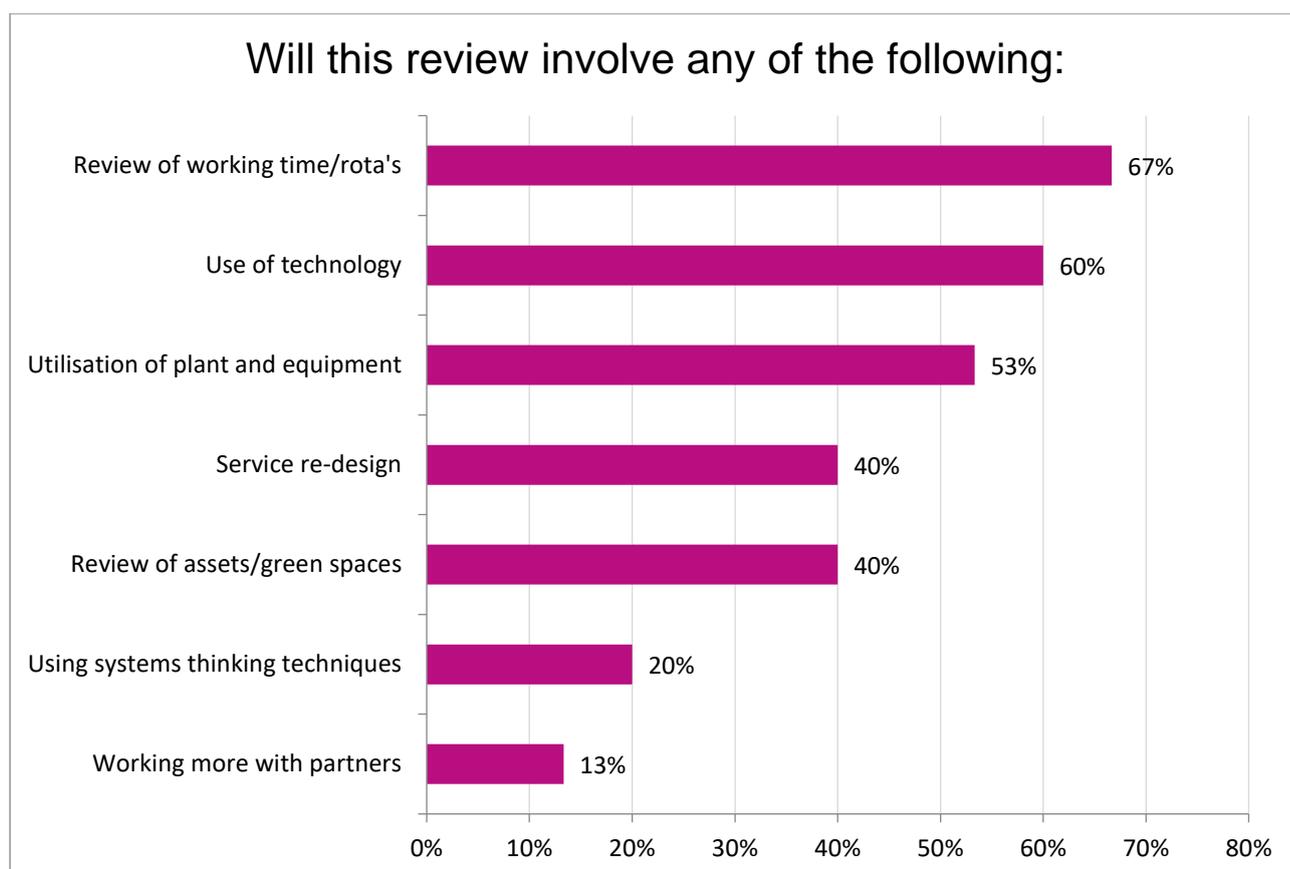
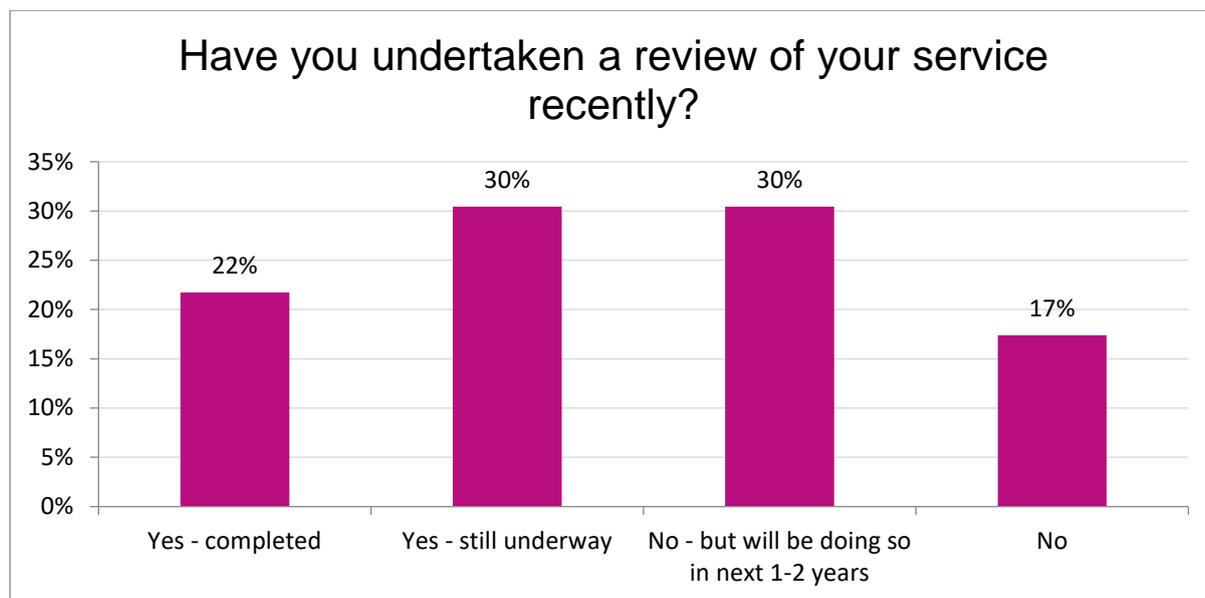
It is notable that areas of growth are quite diverse, but those areas which have been seen as potentially having the biggest increases over the next twelve months are memorial and headstone

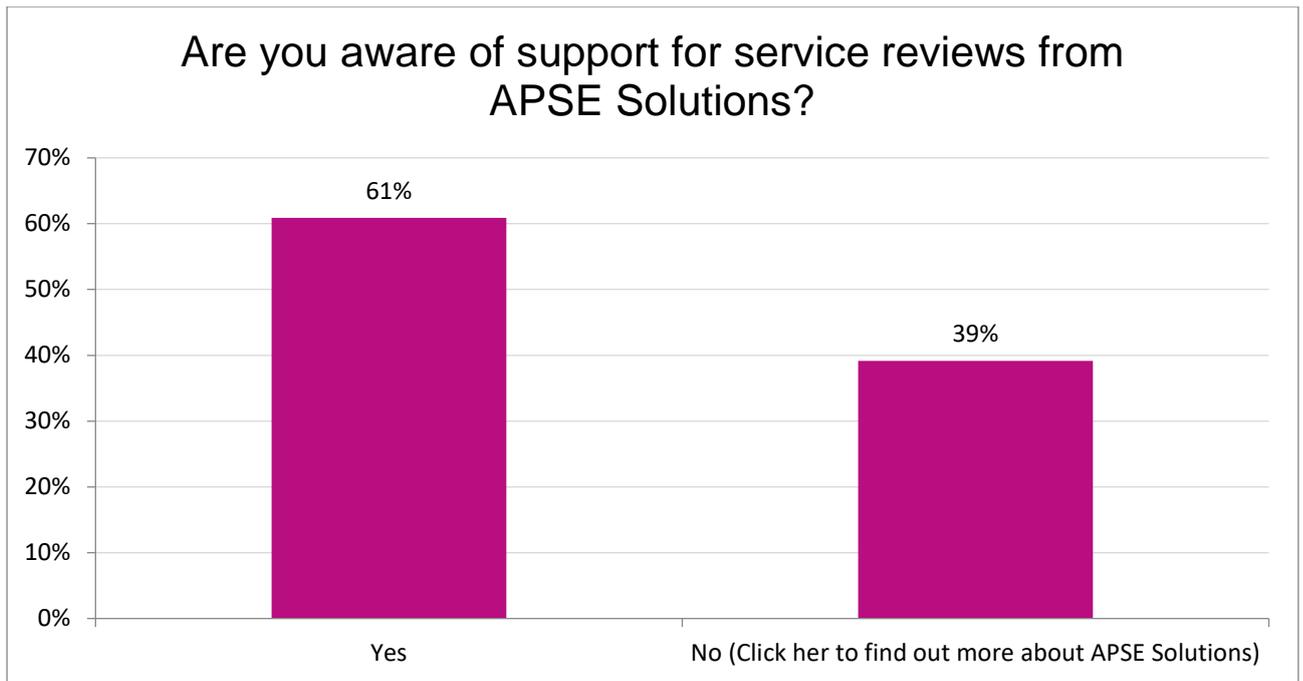
repairs, upgrading crematoria and training. It is therefore interesting to compare these changes in growth areas against those areas of service provision which may need to be reduced.



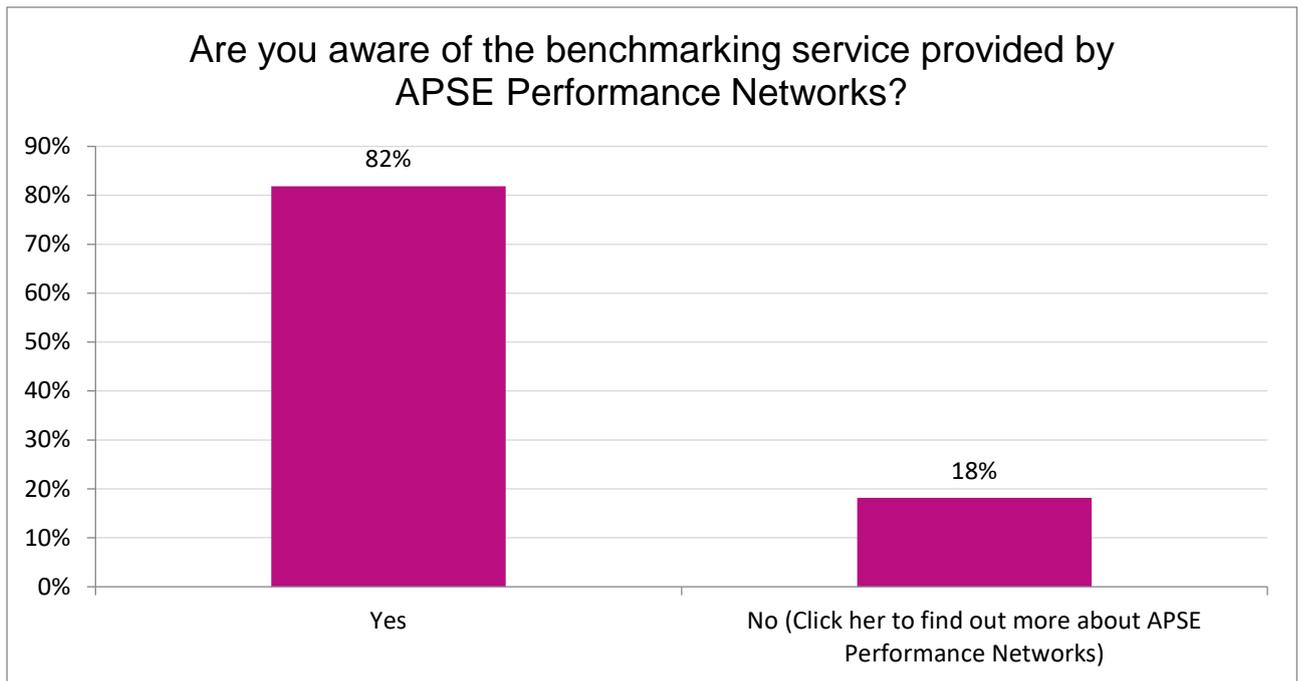
Anticipated reductions in maintenance and service standards have increased in 2023 but surprisingly the number of respondents expecting reductions in bedding displays has again fallen, perhaps a reflection that as land is moved over to less intensive management there is an ability to focus on floral displays and bedding displays in the more frequently used areas of the cemetery, this is also reflected in the fact 2023 figures show fewer respondents intend to cut litter picking frequencies.

18 Service reviews





If you require further details about the services APSE Solution can provide please access the following link.: [APSE Solutions](#)



If you require further details about the services APSE Solution can provide, then please access the following link: [Performance Networks](#)

APSE provides a regular Cemeteries and Crematoria Advisory Group that members may attend for free. We asked what cemeteries and crematoria related topics APSE members would you find most valuable in the near future?

The following a recent example of the sort of issues members would like to see included in future Advisory Groups:

- Management of unauthorised memorials / Memorial Enforcement Issues
- Work scheduling: balance burial work v grounds maintenance requirement
- Technology - poor software options,
- Digitisation of burial and cremation forms, computer management systems which would handle the former, data protection / privacy notices and MOJ forms, Medical Examiner.
- Multi faith burials
- Improving use of crematoria & cemetery buildings
- Woodland burials and memorial structures
- Medical Examiners
- Use of Volunteers
- Best practice examples; councils as funeral directors
- Natural Burial and integrated funeral directors
- Funding green initiatives/environmental impacts of cremation and burials
- Opportunities for rewilding/biodiversity
- Electric cremators/Resomation process.
- Opportunities for apprenticeships
- Memorial Headstone Inspections and Repairs
- Income generating schemes.
- Grey Water/ground water pollution
- Municipal Funeral Services
- Establishing Cemeteries Friends Group
- Regulations of cremation
- Practical solutions for dealing with memorials in closed churchyards/ petitioning for a simplified system to manage safety in churchyards including waving of faculty fees to local authorities.
- Identifying, acquiring, and opening new burial areas
- Use of Columbaria
- How other authorities are planning in terms of limited space/ grave re-use.
- Business planning/modelling and implementation from ideas to services and products.
- Maintenance benchmarking.
- Surrounds versus lawn cemeteries
- Service reviews and outcomes / alternative ways of working / service configuration
- Managing historic churchyards
- Burial related topics
- Identifying new sites for cemeteries
- Maximising income from public health funerals

19 APSE Comment

As this is APSE's seventh State of the Market Survey, the ongoing data collected is now allowing some real trends to be identified within the local authority Bereavement services sector. As time progresses more meaningful comparisons will be able to be made and more detailed trend analysis to be carried out. It is hoped that this State of the Market Survey will be a document to which Bereavement services managers and other interested parties can refer to when considering the key issues for local authority Bereavement services across the UK. The document will continue to provide access to new ideas and service innovations as well as the opportunity to receive performance data which will help service planners and managers to readily understand the bereavement sector and its key issues more accurately.

With the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic, there was clearly significant impacts on the service and these impacts undoubtedly affected some of the progress made with regards to balancing budgets and service improvements, but this was only to be expected. Bereavement services and their staff were at the forefront of local authority response to the pandemic and had to deal with the distress the pandemic caused. Since the ending of the pandemic, there has been time for reflection and reviewing how future services may need to be delivered in the short, medium, and longer term.

However, from the first post- pandemic survey results, Bereavement services across the UK coped well with the added stresses and strains this virus has brought and quality of service delivery has continued unabated.

Although the service has largely not been subjected to the same level of budget cuts that some other local authority services have suffered, this fact has not led to complacency, with respondents highlighting excellent examples of service improvement, income generation and improved user experiences. Unfortunately, in this report there does appear to be a level of pessimism about the future level of resources managers are expecting, with reports of decreases to both capital and revenue budgets, indeed a few respondents have reported anticipated decreases in budget levels of over 15%.

A further note of concern from the survey's findings, is the clear indication that the quality and maintenance of cemetery grounds may be suffering at the hands of wider local authority cuts, but again Bereavement professionals are looking at alternative and perhaps more environmentally sustainable grounds maintenance methods, to combat any cuts which may affect the quality of cemetery and crematoria grounds.

A way to combat pressure on resources is to generate income. Although income generation is pursued by many and is gaining wider support, it is not pursued with the same vigour as in other local authority services but considering the sensitivities surrounding the service and its users, this is perhaps not unexpected. However, 2023 has seemingly seen a perception that there is a reduction in public resistance to increasing or adding new income generating schemes now that the extremes of the pandemic have passed.

What has become more apparent when considering the results from the 2023 survey, is the beginnings of a resurgence of Friends of Cemeteries Groups post pandemic, and the multiple benefits they brought, most notably additional funding. This is an area which was been particularly hard hit, where due to social distancing and several lockdowns, the interaction needed to gain the benefits from these groups was restricted.

The survey has also shown that there are common issues shared throughout the UK, with reducing availability of burial space, funeral poverty and meeting the changing cultural need regularly being referenced in the responses. Such issues and their solutions are regularly discussed via the network query service APSE provides and at Advisory Groups and Seminars.

The need to address environmental impact has also been raised within the survey and there is a growing importance being given to mitigating the environmental impact Bereavement services operations have and within the survey there are examples of how Bereavement Managers and their staff are addressing these issues. Reduced cremator emissions, natural burial options, environmentally friendly grounds maintenance regimes and increasing the opportunities for re-wilding and biodiversity within cemetery grounds quoted by respondents are all clear examples of good environmental practice. APSE has worked with the Environmental Stewardship Group in looking to identify the environmental impact of the Bereavement industry in totality and ways to improve the environmental performance of all those concerned. A report produced by the Environmental Stewardship Group outlines some of the environmental improvements which can be made to help mitigate the impacts of climate change thereby making the Bereavement Sector more environmentally sustainable. A copy of the Group's report can be downloaded using [this link](#).

The information gathered from the survey will be used by APSE to inform the services it offers to its members, to ensure its briefing papers, advisory groups and seminars reflect these key issues in the future.

The State of the Market survey has now become an important tool in allowing trend analysis to be carried out and to ensure APSE's members are kept up to date with the latest Bereavement service issues and innovations.

Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

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.

Our national advisory groups include:-

- FM and Building cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Cost of Providing/Cost of Living Network
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Local Authority Commercialisation, Income and Trading Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Recovery and Renewal
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
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