

School crossing patrols: current position and future considerations

To: all UK authorities

To: All UK Local Authorities

1 Purpose of the Briefing

In March and April 2026, APSE asked local authorities about the current position of school crossing patrol services and how they may change in future.

The survey was followed by a roundtable discussion, which helped test the findings and add practical insight from councils dealing with day-to-day service pressures and review decisions.

This briefing brings together the survey results and the main points raised at the roundtable on **12 May 2026**.

2 Background

School crossing patrols operate within a defined legislative framework. The Transport Act 2000 amended the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 so patrols can operate beyond traditional school times and assist any pedestrian, not only children.

In Scotland, the School Crossing Patrol Sign (Scotland) Regulations 2008 set requirements for patrol signage and visibility.

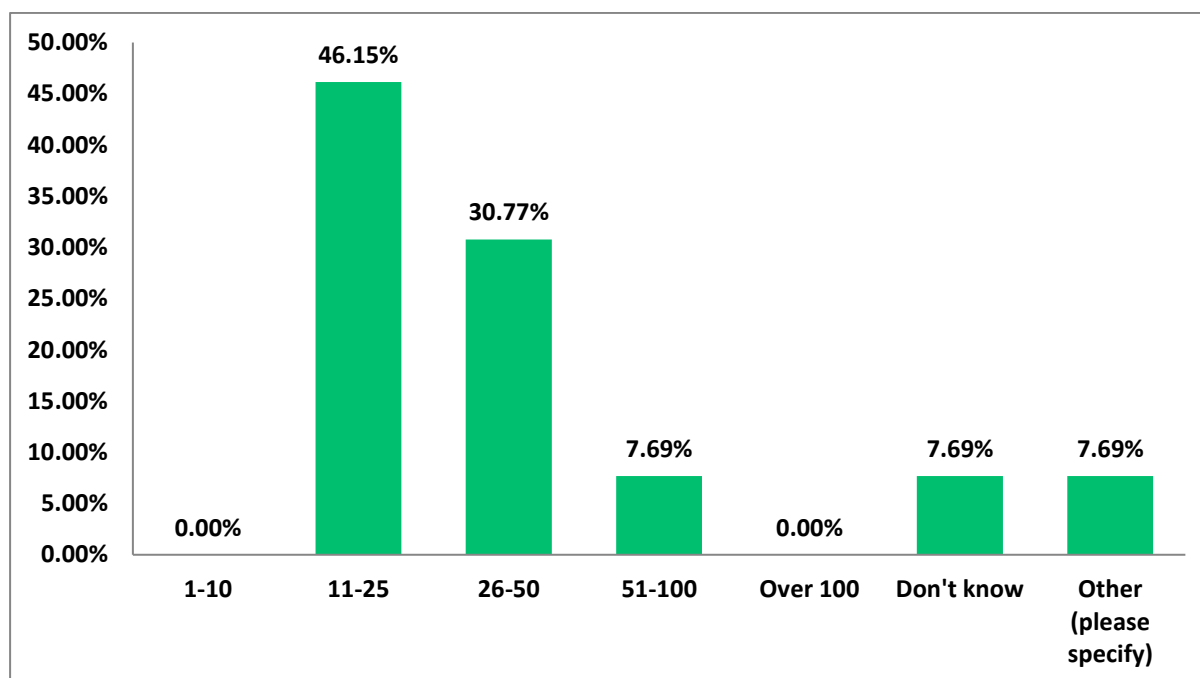
Although councils are not required to provide patrols, many continue to do so because of their role in road safety, child safety and support for the school journey. As a non-statutory service under sustained budget pressure, school crossing patrol provision is increasingly being reviewed. The APSE survey and roundtable explored

the main challenges facing councils and the approaches being used to sustain or reshape provision.

3 Key Findings from the survey

3.1 How many patrol sites are currently funded

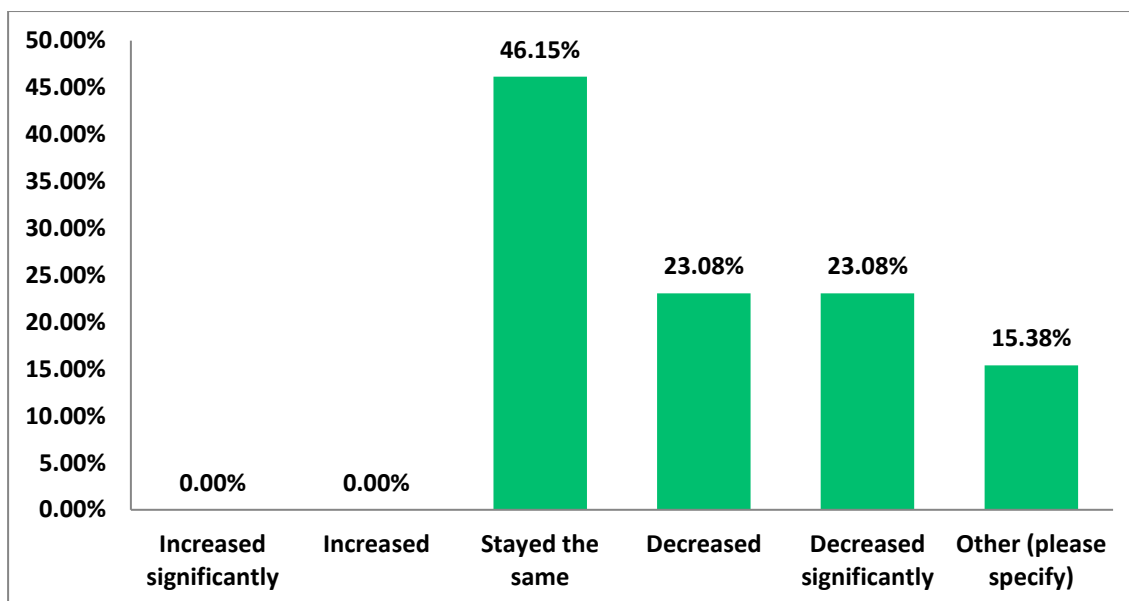
School crossing patrols remain part of the road safety picture in most councils, though the overall pattern suggests provision is becoming more limited. The chart below shows the number of sites currently funded by responding authorities.



Most respondents operate patrols at modest to medium scale. The largest group (46.15%) funds 11 to 25 sites, while 30.77% funds between 26 and 50 sites.

3.2 How has this changed over the last 3 years?

The survey also asked how the number of funded sites has changed over the last three years.



No authority reported an increase in funded sites. Just under half said provision had stayed the same, while a similar proportion reported a fall. Taken together, that suggests councils are largely trying to hold services in place rather than expand them.

3.3 Delivery models for school crossing patrols

The main delivery model remains direct employment by the council, reported by 84.62% of respondents.

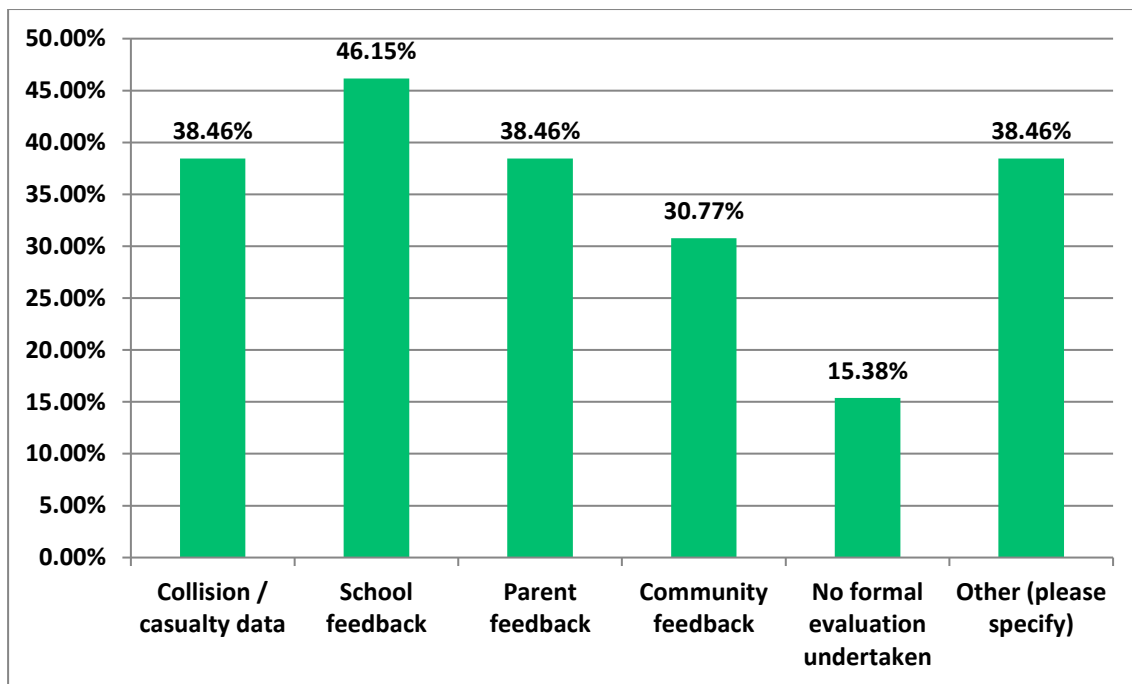
Most authorities (92.31%) operate patrols in both the morning and afternoon. A smaller proportion (15.38%) also provides lunchtime cover.

Where councils retain patrols, they generally continue to provide a full daily service rather than a partial model.

Sites are mostly concentrated at busier crossing points. Some councils also give added weight to younger children, areas of higher deprivation, and pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

3.4 What evidence do you use to assess the effectiveness of the patrols

The survey asked what evidence councils use to assess patrol effectiveness.



The most commonly used evidence source is school feedback (46.15%). A further 38.46% use collision data or parent views. Respondents selecting “other” referred to the following:

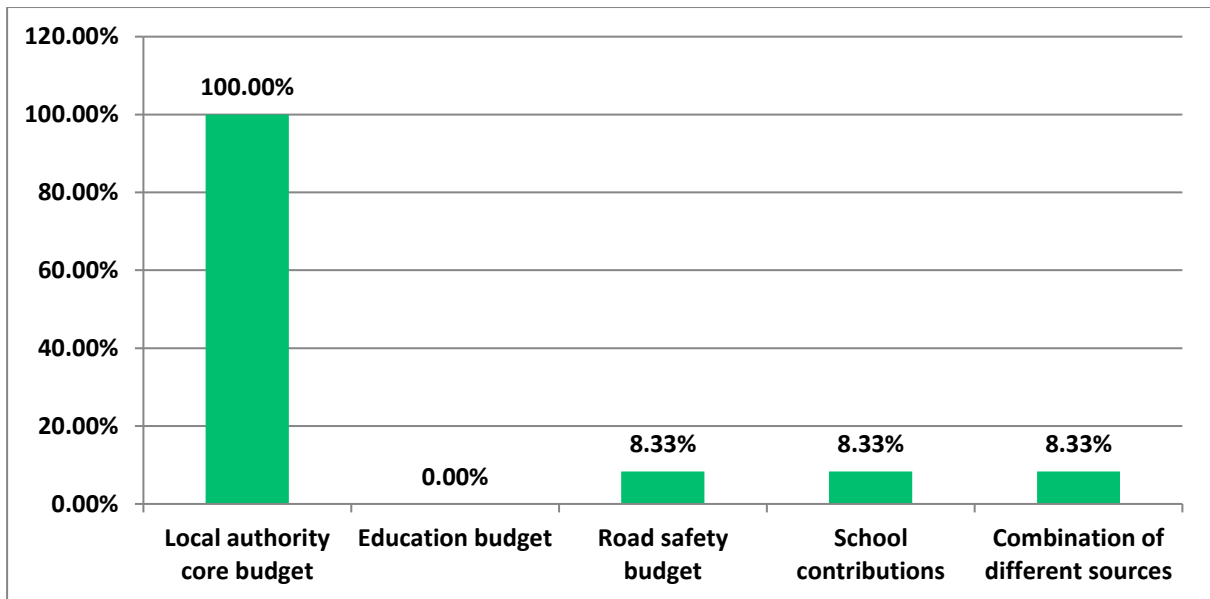
- A combination of all the options
- Site specific risk assessments
- Guidance provided by road safety organisations.

Overall, respondents described patrols as having a positive effect, particularly in supporting safer crossings and giving families confidence on the school journey.

At the same time, the range of methods used to assess impact suggests there is room for a more consistent approach, especially where councils need to explain why provision is being retained, changed or withdrawn.

3.5 What is the primary funding source for School Crossing Patrols

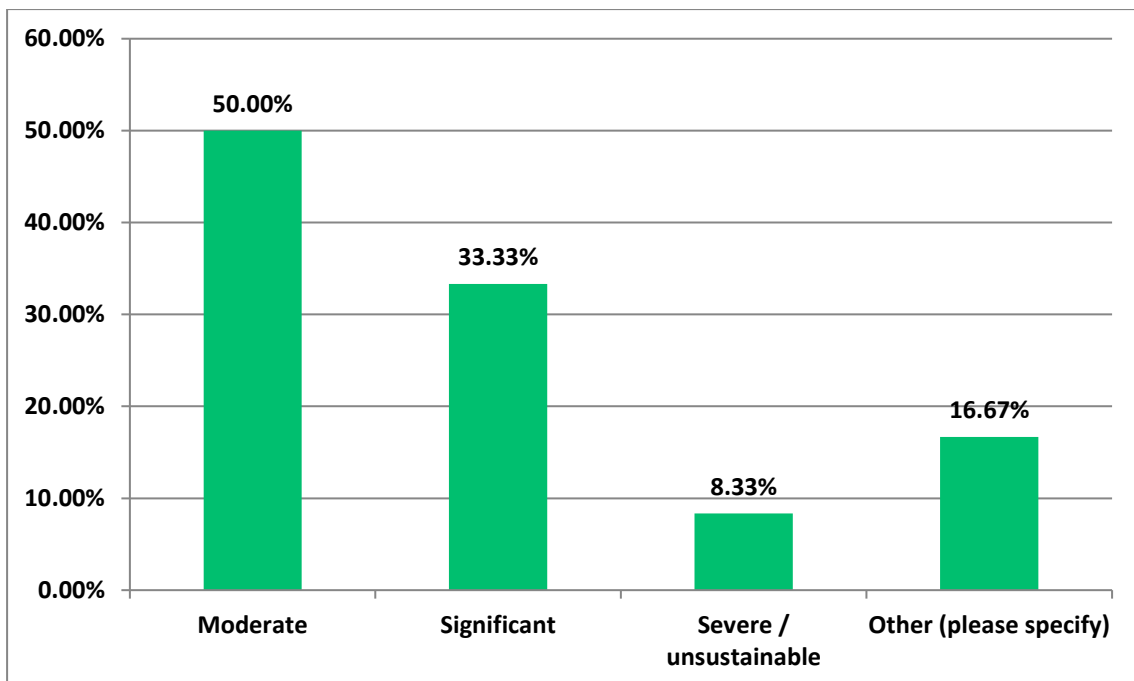
The survey examined the main funding source for patrol provision.



All respondents said the service is funded through core council budgets. That leaves patrol provision exposed when councils are under wider financial pressure and having to prioritise statutory services.

3.6 What is the level of financial pressure on School Crossing Patrols

Respondents were asked to indicate the level of financial pressure on school crossing patrol provision.

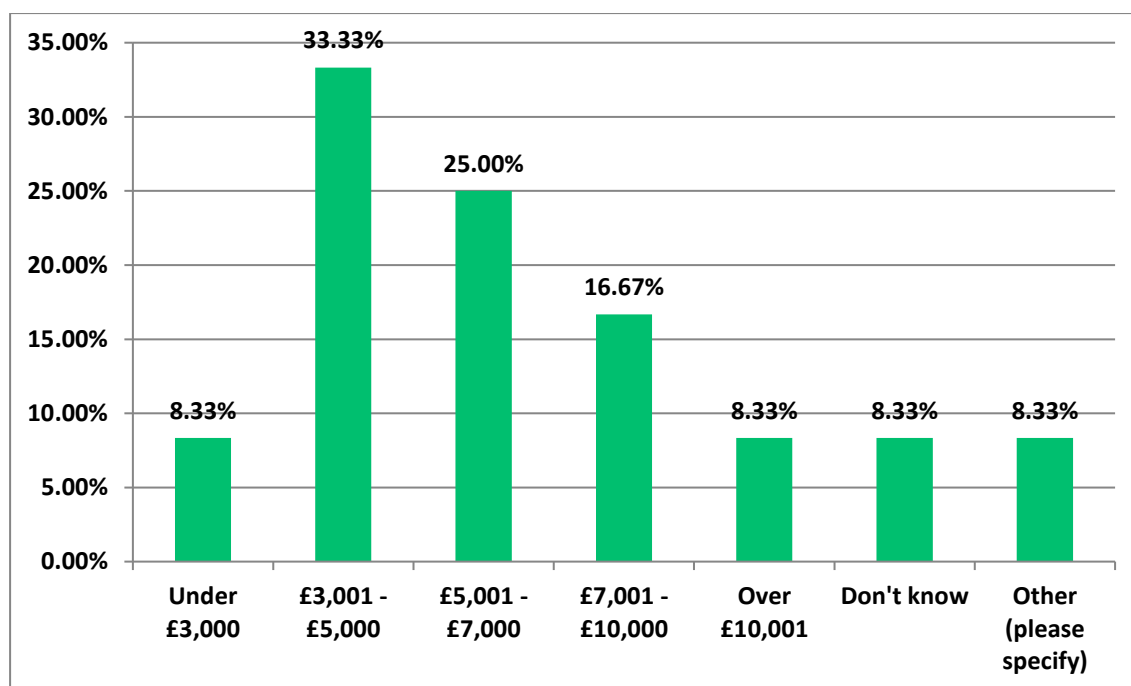


The responses show that financial pressure is significant, with 41.66% describing the position as either significant or unsustainable.

Without protected or alternative funding, patrol services are likely to remain vulnerable where councils are balancing a wide range of competing demands.

3.7 What is the approximate annual cost per patrol

Respondents were asked to estimate the annual cost to the council per patrol.

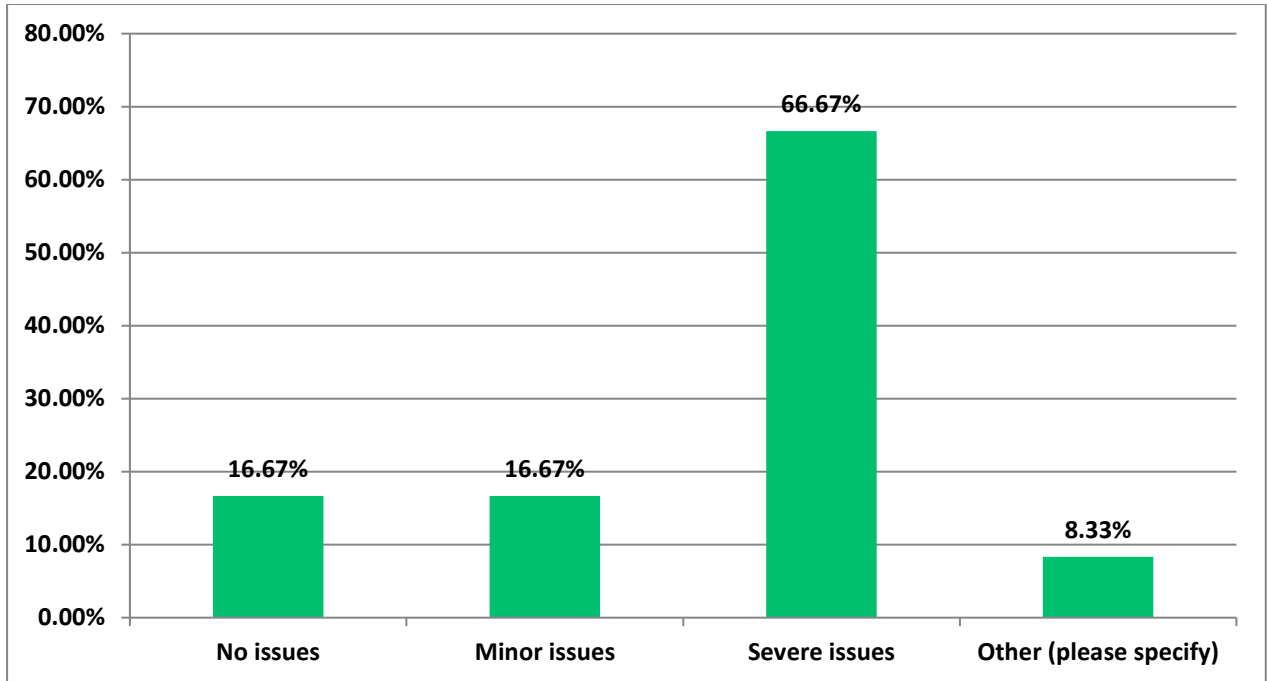


Reported costs sit within a broad mid-range. However, the more material issue for councils is overall service affordability rather than variation at individual site level.

This increases the risk to provision where patrols are not clearly aligned to wider transport, safety or prevention objectives.

3.8 How would you rate the recruitment and retention challenges

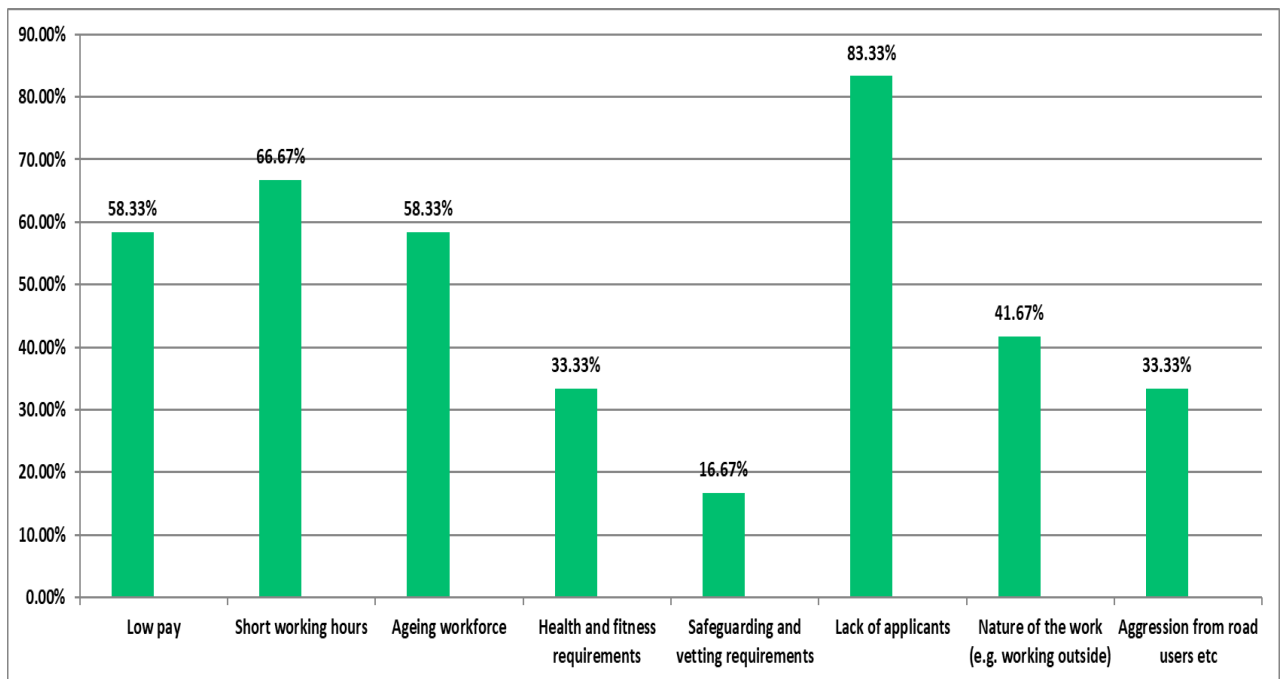
Recruitment and retention have been difficult for some time, reflecting the nature of the role, short hours, fixed times and term-time working. The survey asked councils how serious those pressures are now.



Two-thirds of respondents (66.67%) rated recruitment and retention pressures as severe, indicating a clear risk to current and future service delivery.

3.9 What are the main challenges impacting recruitment and retention?

The survey also asked respondents to identify the main factors affecting recruitment and retention.

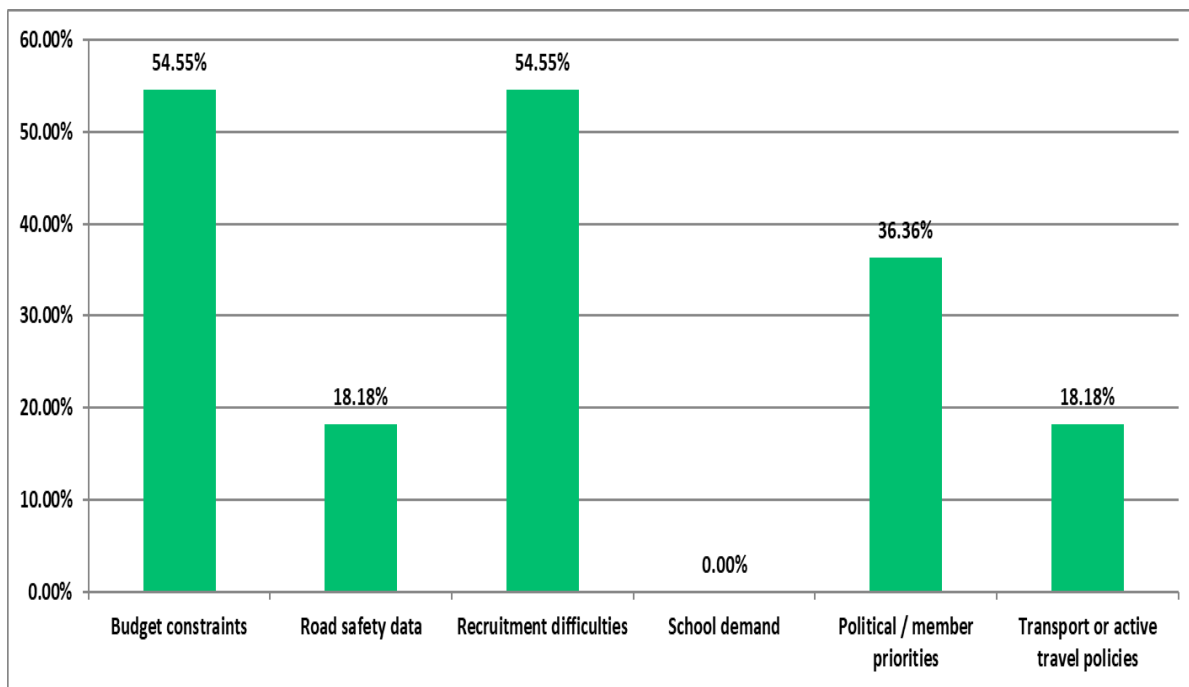


Most respondents said the main difficulty is simply attracting applicants. That is likely to reflect a mix of relatively low pay, limited hours, an ageing workforce and small local labour pools. Some also pointed to the outdoor nature of the work and the abuse staff can face from drivers.

For many councils, the medium-term issue is not only whether provision should continue, but whether the current employment model remains viable.

3.10 What are the key factors influencing future decisions about the provision?

The survey asked respondents which factors are most likely to shape future decisions about provision.



More than half of respondents (54.55%) said budget constraints and recruitment difficulties are influencing future decisions.

Where councils are reviewing future options, patrols are increasingly being considered alongside wider road safety and active travel measures. Common alternatives include zebra or signal-controlled crossings, traffic calming and, in some areas, school street models.

This points to a gradual move away from relying only on staffed patrols towards a broader mix of engineering, traffic management and behaviour-change measures.

Even so, replacing a patrol is rarely straightforward where local risk, public expectation and community confidence remain strong factors.

4 Summary of the APSE Roundtable

APSE held a roundtable on Tuesday 12 May 2026 to explore the survey findings in more detail. The discussion gave a fuller picture of the operational, policy and political issues councils are working through.

4.1 Main Issues

Participants highlighted the following issues:

- Recruitment remains a widespread and longstanding challenge across councils, driven by low hours, split shifts and relatively low pay.
- School crossing patrols are a highly visible and politically sensitive service because they are closely associated with child safety.
- Changes to provision, even where supported by formal risk assessment, can generate significant community opposition and member pressure.
- Most councils continue to rely on local authority funding and locally determined service criteria, often informed by national guidance and PV2-based assessment.
- Authorities are using a mix of community-based recruitment, simplified application processes and local promotion through schools and parent networks.
- There is strong caution against extending the role into parking, speeding or wider enforcement activity.

4.2 Workforce and Recruitment

Several councils said vacancy levels are difficult to sustain, with some posts needing repeated rounds of advertising. Short hours and split shifts continue to narrow the field of potential applicants.

Councils are responding by simplifying recruitment, removing unnecessary barriers, and advertising through schools, parent networks, community venues and social media.

4.3 Assessment and Service Review

Councils described using formal assessment tools, including PV2 and local categorisation frameworks, to determine need and prioritise cover. However,

roundtable participants noted that technical assessment alone may not resolve local concern.

Some councils that reducing sites after assessment later faced sustained complaints, increased in Freedom of Information requests and member challenge, and in some cases the decision was revisited. Participants stressed the importance of a clear communications plan and early engagement with elected members when service changes are proposed.

4.4 Political and Community Context

Participants described school crossing patrols as one of those services that attracts strong public attention. Even where wider road safety measures had been introduced, many communities still saw a staffed patrol as important reassurance.

This suggests that decisions are shaped not only by technical evidence, but also by public confidence and member expectations.

4.5 Role Boundaries and Staff Safety

There was broad agreement that patrol staff should remain focused on safe crossing duties and should not be expected to take on enforcement activity.

Councils reported concerns about aggression from road users and the risk of increasing staff vulnerability if enforcement expectations are added to the role.

Views on body-worn cameras were mixed but generally cautious. Most councils had not introduced them, though some are looking at the issue again after serious incidents or difficulties gathering evidence.

4.6 Alternative Delivery Models

One option discussed was incorporating crossing duties into wider school-based roles, such as facilities or janitorial posts, where sites are close enough to the school. Participants noted that local geography, job design and political commitments may limit this approach.

4.7 Training and Development

Training approaches varied, but common practice included supervisor-led induction, training videos or manuals, shadowing experienced staff, on-site familiarisation and refresher checks.

Some councils also use written materials or central sessions for topics such as safeguarding and health and safety. There was clear interest in sharing training resources and practice between authorities.

4.8 Key Considerations for Councils

- Review recruitment processes to remove unnecessary barriers and use community-based advertising channels.
- Ensure assessment criteria are clear, defensible and supported by documented evidence.
- Plan early for political, community and communications issues when proposing service change.
- Maintain a clear distinction between patrol activity and enforcement responsibilities.
- Keep staff safety, confidence and retention at the centre of service design.
- Share training materials, risk assessment approaches and operational practice across councils where possible.

4.9 Legislative impacts

Participants noted that, while patrol provision is not a statutory council function, the legislative framework identifies the council as the appropriate authority and does not clearly provide for delegation to other organisations. This may limit the scope for volunteers, schools or community groups to support delivery.

APSE Comment

Taken as a whole, the findings suggest that school crossing patrols still matter to councils and communities, but the service does not always sit on a secure long-term footing.

For many authorities, the immediate task is to move beyond short-term maintenance and decide how patrols fit within wider road safety, active travel, child safety and prevention priorities.

Where councils do review provision, they will need clear risk assessment, transparent local criteria and early discussion with members, schools and communities.

It is also important that the role stays focused on crossing duties, with staff supported through sensible recruitment, training and safety arrangements.

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