

State of the Market Survey 2021

Cemetery and Crematorium Services





This state of the market survey was conducted by Wayne Priestley, APSE Principal Advisor for Environmental services

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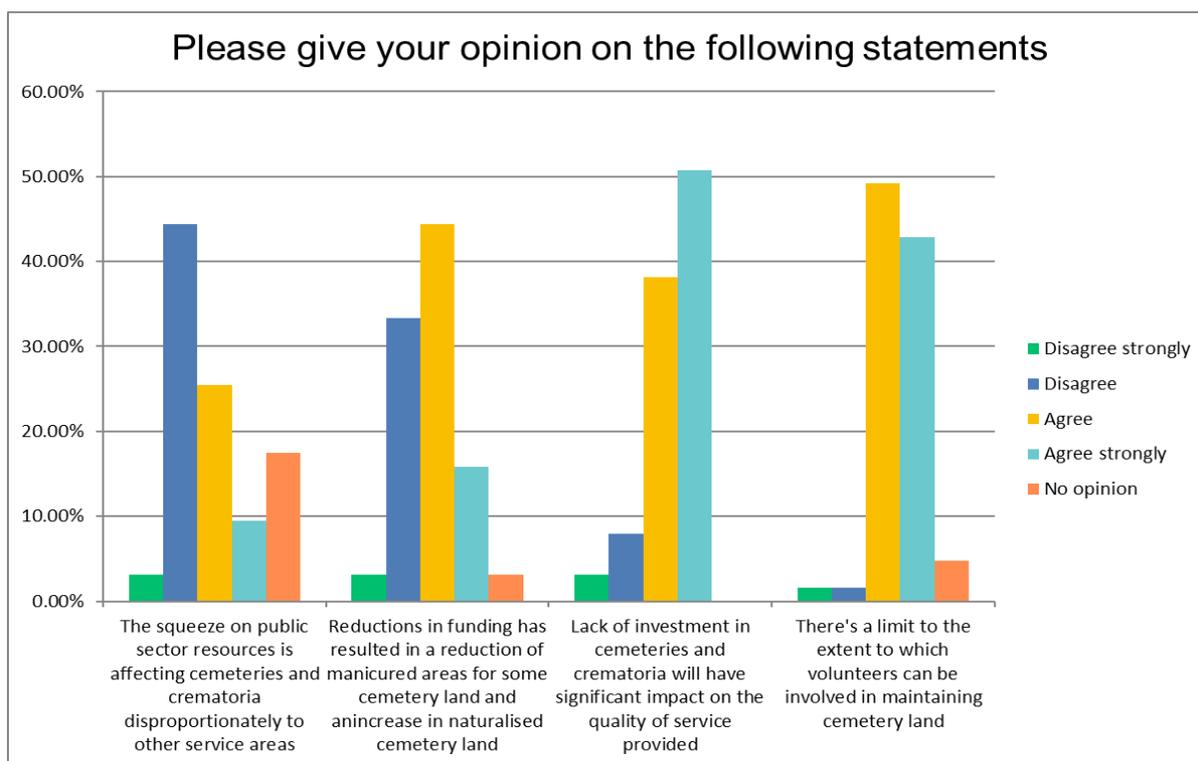
Local Authority Cemetery and Crematorium Services

State of the Market 2021

APSE conducted an online survey during January to March 2021. 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. Despite the oncoming impacts of the coronavirus virus and the impacts this was to have on the service areas, almost 63 local authority responses were received from councils throughout the UK which is an increase of 21% on 2020.

This report identifies the key findings of the survey.

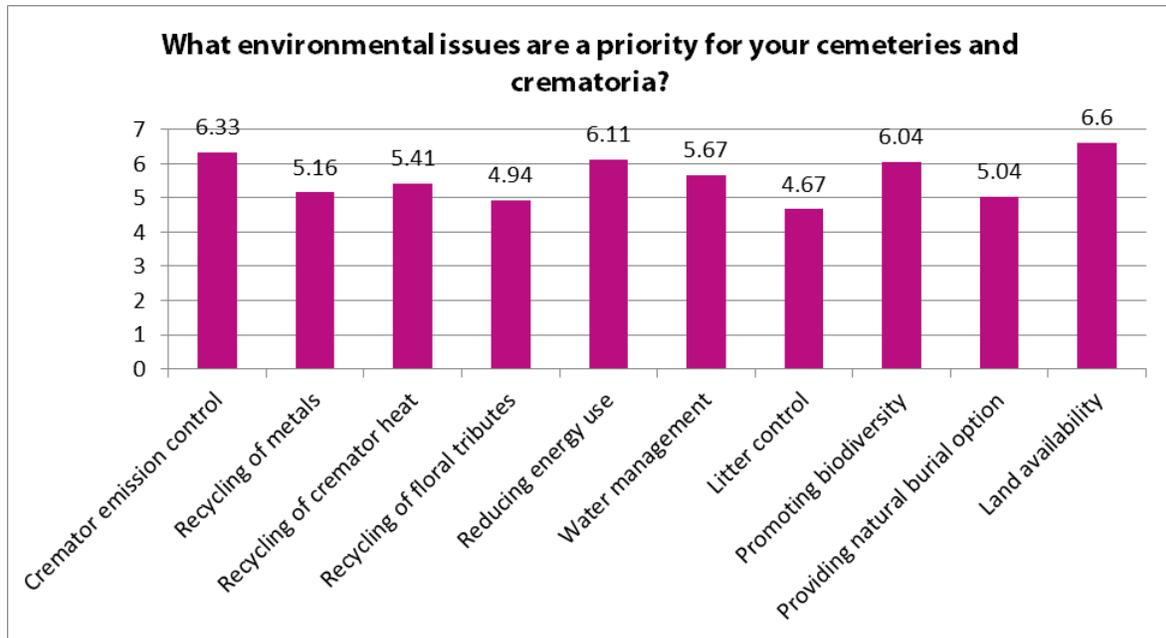
Results from the survey



larger proportion of respondents do not feel their services have been cut more than other service areas. However, interestingly, a high proportion of respondents at 89%, 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 60% of respondents have experienced reductions in the manicured quality of their grounds, but again this is a much lower score than 2020 when 73% said they had experienced reductions in the quality of their cemetery grounds.

Interestingly with regards to the use of volunteers, 92% felt that there was a limit to involving them in grounds maintenance which is a slight fall from 94% in 2020. Volunteers are very much seen as bringing

added value to services rather than being seen as being able to carry out core service work, but there are likely to be variations in the complexity of roles volunteers are given. However, their ability to bring in extra funding is recognised.



There has been a slight shift in key environmental issues since last year with the importance of land availability now being at the top of the ten environmental priorities in 2021. There has also been increases in the importance of reducing energy and recycling heat from cremators. Improving opportunities for biodiversity has risen in significance now being the fourth highest priority.

Although controlling cremator emissions still remains as the second highest environmental priority, it is telling that the importance of land availability is now the major issue for local authorities and one which will no doubt continue to rise in importance as burial space reduces as a result of the impacts of the coronavirus, causing further pressure to be applied to the need to find new burial land.

The visual appearance of cemetery grounds is also well represented with litter control and opportunities or promoting biodiversity again highlighted. It is clear from these results that cemetery and crematoria managers are building environmental considerations into their service delivery as much as financial and social aspects.

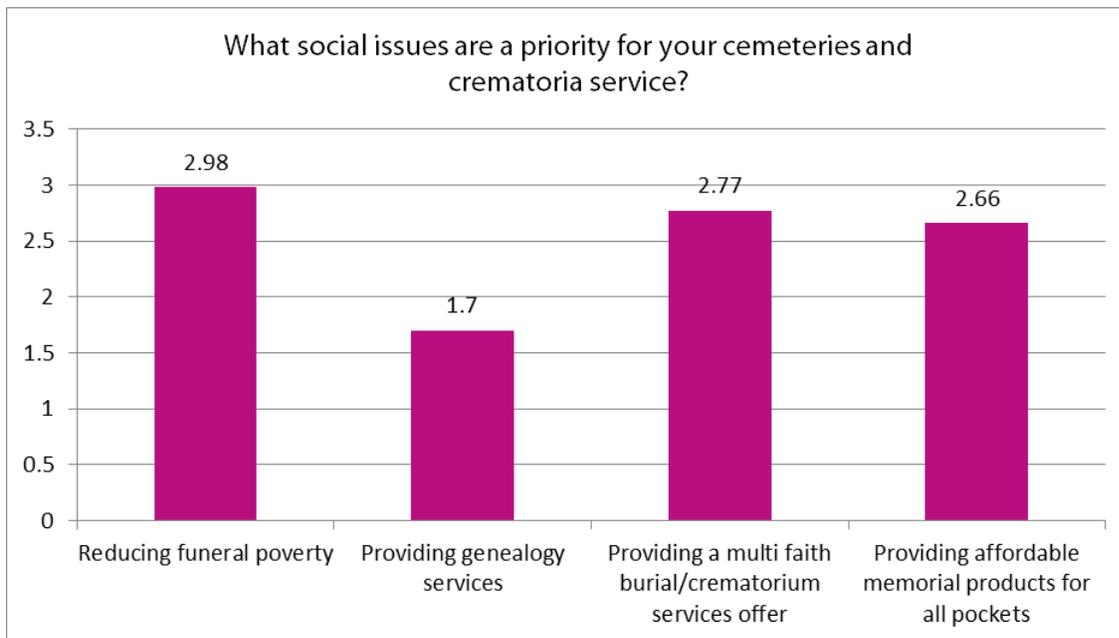
Are there any other environmental issues which are impacting upon your service?

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, including winters. This climate change has also been causing issues for re-opening graves in some sections due to waterlogging.
- The use of chemicals and changes to what can be used
- Weed and Moss control
- Noise pollution from surrounding industries which may be a localised issue but may also reflect the need to use 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.

New areas of concern included the Impact of badger activity on cemetery grounds.



As with last year's results, it is apparent that there is a growing need to adapt service provision to enable Bereavement Services 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. However, the importance of providing multi-faith burials and cremations caused by the UK's population becoming more ethnically diverse has now risen considerably on respondents agendas.

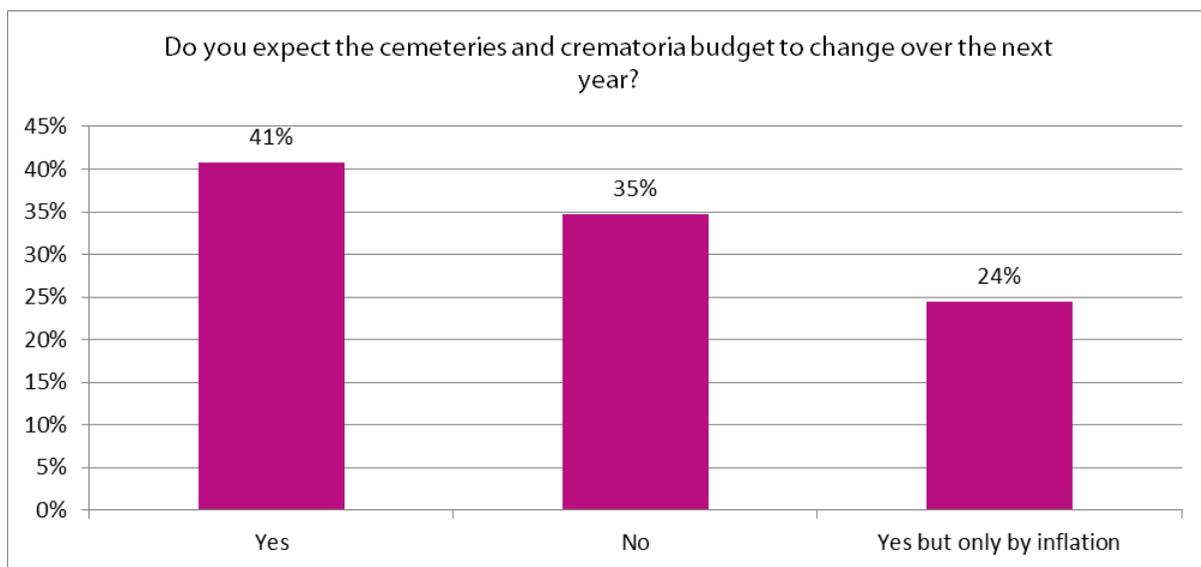
Are there any other social issues which are impacting upon your service?

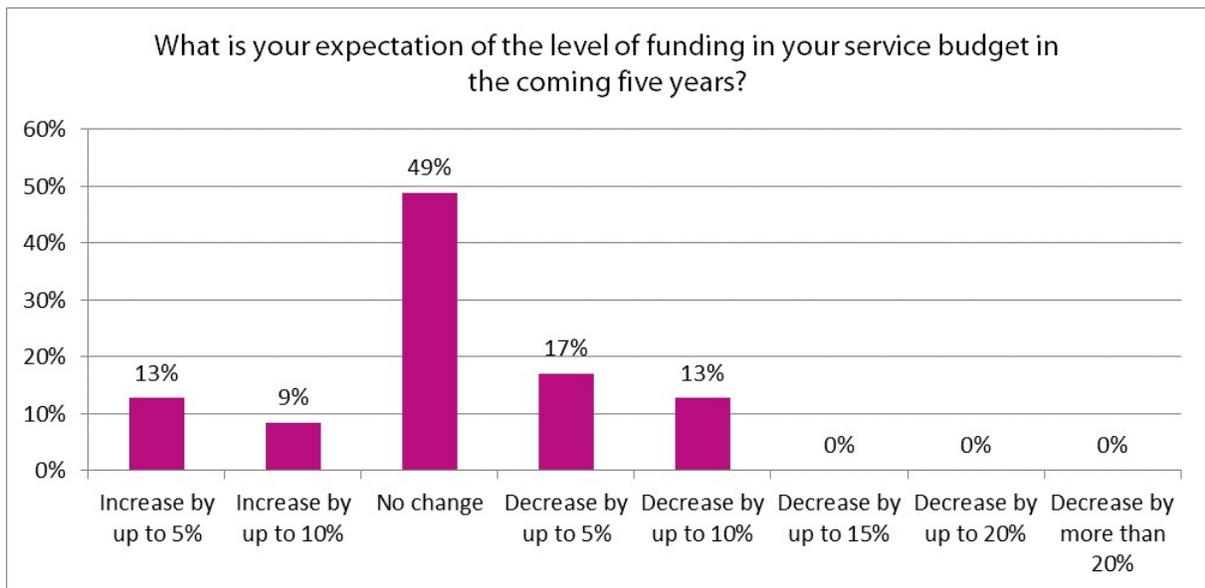
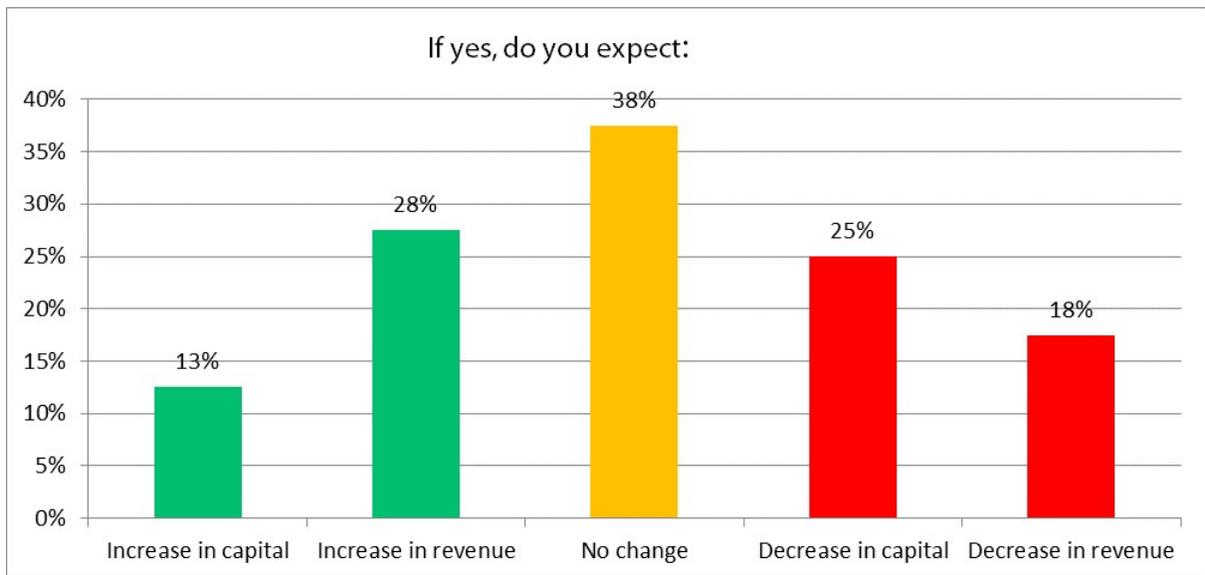
Ensuring residents are dealt with in a sympathetic manner is key to quality service delivery, and as such Bereavement Managers have to consider ways in which to help vulnerable families at their time of loss. Some of the survey responses received over the past few years have highlighted the following:

- 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 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 in particular, 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 as well as 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.

A new area of concern, is the need to improve information about funeral options, so that the bereaved can make more informed choices.





From the above three graphs it is clear that 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 most respondents expecting increases or no change to current levels of funding. However, the one significant change over 2020 is there has been a 4% decrease in those expecting to see a reduction in both their capital and revenue budgets, with the majority of respondents (49% as opposed to 45% in 2020), expecting no change. This is also some improvements in the number of respondents who are expecting increases in their budgets of both 5% and 10% over 2020.

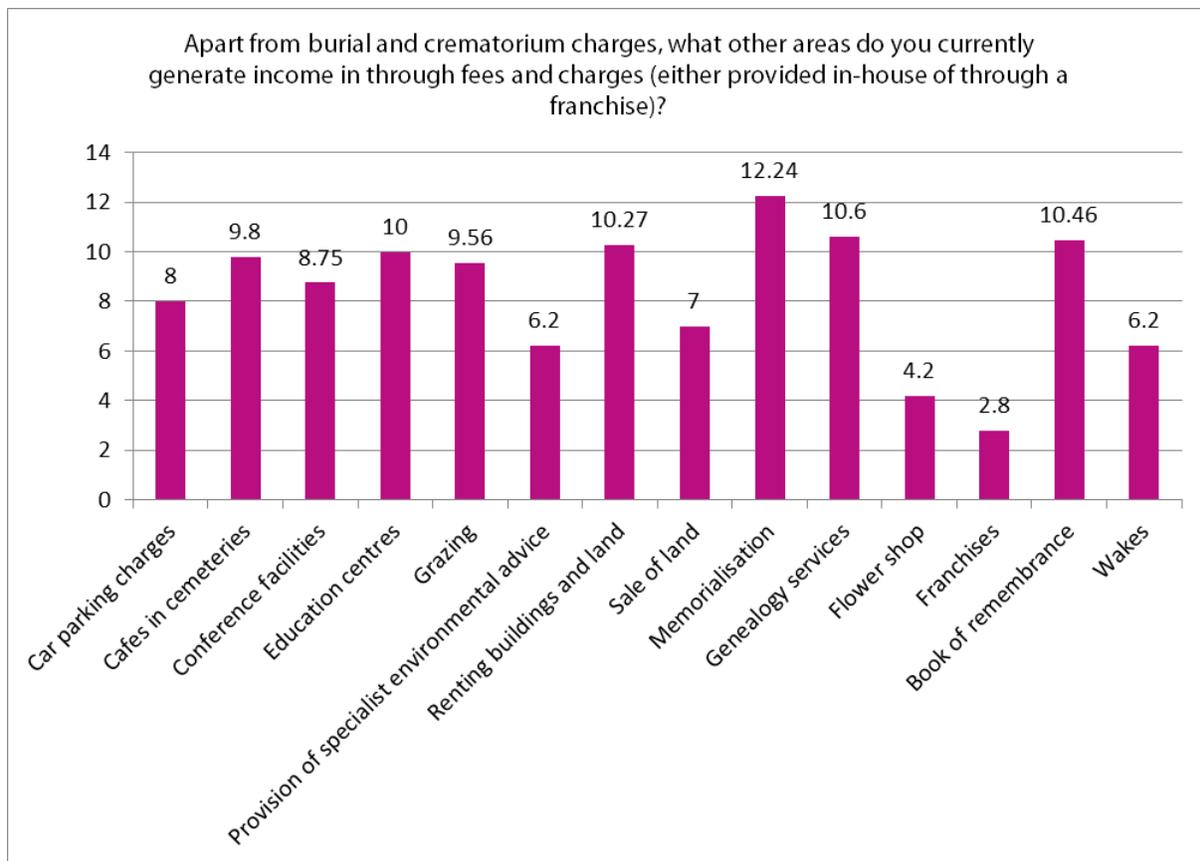
How do you expect to achieve any efficiencies required (e.g. increased income levels / introducing new services offers)?

As in the 2020 results, clearly 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 in order to plug these funding gaps is paramount. From the responses received it is evident there is no shortage of ideas being considered, and implemented, which are helping address these problems.

- Increase existing fees & 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 in order to improve efficiencies and bring in an additional income through higher productivity 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 a number of new memorials/graves combined.
- Introducing new service with additional fees (e.g. Saturday 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.
- Rain water collection and LED lighting in chapels.
- Application for grants to improve cemetery buildings of historical importance.

New additions for 2021 include: offer more options such as reduced rates for funerals taking place on early mornings and late evenings and reduce grounds maintenance costs by carrying out less grass cutting and creating more wildflower areas.



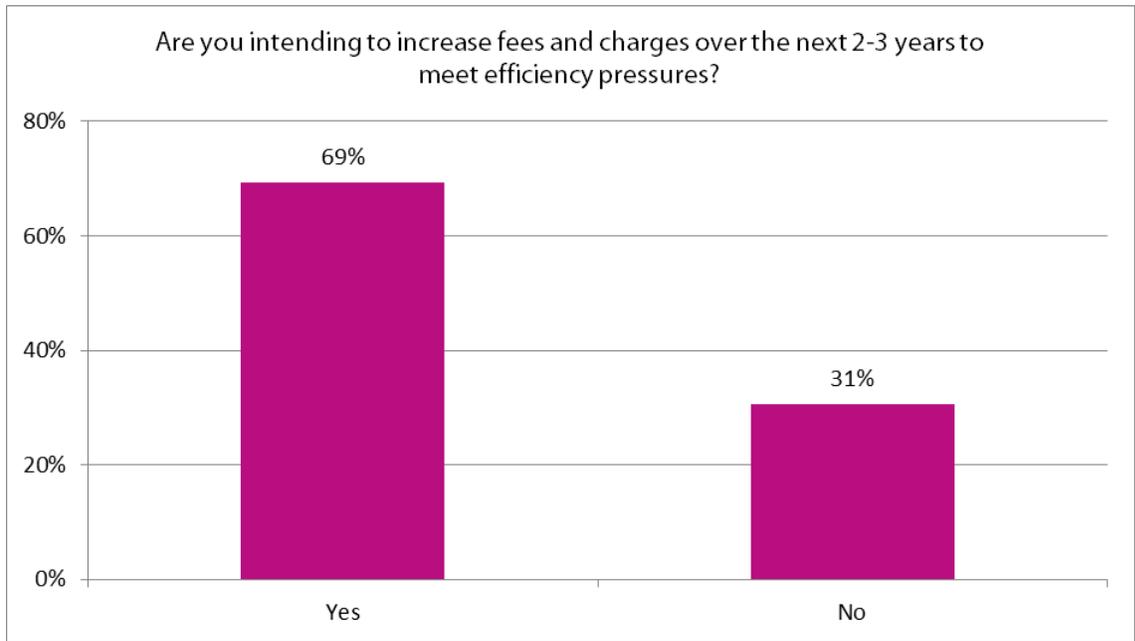
Notable changes since 2021 appear to show that although there has been a continuing reliance being placed on memorialisation, genealogy services, Books of Remembrance and the rentings of buildings and land as the main income generators, the provision of cafes and education centres has grown in

importance . APSE may need to investigate whether these new areas of income generation are as wide spread as suggested, or it may just reflect those who have previously recorded such sources of income not having submitted data in the 2020 survey. Interestingly an ongoing area of income generation is via grazing, which has shown a sustained appearance in respondents continuing to report this as a source of income.

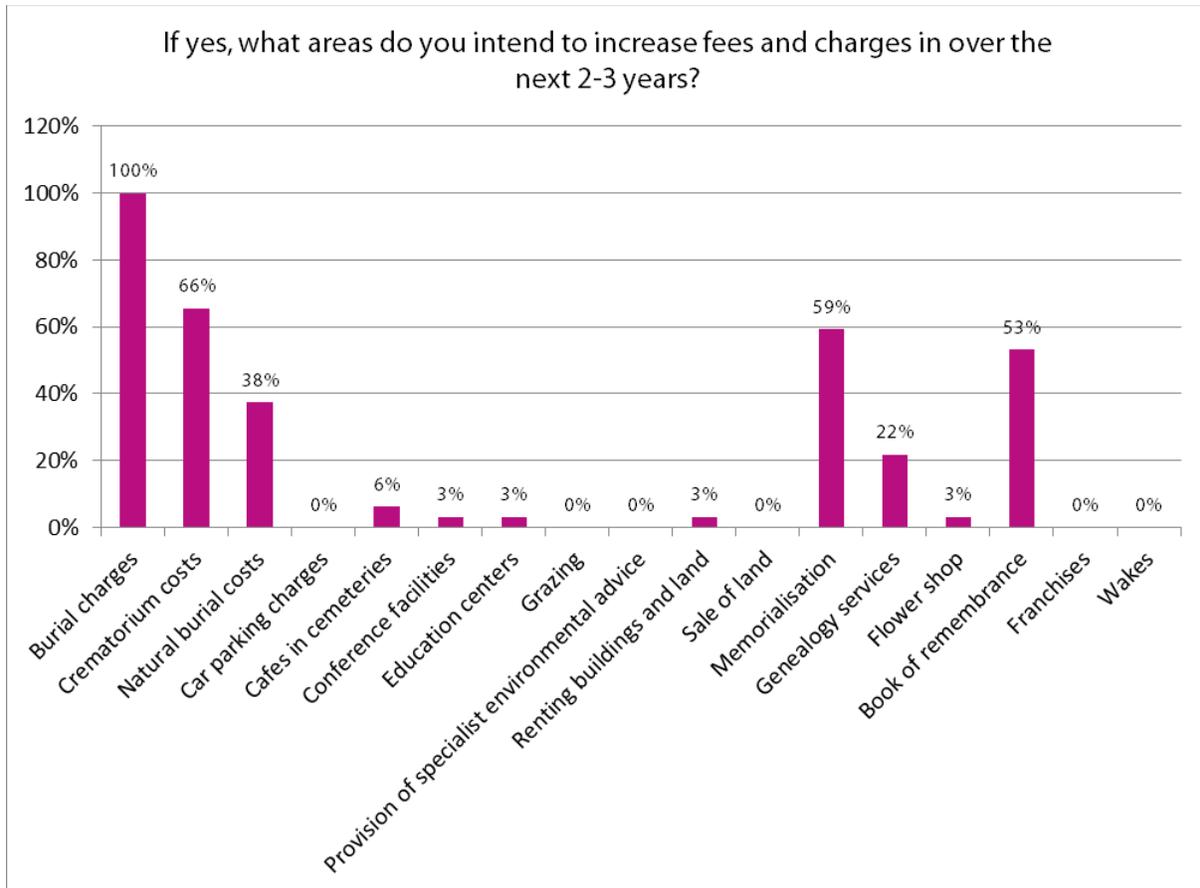
Do you have any other sources of income which are not included above?

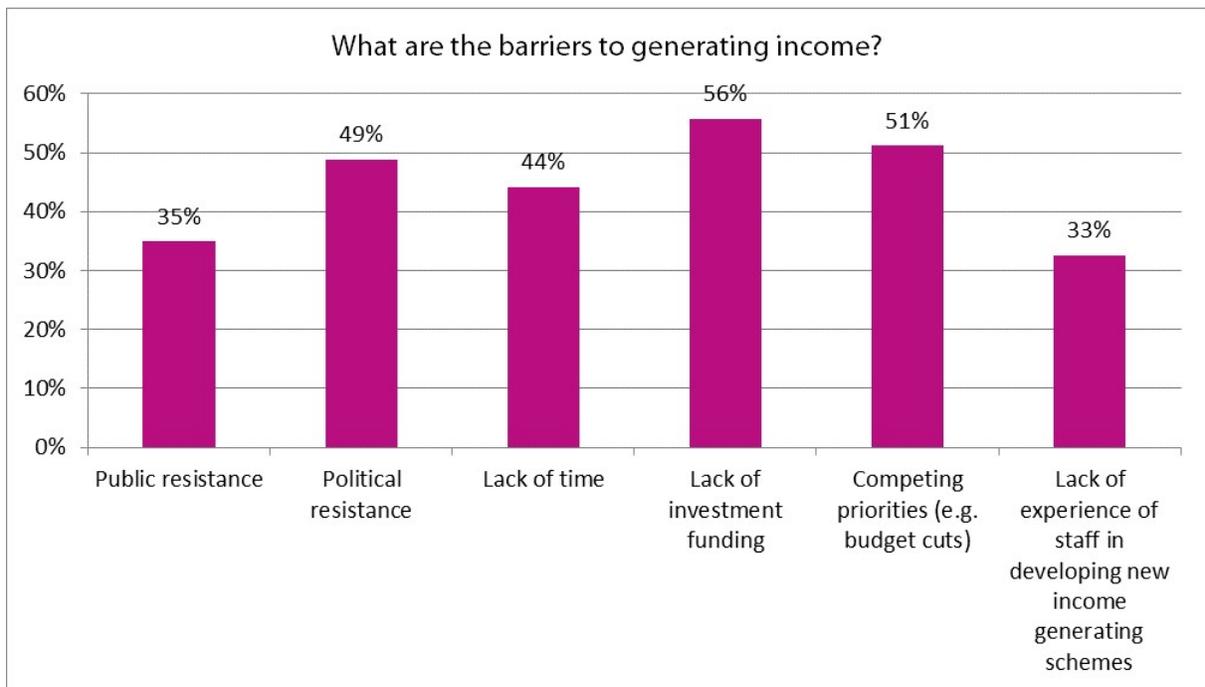
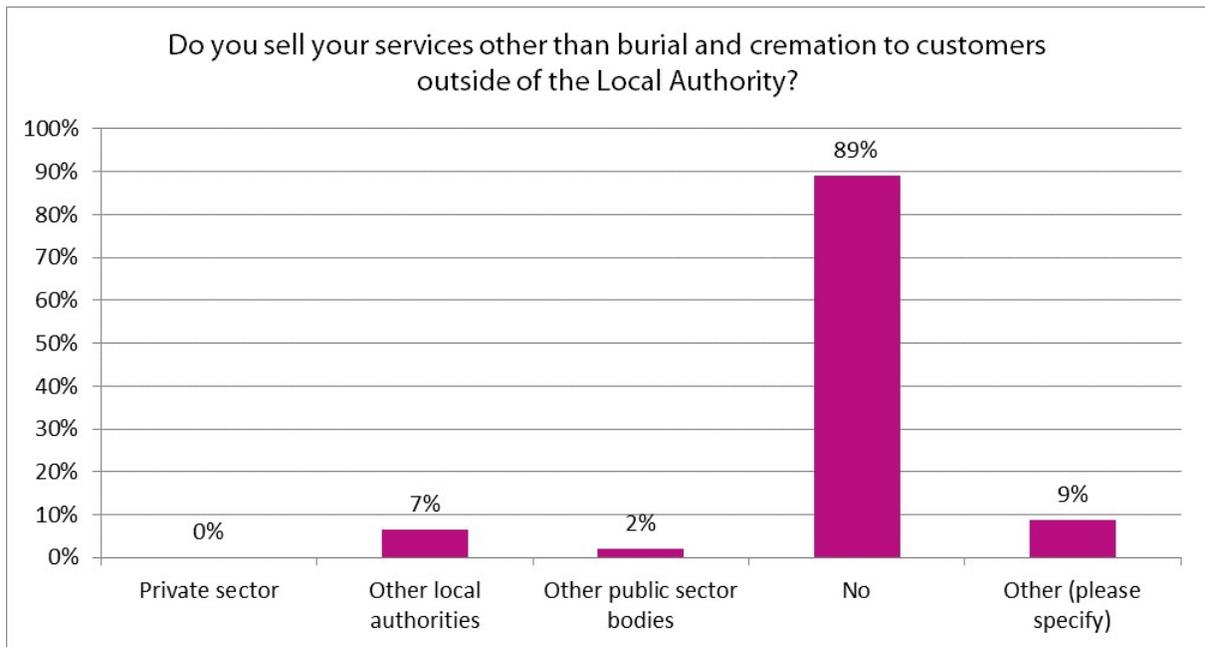
- We make income from memorialisation and genealogy and providing burial service to local parish council cemeteries
- Sports Pitches
- CAMEO mercury trading payments
- Provision of officer time in assisting other authorities to process Public Health funerals.
- Profit share with music partner.
- Pre-paid 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.

New additions for 2021 include charging for the transfer of ownership, allowing weddings in funeral chapels and perhaps somewhat 'left field' – cave tours in a closed cemetery.



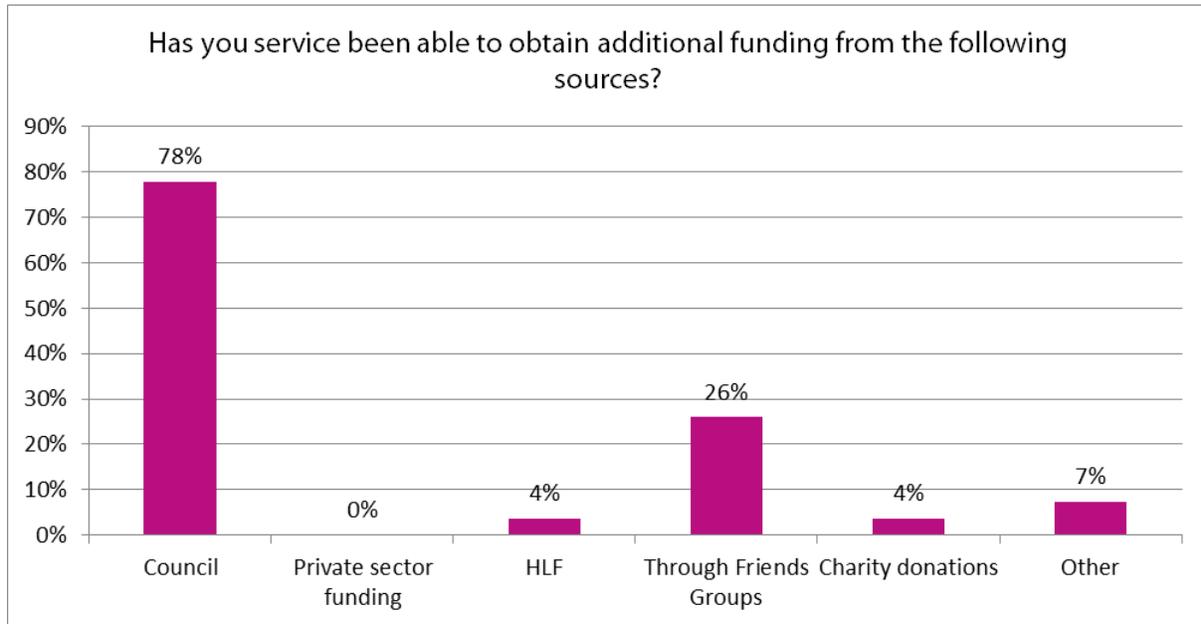
Responses in 2021 show that the percentage of local authorities intending to increase fees and charges has changed significantly, with only 69% intending to increase charges as compared to 2020 when 88% were intending to increase charges.



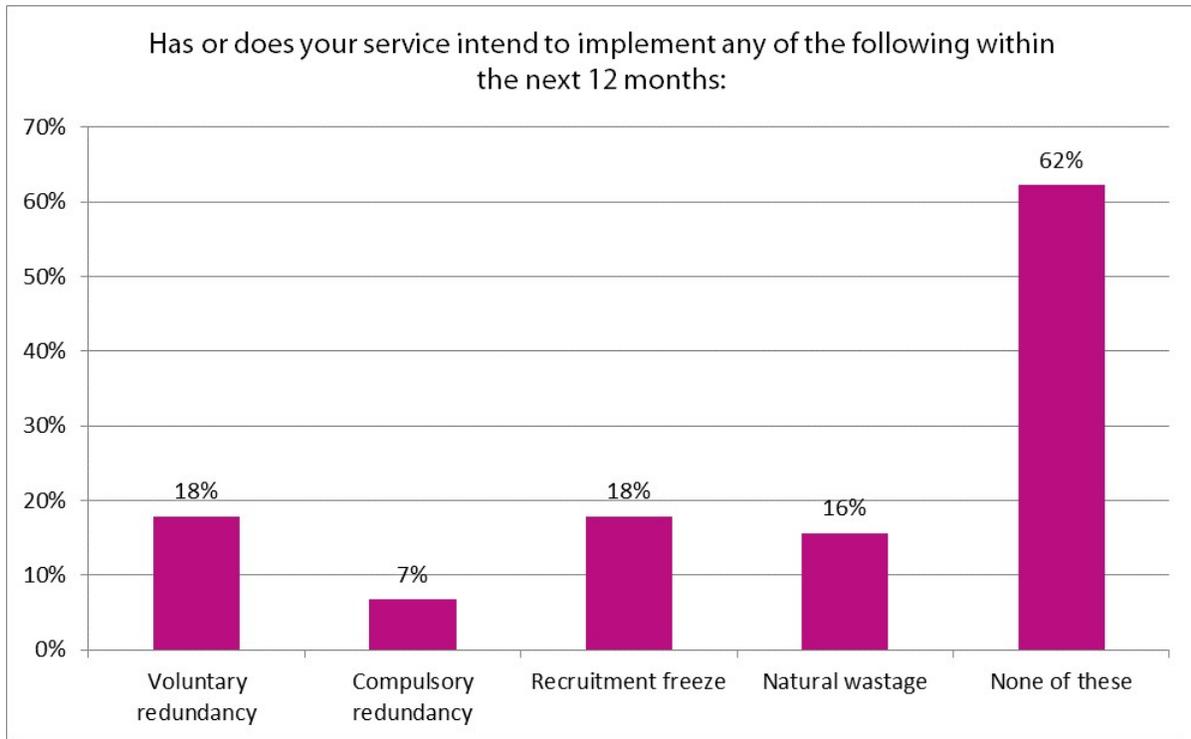


It is clear that because of the nature of the service and the fact many families are extremely vulnerable at the time of loss, it is still seen by many as unseemly to be generating income from the provision of additional services. Equally, where income generation is pursued, it does appear there may be a clear need to train staff to look more closely at the services they provide and their commerciality together with opportunities to develop new services offers in order to help generate additional income. What is noticeable however, is that public resistance as a barrier to income generation is much lower than the

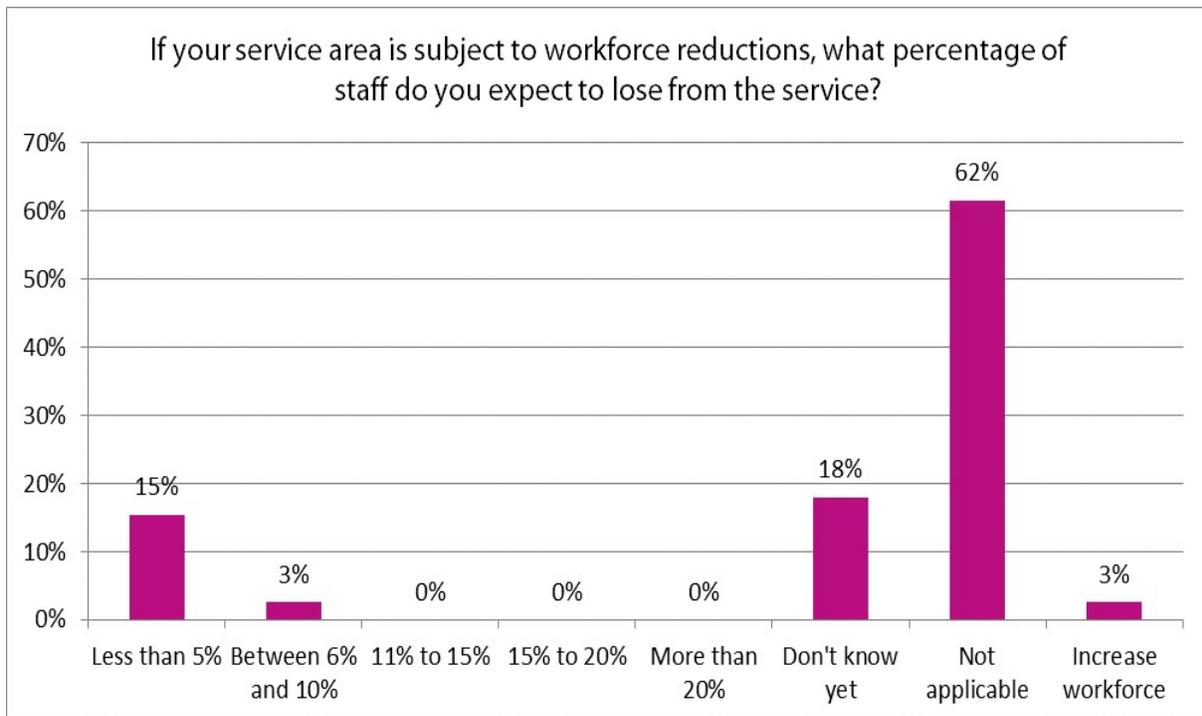
levels of political resistance being a barrier, which has again risen against 2020 figures. The main issues for an inability to develop income generation schemes is competing priorities and perhaps most importantly, a lack of available investment funding. The one real change has been fewer respondents stating a lack of expertise which has fallen from 48% in 2020 to 33% in 2021, perhaps suggesting staff are becoming more adepts at identifying and implementing income generating services.



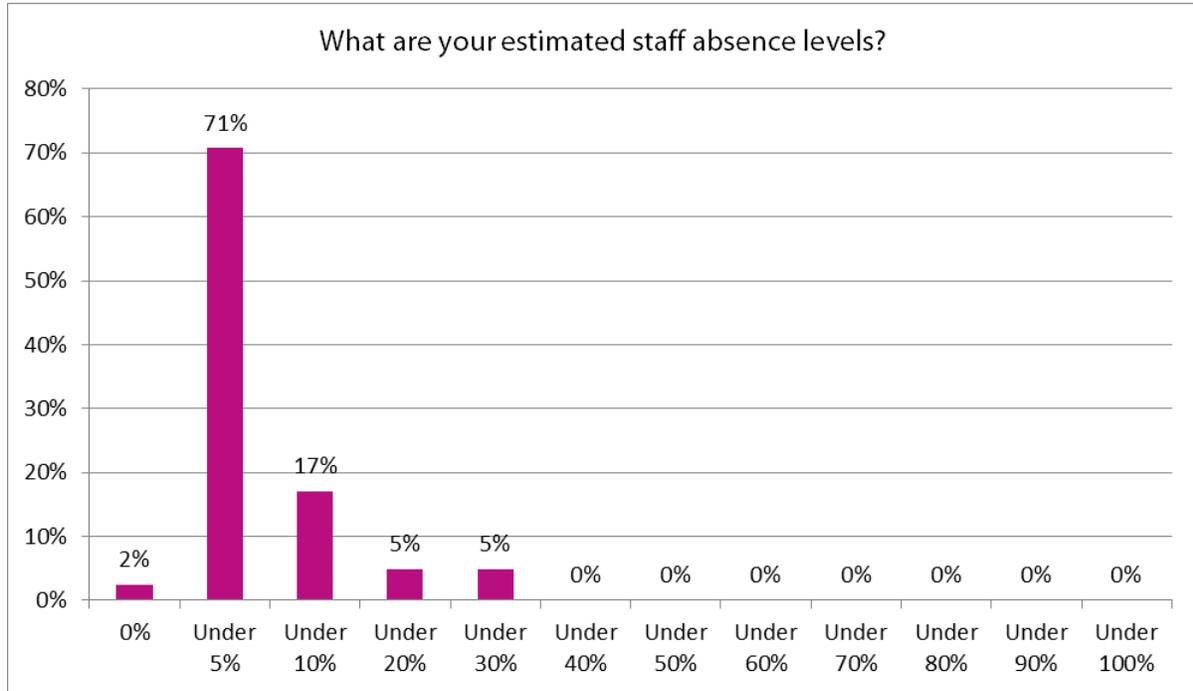
As in 2020, council funding is still the main source of additional funding (although there has been a noticeable increase in the number of respondents who have said they have been able to get additional funding, up from 63% in 2020). This increase is likely to be due to the reductions in income from other sources which have all seen reductions on 2020 figures. The reasoning behind this may well be due to the impacts of Coronavirus affecting the ability of donators, particularly Friends groups being unable to carry out fund raising events. This reduced funding shows the importance of the contributions such groups and organisations are making towards the upkeep our cemeteries in normal times.



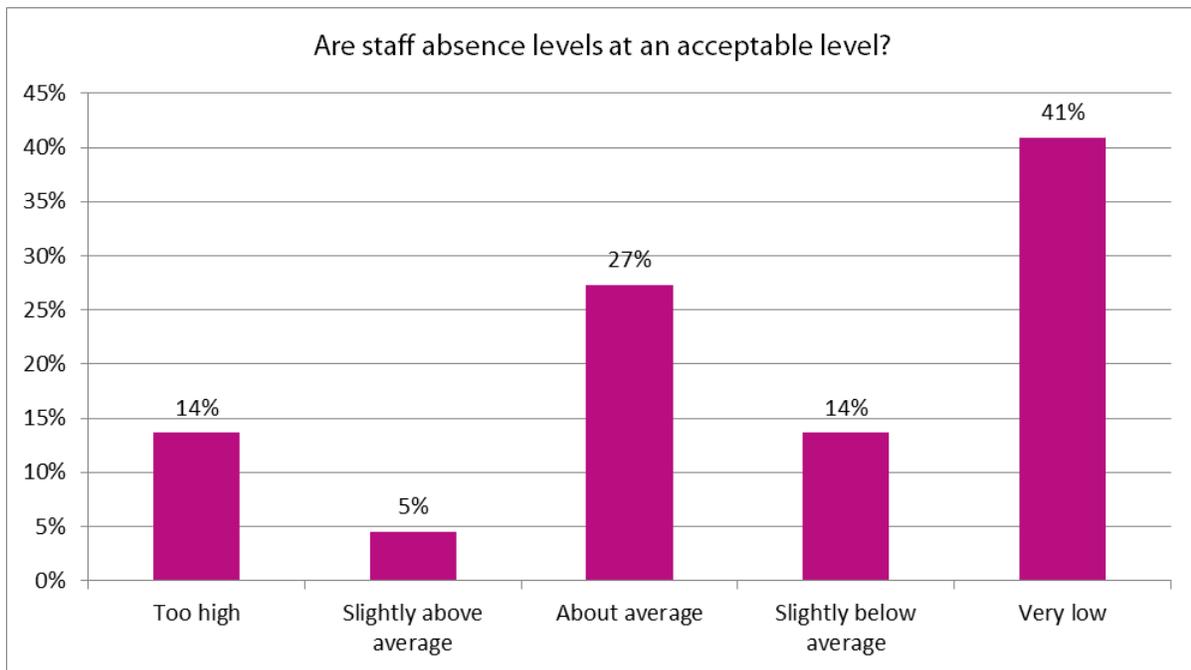
With regards to staffing levels over the next 12 months, 62% of respondents declared they were not looking to lose staff. It is perhaps heartening to note compulsory redundancy is a path fewer respondents are looking to go down, (10% in 2020). Voluntary redundancy as an option has remained the same as 2020 at 18%. Recruitment freeze has seen the largest increase on 2020 levels (13% in 2020).



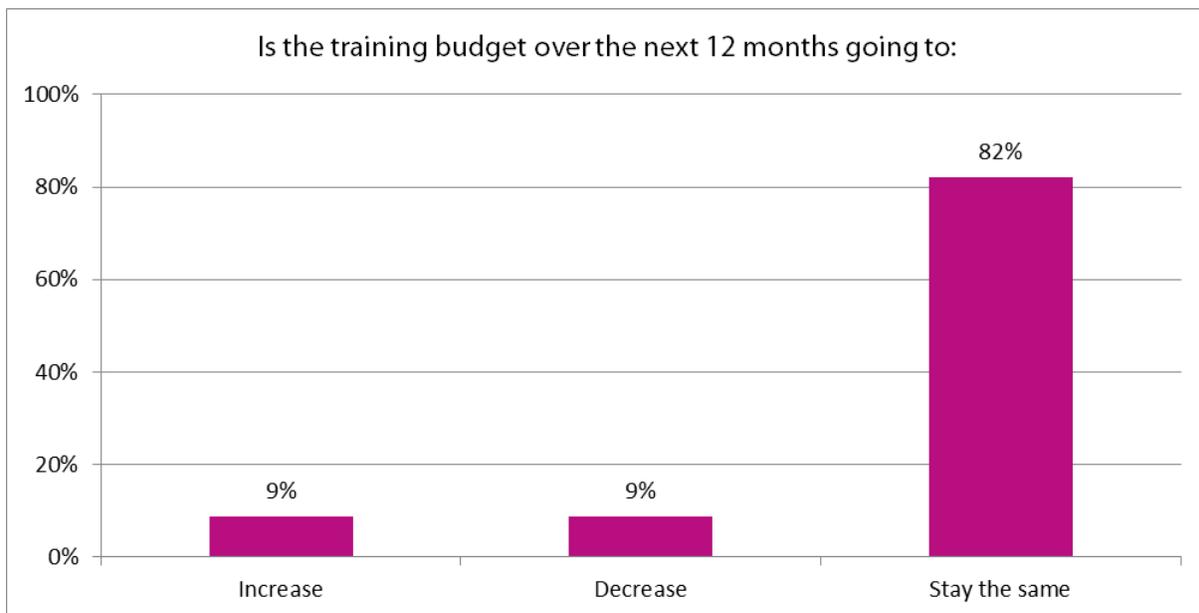
There has been some change on 2020 results with an increase in the number of respondents who are looking to see reductions in staff numbers of less than 5%, (9% in 2020). Most other areas have seen levels remain fairly static.



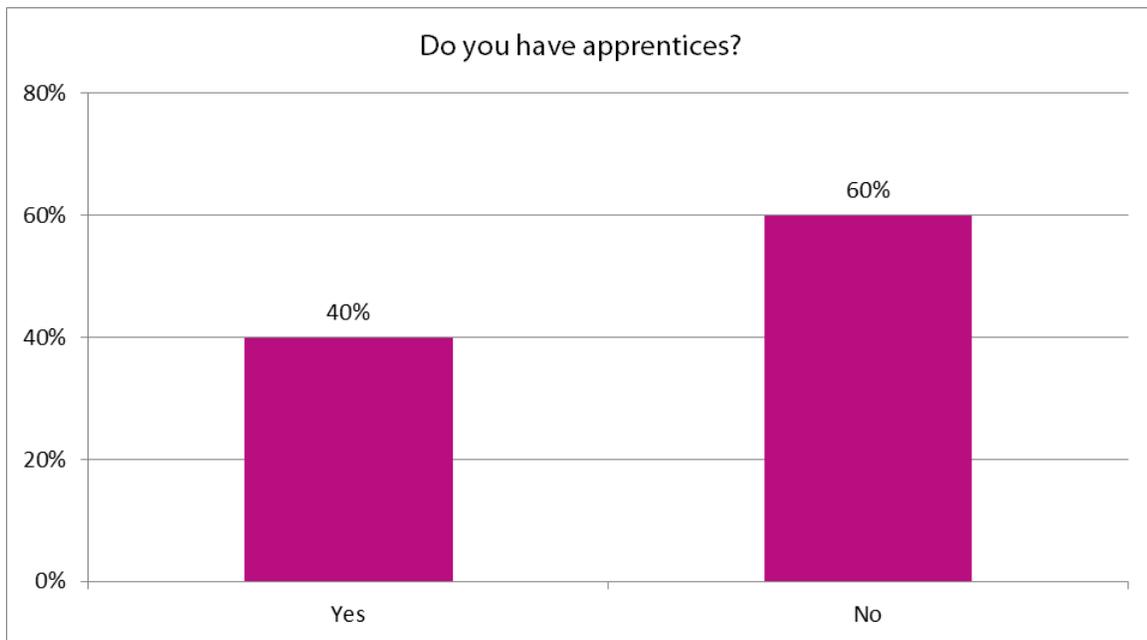
The largest increase has occurred in the number of staff absence levels at under 5%, from 59% in 2020 to 71% in 2021. There have been slight decreases in the under 10%, under 20% and under 30%. There has also been 2% of respondents stating no sickness levels. These figures are perhaps the more impressive considering these were recorded during the worst of the pandemic.



Regarding staff absence levels, it does appear that recorded levels of absence are manageable, with over 82% recording sickness levels of acceptable to very low in 2021, which is a 7% improvement on 2020.



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. 2021 sees 82% (78% in 2020) keeping their budgets the same

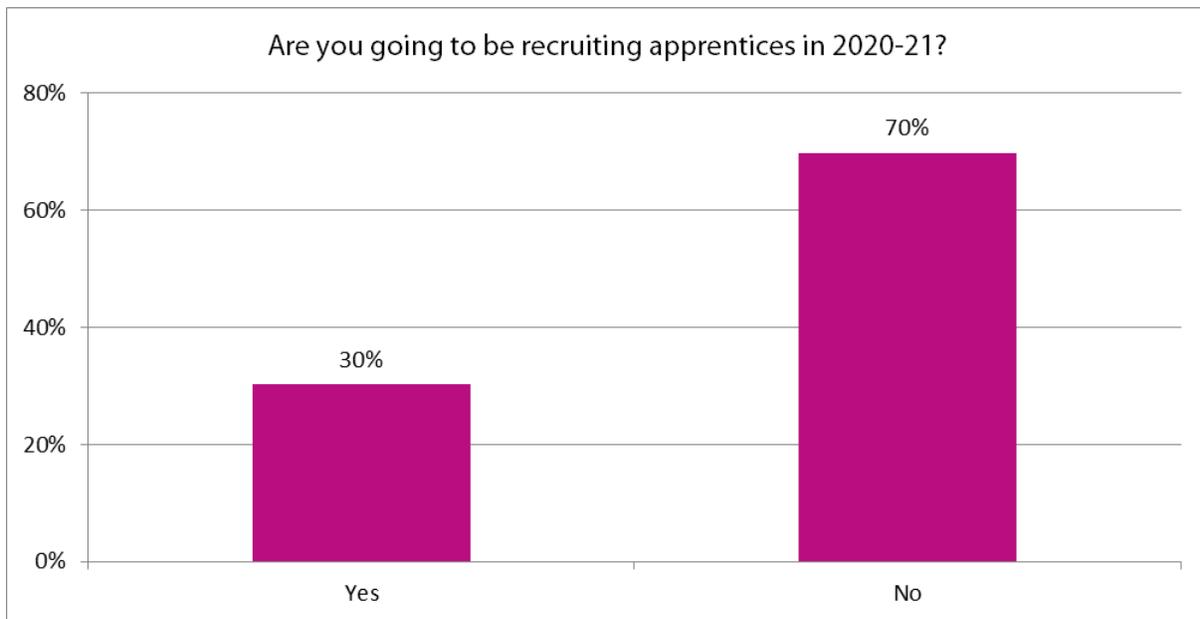


The numbers responding positively to having apprentices has increased from 30% in 2020 to 40% in 2021.

Are you 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.



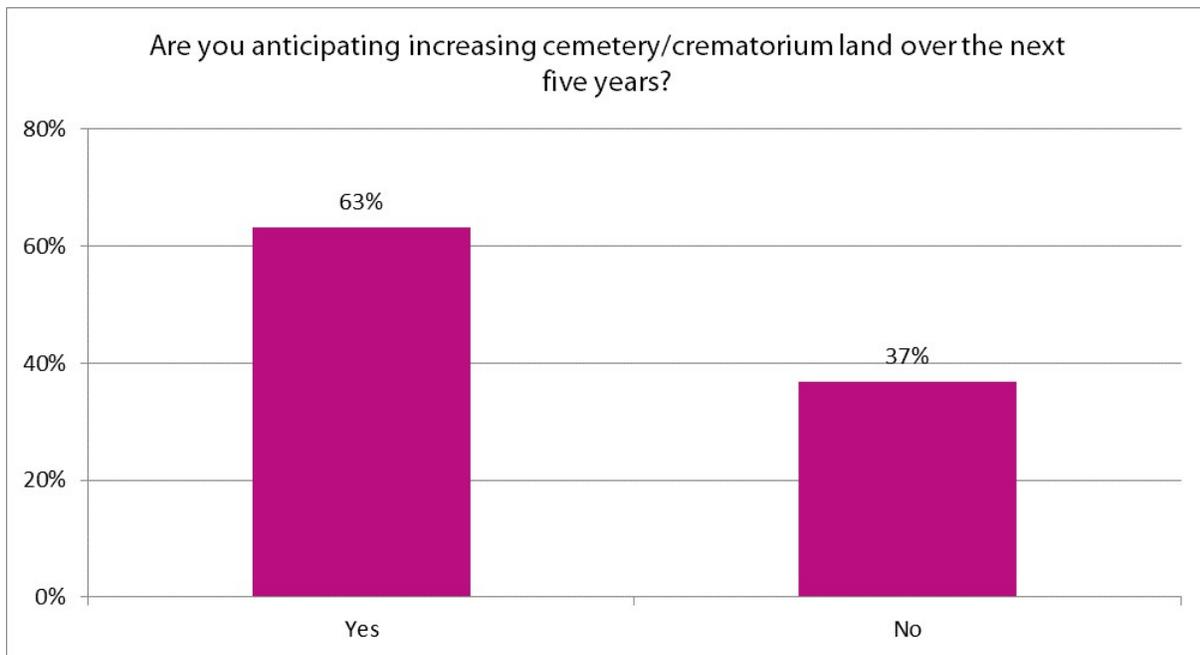
The results for 2021 survey are encouraging with an increase of 6% in those responding who say they will be recruiting apprentices in 2021, from 24% in 2020 to 30% in 2021.

How many cemeteries does your authority manage?

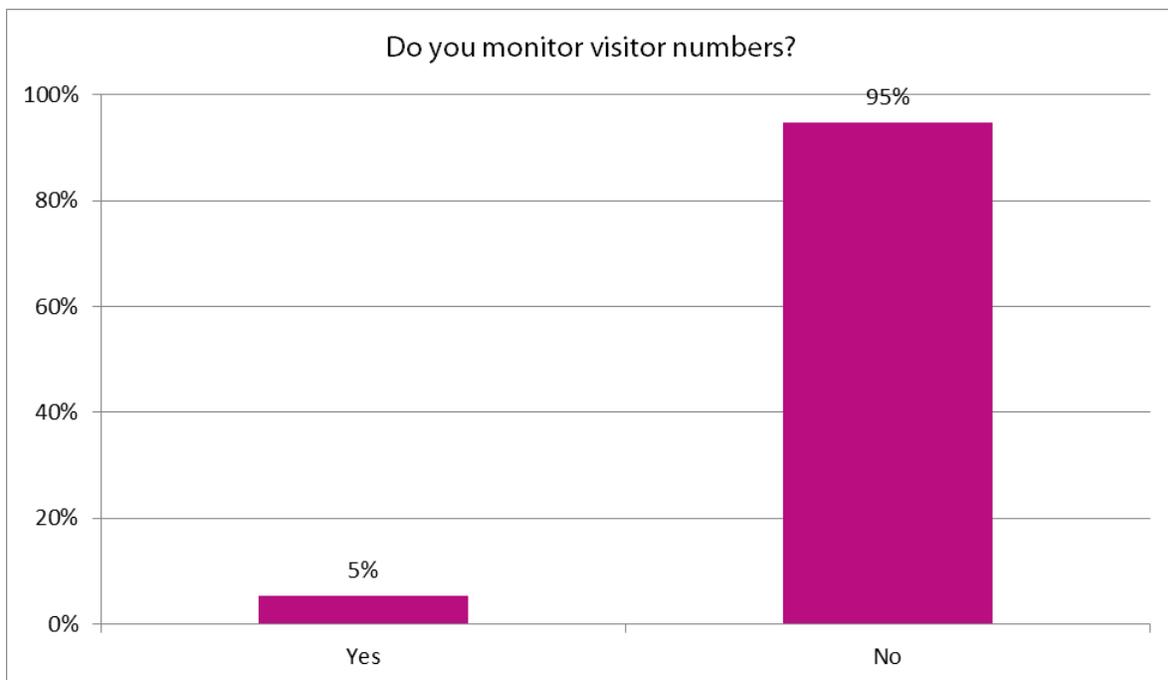
The following results were received:

Most local authorities who replied manage between 1 and 10 cemeteries (80%). 4% manage 11-15 and 12% 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, but most 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.

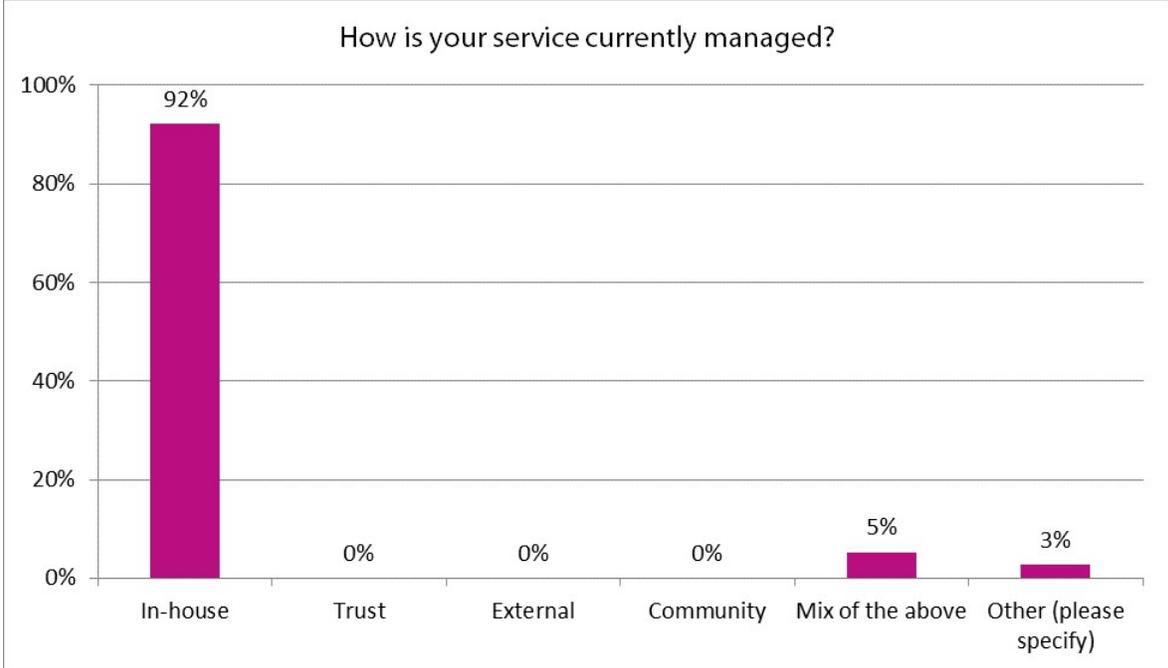


There has been an increase in the number of authorities looking to increase cemetery land over the next five years from 59% in 2020 to 63% in 2021. This is perhaps in some part a reflection of the increased need for burial space during the current Coronavirus pandemic. The manner in which new land is being sought varies to purchasing adjoining land, including future provision within the Local Development Plan and even looking to purchase land in neighbouring authorities.

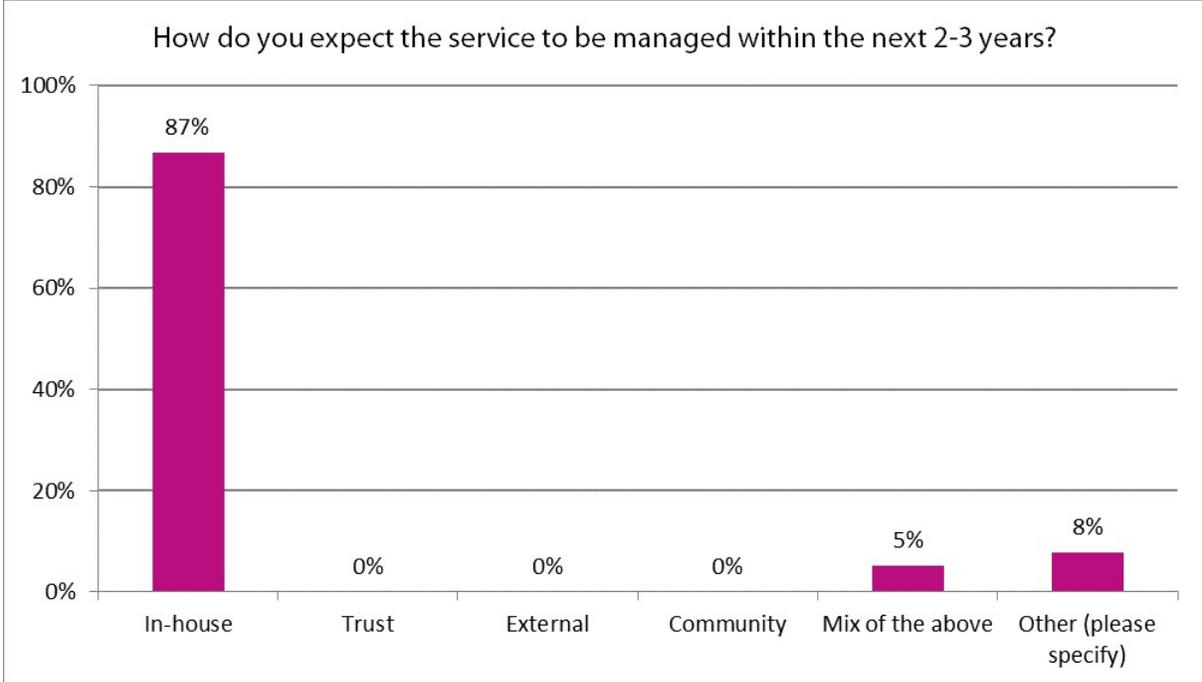


Interestingly only 5% of respondents appear to measure the number of people who visit their cemeteries, which is the same as 2020. This statistical data would be very useful information when

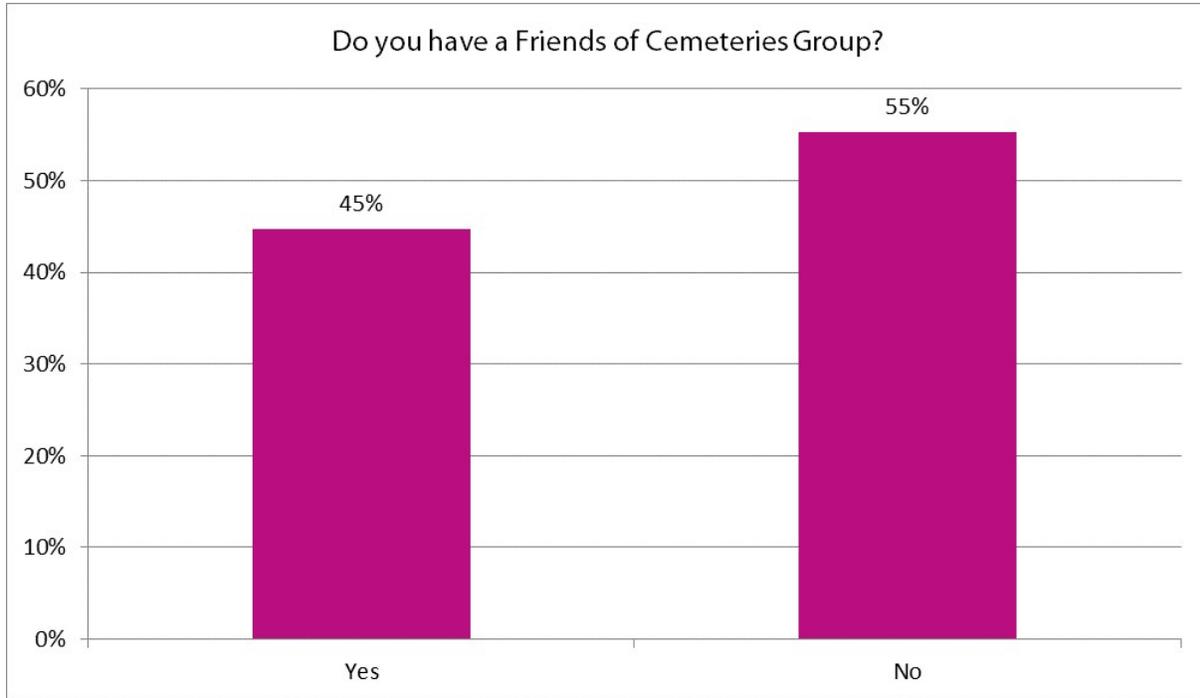
justifying the importance of the service, in particular, budget setting to ensure high standards of physical features and grounds maintenance levels can be maintained. This type of information would also be useful if considering the provision of on-site cafes or florists by allowing a footfall estimate to be established.



The percentage of services being managed in-house has fallen from 95% in 2020 to from 92% in 2021. Interestingly no services are being provided externally.



From the above two graphs the future provision of Bereavement Services does appear to be remaining firmly in control of local authorities. 2021 has seen a slight fall in the number of services managed in house, from 95% in 2020 to 92% in 2021. Equally, over the next few years again more councils anticipate that services will be managed in-house, in fact in 2018 this figure was 86% thus showing that the figure for 2021 shows a growing commitment to in-house delivery.



There has been a slight fall in the number of authorities saying they have Friends Groups from 50% in 2020 to 45% in 2021, perhaps a reflection of the pandemic affecting the ability of Friends Groups to operate. Whether the support from Friends Groups is strategic, operational or financial, the role of such groups seems to be coming common place across a number of local authority services.

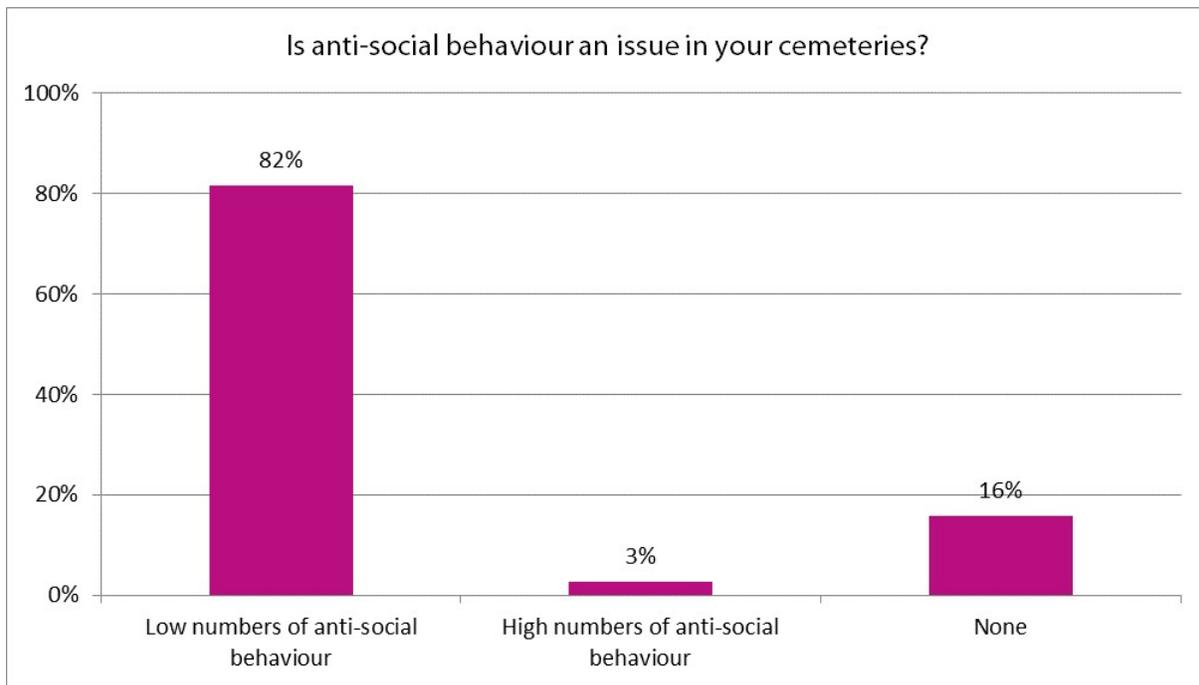
If you have a Friends of Cemeteries Group, please give a brief description of their roles and activities

- 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 social behaviour & 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



Since 2019 there appears to have been an decrease in the number of local authorities which have an all day presence in their cemeteries (41% 2019 to 27% in 2021). Nevertheless, 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.



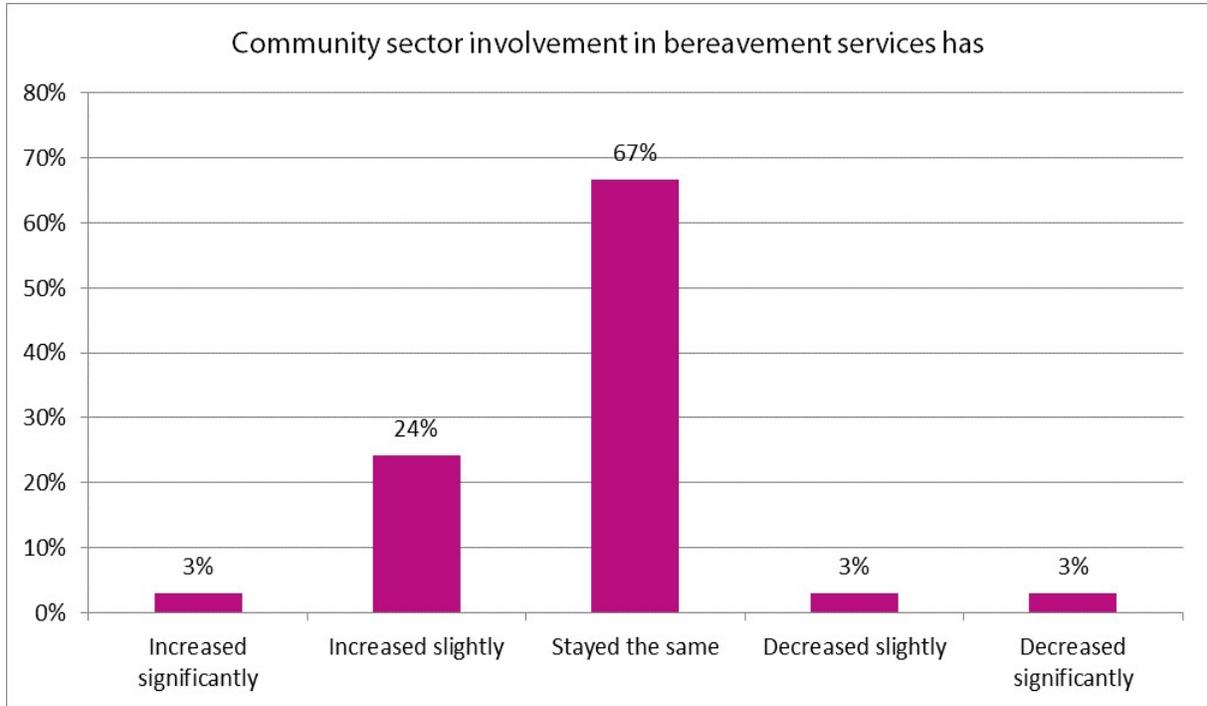
If yes, please give a brief description of any incidents

Although it appears incidents of anti-social behaviour in cemeteries are relatively low, there has been an increase in the number of incidents of anti-social behaviour reported, but these may be confined to a small number of cemeteries with specific problems.

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

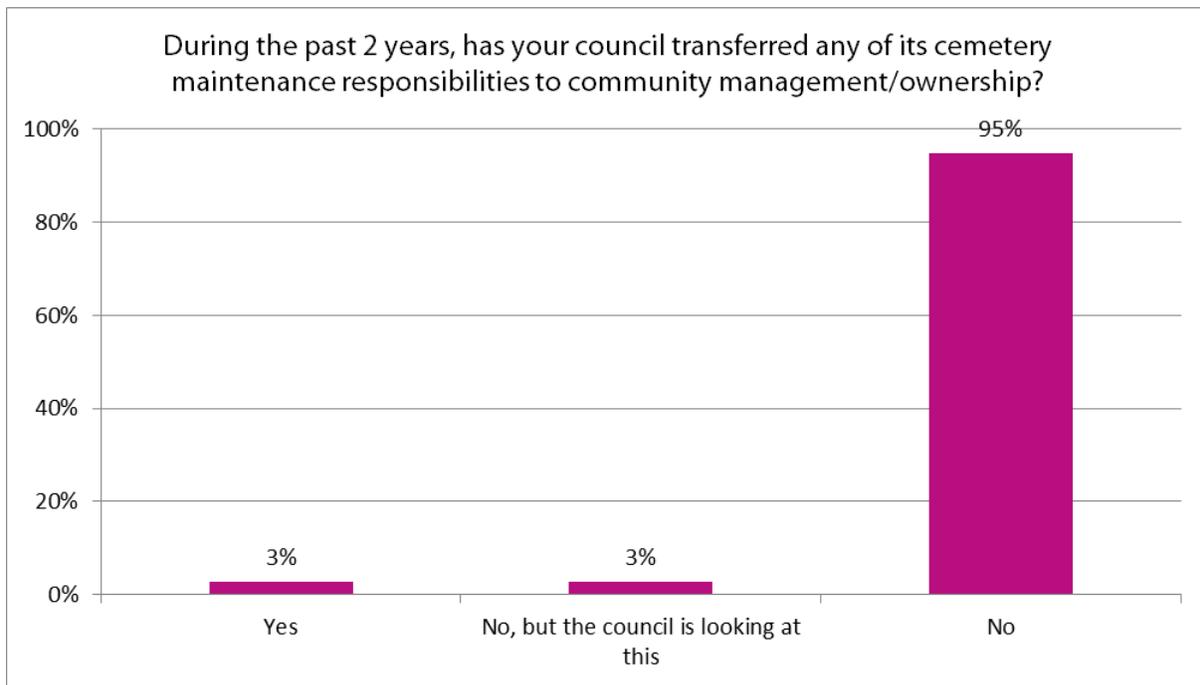
- Drinking alcohol and leaving bottles / cans etc.
- Interference with memorials, drinking, pushing headstones over, unauthorised felling/damage to trees, fly-tipping
- Removal of items from graves
- Vandalism, littering, drug taking, drinking
- Dog fouling / Dogs off leads at all sites
- Dog walkers, 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.



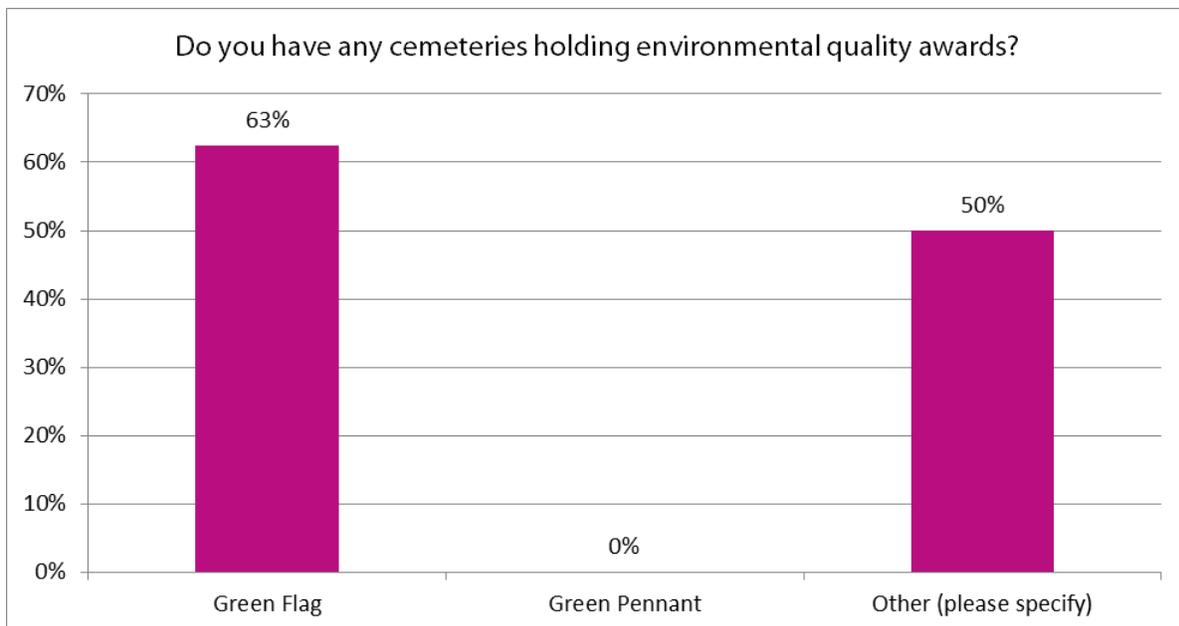
If yes, in what areas is this increasing?

- 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

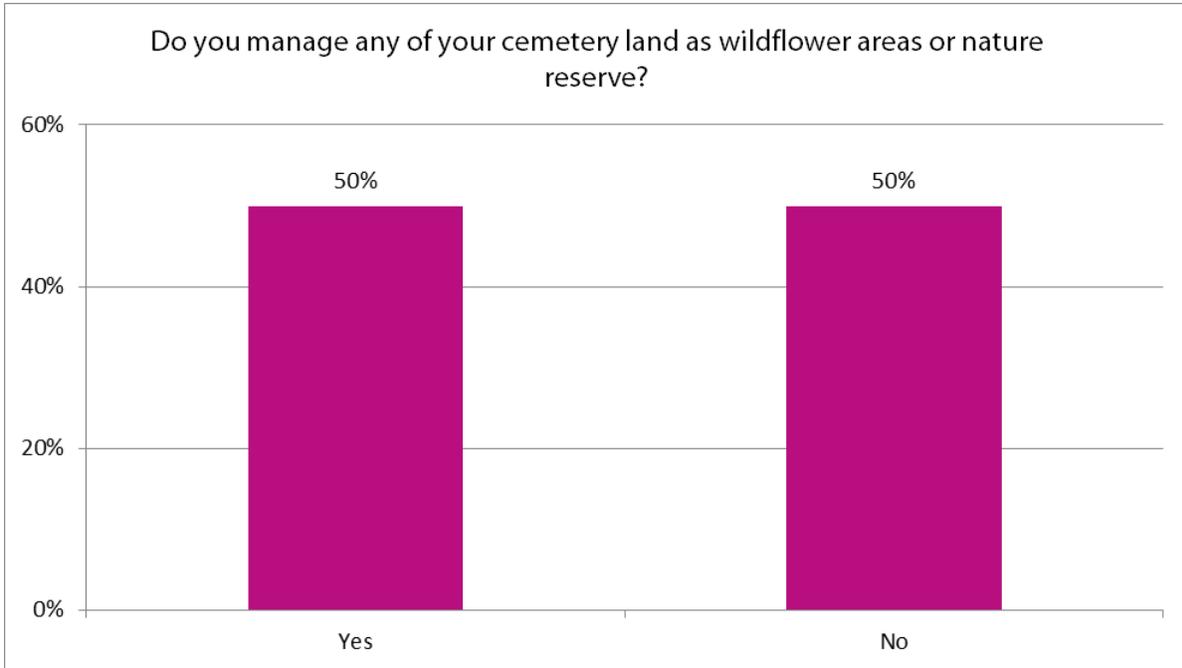


If yes, what elements have been transferred to community management/ownership?

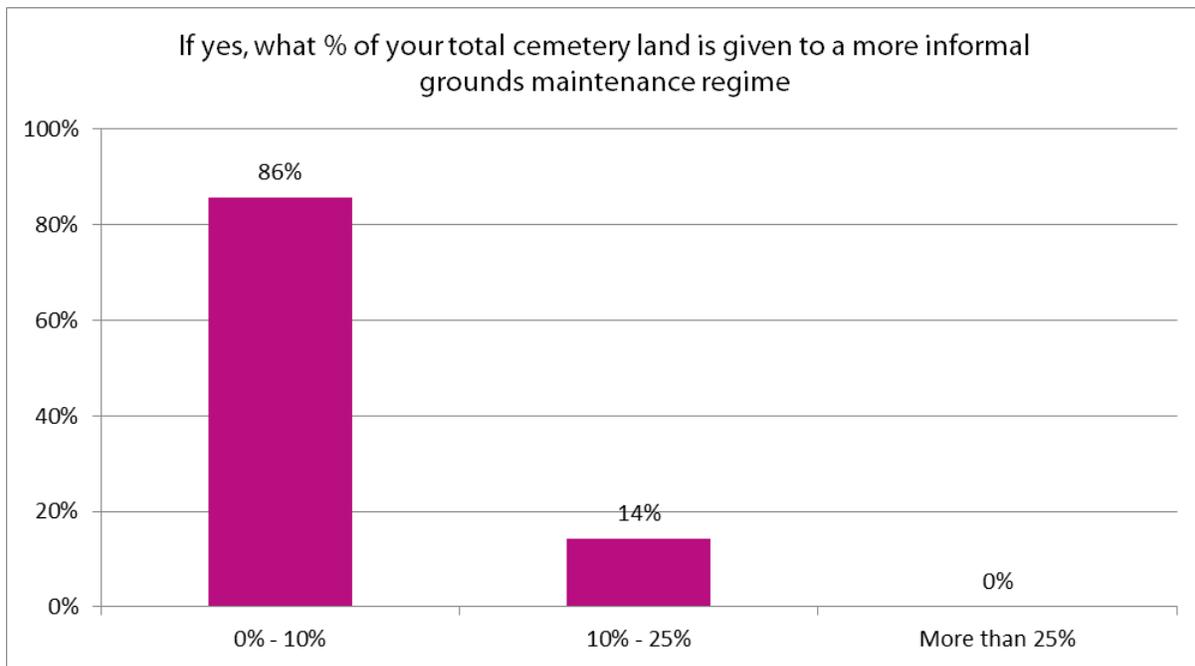
This still appears to be a very rare occurrence, in fact from the responses received in this survey, no-one recorded that they had transferred any cemetery maintenance to community groups apart from one which was allowing a community group to cut grass, the remaining transfers were either to other council departments or to Town and Parish councils.



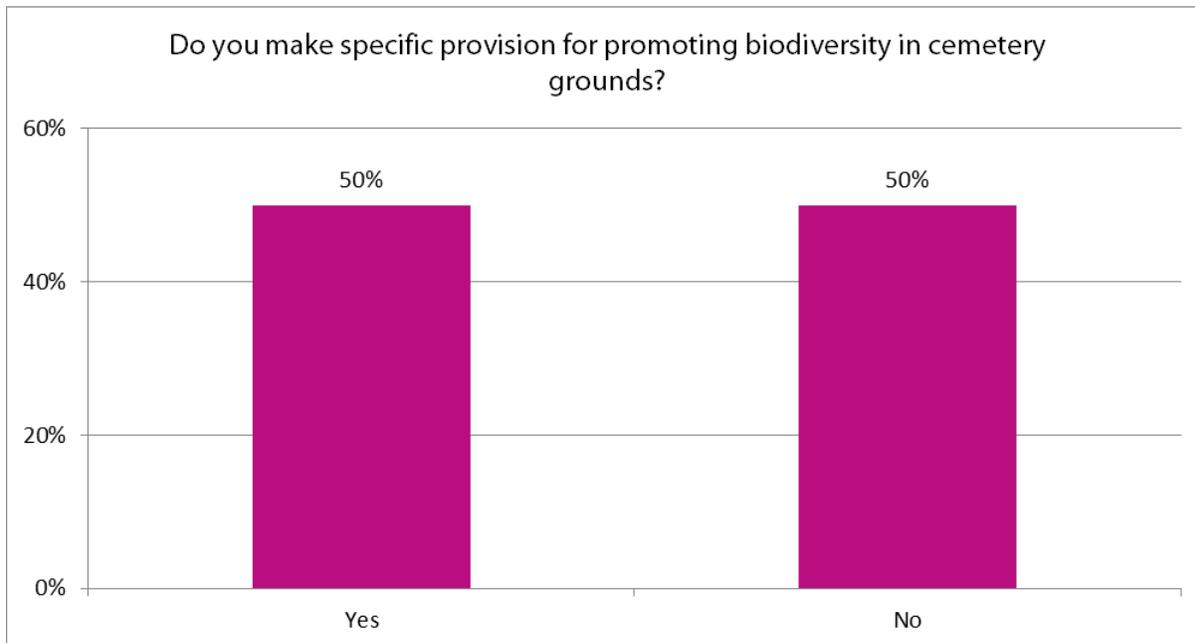
This result is welcome, even though there has been a slight decline in the number of authorities holding the Green Flag Award, 63% in 2021 as opposed to 78% in 2019. In some case's cemeteries are the only greenspaces to which many people have access therefore monitoring their quality is an important aspect in order 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.



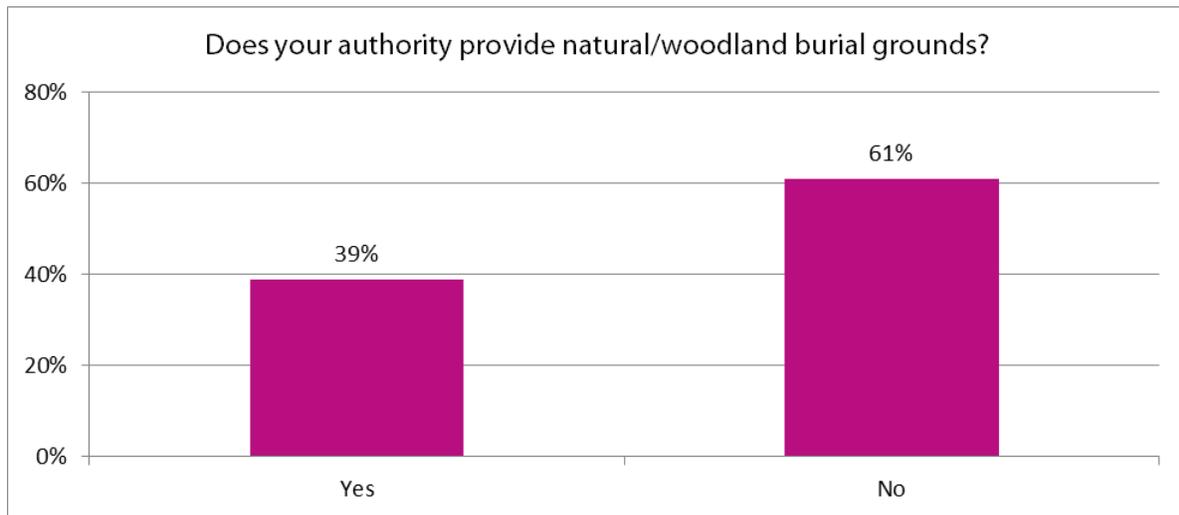
This year has seen a fall in respondents stating that they manage areas of their cemeteries for wildflowers or nature reserves. This decrease is likely to be a reflection of the impact of the pandemic where other priorities have had to take precedence. Previous to this there has been an ongoing annual increase showing this practice is gaining in popularity. Many areas of older cemeteries are now being managed in a way which provides both an aesthetically pleasing appearance for cemetery visitors, but also 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. <http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>



There has been a significant rise in the number of respondents in the 0-10% category (75% in 2020). This may 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.



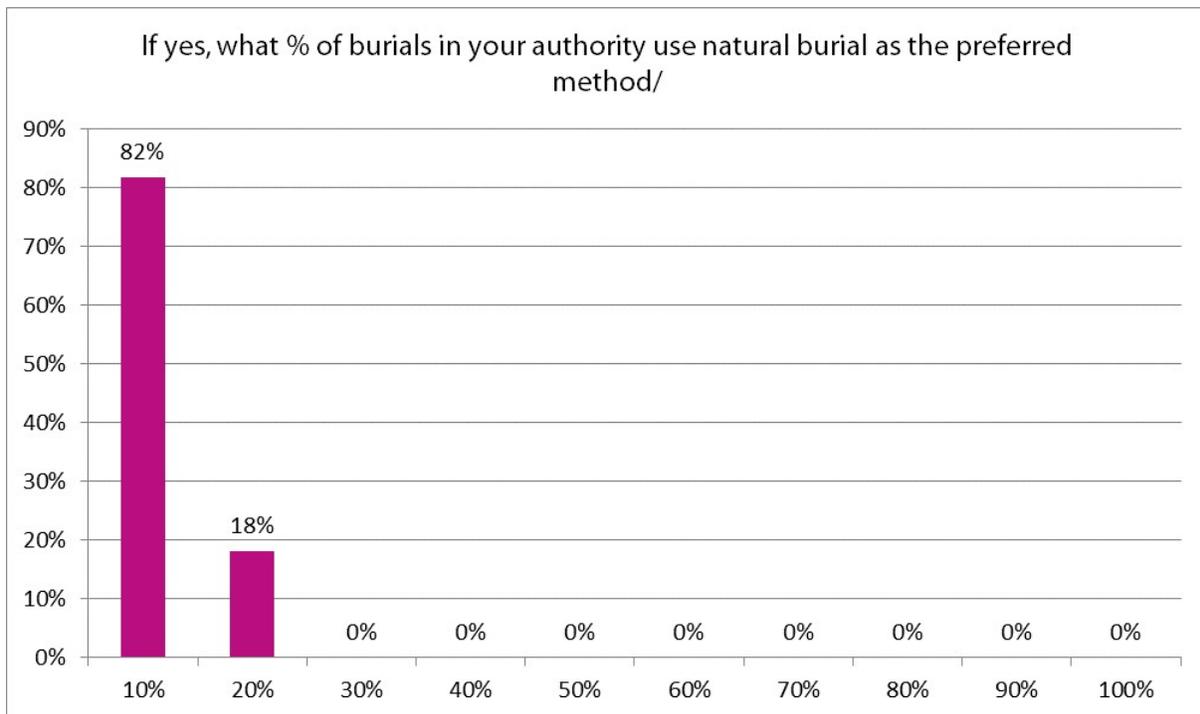
This graph shows that at least a half of respondents are now making provision for wildlife within their cemetery grounds as opposed to 37% in 2020. Whether this is as a result of reduced maintenance, or a deliberate policy to promote wildlife, is unclear, although from the comments received there does 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 2021 seems to have fallen which is in contrast to the previously growing popularity previously recorded (44% in 2018, 59% in 2019, 61% in 2020). This figure may be an anomaly and therefore we will await 2022's survey results to see if this is a continuing trend. However, where natural burials are offered many local authorities are now adopting this practice in order to provide an alternative to traditional funeral practices. 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](#)

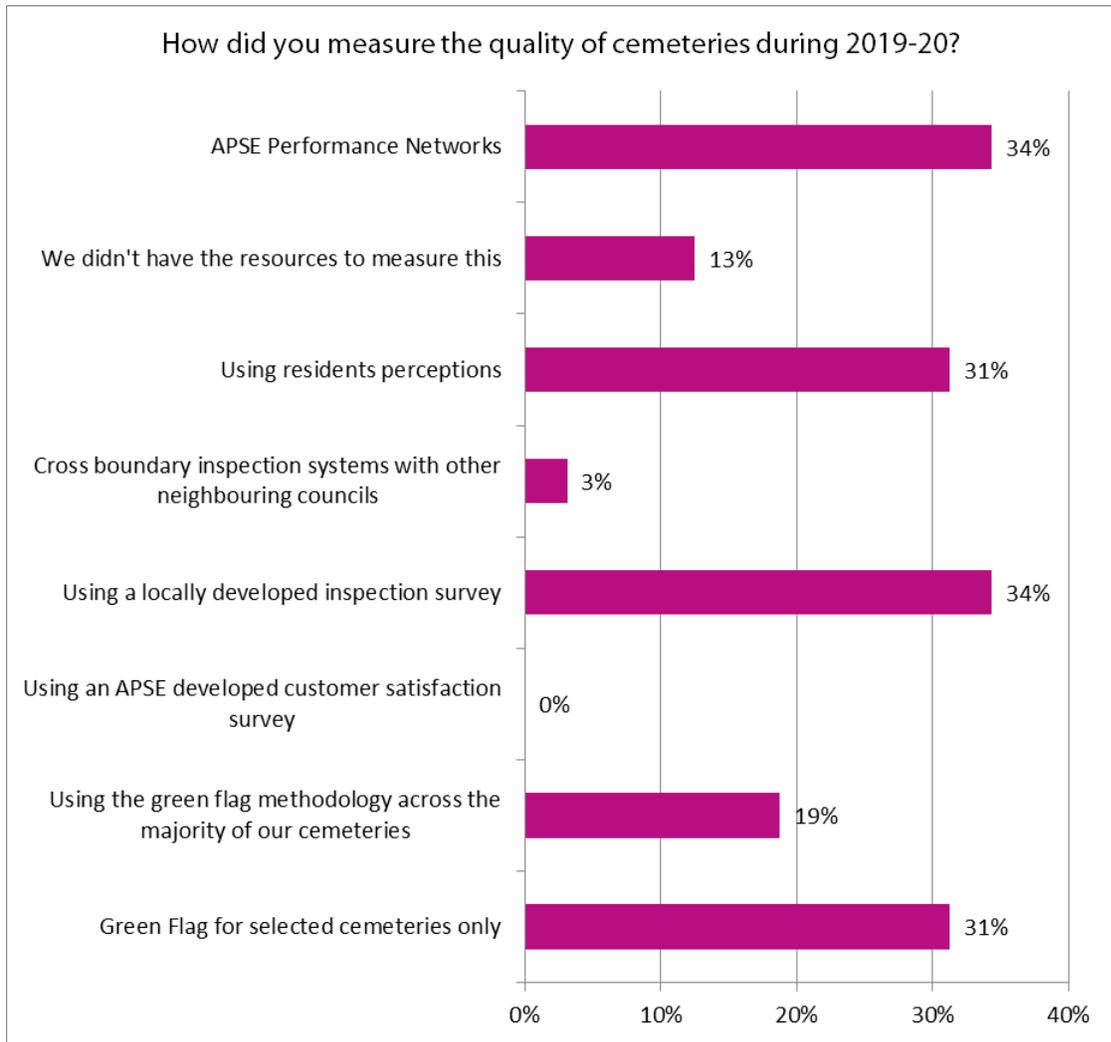
If yes, what % of burials in your authority use natural burial as the preferred method?



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, but it was noticeable in a few other responses up to 20% of people were now choosing natural burial.



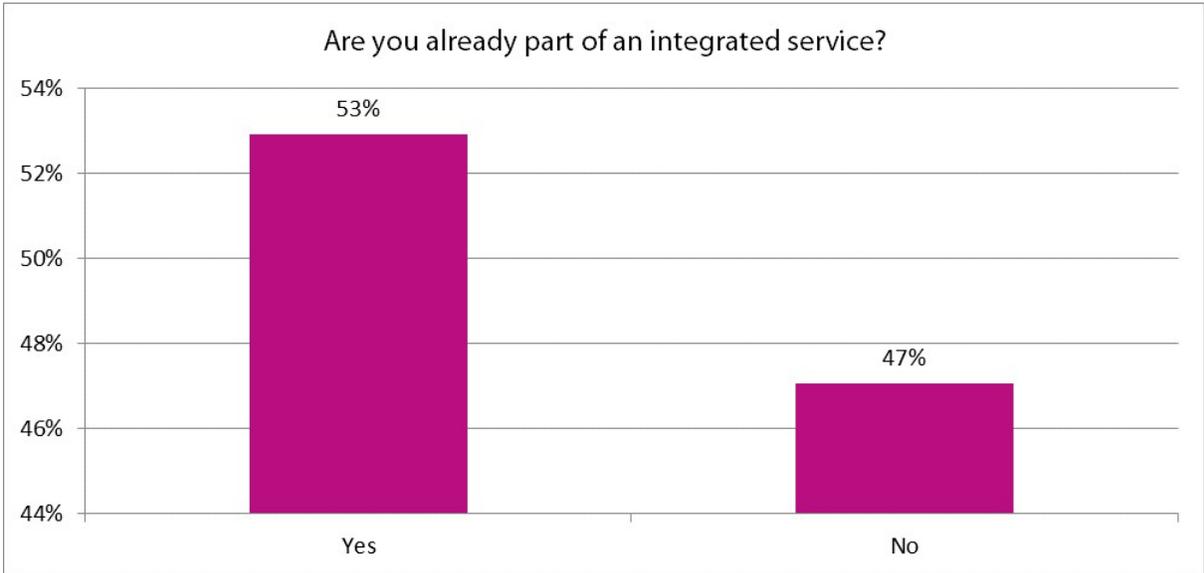
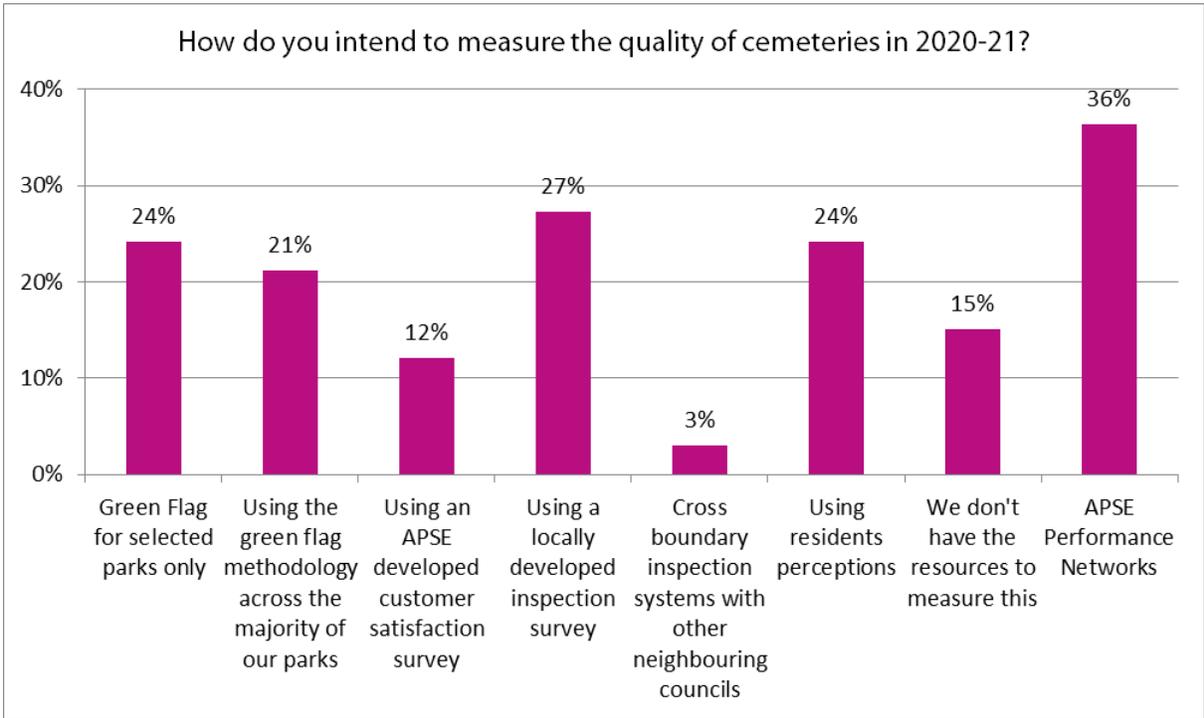
There has been a noticeable shift in the number of local authorities considering/providing natural burials since 2019. The number **not** considering it in 2019 was 69%, this has now fallen by 22% to 55% in 2021 showing a significant reduction in those not considering natural burial as an option. This is confirmed when we see 36% will be introducing it in the next 1-5 years (31% in 2019) and 9% will be introducing natural burial in the next 12 months (0% in 2019).

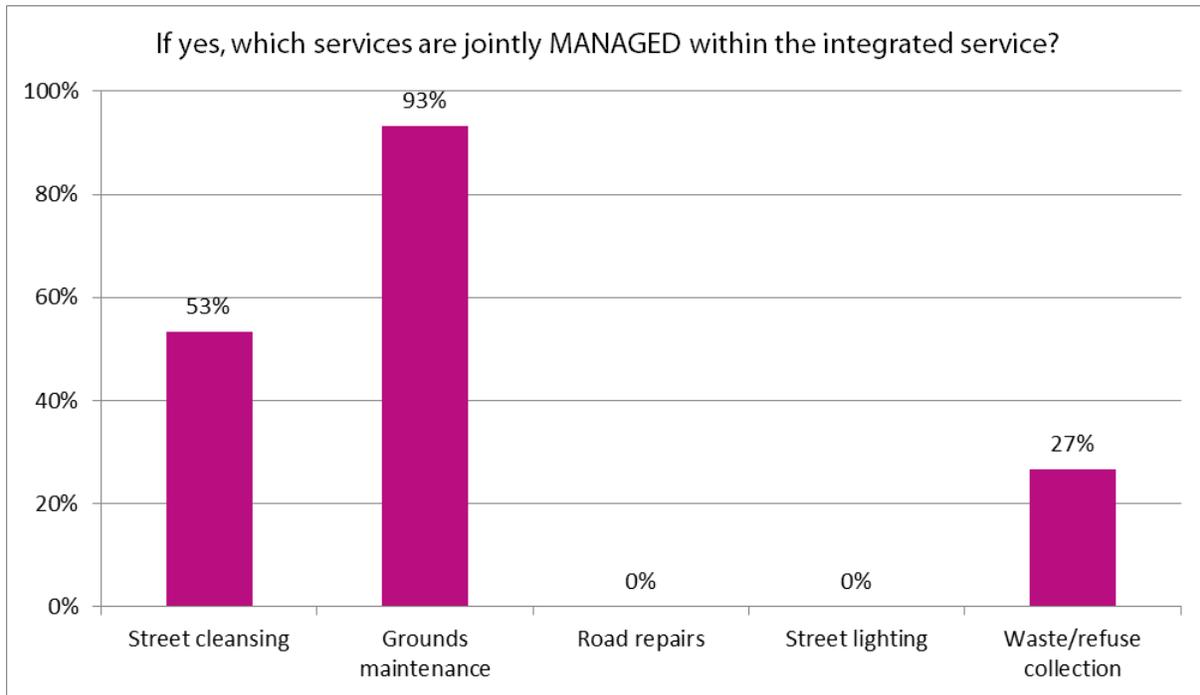


The need for a consistent and measurable quality standard has been an area APSE has been considering for a while. As such it has now introduced a separate element of the Land Audit Management System (LAMS) which can now be used to measure the quality of cemeteries.

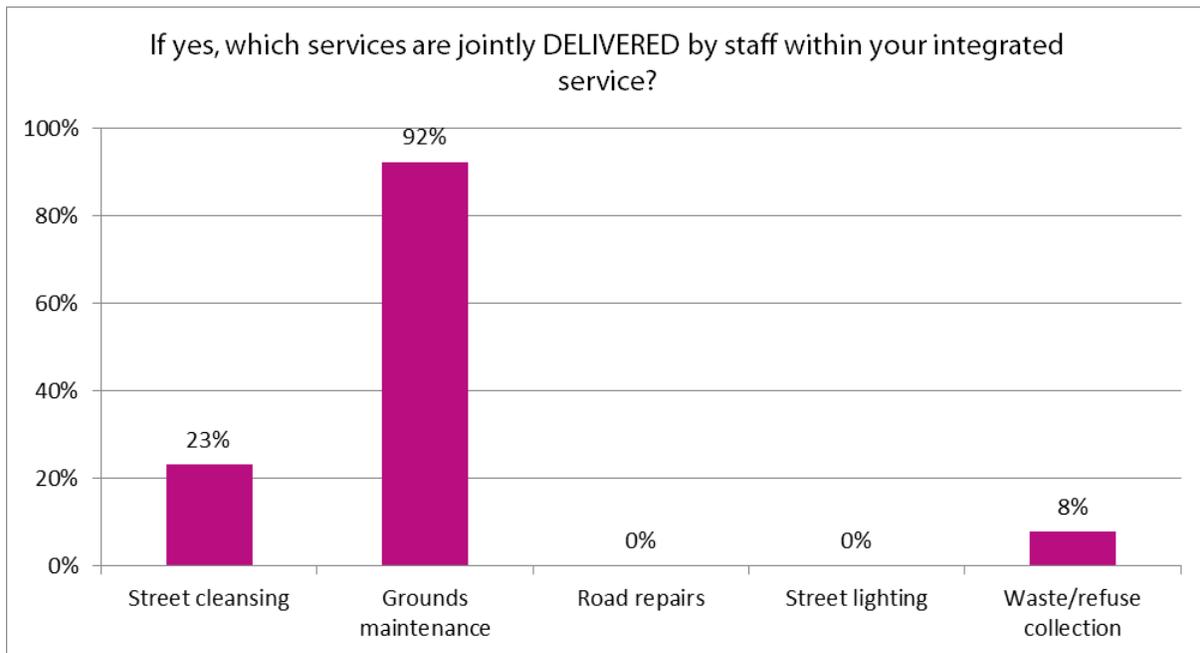
For further information on the general land audit management system please click the link below.

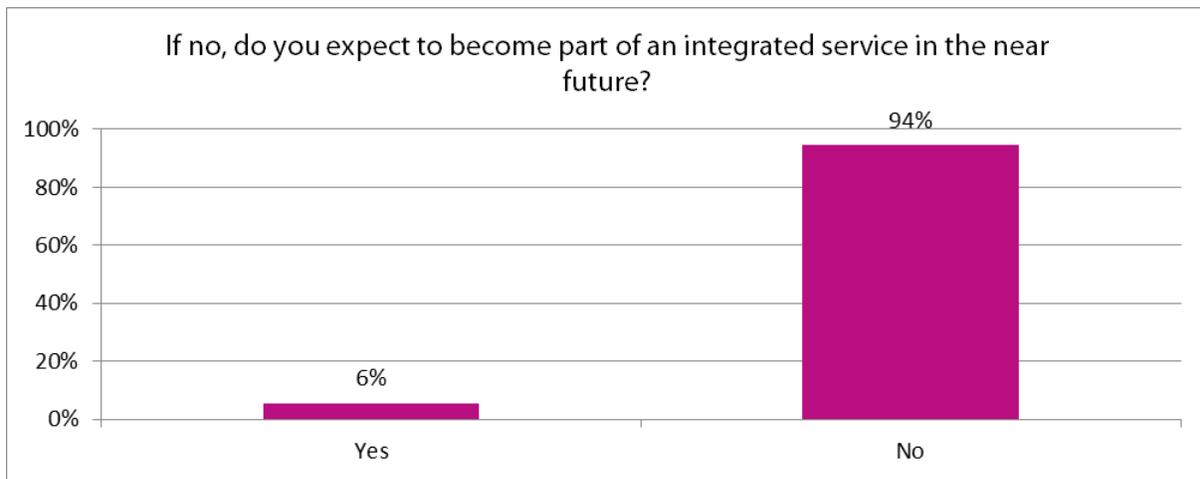
[Land Audit Management System \(LAMS\).](#)





Currently just over half of the local authorities run their cemeteries and crematoria services as part of a wider integrated service provision, (52% in 2019 as opposed to 49% in 2020) usually as a result of the linkages with grounds maintenance and to a growing degree street cleansing. However, where there is often multi-tasking between street cleansing refuse collection and to a degree grounds maintenance, staff employed within cemeteries tend to remain quite specialised in their roles such as grave digging, operating cremators etc.

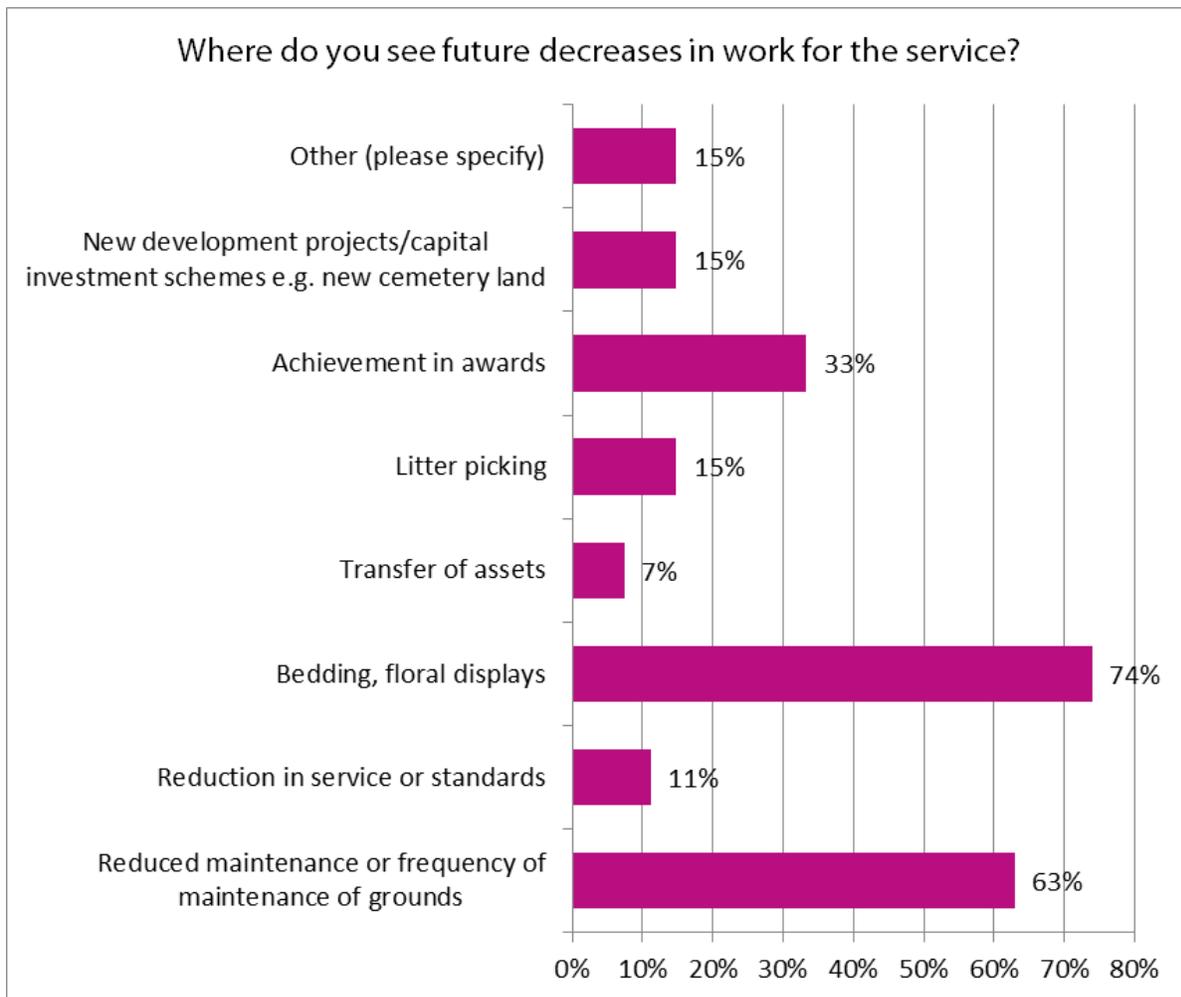




Here we see a clear distinction beginning to appear as there is less of an intention to integrate Bereavement Services into a larger integrated service approach than in 2018 when 15% were considering integration.

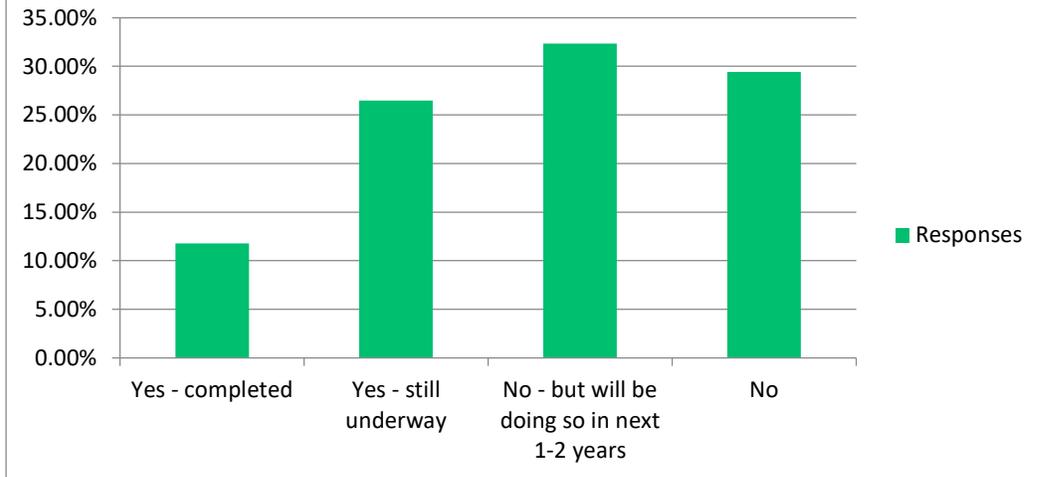


It is notable that areas of growth are quite diverse, but those areas which have seen the biggest increases since 2019 are community engagement, new cemetery developments and capital projects. It is therefore interesting to compare these changes in growth areas against those areas of service provision which may need to be reduced.

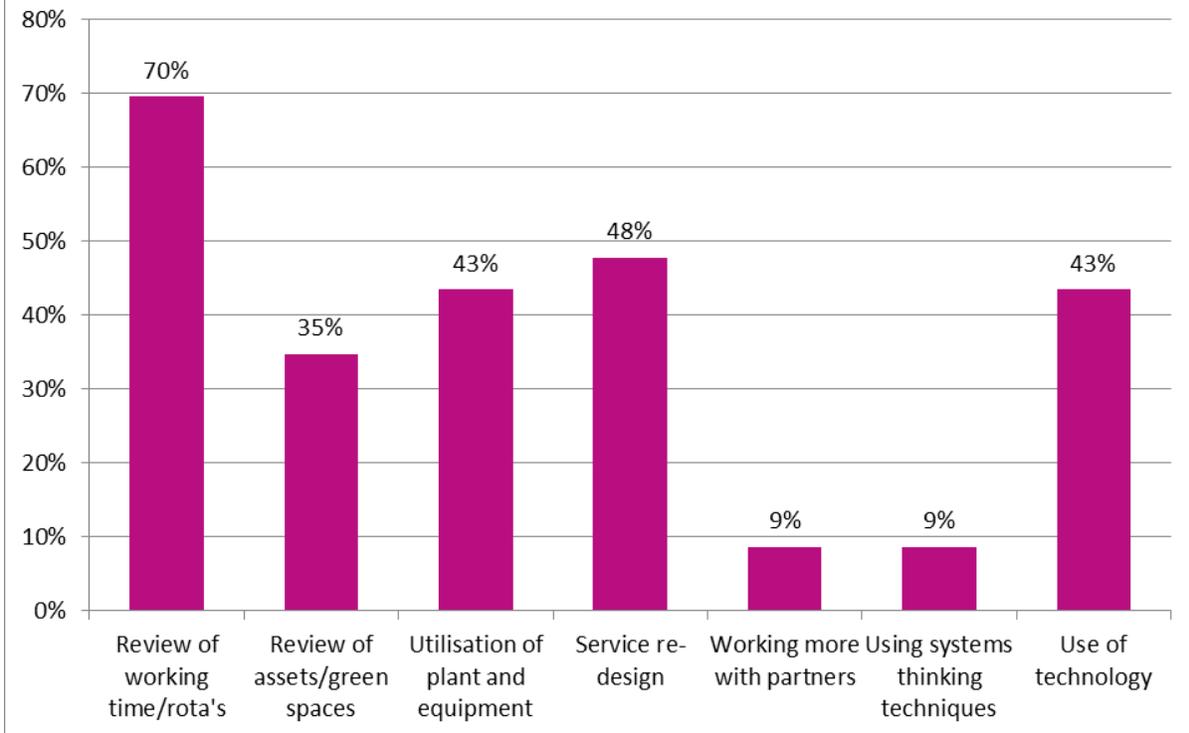


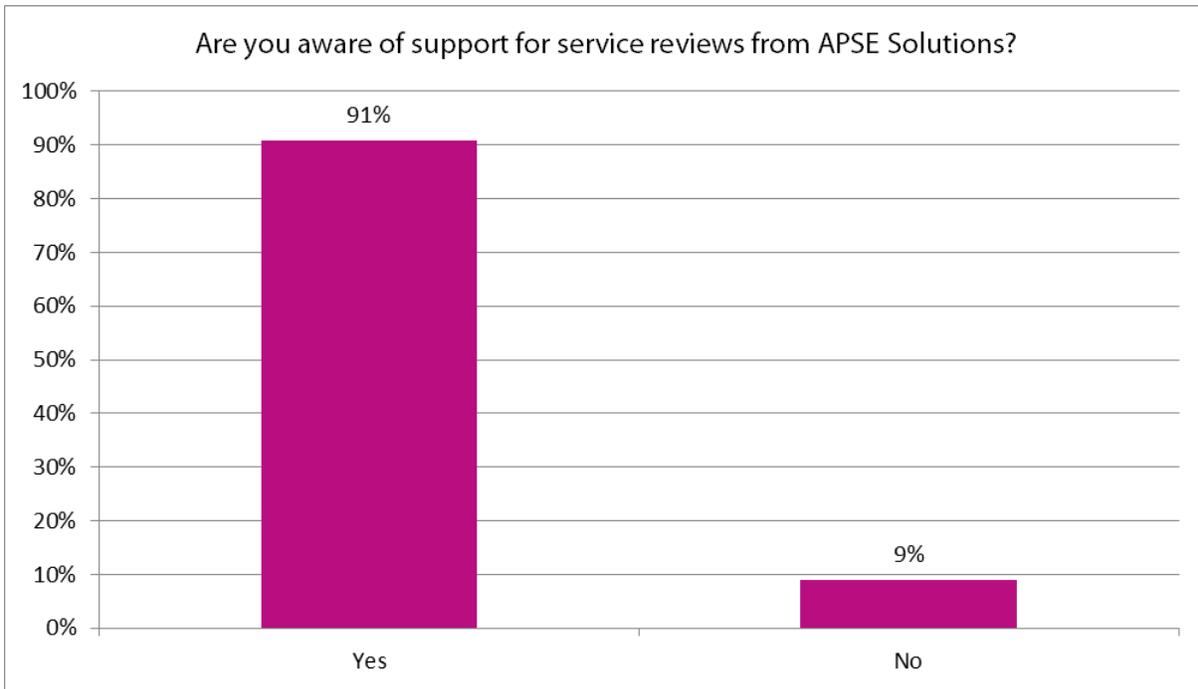
As opposed to 2020 when fewer respondents recorded that they expect to see reductions in maintenance and bedding displays this is not the case in the 2021, these are now the two main areas for service decrease, however it should be noted that several respondents did say they were looking to introduce more sustainable planting regimes with increased naturalisation of older parts of cemeteries where visitors were fewer. Fewer respondents expect to be transferring assets than in 2019. Perhaps it is not surprising, that due to reductions in bedding / floral displays and maintenance standards that there has been a significant increase in those respondents who see the pursuit of awards being an area where less emphasis will be placed in the future.

Have you undertaken a review of your service recently?



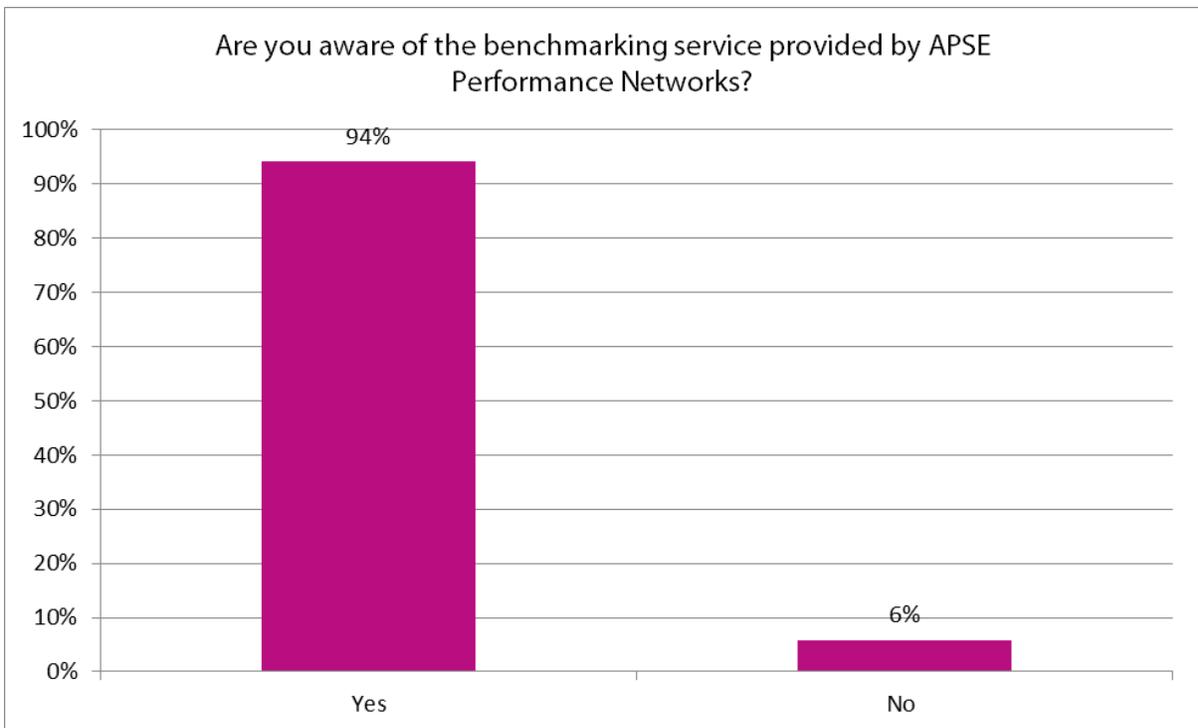
Will this review involve any of the following:





If you require further details about the services APSE Solution can provide please access the following link.

[APSE Solutions](#)

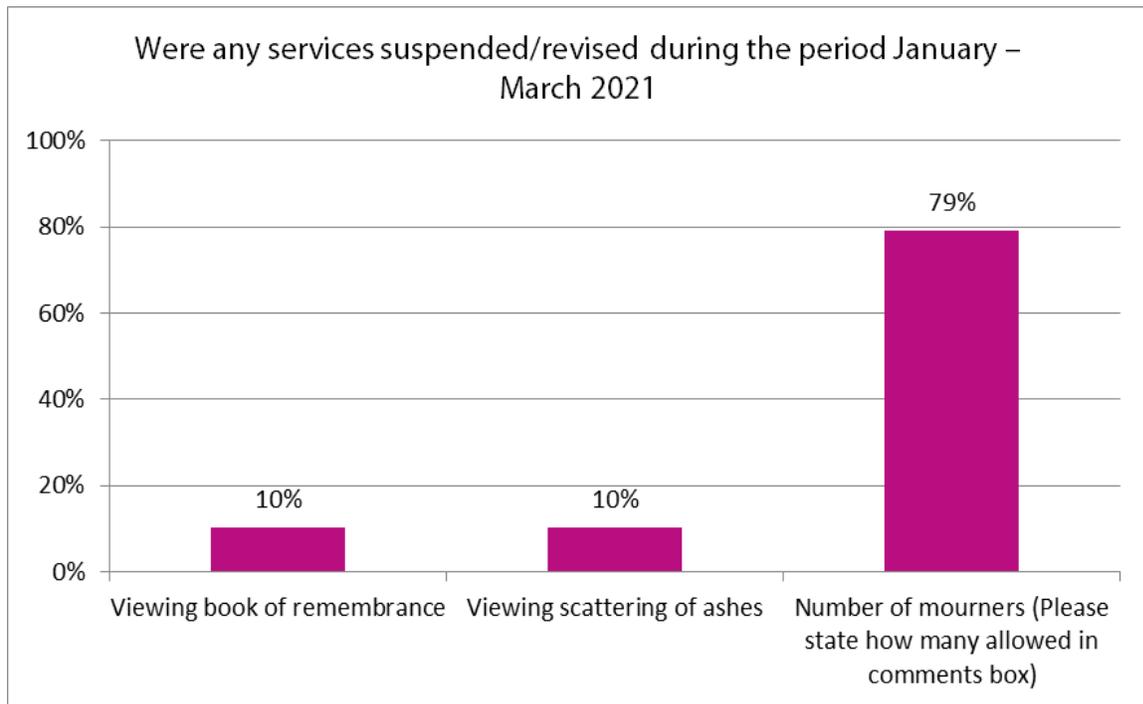


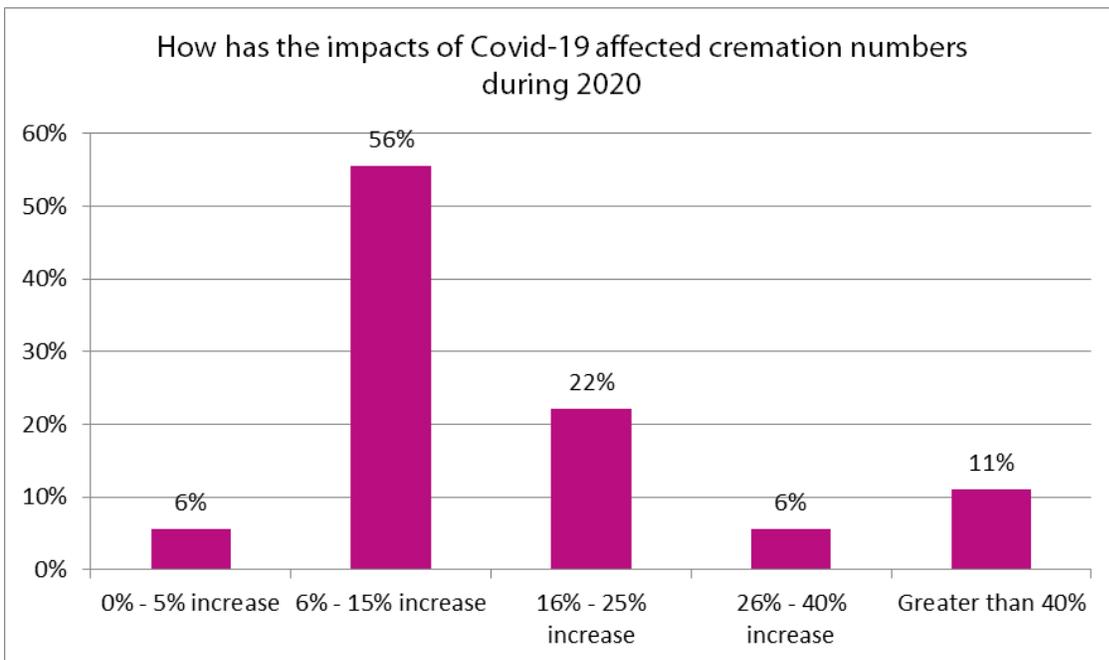
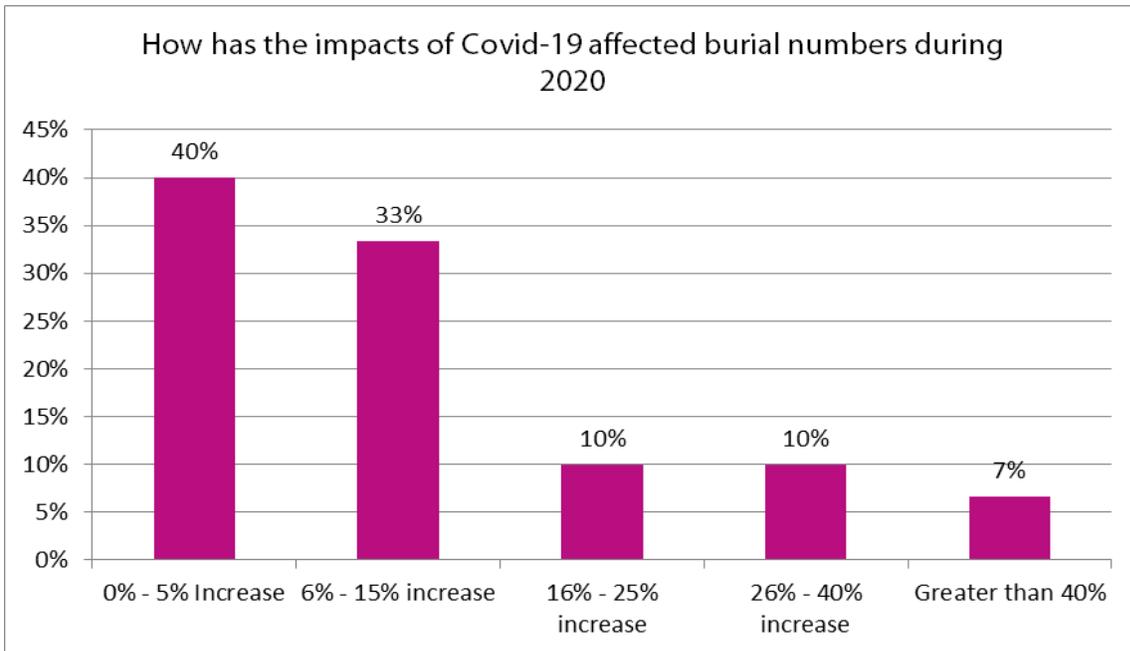
If you require further details about the services APSE Solution can provide, then please access the following link

[Performance Networks](#)

The Impact of Covid-19

In light of the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic APSE included several additional questions to this year's survey which the results of which members may find useful.





Staff absence Levels

With regards to staff absences between March 2020 and December 2020 the average level of absence was between 0-10% for over 85 percent of respondents. Only during April to August were there levels of over 10% and these were relatively few in numbers.

It appears that despite the ravages of the pandemic Bereavement Service across the Uk coped well with the extra demands although often having to being supported form other services sucha street cleansing and parks and grounds maintenance.

However it is testament to all concerned that the increase in burials and cremations was handled efficiently and with empathy.

APSE provides a regular Cemeteries and Crematoria Advisory Group that members may attend for free.

What cemeteries and crematoria related topics would you find most valuable in the near future?

- Impacts of the Coronavirus on Bereavement Services
- 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 for the future 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
- Others

APSE Comment

This being APSE's fifth State of the Market Survey 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 has clearly been significant impacts on the service and these impacts will undoubtedly affect some of the progress made with regards to balancing budgets and service improvements, but this is only to be expected. Bereavement services and their staff have been at the forefront of local authority response to the pandemic and have had to deal with the distress this virus has caused. Therefore, there will be a need for reflection and reviewing how future services may need to be delivered in the short, medium and longer term.

However, from the pandemic results, it is clear that Bereavement services across the UK have coped well with the added stresses and strains this virus has brought.

Although the service has still not been subjected to the same level of budget cuts that 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. Notably in this report there does appear to be some improvements in budgets for the forthcoming year, with few reporting cuts or loss of capital and revenue budgets, indeed quite a few respondents have reported anticipated increase in budget levels.

Although income generation is pursued by many and is gaining wider support, it is clear that 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.

What has become more apparent when considering the results from both the 2019 and 2020 surveys, was the growing importance of Friends of Cemeteries Groups and the multiple benefits they brought, most notably additional funding. This is an area which has been particularly hard hit, where due to social distancing and several lockdowns, the interaction needed to gain the benefits from these groups has not been possible.

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

The need to address environmental impact has also been raised within the survey and from results received from the surveys to date, is the importance now being given to mitigating the environmental impact bereavement services operations have and highlighting the ways in which managers 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 is also working with the Environmental Stewardship Group who are looking to identify the environmental impact of the Bereavement industry in totality and ways to improve the environmental performance of all those concerned.

The only note of concern 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, as a way to combat any cuts which may affect the quality of cemetery and crematoria grounds.

The information gathered from the survey will be used by APSE to inform the services it offers to its members, in order 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.

The Association for Public Service Excellence

APSE member authorities have access to a wide 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:

- Facilities Management and Building cleaning
- Catering
- Climate change and renewable energy network
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Environmental Health / Trading Standards
- Housing, construction and building maintenance
- Local authority commercialisation, income and trading network
- Parks, horticultural and ground maintenance
- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Sports and leisure management
- Vehicle maintenance and transport
- Waste management, refuse collection and street cleansing

If you require any further information on the findings of this State of the Market survey 2021 please contact Wayne Priestley Principal Advisor for Environmental Services at wpriestley@apse.org.uk