



association for public service excellence

State of the Market 2025

Local authority Cemeteries and Crematoria



Briefing 25/38

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Local Authority State of the Market 2025
 Cemeteries and Crematoria

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Results at a glance

Management of the service

	2024	2025
Deliver the service under an in-house model	95.92%	96.55%
Transferred maintenance responsibilities to community groups	2.08%	3.45%
Councils reporting low level anti-social behavior in cemeteries	84.42%	75.86%
Dog fouling as a form of anti-social behaviour	73.33%	77.78%

Budget

	2024	2025
Squeeze on public sector resources is disproportionately affecting cemeteries and crematoria to other service areas – agree or strongly agree	64.29%	65.39%
Decrease in the capital budget in the next year	45.24%	46.15%
Decrease in the revenue budget in the next year	38.10%	46.15%

Staffing

	2024	2025
Staff absence levels are perceived to be above average	40.00%	41.67%
Training budget anticipated to stay the same in the next 12 months	52.50%	86.96%

Operational Considerations

	2024	2025
Anticipate increasing cemetery / crematoria land over the next 5 years	62.16%	58.33%
Community involvement has stayed the same in the last 2 years	66.67%	68.18%

Environmental issues	2024	2025
Promoting biodiversity is a priority	66.67%	75.00%
Provide natural / woodland burial grounds	36.11%	65.22%

1 About the APSE State of the Market – Cemeteries and Crematoria

APSE conducted an online survey from May 2025 to September 2025. 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.

2 Purpose of the report

Each year APSE undertakes a survey on the state of the market in local authority cemeteries and crematoria services. The survey is distributed to officers and elected members across the UK and includes a range of questions covering a diverse range of topics – from budgetary matters to sustainability.

Where possible, this report adopts a comparative analysis with previous APSE state of the market surveys. This allows for the identification of trends in the sector, as well as the challenges, opportunities, and issues that local authority bereavement services are facing. The results of the survey are shared with local authorities and other organisations to help them better understand the needs of the sector.

2.1 Methodology

APSE conducted a survey of its member local councils between May and September 2025. Responses were received from across the UK with 72.42% of responses from England, 3.45% from Northern Ireland, 17.24% from Scotland and 6.90% from Wales. Therefore, the responses provide a good representative sample of the UK local authority cemeteries and crematoria sector.

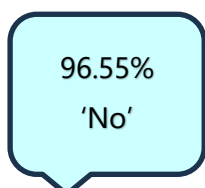
2.2 Local authority cemeteries and crematoria services

The vast majority of the respondents (96.55%) reported that the current services were provided under an in-house model, with 3.45% advising that the services were provided by mixture of delivery models, with elements being undertaken by an external party, a trust arrangement, and community groups.

In two to three years' time, 82.76% expect that all services will be delivered in-house, and 3.45% believe that there will be a mixture of delivery models.

3 Management of the service

3.1 During the past 2 years, has your council transferred any of its cemetery maintenance responsibilities to community management/ownership?

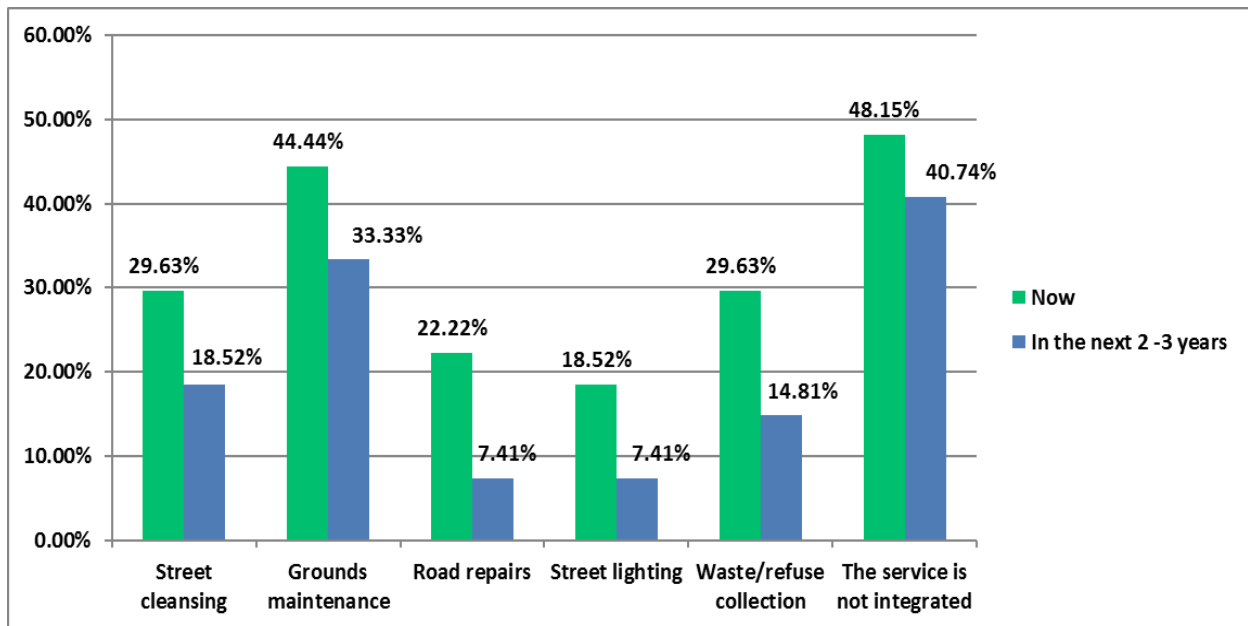


96.55%
'No'

The survey highlights that local councils have not transferred the maintenance responsibilities to community groups with 96.55% reporting this to be the case. 3.45% advise this is something that they are considering. Although councils work with 'Friends Groups', they are not currently transferring the responsibility to them. However, moving forward, with the pressures on the services budget, it will be interesting to see if this changes in the future.

3.2 Which services are jointly managed within an integrated service?

Over the years, the integration of services in councils has become more common and the survey sought to understand which services were jointly managed with an integrated service that included the cemeteries and crematoria service. The graph below provides a summary of the responses for the current year and what respondents anticipate being the case in the next two to three years.



Under half of the respondents (44.44%), report that the service is integrated with grounds maintenance, 29.63% of respondents advise that the service is integrated with street cleansing and a further 29.63% state that the service is integrated with waste and refuse collection.

The responses received highlight that the cemeteries and crematoria service is integrated with services that have the most synergy, such as grounds maintenance, but it is clear that councils have differing approaches, and this could be in part due to the number of services, the service delivery model and the type of provision that the council are responsible for.

In addition, 48.15% of respondents advise that the service is not integrated, which could be for several reasons, but this may reflect that the cemeteries and crematoria is a service that stands alone due to the nature of the work that is undertaken.

3.3 Social Issues

What often sets the local authority apart from other providers is the focus that the service puts on social priorities, and as part of the survey, respondents were asked to state what the top three priorities were. The diagram below highlights what respondents reported for 2025.



The cost of funerals has significantly increased over the last 20 years with the basic cost of a simple attended funeral in 2004 being reported at £1,835 which compares with £4,285 in 2025 (Sunlife). Therefore, there has been a significant increase in the number of families who are experiencing funeral poverty, and hence why local authorities see reducing funeral poverty as a top priority.

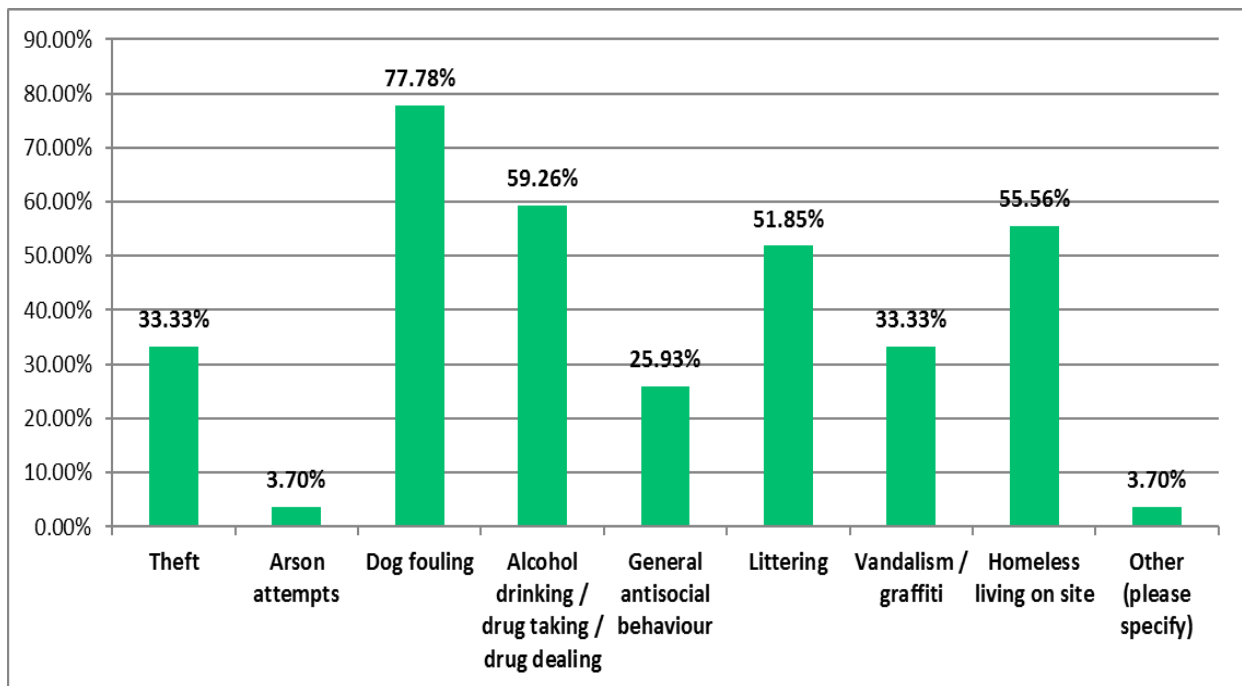
3.4 Anti-social behaviour

75.86%
report low level anti-
social behaviour
issues

Anti-social behaviour in cemeteries continues to be an issue, and 75.86% of respondents advising that they have what they consider to be low level anti-social behavior issues. 20.69% of respondents stated that they have high levels of anti-social behaviour issues reported, which is an increase from the 10.42% of respondents that reported this to be the case in 2024.

3.5 What form does anti-social behaviour take?

To ascertain the form of anti-social behaviour that local authorities are dealing with, the survey asked the respondents to specify, and the graph below highlights the responses received.



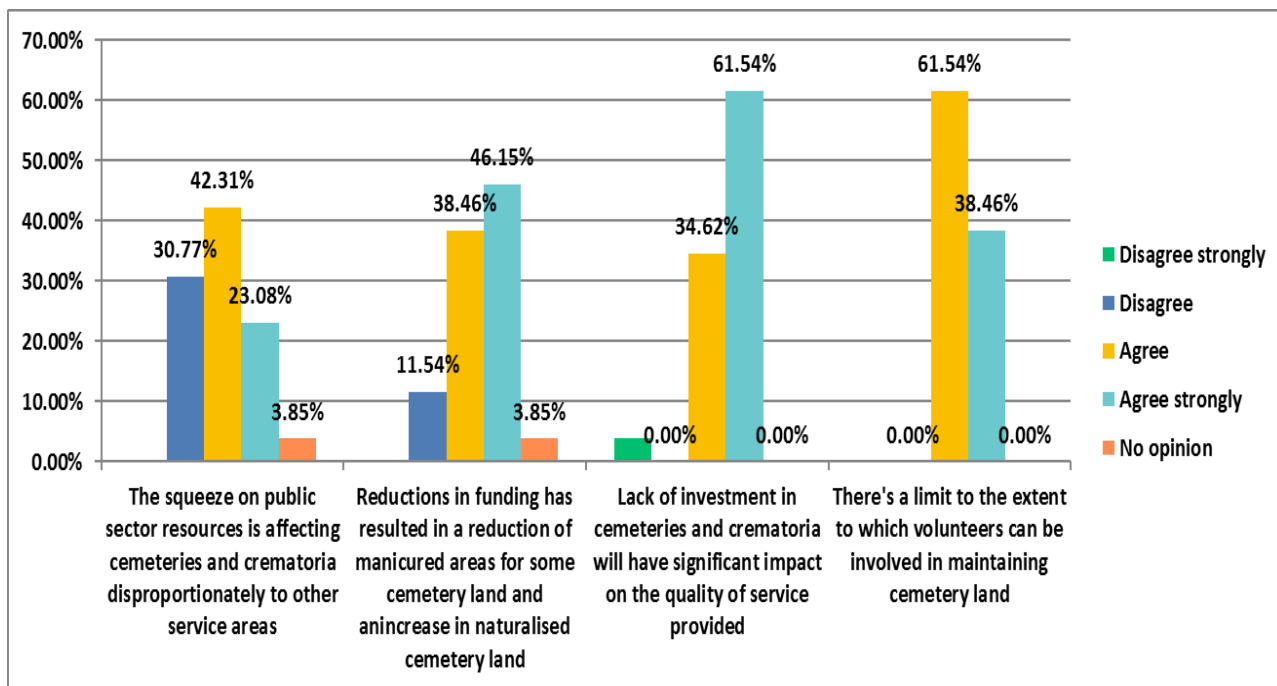
Dog fouling is the most prevalent form of anti-social behaviour with 77.78% of respondents stating this being an issue. 59.26% advised that alcohol drinking/drug taking and drug dealing are an issue and 55.55% report the homeless living on site is something they are seeing in their cemeteries.

The responses serve to highlight that local authorities are dealing with a variety of issues, which can be complex to deal with and add to the resources and cost of managing burial grounds and maintaining them to the high standards required for places of remembrance.

4 Budget and finance

4.1 Please give your opinion on the following statements

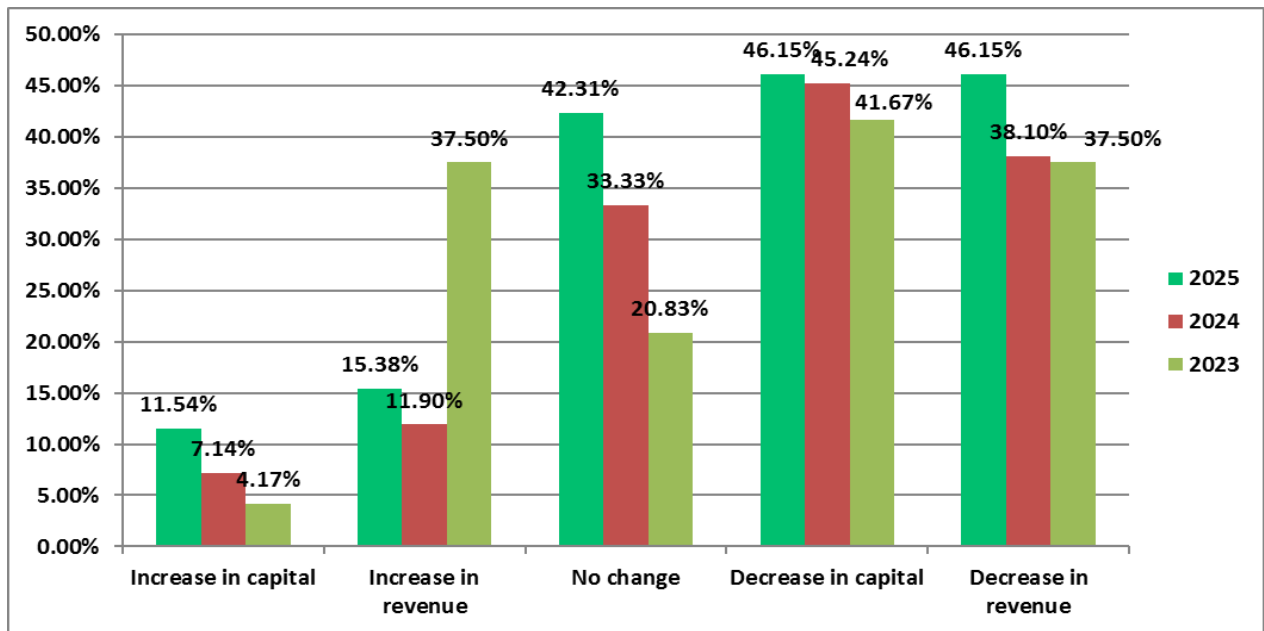
To gain an understanding of how different funding and the lack of investment was impacting on cemetery and crematoria services, the State of the Market survey asked for respondents' opinions on four statements. The graph below details the responses to the question.



From the responses received it demonstrates that the current financial pressures on local authorities are having an impact on cemeteries and crematoria services, with 65.39% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the squeeze on public sector resources is affecting cemeteries and crematoria disproportionately to other service areas. 84.61% of respondents stated that reductions in funding have resulted in a reduction of manicured areas for some cemetery land and an increase in naturalised cemetery land. 96.16% agree or agree strongly that lack of investment in cemeteries and crematoria will have significant impact on the quality of service provided and all of the respondents' state that they agree or agree strongly that there is a limit to the extent to which volunteers can be involved in maintaining cemetery land.

4.2 How do you expect the cemeteries and crematoria budget to change over the next year

The survey sought to establish the expectations for the cemeteries and crematoria budget over the next year. The graph below details the responses and provides a comparison with responses received in 2025, 2024, and 2023.



When comparing the expectation of respondents from 2023, there has been an increase from 41.67% to 46.15% of respondents believing that there would be a reduction in the capital budget over the next year. In terms of the perception for the coming year regarding the revenue budget, the percentage of respondents anticipating that there would be a decrease has increased by 8.65%.

The greatest change in expectation can be seen in the responses of those that feel there will be no change in the budget, where 20.83% believed there would be no change in 2023 compared with 42.31% in 2025

Since 2023, there have been significant pressures on council budgets due to the increase in staffing costs, the cost-of-living crisis and the rise in energy bills have had an impact on bereavement services and could have impacted the responses for 2023 and 2024. However, with an increase in the number of respondents reporting that there would be no change this could indicate that there has been a stabilisation in these pressures.

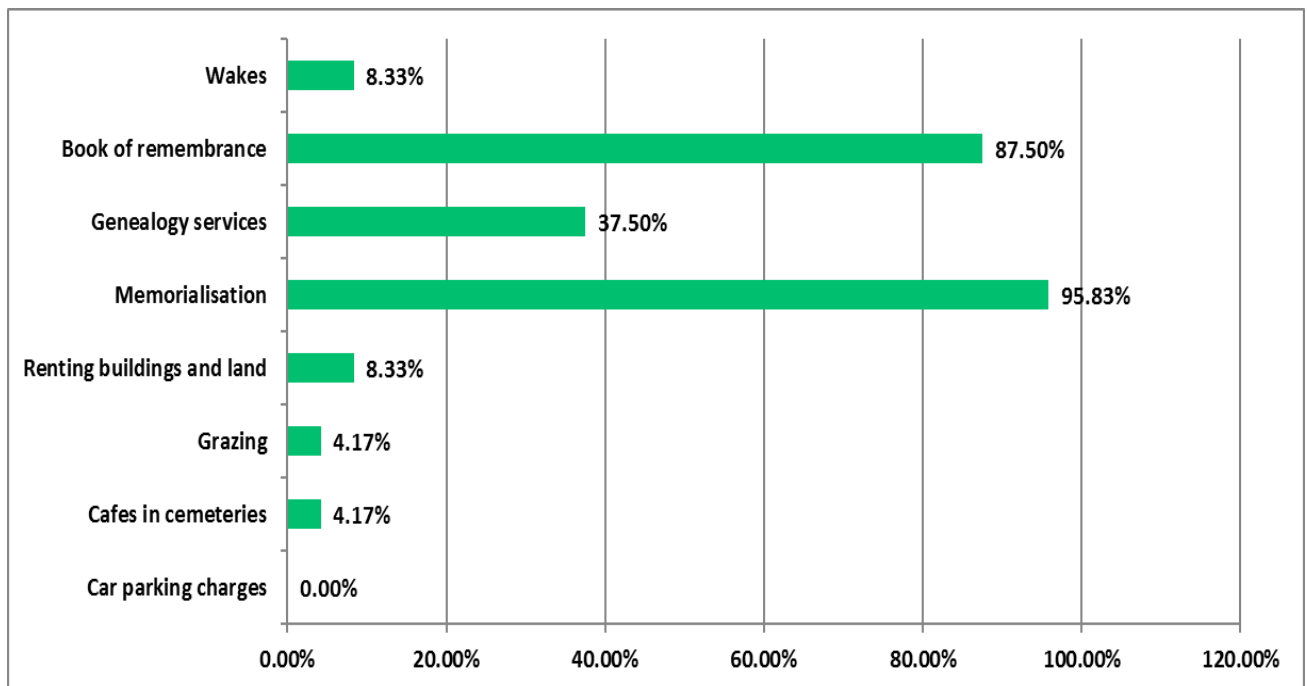
4.3 What is your expectation of the level of funding in your service budget in the coming 5 years?

37.50%
Expect there to be no change in budgets in the next 5 yrs

Looking at the expectations of respondents for the longer term, the survey asked what they thought about the level of funding for the budget in the coming five years. 20.83% of respondents believed that funding would decrease by five to 10 percent, 37.50% stated that they expected the budget not to change and a further 12.50% thought that the funding would decrease by zero to five percent.

4.4 Apart from burial and crematorium charges, what other areas do you currently generate income in through fees and charges (either provided in-house or through a franchise)?

The cemeteries and crematoria service have the opportunity to generate income to support the service budget. To gain an understanding of what areas councils are generating income from, the survey asked respondents to specify.

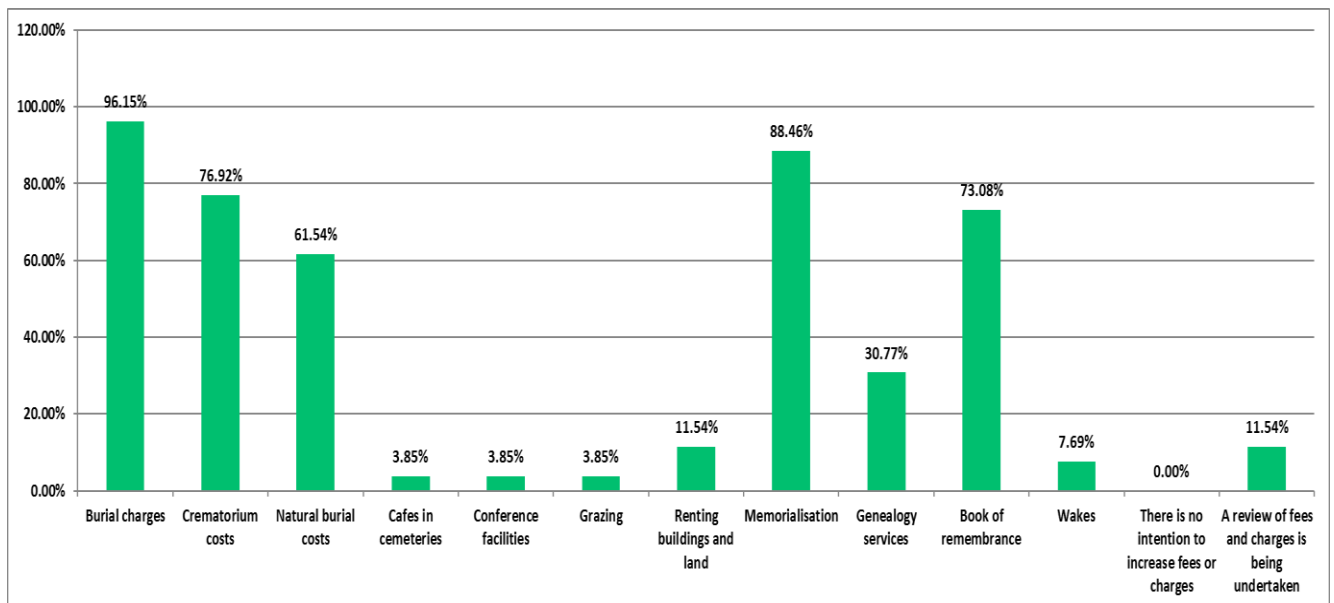


Memorialisation is the most common way the service is generating an income with 95.83% reporting that they do this, with 87.50% reporting an income is generated from books of remembrance and 37.50% stating they provide genealogy services for a fee.

4.5 What areas do you intend to increase fees and charges over the next 2-3 years?

Due to the rising costs related to bereavement services, from the rise in utility costs to the increase in staff wages, to ensure that the service remains financially sustainable there is a need for local authorities to review the fees and in some cases increase what they charge for the service.

Therefore, respondents were asked to advise where they believed the fees would increase in the next two to three years. This question was also asked in 2023 and 2024 which allows a comparison to be made between the responses for the last three years. The graph below provides an overview of the responses.



The responses for 2025 show that the top three reported areas for fee increases are burial charges, crematorium costs and memorialisation.

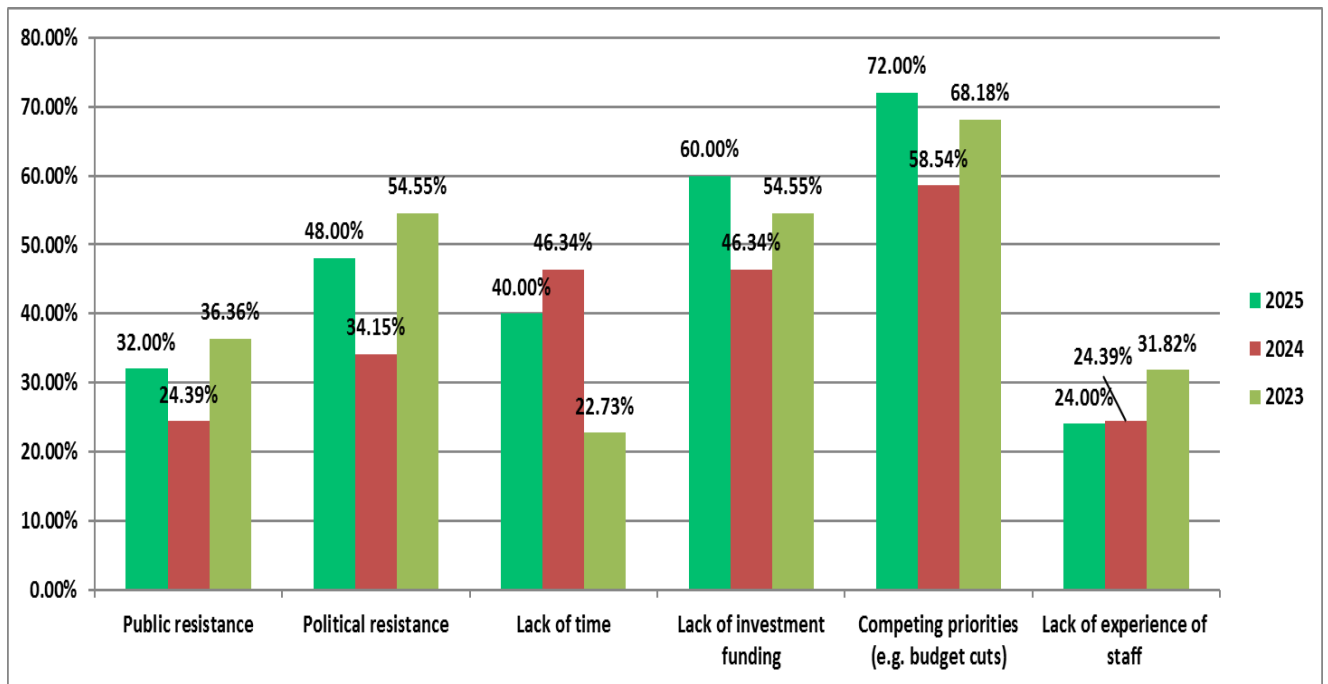
None of the respondents report that they have no intention to increase fees and charges.

The topic of increasing fees and charges has been discussed at the [APSE Cemeteries and Crematoria Network](#) and it is clear from the discussions that any increases in charges are made to ensure that the service is financial sustainable. However, consideration is given to keeping the cost of a funeral affordable to residents.

When asked if the cemeteries and crematoria service sell services other than burials and cremations to customers outside of the local authority, 91.67% state that they did not, 8.3% report selling services to the public sector and 4.17% advised that they sell services to the private sector.

4.6 What are the barriers to generating income?

Due to the nature of bereavement services, there are several barriers that prevent the service from generating income. The graph below highlights these barriers and compares the 2023 and 2024 responses.



Competing priorities are cited as one of the greatest barriers for 2025, 2024 and 2023. Lack of investment funding has become a more prevalent barrier in 2025 with 60% of respondents reporting this to be the case, which represents a 13.66% increase when compared to 2024.

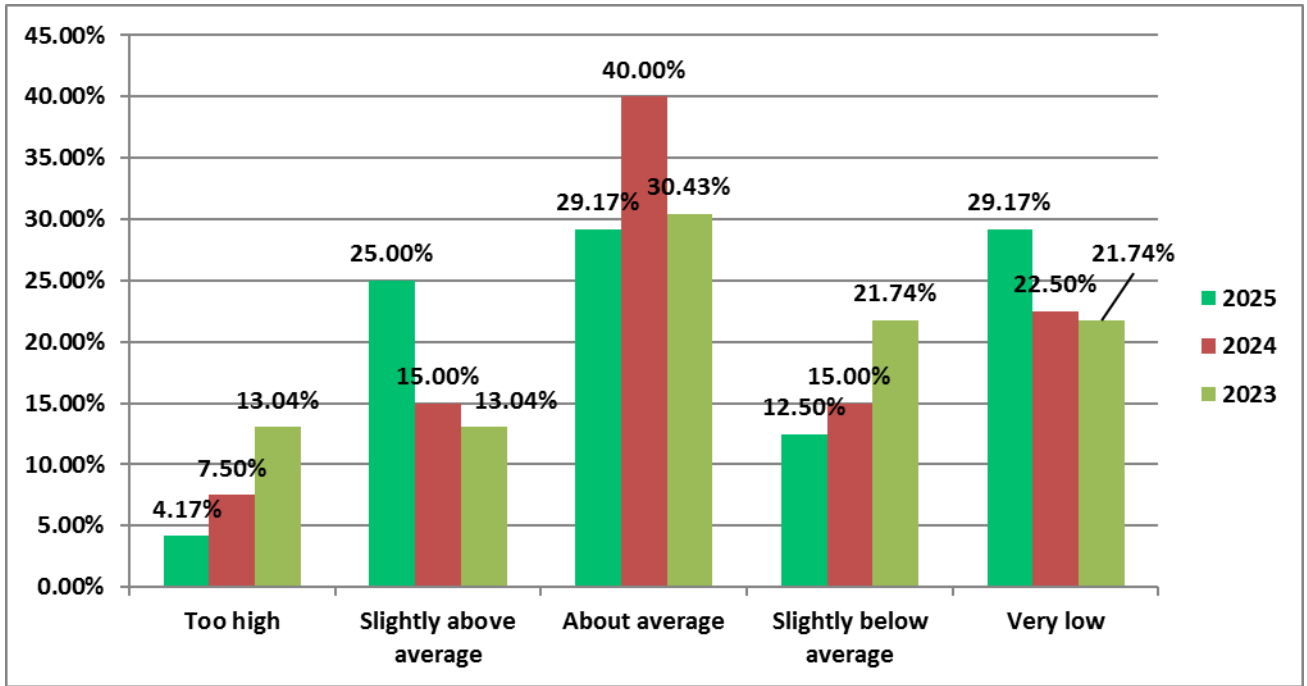
There are APSE Members that have reported that the lack of investment funding has impacted on the services' ability to compete with the private sector. The private sector is opening new crematoria in close proximity to the council's facilities and due to the lack of investment in council run crematoria, the council facilities are seen as less appealing in comparison.

In 2023, over half of respondents (54.55%) reported that political resistance was a barrier to generating income. However, for 2024, this is seen as less of a barrier with 34.15% stating this to be the case, but for 2025 this has started to increase, with 48% reporting it to be a barrier.

5 Staffing

5.1 Are staff absence levels at an acceptable level?

The State of the Market Survey seeks to gain an understanding on the respondents' perception regarding the absence levels in the service. The graph below provides an overview of the perceptions for 2025, 2024 and 2023.



For 2025, 29.17% of respondents believe that staff absence is too high or slightly above average which compares with 26.08% in 2023 and 22.5% in 2024.

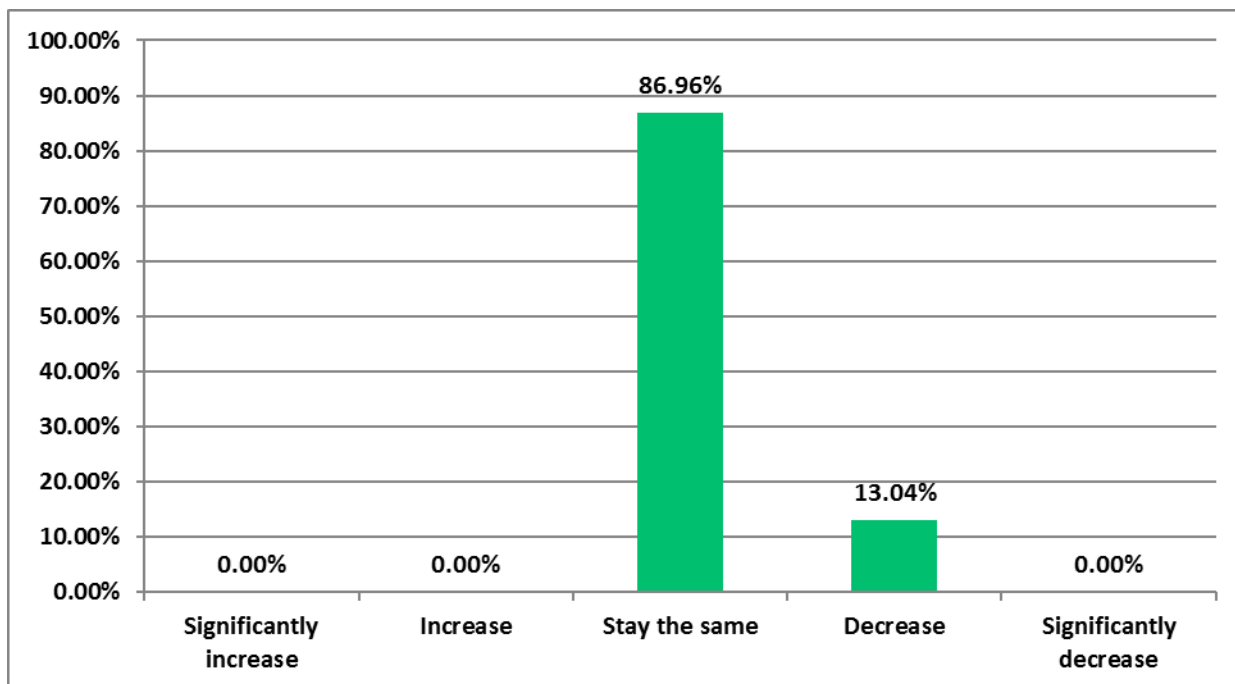
41.67% of the respondents for 2025 believe that staff absence is slightly below average, or very low, in 2023, 43.48% of responses advise that they felt staff absence was slightly above average or very low. In 2024, 37.50% state that they felt staff absence was slightly below average or very low.

This year, there has been a reduction of 10.83% of respondents stating that they felt that staff absence was above average when compared with 2024.

Whilst there has been a slight variation in perceptions of staff absence over the last three years, it is clear that the level of staff absence for the service remains low, and this reflects the dedication and passion that the workforce has for the service.

5.2 Is the training budget over the next 12 months going to increase or decrease?

Staff training is essential to ensure the quality of service is maintained at a high standard, that staff are equipped to carry out their roles, are compliant with legislation and keep up to date with changes in technology and working practices. Therefore, the survey asked about the training budget for the service. The graph below outlines the responses received.



The majority of respondents (86.96%) report that the budget will stay the same, with 13.04% stating that it will decrease.

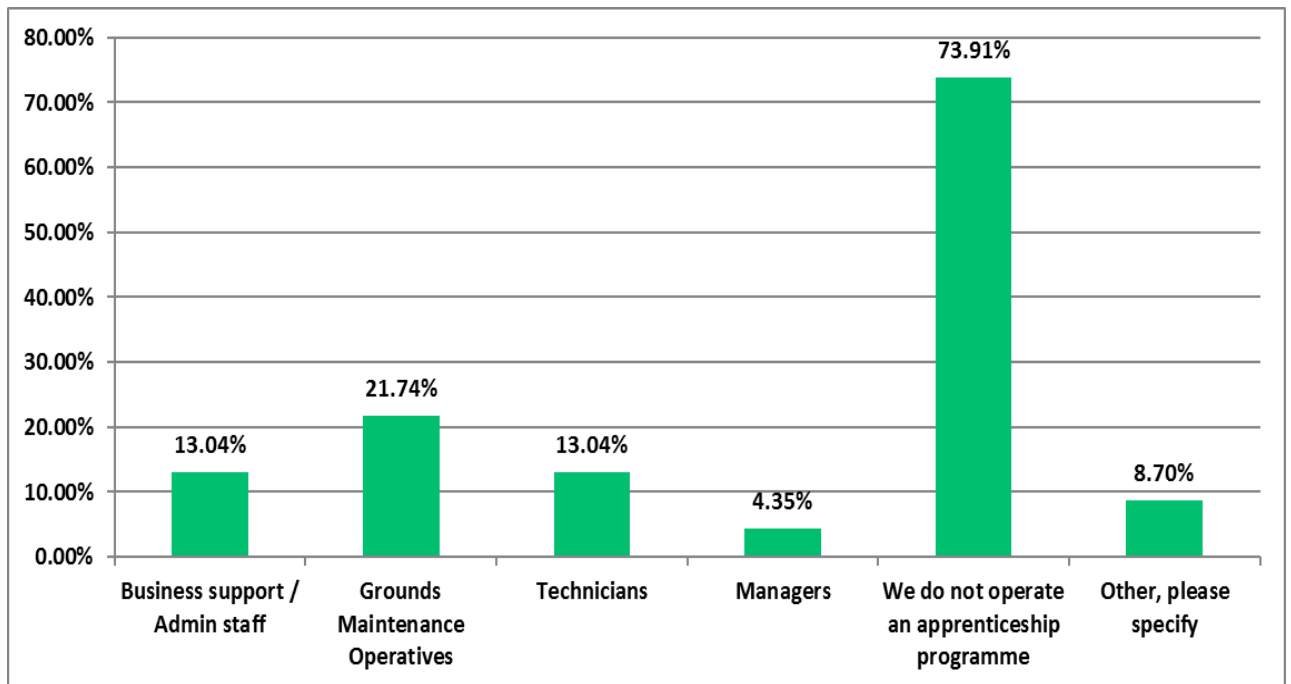
The responses demonstrate that despite the budgetary pressure, it is perceived that the budget for training will remain the same, highlighting that service managers acknowledge the need to have well-trained staff.

[APSE Training](#) has a range of courses specifically tailored for local authorities bereavement services including [Burial and cremation Scotland Act 2016](#), [Legal and practical management of cemeteries](#) and [Making space for nature in our burial grounds and churchyards](#).

5.3 Does your service offer apprenticeships to any of the following?

With the well documented issues with skill shortages across many council services, the focus in government policy on vocational qualifications, and the specialist nature of the roles undertaken in the cemeteries and crematoria service, apprenticeships are a great way to get the skills required in the service. To gain an understanding of whether the service is offering apprenticeships and what sort of apprenticeships they have within their service, the survey asked respondents to specify if they offered any apprenticeships.

The graph below details the responses received.



The majority of respondents, 73.91%, advise that they do not have an apprenticeship programme. The most common type of apprenticeships offered are in grounds maintenance (21.74%).

It should be noted that in the comments related to this question, respondents advise that although they do not have an apprenticeship programme, they do provide work experience and alternative opportunities for staff to receive qualifications.

6 Operational considerations

6.1 Are you anticipating increasing cemetery/crematorium land over the next five years?

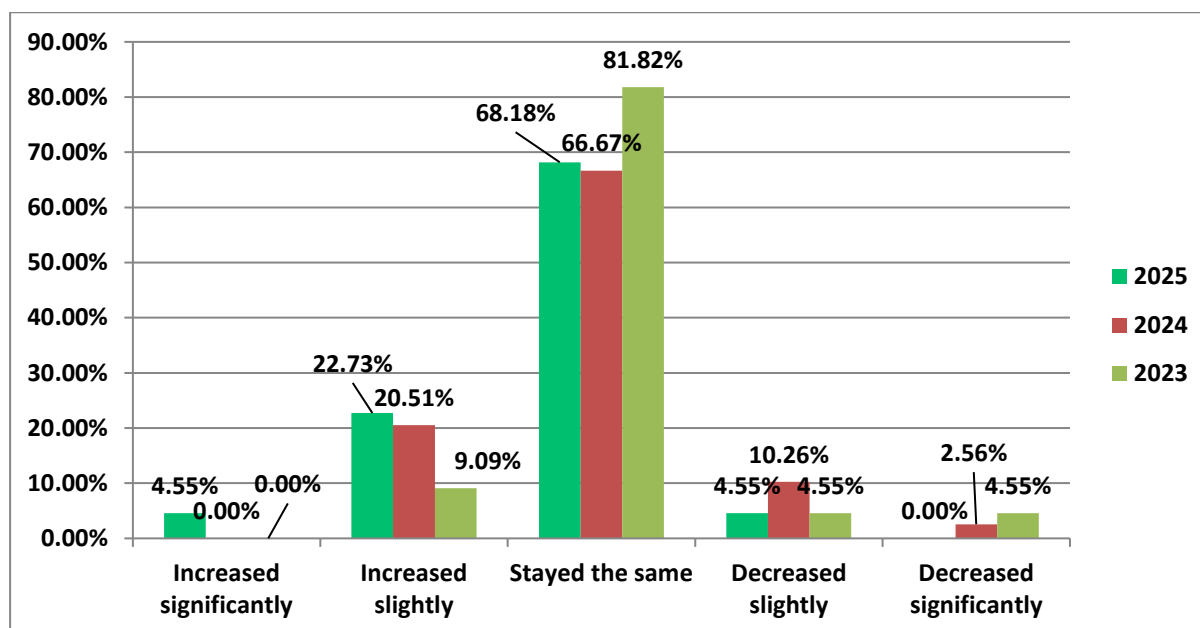
58.33%
Anticipate increasing cemetery/ crematoria land over the next 5 years

The provision of burial space is a regular concern raised at the [APSE Cemeteries and Crematoria Network](#). Therefore, the survey asked if the respondent was anticipating increasing the cemetery / crematorium land over the next five years. In 2023, 40.91% reported that they were anticipating increasing land over the next five years. This increased to 62.16% in 2024, and in 2025, decreased slightly to 58.33% indicating that they are anticipating increasing cemetery and crematorium land over the next five years.

With over half of respondents indicating that they believe they will be increasing land over the next five years, it is clear that this is a continuing issue for the service

6.2 Community sector involvement in bereavement services has

The use of the community sector to support the running of bereavement services is something that councils have done to assist in delivering the service. To gain an overview of how involvement has changed over the last three years the survey asked what the experience had been regarding involvement. The graph below provides a comparison for 2023, 2024 and 2025.

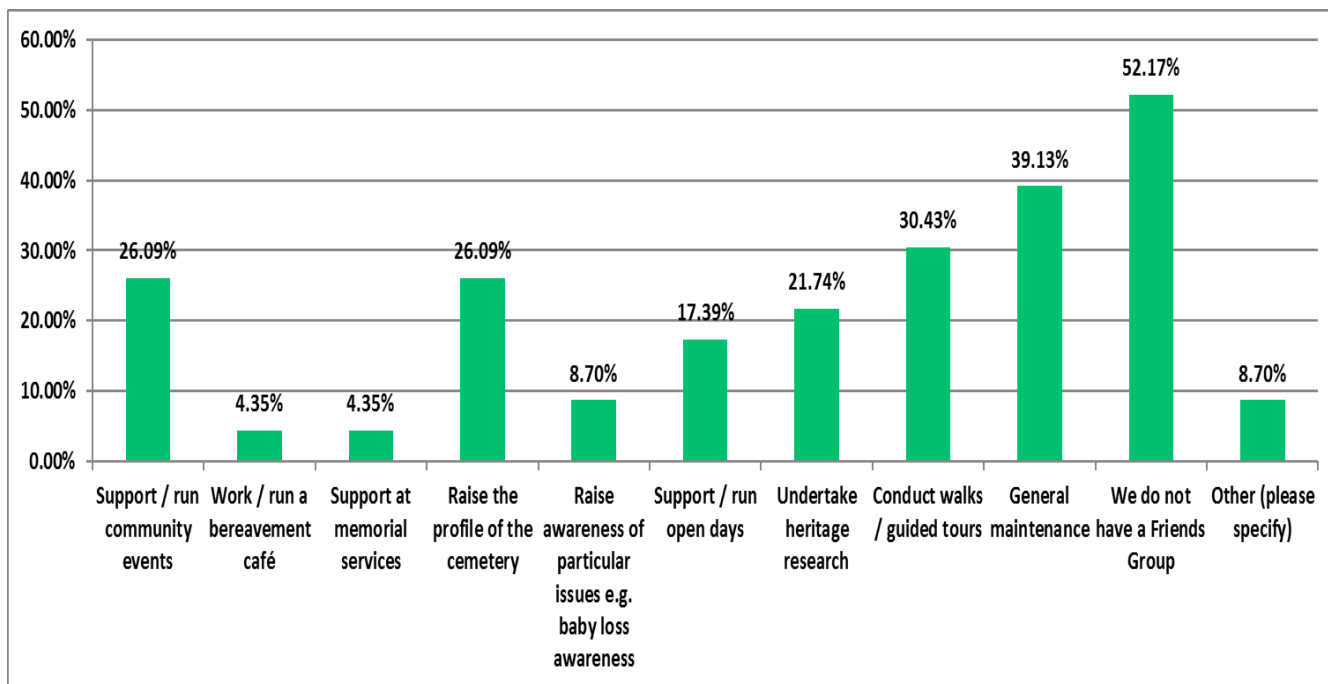


In 2023, the vast majority of respondents (81.82%) reported that community involvement had stayed the same, for 2024, this has decreased to 66.67% and for 2025, there has been a slight increase to 68.18%.

The number of respondents reporting that community involvement has been increasing over the last three years from a low of 9.09% in 2023 to 22.73% in 2025.

6.3 What roles or activities do Friends Groups undertake

Many cemeteries and crematoria services utilise Friends Groups, who help to provide a safe and pleasant place for people to visit and pay their respects, they also assist at community events. To gain a snapshot of what sort of roles or activities the Friends Groups undertake the survey asked respondents to specify. The graph below details an overview of the responses received.



Just over half of the respondents (52.17%) report that the service does not have a Friends Group, and in the comments on this question the main reason for this seems to be that there is some interest in having one, but the group has not been formalised yet.

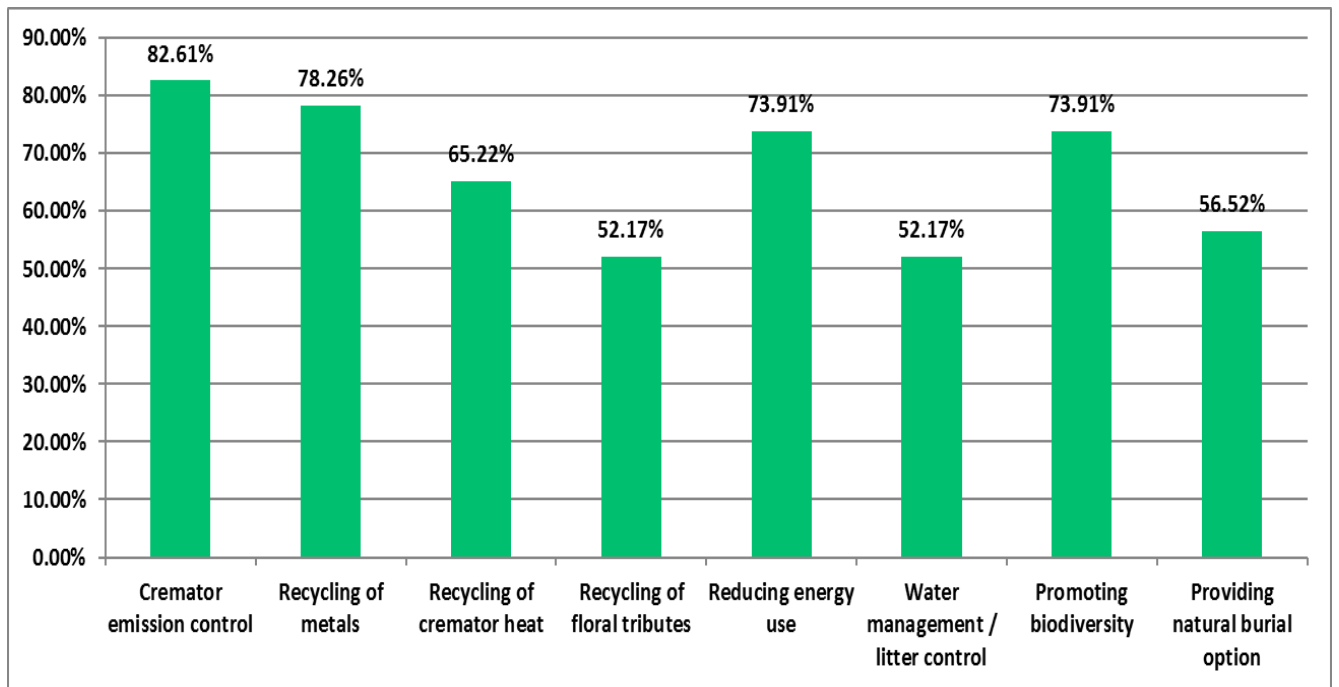
For the respondents that indicate that there is a Friends Group in place the most common activity undertaken is general maintenance with 39.13% of respondents reporting this to be the case, conducting walks / guided tours is the second most common activity with 30.43% of respondents advising this is the case, and 26.09% respondents report that volunteers support / run community events or play a role in raising the profile of the cemetery.

The responses to this question serve to highlight that the activities that Friends Groups undertake are very varied, and where these are well run and have the support of the council can be an asset to the service.

7 Environmental issues

7.1 What environmental issues are a priority for your cemeteries and crematoria?

Protecting and enhancing the environment is now a priority for local authorities and the State of the Market survey asked respondents to indicate what environmental issues are a priority for the council's cemetery and crematoria. The graph below details the responses received.

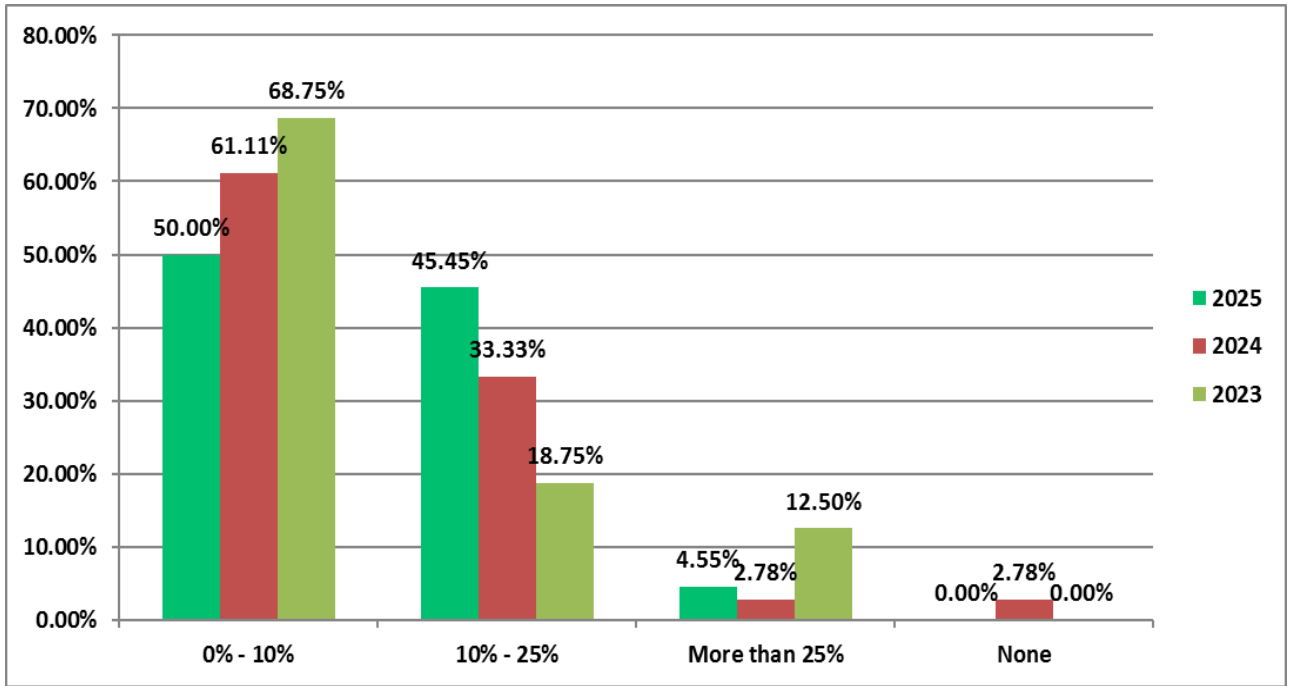


From the responses received, controlling cremator emissions is seen as a priority with 82.61% stating that this was a priority and the changes in the government guidance regarding cremator emission could be a factor in this high percentage. Other priorities include recycling metals with 78.26% advising that this is a priority, and this does not only benefit the environment because many councils donate the money gained from the recycling of metal to local bereavement charities providing an addition benefit.

73.91% of respondents report that they are reducing energy use and promoting biodiversity.

7.2 What % of your total cemetery land is given to a more informal grounds maintenance regime e.g. wildflower area / nature reserve

To assess if cemetery land has been given to a more informal grounds maintenance regime, the survey asked what percentage of land was given to this type of maintenance. The graph below shows the responses received for the 2025, 2024 and 2023 surveys.



The responses show that there has been a further decrease from 68.75% in 2023 to 61.11% in 2024 to 50.00% of respondents for 2025 reporting that 0-10% of cemetery land was given over to informal maintenance.

There has been a 26.70% increase in 2025, from the 18.75% of respondents in 2023 advising that they have given over 10-25% of cemetery land to informal maintenance.

For those respondents stating that over 25% of the cemetery land is given over to informal maintenance, there has been a decrease from 12.50% reported in 2023 to 4.55% in 2025.

The variance in responses from 2023 to 2025 could indicate that the cemeteries and crematoria services are committed to giving cemetery land over for informal maintenance for environmental reasons, but this must be balanced with the expectations of the community and visitors to the cemetery.

7.3 Do you make specific provision for promoting biodiversity in cemetery grounds?

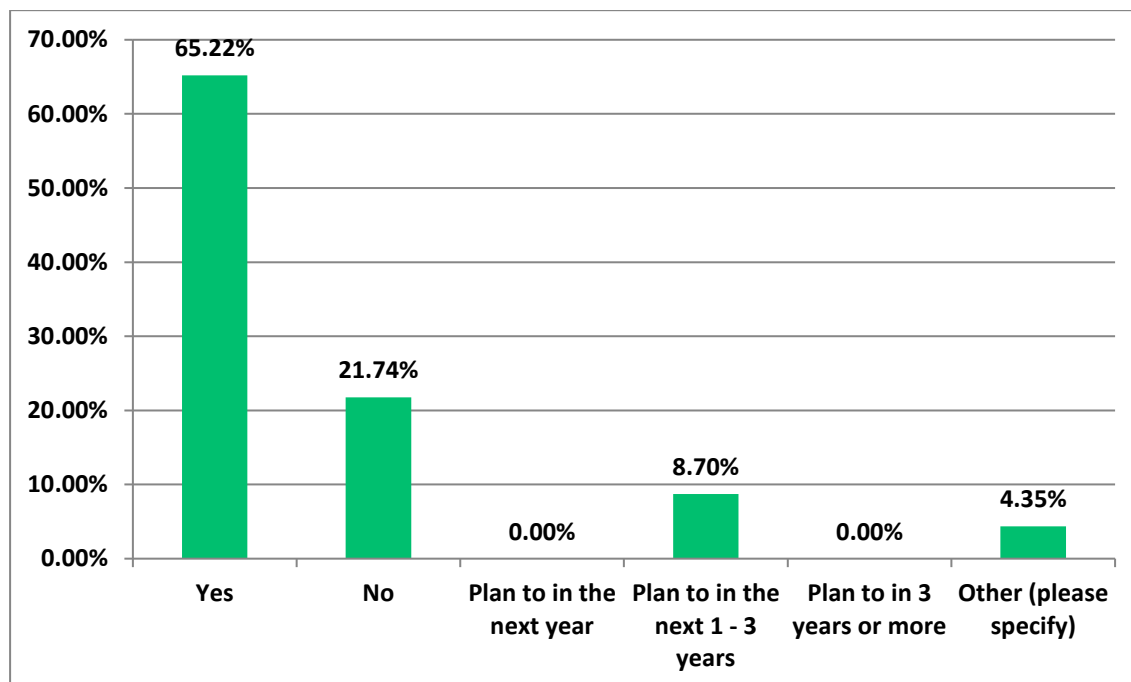
75.00%
Make provision for biodiversity

Promoting biodiversity is a key part of environmental priorities and this is reflected in the responses received to the survey, with an increase from 59.09% of respondents in 2023 to 75.00% of respondents in 2025 reporting that specific provision was made to promoting biodiversity.

7.4 Does your authority provide natural/woodland burial grounds?

With a change in attitudes and the increase in people looking for burial options that have less environmental impact, local authority bereavement services are responding to this change. The survey sought to ascertain whether councils were providing natural / woodland burial grounds.

The graph below highlights the responses received.



There has been a significant increase from 36.11% reporting they had natural / woodland burials in 2024, to 65.22% of respondents advising this to be the case in 2025.

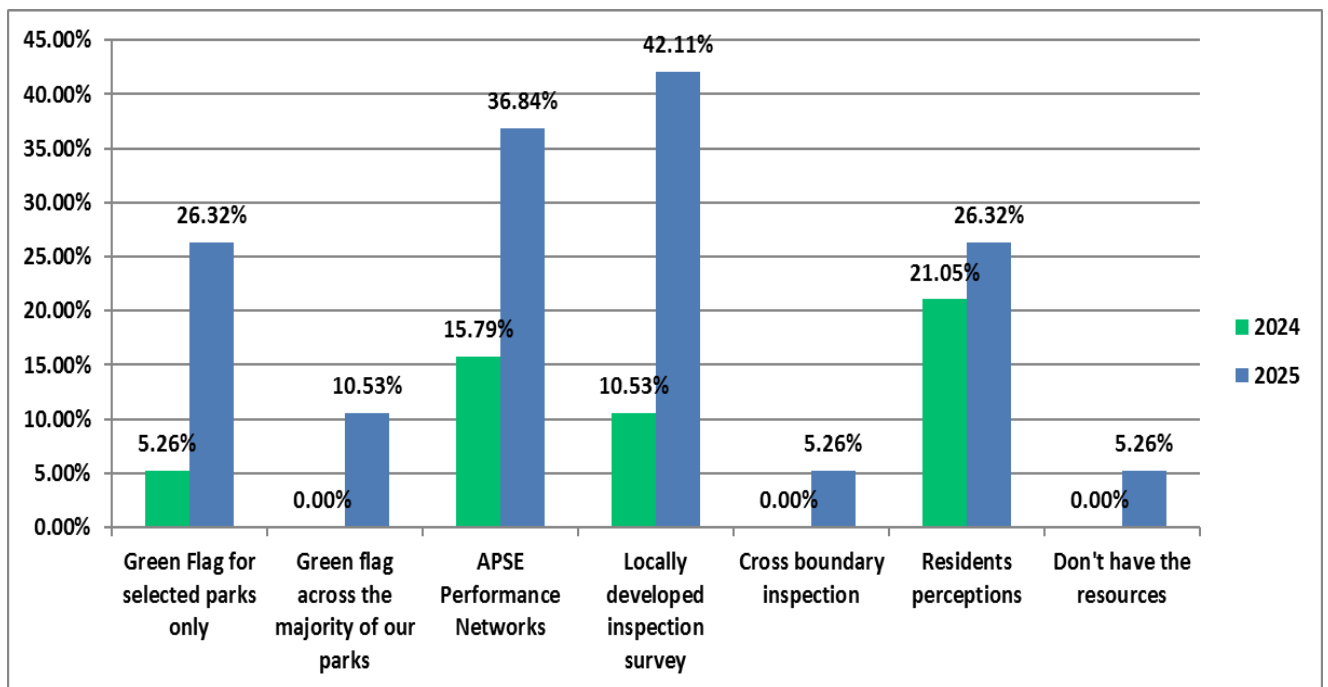
This demonstrates that 24.99% of respondents that advised there were planning to introduce natural burial grounds in the future, have now implemented these plans and are now providing natural / woodland burial grounds.

When looking at the comments in response to this question, it is clear that for the local authorities that do not provide this type of provision, the main barrier is cited as being the lack of available sites.

7.5 How did you measure the quality of cemeteries in last year?

Due to the importance of cemeteries to the community, it is important to measure the quality of them, especially at a time when the service is working with reduced budgets to

ensure that standards are maintained and to assess the impact of any changes made to service delivery. The graph below provides an overview of how respondents report that they have measured the quality of cemeteries over the last year.



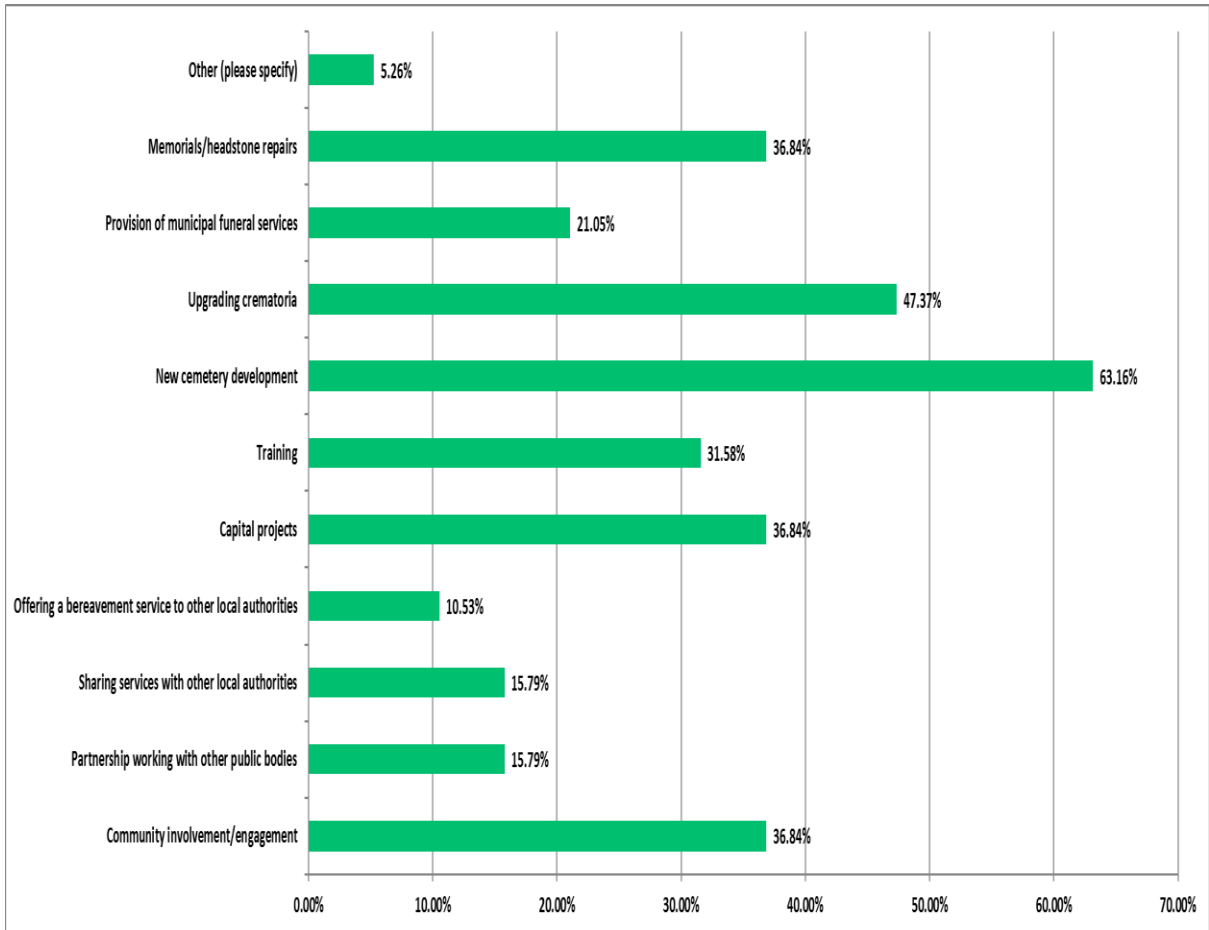
42.11% of respondents advise that a locally developed inspection survey is used, a further 36.84% of respondents report that they utilise [APSE Performance Networks](#)

The results of the survey highlight that although councils are under budgetary pressures services are still focusing resources on measuring performance. The need for a consistent and measurable quality standard is required to ensure the resources are targeted to be most effective and so that areas of improvement can be identified.

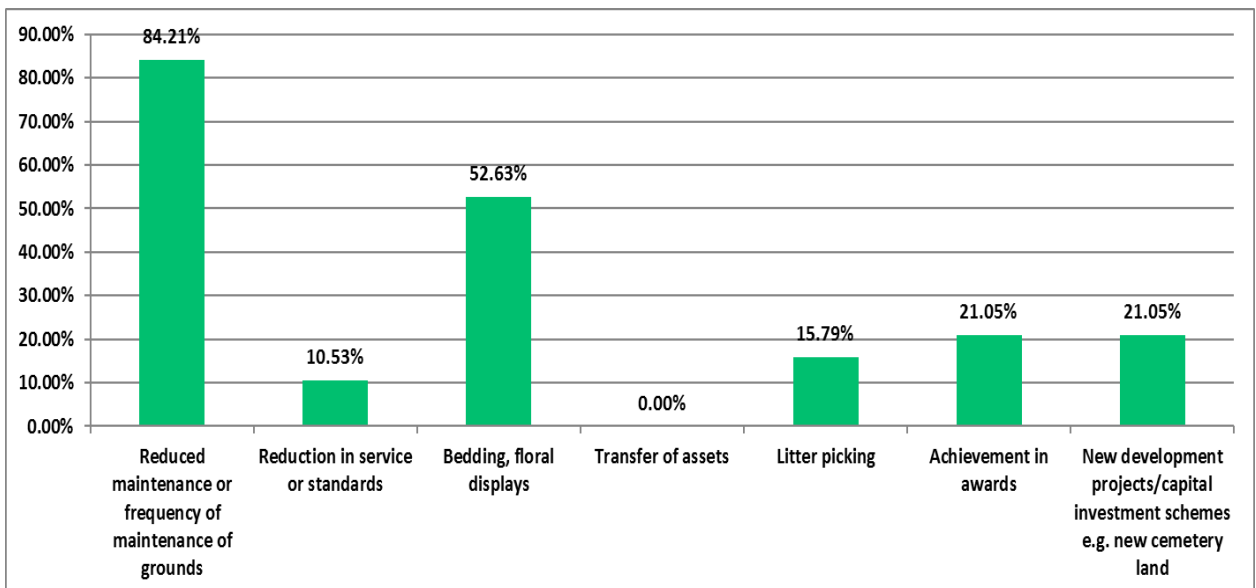
To support the measurement of performance, alongside the [APSE Performance Networks](#) benchmarking, there has been the introduction of the [Land Audit Management System App \(LAMS\)](#) which provides an additional tool for councils to monitor the quality of their cemeteries.

8 Future focus

To gain an insight into where respondents anticipate there will be growth and decreases for the cemeteries and crematoria services over the next 12 months, the survey asked them to specify where they perceived these would be. The graphs below provide a summary of the responses received.



The top three growth areas are anticipated to be new cemetery development with 63.16% of respondents specifying this, which is consistent with the responses to previous questions in the survey regarding the need for additional burial space. 47.37% see growth in upgrading crematoria and 36.84% see growth in capital projects and community involvement / engagement.



Looking at the areas where there are perceived to be decreases in work, the vast majority of respondents (84.21%) state that there could be reduced maintenance or frequency of maintenance of grounds, this is more than likely in response to the pressure on the services budget but could also be attributed to the focus on promoting bio-diversity in burial grounds. 52.63% of respondents reported that they believed that there would be a reduction of bedding and floral displays, which could be seen as a nice to have and has a cost and resource implication in terms of the maintenance of these areas.

9 APSE Comment

This State of the Market Survey provides a snapshot of the perception and opinions of Bereavement services managers and highlights the current challenges that the service is facing.

In previous years, the service has largely not been subjected to the same level of budget cuts that some other local authority services have suffered. However, the responses from the 2024 and 2025 surveys demonstrate that this is no longer the case with decreases in both capital and revenue budgets. With 65.39% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the squeeze and public sector resources is affecting cemeteries and crematoria disproportionately to other service areas and 20.83% of respondents to the 2025 survey stating that they believed their budget would decrease by 5 to 10 percent over the next five years.

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 with 84.61% of respondents reporting that reductions in funding has resulted in a reduction of manicured areas for some cemetery land. On the other hand, this also indicates that bereavement professionals are looking at alternative and perhaps more environmentally sustainable grounds maintenance methods, which is a positive way to support environmental outcomes as well as combatting 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 sensitivity surrounding the service and its users, this is perhaps not unexpected.

The survey has also shown that there are common issues shared throughout the UK, with reducing availability of burial space, pressures and budgets and long term under investment in the service. Such issues and their solutions are regularly discussed via the network query service APSE provides and at Networks and Seminars.

It is clear from the survey that there is a focus on environmental issues with respondents reporting that they are prioritising a range of measures, including promoting biodiversity, cremator emission control and reducing energy use.

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, networks and seminars reflect these key issues in the future.

The challenges highlighted by respondents in this survey will be featured in an interactive group discussion forum being held at the APSE Cemeteries and Crematoria Seminar on **Thursday 20 November 2025** at the **Millennium Gallery, Sheffield**. The event also brings together expert speakers who will explore topics such as: -

- What does Local Government Reorganisation mean for Bereavement Services,
- Taking at-risk heritage assets out of the past and into the 21st Century and beyond!
- Planning cemeteries: Their potential contribution to green infrastructure and ecosystem services
- and many others.

For more information and to book your place, please click the link below: -

[APSE Cemeteries and Crematoria Seminar - 20 Nov 2025 - Millennium Gallery, Sheffield](#)

Vickie Hacking
Principal Advisor

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 network, 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 networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

APSE Networks 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 network meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area, please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national networks groups include: -

- Building cleaning
- Catering
- Cemeteries and crematoria
- Local Government Reorganisation
- Veterans and Military Champions Network
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation
- Housing, construction and building maintenance.
- Parks, horticultural and ground maintenance
- Renewables and climate change
- Roads, highways, and street lighting
- Sports and leisure management
- Vehicle maintenance and transport
- Waste management, refuse collection and street cleansing.

Visit www.apse.org.uk for more details.



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