



State of the Market 2026

Local Authority Street Cleansing Services



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About the APSE State of the Market – Street Cleansing Services

State of the Market 2026

APSE conducted an on-line survey during January and February 2026. This follows on from the 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 ,2021 ,2022, 2023 and 2024 Street Cleansing State of the Market surveys where similar questions were asked to allow for trend comparisons. A wide variety of local authorities from across the UK responded to the survey thus providing a meaningful cross-section of views for the survey. This report identifies the key findings of the survey.

1 Purpose of the report

Each year APSE undertakes a survey on the state of the market in local authority Street Cleansing 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 Street Cleansing teams 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 Methodology

APSE conducted a survey of its member local councils in February 2026; the responses provide a good sample of the UK local authority Street Cleansing Services sector.

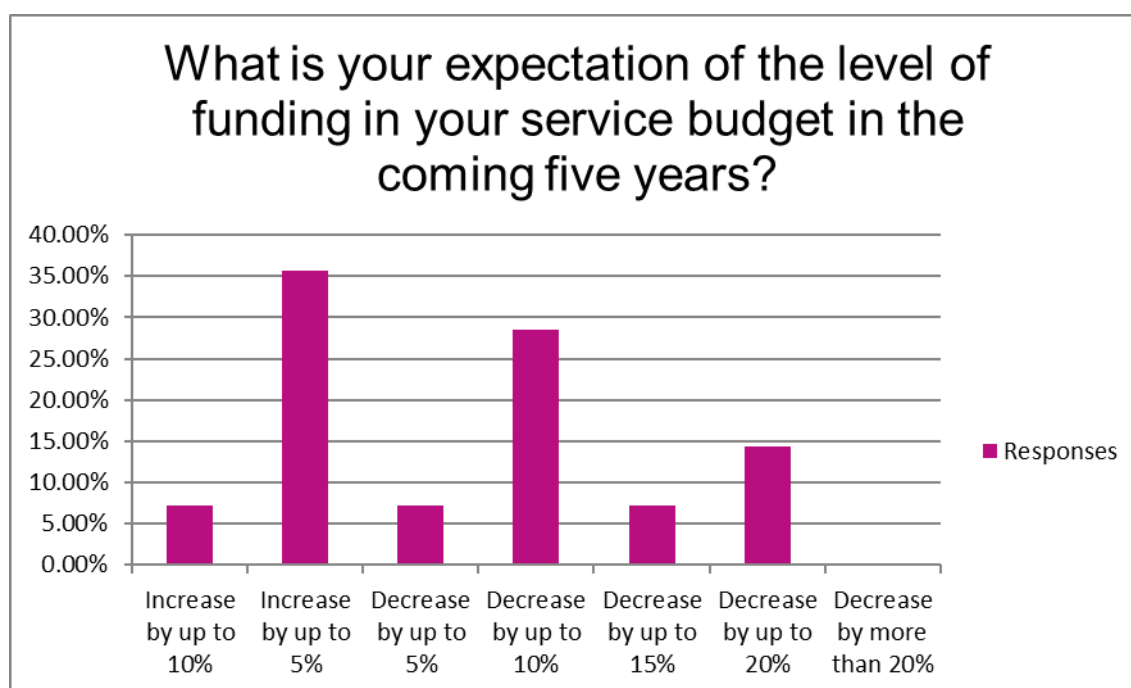
3 Service Budgets

Members were asked if they thought that the street cleansing budget will change over the next year and 80% said yes (compared with 71% in 2025). Of these, 50% expect budgets to decrease over the next year, which is an increase of 30% on 2025 when just 20% expected budgets to decrease. This might indicate that there is an expectation there will be more pressure on budgets. Although 42% of respondents expect budgets to increase with 35% expecting an increase by up to

5% and around 7% expecting an increase of 10%. Discouraging the results from the 2026 survey show a marginal decrease in those expecting increased budgets of 10% or more from 33% in 2025, to 7% in 2026. 28% of authorities are expecting budget cuts of over 10%.

The longer-term view would seem to indicate that local authorities looking at the future of their services might expect less investment and by association decreased budgets.

However, overall, the responses reflects a cautiously optimistic outlook for service budgets over the next five years. With many respondents anticipating modest increases, of around 5%. There is no indication of extreme funding changes.



4 Efficiencies

The survey asked 'What efficiencies are you currently working towards or proposing' and the main responses to this question were as follows:

- Review of weekend working and tasks undertaken.
- Fleet review.
- Operational depot relocation to support multiple service areas in one location/building.
- Reductions in cleaning frequencies.
- Service restructure/Staff reductions.
- Auditing Litter bin collections to ensure correct service levels.
- Single crewed vehicle and more officers working on the ground.

- Digitisation of Data Capture: Moving from manual to digital data collection

From the responses, these are the main areas we continue to see year on year, and where most efficiencies can be made and have already been considered, an upcoming area being given more consideration recently is technology.

The survey asked 'Do you have any income generation schemes' and 53% said 'yes', which is a slight increase on 2025 when 43% answered 'yes', councils continue to look at raising income to support the service budget.

For those that answered yes, they indicated using the following ways of implementing their income generation strategy:

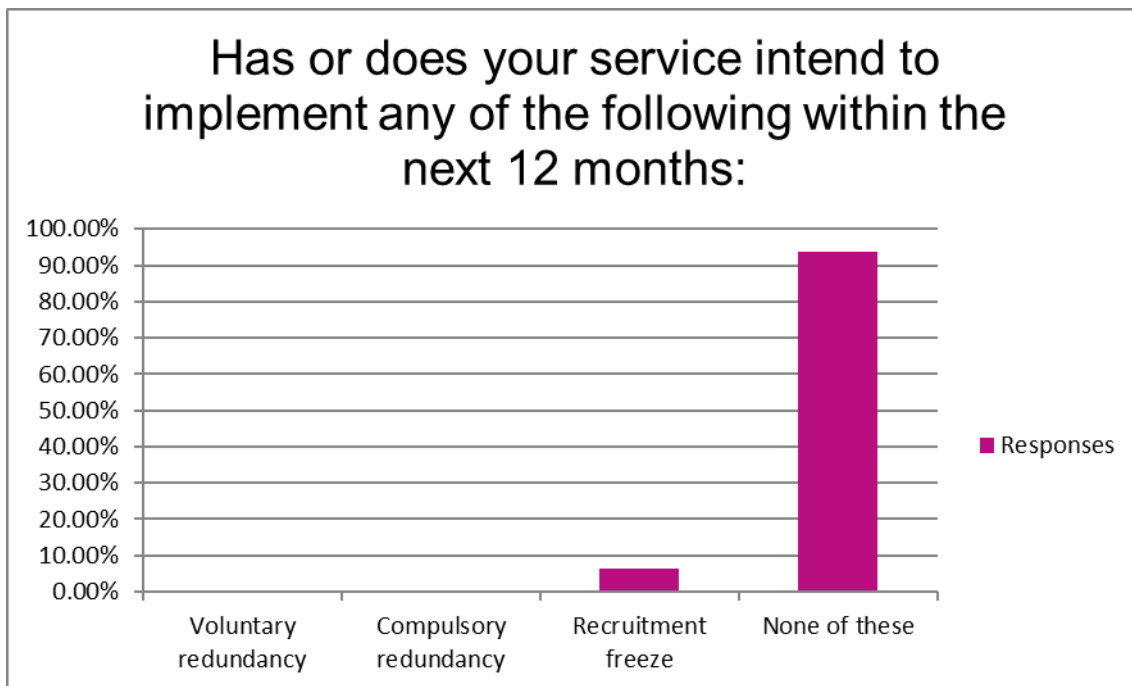
37% increased fees and charges, while 12% were doing so through a wholly owned council company. Types of services being delivered include: -

- Contracts relating to ground maintenance.
- Private land work.
- Possible enforcement to generate income, to be reinvested in communication, campaigns etc.
- Increase in commercial services to others e.g. BID / Businesses.
- Foreshore concessions.
- Private graffiti removal and charging for events.
- Big bin hire, mechanical sweepers for business car parks to create revenue.
- Events and private sweeping.

5 Managing future staffing levels

On employment related matters, the survey asked 'has or does your service intend to implement any of the following within the next 12 months regarding staffing levels.

The responses were as follows:



The proposed use of voluntary redundancy has fallen from 14% in 2025 to 0% in 2026.

Compulsory redundancy has remained a constant at 0% for 2025 and 2026.

Recruitment freezes have increased slightly to 6% now against 0% in 2025.

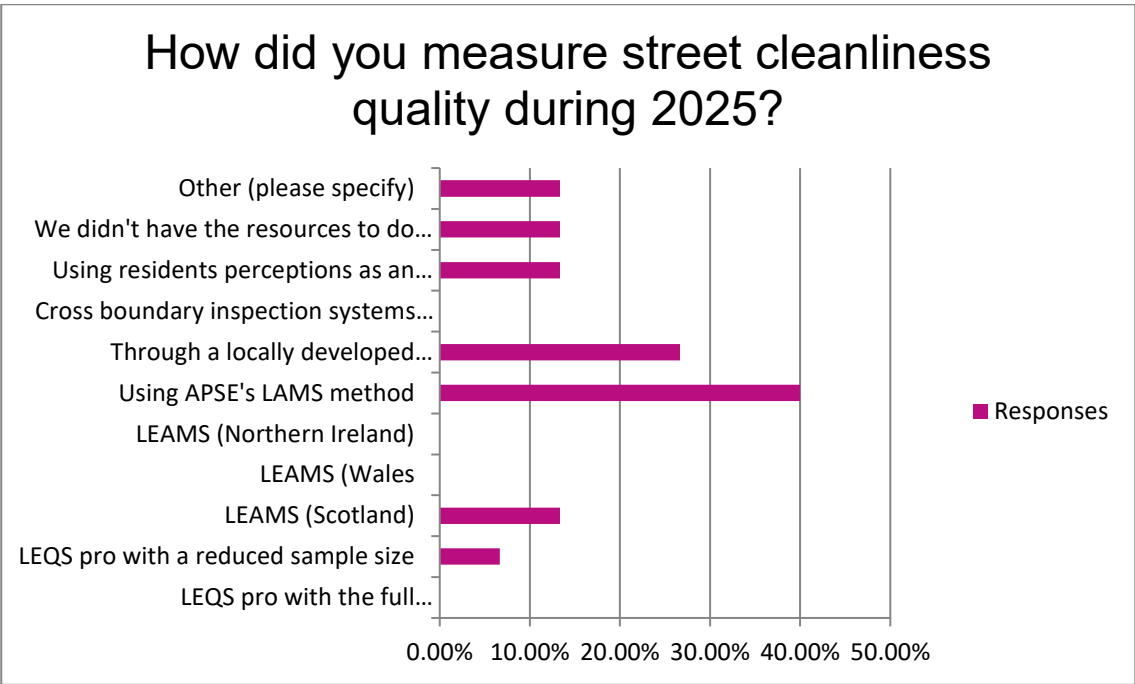
The responses still show a clear expectation of workforce stability over the next 12 months. With 94% of services indicating no planned redundancies or recruitment freezes, and only a small minority considering recruitment freezes.

6 Standards of cleanliness

When asked how cleanliness levels had changed over the current year, 40% said they had stayed the same as compared to 50% in 2025. 40% of respondents reported that their cleanliness levels had improved compared to 33% in 2025. However, 20% said cleanliness levels had fallen compared to 17% in 2025, which shows a slight increase in the perception that standards of cleanliness are falling.

42% expect cleanliness levels to improve over the coming twelve months, 35% expect them to stay the same and 21% still expect a decrease in cleanliness levels.

The survey asked how street cleanliness quality was measured (respondents were allowed to choose more than one response) and the results are as follows: -



When asked who carried out the surveys, the majority of respondents indicated that this was done using Officers from their own local authority within their service/department. A small proportion used local volunteers.

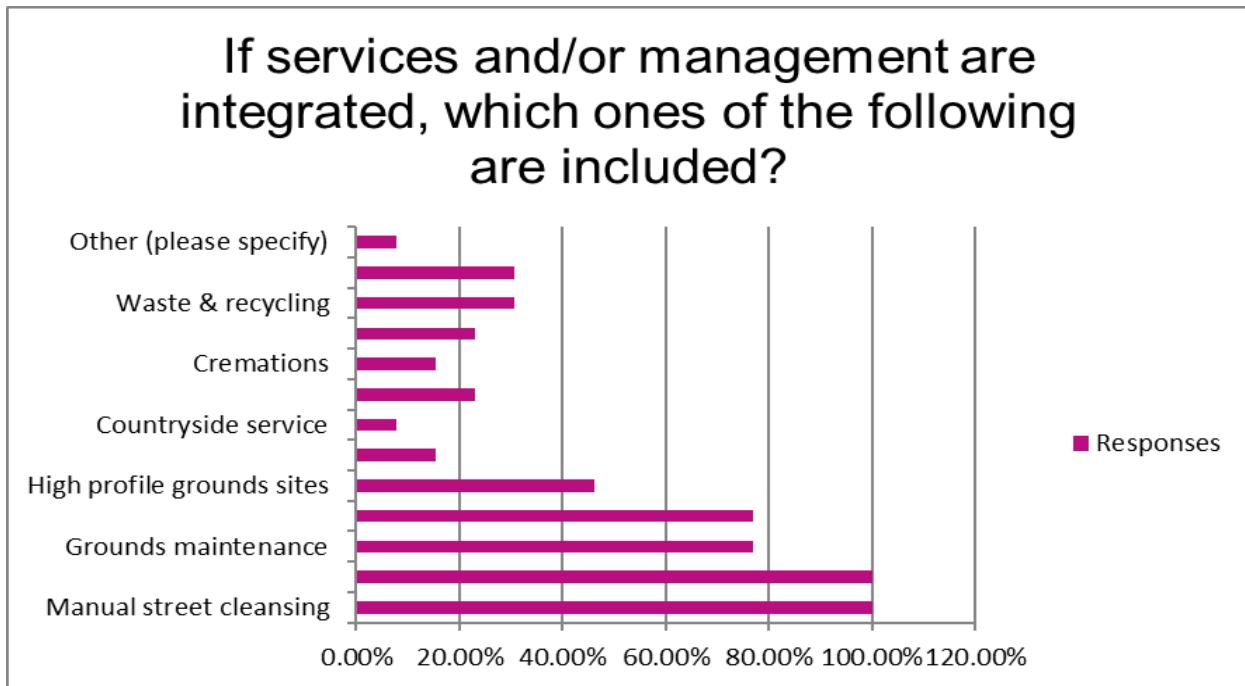
There has been an increase in local authorities using APSE’s Land Audit Management System as it has grown to become a nationally recognised system for measuring street cleansing levels. The LAMS monitoring system also allows the simple measurement of grounds maintenance quality standards for parks and open space and horticultural services.

This system provides a less complex and more affordable way to measure street cleansing quality. The LAMS system has proven to be extremely popular, and the inspections can be done by the local authority or by volunteer groups. The LAMS system has also been referenced by DEFRA in its’ national litter strategy.

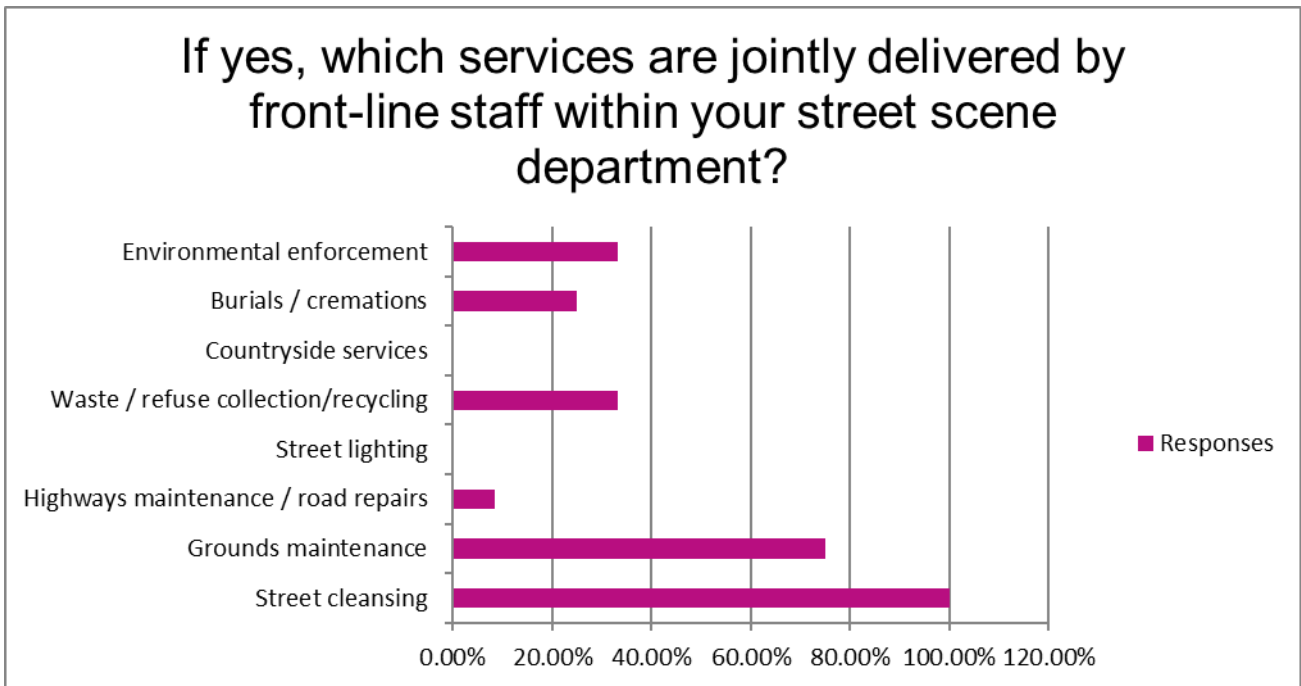
7 Streetscene

73% of respondents indicated that they are part of an integrated streetscene service as compared to 67% in 2025, however the level of integration varies widely, ranging from full-service integration to simply supervisors monitoring the workforce across a number of different services.

Of those who replied stating that services are jointly managed the level of integration according to service type is shown in the graph below.



Respondents also indicated that the following services are jointly delivered by staff within their streetscene department as distinct from service level integration in the above chart. The outcomes on joint delivery are as follows: -



8 Street cleansing operations

60% stated that they have area-based teams (67% in 2025), 71% of respondents stated that they operated a 7-day service. 20% currently undertake night-time street cleansing service as opposed to 17% in 2025.

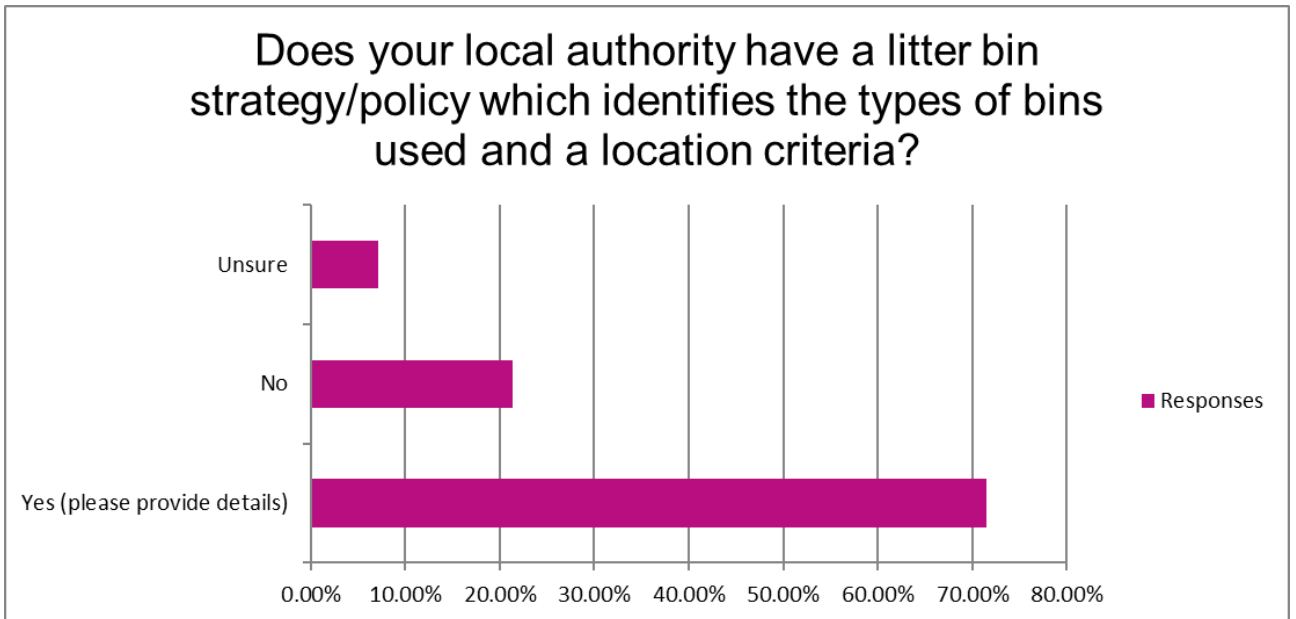
The survey asked how the street cleansing service is currently managed and 80% stated that this is in-house (67% in 2025), and 6% external (33% in 2025), which could indicate a move to bring contracts in-house though caution must be applied to high percentage change here due to some differentiation in respondents.

For those where the service is currently managed externally, 66%, stated the contract length is up to 5 years.

75% of respondents indicated that there is an option to extend the contract. With the notable increase in bringing contracts in-house, for those expecting to be managed externally, we can see a decrease in contract length, this might be due to councils wanting the ability to have greater flexibility to deal with performance management and enforcement, and ability to adapt the service should service needs change.

9 Bininfrastructure

The WRAP guidance document entitled *The Right Bin In The Right Place* to can be found [here](#). It include initiatives to promote greater bin use.

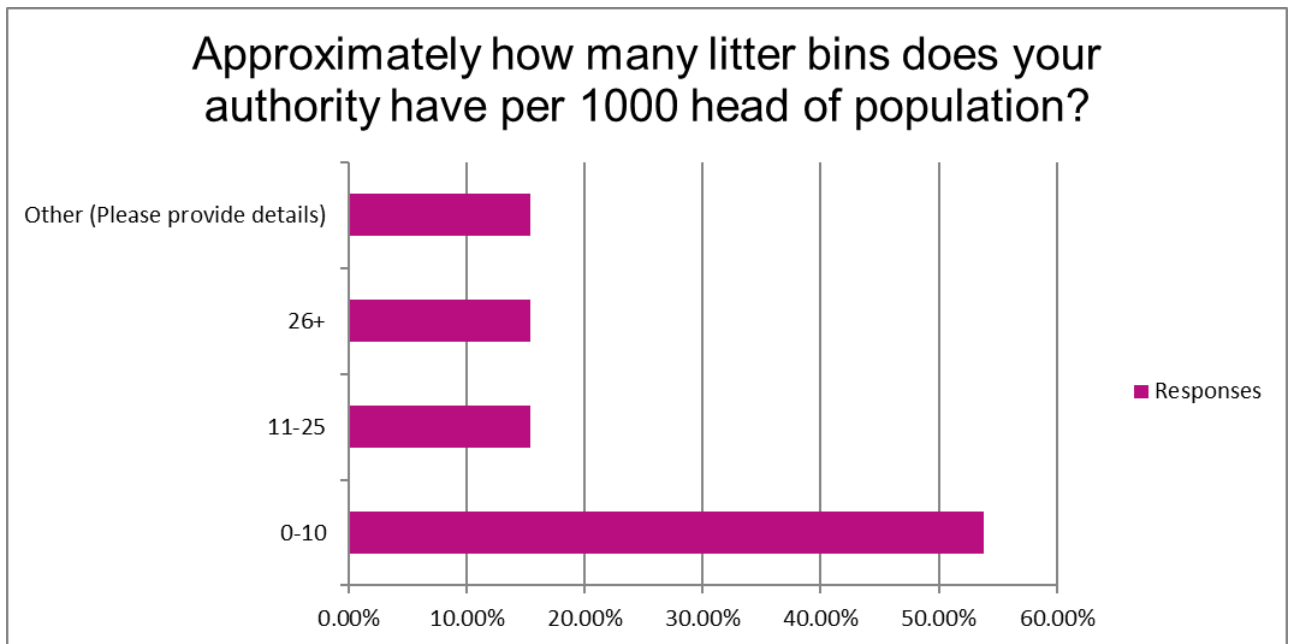


It is clear that according to this response 71% of the respondents do have some form of litter bin strategy/policy which is an increase from 60% in 2025. Historically even with the strategies being developed, there was a concern that not all litter bin providers in their area subscribe to it, leading to confusion regarding Litter bin styles, emptying techniques, locations and responsibility for emptying.

However, looking at the increases in the number of councils with litter strategies, the guidance document provided by WRAP towards developing a formal litter bin strategy is proving useful and will continue to do so for those authorities which have still to set out a policy.

The question was posed as to whether a single department is responsible for providing litter bins. 78% responded that a single department was responsible for litter bin provision.

The number of litter bins provided by a local authority is often a question which is asked by APSE members to get a view as to whether they provide sufficient coverage.



The graph shows for this year 0-10 per 1000 head of population seems to be the most common level of provision.

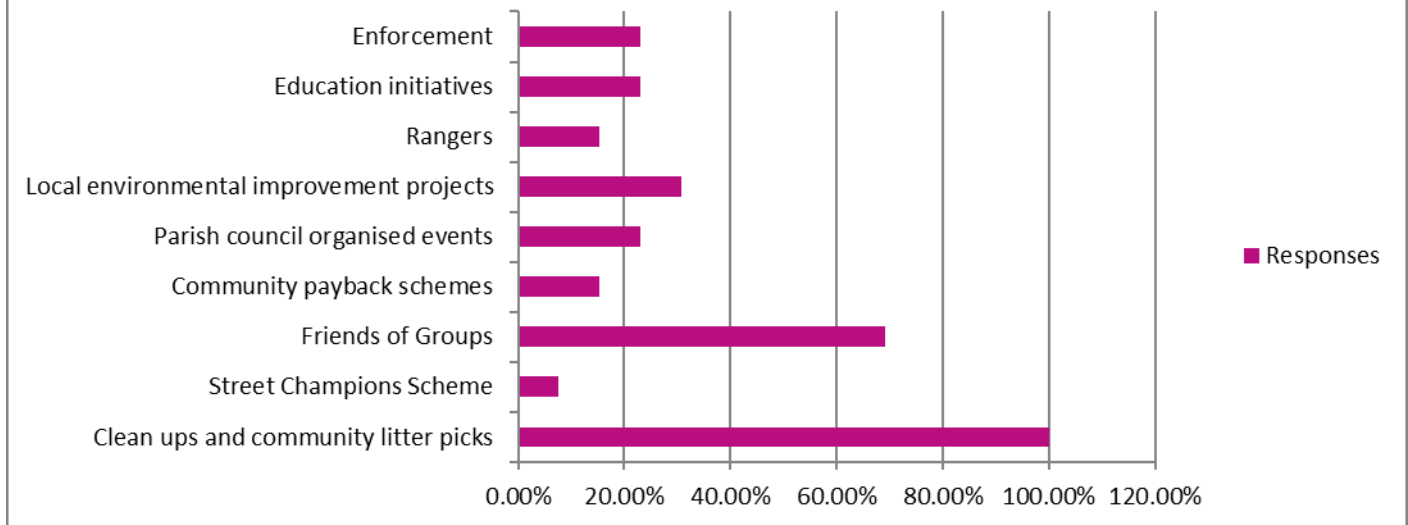
Regarding the accurate mapping of litter bin assets, 78% of respondents had an accurate map of where their litter bin stock was located. This means that for the 22% who do not have an accurate map they may have problems with ensuring regular emptying, repair and maintenance, and also whether litter bins are even needed in their current location. Most of those local authorities which did have accurate litter bin locations used GIS systems as well as excel spreadsheets which are used to record their locations.

The final question in this section asked what proportion of litter bins were replaced annually. The most frequent response at 57%, stated that up to 5% of bins were replaced annually.

10 Volunteering and partnership working.

When asked how volunteers are involved in the service, the majority of respondents said this was through clean ups and community litter picks, Parish council organised events and Friends of Groups. The full breakdown is shown in the following graph below:-

How are volunteers involved in the street cleansing service?



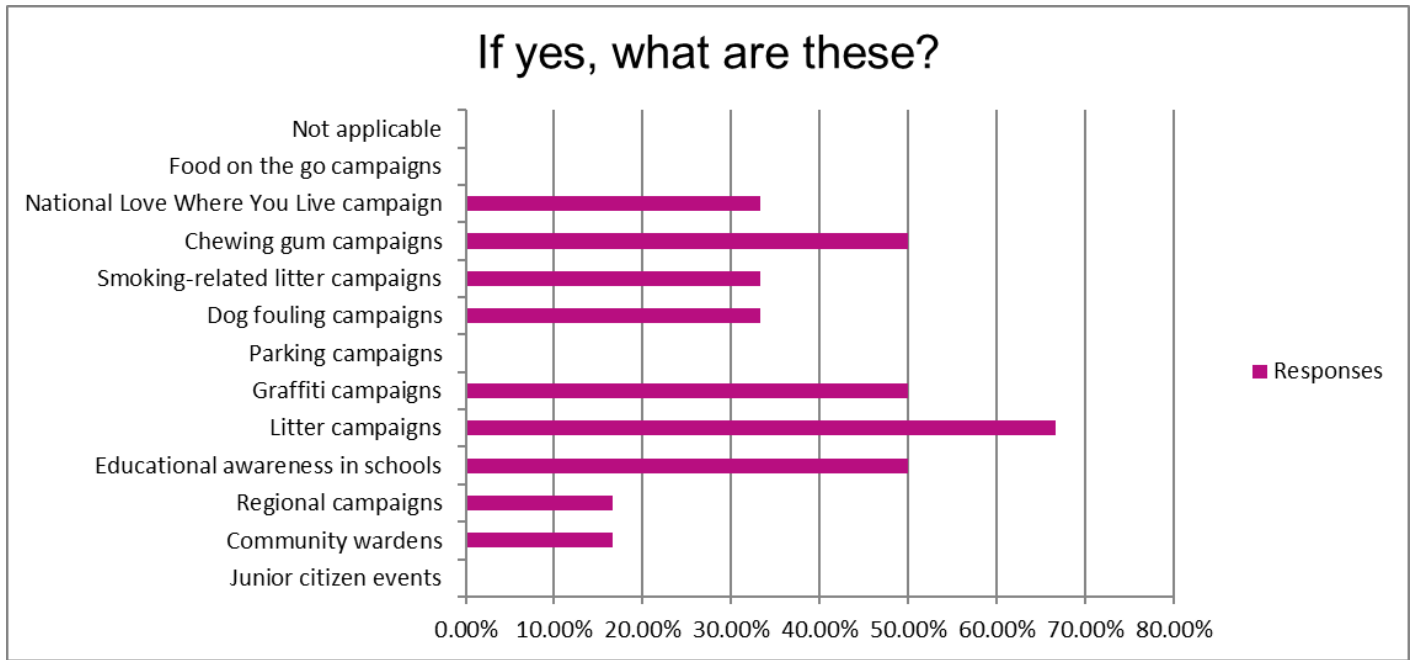
When questioned about working with partners to provide streetscene services, 16% stated that they provide streetscene services as part of a Business Improvement District (BID) as compared to 50% in 2025. APSE found that 7% of respondents have individual street cleansing agreements with supermarkets, retailers and other businesses which is a decrease from the 20% in 2025, again however such a variation could be down to changes in the respondent profiles and should be treated with a little caution.

7% of the respondents indicated that they have a partnership with large supermarkets/retailers/businesses on community clear ups/public realm improvements such as Community Champions schemes. This still has a potential for growth in future years. This latest figure shows an increase from 2025, when 0% of respondents said they had agreements.

71% of respondents stated that they had community sector involvement in street cleansing. However, in 2025 this was 80% showing a slight decline.

The main areas where respondents identified external support were in relation to clean ups and community litter picks (100%) and Friends of Groups (60%).

In terms of education campaigns, 46% are planning these in the next 2 years as opposed to 50% in 2025. The main campaigns being planned are litter campaigns (67%), Graffiti campaigns (50%) and Chewing gum campaigns (50%).



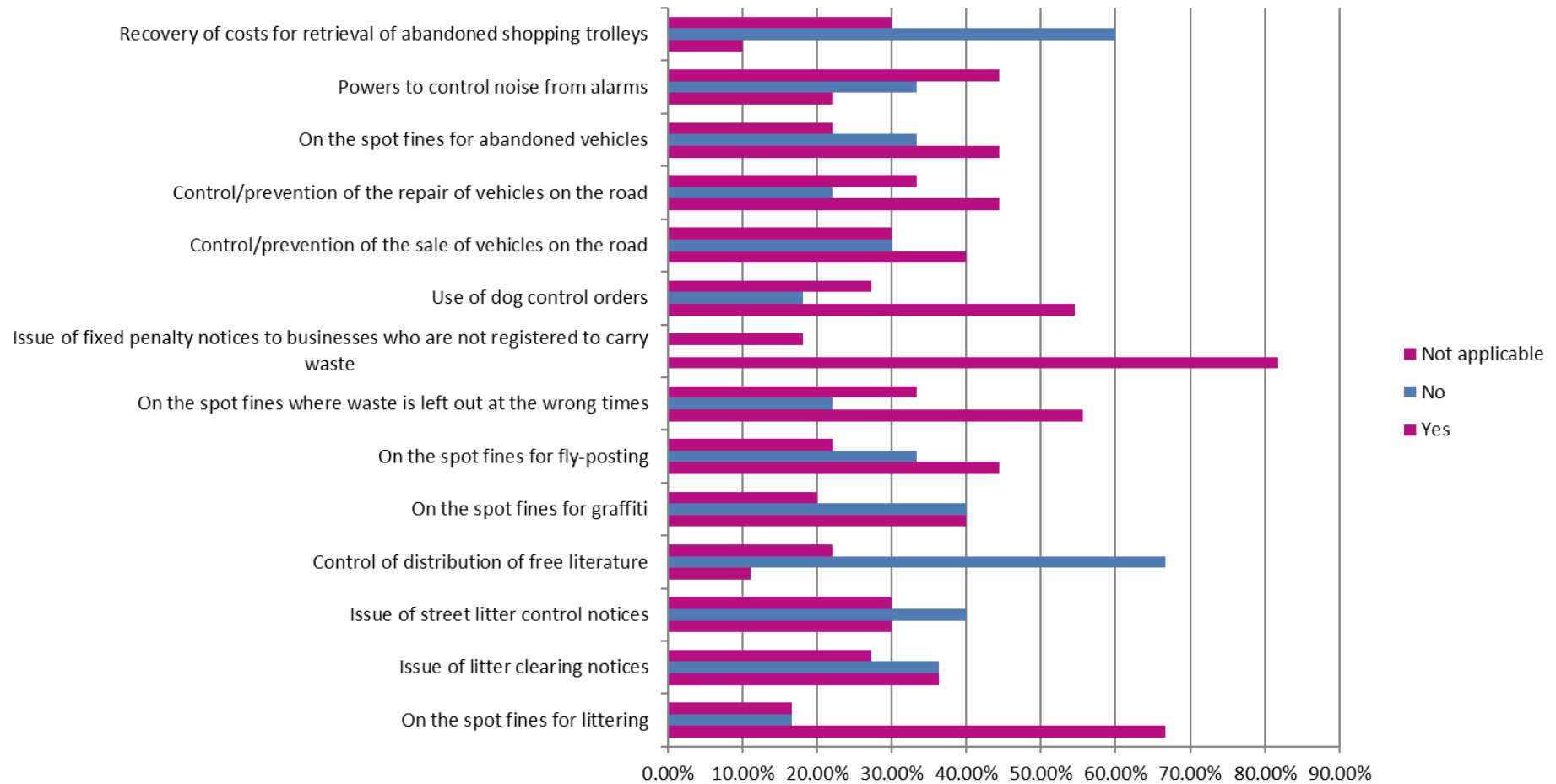
Other educational initiatives included: Dog fouling campaigns and smoking-related litter campaigns.

11 Enforcement

Near to 69% of respondents thought that there will be an increase in enforcement / notices issued in the next 2-3 years with the increase of maximum fines now at £500 for a fixed penalty notice, which is a slight increase in respondents who may turn to enforcement from just over 60% in 2025.

The survey asked which of the following powers were being used currently (where applicable), the results are shown on page 17. These are the powers defined by the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Acts for England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (respondents were asked to tick 'not applicable' where the powers do not apply) and Councils in Scotland only answered these where they were relevant.

Which of the following powers are you currently using (where applicable)?
Please note that these are powers as defined by the Clean
Neighbourhoods and Environment Acts for England, Wales and Northern
Ireland - please tick 'not applicable' if any of these



Regarding the powers being used, 66% of respondents now serve on the spot fines for littering and 36% of authorities are also issuing litter clearance notices. There is clearly a use of other powers such on the spot fines for flyposting, issue of fixed penalty notices to businesses who are not registered to carry waste, and on the spot fines for flyposting.

Noticeably where an increase has occurred it is with regards to the number of authorities serving notice on people leaving waste out at the wrong time which may suggest authorities are now moving back to this form of enforcement regarding household waste presentation.

A further question was asked about why certain powers have not been used (where respondents answered 'no'. Reasons cited included, 'insufficient resources' 62% in 2025 as opposed to 25% in 2024, 'it is covered by other agencies/ departments' (50% same as in 2024) 'they're not problem areas/we have other priorities' (25% same as 2024) and 25% cited 'political reasons' as opposed to 50% in 2024.

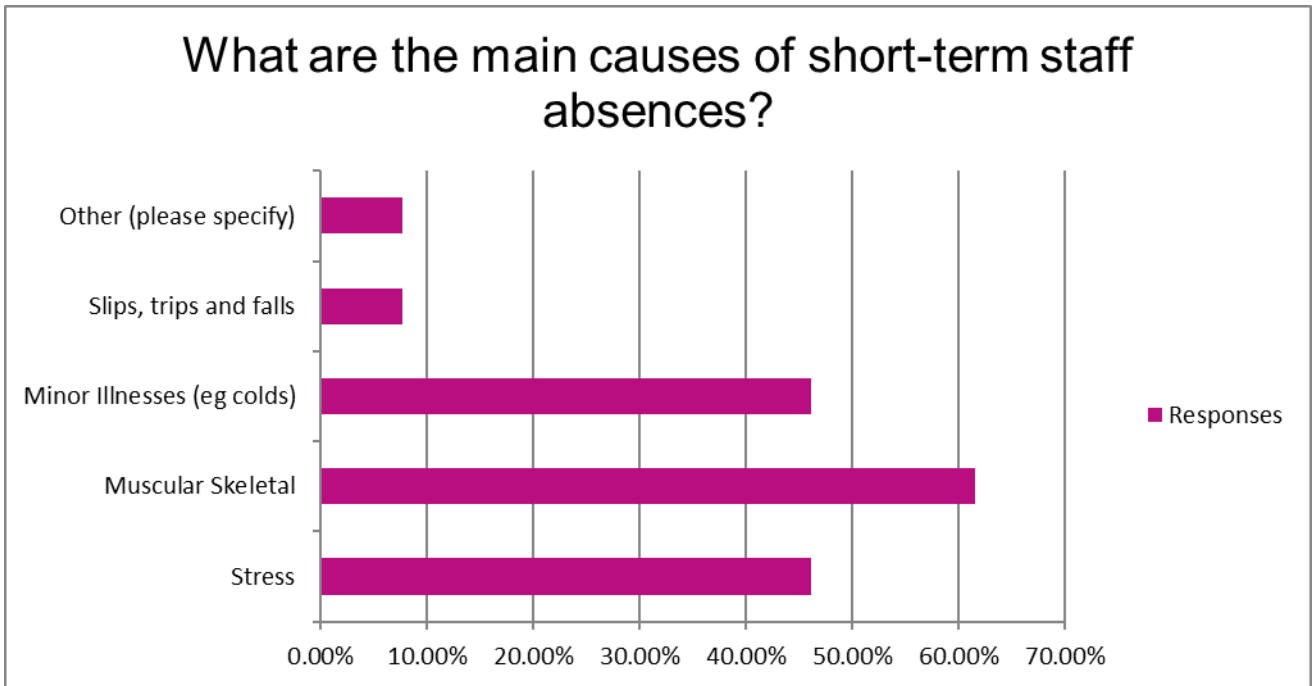
12 Staff absence

In terms of staff absence 7% (40% in 2024), thought that staff absence was too high or above average, but 64% of respondents viewed staff absence as being around or below average levels.



The survey data therefore indicates 42% of local managers believe absence is at a manageable

level.



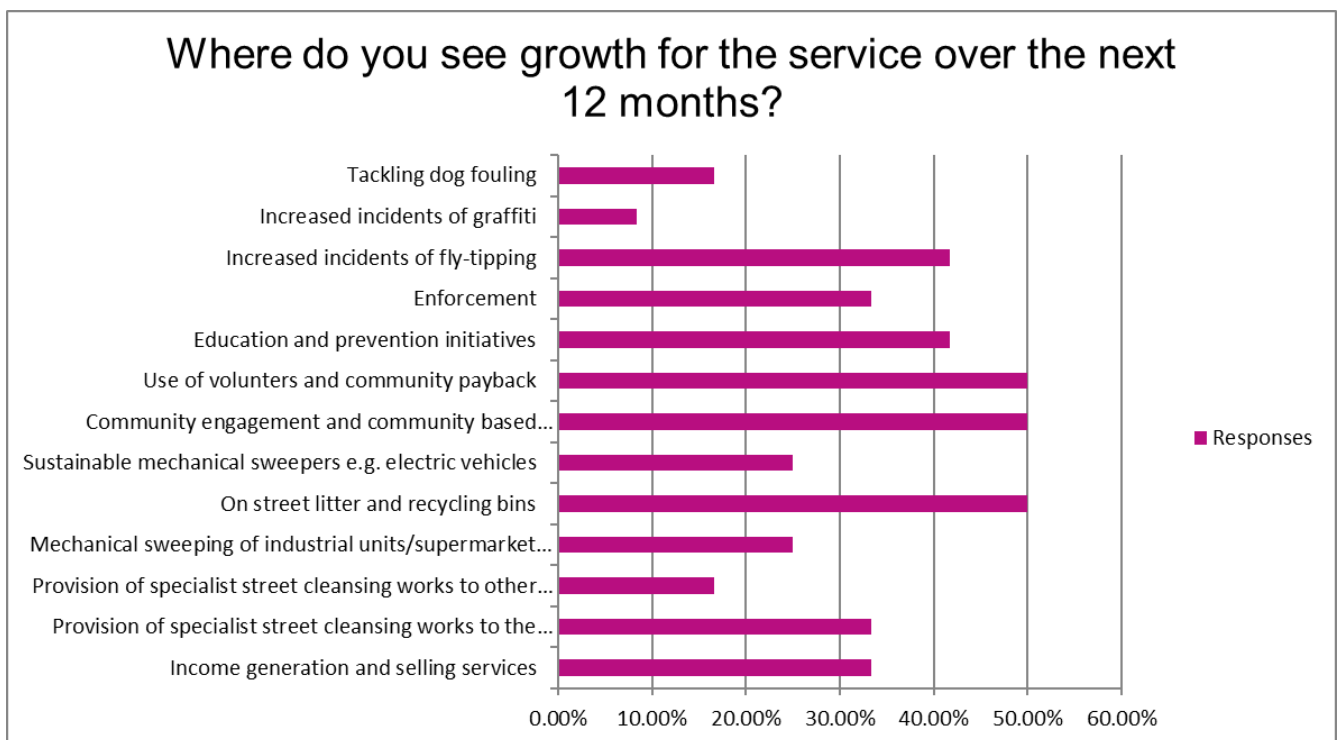
When it comes to the main causes of staff absence over 60% record muscular skeletal issues and given the physical nature of the job this is unsurprising. A pattern is also emerging on stress related absences, which in some services managers have attributed to non-work related issues such as the cost of living issues that many families continue to face. This will be an area of further exploration by APSE.

23% of respondents thought that the training budget was going to increase over the next 12 months (0% in 2024), with 15% stating a decrease (20% in 2024) and 61% stating that this will stay the same. Training needs continue to be a key objective of any service, particularly those where staff will need to be multi-skilled as more services consider integration.

13 Future areas of work and service reviews

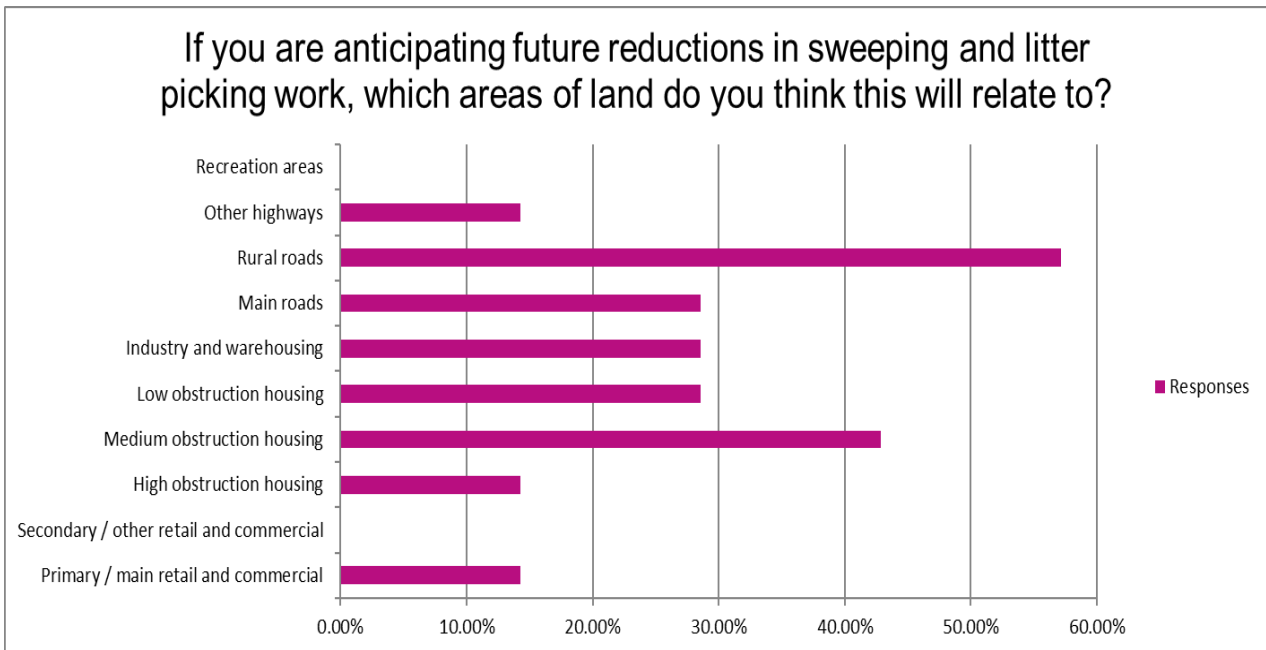
Respondents were asked where they expect to see growth over the next 12 months and where there may be future decreases in work for the service and the responses for both questions were as follows: -

Results show that most areas of growth have increased over 2025 figures, mechanical sweeping of industrial units/supermarket car parks coming up this year.



Following on from the trend of last year, areas where people are expecting reductions are in the levels of cleanliness and the ability to support community groups, and the frequency of cleaning rural roads.

The survey asked 'if you are anticipating future reductions in sweeping and litter picking work, which areas of land do you think this will relate to' and the results were as follows: -



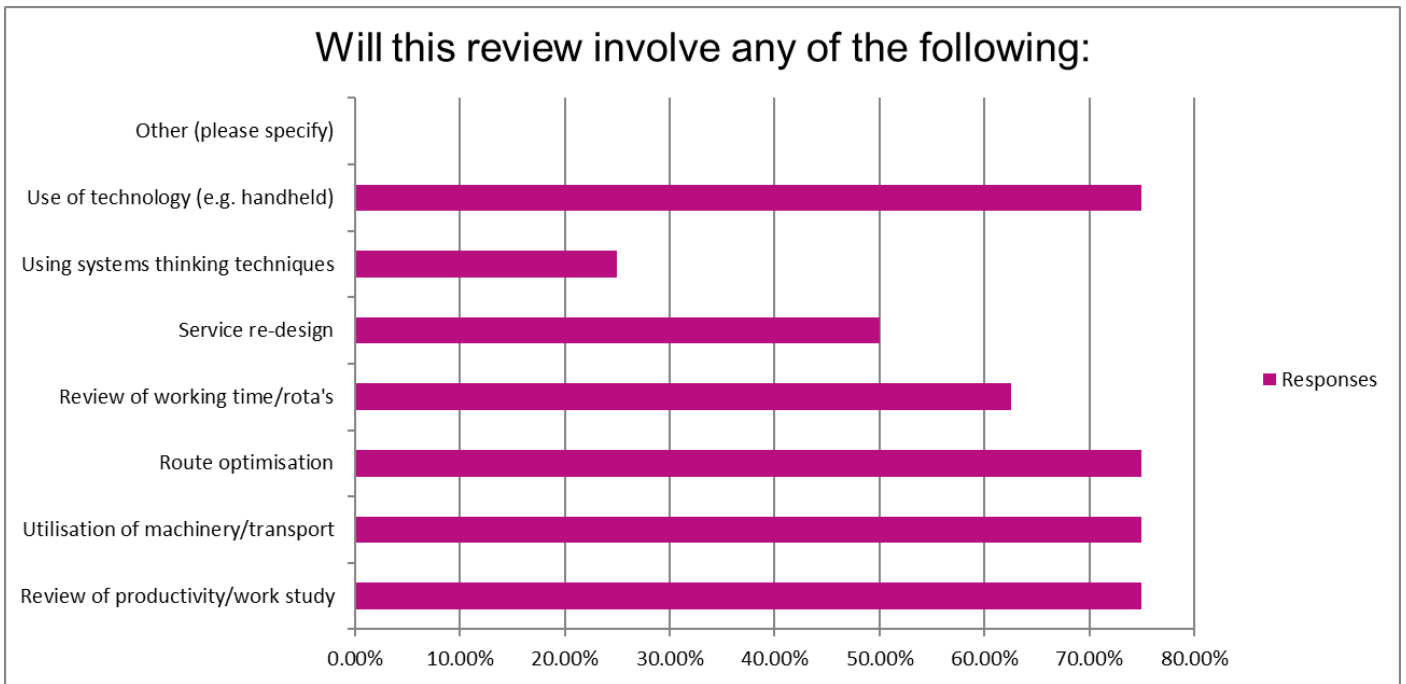
Unsurprisingly the sweeping of rural roads is always a main area where reduced frequencies may occur, but we are also seeing reductions in frequencies of sweeping for low and medium obstruction housing being recorded. Reduced frequencies of course need to be carefully managed, and, for example, many elected members and officers in rural areas are aware of takeaway food cartons littering rural roads, with the vendors taking little responsibility for clean-ups.

14 Service Reviews

When asked if respondents had undertaken a service review recently, 46% stated that they had completed this (33% in 2025), 30% stated that they have a review which is underway (33% in 2025). 15% said 'no' they were not intending to undertake a service review.

The clear emphasis on undertaking service reviews reflects the efficiency drive in local government and the need to review services to try and meet these challenges.

Respondents stated that the reviews will involve the following:



15 APSE Comment

Despite ongoing budget pressures, managers and front-line staff continue to deliver efficient street cleansing services. However, financial constraints continue to pose a real risk to service quality, potentially leading to reduced cleansing frequencies and a growing need for investment.

This year's survey results suggest an optimistic outlook, with budget outlooks overall showing greater stability. Where cuts are expected they appear to be less than in previous years and a healthy proportion of respondents view budgets are marginally improving. Local councils are working hard to address funding gaps through efficiency measures and income generation, but there is a pressing need to recognise the value of public realm services in supporting local economies.

Continued cuts could have far-reaching consequences, making areas less attractive to businesses, residents, and developers. It is crucial to allocate resources effectively, focusing on areas with the highest cleansing demands, additionally, the anticipated cuts are generally slightly better than expected, with most remaining around 10%.

Service managers continuously monitor and adapt their strategies to sustain improvements. Many councils are investigating the reduction of cleansing frequencies and tasks to manage limited resources. While volunteer efforts play a role, they cannot replace professional front-line staff. Volunteers are best suited for localised projects rather than large-scale service delivery.

Despite challenges and ongoing budget constraints, there is hope at the end of the tunnel. Future budgets, beyond the next year, are expected to support service improvements. Local authorities remain committed to creating cleaner, greener, and safer environments, and the dedication of service staff deserves recognition—not only for their work over the past year but for their ongoing support of local communities.

Looking ahead, the initial signs of reinvestment in these essential services are promising. If this trend continues, service performance will improve, reflecting the growing commitment to maintaining high cleanliness standards.

This survey does not go into detail on the pressing issue of fly-tipping, which is better described as Waste Crime, which is a growing concern for APSE member councils. With a number of disputes emerging as to who should pay for the clean-up operations, and pressure on local councils to be more responsive, this will be a further area of enquiry for APSE's street cleansing network in the coming year.

APSE member councils can sign up to APSE's free advisory group on Waste, Refuse and Recycling and Street Cleansing using [this link](#).

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

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular advisory groups, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The advisory groups are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Advisory groups are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE advisory group meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area, please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national advisory groups include: -

- FM and Building cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Recovery and Renewal
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Veterans and Military Champions Network
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing

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