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TRENDSPOTTER
from MRI Software

From Insight to Impact

AI and data readiness for the next era of Facilities Management

April 2026

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Executive Summary

The latest report from MRI Software offers a timely, data-driven snapshot of the UK Facilities Management (FM) sector at a moment of significant technological and organisational change. This year's survey gathered insights from 188 UK-based FM professionals providing a focused view of how the industry is responding to the accelerating pace of digital transformation, persistent budget pressures, and growing workforce challenges.

The overarching picture is one of cautious optimism. FM professionals in the UK are increasingly aware of the potential that AI, automation, and smart building technologies hold, but many feel that the sector is not yet fully equipped to capitalise on these opportunities. Skills gaps, cost barriers, and data readiness concerns are slowing the pace of adoption, even as the appetite for change grows.

Key findings at a glance:

- **AI training is now the top priority:** nearly half of respondents (49%) identify AI and data analytics as their most pressing training need over the next 12-18 months.
- **Data confidence and maturity is low:** over half (52%) are not confident their FM data is robust enough to support AI or digital decision-making, and one in five (21%) say they do not currently measure FM performance at all.
- **Technology adoption is anticipated but not certain:** 57% expect to invest in new technology within the next 12-18 months, though only 17% say they will definitely do so.
- **Cost and skills gaps remain the primary barriers:** 56% cite expense as the biggest obstacle to technology adoption, while 42% flag workforce skills gaps.
- **AI importance is rated moderately:** the average importance score for AI is 5 out of 10, suggesting growing awareness but not yet widespread strategic urgency.
- **Smart technologies and automation dominate the five-year outlook:** increased use of smart technologies and automation are seen as the biggest factor likely to define the future of FM.

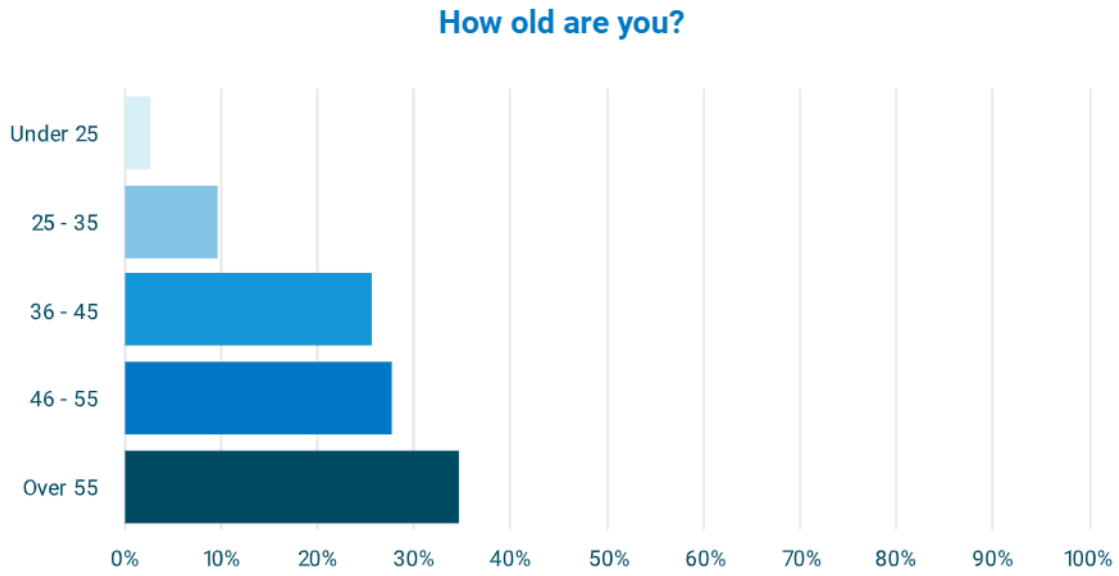
Taken together, these findings suggest a sector in transition. UK FM professionals understand the direction of travel, but the journey towards a fully data-driven, AI-enabled industry will require sustained investment in training, infrastructure, and organisational change.

James Massey

Managing Director for Facilities, Energy Management, and Retail Intelligence

Respondent Profile

An experienced, mid-career workforce



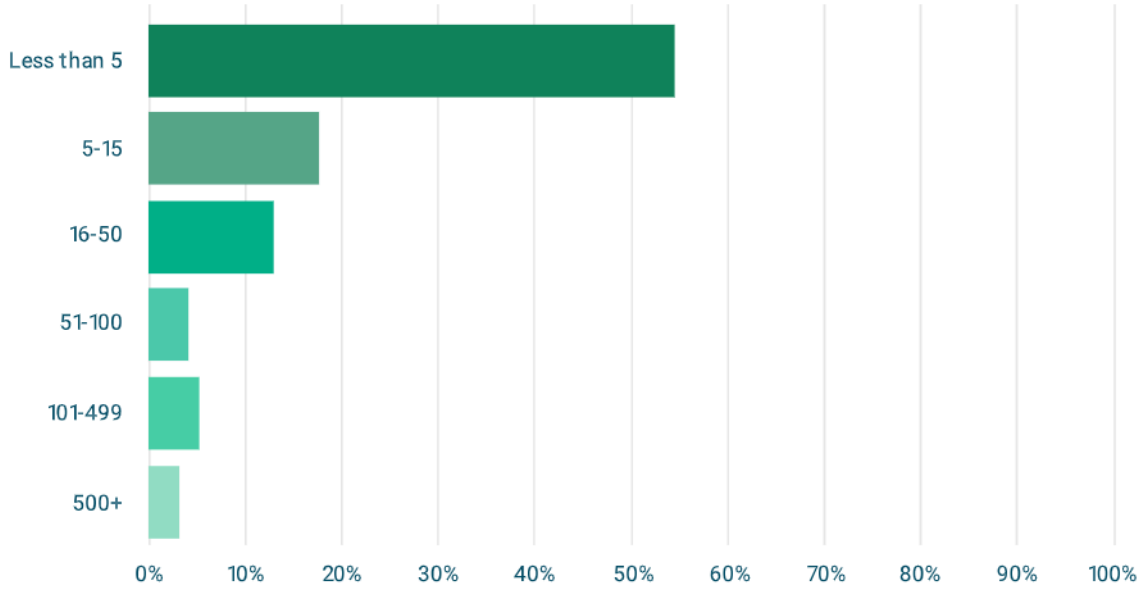
The survey drew responses from 188 UK-based FM professionals, with a notable skew towards older, more experienced practitioners. The largest age group was those over 55 (34%), followed by those aged 46-55 (28%) and 36-45 (26%). Together, these three groups account for nearly nine in ten respondents, reflecting a workforce with deep industry knowledge but also one facing increasingly urgent questions around succession planning and the attraction of younger talent.

Just 9.5% of respondents were aged 25-35, and a mere 2.7% were under 25. These figures underline a persistent challenge for the sector: how to bring in the next generation of FM professionals at a time when the industry is undergoing rapid technological change and when competition for digitally skilled talent is intensifying across all sectors.

Sector spread and portfolio scale

Respondents represented a broad range of industries. Education (15%) and FM service providers (14%) were the most heavily represented sectors, followed by healthcare (9%), property management (8%), and banking and finance (5%). A substantial 'other' category (16%) reflects the diversity of environments in which FM professionals operate, from construction and security to not-for-profit organisations.

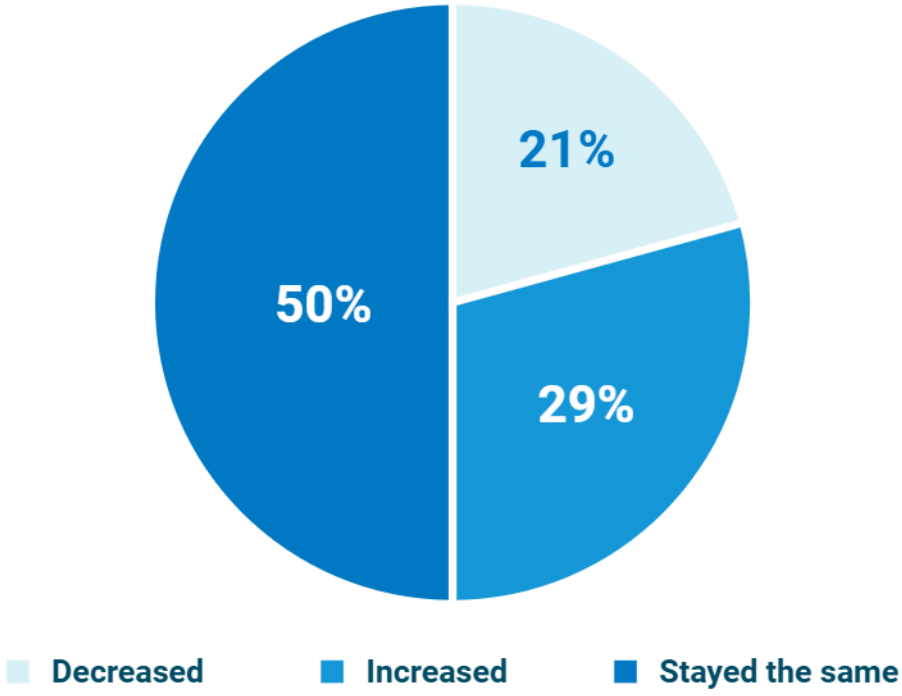
How many sites do you manage for your organisation?



In terms of portfolio size, the survey skewed towards smaller-scale operations: 56% of respondents manage fewer than five sites. However, a meaningful proportion manage larger, more complex portfolios, with 5% overseeing between 101 and 499 sites, and 3% managing 500 or more. This range of scale is significant when considering technology adoption and data management: the needs and capabilities of a single-site education FM team are markedly different from those of a national service provider managing hundreds of locations.

Stable budgets for most, but pressures remain

Has your facility management budget increased, decreased or roughly stayed the same over the last three years?

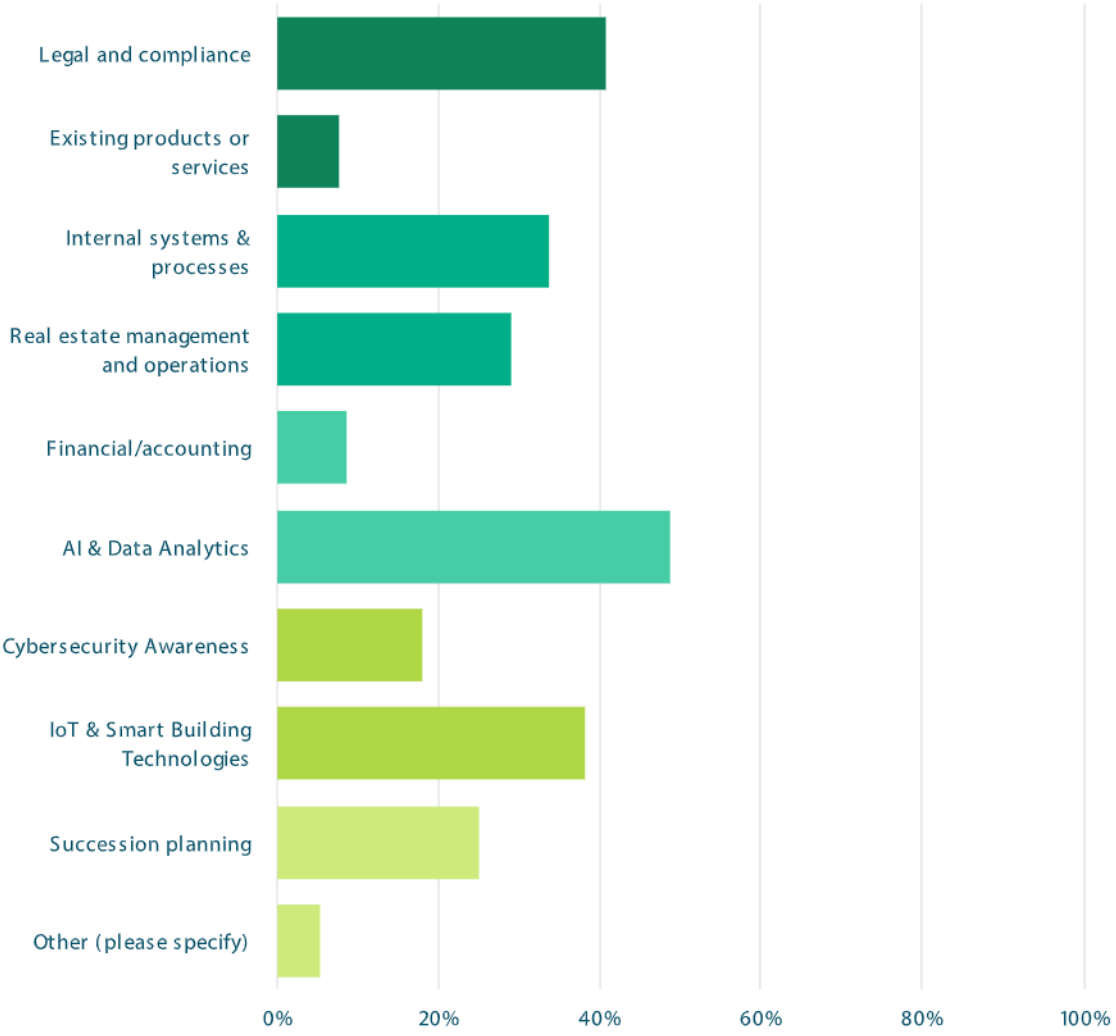


The financial backdrop against which UK FM teams are operating is one of relative stability, but with a significant minority experiencing tighter conditions. Half of respondents (50%) report that their FM budget has stayed roughly the same over the past three years, while 29% have seen increases. However, one in five (21%) have experienced budget cuts, a significant minority that will inevitably affect their capacity to invest in new technology and training. These budgetary pressures, where they exist, amplify many of the other challenges identified later in this report.

Training, Development and Succession

AI and data analytics emerge as the critical skills gap

What type of training do you feel is desired/required over the next 12-18 months to ensure YOU AND YOUR organisation is set up for continued growth?



When asked about training priorities for the next 12-18 months, the message from respondents was clear: the skills needed to harness artificial intelligence and data analytics are now the most pressing development need in UK FM. Nearly half of all respondents (49%) identified AI and data analytics as a required or desired training area, placing it ahead of traditionally dominant priorities such as legal and compliance (41%) and IoT and smart building technologies (38%).

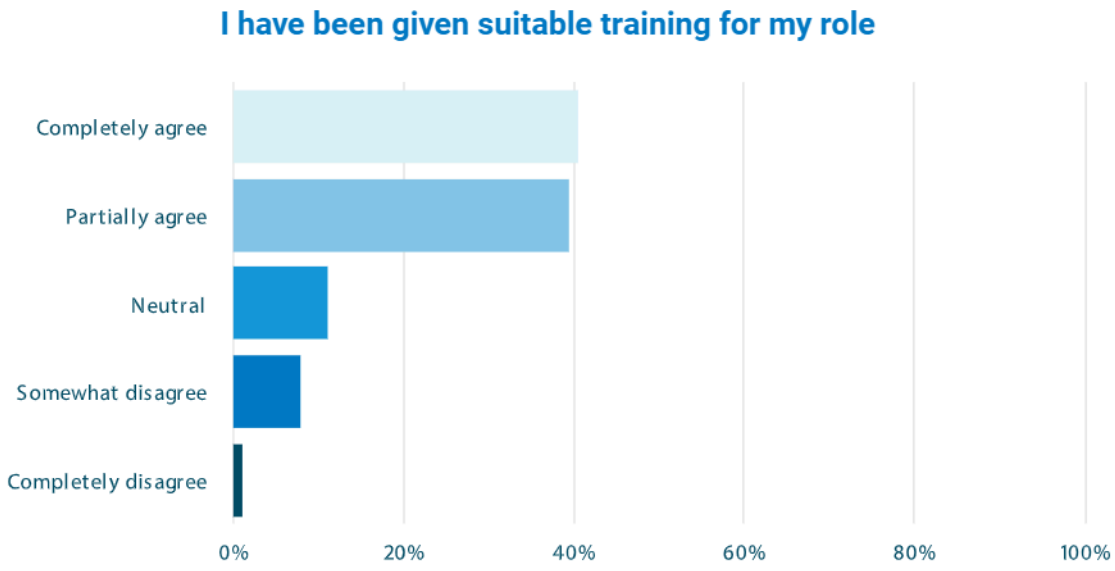
This shift reflects the growing awareness within the sector that AI is fast becoming an operational reality. FM professionals recognise that without the skills to understand, interrogate, and act on AI-generated insights, the technology will fail to deliver its potential. Turning intent into impact will require more than standalone training programmes; it demands connected systems, accessible data and intuitive tools that embed intelligence into everyday workflows enabling FM teams to build confidence as they work.

Legal, compliance and systems training remain core priorities

Alongside the new imperative of AI literacy, more established training needs remain prominent. Legal and compliance training was cited by 41% of respondents, reflecting the ongoing complexity of the regulatory environment in which FM teams operate, from building safety legislation to energy performance requirements. Internal systems and processes were highlighted by 34% of respondents, while IoT and smart building technologies were flagged by 38%.

The breadth of these training requirements points to a multi-dimensional skills challenge. FM professionals are being asked to operate across an increasingly wide range of disciplines, from traditional compliance and operational management to cutting-edge digital technologies. Organisations that take a fragmented approach to training risk leaving their teams under-equipped across multiple fronts simultaneously.

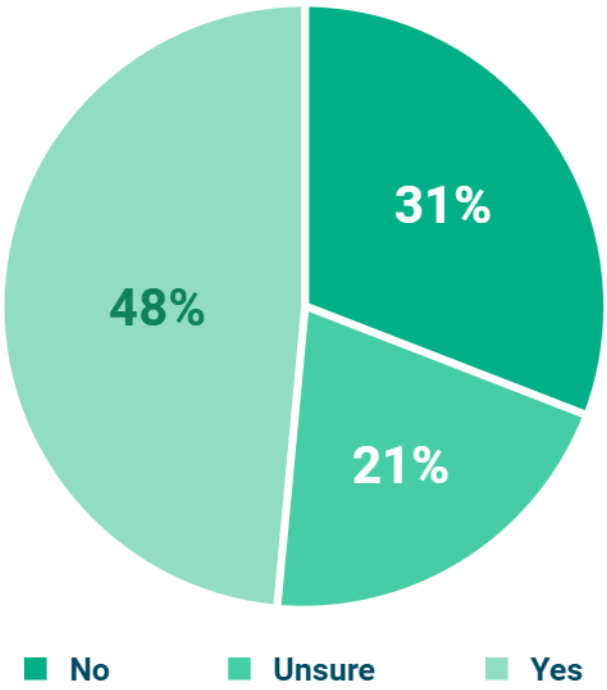
Training satisfaction: Broadly positive but gaps remain



On balance, respondents report a reasonably positive experience of the training they currently receive. 41% completely agree that they have been given suitable training for their role, and a further 39% partially agree. One in ten (10%) either somewhat or completely disagree, suggesting that a meaningful minority feel their training needs are not being fully met. This is particularly concerning given the pace of change in areas like AI and cybersecurity, where outdated skills can quickly become a liability.

Succession planning: A growing concern

Do you see succession planning as a major challenge in your FM team?



One of the more striking findings in this section is the extent to which succession planning is emerging as a strategic concern. When asked whether succession planning was a major challenge in their FM team, just under half (48%) said yes, while only 31% said no. A further 21% were unsure, suggesting the issue has yet to be fully assessed in many organisations.

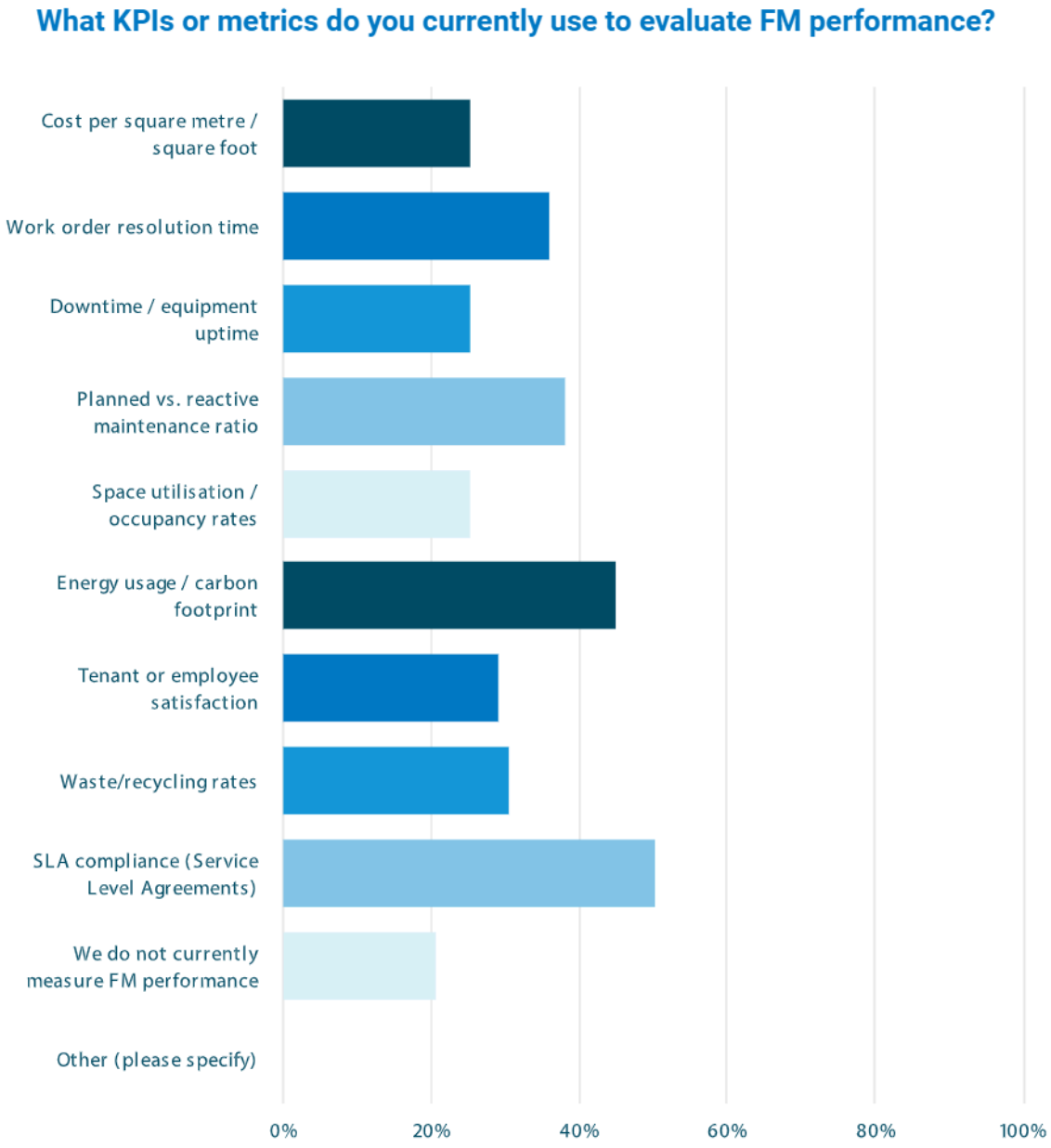
These figures take on added significance in the context of the workforce demographics described above. With over 60% of respondents aged 46 or above, many FM teams face the prospect of significant knowledge and experience leaving the sector over the next decade. Ensuring that this expertise is captured, documented, and transferred will be one of the defining workforce challenges of the coming years.

Organisations are exploring a variety of strategies to attract younger talent, with flexible working arrangements (49%) and apprenticeships (43%) the most commonly cited approaches. Technology-driven roles (25%) and partnerships with universities (16%) also feature, suggesting that the sector is beginning to recognise the need to position FM as a modern, digitally engaged profession. Over half of respondents (55%) say their organisation plans to invest in apprenticeships or similar training programmes over the next 12 months.

At the same time, the findings point to a broader opportunity: technology partners can play a critical role in supporting succession planning by embedding knowledge within digital systems and AI-driven workflows. When operational data, processes and best practice are captured in connected platforms, institutional knowledge becomes less dependent on individuals and more accessible to the wider team. AI-enabled tools can surface insights, guide decision-making and streamline routine tasks augmenting human expertise. In doing so, they help create an environment where experienced professionals can focus on higher-value strategic activity, while newer entrants build capability more quickly and confidently.

Data and Performance

KPIs and Measurement: A mixed picture



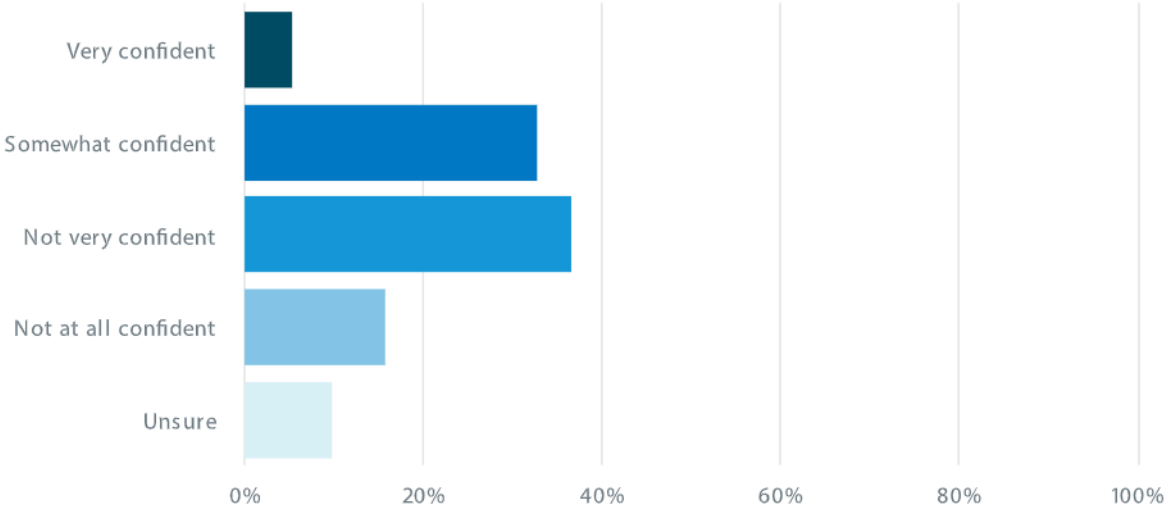
Understanding how FM teams measure performance is central to assessing their readiness for data-driven decision-making and AI adoption. The survey reveals a varied landscape, but one clear priority stands out: SLA compliance is the most widely tracked metric (50%). In an environment shaped by tightening regulatory frameworks, heightened duty-of-care expectations, and increasing client scrutiny, the ability to evidence contractual performance is no longer optional; it is fundamental to operational credibility and risk management.

As regulatory expectations continue to evolve, the next step for many organisations will be to explore moving beyond basic reporting towards predictive, AI-supported performance management. This will enable FM leaders to identify risk earlier, prioritise interventions more effectively, and maintain continuous compliance rather than responding after issues arise.

Energy usage and carbon footprint (46%), alongside planned versus reactive maintenance ratios (39%), are also widely monitored. This reflects a sector operating under multiple layers of accountability: regulatory compliance, ESG reporting requirements, cost control pressures and asset performance optimisation.

However, a significant proportion of respondents, one in five (21%), report that they do not currently measure FM performance at all. This is a substantial gap. Organisations without performance measurement frameworks will struggle to make the evidence-based case for technology investment and will be poorly positioned to benefit from AI tools that rely on rich historical data to generate meaningful insights.

How confident are you that your FM data is robust enough to support AI, automation, or digital decision-making?



Perhaps the most telling finding in this section is the low level of confidence in FM data quality. When asked how confident they are that their FM data is robust enough to support AI, automation, or digital decision-making, just 5% said they were very confident. A further 33% said they were somewhat confident. In contrast, 36% said they were not very confident, 16% said they were not at all confident, and 10% were unsure.

In total, more than half of respondents lack confidence in the quality of their data, representing a fundamental obstacle to AI adoption. AI systems are only as good as the data that feeds them: poor-quality, incomplete, or inconsistently formatted data will produce unreliable outputs and erode trust in the technology.

For many FM organisations, the challenge is not a lack of data, but a lack of data readiness. Information often exists across multiple platforms, contractors and asset portfolios, without a unified structure or clear governance framework. Creating a single, connected view of operational performance, supported by standardised processes and transparent audit trails, is a critical precursor to intelligent automation.

This finding has important implications for how AI adoption in FM should be approached. Before the sector can fully realise the potential of AI, organisations will need to prioritise stronger data foundations: improving capture at source, reducing duplication, embedding governance controls and ensuring information flows seamlessly across teams. With reliable, connected data in place, AI moves from experimental to operational and will likely support faster decisions, clearer compliance reporting and more proactive facilities management.

To explore these themes further, MRI Software has published a series of expert articles that look closely at what AI readiness really means for facilities teams and why data strategy is the critical first step.

Together, these articles offer a useful next step for organisations seeking to understand how stronger data foundations can turn AI ambition into real-world impact.

Read our blog articles to learn how to build the right fundamentals for AI adaptation.

Why a strong data strategy is essential for modern FM

LEARN MORE >

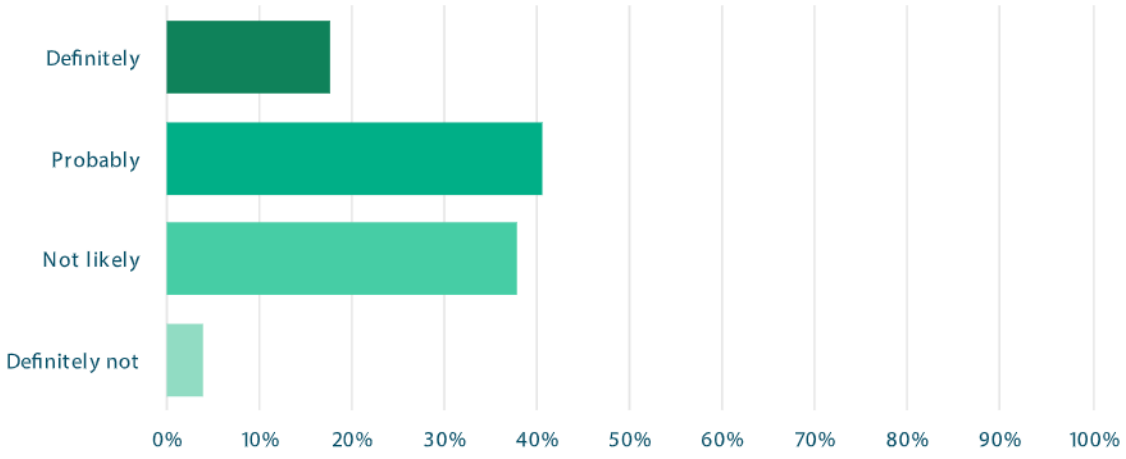
AI readiness in facilities management: Are you prepared?

LEARN MORE >

Technology Adoption and Barriers

Appetite for investment exists, but certainty is lacking

Will your organisation adopt new facilities management technology in the next 12-18 months?



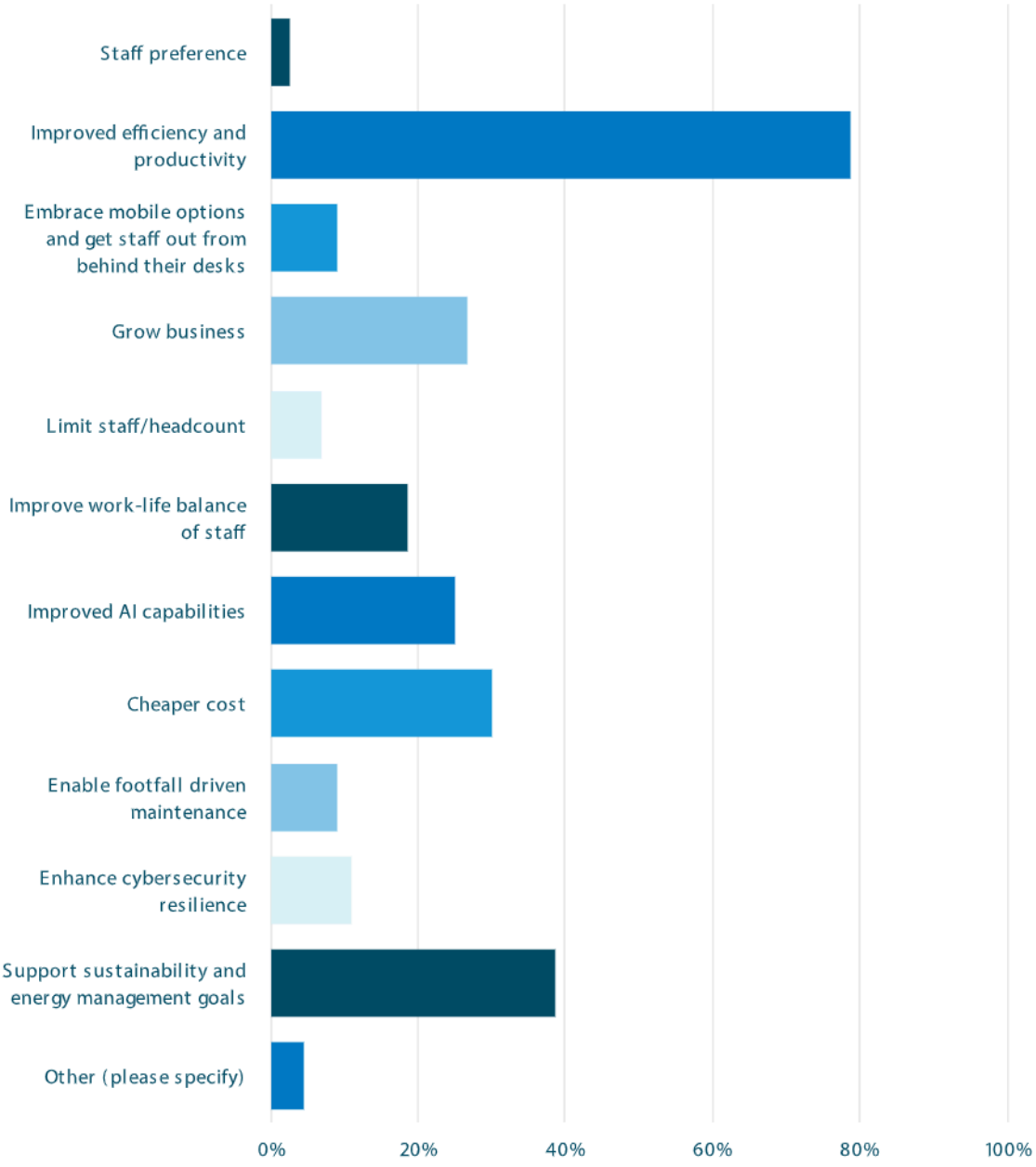
The survey paints a picture of a sector that wants to invest in new technology but is held back by a combination of cost pressures, skills gaps, and integration challenges. When asked whether their organisation would adopt new FM technology in the next 12-18 months, 57% said they would do so either definitely or probably. However, a substantial 38% said it was not likely, and 4% said it was definitely not on the agenda.

This pattern of cautious intent is a recurring theme across the survey. UK FM professionals are broadly aware of the case for technology investment but converting that awareness into committed budgets and implementation plans remains a significant challenge.

Technology partners can play an important role in turning cautious intent into action. While FM organisations recognise the benefits of new technology, cost pressures, skills gaps and integration challenges still make full adoption seem like a leap of faith. Technology organisations can bridge the gap by offering solutions which are easy to integrate, demonstrably cost-effective and support with training and guidance. Pilot projects, proof-of-concept trials, and clear evidence highlighting operational impact can help build confidence and reduce perceived risk. By making adoption simpler, more measurable, and low-risk, technology partners can support FM teams in moving away from awareness to concrete investment and implementation plans.

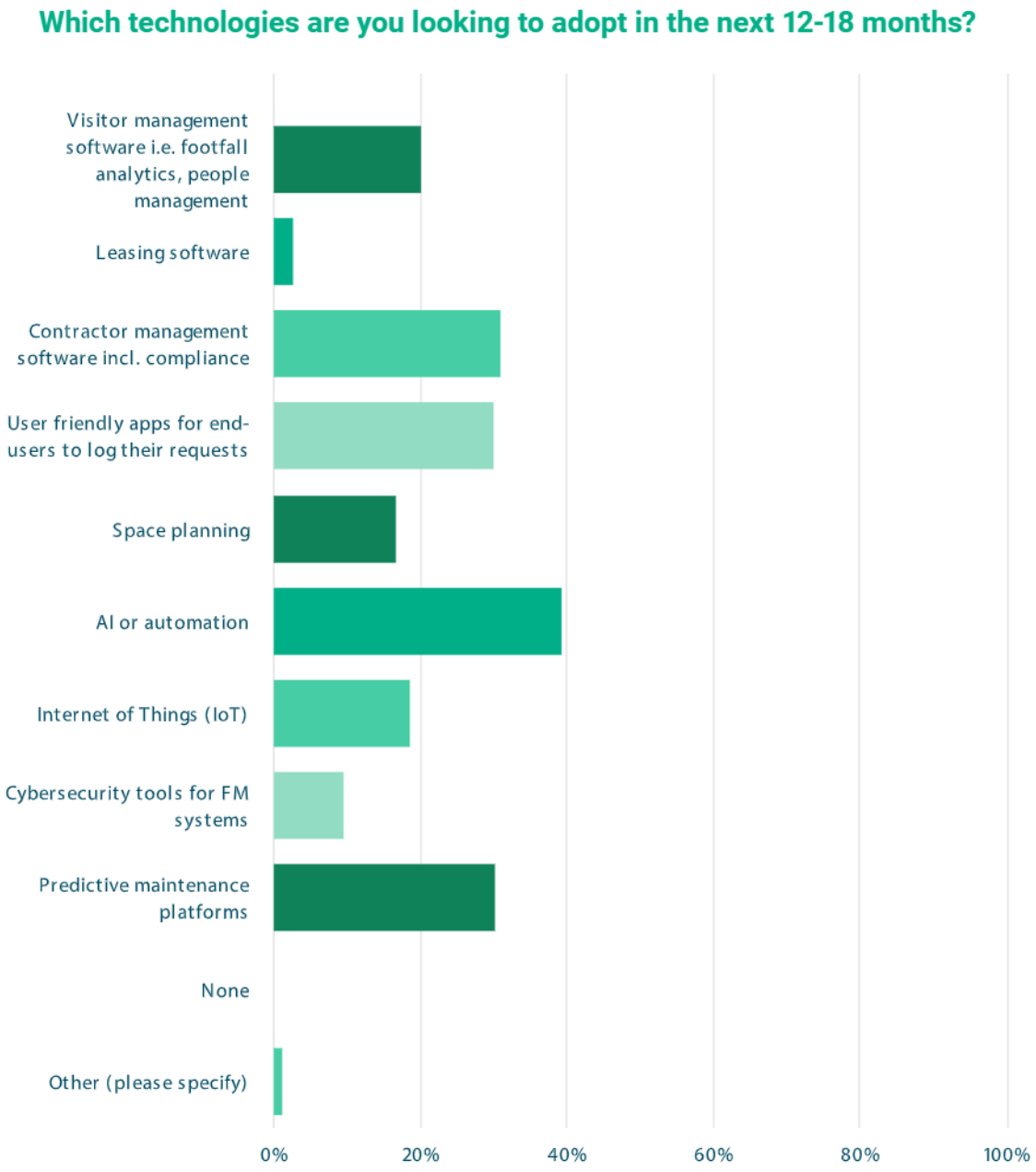
Efficiency drives investment decisions

What are the biggest reasons your organisation would be looking to adopt new technology in the next 12-18 months?



For those organisations that are planning technology investments, improved efficiency and productivity is by far the dominant driver, cited by 79% of respondents. Supporting sustainability and energy management goals was the second most common motivation (37%), followed by cost savings (31%) and business growth (28%). AI capabilities were cited by 27% as a reason for investment, a figure that is likely to grow as the technology matures and becomes more embedded in mainstream FM platforms.

What technologies are FM teams pursuing?

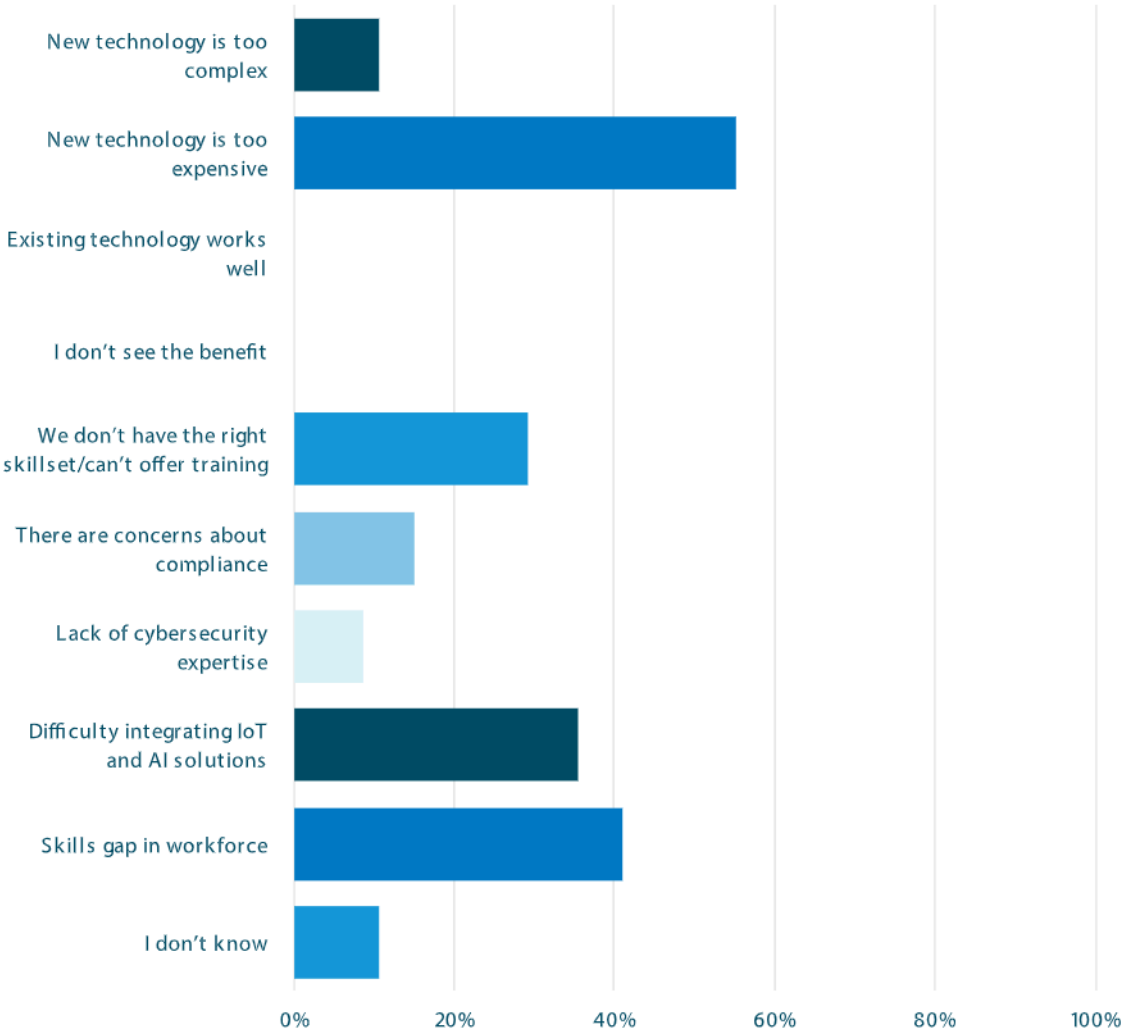


When asked which technologies they are looking to adopt, AI or automation tools topped the list (39%), closely followed by contractor management software including compliance (32%) and predictive maintenance platforms (32%). User-friendly request-logging apps for end-users (26%) and IoT devices (19%) also featured prominently.

The appetite for automation is consistent with the broader finding that efficiency is the primary driver of technology investment. Predictive maintenance in particular represents a significant opportunity: by shifting from reactive to proactive maintenance, FM teams can reduce downtime, extend asset lifespans, and generate cost savings that are tangible and measurable. The pairing of AI with predictive maintenance is an area where many respondents see clear near-term value.

Barriers: Cost, skills and integration

What are the biggest challenges your organisation is likely to face when adopting new technology in the next 12-18 months?

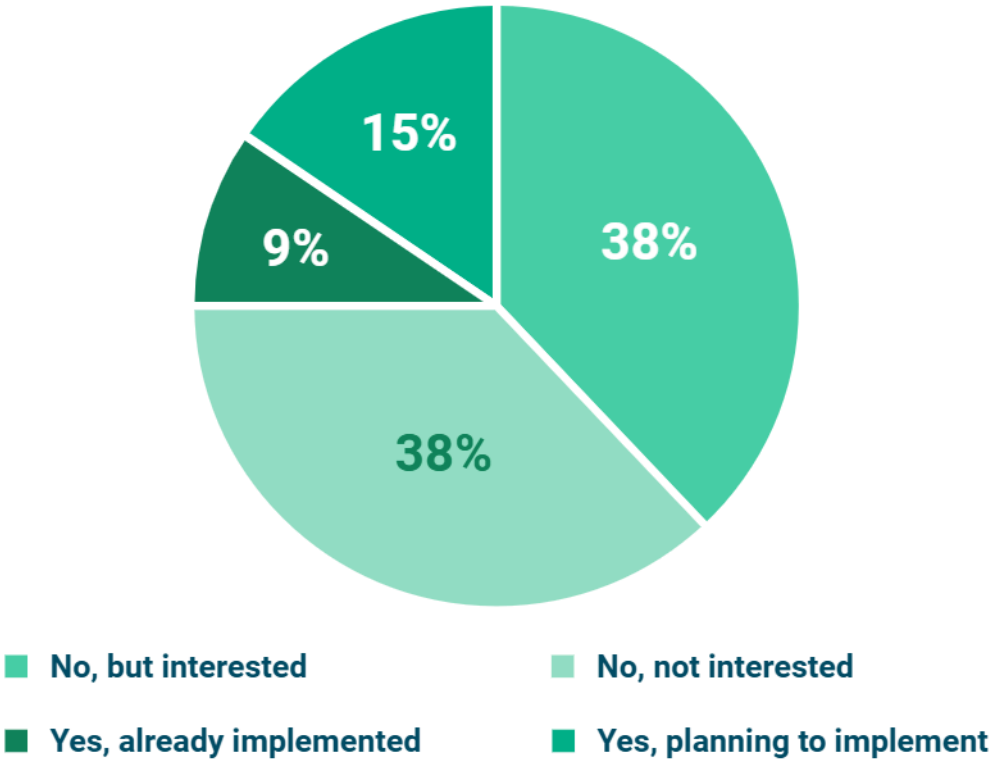


The barriers to technology adoption are well-established and, for many organisations, present a significant challenge. Cost remains the single biggest obstacle, cited by 56% of respondents. The skills gap in the workforce was flagged by 42%, while difficulty integrating IoT and AI solutions was highlighted by 37%. Concerns about compliance featured for 17%, and lack of cybersecurity expertise for 10%.

This highlights that the barriers to adoption are practical rather than attitude-driven: FM professionals understand the value of new technologies in principle, but face real-world constraints around budget, skills, and complexity that prevent them from acting on that understanding.

Footfall-driven maintenance: Awareness growing

Is your organisation exploring footfall-driven maintenance using IoT sensors?



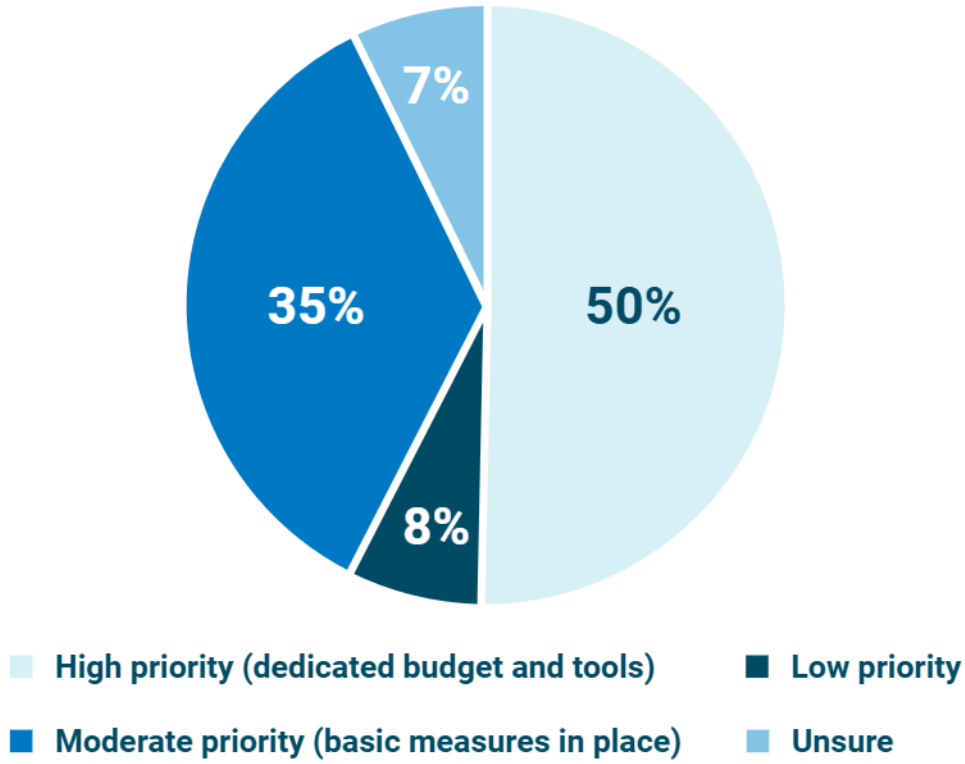
Footfall-driven maintenance, in which IoT sensors track building usage to trigger maintenance activity based on actual demand rather than fixed schedules, is an area of growing interest. While only 9% of respondents have already implemented such systems, a further 15% are planning to do so. More significantly, 38% say they are interested but have not yet moved forward, suggesting a substantial pipeline of potential adopters.

Those who have explored the concept expect benefits across multiple dimensions, with reduced costs (22%) and increased efficiencies (19%) most commonly cited outcomes. As IoT devices become more affordable and easier to integrate, footfall-driven maintenance is likely to move from a niche innovation to a mainstream expectation.

A practical example of this approach in action is MRI Software's King Street London office, where IoT sensors monitor real-time occupancy and usage patterns to inform maintenance schedules. By responding to actual demand rather than predetermined routines, the building team has been able to optimise resource allocation, reduce unnecessary maintenance costs, and improve operational efficiency, resulting in an savings of over £20,000 in less than 12 months.

Cybersecurity: A growing priority for FM

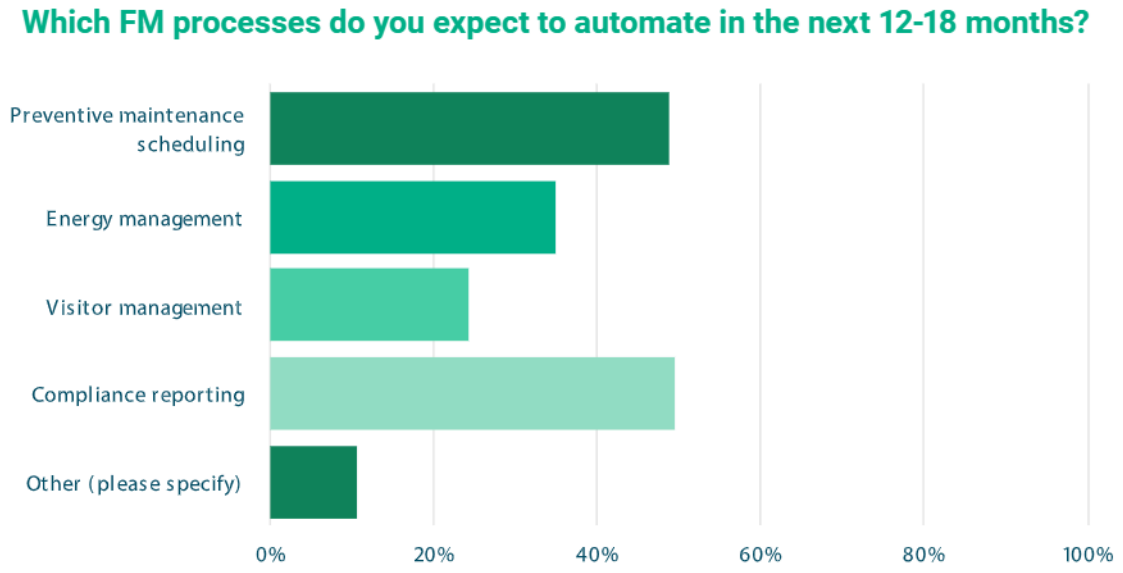
In light of recent high-profile cyber incidents, how is cybersecurity prioritised in your FM technology stack?



Cybersecurity has historically been viewed as an IT concern rather than an FM one, but this is changing rapidly as FM systems become more connected and data-intensive. The survey shows that half of respondents (50%) now treat cybersecurity as a high priority, with a dedicated budget and tools in place, while 35% describe it as a moderate priority with basic measures in place.

The most commonly deployed measures are multi-factor authentication (78%), staff training (73%), and data encryption (62%). Regular penetration testing is in place at 45% of organisations. These figures suggest a sector that is taking the cybersecurity challenge increasingly seriously, though the 7% who rate it as a low priority and the 37% who only have basic measures in place remain potentially at risk, particularly as connected building systems become more prevalent.

Automation: Where FM teams are heading

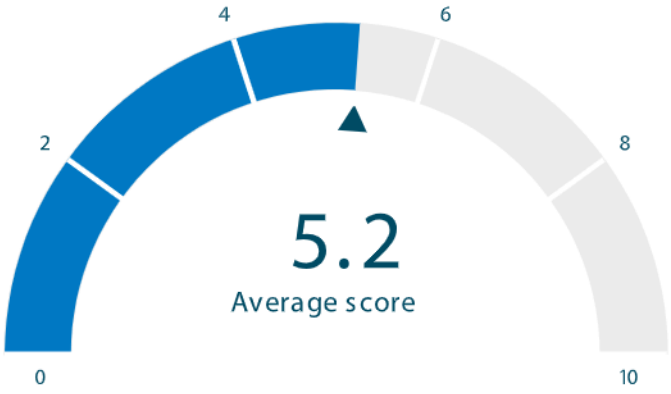


When asked which FM processes they expect to automate in the next 12-18 months, compliance reporting (49%) and preventative maintenance scheduling (48%) were the top priorities, followed by energy management (36%) and visitor management (27%). These choices reflect a preference for automating processes that are either time-consuming and rule-based (compliance reporting, maintenance scheduling) or where real-time data can drive significant efficiency gains (energy management). They also align with the broader sustainability agenda, as automated energy management is a key enabler of carbon reduction goals.

AI’s Role in FM

Importance recognised, but not yet fully internalised

How important is the use of AI within your organisation?

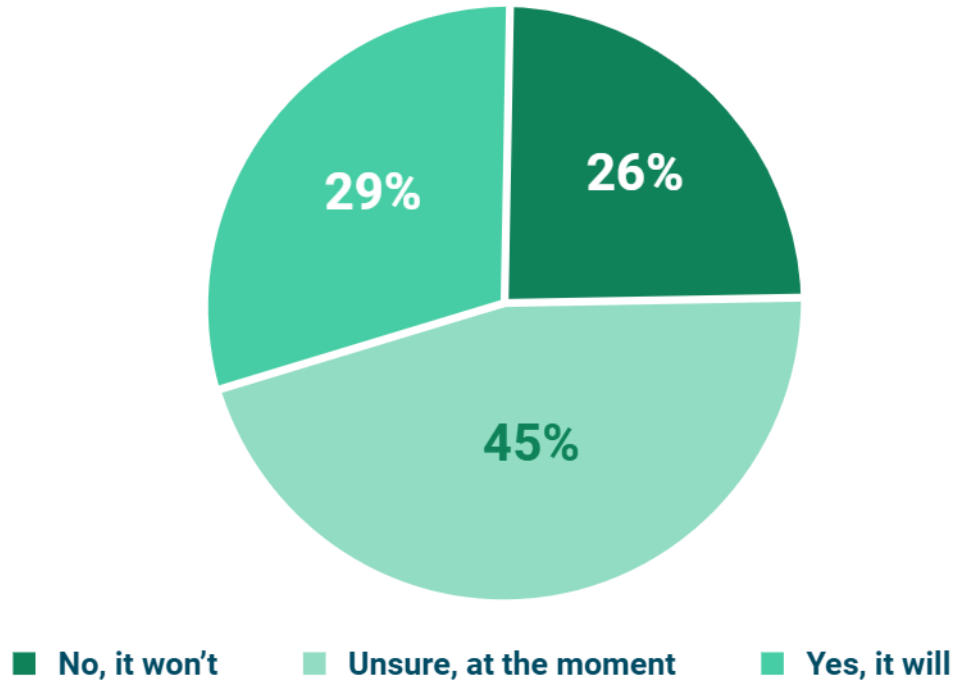


The survey asked respondents to rate the importance of AI within their organisation on a scale of one to ten. The average score of 5 out of 10 is revealing. It suggests a sector that has moved beyond scepticism about AI’s relevance, but has not yet reached the point of treating it as a strategic imperative. This is a significant shift from a position of indifference, but also highlights how much ground remains to be covered before AI becomes central to FM operations.

This moderate average masks a high level of variation within the respondent group. Some organisations are clearly further along in their AI journey than others, and the challenge for the sector as a whole is to ensure that early adopters’ experiences and learnings are shared in ways that help others accelerate their own progress.

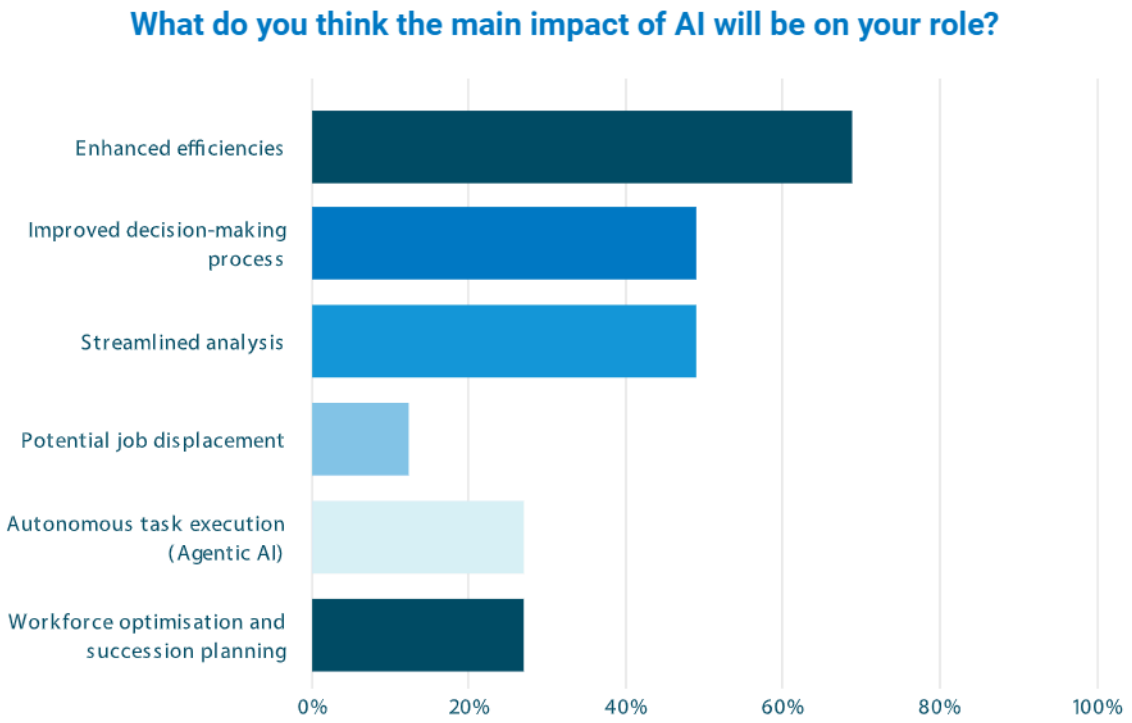
AI as a switching factor: Uncertainty dominates

If AI isn't integrated within your next upgrade/release, will this influence you to implement new solutions that have built in AI capabilities?



When asked whether a lack of AI capabilities in their next software upgrade would prompt them to look for AI-integrated alternatives, 29% said it would, 26% said it would not, and 45% were unsure. The fact that nearly a third of respondents would actively seek AI-enabled alternatives suggests that AI is beginning to function as a product differentiator in FM technology purchasing decisions. At the same time, the large proportion of undecided respondents indicates that many organisations are still working out what role AI should play in their technology stack. For technology partners and FM teams alike, the focus is on solutions that deliver clear, measurable improvements, whether that's through smarter maintenance, more efficient space management, or better insight into building performance, so that technology becomes an enabler rather than a risk.

Expected impacts: Efficiency first



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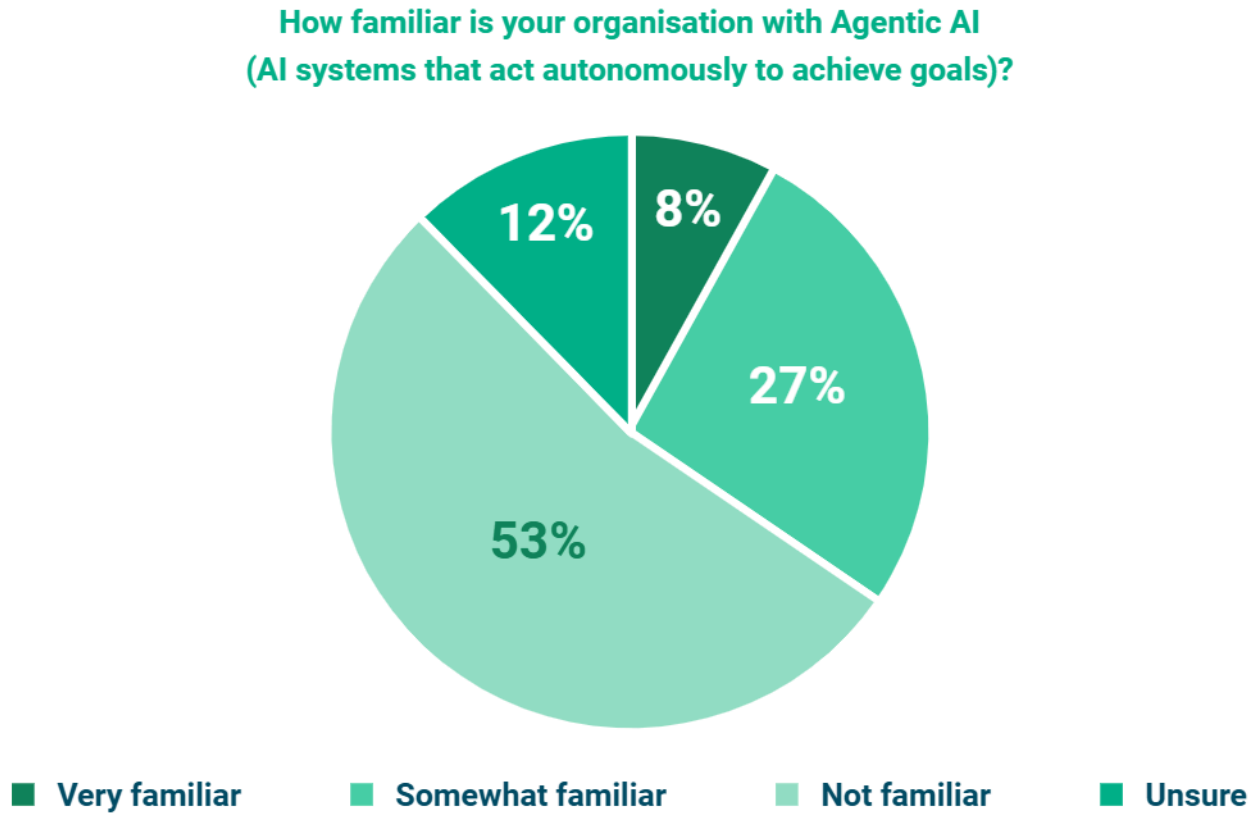
Agentic AI: Familiar in name, less so in practice

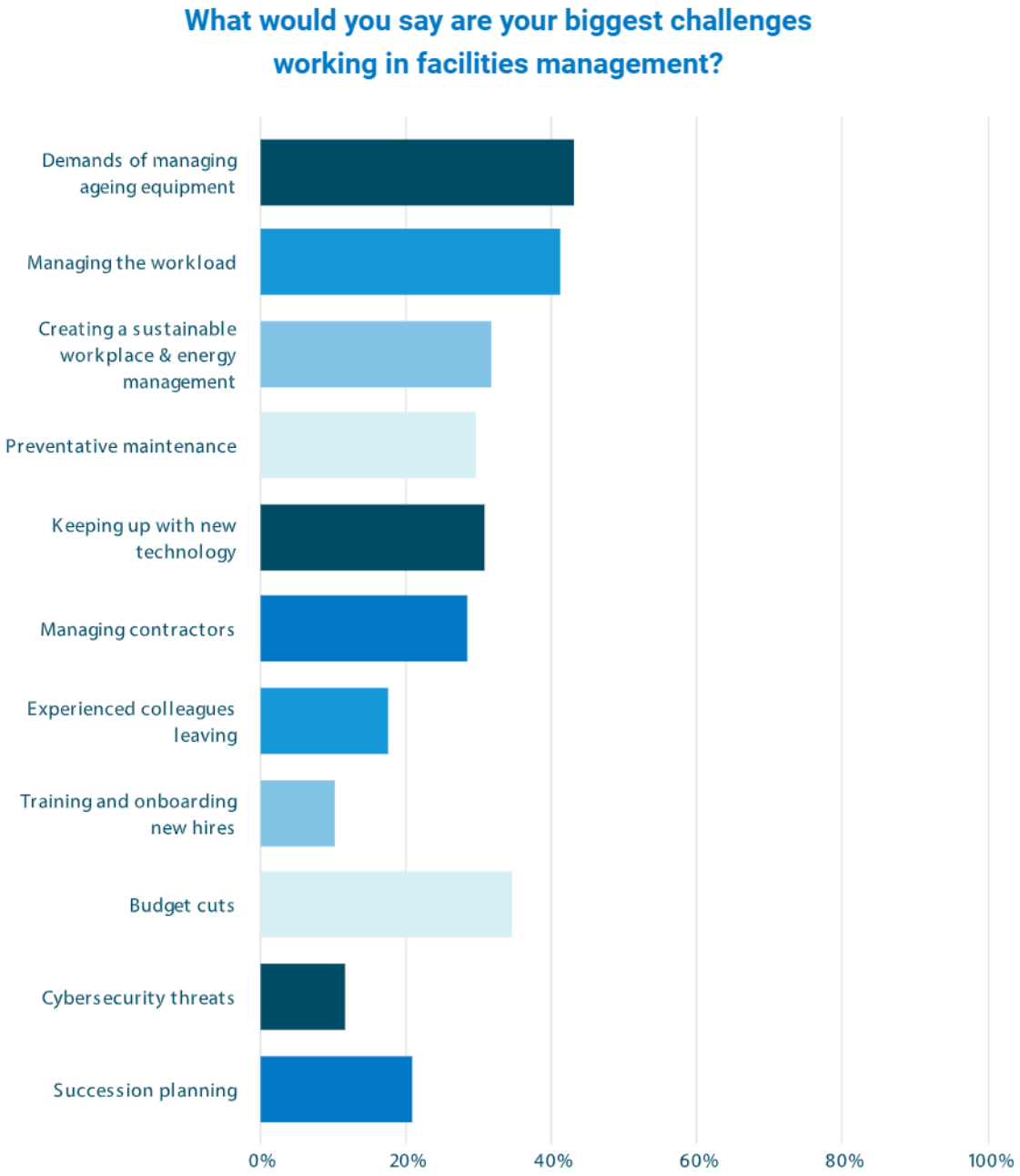


The survey included a question specifically about agentic AI; AI systems that act autonomously to achieve goals. This is a concept that is generating significant attention in the broader technology landscape, but the survey results suggest it remains largely unfamiliar to many FM professionals. Over half of respondents (53%) said they were not familiar with agentic AI, while only 8% said they were very familiar.

While awareness of AI in general terms is growing, many FM professionals have yet to engage with its more advanced manifestations. As agentic AI capabilities become more widely available through mainstream FM platforms, the sector will need to invest in education that helps practitioners understand not only what the technology does, but how to govern and oversee its autonomous decision-making.

Industry challenges and future outlook

The challenges that define day-to-day FM



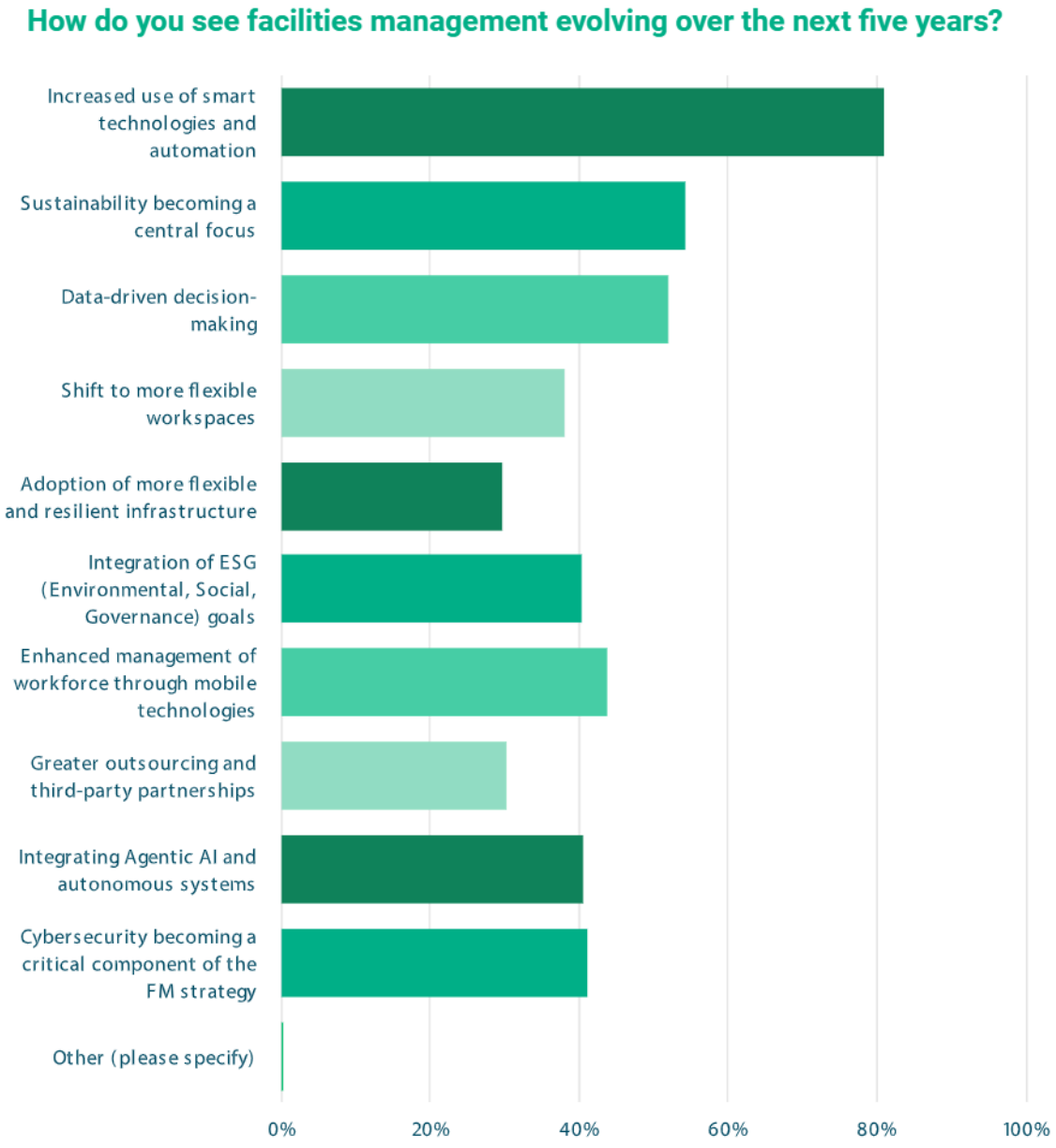
The survey asked respondents to identify their biggest challenges in FM, with the option to select up to three. The results paint a familiar picture of an industry navigating ageing assets, constrained resources, and an ever-expanding compliance burden alongside the demands of digital transformation.

Managing ageing equipment was the most commonly cited challenge (43%). Keeping ageing assets operational and compliant is a constant drain on FM budgets and management bandwidth. Managing the workload was almost equally prevalent (41%), highlighting the human cost of the demands placed on FM teams. Budget cuts featured for 36% of respondents.

Compliance (33%), sustainability and energy management (33%), and keeping up with new technology (31%) all featured prominently, reflecting the multi-front nature of the challenge facing FM professionals today. Managing contractors (28%), succession planning (21%), and cybersecurity threats (14%) round out a picture of a profession navigating an unusually complex operational environment.

Combined together, these results highlight that FM is no longer just about maintaining buildings, it's about orchestrating people, assets, and data in a way that keeps operations running efficiently, sustainably, and resiliently. For organisations looking to meet these challenges, targeted technology and practical solutions are increasingly essential, helping teams do more with less while keeping pace with the evolving demands of the sector.

Looking ahead: How FM professionals see the future

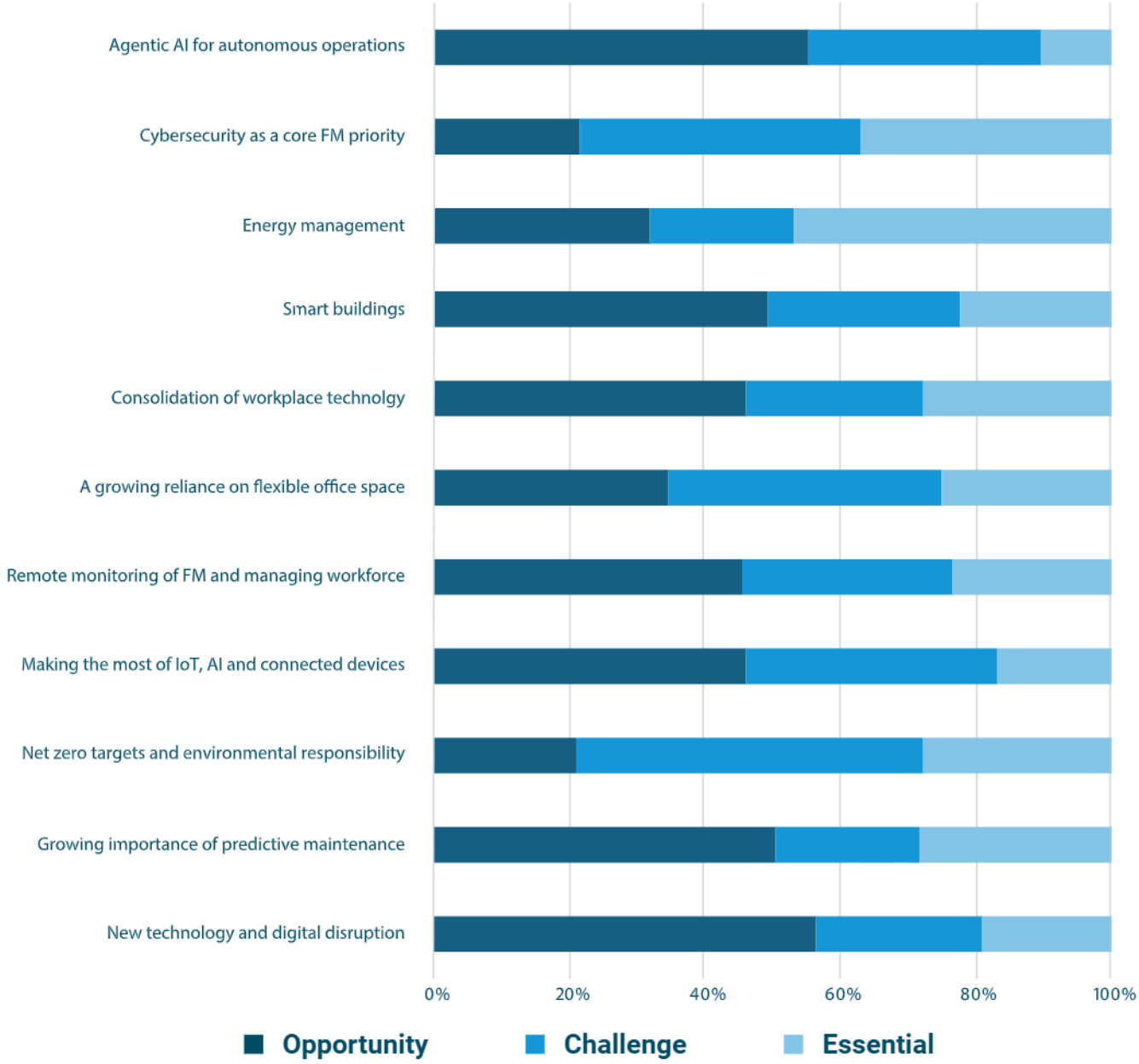


When asked how they expect FM to evolve over the next five years, respondents offered a clear and consistent vision. Increased use of smart technologies and automation was cited by over four in five respondents (83%) as a defining trend, making it by far the most anticipated development. Sustainability becoming a central focus was highlighted by 56%, data-driven decision-making by 53%, and integration of ESG goals by 41%.

The growing importance of cybersecurity as a core FM component was identified by 41% as part of the future landscape, while 41% also cited the integration of agentic AI and autonomous systems. The data suggests that the sector's future is expected to be not only smarter and more sustainable, but also more complex in terms of the security and governance challenges it will need to manage.

Emerging trends: Opportunities and challenges

Do you see the following issues as an opportunity, challenge or essential for the industry to embrace?



The survey asked respondents to assess a range of emerging trends as either opportunities, challenges, or essentials for the industry. New technology and digital disruption was viewed as an opportunity by the largest proportion (57%), with 19% seeing it as essential and only 24% as a challenge, a broadly optimistic assessment.

Predictive maintenance was similarly positive, with half of respondents (50%) viewing it as an opportunity and 28% as essential. Net zero targets and environmental responsibility attracted a mixed response, with 51% viewing them as a challenge, 27% as essential, and just 21% as an opportunity. This tension between the imperative to decarbonise and the practical difficulty of doing so reflects a broader challenge for the sector as a whole.

From insight to action: What's next for facilities management

This report presents a sector that is clear on the direction of travel but candid about the obstacles that remain. UK FM professionals understand the transformative potential of AI, automation, smart building technologies, and data-driven decision-making. The question is not whether these technologies will reshape FM, but how quickly, and whether organisations are investing sufficiently in the capabilities needed to manage that transition effectively.

Three themes emerge most strongly from the data:

Data quality is the foundation that everything else depends on.
Over half of respondents lack confidence in their FM data, and a fifth do not measure FM performance at all. No amount of sophisticated AI capability will deliver value on a foundation of poor-quality data. Organisations that want to be AI-ready must first invest in the less glamorous but essential work of data governance, standardisation, and performance measurement.

The skills gap is widening.
AI and data analytics have become the most urgent training priority in UK FM, yet data confidence remains low and familiarity with emerging concepts like agentic AI is limited. Closing this gap will require investment not just in training programmes but in the cultural and organisational conditions that allow learning to be applied.

The workforce challenge is structural.
With the majority of FM professionals in their mid-career or beyond, and succession planning identified as a major concern by nearly half of respondents, the sector faces a generational transition that requires proactive planning. Attracting younger talent, capturing institutional knowledge, and positioning FM as a technology-forward profession are now strategic necessities.

For organisations that navigate these challenges successfully, the outlook is genuinely exciting. The FM professionals who contributed to this survey are engaged, ambitious, and ready to embrace the technologies that will define the next era of their profession. The task now is to give them the tools, training, and support to make that ambition a reality.

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The findings of this report point to a clear direction for the FM professionals: greater reliance on data, stronger integration between systems, and technology that supports both day-to-day delivery and long-term organisational goals. For leaders and teams navigating this transition, having the right digital foundations in place will be critical.

MRI Software works with organisations globally to provide connected facilities management technology that helps bring data, people and processes together, supporting better decision-making, operational resilience and continuous improvement. To explore how a connected FM ecosystem can help address the challenges highlighted in this report and help your organisation move forward, visit our website to learn more.

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