

The background features a series of flowing, abstract orange lines that create a sense of movement and depth. These lines form loops and curves around the central text, adding a modern and artistic touch to the design.

# The Bereavement Index

2024

Chapter 1: Bereaved Individuals

exizent

# Foreword

Welcome to Exizent's annual Bereavement Index. Now in its fourth year, our research seeks to highlight the key issues facing individuals and firms dealing with the administration of death. It's our "state of the nation" on what remains an extremely difficult, inefficient and emotionally taxing process for bereaved people.

Our hope is that by continuing to shine a light on industry wide problems and the impact that they have, we can work with the sector to drive meaningful change that brings benefit to everyone.

Unlike in recent years, we are publishing the insight gained from our research in chapters. In this first chapter, we focus on data and experiences gathered from bereaved individuals across the UK who have all been recently responsible for the administration of an estate following a death. We explored their feelings toward the overall process, identifying their frustrations and the impact of bereavement experiences on mental health and finances. As effective estate administration relies in large part on the quality of communication between executors and the public and private sector institutions that play a critical role in the process, we also probe whether those interactions are showing any sign of improvement from previous years.

Our research covered all UK jurisdictions. There was no material difference amongst them. The terms that the majority of the public use and know were used in the research to aid public understanding, so are used in this report.

The second chapter of the Index will look at legal firms that handle bereavement cases. Stay tuned for more updates!



**Nick Cousins**  
Founder & CEO

“Death is undoubtedly a difficult time for everybody. The administrative duties related to bereavement often add stress and confusion for those who are grieving. At Exizent, we don't believe it has to be that way. This is why we continually seek insight into the underlying issues and champion solutions to resolve them.”

**Aleks Tomczyk**  
Founder and Managing Director at Exizent.

## Opportunities to improve service experience:

**57%**

used digital channels, so  
service expectation is higher.

**56%**

of people said that the  
probate process took  
longer than expected.

**41%**

found the probate process  
harder than expected.



# Critical Insights

Our 2024 Index reinforces our findings from previous years that dealing with an estate often brings significant emotional and financial strains, which are unnecessarily amplified by the inefficiencies built into the current process. While there have been small signs of progress compared to the previous year, trends pointing to material improvement are hard to spot. The process is still slow, confusing, repetitive and lacking in helpful digitisation.

620,000<sup>†</sup> people died in the UK in 2023. Conservatively, 1 million bereaved individuals would have been involved in the administration of those deaths in some way. At a macro level, the implications of the current process on many of those individuals are stark.

## Mental health

Once again, our research points to the worrying negative mental health impacts that executing an estate can generate. **91% of people attest that they found some of the work stressful.** Younger executors are impacted more heavily, potentially taking on the burden of an older family member.

## The expectation gap

There is an ever-widening expectation gap when it comes to the time it takes to complete the administration of an estate and the complexity of doing so.

The lack of digitisation, the increasing fragmentation of estates (more money and debts in more places) and the limited understanding of the full process mean that **56% of executors were involved in a process that took longer to complete than they expected**, further exacerbating stress, anxiety and cost – financial and time.

## Cost

**48% of people found that the cost of the estate administration process was higher than they expected.** For 27% the cost created financial difficulties for them personally, surely an unacceptable position to put a bereaved individual in. Cost drivers are numerous, but the lack of progress on the digitisation of death certificates (driving a reliance, still, on paper copies), professional fees based on hours spent (rather than outcome) and other administrative costs all contribute heavily.

## Access to help

Finally, not everyone seeks (or necessarily needs) professional help to complete estate administration. However, given the other critical findings in our report, greater access to help may be needed.

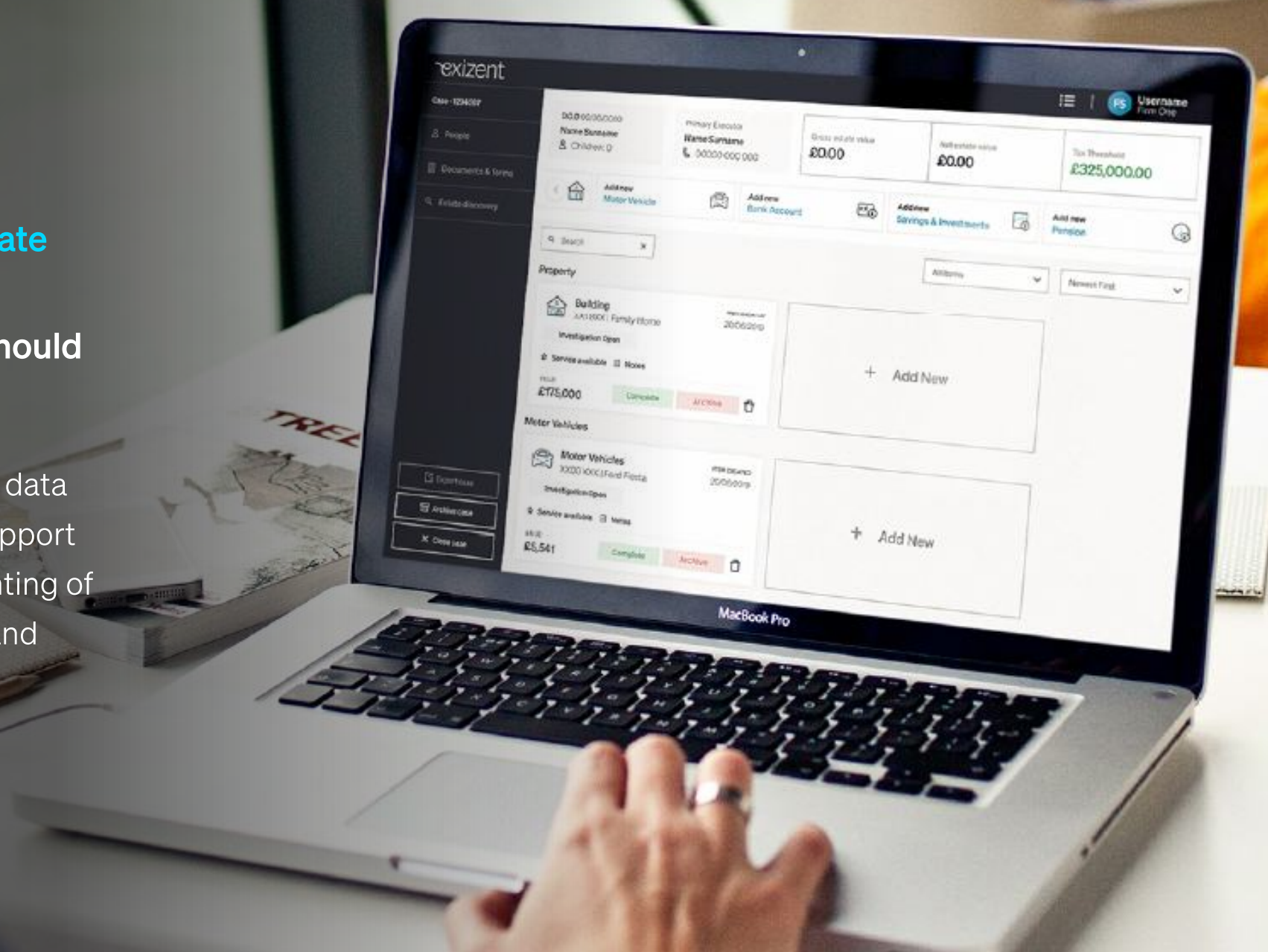
**Of those who used a professional to help manage through probate and administration, 94% said they would make the same choice again.** The eventual realisation of the work involved, the pitfalls and issues that can complicate matters, and the time it can all take may be strong contributors to this sentiment.

However, that many bereaved individuals still prefer to take on the administration of an estate themselves suggests the potential complexities are not clear to all at the outset, and that the perceived cost of enlisting help is either not seen as good value or just not affordable.



It remains Exizent's view that **the end-to-end process of estate administration needs substantial improvement.** A process undertaken when you are already in a vulnerable position should not lead to increased mental stress or financial pain.

In a modern digital economy, the discovery and validation of estate data (people, financial) should be simpler. The public institutions that support the process must do more to make the validation of death, the granting of probate and the settlement of inheritance tax a more streamlined and paper free process that can support the needs of all stakeholders.





# Vulnerability in Bereavement

It is our view that all bereaved individuals should be considered vulnerable. Uncover the hidden mental health and financial impact the bereavement process has on individuals in the UK.

## Mental health implications

Our conversations with people who had recently lost someone about their experiences managing the after effects of death highlighted a worrying level of negative mental health impacts. These impacts are often hidden or unexpected.

Women are 15% more likely than men to experience mental health issues during the process, while younger adults are more vulnerable to mental health issues from handling bereavement compared to older individuals.

91%

of people found at least some of the bereavement process stressful.

55%

of 18 – 44 years old suffer mental health issues administering the estate.

48%

had their mental health impacted by the stress of administering an estate (only 3% reduction compared to 2023).

## The cost of estate administration

The high cost of administering an estate can have a material impact on the wellbeing of bereaved individuals.

Younger generations are experiencing more financial difficulties when administering an estate with 72% being 18 – 44 years old.

1% of all estates are still left in debt when someone has passed away, matching 2023.

63%

of people who struggled financially had their mental health affected.

20%

said that it cost them over £5,000 to administer the estate.

48%

found the whole process more expensive than expected, of which 64% suffered financial difficulties.

## The expectation gap

Many people still find a significant expectation gap in the process of probate and administering estate.

56%

said it took longer than expected.

57%

used digital channels, so their expectation of service is higher.

36%

were not aware of what the estate administration process entailed.

## Access to help

Of those seeking probate assistance, 66% used professionals, and an overwhelming 94% expressed satisfaction with their decision, indicating they would make the same choice again.

25%

chose to use professionals other than a solicitor.

11%

used a bank to apply for probate on their behalf.

41%

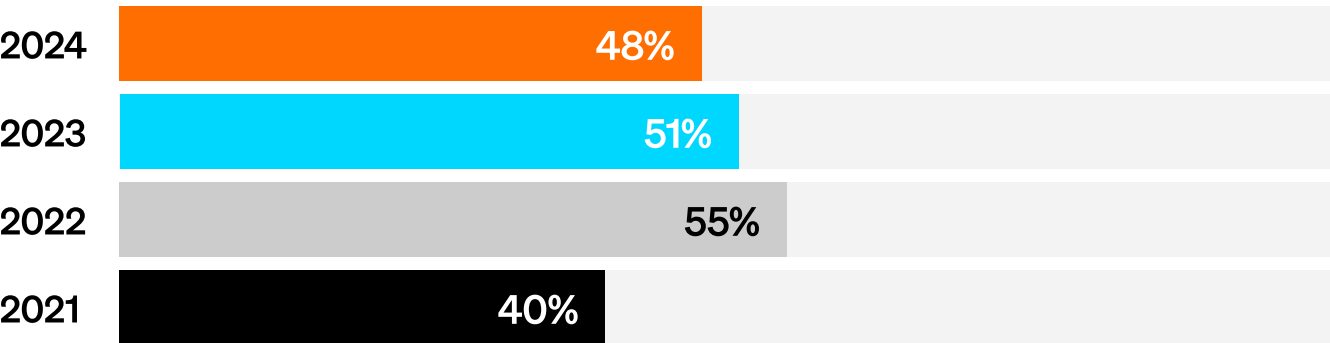
found the probate process harder than expected.



# Understanding the trends

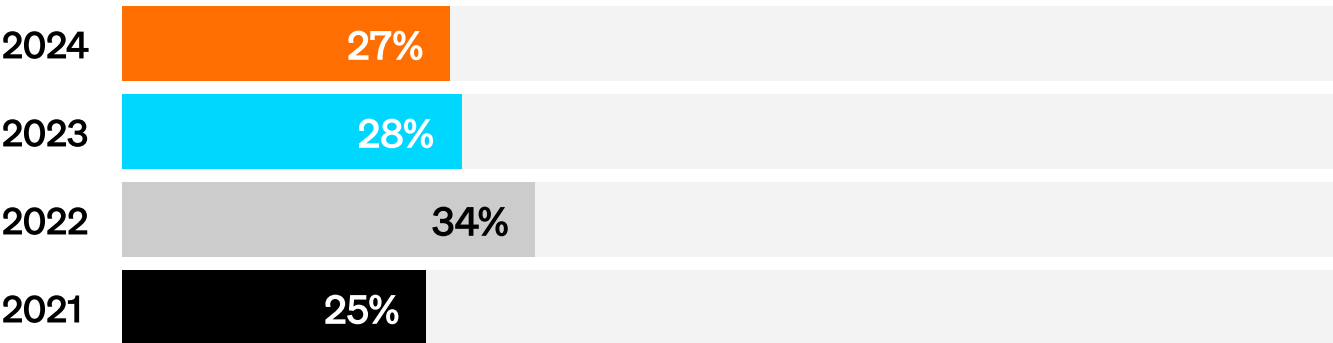
## Mental health

Their mental health was affected as a result of the process.



## Financial difficulty

Suffered financial difficulties when paying for processes.



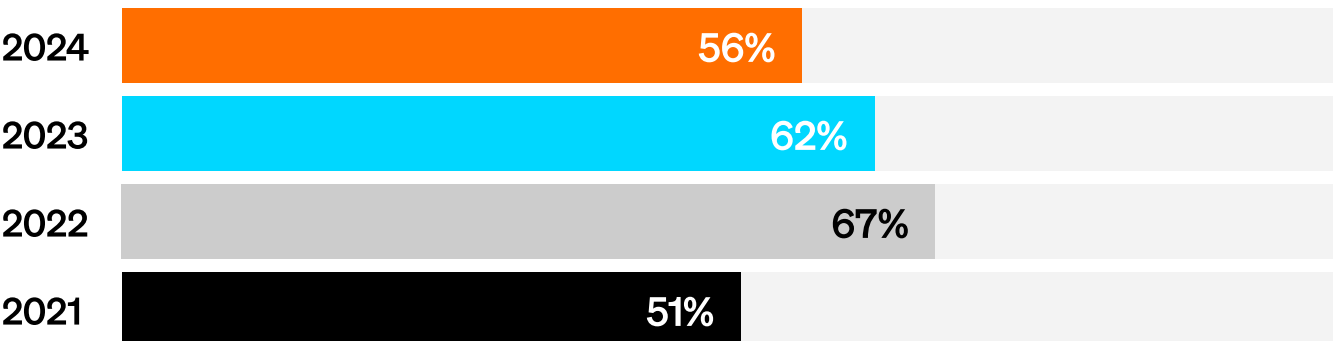
## Stress experience

Found at least part of the estate administration stressful.



## Process duration

Said the process took longer than expected.



## Unknown assets

Valuable assets incl. property or bank accounts unknown at the start.



## Under planned

Said that there was no will.



## Other findings from individuals who have recently been through the probate process:







# Exizent's vision for change

## How can this report help you?

This report highlights numerous challenges related to bereavement. While some progress has been made, much work remains to fully address these issues. Stakeholders in the bereavement sector need to be bolder if we are to achieve the steps and changes needed to mitigate those issues.

## What are the key messages from bereaved individuals to the organisations that they deal with?

### To the public sector:

Modernisation of your bereavement services is critical. The ongoing reliance on a physical copy of the death certificate to validate a death carries a substantial hidden cost for executors and financial services firms. That cost is financial and time. Applying for, being granted, and validating probate is a bottleneck in almost all (probate required) cases. Further digitisation of court and tax process interface points is needed.

### To the legal services sector:

Your value proposition is not clear to everyone. People need help and value it when they get it, but some are unwilling to pay where the costs seem too high in relation to the expectation of work involved. Find ways to help more people that need your expertise.

### To the financial services sector:

Most executors expect you to be easier to deal with. A bereavement represents an increasingly important service interaction in a world of Consumer Duty, Vulnerable Customers and the ever-increasing scale of wealth transfer between generations. Your reputation is at stake. Too many firms still treat a bereavement as a non-critical, operational task.

## How to drive genuine transformation across the sector:

### 1 Public Sector

Fully digitise death registration and verification. Providing a trusted digital mechanism for stakeholders to use to prove that death is valid from the moment it is registered would be truly transformative. Financial Services firms could rely on it, removing the need to see a death certificate, saving time and operational costs. Executors would not need to purchase and then provide multiple copies to progress account settlement across those organisations.

### 2 Legal Services

Strengthen your value propositions. Be more transparent with your pricing and demonstrate why engaging help is a sensible step (time, risk, complexity vs cost). Embrace technology and techniques that allow you to be a more efficient estate administrator. A win-win which reduces the cost to the consumer and increases the capacity to help more people.

### 3 Financial Services

Invest in bereavement journeys. On average an executor may need to engage with 15 financial services firms to settle an estate. Few people want to visit a branch, post forms or spend time repeating their story on a phone. Well designed online bereavement journeys, with clear progress tracking increases transparency and meets modern day expectations of customer service, working well with your other channels. In the absence of a "one stop shop" for the private sector (a valid long-term aspiration) providing the best possible experience when engaging with your firm goes a long way.







# About Exizent

Over the past few years, Exizent has been on a journey to improve the bereavement experience for everyone, leveraging technology to connect data, services and networks of people involved when someone passes away.





## Exizent for legal services

Exizent’s platform empowers legal and tax professionals across the UK to enhance efficiency, save time and work faster across various tasks. Our solution reduces overall costs for firms while increasing their capacity to handle more probate / executry cases. By streamlining processes and optimising resource allocation, Exizent software boosts overall productivity and profitability by providing:

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  a simple, central dashboard to manage cases.      |  automatically generated complete Court and IHT forms. |
|  an effortless way to manage the Estate Accounts. |  simplified estate discovery.                         |

## Exizent for financial institutions

Exizent’s innovative Software as a Service solution supports financial institutions in setting new standards for bereavement notifications management by:

|   |  |
|---|--|
|  providing better connections. |  providing better notifier experiences. |
|  enabling your teams.          |  transforming your operations.          |

## See it in action

Contact our team today to discuss our vision and see how Exizent can help you better manage your bereavement cases.

 [www.exizent.com/contact](http://www.exizent.com/contact)

 Talk to us about features and pricing: [sales@legal.exizent.com](mailto:sales@legal.exizent.com)

 For more information about Exizent, visit [www.exizent.com](http://www.exizent.com)

 See it in action

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