

Cleaning Industry Key Trends for 2026

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The cleaning industry remains resilient and committed to innovation despite persistent challenges and cost pressures, new [Robert Scott](#) research reveals. “This year’s findings show that the sector remains determined and forward-thinking, despite facing economic pressures.”

According to new research from cleaning manufacturer and distributor Robert Scott, the rising cost of doing business is the biggest challenge facing the UK’s cleaning industry.

Key Takeaways

Nearly 90% of the cleaning professionals surveyed in the research stated that the rising cost of doing business had the greatest impact on their operations in 2025. This points to a more sustained challenge than originally anticipated, as it is over 17% higher than the previous year, and over 85% believe that it will remain a significant factor in 2026.

The survey revealed an increase in negative views on the ‘political environment’, with inflation and political or policy uncertainty both scoring 29.7%. Meanwhile political uncertainty for the coming year increased to 35.71%.

When asked about what impact the new government has had on the cleaning industry, close to 60% thought that it was negative or very negative.

Over 97% said that the increase in Employer National Insurance contributions had had a serious impact on their day-to-day operations, as had the increase in the minimum wage (82%).

Looking at the impact of the rising cost of living on their businesses, over 70% said that overall, customers were spending less, with over 30% reducing investment in large purchases. Over 75% of those surveyed said that customers are seeking better value for money, with over 39% saying that customers were

looking for solutions that reduce the costs in areas like workforce.

Striking the Balance Between Cost Savings and Environmental Responsibility

Despite these pressures, sustainability continues to play a critical role in shaping the industry's future. Over 87% of respondents confirmed the importance of sustainability to the sector, with supplying more environmentally friendly chemicals cited as the foremost priority, at over 61%. Over 53% said that the effectiveness of cleaning products was a priority, while over 51% cited understanding the environmental impact or carbon footprint of cleaning products.

While reducing plastic waste continues to be a key issue, only 48% of professionals cited it as a priority this year, down from 60% last year.

However, the research also highlighted that only around one third of customers are still prepared to pay more for ecofriendly solutions, indicating that businesses must deliver on both sustainability while considering value. Indeed, 'demonstrating value for money' was identified as the biggest overall trend for 2026 by over 40% of respondents.

Alastair Scott, sales director at Robert Scott, commented: "The cleaning industry has always adapted to shifting market pressures, and this year's findings show that the sector remains determined and forward-thinking, despite facing economic pressures. Cost challenges and policy changes are real, but it's encouraging to see businesses respond proactively and continue to seek out smarter, more efficient ways of working."

The Future Impact of Robotics

Another emerging area of innovation with the potential to deliver significant efficiency gains - and one that is increasingly on the radar for industry professionals - is robotics. When asked what they thought would be the biggest trend in the cleaning industry in the coming year, over 28% said it would be robotic cleaning, up from only 2% last year. Looking at robotics, the survey asked: "How much impact do you believe robotics will have in the cleaning sector over the next five years?" Over 47% thought it would have some impact, while a further 26% thought it would have significant impact.

"In response to customer demand, Robert Scott continues to expand its cobotics offering and we have recently added the MT1 Max and MT1 Vac to our range," says Alastair Scott. "The MT1 Max builds on the impressive and industry first AI-powered scrubber dryer robot for large-scale environment with improved location technology, slope climbing, rain avoidance and obstacle handling features, while the MT1 Vac delivers powerful, industrial-grade suction, capturing everything from fine particles to larger debris with close-edge cleaning.

Achieving Top Scores

"This annual survey is not just about assessing the industry's views but is also an important way for us to measure our performance in an increasingly challenging marketplace," says Alastair Scott. "Over 97% of respondents had found our service in 2025 to be good or great, up 6% from the previous year.

"The research explored customer satisfaction levels with Robert Scott, and I am delighted to report that 100% of respondents rated Robert Scott's service as good or great - up from last year's excellent score of



93%. We also scored 100% for product availability and product recommendation, up from last year's 95%.

"We are very proud that the industry rates our service offering and product availability so highly but achieving literally top scores does not mean that we will become complacent. In the coming year, our focus will remain on delivering products that improve cleaning efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and provide tangible value for our customers."