



membership resources

State of the Market Survey 2010

Local Authority Parks Services



Briefing 10/61
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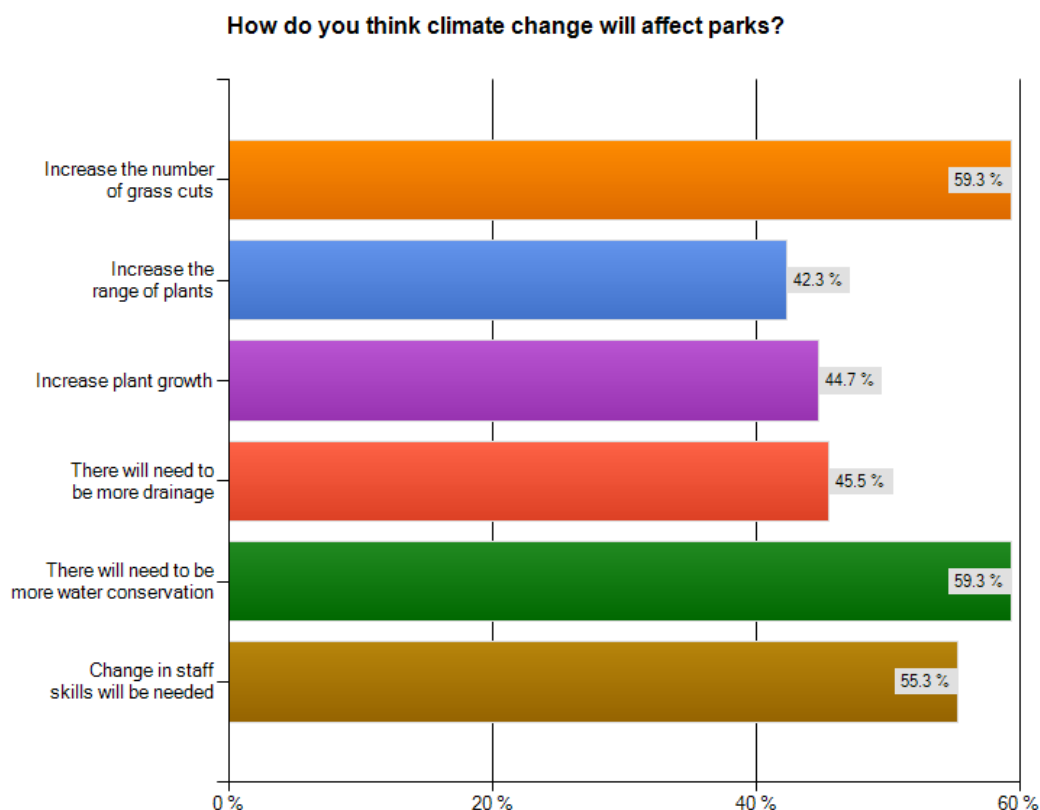
Local Authority Parks Services State of the Market 2010

APSE conducted an on-line survey during August and September 2010. This follows on from the 2008 Parks State of the Market survey where similar questions were asked to allow for trend comparisons. The 2008 results briefing can be accessed by [clicking here](#). 127 responses were received from local authorities throughout the UK. This report identifies the key findings of the survey compared to the 2008 findings.

Results from the survey

a) Climate change

Members were asked how they thought climate change will affect parks. The responses are shown in the chart below:



b) How the service is delivered

- 92% recycle their green waste which has increased from 86% in 2008

- 58% already have parks rangers, which is similar to reported figures in 2008. 11% have an on-site presence in all of their parks.
- 86% have seasonal labour, which has increased from 2008 levels of 74%.
- 70% think the community sector involvement in managing parks is increasing, which is a slight reduction on 2008 levels of 79%
- 52% sell services to other public sector bodies and 21% sell services to the private sector, which is similar to the levels reported in 2008.
- In terms of enforcement in parks and green spaces, 60.5% use dog control orders and 59% give out on the spot fines for litter in parks and green spaces.

c) Your opinions

The table below shows the number of respondents who agree/disagree with the statements.

| Answer Options | Disagree strongly | Disagree | Agree | Agree strongly | No opinion |
|---|-------------------|------------|------------|----------------|------------|
| The squeeze on public sector resources will affect parks disproportionately | 1% | 10% | 38% | 48% | 3% |
| There needs to be stricter controls on pesticide use | 3% | 46% | 39% | 4% | 8% |
| The resurgence of allotments is just a fad | 16% | 58% | 18% | 2% | 6% |
| We lock our park gates at night for safety reasons | 15% | 34% | 21% | 10% | 20% |
| Risk should be brought back into childrens play | 1% | 10% | 48% | 38% | 3% |
| The public should get free access to all parks | 0% | 10% | 32% | 56% | 3% |

86% either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the first question (*which was not asked back in 2008*) 'the squeeze on public sector resources will affect parks disproportionately'. This is obviously a reaction to the economic downturn and prospects of spending cuts from the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010. The responses to the other questions are very similar compared to the responses in 2008.

d) What do you expect?

- When asked 'Overall how do you expect the total number of parks (including playgrounds) to change over the next year?' the responses to this question have changed emphasis from the 2008 results. In 2008, 43% replied 'increase slightly' and 33% said 'stay the same'. In 2010, 34% replied 'stay the same' and there was an increase in the percentage of people who responded that they expect the number

of parks to decrease slightly (34% chose this option). This may be a reflection of budget constraints within local authorities and some council's looking at transferring some of their assets. When asked 'during the past 2 years, has your council transferred any of its parks assets to self management', 17% replied 'yes' and 26.5% replied 'no, but the council is looking at this'.

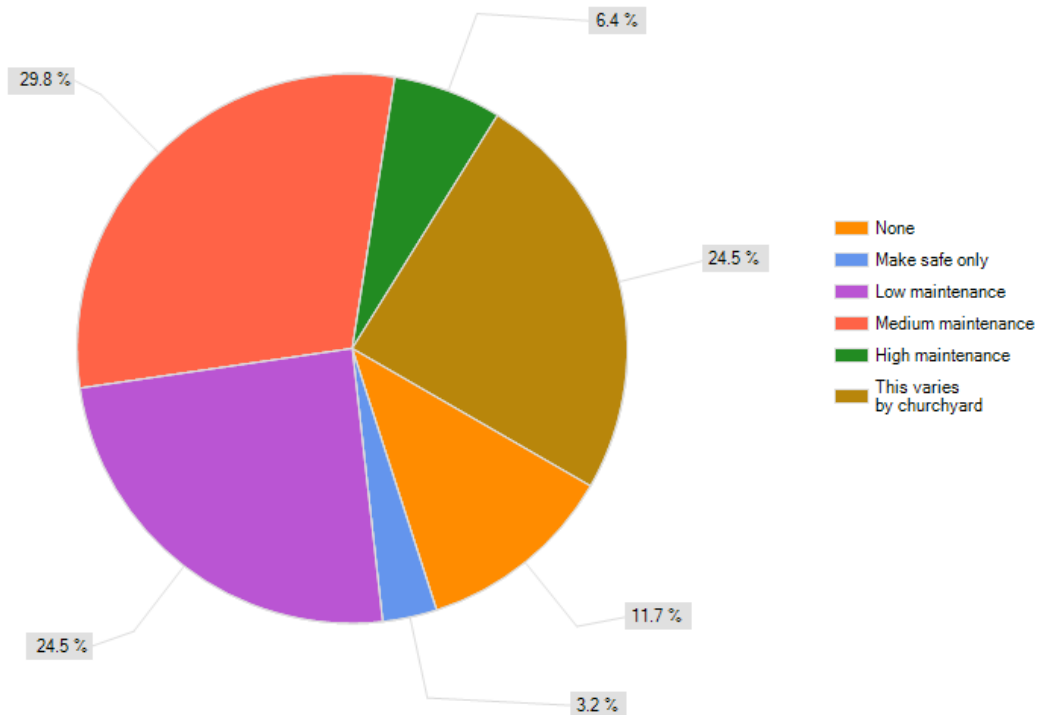
- When asked 'How do you expect the parks budget to change next year?' the responses to this question have changed emphasis from the 2008 results. In 2008, 50% expected the parks budget to decrease, whilst 27% expected it to stay the same. In 2010, only 0.9% expected this to stay the same whilst 50% expected it to decrease and 48% expected it to decrease substantially.
- Whilst 83% currently have in-house services, only 57% expect to be managed in-house in the next 2-3 years. The comments to this question indicate an expectation of an increase in other types of management including a combination of in-house and local management/Friends of the Park and partnerships with the private and voluntary sectors.
- When asked 'Do you expect to be part of an integrated street scene service?', the responses were similar to 2008 responses and were as follows:

| Do you expect to be part of an integrated street scene service? | |
|--|-------------------|
| Answer Options | Response % |
| Yes - We are already | 39.5% |
| Yes - within 12 months | 9.6% |
| Yes - within 2 years | 16.7% |
| No | 24.6% |
| Other (please specify) | 9.6% |

e) Closed churchyards

The 2010 survey contained a new section on closed churchyards, as a result of the APSE working group established to provide guidance for local authorities who have responsibility to maintain these. On average, local authorities have responsibility to maintain 10 closed churchyards and on average spend £40,600 on maintaining these annually. The majority of respondents carry out low or medium maintenance at these churchyards:

What is your level of maintenance at closed churchyards?



f) Job evaluation

The survey asked about job evaluation and the results show that 81% have now completed job evaluation compared to 66% in 2008. When asked about how job evaluation has affected wage costs, the results were as follows:

- How has job evaluation affected wage costs?

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Increased a great deal | 17% |
| Increased slightly | 25% |
| About the same | 24% |
| Decreased slightly | 11% |
| Decreased a great deal | 3% |

These figures are consistent with those reported in 2008.

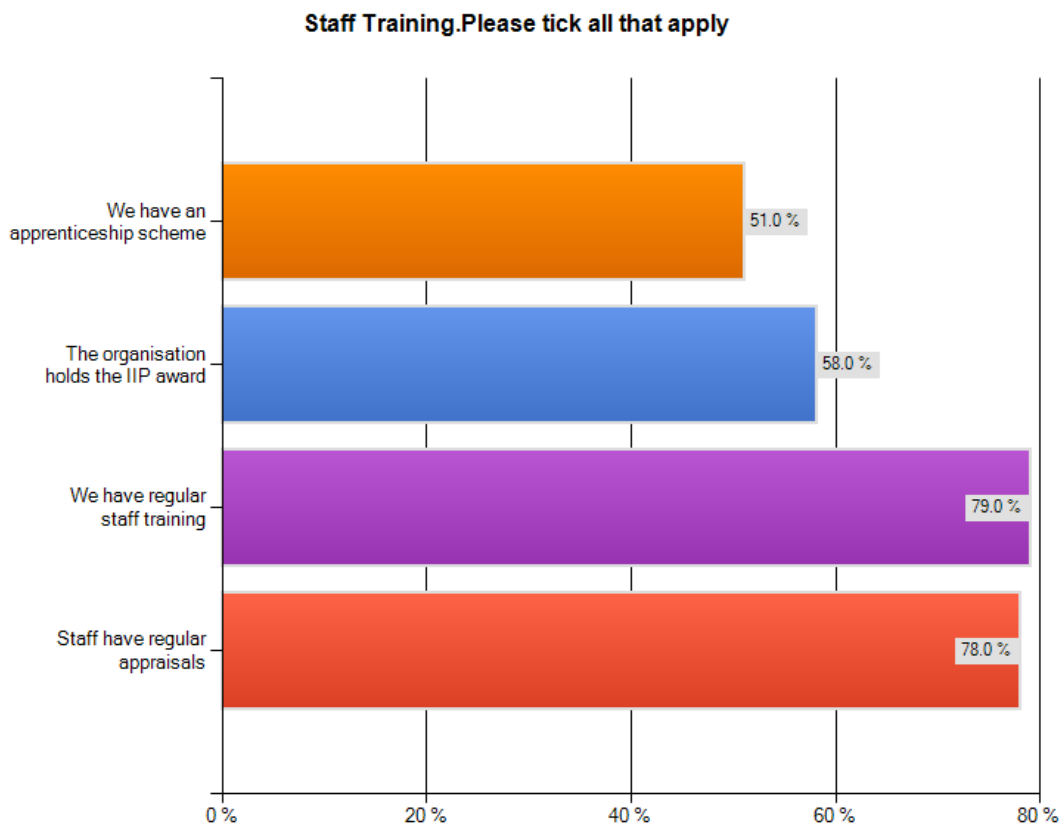
g) Staffing

Members were asked whether they thought that staff absence levels are at an acceptable level. The responses are shown in the chart below:

| Answer Options | Response Percent |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Too high | 17.3% |
| Slightly above average | 12.5% |
| About average | 41.3% |
| Slightly below average | 16.3% |
| Very low | 12.5% |

These figures have improved since 2008 with more respondents indicating that these are either 'about average', 'slightly below average' or 'very low'. This improvement in managing absence can be corroborated with the data recorded through APSE's benchmarking service [performance networks](#) which shows that in financial year 2009-10, average staff absence was at the lowest figure recorded in the last 5 years.

The staff training responses were as follows:



These figures are similar to those reported in 2008, although it is pleasing to see that those respondents who have apprenticeship schemes have increased from 47% to 51%. This improvement may be linked with the valuable work undertaken by the parks sector (CABE,

APSE, Lantra, GreenSpace and other national bodies) in the last few years in the [Skills to Grow](#) strategy, which contains seven priorities to improve green space skills.

h) Future growth and decreases in work for the service

The survey asked qualitative questions around future growth and decreases in work for the parks service. Below lists the main responses received. When asked, 'where do you see growth for the service over the next 12 months', responses included:

- Community involvement/engagement
- Partnership work with community groups and other public bodies (e.g. agencies, Housing Associations, Probation services, etc)
- Amalgamating services with other local authorities
- Specialist services to other local authorities
- Volunteering
- Conservation & management of climate change
- Events in parks
- Possibly working for external organisations e.g. offering a maintenance service to local landowners
- Additional open space from housing developments
- More private work, especially for sports clubs & organisations
- Increasing land transfer
- Children's play
- Capital projects through section 106, Heritage Lottery Fund and landfill tax credits
- Allotments/community gardens
- Nursery production
- Training

When asked 'where do you see future decreases in work for the service', responses included:

- Reduced maintenance or frequency of maintenance of grounds generally
- Deterioration in service and standards
- Bedding, floral displays, regional shows, ornamental grass cutting, bowling greens, high amenity areas
- Landscaping and country parks
- Fewer parks and facilities
- Transfer of assets
- Litter picking
- Sport provision – as facilities are leased to outside bodies such as Sports Associations/clubs to self manage/maintain.
- Works for larger Town/Parish Councils who wish to take on maintenance of their own areas.
- Schools grounds maintenance
- Other Council departments SLA's e.g. education, housing and leisure
- Loss of housing grass cutting contracts
- Cemeteries and closed churchyards

- Achievement in awards
- New development projects/capital investment schemes - e.g. play area refurbishment
- The inspection and maintenance of Children's Play Areas
- Ranger service
- Less parks-specific community engagement
- Parks development activity

The Association for Public Service Excellence

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 authorities 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:-

- Efficiencies, procurement and service transformation
- Building cleaning
- Citizen engagement
- Local authority, police and fire authority partnerships
- Housing management, construction and building maintenance
- Parks, horticultural and ground maintenance
- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Social care
- Sports and leisure management
- Vehicle maintenance and transport operations
- Waste management, refuse collection and street cleansing
- Workforce strategy and employee relations