



Association for Public Service Excellence

State of the Market: Parks and Greenspaces

Matt Ellis, APSE Principal Advisor



association for public service excellence

Local Authority State of the Market 2026

Parks and Greenspaces



Briefing 26/10
March 2026



Purpose:

- 🌿 Survey of UK local authority grounds maintenance teams
- 🌿 Covering a diverse range of topics – from budgets and income generation to biodiversity targets and the involvement of community groups
- 🌿 Provides a valuable snapshot of the sector
- 🌿 Identification of trends in the sector

**Aggregated figures – may not reflect the experiences of your council*



Local Authority State of the Market 2026

Parks and Greenspaces





Selected themes:

- 🌱 Budgets
- 🌱 Efficiencies
- 🌱 Income generation
- 🌱 Workforce
- 🌱 Training and apprenticeships
- 🌱 Biodiversity
- 🌱 Weed control
- 🌱 Community involvement



Local Authority State of the Market 2026

Parks and Greenspaces



Briefing 26/10
March 2026

Economic context

APSE's State of UK Public Parks 2021

Report found that a total of

£690 million was lost from parks

budgets 2010-2021



APSE & Survation 2026 – Annual Polling of Councillors & The Public.



Conducted by Survation on behalf of APSE

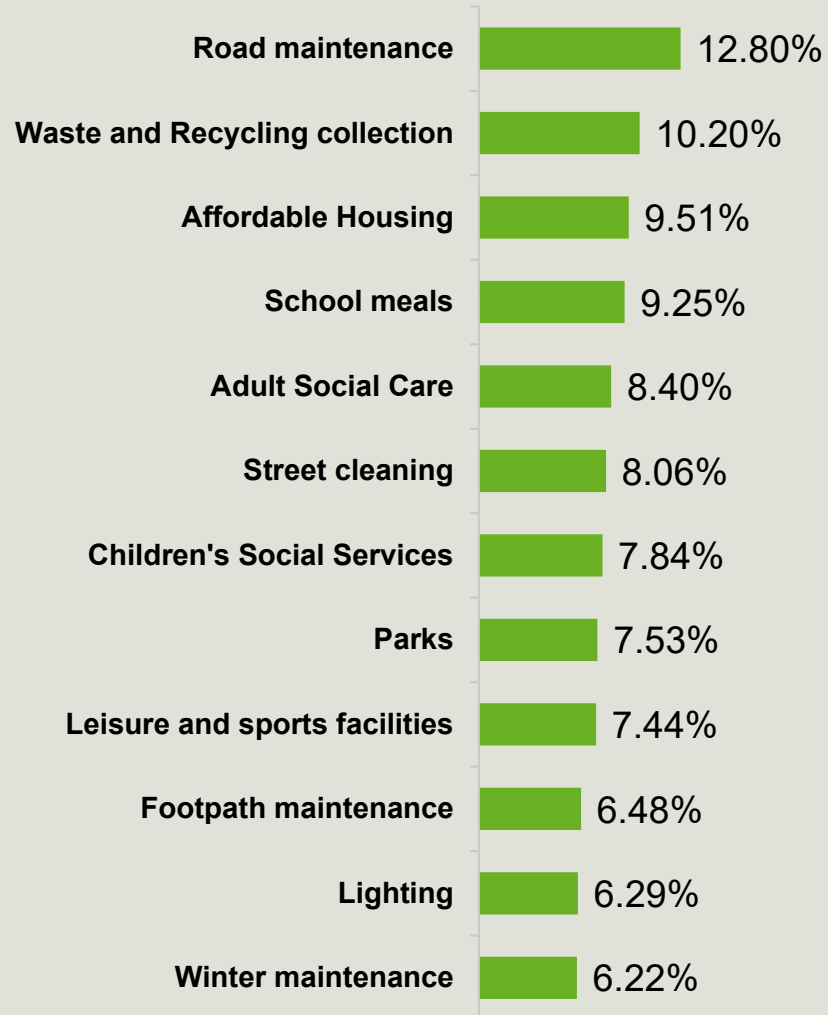
Methodology: Councillor survey was conducted online. Email invitations were sent to elected councillors in the UK.

Fieldwork: 5th November – 18th November 2025

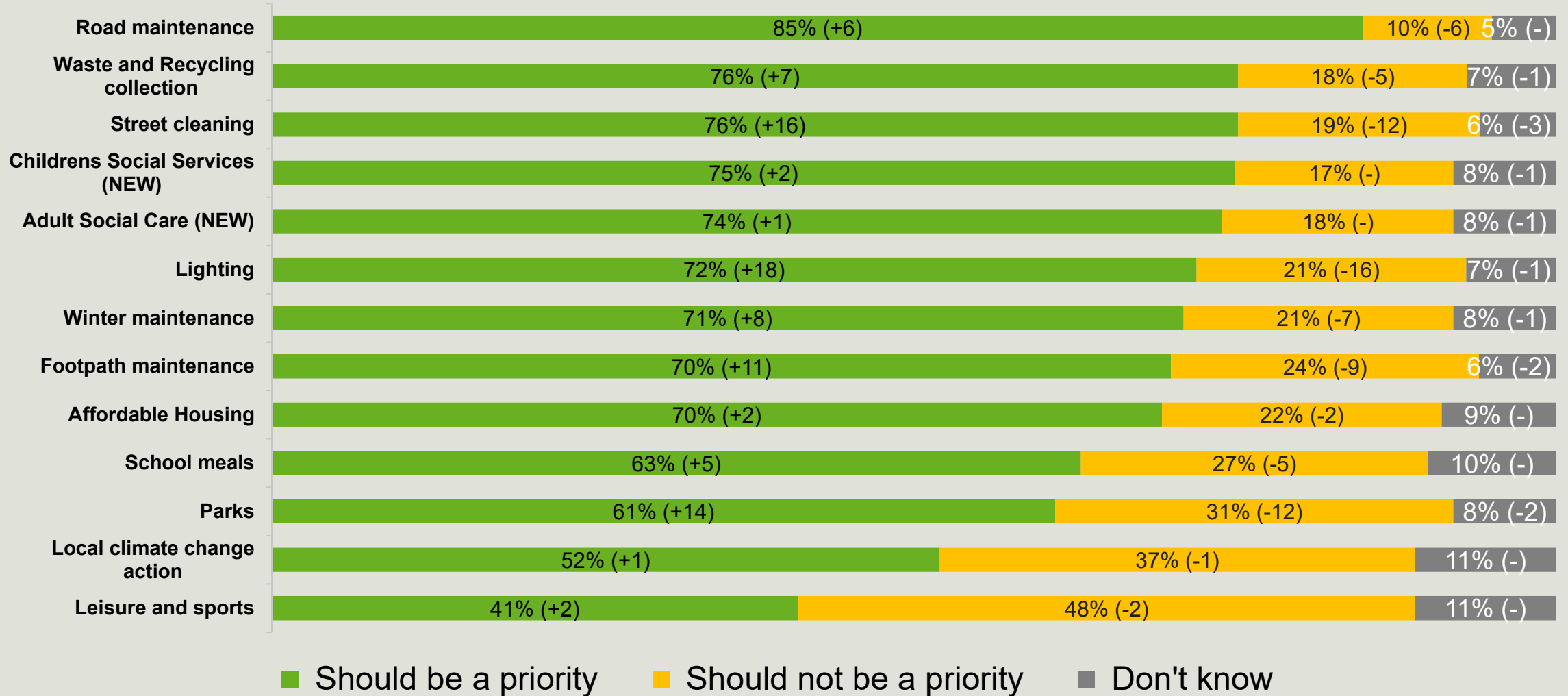
Sample size: 504

Survation.

Q21_Q32_Summary. You stated that you would like to see more money given to local councils than is done so currently. If you had the choice, what percentage of the extra money would be spent on each of the 12 services below?



Q71-Q83. If the local government was making cuts to public services, should the following be a priority to protect? (THE PUBLIC_





Key results at a glance

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) *Local Authority State of the Market 2026: Parks & Greenspaces* report found that 95% of councils consider biodiversity as a priority for their parks services, with 91% citing supporting healthy living as a key social issue for the services.

Despite the increasing recognition of parks as central to local climate strategies, the report highlights the financial pressures that continue to impact services. The overwhelming majority of councils (81%) expected their parks funding to decrease over the coming five years, with 41% anticipating a reduction of up to 10%.

To add to this, councils across England face growing uncertainty surrounding local government reorganisation. With discretionary services at greater risk than statutory services, reorganisation presents an opportunity for councils to innovate and adapt their approach to parks within a broader geographical landscape.



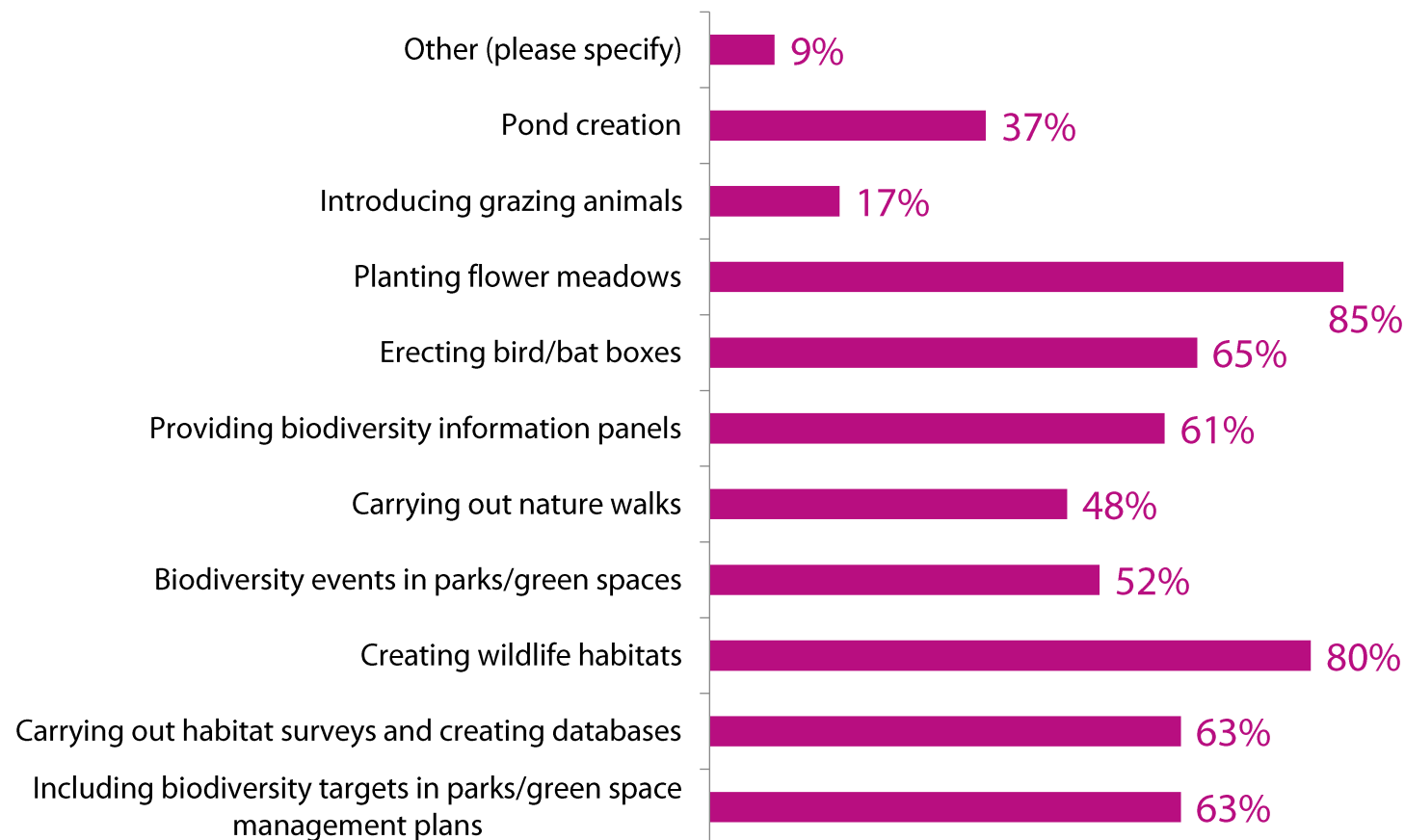
Biodiversity

What environmental issues are a priority for your parks and greenspace service?"

95%

Biodiversity

Which of the following biodiversity initiatives have you carried out:





Rewilding

Are you considering 'Rewilding'
any of your parks or greenspaces?

53%

Yes



The APSE report – *Rewilding for the future: Insight and best practice from local councils* – provides an overview of what schemes councils are engaged in and the progress they are making in contributions to rewilding.



Budgets

87%

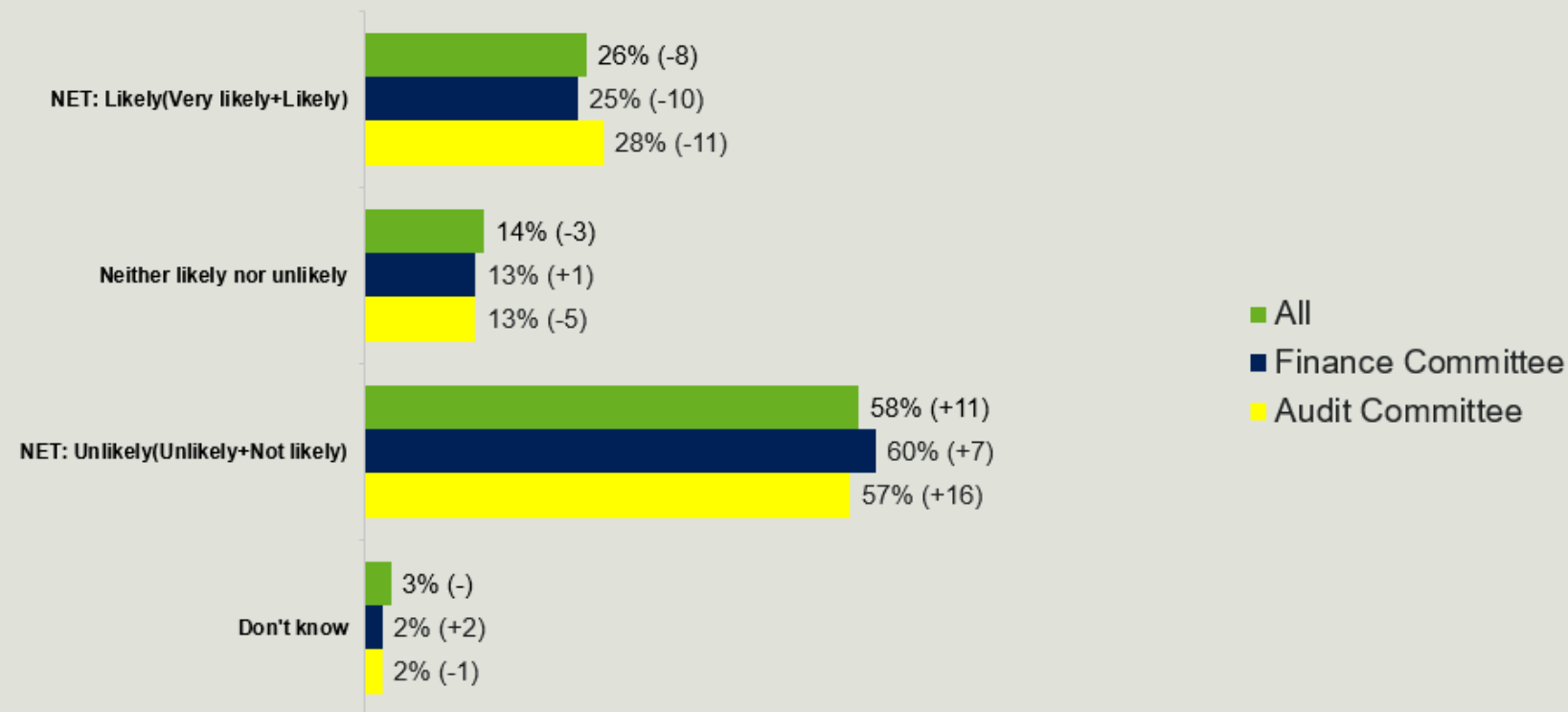
“Agree” or “Agree strongly”

(+7%)

“The squeeze on public sector resources are affecting parks and green spaces disproportionately to other service areas.”

Budgets

Q1. Given the current pressure facing Council budgets. How likely, if at all, would you say it is that your local authority will have to issue a section 114 (or S.95 in Scotland) notice (declaring bankruptcy) in the next five years?



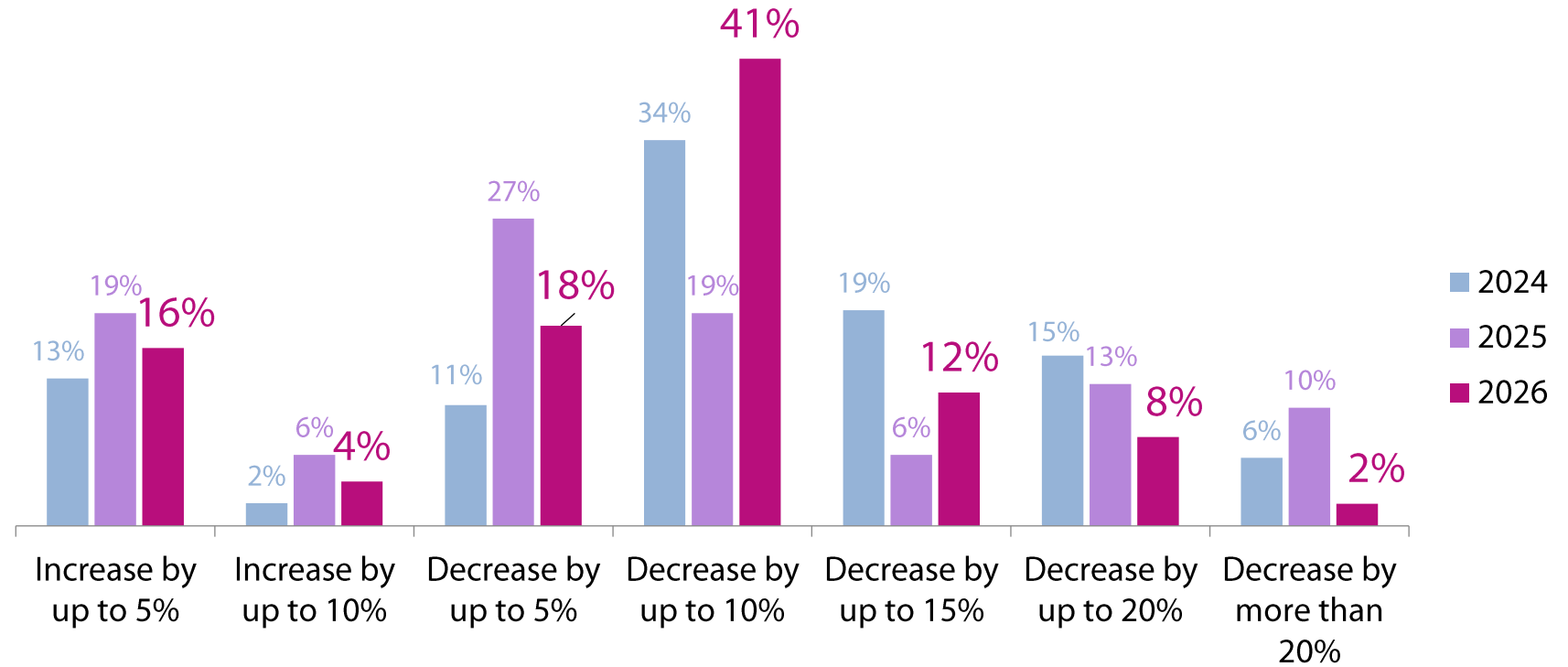
BASE: All respondents. Unweighted total: 504. Changes vs 2024.



Budgets

What is your expectation of the level of funding in your service budget in the coming five years?

- *“Unknown, but expect LGR to be disastrous for Parks services.”*
- *“Unknown due to impact of LGR.”*

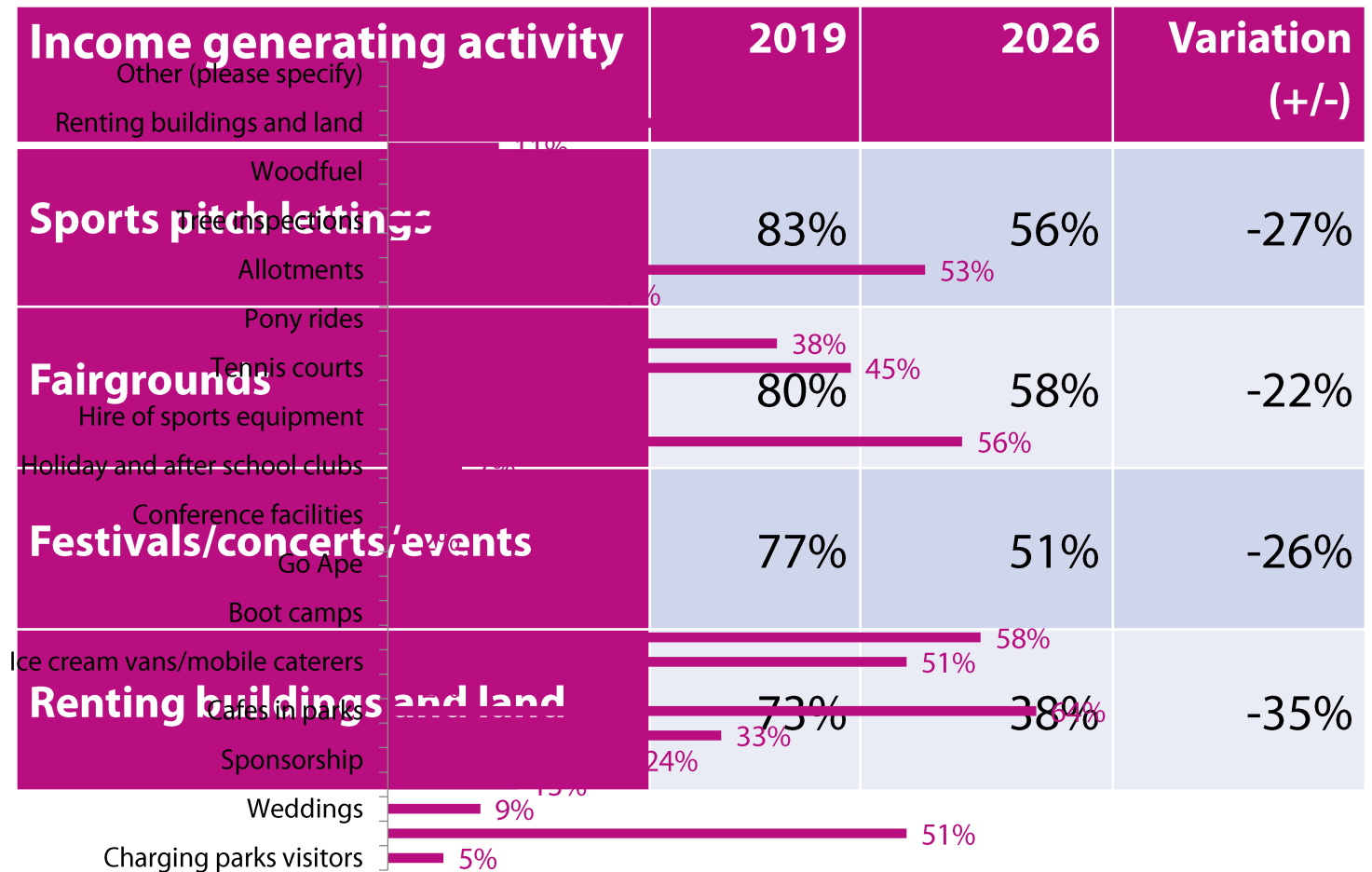




Income generation

The £690m lost from parks budgets has meant parks professionals have had to come up with more creative ways to generate income to bridge the gap left by cuts in funding.

What areas do you currently generate income in through fees and charges (either provided in-house or through a franchise)?





Income generation - *Barriers*

65%

2023 (+25%)

Public resistance

75%

2023 (+25%)

Political resistance

39%

2023 (-2%)

Lack of time

58%

2023 (+8%)

**Lack of investment
funding**



Efficiencies

84%

"Agree" or "Agree strongly"

2025 (+2%)

"Reductions in funding has resulted in a withdrawal of maintenance from some land and an increase in unmaintained land."



Efficiencies

"We are implementing alternative grassland management approaches through reduced mowing frequency and a change to an annual cut and collect in some locations."

"Reduction in Seasonal workforce."

"Reducing intensive mowing areas through naturalisation and tree planting."

"Review of Fees and charges; Removal of discretionary services such as Christmas tree provision; advertising and sponsorship opportunities."

Reduced grass cutting frequencies & changing planting schemes to lower maintenance ones - less bedding and more mixed borders.

"Closure of parks buildings (e.g.: Public Toilets and Pavilions)."



Reduced maintenance

67%

2025 (-3%)

**Bedding/flower
displays**

40%

2025 (-15%)

**Frequency of grass
cuts (amenity)**

39%

2025 (+4%)

**Shrub bed
maintenance**



Association for Public Service Excellence



Sponsored by:



Best in Grass

Effective grassland management strategies for local greenspace



Thursday 7 November

MS Teams



membership resources

Class on Grass

Lessons on grassland and soil management in local greenspace

Thursday 20 February 2025, 10.00-12.15

Online Meeting via MS Teams - Free for members to join!

>>> [Book your place here](#) <<<



Mitigating the impacts of climate change, increasing the opportunities for biodiversity, and securing buy-in from residents and elected members.

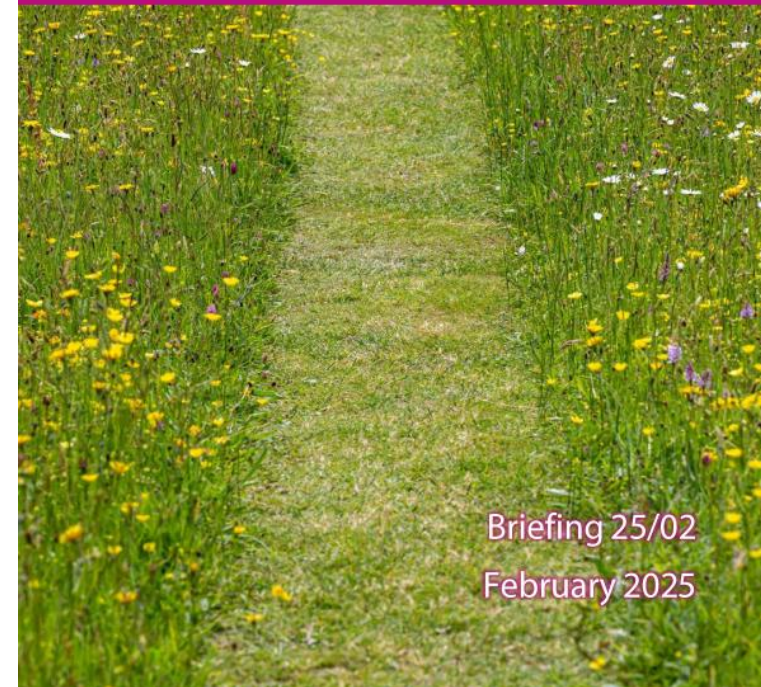
Whether large open spaces or roadside verges, how can local councils design and implement effective grassland and soil management strategies?



association for public service excellence

Grassland management

A guide for local councils



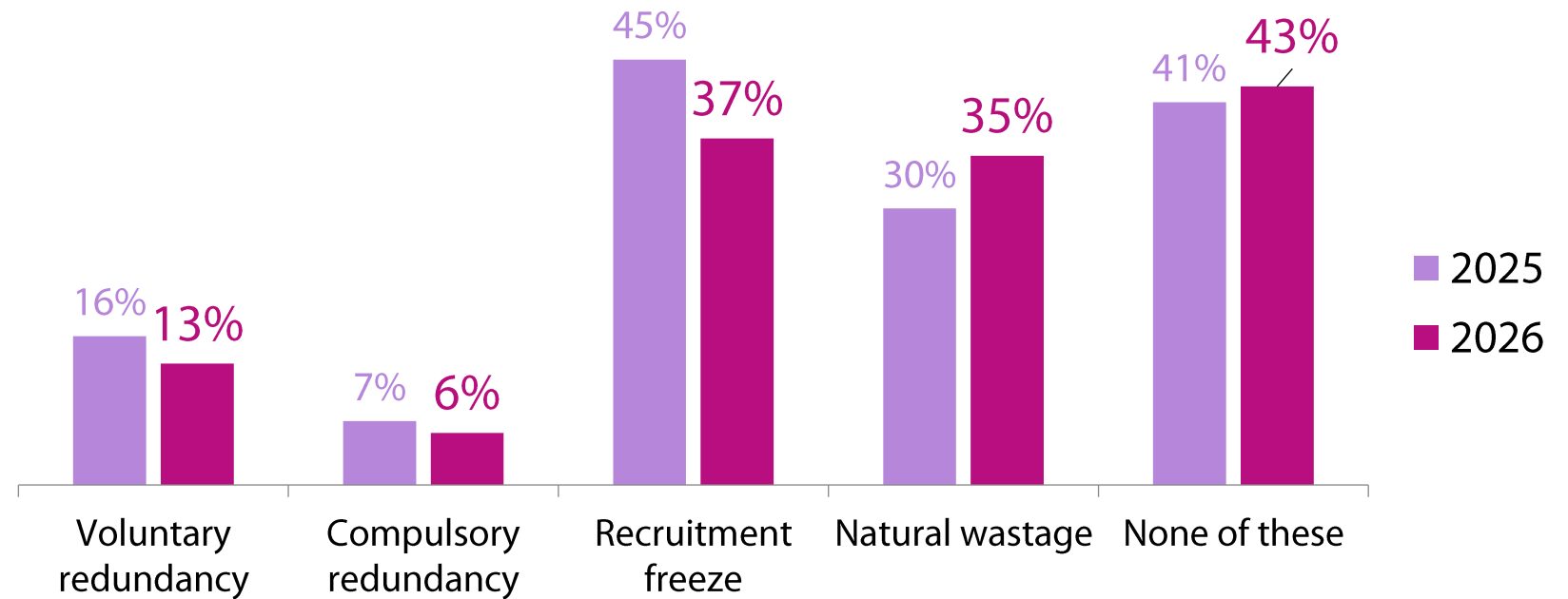
Briefing 25/02

February 2025



Workforce

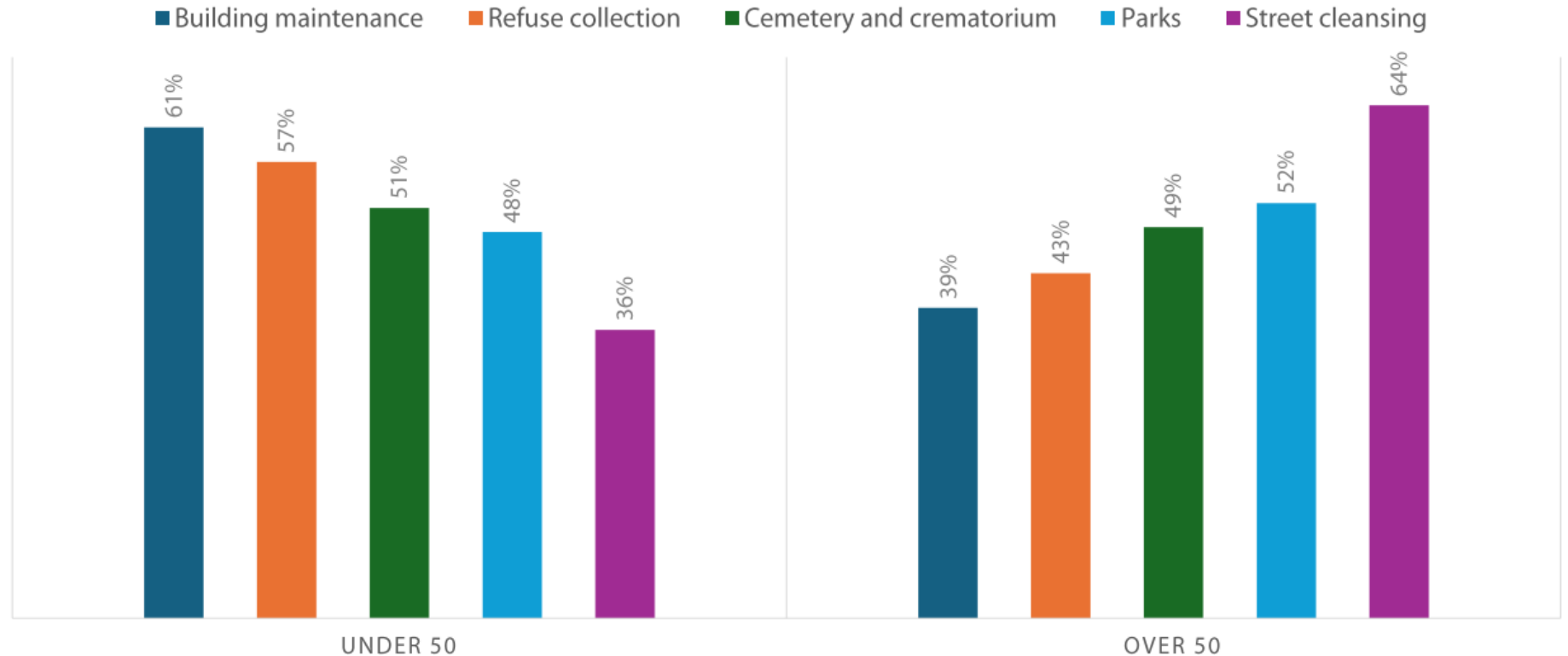
Has your service implemented any of the following in the last 12 months?





Workforce

Are staff absence levels at an acceptable level?
APSE Performance Networks Data





Training

"Is the training budget over the next 12 months going to..."

81%

Stay the same

9%

Decrease

10%

Increase



Apprenticeships

“Do you have apprentices?”

49%

Yes

2022 (-12%)

“Are you going to be recruiting apprentices in 2026-27?”

29%

Yes

2022 (-42%)

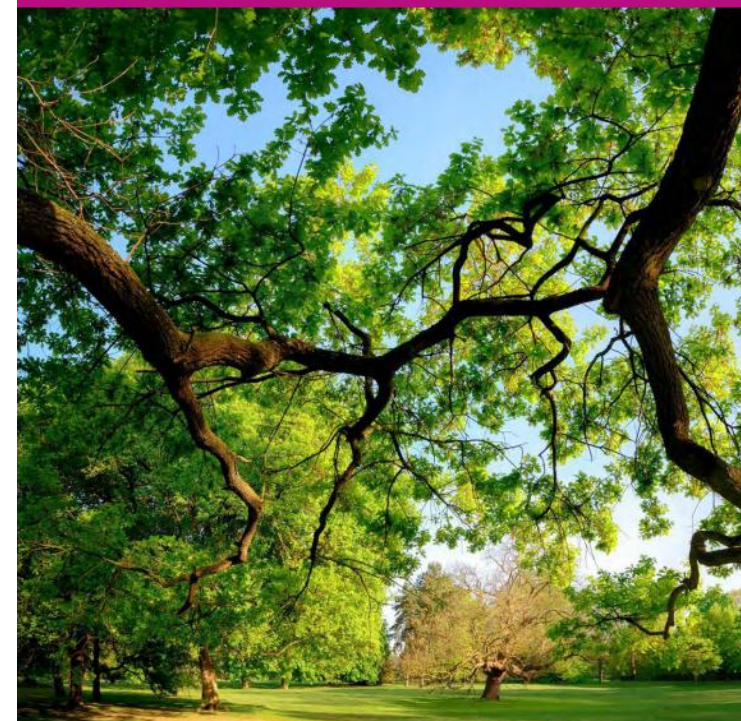


Apprenticeships

- 🌱 APSE has always advocated for the importance of apprenticeships, lifelong learning and career pathways in the local authority parks sector.
- 🌱 Our conclusions from that report included the development of a model framework that is recognised by all stakeholders in the sector and which would guide organisations in developing the appropriate knowledge and skill.



Nurturing skills for 21st century parks





Community involvement

Do you have friends of parks groups?

76%

Yes

1. Friends and residents' groups (83%)
2. Litter picking (78%)
3. Parks events (59%)
4. Local environmental improvement plans (57%)

Where do you see growth for the service over the next 12 months?

66%

Community Involvement / Engagement



Weed Control

Are you considering reducing the amount of chemical treatment you use to eradicate weeds?

58%

Yes

What alternative methods will you be using to remove weeds?

1. Manual Removal (81%)
2. Mechanical Streaming (58%)
3. Hot Water / Stream (8%)

Other themes

- 🌿 Rangers
- 🌿 Quality measurement
- 🌿 Additional funding opportunities

Local Authority State of the Market 2026

Parks and Greenspaces





Three Main Takeaways

1. Parks are increasingly recognised as part of local climate and environmental solutions
2. Financial pressure persists – and reorganisation adds uncertainty
3. Dual buy-in remains critical to long-term sustainability



The APSE network is here to help!



apse association for public service excellence

Local Authority State of the Market 2025
Allotment Services

Briefing 25/08
August 2025

apse association for public service excellence

Adapting Parks
Climate change and local authority greenspace

Briefing 25/07
July 2025

apse association for public service excellence

Rewilding for the future
Insights and best practice from local councils

Briefing 25/08
May 2025

apse association for public service excellence

Grassroots Messaging
Visual communication for biodiversity areas

Briefing 26/05
January 2026



Biodiversity Net Gain: Turning policy into practice and income

Friday 28 November, 10.00-11.15, MS Teams

FREE for APSE member councils



Talking Trees: APSE Parks Network Online Meeting - Wednesday 26 November

Wednesday 26 November 2025, 13.45-16.00

MS Teams



Gloves, Peas and Harmony: Local Authority Allotments Webinar - FREE for members!

Data, Trends and Wellbeing Benefits

Thursday 14 August, 10.00-12.30

FREE for members, MS Teams

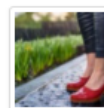


Play It Right: Safe, Accessible and Inspiring Playgrounds

FREE for APSE members

MS Teams

Friday 6 June, 13.00 - 15.00



Tell me about it: SuDS - APSE Parks Network Online Meeting - Thursday 24 April

FREE for APSE members

MS Teams

Thursday 24 April, 14.00 - 16.00



"Class on Grass" - Grassland Management Webinar

Thursday 20 February 2025

10:00 - 12:15, MS Teams



Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Network Meeting - Tuesday 14 January

FREE for APSE members

MS Teams

Tuesday 14 January, 14.00 - 16.00



Association for Public Service Excellence

State of the Market: Parks and Greenspaces

Matt Ellis, APSE Principal Advisor



association for public service excellence

Local Authority State of the Market 2026

Parks and Greenspaces



Briefing 26/10
March 2026