apse membership resources

State of the Market Survey 2022

Local Authority Parks and Green Spaces Services

Briefing 22-12
March 2022

The state of the market survey was conducted by Wayne Priestley, APSE Principal Advisor for Environmental Services.

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Local Authority Parks and Green Spaces Services
State of the Market 2022

APSE conducted an online survey between January and March 2022. This follows on from the 2021, 2020, ,2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2013, 2012, Parks and Green Spaces State of the Market surveys where similar questions were asked to allow for trend comparisons. Earlier briefings are available on the APSE website. The most recent briefings can be accessed at the links below:-

- 2021 results briefing
- 2020 results briefing
- 2019 results briefing
- 2018 results briefing
- 2017 results briefing
- 2016 results briefing
- 2015 results briefing
- 2013 results briefing
- 2012 results briefing

The report identifies the key findings of the survey compared with previous findings.

Results from the survey: Your opinions
The table below shows the number of respondents who agree/disagree with the following statements:

Answer Options	Agree strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	No opinion
The squeeze on public sector resources is affecting parks and green spaces disproportionately to other service areas	59.18%	26.53%	8.16%	0.00%	6.12%
Reductions in funding has resulted in a withdrawal of maintenance from some land and an increase in unmaintained land	53.06%	38.78%	8.16%	0.00%	0.00%
Lack of investment in parks and green spaces will have health and social impacts	75.51%	24.49%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
There is a clear link between parks/play provision and levels of crime/anti-social behaviour	28.57%	59.18%	2.04%	0.00%	10.20%
There's a limit to the extent to which volunteers can be involved in delivering parks and green space services	60.87%	39.13%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
The public should get free access to all parks	70.83%	22.92%	6.25%	0.00%	0.00%

There has been a significant increase from 68% to 86% regarding respondents who either ‘agree’, or ‘agree strongly’ that ‘*the squeeze on public sector resources is affecting parks and green spaces disproportionately to other service areas’.* This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that although all services have been affected by the impacts of the pandemic, parks have been under specific pressure due to the increased use by the public and all the additional strain this has put on parks budgets such as infrastructure maintenance. Equally, there has been a large increase in the numbers of respondents who either ‘agree’ or ‘agree strongly’ that reductions in funding have resulted in a withdrawal of maintenance from some land and an increase in unmaintained land (71% in 2021 rising to 92% in 2022). Coupled together these two results show that there seems to be a growing concern about continuing budget reductions and the negative impact these are having on the quality of parks maintenance. This as previously noted, has become more apparent as increased wear and tear on parks infrastructures have placed additional financial pressure on already stretched parks maintenance budgets. It will be important to see whether as a result of the added costs of the pandemic to local authorities, there will be further budget cuts in order to balance the books, and whether parks may in the short term, be more adversely affected.

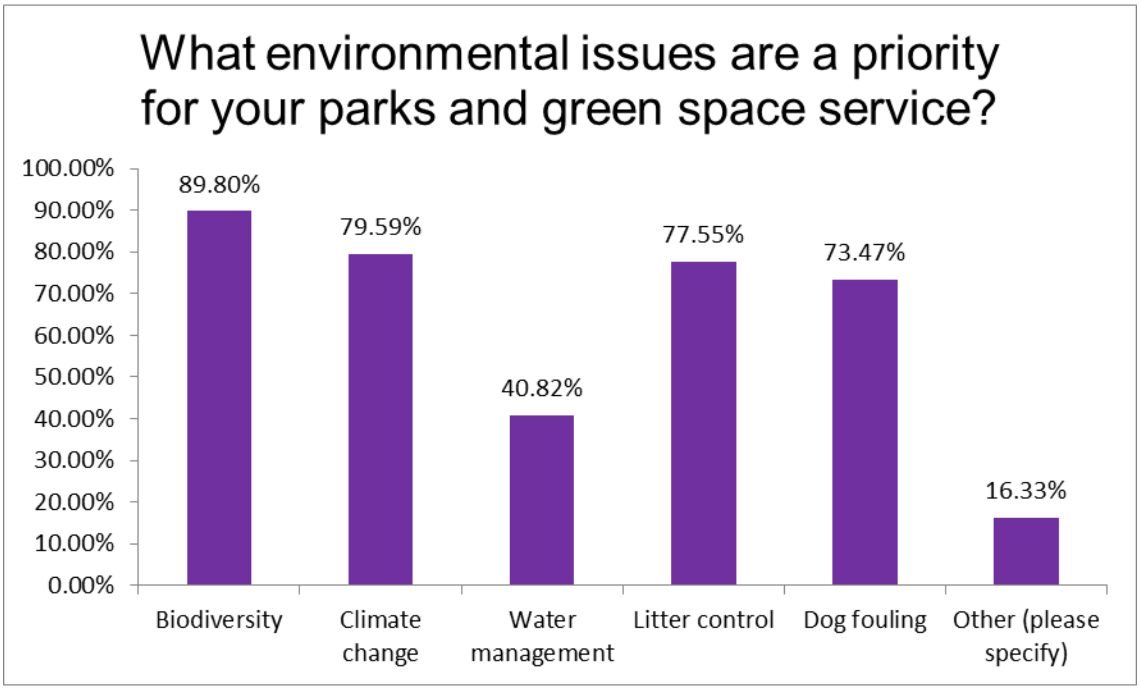
For the very first time 100% of respondents either ‘agree’ or ‘agree strongly’ that the ‘lack of investment in parks and green spaces will have health and social impacts’. This is a 3% increase on last year’s results, and no doubt has been driven by the fact thousands of people used their parks as refuges during the pandemic when all other sources of leisure and exercise were closed, thus showing the importance of parks and greenspaces in providing health-related experiences.

88% either ‘agree’ or ‘agree strongly’ that ‘there is a clear link between parks/play provision and levels of crime/anti-social behaviour’ which is a significant increase on 2021 when the figure was 61%. This is suggesting that the provision of parks/play provision reduces anti-social behaviour. However, considering the seeming rise in incidents of anti-social behaviour during lockdown, reported by some APSE member councils to the APSE Covid-19 support groups, such as refusing to abide by social distancing requirements, littering, breaking into closed playgrounds, verbal abuse to staff etc. this is perhaps a little unexpected, but considering the many people who did use parks considerately, then the balance tips in favour of parks being places where people can socialise and hopefully show respect and consideration for others.

100% of respondents either ‘agree’ or ‘agree strongly’ that ‘there’s a limit to the extent to which volunteers can be involved in delivering parks and green space services’ (86% in 2021). This is likely to be a result of many volunteers not operating during the pandemic due to social distancing and self-isolation requirements. The age profile of volunteers is often made up of older people and these would be the very people who would be seen as vulnerable during the pandemic. Consequently, it does show that there is a need to look at attracting a wider age range of volunteers. Therefore, whilst there does appear to be a slight change in views on the capabilities/reliance of volunteers, it should not be seen as a lack of belief as to the future importance of volunteers, indeed many parks’ managers have reported not only a return of volunteering groups but also, many new and younger people are now volunteering to help in parks as a result of their reliance on parks and greenspaces during the pandemic.

93% either 'agree' or 'agree strongly' that 'the public should get free access to all parks, which is a 1% increase on 2021. This rise re-enforces the view that Parks should remain free for the public to enter and the heavy reliance on parks during the current pandemic has no doubt further strengthened this view.

Environmental Issues



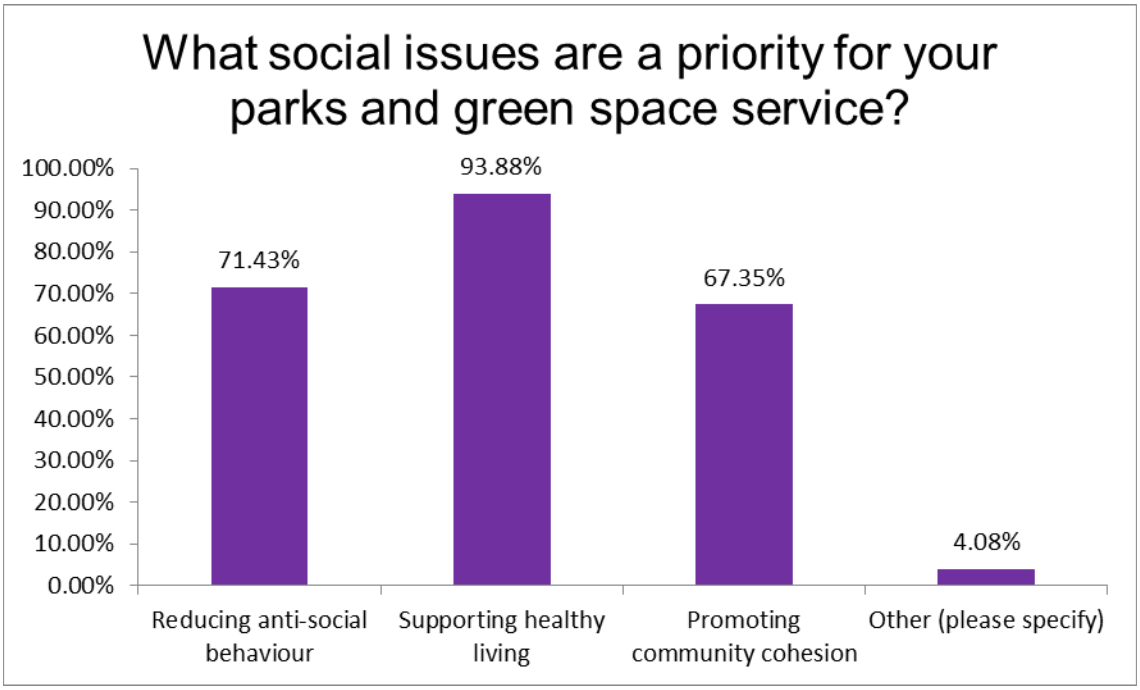
There have been two markedly significant changes in this year's results with respect to the importance of climate change and biodiversity.

The main environmental priority for parks and green space services is now biodiversity at 89.8% as opposed to 83% in 2021. The second highest priority is now climate change at 77.5% as opposed to 65% in 2021. This is perhaps no surprise considering the increasing amount of climate emergency declarations and biodiversity action plans now being seen as corporate priorities and parks and greenspaces being recognised as critical in achieving the aims of these plans by helping ameliorating the effects of climate change and providing habitats for flora and fauna.

The most notable fall is litter control which has fallen from 88 % 2021 to 77% in 2022.

Dog fouling concerns have risen from 70% to 73%. This is likely to be a reaction to the increased number of visitors parks have experienced since the pandemic when such areas have been the only outlet for public exercise and recreation largely for the last 18 months. Therefore, many people who previously did not use parks are now using parks more regularly as part of their dog walks. Unfortunately, many are failing to abide by the need to take litter home and clear up after their dogs. It is anticipated that this will be a short-lived event and hopefully this will improve post-pandemic. Although not shown on this chart it was noticeable that reducing the use of pesticides and improving tree health as a result of the impacts of ash die back were also growing priorities, and for the first time, concerns were raised about invasive non-native species.

Social Issues



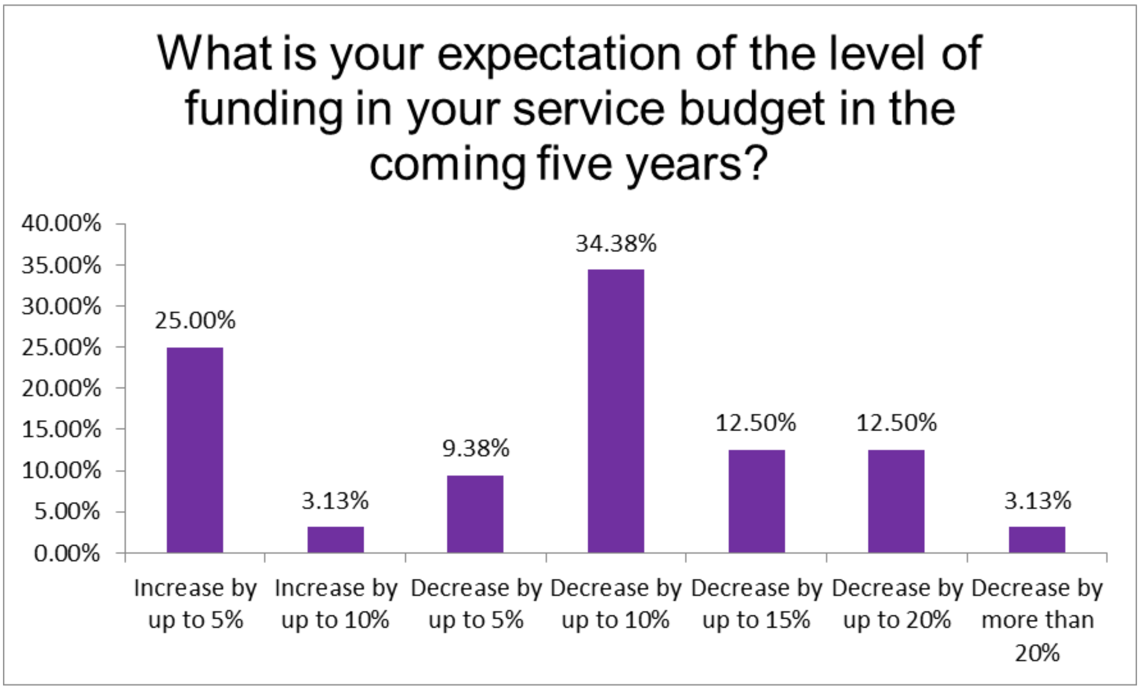
In the 2015 survey, we added a question on the types of social issues that are a priority for local authority parks and green space service. The most frequent response was 'supporting healthy living' which this year again recorded 93.88%, no doubt strengthened by the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic. This shows the recognition of the importance of parks and greenspaces to delivering significant benefits to the public's health and well-being.

The value of parks to community cohesion and reducing anti-social behaviour are still recognised as having significant value, and this value will have only been added to as a consequence of the social mixing, albeit, socially-distanced, caused by recent events.

Budget expectations

The number of respondents who expect the parks and green space budget to change over the next year has remained the same from last year, at 76%. However, of those who expected a change in the budget, 60% expect a decrease in revenue (83% in 2021), and 53%, expect a decrease in capital which is a decrease on 2021, when 60% expected a reduction.

In the next 5 years, the expectation of the level of funding in budgets are as follows:



Relatively little has changed on 2021 with most respondents expecting budget cuts of between 5-10% for the coming year which considering the extra costs of the pandemic is not as worrying as may have been expected. The major change has been with those respondents' expecting increases. In 2021 15% of respondents were expecting increases of between 5% - 10%, whereas in 2022, this has risen to 28% which is positive news.

This reduction in the level of cuts and a growth in those expecting budget increases hopefully will be something which will improve in the coming years as the value of our parks and greenspaces are more widely appreciated. However, it must be remembered that these figures relate to the next five years and there may be further short-term cuts in 2022 to balance the additional costs of the pandemic.

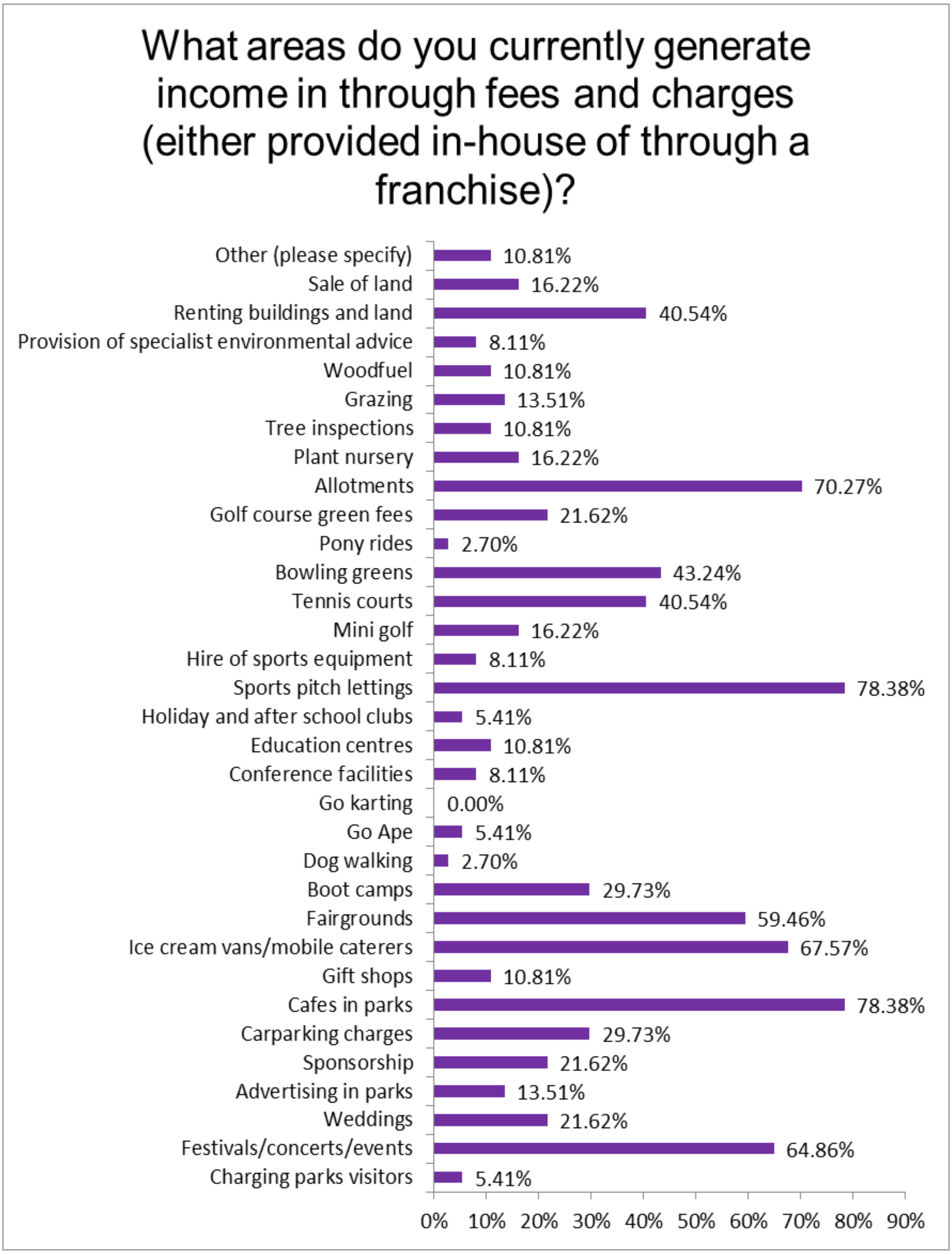
Service Efficiencies

Respondents who are currently looking at a range of efficiencies in order to offset any savings required or improve service improvement in general include: -

- Rethinking staffing levels through reducing management tiers, cutting administrative staff, reducing IT/communications systems updates, introducing larger seasonal staffing, increasing volunteering opportunities, and introducing role flexibility
- Operational changes (moving allotments to self-management, changing horticultural standards to deliver better biodiversity and sports pitch maintenance, reducing grass cutting and increasing tree planting, reductions in bedding plants and replacing them with use of wild flower meadows, replacing annual planting schemes with perennials, prioritising maintenance on greatest need/impact on Council priorities
- Shared contract procurement with neighbouring local authorities
- Increased commercialism (encouraging other authorities to contract council services so income generated can be invested back into the service, increasing local business sponsorship, targets for income generation
- Decreasing subsidised activity (either by increasing allotment/sport charges, charging for car parking)
- Reductions in services (play area and toilet provision)
- Asset transfer of buildings and facilities within parks (cafes, bowling greens, etc.)
- Promotion of sponsorship and donation opportunities
- Introducing new forms of land management such as grazing which results in an income.
- Bringing services back in-house to reduce contractor costs and increased flexibility opportunities.
- More effective location of staff to reduce travel costs
- Increasing Biodiversity through changes to current management operations and the creation of new habitats and reducing carbon footprint.
- More meadow managed grassland in parks and verges as well as stopping grass and weed strimming around obstacles.

Income generation

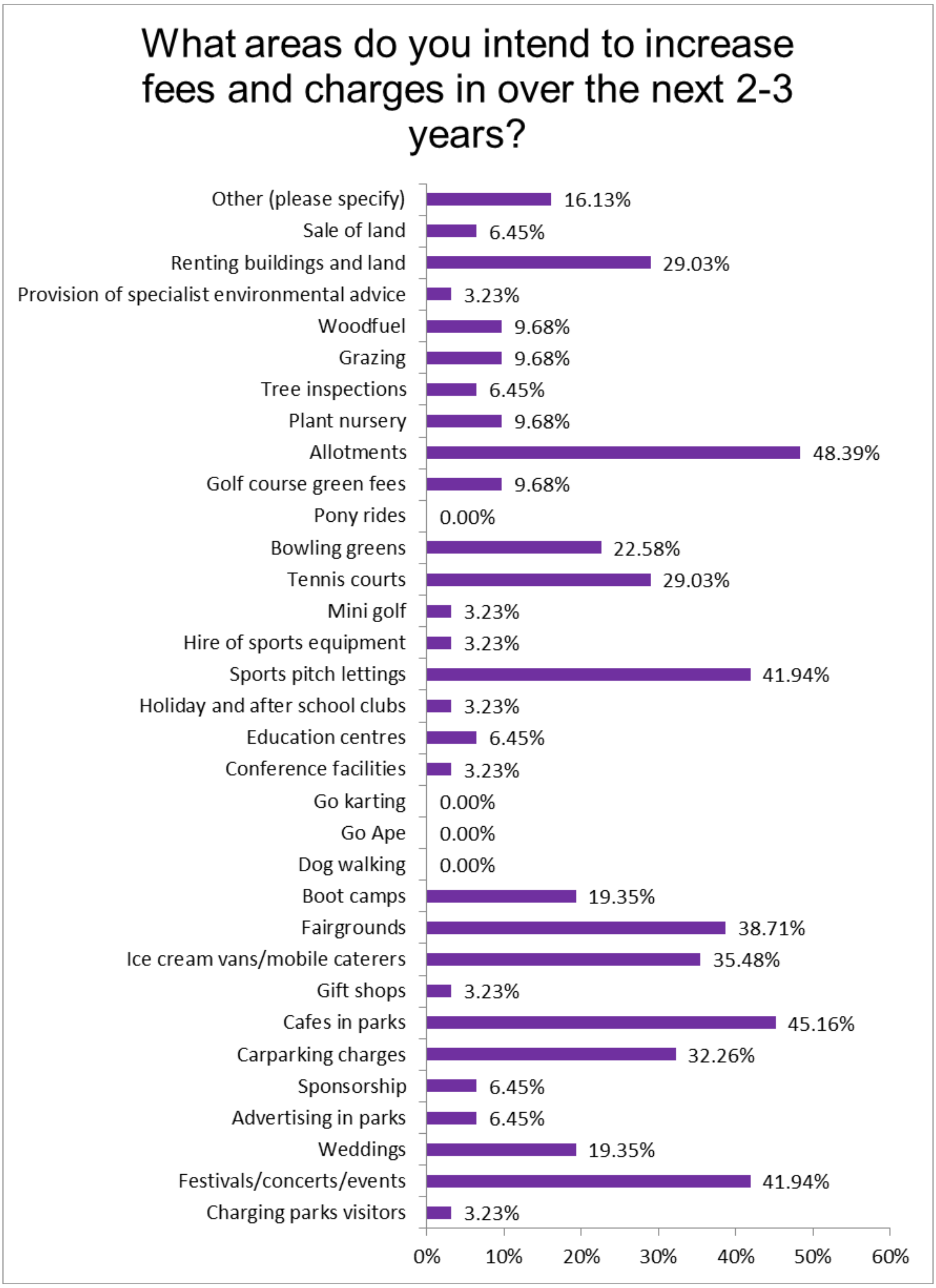
Areas where respondents currently generate income through fees and charges (either provided in-house or through a franchise), include the following as shown in the graph:-



There are no real changes as to the main areas where income is generated, however what is noticeable is a significant fall in the numbers reporting sponsorship as a source of income, possibly as a result of the pandemic when such opportunities have reduced and are still slow to materialise.

81% of respondents indicated that they would be increasing fees in 2022 as opposed to 67% in 2021, undoubtedly due to the loss of income during the main period of the pandemic.

The areas where fees and charges will be increased over the next 2-3 years are shown in the chart below: -



Respondents identified several barriers to generating income, these included:

- 63% cited ‘competing priorities (e.g. budget cuts), a rise on 2021 when the figure was 59%,
- ‘experience of staff in bringing in new income’ at 42% is an increase on 2021 when the figure was 36%, suggesting staff are still lacking skills at raising income.
- ‘political resistance at’ 63%, is a significant rise on 2021 when this stood at 48%. This is possibly due to the realisation that parks are so important to the general populace that they need to offer a free experience rather than a concentration of chargeable activities.
- ‘public resistance’ at 52% is an increase on 2021 when the figure recorded was 47%. These two rises (political/public), as stated previously, may be a reflection of the dependency of the public on parks during the pandemic and especially regarding those families who may not be able to afford to spend money in parks feeling precluded if there are too many income generating schemes present in the parks. It may also be an indication the public are not willing to pay for services within parks which they perceive as being free.
- ‘lack of investment funding’ at 44% is a decrease on 2021 when the figure stood at 53%. Potentially this reduction could be linked with the fact that 25% of respondents stated they expected to have an increase in their budgets over the next 5 years which may well be partly a result of different funding sources other than council funds.
- Other responses included a lack of realistic opportunities available to a small department, a lack of managerial will, the public service ethos, and reductions in staff numbers.

Aside from income from fees and charging, the majority of parks obtain additional funding from one or more of the following sources

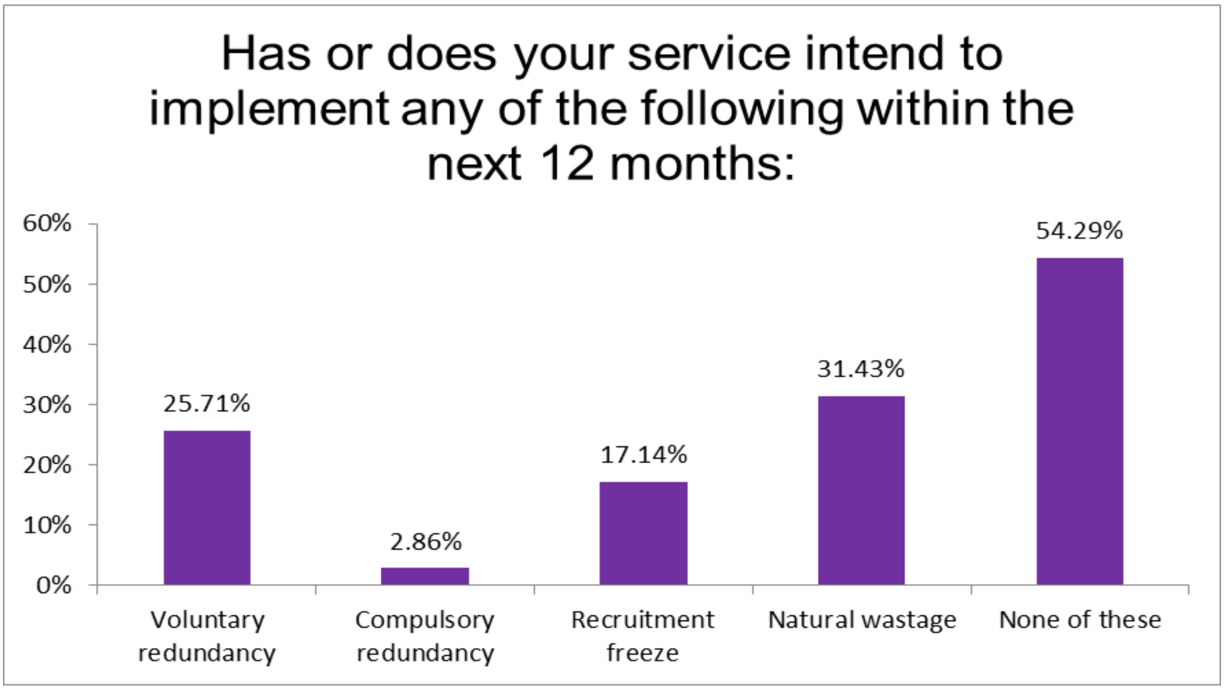
- 78% of respondents have accessed Section 106 money’ shows an increase on 2021 when 77% reported monies from S.106 funding.
- ‘National Lottery Heritage Fund’ 48% which is a rise on 2021 when 45% accessed funding from this source.
- The number of respondents receiving income ‘through friends of parks groups’ shows a minor increase to 51% as opposed to 50% in 2021, which continues to show just how vital such groups are now becoming to their local parks and greenspaces.
- Grant funding from other sources has fallen from 61% in 2021 to 60% in 2022,
- Sponsorship levels have fallen significantly but this is perhaps not unexpected with the reduction in events during 2021.
- 24% of respondents stated they had funding from health-related activities but again many events will not have occurred during 2021.
- Income from ecosystem services is growing in importance.

37% of respondents said they sold their services outside of the Local Authority which is a relatively low return and is somewhat surprising considering the ongoing budget pressures in parks services.

- 16% currently sell services to the ‘private sector’, a decrease from 2021 when 17% recorded selling services to the private sector
- 13% currently selling services to ‘other local authorities’, as opposed to 14% in 2021
- 16% sell services to ‘other public sector bodies’ as opposed to 17% in 2021

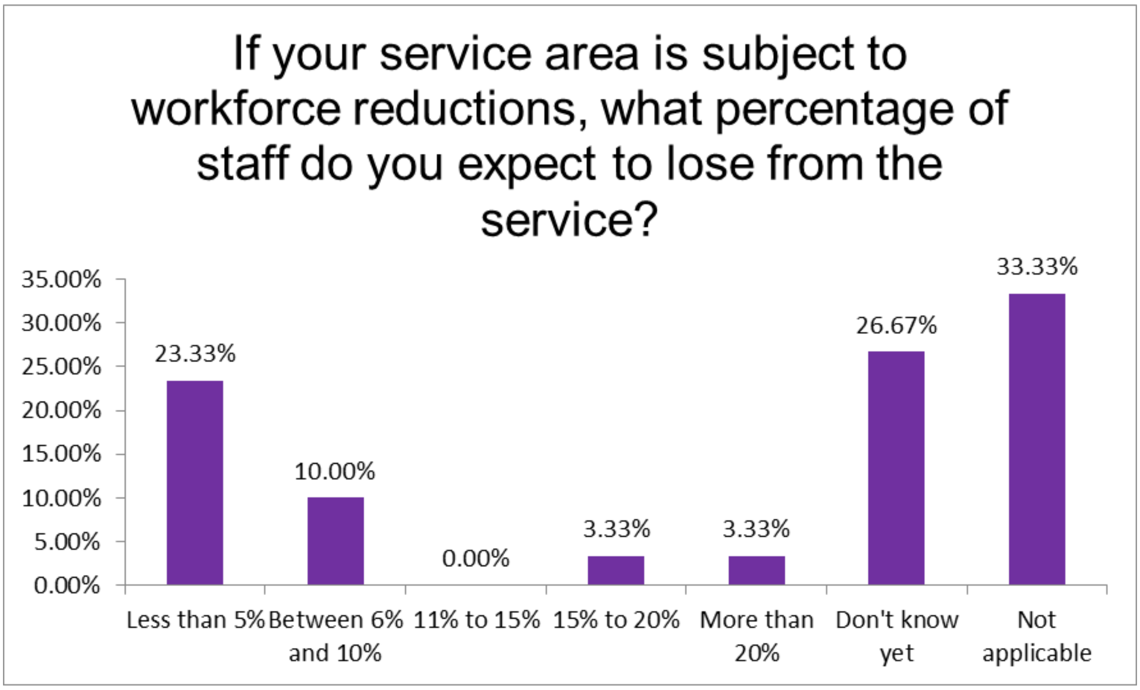
Staffing

In terms of staffing, the survey asked if respondents have or intend to implement any of the following within the next 12 months and the results are as follows:



What was clear from the returns was that there appears to have been a change in the responses compared to 2021, with reductions in all but natural wastage and the decision to apply no staffing reductions –‘none of these’. The most noticeable reductions has occurred in the use of a recruitment freeze which stood at 29.2% in 2021 which has now fallen to 17.14% in 2022. Compulsory redundancies which stood at 10.7% in 2021 has now fallen to under 3% in 2022.. This change in the decision to not reduce or freeze staff positions may reflect the increased need of parks managers to maintain parks during the pandemic and also the potential exposure to gaps in services through the loss of volunteers during this period.

Respondents who were expecting staff reductions were asked what percentage of staff they expect to lose from the service, and the results were as follows: -



Staffing levels are under more scrutiny following the cost of the pandemic to local authorities and some degree of reductions in service costs may be necessary. However, on a more positive note, where staffing levels may need to be reduced the largest proportion of staff losses were expected to be less than 5%.

There has been some change in staff absence levels when compared to 2021, relating undoubtedly to the impacts of the pandemic, with 36% of respondents saying absence levels were too high or above average compared to 22% in 2021. It is anticipated this view will change as the impacts of the pandemic wanes and measures such as testing and self-isolation come to an end.

Training

In terms of training, 70% thought that the training budget will stay the same over the next 12 months and 24% thought that it was going to decrease. 6% of respondents said their training budgets would increase perhaps showing the recognition that the changing role of parks professionals is requiring new and additional skills.

61% of respondents stated that they currently have apprentices, which is a significant increase on 2021 when only 45% reported that they had apprentices and, 71% are planning to recruit apprentices in 2022/23 which is a heartening sign. Of those that hadn't retained all apprentices from the last recruitment round, they stated that this was dependent on suitable vacancies being available and the achievement of good standards of work. Responses on future plans for apprentices indicated that the majority of respondents are maintaining apprenticeship programmes. Other responses included seeking to increase numbers if budgets allow or in some cases having to either reduce numbers or terminate the programme altogether.

Numbers of parks and visitor numbers

The State of the Market survey has tracked the change in responses since 2008 to the question 'Overall how do you expect the total number of parks (including playgrounds) to change over the next year?' 54% of respondents expected the total number to stay the same, as opposed to 60% in 2021, with 24% expecting a slight decrease as opposed to 13% in 2020 and the remaining 22% expecting a slight or significant increase over the next year which is a slight fall on 2021 when only 27% expected any level of increase.

When asked about the number of visitors to formal parks during the past year, almost 90% said they had seen increases (94% in 2021). 5% felt visitor numbers had remained the same (5% in 2021) and 5% believed visitor numbers had decreased (1% in 2020). This continuing increase in visitors is an important point both as a reflection of how important parks have been during the pandemic but also the fact this increased use signifies a greater recognition of the need for such spaces and the proper level of investment and maintenance to what have now been recognised as critical infrastructure for public health and well-being.

Only 40% of survey respondents monitor actual visitor numbers through a mixture of footfall/visitor/gate monitors, car monitors/car park payment monitors, audits and visitor surveys. Better visitor number monitoring is crucial if parks managers are to have auditable statistical evidence that these assets are well used and therefore worthy of ongoing investment and protection.

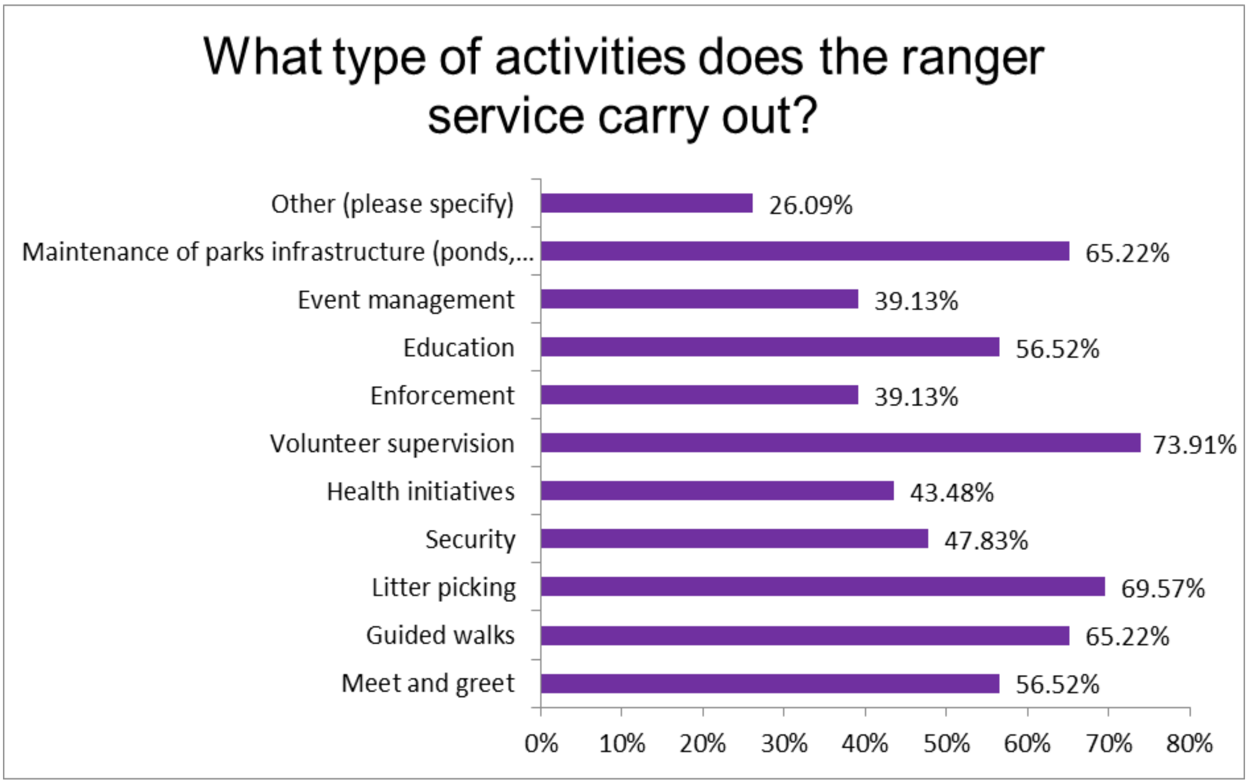
Service delivery

87% of respondents currently have in-house services and 71% expect this to be the case in 2-3 years' time, which is a slight decrease on 2021 when 74% expected in-house service provision to be the likelihood in 2-3 years' time. When asked how respondents expected the service to be managed in the near future, only 29% expected a mix of in-house, trust, external and community management a slight rise on 2021.
However, of these alternative options, a large percentage expected the management of parks to stay in-house with the maintenance responsibilities being provided by an external contractor.

Park Rangers

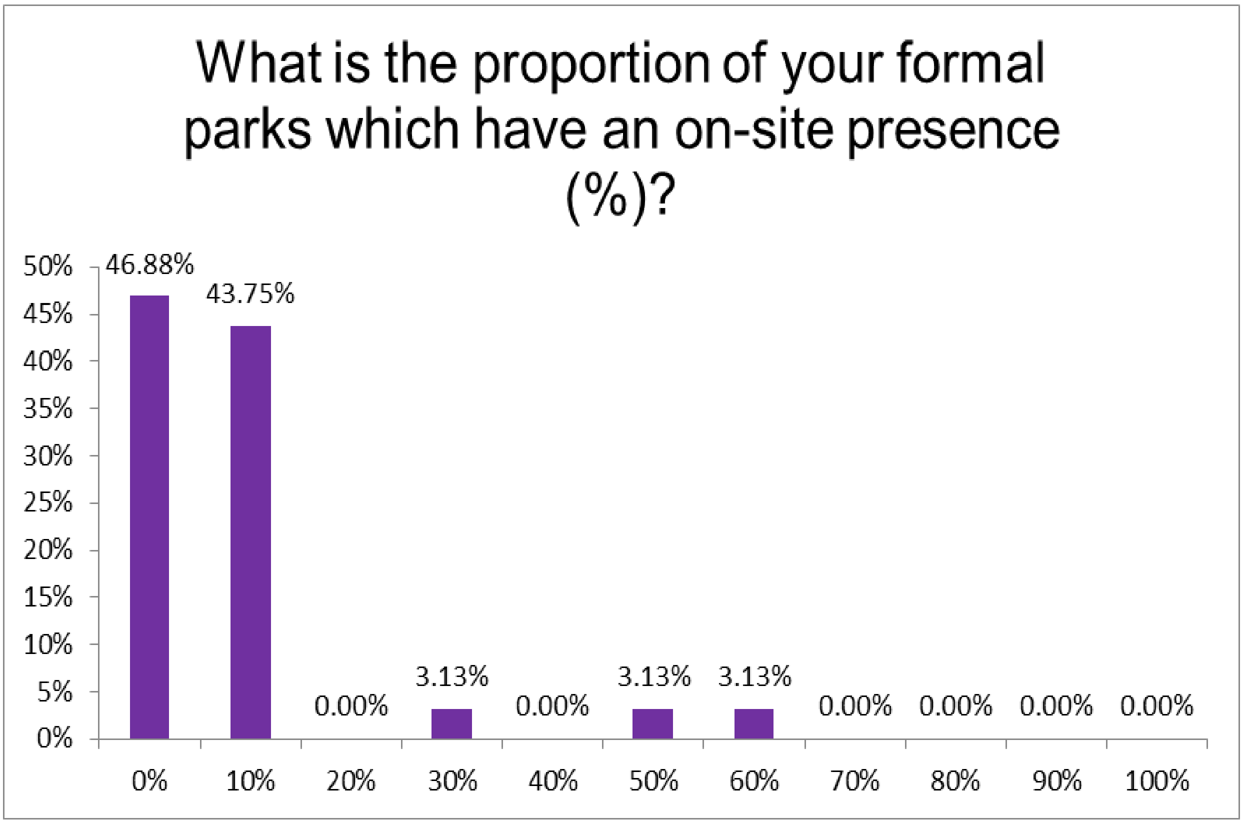
50% reported having parks rangers (60% have 1-5 FTE Ranger posts), which is a 1% increase on 2021.
The roles are varied and the chart below show the variety of responsibilities Rangers carry out. The most significant increase in roles is with regards to education, providing guided walks and delivering meet and greet services. The amount of time being spent on litter picking and infrastructure maintenance duties is still a major part of their roles but does appear to be reducing slightly.

More details on responses to this question can be found in the graph below:-



On Site presence

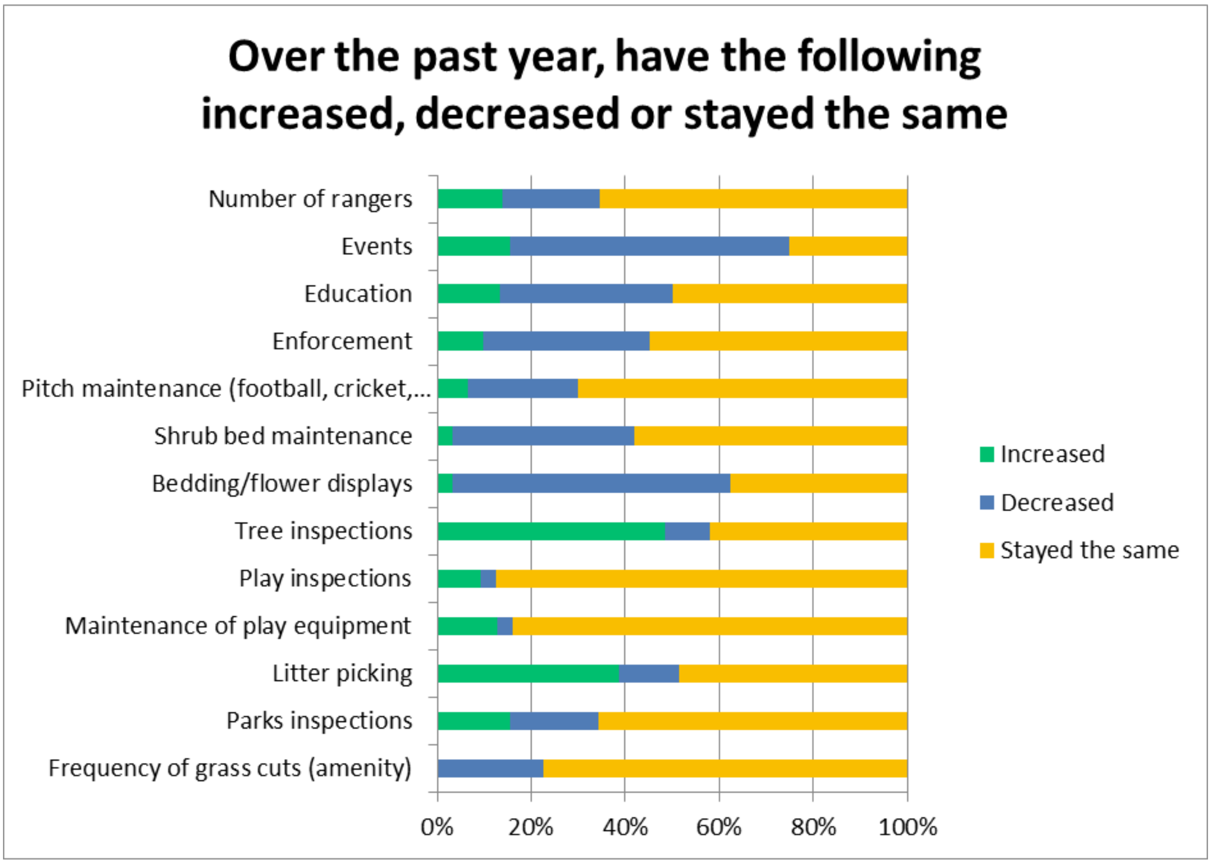
When asked about the proportion of formal parks which have an on-site presence the chart below shows the responses received.



Clearly the days of a permanent on-site presence ('the parkie'), have long gone, with very few parks now having permanent staff assigned to a park. Those which do have a permanent on site presence are likely to be 'destination' parks, where income generation is covering the costs. The reduction in Ranger numbers over the years and fewer volunteers during the pandemic will also have impacted on the lack of a permanent presence.

Service standards and quality of service

The survey asked, over the past year, which services have increased, decreased or stayed the same. The respondents answered: -



The main areas of increase were linked very much to increased visitor numbers, the need to ensure social distancing and also the ability to carry out single person inspections often relating to safety aspect such a tree inspections. These were:

- Litter picking
- Tree inspections
- Enforcement

Perhaps not surprisingly the main areas of decrease were in relation to events, educational experiences, shrub and flower bed maintenance and frequency of grass cutting, all of which would have impacted on the ability to socially distance and the fact employees were being redeployed to support other services such as waste collection and bereavement services.

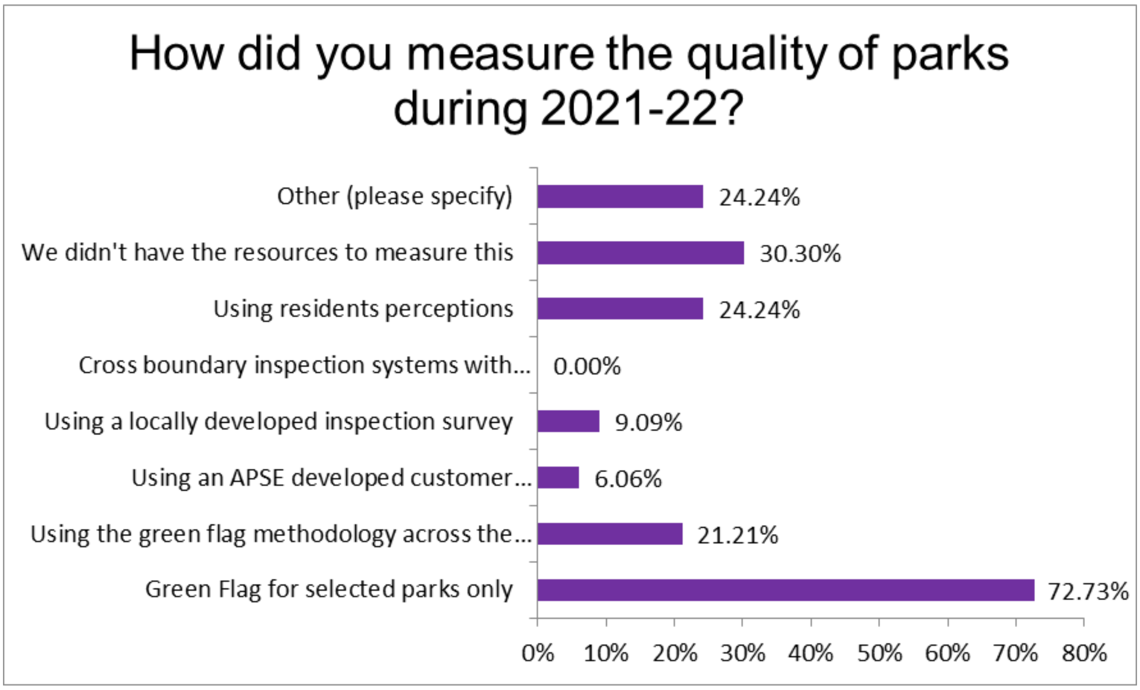
Grass cutting frequency

In this years' survey, we asked for respondents to state their average number of grass cuts (amenity) per annum. Although a number of cuts depends on a range of factors from weather conditions and land use. The highest return showed that 38% of respondents were undertaking 9-14 cuts, 34% stating 15-18 cuts with a further 26% stating 8 cuts or less.

10% used Cylinder machines for estate and highways grass cuts, 34% used Rotary, 35% used Flail and 51% used a mixture of the above. For the first time respondents mentioned the use of robotic mowers being used.

Quality Standards

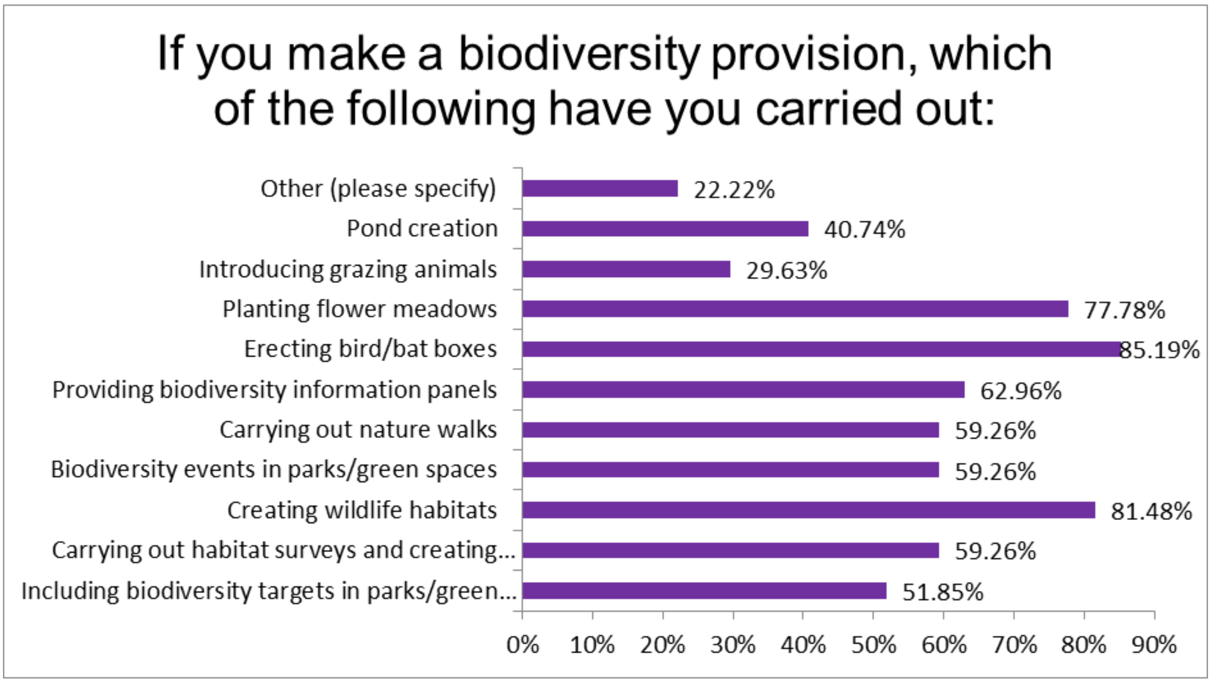
The survey asked how quality of parks was measured during 2018/19 and how respondents intended to measure this in 2022/23 and the results were as follows: -



APSE believes it is vitally important within the current economic climate for Councils to continue to measure the quality, cost-effectiveness and customer satisfaction of parks. APSE offers a performance benchmarking service for parks, horticulture and open spaces called Performance Networks and runs the Land Audit Management System (LAMS). More information about LAMS can be found here which allows local authorities to closely monitor their parks and green space performance. The use of APSE's LAMS system has tripled over the past two years and with the introduction of an App to reduce paper recording requirements, it is expected this will lead to further increased usage over the next twelve months.

Biodiversity

Over 82% of respondents make a specific provision for promoting biodiversity in parks and green spaces. Of those that make specific provisions, the respondents have carried out the following:-

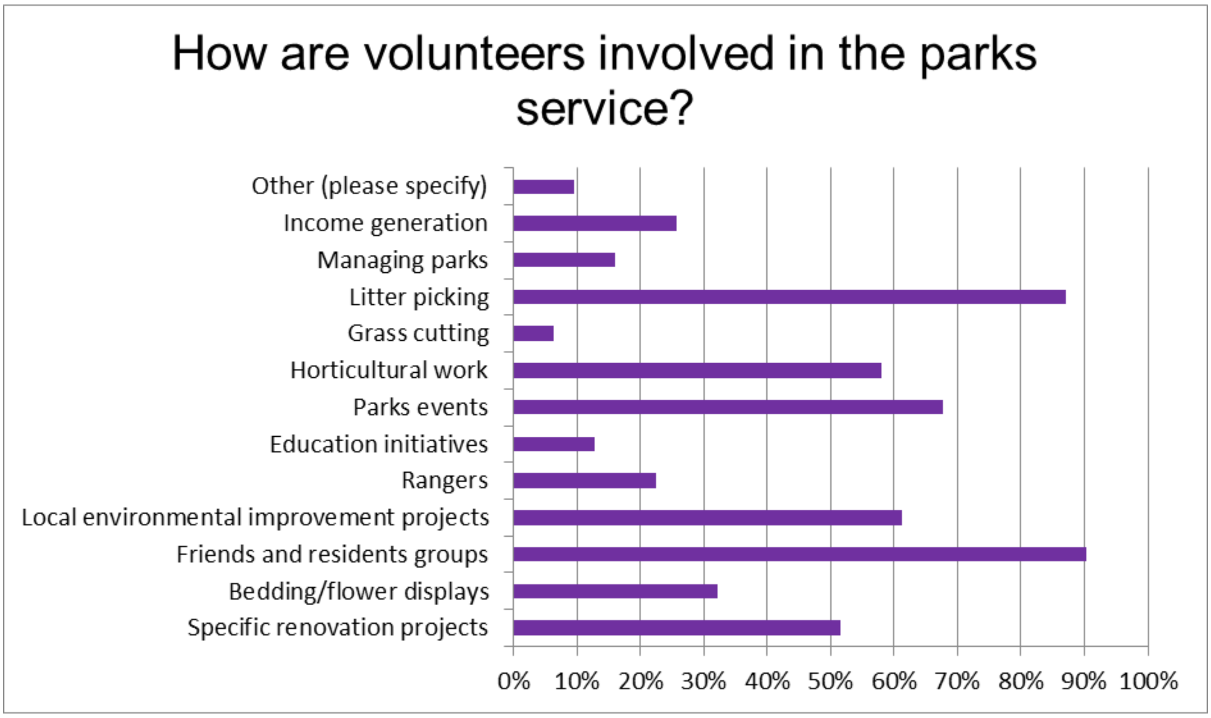


There has been increases in biodiversity provision, although there has been a slight fall in biodiversity events in parks due to the pandemic. In addition, 72% of respondents are actively or considering ways to reduce the amount of chemicals they use to manage their parks and greenspaces.

More naturalised planting is also increasing in popularity both as an option to increase opportunities for biodiversity but also as a potential reducer of high frequency maintenance costs.

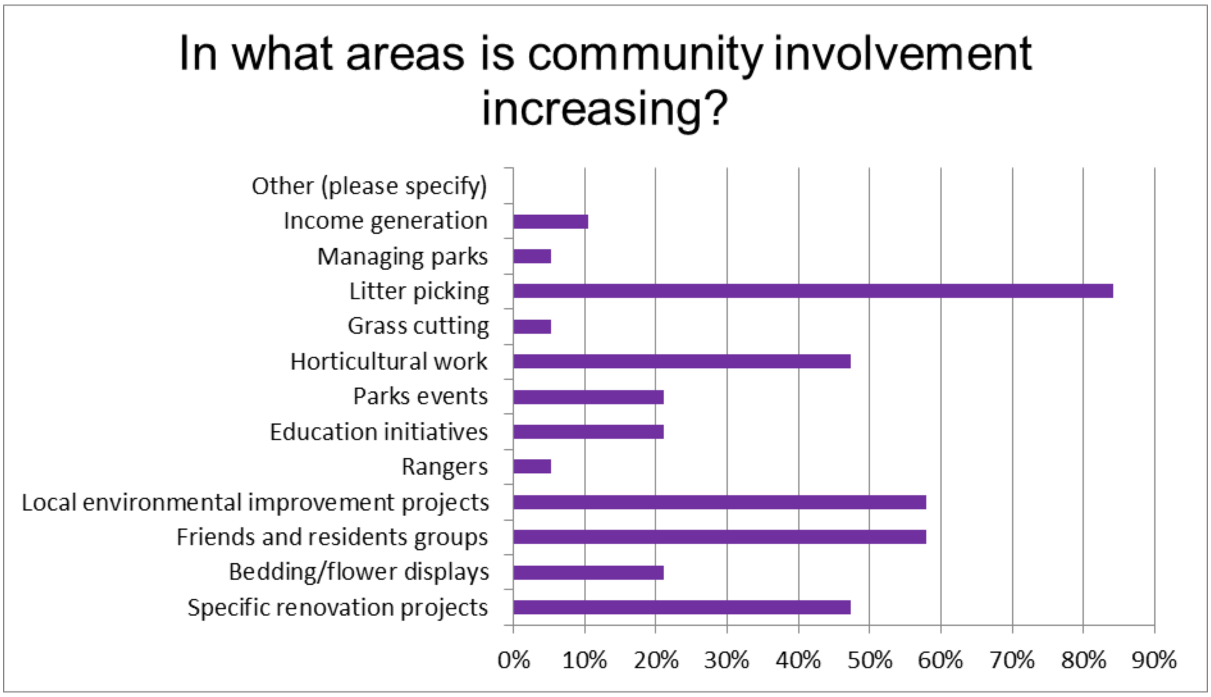
Community and volunteer involvement

94% of respondents had friends of parks groups operating in their localities.
The survey asked how volunteers are involved in the parks service and results were as follows: -



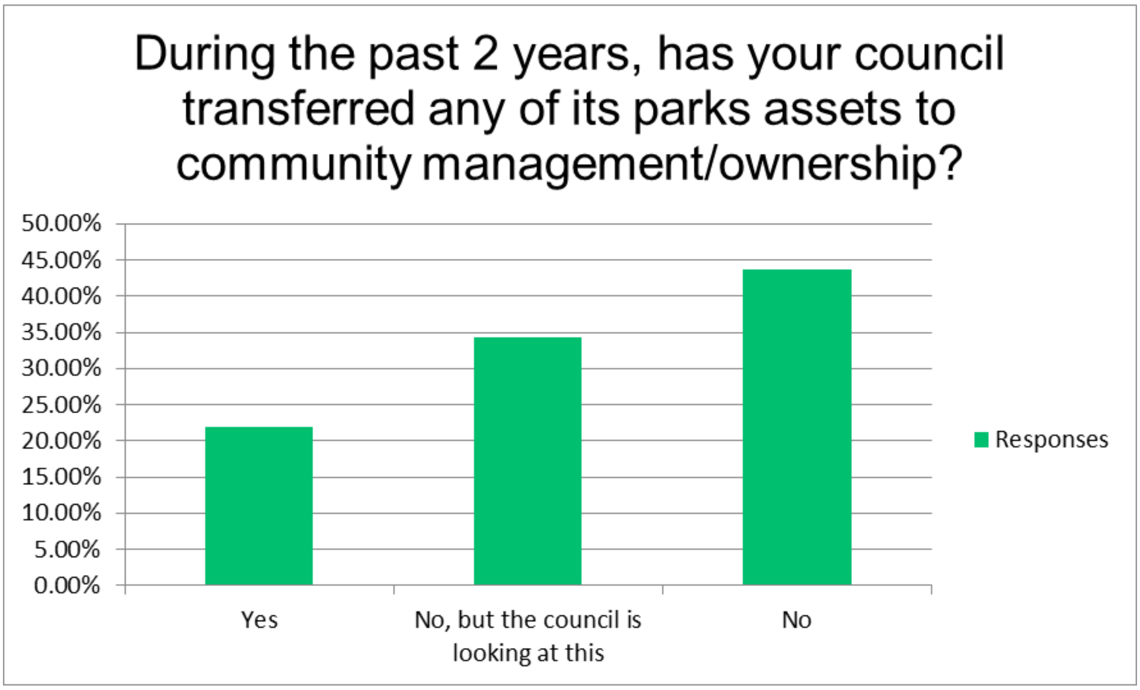
The results show that volunteers tend to be involved more in friends and residents' groups and specific projects like parks events. There has been a rise in the number of volunteers involved in litter picking, education initiatives, income generation and specific renovation projects.

53% of respondents thought that community sector involvement in parks is increasing either slightly or significantly in the following areas:



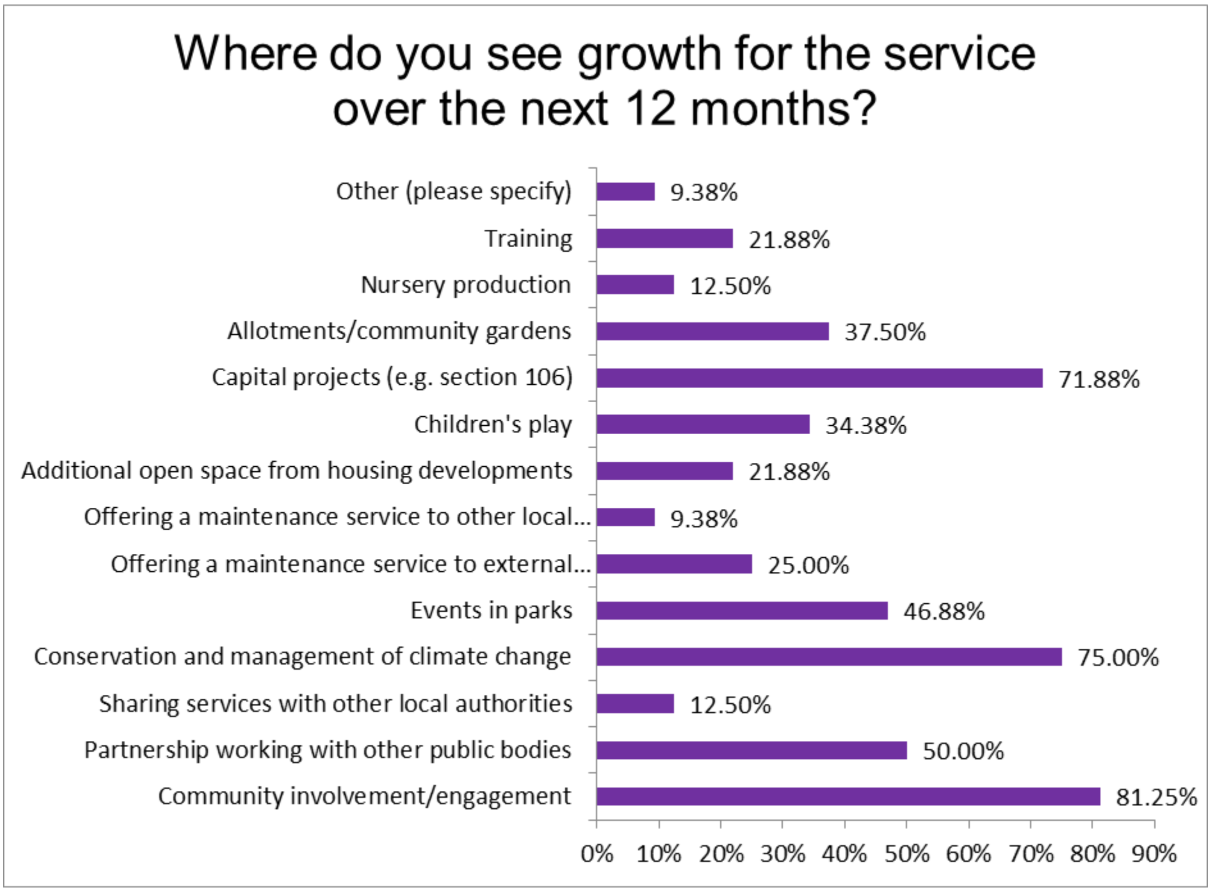
Transfer of assets

When asked 'during the past 2 years whether your council transferred any of its Park's assets to community management/ownership', 21% said yes, a rise of 2% on 2021) and 34% said their council is looking at this (a 15% rise on 2021).44% said they were not considering any form of asset transfer.

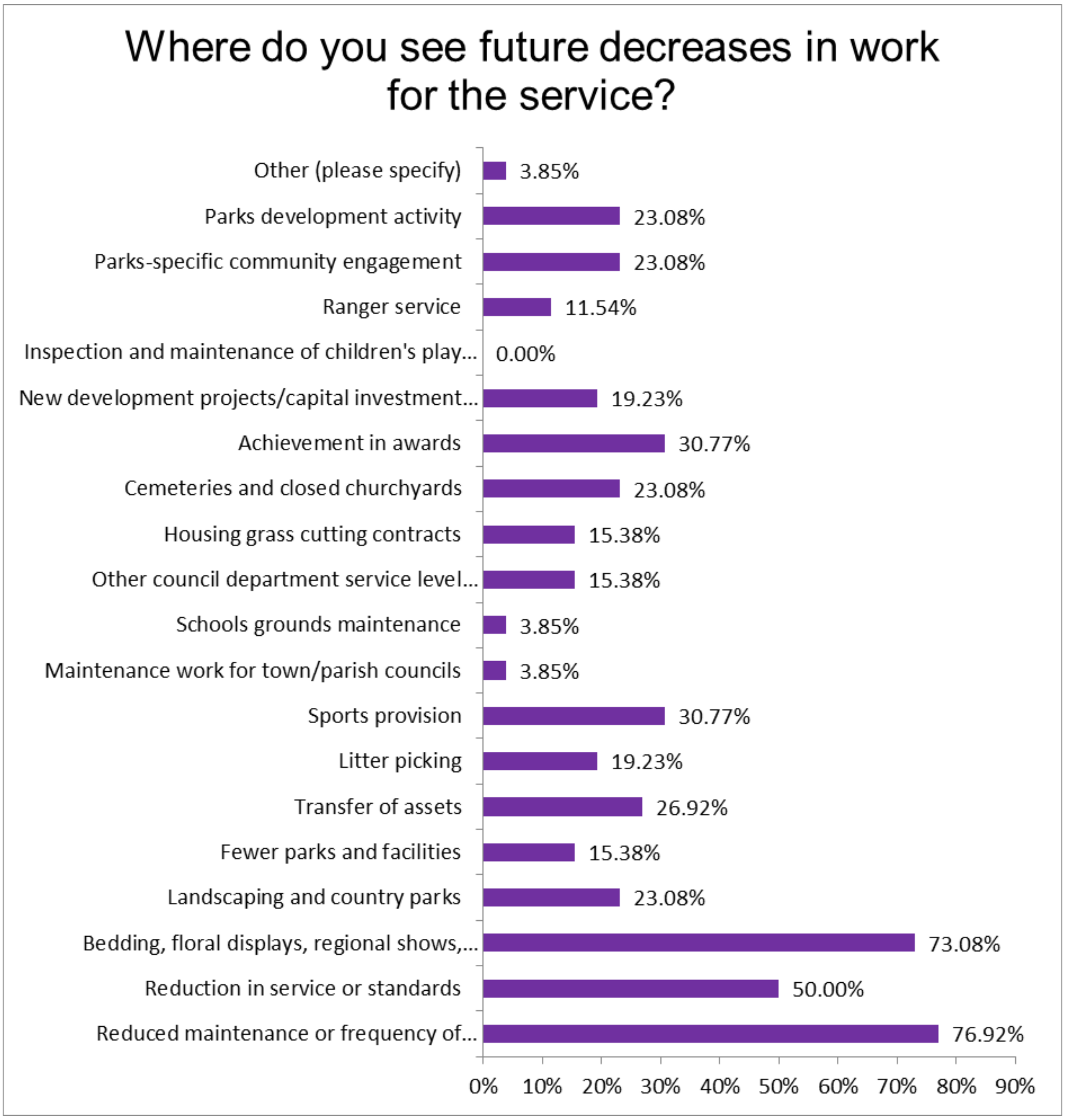


Future growth and decreases in work for the service

Respondents were asked where they saw growth for the service over the next 12 months. The most notable change on 2022 are with regards to growth in the areas of capital projects anticipated and community involvement and engagement. The full results are shown in the graph below.



The survey also asked where they saw future decreases in work for the service and the breakdown is as follows:



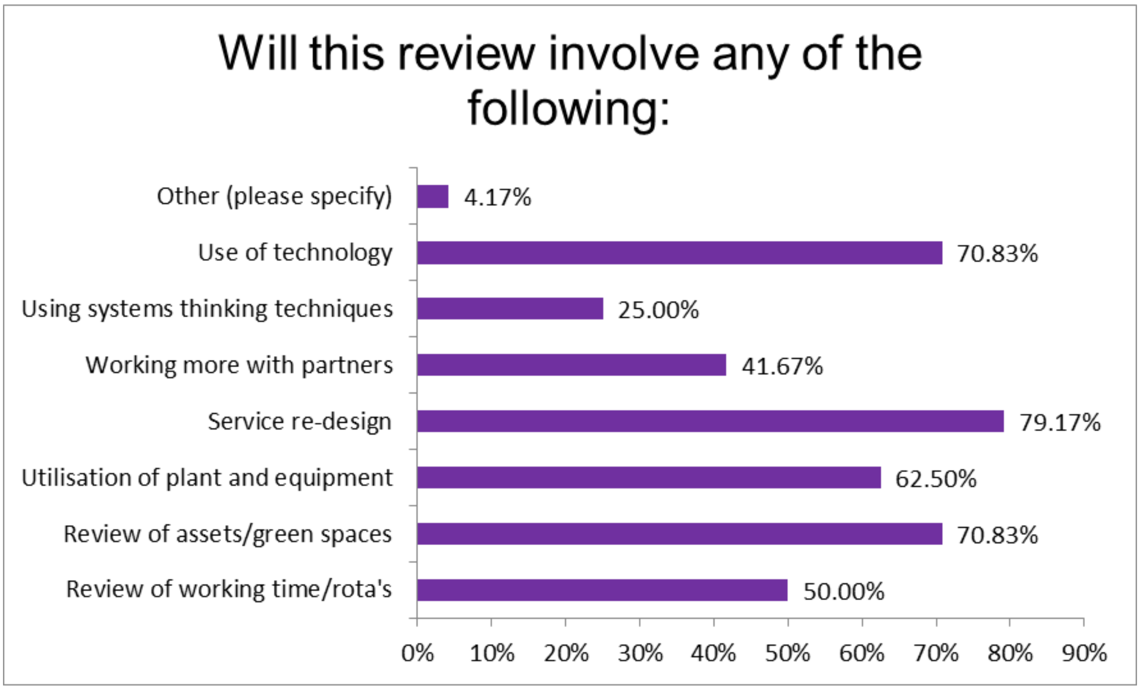
The most notable elements of this table when compared with 2021 results is that there are slight increases in reductions in core work such as reductions in service standards, reduced maintenance frequencies, housing grass cutting contracts and maintenance work for town/parish councils.

The number of respondents suggesting such areas will decrease compared to 2021 suggests that despite some signs of budget pressure being less severe, the lack of optimism that these areas of work will not be cut any further, is still a worry

Service reviews

15% of respondents had recently completed a service review and 50% were currently underway. A further 18% plan to do so in the next 1-2 years. Surprisingly, 15% recorded they had not or did not intend to undertake a service review.

According to respondents, these service reviews will involve the following: -



APSE Comment

Undoubtedly 2021/22 has been massively affected by the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Parks have been called upon to meet public health and well-being needs like never before, with over 90% of survey respondents stating that they had experienced increases in visitor numbers. At the same time as these increased visits, many Parks staff have been redeployed to support key services such as waste collection and bereavement services.

Due to the need for social distancing, many traditional parks events and visitor amenities have been closed resulting in significant reductions in income, which many parks are dependent upon to meet service needs.

In addition, many of the volunteers and Friends Groups have had their activities dramatically curtailed, both operationally and through the grants and additional income they can bring into the parks. Hopefully as the impact of the pandemic fades then many of these problems will be resolved

However from the responses received to this survey, it is quite clear that despite the impacts of the pandemic, ongoing service budget cuts, managers and front-line staff are continuing to provide quality parks and greenspaces.

Nevertheless, there is a real belief amongst parks professionals that service quality may start to be seriously affected as a result of the ongoing pressures on budgets, changes to maintenance frequencies and a need for investment and now more worryingly, albeit potentially short-term, the additional cost imposed on councils by the Coronavirus pandemic which will also take its toll.

Based on some of the results there does seem to be some hope that the scale of budget cuts is reducing, and in some cases, budgets are actually increasing, with some respondents looking at budget increases of between 5-10%, although such gains will need to be sustained in the long-term if the losses experienced over the last few years are to be recovered.

Local councils are working hard to meet these challenges through making efficiencies and looking for income generation opportunities to plug funding gaps. It is therefore welcome that within the survey examples of income generation and the acquisition of additional funding is growing. However, it is noticeable in this year's results that there has been an increase in the degree of resistance to income generation from the public and some elected members, possibly as a result of the refuges parks and greenspaces provided for residents during the pandemic. Therefore, the message appears to be that the drive to generate income needs to be tempered with the ability to ensure there is still free public access to the UK's parks and greenspaces.

Recent changes to local government finance means as councils are now more reliant upon business rates, council tax and other forms or local raised income streams, the value of a quality greenspace should not be underestimated in their ability to attract commercial investment and new housing developments. Therefore, if ongoing budget pressures to these services are allowed to continue then the impact could have much wider implications for local councils. Moreover, the ambitions of the levelling up agenda will not be delivered if there is a remaining disparity in access to quality parks and greenspaces, particularly as this is a known determinant in health inequalities.

The growing need to recognise the value of our parks and greenspaces both to public well-being and health and also to our local economies, has become abundantly clear over the past two years as whole communities have descended on parks and greenspaces as a place of solace.

The announcements of sporadic pockets of funding will help some of those parks in need of renovation and is welcome, but it still falls well short of the hundreds of millions of pounds which has been lost from parks budgets over the past decade.

It is also apparent that using alternative methods to fund and maintain parks, such as the increasing use of volunteers and trust models are still being mooted, however it has to be realised that these resources are often only available for localised projects and will not be enough to be a credible alternative to local authority historical experience and knowledge which has almost 200 years of history.

Therefore, any transference of responsibility of our parks and greenspaces needs to be considered carefully if free access is to be maintained. The Parks Inquiry report, although considering the need for mixed models in parks management, nevertheless still points towards ownership of parks being the role of local authorities, where the skills and resources still sit.

It is not surprising that reducing standards and reduced facilities are common themes in comments recorded in the survey. As a result of ongoing budget pressures and now the negative financial impacts of the pandemic, it will be critical that service resources are targeted more effectively in those areas where the public use and greenspace maintenance need is at its highest. Therefore, there needs to be a greater appreciation by Government and senior local authority leaders and members of the increasing number of benefits parks and greenspace brings, many beyond health and wellbeing such as, climate change mitigation, flood alleviation, biodiversity opportunities contributors towards cleaner air etc. It should also be noted that many of these benefits sit within targets identified as corporate goals outlined in such as Climate and Ecological Emergency and Local Plans. Indeed, both climate change and biodiversity issues have clearly come to the fore in this year’s survey results, with councils striving to meet climate change targets and protect and enhance biodiversity.

It has never been clearer that there is a growing demand from the public for access to greenspaces as our roads become congested and financial constraints in the home mean people are more-needy of free access to pleasant and accessible greenspaces; the recent pandemic has made this demand even stronger.

Local authorities are successfully introducing new and innovative ways to sustainably manage parks whether this be through income generation, partnerships or alternative forms of funding. Local councils are also promoting the multiple benefits that greenspaces provide to other stakeholders and gaining funding from these sources in recognition of these benefits.

With all these considerations in mind, APSE feels there needs to be a balanced and proportionate response to the many concerns being raised about the future of the UK's public parks.

From the results in this survey, it is hoped that the positive and innovative work local authorities are continuing to deliver as part of their desire to maintain cleaner, greener and safer parks and green spaces, in spite of the impact of austerity, will come to fruition. APSE recently produced its own report, entitled ***'State of UK Public Parks 2021'*** which highlights many of the issues now facing parks managers. The report can be accessed using the link and downloaded free of charge. State of the UK Parks 2021

It is hoped that Government and other stakeholders will, in recognition of this innovation and best practice, provide the necessary support for local authorities and their parks managers, in developing a sustainable future for the UK's parks and the multitude of benefits they bring.

Get Involved

APSE member councils can sign up to attend the FREE APSE Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Advisory Group using this link

Other services and networks

APSE member authorities also 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 authority's membership of APSE and all end with informal 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:-

- Building cleaning
- Catering
- Cemeteries and crematoria
- Environmental health and trading standards
- Housing, construction and building maintenance
- Local authorities, commercialisation, income and trading network
- Parks, horticultural and ground maintenance
- Renewables and climate change network

- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Sports and leisure management
- Vehicle maintenance and transport
- Waste management, refuse collection and street cleansing

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