



membership resources

## **State of the Market Survey 2012**

### **Local Authority Allotment Services**



**Briefing 12/08**

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## **Local Authority Allotment Services State of the Market 2012**

APSE conducted an on-line allotment survey during January and February 2012. This follows on from the previous survey which was conducted in December 2008 ([click here to access the briefing paper from the previous survey](#)) and a briefing paper compiled from an APSE email query which was sent out in December 2010 ([click here to access the briefing paper](#)). The 2012 survey asks similar questions to these previous surveys which allows for comparisons to be drawn from previous years. In total, 131 responses were received from local authorities throughout the UK. This report identifies the key findings.

### **Results from the survey**

#### **a) Number and management of allotments**

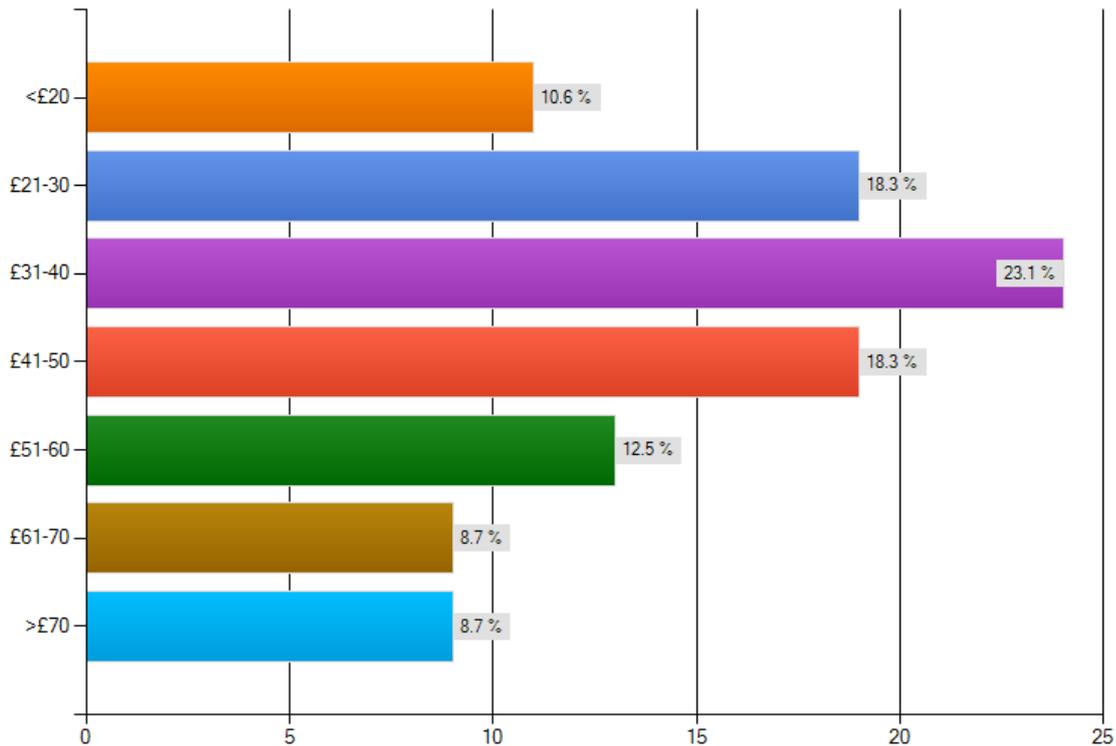
93% of respondents answered that they have council managed allotments within their authority. From the respondents that answered 'no' to this question; 75% stated that demand has been expressed for these.

In terms of management of the allotments, 79% stated that they have allotments which are managed by a council officer and 21% stated that these are managed through a site committee or association.

#### **b) Cost of allotments**

The majority of respondents stated that the cost per annum to rent an allotment in 2011-12 was between £21 and £50. The full breakdown is as follows:

**Cost per annum to rent an allotment plot in 2011-12 (Note: if you have different costs according to size of land, please use the cost for a typical 250 square meter plot including water).**

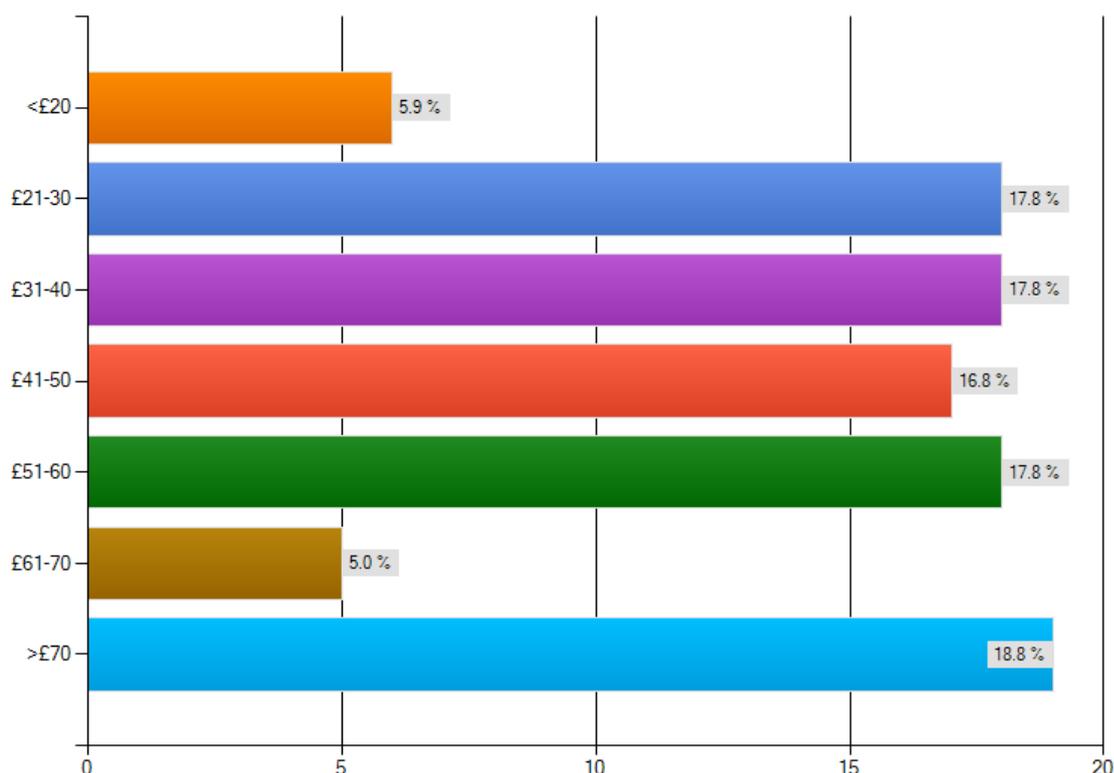


71.3% of respondents are reporting a cost of £31 or above. In comparison, the 2008 survey had reported even though the average cost to rent an allotment in 2008-09 was between £21 and £40, 60% of respondents expected the rent costs for 2009-10 to be above £31.

The 2012 survey asked about previous years increases in the rent of an allotment plot and 45% of respondents stated that there has been an increase in this (beyond an inflationary increase) during the past 2 years.

When respondents were asked about the expected cost per annum to rent an allotment next year (in 2012-13), 76.2% answered that they expected this to be £31 or above and 18.8% answered that this is above £70, representing an overall increase from the current cost paid. The full breakdown is as follows:

**Expected cost per annum to rent an allotment plot in 2012-13**



The majority (73%) of respondents claimed that the charge is directly related to the area of the allotment (e.g. square meters) and 18% stated that this is standard regardless of the size. There was also a split in the respondents who answered that concessionary prices are offered (65% yes, 35% no). From those who offer concessions, the breakdown is as follows:

- 97% offer discounts for pensioners, over 60's and/or retired people. The majority of these (70%) offer a 40-50% discount.
- 71% offer discounts to the unemployed or those on income support. The majority of these (59%) offer a 40-50% discount.
- 69% offer discounts to people with disabilities. The majority of these (53%) offer a 40-50% discount.
- 29% offer discounts to students. Of these, 26% offer a discount of 20-30% and 32% offer a discount of 40-50%.

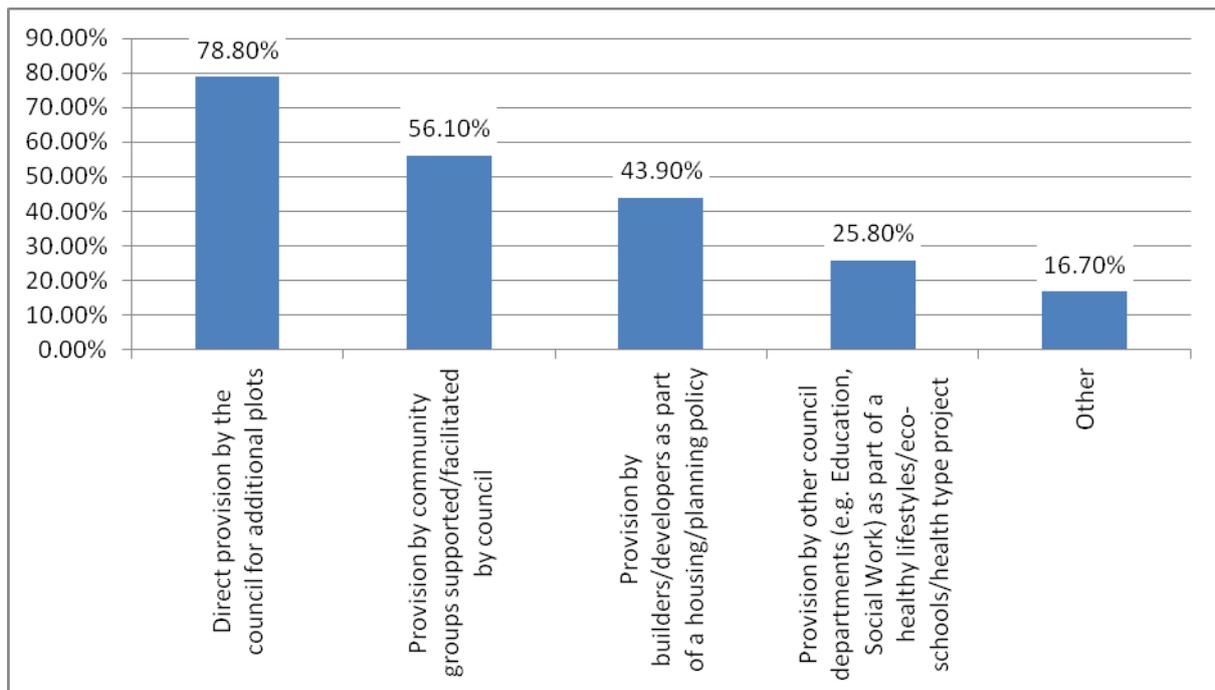
### **c) Size of allotments**

In terms of the size of plots available, 37% stated that they have a standard size for a plot, and out of these, the most common size was 250-299 square meters. When asked for the total number of allotment sites in the local authority, the majority was 1-15 (55%), but this ranged to over 40 (11%). Again, there was a range of responses in terms of allotment plots, with 56% having 750 plots or less, but 5% having over 3,000 plots.

Waiting lists have proved the demand for allotments with 59% of respondents stating that they have 100-600 people on the waiting list for an allotment and 12% claiming over 1,000 people on their waiting list.

#### **d) Future increases in the number of allotments**

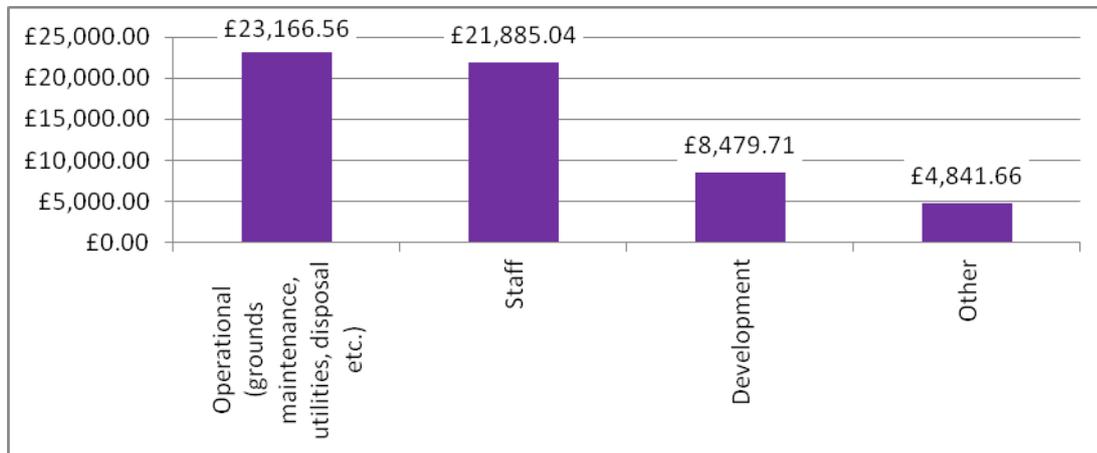
64% of respondents stated that their council plans to increase the number of allotments. From those respondents who stated that the number of allotments is planned to increase, the method of doing this is shown in the diagram below:



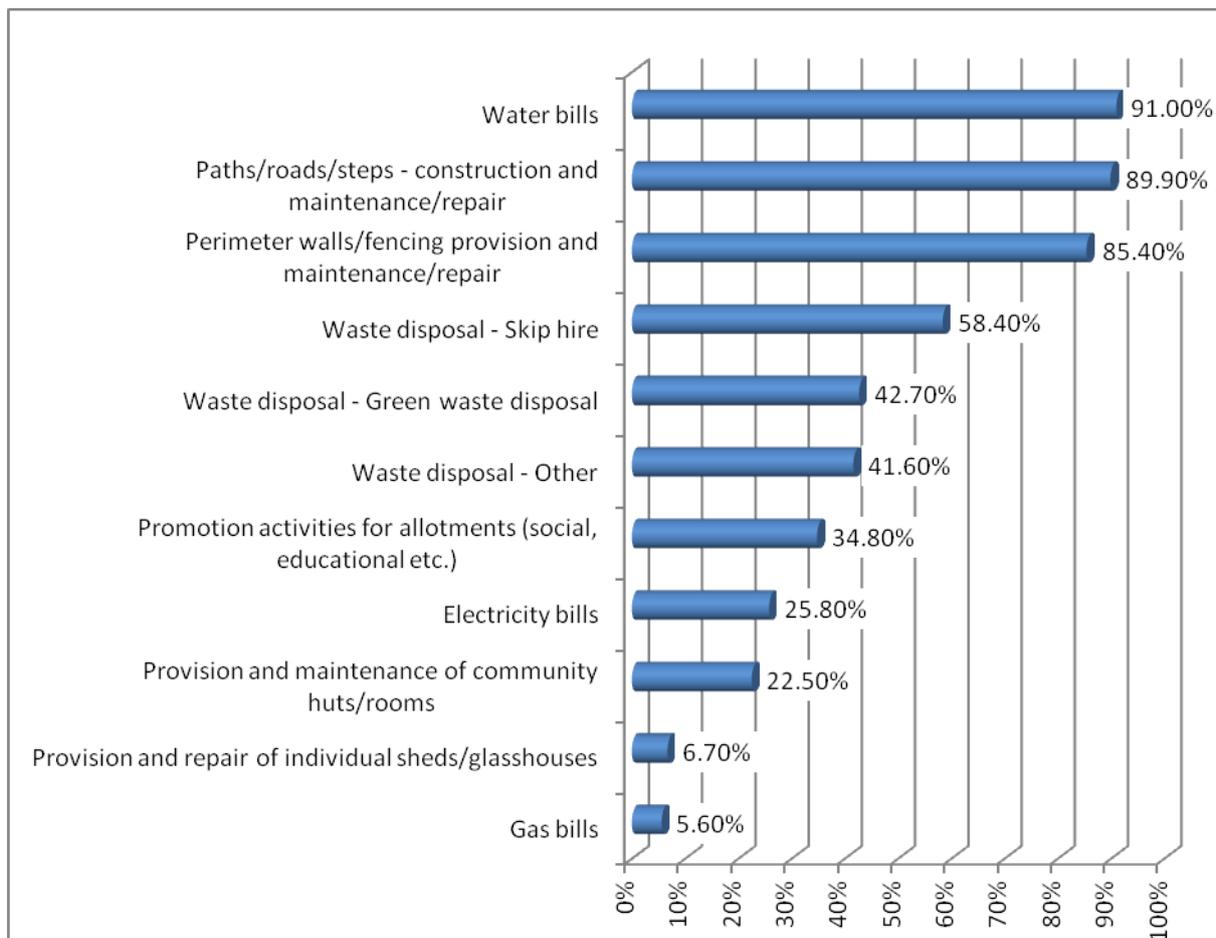
This shows an increase in the proportion provided by community groups supported/facilitated by the council from the survey conducted in 2008 (from 29% in 2008 to 56% in 2012). This may be as a result of 'Big Society' and Localism with a drive for greater involvement of community groups in council services. It may also be a reflection of the reducing budgets for local authority parks services and subsequent reductions in the capacity of managers to take on further responsibilities or assets.

### e) Budget for allotments

The average annual budgets for allotments were stated as follows:



The largest difference in the average budgets allocation above compared to the survey results in 2008 is in the area of development; a reduction from an average of £34,373 in 2008 to £8,479 in 2012. This may reflect a focus on maintenance as opposed to developments in allotments as a result of budget reductions in local authorities. Respondents stated that their budgets include responsibility for the following:

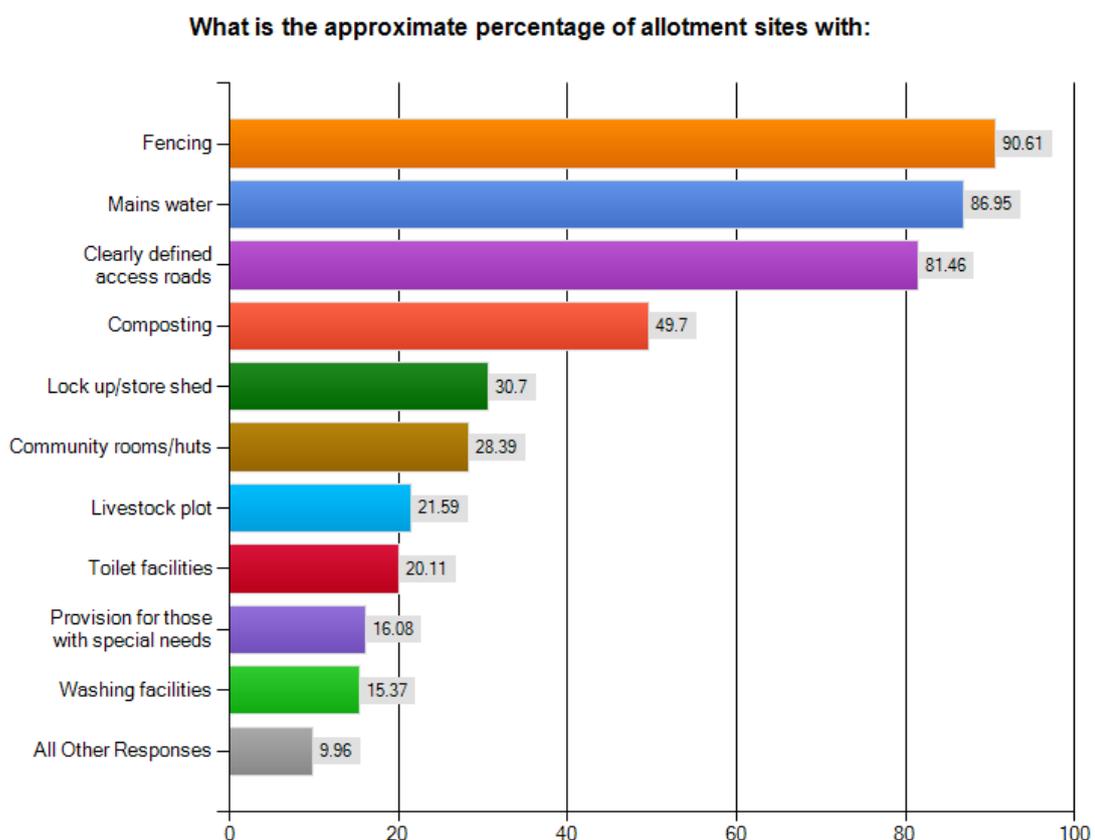


There has been a marked increase in the percentage of authorities whose budgets include water bills (from 83% in 2008 to 91% in 2012) and green waste disposal (from 33% in 2008 to 43% in 2012). There has been a reduction in the percentage of authorities whose budgets include provision and maintenance of community huts/rooms (from 31% in 2008 to 22.5% in 2012).

87% currently subsidise managing allotments (they do not recover full costs from managing these). Of the other respondents, 12% break even and only 1% make a surplus.

### f) Facilities at allotment sites

Most allotment sites have the provision of water, fencing and clearly defined access roads. Some allotment sites have other services such as composting, livestock plots, community rooms, lock up/store sheds and toilet facilities. The full breakdown in terms of the average % of allotment sites with other facilities is as follows:



There has been an improvement in the average percentage of allotment sites with composting since 2008 with an increase from 44% in 2008 to 50% in 2012, as well as an increase in the percentage of allotment sites with community rooms/huts (from 23% in 2008 to 28% in 2012) and toilet facilities (from 17% in 2008 to 20% in 2012).

The majority of respondents stated that grounds maintenance is carried out at allotment sites as an integral part of grounds maintenance operations/contracts (73%). 56% answered that this is carried out by the plot holders/site association and 21% said that this

is carried out as part of rehabilitation programmes (*please note, respondents could choose more than one option on the survey for this answer*).

When asked how grounds maintenance is monitored, the majority stated that this is through inspections/site visits by an allotment officer, council officer or a site representative.

### **g) Security**

Plot holders themselves generally manage the security on allotment sites (67%), with 29% of respondents stating that they don't actively manage security. 7% stated community wardens manage security, 2% stated park rangers and 16% a 'plot watch' scheme or similar. This represents an increase in the percentage of 'plot watch' schemes since the survey was conducted in 2008 from 9% to 16% in 2012 and a reduction in the proportion where security is managed through community wardens and park rangers. The majority of respondents have an allotment forum, friends group or something similar (67%).

### **h) Allotment strategy**

62% of respondents stated that they have an allotments strategy (which is an increase from 53% when the survey was conducted in 2008) and of the 38% that haven't currently got a strategy in place, 68% stated that the council is planning to develop one within the next 2 years.

54% stated that they are intending to increase the price of allotment plots within the next 2 years and a further 2% within the next 5 years. 34% are reviewing this. There has been a marked increase in the percentage of respondents who are reviewing their prices since the APSE email query was conducted in 2010; from 7% in 2010 to 34% in 2012. This may reflect the financial constraints facing local authority budgets and the need to review prices and charges to reduce dependence on subsidy by the local authority.

Of those who are intending to increase the price of allotment plots, 64% stated that even though they are increasing the price, the council would still have to subsidise the service; 35% stated that this would make the service cost neutral and only 2% stated that this would result in them making a surplus. When the responses to this question are correlated with the responses in section e) '*Budget for allotments*' above, the main change from the current situation is an increase in those councils trying to make the service cost neutral as opposed to an increase in the number of councils trying to achieve a surplus.

## 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](mailto:enquiries@apse.org.uk).

Our national advisory groups include:-

- Building cleaning
- Catering
- Housing, construction and building maintenance
- Parks, horticultural and ground maintenance
- Renewables and climate change
- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Service delivery models
- Service transformation and performance management
- Sports and leisure management
- Vehicle maintenance and transport
- Waste management, refuse collection and street cleansing