



membership resources

State of the Market Survey 2012

Local Authority Parks Services



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Local Authority Parks Services

State of the Market 2012

APSE conducted an on-line survey during March and April 2012. This follows on from the 2010 and 2008 Parks State of the Market survey where similar questions were asked to allow for trend comparisons. The 2010 results briefing can be accessed by [clicking here](#) and the 2008 results briefing can be accessed by [clicking here](#). 91 responses were received from local authorities throughout the UK. This report identifies the key findings of the survey compared to the 2010 and 2008 findings.

Results from the survey

a) 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 is affecting parks disproportionately	0.0%	25.3%	39.6%	34.1%	1.1%
Lack of investment in parks will have health and social impacts	0.0%	3.3%	34.4%	61.1%	1.1%
Environmental issues are a priority for parks services	0.0%	9.1%	60.2%	28.4%	2.3%
There's a limit to the extent to which volunteers can be involved in delivering parks services	1.1%	3.3%	40.7%	54.9%	0.0%
The public should get free access to all parks	0.0%	13.3%	32.2%	54.4%	0.0%

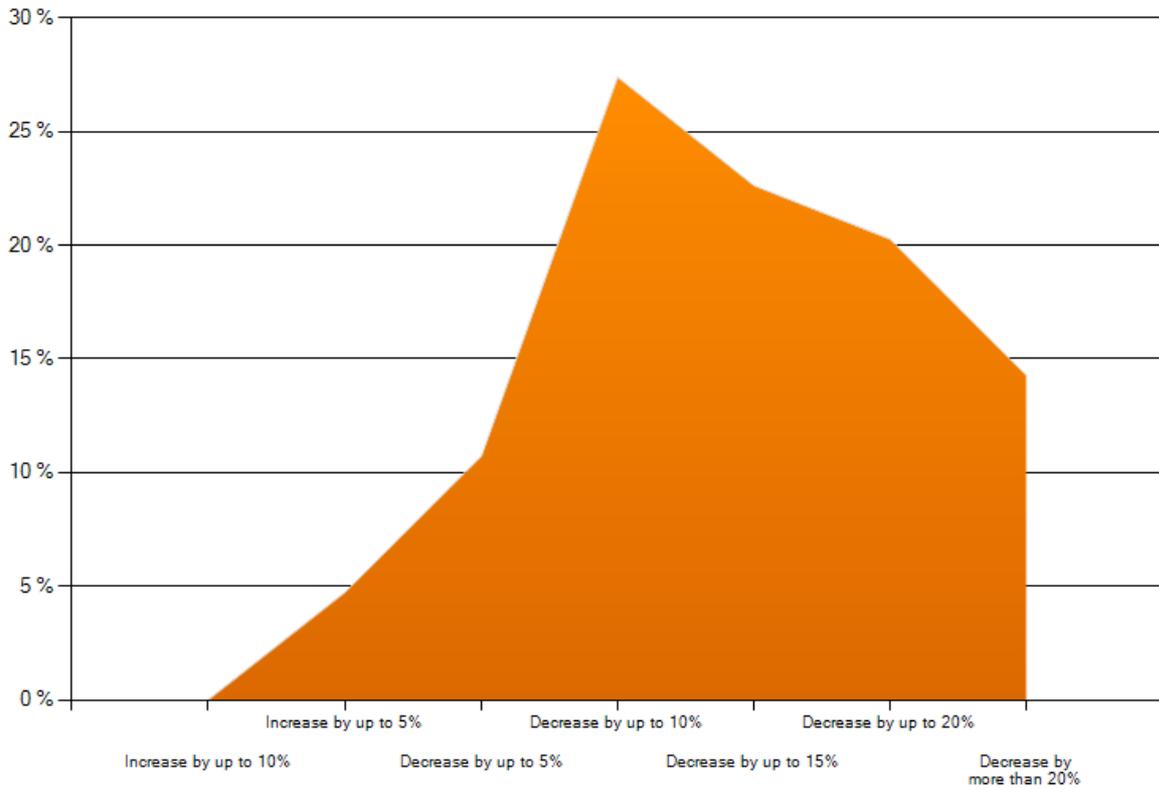
74% either 'agree' or 'agree strongly' that 'the squeeze on public sector resources is affecting parks disproportionately'. This question was asked in 2010 and 86% either 'agreed' or 'agreed strongly' in that survey. This slight reduction in 2012 may be as a result of the efficiency cuts also visibly affecting other services in the public sector as witnessed in APSE's other state of the market surveys, which can be accessed on the following link: <http://www.apse.org.uk/membership/briefings.html>

The other questions which was consistent with the 2010 survey was in relation to whether the public should get free access to all parks and the results are consistent with this survey. There is overwhelming support for the other questions which were asked in this survey for the first time, including the importance of environmental issues, that a lack of investment in parks will have a health and social impact, as well as the extent to which volunteers can be involved in delivering parks services.

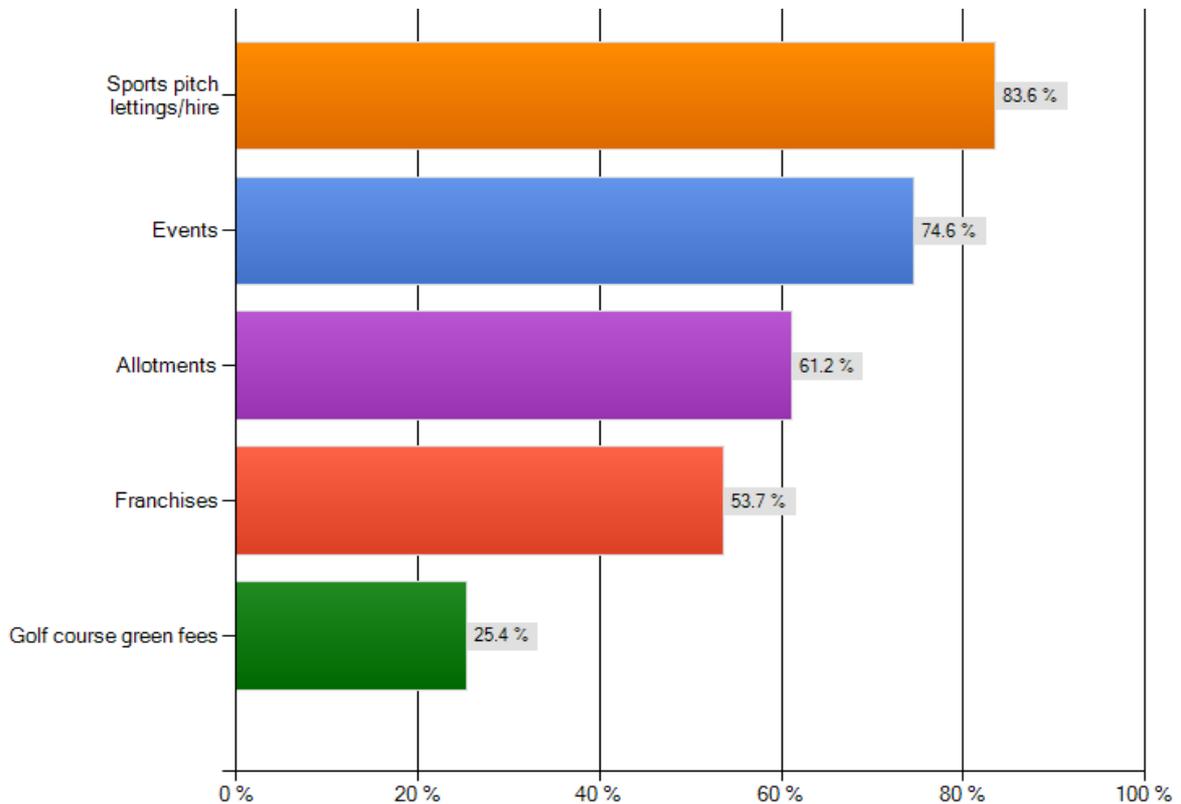
b) Budget expectations

89.8% of respondents expect the parks budget to change over the next year and of these, 86% expect a decrease in revenue and 72% expect a decrease in capital. In the next 5 years, the expectation of the level of funding in their service budget is as follows:

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

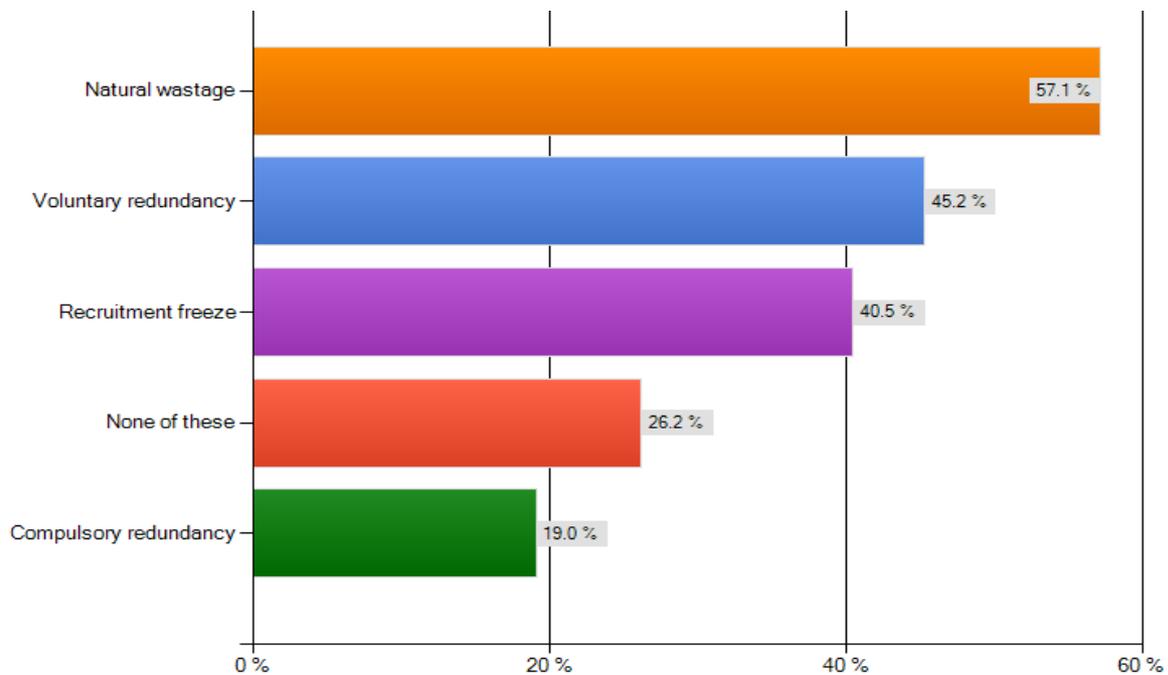


In order to respond to these pressures, 82% are intending to increase fees and charges over the next 2-3 years, including in the following areas:

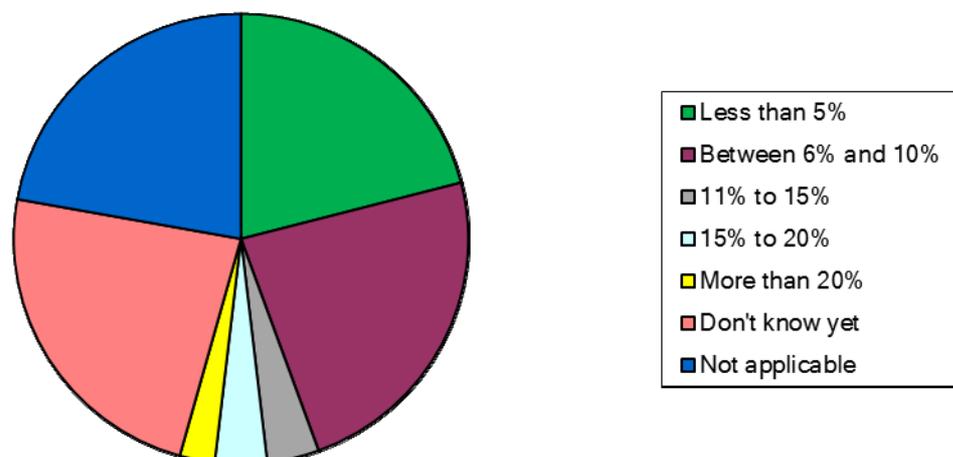


Other responses included car park charging and cemetery/burial charges. The majority of parks services obtain additional funding from section 106 money (85%) and National Lottery Heritage Fund (77%), with some accessing sponsorship (43%) and private funding (15%).

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:

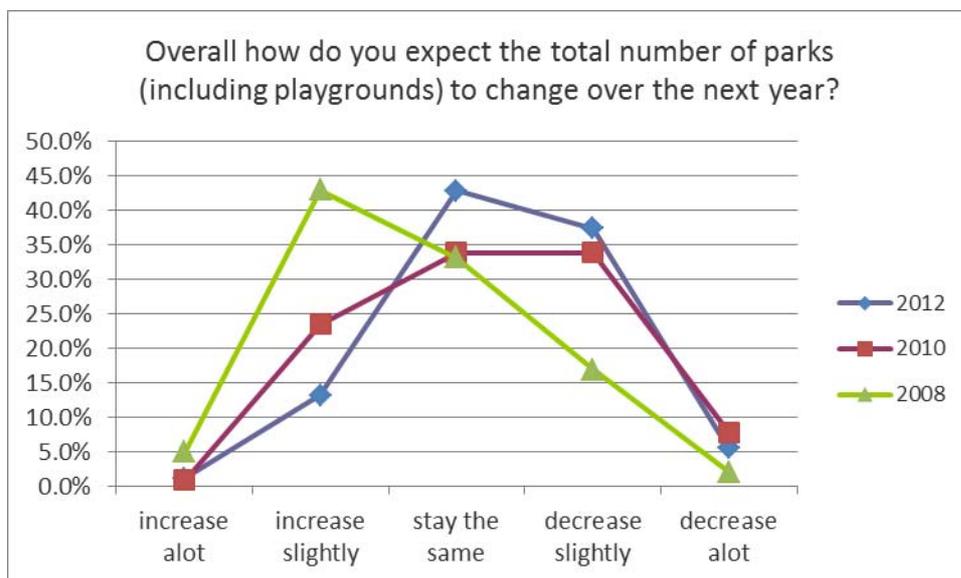


Respondents who were expecting staff reductions were asked what percentage of staff they expect to lose from the service, and the results were as follows:



c) Number of parks

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 over the past 4 years. 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). These figures have risen again in 2012, with 43% expecting them to stay the same and 37% expecting them to decrease slightly. This may be a reflection of budget constraints within local authorities and some council's looking at transferring some of their assets. The shift in responses to this question over the last 4 years is shown in the graph below:



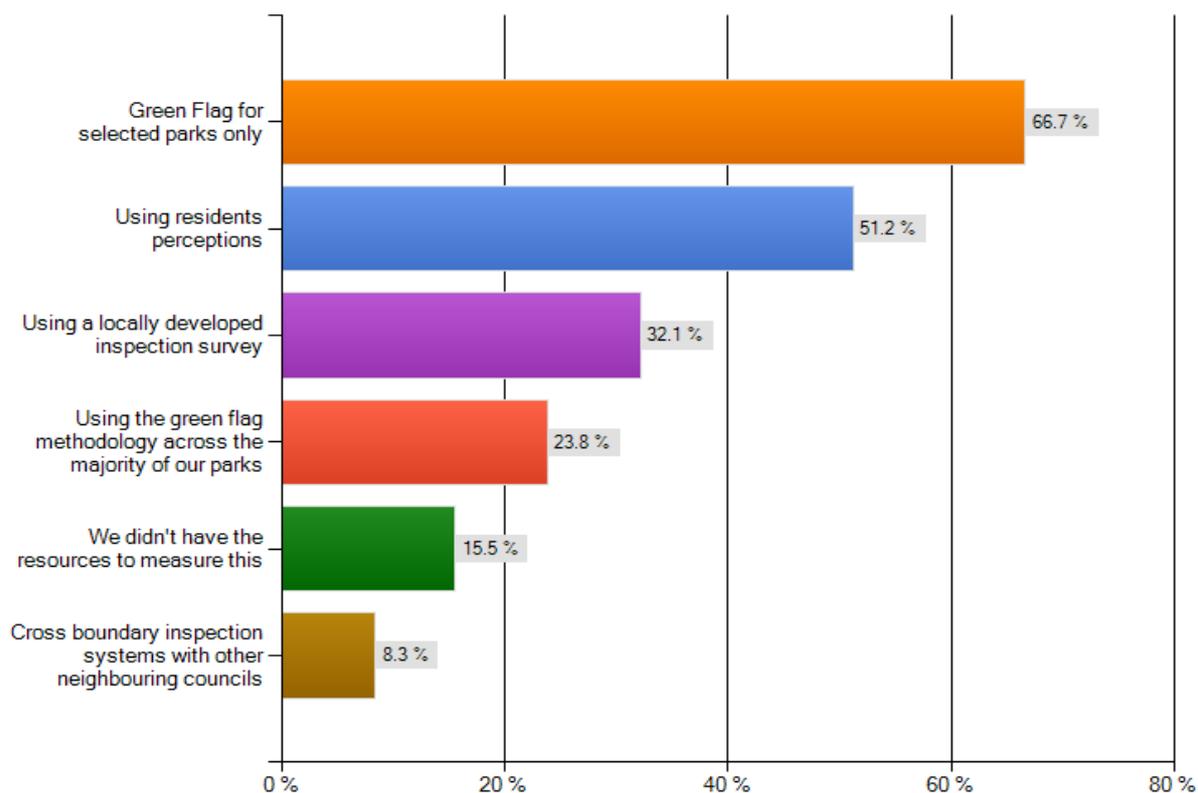
Whilst 82% currently have in-house services, 63% expect to be managed in-house in the next 2-3 years. When this question was asked in 2010, only 57% expected to be managed in-house in the next 2-3 years and the actual percentage that are managed in-house has remained at similar levels to those in 2010. This demonstrates the continuing relevance of in-house provision in a difficult economic climate and a change in the management type of parks services isn't being seen as a panacea to dealing with efficiency savings.

d) Service standards and quality of service

The survey asked, over the past year, which services have increased, decreased and stayed the same. The main areas of increase were tree inspections (20% stated that this has increased) and enforcement (17%). The main areas of decrease were bedding/flower displays (65.5% stated that this has decreased), shrub bed maintenance (48%) and frequency of cuts (36.5%). Over 70% of respondents stated that play inspections, the maintenance of play equipment and pitch maintenance have stayed the same.

The survey asked how quality of parks was measured during 2011-12 and the results were as follows:

How did you measure the quality of parks during 2011-12?

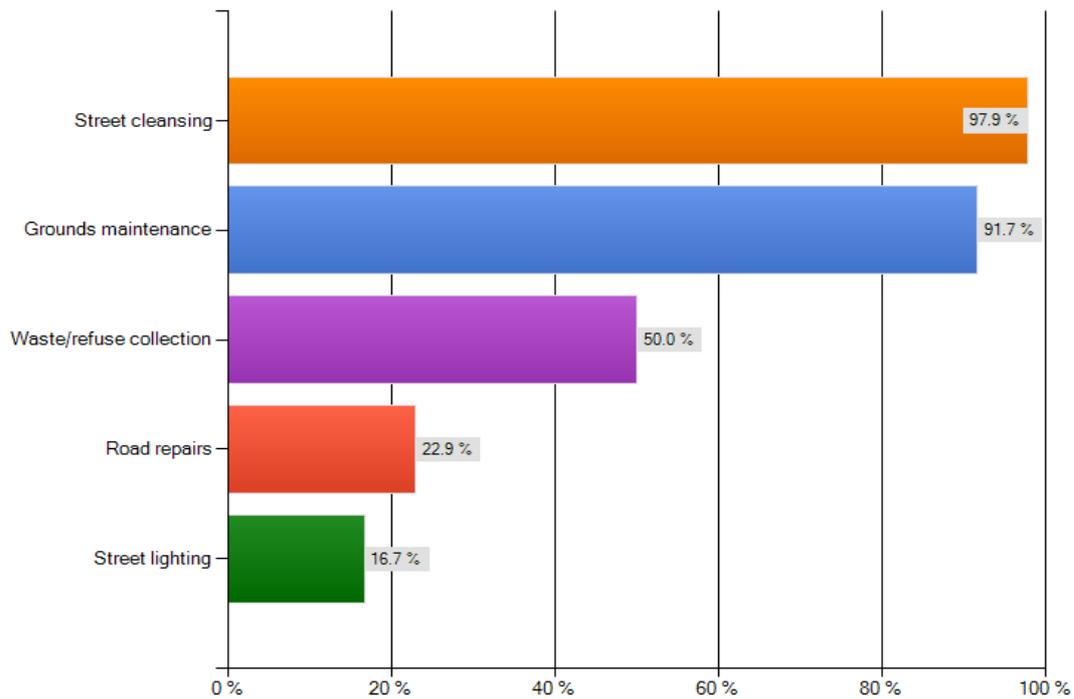


The same question was asked in terms of how the quality of parks is intended to be measured next year and the results were very similar to those reported above. It is encouraging that there is a continued commitment by local authorities to measuring the quality of the service being provided despite budget cuts. APSE believes that it is vitally important within the current economic climate for councils to continue to measure the quality of parks services for both managing the service effectively and to assess changes in service provision against other data such as the cost of service and customer satisfaction. APSE will be further developing quality of service indicators for parks over the coming months through [performance networks](#).

e) Street scene

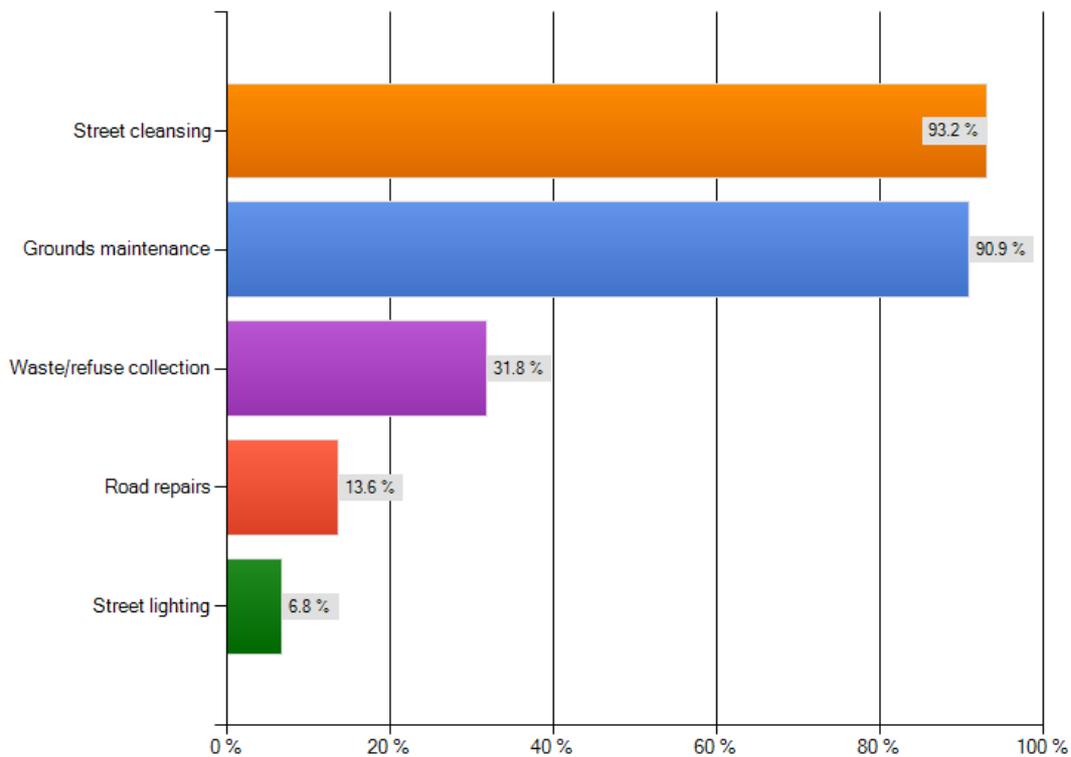
58.5% are already part of an integrated street scene service, which involves the following services being jointly managed:

If yes, which services are jointly managed within your street scene department?



The survey also asked which services are jointly delivered by staff and the results were as follows:

If yes, which services are jointly delivered by staff within your street scene department?



Out of those respondents who answered that they are not already part of an integrated street scene service, 43% expect to become part of one in the near future.

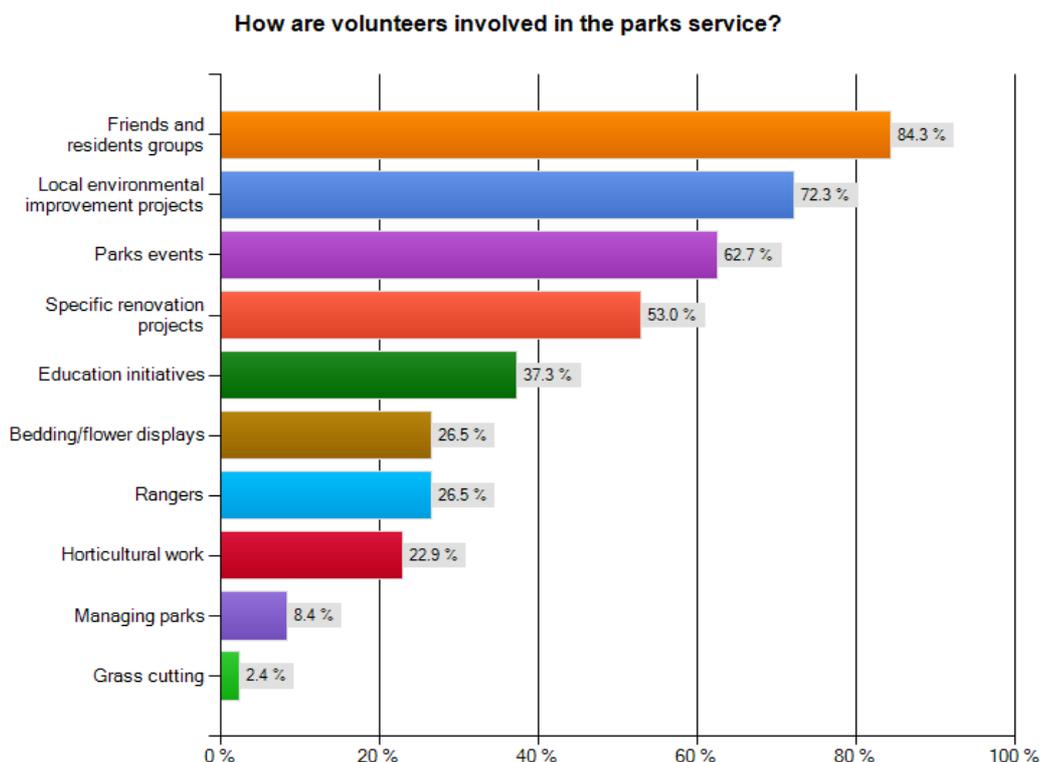
Similar questions were asked in [APSE's street cleansing state of the market survey 2012](#) and this survey found a slightly higher response rate on those authorities who have an integrated street scene service (77%). This could reflect the fact that on both surveys, street cleansing was more likely to be jointly managed in a street scene service and jointly delivered than grounds maintenance. The results from this parks survey and the street cleansing survey report similar proportions in terms the services that are jointly managed and delivered shown in the graphs above.

f) How services are delivered

- 59% already have parks rangers, which is similar to reported figures in 2010 and 2008. 2.5% have an on-site presence in all of their parks compared to 11% in 2010.
- 69% have parks management plans in place.
- 66% have dog control orders in parks and green spaces and 60% have on the spot fines for litter.
- 78% have seasonal labour (compared to 86% in 2010 and 74% in 2008).
- 64% have annualised hours.

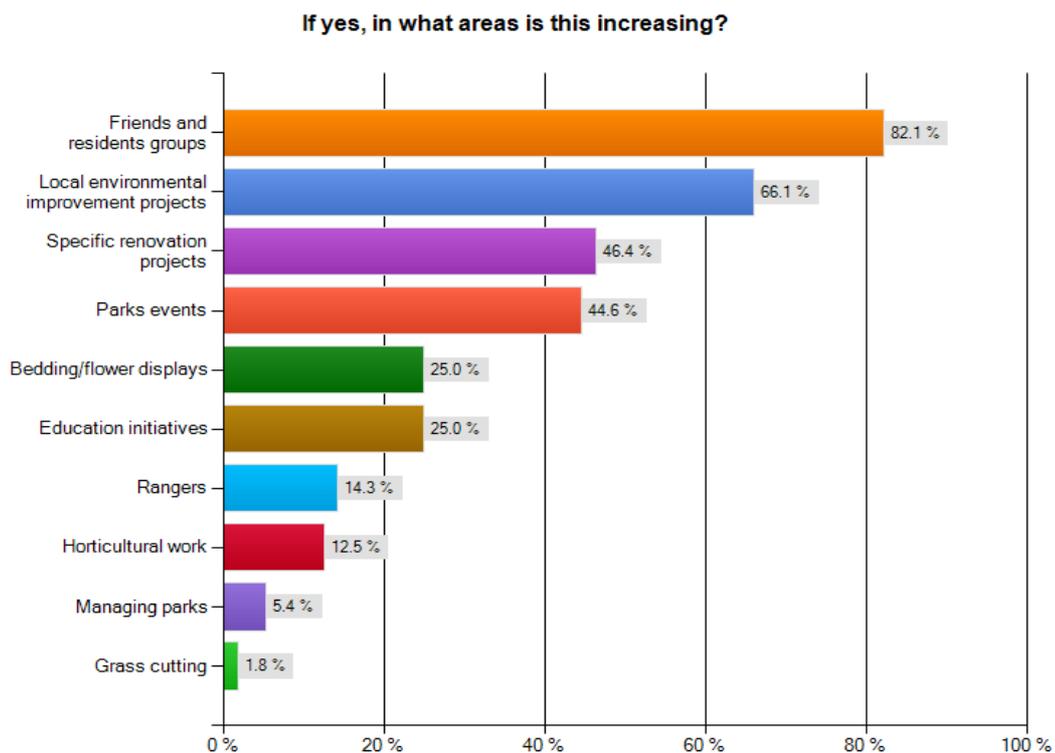
g) Involvement of volunteers

The survey asked how volunteers are involved in the parks service and the results were as follows:



The results suggest that volunteers tend to be involved more in decision making forums (such as friends and residents groups) and specific projects rather than carrying out the actual maintenance or horticultural work. The idea of 'Big Society' has gained impetus recently and the survey shows that the involvement of volunteers is already well established in parks services. However, rather than being about transferring services or maintenance responsibility over to community groups, it is more about their involvement in specific local projects, events and existing forums such as friends of the parks groups.

69% of respondents thought that the community sector involvement in parks is increasing (similar to levels reported in 2010). Areas that respondents thought that this is increasing in reflect the areas they are already involved in (shown above).

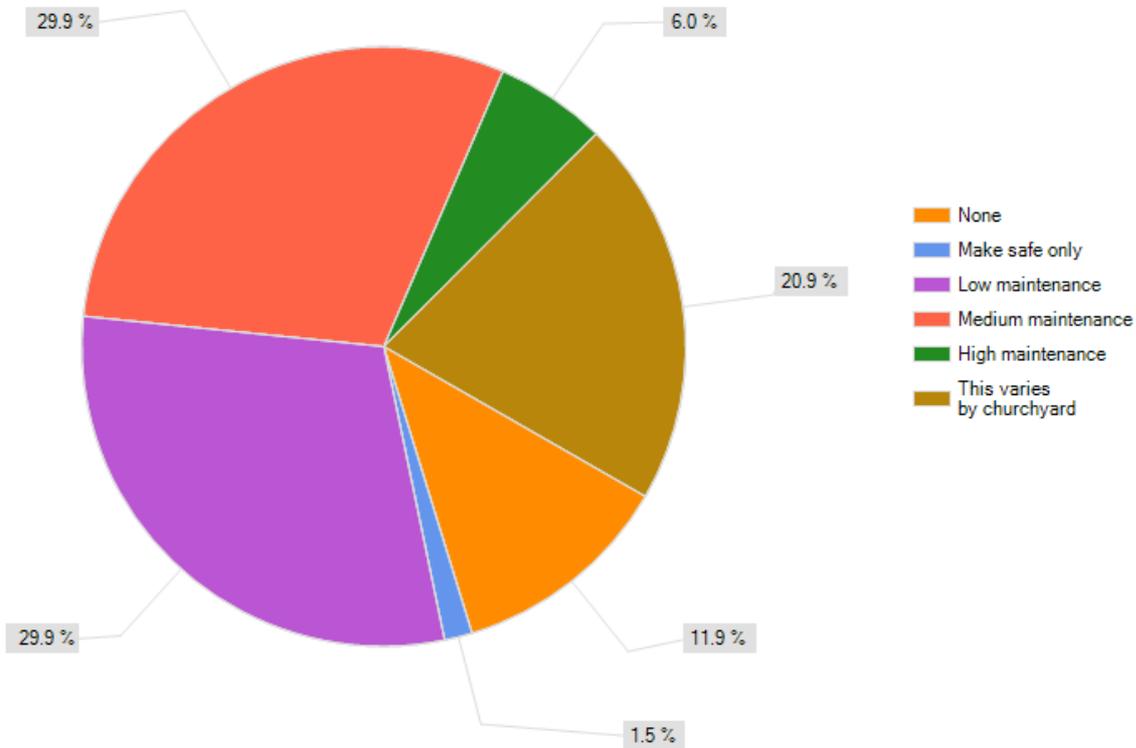


17% of respondents stated that their council has transferred parks assets to self-management during the past 2 years (a further 22% are looking at this). From those who have transferred assets, elements that have been transferred include playing fields (57%) and buildings (57%).

h) Closed churchyards

On average, local authorities have responsibility to maintain 6 closed churchyards and on average spend £25,000 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?

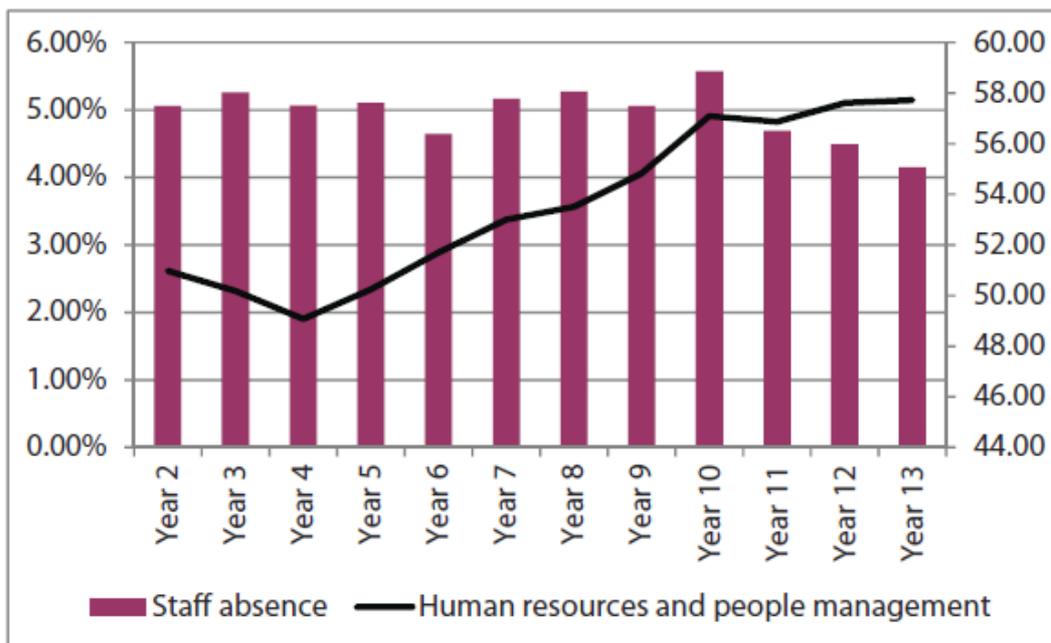


i) Staffing

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	12.5%
Slightly above average	20%
About average	37.5%
Slightly below average	21%
Very low	9%

APSE’s benchmarking service [performance networks](#) has shown an improvement in staff absence to the lowest figure achieved in the past 12 years. In conjunction with this, local authority parks services have continued to improve their performance in human resources and people management (investment in training, development and health and safety) to the highest figure achieved in the past 12 years. The following is an extract from the APSE performance networks summary report 2010-11.



In terms of staff training, 71% thought that the training budget will stay the same over the next 12 months and 22% thought it was going to decrease. 63% have apprentices and the number of apprentices next year is likely to stay the same (65% thought this would stay the same, 27.5% thought this would increase and only 7% thought this would decrease). Therefore, despite the budgetary pressures, it is encouraging to note that this isn't translating into a lack of investment in training and a reduction in the number of apprentices being developed through the parks service.

j) Selling services and future growth and decreases in work for the service

38% of respondents currently sell services to the private sector and 46% sell services to other public sector bodies.

Respondents were asked where they saw growth for the service over the next 12 months and the results were as follows:

Where do you see growth for the service over the next 12 months?	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Community involvement/engagement	74.0%
Partnership working with other public bodies	60.3%
Capital projects (e.g. section 106)	39.7%
Offering a maintenance service to external organisations/private work	38.4%
Events in parks	37.0%
Allotments/community gardens	35.6%
Sharing services with other local authorities	34.2%
Additional open space from housing developments	26.0%
Conservation and management of climate change	20.5%
Children's play	15.1%
Training	11.0%
Nursery production	2.7%

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

Where do you see future decreases in work for the service?	
Answer Options	Response Percent
Bedding, floral displays, regional shows, ornamental grass cutting, bowling greens, high amenity areas	77.0%
Reduced maintenance or frequency of maintenance of grounds	73.0%
Reduction in service or standards	64.9%
Transfer of assets	33.8%
Parks development activity	32.4%
Schools grounds maintenance	29.7%
Achievement in awards	29.7%
Housing grass cutting contracts	28.4%
Landscaping and country parks	25.7%
Other council department service level agreements e.g. education, housing and leisure	25.7%
New development projects/capital investment schemes e.g. play area refurbishment	25.7%
Fewer parks and facilities	24.3%
Litter picking	21.6%
Sports provision	20.3%
Ranger service	17.6%
Inspection and maintenance of children's play areas	16.2%
Maintenance work for town/parish councils	13.5%
Parks-specific community engagement	13.5%
Cemeteries and closed churchyards	10.8%

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:-

- 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