

State of the Market Survey 2016

Local Authority Allotment Services





The state of the market survey was conducted by Wayne Priestley, APSE Principal Advisor for Environmental services with assistance from Garry Lee, Research & Coordination Officer.

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State of the Market 2016

APSE conducted an online allotment survey during July 2016. This follows on from a previous survey which was conducted in July 2015, December 2013, a survey in 2012, an e-mail query from 2010 and another survey from 2008. The 2016 survey asks similar questions to the previous surveys which allows for comparisons to be drawn from previous years. In total, 64 responses were received from local authorities throughout the UK. This report identifies the key findings.

Results from the survey

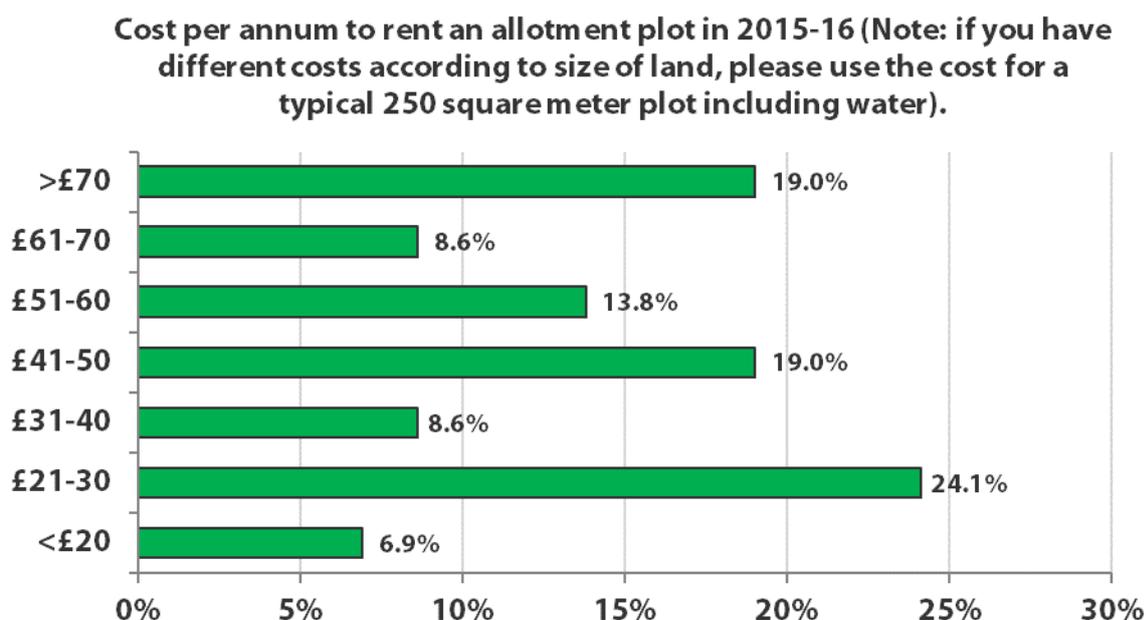
a) Number and management of allotments

96.9% of respondents answered that they have council owned allotments within their authority. From the respondents that answered 'no' to this question, all stated that demand has been expressed for these. One respondent noted that a number of sites are provided locally by parish councils and associations.

In terms of management of the allotments, 37.1% answered that they have allotments which are directly managed by a council officer, 6.5% stated that these are managed through a site committee/association and 56.5% stated that there is a mix of council and site committee/association managed sites.

b) Cost of allotments

The majority of respondents stated that the cost per annum to rent an allotment in 2015-16 was between £21 and £60, although some charge over £70. The full breakdown is as follows:



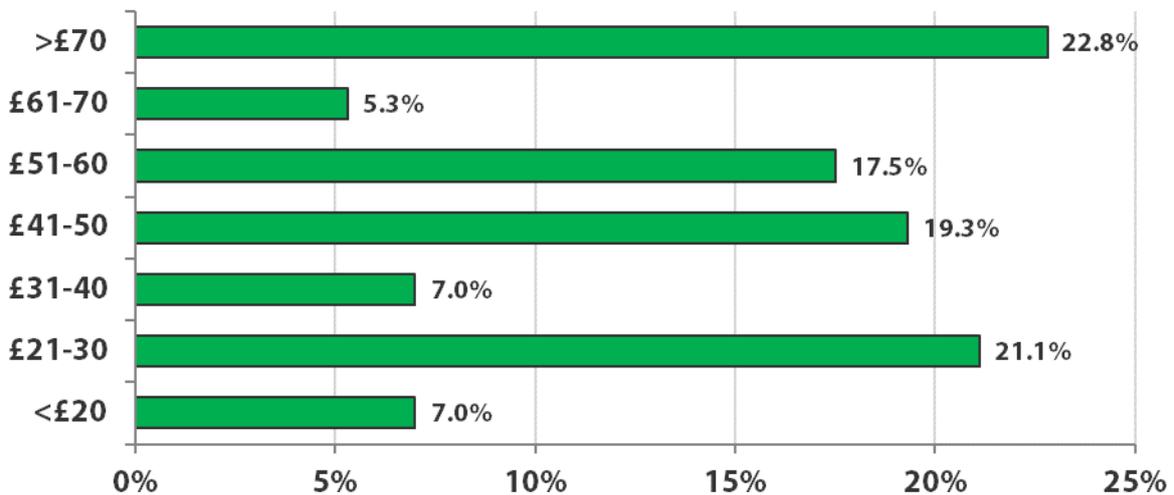
65.5 % of respondents are reporting a charge of between £21 and £60. In 2014-15, the cost band which received the most respondents was £41-50 (20.8%); this has changed in this survey, with

24.1% charging £21-30. The number of respondents charging £41-50 and over £70 this year remains high.

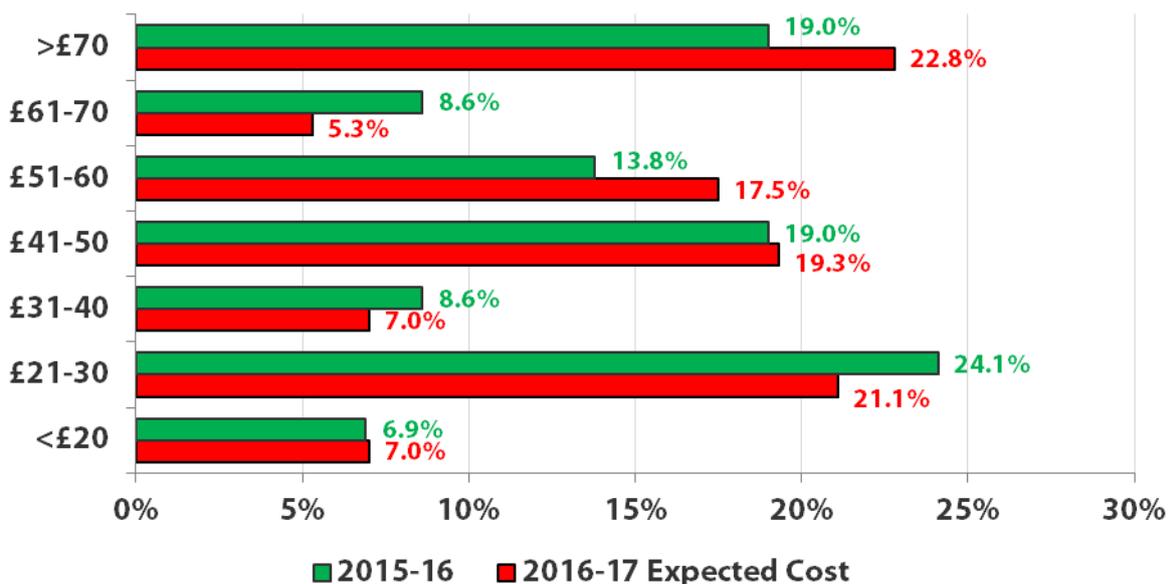
The 2016 survey asked about previous years increases in the rent of an allotment plot and 25.9% stated that there has been an increase in this (beyond an inflationary increase) during the past 2 years. Percentages of rent increase ranged from 2% up to 50%.

When respondents were asked about the expected cost per annum to rent an allotment next year, 64.9% expected this to be between £21 and £60, with 7.0% expecting this to be under £20 and 22.8% expecting this to be over £70 which shows a rise in those proposing to charge this higher rate than in 2015/16. The full breakdown is as follows:

Expected cost per annum to rent an allotment plot in 2016/17



Comparison of allotment plot cost per annum in 2015-16 and expected cost in 2016-17



The majority (67.2%) of respondents said that the charge is directly related to the area of the allotment (e.g. square metres) and 21.3% stated that this is standard regardless of the size. There was also a split in the respondents who offered concessionary prices (63.9%) and those that did not (36.1%). From those who offer concessions, the breakdown is as follows:

- 93.8% offer discounts for pensioners, over 60's and/or retired people. The majority of these (51.7%) offer a 40-50% discount.
- 60.6% offer discounts to the unemployed or those on income support. The majority of these (52.6%) offer a 40-50% discount.
- 61.3% offer discounts to people with disabilities. The majority of these (68.4%) offer a 40-50% discount.
- 23.3% offer discounts to students. Of these, the majority (37.5%) offer a discount of 20-30%.

c) Size of allotments

In terms of the size of plots available, 36.2% stated that they have a standard size for a plot, and out of these, the most common size was 250-299 square metres (50.0%), although many respondents commented that they have other plot sizes available. When asked for the total number of allotment sites in the local authority, the majority responded that they had 1-30 (76.0%), with several having 31-40 (7.4%) and the rest having over 40 (16.7%). When asked for the total number of allotment plots in the local authority, the majority (68.0%) had 1250 or less and 9.4% had over 3000 plots.

The reporting of waiting lists show the demand for allotments is still high, with 38.4% of respondents stating that they have 100-400 people in the waiting list for an allotment and 5.8% claiming they have over 1000 people on their waiting list. The majority of respondents (90.6%) stated that the waiting list is regularly updated (e.g. names of people who are no longer interested or those who have moved are removed). One authority noted that "some sites don't maintain waiting lists because plots come up so rarely".

64.1% of respondents stated that new tenancies are restricted to people living within the local authority area. One respondent commented that they have an out of borough premium rate where they charge an additional 100% of the original cost.

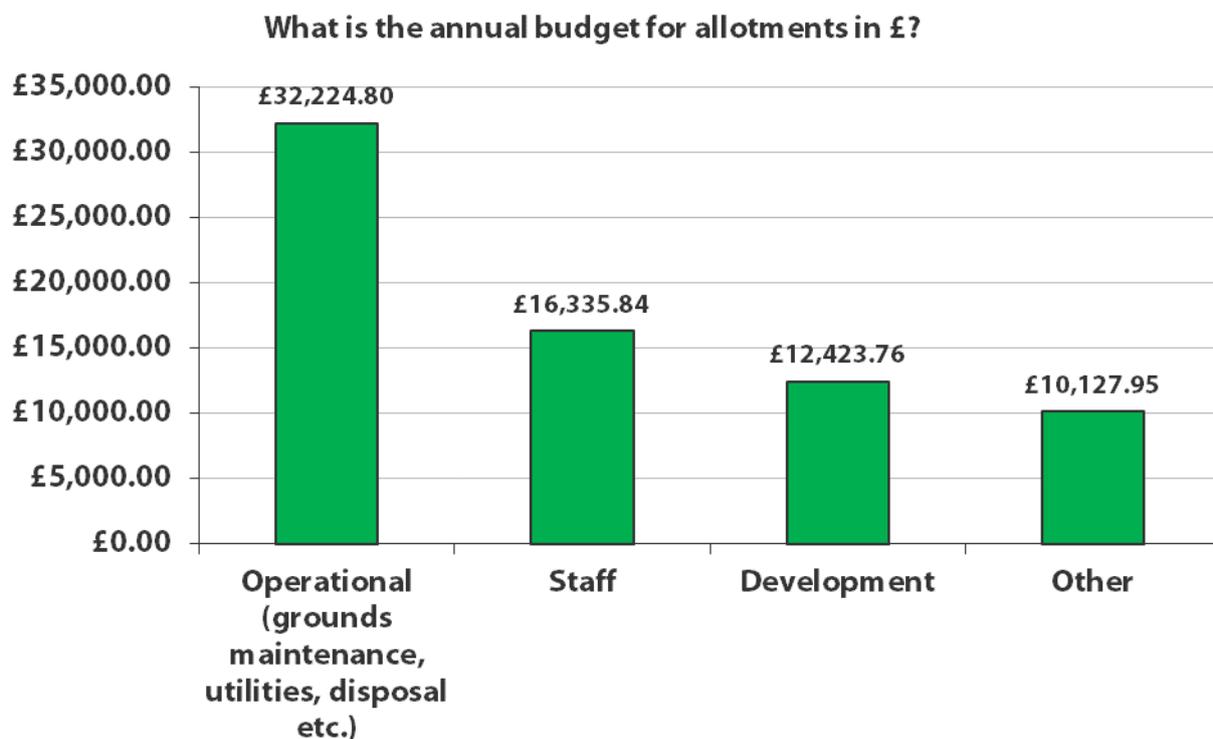
d) Future increases in the number of allotments

34.0% 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 table below:

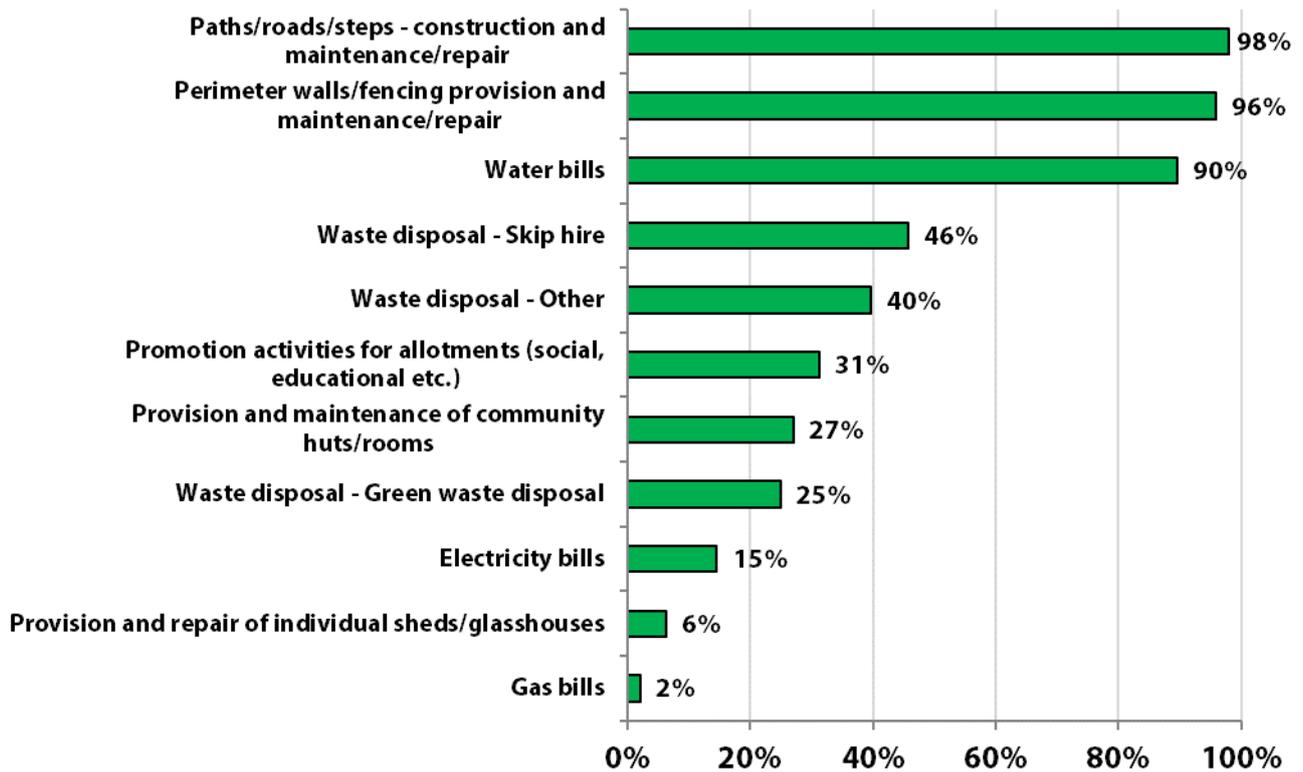
Provision by builders/developers as part of a housing/planning policy	72.7%
Direct provision by the council for additional plots	66.7%
Provision by community groups supported/facilitated by council	50.0%
Provision by other council departments (e.g. Education, Social	27.8%

e) Budget for allotments

The average annual budgets for allotments were stated as follows:



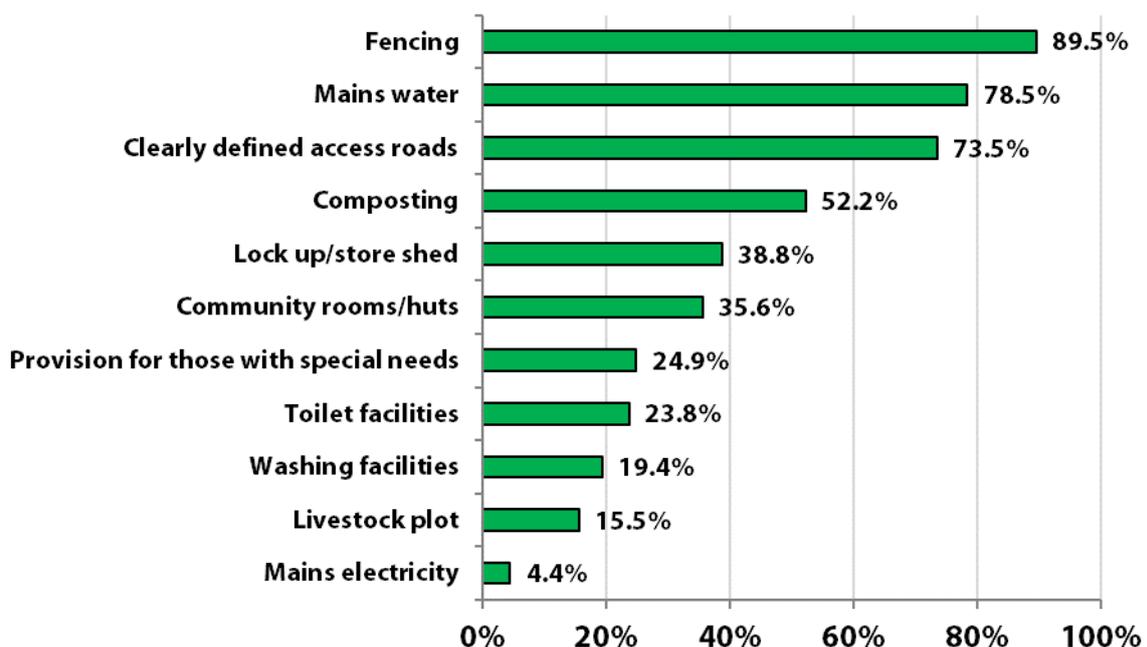
Respondents stated that their budget includes responsibility for the following:



67.3% currently subsidise managing allotments (they do not recover full costs from managing these). Of the other respondents, 30.6% break even and only 2.0% make a surplus.

f) Facilities at allotment sites

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



The majority of respondents stated that grounds maintenance is carried out either at allotment sites as an integral part of grounds maintenance operations/contracts (55.3%) or by plot-holders/site association (70.2%). The full responses are below:

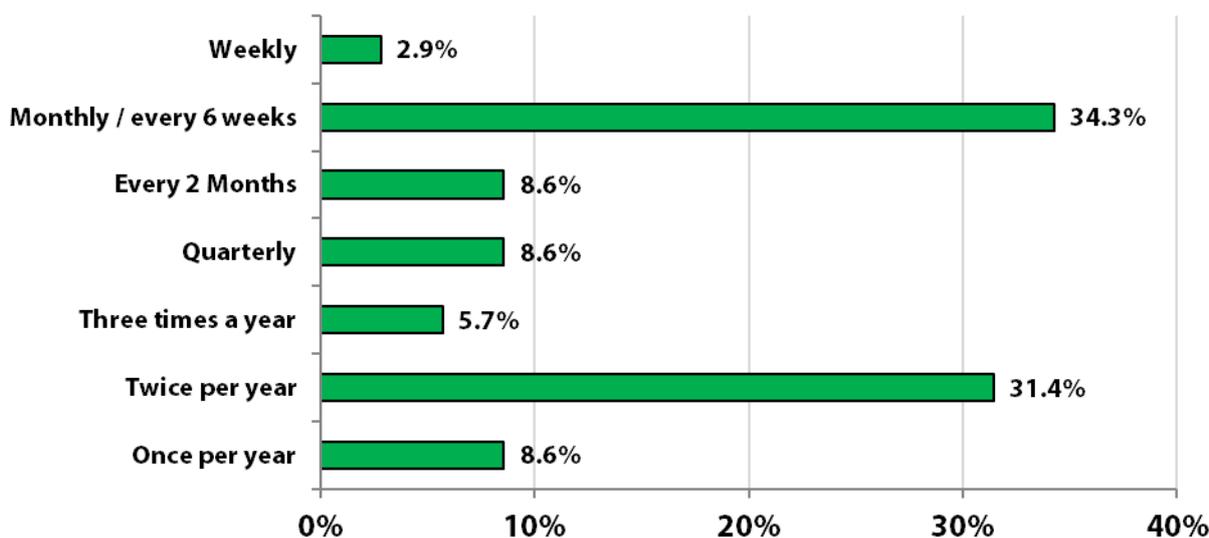
As an integral part of grounds maintenance	55.3%
By the plot-holders/site association	70.2%
By volunteers	23.4%
As part of rehabilitation programmes (health, offenders etc)	21.3%
By a dedicated allotments team/person	14.9%
No grounds maintenance is carried out on the sites	2.1%

(Please note, respondents could choose more than one option on the survey for this answer).

Some respondents noted that some grounds maintenance is carried out by contractors when needed and for specific jobs like tree surgery, and that some sites have chosen to do their own maintenance.

When asked how grounds maintenance is monitored, the majority stated that this is through inspections/site visits by an allotment officer (48.8%). Other responses included a council officer (41.9%) or a site representative (37.2%).

The survey asked how cultivation standards are monitored and the most frequent responses to this question as displayed in the chart below:



Survey respondents noted in the comments that additional monitoring may be carried out in response to complaints from other tenants/residents, and that the inspections may alternate between an officer and the site committee and may become more frequent during the height of the growing season.

g) Monitoring allotments

The majority of respondents allow plots to be uncultivated for 1 month (47.5%) or 3 months (40.0%) before they take action. Notice procedures for tenants who fail to cultivate their plots vary from authority to authority, but are generally around 28-30 days' notice with an initial warning letter followed by an inspection; if no action to cultivate the plot has been taken after a defined period of time, either a termination of tenancy is undertaken or the plot-holder is put onto a probationary period.

Many respondents allow plot holders to have more than one plot, but this is subject to:

- Historical plots (i.e. those who had several plots can keep them, but new tenants are not allowed more than one plot)
- Waiting lists (tenants can have more than one if there are no waiting lists)
- Time limits (tenants can have extra plots on a year-to-year basis, subject to waiting lists)
- Household limits (where tenants are allowed more than one plot, but the amount each household can have is limited)
- Plot size (yes, but they are limited to a restricted amount of square metres)
- Good behaviour (one Council is looking to reward good tenants with a 2nd plot)

50.0% of respondents restrict plot ownership to a person or a household. 36.4% of respondents allow plots to be passed on to families and friends. 88.9% of respondents have considered reducing future plot sizes to create more plots. 24.4% of respondents stated that plot-holders are required to undertake a probationary period to ensure they can manage their plot effectively.

51.1% of respondents stated their authority has a policy in place for handling disputes between its tenants and 59.1% have a policy in place for handling appeals against notices to quit. 66.7% of respondents stated that their authority requires their self-managed sites to have policies in place to address the issues above.

h) Security

Plot-holders themselves generally manage the security on allotment sites (72.3%) with 36.2% of respondents stating that they don't actively manage security. 12.8% stated that they have a 'plot watch' scheme or something similar, 6.4% stated that park rangers manage security and 4.3% stated that community wardens manage security. The majority of respondents have an allotment forum, friends group or something similar (57.8%).

Comments from respondents included that they have lockable gates (some with a suite of security locks and keys that can't be cut by tenants), that community wardens/Police Scotland will respond to hot spots and specific incidents, and allotments are now linked to the Council's Community Safety Team.

i) Allotment strategy

55.6% of respondents stated that they have an allotments strategy and of the 44.4% that haven't currently got a strategy in place, 30.0% stated that the council is planning to develop one within the next 2 years. 55.9% stated that their health and wellbeing strategy recognises the value of allotments.

33.3% stated that they are intending to increase the price of allotment plots within the next 2 years and a further 15.6% within the next 5 years; 22.2% are reviewing this. Of those who are intending to increase the price of allotment plots, 25.0% stated that this would make the service cost neutral; 75.0% stated that the council would still have to subsidise the service.

j) Biodiversity

Biodiversity is being promoted amongst plot-holders in the following ways:

Areas being set aside for wildlife	80.0%
Planting pollinator friendly species	73.3%
Information on how to improve biodiversity	53.3%
Promoting native crops	26.7%

Other responses included “encouraging bees by allowing beehives on plots” and “network of bee keepers”.

100.0% of respondents stated that environmental sustainability is promoted with regards to site management by adopting water-saving measures such as water butts; 46.7% stated that they cultivate plots organically and 40.0% use solar power instead of mains power.

APSE Comment

From the answers received to the survey it is quite clear that local authorities are continuing to provide and manage allotment sites across the UK. The value of allotments is widely recognised across a number of fronts including healthier lifestyles, promoting biodiversity, protecting green spaces, reducing air miles re local food production and social cohesion. Some would even argue allotment sites can be valuable soakaways for flooding at times of heavy rainfall. The increasing demand for building land and the lack of plots for new allotment holders is causing concern amongst allotment holders as is the reductions in council budgets which is having an impact on the ability to maintain such sites. However, many allotment sites are now moving to self-management models, many with the support of the local authority. In this way they can not only ensure what finance is available is used to meet the known needs of the site but they are also able to apply for funding which is not available to local authorities. This allowance by local authorities for allotment holders to manage their own sites should not be seen as them negating their responsibilities as many are now building the importance of allotments into their Health and Well-Being Strategies and also their Local Development Plans. This latter point is evident within the survey where 72.7% have reported they are using new developments to provide additional allotment sites.

The other option to provide new sites or improve existing ones is partnership working with agencies such as the NHS, who more and more are seeing the therapeutic value of green space and are willing to invest in such facilities. Equally the intergenerational value of allotments has been recognised as one way which anti-social behaviour can be reduced as different age groups work together and share common experiences. Finally, from a biodiversity and environmental sustainability point of view, local authorities and allotment holders themselves, are developing and managing sites which bring added value to these aspects.

It is unlikely that local authorities will ever make high levels of income from allotments, indeed many are openly subsidising allotments, but when one considers the multiple benefits they bring, they are acknowledged as being a key community asset and one which local residents, allotment holders and agencies across the country are increasingly helping to sustain.

The Association for Public Service Excellence

APSE member authorities have access to a wide 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 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
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Environmental Health
- Housing, construction and building maintenance
- Local authorities commercialisation, income and trading network
- 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

If you require any further information on the findings of this State of the Market survey 2016 please contact Wayne Priestley Principal Advisor for Environmental Services at wpriestley@apse.org.uk