



association for public service excellence

# Local Authority State of the Market 2023

## Parks and greenspaces



Briefing 23/17

April 2023

## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Previous findings</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Your opinions</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Environmental issues</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Social issues</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Budget expectations</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Service efficiencies</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Income generation</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Staffing</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Training</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Numbers of parks and visitor numbers</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Service delivery</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Park rangers</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>On-site presence</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Service standards and quality of service</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Quality standards</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>Biodiversity</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Community and volunteer involvement</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>Transfer of assets</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>Future growth and decreases in work for the service</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Service reviews</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>APSE Comment</b> .....	<b>24</b>

### Local Authority State of the Market 2023

#### Parks and greenspaces

This analysis was conducted by Wayne Priestley, APSE Principal Advisor for Parks

For any enquires in relation to the survey, Wayne may be contacted on:

Tel: 0161 772 1810

Email: [wpriestley@apse.org.uk](mailto:wpriestley@apse.org.uk)

## 1 Previous findings

This follows on from the 2022, 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. The survey was conducted between January and March 2023.

## Survey Results

### 2 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	46.3%	24.1%	16.7%	1.9%	11.1%
Reductions in funding has resulted in a withdrawal of maintenance from some land and an increase in unmaintained land	38.9%	44.4%	13.0%	3.7%	0.0%
Lack of investment in parks and green spaces will have health and social impacts	66.7%	25.9%	3.7%	3.7%	0.0%
There is a clear link between parks/play provision and levels of crime/anti-social behaviour	37.0%	35.2%	7.4%	1.9%	18.5%
There's a limit to the extent to which volunteers can be involved in delivering parks and green space services	61.1%	29.6%	3.7%	3.7%	1.9%

The public should get free access to all parks	<b>64.8%</b>	<b>24.1%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>
--	--------------	--------------	-------------	-------------	-------------

There has been noticeable decrease from 86% to 70% 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 budgets beginning to normalise after the impacts of the pandemic when already stretched budgets were having to cope with massively increased numbers of visitors and the extra costs associated with this. Parks are still experiencing increased visitor numbers but many of the income generating sources are now fully operational and helping plug gaps in budgets. In some cases, parks budgets have seen extra funding as a result of the need to repair infrastructure such as paths and green areas damaged during the pandemic. By association, there has been a large decrease 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 (92% in 2022 falling to 63% in 2023). When considered together, these two results show that there seems to be a return to pre-pandemic levels where although there were concerns about budget adequacy and the ability to maintain all greenspace areas, pressure was not as extreme as during the pandemic period.

It will be interesting to see whether this reduction in concerns about budgets and maintenance are continued through the coming years.

2022 results showed that 100% of respondents either 'agreed' or 'agreed strongly' that the 'lack of investment in parks and green spaces will have health and social impacts'. In 2023 this figure has fallen to just over 92%. This continuing high figure will be to some extent, still 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 and with visitor numbers still high, 2023 figures show a continuing recognition of the importance of parks and greenspaces in providing health-related experiences.

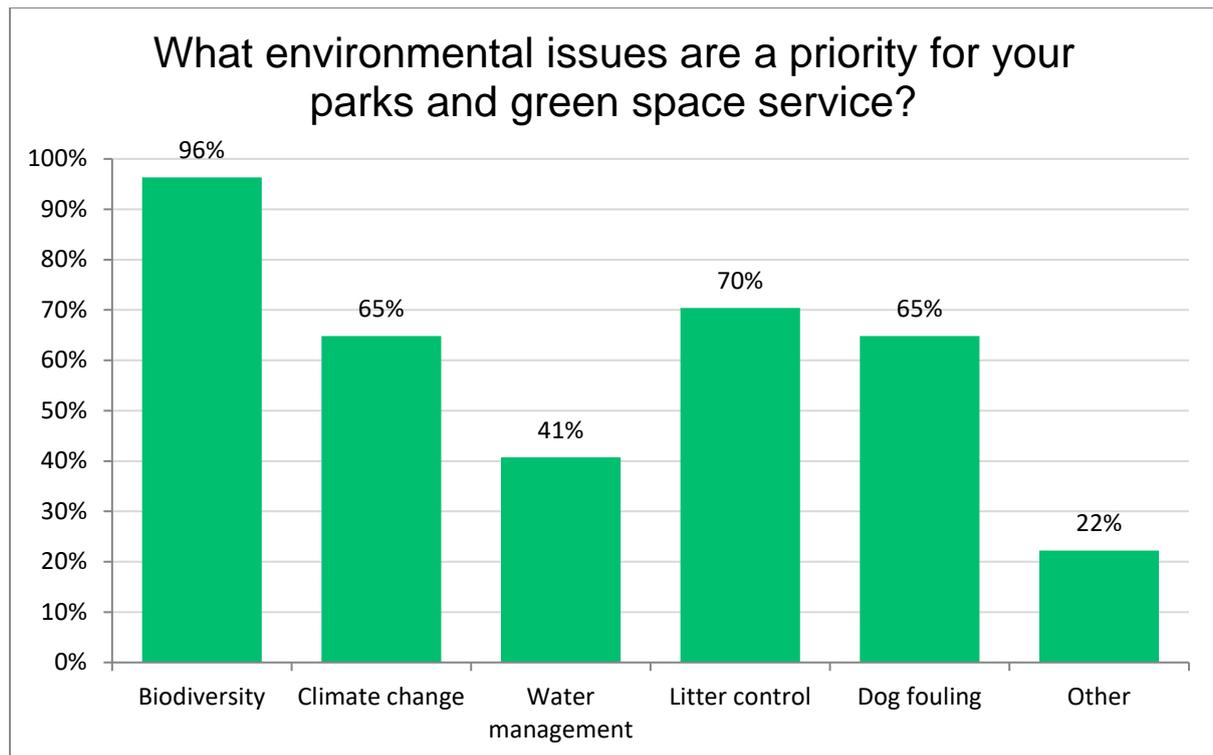
In 2023 72% either 'agree' or 'agree strongly' that 'there is a clear link between parks/play provision and levels of crime/anti-social behaviour' which is a significant decrease on 2022 when the figure was 88%. This is suggesting that whilst many still consider the provision of parks/play provision reduces anti-social behaviour, fewer think it is a major contributor as in 2022. But again, when considering so many people found refuge in parks during 2022, many would see an increased value in their anti-social behaviour reduction role.

In 2022, 100% of respondents either 'agreed' or 'agreed strongly' that 'there's a limit to the extent to which volunteers can be involved in delivering parks and green space services' This was likely to be a result of many volunteers not operating during the pandemic due to social distancing and self-isolation requirements. With the lifting of social distancing and the pandemic now largely under control, the return of volunteers has once again been welcomed. and although over 90% feel volunteers' roles are limited, their contribution is still valued by many, 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.

89% either 'agree' or 'agree strongly' that 'the public should get free access to all parks, which is a 4% decrease on 2022. Although a slight fall, this high figure still re-enforces the view that parks should remain free for the public to enter.

### 3 Environmental issues

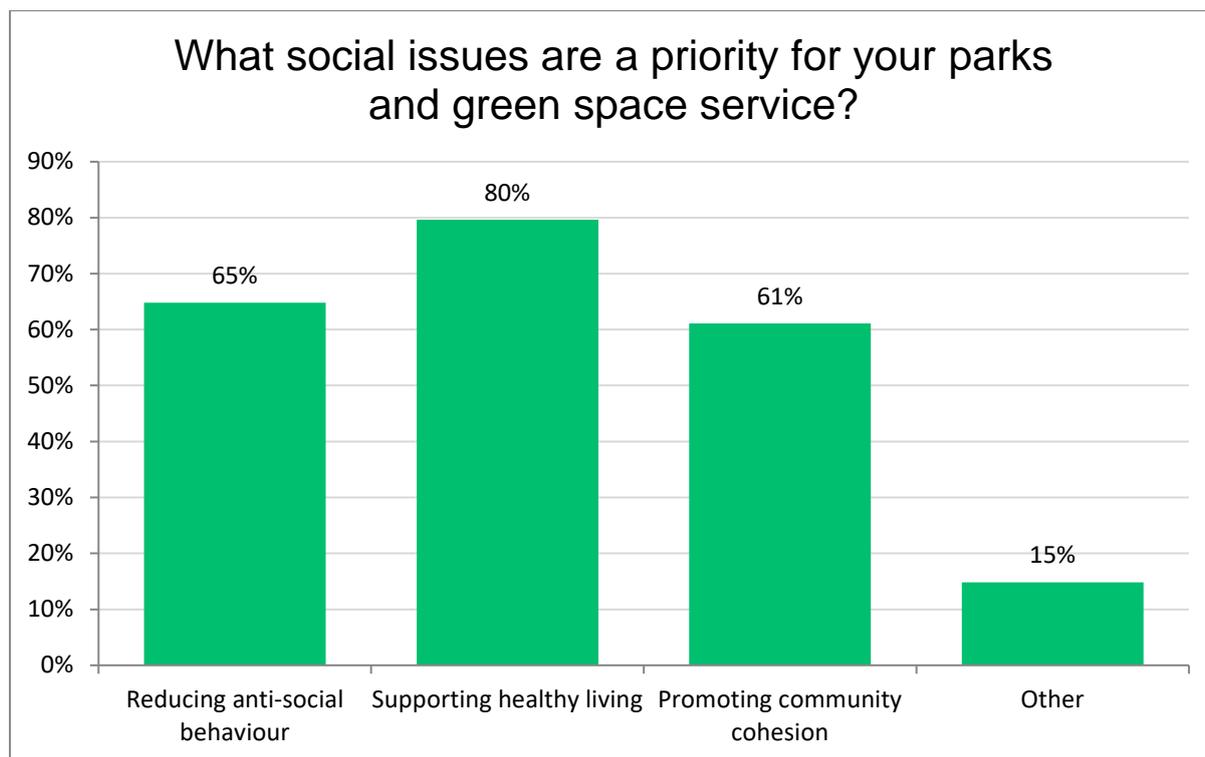


There have been two markedly significant changes in this year's results with respect to the importance of climate change and biodiversity.

The main environmental priority for parks and green space services is now biodiversity at 96% as opposed to 89.8% in 2022. The second highest priority is now litter control at 70%. Litter control was only the third highest priority in 2022 at 77%. Therefore, although having risen in the priority ratings, fewer people have scored it as highly as their major concern. Dog fouling and climate change have received the joint third highest priority rating. This is perhaps not surprising as there was an increase in dog ownership during the pandemic and as visitor numbers have not noticeably fallen, there will be an increased number of dog walkers still using parks, but again in 2022 this scored 77% as opposed to 65% in 2023.

It is clear, that from additional comments received biodiversity and climate change are now the key issues for many in the way they manage their parks, often as a result of the need to meet corporate climate change and ecological emergency plans but also from growing public pressure.

## 4 Social issues



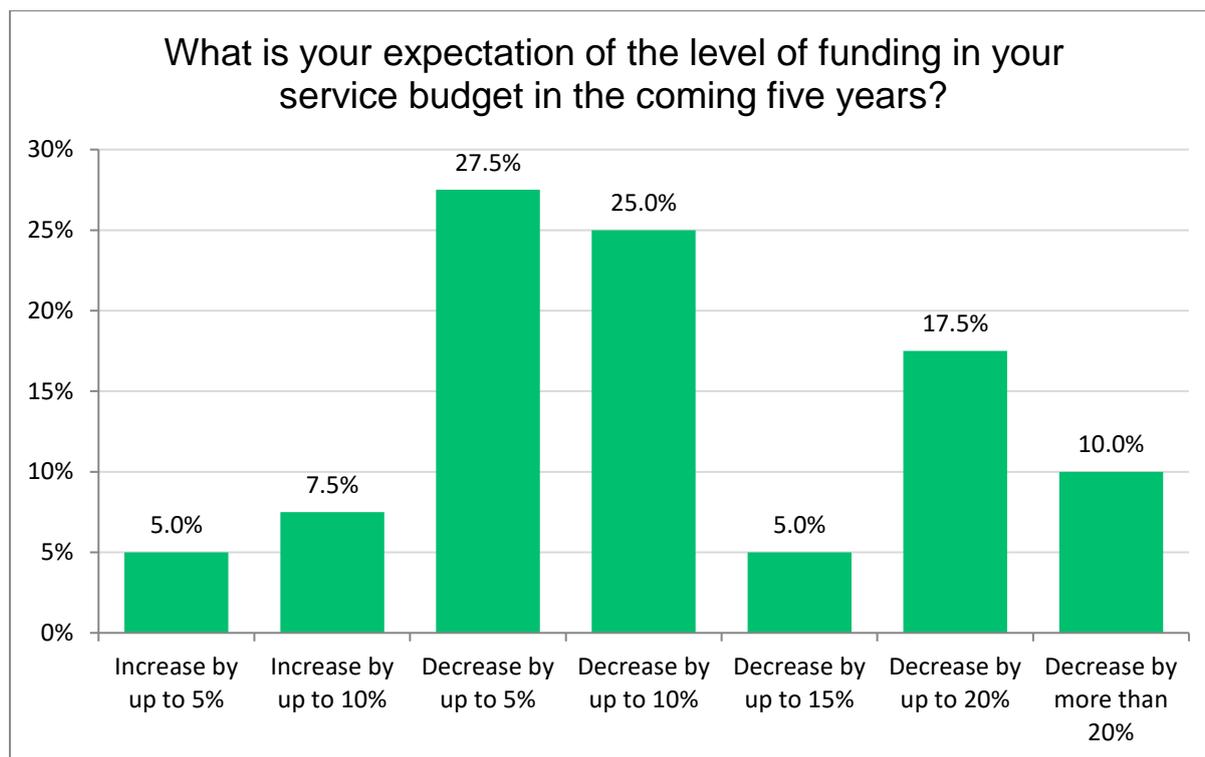
In the 2015 survey, we added a question on the types of social issues that are a priority for local authority parks and green space service. The most frequent response was 'supporting healthy living' which this year again was the main social priority for respondents. This shows the recognition of the 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. Noticeably this year the value of adding more sporting facilities such as MUGA's and play areas was also highlighted in the 'Other' section of the chart.

## 5 Budget expectations

The number of respondents who expect the parks and green space budget to change over the next year has remained roughly the same as last year, at 72% (76% in 2022). However, of those who expected a change in the budget, 82% expect a decrease in revenue (60% in 2022), and 62% expect a decrease in capital which is an increase on 2022, when 53%, expected a reduction. Comments included the view that people were expecting income to plug gaps now that many facilities in parks had re-open. Others stated they had difficulty in judging numbers who visited their parks and it was therefore difficult to argue the case for the value of parks at budget time. Others worryingly, stated that it was easier to get extra capital than increased revenue which is somewhat disconcerting as capital projects will need revenue to support them in the future.

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



There have been some significant changes on 2022. Whilst most respondents are still expecting budget cuts of between 5-10% for the coming year, the major change has been with those respondents' expecting higher levels of budget decreases. In 2022, 28% of respondents were expecting decreases of over 10% whereas in 2023, this has risen to 32.5%, which is somewhat surprising considering the globally recognised value of parks, but again corporate social priorities are most likely to be the cause of this increased strain on the parks budgets as funding goes elsewhere. Budget increases have also suffered with 28% expecting increases in 2022, this has now fallen to 12.5% expecting increases in 2023.

The increase in the level of respondents expecting cuts over the next 5 years may be a reflection of not only general savings requirements but also a current concern over the cost of living crisis placing extra pressures on councils social service costs.

## 6 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:

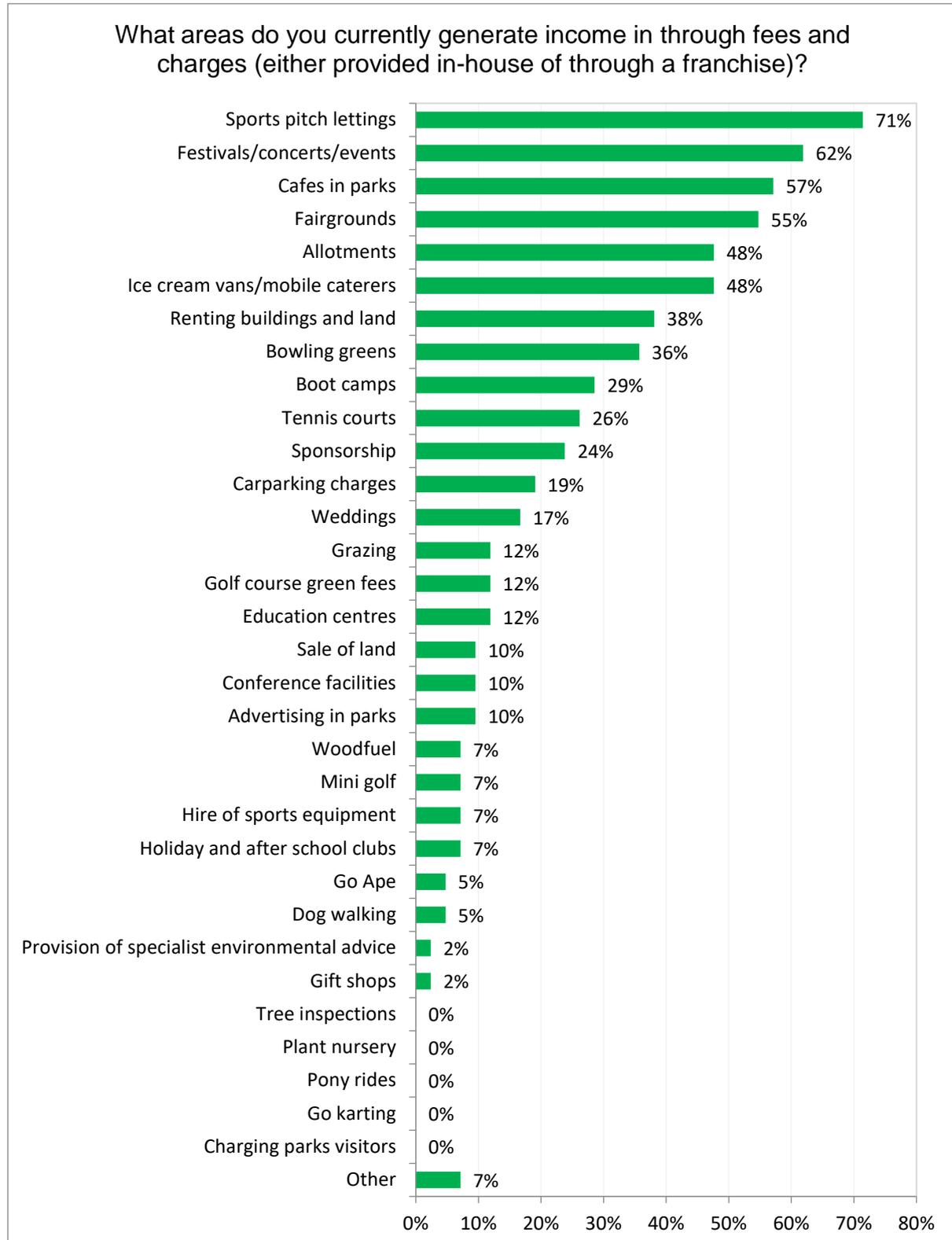
- Rethinking staffing levels through reducing management tiers, cutting administrative staff, reducing IT/communications systems updates, introducing larger seasonal staffing, increasing volunteering opportunities, and introducing role flexibility
- Operational changes (moving allotments to self-management, 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 wildflower meadows, replacing annual planting schemes with perennials, prioritising maintenance on greatest need/impact on Council priorities

- Increased use of digitisation to drive service efficiencies e.g. identifying all areas of greenspace maintained and charging landowners where responsibilities do not currently lie.
- 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.

## 7 Income generation

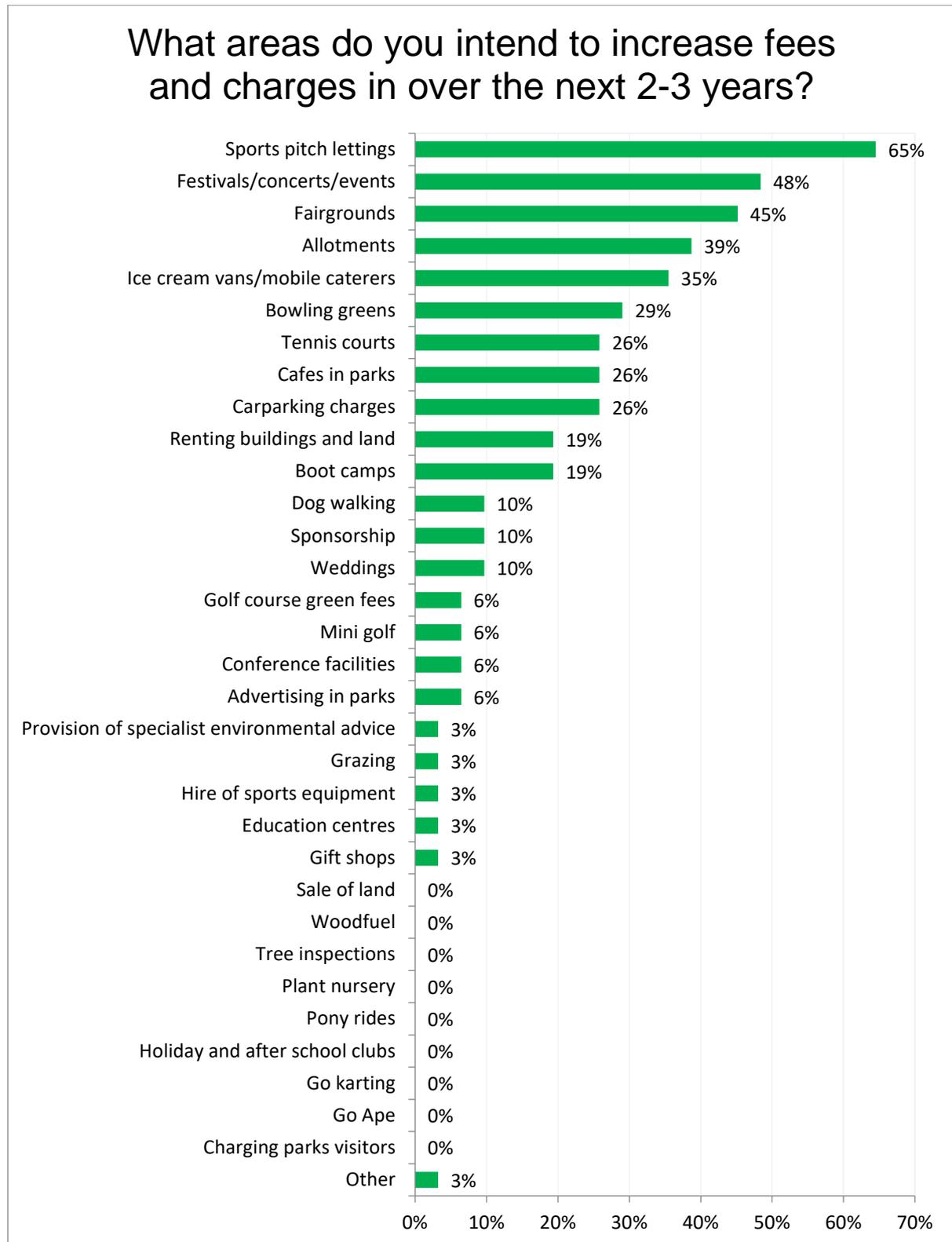
Areas where respondents currently generate income through fees and charges (either provided in-house or through a franchise), include the following as shown in the graph below:



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 cafes, allotments and tennis courts as a major source of income, possibly as a result of the pandemic when such opportunities were reduced and are still slow to materialise, however, in the case of allotments, many are now being self-managed and the income being kept on-site.

75% of respondents indicated that they would be increasing fees in 2023 as opposed to 85% in 2022, possibly a reflection of the fact many of the income generating sources closed during the pandemic have now been re-opened, easing some of the pressures on budgets.

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:

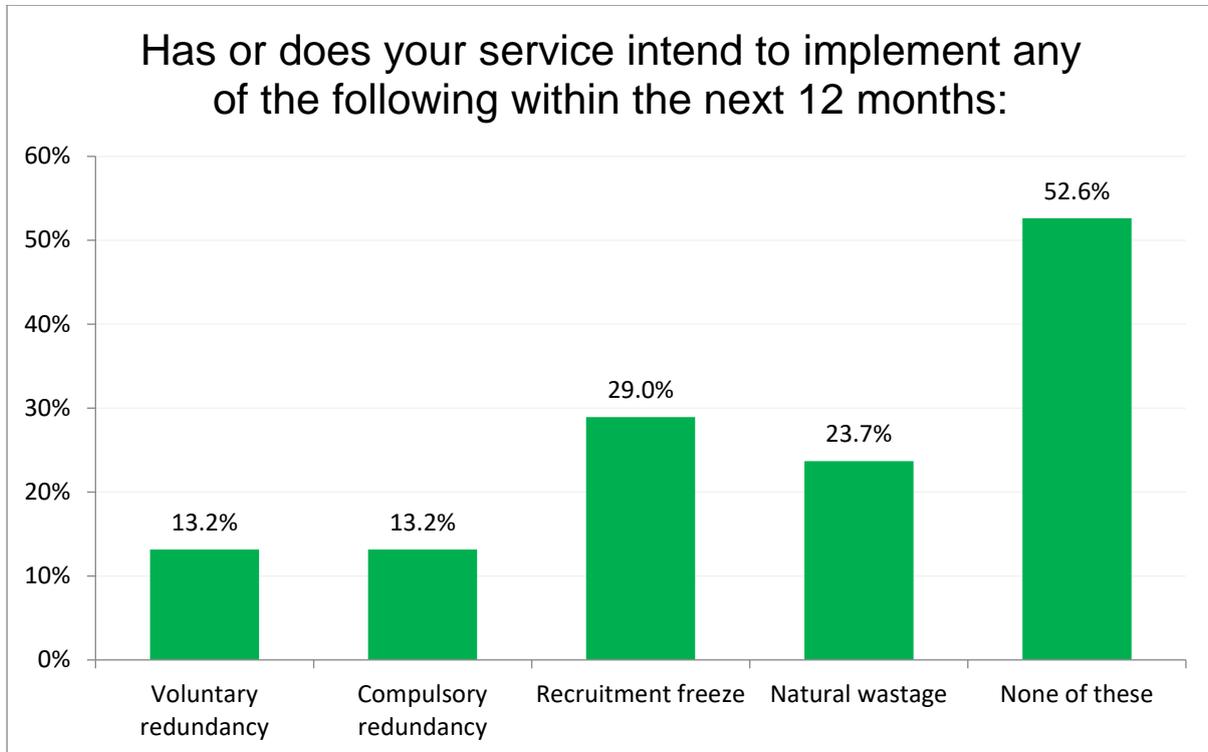
- 50% cited 'competing priorities (e.g. budget cuts), a fall on 2022 when the figure was 63%,
- 'experience of staff in bringing in new income' at 48% is an increase on 2022 when the figure was 42%, suggesting staff are still lacking skills at raising income.
- 'political resistance at' 50%, is a significant fall on 2022 when this stood at 63%. This is possibly due to the realisation that parks are so important to the general populace that although they need to offer a largely free experience there is a requirement to have chargeable services/experiences to help plug budget gaps.
- 'public resistance' at 40% is an decrease on 2022 when the figure recorded was 52%. These declines (political/public), may be an indication the public are willing to pay for services within parks in order that such assets are financially sustainable and protected for current and future generations and politicians are likewise realising that in order to plug budget gaps some element of income generation is needed.
- 'lack of investment funding' at 50% is a increase on 2022, when the figure stood at 50%. Potentially this increase could be linked with the fact that the majority of respondents recorded that they were expecting ongoing budget cuts, and as such are not expecting monies which will allow the development of income generating facilities/equipment.
- 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, and in particular a **lack of time** which was by far and away the main reason regarding barriers to generate income recorded by 60% of respondents.

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

- 88% of respondents have accessed Section 106 money' shows an increase on 2022 when 78% reported monies from S.106 funding.
- 'National Lottery Heritage Fund' 44% which is a slight fall on 2022 when 48% accessed funding from this source.
- The number of respondents receiving income 'through friends of parks groups' shows a significant decrease to 37% as opposed to 51% in 2022, which may be a reflection that some Friends Groups have not fully become fully active after the pandemic.
- Grant funding from other sources has fallen to 56% in 2023 compared to 61% in 2022,
- Sponsorship levels have fallen significantly but this is perhaps not unexpected with the reduction in events during 2022/3. It would be anticipated that this will improve over the coming years.
- 17% of respondents stated they had funding from health-related activities but again many events will not have occurred during 2022/3.
- 34% 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.
- 14% currently sell services to the 'private sector', a decrease from 2022 when 16% recorded selling services to the private sector
- 19% currently selling services to 'other local authorities', as opposed to 13% in 2022
- 9% sell services to 'other public sector bodies' as opposed to 16% in 2022.

## 8 Staffing

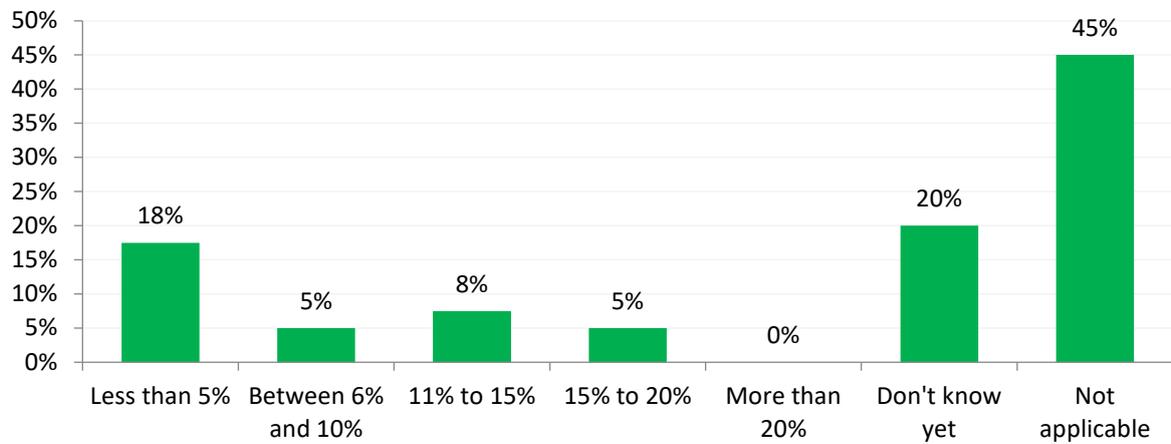
In terms of staffing, the survey asked if respondents have or intend to implement any of the following within the next 12 months and the results are as follows:



What was clear from the returns was that there appears to have been a change in the responses compared to 2022, with reductions in voluntary redundancies and natural wastage, perhaps suggesting these options are beginning to dry-up. There has by association been an increase in those reporting compulsory redundancies but at 13% this is not a choice for the majority, but as budget cuts continue it is perhaps not unexpected. Hearteningly, over half of the respondents have reported they will not be shedding staff during 2023.

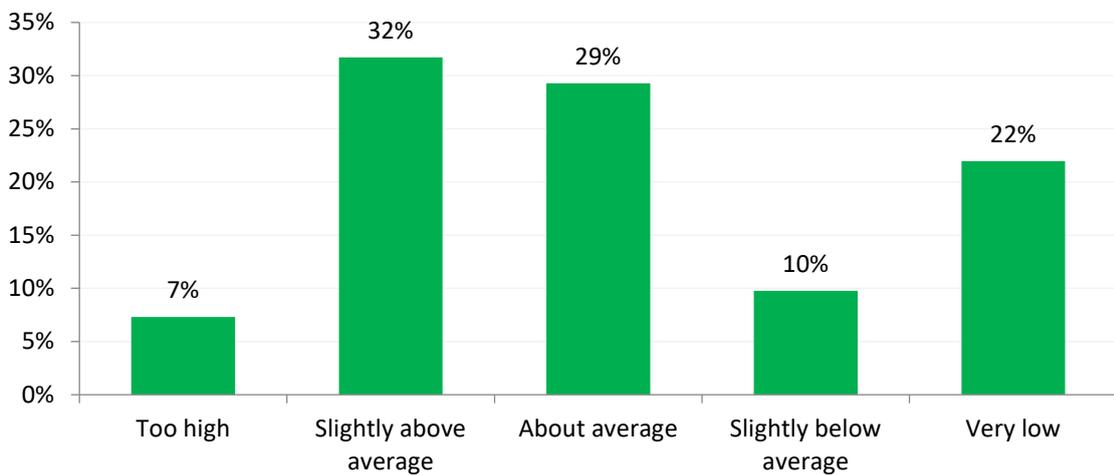
Respondents who were expecting staff reductions were asked what percentage of staff they expect to lose from the service, and the results were as follows: -

### If your service area is subject to workforce reductions, what percentage of staff do you expect to lose from the service?



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% and there has been an increase on those stating staffing losses were not applicable (33% in 2022)

### Are staff absence levels at an acceptable level?



There has been some change in staff absence levels when compared to 2022, with only 7% now stating absence levels were too high compared to 20% in 2022. This has however seen an increase in those saying absence levels are slightly above average, with 32% in 2023 as opposed to 17% in 2022. It is anticipated this view will change as the impacts of the pandemic wanes and measures such as test The most notable change has been with regards to the numbers reporting very low absence levels, 22% in 2023 as opposed to 10% in 2022.

## 9 Training

In terms of training, 71% thought that the training budget will stay the same over the next 12 months and 24% thought that it was going to decrease, largely the same returns as 2022. 5% 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.

Only 43% of respondents stated that they currently have apprentices, which is a significant decrease on 2022 when 61% reported that they had apprentices. Again only 45% are planning to recruit apprentices in 2022/23 which is much lower than 2022, when 71% said they would be recruiting apprentices, perhaps a sign of the earlier concerns about ongoing budget reductions. 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 who do have apprenticeship programmes are looking to maintain them. Other responses included seeking to increase numbers if budgets allow or in some cases having to either reduce numbers or terminate the programme altogether.

## 10 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.

## 11 Service delivery

87.5% of respondents currently have in-house services and 87% expect this to be the case in 2-3 years' time, which is a slight increase on 2022.

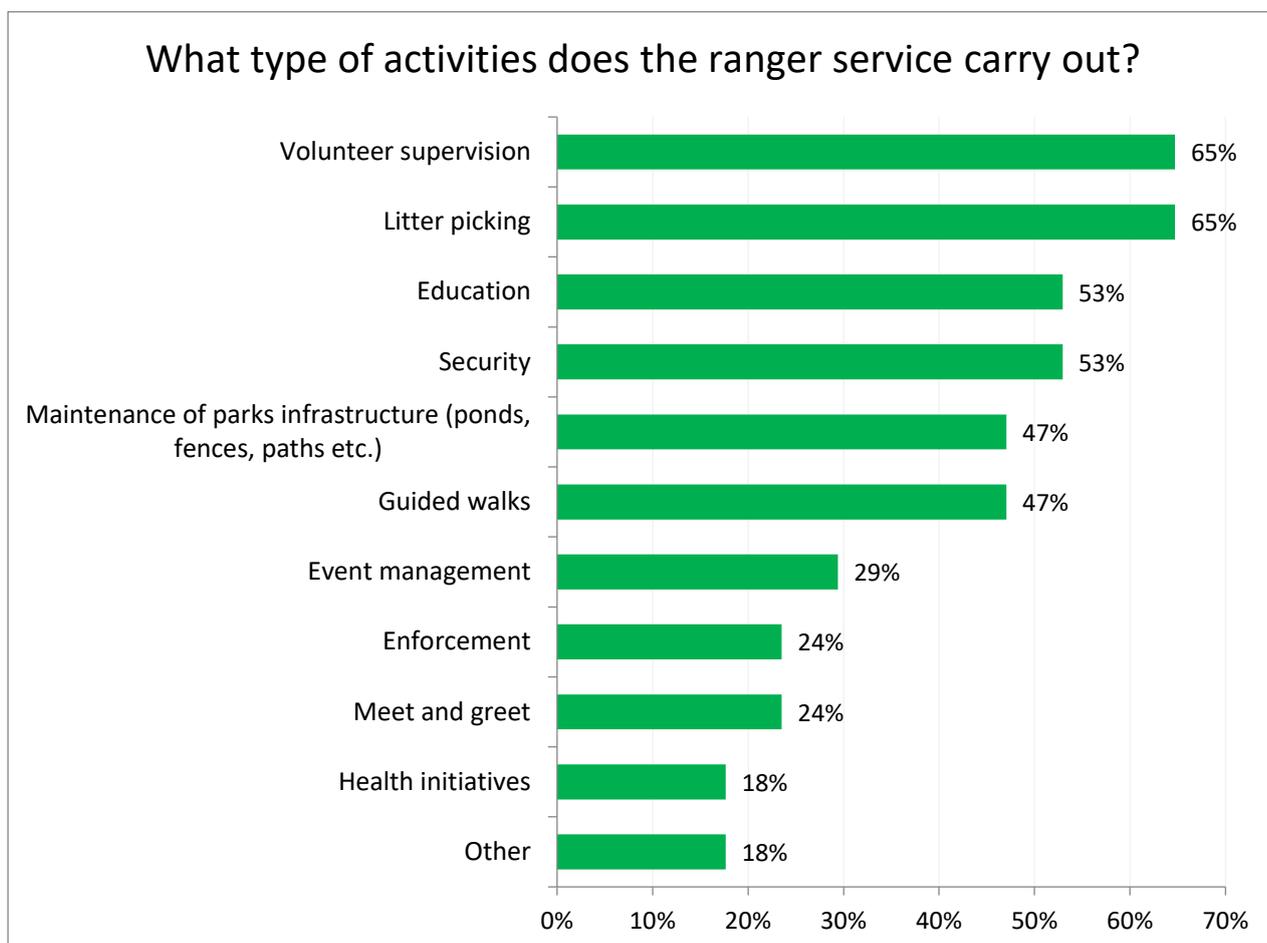
There was very little expectation that alternative options were being considered for parks management.

## 12 Park rangers

40% reported having parks rangers (58% have 1-5 FTE Ranger posts), which is a 10% decrease on 2022. This is clearly an area where further work needs to be carried out as this is a significant decrease.

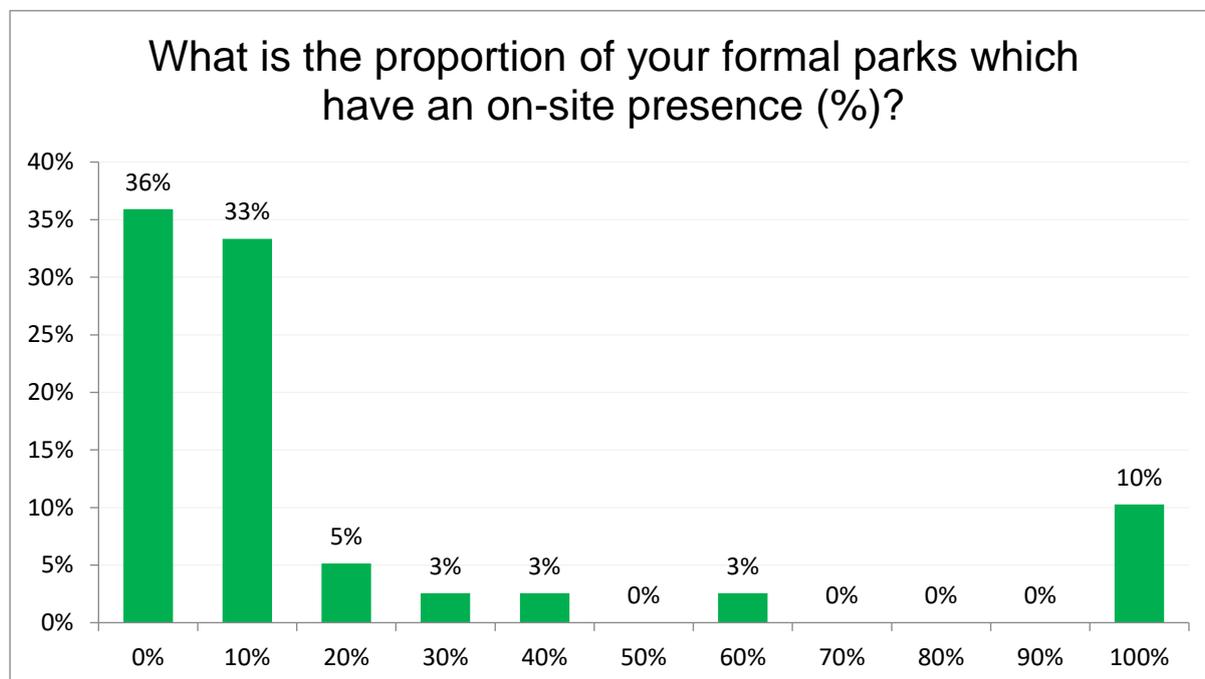
The roles are varied, and the chart below show the variety of responsibilities Rangers carry out. The most significant increase in roles is with regards to education, providing volunteer supervision and education. The amount of time being spent on litter picking and infrastructure maintenance duties 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:



### 13 On-site presence

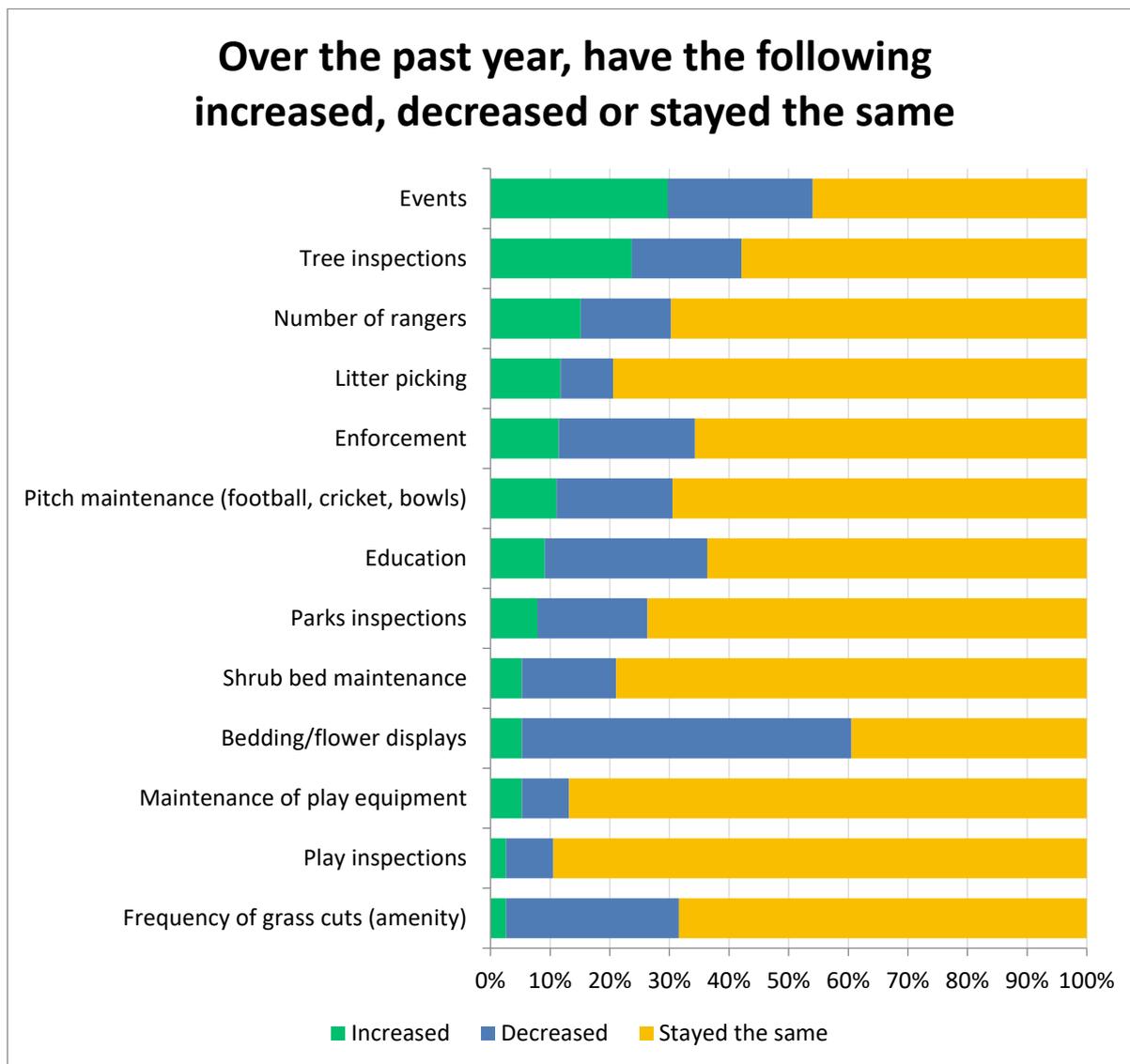
When asked about the proportion of formal parks which have an on-site presence the chart below shows the responses received.



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 will also have impacted on the lack of a permanent presence. However it should be noted that this is the first time 100% presence has had a return and at 10% this is quite significant.

## 14 Service standards and quality of service

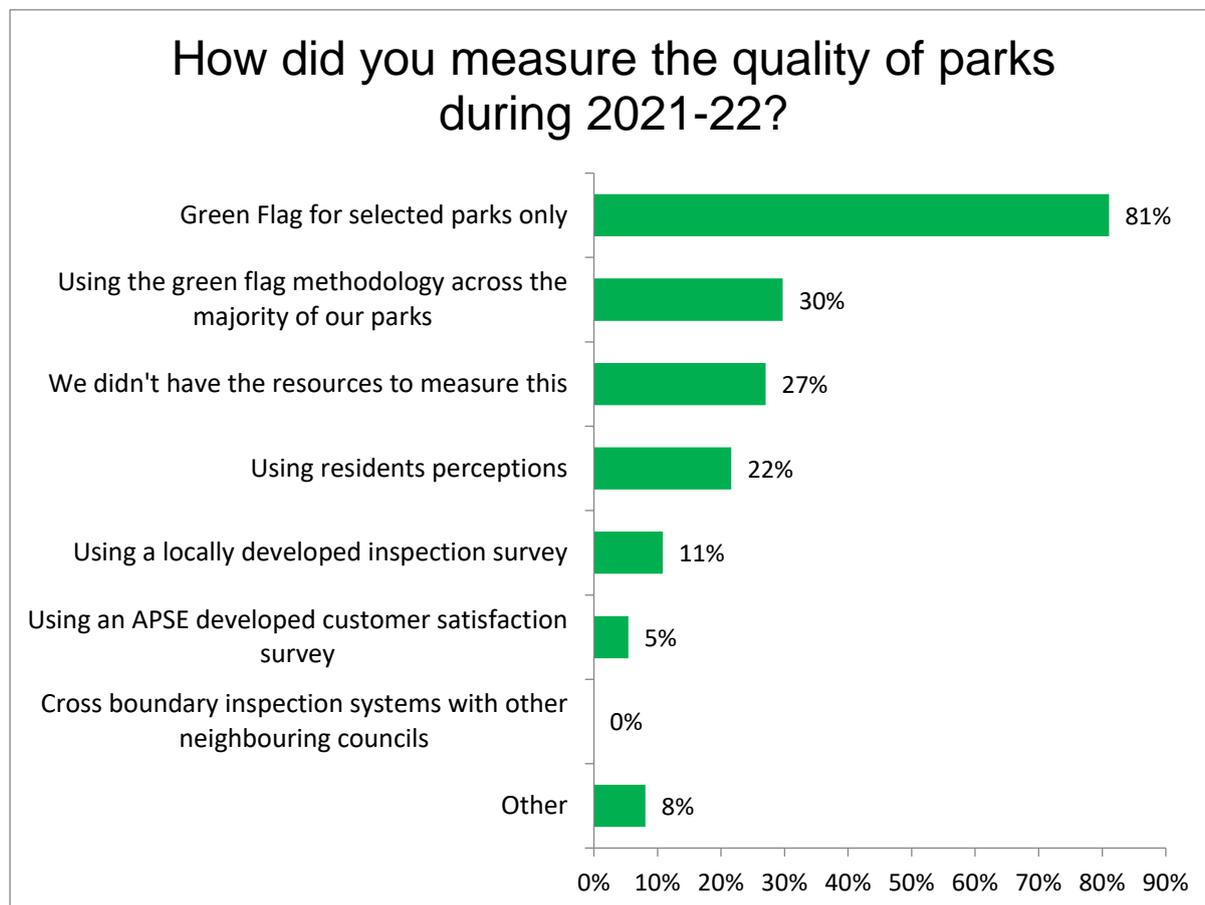
The survey asked, over the past year, which services have increased, decreased, or stayed the same. The respondents answered:



Perhaps not unsurprisingly, events have increased as pandemic restrictions were lifted. Also due to the increasing concerns over the safety of trees and some high-profile fatalities caused by falling trees, tree inspections have also been an area of increase. With regards to decreases as has been the case for the past number of years, both floral displays and grass cutting has been reduced, but re the reduction in grass cutting this could be linked to some extent to the introduction of wilder area and wildflower meadows.

## 15 Quality standards

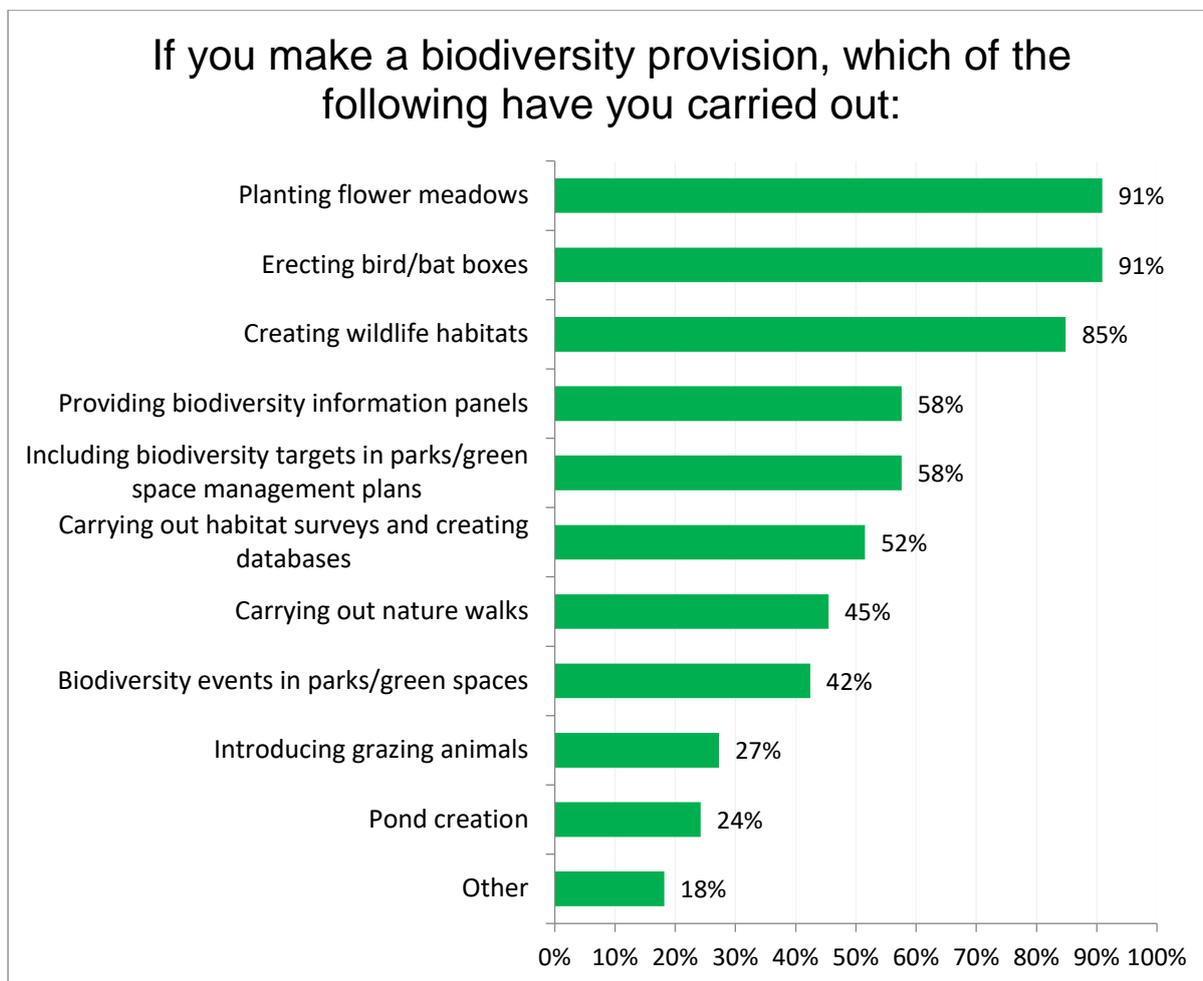
The survey asked how quality of parks was measured during 2018/19 and how respondents intended to measure this in 2022/23 and the results were as follows: -



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.

## 16 Biodiversity

Over 81% 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:

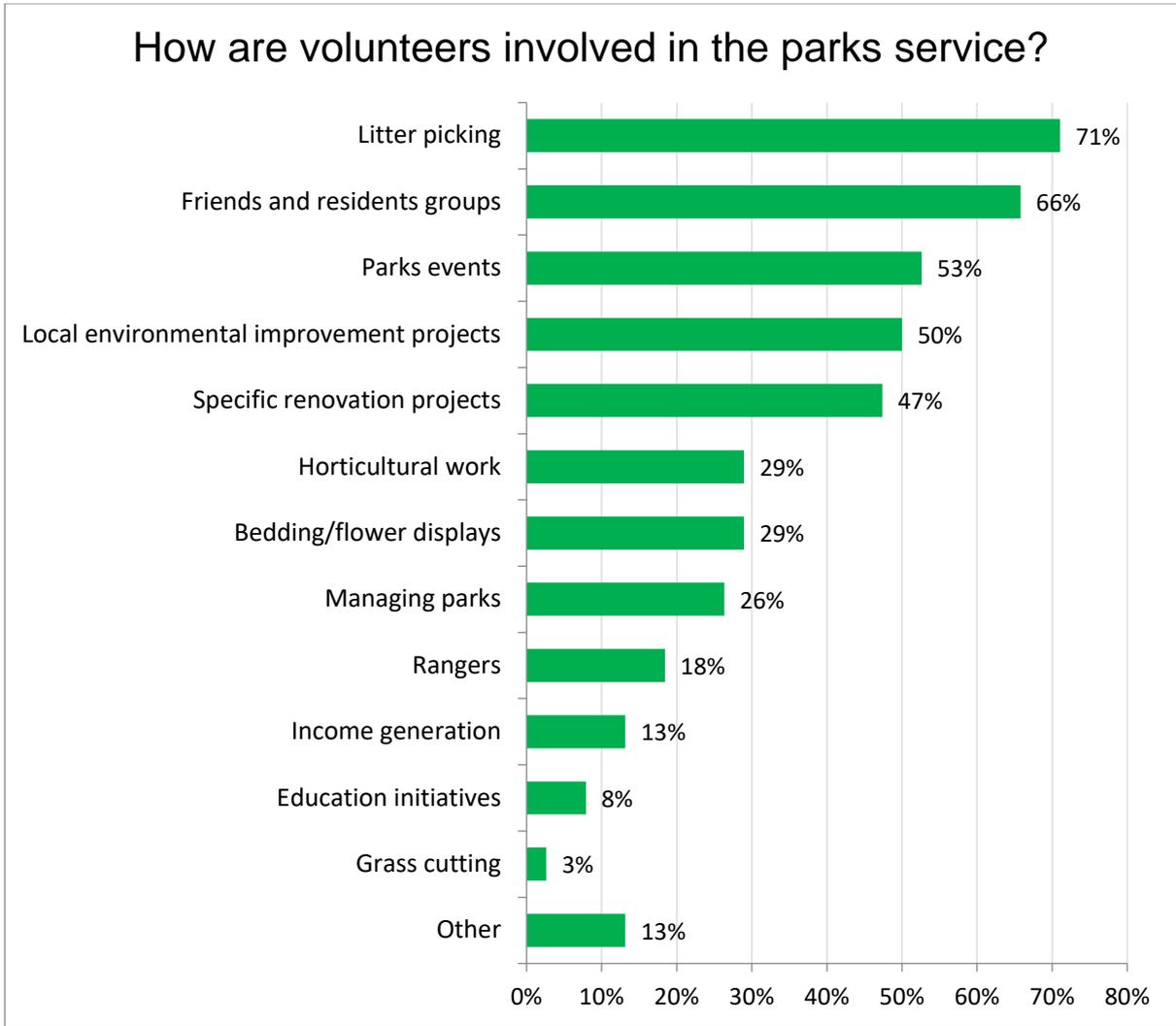


There has been increases in biodiversity provision, In addition, 72% of respondents are actively or considering ways to reduce the amount of chemicals they use to manage their parks and greenspaces. What is noticeable from the comments received is that most parks are now introducing a mixture of the above rather than undertaking single projects.

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.

## 17 Community and volunteer involvement

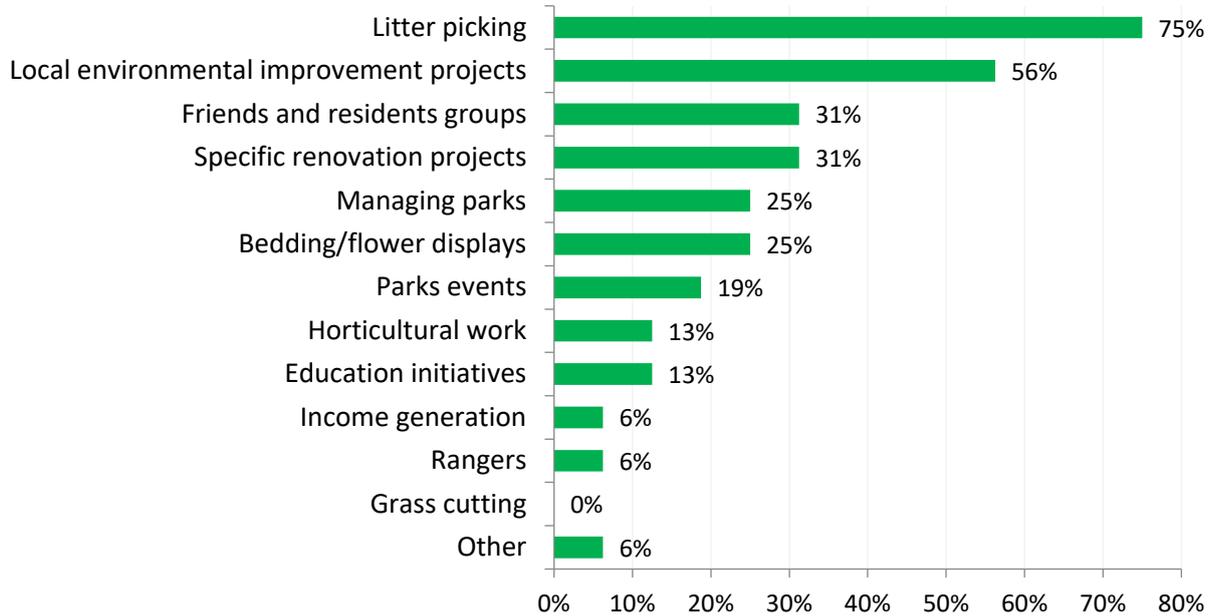
94% of respondents had friends of parks groups operating in their localities. The survey asked how volunteers are involved in the parks service and results were as follows:



The results show that volunteers tend to be involved more in friends and residents’ groups and specific projects like parks events. Volunteers still seem to be mainly involved in litter picking, education initiatives, income generation and specific renovation projects.

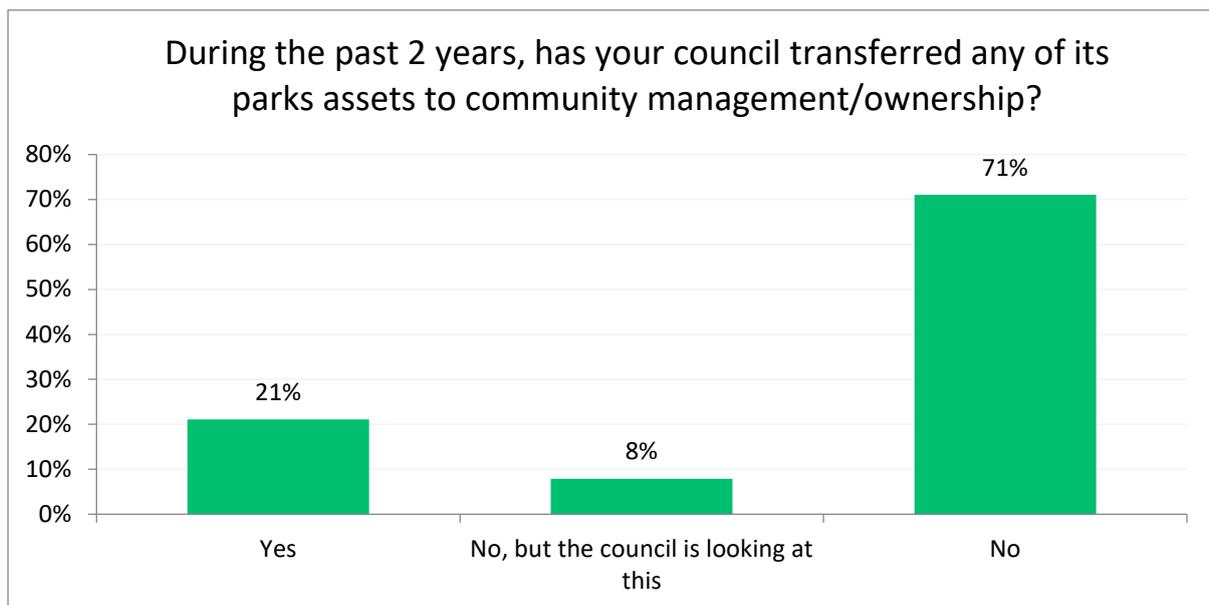
Only 35% of respondents thought that community sector involvement in parks is increasing either slightly or significantly in the following areas as opposed to 2022, but this may be a time lag resulting from the period of uncertainty during the pandemic.

## In what areas is community involvement increasing?



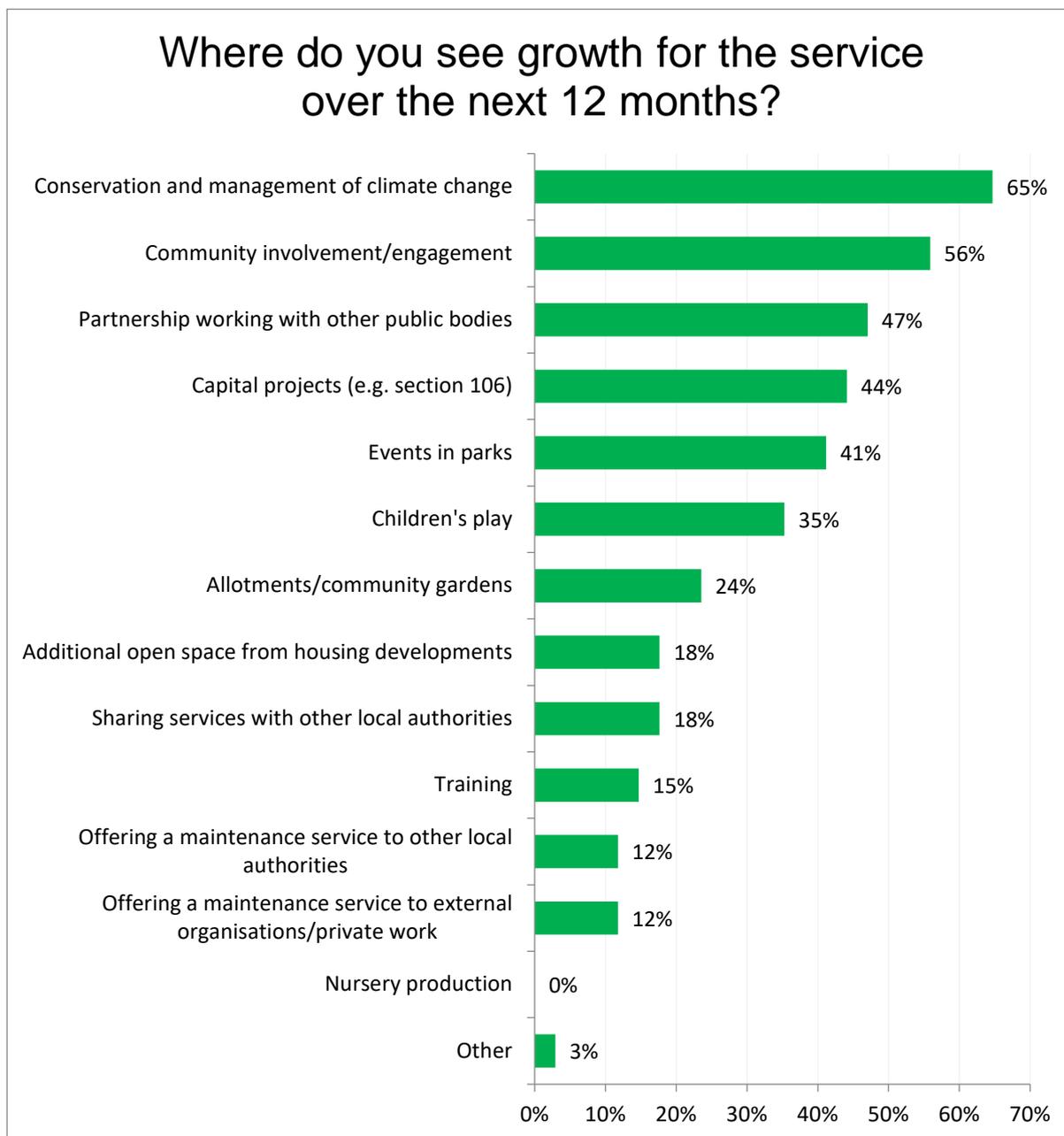
## 18 Transfer of assets

When asked 'during the past 2 years whether your council transferred any of its Park's assets to community management/ownership', 21% said yes, the same as 2022, and 8% said their council is looking at this (a 26% decline on 2022). 71% said they were not considering any form of asset transfer which is a significant difference to 2022 when the score was 44% suggesting asset transfers may be falling out of favour.



## 19 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.



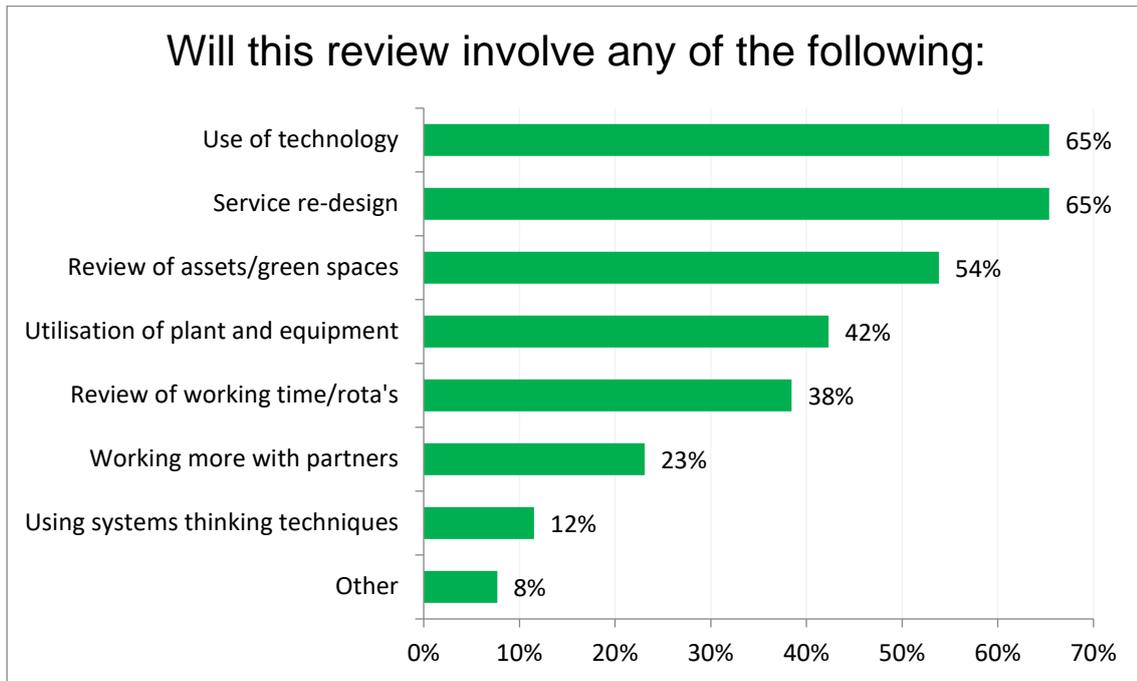
It is clear that conservation and climate change management, community engagement and capital projects are still very much at the forefront of increasing work areas.

The most notable elements of this table is that as with 2022 results there are concentrations on reducing core work such as reductions in service standards, reduced maintenance frequencies, housing grass cutting contracts.

## 20 Service reviews

20% of respondents had recently completed a service review and 20% were currently underway. A further 40% plan to do so in the next 1-2 years. Surprisingly, 20% recorded they had not or did not intend to undertake a service review.

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



## 21 APSE Comment

Undoubtedly 2022/23 results were still affected in some way by the has been impact of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Parks were called upon to meet public health and well-being needs like never before, and despite the lifting of pandemic restrictions, 60% of survey respondents are still stating that they have experienced increases in visitor numbers. This is to a certain degree worrying, not the success of parks in still attracting visitors but the fact budgets are not reflecting the need for extra resources, with many expecting continuing budget cuts. It was noticeable that over 92% of respondents now feel that parks should be given statutory status as a way to prevent further cuts.

Due to the need for social distancing, many traditional parks events and visitor amenities were closed, resulting in significant reductions in income, however most of these are now open and operating again. In fact many respondents noted that they were expecting increases in capital budgets which may create new income generating opportunities to help plug gaps in parks budgets. The only concern was the number of respondents who were expecting cuts to revenue budgets. New facilities and reducing revenue budgets are not a good mix for the future.

In addition, many of the volunteers and Friends Groups had their activities dramatically curtailed, both operationally and through the ability to access grants and additional income they can bring into the parks. Although now active again, it is clear that some are taking longer than others to start up their activities once again.

From the responses received to this survey, it is quite clear that despite the past impacts of the pandemic and 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 particularly as visitor numbers are remaining high, and in many cases increasing.

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. It is noticeable in this year's results that there has been a reduced degree of resistance to income generation from the public and elected members, possibly as a result of the recognition of the importance of parks and the need to make them sustainable in the long-term. But, it has to be recognised 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, 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 but also to our local economies, has become abundantly clear over the pandemic years as whole communities descended upon 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 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 about 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 corporate documents such as Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategies and Local Plans. Indeed, both climate change and biodiversity issues have clearly come to the fore in this year's survey results.

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 and now the cost of living crisis, have 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, the most recent one being the opportunities Biodiversity Net Gain will bring for parks and greenspace managers. In light of this new piece of legislation, APSE has set up a training course which will help members understand the process of biodiversity net gain and the opportunities this will bring. Details can be found at the following [link](#).

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.

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.

## Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

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

Our national advisory groups include:-

- FM and Building cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Cost of Providing/Cost of Living Network
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Local Authority Commercialisation, Income and Trading Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Recovery and Renewal
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, highways and street lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing

Visit [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk) for more details.



**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™**  
We invest in people Gold

Association for Public Service Excellence  
3rd floor,  
Trafford House,  
Chester Road, Manchester M32 0RS.  
telephone: 0161 772 1810  
fax: 0161 772 1811  
web: [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk)

**NEW MUNICIPALISM**  
Delivering for local people and local economies