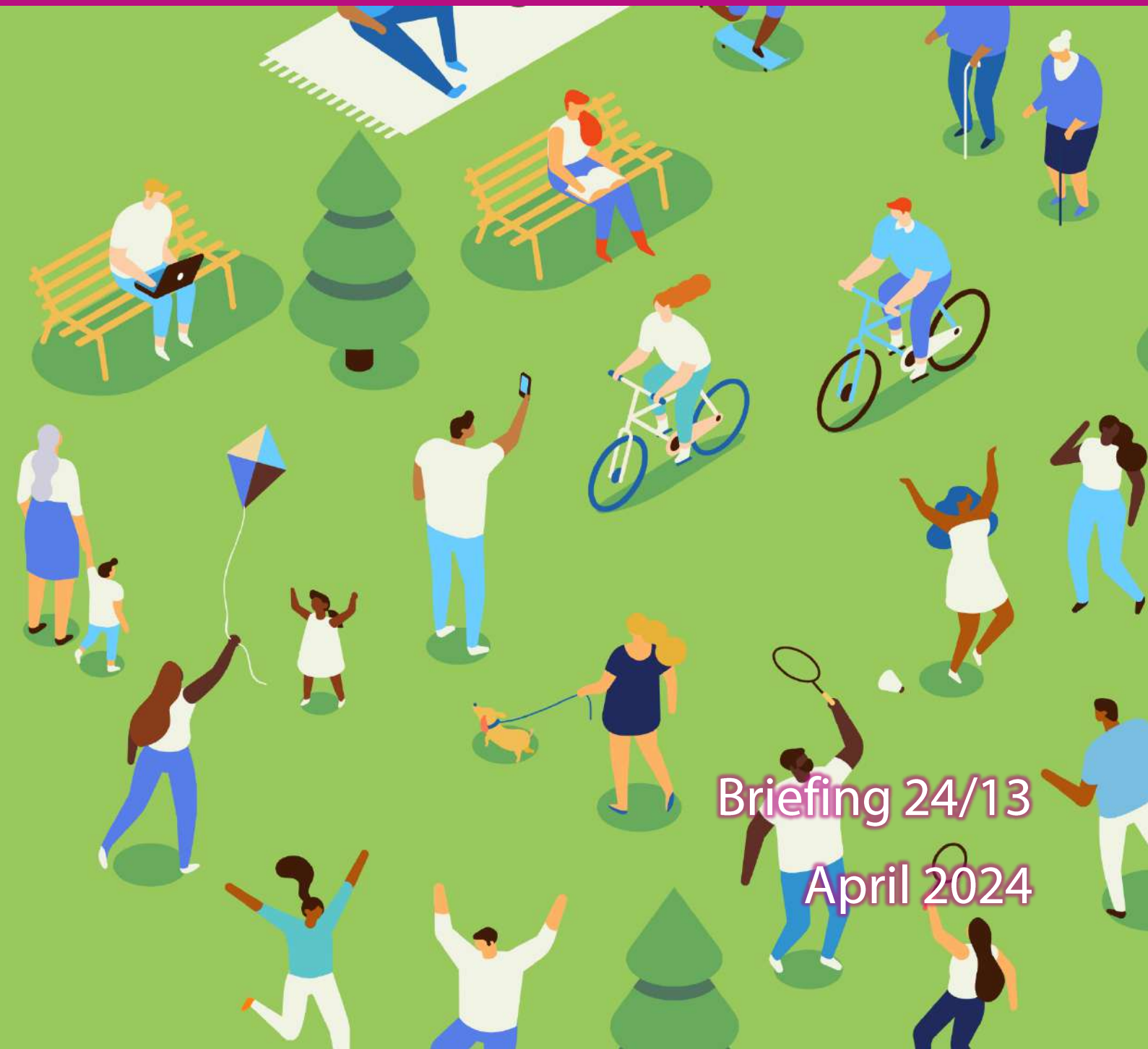




association for public service excellence

Trend Analysis

Parks and Open Spaces



Briefing 24/13

April 2024

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Trend Analysis 2022/23

Local authority parks and open spaces

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About APSE

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is a not-for-profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK.

Promoting excellence in public services, APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority frontline services and operates one of the UK's largest research programmes in local government policy and frontline service delivery matters.

Results at a glance

(Change from 21/22)

Maintenance costs

Maintenance cost per household (excluding CEC)	£41.07	(£1.85) ↓
Maintenance cost per hectare of maintained land (excluding CEC)	£4,851	(£444) ↑

Productivity

Number of hectares maintained per FTE frontline employee	16.36	(0.68) ↑
Number of FTE non frontline employees per 100 hectares maintained	1.32	(0.14) ↓

Quality

% of LAMS sites classed as acceptable (grounds maintenance)	91.64%	(4.76) ↓
Average NPFA play value score of children's playgrounds	34.22	(13.37) ↓

1 Overview

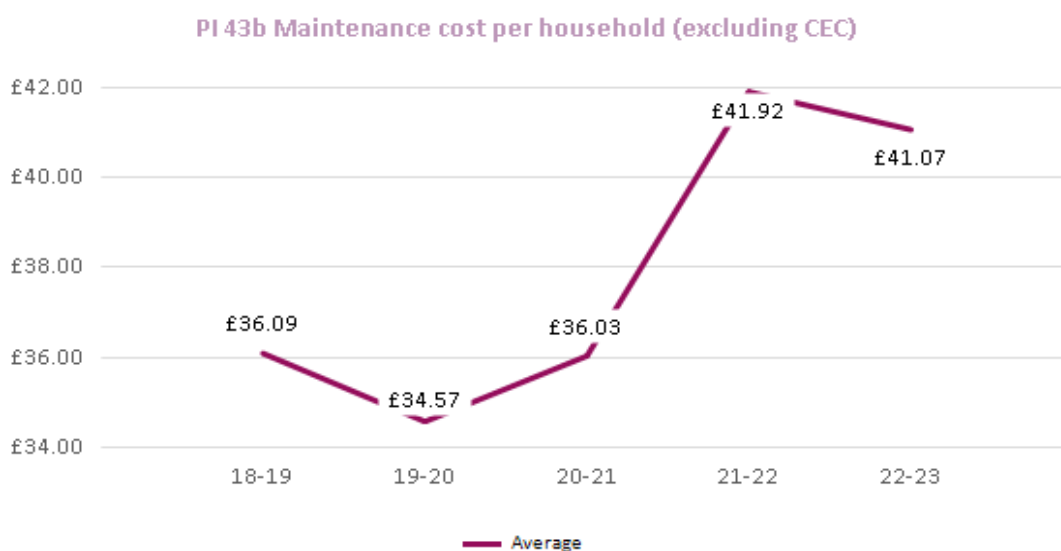
The APSE Performance Networks programme for parks, grounds maintenance and horticultural services provides indicators for various dimensions of the operation; such as the cost, efficiency, productivity and quality. The following executive summary aims to provide participating councils with a picture of what the service trends are; what this infers and what further activity and analysis individual councils and the APSE advisory and benchmarking groups should consider.

The analysis in this summary is based on 'service wide averages' across all participating local authorities for 2022-23. Data is collected at year end (22/23) to provide a reflective analysis and relies upon data submitted by local authorities to the service. The data is then triangulated through discussion groups at the APSE Performance Networks Seminar held in December each year.

2 Cost

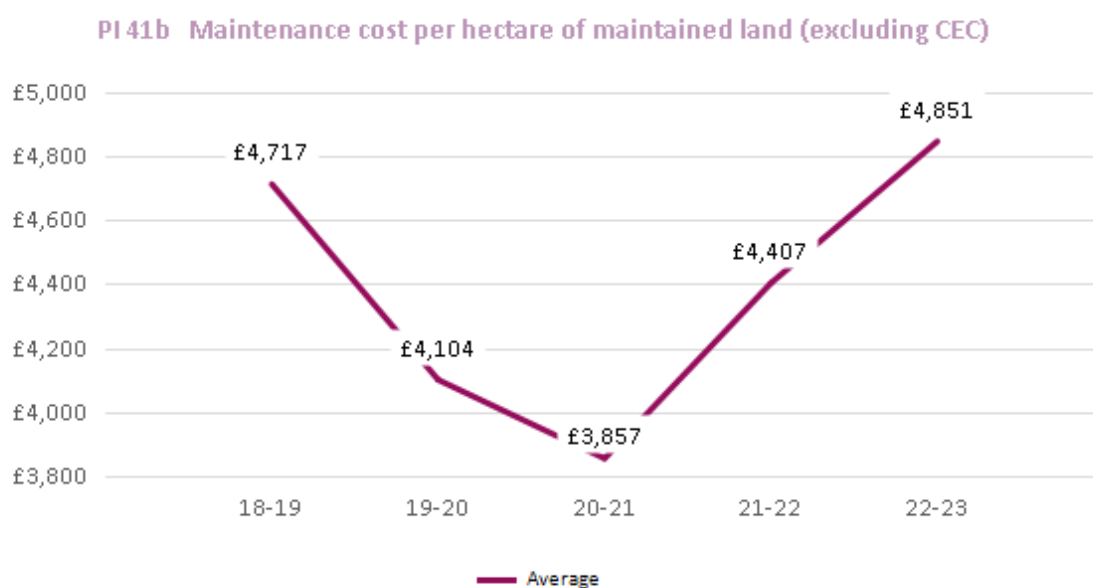
Maintenance cost per household (PI 43b) dropped a little during 2022/23. This is, perhaps, because the additional operating costs associated with COVID have fallen slightly. This, in turn, may be a reflection of a small drop in the number of people using green space compared to the pandemic peak in which people sought refuge in their local parks for exercise and recreation. As more people across the UK made use of their local parks, the management of green spaces took on the need to address the impact of higher levels of footfall. This included the additional costs of wear and tear as well as litter removal, subsequently leading to higher overall service costs.

The 22/23 drop in cost per household may also be a reflection of the fact local authority parks budgets are facing a post-COVID squeeze. The latest APSE State of the Market Survey on Parks reveals 35% of those surveyed expect the level of funding in their service budget to decrease by 10% in the coming five years. A shrinking parks budget means less investment in maintaining public spaces, which has a depreciative effect on maintenance cost per household.



PI 41b continues the trend from last year of rising costs per hectare of maintained land. For the first time since 18/19, the average cost per hectare of maintained land exceeds £4,700. This trend may be explained with reference to the increasing number of councils embracing more relaxed green space maintenance regimes in lieu of rewilding initiatives and hitting biodiversity targets.

Rewilding involves restoring ecosystems with the aim of minimal human management so that natural processes shape the landscape and its habitats. This means fewer hectares to maintain but higher costs per maintained land.

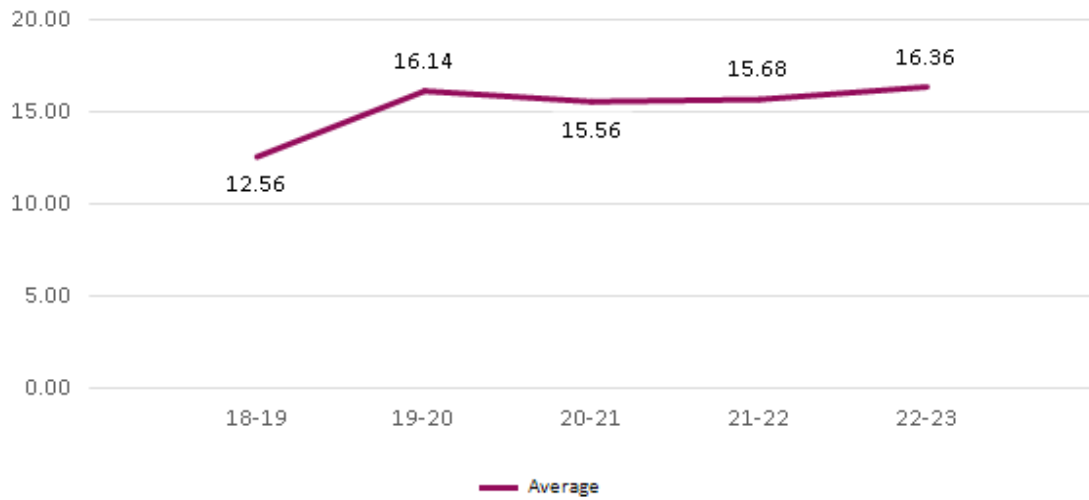


3 Productivity

The average for PI 12 has increased slightly and is now at its highest level since 19/20. Between 2020 and 2022, greenspace areas experienced a higher level of usage than would be normally expected and some of the extra work – repairing pathways, reurfing areas, litter removal, re-instating flower beds and other horticultural features – may have been affected by the large number of people who flocked to parks during the peak of the Covid pandemic. As a result, not all the land requiring maintenance may have been covered and so could have been left out of the equation.

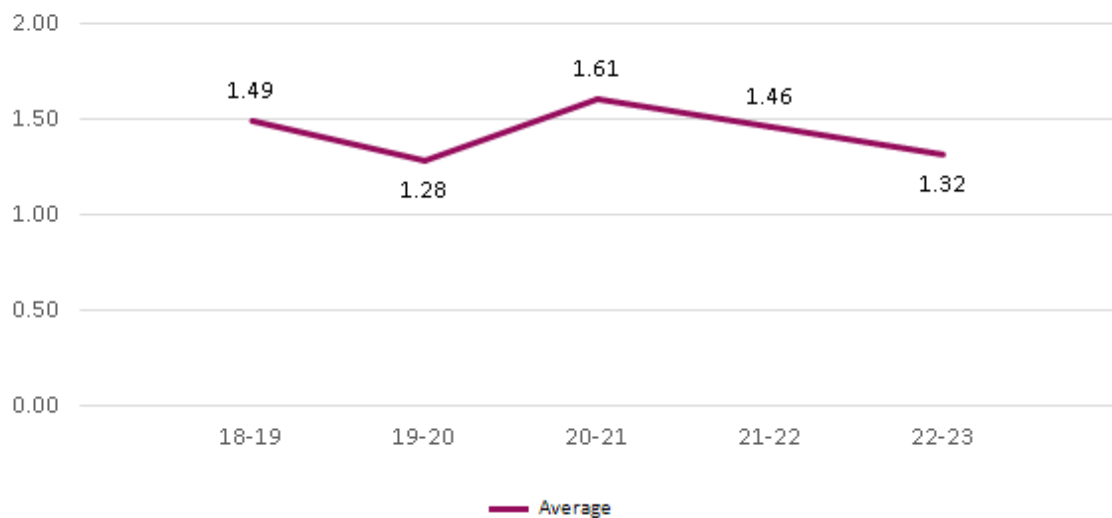
PI 12 would suggest a return to ‘normality’ as the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic no longer apply. However, it is important to note that with staff numbers declining due to budget constraints, the higher average is likely to be a reflection of fewer staff having to cover more hectares.

PI 12 Number of hectares maintained per FTE front line employee



The figure of 1.32 for 22/23 continues the trend from 21/22 of fewer FTE non frontline employees per 100 hectares maintained. The rise in PI 27 in 2020/21 may have been a result of extra staff being employed to cover maintenance and security/social distancing requirements in those parks with large visitor numbers.

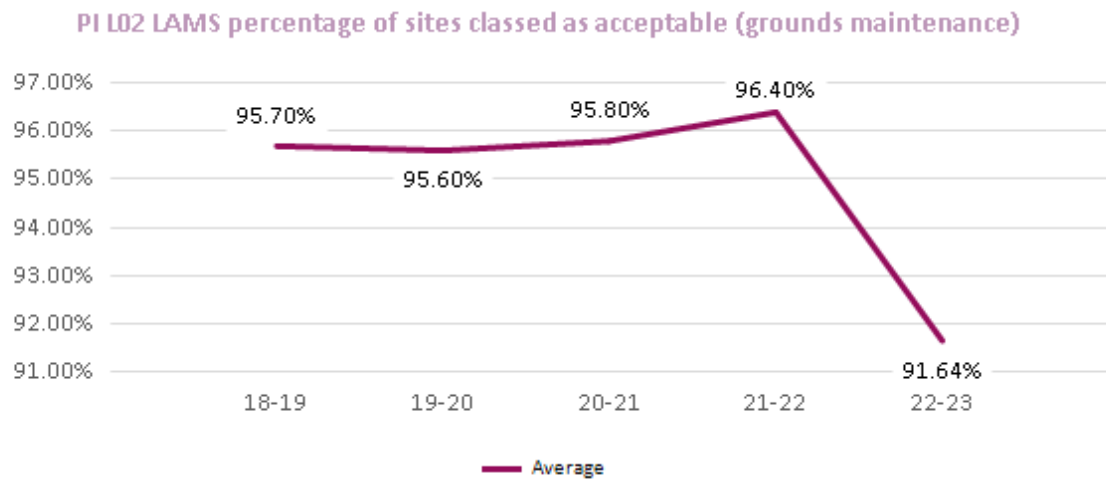
PI 27 Number of FTE non front line employees per 100 hectares maintained



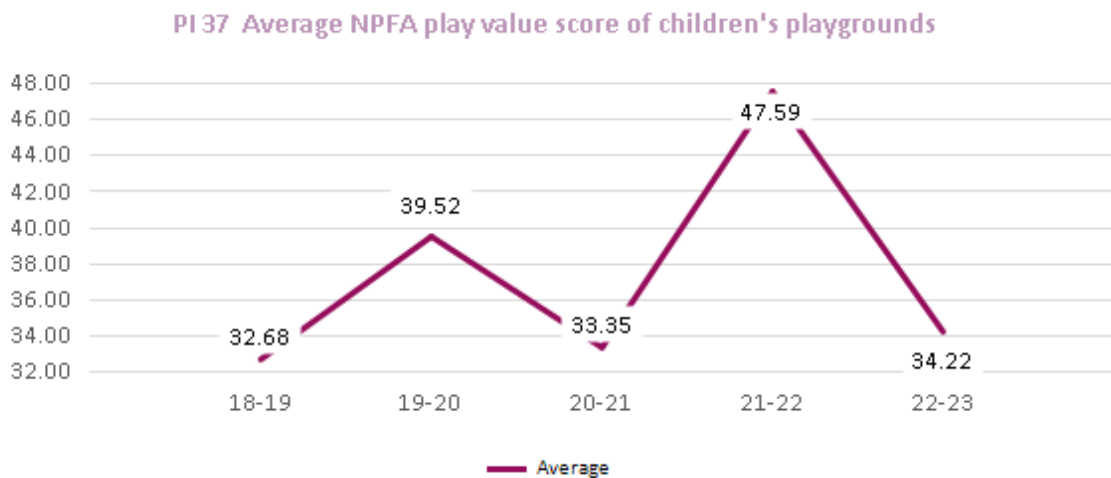
4 Quality

The number of acceptable sites (PI L02) has notably decreased from 96.40% to 91.64%. This perhaps can be explained with reference to financial constraints squeezing capacity as well as the reduced use of glyphosate in shrub bed and hard surface weed management. There has also been a surge in the number of APSE member councils signed up to our Land Audit Management System, many of whom manage sites that lag in quality behind existing LAMS users. Closer analysis of individual results show 2 new councils coming into the data set this year compared to the previous year with significantly lower figures (below 75%) which are dragging the average for

the service down. If the PI is analysed based solely on those councils that submitted data for both 21/22 and 22/23 then the average changes from 94.52 in 21-22 to 94.69 in 22/23.



This year's figure for PI 37 is similar to previous years except from 21/22 which was an unusual spike in the data and bucked the trend



5 APSE comment

With COVID associated restrictions and adaptations now a thing of the past, parks and open spaces teams have, in some regards, returned to a pre-pandemic level of normality in terms of how they function. However, post-pandemic inflationary pressures, and their impact on local government resources, can be observed across performance indicators such as maintenance costs and quality.

APSE are introducing a scored environmental sustainability PI in most service areas over the next couple of years for us to further track progress and highlight areas of good practice. In addition, APSE are launching a corporate climate change model this year to benchmark overall performance

on measures such as emissions, which can be used in conjunction with some of the service-based measures.

More information about the new environmental sustainability PI can be [found here](#).

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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.

Our national advisory groups include:-

- Building cleaning
- Catering
- Cemeteries and crematoria
- Commercialisation network: Local authority trading, charging and income generation
- Housing, construction and building maintenance
- Parks, horticultural and ground maintenance
- 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 for more detail

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