



association for public service excellence

# Local Authority State of the Market 2024

## Parks and Greenspaces



Briefing 24/14

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## Local Authority State of the Market 2024

### Parks and greenspaces

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# Results at a glance

(Change from 2023)

## Budgets

Expect an increase in revenue this next year	<b>0%</b>	-12%
Expect an increase in capital this next year	<b>10%</b>	+1%
Expect the level of funding in the budget to decrease by >5% in the next five years	<b>74%</b>	+16%

## Income generation

Are generating income from the sale of land	<b>18%</b>	+9%
Consider political resistance a barrier to generating income	<b>65%</b>	+15%

## Workforce

Expect redundancies in in the next 12 months	<b>31%</b>	+5%
Expect their training budget to increase in the next 12 months	<b>2%</b>	-3%
Will not be recruiting apprentices in 2024-25	<b>53%</b>	+2%

## Grass cuts

Reduced the frequency of grass cuts (amenity) in the last 12 months	<b>55%</b>	+26%
Average number of grass cuts (amenity) per annum	<b>12</b>	-1.5

## Future growth for the service over the next 12 months

Conservation and management of climate change	<b>68%</b>	+3%
Allotments/community gardens	<b>30%</b>	+6%

## 1 Purpose of the report

Each year APSE undertakes a survey on the state of the market in local authority parks, horticultural services and grounds maintenance. The survey is distributed to officers and elected members across the UK and includes a range of questions covering a diverse range of topics – from budgets and income generation to biodiversity targets and community groups.

Where possible, this report adopts a comparative analysis with previous APSE state of the market surveys. This allows for the identification of trends in the sector, as well as the challenges, opportunities, and issues that local authority parks and greenspace teams are facing. The results of the survey are shared with local authorities and other organisations to help them better understand the needs of the sector.

### 1.1 Methodology

APSE conducted a survey of its member local councils between January and March 2024. A total of 64 responses were received from 64 separate councils with a completion rate of 100%. The total number of responses provides a good representative sample of the UK local authority parks sector.

Respondents were relatively evenly spread across APSE's six areas of activity: APSE Scotland, APSE Wales, APSE Northern Ireland, APSE Northern, APSE Southern and APSE Central.

### What do the survey results tell us?



*"The squeeze on public sector resources are affecting parks and green spaces disproportionately to other service areas."*

Continuing the trend from last year, the number of respondents who either 'Agree' or 'Agree strongly' with the above statement has decreased – from 70% to 66%. This may reflect the fact that the highs of 2021 and 2022 were due to the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic. Many of the income generating sources are now fully operational and once again helping to plug gaps in budgets. That said, as 2.1 reveals, those gaps are widening as a consequence of the ongoing UK local government funding crisis.

The slight increase in those who disagree with the above statement does not suggest their parks service feeling the squeeze. Only that the squeeze isn't being felt "disproportionately" to other local government services. In the wake of the cost-of-living crisis, APSE state of the market surveys consistently find that across local government services, budgets are really feeling the strain.

**78%**

*"Agree" or "Agree strongly"*

**"Reductions in funding has resulted in a withdrawal of maintenance from some land and an increase in unmaintained land."**

When it comes to those who 'Agree' or 'Agree strongly' with the above statement, there has been a slight increase of 4 % from last year's survey (74%). However, this is still down on the 2022 high of 92%. This drop may additionally be explained with reference to the increasing number of councils who are embracing more relaxed green space maintenance regimes because of rewilding initiatives and hitting biodiversity targets, which may be incidental to the issues of funding reductions.

**91%**

*"Agree" or "Agree strongly"*

**"The public should get free access to all parks"**

A slight increase from 2023 (89%), the figure of 91% demonstrates the overwhelming support across the sector for parks as a universal service – free at the point of access. For those who disagreed with the above statement, their disagreement stemmed from the issue of car parking, with one particular comment noting *that "access to parks should be free. However, we should charge for car parking to help fund infrastructure within the parks."*

**"What environmental issues are a priority for your parks and green space service?"**  
[Multiple choice]

**91%**

**Biodiversity**

**69%**

**Litter control**

**47%**

**Dog fouling**

Biodiversity continues to be identified as the main environmental priority for parks services at 91%. The emergence of biodiversity as a priority issue since 2021 is expected; local authorities now have a duty to restore species and habitats in the environment (Environment Act 2021). The second highest priority is litter control at 69%.

Though the proportion of UK adults who own a dog has grown since the onset of the pandemic in 2020, dog fouling has dropped as a priority from 65% in 2023 to 47% in 2024. This may be a consequence of the increase in upper limits for on-the-spot fines introduced as part of the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan in April 2023. Or it may simply be other environmental issues – such

as biodiversity and litter control – now take precedence. APSE conducted its own survey on dog enforcement in 2023<sup>1</sup>, and prepared a briefing on the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan last year.<sup>2</sup>

“What social issues are a priority for your parks and green space service?” [Multiple choice]



As in 2023, the most popular response for social priorities was ‘Supporting healthy living’. At 91% This once again demonstrates the importance of parks and greenspaces to delivering significant benefits to the public’s health and well-being. APSE’s own research in 2020 estimated that parks contribute £2.8bn per year to Scotland’s community health and well-being. Through their contribution to better health, parks save NHS Scotland some £9m per year in fewer GP visits alone.<sup>3</sup>

The value of parks to community cohesion and reducing anti-social behaviour are still recognised as having significant value.

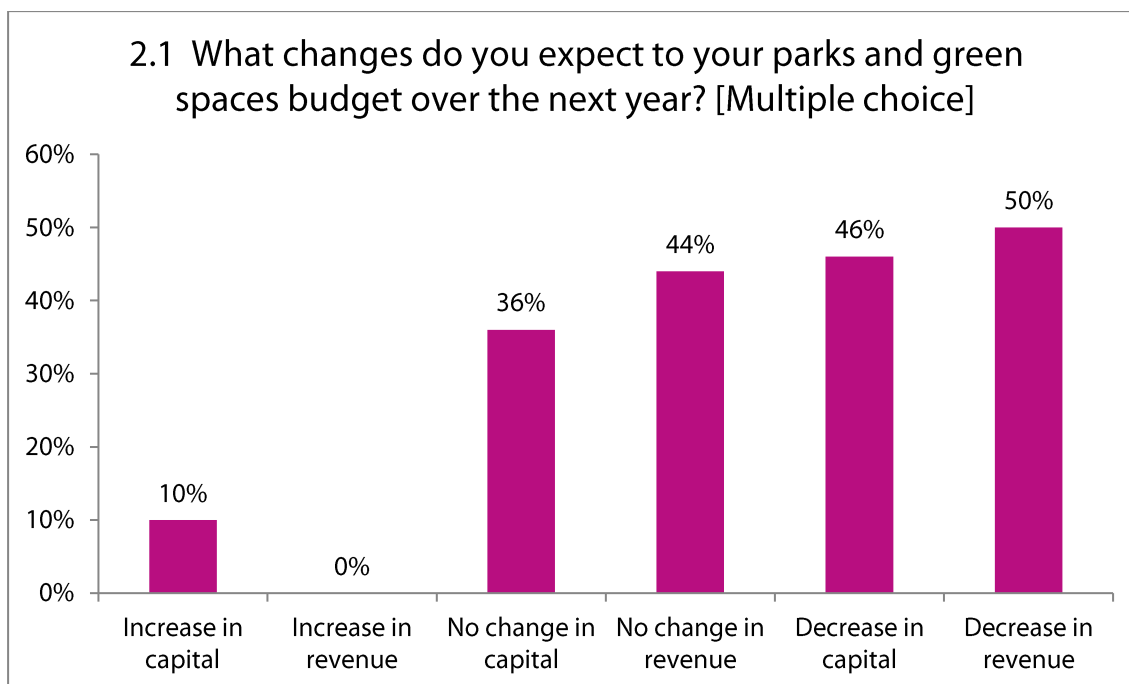
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<sup>1</sup> <https://apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/members-area/briefings/2023/23-41-dog-enforcement-survey/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/members-area/briefings/2023/23-19-anti-social-behaviour-action-plan/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.apse.org.uk/sites/apse/assets/File/Spending%20on%20parks%20in%20Scotland\\_compressed-2.pdf](https://www.apse.org.uk/sites/apse/assets/File/Spending%20on%20parks%20in%20Scotland_compressed-2.pdf)

## 2 Budgets



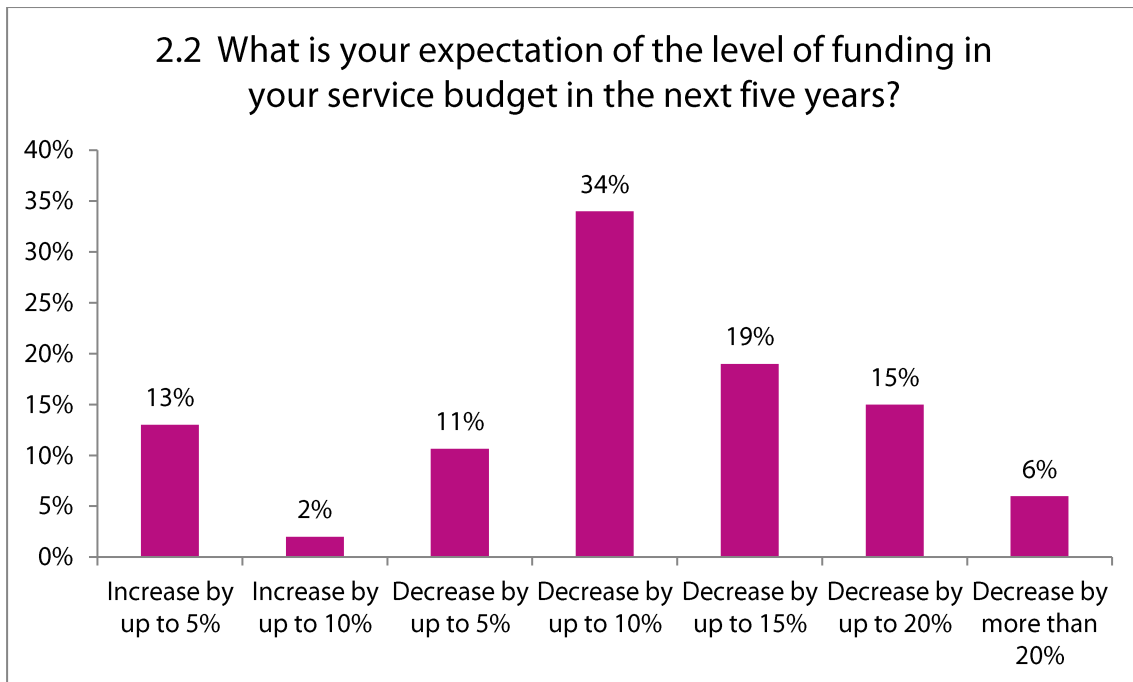
The main takeaway from 2.1 is that none of those surveyed expect to receive an increase in revenue in their parks budgets this coming year, with exactly half expecting a decrease in revenue. One comment added colour to these findings by noting there is *“little to no evidence of a much-needed cash injection into parks from central government funding”*. This bleak outlook for revenue amongst those who work in local parks reflects the bleak financial situation many UK councils now find themselves in. The latest APSE and Survation research found one in four councillors think their local authority is at risk of bankruptcy within the next five years.<sup>4</sup>

Several comments on this question revealed that even for those who anticipate no change in revenue, inflationary pressures mean the cost of running services has increased; parks managers can therefore expect *“much less bang for our buck.”*

The outlook on capital spend is similarly gloomy with 44% expecting a decrease in capital spend. However, 10% do anticipate an increase in capital spend.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/research/current-research-programme/public-attitudes-to-local-council-services-2023/>



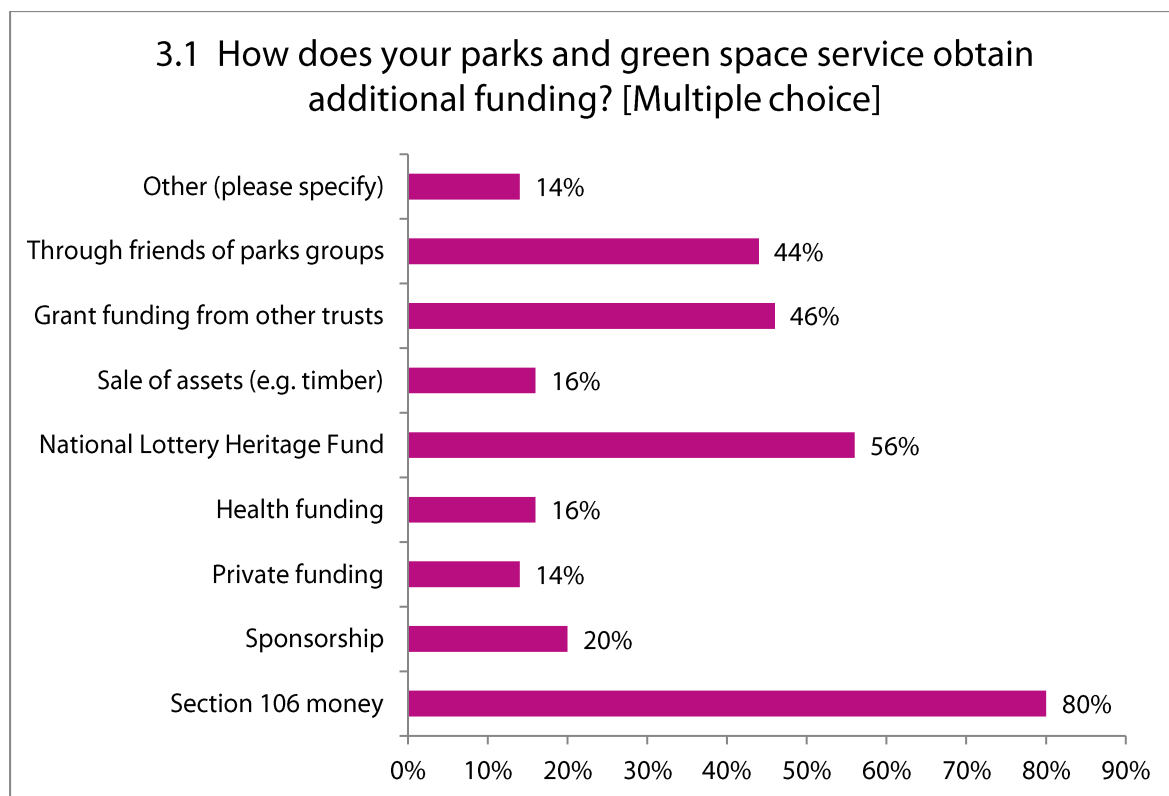
In 2.2, it is revealed that 74% of those surveyed expect the level of funding in the budget to decrease by >5% in the next five years. This is an increase of 16.5% on the previous year, demonstrating just how much the ongoing local government funding crisis is squeezing the budgets of neighbourhood services.

In the comments, a couple of respondents noted their service budget is expecting decreases in funding of up to 30% in the next five years.

With the spectre of Section 114 notices haunting an ever-increasing number of UK councils, the evidence of its impact on the operations of local government parks services is laid bare in 2.1 and 2.2.



### 3 Additional funding



Section 106 money remains the most popular source of additional funding for local councils with four-fifths of those surveyed obtaining funding from it. This represents a not insignificant drop of 8% from 2023.

Compared to last year (44%), there has been a 12% increase in the number of councils accessing National Lottery Heritage Fund money. This increase may be a consequence of the Heritage 2033 strategy raising the threshold for the National Lottery Grants for Heritage funding programmes from £5m to £10 in order to support larger, more ambitious projects over a longer period.<sup>5</sup>

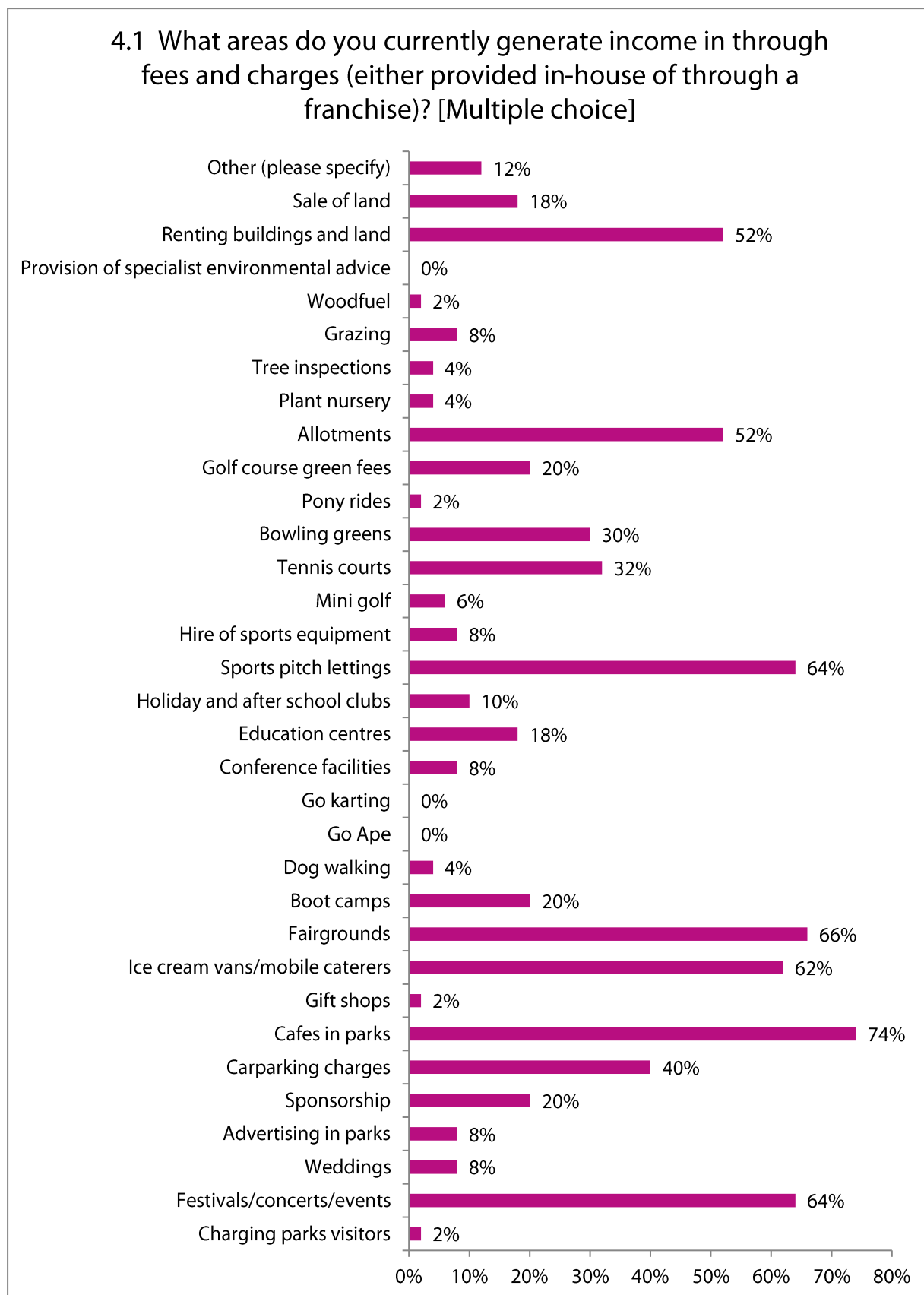
The number of respondents receiving income 'Through friends of parks groups' has increased from 37% to 44%.

Amidst the local government funding crisis, 3.1 shows that local authority parks teams are successfully introducing new and innovative ways to sustainably manage parks. Whether this be through income generation, partnerships or alternative forms of funding. However, there is a limit to how many budget gaps these new innovations can plug.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/about/heritage-2033-our-10-year-strategy>

## 4 Income generation



APSE's State of UK Public Parks 2021 Report found that, between 2010 and 2016, parks lost an estimated £500 million in funding. An estimated £190 million was lost from local authority parks budgets between 2016-2021, meaning a total of £690 million was lost from parks budgets 2010-2021.

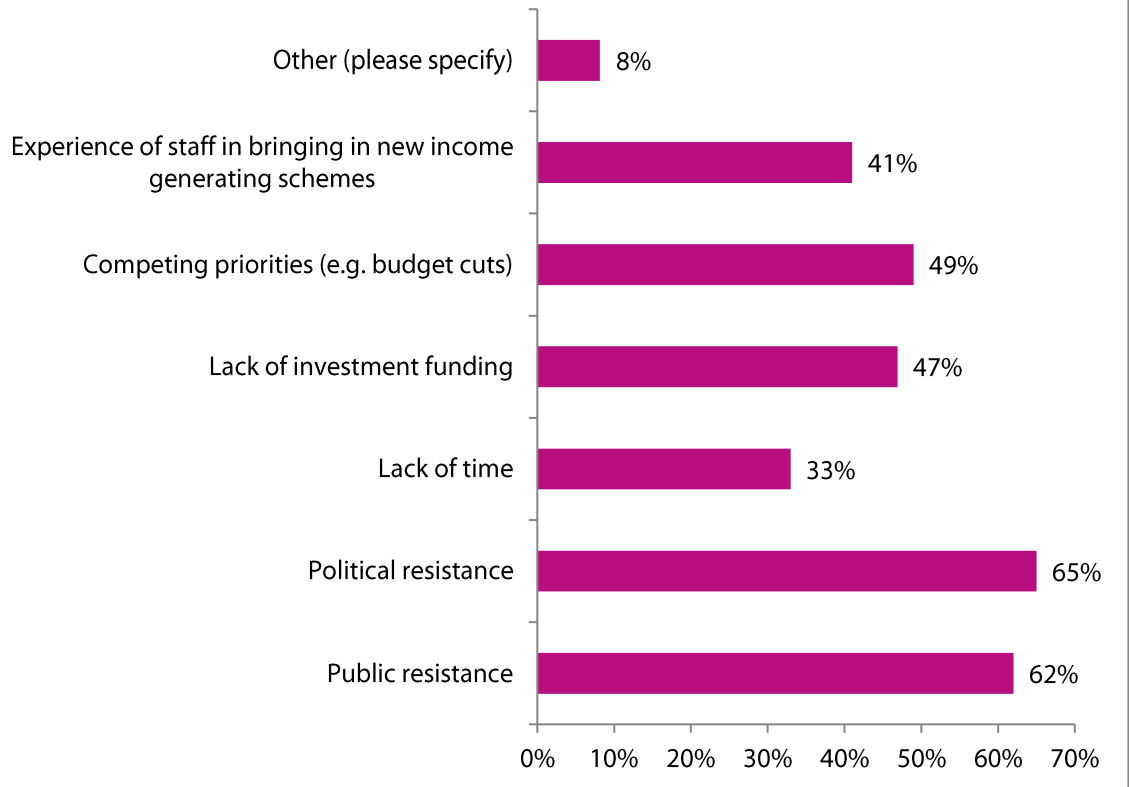
Since 2021, the squeeze austerity placed on local council finances – and the finances of parks teams in particular - has meant parks professionals have had to come up with more creative ways to generate income to bridge the gap left by cuts in funding. These sources of income include commercial trading for profit, using assets to generate income and, in some cases, offsetting service costs by using fees and charges.

4.1 reveals the wide range of income generating activities parks and greenspaces teams are engaged in. These activities took a serious hit during the pandemic as cafes, sports pitch hire, and events were effectively stopped by public health restrictions. Though there has been some recovery, several income generating activities are still slower than they were pre-COVID. For example:

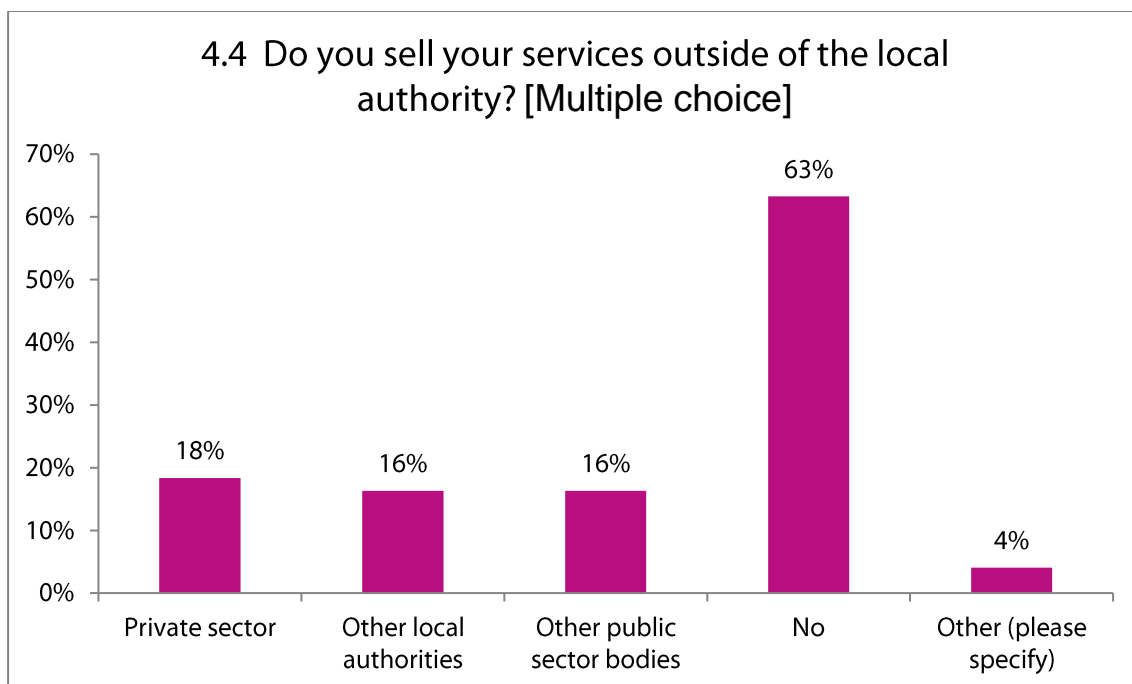
<b>Income generating activity</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>Variation (+/-)</b>
Sports pitch lettings	<b>83%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>-19%</b>
Fairgrounds	<b>80%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>-14%</b>
Festivals/concerts/events	<b>77%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>-13%</b>
Sale of land	<b>9%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>+9%</b>

Though there has been an uptick in certain commercial activities such as 'Allotments' (up 4% from 2023), these have been unable to offset the drop-off in income from activities such as sports pitch lettings and festivals/events. This loss of income may be reflected in the increase in the number of councils now selling their land to plug gaps in their budgets – from 9% in 2019 to 18% in 2024.

### 4.3 What are the barriers to generating income? [Multiple choice]



Regarding barriers to generating income, 4.3 shows 'Political resistance' and 'Public resistance' top the list. Public resistance (62%) is a 22% increase on the 2023 figure, whilst political resistance (65%) represents an increase of 25%. These increases may reflect the fact that, as the cost-of-living crisis has squeezed family budgets and weakened disposable income, charging and trading in parks services has become a more sensitive issue on the doorstep. Dwindling budgets and resources also means parks teams are faced with a 'Lack of investment funding' (47%) and a 'Lack of time' (33%). So even for those teams that have the political support, many lack the resources to effectively implement income generating schemes.



The figures in 4.4 demonstrate just how few local authority parks teams sell services outside of the local authority. The fact that over two-fifths of those surveyed in 4.3 do not have access to personnel with the necessary experience and knowledge of income generation makes it much harder to proceed with selling services outside of the local authority.

In APSE's "Local authority income generation, trading and charging: State of the Market Survey Report 2015", APSE argued "*there is huge scope for developing business relationships with other public sector providers including the NHS, Police and Fire and Rescue Services.*"<sup>6</sup> From 4.4, one can see that huge scope still remains as other public bodies constitute the lowest source of income for around a 16% of those surveyed.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/members-area/briefings/2015/15-64-local-authority-income-generation-trading-and-charging-state-of-the-market-survey-report-2015/>

## 5 Efficiencies

Reductions in maintenance dominate the responses of those surveyed. As noted on page 4, 75% agree that "reductions in funding has resulted in a withdrawal of maintenance from some land and an increase in unmaintained land." Comments also drew attention to staff redundancies, in addition to increasing volunteer involvement and income generating activities:

*"Looking at reducing grass cutting across the whole area. less weed control particular reduction in pesticides."*

*"Reduction in size of maintenance team through voluntary redundancy. Reduction in litter picking at weekends. Removal of all annual bedding. Closure of cricket pitch."*

*"Rationalisation of rose/shrub beds, reduced sport provision reduced mowing frequency."*

*"Ongoing savings challenges - reducing FTE headcount. Increasing income generation."*

*"Securing more income streams from events, car parking, bookings for outdoor learning, cafe, ice creams etc."*

*"Doing more for less, absorbing inflationary increases without an increase to budget. Not replacing vacant posts. Removing seasonal planting and shrub beds features."*

*"Relaxed grass cutting regimes, increasing the number and size of areas managed as rough grassland and meadowland. Our service provider is currently trialling a number of electric vehicles and power tools, to increase sustainability and reduce fuel costs. Our service provider is combining some operations and administrative duties with the GM service they provide for our housing."*

*"Reduction in Street Cleansing by £150,000 which equals approximately 3 x vacant posts."*

*"Increased income generation opportunities (cafes, mobile catering, Go Ape and other payable leisure activities). Reduced maintenance costs for sports provision, currently offered at a loss (e.g. transferring sports pitches to clubs on a repair and maintenance lease). Reducing maintenance costs of general grass areas (e.g.: re-wilding, tree and hedgerow planting - which also supports biodiversity)."*

*"Lowering frequencies of grass cutting regimes. Combining resources of two services that have equipment both can benefit from. Switching to electric equipment and investing in solar and battery storage to power it to make long term gains."*

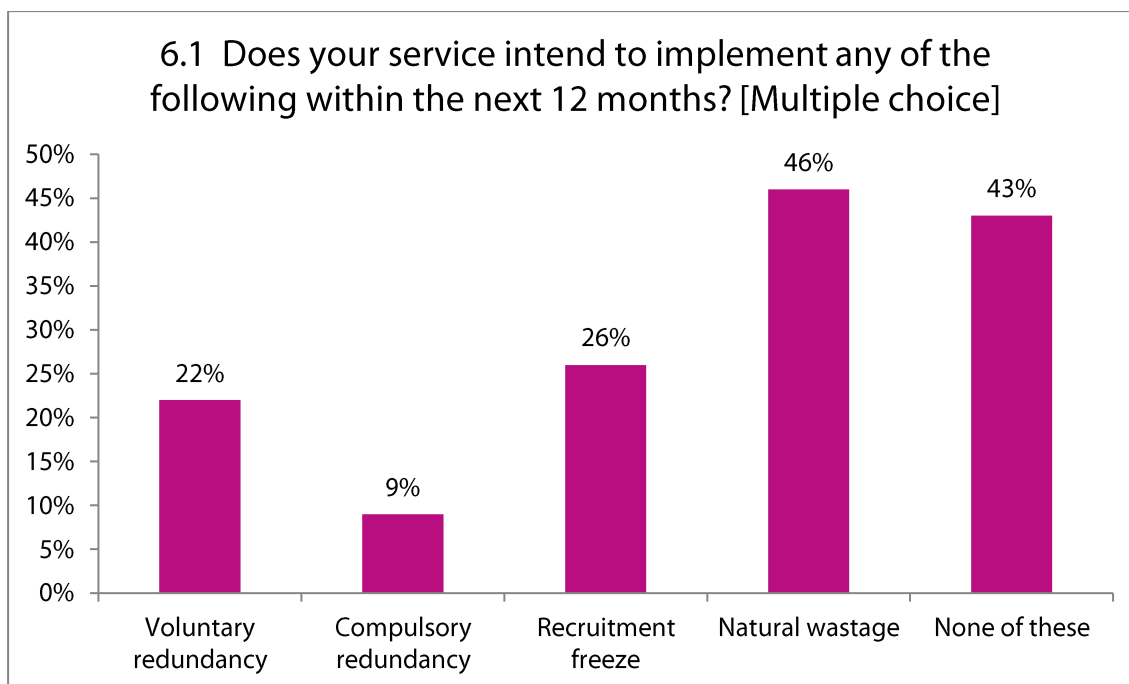
*"Ongoing staff reductions. We don't have specific parks development officers anymore, primarily we try to keep play areas maintained, empty bins and cut grass."*

*"Increase income generation form site cafe. Engage with grants and Countryside Stewardship options. Increase income via dog wash service point. Borrow equipment from another department to do work that we'd normally pay a contractor in to do."*

One comment noted that their authority has no more efficiencies to make, lest it compromise the safety of staff and local communities:

*"We are already at a level of service provision whereby we cannot safely reduce frontline presence any further. Parks and Green spaces are already cut to the bone, short of closure and removal of parks and greenspaces there is not much more in terms of efficiencies we can safely accept."*

## 6 Workforce

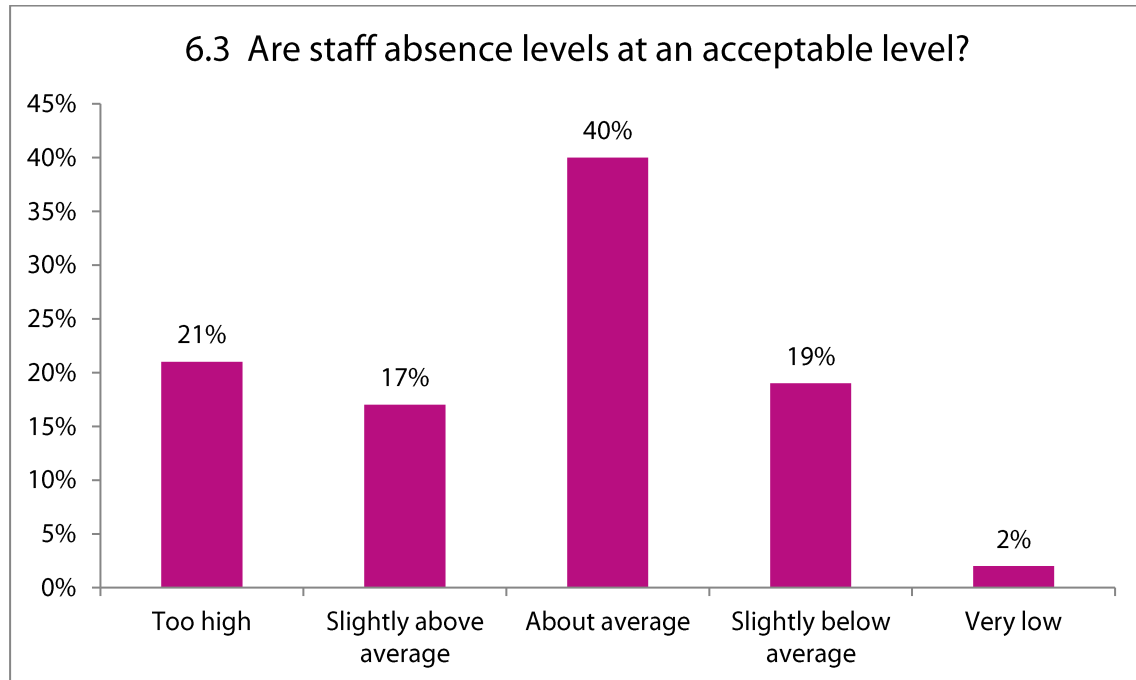


57% of those surveyed report they will implement redundancies and/or initiate a recruitment freeze in the coming 12 months. This is a slight increase from 2023 (55%) and this rise is to be expected amidst the ongoing local authority funding crisis. At 26%, those reporting a recruitment freeze is a slight drop on from 2023 (29%). This may be driven in part by the big increase in those reporting "natural wastage" – increasing from 24% in 2023 to 46% in 2024. There has also been a slight drop on those intending to implement compulsory redundancies – dropping from 13% in 2023 to 9% in 2024.





For those local authority parks teams subject to workforce reductions, 6.2 paints a rather bleak picture for the sector. 25% expect to lose more than 5% of their workforce, a 7% increase from 2023. 16% expect to lose more between 6 and 10% of their workforce, an 11% increase from 2023. 18% of those surveyed expect to lose less than 5% of their workforce.



There has been some change in staff absence levels when compared to 2023, with 21% now stating absence levels were too high compared to just 7% in 2023 and 20% in 2022. Those reporting absences are slightly above average has also increased from 32% in 2023 to 40% this year. The most notable change has been with regards to the numbers reporting very low absence levels, just 2% this year compared to 22% in 2023 and 10% in 2022. These spikes in absences may be a consequence of a multiplicity of factors including an under-resourced workforce; reported increases in physical and mental ill-health and the impact of staff awaiting treatment on NHS waiting lists.

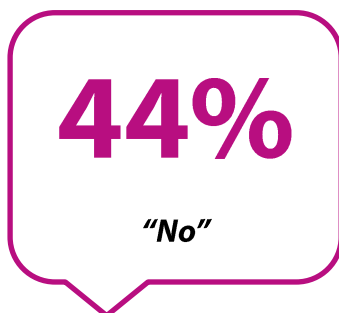
## 7 Training and apprenticeships



"Is the training budget over the next 12 months going to..."

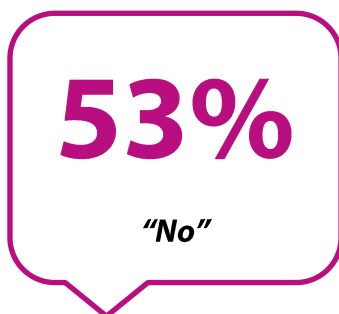
71% thought that the training budget will stay the same over the next 12 months, which is the same as last year.

There has been a slight rise in the number of councils expecting their training budgets to decrease. And a corresponding drop in the number expecting an increase – just 2% of those surveyed.



"Do you have apprentices?"

Only 44% of respondents stated that they currently have apprentices, which is a notable decrease from 2022 when 61% reported they had apprentices.

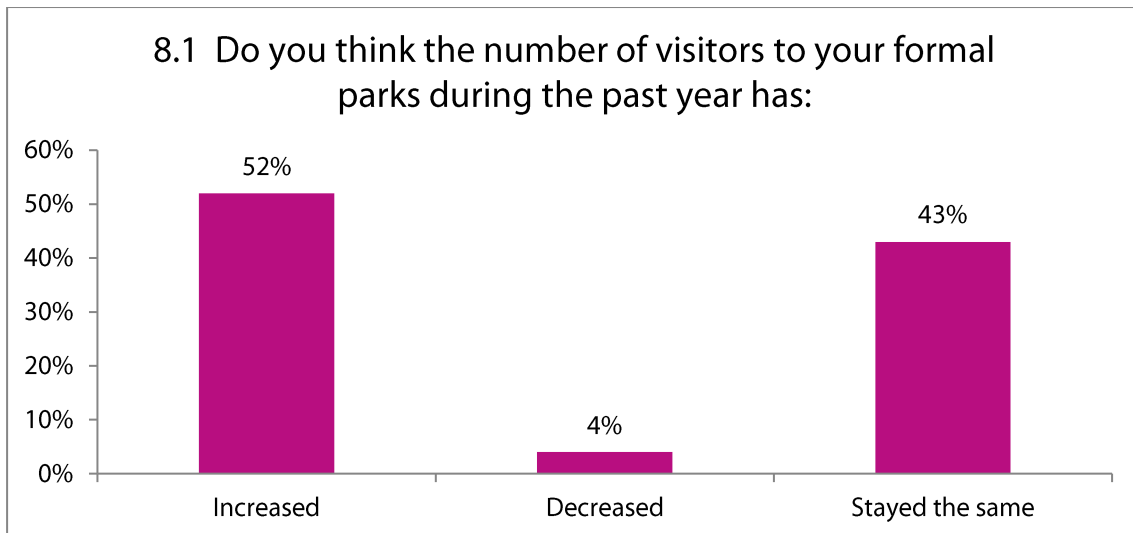


"Are you going to be recruiting apprentices in 2024-25?"

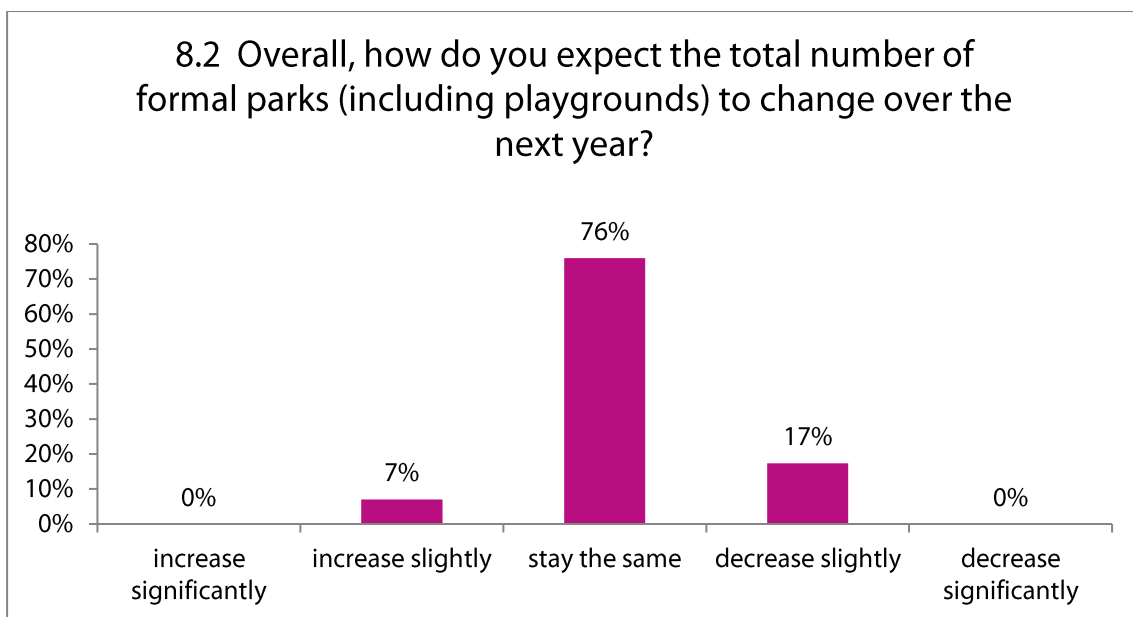
Less than half reported they will be recruiting apprentices for 2024/25. Which is, again, trending down from 2023 and 2022. So, the figures here reveal how, unfortunately, apprenticeship schemes and the budgets which sustain them continue to be squeezed.

APSE has always advocated for the importance of apprenticeships, lifelong learning and career pathways in the local authority parks sector. APSE previously held the Chair's role of the Parks Action Group Knowledge and Skills workstream and published a report "Nurturing skills for 21st century parks", which we would encourage you all to download for free from the APSE website.

Our conclusions from that report included the development of a model framework that is recognised by all stakeholders in the sector and which would guide organisations in developing the appropriate knowledge and skill. Number of parks and visitors



8.1 reveals 52% of those surveyed report the number of visitors to their formal parks has increased during the past year. We know that UK parks experienced significant increases during the pandemic, and 8.1 reveals visitor numbers are continuing to grow for the majority.



When it comes to the total number of formal parks (including playgrounds), 8.2 reveals parks professionals across local government expect the number of parks to largely remain the same. However, there has been a slight rise in those expecting the total number to 'Decrease slightly' from last year, perhaps tying in with the increase in those selling land reported in [4](#).

## 8 Rangers

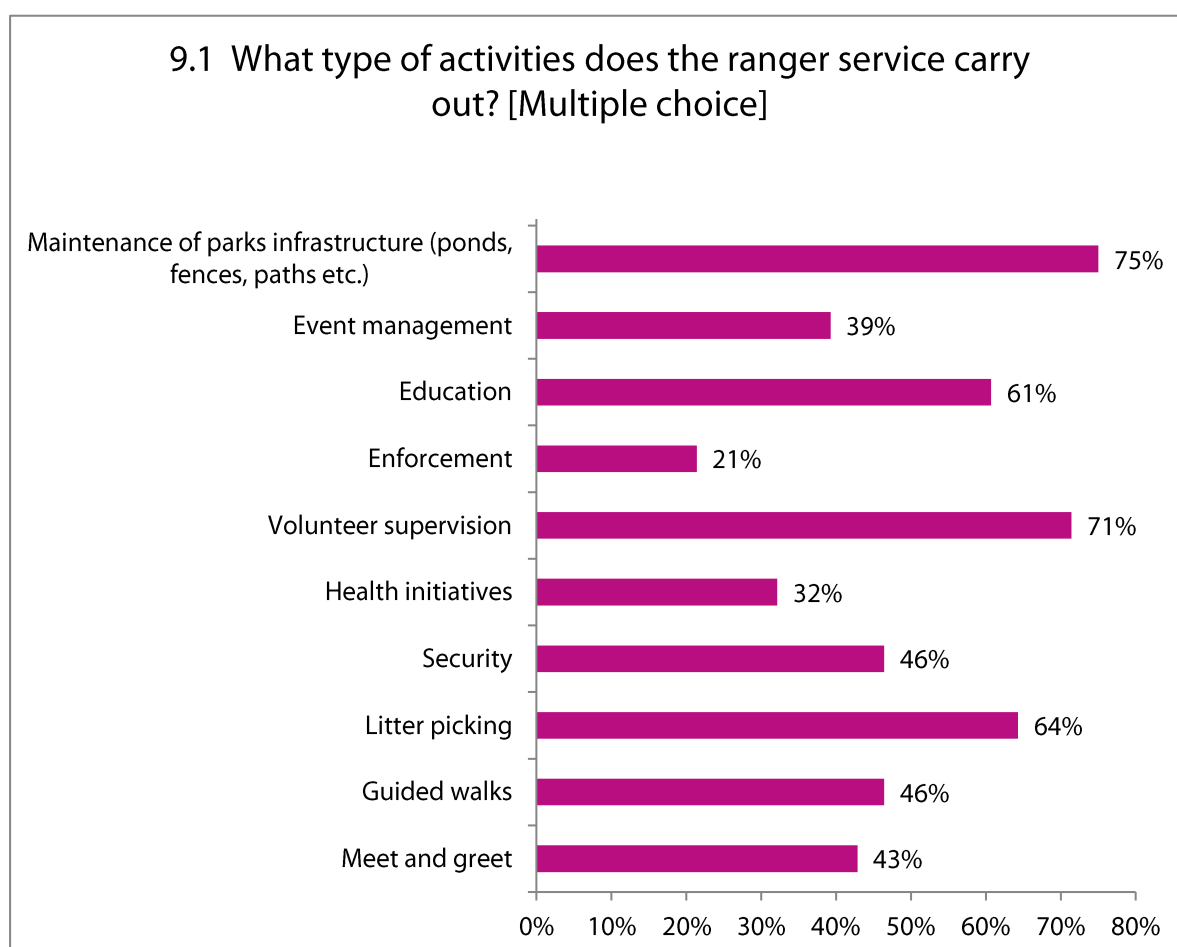


### Do you have parks rangers?

59% reported having parks rangers, which is a 10% increase on 2023 and a return to the figure reported in 2022.

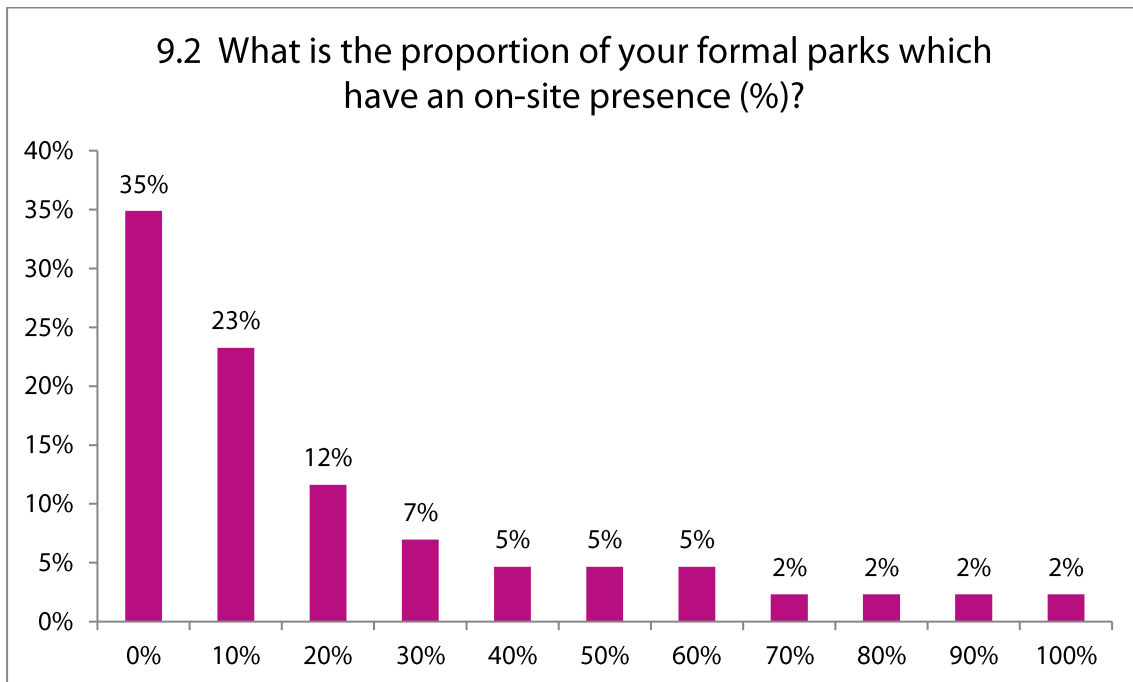
### If yes, how many parks rangers FTE?

Number of rangers	2024	Change from 2023
1 - 5	44%	-15%
6 - 10	37%	+8%
11 - 15	4%	-2%
16 +	15%	+9%



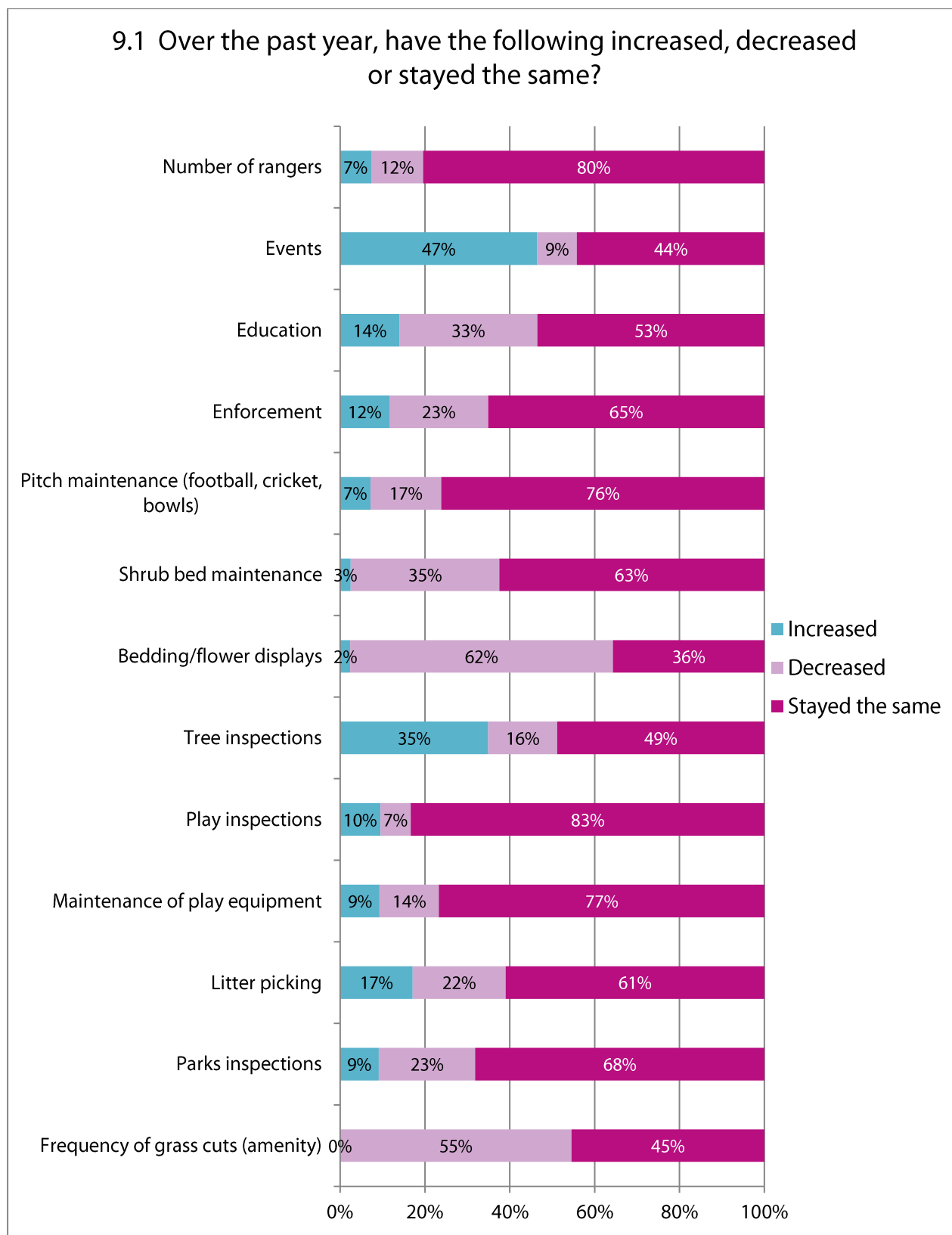
With regards to the type of activities the ranger service carries out, 9.1 reveals the diversity of roles and responsibilities. There is very little variation from 2023 – ‘Maintenance of parks in infrastructure’ remains the most commonly identified activity with ‘Volunteer supervision’ and ‘Litter picking’ following closely behind.

When asked about the proportion of formal parks which have an on-site presence, 9.2 shows a breakdown of the responses received.



Clearly, the days of a permanent on-site presence ('the parkie'), have long gone, with 35% of those surveyed reporting 0% of their parks have an on-site presence. This is not an encouraging statistic, especially in light of recent alarming headlines on the safety of women and girls in parks and greenspaces.

## 9 Service standards and quality

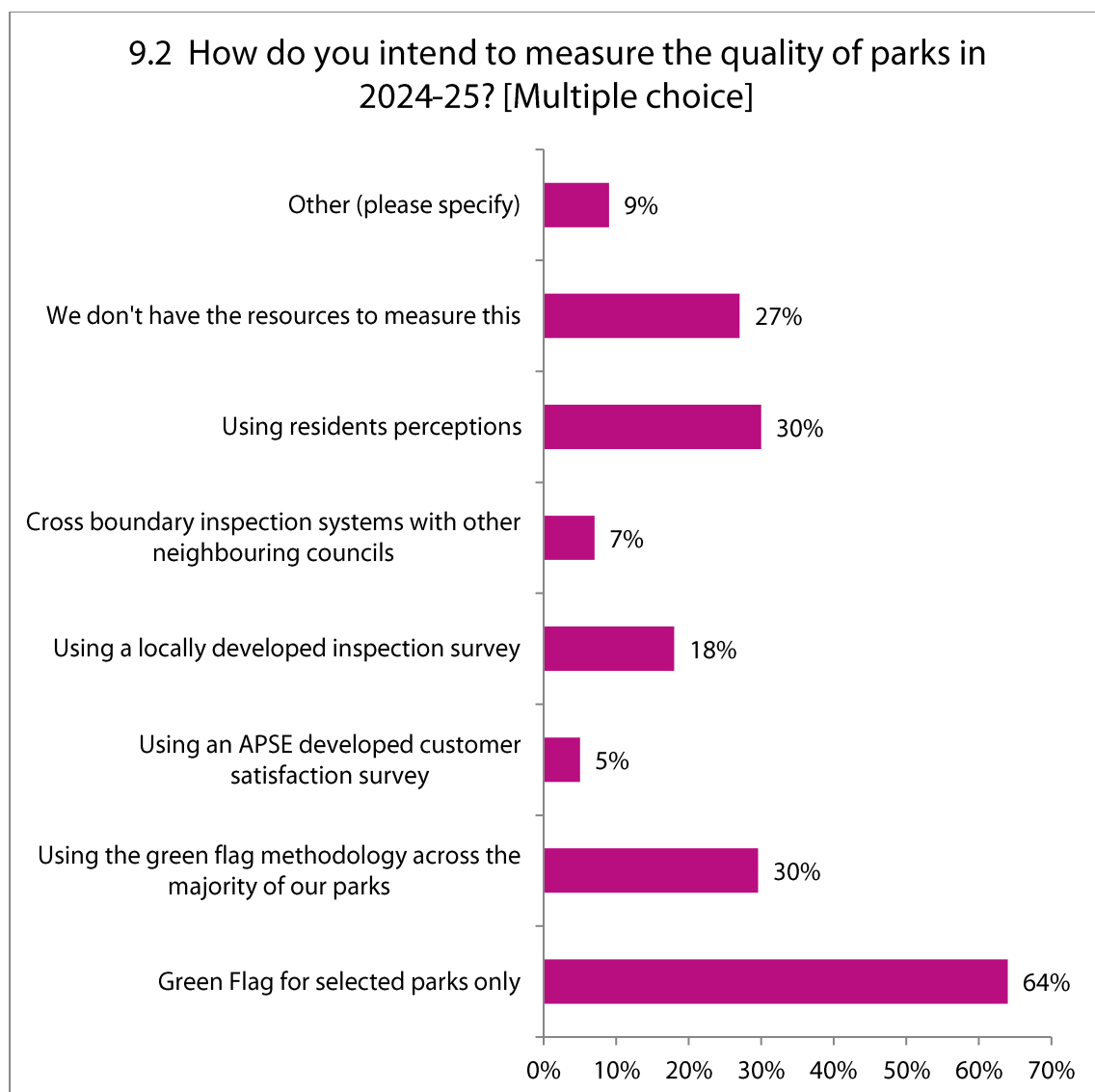


Continuing the trend from 2023, the number of those surveyed reporting decreases in maintaining flower displays has increased (62%). There have also been noticeable decreases for frequency of

grass cuts (amenity) at 55% and in shrub bed maintenance at 35%. With regards to grass cuts, it is likely this decrease is due to a combination of reduced levels of funding as well as the introduction of wildflower meadows to help hit biodiversity targets. Not one single authority reported increasing the frequency of grass cuts.

The survey revealed the average number of grass cuts per annum is 12. This is a drop from last year where the average came to 13.5. This of course also a weather dependent yearly / seasonality issue.

Due to the increasing concerns over the safety of trees and some high-profile fatalities caused by falling trees, tree inspections have also grown in frequency for 35% of local authority parks professionals this past year. This is at a faster rate than 2023 (28%).



The effects of the continuing budget reductions with increasing demand for services and the cost-of-living crisis present an increasing challenge for local authorities to be able to continue to provide a high level of service delivery. To get from start to finish and deliver services effectively, councils need to know where they are, where they are going and how to get there – they need

evidence and decisions need to be grounded in good data not opinions. Data is crucial in our ever-changing world for first class information on how to deliver first class public services. So, it is concerning to observe in 9.2 that 27% do not 'have the resources to measure' the quality of parks.

APSE Performance Networks offers benchmarking for local authority frontline services including parks, horticulture and open spaces. Use of APSE's Land Audit Management System (LAMS) 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.

You can learn more about APSE Performance Networks, and how your local authority parks service can secure cost, quality and productivity improvements, [here](#).

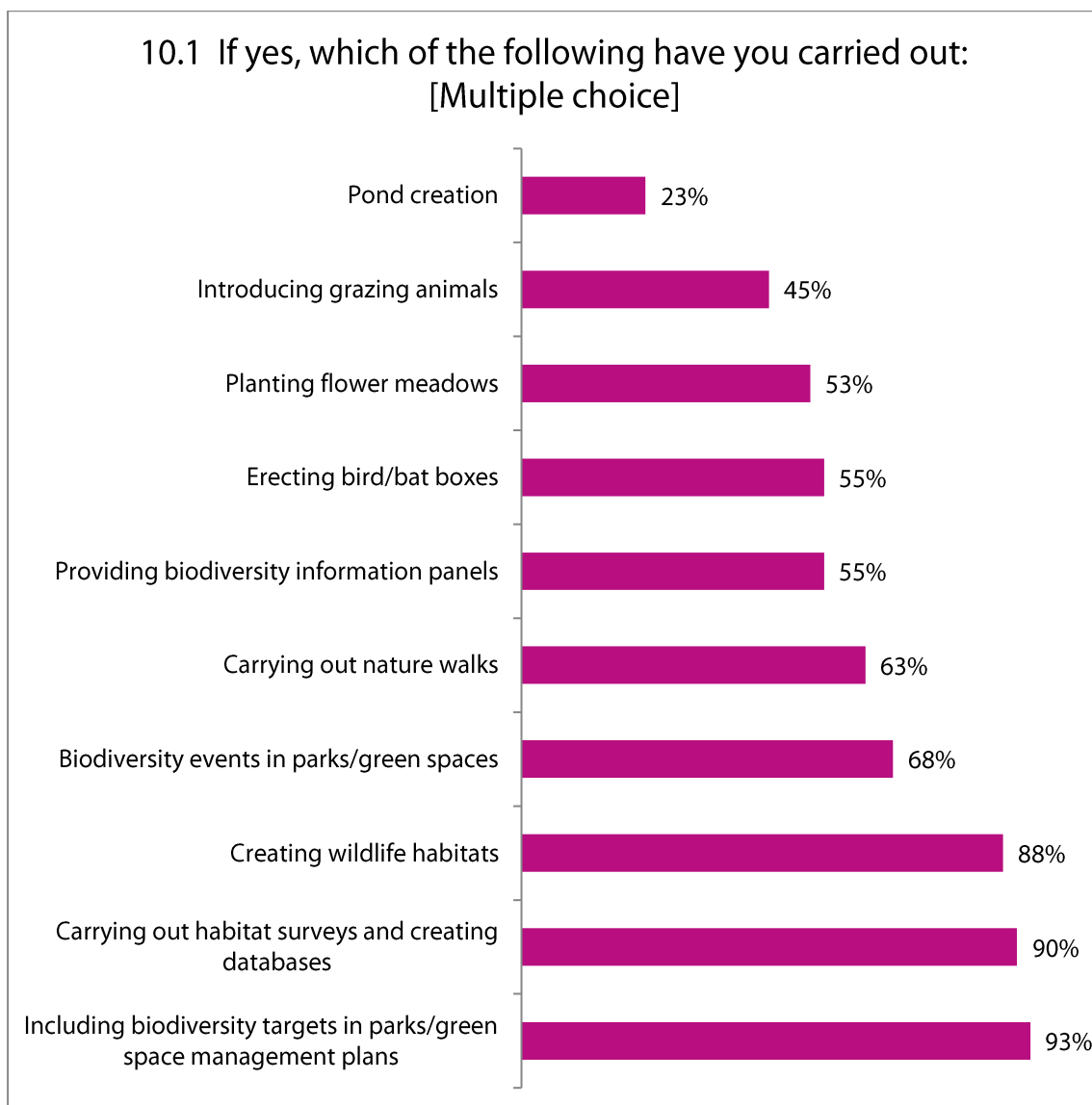


## 10 Biodiversity

Do you make specific provision for promoting biodiversity in parks and green spaces?

**91%**  
*Responded "Yes"*

91% of those surveyed reported making specific provision for promoting biodiversity in parks and green spaces. This is an increase of 10% from last year.



When taking a closer look at what those provisions entail, one can see that 'Including biodiversity targets in parks management plans' is the most popular at 93%, with "Carrying out habitat surveys" and 'Creating wildlife habitats' second and third respectively. Biodiversity events have

grown in popularity from last year – rising from 42% to 55% – as local authorities deepen their community outreach work and aim to affect behaviour change across their local communities.

### Are you considering 'Rewilding' any of your parks or greenspaces?



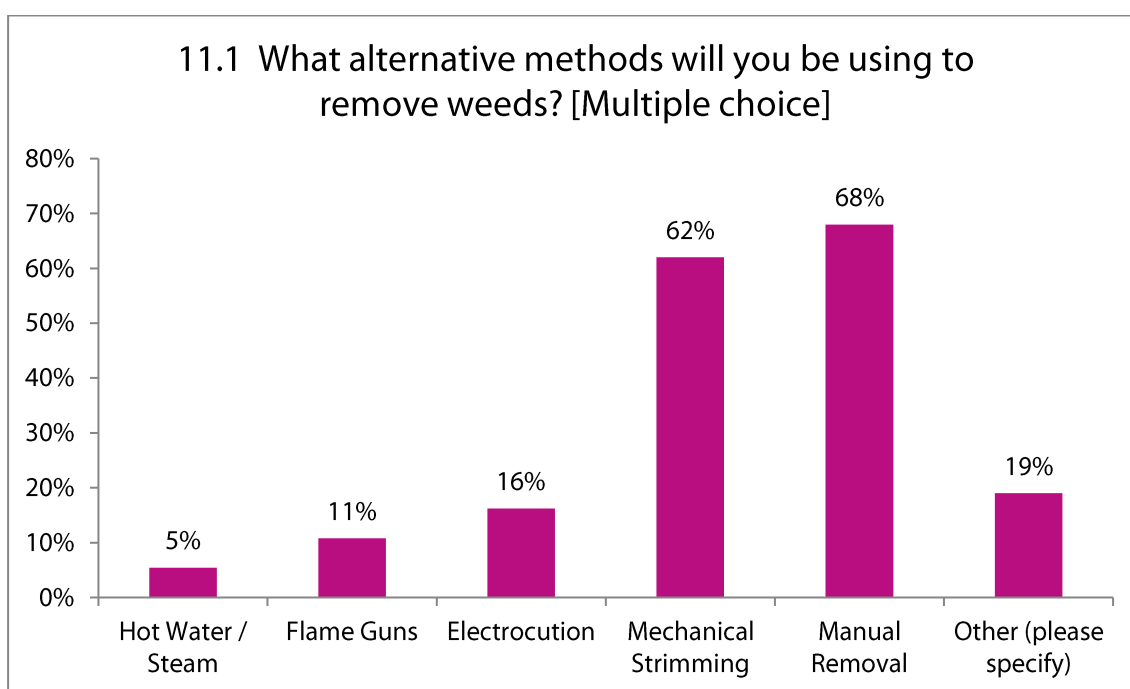
73% of those surveyed are considering 'Rewilding' their parks or greenspaces. This helps to explain – in part – some of the reductions in maintenance across parks services. However, it should also be noted reduction in funding has also played a big part in reduced maintenance.

## 11 Weed control

Are you considering reducing the amount of chemical treatment you use to eradicate weeds?

**82%**  
Responded "Yes"

82% of respondents are actively or considering ways to reduce the amount of chemicals they use to manage their parks and greenspaces. This is an increase on 10% from last year.



When it comes to alternative methods to remove weeds, 'Manual removal' (68%) and 'Mechanical strimming' (62%) dominate responses – as they did last year. There has also been modest increases in those using flame guns and electrocution from last year.

We know there is disagreement amongst the scientific community about the safe use of glyphosate; the European Union recently extended glyphosate's authorisation for a further 10 years. APSE also understands, from various meetings and consultations with our members, that alternative methods are not the most cost-effective – nor always the most popular on the doorstep. However, APSE believes the prudent approach for local councils is to restrict its use – and the survey results show that is happening across hundreds of councils across the UK.

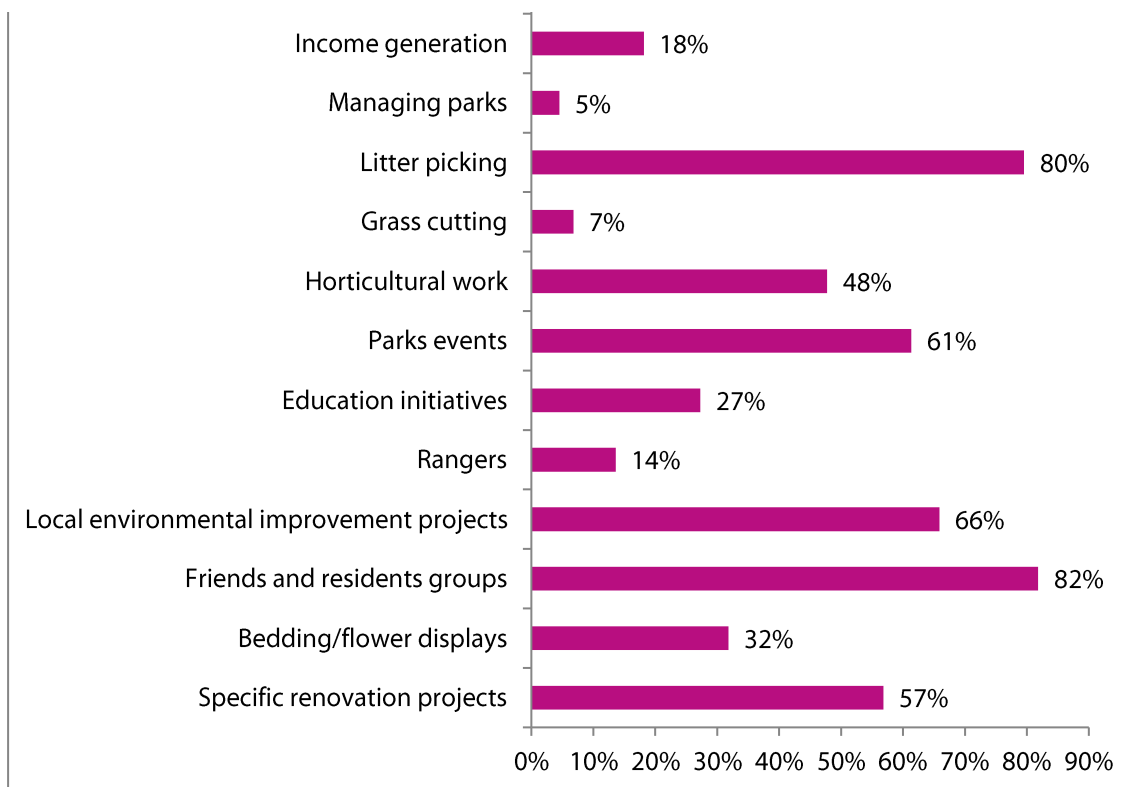
## 12 Community and volunteer involvement

Do you have friends of parks groups?

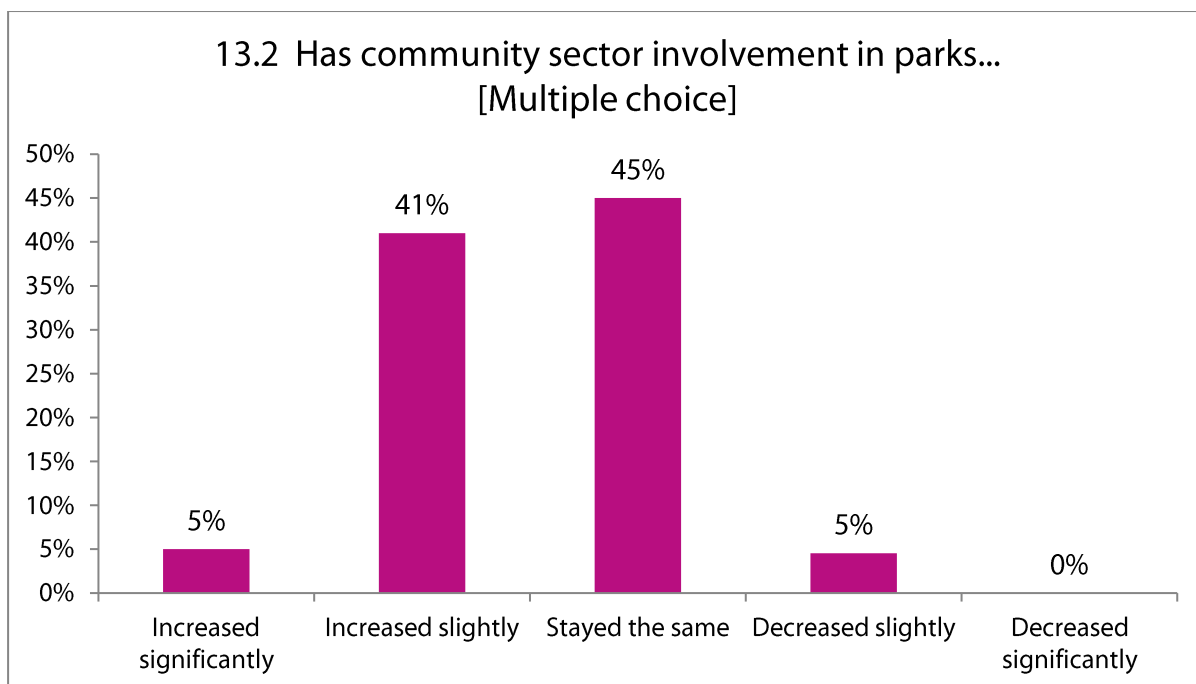


86% of those surveyed had friends of parks groups operating in their localities, which is an 8% drop from last year.

### 13.1 How are volunteers involved in the parks service? [Multiple choice]



In 13.1, one can observe "Friends and residents' groups" dominate responses. 'Litter picking' and 'Specific renovation projects' follow closely behind.



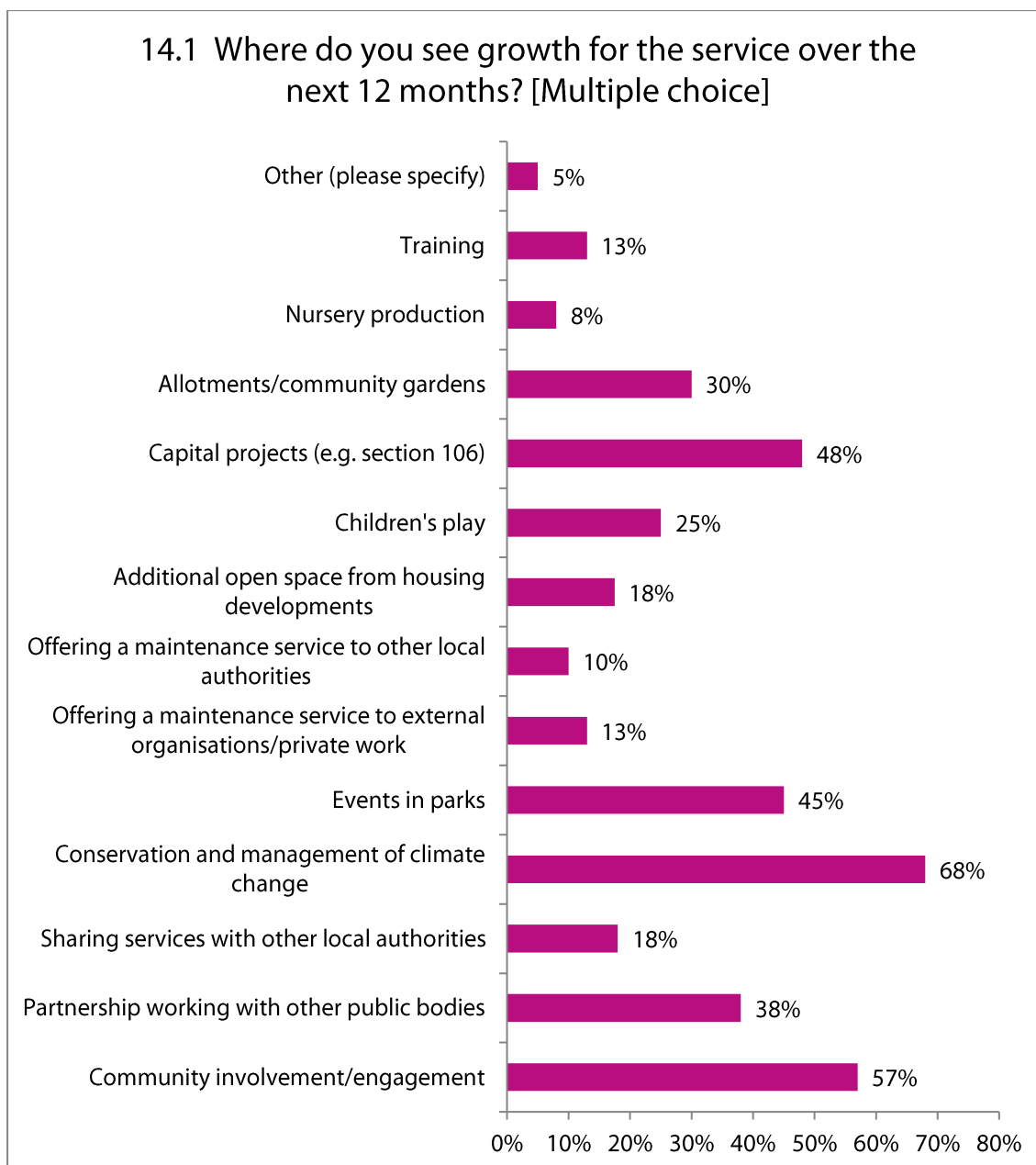
In 13.2, there has been an increase in the number of respondents reporting increases in community sector involvement in parks – standing at 45% compared to 35% in 2023. This would suggest community groups are slowly recovering from the “crisis” of late 2020, in which 60% of community groups were forced to close or decrease their services.<sup>7</sup>

It is notable not a single authority has reported a significant decrease in community sector involvement in parks. This reflects the partnership approach nurtured by local councils whereby such groups provided additionality to, not replacement of, professional parks services.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.groundwork.org.uk/news-community-groups-covid-19-pandemic-report/>

## 13 Future growth



In terms of which area or activity is likely to experience growth over the next 12 months, 'Conservation and management of climate change' emerged as the most popular – growing from 39% in 2019 to 68% in 2024. This ought to be expected in the wake of the hundreds of climate emergency declarations made by local councils these past five years. 'Events in parks' has also experienced a big increase from 2023 – 19% to 45%. Again, this is to be expected as parks services look to generate income to offset budget restrictions.

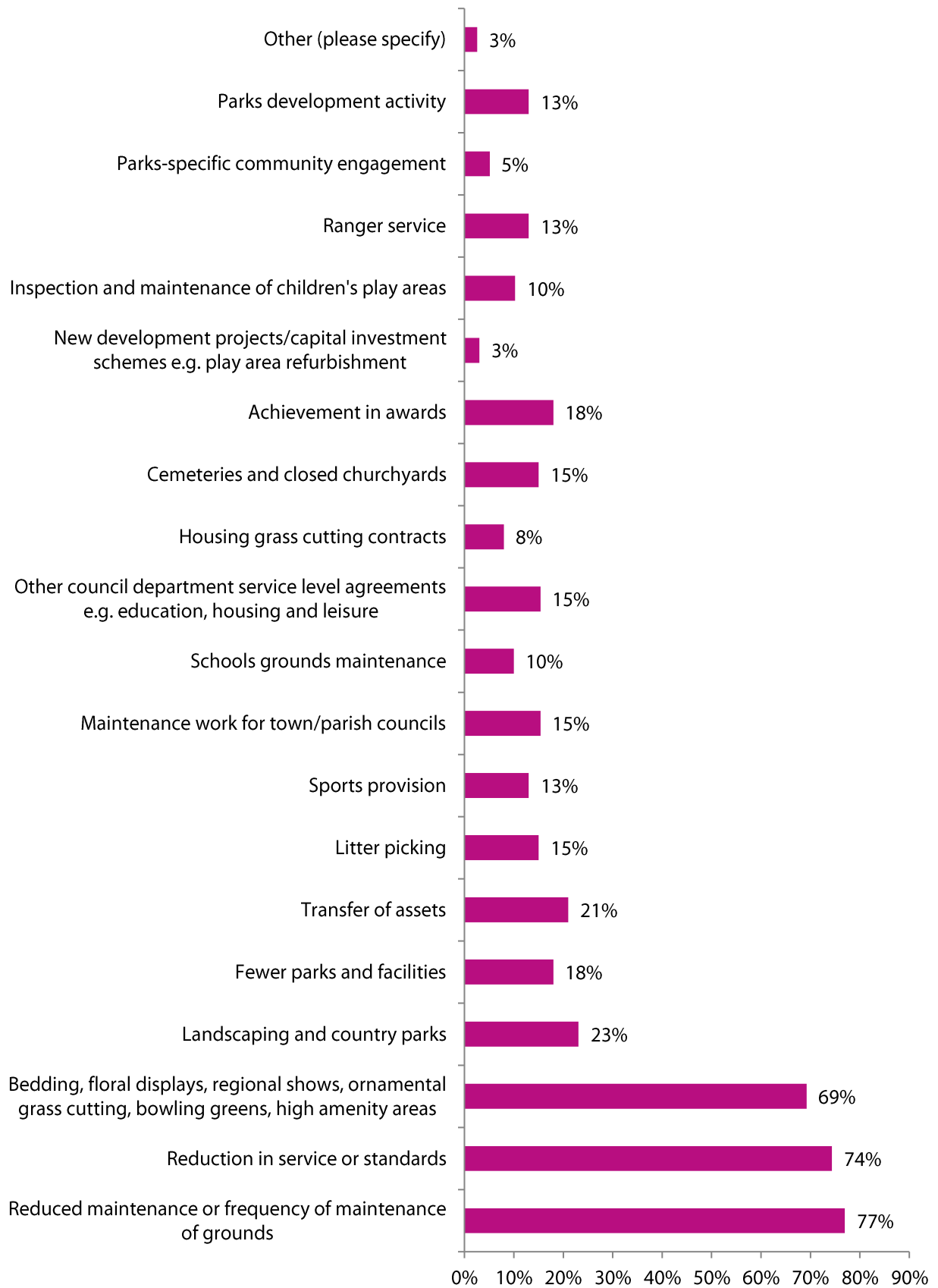
'Allotments and community gardens' has grown from 24% in 2023 to 30%. This expectation of growth correlates with the findings from APSE's State of the Market Survey on Allotments 2023 where it was found that, due to the demand for allotment plots remaining high, there has been a large increase in those local authorities who are halving standard sized allotment plots

to address this demand. The most recent State of the Market Survey on Allotments also found 49% of respondents stated that they have an allotments strategy, a 7% increase on 2022. Of the 51% that haven't currently got a strategy in place, almost half stated that the council is planning to develop one within the next 2 years. You can read more about the findings of the survey [here](#).

In 14.2, respondents were asked where they see future decreases in their service. Reduced maintenance dominated responses, including maintenance of 'Bedding, floral displays, regional shows, ornamental grass cutting, bowling greens, high amenity areas.'

Of concern, 74% reported they expected future decreases in service or standards. One comment noted: *"Some areas it is hard to identify a decrease as we have already cut those services entirely."* There has also been a growth in the number of those surveyed expecting fewer parks and facilities – from 9% in 2023 to 18% in 2024.

## 14.2 Where do you see future decreases in work for the service? [Multiple choice]





## **14 APSE Comment: Red flag for green spaces**

APSE's State of UK Public Parks 2021 Report found that a total of £690 million was lost from parks budgets between 2010 and 2021. The financial health of local authorities – and local parks teams by extension - has not improved since 2021 and the findings of our 2024 report suggest that there is likely to be further deterioration..

APSE's latest poll with Survation involved a poll of UK local councillors from across the political spectrum. When those councillors were asked "How likely it is their authority will issue a section 114 notice?" 28% said they were likely to issue one. This year's parks survey reveals just how much the spectre of Section 114 notices is spilling into the operations of greenspace services across the UK. Whether that is in relation to reduced maintenance, decreases in training budgets, an increase in redundancies as well as a rise in those expecting to close parks and facilities.

However, it is quite clear that despite ongoing service budget cuts, managers and frontline staff are showing remarkable resilience and ingenuity in providing the quality parks and greenspaces our local communities deserve and prosper from. Amidst squeezed budgets, this survey reveals parks professionals continue to deliver high quality, popular services.

The survey also reveals that using alternative methods to fund and maintain parks, such as the increasing use of volunteers and trust models, can only go so far. In many cases, funding can only be accessed by costly and inefficient bidding systems, which take little account of local need. Consequently, the financing of urban parks has continued to be woefully inadequate for local authorities.

APSE research has found parks and open spaces have seen deeper cuts in spending alongside other local authority neighbourhood services, which have collectively taken a deeper share of cuts as budgets have been geared towards addressing critical needs in social care and areas such as homelessness and SEND spending. This is despite the significant contributions these services make to health, wellbeing and combatting climate change.

APSE's research has also found the public do not distinguish between statutory and non-statutory services. They want to see all local services protected and flourishing. Regrettably, the recent Budget seemed to be designed through the prism of cost rather than value. Our parks and greenspaces more than demonstrated their value during the dark days of the pandemic. Further restraints on public finances seriously risk these services being hollowed out of existence and unable to respond in the future.

## 14.1 How can APSE help?

All APSE members can sign up to APSE's Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Advisory Group network, which is an online network providing four learning events across the year, with expert speakers from across local government and the wider parks and greenspace sector. You can sign up to the network using [this link](#).

### 14.1.1 Training

APSE Training has also designed several special interactive online course for parks professionals:

1. **Introduction to Parks Management (CPD)**. This preliminary course provides an introduction to the key issues and principles of parks management. If you are looking to move towards a more senior position, or you want to grow the skills to understand, develop, and cope with the demands faced by managers, this course will provide a robust overview. You can book your place on the course [here](#).
2. **Advanced Parks Management: Sustainable Finance (CPD)**. This particular course is the first in what is expected to become a suite of advanced modules for senior parks professionals. Focussing on sustainable funding, it provides an insight into the key issues and best practice techniques for creating a more sustainable basis for future funding. You can book your place on the course [here](#).
3. **Biodiversity Net Gain: Preparing Parks Professionals**. This training has been specifically designed to familiarise parks and greenspaces colleagues with this legislation. Through a variety of interactive activities, learners will have the opportunity to gather information and discuss strategies for practical application. You can book your place [here](#).

### 14.1.2 Benchmarking

APSE Performance Networks is the largest voluntary public sector benchmarking organisation in the UK. With over 200 authorities in membership, Performance Networks assists local councils by:

- Demonstrating progression on carbon reduction/ecological actions
- Helping to set a clear baseline on which competitiveness, efficiency and value for money can be measured in a systematic manner.
- Identifying the impact of service changes and interventions for your own local authorities and for others.
- Assessing the quality, cost and competitiveness of the services that councils provide on a regular basis.
- Helping to report data in meaningful ways to both elected members and the public.
- Identifying direction of travel and pace of change with regard to service delivery.
- Identifying inefficiencies such as poor productivity and high cost.
- Supporting service improvement through process benchmarking and sharing best practice examples.

For more information about how your parks service can benefit from Performance Networks membership, click [here](#).

## 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
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Local Authority Commercialisation, Income and Trading Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds 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](http://www.apse.org.uk) for more details.



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