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The Future of Local Government Parks and Public Realm Services

Mo Baines, Chief Executive

APSE

The state of local government finance

- 2023-2024 - 9.2 per cent increase in local government core spending power
- Assumes maximum council tax increases
- During the financial year inflation higher throughout
- Workforce pay – the right thing but unaccounted for
- Does not address the fiscal drag of austerity with historic underfunding

Adult Social care funding

- A call for a £13 billion injection
- £6 billion to tackle current pressures / immediate and short-term impact
- £7 billion to enable adult social care to deliver its statutory duties – including prevention and escalation of need.

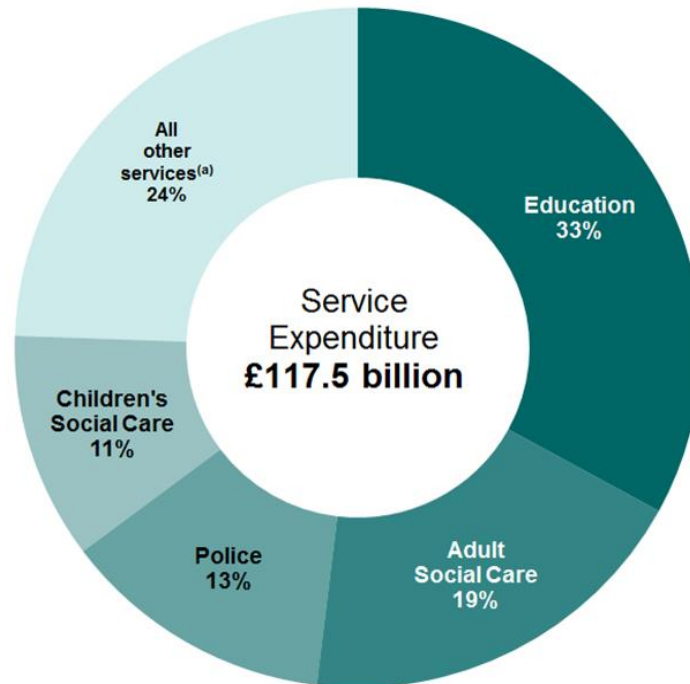
Childrens services

- The number of looked-after children rose 24% in the decade to 2020-21
- By 2020-21 early intervention spends (e.g. sure start) down to 18.5% of spend but in 2010-11 it was 42% of spend
- £1.6bn shortfall – to stand still – not improve children's services .

Unequal misery

- 'Decentralisation' reduction in Revenue Support Grant – poorest areas the most reduced
- Less capable of raising council tax
- Less capable of growth in business rates and council tax but increased demand for adult and Childrens' services
- Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland would argue the impact of funding decisions through the Barnett formula have just transferred inequalities of funding

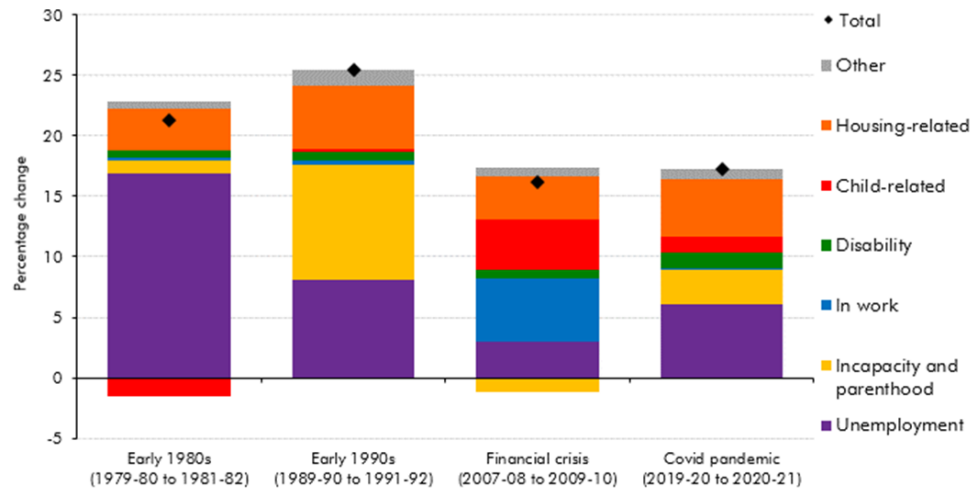
Expenditure by service 2023



‘Other services’

- Broad neighbourhood services dependent on much reduced overall budgets
- ‘Subsidy’ replaced by trading accounts or surplus positions
- DFE swallows up increases – not passported through DLUHC
- 30% overall – out with education – swallowed by Adults and Childrens' services

Welfare spend by 'recessions'



Source: DWP, HMRC, OBR

Impact on Parks and Public Realm

- Popularity in lock-down continues
- But... funding does not follow
- Short-term funding pots prevent long-term planning
- Some councils are now recognising that cuts to parks went on for too long..
- But... funding is not back to where funding was pre-austerity

State of the Market – Parks Services

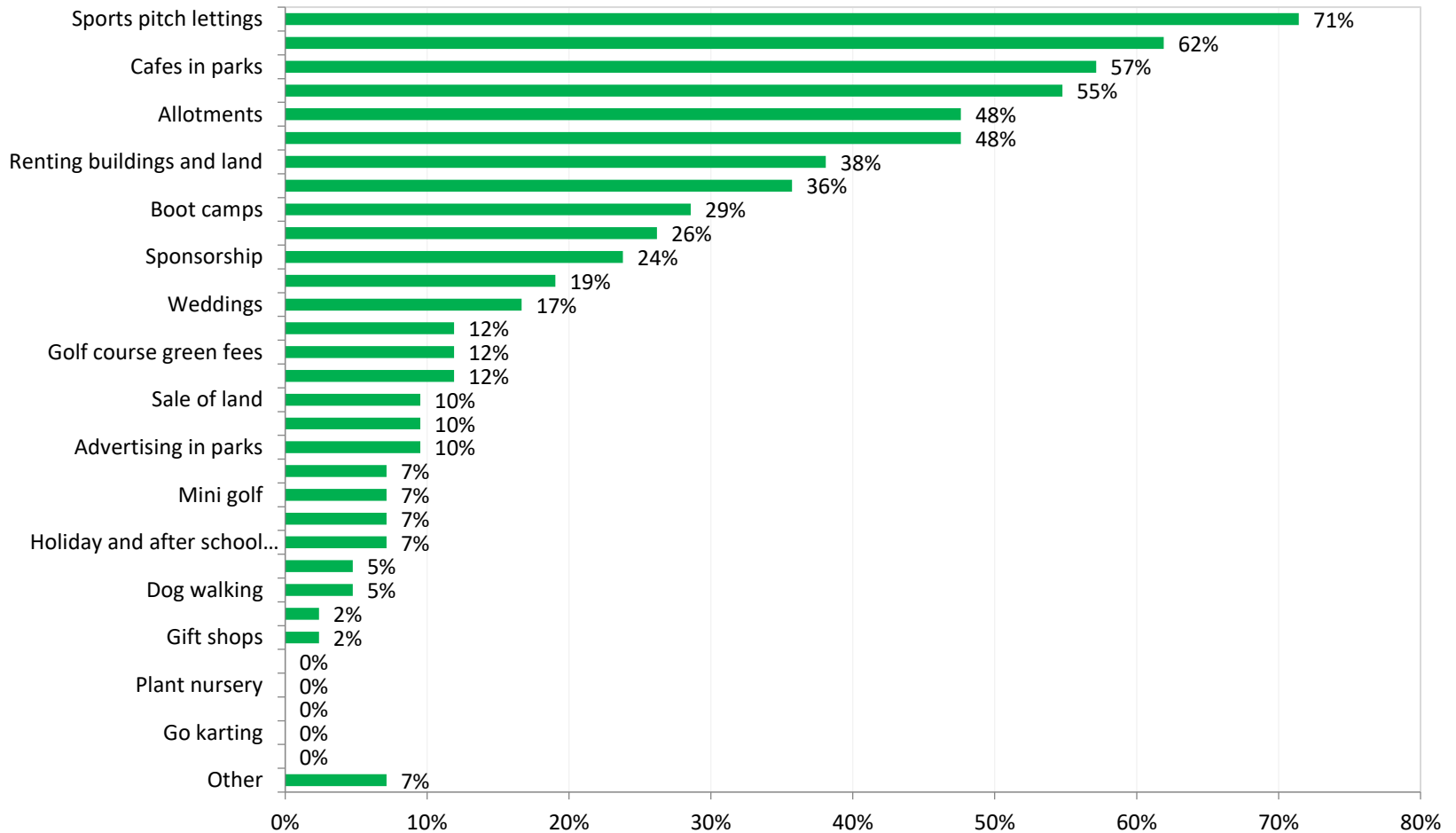


Budgets and parks – a sector based perspective

- 70% feel parks have had their budgets cut more severely than other services (86% in 2022)
- 83% said budget cuts have led to reduced levels of maintenance and increases in unmaintained land (92% in 2022)
- 92% feel lack of investment will impact adversely on health and social well-being (100% in 2022)
- 91% feel there is a limit to the involvement in how volunteers can help deliver parks and greenspace services (100% in 2022)
- 89% stated parks should be free for the public to access (94% in 2022)
- Some level of optimism, but the services provided by parks during the pandemic, do not seem to be being rewarded with new or additional resources to a level many had hoped for.



What areas do you currently generate income in through fees and charges (either provided in-house or through a franchise)?



Visitor numbers

- 60% of parks are still experiencing increasing numbers of visitors to their parks.
- 36% felt numbers had remained the same.
- No evidence that numbers have fallen significantly post-pandemic.
- Pressures on budgets and infrastructure still high.
- No real sign that new funding is being made available to support this added pressure.
- Concern is that only 40% of respondents monitor visitor numbers and then only in certain parks.
- Real need to accurately record visitor numbers if justification can be made for extra funding.

Areas of Service Growth and Decrease

Service Growth

- Community involvement and engagement.
- Conservation /management of climate change
- Capital Projects
- Partnership working with other public bodies
- Events in parks



Service reduction

- Reduced frequency of service in existing areas
- Reductions in provision of bedding and floral displays
- Reductions in actual service standards
- Reductions in areas for sporting provision
- Applications for awards



Questions for the sector?

- Are parks at risk of further budget reductions?
- What is the impact of S.114 notices on parks services?
- Would statutory protection safeguard parks?

Making the case for local parks

- Prevention and healthy communities
- Child poverty
- Adult obesity and chronic diseases
- Mental health and the green environment
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Biodiversity measures

A final word on finance ...

- Capital alone is not good enough
- Revenue support is needed
- There are limitations to the roles of volunteers and charities
- Public parks are services which rely upon professional, expert and experienced staff

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Contact details

Mo Baines, Chief Executive, APSE

Email: mbaines@apse.org.uk

Association for Public Service Excellence

3rd floor, Trafford House, Chester Road,
Old Trafford, Manchester M32 0RS.

telephone: 0161 772 1810

web: www.apse.org.uk



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