



Association for Public Service Excellence

Allotments: What's happening on the ground?

10.30-11.45

State of the Market: Allotment Services

Matt Ellis, APSE Principal Advisor

Identifying opportunities for biodiversity

Sandy Paterson, Assistant Manager (Food Growing), Glasgow City Council





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Local Authority State of the Market 2024

Allotment Services



Briefing 24/31
August 2024



Purpose

- 🌱 Survey of UK local authority allotment teams.
- 🌱 Conducted between May and July 2024.
- 🌱 Covering a diverse range of topics – from cost and waiting lists to amenities and strategies.
- 🌱 Identification of trends in the sector.
- 🌱 Highest number of responses since 2020

**Aggregated figures – may not reflect the experiences of your council*





Themes

- 🌱 Cost
- 🌱 Concessions
- 🌱 Number of sites/plots
- 🌱 Plot size
- 🌱 Plot ownership
- 🌱 Waiting lists
- 🌱 Budget
- 🌱 Strategies
- 🌱 Amenities





Cost

Is cost directly related to the area of the allotment (e.g. square meters)?

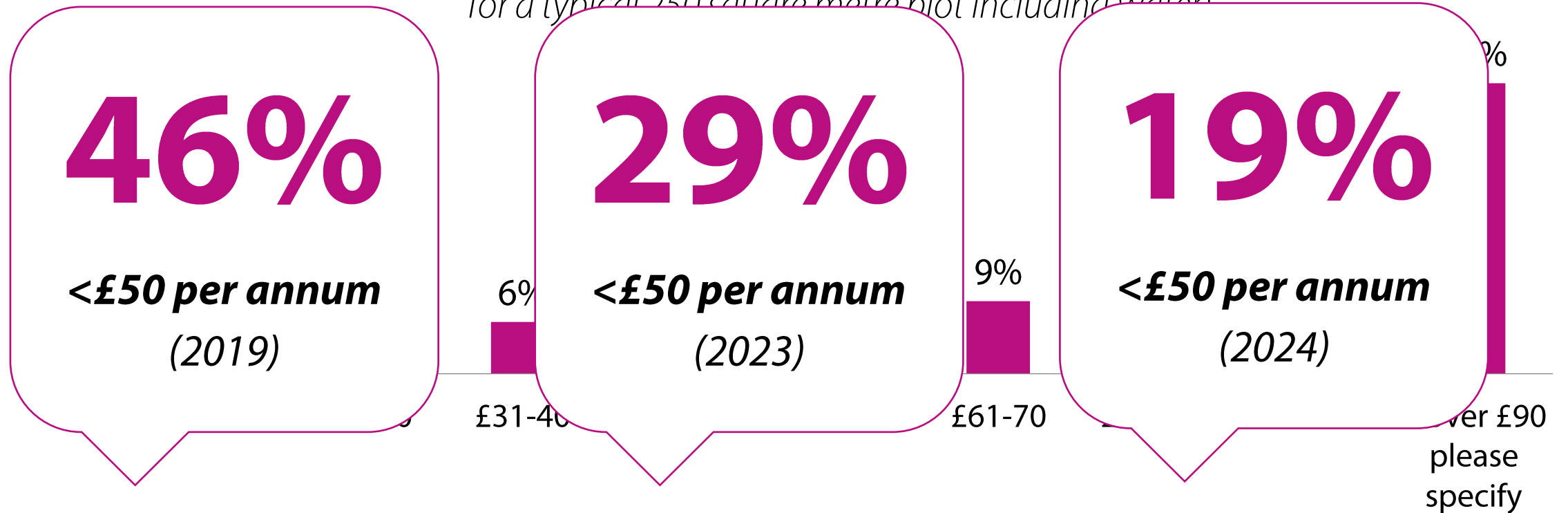
72%

"Yes"

Cost

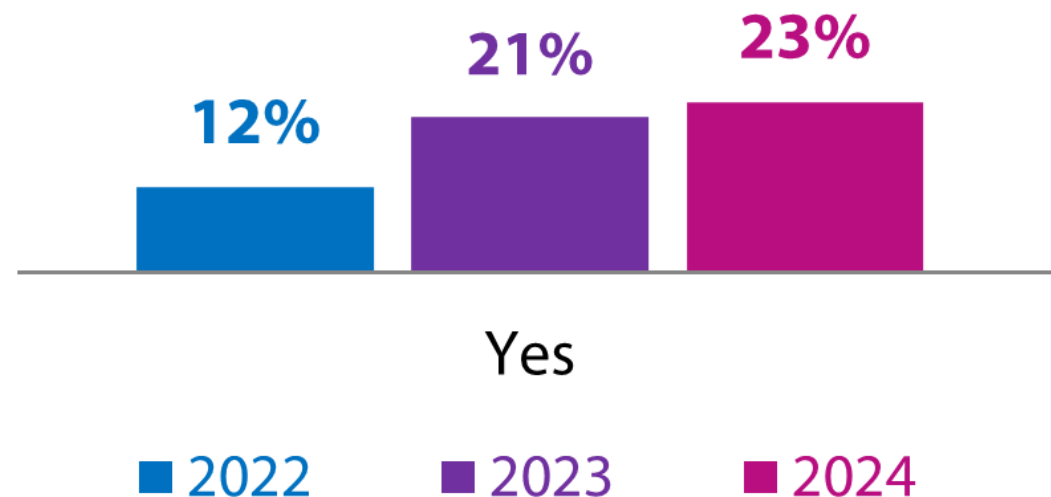
What is the cost per annum to rent an allotment plot in 2024/25?

(Note: if you have different costs according to size of land, please use the cost for a typical 250 square metre plot including water)



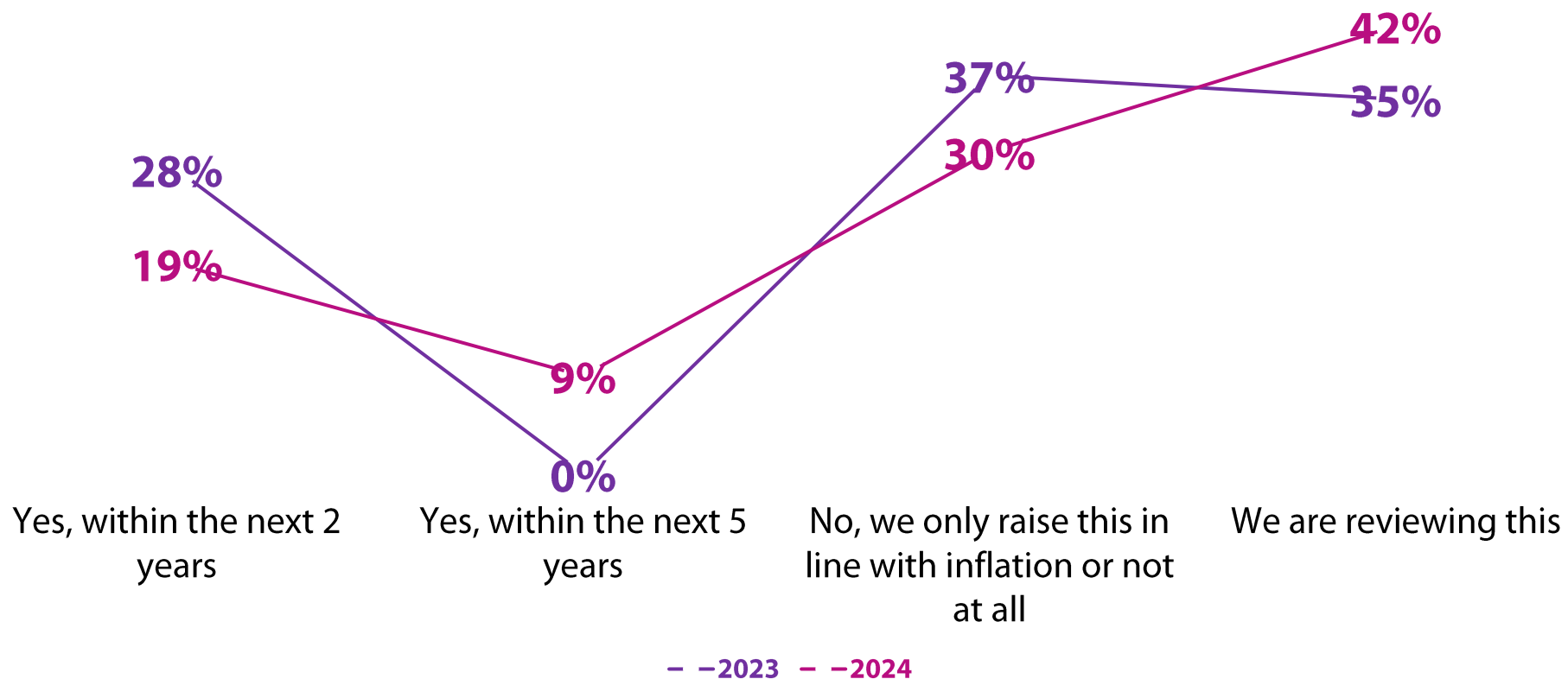
Cost

Has the cost per annum to rent an allotment plot increased (beyond an inflationary increase) during the past 2 years?



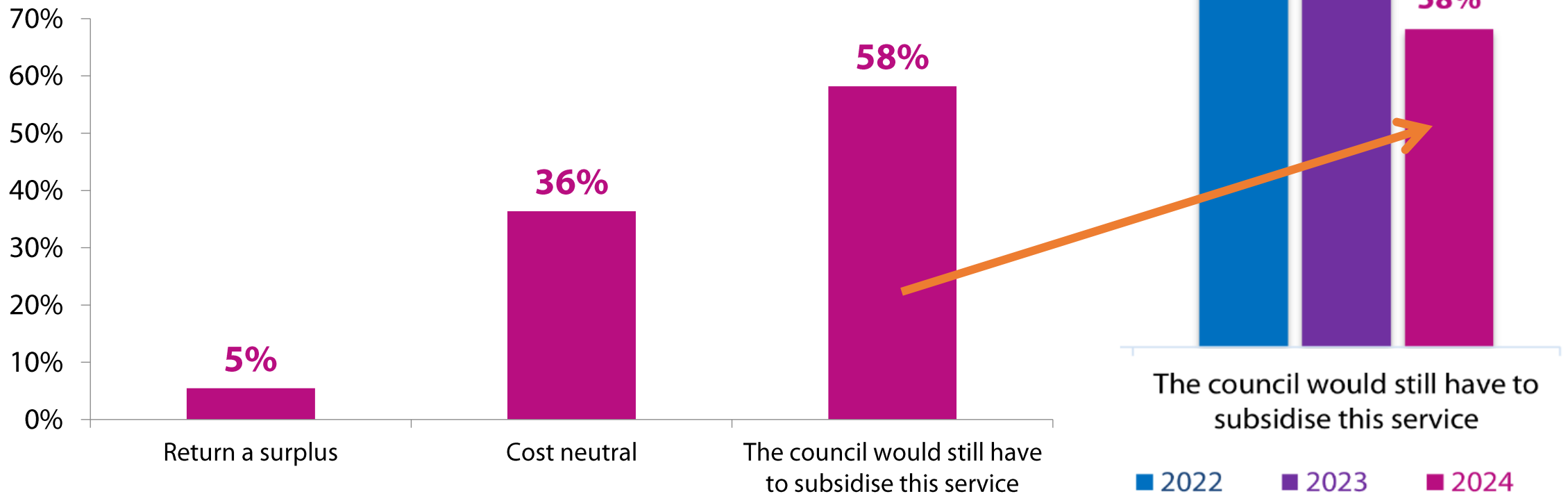
Cost

Are you intending to increase the price of allotment plots beyond inflation?



Subsidies

If you are increasing the price of allotment plots beyond inflation, would this increase make the service:





Subsidies

Do you recover the costs from managing allotments?

29%

We break even
(2023)

32%

We break even
(2024)

2%

We make a surplus
(2023)

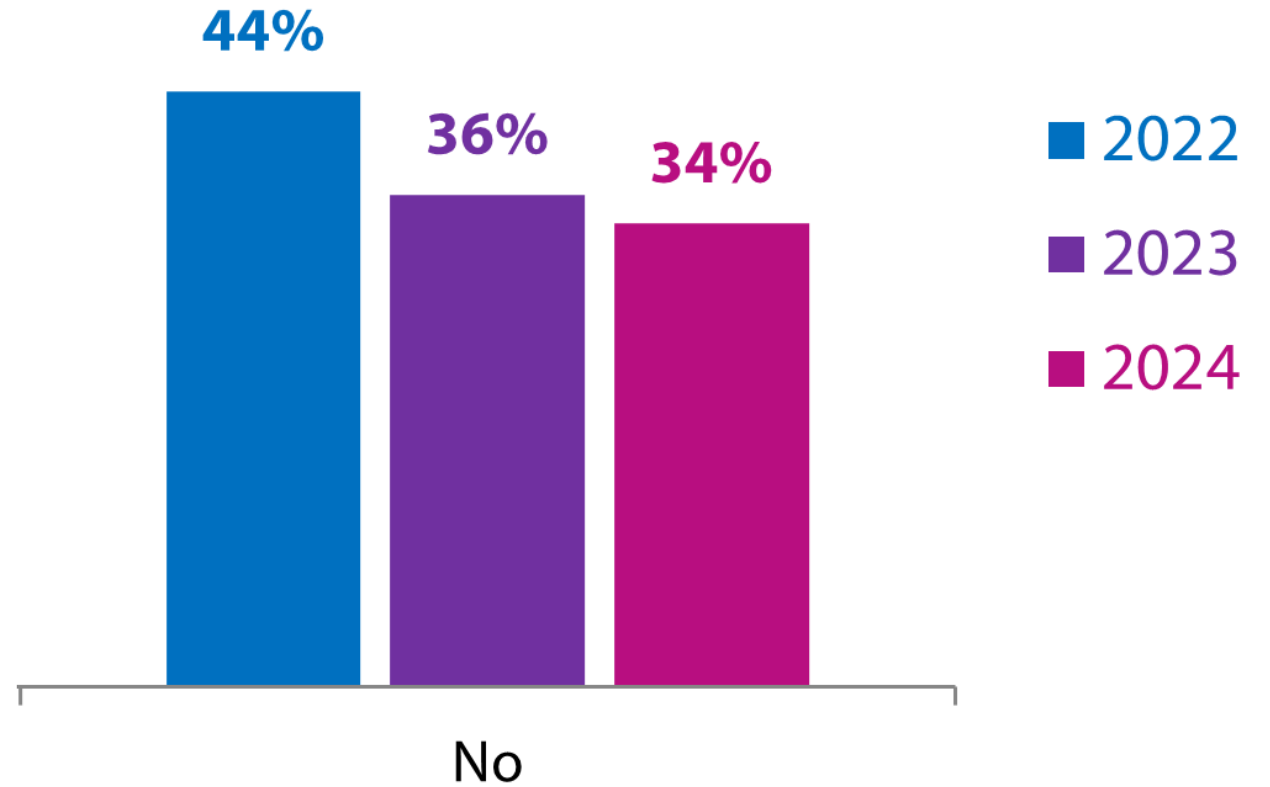
6%

We make a surplus
(2024)



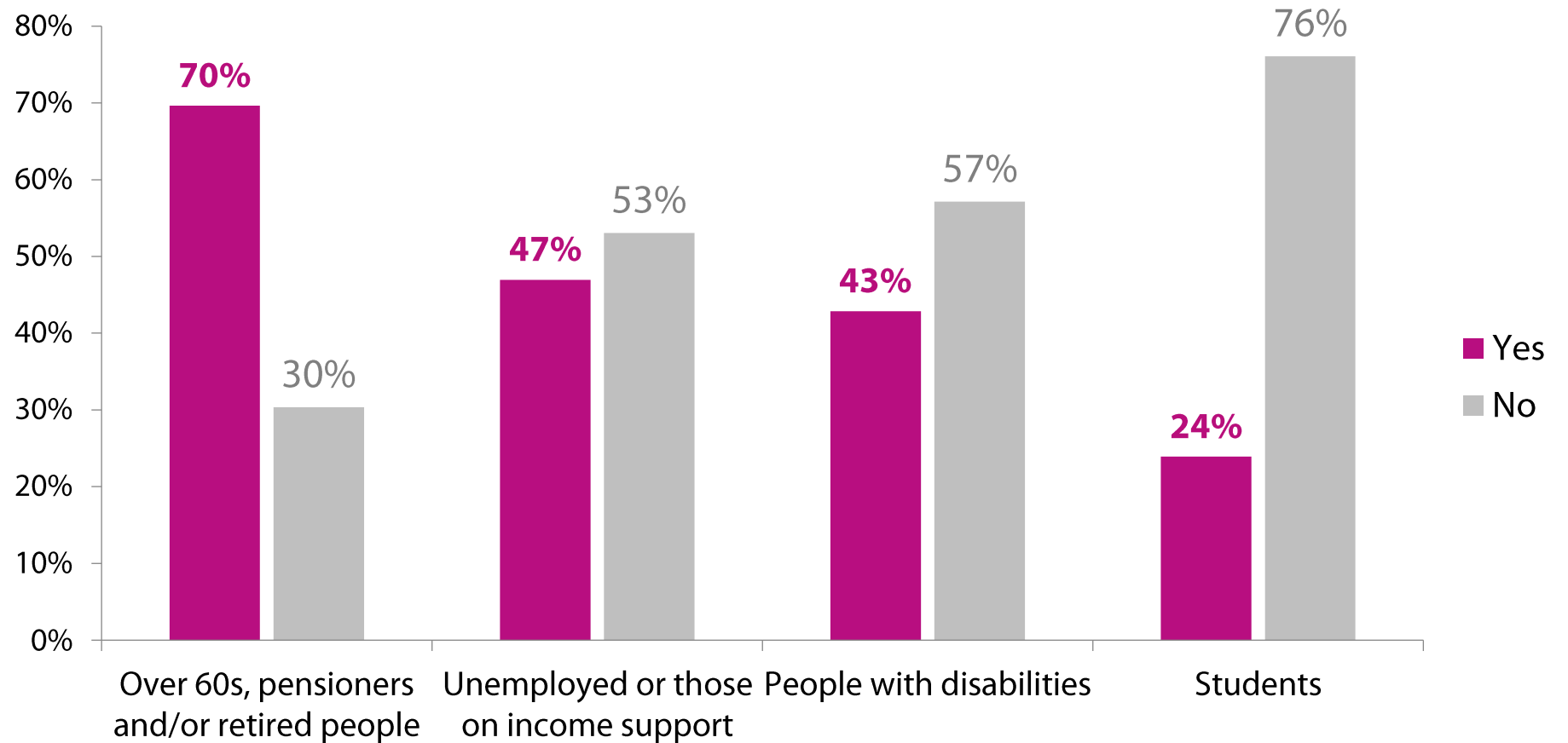
Concessions

66%
Offer concessions



Concessions

Do you offer a concession to the following:





"25% concession to those on means tested benefits."

"50% discount offered to those on council tax reduction or universal credit housing element."

"Senior citizens on pension credit get 50% discount."

"No concessions as we think prices are very low."

"Allotment associations develop their own management rules governing such matters."

"25% discount for anyone on means tested benefits."

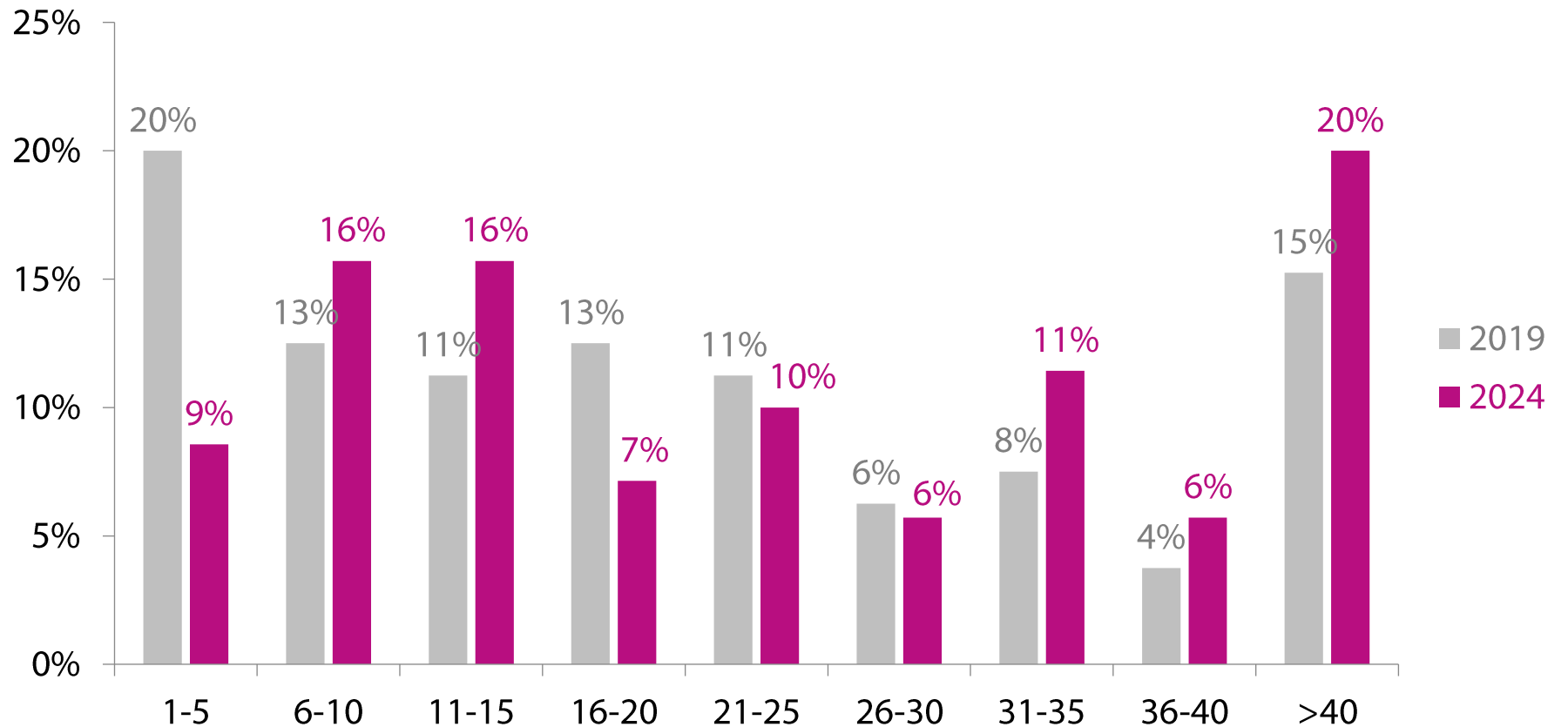
■ Yes

■ No



Number of sites

How many allotment sites have you got?





Number of sites

Does the council have plans to increase the number of allotments?

53%

"Yes"

If you plan to increase the number of allotments, what will be the method of provision?

	2022	2023	2024
Direct provision by the council of additional plots	73%	75%	50%
Provision by builders/developers as part of a housing/planning policy	50%	30%	56%
Provision by community groups supported/facilitated by council	41%	45%	37%
Provision by other council departments (e.g., Education, Social Work) as part of a healthy lifestyles/eco-schools/health type project	32%	20%	8%
Other	18%	5%	13%



Plot size

Have you reduced the size of your plots to create smaller-sized plots to allow waiting lists to be reduced?

73%

"Yes"

"Half plots are offered as starter plots."

"Splitting a full plot in half helps the waiting list but we also do it as we have found our applicants demographic changing. It used to historically be your retired couples applying, now it's younger people who work and have families to look after. They therefore don't have the same available time for an allotment."

"When a plot becomes vacant we usually downsize the plot."

"Our standard plot is still 10 rods but we have sectioned these up into 5 rod, 4 rod and even down to 2 rods depending on demand and ability of plot-holders."

"Some large plots have been turned in to starter plots that are manageable to working families."

"I would say it was more the case that we ended up splitting plots in response to the demand for smaller allotments and because working people / busy families often do not manage or want a large allotment. 20 years ago, the average age of an allotment holder was over 60 and they were mostly retired people but this is no longer the case and many do not want (or cannot manage) a large plot."

Plot size

What is the size of your smaller plots?

45sq.m

Smallest plot

If you have reduced plot size to create more allotments how has the public reacted?

"Reacted well as some people do not have the time to take on bigger plots and it gives people the chance to keep a plot by reducing the size."

"Beneficial. Increased numbers of applicants can be accommodated, with many applicants unable to take on a full plot and may find it intimidating as a new allotment plot holder. This has been particularly useful for people living alone, couples, or those with small families."

"We have only done it where tenants are happy with reducing so haven't enforced it as a rule."

"Mixed views - some of our tenants like larger plots, whereas others like smaller plots - it is best to have a variety within reason."

"Some of the older plot-holders expressed concerns about losing full plots. However they were fine when we explained our reasons and that if the demand dropped/ demographic changed etc we could put them back."



Plot ownership

Do you restrict plot ownership to a person or a household?
i.e. one plot per household?

43%

"Yes"

Can plots be passed on to families and friends?

62%

"No"

Are plot-holders required to undertake a probationary period to ensure they can manage their plot effectively?

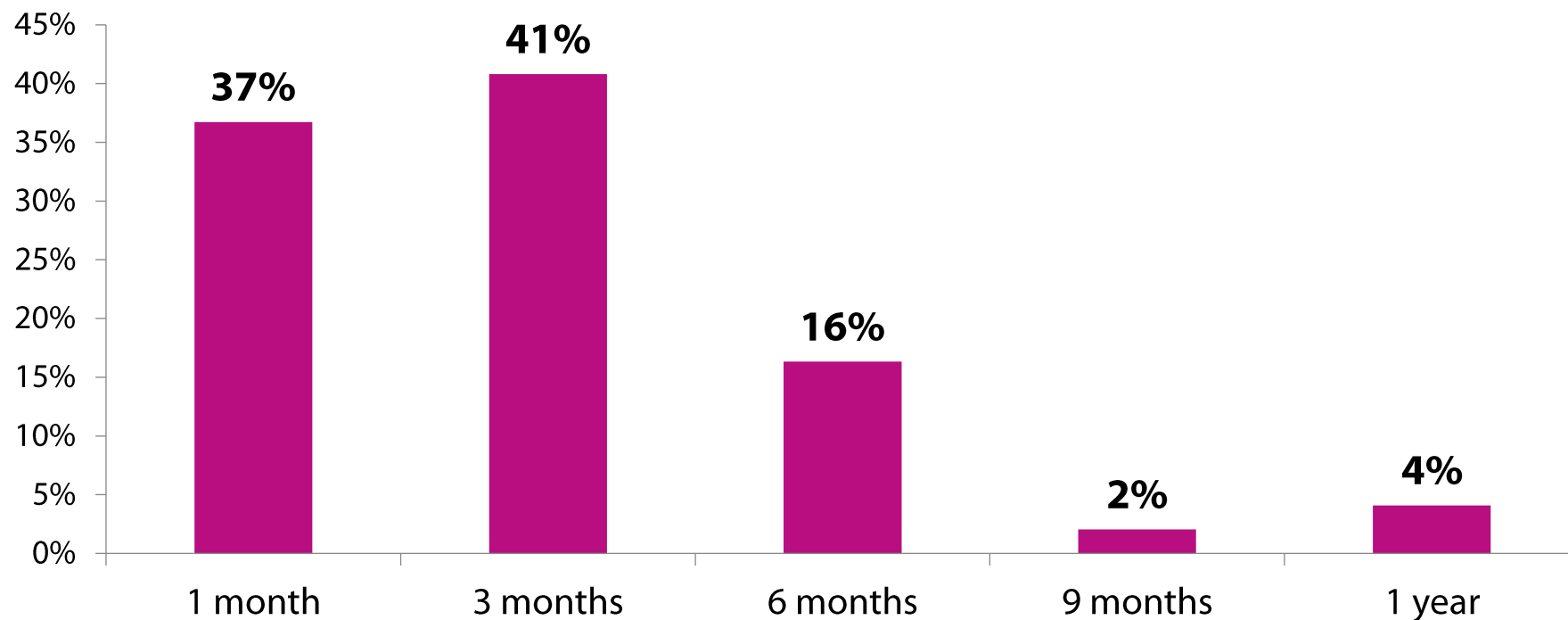
18%

"Yes"



Plot ownership

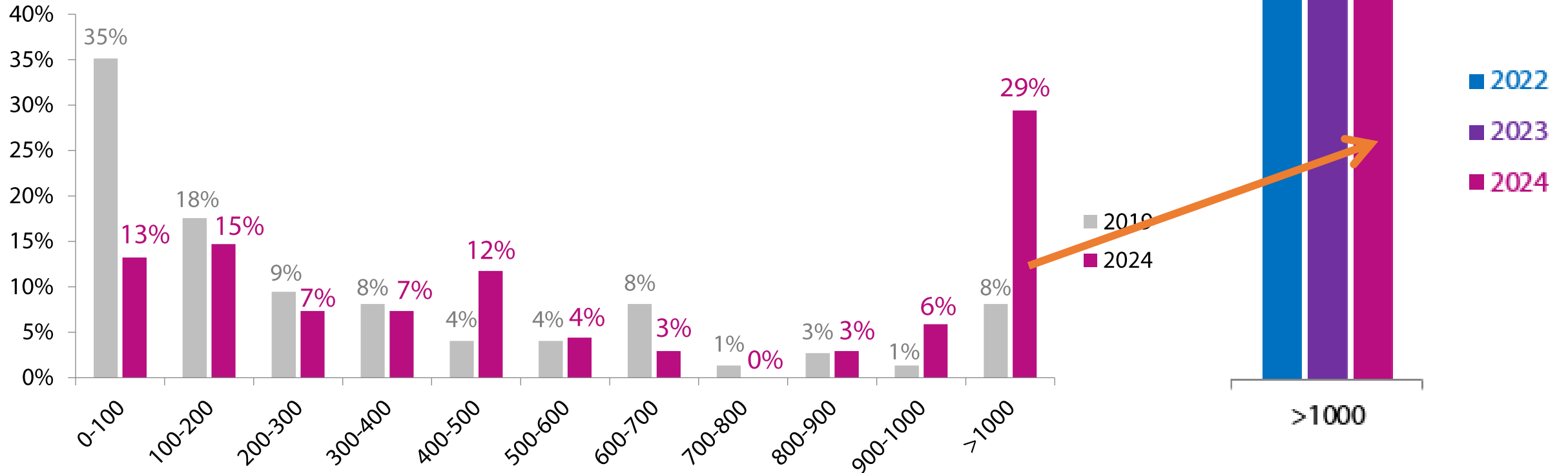
What length of time do you allow a plot to be uncultivated before you take actions?





Waiting lists

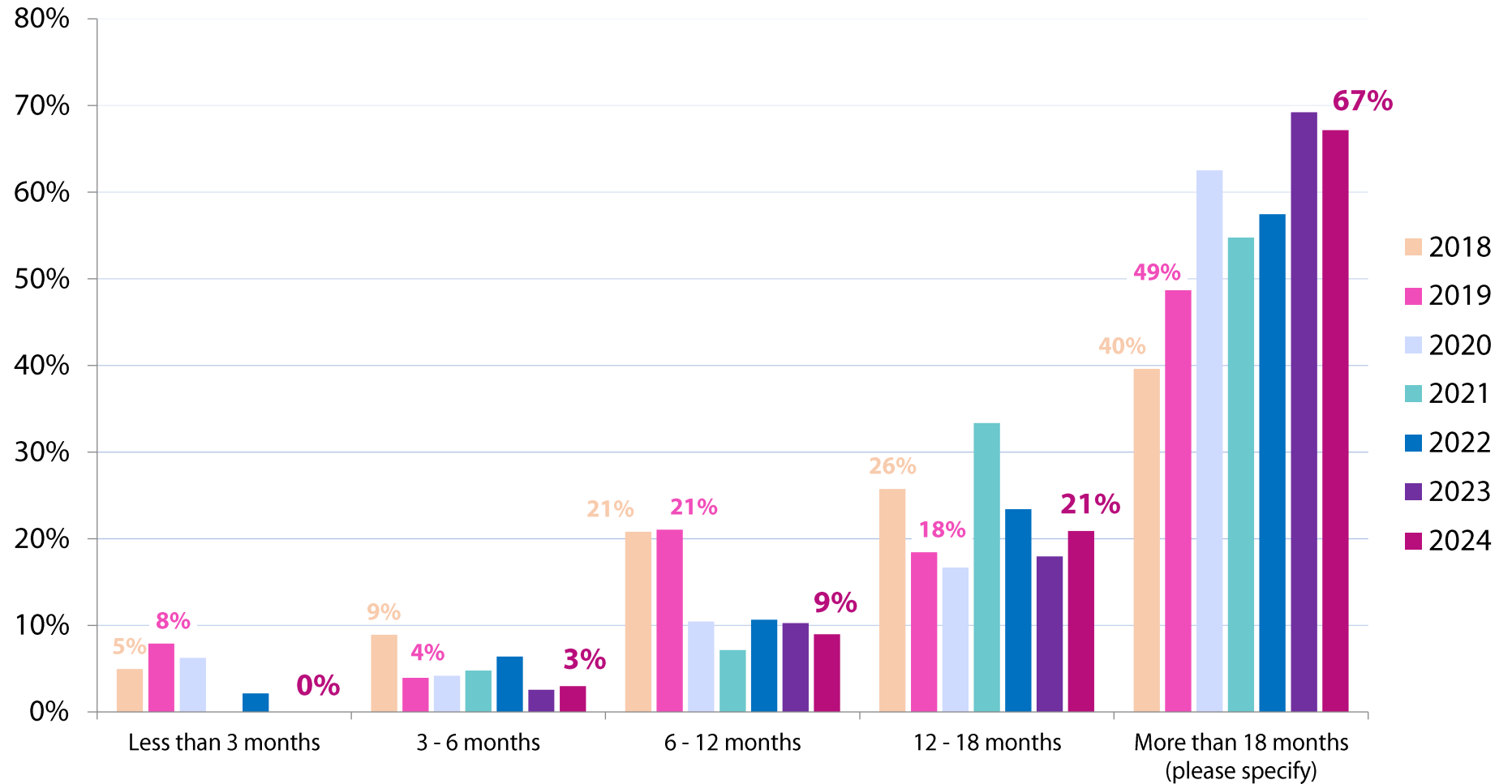
What is the approximate number of people on the waiting list for an allotment?





Waiting time

What is the average waiting time to receive an allotment plot?





Budget responsibility

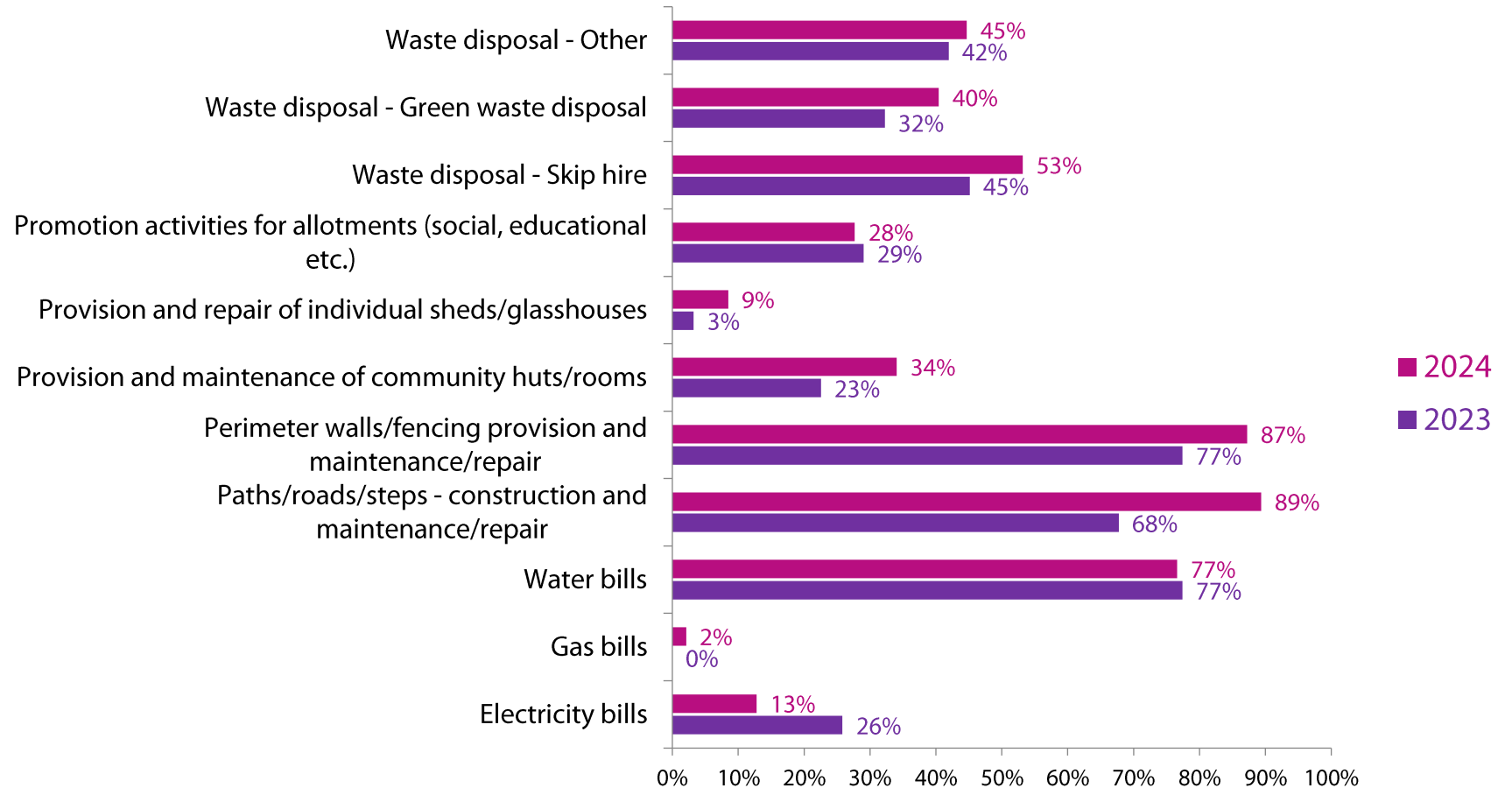
+12%

Paths/roads/steps

+10%

Perimeter walls/fencing provision

Does the budget include responsibility for:
(More than one answer can be selected)





Strategies

Does the council have an allotments strategy?

46%

"Yes"

If not, is the council planning to develop one within the next two years?

46%

"Yes"

Does your Local Plan include specific policies as to the protection/provision of allotment sites?

64%

"Yes"



Strategies

8. Promoting healthy and safe communities

~~96-94.~~ Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places ~~and beautiful buildings~~ which:

- a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages;
- b) are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of ~~beautiful~~, well-designed, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas; and
- c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, ~~allotments~~ and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

11. Making effective use of land

~~123-121.~~ Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or 'brownfield' land⁵⁰.

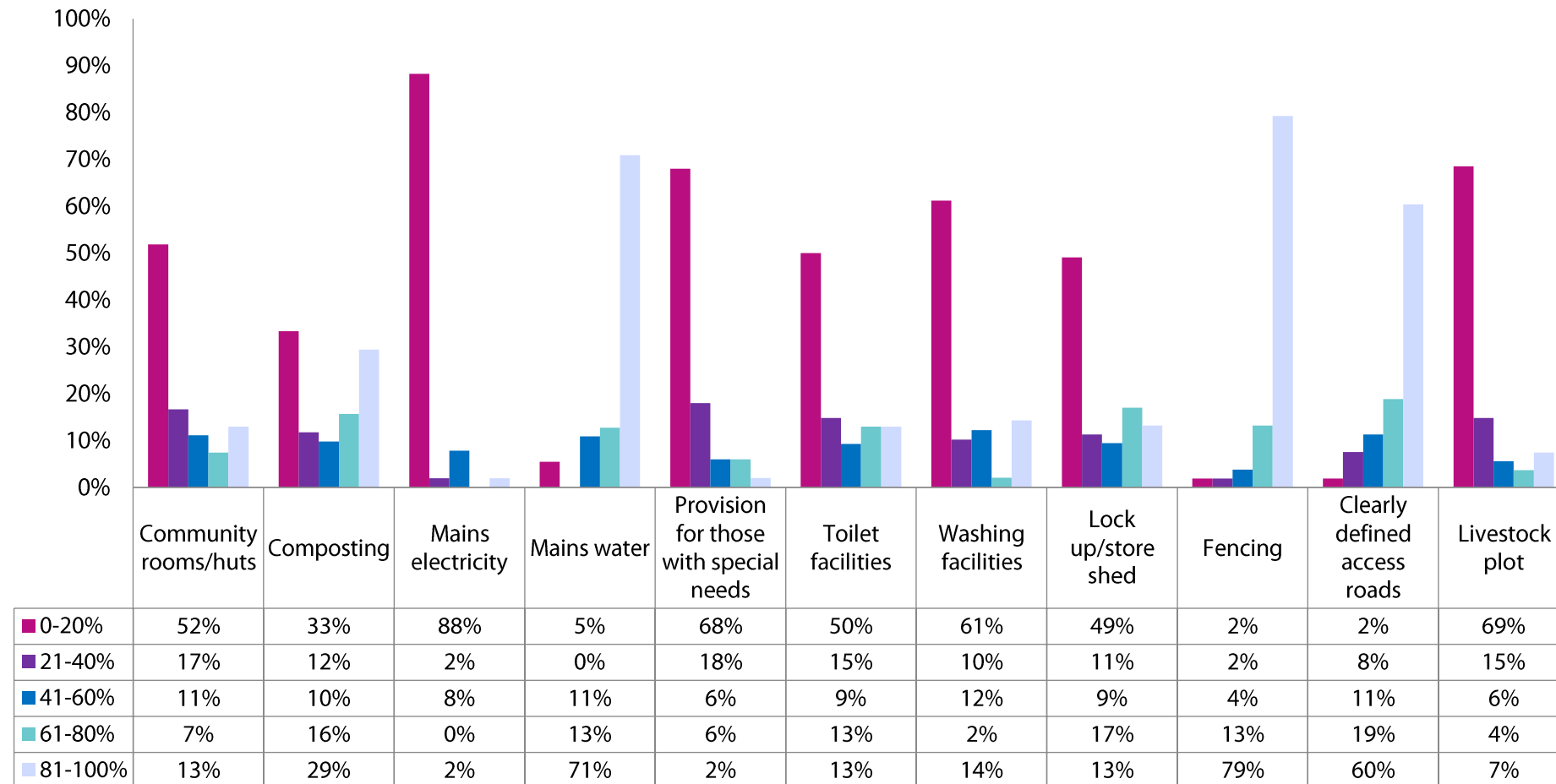
~~124-122.~~ Planning policies and decisions should:

- a) encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes and taking opportunities to achieve net environmental gains – such as developments that would enable new habitat creation or improve public access to the countryside;
- b) recognise that some undeveloped land can perform many functions, such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, cooling/shading, carbon storage or food production;

Amenities

- 71% of authorities provide mains water to over 80% of their sites.
- 31% of authorities provide community rooms/huts to over 40% of their sites.
- 26% of authorities provide toilet facilities to over 60% of sites.
- 60% of authorities provide clearly defined access roads on over 80% of their sites.
- 79% of authorities provide fencing to over 80% of their sites.

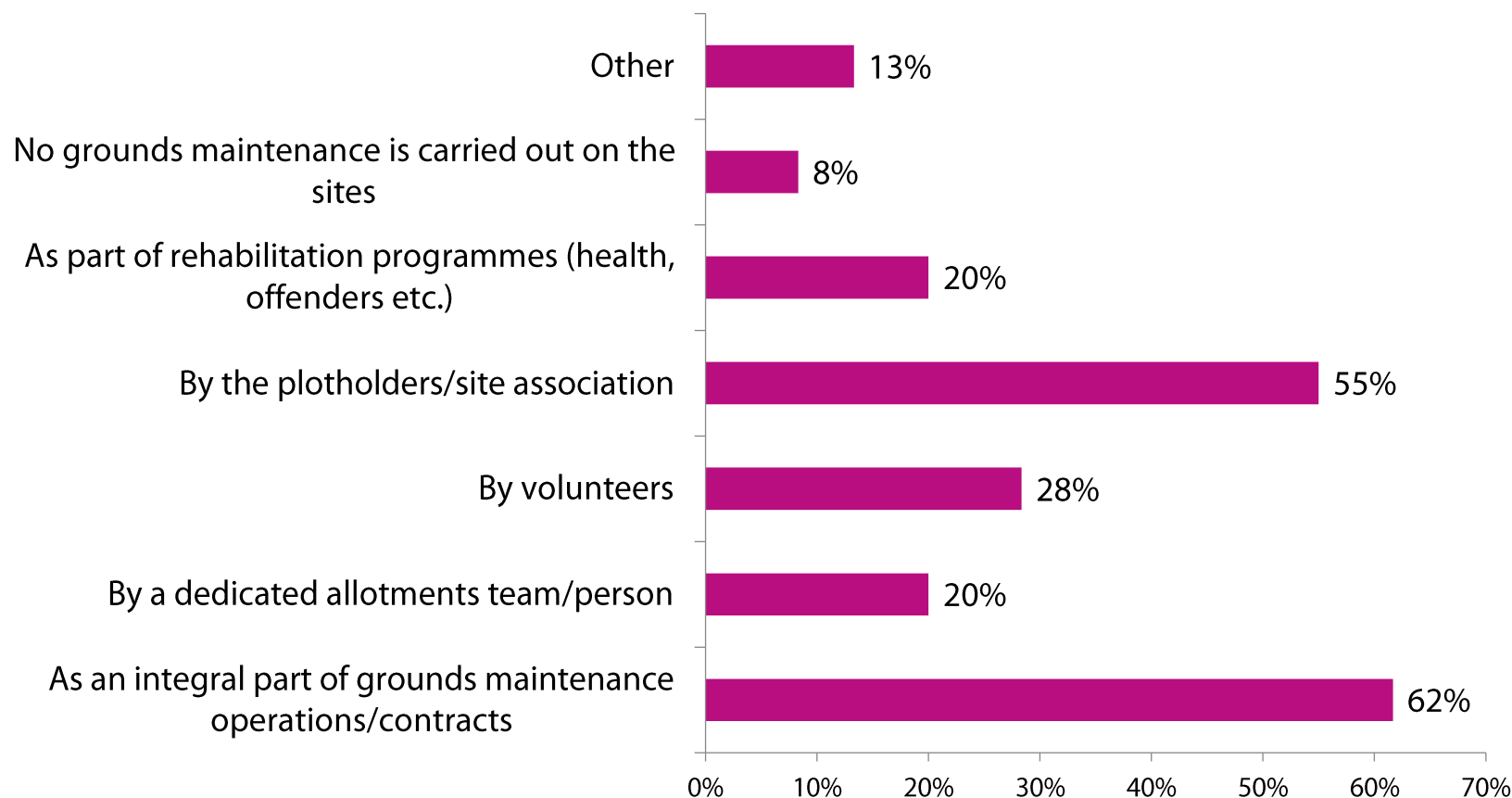
What is the approximate percentage of allotment sites with:





Amenities – Grounds maintenance

How is grounds maintenance carried out on allotment sites?
(More than one answer can be selected)





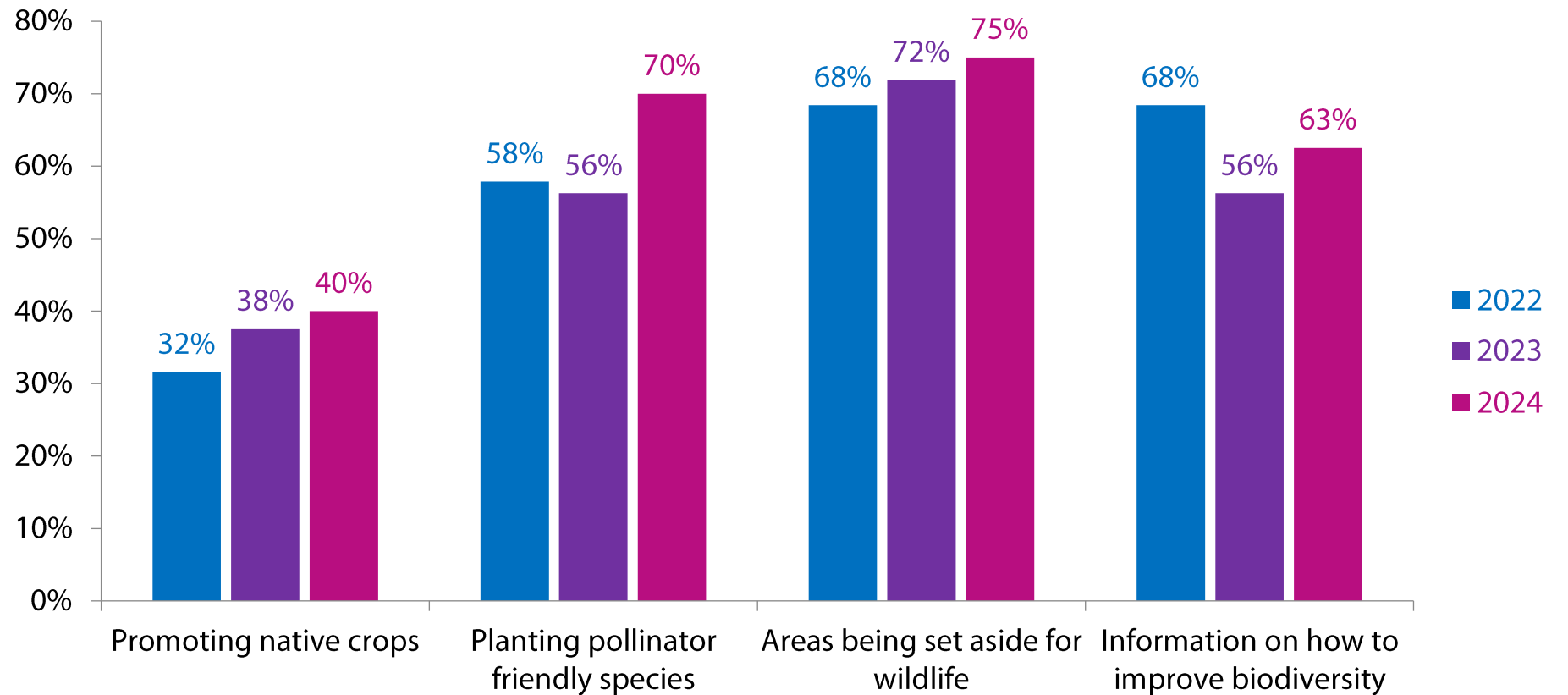
Biodiversity

In May 2024, the four UK administrations published a joint UK Biodiversity Framework which aims to coordinate efforts to meet the UK's international obligations.

- In England, the Environment Act 2021 places a 'biodiversity duty' on public authorities.
- Under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, all public bodies in Scotland are required to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities.
- The Welsh Government is currently reviewing responses to its 'Environmental principles, governance and biodiversity targets: White Paper'.
- Northern Ireland's new Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs Minister, Andrew Muir MLA, has spoken of the need to develop a new Biodiversity Strategy.

Biodiversity

How is biodiversity promoted amongst plot-holders?
(More than one answer can be selected)



Sustainable practices

55%

“Cultivating plots organically”

96%

“Adopting water-saving measures (e.g. water butts)”

19%

“Using solar power instead of mains power”



Four takeaways

1. Average wait times remain very high but may have peaked in 2023
2. Rental costs are increasing, with more allotment services expected to be cost neutral
3. Plot size reductions prompted by high demand are generally met with approval from existing plot-holders
4. Allotments prove fertile ground for promoting biodiversity and sustainable practices



Managing allotments in local authorities

Online training course

This online training course provides an introduction to the key issues and principles of allotment 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.

Next date: 11-12 September 2024





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