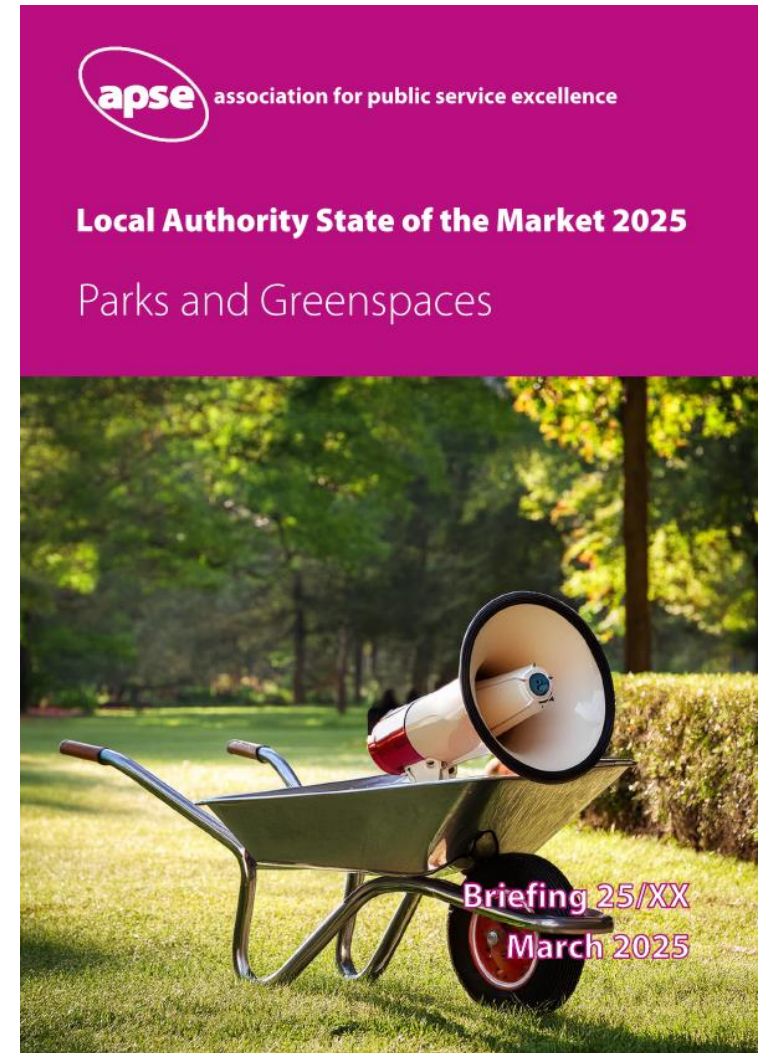




Association for Public Service Excellence

# State of the Market: Parks and Greenspaces

Matt Ellis, APSE Principal Advisor



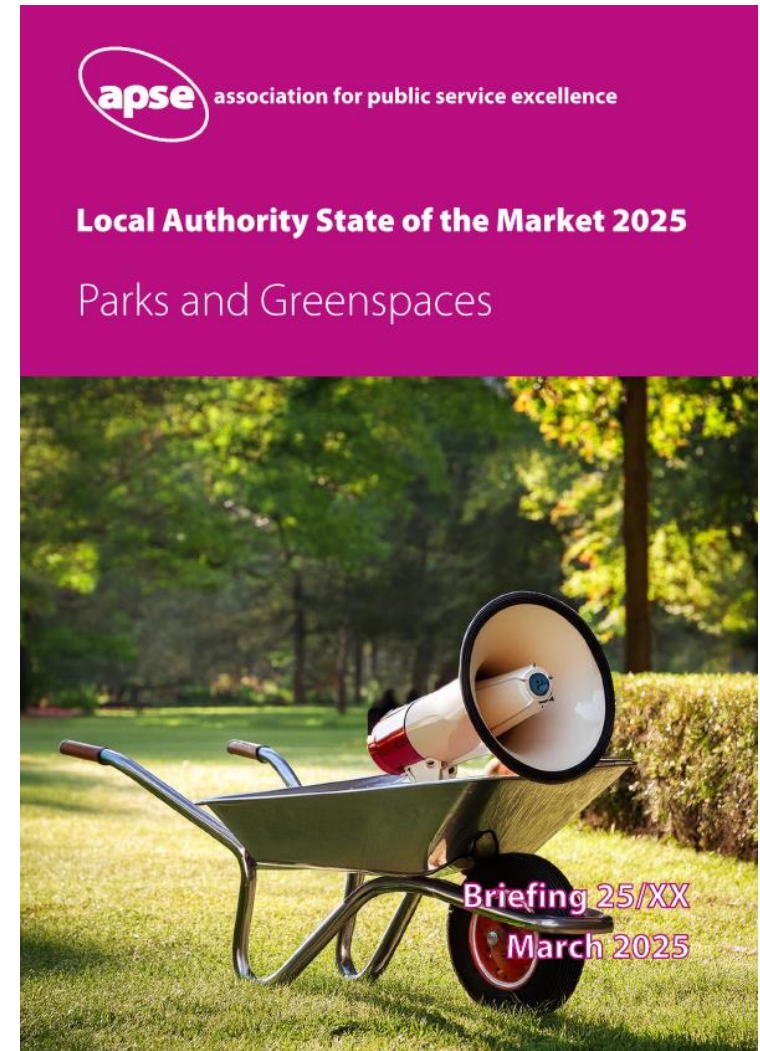


# Purpose:

- 🌱 Survey of UK local authority grounds maintenance teams
- 🌱 Covering a diverse range of topics – from budgets and income generation to biodiversity targets and the involvement of community groups
- 🌱 Provides a valuable snapshot of the sector
- 🌱 Comparative analysis - Identification of trends in the sector

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

*\*\*Exceptional circumstances of the pandemic may have distorted figures 2021-23*





# Selected themes:

- 🌱 Budgets
- 🌱 Efficiencies
- 🌱 Income generation
- 🌱 Workforce
- 🌱 Training and apprenticeships
- 🌱 Biodiversity
- 🌱 Weed control
- 🌱 Community involvement
- 🌱 Health and social impacts





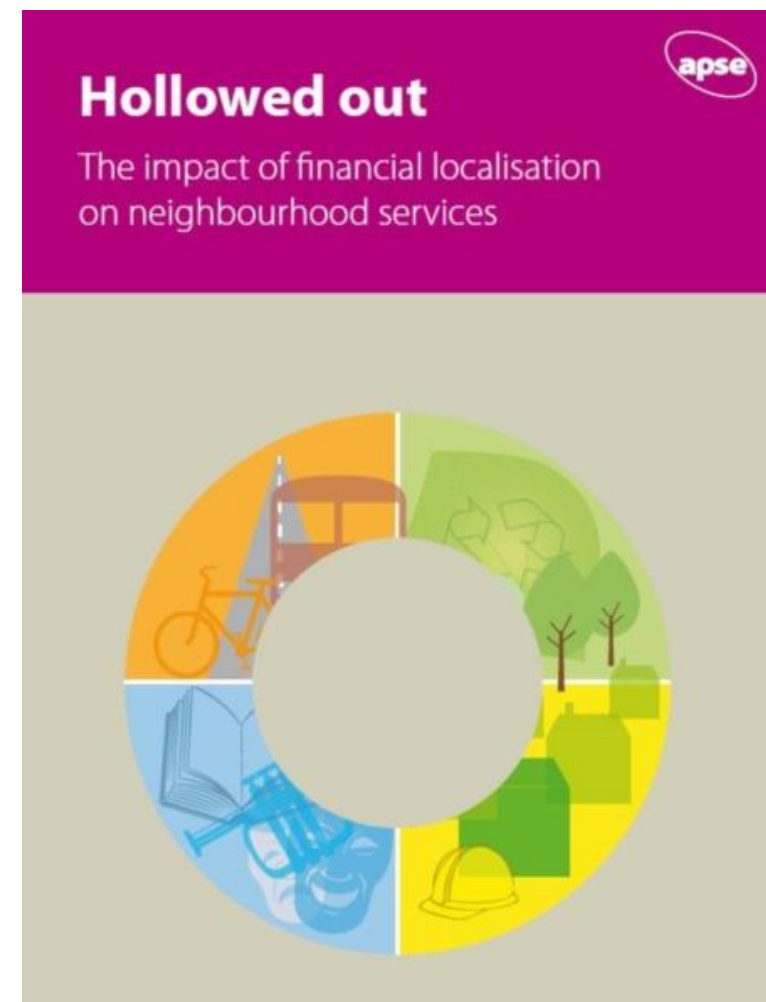
# Economic context

APSE's State of UK Public Parks 2021

Report found that a total of

**£690 million** was lost from parks

budgets 2010-2021- '*Hollowed out*'



# Political context

**Tracking Public Attitudes to Council Service Provision.**

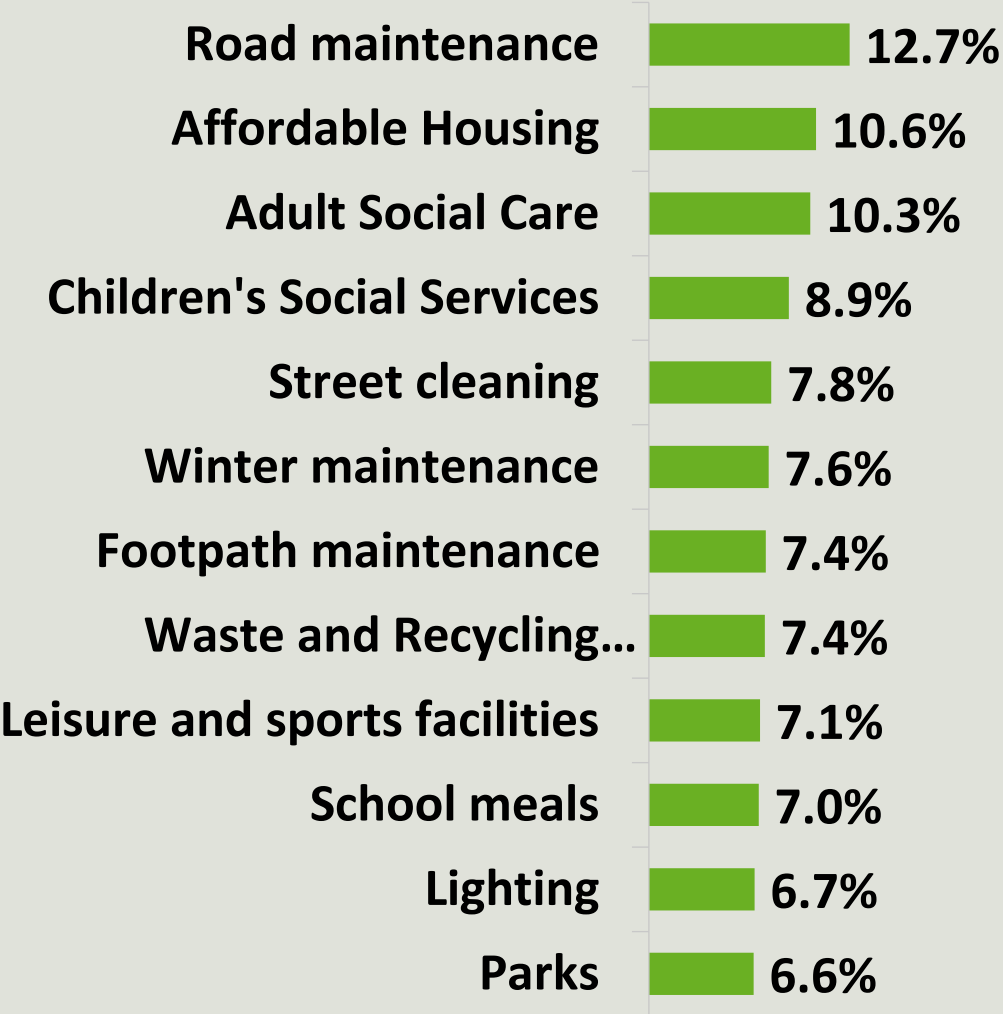
**Tracking Councillors on the pressure to deliver.**

Conducted by Survation on behalf of APSE

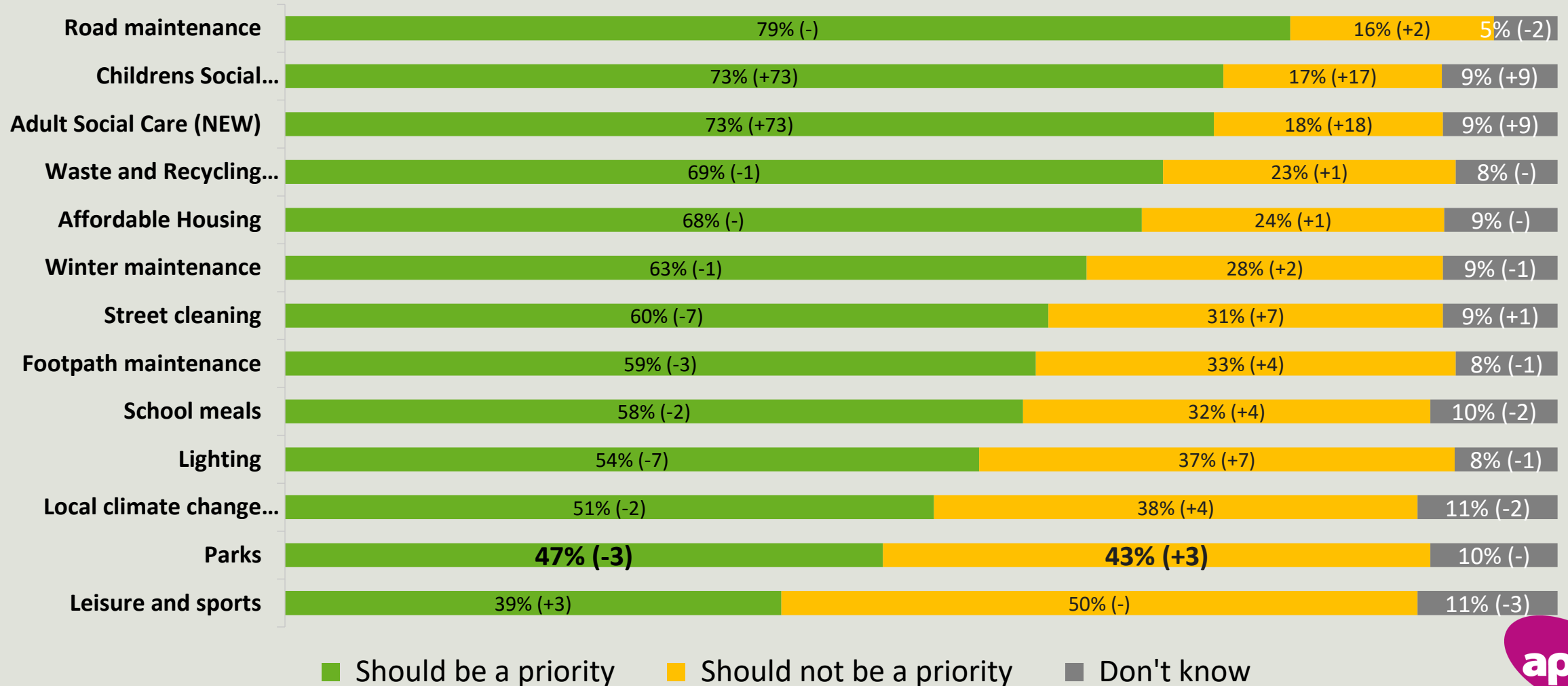


**Survation.**

You stated that you would like to see MORE money given to local councils than is done so currently. If you had the choice, what percentage of the extra money would be spent on each of the 12 services below?



# If the local government was making cuts to public services, should the following be a priority to protect?





# Theme of today's seminar

- 🌱 Conversations with the APSE network / Participation in MHCLG Parks Working Group.
- 🌱 Buy-in: Secure support from those who control the purse strings as well as residents.
- 🌱 *“Explore how local councils can harness the transformative potential of parks and greenspace to improve health, boost wellbeing, and tackle climate challenges head-on.”*
- 🌱 Strategically aligning greenspace initiatives with council priorities, particularly climate change and health and wellbeing strategies – ***Sweat our green assets.***
- 🌱 Survey: How well are parks positioning themselves as a solution to these challenges?





# Budgets

80%

*"Agree" or "Agree strongly"*

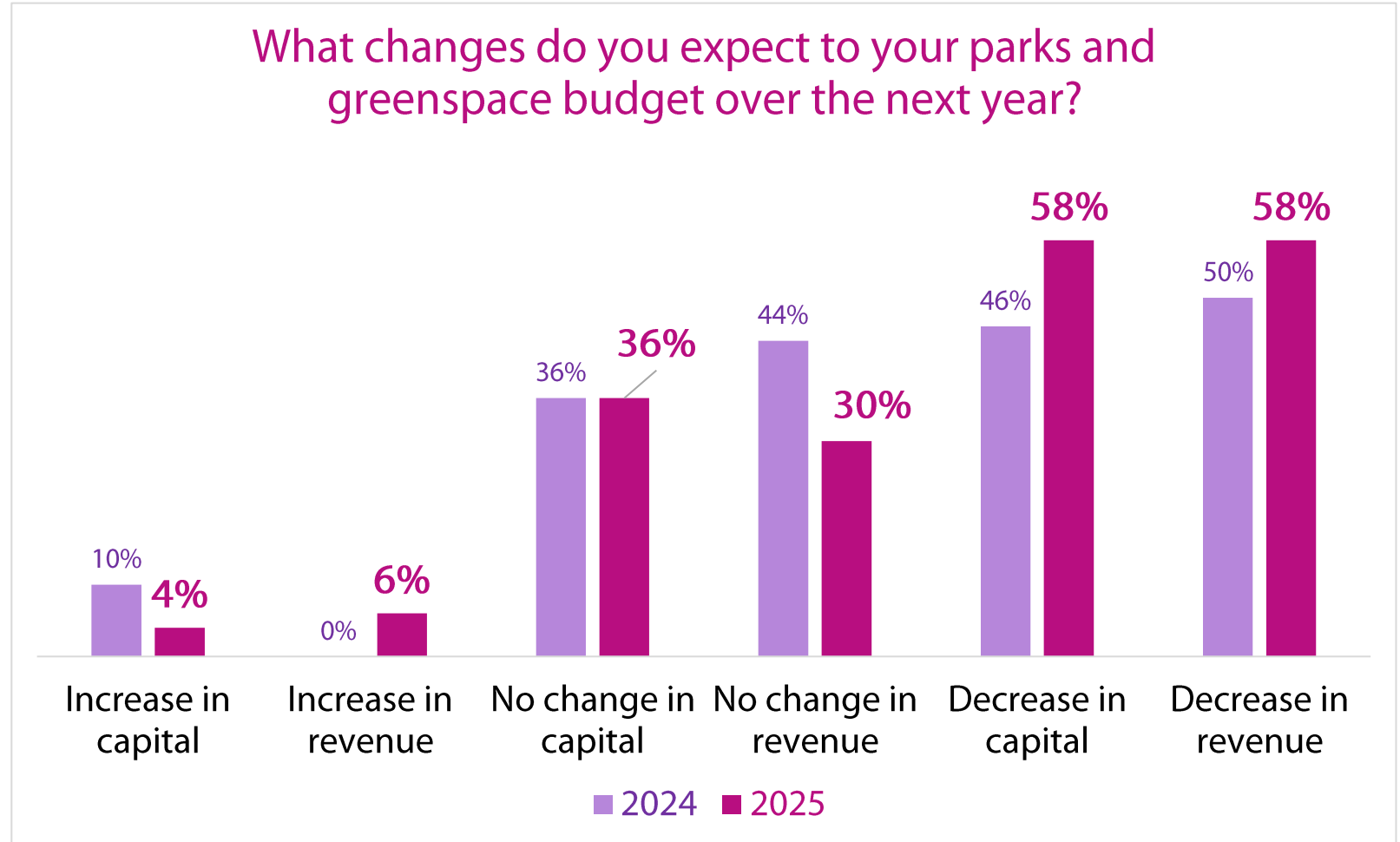
2024 (+14%)

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



# Budgets

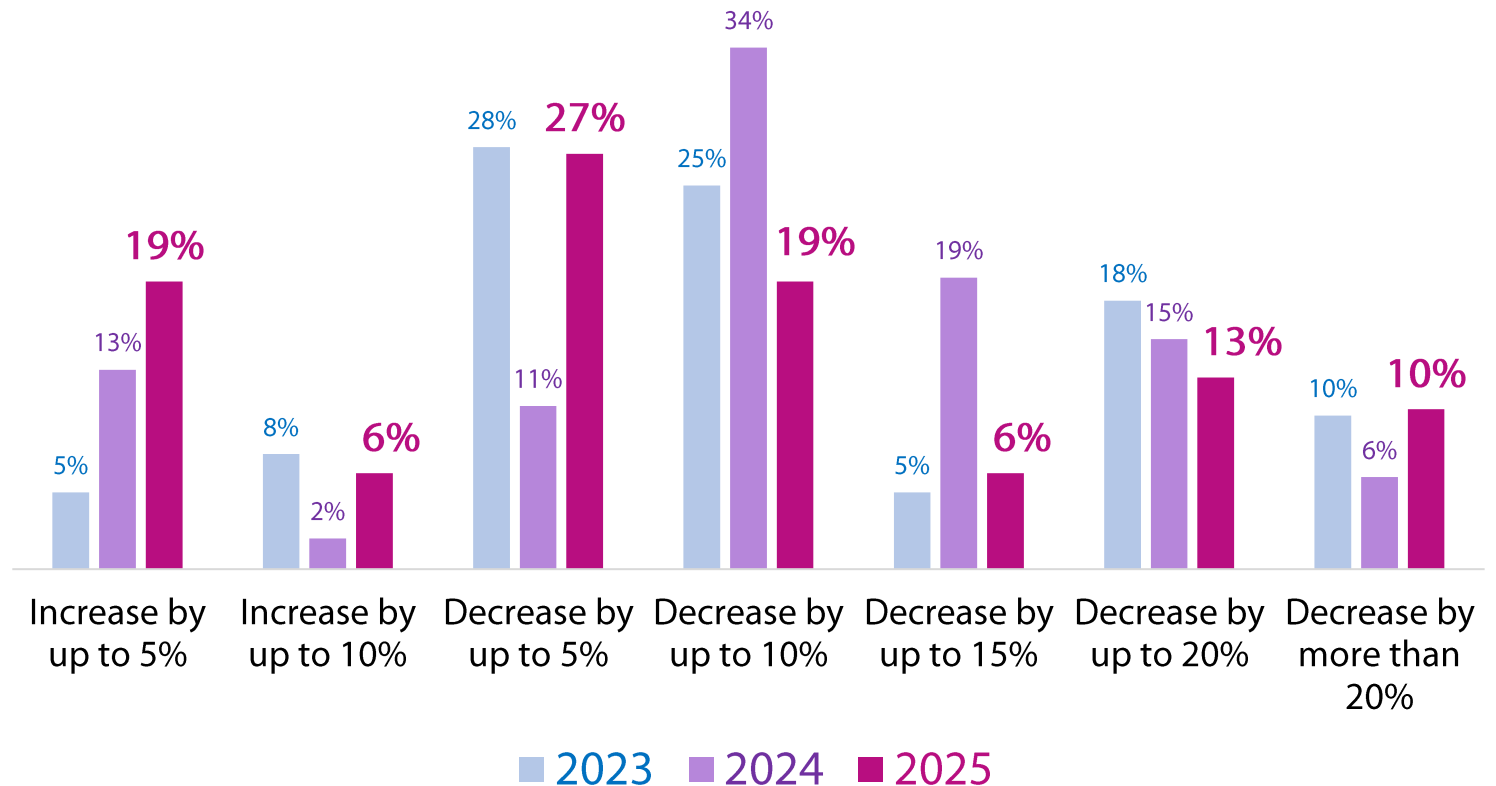
*“Our council is currently in a very precarious financial situation, and it is likely that parks as the ‘soft target’ will see a further reduction in its budget.”*



# Budgets

*“Expecting no change but with local government re-organisation now looming who knows what could happen.”*

What is your expectation of the level of funding in your service budget in the coming five years?

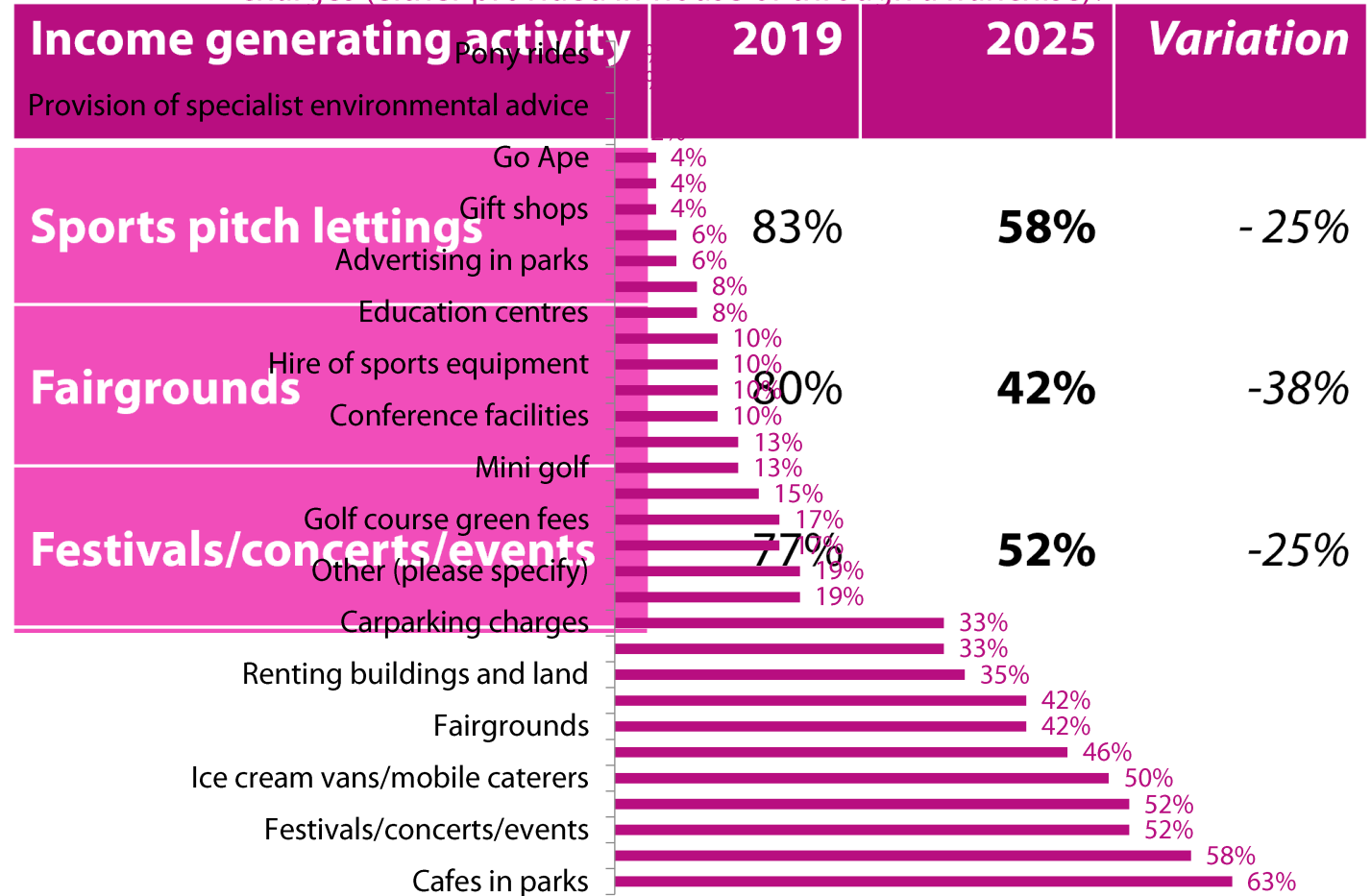




# Income generation

The £690m lost from parks budgets 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.

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





# Income generation - *Barriers*

61%

2023 (+21%)

Public resistance

69%

2023 (+19%)

Political resistance

41%

2023 (-19%)

Lack of time

41%

2023 (-9%)

Lack of investment  
funding



# Efficiencies

84%

*"Agree" or "Agree strongly"*

2024 (+6%)

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



# Efficiencies

*“Reduced maintenance frequencies with less staff. Reducing higher maintenance areas. All large cost items such as bedding have been removed.”*

*“Reduced grass cutting and bin emptying.”*

*“Removal of annual bedding to plant more sustainable displays.”*

*“We have reduced the area that is mown (leaving areas of long grass for wildlife). Reduced the number of mowing cuts, stopped formal bedding, using wildflowers instead, removal of gym equipment at the end of life and not replaced it.”*

*“Reducing the number of FT apprenticeship positions by half (from 4 to 2), reducing the hours / staff dedicated to parks, reducing the number of free public activities and events provided by parks, reducing the horticultural displays.”*



# Reduced maintenance

70%

2024 (+8%)

Bedding/flower  
displays

55%

2024 (No change)

Frequency of grass  
cuts (amenity)

35%

2024 (No change)

Shrub bed  
maintenance





Association for Public Service Excellence



Sponsored by:



# Best in Grass

Effective grassland management strategies for local greenspace



Thursday 7 November

MS Teams



# Class on Grass

Lessons on grassland and soil management in local greenspace

Thursday 20 February 2025, 10.00-12.15

Online Meeting via MS Teams - Free for members to join!

**>>> [Book your place here](#) <<<**



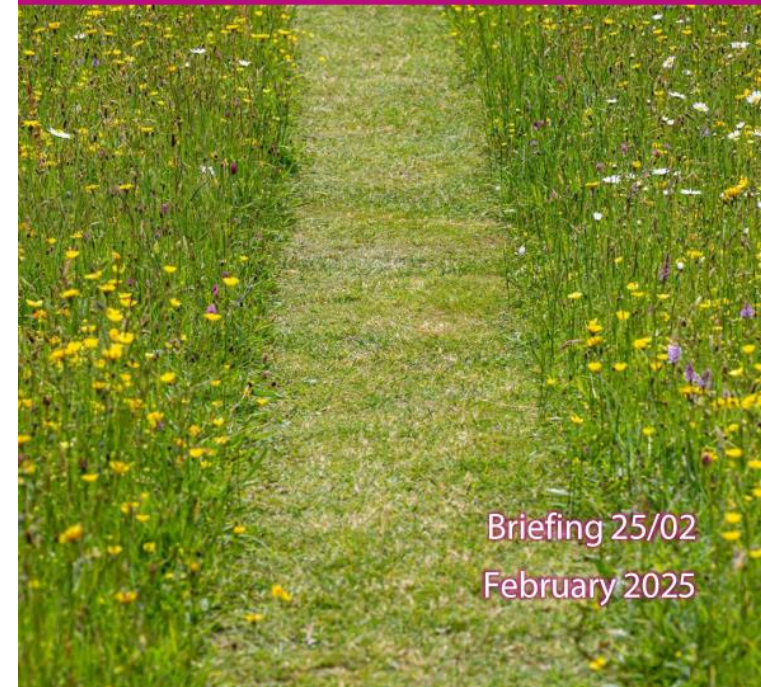
Mitigating the impacts of climate change, increasing the opportunities for biodiversity, and securing buy-in from residents and elected members.

**Whether large open spaces or roadside verges, how can local councils design and implement effective grassland and soil management strategies?**



# Grassland management

A guide for local councils



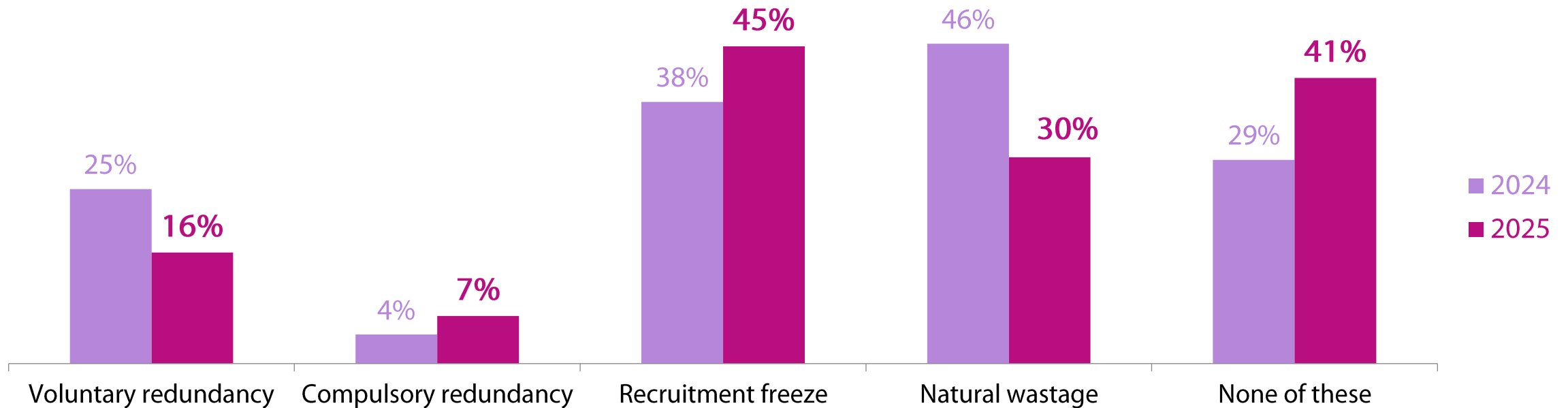
Briefing 25/02

February 2025



# Workforce

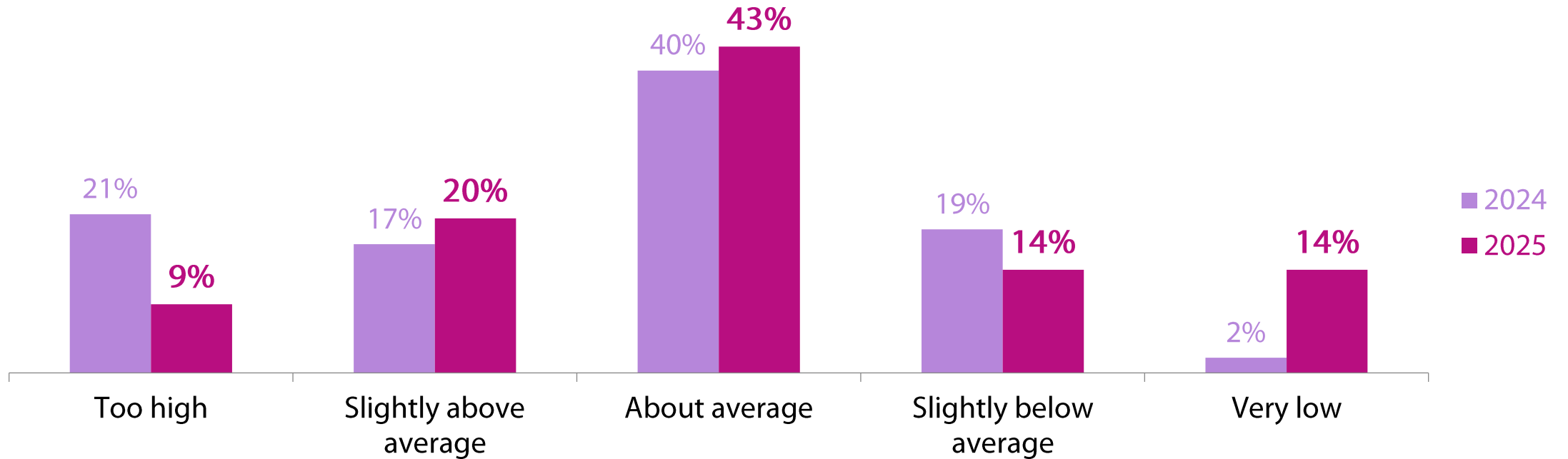
Has your service implemented any of the following in the last 12 months?





# Workforce

Are staff absence levels at an acceptable level?





# Training

“Is the training budget over the next 12 months going to...”

7%

*Increase*

68%

*Stay the same*

25%

*Decrease*



# Apprenticeships

“Do you have apprentices?”

**37%**

**Yes**

2022 (-24%)

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

**73%**

**No**

2022 (-44%)

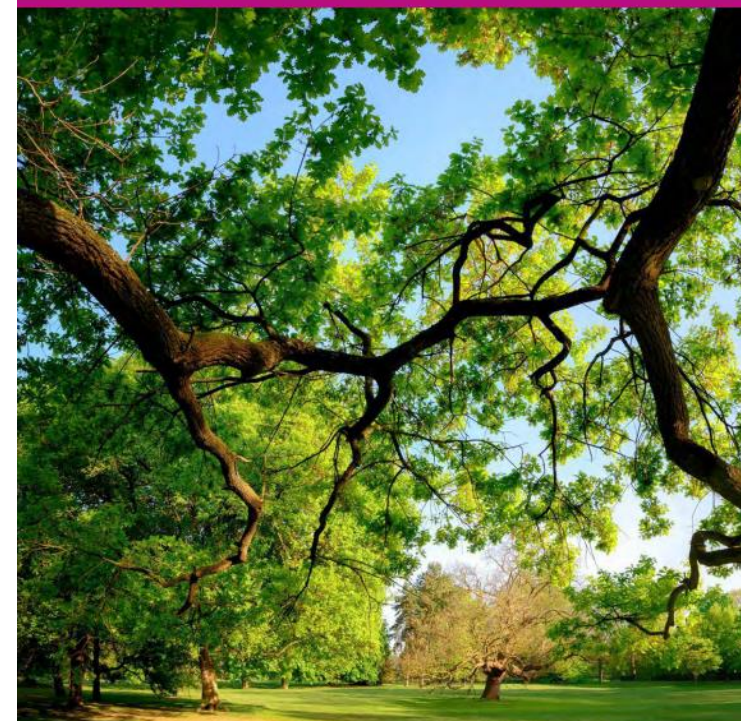


# Apprenticeships

- 🌱 APSE has always advocated for the importance of apprenticeships, lifelong learning and career pathways in the local authority parks sector.
- 🌱 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.



**Nurturing skills for 21st century parks**





# Community involvement

Do you have friends of parks groups?

88%

Yes

1. Friends and residents' groups (88%)
2. Parks events (62%)
3. Local environmental improvement plans (56%)
4. Litter picking (54%)

Where do you see growth for the service over the next 12 months?

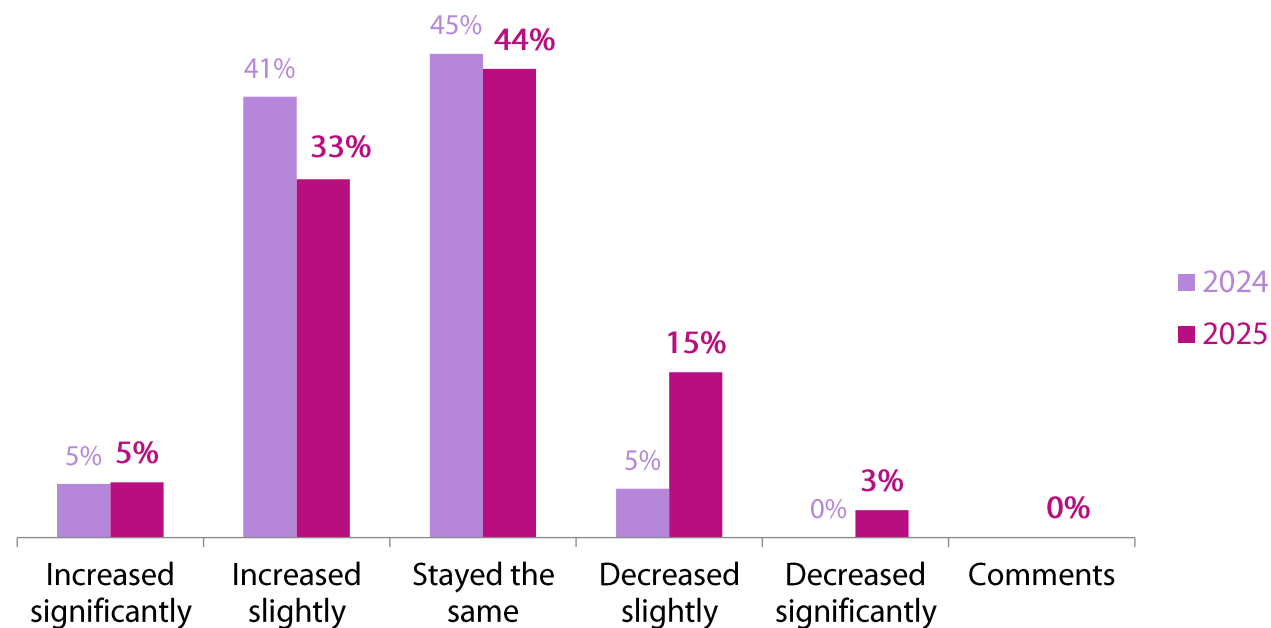
57%

Yes

# Community involvement

🌱 Friends of Parks groups can play a key role in preserving parks, organising events, and advocating for improvements; leading to better-maintained and more accessible outdoor spaces for residents.

Has community sector involvement in parks





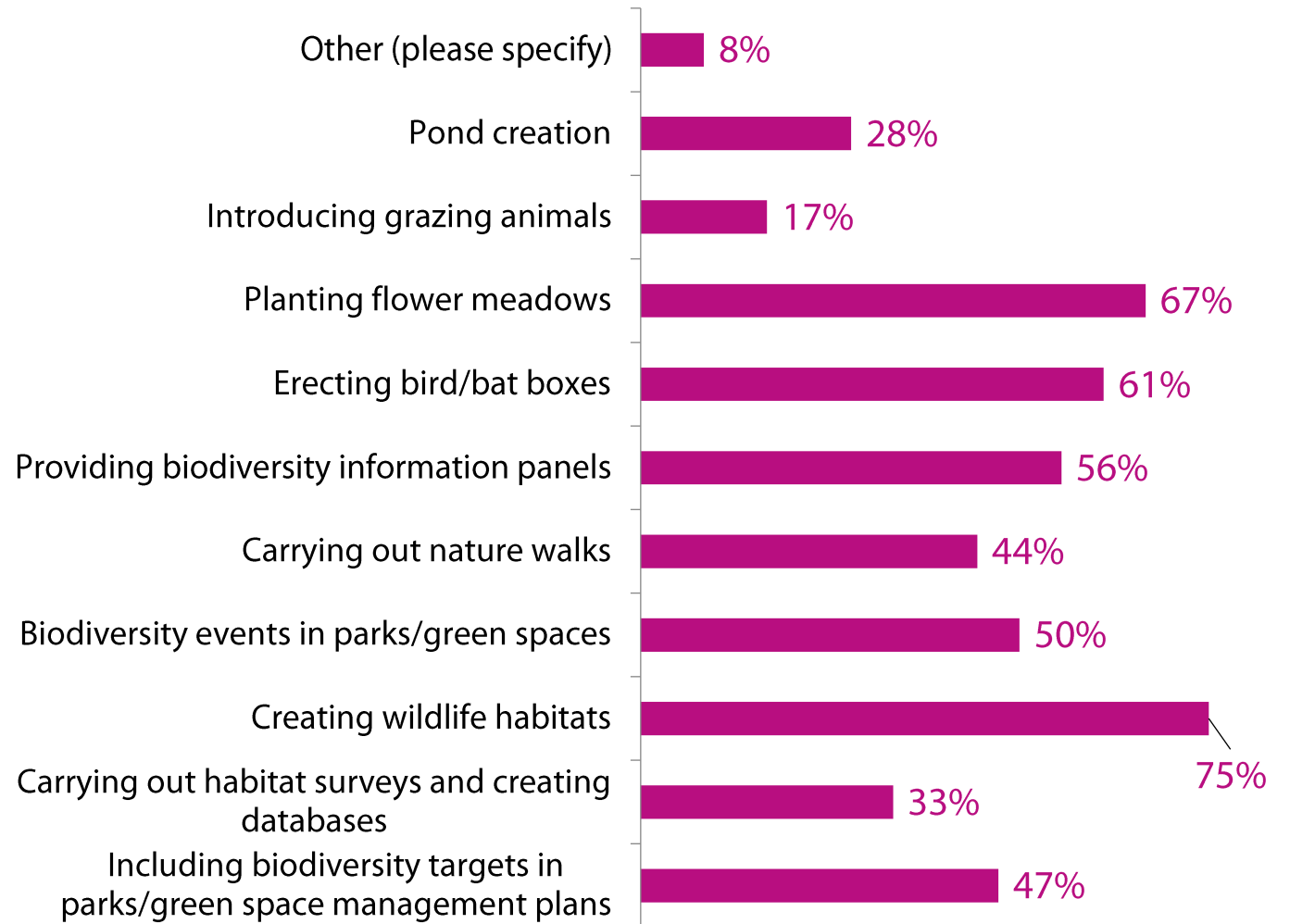
# Biodiversity

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

85%

Yes

If yes, which of the following have you carried out:





# Rewilding

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

66%

Yes

- Abandoned gold course
- Disused quarry



## Protecting local greenspace

A 'green and pleasant land'?



Briefing 25/03  
February 2025



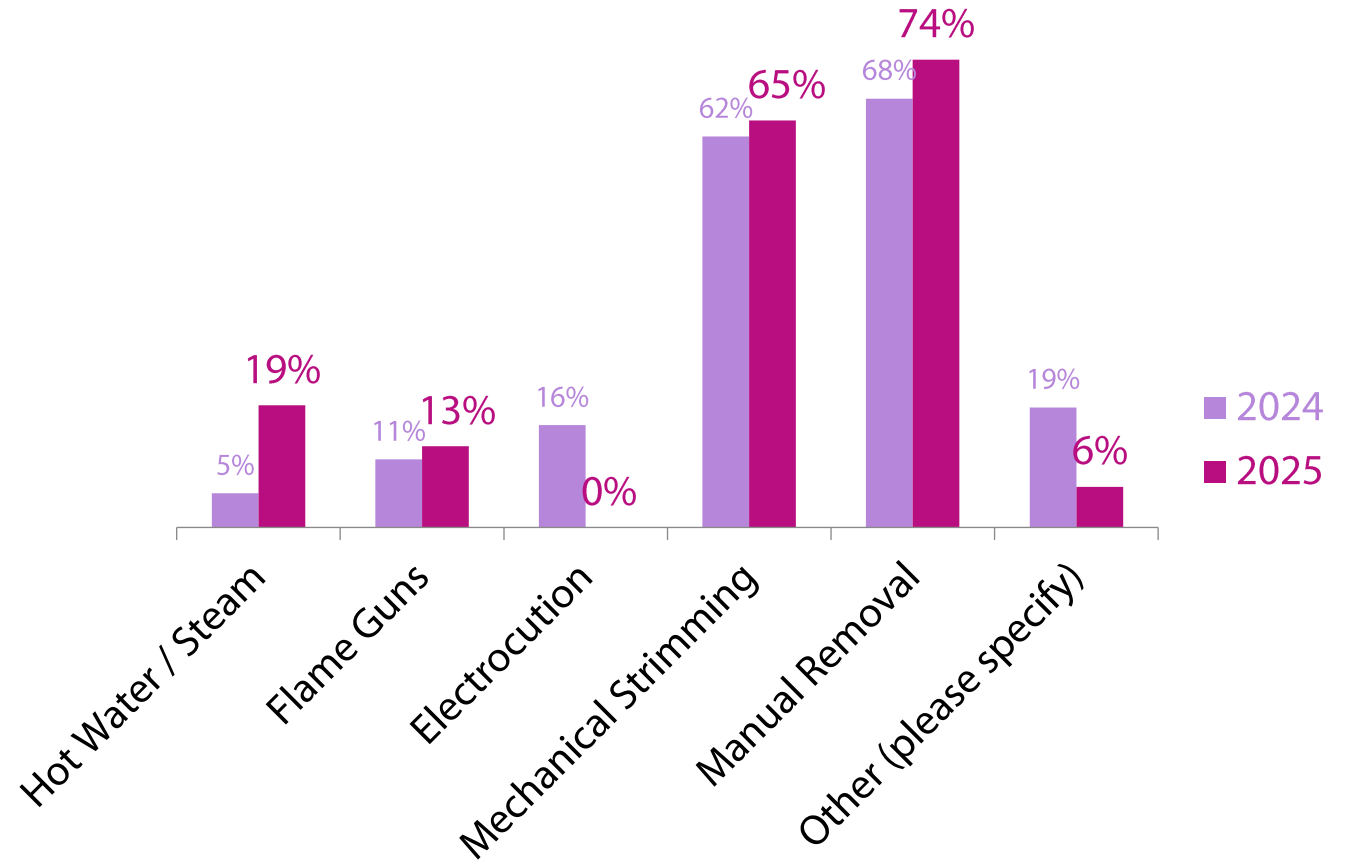
# Weed Control

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

63%

Yes

What alternative methods will you be using to remove weeds?



# Health and social impacts

92%

*"Agree" or "Agree strongly"*

2024 (+5%)

"Lack of investment in parks and green spaces will have health and social impacts"

JECH found that in England, a 1% increase in grassland area was associated with a 37% reduction in annual preventable deaths among the most deprived urban areas.



# Theme of today's seminar

- 🌱 *“Explore how local councils can harness the transformative potential of parks and greenspace to improve health, boost wellbeing, and tackle climate challenges head-on.”*
- 🌱 Survey: How well are parks positioning themselves as a solution to climate change and public health crises?



# 3 points

## 1. Parks as vital community assets

Despite strong public support for free access to parks, declining resources threaten the ability of local authorities to maintain service quality and meet growing visitor demands.

It is imperative to develop a compelling case for continued investment in parks to ensure they remain valued public assets for current and future generations.



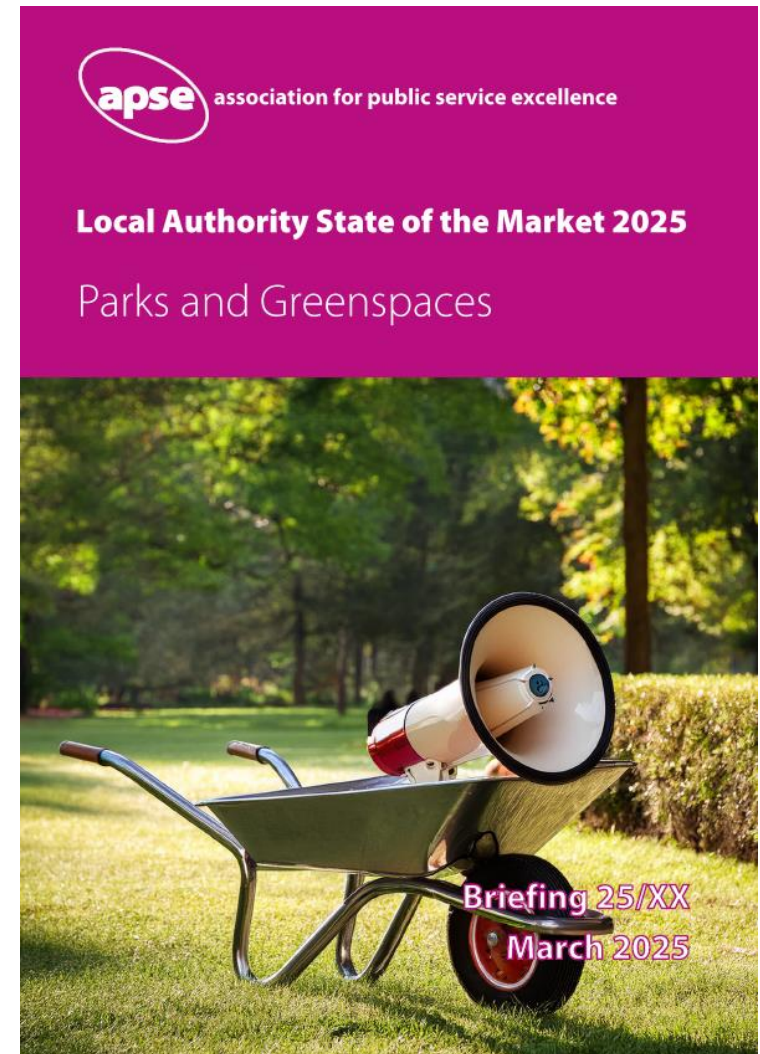


# 3 points

## 2. Buy-in is crucial for parks and greenspace

Securing support from both council leadership and residents is essential for the sustainability of parks and greenspaces

Parks professionals must strategically align greenspace initiatives with council priorities, such as climate change and health strategies, to demonstrate their value and secure continued investment.



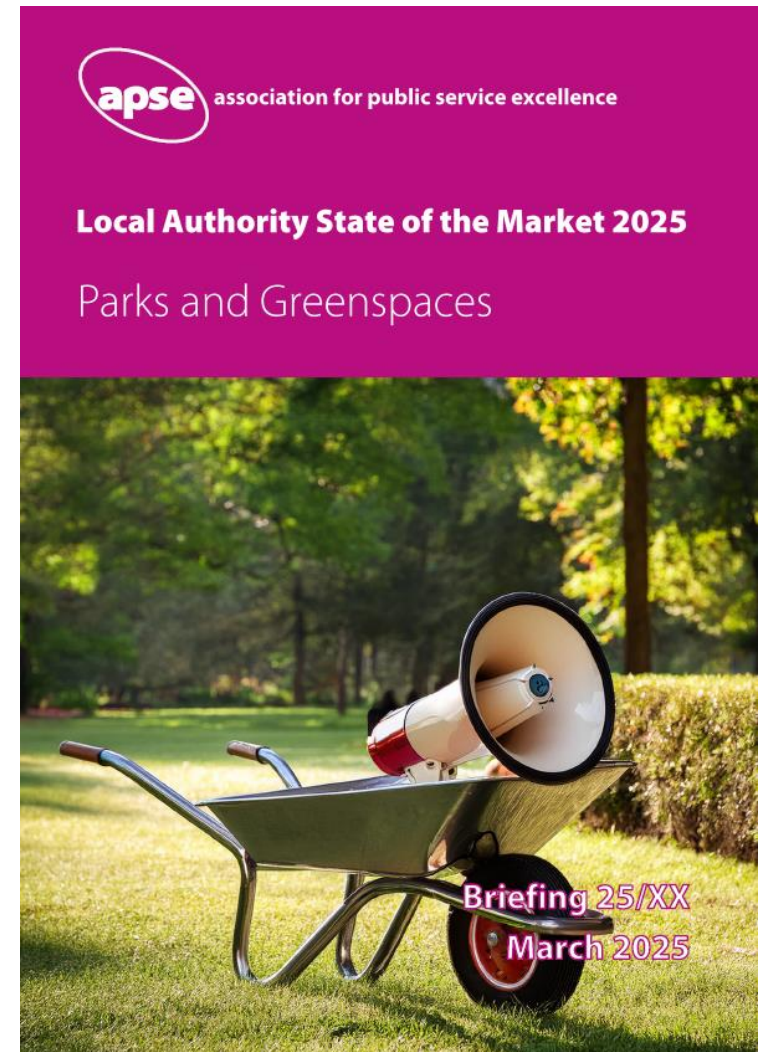


# 3 points

## 3. APSE's role in supporting parks professionals

Training, benchmarking, and networks, we are here to help you navigate the challenges of funding cuts, workforce reductions, reorganisation and service quality maintenance.

By leveraging APSE's expertise and networks, local authorities can improve their parks services, ensuring they continue to meet community needs and contribute to broader environmental and health goals.







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