

GreenSpace: Comprehensive Spending Review Impact Survey 2011 Interim Report March 2011

The Comprehensive Spending Review published in October 2010 set out how the Coalition Government would carry out its deficit reduction plan. As a result of the choices made by Government, its departmental budgets other than health and overseas aid would be cut by an average of 19 per cent over four years.

The Spending Review has been underpinned by a radical programme of public service reform, with the stated intention of:

“ changing the way services are delivered by redistributing power away from central government and enabling sustainable, long term improvements in services.”

Through the Public Service Reform and Localism Bill the Government’s objectives are:

- localising power and funding, including by removing ring-fencing around resources to local authorities and extending the use of personal budgets for service users;
- cutting burdens and regulations on frontline staff, including policing, education and procurement;
- increasing diversity of provision in public services through further use of payment by results, removing barriers to greater independent provision, and supporting communities, citizens and volunteers to play a bigger role in shaping and providing services; and
- improving the transparency, efficiency and accountability of public services.

The Spending Review increases local authorities’ freedom to manage their budgets, but because they will now receive significantly reduced allocations they will be required to make very tough choices on how services are delivered.

As a non-statutory service, parks and green spaces have historically fared badly during difficult economic periods, with budgets disproportionately suffering. Across the last ten years a great deal of research and advocacy work has been undertaken, helping to redefine parks services as community assets that make a significant contribution to social cohesion, the urban environment and climate change, local economies and the health and wellbeing of individuals. In demonstrating that green space services impact across so many agendas the sector has shown that investment in parks and green spaces has the potential to provide significant financial savings, most obviously around areas of health expenditure.

This study, targeted at local authority green space teams, on the brink of agreeing their annual budget for 2011/2012, seeks to examine the following:

- In terms of budgets and service commitment, are green space services being treated equitably?
- Are cuts to green space services likely to inhibit their ability to positively contribute to wider agendas such as health and wellbeing, social cohesion and climate change?
- Is the sectors capacity to remain a vanguard of Big Society being eroded?

This interim report is based on 63 responses. Of these, 11 identified that their budgets were likely to remain unaltered. These 11 respondents were instructed to only complete a limited selection of the questions, the majority of which are aimed at the 52 respondents that are expecting a decrease in budgets.

Q1. What do you expect will happen to your revenue budget for the 2011-2012 financial year?

This question examines whether or not green space teams' budgets are likely to increase, remain the same or decrease in the forthcoming financial year. This is a mandatory question which must be completed by all respondents. Respondents who report that their budgets are set to decrease are asked to complete the remainder of the questionnaire. Respondents reporting that their budgets will stay the same or increase are routed to a specific question asking why their budgets weren't being cut, then on to Q 5 their forecasts for the three financial years following 2011/2012 and on to the end of the questionnaire.

63 responses were received for Q1, of those 52 or 82.5% reported that their budgets would decrease.

11 respondents or 17.5% reported that their budgets would remain the same and no respondents reported that their budgets were set to increase.

It is clear, as expected, that the vast majority of budgets available to green space teams are set to decrease in the forthcoming financial year. For this group of respondents, the follow up questions will examine the percentage decrease and how the decrease compares to their council as a whole.

Those respondents that reported that their budgets would remain the same or increase were then asked to:

Q2. Please explain the reasons why you think your current revenue budget has been retained or increased.

The written responses received were as follows:

| Respondent | Reason for budget remaining unaltered |
|------------|---|
| 1 | As a Parish Council we gain our revenue mainly from precept and we try to leave this the same unless there is a big specific project that we are planning. In these financially challenging times we try to keep the precept unaltered. |
| 2 | Parish council precept has been held at 2010/11 the level. No increase is planned for 2011/12. Standard inflation will be met through planned efficiency savings |
| 3 | No increase has been applied to the parish precept and my council is committed to making maintenance improvements |
| 4 | Green and Open spaces are valued in the borough. Strong leadership within the Council and tight financial controls, have enabled the Council to withstand the current financial pressures well |
| 5 | Amalgamation of West Dorset district and Weymouth & Portland boroughs workforces to create a single entity is expected to attain required saving for both authorities by manager redundancy and natural wastage |
| 6 | Savings have been focussed on easy quick wins for 2011-12, and some inter-Council shared service savings. It is likely that significant reductions in revenue budget will be focussed on 2012-13 and beyond. |
| 7 | Political commitment to the parks remains the same. |

| | |
|----|--|
| 8 | The Parks Section at my council is part of a group covering Streetcare & Waste Management. The savings required for the group have been made by the cancellation of a major project within the Waste section. |
| 9 | Our countryside budget is fairly small & cuts have been focused on other larger depts. The last 2 year's snow has shown the value of having a ranger workforce to assist in severe weather conditions. We have shown prudent management of our budget in the past & have reduced our demand for capital. However I do not expect to avoid cuts in subsequent years |
| 10 | Due to astute budgeting by our finance dept. |
| 11 | Parish Council has set the budget to remain unaltered and it has been agreed and published. |

Four of the 11 respondents who reported that their budgets are remaining unaltered are Parish councils. If these were removed from the analysis the data would show that 88.7% were expecting a budget decrease and 11.3% remaining the same. The responses received suggest that strong leadership and political support have helped some services. For others, the comparatively small size of the service has helped, with the authority able to identify the bottom line savings needed from other much more substantial service areas. One respondent has avoided the cuts because of savings arising from the amalgamation of three local authorities.

Q3. If you answered 'Decrease' in Question 1, please indicate the scale of the cut as a percentage of your current budget

50 respondents that reported that their budgets would decrease went on to answer this question. Of those, the largest group 14 number and 28% reported that their budget would decrease by between 5 and 10%, with a two further significant group 8 number 16% reporting decreases of between 0 and 5% and 10 and 15%.

| Budget reduction | No. Respondents | % Respondents |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 0-5% | 8 | 16.00% |
| 5-10% | 14 | 28.00% |
| 10-15% | 8 | 16.00% |
| 15-20% | 5 | 10.00% |
| 20-25% | 4 | 8.00% |
| 25-30% | 5 | 10.00% |
| 35-40% | 1 | 2.00% |
| 45-50% | 2 | 4.00% |
| 50%+ | 3 | 6.00% |

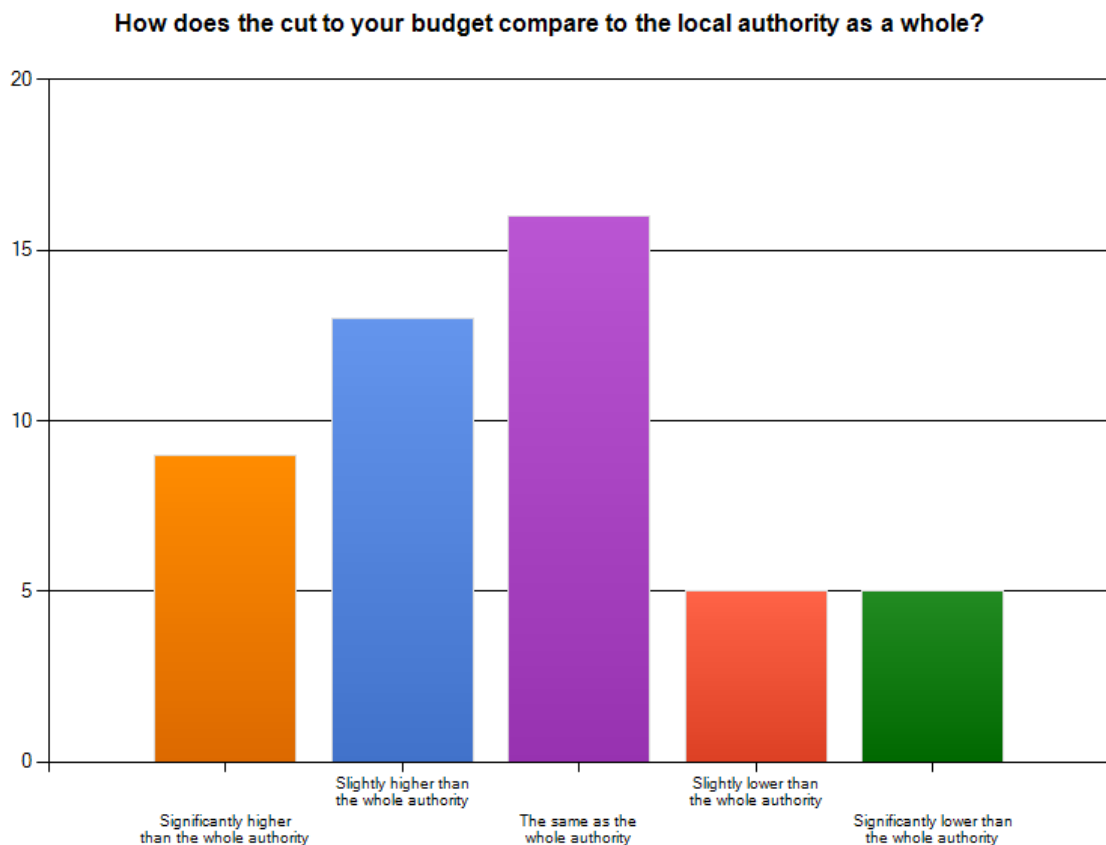
The most alarming finding of this question is the significant number of respondents, 15 number 30% reporting budget cuts in excess of 20%. Within these 5 number and 10% of respondents reported cuts above 40%. If these results are representative of the sector, it is very disturbing that 10% of green space teams are facing 40%+ cuts going in to this first full year of deficit reduction measures. To illustrate what this means, over 33 million people regularly visit green spaces, suggesting that for 3.3 million people, their local green space services are potentially about to be affected to the point

where they can no longer provide the full range of health, social, environmental and local economic benefits; the quality of life of these 3 million people will be severely downgraded.

Q4. How does the cut to your budget compare to the local authority as a whole?

This question seeks to compare cuts to green space budgets with those facing the authority as a whole and it relies on the respondents' view. This question attracted 48 responses.

The largest number of respondents 16 number and 33.3% felt that their decreases were directly comparable with the whole authority. However, almost half of the respondents, 22 number and 46%, stated that their budgets would decrease either slightly or significantly more than the authority as a whole with 13 number and 27% reported a slightly greater decrease and 9 number and 18.8% reported a significantly greater decrease. Three respondents suggested that the decrease in their budgets would be 50% or higher, two reported cuts greater than 40%, one greater than 30% and nine greater than 20%.



The 15 respondents reporting that their budgets were likely to reduce by more than 20% were then examined in relation to Question 11 'We would like to know to what degree you are considering some of the potential alternative mechanisms for delivering green space services in the future'. The responses to Question 11 suggest that many of the organisations facing really significant cuts have not at this late stage settled on a strategy for delivering services in the future:

- Two of the 15 provided no answer at all to this question.
- Two selected four of the options provided but gave no indication of the scale or the likelihood of application of any of the options.
- One selected three of the options provided but gave no indication of the scale or the likelihood of application of any of the options.

- One selected the first four of the options provided indicating that all four were being considered on the basis of applying to the whole service. Three of the options were reported as being likely to happen. One option, 'Outsourcing the management and maintenance functions to an external commercial contractor' was declared by the respondent to be 'highly likely'.

The remaining nine respondents expecting cuts of more than 20% seemed a little more certain of their likely future approach to service delivery:

- Four were able to report that the option of 'Merging with other service areas as part of a broader delivery unit' was highly likely to apply to their entire service area. All four indicated that no other option was being considered in relation to the 'entire service' or 'most of the service'. One other respondent also identified this option as the one they were considering applying to the entire service but suggested that it was likely rather than highly likely to happen.
- One respondent reported that they were looking at two primary approaches with the possibility of 'Being part of a wider leisure or cultural services trust' applicable to much of the service and reported as likely, or 'Merging with other service areas as part of a broader delivery unit', which they reported as being potentially applicable to much of the service and highly likely to happen.
- One respondent reported that they were considering 'Transferring assets to third sector or community based groups' and that this would apply to much of the service and was likely to happen. They also stated that it was likely that a limited element of the service would become 'part of a wider leisure or cultural services trust'.
- One respondent had narrowed down their preferred approach to two of the options, reporting that it was likely that across much of the service they would choose to 'Retain basic current structure but with additional community/volunteering activity' or, highly likely that for the entire service they would choose an alternative 'other' approach to any of the options provided in the questionnaire. The 'other' approach they identified was reported as "Buying in the priority biodiversity services from the Wildlife Trust with the remaining funds from the Biodiversity Partnership".
- The last of these nine respondents reported that most of the options provided were to some limited degree being considered, some were said to be likely to be applied to limited aspects of the service and other unlikely to be applied to limited aspects of the service. In addition to this multifaceted approach to modifying service delivery in the future, this respondent also reported that across the entire service it was likely that they would 'Retain basic current structure with minimum possible changes'. From this slightly unclear response it seems likely that this respondent is going to attempt to continue to deliver most of the existing service within the reduced resource making some of the necessary savings through many different approaches applied to very limited aspects of the service.

For respondents facing really significant budget reductions of over 20%, the most popular potential strategy for future service delivery appears to be merging with other service areas as part of a broader delivery unit with nine of the 15 relevant respondents considering this option to some degree and six of those (40%) feeling that this was likely or highly likely to apply to their entire service or most of their service.

On a more positive note, 10 number and 21% of respondents reported that their budgets would be reduced by slightly or significantly less than the authority as a whole with 5 number and 10.5% reporting a slightly smaller cut and 5 number 10.5% reporting significantly smaller cuts. Unfortunately, in the interest of brevity, the survey did not include a question for these respondents about why they thought their reductions were less than the authority as a whole.

Q5. If at this stage you have been given an indication of the likely change to your revenue budget for the three years that follow 2011-2012 please indicate the likely percentage change in the spaces provided and how this estimate compares to the local authority as a whole

This question was one of the few that required responses from respondents that expected their budgets to remain unaltered as well as those expecting a decrease. There were therefore 63 potential respondents for this question.

Just over half of the respondents 55%, were aware of what was likely to happen to their budgets for the financial year 2012/13. This figure drops to 47% for the financial year 2013/14 and down to 40% for 2014/15. It is perhaps worrying that 45% of those responsible for reshaping services to cope with the budget cuts of 2011/12 have no understanding of their financial operating environment for 2012 onwards. This uncertainty about likely future budgets only serves to make effective strategic planning and restructuring harder. The predominance of working to 12 month financial cycles has often been identified as a strategic issue for local authorities.

For the financial year 2012/13 the majority of the 34 respondents able to answer this question 70% are forecasting cuts of 10% or less and of those exactly half were expecting cuts of 5% or less. For the financial year 2013/14 an even greater percentage of 29 respondents, 83%, were expecting cuts of 10% or less and of those again around half 54% were expecting cuts of 5% or less. For the final financial year 2014/15 again the vast majority of the 25 respondents 82%, are expecting cuts of 10% or less and of those the majority 62% are expecting cuts of 5% or less. Across all of these remaining financial years very few respondents expected their budget reductions to exceed 20%. For 2012/13 just four of the 34 respondents (12%) predicted cuts of more than 20%, for 2013/14 this dropped to just one of the 29 respondents (3.5%) and for 2014/15 from 25 responses again a single respondent (4%) reported cuts exceeding 20%.

Only two respondents (1.6%), of the 62 that were asked to complete this question were able to forecast an increase in their budgets during the period 2012 to 2015. The increases they predict for each of the three financial years are very small at 2% or less.

For each of the financial years respondents were again asked to provide a view as to whether the expected cuts would be higher, lower or similar to the authority as a whole. The second part of this question saw response numbers fall slightly again, suggesting that some do not know what the budget forecasts are for the authority as a whole. The table below shows that for 2012/13 29% are expecting their cuts to be higher than those of the authority as a whole, 38.7% expect them to be similar and 19.4% expect them to be lower. For the financial year 2013/14 29% expect the cuts to be higher than the authority as a whole, 37% expect them to be similar and just under 15% expect them to be lower. For the final year 2014/15, around 22% predict higher cuts, 39% similar cuts and 21% lower cuts.

| | Significantly higher than the whole authority | Slightly higher than the whole authority | The same as the whole authority | Slightly lower than the whole authority | Significantly lower than the whole authority | Don't know | Response Count |
|------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------|---|--|------------|----------------|
| Financial year 2012/13 | 9.7% (3) | 19.4% (6) | 38.7% (12) | 12.9% (4) | 6.5% (2) | 12.9% (4) | 31 |
| Financial year 2013/14 | 7.4% (2) | 22.2% (6) | 37.0% (10) | 14.8% (4) | 0.0% (0) | 18.5% (5) | 27 |
| Financial year 2014/15 | 8.7% (2) | 13.0% (3) | 39.1% (9) | 17.4% (4) | 0.0% (0) | 21.7% (5) | 23 |

Across each of the four years the percentage of respondents reporting cuts that are greater than their authority as a whole reduces from 46% in 2012/13, down to 22% in 2014/15. The percentage of respondents reporting that their budget decrease will be lower than the authority as a whole does not change significantly across the same period. One possible interpretation of this data is that within the local authorities that are forecasting across the next four years, there is a very slight tendency towards 'front loading' budget reductions, taking the worst of the cuts in year one, 2011/12. However, on the whole it appears that green space services are likely to be disproportionately negatively affected by the efforts to reduce the deficit. Most of the respondents that report their budget reductions will be slightly higher than the authority as a whole for 2011/12 make similar predictions for the years that follow. Very few respondents predicting that their cuts will be significantly higher than the authority as a whole were willing to make a forecast about the extent of future cuts. Of the few that did, the vast majority expected future cuts to remain greater than the authority as a whole.

Q6. Where do you plan to find the required 2011-2012 budget savings?

This question examines where respondents plan to find their 2011/12 budget reductions. The options provided examine different elements of delivering the service. Of the 17 options presented to respondents, seven stood out as the most popular areas of consideration with each of these attracting a 'yes' response by at least 50% of respondents.

The most popular option, which was chosen by almost all 98% respondents was, general efficiency savings; this is obviously the starting point for almost everyone. The majority 64% thought that this would yield either significant (23%) or medium (41%) savings with around a third (36%) expecting only minor savings from improved efficiency.

The next most popular option at 82% was increasing income generated by the service. Again, most (69.5%) felt that this area of examination would yield either significant (28%) or medium (42%) savings and less than a third (30.5%) expecting only minor returns.

The third most popular option for creating potential savings is the reduction of staff numbers with 80% of respondents looking to reduce staff numbers. Interestingly although slightly fewer respondents are considering this option compared to improving efficiency of driving up income generation, more felt that this would yield high savings. More than half (51%) thought that this would yield significant savings and a further 40% thought they would see medium savings, only 9% of respondents are expecting just minor savings from reducing staff. Presumably these forecasts for the level of expected saving are directly linked to the scale of expected job losses.

The fourth most popular option chosen by 73% of respondents was reducing development and improvement actions i.e. doing less with the sites to raise their standards and improve them. It is perhaps a measure of the depth of these potential cuts that 31% think this will yield significant savings and 34.5% expect at least medium savings. Just over a third 34.5% are expecting only minor savings from this approach.

The fifth most popular option for creating savings was reduced maintenance operations (litter picking, grass cutting, cleansing) which in most cases are probably contracted out costs. Here, almost 70% of respondents (69%) were looking to make savings. The profile of expected savings is broadly similar to that of reducing development and improvement actions with 25% looking to achieve significant savings, 37.5% looking for medium savings and around a third (35%) expecting only a minor contribution.

Sixth came reduced annual bedding with 64.5% of respondents indicating that this was an area of saving they were considering. Interestingly, very few 4% thought that this would yield significant savings, with the vast majority 62.5% expecting only minor savings to be achieved. Annual bedding displays can have a dramatic impact on the visual appearance of a town or area and can do much to encourage civic pride. They also help to support the retention of a horticultural knowledge base within green space teams. It seems a shame then that such a useful influencing tool should have to be sacrificed for such small savings. It may be that most authorities have already lost most annual bedding and this latest effort to reduce costs represents the final nail in the coffin of what has become a comparatively small area of expenditure.

The seventh option being considered by the majority of respondents is changes to procurement arrangements with 62.5% of respondents reviewing this area as an option for savings. This is of course potentially one of the more attractive methods of creating savings which doesn't automatically mean a reduced service or lower quality service. If savings can be made by for instance joining with other departments to create economies of scale then savings occur without detriment to the service. However changes to procurement arrangements may mean taking lowest cost options for materials and supplies and this could manifest itself in the employment and use of lower quality items. More than half of the respondents 56.5% thought that this would yield either significant (17.5%) or medium 39% savings. Just less than half 43.5% thought that their review of procurement arrangements would yield only minor savings suggesting that many authorities have ensured good practice in this area is already established.

Other areas of interest arising from the data received are as follows:

- 85% of respondents will retain their current commitment to engage with their communities. Of the 15% that are looking at reducing this area of work 42% thought that this would yield medium savings, 42% expected only minor savings and a sixth would achieve something more significant.
- 70% of respondents will retain their current commitment to apprenticeships. Of the 30% that are looking to reduce this area of work only a third expected significant savings and more than half expected the savings to be only minor.
- Almost half of respondents (49%) were looking to cut back on staff training and development despite the fact that during a period of significant change almost three quarters of the authorities cutting in this area (73%) only expected minor savings to be made.
- Less than half (45.5%) of respondents are considering a review of their commissioning arrangements at this stage, even though of those that are reviewing commissioning arrangements 65% expect to find either significant 23.5% or medium 41% savings. It could be that many respondents are at a stage in their existing contract terms where it makes limited sense to change existing arrangements; some may be planning to look at commissioning at a later stage of the next few years.
- Almost half of respondents 47% are considering scaling back their events and activities programme even though less than half of them (42%) think this will bring about anything other than minor savings.
- Just over 20% are considering closing facilities (unspecified). The Public Parks Assessment of 2000/2001 identified three decades of decline with wide spread loss of facilities (toilets, play, cafes, historic features etc.). PPA and subsequent studies established patterns between the loss of facilities, decline in use and fear of crime, the loss of things to see and do has a direct bearing on residents' quality of life and a sites ability to promote healthy lifestyle choices. A third thought this would bring significant savings, a third expected medium savings and a third expected only minor savings from this area of review.

- Around a third of respondents (34%) are considering selling off assets. The majority of these 56% expected to realise only minor savings from this process with the remaining respondents equally split between medium and significant savings.
- Over a third of respondents (37.5%) are considering the transfer of assets to community groups or civil society. Of these the vast majority 75% only expect to achieve minor savings through these transfers.
- Only a small percentage (34%) are reviewing their bureaucracy and red tape and again the vast majority of these 81% expect this to yield only minor savings.
- Around a half 46% of respondents are reviewing their monitoring and evaluation approaches but again the vast majority 70% are only expecting to achieve minor savings.

Q7. How will any planned changes to service delivery affect your ability to deliver against the following management objectives?

This question considers how a respondents planned cost saving changes might impact on their achievement of the 'typical' management objectives which are now well established as desirable across the sector.

The ability to deliver against six of the identified management objectives stand out as being particularly vulnerable as a result of the planned cuts to budgets and the strategies for responding to these cuts. These six objectives, all of which could be considered fundamental to good green space management are:

- **Providing attractive and welcoming sites** –30% of respondents think this will remain unaltered and almost 70% think that their ability to do this will be slightly reduced (43%) or significantly reduced (24.5%).
- **Maintaining high quality standards** – Only around a fifth of respondents (20%) report that their ability to maintain quality standards will be unaffected. A massive 80% of respondents expect their ability to maintain quality standards will slightly reduce (57.5%) or significantly reduce (22%).
- **Responding to wear and tear and vandalism** – this is again an area expected to significantly suffer with only 20% thinking they can maintain current standards and 80% expecting that their ability to respond to this issue will be reduced; 30*% expecting a significant reduction.
- **Keeping sites beautiful and aesthetically appealing** – just over two thirds 67% feel that they will not be able to keep spaces as beautiful and aesthetically appealing as at present with 27% reporting that their ability will significantly reduce.
- **Ensuring safety and security** – Less than half of respondents 47% felt that they would be able to maintain current levels of safety and security with 50% reported that this would reduce either slightly (38%) or significantly (13%) .
- **Meeting the needs of users** – Only around a quarter of respondents 28% stated that they could maintain their current capacity to meet the needs of users, with 68% reporting that this ability would reduce significantly (17%) or slightly (51%).

The inability to effectively respond to these six core areas is associated with a classic cycle of decline whereby public space becomes neglected and starts to be perceived as unsafe. The most vulnerable members of the community (including the young and old) start to disappear from the user base and progressively the site becomes more and more dominated by single user groups until eventually the predominant user becomes male, early 20's, and progressively more and more likely to be involved in anti-social behaviour. The space becomes less of an asset, making people feel good, encouraging social cohesion and inclusion and supporting healthy life styles and instead becomes a liability, increasingly ugly and blighted a magnet for trouble makers and anti-social behaviour; creating expensive social problems rather than solving them.

The next group of seven management objectives prompted between 30% and 40% of respondents to declare that their ability to deliver on them will be reduced:

- **Improve biodiversity** – 34.5% report their ability to deliver improved biodiversity will reduce although 10% suggest that their ability to deliver might improve.
- **Mitigate climate change** – A third 33% report that the capacity to mitigate climate change will reduce.
- **Support healthy lifestyles** – Managers lack optimism about their capacity to deliver this objective with 33% saying that it will reduce, 58% saying it will remain the same and only 10% stating it will improve. The Government's Health White Paper, Healthy Lives, Healthy People, recognises the potential contribution to reducing health inequalities that access to good quality green space can make. In recent years the sector has been working to improve its contribution to health and wellbeing agendas. It appears that the cuts to green space budgets will prevent green space teams from being able to respond adequately to the challenge set out by the Health White Paper and disadvantaged communities will continue to disproportionately suffer from ill health despite the availability of a comparatively low cost intervention which can make a major difference.
- **Tackle barriers to inclusion** – Very few respondents 2% feel that they can improve performance against this objective. The majority 64% report that it will remain the same and 34% report that it will reduce. Green spaces have great capacity to promote social cohesion and tackle social isolation but it takes positive interventions to engage with hard to reach, more vulnerable elements of the community. There are direct links between tackling barriers to inclusion and tackling health inequalities; many of the excluded members of our communities are also socially disadvantaged.
- **Increase use / visitor numbers** – Very few respondents 6% report that they will be able to improve in this area, whilst 30% say that their ability to respond will reduce and 65% that it will remain the same. The sector's ability to positively contribute to issues of health and social cohesion are directly linked to improving access and use levels which are in turn directly linked to site quality, facilities and programmes activities and events.
- **Build and support stronger communities** – The majority of respondents 55% feel that their ability to respond to this challenge will remain the same whilst 29.5% state that it will reduce and a smaller percentage 16% feel that they can improve delivery against this objective. The sector's ability to support stronger communities relies on easy access, regular use and positive beneficial experiences all of which is dependent on maintaining good quality, encouraging use and ensuring that the space remains an asset rather than a liability.
- **Meet the needs of children and young people** – A substantial 44% report that their ability to respond to the needs of children and young people will reduce. Responding to the needs of children is also critically linked to tackling health issues, issues of anti-social behaviour and educational under achievement.
- **Meet the needs of older people** – More than a third 37% report that their ability to meet the needs of older people will reduce. Responding to the needs of older people is also critically linked to tackling health issues and associated issues around loneliness and social exclusion.

Reduced capacity to deliver against these core objectives has significant environmental and social implications. Urban parks and green spaces are vitally important aspects of ecosystem services and can be critical to the viability of rare and vulnerable species. Healthy urban green space also makes a major contribution to ensuring that the worst extremes of climate change are kept within bearable limits. The ability to contribute to the quality of life of older and younger people and to help them make and maintain healthy life style choices has potentially massive implications for local health budgets. Obesity, diabetes, mental wellbeing and independent living, lower disease rates and reduced dependency on medication, are all issues relevant to these two groups and all can be significantly and positively addressed by regular exposure to good quality accessible green spaces. The loss of these two groups of users from the core of green space visitors is also often the start of a broader decline, in many ways a litmus test for the viability and usefulness of urban green space.

There is slightly more optimism that delivery against the management objectives which remain may be less negatively affected by the budget reductions. With each of these objectives at least 70% of respondents reported that their ability to deliver either remained the same or improved:

- **Engage and involve the community** - About the same percentage of respondents report a reduced capacity to respond to this challenge 29% as those who say their ability to deliver will be improved 27%. Almost half of the respondents 44% report that their ability to deliver against this objective will remain the same.
- **Provide volunteering opportunities** – Similar to engaging and involving the community, many managers are clearly prioritising resources towards encouraging and supporting volunteer activities as a strategy for dealing with less resource. Many report that their ability to deliver volunteering opportunities will improve 43%, a further 40% report that it will remain the same, and a relatively small 17% state that it will reduce.

Given that all of these respondents have less resource available to them this result provides an indication that managers are prioritising resources towards this area of work. With less resource available to directly deliver services, managers are clearly aiming to try and take advantage of the Big Society agenda and any momentum that can be created at a national level, to try and increase the level of engagement with their communities and the volunteering opportunities they can offer. The fact that more respondents feel that community engagement and volunteering opportunities will either stay the same or improve than feel it will reduce is slightly at odds with Questions 8 and 10, which examine the types of staff being lost and the likely areas of future skills deficits respectively. Some respondents are reporting that community engagement specialists will be lost and around half of the respondents say that community engagement skills will be in shortage.

Q8 If you indicated that some or all of your savings will be achieved through reduced staff numbers, please indicate where these posts come from within your team

This question examines the number of posts lost as a result of the budget cuts by type of role. Before reviewing the data received, it is worth emphasising that the existing breakdown of staff by type of role is unknown; we do not currently know what percentage of the workforce is made up of ecologists or middle management etc. We therefore do not know whether or not the losses recorded by this question are proportionate to the current workforce profile.

Of the total number of jobs losses identified by respondents, by far the biggest percentage of jobs lost are described as frontline staff at 31%, almost twice as high as any other role. It is likely that the majority of green space staff are employed in frontline maintenance based roles. The loss of frontline staff supports the data received in response to questions 6 and 7. For question 6, respondents reported that they would be doing less improvement works, reducing maintenance operations and getting rid of bedding areas. For question 7 they reported that site quality would reduce, sites would be less attractive and welcoming, and their ability to respond to wear and tear and vandalism (responsive maintenance and repair) would be reduced. The Coalition's stated aim that frontline services should not be affected by budget cuts doesn't appear to be happening in relation to parks and green spaces.

Worryingly, the next biggest group of workers to be affected are the horticulturalists representing 17% of the job losses. The loss of horticultural skills across the sector has for several years now been identified as a quality delivery problem and this latest round of job cuts is only going to serve to compound an existing problem. Maintaining healthy and attractive parks and green spaces relies on the work of an adequate pool of skilled horticulturalists; their work also makes a significant contribution to biodiversity, ecosystem

services and the ability of green spaces to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Administrative staff are next worst affected representing 10% of job losses. Because of the necessity to keep this survey brief in order to solicit adequate numbers of responses, it has not been possible to find out whether the loss of administrative staff can be absorbed through improved administrative efficiency or whether other non-administrative remaining staff will be diverted from their core duties by taking on administrative roles.

Junior managers represent 6% of the identified job losses, again compounding an existing known problem within the sector. The sector has an ageing workforce with much of the required skills and knowledge base held by older members of the workforce nearing retirement age. The need to attract and retain new, young entrants to green space management was identified several years ago as a priority for the sector; it now appears that many of these new entrants will not survive the 12 months ahead. Middle and senior managers are also badly affected with each representing 5.5% of job losses. Assuming middle managers are more likely to be younger than senior managers and have had a shorter career to date; their loss may also compound the ageing workforce issue.

The final remaining type of job role to be most significantly affected is the security and policing of green spaces representing 4.7% of all losses. This supports data from question 7 where a high percentage of respondents reported that delivery against safety and security objectives would reduce.

The table below provides a breakdown of the number of posts lost by type also expressed as a percentage of all lost posts. In response to Question 6, 40 respondents reported that they would reduce staff numbers in response to budget cuts. 38 of these respondents went on to answer Question 8 identifying between them an expected loss of 405 posts, representing an average loss of 10.65 posts each. If these respondents are typical of all local authorities then it is possible to use this average job loss figure to extrapolate the total job losses across the local authority green space sector. There are 354 local authorities in England (counting the GLA) and if each of these is losing an average of 10.65 posts each the total jobs lost is in the region of 3,770 jobs with almost 1,168 of these being frontline staff.

| Role | No. Posts | % Lost Posts |
|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Frontline general operatives | 127 | 31.36% |
| Horticulture | 70 | 17.28% |
| Arboricultural | 7 | 1.73% |
| Ecology | 7 | 1.73% |
| Landscape design | 8 | 1.98% |
| Other specialist | 14 | 3.46% |
| Security / policing | 19 | 4.69% |
| Apprentices | 9 | 2.22% |
| Administrative | 40 | 9.88% |
| Community engagement/development | 17 | 4.20% |
| Other developmental roles | 11 | 2.72% |
| Junior management | 24 | 5.93% |
| Middle management | 22 | 5.43% |
| Senior management | 8 | 1.98% |
| Other (please describe below) | 22 | 5.43% |
| Total | 405 | |

Question 8 also allows analysis of the percentage of teams that are losing jobs of certain types. The table below shows the breakdown of this data. It shows that almost 60% of green space teams are losing frontline staff, more than a third (34%) are losing middle managers, almost a third (31%) are losing horticulturalists and 29% are losing junior managers and administrative staff. The fact that 80% of authorities are not apparently able to identify surplus administrative staff again suggests that in the green space sector at least the notion that budget cuts do not affect frontline services is something of a myth.

For any green space advocate the list is deeply concerning; more than a quarter of teams are losing landscape design specialists, an area of specialism that has already been far too deeply eroded across the last three decades, our most knowledgeable senior staff are being lost in over 20% of authorities.

Given the current political priorities and the Big Society and localism agendas it is perhaps surprising to see such a high percentage of teams that are cutting back on community engagement specialists (18%). It is perhaps also surprising to see so many teams cut back on their apprenticeship programmes (18%) which perhaps represent a cost effective way of bridging the gap left by the loss of horticulturalists especially given Governments public commitment to boost support for apprenticeship in the near future. The analysis of the data, submitted by 38 respondents is provided in the chart below:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------|
| Frontline general operatives | 57.89% |
| Horticulture | 31.58% |
| Arboricultural | 21.05% |
| Ecology | 15.79% |
| Landscape design | 26.32% |
| Other specialist | 15.79% |
| Security / policing | 15.79% |
| Apprentices | 18.42% |
| Administrative | 28.95% |

| | |
|---|--------|
| Community engagement/development | 18.42% |
| Other developmental roles | 13.16% |
| Junior management | 28.95% |
| Middle management | 34.21% |
| Senior management | 21.05% |
| Other (please describe below) | 7.89% |

This question also examines job losses by type as a percentage of all job losses from the respondents' teams. Most commonly (19% of cases), a lost post represents between 1% and 5% of the green space team. Most worryingly are the incidents where the loss of a post represents a really significant depletion of a team. For instance, in 31% of cases a single post lost represents 25% or more of the entire team, in 23% of cases it represents at least 46% of the team. Clearly small teams comprising of just a few members of staff are still having to resort to job losses in order to make their budgets balance. In 7% of cases the loss of a post represents the complete loss of green space specialism within the authority. In these cases it must be presumed that the parks and green space service will be subsumed within a bigger service area and future green space management will be undertaken within a broader and more generic management structure. The breakdown of this data is provided below:

| | |
|---|--------|
| Job losses that represent between 0 and 5% of the green space team | 19.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 5 and 10% of the green space team | 15.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 10 and 15% of the green space team | 12.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 15 and 20% of the green space team | 13.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 20 and 25% of the green space team | 10.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 26 and 30% of the green space team | 1.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 31 and 35% of the green space team | 4.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 36 and 40% of the green space team | 2.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 41 and 45% of the green space team | 1.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 46 and 50% of the green space team | 14.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 51 and 60% of the green space team | 0.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 61 and 70% of the green space team | 1.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 71 and 80% of the green space team | 1.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 81 and 90% of the green space team | 0.00% |
| Job losses that represent between 91 and 100% of the green space team | 7.00% |

Q9. How many staff in total are you losing / have you lost as a result of budget cuts for the financial year 2011/2012?

Whilst around two thirds of green space teams 63% are losing five posts or less, it has to be remembered that many parks and green space teams are very small. A further 14% are losing between 6 and 19 posts and almost a quarter 23% are losing between 20 and 40 posts. The data provided by 35 respondents is shown below:

| Number of posts lost | Number of respondents | Percentage of respondents |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | 7.00 | 20.00% |
| 2 | 6.00 | 17.14% |
| 3 | 5.00 | 14.29% |
| 4 | 2.00 | 5.71% |
| 5 | 2.00 | 5.71% |
| 6 | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| 7 | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| 8 | 1.00 | 2.86% |
| 9 | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| 10 | 1.00 | 2.86% |
| 11 | 2.00 | 5.71% |
| 12 | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| 13 | 1.00 | 2.86% |
| 14 | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| 15 | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| 16 | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| 17 | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| 18 | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| 19 | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| 20 | 2.00 | 5.71% |
| 21-25 | 1.00 | 2.86% |
| 26-30 | 2.00 | 5.71% |
| 31-40 | 3.00 | 8.57% |

The question goes on to explore what percentage of the entire team is being lost through the deletion or loss of these posts. Around two fifths of respondents (43%) report that the expected job losses represent no more than 10% of the whole green space team. This is to some degree reassuring. For a further 26% the job losses equate to between 11 and 20% of the team and for a further 9% they represent 21-30% of the team. Worryingly for around a quarter of parks and green space teams (23%), the jobs lost in response to the budget cuts for the financial year 2011/12 represent at least a third of the entire team. For more than one in ten parks and green space teams (11%), the proposed job losses have reduced their staffing capacity by more than 70%, presumably

leaving the team in an unviable state with some sort of proposal to incorporate their functions within a different service area.

| Percentage of team | Number of respondents | Percentage of respondents |
|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 0.1-10% | 15 | 42.86% |
| 10.1-20% | 9 | 25.71% |
| 20.1-30% | 3 | 8.57% |
| 30.1-70% | 4 | 11.43% |
| 70.1-100% | 4 | 11.43% |

Q10. 10. Looking ahead, in which of the following skills areas do you think you have / will have a significant skills shortage?

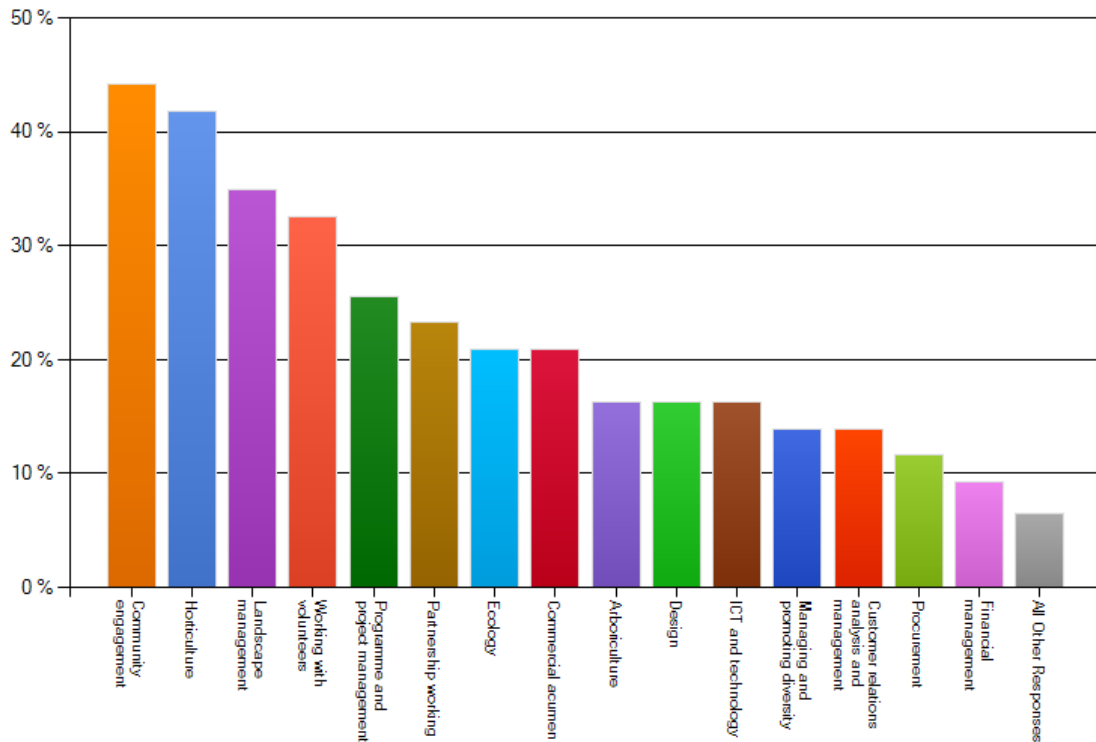
This question examines skills areas which will affect service delivery from this point forward. Of greatest concern with 44% of respondents stating that this will be an area of significant skills shortage, is community engagement. The following question 11 examines strategies for service delivery in the future and reveals that around two thirds of respondents are planning for an increased delivery role for communities and increased opportunities for volunteering. Clearly to achieve this teams will need staff with the right engagement skills to enthuse their communities and solicit additional support and commitment. The data derived from question 8 suggests that 18% of teams are shedding community engagement specialists which suggests that the sector is split in terms of strategies for future delivery.

Horticulture comes closely behind community engagement, with 42% of respondents identifying it as a significant area of concern. Horticultural skills shortages are not new, for several years now the sector has identified this gap as a key issue. A contradiction again occurs when this data is compared to the responses to question 8 which revealed that 32% of organisations were shedding horticultural posts. It seems difficult to comprehend how a sector that recognises it has a shortage of a key specialism can then compound the issue through quite widespread loss of those specialist posts. One possible explanation may be that future strategies for delivering green space services are being decided by non-green space managers, dumbing down the service and failing to recognise that it is a service that depends on specialist staff to ensure that it delivers the full range of possible social, environmental and economic benefits.

Other major areas of concern, where significant skills gaps will occur are:

- Working with volunteers – 33% of respondents
- Landscape management – 35% respondents
- Programme and project management – 26% respondents
- Ecology – 21% of respondents
- Partnership working – 23% respondents; and,
- Commercial acumen – 21% of respondents.

Looking ahead, in which of the following skills areas do you think you have / will have a significant skills shortage?



Q11. We would like to know to what degree you are considering some of the potential alternative mechanisms for delivering green space services in the future

The Coalition’s Big Society and Localism agendas call for innovative approaches to future service delivery. This question sets out to test the sector’s current strategic preferences including whether some of the innovation currently being promoted is likely to play a major part in the future delivery of green space services.

The question design acknowledges that at this stage teams may be considering a number of different options, applying different approaches to different aspects of the service. It also acknowledges that some of the approaches under consideration may be more likely to be implemented than others.

Initially the data would seem to suggest that the most popular strategic approach to delivering services within reduced budgets and the new political agendas is to retain the basic current structure but with additional community/volunteering activity, with 70.5% of respondents stating that this option is under consideration. However, whilst the majority of respondents considering this option say that it is likely to happen (74%), or highly likely to happen (17%), most (65%) also state that the approach will have only limited application, or only be applied to specialist areas of the service (11.5%).

Of the 31 respondents reporting that this option is under consideration it is perhaps worth noting that nine (29%) state that they have skills shortages in the role of community engagement, six (19%) have skills shortages in working with volunteers and in partnership working. It is also worth noting that six of these respondents (19%) state that due to the budget cuts their capacity to delivery on community engagement has been either slightly or significantly reduced and four of these respondents (13%) have lost community engagement staff.

Of greater potential significance is the option of merging with other service areas as part of a broader delivery unit. Whilst a smaller percentage of respondents are considering this option (54%), those who are state that it will be applied to the entire service (50%), or much of the service (25%). A substantial 45% report that it is highly likely to happen with a further 30% stating it is likely to happen. The data relating to the scale of application of this option and the likelihood of it being adopted suggest that it is this approach that will have the most profound impact on the sector. The merging of green space services with other service areas to create a broader delivery unit has been something of an emerging trend in recent years. Green space services have been incorporated within 'street scene' teams and within neighbourhood based operations. Often they are amongst the smaller and politically less significant of the service areas to be merged and the specialist knowledge needed to get the full social, economic and environmental benefits from the service can end up being undervalued and disregarded. Dedicated green space staff with specialist knowledge in areas such as horticulture, ecology, or landscape design and management, may end up discarded in favour of generic managers from bigger and seemingly 'more important' service areas such as cleansing and highways maintenance. It has been reported that very few managers from green space teams go on to reach Director level and as a consequence green space services are often very poorly represented at the strategic level in the establishment and operation of these larger and broader delivery units.

Around half of the respondents (52%) are actively considering the transfer of assets to third sector or community based groups. However most of these (56.5%, are only considering a limited application of this approach whilst a further 35%, are considering it for specialist areas of the service only. There is a high degree of confidence that this limited use of this approach will happen with 64% of respondents suggesting it is 'likely' and a further 18% describing it as 'highly likely'.

Many respondents (44%) reported that they are considering retaining the basic current structure of the service with the minimum possible change. These respondents are looking to apply this approach to either the entire service (42%) or much of the service (58%). Most of these respondents reported that they were either highly likely (45.5%) or likely (45.5%) to implement this approach.

The strategy most likely to be employed by the 15 teams facing really significant cuts (greater than 20%) is 'merging with other service areas as part of a broader delivery unit' where 9 out of the 15 stated that this was under consideration and at least six out of the nine went on to state that the approach would be applied to either the entire service or much of the service and was either likely or highly likely to happen. (See above Question 4 for more detail).

Across all responses 12 respondents (28%), reported that they were considering 'outsourcing the management and maintenance functions to an external commercial contractor'. Six of these (50%) went on to state that this approach could be applied to the entire service or much of the service and all six stated that this was likely or highly likely to happen.

Of the 17 respondents (44%) looking to 'Retain basic current structure with minimum possible changes', ten (59%) reported that this approach would be applied to the entire service or much of the service and eight of those ten declared that this was likely or highly likely to happen. Around half of these 17 respondents report that they will lose staff but for most the staff losses represent less than 10% of their team. The budget cuts facing most of these 17 respondents were mostly reported as comparable to their whole authority and generally (but not always) kept well under 10%. These respondents plan to find the savings needed through staff reductions (47%), general efficiency savings (100%), increased income (100%), changes to procurement (65%), reduced maintenance operations (65%), reduced annual bedding (65%) and reduced improvement and development (65%). In many ways these respondents are falling back into a strategy of 'managing decline', retaining the service but unable to positively develop it or deliver on desired objectives. Most of

these respondents are also likely to face further budget cuts in the three financial years that follow and will need to develop more pro-active responses and strategies.