



London Tree Officers Association

How are Tree Services being delivered in London Boroughs?

Provision in a time of change

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Barnet / Regional Enterprise (Re)

London Tree Officers Association working party



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- Between 2010-11 and 2015-16 funding to London Boroughs fell by 43.2%
- Local authorities responded to reduced levels of funding in a number of ways depending on local priorities
- LTOA survey to assess extent of impact and gain a picture of what was happening to tree services across London in 2016



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Investigating local authority tree services responses to funding reductions:

- the situation in 2016
- changes
 - in the preceding 5 years
 - anticipated
 - impacts / outcomes
- facing the challenge
- case studies

Next steps



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2016 LTOA survey looking at the changing face of tree management in response to central government austerity

LTOA Working party:

- Becky Porter – LTOA Executive Officer
- Ann Currell - Principal Planner – Trees and Environment, London Borough of Barnet / Regional Enterprise (Re)
- Julian Fowgies – Arboricultural Manager, London Borough of Bromley
- Richard Fletcher – Arboricultural Officer, Planning & Tree Preservation Orders, London Borough of Wandsworth / Enable Culture & Leisure
- Al Smith – Arboricultural Manager, London Borough of Camden



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2016 questionnaire

- Principal Tree Officers in the 33 London boroughs
 - 19 responses (just over 58%):
1. Where are you now?
 2. What has happened in the last 5 years?
 3. What do you anticipate will happen in the future?
 4. Overall impact of future changes you anticipate
 5. How do you think Local Authority tree services should adapt in response to financial changes?



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Situation in 2016

Where are you now?

Describe how your Borough's tree services are structured and function, across which departments. Please include:

How many officers in each department?

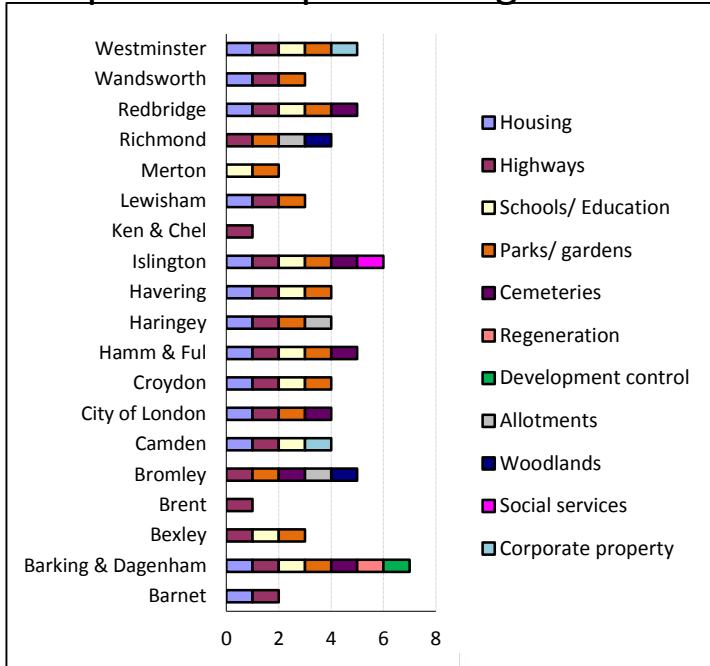
How many admin staff?

Client departments like housing, highways, schools;

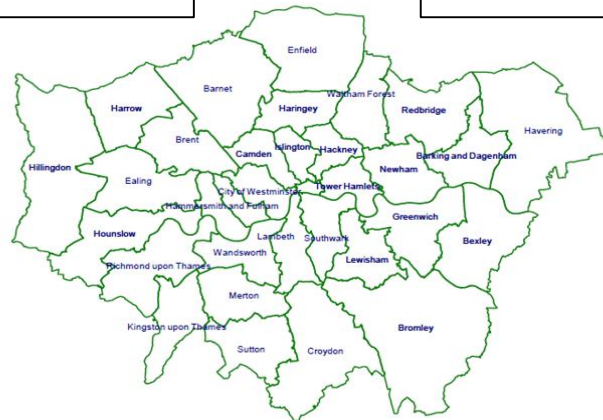
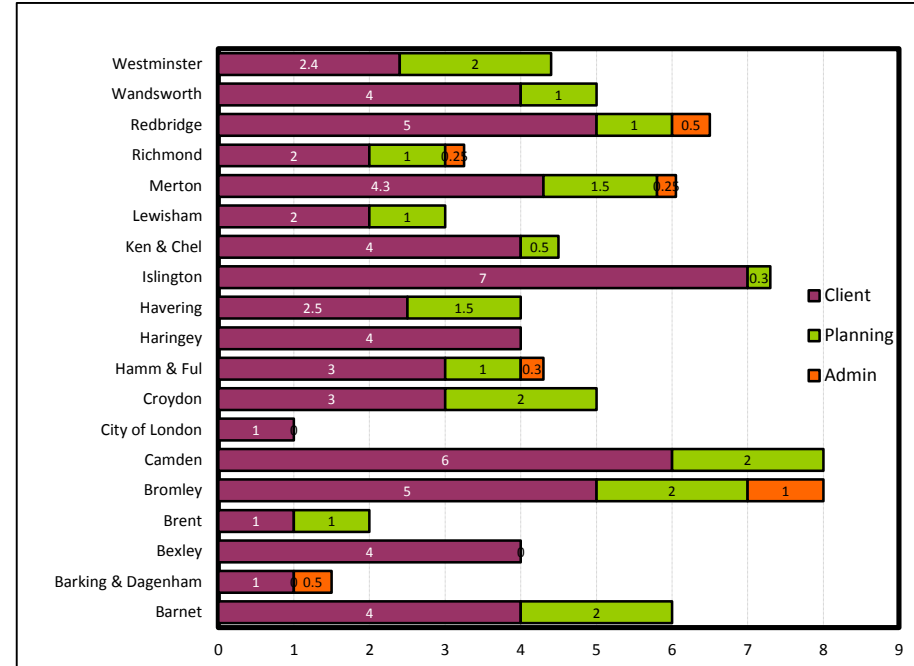
Which functions are managed in house or have been outsourced or other variations?

Is the tree manager the budget holder?

Departments per Borough



Officers per Borough





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Changes



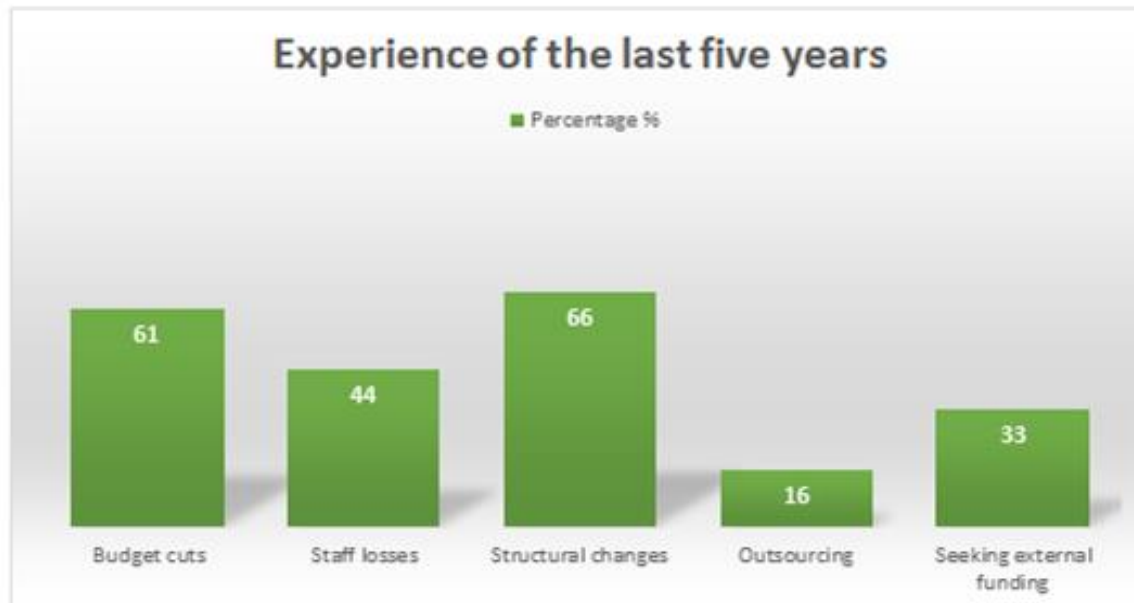
Photo: Richard Fletcher



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What has happened in the last five years?

Briefly identify cuts in budgets, cuts in staff, major changes in structure etc.





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Experience of five years preceding 2016:

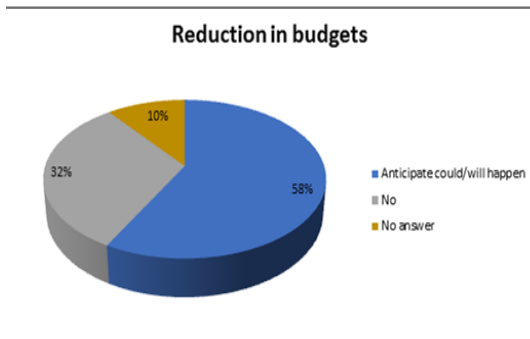
- budget cuts between 5 – 50% (61%)
- staff losses most commonly 1FTE (44%)
- structural changes (66%)
 - including
 - internal / departmental restructures
 - transfer of service(s) to private sector
 - transfer of service(s) to trust organisation
- outsourcing (16% *Some authorities known to have outsourced did not respond*)
- seeking external funding (33%)
 - including
 - internal consultancy services within organisation
 - selling services to external customers



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What do you anticipate will happen in the future?:

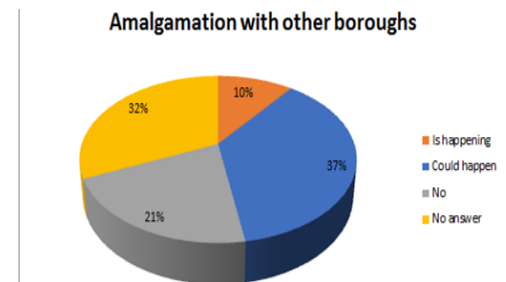
- reductions in budgets (58%)



Concerns about impacts highlighted specifically:

- decline in highways street scene
 - loss of tree planting budget
- monitoring of emerging pests and pathogens
- visual tree presence
 - replacement planting
 - stump grinding
 - maintenance pruning

- amalgamation with other boroughs (37% + 10% already)



- potential reductions in staff (33%)

- some form of outsourcing (26%)

- bringing tree services back in house (generally unlikely)



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What do you anticipate will be the overall outcome of future changes?

- Changes in quality of tree care
- Impact on customer service
- Engagement with communities
- Tree population numbers and natural environment
- Effects on policy and decision making
- Changes in funding



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Positive:

- “Street tree numbers are slowly climbing by 1% per annum.”
- “Improved delivery of service through more robust policy and strategy.”
- “Increased tree numbers through planting, more strategic approach to involve the community, citizen science etc. Seeking out capital and grant funding for planting.”
- “Will ensure quality does not suffer, we are achieving good quality on a contract which is 70% price 30% quality so cannot foresee much change unless budget is squeezed.”
- “Improved ways of working with the tree contractor, to make the operational side more efficient and effective.”

Neutral:

- “Continuing to focus on protecting front line services, including tree care, to an acceptable standard.”
- “Do not envisage significant changes in this area.”



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Negative:

- “Wholly dependent on adequacy of resource.”
- “Reduction in pruning cycles explored and implemented where possible.”
- “The lack of staff means reduced time to intervene, be involved in and contribute to wider matters in which trees are affected.”
- “Almost certain drop in quality of tree care.”
- “It will be increasingly difficult to maintain technical standards, drive for lower costs will increasingly turn public sector tree maintenance into factory, one size fits all, pruning.”
- “Monitoring quality will be severely reduced leading to poor outcomes.”
- “Tree population will most likely decrease even with inroads made by utilising S106 budgets.”
- “Parks don’t have sufficient budget to allow for new tree planting or to maintain current tree stock in a proactive manner.”
- “Over the last five years all of the above have slowly declined along with morale and I fear it will continue.”

Other issues:

- more inventive ways for funding tree planting and care are required
- staff morale and stress levels as tree officers take on more work
- “trees are perceived as throw away street furniture



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Facing the challenges

How do you think Local Authority tree services should adapt in response to financial changes?

- There do not appear to be any 'universal themes'
- May reflect in part the diversity of ways in which tree services are structured and managed
- Several ideas adaptable whichever service delivery mechanism used
 - Review current model
 - Bolster budgets
 - Promote importance of trees



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Review current model – focus

- Have a vision for the future of the service and make the case for improvements
- Review efficiency of current model and make changes prior to outsourcing processes. Prepare and plan for the worst
- Look at the challenge as an opportunity to shake everything up, change is not necessarily a bad thing
- Identify which elements can be outsourced without affecting the core tree management
- Focus on making circumstances work – identify potential savings and benefits and develop strategic improvements
- Make the case for writing a tree strategy prior to any negotiations relating to outsourcing
- Recognise trends and decide what can/cannot be sensibly adopted



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Review current model – roles

- Be clear about the roles tree officers need to undertake and, importantly, those tree officers do not
- Understand that the private sector will inevitably be offering to take over elements of the service and the need to specialise in areas that the private sector could not compete financially or provide the necessary expertise (for example in the creation of policy and strategy)
- We need to be clear about the roles we need to undertake and, just as important, those we don't need to. I think we have to concentrate on the bigger issues where tree officer's input is cost effective and devolve much of the day to day delivery to the private sector
- Demonstrate resilience to senior staff to help further raise profile
- Local Authorities join together to provide a more dynamic workforce whilst retaining specialism and local knowledge



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Bolster budgets – context

- Base discussions about budgets on risk
- Highlight that the tree budget is only a tiny proportion of an overall council budget
- Strive to maintain present budgets, ring fence future funding streams
- Look at the removal of long term contracts in favour of framework agreements to give flexibility - grouping and separating work, having diverse contractors from one-man band to middle size
- Ensure all budget holders aware of their responsibilities and defend/pressure wisely
- Promote common sense in spending



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Bolster budgets – funding sources

- Be inventive in how budgets are formed through alternative means other than revenue
- Need to cover maintenance through CIL if possible
- Use CAVAT (Capital Asset Valuation of Amenity Trees) valuation of trees lost for development to fund public planting
- Seek grants to support ailing funds
- Explore selling services
- Obtain more work to replace that which is lost
- Ensure clients are happy and work closely with them to see if tree input can be expanded into something unrelated e.g. Highway repair contractor using for other civil engineering projects
- When reviewing service level agreements (SLAs), seek opportunities to charge for arboricultural reports e.g. method statements for school extensions
- Offer investigations such as PICUS as a separate service and income stream
- Work with legal and insurance to be a broker for resident tree work, taking a fee
- Offer NHS hospitals competitive tree inspection and maintenance service



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Promote importance of trees

- Emphasise the importance of trees and tree officers to residents and Members
- Highlight to senior staff that some aspects of tree management are statutory duties
- Keep a good profile with internal peers and support them
- Build relationships outside of the service area; avoid a silo or siege mentality
- Continue to share knowledge and experiences of changes being made in other Boroughs
- Develop relationships with senior staff, Councillors/Members, other sections of the authority and community groups and societies and in turn create a positive reputation. There are plenty of ways to embed trees into the various political and social priorities; it's simply a matter of finding out what these priorities are in the first place and jumping on the bandwagon
- Educate as to the national importance of the urban forest and the need to manage and enhance it for the public good



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Case Study A 'Traditional' in-house tree service

- Compiled from the experiences of two London borough tree sections and has been in operation across London for decades
- Essentially consists of an in-house client function with an outsourced tree planting and maintenance function



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Case Study B Commissioning

- As a result of various council wide changes over the last few years, this local authority now operates a range of mechanisms to provide council services
- Allows the council to take a flexible approach to shaping the future of the organisation
- Moving away from the traditional model of providing services in-house to a mixed economy provided via internal and external delivery units
- Delivery unit may be in-house, i.e. provided by the council, or may be provided by an external or third-party provider



Case Study C Outsourced Staff Mutual

- The tree services team is outsourced from the council (2015), along with the wider parks department, sports and leisure and bereavement services
- Involved the setting up of a new body that employs staff directly and offers tree services to the council
- The aim is for this new body to provide cost savings by becoming more efficient whilst providing the same services to the council
- These services include the management of all council trees on highways, in parks, housing sites, cemeteries and schools
- It also includes receiving and processing all TPO and Conservation Area tree works applications, and providing consultations to the planning department for development sites
- The understanding is that this body will have to compete on the open market to provide these services in due course, once it has come to an end of an agreed period to establish itself



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Case Study D

Fully-managed outsourced service

- This outsourcing model has been in operation servicing a London borough since 2011 following the award of a contract for the provision of arboricultural works and arboricultural services to a large specialist arboricultural contracting company (the Company)
- As well as carrying out all aspects of practical tree work the Company also provides full client function with the provision of four FTEs: two tree officers, one surveyor and one administration officer (TUPE'd from the Local Authority)



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Key findings

- no uniformity

- variations between the number of tree officers; their ranges of responsibilities; type and extent of outsourcing; budget holding

- recent changes

- substantial budget reductions; staff losses; structural changes; significant trend towards seeking of external funding

- anticipated changes

- budget reductions; amalgamation with other boroughs; outsourcing; staff reductions

- implications / outcomes of changes

- positive / neutral / negative
- engagement of communities; negative impact on services; improving ways of working; inadequacy of resources; maintaining quality of tree care; more inventive ways for funding; staff morale and stress levels

- how should tree services adapt

- no universal themes but a number of ideas
- reviewing current provision; bolstering budgets; promoting importance of trees



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Next steps

- Everyone does it differently
 - but some ideas can easily be transferred between local authorities
- Single snapshot in a time of ongoing changes
 - use this data to form baseline for further surveys and analysis into the future
- Useful to expand the survey to a wider geographical area
 - adapt the questionnaire for more widespread surveying using the national Tree Officer Groups network
- To be of maximum benefit, data needs to be kept under review and impacts monitored in the longer term
 - undertake future repeat surveys to chart changes / trends
 - review and monitor to identify any apparent advantages / disadvantages of the various service delivery models through time
- Work with other organisations to increase understanding of the changing face of delivering tree services



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Report available on LTOA website:
www.ltoa.org.uk

Thank you