

GOOD GROWTH BY DESIGN

2024 PLACESHAPING CAPACITY SURVEY

Results Report

Published June 2025

MAYOR OF LONDON

About the survey

To deliver Good Growth, local authorities need capacity to manage, create and plan built development in London. Capacity is also needed to shape and plan good growth in local areas and communities.

Since 2014, the Mayor of London has surveyed London boroughs every two years, to see what placeshaping capacity they have. The results have helped us to develop new programmes to support boroughs and programmes, such as Public Practice.

The survey goes beyond asking about capacity and asks about design review. This reflects the fact that design review is a key part of the National Planning Framework, as well as the London Plan and aims to ensure the quality of built schemes.

Since the publication of the 2020 survey results (which were used to support the Greater London Authority's (GLA) response to the government's planning white paper), the team has been in discussion with Public Practice, Homes England and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities who are devising their own surveys looking at similar placeshaping needs in local authorities.

The 2024 survey included some minor changes from the 2022 version to reflect current issues and requirements. The design review questions were refined to focus on key metrics like application numbers, adherence to the London Design Review Charter, and panel representation. The survey was also made in alignment with current and upcoming challenges. Additionally, there was a reduction in duplication with the research being conducted by Public Practice and UDL on recruitment and design review data. These updates were intended to ensure the 2024 survey captured the most relevant and up-to-date information to support the ongoing assessment of placeshaping capacity across London's boroughs.

The response rate is good with all boroughs responding (35/35 planning authorities and development corporations in London).

The survey has been devised with input from colleagues across Planning and Regeneration, Housing and Land, Public Practice and Urban Design London.

What we mean by ‘Placeshaping Team’

What is placeshaping?

Placeshaping is about designing the conditions for ‘good growth’. It is the inconspicuous but indispensable background work of coordinating investment, shaping development, galvanising communities, and strengthening the character of a place.

Placeshaping and proactive planning enables good growth, allows better engagement and public support, provides greater certainty and a more efficient process for developers, allowing for coordination of investment. Together, these benefits are likely to result in a more productive use of limited resources.

For the purposes of this questionnaire ‘placeshaping’ teams are those that design policies, programmes and projects and does not include duties such as maintenance and permitting.

For the purposes of this survey placeshaping includes roles in:

- **Regeneration / economic development / high streets & town centres**
- **Development economics & viability**
- **Capital delivery, including procurement & management of council home building programmes**
- **Strategic property portfolio management staff**
- **Urban design / architecture / masterplanning**
- **Public realm expertise / street design**
- **Parks & open spaces / landscape architecture / green infrastructure**
- **Environmental sustainability/ zero carbon strategy & delivery skills**
- **Conservation / historic environment expertise**
- **Planning policy**
- **Planning development management**
- **Building control**
- **Transport / highways designer**
- **Infrastructure planning & delivery management**
- **Place focused digital and data**
- **Community engagement**
- **Inclusive design / accessible environment**

Key Insights Summary

1. Declining placeshaping capacity within borough teams

There is a consistent decrease in the average team size over time, from 88 down to 67 FTE roles. This suggests that boroughs are facing challenges in maintaining and growing their placeshaping capabilities, which could impact their ability to effectively plan and shape the built environment.

2. Shift towards a more diverse set of placeshaping capabilities

There has been a more significant increase in roles focused on regeneration, economic development, capital delivery, and property management. This shift may indicate a recognition of the need for a more diverse set of skills and expertise to address the complex challenges of placeshaping, beyond just the regulatory aspects. Additionally, the slight increase in smaller, specialised teams covering areas like parks, open spaces and urban design suggests boroughs are working to develop a more diverse set of capabilities to tackle the complex challenges of placeshaping.

3. Significant need for specialised sustainability-focused skills

Local authorities are currently lacking expertise in areas like digital planning, biodiversity, waste management, inclusive design, and energy efficiency, which are in high demand. This highlights the growing importance of sustainability and the need for boroughs to build their capacity in these critical areas.

4. Funding and resourcing constraints as primary barriers

The top-ranked barriers are all directly related to funding, including lack of available funding, uncertainty over future funding levels, and difficulty in setting appropriate pay scales. These financial constraints are limiting the local authorities' capacity to staff up and develop the expertise required for effective placeshaping.

5. Strategies to address capacity needs

Boroughs are prioritising retaining and upskilling existing staff, relying on temporary and contract-based workers and seeking specialised support from the GLA and cross-borough collaboration. These approaches suggest a recognition of the need to be creative and flexible in addressing their capacity challenges.

6. Boroughs' preparedness and confidence

Boroughs feel better established in design-focused disciplines but less so for broader challenges. The data indicates that boroughs feel most prepared in their ability to deliver high-quality design, understand and deliver new housing typologies and apply strategic urban design/spatial planning approaches. However, they feel less prepared to address the broader economic challenges, such as the cost-of-living crisis and expected economic downturn, as well as sustainability-related issues facing their communities.

7. Boroughs value GLA resources for placeshaping

The top useful resources for boroughs are the GLA's Good Growth by Design publications/programme, TfL Guidance Documents, London Plan Guidance resources and the Public Practice placement program. This suggests that the GLA is playing an important role in supporting boroughs' placeshaping efforts by providing valuable guidance, publications and access to specialised expertise.

8. Widespread adoption of design review panels, a positive step forward

The data shows a significant achievement, with all but one borough now having an established design review panel in place. This widespread adoption of design review mechanisms represents an important step forward in ensuring design quality and scrutiny across London's built environment.

9. Diverse Functions Tailored to Local Needs

Boroughs have specialised teams dedicated to functions like regeneration, economic development, high street management, and strategic property oversight. This diversity highlights how councils take a tailored approach to serve their communities, going beyond basic statutory duties.

10. Uneven Capacity Across London

Capacity is not evenly distributed, with outer boroughs having less diverse non-statutory roles to reflect their priorities compared to inner boroughs. Capacity does not necessarily align with development pressure, leaving some authorities comparatively under-resourced.

Response from Authorities

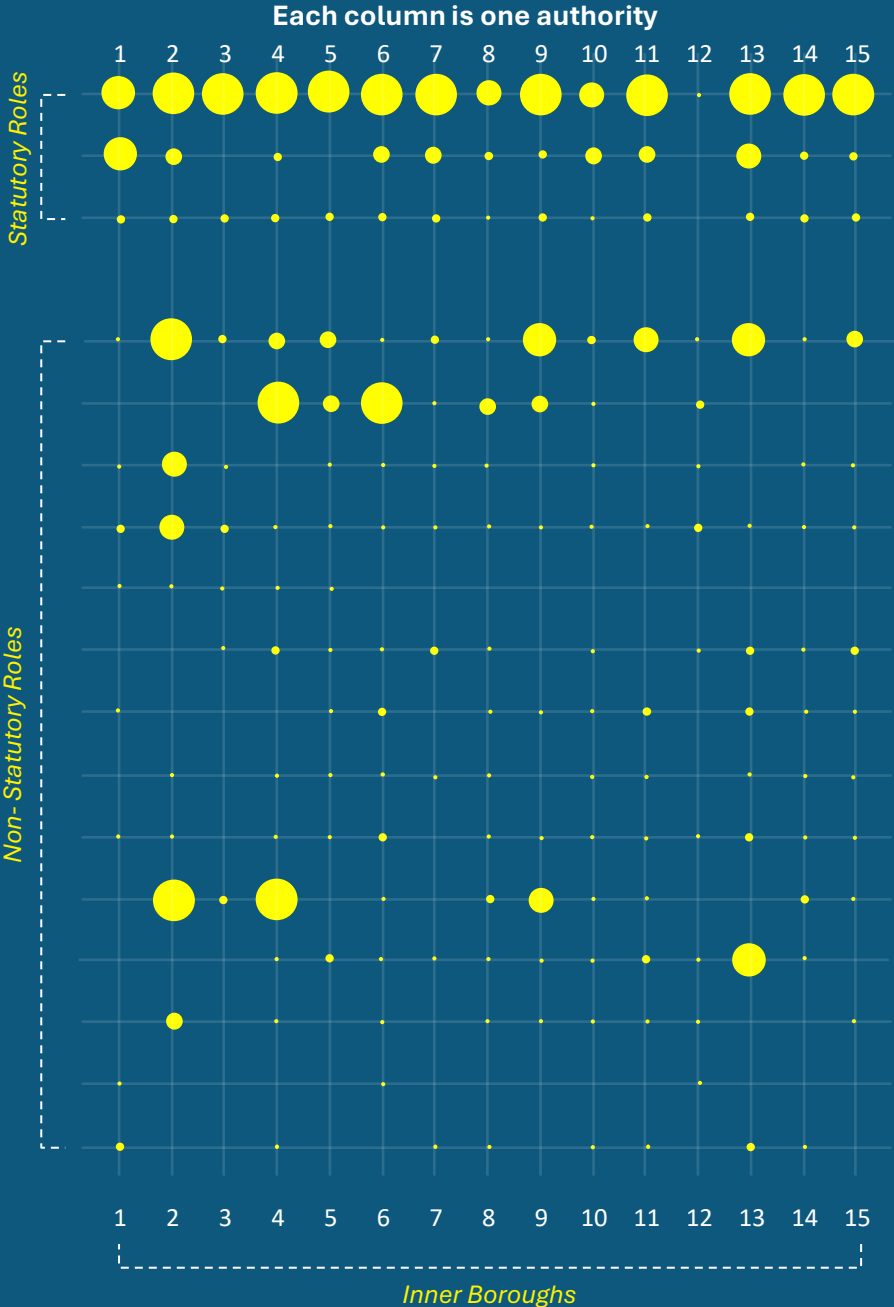
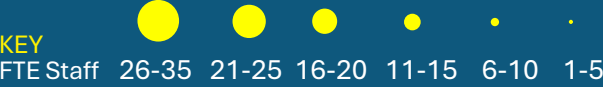


**100% of authorities
responded**

The Placeshaping Capacity Survey was carried out between September 2024 and February 2025, with responses from all authorities (33/33) and Development Corporations (2/2). Responses are self-reporting and so rely on the accuracy and knowledge of the respondent within the organisation.

Capacity by discipline, by authority

- Planning Development Management
- Building Control
- Planning Policy
- Regeneration / Economic Development / High Street
- Capital Delivery
- Public Realm / Street Design
- Urban Design / Architecture / Masterplanning
- Conservation / Historic Environment
- Parks & Open Spaces / Landscape / Green Infra
- Transport / Highways Design
- Development Economics & Viability
- Environmental Sustainability / Zero Carbon
- Strategic Property Management
- Infrastructure Planning and Delivery
- Community Engagement
- Inclusive Design / Accessible Environment
- Place Focused Digital & Data

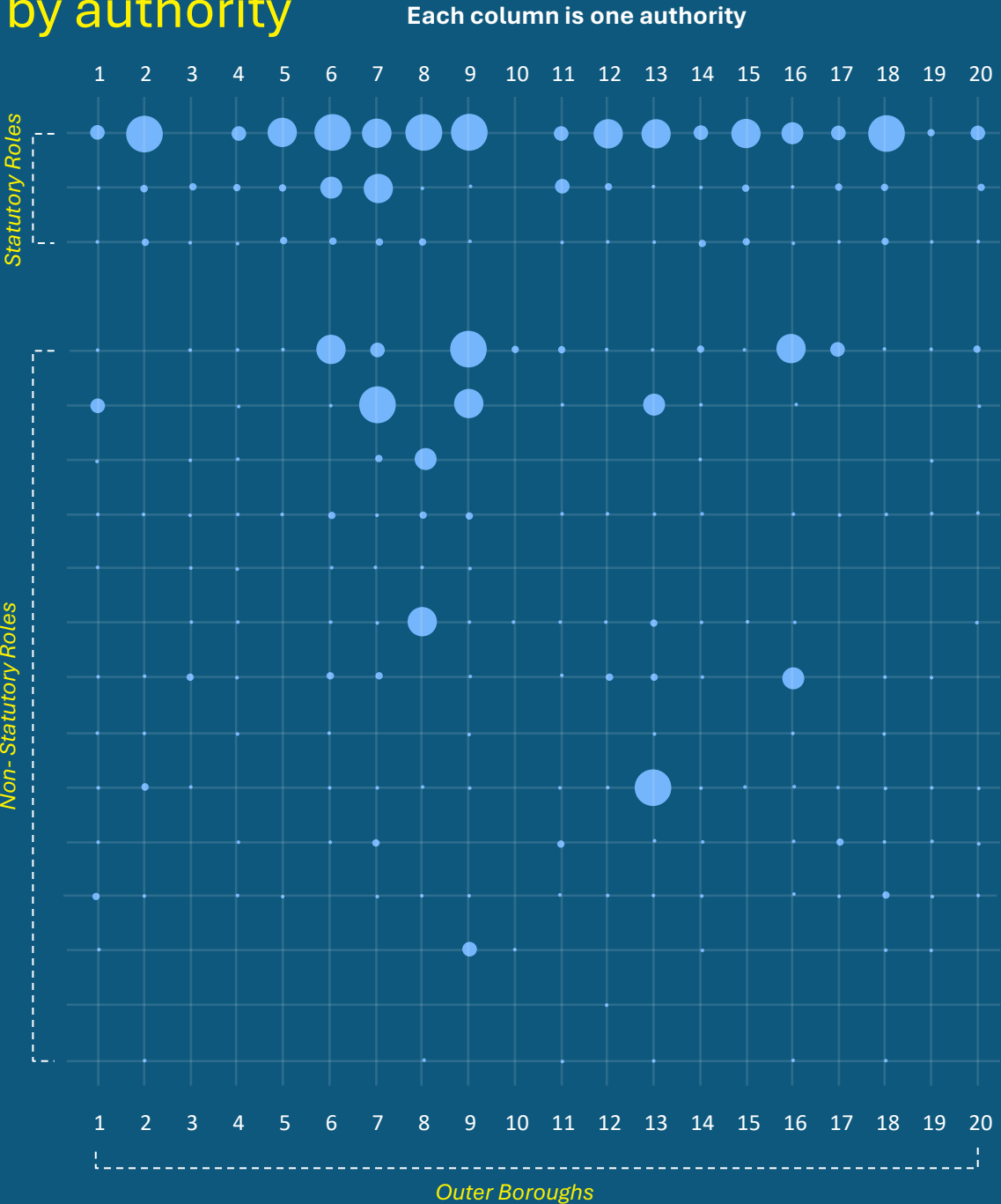


The graph highlights a diverse range of functions, including teams dedicated to regeneration, economic development, high street management and strategic property oversight.

The data reveals that each borough has specialised skills to address their local needs. Roles not required by law tend to be concentrated in regeneration, economic development and high street work. This suggests the councils take a tailored approach to serve their communities, going beyond basic statutory duties. The diversity of functions highlights how local governments adapt to the unique challenges and opportunities in their areas.

Capacity by discipline, by authority

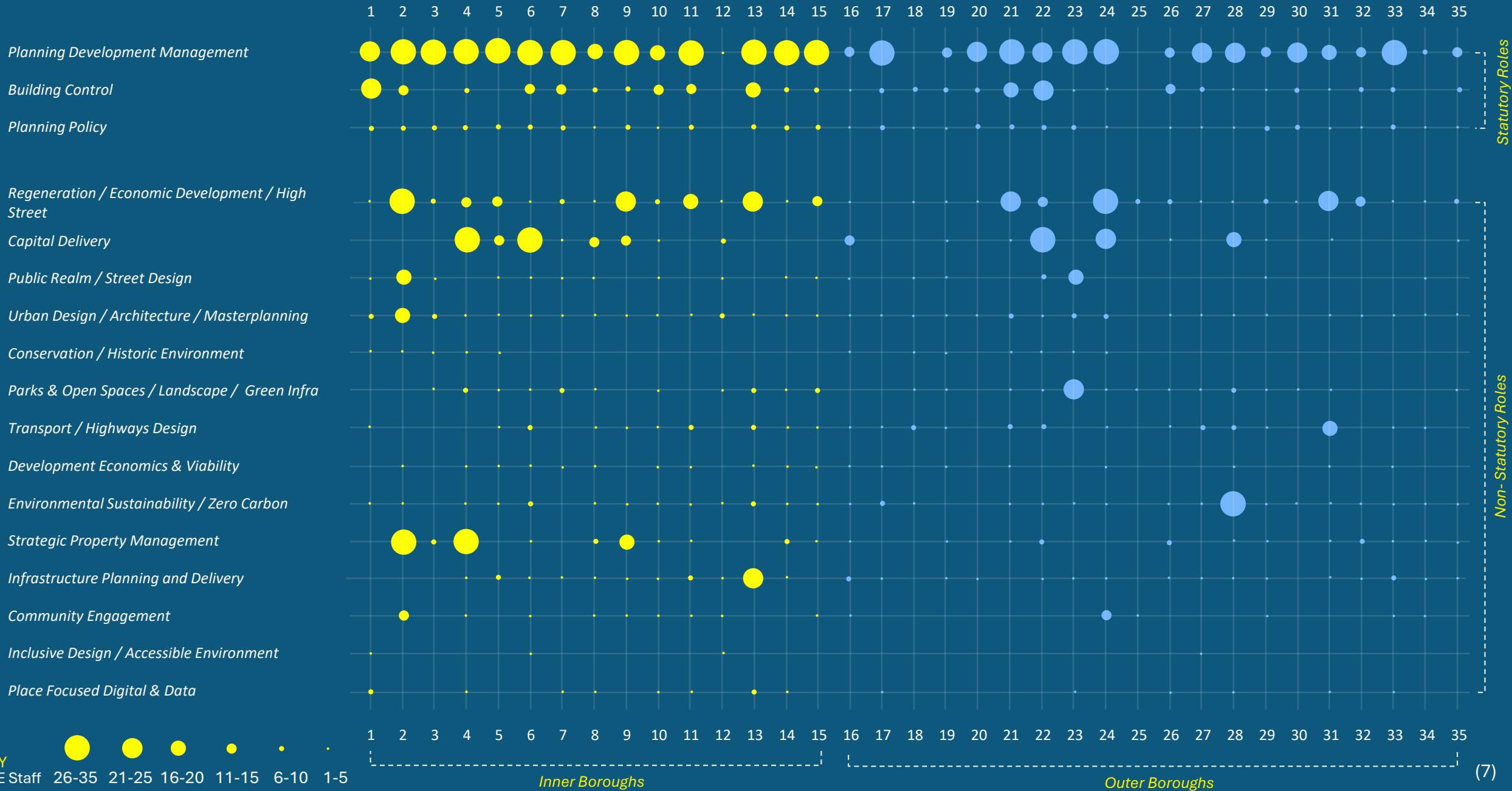
- Planning Development Management
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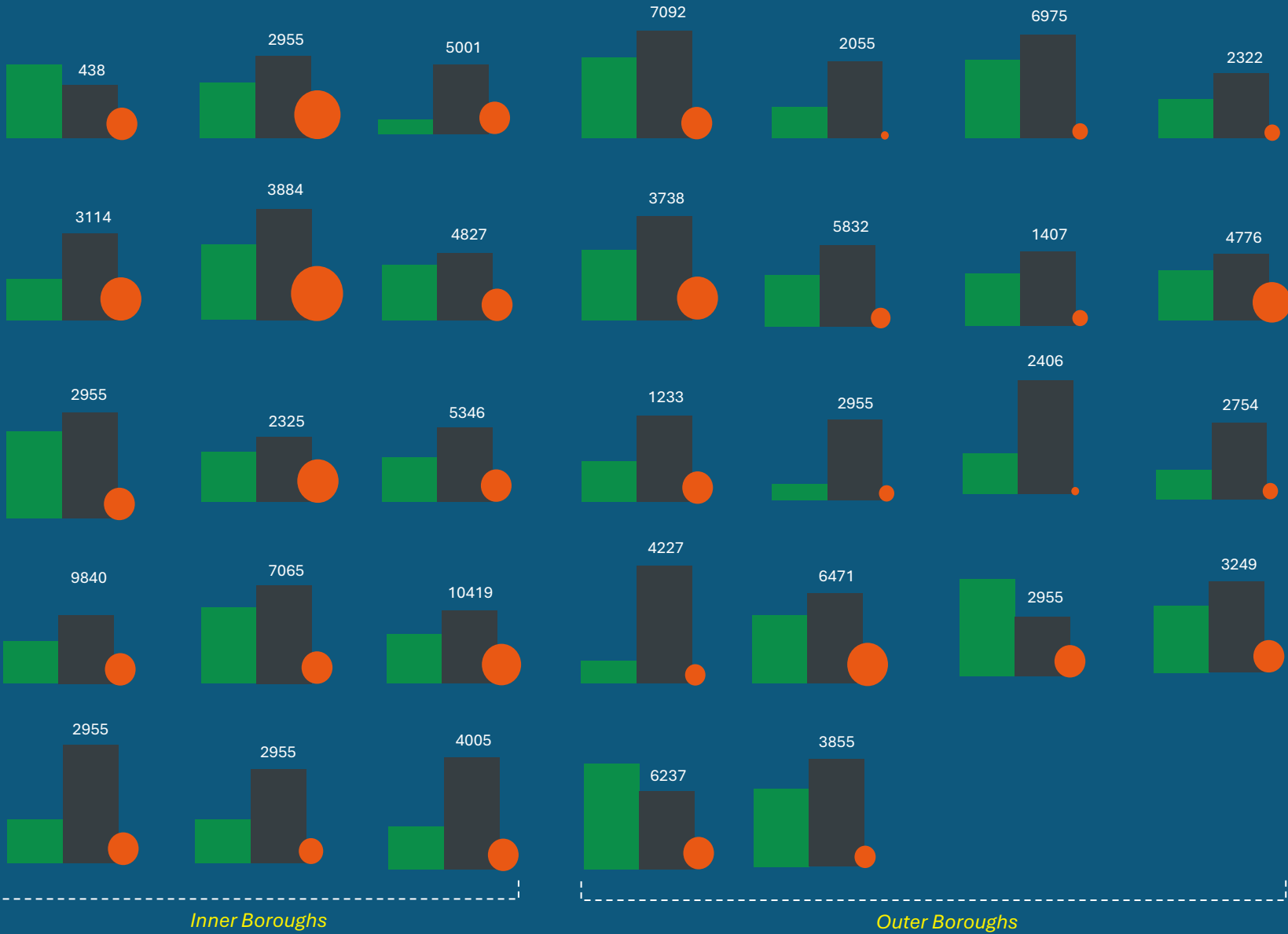
The graph shows that outer London boroughs have a less diverse distribution of non-statutory roles compared to inner boroughs, with a greater focus on regeneration, economic development, high streets, and capital delivery projects. Some outer boroughs also prioritise roles related to parks, open spaces, and environmental sustainability, highlighting how local councils tailor their organisational structures to address the unique needs of their communities.

Capacity by discipline, by authority

Each column is one authority



Existing Capacity versus Housing Target



Capacity is not evenly spread across London and within teams and not necessarily where most development pressure is.

When **Planning Development and Regeneration / Economic Development / High Streets & Town Centres** teams are mapped against the London Plan 10-year housing targets and the number of planning applications validated in 2024, the variance of capacity is notable, with some London authorities appearing comparatively under resourced when compared to others.

**<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/planning-london-datahub-applications>*

***Authorities where both Planning Development and Regeneration / Economic Development / High Streets & Town Centres teams were not given or known are not included in this graphic.*

KEY

350-100

100-50

50-25

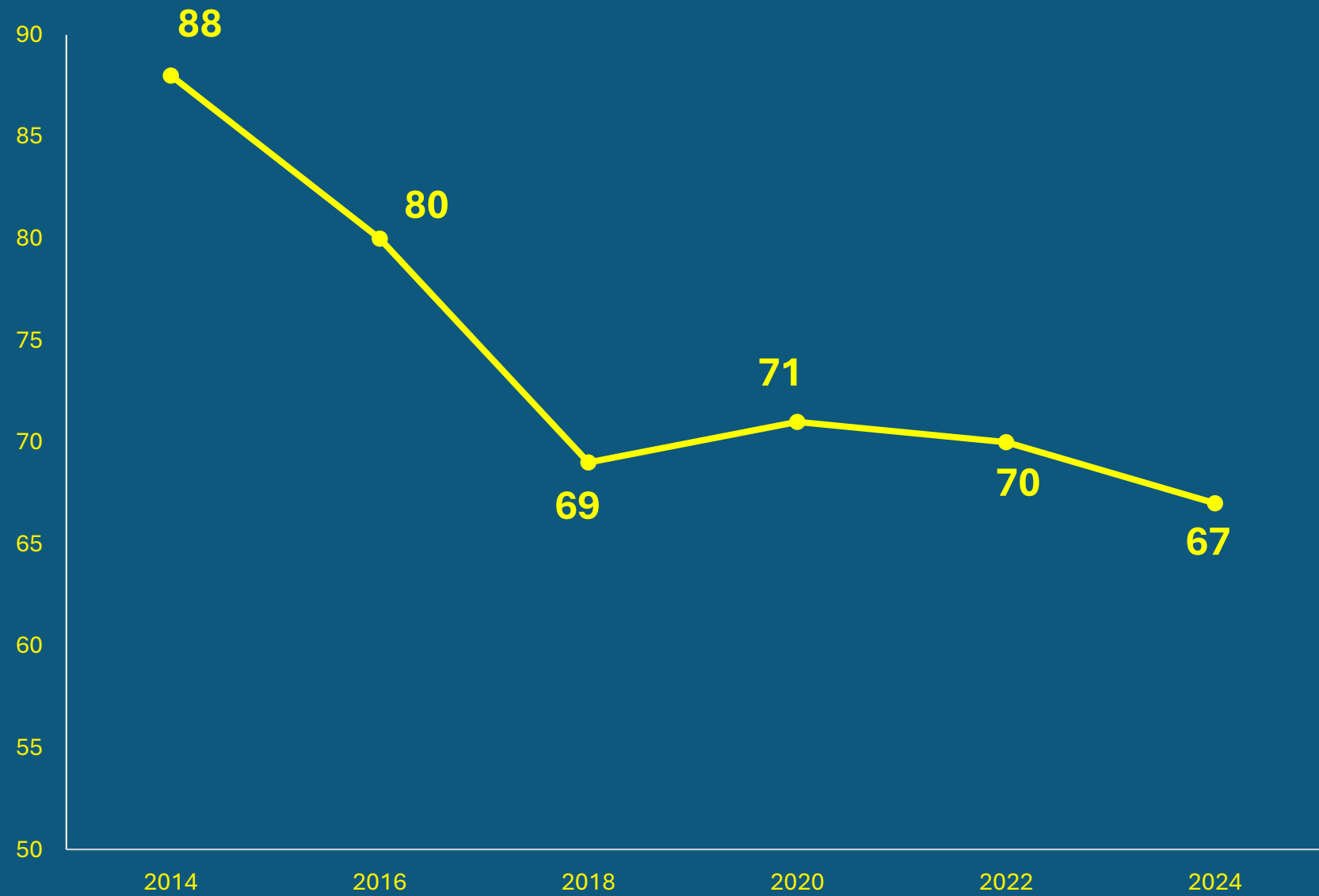
25-0

Planning DM & Regeneration Capacity**

Planning Applications Validated 2024*

London Plan 10-Year Housing Target

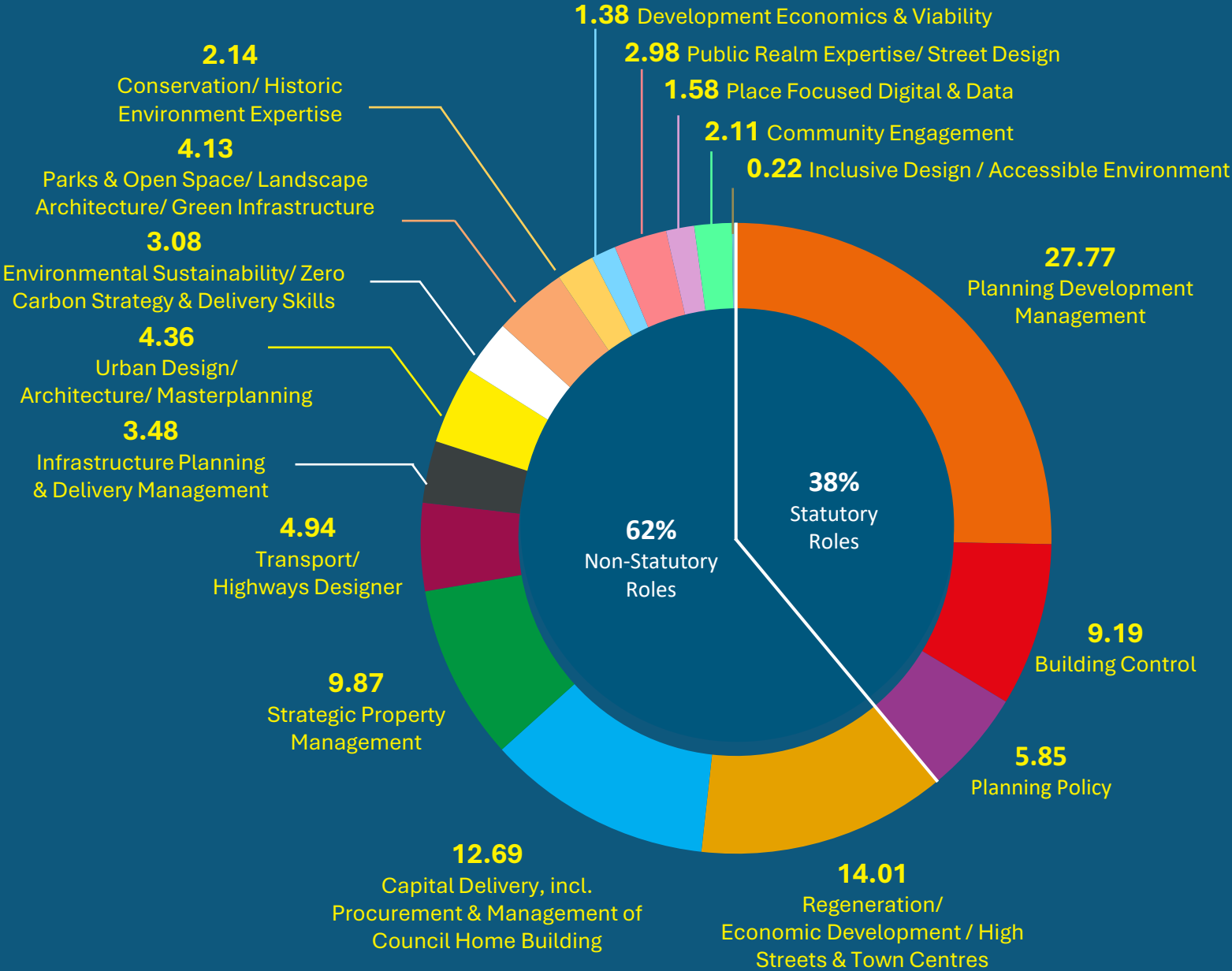
Average authority placeshaping capacity, over time



The data indicates a declining trend in the average team size, going from 88 down to 67 over the time period covered. Results remaining consistent with same departments tracker since 2014.

Boroughs are building a more diverse set of placeshaping capabilities.

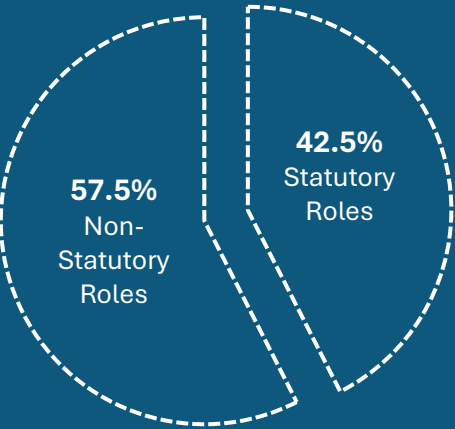
Average capacity (FTEs) by discipline



Placeshaping teams range in size from 15 to 348 people (from complete responses only).

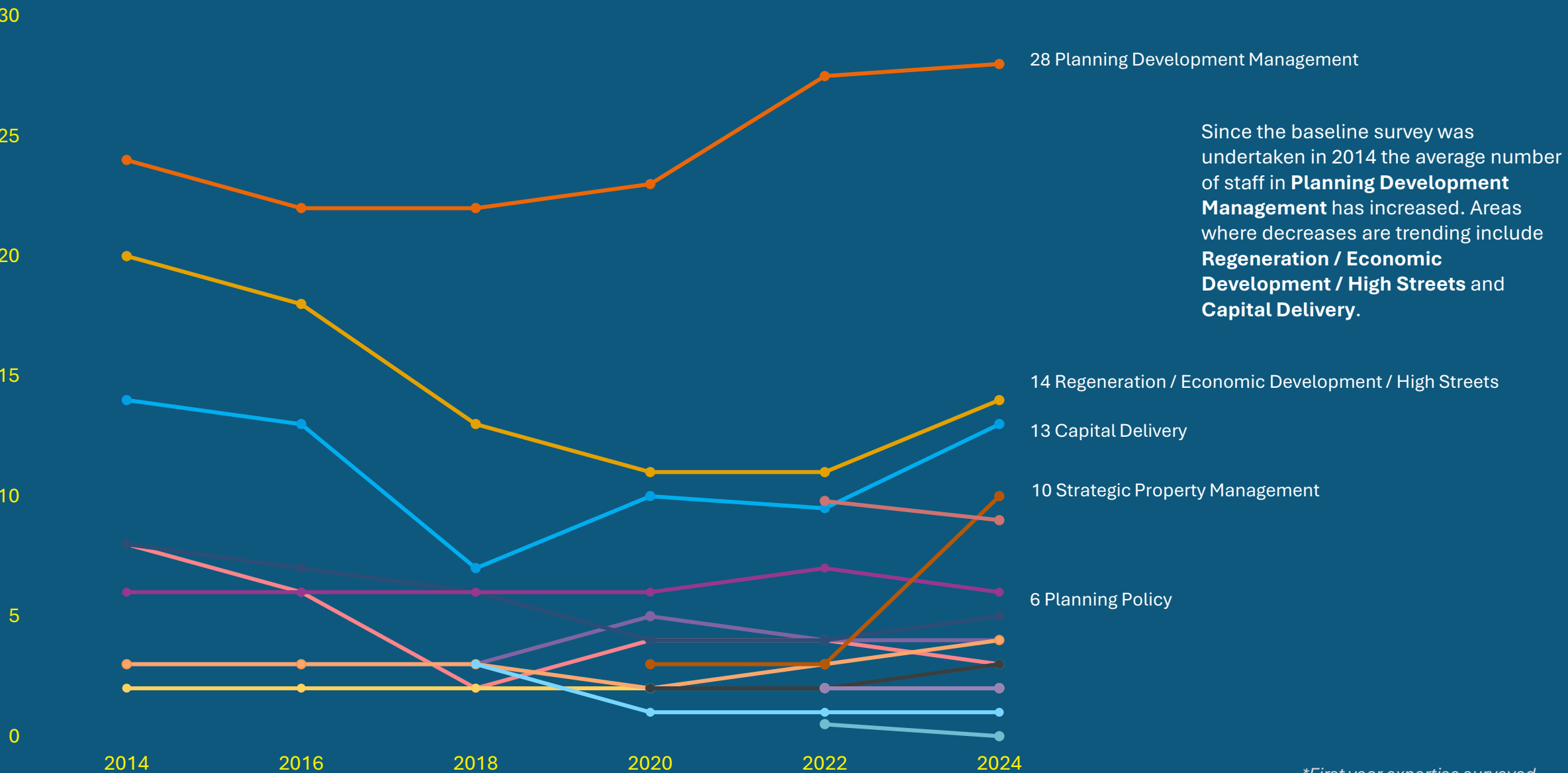
Expertise within placeshaping teams are weighted towards the statutory planning system, with some of the disciplines such as **Inclusive Design and Accessible Environment** being very under resourced.

The 2022 survey results show us an increase in Non-Statutory Roles for 2024.



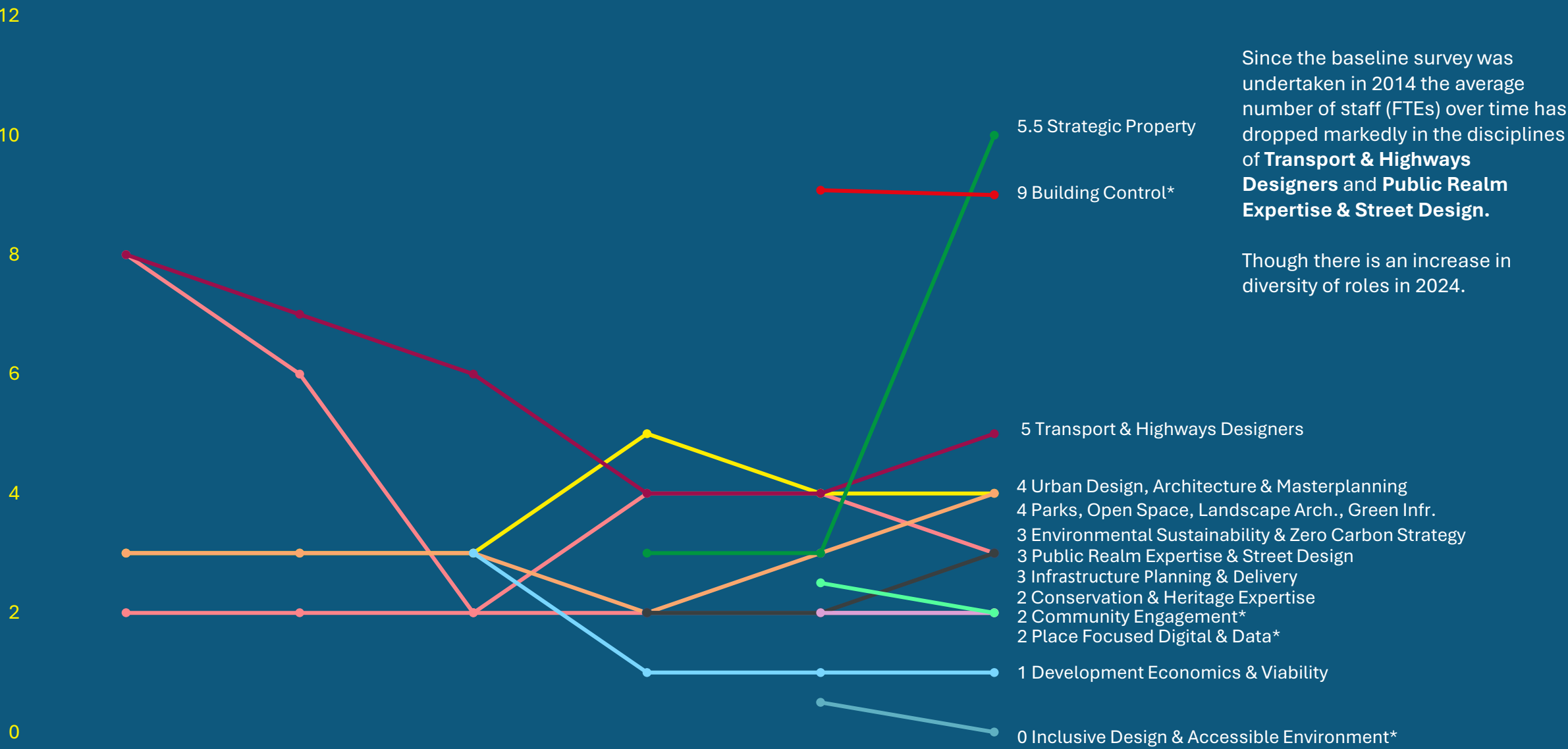
2022 Average statutory vs non-statutory breakdown

Change in capacity over time, per average discipline size (part 1)



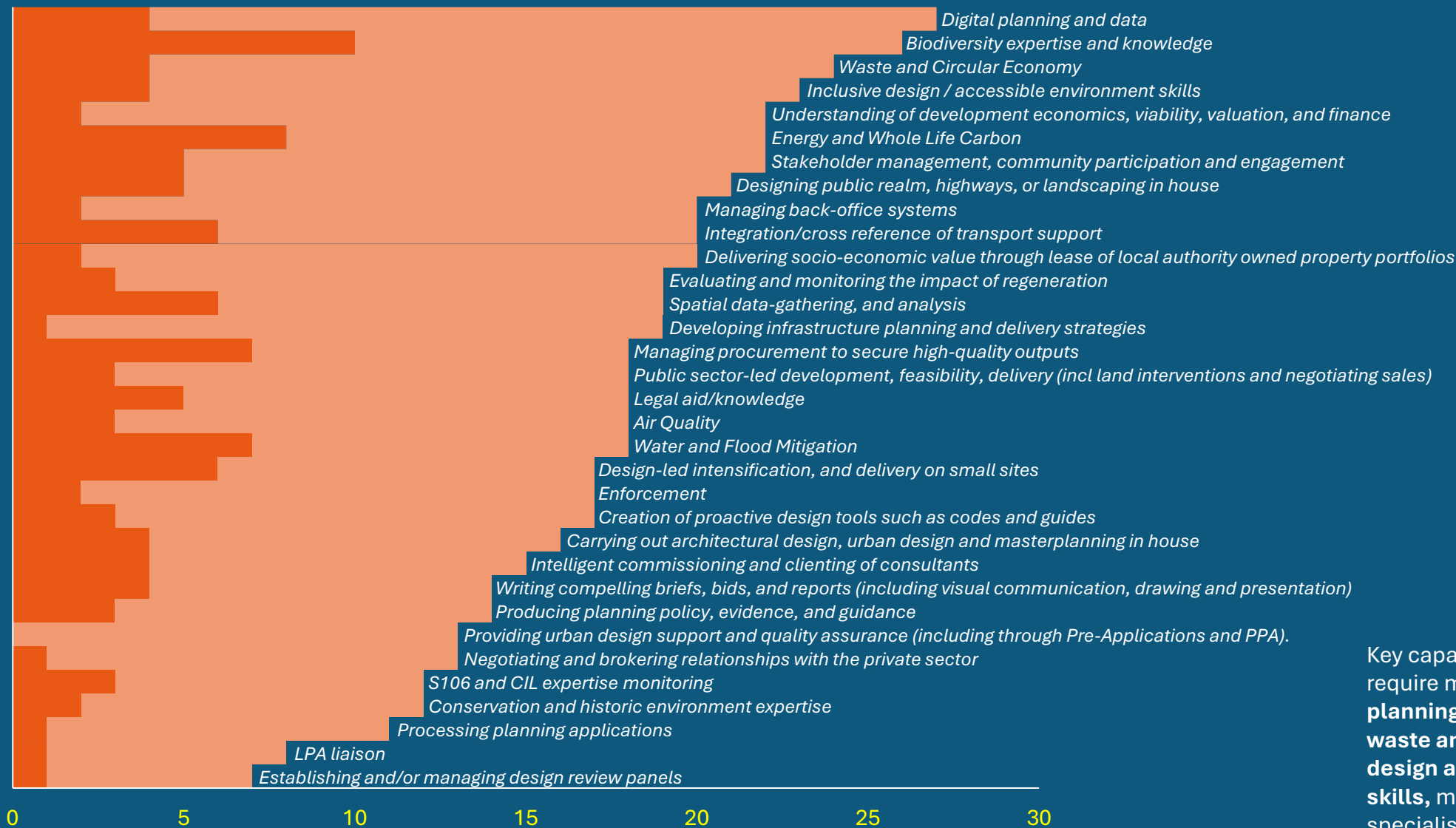
**First year expertise surveyed.
Figures rounded to nearest 0.5*

Change in capacity over time, per average discipline size (part 2)



*Second year expertise surveyed.
Figures rounded to nearest 0.5

Authority capacity needs

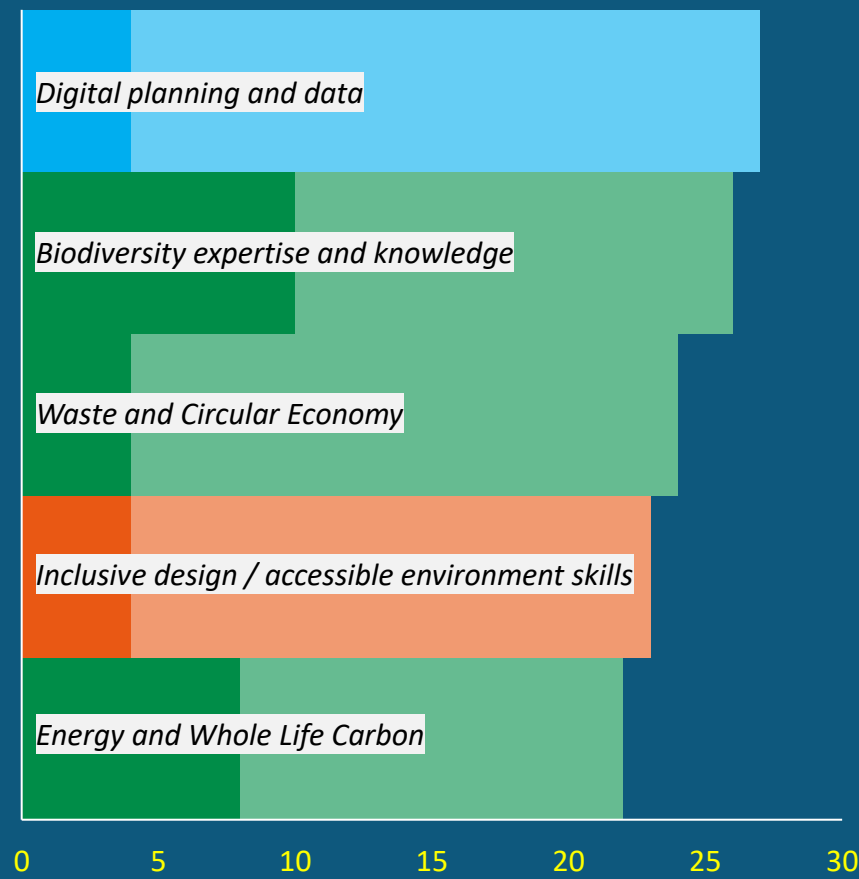


KEY
Strongly required
Required

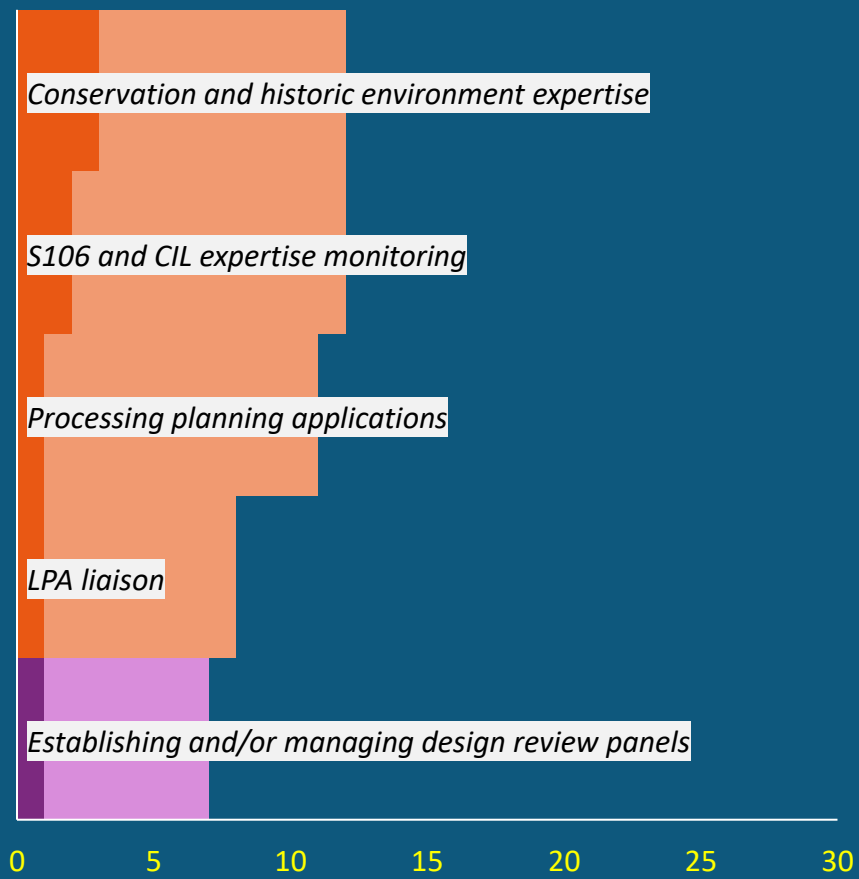
Key capacity authorities require more of **includes digital planning data, biodiversity expertise, waste and circular economy, inclusive design and accessible environment skills**, mainly strong requirement for specialised skills.

Authority capacity needs

Highest required skills



Lowest required skills



Boroughs are prioritising the development of specialised skills. Top on their list are capabilities related to **digital planning data, biodiversity expertise, waste and circular economy knowledge and inclusive design for accessible environments.**

In contrast, boroughs feel more established in their ability to handle **traditional planning functions.** They report relative strengths in areas like **conservation and heritage management, S106 and CIL expertise, processing planning applications, LPA liaison and managing design review panels.**

PLANNING

Significant barrier

Occasional barrier

SUSTAINABILITY

Significant barrier

Occasional barrier

DIGITAL/DATA

Significant barrier

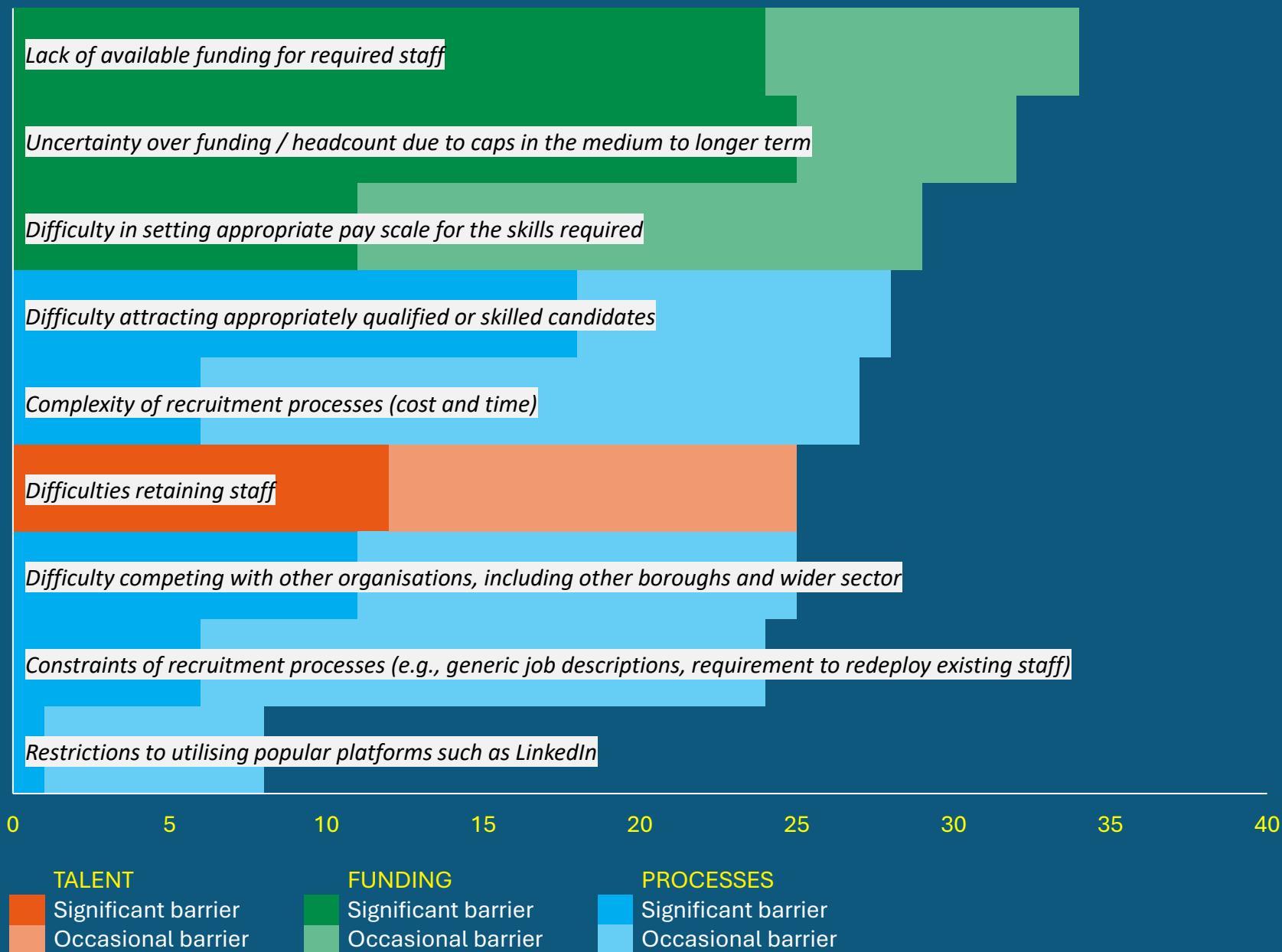
Occasional barrier

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Significant barrier

Occasional barrier

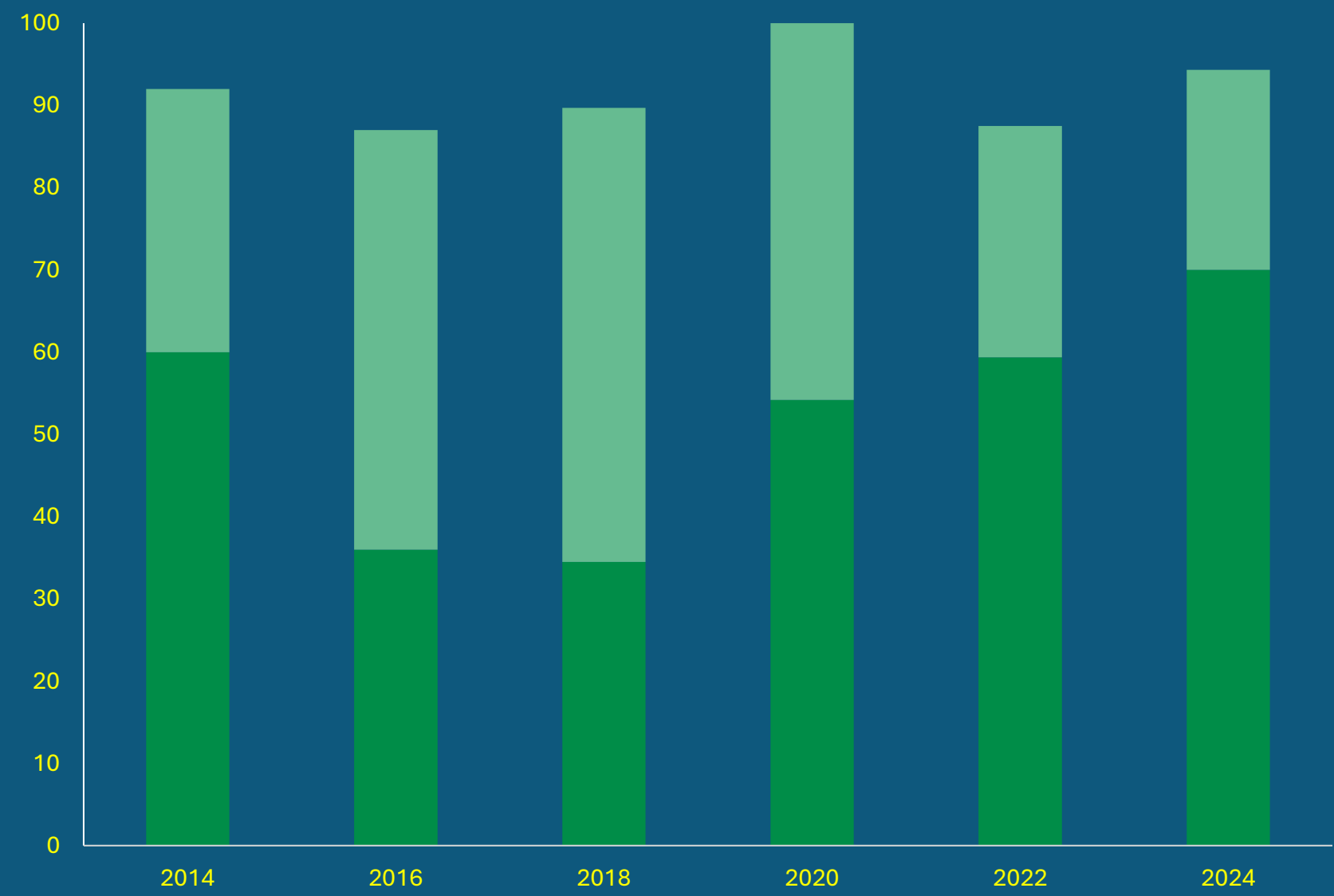
Barriers to meeting capacity needs



Respondent's main barriers to meeting capacity needs are all directly related to **funding and resourcing constraints**.

The primary obstacles hindering boroughs' ability to build the necessary placeshaping capabilities are financial in nature. Insufficient and unpredictable funding, coupled with challenges around competitive compensation, are limiting the local authorities' capacity to staff up and develop the expertise required.

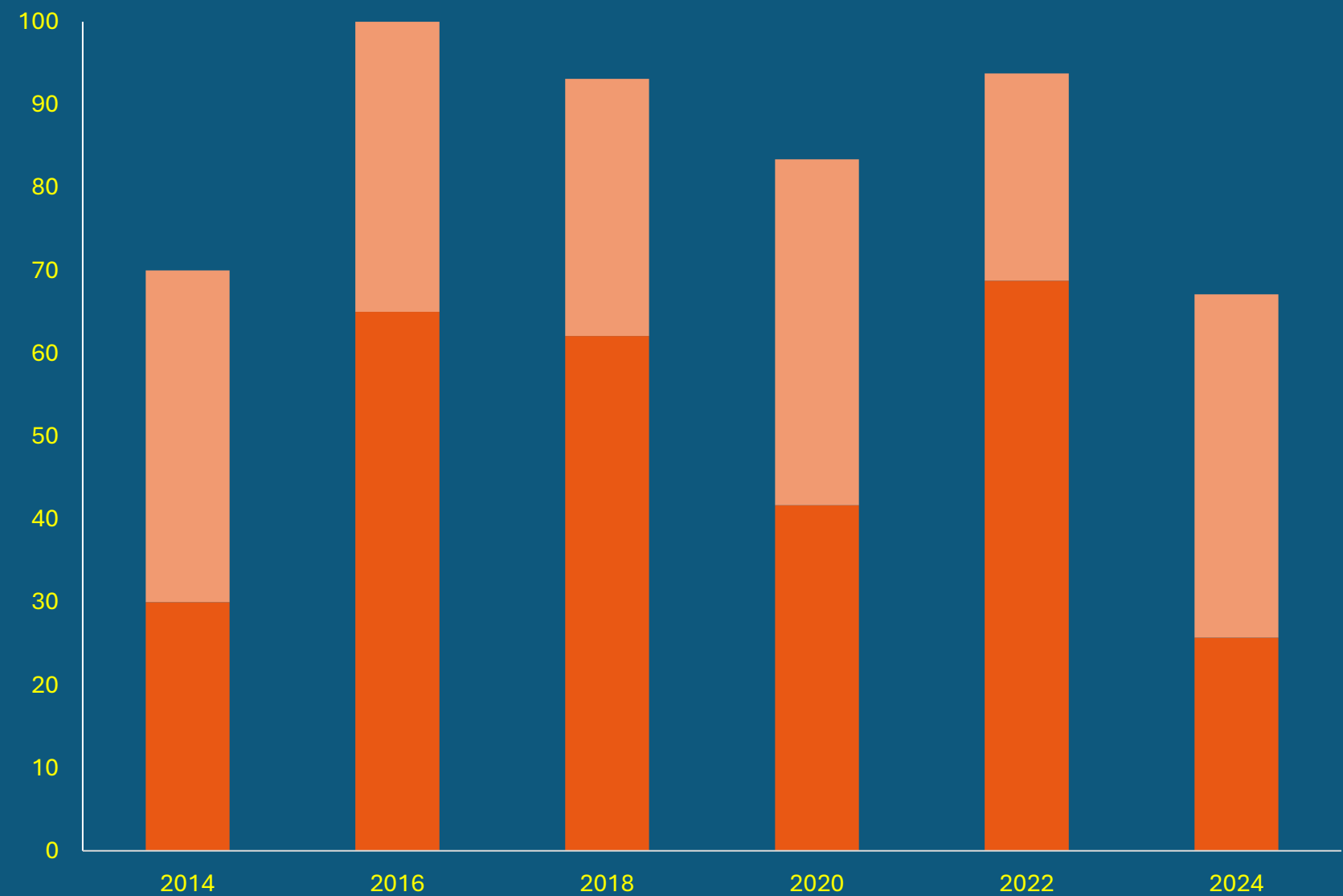
Uncertainty over funding



Funding is becoming a significant barrier for boroughs in their placeshaping work. After declining from 2014 to 2018, the percentage of boroughs reporting funding as a ‘Significant barrier’ has steadily risen, reaching 70% in 2024. This represents a substantial increase from the 59.37% seen in 2022, underscoring the growing challenge of securing adequate resources for placeshaping teams. The 2024 data indicates that funding remains a major preoccupation for the majority of boroughs as they strive to build their placeshaping capacity.

- KEY
- Significant barrier
 - Occasional barrier

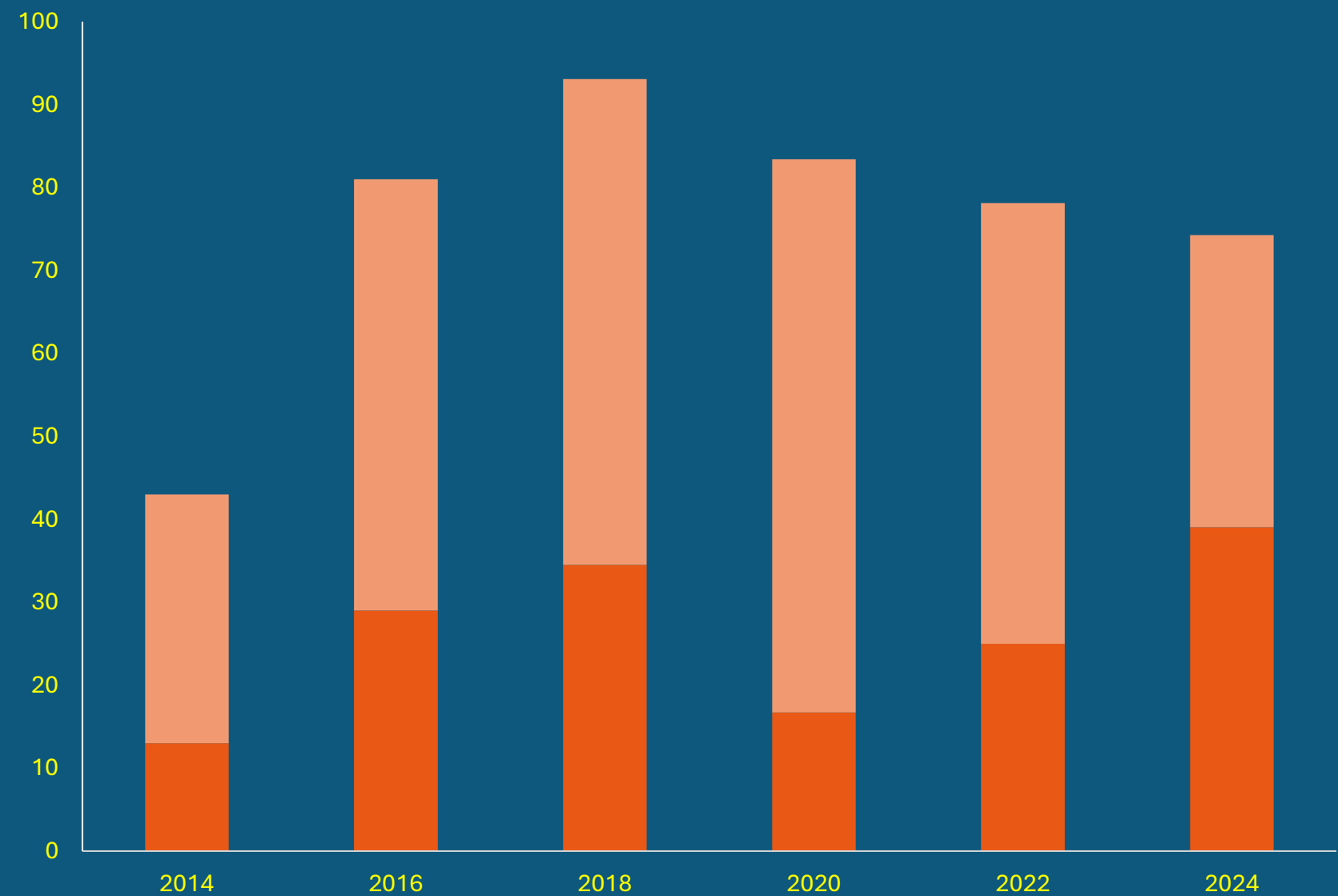
Difficulty attracting candidates



Recruitment difficulties peaked in 2016 and 2022 before improving by 2024. The share of respondents viewing candidate attraction as a ‘Significant Barrier’ dropped from 65% to just 25% over this period, suggesting boroughs have made progress in securing the necessary talent, though the previous volatility underscores the dynamic nature of these capacity issues.

- KEY
- Significant barrier
 - Occasional barrier

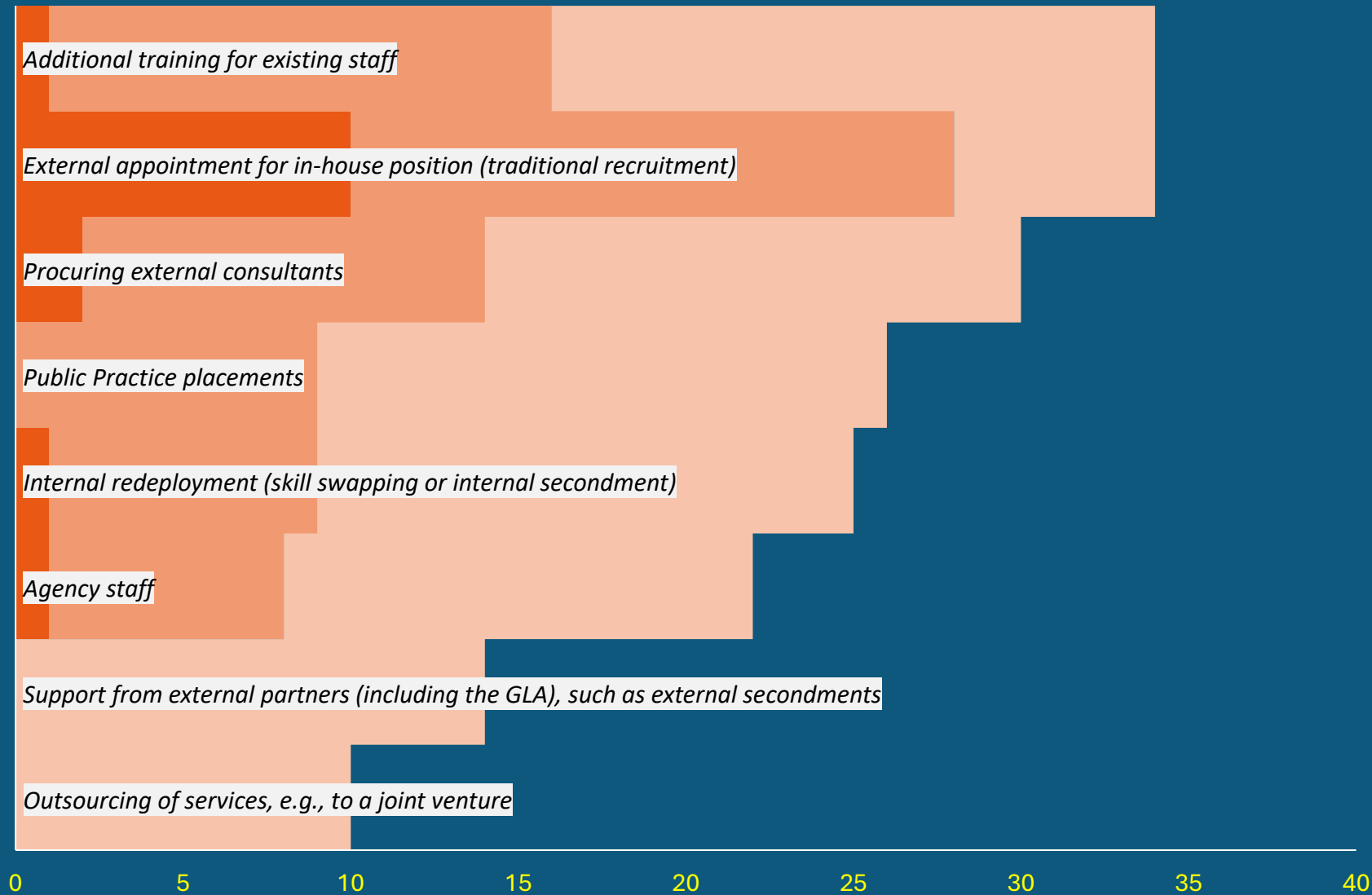
Difficulty retaining staff



After a brief improvement in 2020, the percentage of boroughs reporting staff retention as a 'Routinely' occurring challenge has steadily risen, reaching 39.04% in 2024 - the highest level in the time period covered. Meanwhile, the percentage seeing it as only 'Sometimes' a problem has declined, indicating retention is becoming a more persistent issue for a growing number of local authorities.

- KEY
- Significant barrier
 - Occasional barrier

Meeting capacity needs

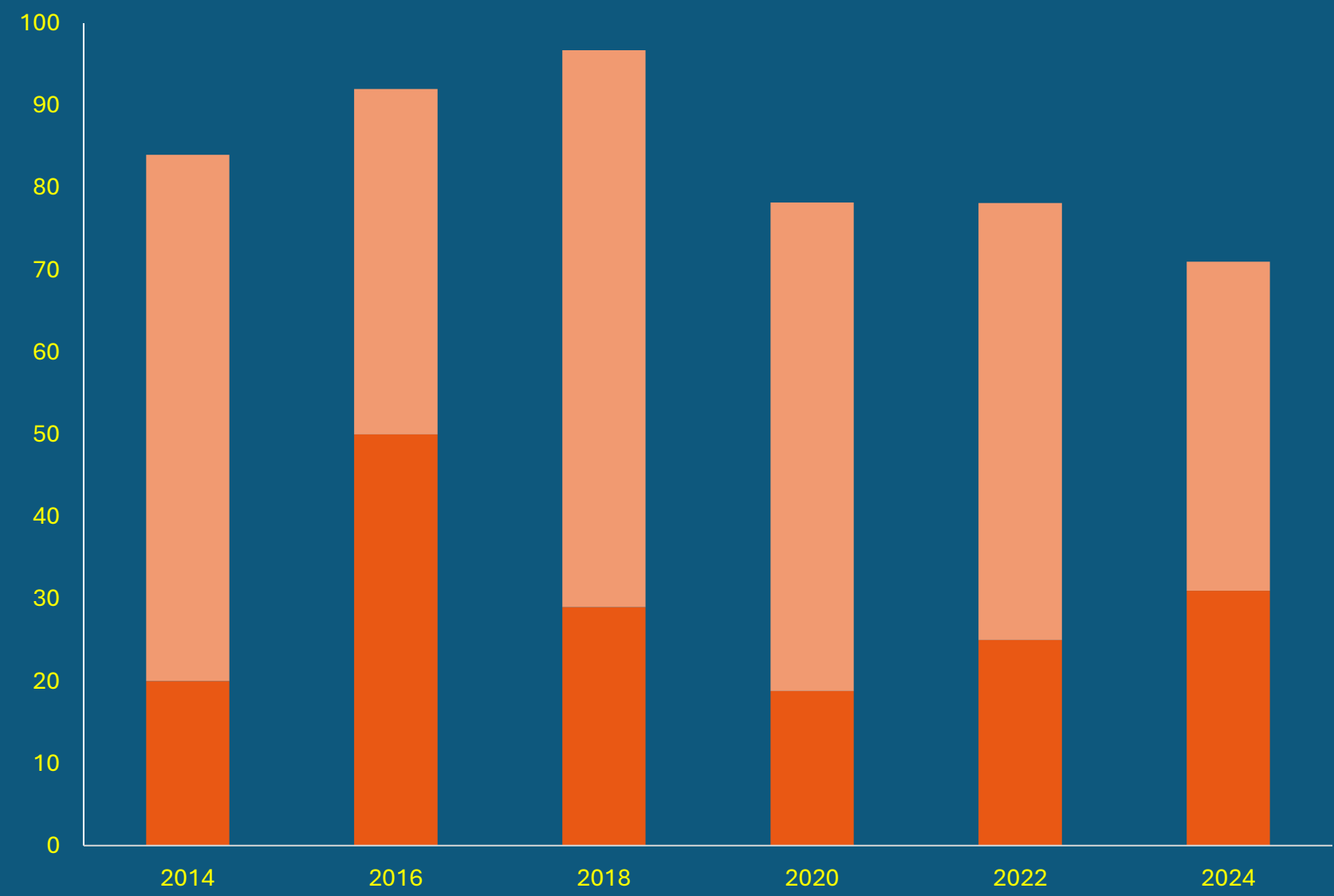


Boroughs are employing a range of strategies to address placeshaping capacity needs, with a strong emphasis on retaining and upskilling existing staff through additional training. While traditional external recruitment is also common, boroughs are supplementing in-house teams by procuring external consultants and leveraging support from partners, potentially due to funding uncertainties that make flexible, project-based solutions more appealing.

KEY

- Always
- Routinely
- Sometimes

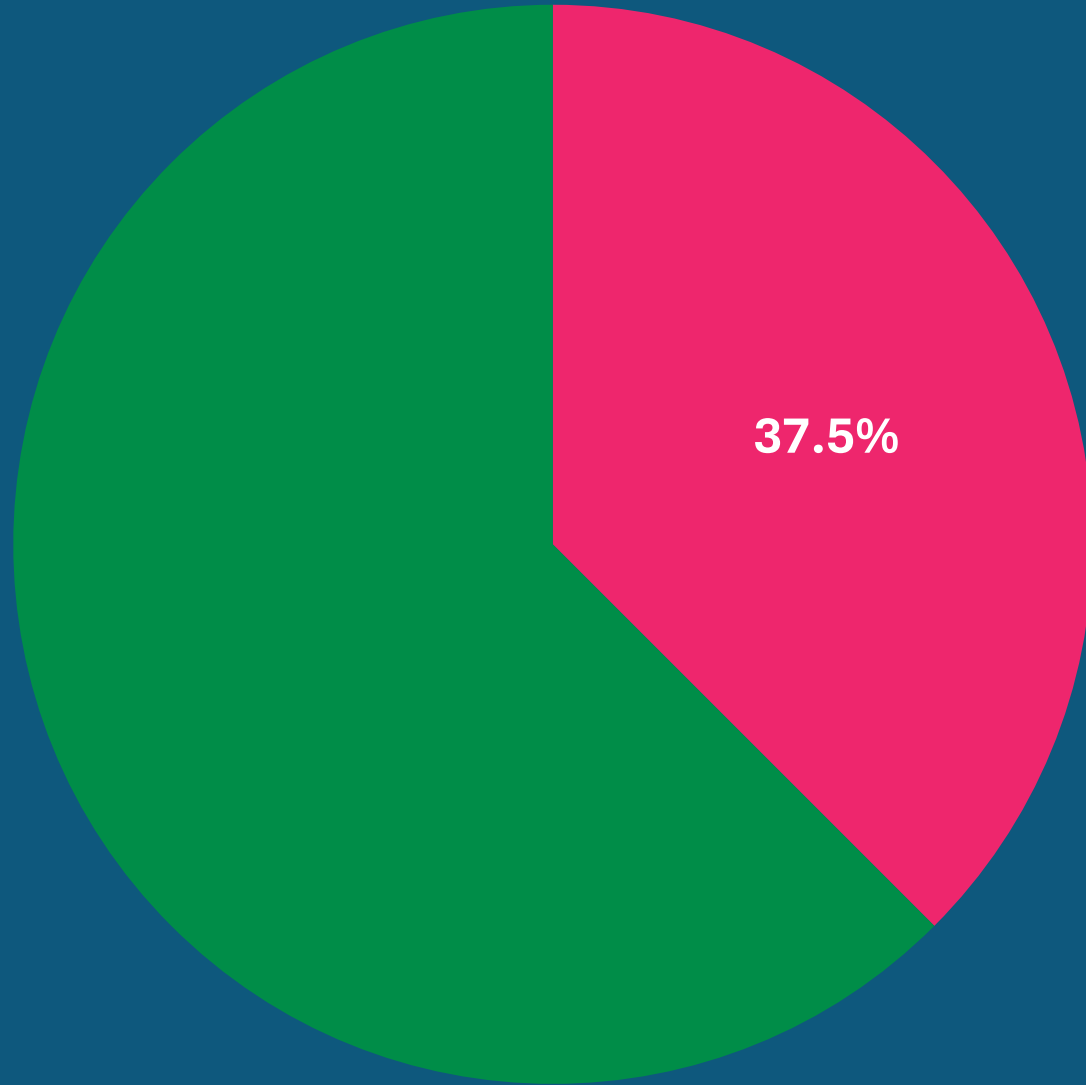
Use of agency staff over time



The data shows a fluctuating trend in boroughs' use of agency staff to address placeshaping capacity needs. After a significant increase in the use of agency staff 'Sometimes' from 2014 to 2018, this figure has since declined, while the percentage using them 'Rarely' has seen a more volatile pattern.

- KEY
- Routinely
 - Sometimes

Proportion of placeshaping staff in temporary roles

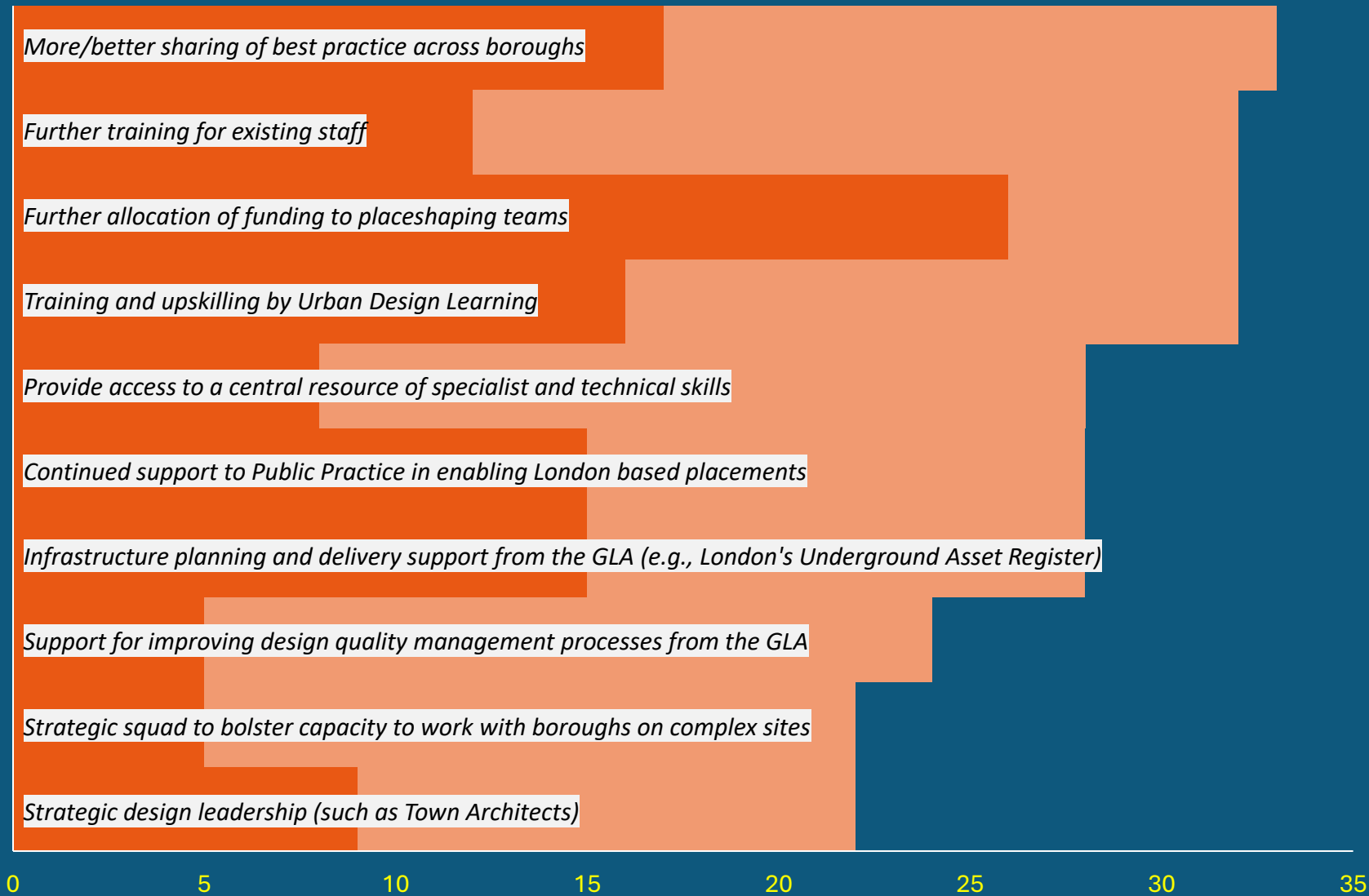


37.5% of placeshaping roles are temporary roles (i.e., fixed term contracts / agency staff). In comparison to 21% in 2022.

This compares to 6.4% of all Londoners using Government data* (latest data from 2018).

<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/temporary-job-rate-in-London>

Potential solutions to capacity needs

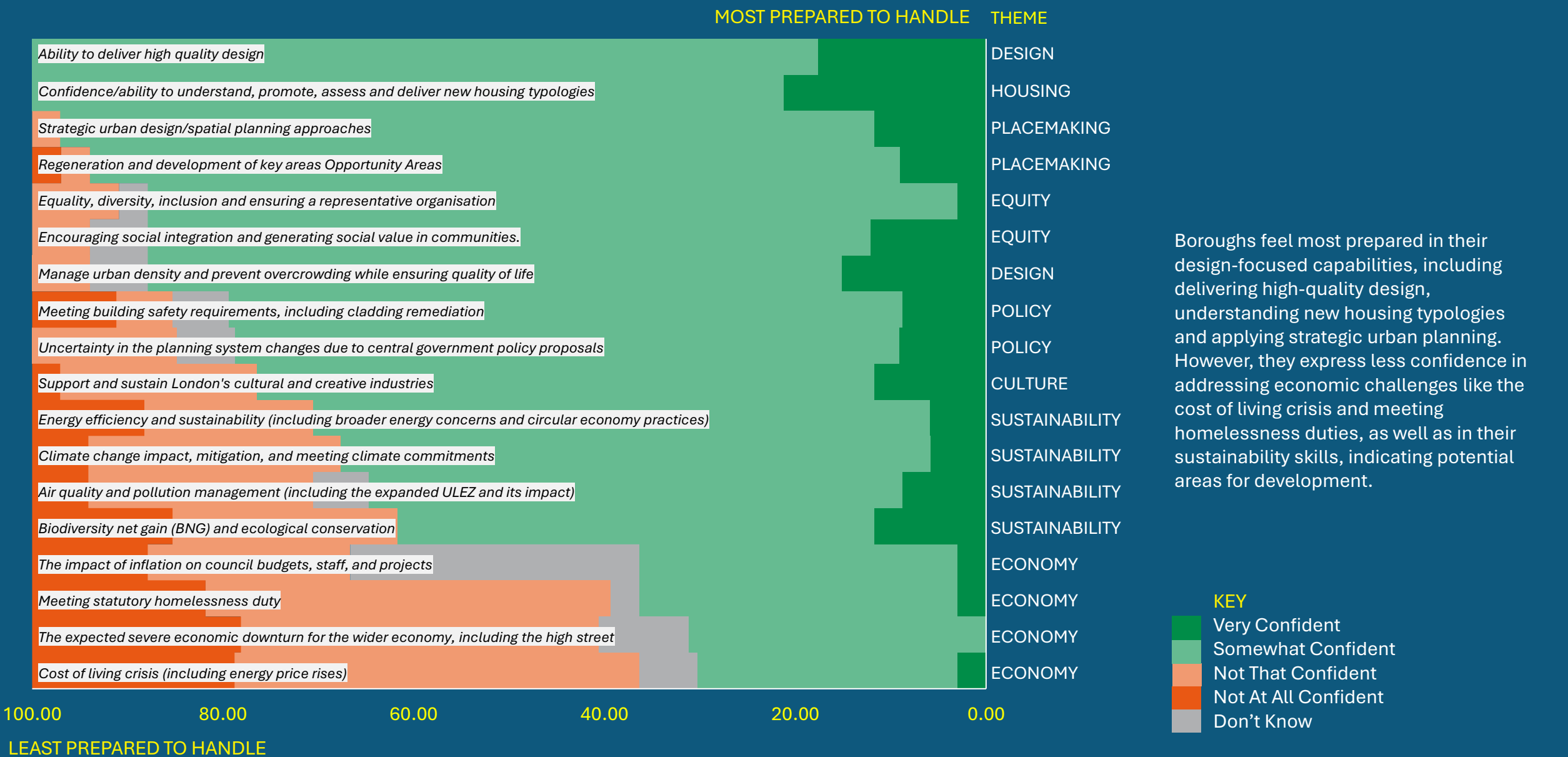


Boroughs prioritise funding and workforce development for placeshaping.

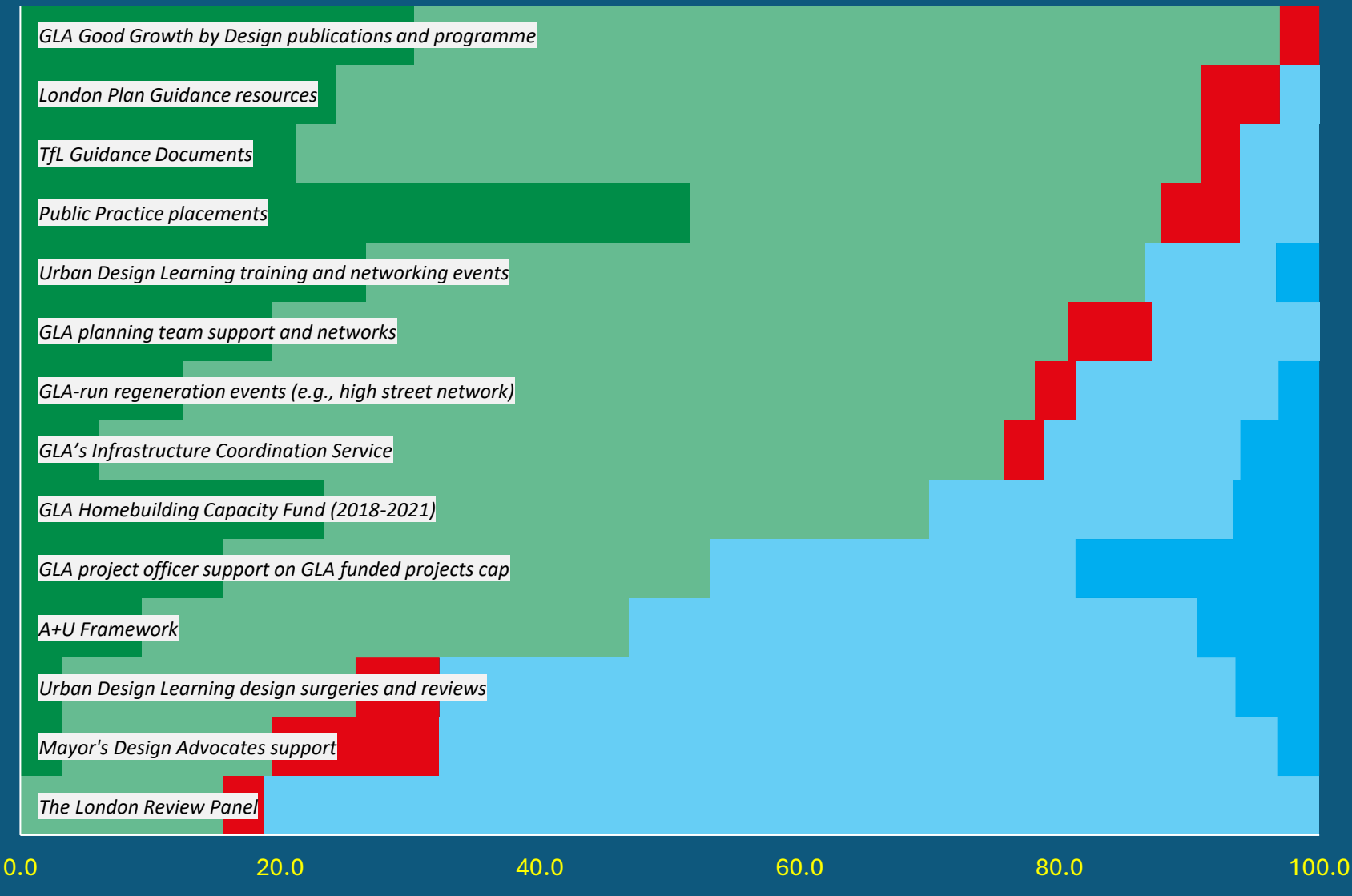
Boroughs are primarily focused on securing additional funding for their placeshaping teams, with the top-ranked solution being further allocation of funding to build capacity. Alongside funding, boroughs are prioritising strategies to develop their existing workforce through training and cross-borough collaboration to enhance capabilities.

KEY
Very Useful
Quite Useful

Preparedness of placeshaping teams to handle challenges



What GLA resources are most useful to placeshaping projects

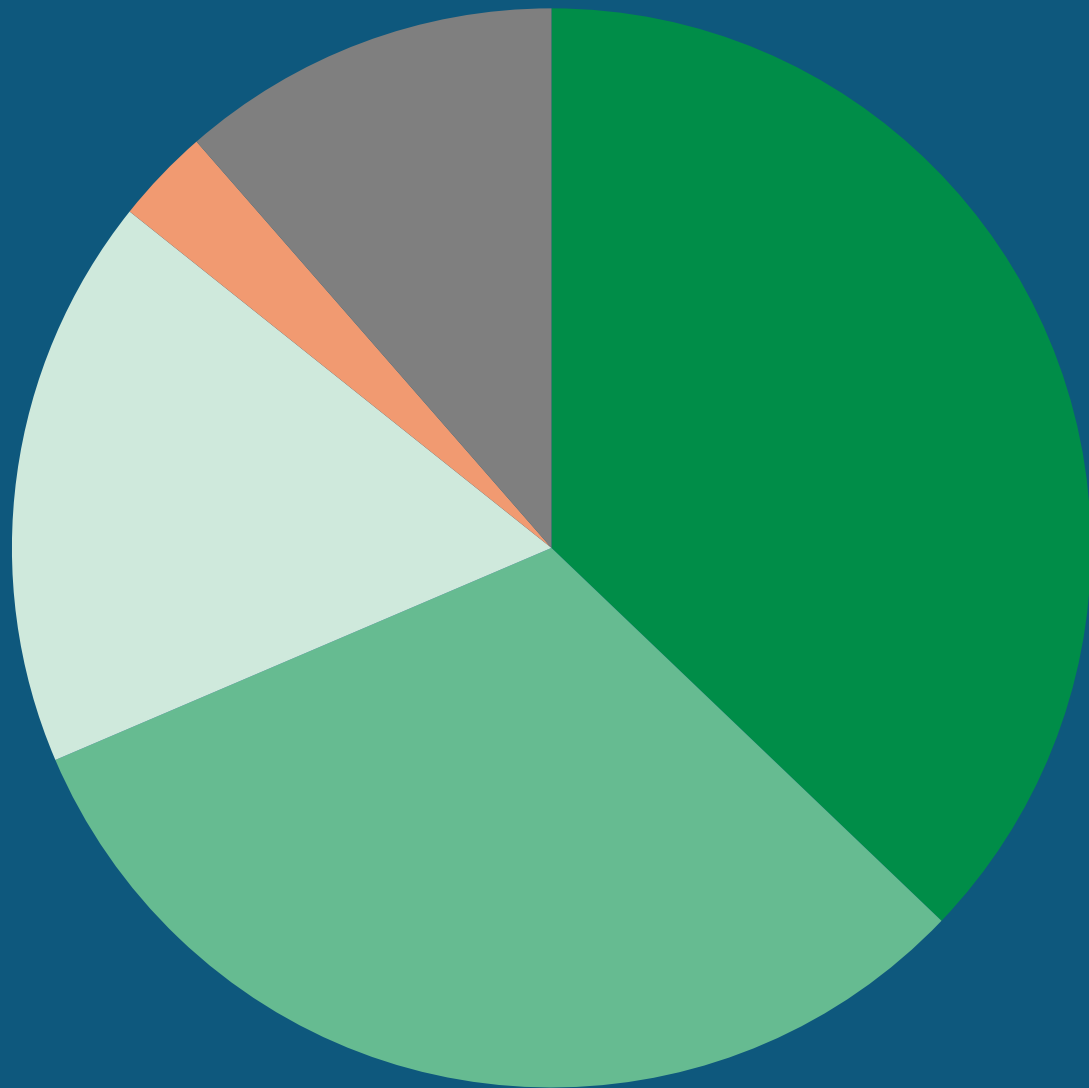


Boroughs find the GLA's resources, such as Public Practice placements, Good Growth by Design publications and Urban Design Learning events, to be highly valuable for their placeshaping projects. While many GLA offerings are widely utilised and appreciated, some support mechanisms like the London Review Panel are less known or used by local authorities.

KEY

- Very Useful
- Quite Useful
- Not Useful
- Haven't Used
- Haven't Heard Of

Importance of placeshaping staff being reflective of local population



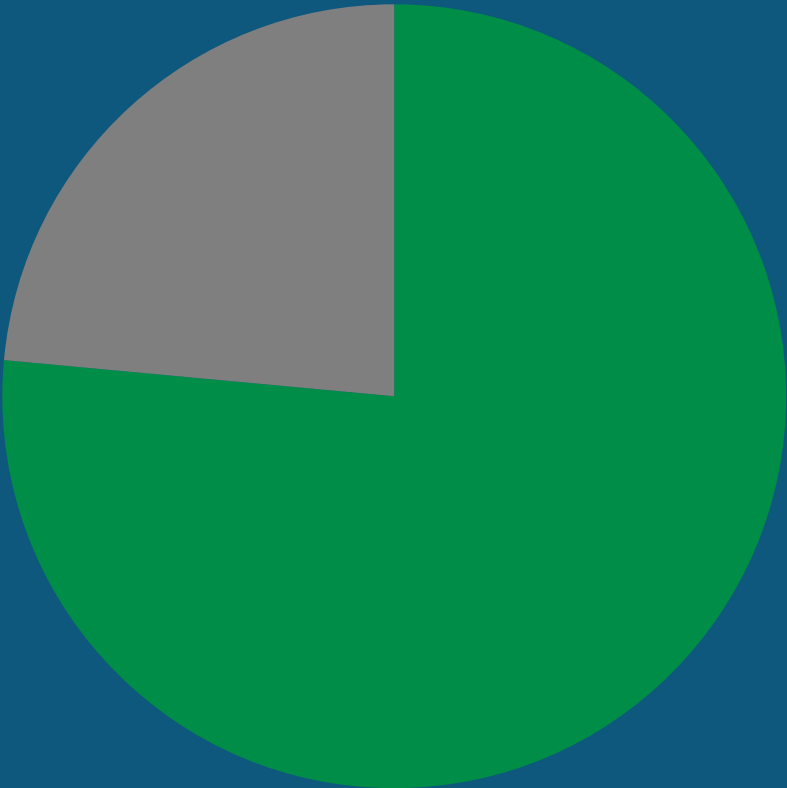
68% of respondents thought that having their placeshaping staff being reflective of the local population was a priority for their organisation.

11% did not know and 3% disagreed with the priority of representation in their organisations.

2022 results were 66% showing consistent results over the last two years.

- KEY**
- Strongly Agree
 - Tend to Agree
 - Neither Agree nor Disagree
 - Tend to Disagree
 - Don't Know

Monitoring of gender and ethnicity pay gaps



Does your organisation track the gender pay gap?



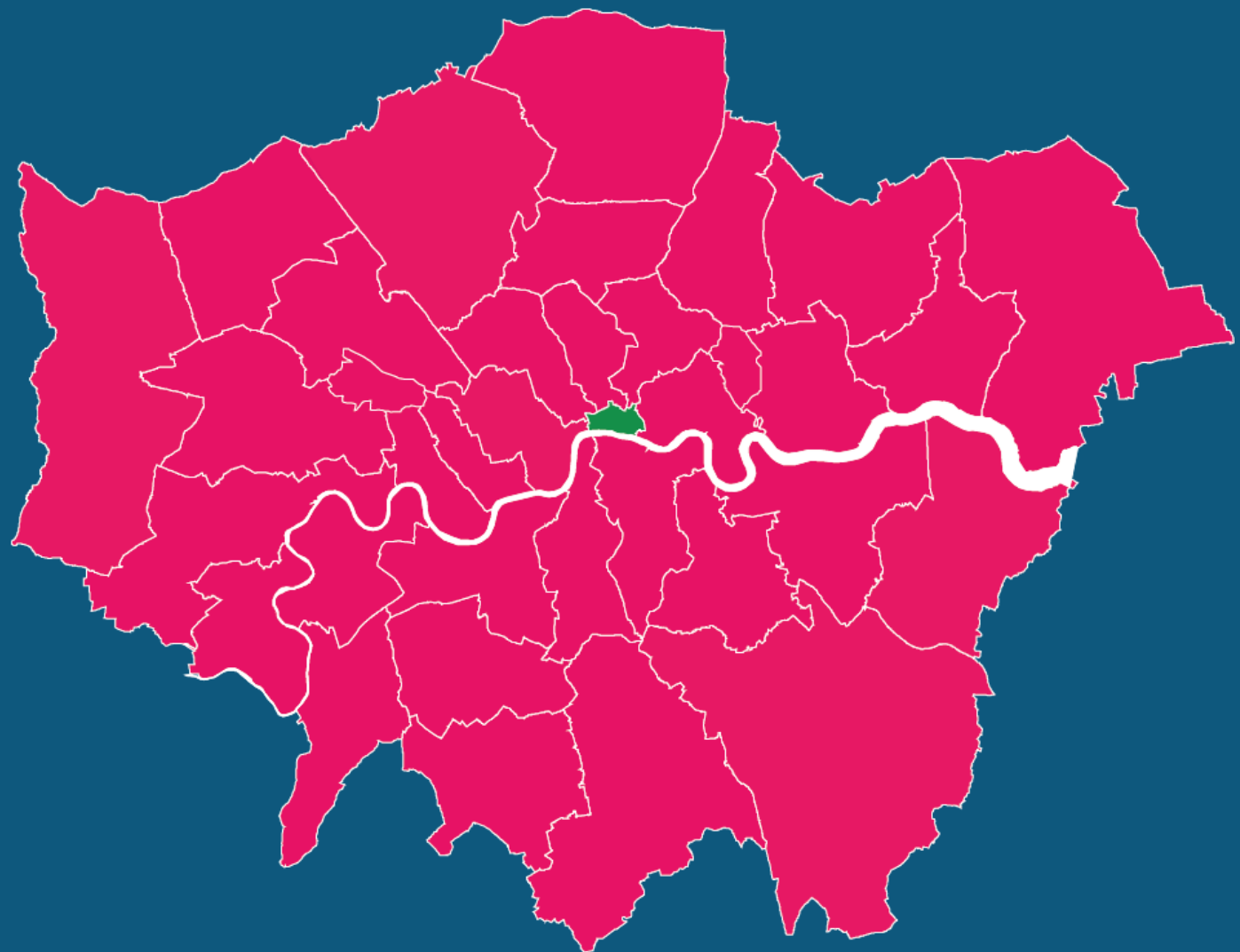
Does your organisation track the ethnicity pay gap?

65% of respondents knew their organisation tracked ethnicity pay gap and 76% knew their organisation tracked the gender pay gap.

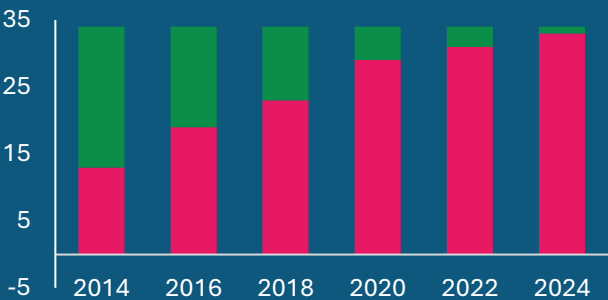
KEY

- Yes
- No
- Not known

Changes in design review provision in London



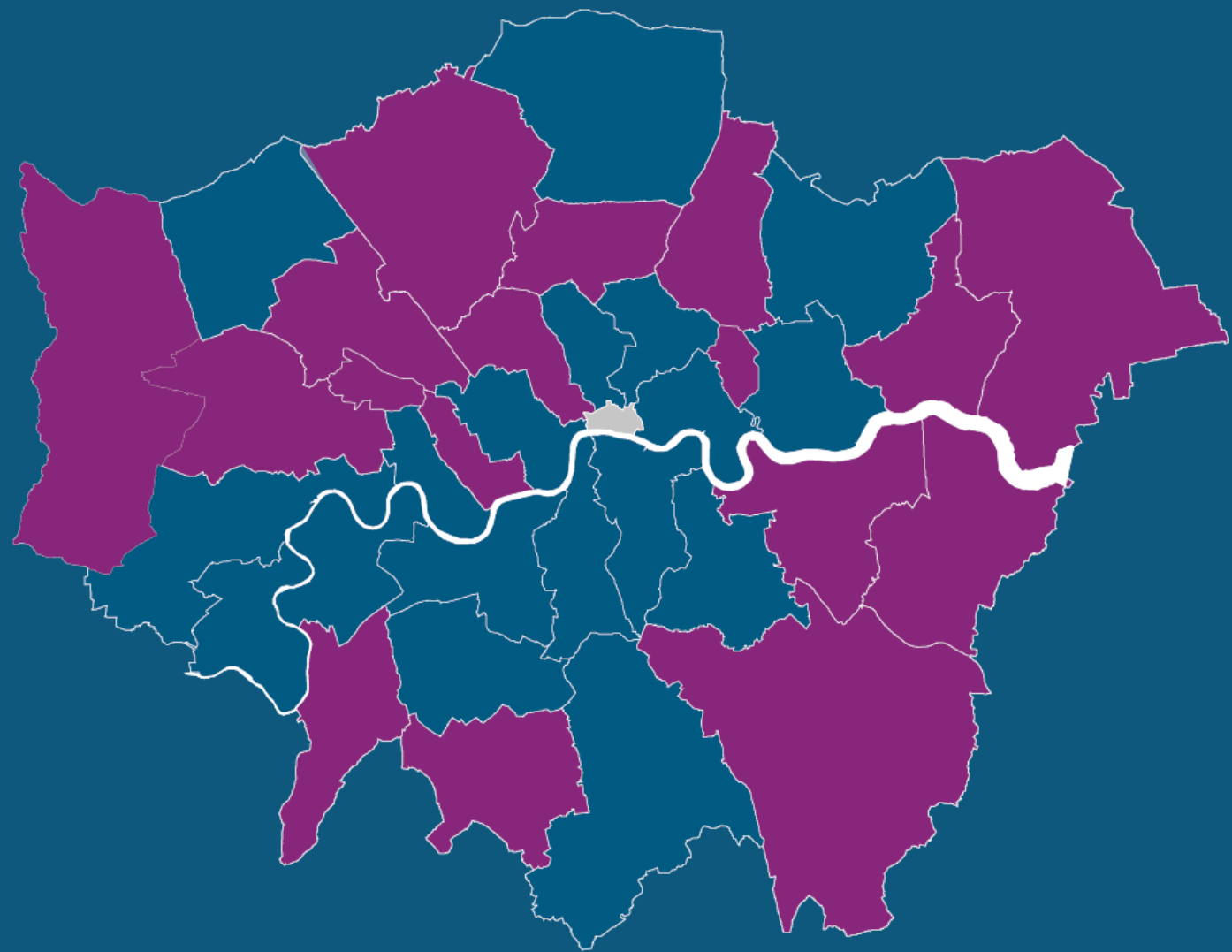
Design Review Panels across London 2024



The provision of design review panels has become nearly universal across London boroughs, with a significant increase since 2014. Last year, 91% of London boroughs had an established design review panel in place. This suggests a growing emphasis on design quality and the use of expert panels to provide independent scrutiny and guidance on development proposals within local authority areas.

- KEY
- Established Design Review Panel
 - In Development, Not Yet Operational
 - No Design Review Panel

Delivery of design review services



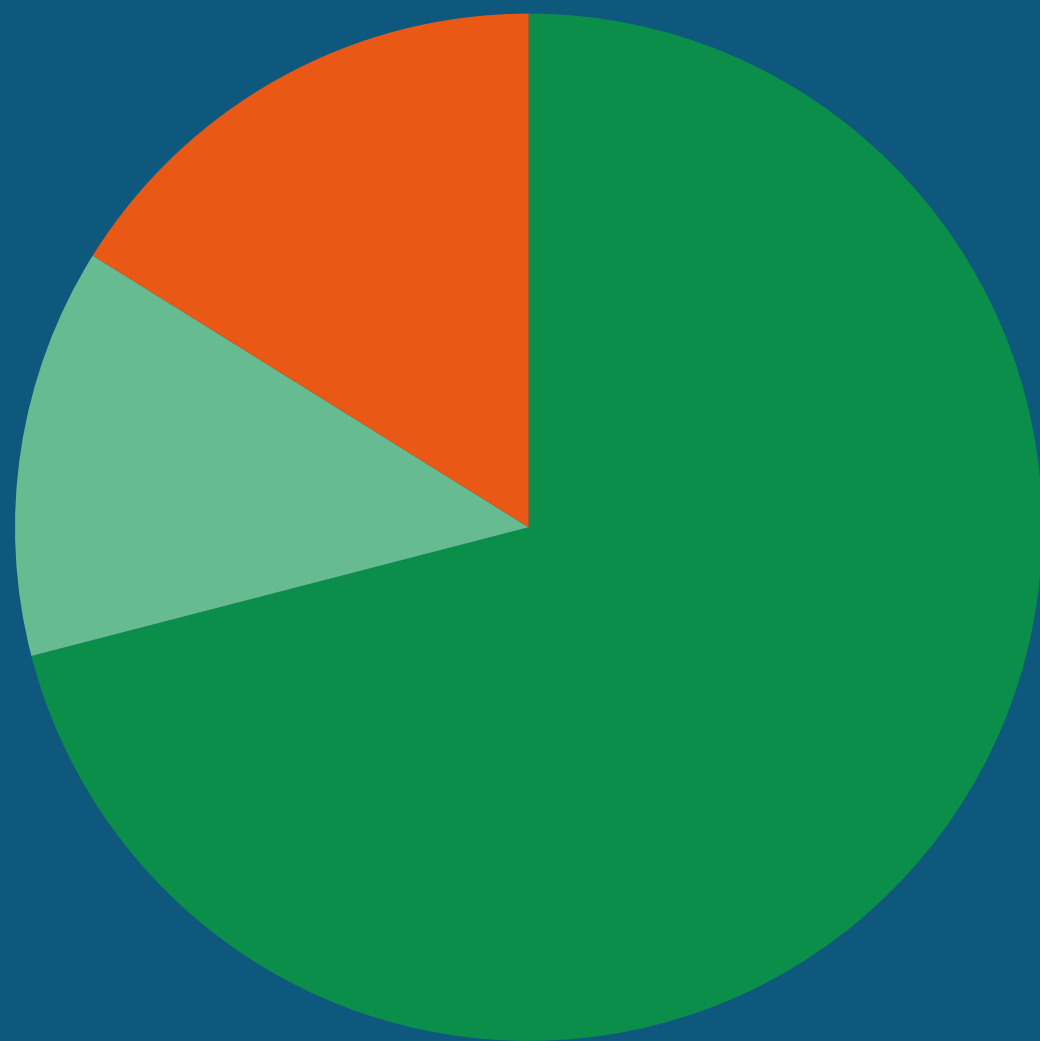
Of the 31 operational design review panels, 16 (51%) are managed in-house and 19 (61%) are managed by external providers.

KEY

- Design Review Panel Managed In-House
- Design Review Panel Managed by External Provider
- Design Review Panel in Development
- No Design Review Panel

Design Review Panels Management 2024

Is your design review panel signed up to The London Design Review Charter?

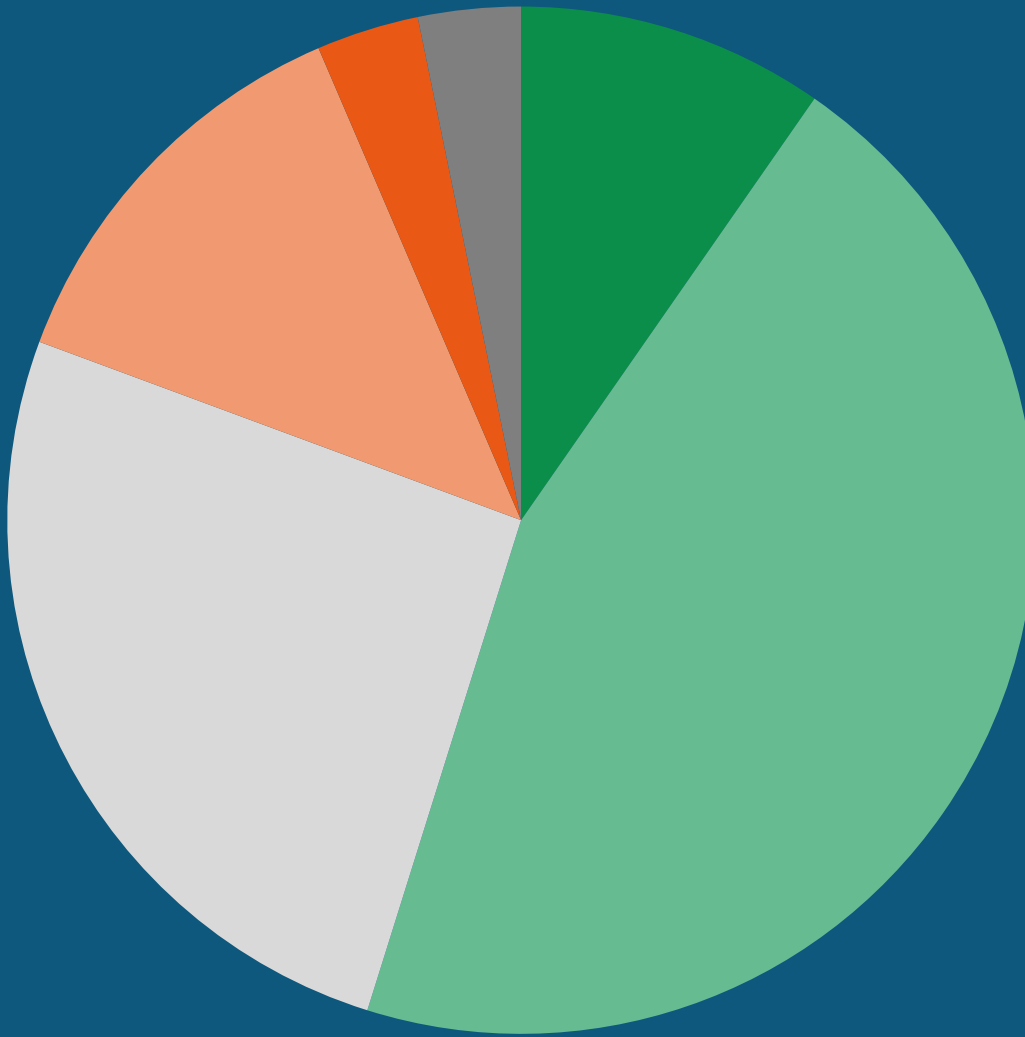


71% of existing respondents self report they are compliant with the London Design Review Charter. The charter sets out core principles for design review panels to support a high quality and consistent service across London and invites panels to sign-up to these principles.

2022 results 63% of people signed to charter.

- KEY**
- Yes and meets all principles
 - Yes, but does not meet all principles
 - No / Did not answer / No panel

Do you feel panel members are representative of the people in the area it serves?



16% of respondents report their panels are not representative of the communities they serve, 55% that their panel's are representative and 3% don't know.

KEY

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither agree/disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Don't Know

Key Challenges and Trends for Local Boroughs

Design

"Continued support required for regeneration, project delivery and development management in a context of very challenging funding landscape for Councils."

Capital Budget Pressures

Local authorities face financial challenges that impact their ability to maintain a pipeline of regeneration projects, affecting their placeshaping capacity. Funding pressures make it difficult to deliver housing, meet net-zero commitments and address financial/economic instability and climate targets.

Recruitment

"Funding for posts, our teams function well and deliver excellent results consistently; however, we are under-resourced and lack the funds to recruit more talent (which we are confident we can attract)."

"Funding, pressures for the numbers of properties may impact design"

"Significant budgetary cuts mean the ability to do Placeshaping projects will be reduced - both in terms of officer resources, but the projects themselves."

Project Delivery

"The capital budget pressures that the public sector is facing will reduce overall placeshaping capacity, due to the need to prioritise projects and outputs."

Funding

Under-Resourced

Capacity and resourcing issues, including recruitment and retention problems and lack of resources for essential tasks, compound the problem. Reduced capital budgets force authorities to prioritise projects, creating challenges in accommodating new housing and revitalising high streets. Addressing emerging needs, like temporary accommodation, further strains limited resources.

To address these issues, local authorities must increasingly rely on partnerships, requiring a shift in skillsets.

Skills Shortage

Regeneration

"local government financial pressures leading to increasing focus on statutory functions; recruitment and retention challenges (national skills shortage for some specialisms)"

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