

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS
MAKING SPACE FOR WATER

**REVIEW OF LOCAL AUTHORITY SKILLS AND
CAPACITY FOR COASTAL DEFENCE FUNCTIONS
[PROJECT HA1]**

FINAL REPORT
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1.0 Background and scope

1.1 A principal outcome of the first Government response (March 2005) to the autumn 2004 *Making space for water consultation exercise for England* was stated as follows:

“So as to facilitate an holistic approach that is risk-driven, the Government will work towards giving the Environment Agency an overarching strategic overview across all flooding and coastal erosion risks.”

1.2 This, in effect, committed the Government to reviewing the current legislative and institutional arrangements for all forms of flooding and coastal erosion risk, with the view to enabling the Environment Agency (EA) to take a strategic overview role for their management in England.

1.3 Through giving the EA a strategic overview for all flood and coastal erosion risk the Government wish to help enable the achievement of a number of objectives that it believes are important to ensure a strategic and sustainable approach to the management of risk on the coast. These originate from the overarching goals of *Making Space for Water* and DEFRA's delivery strategy encompassing effective governance principles and are outlined in Appendix 8

1.4 Since the Government confirmed this approach, local authorities, both individually and through representative bodies, have expressed concerns over alterations to current arrangements, due to fears of the impact any change may have, amongst other issues, on their ability to deliver wider council responsibilities and initiatives.

- 1.5 In contrast to this, others have voiced concerns over skill shortages within councils, and the growing pressure from within local authorities to re-prioritise resources in order to deliver other statutory responsibilities and Government targets. This re-prioritisation also has a knock-on effect on recruiting and developing new engineers, securing the skills we will need as a nation to adapt to the anticipated effects of climate change. In taking matters forward, it will be important to assess these and other concerns in developing possible models, weighing up the impact of change in both the short and long term.
- 16 To help guide an initial analysis of options, the DEFRA MSW EA Strategic Overview Project Board [HA1] (the “Project Board”) have commissioned this review of local authority skills and capacity to give a representative view of the current situation.
- 1.7 This report explains the methodology used in undertaking the review, presents the numerical results of the study (both graphically and in text), makes postulations and estimates, and discusses the outcomes of the results. It is a review, taken at a moment in time (December 2005), to give an indication of skills and capacities, and should be taken as such.
- 1.8 An interim report, essentially a first draft of the final report, was prepared immediately after the completion of the interviews, to present the initial findings of the review for the DEFRA Project Team’s comments. This final version of the report takes on board those remarks.

1.9 Terms used in the document.

Coast Protection – activity to manage the risks and consequences of coastal erosion and encroachment from the sea.

Sea Defence – activity to manage the risks and consequences of flooding from the sea.

Coastal Defence – generic term to describe the carrying out of either or both of the above activities. Where, in the report, has been particularly necessary to distinguish between the two activities, they have been stated individually.

Council Staff – any employees (incl heads of service, project managers, engineers and their technical staff, other professionals, admin, direct labour and other categories of council staff) who work for an authority on coastal defence.

Engineering Staff – project managers, engineers and their technical staff (excl heads of service, other professionals, admin, direct labour and other categories of council staff) who work for an authority on coastal defence.

[N.B. In England, with regard to coastal defence, most coastal operating authorities only carry out coast protection activities but, as can be seen from the returns in this review, a number of authorities (with low lying coastal strips) also consider that they play their part in carrying out sea defence activities.]

2.0 General methodology

- 2.1 Information for the review was obtained, by conducting telephone interviews with a senior manager (or senior engineer) from each one of a representative sample (30%) of operating authorities responsible for coastal defence activities in England.
- 2.2 Interviews were based upon a standard interview form/questionnaire (see **Appendix 2**) which was designed in consultation with the Project Board.
- 2.3 The forms were sent out to the participating authorities, together with a standard explanatory e-mail (see **Appendix 1**) a few days before each interview was carried out, in order that the interviewee could take time to prepare and gather the required information.
- 2.4 The questions on the interview form were designed to require either numerical answers or multiple choice answers, in order that the information could be analysed effectively and quantitatively. Questions inviting free comment were not used, in order to avoid the potential difficulties in interpretation often associated with that type of answer. If however, the interviewee had strong points to make, then these were recorded (and, where appropriate, information used for discussion, see Section 5), but not incorporated into the mathematical analysis. The time required to conduct each interview varied typically in the range 20 to 30 minutes.
- 2.5 The completed interview records for each authority are included in **Appendix 7**.

2.6 Telephone contact was preferred over purely postal or e-mail based questionnaires for the following reasons:

- To ensure a high degree of participation from the operating authorities.
- To acquire the data rapidly, in order to meet DEFRA's tight programme for conducting and reporting on the review.
- To ensure that the interviewees understood the aims of the review and the nature of the individual questions.
- To help ensure that the answers provided were reasonably objective and not unduly skewed by any assumptions or strong opinions held by the interviewee.

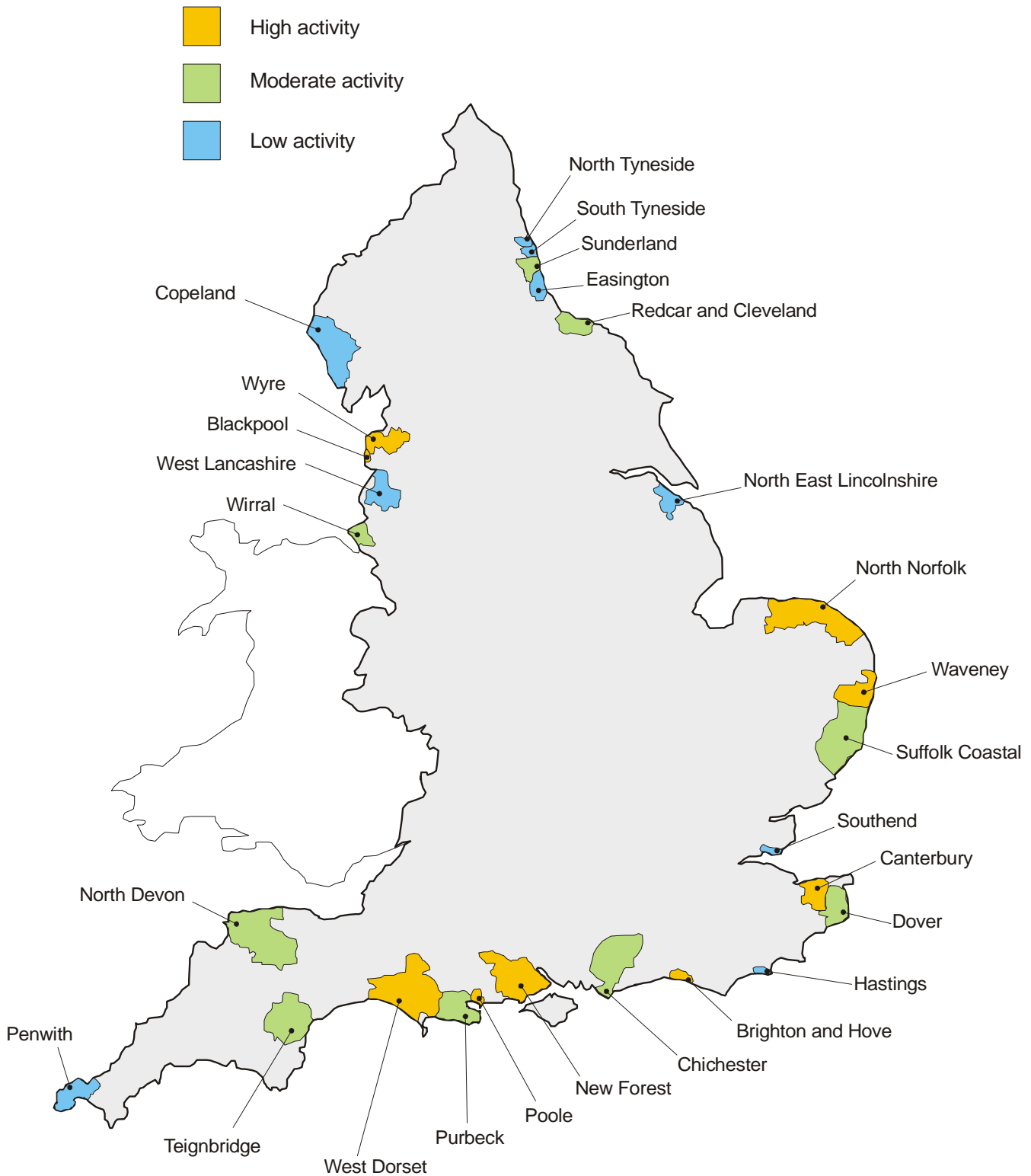
Having said that, a few authority contacts did prefer to complete the forms electronically and then returned them by e-mail.

2.7 The coastal operating authorities invited to take part in the review were chosen in collaboration with the DEFRA Regional Engineers and, it should be noted, that all of those invited for interview agreed readily to take part. A long list total of 36 authorities was first established, from the total number of 90 coastal operating authorities in England. A short list of 27 authorities was then established (6 of whom are unitary authorities), giving a representative sample size of 30%. (See **Figure 1**)

2.8 This representative coverage was achieved on the basis of having at least five operating authorities from the following geographical regions North West; North East; Anglia; South East; and South West. Within that spread, nine were considered to have high activity in terms of coastal defence, nine to have medium activity and nine to have low activity.

Figure 1

Plan showing location of local authorities taking part in the review.



2.9 The full list of participating authorities, with the level of activity and interview date for each, is given below:

North West Authorities		Activity	Interview date
1.	Blackpool BC*	High	2 nd December 2005
2.	Wyre BC	High	6 th December 2005
3.	Wirral BC	Medium	2 nd December 2005
4.	Copeland BC	Low	8 th December 2005
5.	West Lancashire DC	Low	7 th December 2005

North East Authorities		Activity	Interview date
1.	Redcar & Cleveland BC*	Medium	2 nd December 2005
2.	Sunderland CC	Medium	8 th December 2005
3.	North Tyneside MDC	Low	7 th December 2005
4.	South Tyneside MBC	Low	1 st December 2005
5.	Easington DC	Low	7 th December 2005

Anglia		Activity	Interview date
1.	North Norfolk DC	High	1 st December 2005
2.	Waveney DC	High	5 th December 2005
3.	Suffolk Coastal DC	Medium	5 th December 2005
4.	Southend-on-Sea BC*	Low	8 th December 2005
5.	NE Lincolnshire Council*	Low	2 nd December 2005

South East Authorities		Activity	Interview date
1.	New Forest DC	High	5 th December 2005
2.	Brighton & Hove CC*	High	6 th December 2005
3.	Canterbury CC	High	1 st December 2005
4.	Chichester DC	Medium	5 th December 2005
5.	Dover DC	Medium	5 th December 2005
6.	Hastings BC	Low	1 st December 2005

South West Authorities		Activity	Interview date
1.	West Dorset DC	High	6 th December 2005
2.	Poole BC*	High	6 th December 2005
3.	Purbeck DC	Medium	29 th November 2005
4.	Teignbridge DC	Medium	7 th December 2005
5.	North Devon DC	Medium	30 th November 2005
6.	Penwith DC	Low	7 th December 2005

* Unitary Authority

3.0 Rationale behind the interview questions

3.1 The interview questions were designed in order to provide information on a number of key issues. These included:

- What is the ability / capacity of maritime councils to deliver their coastal defence activities at present?
- What is the age profile of local authority engineering staff – are many engineers likely to retire in the next 5-10 years?
- Will the current arrangements be sustainable in a 10-year time frame?
- How successful have local authorities been in securing and developing new engineering staff resource?
- How much engineering services resource is currently used on coastal defence and how much on other District Council functions (such as highway maintenance etc)?
- How would these functions be affected if coastal defence responsibilities moved away from District Councils?
- What would the impact be on an authority's wider objectives (such as tourism and regeneration) if coastal defence responsibilities were moved away from councils?
- What has been the impact of similar policy changes, such as the transfer of Critical Ordinary Watercourses (COW's) on local authorities?

- 3.2 The rationale behind each of the individual questions on the interview form is given in the following sections, for which reference should be made to the blank interview form in **Appendix 2**. Sections 1 to 3 give factual information on staff numbers, roles, ages etc., whereas Section 4 through to Section 12 involves a degree of opinion from the interviewee.
- 3.3 The table in **Section 1** records the numbers and roles of staff within the operating authority who are engaged in coastal defence work, together with the percentage of staff time spent on the different engineering services functions of the authority in addition to coast protection and sea defence. The boxes for year of appointment and age range of each staff member have been included to allow the calculation of demographic information.
- 3.4 **Section 2** records the number of engineering services staff who are not engaged in coast protection or sea defence, so that the percentage of staff working on coastal defence in terms of total engineering services personnel may be determined.
- 3.5 **Section 3** records the number of engineering services staff, in terms of full time equivalent posts, that carry out work for other authorities/clients on a consultancy basis. For example, work as a water company sewerage agency or as a highway agency.
- 3.6 **Section 4** gathers information from the local authority contact (“the interviewee”) on their view of the overall impact on the operating authority of responsibility for COW’s transferring to the Environment Agency. Any resulting imbalance in staff numbers in relation to workload is also recorded, either as a surplus of full time equivalent posts (for example, due to the reduced workload) or as a deficit (for example, due to staff cuts as a result of the transfer).

- 3.7 **Section 5** gives the interviewee's estimate of the number of staff that would transfer under Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE) in the event that the responsibility for delivery of coastal defence work passed to another authority or body.
- 3.8 **Section 6** invites the interviewee to consider how successful their authority has been in securing and developing engineering staff, *in the past*, that is over the last 10 years.
- 3.9 **Section 7** asks the interviewee for an opinion about the adequacy of the authority's *current* staff resources engaged in coastal defence.
- 3.10 **Section 8** records the interviewee's degree of confidence about securing and developing engineering staff *in the future*.
- 3.11 **Section 9** gives the interviewee's estimates of the *impact on the authority's wider responsibilities* if it were to lose the ability to promote centrally funded coastal defence measures, including:
- Other engineering objectives (for example land drainage measures).
 - A variety of non-engineering responsibilities.
 - Overall ability to deliver objectives other than coastal defence.
- 3.12 **Section 10** considers the interviewee's opinion of the *impact on coast protection and sea defence* of a reduced role in the authority's delivery responsibility, over a range of indicators.
- 3.13 **Section 11** records the interviewee's opinion of the level of activity (High, Moderate or Low) of the authority in terms of both new schemes and operations and maintenance. This is to confirm that the interviews have

been conducted over a representative range of council activity levels and gauges the interviewee's opinion of that authority's activity level.

3.14 **Section 12** gives information on the level of engagement that the interviewee considers coastal defence staff have with planners in the same authority, in terms of implementing new schemes and shoreline management plans. For example, in taking account of the recommendations of a shoreline management plan in planning policy.

4.0 Results and analysis

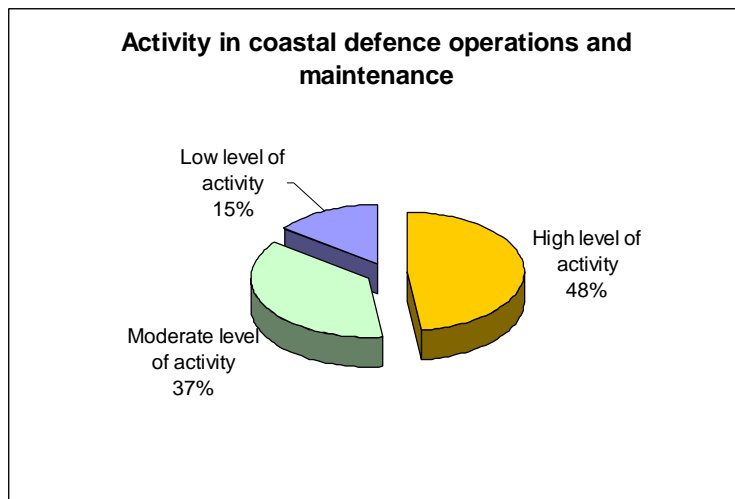
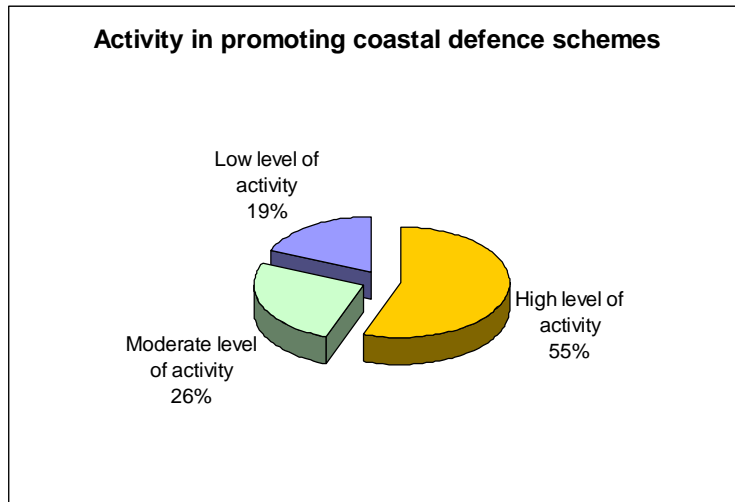
4.1 The results of all the interviews are summarised in the analysis spreadsheets in **Appendices, 3, 4, 5 & 6.**

4.2 The following paragraphs give a summary of the main findings of the review, with brief comments on the data. Commentary on the significance of the findings is given in Section 5 Discussion.

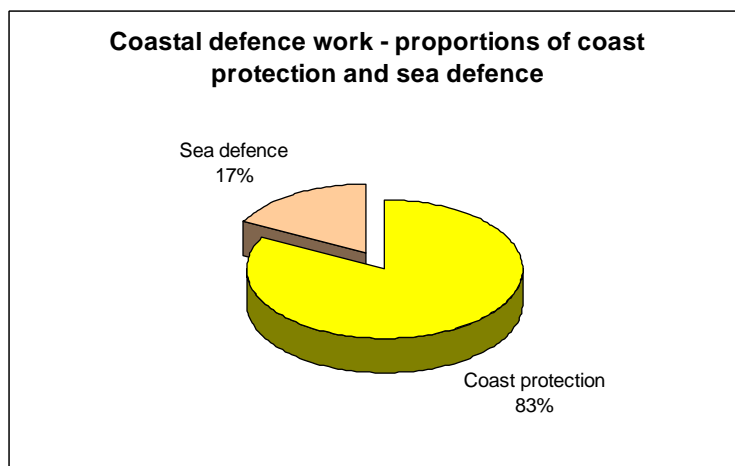
4.3 *Review statistics*

4.3.1 A total number of 27 local councils were interviewed representing 30% of the 90 operating authorities in England. The review covered a total number of 232 staff working on coastal defence in those authorities, of which 128 (55%) were within engineering disciplines.

4.3.2 The relative activity of the operating authorities in terms of coast protection and sea defence (coastal defence) are given in the charts below. These are based on the views of those LA reps interviewed and, as such, indicate that the review covered a reasonably even spread of councils in terms of activity.

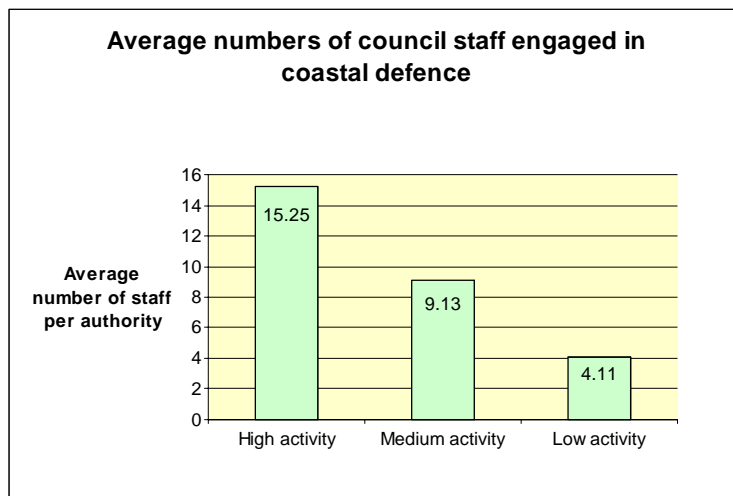


4.3.3 Overall, a relatively small proportion of the coastal defence workload was taken up by sea defence activities, as indicated in the chart below:

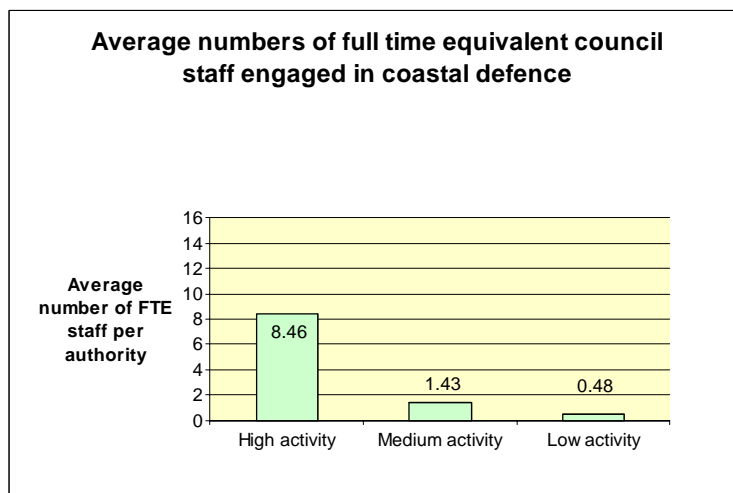


4.4 **Local authority staff engaged in coastal defence.**

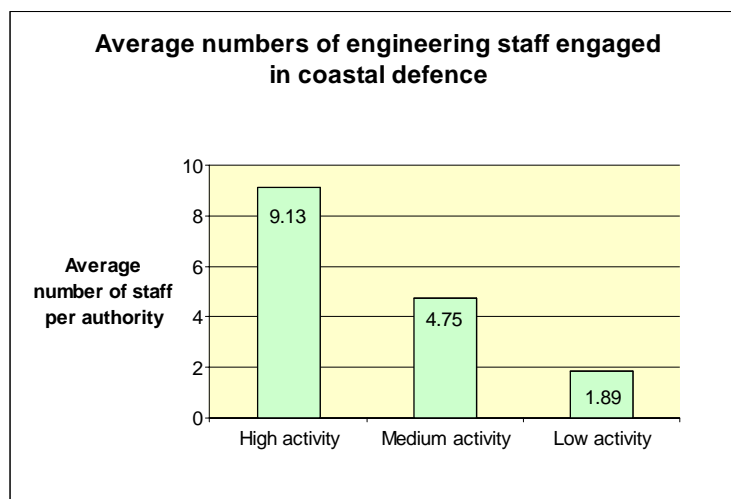
4.4.1 The average number of council staff engaged in coastal defence work in each local authority was 8.9. As might be expected, there was a contrast in staffing levels between councils of high, moderate and low activity.



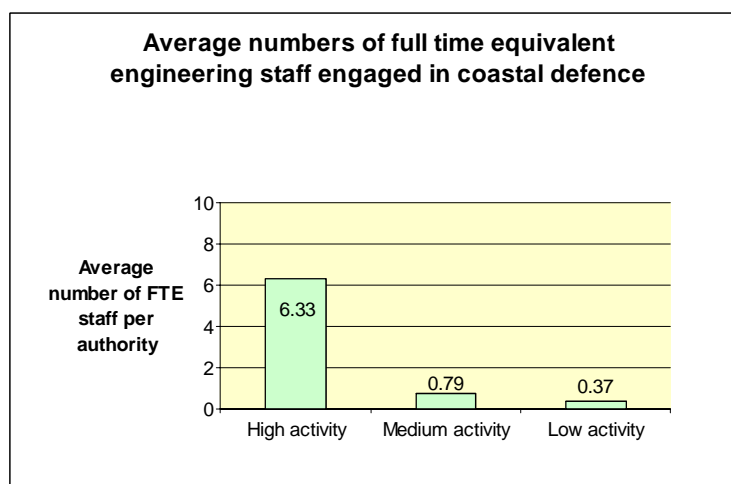
4.4.2 The numbers of full time equivalent council staff engaged in coastal defence work were very much lower than the total numbers of staff, particularly for authorities of moderate and low activity. This indicates that many staff (e.g. legal officers) only spend a small fraction of their time on coastal defence matters. The overall average number of full time equivalent staff engaged in coastal defence was 3.2.



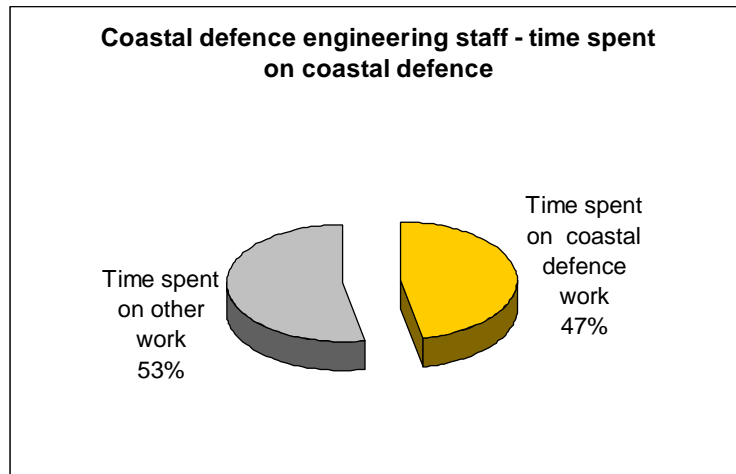
4.4.3 Definition; as explained in the Introduction, for the purposes of the analysis, “engineering staff” were taken to comprise the project managers, engineers, and other technical staff and excluded the heads of service, admin and other categories (see Questionnaire returns). The average number of engineering staff engaged in coastal defence work was 4.9 per authority.



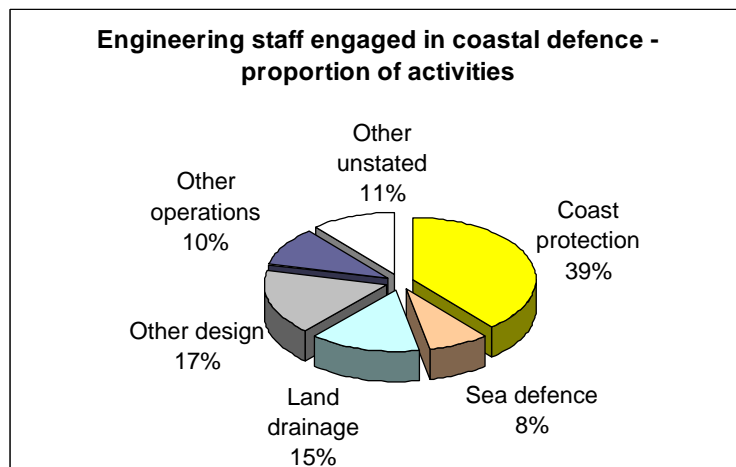
4.4.4 Again, the full time equivalent numbers are very much less than the totals, particularly for councils of moderate and low activity. The overall average full time equivalent number of engineering staff engaged in coastal defence was 2.3 per authority.



4.4.5 Essentially, many of the engineering staff were employed on other duties in addition to coastal defence work, which meant that the number of full time equivalent posts working on coastal defence was less than half the total number of engineering staff working on coastal defence.



4.4.6 A more detailed breakdown of the proportion of full time equivalent engineering staff engaged in coast protection, sea defence and other responsibilities is given below:



4.4.7 Coastal defence activity may also be subdivided on the basis of capital works, as opposed to maintenance operations or studies. To make an estimate of the number of full time equivalent engineering posts engaged in capital works, it was postulated (using Defra's data on recent capital projects) that those councils in the sample that had a “high” or “medium”

level of coastal defence activity were engaged on capital schemes, and that those with “low” activity were not. The review has determined (from its spread of councils) that the average full time equivalent engineering staff from the high activity councils was 6.33, from the moderate activity councils was 0.79 and that from the low activity councils was 0.37 (section 4.4.4).

4.4.8 Aggregating up to get a national perspective. The review statistics show that there is, generally, a close correspondence (50/50) within each high activity council between level of activity on schemes and level of activity on operations/maintenance. It may, therefore, be assumed that half of the engineering staff time in those councils would be engaged on schemes (capital) and half on operations/maintenance (revenue). It has been postulated that for moderate activity councils a smaller correspondence for capital/revenue (25/75) is probably realistic and, as stated above, for low activity councils the capital element is likely to be nil (0/100). The total number of full time equivalent engineering posts engaged on coastal defence capital and revenue in the 90 coastal authorities in England (see **Table 2** which follows), may then be postulated as shown immediately below (in **Table 1**):

TABLE 1

	Average full time equivalent (FTE) engineering staff (section 4.4.4)	Number of councils nationally (Table 1)	Proportion of time (%) engaged on capital/revenue	Estimated full time equivalent engineering staff engaged on capital	Estimated full time equivalent engineering staff engaged on revenue
High Activity Council	6.33	18	50/50	57	57
Mod Activity Council	0.79	25	25/75	5	15
Low Activity Council	0.37	47	0/100	0	17
TOTALS		90	-	62	89

AGGREGATING UP TO PRODUCE NATIONAL FTE ESTIMATES (ENGLAND)

TABLE 2

***POSTULATED ACTIVITY LEVELS OF COAST PROTECTION AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND**

[Running clockwise around the English coastline, starting from NW (Liverpool Bay), via Straits of Dover, to SW (Severn Estuary)]

COAST PROTECTION AUTHORITY	ACTIVITY Cap	Rev	COAST PROTECTION AUTHORITY	ACTIVITY Cap	Rev
<i>START at Liverpool Bay</i>			<i>Though Straits of Dover</i>		
Wirral	M	H	Shepway	H	M
Sefton	H	H	Rother	L	L
West Lancashire	L	M	Hastings	L	M
Fylde	L	L	Eastbourne	L	L
Blackpool	H	H	Wealden	L	L
Wyre	H	H	Lewes	L	L
Lancaster	H	H	Brighton & Hove	H	H
South Lakeland	L	L	Adur	L	L
Barrow	M	M	Worthing	M	M
Copeland	L	M	Arun	M	M
Allerdale	L	L	Chichester	M	H
Carlisle	L	L	Havant	M	M
<i>NW to NE along Scottish Border</i>			Portsmouth	M	M
Berwick-upon-Tweed	M	M	Gosport	L	L
Alnwick	L	L	Fareham	L	L
Castle Morpeth	L	L	Eastleigh	L	L
Wansbeck	H	M	Southampton	L	L
Blyth Valley	L	L	<i>Through The Solent</i>		
North Tyneside	L	M	Isle of Wight	H	M
South Tyneside	L	L	New Forest	H	H
Sunderland	M	M	Christchurch	M	M
Easington	L	M	Bournemouth	H	H
Hartlepool	M	M	Poole	H	H
Redcar and Cleveland	M	M	Purbeck	M	M
Scarborough	H	H	Weymouth and Portland	M	M
East Riding of Yorkshire	H	M	<i>Round Portland Bill</i>		
Kingston-upon-Hull	L	L	West Dorset	H	H
NE Lincolnshire	L	M	East Devon	M	M
East Lindsey	L	L	Teignbridge	M	H
# Boston	L	L	Torbay	M	L
# South Holland	L	L	South Hams	L	L
<i>Across The Wash</i>			Plymouth	L	L
Kings Lynn & W Norfolk	M	L	Caradon	M	M
North Norfolk	H	H	Restormel	L	L
Great Yarmouth	M	L	Carrick	L	L
Waveney	H	H	Kerrier	M	M
Suffolk Coastal	M	H	Penwith	L	L
Tendring	H	M	<i>Round Lands End</i>		
Colchester	L	L	Isles of Scilly	L	L
Maldon	L	L	North Cornwall	L	L
Rochford	L	L	Torridge	L	L
Southend-on-Sea	L	L	North Devon	M	L
<i>Across Thames Estuary</i>			West Somerset	L	L
Medway Towns	L	L	Sedgemoor	L	L
Swale	L	L	North Somerset	M	M
Canterbury	H	H	City of Bristol	L	L
Thanet	L	L	Forest of Dean	L	L
Dover	M	M	Stroud	L	L
<i>Though Straits of Dover</i>			<i>END at Severn Estuary</i>		

*H = High Activity

*M = Mod Activity

*L = Low or Nil Activity

- Capital 18 No = 20%
- Capital 25 No = 28%
- °Capital 47 No = 52%

Revenue 17 No = 19%
Revenue 28 No = 31%
Revenue 45 No = 50%

TOTAL English CPAs = 90 No*

* Postulated from information provided by Defra and CPAs.

° It is probable that L (Low) activity councils actually have Nil activity on capital works.

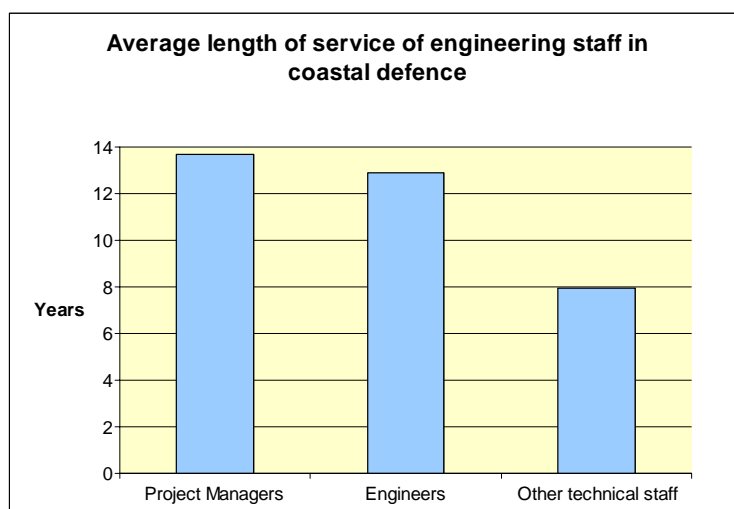
May only be sea defence activity, but included as a CPA for continuity of coastal run.

4.4.9 There was a contrast between the District Councils, which tended to have relatively small engineering departments, and the Unitary, Borough and Metropolitan Councils, which had a much larger engineering staff engaged on other engineering duties and, hence, a smaller proportion of their whole working on coastal defence.

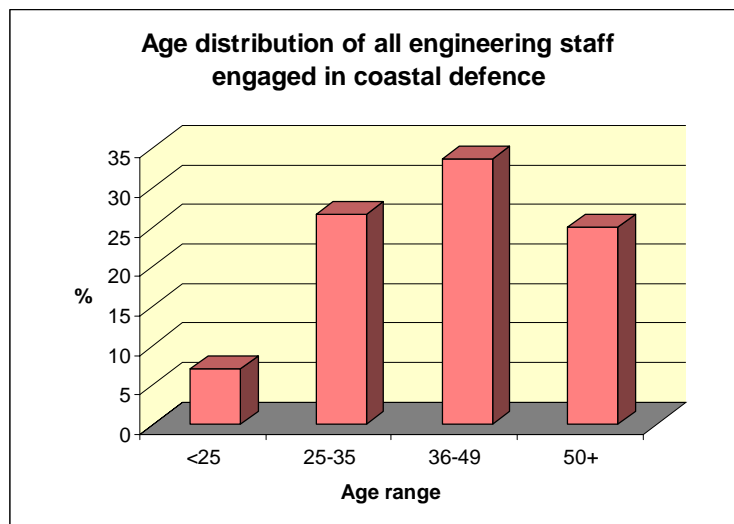
4.4.10 For the District Councils, the overall percentage of engineering staff working in coastal defence was relatively high, with 80% of District Councils having more than half their engineering staff involved in coastal defence. However, the overall amount of time that was spent by District Council coastal defence engineers on coastal defence was 47%. In other words, a large proportion of District Council engineering staff are involved in coastal defence work, but this takes up less than half of their overall workload.

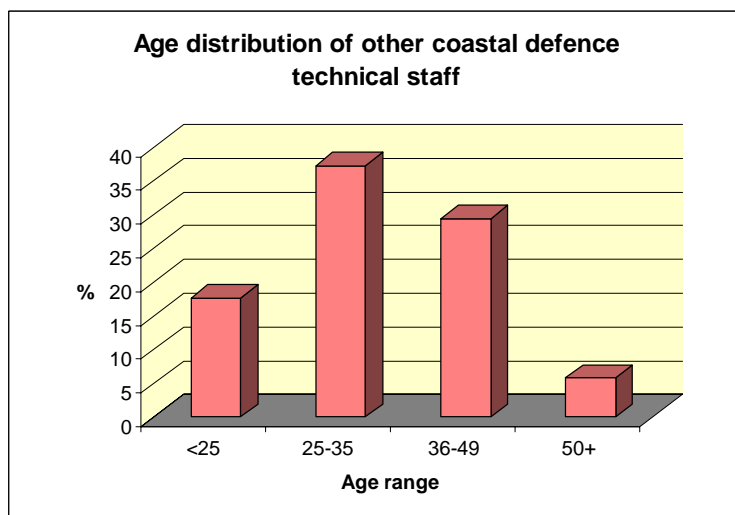
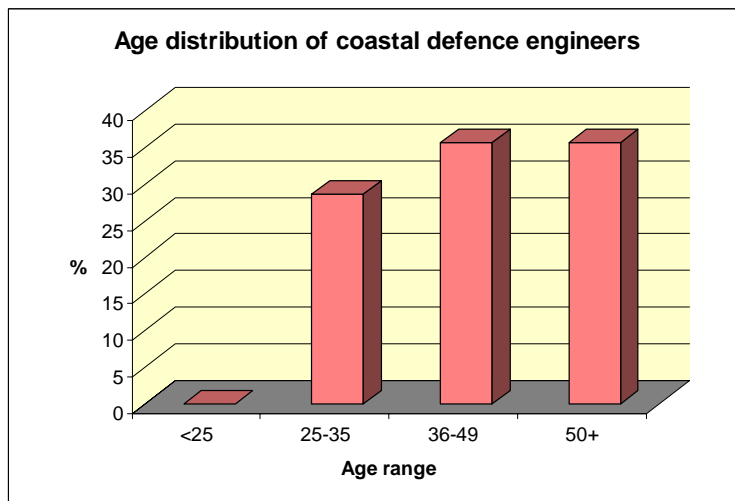
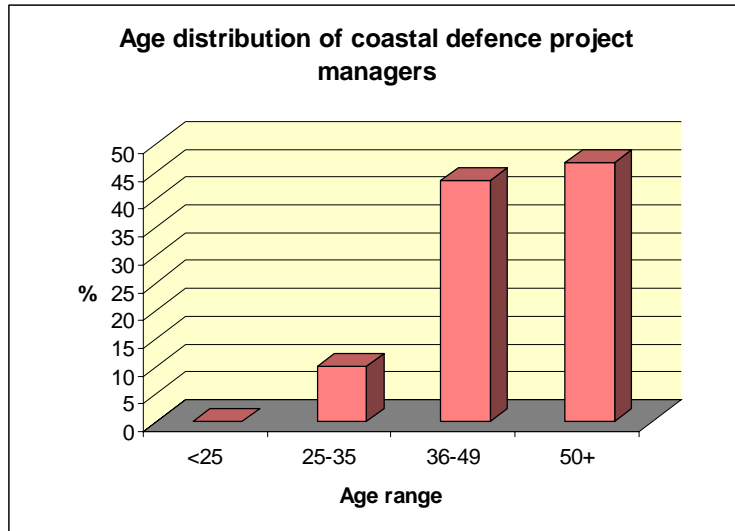
4.4.11 The overall proportion of engineering staff working in coastal defence in the review authorities, as opposed to other engineering activities, was 19%.

4.4.12 It was notable that many of the engineering staff had long service records, with the average length of service for project managers and engineers being 14 and 13 years respectively.



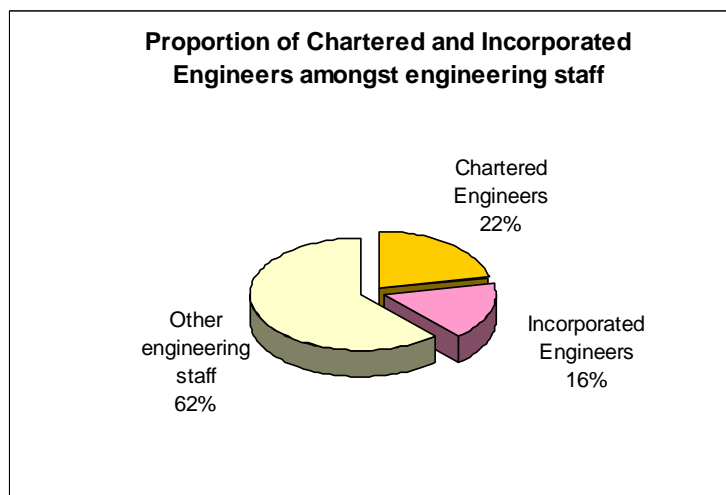
4.4.13 Overall, the age distributions of engineering staff were fairly evenly spread amongst the age ranges, except that there were notably few engineering staff below the age of 25. As might be expected, ages in the more senior “project manager” category were skewed towards the older age ranges.





4.4.14 About a third of the operating authorities had engineering staff which carried out work for other authorities on a consultancy basis. One SE authority was notable in this respect, with 13 of their 15 coastal defence engineering staff carrying out work for other authorities. Overall, however, 18% of engineering staff resource at those operating authorities interviewed was engaged in work for other authorities

4.4.15 The proportions of engineering staff who were either Chartered Engineers or Incorporated Engineers are illustrated in the graph below. No particular trend between councils of different activity levels was apparent.

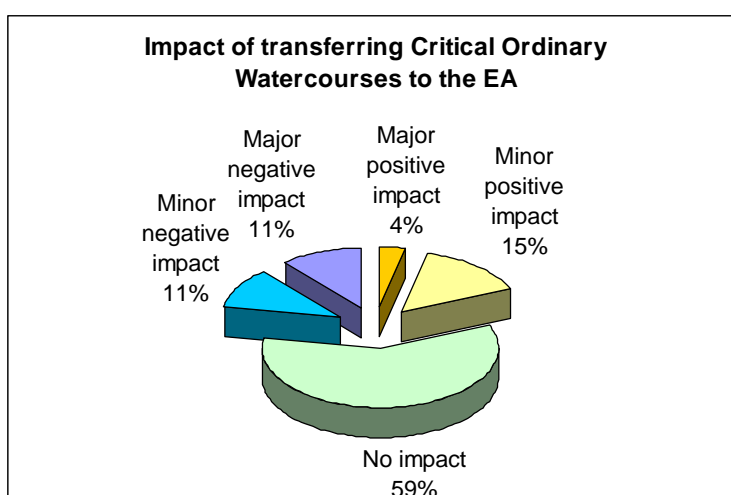


4.4.16 Administrative staff and staff of other disciplines, such as legal services and finance, generally made up a very small proportion of the total number of full time equivalent posts working in coastal defence. However, it is clear that a large number of staff from these disciplines are necessarily engaged, as and when required, on coastal defence work.

4.4.17 Similarly, the overall proportion of their time spent by heads of service on coastal defence was only 2%, but in terms of executive supervision and overview it appears to be a necessary and important input for most organisations, as has been revealed.

4.5 ***Impact of transferring Critical Ordinary Watercourses to the Environment Agency.***

4.5.1 The transfer of Critical Ordinary Watercourses to the EA gave a fairly even spread of opinion on the positive and negative effects, and the majority of authorities felt that there had been no impact.

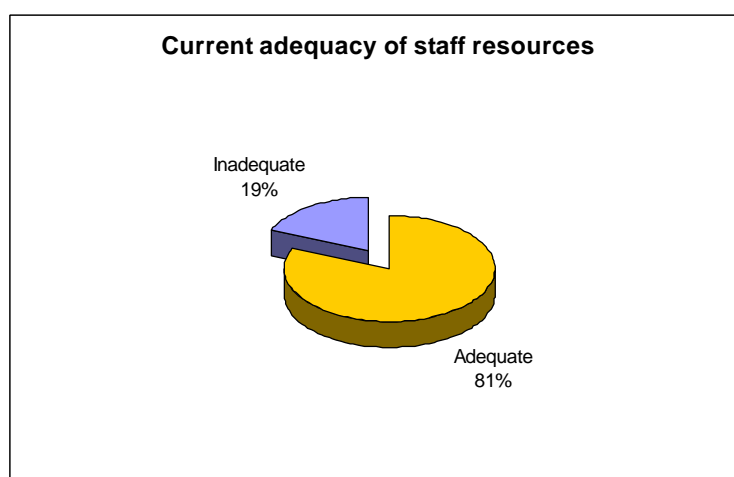
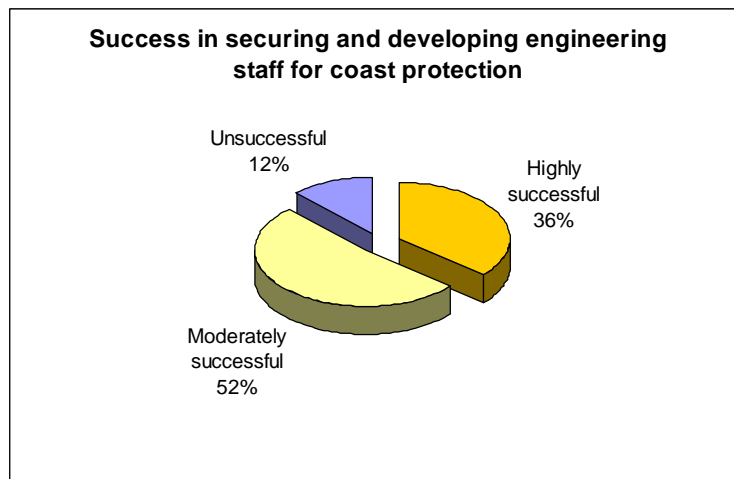


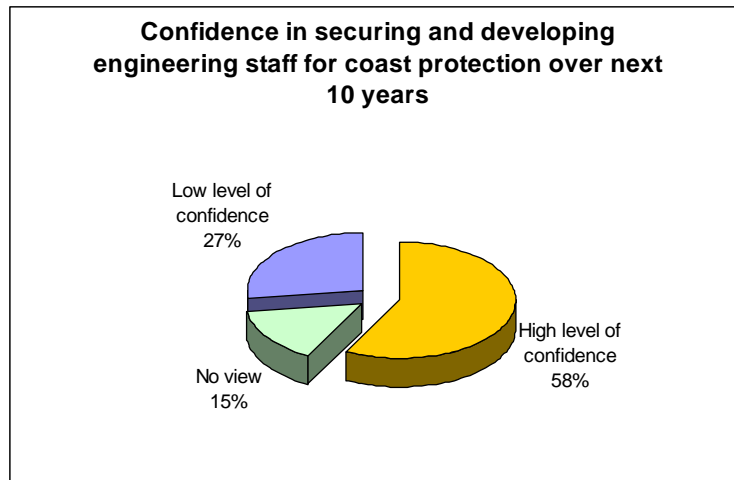
4.6 ***Estimated number of staff that would transfer under TUPE if responsibility for delivery of coastal defence work passed to another authority.***

4.6.1 The interviewees estimated that the number of council staff that would transfer under TUPE (assumes these staff spend over 50% of their time on coastal defence), was 75 across the participating authorities, an average of 2.8 staff per authority. This represents nearly 90% of the full time equivalent council staff engaged in coastal defence at those representative authorities..

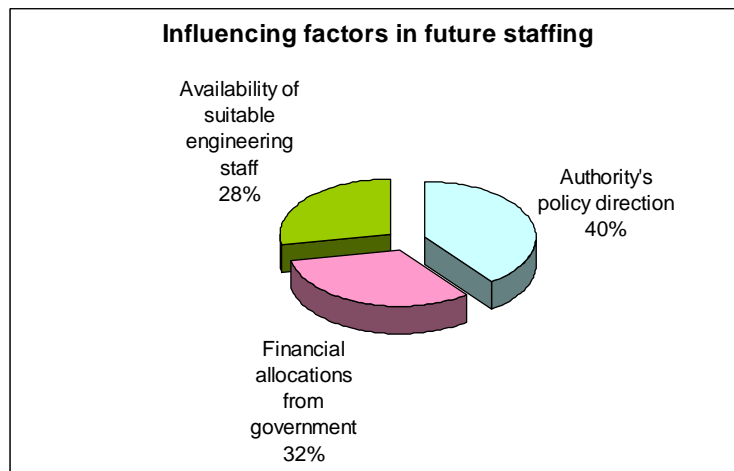
4.7 ***Adequacy of engineering staff in the past, present and future.***

4.7.1 A high proportion of respondents, 88%, felt that they had been successful in securing and developing engineering staff over the last 10 years, and 81% of authorities considered that they had adequate staff resources at present. There was slightly less confidence in the future, with only 58% of authorities having a high level of confidence that they would be able to secure and develop adequate staff over the next 10 years.

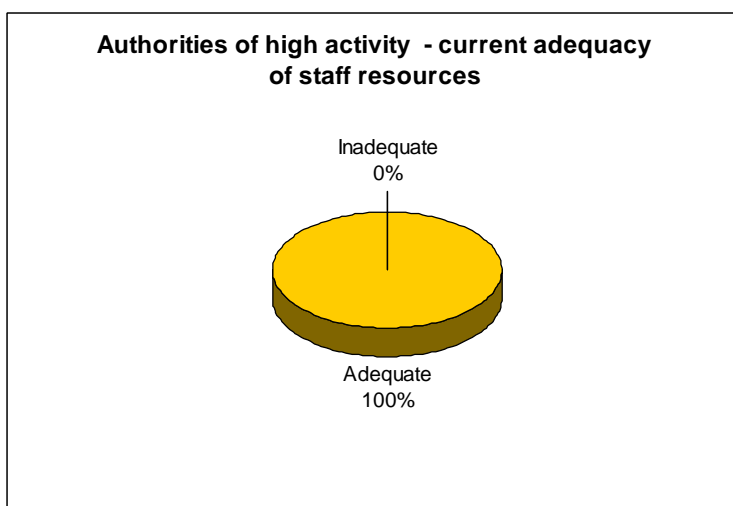
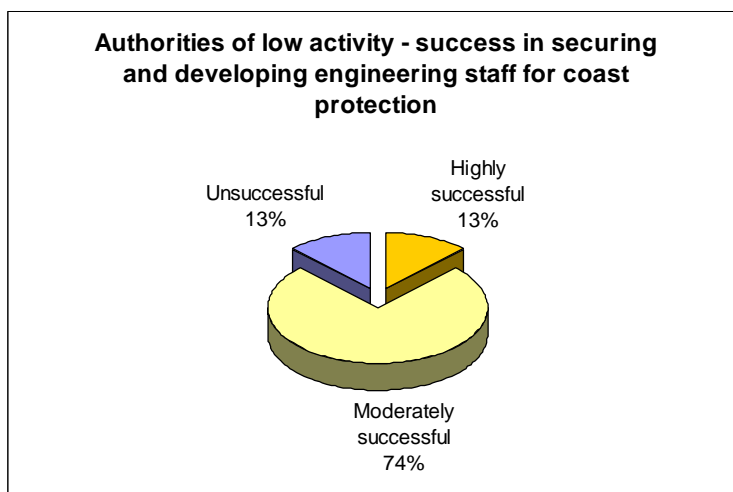
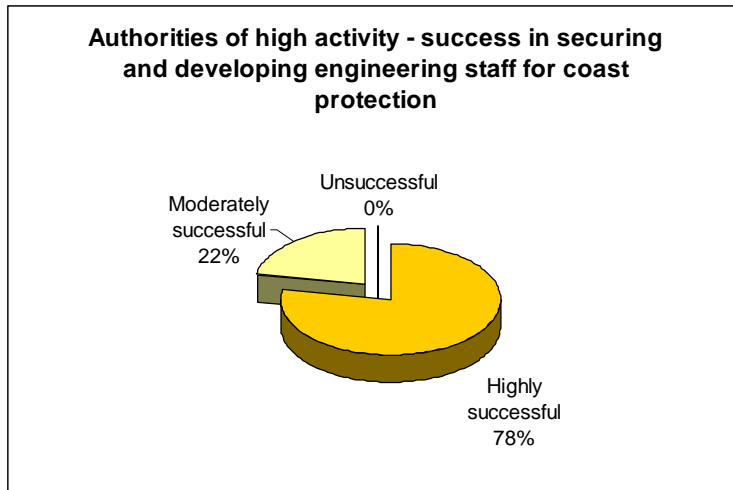


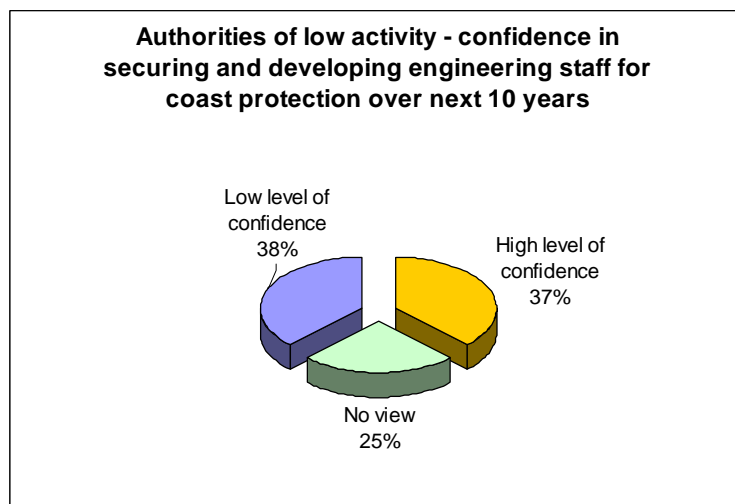
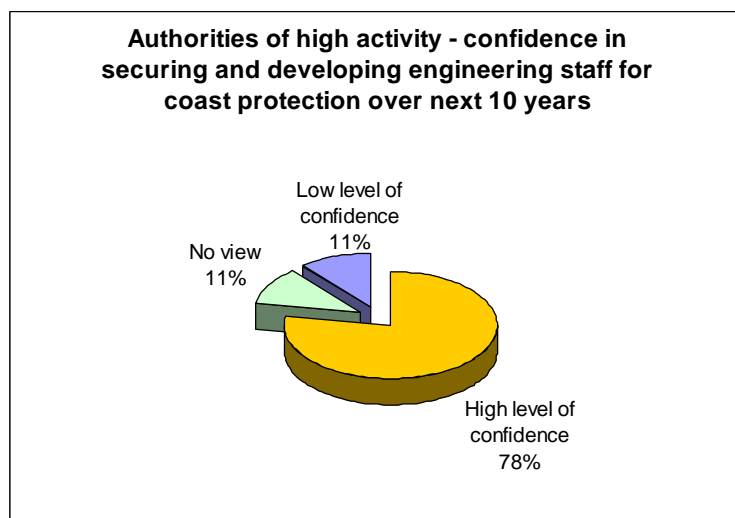
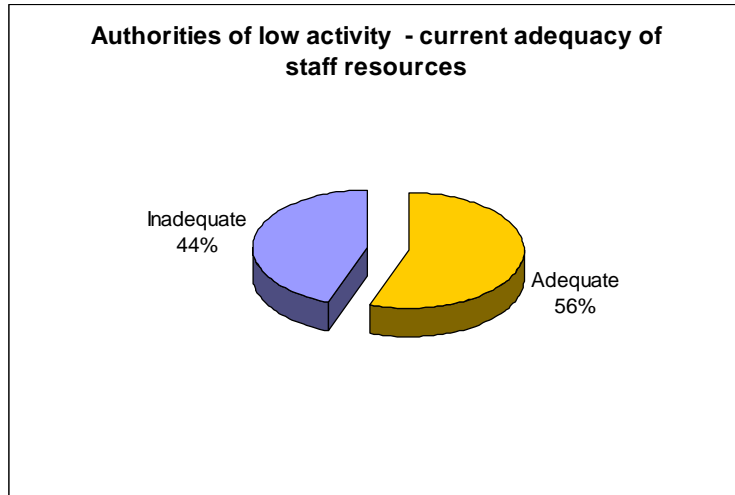


4.7.2 There was an even spread of opinion on the relative importance of influencing factors (availability of suitable staff, local authorities' policy direction, finance allocation from government) with regard to future staffing, as illustrated in the chart below.



4.7.3 Marked differences in the responses on staffing were apparent from councils of high activity level compared with those of low activity level, with moderately active councils giving opinions intermediate between those of the high and low activity councils:

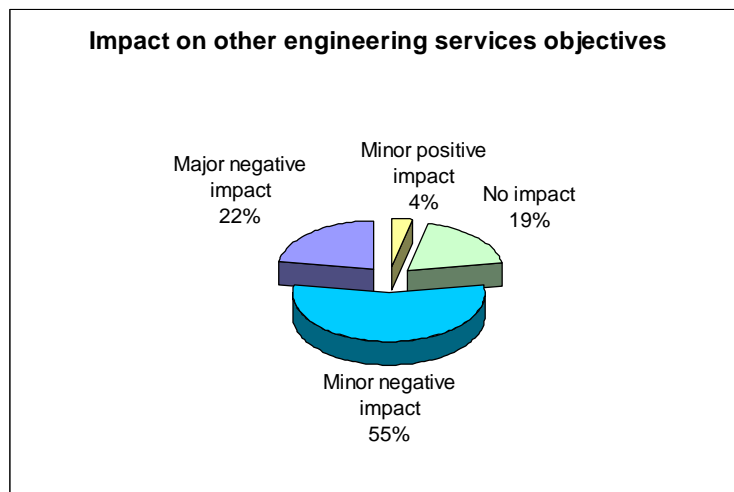




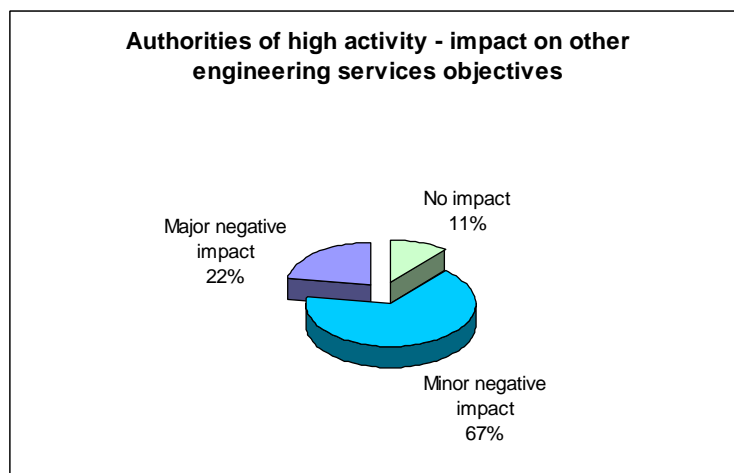
4.8 Impact on authorities' wider responsibilities if they were to lose the ability to promote centrally funded coastal defence measures.

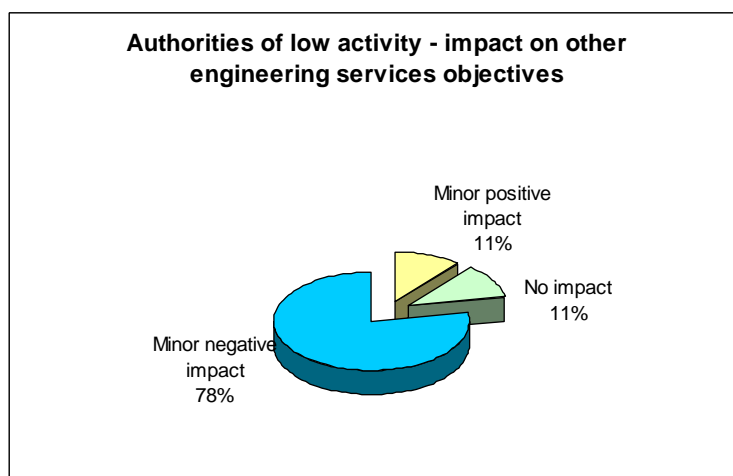
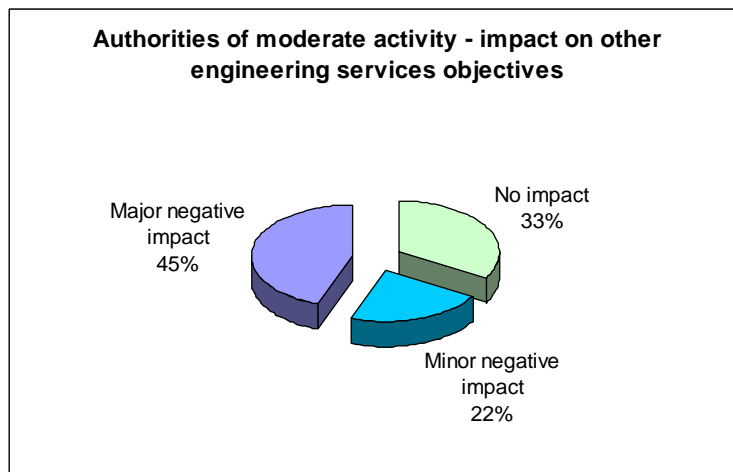
4.8.1 Interviewees were asked for their opinion of the impact of losing the ability to promote centrally funded coastal defence measures would have on a range of their authority's wider responsibilities.

4.8.2 In terms of the authorities' *engineering services* activities other than coastal defence, 77% of participants considered that there would be a negative impact, and 19% no impact. Only one authority, representing 4% of the sample, thought that there would be a positive impact.

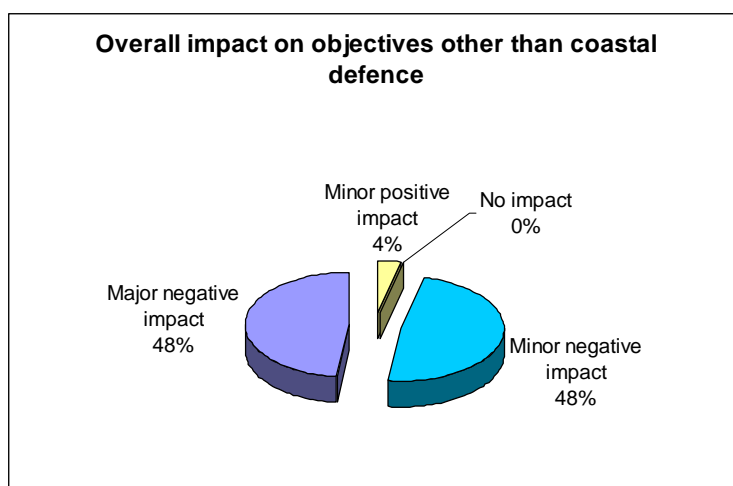


4.8.3 As might be expected, the high and moderate activity councils tended to have a more negative opinion of the possible impact on other engineering services objectives than the low activity councils:

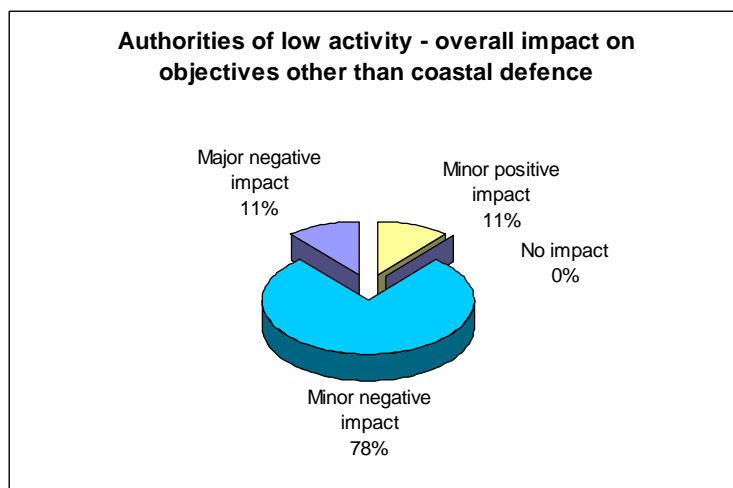
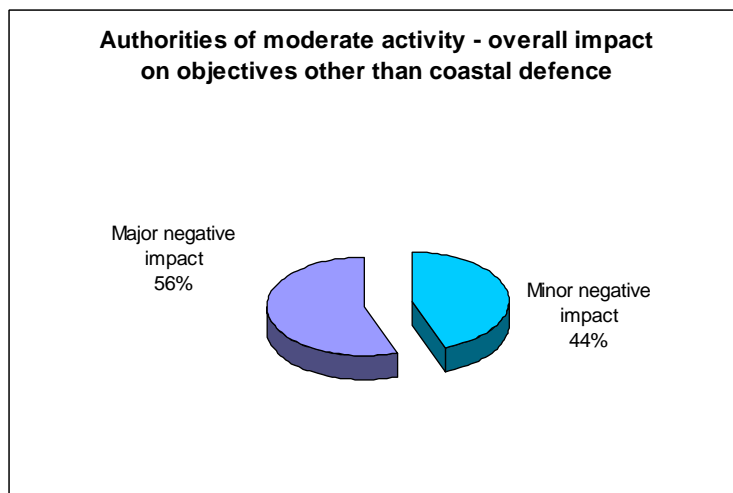
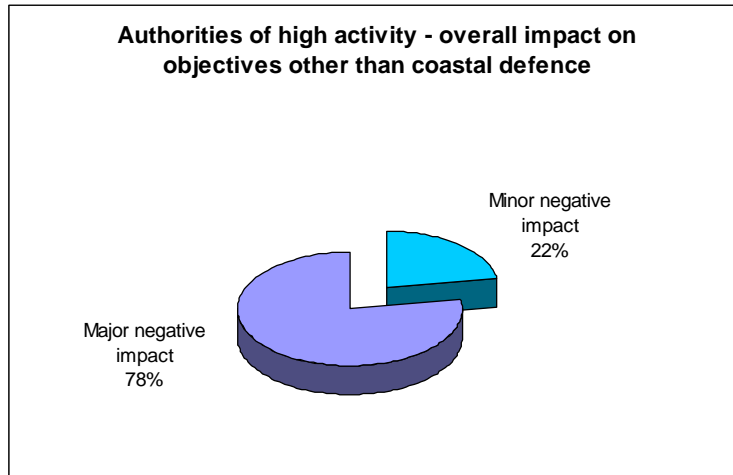




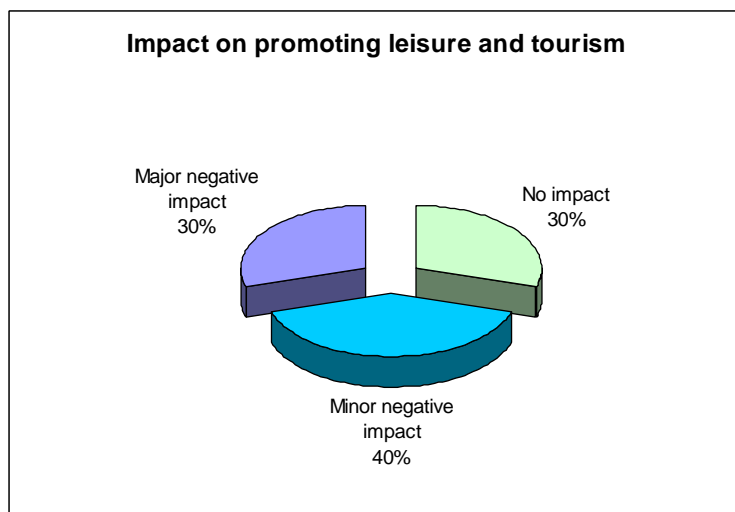
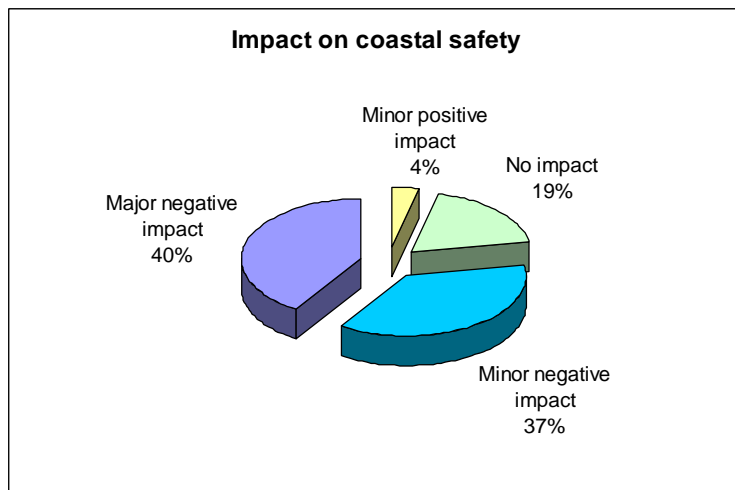
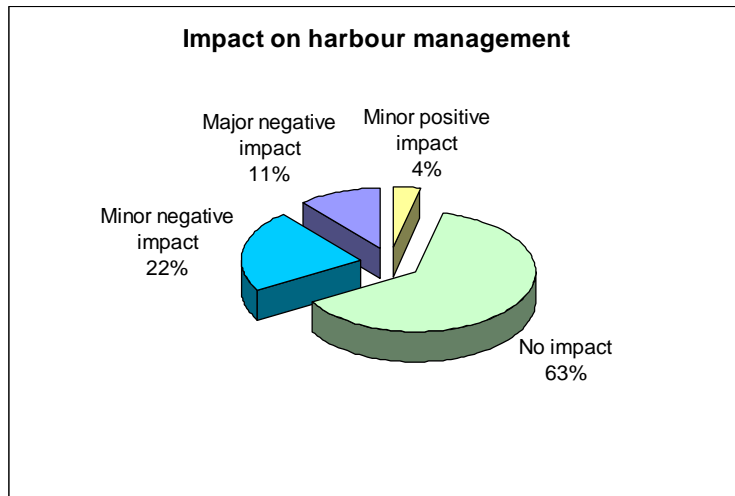
4.8.4 The overall view of the impact of the possible change to reduce the wider coastal defence responsibilities generally was largely negative, with 48% of authorities considering that there would be a minor negative impact and 48% a major negative impact. Again, only one authority felt that there would be a positive impact.

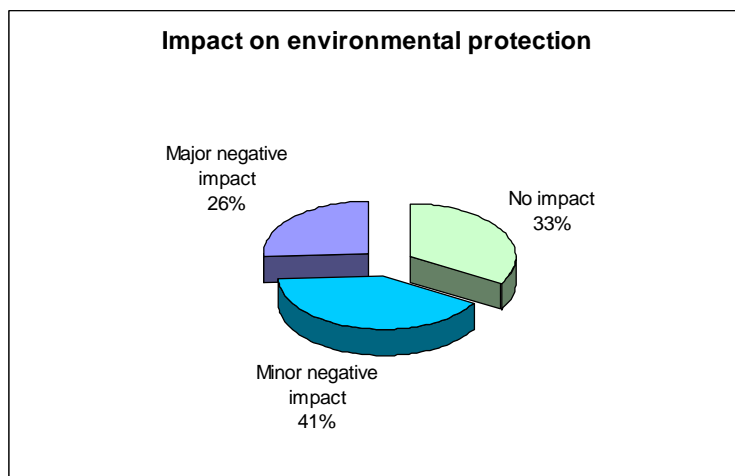
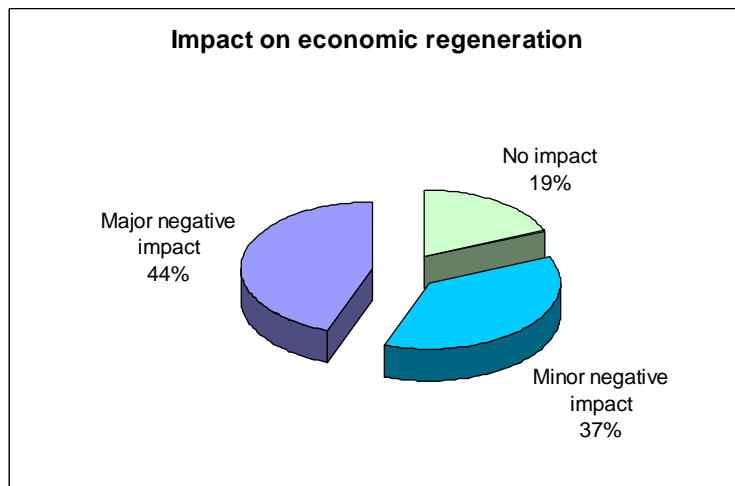
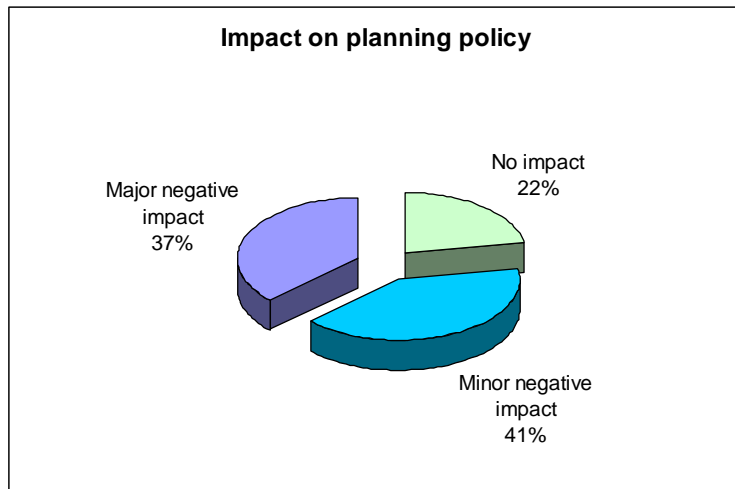


4.8.5 There was, again, a trend of the high activity authorities having a more negative opinion than the low activity authorities:



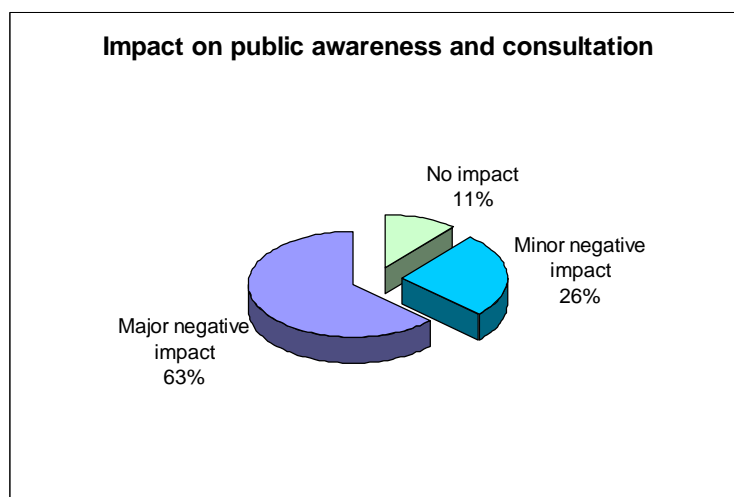
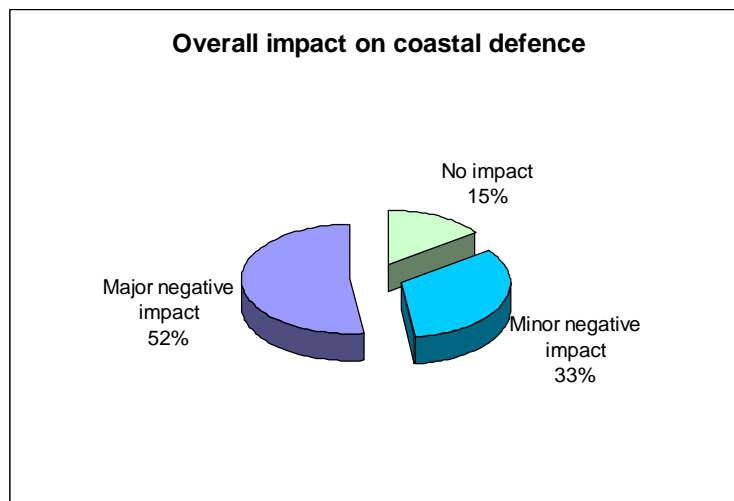
4.8.6 The overall opinion on a range of objectives other than coastal defence is given in the charts below:

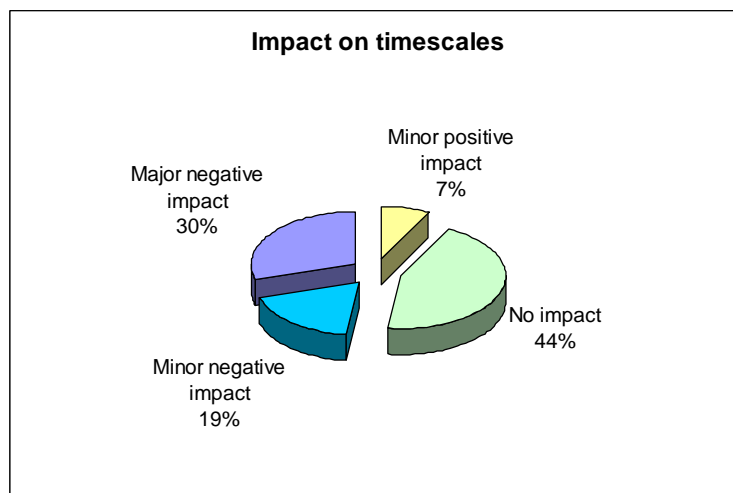
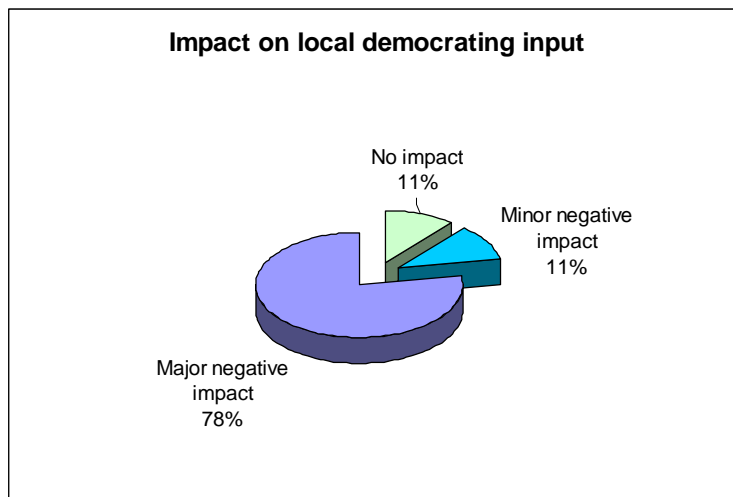
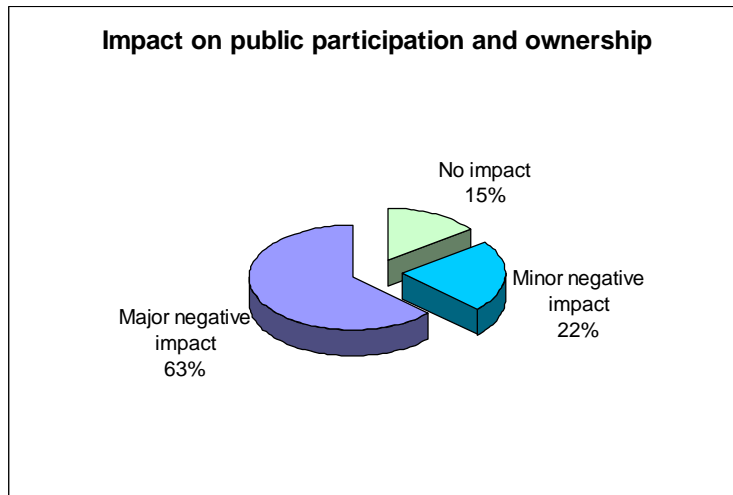


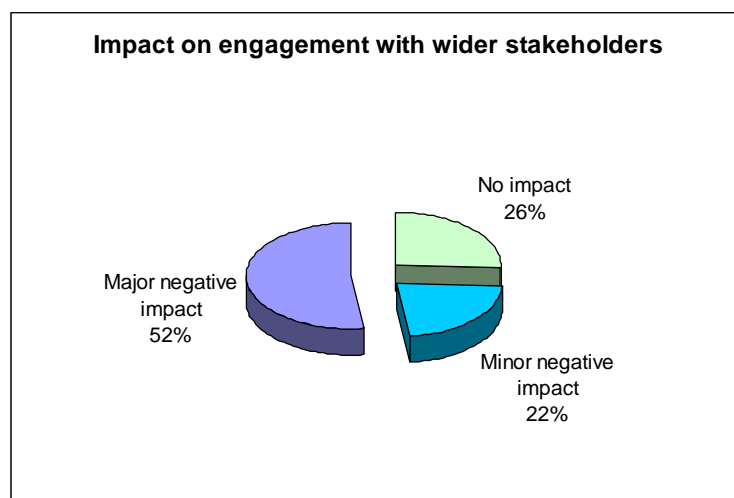
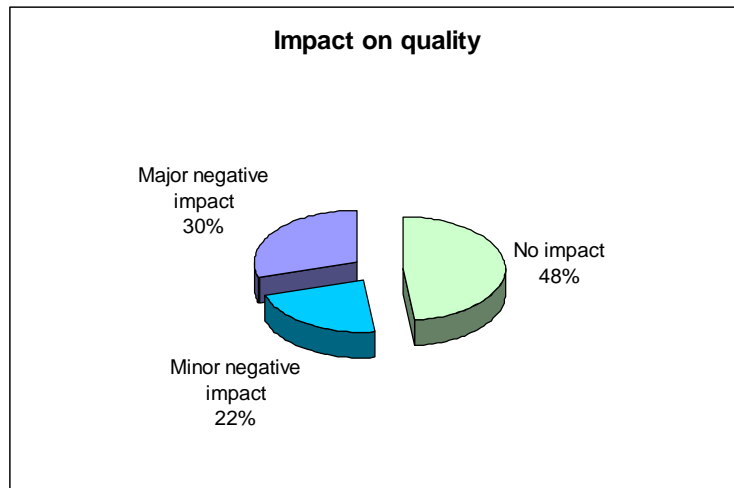


4.9 ***Impact on coast protection and sea defence of a reduced role in authorities' delivery responsibility.***

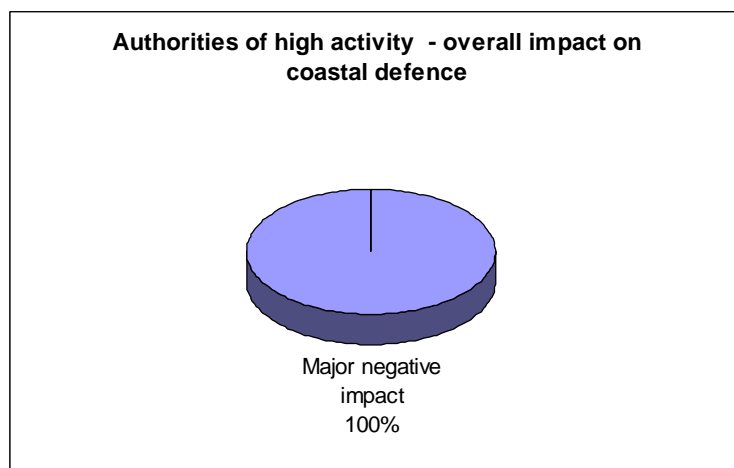
4.9.1 The overall opinion from the participating authorities was that a reduced role in the authority's delivery responsibility would have a strongly negative effect, and particularly on those activities involving the input of the public. The only positive opinion came from two low activity authorities who believed that there would be a minor positive effect on timescales.

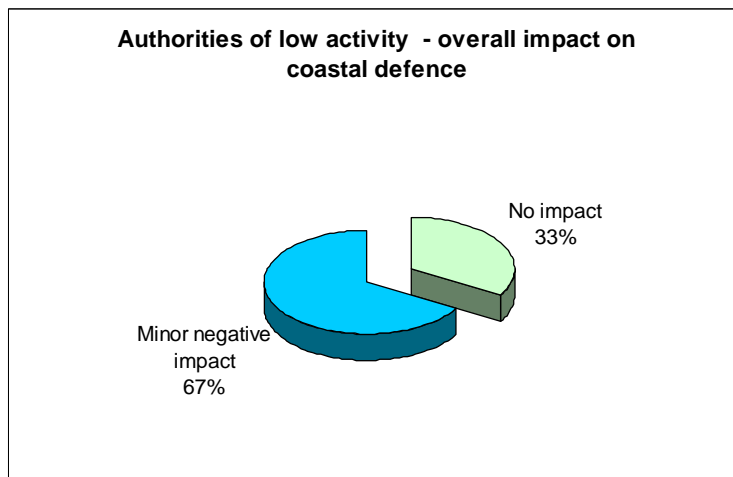
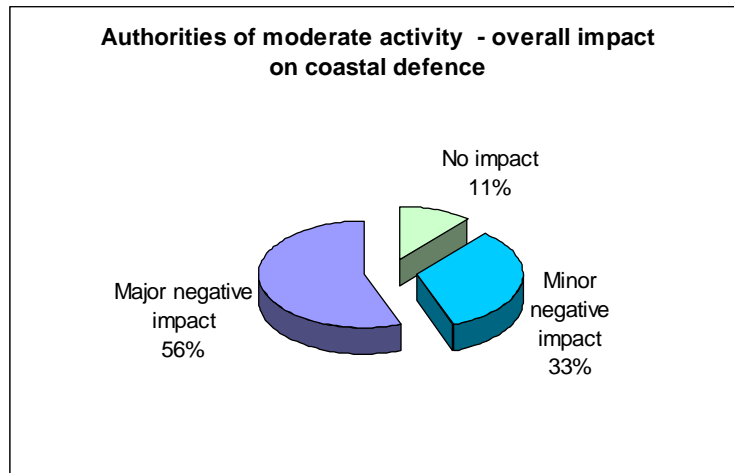






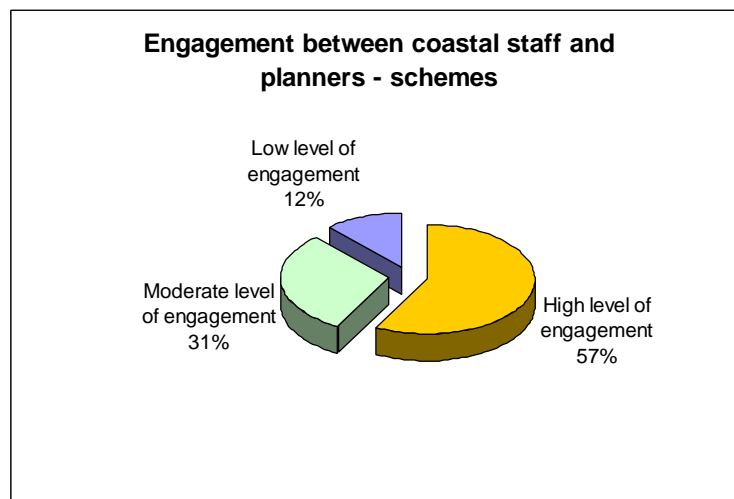
4.9.2 There were distinct differences in the opinions of the interviewees depending upon the degree of activity of their authority. For example, all of the high activity councils considered that there would be a major negative impact overall if their authority were to have a reduced role in delivery, whereas two-thirds of low activity councils considered that there would be only minor negative impact and the remaining third, no impact.

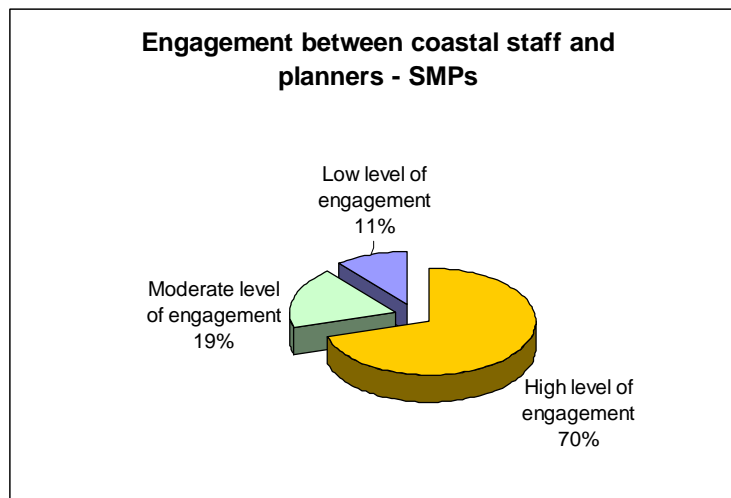




4.10 *Engagement with planners*

4.10.1 There was a fairly high level of engagement between coastal defence staff and planners in the same authority. As might be expected, those with low levels of engagement tended to be low activity authorities.





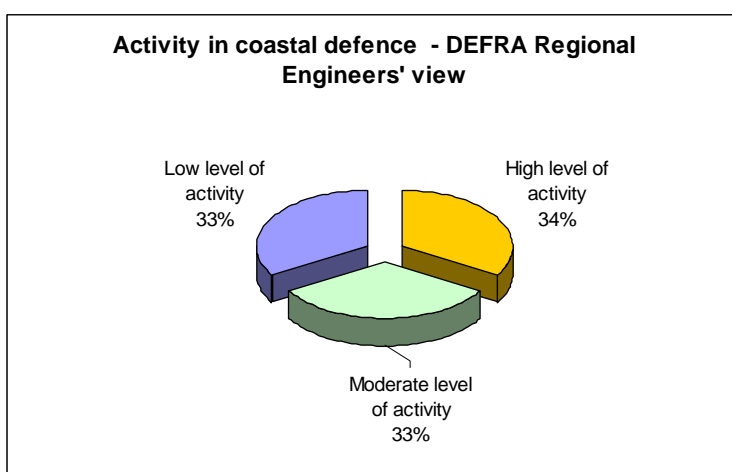
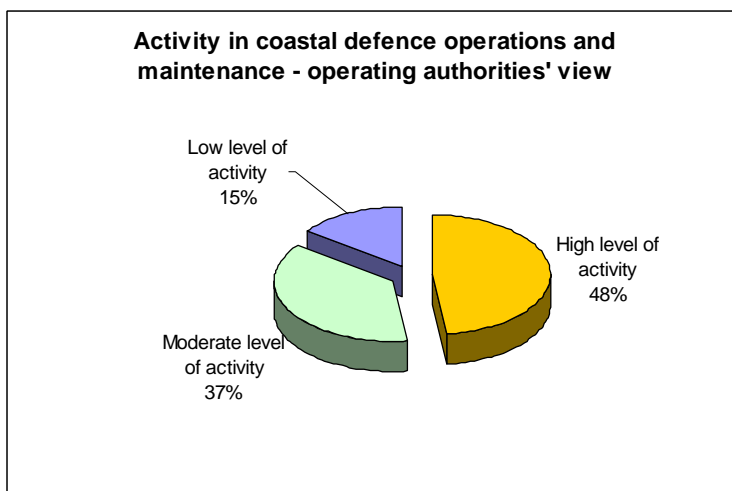
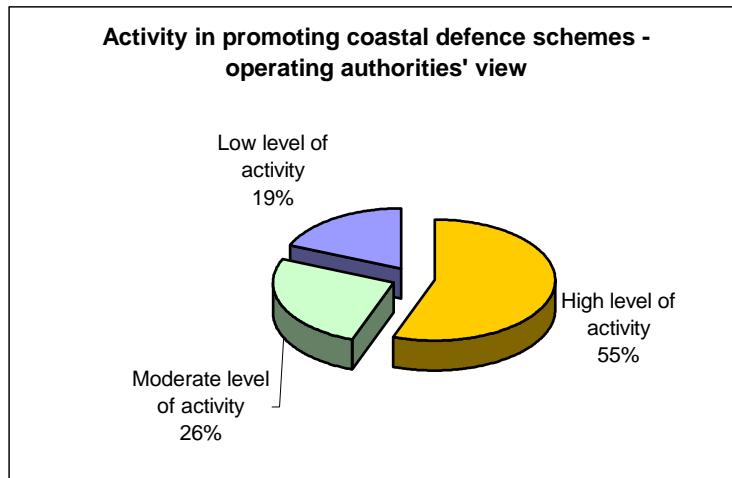
5.0 Discussion

5.1 *Validity of the review data*

5.1.1 The total number of authorities interviewed was 27, which represents 30% of the total number (90) of operating authorities with coastal defence responsibility. It could be said that had the remaining 70% been interviewed, then they may (in theory), have supplied information very different from the sample obtained and given a different complexion to the findings of the review. However, such is the spread of authorities which took part in the review, in terms of different types of council, geographical location and activity, together with the strong degree of consistency of many of the answers given, that it is reasonable to assume that it is representative of the larger whole.

5.1.2 Most of the elements of the review concerning staffing relate to factual data and are considered to have a high degree of accuracy. Some authorities were not able to provide all of the information requested, but this was a very small proportion of the total body of data.

- 5.1.3 With regard to the estimates of full time equivalent staff engaged in coastal defence, as for any focused survey, it may be prudent to consider whether there would have been an inclination for the interviewee to be subject to “focus bias.” This is where there is a tendency to overestimate the amount of staff time spent on the topic of the survey. For example, if the principal theme of the survey had been land drainage, rather than coastal defence, then different distributions of staff time may have been obtained in the interviews and with a bias towards land drainage. However, even if this has occurred, it is believed that it would have had a relatively small effect and certainly would not invalidate the overall findings of the staffing survey – which was factual.
- 5.1.4 Those questions inviting opinion give, by their very nature, subjective information. For example one senior officer may consider that a particular factor may have a major negative impact on his authority, whereas a colleague in the same authority may consider the same factor to have only a minor negative impact. It is considered, however, that the broad trends indicated by the review should be valid.
- 5.1.5 Similarly, in critically validating the responses, it could be said that it is human nature to tend to place a high degree of importance on one’s own activities and those of the organisation in which one has a senior role - a view which others outside the organisation may not share. It is interesting to compare, for example, the DEFRA Regional Engineers’ view of the relative activity of the authorities taking part in the review with the opinions of the authorities themselves, as shown in the graphs below:



- 5.1.6 Again, it could be said that, upon being asked, there may be few people who would be humble enough to admit that others could carry out their professional responsibilities better than themselves. However, most of the authorities have just experienced the handing over of COWs to the Environment Agency and, upon being asked, gave answers (some may say surprisingly) that indicated that there would be little or no impact to this change.
- 5.1.7 In recent years, very useful voluntary performance indicators on coast protection (for capital and operational activity) have been produced as an outcome of a TAG working group. Whilst there is an increasing take-up of these indicators by coastal authorities, there has not been a sufficient take-up for them to have been used for worthwhile benchmarking (on either level of activity or performance) at the time of this study. Hence, the Defra Regional Engineers' overview, with regard to the level of activity of councils in their regions, has been a useful guide for the Review.
- 5.1.8 Whilst the parts of the review concerning opinion on the impact of possible changes in delivery function should be treated with some caution (as should those in which "focus bias" may play a part), it is considered that the outcomes of this review are likely to fall within plus or minus 10% of those likely to have been obtained should every appropriate local authority have taken part. The overall trends obtained from the answers to these particular types of question are striking and are, therefore, considered to have a high degree of validity as to the views of local authorities in England.

5.2 ***Significance of the results***

5.2.1 The staffing data indicate that coastal defence responsibilities form an important part of the engineering workload of many of the maritime local authorities, particularly the smaller ones, where a large proportion of the staff may be engaged in coastal defence works in addition to their other duties. Many authorities would appear to have insufficient coastal defence workload to justify full time coastal staff (particularly operational), but find a compatible combination with other responsibilities, such as land drainage, which allows the successful operation of small engineering units. This is considered to be one of the principal reasons for the perceived high degree of negative impact that a reduced role in delivery responsibility would have on these councils, and should be a serious concern.

5.2.2 The age distribution data for the engineering staff are fairly evenly distributed amongst the different age categories, and there is a substantial body of personnel in the middle age ranges, with no major concerns in the upper age ranges being evident. It is important to note that this part of the review was factual and not opinion. Only the very youngest age range of less than 25, is notable as being underrepresented, and, hence, a more serious concern may be the future availability of young engineers to replace those in the middle ranks.

5.2.3 The length of service data indicated that local authorities command a high degree of loyalty amongst their employees, with staff members typically serving with their council for many years. This must represent an enormous and valuable body of local knowledge and experience, built up over long periods of time.

5.2.4 The opinions of the participating authorities' contacts on the impact of a reduced role in delivery responsibility gave a remarkably negative

picture, both in terms of the authorities' wider responsibilities and the impact on coast protection and sea defence. This was particularly so amongst authorities of high and moderate activity (essentially those carrying out capital works and regular operational maintenance work). Notwithstanding the caveats described in section 5.1 above, such is the degree of the perceived negative impact of those interviewed, that this should be a serious concern.

5.2.5 As mentioned above, the degree of the concern about the possible impacts relating to coastal defence contrasts markedly with the effect of the transfer of Critical Ordinary Watercourses to the Environment Agency. Opinions were evenly balanced between positive and negative, with the majority of the participating authorities feeling that there had been/would be no impact. Several authorities gave plausible explanations for this, because it was revealed upon interview that those who had been active were continuing to maintain COWs (with payment from the EA), which meant they felt little or no (financial or human) resource impact. Paradoxically, those that were not intending to maintain COWs (and therefore receiving no payment from the EA) felt no resource impact either, because they had not maintained many COWs in the first place.

5.3 ***Other issues arising from the review***

5.3.1 Many of the interviewees expressed concern at the level of relationship management and communications experienced recently with the delivery and roll out of the NFCDD by the EA. Whilst there was a general acceptance to the inevitability of the strategic changes arising from MSFW, it was hoped that early and continuing dialogue would be offered to enable the LAs views to be heard and taken into account.

5.3.2 Those authorities who felt that their current staff base was "inadequate" explained that the shortfall in resource was often made up by employing

outside consultants. Therefore, although their staffing may be inadequate, they did not feel the service suffered as a result, as the council officer with local knowledge could still guide the support service consultant.

5.3.3 Some authority reps felt that the negative impacts of the possible changes in delivery responsibility could be mitigated, but this would be at an increased cost to the council taxpayer.

5.3.4 It should be noted that one metropolitan borough, with several hundred engineering staff, only a very small proportion of which are engaged in coastal defence, was interviewed. Such is the extraordinary size of its engineering contingent, together with the fact that it was impractical for them to provide the precise information requested in the short timescale of the review, that their factual data on staffing was excluded from the general analysis. Their opinions in the later sections of the questionnaire were, however, fully included.

5.3.5 It is clear from the responses and factual returns that a major coastal scheme, particularly when carried out principally in house by a local authority, involves a large commitment of authority staff drawn from many disciplines. The public consultation, exhibition and engagement agenda, alone, can involve directors, press officers, graphic design teams, printers, committee clerks, legal officers, finance officers, planners, environmentalists, IT technicians, admin staff etc, as well as the engineers on the project.

5.3.6 Whilst comment has been made in 5.1.1 above, “*that the sample is considered to be representative of the larger whole*”, some added value could be obtained from interviewing each of the coastal authorities listed on the Defra capital programme. This would be with regard to validating staff numbers on the high activity councils and the corresponding capital/operations split.

6.0 Summary

- 6.1 Since the Government confirmed that it will work towards giving the Environment Agency (EA) an overarching strategic overview across all flooding and coastal erosion risks, local authorities, both individually and through representative bodies, have expressed concerns over alterations to current arrangements.
- 6.2 Local authorities' fears have been focused on the impact any change may have, amongst other issues, on an authority's ability to deliver wider council responsibilities and initiatives, should this new initiative result in yet another reduction of the critical mass of local authority engineers.
- 6.3 As a consequence, this Review has sought to gain survey information not just on the current local authority skills and capacity, but also to obtain a representative view on how more far-reaching models for change might affect the wider responsibilities of local authorities.
- 6.4 A short list of 27 authorities was drawn up for the Review from the 90 operating authorities in England, giving a representative sample size of 30%. Of these nine were considered to have high activity in terms of coastal defence, nine to have medium activity and nine to have low activity.
- 6.5 The results were obtained over a 10-day period by telephone interviews with senior managers or engineers from each authority, working through a standard questionnaire which had been e-mailed to them in advance.
- 6.6 The outcomes of the Review indicate, from this representative spread, that the average number of staff engaged at local authorities on coastal defence (capital and operational maintenance) work is 8.9. This varied from those designing schemes (engineers) and consequently spending

all of their time on coastal defence, to those providing specialist services as and when required (e.g. legal officers) and consequently spending a small proportion of their time on coastal defence.

- 6.7 The responses indicated that the average number of full time equivalent (FTE) council staff engaged on coastal defence was 3.2 and the average number of FTE engineering staff (capital and operations/ maintenance) was 2.3, in those representative authorities. Using the figures obtained from this review and postulations on the activity of councils nationally, aggregating up has produced estimates for England of 62 FTE engineering staff engaged on capital and 89 FTE engineering staff engaged on operations/revenue.
- 6.8 It was noted that the results showed that many of the engineering staff had long service records and that the age distributions were fairly evenly split amongst the age ranges used, except that there were few engineering staff below the age of 25.
- 6.9 There was a high degree of concern expressed (see survey results) as to the likely negative impacts on engineering and many other council services, should a reduced role for local authorities in delivering coastal defence be realised. This contrasts markedly with the perceived impact of councils transferring Critical Ordinary Watercourses (COWs) to the (EA), where the majority of council interviewees felt that there would be no impact.
- 6.10 Generally, there was a desire from the interviewees to ensure that relationship management and communications, between the EA and local authorities, be improved upon that recently experienced with the delivery and roll out of the National Flood and Coastal Defence Database (NFCDD).

6.11 In particular, authority representatives expressed a wish to be consulted in more detail on any possible models being considered for alternative delivery of coastal defence, since they believed that any such proposals are likely to result in negative impacts. Some authority representatives felt that, whilst negative impacts of a reduced local authority delivery role could be mitigated, any such mitigation would inevitably be at the cost of the coastal council taxpayer.

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 Standard E-mail to Interviewees
- Appendix 2 Blank Questionnaire
- Appendix 3 Master Analysis of all 27 Interviewed Authorities
- Appendix 4 Analysis of all 9 High Activity Authorities (electronically and on CD only)
- Appendix 5 Analysis of all 9 Medium Activity Authorities (electronically and on CD only)
- Appendix 6 Analysis of all 9 Low Activity Authorities (electronically and on CD only)
- Appendix 7 Completed Questionnaires (electronically and on CD only)
- Appendix 8 Government objectives for management of risk on the coast

Plan showing location of local authorities taking part in the review.

