Haringey Council

Agenda item: **[No.]**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee **On 10th December 2008**

Report Title: **Recreation Services Report on the Call-In of a Decision taken by The Cabinet on 18 November 2008 recorded at minute CAB 91**

Report of : **Mun Thong Phung, Director of Adult, Culture & Community Services.**

Signed : p.p

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Wards(s) affected: **All**	Report for: Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny Committee under Call-in procedure rules.

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 In response to a valid call-in on decisions of Cabinet 18th November 2008 to explain the merits of the original decisions.

1.2 To provide further evidence in support of the original recommendations to Cabinet

2. Introduction by Cabinet Member Leisure, Culture and Lifelong Learning

2.1 The provision of good quality, accessible and well used open space is clearly a feature of our Greenest Borough and Wellbeing priorities and ambitions.

2.2 The Council, and partners, have made and continue to make significant investment in the physical infrastructure. We must now build upon this investment and sustain these improvements by ensuring that we have effective supervision of our parks and open spaces.

2.3 I believe that the partnership approach and model proposed in this report will create a 'Parkforce' that unites interest, combines resources, increases open space supervision and meets resident expectations.

2.4 The implementation of Parkforce is consistent with Council policy in improving community safety.

3. Recommendations

3.1 That Members note the response to the matters raised in the call-in.

4. Background

4.1 The separate report of the Monitoring Officer to this committee explains the call-in procedure, details his response to the call-in and complements this report.

4.2 Listed below is each of the points made on the Call-in sheet submitted by Members on 26th November 2008. The points appear in the same order as in the original document.

4.3 The call-in stated that "The proposals are considered to be inside the budget framework but outside the policy framework".

5. Reason Given for Call-in with Response by Recreation Services

5.1 Below each point made in the call-in (in inverted commas) is the response from Recreation Services which explains the merits of the original decisions.

5.2 "Whilst supporting the general principles of the Parkforce scheme the overview and scrutiny committee should re-examine the specific proposal to abolish the Haringey Parks Constabulary."

5.2.1 **Response**: the implementation of the Parkforce model depends on the deletion of the Parks Constabulary in order to release resources to increase both the number and hours worked of staff in parks and open spaces (as detailed in section 8.4 and Appendix 3 of the report to Cabinet).

5.2.2 The Parks Constabulary is not itself a matter of policy; it is a vehicle for delivery of Council policy and is a means to an end.

5.3 "The disbandment of the Parks Constabulary would undermine the Council's ability to meet performance standards in the area of crime, community safety and antisocial behaviour."

5.3.1 **Response**: The Parks Constabulary does not have a role in general law enforcement which is the function of the Metropolitan Police Authority and the Metropolitan Police Force; it is these bodies that have the duty of general law enforcement within the public parks in London. The principal function of the Park Constabulary is to provide reassurance to users of parks and open spaces through visible patrolling and the enforcement of byelaws.

5.3.2 The implementation of the Parkforce model on the ground will maintain the security of parks and improve supervision through means the Parks Constabulary could not deliver.

5.3.3 Improved and effective open space supervision can only be achieved through real and sustained partnership working; it cannot be delivered by a single service

or agency. The Parkforce 'model' seeks to maximise onsite supervision/presence and harness the activities in open space, including the investment into Metropolitan Police community policing, under the 'Parkforce' umbrella to ensure best use of community resources.

5.3.4 Recreation Services is working with colleagues in Frontline Services (Urban Environment) to review and update byelaws in parks and open spaces, including the potential for the enforcement of byelaws through fixed penalty notices.

5.4 "According to recent Metropolitan police figures there were 527 offences recorded in parks and open spaces in the borough between December 2006 and November 2007. The existence of the Parks Constabulary operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year allows the Council to deal with criminal behaviour in parks and open spaces, much of which occurs at night."

5.4.1 **Response**: The period quoted in the report referred to above is December 06 - November 07. This is an unusual period, as it is normal to measure and compare the financial year i.e. April 06 - March 07.

5.4.2 However, for the purposes of comparison, the Community Safety Data Team has geo-coded all police recorded offences in parks and open spaces in Haringey for the period quoted (Dec 06 - Nov 07) and the total was 422. The majority of these were for a range of acquisitive offences and some less serious Actual Bodily Harm.

5.4.3 The reason for the discrepancy between this figure and the 527 quoted above is that the 527 is based on the location of an offence as provided by the victim and can include incidents which occur outside the park boundaries.

5.4.4 In terms of street crime, for the period December 2006 – November 2007 there were 1,619 personal robbery offences and 1,956 theft from person (snatch and pickpocket) offences in Haringey. This represents a 4.5% reduction in personal robbery and a 9.8% increase in theft from person compared to the previous 12-month period.

5.4.5 The Parks Constabulary does not provide 24 hour coverage 7 days per week. Since its inception in 2002, the Parks Constabulary has provided services to other clients including night time dog security patrols for Council buildings (for Property Services) and a day time security presence at Alexandra Palace Park. These clients are aware of the potential deletion of the Parks Constabulary and are prepared to make alternative arrangements.

5.4.6 The core operating hours of the Parks Constabulary service are designed to provide maximum cover during the periods of maximum demand which tend to be in the late afternoon/early evenings and at weekends.

5.4.7 Parkforce will extend the coverage and provide more hours of staff presence during these periods of maximum usage in parks and open spaces.

5.5 "The Metropolitan Police are often overstretched and frequently relay 999 calls about parks to the Parks Police for a response."

5.5.1 **Response**: 999 calls are infrequently referred to the Parks Constabulary and are invariably dealt with by the Metropolitan Police Service. The Parks Constabulary accepts calls considered to be suitable for initial response by them, subject to back-up from the Police. The Head of the Parks Constabulary has advised that these calls occur about 6 to 8 times per month.

5.5.2 The Metropolitan Police Service has the Duty of Care to keep the peace in all public spaces, including parks and opens spaces and the report to Cabinet proposes that in addition to Safer Neighbourhood Teams the Council invests in a Core Response Team of 4 Police Constables managed by the Metropolitan Police Service (please see section 8 of the report to Cabinet for more details).

5.6 "Disbanding the Parks Constabulary is outside the policy framework of the Council. The Council would risk not meeting several best value performance indicators (BVPi) if this action went ahead. BVPIs on the level of crime fear of crime, the feeling of public safety, robberies per thousand population, the number of class A drug supply offences, number of racial incidents per thousand population, as well as the green flag status of the boroughs parks will all be jeopardised if the 10 Parks constables are lost."

5.6.1 **Response**: Council policy is ensuring community safety and the Parks Constabulary is one means to that end. The Parkforce model and the proposed enhanced services will still contribute to achieving NIs and targets on crime, anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime.

5.6.2 The Parks Constabulary has a limited role in reducing the fear of crime and has a particular function in terms of feelings of safety in parks and open spaces. Parks Constables have limited powers (to enforce byelaws) and have no duty or powers of general law enforcement. The Parks Constabulary therefore cannot not have a role in directly reducing crime, but makes a limited contribution to the Council's ability to achieve its objectives around community safety.

5.6.3 The Senior Management Team of Haringey Police have been contacted and confirm that all crime incidents occurring in Haringey Parks which are reported to them will be responded to and dealt with accordingly.

5.6.4 The Green Flag status of the parks will not be jeopardised. On the contrary, the Parkforce model is seen by industry experts (including Green Flag judges and parks 'Friends' groups) as a progressive and practical solution to improving open space supervision.

5.7 "Regarding the consultation exercise carried out by the Parks service it seems that only 39 responses were received. In contrast a petition organised by opposition councillors, the MP for Hornsey and Wood Green and local neighbourhood watches has so far attracted support from over 1000 residents of the Borough."

5.7.1 **Response**: The consultation exercise was designed to establish the perception of users and non-users of parks with particular reference to which parks they used, which issues they felt should be addressed in terms of feelings of safety and whether they felt there was need for a greater staff presence in parks. The overwhelming response was that having someone present in parks would reduce the amount of anti-social behaviour and make parks a more welcoming and friendly place. Although this was a relatively small sample size, the findings accord with other statistically valid resident and user surveys and reflect the norm in national and local surveys across the sector.

5.7.2 Haringey's Friends of Parks Forum and Friends Groups were consulted during the Parkforce review that preceded the original report to Cabinet. They are supportive of this review and have expressed their concerns regarding the limitations of the Parks Constabulary service.

5.7.3 In their formal response to consultation on the Parkforce model, the Friends of Parks Forum very clearly expressed their preference for more on site supervisory presence in our parks and open spaces.

5.7.4 We have no record of a petition on this issue having been presented to the Council.

5.8 "Figures on page 9 Para 13.1.4 of the report to Cabinet which indicate a reduction in the numbers of park users who feel unsafe in parts is due in substantial part to the work of the Parks Constabulary. Such progress could not be guaranteed to continue if they are disbanded."

5.8.1 **Response**: Police Safer Neighbourhoods Teams were first introduced in Haringey in April – August 2004 initially in 3 wards, then from March 2005 there were 8 wards covered and by February 2006 all wards had SNTs.

5.8.2 The reduction in the fear of crime reflects the trend across London and since the introduction of Safer Neighbourhood Teams and their subsequent integration and interactions with other enforcement activity at a local level, which has significantly contributed to the reduction.

5.8.3 The new Parkforce model seeks to further improve on this reduction in the number of park users who feel unsafe.

5.9 "There are also figures quoted on page 11 Para 13.5.4 of the report which do not give a true picture of performance of incident responses and the fear of crime during the last three (sic). Patrol hours and responses have reduced because the number of parks police have reduced from 20 to 10 and time spent processing prisoners at local police stations is not reflected in these statistics."

5.9.1 **Response**: The incident and fear of crime figures were carefully checked before they were included in the original report to Cabinet and they are correct. The Parks constabulary has never had 20 officers - the maximum since 2002 has been 12 officers. The time spent processing prisoners at local police stations are

legitimately excluded from the figures as this time is not spent on patrol. Parkforce staff would not undertake this task and the comparison in hours is therefore valid.

5.10 "Similarly, there are claims in the report to Cabinet that safer neighbourhood teams (SNT) will fill the patrol capacity for parks and open spaces across the borough. This is misleading as SNT's are not 999 response teams, nor do they work night shifts other than due to special requirements, and they would not have the ability to secure the Parks or answer calls during the night about a disorder in the Parks."

5.10.1 **Response**: Section 12.5 of the report to Cabinet makes clear that Haringey has agreed with MPS to provide a "Core Response" team based in Finsbury Park however deployable to other parks and open space crime hotspots and/or joint park enforcement operations.

5.10.2 This team of 4 Police Constables will be additional to but complementary to the existing Safer Neighbourhood Team officers.

5.10.3 The existing SNTs are not 999 response teams but in Haringey they do work evenings and weekends and they are deployed according to local priorities.

5.10.4 SNT teams will be encouraged to continue routine patrols in parks and open spaces and to work closely with the staff and volunteers involved in delivering Parkforce on the ground.

5.10.5 The proposed model includes a dedicated resource for locking parks (please see section 8.4 of the report to Cabinet)

6. Response to Variation of Action Proposed

6.1 The Overview and Scrutiny committee is asked to re-examine the proposal to disband and to vary the actions of Cabinet by placing the Parks Constabulary within the safer neighbourhoods management of the Council.

6.1.1 **Response**: It is assumed that this refers to the Safer Communities Team. The proposal was considered in developing the application of the Parkforce model in Haringey. However, it was rejected as it could not resource the greater park based supervisory presence which Parkforce can deliver.

6.2 "To explore outside funding and the secondment of a sergeant or inspector from the Metropolitan Police to provide liaison and management backup."

6.2.2 **Response**: The key issue is the redirection of existing revenue funding, to increase front line, on site presence. External funding tends to be directed to capital and improvement works but we are using Area Based Grant (to fund 2 additional Police Officers) and external investment from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) for community outreach and co-ordination. This

is detailed in section 8 and appendix 3 of the report to Cabinet.

6.2.3 The Metropolitan Police Service is not equipped to second officers to the Council in the way proposed above and it would see no advantage in doing so. The new Core Response team provides the best solution; dedicated police response to incidents in parks and open spaces directed and influenced by the Council but with the officers managed, directed, trained and equipped by the MPS.

6.3 "Several other local authorities have adopted the park force model but have retained their Parks Constabulary - we believe Haringey should adopt this option until the new Parkforce model has been evaluated."

6.3.2 **Response**: Several authorities have signed up to the 'Parkforce Pledge' although that does not mean that they have fully implemented the essential elements of the model. With the exception of the City of London, we are not aware of a single London Borough that has implemented the Parkforce pledge and retained its Parks Constabulary. We are aware that several London Boroughs are actively considering how they implement Parkforce or similar schemes and some are also contemplating the deletion of their Parks Constabulary.

6.3.3 It is difficult to draw a direct like-for-like comparison in this area. Many other boroughs had parks constabularies long before the Parkforce initiative and the renewed drive to restore on-site supervision in parks and open spaces.

7. Summary

7.1 Recreation Services believes that the Haringey model provides the correct and best balance between uniformed enforcement, supervision by directly and indirectly employed staff and community/volunteer involvement.

8. Chief Financial Officer Comments

8.1 The Chief Financial Officer has advised that the comments on the original report to Cabinet stand and these are reproduced below

8.2 Implementation of the proposed Haringey Parkforce model will allow resources to be combined and an increase in open space supervision that meets residents' expectations, whilst providing a value for money service and producing efficiency gains, both operationally and financially, particularly through closer working with partners such as the Metropolitan Police Service.

8.3 This report outlines future efficiencies to be gained from the use of this model and details the costs of existing and proposed structures. Where posts are deleted every effort will be made to re-deploy displaced employees. However, where this is not possible redundancy costs may be incurred.

9. Head of Legal Services Comments

9.1 The Council holds its Parks and Open Spaces under a statutory duty to administer them for the enjoyment of the public and it must maintain them in a "good and decent state". But the Council has a very broad discretion as to how this is to be achieved and what resources are to be allocated overall. There is nothing in the legislation that requires any particular form of policing or supervision.

9.2 The Head of Legal Services notes the contents of the report. The proposals involving the deletion of the Parks Constabulary Service, the restructuring and potential redundancies should be the subject of consultation with staff, their union representatives and effected bodies. The report suggests that this will be done.

9.3 The actual deletion of the Service and the restructuring should be undertaken in accordance with the Council's policies and procedures concerning organisational change, redundancy and redeployment.

10. Service Financial Comments

10.1 No specific comments additional to those above by the Chief Financial officer.

11. Use of appendices /Tables and photographs

11.1 Not applicable

12.Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

12.1 The report on "Haringey's Parkforce – Open Space Supervision" to The Cabinet meeting on 18 November 2008