


Haringey Council

Agenda item:

[No.]

Cabinet		On 22 March 2011
Report Title: Parks Services – Change Proposals		
Report of: Director of Adults, Culture and Community Services		
Signed: 		
Contact Officer John Morris, Assistant Director, Recreation Services		
Wards(s) affected: All	Report for: Key Decision	
1. Purpose		
1.1	To review current arrangements for funding and provision of parks services in the borough.	
1.2	To consider the range of options for future service provision and delivery and decide the way forward.	
1.3	To outline specific proposals to implement the approved budget reduction.	
2. Introduction by Cabinet Member		
2.1	We have worked hard alongside residents and partners, to improve the quality and use of the boroughs parks and open space. However faced with the unprecedented cut in government funding, we have some very difficult decisions to make.	
2.2	We need to modify our approach to the delivery of Parks Services in the borough, with a focus upon: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reducing the cost of managing the service• Increasing the involvement of the voluntary and community sector, and• Revising the scope and scale of grounds maintenance activity.	
2.3	In doing so we need to work closely with other agencies, and actively engage with	

resident groups to work through what will be a difficult and challenging period.

3. State Links with Council Plan Priorities and Actions and or other Strategies

3.1 The purpose and role of Parks Services is primarily linked to delivering the Council Plan priorities of:

- Delivering a Greener Borough
- Delivering excellent customer focussed and cost-effective services.

4. Recommendations

4.1 To consider the future use of Council funding and the related service delivery arrangements.

4.2 To agree in principle the package of proposals set out at paragraph 8 in the report, subject to the outcome of statutory consultation with recognised trade unions and taking into account the authority's public sector equality duties, Final decisions may not be taken until these matters are considered fully.

4.3 To agree in principle the related redirection of funding to voluntary sector and partner led delivery subject to taking account of the authority's public sector equality duties and the results of consultation referred to in 4.2 above.

4.4 In the event that the relevant decision-maker decides not to proceed, with the result that savings are not realised, there will be an enquiry as to whether equivalent savings can be found elsewhere. Accordingly, Cabinet with the Leader's agreement delegates final decisions on the savings to be adopted to Directorates and where appropriate to the relevant Cabinet member, following appropriate consideration of the results of any consultation and with due regard to the Council's public sector equality duties. Decisions on staffing matters will come within the terms of reference of the General Purposes Committee.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

5.1 The Council and partners face a range of challenges and issues, including:

- The Local Government settlement and resulting £84m reduction in funding to Haringey including £41m in 2011/12.
- Pressure on public spending as a result of these Government cuts and the impact of those cuts on Council budget priorities, strategic planning and use of resources.
- The largely discretionary status of the services involved.
- The potential impact and role of the private/voluntary/third sector in parks services.
- The needs, demands and expectations of residents.

6. Current Service Description

6.1 Organisation and Functions

6.1.1 The service currently employs 108 full time staff, together with 19.5 full time equivalent agency staff, organised and managed through:

- Parks Management and Support
- Parks Operations (East, West and Central)
- Trees and Allotments
- Specialist services (Play, Cemetery and Plant/Machinery Maintenance)
- Wolves Lane Horticultural Nursery
- Hygiene Team
- Parkforce partnership(s)

6.1.2 The Service undertakes a range of parks and open space management and maintenance work, and this is summarised in Appendix 1.

6.1.3 The service also provides grounds maintenance, arboriculture, play maintenance and allotment management services to Homes for Haringey (HfH), Urban Environment (UE,) and Leisure Centres.

6.2 Assets and Work

6.2.1 The work outlined above is undertaken in managing a range of sites, features and assets, as detailed in Appendix 2. In summary these cover/include:

- 45 parks and small open spaces, covering 222 hectares.
- 482 HfH estates, covering 54 hectares
- 27 Allotment sites and 1749 plots.
- 33k HfH, Street and Parks Trees.

6.2.2 The table below summarises the key grounds maintenance tasks, volumes and frequencies, by operational area:

Task	East	West	Central	Total	Frequency
Grass m ² - cutting	507,889.0	375,256.0	340,085.0	1,223,230.0	Average 16
Bedding m ² - planting	976.0	1,246.0	609.0	2,831.0	Twice annually
Shrubs m ² maintenance	28,889.0	25,192.0	37,860.0	91,941.0	Twice annually
Paddling Pool maintenance	2.0	1.0		3.0	May – Sept
Play sites Inspection	10.0	9.0	6.0	25.0	16 per site annually
Dog/Litter bins Collection	256.0	228.0	114.0	598.0	Up to twice weekly
Hedges m ² maintenance	5,773.0	4,805.0	556.0	11,134.0	Twice annually
Privet Hedges maintenance	2,117.0	4,577.0	822.0	7,516.0	Three times annually
Bowling Greens (mow)	3.0	2.0	1.0	6.0	Annual
Tennis Courts maintenance	27.0	8.0	34.0	69.0	Weekly
Gates Locking/unlocking	9.0	22.0	22.0	53.0	Daily
Sports Pitches maintenance	12.0	18.0		30.0	Weekly

6.3 Revenue Budget (see Appendix 3)

6.3.1 The current net Parks Services budget is £1.77m, (excluding corporate overheads and capital charges). The base budget for 2011/12 is £2.09m, as the current Area Based Grant (ABG) support of £325k has been added to core funding.

6.3.2 Current expenditure is £5.36m, with 63% attributed to staffing costs. Income is £3.59m, and includes recharges to HfH (£1.4m) and UE (£440k) together with third party fees and charges (£700k).

6.4 Capital Investment [see Appendix 4].

6.4.1 A total investment of £16.2m has been secured/made in the boroughs Parks and Open Space over the last four years. This has/is being funded in a number of ways, with 75%/£12.2m coming from external sources. The largest single external funding agency is the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), who have supported major projects in Finsbury Park, Markfield Recreation Ground, and Lordship Recreation Ground. These schemes are underpinned by contractual funding agreements. Clearly, in the current economic climate most local authorities are in a similar position, and it is understood that the HLF are taking a pragmatic and sympathetic approach, on a case by case basis.

6.5 Performance

6.5.1 The boroughs Parks and Open Spaces provide for a wide range of recreational interest and use, exemplified by the following in 2010:

- 1312 sports pitch bookings and 193 events.
- 7851 British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) volunteering hours
- 148 new allotments tenancies
- 3078 school children visits to Wolves Lane
- 3750 supported volunteer sessions at Wolves Lane.

6.5.2 Overall quality and resident satisfaction are primarily monitored through the national 'Green Flag programme, the annual parks user satisfaction survey, and the boroughs annual resident perceptions survey, with the following performance in 2010:

- 16 Green Flags and 6 Green Pennants
- 71.5% park users satisfied/very satisfied
- 79% park users feel safe/very safe
- 72% residents satisfied/very satisfied with Parks and Open Space in the borough.

7. Other Options Considered

7.1 Set against the context outlined above, the Council has three broad options in planning for future parks service provision and delivery in the borough.

- Maintain direct Council management of services
- Fund external organisations to deliver services
- Withdraw from the delivery of services altogether.

7.2 Maintain direct Council Management of Services

- 7.2.1 Revenue funding for parks, has been reduced by 22% over the last four years from £2.26m to £1.77 in 2010/11.
- 7.2.2 The Service is also having to deal with an income shortfall of £300k during the current financial year as well as implementing in year staffing productivity efficiency savings of £200k.
- 7.2.3 The Service also receives £325k ABG [Working Neighbourhood Fund] funding which currently supports Parks Hygiene [£150k], Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Safer Parks Team [£75k], and BTCV Green Outreach [£100k]. This provision has been included in the base budget position for 2011/12.
- 7.2.4 Audit Commission assessment suggests that there is limited scope to improve value for money from the funding of parks and open spaces. We compare well with other London boroughs for use and satisfaction levels among users, and spending is among the bottom 25% compared to other boroughs.
- 7.2.5 There is some scope to achieve further efficiency savings, however, this fell significantly below the Recreation reduction target.

7.3 Externalise and Fund Delivery of Services

- 7.3.1 The Council could consider moving away from direct delivery, and focus upon supporting provision through a range of providers, particularly in the third and voluntary sectors.
- 7.3.2 The Council already supports delivery through external agencies, albeit on a relatively small scale, and largely currently dependant upon time limited Area Based Grant. Service delivery and providers include:
- Parkforce – BTCV, MPS and Friends Groups.
 - Parks Restoration – Groundwork.
- 7.3.3 A recent operational review and benchmarking of our Parks function, suggests that there is limited scope for achieving any further significant cost reduction from outsourcing Grounds Maintenance. However, market testing should be considered within the next 2-3 years to fully test this position.
- 7.3.4 The Parks unit also currently provides grounds maintenance and arboricultural services under 'service level agreements' to both HfH and UE. They are both the client and budget holder and thus pay for, and demand a specified level of service. Improved value for money and/or cost reduction has been delivered in both areas, and proposals are currently being considered to revise highways arboricultural and grounds maintenance client and budget responsibility.

7.4 Withdraw from Delivery and Funding of Services

- 7.4.1 Parks Services are discretionary functions, and thus the Council could decide to withdraw all funding and cease to provide any services. However, it is recognised

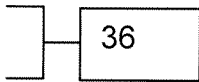
that Parks Service provision has a significant ongoing role, in meeting a range of community need and stakeholder priorities.

- 7.4.2 The Council could consider withdrawing from delivery by either closing or leasing assets to an external operator(s). This would be achieved by offering longer term leases and giving the operator full control over facility development and service delivery.
- 7.4.3 The maintenance and management of Parks is a key component of the boroughs public space, with significant protection in planning policy. Therefore we consider that complete withdrawal from delivery is not an option. However opportunities do exist to encourage and secure some additional commercial revenue streams, capital investment and new leisure facilities in the boroughs larger parks. This could be achieved by enabling use of under used and poorly maintained space and/or buildings, and reviewing the Councils current events policy.
- 7.4.4 Consideration could be given to reducing the scale and scope of the grounds maintenance function. This would entail a fundamental revision and reduction to activities, including grass cutting, shrub maintenance, hygiene, repairs and maintenance. This could lead to a deterioration in the quality of open space, put 'green flag' standards and recognition at risk, and might lead to concerns for external funding bodies such as the HLF.

8 Recommended Option

- 8.1 The recommended course of action includes elements of all three options outlined above, and future delivery would have the following key features:
- It will cost significantly less.
 - Attract external investment for facility improvement and development.
 - More services would be delivered by volunteering/the voluntary sector and partners.
 - Revised maintenance programmes.
- 8.2 This will be achieved by agreeing and implementing the following key ingredients with a net cost saving of £1.06m over 3 years. [See Appendix 5]
- Tackling base budget pressures effectively.
 - Make further operational efficiency savings.
 - Redirecting funding to the voluntary sector/partners for them to support service delivery.
 - Actively encouraging appropriate Parks based commercial income generation.
 - Reducing Grounds Maintenance activity.
 - Reconfiguring Parks Services in conjunction with wider organisational changes.
- 8.3 The financial and people impact of the change proposals are detailed in Appendix

6 and summarised below:

	Budget £'000's	Staff FTE (excl. agency)
Baseline	2,092	108
Operational Efficiency -	- 248	
Externalise -	- 208	
Withdraw -	- 610	
New Baseline	= 1026	= 72
Reduction	1066 (51%)	36 (33%)

The proposals will lead to 51% reduction in spend on Parks Services, together with a 33% reduction in the workforce.

8.5 Tackling Base Budget Pressure

8.5.1 The Service is consolidating a range of action to compensate for the £300k under performance on external income (Events and Sponsorship) including:

- Deleting 2 funded vacant posts
- Deleting the Head of Parks and Bereavement Services post.
- Reducing the Parkforce Stewards agency provision.
- Reduced Supplies and Services, and Repairs and Maintenance provision.

8.5.2 This will ensure that any subsequent savings proposals are considered in the context of a confident base budget position.

8.6 Operational Efficiency Savings

8.6.1 Further efficiency savings of £248k in 2011/12 are proposed within the current service delivery arrangements, and have already been considered in the budget setting process, and include:

- Reduction and deletion of 2 funded vacancies
- Reduction and deletion of 6 funded posts (potential redundancies)
- Increase Allotments fees and charges.

8.6.2 Whilst this represents a 12% saving on the 2011/12 budget, existing service delivery can be maintained, although clearly there is a reduction in staffing levels the equivalent of 8 full time jobs.

8.6.3 The key risks associated with these proposals, and the related action to limit their impact are:

- User reaction to increased fees will be managed through active engagement with the boroughs Allotments Forum.
- Reduced management capacity across the service, will require a review and reorganisation of the existing structure.

8.7 Revised delivery of Parkforce Activity

8.7.1 Encourage greater partner and volunteering involvement by using reduced funding of £185k to support:

- The maintenance of some BTCV capacity and activities.
- Develop and expand Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordination in partnership with the MPS and Friends Groups.
- Friends of Parks volunteering to encourage the use of parks.

8.7.2 This will achieve a £208k saving, and require renegotiation of existing agreements with the MPS and BTCV respectively.

8.8 Withdrawal from Delivery Proposals

8.8.1 Park Based Commercial Income Generation

- a) It is proposed that the Council reviews the existing events policy, in seeking to establish a more proactive and flexible approach, to encourage greater use of our parks, extend the range of cultural activities, and increase revenue generation. Given the action recommended at 8.5.1 above, it is proposed that revenue generated from future large commercial events, is ring fenced and supports parks infrastructure capital investment needs.
- b) It is also proposed that the Council builds upon existing work, which encourages appropriate commercial income generation in the boroughs parks e.g. Cafes, Haringey Tennis, and is endorsed in the boroughs Football and Tennis Development Plans. The initial sites include:
 - Bruce Castle and Priory Park Tennis Courts/Pavilions.
 - Finsbury Park Athletics Track and Gym.
 - Finsbury Park hard court multi sports area.
- c) An initial net saving of £100k over the next 3 years is projected in the budget savings. Officers have had initial discussions with UK Athletics, Heathside Athletics Club, London Blitz American Football Club, and Access to Sport, who have indicated an interest in taking on the operation and management of the Track and Gym under a leasehold agreement. It is proposed that this is phased over 2 years, to support the establishment of the new management arrangements, and deliver a saving of at least £50k.

Consultation has also been completed on the proposed development of a 5 a side football facility on Western edge of Finsbury Park. Whilst this indicated a 60:40 split against the proposal mitigating action would address a significant proportion of the concerns raised, and bring both capital investment and revenue income into the park. The latter would be between £50k - £75k per annum.

8.8.2 Revised Grounds Maintenance Programme

- a) It is proposed that the £510k (50%) saving in parks grounds maintenance cost is achieved by:

- Reorganising the Service and adjusting the balance of parks charge hands, senior operatives and operatives, whilst also reducing the number of employees from 127.5 to 81.5 (36%).
- Reducing the use of seasonal 'agency staff'
- Revising parks hygiene operations to combine litter and dog waste collection, and integrate gate locking/unlocking responsibility
- Reducing vehicle supply and usage
- Working with BTCV and Wolves Lane Nursery to undertake bedding planting and maintenance through supervised volunteering programmes
- Reviewing parks grounds maintenance regimes, with a particular focus upon more active management of nature conservation, and revenue support from Natural England (Agri Environmental programme).
- Sharing the use and cost of local parks depot facilities with other agencies e.g. Veolia, local landscape businesses.
- Reducing repairs and maintenance provision by 25%.
- Reducing frequencies for grass cutting, shrub and hedge maintenance in parks.

b) Whilst the Council is and will continue to work hard with partners to mitigate the impact of these changes, the standards and quality of the boroughs parks may deteriorate.

9. Chief Financial Officer Comments

- 9.1 As reported to Cabinet in February this year the Council must find savings of £83.7m over the next 3 financial years in order to achieve a balanced budget position, of which £41m is required in 2011/12. This report details proposals made for Parks Services.
- 9.2 The recommended option will yield savings of £1.06m over 3 years.
- 9.3 Tackling base budget pressures. Whilst no net gain is achieved through these proposals the service has an inherent budget pressure of £300k due to declining income. The proposals outlined will remove this pressure and ensure a stable starting point from which to proceed with future budget reductions.
- 9.4 Operational efficiency savings. As detailed in paragraph 8.6 and appendix 5 the operational efficiencies will produce savings of £248k.
- 9.5 Revised delivery of Park Force activities. The renegotiation of existing agreements and a investment in volunteering programmes will result in a net saving of £208k.
- 9.5 Withdraw from delivery. Park based commercial income generation should give income of £100k, split between leasing of the Track and Gym at Finsbury Park, Bruce Castle and Priory Park Tennis Courts/Pavilions £50k and a further £50k from leasing a newly developed 5 a side football facility in Finsbury Park. The remaining saving of £510k will be secured by reducing parks grounds maintenance costs as described in 8.2.2 above.

10. Head of Legal Comments

- 10.1 Consultation with staff and statutory consultation with recognised trade unions is an essential part of the responsibilities of an employer in the course of a business re-organisation of this nature. Due consideration should be given to responses received as a result of the consultation before any final decision is reached concerning the proposals outlined. Further, due consideration must also be given to the authority's public sector equality duties before such a final decision, taking into account the outcome of the relevant equality impact assessments, including those already done. It is noted that the proposals involve the potential loss of 36 (FTE) employees. Thus the process by which the restructuring exercise is to be achieved must comply with the Council's procedures regarding organisational change. Further, the position of any members of staff at risk of displacement must be considered under the Council's procedures regarding redundancy and redeployment.

11. Equalities and Community Cohesion Comments

- 11.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed, to assess the service delivery implications of the budget reductions and related action, outlined in this report. The key issues and conclusions identified include:
- A deterioration in standards could impact upon both satisfaction and use from all sections of the community.
 - Any changes to charging policy should seek to maintain concessions to support disadvantaged access to facilities/services.
 - Reductions to parks supervision could have a disproportionate negative impact upon both women and older residents, and their fear of crime.
 - Level of use by Afro Caribbean and Disabled residents.
- 11.2 Employee related implications will be considered within the Equalities Impact Assessment being undertaken in the preparation and consultation on Recreation Services reorganisation proposals.

12. Consultation

- 12.1 The review has drawn upon existing user and usage data from internal management systems, the KMC Parks user Survey and other agency information.
- 12.2 Officers have also undertaken initial consultation through the borough's Allotments and Friends of Parks Forums and specific partners, including:
- NHS Haringey
 - LBH Services – Adults, Children's, Youth, Transport Planning
 - Pro-Active North London and Sport England
 - Friends of Parks Groups.
- 12.3 The key issues and concerns to emerge to date include:

- Assessment of need and allocation of resource should be evidence based.
- More on the ground support for the voluntary sector.
- Future maintenance standards and potential deterioration in the quality of open space.
- Safety and security in parks and open spaces.

12.4 Following initial discussion, officers have agreed to consult the Friends of Parks Forum in more detail, on our future approach to Volunteering and Asset Maintenance/Investment.

12.5 The Councils Corporate Consultation – Shaping Our Future – suggested the following:

- Stopping all landscaping and building in parks and open spaces, unless fully funded by others.
- Working with others to achieve greater efficiency in the delivery of environmental services.
- The use of volunteers to encourage greater community involvement and ownership in the maintenance and management of parks and open spaces.

12.6 Officers have had early discussion with staff and Trade Union representatives, on both the scale of reductions and implications for staff, together with outline reorganisation proposals. Formal consultation should commence in mid March 2011, with implementation achieved early in 2011/12.

13. Service Finance Comments

13.1 The proposals set out in this report seek to tackle the base budget pressures, particularly in parks operations, whilst also implementing £1.06m efficiency, transfer and service reduction savings. The 'blueprint' proposals also seek to actively maintain core service delivery.

14. Use of Appendices/Tables and Photographs

Appendix 1 – Parks Service Functions
 Appendix 2 - Parks Green Space
 Appendix 3 - Base Budget/Staff
 Appendix 4 – Capital Investment
 Appendix 5 - Budget/Staff Reductions
 Appendix 6 - Parks Savings

15. Local Government [Access to Information] Act 1985

- Audit Commission Value for Money Assessment (2008)
- Parks Operations Review
- Parks Service – Change Proposals, Equalities Impact Assessment.

