

Report for: Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 21 July 2016

Item number:

Title: Scrutiny Review on Community Safety in Parks; Conclusions and Recommendations

Report authorised by : Cllr Charles Wright, Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Ward(s) affected: N/A

**Report for Key/
Non Key Decision:** N/A

1. Describe the issue under consideration

1.1 Under the agreed terms of reference, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) can assist the Council and the Cabinet in its budgetary and policy framework through conducting in-depth analysis of local policy issues and can make recommendations for service development or improvement. The Committee may:

- (a) Review the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas;
- (b) Conduct research to assist in specific investigations. This may involve surveys, focus groups, public meetings and/or site visits;
- (c) Make reports and recommendations, on issues affecting the authority's area, or its inhabitants, to Full Council, its Committees or Sub-Committees, the Executive, or to other appropriate external bodies.

1.2 In this context, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 March 2016 agreed to set up a review project to look at community safety in parks.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction

N/A

3. Recommendations

3.1 That the recommendations of the review be as follows:

- (i) That the Panel's findings that crime levels within Haringey parks are comparatively low and that there is no evidence of any significant recent increase be noted;

- (ii) That further consideration be given to the inclusion of community safety contacts and their prominence on park signage as and when it is renewed;
- (iii) That the setting up by the Police of a team of Special Officers to patrol in parks be supported and that work be undertaken to develop links between them and the Council's enforcement teams;
- (iv) That a review be undertaken of vehicular access and provision for parking in Finsbury Park and the feasibility of reducing and restricting it to certain areas of the park.
- (v) That the practice of the locking of some parks be suspended for a trial period of six months and reviewed at the end of this period to ensure there are no negative consequences and that this process be subject to engagement with relevant parks forums and neighbourhood watches;
- (vi) That, in order to enhance cost effectiveness in addressing this issue, officers investigate jointly with Alexandra Palace and Board the feasibility of collaborating on updating the bye laws covering the borough's parks and open spaces;
- (vii) That separate dog waste bins be removed from parks and that, beginning two months prior to their removal, a PR campaign take place which includes engagement with friends forums and neighbourhood watches and signs placed on all dog waste bins;
- (viii) That Community Payback be utilised fully in parks to undertake areas of work for which there is currently no provision; and
- (ix) That further work be undertaken to develop friends of park groups where they do not currently exist.

3.2 That, subject to any comments or amendments that the Committee may wish to make, the final report be submitted to Cabinet for response.

4. Reasons for decision

4.1 The Committee is requested to approve the report and the recommendations within it so that it may be formally referred to the Council's Cabinet for response.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee could decide not to approve the report and its recommendations, which would mean that they could not be referred to Cabinet for response

6. Report

Introduction

- 6.1 The review was set up following concerns being raised with Members regarding community safety in the aftermath of two incidents that took place in parks. The review looked at how it could be addressed effectively within current resource constraints so that residents feel safer when using them.

Terms of Reference

- 6.2 The terms of reference for the review were as follows:

“To consider and make recommendations to the Council’s Cabinet for improvements that can be made by the Council and its partners on how they address both crime and fear of crime in parks.”

Evidence Gathering

- 6.3 The Panel received evidence from:
- Sarah Jones - Partnerships Officer, Commercial and Operations;
 - Simon Farrow – Parks and Leisure Services Manager, Commercial and Operations;
 - Councillor Stuart McNamara – Cabinet Member for Environment;
 - Councillor Bernice Vanier – Cabinet Member for Communities;
 - Pauline Sydell - Police Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator;
 - Police Inspector Dayle Speed; and
 - Mark Evison - from Alexandra Palace and Park.
- 6.4 In addition, an on line survey of members of friends of parks was undertaken, which generated 58 responses.

Crime Statistics

- 6.5 Reported crime for all parks/green space between 2012 – 2016 was as follows:

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOT
2012	12	15	22	27	37	55	52	34	43	15	22	13	338
2013	22	21	17	32	35	34	43	37	32	34	28	27	362
2014	21	17	27	40	56	74	56	63	54	60	33	31	532
2015	26	19	34	58	45	55	81	88	55	50	36	34	586
2016	34	25	39										98

- 6.6 Haringey's parks and green spaces cover approximately 25% of the borough and there are 3 to 5 million visits to them every year. Whilst there were 586 reports of crime across all Haringey's parks in 2015, the total notifiable offences

(TNOs) for the whole of the borough was 25,935. This constituted only 2.26% of crime within the borough.

6.7 Police representatives felt that the following were reasons for the increase in reported crime:

- More police operations and patrols in parks resulting in positive stop and searches by officers being recorded as a crime in a park;
- Encouraging members of the public to report crimes and concerns in parks, and promotion of the police 101 number;
- Many different ways crime and issues are brought to the attention of the Police i.e. Twitter, apps, online reporting to Council and Police;
- Perception of crime due to social media resulting in members of the public being more vigilant and reporting crime;
- The inputting of park crimes that had not been put onto the crime reporting system correctly.

6.8 People are encouraged to report issues to the Police and crime statistics are provided on a monthly basis. The park with the highest number of incidents last year was Finsbury Park, which had 113 incidents but this was expected due to its size and location. Ducketts Common was the next highest. Figures do not include festivals. The most common incidents in parks are theft or robbery. In terms of reports of anti social behaviour, drinking and drug taking were the most common issues.

6.9 1226 service requests were received in the past year, 47 of which related to ASB. There were also a large number relating to dogs. There were 83 complaints or Member enquiries. 10 of these made reference to community safety issues, such as litter, dog fouling, rough sleepers, street drinking and out of control dogs. Issues are also identified by parks staff out in the parks. These are mainly associated with rough sleepers and street drinking.

6.10 The Panel heard that there are 2.8 million visits per year to Alexandra Palace and Park. The number of reported crimes last year (599) equated to 1 for approximately every 5,000 visitors and very few were serious. The largest number of crimes relates to vehicles. There is natural surveillance provided by park visitors, dog walkers etc. as well as by parks maintenance staff. When events are taking place, there are also event security and marshals.

6.11 The conclusion reached by the Panel in respect of levels of crime is that there is no evidence that crime in parks within the borough is currently an issue of increasing concern. Indeed, current crime levels are remarkably low. In addition, there is little evidence of residents feeling unsafe in parks. Out of 54 responses to the Panel's survey, only 4 people stated that they felt unsafe in parks and none said they felt very unsafe. 50 people felt either safe or very safe.

- *Recommendation 1: That the Panel's findings that crime levels within Haringey parks are comparatively low and that there is no evidence of any significant recent increase be noted.*

6.12 There is some evidence that there is under reporting of crime. In response to the survey, a majority of people who had said that they had witnessed a crime in a park had not reported it. The Panel would therefore recommend that as and when park signs are updated, consideration be given to the inclusion of community safety information. It should nevertheless be emphasised that it is highly likely that the level of any under reporting of crime in parks is no different to that which may occur outside of parks.

- *Recommendation 2: That further consideration be given to the inclusion of community safety contacts and their prominence on park signage as and when it is renewed.*

Enforcement

6.13 Police resources to deal with incidents in parks are limited, with each Safer Neighbourhood Team having 1 Police Constable and 1 PCSO and sharing a Sergeant. They are responsible for covering the whole of individual wards and therefore cannot provide a presence in parks all of the time. There are other Police teams that can be brought in should there be issues, such as the Territorial Support Group (TSG) and the Robbery Squad. Policing is intelligence led and it is therefore necessary to have relevant information coming in.

6.14 Efforts are currently being made to start up a Police Parks team that is made up of Specials, who are volunteer Police officers. The team had been set up with 5 PCs and 1 Sergeant. Recruitment is currently taking place. Each Special is required to undertake at least one shift per month but a lot of them work full time so have limited availability. Park patrols are based on intelligence but mainly focus on Finsbury Park.

6.15 The Panel supports the setting up of a team of Specials to patrol in parks and would recommend that they liaise closely with the Council's enforcement teams.

- *Recommendation 3; That the setting up by the Police of a team of Special Officers to patrol in parks be supported and that work be undertaken to develop links between them and the Council's enforcement teams*

6.16 There is Police targeted action where necessary. There has been a high level of joint enforcement activity within Ducketts Common and this has been successful. The park is heavily used and popular activities such as the outdoor gym and the basketball court draw people there, which can help keep crime levels down. Enforcement activity in Ducketts Common has been a targeted multi agency operation and resulted in arrests and ASBOs. CCTV has now been installed and a civil injunction is now being considered against particular individuals.

6.17 Although the Council has enforcement powers, they are very unlikely to be used unless there is someone present who is able to undertake them. With staffing reductions, particularly amongst the Police, this is becoming increasingly less likely. Officers feel that it is necessary to increase the level of risk for those dropping litter or causing dog fouling. At the moment, it is considered to be too

low and there is a need to look at new options. Whilst it might be possible to update the bye laws, the model ones produced by the Cabinet Office do not cover all enforcement issues

- 6.18 Self funding enforcement is an option. This has been successfully implemented by, amongst others, Enfield Council. If such a scheme was brought in, the Council would maintain the overall policy role. There is a minimum level of income that needs to be brought in to make the scheme economically viable but it is not intended as a method of generating income. Officers have visited both Enfield and Redbridge to look at their schemes.

Rough Sleeping

- 6.19 Action has been taken in Chestnuts Park, the Paddock and Finsbury Park to address rough sleeping, which is a growing issue. There has been a noticeable increase in it following the change in the law on squatting. Many rough sleepers are vulnerable and in need. Efforts are made to involve support agencies but a lot do not wish to receive any help. Once rough sleepers have been removed, parks staff clean up the area and cut back shrubbery to discourage further instances. There have also been issues with rough sleepers in Alexandra Park, with 17 being identified in the last year. The policy is to move them on.
- 6.20 One means of addressing the problem is to design park seats so that they discourage people sleeping. There had been instances where rough sleepers had been found to be illegal immigrants and the park was the only place that they were able to sleep. The bye laws state that it is the responsibility of the Police for dealing with the issue.
- 6.21 The Panel is of the view that rough sleeping is a complex issue that goes wider than just parks. It notes that the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel will be undertaking work on this specific issue in due course.

Traffic Management

- 6.22 Traffic management is also an issue as it is possible to drive in Finsbury Park. There was a near miss involving a small child and a lorry last year. Parking charges are being reviewed and enforcement increased with the aim of discouraging driving.
- 6.23 The Panel feels that the presence of motor vehicles in Finsbury Park is something of an anomaly and can detract from people's enjoyment of the park and its environment. It would like to see motor vehicle traffic reduced or, if possible, removed altogether. It is nevertheless recognised that there may be some circumstances where there is a need for vehicles to enter the park, including providing disabled access to some of the facilities.
- *Recommendation 4; That a review be undertaken of vehicular access and provision for parking in Finsbury Park and the feasibility of reducing and restricting it to certain areas of the park.*

Locking of Parks

- 6.24 14 parks are locked at night at a cost of £45,000 per year. Many of these have been locked at night for a long time. It is unclear whether locking deters crime or anti social behaviour. Parks are normally locked for the reason that they have always been locked. It has been demonstrated that some parks are actually busier after they are locked than when they are not. Comparisons can be done with parks that are not locked to see if it makes any difference. The Police have been asked if they have a view on this issue. Locking of parks normally takes around four hours and it might be the case that the money could be better spent on enforcement.
- 6.25 Designing out crime might help to mitigate any impact from ceasing to lock parks, such as better illuminated entrances. Most fences around parks are not very high and it is therefore relatively easy to get into them if they are locked.
- 6.26 Alexandra Palace and Park remains open for 24 hours a day. However, the Alexandra Park and Palace Board approved overnight closure of two gates in 2012 in order to combat particular anti-social behaviour problems in the Grove and Redston Field.
- 6.27 A range of views were expressed in response to a question regarding this in the survey. A small majority (28 out of 51) of people who responded to the survey were in favour of parks being locked. However, the Panel were not convinced that there was any benefit to be gained from continuing to lock parks. It is nevertheless clear that work needs to be undertaken with the community to convince them that this is the case
- 6.28 It would therefore recommend that the practice of the locking of some parks be stopped for a trial period of six months and reviewed at the end of this to ensure that there are no negative consequences arising from this. It would also recommend that engagement take place with friends of relevant parks forums and neighbourhood watches ahead of the proposed changes and as part of the review at the end of the trial period. Savings arising from ceasing to lock parts should be re-invested in the Parks Service.
- *Recommendation 5; That the practice of the locking of some parks be suspended for a trial period of six months and reviewed at the end of this period to ensure there are no negative consequences and that this process be subject to engagement with relevant parks forums and neighbourhood watches.*

Anti Social Behaviour

- 6.29 Anti social behaviour reports can cover drugs issues, youths gathering and drinking. Youths gathering in parks can be perceived as intimidating for some people although they are most often not causing a problem.
- 6.30 Drinking is an issue in a number of locations. Street drinkers often know which areas are outside of alcohol control zones. It is more difficult for the Police to act if people drinking are causing anti social behaviour in parks outside of the

zones. A light touch approach in the first instance or the designing out of potential problems is the preferred approach by officer.

- 6.31 Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) cannot be used to restrict drinking in parks that are locked. It is not possible to create a byelaw to stop street drinking. It would need to be done by using a PSPO instead as byelaws cannot be created where there is existing legislation to deal with issues. There are currently no PSPOs in operation in parks. It is necessary to demonstrate that issues were persistent in order to obtain one.
- 6.32 The riding of mopeds can also be an issue. The main areas where this took place were Priory Park and Lordship Lane Recreation Ground. Staggered barriers could help to address this issue.
- 6.33 In terms of Alexandra Palace and Park, street drinking is not a major problem. There are issues with anti social behaviour from time-to-time which are dealt with by security staff and, if necessary, the Police. In order to prevent fly tipping and other anti social behaviour, car parks and other roads not required for events are closed. A proactive approach is undertaken to dealing with vehicles that knock over bollards, gates and lamp columns, with costs recovered from them. CCTV surveillance covers some areas of the park.
- 6.34 The Park and Palace have their own bye laws although these were now very old and archaic. Closer working with the Council's Enforcement Team would help them to deal with issues in the Park and Palace as staff did not currently have enforcement powers.
- 6.35 There is the possibility of economies of scale if the Council and Alexandra Palace and Park were able to collaborate on the updating of the bye laws. It was noted that there are model bye laws that have been produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) but these do not cover several current issues, such as rough sleeping and drinking. In order for any of the model bye laws to be implemented, it would be necessary to demonstrate to the DCLG that there is a problem and that all other options have been exhausted. In addition, it would be necessary to go through a lengthy public consultation. The whole process is likely to take a long time and, in addition, there is a lack of resources to enforce bye laws once they have been approved.
- 6.36 The Panel would recommend that officers investigate jointly with Alexandra Palace and Board the feasibility of collaborating on updating the bye laws covering the borough's parks and open spaces.
- *Recommendation 6; That, in order to enhance cost effectiveness in addressing this issue, officers investigate jointly with Alexandra Palace and Board the feasibility of collaborating on updating the bye laws covering the borough's parks and open spaces.*

Removal of Dog Waste Bins

- 6.37 It has been proposed that separate dog bins in parks be removed. These can be unsightly, are often not well or properly used and have to be emptied separately. They are also no longer used in some other local authority areas. The Panel obtained feedback on this proposal from friends of parks forums.
- 6.38 Respondents to the survey were not generally in favour of this proposal, with 22 out of 56 being against it. However, the largest number of people (24) stated that they were unsure about it which indicates that people did not appear to feel particularly strongly about the issue. Such concerns that were raised were on the whole linked to whether such a change would lead to more overflowing bins.
- 6.39 On balance, the Panel is of the view that dog waste bins should be removed but recognises that work needs to be undertaken with the community to convince them of the benefits of this.
- *Recommendation 7; That separate dog waste bins be removed from parks and that, beginning two months prior to their removal, a PR campaign take place which includes engagement with friends forums and neighbourhood watches and signs placed on all dog waste bins.*

Neighbourhood Watches

- 6.40 218 neighbourhood watches include a park within their area. Crime statistics are received every month and there are monthly meetings where issues that have arisen were discussed.

Community Payback

- 6.41 It is possible for a wide variety of work to be undertaken as part of community payback. All that is needed is access to toilet facilities and refreshments. More work is needed on the scheme in Haringey and the Police are prepared to consider suggestions. There is no cost to the projects that they work with. However, hosting can be quite involved. Management of scheme projects is not always simple and the right job needs to be picked.
- *Recommendation 8; That Community Payback be utilised fully in parks to undertake areas of work for which there is currently no provision.*

Feedback from Friends of Parks Forums

- 6.42 The key messages from feedback from the survey of friends of parks forums appeared to be the following:
- Very few people felt unsafe in Haringey parks;
 - Litter was by far the biggest concern, followed by dog fouling;
 - A majority of people who had said that they had witnessed a crime in a park had not reported it;
 - Most people felt that the Police and Council dealt with problems well or very well;
 - Most people supported the continuation of the locking of parks; and
 - There was little support for the removal of separate bins for dog waste.

6.43 The Panel noted that not all of the parks within the borough currently have friends groups and would recommend that further work be undertaken to develop them where they do not currently exist.

- *Recommendation 9; That further work be undertaken to develop friends of park groups where they do not currently exist.*

7. Contribution to strategic outcomes

7.1 This review relates to Corporate Plan Priority 3 – “A clean, well maintained and safe borough where people are proud to live and work”. Objective 2 is: “To make our streets, parks and estates clean, well maintained and safe”.

8. Statutory Officers comments (Chief Finance Officer (including procurement), Assistant Director of Corporate Governance, Equalities)

Finance and Procurement

8.1 The costs of undertaking this Scrutiny review have been contained within existing budgets.

8.2 Before Cabinet can be asked to approve any recommendations the cost of undertaking these recommendations needs to be clearly established. Although the cost is not thought to be significant there is likely to be a cost in undertaking actions such as reviewing vehicular access or updating bylaws and thus this cost needs to be clearly set up for Cabinet approval or otherwise.

Legal

8.3 Under Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 (“LGA”), the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the power to make reports or recommendations to Cabinet on matters which affect the Council’s area or the inhabitant of its area. Reports and recommendations will be presented to the next available Cabinet meeting together with an officer report where appropriate.

8.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee must by notice in writing require Cabinet to consider the report and recommendations and under Section 9FE of the LGA, there is a duty on Cabinet to respond to the report, indicating what (if any) action Cabinet, proposes to take, within 2 months of receiving the report and recommendations.

Equality

8.5 The Council has a public sector equality duty under the Equalities Act (2010) to have due regard to:

- Tackle discrimination and victimisation of persons that share the characteristics protected under S4 of the Act. These include the characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex (formerly gender) and sexual orientation;

- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not;
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.

8.6 The Panel has aimed to consider these duties within this review and, in particular;

- How policy issues impact on different groups within the community, particularly those that share the nine protected characteristics;
- Whether the impact on particular groups is fair and proportionate;
- Whether there is equality of access to services and fair representation of all groups within Haringey;
- Whether any positive opportunities to advance equality of opportunity and/or good relations between people, are being realised.

9. Use of Appendices

None.

10. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985