

REPORT FOR: CABINET

Date of Meeting:	15 September 2016
Subject:	Response to recommendations from the Scrutiny Challenge Panel Community Involvement in Parks
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Tom McCourt, Corporate Director of Community
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Graham Henson, Portfolio Holder for Environment, Crime and Community Safety
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Wards affected:	All
Enclosures:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Community Involvement in Parks report

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

The report provides members with officer feedback in response to the 'Community Involvement in Parks' Scrutiny review report and relevant recommendations.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to:

- I. Note the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review report.
- II. Agree the response and proposed actions to the recommendations as set out in this report.

Reason:

The above recommendations were made to provide a framework for future community involvement in parks.

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

The Overview and Scrutiny panel met on 7 June 2016 and considered the issue of community involvement in parks. The main aims of the Panel were to:-

- Examine the current levels of community involvement in Harrow's parks and benchmark against parks in neighbouring boroughs.
- Develop an understanding of what residents want from their local parks.
- Explore innovative practices in the delivery of park services by other councils and other initiatives demonstrating community involvement and volunteering in parks.
- Identify ways in which Harrow Council can best deliver 21st century parks for residents.
- Inform the development of Harrow's parks and open spaces strategy 2016-19.
- Develop the park users' forum so it is inclusive and representative of all park users across Harrow.
- Inform the progress of Project Phoenix and the commercialisation strategy for parks.

The panel and made a number of recommendations as set out in Table A..

Table A

Officer Responses & actions to the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Group deriving from the review on COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN PARKS

Recommendation

We note the success of the Park User Groups and the energy and commitment they contribute to improving our Parks. We recommend that Council should continue to work with Park User Groups and the Parks Forum to ensure our parks are safe and secure environments in which all users feel safe and welcome, to promote the use of parks and open spaces by all sections of Harrow's diverse communities and to explore how sections of our community that do not use Parks can be encourage to do so

Response

A number of Park User Groups have established volunteering embedded into their ethos, which has enabled community events and activities to draw more users into our parks and involve differing members of the community to a shared use of parks. The Council is also working with those groups who have not completed a 5-year plan to create a joint vision for the park following the criteria of the green Flag Parks scheme.

The Council will explore options to extend the usage of parks across the community and have started a programme to improve faculties and sports pitches

Recommendation

That the Council works in partnership with Park User Groups in identifying projects, including capital, to improve parks and park facilities and works with those groups to apply to funding sources. The Council will continue to manage projects but, where appropriate Park User Groups can be involved in project delivery

Response

Parks with developed 5-year plans have benefitted from shared Council/community objectives, more effective deployment of resources, targeted capital expenditure, greater leverage for grant applications.

As above the Council is working with those groups who have not completed a 5-year plan to create a joint vision for the park and to direct development and potential investment.

Greater Stanmore Country Park and to a lesser extent Bentley Priory and Harrow Weald Common have Management Boards to oversee and procure services within pre-defined budgets. These models can be extended as circumstances allow to include other Open Spaces.

Recommendation

That the Council should investigate potential funding routes, such as grants, that could be available to properly constituted Park User Groups that would not be available to local authorities

Response

There have been successful Marathon Trust and Lottery bids previously, benefitting parks. The Council will continue to seek outside funding and support groups to make suitable applications. Development of Park Management Plans are considered an essential step to assisting with a competitive bid.

Recommendation

That the Council should explore the use of existing buildings in Parks to maximise use/income, this should include an assessment of how existing buildings could be used to develop facilities that would include the provision of refreshments and toilets including community cafes run by Park User Groups as well as commercial lets

Response

A survey of park buildings assessing structure, condition, current and potential usage is underway to identify suitable assets for investment to sustain the property and increase usage and income. Currently the Council is tendering for facilities to provide refreshments for 3 parks.

Recommendation

Those Commercial opportunities to develop sporting facilities should be explored as much possible but that such schemes should offer access at affordable prices to residents

Response

The Council will continue to investigate commercial opportunities through the Project Phoenix Board. The Council is also working to upgrade the sports booking system to enable greater social media penetration to assist retaining and attracting sports club members.

Recommendation

We note the success of the existing Park User Groups and recommend that the Council should continue to work in partnership with Parks User Groups through the Parks Forums and that the Council should actively encourage the creation of further Park User Groups where they do not exist. We note the existence of properly constituted groups promotes good governance and allows such groups to apply for grants as appropriate

Response

The operational framework for Park User Groups is designed to set the parameters that will govern both the creation and operation of these groups, including setting the remit for these groups to undertake activities in parks. It is important that the framework ensures there is clear and unambiguous allocation of roles and responsibilities between the Council and groups.

The range of activities undertaken by a User Group depends greatly on the ability of will of its members. Types of function can include:-

- Carrying out amenity works for the betterment of the Park;
- Developing annual work plan so that each year there is clarity of what the Council will do and what the Park User Group will do;
- Producing flower displays and assisting with the maintenance of flower beds;
- Physical work such as sweeping paths, clearing litter, painting and projects;
- Acting as Voluntary Park Wardens and ambassadors;
- Agreed utilisation Park buildings if required to assist with voluntary work;
- Marketing and promotion - assisting with general duties, designing leaflets, and research and event organisation.

The Council has worked on the successes and lessons learnt from older Park User Groups and are encouraging formation of new groups. Over the past year an additional six User Groups have formed which brings us to 21 operational User Groups. We have written a volunteers toolkit to help new groups through the start-up stage and ensure correct governance. Constituted groups have access to training such as 1st Aid, power tools and safe catering as well being able to apply to the Community fund for financial assistance. The Borough Parks Forum was founded in 2015 being led by Members and Officers. In May 2016 the Forum held elections and is now constituted and run directly by volunteers. We will continue to support the Borough wide parks Forum and encourage and nurture new Park User groups.

Recommendation

That the Council should encourage schools to utilise Parks for School activities including a "Daily Mile" to promote health and to combat child obesity. This will also have the benefit of improving concentration and performance by pupils in schools

Response

The Council is establishing and actively promoting a schools daily walk programme across all Infant and Primary Schools.

The Council is expanding the Community Champion scheme to include Young Champions. It is envisaged that the scheme will promote greater use and understanding of our parks.

Recommendation

We note the success and popularity of the “Green Gyms” and these should be expanded as appropriate and as funding is available with a specific focus on parks in the most deprived wards, especially near family homes without gardens

Response

The key objective is to promote health amongst those with potential cardiovascular, diabetes, mobility or obesity issues and also to promote social cohesion between differing groups of people who share a common desire to increase their fitness levels.

The council has will explore opportunities to expand Green Gyms focusing on need and ensuring a range of activities to include cardio-vascular, core body mobility, upper & lower body strength. Where Park User Groups exist the location will be made in consultation with the group

Implications of the Recommendation

Resources, costs

There is no requirement for additional staff or resources

Performance Issues

There are no specific performance issues associated with this report, however performance will be monitored on a quarterly basis

Environmental Implications

None.

Risk Management Implications

This report is not included on the Directorate or any other Corporate Risk Register

Legal Implications

There are no specific legal implications arising out of the recommendations in this report. The council has the power to provide parks and outdoor recreational facilities under a number of legislative provisions, including the Public Health Act 1875, the Open Spaces Act 1906 and the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. Whilst the authority’s budgets are under increasing pressure, resulting in the authority being restricted in what it may be able to offer and do for residents, it has to nonetheless be mindful of its statutory obligations, including the public sector equality duty, should any service changes be proposed.

Financial Implications

Consideration will need to be given to proposed service changes or the adoption of specific policies, and these should only be implemented where changes lead to “invest to save” or overall Council savings. Where implementation of the recommendations may lead to an increase in specific services revenue budgets, funding will need to be found from within existing budgets or by making compensatory savings elsewhere in the budgets.

Equalities implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

An EqIA was not carried out specifically for this report as it includes no proposals for significant service change.

Council Priorities

The Corporate Plan 2016-2019 sets out the Council’s vision; Working together to make a difference for the vulnerable, communities, families and businesses.

The Council’s priorities to deliver this vision between now and 2020 are :-

Build a better harrow

Be more business-like and business friendly

Protect the most vulnerable and support families

These have been taken into account when developing the response to the recommendations.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Jessie Mann	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 15 August 2016		
Name: Matthew Adams	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 2 September 2016		

Ward Councillors notified:

**NO as it impacts on all
Wards**

EqIA carried out:

NO

EqIA cleared by:

N/A

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Dave Corby: 0208 424 1758 ; dave.corby@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Community Involvement in Parks' Scrutiny review report (see enclosure)

**Call-In Waived by the
Chair of Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**

NOT APPLICABLE

[Call-in applies]