
**REPORT FOR: PERFORMANCE AND
SCRUTINY SUB-
COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting:	11 December 2017
Subject:	Monitoring of Recommendations from the Scrutiny Challenge Panel 'Community Involvement in Parks'
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Paul Walker – Corporate Director – Community
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Graham Henson – Portfolio Holder for Environment
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Wards affected:	All
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

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

Recommendations:

I. To note actions taken and success of the programme to meet the scrutiny Recommendations.

Reason:

To consolidate the Recommendations from the 2016 review and provide results of the implementation of the framework for future community involvement in parks.

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 7 June 2016 and considered the issue of community involvement in parks. The main aims of the Review 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 the Project Phoenix and the commercialisation strategy for parks.

The Committee and made a number of recommendations as set out in Table A which were responded to at the Performance & Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting of 15 September 2016.

Table A

Officer Responses, actions and year 1 monitoring 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 the 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 facilities and sports pitches.

The Community Engagement team have been working with User Groups to promote a focus to their activities and encourage professionalism to the working of the groups. The increased number of groups and their activity has placed pressure on the team to deliver the service and contact time with the User Groups has been consequentially reduced.

Park User Groups have increased with 3 new groups being fully established over the past year bringing the total to 24. In setting up new groups it is important to provide enough time and guidance to ensure they have realistic expectations, correct governance and achievable priorities.

12 User groups have held fun-days in their park with at least 4 of them attracting over 450 people to the event.

The Chandos group attracted over 50 young people to a sports day and Headstone Manor attracted 80 people to a Bat walk. User groups managed water stations for the Harrow Marathon.

7 parks have started gate locking to reduce potential anti-social behaviour. Harrow Weald group have a committee member for Crime and Antisocial Behaviour with direct links to our community safety team.

Over 11 groups are using social media and/or running membership drives to increase and diversify their membership. The Pinner Village group recruited an additional 50 members at their last membership day and Headstone Manor recruited 30 members.

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.

14 parks now have 5-year plans.

The plans have been useful in integrating community priorities into the Green Grid programme and enabling groups and the Council to target funding bids. Several parks have been instrumental in delivering projects; these include World Record attempt at bulb planting, drinking fountain refurbishment, garden landscaping, procuring a park shelter.

The three existing self-managed site are continuing however, there has been no consideration to moving any additional parks to a self-managing pre-defined budget.

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.

This is the first year where park groups have targeted external funding and there have been some good achievements. It is important that groups can see success on smaller bids before embarking on larger more complicated funding projects. The park management plans have proved useful in providing groups the focus to enable successful funding.

Examples of successful bids are: - West Harrow gazebo, Kenton landscaping, Bernays store and landscaping, Queensbury and Roxbourne storage facilities.

Funds have been secured to regenerate Newton Park East (200k), GLA funding for trees (40K) and a Heritage Lottery application has been made for Headstone Manor Park (1.3 million).

6 parks have secured funding from Tesco's bags of money (32k), 2 secured Lottery funding (20k) 1 secured funding from Greggs (2K).

The established Borough Parks Forum run by volunteers, with chair and executive committee includes a fund raiser.

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.

We have built cafés in Stanmore Rec and Centenary Park which have been successfully marketed and has tenants ready to start operating, a third café is in

the process of installation in Harrow Rec. We are also extending the successful café in West Harrow Rec to allow extended use. As a part of the programme the Stanmore Rec build included construction of a new changing room for footballers and a children's nursery. The café/nursery tenant has committed to make the facility a focal hub in the park and to instigate formation of a park user group.

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.

A new sports booking system came on stream in April and has been widely accepted with the sports clubs with requests being made by community groups and sports coaches for potential usage. E.g. Tottenham Hotspur coach volunteering to develop activity for young people.

Centenary Park has the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) and Pitch and Putt course let under a management operating agreement, we anticipate the new (MUGA) being constructed in West Harrow Rec has potential to be let under a similar agreement.

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 have encouraged formation of new groups. Over the past year an additional three new User Groups have formed which brings us to 24 active User Groups. We have written a volunteers toolkit to help new groups through the start-up stage and ensure correct governance. We have delivered training primarily around use of power tools, catering, safe guarding, health and safety and 1st aid and have supplied power tools to suitably trained groups.

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.

A core group of schools have adopted the Daily walk Programme. Officers are working to increase uptake.

Work has begun on developing Young Champions and whilst there was early success with two schools this has not been sustainable. The main focus has been on park groups and preparing the Headstone Manor HLF bid. There is still work to be undertaken to support this recommendation.

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.

We have now installed 25 Green Gyms in total with two more currently being installed and one further linked to the Avanti School development at Whitchurch Playing Fields. This will conclude the Green Gym programme in parks, any further installs will be linked to commercial developments.

Implications of the Recommendation

Resources, costs

The programme has been a success but there should be recognition that it has been delivered without additional resources and there has had to be specific focus on some of the recommendations.

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

Equalities implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

An EqlA 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

Not Required

Ward Councillors notified:	NO as it impacts on all Wards
EqlA carried out:	NO
EqlA cleared by:	N/A

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

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

Background Papers:

Community Involvement in Parks' Scrutiny review report