

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
(REGENERATION AND SKILLS)**

**PARKS AND GREENSPACES WORKING GROUP  
FINAL REPORT  
APRIL 2018**

Overview  
& Scrutiny



# **Overview & Scrutiny**

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## **LEAD MEMBER'S INTRODUCTION**

I am very pleased to introduce this Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) Parks and Greenspaces Working Group report.

I wish to thank all those people who gave up their valuable time to take part in the Working Group's review as their input and expertise greatly helped the Working Group in the formulation of its recommendations. Finally, I am extremely grateful to my fellow cross-party Working Group Members for their commitment and their ideas and contributions.



Councillor Harry Bliss,  
Lead Member, Parks and Greenspaces  
Working Group

## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 At its meeting held on 20 September 2016 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills) approved the establishment of a Working Group to review Parks and Greenspaces.
- 1.2 Councillors Bliss, Roche, Webster and Bill Welsh were appointed to serve on the Working Group.
- 1.3 Councillor Bliss was appointed Lead Member. Details of Working Group meetings are set out below:-

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>
28.11.16	Scoping Document approved Better Places, Greener Spaces – the Future Management of Parks and Greenspaces document considered
12.12.16	Gathering Information
30.01.17	Site visits undertaken to parks and greenspaces across the borough
31.07.17	Meeting to discuss and consider the outcome of the public consultation process and the proposed revision to the Draft Strategy

## **2.0 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND OBJECTIVES**

- 2.1 The Terms of Reference and Objectives of the Working Group were approved as part of the scoping exercise at the first meeting and are set out below.
- 2.2 Terms of Reference and Objectives
  - 2.2.1 Review the General Reduction in Standards' saving proposal for 2015-17, and the evolved draft 'Better Places, Greener Spaces - Future Management Parks and Greenspaces' document
  - 2.2.2 To support and/ or challenge this and make recommendations as appropriate to improve the proposed strategic approach and its resulting resource allocation and future changes to service delivery
  - 2.2.3 To undertake annual reviews of the impact of the approach once enacted in order to track the impact of changes to service and react/ make recommendations accordingly

## **3.0 METHODS OF ENQUIRY**

- 3.1 Individual Discussions
- 3.2 Group discussions and presentations to the Working Group
- 3.3 Observation of consultation sessions, and techniques to be undertaken with the wider community



3.4	Review the outcome of the consultation exercise on completion
3.5	<p>Option to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of wider background documents that reflect the current position of parks management and make recommendations for future delivery of parks in the UK: eg the ongoing central government inquiry into public parks, documents from the Landscape Institute, Natural England, the Heritage Lottery Fund, NESTA, APSE etc</li> <li>• Undertake site visits within the borough</li> <li>• Undertake site visits nearby authorities</li> </ul>
<b>4.0</b>	<p><b>BACKGROUND</b></p> <p>The Parks and Greenspace Service is the largest land management service in the borough. With over 160 sites, covering circa 788 ha, some of which are high profile tourist destinations, others are local or neighbourhood sites still valued by their local communities. They all have a complex range of facilities and features including living plant material, small animals, buildings, lakes, play areas, footpaths, walls, sports features etc.</p> <p>The Parks and Greenspace Service provides a one stop shop to estimated 12M visitors per year, providing full land management and development, including community and volunteer opportunities.</p>
<b>5.0</b>	<p><b>PARKS AND GREENSPACE SERVICE – AN OVERVIEW</b></p> <p><b>5.1 Parks and Green Spaces</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 160 individual sites – including regional or local visitor destinations such as Botanic Gardens, Hesketh Park and Kings Gardens, Crosby Coastal Park Play Area, Derby Park.</li> <li>• Total area of 788 ha of land managed.</li> <li>• Historic and/ or listed structures such as conservatory, observatory, fernery, bandstands, and other monuments.</li> <li>• Buildings including parks lodges, community buildings, sports changing rooms, nursery greenhouses and much more.</li> <li>• Lakes, water features and fountains, including bridges and other structures.</li> <li>• Estimated 12M visits/year.</li> </ul>



<b>5.2</b>	<b>Play and Exercise Facilities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly within parks but some stand-alone;</li> <li>• 55 play grounds</li> <li>• 34 outdoor gyms</li> <li>• 3 skate parks</li> <li>• 13 multi-use games area</li> </ul>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Outdoor Sports and Recreational Facilities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 Golf Courses</li> <li>• 18 Bowling Greens</li> <li>• 46 Sports pitches for example: football, rugby, baseball)</li> <li>• 25 Tennis courts</li> </ul>
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Allotments</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 1,100 plots over 14 sites</li> </ul>
<b>5.5</b>	<b>Trees</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circa 30,000 Street trees managed on behalf of Highways</li> <li>• Circa 60,000 trees in parks</li> <li>• 24 hour call-out emergencies</li> </ul>
<b>5.6</b>	<b>Service delivery mechanisms and Contracts</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounds Maintenance function (insourced April 2017) which carries out all day to day tasks for managing parks, e.g. litter, grass, shrubs, sports pitches, bowling greens, floral bedding etc.</li> <li>• Tree Management contract for all trees in parks and on the highway e.g. pruning, felling and pro-active maintenance.</li> <li>• Term contract and ad hoc small contracts for hard infrastructure repairs and improvements (eg surfacing, play equipment, railings and boundaries)</li> <li>• Capital works contracts for improvement schemes – budgets ranging from a few thousand upwards often to several hundred thousand pounds.</li> </ul>



5.7	<p><b>User Management and Community Development in Parks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for Friends of Park Groups and other associated community groups (currently 36 supported)</li> <li>• Promotion and development of volunteer work in parks; (there has been an increase in volunteer hours in Sefton's parks by 1100% since 2008/9, to 22,000 hours in 2014/15 – valued at circa £315,000)</li> <li>• Development of partnership and “organisational” volunteering.</li> <li>• Promotion of park activities to encourage increased and better use of parks; 900 in 14/15, attended by circa 120,000 people, (mostly run by others but facilitated by ourselves)</li> <li>• Liaison with other agencies to promote community safety and reduce anti-social behaviour</li> <li>• Pro-actively work with schools and young people and provision of diversionary activities</li> <li>• Enforcement of by-laws e.g. dog-fouling, dog control, litter</li> </ul>
5.8	<p><b>Other Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek funding, design and deliver capital projects to develop our sites (over £11M over the last ten years)</li> <li>• Seek sponsorship and other external funding to contribute to the service</li> <li>• Advise the Planning Department on Landscape issues relating to planning applications, and the development of corporate of corporate land based strategies (the Local Plan, Greenspace Strategy, Open Space Study, Pitch Study and Non Pitch Study)</li> <li>• Manage concessionaires on our sites</li> <li>• Manage health and safety and deal with insurance claims relating to our land</li> </ul>
5.9	<p><b>Benchmarking and Quality Awards</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green Apple award – international award for environmental best practise</li> <li>• ASAP Service Team of the year finalist 2009 and 2011 (Association of Public Sector Excellence)</li> <li>• Gold Standard national play award (Royal Society of Prevention of Accidents)</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Winners of 7 Green Flag awards (national standard for parks management)</li> <li>• Consecutive success in “In Bloom” competition since 1993 both at regional and national level. Southport in Bloom won the Large Coastal Resort category for national finals of Britain in Bloom for 2016, and all five town entries found success in the North West in Bloom awards</li> <li>• Facilitated 3 community groups to enter Community Green Flag awards</li> <li>• Facilitated 35 community groups to enter Neighbourhood In Bloom awards</li> </ul>



<b>6.0</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>
6.1	The Council provides a rich network of parks and greenspaces which are diverse in their designs and meet differing needs within our communities.
6.2	<p>Parks and Greenspaces provide many benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A valuable space for families to bond away from the distractions of technology;</li> <li>• A shared local space, where a range of groups and clubs will establish and congregate to create strong local bonds;</li> <li>• Ideal for fitness and training and encourage local residents to adopt a more healthy, outdoor lifestyle;</li> <li>• Increased tourism as a destination for a day out for outdoor fun, often free or at little cost;</li> <li>• Local Identity as a natural meeting point and event stage;</li> <li>• Increased footfall meaning local business could benefit from increased residual custom;</li> <li>• Widely regarded as key to improving the mental health of local residents;</li> <li>• Provide a constructive environment for older children and young adults; and</li> <li>• Provide an important role in the development of social and fine motor skills in young children, as well as encouraging an active lifestyle.</li> </ul>
6.2	Community volunteering has made a massive contribution to the Parks and Greenspace.
6.3	<p>In recent years there has been a great focus on development of volunteering opportunities in parks. This can range from volunteer gardening such as planting, weeding, pruning etc, to assisting with infrastructure such as repairing and painting benches, railings etc, to offering guided walks, to simply being an 'eyes and ears' volunteer to report issues about the parks.</p> <p>The Working Group highlighted the importance and excellent work undertaken by volunteers and hoped to see this developed further in the future.</p>
6.4	Members of the Working Group agreed that the way Parks and Greenspaces are managed needs to change and flex with the demands of the Council, in the context of reducing revenue budgets, but still contributing towards the 2030 vision.
6.5	It was also noted, based on research on trends in parks management from across the country, that other options for the future of the service can be explored also. These can include alternative service delivery mechanisms, such a 'Parks Trust' being explored by Knowsley Council, the trialling of Parks



	Improvement Districts, crowdfunding, commercialising some of the services we are able to offer to other land owners, selling arisings from land management such as timber, hay and potentially developing a tree and shrub nursery etc
6.7	It should also be noted that since this working party began its work, Full Council agreed to the integration of the Parks and Greenspace Service, the Coast and Countryside Service, and the Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Team (March 2017). With the insourcing of the Grounds Maintenance function in 2017 too, the potential for the newly evolving 'Green Sefton' Service is an excellent opportunity for the council to deliver these land management functions in very different ways.
6.8	A fundamental conclusion is that parks play a valuable part in people's lives, that they create a sense of place for communities and that meeting health and safety obligations must always be paramount. Further it was concluded that access to general parks facilities should remain freely accessible to all (but that some specific facilities, for select segments of users (and not for the wider public) could still be charged for).



<b>7.0</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
7.1	That consideration and further research continues to take place on future service delivery mechanisms for the newly forming 'Green Sefton' service. These, together with other day to day innovations, to seek to reduce the reliance on the service on revenue budgets whilst still providing sites that communities value, feel safe in, and remain freely accessible;
7.2	That the Head of Communities in consultation with Corporate Communications be requested to investigate the possibility of a Sefton Parks and Greenspaces application for electronic devices to enable visually impaired individuals to safely and confidently navigate around Sefton's Parks and Greenspaces, encouraging individuals to visit parks and greenspaces;
7.3	That the Head of Communities be requested to continue exploring and developing food growing projects, such as communal allotments in parks;
7.4	That the Head of Communities be requested to continue exploring and developing the volunteer hubs, such as that at Botanic gardens old nursery site;
7.5	That the Head of Communities be requested to continue to arrange 'Volunteer Celebrations' and offer thanks formally to all volunteers who contribute so much to our Parks and Greenspaces; and
7.6	That the Head of Communities be requested to report annually or when appropriate, whichever is the sooner, to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee updating the Committee on progress in relation to recommendations 7.1 to 7.5, above.



Thanks must also go to the Members of the Working Group who have worked hard and dedicated a great deal of time to this review, namely:-



Councillor Harry Bliss, Lead Member,  
Parks and Greenspaces Working Group



Councillor Michael Roche



Councillor Veronica Webster



Councillor Bill Welsh

**For further Information please contact:-**



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Overview and Scrutiny

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