

Information briefing

Report from: **Darren Share, Head of Parks**

Date: **14th December 2011**

Title: **Overview of Parks Service**

Summary:

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To provide the committee with an overview of the Parks Service. This will include an update on current issues and on the current financial position.

Background information:

2. Background

2.1 The Parks Service is part of the Environment and Culture Directorate. The Parks Service employs 294 staff; 95% of which deliver services directly within the Constituencies and consists of the following service areas:

➤ **Allotments**

The service manages the 7435 allotment plots over 115 sites. It is the largest single allotment provision in the Country. In 2010/11 92% of all plots were tenanted and in the current 2011/12 year 91.8% of plots are tenanted.

➤ **Birmingham Parks and Nurseries**

Birmingham Parks and Nurseries (BPN) is our internal service provider working to the Grounds Maintenance Contract.

➤ **Golf**

The Service manages 7 golf courses which is the largest provision of this type in the UK. It attracted 210,000 rounds of Golf in 2010 and it is on target to improve this year. The Service was awarded the Critchly Award by the Golf Foundation as recognition for our junior golf development programme. The Service is currently assessing tenders to transfer the Management of Golf Service to an external golf organisation.

➤ **Grounds Maintenance and Compliance**

The Parks Service through a Service Level Agreement manages the City's Grounds Maintenance Contract to all 10 Constituencies. The Parks Service administers the contract and ensures compliance on behalf of all Portfolios.

The Grounds Maintenance Contract was awarded for 10 years to:

- **Quadron:** for the Constituencies of Selly Oak, Hall Green, Ladywood, Yardley and Hodge Hill.
- **Glendale:** for the Constituencies of Perry Barr, Erdington and Selly Oak.
- **Birmingham Parks and Nurseries:** for the Constituencies of Edgbaston and Northfield, 7 Golf Courses, Floral Provision and Strategic Parks (Cannon Hill Park, Kings Heath Park, Sutton Park, Handsworth Park and Lickey Hills Country Park) and the City Centre.

The Parks Service provides strategic direction and consistency across the contracts, the budget holding service areas have control of the frequencies and types of task within the contract and Cabinet approves the core standards. The only areas of direct budget responsibility for the parks service through the Grounds Maintenance Contracts are Allotment Sites, Golf Courses and Strategic parks.

The Parks Service has introduced an asset management system to (POPI) to help manage our Parks and Open Spaces and Grounds Maintenance Contracts.

Service Providers have access to our electronic records and are able to view and schedule work. The work is allocated to a team via smart phones and they confirm work is completed on site. Recent samples of these completed tickets are sent to the Service Providers supervisors who then check the work and re confirm. The local Parks Officer receives a sample of this inspection and checks for Contract Compliance and the quality of work carried out.

➤ **Landscape Practice Group**

The Landscape Practice Group (LPG) is the City Council's sole in-house provider of Landscape Architectural Design services and delivers the service to all City Council Directorates and Portfolios. LPG provides input, as a statutory consultee, into all Planning Applications which impact upon land held by the Leisure, Sport and Culture Portfolio and is the implementing service for Section 106 Agreements. The Group also provides a Landscape Clerk of Works service to supervise landscape contract implementation works. LPG operates a Trading Account and recovers all costs through fee recharges against capital projects and delivers an additional income target.

➤ **Parks Development**

Kings Heath Training School provides specialist horticultural training for Parks Officers, our Service Providers and members of the public.

➤ **Ranger Services**

The Ranger Services operate out of 7 hubs (the Nature Centre, Sutton Park, the Lickey Hills Country Park etc etc) which cover the whole of the City and provide conservation management, facilitation of volunteering, events and environmental education programmes. The Ranger Service monitors our compliance with the National Indicator 197, sites in positive biodiversity management.

➤ **Playground Services**

The Service manages the 225 play areas and 71 multi use games areas which include inspections, repairs and refurbishment.

➤ **Trees**

The Parks Service maintains the City tree stock of 763,188 trees (non-highways) on behalf of the City local service areas. This includes maintenance, ensuring compliance with the Tree Policy and carrying out routine tree inspections.

- 2.2** The Parks Service is one of the largest in the Country managing 591 parks over 3,959 hectares of land.

The Parks Service strategically manages the parks through a Service Level Agreement and the budgets for the local parks were devolved to the Constituencies in 2000. The Service Level Agreement has been in place since then for Grounds Maintenance, Playground Maintenance Service, Parks Management Services and Ranger Services.

- 2.3** The Parks Service completed a restructure in 2010 which resulted in a £1.3 million revenue saving or 17% reduction in gross expenditure (from a total budget of around £8 million).

3. Current Financial Position

- 3.1** In 2010 the Parks Service achieved in £1.3 million pound efficiency saving.

- 3.2** In 2011/12 the efficiency saving target is an additional £1.58 million

4. Current Issues

- 4.1** The Parks Service has reviewed all of the City Park assets and produced a database of all land, buildings, play areas, pools, trees etc. All assets have been assessed in terms of importance, quality and risk. The work identified to bring assets up to standard has been estimated at £33 million.

- 4.2** Service areas across portfolios are all reviewing their budgets and many are choosing to reduce their grounds maintenance budgets commitments. This can cause inconsistency across the portfolio and could produce unviable contracts.

- 4.3** **Volunteering:** There are 140 friends of groups involved in the Parks Service under an umbrella organisation the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum. They often undertake volunteering with our Ranger Service with over 2205 individuals contributing a total of 5,086 volunteer days in 2010/11.

- 4.4** **Be Active In Parks:** Parks play an important role in the health and fitness of residents. The Park Service maintains 43 Walk 2000 routes and 7 Walk 5000 routes. The Service also maintains 53.5km of cycling/ walking routes in our parks. Throughout Parks there are 150 playing pitches in regular use. This does not include the informal health activities and research documentation shows that Open Space has positive effects on mental health recovery.

- 4.5** **Working with Partners:** The Parks Service have been working with Partners to deliver services for a number of years. We are extending our partnership working examples of this to include: Birmingham Open Spaces Forum, Birmingham Trees for Life and OPAL.

- 4.6** **Birmingham Trees for Life.** This project is devoted to promoting awareness and understanding of the value of trees. During the winter of 2010/11 over 5000 trees were planted.

- 4.7** **The OPAL Project** is a lottery funded research project in partnership with Birmingham University. It aims to find out how biodiversity in green spaces is used.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1** The Service is the largest of its type in the Country. With the volume and type of land there come risks and responsibilities.

- 5.2** The Parks Service have reviewed and restructured to produce savings and not compromise outcomes. The savings targets for 2011/12 are challenging and will only be achieved through maximizing income opportunities and developing partnership working.