

# Report of the Parks & Green Spaces Service to the meeting of the Bradford South Area Committee to be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2015

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## **Subject:**

**Parks & Green Spaces Service Report on the grounds maintenance in Bradford South 2014**

## **Summary statement:**

**This Report for the Parks & Green Spaces Service reflects back on the past 6 months and details the proposed changes/improvements planned for the service area for 2015.**

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## **Portfolio:**

**Environment, Sport & Sustainability**

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## **Overview & Scrutiny Area:**



Suzan Hemingway, City Solicitor

## **1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Council's Executive on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2012 identified the Parks & Green Spaces Service to report to Area Committees through the devolution agenda.

This interim Report for the Parks & Green Spaces Service reflects back on the past 6 months and looks at how the service was improved upon and what changes/improvements have been put in place for the delivery of the service in 2015.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 The Parks & Green Spaces Service**

Currently sits in the Sports and Leisure Service, which is part of the Environment & Sport Department and the main function is the management and maintenance of the district's parks and green spaces. The area of land managed by the section totals over 1,000 hectares of parks/grassed areas and around 850 hectares of woodland.

In total, utilising its 95 permanent gardeners, the service manages, develops and maintains 36 parks, of which 5 have achieved Green Flag status, 115 recreational spaces (which include football, rugby, cricket, tennis and bowls facilities) and 276 play areas. Property responsibility is also held for over 50 pavilion/changing rooms, 20 lodges and 5 cafes.

The service provides support to community, voluntary and friends of groups whilst co-ordinating all sporting fixtures on playing fields within the service remit.

This service includes the following operational activities managed and delivered within Bradford South Area:

- Management and development of sites including parks, buildings, sports provision and community events.
- Maintenance of Parks and recreation grounds
- Maintenance of sports pitches and bowling greens
- Maintenance of play areas (other than play equipment)
- Grave digging and cemetery maintenance (including survey's and risk assessments)
- Winter maintenance activity to Adult & Children's Services
- Maintenance of highway verges and green spaces vested in other internal clients.

In addition to the above, the Bradford South Parks and Green Spaces service is responsible for the management of the district wide Highway weed spraying contract which is presently delivered through an external contractor.

## **2.2 Managed Facilities in Bradford South**

Within the constituency there are 9 main parks that are managed and maintained by the service area teams:-

Knowles Park, Wibsey Park, Harold Park (Green Flag), Foxhill Park, Brackenhill Park, Horton Bank Country Park, Littlemoor Park, Russell Hall Park, Victoria Park.

There are also 21 recreation grounds, 23 equipped play areas, 5 MACA's and 3 skate/BMX parks. Other facilities include 30 Football/Rugby pitches (4 of which are exclusively for juniors), 9 bowling greens, 1 cricket pitch, 1 tennis court, 3 lakes and an aviary

In addition to horticultural works the service is responsible for the upkeep of all the associated structures within the above sites including 11 pavilions, 4 changing facilities and 6 lodges.

## **3.0 FRONT LINE OPERATIONS**

### **3.1 Spring/Summer 2014**

In an effort to better the previous years delivery the service teams got off to a good start and managed to achieve an early cut in March/April. However, with the combination of a very wet but mild winter and a warm spring interspersed with downpours initially resulted in grass growing at a far higher rate than normal causing an issue for the Service, operating on minimum cut numbers across the District. In addition to this the run of bank holidays in April/May also delayed progress and the early season once again proved to be challenging.

During the early season the general grass cutting teams were split into 2 units and covered 3 wards each as this was deemed to be the best working model with a 'mirrored' presence on both sides of the constituency.

However, management recognised that Bradford South appeared to be further behind schedule than most other areas and moved to increase resources early in May after establishing that the first cut was completed some 8 days late. A third grass cutting gang was introduced and was allocated a remit of 1 ward (Royds) which reduced the pressures from the remaining teams and allowed them to catch up with the workload.

By June the weather patterns had not changed and the grass continued to grow at a rapid rate and it was clearly visible that the grass cutting operation was still struggling to keep to schedule. Therefore, it was proposed by senior management that a period of overtime should be introduced to include evenings and weekends and would run for at least 3 weeks, or until management was satisfied that the maintenance teams were back on schedule.

In addition to the above, assistance was requested from adjacent service areas to specifically attend to any parks/cemetery maintenance as some areas had fallen behind due to the main focus being on highway verges and other public

open space.

Throughout this period, an additional management resource was deployed from other service areas to carry out an 'audit' of works and performance standards across the Bradford South area and also to highlight any snagging issues and to action any infrastructure concerns within parks and recreation grounds. This remit also included officers liaising with partnership organisations such as 'residents associations and friends of groups' with a view to discussing and addressing areas of concern and to be pro-active in resolving ongoing issues.

During this period officers met with Ward Members to discuss their concerns and to note any further issues that could be dealt with and informed of how the service intended to address any existing/outstanding concerns. This form of communication proved to be positive and was pivotal in assisting with a better service delivery.

The agreed period of overtime assisted greatly and allowed the mowing teams to regain control of the schedules. However, senior management still had a concern with regard to the consistency of service delivery. Therefore, a senior management decision was made around the middle of June to consolidate the teams as one complete unit, which would allow them to 'blitz' an area and the main tasks of mowing, strimming, blowing and sweeping to be fully completed on all areas before moving on.

By the middle of July there was a noticeable rise in the standard of the service delivery with all mown areas now being consistent with other adjacent service areas, and the maintenance teams were on course to achieve the 3 weekly cycle of grounds maintenance works.

By implementing the above measures the service improved significantly and the operational teams continued working as one unit, and along with the support from colleagues in Cleansing (mechanical sweeper back up), managed to deliver 10 cuts in some areas before the weather brought a premature end to the cutting season. Management are continuing to liaise with both Members and partner organisations and are providing regular updates and information on all matters raised.

#### **4. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- 4.1 Through the meetings with Members officers were made aware of the growing concerns regarding a problem with weeds on some specific footpath areas in Odsal/Wyke Wards. The areas in question had also previously been identified as a concern but had only been partially addressed through the external weed spraying contract.

However, following consultation with officers in the Highway section some funding was made available to allow the service area teams to fully attend to this issue and remove what could have potentially created a hazard for pedestrians.

The programme of weed removal was successfully completed within the highlighted areas before the end of the operational season. In an effort to continue the best delivery of the contract regular meetings are held with the

nominated officer/contractor and spraying schedules are reviewed and adjusted to suit the demands of the areas.

## **5. OPTIONS**

### **5.1 For Information Only**

Members may wish to receive this report for information only

### **5.2 Revenue Funded Front Line Operations – 2015/16**

Due to the proposed departmental budget savings the service is having to look at alternative ways of how it delivers the present service and below are some proposals that Members may wish to consider. Further reports outlining such options would be brought to future meetings for potential implementation in the following year, although elements of some have already been adopted in response to the various agreed budget savings:

- Reduce overall grass cutting and remove some grass areas from the schedule to leave as 'wild' areas
- To remove larger areas from the schedule and cultivate as 'wild flower meadows'
- To reduce some specifications in certain areas and raise in others
- To reduce/increase annual bedding displays
- To increase/decrease weed spraying activity
- To increase/decrease sports letting charges following review of levels of subsidy by sport
- To involve community based project groups in maintaining and improving areas

With regard to annual bedding displays, this is one area that will require Members to give some serious consideration as it is proposed to close the central growing nursery as part of the departmental savings later in the financial year. Initially, as the plants are ordered and growing for this summer the impact will be minimal, however, should the proposal be carried forward seasonal plants will be bought in and the number of flower beds will either be greatly reduced or removed completely for the year 2016.

Previously, there has been much discussion around the issue of weed spraying and at the present time, we are aware that our colleagues in Cleansing are potentially looking at the procurement of specific sweeper head attachments (mechanical sweepers) which allows the chemical treatment of weeds to be applied at the same time as sweeping. Should this be practicable this additional weed spraying resource could be of benefit across the district.

On the subject of sports letting charges and the involvement of community based groups maintaining areas, there has been some significant movement on the role of bowls clubs within the Bradford Areas. A previous report on the subject of bowls clubs highlighted how costly they were for the service to run and maintain and the report highlighted a number of possible 'options' including, increased fees and the possible hand over of maintenance.

The Council's draft budget for consultation includes a proposal to save £100K over the next two years by supporting a managed transfer of bowling greens to bowls clubs and community ownership. The Council is in discussion with bowling clubs about maintenance regimes, charges and the potential for clubs to take on more responsibility for the upkeep of greens. The final decision on this proposal will not be made until the full council meets at the end of February 2015.

Due to the retirement of some managerial staff the service is presently going through a 'management re-structure' and a change of management in the Bradford South Parks Operational Area is certain to be in place before the main season commences. To this end, senior management will be looking to implement the proposed changes early in the new year which will allow for a period of 'shadowing' and handover to enable a smooth transition in readiness for the start of the main season. Indeed, management are already in the process of reviewing the operational workforce and the needs of the service in an effort to achieve the best possible performance within the current resource and financial constraints. Members will be informed of the changes as soon as they are implemented.

The Bereavement staff (grave diggers) have been an integral part of the parks service teams for a number of years, however, at the present time, it is being considered as to whether the staff concerned (4 in total in South) should be transferred to the Bereavement Service and be directly managed by their officers. Should this be agreed this transfer would obviously include the devolvement of the associated salaries from the base budget but as the operatives role is specifically in this area of work there should not be any impact on the main operational remit.

Clearly any decision making in any of the above areas will need to be made against a background of reducing resources and in line with the Council's corporate decision making process.

## **6. FINANCIAL APPRAISAL**

Whilst the budget for the year 2015/16 has yet to be confirmed the budget allocated to the Area Parks Manager for Bradford South for the year 2014/15 is £236,000 (net of income). The gross budget is £759,000 and represents 21% of the overall devolved budgets.

It is anticipated that the extra resource involved with the above operations will cost the service in the region of £75k. However, this additional resource cost is currently anticipated to be covered through central operational budgets.

## **7. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

- 7.1 The financial risks posed are limited by the nature of the expenditure delegated. However, there is potential to reduce efficiency and overall quality of the service in specific areas if any proposed change is not considered for the wider implications.

## **8. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

- 8.1 The contents of this report are in accordance with the decisions of the Executive on 9 October 2012 and 16 April 2013.

## **9. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **9.1 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

Area Committee decisions will need to be made in line with Equal Rights legislation. This will require Area Committees to assess the potential equality impact of any decisions they make.

### **9.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

Increased local decision making has the potential to create more sustainable solutions to local issues.

Contact the Sustainability Co-ordinator (Policy), on Bradford 434123 or e-mail [jamie.saunders@bradford.gov.uk](mailto:jamie.saunders@bradford.gov.uk) for further guidance.

### **9.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS**

The Parks and Green Spaces service provides a pro-active approach in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through the local deployment of its maintenance teams. Teams are based in areas in an effort to reduce travelling times with its fleet/plant resulting in reduced fuel consumption. In addition to this parks and recreation grounds/trees/woodlands provide communities with 'green lungs' which can naturally assist with the filtering of polluted air.

### **9.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no Community Safety Implications arising from this report.

### **9.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

There are no Human Rights Act implications arising from this report.

### **9.6 TRADE UNION**

There are no Trade Union implications.

**9.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

The information in this report is relevant to all Wards in the area.

An increased level devolution of the services will allow the Area Committee to further address local priorities for those services within wards.

**10. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

There are no not for publication documents.

**11. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Bradford South Area Committee:

Notes the content of this report.

Considers the options available to receive further reports to change future operational delivery (section 5.2)

**12. APPENDICES**

None

**13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None