

Decision Maker: Environment PDS Committee

Date: 16 June 2011

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: REVIEW OF RANGERS, COUNTRYSIDE SERVICES AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES TO THE PARKS AND GREENSPACE SECTION

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Chief Officer: Nigel Davies, Director of Environmental Services

Ward: N/A

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 This report, describes proposals for a significant restructuring within the Parks and Greenspace section of the Streetscene and Greenspace Division based on the outcome of the Council's budgetary exercise for 2011/12 and the inclusion of the Countryside Service, formerly within Renewal and Recreation. This undertaking has been carried out by the Director of Environmental Services and staff have been formally consulted. It is brought to the Environment PDS to give scrutiny on the proposed reorganisation which will be decided subsequently by the Director.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

The Committee is asked to:

- 2.1 **Note the Director of Environmental Service's proposals for restructuring within the Parks and Greenspace Section, together with the implications for a reduction in service area delivery and reduction of seven full time staff equivalents.**

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing policy.
 2. BBB Priority: Quality Environment.
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated cost An estimated maximum cost of £150k for redundancy/early retirement (worst case scenario)
 2. Ongoing costs: Recurring cost. Part year saving of £107k, full year saving of £291k
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Parks and Greenspace
 4. Total current budget for this head: £Staffing budget of £1,761k
 5. Source of funding: Existing Revenue budget 2011/12
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Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 46FTE current, reducing to 39 FTE
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: n/a
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: No statutory requirement or Government guidance.
 2. Call-in: Call-in is not applicable.
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): It is impossible to gauge with any accuracy the true number of park visitors across the Borough's 156 parks, recreation grounds, woods, commons and other amenity land.
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? No.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: n/a

3. COMMENTARY

Overall Background

- 3.1 The rationale is motivated primarily around a need to match service delivery to a reduction in overall Council budgets. This was agreed at the Council's Executive meetings on the 2nd and 14th February 2011 before being endorsed at Full Council on 28th February. The proposal sought to make permanent savings to the Ranger and Countryside services amounting to £291,000 commencing in 2011/12 and subsequent years. The review also has to accommodate the Countryside and Education facilities at High Elms and the BEECHE transferring to Environmental Services from Renewal and Recreation - as part of the Authority's overall Organisational Improvement Programme. Given these fundamental changes, opportunity has been taken to review the section as a whole to ensure best efficiencies and synergies are identified and embedded in a new structure. The current external security contract is also looked at to see how it can support such proposals. The report identifies the impact of the recommendations and the financial implications of the proposed changes including savings and redundancy costs. The staffing implications in this report will be dealt with through the Council's Managing Change Procedure.
- 3.2 The last review of the Parks and Greenspace Section (formerly Parks and Recreation) was carried out during 2006. At that time, the current in house security Parks Patrol team had already been exposed to competition during 2004 and was subsequently being delivered by Ward Security limited a year later; and again by public tender during 2010. A residual number of Rangers however were kept within the department and formed Parks Services, based at Churchouse Gardens, Bromley from 2005. At that time the Rangers at Crystal Palace Park were not subjected to review as it was believed they would be transferred along with their park to the GLA. In the event, this option was never ratified, when following the development of the Masterplan with the London Development Agency (LDA), the liability of the park transferring was rejected. This is therefore the first major review of that service aspect since acquisition from the former GLC in 1986, although there had been a minor reorganisation in 2000.
- 3.3 The Countryside and Education services operated from High Elms and the BEECHE were subject to review following the reconstruction of the current BEECHE during 2009.

What services are affected?

- 3.4 The review has looked at three specific service areas:
- **Parks Services** – based at Churchouse Gardens, Bromley
 - **Crystal Palace Park Rangers** based at Crystal Palace Park; and,
 - **The Countryside Service and Educational facility at BEECHE** – both currently at High Elms
- 3.5 The review also identifies other areas within the current Parks and Greenspace section, where there may be an overlap or logical co-joining of services or responsibilities. Additionally it will seek to amend the general structure, management and reporting lines to reflect the changes in emphasis over the last few years and heightened by the overall review as shown in Appendix C.
- 3.6 In addition there has been a review of permanent places of work to best meet the needs of the service going forward – although this undertaking will still need considerable development by managers after this review in the context of accommodation generally and the way services pan out on the ground that best serve customers. There is therefore no presumption at this stage that any or all of the existing three locations will be decommissioned.

What are the current issues?

3.7 *It has been appropriate to conduct a review, in addition to any budgetary constraints because:*

- a) The static Ranger provision at Crystal Palace Park is unique insofar as every other park in Bromley's 156 site portfolio only has a visiting presence by Parks Services Officers/Ward Security.
- b) A significant volume of staff time (at Crystal Palace Park) is expended on locking up duties late at night.
- c) There is currently no Ward Security presence at Crystal Palace Park, who would have the ability to deal with the whole raft of anti-social issues in parks – particularly heightened given its location.
- d) The Countryside Service (until now) has operated within a different directorate, adding to the confusion of a single landscape team from a public, strategic and operational perspectives.
- e) There has been a blurring of responsibilities between different teams – ie Friends Officers and Countryside Rangers.
- f) There is limited coherence between the Ranger Services within the countryside and those in the more town based sites.
- g) There is no constant public perception of Rangers between the three areas.

What will the key components of the new service look like?

3.8 The new service within Parks and Greenspace will be comprised of three service areas (reduced from four as shown in Appendices A and B):

- **Contracts** (Largely unchanged but significant interaction with the two service areas below - covering Grounds Maintenance, Cemeteries, Trees, Play and Infrastructure contacts)
- **Community and Development** – Amalgamating the key areas around Countryside and Urban Park development, Friends, Healthy Lifestyles, and fundraising. The BEECHE at High Elms will be subject to further review and minor staffing changes after a full assessment has been undertaken by Parks and Greenspace Management; following introduction of the current proposals.
- **Ranger Services** – Multi-purpose rangers covering all landscape sites, event management and security.

3.9 Ward Security will be based and patrol at Crystal Palace Park. They will undertake locking duties at night. This will all be provided for within the existing contact and no additional cost to the Authority.

What will the proposed changes have upon service delivery?

3.10 The review will have an impact on the section's ability to deliver existing services in extent, quality, development and sustainability. The key areas likely to be affected as a result of staff and overall revenue reduction are anticipated to be:

- a) Less visible and reduced staffing presence at Crystal Palace Park,
- b) Potential loss of key skills – particularly around Countryside Management,

- c) Potential loss of local knowledge and technical expertise through relevant staff leaving the organisation arising from these changes.,
- d) Reduced budget for plant, tools, equipment and materials to support parks and greenspace generally,
- e) Less advocacy and advice for local land owners' – leading to potentially fewer grant/stewardship awards and;
- f) Reduced on site Ranger support to volunteer groups.

However, this must be weighed in context against the increased synergies, efficiencies and proposed removal of unnecessary duplication of some aspects of the existing service, and the very positive opportunities afforded by the review and joining of the Countryside Services with Parks. The future emphasis is for staff and communities, through training, guidance and empowerment, to work towards greater self sustainability.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The policy imperative of the Parks and Greenspace section is the conservation and enhancement of the natural and built locations to deliver a quality environment to its residents, customers, workers and visitors. According to 'Building a Better Bromley' the General Satisfaction Survey conducted by MORI (2006), showed that nearly 30% of Bromley residents identified access to parks and open spaces as important in making an area a good place to live and 20% Bromley residents ranked access to nature as a local priority.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This review of service needs to be aligned to a backdrop of financial savings to be delivered by the Authority over the next two financial years 2011/12 and 2012/13; in addition to assimilating both the Countryside and Bromley Environmental Education Centre at High Elms (BEECHE) functions, which became part of Environmental Services effectively, from a budget perspective at the beginning of April 2011.
- 5.2 On 28th February 2011, Full Council agreed savings of £156k for 2011/12 and a further £135k in 2012/13, making a total of £291k relating to a review of Ranger and Countryside Service.
- 5.3 Overall the effect of the staffing review will be a net reduction of 7 FTEs generating a part year saving of £107k and full year saving of £213k as shown in the table below: -

	FTEs	2011/12 Part Year	2012/13 Full Year
Agreed budget options		(156,000)	(291,000)
Net saving from staffing review	(7)	(106,680)	(213,360)
Balance of savings to be met from other budgets		<u>(49,320)</u>	<u>(77,640)</u>

- 5.2 For 2011/12, there will be a budget gap of £49.3k which will be met from budget savings brought forward from 2012/13 such as staff within Transport and Highways that will be funded from TfL resources rather than LBB resources during 2011/12.
- 5.3 The full year savings from this review leave a balance of £77k for 2012/13 which will be met by reducing budgets such as the maintenance of paths (£18k), countryside initiatives (£30k) and other general running expenses for parks (£29k).

5.4 There are likely to be redundancy/early retirement implications arising from these proposals. Based on the Council's redundancy policy framework, the maximum costs are estimated to be £150k and will be met from the earmarked reserve set aside to meet redundancy costs as a result of agreed budget options. These estimated costs represent the worst case scenario as it is not possible at this stage to identify which, if any, individual post-holders will be unable to be redeployed and which, therefore, may be made redundant.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are a number of statutory functions placed on the Authority's countryside. It has the largest area of parks and countryside of any London Borough and includes within its boundaries 1/3rd of London's chalk grassland, 1/3rd of it semi-natural ancient woodland, 6 SSSIs (3 of which are on LB Bromley owned land and which it therefore has a statutory responsibility to maintain and improve where required), a proposed World Heritage Site, part of Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, 5 Local Nature Reserves 23 Sites of Metropolitan Importance and 57 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 In order to keep staff fully aware and engaged in the reorganisation, a series of meetings were established during January 2011 and have continued prior to, during and after the formal consultation phase which was undertaken in April/May.

7.2 The proposals to restructure the Parks and Greenspace section have been the subject of detailed discussions with trade union and staff departmental representatives and ensures that the Council meets its statutory obligations in the way that redundancies are managed throughout the organisation.

7.3 The staff of the Parks and Greenspace section are employed on permanent contracts. However, a redundancy situation exists if fewer staff are required and therefore the Council's established redundancy and redeployment policy framework will apply to all staff affected.

7.4 The equality impact assessment in relation to existing staff has been considered as part of consultation and in an attempt to minimise the number of redundancies overall, where proposed working patterns and/or hours required will change from those currently worked attempts will be made to accommodate existing staff. Consultations with user groups and a special meeting of the Friends Forum were established throughout the consultation.

7.5 Other personnel implications, including the number of staff affected and details of the impact of the restructuring proposals, are as set out elsewhere in this report.

Non-Applicable Sections:	none
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Report to the Executive and Full Council on budget proposals – February and March 2011 Formal Consultation Report on Draft Proposals – April 2011 Correspondence between staff members and Head of Parks and Greenspace – January to May 2011 (and ongoing)