

North Lanarkshire Council Report

Transformation and Digitalisation Committee

approval noting

Ref ...

Date 27 February 2019

Country Parks and Greenspace Review

From Head of Environmental Assets

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Executive Summary

Country Parks and Greenspace Services have been subject of a review over the last 12 months. The review concluded that the service can be better focussed on corporate priorities and achieve the anticipated savings by undertaking the actions enclosed.

The review also highlighted the desirability of a master planning exercise for the country parks to provide a clear focus on development activities in the medium to long term.

Recommendations

That the committee:

- 1) Notes the progress made over the last 12 months in reviewing operations within the Country Parks and Greenspace, and the anticipated savings of £231,000.
 - 2) Gives approval to implement the outcomes of the review.
 - 3) Notes the intention to build on the review outcomes further by master planning the Council's main country parks.
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Supporting Documents

**Council business
plan to 2020**

1. Background

- 1.1 Savings proposals put forward previously in 2018/19 aimed to reduce costs within country parks and Greenspace by focusing on three areas:
- At Palacerigg by removing the animal collection and reducing the staff complement.
 - Reducing the Ranger Service and therefore removing support for volunteer and health and wellbeing groups
 - Reducing the Greenspace Team, and subsequently reducing project work and external partnerships.
- 1.2 A separate Savings proposal was put forward to reduce the Arbor service to an emergency service only, and reduce the staff complement from 12FTE to 4 FTE.
- 1.3 Following the 2018/19 savings review, the Transformation Sub Committee requested a full review of the proposals put forward for Country Parks and Greenspaces and arbor to achieve a saving of £237,000.
- 1.4 The review was started in July 2018 and aimed to undertake an in depth review of the value of Country Parks and Greenspace to the council's priority outcomes. Specific objectives were:
- Review operations of each Country Park:
 - Review how they contribute to council priorities
 - Identify improvements to better deliver to priorities
 - Review Greenspace Development operations
 - Review how they can best deliver against priorities
 - Identify improvements to best deliver against priorities
 - Review how the arbor service can be structured to deliver an efficient and effective service.
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2. Report

- 2.1 The review team met 4 times over the period and reviewed all in scope elements. The review was overseen by the Infrastructure Programme board and reported to the Transformation subcommittee. The review went through a Gateway review with members of the transformation subcommittee on 12 December 2018 and the review panel approved the review process used to develop the draft proposals. The proposals deliver the anticipated £231,000 of savings.
- 2.2 The review concluded that in the Country Parks, better service provision and efficiencies could be achieved by rationalising the opening hours and staffing levels to better match the periods of highest visitor numbers. The proposal at Palacerigg, and Drumpellier Parks are to reduce building opening hours in summer to 5pm in line with other country parks across the country. This will have a limited effect on staff rotas. We will also rationalise the countryside stewards roles and rotas to provide better cover across the parks aligned to peak visitor numbers. These changes will result in deletion of 2.5 FTE posts and reconfiguring of 0.26 FTE posts to 0.5FTE

- 2.3 The review of the Greenspace service highlighted the valuable role the Countryside Ranger service play in supporting Health and Wellbeing priorities, together with various partnerships including NHS Lanarkshire, and the role the service play in securing externally funded improvements to greenspaces in partnership with local communities.

The review proposes to improve service and efficiency by rationalising the team to one location within Strathclyde Park. This releases limited accommodation savings but will *provide* efficiencies in vehicles and plant usage. It will also enable a reduction in biological survey and monitoring services and streamline and potentially improve the advice service to planning and external agencies.

Admin support will be rationalised by centralising the service, but technical resource is required to support externally funded projects in both grant monitoring and procurement activity. The review also reconfigures admin support roles across the three parks to allow more flexibility of cover among the team.

The review proposes to reduce Greenspace for communities' budget by £10,000 but to improve performance in supporting communities accessing external funding. The proposals result in deletion of 2.5 FTE posts across the administrative and biodiversity teams and creation of 1 FTE technical support post.

- 2.4 The review of the Arbor service looked at various options for achieving savings in the team. It proposes to centralise the team at Strathclyde Park, providing savings in fleet and machinery, and reducing the team by 3 FTE. The review however highlights that to achieve this saving will result in a reduction in service and may expose the council to increased liability from tree related damage or injury across its estates and assets. The review also proposes to improve succession planning in the service by creating one apprentice post within the service.
- 2.5 The proposals were presented to Trade Unions (representatives from GMB, Unison and Unite) on 15 January 2019. Further written details were requested by the unions and these were provided and discussed on 25 January 2019. Staff engagement sessions were held the week of 28 January. A follow up meeting was held with Trade Unions on the 11 February 2019 to discuss any further issues raised by staff.
- 2.6 The review team anticipates the savings are achievable, with options of VRS and redeployment as appropriate.

3. Equality and Diversity

3.1 Fairer Scotland

The Fairer Scotland duty does not apply to the review

3.2 Equality Impact Assessment

An equality impact assessment has been undertaken

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Impact

The review will deliver £231,000 of revenue savings

4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative Impact

We anticipate the savings will be delivered without compulsory redundancy. There has been full consultation with staff and Trade Unions.

4.3 Environmental Impact

There will be some environmental impact through a slightly reduced service level for arboriculture management. This will be managed by prioritising highest risk issues and improving capacity through capital investment in machinery

4.4 Risk Impact

Reputational risks due to changes in operation will be mitigated through a communications plan.

5. Measures of success

5.1 Savings of £231,000 are delivered within financial year 2019/20.



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