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## Report of the Chief Recreation Officer

### South Leeds (Outer) Area Committee

Date: Monday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2011

Subject: Site Based Gardeners in Community Parks & Green Spaces

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#### Electoral Wards Affected:

Morley North

Morley South

Ardsley & Robin Hood

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

#### Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Council  
Function

Delegated Executive  
Function available  
for Call In

Delegated Executive  
Function not available for  
Call In Details set out in the  
report

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## Executive Summary

This report is to provide the Area Committee with a review of the work undertaken by the site based gardeners in the Outer South Area, which has been funded from the Well being Budget from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. Furthermore the report looks at the options available to continue the service.

### 1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Area Committee with a review of the site based gardeners scheme that is currently funded by the Area Committee Wellbeing Fund. This funding is due to cease on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.
- 1.2. The report also outlines options available to the Area Committee for the continuation of the service.

## 2.0 Background Information

2.1 The parks & greenspace areas currently hosting site based gardeners are:

| Sites/Group of sites with a site based gardener                       | Ward               |
|---|--------------------|
| Drighlington Park and Churwell park                                   | Morley North       |
| Lewisham Park   | Morley South       |
| Lowry Road And Smithy Lane recreation ground                          | Ardsley Robin Hood |
| Wide Lane, Magpie Lane play areas and Hembrigg Park                   | Morley South       |
| Woodsford Park, Shayfield recreation Ground and Carlton Village Green | Rothwell Ward      |

- 2.2 Since the introduction of the site based gardeners in 2007, there has been a significant change in public opinion. It is apparent that complaints to both Ward Councillors and the Parks and Countryside Service have declined. It must be stressed that this information is only anecdotal. In addition, the service has observed an increase in the number of residents using parks and open spaces resulting in feed back from users being complimentary of the service rather than critical. This information was accrued through conversations with the site based gardeners.
- 2.3 Each of the site based gardeners have built a rapport with users, local residents, Ward Members and local groups developing a sense of shared ownership for the site and the activities that are undertaken there. In addition, the gardeners develop a sense of responsibility and the attainment of a wealth of knowledge pertinent to the site and the people who use it. Certainly the rapport with the public often enables problems to be dealt with effectively and helps to reduce the pressure on the wider service in the area allowing issues to be resolved with little or no budget implications for Parks and Countryside.
- 2.4 In Drighlington, the Parish Council meet regularly with both the site based gardener and the area officer to discuss maintenance issues along side projects that they wish to undertake.
- 2.5 At Lowry Road, the gardener not only manages the shrub beds by undertaking litter collection and seasonal pruning, but also tends to the grass and paths, removing graffiti and over hanging branches, alongside engaging with members of the local community by being a constant visible presence on site during the day. Where once Lowry Road Public Open Space suffered from anti social behaviour, the site based gardener has managed through close working with Ward Members and residents, to improve the appearance of this public open space making it a more attractive and inviting space to visit.

- 2.6 At Lewisham Park the site based gardener undertakes a variety of tasks from grass cutting to managing the artificial cricket wicket, keeping the surface clean and the wickets ready for use, along side maintaining the bowling green and seasonal bedding displays. Additional duties involve emptying of bins, community engagement, providing advice and tips on horticulture along with keeping the park well tended.
- 2.7 The final site based gardener of the provision is responsible for the green spaces along Wide Lane, Magpie Lane and Hembrigg Park undertaking gardening duties that range from litter collection and seasonal pruning through to grass cutting, marking out of sports pitches, inspecting the refurbished play areas and the newly installed youth hub on Magpie lane along side carrying out strimming work around obstacles and inspecting the sports pavilion.
- 2.8 Revenue funding made available by the Area Committee Well being fund was to the value of £60,380 in 2008/09 and £46,182.50 in 2009/10. £15,712.50 was match funded by Parks and Countryside. In order to continue this service the Parks and Countryside service continues to seek mainstream funding for increased staffing via the budget processes of the Council.

### 3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 To continue with the existing service of four site based gardeners would require £69,903 for the financial year 2011/2012. In the light of Well being Revenue Budget pressures already existing in Outer South, two options are proposed to achieve the most effective use of resources.
- 3.2 Option 1 recommends the funding of three site based gardeners to operate as per the current arrangements as per the table below :-
- This option would require £69,903 of funding for the financial year 2011/2012

| Sites/Group of sites with a site based gardener                         | Ward               |
|---|--------------------|
| Drighlington Park and Churwell park                                     | Morley North       |
| Lewisham Park   | Morley South       |
| Lowry Road And Smithy Lane recreation ground                            | Ardsley Robin Hood |
| Wide Lane, Magpie Lane play areas and Hembrigg Park                     | Morley South       |
| Woodlesford Park, Shayfield recreation Ground and Carlton Village Green | Rothwell Ward      |

- 3.3 A second Option that could be pursued would be to employ three site based gardeners for 6 months to operate again as per the table below : -

| Sites/Group of sites with a site based gardener                         | Ward              |
|---|-------------------|
| Drighlington Park and Churwell park                                     | Morley North      |
| Lewisham Park   | Morley South      |
| Lowry Road And Smithy Lane recreation ground                            | Ardley Robin Hood |
| Wide Lane, Magpie Lane play areas and Hembrigg Park                     | Morley South      |
| Woodlesford Park, Shayfield recreation Ground and Carlton Village Green | Rothwell Ward     |

- This option would require £34,951.50 of funding for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

#### 4.0 Implications For Council Policy and Governance

- 4.1 There are no implications on Council Policy and Governance associated with this scheme.

#### 5.0 Legal and Resource Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications associated with this scheme.

- 5.2 The resource implications associated with this scheme are: -

##### Option 1

- A cost of £69,903

##### Option 2

- A cost of £34,951.50

#### 6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 It is clear that the site based gardeners have proven to be extremely popular with local residents and a great asset to the service. Since their introduction the general condition of the sites have improved markedly however the funding needed to continue the improvements at their present level will not be available owing to the current financial climate
- 6.2 To retain the benefits of having site-based gardeners from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012, option 1 is the Parks and Countryside preferred option.

6.3 However Parks and Countryside understand the pressures on the council as a whole and realise that securing this level of funding may be difficult. They are therefore seeking to develop a volunteer resource to assist with the maintenance of their parks gardens and open spaces in partnership with the existing staff. Enabling and empowering volunteers to undertake work such as pruning, brash cleaning and litter collection.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

7.1 The Area Committee is asked to consider the contents of the report with a view to supporting the continuation of the site based gardeners through either option 1 the preferred option or option 2 from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011.

### **Background Papers**

- Site Based Gardeners in Community Parks & Green Spaces 30<sup>th</sup> March 2009
- Site Based Gardeners Report 7<sup>th</sup> July 2008