

Report of the Head of Parks & Countryside

Report to West Leeds (Outer) Area Committee

Date: 7 September 2012

Subject: Site Based Gardeners in Community Parks & Green Spaces

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	Farnley & Wortley Pudsey	
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	Yes	No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number:		
Appendix number:		

Summary of main issues

1. To advise the West Leeds (Outer) Area Committee of the work that has been on going with the site based gardener funded by West Leeds (Outer) Area Committee Wellbeing Fund in 2012/13 & 2013/14.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Area Committee with a review of the site based gardener scheme that is funded by the Area Committee Wellbeing Fund between August 1st 2012 - July 31st 2013.

2 Background information

Research by CABA (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) Space, highlighted that by 1996 only a third of parks nationally had dedicated park staff with 90% of local authorities experiencing vandalism in their Parks. Furthermore CABA linked the £1.3billion cumulative cut in revenue expenditure in Parks from 1981 to 2001 with the downward spiral towards greater vandalism, litter, neglect and visitor decline in use of our Parks¹.

- 2.1 A telephone survey conducted on behalf of the Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions revealed that 67% of women, 57% of 12-15 year olds, 50% of 16-19 year olds, 79% of 56-65 year olds, 63% of 76 year olds and 77% of disabled

¹ Parks need Parkforce, CABA Space 2005

respondents felt that the presence of staff on site would make them feel safer visiting their particular greenspace².

- 2.2 This project is providing 1 gardener (37 hours per person per week) for a period of 12 months, dedicated to managing community parks in the west outer area of Leeds. The funded site based gardener commenced work on 1st August 2012 and is funded until 31st July 2013.
- 2.3 It was agreed by the West Leeds (Outer) Area Committee that this additional staffing resource would provide dedicated front line support in the following parks and greenspaces identified in the table below.

Sites/Group of sites with a site based gardener	Ward
Tyersal Park	Pudsey
New Farnley Park	Farnley & Wortley

- 2.4 Although site based gardeners conduct lone working operations, they also at times work with the area maintenance teams in order to create marked improvements of the above sites. The table below provides an indication of how the funded site based gardener's operational hours are divided between the parks and the duties that they carry out. The tasks undertaken are often cyclical, and the site based gardener provides a higher frequency of the tasks so that the areas look considerably better maintained for a longer time. However these staff must remain flexible and reactionary when non common issues arise within their respective areas.

Site Based Gardener (SBG)	Park / Greenspace Name	Hours worked per week	Main Duties
SBG1	New Farnley Park	18	<p>The site based gardener undertakes a variety of tasks from grass cutting, maintaining the bowling greens, strimming work around obstacles and seasonal bedding displays. Additional duties involve emptying of bins, undertaking litter collection, seasonal shrub pruning, removing graffiti and over hanging branches, inspection of the play area and sweeping of paths.</p> <p>The site based gardener also engages with the local community, providing advice and tips on good horticultural practices . By being a regular visible and approachable presence on site the site based gardener has managed through close working with Ward Members and</p>
SBG1	Tyersal Park	19	
TOTAL		37	

² Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Open spaces, The Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions 2002

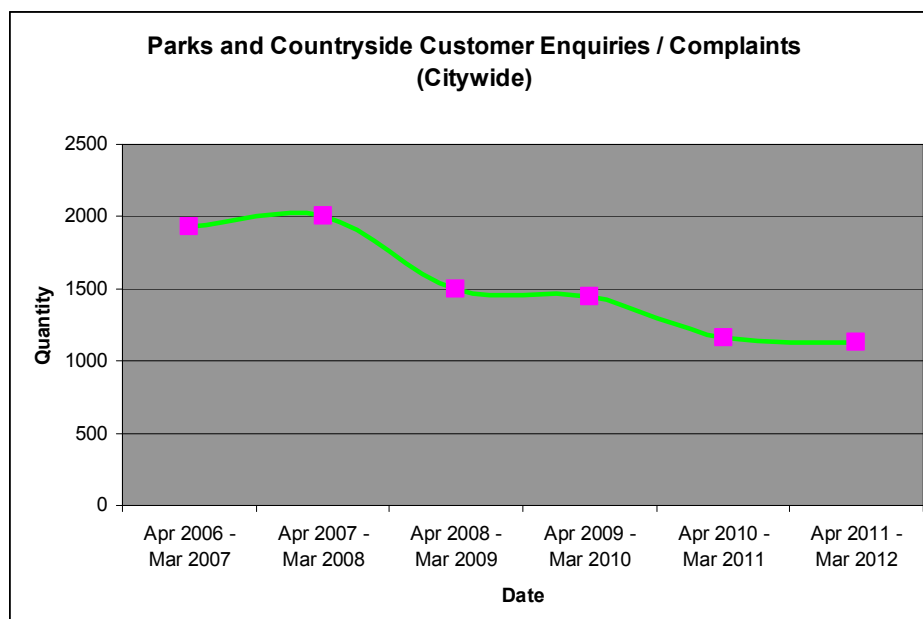
			<p>residents, to reduce the incidents of ASB and improve the appearance of the two parks making them more attractive and inviting spaces to visit.</p> <p>The regular visit by the site based gardener ensures this site is well maintained and cared for throughout the year and a familiar face ensures residents know who to speak to about any problems that arise.</p>
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2.5 Since 2007 when the site based gardener scheme was first introduced the funded site based gardeners have helped make marked improvements to a number of horticultural tasks in these parks that in the past were of concern. There have been vast improvements to the horticultural maintenance of these parks as well as a reduction in litter and dog faeces. As a result, Parks and Countryside have observed an increase in the number of residents using the parks.

2.6 Since the introduction of the site based gardeners there has been a significant change in public opinion which has subsequently reduced complaints to both Ward Councillors and the Parks and Countryside Service. As a consequence of the site based gardeners working pattern being regular per site, it means that users / members of the public can arrange to meet and engage with the gardeners to discuss any issues and concerns that they may have. This can assist in reducing the time it takes to resolve complaints and issues which in turn creates greater customer satisfaction.

2.6 The Service has been complimented on a number of improvements by members of the public, local Councillors, sports clubs and associations and also voluntary organisations such as 'Friends of' groups. Much of this can be attributed to the dialogue between customers and the site based gardener.

2.7 The table below illustrates the number of customer enquiries / complaints that Parks and Countryside has received between financial years 2006/7 – 20011/12. The collated data is citywide and covers all issues that were raised.*



** This data is compiled from enquiries that have been received from P&C's central administrative system and does not include direct contact with individual officers.*

2.8 It is evident that the number of enquiries / complaints have decreased in recent years which could be directly attributed by the presence of site based staff both in the west of the city and citywide. Due to the nature of P&C's customer enquiry system it is very difficult to extrapolate data by site.

2.8 As well as increasing customer satisfaction, the provision of this extra resource also plays a key factor in assisting the Parks and Countryside Service in its strategic objective to raise the standard of all its Parks and Opens Spaces and have all of the cities community Parks up to Leeds Quality Parks (LQP) standard by 2020. Both Tyersal Park and New Farnley Park's LQP scores dramatically increased during their last assessment (2011).

Site	LQP Score 2008	LQP Score 2011	Minimum score required to obtain LQP accreditation
New Farnley Park	28	56	48
Tyersal Park	35	44	

2.9 Parks and Countryside's are currently in the process of conducting the 2012 Residents Survey. The evaluation of the survey responses will help provide more up to date opinions of these two parks which will assist in gauging local customer satisfaction.

3 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

3.1 The presence of an on site gardener can help identify issues affecting different members of the community and identify problems which often lead to some members of a community failing to use the park and the amenities. The site based gardener does help to resolve these issues thus providing community cohesion and inclusion.

4 Council policies and City Priorities

4.1 The site based gardener helps Leeds to contribute to PSA (Public Service Agreement) objectives that include crime reduction, reducing public fear of crime, increasing voluntary community engagement and the delivery of cleaner, safer and greener public spaces.

4.2 This resource also assists the Council's Parks and Greenspace Strategy objectives.

5 Resources and value for money

5.1 Site based gardeners are paid at B3 grade and given their important role in building community confidence and dealing with issues as they arise, this represents good value for money.

6 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

6.1 There are no legal implications associated with this scheme.

7 Risk Management

7.1 Parks and Countryside are professional and diligent in their approach to health and safety management and any risks will be managed through Parks and Countryside's Health and Safety Policy.

8 Conclusions

- 8.1 It is clear that the site based gardener has proven to be extremely popular with local residents and a great asset to the Service and the outer west area. Since their introduction in 2007 the general condition of the sites in which they concentrate their efforts has improved.
- 8.2 Site based gardener's act as a point of liaison with the local community, effect policing duties, deal with other routine park maintenance and locking / unlocking of parks facilities.
- 8.3 In addition, site-based gardeners associate better with their own sites of responsibility and attain a wealth of knowledge pertinent to the site. The latter asset is invaluable in gaining a rapport with the public and dealing with site specific problems.
- 8.4 Dedicated park gardeners create a virtuous circle of improvement as their presence leads to better maintained parks. These parks are no longer perceived as being unsafe but are respected and seen as being welcoming and a place for both active and passive recreation. This in turn helps to combat public fears, increases public confidence and encourages more people to use their park.
- 8.5 In Conclusion, the main outputs of this scheme is to ensure the continuation of increased public confidence, engagement and interaction along with undertaking additional horticultural and maintenance tasks. This ensures that the Service, team and the Area Committee play an important part in helping enhancing people's enjoyment of their parks and greenspaces.

9 Recommendations

- 9.1 This report seeks to demonstrate the importance of the based gardener within the community, funded by West Leeds (Outer) Area Committee Wellbeing Fund in 2012.
- 9.2 That the West Leeds (Outer) Area Committee notes the contents of this report.