



Report of the Chief Recreation Officer

South Leeds (Outer) Area Committee

Date: Monday 30th March 2009

Subject: Site Based Gardeners in Community Parks & Green Spaces

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

Executive Summary

This report is to provide the Outer South Area Committee with a review of the work undertaken by the site based gardeners based in the Morley and Ardsley and Robin Hood, Wards, which has been funded from the Well being Fund during the past 12 months. Furthermore the report looks at the options available to continue the service over the next 6-12 months.

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 to 31st of March 2009.
- 1.2. The report also outlines options available to the Area Committee for the continuation of the service.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 Research by CABA (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) Space, a central government body responsible for the strategic improvement of urban greenspace, has highlighted that by 1996 only a third of parks had dedicated park staff, with 90% of local authorities experiencing vandalism in their Parks. Furthermore CABA Space linked the £1.3billion cumulative cut in revenue expenditure in Parks from 1981 to 2001 with the downward spiral towards greater vandalism, litter, and neglect and visitor decline in use of our Parks¹. With specific regard to people who rarely visit or use Parks, a national survey conducted on behalf of CABA Space ascertained that 68% cited dog fouling as their reason for not using their local park, whilst 57% did not visit due to vandalism and graffiti and 44% by poor maintenance². The presence of on site gardeners has the potential to address these problems, and preliminary assessments of the 25 Community Parks in Leeds which currently have on site staff reinforce this belief.
- 2.2 The site based gardener scheme has been in operation for 2 years. Originally the scheme funded 3 posts, 1 working in Ardsley and Robin Hood and 2 in Morley North. However in September 2008 it was agreed to extend the scheme to a 4th post based in Morley South.
- 2.3 Prior to the appointment of site based gardeners, complaints from local residents regarding site safety, security, and fly tipping were on the increase, placing pressure on the service to deal with concerns and fears from local residents and increasing volumes of complaint to ward councillors.
- 2.4 The opinion of many local residents was that local green spaces, and parks were unkempt, unsafe and a source of anti social behavior. Many residents complained about rowdy youths and problems with young adults misusing the facilities. This resulted in many residents not making the most of their local green spaces.
- 2.5 Revenue funding for the provision has been made via the Area Committee Well being fund to the value of £28,410 in 2008/09. The Parks and Countryside service continues to seek mainstream funding for increased staffing via the budget processes of the city council.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 CABA Space is aware that the best parks are being developed through the efforts of a skilled modern team and on site park gardeners who are often multi-skilled and highly trained take a key role, not only as a point of liaison with the local community, but taking responsibility for other issues which may not be routinely dealt with by a visiting maintenance team.

¹ Parks need Parkforce, CABA Space 2005

² Dunnett, N., Swanwick, C. & Woolley, H. Improving urban parks, play areas and green space, 2002, University of Sheffield

- 3.2 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. 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.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 The sites currently hosting gardeners are :

Site Name	Wedge
Drighlington Park /Woodlesford Park	South Outer
Lewisham Park	South Outer
Lowry Road	South Outer
Magpie Lane	South Outer

- 3.5 At Drighlington, the Parish Council often meets up with the both the site based gardener and the area officer to discuss maintenance issues along side projects that they wish to undertake. One example of the close working relations is the establishment of the Quiet Garden, funded in part from Area Committee through the Participatory Budgeting 'Big Spender' project and S106. This new seating area was laid out by Parks staff, but will be maintained by volunteers from the Parish Council who have taken responsibility for the seasonal bedding displays.
- 3.6 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, removes graffiti and over hanging branches, alongside engaging with members of the local community by talking to them and being a 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 the POS making it a more attractive and inviting space to visit.
- 3.7 At Lewisham Park and Woodlesford Park the site based gardener undertakes a wide 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
- 3.8 The 4th post is responsible for the green spaces along Wide Lane, Magpie and Hembrig Park undertaking gardening duties that range from litter collection and seasonal pruning through to grass cutting, marking out of sports pitches, inspecting the play areas, strimming around obstacles and inspecting the sports pavilion.

3.9 The increasing sense of ownership within the site based gardeners themselves, has allowed them to develop a sense of responsibility and the attainment of a wealth of knowledge pertinent to the site and the people who use it. This in turn has led to the service being able to establish a rapport with the public and increased the ability to deal with problems, leading to a reduction in pressure on the wider service in the area allowing issue to be resolved with little or no budget implications.

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 only resource implications associated with this scheme, are on the Well being Budget if Members agree to support the continuation of the scheme.

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 continue to improve which is assisting with the service's bids for capital funding through increased funder confidence in the sustainability of provision.

6.2 It is evident that the Site based gardeners are a benefit to the local community. However, through discussions with colleagues it has been noted that the Well being fund may not be able to provide the support needed to facilitate the continuation of the service at its current level.

6.3 The revenue costs to continue the service at its current level, i.e. to retain the existing 3 posts from April to September is £31,425 (post 4 is fully funded until October 2009 from Well being Fund).

6.4 Parks and Countryside have identified funding to support the following options :

a) Support 1 & ½ posts by using funding identified for the employment of seasonal gardeners during the peak season April – September 2009, at a cost of £15,712.50 to the service. With the Well being Fund providing financial support for the remaining 1 & ½ posts April – September 2009, at a cost to the Well being fund of £15,712.50

Although this will have a minor negative affect on the resource availability across the wider area, it does mean that Parks and Countryside are still able to employ 1 & ½ seasonal posts during the peak season, for use across the wider area, thus reducing the impact on the service as a whole in the wider area.

b) Parks and Countryside provide funding to support all 3 site based posts for a period of 3 months April – June 2009 from funds identified for the employment of seasonal gardeners.

However it should be noted that this option will have a larger negative affect on the resource availability across the wider area.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 The Area Committee consider the contents of the report and indicate their preferred option for the continuation of the service from April – September 2009 (Options a) or b) at 5.2 above). At a cost of £15,712.50 from the Well being Fund.

7.2 The Area Committee is also asked to note that to continue the scheme in its existing form (4 posts) from October 2009 until March 31st 2010, at a cost of £41,900 to the Well being Fund.

Background Papers

- Site Based Gardeners Report 7th July 2008