

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>TOURISM, ECONOMY AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Relevant Officer:</b>	John Blackledge, Director of Community and Environmental Services
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	19 June 2019

**PARK AND GREEN ENVIRONMENT SERVICE UPDATE**

**1.0 Purpose of the report:**

1.1 To consider an update on work undertaken, future plans and performance of the Park and Green Environment Service.

**2.0 Recommendation:**

2.1 To scrutinise the work of the service and identify any matters for further scrutiny.

**3.0 Reasons for recommendation:**

3.1 To ensure effective scrutiny of Parks and Green Environment Service

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council’s approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

3.4 Request Internal Audit to programme in to the annual work plan.  
Refer to external audit.

**4.0 Council Priority:**

- 4.1 The Parks and Green Environment Service contributes to all three council priorities;
- Priority One ‘The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool’;
  - Priority Two ‘Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience’
  - Priority Three ‘Organisational Resilience’

**5.0 Report Information**

5.1 The report provides an update on the work and performance of the service with year-end finance for 2018/19. The Parks and Green Environment Service is responsible for the management and improvement of Blackpool’s parks and open spaces to maximise the benefits green spaces can offer to social, economic and environmental objectives.

## 6.0 Parks and Green Environment Service overview

- 6.1 The Parks and Green Environment Service employs 30 staff. The main function of the service is the day to day management and maintenance of:
- Over 100 Parks and Open Spaces
  - Highway verges and roundabouts
  - Over 50 children’s playgrounds and multi games areas
  - Marton Mere Local Nature Reserve and ecological sites
  - Blackpool Council’s tree stock
  - Over 70 sports pitches, cricket wickets, bowling greens and tennis courts
  - Service Level Agreements (SLA’s) to schools, academy’s, colleges and outside organisations.
- 6.2 The Service also assists in the delivery of parks and sporting events, the delivery of the Better Start programme through Park Ranger Service and support and guidance to local parks Friends Groups.
- 6.3 The service contributes and plays an active part in supporting some of Blackpool Council’s key strategies and plans. Including:
- Local Plan
  - Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy
  - Open Spaces Assessment.
- 6.4 The service is a lead on the Play Pitch Strategy that maps out the usage, condition of grass sports provision and facilities. In addition, the Parks and Green Environment Service plays an advisory role in supporting other Blackpool Council departments, elected members and outside agencies around grounds maintenance issues I.e. Planning, new housing developments and tree issues.
- 6.5 Operations
- 6.5.1 To meet the demands of the seasons the operational staff work annualised hours. This means summer (April to September) 7am to 4pm and winter (October – March) 8am to 3pm. Through the growing and sporting seasons the majority of the work is cyclic, so the staff work to Rota’s. This work includes:
- General grounds maintenance
  - General grass cutting
  - Bowling green maintenance
  - Sports pitch markings and inspections
  - Playground inspections
  - Stanley Park bedding maintenance.
- 6.5.2 During the winter months the teams are reorganised and their primary role is shrub pruning and full site maintenance. Specific sites are selected on a rolling programme to receive in depth maintenance.
- 6.5.3 This results in sites requiring less frequent visits through the growing season. Children’s playgrounds require regular inspections and maintenance. A designated Playground Technician’s role is to manage these facilities.

- 6.5.4 The “tree gang” are a full-time gang of two that manage the tree stock with priorities given to the dead, diseased and dangerous trees. They also carry out work to private customers and are on call through some of Blackpool’s extreme weather conditions if tree work is required.
- 6.5.5 The Service Level Agreement (SLA) team carry out ground maintenance for other Council departments facilities together with organisations outside the authority. The work ranges from grass cutting and general maintenance to playground and sports day markings.

## 6.6 Development

- 6.6.1 The development of Blackpool’s Parks and open spaces includes:
- The delivery of the Better Start Parks and Open Spaces programme which includes physical park improvements and the Park Ranger Service, consisting of Early Years Park Rangers and Junior Park Rangers
  - The coordination of the management of Marton Mere Local Nature Reserve & ecological sites across the borough
  - The coordination of volunteering activities across green spaces through the Volunteer Ranger network and working alongside Park Friends groups, offering support and assistance through the Open Spaces Network to share good practice
  - The delivery of playground and park improvement schemes involving sourcing external funds, developing schemes, project management, stakeholder engagement and consultation
  - Working in partnership with other Council services for example through commenting on planning applications and new open space development such as Layton Recreational Ground
  - The delivery of the Green & Blue Infrastructure strategy with partners and stakeholders
  - Supporting events on parks and opens paces undertaken by partners and Friends groups.

## 7.0 **Budget Information**

- 7.1 Between 2014/2015 and 2018/2019 Parks Budget has decreased by £444k. This is due to the Comprehensive Spending Review cuts applied in 2014/2015 and again in 2015/2016. Parks have managed their budget by decreasing staff numbers and making efficiencies in other areas of spend as well as generating more income. Savings have had to be made but the service has worked hard to secure other funding sources, for example Better Start Funding which equates to £795k over the last 3 years. This has helped deliver events and projects within the Blackpool community.

## 8.0 **Key Performance Indicators**

- 8.1 Through support from the volunteer community and improving the way volunteer hours are administered the KPI for volunteer hours has exceeded all expectations. The total is equivalent to over 3800 days of support in our Parks and Open Spaces.

8.2 Since 2017 there has been a dramatic increase in the number of events delivered. This in part is due to the number of free events delivered by Park Rangers on behalf of the Better Start Programme.

	2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
	Target	Actual	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
<b>Volunteer Hours</b>	2 000	8,586	10,000	13 474	15,000	29,102
<b>Number of events</b>	60	72	79	223	245	408
<b>Income from events</b>	£0	£4 972	£7,500	£24,960	£10,000	£10,294

## 9.0 People and Parks

### 9.1 Park Ranger Service

9.1.1 In 2018/19 the Better Start funded Early Years Park rangers undertook over 125 events to 1700 people across Claremont Park, Revoe Park, George Bancroft Park and Mereside. Their activities are focused at families with children aged 0-4 years to engage them in their local park and encourage imaginative play. The Park Rangers have launched a '50 Things to do in Nature Before you are 5' booklet which complements their events programme and gives parents ideas of fun and engaging activities they can do in any park with their children. At Revoe Park, the Rangers have held additional larger family events such as a Children's Garden Parties, a Flower Festival and a Winter Wonderland Fairy trail. The Park Rangers are now qualified Forest Level 3 Practitioners enabling them to lead Forest School Sessions for children in Blackpool.

9.1.2 A new Junior Park Ranger programme is being developed with a new Junior Park Ranger Coordinator starting in June. Funding has been secured from Head Start and Better Start, and ward Councillors to create engaging activities for young people on Blackpool's Parks to inspire the next generation to get involved with and respect their green spaces.

9.1.3 Following the initial success of the Early Years Park Ranger programme, Better Start have recently committed additional funding to expand the service to include 3 additional roles and extended until 2023. The Parks and Green Environment Service are working towards a vision for self-sustaining Ranger Service by investigating income generation through paid for activities, birthday parties and school visits.

### 9.2 Volunteering and Friends Group

9.2.1 The Parks Service work with 15 Friends groups across various parks and open spaces who together form the Open Spaces Network. The scope of Friends groups varies amongst groups, but many undertake tasks and projects such as fundraising, gardening improvements, events and fun days, the improvement of facilities and infrastructure. The Parks and Green Environment Service provide support by assisting with event organisation, fundraising, advice and expertise.

9.2.2 The Volunteer Rangers have undertaken practical conservation work across Stanley Park, Marton Mere Nature Reserve and Herons Reach. This year has seen the group have complete tasks such as reed bed clearance, infrastructure repairs, grassland management and scrub clearance. The Volunteer Ranger team have also been collating past and present wildlife records and putting together a

comprehensive archive of the site including past reports, articles and visitor's memories. This year has seen 3 Volunteer Internships undertaken by graduate students who have taken a lead role in supervising the practical work and gathering records and data to monitor the site and feed into the future management programme.

9.2.3 Both Stanley Park and Marton Mere Local Nature Reserve Visitor Centres are manned by volunteers who showcase the sites and promote events

### 9.3 Events

9.3.1 There were over 300 events in Parks during 2018/19 with an estimated audience of over 40 000 people attending.

9.3.2 Highlights include;

- Every Sunday from mid-May until mid-September (weather permitting) local bands perform on the Bandstand, which can draw crowds of up to 3,000 people as this is a free event open to all
- Theatre performances at the Bandstand and Visitor Centre of The Reluctant Dragon, Mid-Summers Night's dream and The Snow Queen last year
- Armed Forces event in June and a special 100year memorial event including poppy display and the unveiling of a bespoke commemorative bench
- A wide range of activities undertaken during Love Parks Week across several parks. These were popular children's activities which included Heritage walks, Teddy Bears picnic and Circus skills
- The annual Library Service led Wordpool Festival at Stanley Park in which over 2,000 people came along to watch imaginative story telling performances and participate in literacy themed activities
- Several large sporting events including Masters Rugby tournament, Hockey Festivals and Athletics meetings.
- Bubble Rush & Pretty Mudder charity races took place on Lawsons showground and Heron's Reach
- A weekly Parkrun event which is run by volunteers and attracts over 150 runners each time
- A Classic car show held in the Italian gardens in Stanley Park with over 200 cars.

9.3.3 There is an extensive events programme booked for 2019 including Wind in the Willows & Christmas Carol performances at Stanley Park, 90<sup>th</sup> celebrations of the Bandstand.

## 10.0 **Current Key Projects and Achievements**

### 10.1 Better Start Parks Programme

10.1.1 Through the Blackpool Better Start partnership £795,000 has been invested into our Parks and Open Spaces to improve them for families with young children. This investment comprises of a capital development programme to improve the infrastructure and facilities of targeted parks and a revenue funded Park Ranger Service to engage families.

- 10.1.2 In 2018/19 Revoe Park has been subject to an investment in the region of £100,000 which has included Phase 2 of the Early Years Play garden, Nature trail installations, picnic space and dog exercise space. The community garden has gone from strength to strength with the addition of a polytunnel, more planting areas, an improved mud kitchen and Forest Schools circle. Revoe Park hosted a visit by HRH Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in March, who came to the community garden to talk to families who benefit from the space and Better Start investment there.
- 10.1.3 In Claremont Park, the Better Start investment has created an Early Years extension to Claremont Park play area costing £180,000. The team undertook consultation with families and the chosen design included a pirate ship, double width slide, roundabout for wheelchairs and pushchairs, extra swings and toddler focused play panels and multi-units. The investment in the wider park has seen the addition of paths to encourage parents with pushchairs within the park and a Forest Circle installed to enable park ranger activities in all weathers.
- 10.2 Stanley Park
- 10.2.1 Stanley Park is a Grade 2 Heritage destination park which received the Fields in Trust Award for Best Park in the United Kingdom in 2017. The Parks and Green Environment Service work closely with Friends of Stanley Park and Salisbury woodlands to improve the park, run events and promote the site. Projects undertaken in 2018/19 include:
- new £450 000 high specification 3G football pitch installed adjacent to the Sports Centre and opened by Rio Ferdinand on Dec 2018
  - a new leaflet was created showcasing the features of Stanley Park
  - refurbishment of the toilets next to the Visitor Centre
  - creation of a Dog Club, attracting 50+ people who meet each week.
- 10.2.2 A lake engineering study, funded by the Coastal Revival Fund, is currently being conducted to establish best management practices of removing the build-up of silt and addressing pond weed growth. APEM Ltd have been contracted to undertake lake sediment samples and provide a methodology and costings to for future desilting works, which will be the catalyst for opening up the lake for a wider range of activities.
- 10.3 Anchorsholme Park
- 10.3.1 At present Anchorsholme Park is currently closed whilst United Utilities are installing a new pumping station and storm outflow. The Parks and Green Environment Service have been working closely with United Utilities and their principle contractor C2V+ to ensure the new park is the best it can be. This has included the procurement and installation of a Riverdance themed £240,000 play area which aims to provide a unique and imaginative play space which is inclusive for children with a range of ages and abilities. The site which also includes a café, amphitheatre, Multi-Use Games Area and Bowling facilities which will be opened later in the year.
- 10.4 Fishers Field
- 10.4.1 United Utilities have also been putting in a new storm storage tank under the Fisher Field site on Highfield Road. As a result of the works Foxhall Football Club have been playing their football matches at other venues within Blackpool. The building work and the reinstatement of the football pitches is

now complete. A funding bid is to be submitted to the Football Foundation later this year for the replacement of Foxhall FC's changing rooms estimated in the region of £300,000.

10.5 Layton Recreational Ground

10.5.1 Layton Recreational Ground will be reopened this year following a full development as part of the redevelopment of Queens Park site. The Parks and Green Environment Service have been working with Blackpool Housing to ensure a high quality open space with improved play facilities within the housing area. The £100,000 play area, £50,000 of which is from Better Start, will ensure there is a diverse play offer for the new residents.

10.6 Common Edge

10.6.1 The Parks and Green Environment Service is currently working with Procurement on the tender process for the relocation of the grass football pitches to support colleagues on the Enterprise Zone delivery plan. It is envisaged that work to construct the pitches will start later this year

10.7 Wider Park Developments

10.7.1 In partnership with the Friends of Highfield Road a new Multi-use games area has been installed and the tennis courts refurbished.

10.7.2 A new Multi-use Games area has been created at Mereside in partnership with Blackpool Coastal Housing and local residents of Mereside Friends in Action (MAFIA). Thanks to funding from Blackpool Coastal Housing we resurfaced the BMX pump track this year.

10.7.3 At East Pines park, the team have worked in partnership with the Friends of East Pines Park to add additional play equipment including a boat, basket swing and improve the safety surfacing. They have removed hedges and installed fences to increase visibility in the park and reduce anti-social behavior

10.7.4 Following the removal of disused toilets at Devonshire Square, this area has been landscaped and planted with selection of shrubs and trees planted to improve the site. Sparrow Park, the grass area outside Raikes Parade has also had additional planting, chosen to complement the Devonshire Square space and bring year round colour and interest to the site.

10.7.5 The Parks and Green Environment Service worked with Keep Britain Tidy to improve Gateside park through a £100,000 funding grant from Willkos. The project included planting over 100 new trees, improving paths and adding welcoming entrance features.

10.7.6 In partnership with Better Start and Property Services a development scheme is being worked up for the hub at Talbot and Brunswick Children Centre. Work will include additional play equipment, removal of walls and creation of a more welcoming park.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information?

No

**11.0 List of Appendices:**

- 11.1 Appendix 10(a) – Budget Monitoring 2017-2018
- Appendix 10(b) – Budget Monitoring 2018-2019

**12.0 Legal considerations**

- 12.1 None

**13.0 Human Resources considerations**

- 13.1 The Park and Green Environment Service employs 30 staff.

**14.0 Equalities considerations**

- 14.1 The aim of the Parks and Green Environment Service is to ensure accessibility for all interests and abilities.

**15.0 Financial considerations**

- 15.1 Revenue savings and investment in the Parks and Green Environment have been considerable.

- 15.2 See Appendix 10(a) and Appendix 10(b).

**16.0 Risk management considerations**

- 16.1 The Parks and Green Environment Service operates within a robust risk assessment framework

**17.0 Ethical considerations**

- 17.1 The Parks and Green Environment Service adhere to the Ethical policy of the Council in ensuring appropriate use of the town's parks and open spaces.

**18.0 Internal/External Consultation undertaken**

- 18.1 None

**19.0 Background papers**

- 19.1 None