

Care For Your Area Services – Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation Review.

Care for Your Area is an umbrella organisation that provides a large number of different front line services. The scope of this review is to consider the following services: Refuse Collection, Street Cleansing, Horticultural Services, Urban Parks, Recycling Services, Markets, Public Conveniences and Workshops and Vehicle Maintenance. This review will consider each of these separate services in turn. Other services that fall within CFYA that are subject to previous and ongoing reviews include Commercial Waste Services, Highway Maintenance, Countryside Parks and Bulky Household Waste.

URBAN PARKS

Service Baseline / Initial Challenge	Guidance	Information
Description of Current Service	Who provides the service?	The service is provided through an in-house provision based at Cowpen Lane Depot, Billingham. However, the nature of this service does dictate remote working throughout all sites across the borough including staff from the street cleansing and horticultural services.
Baseline	History - how was the service formed and why does it exist?	The service has been operational for many years and the management responsibility for Urban Parks was transferred to Direct Services in 2005 from Education, Leisure and Cultural Services – it was felt that the nature of the service would provide a nature fit with existing services provided by Direct Services, notable Horticultural Services. The service exists to provide high quality urban parks for our residents and visitors to visit and enjoy. The parks are all set within a residential setting and complement the range of Countryside Parks and 13 Local Nature Reserves that sit within the borough. Urban

		<p>Parks include Ropner Park, Victorian Park, Preston Park, John Whitehead Park, Village Park, Newham Grange Park and Grangefield Park. The provision of Council run allotments (the two main sites are based in Thornaby and Ragworth) is also included within the Urban Parks budget as well as the inspection and maintenance of the Council's Play Areas.</p>
<p>Challenge</p>	<p>What influences impact on the service? (political, social economical, technological)</p>	<p>Parks are extremely important to the health and well-being of the community and play an integral part in a range of policy documents with a focus on healthy living and green infrastructure strategy (including linkages to external organisations and providers). Parks and open spaces are very important to our residents and are constantly in the top three of the most important services provided by the Council when a range of 2,000 residents are chosen to participate in the bi-annual MORI resident survey. The national agenda also influences the provision of parks and open spaces in the local setting with the Governments aspirations for the Big Society set to see an increased involvement of the third sector. Stockton has a variety of organisations it currently works with on a range of environmental initiatives in green spaces including linkages with the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust (who now has a lease agreement for the management of Hardwick Dene), Friends of Ropner Park (who manage the Café), Billingham Environmental Link Project (who now manage the Clarences</p>

		<p>allotments) as well as Go-How North East (who now manage the Clarence's Farm and Allotments), Friends of Newham Grange Park, Village Park Residents Association and Support of John Whitehead Park.</p>
	<p>How does the service perform?</p>	<p>The service performs well with comparable performance against a range of indicators as part of the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE). We have recently been awarded the Best Service Team of the Year in 2010 for Horticultural and Parks Maintenance (which includes Urban Parks). Some of our Urban Parks are also included in the regional Northumbria in Bloom judging as well in the national Britain in Bloom and, in 2010, Ropner Park was also included in the successful Gold winning Entente Florale bid and won Park of the Year in 2009. The service has a cross service representation of horticultural services as well as rotational staff from street cleansing who keep the areas clean and tidy for members of the public, all of which have led to significant increases in public satisfaction. Customer satisfaction ratings for parks stood at 86.63% which is based upon a series of monthly telephone satisfaction surveys whilst the main MORI satisfactions survey in 2008 showed comparable results with a 76% overall satisfaction rating.</p>
	<p>What does inspection tell us about this service?</p>	<p>The service as a whole was last inspected in 2003 when 3 stars with excellent prospects for improvement were awarded by the Audit Commission. However, the service has been awarded Green Flag status for Ropner Park –</p>

		<p>this process requires an intensive annual visit where judges will assess the quality of the park based upon a range of rigorous criteria. Added to this, the annual in bloom judging also assesses similar criteria as part of the overall submission for the overall entry.</p>
	<p>What resources are used?</p>	<p>The majority of the resources used within this service are labour related and supplies and services costs are detailed under 'What are the costs of the service'.</p>
	<p>What assets are used to deliver the current service?</p>	<p>General tools, equipment, a small number of vehicles that are shared with other CFYA services.</p>
	<p>Are there any limitations or barriers affecting the delivery of the service?</p>	<p>The Council has undertaken a range of capital improvement projects in recent years. This is extremely positive and popular from a customer perspective. However this leads to an increased demand on resources in terms of the labour required to provide increased scope of services. For example, new play areas require ever increasing resources and in some cases full-time permanent presence from 8am to 8pm is required. These works do not attract revenue funding and therefore cause significant pressures on already stretched resources.</p>
	<p>If the service is outsourced or provided by a third party, how are service standards monitored?</p>	<p>The service is not currently outsourced.</p>

	<p>Could the service be provided through a different mechanism?</p>	<p>It is increasingly difficult to provide the required resources without revenue funding to run alongside capital improvement projects. Working with voluntary and community groups will be needed to plug the revenue funding gap.</p>
<p>Customer Baseline</p>	<p>Who are the customers what are their needs now?</p> <p>How are service users consulted and how do their views shape delivery?</p> <p>How satisfied are the customers?</p> <p>How do you communicate with your users?</p> <p>How are these services promoted / marketed?</p>	<p>There are a large range of individual residents, families and other groups who visit the Parks, allotments and play area within the borough. Research has already been conducted through the Countryside and Greenspace Team via greenstat surveys which provide additional data on the type and number of people using our sites as well as the reasons for their visit.</p> <p>Customers are consulted through the ongoing green infrastructure strategy where views are sought on the future use of greenspace in the borough and public consultation sessions are held across the borough. Views are also sought through leaflets and posters, via our website and Stockton News articles.</p> <p>Customer satisfaction levels are currently running at 86.63% according to monthly telephone surveys and 76% based upon the 2008 MORI survey.</p> <p>Face to face via contact centre and through contact with site based staff, posters, leaflets and web content. We also attend residents and friends meetings where required.</p> <p>MORI surveys have proved positive as too</p>

	What do Viewpoint Surveys/ internal audit reports tell us about the service?	have ongoing telephone customer satisfaction surveys conducted by the Contact Centre. There have been no viewpoint surveys undertaken for this service area.
Customer Challenge	<p>Are there customers who could use the service but don't?</p> <p>Are there customers using the service who shouldn't be?</p> <p>Who are the customers of the future and what are their needs?</p> <p>What is likely to impact on demand for these services in the future?</p> <p>What do complaints/ compliments tell you about these services?</p>	<p>The parks are visited by significant numbers and we are not aware of particular groups who would not visit our sites for any reason.</p> <p>No.</p> <p>Future generations of residents of the borough who will be educated on the use of urban and countryside greenspaces through parents, family and teachers.</p> <p>Capital improvements projects have already resulted in significant increase in visitor numbers – for example the recent developments at Romano Park and John Whitehead Park have increased usage on these sites which have, in turn, required additional resources from cleansing staff to 'manage' these sites. Additional projects in the future are likely to result in similar demands on resources in the future. New play areas also need to be inspected and maintained. New play area's such as Romano Park, Wynyard Woodland Park and John Whitehead need to be inspected three times a week. Preston Park, for example is inspected on a daily basis.</p> <p>There have been no formal complaints registered this year in relation to the use of</p>

		play areas, urban parks or allotments in the borough.
Aims & Objectives Baseline	Is the service required by statute?	No.
Challenge	Is there a statutory level of service?	There is a requirement to provide suitable provision for allotment space in the borough. This is also the subject of an ongoing review by the Countryside and Greenspace Team, where revisions to planning regulations have been adopted - developers must consider allotment provision along with a range of other land use priorities. Similarly Council's must also consider play areas as part of development planning provisions.
	Is the service responsive or proactive or a mixture?	A mixture.
	Is the service needed?	Yes.
	What would happen if the service was not provided either in whole or part?	Increase in public complaints / reduced satisfaction levels / adverse press coverage and the reduction of valuable facilities for the public to use. Health and Wellbeing agenda would be detrimentally affected.
	How would the service react to new pressures? What capacity would be required to deal with additional / new demands?	Resources are currently stretched due to the increased expectations which arise from new capital projects.
Aims & Objectives Challenge	Who provides a similar service to this using a different delivery mechanism e.g. external partnerships, shared services etc?	There are examples from across the UK of other authorities and providers using external groups to provide standalone or shared services – elements of this approach are already being adopted in Stockton through the works of organisation such as the Tees Valley

		Wildlife Trust (who have a lease agreement for Hardwick Dene) as well as the management of the Ropner Park Café by the Friends of Ropner Park. This is an area-which would need to be considered for other sites in the borough / consideration of resourcing for increased service provision.
Relevance / Context Baseline / Challenge	<p>How does the service fit with the overall aims of the Council?</p> <p>How does the service contribute to key policy areas?</p> <p>What policies, plans and strategies impact on the service e.g. statutory, policy, function, other services?</p>	<p>Contributes to several policy areas, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regenerate the borough through the delivery of major local and sub-regional projects; • Make the borough a cleaner, greener and more attractive environment; • Tackle climate change through carbon reduction and resilience to extreme weather events; • Increase participation in sport and active leisure; • Reduce health inequalities by adding 'life to years and years to life'; • Reduce levels of obesity in children, young people and adults; and • Further develop Community Engagement infrastructure and activity. <p>Several, including: the Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy, Stockton-on-Tees Green Infrastructure Strategy, Local Development Framework, Tees Valley Biodiversity Action Plan, Stockton-on-Tees Play and Play Area Strategies, Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC Act).</p>

	<p>Are there any political judgements/decisions involved in determining the level of service?</p>	<p>Parks are a very sensitive service area, with many community groups involved, some with very strong views on how the park should and shouldn't be used and managed.</p>
<p>Financial / Resource Considerations Baseline</p>	<p>What are the costs of the service?</p> <p>Capital and revenue costs?</p> <p>What is the level of 3rd party expenditure?</p> <p>What contracts or other arrangements are in place (spend analysis)?</p> <p>What is the Councils commitment to contracts / other arrangements</p> <p>Do you have any charging policies?</p> <p>How have Gershon efficiency savings impacted on the service and how were the service planning to meet future Gershon efficiency targets?</p> <p>How will the current financial climate affect the service?</p>	<p>The Urban Parks budget for 2011/12 is £645,030. The main costs are:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salaries £233,637 • Maintenance £307,638 <p>All revenue costs.</p> <p>£1,006</p> <p>There are no contracts although arrangements to provide services via other organisations exist i.e. the lease agreement with Tees Valley Wildlife for the running of one site, the management of the Café at Ropner Park by the Friends of Ropner Park.</p> <p>The cost of allotment rent is £28 annually which reduces to £14 annually for OAP's.</p> <p>For the financial year 2009/10 Council agreed to limit the annual increases in the services Resource Allocation (RA) to 1%, which was below the Gershon inflation guide of 2.5% for that year. This has forced services to drive down costs to generate the desired efficiencies required to meet the gap between inflation and the limit on RA.</p>

