

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 16 <sup>th</sup> December 2003	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Executive
<b>Report title:</b>		Southwark Parks – Organisation, Structure and Contracts	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Strategic Director of Environment & Leisure	

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Members consider and approve the approach to parks management set out in paragraph 13 of the report.
2. That Members note the requirement to tender a grounds maintenance contract for parks and agree a process of consultation on the specification.
3. That Members approve the initiation of a consultation process with a view to the creation of a new community wardens service for parks within the Wardens division of Environment and Leisure and the replacement and enhancement of the current ranger service

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. The organisation and delivery of parks services has undergone a number of reviews in order to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Most recently, a Best Value Review suggested that the Parks Operations service (Park Rangers) should be market tested and that better links should be forged between the Parks Operations and Grounds Maintenance sections. As a consequence, the Parks Operations section was re-organised to provide a static team at each of the Borough's four major parks, a mobile Ranger team and a 'Ranger Gardener' pilot scheme at three sites. The Best Value Review endorsed the creation of community outreach function for Parks Operations.
5. The contracts for delivery of grounds maintenance in parks are now at the point of renewal and the department is in a position to procure a Borough-wide contract centred on the four major parks. This has prompted some further review and thinking in terms of how to deliver the service, particularly in the light of changes and developments in other parts of the Council. For example the creation of Southwark Cleaning, the development of Community Wardens borough wide and the significant increase in anti social behaviour in parks most recently exemplified by an incident of grievous bodily harm in Russia Dock Woodlands.

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

6. There are a number of functions that need to be delivered in parks, which can be broadly summarised as:-
  - Strategy and policy
  - Investment, design and infrastructure
  - Repairs and maintenance of infrastructure
  - Graffiti removal
  - Physical presence and security
  - Community liaison and outreach
  - Community and other events
  - Litter picking and other cleaning duties
  - Locking and unlocking
  - Health and safety checks
  - Quality control and monitoring
  - Grounds maintenance
  
7. In considering how the contracts for grounds maintenance in parks should be designed a more thorough review of the structure of parks delivery has been carried out to consider how best these various functions could be delivered and how public concerns could best be addressed.
  
8. The parks service is generally well regarded both at a national level within the parks community and at a local level. Last years MORI survey showed an improvement in customer satisfaction with Southwark's Parks for the second year running (the national trend is for declining satisfaction). Consultation carried out by the Best Value Review showed a generally high level of satisfaction with the service. Generally few complaints are received. Those received these can be broadly grouped around the following areas:-
  - Lack of 'presence' and enforcement
  - Dogs and dog mess
  - Graffiti and vandalism
  - Funding and investment
  
9. In thinking about the way in which the parks service should be delivered the following factors have been taken into account:
  - The need to sustain success in gaining external funding and public satisfaction levels
  - The need to address remaining concerns with parks
  - Sufficient capacity to deliver a significant volume of capital schemes
  - Members wish to create an ecology function
  - The wish to reinstate the previously cut community development and outreach function (previously provided by a central section and the rangers, but not part of current duties)
  - The desire to create local management of parks and ownership, previously articulated in the desire to re-instate the historical ranger/gardener/park keeper function
  - The wish to involve local Friends groups in the management and development of parks

- The need to tackle a growing amount of anti social behaviour and vandalism – recent examples being Southwark park, Russia dock woodland, Peckham Rye and Goose Green
  - The need to enhance the quality of litter picking
  - The need to deliver continuous improvement in grounds
  - The need to increase revenue funding for grounds maintenance to introduce more features such as bedding
  - Quality control
10. In considering how best this could be structured, specified and organised a number of officers have been involved in an ongoing working group, combining managerial expertise, contract expertise, operational knowledge and knowledge of security issues.

#### The Ranger Gardener model

11. As set out above there has been an aspiration to expand a ‘ranger gardener’ management model to all our parks in order to achieve these objectives. The Ranger gardener model combines all of the Park Ranger duties with the functions of grounds maintenance in a fixed team. This model has been piloted in Nunhead Cemetery, Sumner Park and Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park and has proved successful in all but Sumner Park.

However, having carried out significant costing work officers have concluded that:

- It will be too expensive to implement this model across all parks as it will in effect require that all staff, whether picking litter, cutting grass or rangers have wages uplifted to the highest of all grades for this job, without any decrease in overall staffing numbers. It will also obviously not deliver the savings required to fund other functions such as outreach and ecology. It is estimated that the increase in costs may be in the region of a one third increase to the existing budget.
- That if the functions necessary are specified any contractor in designing the operation and submitting a bid and method statement would choose to provide litter picking, grounds maintenance and rangers through three separate workforces on different grades in order to be cost effective
- That the required objectives could be delivered with the same outcome by another more cost-effective method
- That there is a need to consider the future of the ranger service in the context of the Executive’s decision to expand the wardens scheme significantly, and the aspiration to create a borough wide warden service in future years.

#### The Way Forward

12. The objectives we are seeking to achieve in the Parks service have been set out above.

In addition, Members have requested that as part of the process of designing and letting the new contracts that officers seek to fund rangers for Russia Dock Woodland, a new ecology officer and community outreach officers.

13. Having considered the matter in some detail officers propose that the structure of the service, delivery mechanism and contracts to achieve these objectives could be as follows:

- The creation of four area park managers each covering one major park and a number of other local satellite parks.
- That quality control, monitoring, reporting defects and community liaison in each major park is addressed by a standards officer who will work with the park manager and contractors to deliver continuous improvement.
- That the functions of rangering and grounds maintenance be provided in two separate ways:
  - a. That the physical presence / security / environmental enforcement/tackling anti-social behaviour elements of rangering be provided by a new park warden service. This service will function as an extension of the existing Community Warden pilot schemes but with a remit and service level agreement specifically relating to parks.
  - b. The litter picking function of the Park Ranger service will be provided by a new grounds maintenance contract for all the parks and the woodland. The contractor will be required to provide a link person for each of the major sites and grounds maintenance staff will be required to provide basic information to the community and act as a public liaison point.
- That a new post of ecology officer is created.
- That a new Community Outreach team is created to build capacity amongst local communities and encourage usage by under-represented groups
- That the uniforms and livery of these services be considered carefully to ensure maximum visibility and impact, and a feeling of cohesiveness of service delivery in parks.
- That the post of Service Development Manager (Grounds Maintenance) will continue to monitor the performance of the grounds maintenance contract centrally and to manage the grounds maintenance complaints system and repairs and maintenance.
- That the post of Service Development Manager (Parks Development) will continue to deliver work on funding, design and capital projects and events.
- That one unified contract for grounds maintenance be let subject to future consultation with the community.

Officers believe that the benefits of this approach will be:-

- Ownership and accountability for each park with the park manager and standards officer for each major park
  - Greater local scrutiny of performance standards
  - A community outreach resource that will develop capacity amongst park 'Friends of' groups and provide a point of liaison between park users and park managers. This relationship will reinforce local accountability and improve service delivery standards.
  - A resource to promote ecological issues and develop a bio-diversity action plan for the Borough
  - A consistent borough wide approach to wardens, without demarcation problems around parks
14. This will be supported by software and technology developments for parks which have been developed in line with the rest of the Environment and Leisure departments using Confirm, the Environment Call Centre, and eventually handheld technology for reporting defaults and monitoring. All asset data for parks has already been uploaded onto the Confirm system.

#### **Timetable for delivery**

15. The changes to service provision are being timetabled with a view to new arrangements being in place by April 2004.

#### **2003**

##### **October**

Proposals presented to members  
Proposals presented to Trades Unions and staff and consultation process initiated

##### **November**

Consultation with Members on specification  
Trades Unions and staff consultative process continues  
Grounds maintenance contract final draft  
On-going consultation process with staff and Trades Unions

#### **2004**

##### **December – January 2004**

New budget structure agreed  
Report to Executive – **Southwark Parks – Organisation, Structure and Contracts**

##### **February**

Tenders invited for new grounds maintenance

##### **February**

Formal consultation initiated

##### **March**

Selection and appointment

## **April**

Implement new structure  
New grounds maintenance contract begins  
New structure implemented  
New budget structure implemented

### **Policy implications**

16. The recommendations contained in this report are consistent with the Action and Improvement Plan from the Parks Best Value Review and will contribute towards two of the Council's priorities: making Southwark cleaner and greener and cutting crime and fear of crime.

### **EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES ON THOSE AFFECTED**

(Refer to Appendix 1)

17. The aim is to make Southwark's parks and open spaces safe and accessible to the widest possible range of users and to those who feel vulnerable.

The widest possible consultation will be carried out with members, members of staff, trades unions and parks 'Friends' groups when considering this new structure.

### **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

18. The new Community Parks Warden service and Grounds Maintenance contract will be resourced within the context of existing budgets.

The current Parks Operations Budget of £1.7 million will be split in three in order to facilitate the Parks re-structure and fund the improvements and additional posts required. An additional £75,000 will be re-allocated from within Parks Business Unit budgets for water wardens and repairs and maintenance.

- i) Parks SCD - £525,000. This budget provision will be used to fund the following posts and Service provision:
- 4 Area Park Managers including the four major parks
  - 4 Outreach Rangers
  - 1 Ecology Officer
  - 1 Chumleigh Gardens Gardener
  - The Nunhead Ranger/Gardener team to remain but with a staff compliment of three to continue to support the management plan and resources required following the recent Heritage Lottery Fund works of £1.25 million. The ranger/gardener team of two staff also to be retained at Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park.
- ii) Parks Grounds Maintenance - £210,000. This budget provision will be used to fund the areas of work which will be transferred to the borough-wide Parks Grounds Maintenance contract planned to commence from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004:-
- Litter Collection from the Major Parks

- The addition of existing sites; Sumner Park and Flaxyard.
  - A specific dog waste collection service
  - The unlocking of Park Gates
- iii) Major parks repairs and maintenance of Chumleigh Gardens - £235,000. This budget will be used by the four park managers to address repairs and maintenance issues within the four major parks. A budget has also been established for the management of the 'world garden' at Chumleigh Gardens.
- iv) Community Park Warden Service - £950,000. This budget provision will be used to fund the development of this service:-
- 20 Static Community Park Wardens to be based within the four major Parks (4 at each Park) and additional provision for Russia Dock Woodland.
  - 4 Mobile Community Park Wardens to provide a Warden Service to Tier 2 Parks.
  - 1 Community Park Warden Manager.
19. The transfer of Park Ranger responsibilities to a new grounds maintenance contract and Parks Warden service will be effected through the dissolution of the current Parks Operations section. The new services will be created through a combination of assimilation, transfer and redundancy.
20. During the process of transition there will be additional costs of £145k in 2004/05 which will be met from a vacancy factor of 6% for Community Wardens, which have a total budget of £2.4m. This arises from the recruitment drag as the service expands rapidly. In the following and future years the shortfall will be eliminated through economies of scale in Phase 2 and 3 of the development of the Wardens service.
21. The total cost of redundancies and early retirements could be a maximum of £260,000 but in reality is likely to be lower. Every effort will be taken to minimise these costs. A revenue growth bid has been submitted to fund these one off costs in the financial year 2004/05 (£200k), 2005/06 (£30k) and 2006/07 (£30k). The success of this bid will not be known until the full council agree the budget in February 2004. Should the bid not be successful Environmental and Leisure will make one off reductions in some levels to fund the centre.

### **Property**

22. Within the new contract arrangements, the parks will remain in Council ownership. Depots and other facilities will be offered to the successful contractor under a lease/license arrangement.

## SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

### *Borough Solicitor & Secretary*

23. In considering the recommendations set out in paragraphs 1-3 of this report the Executive must have regard to the Council's obligations to carry out its duties in accordance with the principles of Best Value, introduced by the Local Government Act 1999.
24. In particular Part 1 of the 1999 Act require that services are provided which are responsive to the needs of citizens, are of high quality and cost effective, and are fair and accessible to all who need them. This report details the reviews and considerations that have been taken into account in proposing these recommendations.
25. With particular reference to recommendation 2 (tendering for a grounds maintenance contract) this will need to be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Council's Contract Standing Orders. Officers should therefore consult with the Contracts Section of Legal Services on the tendering process and agree the timetable to enable commencement of the new contract by April 2004.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
<i>Title of document(s)</i>	<i>Title of department / unit Address</i>	<i>Name Phone number</i>

## APPENDIX A

### Audit Trail

<b>Lead Officer</b>	<i>Gill Davies</i>	
<b>Report Author</b>	<i>Jon Sheaff</i>	
<b>Version</b>	<i>Draft</i>	
<b>Dated</b>	<i>5<sup>th</sup> December 2003</i>	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	<i>Yes</i>	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Borough Solicitor & Secretary	Yes	Yes
Chief Finance Officer	Yes	No
<i>List other Officers here</i>		
<b>Executive Member</b>	Yes	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Support Services</b>		



## Appendix 1

### Consultation

3 <sup>rd</sup> October	Briefing to entire staff cohort – Chumleigh Gardens
21 <sup>st</sup> October	Divisional DLC briefing
3 <sup>rd</sup> November	Proposals outline – Burgess Park Team Proposals outline – Southwark Park Team Proposals outline – Peckham Rye Park Team
5 <sup>th</sup> November	Proposals outline – GMH Park Team
10 <sup>th</sup> November	Departmental DLC briefing
12 <sup>th</sup> November	Staffside meeting with Trades Union representatives
19 <sup>th</sup> November	Proposals outline – Nunhead Cemetery team
1 <sup>st</sup> December	Briefing – Friends of Burgess Park