

# Parks and Leisure Committee

Thursday, 16th September, 2010

## MEETING OF PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor O'Reilly (Chairman);  
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Humphrey); and  
Councillors Adamson, Cush, Kyle, Mallon, C. Maskey,  
McCabe, McCann, McKenzie, L. Patterson, Robinson,  
J. Rodgers and Stoker.

In attendance: Mr. A. Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure;  
Mrs. R. Crozier, Head of Parks and Leisure; and  
Miss L. Hillick, Democratic Services Officer.

### Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the High Sheriff (Councillor Stalford) and Councillors Ekin, Hartley, Mac Giolla Mhin and McCarthy.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 12th August were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st September, subject to the omission of the minute under the heading "Skegoneill Health Centre" which, at the request of Councillor Crozier, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

### Skegoneill Health Centre

*The Director advised the Committee that, as part of the partnership arrangement with the North and West Belfast Trust regarding the development of the Grove Wellbeing Centre, it had been agreed that the site of the former Skegoneill Health Centre would revert to the Council upon completion of the scheme and the relocation of the Health Centre within the new building. He pointed out that the transfer of the land had now been completed and was currently under the management of the Parks and Leisure Department.*

*He advised the Committee further that the former Health Centre was located at the rear of the Grove Wellbeing Centre and that there had been no conditions attached to the transfer of the land. The Centre had been demolished and an assessment had indicated that the capital cost of landscaping the area and integrating it within the existing Grove Playing Fields would be significant. Within that context and given the current affordability limits, it was proposed that the site be transferred to the Council's corporate land bank where a planning assessment could be carried out to consider future development options. Accordingly, he recommended, due to the fact that the Parks and Leisure Department had no operational need for the site and did not have the necessary resources to develop it, that it be declared surplus to requirements and placed within the Council's corporate land bank.*

*The Committee adopted the recommendation, subject to notification, in accordance with Standing Order 60, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee."*

The Director advised the Committee that a report detailing options for the future use of the site and the costs of integrating it within the existing Grove Playing Fields would be submitted for its consideration at a future meeting.

The Committee noted the information.

### **Quarterly Finance Report**

(Ms. J. Thompson, Director of Finance and Resources, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **"Relevant Background Information"**

**It was agreed at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 18 June 2010 that financial reporting packs would be produced for the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and each Standing Committee on a quarterly basis and following discussion, that the first reports for the quarter ended June 2010 would be available for Committees in September. Monthly financial updates were also agreed to be provided to the Budget and Transformation Panel, if there were any significant issues to report.**

**The reporting pack contains a summary dashboard of the financial indicators and an executive summary explaining the financial performance of the Parks and Leisure Committee in the context of the financial performance of the overall Council. It also provides a more detailed explanation of each of the relevant indicators covering the year to date and forecast financial position.**

As was advised in the 18 June 2010 Strategic Policy and Resources Committee report, the reporting pack should be viewed as still under development and the style and information in the reports will continue to evolve, in liaison with Members.

The information within these financial reporting packs has been developed through collaboration between central finance and departmental management teams. The information for Standing Committees has therefore been reviewed and endorsed by central finance. As was outlined in the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee report of 18 June 2010, a number of practical issues have been resolved in the development of the reports. In particular, Members are asked to note the following:

- (i) the original 2010/11 rates setting exercise included a budget for a pay rise of 1.5%. The pay position of the council is determined by national negotiations and currently no pay rise has been offered for 2010/11, which is causing significant trade union concern. The budget of £1.1m has therefore been removed from departmental budgets, for reporting purposes, so that the true departmental variances can be identified. The current unutilised pay rise budget underspend has been logged centrally;
- (ii) demand led internal charges have also been removed from the budgets and expenditure of service users and applied to the budgets of service providers (eg ISB, facilities management etc) for reporting purposes which keeps the budgetary treatment for 2010/11 in line with that agreed by Members on 18 June 2010 for 2011/12.
- (iii) capital charges are non cash items which have been removed from departmental budgets so that accurate variances can be identified.

### Key Issues

#### Current and Forecast Financial Position 2010/11

The current year to date financial position for Parks and Leisure Committee is an overspend of some £0.2m (4%) with a forecast end of year overspend of some £0.3m (1%). The reasons for this overspend relate to:

1. An overall employee budget overspend at quarter one. The Department has in place protocols for managing overtime and agency spend. Audits are underway on the

use of overtime and agency staff and a number of recruitment exercises are also underway which will reduce expenditure in both these areas. Committee will also be aware of the ongoing operational reviews within the Department which have delayed the recruitment of posts on a permanent basis. Recommendations will be provided to committee over the next number of months to finalise the structures. Operational reviews are about to commence in Leisure regarding operational requirements and it is hoped that working practices can be challenged and agreement reached on ways of achieving a more effective service provision within the right structures.

2. Utility costs, specifically in Parks are over budget. Water and sewerage charges at a number of sites are being disputed by the department however some of these costs have already hit the budgets. These additional costs have been included in the final forecast for the department as it is unclear if they will be refunded at this stage. Premises costs will continue to be monitored and CTU are reviewing processes to ensure the appropriate operational manager signs off any charges prior to the bills being processed.

The financial reporting pack contains more detail on both the overall council position and the financial performance in each of the Services within the Department.

It should be emphasised that it is very early in the financial year and therefore it is difficult to make an accurate forecast of the end of year financial position. There are considerable uncertainties which could impact on the forecast. Nonetheless, an early forecast is helpful to Members in making financial decisions for the remainder of 2010/11 and in advance of the 2011/12 rates setting exercise.

### Training

As was agreed at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 18 June 2010, to provide training in financial management for Members. It is currently planned that this will be provided in liaison with the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DEA) and will take place in three sessions on 27 September. Members have already been advised of this training and attendance is encouraged, wherever possible.

### Links to performance management

Members should note that officers are currently working on the development of performance management reporting packs which in time will become available for Members' consideration alongside the financial reporting packs. Further updates will be brought to Members as the work progresses.

### Resource Implications

There is a year to date overspend of £0.2m and a forecast overspend of some £0.3m.

### Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

1. Note the above report and associated financial reporting pack; and
2. note that financial training is to be provided to Members on 27 September and attendance, wherever possible, is to be encouraged.

### Key to Abbreviations

CTU: Central Transactions Unit"

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided.

### Parks and Leisure Improvement Programme

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### "Purpose

To provide committee with an overview of the Parks and Leisure improvement programme and an update on progress and ongoing work.

#### Relevant Background Information

The Parks and Leisure improvement programme is focused on building capacity and delivering better services and better outcomes for communities in Belfast. This is being achieved through:

1. reviewing management arrangements and operational efficiency

2. bringing the Parks and Leisure functions of the department together to integrate community development and to work more closely in planning and service delivery.

The programme has a number of work streams; Parks Improvement, Leisure Services Improvement, Review of Business Support, and a Marketing and Communications Review. Given the scale of the reviews the following phased approach to streamlining management arrangements and achieving operational efficiency has been adopted:

#### Phase I

- agreement and implementation of the Parks Management operational structural tier; and
- agreement and implementation of Parks and Leisure Business Support management tier.

#### Phase II

- operational review of Parks and Leisure Business Support including the leisure centre staff;
- parks operational review to include: the review of the role of Team Leaders or “Parks Supervisors”; review of boundaries and numbers of staff; development of processes; quality monitoring; and implementation of systems.
- operational review of the Outdoor Leisure function
- development of a Parks Community Resource (i.e. Community Park Attendant);
- review of the estates function including Belfast Castle and Malone House (this will include the exploration of a coordinated estates/commercial function across the Parks and Cemeteries Service);
- review of Landscape Planning and Development Unit; Review of Parks Services and Support unit; and Review of the Conservation and Promotion Unit. This will be conducted as one review; however they are in reality three concurrent reviews which will streamline functions and identify efficiencies and improvement leading to more effective development functions; and
- review of Bereavement Services.

#### Phase III

- Review of the management strand within Leisure Services; and
- review of the operational strand in Leisure Services.

## Key Issues

### Progress to Date

#### Phase I

- The review was completed in January 2010 with agreed management side and trade union positions on the way forward. Proposals from Phase I of the structural reviews were approved by Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in February 2010 and recommendations are being implemented.

#### Phase II

- A review of Bereavement services had been completed in conjunction with the review of management arrangements and operational efficiency for Parks.
- A review of parks operational boundaries has been completed which includes more efficient deployment of staff and use of equipment. There is a focus on how flexibility is increased and to ensure that resource is best used to achieve a balance between static and mobile staff whilst improving customer focus and providing a staff presence in parks. Proposals on presence in parks will be brought forward to committee in October 2010.
- Work on reviewing the staffing allocation in each parks operational area is nearing completion and will be reported to committee in October 2010. This work has been extended to include the demand required to take on the future management and maintenance of the Connswater Community Greenway.
- Recommendations from the review of the development strand of the Parks operation were made to committee in June 210 with proposed further work to be done on the post of Principal Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager, the Landscape Planning and Development Unit, Parks Estates and a proposed Departmental Development Strand. Recommendations are to be made to the November 2010 committee.
- Work on reviewing and defining roles and responsibilities for the Parks operation is well progressed. This includes the development of a Community Park Supervisor and Community Park Attendant roles.
- The Green Flag standard has been adopted and a framework has been developed to improve all parks and open spaces.

- Phase I of the review of Business Support has been completed and implemented. The first stage of Phase II has been completed and extensive consultation has been carried out with the trade unions, management and staff.
- The second stage of Phase II of the review of business support will examine the provision of business support within leisure centres. A Pilot Review will commence in three leisure centres (Grove Well Being Centre, Shankill LC and Andersonstown LC) whereby we will identify any areas where there may be additional capacity in business support which could then be utilised across other areas of the department. It is anticipated the pilot review will run for a three month period.
- Communication and engagement has been an ongoing priority delivered through staff briefings, the production of a newsletter, staff representation on task forces and reference panels and frequent engagement with trade unions.

### Phase III

- The Leisure Improvement programme has been initiated with staff briefing sessions and engagement of Trade Unions to set the context for the review. We are in the process of planning and establishing task forces to carry out the work of the programme. Initial focus will be on the review of management arrangements and operational efficiency in line with the Parks stream.
- The review of marketing and communication in the department is nearing completion and proposals for change are at the consultation stage. It is envisaged that proposals will be brought to the October committee.

### Summary of Future Reports:

October 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Marketing and Communications</li><li>• Efficiency review of Parks Operational Resource</li><li>• Proposals for improved staff presence in parks</li></ul>
November 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Departmental Development Strand</li><li>• Landscape Planning and Development Unit</li><li>• Parks Estates</li></ul>



December 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recommendation for leisure management arrangements</li></ul>
February 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recommendation from pilot review of business support in Leisure Centres</li></ul>
February/March 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leisure Operational Efficiency Review</li></ul>

### **Resource Implications**

#### **Financial**

##### **Phase I**

Deletion of 7 posts including 2 business support posts with a net saving of £217,685 per year.

Deletion of Parks and Cemeteries Senior Manager and Leisure Manager posts and the creation of a Head of Service post resulting in a net saving of £50, 797 after an initial payback period of 1.6 years.

##### **Phase II**

Deletion of 2 posts with the creation of a new Open Spaces and Active Living Coordinator giving a net saving of £43,018 after a payback period of 2.13 years.

The outcomes of phase II of the Business Support review are being reported to the September committee. It should be noted that the terms of reference for the review were to ensure that any changes would be achieved within current budget.

#### **Human Resources**

Consultation relating to the recommendations has been undertaken with the postholders, Human Resources and the Trade Unions.

All affected postholders will be subject to the normal HR policies and procedures relating to the offer of voluntary redundancy or suitable alternative employment.

#### **Asset and Other Implications**

None.

### **Recommendations**

Committee is asked:

- to note the progress of the Parks and Leisure Improvement programme
- to note decisions to be brought forward to future committee meetings.”

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided.

### **Phase II Review of Business Support**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **“Purpose of the report**

To update the Parks and Leisure Committee on phase II of the review of the department’s business support function and to set out recommendations for its approval.

#### **Relevant Background Information**

At the Parks and Leisure committee on 11 February 2010 approval was given for a new centralised business support structure. The review referred to Phase II of the process which would address the posts at Scale 6 and below within the structure including those posts considered to be in Directorate Support.

As part of the Parks and Leisure Improvement programme, and specifically the review of business support across the Department, a review of Directorate Support was also undertaken to assess the impact of the ongoing change programme and the appointment of the Head of Parks and Leisure (HOS).

As reported to Members in February 2010 this stage of the review is considered Stage I of Phase II in order to address structural and operational anomalies with the staff based centrally graded at Scale 4 to Scale 6.

#### **Key Issues**

The key issues are outlined in detail and include:

- Clarification of roles and responsibilities around the HR and Finance functions;
- Provision of a more effective management support structure including support to the Director and Senior Management Team.

- Full integration into one departmental resource to provide a greater degree of flexibility within the team;
- Effective communication; and
- Improved management decision making.

An assessment of the business support requirement within leisure centres is also included as part of the review of Business Support. A 3 month pilot will assess the support requirements in leisure regarding receptionist, clerical and Business Assistant duties, including membership management, key performance and management information and the linkages with business support in the centre of the department. It is essential to address the anomalies within the central business support team before the start of the three month Leisure pilot in order to fully realise the potential efficiencies to be achieved.

*Committee should note that all parties have been consulted throughout this process to date including the Trade Unions and are all in agreement with the recommendations contained in the review.*

#### Recommendations for Phase II stage 1

In respect of the posts within the centralised business support unit the following recommendations are made:

- Delete the post of Finance Assistant (Income) Scale 4
- Delete the post of Finance Assistant (Expenditure) Scale 4
- Delete the post of Business Assistant (Creditor and Income) Scale 6
- Create three new generic posts of Business Assistant (Finance/Systems) Scale 6
- Delete the post of HR and Quality Officer, Scale 6
- Delete the post of HR Assistant, Scale 6
- Delete the post of Administrative Assistant, Scale 6
- Create three generic posts of Business Assistant (HR/Admin) Scale 6
- Extend the FTC of the post of Business Assistant (Income) until such times as the Pilot review within Leisure has been completed and review the status of this post at that time.
- Re designate the existing MSA Sc4 to a Secretarial Assistant Sc6

In addition, the job description of the MSA Sc4 reporting to the BSA Sc6 should be amended to better reflect the departmental responsibility and therefore the section of the job description be re-titled to read 'Directorate' to ensure consistency with the other posts within the section and any reference made to reporting to the

**'Human Resources/Administration Officer' or 'Human Resources/Administration Manager' be changed to reporting to the 'Business Support Assistant'. The job description of HR Assistant Sc 4 should be amended to better reflect the departmental responsibility and the updated reporting lines.**

**The duties that the BSA Sc6 is carrying out are in accordance with the duties that are detailed in the post holder's job description with some additional staff supervision and work planning. Therefore no change is required. The duties that the PA/Secretary is carrying out are in accordance with the duties that are detailed in the post holder's job description and no change is therefore required.**

**In line with the corporate agenda and the desire to move to more flexible and generic job descriptions, BIS would recommend that a generic job description is developed for the Business Support Assistant role which will enable greater flexibility between the support posts across the new unit in the two key functions i.e. Finance/Systems and HR/administration. Two new generic job descriptions will cover all aspects of each strand and will therefore enable staff to be trained in the full range of the role which will provide greater flexibility to the service. Draft job descriptions have been developed and an indicative job evaluation has shown this grade to be Scale 6.**

#### **Resource Implications**

##### **Human Resources**

**Consultation will continue with all relevant stakeholders including HR, trade unions and staff to develop an implementation plan which is fully in accordance with all HR policies and procedures. The affected post holders will be subject to the council's categorisation procedure and it should be noted that all affected post holders should sign and agree the new job descriptions prior to implementation.**

##### **Financial Implications**

**Whilst there is a cost associated with the proposed structure, this will address the anomalies with grades that currently exist across both services and are currently having a detrimental effect on the daily operations of the service. Furthermore, within the recommendations there remains an opportunity to reduce the headcount by one with the potential removal of the additional Business Assistant which has been recruited on a fixed term contract. This will be subject to the recommendations of the Leisure Pilot.**

**Savings:**

**Business Assistant Sc6 (4 months savings following the end of the Leisure pilot) £7,902**

**Costs:**

**3 X Sc4 to Sc 6 grades: £13,746**  
**Total cost: £5,844**

However although there is a cost associated with Stage I of Phase II it is essential to address the operational issues that are prevalent due to the grading differences between staff previously based in the separate Parks and Leisure Services.

By addressing these issues it is anticipated that savings over and above the cost of Stage I will be achieved following the Leisure pilot and therefore provide overall savings as a result of the Phase II review. Members will be presented with this information at the end of the Leisure Pilot.

Additionally, the creation of two generic job descriptions i.e. that of the Business Assistant (Finance/Systems) and the Business Assistant (HR/Admin) has reduced the number of designations within the structure from seven to three.

**Recommendations**

Committee is asked to approve the recommendations as listed above.”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

**Job Title of Head of Parks and Leisure**

The Committee considered a report in relation to the most appropriate designation for the Head of Service post within the Parks and Leisure Department.

After discussion, during which it was suggested that the post of Head of Parks and Leisure be re-titled as the Head of Open Spaces and Recreation, the Committee authorised the Director to investigate the re-designation of the post within the context of the Active Belfast and Open Spaces Strategy.

**Beechmount Leisure Centre Closure - Supernumerary Staff**

The Committee agreed to defer for a period of one month consideration of a report in relation to the identification of supernumerary staff in connection with the closure of the Beechmount Leisure Centre.

### **Acquisition of Land for Future Burial Provision**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **“Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to:

- (i) provide Members with an update on the burials land acquisition project;
- (ii) seek the Committee’s approval of the recommendations made by the Cemeteries Working Group
- (iii) seek the Committee’s approval for officers to commence the process to appoint a suitably qualified consultant to carry out the site investigations at the Dundrod sites;
- (iv) seek the Committee’s agreement that the Nutts Corner site is not suitable as a potential site for a new cemetery; and
- (v) seek the Committee’s approval that an update newsletter is sent to all potentially affected landowners and other key stakeholders.

#### **Relevant Background Information**

Members will be aware of the ongoing project to select a site for a new cemetery for Belfast and that update reports are brought to Committee on a regular basis, the last of which was in June 2010.

It was reported at this Committee meeting that a number of pieces of work had been completed and the key findings of the final draft report for the Tier 3 tests at Lisleen, the draft interim report for Nutts Corner and the final report on the Review of Burial Capacity were presented.

We have now also received the final draft report for the economic appraisal of a new crematorium facility and its key findings were presented to the Cemeteries Working Group at their meeting in August 2010 and in a paper that was circulated to all Members prior to the party group briefings.

Members agreed at Parks and Leisure Committee meeting in June 2010 that the findings of the various pieces of work be referred for discussion at a meeting of the burials working group and that party group briefings be carried out on this issue during August.

### Key Issues

The Cemeteries Working Group met on 9 August 2010 and was presented with the key findings from the tier 3 tests at Lisleen and Nutts Corner, the Review of the Burial Capacity and the economic appraisal for a new crematorium facility.

A summary of the findings of these pieces of work show that:

- If the council proceeds with the original approach of cemetery only provision, a site of 72 acres will be sufficient to meet the council's burial needs.
- The site at Lisleen is suitable for burial provision.
- Applying a weighting for sites which would serve the North and West of the city resulted in the two sites at Dundrod coming to the top of the rank order. However no site investigations have been carried out on either site. One of these sites came forward through the expressions of interest approach.
- There are a number of options available for the development of additional crematorium facilities. Based on current trends, additional facilities would impact on the requirement for additional burial land.

Based on the new information now available there are a number of options open to the council and the Cemeteries Working Group was asked to consider these. The options are:

1. Stay with the original approach and agreed to acquire and develop all or part of the site at Lisleen.
2. Given that the priority for new cemetery provision is in the North and West of the city, agree to commence site investigations into the two Dundrod sites to assess their suitability with a view to acquisition and development.
3. Abandon the current process to acquire a new cemetery and rely on the existing provision at Roselawn supplemented with additional crematorium provision in the city.
4. Option three as above but agree to commence site investigations into the Dundrod sites to assess their suitability with a view to acquisition and land banking to meet future cemetery needs.

### Recommendations of the Cemeteries Working Group

Following a discussion around the options for going forward the Cemeteries Working Group proposed:

1. That the issue of providing additional crematorium facilities needs to be addressed and work needs to be undertaken to identify what is required, where facilities would be located and the options for financing it.
2. That abandoning the current process to acquire a new cemetery and rely solely on the existing provision at Roselawn was not a feasible option.
3. That further consideration is given to tests at the Dundrod sites, to assess their suitability as cemetery sites, and that legal advice is sought on the implications of keeping Lisleen as an option while these are ongoing.
4. That further work should be taken to investigate the provision of natural burials.
5. That burial and cremation charges should be reviewed.

Members are asked to note that the provision of additional crematorium facilities does not include refurbishment to the current crematorium at Roselawn. If a new crematorium were to be developed consideration would have to be given to the refurbishment of Roselawn to bring it up to the current requirements of a modern crematorium.

If the Committee agrees to accept the recommendations of the Cemeteries Working Group it is proposed that arrangements are made to undertake initial site investigations at both Dundrod sites. It is suggested that, given that one of these sites come forward through the expressions of interest process, it should be given priority for site investigation. If these investigations show that either site has the potential to be used as a new cemetery the Council will then be required to undertake more detailed tier 3 tests. A further report will be presented following these investigations.

#### Nutts Corner site

Members are advised that the tier 3 tests have shown that two thirds of the Nutts Corner site is unsuitable in its current form for the proposed development. For this reason it is recommended that the site at Nutts Corner no longer be viewed as a potential site for a new cemetery.

#### Lisleen site

No specific decision is required regarding the site at Lisleen at this time and Legal Services has indicated that this has no implications for any duties that might be placed on the council by the legislation regarding blight.

However if there is going to be a potential change to the council's policy on burial provision further legal advice will be required on the implications for a compulsory purchase order proposal.



### Communication with landowners

Members will be aware that an update newsletter has been sent on several occasions to potentially affected landowners at both Lisleen and Nutts Corner and to other key stakeholders. It is proposed that a newsletter be produced providing an update on the Committee's decisions and this also be sent to potentially affected landowners at the Dundrod site.

### Resource Implications

#### Financial

There is provision of £13.9M in the Council's capital programme for new cemetery provision for Belfast City Council.

#### Human Resources

There are no human resource implications at this stage.

#### Asset and Other Implications

None at this stage although the final phases of the project will inevitably increase the Council's land ownership and associated liabilities.

### Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

1. note the contents of this report;
2. agree to the recommendations made by the Cemeteries Working Group;
3. agree that officers make appropriate arrangements for site investigations at the Dundrod sites, with priority to be given to the site offered through the expressions of interest process;
4. agree that the Nutts Corner site is not suitable as a potential site for a new cemetery;
5. agree to seek legal advice on the implications for potential future compulsory purchase; and
6. agree that an update newsletter is sent to all potentially affected landowners and other key stakeholders.

### Decision Tracking

The next update report on the new cemetery process will be brought to Committee in November 2010 by the Policy and Business Development Officer.

A report on Natural Burials will be brought to Committee in November 2010 by the Policy and Business Development Officer."

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed that a robust plan be developed in relation to the development of additional crematorium facilities and the extension of the Roselawn Cemetery. In addition, the Committee agreed that a review of burial and cremation charges be undertaken and that a report thereon submitted for its consideration at a future meeting.

### **Heritage Lottery Fund - Tropical Ravine**

The Committee agreed to note the contents of a report in relation to the progress achieved in respect of the funding application which had been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund to enable the restoration of the Tropical Ravine at the Botanic Gardens.

### **Allotments and Community Gardens - Strategic Approach**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **“Purpose of Report**

**The purpose of this report is to outline a review and determine a strategic approach to the provision of allotments and community gardens within the Belfast Council area.**

#### **Relevant Background Information**

##### **1. Allotments**

**The Allotments Act (Northern Ireland) 1932 allows local authorities in Northern Ireland to *‘if they think fit, provide allotments under and subject to the provisions of this Act for persons resident in the ... district of the local authority.’***

**The Act outlines the provisions for the letting of allotments, the conditions applying to tenants of allotments and the duty of the local authority to make regulations around a number of things including the cultivation of allotments provided by them and for the preservation of good order in such allotments.**

**The current provision by Belfast City Council is as follows:**

<b>Site</b>	<b>No of full plots (full plot equivalents)</b>	<b>Waiting list</b>
<b>Annadale</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>Ballysillan</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Belmont</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>Blythefield</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>

As stated above, provision of allotments in Northern Ireland is discretionary. The National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners suggest that there should be a minimum of 20 standard allotments per 1000 households. This would equate in Belfast to approximately 171 acres of land; currently we provide 11 acres for allotments.

## 2. Community Gardens

Community gardens are a relatively new and growing demand within Belfast. Community gardens are community-managed projects working with people, animals and plants. In practice, they range from tiny wildlife gardens to fruit and vegetable plots on housing estates, from community poly-tunnels to large city farms. The emphasis is as much about growing people and communities, as it is about growing plants.

Community gardens are often initiated to promote access to green space, to encourage community relationships and to build an awareness of gardening. Some projects provide food-growing activities, training courses, school visits, community allotments and community businesses. Most are run by a management committee of local people and some are run as partnerships with local authorities, whilst retaining strong local volunteer involvement.

They are considered to have several benefits which distinguish them from traditional allotments:

- *Social aspect* – the group of people who rent the garden (generally food-based) can be very diverse in terms of income, ethnic and community background and age. This promotes a sense of belonging and common purpose amongst a diverse group of people, including those who are newcomers into communities;
- *Health aspect* – the interaction in a community garden has a positive impact on mental well-being, as well as the traditional benefits of working outside;
- *Educational aspect* – the organised educational function of the community garden, enables people to learn from one another, often between generations, sharing knowledge on vegetables, flowers, animals and birds. This includes an increased awareness of sustainability issues, through re-using and composting;

- *Neighbourhood attractiveness* – there is a joint responsibility for the maintenance of the plot, allowing people to seek assistance from others in the upkeep of the site. This improves the overall tidiness and visual appearance of the site, aiding the overall attractiveness of a local neighbourhood.

In terms of the Council's current provision, the Committee has given approval to community gardens at:

- several school projects in the west of the city;
- Waterworks;
- derelict land adjacent to Ballysillan allotments;
- Glenbank (Peace III);
- Glen Community Centre (Peace III); and
- Suffolk (Peace III).

In addition, a number of other sites have been identified as potential community gardens, including three within the Connswater Community Greenway and one at Grove.

#### Key Issues

At the present time, there has been a surge of interest in allotments, primarily as a result of increased environmental awareness and the current economic climate. As a consequence, more people are requesting an allotment plot.

As the demand for 'growing your own' increases, at the same time there is a limit to the availability of suitable land for allotments. Communal gardening potentially offers a way around this by maximising the number of people who can share one large plot rather than smaller individual plots.

Officers have been approached by a number of community groups in relation to sites for allotments and community gardens across the city; these include:

- Seaview allotments;
- Whiterock;
- Andersonstown Leisure Centre;
- Woodvale Park; and
- Musgrave Park.

The current position is that site layout plans have been prepared for four of the above sites. At two sites, additional survey work will be required to determine contamination issues and establish their suitability for food production. It is anticipated that further requests will emerge within neighbourhoods as the success of current community gardens expands.

### Way forward

In light of the above issues, and in the context of the emerging Active Belfast and Open Spaces Strategy, it is proposed to review our current policy regarding the provision of allotments. A review would include:

- a review of the management model, including charges and tenancy agreements;
- potential provision of temporary allotments;
- plot size and standards of adequate provision;
- facilities including toilets, parking and storage;
- accessibility and security issues; and
- bio-diversity considerations.

As part of the review, it is also suggested that the Committee gives further consideration to the provision and management of community gardens. Given the substantial strategic fit with the Council's quality of life agenda, there may be merit in developing a 'community garden' model for Belfast.

Amongst others, the NI Housing Executive and the Public Health Agency have both expressed a preliminary interest to work in a partnership with the Council.

It is therefore proposed that a seminar is held towards the end of 2010, with a range of statutory and community partners. The purpose of the seminar would be:

1. To examine good practice in community garden provision and promote its benefits;
2. To establish an agreed approach to the provision of community gardens;
3. To identify opportunities for collaborative working, including the Peace III City of Neighbourhoods project (tbc).

The seminar will be for up to 50 persons including elected Members. It may be of benefit to invite some established practitioners from England to explain the challenges and opportunities of successful community gardens.

In advance of the outcome of the review, and in order to meet growing community demand, it is proposed that the Director is granted delegated authority to facilitate straight-forward requests from communities for in-kind support towards the establishment of a community garden. The Director will determine with officers the viability, deliverability and sustainability of the relevant community garden, in advance of any decision.

Any larger requests, such as asset transfer or leasing arrangements, will be brought to Committee for their consideration.

### **Resource Implications**

#### **Financial**

There will be a small cost for the autumn seminar including travel expenses for speaker(s) from England. This is covered in revenue budgets and will not exceed £3,000.

In-kind costs for the establishment of new community gardens can be covered through revenue budgets.

#### **Human Resources**

Officer time.

#### **Asset and Other Implications**

n/a

### **Recommendations**

That the Committee agrees to:

1. the review process as outlined above, including the organisation of the community gardens seminar; and
2. grant delegated authority to the Director to facilitate in-kind requests from communities for the establishment of a community garden.”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

### **Refurbishment of the Dunville and Woodvale Parks**

The Committee agreed to note the contents of a report in relation to the progress achieved in respect of the proposals to refurbish the Dunville and Woodvale Parks.

### **Shore Road Playing Fields**

The Committee agreed, to enable an opinion to be obtained from the Director of Legal Services, to defer consideration of a request which had been received from the Grove United and Malachians Football Clubs to lease the Shore Road Playing Fields site.

### **Acquisition of Land at Slievegallion Drive**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **“Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to receive Committee approval to proceed with the acquisition of land at Slievegallion open space.

#### **Relevant Background Information**

The Committee is asked to note that the Council currently holds 4.975 acres of land at Slievegallion Drive. The land is held on a 10,000 year lease, dated 20 February 1984, from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The lease restricts use of the site to open space.

A small portion of land at the northern end of the site was omitted from the original transfer and remains in NIHE ownership. To allow rationalisation of the site boundary Council officers contacted the NIHE and requested the transfer of the previously omitted portion to the Council. The transfer would be on terms similar to those of the original lease i.e. a long lease at nominal rent. The NIHE has agreed to this request.

The land to be acquired comprises approximately 0.173 acres. The land is currently in grass. A Preliminary Risk Assessment to increase understanding of any potential contamination on the site indicates there are no greater contamination risks associated with the portion being acquired than with the other portions of the site which are already held by the Council.

#### **Key Issues**

The key issue for the committee to note is that the transfer of the portion of land hatched black would rationalise the existing site boundaries and ‘square off’ the Council’s land holding. This would simplify any future pitch or other recreational development at this location. Acquisition of the land would be at no cost to the Council.

#### **Resource Implications**

##### **Financial**

The acquisition would be at no capital costs to the Council. Minimal additional revenue costs incurred for grass cutting of the additional portion of land which measures approximately 20 metres x 30 metres.

### Human Resources

There are no additional human resources required.

### Asset and Other Implications

Acquisition would rationalise site boundaries which are currently undefined around this portion of land. i.e. there are currently no fences or other structures which separate the Council's existing land from the portion to be acquired.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee approve the acquisition from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive of approximately 0.173 acres of land, on the basis of a long lease at a nominal rent, with use restricted to open space, subject to the approval of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in accordance with Standing Order 60 and appropriate legal documentation to be approved by the Assistant Chief Executive and Town Solicitor.

### Key to Abbreviations

NIHE: Northern Ireland Housing Executive"

After discussion, the Committee agreed to adopt the recommendation contained within the report.

### Tender for the Collection and Treatment of Animal Waste at the Belfast Zoological Gardens

The Director sought and was granted authority to instigate a tender exercise in relation to the collection and treatment of animal waste at the Belfast Zoo for a period of one year, with an option to renew annually up to a further three years. The cost of the provision of this service would be approximately £14,000 per year.

The Committee noted that the tender would be evaluated against criteria based on both cost and quality and, in accordance with the authority delegated to him, the Director would be accepting the most economically advantageous tender submitted.

### Belfast Festival at Queen's - Black Watch

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 15th April, it had approved the use of the Shankill Leisure Centre for the Belfast Festival at Queen's staging of the internationally acclaimed play Black Watch. The Director pointed out that, prior to signing the contract, the organisation and the National Theatre of Scotland had examined the logistics of bringing the play to the Shankill Leisure Centre and, despite concerted efforts, had chosen the Girls' Model School as the most appropriate venue.



Accordingly, the Belfast Festival at Queen's had expressed its regret that it was unable on this occasion to utilise the Shankill Leisure Centre but had indicated that it would continue to work in partnership with the Council in future years.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

### **Installation of Flood Alert Station at the Knock River and Orangefield**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **"Purpose of Report"**

The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Committee to the request from the Rivers Agency to install a flood alert station at Orangefield Park.

#### **Relevant Background Information**

The Committee will be aware of the sporadic flooding which has occurred across the city over the past few years. To help tackle the problem the Rivers Agency has initiated a programme of installing flood alert stations at various key areas throughout Belfast to enable early warning of potential flooding.

#### **Key Issues**

The Rivers Agency has sought a licence from the Council by way of exchange of correspondence for the installation of data logger equipment and a water level gauge board on the masonry wall and fence of the Knock river near the entrance to Orangefield Park.

The data logger is contained within a 100 mm rigid PVC pipe with the top end capped. Both pieces of equipment will be fixed to the masonry wall and fence. The equipment is battery powered and the data gathered is relayed by a SIM card telemetric communication system. The equipment can be installed in less than a day and will require routine maintenance once or twice a year. Installation and maintenance of the equipment will be undertaken by the Rivers Agency engineering staff.

The Flood Alert Station will be a permanent fixture until such time as the proposed realignment of the Knock River is completed as part of the Connswater Community Greenway project.

Rivers Agency will indemnify the Council against any loss or claim of damage to the Flood Alert Station during installation, operational presence and maintenance, caused by any unauthorised person or persons or injury to same during such an event.

Members are asked to note that the Rivers Agency has powers under the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973, which permit it to undertake such installations as of right. However, the Agency prefers to seek agreement with landowners on a voluntary basis.

**Resource Implications**

**Financial**

There will be no cost to Council.

**Human Resources**

There are no additional human resource implications.

**Asset and Other Implications**

This work will not enhance the facility but will provide a valuable resource to the community as it will enable greater warning to be given to local residents.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Committee grant approval for the Rivers Agency's proposal."

The Committee granted the approval sought.

**Support for Sport - Small Development  
and Hospitality Grants**

The Committee noted a schedule of Support for Sport applications in relation to Small Development and Hospitality Grants which had been approved by the Director of Parks and Leisure in accordance with the authority delegated to him. A copy of the Schedule was available on Modern.gov.

Chairman