

Parks and Leisure Committee

Thursday, 13th September, 2012

MEETING OF PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor McCabe (Chairman);
Aldermen Humphrey and Rodgers;
Councillors Corr, Haire, Kelly, Kyle,
Mallon, McKee, Mac Giolla Mhín,
Mullan, A. Newton, O'Neill, Thompson,
Garrett and Spence.

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

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Hartley and Hendron.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 9th 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 3rd September, subject to the variation of the minute under the heading "Departmental Improvement Program - Operations Reviews" to provide that 'any Party' as opposed 'any Member' could request a briefing from the Director in this regard.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Support for Sport

Small Development and Hospitality Applications

The Committee noted a schedule of support for sport applications in relation to small development grants and hospitality applications which had been approved by the Director of Parks and Leisure in accordance with the authority delegated to him.

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Large Development Grants

The Director advised the Committee of the criteria used to assess the Support for Sport Large Development Grants applications, which took into account:

- the club's development plan;
- how that plan linked to the governing body's plan;

- the sustainability of the initiative; and
- how it contributed to improving quality of life, provided good relations and increased opportunities for participation

He indicated that the standard of applications had been high, with two clubs passing the 50% threshold for funding. He recommended that the top thirteen clubs be awarded grants, given that two applications had received the same score.

The Director reported that, if the Committee was minded to accept the recommendations, this would result in an overspend on the £60,000 budget allocated for the large development programme. However, it could be accommodated within the overall Support for Sport budget.

The Committee proceeded to consider the following requests which had been received and had been assessed within the agreed criteria for assistance:

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Recommended</u>
Holy Trinity Amateur Boxing Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a crime diversion, specialist coaching and mentoring initiative
St. John Bosco Amateur Boxing Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a local community outreach initiative
Grosvenor Fencing Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to two specialist coaching initiatives to develop Sabre and Epee fencing
St. Paul's Gaelic Athletic Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to the delivery of a structured coach education and development programme for coaches and volunteers
Redhog Wrestling Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a series of coach education sessions and training camps to develop wrestling
Cathal Brugha Water Polo Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to the development of a elite performance programme

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Recommended</u>
Donegal Diamonds Water Polo Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to the development of a mini and maxi water polo coaching manual and associated improvement in water polo coaching standards
Linfield Youth Academy	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a sports science development project to increase performance levels and player development
Templemore Swimming Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a development programme to enable the Club to expand and offer alternative aquatic disciplines
Crusaders Football Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a community programme aimed at developing healthy lifestyles and promoting the European Union Healthy Stadium Concept
Belfast Star Basketball Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to the development of a support structure for under 18 and under 20 teams
Shankill United Football Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to education and female outreach programmes
St. Patrick's Football Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to the delivery of a mental health and wellbeing programme
St. Oliver Plunkett Football Club	Do not support
St. Agnes Gaelic Athletic Club	Do not support
Cairn Lodge Amateur Boxing Club	Do not support
Cregagh Wanderers Football Club	Do not support
Harlequins Men's Hockey Club	Do not support

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Recommended</u>
Immaculata Football Club	Do not support
Windsor Tennis Club	Do not support
City of Belfast Swim Club	Do not support
Alexandra Presbyterian Table Tennis Club	Do not support
Malachians Football Club	Do not support
Ocean Youth Trust	Do not support
Shaftesbury Bowling Club	Do not support
Glenburn Methodist Table Tennis Club	Do not support
Cooke Rugby Football Club	Do not support
Santos Football Club	Do not support
Falls Bowling Club	Do not support
Instonians Cricket Club	Do not support
Stadium Youth and Community	Do not support
O'Donovan Rossa Gaelic Athletic Club	Do not support
Patrick Sarsfields Gaelic Athletic Club	Do not support
Belfast Harlequins Rugby Club	Do not support
Immaculata Amateur Boxing Club	Do not support
Sean McDermott's Gaelic Athletic Club	Do not support
Olympia Triathlon Club	Do not support

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**Parks and Leisure Departmental Improvement Programme –
Operational Reviews**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

As part of the Departmental Improvement Programme operational efficiency reviews have been ongoing since January 2012 and have resulted in a number of recommendations being approved by Committee including new management arrangements for Parks and Leisure operations and reviews of the Business Support function and Landscape Planning and Development Unit.

Current reviews include a review of the Open Spaces and Active Living Unit (OSAL), operational efficiency in Leisure Services and a review of Belfast Zoo.

Whilst the operational reviews of individual elements have been continuing, work has commenced on reviewing the department’s senior management tier.

This report proposes a way forward in the review of the senior management tier of the department and makes recommendations on the OSAL review.

2 Key Issues

Key Issues for Parks and Leisure Senior Management Tier

- The structure of the Parks and Leisure Department can be defined as having three functional areas of responsibility: Growth and Development, Business Management and Operational Delivery.
- Each of these areas requires strong leadership and management to ensure effective delivery of Members’ ambitions and value for money services.
- Given the current priority for delivery of the investment programme and the significance of the Parks and Leisure agenda within that, it is proposed that priority is given to the Growth and Development strand and further work being undertaken to bring together the Parks and Leisure operations and to examine management of the Department’s commercial businesses, i.e. Belfast Castle, Malone House and Belfast Zoo.

- This work will seek to ensure the integrated management and planning of effective service delivery in support of Active Belfast and area based planning. Proposals on these functions will be brought to Committee at a later date.
- Given the priority in relation to the Growth and Development strand it is proposed that a permanent senior management post of Growth and Development Manager is created to ensure the strategic management and oversight of delivering the development functions for the department as well as delivery of key strategic programmes of work (such as the Parks and Leisure elements of the Council's Investment Programme). It is vital that this new role ensures that the Department is actively engaged with local communities and delivering to local needs through the effective use of our open space and leisure assets.
- Functions that will potentially come under this remit will be:
 - Policy and Business Development Unit
 - Leisure Development Unit
 - Open Spaces and Active Living Unit
 - Landscape Planning and Development Unit
 - Capital Projects.
- It is proposed that once the Growth and Development Manager is appointed, priority will be given to defining the structure to support the function.

Key Issues for Open Spaces and Active Living Review (OSAL):

- There have been a variety of reviews conducted over the past year on the monitoring and reporting of Facility Management Agreements (FMAs) resulting in recommendations for much tighter controls of the FMA process.
- The proposed changes are a key element of an action plan to improve the process which is being monitored by the Council's Audit Panel. Much of the responsibility for the management of this function lies within the Open Spaces and Active Living Manager; it is apparent however that support at an appropriate level is required to assist with the management of FMAs.

- Further to this, a recent study of the allotment service showed that while operational responsibility for allotments resides with the Community Parks Managers, there is a need for improved management and more effective and efficient processes in this area.
- There are currently three Outdoor Leisure Officers carrying out an outdoor leisure function. There are however no substantive post holders in this role. Two of these are employed through an agency and the third officer, whilst a permanent member of staff, is covering this role on a temporary basis. The review has concluded that there is a need to put in place wider permanent roles. It is therefore proposed to cease the use of the agency staff and create two permanent posts with a broader remit relating to open spaces and active living – i.e. an Open Spaces and Active Living Officer and an Open Spaces and Active Living Co-ordinator.
- There is currently no substantive post holder in the post of Events Co-ordinator.
- The emphasis of the unit has changed to become more focussed on delivering to the Active Belfast agenda and will fulfil a coordinating role for all outdoor recreation. As the marketing function of the unit has moved to the Policy and Business Development Unit the post of Marketing Officer will be deleted and replaced with the post of Events Officer.
- This renders the post of Marketing Officer redundant and no suitable alternative employment currently exists in the organisation. Consequently, the option of voluntary redundancy has been discussed with the post holder and the Trade Unions and this has been accepted in the event that this structure is approved.

3 Resource Implications

Finance

The cost creating a Development and Growth Manager is £56,695 (top of SCP 65) and will be funded from corporate resources repaid from departmental efficiency savings to be realised through an agreed action plan.

The overall financial implications of the OSAL review are as follows:

- Cost of re-designating posts: £ Nil
- Cost of creating new post of Events Officer: £36,160
- Total cost: £36,160
- Savings from deleting Marketing Officer post: £36,160
- Net Cost: £Nil

There is a one off cost of £70,806 for voluntary redundancy. This can be funded from existing departmental budgets. The payback period is 1.92 years and meets corporate criteria.

Human Resources

Staff and Trade Unions have been consulted throughout the review process. We have an agreed position with the exception of the work which remains, namely to review the Biodiversity function, the Biodiversity Officer job description and structural position in the organisation. Interim arrangements for the line management of this post will be reviewed.

All job descriptions within the open spaces and active living unit (and where appropriate job titles) will be refreshed to ensure that the posts are now more relevant to the unit's overall remit and further ensure that support is provided at the appropriate level.

It is acknowledged that all affected post holders will be required to sign and agree amended job descriptions to take account of changes to roles and responsibilities and reporting lines.

Asset and Other Implications

None

4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

There are no equality implications.

5 Recommendations

Members are asked to approve :

- The creation and recruitment of Growth and Development Manager post.
- The creation and recruitment of an Active Living and Open Spaces Officer post.

- The creation of an Active Living and Open Spaces Coordinator post.
- The deletion of the post of Marketing officer with the release of the post holder on VR.
- The creation and recruitment of an Events Officer post.
- The Open Spaces and Active Living structure.”

After discussion, the Committee granted the approvals sought.

Financial Reporting - Quarter 1 2012/2013

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1. Relevant background information

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed on 18 June 2010 that:

- the council would produce financial reporting packs for the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and each Standing Committee on a quarterly basis
- the Budget and Transformation Panel would also receive monthly financial updates 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 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 the year end forecast position.

The style and layout reflect much of the discussion and feedback arising from the members’ financial training at the end of September 2010. As we previously advised the committee, we will continue to develop the style and contents of the reports in liaison with members.

Central finance and our departmental management team have worked together to develop the information within this financial reporting pack.

2. Key issues

Current and forecast financial position 2012/13

The current performance in quarter one of the Parks and Leisure department shows a -9.9% variance against the year to date budget; i.e.; an under spend of £514k.

There are a number of key reasons for the under spend within the department as follows:

Income overall is down 4% or £100k on budget. Leisure Centres are down by 11% or £90k on budget. Promotional activity especially around the new membership scheme is ongoing and summer campaigns have been underway from June.

Income from fees and charges at the Zoo is down 14% or £77k against budget and the income at the shop is also down £40k but this is offset by a reduction on expenditure on supplies. Visitor numbers are currently down by 21% on the same period as last year. The poor weather and the opening of other prestigious visitor centres have impacted on the Zoo.

Income from Grants is also outstanding by £50k and officers are working with funding bodies to ensure all monies are claimed in a timely manner. Income from fees and charges in Parks is up by 3% or £50k which is mainly from the crematorium.

The direct employee budget is showing a 2% (£133k) under spend at quarter one however this is mainly due to vacancies being filled by agency staff and the impact on the superannuation budget being unspent. Committee will be aware of the ongoing service reviews within the Department and recommendations will be provided to committee over the next number of months to finalise the structures. Recommendations regarding overtime and agency staff are currently being implemented.

Utility costs although currently on budget are a concern for the department. Services are reporting that water charges are slow to come through and they are experiencing issues with some sites. For example there are problems with the CHP (combined heat and power) units which mean centres are paying more to revert to electricity.

Grounds Maintenance expenditure is under spent against budget by £256k. £95k of this relates to the maintenance of paths and although work has been completed there has been an issue with the contractor over the rate of payment which has now been resolved. There is £70k of payments processed in period 4 in relation to paths. Other programmes of work are currently being agreed and procured.

Supplies and Services within the department are under spent by £227k. This expenditure relates to a number of programmes of work that are being developed and also programmes of work with external partners that are underway and are being monitored on a monthly basis. This also refers to the issue of the Zoo shop referred to above which has reduced its supplies for resale by £60k.

Vehicle costs within the department are overspent by £49k against budget in quarter one and budgets have been centralised to help to monitor and control levels of expenditure. This budget will also be re-profiled.

Compensation claims are £35k above budget for both services but significantly in Parks by over £30k. Grants within the department are currently under claimed by £28k and officers will continue to work with community groups and clubs to ensure monies are effectively drawn down.

The department will continue to monitor the variance between actual and budgeted expenditure/income during quarter 2.

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.

3. Resource Implications

There is a year to date under-spend of £0.51m and a forecast over-spend of some £0.2m or 1% by year end.

4. Equality and Good Relations Implications

None.

5. Recommendations

Members are recommended to note the above report and associated financial reporting pack.”

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Leisure Income and Boost Membership

The Committee was reminded that the Boost Scheme had been developed and implemented during April, 2006 and, since that time, its associated pricing and membership categories had been reviewed a number of times. The Director pointed out that that had led to the scheme becoming more complex. In order to address those complexities and to make pricing more competitive, a revised framework for Boost had been developed during 2011. That framework, which had streamlined the existing framework and categories, had been approved by the Committee at its meeting on 6th December and had introduced various benefits such as competitive pricing. In addition, reduced charges for corporate and staff memberships had been introduced during April.

The Director stated that, although the new pricing structure provided Leisure Centres with a more competitively priced product, it had provided the Department with challenges in terms of increasing and retaining current members. He pointed out that, since the introduction of the new scheme, membership numbers had increased. However, despite that increase, income had declined by £130,622 during the first quarter of the 2012/2013 financial year. In order to help address that decline in income, extensive marketing plans had been developed to promote the Scheme, with a particular focus being given to corporate membership, membership retention, weight management programmes, family sessions, staff memberships and the promotion of the competitive £25 monthly fees. To date, activity had focused around increasing full and concessionary memberships which was proving to be successful year on year but had not yet filled the gap created from the price reduction.

The Director then proceeded to outline further areas of work which would be undertaken and pointed out that casual usage of facilities had increased year on year and opportunities existed between now and Christmas to carry out additional targeted promotions, such as the use of the main halls, buy one get one free promotional offers, bring a friend for free, competitions, free one day passes, gift vouchers, refer a friend incentives and recognition for staff who sign up the most members. Specific programmes would be targeted in particular areas across the City based on the current utilisation rates. He stated that promotional work would be undertaken by the section's marketing team, the newly appointed participation officers and centre staff and that a programme of training would be provided. Accordingly, he recommended that the Committee delegate authority to him to approve a range of measures aimed at attracting members to the Council's leisure facilities.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Partnership Development Officer - Recruitment Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 **Relevant Background Information**

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to extend the contract of the Partnership Development Officer to the end of May 2013.

From 1999 Council led Sport Belfast as the partnership delivery vehicle for Sports Development. For a number of years the Department financially supported the employment of Sport Belfast's Project Development Officer to the amount of £15,000.

Over the last number of years the Belfast Strategic Partnership has become the primary vehicle for partnership working to improve health and wellbeing, reducing health inequalities. The framework for action supports the underlying theme of Active Belfast and an action plan is evolving to include Active Living, Active Leisure and Sport.

Appropriate internal structures for delivery of the Belfast Strategic Partnership action plans will be determined through the review of the Department's development function.

It is important that the current momentum is maintained whilst detailed action plan, resources and structures are agreed. Delivery of the work plans developed through the existing Belfast Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy action plans can be assured through the continued appointment of a Partnership Development Officer.

2 Key Issues

Partnership Work programmes

In 2006 Council led the development of the Belfast Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy and agreed to support close partnership working with a range of organisations to deliver this strategy. A key part of this support was through Parks and Leisure Committee's decision, on 10 May 2008, to support a fixed term post of Partnership Development Officer within the Leisure Development Unit at a cost of £20,000 per annum, with three years support funding of £15,000 per annum from Sport NI. The final claim under this funding was submitted to Sport NI in August 2012 and the fixed term post has reached its term.

An extensive work programme has been in operation over the last three years to include work which supports Corporate and Departmental plans. Parks and Leisure committee on 12 March 2012 received a report detailing how the Council is working to support delivery of the NI Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation. Many of the items listed in this report were delivered through the Partnership Development Officer.

For continuity and to minimise the negative outcome of non-delivery of work programmes it is felt that the most appropriate solution is to extend the Partnership Development Officer position to the end of May 2013. This will allow sufficient time for review of the Departmental development strand and agreement on appropriate permanent resources.

3 Resource Implications

Financial

There is no longer an offer of financial assistance from Sport NI for this position.

An amount of £27,000 is required to support this post from September 2012 to the end of May 2013. There is an allocation of £30,000 within current budgets to recruit one additional full time Health and Fitness Coach (Referral) which has not yet been recruited and we have now secured 100% funding from Sport NI for four such posts. It is proposed that the budget for our own referral post which is now fully funded can be reallocated to extend the Partnership Development Officer position representing a saving to the Department.

Cost of extending contract September 2012 – May 2013: £27,000

Saving from Health and Fitness Coach April 2012 – March 2013: £30,000

Net saving: £3,000

Human Resources

If agreed by Committee, the Partnership Development Officer position will remain in the Parks and Leisure Department until the end May 2013.

Asset and Other Implications

There are no assets directly connected to the projects delivered through this proposal.

Equality and Good Relations Implications

There are no equality and good relations implications from this proposal.

5 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- **Approve the extension of the Partnership Development Officer post to the end of May 2013 through the reallocation of the referral officer post budget which is now being fully funded.”**

After discussion, the Committee granted the approval sought.

Cemetery Operative Posts

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1. Relevant Background Information

During the reviews within Parks and Cemeteries Services resources/staffing levels have changed and subsequently it has been established that the current resources/staffing levels at Roselawn are not providing sufficient operational cover. There is a requirement that staff are flexible in order to deal with the number of burials and to provide sufficient staff cover specifically at Roselawn Cemetery. Cover for absence, holidays and operational requirements is proving difficult.

It was previously agreed by the Parks and Leisure Committee at its meeting on 15 May 2008 that new Cemetery Operative posts would be created. The post was developed to carry out all aspects of cemeteries work including acting as Crematorium Technician when required. This post allows for more flexibility in arranging cover at the crematorium.

Recommendations from the review of the Crematorium agreed by Committee in April 2011 established four additional Crematorium posts to address the increased demand in the Crematorium. The recruitment of these posts has been completed, staff trained and when fully operational should reduce the demand for Cemetery Operatives to cover the Crematorium.

Since May 2008 the workload at Roselawn has increased in relation to additional graves to maintain. Since 1 May 2008 to present 1081 new graves have been sold in Section W. The construction of Section Y started on 14 August 2011 and is close to completion which will also includes additional graves.

The Service has also seen an increase in customer complaints during 2012 which relate directly to weeds and slipping standards. Insufficient resources to undertake day to day duties, i.e. weed control, grass cuttings, bark mulching, dead tree removal etc. is considered to be the main issue.

2. **Key Issues**

It has been identified that the current staffing levels at the Crematorium and Cemeteries are not providing the necessary flexibility to ensure operational cover therefore it is proposed that two additional posts of Cemetery Operatives should be created within the current established staff levels.

At present there is one vacancy of Gravedigger at Roselawn and it is proposed that this post plus a further post will be recruited through external recruitment. A reserve list will be compiled so that the remaining post can be recruited if/when a vacancy arises. Once these vacancies are recruited as Cemetery Operatives, the established number of Gardeners and/or Gravediggers will be reduced accordingly to ensure no overall increase in the total establishment figures.

The result of this will mean that two posts will be replaced with Cemetery Operatives creating a maximum of 14 Cemetery Operatives posts which will be more flexible to meet the operational demands.

Overtime costs from 1 April 2011 until 31 March 2012 were £12,426.86 at Roselawn. Agency costs from 1 April 2001 until 31 March 2012 were £2619.54. The introduction of these posts will assist to reduce overtime and agency costs currently being used to cover these duties.

3. **Resource Implications**

The creation of two posts of Cemetery Operatives will have financial implications. This will include the differential between current remuneration of posts at Scale 3 to the proposed Cemetery Operative posts of Scale 4. This will cost £1965 per post, totalling £3930 for two additional posts.

Note that the above calculations assume that post holders currently being remunerated at Scale 4 will not apply, however if they are successful the financial impact will be lessened.

Human Resources

Recruitment for the posts of Cemetery Operatives will be carried out through external recruitment and one post will be filled immediately to replace the Gravedigger vacancy and the other will be filled as and when a further vacancy occurs within Gardener or Gravediggers designations at Roselawn.

There are currently 4 Apprentices who were temporarily allocated posts as Gardener 3s until suitable Scale 4 posts became vacant. If the above is agreed, these posts will have to be offered to these members of staff as suitable redeployment options.

4. Equality and good relations implications

None.

5. Recommendations

Members are asked to approve the contents of this report namely:-

- To agree the creation of two additional Cemetery Operative posts to replace one existing Gravedigger vacancy and one other vacancy as and when it arises within Gravedigger and Gardener designations at Roselawn.”

The Committee granted the approval sought.

Summer Scheme - Grove Wellbeing Centre

The Committee noted the contents of a report in relation to the summer scheme which had been held at the Grove Wellbeing Centre and the issues which had arisen as a result of the popularity of the scheme. The Director informed the Committee that a number of measures were being considered to ensure that those issues did not arise in 2013 and that a report would be brought back to the Committee in due course. In addition, the Committee agreed that the Director of Parks and Leisure meet with elected representatives of the area in order to discuss how those measures could be implemented to avoid the difficulties which had occurred at the centre during the summer.

Lagan Valley Orienteers Partnership Request

The Committee was advised that over the previous ten years the Lagan Valley Orienteers Partnership had been holding Wednesday evening events which had been accessible to local communities in various parks and forests over the summer months. In recent years, the Wednesday spring and a summer series had attracted between sixty and one hundred members and non-members. The Assistant Director stated that, in order to improve orienteering skills and keep participants active, the group had expanded these evenings into the autumn and winter months. In addition, a fee had been charged to cover costs associated with the upkeep of electronic equipment, the mobile registration cabin and map printing.

The Assistant Director stated that, in order to increase participation in the sport, Council officers had been working with the Group and the Northern Ireland Orienteering Development Officer to develop an orienteering pack for schools and youth groups to be used throughout Belfast's parks. It was envisaged that this would be piloted at the Victoria and/or Ormeau Park and that schools would be encouraged to use orienteering in order to link it to the national curriculum.

She stated that the Department wished to pilot the new arrangements in order to develop the use of parks out of hours and, where feasible, offer free access to toilet facilities within the Council's parks and leisure facilities. The Assistant Director pointed out that in instances where parks buildings were not normally staffed, it was hoped that the key handling arrangements could be put in place with the Partnership. However, training would be required in relation to all health and safety issues related to the management of pavilions and the locking of parks after hours. In order to ensure that there would be no double bookings, the Outdoor Leisure unit would handle all bookings. It was anticipated that such a partnership arrangement would increase active, positive participation and improve customers' experiences within the Council's parks facilities. She recommended that the Committee grant authority for free out of use hours of the Council's parks and toilets facilities to the Lagan Valley Orienteer's Partnership, subject to satisfactory terms being agreed by the Director of Parks and Leisure and on the condition that:

- (i) the organisation resolve all operational and health and safety issues to the Council's satisfaction; and
- (ii) an appropriate legal agreement, to be prepared by the Assistant Chief Executive and Town Solicitor.

The Committee granted the authority sought.

Outdoor Gym in Alexandra Park

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1. Relevant Background Information

Committee will recall at its meeting on 11 August 2011 approval was given for a funding agreement between Groundwork NI and the Council for the continued involvement of Groundwork NI in Alexandra Park up to December 2012.

The provision of that funding has ensured that Groundwork NI have continued to work with the Alexandra Park Steering group ensuring the delivery of a programme of activities which meets the Council and departmental aims with regards to good relations, anti-social behaviour and shared space.

As part of the ongoing work with the steering group the group has been successful in securing £20k of funding for further environmental improvements within Alexandra Park.

On discussion the steering group have agreed that the installation of an outdoor gym would be top of the wish list. This option was also greatly favoured by the funder and the request does reflect the Council's ambition to improve and make better use of its assets and get people more active.

Groundwork NI and the steering group have secured the £20k funding from a regular contributor to Groundwork UK called BUNZL.

2. Key Issues

From a recent tender exercise carried out by Belfast City Council £20k of funding should provide six pieces of outdoor gym equipment including safety surface and installation however this will be more apparent following a specific tender exercise for this project.

A consultation exercise with the wider community needs to take place regarding the positioning of the pieces of equipment within the park. Sensitivity needs to be applied when selecting areas for equipment and early discussions have favoured a trim trail effect encouraging participants to move around all areas of the park passing through the peace wall.

The landscape plans and tender process will be carried out by Groundwork NI under the guidance of officers from the parks operational team and the landscape unit. The specification for equipment must meet the required standards as outlined by the council.

It is anticipated that 10% of the overall cost of the outdoor gym needs to be incorporated in to the budget estimates to cover ongoing maintenance and essential repairs.

The daily inspection of the gym equipment needs to be built in to the programme of work for the ROSPA team in that area. Safe inspection and recording of the outdoor gym equipment is likely to require additional training.

The life span of the equipment is estimated at approximately 10 years at which the Council may be obligated to find funds for a full refurbishment. This may need to form part of the playground refurbishment programme.

3. **Resource Implications**

Financial

There may be a cost to the council if the staff require additional ROSPA training specific to the outdoor gym equipment. This will be absorbed by the training and development budget for the area.

10% of the overall capital works needs to be factored in to parks annual budget to cover essential inspections and maintenance.

Human

It is anticipated that the existing ROSPA squad for the park will carry out the daily inspection of the outdoor gym equipment this will be accommodated through our normal management process.

Asset and Other Implications

None.

4. **Equality and good relations implications**

The Alexandra Park project and work carried out by Groundwork NI has been developed with full involvement of the good relations team, local communities and all relevant stakeholders and is completely in line with the Council's responsibility in this area.

5. **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the committee grant authority for the installation of the outdoor gym in Alexandra Park subject to:

- Groundwork NI carrying out a consultation exercise with the wider community
- All landscape designs and equipment specifications being approved by Belfast City Council
- The development and implementation of a programme of activity for the outdoor gym with the community and users of the park."

The Committee granted the authority sought.

Ballysillan Leisure Centre Grounds – Contractor Access

The Director reported that the Department for Social Development, in its urban regeneration role, had commissioned URS Limited to implement public realm improvements for a number of areas, including the Ballysillan Road. It was proposed that improvements would be made to the boundary treatment at the Ballysillan Leisure Centre and the Parks and Leisure Department, which had been contacted in order to seek its views thereon, was liaising currently with the URS Limited on the design. The company had indicated that it would require an arrangement with the Council in order to provide contractor access for White Mountain Quarries to the grounds of the Ballysillan Leisure Centre in order to undertake those works. The Director pointed out that a suitable Licence Agreement would regulate such use and that it was anticipated that access would be required for approximately thirty days. In addition, the improvement works would benefit the Council and no fee would be associated with the Licence.

The Director recommended that the Committee approve the Company's request for access to the grounds of Ballysillan Leisure Centre, subject to a suitable location being agreed for ancillary facilities and to such occupation being regulated by an appropriate Licence Agreement.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Grove Bowling Pavilion - Grove Dance School

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 **Relevant Background Information**

The Parks and Leisure department has received a request from the Friends of Grove Park (FOG) for free use of a room in Grove Bowling Pavilion, on a Friday evening for three hours from 6:00pm to 9:00pm, for thirty seven weeks during the period 14 September 2012 to 20 September 2013.

The FOG formed in 2008 and, over the past 4 years has secured substantial internal and external funding to deliver a wide range of activities in the park such as:

- **annual fun day events**
- **annual Christmas tea dance for the older community**
- **the construction of a community garden**
- **the formation of a weekly dance school for local youths.**

The dance school commenced approximately 1 year ago and was specifically aimed at engaging young people who were involved in antisocial behaviour and vandalism in the Park. The dance school takes place on a Friday evening between

6:00pm and 9:00pm over a thirty seven week period during the academic year. Given that a room is currently available in Grove Bowling Pavilion at the times needed by the dance group, an informal arrangement has been operating during the bowling season extended opening hours, to assist the group for an interim period.

The dance school attracts a core weekly attendance of twenty young people, which is regularly supplemented by a number of other young people who attend less frequently. Successes include the group entering several dance competitions and performing dance demonstrations at community events that have taken place in the Grove Park and the surrounding area. Additionally, Council antisocial behaviour statistics demonstrate that antisocial behaviour in relation to youth behaviour in the area has decreased.

To date the dance school's primary funder has been the Crescent Arts Centre, through direct financial grant aid and contributions in kind by way of free dance coaching.

FOG have identified to Council officers that funding the dance school is becoming increasingly difficult and have been organising fund raising activities to raise much needed funds to assist in sustaining the dance school . Given this, a request for assistance has been submitted to the Council for free use of a room for three hours on Friday evenings.

Free use of a dance space will contribute greatly to ensuring the sustainability of the dance school and Council officers will continue to work with the FOG to indentify future relevant funding sources.

2. **Key Issues**

Free use of the bowling pavilion would result in a potential loss of income to the park whilst incurring expenditure for overheads including staff, electricity and heating. However, the bowling pavilion would otherwise be closed on a Friday evening and allowing this use would ensure a positive community activity taking place in the premises.

Council officers have considered the option to manage this request and have identified that the total cost to the Council for thirty seven weeks free use of the facility would be £4,728.60.

Council officers have explored the availability of suitable accommodation in Grove Health and Wellbeing Centre during the times requested however no appropriate rooms are vacant.

Discussions have occurred with the FOG regarding key holding responsibilities for the bowling pavilion, which would alleviate the cost of overheads to the Council. Similar arrangements exist across the city with other partners and friends groups. Upon completion of the appropriate health and safety and other relevant training, the FOG are content to assume key holding responsibilities for the Grove Bowling Pavilion

3. **Resource Implications**

Financial

Approving free use of the bowling pavilion would incur a weekly loss of income of £54.00. Additionally a cost of £73.80 a week for overheads, including salaries, would be incurred which would have to be absorbed by the Parks operational budget. The total cost to the Council over a thirty seven week period would be in excess of £4,728.60.

Approving free use of the bowling pavilion with key holding responsibility would incur a loss of income to the Park of £54.00 per week. The total loss of income over a thirty seven week period would be £1,998. Excluding salaries additional costs for overheads such as additional heating and lighting would have to be absorbed by the parks operational budget.

Human Resources

Officer time and salary will be required to accommodate additional opening hours on a Friday evening if key holding responsibilities are not delegated to FOG.

If key holding responsibilities are delegated to FOG there will be no human resource implications.

Asset and Other Implications

Facilitating the request ensures that the community are actively using our bowling pavilion during a period when it is usually left empty.

4. **Equality and good relations implications**

There are no equality or good relations implications anticipated.

5. **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Committee:

- Note the contents of the report

- Approve the FOG dance group's request for free use of the bowling pavilion, with delegated key holding responsibility, for 3 hours each Friday evening for a thirty seven week period commencing on 14 September 2012 and expiring on 20 September 2013."

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

**Belfast Activity Centre –
Request for Use of Waterworks Lower Pond**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1. Relevant Background Information

The Parks and Leisure department has received a request from the Belfast Activity Centre (BAC) as part of the Youth Build project for the use of the Waterworks Park and the pond situated at the lower end of the park. The proposal (see Appendix I) is to create a partnership between BAC and the Council to enhance and encourage involvement and participation in the park and in North Belfast.

The Youth Build initiative offers a dynamic programme engaging leaders and potential leaders to participate in experiential learning activities and to explore leadership development to support sustained and enduring capacity building for the future.

The BAC currently leases an area of land within Barnett Demesne where a large amount of their activity takes place. The activity centre consists of a climbing wall, high ropes obstacle course and manmade caving area. Other activities that take place in the surrounding parkland and area are, archery, orienteering and canoeing at Shaw's Bridge.

BAC has provided a range of outdoor activities at recent parks and leisure events and in particular the mobile climbing wall has proved a hit with community focused events.

2. Key Issues

The proposal aims to recruit 12 youth leaders from within North Belfast (6 youths directly from the Waterworks area and the further 6 from North Belfast).

The 12 youths will undergo training in paddle sports with a potential accreditation to level one paddle sports coach standard. This will include foundation safety rescue training and a relevant first aid certificate.

The training will take place from October 2012 to March 2013 twice a week for 2 hours each session. Specific times and dates will be agreed with the Park Manager and Outreach Manager depending on other programmed activity in the park.

BAC will provide all the training to the 12 youth leaders selected for the programme who will sign up to a code of good conduct. All equipment, insurances and risk assessments will also be provided and managed by the BAC.

All activity is to take place on the lower pond in the Waterworks park and although all fishing activity takes place in the upper lake Council officers will liaise with the Families of the Waterworks Fishing Club and all other relevant stakeholders regarding the new proposed canoeing activity. Council officers will work with BAC to develop a traffic management plan for vehicles that will transport canoeing equipment to and from the park. The appropriate Council departments will be involved to ensure that all insurances and health and safety documentation is adequate.

On successful completion of the training the newly qualified coaches will deliver sessions under the stewardship of the BAC/Youth Build staff.

The long term aim is to have a sustainable paddles sports programme, supported and governed by BAC in partnership with Belfast City Council and local communities. The proposal also reflects the Council's ambition to improve and make better use of its assets and get people more active and re-enforces the department's vision as regards people, places and possibilities.

Prior to this request the Parks and Leisure department have already engaged in discussions in respect of a potential partnership between the Council and BAC. The partnership would seek to enable and assist the Council to empower local community groups and community organisations to deliver and co-ordinate activities that will build future capacity within their local areas.

This proposal is the first step towards developing a partnership with BAC which will deliver development and learning opportunities through the powerful outdoor learning environment across the city.

3. **Resource Implications**

Financial

There are no financial costs to Belfast City Council as BAC will fund all associated costs with the programme.

Human Resources

There are no additional human resources known at this time.

Assets and Other Implications

The Parks and Leisure department will carry out an environmental impact assessment of the area and will work closely with the North Down Ringing Group to ensure there is no disruption caused to the birds that inhabit the lower pond.

4. **Equality and good relations implications**

There are no equality or good relations implications anticipated.

5. **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Committee:

- Note the contents of the report and the proposal by BAC
- Approve the use of the waterworks park and the lower pond to allow BAC to deliver the Youth Build project in North Belfast and the Waterworks area subject to satisfying all legal and statutory requirements, the development of an agreed activity plan and insurances being approved by Council officers.”

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Flooding in East Belfast

The Director reminded the Members that heavy rain had occurred on the evening of 27th June and had caused severe flooding across the City. Initial reports on the Council's response to the flooding had been considered by the Health and Environmental Services and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committees at meetings on 1st August and 10th August respectively. A number of multi-agency and internal reviews had taken place throughout the month of August and a flooding incident report would be produced with recommendations for the Council to take forward over the coming months. The Director reported that, in the interim, a number of actions had been taken forward and that flood alleviation works were underway currently at the Orangefield Park. Those works were being delivered jointly by the Council and the Rivers Agency and a report on the costs associated with that work would be submitted for the Committee's consideration in due course.

The Director stated that East Belfast had been particularly affected during the flooding emergency and that permission had been granted previously to the Rivers Agency to place a container for the storage of sandbags within the Orangefield Park. During the most recent flooding incident it had become clear that the positioning of that container had been inappropriate as the area in which it was situated had been flooded and residents had not easily been able to gain access to it. The Council was working closely with the Rivers Agency to find an alternative arrangement for the storage of sandbags within the park and, in order to assist residents, the Rivers Agency had submitted a request to relocate the existing container on the grounds of the Dixon Playing Fields. That would be considered as an interim measure until the flooding alleviation works had been completed within the Connswater Community Greenway.

Accordingly, he recommended that the Committee authorise the relocation of the sandbag container from the Orangefield Park to the Dixon Playing Fields, subject to all operational requirements being agreed by the Director of Parks and Leisure and an appropriate legal agreement being put in place between the Council and the Rivers Agency.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Belfast Festival at Queen's - Use of Drumglass Park

The Committee was advised that a request had been received from Paperclip Architects and the Kabosh Theatre Company in relation to the use of the Drumglass Park for a "Ghosts of Drumglass" evening event during the period from 24th till 31st October, as part of the 50th Belfast Festival at Queens. It was anticipated that the event would run from approximately 8.00 p.m. till 11.00 p.m. each evening with the exception of Halloween night when it would run from 8.45 p.m. till 11.45 p.m. The Director pointed out that Paperclip Architects had recently approached the Heritage Lottery Fund for support to undertake a feasibility study on the development of the Park and it was Paperclip's intention that the event would provide an opportunity to engage parks users in advance of that.

The Director advised the Committee that the event would be based on the Musgrave family who, during the 19th Century, had bequeathed the land which now formed Drumglass Park. Entry to the event would be by ticket only, priced at £8.50, with an advisory minimum age of 15 years. During each evening, parties of up to twenty-five people would be guided around six stations within the park at which a series of short performances would be delivered over a forty-five minute period. Entry and exit to the event would be at the Lisburn Road and Cranmore Park Gates respectively. In addition, the request sought the assistance of Council staff and, at this stage, no financial support had been requested. The Director pointed out that, with respect to the relationship of the event to the feasibility study, it was suggested that any action related to the future development of the Park should be undertaken in consultation with the Council and within the context of its wider objectives for parks development.

The Director recommended that the Committee grant approval for the use of the Drumglass Park on the basis that the event organisers would:

- i) pay a bond of intent;
- ii) put in place the required event management plan; and
- iii) resolve all operational and health and safety issues to the Council's satisfaction.

After discussion, the Committee granted the approval sought, subject to an appropriate legal agreement being prepared by the Assistant Chief Executive and Town Solicitor.

Laganscape Partnership Scheme Project

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1 Relevant Background Information

The purpose of this report is to update Members in respect of the Laganscape Partnership Scheme Project (LPSP) and seek Members approval to allocate human and financial resources in order to complete Council's programme of activities within the scheme and fulfil its requirement to the programme.

LPSP is managed by Lagan Valley Regional Park (LVRP) which is a partnership between the Council, Castlereagh Borough Council, Lisburn City Council, Department of Culture Arts and Leisure and Northern Ireland Environment Agency. Historically the Council has provided funding to support LVRP over a number of years and, during this time the Council has benefitted from the positive impact of the work of LVRP.

In 2006 LVRP submitted a funding application to Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), seeking funding in respect of the LPSP. The aim of the LPSP was to implement and manage a programme which included the following elements:

- **interpretation development**
- **species survey and conservation**
- **habitat management and enhancement**
- **volunteer and community participation and**
- **built heritage and urban improvements.**

In June 2007 LVRP received a letter of offer from HLF confirming that its funding application had been successful and a grant in the sum of £1,617,000, which represented 71% of the total eligible project costs, had been approved.

On 24 August 2007 Council signed a partnership agreement consenting to delivery of the LPSP in accordance with the LVRP funding application to HLF and the letter of offer issued by HLF. A copy of the partnership agreement is attached as Appendix 2.

The project was to be delivered over a five year period commencing in 2007 with capital projects being delivered in year 1 and projects aimed at engaging users, community groups and schools delivered throughout the duration of the project. A list of the project partners together with their contribution to the project is attached as Appendix 3.

In 2007 the Council agreed to invest an in kind contribution to the project in the sum of £50,000 under the theme of habitat management and enhancement, in particular grassland and wetland management within Council sites.

Council's Corporate Plan identifies the importance of caring for Belfast's environment by creating a clean, green city now and for the future. The Parks and Leisure Departmental Plan supports the Council's objectives under the themes of environment and people and communities by maintaining, developing and protecting parks and open spaces as well as engaging with local people to create a wide range of community programmes. By participating in the LPSP, Parks and Leisure Department endorsed these aims and objectives through delivery of its programme themes under habitat management and enhancement.

2 Key Issues

To date Council has evidenced £4,554 of "in kind" contribution to the project and it is estimated that a further £2,500 in respect of works is in the process of being submitted to LPSP.

Given that Council agreed to a total in kind contribution in the sum of £50,000 (over the 5 years), a balance of £42,946 would technically still be outstanding.

LPSP has confirmed that the project will be extended to June 2013, which will enable Council officers' sufficient time to complete a proportion of works in respect of habitat management and enhancement within Council sites.

It is proposed to carry out grassland and wetland enhancement initiatives on Council sites within LVRP such as Lagan Meadows and Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park. Specific project proposals will be further developed and subject to Committee approval, an implementation plan will be devised for delivery during the period October 2012 to June 2013.

Council works closely with the LVRP (to which it makes a financial contribution on an annual basis) and officers have developed a strong working relationship over a period of time.

The Laganscape project is now in year 5 (final year). Throughout its lifespan there has been a range of project delays and staff / project management changes. Given that the Council's original commitment for 5 years is due to expire in November 2012, the question has now been raised as to BCC's ongoing level of contribution.

At this stage, there is no forward plan or budget beyond this year (and up until June 2013) to support this project. It is proposed that BCC commit to fulfilling an in-kind contribution of £10K for the 12-13 year and that any further, ongoing request would fall outside of the original agreement and would therefore need to be defined in a business case and submitted to the current Parks and Leisure Committee for review and approval in line with future planning / estimates cycles.

3 Resource Implications

Financial

As outlined above, it is proposed that £10K is contributed (by way of 'in-kind' contribution) to Laganscape in the current financial year – this can be provided for from the Parks area south/west budget.

Human Resources

Officer time will be required for planning, coordinating and delivering project activities.

Asset and Other Implications

The project activities will enhance a number of Council parks and ongoing maintenance will need to be incorporated into the relevant parks management plans.

4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations

There are no known associated equality considerations associated with this project.

5 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

- Note the contents of this update report;
- Agree that a contribution of £10K 'in-kind' be made to the project for this final year of the original agreement in order to fulfil our obligation to the programme;
- Agree that any further request for financial or 'in-kind' support would be subject to a more detailed proposal from Laganscape being submitted to the Parks and Leisure Committee for review and agreement in line with current planning and estimates processes."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Chairman