



A Review of Belfast City Council's Parks Service

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A Parks Service for 21st Century

- Birth & Rebirth of Parks
- '60's Decline
 - Lack of investment
 - Inappropriate management
 - Vandalism, A.S.B.
 - C.C.T.

“For too long, Local Government (Parks) has been a closed world of professionals delivering services to standards they determined, untouched by those they serve.”

(Director, Best Value Inspectorate, Audit Commission)

“Parks for plants not people.”

(Anon)

“Nothing encourages the vandal more than management by abandonment”

(CABE Space)

A Parks Service for 21st Century

- Community involvement-top down & bottom up – *“must listen, must know they are being listened to.”*
- Holistic, strategic, area approach
- Pro-active facility type management-customer friendly
- Capital and revenue investment
- Well designed involving users

“Ultimately local solutions are necessary, although the evidence shows that investing in good design, attractive facilities and good maintenance remains the driver for improvement.”



Belfast Parks Service- A Baseline Assessment, August 2008



Recent History

- Ongoing change
 - Early '90's client/contractor split
 - C.C.T. ends Jan.2001-split continues to 2005
 - Current structure created 2005
- Loss of service head 2007
- Ongoing reviews since Nov.2005
- No. of agency staff/secondee
- Lack of investment - £29m est. (Nov. 2006)-railings,trees etc

Yet...

Recent History

- No apparent failures
- Some delivering to high standards
- Public perception good but...

"This is largely down to the dedication and commitment of the staff especially those involved in the day-day delivery of front-line services."

However...

- Staff morale low, becoming frustrated
- Cracks beginning to appear

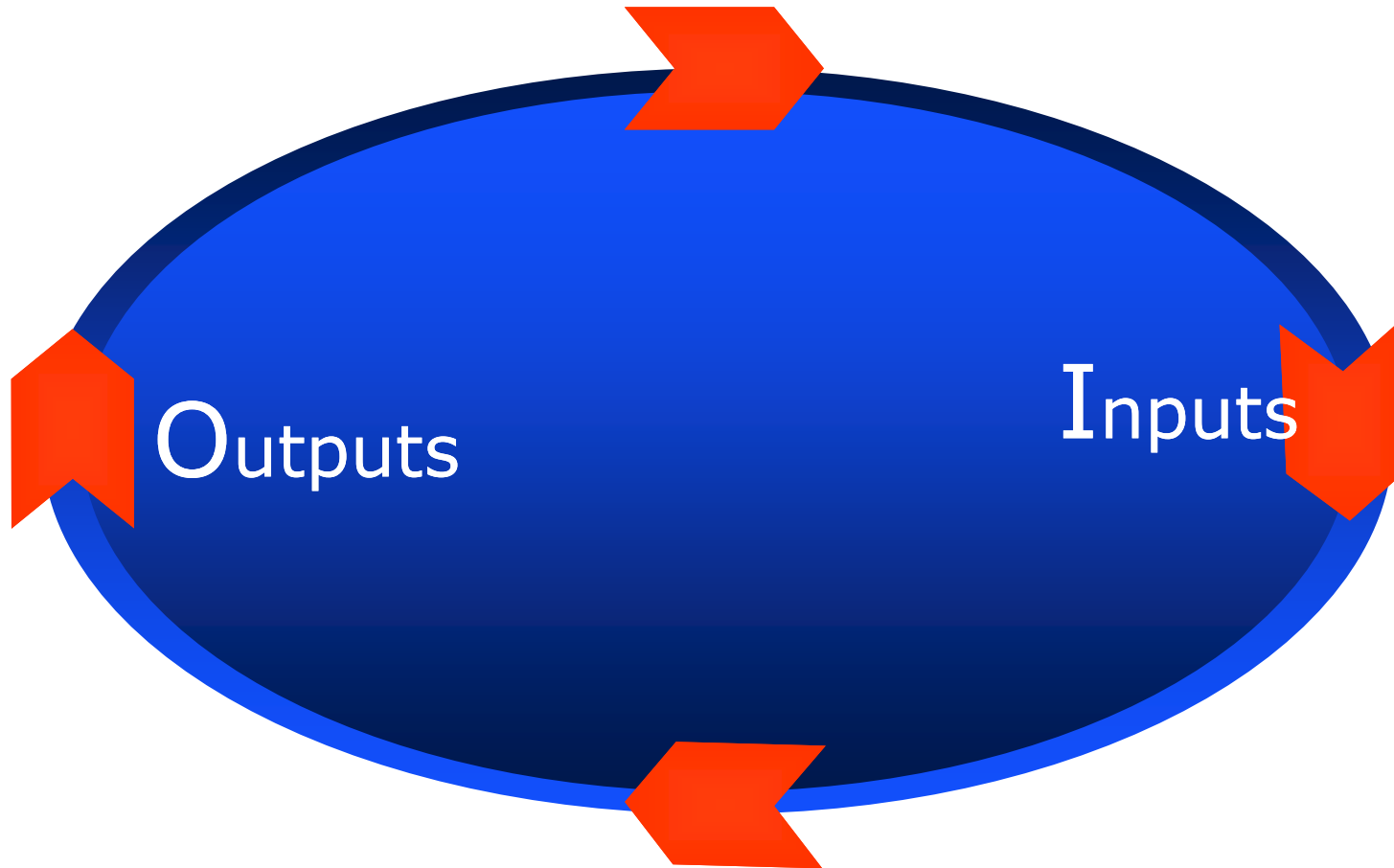
Not sustainable, parks becoming increasingly dated

Operationally & Process Driven

v.

Customer & Outcome Focussed

Objectives
Outcomes



Findings 1

- Lack of policies/strategies
 - o Fully informed decisions limited
 - o Reactive as opposed to proactive
 - o Mitigates against corporate responsibility at officer & member levels
 - o Selective/opportunistic management
 - o A culture of fire fighting-damage limitation-contain rather than explore
 - o Reduces development potential of parks
 - o External investment opportunities at risk

Findings 2

- Service does not pull together as a team
- Functional groupings display
 - Silo working
 - Overlap/duplication
 - Poor communication
 - Exotic mixes

In summary, roles and responsibilities have become blurred across parts of the service with there being evidence of overlap/duplication. This clearly impacts upon the efficiency and effectiveness of the service and at times will confuse “the customer”.

Findings 3

- Capacity issues across the service
 - o Lack of leadership & management skills
 - o Some operating at levels not commensurate with post
 - o Abrogation of decision making upwards & over-utilisation of grievance process- management by control ?-little innovation
 - o Risk averse-lengthy paper trails-no admin. support
 - o Key staff-no continuity planning
- “If not addressed, the council will be putting itself in a position of risk.”*

Findings 4

- Performance difficult to assess
 - o Few measures to enable benchmarking
 - o Asset register dated
 - o Specification is a shelf document
 - o Current operational split unmeasured/historical

“The lack of measures cause difficulty in making informed management decisions while the operational set up poses efficiency queries especially with increasing utility costs.”

Findings 5

- Scope of service fairly comprehensive but...
 - o Allotments & urban agriculture low profile
 - o Specialist horticultural advice
 - o Lack of marketing
 - o Events potential unrealised-strategy & budget
 - o Ranger & attendant duties
 - o Future role with R.P.A.
 - o Complementing or competing with other departments

Conclusion

- *To address the risks, inefficiencies and inconsistencies described above and to deliver a new modern customer orientated parks service, **structural change** will be necessary.*
- *This must be accompanied by actions that will fundamentally **change the culture and general management philosophy of the service** in addition to **clearly defining what functions it undertakes and that such are not duplicated elsewhere.***

What Functions?

- The development of a policy/strategic framework for all matters relating to open space provision, design, maintenance and management.
- Responsibility for all matters relating to landscape design within the City
- Maintenance and management of all existing open space to achieve cost-effective landscapes
- All matters relating to trees within the city
- Promotion/facilitation of Belfast in Bloom
- Assuming the lead role for matters relating to biodiversity

What Functions?

- Facility management of all outdoor public space – parks, play areas, outdoor leisure facilities including allotments
- Promotion/facilitation of a wide range of events
- Promoting the use and understanding of the external environment
- A cemeteries and crematoria service
- Belfast Castle and Malone House
- Belfast Zoo
- Plus
- Support Services

Structural review, embracing

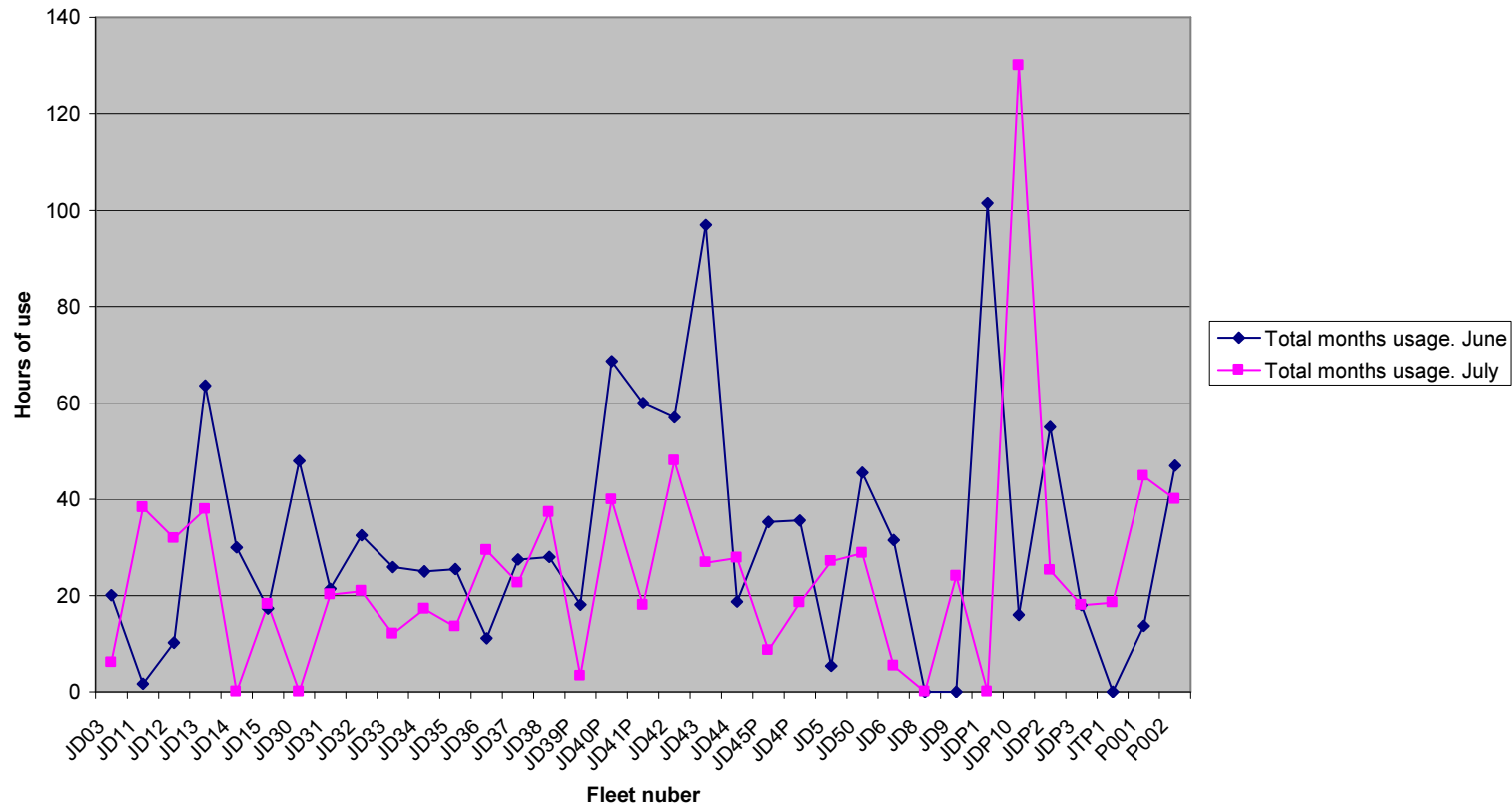
- the service's assets
- the continuation of annualised hours
- the levels of overtime being worked
- the use of Agency Staff
- the operation of a flexible multi-tasking approach
- the development of an enabling culture as opposed to one of control with clear levels of devolvment, responsibility and accountability

Structural review, embracing

- the balance between development, support and frontline staff
- capacity issues - skills, funding including distribution, machinery etc.
- the employment inconsistencies
- the geographical split of responsibilities within operations
- the apparent duplication of activities/responsibilities with other departments and the potential for rationalisation and efficiencies
- the service's by-laws
- the need for a presence in parks especially at peak times (evenings and weekends and school holidays)

Assets-Ride On Mowers

Ride on usage June/July



Average hours for June 08 – 34.18hrs/1.63 hrs per day excluding down time

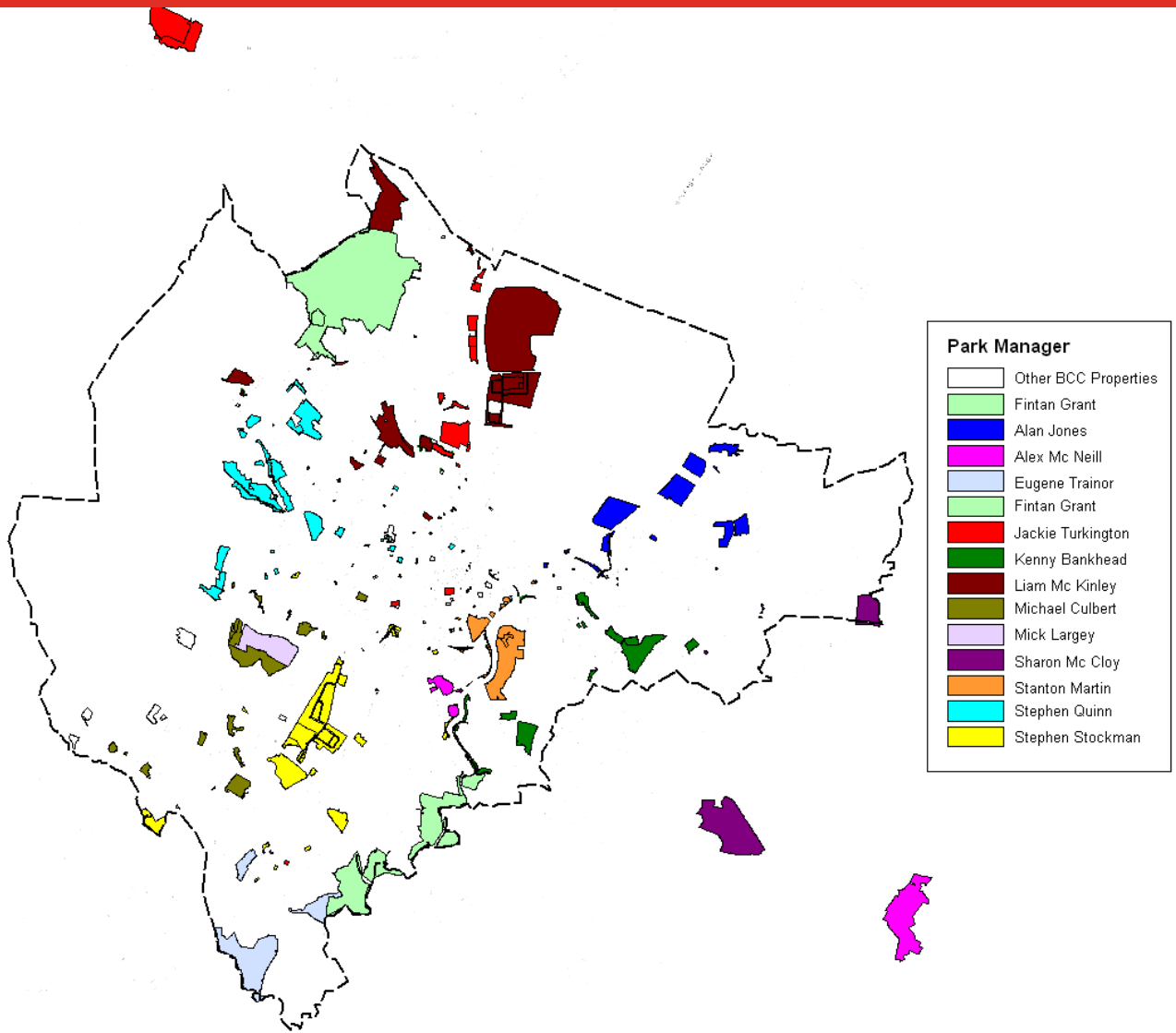
June range 0-101 hrs

Average hours for July 08 – 24.52/1.36 hrs per day excluding down time

July range 0-130 hrs

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Structural review, embracing

- the possibility of adopting the Local Area Working approach to bring the services closer to the public and to their specific needs
- the nursery service
- the need to address customer relationship management (CRM)
- a review of partnership working-existing & potential
- the need for income generation and marketing



"Since change will catch up with all of us, the real thrill is not waiting for it to happen, but to join in early and shape it. Making change rather than being made to are radically different experiences"

Prof. P. Corrigan



Thank You

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