

<b>Public Accounts Select Committee</b>		
Title	Parks management review	
Contributor	Scrutiny Manager	Item 7
Class	Part 1 (open)	4 June 2019

### **Reasons for lateness and urgency**

This report is late due to the shorter-than-usual time period between this and the previous meeting of the Committee and the need to ensure that the Committee has sufficient information to scope the proposed in-depth review.

The report is urgent and cannot wait until the next meeting of the Sustainable Development Select Committee as the Committee has a limited number of meetings in the 2019/20 municipal year in which to complete the proposed in-depth review.

### **1. Purpose of this paper**

- 1.1. At its meeting on 30 April 2019, the Committee discussed its work programme for 2019-20 and it decided to carry out a review of parks management in Lewisham.
- 1.2. This paper sets out options for the scrutiny of this issue and it provides some background information on the current situation within Lewisham in order to inform Committee discussions. It also provides some potential 'key lines of enquiry' to help structure Committee discussions.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. The Select Committee is asked to:
  - note the content of the report
  - consider what outcomes it would like to achieve;
  - discuss and decide on key lines of enquiry;
  - agree a timetable for scrutiny of this issue
  - approve an invitation to members of the Housing Select Committee to contribute to issues within that Committee's remit.

### **3. Context**

- 3.1. Government austerity has forced the Council to make year on year cuts to its budget. Over the period from 2010-11 to 2018-19 the Council has implemented cuts of £165m. Ongoing pressures to service budgets have resulted in significant overspends. It is anticipated that the final outturn for the 2018-19 budget will show an overspending of the budget in the region of £10m. Budget reductions have had implications for all of the Council's services, including the parks service, which has reviewed its staffing levels and pursued innovation to maintain services. It should be noted that there is no

legal duty on councils to provide or maintain parks – and as the impact of austerity has been felt - a number of authorities have sold parks or transferred their ownership.

- 3.2. National planning policy promotes the protection and improvement of green and open spaces. It encourages the strategic protection of green infrastructure in order to create high quality environments, enhance local landscape character and contribute to a sense of place. Policy also recognises the role of green spaces in promoting healthy communities by reducing air pollution and noise as well as mitigating the impacts of extreme heat and extreme rainfall events. Furthermore, parks are recognised for the important role they play in encouraging ecology and biodiversity.
- 3.3. Research<sup>1</sup> by the Heritage Lottery Fund has found that nationally, park use is rising while resources and skills available to manage them are declining. It has also found that the downward trend in condition of parks first highlighted in its 2014 report on the state of parks is set to continue.
- 3.4. The Mayor of London's environment strategy recognises the importance of parks in the broader 'green infrastructure' of open spaces, river corridors, green roofs and gardens. It includes the ambition to make London 'Greener':

'All Londoners should be able to enjoy the very best parks, trees and wildlife. Creating a greener city is good for everyone – it will improve people's health and quality of life, support the success of businesses and attract more visitors to London'<sup>2</sup> (London Environment Strategy, p12)

- 3.5. 'Making Lewisham Greener' is a priority in [Lewisham Corporate Strategy \(2018-2022\)](#). Through the delivery of the strategy, the Council is committed to ensuring that: 'Everyone enjoys our green spaces and benefits from healthy environment as we work to protect and improve our local environment.'
- 3.6. Lewisham's Mayor and Cabinet has agreed to the creation of a 'greening fund'<sup>3</sup> to support the delivery of the plans in the corporate strategy. The amount of £250k will be distributed to parks groups in order to enable local groups to improve local green spaces. A 'Green Spaces Improvement Officer' has been appointed to manage the Council's approach to this work and to oversee the best use of the funding.
- 3.7. This is important because, by 2021, projections indicate that Lewisham's population will have increased to 318,000 people and by 2031 it is anticipated the population will reach 344,500 people. To accommodate this growth, the Committee has heard that national assessments and those for the draft London Plan indicate the need for between 20 to 30 thousand<sup>4</sup> new homes in Lewisham over the next decade.
- 3.8. Lewisham's Open Spaces strategy (2012-17) provides useful descriptions of the different types of green spaces in the borough:

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<sup>1</sup> Heritage Lottery Fund 'Public parks face decline' – online at: <http://www.heritagefund.org.uk/news/public-parks-face-decline>

<sup>2</sup> London Environment Strategy (2018) – online at: [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/les\\_executive\\_summary\\_0.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/les_executive_summary_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See Greening Fund report to Mayor and Cabinet - online at: <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s59823/Greening%20Fund.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See minutes of the meeting held on 30 April 2019 – online at: <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/ielistDocuments.aspx?CId=136&MId=5561&Ver=4>

- **Parks and gardens:** includes urban parks, county parks and formal gardens
- **Children's play:** includes equipped play areas, multi-use games areas (MUGA), BMX tracks and skateboard parks
- **Natural and semi-natural greenspace:** includes green corridors, woodlands, scrubland, wetland, and nature conservation sites
- **Outdoor sports facilities:** includes pitch sports, athletic tracks, tennis and bowls
- **Amenity greenspace:** housing open space, village greens, informal recreation space, hard-surfaced areas (civic space) roadside enclosure
- **Allotments and community gardens:** site opportunities for those people who wish to grow their own produce
- **Green corridors;** includes grids, chains and networks
- **Cemeteries and churchyards:** Quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation, biodiversity and to provide a link to the past

3.9. It is proposed that this review should focus on Lewisham's parks and gardens. However, members of the Committee have also stated their interest in the provision of green spaces by Lewisham Homes – additional information about this is included in the sections below. The Committee has also raised concerns about the wider accessibility of open spaces (including those that are open to the public but not included in the typology above – such as public squares) – further information about this is also included in the following sections.

#### 4. Managing Lewisham's parks

4.1. Glendale green space management service has been Lewisham Council's contracted provider of parks management and maintenance services since the year 2000. Its full list of services to the Council includes<sup>5</sup>:

- Grass cutting
- Sports pitch maintenance
- Sports pitch promotion, booking management and fee collection
- Event management
- Development, planting and maintenance of annual bedding displays
- Hedge trimming
- Shrub and rose bed maintenance
- Tree supply, planting and aftercare
- Playground inspections and maintenance
- Graffiti removal
- Litter picking and bin emptying
- Conservation grass maintenance
- Weed control
- Park keepers

4.2. Contracting arrangements cover parks in the borough (though not currently Beckenham Place Park) as well as some other green spaces (such as grass verges and community green spaces). The delivery and performance of the contract is

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<sup>5</sup> See Glendale, 'your service' online at: <http://lewisham.glendalelocal.co.uk/services/>

overseen by officers in the Council's Environmental Services Division within the Customer Services Directorate (led by Kevin Sheehan).

- 4.3. Parks for London is an independent charity which advocates for the protection and best use of London's green spaces. Its stated vision for London is that it: '...is a healthy and sustainable world city. A place where parks and green spaces make a contribution to the health and wellbeing of Londoners and to the environment they live and work in'<sup>6</sup>. It is responsible for the new 'Good Parks for London Report', which assesses the overall quality of parks and parks services in all of the London boroughs.
- 4.4. Researchers for the 'Good Parks for London' report<sup>7</sup> use the following measures for assessment:
1. **Public satisfaction** (based on borough surveys)
  2. **Awards for quality** (based on numbers of Green Flags and London in Bloom awards)
  3. **Collaboration** (evidenced by cross boundary management and delivery of parks services through partnerships and alliances)
  4. **Events** (based on quality of events polices as well as numbers and variety of events)
  5. **Health, fitness and well-being** (incorporating promotion of social prescribing; health campaigns and healthy infrastructure, such as free water fountains)
  6. **Supporting nature** (based on biodiversity action planning and the proportion of sites of importance for nature conservation that are being well managed)
  7. **Community involvement** (based on a combination of measures on involvement of community groups)
  8. **Skills development** (number of parks apprentices as a percentage of the total workforce)
  9. **Sustainability** (based on the sustainability of fleet vehicles, use of battery operated equipment and management of waste)
  10. **Strategic planning** (assessed by current open space/green infrastructure strategy action plans and management systems)
- 4.5. Lewisham's parks (and parks management service) received the highest ranking of the 33 London Boroughs (and City of London) in 2018. Lewisham's strengths were also highlighted in several sections of the report which demonstrate good practice. In particular, Lewisham's planning and programming for events was commended:

'Lewisham's parks currently offer one of the most diverse range of community, sporting, arts and cultural events in London. They provide a mixture of charity and commercial events that increase public use of parks and promote greater social inclusion and cohesion' (Good Parks for London (2018), p20)

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<sup>6</sup> See Parks for London 'about us' online at: <https://parksforlondon.org.uk/about-us/>

<sup>7</sup> Good Parks for London (2018) – online at: <https://glhearn-publications.cld.bz/Good-Parks-for-London-2018/4/>



A blank square indicates that a Borough has not submitted data for a particular area or the data is not available or has not achieved a score.

Scoring criteria



4.6. Lewisham’s partnership with Glendale and the combined efforts of both organisations to bolster community involvement was also praised in the report.

Future options for the parks service

- 4.7. Glendale’s current contract with Lewisham Council will come to an end in 2020. This presents an option for the Council to review its arrangements for the management and maintenance of Lewisham’s parks.
- 4.8. Before the summer, officers intend to ask Mayor and Cabinet for a decision on potential future options for the parks service. These are likely to include - retendering of the contract to a green spaces provider as well as giving consideration to bringing the service back ‘in-house’ in line with Council policy. Other potential options might include the sharing of services with other authorities or public sector partners.
- 4.9. Pre-decision scrutiny of this decision could be carried out by the Committee. An opportunity for this to take place has been added to the timeline for the review (below). Full consideration of the options will be a matter for the Mayor and Cabinet, which will be required to take into account all of the relevant information on the options available. Officers will be able to provide further information in a report to the Committee however, it should be noted that the lead in times for contracts mean that it is likely a decision on the future of the service will need to be reached relatively soon.

Income generation

4.10. During 2017-18 around 500 events were held in Lewisham’s parks and open spaces. These ranged from small events to the two day OnBlackheath music festival. In October 2018, the Committee considered officer proposals<sup>8</sup> for balancing the Council’s budget and heard from officers that demand for events in Lewisham’s parks and open spaces is increasing. In particular, officers proposed (see proforma CUS2)

<sup>8</sup> See the select committee agenda for 29 October 2018 – online at: <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/ielListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&MId=5154&Ver=4>

that large events in the borough's biggest parks (Blackheath and Beckenham Place Park) might generate significant income. A target of £500k was proposed to be delivered over the two years to 2021.

- 4.11. Responding to the proposals, the Committee recommended to Mayor and Cabinet that the policy for managing commercial events in Lewisham's parks should be reviewed. Members suggested that this should build on best practice and that it might include options for charging for the full range of commercial activities taking place on the borough's green spaces (including but not limited to: commercial dog walking, commercial exercise classes and other profit making activities)<sup>9</sup>.
- 4.12. Monitoring of implementation of 'cuts' proposals falls within the remit of the Public Accounts Select Committee, however, this review provides an opportunity for the Sustainable Development Select Committee to consider the implementation of its recommendations as well as officers' progress on generating income from the borough's parks (see key lines of enquiry, below).
- 4.13. A number of London authorities are undertaking projects to raise income from parks. Such initiatives might include small scale commercialisation, such as charging users that deliver professional services from parks and rents for park buildings. Some boroughs have begun to use their parks for private ceremonies and celebrations, such as weddings. However, others have begun to host large scale events such as festivals and concerts over a number of days or weeks<sup>10</sup>. It is worth noting that a number of community campaigns against the commercialisation of local parks have been started in boroughs that are using their parks for large scale events, with some community groups concerned about the damage to park infrastructure and the limiting of access to public space<sup>11</sup>.

#### Maintenance and management of other open spaces

- 4.14. Lewisham Homes is responsible for the maintenance and management of communal green spaces in Lewisham's housing stock. Members have raised the issue of casework complaints about the service as an issue for further consideration. Scrutiny of Lewisham Homes falls within the remit of the Housing Select Committee – and as such any consideration of Lewisham Homes' performance should include that select committee.
- 4.15. Lewisham Homes' annual report<sup>12</sup> (2018) stated that resident satisfaction with grounds maintenance increased from 62% in 2015-16 to 77% in 2017-18:  
'We have invested £180k in improving our environmental services, which includes caretaking, grounds maintenance and bulk waste removal... We've recruited an extra team of gardeners so that we can spend more time improving the quality of the green spaces on our estates, and we're planting thousands of new flowers and shrubs that are beefriendly, sustainable and will grow each year.'  
(Lewisham Homes annual report (2018) p6)

<sup>9</sup> See the Committee's comments to the Public Accounts Select Committee meeting 7 November 2018 – online at: <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s60626/05Selectcommitteecommentsonthebudgetcutproposals071118.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> See for example, Guardian (2018) London parks accused of creeping privatisation of public spaces: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/aug/31/londons-parks-accused-of-creeping-privatisation-of-public-spaces>

<sup>11</sup> Crowd Justice: <https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/brockwelltranquillity/>

<sup>12</sup> Lewisham Homes, annual report (2018) – online at: <https://hg3v243wqge3dgv253uelk9o-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Annual-Report-2017-2018-FINAL.pdf>



- 4.16. The Committee may wish to focus on how this improvement is being delivered – as well as the plans in place to manage Lewisham Homes’ green spaces in future.
- 4.17. Sustainable Development Select Committee has been scrutinising the development of the new Local Plan. As part of this work, it is reviewing the developing evidence base for the new plan. At its meeting in April 2019 – the Committee reviewed the ‘Lewisham open spaces assessment’<sup>13</sup> which was carried out by Jon Sheaf & associates and overseen by the planning department. It included categorisation and assessment of 349 parks and green spaces in Lewisham.
- 4.18. The study team considered the quality and accessibility of Lewisham’s green spaces, in order to inform future planning policy. The study also reviewed future requirements for open space, given the projected increase in Lewisham’s population over the next 20 years.
- 4.19. Field work for the study found that:
- ‘To maintain the current level of greenspace provision, the growth in the borough’s population over the next twenty years implies the need for the provision of approximately 50 hectares of new public open space by 2030. The benefits that could accrue from additional open space could be delivered by improving the quality of existing provision.’ (Open Spaces Assessment 2019, p7)
- 4.20. The assessment of Lewisham’s existing open spaces found that the majority of Lewisham’s parks were of good or fair quality. However, the assessment did not find any ‘excellent’ parks in the borough. It also found that Lewisham has a number of poor quality green spaces, including a number of spaces that are categorised as ‘pocket parks’. Though it should be noted that a distinction is drawn between those spaces that are publicly accessible and those that are not. For example, the assessment included some areas adjoining railway corridors and a number of other areas that would not be suitable for public access.
- 4.21. More broadly, the Committee is concerned about public access to open spaces. Whilst the examples given above would never be suitable for public access, the Committee is keen to ensure that new development in the borough provides freedom of access to the whole community. Recent examples from other London Boroughs – such as segregation of open spaces for people living in social and private housing (including play areas for children) – have heightened this concern.
- 4.22. The Committee has expressed its intention to ensure that, as far as is reasonably possible, open spaces are planned to enable freedom of access. There is a potential tension arising from this position when it is contrasted with the ambition (outlined above) to explore options for increasing income generation from parks. Good management of parks – including well thought out events management policies - can be seen as one of the principal ways of overcoming this potential conflict.

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<sup>13</sup> Open Spaces Assessment (2019) LB Lewisham – online at:  
<http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s64909/Appendix%203%20-%20Open%20Spaces%20Assessment.pdf>

## 5. Meeting the criteria for a review

5.1. The topic of 'parks management' meets the criteria for an in-depth scrutiny review because:

- it is a strategic and significant issue for the Council and its finances;
- It has the potential to affect a large number of people living, working or studying in Lewisham (and also smaller groups of people disproportionately);
- The Council is reviewing and developing this area of work.

## 6. Key lines of enquiry (KLOE)

6.1. The Committee should consider what its priorities are for the review given the time and resources available. The three 'key lines of enquiry' set out below represent broad areas for investigation.

### KLOE1: future options for the parks service

- (Having considered a report by officers) - Which option for the future of the parks service does the Committee believe would be best?
- What good practice should Lewisham seek to retain and which areas could be strengthened further?

### KLOE2: income generation

- How much progress have officers made in delivering proposals to generate income from the borough's parks?
- Are there examples of good practice that Lewisham can learn from? How might Lewisham avoid the potential pitfalls of income generating projects?
- Are changes required to Lewisham's policy for events in parks to ensure that the Council continues to build on its best practice whilst also creating opportunities for income generation?

### KLOE3: maintenance and management of other open spaces

- How well is Lewisham homes doing at maintaining and managing housing amenity space?
- How might Lewisham ensure freedom of access to open spaces in the borough?
- Are there innovative options for the maintenance of these spaces that the Council could consider?
- What progress has been made on delivering the greening fund?

### Public engagement

6.2. It is proposed that the review be listed on the Council's website as part of an open call for evidence ([Open Scrutiny Investigations](#)). In particular, the Committee might be interested in hearing community responses to the question:

- What good parks management practice should Lewisham seek to retain and which areas could be strengthened further?



## Work with other select committees

- 6.3. Housing related issues are within the remit of Lewisham's Housing Select Committee. Members of that Committee are entitled to attend meetings of the Sustainable Development Select Committee under the Council's existing standing orders. However, an invitation may be offered to Members of that Committee to speak on issues within its remit (the questions raised under KLOE3).

## **7. Timetable**

- 7.1. The Committee agreed that it would carry out a review into parks management in the 2019-20 municipal year. The Committee is asked to consider the outline timetable below:

### Committee meeting: 4 July 2019

Update from officers on the development of the options for the future of the parks service (to help answer questions under KLOE1); update from officers on the delivery of the greening fund (to help answer the questions under KLOE3)

### Lewisham's parks visit: summer 2019

Visit with officers from the parks service to examples of good practice in the borough. To help answer the questions posed under KLOE1 and KLOE2;

### London borough best practice visit: summer 2019

Visit to an example of best practice in another London borough (to answer the questions posed under KLOE2 and KLOE3);

### Committee meeting: 11 September 2019

Report on summer visits by Councillors who attended; invitation to representatives of the Lewisham's parks forum.

### Visit to Lewisham homes: autumn 2019

To help answer the questions posed under KLOE3;

### Committee meeting: 28 October 2019

Update from Lewisham Homes (to help answer the questions posed under KLOE3);

### 4 December 2019

Final report and recommendations for submission to Mayor and Cabinet.

## **8. Further implications**

- 8.1. At this stage there are no specific financial, legal, environmental or equalities implications to consider arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. However, there will be implications arising from the issues considered over the course of the year, these will need to be considered in due course.

## 9. Background papers

SDSC agenda and minutes, 29 October 2018: [link](#)

SDSC agenda and minutes, 30 April 2019: [link](#)

### Sources

Communities and Local Government Committee (2017) Public Parks Inquiry: [link](#)

Glendale Lewisham: <http://lewisham.glendalelocal.co.uk/services/>

Good Parks for London report (2018): [link](#)

Guardian (2018) 'London's parks accused of 'creeping privatisation' of public spaces': [link](#)

Heritage Lottery Fund 'Public parks face decline' (2016): [link](#)

Lewisham Open Spaces Assessment (2019): [link](#)

Parks for London: <https://parksforlondon.org.uk/about-us/>

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# How to carry out an in-depth review

