

Decision Session – Executive Member for Economic Development & Community Engagement, 10 May 2016
in consultation with the Executive Members for Environment, and Culture, Leisure & Tourism

Report of the Assistant Director (Communities, Culture & Public Realm)

Supporting the Local Delivery of Improvement to York’s Parks, Gardens, and Open Spaces

Summary

1. This report proposes how to use the additional investment of £150k in 2016/17 and 2017/18, agreed by Budget Council in February 2016, to support the Pride in York local delivery of environmental projects and grounds maintenance, and to build capacity in the voluntary sector.

Recommendations

2. The Executive Member is asked to agree:
 - The allocation of funding to wards set out in Annex 1
 - The core standards set out in paragraph 7
 - Use of some of the funding on a city-wide basis from the options set out in paragraphs 13 to 20

Reason: to support community initiatives to improve York’s parks and open spaces.

Background

3. As part of the programme to re-establish Ward Committees and to localise funding and decision-making, Council, in July 2015, allocated new Pride in York funding to wards to help them to facilitate local environmental schemes and to mitigate the effects of a £750k saving approved by Cabinet in 2014 as part of a programme to save money, between 2015 and 2018, from place based services, including grounds maintenance and cleansing.

4. During 2015/16 wards have submitted their priorities and recommendations in respect of their grounds maintenance budgets for 2016/17. This has involved discussions with residents, partners and officers. Each ward has taken a variety of approaches to meeting their savings targets including community groups taking on the maintenance of existing planting schemes and undertaking litter collection, as well as using local knowledge to remove unnecessary tasks. Some wards are also exploring alternative planting regimes whereby labour intensive annual bedding will be replaced by herbaceous plants. At the same time wards have used their new Pride in York money to good effect. Example initiatives include equipment to kit out litter pickers in Dringhouses and in Westfield, and a community planting scheme for Clifton Green.
5. The additional £150k Pride in York funding, approved by Council in February 2016, gives further potential for wards and communities to mitigate the effects of previous reductions in grounds maintenance budgets and to get involved in improving their local spaces. At the decision session held on 8 March the Executive Member agreed that these additional funds be divided into two elements as follows:
 - One part to be divided amongst all wards. This will be £100k in 16/17 (see Annex 1).
 - One part to fund community and voluntary sector organisations who can support wards with community led environmental and gardening type projects (to prioritise those wards where the affects of previous reductions have been greatest, principally city centre and those with parks). This will be £50k in 16/17.
6. During the recent review of the Council's Neighbourhood Working arrangements it was agreed to replace the spreadsheets previously used by wards to manage their devolved grounds maintenance. In place of this it is proposed to move to a position where we support wards by:
 - Agreeing with them the core tasks / minimum standards that the Council's grounds maintenance team will continue to provide in the ward
 - Identifying the support wards need to develop community schemes and providing this through the Environment Community (ECO) Officers
 - Creating city-wide arrangements to increase volunteering and to support local schemes notably in the city's parks and gardens where costs are highest

Proposals

7. **Core Tasks / Standards:** Across the city the aim will be to continue to maintain the Council's green spaces in a safe, clean and usable condition. The Council will be responsible for providing:
- a strategic overview and the development of future plans
 - coordination of effort and community input
 - the majority of repairs and maintenance e.g. footpath resurfacing, painting and building repairs
 - work which requires powered machinery e.g. grass and hedge cutting
 - work which requires specialist equipment or qualification e.g. weed spraying, arboriculture care
 - work of a health and safety nature e.g. play ground inspection and care, water treatment, inspection and care of gravestones
 - the collection of rubbish, emptying litter bins, and coordinating graffiti removal
 - providing information and support to community organisations e.g. through the ECO officers and through the Council's website
8. To maintain and develop green space which are of a higher quality, visually appealing and have a range of events and activities taking place local communities will have a part to play.
9. How the community can or wants to respond will depend on local circumstance. We are currently working with over 100 community environmental projects. Here are just some examples of the initiatives that the Council is supporting at key sites:

Site	Group	Activity
Rowntree Park	Friends of Rowntree Park York Explore Rowntree Park Tennis Club	Events & gardening Café Management of Tennis Courts

West Bank Park	Individual volunteers Friends of West Bank Park West Bank Park Bowls Association 14 New Lane project	Gardening Events Full management of bowling green (2017) Potential community café and funds towards the upkeep of the park
Glen Gardens	Mosaic Garden Group Friends of Glen Garden Blueberry Group Heworth Tennis Club Osbalwick Bowls Club	Gardening Open and closing Gardens, gardening and events Gardening Management of tennis courts Management of bowling green (2017)
Clarence Gardens	Friends of Clarence Garden Clarence Gardens Bowls Association	Gardening Full Management of bowling green (2017)
Rawcliffe Country Park	Friends of Rawcliffe Meadows CYC Youth Justice programme SingletrAction	Management of the Cornfield nature reserve Woodland care Construction and maintenance of bike tracks
Hull Road Park	Secret Garden group	Gardening and possible future care of the pavilion / café
Chapman's Pond	Friends of Chapman's Pond	Events, maintenance and fishery bailiff scheme

10. In addition to the above examples the Council's work is supplemented by the efforts of York Cares, various faith based volunteering groups, scouts, the Probation Service, other community

organisations and individual volunteers. In terms of individuals we currently have:

- 102 volunteer litterpickers
- 87 volunteer gardeners
- 27 volunteer tree wardens
- 40 volunteer lockers
- 11 volunteer water bailiffs
- 7 volunteer goose scarers
- 218 volunteer snow wardens

11. It is proposed to further develop the role of the ECO officers to support wards in use of their Pride in York budgets to enhance the standard of local parks and open spaces and to increase the number and effectiveness of volunteers engaged in relevant projects.
12. For the main parks and gardens the Green Flag standard (the national quality mark for green spaces) will remain the goal. At the moment Rowntree Park, West Bank Park, Glen Gardens, Clarence Gardens and Rawcliffe Country Park hold this award. Hull Road Park is working towards the standard. The Council will continue its work to support these efforts and examine what further support could be offered to help Hull Road Park achieve the Green Flag standard. Given the need for greater community action to meet this standard in future years it is proposed to talk to wards about any views they might have about retaining the award and how they can contribute to it.
13. **Use of the £50k to support community and voluntary sector organisations:** There are two areas where this funding might be most effective in supporting the community and voluntary sector to assist this agenda:
 - a) In using the expertise of the sector to encourage and to support volunteering
 - b) In targeting those wards where the affects of previous reductions have been greatest, principally city centre and those with parks, to create specific schemes
14. With regard to volunteering, much of York's green space community activity takes place at a local level with only a few organisations carrying out work across the whole of the city.

Given that future challenges of looking after green space cross geographical boundaries there is potential to seek partners with appropriate environmental expertise who could develop a co-ordinated programme of volunteering across the city.

15. At the moment the Council, in the main, responds to offers of volunteering, be they from individuals or organisations, rather than pro-actively seeking volunteers and developing volunteer opportunities. There is potential for an organisation with a track record of recruiting, developing and deploying volunteers across environmental projects to take an overview of the city's parks and open spaces needs and to create tailor made volunteering schemes to meet specific identified needs. If funding is provided to establish this scheme particular schemes may be identified by wards and supplementary funding provided as appropriate.
16. A particular advantage of contracting with a third sector organisation to provide this function would be their ability to tap into volunteers from other third sector organisations, for example youth organisations, business organisations, mental health providers and so on.
17. With regard to targeting particular wards, as suggested in 13b) above, a further approach that may be helpful would be to create a challenge fund approach. This would allow the Council's ECO officers to work with partner organisations within the sector to draw together proposals for projects aimed at addressing need.
18. This approach would support the further development of an Environmental Network, following the meeting of environmental groups called last year. This would bring together representatives of voluntary, community and independent organisations working in the area of environment. Proposals would be called for by the network and presented to it by individual organisations. Network members would be able to evaluate potential projects by asking informed and appropriately probing questions. The Council would remain the accountable body for final decision and distribution of the funding, based on the advice of the network.
19. A similar approach has been trialled and proved very successful in the youth and community sector. As well as ensuring that robust projects are developed in partnership it has also provided the opportunity for organisations to share their resources and expertise.

20. Option b) could be developed quite quickly whilst option a) would require more time to procure and would therefore be more suited to 2017/18. It may therefore be beneficial to adopt a mix of both approaches allocating more funding to b) this year and more to a) in 2017/18.

Options and Analysis

21. The principal options open to the Executive Member are to comment on and amend the core standards and to decide which of the options to pursue within paragraphs 13 to 20.

Council Plan

22. The proposals in this report contribute to the Council Plan objective that “All York’s residents live and thrive in a city which allows them to contribute.”

Implications

23. **Financial:**

Budget Council on 25 February, 2016 approved additional investment of £150k in 2016/17 and 2017/18 to support the Pride in York local delivery of environmental projects and grounds maintenance, and to build capacity in the voluntary sector.

24. **Equalities:**

The Equalities Impact Assessment and action plan is attached at Annex 2.

There are no **Human Resources, Legal, Information Technology, Property, Crime and Disorder** or **Other** implications.

Risk Management

25. In compliance with the Council’s risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified associated with the proposals contained in this report are those which could lead to the inability to meet business objectives and to deliver services, leading to damage to the Council’s reputation and failure to meet stakeholders’ expectations. The level of risk is assessed as “Low”. This is acceptable but means that regular monitoring is required of the operation of the new arrangements.

Annexes

1: Ward Allocations

2: Equalities Impact Assessment

Contact Details

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	Report Approved	✓	Date 28.4.16.
Specialist Implications Officers:			
Wards Affected:		All	✓
For further information please contact the author of the report			