

Briefing Note

Parks Underspend - 2020/21 Financial Year

- The overall underspend position recorded resulted from planned and unplanned reductions in expenditure, increases in excess of budgeted income and additional unbudgeted recharges made to other services. The key variances are set out below :
- In terms of planned reductions in expenditure a FRM budget of £250k allocated for Ash Die Back Management was, in early 2020/21 deferred into 2021/22 to assist with the financial budget pressures anticipated within the Council in 2020/21, particularly as a result of Covid-19.
- Within Grounds Maintenance and owing to the impacts of Covid-19 and the suspension of aspects of the service in Quarter 1, recruitment exercises planned for Quarter 1 were suspended with appointments not being made until Quarter 3. Expenditure on overtime also reduced culminating in an underspend on employee related expenditure of £148k.
- Within the Land Management / Technical function and Business Administration savings on vacancies also resulted in an underspend of £56k and £ 24k respectively.
- Owing to operational restrictions during Covid-19 and arrangements for distance learning for Apprentices and Trainees a decision was made not to recruit to new cohorts from vacancies but to suspend recruitment until quarter 1 of 2021/22. This decision was made to ensure that Apprentices and Trainees could gain from the best possible experience in the appropriate environment. The resulting saving was 68k.
- Savings totalling 12k were also achieved on depot and premises related expenditure, mainly relating to reduced repair demand.

- In terms of income and notwithstanding COVID-19, increases in excess of budget were achieved for plant sales within the Plant Production Nursery owing to marketing and promotional activity and within Grounds Maintenance, totalling £65k.
- Additional unbudgeted recharges of £37k relating to Cardiff Harbour Authority for health / safety and administrative support, a reduction in transport / vehicle charges of £30k and reductions in the use of herbicide and fertilisers of £15k, mainly owing to the suspension of sports fixture programmes also contributed to the underspend position.
- Corresponding overspends occurred in Playground Management, Allotments, the Park Ranger Service, Bute Park and Flat Holm Island, across employee and supplies and services cost headings, offsetting the underspends elsewhere within the service.
- No underspends were incurred on parks revenue projects for 2020/21.
- Non-essential works undertaken by the parks outdoor workforce such as the maintenance of planted areas and mowing, excluding highway locations whereby visibility required maintaining were suspended in Quarter 1 of 2020/21, in line with the Council's policy at the time in taking measures necessary to reduce the transmission of the virus.
- Robust risk assessments were also introduced from Quarter 1, also designed to prevent the spread of the virus which saw the creation of split shifts and staggered breaks for the parks outdoor workforce, this as with other parts of the Council's workforce resulted in the reduction of working hours for a period.
- During the period above and beyond staff were redeployed into critical front line services including the Bereavement and Registration Service

and Social Care, in response to the pandemic demands. Repurposing of jobs roles within the parks outdoor workforce were also necessary during Quarters 1, 2 and 3, to undertake daily patrols of the Council's 154 Playgrounds / Outdoor Sport Facilities ensuring that Covid-19 related signage was in place and chains / locks secure, preventing access.

- Extensive daily independent and joint patrols in conjunction with South Wales Police were conducted during Quarters 1, 2 and 3 providing a presence in our parks and reassurance to users, supporting SWP in the enforcement of Coronavirus Regulations.
- The outdoor parks workforce were also, throughout 2020/21, engaged in city greening activities supporting the work of the Planning, Transport & Environment Directorate, installing, maintaining and dismantling temporary landscape features within the City Centre and adjoining wards.
- The impact of increased parks usage during the pandemic resulted in an increase in patrolling, monitoring and litter collection. The patrolling / monitoring function was achieved through the repurposing of the parks outdoor workforce, the impacts and resourcing of increased litter collection was supported by the Neighbourhood Services Team who are responsible for routine litter collection and bin servicing across all service areas.
- During Quarter 2 service recovery saw the reintroduction of non-essential works, however owing to the suspension of such from late March 2020, activities such as the maintenance of planted areas and mowing of grassland took longer to undertake as a result of growth rates during the suspension period.
- The decision to suspend non-essential works during Quarter 1 was, at the time, taken in order to prevent the transmission of the virus.

Inevitably, the frequency of annual operations / activity was reduced but was not symptomatic of a failure to redeploy staff. The decision to redeploy staff into areas of critical front line activity followed corporate requirements, the decision to repurpose job roles within the service was taken by the service and the reduction of available hours for a period of 2020/21 was a consequence of risk assessment, ensuring compliance with Welsh Government Coronavirus Regulations.