

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SAFETY IN PARKS: PRE-DECISION
SCRUTINY**

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide background information to Members to aid their scrutiny of the draft report to Cabinet regarding community engagement and safety in parks, attached at **Appendix 1**, which is due to be considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 20 January 2022.

Scope of Scrutiny

2. At their meeting on 20 January 2022, the Cabinet will receive an update on current activities and future plans for community engagement and safety in parks, prepared in response to a motion passed at Council on 21 October 2021.
3. During this scrutiny, Members can explore:
 - i) The response to the areas outlined in the motion to Council, including:
 - i. The work to date re community engagement in parks
 - ii. The work to date re safety in parks
 - iii. Plans for community engagement and safety in parks
 - ii) Whether there are any financial implications for the Council
 - iii) Whether there are any risks to the Council
 - iv) The timeline and next steps
 - v) The recommendations to Cabinet.

Background

4. At Council on 21 October 2021, Councillor Robson proposed a Notice of Motion, seconded by Councillor Hudson, regarding safety in parks. Two amendments

were received, from the Labour Group and Liberal Democrat Group. The notice of motion as amended by the Labour Group, with the Liberal Democrat Group amendment regarding meaningful consultation with local communities regarding whether or not to return to locking parks at night, was carried, as follows:

This Council notes that:

- 1. Cardiff's parks and open spaces are a major feature of the city which are a valuable resource and safe space for residents and visitors.*
- 2. Parks are places where individuals and families should feel safe and during the Coronavirus pandemic, many residents enjoyed and appreciated their local park to be able to get outside.*
- 3. There are a number of volunteer groups, including "Friends" groups, who make a valuable contribution and help to enhance our parks. This Council expresses its thanks to them for their hard work.*
- 4. The work of parks rangers is crucial in both enabling work carried out by Friends groups and ensuring that Cardiff parks are safe and well-managed.*
- 5. That working with the police is vital to keeping Parks safe and well managed, and notes that 21,000 Police Officers in the UK have been cut since 2010.*

This Council also notes that there has sadly been a spate of incidents in parks over the past few months, ranging from serious crimes to low-level anti-social behaviour. This Council calls on the Cabinet to bring forward a report which includes:

- Continue to look at ways during the budget process to increase funding in park safety and support staff and Friends Groups going forward*
- A policy on where and when it is appropriate to continue to introduce lighting in parks, and what consultation would be undertaken to identify any paths that need lighting.*
- Consideration of whether when serious vandalism occurs in parks the Council should, after seeking advice from the Police, offer a reward, where appropriate for information which leads to arrests.*
- Proposals to undertake a meaningful consultation with local communities on whether or not to return to locking parks at night.*

Such a report should be brought to Cabinet within four months.¹

¹ Extract taken from minutes Council Meeting 21 October 2021

5. The draft report to Cabinet entitled '*Community Engagement and Safety in Parks*' is attached at **Appendix 1** and has **three** appendices:
- **Appendix A** - Parks 'Friends Of' Groups
 - **Appendix B** - Community Park Ranger Service – Partner Organisations
 - **Appendix C** – Community Park Ranger Service – Live Projects.

Community Engagement re Parks

6. **Points 5-14** of the report to Cabinet provide an overview of existing community engagement in parks, with additional information provided in Appendices A - C. This shows the **Community Park Ranger** team lead on community engagement in parks by:
- i) Supporting 29 constituted and emerging Friends Groups
 - ii) Supporting the volunteer workforce – volunteer hours in 2018/19 were at 20,488, equating to £157,000 at National Living Wage level
 - iii) Hosting the Local Nature Partnership and Co-ordinator post, which is funded till 31st March 2022
 - iv) Undertaking partnership work with circa 32 organisations
 - v) Supporting grant applications for third parties – total value of current live projects exceeds £1,600,000
 - vi) Supporting volunteering and work experience opportunities for individuals within the homeless community.
7. At **point 14**, the report to Cabinet highlights that the Community Ranger Services is the Council's lead delivery service in responding to, halting, and reversing the decline in biodiversity, helping to respond to the nature emergency declared by Welsh Government in June 2021 and Cardiff Council in November 2021.

Safety in Parks

8. **Points 15- 23** of the report to Cabinet include details of work currently undertaken to ensure safety in parks, including:
- i) **Urban Park Ranger Service** leading on this work, via patrolling, byelaw enforcement, litter collection and graffiti clearance, visual playground inspections and repairs, emergency call out, delivering public awareness and engagement events, liaison with other

Council teams, and liaison with South Wales Police, South Wales Ambulance Service and South Wales Fire and Rescue Services

- ii) The establishment of a **Bute Park multi-agency Task and Finish Group** to address safety concerns, resulting in installation of CCTV, a designated 'Safe Space' at Pettigrew Tea Rooms, public awareness events promoting safety for women and girls and an anti-knife campaign, relaunch of Friends of Bute Park, 'Cuppa with a Copper' events, and ongoing work exploring options for anti-social behaviour detectors.

9. **Point 17** of the report to Cabinet highlights that the pandemic has led to closer working between Urban Park Rangers and South Wales Police, with enhanced sharing of information/ intelligence and establishment of joint patrolling and enforcement activity. **Point 19** states the Urban Park Rangers are now aligned to the seven South Wales Police sector areas.

Response to Council Motion

10. The motion to Council specifically asks for the report to Council to address the following:

- *Continue to look at ways during the budget process to increase funding in park safety and support staff and Friends Groups going forward*
- *A policy on where and when it is appropriate to continue to introduce lighting in parks, and what consultation would be undertaken to identify any paths that need lighting.*
- *Consideration of whether when serious vandalism occurs in parks the Council should, after seeking advice from the Police, offer a reward, where appropriate for information which leads to arrests.*
- *Proposals to undertake a meaningful consultation with local communities on whether or not to return to locking parks at night.*

Funding

11. The report to Cabinet sets out that the Community Park Ranger and the Urban Park Ranger services operate seven days a week to meet service demand. The Community Park Ranger staffing establishment is 12.4FTE, which includes a trainee post created in 2021/22, funded through external grant sources, over a three-year term. The Urban Park Ranger staffing establishment is 14 FTE, which

includes four new posts created 2021/22, following permanent base budget revenue growth of £112,000, and a trainee post on a three-year, fixed term basis.

12. The report to Cabinet highlights, at **point 38**, that a Parks Community Liaison Officer post and an Anti-Social Behaviour Case Worker post were deleted in financial years 2009/10 and 2010/11 respectively, due to savings targets.
13. The report to Cabinet highlights that existing budget provision is already subject to significant constraint and that any new resource demands will apply further pressure. **Point 12** of the report to Cabinet highlights increasing interest in volunteering, and states:
- 'The extent to which volunteering and wider community engagement places maximum demand on the service will be determined by the recovery from the pandemic.'*
14. **Points 40-44** of the report to Cabinet set out there are other current and emerging budget pressures within the parks service, namely:
- i) Ash Dieback Action Plan – no current external funding available to support investment or delivery of this plan
 - ii) Weed Control – increase in costs of herbicides.
15. **Points 45-46** of the report to Cabinet highlight that reduced service provision may be considered to mitigate other demands, including the removal of shrub beds, hedges, and spring/ summer bedding displays.

16. **Point 47** states:

'The Council continues to be active in identifying and securing external funding that supports community engagement and safety in its parks. Such opportunities are, in the main project based, over a fixed term and do not support on-going revenue expenditure, particularly mainstream staffing.'

Lighting

17. The report to Cabinet states that evidence suggests parks situated closer to the city centre will be more at risk of anti-social behaviour and crime linked to the night-time economy and that the provision of lighting can improve safety and increase confidence for after dark/ night-time users. Currently, lighting covers

circa 6.7% of parks and wider green corridors, the majority of which is for adopted highway paths crossing parkland.

18. **Point 26** sets out the following limitations on the Council's ability to increase lighting in parks:

- i) Capital and ongoing revenue expenditure
- ii) Availability of infrastructure, such as ducted power supply
- iii) Presence of mature trees, with extensive root systems
- iv) Negative impact on wildlife and their habitats.

19. The report to Cabinet highlights the existing Home Office Safer Street funding does not currently including lighting for parks but that future funding rounds may do so.

20. The report to Cabinet outlines that the Cycle Superhighway 4, which extends from Sophia Gardens, through Pontcanna Fields, along the River Taff to North Cardiff, includes proposals for installation of lighting, with an integral environmental impact assessment on the parkland the route transverses. Specialist consultants are determining options for provision; learning from this work can be used to inform future policy and design (**point 28**).

21. **Point 29** sets out the following key factors for determining a policy on where and when it is appropriate to continue to introduce lighting into parks:

- Level of use (Frequency, Duration and Total Use Metrics)
- Type of use (Purpose & Demographic)
- Connectivity (Neighbourhood & City Wide)
- Environmental Impacts
- Equality Impacts
- Management Information (Crime & Anti-Social Behaviour Statistics)
- Condition Assessment of Existing Infrastructure
- Future Proofing.

22. **Point 29** stresses the Council recognises the importance of public safety and is supportive of the introduction of lighting schemes, particularly for commuter routes and areas of high footfall. **Point 30** states consultation involving local communities, local and city-wide stakeholder groups and agencies will be key.

Reward

23. The report to Cabinet sets out current arrangements to offer rewards, via Crimestoppers, which enables people to come forward anonymously. Whilst there are no restrictions to prevent local authorities from offering rewards, it is not commonplace and the report to Cabinet states, at **point 33**:

'The merits of such a scheme are not self-evident and may raise issues as to the integrity and validity of information provided. There is, at present, no budget allocation for such a provision.'

Consultation re Locking of Parks

24. The report to Cabinet highlights currently there are eleven groups across Cardiff involved in locking and unlocking their local parks. Only Parc Cefn Onn and Roath Park (including Roath Pleasure Gardens) have not returned to a park locking regime post pandemic.

25. At **point 37**, the report to Cabinet states that it is proposed a '*consultation exercise involving the users / stakeholders and local ward member in Lisvane, in respect of Parc Cefn Onn, and the local ward members for Cyncoed and Plasnewydd for Roath Park and Roath Pleasure Gardens, respectively, is conducted in February 2022.*'

26. **Financial Implications** are set out at **points 49-51** and highlight:

- i) Additional financial implications are not identified but reference is made to budget pressures and constraints
- ii) That external grant funding opportunities will be actively sought but are not confirmed at this time
- iii) The service will look to identify potential efficiencies to release revenue funding and mitigate against existing and future pressures
- iv) The existing revenue budget for Parks service is £5.8million, which supports 140FTEs.

27. **Legal Implications** are set out in **points 52-59** and state the various Acts providing local authorities with powers to provide and maintain recreation grounds and public open spaces and to do something for the benefit of the area. They also set out the requirement to make decisions in the context of the Council's public

sector equality duties, public sector duties, socio-economic duty, Wellbeing of Future Generations duties, including sustainable development principle, and Welsh Language duties.

28. **HR Implications** are set out at **Point 60** and state that *‘any proposals to review the staffing establishment to address capacity will be subject to the usual processes which include the application of the Council’s Job Evaluation, post creation and recruitment processes. Where appropriate trade union consultation will be required.’*

29. **Property Implications** are set out at **Point 61** and state that there are no specific property implications arising from this report.

Proposed Recommendations to Cabinet

30. The report to Cabinet contains the following recommendations:

- i) *note the current activity, projects and plans relating to community engagement and safety in parks, as detailed within the report.*
- ii) *note the content of the report and consider as part of the 2022/23 budget proposals.*
- iii) *through the work being undertaken on the Cycle Superhighways Programme and the learning and operational experience gained from the Cycleway 4 project, develop a policy and design guide document to inform the future provision of lighting in parks.*
- iv) *through Welsh Government Active Travel Funding, continue to submit bids that provide lighting in our parks.*
- v) *to conduct a consultation exercise for the return of a locking regime for Roath Park, inclusive of Roath Pleasure Gardens, and Parc Cefn Onn.*

Previous Scrutiny

31. This Committee has undertaken regular scrutinies of the parks service and regularly recommended increasing the resources available to the park ranger services, including a ‘Funding of Parks’ Inquiry (April 2018).

32. Following scrutiny of the 2021/22 budgetary proposals, the Chair, Councillor Nigel Howells, wrote to Councillor Chris Weaver, Cabinet Member- Finance, Modernisation and Performance, stating²:

'Members are very pleased that the urban park rangers' team is being increased, given their excellent work in ensuring safe and biodiverse parks, so critical at all times and noticeably so during the pandemic.'

Way Forward

33. Councillor Peter Bradbury (Cabinet Member – Culture and Leisure) will be invited to make a statement. Neil Hanratty (Director of Economic Development) and Jon Maidment (Operational Manager – Parks and Cardiff Harbour Authority) will attend and the whole panel will be available to answer Members' questions.

Legal Implications

34. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review, and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters, there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

² Extracts taken from the Public Letter from Councillor Howells, Chair Economy & Culture Scrutiny Committee, to Councillor Weaver, Cabinet Member – Finance, Modernisation and Performance, dated 23 February 2021.

Financial Implications

35. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review, and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters, there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to:

- i) Consider the information in this report, its appendices and the information presented at the meeting
- ii) Determine whether they would like to make any comments, observations, or recommendations to the Cabinet on this matter in time for its meeting on 20 January 2022, and
- iii) Decide the way forward for any future scrutiny of the issues discussed.

DAVINA FIORE

Director of Governance & Legal Services

13 January 2022