

# Outcome of Birmingham City Council 2017/18 Budget Consultation

## Affecting

### Birmingham Parks and Nature Conservation Division

#### 1. Background

“After one of the largest public consultations with Birmingham citizens it’s ever done – and making changes as a result of the feedback received from local people – the council has set its budget for 2017/18, committing more funding for vital frontline services” (*Birmingham Newsroom March 1<sup>st</sup> 2017*).

As part of the consultation process the Parks Division were asked to put forward savings at both 20% and 10% of existing budgets.

During the consultation exercise there was huge support for parks staff (in particular rangers and park keepers) and the work they do in facilitating tens of thousands of volunteer hours of practical work in parks, given freely by Friends Groups, individuals, community, and corporate groups. Loss of staff would, it was highlighted, result in a cessation of this help as it was felt most activity would not continue without adequate staff supervision.

Likewise, there was very vocal support for the role parks and horticultural features bring to the life of the city, both in neighbourhoods and in the city centre itself.

Following the consultation exercise the savings required from Parks were set at around 10% in addition to the on-going impact of prior year savings targets.

#### 2. Proposed Outcomes

As a result of public consultation £1.2M has been put back into the Parks’ budget and a large proportion of this figure has been used to minimise the reduction in staffing that was proposed in the consultation exercise. The challenge facing the Division in meeting its allocated target is still considerable and will have noticeable effects across the City.

##### 2.1 Ranger Service 2017/18

At 20% savings the Ranger Service would have reduced from the existing six ranger hubs down to 2 (one based in the north of the city and one in the south). At the agreed and current 10% savings target the six teams will remain with the existing staff being managed out of five locations.

The five office locations proposed are **Sutton National Nature Reserve** (serving Sutton and Erdington), **Lickey Hills Country Park** (serving Northfield), **Sheldon Country Park** (serving Hodge Hill and Yardley) **Kings Heath** (serving Hall Green and Selly Oak) and **Woodgate Valley Country Park** (serving Edgbaston).

There is currently a vacancy for a Senior Ranger (manager) at the **Edgbaston Hub** (covering Ladywood and Perry Barr Constituencies). It is proposed that this vacancy not be filled and the existing Edgbaston Hub ranger team be managed out of Woodgate Valley Country Park, but retain their focus on their existing geographical area and local contacts with Friends Groups in Ladywood and Perry Barr Constituencies.

The ranger's lodge at Edgbaston Reservoir would be retained by the City Council and an alternative use by a third sector community/environmental organisation explored.

Although this proposal would see the loss of three existing vacant Ranger Service posts it would not unduly affect other staff in current posts. Current levels of service delivery would be maintained.

## **2.2 Park Keepers 2017/18**

There are currently 30 Park Keepers in posts across the City. Park Keepers are employed by the grounds maintenance service providers (Glendale, Quadron Services (now Idverde), and the in-house Birmingham Parks and Nurseries).

Their role is to provide a visible presence on their allocated site, to carry out grounds maintenance activities, and to bring "added value" to the site through close working with Friends Groups and others. In this way they carry out additional tasks over and above those specified in the contract of works.

At 20% savings all 30 park keeper posts would have been deleted. With the current 10% saving target to be met it is proposed to further review the current provision with regard to the "added value" the post holders bring to each site.

Examples of "added value" would be the additional activities that the park keeper carries out, over and above gardening duties eg attendance at Friends Group meetings, facilitating activities, events or volunteering, or deterring anti-social behaviour.

The rationale for selecting the posts to keep will be based on those sites (and individuals) where added value has been tested and proved over the last four years through "Mystery Shopper" inspections and feedback from Friends Groups, local Councillors and Park Managers.

Following the review Friends Groups and Councillors with parks that will be affected will be consulted on the proposed removal of those posts.

There will be a greater focus on the "added value" element of the retained park keepers' role with the staff becoming more aligned with the role of "Ranger Wardens" and playing a greater part in facilitating volunteering and events in partnership with Friends and community groups.

Further, for those parks losing a park keeper there will be a commitment to provide greater contact from the local Rangers who will offer additional support to the Friends and the site.

### **2.3 Grounds Maintenance 2017/18**

The level of savings required in 2017/18+ is substantial even after the reduction in the total required following the consultation exercise. Many of the grounds maintenance savings proposals that went out to consultation are still required, although some have been withdrawn or scaled back slightly.

Grounds Maintenance Reductions for 2017/18+:

- Cease amenity grass cutting on 20% of grass assets
- Reduce ornamental grass cutting from 21 to 12 cuts (Parks and Highways)
- Reduce flower beds on Parks and Highways
- Reduce Shrub beds on Parks and Highways
- Reduce maintenance of shrub beds to core standard
- Cease half-moon works (edging) in all Parks and Highways
- Review/reduce planters and baskets in the City Centre

### **3. Timescales**

The sooner the proposals above are implemented the greater the likelihood that the Division will fully meet its saving targets. Cessation of some activities has already commenced whilst others will be phased over the coming months.

However, consideration is being given to the requirements of Service Providers to accommodate and implement these actions, not least where these proposals impact on staff and individuals.

### **4. Further Information**

For further information please email: [joe\\_hayden@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:joe_hayden@birmingham.gov.uk) (Parks Services Manager) or [Philip\\_beville@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Philip_beville@birmingham.gov.uk) (Assets and Contracts Manager)