

# Executive Decision Report

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## **Spending Review Programme – Parks and Open Spaces**

Decision to be taken by: City Mayor

Decision to be taken on: 30<sup>th</sup> March 2016

Lead director: Frank Jordan

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Useful information

■ Ward(s) affected: Citywide

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■ Report version number: 3.1

## 1. Summary

To agree the proposals of the Parks and Open spaces spending review to achieve savings of £1.5m, as part of the Council's Spending Review Programme.

## 2. Recommendations

The Executive is recommended to:

(a) Reflect the anticipated savings in the approved budget and budget strategy, and reduce budgets accordingly by the following amounts:

- 2016/17 £770k
- 2017/18 £1,200k
- 2018/19 £1,350k
- 2019/20 £1,500k

(b) To delegate authority to the Director of Finance to determine the specific budget ceilings affected.

## 3. Supporting information:

### Background

3.1 The review covers management and maintenance of all the Council's allotments, parks, play areas, trees and woodlands, and grounds maintenance activities carried out for the Council's other portfolios. The services included have a gross budget of £9m, of which £1m is met from external income/HRA.

### Data analysis and approach

3.2 Analysis of all costs has been carried out, which included the review of labour, machinery, and running costs. These were benchmarked by the Association for Public Excellence (APSE) and, apart from staffing costs, were found to be close to the market norm.

3.3 To identify the necessary substantial savings, high cost (>£300k) grounds maintenance features been identified: grass cutting; litter and waste; shrub maintenance; golf courses; tree management. Golf courses are considered under the Sports and Leisure review, savings made there are separate to the Parks and Open Spaces review.

- 3.4 It is felt that no significant operational reductions in tree maintenance and the collection of litter and waste can be made, although business as usual savings have been identified in waste collection and are discussed below.
- 3.5 Reductions in maintenance standards will inevitably result in a reduction of staff and impact on the organisational structure. This will be addressed through a Parks and Open Spaces organisational review.

### Savings

- 3.6 Over £2m per annum is spent on grass cutting. Reduced standards of grass cutting were trialled at a number of sites across the city through the summer, which resulted in a small number of complaints focussed on grass cutting along the ring-road; the frequency of operation for this area will therefore be increased to a more acceptable level. Reduced frequencies of grass cutting will realise total revenue savings of £465k per annum, £279k from 2016/17.
- 3.7 £275k per annum is spent on the containment pruning (hedge cutting) of shrubs. Again, a reduction in the frequency of operation was trialled through the summer with no complaints being received. Reducing the frequency of containment pruning to once per annum will realise total revenue savings of 124k per annum, £70k from 2016/17.
- 3.8 £800k per annum is spent on litter collection. Utilising lower graded staff, made possible through re-organisation of the service, will save £25k per annum from 2016/17. The frequencies of operation will remain the same.
- 3.9 Landscape improvements, funded by the HRA and including the removal of old overgrown shrubberies replaced by grass or slabs has realised small year on year revenue savings, which will have accrued to £20k per annum by 2017/18.
- 3.10 Organisational savings of £146k per annum from recently vacated or unfilled posts following the recent Parks and Open Spaces Phase I organisational review, effective from 2016/17.
- 3.11 Organisational savings of £220k per annum from removing anomalies introduced through Job Evaluation and generic job descriptions. Revenue savings will be phased; £70k in 2017/18 rising to £220k from 2018/19.
- 3.12 An phased 8% reduction in running costs, providing revenue savings of £250k per annum from 2016/17 and total revenue savings of £350k per annum from 2017/18.
- 3.13 A revenue saving of £150k per annum through the disposal of assets is proposed. The Council maintains a large number of spaces, ranging from major parks to small pockets of land between individual homes. Based on the Council's planning standards the city is well provided for in open space. However, the disposal of assets would only be tested by public consultation whether via allocation through the local plan or planning permission, which will be required for development and/or change of use. Savings accruing from asset disposal will therefore not be realised until 2019/20 onwards

## Summary of savings

3.14 The table below summarises the identified savings in the approved budget and budget strategy.

Description	2016/17 000s	2017/18 000s	2018/19 000s	2019/20 000s
Reduction in frequency of grass cutting	279	465	465	465
Reduction in frequency of shrub pruning	70	124	124	124
Re-engineered waste collection service	25	25	25	25
Accrued savings from HRA funded landscaping	-	20	20	20
Vacancies	146	146	146	146
Phase II organisational review	-	70	220	220
Reduction in running costs	250	350	350	350
Disposal of assets	-	-	-	150
<b>Total</b>	<b>770</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>1,350</b>	<b>1,500</b>

## **4. Financial, legal and other implications**

### 4.1 Financial implications

The report sets out the savings to be achieved from the Parks and Open Spaces spending review.

Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance, ext. 37 4081

### 4.2 Legal implications

A reduction in spending may result in a diminution of work which would impact by way of staff redundancies. The Council's redundancy policy provides details of the correct steps to take. Should a further reorganisation occur then the Council's appropriate policy will again provide details on the steps to take. Any employment issues that arise can be referred to Legal Services for advice as required.

Caroline Woodhouse, Principal Solicitor for Employment, Education and Litigation, ext. 37 1429

#### Property Legal Implications

In respect of possible future disposals as outlined in 3.11, the Council will need to comply with its legal obligations to obtain the best consideration that is reasonably obtainable in the circumstances, under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) (in respect of non-Housing land) or s.32 of the Housing Act 1985 and associated Housing General Consents in respect of Housing Land (as appropriate). In addition, under s. 123 (2) (a) of the 1972 Act the Council is required to advertise any disposal of public open space prior to disposal, and to consider any objections to a proposed disposal. In respect of any land and property disposal the Council will need to consider its general fiduciary duty to its taxpayers.

It is strongly recommended that appropriate due diligence checks (including title

investigations) are carried out on any land proposed for disposal, in order to identify any potential incumbrances, covenants and restrictions on disposal. In addition the Council may hold land in trust or pursuant to planning obligations, and further legal and professional advice should be taken as to the implications of any such restrictions. The planning status of land proposed for disposal should also be considered at an early stage.

John McIvor, Legal Services, ext. 37 1409

#### 4.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

Relaxing grass and shrub land management in order to make financial savings may provide an added benefit to wildlife and carbon sequestration in the city. The replacement of shrubbery with paving slabs, and the disposal of open green space however are likely to cancel out these benefits. Any new development on open space will inevitably result in an increase in the city wide carbon footprint through operational emissions of the new build. The removal of green space will have a wider environmental impact through increasing the risk of flooding by replacing areas of open space with non-porous material, and will have implications for wildlife through the removal of habitat. Sustainable urban drainage should therefore be considered at these sites to mitigate any flood risk.

Louise Buckley, Senior Environmental Consultant, ext. 37 2293

#### 4.4 Equality Implications

The proposed changes to grounds maintenance are the savings most likely to impact directly on local residents. The service carried out an evaluation of grass cutting standards across the city during the summer months to determine public response to the proposed reduction in grass cutting. Only 35 complaints were received and these were for grass length on the ring road only. Other similar reductions in standards for shrub pruning citywide were also tested, with no complaints being received. Therefore, on the basis of these tests, it is unlikely that the proposed savings/changes in standards for grounds maintenance will have an adverse impact on the public. On this basis, there are no anticipated adverse impacts on the public arising from this savings proposal. This would be for all protected characteristics, given that this facility is open to all local residents.

Irene Kszyk, Corporate Equalities Lead, ext. 374147

#### 4.5 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

None.

**5. Background information and other papers:**

This is contained within the body of the report.

**6. Summary of appendices:**

None.

**7. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?**

No.

**8. Is this a “key decision”?**

Yes.

**9. If a key decision please explain reason**

The report proposes the making of savings, which are significant, having regard to the Council’s budget for the service or function to which the decision relates.