

Council - 15 July 2019

Petition to Support Walsall Arboretum Dedicated Team

Submitted by Fiona McMillan to Cabinet on 28 May 2019

“The dedicated management, team of gardeners and event management, based at the Arbo will be lost in a reorganisation. So we fear that the many activities and events, and the care and maintenance of the park will deteriorate without the dedicated Arbo based team.”

The petition was submitted to Cabinet on 28 May. The petition contains approximately 2,200 signatures, at the time of submission. The Council’s petitions scheme states that ‘If a petition contains at least 1,500 signatures it will be debated at a meeting of the Council’.

Ward – St Matthews

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The above petition was submitted to Cabinet on 28 May 2019 by Fiona McMillan.
- 1.2 The petition states “The dedicated management, team of gardeners and event management, based at the Arbo will be lost in a reorganisation. So we fear that the many activities and events, and the care and maintenance of the park will deteriorate without the dedicated Arbo based team.” And asks for people to sign the petition if they share the concern.
- 1.3 The petition is in relation to savings through the Healthy Spaces Review that are being implemented to deliver £395k of savings to contribute to the Councils Medium Term Financial Plan.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The council has already reduced its spending by £173m since 2010/11 and needs to save in the region of a further £20m in 2019/20. In considering future resource allocation, funding for development of services need to be met from the redirection of existing resources, reducing existing spend and the identification of new or revised income sources. The council needs to do things differently and in some cases cease doing things that are not in line with corporate priorities or local need.
- 2.2 As part of the corporate savings, a target of £395k across Public Health lifestyle contracts and Clean and Green needed to be achieved in 2019/20 (Budget saving proposals Ref:16 & 45), Clean and Green achieved £105K saving in 2017/18 through reductions in Parks and Green Spaces resources. Currently Public Health has transformation and service level agreements with Clean and Green of circa £377k and Sports and Leisure of circa £260K.

- 2.3 A Healthy Spaces Steering Group was formed with officers from Public Health, Clean and Green and Sports and Health Development in 2018. The aim of this group, was to pool expertise and develop programmes of work to ensure better use of Walsall's outdoor space and other assets, particularly in the promotion of healthy living and increasing physical activity.
- 2.4 The Healthy Spaces project fed in to the Transformation project "Shaping a Sustainable Healthy Environment". This project aims to develop greater efficiencies across a range of services resulting in improved delivery and outcomes for customers. This project is led by Public Health, which is focussed on building a healthy environment for residents.
- 2.5 The agreed Healthy Spaces vision is ***"Working together to maximise use of our public spaces to provide a safe and welcoming environment for all citizens to live a healthy, active lifestyle"***.
- 2.6 The vision focuses on Programme, People and Place similar to the Black Country Economic Plan and includes a broad strategic approach across a range of key settings. This includes;
- Green Spaces
 - Schools
 - Community / Home Based
 - Workplace
- 2.7 An action plan has been developed to roll out a range of evidence based infrastructural improvements / interventions that will have a population impact on health, particularly those living in areas of greatest deprivation. It also details an approach, to further develop healthy parks and green spaces alongside a longer-term plan to revise existing service / delivery model leading to increased efficiency and impact in line with the Green Space strategy.
- 2.8 A vision of a healthy park was produced, including numerous examples of how to deliver a "healthy park". This includes:
- Led walks, jogs and cycles
 - Active travel corridors
 - Individual and volunteer group led activities
 - Signposted walking and cycling routes tailored to ability
 - Active play areas
 - Individual and corporate volunteering schemes
 - School targeted programmes e.g. Forest Schools and A*Stars
 - Utilisation of park based venues for the community

3.0 The New Arrangements

- 3.1 The redesign protected the operational service within green spaces and there has been no reduction in the number or functions for these staff. Posts have been reduced in the strategy area at management levels.
- 3.2 The new team, made up from existing Green Space Strategy officers and Sports Development officers, will be led by Public Health and commence on 1 August 2019. The team will include the commissioned lifestyle element formerly in Sports & Leisure and strategic management of Green Spaces within Clean and Green. The new team will deliver a range of health (and other) outcomes across a range of settings. The Strategic Lead will be Public Health covering the end-to-end delivery model i.e. Commissioning and the delivery of operational management. This redesign effectively brings the commissioned services “in –house”, into Public Health.
- 3.2 The principles that will underpin the new service structure are robust systems for monitoring and evaluation, streamlined delivery through a single team, development across a range of settings and increased sustainability.
- 3.3 The new arrangements will deliver a flexible structure that will maximise input from voluntary sectors, Friends Groups and meet Portfolio priorities. The key points that the proposed structure will deliver in the future are:
 - Maintain the expertise of Green Space Officers
 - Link with volunteers and support Friends network
 - Put a focus on developing the voluntary sector
 - Market and sponsorship to maximise income
 - Include Public Health leadership and activities
 - Enable strong links with localities
 - Improve the perceived safety of Greenspaces
- 3.4 Benefits of an integrated team include: pooled resources, increased efficiencies with less impact on services, residents’ health and the environment of the Borough.
- 3.5 The new arrangements will deliver the new service to achieve the savings but it is acknowledged this will have an impact on some residents and visitors due to reduced resources.
- 3.6 The operational service within Green Spaces (grounds maintenance and infrastructure maintenance) will remain with Clean and Green under the Service Manager Operations. The redesign protected the operational service within green spaces and there has been no reduction in the number or functions for these staff.
- 3.7 Joint working will continue between Public Health and Clean and Green to minimise risk and maximise best working practices.

4.0 Consultation

- 4.1 Appropriate consultation was carried out with all Council Employees within scope of the review and commenced on the 16 January 2019 and finished on 4 March 2019. Since this time, officers have progressed the recruitment to the new structure and at the time of writing this is ongoing.
- 4.2 Additionally several meetings have been held with outside organisations who became aware of the proposals including representatives of the Friends of Walsall Arboretum and the Chair of Walsall Greenspaces Forum. These groups expressed concerns over the proposals; particularly the Public Health lead and split of green space strategy and management from operational maintenance. It was suggested that current arrangements for the Arboretum and other green space sites should remain but no reference to how alternative savings could be made was provided.
- 4.3 Briefing sessions with Portfolio Holders from Clean and Green, Community, Leisure & Culture and Children's & Health & Wellbeing also took place.
- 4.4 The new integrated team preserves a locality focus with staff working in one of four localities. The managers and officers based in the central south locality will be responsible for the strategic parks of Walsall Arboretum, Palfrey and Pleck. This mirrors the current locality duties for the staff.

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