

Report to: Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel
Date of meeting: 8 January 2018
Report of: Head of Community & Environmental Services
Title: Review of the Parks and Open Spaces Service element of the WBC Partnership / Veolia contract

1.0 Summary

1.1 This report provides a summary of:

- Background information to the Veolia partnership / contract – a brief introduction;
- Where we are now;
- Strengths and weaknesses; and
- The future? Issues to consider.

1.2 This purpose of the report is to provide information and advise the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel on the performance of the Parks and Open Spaces Service and the ongoing partnership with Veolia 2016-2017. A PowerPoint presentation forms part of this report.

1.3 Recommendation

To note the contents of the report.

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2.0 Risk Matrix

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response <i>(Treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)</i>	Risk Rating (the combination of severity and likelihood)
The Contractor (Veolia) does not deliver contract and service specification	The service is not available for residents and customers to use with a decline in standards	Regular contract monitoring by the council to review the contract performance through regular fortnightly meetings and that specification requirements are being met by the contractor alongside and scrutiny by elected members	Treat	Unlikely (2) x High (3) = rating of 6
The Contractor (Veolia) goes into administration	As above	As above Regular review of contractors accounts	Tolerate	Unlikely (2) x High (3) = rating of 6
The Contractor (Veolia) is taken over by another company	Could have no impact on the service Or New company tries to alters the contract/SLA and KPIs which impacts on the service	As above Option to terminate the contract early	Tolerate	Unlikely (2) x High (3) = rating of 6

3.0 **Background information to the Veolia contract – a brief introduction**

3.1 In July 2013, the Council outsourced its frontline services to Veolia the outsourcing included Waste & Recycling, Street Cleansing and the Parks and Open Spaces Service. This report relates to the performance of the latter service.

3.2 The Parks and Open Spaces Service which Veolia manages consists of the following:-

- All grounds maintenance functions;
- Allotments management and maintenance;
- Sports pitch management and maintenance;
- Cemetery maintenance and burials;
- Park Ranger Service;
- Play area management and maintenance;
- Tree management and maintenance (including Highways);
- Verge maintenance;
- Small scale improvement projects;
- Green Flag applications; and
- Events bookings.

A number of work areas were retained in-house which cover the following areas:-

- Major Capital Projects;
- Cemetery Management;
- Contract management;
- Management of Cassiobury Park and Pools; and
- Policy and strategy development.

4.0 **Where are we now?**

4.1 Since the service was outsourced in 2013, the Parks and Open Spaces Service has transformed itself and working in partnership with Veolia, and underpinned by a very sound Green Spaces Strategy, has made significant improvements to service delivery, the quality of parks and open spaces and significantly raised its local and regional profile. These improvements are highlighted in the presentation that accompanies this report but in summary include the following:-

- Increase in the number of Green Flag Award winning parks from 3 to 11, the most in Hertfordshire;
- Cassiobury Park voted in the People's Choice as one of the top 10 parks in the country;
- Completion of the £6.6 million HLF / Big Lottery funded Cassiobury Park Restoration and opening of the Hub and pools;
- Horticulture Week Awards for Partnership working with Veolia (2017) and the Parks Improvement Programme (2016);
- Significant investment in parks, play areas and allotments (£10 million+);
- Adoption of a 10 year Allotments Strategy;
- Adoption of a 10 year Cemeteries Strategy
- Adoption of a 10 year Sports Facilities Strategy;
- Provision of 13 outdoor gyms across our principal open spaces;
- Activity and education programme in Cassiobury Park;
- Successful delivery of a £1.4 million relocation of the Gaelic Football Club to Radlett Road Playing Fields – a difficult site;
- £1.4 million investment in two adventure playgrounds at Harwoods and Harebreaks

Recreation Grounds;

- Events programme in Cassiobury Park; and
- Increased community involvement in many of our Green Spaces.

4.2 The improvements to our parks and open spaces working in partnership with Veolia have been transformational and have been underpinned by the Green Spaces Strategy, a significant investment programme funded by S106, the Council's Capital Programme and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Whilst the programme of improvements have seen standards improve and the quality of our open spaces increase, with the majority of our open spaces moved to high quality / high value, this does bring pressures on the wider service. These are discussed below.

5.0 **Strengths and weaknesses**

5.1 The foundation of the Green Spaces Strategy was based on an open spaces audit carried out in 2011 and 2012 which measured the quality and value of all our parks and open spaces. Parks and recreation grounds such as Callowland Rec, Oxhey Park, Waterfields Recreation Ground were all deemed of very high value to our local communities, but of very low quality. With significant investment this has ensured that all these and many other open spaces have seen their quality move to high scoring. Many of these have now become Green Flag award winning parks – the national benchmark as managed by the Keep Britain Tidy Group. These now include:-

- Cassiobury Park (2007);
- Woodside Playing Fields (2009);
- Cheslyn House and Gardens (2009);
- Oxhey Park (2014);
- St Mary's Churchyard (2015);
- Callowland Recreation Ground (2015);
- Waterfields Recreation Ground (2016);
- North Watford Playing Fields (2016);
- Goodwood Recreation Ground (2017);
- North Watford Cemetery (2017); and
- Paddock Road Allotments (2017).

5.2 The major strengths of the service are:-

1. The partnership with Veolia and WBC is positive and flourishing and both parties work effectively with the aim of ensuring satisfaction levels continue to be high. Satisfaction rates are currently 95% with at least 64% - nearly two thirds of people using the parks at least once a month;
2. Continued support from our local community and in particular the many residents groups and Friends groups. This has been celebrated in a number of ways including the Parks and Allotments Forums that were held in 2016 and will be held again in 2018. We also hosted the annual Parks Herts Awards in Cassiobury Park in 2017 where many of these groups came together to celebrate Green Flag and our many parks and open spaces;
3. Significant investment programme targeted in the right place at the right time;
4. A good solid strategic approach as to how we deliver our green space provision.

5.3 These successes do come with a 'sensitivity check'. The Council's ambitions are to be bold and progressive and this has been ably demonstrated with the ongoing successes in the parks and open spaces service and the Veolia team. Our resources are stretched and this is further impacted with many of the frontline parks operatives also covering street cleansing duties. This is a pressure on the wider service and gives the impression of fewer staff in parks.

6.0 **The future? Issues to consider**

6.1 The future will bring a number of challenges to the service. It is deemed a high priority for the Council but with the pressure to make savings across all service areas. With this in mind, the parks service has already begun to look at ways to continue to deliver a high quality service within constrained budgets. This will include the following:-

- Income generation and a more commercial approach to delivering the service e.g. cost recovery of some areas;
- Introduction of charges for some services;
- Encouraging community groups to take a more active role;
- Transfer of the management of the Cassiobury Pools complex to SLM in 2018;
- Update of the Green Spaces Strategy in 2018 to ensure priorities are still relevant;
- Offering a greater variety of services that generate income; and
- Greater use of grant opportunities.

6.2 Despite the challenges, a number of projects are still being delivered that will challenge the service but will add value to what we currently deliver. These include:-

- New recreational facilities at Oxhey Park including skate park, BMX track, and community café;
- New cemetery provision currently being investigated;
- Extension to the cemetery office and further environmental improvements at NWC;
- Proposals to see improvements at Woodside Playing Fields with major investment in sports facilities;
- Improvements to Garston Park;
- The River Colne Restoration Programme – looking at a wide range of improvements including access, recreation, environmental and water quality;
- Green Flag applications for Garston Park, Harwoods Recreation Ground, Watford Heath, KGV Playing Fields and the River Colne corridor – a total of 16.
- The transition into full operational mode for Cassiobury Park after its significant investment.

6.3 Despite the ongoing challenges, the Veolia partnership continues to thrive and the Parks and Open Spaces Service is deemed to be performing well. We will continue to benchmark through Green Flag but will be looking to some wider national recognition through national awards, and in particular for Cassiobury Park and the ongoing partnership with Veolia.

7.0 **Legal comments**

There are no legal implications in this report

8.0 **Financial comments**

Comments from the finance department have been incorporated into this report.

9.0 **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – PowerPoint Presentation