

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

NOTES of the inquorate meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in the Countryside Centre, Hinchingbrooke Countryside Park on Friday, 16 October 2015.

PRESENT: Councillors T Hayward and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Sir P Brown, B Hyland and T D Sanderson.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs J Arnold, Mr A Green, Mrs S Martin, Mr A Merrick and Mr C Moss.

10. OPERATIONS REVIEW UPDATE

Arising from the meeting being inquorate, Members noted that according to the Medium Term Financial Strategy the Operations Division had a target to reduce its budget by £2.3million over the next five years. As a result of this a fundamental service review was currently taking place within the Division. Part of the review involved a restructure and the Interim Head of Operations explained further details of the restructure. The main points were as follows:

- the number of senior managers had reduced from five to three;
- the division would be structured around three distinct business units: Commercial, Environmental and Business Development;
- the Street Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance functions would be integrated in the new Street Scene Service within Environmental Services, deployed in two area teams (north and south). The current Greenspaces Team would be redefined as a development team to support the Street Scene Service; and
- the Countryside Service situated within Environmental Services would continue to be managed as a separate team and would work closely with the Development Team to ensure optimisation of resources.

Other areas discussed included the following:

- It was noted that the income stream from recycling fluctuated dependent upon the demands of the market. This was reflected in the net costs of the Waste Service as the Council received an income share from the sale of recyclates. It was reported that the Council was paid for plastics by weight and not volume.
- Huntingdon Town Council had responsibility for 20 play areas in addition to those maintained by the Council which was too many to be sustainable. However, following a further analysis it was discovered that the north of the town was underprovided. This was being reviewed through a shared needs analysis with the Town Council to determine future priorities.
- As part of needs analysis for St Ives, it was identified that apart from the need to upgrade two play areas, the Town was well provided for in terms of open spaces and allotments.

- The Group were informed that there would be a new Management Plan for the Country Park to determine the future development priorities and maintenance regimes. This would be subject to consultation with the Joint Group. In respect of the remainder of the District, there was not currently a robust database of all the sites owned by the Council. In response to a question it was explained that Parish Councils could assist by sharing information with the Council on sites owned by them.
- The Group noted that the Council did not have the technology to conduct live checks on waste bin enquiries. Currently customers that contacted the Council regarding a missed bin collection were advised to call back at 2.30pm. The Group were informed that refuse collection rounds would be reconfigured to rebalance the rounds and to deliver efficiencies by reducing the number of rounds. In addition Members were advised that a waste collection shared service would not realise many benefits.

Discussion ensued in relation to Hinchingsbrooke Country Park matters. The key points were as follows:

- the post of Countryside Co-ordinator had been redefined as Countryside Manager to place a stronger emphasis on the overall management of the service; and
- the Countryside Centre and Café needed to become more commercial. The meeting rooms would be advertised for hire to organisations that did not normally utilise the Country Park to encourage a broader use and enable a sustainable income stream.

11. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

Arising from the meeting being inquorate, Members noted the following matters:

a) Staffing

Members noted the appointment of a Senior Ranger as at the end of July 2015 and a Ranger as at the beginning of September 2015. As a result there were now sufficient Ranger capacity to accommodate work experience staff for the ensuing year. The Countryside Centre Cleaner post was vacant having resigned to take up a Caretaker post at Pathfinder House. Consideration was being given to combine the role of Café Supervisor and Countryside Centre Supervisor.

b) Volunteers

A number of long-serving volunteers had recently left having moved from the area. It was reported that three new volunteers had commenced at the Park. A tool use handbook was being developed for training purposes accompanied with a certificate once training was completed.

c) Wider District

There was currently no capacity to undertake additional work around the District. Changes following the LEAN review had

impacted on the ability to provide staff cover particularly when staff had taken leave or had been absent through sickness.

d) Park Management

The Country Park had been nominated for the 'Best Biodiversity' category within Anglia in Bloom.

e) Café

Members noted that income received at the Café had increased by £9k compared to the same period the previous year. In response to a question the Group were informed that the increased income was attributed to an enthusiastic Team with good personalities, good homemade food as well as the weather conditions.

f) Events and Activities

In response to a question it was noted that there were 40 new users of the wheelchairs. The specially adapted bicycles were serviced twice a year with the Friends of Hinchingsbrooke Country Park funding the parts. The Group was reminded that Cambridgeshire County Council provided funding for ten volunteer placements per week for people with additional needs.

g) Finance

Members' attention was drawn to the current positive financial position of the Country Park.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Group noted that their next meeting would be held on Friday 11th March 2015.

Chairman