

<p>For: (x)</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 80%;">Executive</td> <td style="width: 20%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>CLMT</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table> <p>Meeting Date: 29th April 2013 Report of: Head of Engineering and Street Services Report author: Barry Timms</p>	Executive	<input type="checkbox"/>	CLMT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold;">Agenda Item Number: 15</p>
Executive	<input type="checkbox"/>				
CLMT	<input type="checkbox"/>				

<p>Subject: Outcomes of Stakeholders Consultation on Budget Cut Proposals for Grounds Maintenance and Future Staff Consultation (For Executive Only) Lead Executive Member(s): Councillor Ashraf Wards Affected: All</p>	<p><u>Consultations:</u></p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td>Councillors</td> <td style="text-align: center;">(x) <input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Scrutiny</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Stakeholders</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Others</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>	Councillors	(x) <input type="checkbox"/>	Scrutiny	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stakeholders	<input type="checkbox"/>	Others	<input type="checkbox"/>
Councillors	(x) <input type="checkbox"/>								
Scrutiny	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Stakeholders	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Others	<input type="checkbox"/>								

<p>Recommendations</p> <p>1) Following results of the public consultation the Executive is recommended to approve;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) the proposed Phase II savings for 2014/15 to achieve the target figure of £735.5k contained within paragraph 14, of the required £1.418million. (ii) the commencement of formal consultation with all the 72.2 full time equivalent employees regarding the reduction of up to 21.2 full time equivalents posts (iii) the commencement of formal consultations with the employees with regards a possible transfer of three employees from Stockwood Park Discovery Centre gardens to the Cultural Trust from the 1st April 2014. (iv) the introduction of sponsored trees, seats, and bins in parks (v) Submission of a further report to the 23rd September 2013 Executive on the outcome of the employee consultation and approval of the Phase II savings.
--

<p>Background</p> <p>2. Members at the 22nd November 2012 Executive meeting approved the commencement of consultation with stakeholders on the proposed reductions in grounds maintenance by £1.418 million by April 2015 as shown in table 1.</p>
--

Table 1.

Services	savings £000
Head office, parks infrastructure, sports, allotments and support services	353.7
Grounds maintenance including: floral displays, shrubs, litter collection, grass cutting and conservation areas	859.0
Aboricultural services	205.5
Parks sports (awaiting outcome of playing field strategy)	
Total	£1418.2

3. The proposals to reduce the grounds maintenance budget by £1.418m is to be spread in three phases between April 2013 and 2015 as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

	Timing	Services
Phase I £577.2K (Achieved see para.13)	April 2013	Arboricultural work, tree planting, conservation cuts, grass cutting and grounds maintenance (floral)
Phase II £735.5K (See para.14)	April 2014	Head office(part), infrastructure costs and remainder grounds maintenance
Phase III £105.5K (See para.15)	April 2015	Head office – remaining

The current position

Public consultation

4. Formal stake holder consultation took place between the 4th December 2012 and 18th February 2013 organised by the councils PR section using the website.
5. In addition the parks service wrote to individual stakeholders encouraging them to complete the online consultation form and met formally with the Friends of Luton's parks. Their views were that whilst they reluctantly agreed with the budget cuts they would oppose any consideration of losses of amount of parks or open spaces.
6. The main problems highlighted by the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) identified a potential adverse effect on the visually impaired members of the public. The parks manager contacted the Disability Access Adviser officer who reported there were now no suitable bodies to contact where previously the Disability forum used to operate. Officers also attended a meeting of the local access forum and presented the outline of the proposed savings and encouraged attendees to complete the online form.
7. Summarised below are the comments received in respect of the question;
'Please tell us what you think the Council should do to reduce the impact of this possible proposal, if it were to go ahead'

Table 3

Comment	Numbers	Percentage
No impact at all	4	7
Very little impact	15	27
A fairly big impact	23	42
A very big impact	13	24
Don't know	0	0
Total	55	100%

8. As can be seen in Table 3 13 responses (24%) said that these savings would have a very big impact and 23 (42%) stated that it would have a fairly big impact. Added together it is clear that the majority of respondents were concerned, albeit that due to the small sample size the findings

and comments should be interpreted as indicative only as they may not be representative of the population of Luton

9. Below is a sample of the comments with regards the common themes that emerged from the consultation.

‘Encourage more sponsorship of parks, gardens and green spaces’

‘I suppose you will have to prioritise. Also call upon volunteers to do gardening, schools students. Create projects that organisations can complete as part of their staff away days’

‘more personal safety methods will need to be employed if shrubs etc are not kept cut back, to ensure people feel safe using park facilities’

10. Previously sponsorship of memorial seats and bins has been limited to Vale cemetery. In the light of the diminishing budgets and from comments made in the public consultation, it is recommended that a change to this policy is made to allow for sponsorship in parks in respect of seats bins and trees. Customer would be asked to pay the full cost of providing the service.
11. Also from the consultation it is suggested that greater use of volunteers be considered. Whilst this suggestion is already working in some parts of the service, adoption of this suggestion is recommended to be delayed until the section has been through this savings process.

Goals and Objectives

12. The goals and objectives are to meet the reductions target of £1.418million and to make every effort to reduce spend/increase income in order to minimise the need for redundancies.

Proposal

13. As mentioned above to achieve the reduction of £1.418million, this will be carried out in three phases

Phase I £577.2k

14. Table 4 below show the services withdrawn from the 1st April 2013. The full value of Phase I savings will not be realised in 2013/14 as some of the proposals will be implemented part way through the year.

Table 4.

Services	Proposals
Arboriculture	<p>Ceasing of replacement tree planting and the retained service will only respond to maintenance of the council's tree stock where there is a statutory requirement in respect of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Occupiers Liability Acts in that the council has a duty of care to people who visit the council's property or adjoin it, and for the safety of all visitors.• The Highways Act by ensuring safety for highway users from trees within falling distance of the highway.

Grounds Maintenance	<p>Floral</p> <p>From June 2013 onwards the bedding displays across the town including parks, town centre and war memorials will be replaced by perennial plants. The grass cutting contract with OCS expired on the 22 March 2013 and 11 employees have now been TUPE transferred into the Council occupying posts that have been purposely been kept vacant. A reduction in the frequency from 17 to 12 cuts will be carried out by this group this summer. Grass cutting on conservation areas will be reduced to the legal minimum required by either the Council owning Sites of Special Scientific Interest or having a duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006</p>
Total	603.4

Phase II £735.5

15. Phase II savings are planned to be implemented by the 1st April 2014. To achieve this target date Members are asked to approve consultation with the employees leading to a further report on the outcome to the 23rd September 2013 meeting.

Services	Proposal
Remainder of Grounds maintenance	<p>To significantly reduce the maintenance frequencies of the Council's shrub beds to as little as one visit a year in some low priority locations.</p> <p>Implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large amounts of weed may be evident at all times of the year • Unless carefully managed with appropriate priority given to areas likely to affect the public, this could place the Council in breach of its obligations to protect and assert the rights of highway users under the Highways Act 1980. • Complaints relating to overgrown vegetation are likely to significantly increase. <p>The frequency of grass cutting would reduce from 12 to between 6 or 8 cuts per year where grass cutting would be retained. Large areas of open spaces and highway verges would only be cut once a year.</p> <p>Implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cutting grass at this length produces a large amount of clippings which are not removed. This material will be present for long periods giving an untidy appearance to the street scene. People will walk the grass onto the pavements and this may cause a hazard to pedestrians. Also clipping has the potential to block drains and roadside gullies adding costs to other Council budgets. • It is anticipated that service complaints associated to grass cutting would significantly increase at this level of provision. <p>**Transfer of employees from Stockwood Park Discovery Centre gardens to the Cultural trust (see paragraph 15 below)</p> <p>Implications none</p>
Infrastructure costs	To reduce annual revenue spends on maintenance of parks infrastructure including seats, bins, materials etc to a minimum level.

	<p>Implications none</p> <p>Parks sports Wigmore Valley park provides three adult, one junior and mini pitches and the from the annual survey the take up rate for the adult pitches in 2011/12 season was 75% and the other smaller sized pitches rarely used. The Wigmore Valley Park building is being used on a temporary basis by Shamrock Boxing Club which still means that if football is stopped then the building will be occupied avoiding it becoming empty and liable to vandalism.</p> <p>The proposal is to close this facility as a venue for both summer and winter football as there is spare capacity at other nearby facilities.</p> <p>Implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This has the potential to lead to an increase in anti social behaviour (motor bikes) due to a lack of presence in the park at the weekends. <p>Mitigation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer football facilities are available from other providers in the borough. • The pitches at this venue are subject to regular flooding and due to the settling of underlying ground the surface is uneven.
Head office (part)	<p>To reduce revenue spends in relation to the Parks head office and support services by implementing a restructure.</p> <p>Implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Parks Service may not be able to meet the council's performance indicators at peak times in relation to answering telephone calls and responding to correspondence. • Response times to correspondence/enquires are likely to increase.
Cost saving	£735.5
<p>16. **To assist in achieving the savings target officers have been meeting with the Cultural trust to investigate if it is possible to transfer the responsibility for maintenance of the Stockwood Park Discovery Centre to the trust from 1st April 2014. The Cultural trust officers are in favour of this suggestion which would be subject to approval by their board. Permission is sought to start consultations with the effected employees and this to be included in the 23rd September 2013 Executive report.</p> <p>Phase III</p> <p>17. The plan for Phase III is a further restructure in the remaining head office to achieve the saving of £105.5k.</p> <p>Employee implications</p> <p>18. Currently the grounds maintenance has a total of 72.2fte posts which will need to reduced by up to 21.2fte by the 1st April 2014.</p>	
Key Risks	
19. The following risks have been identified;	

- That the reduced maintenance frequencies will have a detrimental effect on the image of the town which could lead to businesses not being attracted to relocate to Luton.
- With the likely decrease of park usage it is likely that there will be a subsequent increase in the already poor health statistics for the town.
- The Parks Service may be unable to meet the council's performance indicators at peak times in relation to answer telephone calls and responding to correspondence and the Council's reputation damaged
- Reduced maintenance & lack of community support may lead to the council losing its green flag status for its current 5 green flag parks.
- That the reduced maintenance leads to an increase of fly tipping, littering & anti social behaviour that has a detriment effect on other council services budgets.
- If parks and the street scene appear to be abandoned and run down then it has been proved on many instances that they will be treated that way leading to perhaps a much higher level of crime, vandalism & anti social behaviour.
- To possible increase of sickness levels of the remaining employees leading to service difficulties.

Consultations

Consultation will be required with the employees

Appendices attached:

Appendix A - IIA

Background Papers:

None

IMPLICATIONS

		Clearance – agreed by:
Legal	The legal responsibilities of the Council in respect of its ownership and maintenance of open space, are addressed in this report	Clive Tobin on 15 th April 2013.
Finance	The financial implications are outlined in the body of the report	Darren Lambert Finance Manager for Environment and Regeneration on the 12 th April 2013
Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) – Key Points		
Equalities/ Cohesion/Inclusion (Social Justice)	<p>An IIA has been carried out and the following impacts have been identified:</p> <p>Disability – reducing the frequency of shrub pruning will have a negative impact and will lead to more growth overhanging pathways alongside roads and in the parks and open spaces. This could cause danger to, in particular, people with visual impairment, wheelchair/mobility scooter users and people with pushchairs</p> <p>Mitigation</p> <p>The highways are inspected regularly and one of the criteria inspected is whether there are any obstructions to the highway</p>	Maureen Drummond, Social Justice Adviser, 11 April 2013

	<p>including the pathway. In future a priority will have to be given to those shrubs beds that abut a pathway which again are adjacent to a carriageway.</p> <p>Social Justice Currently parks and open spaces are one of the only free facilities available for families on low incomes. If the quality and perception of safety and security on these sites are reduced it will have a disproportionate negative affect on low income families</p> <p>Mitigation None available as there will consequently be a reduction in the numbers of employees present in the park.</p>	
Environment	This report does have a negative impact on the quality of the environment. As outlined by the IAA, a reduction in service delivery is likely to see an increase in grass, shrubs and weeds on street, and therefore the street scene will appear to what many people will describe as unkempt and overgrown.	Agreed by Strategy & Sustainability Manager on the 10/04/2013
Health	<p>With the likely decrease of park usage it is likely that there will be a subsequent increase in the already poor health statistics for the town.</p> <p>Other actions and activities/initiatives will hopefully offset this downward pressure and the town's health statistics will continue to improve.</p>	Agreed by Shahin Sexual Health Improvement Manager 12/04/13
Community Safety		
Staffing		
Other		

FOR EXECUTIVE ONLY - Options:

- a) Not to approve the report.
- b) To make alternative savings by reducing another service.