

Committee(s): Open Spaces and City Gardens West Ham Park Education Board Epping Forest and Commons Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queens Park	Dated: 13 July 2021 13 July 2021 9 September 2021 13 September 2021 29 September 2021
Subject: Two year review of the Open Spaces Department's learning programme, 2019-21	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Director, Open Spaces Department	For Information
Report author: Abigail Tinkler, Head of Learning	

Summary

This report and appendices provide Members with an overview of the Open Spaces learning programme from 2019 to 2021. The programme has received core funding since April 2019 and delivers school, youth, play, community and volunteering opportunities to children and adults at Hampstead Heath, West Ham Park and Epping Forest. Key highlights include:

- The programme engaged over 44,000 participants in facilitated learning activities over the two years.
- The programme continued to reach audiences in need during the Covid pandemic, producing an innovative programme in line with each stage of restrictions.
- Programme evaluation showed a positive change across five impact areas: connection, understanding, wellbeing, confidence and involvement.

Recommendation

Members are asked to: Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. In 2016 the Open Spaces Department launched a new centrally co-ordinated learning programme. Following a successful three years, the Open Spaces Department's resource base was increased to provide core funding for the learning programme from April 2019.
2. The programme was developed in response to concern over health and wellbeing inequalities as people in deprived areas face barriers to accessing nature and associated health and wellbeing benefits. The programme has the following aims and outputs:

- Engage urban and deprived communities close to three open spaces: Hampstead Heath, Epping Forest (including Wanstead Flats) and West Ham Park
- Deliver five learning impact areas: understanding, confidence, involvement, wellbeing, and connection
- Schools service operating out of Hampstead Heath, Epping Forest, West Ham Park
- Green Talent programme working with young people struggling in education and/or furthest from the job market
- Play activities at Hampstead Heath
- Volunteer development and community engagement.

Current Position

3. This report provides, as Appendix 1, a detailed two year review of the Open Spaces learning programme from 2019 to 2021.
4. The review outlines the successful school, play, youth, community and volunteering programme delivered in 2019-20, including:
 - Schools service operating from Hampstead Heath, Epping Forest and West Ham Park, reaching students in London's most deprived boroughs including Tower Hamlets, Newham, Hackney, Islington, Haringey, Brent and Camden.
 - Green Talent programme working with young people struggling in education and/or furthest from the job market, including pupil referral units, young carers and young refugees.
 - Play activities at Hampstead Heath, reaching children and families from some of the most deprived wards to the south of the Heath, including Gospel Oak Ward where there is 39% child poverty.
 - Volunteer development and community outreach work, including a successful partnership with 'Ambition, Aspire, Achieve', an organisation that works and supports families from very deprived areas in Newham.
 - The 2019-20 programme reached over 40,000 participants and exceeded its participation target by 7%.
5. The review outlines the innovative approach taken in response to the Covid pandemic and associated restrictions, including:
 - A series of nature-focused activities which schools and families could do themselves – for example, showing children how to create eco art or make a bird feeder. Activities were designed to include children at home with only limited resources by using simple items such as old cereal packets and milk cartons. Printed activity sheets were shared via food banks, community centres and hostels, reaching families who may not have access to a computer.

- Reaching out to groups in need, including a hostel for homeless families, young people who had been suffering from anxiety and depression over lockdown, and unaccompanied refugee minors, offering bespoke programmes including a virtual tour of Epping Forest.
 - Responding to concerns over the impact of the pandemic on mental health with new sessions designed to improve wellbeing, including an in-school sessions for schools who were unable to visit our Open Spaces, and outdoor facilitated sessions for groups of five (plus one facilitator) to coincide with the 'rule of six' outdoors.
 - An adapted school programme to engage the vulnerable children, children with special educational needs and disabilities, and key worker children who were attending schools (which were otherwise closed) within walking distance of West Ham Park and Hampstead Heath.
 - Regular in-school nature sessions for autistic children, bringing nature learning to the school whilst they were unable to travel to West Ham Park due to staff shortages during lockdown.
6. The programme's innovative approach to engagement through the Covid pandemic was featured in the Evening Standard, City Matters, Ham and High, Pro Landscaper and Epping Forest Guardian.

Key Data

7. The programme engaged 44,487 participants in facilitated learning activities over the two years. Of these, 40,369 participated in 2019 – 20, and 4,118 participated in 2020-21 when Covid restrictions limited face-to-face participation.
8. The school programme engaged schools in 15 London boroughs, including the seven London boroughs with the highest levels of poverty: Tower Hamlets, Newham, Hackney, Islington, Haringey, Brent and Camden.
9. The programme made a positive difference across the five learning impact areas, including:
- 107% increase in learning volunteers' feelings of confidence to explore our Open Spaces
 - 22% increase in family participants' sense of wellbeing
 - 15% increase in school programme participants' feelings of connection to our Open Spaces
 - 74% increase in Green Talent participants' feelings of involvement
 - 47% increase in Green Talent participant's understanding of the importance of green spaces.

(School and family programmes are one-off engagements, whereas Green Talent and volunteer engagement are longer term and have a greater impact. Evaluation toolkits developed by University College London and University of Derby.)

Corporate & Strategic Implications

10. The OS learning programme contributes to the delivery of all three of the CoL Corporate Plan's overarching aims and seven of the twelve outcomes:

- **Contribute to a flourishing society:**
People are safe and feel safe; People enjoy good health and wellbeing; People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential; Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need.
- **Support a thriving economy:**
We have access to the skills and talent we need.
- **Shape outstanding environments:**
We inspire enterprise, excellence, creativity and collaboration; Our spaces are secure, resilient and well-maintained.

11. The OS Learning Programme delivers aspects of the CoL Social Mobility Strategy, CoL Education Strategy, and OS Business Plan. See appendix two for details.

Financial summary

Year	Actual Exp £	Actual Inc £	Actual Net Income/Expenditure £	Budgeted Net Income/Expenditure £
2019/20	357,655	39,654	318,000	395,000
2020/21	336,019	6,784	329,235	312,000

12. The 2019/20 budget was underspent due to vacant posts within the team. The 2020/21 budget was overspent due to reduced school income following school closures and restrictions (COVID-19).

Conclusion

13. The Open Spaces Learning Programme was successful in engaging 44,487 participants in facilitated activities from 2019 to 2021. The programme adapted to the restrictions and impacts of the Covid pandemic and continued to reach Londoners living in areas of poverty and deprivation, young people struggling with mental health, children with special educational needs and disabilities, and vulnerable children. Evaluation also showed that the programme had a positive impact on participants' understanding, wellbeing, confidence, connection and involvement with nature.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Review of the Open Spaces Learning Programme 2019-21
- Appendix 2 Strategic Value
- Appendix 2 Learning Principles
- Appendix 3 Maps showing school programme reach and areas of deprivation

Background Papers

Three year review of the Open Spaces Learning Places' programme 2016 – 19

Abigail Tinkler, Head of Learning, Open Spaces Department

T: 07740 537 582, E: abigail.tinkler@cityoflondon.gov.uk