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| <b>Committee(s)</b>   | <b>Dated:</b>                    |
| Epping Forest and Commons Committee   | 23 November 2023                 |
| Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood, and Queen's Park Committee  | 29 November 2023                 |
| Natural Environment Board   | 4 December 2023                  |
| West Ham Park Committee   | 4 December 2023                  |
| <b>Subject:</b> Business Plan 2023/24 – Progress Report (mid-year, April-September 2023)                  | <b>Public</b>                    |
| <b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b> | Outcomes:<br>2, 3, 5, 10, 11, 12 |
| <b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>                                  | No                               |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Bob Roberts, Interim Executive Director, Environment                                 | <b>For Information</b>           |
| <b>Report author:</b><br>Joanne Hill, Environment Department  |                                  |

### Summary

This report provides Members with an update on progress against the Environment Department's high-level Business Plan 2023/24. Due to the complexity and scope of the department, three separate High-Level Business Plans were produced to reflect our three key Committee 'clusters'. This report refers to the Business Plan which covers the Natural Environment Division and City Gardens.

The report summarises the progress that has been made against major workstreams and performance measures during the first six months of 2023/24. An update on the financial position is provided in the separate Chamberlain's report also presented to this Committee.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the content of this report and its appendices.

### Main Report

#### Background

1. The Open Spaces and City Gardens Committee approved the High-Level Departmental Business Plan 2023/24 on 13 February 2023.
2. The Business Plan sets out the major workstreams and key performance indicators (KPIs) for the year ahead.
3. To ensure your Committee is kept informed, progress made against the high-level Business Plan is reported to you every six months. This approach allows Members to ask questions and have a timely input into areas of particular importance to them.

## **Current Position**

### **Major workstreams**

4. The high-level Business Plan set out workstreams that would be undertaken during 2023/24. Throughout the year, your Committee is kept informed on the progress of the key workstreams by way of regular Assistant Director Update reports and/or separate detailed reports. A summary of progress made to the end of September 2023 is presented below.

### **Carbon Removals Project**

- a) Proposals for rescoping the project will be presented to the Natural Environment Board and Policy and Resources Committee for approval in the coming months.
  - The proposals extend the original project scope (i.e. creating new habitats to increase carbon sequestration capacity) to include measures to protect the existing carbon sequestration capacity.
  - The additional proposals have been drawn up in liaison with external consultants, Arcadis.

### **Learning and Play Programmes**

- b) During the first six months of the year the following groups took part in activities which enhanced wellbeing and nature connection:
  - 10,214 school students
  - 164 students with special education needs
  - 323 13–25-year-olds, and
  - 13,733 play participants.

### **North London Open Spaces**

- c) Support the development of volunteer skills, networks and confidence, and improve volunteer wellbeing.
  - In conjunction with partner organisation, Heath Hands, a varied programme of walks, talks, training workshops and social events runs throughout the year at Hampstead Heath.
  - The programme includes twice-weekly health walks, monthly forest bathing workshops and training in a variety of topics from bird and tree identification to history and geology. There are also 'toolbox talks' at the start of each volunteer session to aid learning.
  - All wellbeing is monitored and tracked via the annual Volunteer Opinion Survey.
- d) Develop income generating activities and continue to investigate further opportunities for funding
  - Initial proposals have been submitted by North London Open Spaces for discussion as part of the ongoing Natural Environment Charity Review. Also, Officers continue to review existing licences and agreements to ensure that market rate income is being received.
- e) Develop a gift aid system for the Natural Environment Charities
  - Hampstead Heath Charity and Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Charity can

receive Gift Aid if donations are made through the 'Just Giving' platform which collects Gift Aid from HMRC on the charities' behalf.

f) Highgate Roman Kiln

- The National Lottery Heritage Fund Awarded £250k to The Friends of Roman Highgate Kiln charity for the 'Firing London's Imagination Project'.
- A Heritage Officer has been engaged to provide support, with 50% of the cost funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

### **Epping Forest**

g) Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS).

- The Countryside Stewardship (CSS) application for the second half of the Forest is due to be completed in October 2023.
- The CSS application for buffer land will need to wait until the carbon removals rescoping has been resolved and additional staff are recruited.
- The CSS application for Wanstead Park is dependent on sufficient staffing resource to provide a project lead.

### **The Commons**

h) Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB)

- There has been no further progress by Chilterns AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) regarding their boundary review.

i) Stakeholder engagement on the Burnham Beeches habitat management programme

- A partnership meeting was held in early August. Various actions were agreed and will be followed up at a further meeting on 8 November 2023.

j) Burnham Beeches Strategic Access Management and Monitoring program (SAMM)

- Regular updates have been provided to partners and the annual SAMMs progress review meeting is scheduled for 11 December 2023.
- Engagement activity is being provided by Community Engagement Rangers as required.

### **City Gardens**

k) Biodiversity Action Plan

- The Biodiversity Action Plan programme to improve gardens and planting along the biodiversity routes has commenced, and the first two gardens (St Mary Aldermanbury and All Hallows by the Tower) have been delivered.
- The vacant post which is being funded by the Woodland Accelerator Fund has now been filled and trial pits are being dug ahead of this year's planting programme to deliver the Street Tree Development Programme.

l) Fleet replacement

- Electric vehicles to replace the remaining diesel fleet will be delivered in Spring 2024.

## **Performance Measures**

5. 10 Key Performance Indicators were identified in the Business Plan. These measures are monitored to assess performance against targets and the progression of key workstreams. Details of performance to the end of September 2023 is provided at Appendix 1.

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

**Strategic implications** – The monitoring of key workstreams and performance measures links to the achievement of the aims and outcomes set out in the Corporate Plan 2023-24.

**Financial Implications** – Financial implications are addressed in the separate Chamberlain’s report presented to this Committee.

**Resource implications** – Recruitment to vacant posts across the division is underway.

**Risk implications** - Risks to achieving the objectives set out in the Business Plan are identified and managed in accordance with the City of London Risk Management Framework. Risk Registers are reported to this Committee quarterly.

**Climate implications** – An update on the Carbon Removals Project is presented in a separate report to your Committee.

**Charity implications** - Many of the Natural Environment sites are registered charities. Any decisions must be taken in the best interests of the relevant charity.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 - Performance measures

## **Contact**

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