

Committee:	Date:
Open Spaces & City Gardens	20 April 2015
Subject:	Public
Approval of Equipment Funding Offers	
Report of:	For Decision
Director of Open Spaces	
Summary	
<p>The financial impact of resource restrictions for both local authorities and the City of London will result in more opportunities for services delivered in partnership, including the external funding of equipment. This report considers whether a policy principle is required to ensure decisions made by open space management committees are consistent.</p>	
Recommendation	
Member's views are sought.	

Main Report

Background

1. Local authority's functions and responsibilities include education, learning, health, social care and leisure; including play and well-being. Current resource restrictions are resulting in new opportunities for partnership working.
2. At the Epping Forest and Commons Committee on 12th January 2015, consideration was given to a request from the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) to install natural play equipment on Forest Land at Hollow Ponds, Leyton Flats and thus remedy a local play deficiency. The request included a commitment to:
 - fund the design, production and installation of the equipment;
 - appropriate insurance;
 - a care and maintenance agreement, to ensure the equipment is inspected, maintained and removed at the end of its life.

There were also mitigation requirements from Natural England to help ensure SSSI restoration objectives are achieved by 2020; a botanical survey of the acid grassland and a pond strategy with bankside restoration.

3. Members noted that the many benefits of natural play, including positive impacts on the mental, physical and social wellbeing of children and their relationship with nature. Installing natural play structures was in line with corporate strategy and had no major legal or property implications. It addressed the genuine need for play facilities in the area around Hollow

- Pond, satisfied local community demands and promoted positive publicity for the City of London. The Committee approved the request, with the costs of design, construction and installation being met entirely by LBWF.
4. The natural play facilities have subsequently been installed with £30,000 of financial support from LBWF.
 5. On 23 March 2015, the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee were advised by the Superintendent of a proposal by the London Borough of Camden (LBC) to install outdoor gym equipment at Parliament Hill, which would be aimed at people who had been advised to carry out additional exercise for their health and wellbeing. The proposal was subject to LBC undertaking an assessment of need based on the demographic of the area to ensure that their investment had the greatest impact on physical activity within the borough. Members were advised that the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee were supportive of the proposal but anxious about the location of the equipment, which would be identified within the business case.
 6. In response to a Member's question, the Superintendent advised that the City of London Corporation did not have financial provision within the local risk budget to make a capital contribution towards the outdoor gym equipment. He added that a report would be submitted for consideration once the proposals had been finalised. Members noted that an evaluation of outdoor gym equipment carried out by the LBC would be circulated.

Current Position

7. With current financial pressures, local authorities are looking at all opportunities to deliver their services and priorities, sometimes in new or alternative ways. Substantial reductions in central government grants have left local authorities with major decisions to make over the levels of service they provide. Whilst the City of London Corporation is not simply a local authority, we do provide local services. Like other organisations, we are facing serious economic challenges; we are, however, working hard to ensure our financial position remains stable. In reviewing our services we are challenging what and how we provide them, as well as the way we currently operate. This will, allow us to explore more efficient, effective and innovative ways of working.
8. Another driver for applications received to date, is the geography of the local area; a lack of strategic green space in local authority ownership to facilitate play provision.
9. The Lawn Tennis Association and Football Association have both recently produced new strategies focussing on supporting grass roots

activity. They recognise that local authorities have historically been leading providers of facilities and that with new financial pressures there may now be a need for different funding models.

10. Although the precise charitable objectives of each of our eight trusts are subtly different, overall they focus on the preservation of our open spaces for the recreation and enjoyment of the public. Any offers of equipment need to take account of these objectives, which are the responsibility of each of the three management committees. A committee may for example, determine that it wishes to financially partner a proposal because of the benefits to its charitable objectives. It could in the same way determine that it wishes to stop doing something else, to release the funding required.
11. These recent approaches from local authorities highlight the potential for inconsistency in decision making by the management committees. This Committee may wish to consider whether an overarching policy principle is required.

Options

12. Option 1- Decisions on equipment funding offers should be made by the respective Management Committee based on the individual case but linked to the .
13. Option 2 – Decision on equipment funding offers should be made by the respective Management Committee based on the principle that any offer should be self-funding for the lifetime of the equipment.
14. Option 3 – No overarching policy principle is required

Proposals

15. Member's views on the options and implications are sought.

Conclusion

16. The financial impact of resource restrictions for both local authorities and the City of London will result in more opportunities for services delivered in partnership, including the external funding of equipment. This report considers whether a policy principle is required to ensure decisions made by open space management committees are consistent.

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