

Summary Findings of the Parks Action Group work on Finance and Skills and Knowledge of 21st Century parks professionals

Finance

- Difficult to gain true comparisons on actual spend on parks by authority. (different definitions and also as to what's included)
- Over a quarter parks budgets lost across England since 2010/11
- Slightly more than losses against similar neighbourhood services
- Losses most marked in urban authorities
- Significant benefits to investing in parks - £1 investment gave £36 worth of benefits (Sheffield study)
- Increasing reliance on income generation and external funding

Impact of cuts

Immediate impacts:

- Reduced maintenance
- Closure of facilities and buildings
- Lack of staff – increase in ASB and vandalism

Long-term impacts:

- Loss of skills and public liaison capability
- Lack of support for Friends groups and volunteers
- Further reduction in funding and community involvement
- Visual decline and reduced feelings of safety
- Loss of mental and physical well being benefits

Skills and Knowledge

- Focus Groups, Surveys, seminars, advisory groups and 121 interviews carried out.
- Local authority officers, training providers, trust managers, accreditation organisations.
- Detailed picture of skills and knowledge required by today's parks professionals.
- Difficulties arise due to varied roles and responsibilities and service location within local authority structures.
- Different routes into service also results in wide range of skills and knowledge.

Developing the modern parks professional.

- New skills and competencies now being clearly identified with varying levels of confidence against them.
- Concern about loss of horticultural skills
- Gaps in training provision in areas such as commercial acumen, marketing of assets, influencing policy makers and stakeholders and championing the service.
- Need for development of a competency framework linked to supportive training programme which will support staff at different levels to create career pathway

Work being undertaken

- Development of competency framework and training matrix
- Liaise with training organisations to look at ‘filling gaps’ and creating modular training packages.
- Consideration of more creative use of Apprenticeship Levy at all levels.
- Better use of ‘experts’ within the industry to support and mentor parks professionals.
- Identification of senior champions within organisations to speak up for parks service and its cross-cutting benefits.
- Profile raising campaign to promote attractiveness of parks and greenspaces career.

NEW MUNICIPALISM

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