

**To: The Scrutiny Housing Panel**

**Date: 7<sup>th</sup> February 2014**

**Report of: Head of Law and Governance**

**Title of Report: Report back on comments and recommendations made at the Panel meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014**

## **Summary and Recommendations**

**Purpose of report:** To report the outcome of comments and recommendations made at the Housing Panel held on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

**Scrutiny Lead Member:** Councillor Mark Mills

**Executive Lead Members:** Councillors Mark Lygo, Scott Seamons and Ed Turner

**Recommendation:** To comment on the responses and to decide what further action, if any is required.

## **Introduction**

- (1) This report updates the Panel on comments received from Board Members and Officers on items considered at the Housing Panel meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014:
  - Improving quality in the private rent sector – A City Council Letting Agency
  - Satisfaction with Parks – Details of survey results

## **Improving quality in the private rent sector – A City Council Letting Agency**

- (2) The Panel considered a report prepared by the Head of Housing and Property which provided further information on the benefits and disadvantages of a City Council Lettings Agency.

- (3) The Panel agreed:
- (a) That it was not appropriate for the Council to establish a Local Letting Agency with the purpose of driving up housing standards in the private rented sector in the City;
  - (b) That the Council should further consider alternative approaches to this, that would seek to achieve the same policy objective through different means and to refer this to the Board Member for Housing.
- (4) Following the meeting, Board Members, Councillors Ed Turner and Scott Seamons, whose portfolios this issue bridged accepted the recommendations of the Panel as they wished to improve the situation regarding, physical improvements, the rights of tenants and the financial position of tenants. While they did not see a Council run local letting agency as an appropriate approach to deliver this at this time, they would continue to look at how future policies/initiatives could achieve the same goals.

#### **Satisfaction with Parks – Details of the Survey Results**

- (5) The Panel considered a report by the Head of Leisure, Parks and Communities which provided further information on the performance of Parks Services, and performance indicator LP013.
- (6) The Panel agreed:
- (a) To forward the comments made at the meeting to the Board Member for Leisure and the relevant Executive Director and to have any comments reported back to the Panel;
  - (b) To continue to monitor satisfaction of the Parks Service.
- (7) Following the meeting the Head of Leisure, Parks and Communities made the following comments:

*Panel Comment 1* - That actual users of the parks should be consulted rather than using the Talk Back Panel, for example football clubs;

*Response* - Actual users of the parks are also consulted in addition to the Talk Back panel. We have an annual Parks Satisfaction Survey that has been in place since 2000. Park Rangers interview customers to complete the questionnaire or customers can complete it on-line. We are in the process of analysing the 2013 results and setting up the 2014 survey.

*Panel Comment 2* -That the Parks Friends/User Groups should be surveyed on their satisfaction of their parks, groups that were established to work with the Council to improve the parks and green spaces in the City;

*Response* - Our Friends groups have the opportunity to complete the annual satisfaction survey, and sometimes volunteer to interview customers. The Friends are also involved in the annual review of Park Management Plans and help set priorities for improvement.

*Panel Comment 3* - That following the increased investment in parks especially in play areas, that this should be monitored to ensure that these facilities are maintained;

*Response* - In 2012 the annual Parks Satisfaction Survey included a section specifically on play areas to monitor usage and satisfaction, this is monitored using CORVU.

- (8) The Head of Leisure, Parks and Communities also provided further information on the comments in paragraph (7) of this report.
- (a) The parks service has improved significantly over recent years, the satisfaction level of 80% is the second highest of all council services does have many variables. The positive work and some context that details what we are doing to continue to improve the service is detailed below:
- We are delivering a continued programme of improvements, this includes; tennis Courts, Multi-use Games Areas (MUGAS), fitness trails, pavilions and continued improvements to play areas (the 70<sup>th</sup> play area was completed last Sept).
  - We now have a fifth Green Flag Park at Blackbird Leys Park (*this park has been transformed from poor quality green space into vibrant Green Flag Park*)
  - Shortlisted for the best Parks Team at the Association for Public Service Excellence Awards and shortlisted for the most improved parks team based on our performance data (which compares our benchmark data)
  - 622 people volunteering between April 2011- April 2012 and 17 Friends Groups
  - Green spaces funding achieved - £172,000 for Port Meadow, £60,000 for Wild Oxford and £60,000 WREN funding for Spindleberry Park
  - Staff attendance is forecast to be less than five days per person, which for an area such as parks with lots a manual work is a major achievement.
- (b) Dog fouling is far better managed. We have managed to increase the amount of dog faeces collected from dog bins to 45 tonnes in the last 12 months. This figure has doubled in the last 3 years. This

is due to a combination of our work with friends of, education, and improved enforcement. We are also training more staff to be able to issue FPNs.

- (c) Whilst the service is committed to continually improve performance, there are many factors that impact satisfaction of the city's parks such as increasing expectations, there are a number of parks managed by others (e.g. university, parish council's, voluntary bodies that are included in the score).
- (d) An invite to the Panel Members to attend a tour of some of the parks to further see the improvements and initiatives that are underway.

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