

# PARKFORCE FACT PACK

How six local authorities created their Parkforce

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space

# **PARKFORCE: A TEAM OF PEOPLE DEDICATED TO MAKING PARKS SAFE, WELCOMING PLACES**

Park staff are there to enhance the public's enjoyment of parks, helping to engage with the community, and to create safe, popular and beautiful parks. How can this vision for Parkforce be made reality?

In our report *Parks need Parkforce*, CABI Space sets out the case for local authorities to increase the number of on-site dedicated staff in their parks. We ask local authorities to consider finding ways of developing and sustaining investment in people who care for public spaces, but we also recognise the challenges.

Here we offer advice on how to address the age-old problem of revenue funding, and whether to contract parks staff or keep them in-house. We also delve more deeply into the solutions developed by the six local authorities to deliver a successful Parkforce across their parks.

By example, we show that a range of different solutions exists, and demonstrate how local authorities have found answers to questions such as: What role can the green space strategy play? How should the service be designed and funded? Should it be in-house or contracted? How is joined up working achieved? Each solution has been tailored to local circumstances.

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# UNEARTHING NEW SOURCES OF FUNDING: FINDING THE MONEY FOR YOUR PARK TO GROW

Before you start looking for new money to fund new services, it's critical to know what you're spending on existing services. A good approach to this is to produce a list of all the resources you have then spend according to your priorities.

In Oldham, efforts were being spread too thinly to make an impact. By redistributing budgets, 12 parks have been completely refurbished. To keep up this new standard in Coalshaw Green Park, a respected local person runs an on-site café. She's backed up by a mobile ranger service, and the friends group reports loutish incidents to the council's anti-social behaviour team. The park has won the Green Flag Award for three consecutive years. Visit [www.greenflagawards.org.uk](#) to see what you need to do to reach the standard in your parks and green spaces.

A good knowledge of your budget may not be enough to expand or fund a new Parkforce. You'll discover that finding extra funding in-house requires political will. And tenacity. Despite the financial hurdles, however, providing a Parkforce is a win-win situation for an authority intent on community satisfaction. A survey of 1500 respondents to CABE Space's Manifesto told us that bad parks are those lacking park keepers or wardens, which are blighted with anti-social behaviour and where there's a problem with safety (*Parks and squares who cares?* CABE Space 2005).

At Pearson Park in Hull, cultural and racial tensions had turned the park into an intimidating, unwelcoming place. Now a thriving hub of the community, there's someone on-site all the time funded by central government and the local area committee. In 2003, seeing the value of the park centre being staffed and open seven days a week, the council dedicated revenue to keep the initiative going permanently. For more examples of turning a spiral of decline into one of improvement, have a look at the publication, *Decent parks? Decent behaviour?* (CABE Space 2005).

Finding funding requires skills that staff at the London Borough of Brent clearly have. Income streams come from public / private partnerships such as leasing public land, renting venues for weddings and from planning obligations. The council invests in the quality of its current sites rather than increasing the quantity of green spaces. That includes providing community park wardens, part of the Brent warden service.

Some useful sources of funding dedicated for improving parks and green spaces are lottery funding and the government's Safer, Stronger Communities Fund, which unites several existing ODPM and Home Office funding streams – see [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk). Friends and other community groups can also tap into funding pots dedicated to community initiatives. Members of Southampton's Freemantle Youth Forum pursued this route, raising money for improvements including a shelter for park users that's lit at night.

A good way to delve into the opportunities to fund your Parkforce is to talk to other authorities. The Green Flag Award scheme provides a forum for its judges across England and Wales at [www.greenflagawards.org.uk](http://www.greenflagawards.org.uk). The regional parks forums are another useful source of information [www.green-space.org.uk](http://www.green-space.org.uk). In London, the London Parks Benchmarking Group offers an opportunity to share experiences at [www.lpbhg.org.uk](http://www.lpbhg.org.uk).

# IN-HOUSE OR OUTSOURCE? THE INS AND OUTS OF PARK MAINTENANCE

CABE Space's Parkforce campaign calls for on-site staffing in every significant urban park. Fine – no-one would argue with that, but how do you deliver the obvious benefits of this within your existing constraints? For a start, question whether your resources really match your priorities. If they do, the next step is to specify the staff required to deliver them. This, of course, could be through an external contract or one delivered in-house. It could cover green spaces or the whole street scene. There's no 'one-size-fits-all' approach and the best sources of information are public authorities that have successfully provided on-site staff. Some of these are outlined below.

Letting a new contract, or renewing an existing one, are the prime times to specify the staff you want. However, you can still introduce new approaches when you're part way through an existing contract. Having a good relationship with your contractor is critical, as demonstrated by the Royal Parks Agency. It only employs three permanent on-site staff in Hyde Park, yet has a wide range of other contractor-supplied on-site staff, from plantsmen to badged volunteers. In Stockport, the city council has removed the parks staff from their main contract to allow for greater staff training and skills development, although you may prefer this to be delivered by the contractor. The client team at the London Borough of Lewisham includes people with staff management experience and demands high levels of training from its contractor. If you're going to ask contractors to provide on-site staff, you'll need to specify exactly what you want them to do, and how you expect them to be trained. Writing a person specification will help you clarify their role. Output specifications are fine, but they sometime conceal assumptions that your contractor may not share.

Creating new 'streetscape' contracts with a wider remit to manage roads and public spaces allows councils to put in place more multi-skilled staff. This reflects the objectives of the Parkforce campaign by bringing existing staff together to create more of a neighbourhood management approach, where several teams work together to care for parks, streets and the spaces around housing. The basic rule is to make sure you know what you've got, then prioritise. There's no reason why street wardens should stop patrolling at the park gates - the London Borough of Southwark demonstrates this by linking their park staff with their neighbourhood wardens team.

Accepting that the community is a valuable resource, Parkforce represents everyone who works in parks, whether employed or voluntary. Gloucester City Council has moved to a 'streetscape' contract and has ensured the continued involvement of park friends groups by providing a nominated officer from the council to support each group. In addition, the council's community park keepers and community rangers act as day-to-day contact points for these groups. Support works both ways, with friends groups involved in management issues and the council welcoming volunteers from the groups to work in parks.

## **DELIVERING A NEW PARKFORCE: SIX CASE STUDIES**

In *Parks need Parkforce* CABE Space features some of the people who make up Parkforce through six case studies. But what are the circumstances in which Parkforce operates?

# CASE STUDY: SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL MOWBRAY PARK

In 1993/94, the cost of repairs needed because of vandalism in Sunderland's parks was £40,570. In 1998/99, total expenditure on repairs was £2,410. What role did the introduction of the park warden scheme play, and how was it implemented?

## What precipitated the introduction of the park warden scheme?

- The system of an on-site presence was introduced in response to high levels of vandalism, and public fear of parks.
- The six parks with dedicated park wardens were selected because of particularly high rates of anti-social behaviour and vandalism.
- The scheme was piloted in two parks in 1994/95, and the positive results (reduction in vandalism by 50% and an increase in use) led to it be expanded to six parks.

## What are the contractual and funding arrangements?

- Since 1993 responsibility for security in Sunderland's city centre parks has been contracted to an external security company. Over the same period, grounds maintenance has been retained in-house.
- To minimize costs and streamline management, the park wardens were added to the council's existing security contract. The council's security contract is managed by the Development and Regeneration Directorate.
- The contract for the park wardens has remained largely unchanged since 1993. The main developments are, the addition of one mobile warden to the original team of six static wardens and the cost, which has risen from £70,000 per annum in 1994/1995, to £130,000 in 2005/2006.
- The wardens are funded entirely by the council.
- Over the past 12 years three companies have managed the security contract: Burns Security (1993-1998), Securicor (1999-2004); Pegasus Security (January 2005 – present). Each contract has been let for a period of five years.

## What is the wardens' role?

- The wardens' responsibilities include a daily safety inspection of park facilities and furniture, reporting defects to the relevant department, distributing 'poop scoops', and picking up litter. All wardens have been given basic first aid training.
- This approach has limitations. "Originally we wanted the park wardens to get involved in education and community consultation, but we were told that the staff didn't have those skills," says Ian Coburn, a representative of the council's Community and Cultural Services Directorate.
- Monthly park warden meetings are attended by Ian Coburn, a representative of the Development and Regeneration Directorate, Pegasus Security's contract manager and the mobile park warden, who is employed in a supervisory role.

## Joined-up working

- The park wardens and Pegasus Security maintain a close working relationship with the police, and local friends groups. The wardens are on hand to identify problems, and call for appropriate support services – ie: requesting additional police patrols on mountain bikes.
- To date there have been no attempts to join up with other neighbourhood activities, however a Park Watch Scheme is under consideration, a more formal monitoring network between park users, resident and friends groups, and the authorities.

## Strategy

- At the time of writing, Sunderland's green space strategy was under development.
- There is substantial local political support for the warden scheme. A review of this support is imminent.

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# CASE STUDY: MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL KING GEORGE V PARK

A mobile park warden scheme has been introduced to cover all parks, green spaces and urban squares across the city, in line with the philosophy of the city council's parks strategy.

## How is the reintroduction of park staff linked to Manchester's parks strategy?

- Manchester's parks strategy, *Parks for all seasons*, was published in 1996. It was based on consultation with the public, which revealed that people wanted an increased official presence in the city's green spaces.
- "Returning staff to the front-line is a fundamental feature of Manchester's parks strategy," says Jeff Staniforth, City Parks Manager with Manchester City Council.
- The strategy outlines Manchester City Council's decision to employ park wardens as a 'human face' of the parks. "It is important that the park wardens have regular contact with park users, and are based in the parks," says Staniforth.
- The wardens' responsibilities include fund raising, working with and setting up friends groups, and liaising with all partner groups, including schools, the youth service, adult education services, and initiatives on valuing older people.
- Manchester City Council seeks to recruit 'all rounders' as park wardens. They are a mixed age group, although the majority are between 25 and 45. "They must also be willing and able to interact effectively with local people," says Staniforth.
- In 2001, a decision was taken to support the park wardens with a Park Security Force, a dedicated ten-strong team of security specialists, who work across the city.
- The mobile wardens also work alongside other colleagues who provide an on-site presence when the mobile wardens are not at hand. For example, in King George V Park, a network of friends groups, street wardens and sports development officers provide back-up.

## Funding and management arrangements

- Manchester City Council funds all the park wardens. They are employed by the Leisure Department, which has three divisions, Outdoor Leisure, Indoor Leisure and Sports Development.
- The 2005/2006 budget for the park wardens is £700,000.
- With the exception of short-term regeneration funding streams the wardens receive no external funding. Over the past four years, North Manchester Regeneration, New East Manchester, and the Inner South Regeneration Organisation have all contributed funds to park wardens.

## How is the service designed?

- A total of 32 park wardens are employed across Manchester's four areas and Heaton Park, a 600-acre park in the north of the city. The wardens cover all parks, green spaces, and urban squares across the city.
- All the wardens are mobile. The only exceptions are the four static wardens dedicated to Heaton Park.

## Joined up working

- Attending meetings, and maintaining communication with partners is a key feature of the job.
- Once a month all parks wardens attend ward co-ordination meetings, with councillors and resident groups. They also attend quarterly meetings with friends groups.
- Park wardens meet the police weekly, and hold fortnightly local tasking meetings, offering council officers opportunities to raise their concerns and report issues to the police.
- The wardens have been involved in setting up over 50 friends groups.
- "Wardens do joint work with friends groups, in which they sometimes take the lead. More often than not, they offer advice and support," says Staniforth.

# **CASE STUDY:** **MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL** **KING GEORGE V PARK CONT.**

## **Joined up working, cont.**

- The Park Security Force is in regular contact with the local police, and plays an integral role in the Local Authority Partnership (LAP), a police-led initiative to coordinate policing services.
- The park wardens operate independently of the street wardens. There are no plans to integrate the park wardens with a broader neighbourhood Street Scene Strategy.

## **Political support**

- There is strong local political support for the wardens in Manchester. "This has certainly increased over the past five years, as the impacts of the Parks Strategy have become more visible," says Staniforth

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# CASE STUDY: PRESTON CITY COUNCIL GRANGE PARK

The success of a park ranger scheme in one park in Preston has led to it being extended to cover all the major parks in the city.

## How were Preston's parks staffed before the introduction of dedicated staff?

- Throughout the Compulsory Competitive Tendering years (1986-1997), Preston saw a reduction in the number of staff based in parks. During this period much of the maintenance work was carried out by mobile maintenance teams working out of centrally located works depots. The only members of staff dedicated to parks were seasonal bowls attendants.

## When did improvements to the service begin?

- The first changes occurred at Grange Park, with the award of a £500,000 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant in 1999. This covered the cost of refurbishment, the construction of an interpretation centre, and the provision of a dedicated park ranger.
- Upon completion of the council's Fundamental Review of Parks and Open spaces in 2001, and following the success of the Grange Park ranger, it was agreed to increase the ranger service to the current number of six, covering all the major parks in Preston.

## Funding arrangements

- Besides the HLF grant, additional funding for the ranger service has been achieved via the redirection of existing resources through the removal of the seasonal bowls attendants.
- All internal funding is channelled through Preston City Council's Regeneration Community and Leisure Services Department.
- Originally one of the rangers was partially funded by Sure Start. When the funding expired in March 2004, Preston City Council entered into a partnership with South Ribble Borough Council, a neighbouring local authority, to provide a joint funded post to cover sites within both authority areas.

## What are the rangers' responsibilities?

- All rangers are dedicated to either a major park or a number of smaller green spaces. The rangers' site offices are shared with a dedicated gardener.
- Through regular patrols, rangers provide a uniformed presence on site promoting a sense of personal safety and confidence for park visitors.
- The service also promotes parks as an educational resource delivering a varied educational and events programme.

## Joined-up working

- Some of the rangers' site offices are used as a base for a community beat manager, an arrangement with Lancashire Constabulary.
- The ranger service works with schools to deliver the educational programme.

## What does the future hold?

- In April 2006 an additional ranger will take up post in a new sports recreation ground and nature reserve on the banks of the River Ribble. The fifteen-hectare site is being transformed with the assistance of funding from the Northwest Regional Development Agency. The ranger will be funded by the REMADE in Lancashire Programme.

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# CASE STUDY: BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL VICTORIA PARK

Support from the public for an increased on-site presence in their parks has led to the negotiation of an enhanced service from their contractors.

## The recent history of grounds maintenance in Bristol

- Since the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering in 1986, the management and maintenance of Bristol's parks has been managed by a large number of external and in-house organisations.
- Today there are three different approaches to parks management and maintenance across the city. Parks and green spaces in eight of the city's eleven areas are managed by Continental Landscapes, an external contractor; two smaller contract areas in the east of the city are managed by Bristol Contract Services, a division of the city council; and the Ashton Court Estate, a large semi-rural estate with a wide variety of facilities, is managed by a dedicated six-strong team of gardeners and rangers employed by the Department of Culture and Leisure.
- Continental Landscapes' (CL) contracts for grounds maintenance, which collectively cover approximately 75 per cent of Bristol's parks and green spaces, was let on 1 February 2004. Contracts are let for each area, and last for between four and six years, with an option to renew for a further three years.

## What precipitated the changes to the contract?

- Between 1999 and 2003, Bristol City Council conducted a number of public surveys, forums, and workshops. The consultation revealed strong support for an increased on-site presence in Bristol's parks. As a result, the 2004 version of CL's contract incorporated alterations with implications for park staff.
- "Since February 2004 Continental Landscapes has been required to provide an enhanced service as it relates to an on-site presence. Skills that staff must be competent in now include customer care, emergency first aid, and dealing with violent and aggressive behaviour," says Graham Evans, Parks Operations Manager with Bristol City Council.

- The current draft of the contract also specifies three levels of attendance – annual, seasonal, and weekends and evenings – depending on local requirements.

## Funding arrangements

- With some exceptions, all park staff in Bristol are funded through the Department of Culture and Leisure. The annual budget for 2005/2006 is approximately £2.9 million.
- External funding and support augments the annual budget. For instance, at the time of writing, interviews were underway for a dedicated member of staff, funded through the Safer Stronger Communities Fund, to undertake a review of safety across all of Bristol's parks and green spaces.

## How do on-site staff fit into the green space strategy?

- Bristol City Council adopted a Parks Strategy in 1997. This will be superseded in Autumn 2006 by a Green Spaces Strategy, which will include new policies relating to on-site staff.

## Political support

- The presence of dedicated members of staff in Bristol's parks has strong local political support. This support is delivered primarily through local councillors.

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# **CASE STUDY:** **LONDON BOROUGH** **OF TOWER HAMLETS** **MILE END PARK**

The successful ranger scheme in Mile End Park provides a potential model for other parks in the borough.

## **Park staff across the borough**

- Prior to Compulsory Competitive Tendering, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets employed over 100 park keeping staff. As a consequence of CCT, several key park keeping activities – notably litter picking – were contracted out, although a core of staff were retained to patrol parks, assist the public, monitor safety and maintenance, and collect fees. Today Tower Hamlets employs some 30 park keepers and park rangers.

## **Why is Mile End Park an exception?**

- Mile End Park is an exception in two respects: its dedicated staff are known as park rangers, reflecting their educational and socially interactive roles; and the team is four-strong, larger than most in the borough. The reason dates back to the mid-1990s, when park users were invited to comment on how the park might be improved – a large majority specified park rangers. Mile End Park also has a ring-fenced budget (see below).
- The park has four dedicated rangers. “In an ideal world, I’d like fifteen rangers”, says Michael Rowan, director of Mile End Park.

## **What are the funding arrangements?**

- For the years 2005/2006, Mile End Park has a total budget of £650,000. Of this, approximately 33-50 per cent comes from Tower Hamlets. The remainder comes from revenue generated by the shops and restaurants inside the park, other activities including go-karts, and hiring out the two pavilions for weddings, conferences, and exhibitions.
- Elsewhere in the borough, the council is seeking to develop partnerships with a range of third sector organisations for the maintenance and development of public green spaces – over 15 percent of the green spaces in the borough are now maintained in part or in whole by a community or charitable organisation.

- “The third sector partners are bringing additional skills, local knowledge, training capacity and new funding into the spaces. The borough intends to develop its capacity to support these exciting initiatives, and the existing park keeping service will be a key factor in supporting and developing this area of work” says Oscar Ford, Tower Hamlets Parks, policy & projects manager.

## **What are the park keepers/rangers responsibilities?**

- The park keepers patrol the parks, lock and unlock, collect sports fees, control anti-social behaviour and report damage. Subject to review and agreement, future changes could include: increased interaction with users and partner organisations, more direct involvement in developing and supporting parks-based community events and activities, re-introduction of some specific maintenance activities such as minor repairs, and possibly some horticultural maintenance.
- As well as patrolling, monitoring user behaviour, and assisting with basic maintenance (Continental Landscapes is contracted for grounds maintenance), the park rangers have a greater focus on education, promoting environmental improvements, and engaging with park users.
- Park rangers work with Park Watch (a network of local people) and have a good relationship with the police, who exercise their horses in the park.

## **What are the other plans for the future?**

- Tower Hamlets is reviewing the effectiveness of its park warden/ranger service, and sees the ranger provision recently implemented at Mile End Park as a potential model for other parks in the borough. “High visibility is an important aspect of the service, and in addition to the highly recognisable bright yellow tops, the council is aiming to provide a more regular, static service at the main park sites, and at key times of the day,” says Ford.

## **CASE STUDY: LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS MILE END PARK CONT.**

### **Green space strategy**

- A green space strategy is currently being finalised and will be completed this autumn (2005). It is likely that park staff will contribute to fulfilling the strategy by protecting the parks, improving accessibility, giving users a sense of security and a point of contact, encouraging greater use of the parks, supporting partnership working, and informing parks development and improvement projects.

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# CASE STUDY: NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL LEAZES PARK

Newcastle has a well-established park keeper scheme, which was reintroduced into the city's parks in 2000.

## Why were park keepers reintroduced?

- Following the introduction of Best Value in 1997, Newcastle City Council responded to overwhelming public support for a dedicated on-site presence in parks by reintroducing the role of park keeper. The commitment was built into Newcastle's Leisure Service Plan of 1998. Seven members of staff were redeployed from the council's grounds maintenance, ranger and security services in 2000.
- Today there are 14 park keepers covering the ten major parks in the city. Prior to 2000, grounds maintenance had been contracted to Cityworks, a division of Newcastle City Council. Community engagement, security, and policy development were the responsibility of the council's Leisure Services Department.
- In the latter years of Cityworks' contract, the council was able to negotiate the full-time deployment of two staff members to Walker Park. But this was an exception. Aside from this, site-specific staff had been absent from Newcastle's parks since the early 1980s.

## The park keepers' role

- "The park keeper's role is very much one of site based park maintenance, but with an emphasis on making direct contact with the general public and responding to their requests in a timely and appropriate manner," says Anthony McKenna, acting head of Leisure Services, and former Parks and Countryside Service Manager with Newcastle City Council.
- In the main, the park keepers have previous experience in grounds maintenance or security. Training is offered to augment existing skills, creating professionals with a balance of horticultural and social competencies.
- Since 2000, the park keepers have been employed on the highest manual grade. "This gives the post the status it deserves," says McKenna.

- To ensure that management and delivery are integrated, the park keepers are employed by the council's Leisure Services Department.

## Joined-up working

- Newcastle's parks are divided into three areas, each managed by an area manager. The area managers have responsibility for all the parks and green spaces in their area of the city. They also manage the park keepers in their area – there are either one or two park keepers per park, depending on size and content.
- The parks team, including the area manager, are responsible for every aspect of the park.
- The area managers attend regular meetings with the police, and user groups. "The intention is to ensure that information is exchanged, and problems and opportunities are raised," says McKenna.
- Area managers are also responsible for accessing external funds, and collaborating across departments to support the central council-funded service. For instance, since 2003, street wardens funded by the ODPM's Sustainable Communities Fund have also patrolled the city's parks.
- A peripatetic Security Service, funded by Leisure Services, patrols the city centre parks regularly, as well as other parts of the public realm.

## Delivering the Green Space Strategy

- Newcastle's Green Space Strategy was completed in April 2004. It was put together over a period of two years by a dedicated team of three. Since April 2004, two of that team have been employed to oversee the delivery of the strategy, which includes extending the provision of park keepers across the city.
- "We did this, because there's no point drawing up a strategy if you're not going to deliver it," says McKenna

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