

# **Best Value Review**

## **Parks and Gardens**

**March 2003**

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# 1.EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

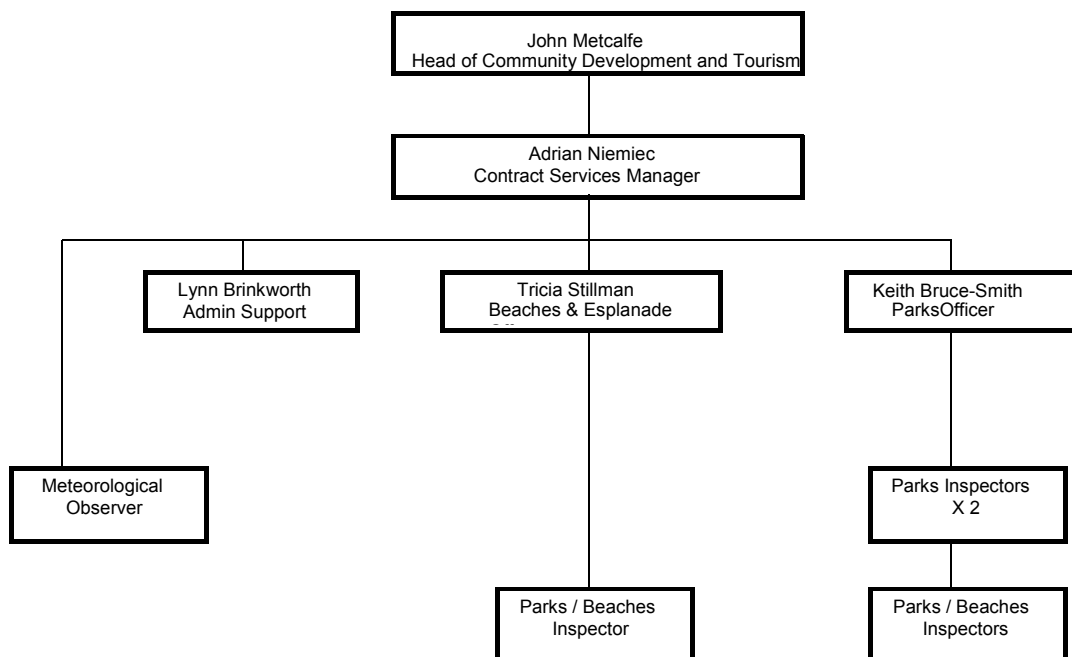
## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This review is concerned with the provision of the Councils Parks and Gardens Management and forms part of the functions of the Parks and Beaches section within the Education & Community Development Directorate. See Appendix 14 for the corporate structure to understand where this Directorate sits within the organisation and Appendix 13 for the Directorate structure and the position of Parks and Beaches.

The Best Value Review Unit included Parks and Gardens Management Services as part of the thematic review of council services and was planned for year 5 (2004/05) of the Best Value Performance Plan. With subsequent restructures this was brought forward to be considered during 2002 to incorporate the results into the emerging Cultural Strategy.

The Parks and Gardens Management review was carried out over the year 2002 and is part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of reviews. It forms one part of a series of reviews encompassing Libraries, Ventnor Botanic Garden, Arts Unit, Sports Unit, Museums Service, Archives Services and the Music Service.

The current Staffing structure is as follows:



Mr Adrian Niemiec the Contract Services Manager undertook this review.

The Parks and Gardens service looks after one of the Island's best natural assets that are used for the enjoyment of both Islander's and Tourists. The review carried out extensive consultation with stakeholders, the public and other bodies about the Parks services.

Most stakeholders reported the basic services were good, but improvements could be made if we became more pro-active through investment and the management of the service. The public survey showed that people rated environmental issues and wanted clean, safe and accessible Parks that were in a good state of repair, with the decline of recent lack of investment reversed.

These improvements, will assist by linking to the Councils corporate objective of 'Improving Island Life' and the main goals of : Improving Health, housing and the quality of life for all and protecting the Island's natural, built and historic environment.

The improvement plan is based on evidence collected and analysed as part of the review process and application of the 'four C's' of Challenge, Consult, Compare and Compete. The Parks and Gardens Management is a small section of the IW Council however it is responsible for the largest 'free to use and enjoy facilities.' The safe and effective delivery of the service is important to the enjoyment of Island life for tourists and locals alike. The review has shown how this infrastructure service is a vital support to tourism, economic development and the environment of the Isle of Wight.

## 1.2. Main Recommendations.

The summary of the main Parks and Gardens recommendations is that:

- 1 The Local Authority is the best provider of this service, and should remain protector of the valuable assets.
- 2 Standards and Budgets need to be maintained.
- 3 Current departmental fragmentation and require centralising to provide a more uniform service.
- 4 The Council needs to raise the awareness and benefits of the service to both local and tourist users.
- 5 Current service anomalies need rectifying. I.e. only 50% of car park surrounds our maintained.
- 6 The Council needs to investigate more sustainable ways of funding the service, particularly with park landscaping improvements.
- 7 The retention of capitol receipts should be used to improve infrastructure. I.e. replacement play equipment and public seating.
- 8 Playgrounds require investment to improve their existing position of being in the National bottom quartile.
- 9 Councillors need to be further engaged, with performance measurers that are more service than organisation led.
- 10 The continued provision of services to 'outside' organisations (e.g. clubs, Wight leisure) needs to be reviewed.
- 11 Current service satisfaction is high, but it's contribution to Island Life is underestimated consequently the service is under funded
- 12 The adoption of the improvement plan with develop the service but it must be recognised as being staff and fiscal dependent Service Review Introduction

## **Service Review Summary**

This review is primarily concerned with the provision of the 'free to use' Parks, Gardens and Open space network undertaken by the Isle of Wight Council. The Council does provide for other leisure and sports services through differing means and these will be covered by their own reviews.

The review of the services has been undertaken by drawing on information gained from existing service reviews and research undertaken in the preparation of the Isle of Wight Council's Cultural and Leisure strategy. Research for the review involved many stakeholders, the general public and the Council's Citizens Panel, together with voluntary organisations and focus groups. The information gained at each stage was fed to the Best Value appraisal group that consisted of both Officers and Elected Members.

## **Challenge Summary**

The Challenge Events proved a lively forum for sharing ideas on existing and future service delivery. The summary of which was, that generally the parks and garden service is a valued contributor to the health and well being of Island residents, and the high levels of presentation was a significant contributor to local tourism. The consensus of opinion is that the Local Authority is the best provider of these services and should remain protector of these assets, ensuring standards are maintained.

However this is against a background of continual changing of senior management, refocusing of service delivery and budgetary pressures. Useful ideas were discussed on future development and the way forward may internally include the combining of services that have certain synergies.

- A local authority is the best provider of local services
- They should remain the protectors of these valuable assets
- Standards need to be maintained
- Resistance to changing layouts and displays and standards was encountered
- Improved funding of infrastructure items was required
- Regular services to be maintained by Isle of Wight Council
- Current fragmentation of resources should be centralised
- Improved marketing of parks, gardens and open spaces as community assets
- Development of voluntary sector assistance could assist community links

## **Consultation**

Internal consultation identified a need to bring closer together the working relationship between similar service departments who deal with grounds, countryside and open space management issues to provide a more unified service and thus reduce any duplication of inspection and management of service delivery. This would also remove service delivery confusion currently experienced with internal

departments who could also make greater use of the departments expertise in horticultural and landscaping issues.

### **Summary Points from Departmental Consultation.**

- The introduction of a central incoming call centre required, removing duplication of resources investigating the same incident.
- Improved interdepartmental communications particularly with Property Services, and Environment and Engineering Services.
- Raise the awareness of the need for a tourism and leisure strategy.
- Improve the grounds maintenance of Car Park surrounds to provide all Island service, subject to securing funds.
- Raise the public awareness and profile of the service to help combat anti social behaviour and promote safer communities.

External consultation through the MORI surveys, public surveys/ questionnaires and focus groups indicated respondents want the Council to increase the priority given to protect and enhance the health, safety and environment of the Island. Indicated to achieve this was increased expenditure on maintenance and cleansing of open areas and improved play equipment provision.

### **Summary of Points gained from the MORI 2,3,5 and 6 Surveys**

- Council Priority to protect and enhance the health, safety and environment of the Island.
- Public wish to see more money spent on keeping the cleansing and protecting the environment.
- Parks and Gardens key to achieving the Councils aims.
- 80% of respondents satisfied with existing service provision.
- Respondents split between satisfied and dissatisfied on play area provision.
- 97% of respondents had no access difficulties.

### **Summary of Public Consultation Survey**

- High level of satisfaction, but 32% of respondents would like to see some improvements.
- Most parks used for general recreation and exercise through walking in and to the park
- The profile and visibility of Staff, Contractors and the Parks services require raising
- Lower satisfaction levels were achieved in infrastructure areas, indicating a lack of capital investment, and these were raised as priority areas to increase investment.
- Concerns about Anti-social behaviour raised by 53% of respondents.

Overall 80% of respondents were satisfied with the existing service delivery, with 97% of respondents not having encountered any access difficulties. However, indicated by 32% of respondents was the need for improvements within their local park principally with infrastructure items, and measures to combat the increasing prominence of anti-social behaviour. The current position of taking these services for granted needs to be combated by increasing the profile of staff, contractors and the contribution the service makes towards the Councils corporate objectives and the general community.

### **Compare**

Comparing this varied service proved difficult, as establishing core parameters for comparison were dependent upon how each local service was structured, as each service provider contains differing service delivery options within their remit. However on balance with regards to the grounds maintenance elements the service provided on the Isle of Wight proved keenly cost efficient, when comparing similar authorities the Isle of Wight Council was providing overall the cheapest cost to maintain Parks and Garden services per hectare.

### **Summary of Service Comparison**

- Isle of Wight Council spends less per Hectare on Parks and Recreation than comparative authorities
- Despite the low investment, maintenance rates per item are the most cost effective of the comparison group
- Better joint working could assist the service and profile of assets
- Retention of capital receipts from land sales could be used to improve infrastructure
- The greater use of Private Finance Initiative and sponsorship should be explored
- Planning Policy could be used to assist and improve the Parks Network
- Playgrounds require improvement, nationally in bottom quartile

These have been included within the improvement plan

### **Compete**

Previous work undertaken during 2000/2001 with regards to the provision of green/soft horticultural maintenance, established for the Authority that internally there was not sufficient critical mass to cost effectively provide these services directly. However the review has established through consultation and benchmarking that the current structure of internal management arrangements authority wide could be improved by combining services with distinct synergies. This over time would lead to improvements in the planning and development of the service for the future, as well as raising the service profile and the contribution these free to use services make to island life.

Further development opportunities in partnerships and sponsorship have been identified as a way to improve revenue, together with a critical revaluation of services provided to outside organisations such as bowling clubs and Wight Leisure. Both of



who receive an income from use of amenity land and facilities without the link of contributing or being responsible for their maintenance.

### **Summary of Service Competition**

- IWC is best placed to undertake this important service
- Clubs, Town / Parish Council's would like more control but not the attached responsibilities
- Re-engineering works and market testing undertaken have lead to significant cost reductions

#### *Is it a good service?*

- Declared aim only established recently.
- A clear reference to aims and objectives needs to be established
- Service Aims require more quantifiable objectives
- Standards of service provision are good
- Service Satisfaction is high but it's contribution to Island Life is underestimated and service is under funded
- Councillors not engaged enough, therefore services are provided rather than owned
- Corporate performance measurers are office measurers rather than service measurers

#### *Will the Service Improve?*

- Service is good and recognised by satisfaction surveys
- Councillors need to be better informed to take more ownership
- Should the provision of grounds maintenance to clubs and Wight Leisure Continue
- The improvement plan will help develop the service but it will be staff and fiscal dependent.

### **General**

In general this review gained a valuable insight into the Parks and Gardens provision on the Island. This review was brought forward from the proposed timetable for completion during 2004/5 and as a consequence the question of providing the grounds services internally or by contractor had previously been addressed during the year 2000 prior to the letting of the existing contracts.

Previous reviews by Tourism and Wight Leisure had identified the contribution these assets make to Island life, particularly in the provision of sporting and recreation facilities. The review indicated that there was an need to improve infrastructure funding, and this is endorsed by Tony Blair the prime minister who when addressing the House of Commons said " Investing money in sport and leisure is not just a

sports policy, it's a health policy, an education policy, an anti-crime policy and an anti-drugs policy" (September 2000).

### 1.3 IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Priority Key  
 1 High  
 2 Medium  
 3 Low

#### Area for Improvement: Development of service provision

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcome Measurers	Links to Corporate Objectives
			Capital	Revenue		
<p><b>1</b> Audit existing service delivery &amp; develop a parks and gardens strategy to create a development plan that better links the service delivery to the community  <b>Priority 3</b></p>	Adrian Niemiec Ventnor Botanic Garden Countryside Highways	2005	£10,000 to engage a Consultant	N/A	<p>A better link between corporate issues and service delivery further developments of the service planning rather than 'piece meal' development.</p> <p>Publish Details – Consult</p> <p>Develop Action Plan</p>	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
<p><b>2</b> Investigate &amp; consider the establishment of a single Isle of Wight Council parks unit  <b>Priority 3</b></p>	John Metcalfe Adrian Niemiec	To be completed after improvement action 1	£N/A	£N/A but could depend on outcome of review	<p>A single point contact for members of the public</p> <p>standardisation of service delivery across the Island</p> <p>Synergy of management leading to cost savings</p> <p>Full implementation inconjunction with 1 above</p>	1, 6

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcome Measurers	Links to Corporate Objectives
			Capital	Revenue		
<b>3</b> Centralise admin and contact details & instigate a call centre communication office, within the department <b>Priority 1</b>	Adrian Niemiec	January 2004	£N/A	£not quantified at this stage	Centralised contact points & reception points  improved recording of incidents  improved allocation of inspection requests	1, 6
<b>4</b> Actively seek & co ordinate a volunteer group to assist on the agreed works management programme <b>Priority 3</b>	Adrian Niemiec	To undertaken after improvement action 1	£N/A	£3,000 for training and Health & Safety equipment	improved community participation  better parks use  raised public awareness  2 Groups to be established by 2005	1, 3, 6
<b>5</b> Investigate existing position of providing free Grounds Maintenance to Clubs and Wight Leisure <b>Priority 2</b>	Adrian Niemiec	Summer 2005	£N/A	£50,000 possible reduction in spending	Draft project by November 2003  Investigate and benchmark by July 2004  Report January 2005  Implement April 2005	1,2,3,6
<b>6</b> Upgrade principle parks to meet 'Green Flag' criteria <b>Priority 2</b>	Adrian Niemiec Keith Bruce-Smith	Summer 2005	£4,000 per park	£2,000 per park per annum	Improve facilities & public awareness, leading to increased usage from locals and tourists alike.  Investigate ways of service	2, 3, 4, 7

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcome Measurers	Links to Corporate Objectives
			Capital	Revenue		
					measurement and satisfaction by 2004	

## 1.4 IMPROVEMENT PLAN

### Area for Improvement: Improving health, housing & the quality of life for all

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcome Measurers	Links to Corporate Objectives
			Capital	Revenue		
<b>7</b> Improve the provision, cleansing & emptying of litter bins <b>Priority 1</b>	Adrian Niemiec Keith Bruce-Smith	April 2003	£2,000	£1,000	a more uniform service provision undertaken to the same frequency as the adj. highway  Increased frequency to be undertaken by April 2003	1, 4, 6
<b>8</b> Improve the provision, quality of public seating <b>Priority 2</b>	Adrian Niemiec Derek Jones	On going	£10,000	£N/A	a concentrated core of safe, clean useable public seats leading to a 10% reduction of complaints by April 2004	1, 4, 6
<b>9</b> Improve condition & appearance public shelters <b>Priority 1</b>	Adrian Niemiec Tricia Stillman	On going	Estimated £10–15,000 to build a new shelter	N/A	a concentrated core of safe, clean and useable public shelters leading to a 10% reduction of complaints by 2004	1, 4, 6
<b>10</b> Improve parks paths to assist access availability for all user groups <b>Priority 2</b>	Adrian Niemiec Keith Bruce-Smith	On going	£30,000	£5,000	improved parks access for all age & ability groups by 2006  reducing the number of accident litigation claims by 10%	1, 4, 6

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcome Measurers	Links to Corporate Objectives
			Capital	Revenue		
<p><b>11</b> Develop an on going maintenance and replacement plan for playground equipment to ensure replacements can be undertaken when the existing equipment reaches the end of its serviceable life</p> <p><b>Priority 1</b></p>	Adrian Niemiec Richard Lovell	Sept 2003	£N/A	£20/40,000	<p>A stabilised position of playground provision and service</p> <p>reduced decline in playground infrastructure</p> <p>improve quality of life and development of children</p> <p>Agree Maintenance Plan April 2003</p> <p>Implement when funds are available</p> <p>Complaints reduced by 10% by 2005</p>	1, 3, 4, 6
<p><b>12</b> Investigate position for improving the fabric of public toilets</p> <p><b>Priority 2</b></p>	Adrian Niemiec Property Services	December 2004	Estimated to be £50/70,000	£N/A	<p>Improved public facilities within parks network leading to increased usage &amp; quality of life.</p> <p>investigation commenced by 2004</p> <p>Plan implemented when funds are available</p>	1, 4, 6

## 1.5 IMPROVEMENT PLAN

### Area for Improvement: Raising standards & awareness

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcomes	Links to Corporate Objectives
			Capital	Revenue		
<b>13</b> Instigate the provision of community information leaflets to raise awareness of the service <b>Priority 1</b>	Adrian Niemiec Tourism	December 2003	£5,000	£N/A	Better informed public stake holders & user groups  Raised awareness of services provided  Plan leaflet Summer 2003  Circulate Draft fall 2003  Publish for 2004	1, 3
<b>14</b> Improved information & publicity relating to events <b>Priority 2</b>	Adrian Niemiec Wight Leisure	December 2003	£N/A	£2,000	Public better informed in relation to 'what's on' in their local Park  Increase in attendance to all events	1, 2, 3
<b>15</b> Improve profile & visibility of service delivery <b>Priority 1</b>	Adrian Niemiec Keith Bruce-Smith	July 2003	£N/A	£1,000	Public more aware of service delivery & assets available for them to enjoy  Greater awareness of service operations & approachability of staff  Service Plan April 2003	3, 4



Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcomes	Links to Corporate Objectives
			Capital	Revenue		
					Implement Changes June 2003  Review Service August 2003	
<b>16</b> Implement plans & procedures to reduce the occurrence of dogs fouling in the park. This item links with improvements 13, 14, & 15 above <b>Priority 2</b>	Adrian Niemiec Keith Bruce-Smith	June 2004	£15,000 for increased capacity dogbins	£5,000 for increased emptying	public better informed with regards to health & safety issues of dogs mess  improved cleanliness leading to increased use & reduce public dissatisfaction  Report findings August 2003  Plan improvements Fall2003  Implement Spring 2004	1, 3, 4, 6
<b>17</b> Investigate measures to reduce anti social behaviour & increase enforcement's <b>Priority 2</b>	Adrian Niemiec Keith Bruce-Smith	December 2005	£5,000 for improved signage	£5,000 to progress the by-law	reduced incidents of crime & anti social behaviour  better maintained infrastructure items  increased parks usage  Investigate position Summer 2003  Produce draft byelaw Spring 2004	1, 4, 6

Actions	Responsible Person	Target Date	Cost Implications		Outcomes	Links to Corporate Objectives
			Capital	Revenue		
					Consult summer 2004 Agree adoption Fall 2004	

## 1.6 Links to the Isle of Wight Council's Corporate Objectives

The IW Council's vision of its purpose is to **"Improve Island Life"**, with the crosscutting issues of:

- Giving Excellent Service
- Listening to people
- Working in Partnership
- Being open and Fair, and
- Caring for our unique environment

In order to realise this vision the following 6 key goals have been set in the corporate Plan.

- 1 Improving health, housing and the quality of life for all.
- 2 Encouraging job creation and economic prosperity.
- 3 Raising education standards and promoting life long learning.
- 4 Creating safe and crime-free communities.
- 5 Improving public transport and the highways infrastructure.
- 6 Protecting the Island's natural, built and historic environment.

## 1.7 Parks and Gardens Objectives

The **principal aim** of the Parks and Gardens service is:

**'To manage Parks and Gardens to meet the expectations of stakeholders whilst minimising the impact on the environment'.**

The following table shows the aims and objectives of the Parks and Gardens department are in line with IW Council corporate objectives 1, 4 and 6 above.

Service Aim	IW Council Objectives	Guidelines/ Regulation/ Codes of Practice	Achieved By
To Manage The Parks and Gardens service to meet the expectations of stakeholders and minimise impact on the environment	Objective 1: Ensuring facilities and amenities provided meet the needs of the community and users	IW Council Consultation Guidance	- Public Surveys - IWC MORI Surveys - Discussions with Town & Parish Councils - Meetings with Providers - Liaison & Co-ordination with other IW Council Departments - Meetings with Voluntary Organisations

Service Aim	IW Council Objectives	Guidelines/ Regulation/ Codes of Practice	Achieved By
	Objective 6: Clean Parks and Gardens	Tidy Britain Codes – Environmental Protection Act 1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cleaning Programme with service Provider</li> <li>- Monitoring by Inspection team</li> <li>- Working with Tidy Britain on award status and legislation criteria</li> <li>- Working with Environment services on cleansing and rubbish removal from the paths together with the removal of the contents of litter bins</li> <li>- Clean modern toilet facilities</li> <li>- Working with Concessionaires to ensure clean sites.</li> </ul>
To Manage the Parks and Gardens service to meet the expectations of stakeholders minimise impact on the environment	Objective 6: To promote greater environmental awareness and understanding	Agenda 21 Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Information Leaflets</li> <li>-Local Press</li> <li>-Working with IW Council Agenda 21 officer</li> <li>-Working with Concessionaires And IW Council Departments</li> </ul>

## 2. REVIEW OF SERVICE

### 2.1 DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT SERVICES PROVIDED

#### 2.1.1 Parks and Garden Management

The Parks Department currently maintains over 160 public Parks, Gardens, Open Spaces, Sports Grounds and Amenity areas, the area of which equates to over 180 Hectares (Ha), including 37 children's playgrounds and other facilities contained therein, such as public seating, shelters and monuments. Although other departments undertake some horticultural maintenance as part of their remit, grounds maintenance services are the principal remit for the Parks and Gardens Section. The services provided are best being described as '**The Management and Maintenance of free to use council assets that have an Amenity or Visual Amenity Value**'. As a consequence areas maintained are on behalf of the following internal departments:

Parks and Beaches  
Highways - Car Parks  
Property Services  
Environment Services

The sites can generally be grouped as follows:

<b>Principal Parks</b>	<b>Open Space</b>	<b>Sports Grounds</b>
Northwood Park	Binstead Rec. Grounds	Park Road Rec.
Church Litten	Colwell Common	Stroud Playing Field
Appley Park	Crossfield Estate	Clatterford Rec.
Battery Gardens Sandham Grounds	Princess Green Whippingham Heights	Seaclose Park Ryde Bowling Greens
Rylstone Gardens	Gurnard Green	Sandown Bowling Greens
Ventnor Park Cascade	Lake Common County Hall	County Ground Shanklin Putting Greens
	Venner Avenue Haylands Rec.	Totland Rec. Ventnor Park Putting
	St Helens Green Big Meade Western Cliffs Fishbourne Green	Wroxall Football Ground

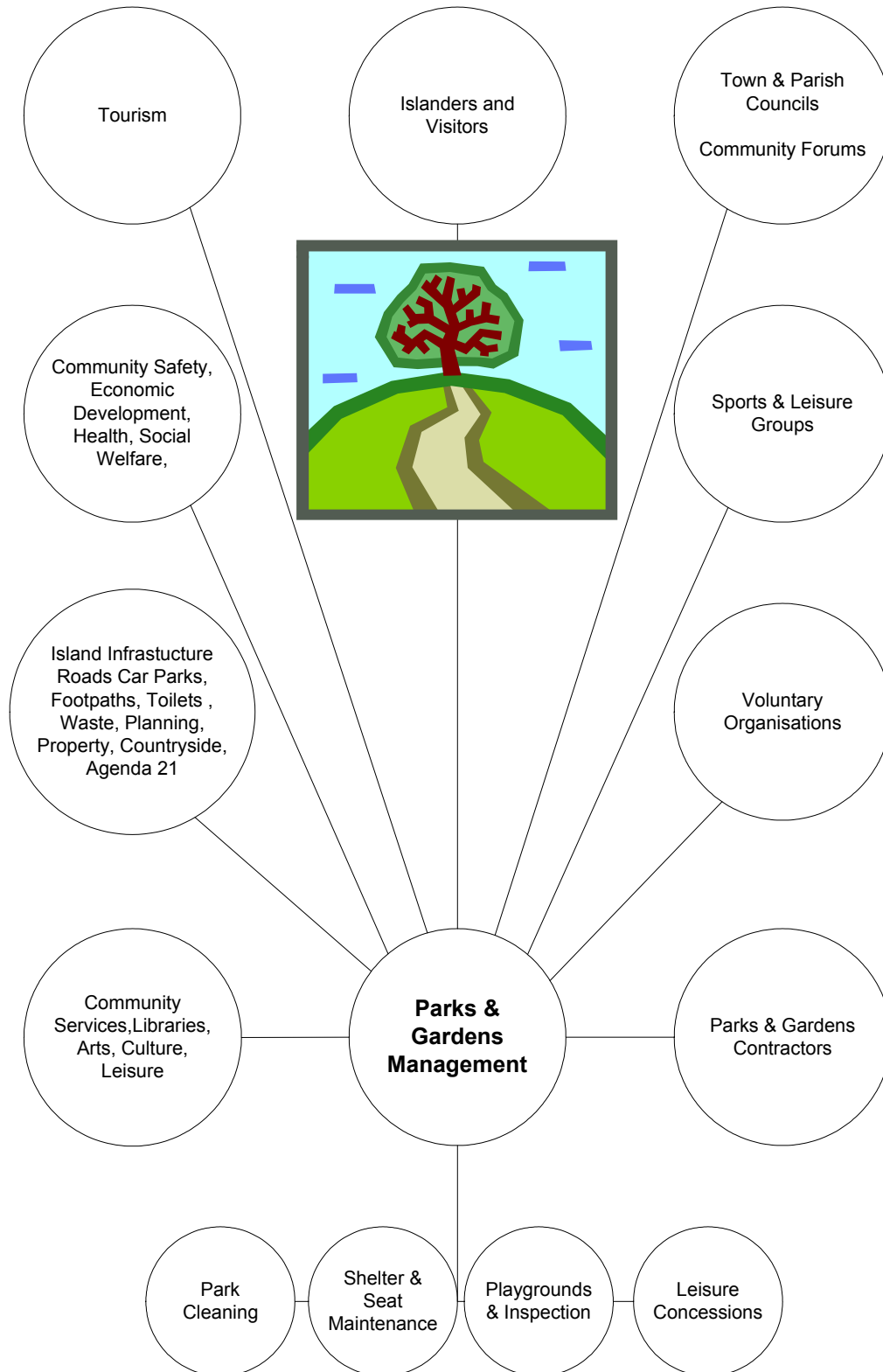
The above table is only a sample of the sites that are currently managed and maintained. A full list is available in appendix 1.

### **2.1.2 Parks and Gardens Strategic Management Links**

The following chart is a graphical representation of how Parks and Gardens links with its stakeholders.

The review has identified how the infrastructure and presentation of this service is vital to sustain the natural balance and well being of Island life together, with contributing to Tourism and Economic Development of the Isle of Wight.

## Parks & Gardens Strategic Management Links



### 2.1.3 Horticultural Maintenance

Although horticulture is traditionally a seasonal and weather dependent maintenance process, to ensure quality of operations and standards, the Parks network is maintained in accordance in accordance to the following British Standards:

BS 3998: 1989	Recommendations for tree work
BS 4043: 1989	Recommendations for transplanting root-balled trees
BS 4428: 1989	Code of Practice for general landscape operations (excluding hard surfaces)
BS 7370: Part 1: 1991	Grounds Maintenance Recommendations for organisational establishment.
BS 7370: Part 2: 1994	Recommendations for the maintenance of hard areas (excluding sports areas)
BS 7370: Part 3: 1991	Recommendations for the maintenance of amenity and functional turf (other than sports turf)
BS 7370: Part 4: 1993	Recommendations for maintenance of soft landscaping (other than amenity turf)
BS 7370: Part 5	Maintenance of water areas
BS 3969: 1998	Recommendations for turf for general purposes
BS 4159: 1990	Recommendations peat for horticultural and landscape use.

By amalgamating these standards the service areas can be broken down into the following site operations:

- Grass Maintenance
- Edging of Grass
- Additional Turf Management
- Hedge Maintenance
- Shrub and Rose Maintenance
- Tree Maintenance
- Replacement Planting- Shrubs, Roses, & Trees
- Bedding
- Herbaceous Borders and Rockers
- Chemical Control
- Water Features & Drainage Ditch Management
- Animal Management
- Site Maintenance, Litter and Refuse Collection
- Snow Clearance & Gritting



Currently the majority of the routine grounds maintenance service are undertaken by 2 private external contractors. North and West Wight being maintained by Brighstone Landscaping Limited, head office Unit 3, Porphfield Business Park, Porphfield, Newport, IW PO30 4QB.

South and East Wight by Wyevale Grounds Maintenance, head office Upper Buckover Farm, Wotton-Under-Edge, Gloucestershire, GL12 8Z. The existing contracts are schedule of rates contracts competitively won through an open tendering process. The contractors commenced operations on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2002, with the contract length of 6 years with a possible 3-year extension.

A condition of the contract is that the contractors are available 24 hours a day 365 days per year for works relating to emergency situations that may occur in areas under their control.

The cleansing standard in relation to the Parks and Gardens is governed by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse. The service delivery specification is written so that all areas covered by the department are maintained in accordance with the Act to ensure that the Council complies with this legislation and the parks are clean and litter free.

#### **Total Expenditure for the Parks and Gardens Services 2001/2002**

<b>BUDGET</b>	<b>EXPENDITURE</b>
Parks and Gardens Maintenance	£ 733 750
Playground Maintenance and Management	£ 74 490
Parks and Gardens Management and inspection	£ 96 277
<b>Sub Total</b>	£ 904 517
Seat Maintenance	£ 10 710
<b>Total</b>	£ 915 227

These budget figures do not include the administration and management costs for the provision of services. However a sum of £42,500 has been identified for the element of service covered by this review.

The total Budget for grounds maintenance for the last three financial years is shown below: -

<u>Year</u>	<u>1999</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2001</u>
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>£855,170</b>	<b>£898,290</b>	<b>£904,517</b>

The increase in budget provision over the last three years is a reflection of the increased costs of complying with recent legislation changes relating to playground health and safety.

## 2.1.4 Playground Provision

The Parks Department as part of its remit undertakes the provision of public playgrounds for the authority. The playground service comprises of 35 playgrounds including 3 wet play / paddling pool areas located in the following main Town and Villages.

Cowes  
East Cowes  
Newport  
Havenstreet  
Ryde  
Wootton  
Sandown  
Shanklin  
Ventnor  
Freshwater  
Totland

A full list of sites and equipment is available in appendix 2

It must be noted that this is not exclusive Island service provision as some Town and Parish Councils are also service providers.

The playground network is governed by a number of different pieces of legislation in order to ensure users are not placed in any unnecessary danger. Outlined below are the main documents that relate to the provision of play areas:

Common Law 1932 “The Neighbour Principal – Duty of Care”

Occupiers Liability Act 1954 & 1984

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

Reporting of Incidents Design Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

BS EN 1176 Standard for the Design, Construction and Maintenance of Playgrounds

BS EN 1177 Standard for Impact Absorbing Playground Surfacing

By amalgamating the law and standards together gives rise to the current management operations of the playgrounds. These are conducted to provide equipment that is sufficiently challenging to meet users needs, whilst ensuring it is safe to use and does not place the user in danger. Currently it is the Councils policy to site all playground equipment on certified safety surfaces.

To ensure continued safety all the playgrounds are checked weekly throughout the year, with the paddling pools being checked daily through the opening summer season (End May – Mid September). Any maintenance items raised through the

inspections are immediately instigated. A further bi-annual safety engineering inspection is also undertaken by our Insurers (Zurich Municipal) to ensure the sites comply to the legislation and will be fit to use for the next 6 months.

The current budget for playground maintenance in 2001/2 is £92,487 of which £75,585 relates to maintenance of equipment, and this equates to £2,159 per playground per annum.

### **2.1.5 Seat Maintenance**

The Authority currently maintains approximately 1100 public seats principally situated within the parks and gardens network and at other on Highway locations in the main towns and resort areas. (Note: in some areas the Town or Parish Council is also a service provider).

The seats are inspected on a six monthly basis and also maintained throughout the year. The majority of maintenance is undertaken outside of the tourist season during the period (October to April). The target where possible is to give priority to the resort areas by undertaking pre-season maintenance before Easter each year.

The budget for the seat maintenance for 2001/2 is £10,700 equating to £9.70 per seat per annum.

A summary sheet of public seat locations is available in appendix 3

### **2.1.5 Leisure Concessions**

Located within the Parks and Gardens are services undertaken by private operators by way of a concession agreement. These facilities include Kiosks, Deck Chair hiring, vending rights and all leases relating to sport and leisure facilities. Currently there are 152 departmental concession agreements and these are managed and administered along with the Beaches and Esplanades concessions by the Beaches and Esplanades administration.

The management responsibilities of this service are:

- Co-ordination of all new concessions.
- Annual site inspections, to ensure that facilities are maintained to a suitable standard required by the IW Council.
- Administer rental increases governed by retail price increases.
- Maintain a database of all concessions.
- Ensure all concessionaires obtain public liability insurance.
- Liase with Customer Accounts to raise accounts, increases and amendments.
- Collection and regular reconciliation of income received.
- Assignment of Licences for concessions.
- Liase with Environmental Health on fleet licences where appropriate.

Liase with Property Services:-

- Production of tenancy agreements/licences and conditions of tenancy.
- Rent assessments and pricing.
- Site inspections as part of rent assessments.

- Periodical Rent reviews.
- Renewal of expired agreements.

Working procedures for management of concessions and the related collection of rental fees are currently being reviewed, following a Best Value Review of Property Services.

The budget for operations of the Parks Concessions is amalgamated within the Beaches and Esplanades concessions and is covered by that best value review.

### **2.1.7 Parks and Gardens Management**

The management team for the service is located in The Guildhall, Newport, and consists of 4 members:

- A Parks Officer overseeing the service;
- Two Parks Inspectors whose duties are split geographically and functionally.  
North Inspector - Covers the north and west of the Island with particular responsibilities for Irrigation, drainage and water feature management.  
South Inspector - Covers the south and east of the Island with particular responsibilities for playgrounds:  
together with a,
- Parks Health and Safety Inspector – who covers the entire Island specialising in Playground equipment, paths, signs, seats and other infrastructure items.

### **2.1.8 Analysis of the Service Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**

#### **Strengths.**

- Skilled dedicated multifunctional staff
- Single point of contact for service provision
- New parks team with enthusiasm
- Parks contract re-let with increased service standards

#### **Weaknesses.**

- Non statutory function
- Non core located
- Continual senior management change leading to a lack of service understanding
- New staff unaware of full responsibilities of their posts and the organisation objectives

#### **Opportunities.**

- Increased revenue through sponsorship
- Increased service provision through partnership working
- A return to a single Island Parks unit covering all horticultural issues

#### **Threats.**

- Continual budgetary pressure
- Undermining of parks authority through weak management
- Disposal of assets undertaken without consultation

### 2.1.9 Local Parks and Gardens Performance Indicators

1. Total cost of parks, gardens and open space management per head.
2. Costs of parks, gardens and open space maintenance to BS7370 per hectare.
3. Cost of playground maintenance and repair per head.
4. Percentage of playgrounds that meet the LEAP standards.
5. Number of Green Flag Awards held as a percentage of Principal Park network.
6. Average cost of public seat provision per head/per seat.
7. Satisfaction survey percentage of users who are satisfied with the level of service.
8. Number of inspections undertaken by park staff per day.      New Indicator

<b>Local Performance indicator</b>	<b>Year 2001/2</b>	<b>Year 2002/3</b>	<b>Year 2003/4 (Forcast)</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>£7.87</b>	<b>£7.90</b>	<b>£6.77</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>£4.455.63</b>	<b>£4.446.65</b>	<b>£4.434.66</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>£0.45</b>	<b>£0.45</b>	<b>£0.43</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>£0.09 / £9.74</b>	<b>£0.09 / £9.74</b>	<b>£0.08 / £9.74</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>10%</b>

## **2.2 SCOPE FOR REVIEW AND OBJECTIVES**

### **2.2.1 Scope**

Parks and Gardens management is part of a group of reviews encompassing Education and Community Development. The review is an opportunity to take a strategic look at the links between this service and Community Development, Tourism, Economic Development and other organisations both within and outside the Council. It is an opportunity to review the service and explore improvements to the services in the light of the views of its major stakeholders.

Areas to be reviewed include:-

- The strategic links between Parks & Gardens and Beaches & Esplanades, Tourism, Economic Development and other departments who have an interest in the service delivery.
- The need for and development of Grounds Maintenance looking at the objectives, management plans and performance measurement of their contractors.
- To compare performance with other Local Authorities and their service providers, through national and local groups.
- As a result of the above, develop service options and improvements which will directly enhance the Isle of Wight Council Parks and Garden service provision.

### **Strategic Links**

An investigation of the existing links and possible new ones to share information and develop the Parks and Gardens services with Beaches and Esplanades, Tourism, Economic Development, Highways, Property Services, within the IW Council and external organisations such as Town Councils, Parish Councils, Development Groups, and private businesses was to be explored.

### **Appraisal Group**

The Parks and Gardens Best Value Review forms part of the Education and Community Best Value Review that encompasses Libraries, Ventnor Botanic Garden, Arts, Sports, Museums and Archives together with the Music Service. These were guided by an Appraisal Group that meet at the completion of significant stages of the Review, i.e. the results of consultation, comparison, and options for the service developments. Appraisal Group meetings were also called, if after work on the Review there was need to change the way the review is carried out due to new information, or resource changes took place. A draft report will be written and findings available by the end of November. The make up of the Appraisal group is available in appendix 6.

## 2.2.2 Links to Other Best Value Reviews

The Best Value Review and its association with Tourism and Economic Development reviews and the previous Safe Society review, has shown strong links with these services:

**Beaches and Esplanades** – Share similar service delivery responsibilities as they manage similar free to use assets with similar pressures. The close proximity of service delivery leads to service overlap, and the sharing of resources that in turn benefit not only the users but also the stakeholders.

**Safe Society** – Community Safety in the Parks and Gardens, with the need to provide a safe environment for people to recreate and enjoy them was recognised as part of the safe society strategy.

**Tourism & Economic Development** – the provision of clean and safe Parks with well maintained facilities is fundamental to the development of Tourism in an increasingly competitive market. The Parks and Gardens service was recognised in contribution to the Island's economy by providing well maintained and clean parks and gardens with horticultural displays that are a visual amenity to users and passers. This is a core free to use service for Tourists and Locals alike.

**Wight Leisure** - There was evidence from this review that greater development of young people and extreme sports would be welcomed.

**Assets & Asset Management - Property Services** - This review showed the need to examine the working between Property Services and Parks and Gardens over understanding of service roles and the management of concessionaires. Property Services are currently investigating improvements to the current system.

## 2.2.3 Links to Other Departments of the IW Council

It was very clear that there are definite links with all sections of the council. Tourism, Engineering Services and Property Services all felt that there was some synergy in combining Parks and Gardens Management within their individual departments as the connections were very apparent and strong. However, the current service cross cuts many departments and it is difficult to easily sit this service in any section.

The recent positioning within Community Development with Parks and Gardens has not altered the department's basic aims or objectives nor will it diminish the need to communicate and work together in partnerships with all departments. However the synergy of locating this service delivery department in a department that is not primarily maintenance focused has been questioned.

The future formation of a Community Development Strategy for the Island, that will link Parks and Gardens, Sports Unit, Planning, Property Services, Highways, Tourism, Arts etc. will strengthen and enhance the departments links further and will play a vital role in the future development of its services in the longer term.

Within Community Development the improvement plan for this review will form the basis of the future business plans for the Parks and Gardens.





## **2.3 How the Review Process Has Been Addressed**

### **Methodology**

This Best Value Review was undertaken from a positivist standpoint, where the details and information were collected in an apparent value-free manner, with the report writer independent of the subject matter of the research and review process.

The review also examined the need for, and further development of Education and Community Development services and explored how these services together with Parks and Gardens fit into the strategic picture. This included organisational structure, external contracting versus in-house services, partnerships, private investment, and capital allocation through grants.

### **How the Review was Undertaken**

The whole of the Parks and Gardens Management Service was examined and particular attention was paid to the “4Cs” **Challenge, Compare, Consult and Compete**.

#### **2.3.1 CHALLENGE.**

The Review Team examined questions like why the service is provided, what is it trying to achieve and whether it could be provided in a different way. The team considered the service objectives and the importance of the service to the local community and visitors through the consultation part of the process. Examined were the aims and objectives of the department and how they related to the council’s aims and objectives. Also examined were the strategic links with Economic Development and Tourism as well as other Council departments. The challenge part of the review also took into account comparison with other local authorities and how competitive the service was in terms of its performance. The challenge element was tested during Challenge Events and also undertaken in the compare, consult and compete parts of the review.

The fundamental question of “should the Council provide Parks and Gardens Services” although addressed in more general pieces of Council research, indicated that there was great support for protecting and improving the environment together with keeping open areas cleansed. (Full details are available in the Mori 5 survey Appendix 12) The survey also revealed that improving the Quality of Life, Promoting Tourism Development and Protecting and Developing the Island’s Cultural Resources were three of the top six aims the Council should address.

Public consultation undertaken in advance of this review into the Island’s Culture and Leisure Strategy, identified that the service makes a contribution to providing recreation, assisting people to stay healthy, fit and well and encourages community involvement.

This was tested at Challenge Events held during the summer 2002, to which the major points are listed below;

## 1. Ryde Theatre summary 10 July 2002

- A local authority is the best provider of local services
- They should remain the protectors of these valuable assets
- Standards need to be maintained
- Resistance to changing layouts and displays was encountered
- Improved funding of infrastructure items was required
- Regular services to be maintained by Isle of Wight Council

## 2. Ventnor Botanic Gardens 22 July 2002

- As valuable asset to the Island and community Parks should be exploited
- Current fragmentation of resources should be centralised
- Improved marketing of park assets
- Development of voluntary assistance

Full details of the Challenge Event are available in Appendix 4.

### **Summary Points from the Challenge Events.**

The service is a valued contribution to the Islands health, well being, Island presentation and tourism, and that the local authority is the best provider and should remain protector of these assets, ensuring standards are maintained.

### **CONSULTATION.**

Process was very extensive and has been undertaken in a number of different ways. Owing to the various forms of consultation a programme was set out of:

Consultation (evening meetings) with Town / Parish Councils and User Groups.  
Questionnaire through the Councils regular Mori poll (Citizens Panel).

Postal Questionnaire for those who did and didn't attend the evening challenge meetings.

Questionnaire Distribution through service points network within the Parks.

Questionnaire Distribution through non-service areas i.e.: Leisure Centres, Libraries.

Consult with the public face to face and completion of a questionnaire in the Principal Parks.

Consultation with members of Appraisal Group Meetings.

Consultation with internal sections and outside organizations relating to the following issues:

- Waste - Litter bins, dog bins
- Public Toilets – Fabrication
- Public behaviour – Vandalism
- Community Safety
- Car Parks - Charges

Dog Patrols  
Coastal Management  
Concession Leases  
IW Tourism  
Wight Leisure – Leisure facilities  
Consultation with Service Contractors

## **CONSULTATION PROCESS AND OUTCOME**

### **Consultation- Other Council Departments views:**

**Beaches and Esplanades** management has a good working relationship with the parks office as both sections have the same objectives and service goals. Partnership working is undertaken on many projects including the management of concessions and the closeness and service overlap means that the working relationship is good, and the staff professional. This is not always the same for other sections that provide grounds maintenance such as the Countryside or Highways sections where they have a different perspective of service provision. An area for improvement within the department could be a central reception switchboard as on many occasions when concerns are reported in areas that overlap direct calls may go to both sections which leads to a doubling of inspector investigation.

**Property Services** estates office felt they had a good working relationship with the parks office and the overlap on services worked well with the standard of grounds maintenance high. The property department worked to minimise the councils expenditure and liability by discussing the adoption on new sites through section 106 agreements and declining problem areas. Property Services also dealt with licences and agreements that in the main worked satisfactorily however on occasion there was a need for closer working that due to the pressure of time and physical location made communications awkward.

The opinion of **IW Tourism** is that a properly managed Parks and Gardens service is fundamental to the majority of visitors to the Island. Not enough importance is given by the IWC to the development of tourism at these 'free to use' facilities and supporting services such as Beach Esplanade Management. There is a need for a strategy for tourism, leisure and recreation services.

**Car Parks** also agree that there is an overlap between their section and Parks Management particularly as the parks department undertakes approximately 50% of their grounds maintenance.

As they predominately deal with fees, charges and excess charges they would be willing for the parks department to undertake grounds maintenance Island wide as this would relieve them from this burden and free their time to concentrate on their core function.

**Environmental Health** suggested that a lot would be gained from organising Council Departments into Customer Services and Support Departments, which would get over lines of demarcation and organisational boundaries that currently exist. For example currently the dog warden service is under their remit, but the majority of requests are generated from the parks and other 'free to use' areas.

**Wight Leisure** are of the opinion that Parks and Garden Management are a strong natural selling point for the Island (known as the 'Garden Isle'), therefore there are strong links to Tourism and the attractiveness of the Isle of Wight. Quality parks management is also essential to the operation of the 15 seasonal amenity sites and also bookings for amenity land hire and sporting events etc. The existing service arrangements were very satisfactory presentation wise. Problem areas associated with the operations mainly related to antisocial behaviour and poor control of dogs, who frequently mess on the putting greens, as well as changing room hirers who showed little respect for the facility.

**Community Safety** gave guidance and information on public order issues. They recognised that public safety was politically high profile and were working with the Parks office to introduce measures to combat this growing problem. They would wish to raise the profile of department staff and see them more active with the provision of advice and preventative measures.

**Coastal Management** is in agreement that there are very strong links between both sections. The current position where Parks and Beaches sits outside Engineering services is not good because of the natural links with coastal management, waste management and the highways section are not maintained at Director level. The staff working relationship is good, the only problems that occur where maintenance items fall between departments and are unfounded. (e.g. Is tallis slope maintenance a coastal stability or grounds maintenance function?)

**Engineering Services Operational** reported that the current working relationships were good, but problems arose where services overlapped such as Town street cleansing where an increase in road schedule would necessitate an increase in Parks schedule. Through being in separate departments this meant that funding might not always be forthcoming.

**Agenda 21** The Parks and Gardens department make a significant contribution to Agenda 21 issues to sustain the environment. The Parks provide clean, open space areas but also contribute to a healthy environment through bio diversity. The department has been fundamental in assisting with re-cycling initiatives and the setting up the Islands composting facility by centrally composting all the parks arising, and having the benefit of up to 400 tonnes of composting material as a soil improver on flower beds and all horticultural displays. The planting of trees is also seen a key to improving the air quality and visual appearance of the Island.

#### **Summary Points from Departmental Consultation.**

- The introduction of a central incoming call centre required to remove duplication of resources investigating the same incident.
- Improved interdepartmental communications particularly with Property Services, Environment and Environmental Services.
- Raise the awareness of the need for a tourism and leisure strategy.
- Improve the grounds maintenance of Car Park surrounds to provide all Island service, subject to securing funds.
- Raise the public awareness and profile of the service to help combat anti social behaviour and promote safer communities.

## **MORI Public Opinion Surveys - Summary of Consultation**

The **MORI 2** survey of the citizens' panel carried out in December 2000, indicated that cleanliness in keeping areas clean and tidy in line with the EPA act, together with protecting and improving the environment were two of the top three areas that Islanders would favour for increasing expenditure.

In the **MORI 3** survey carried out May 2001, listing the IW Council's objectives, the most support was given to protection and enhancement of the health, safety and environment of the Island, This is one of the main drivers of the Parks and Gardens Management service provision.

Specifically in the **MORI 5** 33% of respondents indicated they would like more money spent on cleansing of open areas. In considering the Council's most important aim the respondents placed Protecting the Environment, Improving the Quality of life, Promoting Tourism development and Protecting and developing the Island's cultural resources were raised as 4 out of the 5 most important council functions. In recognition of this the Council has set a mission statement of 'Improving the Quality of Life'. In order to work towards the aim, 36% of respondents indicated development of Sports and Recreation and Parks and Gardens would be best suited in achieving this.

**MORI 6 Spring 2002 Survey** Indicated that 80% of respondents were either happy or satisfied with the parks and gardens service provision with 9% indicating some dissatisfaction and 11% undecided. However within the parks and gardens service delivery area, satisfaction with the children's play activities was more evenly balanced between satisfied and dissatisfied respondents. This possibly indicates some geographical split between well maintained and lower maintained areas. Of interest, 58% of respondents indicated they were unaffected by this element of service provision. This may indicate the respondents to this survey were from the elder population. With regards to improving facilities improving children's play and improving parks and gardens were rated as the 4<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> priority behind the most popular response of improving young people's activity (age 15 – 21).

Within this survey the results gained from the respondents was that they enjoyed walking, rambling and gardening as their most interesting and most enjoyable past times. Indicating that in all but 3% of responses their ability was no restriction to their access. Their biggest hindering factor for not undertaking a recreation activity was that it was not applicable to them personally or they did not have the time to participate.

### **Summary of Points gained from the MORI 2,3,5 and 6 Surveys**

- Council Priority to protect and enhance the Health, Safety and Environment of the Island.
- Public wish to see more money spent on keeping the cleansing and protecting the environment.
- Parks and Gardens key to achieving the Councils aims.
- 80% of respondents satisfied with existing service provision.
- Respondents split between satisfied and dissatisfied on play area provision.
- 97% of respondents had no access difficulties.

The full details of responses are available in Appendix 12.

### **Results of Public Consultation Survey – July 2002**

A dedicated public survey questionnaire developed and was designed for a user consultation to be completed throughout the summer of 2002, concentrating on the principal park network. A copy of the questionnaire is available in Appendix 7.

The survey was undertaken by a combination of distributed self-completed questionnaires and face to face interviews in the parks. 764 questionnaires were distributed to Libraries, Tourist Information Centres, Leisure Centres and seasonal concessions with 25 being completed with assistance of face to face interviews.

Returned were 64 completed questionnaires, these equates to a return rate of 8.3% covering 14 different areas of the Isle of Wight and 24 separately identified parks. The gender split of respondents was 51% female to 39% male with 10% unknown. The age profile of respondents was 55% were over 60 years old, 45% were between 25 – 60 years old. There were no responses received from people below the age of 25. This age range concurs with the most popular occupation of respondents which is that of retirement.

A full list of results is available in Appendix 8.

The following information has been drawn from the relating questions numbered in brackets. E.g. (3C) relates to survey question 3c.

#### **Satisfaction Level**

The survey indicated that 90% of respondents were satisfied with the level of parks care in their area (3C) however, within this 32% of respondents would like to see some improvements.

With regards to cleansing 89% of respondents felt the park was cleansed to a fair standard or higher (1D)

With 90% of respondents indicating that the level of public equipment provided was to a fair or better standard (3B).

#### **Parks Selection**

When choosing to visit a park the most popular activities to be undertaken was walking, viewing the landscape and relaxing. This equated to the activity of 58% of all users (1A), other notified activities were dog exercise, recreation, play, sport and others (1B). In selecting a park, cleanliness, accessibility and views and landscape were placed as the highest priority, with horticultural displays, refreshments and car parking were the lowest three.

Questions 2A established how users travelled to the park. The most popular mode of transport was on foot 50%, followed by car 46%, bike 3% and coach 3%, with public transport (bus) accounting for only 1.5% of respondents. Of the car drivers 92% said there was adequate parking available, with 63% indicating any related parking

charges were fair. However 30% of respondents indicated that parking charges were high (2C).

When considering getting to the local park, 66% of all respondents felt directional signage to the park was fair to very good (2D) with a 77% of respondents indicating that once at the park access to and throughout the park was either good or very good (2E).

### **Parks Standards**

The survey tried to gauge users overall impression of their park. 35% of respondents felt their nominated park was excellent, 41% responded it was good, 13% reported it was fair. Overall this equates to 89% of users who thought the parks were between fair to good standard. Despite achieving this high standard the majority (60%) of respondents were unaware of how often the parks maintenance was conducted (1E). This concurs with the results on question A3 with 60% of respondents indicating that the parks staff or maintenance contractors are not easily identifiable. However question 1G established that 63% of people would know who to contact to discuss concerns over their local park. With regards to cleanliness and maintenance, the majority of people (70%) indicated that a reduced regime would effect their enjoyment of their visit to the park (1F).

The questionnaire also tried to establish people's perception of litter. From question 1H it was established that 47% of respondents would like to see more litter bins in the park although 41% of respondents thought that the bins were adequate. However when considering emptying 60% of users felt the existing frequency was sufficient compared to 36% who would like to see improvements (1I).

With regards to public conveniences 64% of respondents indicated they have used the WC's in the park (1J), with 53% of the respondents also aware of the disabled facilities. The disabled facilities were only used by 16% of respondents, of these 60% of found them adequate for their needs, with 40% they were not (1L).

Over all the users were satisfied with the parks service, with the following percentages of people viewing the individual services ok or better:

90%	Paths and grass cutting
80-90%	Presentation, layout and signage
70 – 80%	Bedding displays, horticultural features & public seats
50 – 70%	Litter bins, playground facilities and public shelters

Over all the impression of parks buildings (incl. Public WC's) were viewed as being very good and clean except for their physical condition which due to their age is best described as tired.

These results generally indicate lower satisfaction levels being achieved in infrastructure areas, and are a reflection of reduced Capital Investment within the parks network.

## **Parks Safety**

Although the majority (90%) of respondents believe that the Isle of Wight is a safe place to live and visit (4A), 72% of respondents indicated that they had seen graffiti, litter or damaged caused by vandalism on a recent visit to the park (4B). Of these responses, 53% expressed concern that this level of behaviour caused them a concern or problem when visiting the park, compared to 27% that indicated it had no effect on their enjoyment of a park visit(4D). Over half of the respondents had identified dogs mess, litter and anti social behaviour as their main concern when visiting the park.

## **Service Delivery/Improvements**

In considering our existing service delivery the majority of respondents (up to 63%) felt that the existing service delivery was adequate. However, specifically by some respondents was the wish to see increase spending on:

Playground equipment, public seats and litter bins were identified by between 20 – 33% of respondents for increased investment.

Public shelters, signage, layout, bedding displays were identified by between 10 – 20% of respondents.

0 – 8% of respondents would like to see improved horticultural features, paths and improved grass cutting.

With regards to re directing resources within the parks department to meet proposed improvements, 8% of the respondents (the most popular) felt a reduction in grass cutting would be a way of re directing fiscal resources to improvement ideas. A further 5% of respondents indicating reduced spending on signage, bedding displays, public seats, playground equipment, horticultural features, paths and layout may be advantageous.

Over all 56% of respondents felt that the existing parks and gardens management was acceptable, with a further 17% indicating that the parks needed some increased investments. Only 1.5% of respondents felt there was scope to reduce spending in the park area.

The main areas indicated to improve were the infrastructure items of children's play, with the health issues of dogs mess and litter identified, together with more resources in staffing to undertake works and control anti social behaviour.

## **Summary of Public Consultation Survey**

-High level of satisfaction, but 32% of respondents would like to see some improvements.

-Most parks used for general recreation and exercise through walking in and to the park

-The profile and visibility of Staff, Contractors and the Parks services require raising

-Lower satisfaction levels were achieved in infrastructure areas, indicating a lack of capital investment, and these were raised as priority areas to increase investment.



-Concerns about Anti-social behaviour raised by 53% of respondents.

## COMPARE.

The Isle of Wight Parks and Gardens Service proved difficult to compare with other local authorities owing to the number of sites and the nature of the services involved, as other local authorities had differing structures on how to managed their services. For example including countryside services, allotments, wardens and park rangers, car-parking, toilet cleaning, catering kiosks and sports pitch hire etc as part of the Parks and Garden service.

However information was shared and compared with the New Unitary Benchmarking Group, (NUBS) a forum developed for sharing and comparing information and services, and other similar and excellent service providers. The Isle of Wight Council being a unitary council has been a member of the NUB's group since conception. A full distribution list is available in Appendix 9. Also shared was information from our neighbouring authorities of Bournemouth Borough Council and Portsmouth City Council.

### Performance Indicator Comparison

As part of the review there was an obligation to make meaningful comparison with other service providers. To compare the performance of local authorities nationally the audit commission produces performance indicators known as ACPI's. Within the remit of this service review there is only one indicator ACPI 12 relating to the provision of play areas. The Isle of Wight council compares to this standard as follows:

Performance Indicator ACPI 12	Actual 00/01	Estimate 01/02	English Unitary Councils	
			Median	Upper/Lower Quartile
(a) The number of playgrounds and play areas provided by the Council, per 1000 children under 12	2.1	No longer collected	2.3	3 / 1.4
(b) The percentage of these which conform to national standards for:-		No longer collected		
(i) Local unequipped play areas	0%		0%	8 / 0 %
(ii) Local equipped play areas	1%		33 %	49 / 17%
(iii) Larger, neighbourhood play areas	0%		7 %	13 / 0%

The details in ACPI(a) show there is an slightly below average number of playgrounds provided by the council, however this performance indicator does not take into consideration other service providers such as Town and Parish Councils.

The quality indicator ACPI(b) shows that the playgrounds provided do not in general conform to national standards for service provision.

### Results of New Unitary Benchmarking Club Comparison

Due to the complex nature of the service and the delivery permutations possible, there is limited National information with regards to performance standards. The ACPI 12 indicator represents only a fraction of the departments remit, therefore other Local Best Value Performance Indicators (LBVPI's) were developed through comparison of previous ACPI's, and service comparisons with other internal departments. In order to make a comparison with other local authorities, the LBVPI's were distributed to the NUBs group.

Unfortunately gaining a meaningful response from this survey method proved difficult, as the responders reported that they did not have the information required in a useable form. However this exercise did establish six useable comparisons details through more traditional fiscal information. These were from; North Lincolnshire Council, Darlington Borough Council, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Vale of Wight Horse District Council, and South Oxfordshire District Council. The supporting results gained and analysis chart are contained within Appendix 5.

These can be summarised as follows:

#### NUB's COMPARISON TABLE

Operation	Cost High/Low	Average	Isle of Wight	Comments
Av. Cost to Maintain per Ha	£4.4 / £125k	£30.26k	£4.4k	IW cheapest in this category
Gang mowing per 100sqm	£0.13/£0.88	£0.51	£0.42	IW below the average cost
Rotary Mowing per 100sqm	£0.51/£1.20	£0.80	£0.66	IW below the average cost
Meadow Cut per 100sqm	£0.15/£1.84	£0.89	£1.10	IW just above the average cost
Shrub Bed Maint. per sqm	£0.14/£3.21	£1.60	£0.53	Second lowest
Set out and Mark Football pitch	£41.01/£164.47	£94.37	£52.00	Second lowest
Day Work Rate per hour	£11.00/£17.30	£13.82	£14.00	IW just above the average cost

The comparison table shows that the service on the Isle of Wight fiscally compares favourably with other unitary authorities, in providing a value for money service. Although some specific elements of service delivery were apparently achieved more cost effectively by comparable authorities, overall the Isle of Wight Council proved on

average to undertake its grounds maintenance for the most cost effective figure for this group of similar local authorities.

### **Service Benchmarking Visit**

Specifically our nearest matching comparable authority was East Riding of Yorkshire Council. However in order to gain more direct information from a similar comparable coastal tourist authority, a service benchmarking visit was undertaken to Bournemouth Borough Council in early November 2002. The key costing elements of the comparison between authorities are shown below.

<b>Council</b>	<b>Maintained Area (ha)</b>	<b>Value of Grounds Maintenance per annum</b>	<b>Average Cost per ha per annum</b>	<b>Total Cost of Grounds Maintenance per head</b>
<b>Isle of Wight Council</b>	180	£800k	£4 444.44	£ 7.90
<b>East Riding of Yorkshire Council</b>	190	£937k	£4 931.58	£ 2.98
<b>Bournemouth Borough Council</b>	796	£3 800k	£4 773.87	£23.38

The table shows a close balance between size and spend of both the Isle of Wight and East Riding authorities, with the Isle of Wight undertaking its grounds maintenance services 11% cheaper. Compared with Bournemouth maintenance undertaken 7% cheaper per hectare.

Spending annually per head on grounds maintenance is only 33% of Bournemouth, although 150% more than East Riding.

### **Summary points from the Comparison visit:**

Below is a summary of the service development points gained from the comparison visit to Bournemouth Borough Council that could be further explored and adopted to improve local service delivery.

#### **Capital Investment**

Improved investment has been achieved by the following initiatives.

- 1 The retaining of 50% of capitol receipts for Park's reinvestment when assets are disposed.
- 2 The use of land fill tax money to improve infrastructure.
- 3 The implementation of Planning Development Policy to ensure where developers cannot provide adequate open space and recreation within developments there is a relevant contribution to secure and improve existing recreation needs.
- 4 The use of Private Finance Initiatives to secure and improve service provision.
- 5 The introduction of sponsorship of visual amenity areas i.e. roundabouts/traffic Islands.

## **Joint working to Increase Service Profile**

The better utilisation and control of resources by providing a central Parks and Gardens Department who undertook all relating services in the Parks, Gardens, Open spaces, Landscape Design and Planning, Amenity areas, Countryside, Conservation, Allotments and Agenda 21. Thus gaining a higher profile, importance and organisations strength as well as giving greater opportunity of joint working towards corporate objectives through a central management structure. Currently Bournemouth provides all these services in house.

The centralisation of service management will lead to a reduction of in the duplication of management, ease the process of joint working and provide a better mechanism to implement the corporate aims of the Council. This in turn will lead to a more unified service and help contribute better to joined up government.

Improved working relationship with the Dog warden's service and exploration of offering these services in house.

## **Summary of Service Comparison**

- Isle of Wight Council spends less per Ha on Parks and Recreation than comparative authorities
- Despite the low investment maintenance rates are amongst the most cost effective
- Better joint working could assist the service and profile of assets
- Retention of capitol receipts from land sales could be used to improve infrastructure
- The greater use of PFI's and sponsorship should be explored
- Planning Policy could be used to assist and improve the Parks Network
- Playgrounds require improvement, Nationally in bottom quartile

## **COMPETE.**

Alternative ways of providing the current services were explored leading up to and through this review. These included:

Establishing if the service was required to be delivered in the current form or was there a way of achieving the same outcome with reduced or different resources.

Exploring existing Partnership Provisions through Town / Parish Councils and sports clubs was undertaken to establish if more of the service could be undertaken through a third party provider. The general response was that the IWC was best placed and resourced to undertake these services and as long as they were correctly managed there was no requirement to change the status quo. What would be appreciated would be a way for the club or Town / Parish Council to have more control without the attached responsibility.

Investigated was the possibilities and consequences of undertaking more of the existing contracted out service provision directly in house.

The Council explored and considered all the available service delivery options as part of a business process reengineering exercise conducted with ground maintenance service delivery authority wide during 2000/2001. The outcome of this review was that although there were certain synergies in undertaking the service directly in house, it would be difficult for the Council to find the capitol injection required to purchase depots, plant and equipment to mobilise for the service. Also, a large proportion of the equipment required was of a specialist nature and not easily available on the Island, the authority would be forced to purchase the equipment and not be able to utilise it to its maximum capacity. Having the services undertaken by a contractor would give the authority chance to use the equipment at reasonable rates as the contractor could achieve greater utilisation ratios by undertaking work operations with third parties outside the contract.

The Council decided upon the latter and the Parks office successfully produced documentation to re-tender the grounds maintenance services under the umbrella of the directorates mission statement 'To ensure the delivery of high quality public services, whilst obtaining Best Value in their provision to our customers'. Through the BPR process and repackaging work requirements, this exercise has lead to maintaining existing standards and produced prospective savings of £60k per annum, starting in the financial year 2002/3.

### **Review of Service by a Critical Friend**

The purpose of this element of the Best Value Review was to have the process, draft review and service delivery evaluated by an experienced Grounds Maintenance service delivery professional who could act as a critical friend and provide constructive criticism on the process to date. For this purpose we were assisted by Mr A Itter who was previously Head of Leisure Services at Taunton Deane Borough Council.

The report completed for this process is contained in Appendix 10. However it should be noted that adjustments have been made to expand on details that were light and to create better links between sections where relevant.

### **Summary of service Compete**

- IWC is best placed to undertake this important service
- Clubs, Town / Parish Council's would like more control but not the attached responsibilities
- Re-engineering works and market testing undertaken have lead to significant cost reductions

#### *Is it a good service?*

- Declared aim only established recently.
- A clear reference to aims and objectives needs to be established
- Service Aims require more quantifiable objectives
- Standards of service provision are good
- Service Satisfaction is high but it's contribution to Island Life is underestimated and service is under funded
- Councillors not engaged enough, therefore services are provided rather than

owned

- Corporate performance measurers are office measurers rather than service measurers

*Will the Service Improve ?*

- Service is good and recognised by satisfaction surveys
- Councillors need to be better informed to take more ownership
- Should the provision of grounds maintenance to clubs and Wight Leisure Continue
- The improvement plan will help develop the service but it will be staff and fiscal dependent.

### **3 Raw Data**

#### **List of Appendices**

1. List of Sites
2. List of Playgrounds
3. Summary locations for Public Seats
4. Summary of Parks and Gardens Challenge Events
5. Service Comparison with other Authorities (NUB's)
6. Appraisal Group Details
7. User Consultation Survey Questionnaire
8. Results of User Consultation Survey Questionnaire
9. Service Comparison Distribution List (NUB's)
10. Critical Friend Report
11. Not Used
12. Results of Survey Questionnaires 2,3,5,and 6.
13. Directorate of Education & Community Development Structure
14. Corporate Structure

