

**LEE VALLEY REGIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**21 NOVEMBER 2019 AT 13:00**

**Agenda Item No:**

**7**

**Report No:**

**S/53/19**

**SCRUTINY REVIEW TOPICS**

Presented by the Head of Parklands

**SUMMARY**

This report outlines the potential scrutiny review topics last discussed at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 22 November 2018.

The areas proposed:

- Holyfield Farm – looking at what the farm currently does, ways it could diversify and how market trends affect the business;
- Canal & River Trust – looking at moorings, towpath and signage; and
- Management of Parklands – looking at how Rangers and officers care for the flora and fauna and what issues they face.

This report considers those options but asks the Committee to consider other areas as outlined in the report. It is proposed that the Scrutiny Committee recommend to Executive Committee that the next scrutiny review be the Authority's office accommodation.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members note: (1) the report; and

Members recommend to Executive Committee that: (2) the focus of the next Scrutiny Review be office accommodation requirements as per the scope set out in paragraphs 13 to 16 of this report.

**BACKGROUND**

1 For the benefit of new Members, it should be noted that the Scrutiny Committee was formed in 2009 following a review of the Authority's governance. It is a Committee formed under the Lee Valley Regional Park Act 1966 and not in line with the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in local authorities which derive from the Local Government Act 2000. The Authority has set the following terms of reference for this committee;

- To review performance and to scrutinise the activities of the Authority.

- To make recommendations to the Executive Committee.
- To take evidence from officers of the Authority, interest groups, individuals, and make recommendations to the Executive Committee and Authority for policy change and review the performance of outside bodies.
- To consider issues referred by the Executive Committee where the views of external bodies/persons may contribute, take evidence and report to the Executive Committee and Authority.
- To consider any item to be considered by the Executive Committee (except items of urgent business) before the item is considered by the Executive Committee if required by the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee. The relevant report to the Executive Committee will be made available to the Scrutiny Committee.
- To have regard to the need to avoid duplicating the work of the Audit Committee and Task & Finish Panels/Groups when considering subjects for scrutiny.

### **HOLYFIELD HALL FARM**

- 2 Holyfield Hall Farm (the Farm) has been owned and directly managed by the Authority since 1976. Its 600 acres are managed as a mixed farm supporting a milking herd, livestock and an arable operation. The Farm also provides grazing animals, including a small-dedicated conservation grazing herd of Belted Galloways which are used in the on-going management of nature conservation sites within the Regional Park; grazing with cattle is a long established method of managing grasslands to enhance its nature conservation value. The Farm is also part of the visitor attraction at Lee Valley (Hayes Hill) Park Farm. The visitor attraction is owned by the Authority and currently managed by Lee Valley Leisure Trust Ltd (the Trust).
- 3 The Farm has undergone a full review and all actions and recommendations from that review have been implemented, this has resulted in a budget improvement of £70,000, with the aim of breaking even. This breakeven position is with due consideration to internal budget movements that have no impact on the overall Authority budget but impact negatively on the Farm's, so are excluded for the budget target.
- 4 Conversions of the old barns into holiday, staff accommodation and/or office units has been put on hold due to officers having to focus on other pressing projects.
- 5 Following consideration of the external consultants report, the Scrutiny Committee recommended to Executive Committee in July 2018 that the Farm business be kept in-house for 2 years to achieve SMART targets with the aim to become cost neutral (paper E/570/18).

### **CANAL & RIVER TRUST**

- 6 Members should note that this was the subject of a Scrutiny review by a previous Scrutiny Committee in 2014. Canal & River Trust were invited in to discuss a number of issues relating primarily to enforcement and the condition of boats on the waterway and boater behaviour including floating 'raves' and canal fairs.
- 7 Canal & River Trust are an independent organisation with representation on the

Authority Board. Members may have noticed more recently that since the AGM the newly appointed representative from Canal & River Trust, Sam Anderson-Brown, is now attending Authority meetings when previously Canal & River Trust did not attend. This is a positive step towards a closer working relationship and interaction with Members of the Authority.

- 8 It should be noted that officers do work as closely with Canal & River Trust as they can relating to waterways matters throughout the Regional Park and a number of joint meetings are held throughout the year. The Canal & River Trust have undergone a restructure and as such Senior Officers are in the process of arranging a meeting with the Regional Director for later in 2019 when the following will be discussed:
- Canal & River Trust Mooring Strategy;
  - Green Flag within River Lee Country Park (awarded this year);
  - conflicts between users of the Navigation, this has included joint working parties on vegetation clearance, plus working closely with user groups and clubs; focusing on Stonebridge Lock;
  - Canal & River Trust new structure/roles and contact details; and
  - the proposed new Ice Centre development and Oxbow Lake opportunity.
- 9 From the officer perspective, a further Scrutiny review of the working relationship with Canal & River Trust would not necessarily be beneficial at this time and may duplicate some of the work that is underway.

**PARKS & OPEN SPACES (looking at how Rangers and officers care for the flora and fauna and what issues they face)**

- 10 The Parklands and Open Spaces are managed by various sections of the Authority; mainly the Ranger Service, Biodiversity, Fisheries and the Farm.
- 11 A review of the Farm has been completed.
- 12 The Ranger service has just been restructured as part of the wider service reviews, this mainly focused on the staffing levels and as such work is still to be undertaken on the following:
- team area review;
  - roles and the changing needs of the Authority;
  - budgets;
  - site management delivery options – in house, external contractors/ partner organisations for example;
  - efficiencies and savings; and
  - weaknesses and strengths.
- 13 With this internal service review underway officers would recommend that the Scrutiny Committee wait for the outcomes of this review which could then be brought to the Scrutiny Committee in this committee term for analysis and input before going to the Executive Committee.

**OTHER POTENTIAL SCRUTINY REVIEWS**

- 14 Members are asked to consider one further area for Scrutiny Review during this committee term. Some information on this area is set out below.

- 15 Officers have been looking at options to improve on the budget performance and continued reliance on the levy as part of the levy review process. With the number of Authority staff being reduced due to a third party running the six major sporting venues and having their own headquarters, now would be an opportune time to review the Authority's future accommodation requirements.
- 16 Officers are seeking the views of the Scrutiny Committee as to whether future accommodation options should be explored. Such a review could operate under the following terms of reference:
  - To evaluate the Authority's future accommodation requirements
  - To review the Authority's current accommodation portfolio
  - To identify any costs/savings in future accommodation provision
- 17 Therefore officers are recommending that this work forms the basis of the Scrutiny Committee's review for 2020/21.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 18 There are no environmental implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 19 There are no financial implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

### **HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 20 There are no human resource implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 21 There are no legal implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

### **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 22 There are no risk management implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

### **EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 23 There are no equality implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

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### **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

the Farm                      Holyfield Hall Farm