
Business Case for withdrawing the Urban Ranger Service

March 2013

**Report By: Director of Housing & Community Services
Lead Officer: Steve Bird, Assistant Director(Communities &
Street Scene)**

A. Scope and Objectives of the review

Drivers for the Review of the Service:

The local government finance settlement the City Of Lincoln Council received in December 2012 has left the Council needing to find £1million of ongoing savings in 2013/14, rising to an estimated £3million per annum by 2016/17.

Whilst the Council remains committed to Lean systems reviews in order to achieve cost efficiencies and reductions of the scale required, we now find ourselves at the point where we can no longer make the size of savings demanded of us without impacting on the services we provide.

Towards the end of 2012 the Leader of the Council, along with Executive members and the Corporate Management Team conducted a detailed review of our spending.

A driving principle of this review was to accept that the organisation must do fewer things well and therefore, although the Strategic Plan was only approved last year, careful consideration was given to further refocusing the Council's priorities. A number of considerations has led to these now being defined as:

- ❖ **Growing the local economy**
- ❖ **Protecting the city's poorest people from the effects of the recession**
- ❖ **Increasing the supply of affordable housing**

Once this had taken place the Executive and Corporate Management Team undertook a detailed review of the Council's current budgets, including a review of all savings achieved since 2008. Budgets were considered from a number of perspectives including the way in which they contributed to these priorities.

In addition to ensuring that the Council balances its budget it is committed to achieving a position of financial sustainability from which the Council has a steady base and is in the best position to grow moving forward. A revised strategy entitled "Towards Financial Sustainability" (TFS) has been developed to deliver this.

As part of this fundamental review under the Towards Financial Sustainability Programme a number of potential savings have been identified for 2013/14. These savings include, amongst others, a proposal to withdraw the Urban Ranger Service during 2013/14.

B. Summary of the existing service

Current Service Delivery:

The Urban Ranger Service was introduced in 1999 and from the outset has consisted of a team of three staff, equipped with motorcycles suitable for off-road use, patrolling the Council's open spaces.

The original purpose in introducing the service was to enforce laws and byelaws in public parks, play areas and open spaces. The main role and function of the service covers a range of service elements:

- Regular patrols of parks and open spaces to act as a deterrent to misuse and abuse and ensure the safety of park and open spaces
- Provision of advice and assistance to users of parks and open spaces
- Enforcement of rules and byelaws
- Control of anti-social behaviour in parks and open spaces

- Education and raising awareness of the value of parks and open spaces
- Maintenance of equipment and opening and closing of parks and play areas (where locked).

The range of service provided has evolved and grown since its inception. The Urban Rangers are empowered to take direct action where it is reasonable and safe to do so, including immediate action to respond to vandalism and other damage including the cleaning up of graffiti, making safe damage to play equipment clearing broken glass and littering as a part of the routine patrols. The Urban Rangers act in an ambassadorial role with members of the public and seek to establish good working relationships with the users of parks and open spaces(particularly local youths) to encourage use of the facilities and to deter vandalism.

The Service has also developed its educational role with Urban Rangers visiting and speaking at local schools on a regular basis to explain the value of caring for open spaces, and other environmental messages pertaining to the work of the Council encouraging young people to use parks and open spaces responsibly.

The Urban Rangers are equipped with high visibility uniforms and operate mobile patrols of the Council's parks and open spaces on motorcycles in an extended shift system covering evenings and weekends which sees them work through until 10pm on some nights of the week and provide patrols at weekends and bank holidays when park and open space usage is at a peak. The team routinely address anti-social behaviour issues in parks and open spaces, working in co-ordination with the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team , CCTV, and the Police.

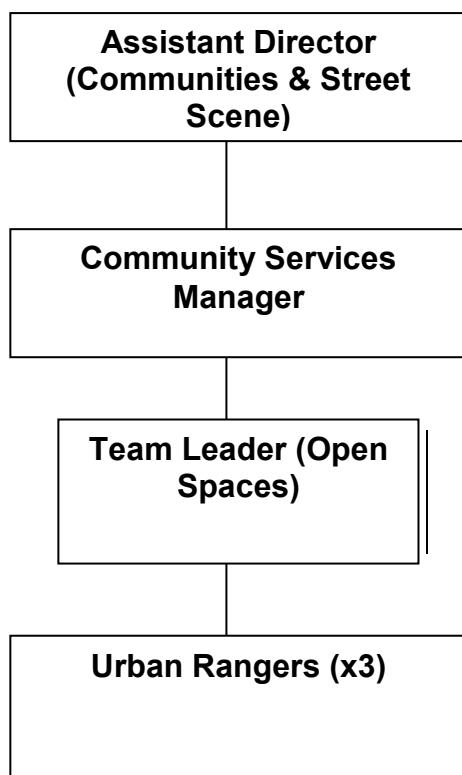
Staffing:

The Urban Ranger Service consists of the following staff -

- 3 Urban Rangers (Full time posts – salary grade 4)

Overall line management of the 3 staff is undertaken by the Team Leader (Open Spaces) who also has responsibility for a range of other services including day to day management of the council's grounds maintenance contracts

Current Structure – Urban Ranger Service



Description of key roles from the Job Descriptions

The key duties and responsibilities of the Urban Rangers as set out in the job description for the post are to:

1. To carry out patrols of land and premises managed by the City Council, opening and securing premises as necessary (**55%**)
2. To offer advice and assistance to the public, and provide information and support for the Council's Street Cleansing, Refuse Collection and Grounds Maintenance Monitoring Service (**15%**)

3. To co-ordinate/assist with the apprehension of those in breach of the law or Council policies, and present documentation and evidence sufficient to secure prosecutions **(10%)**
4. To monitor and effect the removal of graffiti by direct or indirect means **(10%)**
5. To participate in the organisation and presentation of talks to schools and other interested groups on the role of the service in connection with the promotion of pride and citizenship.**(5%)**
6. To be responsible for the security of all equipment and carry out regular checks and basic maintenance of motor cycles **(5%)**

The proportion of time allocated to each element of the job is indicative only and may vary from time to time.

C. Proposal Summary

Outline proposal

The proposal is for the full withdrawal of the Urban Ranger Service and deletion of the 3 posts of Urban Ranger from the staffing establishment in order to contribute to the £3million budget savings identified in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Full year revenue savings will be of the order of £86,170 in 2014/15 (actual savings in 2013/14 will be of the order of £29,960 (based on 9 months of savings and potential redundancy costs if staff cannot be redeployed). Withdrawal of the service will provide net ongoing revenue savings of £383,830 to the General Fund over the life of the Medium Term Financial Strategy as illustrated in Section d..

Other options could include maintaining the service or deleting one or two posts from the current establishment of three. However these will not

- a) Contribute significantly towards the identified savings target and therefore do not contribute to savings identified in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy / Towards Financial Sustainability Programme.

- b) Deliver against the principle of doing fewer things well - less staff will inevitably lead to a decline in outputs.
- c) Will not fundamentally contribute to the revised Council priorities.
- d) Will not provide sufficient staff hours to operate a rota of patrols and other activities covering weekdays, weekends and evenings as now and provide sufficient resilience of service allowing for holiday entitlements and any sickness absence.

The scope and brief for this review has been to examine the implications of a proposal to close and withdraw the service and therefore these options have therefore not been considered in any more detail at this stage.

D. Detailed appraisal of option

The withdrawal of the Urban Ranger Service and the deletion of the 3 posts of Urban Ranger in the Urban Ranger Team will involve the cessation of the service and related activities in Section B above or (where essential), the delivery of those activities in an alternative way. For example the Council will still need to respond to reports of vandalism and damage in parks, play areas and open spaces which present an immediate health and safety risk to users and would need to make alternative arrangements via other staff or contractors to respond to such reports from the public but this would be a purely limited responsive service.

It is inevitable that the withdrawal of the service will lead to both a perceived and actual reduction in the provision of services in the Council's parks and open spaces.

The withdrawal of the Urban Ranger Service will mean that parks and open spaces will no longer be routinely patrolled and may add to the public's fear of crime and a potential increase in anti-social behaviour and vandalism in such

areas but it is difficult to assess the extent or cost of any such impact and this will need to be kept under review.

Any reports of criminal activity, anti-social behaviour or vandalism in the Council's parks and open spaces will need to be referred on directly to the Police and/or to the Council's Anti-social Behaviour Team and be prioritised along with other reports of such activity. However given the existing workloads and competing demands on such services it is inevitable that service levels in terms of responses to reports of anti-social behaviour and vandalism in parks, play areas and open spaces will be adversely affected.

Savings identified with the proposal:

A summary of the predicted savings against projected budgets are set out in the following table:

Year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Net savings	£29,960*	£86,170	£87,680	£89,220	£90,800

* 2013/14 savings based on withdrawal of service from 1 July 2013, therefore delivering savings from start of qtr 2. Identified savings include potential redundancy costs

A more detailed breakdown of the financial data including staff redundancy costs is presented in the report in Part B of the agenda for the meeting.

E. Staffing Issues

Under this proposal, **three full time posts** will be deleted from the organisational structure.

- Urban Ranger (Salary Scale 4)
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All 3 posts are currently filled and there are no vacancies in the establishment and should the Council proceed with the proposal to withdraw the service the

post holders would be at risk of redundancy unless they can be redeployed to suitable alternative employment within the Council.

If the service is deleted then the post of Team Leader (Open Spaces) will at some point need the job description and person specification revising. However because this service forms a relatively small part of the range of services and duties and responsibilities and extended range of services managed by that post it is not envisaged that the changes will substantially affect the day to day duties or role of the post nor the salary grade. The post of Team Leader has not therefore been formally included in the current consultation although the post holder is fully aware of the proposal.

The Council's Management of Change Policy is being applied in terms of consultation on this proposal and the 3 affected staff have been notified of the proposal and consulted under the Policy including the right of representation by their trade union or other representative.

The 3 Urban Rangers have submitted a joint response to the proposed closure of the service which is enclosed at **Appendix D (i)**.

The Unison trade union has submitted a general response to the package of measures and proposed budget savings identified in the Medium Term Financial Strategy and in regard to the Urban Ranger Service has commented generally as follows:

- “Unison acknowledges the need to save money due to government cutbacks, however the withdrawal of services should always be a last resort. Not only do withdrawal of services lower the public's esteem of the Council, but also the dramatic changes to individual staff members affected by possible redundancy, affect, hugely, staff morale throughout the authority.”

On the specific proposal to withdraw the Urban Ranger service Unison commented as follows:

- “the public perception is that the Council don’t care about anti-social behaviour and vandalism”

In the event that Council decide to proceed with the proposal to close the Urban Ranger Service the 3 post holders will be issued with redundancy notices and unless suitable alternative employment can be found for the 3 employees through the Redeployment Pool they would be entitled to redundancy payments calculated in accordance with the Council’s Redundancy Payments Scheme. Further details are set out in the report in Part B of the agenda for the meeting

F. Stakeholder Responses

Following announcement of the proposed closure of the Urban Ranger Service alongside the publication of the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy the following groups were advised of the proposal and their comments (and or those of their constituent member & member organisations) were invited:

- Arboretum Park Advisory Panel
- Boultham Park Advisory Panel
- Hartsholme Country Park Advisory Panel
- Birchwood Nature Park Advisory Panel

Comments on the proposed closure of the Urban Ranger Service have been received from:

- Lincoln Commons Horse Association
- Long Leys Residents Association
- West End Residents Association
- Ramblers Association (Lincoln Group)
- The Café at Hartsholme Park Ltd
- Monks Road Neighbourhood Initiative (combined response from the Parks Advisory Groups)
- 2 staff at Hartsholme Park Café

These responses are set out in **Appendix E (i)**

In addition to these responses the Council has received a 67 page petition signed by some 1200 people objecting to the proposed closure of the Urban Ranger Service stating:

- “*We would like to raise our objections to the planned closure of the Urban Ranger Service. The removal of the service will lower our feeling of safety whilst using the parks and may affect our usage of them. We would also like to point out that anti-social behaviour will increase as will damage to our green spaces and we all do not see how the removal of this service versus the impact and increase in damage and anti-social behaviour makes financial/business sense”* “*We the undersigned want the City of Lincoln Council to retain the Urban Ranger Service*”

A copy of the petition will be available for inspection at the meeting, and the front sheet is attached as Appendix E (iii).

The Commons Advisory Panel meeting on 11 February 2013 also considered the withdrawal of the Urban Ranger Service and the relevant extract from the minutes of the Commons Advisory Panel meeting held on 11 February 2013 at which the proposal for closure and withdrawal of the Commons Warden Service was discussed are attached at **Appendix E (ii)**

All of the responses express concern at the proposal to close and withdraw the Urban Ranger Service. The Council has received a public petition objecting to the proposal to close the service and the Commons Advisory Panel resolved to request in the strongest terms that the Council should not go ahead with the proposal.

G. Analysis of the Service implications, Risk and Equality Impact Assessment

A summary of the main concerns raised in response to the proposals and identified risks and mitigations from withdrawing the service are set out below;

Risks	Mitigation
<p>Lincoln Commons Horse Association</p> <p>Letter submitted expressing concerns relating to the Commons Warden and Urban Ranger services. Consider that the Commons Warden and Urban Rangers have made Lincoln's open spaces better places since their introduction.</p> <p>Unclear who will now tackle ASB issues and believe that the open spaces generally will be less safe.</p>	<p>The enforcement of laws and byelaws is a matter that would have to be reported to, be picked up, and prioritised by the Police.</p> <p>The Council's Anti-social Behaviour Team may be able to address persistent problems of anti-social behaviour (e.g. street drinking in parks and open spaces) but like the Police would need to prioritise such work.</p>
<p>Long Leys Residents Association</p> <p>Letter submitted that covers concerns relating to the Commons Warden and Urban Ranger services. Consider that the Commons Warden and Urban Rangers have made Lincoln's open spaces better places since their introduction.</p> <p>Suggests closure is a risk to the care of Green Flag accredited open spaces such as the Arboretum and Hartsholme Park.</p>	<p>The absence of the dedicated staff resources will undoubtedly impact on the Council's ability to pro-actively maintain the sites and will not help the prospects for Green Flag status. However, the Green Flag judging criteria covers many areas, and the effect on the accreditation cannot be prejudged. It does not mean certain failure of any bid.</p>

Asks who will provide enforcement in open spaces?	The enforcement of laws and byelaws is a matter that would have to be reported to, picked up and prioritised by, the Police and/or the Council's Anti-social Behaviour Team.
<p>West End Residents Association</p> <p>Letter submitted that covers concerns relating to the Commons Warden and Urban Ranger services. Consider that the Commons Warden and Urban Rangers have made Lincoln's open spaces better places since their introduction.</p> <p>Asks who will respond to crime and ASB in open spaces if these services stop?</p>	See comment above.
<p>Ramblers Association</p> <p>Letter submitted that covers concerns relating to the Commons Warden and Urban Ranger services. Considers that the Commons Warden and Urban Rangers have done an excellent job.</p> <p>Concern that without both services there will be nobody addressing misuse of the commons.</p>	See comment above
<p>Hartsholme Park Café owner (member of PAG)</p> <p>Considers Urban Rangers vital & believes park visitors will feel less safe.</p> <p>Asks what has changed since the ranger service was started to make it less worthwhile now?</p>	<p>The absence of regular, highly visible patrols by the Urban Ranger service may result in an increase in visitors fears of crime and anti-social behaviour. It is difficult to accurately predict whether the absence of the service will in fact result in an increase in crime and anti-social behaviour</p> <p>The financial position of the Council has changed significantly as a result of the Governments austerity</p>

	<p>measures as set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Council has no alternative but to find £3million savings over the next 3 years. The fact that this proposal is being brought forward for consideration is a reflection of the budget position and not a reflection on the quality of the Urban Ranger Service.</p> <p>Concern that loss of protection in open spaces means more vandalism and damage.</p>
<p>Park Advisory Groups –Joint (Arboretum, Hartsholme , Boultham Park, Birchwood Nature Park) .</p> <p>Accept that due to the financial position the Council would not be able to maintain the services in their present form. But View is that the Urban Rangers are of great value in controlling ASB and make people feel safer, giving on-the-ground support to CCTV and feel that service is too important to be cut.</p> <p>Option put forward on possibility of sponsorship from local businesses, with the City Council still managing the service. Asked for this to be considered by the Council as a serious option, which the Park Advisory Groups could be allowed to pursue.</p>	<p>The enforcement of laws and byelaws is a matter that would have to be reported to, picked up and prioritised by, the Police.</p> <p>Experience of seeking and obtaining sponsorship for ongoing revenue services show this to be very difficult to obtain, and even more difficult to sustain and the Council cannot predicate its budgets in the hope of obtaining the necessary ongoing sponsorship.</p> <p>The Council may wish to invite sponsorship proposals from Park Advisory Groups that could show how third party funding/volunteer services could be secured but does not have the resources to seek this funding itself. Given the financial deadlines that the Council faces in order to make the necessary savings it is not in a position to enter into protracted negotiations unless there was a</p>

	demonstrable high probability of success at the outset.
<p>Urban Ranger Service- Staff Response</p> <p>Objects to the closure based on:</p> <p>Decision not thought through.</p> <p>Considers that the saving is small against the benefits the service gives, and comments that it will cost in redundancy payments. Believes the Council will see increased costs from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage • ASB • Fly tipping • Littering • Graffiti • Dog fouling • Drug/alcohol abuse • Motorcycles in parks <p>Wishes it to be noted that currently the Police look to the URS to deal with parks issues.</p> <p>Asks who will enforce parks and commons byelaws now?</p> <p>Believes that the public will feel less safe, and use open spaces less as a result.</p> <p>The loss of the URS means no 'out of hours' response to problems in open spaces. Who will attend incidents such as traveller encampments in the future?</p> <p>Believes that the educational role the URS has fulfilled in establishing local ownership of open spaces, and promoting the Council's work will be lost.</p>	<p>No decision has been made to close the service.. Following the statement by the Chancellor on further cuts to local government the City Council has needed to respond quickly with proposals in order to meet the budget pressures placed upon it. The proposal to close the Urban Ranger Service (URS) arose from those considerations, and has lead to consultation on this proposal.. The consultation has identified the key issues and risks in order to permit opportunity for consideration and deliberation on key matters.</p> <p>It is recognised that the URS has been of benefit for the care and maintenance of open spaces. However it is difficult to quantify in financial terms the direct impact that the introduction of the service has had. There have been no budget cuts in areas as a result of the introduction of the service. It is expected that additional costs may be incurred in some areas should the service close but these will need to be absorbed by respective service areas.</p> <p>The most important area for savings that the Council is required to make are on 'revenue', that is to say to reduce the on-going year-on-year operating costs of the Council in the longer term. The redundancy costs for the Council would be one-off single costs that need to be taken into account, but even if incurred would still deliver year-on-year savings in operating costs compared to current budget.</p>

<p>Asks who will look for lost children in parks?</p> <p>Who will CCTV contact for on-the-ground response to issues in parks?</p>	<p>Lost children would be a matter for the Police to consider and prioritise.</p> <p>The Police would have to be the contact point for all matters in the future, and they would have to prioritise them against the resources available, at that time</p>
<p>Believe that members have forgotten how bad things were before the URS was established and that nothing is in place to address their loss.</p> <p>Concern that changing minds later, if/when problems emerge, will cost the Council more to re-establish a new service, with loss of knowledge and experience.</p>	<p>Before the Council developed the Urban Ranger Service the Police enforced laws and byelaws. This responsibility has not changed, although it is accepted that the Police would have to prioritise calls for action in open spaces against other priorities and there is no doubt that the loss of this service would mean a reduction in enforcement in open spaces.</p> <p>Assessment will need to be made of incidents on a case-by-case basis. Very minor incidents may be addressed by Community Services staff if there is a resource available, alternatively it may be something that would be referred to the Police. It is accepted that some issues raised with the Council would not receive a direct response. Traveller encampments would be dealt with by the staff in the Community Services section as additional work.</p>
<p>They do not believe that the decision to close the service is supported by the public.</p>	<p>A public petition has been received and is enclosed with this Business Case for consideration in any decision to close the service.</p> <p>The valuable work that the Urban Rangers have undertaken to protect and promote the Council's open spaces since their inception is acknowledged. However, faced with the need for significant cuts it has been necessary to consider difficult and in other circumstances</p>

	<p>undesirable proposals.</p> <p>If a decision were to be taken to close this service, it would be to meet financial demands on the Council. There is currently no prospect of an improvement in local government finances and thus, if a decision were to be taken to close the service, then there would be little prospect of a replacement in the foreseeable future.</p>
Other risks:	
Expectation that work currently undertaken by the Urban Ranger service will need to be absorbed by other staff elsewhere within the service or organisation	<p>There is no capacity to absorb the pro-active work undertaken by the Urban Ranger service but to the extent that members of the public and park visitors report damage, vandalism and anti-social behaviour in parks and open spaces demand on customer services and the community services team generally will not diminish. This will have to be carefully monitored by the Assistant Director and Service Manager.</p>
Reduction in resources for responses to emergencies under the Emergency Plan	<p>During declared emergencies (eg the floods of 2007 & 2012) the Urban Ranger Service has been deployed in a forward liaison role by the Council's operational command. Other staff would be deployed in such a role if necessary but the mobility provided by motorcycles would be lost</p>

Copies of the full responses of stakeholders are attached at **Appendix E(i)** and the staff response at **Appendix D (i)**

An Equalities Analysis on the proposed closure has also been carried out and is attached at **Appendix A**

H. Implementation plan

The broad implementation plan for this restructure is as follows:

- Staff Consultation starts - letter & meeting with those directly affected with their trade unions - Offer of HR rep & TU present as well for those staff directly affected –**issued on 17 January 2013**
- Initial responses to proposal – **21 February 2013**
- JCC considers business case – **20 March 2013**
- Policy Scrutiny Committee considers Business Case – **20 March 2013**
- Executive considers business case –**25 March 2013**
- Call in period ends –**5 April 2013**
- Implementation starts – **8 April 2013**
- Notice of redundancy issued to relevant staff and potential redeployment options considered – w/c **8 April 2013**
- Gradual exit from programmes and handovers where relevant - **8 April – 14 June 2013**
- Service withdrawn – **14 June 2013**

I. Key Decisions Required

The key decision required to enable the Detailed Business Case to move to implementation is:

- Decision to proceed with the proposal to withdraw the Urban Ranger Service
- In the event of such a decision authority to officers to issue notices of redundancy to the 3 affected staff and to implement the Council's managing change procedures.

Appendix A: EQUALITY ANALYSIS

Attached

Appendix B: FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Summarised in Section D and detailed as set out in report in PARTB of the agenda papers.

Appendix C: TRADE UNION COMMENTS

To be added after Joint Consultative Committee has met on 19 March 2013

Appendix D: RESPONSE FROM STAFF

Attached. (i) collective response from 3 Urban Rangers

Appendix E: RESPONSES FROM PARKS ADVISORY GROUPS & OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Attached: i) Individual responses.
(ii) Minutes of Commons Advisory Panel 11 February 2013

Appendix F: POLICY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE COMMENTS

To be added after Policy Scrutiny Committee has met on 20 March 2013