

Extract from Committee

COMMONS ADVISORY GROUP

11 FEBRUARY 2013

16. Commons Rangers Redundancies

Lincoln Commons Horse Association presented a short report raising concerns regarding the potential loss of the Commons Ranger Service and questioned how this would affect the running of the Commons and the management plan for the future.

Steve Bird, Assistant Director, Community Services, Leisure and Sport:

- a. updated Commons Advisory Panel on further financial restraints imposed on the Council by the local government finance settlement
- b. advised that this had resulted in proposals put forward to form part of the strategy to achieve our financial target in 2013/14, which included withdrawal of the Urban Ranger and Commons Warden Service
- c. urged members of Commons Advisory Panel to respond to the consultation process either in person or together in groups within their individual organisations.

External Members of Commons Advisory Panel commented on the proposed cuts to the Urban Rangers and Commons Warden Service as follows:

- Comment: The cuts would be detrimental to the City resulting in further incidents of anti social behaviour on the City Commons.
- Question: Why couldn't the money ring fenced from parking charges on the South Common be used to fund the Commons Warden?
- Officer response: There was still a receipt to be added to the income for match day parking on Boxing Day 2012; it currently stood at £6,048.00. This sum of money would not fund a Commons Warden.
- Comment: The proposed cuts took out a whole tier of protection currently afforded to the City Commons and parks. Commons Advisory Panel should make its objections extremely clear; once this protection had gone it would be difficult to know who to contact in the event of incidents of anti social behaviour as the police did not get involved unless only in specific cases.
- Comment: It was difficult to comprehend why the Council were proposing to withdraw from a need for 4 rangers to police the Commons and parks to having none at all.
- Response by Chair: No one was saying this. The Council had been instructed to cut £3 million from its revenue budget. Urban Rangers had not always existed. We bought into the service when the police were short of financial resources. We had the resources then but not now. The police had a legal duty to respond to incidents of crime and disorder.

- Comment: We must assess which services remained essential to the Commons, for example, maintenance of fences. What did the rangers do? Were there other ways of performing essential tasks?
- Officer Response: The proposed cuts only related to the budget for the Commons Warden and Urban Rangers. The wider budget for fencing remained protected.
- Comment: There had been more anti social behaviour over the last few years; the Urban Rangers were excellent at pre-empting problems before they escalated.
- Comment: The situation in respect of the golf club lease should be reassessed to increase the Council's income stream.
- Response by Chair: The lease for the Carholme Club extended over a long period of time and was a small amount of money compared to the extent of the savings to be made. The core budget for the Commons still remained.

Councillor C Burke advised that although he fully agreed with the sentiments made; financial restraints imposed by central government meant that cuts had to go so deep we must dispose of essential services we believed in.

A discussion took place around how the community could respond positively to ease the pressure on the Commons should the proposed cuts go ahead. The following suggestions emerged from discussions held:

- Park Watch Schemes
- Volunteering
- Increased signage
- Engagement with the community
- Use of Community Service Volunteers
- Use of 'ring fenced' car parking fund to employ a part time coordinator to organise volunteers

RESOLVED that:

1. Commons Advisory Panel to make its views expressed collectively on the proposed cuts to the Commons Warden and Urban Rangers Service via the formal consultation process, expressing its deep regret and requesting in the strongest terms that the Council should not go ahead with the proposals.
2. In the event that the Council should have to take the decision to withdraw the Commons Warden and Urban Ranger Service; a special meeting of Commons Advisory Panel be convened to look at a way forward in the coordination of volunteers within organisations across the City and to set up a watch scheme for the Commons.
3. Members of the public, Karl McCartney, MP for Lincoln, and Alan Hardwick, Police and Crime Commissioner for Lincoln be invited to attend the above special meeting of Commons Advisory Panel.
4. Lincolnshire Police be invited to nominate an advisory representative to serve on the Commons Advisory Panel.