

## Outcome 5– Improving maintenance and management

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In September 2009, the Parks for People support team issued an e-survey to all current Parks for People projects exploring experiences around Outcome 5– Improving maintenance and management

There were 46 responses with half of the projects (49%) at the implementation stage, around a third (31%) having had stage 1 approval and in development. The remainder (20%) had submitted their Stage 2 application and were awaiting approval.

While there were 46 responses, not every project completed all of the questions. This may reflect many issues – project apathy, survey fatigue and so on. It may also suggest that where responses to questions are lower than 46, those that did not answer the question may not be able to.

### Key outcomes

#### Green Flag

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- For over a quarter (11 or 27.5%) of projects, this will be the first time that a park in their authority has achieved the Green Flag. For the remainder (29 or 72.5%), this will be anything from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> park to achieve Green Flag
- Three quarters have carried out an assessment against the Green Flag criteria as part of their management and maintenance plans. The remainder plan to do so by summer 2010.
- Those who have done the assessment have either done it themselves using the criteria, got a colleague or volunteer or consultants to do it. In nearly two thirds (63%) of the cases, the assessor was a Green Flag Judge, with usually around 4-6 years experience.
- Two thirds (64%) of the assessments date to 2007 or before.
- Reflecting the nature of the assessment (more informal, not always completed by a judge) It would appear that many of the assessments were not a formal scoring – for example, only 15 responded with their desk assessment scores with 7 of these only indicating that they did not have a score.
- Only 11 projects indicated their total score with only one likely to have passed. Four projects scored less than 40
- 40% of all projects have set a target pass score. These 14 projects indicated their target score, all of which aim for a minimum of a pass score (66) and in case 85. Those that are being implemented now are typically aiming for 2011 while those that are not this stage are generally aiming for 2012-2013.
- 71% of projects (35) have an action plan to help achieve Green Flag. Around 60% (of 37) have allocated money from outside the HLF budget to help achieve the Green Flag. The proportions are a little higher for projects at the implementation stage.
- The barriers to achieving Green Flag are various but poor maintenance (and 'the need to implement the park maintenance plan' and commensurate success in achieving HLF monies) and vandalism/anti-social behaviour are most commonly cited.
- The main support needed by projects is in the form of 'critical friend' – such as a Green Flag judge or a project that has been through the process.

## Customer satisfaction

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- Nearly all projects (95% of 40) measure customer satisfaction.
- Green Stat is preferred by a significant number of projects (55%) while a similar amount of projects use their own. A fifth use comment cards while a third use feedback via email, friends groups and consultation exercises.
- However, some of the measures of satisfaction are too removed from the condition of the park – for example, number of visits and visitors are one measure but may depend on many factors outside the park. But actual satisfaction with the park measured through a survey is more accurate.
- Four fifths (82%) feel that their current system works but the remainder feel their systems are not working. Criticisms include unspecific questions, piecemeal systems and overly long survey form
- A little less than one third (30%) are revising their systems. It is clear from the comments that there some differing views on Green Stat. Some projects are moving towards it while others are reducing its role. In most cases, projects wanted detailed and specific information that their current systems are not giving them.
- 29% have no baseline data. For those that do, the indicators vary between “good and very good” percentages and Likert Scales. A small minority of projects will need to consider whether generic questions about local facilities will deliver the data they need. Or where projects intend to use the eventual Green Flag score, they will have failed to capture the levels of satisfaction ‘pre intervention’.
- Just over half of projects (51% or 19 of 37) have not set a target for customer satisfaction. Those that have, have adopted similar variables as outlined above – “good and very good” etc.
- Going forward with monitoring customer satisfaction, Green Stat featured in 14 of 32 responses. Surveys/questionnaires are standard responses although the responses of two projects (out of 32) appeared to be inadequate. It would appear that in two thirds (8 of 12) of projects, park staff will be responsible for collecting satisfaction information – the remainder is a mix of consultants, MORI, contract staff and college students.
- Over half of projects (20 out of 35 or 57%) will measure satisfaction on an annual basis with a further 12% will do so on an ongoing basis and 23% on a quarterly basis. There are issues with four projects (12%) with two intending to measure every two years (too long) and a further two having made no plans.
- Slightly less than half (49%) had a management plan in place before applying to HLF. However, of those that had a plan (17), a fifth had not reviewed maintenance costs and a fifth had not reviewed staffing structure. Nearly all (95%) had reviewed maintenance arrangements and specifications.
- The results of the review appear were varied. For four projects (out of 19), they were developing a response or the response was unclear with a further two not changing anything. Aside from that, changes in staffing structures and resourcing were the most commonly cited changes (5 mentions each). This ranged from the creation of new operational posts, to increase in maintenance budget. But generally a the movement of resources to frontline maintenance.
- The increase in revenue budgets as a result of HLF funding varies widely – five projects (out of 33) cited an increase of less than £10,000. But 58% cited an increase of more than £30,000 (it would appear that this is annual figure). The majority of these (13 out of 20) were relying on HLF for £50,000 or more, a significant dependence on HLF funding that will need to be addressed when the funding period ends.

- Projects have largely adopted three ways of sustaining the capital improvements through maintenance – additional staff, increased frequency of maintenance, improving of maintenance processes (frequency/structure) and the use of volunteers
- The sustainability of the new staff positions is questionable. Around a quarter of projects (8 out of 30) appear to have funded the new positions through increases from the local authority or restructuring. However, the dependence on HLF is high, with three quarters of projects relying on it to fund largely operational positions. For example, our sample of 27 projects were funding:
  - 5 park officer style positions
  - 11.5 Rangers/keepers
  - 25 Gardeners; and
  - 3 Apprenticeships
- The vast majority of respondents (87%) identified a need for additional training to achieve higher standards of park maintenance. The cost of this varied widely, usually around £5-10,000. 38% of projects were unable to identify the additional costs as this was tied up in internal budgets.
- Projects identified other measures of success. Most cited among these were repair costs and recorded incidents of vandalism/antisocial behaviour. Condition surveys, quality audits and numbers of visits/visitors were also mentioned.