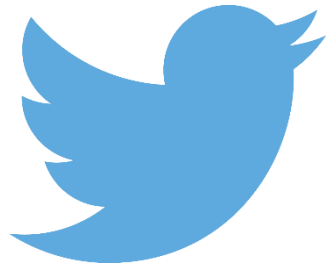




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Re-mobilising services post lockdown. Parks and Greenspaces

The restrictions implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are being lifted, and local government services are now looking to remobilise their services

APSE Remobilisation working groups were established to highlight the plans that councils are considering, and currently implementing.

Remobilisation reports cover four key areas:

- Operational activity
- Regrouping the workforce
- Budget, finance and re-establishing commercial activity
- Technical Considerations



Operational changes

Whilst some council services had limited or ceased their operations, parks and greenspaces services have been working at almost full capacity to ensure the public had access to greenspaces as part of their daily exercise routines despite some having to re-deploy staff to support grave digging and waste services

- Issuing of PPE, additional vehicles and lone working to reduce possibility of infection
- Monitoring of visitor numbers and taking enforcement action to comply with social distancing.
- Closure of some services and assets (playgrounds, cafes, toilets, sports pitches, visitor centres, car parks etc.)

Operational Changes (2)

- Reductions in service standards – grass cutting, fine turf maintenance, bedding etc.
- Increasing cutting heights of grass
- Introduction of differential mowing regimes
- Reductions in the maintenance of highway verges
- Difficulties in the ability to plant annual bedding schemes, either through a lack of availability of plants from nurseries or simply not having the staff available to carry out the task
- Some sports facilities are now being opened including tennis, golf, bowls etc.

General concern that when lock down ends, the public may expect the same standards of parks as before. Some things may be less well manicured and if social distancing continues some things may not be opened (e.g. playgrounds)



Re-grouping the workforce

- Issued hand sanitisers and enhanced access to hand washing facilities
- Reduced numbers in vehicles
- Enhanced the information being given to staff regards the need for social distancing
- Issued face masks
- Spreading staff more widely across parks when working
- Introducing week on week off rotas
- Staggering finishing times to prevent staff congregating at depots
- Single operative working across parks
- Councils have set up facilities for office staff to work from home and divert the phone lines to mobile numbers, thereby reducing exposure of staff to the public

Re-grouping the workforce (2)

- Most friends groups and volunteers are not working on physical projects within parks, although protocols and guidelines are being developed by a number of authorities whereby volunteers can be re-introduced.
- One area which was still causing staff concern was the ability to effectively enforce social distancing and manage anti-social behaviour.
- It was felt one of the main reasons there needs to be an ability to control numbers was that if there was a second wave of infection, then it may be difficult to re-enforce the stricter social distancing measures used at the start of the lockdown period leading to increased levels of ASB and threats to staff.

Budget, finance and re-establishing commercial activity

- COVID-19 and the closures and restrictions it has caused in parks has clearly impacted on the financial state of chargeable services offered in parks which have been a key source of income in the face of continued budget cuts over the last decade. Many parks services rely on the external income they generate from fees and charges, events, cafes, car parks and other activities.
- Governments' promise to reimburse councils for costs associated with COVID-19. Still a degree of uncertainty as to whether this reimbursement will cover all lost income.
- Most income is generated during the spring and summer months.
- Common problem was the ability of holders of franchises or those renting facilities within parks to pay their fees.
- future sustainability of sports clubs, such as bowling and football clubs, who use facilities within the parks.

Budget, finance and re-establishing commercial activity (2)

- As a result of lost income both capital and revenue spend is being closely scrutinised and many non-essential activities are being curtailed or stopped altogether.
- Ability of parks managers being able to manage their service budgets was highlighted in that wider corporate priorities are needing to be taken into account which could impact on future parks budgets.

Technical Considerations

- Most councils felt that there should not be any significant problems in bringing facilities and operational equipment back online as most had been maintaining many parks features and assets on a daily basis.
- Bringing horticultural features, sports pitches etc, back to the required standards.
- Most facilities requiring safety inspections had continued to receive them, mainly because some were still being illegally used despite notices and temporary fencing trying to prevent this.
- Opening of public conveniences is a concern due to easing of lockdown and DDA requirements.
- Many parks toilets do not have an attendant on duty which raises concerns as to enforcing social distancing and the cleaning specifications that would need to be in place alongside removing any payment slots or taping off sinks / cubicles to ensure social distancing.

Changes in service delivery

- Because of the reduction in high maintenance levels, the ability to introduce more naturalised and biodiversity friendly landscapes within parks will be possible – ‘biodiversity bonus’
- Reduced mowing regimes have seen increases in wildflowers and wildlife species which may have struggled to establish themselves in the past due to high maintenance mowing regimes.
- Potential for home working has increased for administration staff.
- Consideration of less high maintenance horticultural features such as bedding schemes, but also self reliance for plants from local nurseries.
- Push to raise the profile of parks and open spaces and their financial sustainability due to large reliance on these features during current pandemic.



**Parks and open spaces
Remobilisation Report**



Parks and Open Spaces Remobilisation Report (June2020)

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Fiona Sutton-Wilson, Phil Brennan & Charlotte Banks

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Advanced Parks Management *Sustainable Finance*

Mel Henley, APSE Associate

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21/07/2020 + 22/07/2020	09:00 - 12:30
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Working with Volunteers and the Voluntary Sector

Fiona Sutton-Wilson, Head of APSE Training

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