



## Shared Services Joint Committee Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022

<b>Report Title</b>	Country Parks and Outdoor Learning Disaggregation
<b>Report Author</b>	Jonathan Waterworth, Assistant Director, NNC Simon Bowers, Assistant Director, WNC
<b>Executive Member</b>	Councillor Graham Lawman Executive Member Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and Assets, NNC Councillor Phil Larratt, Portfolio Holder for Climate, Transport, Highways and Waste Services, WNC

<b>Key Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Are there public sector equality duty implications?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972</b>	

### List of Appendices

None

### 1. Purpose of Report

---

- 1.1. To seek approval of the recommendations to reprofile and commence the disaggregation of the Country Parks and Outdoor Learning service.
- 1.2. To seek approval of the recommendations following the completion and review of an Impact Assessment, set out within this report for the Committee's consideration, based on Officers' assessment for both authorities in relation to the disaggregation of the shared Country Parks and Outdoor Learning service.

### 2. Executive Summary

---

- 2.1. The Country Parks and Outdoor Learning service manage, operate and maintain country parks in North and West Northamptonshire, including ranger services. Everdon Outdoor Learning provides a variety of educational activities. The service is a Lead Authority in North Northamptonshire.

- 2.2. Senior Officers of both authorities desire to disaggregate the service to allow them to localise strategic planning and service delivery.
- 2.3. Existing arrangements will remain in place, including overall staffing levels, current budgets provisions, and equipment associated with the Country Parks and Outdoor Learning service.
- 2.4. Following disaggregation local decisions will be made on the architecture of new service areas through Country Park services operating independently in North and West Northamptonshire Authorities and aligned with each Council's own strategies and priorities.

### **3. Recommendations**

---

#### **3.1. That the Joint Committee (Shared Services):**

- a) Approve to disaggregate the Country Parks and Outdoor Learning service by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.
- b) Approve the proposed arrangements for disaggregation, budget, staffing, contract and cost implications, as set out in section 5 and section 7.
- c) Grant delegated authority to the Monitoring Officers for North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council to complete the decisions and actions necessary to give effect to the recommendations and conclude the requirements for the exit plan for IAA schedule 2H2.

#### **3.2. Reasons for recommendation**

- a) The proposed option to disaggregate the Country Parks and Outdoor Learning service adopts the local government reform blueprint, whereby a service has been led for a period of time before it can safely and legally disaggregate.
- b) Ensures the Councils and customers receive the most benefit from the delivery of Country Parks and Outdoor Learning services by changing the treatment of the service to allow it to be disaggregated, localising the strategic direction and service delivery in future
- c) So that disaggregation of the Country Parks and Outdoor Learning service can be completed by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

#### **3.3. Alternative Options Considered**

3.3.1 The Country Parks and Outdoor Learning service is currently being delivered as a lead authority service in accordance with the Administrative Agreement for the hosted /lead provision of functions and services between North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council. North Northamptonshire Council provides management and operational duties to both North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire administrative areas. This arrangement could continue as is. (Option 2 shown below at 5.1.2)

## 4. Report Background

---

- 4.1. The Country Parks and Outdoor Learning service manage, operate and maintain country parks in North and West Northamptonshire, including ranger services. Everdon Outdoor Learning provides a variety of educational activities.
- 4.2. Since the launch of the two new unitary authorities in April 2021, the Country Parks and Outdoor Learning service has been led by North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and currently delivers the duty of running the service for both NNC and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC).
- 4.3. Disaggregation of the service will facilitate both NNC and WNC integrating the former NCC country parks into their respective green space services.
- 4.4. Subsequently, an Impact and Options Assessment was completed and detailed options and recommendations around the future service and impact that this would have on customers. The outcomes of which have meant that each authority has a slightly different preferred approach towards the delivery of the service following disaggregation. Both NNC and WNC have requested integration of the former NCC country parks into their relevant NNC and WNC green space services.
- 4.5. To facilitate this approach, it is therefore recommended to disaggregate the existing service 'as is' and allow each authority to move separately towards two new delivery models after disaggregation, which will be reported to each individual council for approval according to corporate governance.

## 5. Issues and Choices

---

5.1 The following options were considered:

**Option 1** – Approval of full disaggregation by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022

**Option 2** – Continue with hosted arrangement as defined in the blueprint

5.1.1. **Option 1** is the recommended option for the following reasons:

- It allows each Authority the autonomy to invest in and deliver its own services aligned strategically with local objectives allowing WNC/NNC to build integrated parks services incorporating ex-Northamptonshire County Council and District & Borough parks into a greater whole for each authority by:
  - Creating embedded strategic linked opportunities.
  - Assist in building team identity aligned to the appropriate council and feel “part of” WNC/NNC.
  - Ability to offer customers and residents services /opportunities aligned to any local consultation and engagement feedback.
  - Allow the services to set their own fees and charges, seek internal and external funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment and to develop income generating ideas and deliver services aligned with their own council strategy and priorities.
  - Reduce the administrative burden around the need for discussion regarding operational decision making and service delivery, that the lead model currently requires.

- To integrate the country park teams with equivalent functions in each respective council, offering opportunities for service improvement and efficiency.

#### 5.1.2 **Option 2** – Continue with hosted arrangement as defined in the blueprint

- The service would continue as currently provided under a lead arrangement.
  - There are no significant disbenefits with adopting this option, however the opportunities arising from the benefits noted for Option 1 in Section 5.1.1 above would not be forthcoming.

## 5.2 **Core Impact and Considerations**

5.2.1 **Policy/Service Delivery** – Through disaggregation of the service both authorities will integrate the former Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) country parks into their relevant NNC and WNC green space services. This includes disaggregation of the staff, contracts, policies, statutory processes, GDPR requirements, IT and business support provision.

5.2.2 **Staff** – Staff working exclusively at Brixworth Country Park and Everdon Outdoor Learning Centre will become West employees following disaggregation. This is approximately 9 members of staff. A full and proper consultation will be undertaken with all staff directly affected by the disaggregation. The engagement of Parks casual staff will be reviewed, and new processes agreed.

5.2.3 **Resources** – As a shared project between West and North, it has been agreed that the North Transformation team provide a lead Project Manager, with a Project Manager also assigned in the West as a supporting role. Additional resources will be required from the enabler services to support the disaggregation process and TUPE of staff.

5.2.4 **Assets/ Equipment** - As per the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA, the agreement that sets out the general terms on which the hosted and lead functions and services will be discharged and delivered between the Councils). All equipment in WNC/NNC is owned by the appropriate authority and will remain at the existing locations.

## 5.3 **Benefits**

The core benefits of this proposed approach are:

- 5.3.1 Each Council will have full autonomy regarding how the service is shaped for each.
- 5.3.2 Ability to offer customers and residents services /opportunities aligned to any local consultation and engagement feedback.
- 5.3.3 Allow the Councils to set their own fees and charges, seek internal and external funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment and to develop income generating ideas and deliver services aligned with their own council strategy and priorities.

- 5.3.4 Reduce the administrative burden around the need for discussion regarding operational decision making and service delivery, that the lead model currently requires.
- 5.3.5 To integrate the country park teams with equivalent functions in each respective council, offering opportunities for service improvement and efficiency.

## **6. Next Steps**

---

- 6.1. Should Committee agree to the recommendations shown above then an exit plan would be developed in accordance with the requirements of the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) for the hosted /lead provision of functions and services between North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

---

### **7.1. Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1. The 2021-22 budget allocation by corporate finance of the former NCC budget amounted to net benefit (income above expenditure) for WNC and a net loss to NNC because Brixworth Country Park and Everdon Outdoor Learning Centre generate income attributable to the Open Spaces in West Northamptonshire, plus a share of NNC management costs.
- 7.1.2. Following disaggregation, NNC would lose the benefit of the income from WNC towards its management and administration costs. NNC will manage this through realigning budgets and services to accommodate the deficit in the interim, and further mitigate by other means and through service redesign within the NNC Assets & Environment service area.
- 7.1.3. Payments and receipts (AP/AR): In line with any transfer of contracts, respective contractors must be set up in the relevant Authority's ERP to ensure contractors can be paid in a timely manner and any receipts taken. Income from parking systems and cost centre allocation will need to be reviewed to ensure correct monies transferred. As parking enforcement is already provided by WNC this should not require any changes.

### **7.2. Legal and Governance**

- 7.2.1. An exit strategy for the IAA schedule will need to put in place if the recommendations are approved.
- 7.2.2. There are no statutory requirements for the service.
- 7.2.3. There are no legal implications arising from the proposals.

### **7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans**

- 7.3.1. The proposal will assist delivery of the North Northamptonshire Draft Corporate Plan 2021-25 "Active, fulfilled lives" priority, through continued and focussed support of the Active Parks team.

7.3.2. The proposal will assist delivery of the West Northamptonshire Corporate Plan 2021-2025 by enabling greater localised focus on the priority to improve Environment and Wellbeing through provision of high-quality parks and accessible green space.

#### **7.4. Risk**

7.4.1. Risks are regularly reviewed by the Project and Programme teams and will be monitored via approved project governance.

7.4.2. There are no significant risks identified when delivering this project.

#### **7.5. Consultation**

7.5.1. Service areas from North and West have been consulted in this report with both Executive Directors agreeing the approach. The public facing element of the service is not changing.

7.5.2. There is no statutory requirement for public consultation.

7.5.3. Consultation with affected staff, supported by the Trade Unions, will commence on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2022 and will finish no earlier than 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

#### **7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel**

7.6.1. No considerations arising from this report

#### **7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny**

7.7.1. No considerations arising from this report

#### **7.8. Equality Implications**

7.8.1. At this point in the process, it is not possible to fully assess the actual impact on all protected characteristic groups. The disaggregation proposal and processes are restricted to the method of delivery of the service rather than changes to service delivery itself, as such it is unlikely that there will be an impact of the proposal on equality groups. However, during consultation the situation will be reviewed and as any impact becomes apparent, appropriate mitigating action will be taken (where this is possible).

7.8.2. Standard Council HR policies and procedures will apply, and all of these have been equality impact assessed.

#### **7.9. Climate Impact**

7.9.1. There are minimal impacts arising from this change although localisation of this service will have a small beneficial effect by equipment and staff remaining in their current work locations.

## **7.10. Community Impact**

7.10.1. Changes are required for the management of the season ticket parking permits. From 1st April 2022 new season ticket holders will require separate parking permits for North and West owned Country Park car parks. This will be managed by a new season ticket offering in the West and the North, as well as targeted communication to current season ticket holders notifying them of a change to existing season ticket arrangements.

## **7.11. Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.11.1. None arising from this report

## **8. Background Papers**

---

None