

# Park Managers Forum

Wednesday 11 May 2016 – The Melting Pot, Edinburgh



## Workshop summary: Making the Forum work for you – communication methods and tools

### Background

In addition to face-to-face Forum meetings, the HLF application included an action to investigate digital and remote communication options for the Forum (whilst also noting that many council IT systems prohibit or restrict access to many digital/social media options). The MyParkScotland website currently provides access to password protected information for Forum members, primarily presentations and meeting notes.

Responding to survey which informed the development of the Park Managers Forum, around one-third of respondents said they would be interested in communicating via online blog, community of practice and/or web forum. 40% were keen to explore a 'questions, queries and advice' exchange and matching services and over 80% wanted an ebulletin.<sup>1</sup>

This session provided an opportunity to discuss other communication methods and tools.

- **Importance of face-to-face contact**

Whilst time is limited for Parks staff and it can be difficult to take time out to attend meetings, face-to-face contact time is important and useful, so need to keep that element going even if it's not possible for people to attend all the meetings

Informal networking is very useful and valuable - Forum is a good opportunity for 'letting off steam' and 'cathartic sharing of pain'!

Web-based 'chat room' type of forum can work well but needs active engagement from members

*Regional meetings* - perhaps there could be more frequent meetings for smaller groups of Park Managers in a region?

- **'Knowledge hub' and information needed**

The Knowledge hub is a good tool – the Urban Design Forum uses this and it is a good free resource - to be useful, it needs to be clearly themed

Compelling statistics and evidence are needed to demonstrate to councillors what the effects of budget cuts will be – as decisions tend to be made simply on the basis of cutting funds without understanding what impacts this will have

Easy access to data and summaries for parks/outdoor management costs and justifications

- **Working with other networks** - for example, APSE have a 'library' of information available, so don't reinvent the wheel – but would be good to have quicker and snappier responses than APSE currently provide.

Would be useful to have something like an APSE network providing access to real evidence e.g. on the effects of poor parks on mental and physical health etc

With big budget cuts and redundancies in the pipeline, if Park staff want to try and justify maintaining budgets they will need access to short, snappy and easily digested facts and evidence to try and head these off

- **Budget setting – sharing intelligence:** budget discussions normally start in October, so would be useful to start to share what different proposals are emerging from authorities around then.

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<sup>1</sup> If you don't already receive the **free monthly greenspace scotland ebulletin** you can sign up here <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/11ebulletin.aspx> – each month news from Scotland, UK and international; research and funding, jobs and events

- **Buddying and benchmarking**

Could the Forum create a buddy system to 'match up' local authorities for benchmarking purposes e.g. comparisons of management systems and sharing good practice

- **Advocacy and lobbying**

GS could lobby COSLA and others on behalf of Parks departments

The public really need to be made aware of the full impact of cuts on their outdoor spaces

- **Future Forum meetings – topics, timing and location**

Look to *learn from England*, where cuts are hitting sooner than in Scotland – useful to see how they plan to cope with seriously *reduced budgets* for parks

Case studies and Sharing Good Practice events (e.g. there was recently a very useful event in South Lanarkshire on managing grasslands) and useful to have some meetings in a Park to look at issues on the ground

Future Park Managers' Forum meetings – worth exploring the use of free venues for future meetings to keep costs to a minimum or Local Authorities taking turns to offer their own venue spaces

Need plenty of notice in advance so that dates can go in diaries early on

**Summary of recommendations/actions**

- *Continue with face-to-face Forum meetings (3-4 times a year) with dates set well in advance and explore option of regional meetings (with on-site element for sharing practice) and rotational hosting by Councils*
- *Explore opportunities for information sharing with other networks (particularly APSE)*
- *Knowledge hub - develop (and/or signpost to) resources and info*
- *Sharing intelligence around October 2016 budget process*