

COMMITTEE : **Housing And Environment** DATE: 11th January 2010

CORPORATE DIRECTOR: Pete Leonard

TITLE OF REPORT: – Progress with approved savings for the Countryside Ranger Service and Hazlehead Golf Course for 2009/10

REPORT No. H&E/09/083

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide the Committee with a **regular** update of progress towards making the approved budget savings for 2009/10 in respect of the Ranger Service and the Hazlehead Golf Transfer. **Changes from the previous reports to this Committee are presented in bold type for ease of reference.**

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:

- (i) approves the steps being taken to achieve these savings;
- (ii) notes that the required savings for the Ranger Service have been achieved ; and
- (iii) instructs the Corporate Director for Housing & Environment to report back with a further progress report on achieving the savings for Hazlehead Golf Course at its first meeting 16 February 2010.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The approved 2009/10 budget saving for the Ranger Service is £82,000, and, for the Hazlehead Golf Course, £260,000.

4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

This report supports the Community Plan's vision for land use and the environment, namely, for Aberdeen to be a City that protects, enhances and values its environment. It also links generally to the Council's policy statement, Vibrant, Dynamic and Forward Looking, in terms of its declared intention to be an efficient Council.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The Countryside Ranger Service is a cost effective means for ACC to deliver Many of its statutory functions relating to the natural environment under the EC

Habitats Directive, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and Land Reform Scotland Act 2003, as well as promoting outdoor access, learning in the outdoors which supports the Curriculum for Excellence, encourages an active and more carbon neutral lifestyle which helps to improve the overall health and wellbeing of the people of Aberdeen and its environment. The Service also delivers many of the Council's obligations for the UK, Scottish and Local Biodiversity Action Plans and the Water Framework Directive.

If the Countryside Ranger Service was to be discontinued as a result of not achieving the additional level of income or equivalent savings then ACC would lose the expertise to manage its countryside sites (c.1800hectares) for nature conservation, recreation and education. ACC has a statutory obligation to manage the two Sites of Special Scientific Interest in its ownership, which the Countryside Ranger Service currently undertakes. The Countryside Ranger Service is also a key part of the development, promotion, implementation and management of the proposed Core Path network and other non-motorised outdoor access routes. This is a function identified in the legislation for Ranger Services to undertake.

Hazlehead Golf Course is maintained to a high standard, as befits a course which is a major attraction for golfers due to its location and McKenzie design. Failure to make the required savings would result in a poorer standard of maintenance and ultimately a loss in prestige and income for the City.

6. REPORT

(i) The Ranger Service

The current total of definite savings for 2009/10 stands at £85695, £3695 in excess of the required savings for 2009/10.

The Ranger Service savings have therefore been met.

Housing and Environment Committee has, at its meeting on 26th August 2009, given full approval for any excess savings made by the Ranger Service to be used to help fund the unforeseen savings required for Hazlehead Golf Course.

(ii) Hazlehead Golf Course.

This was a saving which was unforeseen when the budget challenge meetings were setting the Environment savings for 2009/10, and which was allocated against the Service after the budget was set. This section gives an account of progress towards achieving the savings,

The required savings for 2009/10 for the Hazlehead Golf Course are £268,000. To date, a total of £168,000 has been identified, £100,000 of which will be generated by the recently agreed contract for Roundabout Sponsorship, and £68,000 from the continued vacancy for an Interim lead Environment Manager (the post was approved by the full Council on 20th May 2009 as part of the £250,000 restructuring of the management of the Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing Services).

A further £25,000 has been allocated from the cleansing budget. This budget was primarily set aside for the redevelopment of a works depot. This work is no longer required for 2009/10 and therefore allows the funds to be used as a saving.

Approval has already been given to use surplus savings generated by the Ranger Service against Hazlehead Golf Course. This added to a staff vacancy within the current structure that is not to be filled amounts to a further £40,000 saving.

The remaining saving of £35,000 will be achieved through continued careful weekly monitoring of the grounds maintenance and street sweeping labour costs. Vacancies within the team are not currently being filled. **It was anticipated that we would have to make this savings balance from continued careful weekly monitoring of labour, fuel and other resources costs. These latter elements were £90,000 within budget up until the middle of September 2009, but moved to a £10,000 deficit position by the end of October 2009, as a result of payment of lump sums to ease the transfer of weekly paid staff to monthly salaries. However, this payment has now been covered corporately.**

These overall labour costs are now well within budget at the time of writing and it will be possible to manage staff numbers and vacancies so as to allow a saving against budget.

The non filling of staff vacancies for a 4 week period will allow for the remaining saving to be met.

Therefore, as of 15th December 2009 the remaining savings are on track to be made.

7.REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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8.BACKGROUND PAPERS

None