

LBB Friends Forum AGM: Council Update 2020

We have striven to undertake our business as usual contractual requirements in a difficult pandemic year, following government guidance with the assistance of our departmental Public Health and Public Protection Teams.

All of our staff have somehow been involved in COVID mitigation services, some Environmental staff being fully seconded to, or involved part time, in COVID Shielding, Flow Testing and Track and Trace initiatives. Whether this has been taking calls from anxious members of the public, acting as gatesmen at Testing Centres, distributing lateral flow tests and even assisting the public with their tests at designated Bromley testing stations, all staff have had some input, the vast majority in their free time in evenings and weekends, all on a volunteer basis. Many have made the effort to undertake their business as usual roles working from home with additional domestic and personal difficulties. However, Bromley Council have deployed over 1,200 staff volunteers from March to December 2020. 4,600 member of public volunteers registered through the Council's initiative. 50 members of staff were deployed for Contract Tracing, with 140 full time staff working on the volunteering programme.

A number of Soundbite Sessions were held for Council Staff, raising awareness for mental health, wellbeing, and specifically sessions were held on the importance of our Parks and Greenspaces and how they contribute to the Wellbeing of our local communities.

Neighbourhood Officers continued all routine duties and idverde inspections, working from home instead of the office and we have been very impressed with idverde's performance during the last year.

Park Friends, Volunteer Groups and Delegated Sports Managers were informed at each necessary juncture regarding the government guidance and necessary precautions needed to protect our volunteers and public, and we thank all our volunteers for the hours they still managed to put in during the very difficult circumstances. Idverde's communication process should be commended in relation to this.

We were continually updating our Covid-19 Guidance, to summarise the main areas impacting on the management of parks and green spaces from the government's 4 step roadmap out of lockdown, We made some changes to our guidance for volunteering in parks and green spaces as you were all informed through the Friends Forum at each juncture. Please note that volunteering activities (subject to all Covid-safe guidelines) are permitted under current lockdown rules and restrictions and can be undertaken outside where volunteering cannot reasonably be done from home.

Special thanks go to idverde for the work they have undertaken in their capacity as Bromley's fully managed parks service by keeping our Parks and Greenspaces to the best standard possible during this pandemic. Throughout the lockdown period the daily review of our service business continuity plan remained our focus with the relevant measures being undertaken to ensure we adhered to the government guidelines, keeping our parks and greenspaces open and preserving the well-being of our park users.

We have been very impressed with the proactive response from all our idverde staff who have played a massive role in keeping the Borough as presentable as possible our Greenspaces under control. Specific thanks goes to Frank Kleinhans, Andy Hodgson from an operational perspective, and John Pemberton from an Education aspect, for their continued hard work.

Many Thanks also to Amy Rogers and Allison John-Pandya for their involvement during 2020, during which they still managed to secure almost half a million pounds of external funding. Many funds are now, understandably, making COVID-19 related funding their priority. As an example, the National Lottery with its Awards for All Fund and Reaching Communities Fund, is still accepting applications for non-COVID related funding but applications will face greater competition and delay.

Funders are now operating differently - some are temporarily closed, some have extended their deadlines, some are still open but it may not be prudent to apply just now in the current climate. Respectively, it is best to check websites beforehand and keep in contact with Bromley's Fundraising team at the address provided. Please continue to use fundraisingbromley@idverde.co.uk

Thanks to our Park Friends who have raised funds during the past year through crowd funding, I may be the "man behind the curtain" that some of you haven't seen much of during a COVID restricted year, but rest assured I have been privy to the facebook pages, crowd funding and twitter initiatives encouraging funding and you should all be commended on this also

It is worth mentioning that an additional £57,000 was secured during 2020 from the MHCLG (Ministry, Housing, Communities and Local Government) fund which was assigned to the Croydon Road Recreation Ground Bandstand initiative due to its long standing progress; also to further support the Borough wide interest in the project and its heritage aspect.

Parks Security: Throughout the lockdown period our Parks Security provider, Ward, have continued their routine patrols, with additional resources in place to monitor and manage social distancing and also replenish the Parks guidance signage in line with government guidance.

Ward Security were issued with a certificate of gratitude and appreciation by Bromley's Madam Mayor Hannah Gray with the following:

"Thank you and all your staff for the dedication in serving your community during the Coronavirus pandemic. Your selflessness in putting yourselves at risk of infection to maintain the essential services is greatly appreciated. Long after this emergency is over, we hope you will look back with pride and satisfaction on your part in maintaining the vital fabric of our society. Our heartfelt gratitude to you."

Following the gradual lockdown ease, we anticipated an increase in park and greenspace use and measures have been put in place to increase litter operatives to accommodate this. Our Enforcement Manager Toby Smith did a sterling job of ensuring our Parks and Open Spaces were a safe place to be, including addressing the unauthorised encampments we experienced during 2020 and the relevant operational, social and legal implications involved in eliminating the issue. I would again thank idverde for working closely with myself regarding the clean up operation following the subsequent abuse of our open spaces. We are saddened to report that Toby Smith will be leaving us on 27th May this year to enjoy his retirement after 20 year's service at the council. While his knowledge and expertise will be greatly missed, measures are underway to appoint his replacement as we speak.

As part of the new council contract issued to idverde from April 2019, the drafting of an Open Space Strategy has been agreed. A public consultation survey was undertaken in late 2020 and the subsequent data analysis and progression of a revised brief is underway with a view to amending the redraft. Engagement sessions will be arranged to provide further opportunity for feedback and we will be in contact with you respectively in the coming months. It has been agreed that in the autumn of 2021 we will be going back to PDS committee with ongoing progress. We want to spend time working with stakeholder groups and ensure there is no rush in the process and therefore will not be shortening the redrafting period. Our aim is to ensure all opinions are taken into consideration.

Lastly, it is worth reminding ourselves that it is our contractors, suppliers and in some ways, our volunteers that have been under the spotlight in the past year. Our litter pickers, waste collection staff, parks and grounds maintenance operatives and many other front facing aspects of Council Services visibly on site in their Hi-vizs, that have been subject to the frustration and unexpected reaction from the general public during a very difficult pandemic period. Our thanks also goes to those affected, and we look forward to an easier 2021 working in partnership together with our valued stakeholders and suppliers.

James Hilsden

Parks & Greenspaces Borough Manager & Neighbourhood Manager, Bromley West
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