



The Association of Directors of Public Health

Running Free: Consultation on preserving the free use of public parks

The Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) is the representative body for Directors of Public Health (DPH) in the UK. It seeks to improve and protect the health of the population through collating and presenting the views of DsPH; advising on public health policy and legislation at a local, regional, national and international level; facilitating a support network for DsPH; and providing opportunities for DsPH to develop professional practice.

The Association has a rich heritage, its origins dating back 160 years. It is a collaborative organisation working in partnership with others to maximise the voice for public health.

1. Do you agree that local authorities should not be able to charge parkrun or parkrun junior for the use of public parks?

We support the viewpoint that health promoting not-for-profit initiatives such as parkrun should remain free for participants wherever possible. However, we also recognise that local authorities are experiencing financial pressures and may need to protect or diversify sources of income to continue to provide access to services, including parks. This should not be the subject of national legislation and local authorities should be free to choose whether to charge parkrun or junior parkrun for use of parks depending on local priorities and financial need.

The importance of parks

Parks are a heavily-used, much-valued service and need to be properly resourced. They are key assets which can be central to the lives of local communities. According to research by the Heritage Lottery Fund, over 37 million people—more than 57% of the UK population—regularly use parks in the UK.¹ Edinburgh City Council has employed a social return on investment model which assessed the “social, environmental and economic benefits that a service or activity delivers”. In relation to parks, this model concluded that for every £1 of investment, around £12 of benefits are delivered.²

ResPublica found in July 2015 that 61% of respondents who said that they had good access to green spaces were satisfied with their physical health compared to only 44% of those who had poor access.³ Research undertaken in 2015 by Fields in Trust (formerly the National Playing Fields Association) found that 50% of people said they would be less active without their local parks and green spaces, and 48% said that using

¹ Heritage Lottery Fund, 'Heritage Lottery Fund response to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee inquiry into public parks', September 2016, available here: <https://www.hlf.org.uk/about-us/news-features/parks-matter-%E2%80%93-great-public-asset/select-committee-parks-inquiry>

² Edinburgh City Council, 'The Value of City of Edinburgh Council's Parks' accessed 27 June 2017, available here:

http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20064/parks_and_green_spaces/1300/the_value_of_city_of_edinburgh_councils_parks

³ Written evidence provided by ResPublica to Communities and Local Government Select Committee inquiry into public parks, September 2016, available here: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/communities-and-local-government-committee/public-parks/written/39025.html>



their local park made them feel healthier.⁴

Any activity that drives people to local parks and generates a variety of positive health and community benefits should be encouraged; however local authorities need to be free, where necessary, to raise the funds to maintain parks and ensure they are accessible to all. The State of UK Public Parks 2016 report found that 92% of local authority parks departments have experienced budget reductions in the past three years and that 95% of parks managers expect to be faced with further reductions in the next three years.⁵

Many contributors to a recent Communities Select Committee inquiry into parks highlighted the impacts on parks of these financial circumstances, for example, the closure of park facilities, downgrading of facilities, deteriorating standards of maintenance, reductions in service levels and decreased ability to enforce park bylaws.⁶ Although income from the hire of parks for physical activity may not be a significant income stream in the context of the whole local authority budget, restricting it could mean a reduction or loss in services that are currently being provided.

We would support free access for not-for-profit enterprises such as parkrun if there was a guarantee that parks were being appropriately funded. This is not the case at present. Therefore, to make sure parks are properly resourced and can be used by local communities, local authorities should be free to choose whether to charge companies for the use of the park and should not be subject to national legislation regarding this issue. These are decisions that need to be taken by individual local authorities and will be dependent upon the context and financial constraints in which they are working.

Parkrun

While we believe local authorities should choose whether to charge, we would like to express our support for parkrun. Most local authorities are very supportive of the initiative. Directors of Public Health have a remit to improve health locally which can include increasing levels of physical activity, reducing levels of inactivity and reducing diseases associated with physical activity and obesity. In 2015/16 26% of adults were classified as inactive (fewer than 30 minutes physical activity a week).⁷ Participating in a parkrun alone would very likely move an individual out of the 'inactive' category for the Public Health Outcomes Framework measure and contributes towards the measure of utilisation of outdoor space.

There are currently 1,343,962 'parkrunners' with events taking place in 455 locations.⁸ A survey of 7308 participants across 130 different parkruns in the UK indicated that the majority were not regular joggers or runners before attending a parkrun event (with a quarter doing no running or jogging at all) and that these individuals were most likely to demonstrate fitness improvement and report benefits in health,

⁴ House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee 'Public parks', January 2017, available here: <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmcomloc/45/45.pdf>

⁵ Heritage Lottery Fund, 'State of UK Public Parks 2016', September 2016, available here: <https://www.hlf.org.uk/state-uk-public-parks-2016>

⁶ House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee 'Public parks', January 2017, available here: <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmcomloc/45/45.pdf>

⁷ National Statistics, 'Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet – England 2017', March 2017, available here: <http://content.digital.nhs.uk/searchcatalogue?productid=24815&q=physical+activity&sort=Relevance&size=10&page=1#top>

⁸ Parkrun, <http://www.parkrun.org.uk/> (accessed 20 June 2017)



weight control, mental wellbeing and confidence for running.⁹ Therefore parkrun seems to be effective at encouraging greater activity in those who were previously inactive. Parkrun also offers opportunities for volunteering which can deliver great social value. Research has shown that one volunteer in sport creates a 'wellbeing worth' of £16,032 for themselves and for those they help play sport.¹⁰

- 2. Is there any specific activity, in addition to parkrun or junior parkrun, that takes place in a public park, that does not require exclusive use of the park or part of the park, that should be considered for inclusion in provisions to prevent local authorities charging for that activity, and if so why?**

As above, local authorities should be free to choose whether to charge and should not be subject to national legislation.

- 3. Are there any activities that involve a financial charge to a client or clients by a professional or business, but do not involve exclusive use of a public park or part of park, that should be considered for inclusion in provisions to prevent local authorities charging for that activity, and if so why?**

If an activity is making a profit for the organiser, councils should be able to charge a fee to cover costs and to help to pay for not-for-profit initiatives.

**Association of Directors of Public Health
June 2017**

⁹ C. Stevinson, M. Hickson; Exploring the public health potential of a mass community participation event. *J Public Health (Oxf)* 2014; 36 (2): 268-274. doi: 10.1093/pubmed/fdt082

¹⁰ Join In, 'Hidden diamonds: uncovering the true value of sport volunteers', January 2015, available here: <https://www.joininuk.org/hidden-diamonds-true-value-of-sport-volunteers/>