

Parks and open spaces: Towards An Excellent Service

1. Introduction

Supported by:



1 The challenge for parks and open spaces

1.1 Parks and open spaces play an important role in the lives of many people and are fundamental to delivering the 'shared priorities' established between central government and local government, including:

- improving the quality of life for all sections of the community
- promoting healthier communities and narrowing health inequalities
- providing opportunities for active and passive recreation, relaxation, social interaction, play and spiritual refreshment
- creating safer and stronger communities
- transforming our local environment and ensuring sustainability
- meeting local needs more effectively
- promoting the economic viability of localities
- enhancing biodiversity

1.2 The role of local authorities in designing, developing and managing public services is increasingly being challenged, due to a number of factors including:

- the changing customer needs and expectations in relation to services in general and public services
- the changes in our lifestyle habits
- the growth in leisure services available to people, provided by public, voluntary and commercial organisations
- the national improvement agenda for the public sector, including comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) and Gershon efficiencies

1.3 Public sector services, including parks and open spaces, are being challenged to develop better methods of performance measurement and the impact of the services and ensuring continuous improvement.

1.4 If we are to continue to make the case for parks and open spaces in terms of public policy, the allocation of public resources and increased resources, we need to demonstrate commitment to improving how we provide these services and in achieving tangible outcomes for our communities. 'Towards an Excellent Service' (TAES) is designed to help us achieve this.

2 Towards an excellent service: what is it?

2.1 TAES has been developed and adopted by the parks and open spaces, sport and recreation and wider cultural services industries to underpin continuous improvement. It supports organisations and partnerships to carry out cyclical self-assessment and to plan and implement improvements as part of service planning. This helps the organisations and partnerships to improve all aspects of the way they work in a sustainable way, leading to improved results.

2.2 TAES has been developed by industry practitioners and relevant industry bodies; it is seen as key to the success and survival of publicly funded parks and open spaces, sport and recreation and wider cultural services organisations.

2.3 Currently, versions of TAES exist for:

- local authority sport and recreation services
- county sport partnerships
- Sport England

Further versions are under development for national governing bodies of sport and a generic version for cultural services. **This version of TAES has been developed specifically for parks and open space services by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), the Institute for Sport, Parks and Leisure (ISPAL) and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and the following industry practitioners through a consultation, piloting and evaluation process:**

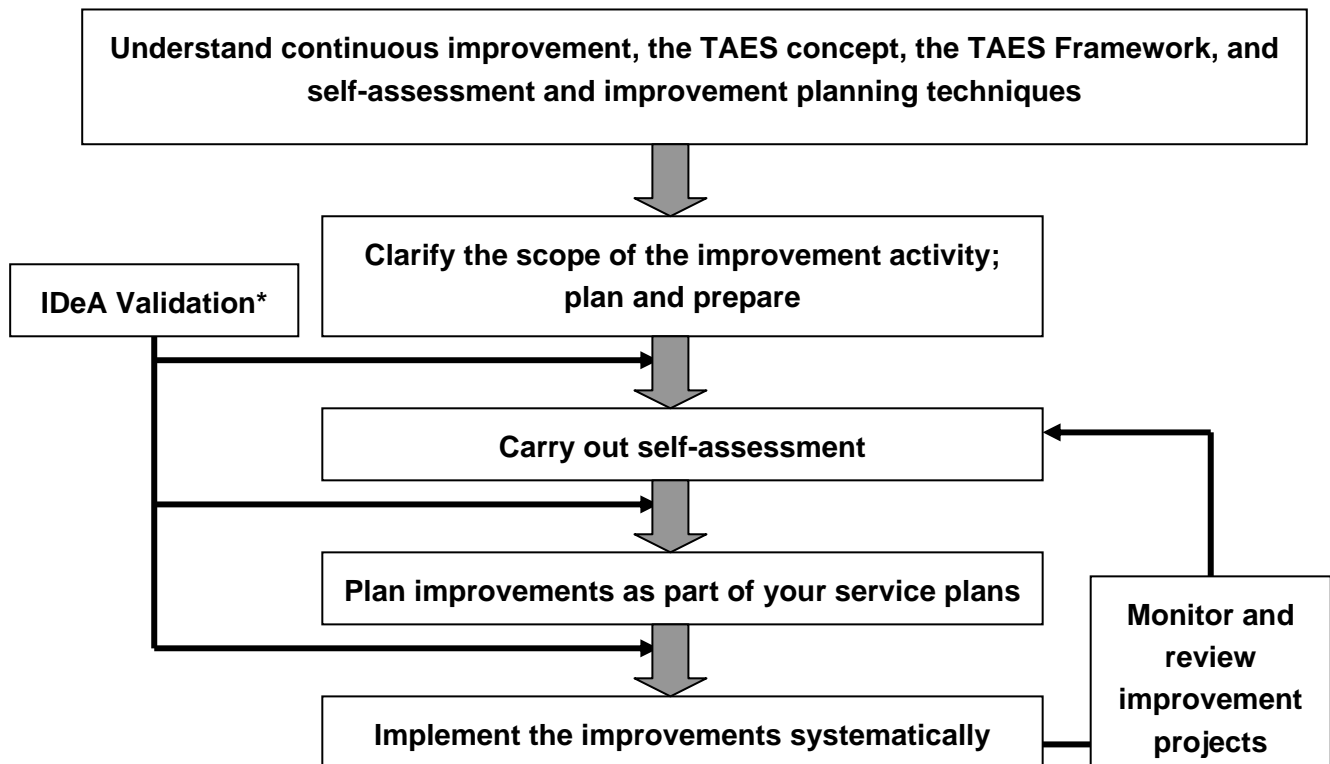
- Bristol City Council
- GreenSpace
- Lee Valley Regional Park Authority
- London Borough of Camden
- Manchester City Council
- Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
- Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
- Sheffield City Council
- South Staffordshire Council

- 2.4 At the heart of TAES lies the TAES Framework – which establishes criteria that organisations and partnerships need to work on to achieve improved results – and cyclical self-assessment and improvement planning using this Framework. The Framework is based on the criterion parts of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model and incorporates relevant industry-specific and generic quality schemes and recognised best practice for the parks and open spaces industry.
- 2.5 TAES is not a ‘product’, or a ‘scheme’ or even a ‘process’; it is a ‘journey’ of improvement in all aspects of the way the organisation or partnership operates, in order to achieve excellent results. There is no end to this journey: it is an ongoing process of improvement because:
- the needs of the community change continually
 - users’ expectations change continuously
- and because
- there are always ways in which the effectiveness and efficiency of an organisation or partnership can improve
- 2.6 The pursuit of excellence underpins success in all organisations (and individuals). It is essential for publicly funded parks and open spaces, because:
- it creates the capacity for the organisation or partnership to achieve its stated outcomes and make a difference to people’s lives
 - it improves staff satisfaction and helps to ensure sustainable jobs with personal development opportunities
 - the current external environment in which the industry operates demands continuous improvement
- 2.7 TAES is not about perfuming the pig – it is not an initiative designed just to prove continuous improvement or ‘quality’, which is only pursued because of external pressure. This approach is reflected in the desire of many organisations to badge chase or to tick various boxes. It is clear that many organisations choose the easiest route available to gain a plaque on the wall, high assessment score or statutory pass. Whilst the need to meet statutory requirements and perform well in mandatory and voluntary assessments is completely understandable, it should not be confused with excellence.

3 Continuous improvement

- 3.1 TAES also involves adopting values and habits of continuous improvement. Continuous improvement is an attitude and an integral approach to how the organisation works: a culture of desire.
- 3.2 The basic concept of continuous improvement for organisations and individuals is that, in order to achieve desired results, you need to:
- clearly establish clearly what you are trying to achieve
 - establish what causes success
 - identify your current progress
 - take actions to improve towards your goal on a continuous (ie, ongoing) basis
 - go back to step one and carry on
- 3.3 Continuous improvement involves a passion for improvement and for the following presuppositions:
- you, your organisation and its people **need** to improve continuously
 - it is always possible to improve
 - this is not a **criticism**, a **weakness**, a **problem** or somebody's **fault**
 - the clever people and organisations regularly identify areas for improvement in an **objective, honest** and **positive** way
 - you should not let barriers stop your progress – you can **always** overcome these or try something different
 - there is no such thing as **failure** – merely **feedback**
 - learning from others is vital if you are to improve
- 3.4 **All organisations have strengths and all have areas where improvement is necessary. The acceptance of this in an open, mature and positive way, without fear of failure, is vital for every organisation.**
- “If it ain't broke, don't fix it” should be revised to “if it ain't broke, you just haven't looked hard enough”!

4 The TAES Self-Assessment and improvement process



* A system of peer challenge is being piloted as an alternative to the validation process.

5 In summary

5.1 You cannot 'get TAES', or 'do TAES'. You can, however, choose to adopt the concepts, values, habits, process and practices involved in working towards an excellent service. This is much more challenging than merely adopting a scheme or achieving a badge; however it is significantly more valuable in achieving successful results for your communities.

5.2 At the heart of TAES lies self-assessment and improvement planning using the TAES Framework. This can bring the following to your organisation:

- **clear, workable improvement plans, containing breakthrough improvement projects, which will change the way the organisation works**
- **comprehensive measurement of the present and future health of the organisation**
- **opportunities to improve the intangible elements of partnerships, particularly synergy, consensus decision making and joint ownership of continuous improvement**

- **enhanced understanding of what Excellence means for the organisation and of the concepts and practices of continuous improvement**
- **enhanced values and habits of continuous improvement amongst people taking part**

5.3 This will assist in achieving the following outcomes:

- **improved user satisfaction**
- **improved staff satisfaction**
- **improved efficiency**
- **improvements in the health and well-being of communities through parks and open spaces**
- **improved appearance of our urban environment**
- **increased recognition, respect and profile for the parks and open spaces industry**

6.0 Documentation

6.1 To help you carry out your self assessment the following documents have been developed:

- 1: Introduction
- 2: The TAES Framework – the 32 criteria used for self assessment
- 3: Examples of Practice and Good Practice – good practice and common approaches to service delivery to help you make your assessment
- 4: Self-Assessment Record – a simplified version of the framework to record your ratings, strengths and areas for improvement
- 5: Guidance on TAES Scoping and Planning
- 6: Guidance on TAES Self Assessment – tips on how to carry out the self assessment
- 7: Guidance on Improvement Planning – how to get the most out of the improvements identified
- 8: Guidance on TAES Validation – why an external review (optional) of your self assessment can be helpful
- 9: Partner Feedback Template – suggested questions specifically for partners
- 10: Staff Feedback Template – suggested question specifically for staff.