

Parks and open spaces: Towards An Excellent Service

3. Examples of practice and good practice

Supported by:



Introduction

This document contains examples of practice and references to recognised best practice relating to each of the parks and open spaces TAES Criteria. This will help organisations to plan improvements following TAES Self-Assessment. It will also help self-assessment teams to develop a clear understanding of the meaning and intent of each criterion.

Please note that this document shows only **examples** of what organisations **could** do. TAES is not prescriptive; it recognises that many different practices could be successful within each criterion, depending upon the nature of the organisation. History has shown that changes are much more effective if people have chosen them. Improvement planning teams should use their knowledge, creativity and resources (eg, benchmarking groups) to identify, select and develop new practices which will meet the organisation's specific needs.

The following abbreviations have been used in this document:

APSE	Association for Public Sector Excellence
BAP	Biodiversity action plan
CABE	Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
CLG	Communities and Local Government
CPD	Continuous professional development
EMAS	Eco-management and audit scheme
ENCAMS	Environmental campaigns
ICCM	Institute for Cemetery and Crematoria Management
liP	Investors in People Standard
ISO9001	International standard for quality management systems
ISPAL	Institute for Sport, Parks and Leisure
JD	Job description
LA21	Local Agenda 21
LAA	Local area agreement
LDF	Local development framework
LSP	Local strategic partnership
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
SPD	Supplementary planning document
SPD	Special planning document

Theme1: Leadership

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
1.1 Leaders in the organisation develop the mission, vision and values, demonstrate ambition and are role models for continuous improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vision and mission workshops with leaders and stakeholders (eg, part of the green space strategy) • workshops with all managers and staff to develop values • managers and political leaders involved in TAES Self-Assessment and establishing and supporting breakthrough organisational improvement projects (up to three at any time) • continuous improvement workshops for managers and staff • senior managers leading process improvement and service development projects or being part of the project teams • personal improvement and development goals agreed all managers • one-to-one coaching programmes for leaders • managers and political leaders showcasing continuous improvement in the organisation and at conferences such as ISPAL, APSE, ENCAMS, GreenSpace (an example of disseminating best practice can be found at www.southampton.gov.uk) • CABE Space leaders' programme • innovation workshops and improvement teams • best practice benchmarking groups/partnerships with organisations within and outside of the parks and open spaces industry • leaders sharing best practice through case studies disseminated by CABE Space, GreenSpace, ISPAL, the Environment Agency, Natural England, ENCAMS, Civic Trust and others (an example of engagement in national and regional best practice in open space management and spatial planning can be found at www.bristol.gov.uk) • leaders welcoming and being actively involved in external assessment schemes, such as the Green Flag Parks Award (www.greenflagaward.org.uk), Britain in Bloom (www.rhs.org.uk), liP and ISO9001 • reviewing the political, economic, social, technical, environmental and legal influences on the organisation and internal capability as part of an annual planning away days • developing long-term change goals as part of the service plan or strategy • developing and implementing change management plans • one-to-one 'change coaching' for staff • business risk assessments and risk management applied to change plans

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
<p>1.2 Leaders actively engage with key stakeholders to manage and develop the reputation of the organisation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stakeholder analysis • leaders creating clear links between the parks and open space service and the LSP • leaders engaging with residents associations and friends groups • parks and open spaces leaders working within the corporate management team to link parks and open spaces to the corporate objectives in the corporate plan • leaders actively engaging with other organisations to promote their activities as best practice, eg, leading regional green space forums, engaging with CABE Space, GreenSpace, ILAM and others (an example of regional leadership can be found at www.sheffield.gov.uk) • leaders encouraging participation in activities that result in national awards and use these to gain further resources for the service • leaders engaging with national agendas to demonstrate the value of public space, including the CLG's Cleaner Safer Greener communities agenda, LAAs and LSPs (an example of positive engagement through grounds maintenance can be found at www.basildon.gov.uk/sporting_futures) • leaders building political alliances and identifying political champions for the service
<p>1.3 Leaders are actively engaged with service users and partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leaders engaging with friends groups • leaders engaging with residents' associations • leaders attending focus groups and participating in e-focus groups • leadership presence in the parks on a regular basis • leaders promoting and leading discussions in schools about parks and open spaces • leaders supporting management plans developed by the community • leaders developing shared goals and joint continuous improvement programmes with grounds maintenance contractors • leaders placing parks and open spaces at the heart of delivering LSP targets • identifying partnerships as part of the green space strategy • leaders engaging with the LAA process in a way that is placing public space in a position to help meet LAA targets • involving partners and community representatives in service improvement and development projects activity • partner/community group recognition schemes

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
1.4 Leaders motivate, support and recognise people in the organisation to improve services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • policy of ‘management by walking about’ • open door policy • managers and elected members leading presentations and workshops for all staff • staff events and away days • mission, vision and values workshops • mission, vision and values discussed during staff appraisals • one-to-one coaching programmes for staff • managers developing coaching skills • mentoring programmes for staff • recognition and award schemes • recognition within staff newsletters • using staff surveys to measure and improve the elements in this criterion
1.5 Leaders are committed to sustainability in the management of parks and open spaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • including environmental elements in strategy and service plans such as energy conservation • using CABI Space publication ‘Making contracts work for wildlife: how to encourage biodiversity in urban parks’ (see www.cabi.org.uk) • carrying out sustainability appraisal of the green space strategy (an example can be found at www.torbay.gov.uk/lsp) • leaders engaging with and referring to the LA21 document or comparable environmental frameworks • leaders actively promoting and using EMAS • leaders using the results of local BAPs in their day-to-day planning

Theme 2: Policy and Strategy

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
<p>2.1 The organisation develops clear strategy for parks and open spaces and delivering outcomes from it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • producing and implementing a documented system (eg, process map) for developing and reviewing strategy and service plans on a cyclical basis • agreeing with planners that open space supplementary planning documents are included in the local development framework • ensuring open space policies are in line with open space strategies and included in the authority's local development scheme. See www.communities.gov.uk • identifying the role of parks and open spaces within the community plan/strategy and cultural strategy • identifying the role of parks and open spaces within the corporate plan • developing and implementing green or open space strategy and sub-strategies for play, allotments, trees and playing pitches in line with CABE Space guidance 'Green space strategies: a good practice guide' (see www.torbay.gov.uk for an example of a green space strategy which is also an SPD) • community visioning workshops • establishing clear outcomes relating to parks and open spaces (ie, what the service will achieve) in service plans or the corporate plan • linking strategy for parks and open space strategy to the shared priorities of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – health improvement, eg, BTCV Green Gyms (see www.btcv.org), fitness trails, outdoor events (see www.sportengland.org) – local economic viability – environmental sustainability, eg using CABE Space guidance '<i>Making contracts work for wildlife: how to encourage biodiversity in urban parks</i>' (an example of managing for biodiversity can be found at www.southend.gov.uk) – community safety, eg, following CABE Space guidance 'Decent Parks, Decent Behaviour – and parks need Parkforce' (examples of good practice in Parkforce can be found at www.leeds.gov.uk and www.leicester.gov.uk) – improving quality of life for people at risk – raising education standards – strategies to improve public spaces and the physical realm – 'Every child matters' outcomes • Ensuring planners consult with parks staff on all developments that have an impact on open space • working with the community to develop and implement site-specific management plans in line with CABE Space guidance 'A guide to producing park and green space management plans' (examples can be found at www.tauntondeane.gov.uk and through the Green Flag Award

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
	<p>scheme – www.greenflagaward.org.uk)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conducting and acting on equality impact assessments • engaging under-represented groups in undertaking impact needs assessments • linking strategy for parks and open space to Equality Strategy, Race Equality Scheme and the Equality Standard • utilising PPG17 and accompanying ‘assessing needs and opportunities’
<p>2.2 The organisation sets ambitious and achievable targets and plans to achieve strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and using a ‘balanced scorecard’ approach: developing and using measures and targets directly linked to strategy and community, financial, user and staff perspectives • applying the principles of the CLG document ‘New performance management framework’ (see www.communities.gov.uk) • developing, implementing and reviewing service development plans, containing development projects • developing, implementing and reviewing improvement plans, linked to change goals, based on the TAES Self-Assessment • use of service development and improvement teams • use of project management techniques to plan, implement and review service development and improvement projects • setting team and individual improvement and development goals, linked to the service development and improvement plans • encouraging communities to develop and use site-specific management plans • Using good practice case studies (see CABE Space guidance ‘Is the grass greener – learning from international innovations in green space management’)

<p>2.3 The organisation meets the needs of the community through attention to design and development of public space and its use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaging with design champions and using design guides to achieve high standards of public space design (see www.cabe.org.uk) • using CABA's design review • using the principles enshrined in the CABA Space publication 'Start with the park' (www.cabe.org.uk) • employing skilled staff with good design appreciation and using their influence to improve the wider environment • recognising the need for good design of public space in green or open space strategies and site-specific management plans, eg, applying CABA Space guidance 'A guide to producing park and green space management plans' (see www.cabe.org.uk) • using design to serve needs, accessibility and maximising usage, as well as aesthetics (an example of effective enhancement of landscape character can be found at www.ashfordbc.gov.uk) • using the design principles in the CLG's 'How to create quality parks and open spaces' (see www.communities.gov.uk) • quarterly programming reviews in partnership with the sport and recreation team • applying the principles in the CABA Space guidance 'What would you do with this space?' (see www.cabe.org.uk)
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Theme 3: Community Engagement

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
<p>3.1 The organisation is actively developing community engagement to improve parks and open spaces.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • auditing community engagement skills • including community engagement skills in staff training programmes and competency frameworks • planning resources for community engagement activities • regular market research and reporting, including analysis of socio-economics and demographics • developing and using a joined-up consultation plan for the whole organisation and partners, which avoids over-consultation • risk assessment of community consultation engagement and plans to minimise the risks • planning community engagement in the community plan, cultural strategy and green or open space strategy (for an example of a good green space strategy see www.wakefield.gov.uk)
<p>3.2 The organisation communicates to, consults with, and involves communities in providing services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus groups and e-focus groups • citizens' panels • parks user surveys and neighbourhood surveys • regular liaison with community groups and area committees • developing and using school or young people forums • running special events in parks and open spaces to communicate plans and obtain feedback • using a dialogue-building tool to measure perceptions of professionals and users (www.CABE.org.uk) • using GreenSTAT (www.greenstat.org.uk) • engaging the community in developing and using site-specific management plans, using 'A guide to producing park and green space management plans' by CABE Space (for an example of effective site planning see www.birmingham.gov.uk) • seeking and gaining Green Pennant Awards for sites managed by community groups (www.greenflagaward.org.uk) • developing service standards jointly with local communities (see www.gloucester.gov.uk for an example of this) • developing and using marketing plans and schedules containing a mix of advertising, PR, branding and outreach activities • best practice benchmarking of community engagement techniques with other parks and open spaces organisations and other public sector organisations (eg, via regional networks) • supporting community-led initiatives, including communities setting and monitoring local service standards (for an example of community involvement in Streetscene see www.gloucestercc.gov.uk)

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
3.3 The organisation is able to demonstrate the value of its work with communities in providing services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using consultation to inform strategy • using consultation to inform service plans • using consultation to inform budget and staff plans • annual reviews of the effectiveness of community engagement in meeting the needs of the community • community surveys to establish the impact of community engagement activity

Theme 4: Partnership Working

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
<p>4.1 The organisation develops and maintains a clear understanding and awareness of partnership working.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff training and development activity relating to the role of partnerships • committing time, funding and resources to partnership work • developing partnership agreements, containing clear goals, responsibilities, rules of engagement and measurement, review and improvement system • building people's roles in partnerships into their JDs and key result areas
<p>4.2 The organisation proactively develops and maintains relevant partnerships in order to achieve strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working with partners towards LSP or LAA objectives, eg, crime and disorder and health outcomes through initiatives such as Parkforce (www.cabe.org.uk) and Green Gym (www.btcv.org.uk) • identifying new partnerships through the green or open spaces strategy • strategic thinking away days, during which managers establish how partnerships could help to achieve strategy • establishing clear goals and rationale for each partnership • engaging with national bodies to develop and implement policy and strategy (eg, www.cabe.org.uk) • including partnership working in service plans • developing value-adding partnerships with suppliers • developing knowledge of local and other relevant partnerships and potential partners, eg, strategic service delivery partnerships, county sports partnerships, health partnerships, education, police and businesses, community organisations • developing knowledge of national cross-cutting themes • involving partners in developing green space strategy and plans • developing and agreeing partnership performance plans, containing shared outcomes, measures, targets and plans • empowering partnerships to make decisions • involving partners in improvement activity (eg, TAES Self-Assessment and improvement planning) • Taking part in partners' self-assessment and improvement planning (eg, county sports partnership)

<p>4.3 The organisation takes into account the implications and impact on partnership arrangements when taking policy and budget decisions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • including a partnership section in strategy and service planning away days
<p>4.4 The organisation continually reviews and modifies its involvement in partnerships and is able to demonstrate their value.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing partnership agreements, containing clear goals, responsibilities, rules of engagement and measurement, review and an improvement system • regular review of the inputs, outputs and outcomes of each partnership • including partnership endorsement/ratification in the organisation's annual review process

Theme 5: Use of Resources

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
<p>5.1 The organisation allocates financial resources in accordance with strategic priorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working with strategic planners to ensure funding through planning contributions (Section 106) is maximised and in line with strategic priorities • medium-term budget in place designed to achieve strategy and service plans • budgeting for self-assessment and improvement teams • zero-based budgeting • restructuring, reorganising the workforce, outsourcing and developing new supplier agreements to make savings without adversely affecting the service
<p>5.2 The organisation controls the use of its financial resources effectively.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • budget targets included in team and individual goals • budgets included within site management plans • budget monitoring systems • delegating and devolving budget management • planning for income generation (park buildings, use of facilities, etc).
<p>5.3 The organisation achieves value for money in the use of its resources and adds value by its actions and activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scheduled process reviews, process mapping and process improvement teams • using innovative working methodologies, such as self-directed work teams and independent business units, to improve efficiency • using independent consultant reports evaluating value for money • using APSE performance networks • using local performance benchmarking groups • developing and maintaining approved suppliers lists • supplier auditing • managing the supply chain to ensure fair trade and to limit the use of non-renewable global resources • developing joint purchasing agreements • management options appraisals, market testing and procurement • using cross-functional improvement teams to stimulate creativity • using coaching techniques to stimulate creativity • staff training programmes for project management techniques (eg, Prince2) • formal project management process • risk assessments and risk management plans • business continuity planning

<p>5.4 The organisation seeks and attracts resources from outside the organisation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cost–benefit analysis demonstrating value for money achieved in the process of attracting funding • establishing and supporting dedicated voluntary groups accessing external funding for parks and open spaces improvement • training and advice to support staff to attract external funding
<p>5.5 The organisation manages its physical assets (equipment, vehicles and premises) efficiently.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and implementing planned, preventative maintenance schedules • developing and implementing renewal plans for equipment • developing and implementing refurbishment plans for the facilities • managing inventories • stock control and storage systems • formal goods receiving process • measuring, reviewing and improving utility consumption • measuring, reviewing and reducing waste and pollution
<p>5.6 The organisation uses alternative and new technologies to achieve strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing ICT strategy and e-government route map • setting up and managing an internet site providing information and interactive booking facilities for users • setting up and managing an intranet site used to keep staff informed about the organisation and its performance • using new technology to monitor usage (eg, automated people counters; see www.manchester.gov.uk) • using e-focus groups • setting up a team to investigate new and emerging technology

Theme 6: People Management

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
<p>6.1 The organisation develops and implements a strategy for managing people to improve its performance which is clearly defined and understood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and implementing a human resource strategy • planning future staffing needs based on strategy • developing and implementing succession and career progression plans • changing then nature of jobs to achieve increased effectiveness, staff satisfaction and sustainability (eg, making the jobs multi-functional, giving ownership of parks, adding community engagement work to JDs) • researching and using innovative working methodologies, eg, self-directed work teams, business units, etc • setting up and supporting staff forums • conducting and using staff satisfaction surveys, including e-surveys • involving staff in the TAES Self-Assessment and improvement planning • using cross-functional improvement teams • team goal setting sessions • individual appraisal and development system
<p>6.2 The organisation plans learning and development to achieve strategy and plans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and using competency-based JDs and person specifications based on strategy and service plans • using National Occupational Standards • skills and knowledge audits • Individual and team appraisal and development systems • developing training plans based on the identified competencies and existing skills and knowledge • developing and implementing staff induction programmes • developing and managing training schedules, which include regular update sessions • one-to-one coaching for all staff • agreeing personal development plans with all staff, which contain a mixture of formal training, informal training, self-learning, special projects and mentoring • encouraging and supporting people to gain professional and management qualifications • supporting and encouraging staff to gain NVQs • knowledge sharing systems within the organisation and with partners (eg, via an intranet, 'buddy' systems, communication teams) • using improvement teams to make the best use of the knowledge within the organisation • setting up libraries of up-to-date external resources and giving people easy access to these resources

<p>6.3 The organisation's strategy for managing people is designed to promote equality of opportunity in the development of people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff suggestion schemes • giving all staff the opportunity to be involved in improvement teams • giving staff the opportunity to develop work programmes and individual goals in line with strategy • workforce monitoring • developing and implementing an equal opportunities policy for recruitment, training and development • staff training and awareness programmes • using staff satisfaction surveys to test the equal opportunities policy • using staff surveys and staff forums to identify the need of staff in relation to facilities and flexible working • developing and offering child care facilities • adapting work equipment and facilities to suit people's needs • developing a working from home policy • developing and implementing a dignity at work policy
<p>6.4 Managers lead, manage and develop people effectively.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating suitable management development programmes • encouraging people to attend the CABE Space leaders' programme • one-to-one coaching programmes for managers • mentoring programmes • 360 degree appraisals • annual review of leadership style, bearing in mind present and future needs • using staff satisfaction surveys to measure and improve leadership • appraisal system and job chats • staff meeting schedules • discussion forums
<p>6.5 The organisation encourages people to take ownership and responsibility for the service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involving staff in TAES Self-Assessment and improvement planning • involving staff in performance reviews and communicating performance results widely • involving staff in process reviews • using improvement and service development teams • giving responsibility for the end-user service and for any changes to teams • one-to-one coaching • developing teamwork • using staff satisfaction surveys to measure and improve ownership
<p>6.6 The organisation values and recognises people's contribution to the organisation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff recognition and award schemes for teams and individuals • recognising staff contribution in staff newsletters • using staff events to recognise and reward staff • using staff satisfaction surveys to measure and improve staff recognition

Theme 7: Standards of Service

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
<p>7.1 The organisation plans and manages service delivery to meet the needs and expectations of users.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying the service delivery processes as part of strategy and service planning workshops • producing a top-level process map showing the processes and sub-processes • producing a quality manual based on the requirements of ISO9001 • producing process maps, process models or operational procedures • developing an integrated management system • incorporating service standards within process documents • developing standards specific to particular user groups such as children, people with learning difficulties • using process managers to manage end-to-end processes (which could include functions for which they are not directly responsible) • process auditing (ie, a schedule of mini reviews for each sub-process, which compare practice against procedures and identify non-value-adding activity) • establishing and using process performance indicators and dashboards to predict and adjust the performance of the processes • using external standards and awards to improve the service; such as the Green Flag Award (www.greenflagaward.org.uk), Blue Flag Award (www.encams.org), ICCM Best Value Charter Assessment Scheme, Cemetery of the Year (www.namm.org.uk), Charter Mark, Equality standards, ISO9001, BALI (www.bali.co.uk), Man in the Biosphere Award (www.ukmaburbanforum.org.uk) • health and safety risk assessment • developing a operating a scheduled approach to process review and improvement • using diagnostic process mapping • using cross-functional process improvement teams
<p>7.2 The organisation manages the relationships with the users to improve their experience of parks and open spaces.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and publishing a user care policy and commitments • training all staff in communication skills • communications coaching for staff • building communication skills into personal development goals • developing a one-stop approach to enquiries, comments and complaints • using friends groups and other community groups to maintain regular dialogue with users • ensuring a staff presence at parks • publishing service standards and information in different languages • encouraging users to give feedback through telephone numbers, email addresses, feedback cards given by out by staff, and regular surveys • using IT systems to track, review and log user comments

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
<p>7.3 The organisation ensures that service standards are based on the needs and expectation of users.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of friends groups and other community groups to encourage the community to set local standards and become engaged in monitoring performance (see www.gloucester.gov.uk for an example of this) • surveys, questionnaires, focus groups and e-focus groups to establish what is most important to the user and the required standards of service • a programme of mystery visits • reality checks by managers and other staff • user surveys and e-surveys to measure user satisfaction • using a dialogue-building tool to measure perceptions of professionals and users (www.CABE.org.uk) • using GreenSTAT (www.greenstat.org.uk) • quarterly review of user feedback • quarterly balanced scorecard of user satisfaction • analysis of user perception and required standards used in process review and improvement projects

Theme 8: Performance Measurement and Learning

Criteria	Examples of practice and links to best practice
<p>8.1 The organisation has developed a performance measurement culture.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • managers' health checks of performance management • staff meetings to discuss performance • making performance management/monitoring records/reports readily available to all staff • regular monitoring of service plans and team work programmes • including performance management in JDs and key result areas • identifying performance management as a key management competency • including the reasons behind the results in performance reports • communicating case studies showing the link between performance measurement and improvements made over time
<p>8.2 The organisation has developed a well-balanced range of high quality data and information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and using a balanced scorecard, including performance measures and indicators linked to strategic outcomes and community, finance, users and staff perspectives • electronic collation of data • using corporate dashboard and red, amber and green reporting • presenting data as historical trends • showing performance against internal targets • showing performance against external benchmarks, using national and regional performance benchmarking schemes, eg, APSE Performance Networks • producing monthly and quarterly performance reports
<p>8.3 The organisation monitors and takes action on performance information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quarterly performance review at department and team levels • using external assessment reports • developing improvement plans following the reviews • developing service development and marketing plans following the reviews
<p>8.4 The organisation learns from its performance measurement and utilises it in its future planning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collecting and documenting learning points from past experiences • reviewing the causes of three- to five-year performance trends • establishing how the organisation's approaches relating to the TAES Criteria have affected performance • building the knowledge gained from past performance into annual performance reviews