

HIGHWAYS AGENCY 2006

(Report by Head of Environment & Transport)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council undertook certain highways maintenance functions, on behalf of the Cambridgeshire County Council, from 1974 until 31 March 2005. These functions were performed under the terms of an agency agreement (the 'Highways Agency') as provided for in the Local Government Act 1972.
- 1.2 The full Highways Agency terminated in March 2005 and the employees involved in the running of the highways maintenance contract were transferred to the County Council.
- 1.3 Other work carried out under the Highways Agency was performed by the Operations Division and included grass cutting on Highway verge and weed control on kerbed roads. Environment & Transport's engineering team undertook design work on jointly funded schemes.
- 1.4 The County Council paid for the equivalent of the cutting of highway verges 4 times each year in the town areas included in the Highways Agency. This Council cuts its own grass areas about 10-11 times each year and so the Council agreed to enhance the standard of service by funding the extra frequency of highway verge grass cutting so that it was harmonised with that of adjoining public open spaces. Since these areas generally abut each other, differing standards will appear very obvious and complaints would have been received.
- 1.5 This Council also puts extra funds into weed spraying. The County Council pays for the cleansing of kerbed channels on all roads in the district. However since there are problems from weeds growing in the kerblines and across the pavement which gives the impression of uncleansed roads, this Council agreed to enhance this to give better treatment to the whole paved and kerbed area. This policy has been developed over the last 4-5 years.

2. FUTURE AGENCY WORK

- 2.1 At their meeting on 14 July 2004, Cabinet agreed to the termination of the existing highway agency agreement and also resolved to:
 - (e) "support the proposal to develop a co-ordinated 'street-scene' approach to the management of complementary services affecting public areas; and
 - (f) authorise the Director of Operational Services, in consultation with the Executive Councillor responsible for Planning Strategy, to seek to secure a new agreement with the County Council for the discharge of the functions listed at paragraph 6.2 of the report and

to report the outcome of the negotiations to a future meeting of the Cabinet.”

2.2 Paragraph 6.2 of the previous report stated:

“There are, however, a range of highways related activities that could be undertaken by the District Council that would benefit local communities and contribute to the development of a co-ordinated ‘street-scene’ service. These are –

- design of environmental improvements within the highway
- design of jointly funded transport schemes, such as cycleways
- management of on-street parking
- verge maintenance
- weed spraying
- bus shelters
- licensing of pavement cafes
- sign washing
- removal of fly posting and A-boards”

2.3 It was not possible before the termination of the agreement in April 2005 to conclude a comprehensive agreement for 2005/06 and it was agreed therefore, that the Council would continue to deliver all of the items listed in 2.2, except sign washing and removal of fly posters and A boards, which had not been carried out previously, until an alternative agreement was made. The budget for the services provided by the County Council was as the previous year with the agreed inflation increase.

2.4 Negotiations have been taking place with the County Council regarding the provision of the above services for future years.

3. PROGRESS ON THE NEGOTIATIONS

3.1 The County Council is presently out to tender for a comprehensive county-wide Highway Services contract which will include all highway maintenance, design of schemes and their construction. This contract is due to start in September 2006. The County Council, however, is still prepared to enter into a separate agency with this Council for the majority of the work listed in paragraph 2.2 above.

3.2 The County Council has a very small budget for the washing of signs and has not resolved its policy on A Boards in town centres. It is therefore not proposed to take on this work. The removal of illegal signs and graffiti is currently funded by the district and undertaken by the Operations Division.

3.3 The County Council has been paying the District Council for maintaining their verges on the basis of 4 cuts per year. Where this Council has been cutting more frequently to match the frequency given to our own land, the District Council has been paying for the difference.

3.4 The District Council has only been cutting the highway verges in the old Highways Agency areas, i.e. the five town areas. The Council has

the option of taking on the responsibility for the grass cutting of the remainder of the district. At present this is carried out by Parish Councils, the County Council or contractors. However to take on the management of this work will mean running a mixture of contracts with different contractors and agents and with the reduction to four cuts a year in these non-agency areas could result in complaints for a reduction in service. The majority of our public open space is within the town areas. It is not considered that it is beneficial to take on this extra work.

3.5 The County are prepared for the District to continue with the other items as the previous agreement.

4.0 PROPOSED FUTURE AGENCY

4.1 It is proposed that the following work be included in the future agency agreement:

- the right to design and construct environmental improvements within the highway
- design of jointly funded transport schemes, such as cycleways
- management of on-street parking
- verge maintenance
- weed spraying
- bus shelters and other street furniture
- licensing of pavement cafes

4.2 It is proposed that this agency should run for an initial for an initial period of three years with the option to renew.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The financial implications of the above proposals are:

5.2

Design	This is funded direct from the capital schemes and has no extra revenue implication
On-street parking	This is covered by the income from the parking. Any excess income has to be spent on car parking matters.
Verge maintenance in original agency district	At present we receive £42k contribution from the County Council for this work. There is an existing budget to cover the costs of meeting our higher standards of extra cuts.
Weed spraying	At present we receive £35k contribution from the County Council for spraying the channels. There is an existing budget to cover the extra costs of meeting our higher standards by spraying and cleansing the whole footpath areas.
Bus shelters and	This is covered by existing budgets

other street furniture	
Licensing of pavement cafes	This is covered by existing budgets

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The Highways Agency for the road maintenance in the town areas was terminated on 1st April 2005. The Cabinet in July 2004 agreed to continue certain highways related services after this date subject to a new agreement being negotiated.

6.2 As these negotiations were not concluded, the Council has been carrying out these services on the basis of the previous agreement. There is now an understanding with the County Council regarding the work that could be included in a new agreement.

This is –

- design of environmental improvements within the highway
- design of jointly funded transport schemes, such as cycleways
- management of on-street parking
- verge maintenance of the original highways agency area
- weed spraying and cleansing of kerbed footways.
- bus shelters
- licensing of pavement cafes

6.3 If Cabinet approve the principle of the agreement, the new contract will be entered into for 1st April 2006 for an initial period of three years with the option to renew.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that Cabinet –

(a) **authorise the Director of Operational Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Environment & Transport to secure a new three year agreement with the County Council for the discharge of the functions listed at paragraph 6.2 of this report**

(b) **agree that the existing budgets remain for the work presently carried out on Highways Agency matters.**

Background Papers

Highways Agency Agreement

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