

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter:	Street Scene Service – Update Report.
Meeting/Date:	Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities & Environment) – 6 September 2016 Cabinet – 22 September 2016
Executive Portfolio:	Councillor Robin Carter – Executive Councillor for the Environment, Street Scene and Operations
Report by:	Alistair Merrick – Interim Head of Service (Operations)
Ward(s) affected:	All

Executive Summary:

1. The report provides an update on the progress made to implement the Street Scene Service (an integration of grounds maintenance and street cleansing activities on an area basis) to improve the service delivery arrangements and standards of work across Huntingdonshire. The report also includes a review of grass maintenance regimes in 2016 and an update on the negotiations with the County Council on grass cutting frequencies on their land in urban areas.
2. The transformation of the Operations Service during 2015/16 included the development of a broad range of policies, strategies and service specifications to better direct future investment in services and then the delivery of those services. This in turn has required the fundamental reconfiguration of service delivery arrangements to meet specified service requirements and standards. This included the creation of the Street Scene Service to deliver integrated grounds maintenance and street cleansing activities with area based teams.
3. This is the first year such a formal performance management regime has been applied to Street Scene activities and it evidences that real progress is being made towards delivering the specified service standards in the Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing Service Specifications. However the Street Scene Service will prioritise improving performance in resolving grounds maintenance service requests within 5 working days.

4. There have been some variance in performance of grass cutting operations caused by the following:
 - a) The late delivery of the new mowing equipment resulting in a late start to the annual mowing regimes.
 - b) Introduction of stricter service standards for mowing teams to deliver as required by the recently adopted Grounds Maintenance Service Specification, grass no higher than 50 mm with all actions being completed at the same time including strimming of obstacles. This has involved slowing the pace of work to ensure standards have been delivered.
 - c) The exceptional growing conditions in the whole of the East of England have meant long grass on the first cut. This will result in cutting frequencies of 12 and 14 cuts by the end of the season compared to the planned 8 cuts. By the end of May 2016 three cuts of amenity grass and 6 cuts of parks had to be completed.
 - d) The cessation and then restarting of the cutting of County Council grass, which required the recovery of four weeks of grass growth.
5. The particular impact these factors has caused is instances of excessive grass arisings resulting from long grass having been cut. The profile of the machinery has not been the issue (with access for the mowing teams to both rotary and cylinder machines) although the factors detailed above have necessitated the hire of a cut and collect machine to help remove excessive arisings on selected sites. The full detail of the remedial action taken is outlined in Section 4 of the report.
6. Negotiations have been ongoing with the County Council since November 2015 involving the Executive Director responsible for Highways because the maintenance regimes specified by the County Council form part of their Highways Asset Management Improvement Plan (HAMIP). The fundamental issue is that the HAMIP only includes for three cuts per annum in urban areas which have been evidenced to be inadequate to provide a maintained environment to a reasonable standard. Therefore any increase in the frequency of grass cutting would have to be funded from the Highways budget. This fundamental issue needs to be resolved regardless of which organisation actually cuts the grass.
7. These negotiations have been slow to progress matters to a resolution and in June 2016 the decision was taken to stop cutting County Council grass because three cuts had already been completed and to redirect resources to the maintenance of HDC land. Grass cutting on County Council land recommenced in late July 2016 after the County Council agreed to interim funding for grass cutting in 2016 pending the finalisation of an agreement for grounds maintenance services in future years. This has at least for 2016 resulted in increased payments from the County Council towards the costs actually being met by this Council. Councillors are reminded that the grounds maintenance service not only includes grass cutting but also shrub maintenance, hedge cutting, annual bedding and weed control.

Recommendation(s):

1. The review of the performance of the Street Scene Service detailed in this report gives the Panel the opportunity to appraise the impact of previous scrutiny work and to influence the future development of service delivery arrangements for grounds maintenance and street cleansing activities.
2. The Cabinet is recommended to receive a further report on the resourcing of the Street Scene Service once negotiations with the County Council have been concluded.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an update on the progress made to implement the Street Scene Service (an integration of grounds maintenance and street cleansing activities on an area basis) to improve the service delivery arrangements and standards of work across Huntingdonshire. The report also includes a review of grass maintenance regimes in 2016 and an update on the negotiations with the County Council on grass cutting frequencies on their land in urban areas.

2. Background

- 2.1 During 2015/16 the Operations Service was fundamentally restructured and transformed against the following drives:

- The customer and optimisation of business processes around the customer.
- Commercialisation of services to embed demand management, generation of income and delivery of trading surpluses/efficiencies.
- Introduction of a robust asset management approach to environmental assets and maintenance; (*needs analysis – strategies to confirm priorities – management plans/asset management register – resources plans on market rates*)
- Business intelligence driving the business, with robust governance and performance arrangements.
- Detailed plans for continuous service improvement, service improvement certificates.

- 2.2 The transformation included the development of a broad range of policies, strategies and service specifications (for waste services, grounds maintenance and street cleansing specifically) to better direct future investment in services and then the delivery of those services. This in turn has required the fundamental reconfiguration of service delivery arrangements to meet specified service requirements and standards. Overview and Scrutiny have had a critical role in the shaping of the policy, strategy, service specifications and new service delivery arrangements.

- 2.3 Detailed in Table 1 below are the performance targets set for the next five years in the 2016/17 Service Plan for the Operations Service for grounds maintenance and street cleansing activities. These targets need to be viewed together as evidence of the Operations Service delivering an integrated Street Scene Service as agreed by the Cabinet in April 2016.

Table 1: Adopted Performance Targets for the Street Scene Service

Key Performance Indicator – Corporate Plan	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Grounds maintenance works to standard (new).	80%	82%	86%	88%	90%
Street cleansing works to standard (new).	80%	82%	86%	88%	90%
NI195 results for street cleansing, (graded A-B) (new).	80%	85%	90%	92%	94%
Street cleansing and grounds environmental maintenance service requests resolved in 5 working days (new).	80%	82%	86%	88%	90%
Residents satisfied with street cleansing services (new).	60%	64%	68%	72%	75%
Residents satisfied with grounds maintenance services (new).	55%	58%	60%	63%	65%

3. Analysis of Performance of the Street Scene Service

3.1 The performance of the Street Scene Service is measured through the following performance indicators:

- a) The number of service requests for work received from residents through the Call Centre.
- b) The resolution of these service requests within the target time of 5 working days.
- c) The number of formal complaints received from residents either through the Call Centre.
- d) The results of independent site inspections of work completed on site against the set service standards set in the Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing Service Specification.

3.2 The outcome of performance to the end of July 2016 against these performance indicators is set out in Table 1 below:

Performance Indicator	Annual Target	Actual Performance
Service requests for grounds maintenance activities	80% to be received within 5 working days	194 service requests of which 57% have been resolved within 5 working days
Service requests for street activities	80% to be received within 5 working days	190 service requests of which 81% have been resolved within 5 working days
The number of formal complaints received from residents regarding grounds maintenance.	Less than 3 per month	From April 2016 to July 2016 three complaints regarding grounds maintenance have been received.
The number of formal complaints received from residents regarding street cleansing	Less than 3 per month	From April 2016 to July 2016 there have been no complaints received regarding street cleansing.
Independent inspection results of grounds maintenance works to standard when completed	80% of works on site to standard when inspected	1,660 inspections have been completed from April 2016 to July 2016 of which 86.7% work was to standard
Independent inspection results of street cleansing works to standard when completed	80% of works on site to standard when inspected	1,220 NI195 audits have been completed from April 2016 to July 2016 of which 91.3% work was to standard

3.3 This is the first year such a formal performance management regime has been applied to Street Scene activities and it evidences that real progress is being made towards delivering the specified service standards in the Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing Service Specifications. However the Street Scene Service will prioritise improving performance in resolving grounds maintenance service requests within 5 working days.

4. Review of Grass Cutting Operations

- 4.1 There have been some variance in performance of grass cutting operations caused by the following:
- a) The late delivery of the new mowing equipment resulting in a late start to the annual mowing regimes.
 - b) Introduction of stricter service standards for mowing teams to deliver as required by the recently adopted Grounds Maintenance Service Specification, grass no higher than 50 mm with all actions being completed at the same time including strimming of obstacles. This has involved slowing the pace of work to ensure standards have been delivered.
 - c) The exceptional growing conditions in the whole of the East of England have meant long grass on the first cut. This will result in cutting frequencies of 12 and 14 cuts by the end of the season compared to the planned 8 cuts. By the end of May 2016 three cuts of amenity grass and 6 cuts of parks had to be completed.
 - d) The cessation and then restarting of the cutting of County Council grass, which required the recovery of four weeks of grass growth.
- 4.2 The particular impact these factors has caused is instances of excessive grass arisings resulting from long grass having been cut. The profile of the machinery has not been the issue (with access for the mowing teams to both rotary and cylinder machines) although the factors detailed above have necessitated the hire of a cut and collect machine to help remove excessive arisings on selected sites.
- 4.3 **Remedial Action Implemented:** The following remedial action has been proactively implemented:
- a) Mowing and strimming standards have been reinforced with Team Leaders and the need to slow up mowing if necessary to better coordinate mowing and strimming activities.
 - b) There has been a temporary revision of staff deployment to prioritise areas of the District that have experienced particular flushes in grass growth.
 - c) A cut and collect ride on mower has been sourced and deployed to target the hot spot sites that have suffered particularly from brown arisings being left on site following standard mowing operations.
 - d) The mowing teams worked extended hours on Fridays and additional hours on Saturdays to recover the problem sites.
- 4.4 To reiterate real progress has been made towards delivering the new service standards and this is evidenced by the level of service requests and complaints actually received regarding grass cutting that are not excessive and the results of the independent monitoring evidencing service standards are being delivered.

5. Grounds Maintenance Service Provided to the County Council

- 5.1 The 2015/16 ZBB Programme included a proposal for the Operations Service to fully recover the costs for providing grounds maintenance services to the County Council and Luminus Housing. This work for the County Council after SLA fees was costing HDC circa £100k per annum; and for Luminus after SLA fees their work was costing HDC circa £17k per annum. Consequently it was agreed for negotiations with the County and Luminus to recover the full costs of their works. These negotiations were to also address the long standing frustration of residents about poor environmental maintenance standards on the Highway in urban areas that has been unresolved for many years.
- 5.2 Negotiations have been ongoing since November 2015 involving the Executive Director responsible for Highways because the maintenance regimes specified by the County Council form part of their Highways Asset Management Improvement Plan (HAMIP). The fundamental issue is that the HAMIP only includes for three cuts per annum in urban areas which have been evidenced to be inadequate to provide a maintained environment to a reasonable standard. Therefore any increase in the frequency of grass cutting would have to be funded from the Highways budget. This fundamental issue needs to be resolved regardless of which organisation actually cuts the grass.
- 5.3 In order to maximise the impact of the negotiation meetings the discussions were broadened out to include the following issues:
- Grass Cutting – funding of increased grass cutting frequencies tied to revised land ownership of land assets.
 - Weed Treatment – increasing the frequencies of treatments.
 - Orphan Sites – the County Council adopting the identified orphan sites on the Highway.
 - Hinchbrooke Country Park – transfer of ownership to HDC to reflect this Council's financial commitment to the site.
 - Ouse Valley Way – management and maintenance arrangements.
- 5.4 These negotiations have been slow to progress matters to a resolution and in June 2016 the decision was taken to stop cutting County Council grass because three cuts had already been completed and to redirect resources to the maintenance of HDC land. Grass cutting on County Council land recommenced in late July 2016 after the County Council agreed to interim funding for grass cutting in 2016 pending the finalisation of an agreement for grounds maintenance services in future years. This has at least for 2016 resulted in increased payments from the County Council towards the costs actually being met by this Council. Councillors are reminded that the grounds maintenance service not only includes grass cutting but also shrub maintenance, hedge cutting, annual bedding and weed control.

- 5.5 If any of the County Council work transfers to another party it will need to include all of these grounds maintenance activities and the direct management of customer interface for the service provided. This is necessary for two reasons: this Council will have no control or responsibility for the service being delivered; and it will be outside of this Council's service standards as set out in the Service Specification for Grounds Maintenance.
- 5.6 The Cabinet is recommended to receive a further report on the resourcing of the Street Scene Service once negotiations with the County Council have been concluded. This is to ensure the resourcing of the service going forward includes fully for the work requirements of the land to be maintained subsequent to these negotiations and to build in contingency to be able to respond to extreme growing conditions.
- 5.7 **Public Rights of Way:** County Council has the statutory responsibility for Public Rights of Way. The development of a comprehensive management plan and the establishment of the Management Group for the Ouse Valley Way have been useful to get clarification from the County Council of how they will discharge this statutory responsibility. The County Council have confirmed their commitment to cut grass on public rights of way twice per annum and then to respond to complaints about maintenance standards (e.g. over grown shrubs and trees) thereafter. The County Council will also undertake enforcement work with private land owners who fail to adequately maintain their land that forms part of a public right of way.
- 5.8 Consequently this Council will not carry out beyond 2016/17 environment maintenance work on privately owned land on the Ouse Valley Way requiring the County to more proactively enforce such works with the landowners and to carry out such works directly for land owned by the County Council.

6. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

- 6.1 Comments of the Panel will be included in the future reports to the Cabinet regarding the delivery of the Street Scene Service.

7. KEY IMPACTS/RISKS AND HOW THESE WILL BE ADDRESSED

- 7.1 The service specifications, service standards and new maintenance regimes have been developed to reduce the risk of the Council failing to properly protect, develop and maintain the public realm environment of the District.

8. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 8.1 Independent monitoring of service standards has been put in place along with standardised performance reporting to be able to evidence the standards of service being delivered.

9. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN

9.1 The measures contained in this report will contribute to the Corporate Plan as follows:

- a) Enhancing fundamentally the built and green environment of the District.
- b) Operations becoming much more business-like and efficient in the way it delivers services.
- c) The new Street Scene service delivery arrangements will ensure the Operations Service aligns with the principles and requirements of the Council's Customer Services Strategy.

10. CONSULTATION

10.1 The service improvement plan adopted by the Operations Service includes a structure of on-going consultation with residents and service users; these will be used to test the performance in respect to the delivery of Street Scene activities detailed in this report from the users' perspective. The performance monitoring results will also be published to evidence to residents that specified service standards are being delivered.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The adopted Street Scene service delivery arrangements will better enable the Council to meet the requirements and environmental maintenance standards of the Environmental Protection Act.

12. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The adopted Street Scene service delivery arrangements in this report are being delivered within existing resources and are sustainable within the existing resources profile of the Operations Service set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

12.2 The additional funding received from the County for grass cutting in 2016 will reduce the level of subsidy from the Operations Service for this work and allow for additional resources to undertake remedial shrub maintenance programmes at no additional cost to this Council.

13. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The outlined service delivery arrangements seek to ensure the delivery of an appropriate and equitable balance in the provision of the detailed environmental activities across the District.

14 REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 14.1 The review of the service delivery arrangements detailed in this report gives the Panel the opportunity to appraise the impact of previous scrutiny work and to influence the future development of service delivery arrangements for these key environmental activities.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Street Cleansing Service Specification – approved by Cabinet on 12 January 2016.

Grounds Maintenance Service Specification – approved by Cabinet on 17 March 2016.

Street Scene Scoping Report – approved by Cabinet on 21 April 2016.

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