

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Grounds Maintenance Service Review

Meeting/Date: Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Environment) – 4th April 2017

Executive Portfolio: Councillor Jim White, Executive Councillor for Operations

Report by: Neil Sloper, Head of Operations

Wards affected: All

Executive Summary:

This report provides:

- 1) An update on Grounds Maintenance performance.
- 2) An update on arrangements for grass cutting.

Recommendation:

- 1) The Overview and Scrutiny Panel are asked to note the update and preparations for the 2017 grass cutting season.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The report is an update on the Grounds Maintenance service, its performance and changes made to improve grass cutting performance.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel received a report on 22nd September 2016 which presented an update on new service delivery arrangements. This particularly identified issues in respect of grass cutting:

- a) Late delivery of equipment delayed the start of mowing regimes in 2016.
- b) The introduction of stricter and more consistent standards of cutting initially slowed the pace of work.
- c) The cessation of County grass cutting to achieve adequate funding to the meet standards our residents expect impacted the standards delivered.
- d) The recovery operation resulting from the cessation of unfunded highway grass cutting created additional work impacting delivery of district wide standards for a month.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 Grass cutting has not really stopped since last season. With our main parks even taking a cut in December and January. All grass cutting equipment has been made available to the teams throughout the winter with servicing being rotated to accommodate this. Team leaders have been empowered to cut the grass in their areas if deemed beneficial and ground conditions allow.
- 3.2 Team leaders ensured all areas requiring box mowing for their first cut (e.g. Luminus sheltered housing and some small play areas and church yards) took place in mid-February.
- 3.3 Grass cutting of the general areas in towns and villages start at the beginning of March, a month earlier than last year. It is envisaged that that by the time this report goes to committee that we will have completed 2 cuts and be into a 3rd in most areas.
- 3.4 It was evident from the first year of monitoring to the required Grounds Maintenance standards that we did not have the required resource to cut the amount of grass to the expected standards throughout the district. The Cabinet's decision not to remove £67,000 from the budget to continue cutting County grass to our specification, as required by our residents has enabled the service to plan and take on an additional 3 seasonal staff from mid-March to mid-September on a fixed term contract. These staff will support team with strimming and blowing activities allowing our more specialist staff to carry on mowing. The seasonal staff will also assist with the May planting of annual bedding and repair of football goal mouths delivering a significant improvement of standards.
- 3.4 A small amount of County Council grass cutting has been transferred to Huntingdon and St. Neots Town Councils for 2017. A contingency of £20,000 has therefore been retained from the £67,000 which may be offered up as a saving, if not required to achieve the Grounds Maintenance standards this year.

- 3.5 The performance of the Grounds Maintenance service against standard and key indicators between February 2016 to February 2017 are shown below:

Service Requests for Grounds maintenance activities	80% to be received within 5 working days	317 service requests of which 67% have been resolved within 5 working days
The number of formal complaints received from residents regarding grounds maintenance	Less than 3 per month	April 2016 to Feb 2017 3 received
Inspection results of Grounds Maintenance works to standard when completed.	80% of works on site to standard when inspected	2397 inspections have been completed from April 2016 to Feb 2017 of which 94% work was to standard

Performance will be closely monitored on a monthly basis in 2017 and the new arrangements of staffing and adjusted regimes will ensure achievement of standards and responsiveness to service requests. A more detailed review of service requests will also be undertaken as the final resolution may be already planned work or impacted by the weather conditions.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 4.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be included in this section prior to further update reports to the Cabinet.

5. KEY IMPACTS & RISKS

- 5.1 The retention of the £67,000 to enable the cutting of County Council grass to the District Council's specification has enabled the service to re-plan staffing resources and enhance the delivery of standards to specification across the District.
- 5.2 The forward planning has also ensured all required equipment is in place and being utilised at the start of the season, in some cases work starting to maintain standards 3 months earlier than last year.
- 5.3 The service arrangements and maintenance regimes have been fine tuned after year one of implementation in 2016 to reduce the risk of the Council failing to properly protect, develop and maintain the public realm of the District.

6. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1 The Grounds Maintenance Manager, Terry Barry will be monitoring the resources closely, using customer and Member feedback as well as results of our performance review inspections, which are independent of the Grounds Maintenance service.
- 6.2 Any comments you wish to make may be directed to:-

Terry Barry – Grounds Maintenance Manager
 01480 388645
Terry.Barry@huntingdonshire.gov.uk

7. LINKS TO STRATEGIC PRIORITIES/CORPORATE PLAN

- 7.1 The delivery of Grounds Maintenance services to standards will contribute to the Corporate Plan as follows:
- a) Enhancing fundamentally the safety of the green environment of the District.
 - b) Operations becoming much more business-like and efficient in the way it delivers safe services.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Consultation has been conducted with all staff to ensure work plans and resourcing are optimised following the implementation of the new Grounds Maintenance service specifications in 2016, introduction of new equipment and maintenance regimes.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Grounds Maintenance service specification and delivery arrangements enable the Council to meet the requirements and standards of the Environmental Protection Act.

10. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Cabinet agreed to subsidise the costs of cutting County grass by not removing £67,000 from the Grounds Maintenance budget on 19th January 2017. This saving had been previously agreed within Zero Based Budgeting target.
- 10.2 This has been used to employ 3 seasonal staff on a 6 month fixed term contract. This will not use all of the available funds and will allow us to maintain a contingency to top up resources with agency staff if necessary.
- 10.3 The transfer of some County grass areas in St Neots and Huntingdon to the Town Councils, valued at approximately £20,000, has enabled staff to be redeployed into other areas of the district to spread the work load more evenly. The retained contingency in 12.2 above will be offered up as a saving following the 2017 year to reflect this transfer of work, should it not be required to achieve the grass cutting standard across the district in 2017.
- 10.4 The Ramsey Town Council contract has 2 dedicated staff members for the first time this year. Additional support will also be available for watering of annual bedding as and when it is required.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 11.1 The report sets out to members how the resourcing of Grounds Maintenance activities will best meet the Grounds Maintenance, and in particular grass cutting, specification in the District during 2017.

LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – Team Areas for Grounds Maintenance

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Street Scene Service Update Report – 22nd September 2016

<http://moderngov.huntsdc.gov.uk:8070/documents/s82242/Street%20Scene%20Update.pdf>

Grounds Maintenance Service Specification – approved by Cabinet 17th March 2016
<http://applications.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s78753/Grounds%20Maintenance%20Service%20Specification.pdf>

CONTACT OFFICER

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