

**SCUTINY Committee – Grounds maintenance Task group
NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 17TH February 2012
AT SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DC**

Present: Cllr Neil Atkin
Cllr Roy Bell
Steve Sheppard, Grounds Maintenance Manager
Paul Evans, Direct Services Manager
Bob Ledger, Head of Service

1. Introduction

Cllr Atkin opened the meeting. Bob gave the background of the circumstances of the grounds maintenance function i.e. service exposed to full market test in 2011. In-house cost was around £30k lower p.a. than lowest external tender therefore decision taken to retain service in-house. New work has been taken on by the in-house team to meet the tendered specification in full i.e. flail mowing (grass verges adjacent to the highway outside built up areas) and full tree work commencing 2012 season.

Grounds maintenance effectively has three clients. Just over £150k of income comes from the County, £140k from the HRA and the rest from the SDDC General Fund. There is an in-house client function in the Leisure Service which is focussed on the SDDC general fund issues.

2. Parish Council input into the review

Cllr Atkin enquired re how we are seeking parish councils' views, to which Bob replied that Paul Spencer had sent an initial letter. Bob confirmed that two parishes had taken up the offer of further info and had contacted him i.e. looks like we will get some feedback.

3. Current schedule of works

The majority of the meeting was taken up with Steve going through the detail of the work. There are different schedules of work as they relate to:

- public open space and grass verges in the built up areas (12 times a year)
- parks,
- public housing land (14 times and 22 times around sheltered),
- verge cutting outside the built up areas (this flail mowing ranges from 2 – 3 times a year with one full width cut to approximately a third of the District every year),
- hedge cutting
- tree work

Non-housing public open space in built up areas (i.e. the areas that most people will see most often) gets cut 12 times a year.

There is a lot of detail involved in operating the above process and members were impressed with Steve's knowledge and level of control.

There was a discussion about Ragwort weeds in those areas that are only cut 3 times a year with the conclusion that there would be significant budgetary implications in increasing the frequency.

Steve also pointed out that the team is doing play area inspections and maintenance.

4. Issues identified for development/Improvement in 2012

Bob outlined areas that officers were already considering as development priorities in 2012 as listed below;

1) Quality control. There are three clients as mentioned above. The only person fulfilling the role in any meaningful detailed way is Zoe Sewter in the Leisure department. As it's an in-house service we should be carrying out minimal monitoring and its Steve job to ensure quality across the board. The issue is therefore how do we build in proportionate quality control?

Paul advised that quality monitoring is currently undertaken by the grounds foreman but we are already looking to make that more of a qualitative and less of a quantitative assessment.

2) Closely linked to 1) is to more widely define the client/contractor relationship and who does what.

3) At least one parish council is paying for additional work by a third party contractor. We need to try to establish better coordination with those works. It could be said that we're the lead operator and its upto others to fit in around us and this would have to be the stance if a large number of parishes were doing their own work (otherwise it would become unmanageable) but as its currently one (and maybe two) we'll look at whether this can done. Steve also interested in why they are paying for additional works and can we offer to carry them out at a lower cost?

4) Feedback. Currently the feedback channels are limited to a formal customer complaint or an unlogged telephone call. We want to do more about getting feedback from local recipients of the service. A couple of suggestions were made in the meeting but the conclusion was we need to do more work on this.

5) The current agreement and funding with County is relatively loosely defined. Our assessment is that the amount of work we do is commensurate with the funding supplied but there does need to be more written down about what we are providing and what it costs us to do that.

6) External accreditation.

Although the perception of the service overall appears to be good there is also acceptance that things not so long ago weren't that good. Therefore there may be some benefit is seeking an external accreditation as verification of the improvements that have been made.

5. Next actions

Cllrs Atkin and Bell will go out for an afternoon with Steve to see the on-site operation. This to happen on Tuesday 27th March p.m commencing in Bob's office at 1.30 p.m.