
REPORT TO:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	AGENDA ITEM: 6
DATE OF MEETING:	23rd October 2013	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	Director of Housing and Environmental Services	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	Bob Ledger 5975 bob.ledger@south-derbys.gov.uk	DOC:
SUBJECT:	Service Review: Grounds Maintenance	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Members note and comment on the actions that have been undertaken following the 2012 Overview and Scrutiny Committee service review.

2. Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To advise members of progress on actions following the 2012 Overview and Scrutiny Committee service review of grounds maintenance. There were four sections to the final report to the Committee in October 2012. These are now utilised again below.

3. Quality Control

- 3.1 Quality Control. There are three principal clients for the Grounds Maintenance Service: the County Council, the Housing Service and the Culture and Community Service (Parks/Open spaces). As a result of last year's work an amended quality inspection process was put in place. The outcome of this is that more detailed information has been feedback to the three clients.
- 3.2 Over the last year the client function has been exercised by Culture and Community through its monthly client meeting and the County Council through its quarterly client meeting. The Housing Service does not undertake separate client meetings but in preparation for this report the Housing Service has given a view on the last year's operation.
- 3.3 No full or part District issues have been raised in the client meetings. Most items discussed related to additional attention to specific locations rather than concerns about wholesale failures to deliver the quantity or quality specified. The Housing Service similarly does have concerns about the quality of work in some locations on some occasions. The Grounds Maintenance Manager has been made aware and repeat work has been scheduled as a result on several occasions.

- 3.4 In addition the Housing Service stated that it was only getting a Grounds performance against schedule report on request rather than monthly as a matter of course. This, along with a commentary on why certain work may be behind or ahead of that schedule, is now in place.
- 3.5 There were two outstanding actions at the time of completing last year's review in October 2012. These were:
- "That there was no gathering of complaints or concerns in a central location".
 - In response a log is now kept by the Grounds Maintenance Manager of all complaints to identify patterns or trends in non-performance
 - "That the specification for the service needs to be more adaptable and where items are needed routinely, that were not originally specified as such, then separate orders and cost transfers have to be arranged wasting time and effort on both sides of the client contractor relationship".
 - This issue relates primarily to open spaces under the management of the Culture and Community Service. In this regard variations to the original specification are being agreed in an end of season series of meetings. The unit prices for additional works are set in the base contract documentation i.e. the prices for additional works are set at the lowest 2011 tendered rates. However it is unlikely, given the current financial position, that additional monies will be forthcoming and therefore the grounds maintenance service will do what it can to incorporate the items into the regular schedule. This additional work should also be placed in the context that grounds maintenance work across the District was put out to tender in 2010/11 and the decision was subsequently made to retain the service in-house as it represented the best value option.

4 Feedback

- 4.1 A survey process was initiated as part of the last years' service review utilising a Freepost response survey card that is delivered to targeted numbers of residents residing in properties adjacent to the location of each cutting activity. The results of the surveys in the 2013 cutting season are a return rate of 23% and of that number 65% report the service as good or excellent.
- 4.2 In addition it was agreed in the review to undertake a web-based survey. This was not carried out until recently, is currently on the website and it is anticipated that we'll have the results towards the end of November.

5 County Funded Works

- 5.1 It was reported as part of the service review that the current agreement and funding with the County Council for the cutting of highway verges is relatively loosely defined. The work includes urban verges, rural verges and junction visibility splays all at different frequencies. Our assessment at that time was that overall the amount of work we do (including Highway cleansing) is broadly commensurate with the County Council funding supplied. However in Grounds we are cutting verges and visibility splays at marginally higher frequencies than the County expect. We identified in last year's review that from the District's (or contractor) perspective more needs to be written down but that the County officers take the view they will provide funding to a partner and it's up to that partner (ourselves) to deliver as best we can within that amount.

- 5.2 Alongside last year's review the County were also stating that the budget was likely to be cut. When this was put into the political domain last year in the event no cuts were made to the funding level. However the County Council officers are again now stating that a reduction in funding is likely next year.
- 5.3 From the District Council perspective it seems reasonable that the specification and budget should be agreed at a level to formally define service levels. Whereas the County Council's position, although based on that principle, in the light of budget cuts seems to be we all need to manage with less without agreeing to any reduction in service. To some extent the District Council's negotiating position is adversely affected by the fact that the scale of our operation only works with the County Council funding in place and if we were to lose that work the costs of service provision to the District would rise disproportionately.
- 5.4 Therefore the negotiating rationale to date has been to wait and assess the extent of any proposed reduction in funding on our whole service and then lobby or change specification levels accordingly. As there is no formal contract in place either side has the ability to pull out of the current arrangement subject to reasonable notice.

6 External accreditation.

- 6.1 After some consideration in the review process it was agreed we don't follow a formal accreditation route but officers develop further in-house quality monitoring processes and produce an annual report detailing priorities for future action. The first such report for the 2013 season is being produced and will be available in the next few weeks.

7 Developments during the 2013 season

- 7.1 In 2013 the Grounds Maintenance service has taken on additional highway spraying works that were previously sub-contracted out. This includes spraying around highway signage and street furniture. The cost saving of bringing the work in-house is around £11,000 per annum.
- 7.2 Additional cuts to churchyards have been introduced at no extra charge which has generated some compliments in to the service.
- 7.3 The service continued to respond to emergency requests (which would be additional costs in a formal contractual situation) such as removing dangerous trees and filling and delivering sandbags in response to flooding alerts.

8 Corporate Implications

- 8.1 The Council's reputation is assessed by many on the standard of such generic services as grounds maintenance i.e. it is key that this service be of a good quality. The outcome of the review was that this is generally the case but that actions identified in the initial review, and subsequent to it, will help to further improve the quality of the service delivered.