

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Streetscene Scrutiny Panel

Date: 17 October 2019

Report of: Head of Streetscene

Subject: GRASS CUTTING ARRANGEMENTS

SUMMARY

This report provides information to members about the varied grass cutting operations and staffing levels required to maintain the parks, open spaces and verges located throughout the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Panel scrutinises the arrangements for grass cutting as set out in this report.

INTRODUCTION

1. Fareham Borough Council is responsible for the cutting of grass on all of Fareham Borough Council owned land in addition to the adopted Highway verges and open spaces across the Borough that are maintained on behalf of Hampshire County Council via a funded agency agreement.
2. The grass cutting operations generally start at the end of February/early March and continue through to the end of October/early November depending on the seasonal weather conditions. This is known as the cutting season and consists of approximately 170 days of grass cutting a year.
3. The Grounds Maintenance team sit within the Streetscene Department based at Broadcut Depot and undertake all of the grass cutting operations. During the cutting season, the Grounds team consist of 40 directly employed staff and this is supplemented by 3 seasonal agency operatives to give an operating total of 43 staff.
4. Of the 43 staff, around 50% will be fully employed on the various grass cutting operations throughout the cutting season. The other 50% of the team are fully employed on tasks such as burials, play area inspection and maintenance, hedge and shrub cutting, irrigation, flower bed maintenance and sports pitch maintenance.
5. Most of the grass in parks, open spaces, on roadside verges and around housing estates is cut approximately every 3-4 weeks. Rural verges are cut twice a year and meadow areas are generally cut and collected annually.

GRASS CUTTING OPERATIONS AND MACHINERY

6. A range of machinery is used to keep the various areas of grass under control from large tractors, ride-on mowers, pedestrian mowers through to hand held strimmers.
7. Two large tractors operate full time throughout the cutting season to mow the main parks, recreation grounds, and the largest of the Borough's open spaces. Another large tractor is allocated to grass cutting at Solent Airport.
8. Tractor towed cylinder mowers that operate with 7 cutting decks are used on prime sports fields such as cricket outfields and prestige park sites and provide a high-quality cut, whereas the general open spaces are cut with tractor towed rotary blade decks that will still provide a good quality cut but are more suited to the undulating ground that is common on many recreational sites.
9. Smaller open spaces and grass verges are cut using ride-on flail mowers. The flail mowers are designed to cut and drop the grass and this generally works well so there is no need for an additional team to constantly follow up with blowers to clear debris of footpaths. These robust machines are also designed to cope well with long wet grass and the occasional hazards that can be hidden in verges that other types of mower such as cylinder or rotary can struggle with or be more easily damaged.
10. The Borough is split into 7 areas and each is assigned a ride-on mower with a driver to follow a designated route cutting road after road until reaching the end of the route and then starting over again.

11. The 7 grass cutting areas are listed below:

1. Portchester
2. North Fareham
3. South Fareham
4. Stubbington and Hill Head
5. Titchfield and Warsash
6. Locksheath
7. Sarisbury, Burridge, Park Gate and Whiteley

12. The three areas numbered 5,6 and 7 operate out of a small satellite depot located at Hook Recreation Ground. This facility reduces the down time that would occur if they started and finished at the main Council depot in Wallington and therefore, enabling more cutting time per operative to be completed each day in these three areas.

13. There are 13 cemeteries and closed churchyards maintained by 3 of the Grounds team during the cutting season. A ride-on mower, pedestrian mower and strimmers are used to cut the grass approximately every 3 weeks.

14. There are 28 Council run sheltered housing schemes that require 2 of the Grounds team staff to be fully employed during the cutting season. A zero-turn ride-on mower, pedestrian rotary mower and strimmers are required to cut the grass approximately every 3 weeks.

15. Approximately 160 of Fareham Housing tenant's gardens are maintained monthly using pedestrian operated rotary mowers and strimmers. A further 2 members of the Grounds team provide this service.

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

16. The following tables show the frequency and type of feedback received by the team for the entire 2018 season and up to the end of August for the current cutting season.

2018

.Reason	Too Long	Missed Cut	No Strimming	Damage	Other	Total
.Month						
May	5	2	1	0	0	8
June	4	2	1	2	0	9
July	1	1	0	0	1 (meadow area unsightly)	3
August	0	0	0	0	0	0

September	4	1	2	0	1 (poor work)	8
October	2	1	0	0	1 (poor work)	4
TOTAL	16	7	4	2	3	32

2019

.Reason	Too Long	Missed Cut	No Strimming	Damage	Other	Total
.Month						
April	0	1	0	0	0	1
May	4	4	1	0	1 (Daffodil area not cut)	10
June	7	5	11	0	2 (1 thank you and 1 poor work)	25
July	2	3	7	0	0	12
August	0	0	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	13	13	20	0	3	49

21. As can be seen from the limited number of complaints received that many of the Borough's residents appear to be generally satisfied with the service. One of the stand out changes from 2018 to 2019 is the number of calls regarding missed strimming for June and July.
22. Strimming around obstacles such as street furniture, alongside fences and walls and grass banks is planned to be undertaken by 4 members of the team with sites split between monthly and two monthly cycles. However, this is the operation considered least essential to the service with priority given to Burials, play inspection and maintenance, works to keep the public safe and the general grass cutting operations to ensure our open spaces are fit for purpose.
23. Unfortunately, the Grounds team has seen an unusual spike in long-term absences in 2019. The absence was due to various health conditions/medical procedures that led to a shortfall in staffing across the service for several months. This necessitated the delay in deployment of the follow up team for periods of this cutting season and explains the unusual amount of resident contact about this part of the service.
24. The team will ensure that all outstanding areas are strimmed and made tidy before the end of the year so that all the grass areas are brought back to the required standard ready for the new cutting season.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

25. The grounds maintenance team currently operate on an annual revenue budget of £1,568,000. Grass maintenance makes up about 50% of the operation for 8 months of the year and therefore, the grass cutting service to maintain all the various grass cutting operations discussed in this report can be estimated to cost approximately £522,000 per annum.
26. Hampshire County Council Highway Department contribute approximately £135,000 per annum towards the Highway grass cutting element of the service.

RISK ASSESSMENT

27. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

Hampshire County Council Agency Agreement

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Mick Gore. (Ext 4459)