

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Streetscene Scrutiny Panel

Date: 15 October 2020

Report of: Head of Streetscene

Subject: HEDGE CUTTING AND SPORTS PITCH RENOVATIONS

SUMMARY

The members of the panel are invited to scrutinise the performance of the hedge cutting and sports pitch maintenance service, that are undertaken by the Public Spaces Operations Team, with the purpose of delivering the corporate objective of providing a Clean and Tidy Borough.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Panel scrutinises and notes the information as set out in this report.

INTRODUCTION

1. In 2017 the Vanguard review of the Grounds Maintenance service concluded that the hedge cutting and sports pitch maintenance service, previously outsourced to a private contractor since 2004, should be managed in-house. The main reason being it would enable the Grounds Maintenance service to become more flexible and responsive to changing demands and therefore be more efficient and effective than the outsourced service.
2. At the Council's Executive meeting in January 2018, approval was obtained to employ four additional operatives within the existing Grounds Maintenance service to undertake hedge cutting and sports maintenance work.
3. The Executive also approved a capital investment of £120,000 to procure the specialist vehicles and plant required to undertake the work.

OPERATIONS

4. Hedge cutting is the primary function of the team with around 60% of the team's annual workload dedicated to maintaining approximately 50 kilometres or 31 miles of hedging and greenways across the Borough. Meadow operations make up around 20% of the workload with the remaining 20% split between sports pitch maintenance, rural grass cutting and countryside path management.
5. The team commenced work in July 2018 and the meadow management and countryside path maintenance operations were included in the work programme so that a full annual work schedule was created for the team as set out in the below table:

Work Schedule	Operation
March/April	Meadow preparation and sowing
May	End of season renovations for winter sport
May/June	Rural grass cut & countryside path cutting
July - September	1 st cut of hedges & countryside path cutting
October	Rural grass cut and meadow cut & collect
November - February	2 nd cut of hedges/greenway management

6. In order to undertake the wide variety of operational tasks, the team have been equipped with the following vehicles, plant and machinery.

Equipment	Operation
100hp tractor	Multi-function – sport, hedge, grass maintenance
Transit van	All works
Deep aerator	Sports pitch maintenance
Disc seeder	Sports pitch maintenance
Tractor operated	Sports pitch maintenance and meadow

cultivation equipment	preparation
Tractor towed flail cut & collect equipment	Meadow mowing
Tractor mounted side arm flail	Hedge and rural grass cutting
2 long & 2 short reach hedge trimmers	Hedge cutting
2 blowers	Hedge and grass works
Hand tools	All works

REVIEW OF THE SERVICE

7. Delays in the recruitment of operatives and a period of transition which required reorganisation of the team and delay in delivery of the new flail equipment meant the meant that progress was slower than desired to begin with.
8. It soon became apparent that in some areas the hedge growth had become established too high and therefore needed extensive reduction which required a greater amount of time and effort to deliver. The reduction to an appropriate size was welcomed by most residents but also gave rise to some complaints about lack of privacy to their property as a result of the hedge reductions.
9. Despite the issues and slow initial progress, the team completed the essential trimming back of the seasonal growth over the first year although had little time to deliver many improvements to the service.
10. Year two was much better and has not only seen standards of the work improve but also resulted in some significant reduction work being completed on hedges and other tall vegetation that had previously caused issues for some residents or that made efficient and effective maintenance challenging.
11. Hedge and vegetation reduction work is very time consuming and results in a lot of green waste to remove from site. Previously this would have been undertaken by the contractor at an additional cost to the contract and in some cases a location with a significant amount of vegetation to reduce could cost thousands of pounds a time.
12. As a result of the above, the ability of the Council to undertake reduction works was limited to the budget available. This is no longer the case with the in-house team as although the time available for this work is limited to a period in the winter there is no additional cost involved other than the green waste disposal.
13. The intention going forward is for the reductions to continue each year as required so that the Council's hedge stock can be improved visually and become more efficient to maintain over time. This will then reduce the number of complaints received from residents about vegetation overhanging paths and cycleways or blocking light from gardens.
14. Sports pitch maintenance has also improved as a result of the in-house team operation.

The deep aeration work can now be scheduled as appropriate rather than being determined by contractor availability. Standards of the pitch renovation work are more consistent as a result of the dedicated team's involvement year on year.

15. Meadow management and creation has continued to the same high standard as in previous years but with more flexibility to match the best conditions for preparation and sowing when compared to again being determined by contractor availability for this time sensitive work.

RISK ASSESSMENT

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

CONCLUSION

17. The in-house hedge cutting, and sports maintenance team have, after a challenging start, developed into a productive and flexible asset for the Council. Improvements have commenced to some of the Council's assets following resident's requests such as hedge height and width reductions that have saved money and will drive efficiencies going forward. These service improvements will help to reduce the number of complaints received from residents about vegetation overhanging paths and cycleways going forward.

Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Reference Papers: Executive Report Review of Hedge Cutting Contract, 08 January 2018

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