

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Streetscene Policy Development and Review Panel

Date **24 October 2013**

Report of: **Director of Street Scene**

Subject: **GROUNDS MAINTENANCE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS**

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the changes to working arrangements within the grounds maintenance service.

RECOMMENDATION

That the panel notes the content of this report.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Grounds Maintenance service assists with delivering the Council's vision of a safe and attractive place to be and also plays a key role in the Council's aim to protect and enhance the environment.
2. The Service provides the following operations on Fareham Borough Council (FBC) and Hampshire Highway land:
 - Grass cutting to verges and open spaces.
 - Shrub and rose border maintenance
 - Hedge cutting
 - Floral display maintenance including flower beds, hanging baskets and roadside troughs.
3. The service also provides the following operations on FBC land:
 - Winter sports pitch maintenance including football & rugby.
 - Summer sports maintenance including cricket and bowls
 - The play area inspection and maintenance service.
 - The Council's burial service.
4. The service is provided within the Streetscene Department's Operations Team. The team includes the full time Grounds Maintenance Supervisor reporting directly to the Operations Manager. The supervisor is responsible for the day to day running of the service and provides direct line management to the team.

STAFFING VEHICLES AND PLANT

5. The team consists of 22 full time employees (including the supervisor) and 10 seasonal grass cutting operatives. The usual hours of work are 37 per week 8am – 4pm Monday to Thursday with a 3.30pm finish on a Friday. During periods of peak operational demand temporary labour is employed through local agencies.
6. The team operate with the following fleet of vehicles and large plant:
 - 12 flat-bed vans
 - 1 Lorry
 - 3 pick-up vehicles/small van
 - 2 large tractors & equipment
 - 1 medium tractor and equipment
 - 2 small tractor digger/loaders

- 12 Flail ride-on mowers
 - 3 Rotary ride-on mowers
 - 9 trailers
7. In addition to the above fleet the service also operates with a range of small plant and equipment that includes:
- Fine turf mowers and equipment including aerators, scarifiers and a soil spreader.
 - Chainsaws and pole saws.
 - Pedestrian rotary mowers.
 - Petrol strimmers.
 - Petrol hedgecutters.
 - Petrol blowers.
 - Wood chippers.
 - Salt/fertiliser spreaders.
 - Various power tools and hand tools.

OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

8. For a number of years the Grounds Maintenance service has operated on a geographical area basis by dividing the Borough into three contract areas, Central Fareham, Portchester and Stubbington and the Western Wards.
9. Area based working allowed for greater diversity of work within the teams but it was hard to split the workload evenly due to the fact that one area had more or less of a particular type of work than another. For example the Western Wards contained the highest quantity of shrub borders but the least assisted gardens. This differential made it more difficult to balance staffing during peak seasonal demand and on occasion led to inconsistencies in standards for similar sites across the Borough such as cemeteries or major parks.
10. Over the winter of 2012/13 a review of the grounds maintenance working arrangements was undertaken as part of the on-going management of the service to see if it was possible to increase the productivity of the team. The review also looked at the potential to improve the quality and consistency of the service to the customer without the need to increase the cost of the service. The workforce and their representatives were consulted during the process and were supportive of the change.
11. The review concluded that the service could potentially be improved by changing the structure of the teams from area based operations to task based working. By focusing on tasks rather than areas the teams should be able to provide a consistent standard of work across all the locations within their discipline.

12. The revised working arrangements commenced in March 2013 and since that date the service has been structured with the following operational teams:
13. Cemetery Maintenance Team - A four person team with two vans and trailers, two ride-on mowers and a range of small plant. The team is responsible for the presentation of the 8 working cemeteries and a number of small closed churchyards including grass cutting, border maintenance and the general upkeep of the facilities.
14. Sheltered Accommodation Maintenance Team - A two person team with one van and a trailer, a ride on mower and a range of small plant. The team is responsible for all the Council's sheltered accommodation sites and a small number of prestige areas of open space. The team operations include grass cutting, border maintenance and the general upkeep of the sites including drying areas.
15. Sports Maintenance Team - A two person team with two vans and a trailer and a range of fine turf small plant. The team is responsible for the preparation, repair and maintenance of the Council's football, rugby, cricket and bowls facilities.
16. Shrub and Rose Border Maintenance Team - A two person team with a van and a range of small plant responsible for over 47,000 square metres of borders. The team visit the shrub borders in the summer months to remove overhanging foliage from the footway or carriageway and apply herbicide to weedgrowth. In the winter a more comprehensive prune and tidy is undertaken and the team is increased by utilising a number of the grounds team that are no longer employed on the seasonal grass cutting operations.
17. Display Team - A three person team supported by an additional temporary member for peak seasonal demand with two vans, a trailer and a range of small plant. The team maintain the Borough's prestigious park sites and the 46 flower borders, 103 hanging baskets, 36 tubs and planters and 67 roadside troughs.
18. Tractor Team - A two person team with two tractors towing rotary and cylinder gang mowing equipment and a variety of trailed turf maintenance equipment. The team is responsible for maintaining the grass on the parks, large open spaces and sports pitches and their work includes some of the winter sports pitch operations.
19. Follow Up and Ditch Team - A two person team with two vans and a range of small plant is supported with additional temporary labour during peak seasonal demand. The team strim around obstacles, walls and fence lines and cut areas of land such as steep banks that the larger machinery is unable to cut. The team also clear ditches maintained by the Council in the autumn to ensure they are fit for purpose during the winter season.
20. Assisted Gardens - A one person operation with a van and a range of small plant supported with additional temporary labour during peak seasonal demand. The task is to cut grass on a monthly schedule for the 185 residents on the housing tenants assisted garden scheme and to maintain hedges within these gardens.
21. Play Area Inspection - A one person operation with a pick up vehicle and a range of small plant supported with additional temporary labour during peak seasonal demand. The operation is responsible for inspecting and repairing the Council's 45 play area sites.

22. Burials Team – A two person team with a lorry, a van and trailer and a small tractor/digger. During the winter season a member of the Tractor Team transfers to this operation to provide support for the challenging conditions that the team face at this time of year.
23. Ride-on Grass Cutting Team - Ten person seasonal team (March – October) operating with a fleet of ride-on flail mowers responsible for the cutting of highway, Leisure and Housing open spaces and verges on an approximate two weekly schedule.
24. In addition to the above in-house teams the hedge cutting and sports renovation work was awarded under contract to The Landscape Group in 2011 for a three year period with an option to extend for a further two years.

GREEN FLAG AWARD

25. The team have once again played a significant part in helping the Council to retain Green Flag awards for Holly Hill Woodland and the Town Centre's Sensory Garden.

SOUTH & SOUTH EAST IN BLOOM

26. Further success was achieved at the recent South & South East in Bloom Awards held in Tunbridge Wells, Kent. The Borough received its 10th consecutive winning entry receiving another gold award, along with the prestigious Hampshire Life Award for the entry with highest marks in the county.
27. Fareham's parks also came out with top awards including:
 - Holly Hill Woodland Park - Gold
 - Sensory Garden of Reflection - Gold
 - Westbury Manor Garden – Silver Gilt
 - Warsash Common - Gold
 - Civic Gardens – Gold

RISK ASSESSMENT

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

CONCLUSION

29. It is always difficult to assess the impact of the change in a service that is also influenced by the environment and the ever changing weather conditions. This is well demonstrated by comparing the very cool wet summer of 2012 with the hotter, drier summer experienced this year. The effect of this year's conditions has meant that grass cutting was easier to manage but the shrub borders, brambles, nettles and hedges grew at a faster rate. The floral displays also required extra resource to ensure they continued to look their best during the high temperatures recorded over a long period this summer.
30. Given with the influence of the above factors it was still noted that the new

arrangements allowed the service to be more proactive in 2013. Having dedicated crews visit shrub borders during the growing season and a follow up crew ensuring the obstacles, ditches and banks were cut more often improved the appearance and safety of the Borough and compares favourably with the more reactive service provided by the area based working arrangements previously in place.

31. Positive comments received from the public also support the above claim and have included the following feedback:

- “I would like to thank the people who manage the roadside flower beds and boxes throughout Fareham. Every year the displays just get better and better and are a joy to see. Thank you for your hard work”.
- “Wickham Road Cemetery must be one of the best kept in the area. It is such a pleasure to walk in, so peaceful and well maintained”.
- “Wickham Road Cemetery is beautifully kept. Thank you grounds team the grounds are absolutely beautiful, and cannot think of a nicer place that her husband has been left to rest”.
- “The tenants at Melvin Jones House want you to know that the grass cutting service is excellent”.
- “I wanted to thank you for the grass cutting in the Park Gate area. The young chap driving his ride-on mower took so much care when cutting near daffodils and every time he saw a piece of litter he stopped and picked it up”.

32. Officers are of the opinion that the service is improving as a result of the new working arrangements from the day to day visual monitoring of sites and this is supported when comparing the number of compliments received about the service (5) in 2012/13 compared to the 23 received so far in 2013/14. However, it will take a couple of years to fully assess the impact of the changes when it is further tested by the changeable weather conditions and the continual challenge to be ever more efficient whilst still providing a good value service for the customer.

Background Papers:

None

Reference Papers:

None

Enquiries:

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