

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Streetscene Policy Development and Review Panel

Date 08 January 2015

Report of: Director of Environmental Services

Subject: ANNUAL REVIEW OF GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the Council's Grounds Maintenance Service.

RECOMMENDATION

That the panel notes the content of this report.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Grounds Maintenance service plays a key role in delivering the Council's vision of a safe and attractive place to be and also assists the Council to meet its aim to protect and enhance the environment. The majority of the service is not a statutory obligation with the exception of the burial service element.
2. The service is responsible for the following operations:
 - Grass cutting
 - Shrub border, rose bed and hedge maintenance
 - Floral display maintenance
 - Winter and summer sports pitch preparation and maintenance
 - Burial Service
 - Play area safety inspections, repairs and maintenance

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

3. The service operates on an annual revenue budget of £1,284,000 as detailed below:
 - Employees £774,000
 - Transport £210,000
 - Supplies and services £174,000
 - Internal recharges £93,000
 - Depreciation £33,000
4. Hampshire County Council contributes £164,000 towards the maintenance of the highway grass verges, shrub borders and hedgerows under an agency agreement.

SERVICE OPERATION

5. The service is managed by the Operations Manager, assisted by the Grounds Maintenance Supervisor. The operational team consists of 27 full time employees, 1 apprentice and 5 seasonal grass cutting operatives. During periods of peak demand a small number of temporary labour operatives are employed through local recruitment agencies.
6. The usual hours of work are 37 per week. 8am - 4pm Monday to Thursday with a 3.30pm finish on a Friday. Occasional overtime is required to meet service demands and play area inspections are carried out 6 days per week Monday to Saturday.

GRASS CUTTING

7. The service is responsible for cutting over 2.5 million square meters of grass most of which is cut every two to three weeks. The work is seasonal, usually commencing in

early March and running through to early November.

8. The highway verges, small open spaces and grass located around the general housing areas are cut approximately every two to three weeks depending on weather, ground conditions and the grass growth rate. Follow up strimming of banks and obstacles are carried out approximately every six weeks.
9. Large parks and open spaces are cut at least twice per month or as conditions allow and winter sports pitches are cut as required to maintain a playable surface.
10. Cemeteries and Council sheltered housing schemes are cut on a frequency of two occasions per month, or as conditions allow. Obstacles are followed up by strimmers during each maintenance visit. At times of peak growth the grass is sometimes collected to ensure these sensitive areas remain safe and attractive.
11. The Council operates an assisted garden scheme for elderly and disabled tenants. The scheme provides a monthly grass cutting service from March to October for residents who are unable to manage their gardens.

SHRUB AND ROSE BORDERS

12. The team maintain over 47,000 square meters of shrub borders on a frequency of two occasions per annum. The main maintenance visit is undertaken during the winter months (November – February) and includes weed removal and formative pruning. A second visit is carried out during the summer to control vegetation encroaching onto adjacent footpaths and roads.

HEDGE MAINTENANCE

13. This operation is carried out throughout the Borough at nearly 400 different locations with almost 43 kilometres (26 miles) of hedgerow trimmed on a frequency of two occasions per annum. The first cut commences in July through to September and the second visit takes place between October and February.
14. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 makes it an offence to disturb nesting birds and this is why we do not cut hedges between March and June of each year.
15. The Council's incumbent contractor, The Landscape Group was re-awarded the contract following a competitive tender process undertaken early in 2014 having achieved the highest combined score based on cost, quality and service delivery. The contract commenced in July 2014 and runs for three years with an option to extend for a further two years.

FLORAL DISPLAYS

16. The service is responsible for the maintenance of over 100 lamp post baskets, 40 shop front baskets and over 100 barrier troughs, planters and tubs. The seasonal displays provide colourful enhancements to a number of prime locations throughout the Borough. The service also maintains 46 flower beds that provide seasonal interest to enhance Fareham's prime parks, main roads and roundabouts.

SPORTING FACILITIES

17. The service is responsible for the maintenance of 17 adult and 8 junior football pitches, 2 rugby pitches, 4 cricket pitches and 2 grass bowling greens.
18. The majority of the maintenance work is undertaken by the Grounds Maintenance team with the exception of the deep aeration and end of season renovation operations that are carried out on the winter sports pitches by The Landscape Group as part of the Hedge and Sports Maintenance Contract awarded in 2014.

BURIAL SERVICE

19. The service provides a team responsible for the excavation and backfilling of graves and cremated remains in the Borough's 8 working cemeteries. The team attend services to ensure that there is a Council presence at the cemetery should it be required. The team prepare and dress the graveside in preparation for the interment.
20. During 2014 the team have buried over 100 residents and interred over 90 cremated remains.

PLAY AREAS

21. The team inspects repairs and maintains the Council's 43 play areas, 6 skate facilities and 2 outdoor gyms that are located in all wards of the Borough. Inspections are carried out 6 days a week, Monday to Saturday on a frequency based on individual usage of each site that ranges from 1 to 3 occasions per week.
22. A full time play inspector is trained to inspect and repair the equipment and safety surfacing. Five members of the grounds team who are also trained to inspect play areas provide cover for holidays and weekends.

SERVICE ACHIEVEMENTS

23. The most recent Residents Survey results (2013) show that the majority (93%) of people in the Borough are happy with their local parks and open spaces. An increase of 2% compared with the 2011 response. There was also a 5% increase in the respondents who were happy with the children's play areas in the Borough between 2011 (85%) and 2013 (90%). Finally, 83% of respondents were happy with their local sports facilities including football pitches, cricket pitches and bowling greens. This is 2% more than in 2011 (81%).
24. 2014 has been another successful year for Fareham's South East in Bloom entries with the Borough again achieving a Gold award from the region and The Hampshire Life Award for the entry receiving the highest marks in Hampshire. In addition, the following parks and open spaces maintained by the Grounds Maintenance team were all awarded a gold:
- Holly Hill Woodland Park
 - Sensory Garden
 - Westbury Manor Gardens

- Civic Gardens

25. The service also helped Fareham to retain its Green Flag Park status at Holly Hill Woodland and the Sensory Garden.

SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

26. The service continues to focus on providing a high level of customer service standards with the teams encouraged to work proactively to seek improvements in the quality of their work and to raise the standards of maintenance in Fareham's open spaces.

27. Training needs continue to be identified to provide service resilience and career progression. During 2014 the team have undergone training to update their knowledge and awareness of changes in the legislation and best practice relating to chemical application and fast road working. In addition, the full time play inspector has updated his inspection and maintenance training certification.

28. Work is almost completed with the creation of a detailed grounds maintenance scheduling system and should be fully operational for the start of the 2015 cutting season. The system will help to improve the management and supervision of the teams through improved service planning and information exchange and also improve the service response to customer enquiries

29. Finally, the changes to the grass cutting ride on team in 2014 have been positive. Half the team are now employed on permanent contracts. The benefits of this change include a reduction in recruitment issues and the creation of a stable workforce. This has increased operational efficiency and should safeguard an improvement to the future grass cutting operations by retaining the best operators and therefore ensure their skills and knowledge remains with the service.

Background Papers:

None

Reference Papers:

None

Enquiries:

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