

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	Homes and Environment Scrutiny Committee
<b>REPORT NO:</b>	HEP/88/18S
<b>DATE:</b>	14 November 2018
<b>LEAD MEMBER:</b>	Councillor David A Bithell Lead Member for Place – Environment and Transport
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Martin Howorth (Tel: 729630)
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	The Management of Grounds Maintenance Operations on Highways, Open Spaces and Housing Revenue Account Land
<b>WARD:</b>	All Wards

## 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To review service performance against agreed standards over the 2018 season in respect of grass cutting on highways, open spaces and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) land.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 During the 2018 season, grass cutting operations of open spaces (including land within the HRA portfolio) began in early April and has continued into November to keep pace with the growth of the grass. There has been an average of 6 cuts across all these areas. The extended length of the grass cutting season has allowed the grounds maintenance teams to keep pace with the grass growth across the County Borough and has resulted in few complaints this year.
- 2.2 The Streetscene team from the Environment & Planning Department cuts grass on HRA land under the terms of a service level agreement with the Housing & Economy Department.

## 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **That the Committee supports the continuation of the Service Level Agreement between the Environment and Planning Department and the Housing and Economy Department with realistic targets set for the delivery of the service commensurate with the budget.**

### **3.2 That the present system and frequency of the grounds maintenance operations across the open spaces and highways be supported.**

#### **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) The current Service Level Agreement between the Environment and Planning and Housing and Economy Departments provides the budget and stability to support a reasonable standard of grounds operations across HRA land.
- (ii) The existing system of management of open spaces and highways by Streetscene provides a reasonable standard of grounds maintenance .

#### **4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

4.1 The Environment and Planning Department cuts all areas of public open space within the control of the environment portfolio and also maintains the highway verges. In addition, the team provides a grass cutting service for the HRA estate, HRA public open space and those tenants who are eligible (as assessed by colleagues in Housing and Economy Department) for the Assisted Gardening Scheme. There are, on average, 9 Streetscene staff working in each of 3 areas across the County Borough (27 staff). Highway verge management work is been undertaken with a mixture of Streetscene staff and contractors.

##### Housing Revenue Account Open Space

4.2 All grass cutting undertaken on behalf of the HRA is defined in 2 Service Level Agreements (**Appendix 1**) prior to the start of the season. To ensure a consistent appearance of the public realm throughout the County Borough and avoid confusion with differential standards, the maintenance is undertaken by the same 'gangs' (i.e. all grounds maintenance in each community, whether public open space or HRA, is cut by the same team on the same consistent basis).

##### Streetscene Service Standards

4.3 All grounds maintenance work is dependent on the weather and the growing season. Targets are based upon a desired number of 'cuts' per season. Adopted Streetscene Standards define the service level for public open space and verge cutting as:

- Amenity grass: 6 - 8 cuts per annum
- Highway verges: At least once annually
- Council-owned shrubs and hedges: Twice annually

##### 2018 Season - Performance to Date

4.4 Performance on the various schedules of work is detailed below:

#### **Open Space Amenity Grass, Communal and Open Plan HRA Land, Assisted Garden Scheme:**

##### **Grass Cutting**

This year's grass cutting regime yielded few complaints and is sustainable with the current workforce and produces a reasonable length of grass. All gangs have completed 6 cuts, with 7 forecasted to be completed by the end of the season. The

Assisted Garden Scheme will have received 8 cuts by the end of the season. Growth this season has been exceptional with the high temperatures and occasional heavy rain encouraging vigorous growth, especially early in the growing season when pressure on cutting resource was at its peak. The length of time taken for a cut at this highest pressure time was around 6 weeks. Grass cutting has continued from April to November this year.

### **2019 Season**

It is anticipated grass cutting will resume in March 2019, weather permitting.

### **Hedge and Shrub Bed Cutting**

Hedge cutting normally takes place in the autumn and winter (outside the bird nesting season). Some hedge cutting was undertaken earlier in the season where there were access issues. One cut of hedges and shrubs is undertaken annually. Shrub bed maintenance is carried out from November to March, once the main grass cutting season is over.

### **Assisted Garden Scheme**

There have been 6 cuts of the grass areas and at least one hedge cut of all properties. More cuts of the hedges were completed where hedge growth was particularly vigorous. This is undertaken on a need basis (e.g. privet hedges require more cutting than other types of hedging during the summer).

### **Highway Verges**

Timing of the cut of the highway verges is a balance between highway safety and the encouragement of biodiversity. If the cut is undertaken too early complaints are received over cutting wildflowers; too late and there are issues over highway safety. The main cut commenced on 4 June 2018 and was completed by 25 July 2018. Safety visibility splay work continued during the late summer and autumn as required. A final cut of the highway verges is underway across the autumn period on areas that require cutting. The work during 2018 has met the Streetscene standards.

### **Trunk Roads & Special Traffic Management Controlled Areas**

Llan-y-Pwll Link Road, the Industrial Estate Access Road and A541 Mold Road were cut in June and the A483 was cut 24 June to 7 July. The main A and B road network was cut from 30 July to 10 August 2018. All of these roads required traffic management to be in place which significantly adds to the cost of work.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 **Policy Framework** – The management of grounds operations on highways and open spaces supports the following corporate policies:

PI2 - Pride in our environment

PI3 - Communities with sustainable, attractive settlements, neighbourhoods, buildings and spaces, through a clean and well cared for environment.

5.2 **Budget** – Environment and Planning Department recharge the grounds works to Landlord Services, Housing and Economy Department. This covers grounds work on Housing (HRA) portfolio land. There is an additional recharge for the Assisted Garden Scheme. The Service Level Agreement will be reviewed with Officers from Housing and Economy Department.

5.3 **Legal** – There are no legal implications related to this report.

5.4 **Staffing** – Staffing levels will need to reflect the needs of the service.

5.5 **Equality/Human Rights** – Members are advised of their duty to consider the full Equality Impact Assessment which is available at <http://vmwinsqld/equalityisalive/Menu.aspx> report number EP/EIA00093/2018. Members of the public can request a copy of the full Equality Impact Assessment from the Contact Officer named in the header box of this report.

A summary of the Equality Impact Assessment is attached as **Appendix 2**.

5.6 **Risks** – There are no significant risks to continue with the current delivery of the grounds operations as long as the budget is in place to support the service.

## 6. CONSULTATION

6.1 No consultation has been undertaken as part of this report.

## 7. EVALUATION OF OPTIONS

### 7.1 Option 1 – Existing Service

The existing service, as defined by the Streetscene Standards and the HRA Service Level Agreement remains.

### 7.2 Option 2 – Increase in HRA Grass Cutting Frequency

Any increase in staffing and vehicles to allow greater frequency of grass cutting on HRA land would need to be met through an increase in contribution from the Housing budget. This would also require enough lead time to be put in place to deliver changes to the grounds operations.

BACKGROUND PAPERS	LOCATION	WEBSITE INFO
None		