

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Grounds Maintenance Contract Review</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2018
<b>WARD</b>	None specific
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Josie Wragg, Director of Environment
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Norman Jorgensen, Executive Member for Environment

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

The management of Council owned green spaces is largely universal. This visual service impacts all residents and visitors to our borough. Through our Grounds Maintenance contract we:

- Maintain open spaces for the public to enjoy
- Look after sports facilities and sites to enhance leisure
- Maintain play areas and youth provision
- Look after burial grounds
- Encourage biodiversity

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Committee consider the contents of this report as the start of a review of the Contract and consider further lines of enquiries in future reports.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

The report provides details of the current Grounds Maintenance Contract including:

- Background
- Stakeholder & Market Engagement
- Scope of Tendered Services
- Partnering and Contract Form
- Performance Management, Reporting, Review and Improvement

## **Background**

Grass areas maintained by our Grounds Maintenance contract are considerable comprising of:

- 4.4million sqm grass in parks and verges across the borough
  - 2million sqm grass verges
  - 2.2 million sqm grass in parks and open spaces
  - 122,561 sqm sports pitches
- 130k sqm of hedges and shrubs
- Over 50 sports pitches
- Over 100 play areas

The contract has a value of £809k + a £40k performance bonus with £350k spent solely on grass maintenance.

Following a public consultation in 2014, it was identified that residents wanted there to be a more flexible approach to grass cutting allowing cutting to be prioritised for play areas and sports pitches. As a result, the decision was made to re-tender the grounds maintenance contract and move to an outcome/output specification, which would offer more flexibility moving away from a rigid maintenance programme.

The procurement of the Grounds Maintenance contract was carried out in partnership with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead to offer up savings to both parties, with the support of an independent consultant from Edge Public Solutions.

The contract was let from March 2016 for 10.5 years, ending 30<sup>th</sup> September 2026 with a possible 5 year extension. The length of the contract was chosen to provide an opportunity for the contract to grow and develop over time and encourage our contractors to invest in the service they provide.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

Grounds maintenance and the areas that we maintain are highly visible areas and impact all residents as well as visitors to the borough. Within the Council we provide services to:

- Highways
- Children Services
- Libraries
- Leisure Centres
- Property Services
- Car Parks
- Housing Services

Our priorities of the current contract, which we strive to develop in partnership with our contractor over the 10 year period include:

- Working in partnership with a problem-solving approach
- Providing sustainable and minimal costs for operational activity and offering flexibility to maintenance regimes
- Improving customer and user satisfaction
- Improving the service for priority identified areas over the course of the contract, by adjusting existing resources
- Improving biodiversity-based maintenance regimes
- Achieving savings and generate new income streams over the course of the contract

### **Market Engagement**

As part of the contract tender, to provide clear expectations of what savings might be achieved, a shadow bid was arranged. This confirmed that the service we were looking for could be attained within the Council's budget.

There was a competitive bidding process with a well attended Market Event providing the opportunity to listen to supplier feedback on having both a joint tender process with Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead as well as an output specification. Some of the key feedback was:

- The specification for both boroughs varied substantially
- A partnership approach would be key to the success of the contract
- A joint tender could help deliver savings to all parties
- Suppliers were impressed by the emphasis on a biodiverse approaches to grounds maintenance

### **Scope of Tendered Services**

As part of the contract output specification, maintenance of the following operational tasks are provided under the contract:

- Grass and Grassland
- Hedge and Hedgerow
- Shrub
- Woodlands, Copses and Thicket
- Trees – ground level work
- Pond and Lakes
- Ditch, Drain and Watercourses
- Planters Containers and hanging baskets
- Border Planting
- Sports Facilities
- Cemeteries
- Play areas/Youth Provision repair & maintenance
- Infrastructure
- Open Space Furniture
- Leaf Clearance
- Litter and Detritus
- Weed and Pest Control

In addition to these maintenance tasks our contractors provide assistance in the following areas:

- Attendant duties for sports facilities and at events
- Winter Operations/Adverse weather in collaboration with other Council contractors
- General Reporting of incidents such as antisocial behaviour broken damaged equipment
- Customer Relationship Management using our CRM Dynamics system to action and respond to resident reports

### **Performance Management, Reporting, Review and Improvement**

The contract term lasts 10 years with an option to extend for a further 5 years subject to satisfactory performance.

To help measure the performance of the contract there are 10 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) including 9 Management Performance Indicators (MPI), which are reviewed annually and are designed to evolve in partnership based on the needs and demands of the service.

The KPIs include

- Officer inspection scores
- Independent inspection scores
- Play area inspections completed and officer inspections
- Stakeholder/customer satisfaction
- Sports user satisfaction
- Justified complaints – grass
- Justified complaints – hedges, copse and shrubs
- Justified complaints – other
- Biodiversity performance

The MPIs include

- Assistance provided in preparing Management Plans
- Support in providing Community Involvement/projects/volunteer hours
- Contribution to changing customer perception
- Assistance/support in changing management regimes
- Identifying opportunities and delivering reduced pesticide use
- Sports surface quality improvement
- Staff training, multi-skilling
- Assistance updating mapping and data
- Savings and new income streams achieved

KPI	Description	Year 1	Year 2
MPI 1	Assistance provided in preparing Management Plans	-	-
MPI 2	Support in providing Community Involvement/projects/volunteer hours	Yes	Yes
MPI 3	Contribution to changing customer perception	Yes	Yes
MPI 4	Assistance/support in changing management regimes	Yes	Yes
MPI 5	Identifying opportunities and delivering reduced pesticide use	-	-
MPI 6	Sports surface quality improvement	No	Yes
MPI 7	Staff training, multi-skilling	Yes	Yes
MPI 8	Assistance updating mapping and data	-	-
MPI 9	Savings and new income streams achieved	Yes	Yes
KPI 1	Officer inspection scores	Yes	No
KPI 2	Independent inspection scores	Yes	Yes
KPI 3	Play area inspections completed and officer inspections	Yes	Yes
KPI 4	Stakeholder/customer satisfaction	Yes	Yes
KPI 5	Sports user satisfaction	No	Yes
KPI 6	Justified complaints – grass	-	Yes
KPI 7	Justified complaints – hedges, copse and shrubs	-	No
KPI 8	Justified complaints – other	-	Yes
KPI 9	Biodiversity performance	Yes	Yes

Generally, areas where there has been good performance include; partnership working, community engagement, staff training and biodiversity. Improvement has been required for justified complaints and sports surfacing, with some KPIs out of scope or under development.

Working to increase biodiversity through the management of our contract has raised some questions from residents in particular relating to ticks, hay fever and dog mess. For these we put together information to challenge the perception of these matters:

#### Ticks

We have sympathy for dog owners and do not seek to reduce the enjoyment of walking your dog. Veterinarians agree that it is the responsibility of the dog owner to ensure the health of their dog. Ticks are easily removed and it is important to examine your dog after a walk regardless of whether they have been taken through woodlands or grasslands.

#### Dog mess

We understand that some people may find it more difficult to collect dog mess in longer grass; but it is each owners responsibility to collect their dog's waste regardless of the environment they are in. The benefits of biodiversity outweigh the potential increase in dog fouling. Any specific concerns can be highlighted to our dog warden.

#### Hayfever

We have sympathy for hay fever sufferers, but believe the wider health, wellbeing and ecosystem benefits far out-weigh the negative impact on hay fever sufferers. The actual cutting of grass exacerbates hay fever symptoms as the pollen is being disturbed,

Our move to a more biodiverse approach to grounds maintenance has led to a number of compliments being received across the borough including endorsement from the charity Plantlife the wild plant conservation charity.

*"The uncut areas of roadside verge are full of wildflowers which look wonderful and greatly help our declining bee and insect population. Well done. Keep up the great work."*

*"Thank you so much for leaving the grass longer in areas of Wokingham. It's wonderful to hear the buzz of the bees and other insects and I've been watching the fixes gambolling in the grass. It's so lovely. Instead of stark green 'lawns' we have colourful meadows. And children including my own love exploring the meadows. We found 8 different grasses just in the patch at the back of our house. So thank you again and don't let a few moaners stop you from doing it again"*

*"Hi - just been reading about verge cutting on 'Streetlife' and everyone is complaining about it. So I just wanted to say what a brilliant idea it is. It is really important for inset/bee population and bio-diversity which is a key issue. I love seeing the patches of flowers etc that have sprung up around the area. Well done!"*

This current contract year we have identified that there has been a failure in delivery regarding grass cutting, which has resulted in a number of complaints registered on our CRM Dynamics system. These complaints have been taken as bona fide complaints and will affect Tivoli's annual performance payment. Within the first quarter of the current contract year grass complaints reached a peak in mid-May predominantly attributed difficult weather issues with a cold March and wet April, which lead to a late start in grass cutting due to ground conditions.

We are currently reviewing the available resources on this contract to make sure that they are appropriate to deliver the required standard. As a result, pressure has been put on Tivoli and Officers are working closely with the new Area Manager to improve matters. This has led to extra resources being brought in at no extra cost to the Council.

Areas where we are looking to work with Tivoli include:

- Looking at introducing some online grass cutting information to provide residents with clear expectations.
- Improve customer engagement using the CRM Dynamics system, keeping residents updated on the progress of their reports.
- Agree the resource and machinery level for the current contract to make sure that the service provided is sustainable.
- Work to introduce more areas of long grass and wildflowers at appropriate locations.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION**

***The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	0	0	0
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	0	0	0
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0	0	0

#### **Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision**

None

#### **Cross-Council Implications**

No specific cross cutting themes

#### **List of Background Papers**

None

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