

TITLE	Grounds Maintenance Contract Review
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 17 October 2018
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director, Governance

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Overview and Scrutiny is one of the checks and balances which ensure that the Council and its partners make and implement effective decisions. It is a key element in the decision making process which ensures transparency and accountability.

The grounds maintenance service aims to improve quality of life by maintaining quality parks, play areas and open spaces and encouraging biodiversity across the Borough.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to consider:

- a) the community and stakeholder feedback received to date;
- b) the evidence submitted by witnesses at the meeting;
- c) the key issues to be addressed in the Committee's final report to the Executive;

SUMMARY OF REPORT

At its meetings on 1 August and 19 September 2018, the Committee considered evidence relating the Council's Grounds Maintenance Contract. In order to provide additional evidence for the Committee, Officers published a Call for Evidence via print and social media.

The Committee has now received a significant amount of evidence relating to the operation of the Grounds Maintenance contract in 2018 and will now begin to consider the evidence and the specific issues it wishes to include in its final report to the Council's Executive.

Background

At its meeting on 1 August 2018, the Committee commenced a review of the Council's Grounds Maintenance Contract. The Committee agree the following Terms of Reference for the review:

- a) To understand the key terms of the Council's grounds maintenance contract with Tivoli Group Ltd (who took over this year, having bought out ISS Facilities Services Landscaping).
- b) To understand the operation of the joint management arrangements between Tivoli, WBC and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.
- c) In relation to grass cutting, to understand the delivery of the service in terms of frequencies, timings, local priorities, complaints handling and communication with stakeholders.
- d) To understand how the grounds maintenance service works with key partners such as Town and Parish Councils and local community groups.
- e) To consider performance management of the grounds maintenance contract in relation to performance indicators, targets, penalties, monitoring, financial control and reporting to Members.
- f) To consider the financial elements of the grounds maintenance contract within the context of the financial challenges facing the Council.
- g) To understand how other Council's deliver grounds maintenance services and consider examples of best practice.
- h) To consider the potential for service improvements, improved communications and partnership working within the context of the challenges facing the Council.

Call for Evidence

In order to understand the views of residents, community groups and Town and Parish Councils, the Committee published a Call for evidence via print and social media. The Call for Evidence stated:

"The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee is undertaking a review of the Council's grass cutting service. The new service commenced in April 2016 and aimed to provide a more flexible service which responded to local needs and priorities. However, there have been a number of complaints about the quality and effectiveness of the service which has led to the review.

The Committee would like to hear the views of residents, Town and Parish Councils and Community Groups about the frequency and quality of grass cutting across the Borough. This could include the timeliness and frequency of cuts, the quality of the

work, disposal of grass cuttings, impact of wildflower areas, information on the Council's website, complaints handling or any other issues".

The Committee has now received a significant amount of evidence relating to its Key Lines of Enquiry. Evidence has been submitted by residents, community groups and Town and Parish Councils. Key issues emerging from the evidence to date include:

- Public consultation and scrutiny relating to the development of the new Grounds Maintenance contract which commenced in April 2016;
- Operation and feedback/complaints relating to the new contract in 2016 and 2017;
- Impact of weather conditions in the spring of 2018 – wet and cold in March/early April followed by hot, dry weather in late April/May;
- The provision of sufficient/flexible resources by the contractor to tackle the weather-related impacts in the spring/early summer of 2018;
- Reviewing performance management of the contract to focus on key outcomes such as effective grass cutting and the criteria for withholding all or part of the performance bonus;
- Reviewing the contract's Key Performance Indicators in order to focus on the key issues identified by residents and community stakeholders;
- Communication with ward Members, residents, community groups and Town/Parish Councils about the operation of the contract, agreed standards and updates on local delivery, impact of adverse weather conditions, etc;
- Communication with residents on issues, such as parking on verges, which impact on the quality of grounds maintenance in local communities;
- Ensuring greater flexibility in the provision of resources to deal with peaks and troughs in demand and the impact of adverse weather conditions;
- Delivering benefits from the Council's 21st Century Council programme to improve operation of the CRM Dynamics customer contact system;
- Utilising the new Localities service to improve local intelligence and communication with local stakeholders;
- Reviewing the current and future provision of long grass and wildflower areas in light of feedback about health and welfare issues;
- The provision of detailed/accurate maps to assist the contractor in delivering the service;
- Greater involvement of local biodiversity and wildlife protection groups to inform discussions about the future direction of the service;

- Ensuring that customer complaints are logged, investigated and reported in a timely and effective manner;
- The potential for improved coordination between services e.g. grounds maintenance, weed spraying, litter picking and street sweeping;
- Measures to improve grass cutting and health and safety in relation to major roads and road junctions across the Borough;
- The impact of overgrown vegetation on road signs, kerbs and pavements, as discussed in the Scrutiny request from Finchampstead Parish Council;
- Greater involvement of Overview and Scrutiny in the future delivery, monitoring and reporting of the service.

Next Steps

It is proposed that a draft report be produced following the meeting for consultation with Committee Members, the Executive Member and Officers. A final draft will then be submitted to the meeting on 21 November for sign off by the Committee.

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)	NA	NA	NA
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	NA	NA	NA
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	NA	NA	NA

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

To be considered as part of the discussions.

Cross-Council Implications

Overview and Scrutiny impacts on all Council services and the work of key partners.

List of Background Papers

Reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee – 1 August and 19 September 2018
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