WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

REVIEW OF THE GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NOVEMBER 2018

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REVIEW OF THE GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE

Foreword by Councillor Parry Batth,
Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Wokingham Borough frequently appears in lists of the best places to live in the UK. These “best place to live” surveys look at quality of life issues such as the performance of schools, health and wellbeing, crime rates, job opportunities and access to well-maintained parks and open spaces. The Council’s Vision statement “A great place to live, an even better place to do business” emphasises the importance of quality of life issues for our residents.

We all recognise that well maintained parks, open spaces and residential areas promote a feeling of pride in our local communities. Consequently we were all concerned about the unloved appearance of some of our neighbourhoods earlier in 2018. A large number of complaints and media references to “Grassgate” did not reflect well on the Borough and did not reflect well on the Council’s aim to provide a high quality grass cutting and grounds maintenance service for our residents.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee was subsequently asked to carry out a review of the Grounds Maintenance contract with specific focus on the grass cutting service. In carrying out the review, we looked at three main issues:

1. Were there problems with the structure of the Council’s Grounds Maintenance contract?
2. Were there problems with the way the Council’s contractor was delivering the service?
3. Were there problems with the way the Council monitored and managed the contract?

In order to address these issues the Committee published a “Call for Evidence” which generated a significant number of responses from residents, community groups and Town and Parish Councils. We also interviewed a number of key people including the Executive Member, the Council’s client team and a representative from the contractor (Tivoli Group). Finally we spoke to a number of other local authorities to gain an understanding of best practice and to understand their experience of service delivery issues during 2018.

Having considered the evidence, the Committee agreed a number of recommendations which will be submitted to the Council’s Executive. We hope that the recommendations will be accepted and their implementation will result in better performance of the service in 2019, with greater coordination, improved communications and the development of a real partnership between the Council and the contractor.

Finally, I would like to thank the residents, stakeholder groups, Officers and Members who contributed their time and expertise to support the Committee’s deliberations.

Parry Batth,
November 2018

Section 1 - Executive Summary

1.1 The Council's current Grounds Maintenance contract commenced in 2016 with a new contractor, ISS Facility Services (ISS was subsequently bought out by Tivoli Group, with the handover taking place in June 2018). The contract was awarded after a joint procurement exercise with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM). The contract moved away from a traditional prescriptive model (i.e. a defined number of cuts) to an output/outcomes based contract.

1.2 The new contract was developed on the basis of a partnership approach with the new contractor. This meant that the contractor was responsible for delivering a service which left the Borough in a presentable condition and, crucially, had the flexibility to move resources around to deliver that outcome.

1.3 The contract commenced on 1 April 2016. There were immediate problems as the contractor tried to train staff and get to grips with the geography of the Borough. In 2017 there was a significant improvement in the service delivered and it appeared that the partnership arrangement was developing. However, in 2018 further significant problems arose. The adverse weather conditions in March/April were put forward as a reason, but other Councils appear to have coped with the impact of the weather conditions and delivered a satisfactory service.

1.4 It appears that the major cause of the problems earlier in 2018 was a failure by the contractor to provide sufficient resources (machinery, staff and effective supervision) in order to achieve the standards required. It appears that RBWM experienced similar problems. The outcome was that some parts of the Borough received a good quality service whilst in other areas the grass was knee high. As a result the Council received hundreds of justified complaints and negative coverage in print and social media.

1.5 The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee gathered a significant amount of evidence about the service from residents, community groups and Town and Parish Councils. The Committee also interviewed a number of key people including the Executive Member, the WBC Client Officers and a representative of the contractor. The Committee also received evidence from RBWM and Bracknell Forest Borough Council (BFBC). The latter successfully delivers an outcome-based contract.

1.6 The evidence submitted by RBWM indicated that they were experiencing similar problems to WBC in relation to the contractor's staffing levels and contract supervision. Conversely, BFBC had developed a strong partnership with its contractor (Continental Landscapes) resulting in good service delivery with very few complaints.

1.7 The Committee felt that the successful delivery of the service in 2017 indicated that the partnership arrangement set out in the contract could

work. However, this required a commitment from the contractor to allocate sufficient resources and robust contract management by the Council. The Committee felt that the Council was currently reacting to service issues as they arose rather than proactively managing the contract to drive the partnership approach set out in the contract.

1.8 The Committee made a number of recommendations relating to the future delivery of the contract. These included a suggestion that the Council meet with senior management from Tivoli Group to reaffirm the contractual obligations and to confirm that appropriate resources would be in place for 2019. The Committee received some evidence from Tivoli Group that they were taking steps to ensure that more resources would be allocated to the contract in 2019. This was a positive response but the Committee wanted to see further concrete evidence of this commitment. Consequently, the Committee asked for a report to be submitted to its meeting in February 2019 setting out details of preparations and resources available for the 2019 grass cutting season.

1.9 The Committee made recommendations about the way in which WBC Officers manage the contract and suggested improvements in relation to greater transparency and communication with residents, community groups, Town and Parish Councils and ward Members. The Committee felt that the roll-out of the new Localities Service (as part of the 21st Century Council programme) provided opportunities for improved local intelligence and the development of local networks which could provide feedback on the operation of the grounds maintenance service.

1.10 The Committee welcomed the potential improvements relating to the Council's customer relationship management system (Dynamics) and the roll-out of comprehensive maps showing the different areas of grass and the standards required for each. It was also noted that Tivoli Group were investing in hand-held technology which could link to the Council's IT system to provide more up to date information on areas to be cut and progress made.

1.11 The Committee's recommendations will be submitted to the Council's Executive for consideration. It is hoped that implementation of the recommendations will result in an improvement in service delivery in 2019 and subsequent years. If the service delivery problems continue into 2019, the Committee suggest that the Council consider more stringent options to ensure that the Borough's residents receive the high quality service they expect and deserve.

Section 2 - Recommendations

2.1 That the Executive Member and Director of Locality and Customer Services meet with senior management from Tivoli Group to discuss the operation of the grounds maintenance service and to emphasise the Council's expectations for service delivery in 2019.

2.2 That the Executive Member and Director of Locality and Customer Services liaise with their counterparts at RBWM to identify areas of common interest and concern and make joint representations to Tivoli Group as necessary.

2.3 That the Director of Locality and Customer Services review the level of WBC's client monitoring/management resource available for the beginning of the next grass cutting season – March/April 2019.

2.4 That the Director of Locality and Customer Services review the contractual options available to the Council in the event of continuing underperformance by the grounds maintenance contractor.

2.5 That the Director of Locality and Customer Services explore options for co-location of the grounds maintenance client and contractor teams and review the weighting of Key Performance Indicators in the contract to emphasise the performance standard required for key public-facing elements of the service.

2.6 That the implementation of the Localities Service be used to explore opportunities for improved local intelligence and the development of local networks providing feedback on the operation of the grounds maintenance service.

2.7 That WBC Officers work with the contractor to seek input from appropriate specialist groups, including RSPB and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) in order to inform management plans for biodiversity sites (woodland, copse and thicket) across the Borough.

2.8 That, as part of the 21st Century Council programme, opportunities for using new technology be explored in order to deliver more comprehensive, up to date information on grounds maintenance schedules, routes, performance and customer feedback.

2.9 That the Council continue discussions with Town and Parish Councils about the potential for further asset transfers and options for mutual support in relation to the grounds maintenance service, with regular updates to the Borough Parish Liaison Forum.

2.10 That the Director of Locality and Customer Services submit a report to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, at its meeting in February 2019, setting out the arrangements in place to ensure an effective grass cutting service in 2019.

2.11 That the Director of Locality and Customer Services submit a further report to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, at its meeting in October 2019, setting out details of performance issues and lessons learnt during the 2019 grass cutting season.

2.12 That the Executive instruct Officers to provide updated guidance on the Council's approach to public consultation, in line with the commitments set out in the Council's Constitution and the relevant legal principles.

3. Section 3 - Background

3.1 The Council's new Grounds Maintenance contract commenced on 1 April 2016. The contractor delivering the new service was ISS Facility Services. The contract was set for a period of 10.5 years and will run until September 2026, with provision for a potential five year extension. It was considered that this length of contract would provide security for the contractor who would then be able to invest, for example, in modern machinery and high quality staff training.

3.2 Contract procurement was carried out in partnership with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) with both Councils using the same contractor. However, the two contract specifications were different with RBWM adopting a more traditional approach to contract management involving greater checking and monitoring of the contractor's performance. The range of operational tasks included in the WBC contract is set out at Annex 1 to the report.

3.3 The parks and green spaces covered by the WBC Grounds Maintenance contract are substantial, comprising:

- 4.4million square metres of grass in parks and verges across the Borough;
- 122,560 square metres of sports pitches (over 50 pitches);
- 130,000 square metres of hedges and shrubs;
- Over 100 children's play areas.

Due to the length of the contract and the changing local environment, the contract also has flexibility to add or remove sites. For example:

- Addition of new residential areas (potentially with parks and open spaces) across the Borough;
- Schools may opt-in or opt-out of the service by arrangement with the contractor;
- Sheltered housing schemes are not part of the contract but may decide to opt-in;
- Asset transfers to Town and Parish Councils (including parks and open spaces) resulting in opt-out, opt-in or opt-in plus arrangements.

3.4 Following a consultation exercise in 2014, it was decided to procure the new contract on an output/outcome specification. This meant a move away from a rigid maintenance regime to a more flexible approach allowing the contractor to allocate resources to address specific issues during the growing season, such as dealing with the impact of unseasonal weather and improving the quality of sports pitches.

3.5 The Grounds Maintenance contract has an annual value of £809k, with over £350k spent on grass cutting and maintenance. The contract does not include penalty clauses, but there is a £40k performance bonus payable dependent on the contractor's performance against a set of agreed key performance and

management indicators. The contractor employs approximately 22 staff with up to five seasonal staff added in busy periods. There are nine different grass cutting routes, but these are not all in use at the same time.

3.6 Effective maintenance of parks, pitches and green spaces are an important element in making the Borough a “great place to live”. Recent public engagement on the new Borough Plan, in 2018, indicated that the provision of “clean, green and enjoyable spaces” is one of the key priorities for local residents.

3.7 The Grounds Maintenance contract set out a number of key outcomes which would be achieved through a strong partnership approach with the contractor. The list included outcomes for the contractor to deliver and outcomes which would be a shared responsibility for the Council and the contractor. The key outcomes are set out below:

Key Outcomes for the Contractor to deliver:

- Improved customer and user satisfaction levels for targeted users and designated sites;
- Continued reduction of customer complaints over the course of the contract, with resolution at first point of contact (direct to the contractor);
- Service performed to, at least, the minimum specified standard on every site;
- Partnership working and problem solving approach to provide added value to the client;
- Sustainable and minimal costs for operational activity;
- Improved service for specific areas, to be identified during the course of the contract, by adjusting existing resources (e.g. play areas, sponsorship sites and sports pitches);
- Improved biodiversity-based maintenance regimes, focussed on target species and habitat, together with careful site management to ensure sites are maintained according to need.

Key Outcomes to be a Shared Responsibility between the Client (WBC) and the Contractor:

- Achieve savings and generate new income streams over the course of the contract term;
- Update and maintain map and quantity records;
- Establish management plans for selected sites over the course of the contract;
- Change management regimes to become more sustainable;
- Positively change customer perception and expectations of sustainable maintenance regimes;
- Increase community involvement and volunteering.

3.8 During the first year of the new contract (2016) there were a large number of issues and complaints relating to the delivery of the service. A factor in this poor performance was the contract start date of 1 April. This meant that the new

contractor, ISS, had to take over the contract when the grass growing season was already under way. ISS TUPE'd all existing staff over by 1 April. However, training the staff on new equipment and new working practices delayed the start of grass cutting and sightline work. There were also problems relating to equipment and confusion about the interpretation/location of the newly introduced long grass/wildflower areas.

3.9 Lessons were learnt following the first year of the contract and the second year, 2017, appeared to be much better with improved feedback from residents and local stakeholders. WBC Officers felt that ISS was settling into the new arrangements and that the contract would settle down and run more smoothly. During 2017 there were a total of 113 justified complaints recorded on the Council's new CRM Dynamics system. These complaints related to grass cutting (19), hedge, shrub and copse work (72) and other issues (22).

3.10 In 2018, the service delivery issues returned, generating a significant increase in complaints and negative reporting in print and social media. It was reported that adverse weather conditions were a key factor in the contractor's failure to complete the initial round of grass cutting in a reasonable timeframe. March and early April did see very cold and wet conditions with several winter storms including the "Beast from the East". By mid-April the weather had swung to the other extreme. May was then the sunniest and warmest since records began more than 100 years ago.

3.11 The key issue relating to the delivery of the service was this delay in completing the first round of grass cutting in March. ISS was then playing catch up at a time when the hot weather was leading to rapid growth. As a result the grass in many areas became very long and, when eventually cut, left large amounts of clippings or clumps which damaged new growth and left areas looking extremely unkempt.

3.12 In these circumstances the Council would expect the contractor to deploy additional resources (staff and machinery) in line with the contract in order to catch up and bring the Borough back up to standard. However, it appeared that ISS was unable or unwilling to provide additional resources and was, therefore, unable to deal with the backlogs of work. By June/July the backlogs had been resolved and the extremely hot weather meant that there was little additional growth.

3.13 Tivoli Group bought ISS, with the acquisition completed on 1 June 2018. Tivoli Group is owned by private individuals as part of the Sullivan Street Partners portfolio of companies. The ISS Management team transferred to Tivoli along with 1,000 employees. As part of the publicity material relating to the acquisition of the ISS contracts (including WBC and RBWM) Tivoli's Managing Director, Phil Jones, stated: "This is a new and exciting opportunity for the business to take hold of its independence and concentrate on what we do best which is to deliver excellence to our clients".

3.14 In addition to WBC and RBWM, Tivoli operates grounds maintenance contracts with other Councils including the London Borough of Bexley and

Arun District Council. It also has a significant contract with the British armed forces. In 2015 Tivoli won a five year contract worth £20m to provide maintenance of military land, airfields and sports fields, etc.

3.15 During the first quarter of 2018 the CRM Dynamics system recorded 314 justified complaints about the grounds maintenance service. The complaints related to grass cutting (258), hedge, copse and shrub work (31) and other issues (25). This showed a threefold increase in complaints compared to the first quarter of 2017/18. In addition, elected Members received a large number of complaints from their constituents and there was a further significant amount of negative reporting in print and social media.

3.16 As a result of the large number complaints received, Members made the request for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to carry out a review of the Grounds Maintenance contract with a specific focus on the delivery of the grass cutting service.

3.17 The Committee met on 1 August 2018 and agreed the following terms of Reference for the review:

- To understand the key terms of the Council's Grounds Maintenance contract with Tivoli Group (who took over the contract in 2018, having bought out ISS Facility Services).

- To understand the operation of the joint management arrangements between Tivoli, WBC and the RBWM.

- 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.

- To understand how the Grounds Maintenance service works with key partners such as Town and Parish Councils and local community groups.

- To consider performance management of the grounds maintenance contract in relation to performance indicators, targets, penalties, monitoring, financial control and reporting to Members.

- To consider the financial elements of the grounds maintenance contract within the context of the financial challenges facing the Council.

- To understand how other Councils deliver grounds maintenance services and consider examples of best practice.

- To consider the potential for service improvements, improved communications and partnership working within the context of the challenges facing the Council.

3.18 The Committee gave consideration to the review at four meetings: 1 August, 19 September, 17 October and 21 November 2018. The Committee's report was finalised at the November meeting. In order to understand the range of issues involved in the Grounds Maintenance service, the Committee interviewed a number of witnesses, viz:

- Norman Jorgensen, Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Libraries;
- Peter Baveystock, Service Manager, Cleaner, Greener and Reactive Highway Services;
- Emma Pilgrim, Specialist, Place Clienting;
- Councillor Jane Hartley, Charvil Parish Council:
- Peter Fry, Tivoli Area Manager.

3.19 The Committee also published a Call for Evidence, using print and social media, in the following terms:

"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 Call for Evidence generated over 70 responses from local residents in addition to comments from community groups, Residents' Associations, Town and Parish Councils and elected Members.

3.20 The Committee also received written evidence from BFBC. Finally, Members carried out a site visit in order to look at the delivery of the service in several different settings across the Borough. This included general grass areas, play areas, sports pitches and biodiversity sites.

Section 4 - Issues and Evidence

4.1 In order to gather evidence about the Grounds Maintenance service the Committee interviewed witnesses at three of its meetings. The Committee agreed a set of Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) which provided a framework for the sessions. The KLOEs are set out below together with the responses and evidence supplied by witnesses:

4.2 **KLOE 1 – Grounds Maintenance Contract**

The Grounds Maintenance contract was let from March 2016 to September 2026 with a possible five year extension. Please explain how the contract is structured to deliver a more flexible approach to grass cutting.

The contract moved away from a frequency based specification to a specification based on outputs and outcomes driven by local needs and available resources. It was anticipated that the contractor would become a partner organisation working with the Council to achieve policy objectives and shape customer and user expectations.

The contract was structured to allow flexibility to the service through not having a “one size fits all” approach. The Contract Sum was agreed to cover all aspects of grounds maintenance to Wokingham Borough Council areas. For example, as opposed to having 8 cuts per year across all grass areas, the contractor is empowered to cut the grass when necessary in order to achieve the agreed standards. For example:

- Ornamental grass areas (e.g. lawn areas in high profile locations) should be no longer than 50mm and no shorter than 15mm;
- Amenity grass areas (e.g. parks and picnic areas) should be no longer than 100mm and no shorter than 30mm);
- General grassed areas (e.g. housing estates, highway verges and open spaces) should be no longer than 125mm and no shorter than 30mm);
- For grassland regimes (e.g. wildflower meadows, grassland habitats and sightline verges) the contractor will provide details on the measures to be taken to promote biodiversity and meet required standards at each site;
- Sports Areas – the contractor will meet the specified standards for each sport or activity identified in the contract.

During hot/dry periods where grass cutting is not appropriate the contractor is able to shift the resources available to different work e.g. hedges and shrubs. Conversely, the contractor is able to increase grass cutting when this is required. Whilst the contractor may not be able to cut all areas on a fortnightly basis during the growing season the Tivoli contract managers are able to make the decision to put more resources into the contract to achieve

the agreed quality standards expected or be penalised for not achieving it through the performance bonus.

Over the course of the contract it is clear that Wokingham Borough will change and grow and that the Council needs a contract that can be managed to reflect this. The current contract allows the Council to take on management of new areas and transfer assets to Town and Parish Councils.

Please explain how the £40k contract performance bonus is awarded and how it is linked to the performance management of the contract.

The performance bonus is broken down between the various Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Management Performance Indicators (MPIs) which have a specific weighting. If a KPI is achieved, e.g. play area inspections completed to standard for the contract year, the contractor will receive an incentive payment. If performance of a KPI deteriorates the contractor will not receive the incentive payment and will be asked to "pay back" the KPI value into the service. So, for example, if sports user satisfaction falls in comparison to the previous year, the contractor would need to invest the relevant sum into sports facilities or maintenance.

In 2017 the service was delivered to a reasonable standard and the contractor received £35k out of the £40k maximum bonus payment. Work is ongoing to determine the 2018 payment but it is likely to be significantly below the £40k maximum.

Please explain how the contract is structured to enable input variations to ensure that the agreed outputs/outcomes are met.

Whilst the Council has agreed the outputs to be achieved, it expects the contractor to have a clear understanding of the resources required and to put together a schedule of an input basis in order to achieve this. Moving forwards, Council Officers will work with Tivoli to agree an annual/seasonal programme of work, aspects of which could be made available for public inspection via the Council's website.

4.3 **KLOE 2 – Future Stakeholder Engagement**

The contract outlines six priorities for future development. Please explain progress made in relation to each of the priorities:

- **Working in partnership with a problem-solving approach**:
  Tivoli Group provided support for pitch management at Laurel Park where an agronomist was made available free of charge to provide recommendations for future maintenance and advice to the football club on sustainable improvements.

- **Providing sustainable and minimal costs for operational activity and offering flexibility to maintenance regimes:**

The Council has been able to move resources to introduce long grass regimes and to take on the management of new sites using existing resources.

- **Improving customer and user satisfaction:**
  The contractor is able to update residents directly using the CRM Dynamics system and work with Officers to meet residents and stakeholders to resolve issues. This is a potential area for improvement using technology available as part of the 21st Century Council programme.

- **Improving the service for priority identified areas over the course of the contract by adjusting existing resources**:
  Through the flexibility of the contract the contractor has been able to assign a dedicated play area grass cutting team. Over the course of the contract this is an area that needs to be looked into in more detail to make sure that new initiatives are communicated effectively to residents and local stakeholders.

- **Improving biodiversity-based maintenance regimes**:
  The contract has introduced a number of long grass and wildflower areas which the Council intends to increase over the course of the contract. Again, consultation and communication will be important elements of this initiative.

- **Achieving savings and generate new income streams over the course of the contract.**
  The Council is currently reviewing how income streams are generated with a focus on the resources available within the contract.

4.4 **KLOE 3 – Market Engagement and Joint Procurement**

Please explain the contract variations between WBC and RBWM.

The WBC and RBWM contracts are both output/outcome based contracts with the same terms and conditions. The only significant difference is that the RBWM output specification is more detailed and the contract is managed in a more “hands on” way than the WBC contract. RBWM makes payment to the contractor each month based on the agreed performance indicators (scheduled works completed, complaints, play area maintenance and average joint monthly site inspection scores). If there are no significant issues the contractor receives the full monthly sum. A payment reduction is agreed is there are any significant outstanding issues.

Please provide details of the working relationship between the two Boroughs in relation to the management of the grounds maintenance contracts.

There has been a shared Tivoli Contract Manager in place for both RBWM and WBC with both Council’s having dedicated supervisors. Client Officers

from the two Councils meet occasionally to discuss contract performance and any outstanding issues. At present meetings between each Council and senior management from Tivoli Group are held separately.

Please provide details of any feedback on the operation of the grounds maintenance contract at RBWM including the level of complaints received.

RBWM report that they have experienced similar problems to WBC in relation to the resourcing and supervision of their contract. They also confirm that the adverse spring weather should not be used as an excuse for sub-optimum service delivery. They believe that the key issue was/is the contractor's failure to provide adequate resources (trained staff/machinery) and contract supervision.

4.5 **KLOE 4 – Customer Relationship Management**

Please provide more details of the operation of the CRM Dynamics system, including involvement of the contractor and examples of responses provided to residents.

The contractor has a dedicated "dashboard" of reports received directly from the Council's Customer Services Team. These reports specify details of the issues raised and their location. There is scope for the contractor to provide the following details:

- Investigation date;
- Whether the investigation was postponed;
- Investigation outcome which could be:
    - No work required;
    - Work Scheduled;
    - Work completed;
    - Postponed;
    - Date work scheduled;
    - Date work completed.

Depending on the customer's request, they may receive a text or an email with an automated response setting out the results of the investigation.

4.6 **KLOE 6 – Performance Management**

Please provide performance management data for each of the agreed contract Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

KPI Performance Management data for 2017 and 2018 (Quarter 1) is set out in the tables below.

Table: Grounds Maintenance Key Performance Indicators – 2017

KPI	Description	Target 2017	Score	Pass/Fail
KPI 1	Officer Inspection Scores	80	78	Fail
KPI 2	Independent Inspection Scores	80	80	Pass
KPI 3	Play Area Inspections	90	92	Pass
KPI 4	Customer Satisfaction	81	85	Pass
KPI 5	Sports User Satisfaction	80	92	Pass
KPI 6	Justified Complaints - Grass	24	19	Pass
KPI 7	Justified Complaints – Hedges	30	**72**	**Fail**
KPI 8	Justified Complaints - Other	37	22	Pass
KPI 9	Biodiversity – No of Projects	6	6	Pass

Table: Grounds Maintenance Key Performance Indicators – 2018 Q1

KPI	Description	Target 2018 Q1	Score	Pass/Fail
KPI 1	Officer Inspection Scores	80	73	TBC – inspections continue
KPI 2	Independent Inspection Scores	80		TBC
KPI 3	Play Area Inspections	90	90	TBC – inspections continue
KPI 4	Customer Satisfaction	85		TBC
KPI 5	Sports User Satisfaction	80		TBC
KPI 6	Justified Complaints - Grass	24	**258**	**Fail**
KPI 7	Justified Complaints – Hedges	30	**31**	**Fail**
KPI 8	Justified Complaints - Other	37	25	TBC
KPI 9	Biodiversity – No of Projects	6		TBC

Please provide evidence of good performance in partnership working, community engagement, staff training and biodiversity.

- **Partnership Working –** the contractor attended onsite meetings with football clubs, resident groups and Town/Parish clerks.

- **Community engagement –** Bulb donation and planting at St Crispins School with the Wokingham Rotary club, tree and shrub planting for community projects.

- **Staff training –** the contractor provided 400 hours of staff training, including tree inspection, first aid and chainsaw training.

- **Biodiversity –** the contractor worked with the client team to deliver the long grass regime and attended associated meetings with resident groups.

Please provide details of benchmarking undertaken in relation to the service and lessons learnt from best practice in other parts of the country.

As part of the tender process a consultant was engaged to assist with the writing of the contract and a shadow bid was carried out to gauge whether the Quality Standards within the Specification were achievable within the budget available. The move to an output-based contract model is relatively new, but Officers are consistently seeing a change in perception and policy in relation to biodiversity which includes:

- the National Pollinator Strategy,
- the UK Biodiversity Action Plan,
- the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006: Duty for Public Authorities.

4.7 **KLOE 6 – Contract Performance, Customer Feedback and Complaints**

Please explain the process for identifying failures in service delivery and the steps taken to address issues with the contractor.

The Grounds Maintenance contract is monitored by Officers from the Localities and Place Clienting teams. Contract monitoring involves:

- Daily contact between WBC Officers and the Tivoli Contract Manager/supervisors;
- Weekly/monthly meetings with the contractor;
- Quarterly site inspections;
- Quarterly meeting with the contractor to review KPIs;
- Annual review meeting;
- Annual independent inspection.

The main method of identifying a failure in service is through the CRM Dynamics System which enables the Council to record customer reports which have not been responded to within an agreed timescale.

In addition, residents may also contact the Council directly to seek updates on reports already logged. Once these are highlighted Council Officers liaise with the contract supervisors to resolve the issue or obtain further information to update the resident. Any trends emerging in these reports are raised at the monthly contract meetings.

Stakeholder feedback is also received from other services which have separate contracts with Tivoli, such as Tenant Services, Property and local schools.

Please provide details of the number, type and geographical location of complaints received in the first quarter of 2018 compared to 2016 and 2017.

Table: Grounds Maintenance – Quarter 1 Justified Complaints

Quarter 1 Justified Complaints	2016	2017	2018
Grass	N/A	19	258
Hedge Copse,Shrub	N/A	72	31
Other	N/A	22	25

Of the justified complaints received in 2018, 111 were from residents in Wokingham, 43 from residents in Earley and 43 from residents in Woodley.

Note: The CRM Dynamics system was not operational until 2017.

Please explain how service issues were communicated to residents, Town and Parish Councils, community groups and other stakeholders.

Officers worked with the Council's Communications team to provide information to the public. With good relationships already in place with community groups, Officers have been able to use this communication channel to keep interested parties updated. There is scope to improve communication with residents by making more information available online such as details of the grass cutting routes and dates.

4.8 **KLOE 7 – Next Steps**

Please explain how the Council is working with the contractor to ensure that additional resources are identified in order to achieve the agreed standards within the contract.

Tivoli have arranged for some pieces of work such as tractor work and rotorvating to be sub-contracted out to approved suppliers in order to make more staff available for grass cutting. By reviewing the current KPIs the Council is able to amend the weighting to shift the focus on to areas where improvement is required such as grass cutting.

Tivoli also provided evidence to the Committee that they intended to retain a full team of contract staff over the coming winter. This would ensure that adequate, trained staff would be available at the commencement of the grass cutting season in March 2019.

Please give details of any further areas where WBC is seeking to work in partnership with the contractor.

The Council will work with the contractor to:

- Provide more online grass cutting information to provide residents, community groups and ward Members with clear expectations. Raw data is available to provide a timeline for grass cutting in local areas.

- Improve customer engagement using the CRM Dynamics system, keeping residents updated on the progress of their reports. Further support and training will be provided for Tivoli staff, to enable them to advise residents on progress relating to their complaint/issue.

- Agree the resource and machinery level for the current contract to ensure that the service provided is sustainable. This work is ongoing as additions/changes to long grass areas will impact on this process. Changes will need to be agreed prior to the commencement of grass cutting in 2019.

- Introduce more areas of long grass and wildflowers at appropriate locations. Basic maps have been created by Council Officers to outline proposed long grass areas. Proposed wildflower sites for the 2019 contract year have been agreed.

Please explain how the Council's 21st Century Council programme is being utilised to deliver improvements in communication, engagement, complaints handling and the overall customer experience.

The Council's 21st Century Council programme has seen significant investment in improved IT which enables greater self-service and improvements to the Council's website.

With improvements in technology available to contractors, Council Officers and residents it will be easier to log where issues have been highlighted, prevent duplicated reports and provide clear responses to residents. This will help to manage expectations and improve the customer experience.

Please explain how the development of Locality Services will deliver improved engagement and performance management of the contract.

The development of Locality Services will provide more local intelligence and provide feedback from the local community which will help to shape local green spaces. It is envisaged that Localities Officers will attend client-contractor meetings to share local knowledge and feedback.

Please explain the consultation process used for service changes such as the introduction of additional long grass/wildflower areas.

The consultation "Maintaining our open green spaces" consisted of an online survey which ran for two months between October and December 2014. The survey generated 173 responses. The survey responses indicated a low level of satisfaction with the condition and maintenance of open green spaces in the Borough: 21.7% satisfied/very satisfied; 53.3% dissatisfied/very dissatisfied. The responses also indicated support for a more flexible approach enabling more focus on specific areas to meet specific demands. Officers also contacted residents who had lodged complaints about the service to explore their concerns.

4.9 **Call for Evidence – Submissions Received**

4.10 As outlined above the Committee issued a Call for Evidence which sought the views of local residents, community groups and Town and Parish Councils on the performance of the Council's contractor in delivering the targets in the Grounds Maintenance Contract. The main issues raised in relation to the Call for Evidence are summarised below:

- The Council publishes details of the grass cutting contract standards (e.g. the height of grass in general grass areas) but it is obvious that these standards are not being met.

- Allowing grass to grow longer results in an increase in health complaints such as asthma and hay fever as increased amounts of grass pollen are released.

- The overgrown appearance of highway central reservations, especially at "gateways" into the Borough, did not present a positive image of the Borough for visitors.

- Long grass tends to contain increased amounts of litter and dog owners are unable to effectively clear up after their pets – it is apparent that litter picks are not always carried out before cutting.

- Long grass also results in increased numbers of ticks which can affect the health of dogs and, potentially, humans.

- Long gaps between cuts leaves areas looking "scruffy" and, when the grass is cut, large clumps of grass are left behind.

- The large clumps of grass inhibit new growth, block drains and gutters and make it difficult for young people to enjoy informal play.

- Long grass and overhanging vegetation at road junctions create health and safety risks for pedestrians and drivers.

- Long grass and encroaching vegetation on cycle paths causes difficulties for cyclists.

- The quality of grass cutting work was poor with areas within open spaces randomly missed.

- When local areas begin to look untidy there is a "snowball" effect with increased levels of littering.

- From visiting neighbouring Council areas it was apparent that they were able to cope with the adverse spring weather and deliver a good service.

- Adopting a flexible approach is fine but there must be some control to ensure that early cuts are completed, otherwise the contractor ends up playing catch up.

- When the hot weather arrived, the contractor was cutting the grass – even when there was no grass to cut, resulting in clouds of dust.

- Allowing residents to park cars and vans on verges and green spaces causes damage especially when the weather is wet.

- The Council should restore verges which have been eroded by parked vehicles and take steps (such as fixed posts) to discourage this behaviour in the future.

- The growth of weeds has increased significantly since the new contract began in 2016 – this links to complaints about performance of the street sweeping service.

- Allowing grass and weeds to grow between the road and kerbside increases the “scruffy” appearance of residential areas.

- There are frequent problems relating to overgrown grass and weeds in children’s play areas which causes concern for parents.

- There appear to be examples in some areas of confusion between the Council and the contractor about which areas to cut – this did not happen prior to 2016.

- The Council should develop a better understanding of local needs for open space (e.g. informal play, picnics, etc.) and factor this information into decisions about long grass/wildflower areas.

- The Council should provide more public information about the timing of grass cutting/street sweeping to enable residents/community groups to check on the performance of the contractor and provide feedback.

4.11 It is worth noting that the Call for Evidence also generated a number of positive comments, including:

- the development of wildflower areas was well received in some areas;
- areas of longer grass support declining bird and insect populations;
- the quality of grass cutting work in some areas of the Borough was good.

4.12 **Case Study – Bracknell Forest Borough Council**

4.13 In order to gain a different perspective on the delivery of a grounds maintenance contract, Officers visited Bracknell Forest Borough Council (BFBC) and met with the Director of Environmental Services to discuss the operation of their contract.

Bracknell Forest delivered its grounds maintenance service through an in-house team up to 2014 when it carried out a procurement exercise and outsourced the service to Continental Landscapes Ltd., commencing in 2015.

4.14 BFBC developed a similar output/outcome based contract to WBC with the contractor being responsible for keeping the Borough in a presentable condition. However, there are a number of specific deliverables set out in the contract. For example, urban grass areas have to be cut approximately 15 times within the spring/summer months which equates to a cut roughly every two weeks. This means that the contractor will cut the grass less frequently if the weather is hot and dry and will cut more frequently if the weather is wet and the grass grows more quickly. The effect is that the contractor may carry out 16/17 cuts in one year and 12/13 cuts in the following year. The exact frequencies are agreed following discussions between the client team and the contractor.

4.15 The Director and client team for the BFBC grounds maintenance service is based in the same building as the grounds maintenance contractor's management team which has made it much easier to build a strong partnership approach. There is daily contact between the client and the contractor.

4.16 The BFBC client team and contractor carry out a joint weekly inspection which focuses on the overall appearance of the Borough. Client officers seek to build a common understanding of what is acceptable and what is not. This helps to build a real partnership with both sides owning the process. Any issues arising that cannot be resolved by the client and contractor teams are resolved through a discussion between the Director of Environmental Services and the relevant Director of Continental Landscapes.

4.17 A monthly contract meeting is held between the client team and the contractor. The meeting uses a standard Agenda which includes performance data, complaints, staff training, health and safety and any high profile events (such as the recent visit of the Queen to Bracknell).

4.18 As part of the contract procurement exercise, bidders were required to submit method statements setting out how they would resource and deliver the contract. These method statements are used in discussions if/when the client team believe that the contractor is not achieving the required standard. For example, one of the method statements sets out the management/supervisory structure which will be used to manage the contract. If the contractor has a vacancy in one of these posts it is required to fill that vacancy in line with its method statement.

4.19 Overall, it was felt that the grounds maintenance service in Bracknell Forest was of a good standard. The client team and contractor had developed a positive working relationship which was evidenced by the high number of compliments and the low number of complaints received each year. In relation to the adverse weather conditions in 2018 it was felt that they did provide a serious challenge but the contractor was able to cope effectively. The contractor was able to deliver the agreed number of cuts and to maintain the standards expected by the Council. The level of complaints in 2018 was no higher than in previous years.

Section 5 - What Does the Evidence Tell Us?

5.1 The Council's Grounds Maintenance contract commenced on 1 April 2016 and will run until September 2026, with provision for a five year extension. The perceived benefits of a 10 year contract included increased certainty for the contractor resulting in improved local knowledge and community engagement, greater investment, and staff training. The contract moved away from a traditional prescriptive model to an outcome based model which relies on the contractor to commit positively to the partnership model and to adopt a proactive approach.

5.2 A long contract with light touch contract management also exposes the Council to risks in the event that the contractor fails to allocate sufficient resources to achieve the agreed performance standards. The Committee noted that there had been service failures in two out of the three years of the contract's operation. Consequently, the Committee felt that discussions should be held with senior management from the contractor (Tivoli Group) in order to highlight the Council's expectations and concerns about future delivery of the service.

Recommendation 1 - That the Executive Member and Director of Locality and Customer Services meet with senior management from Tivoli Group to discuss the operation of the Grounds Maintenance service and to emphasise the Council's expectations for service delivery in 2019.

5.3 The Committee also noted evidence submitted by Officers of RBWM which indicated concerns about the service provided by ISS/Tivoli. The Committee felt that a joined up approach between the two Councils would deliver more leverage in discussions with the contractor. This could take the form of joint meetings as currently each Council met with Tivoli independently.

Recommendation 2 - That the Executive Member and Director of Locality and Customer Services liaise with their counterparts at RBWM to identify areas of common interest and concern and make joint representations to Tivoli Group as necessary.

5.4 The Committee considered the factors behind the sub-optimum delivery of the grounds maintenance service in 2018. It was apparent that a crucial issue was completion of the first round of cuts in a reasonable time thereby preventing significant grass growth and the development of backlogs of work. The Committee noted the steps being taken by the contractor to ensure that adequate resources were available for the start of the grass cutting season in March/April 2019 and felt that the Council should consider additional support for the client team to ensure that the service was monitored and supported proactively during those key months.

Recommendation 3 - That the Director of Locality and Customer Services review the level of WBC's client monitoring/management resource available at the beginning of the next grass cutting season – March/April 2019.

5.5 The Committee considered the performance management data for the service and noted that a reasonable standard had been achieved in 2017 (with the contractor receiving most of the performance bonus). As a result Members believed that the existing contractual arrangements could work effectively. However, another year of underperformance would raise serious concerns about the future viability of the partnership with Tivoli Group. As such, the Council should start to consider contingency arrangements in case of further service failures next year.

Recommendation 4 - That the Director of Locality and Customer Services review the contractual options available to the Council in the event of continuing underperformance by the grounds maintenance contractor.

5.6 The Committee also felt that there were some practical steps that could be taken to strengthen the partnership approach to the contract. One of these was to explore options for the co-location of the WBC client team and the contractor's management team. It was noted that the grounds maintenance service in Bracknell Forest benefitted from such an arrangement.

5.7 It was also felt that the weighting of the KPIs should be addressed with the contractor in order to put more emphasis (and financial incentive) on the key public-facing elements of the service such as grass cutting and sightline maintenance.

Recommendation 5 – That the Director of Locality and Customer Services explore options for co-location of the grounds maintenance client and contractor teams and review the weighting of Key Performance Indicators in the contract to emphasise the performance standard required for key public facing elements of the service.

5.8 The Committee considered a wide range of evidence from local stakeholders about the importance of effective communication about service delivery and the designation and treatment of different types of grassed areas. Members noted that the roll-out of the Localities Service was in its early stages but, in due course, would result in improved local intelligence with better links into the Council's IT systems. This should deliver more accurate information and knowledge about issues such as the health impacts of longer grass/wildflower areas and the impact of vehicles parking on grass verges.

Recommendation 6 - That the implementation of the Localities Service be used to explore opportunities for improved local intelligence and the development of local networks providing feedback on the operation of the grounds maintenance service.

5.9 In relation to biodiversity areas, Members visited Winnersh Meadows during their site visit. Members were informed that maintenance of similar sites (woodlands, copses and thickets mainly within the Borough's parks) was expected to meet good standards of industry practice. Members felt that Winnersh Meadows (and similar sites) would benefit from expert advice relating to local flora and fauna

and that this advice could be used to inform improvements to local management plans. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) were suggested as sources of expert advice, although there were likely to be others.

Recommendation 7 – That WBC Officers work with the contractor to seek input from appropriate specialist groups, including RSPB and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) in order to inform management plans for biodiversity sites (woodland, copse and thicket) across the Borough.

5.10 The Committee also received evidence about potential IT improvements linked to the Council's 21st Century Council programme. Publication of improved maps and work schedules on the Council's website would help to deliver a more transparent and accountable service.

Recommendation 8 - That, as part of the 21st Century Council programme, opportunities for using new technology be explored in order to deliver more comprehensive, up-to-date information on grounds maintenance schedules, GIS mapping, performance and customer feedback.

5.11 The Committee noted that the Borough and the Town/Parish Councils had been in discussions for some time over the possibility of more joined up working and mutual support. This included the potential for asset transfers (including open spaces) as part of the Borough Council's ongoing Asset Management Review. The Borough Parish Liaison Forum had considered a number of reports relating to these issues and would continue to monitor progress.

Recommendation 9 - That the Council continue discussions with Town and Parish Councils about the potential for further asset transfers and mutual support and provide updates to the Borough Parish Liaison Forum.

5.12 In order to monitor progress and ensure that preparations were in hand for the 2019 grass cutting season, Members felt that a report should be submitted to the Committee's meeting in February 2019.

Recommendation 10 - That the Director of Locality and Customer Services submit a report to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, at its meeting in February 2019, setting out the arrangements in place to ensure an effective grass cutting service in 2019.

5.13 Similarly, the Committee felt that a further report should be submitted to its meeting in October 2019. The purpose of the report would be to highlight any issues arising in the main grass cutting months and to identify any lessons learnt for future years.

Recommendation 11 - That the Director of Locality and Customer Services submit a further report to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, at its meeting in October 2019, setting out details of performance and lessons learnt during the 2019 grass cutting season.

5.14 Finally, the Committee considered the way in which service changes were consulted upon and communicated as part of the Grounds Maintenance contract re-let process. The online survey in late 2014 generated 173 responses and was supported by feedback from residents who had lodged complaints and discussions with Town and Parish Councils. The information and views collated were then fed into the development of the new contract. The Committee felt that a consultation process which set out details of proposed service changes such as the introduction of long grass areas may have resulted in less confusion and complaints when the new arrangements were introduced.

5.15 The Council's approach to public consultation has been a constant theme in the recent work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Committee has previously considered and confirmed the Council's key principles for effective consultation, viz:

- Consultation must occur when proposals are still at a formative stage;
- Sufficient information/reasons for the proposals must be given to allow consultees to understand the proposals and respond to them appropriately;
- Sufficient time must be given to allow for consideration and response;
- Responses must be conscientiously taken onto account.

5.16 The Committee noted that, following an Overview and Scrutiny review in 2011/12, the Executive had instructed Officers to prepare guidance on effective consultation. However, it was apparent that this guidance was no longer available on the Council's website or intranet. The Committee felt that updated guidance on the Council's commitment to and delivery of effective public consultation (as set out in the Council's Constitution) would be of significant benefit to Members and Officers.

Recommendation 12 - That the Executive instruct Officers to provide updated guidance on the Council's approach to public consultation, in line with the commitments set out in the Council's Constitution and the relevant legal principles.

Section 6 - Conclusions and Next Steps

6.1 The report highlights the important role that well-maintained parks, open spaces and residential areas play in making the Borough a great place to live. The Committee noted the positive ambition of the Council to develop a strong partnership approach and the fact that a number of initiatives had already been developed and delivered successfully with the contractor. It also welcomed the fact that WBC Officers were working hard to ensure that the service is fully equipped and resourced in time for the 2019 grass cutting season. Having said that, the Committee also noted that the Grounds Maintenance service has experienced serious problems in two of the past three years. This is unacceptable. The Borough's residents expect better and the Council must take appropriate steps to ensure that the agreed standards are achieved in 2019 and beyond.

6.2 Moving to an output/outcome based contract can deliver a good service and a strong partnership, but only if both partners are willing and able to deliver on their side of the agreement. This means that the contractor must provide adequate resources in terms of skilled staff, modern machinery and experienced supervisors/managers. The Council must also be able to monitor the contract effectively and proactively, which means being able to identify issues at an early stage and escalating them if they are not resolved quickly.

6.3 In terms of next steps: in line with the Council's Constitution, the Committee's report will be submitted to the Council's Executive at its meeting on 31 January 2019. The Committee hopes that all the recommendations will be accepted in order to drive improvement in the delivery of the grounds maintenance service.

6.4 In the meantime, the Committee will monitor progress through update reports to its meetings in February and October 2019.

Annex 1

WBC Grounds Maintenance Operational Task List		
No.	**Operational Task**	**Description**
1	Grass and Grassland Maintenance	Mowing and maintaining up to standard all grassed areas within the contract. Creation and maintenance of wildflower and grassland areas.
2	Hedge and Hedgerow Maintenance	Pruning and maintaining up to standard all hedges within the contract.
3	Shrub Maintenance	Pruning and maintaining up to standard all shrubs within the contract area.
4	Woodlands, Copses and Thickets	Maintaining a range of woodlands, copses and thickets according to good woodland management practice to develop and enhance biodiversity.
5	Tree Maintenance	The maintenance of the Council's tree stock within reach from ground level and Level 1 tree inspections.
6	Pond and Lake Maintenance	Maintaining a range of ponds and lakes according to good management practice to develop and enhance biodiversity.
7	Ditches, Drains, Watercourses	Maintaining a range of ditches, drains and watercourses according to good management practice to develop and enhance biodiversity.
8	Planters, Containers and Hanging Baskets	The provision, planting and maintenance of planters, containers, floral display units and hanging baskets with a range of plants including flowers, shrubs and small trees, etc.
9	Border Planting and Maintenance	The planting and maintenance of borders with range of plants.
10	Sports Facilities Maintenance	Inspection and maintenance of sports playing surfaces, facilities (not including buildings) and equipment to the required standard.
11	Attendant duties	Attendance primarily during evening and weekend match fixtures/games at Cantley Park, Wokingham etc. including cleaning in between games/fixtures.

12	Cemetery maintenance	The provision of Cemetery maintenance including liaison between the Authorised Officer, undertakers, the public and the cemeteries as appropriate.
13	Play areas/Youth Provision Repair and Maintenance	The inspection, repair and maintenance of all play areas/youth equipment and facilities across the Borough.
14	Infrastructure Inspection and Maintenance	The inspection and minor maintenance of Southlake Dam, paths, bridges and hard standing areas across open spaces.
15	Open Space Furniture Maintenance	The installation (on request), inspection and maintenance of signage, benches, bike racks, planters, fencing etc. in all open space.
16	Leaf Clearance	The clearance of leaf fall and tree litter across contract areas, including paths and hard standing areas, where appropriate.
17	Litter and Detritus	Maintaining all sites within the contract according to the litter priority areas.
18	Weed and Pest Control	Maintaining sites within the contract according to the weed control requirements in priority areas. Dealing with pests as required.
19	Winter Operations	The provision of practicable winter maintenance including snow removal and gritting in the Council's priority sites and features.
20	General Reporting and Miscellaneous	The reporting of all issues on WBC property and land.
21	Customer Relationship Management	To provide sufficient compatible IT systems and employee resources to support the safe, efficient and smooth running of the services provided by the Service Provider which links fully with WBC's CRM solution.