

ENVIRONMENT PDG

[9 Jan 18]

Feedback from the Grass Cutting Working Group held on the 1st December 2018

Cabinet Member: Cllr Clive Eginton, and Cllr Colin Slade

Responsible Officer: Andrew Pritchard, Director of Operational Services

Reason for Report: To consider the findings of the Grass Cutting Working Group.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: Environment – Priority 4 – Protecting the environment.

Financial Implications: The 17.18 budget to maintain open spaces and parks is set out below:

- Grounds Maintenance £620k
- Parks and Open Spaces £386k
- Play areas £159k
- Bereavement Services £77k
- Cemeteries £120k

Legal Implications: Health and Safety legislation requires the Council to ensure all parks and open spaces are compliant with current guidelines. Crime and Disorder Act Section 17 requires that open space design and maintenance ensures adequate provision is made to design-out opportunities for anti-social behaviour and criminal activities.

Risk Assessment: The Council would require a relevant review of risk assessments for all proposals that significantly impact on current landscaping provision; the intent being to assess risk on a case by case, site by site basis.

Equality Impact Assessment: There are no equality issues identified in this report.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 On the 1st December 2017 the Grass Cutting Working Group Chaired by Cllr R F Radford sat to consider grass cutting.

1.2 The Director of Operations outlined the Grounds Maintenance function, putting into context its current funding, how the funding was utilised.

The officer posed the question ‘where do you want to be in the future?’

The officer explained the current charging mechanism is based on a ‘per square meter’ method for all work undertaken. He explained that this methodology tended to work for cutting areas such as recreational grounds and sports pitches which required one piece of equipment and took a consistent amount of time. However, areas that might require strimmer’s, blowers or for smaller more time consuming areas, could cost considerably more. He proposed an alternative would be to charge what it actually cost in terms of labour and equipment rather than on a per square meter basis.

The Group Manager for Waste and Open Spaces explained bills had been sent to the 11 Town and Parish Councils that had an agreement with the authority. However, these bills had been sent without internal due diligence having been undertaken. He explained that a further letter was due to be sent to the 11 councils following the last PDG explaining what had actually been done and to reassure Parish and Town Councils they would only be charged for work undertaken; with the dates they had been done.

- 1.3 Following consideration of Motion 538 (Cllr Mrs J Roach - 1 June 2017) and a *report of the Director of Operations regarding grass cutting issues in Mid Devon, the Environment Policy Development Group had recommended that invoices to Town and Parish Councils regarding grass cutting should confirm the number of cuts undertaken with dates.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for the Environment outlined the discussion that had taken place at the Policy Development Group meeting and added that in addition to the above, he would like the clients to receive notification when their grass had been cut.

The Director of Operations provided answers to questions posed in public question time: he stated that the report had been specifically focussed on Silverton and supplied answers to questions posed originally by Cllr Mrs Roach; however the current charge was per square metre and not on individual man hours. A working group of the Policy Development Group had been formed to look at budget issues and the Town and Parish Councils would be notified in good time to allow for precepts to be set. With regard to the possibility of the Grounds Maintenance Team moving to Willand, there had been security issues at Park Road and he wished to encourage closer working between the Grounds Maintenance and Street Scene Teams; so yes he was looking at combining the team at Carlu Close, the recharge cost for grass-cutting would be calculated accordingly.

Consideration¹ was given to:

- The consultation process that was taking place with staff
- The need to make savings.

RESOLVED that notification to Town and Parish Councils regarding grass cutting should confirm the number of cuts undertaken with dates; this notification should take place on a monthly basis or as applicable if no cuts occurred during a month.

2.0 Outcome of the Working Group

- 2.1 It was **AGREED** that Town and Parish councils needed to be told what was being cut and when it had been cut.

¹ Minute – 78 Cabinet 23 November 2017

2.2 It was **AGREED** that the grounds maintenance² team should price all work on the basis that it should recover the full cost incurred by them carrying out that work.

2.3 It was **AGREED** that Town and Parish councils be informed in the first instance that the service was to be reviewed and that full cost recovery be tapered to allow for them to make provision regarding other providers and any required increase to budgets.

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 RECOMMENDATION 1: That notification to Town and Parish Councils regarding grass cutting should confirm the number of cuts undertaken with dates; this notification should take place on a monthly basis or as applicable if no cuts occurred during a month.

3.2 RECOMMENDATION 2: That the grounds maintenance team price all work on the basis that it should recover the full cost incurred by them carrying out that work.

3.3 RECOMMENDATION 3: That Town and Parish councils be informed that a full cost recovery pricing model for grass cutting will be implemented over 3 years starting in the 18.19 financial year. However any increase in cost will be tapered to allow for them to make provision regarding other providers and/or any required increase to their budgets.

Contact for more Information: Andrew Pritchard, Director of Operations

Circulation of the Report: Cabinet Members, Leadership Team, Community and Environment Policy Development Groups.

² The grounds maintenance team is part of the Open Spaces and Street Scene Service.