

Cabinet Lead Reports – Full Council 29 March 2017

Councillor Tony Briggs: Deputy Leader and Cabinet Lead for Operations, Environmental Services and NORSE.

Parking Strategy/Management & Traffic Management

The Parking Service can celebrate the successful project that all parking related calls being diverted into the CSC at EHDC where the CSC will take the top Frequently Asked Questions [FAQs] therefore ensuring that the back office team have more time to deal with the specialised queries. This also includes car park queries to be dealt with via the web site on Live Chat – potentially channel shifting the telephone calls and giving the customer an alternative method of contact.

Going forward with project we will have greater management data of how many telephone calls and chats were handled via the CSC the data from this can be used to look at trends, service improvements etc. and look at peak times for those contacts – all information we never had before as we had no way of monitoring the incoming calls, it may also give us data of where we could possibly digitalise the service – self serve and therefore reduce customer interaction on the highest cost channels making us more streamlined and more accessible.

The Parking team are looking at alternative options around West Beach Car Park and Motorhomes to discourage longer than permitted overnight stays. This is being done with the Civil Engineering & Landscape Team and are hoping to have something in place this summer.

So far this year, the Traffic Management Team has implemented Traffic Regulation Orders on 8 roads within the Borough and completed investigative work on two further TRO's which were subsequently discontinued as a result of the investigations.

The team have also processed numerous road closure applications required to ensure safety of the public and deployed speed monitoring equipment in 11 locations to monitor speeding concerns across the Borough. It is anticipated that a greater number of locations will be covered in the forthcoming period now that the re-opening of the footpath under the Emsworth railway bridge has ended the safety requirement for one of the speed limit reminders to be permanently sited at that location.

Support has been given to facilitate signing and access for public events within the Borough including the Virgin Kitesurf Armada, Emsworth Farmers' Market, and St. George's Day Parades. Conversely, the team have also been proactively implementing DfT. guidance on reducing street clutter by making use of new legislation to prevent display of unwanted and unnecessary signs.

NORSE South East

Beachlands team review

Now completed, no alternative working methods were submitted during the 30 day consultation period and as such two Beachlands Officers have been served notice of redundancy. This will deliver savings and will lead to a more efficient service. Initially we are likely to receive service enquiries from beach users who are used to seeing and having contact with the two post holders.

During the recent hot weather there were large numbers of visitors to the beach. The team responded well and although litter bins were emptied as normal the subsequent high use of the bins resulted in complaints overflowing bins/bags placed on floor around the bin, this was dealt with as quickly as possible.

Business Growth being pursued includes:

Norse South East are tracking and targeting local businesses as well as schools with marketing messaging that we are a high quality alternative to national competition. Proposals submitted for;

- Grounds maintenance work at Havant Academy and Bridgemy School
- Waste Services – ‘One-stop’ distribution depots
- Waste collection - Horndean Technical College -
- Grounds Maintenance - Portchester Crematorium

Strategic Waste:

NSE Officers continue to attend Project Integra (PI) meetings as this provides an opportunity to discuss issues and opportunities affecting all Hampshire Local Authorities. The current main focus of attention is the need to increase throughput via the Materials Recycling Facilities (MRF). PI have employed a consultant to investigate options for the acceptance of Plastic Pots, Tubs and Trays, if pursued this will require significant investment as existing MRF's will need to be upgraded.

Overview

NSE has had a positive first year in business, which financially has resulted in being significantly ahead of budgeted profitability. The core services have continued to perform to the standards required under the SLA's, and partners have retained their influence and control over service delivery as required.

Employee relations have remained in good spirit throughout, with a productive continuation of management and union briefings. A number of changes to both the management and front line teams have taken place during the year. This has given permanent opportunities to agency workers, and allowed commercially experienced or talented young people to join our business. At the same time HBC have needed to change their client management of the partnership which has been managed effectively by both partners.

New commercial revenue of £160k has been achieved during the year, with £244k already contracted for 2017-18. The business is well placed to further achieves sales this year and grow its commercial work.

Whilst there is still much work ahead in continuing to make improvements to operations and manage project work, NSE has succeeded in its first year of trading and has already shown glimpses of a bright future ahead for both partners.

Highway Verges and Weed Control

In response to the current issue regarding Verge Cutting and Weed Control we can confirm the following.

The Assistant Managers have been responding positively to all enquiries/remedies regarding grass and weed issues; addressing the concerns expressed.

Due to ideal growing conditions at the beginning of the grass cutting season the length of grass has been an issue, especially in the ever increasing areas where daffodil bulbs have been planted, which we cannot cut for a 6/8 week period after flowering.

Historically we have always experienced challenges with the first 3 cuts due to inclement weather, verges unfit to cut, the length (fast growing) and thickness of grass which slows down the cutting process.

Verge Cutting

The grass is now reducing in growth due to the change in the weather conditions and time of year; as a result we are now cutting and getting around a lot faster than at the beginning of the season. To ease the pressure we have now increased our verge cutting team by one to help speed up the cutting process and to cover holidays and sickness. The additional resource will also be used to improve the finished standard i.e. strimming around street furniture/obstacles, litter picking and blowing grass from the footways.

Weed Control

This year our initial weed control programme has not been as successful as was intended. Our first window of weed treatment consisted of spraying individual weeds, the same approach as last year. We did not visit every area, we only concentrated on areas / locations which had identifiable weed growth. Please accept our apologies as we clearly got it wrong.

To address the current situation;

- ✓ We have introduced mobile teams to remove *significant weed growth. The teams will work in separate areas prioritised by Managers based on site visits and information received from Customer Services, Councillors and Council Officers. This will be supplemented with overtime and Saturday working, when resources are available, until further notice.

- ✓ We are employing a contractor to deliver our second window of weed spraying, they will cover the entire Borough, commencing Monday 10 July, starting in the Cowplain area.
- ✓ We will provide information, to Councillors and HBC Liaison Officer, by end of day each Friday giving of our Highway Weed Control and Verge Cutting schedules for the following week.
- ✓ We will provide information, to Customer Services and HBC Liaison Officer, on a daily basis as to the progress of our Highway Weed Control and Verge Cutting. This will be a list of completed areas, road by road.
- ✓ We will continue to respond positively to all enquiries/Remedies i.e. addressing the concerns expressed.

It is anticipated that the above actions will enable us to get back on top and in control.

****small weeds need to remain so that weed treatment can be applied as it is most effective on established weeds***

Grass cutting Information: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. When do you start grass cutting and for how long?

In general terms, depending on the weather, grass cutting within the Borough of Havant typically starts mid-March and continues until the season ends (typically October). The planned schedule involves dedicated teams focussed on areas throughout the growing season. These teams also undertake occasional urgent/reactive works in addition to the schedule.

This season (2017), our Highway grass verge cutting began week **commencing 27th February** and the first round was completed week commencing **17th April**. Typically, the first cut of the season can takes longer, particularly if grass has remained active during the winter period.

The first cut of the season can take up to seven weeks to complete, subsequent cuts are quicker and from cut three onwards should take about **four weeks** to complete.

NB: Given that in recent years the growing season has lengthened with warmer year-round temperatures, there have been occasions where cutting has been carried out earlier and later than the above schedules.

2. Will the standard of grass cutting this year vary from previous years?

We have now had three consecutive mild winters and though grass cutting actually commenced earlier in 2017 than 2016. It is difficult to predict grass growth, particularly at the beginning of the year and when peak growing (“flushes”) will occur.

Thick grass as well as rain can slow the schedule down, as it takes longer to cut and the height of grass through this speed of growth becomes more obviously noticeable.

3. Has the service been cut this year and if so is it to save money?

There has been no reduction in the amount of resource provided to undertake grass cutting in 2017 and resources remain the same as in previous years.

We aim to cut all grass across the Borough 9 times during the season.

4. I am confused as to what the various agencies do in respect of grass cutting across the district?

Norse South East – the Council's operational services partners undertake cutting of grass on public open spaces across the districts.

Norse South East also carries out grass cutting on behalf of Hampshire County Council on its highway verges.

Highway grass on the main trunk roads and areas outside of the main towns is generally carried out either by Hampshire County Council or Highways England.

5. Why not have extra resources ready when the grass is growing strongly?

There will always be grass flushes during a growing season, although it is very difficult to predict and consequently to apply extra resource.

It would be inefficient to invest in additional resource at the start of the season, so we use a tested method of utilising seasonal operatives who can be applied during peak growth periods.

6. Why do you not collect grass cuttings?

We have never collected grass from verges, communal areas or open spaces. When grass is growing slowly, it can appear that we have collected cuttings as there is little to show, but when the grass is long then the arisings (cuttings) are more apparent.

However, arisings do not kill that which is underneath and new grass soon shows as the arisings quickly breakdown.

We will always remove grass cuttings from pavements and footpaths, by blowing back on to the verges.

7. You say you cut the grass approximately every four weeks but the grass in my area has not been cut for months...

As previously mentioned we do operate to a schedule for grass cuts so you should see our teams on a regular 4-5 week basis.

If you feel an area of grass has not been cut when generally similar areas in your neighbourhood have, please do let us know and we will check our schedules, respond to your enquiry and address if required.

8. Why are some green areas cut more often than others?

There are a few areas cut more often, like formal open spaces and recreation grounds, however given the total area covered, these represent an extremely small percentage.

There are also some areas which by their very nature lend themselves to being managed for the benefit of conservation. These areas will appear longer in order to allow the plants and insects the full benefit to this approach.

9. If you fall behind with grass cutting, when would you expect to catch up?

If we experience conditions where we cannot cut grass for a period of time i.e. received torrential rain or very soft ground conditions we will resume cutting as soon as we are able. This occasionally occurs at the beginning of the season and it can take several weeks to catch up for the missed cut(s) but when we resume we will be able to return on the same frequency i.e. four weekly.