

# HAVANT BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Scrutiny Board**

**20 February 2017**

## ***Review of Grass Cutting and Weed Clearance in the Borough***

FOR RECOMMENDATION

KEY DECISION NO

REPORT BY: Operations, Environmental Services and Norse Scrutiny and Policy Development Panel

### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 The review was established following complaints raised by Councillors at the Scrutiny Board meeting on 27 June 2017.

1.2 The review investigated:

- a) the problems experienced this year and measures taken resolve these issues
- b) measures introduced to prevent similar problems in the future; and
- c) how the service can be developed and enhanced to meet customer expectations.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 Cabinet be recommended to

2.1.1 endorse the new monitoring arrangements as set out in the Findings Pack to improve monitoring of the grass cutting and weed clearance programme;

2.1.2 request officers to provide regular reports to Councillors on the progress of the grass cutting / weed clearance programme;

2.1.3 request the officers to investigate ways of encouraging Councillors to report any instances of poor or lack of grass cutting / weed clearance to Customer Services, and in turn encourage residents to do the same;

2.1.4 request the officers to publish an article in Serving You advising residents to contact Customer Services in any instances of poor or lack of grass cutting or weed clearance.

2.2 That the Scrutiny Board be recommended to include a review of the performance of this service in its 2017/18 and 2018/19 Work Programmes. This review will include a meeting at the commencement of the 2018 programme to discuss the proposed schedule of works and a meeting at the end of the 2018 programme to review how the service has performed during the season.

### **3.0 Resources:**

3.1 The above recommendations seek to make the service more efficient through more effective monitoring of the grass cutting / weed clearance programme. These changes can be delivered within existing budgets.

### **4.0 Legal:**

4.1 n/a

### **5.0 Strategy:**

5.1 The Council is committed to improving neighbourhoods and their environmental quality, while realising this goal through innovative methods and successful partnerships with public service partners to improve services for residents, namely the Norse South East Joint Venture Company.

5.2 The Council will also use customer feedback to ensure that this service is delivered at the right quality and price.

### **6.0 Risks:**

6.1 There are risks to the Council's reputation if the grass cutting/weed clearance work is conducted to a poor standard.

### **7.0 Communications:**

7.1 n/a

### **8.0 For the Community:**

8.1 The provision of grass cutting and weed clearance is one of the most visible services provided by the Council to its residents. Therefore, it is essential that this is undertaken at a high standard.

### **9.0 METHODOLOGY**

9.1 The review was requested at the Scrutiny Board meeting on 27 June 2017. However, due to the workload of the Operations etc. Scrutiny and Policy Development Panel, the review was delayed to January 2018.

9.2 The Panel canvassed all councillors to ascertain their concerns relating to the performance of the grass cutting and weed clearance. The Panel also

invited the Operations Director of Norse South East and the Strategic Procurement Project Manager, to discuss the difficulties experienced in the summer of 2017, the concerns raised by Councillors and measures to overcome the problems experienced in future years.

## **10.0 Conclusions**

- 10.1 The Panel is confident that the measures introduced this year to overcome the problems experienced with the grass cutting and weed clearance are robust and will reduce the risk of such problems reoccurring in future programmes.
- 10.2 Arrangements should be put in place to keep Councillors informed of the performance of this service throughout the year. This will enable Councillors to respond to residents' enquiries and complaints.
- 10.3 Councillors and residents should be encouraged to use the Council's complaints data base (CRM) to enable the officers and Norse South East to easily identify the scope of any issues and respond quickly.
- 10.4 The performance of this service should be reviewed by a scrutiny panel both prior to and after the 2018 grass cutting / weed clearance programme.

## **11.0 Key Findings**

- 11.1 The Panel has found that the grass cutting and weed clearance programme for 2017 was not carried out to the usual standard due to an unprecedented growth of weeds and grass, poor weather conditions, and a delay in identifying that there was problem with the performance of the service and responding to the issue.
- 11.2 The delay in recognising the extent of the problem and reacting accordingly was due in part to a failure to collate all the complaints onto one system. Although members of the public were reporting their concerns, they did so mainly by contacting officers and Councillors directly and these complaints were not fed into the Council's data base (CRM). Therefore, the official records did not record the true scale of the problem. Recommendations 2.1.3 and 2.1.4 seek to stop this occurring in the future.
- 11.3 A failure of the Council to introduce a system to monitor the performance of the grass cutting and weed clearance programme also contributed to the delay in responding to the problem. The Panel was pleased to learn that a monitoring system has been introduced to ensure the works are completed within an agreed schedule, and if not, reasons for the failure are recorded. These changes will enable Norse to effectively assign resources to the right areas in the Borough, and enable the Council to accurately monitor the performance of the service and react if standards begin to slip (full details of the measures are set out Section G of the Findings Pack). The Panel are confident that the necessary robust measures are being put in place to

reduce the risk of these problems happening again. Recommendation 2.1.1 asks the Cabinet to endorse these measures.

- 11.4 The Panel was also pleased to learn that Norse South East has revised its working methods to improve the service provided to the Council. These new methods make the service more flexible and able to react quickly to resolve issues that arise during the cutting/clearance season. Recommendation 2.1.1 asks the Cabinet to endorse these measures.
- 11.5 A failure to keep Councillors up to date with the issues at the beginning of the season did not help the situation. Councillors play an important role keeping their constituents informed about issues, and preventing and resolving complaints. It is therefore imperative that Councillors are kept up to date on sensitive areas such grass cutting/weed clearance The Panel acknowledge that towards the end of the season regular reports were submitted to Councillors. The Panel consider that reports on the progress of the programme should be submitted to Councillors on a regular basis, to enable quick reference in response to any queries from residents. Recommendation 2.1.2 seeks to implement this measure.
- 11.6 While assured by the measures suggested by the officers, the Panel are keen to ensure these problems do not arise in the coming summer period. As such, the Panel will meet with the key officers before the season to discuss the coming programme, and following the season to analyse the work undertaken, as per recommendation 2.2
- 11.7 The full findings of the review can be found in the Findings Pack.

## **Background Papers**

[Findings pack for the review](#)

**Contact:** Councillor Jackie Branson  
**Title:** Scrutiny Lead for the Operations, Environmental Services and Norse Scrutiny and Policy Development Panel  
**E-Mail:** [jackie.branson@havant.gov.uk](mailto:jackie.branson@havant.gov.uk)