

## SCRUTINY BOARD

### REVIEW OF GRASSCUTTING

Report by the Environment and Neighbourhood  
Quality Panel

Environment and Neighbourhood Quality Cabinet Lead

Key Decision: NA

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#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Grass cutting in the Borough is very much the public face of the Council. It contributes greatly to a pleasant and attractive environment for our residents to live in and through our parks and open spaces contributes to a feeling of wellbeing for our residents.

#### 2.0 Recommendations

The Scrutiny Board recommends to Cabinet:

- 2.1 that the Operational Services Manager and the Executive Head work together to ensure they have correct trained staffing levels before the cutting season starts;
- 2.2 that the Workshop Manager, Operational Services Manager and Executive Head introduce a satisfactory servicing and repair regime; and
- 2.3 an update be provided to the Board in February 2015 on the Council's readiness for the 2015 grass cutting season.

#### 3.0 Background

- 3.1 This report is the result of concerns expressed by both residents and Councillors in May and June this year that something had gone radically wrong with our grass cutting service throughout the Borough.
- 3.2 Hampshire County Council provide funding to each district in Hampshire for 6 highway verge cuts per annum. The districts can increase the number of highway verge cuts at its own cost. Until 2013 HBC decided to provide additional funding up to a maximum of 12 cuts per annum. In reality because of weather and ground conditions we have not achieved more than 10 or 11 cuts in any year. In 2013 the number of cuts were reduced to 9 and this proved successful.

#### **4.0 How the Work Was Done**

- 4.1 We interviewed the Cabinet Lead (Cllr A Briggs), the Executive Head for Environment and Neighbourhood Quality and the Operational Services Manager to discover the reasons for so many complaints.

#### **5.0 Key Issues**

- 5.1 We looked at the following:

The weather over the period involved, the staffing levels, and the grass cutting equipment. We wanted to find out how much the weather had effected the cutting rotas. If cuts in the labour force was causing problems and if the cutting equipment was up to the job. Quite simply, had we made too many cuts?

#### **6.0 Conclusions**

- 6.1 Reference to the Met Office shows that April was the 3<sup>rd</sup> warmest on record and rain fall was 5% above average in the South. In May there was some heavy rain in Central Southern England towards the end of the month giving above average rainfall an exceptional growing period for grass.
- 6.2 The Panel has been assured by the Operational Services Manager that the staff reduction, from three teams to two, was not the reason for delays. He told the panel that the reduced number of cuts per annum (9) was totally feasible with just two teams. In 2013 9 cuts were achieved.
- 6.3 There were however problems with staffing levels at the start of the 2014 cutting season and this meant that new operatives had to be trained. We would recommend that the Operational Services Manager and the Executive Head work together to ensure they have correct trained staffing levels before the cutting season starts.
- 6.4 As a Council with its own workshops, we were dismayed to discover that grass cutting equipment, that had lain idle over the winter, was not ready for use at the start of the season, and that major defects had not been rectified on at least two "sit on" machines. We would urge the Workshop Manager, Operational Services Manager and Executive Head to introduce a satisfactory servicing and repair regime to prevent this ever happening again.
- 6.5 In conclusion, we believe that the weather conditions and exceptional growth period in May were the major factors in grass not being cut and this led to a number of customer complaints. We wish to express our concern however that there was a shortage of trained staff, and equipment was not fit for purpose when needed. We feel that this probably did not help to keep grass cutting on track although we acknowledge that the major cause was the weather.
- 6.6 The Panel would appreciate an update in February 2015 on the Council's readiness for the 2015 grass cutting season.

## **7.0 Implications**

- 7.1 **Resources:** There are no financial implications arising from this report.
- 7.2 **Legal:** A fully trained workforce should reduce accidents in the workplace and reduce potential insurance claims against the Council.
- 7.3 **Strategy:** The provision of clean and tidy open spaces and highway verges will fully support the corporate strategy
- 7.4 **Risks:** Uncut verges and open spaces could affect the reputation of the council and have an adverse impact on our residents, visitors and businesses.
- 7.5 **For the Community:** Continue to provide a clean and tidy environment with the support from residents, businesses and partner agencies.
- 7.6 **The Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has been completed and concluded the following: NA**

### **Agreed and signed off by:**

Legal Services: 02/09/14

Executive Head of Governance & Logistics: 01/09/14

Relevant Executive Head: 01/09/14

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