

Subject: Report on the Findings of The
Grass Cutting Task And Finish Group

Status: For Publication

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny
Management Committee

Date: 28 September 2009

Report of: Operations Manager

Portfolio

Holder: Environmental Services

Key Decision: Yes / No

Forward Plan General Exception Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The report considers the recommendations of the grass cutting task and finish group

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:-

- Delivering quality Services to our customers
- Delivering regeneration across the Borough
- Encouraging healthy and respectful communities
- Keeping our Borough clean, green and safe
- Promoting the Borough
- Providing value for money services

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no specific risk issues for members to consider arising from this report.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 4.1 Whilst developing its work programme for 2008/09, it was agreed that a Task and Finish Group be established to look at grass cutting throughout the Borough, which is undertaken by Rossendale Borough Council, Lancashire County Council, Highways Agency, Green Vale Homes and Whitworth Town Council.
- 4.2 The Task and Finish Group first met in July, with further meetings in August, September, October and finalising their report in December 2008
- 4.3 The report was submitted to officers in March 2009 and detailed six recommendations. The responses to these recommendations are as follows:-
- 4.4 Recommendation 1:- That consideration be given to purchasing a side-arm flail to enable the cutting of steep bankings, at a cost of £42,370 capital one off cost and £17,000 annual revenue, from within its service budget.
- 4.4.1 Whilst it is recognised that the purchase of the equipment would be beneficial to extending the grass cutting service currently provided by the council, the use of capital expenditure to purchase new equipment, at the present time is not an option available to the council.
- 4.4.2 The Council's capital programme is approved annually each year as part of the budget process. The 2009/10 programme was approved in Feb 2009 and was agreed on the understanding that adequate capital resources in the form of capital receipts would be forthcoming. Financing for the capital programme was going to be a challenge for the Council and this has proved to be the case. For example the Council anticipated £200k form receipts associated to the disposal of Green Vale Homes housing stock, however at the time of writing there have been no disposals and therefore no receipts.
- 4.4.3 Cabinet and other Members review this situation frequently and Cabinet have set up a separate Capital Monitoring Group to review progress on the capital programme and the delivery of capital receipts.
- 4.4.4 Any recommendations for changes or additions to the capital programme would normally be made during the annual budget process in order to get Member consensus on spending in line with Council priorities. The same process would also apply for the additional revenue required.
- 4.4.5 Taking into consideration the pressures on capital expenditure, other options considered are a partnership approach with neighboring authorities, and so far both Hyndburn and Rochdale Councils have offered assistance in the form of using their tractor and side arm flail (with driver) on a contract basis. Both councils have indicated they anticipate being paid for the provision of such services. Any costs incurred with this arrangement would have to represent an increase in revenue expenditure as the current budget, at present, does not make allowances for such an arrangement.

- 4.5 Recommendation 2:- That the Operations Manager consider increasing the number of cuts by both Lancashire County Council and Rossendale Borough Council, which would give a considerable reduction in grass cuttings. Increase in cuts and costings need to be agreed by both organisations.
- 4.5.1 Both Rossendale and Lancashire are working more closely together to ensure that the standard of grass maintenance is consistent across the valley, Currently Rossendale undertake between 3 and 15 cuts per season depending on the location. Lancashire County undertakes 8 cuts per annum.
- 4.5.2 To increase the quantity of cuts untimely a re-profiling of resources needs to be undertaken and or additional revenue required. So far, Lancashire County Council, as part of the negotiations surrounding the residual highways agreement have confirmed that for the next three years they will contribute additional finance to the Pride in Rossendale project. It's anticipated that some of this money can be used to increase the grass frequency to match Rossendale's.
- 4.5.3 In addition Rossendale has increased its grass cutting regime in cemeteries by replacing the need to plant annuals with perennials as part of the grave gardening service. The extra labour saved has been used to increase the regime from 10 to 12 cuts.
- 4.5.4 Further proposals to enhance the standards of grass maintenance is to target areas such as Town Centres and areas of high footfall and increase the frequency of maintenance whilst reducing areas of outlying areas, where a reduction in frequency may not have a counter negative affect and may also improve biodiversity.
- 4.6 Recommendation 3:- That in order to have a co-ordinated approach to grass cutting between all organisations, a 'lead officer' be nominated within the Operations Department to ensure that maintenance schedules are adhered to. LCC, Highways Agency and Greenvale should share their grass cutting information with this person and keep them up to date with any problems that may cause that schedule to slip
- 4.6.1 The Lead officer within the operations department is the operations manager; this was implemented as a consequence of the recent organisational restructure. Since this change both Lancashire County Council and Rossendale Borough Council have been in regular contact to ensure the schedules are matched as closely as possible. To make this information more accessible it is proposed that in future the information is available on the website.
- 4.6.2 With regards to Greenvale, recently grass cutting been added to the agenda as part of the partnership monitoring process, with the operations manager now attending regularly. As yet no schedule information has been provided by Greenvale, although a number of meetings have been held with the

Environmental Services Manager at Greenvale with a view adopting a joined up approach to grass maintenance.

4.6.3 The standard of maintenance provided by the Highways Agency is unlikely to be improved due to the sheer size of the road network they have to maintain. In addition the Highways Agency have quoted that “Wide areas of grassland may appear unmanaged however programmed cutting, over a period years, is undertaken to ensure the balance between the unsightly and unmanaged, and biodiversity. Grassland is a wonderful habitat for many species, including small mammals, reptiles, birds and insects. It also provides a rich tapestry of wildflowers including orchid, oxeye daisy and campion. “ Given that the highways agency only have responsibility for the A56 and A682, the impact of them not increasing the standard is minimal.

4.7 Recommendation 4:- That the Council and Highways Agency work together to look into sponsorship to improve the Rising Bridge roundabout.

4.7.1 Rossendale are currently working with both the Highways Agency and Lancashire County council with regards to sponsorship. During this period improvements have been made to the exit and entrances to the Rising Bridge roundabout with dialogue ongoing for improving the centre island.

4.8 Recommendation 5:- That consideration be given to looking at new ways of working to provide flexibility of working practices.

4.8.1 There is currently a pilot scheme taking place in South Ribble where the Council and Lancashire County Council agreed for South Ribble to carry out grass cutting to highway verges borough wide. Rossendale Borough Council, have asked to be a part of the next pilot.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER

5.1. The Task and Finish recommendations have budget implications. Any financial implications outside the Council's approved budget would require approval of full council. However, the Councils approved Medium Term Financial Strategy has agreed to Key assumption 1, being “no supplementary estimates will be approved which commit to costs in future years”.

6. MONITORING OFFICER

6.1 No Comments

7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

7.1 No Comments

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1. The purchase of a side-arm flail from capital will have to be considered as part of the 2010/11 budget process along with the extra revenue required for operation.
- 8.2. There is a real possibility of entering in to a contract with both Hyndburn and Rochdale Councils in place of purchasing a side-arm flail, however the extra revenue would need to be considered in the 2010/11 budget process
- 8.3. Where improving services can be achieved within existing resources, this is already being implemented.
- 8.4. For Rossendale to increase the quantity of cuts untimely, a re-profiling of resources needs to be undertaken and or additional revenue required. If the latter is the preferred option, this needs to be included in the 2010/11 budget setting process.
- 8.5. It has been identified that Rossendale are also maintaining a number of sites where ownership is in the private sector, ownership of these sites and future direction needs to be agreed before additional revenue is approved.
- 8.6. Increases in grass cutting schedules have already been implemented in Rossendale's cemeteries, and further improvements are proposed for the future. In addition areas of grass are now being replaced with annual meadow flowers.
- 8.7. Both Rossendale and Lancashire County Council are now working more closely on coordinating grass cutting schedules, with Greenvale now being involved in discussions.
- 8.8. Rossendale are currently working with both the Highways Agency and Lancashire County council with regards to sponsorship, in particular the gyratory at Rising Bridge.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 9.1 That Cabinet notes the ongoing work being undertaken by officers in relation to implementing the recommendations of the Task and finish Group.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

- 10.1 None.

11. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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| Is a Community Impact Assessment required | Yes / No |
| Is a Community Impact Assessment attached | Yes / No |

12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required Yes / No

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment attached Yes / No

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No background papers