

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION

**Venue: Town Hall, Moorgate
Street, ROTHERHAM.
S60 2TH**

Date: Wednesday, 27th March, 2013

Time: 1.30 p.m.

A G E N D A

1. To determine whether the following items should be considered under the categories suggested in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended March 2006) of the Local Government Act 1972.
2. To determine any item(s) the Chairman is of the opinion should be considered later in the agenda as a matter of urgency.
3. Apologies for absence
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Questions from members of the public and the press
6. Communications
7. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 20th February, 2013 (Pages 1 - 6)
8. Scrutiny Review of Grounds Maintenance (report herewith) (Pages 7 - 30)
9. Improving Places Select Commission - Work Programme 2013/2014 (Officers to report)
10. Date, time and venue for the next meeting:- Tuesday, 16th April, 2013 at 1.30 pm at the Town Hall

Improving Places Select Commission: membership: -

Councillors Andrews, Astbury, Atkin, Dodson, Ellis, Falvey (Vice-Chairman), Foden, Gilding, Gosling, N. Hamilton, Havenhand, Jepson, Johnston, Read, P. A. Russell, Sims, Swift, Wallis, Whysall (Chairman), Wright.

Co-opted members: - D. Corkell, T. Roche and B. Walker.

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
20th February, 2013

Present:- Councillor Falvey (in the Chair); Councillors Andrews, Astbury, Atkin, Dodson, Ellis, Foden, Gosling, N. Hamilton, Jepson, Read, Sims, Swift, Wallis and Wright.

Together with co-opted members:- Messrs. T. Roche and B. Walker

Apologies for absence were received from Gilding, Havenhand, Johnston, P. A. Russell and Whysall.

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.

43. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or the press.

44. COMMUNICATIONS

None were received.

45. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION HELD ON 28TH NOVEMBER, 2012

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission, held on 28th November, 2012, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

46. TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 - SECTION 106 PLANNING OBLIGATIONS - PROGRESS

Further to Minute No. 39 of the meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 28th November, 2012, consideration was given to a report presented by the Planning Manager concerning agreements made under the provisions of Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

The submitted report detailed the information collated and updated from the first meeting of the Section 106 corporate officer steering group assessing how recipient services engage in the Section 106 process, the monies required from development, monies received and spent on specific projects and the investigation of the move away from Section 106 agreements towards a Community Infrastructure Levy for Rotherham. The appendix to the report included specific details of:-

(i) Section 106 agreements with financial obligations entered into for the financial years 2006/07 to 2012/13;

(ii) trigger points within Section 106 agreements reached during the period from 2006/07 to 2012/13;

(iii) payments made by developers and monies expended by the recipient service during the period from 2006/07 to 2012/13.

The report highlighted the following issues:-

(a) matters concerning specific Council services in receipt of Section 106 contributions – education and schools, green spaces (eg: play areas), libraries, contributions for affordable housing; highways and transportation (including public transportation); one example mentioned was the arrangement whereby planning permissions granted for large scale housing development sometimes lead to pressure upon places available at local schools, which can be mitigated by the developer making a contribution via a Section agreement;

(b) the financial procedures in place to ensure sound financial governance for Section 106 agreements; it was noted that Section 106 contributions are first of all paid into one central holding account and are immediately transferred to the accounts of the recipient Council service;

(c) reference was made to the use of powers under Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980, rather than Section 106 agreements, in respect of off-site highways mitigation works;

(d) the requirements of a Section 106 agreement must be reasonable, because the facility is available to a developer to challenge the terms of a S106 agreement which may not be realistic or reasonable; the heads of terms of Section 106 agreements are considered by the Planning Regulatory Board alongside the application for planning permission.

The Select Commission's discussion of this matter included the following issues:-

: Section 106 contributions are intended to mitigate the effects of the new development which has been allowed by the planning permission; it was acknowledged that the system could not and was not intended to resolve all issues within a community;

: contributions to open spaces and play areas – Members learned that there is no formal policy for the calculation of Section 106 contributions for green spaces/play areas;

: Section 106 contributions are sometimes paid in stages at various "trigger points", eg: according to the number of completed houses in respect of a large scale development;

: Section 106 agreements will include a clause which will require

developers to inform the Local Planning Authority when a trigger point has been reached;

: the current pressure upon primary school places, generally throughout the Borough area, was raised as a significant issue;

: specific issues concerning new residential development (eg: in the Wath-Manvers area, at Treeton, at Waverley and a number of other locations around the Borough area);

: all recipient services are consulted on major planning applications ie: 10 or more houses; recipient services use their policies / calculations to assess the application, for requirements for Section 106, at various thresholds eg:-

10 properties for education purposes

15 properties for the building of a proportion of affordable housing

50 properties for contributions to new open spaces and play areas

: contributions to the development of highways facilities – these are dependent upon an assessment of the number of journeys likely to be made by the vehicular traffic generated by the new development;

: the implications of not utilising the Section 106 contributions paid to the Council by developers; the Council could be required by the developer to return the money, although this has never occurred in Rotherham;

: the current use of Section 106 agreements is being phased out and will be replaced (by Government legislation) by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL); under the proposed new system, the Council has to prepare an inventory of the community infrastructure projects which are to be undertaken and funded by the CIL; this work continues and will be the subject of progress reports to Elected Members;

: it was noted that the principal beneficiary of Section 106 contributions should be the immediate area and community around the new development site; Members expressed concern that funds may be expended in other areas; however, the agreement specifies how the funds must be utilised, to mitigate the impact of the development and any alternative spending would have to be agreed with the developer and Planning Regulatory Board if it altered the terms of the original Section 106 agreement;

: it was noted that the passage of time from signing the Section 106 agreement, to payment/receipt of contributions, through to the Council's use of that funding might mean that the purchasing power of the initial contribution had been reduced by inflation; however, the value of contributions is index-linked and interest is added to the accounts of the recipient service;

: an issue was raised about commuted sums for continuing maintenance (eg: for open spaces), in the past a developer was required to carry out works on site and the Council would eventually adopt the open space (a Section 106 agreement was not required); later, Council policy changed and it became necessary for these maintenance costs to be borne by the developer and in most cases the Section 106 agreement would require a developer to set up a management company to look after open spaces on new developments;

: Section 106 contributions can only be used where the new development would cause a problem that requires mitigation; they would not be used to replace existing or previously approved sources of funding, eg: where Central Government funding is provided for the provision of a new school;

: Members questioned the provision of travel passes for use on public transport, which were often included as part of Section 106 agreements and contributions;

: the Local Plan Core Strategy includes an Infrastructure Delivery Plan; a whole plan viability assessment, which provides information about the infrastructure required to ensure future sites for development, will be acceptable.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That this Select Commission expresses some concerns about the Section 106 process and notes that these may be addressed with the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy.

(3) That progress reports about Section 106 contributions and the Community Infrastructure Levy be submitted to future meetings of the Improving Places Select Commission at regular intervals and at least on annual basis, with the first of such reports being submitted in six months' time; and such reports shall include:-

: details of the amounts of Section 106 contributions received by each Council service;

: details, from each recipient service, of the amount of money spent on each scheme (and any under-spending) which is the subject of a Section 106 agreement;

: details of forthcoming proposals which are likely to be the subject of Section 106 agreements and/or the Community Infrastructure Levy;

: details of Section 106 contributions already received by the Council, but not yet utilised;

: an explanation, from Children and Young People's Services, of the process used to ensure that sufficient Section 106 contributions are being

received for education purposes;

: details of the way in which the Council's Green Spaces Service will amend the Green Spaces Strategy so as to maximise the future use of Section 106 contributions and the Community Infrastructure Levy;

: information concerning the provision of travel passes, as part of Section 106 agreements, from the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive.

(4) That this Select Commission suggests that consideration be given to allocating responsibility to the Area Assembly Co-ordinating meetings to monitor the use of Section 106 contributions and the Community Infrastructure Levy in their respective areas of the Borough.

(5) That a further request be made to the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive for information about the provision of travel passes as part of Section 106 contributions.

(6) That Council Falvey be nominated as the representative of the Improving Places Select Commission on the Section 106 corporate steering group and further consideration be given to the need increase Elected Member representation on the steering group.

47. IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION - WORK PROGRAMME 2012/2013

Further to Minute No. 24 of the meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 5th September, 2012, discussion took place on the Select Commission's work programme for the 2012/2013 Municipal Year. Members noted the following details:-

(i) Housing issues: repairs have been considered and the allocations policy will be considered at the next meeting of this Select Commission, to be held on 27th March, 2013;

(ii) progress reports about potholes and about the Grounds Maintenance review report will be submitted to the meeting on 27th March, 2013;

(iii) off-road motor cycle nuisance – to be considered at the meeting of this Select Commission to be held on 16th April, 2013.

In addition, Members made the following suggestions of topics to be included within the Select Commission's work programme:-

: Council housing rents and supplementary charges for community rooms and laundry charges;

: community assets/community right to buy;

: future use of community buildings;

: Council housing finance (eg: housing revenue account; the programme of new building and funding for the maintenance of the existing housing stock).

Members were asked to contact the Scrutiny Manager with any other suggested topics.

Resolved:- That the details of the Select Commission's work programme be received.

48. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved: - [1] That the next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission take place on Wednesday 27th March, 2013, starting at 1.30 pm at the Town Hall, Rotherham.

[2] That, in view of the cancellation of the January, 2013, meeting, a further meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission be held on Tuesday, 16th April, 2013, starting at 1.30 pm at the Town Hall.

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - REPORT TO MEMBERS
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1.	Meeting:	Improving Places Select Commission
2.	Date:	27 th March 2013
3.	Title:	Grounds Maintenance Review
4.	Directorate:	Resources

5. Summary

The report includes the final report of the sub group established to implement a scrutiny review of the Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing services, following discussion at the Commission's meeting in July 2012. The full report is attached as an appendix.

6. Recommendations

That Select Commission members:

- **Endorse the findings and recommendations of the report and make any amendments as necessary**
- **Agree for the report to be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and then Cabinet**
- **For the Cabinet response to the recommendations be fed back to the Improving Places Select Commission**

7. Proposals and details

A full report was presented to the Improving Places Select Commission on the 25th July 2012, regarding the Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing services. Following some very detailed discussion it was agreed that a review of the services was required. It was noted that officers were already committed to conducting a review in October/November of 2012, however, Members felt very strongly that they needed to be involved in the review as they were responsible for making the budget decisions. A joint Member/officer review was therefore agreed.

The agreed objectives of the review were:

- To analyse the impact of budget cuts to the service
- To ensure that risk and impact assessments have been fully considered and are in place for the future
- To develop practical suggestions for improvement of the service within budget
- To consider invest to save options

An initial officer review was completed and was the focus of the early discussions held by the review group. This focused on Grounds Maintenance and looked at the areas of grass cutting, weed killing, shrub/flower beds and hedges and rural verges, considering each of the agreed objectives as listed above.

Members of the review group went on to explore this paper in more detail and a key issue that arose was the integrated nature of the Grounds Maintenance Service and Street Cleansing services. For this reason, the review included issues and suggestions relating to both service areas.

Cabinet Members with relevant portfolios and other ward councillors were also consulted as part of the process. The resulting recommendations were specifically relating to each of these services, as well as some more overarching and general recommendations. There were three main themes emerging from these findings:

1. Flexibility of resources

This includes a set of recommendations around the need to be more flexible in the use of staffing resources and also around schedules and resource distribution.

2. Local feed back and support

A key finding was the need to improve communications both with the public and elected members. The recommendations make some practical suggestions about how this can be achieved.

3. Information sharing

The recommendations in this section look at clarifying roles and responsibilities of the cabinet portfolios and also how different services can share information and intelligence to ensure resources are targeted effectively.

8. Finance

The recommendations in this report relate to use of existing resources more effectively.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The main risks identified with this area of work are the reputational risks associated with the increasing levels of dissatisfaction with the general public. There are also risks associated with the physical impact of the declining frequency of service delivery.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

This review supports the Corporate Plan priority “Improving the environment”

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Details can be found in the main report appended to this paper.

12 Contact

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Scrutiny review: Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing

Review of the Improving Places Select
Commission

November – December 2012

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Executive Summary

The aim of the review:

The review group was made up of the following members:

- Cllr Chris Read (Chair)
- Cllr John Swift
- Cllr Jenny Andrews
- Cllr Alan Atkin
- Cllr Sue Ellis
- Cllr Clive Jepson

Summary of findings and recommendations

The agreed objectives of the review were:

- To analyse the impact of budget cuts to the service
- To ensure that risk and impact assessments have been fully considered and are in place for the future
- To develop practical suggestions for improvement of the service within budget
- To consider invest to save options

An initial officer review was completed and was the focus of the early discussions held by the review group. This focused on Grounds Maintenance and looked at the areas of grass cutting, weed killing, shrub/flower beds and hedges and rural verges, considering each of the agreed objectives as listed above.

Members of the review group went to on to explore this paper in more detail and a key issue that arose was the integrated nature of the Grounds Maintenance Service and Street Cleansing services. For this reason, the review included issues and suggestions relating to both service areas.

Cabinet Members with relevant portfolios and other ward councillors were also consulted as part of the process. The resulting recommendations were specifically relating to each of these services, as well as some more overarching and general recommendations. There were three main themes emerging from these findings:

1. Flexibility of resources
2. Local feed back and support
3. Information sharing

The recommendations have therefore been grouped under these headings.

1. Flexibility of resources

- a. That the options put forward as part of the initial officer review (appended to this report) that have not been explored further as part of this review be supported in principle and subject to further detailed consideration for ways of improving services and reducing costs.
- b. That the areas detailed in section 5.1, and summarised below are subject to further detailed consideration and proposed actions reported back:
 - Use of spare capacity of green waste collection operatives on a Grounds Maintenance winter schedule
 - Urban gardening as an alternative to shrubs
 - Employment of member of staff to identify sites for alternative use/disposal
 - Waiver of legal fees for disposal of sites
 - Promotion of Streetpride's grounds maintenance service to schools
 - Opportunities for grass retardant spraying
 - Dealing with over grown rural junctions
 - Consortium for purchase of equipment
- c. That the Council considers the adoption of a Town/Village centre standard for Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing that focuses resources in these areas using the Parish Network where appropriate.
- d. That, subject to a positive full evaluation of the pilot, the Council purchasing further Billy Goat machines as and when resources allow.
- e. That the response times for racist and homophobic graffiti is changed from 4 hours to 24 hours, to allow greater flexibility of resources and ensure this target can be met.
- f. That a study is completed to identify the most effective use of diminishing staff resources

2. Local feedback and support

- a. That customer contact is improved by the following and that this information is used to inform the Town/Village Centre standard:
 - Recording contacts with geographical information to gather intelligence on trends and patterns.
 - Weekly lists of big works and schemes
 - Monitoring of standards and reporting back to customers who complain

- b. That ways to involve the community and generate civic pride are explored including:
- The development of an accredited volunteer scheme.
 - Making the right tools for the job available for members of the community who wish to assist with neighbourhood tidying
 - Consideration of how the Streetpride Champions initiative could be re-invigorated or replaced.
 - Councillors and staff to become eyes and ears in the community

3. Information Sharing

- a. That an exercise to assess over used and under used bins is completed with a view to moving existing bins in line with its findings and that the following methods are used to maintain this over time:
- Staff on the ground to monitor usage
 - Engagement with Planning on bins at application stages and ward members when removing bins
 - Monitoring of shopping areas
- b. That Cabinet consider any ways in which the Cabinet portfolios covering this area could be clarified and simplified.
- c. That all pilots and initiatives generated as a result of this review are evaluated fully and progress is reported back to the relevant Cabinet Member.

1. Why members wanted to undertake this review?

A full report was presented to the Improving Places Select Commission on the 25th July 2012. Following some very detailed discussion it was agreed that a review of the service was required. It was noted that officers were already committed to conducting a review in October/November of 2012, however, Members felt very strongly that they needed to be involved in the review as they were responsible for making the budget decisions. A joint Member/officer review was therefore agreed.

It would also aim to support the achievement of the following Council priorities from the Corporate Plan:

- Improving the environment

The stated objectives of the review were to consider, as follows:

- To analyse the impact of budget cuts to the service
- To ensure that risk and impact assessments have been fully considered and are in place for the future
- To develop practical suggestions for improvement of the service within budget
- To consider invest to save options

2. Terms of reference

The work of the review group was conducted over three separate meetings during November and December 2012. The first meeting considered the initial officer review completed on Grounds Maintenance. The subsequent meetings considered further detailed evidenced submitted by Streetpride and heard from Cabinet Members for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods and Waste and Emergency Planning. Views from other ward members were also sought to supplement this evidence.

The review has been provided with technical support by Steve Hallsworth, Streetpride. Other witnesses that contributed to the review were:

- David Burton, Director of Streetpride
- Richard Jackson, Streetpride
- Councillor Rose McNeely, Cabinet Member, Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods
- Councillor Richard Russell, Cabinet Member, Waste and Emergency Planning
- Councillor Maggie Godfrey
- Councillor Emma Hoddinott

3. Evidence

The majority of the evidence gathered as part of this review was from the Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing Service and was received in both written and verbal form. An initial officer review on the Grounds Maintenance Service was

carried out prior as a starting point for the review. This is attached as Appendix A. A range of supplementary documents and evidence was then requested which is listed in Appendix B and can be made available as background documents to this review.

4. Background

The grounds maintenance and street cleansing functions are now part of the Leisure and Community Services Team within Streetpride. The Grounds Maintenance service was brought back in-house and integrated with the Street Cleansing service in January 2010 after almost two decades of being contracted through outside providers.

The Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing integrated service is divided into two delivery teams.

- Eastern Team: working from Barbers Avenue Depot, Kiveton Park Depot and Hellaby Depot.
- Western Team: working from Oaks Lane Depot and Ulley Country Park.

Staff numbers in Grounds Maintenance have reduced from 43 in 2011/12 to 25 currently and will further reduce to 20 in 2013/14. Staff numbers in Street Cleansing have reduced from 54 to 41.

Their work includes general grass maintenance, shrub and rose bed maintenance, hedge maintenance, fine turf, horticultural services including seasonal bedding displays, scheduled litter picking and emptying of litter and dog waste bins.

There is also a Miscellaneous Cleansing Team Based at Hellaby Depot that provides the following services: mechanical sweeping, graffiti removal, fly tip removal, weed killing, leaf removal, and response to other cleansing issues (e.g. road traffic accidents). There is also a specific cleansing team based and dedicated to Rotherham town centre.

Leisure and Community Services has been affected by the Council's need to find savings as part of the Government's austerity measures and as such the Council's Cabinet approved total budget savings of £2,472,000 over the period 2011/12 to 2013/14. The total savings relating directly to the delivery of grounds maintenance and street cleansing services is £1,683,500. This equates to % of the total budget.

The reduction in the grounds maintenance budget has resulted in a change to the grass cutting schedules. Up to 2010/11 general grass cutting took place across the borough on a two weekly cycle, in 2011/12 this was reduced to 3-weekly and at the start of this year's cutting season the budget could only accommodate a three weekly cycle from 2nd April, reducing to a five weekly cycle from the beginning of July. This means that the grass will grow to a greater height between cuts and the cuttings that remain after work has taken place will be greater and more visible.

The savings required from the street cleansing budget have resulted in a reduction in the scheduled litter picking and in the frequency that litter and dog waste bins are emptied. Areas previously scheduled for work 2 or 3 times per week have been reduced to once 1 per week, with the exception of parks which remain the same; areas previously scheduled for work once every 3 weeks are now done

monthly, and areas previously scheduled for work every 9 weeks are now done every 10 weeks.

The treatment of weeds has been reduced from twice yearly, to only once a year.

In August one of the three mechanical sweepers was withdrawn and a new schedule for the two remaining sweepers drawn up.

The changes to the grounds maintenance and street cleansing services, including reduced frequency of operations for grass cutting and litter picking and the emptying of dog waste and litter bins, have resulted in an increase in the level of dissatisfaction of customers .

5. Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing

5.1 Grounds Maintenance.

The review group welcomed the work provided by Streetpride Officers and noted the suggestions being made. They used this paper for their initial deliberations but noted that they would require further work on them before they could agree to them. It was also noted that the proposals should be subject to consultation with stakeholders (e.g.wild flower planting)

The review group expressed concern about the changes to grass cutting schedules in particular changes to the frequency of grass cutting. It was noted that the driving force behind this was the budget cuts that were implemented in the previous year, however it was felt that a stronger evidence base or rationale was required for the changes . Members were concerned about the lack of flexibility in the schedules and that this has been an unintended secondary effect of the budgets cuts.

Members of the review group discussed the proposals from the initial officer review in detail, with the officers concerned. This resulted in the following findings:

- Use of spare capacity of green waste collection operatives (from the 41 fte staff) during winter by the development of a winter schedule of works to deal with the back log in Grounds Maintenance.
- Urban gardening should be considered as an alternative option to planting shrubs. This could be explored in partnership with Rotherham in Root, run by Groundwork. The starting point for taking this work forward would be the identification of suitable sites. The review group understood during discussions that work to identify sites was already being taken forward by officers, including those sites not yet subject to reduced schedules and options for disposal or alternative use.
- When disposal of land is being considered the Council could look at waiving legal fees – with appropriate safeguards and a simple procedure, for example the sale only benefits one property. Ward members should be made aware of any of these changes. Priority should be given to community organisations, schools, community centres etc.. Schools could be proactively targeted with this, looking at the whole site.

- The review group members supported the idea of appointing a person to carry out this work as it could be a good example of spend to save.
- In noting that Streetpride were in the process of trialling grass retardant spraying, consideration should be given as to how this might be rolled out if successful. Timescales and the process for evaluation are required.
- Schools who have purchased their grounds maintenance service from elsewhere due to costs may be prepared to consider coming back to Streetpride as a result of receiving an inferior service elsewhere. Streetpride should consider targeting these schools to see if any would prefer to buy the services of Streetpride grounds maintenance due to the higher quality.
- Overgrown junctions in rural areas not being effectively monitored and this could lead to a road safety issue. This should be addressed.
- Explore the possibility for a consortium for purchase of equipment. It was recognised that this might be a longer term objective, however it was felt that there may be potential to save money via this route.

5.2 Street Cleansing.

The review group considered a number of issues regarding this area of work. This included the use of bins, the issue of targeting services in certain areas of the Borough, and customer response times. The main point about the effect of budget cuts on timetables was re-iterated and again greater flexibility was recommended.

The group felt that an exercise was required to identify over and under used bins. This was required to ensure that bins are located in the right place. There were also a number of recommendations made about how to monitor and gather intelligence on this both for the exercise and on an ongoing basis. This included:

- Use of staff on the ground to monitor and use local knowledge and intelligence
- Engagement with planning – more up front dialogue and consideration on location and size of bins with applications
- Monitor shopping areas, using enforcement officers knowledge where appropriate.

It was noted that costs involved in carrying out this piece of work do not necessarily result in savings down the line (i.e not a spend to save initiative) however it was felt that the reputational gains and reductions in complaints received about this issue would make it worthwhile. For this reason it is suggested that it is done gradually over time with small savings on the budget. The review group members also recognised the sensitive nature of this piece of work, particularly associated with removal of bins, however this is being recommended where they are being under used.

Members of the review group have become aware of plans for the removal of concrete bins, during the completion of this review, and have expressed concern about the lack of consultation with Ward members. As many as 250 of these bins are under consideration for removal. The review group would strongly recommend that consultation should take place and a range of options be considered.

The review group considered the previous policy focus on strategic gateways into the Borough and concluded that this was no longer current. Cabinet members even appeared to be unclear about the status of this policy. They also considered the

impact on street cleansing issues of the Council's policy to focus on the 11 most deprived areas of Rotherham. The conclusion was drawn that the most visible parts of the Borough to the residents are the village and town centres, regardless of their level of deprivation. They are therefore recommending to the Council the introduction of a village/town standard (not including Rotherham Town Centre). It is further recommended that the dedicated operatives (lengthsmen) resources are focused on these centres. It was noted that this recommendation is not just about physical appearance but also contributes to the economic resilience of areas. This is of increased importance as the Local Authority will now retain a proportion of local business rates.

The review group considered the way in which the Billy Goat machine had been piloted in Rotherham and noted that so far this seemed to have been a success. They recommended therefore that as and when small amounts of budget become available and subject to the pilot being deemed as successful when it is fully evaluated, more of these machines are purchased.

Finally, in this area, the group considered the response times for graffiti. They were concerned that different response times for example, 4 hours for racist or homophobic graffiti may be unrealistic and create a lack of flexibility around the deployment of resources. For this reason the group considered that a more realistic response time might be 24 hours and recommend that the potential savings associated with this be calculated. It was also felt that this would impact positively on customer expectations as it is more realistic.

5.3 Customer contact.

The group felt very strongly that communications with the public over the delivery of these services needed to improve. They noted that information was not readily available about complaints on a geographic basis and observed a lack of clarity about how customer feed back is logged. Suggested ways of improving this were:

- Customer contacts should be recorded with geographical information so that trends and patterns can be mapped and therefore resources deployed appropriately. This could be used over time following the adoption of a Village/Town Standard, to refine it. This information should be reported to Ward members on a monthly basis.
- Producing weekly lists – what is planned and where for the week ahead. This should include big works and schemes (road closures due to litter picking and grass cutting). The group recommended learning from Planning who do this currently and whether it could be adapted for Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing.
- Monitoring of standards required and adjusting them as appropriate, being clear with people what they can expect, and communicating this back to people who submit reports. This is becoming a growing problem and therefore of increasing importance.

5.4 The role of the community.

In recognition of the increasing pressure on resources and the impact of cuts made already, the review group gave consideration to the ways in which greater value for money could be achieved with the involvement of the wider community. They could see the benefit to be derived from the use of volunteers within Streetpride and recommended that this should be an accredited scheme. It was felt, however, that such volunteers should be distinguishable from regular members of staff. In light of this they expressed concern that the existing volunteer scheme gave volunteers the same uniform and shift pattern as regular employees.

They also supported measures to increase the level of civic pride within the community and their ability to help themselves around grounds maintenance and litter picking. Making the right tools available to encourage neighbourhood tidying could be one way to achieve this.

The group felt that there is an indication that the Streetpride Champions initiative has run its course. It is suggested therefore that officers consider this for the future, looking at, for example, how many people attend the meetings.

It was also considered that as well as the wider community, Councillors and all staff could have a role to play being the “eyes and ears” on the ground therefore the Council could encourage a corporate approach to reporting issues.

5.5 Cabinet Member portfolios

As part of the review process, the four Cabinet Members with a relevant portfolio were consulted. The cabinet members for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods and for Waste and Emergency Planning attended one of the review group meetings. The Cabinet Members for Regeneration and Development and for Culture and Tourism were unable to take part in this meeting.

It was observed by the review group that the services cut across potentially four portfolios and that this was creating confusion as to who the lead Cabinet member for this area was both for members of public and also amongst members themselves. One of the recommendations of the group to create a more flexible management of resources and schedules at a local level, would be easier to manage with one line of accountability for both Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing. It is therefore suggested that a clarification and simplification of the Cabinet Member roles for this area could be considered. This links into section 5.6 below and difficulty with interrogating the budget lines for these services.

5.6 Further reviews and evaluation

During the review, the group discussed early ideas with Streetpride officers. It is understood that initial investigations have been instigated as result of the review and that work on the following will be reported back early 2013:

- Review of sites (see section 5.1)

- Review of schedules looking at altering frequency in areas of high volume and a pilot in one area where the schedule is removed and on the ground intelligence to flex resources is used instead, with a view to rolling this out if deemed successful.
- Review of bins (see section 5.2)

It was noted that pilots could be used to test out ideas for service improvement that lead to cost savings and have been already, for example, Billy Goats. The group wish to stress the importance of these pilots being properly evaluated before any longer term decisions can be made based on them. They also found that detailed impact assessments should be required for any future budget cuts and that they need to allow for unintended impacts. The group were unable to make any detailed conclusions about the budget situation for these two services, as there was a lack of information available to do this. This recommendation should apply to all services and not just the ones in scope of this review.

6. Summary of recommendations.

Flexibility of resources

1. That the options put forward as part of the initial officer review (appended to this report) that have not been explored further as part of this review be supported in principle and subject to further detailed consideration for ways of improving services and reducing costs.
2. That the areas detailed in section 5.1, and summarised below are subject to further detailed consideration and proposed actions reported back
 - Use of spare capacity of green waste collection operatives on a Grounds Maintenance winter schedule
 - Urban gardening as an alternative to shrubs
 - Employment of member of staff to identify sites for alternative use/disposal
 - Waiver of legal fees for disposal of sites
 - Promotion of Streetpride's grounds maintenance service to schools
 - Opportunities for grass retardant spraying
 - Dealing with over grown rural junctions
 - Consortium for purchase of equipment

3. That the Council considers the adoption of a Town/Village centre standard for Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing that focuses resources in these areas using the Parish Network where appropriate.
4. That, subject to a positive full evaluation of the pilot, the Council purchasing further Billy Goat machines as and when resources allow.
5. That the response times for racist and homophobic graffiti is changed from 4 hours to 24 hours, to allow greater flexibility of resources and ensure this target can be met.
6. That a study is completed to identify the most effective use of diminishing staff resources

Local feedback and support

7. That customer contact is improved by the following and that this information is used to inform the Town/Village Centre standard:
 - Recording contacts with geographical information to gather intelligence on trends and patterns.
 - Weekly lists of big works and schemes
 - Monitoring of standards and reporting back to customers who complain
8. That ways to involve the community and generate civic pride are explored including:
 - The development of an accredited volunteer scheme.
 - Making the right tools for the job available for members of the community who wish to assist with neighbourhood tidying
 - Consideration of how the Streetpride Champions initiative could be re-invigorated or replaced.
 - Councillors and staff to become eyes and ears in the community

Information Sharing

9. That an exercise to assess over used and under used bins is completed with a view to moving existing bins in line with its findings and that the following methods are used to maintain this over time:
 - Staff on the ground to monitor usage
 - Engagement with Planning on bins at application stages and ward members when removing bins
 - Monitoring of shopping areas
10. That Cabinet consider any ways in which the Cabinet portfolios covering this area could be clarified and simplified.

11. That all pilots and initiatives generated as a result of this review are evaluated fully and progress is reported back to the relevant Cabinet Member.

7. Future monitoring.

The recommendations contained within this report, that are subsequently agreed by the Cabinet, should be monitored on a six monthly basis and reported to the Improving Places Select Commission

8. Background Papers

Report to Improving Places Select Commission - Leisure and Community Services: affects of budget savings on grounds maintenance and street cleansing schedules. Dated 25th July 2013.

9. Thanks

Thanks for their support and assistance with this review go to David Burton, Steve Hallsworth and Richard Jackson from Streetpride, to the Cabinet Members, Councillors McNeely and Richard Russell, and also to Councillors Godfrey and Hoddinott for their ideas and suggestions.

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Appendix A
Streetpride: Leisure & Community Services
Review of Grounds Maintenance and Weed Killing Operations October / November 2012

1. Background information

1a. Customer contacts pre and post budget saving implementation.

Month	No contacts 2012	3 year average 2009, 2010, 2011
April	106	100
May	141	97
June	215	128
July	193	143
Aug	238	113
Sept	159	92
Total	1052	727

45 % Increase in contacts in 2012 compared to 3 year average (2009-2011)

1b. Customer contacts for 2012 by type

Month	Grass Maintenance	Hedge Maintenance	Horticultural Features	Pesticides	Sports Maintenance	Other	Total
April	92	4	7	0	0	0	103
May	119	8	6	0	0	0	133
June	128	36	22	2	2	17	207
July	96	52	25	0	1	14	188
Aug	144	44	32	0	1	11	232
Sept	86	43	18	0	1	3	151
	665	187	110	2	5	45	1,014
3 Year	337	126	116	3	2	29	613

Average							
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2. Key Issues

2a. Grass cutting: What's changed? 2010/11 cut every 2 wks; 2011/12 cut every 3 wks; 2012/13 cut every 3 wks (Apr-Jul) then every 5 wks (Aug – Oct); (2013/14 **cut every 5 wks**) *except in parks and recreation grounds which is still every 2 weeks*

Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grass grows longer between cuts • Significantly more grass clippings after each cut • Cut is less effective (e.g. sections can appear uncut / spring back up after mowers have moved on) and certain areas need a double cut which slows operations and affects ability to deliver the schedule. • Increased breakdown of smaller machinery due to inability to cope with longer grass. • Reduced capacity to deal with pressures created by extreme weather conditions • Reduction in skills base affects flexibility of the whole team to carry out scheduled work during sickness / leave. • Increase in shredded cans, bottles, litter as more difficult to remove prior to cutting • Significant increase in complaints from residents and Ward Members • Increase in accumulation of litter due to longer grass • Deterioration of the general environment • Increase in manager / supervisor time responding to contacts and related impact on service management tasks.
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased risk of slips due to long grass falling onto paths and increased clippings being blown onto paths and more difficult to see surface hazards, possibly leading to increase in insurance claims • Increased risk of fire during dry weather • Service's ability to attract new clients • Council and service reputation
Actions already taken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teams rescheduled and working arrangements adjusted to ensure as efficient deployment as possible
Suggestions for improvement of the service within budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selective reduction in the areas that are 'fully maintained' in order to release some capacity (e.g. Parks and Highway verges) • Reduce the impact of leave and sickness by adapting process for seasonal recruitment • Revert to a standardised 37 hour week (impact of this needs to be investigated)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Split shift pattern and 7 day working pattern - both require supervision and management by permanent staff. Equipment costs mostly remain the same but staffing costs increase to an unaffordable level. • Broaden skills of remaining full time staff in order to cover leave / sickness etc • Burn in certain football pitch lines with chemical on a selected site to trial whether it would be cost effective at the end of the season for the following season • Change to flail head mowers from rotary mowers on pedestrian machines to help cut long grass on the five week grass cutting cycle • Continue to develop structured approach to the use of volunteers • Explore opportunities to introduce 'cut and remove' by third party (e.g. farmer for hay crop)
Invest to save options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase specialised grounds maintenance equipment at the end of the current contract (2015). This proposal would require a maintenance contract and the level of investment would be high in the first year.

2b. Weed killing: What's changed? 2010/11 – 2 treatments per year; 2011/12 – 1 treatment per year; 2012/13 – 1 treatment per year; (2013/14 – 1 treatment *per year*)

Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas sprayed early in schedule experience regrowth. • Increase in build up of detritus on highway • Increased weed growth • Contribution to the deterioration of highway • Damage and trip hazards in block paving, steps, etc • Deterioration of the general environment • Significant increase in customer contacts • Removal of one large mechanical sweeper (3 sweepers down to 2, Aug. 2012) means reduced frequency leading to increased detritus which in turn leads to increased weed growth
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem will increase year on year - the less we sweep detritus the more weed will grow the following year. • Not removing the dead weeds adds to the detritus issue. • Slipping hazard on some footways • Access issues on some narrow footpaths • Loss of customers / income • Council and service reputation
Actions already taken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some weekend working to support catch up due to wet weather (can't spray when wet) • Invest in Billy Goat sweepers to deal with cigarette butts and hard to reach litter (e.g. under benches) and remove detritus from footways. £1800 each - one purchased, if successful further 2 may be purchased.
Suggestions for improvement of the service within budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore efficiencies created by integrating operation with grounds maintenance schedules • Store weed kill in a dedicated container at Hellaby to save time on current travel to store at Kiveton Park.
Invest to save	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further investment in Billy Goat sweepers x2

options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in weed spraying attachment for large mechanical sweepers to reduce weeds in channels
2c. Shrub/Flower Beds & Hedges: What's changed? Reduced resource means this schedule is too large to be completed in any one year.	
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 300,000m2 of shrub beds (pruning, weeding and hoeing) only 60% of these receive 1 visit per year. Priority is given to health and safety, schools, parks and high volume contacts Increased growth Deterioration of the general environment Significant increase in customer contacts Potential deterioration of sight lines and increase in road safety issues
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem will increase year on year - the less we visit the more the beds will overgrow Health and safety issues regarding pedestrian movements Increase in anti social behaviour. Litter, weeds and detritus in shrub beds causing increase in reports of vermin. Deterioration of gateways and impact on businesses and visitors
Actions already taken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teams have been reorganised to ensure as efficient deployment as possible. End of year removal of certain shrub beds and replace with grass seed. Established list for potential removal should further funding become available. Shrub bed areas prioritised for action based on customer contacts and individual street scene issues.
Suggestions for improvement of the service within budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a long term programme of works to remove shrub beds that are overgrown and can't be maintained on a regular basis. Review flower beds in parks with view to reducing number / size Flexible working in Waste Management Service may release some resources to accelerate the programme of shrub removal / reduction.
Invest to save options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mechanical removal of shrub beds to achieve an expedient efficient method of operation at a rate of approximately £10 per m2 and replacement with soil and seed to allow for easier maintenance. An evaluation of the condition of the shrub beds needed to establish which areas can be removed and which remain because they are beneficial to the neighbourhood and therefore need increased maintenance

2d. Rural Verges: What's changed? 300 miles of verges previously cut on two occasions during the summer growing season (April to October), now cut over a 32 week period (May to June and October to March).

Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in operations means some areas are now cut out of grass growing season. This year increased growth due to wet summer caused problems for areas cut early in the year. Many areas now require further attention. • Removal of litter from the rural verges increasingly difficult as increase in height of grass makes removal prior to cutting very difficult.
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem will increase year on year - the less we visit the more the grass will overgrow • Health and safety issues for path and road users • Council and service reputation
Actions already taken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teams have been reorganised to provide staff to carry out this activity as efficiently as possible. • Evaluation of operation to establish if alternative method could be employed. Traffic Management experts being consulted.
Suggestions for improvement of the service within budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore reinstatement of part or whole of summer cutting schedule • Equipment is leased for 32 week to deliver the rural cuts.
Invest to save options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wild flower planting to reduce maintenance costs.

Appendix B – List of Evidence

- Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing Operations (2012/13)
- Leisure and Community Services (LCS), Street Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance Structure @ 1st November 2012.
- Impact of Budget Savings on the Grounds Maintenance Services
- Impact of Budget Savings on the Street Cleansing Service
- Impact of Budget Savings on Green Space Services (Grounds Maintenance services only)
- Work already undertaken
- Budget information
- Table of frequencies
- Customer contacts and enquiries by ward