

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Improving Places Select Commission
2.	Date:	25 th July 2012
3.	Title:	Leisure and Community Services: affects of budget savings on grounds maintenance and street cleansing schedules
4.	Directorate:	Streetpride

5. Summary

This report outlines changes made to grounds maintenance and street cleansing schedules as a result of Cabinet approved budget savings.

6. Recommendations

1. Members note the changes to the schedules

7. Proposals and details

The grounds maintenance and street cleansing functions are now part of the Leisure and Community Services Team within the Streetpride. The grounds maintenance service was brought back in-house and integrated with the 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.

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.

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 has 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 will be withdrawn. A new schedule for the two remaining sweepers is currently being worked on.

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 increased number of customer contacts from residents and Ward Members.

Appendix A and B provide further detail on the budget savings, reduced resources and impact on service.

Further Work

In respect of the changes to grounds maintenance schedules a full review of service provision will take place at the end of the season in October / November of this year. The purpose of this review will be to support decision making on the deployment of resources for the remainder of the year and into the financial year 2013/14 and beyond.

In respect of the changes to the street cleansing schedules an action plan (Appendix C) has already been established and a full review of service provision will take place early in the new year in order to support decision making on the deployment of resources for the remainder of the year and into the financial year 2013/14 and beyond.

8. Finance

Appendix A and B provide further detail on the relevant budget savings. It is important to note that in-year budget pressures and additional budget savings required during 2013/14 will require further amendments to the grounds maintenance schedules.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The need for service provision is significantly influenced by the weather conditions and by the behaviour of people in respect of their attitude to all forms of littering for example last year's particularly dry weather conditions limited the impact of changes in the grounds maintenance schedule, whilst this year the extended period of wet weather is compounding the situation by stimulating the growth of grass and other vegetation and at the same restricting work focused on weed killing.

The planned schedules for both grounds maintenance and street cleansing are already proving to be challenging to deliver and in certain areas they are not sufficient to meet the standards that residents of the borough have been accustomed to. Whilst the current deployment of resources will undergo a thorough review in the near future, it is not possible to determine at this point whether the level of resources is sufficient to deliver the standards set out in the ***Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse***.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The budget savings and resultant amended schedules have lead to changes in performance, which in turn will impact on certain service standards. A review of these standards is currently being undertaken and where necessary reports in respect of these matters will be taken to appropriate members.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse

12. Contact:

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