



To: Executive Councillor for Environmental and Waste Services: Councillor Jean Swanson
Report by: Adrian Ash - Interim Head of Streets and Open Spaces
Relevant scrutiny committee: Environment Scrutiny Committee 14th January 2014
Wards affected: All

Proposed Change to Subsidised Working with the County Council in relation to Grass Cutting of Highway Verges

Key Decision

1. Executive Summary

Cambridge City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council have operated a reverse agency agreement for a number of years. This agreement allows for each Authority to provide various highway related elements for the other, which includes maintenance functions.

The County Council are faced with financial saving requirements and, as part of the budget programme for 2014/15, it is proposed to review working with the County Council in relation to grass cutting of highway verges given these pressures

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended to agree the following principles to guide officer negotiations with Cambridgeshire County Council in relation to highway verge grass cutting:

1. Continue to put the case to the County Council for the retention of current levels of resource to safeguard the amenity of the existing green verges within the city;
2. Ensure that the subsidised element of highway grass cutting

which the City Council provides to the County Council continues to reflect the efficient use of resources and is affordable.

3. Background

- 3.1 Cambridge City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council have been partners in an agency agreement for a considerable time that provides for each Authority to carry out various highway related functions on behalf of the other. In terms of the City Council this included the maintenance of highway verges, ditches and trees in the city as well as highway weed kill operations.
- 3.2 Although the existing agreement expired on the 31st March 2013 the framework has remained in place, subject to agreement by both parties and operated on an informal basis. Further work is being undertaken to ensure a cost-effective approach to joint working on street management.

Budget Pressures

- 3.3 At the end of the previous financial year(2012/13) the County Council reduced their funding to the City Council by 25% lowering the number of grass cuts for highway verges that they directly paid for from 4 cuts a year to 3 cuts a year. The City Council maintained its subsidised cutting regime and carried out 9 cuts for the season. In total 12 cuts have been provided for during 2013/14.
- 3.4 At a meeting on the 18th December 2013 officers of the County Council advised that consideration was being given to further reducing funding of cutting highway grass verges. The latest position from the County Council is for this proposal to be implemented in 2015/16. These reductions in funding are part of a county wide approach whereby the level of grass cutting is reduced or, in areas outside the city, Parish Councils may increase their contribution.

Priorities for the City Council

- 3.5 It is recommended that the priorities for the City Council are two fold;

1. Continue to put the case to the County Council for the retention of current levels of resource to safeguard the amenity of the existing green verges within the city;
2. Ensure that the subsidised element of highway grass cutting which the City Council provides to the County Council continues to reflect the efficient use of resources and is affordable.

Service Implications

- 3.6 By its very nature the cutting of verges is influenced by seasonal aspects and is weather dependent. Currently City Council grounds maintenance staff carry out a work programme that ensures that highway verges are cut approximately every 10 to 12 days in the season.
- 3.7 The City Council's grounds maintenance team will carry out a review of how it could operationally deliver this service, its utilisation of resources and what equipment and machinery may be required for 2014/15.
- 3.8 Meetings are planned for January 2014 between the City and County Councils to review the future delivery of the service.

4. Implications

(a) Financial Implications

In 2013/14 the County Council contributes £45,150k for verge grass cutting and this is supplemented by the City Council with an additional £71,210k. It is proposed to maintain a contribution of £71,210k in the budget of the City Council for 2014/15.

(b) Staffing Implications

There are no direct implications for staff.

(c) Equal Opportunities Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

(d) Environmental Implications.

The City Council generally cuts the grass to ensure that people can use roads and pavements safely. Although environmental issues are of paramount concern, grass cutting is actually carried out for highway safety reasons rather than environmental purposes. However the grass cutting teams are instructed to cut and strim the grass and leave or blow back the arisings onto the verges where possible, this helps to reduce nutrient loss.

- +L: the proposal has a low positive impact.

(e) **Procurement**

N/A

(f) **Consultation and Communication**

The Consultation and communications with residents will take place if there is any change to the frequency of grass cutting to be carried out.

(g) **Community Safety**

There are no implications for community safety

5. Background Papers

List if Highway Verges

6. Appendices

None

7. Inspection of Papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

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