

18th October 2012**Agenda Item:10****REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR, HIGHWAYS****HIGHWAY ENVIRONMENTAL MAINTENANCE UPDATE****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update for Committee regarding the delivery of highway environmental maintenance during 2012 and improvements proposed for 2013.

Information and Advice

2. Highway environmental maintenance includes delivery of the following highway services:
 - a. Across the County the Council funds grass cutting of urban highway verges up to 5 times a year for highway safety purposes, including strimming around obstacles following the 2nd and 4th cuts. For cost purposes the cuttings are not collected. Some Town and Parish Councils deliver this service on behalf of the Council for example through the lengths-man schemes and often chose to fund an enhanced service themselves. Similarly some of the former Manage and Operate Partnerships (MOP), and previously some of the Districts under the agency arrangements, have in the past chosen to fund enhanced service themselves.
 - b. Rural highway verges are cut for highway safety reasons, two cuts of approximately 1m width plus visibility splays and usually two additional cuts of the visibility splays.
 - c. Spraying of weeds within the highway – kerbed channel at edge of carriageway and at back of footway where possible. Treatment usually repeated twice a year.
3. The transfer of highway services from Manage and Operate Partnerships (MOP) with Ashfield, Broxtowe and Mansfield District Councils back to the County Council on 1st April 2012 included an interim arrangement for 2012 for all three districts to continue the delivery of the highway grass cutting for that year only to allow the County Council additional time to prepare for the transfer of that service. The County Council has now appointed staff to seasonal roles to deliver the gritting and snow clearing this winter and the grass cutting next summer and is detailing the operational requirements. The County Council will maintain the current County standard of 5 cuts a year in these areas although they will no longer benefit from the additional investment from the District Councils.

4. The delivery of the weed spraying this year has been hindered by the exceptionally wet summer weather. The reasonable and legal requirement for all councils to avoid polluting the local environment whilst treating weeds requires the use of a systemic weed spray – i.e. this will not prevent weeds growing but is applied after they have appeared and is digested by the weed resulting in die-back over the following two weeks in common with most products available for domestic use. It also relies on dry weather not to wash the spray off before it has taken effect. Most weeds after they have died back will be removed through the usual sweeping of the highway which is undertaken by District Councils. In response to the extremely wet summer weather the County Council has this year arranged an additional weed spray across the County this autumn which will be completed later this month.

Proposed Improvements

5. Whilst the cutting of highway grass verges is primarily to ensure highway safety an opportunity to improve the quality would be to introduce strimming around obstacles for all 5 cuts. If this is introduced from the first cut in 2013 it is expected to cost approximately £14,250/cut or £42,750 a year.
6. Before the first highway grass verge cut in 2013 the County Council intends to provide improved schedule information for the public and also for colleagues at District Councils to assist with improved coordination with the delivery of their litter picking service.
7. Similarly before the first weed spray of the highway in 2013 the County Council intends to provide improved schedule information for the public and also for colleagues at District Councils to assist with improved coordination with the delivery of their road sweeping service.
8. The County Council is also investigating options to improve delivery of weed spraying should the wet summer weather conditions continue in future years.
9. It is noted that the growing season is gradually extending which may also require a future review of delivery of the highways environmental maintenance service.

Reasons for Recommendations

10. To note the current arrangements and consider proposed improvements to the highways environmental maintenance service.

Other Options Considered

11. The proposed service improvements are consistent with current expectations for service performance. An option to continue with present arrangements is likely to continue to fall below those expectations.
12. In order to deliver efficiency savings from these services including off-setting the improvements proposed, to ensure a County wide service standard and to maintain the efficiency of the gritting and snow clearing service through use of seasonal resources delivery of highway grass cutting has not been offered to the former MOP District

Councils beyond 2012.

13. Consideration has been given to the collection of grass cuttings following each of the 5 urban cuts. However the cost is estimated to be:

Purchase of replacement mowers £150,000 (14no.)

Cost of collection and disposal for 5 cuts across the County £187,000 a year

If operated it would be reasonable to expect some reduction in the running costs as efficient processes were developed.

Statutory and Policy Implications

14. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Implications for Service Users

15. These proposals will improve service provision.

Financial Implications

16. The proposals will require additional funding of £42,750 plus inflation to be made available in the highways revenue budget for 2013/14 and onwards.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

17. The proposals generally improve the environment for residents and road users.
18. The rural grass cutting is generally at the minimum standard required for highway safety but where the opportunity exists to further promote wild flower growth these will be considered through local reductions

RECOMMENDATION/S

It is RECOMMENDED that:

19. Committee notes the update of service delivery in 2012 is noted and approves that the weed spraying and grass cutting in the former MOP Districts is directly

delivered by the County Council from March 2013.

20. Committee approves an improved standard of grass cutting across the County from 2013 through strimming urban grass following every cut.

21. Committee approves no change to the current practice of not collecting grass cuttings from urban cuts.

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

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Constitutional Comments

22. Committee have power to decide the Recommendation.

Financial Comments [MA 10//10/12]

23. The costs of the additional works will need to be contained within the overall Highways Maintenance budget of the Transport and Highways Committee budget.

Background Papers

24. Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Report to Cabinet Member for Transport and Highways (1/3/2011), Changes to Highway Maintenance Policies.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All