

4th July 2013

Agenda Item:

REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR, HIGHWAYS

GRASS CUTTING UPDATE REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Committee with an update on grass cutting of highway verges in the County

Information and Advice

2. Highway verges and grassed areas that form part of the highway are cut by the County Council during the growing season between April and October each year. In towns and villages and other roads where the speed limit is 40mph or less the grass is cut five times per year. In rural areas where the speed limit is 50mph or above the grass is cut twice. Strimming around posts and along edges is carried out after each cut. The Countywide budget for grass cutting in 2013/14 is £780k with each urban cut costing approximately £96k.
3. Within each District there are substantial areas of amenity grass which are cut by the District Councils up to fourteen times per year. Where this amenity grass is adjacent to highway verge it can lead to expectation from local residents that the highway verge should be cut to the same frequency. However, this is often a reflection of the different uses of the grassed areas and perhaps unreasonable to incur the extra cost of cutting highway verges to the higher standard. However, strenuous efforts are made to co-ordinate the highway grass cutting with amenity grass cutting and other District Council functions such as litter picking. On high speed dual carriageways, other highway works such as street light repairs and gully emptying are also co-ordinated to minimise disruption
4. Most of the highway grass cutting is done by highways gangs who undertake winter service duties such as gritter driving between November and March and then do grass cutting during the summer months. There are also 30 Parish Councils that arrange grass cutting in their areas.

Grass Cutting of Highway Verges in Towns and Villages

5. In some areas of the towns and villages (urban cutting areas) and at some times over the last few weeks the cutting has been up to 3 weeks behind schedule due in part to the weather but in the main due to the new arrangements in place for

Ashfield, Broxtowe and Mansfield this year. The following actions and additional resources have been put in place in response to and to improve this situation:

- a. An additional 5 gangs have already been deployed through bringing in weed-spraying contractors and diverting the 5 in-house gangs to grass cutting achieving an immediate 23% increase in resources;
 - b. Most of the 22 staff are working over-time and weekends, effectively an immediate further 30% increase in resources;
 - c. 2 multi-hog machines and drivers have been diverted from the rural cut to the urban cut – a further 10% increase in resources;
 - d. In addition to this 63% increase in resources already deployed urgent negotiations are continuing with contractors to secure further resources estimated at another 20 to 30% increase;
 - e. An additional 7 gangs from the Council's Catering Cleaning and Landscape group are also able to support highway verge grass cutting alongside their current operation and these arrangements are being finalised.
6. These additional resources will address the timely delivery of the urban cut and the quality for the rest of this season. A further review will be undertaken to determine resources required in the future and the gangs will also have knowledge of the additional areas incorporated into this seasons arrangements.

Grass Cutting of Rural Highway Verges

7. 1 tractor is deployed in each district except Gedling where previous arrangements with an external contractor have been retained. Three further contractors have been employed to cover Broxtowe (1 tractor) and Newark (2 tractors) and these have been in place for around 6 weeks.
8. These 10 crews with some overtime on Saturday and Sunday have been able to keep the rural grass cutting to schedule.

Grass Cutting Schedules

9. A schedule showing when the highway grass is going to be cut in areas across each District is available on the County Council's website so that residents can see when the grass in their area is going to be cut.

Statutory and Policy Implications

10. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, 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.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) It is recommended that Committee note this report.

Andrew Warrington
Service Director Highways

For any enquiries about this report please contact:
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Constitutional Comments

11. Report for information

Financial Comments

12. Report for information

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All