

**Report of Steve Vowles, Head of Partnerships, East North East Homes Leeds.**

**Report to Inner East Area Committee**

**Date: 6th December 2012**

**Subject: East North East Homes Leeds Grounds Maintenance report**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

**Summary of main issues**

1. The quality of service has been of good standard considering the wet weather conditions.
2. East North East Homes Leeds Estate Services section has targeted resources to monitor this area of work, regularly monitoring 30 to 80% of assets cut.
3. East North East Homes Leeds monitor customer contacts and have not seen any increased activity concerning Grounds Maintenance.
4. Sheltered housing sites are being cut more frequently from June 2012.
5. Due to the severe weather conditions there have been increased levels of weed growth in shrub and rose beds, a schedule of additional maintenance visits has therefore been implemented.
6. An additional cut has been agreed by partners and this took place over a 3 to 4 week period during October and November.

**Recommendations**

1. Area Committee are requested to note the content of this report.

## **2 Purpose of this report**

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Area Committee of the work and progress made by the Grounds Maintenance contractor, Continental Landscapes, from April to November 2012.

## **3 Background information**

- 3.1 The citywide grounds maintenance contract was awarded to Continental Landscapes Ltd in August 2011 following a thorough procurement process. The contract is delivered on behalf of five clients, LCC Highways, Leeds ALMOs and Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation.
- 3.2 The contract is overseen by a Grounds Maintenance Project Board comprising managers from the clients and Strategic Landlord.

## **4 Main issues**

- 4.1 The prolonged wet weather caused the grass to grow much faster than normal during the summer and ground conditions made mowing slower with some areas not being accessible at all. The amount of grass cuttings left when the grass was cut gave the appearance of a poor quality cut in some areas. In particular the wet conditions had made some areas, such as banks, unsafe to cut
- 4.2 Continental Landscapes introduced additional teams and offered overtime to staff to maintain service. This was at no additional cost to East North East Homes Leeds (ENEHL) & partners, it delivered a better quality of cut as there was no undue delay between cuts.
- 4.3 Overall the quality of service has been of good standard considering the wet weather conditions. Continental Landscapes have been proactive in communicating with stakeholders such as Locality Management and local resident groups. They have also developed good working relationships with Britain In Bloom groups and Parish and Town Councils. They have provided a quick response to customer complaints and issues.
- 4.4 Residents may have noticed issues at some LCC Highways assets where there had been delays cutting adjacent to main roads and along high speed roads.
- 4.5 The quality of cutting at some sheltered housing sites had been an issue, these were being cut 13 times in the growing season. Many residents felt that it should be more frequent and this has subsequently been increased. Continental Landscapes have established dedicated teams to carry out this work.
- 4.6 The wet weather conditions encouraged unusual levels of weed growth in many of the shrub and rose beds. A schedule of additional maintenance visits was therefore agreed and completed by September 2012. This included removal of established weeds followed by a herbicide application when the weather

conditions were more favourable. Continental Landscapes have employed additional teams to carry out this work.

- 4.7 There have been some service quality issues, litter not being removed from grassed areas prior to being cut resulting in shredded litter, and grass cutting's not being cleared from hard surfaces following grass cutting. Both were raised with Continental Landscapes who carried out further training with staff and took formal action. We continue to monitor service quality, any issue are reported to the contractor and failure to respond results in contract deductions.
- 4.8 East North East Homes Leeds monitor customer contacts and have not seen any increased activity concerning Grounds Maintenance. We work with Continental Landscapes to ensure that they maintain a satisfactory standard of grass cutting across the area.
- 4.9 New specialist bank mowing machines were purchased by Continental Landscapes to ensure that all banked areas were cut safely.
- 4.10 The contract has been successful to date taking into account the difficult weather conditions, the appearance of green space is good and we need to ensure it is well maintained going into winter. An additional cut was therefore agreed by partners and this took place over a 3 to 4 week period during October and November.
- 4.11 At its meeting in June 2012, Leeds City Council's Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board acknowledged a request for Scrutiny made by Councillor Wadsworth in relation to the new grounds maintenance contract. The Scrutiny Board agreed to hold a working group meeting to discuss progress with the contract.
- 4.12 This working group meeting took place in August 2012. The meeting discussed key issues, the reasons for these and noted the actions taken to help address such issues in the future.
- 4.13 The key issues that may have affected residents in the Inner East area included litter picking; this was identified as an important issue and is managed through the monitoring processes. Continental Landscapes ensure that litter picking and cutting is completed in the same working day for each asset. However, it was highlighted that in some parts of the city litter was not being removed from grassed areas prior to being cut, resulting in shredded litter. However there were very few instances of this on Inner East assets.
- 4.14 Continental Landscapes have carried out further training with staff and where appropriate, taken formal action. We monitor any issues of this nature which are passed back for rectification.
- 4.15 Another common enquiry related to grass cutting's not being cleared from hard surfaces following grass cutting. The public perception is that grass cuttings should be collected, this is despite the fact that the collection of grass cuttings has never featured in any Leeds City Council grounds maintenance contract. Leeds City Council's Call Centre staff are being trained to respond effectively to

such complaints by explaining what is actually expected from the grounds maintenance staff in accordance with the contract.

- 4.16 Through the summer we increased the level of monitoring as we were not receiving many enquiries about the contract and not generally experiencing the issues reported by some Councillors at the working group. We are required to monitor 10% of assets completed during each cut cycle. Because of the Scrutiny working group, and the issues identified by some Councillors, it was decided to target resources in the Estate Services section to monitor this area of work. During cut 11 we monitored over 80% of assets cut (see appendix A).
- 4.17 Any non-compliance identified during the first monitoring visit is passed to the contractor for rectification. Any failures to rectify issues at the second monitoring visit results in a financial deduction from the contractor's payment.
- 4.18 ENEHL have a positive relationship with Continental, with 'first time right' rates being at very high levels. (Appendix A).
- 4.19 Continental Landscapes work closely with the Leeds City Council's Locality Teams to deal with issues around litter picking. They are keen to work more effectively together to deliver joined up services.
- 4.20 Performance monitoring is supported by estate walkabouts which give residents the chance to work with us to make our estates a better place to live. Residents are joined by their Housing Support Officer and other key staff who can help make improvements to the estate. They walk the estate together looking for anything which may make the estate look unsightly and can be improved. Walkabouts pick up any issues relating to the Grounds Maintenance contract as part of this work.
- 4.21 During 2011/12 a full review of the ENEHL Estate Walkabout procedure was undertaken which involved ENEHL tenants and staff, the review sought to extend the parameters by which we undertake Estate Walkabouts and transfer the responsibility from the ENEHL Partnerships Team to ENEHL Area Office staff.
- 4.22 The Walkabout process is fundamental to creating a sustainable and welcoming environment where people are proud to live. A pictorial guide is used to rate each area from 0 (poor) to 3 (excellent), depending on the condition of the area. The aim is to improve each area to an excellent standard, and the guide helps residents to be consistent and objective when rating an area.

From April 2012 the new process was introduced and we offer a minimum of 2 Walkabouts in all areas. This frequency can increase subject to negotiations with tenants and residents in respective areas if, because of serious deterioration in the environment or other issues, there is a need to do more. Invitations have been sent to Local Councillors and ENEHL Area Panel members who are welcome to attend any Walkabout in their area if they wish. We want to ensure that standard ratings are based upon customer perceptions rather than those of staff who are managing the respective area.

4.23 Between April & September, 75 walkabouts were carried out in the Inner east area, all were scored at 2 or 3 stars apart from the walkabout at Shakespeare Court in August where resident gave the area a 1 star rating. This subsequently led to a bid to ENEHL Area Panel to have resin bound surfacing applied to the grounds within the gated area at the back of the blocks. This is to replace the uneven flags currently there, the area is currently paved and has been a constant problem in terms of tripping hazards and maintenance. The proposals will enhance an existing ambitious large scale improvement project to the back of Shakespeare Tower blocks.

The new procedure shows a significant improvement in the number of Walkabouts we are now carrying out. It is encouraging to note that none of the Walkabouts so far have achieved a no star rating but there are areas where conditions are not perceived to be at the level that tenants and residents would prefer and where more concentrated efforts with various partner organisations may be required. We will be able to use these ratings to provide supportive information to Area Committee in the future.

4.24 The ENEHL Environmental Caretaking Teams carry out work in the environment. Their main activities involve the provision of a gardening service for elderly, vulnerable or disabled tenants who have no other assistance, clearing gardens at empty properties, removal of fly tipping and the removal of bulky refuse from communal areas at low and high-rise flats.

4.25 This work is not yet reported by Area Committee boundaries, the following work was carried out across the ENEHL area from April to September 2012;

Gardens cleared for elderly or vulnerable resident	858
Empty properties garden clearance	343
Fly tipping	55
Clearance of overgrown communal areas	488

4.26 ENEHL staff are instructed to remove any rubbish rather than determine which agency is responsible for collection in that location. We have a good working relationship with Area Management staff and Locality Teams. Joint working with the Locality Teams allows our Environmental Caretakers to collect white bags of litter picked up by Locality staff. This releases Locality Team resources for further litter picking and also to target work in Environmental Improvement Zones. This arrangement is currently in place in Seacroft and Gipton.

4.27 We have also worked closely with Locality Teams to assist clearing areas of litter and fly tipping where there are specific problems, for example Lincoln Green Road shops and the Nowells. Both partners work together to clear bin yards across the Inner east area.

## **5 Corporate Considerations**

## **5.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 5.1.1 Continental Landscapes staff and ENEHL Estate Services attend resident group meetings to promote issues and raise awareness. East North East Homes Leeds Area Panels receive briefings from Continental Landscapes staff and ENEHL Estate Services officers.

## **5.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 5.2.1 Equality Assessments were carried out throughout the Procurement process

## **5.3 Council policies and City Priorities**

- 5.3.1 The service delivered by Continental Landscapes contributes to themes in the City Priority Plan, best city for communities & best city to live.

It also makes a major contribution to ENEHL Decent Places agenda.

## **5.4 Resources and value for money**

- 5.4.1 The contract is delivering savings on the previous contract.
- 5.4.2 A key element of Continentals Landscapes tender submission was to have three operational depots, one in each area of the city. Having a depot in each of the areas delivers efficiencies in terms of reduced travel time to site and more localised teams. In addition this approach encourages a locality based approach to service delivery and allows Continental Landscapes to deliver its commitment to providing locally sourced staff. It also improves working relationships with partners such as LCC's Locality teams and ENEHL.

## **5.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 5.5.1 East North East Homes Leeds has delegated responsibility for taking decisions and monitoring of activity relating to utilisation of budgets.

## **5.6 Risk Management**

- 5.6.1 Risk assessments were carried out throughout the procurement process. A Risk Register remains in place and is reviewed by Grounds Maintenance Project Board

## **6 Conclusions**

- 6.1 The contract has been successful to date taking into account the difficult weather conditions, the appearance of green space is good.

## **7 Recommendations**

- 7.1 Area Committee are requested to note the content of this report

## **8 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

- 8.1 Appendix A, summary of performance monitoring.

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.