

Report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development

Report to Scrutiny Board (Safer and Stronger Communities)

Date: 10th November 2014

Subject: Grounds Maintenance– recommendation tracking

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

1.0 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report sets out the progress made in responding to the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny review on the Council's Grounds Maintenance Contract.

2.0 Background information

- 2.1 In June 2012, the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board acknowledged a request for Scrutiny in relation to the new grounds maintenance contract. In taking forward this request, the Scrutiny Board reviewed the key issues that had arisen during the initial stages of contract delivery, the reasons for these and any actions taken to help address such issues in the future.
- 2.2 In November 2012, the Board published a report setting out its findings, recommendations and desired outcomes following its review of the new grounds maintenance contract. There were 10 recommendations arising from this review. The Board received a recommendation tracking report in October 2013 and whilst acknowledging that sufficient progress had been made, the Board felt that the recommendations had not yet been fully implemented and therefore agreed to continue monitoring these.

3.0 Main issues

- 3.1 The Scrutiny recommendation tracking system allows the Scrutiny Board to consider the position status of its recommendations in terms of their on-going relevance and the progress made in implementing the recommendations based on a standard set of criteria. The Board will then be able to take further action as appropriate.

3.2 This standard set of criteria is presented in the form of a flow chart at Appendix 1. The questions in the flow chart should help to decide whether a recommendation has been completed, and if not whether further action is required. Details of progress against each recommendation are set out within the table at Appendix 2.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 Members are asked to:

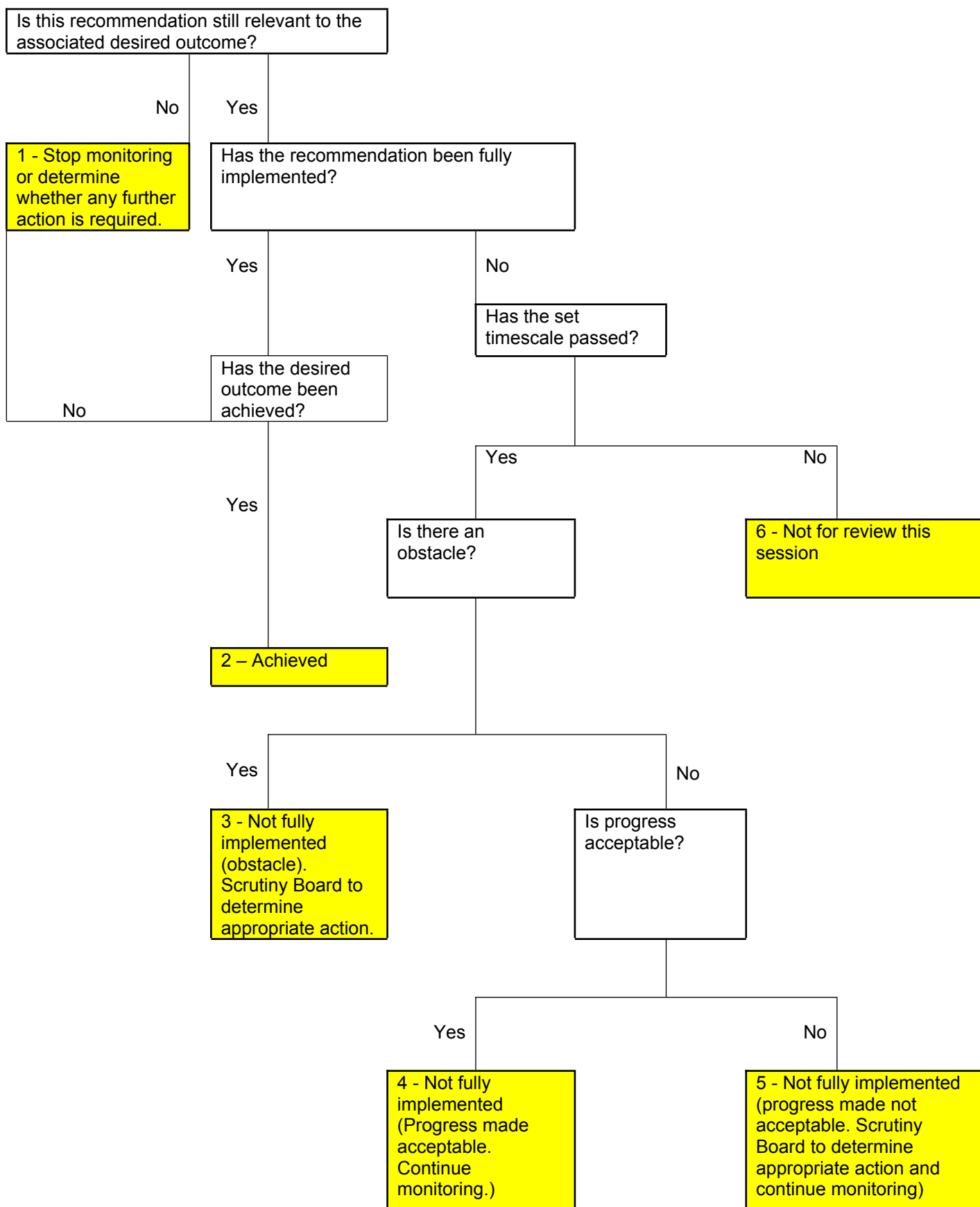
- Agree those recommendations which no longer require monitoring;
- Identify any recommendations where progress is unsatisfactory and determine the action the Board wishes to take as a result.

5.0 Background documents¹

5.1 None.

¹ 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.

Recommendation tracking flowchart and classifications:
Questions to be considered by Scrutiny Boards



Position Status Categories

- 1 - Stop monitoring or determine whether any further action is required
- 2 - Achieved
- 3 - Not fully implemented (Obstacle)
- 4 - Not fully implemented (Progress made acceptable. Continue monitoring)
- 5 - Not fully implemented (Progress made not acceptable. Continue monitoring)
- 6 - Not for review this session

Desired Outcome: That necessary grounds maintenance work on miscellaneous grassed areas is scheduled immediately for action.

Recommendation 1 - That the Director of Resources and Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods establish a separate budget to enable the Grounds Maintenance Team to schedule immediate grounds maintenance work on miscellaneous grassed areas pending clarification of land ownership and formal allocation of future maintenance responsibility.

Formal response (January 2013):

This recommendation is agreed, although a budget needs to be identified to enable these areas of land to be brought up to standard, then maintained on an ongoing basis, which will be sought by trying to identify efficiencies in the contract.

Position reported in October 2013:

This issue is currently being managed without the need to identify a dedicated budget line. From April 2013 the budgets for Grounds Maintenance operations have been delegated to Parks and Countryside and are no longer split along the former ALMO boundaries. This flexibility allows for a more holistic approach to asset management that to date has meant that assets are being included in the contract where appropriate. It is important to note that a level of due diligence is required before instructing works to ensure that the land is in public ownership. Once this is established then the contractor has been instructed to undertake works with the funding arrangements resolved later. When land is found to be in private ownership then action is considered using formal enforcement powers where costs can be recovered.

Current Position:

This issue is being managed as reported in October 2013. This means that where Council ownership is established but management responsibility is unclear then works will be instructed if required. Where Council ownership does not exist or cannot be established then suitable action is considered with enforcement teams to undertake minimal maintenance to prevent public nuisance e.g. where vegetation impacts on the highway.

Position Status (categories 1 – 6) *This is to be formally agreed by the Scrutiny Board*

Desired Outcome: That the specification for grounds maintenance and shrub maintenance is fit for purpose in delivering a good quality service.

Recommendation 2 - That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods works with each of the internal clients to explore a move towards an extended shrub maintenance service (6 shrub visits) and a fortnightly grass cut frequency (16 cuts in one season) in order to achieve a better quality of service.

Formal response (January 2013):

This recommendation is agreed in principle as adopting good horticultural practice, but would require an additional contribution from each client to deliver the improvements. Following discussion that took place at the street scene grounds maintenance programme board on 17th December 2012, it was agreed that Aire Valley Homes and Belle Isle Tenants Management Organisation would trial increased shrub and rose bed maintenance in 2013. This will provide an evidence base to inform a review in the light of visible benefits and resident feedback in order to help determine resource prioritisation.

With regard to grass cutting frequency it is not proposed to alter the frequency of mowing at this stage, other than to retain the increased frequency of grass cutting on 'premium' sites, in response to customer concerns raised during 2012. For other grass, it was agreed that a flexible approach to phasing will be adopted in 2013 that will use climatic conditions to direct the overall frequency that may increase above 13. For example a cold spring and a hot, dry summer would enable reduced frequencies, conversely a mild winter and wet summer would require additional mowing activity.

Position reported in October 2013:

Given the realignment of contract and budget control to Parks and Countryside as described in the update to Recommendation 1 above, it was decided to take the opportunity to introduce revised frequencies city wide. The revisions introduced from April 2013 provided a contingency to instruct a maximum of 14 grass cuts for amenity grass (28 cuts for premium amenity), and a doubling of shrub bed maintenance visits to 4 per annum. The major shrub pruning operations will still take place during the 4th quarter visit with the emphasis of other visits being to remove weeds and litter and keep shrubs 'in check'. However the dry summer in 2013 has only required the instruction of 13 cuts as there was little apparent grass growth during the middle of the summer.

Current Position:

There were 14 amenity grass cuts programmed in 2014 with 28 cuts programmed for premium amenity. Weather conditions were exceptional in 2014 with higher rainfall than usual, combined with a mild winter, lack of frost and a warm spring. Rainfall in 2014 was 95% higher between January and May compared to the average of the previous 4 years. This caused vigorous grass growth that was taller than usual making it more difficult and slower to cut. Cutting in these conditions also generates a larger volume of clippings when mown, leading to clumping, and creates further difficulties in clearing grass off paths when wet. A recovery plan was implemented during June 2014 to reduce the mowing interval from 12 to 10 working days at no additional cost to the Council, with the contractor working overtime during weekday evenings and on weekends. This proved successful, and the contractor was back on schedule from July. Ward members and the public were kept informed of the issues and actions taken to address them. Consequently a review is under

way to consider whether increased frequency of mowing is viable in residential areas with a consequent reduction in less sensitive areas e.g. high speed roads. For winter 2014/15, additional work to spread woodchip mulch on some shrub beds has been identified to improve appearance and suppress weeds throughout the growing season which will mean that on treated beds the existing visit profile will be adequate.

Position Status (categories 1 – 6) *This is to be formally agreed by the Scrutiny Board*

Desired Outcome: That the future use and maintenance of old shrub beds is determined in consultation with local Ward Members and relevant Parish and Town Councils.

Recommendation 3 - That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods ensures that asset holders consult with local Ward Members and relevant Parish and Town Councils on the future use and maintenance of old shrub beds.

Formal response (January 2013):

This recommendation is agreed and consultation will take place with Ward Members and relevant Parish and Town Councils on any proposals on the future use and maintenance of shrubs beds.

Position reported in October 2013:

This is the current situation and local consultation is undertaken on planned changes to shrub beds prior to removal.

Current Position: No change.

Position Status (categories 1 – 6) *This is to be formally agreed by the Scrutiny Board*

Desired Outcome: That there is a joined up approach between the Council and Continental for undertaking litter picking services across the city.

Recommendation 4 - That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods works with the Head of Parks and Countryside, the internal clients, Locality Management and Continental to review existing litter picking responsibilities and opportunities for more joined up working.

That this review is undertaken immediately and an update report brought back to Scrutiny in January 2013.

Formal response (January 2013):

This recommendation is agreed and the report to Scrutiny Board (Safer and Stronger Communities) meeting in December 2012 highlighted that consideration is being given for Continental to expand litter collection to cover adjacent hard surfaces where applicable in co-ordination with street cleansing activities.

Position reported in October 2013:

Continental are once again to be engaged in winter litter picking work supporting locality management in meeting their seasonal pressures. To this end areas of land have been identified that cause particular problems and are often a cause for concern from the public and elected members during winter months when grass cutting operations are not taking place on high priority arterial routes into the city. There is a further advantage in utilising Continental as they are equipped to put in appropriate traffic management arrangements. Examples of the type of work involved includes the following:

- Commuter routes leading into the city centre with a speed limit of 30mph (eg, Woodhouse Lane)
- Main commuter routes outside the city centre with speed limits above 40mph
- Junctions / roundabouts leading from motorways such as Tingley Common, which feeds traffic to the White Rose Centre and Elland Road football ground.
- Routes which would require implementation of traffic management to carry out the works (eg Stanningley, Drighlington Bypass)

Current Position:

Where lane closures are taking place due to traffic management arrangements then locality managers are advised in order to allow coordination of services such as litter picking and gulley cleansing. Highway officers also have the opportunity to coordinate highways activities within the safe working zone as necessary.

Position Status (categories 1 – 6) *This is to be formally agreed by the Scrutiny Board*

Desired Outcome: Utilising available resources to obtain greater added value of service by Continental.

Recommendation 5 - That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods reviews where any additional services provided by Continental could lead to further cost savings, with particular attention given to potential winter operations.

That this review is undertaken immediately, with an update brought back to the Scrutiny Board in January 2013.

Formal response (January 2013):

This recommendation is agreed. Locality managers have commissioned Continental to undertake bulk leaf clearance and other cleansing works normally undertaken via temporary staff to support staff retention within Continental.

This issue has also been discussed at the street scene grounds maintenance programme board. Budget holding clients have indicated that they are unable to prioritise funding for Continental to undertake additional winter works. However, clients are asking Continental to tender for individual environmental projects as well as quote for ad hoc work on assets that need additional work to meet specifications.

Position reported in October 2013:

Continental staff are being engaged to undertake litter collection, rubbish removal, ginnel clearances and cut back of Horticultural features during the winter. In addition they will be given the opportunity to compete for additional works in line with the councils approved procurement procedures.

Current Position:

For winter 2014/15, additional work to spread woodchip mulch on some shrub beds has been identified to improve appearance and suppress weeds as well as support staff and skills retention by providing a more balanced workload.

Position Status (categories 1 – 6) *This is to be formally agreed by the Scrutiny Board*

Desired Outcome: That contract monitoring is conducted efficiently and there is parity between the contract monitoring processes of the ALMOs and Highways.

Recommendation 6 - That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods reviews the contract monitoring processes to identify efficiencies and consistency.

Formal response (January 2013):

This recommendation is agreed, and a review will be undertaken of existing monitoring processes to ensure a balanced, consistent and efficient approach commensurate with the outcome of monitoring results.

Position reported in October 2013:

The delivery of contract monitoring is now undertaken by Parks and Countryside with some resource TUPE transferred to the service in April 2013 from the ALMOs. The approach taken this year has been to be much more intelligence led using referrals from ward members, Town and Parish Councils, and individual residents to direct monitoring activity. Comparison of queries regarding performance or quality during March to August 2013 have indicated a reduction of 21% when compared to the same period in 2012.

Current Position:

Parks and Countryside continue to provide monitoring and contract management activities in a holistic and consistent way.

Position Status (categories 1 – 6) *This is to be formally agreed by the Scrutiny Board*

Desired Outcome: That contract monitoring is conducted efficiently and there is parity between the contract monitoring processes of the ALMOs and Highways.

Recommendation 7 - That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods ensures that Parish and Town Councils are proactively engaged in the contract monitoring process for the grounds maintenance contract.

Formal response (January 2013):

This recommendation is agreed, and Parish and Town Councils will be invited to contribute to monitoring activity as part of the overall review alluded to in recommendation 6.

Position reported in October 2013:

As set out in the response to recommendation 6 above a revised approach to monitoring has been introduced for 2013. Concerns raised by Town and Parish councils have been used to direct monitoring activities thereby directly influencing the quality achieved in the local area. In addition there remains an option for Town and Parish Councils to take on the control of this work in their respective areas should they wish to do so.

Current Position:

Officers have attended Town and Parish Council liaison meetings to disseminate information and gather feedback on issues relating to contract performance. Some Parish Councils have enquired regarding taking up the option of budget delegation for service provision and management although to date none have done so once the scope of delegation and available budget has been advised. One issue that has been raised relates to the performance of sight line and rough grass cutting in rural areas. For the cutting season in 2015/16 it has been decided that this work will no longer form part of the contract and instead be conducted by Parks and Countryside.

Position Status (categories 1 – 6) *This is to be formally agreed by the Scrutiny Board*

Desired Outcome: That all Elected Members are fully aware of what is expected from the grounds maintenance service in accordance with the contract.

Recommendation 8 - That the Chair of the Member Development Working Group includes grounds maintenance as part of the Member Development Programme and Induction Programme to promote greater awareness of the expectations of the grounds maintenance service in accordance with the contract.

Formal response (January 2013):

The Chair of the Member Development Working Group will be discussing how best to take forward this recommendation during the Member Development Working Group meeting on 31st January 2013.

Position reported in October 2013:

At its meeting on 31st January 2013, the Member Development Working Group discussed how best to get the information out to Members and agreed it would be better to circulate the information via Area Committees at the start of a municipal year.

With the introduction of Area Lead Members in May 2013, Member Development and the Citizens and Communities directorate are developing an induction programme for Area Lead Members. As such, the issues surrounding grounds maintenance will be incorporated into this programme for Environmental Area Lead Members.

Current Position:

See response to Recommendation 9 which refers to grounds maintenance information shared periodically with Community Committees and their respective environment sub-groups. Training for Environmental Community Committee Champions takes place in a variety of ways as follows:

Induction Training – An overview will be provided by the Senior Management Team from Environmental Action Services, Waste Management, Highways and Parks and Countryside focussing on the environment key areas of responsibility and priorities.

This will be followed by briefings provided by Locality Managers, Waste Management, Highways and Parks and Countryside within 6 weeks of being appointed to the post and will include the following:

- Service provision in the local area including council, partners, third sector and any commissioned providers, key contacts, local partnerships and networks relevant to the functional area. This will be tailored to take account of members' needs.
- On-going support/development which will include where relevant, briefings and updates prior to meetings.

In addition there will be:

- Opportunities for the Community Committee Champions to network and to attend relevant briefings and awareness sessions in areas related to their role.
- Opportunities for peer mentoring which can be accessed through the Group Offices.
- Specific skills training accessed through existing Personal Development Plan arrangements.

Position Status (categories 1 – 6) *This is to be formally agreed by the Scrutiny Board*

Desired Outcome: That Area Committees are regularly updated on the performance of the grounds maintenance service delivered within their area.

Recommendation 9 - That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods works with the Area Management Teams to ensure that Area Committees receive regular updates regarding the performance of the grounds maintenance service delivered within their area. Such updates are to include an overview of key issues raised within their areas; how such issues have been dealt with; and any new or pending contract variations that will impact upon their area.

Formal response (January 2013):

This recommendation is agreed. A report to Area Committees is being prepared for the February/March round of meetings that will include a performance review of the first year of the contract as part of the Parks and Countryside annual report. Representatives from Parks and Countryside have been identified to attend Environment Sub-Group Meetings where issues can be raised relevant to each area and responses given, as appropriate.

Position reported in October 2013:

As described in the January update the Annual reports were submitted to Area Committees to inform them of performance of the contract. A performance update will be provided to the February/March 2014 round of area committees with a particular focus on grass cutting operations during the 2013 season. Nominated Parks and Countryside officers are also attending the Environment Sub groups to provide ongoing liaison with regards to any emerging concerns ahead of the next annual report round. Whilst this does not include a formal performance report, officers are briefed ahead of attendance at these meetings in order that they are able to provide verbal feedback on matters relating to the performance of the contract. Any specific queries raised at meetings that the officer attending is not able to deal with are followed up and a response given.

Current Position:

A performance summary in respect of the streetscene grounds maintenance contract was included in the Parks and Countryside annual report to what are now Community Committees in Feb/Mar 2014. It is anticipated that this will form a part of future reports to Community Committees as well as a summary of performance reported at environment sub-groups which are attended by Parks and Countryside officers.

Position Status (categories 1 – 6) *This is to be formally agreed by the Scrutiny Board*

Desired Outcome: That public behaviour does not obstruct the delivery of a good quality grounds maintenance service.

Recommendation 10 - That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods works with the Head of Communications and Marketing and the internal clients to develop a Communications Strategy aimed at promoting public awareness of behaviour that is obstructive to the delivery of a good quality grounds maintenance service (e.g. parking on public verges).

Formal response (January 2013):

This recommendation is agreed, and it is proposed that this takes place ahead of the grass cutting season in 2013.

Position reported in October 2013:

Highways and Transportation have produced a briefing and options paper examining the issue of parking on verges. This examines not only the issue of obstructing maintenance but considers the more damaging and costly effects on the infrastructure and buried services. The paper does note that this behaviour is often due to the design limitations of estate road and parking provision and requires significant capital investment to address. Nevertheless, there are issues with regard to public behaviour and it is intended that work will be conducted in this regard ahead of the 2014 grass cutting season.

Current Position:

We are revising the approach for 2015 with a view to the contractor staff placing advisory notices on vehicles that are impeding mowing operations. Additionally as part of the Housing Area Environmental Programme some improvements to parking provision has been made, and Area Panels are able to support changes to off street parking reducing the incidence of parking on verges.

Position Status (categories 1 – 6) *This is to be formally agreed by the Scrutiny Board*