

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Board Grounds Maintenance Contract

Summary Note of the Working Group Meeting held on Tuesday 2nd October 2012

1.0 Background

1.1 This report presents a summary note of the discussions held at the second working group meeting in relation to the new Grounds Maintenance Contract.

1.2 The following individuals had attended this working group meeting:

Councillor Barry Anderson (Chair of the SSC Scrutiny Board)
Councillor Neil Buckley (Member of the SSC Scrutiny Board)
Councillor Mary Harland (Member of the SSC Scrutiny Board)
Councillor Sandy Lay (Member of the SSC Scrutiny Board)
Peter Marrington, Head of Scrutiny and Member Development (LCC)
Sean Flesher, Head of Parks and Countryside, LCC
Simon Frosdick, Business Development Manager, Parks and Countryside, LCC
Steve Smith, Environmental Services, LCC
Wayne Shirt, Contracts Manager, Aire Valley Homes Leeds

1.3 The main issues raised during the working group's discussion are summarised below.

2.0 Main issues

Mobilisation of the new contract

2.1 There were no outstanding issues to address from the last meeting. It was acknowledged that the mobilisation process for the commencement of the new contract had been successful and adequate arrangements were in place to manage the staffing transition from Winter 2012/13 to summer 2013.

Initial delivery of service standards specified within the contract

2.2 A discussion was held on the management of shrub bed maintenance. The relative cost effectiveness of maintaining empty shrub beds or returning to full beds/grass or other asset was discussed.

2.3 It was acknowledged that different clients would have differing views. It was recommended by the Working Group that asset holders should consult with local Ward Members and or Parish/Town Councillors on the future of individual old shrub beds.

2.4 It was noted that an extended service (6 shrub visits) and a fortnightly cut for grass areas (16) at an additional cost of £407K had been offered to clients. No response had yet been received.

Maintaining Primary Network routes

- 2.5 The significant improvement in the co-ordination of arrangements between Continental, Highways Services, Street Cleaning Teams and Grounds Maintenance to reduce traffic management problems was noted and welcomed.
- 2.6 Issues raised at the last meeting in relation traffic management arrangements at:
- Ring Road, Weetwood.
 - M1/A650 junction (J41)
 - Ring Road, Seacroft (70mph section)
 - A63 Selby Road
 - Ring Road, Beeston

had now been resolved.

Maintaining grass and other growth around street furniture

- 2.7 No additional issues from those raised at the last meeting were discussed.

Shrub bed maintenance

- 2.8 This matter was discussed under 2.2 above.

Sheltered housing

- 2.9 No further issues were raised under this item except the acknowledgment that current arrangements were well received.

Litter picking

- 2.10 The Chair of the Working Group reported on an issue raised with him about Continental being prevented from undertaking additional litter picking work in return for savings in waste removal. An industrial relations issue had been cited as the reason for the initiative not to have gone ahead.
- 2.11 This particular initiative was known to officers but the full reasons as to why it had not been progressed were unknown. It was agreed that Mr Flesher would pursue the matter and provide a written note to the Chair. The Working Group stressed that opportunities should not be lost where the Council and City benefited.

Dealing with grass arisings

- 2.12 A brief discussion was held on the benefits of the first cut of the season being a 'cut and collect' to reduce subsequent arisings. It was recognised that operationally in terms of crew and machinery and the additional cost made this prohibitive. Reduced grass arisings could only realistically be achieved by an increase in the frequency of cut. No further scrutiny would take place on this.

Contract monitoring

- 2.13 The role of Town and Parish Councils in contract monitoring was discussed. It was acknowledged that Town and Parish Councils could initiate more contract

monitoring, however their engagement with the City Council was poor. It was agreed that a more proactive approach could and should be taken by the City Council in building a relationship with Town and Parish Councils in terms of providing contract data and performance intelligence.

- 2.14 Additional Matters relating to Communication are noted in paragraph 2.20 of this summary.
- 2.15 It was noted that greater parity between the monitoring processes of the ALMO and Highways had been achieved.

Contract Variations

- 2.16 It was reported that the Council's asset management register had improved significantly. The backlog of variations had reduced to one week, which was a significant improvement.
- 2.17 The issue of the management of miscellaneous areas of grass and the need for these to be assigned to the appropriate client was discussed. Whilst appreciating the importance of ensuring that assets are correctly identified and assigned to the appropriate client, the Working Group reiterated its view that such processes should not hinder the delivery of the service, particularly as the public is not likely to make such distinctions and will simply hold the Council to account for this service.
- 2.18 The Working Group recommended that where council ownership is not clear these sites need to be investigated speedily to clarify responsibilities so that private land-owners can be approached by council enforcement officers. In addition a corporate contingency budget should be established from which Grounds Maintenance can draw, without detriment to their budget, to undertake the necessary work pending ownership clarification.
- 2.19 It was reported that Continental had submitted a list of potential winter operations they could carry out for clients should they so wish. These included; verge reinstatements, managing verge creep and grass on pavements. It was noted that where possible and financial support is available these services could be taken up via 'contract variations'. Other more substantial and diverse pieces of additional work would need to go through the normal procurement processes.

Communication

- 2.20 In addition to the discussions held around the need to proactively engage with Town and Parish Councils (see 2.13 above). A discussion was held on the need to periodically remind Members of the work of the service and the management of the issues faced by Ward Members on a daily basis. It was agreed that opportunities to address Area Committees would be taken. It was acknowledged that newly elected Members had not been provided with much information regarding the service and this would be addressed.
- 2.21 The Working Group agreed that efforts to raise public awareness of behaviour which is damaging (e.g. parking on public verges) should be undertaken. The Working Group questioned whether the Council had a policy on grass verges including bollards on grass verges. The Chair agreed to pursue this.

3.0 Next Steps

- 3.1 Closing the meeting the Chair stated that a report detailing the Working Groups findings would be presented to the full Board in October.