

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE BUDGET

Background

1. The grounds maintenance budget is divided into two elements:
 - A budget for grass cutting and hedge work which is covered by a contract with landscape gardening company
 - A budget for tree and shrub work which is covered by a schedule of rates by the same contractor, the work being commissioned on an 'as required' basis
2. The value of the grounds maintenance contact is £330,900 per annum.
3. The current grounds maintenance contract was let 1 April 2007. Its term is for a period of five years with the option to extend it for a further three years. Clause 7, Variation or Amendment, allows the Council to make changes which may be significant to the specification and or bill of quantities of the contract should it require. The only stipulation is that reasonable notice must be given. The contract deems this notice period to be one months written notice. The contractor will ensure that the amendments are in place within two months of receipt of the amendment.
4. Grounds maintenance work is funded through both the Housing Revenue Account and the General Fund. In most cases it is not possible to apportion the value of the work precisely for Council owned property or owner occupied property due largely to the large numbers of 'Right to buy' properties interspersed amongst Council properties. An approximation is therefore used and the cost to the HRA and General Fund is spilt broadly 50/50.

Considerations

5. Account must be taken of the
 - Visual impression of neighbourhoods as the contract includes grass cutting, hedge cutting, and tree works, litter picking and weeding of both soft and hard landscapes.
 - Health and safety of residents
 - Any environmental and public health impacts

Options

6. A decision is required as to the extent to which the budget is reduced with regard to the above considerations.
7. The options to consider are:

Indicative grounds maintenance budget costs

Option	Cost per 'item'	Total current cost (<i>budget</i>)	Proposed saving	Total proposed cost	Implications
Reduce hedge cutting from twice per year to once per year	£20,600	£41,200	£16,200*	£25,000	Limited visual impact. Hedges will be cut back harder between cuts to maintain overall height.
Limit ditch clearance to urgent works only (currently annually)		£3000	£3000	£0	Any urgent works arising will be addressed on an ad hoc basis using the contingency fund.
Do no weeding of grassed areas (currently carried out during grass cutting rota)		£7,100	£7,100	£0	Will have some limited visual impact
Do no sweeps of hard areas such as car parks (currently twice)	£8,500	£17,000	£17,000	£0	Will have limited visual impact. Current sweeping regime is already limited. Any particular problem areas that may arise will be addressed using the contingency fund
No weed kills to hard areas (currently twice)	£4,300	£8,600	£8,600	£0	Limited visual impact
Tree and shrub work to be reactive in response to health and safety risks only		£35,100	£5,100	£30,000	Tree and shrub work is already carried out on high priority only cases.

No shrub bed work (currently minimal as required)	£2,300	£4,500	£4,500	£0	Limited visual impact as this service is already operated at a minimal level.
No regular litter picking (currently following grass cutting and out of season around shrub beds and trees) **		£29,400**	£29,400	£0	There would be some potential visual impacts and areas that became particularly unsightly would be addressed using the contingency fund.
No edging of grassed areas (currently when grass cut on a rota basis)	£600	£4,000	£4,000	£0	Some limited visual impact.
Cutting the grass 12 times per season (currently 14 cuts).	£6,700	£94,300	£13,900	£80,400	Reduced cuts will have a minor visual impact.
Other grass cutting	£3,500	£15,700	£11,600	£4,100	Limited visual impact as this grass cutting is around ditches and other small areas.

Contingency		£71,000	£46,000	£25,000	This budget will be used to meet any essential health and safety works required outside of the main budget allocation and will allow for other cosmetic improvements to be undertaken as indicated above.
TOTAL		£330,900	£166,400	£164,500	

* It costs more to do one larger cut

** This will cost the same regardless of times as it is per tonnage

8. If all of the above were agreed the annual saving would be £166,400 split approximately equally between the HRA and the General Fund. The overall budget would therefore be reduced to £164,500 which includes a contingency fund of £25,000.

Implications

9. An indication of the impact of proposed changes have been provide in the table at 9. above. In relation to the guiding principles the implications can be summarised as follows:

Visual impression of neighbourhoods as the contract includes grass cutting, hedge cutting, and tree works, litter picking and weeding of both soft and hard landscapes.	The impact of the proposed changes will be an aesthetic one. There will be some effects on the look of the district. The proposed changes to grass cutting will result in longer grass at some points in the growing season. Trees and shrubs would not be pruned unless they pose an urgent health and safety risk
Health and safety of residents	The remaining budget will be used to ensure that health and safety issues are still addressed as they are at present e.g. dangerous trees removed
Any environmental and public health impacts	There will be no adverse effects on the environment or on public health

10. In consultation with the contractor every effort will be made to ensure health and safety and minimise loss of amenity. Care will be taken to ensure that the grass cutting is carried out at a time to ensure maximum impact and sustainability of the grass.

11. Financial	The proposal sets out £166,400 savings to be shared between the HRA and General Fund
Legal	None, the contract terms allow the Council to substantially vary the specification and Bill of Quantities.
Staffing	None for the Council.
Risk Management	Working with the contractor to identify areas where it is necessary to carry out health and safety work that may on occasion include hedges.
Equal Opportunities	None

Consultations

12. Tenants and residents were consulted throughout the Housing Futures process on the impact on grounds maintenance in the event of a no vote. Consultations with the contractor are in progress.
13. This report has been to the meeting of the Portfolio Holder for Housing on 21 October 2009 and he recommended all of the savings set out in the table at 7.

Effect on Strategic Aims

14. Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.
There will be some reduction in service
Commitment to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for all.
Procedures are in place that take account of health and safety work
Commitment to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live.
None
Commitment to assisting provision for local jobs for all.
There will be job losses for the contractor.
Commitment to providing a voice for rural life.
None

Summary

15. There is a need to reduce expenditure on both the HRA and the General Fund.

16. Of the savings proposed around £90,000 are for the HRA
17. This report sets out the key elements of the grounds maintenance work undertaken by the Council and the cuts that could be accommodated in order to achieve savings for both the HRA and the General Fund.
18. The savings can be achieved by working with the Council's existing contractors but there would need to be a lead in time of three months. Whilst some savings can be achieved in 2009/10 the full savings will be achieved from 2010/11.