

# Gloucester City Council

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Overview and Scrutiny</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup> January 2018</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>AMEY Redesign of Grounds Maintenance Contract</b>		
<b>Report Of:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Environment</b>		
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Budget/Policy Framework:</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Ismael Rhyman, Neighbourhoods Manager</b>		
	<b>Email: Ismael.rhyman@gloucester.gov.uk</b>	<b>Tel: 6784</b>	

## FOR GENERAL RELEASE

### 1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested an update as to how the grounds maintenance contract was to be rolled out this summer. This report details what led up to the maintenance programme of last summer and how this has changed to address concerns expressed by Councillors and members of the public while still keeping within ambitious spending requirements.

### 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to, subject to any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet, to **note** the contents of the report.

### 3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 In the Winter of 2016/17 Amey in partnership with City Council officers endeavoured to re-design the grounds maintenance contract in order to save in the region of £125,000. This saving would be achieved against the current annual budget for ground maintenance.
- 3.2 A decision was taken early on to not employ seasonal labour, which negated the need for expensive redundancy payoffs and allowed experienced staff to be retained. A basic schedule was then designed around this resource which allowed for the high profile 'arterial' routes to be maintained on a traditional approximately 12 cut per annum cycle (once every 3 weeks). The urban routes (less high profile) were to be cut every 6 weeks. Sports pitches and large areas of open space cut by the large tractor were to remain as before. Strimming was to be kept to a minimum

with trees being excluded (strimming damages trees) street furniture, posts, fences etc were reduced to 2 visits a year

- 3.3 The schedule was implemented spring 2017 and a number of flail mowers were leased to enable longer grass to be cut. As the start of the season was relatively dry, the grass grew slower than normal and we went into April with a modest number of complaints. As the season progressed however, and grass that had been traditionally cut roughly once every three weeks was looking long and members of the public were beginning to complain. Issues were compounded by the gangs not being able to keep up with the schedule they had been allocated, resulting in longer periods of grass being uncut. Often this was not excessive but when cutting dates were not met it further aggravated people. Complaints were not universal and indeed some people did express a preference for the 'wilder' look exhibited in some areas especially in more mature areas of grass with poor nutrient levels and where wild flowers were allowed to bloom.
- 3.4 To bring the issue under control an outside contractor was engaged to help catch up, and extra resource was re-deployed. This resulted in the schedule being brought down to a cut every 4 weeks. Complaints rapidly decreased at this point.
- 3.5 Also of concern over the summer months was the backlog of hedges and scrub growth that was not kept off footpaths and cycleways that were under the City Council's remit.

#### **4.0 The 2018 Proposal**

- 4.1 The first point to make is, rather than look at the problem from a staffing point of view i.e. how many staff can we afford and what can we do with them, the issue was examined from the point of view as to what people's expectations were and how we could best accommodate those in the most efficient manner.
- 4.2 We were also keen to engage the knowledge and experience of the grounds staff, and right from the beginning they were put on the project team. To further encourage team building and motivation it was decided from the outset that the City would be divided into a number of areas. There would then be dedicated teams who broadly had 'their patch' to look after. The purpose was to allow local knowledge to build up, and engender a sense of pride in the work undertaken.
- 4.3 Monthly meetings were scheduled where City staff, Amey management and grounds maintenance operatives met. Large scale maps were produced and google maps were extensively utilized. At these meetings every area of open space was looked at and a management regime identified. Some sites were identified to be cut

as 'normal' (approx. 12 cuts a year) others it was clear that with modest infrastructure changes, larger more efficient machines could be utilised allowing the normal regime to be implemented with less input. Some sites, for example under dense tree canopy or where there were clear habitat imperatives were identified for a less intensive wildlife cut.

- 4.4 It was decided that strimming will be increased from last year's frequency but trees will still be left untrimmed. The proposal is for a trim to take place every other grass cut on City Council land areas with Gloucester City Homes cutting and strimming regimes not changing from previous years.
- 4.5 With regard to hedge work it is clear that there is a significant legacy of hedge work that is coming increasingly difficult to manage. These have been managed in a traditional manner, essentially by hand. We have over the winter months procured mini tractor with side arm flail that will allow large lengths of hedge and scrub to be 'hit' over the winter months. This should allow summer cut backs, which due to bird nesting, generally has to be done by hand to be kept to a minimum.
- 4.6 Looking forward it is clear there are further efficiencies that can be made as investment from the ESIF and other bids creates larger areas of habitat/flood relief, taking land out of traditional management. Further land will be taken out of management as other models for park management take hold including take up by communities and the private sector.

## **5.0 Conclusions**

- 5.1 It was apparent that the less frequent mowing regime implemented in the summer of 2017 was unpopular with a large number of people. This was not, however, universal and some did enjoy the wilder look afforded by longer grass and wildflowers. To address these concerns therefore, working with the City we have produced a more sophisticated schedule that is more efficient in its use of manpower and machines. It should also satisfy those that wish to see grass kept short and tidy but allow for some more appropriate areas to be managed in a less intensive manner. Coupled with other savings for example from waste management it is hoped to deliver a grounds maintenance service that satisfies the public but keeps within ambitious savings requirements