



Name of meeting: Scrutiny Panel

Date: 10th January 2023

Title of report: Grounds Maintenance Current Position

Purpose of report: To highlight the work undertaken by the councils ground maintenance teams and the challenges that we are facing.

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	Yes/ no or Not Applicable If yes give the reason why
Key Decision - Is it in the <u>Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports)</u> ?	Key Decision – No Private Report/Private Appendix – No
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	N/A If no give the reason why not
Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director</u> & name Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance? Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning?	Colin Parr , Strategic Director – Environment and Climate Change – 21/12/2022 n/a n/a
Cabinet member portfolio	Give name of Portfolio Holder/s

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: N/A

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? Yes

1. Summary

The Grounds maintenance team for the council carries out horticultural maintenance and management to all Parks and Recreation Grounds in Kirklees and provides a contracted service to a range of clients including Kirklees Homes and Neighbourhoods, Highway, Bereavement, Corporate Facilities Management, SPIE (Schools), Academy Schools, KAL.

The team maintain the majority of greenspaces within Kirklees carrying out tasks such as grass cutting, strimming, shrub pruning, hedge trimming and sports pitch maintenance.

The team is small with 70 full time employees supported by seasonal staff in the summer months, and we run an apprenticeship training scheme.

2. Information required to take a decision

2.1 Added value of the work that Grounds Maintenance undertake

As well as providing a management and maintenance service we work across the district to bring added value to our sites and for the citizens of Kirklees. We work with people and groups to help them gain skills and to help them develop the spaces that mean something to them. Examples include:

- Work with local 'In Bloom' groups to help small towns and villages flourish
- Work alongside 'Friends of groups' in many of parks to ensure working for a common goal
- Work with many local groups including Transformers North, Support to recovery (S2R) to provide them with practical work experience and also add benefit to the work that we undertake.

We have been successful in achieving the prestigious green flag award for 6 of our sites including our primary parks and country parks and we continue to work with fellow colleagues to ensure that we strive to manage our parks to the highest standards despite a growing list of challenges that face us.

All of Kirklees' open spaces provide citizens of Kirklees with free and openly accessible green spaces for them to enjoy which have proven positive impacts on people's mental health and wellbeing which has shown its huge benefits over the last couple of years as people couldn't leave the areas where they lived.

We work with partners to create networks for biodiversity and look to increase the connectivity and opportunities wherever we can. This work has helped towards the councils Climate Change Agenda but also brings huge benefits to our local ecosystems and nature as a whole.

2.2 Challenges faced

- Recruitment
 - Ability to attract and recruit new trained staff is decreasing.
 - We have an aging workforce and there is a need for successional planning.
 - Current vacancies are at 20% of the workforce

- Budgets
 - No central budget to support Parks and Open spaces maintenance
 - Income generated through SLA's covers all GM works regardless of client
 - Clients' expenditure with grounds maintenance could reduce in future

- Machinery
 - Budgets within transport services are stretched which is leading to delays in the purchase of new fleet and machinery
 - Currently looking at future options to ensure we have the correct and suitable machines to carry out all the work required as part of our service standards

- Gap between Expected and resourced Service Standards
 - Expectation of work carried out has increased with more ask to increase standards from agreed standards
 - Gap between the scheduled work and the expected work is that of 33 FTE's during March – October.
 - Due to climate change, we are now experiencing longer growing season and therefore increased maintenance required

2.3 Service Standards – Closing the Gap

A gap has opened up between agreed standards and the expected standards since they were last agreed in 2015. At this time all sites were given a category of Gold, Silver, Bronze or Natural as part of a service budget reduction of £1.3m. These standards were agreed but as time has gone on people expect or demand a higher service level so there has been creep and our resources do not allow for this increased service delivery and teams are now stretched beyond capacity.

Alongside this we are being asked to maintain new areas of land or maintain areas in a new way for example wildflower verges. These requests and additions are added to our portfolio with no additional revenue to maintain them and regardless of our capacity or tools available. We have also seen a decline in S106 revenue contributions.

As an interim measure we are looking to continue to work to the agreed standards but combine the silver and bronze categories into one standard. This will mean that all silver and bronze sites will get grass cut on a 3-4 weekly cycle on average. This will allow for some flexibility in our service but also mean that we can continue to provide a level of service to all agreed areas and clients.

Additional and ad hoc work will be looked at and prioritised to limit the impact on our cyclical operations. Some requests may be denied if the resource cannot be found or if the priority level is assessed as being low.

2.4 Future

➤ **Initiatives/Improvements**

- Network mapping our spaces to link in with other initiatives to create a wider network of increased biodiversity and habitat creation
- Investment in more efficient machinery to carry out a wider variety of maintenance tasks
- Improvement in back-office systems to allow for a greater knowledge base for future decision making

➤ **Enabling and Empowering Communities and Sports Groups**

- We will continue to support the many community groups across the district as well as looking to promote more groups across the district.
- We will seek to empower and enable community groups and sports clubs to take more ownership of the land they use and add an over and above standard to the work we already undertake. Examples include planting areas, sports pitch renovations and litter picking.

➤ **Re-alignment of service standards and budgets**

- We will look to re-align how we maintain our spaces in line with the budgets and resources that are available to us. This will be done gradually and using data and knowledge to shape a new service standard. This work will come back to scrutiny in future months to update on progress and direction.
- We will work within the parameters of the emerging Parks and Greenspaces Vision

3. Implications for the Council

3.1 Working with People

The GM teams will continue to work with groups and individuals to help them to improve their spaces and their skills. This is a key part of the role that we provide and getting people to help love their spaces and care them is a key message that we would like to promote. We also help to support a range of sports clubs and provide over 100 sports pitches for community grass roots sports to take place.

3.2 Working with Partners

We work with a number of partners internal and external to the council to help improve the offer that we can provide. These include national sporting bodies to help groups to bring in external funding as well as helping to support the councils' wider ambitions towards climate change and improving the lives of its citizens.

3.3 Place Based Working

Are teams work on set routes across the district and know there areas well. They are able to link in with residents and adapt to the needs of the people who live and use our spaces.

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

We are linked into the council's climate change action plan and consideration on how and where we maintain greenspaces is always linked to the impact it will have on this. By providing and maintaining greenspaces, planting and trees we can help to improve air quality and create biodiversity linkages.

3.5 Improving outcomes for children

By maintaining over 100 sports pitches, we create a platform for local grass roots sports to take place which many children are a part of. We also provide well maintained greenspaces for children to access and use in a variety of ways, often local to their homes.

3.6 Financial Implications for the people living or working in Kirklees

N/A

3.7 Other (e.g. Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)/Legal/Financial or Human Resources) Consultees and their opinions

N/A

4 Next steps and timelines

A new service standard will be drafted over the coming months in line with the budgets and resources that will be available to us. As this work develops, we will bring an update back to scrutiny to seek a direction and plan a way forward.

5 Officer recommendations and reasons

6 Cabinet Portfolio Holder's recommendations

7 Contact officer

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8 Background Papers and History of Decisions

9 Service Director responsible

Graham West
Service Director for Highways & Streetscene