

Grounds Maintenance on HRA sites

Housing Committee Tuesday, 19 March 2024

Report of: Head of Housing

Purpose: For decision

Publication status: Open

Wards affected: All

Executive summary:

The grounds maintenance service has been subject to a thorough review as part of the Future Tandridge Programme, culminating in a detailed option appraisal to recommend a future delivery model. At the September Housing and Community Services Committees Members approved the recommendation to continue to provide the grounds maintenance on HRA sites via an in-house service.

Officers are currently working to ensure that grounds maintenance activity is adequately resourced and planned for the upcoming growing season. As a result, this report seek authority to amend the grass cutting schedule and specification.

This report supports the Council's priority of: Building a better Council
Creating the homes, infrastructure and environment we need.

Contact officer James Devonshire Head of Housing
JDevonshire@tandridge.gov.uk –

Recommendation to Committee:

That the Council moves from a cut and collect approach on all cuts throughout the cutting season to a cut and collect approach on the first and last cuts.

Reason for recommendation:

Moving from a cut and collect to a cut and mulch service will ensure a greater number of cuts per year than currently and will deliver the efficiencies as detailed in this report.

Introduction and background

- 1 The current service requirement is that all grassed areas on HRA estates are cut and the arisings collected on each visit. This has been a long-standing requirement having first been implemented when the service was first outsourced.
 - 1.1 Due to this and the other challenges identified in this report, the grounds maintenance service fell short of both residents and the Council's expectations last year which generated high volumes of complaints and reduced satisfaction.
 - 1.2 The cut and collect approach has proved problematic both for previous contractors and more recently the in-house team. This is due to challenges encountered which are highlighted below:
 - Only certain mowers, both pedestrian and ride on can be used to cut and collect the arisings.
 - Cutting takes longer as the arisings have to be constantly emptied into a vehicle.
 - The vehicle has to be taken to a disposal site at least twice per day reducing productivity and increasing vehicle emissions.
 - A cut and collect approach removes the goodness from the area leading to greater weed growth in the grass, weeds grow faster than grass, leaving the site looking untidy.
 - Additional resources would be needed in periods of excessive growth.
 - Additional, larger machinery would need to be purchased to ensure productivity when cutting larger areas.
 - Disposal of green waste is expensive, requires storage and is not environmentally friendly as it not suitable for recycling and often goes to landfill at a cost to the council.

2 Proposed approach

- 2.1 Given the challenges highlighted in paragraph 1.2, it is proposed that the cut and collect service be replaced using the following methods:

- Grass cutting will be undertaken on a strict fortnightly schedule using a cut and mulch approach.
- Mowers be fitted with mulching blades. Mulching blades chop the grass into very small pieces allowing it to be left on site without causing mounds of grass left in place.
- Cut and collect will still take place on the first and last cuts of the season. At periods of exceptional growth, additional cut and collect services may be undertaken.

3 Benefits

3.1 By adopting the approach detailed in paragraph 2.1, the following benefits will be realised:

- Greater productivity from staff.
- Less green waste generated.
- Improved and sustainable service.
- Less environmental impact.

Other options considered

4 Consideration has been given to continuing with the cut and collect service. This will inevitably require an increase in resource to ensure a fortnightly cutting schedule is maintained.

4.1 To ensure a strict fortnightly cutting schedule, it is anticipated that cutting of grassed areas will commence earlier than usual.

4.2 A new grounds maintenance contract and Service Level Agreement will be developed in preparation for the formal commencement of the new in-house service delivered on HRA site in November 2024. As part of this work, Officers are currently working to determine the key metrics and performance measures required to ensure sites are maintained and residents remain satisfied with the service.

Consultation

5 This proposal was discussed at the Housing Committee Mid-Cycle Meeting on Tuesday 20 February 2024 which is attended by a Member from each group.

5.1 This proposal was discussed and approved by the Residents Forum on Wednesday 21 February 2024 and received positive feedback.

Key implications

Comments of the Chief Finance Officer

As noted in the report the new cut and mulch processes will lead to greater efficiencies than the current processes of cut and collect. As noted a new grounds maintenance contract and Service Level Agreement is being developed currently which will give a better quality of service to our tenants and leaseholders. The team are working to delivery the new contract in the most cost effect way.

Comments of the Head of Legal Services

As set out in this report, it is proposed that the provision and maintenance of grass cutting services to HRA properties be carried out in-house. Any arrangements will need to reflect the fact that there is no longer a client/contractor relationship, meaning that whilst there will still be a focus on ensuring standards are maintained, the onus will be on senior Officers to ensure adequate supervision is in place and that performance is recorded and made available for scrutiny.

Equality

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to the aims of the Duty at the time the decision is taken. The aims of the Duty are:

- (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
- (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and
- (iii) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Protected characteristics: age, sex, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy & maternity.

The Council's tenants and leaseholders include residents that have protected characteristics as set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The revision of the cutting schedule as set out in this report will need to take into account the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty. Officers will complete a full Equalities Impact Assessment on the detailed service specification, once we get to that stage.

Climate change

Proposals set out in this report will bring about positive climate change. This being generated through less vehicle emissions and reduced disposal of green waste being stored and taken to landfill.

Appendices

None

Background papers

Grounds Maintenance Options Appraisal Outcome – Housing Committee 14 September 2023.

----- end of report -----