

24th October 2007

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE TRADING OPERATION

Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the members of the Trading Operations Sub-Committee of the activities of the Grounds Maintenance trading operation for the period 1st of April to 31st August 2007.**

Background

- 2.1 The Grounds Maintenance trading operation performs contracted and ad-hoc maintenance mainly for Parks and Open Spaces and Burial Grounds and also for local Housing Associations and private individuals.

Business Performance and Update

3.1 Workload

The section has continued to undertake its summer maintenance programme including grass cutting and collection, flower bed maintenance, weed control and litter picking. Additional budget funding of £35,000 to increase the frequency of grass cutting in cemeteries has been used to fund increased overtime being worked allowing the section to improve the utilisation of its equipment.

The section continues to monitor its performance in all areas. In monitoring business performance the section has again contributed data to the APSE performance network for 2006/07, and when results are published the section will be in a position to benchmark results with comparable local authorities.

Grounds Maintenance current contract with SBHA ends on 2nd of March 2008 and if not renewed would result in an income reduction in the current year. We are currently in negotiation with SBHA to extend this contract.

3.2 Budget

The current approved budget for the year is a trading surplus of £44k.

3.3 Updated Projections

The section is currently forecasting a break-even position for the year.

3.4 Resources

A report on the future sourcing of plants previously grown at the Glenraig Nursery in Peebles is being prepared and will be presented to the next trading operations sub-committee meeting.

Following the last round of reporting, the service has commissioned a review by APSE

into general service provision, with a focus on grass cutting operations. This follows concerns raised by members and a perceived failing in the service. Once the report is available, it will be brought to this committee for consideration.

3.5 Staffing

The section has 86 full time permanent manual staff and recruits 46 seasonal staff for approximately twenty six weeks per year to cover the increased work load during the growing season. The recruitment and retention of seasonal staff continues to present a challenge to the service, and in particular the Ettrick and Lauderdale area, where three seasonal posts have remained unfilled all season. Four apprentice posts have been filled and they have all started attending Borders College on a day release programme, studying SVQ in Amenity Horticulture, level 2, progressing to level 3 next year.

3.6 Training

Core skills training continues to be delivered to all staff in the section, linked to the training matrix for the section. This is reviewed and agreed during regular performance appraisal meetings between supervisors and staff. An application has been lodged with Investors in People for accreditation.

3.7 Health and Safety

The health and safety arrangements in the section are currently under review. A programme of training identified in the appraisal review is ongoing.

Financial Implications

- 4.1 The budget trading surplus of £44k has been reduced to break-even following a revision of the income forecast for the year. Increased overtime worked has been funded by transport cost savings.
- 4.2 External customer charges increased by 7.5% in this financial year. Whilst further significant increases are being proposed for 2008/09 some clients have indicated that further increases cannot be sustained

Consultation

- 5.1 The Heads of Corporate Finance, Financial Administration, Corporate Administration, and Legal Services have been consulted and their comments have been incorporated into the report.

Equality

- 6.1 There are no equality issues directly associated with this report.

Environment

- 7.1 The Region had two entrants into the Beautiful Scotland competition, Peebles and Galashiels

Risk Commentary

- 8.1 Recruitment and retention of seasonal staff remains a challenge for the section, due to competition in the local employment market.
- 8.2 Risks associated with the closure of the Glenraig nursery are considered to be minimal following a thorough review of options.

- 8.3 Two significant contracts with local RSLs are due for retendering this financial year, Elidon Housing association and SBHA. The latter has initiated a discussion over a contract extension.
- 8.4 The final outcome of single status is still awaited and remains a potential risk for Grounds Maintenance

Recommendations

9.1 I recommend that the Trading Operations Sub-Committee:

- (a) Agree the contents of this report**

Approved by

Name	Designation	Signature
Callum Hay	Director of Technical Services	[insert signature]

Author(s)

Name	Designation
Jason Hedley	Parks Manager

Background Papers:

ADD AS APPROPRIATE

Previous Minute Referenc