

3rd DECEMBER 2007

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES

A MINI-REVIEW OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This covering report introduces an interim report by APSE on the Parks and Open Spaces service.**

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Department is conducting a phased series of operational reviews of services to help address immediate performance issues and shape future service development. A review of the Cleaning and Catering Service has just completed, and a similar review for Parks and Open Spaces was planned to start in the last quarter of 2007.
- 2.2 At the meeting of 19th June 2007, the Trading Operations sub-committee requested that a review of grass cutting operations be brought forward to a future meeting.
- 2.3 At the meeting on 20th September, the Scrutiny committee also considered the need for a review of grass cutting. The Committee decide to postpone a decision until the Trading Operations sub-committee had considered the departments findings.
- 2.4 Considering these different but linked demands, and the difficulty of resourcing an effective, independent review internally, the department approached APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) for assistance.

An experienced APSE consultant, with an impressive background in Land Services management was engaged to conduct a mini-review of the service. The review was structured to allow continuation at a more detailed level (as originally planned) in 2008 but with a break point to allow reporting to committee in December 2007.

3 REPORT FINDINGS

- 3.1 A copy of the interim report is attached at Appendix 1
- 3.2 The key findings are:
- Standards were found to be reasonable with the quality of grass cutting being on a par with other authorities.
 - Management information is limited – estimating costs is difficult
 - Costs appear to be above average – although it is not clear if this is because of overheads (e.g. geography) or inefficiencies
 - There is a trend developing - from planned work to “fire fighting”
 - Activities are largely based on historical practices

The report concludes that there is scope for improvement, but investment in capacity and information systems will be necessary.

- 3.3 With particular reference to **grass cutting**, the report recommends
- a detailed examination of what land is currently maintained
 - better matching of service standards to the purpose of each site
 - Agreeing and applying a hierarchy of standards (higher and lower)
 - Addressing capacity issues

- Machinery – types, numbers, locations
- Skills
- More effective enablement and empowerment of staff

However the report also recommends that this should be undertaken as part of a comprehensive review of the service as a whole

- 3.4 Summarising - if agreement can be reached on a hierarchical approach (some areas maintained to a higher standard, others less so) then it should be possible to address many of the members concerns about grass cutting within existing budgets.

However, this cannot be done effectively on an ad-hoc basis so should be done systematically. A systematic approach will inform decisions about changes to standards, equipment and help identify the training and changes in management practices required to deliver an improved service.

4 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 It is proposed that the review work is concluded in 2008 to

- Resolve the immediate concerns over grass cutting (particularly in high amenity and/or high profile areas) prior to the next cutting season and develop proposals for a hierarchical approach so that this can be achieved within the existing budget.
- Identify the development resource required to address the recommendations, and develop a detailed improvement plan for approval
- Once approved, start implementation (within available budgets).

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

- 5.2 Proposals have been included in 2009/10 budget proposals for an enhanced development capacity in Environmental Services to ensure that an improvement programme can be developed and delivered.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Heads of Corporate Finance, Financial Administration, Corporate Administration, and Legal Services have been consulted and their comments have been incorporated into the report or will be reported at the committee.

7 EQUALITY

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

8 ENVIRONMENT

- 8.1 There are no environmental issues directly associated with this report.

9 RISK COMMENTARY

- 9.1 There is a risk that if the recommendations outlined in the report are not followed through, the service is unlikely to improve.

9 SUMMARY

9.1 *This report introduces a mini-review of the parks and Open Spaces service. The review, detailed in Appendix 1, concludes that grass cutting operations are reasonable and comparable with other authorities. However, improvement is possible but needs to be tackled in a systematic way. The review concludes with several recommendations to deliver improved services*

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 I recommend that the Committee

(a) Note the content of this report

(c) Agree that the review process should continue (including improvements to grass cutting, to be made prior to the next cutting season) and that a further report should be brought to the committee within 6 months, detailing progress.

Approved by

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

Author(s)

Name	Designation
Callum Hay	Director of Technical Services

Background Papers:

None

Previous Minute Reference:

**Trading Operations Sub Cttee
19th June 2007 item 6(c)**

**Scrutiny Cttee
20th September 2007 item 7(e)**