

10th March 2008

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 November to 31st December 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 completed the autumn maintenance programme and has commenced with the winter schedule of maintenance which includes, , leaf collection, shrub bed pruning and renovations, hedge cutting, sports pitch maintenance, litter picking, play area inspections and maintenance, landscaping including planting of trees and shrub/rose beds.

The section also successfully delivered the councils 10 designated Christmas trees throughout borders towns and villages with a total value of over £5k.

3.2 Budget

The current approved budget for the year is of a trading loss of £1k.

3.3 Updated Projections

The section is currently forecasting a trading surplus of £13k.

3.4 Resources

A report on sourcing of plants previously grown at the GlenCraig Nursery in Peebles has been prepared. The report as previously advised was reported to the Administration Policy Working Group in December and will be heard by the Executive on 26th February.

In advance of this plans have been progressed to initiate the scheme as per the proposals contained in the report.

Following the last round of reporting, the service commissioned a review by APSE into general service provision, with a focus on grass cutting operations. At the last round of this committee the committee requested an update on progress against the actions contained in the action plan. This presentation will follow from this report.

3.5 Staffing

The section continues to employ its full compliment of 86 FTE manual staff, and 7 APT&C

staff.

Progress has been made on the issue of the employment of seasonal staff, with Human Resources advising that where a person was employed in the previous season, and they had successfully supplied references and medical self assessment then we could re-employ them without interview. This is a significant breakthrough and will serve to streamline the employment process.

3.6 Training

The training programme for the staff has continued to be delivered through the period

3.7 Health and Safety

The section has continued to review risk assessments, with 20 being complete and 2 remaining.

Further trials of grass cutting machinery for use on embankments were successfully concluded at Nisbet tower area, Eyemouth; Tweedgreen, Coldstream; Gunn Road Earlston. The service is now seeking finance to enable use of the machinery in the 08-09 season as a growth item in the 2008/09 budget.

5 incidents/ accidents were reported during November and December.

Sickness and Absence levels among our grounds maintenance staff ran at 3.31% during November and 2.30% during December.

Financial Implications

4.1 The previously agreed budget trading loss of £1k has been increased to a trading surplus of £13k following a decision to defer training and health and safety expenditure to April 2008 to contribute towards achieving a balanced budget in Environmental Services.

4.2 Significant contracts with external clients, including SBHA, Waverley housing association are being extended for a further period. Eildon Housing association has indicated that they will be going through a full tender exercise, which the service will be included in.

Meetings with internal customers have been ongoing and successful in improving communications. Steps to improve the maintenance standards at industrial sites have been agreed with the relevant officers, and staff deployed to deal with hedge/shrub and weed issues.

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 outcome of the national Beautiful Scotland competition has seen both Galashiels and Peebles achieve national recognition for their efforts. Galashiels was awarded four Thistles (with five being the highest mark) in their category, effectively placing them third in their national category. Recognition was also achieved by Whitsome in the neighbourhood awards.

Risk Commentary

8.1 Recruitment and retention of seasonal staff remains a challenge for the section, due to

competition in the local employment market. The new streamlined recruitment policy of seasonal staff as detailed in section 3.5 should help greatly in the season 08-09.

- 8.3 Eildon Housing may choose an alternative supplier, subject to the outcome of their tendering exercise, which would be managed by reducing the expenditure on seasonal staff and machinery accordingly.
- 8.4 The risk to staff morale, generated by the ongoing uncertainty regarding single status has yet to be fully realised. However the unrest to staff which this issue continues to cause with should be acknowledged.

Recommendations

9.1 I recommend that the Trading Operations Sub-Committee:

- (a) Agree the contents of this report**
- (b) Approve the projected outturn as the revised approved budget.**

Approved by

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

Author(s)

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Background Papers:
Previous Minute Reference:

