

**23<sup>rd</sup> JUNE 2008**

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**REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES**

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**GROUNDS MAINTENANCE TRADING OPERATION**

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**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To update the members of the Trading Operations Sub Committee on the 2007/08 financial year outturn of the Grounds Maintenance trading operation and an update on current issues for 2008/09.**

**2 Matters Arising from previous Trading Sub Committee**

- 2.1 There are no matters arising.

**3 Background**

- 3.1 The grounds maintenance service is the in-house service provider of grounds maintenance services for Scottish Borders Council, including a number of other departments/services throughout the council. Contractual grounds maintenance services are also provided to a range of external clients, including some registered social landlords and smaller concerns throughout the borders

**4 Business Performance and Update**

- 4.1 **Workload:** Winter maintenance including, shrub bed renovation, salting of paths in cemeteries/parks as required, removal of festive Christmas trees, hedge cutting, litter clearance, tree pruning.

Commencement of spring maintenance including weed killing in drying areas, hard standings, against obstacles and edges. In some areas, due to contract terms, commencement of grass cutting operations.

Development of the actions of the best value review of grass cutting operations.

34 contracts were tendered for the 2008-09 season, 31 were successful. These contracts have a value of £332k, in comparison with a value of £353k for the 2007-08 season. A reduction of contractual income of £21k.

- 4.2 **Budget :** A budget trading surplus of £55k has been agreed for 2008/09.

- 4.3 **Updated Projections:** The trading surplus of £55k is considered ambitious given experiences of 2007/08.

- 4.4 **Resources:** To meet the reduction of contractual income, fewer seasonal staff have been employed.

- 4.5 **Staffing:** Seasonal staff recruitment has been far more effective this year; this is due to an improvement in the procedures associated with the recruitment and terms and conditions that we can offer our seasonal staff, and the flexibility which HR allowed us

to operate. All seasonal staff have been put through a formal induction programme. This is in line with the recommendations contained in the IIP report of last October, which reported that seasonal staff felt undervalued as a result of their temporary employment status with the council, despite many returning for a number of years.

- 4.6 **Training** : Training has continued to be rolled out to all staff in line with the sections training matrix. The courses and numbers of staff trained are shown at appendix 2.

Additional training on undertaking risk assessments and specifically the “*Managing Safely*” course, operated by the council, has been undertaken by all managers, foremen and charge-hands.

- 4.7 **Health and Safety** ; The section has improved its procedures in this area by continuing to review the sections risk assessments and safe systems of work, in doing so all staff identified as appropriate to undertake risk assessments have been trained to allow them to do so.

21 risk assessments and 19 safe systems of work have been reviewed with 1 risk assessment still to be reviewed and 4 safe systems of work remaining to be reviewed. This remaining review will be complete by the end of July 2008.

The issue of working on steep embankments, previously notified to this committee, continues to present a challenge to the section. A recent court case brought against a council in England found them at fault in relation to their procedures/systems for working on steep embankments, when considering the death of one of their employees cutting grass on an embankment. Our programme of review of risk assessments has identified the role that anti-roll bars and seatbelts play in any safe system of work on embankments, and a programme of implementation is currently being worked on. Additionally, the section has considered the amount of banks and the current standards of service provision against the utilisation of the new grass cutting equipment, (the “Spider”) which is to be utilised to cut grass embankments. The outcome is that the “Spider” will be utilised on high profile embankments only, on an approximate frequency of 13-15 cuts per season. Other areas will either

- a- be cut using tractor mounted flail on a reduced frequency,
- b- be planted with bulbs, and then cut as above,
- c- be left completely,
- d- have growth retardants used,

All embankments have been prioritised as high, medium and low risk, and the section is reviewing those higher priority sites first, with any management changes likely to be implemented in the 2008-09 season. Medium and low priority areas will be assessed later this year with changes implemented for the 2009-10 season.

## 5 **Financial Implications**

- 5.1 Ground maintenance has achieved a break-even position for 2007/08 compared to a revised trading surplus budget of £13k. Total income for the year has been in line with budget with increased costs responsible for the surplus reduction.

## 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.

## 7 **Equality**

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

7.2 There are no rural proofing 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 are risks associated with working on steep embankments, with steps being implemented to carry out systematic assessments and to change management regimes, coupled with implementing anti roll bars and seatbelts.

## 10 Future Activities

10.1 The seasonal nature of grass cutting will form the main focus for the service through the next six months. Work to deal with this derived from the mini best value review, previously reported to committee, is ongoing and confidence is high that service standards will be sustained

## 11 Summary

11.1 There is a reduced value of contracted maintenance for the 2008-09 seasons.

11.2 Work on steep embankments is being evaluated and new management systems and maintenance regimes implemented.

11.3 There has been an improvement in the procedures associated with the recruitment and terms and conditions that we can offer our seasonal staff.

## 12 Recommendations

**12.1 I recommend that the Group:**

**(a) Notes the contents of this report**

**(b) Approve the outturn as the final position for the Grounds Maintenance Trading Organisation in 2007-08.**

### Approved by

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

### Author(s)

Name	Designation
Jason Hedley	Parks & Open Spaces Manager

**Background Papers:**

**ADD AS APPROPRIATE**

**Previous Minute Reference:**