

- To determine a way forward to ensure there is a consistent approach throughout the Borough by all organisations
- 4.3 In scoping the review the Task and Finish Group agreed to seek evidence from Officers from Rossendale Borough Council, Lancashire County Council, Green Vale Homes and Whitworth Town Council.
- 4.4 All Members were asked to assist the Task and Finish Group by forwarding any areas of concern to them. There were a number of concerns which appeared to be consistent to all wards, which are detailed below.
- Cutting not undertaken frequently enough
 - Grass cuttings not cleared up, particularly after the first cut of the season when the grass was very long
 - Adverse comments about edges being treated with weed killer instead of being strimmed
 - Problem areas where more two or more organisations were responsible.
- 4.5 The report of the Task and Finish Group is attached at Appendix A..
- N.B. Since undertaking this review, Overview and Scrutiny have been informed that a pilot scheme has being undertaken in South Ribble commencing 1st April 2009. South Ribble would take over responsibility for all grass cutting formerly undertaken by Lancashire County Council, who has estimated the amount of money spent on grass cutting in South Ribble and will pay this sum to them. If it was seen that there were improvements on the current practice, then from April 2010 any district that wanted to would be able to adopt the same arrangements.

Overview and Scrutiny Members were disappointed that Lancashire County Council had not presented the Task and Finish Group with this information at an earlier stage.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 5.1 The financial implications arising from the report have not been included in the 2009/10 budget.
- 5.2 Key assumption 1 of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy does not allow for in year supplementary budget resources. Therefore, the financial implications arising from the recommendations, if implemented, must be met from existing resources. The report does not specifically identify the financial resource.

6. MONITORING OFFICER

- 6.1 No comments.

7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

7.1 No Human Resources implications arising from the report

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 That the Cabinet considers the report of the Task and Finish Group and the recommendations detailed within the report.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

9.1 That the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services in consultation with the Operations Manager provide a response to the Grass Cutting Task and Finish Group recommendations listed as follows and report back to a future Cabinet meeting:

1. That consideration be given to purchasing a side-arm flail to enable the cutting of steep bankings, at a cost of £42,370 capital one off cost and £17,000 annual revenue, from within its service budget.
2. That the Operations Manager consider increasing the number of cuts by both Lancashire County Council and Rossendale Borough Council, which would give a considerable reduction in grass cuttings. Increase in cuts and costings need to be agreed by both organisations.
3. That in order to have a co-ordinated approach to grass cutting between all organisations, a 'lead officer' be nominated within the Operations Department to ensure that maintenance schedules are adhered to. LCC, Highways Agency and Greenvale should share their grass cutting information with this person and keep them up to date with any problems that may cause that schedule to slip.
4. That the Council and Highways Agency work together to look into sponsorship to improve the Rising Bridge roundabout.
5. That the Council look further into how sponsorship money is collected, allocated and utilised for all roundabouts throughout the Borough.
6. That consideration be given to looking at new ways of working to provide flexibility of working practices.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

10.1 Councillors
Neighbourhood Forums

11. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is an Equality Impact Assessment required No

Is an Equality Impact Assessment attached No

12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required No

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment attached No

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SCRUTINY

REPORT OF THE GRASS CUTTING TASK AND FINISH GROUP

December 2008

Version Number:	2	Team:	Democratic
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1. Purpose of the Report

To outline the findings of the Task and Finish Group, in relation to grass cutting throughout the Borough.

2. Background

- 2.1 Whilst developing its Work Programme for 2008/09, it was agreed that a Task and Finish Group be established to look at grass cutting throughout the Borough, which is undertaken by Rossendale Borough Council, Lancashire County Council, Highways Agency, Green Vale Homes and Whitworth Town Council.
- 2.2 The key area related to the current programme of grass cutting carried out by each of the organisations. It was agreed that there was a need to identify actions to resolve these issues.
- 2.3 Grass cutting is a regular feature for discussion at Neighbourhood Forum meetings. The concerns expressed by members of the public relate to the frequency of cutting, the quality of work and grass cuttings not being cleared up after the cuts.
- 2.4 The Task and Finish Group first met in July, with further meetings in August, September, October and finalising their report in December 2008.

3. Membership of the Task and Finish Group and Terms of Reference

- 3.1 The Members of the Task and Finish Group were Councillor Thorne (Chair), Councillor Cheetham, Councillor Crawforth, Councillor Lamb, Councillor Morris and Councillor Neal.
- 3.2 The Terms of Reference were as follows:
 - To review the timetables for grass cutting for each responsible organisation – Lancashire County Council, Rossendale Borough Council, Green Vale Homes and Whitworth Town Council
 - To identify problem areas throughout the Borough based on internal information eg complaints, local councillor awareness
 - To determine a way forward to ensure there is a consistent approach throughout the Borough by all organisations

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4. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

In determining how to take the work forward and to ensure they consulted with all organisations involved, the Task and Finish Group agreed that all organisations would be invited to provide details of each of their programme of cuts.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 To review the timetables for grass cutting for each responsible organisation – Lancashire County Council, Rossendale Borough Council, Green Vale Homes and Whitworth Town Council

Representatives from each responsible organisation were invited to the August meeting to give an overview of the current grass cutting arrangements and frequency of grass cutting (information at 7).

The following Officers attended to provide information.

- Daniel Herbert, Area East Manager, Highways, Lancashire County Council
- Jason Foster, Operations Manager, Rossendale Borough Council
- Martin Yates, Green Vale Homes
- Andrew Olive, Highways Agency

5.2 To identify problem areas throughout the Borough based on internal information eg complaints, local councillor awareness

A letter was sent to all Members asking for details of any areas of concern, which could be included in future monitoring. The Operations Manager followed up the issues identified by Members.

Members also fed back the following concerns:

- Cutting not done frequently enough
- Lumps of unsightly grass not cleared up, particularly after the first cut when the grass is very long
- Adverse comments about edges being treated with weed killer instead of being trimmed
- Problem areas where two or more organisations were responsible

Comments raised at Neighbourhood Forums in relation to grass cutting were also presented to the Task and Finish Group.

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Members also took photographs of areas which would be used as evidence.

5.3 To determine a way forward to ensure there is a consistent approach throughout the Borough by all organisations

The Task and Finish Group highlighted a section from the Locality Plan for Rossendale Borough Council which highlighted the following;

To agree shared standards for maintenance of the Borough's public realm aimed at creating and maintaining quality public and community spaces and covering, amongst others, grass cutting.

It was accepted that this could only be achieved if the 'host' Borough took the lead on ensuring a consistent approach throughout the Borough. More emphasis needs to be placed on quality of cuts with appropriate monitoring and checking mechanism.

6. COSTINGS

The Council's budget for grass cutting is £250,000 per annum. Staffing is detailed below:

Area	Staffing
Rawtenstall Mobile	2
Haslingden Mobile	2
Whittaker Park	2
Whitworth Mobile	2
Stubbylee Park	3
Bacup Mobile	2
Tractor Team	3
Cemeteries	4

Staff work 39 hours per week in the Summer (30 weeks of the year) and 34.5 hours in winter (22 weeks of the year). All posts are full-time and permanent, although at the moment two agency staff are employed to fill two gardener posts. These posts are being advertised with the aim of having one gardener and two apprentices.

Lots of different equipment is used to provide this service and this differs for each area, as required.

Members raised concern that the steep banking in Bacup was not being cut and it evolved that this was a decision taken at a Committee in 2001, due to health and safety. The Task and Finish Group were informed that a side arm flail, was needed to cut the steep bankings throughout the Borough.

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Costing for this piece of equipment was broken down as follows.

Side arm flail retailing	£18,730
A tractor to mount the flail	£24,000
Running costs and staff	£17,000

Therefore, £42,370 capital one of cost and £17,000 annual revenue, which implies appointing a member of staff required for only 30 weeks over the growing season. Members suggested that if a side arm flail was purchased then thought should be given to leasing this equipment to neighbouring authorities when not in use by the Council.

Estimated figures for renting this equipment was £265 per day (£300 per day taking into account any possible increases in running costs next year). There would be 10-15 days each cut and it was recommended that three cuts per session, such as May, early July and October. This would equate to £13,000 for renting the side arm flail per year.

Members agreed that the Council should look into buying a side arm flail, which would fit nicely with the 'Pride in Rossendale' project.

There is also a budget of £18,500 per year for the replacement of small equipment and there is £6,080 in the leasing budget for various small non vehicle items (mowers etc).

In addition for 2009-10, there is in total of £12,790 for the purchase of tools, the majority of which are probably consumed by the Parks Team.

7. QUALITY OF CUTTING

A number of issues can be incorporated under this heading, including, incomplete cuttings.

There were a number of complaints about not just times and amounts of cuts but also about the quality. The fact that complaints would possibly increase in May, June and July, was due to the natural surge in grass growth during these months.

Frequency of cuts are covered later in the report, but it was agreed that some verges remain in poor condition throughout the year and that more cuts should be programmed into the year.

It is the role of the Supervisor to validate/monitor cuts on a daily basis with assistance and guidance from the Assistant Operations Manager for Parks and Open Spaces. Monitoring has been covered by the Assistant Operations Manager, the West area supervisor and information from the public.

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8. FREQUENCY OF CUTTING

8.1 Rossendale Borough Council

The number of cuts varied widely from site to site due to the poor weather affecting the ground conditions, but generally there are ten cuts per year.

High profile areas such as memorial gardens and town centre gardens, such as the library gardens in Rawtenstall have maintained a weekly cut. Other sites that are known to be very wet or sloping have received, in places, only 5 cuts – but these are few.

Most sites have received the planned one cut every three weeks, as a minimum. Bowling greens and fine turf had generally received the minimum two cuts per week with only occasional times when only one cut was possible. Cutting continued until the end of October.

Fine turf and bowling greens would be renovated during October, so cutting is reduced. Pitches would continue to be cut in accordance with scheduled matches to maintain a playable surface, but the frequency can be weather dependent.

8.2 Lancashire County Council (LCC)

As part of the Highways Agreement that 8 cuts be undertaken a year, the Council had paid for an extra 2 cuts this year alone at an additional cost of £7,500.

The following information from Lancashire County Council was that nine of the planned ten cuts for the season had been completed. The final cut was delayed due to weather conditions but members were concerned that if the final cut was delayed to long the grass cutting equipment would not be available as it was on hire until end of September. Enquiries were being made about this to ensure the final cut would take place, which the group understood had taken place.

In relation to monitoring of cuts, the County work closely with the contractors, Lancashire County's Engineering Service Grounds Maintenance Team and also carry out their own monitoring during the course of the season.

In relation to the Bolton Road North roundabout, [LCC](#) do a 1m wide cut around the perimeter of the roundabout, but the rest is the Council's responsibility. Joint discussions are ongoing about the need to tidy up the roundabout.

8.3 Whitworth Town Council

The Town Council only takes care of two grass bankings on a regular basis, these are on Market Street. They are both tended to by the Parish

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Lengthsman, who mows them fortnightly during the spring and summer months and infrequently at other times of the year, although not at all during winter.

In addition to this the Lengthsman undertakes a number of sporadic pruning and trimming edges throughout the year, as and when a request comes in. This is mainly undertaken on Town Council land, although he will do this on Rossendale Borough Council or Lancashire County Council land if it is a simple job and needs a quick response.

8.4 Green Vale Homes

Green Vale Homes maintains many of the grassed open spaces on its estates, including most of the open plan areas, but some areas are the responsibility of other organisations or private individuals.

Grass cutting generally takes place from the beginning of April to end of September, depending on weather conditions.

During the grass cutting season sites are mowed on a fortnightly basis and they sweep paths, steps and other adjoining areas or blow them clear of cuttings.

8.5 Highways Agency

The Assistant Performance Manager, Highways Agency, confirmed that up to 12 months ago contractors provided the general maintenance work on their behalf, which included grass cutting and litter picking between 2-4 times per year. This is now performance related and cuts are undertaken to specification, which varies/changes each route.

He explained the work undertaken on the Rising Bridge roundabout and that sight lanes were cut at least twice a year.

The Assistant Performance Manager, Highways Agency, agreed to make enquiries of local businesses to provide sponsorship for the planting of bulbs, shrubs etc on the Rising Bridge roundabout.

9. CONCLUSION

There was a need for closer monitoring of cuts in the future and corrective action taken immediately to ensure standards of quality were met.

Although all organisations commented that collecting and disposing of grass cuttings would be extremely expensive, leaving the cuttings on the ground is the most environmentally friendly method, because they mulch down and return nutrients to the soil.

It was agreed that, as the roundabout at Rising Bridge was an 'entrance to the Borough', it was necessary for improvements to be made, ie bulbs, shrubs on

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the roundabout, which would fit in with 'Pride of Rossendale'. The Assistant Programme Manager confirmed that the Highways Agency still operate a Sponsorship Guidance Policy and information on this would be forwarded to the Area Manager of Communities, to enable the Council to look into the issue further.

There was a need for clarification on how the sponsorship money was used and how this was collected, allocated and utilised in relation to all roundabouts throughout the Borough.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That consideration be given to purchasing a side-arm flail to enable the cutting of steep bankings, at a cost of £42,370 capital one off cost and £17,000 annual revenue, from within its service budget.
2. That the Operations Manager consider increasing the number of cuts by both Lancashire County Council and Rossendale Borough Council, which would give a considerable reduction in grass cuttings. Increase in cuts and costings need to be agreed by both organisations.
3. That in order to have a co-ordinated approach to grass cutting between all organisations, a 'lead officer' be nominated within the Operations Department to ensure that maintenance schedules are adhered to. LCC, Highways Agency and Greenvale should share their grass cutting information with this person and keep them up to date with any problems that may cause that schedule to slip.
4. That the Council and Highways Agency work together to look into sponsorship to improve the Rising Bridge roundabout.
5. That the Council look further into how sponsorship money is collected, allocated and utilised for all roundabouts throughout the Borough.
6. That consideration be given to looking at new ways of working to provide flexibility of working practices.

The Task and Finish Group would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this report.

Daniel Herbert, Lancashire County Council
 Andrew Olive, Highways Agency
 Martin Yates, Green Vale Homes
 Jason Foster, Rossendale Borough Council
 Julie Jackson, Rossendale Borough Council
 Tamzin Percival, Rossendale Borough Council
 Karen Douglas for providing the information on Whitworth Town Council

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