

Subject: Public Realm Integration Project

Status: For Publication

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 3rd June 2010

Report of: Chief Executive.

Portfolio

Holder: Environmental Services

Key Decision: Yes

Forward Plan General Exception Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To set out the operational and financial consequences in relation to the Borough Council implementing phase 1 of the Public Realm Project, which relates to the 'clean and green' agenda.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:-
- Delivering Quality Services to Our Customers
 - Keeping our Borough Clean, Green and Safe
 - Providing Value for Money Services

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:
- The cost implications and future management issues as detailed in the report;
 - The potential for disjointed delivery and a lack of accountability; and
 - Reduced levels of customer satisfaction.

4 BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

4.1 A Report was submitted to Cabinet on the 25th November 2010 detailing the Lancashire County Council Public Realm Project. This report recommended that a further report be presented identifying the operational and financial consequences in relation to Rossendale Borough Council (RBC).

4.2 The Public Realm Project was developed following the 'Team Lancashire' pilot project in Ribble Valley, which was to "create an environment within Lancashire whereby joined up local government working is seen to be the way to do business" (Task Group on Highways, Trees and Verges, Lancashire County Council, April 2009). This set out that:

"The arrangements for grass cutting under this pilot project is for the district council to carry out all grass cutting in the area for the same money but providing a higher standard of service than previously." (p 15)

4.3 There have been discussions between officers at Lancashire County Council (LCC) and RBC with regard to implementing Phase 1 of the Public Realm Project, which is about integrating the 'clean and green' services. The discussions have involved looking at the budget which would be available from LCC and considering what services could be provided by RBC within the available budget.

4.4 Current Arrangements With Lancashire County Council

4.4.1 Following discussions with Lancashire County Council, it was confirmed that in total £47,900 was the allocated budget for green space maintenance for Rossendale. This can be broken down in the following ways:-

•	Verge maintenance – shrubs, urban and rural grass cutting	£18,000
•	Verge maintenance – sidings	£ 6,700
•	Tree maintenance	£13,500
•	Hedges	£ 400
•	Weed treatment	<u>£ 9,300</u>
•	Total	£47,900

4.4.2 However, the budget as detailed above does not appear to completely reflect the actual spend on providing these services. Indicative reports suggest that the true costs of green space maintenance may be higher.

4.4.3 Lancashire County Council themselves have confirmed that during fiscal year 2009/10, their spend on urban grass cutting was circa £36,000 and a further £15,000 was spent on rural works. In addition, Lancashire County Council have confirmed that the estimate for grass cutting in total for year 2010/11 is £60,000 which includes urban, rural and high risk roads but doesn't include the remaining headers in 4.2.1.

4.4.4 In addition to the above, Lancashire County Council receives an income from the sponsorship of some roundabouts, and whilst no actual figure has been provided it is estimated that this figure is c.£3,000 pa. The current allocation of

this income is a 50/50 split between RBC and LCC. Rossendale Borough Council therefore currently receives c.£1,500 per year in roundabout sponsorship income. This forms part of the Operations Team overall budget and is allocated to the overall maintenance of all green space.

- 4.4.5 If RBC were to maintain the sites where this income is generated under the Public Realm Project, it is presumed that RBC would be the sole beneficiary of any sponsorship income, therefore extending the budget by approximately £3,000. However, income generated by sponsorship cannot be relied upon on an ongoing basis as it is not guaranteed.
- 4.4.6 The standard of maintenance that the above budget in 4.2.1 affords is detailed in the Lancashire Highways Maintenance Plan. For grassed areas this is 5 cuts per year to maintain growth not exceeding 150 mm height. For shrub bed areas the maintenance in the plan is defined as minimum required and, as such, little or no maintenance is applied to these areas in Rossendale.
- 4.4.7 For tree maintenance, work is only undertaken if the tree is seen as a hazard to vehicular or pedestrian movement. Weed killing is already undertaken by RBC who match from the operations budget £9,300 to undertake two applications throughout the valley, once in spring with a further application in late summer.
- 4.4.8 At present, LCC, following the negotiations surrounding the Residual Highways agreement, has agreed to maintain the grass verges at 8 cuts per year until the end of the 2010/11 season. After this period, LCC have confirmed that the standard will return to the specification as detailed in the Highways Maintenance Plan, which is 5 cuts per year to maintain growth not exceeding 150 mm height

4.5 What RBC Can Provide for a Budget of £47,900

- 4.5.1 It is expected that, should the range of Phase 1 Public Realm Project services transfer to RBC, then the budget in its entirety would also transfer. However, as detailed in section 4.2.1 the budget allocation is significantly less than the estimated spend for 2010/11 of £60,000.
- 4.5.2 If RBC did choose to deliver the Public Realm agreement from the available budget of £47,900, it has been agreed with LCC that RBC would not have to stick to the headers as detailed in 4.2.1 above but would be able to allocate cash based on Member and community priorities. This means that if members wanted to spend more on grass cutting and less on tree maintenance and weed control this would be possible, the only proviso being that the standards as detailed in the Highways Plan are adhered to.
- 4.5.3 To what level this revenue is reallocated would be an operational decision, but ultimately it would translate to the reduction or removal of one service to deliver another, as per the headers as detailed in 4.2.1.

4.6 Funding Required to Implement the Project to RBC Standards

4.6.1 RBC maintain amenity grass, such as that currently being maintained by Lancashire County Council, 10 times per season (as opposed to their 5 cuts per season). In addition to this, RBC maintain shrub bed areas all year round, ensuring they are trimmed and kept litter free. Maintenance of shrub beds involves the regular removal of litter, pruning a minimum of once per season, removal of weeds and application of annual weed suppressant such a woodchip.

4.6.2 To maintain the grass cutting sites as identified in the Public Realm Project (excluding rural verges), to the 10 cuts standard as currently applied in Rossendale, and maintain shrub bed areas as detailed above, it's estimated that the total additional cost to RBC would be approximately £43,000. This includes staffing and equipment hire costs as set out below:

Cost for Extra Employees & Equipment per week			
Description	Hr Rate*	No. Weeks*	Cost
Gardener Grade 3	12.42	29	£ 14,047.02
Gardener Grade 4 chargehand	13.60	29	£ 15,381.60
Transit and Trailer	5.00	29	£ 5,655.00
Scag Mower	4.12	29	£ 4,659.72
Small Plant x 2	2.66	29	£ 3,008.46
			£ 42,751.80

* Hr Rate inc National Insurance, pension etc.

* 29 weeks throughout mowing season. 39 hours per week summer hours.

4.6.3 The estimation on labour has been calculated using current contract rates. These rates are calculated by using accurate measurements of the areas of land that LCC have a responsibility for.

4.6.4 In addition to the above, in order to carry out cuts on rural verges, specialist equipment is required (side arm flail). This service could be sub-contracted for a cost of £15,000.

4.6.5 If this equipment were to be purchased, it could also be used to maintain some steep bankings which are currently a health and safety risk (as per the Cabinet report on Grass Cutting). The cost of this would be £43,000 (£24,000 for a tractor and £19,000 for a side arm flail) and the equipment would need to be replaced every 3-5 years. The staffing cost would be approximately £17,000 per annum, which is based on recruiting temporary staff for the growing period (March – October). However, these costs are not currently contained with existing LCC or RBC revenue or capital budgets.

4.6.6 Overall, to deliver maintenance of the services listed in 4.2.1 to RBC standards, the cost to RBC would be as follows:

Projected Spend

• Verges Maintenance and Shrubs (Rossendale as Contractor)	£(42,000)
• Verges Maintenance – Sidings (Sub Contracted)	£(15,000)
• Tree Maintenance	£(13,500)
• Hedges	£(400)
• Weed Treatment	£(9,300)
• Sub Total	<u>£(80,200)</u>

Available Budget

• LCC Budget	£47,900
• Sponsorship of roundabouts	£3,000
• Sub Total	<u>£50,900</u>
Total Deficit	<u>£(29,300)</u>
Total Deficit if sponsorship not forthcoming	<u>£(32,300)</u>

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 5.1 Financial matters are noted in the report. The conclusion must be that the current proposal for the transfer of resources from Lancashire County Council will not be sufficient to deliver a maintenance schedule equivalent to the current standard nor Member and Office expectations.
- 5.2 The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy indicates a number of significant financial pressures over the medium term. Any final recommendations must be contained within identifiable and available budget resources

6. MONITORING OFFICER

- 6.1 No comments.

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

- 7.1 The report has no Human Resource implications.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The pilot project has the potential for improved co-ordination across a range of Highway, Transport and Environmental activities which could result in more efficient and customer focused services.

- 8.2 However at the current level of budget allocation Rossendale would only be able to improve areas such as shrub and grass maintenance at the detriment of other customer priorities such as tree maintenance and weed control.
- 8.3 Rossendale Councillors, through the Overview and Scrutiny Grass Cutting Task and Finish group, have expressed a view that they would like to see this project as a method to improve the portfolio of services currently offered by both RBC and LCC, with the potential for any savings to be reinvested in improving high profile sites such as roundabouts, rural verges and steep bankings.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 9.1 That the decision to participate in the Public Realm Project be deferred until funding can be identified to adequately cover the revenue and capital associated with delivering services to the appropriate Rossendale Borough Council standards.
- 9.2 That the Director of Customers and Communities from RBC meets with the Director of Environmental Services from LCC to explore any further possible options for delivering Phase 1 of the Public Realm Project within budget and to the appropriate standards.
- 9.3 That a further report is presented to Cabinet once options have been fully explored and if the position changes.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

- 10.1 Project meetings with Lancashire County Council and Member Drop in Sessions.

11. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- Is a Community Impact Assessment required No
- Is a Community 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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Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Lancashire County Council Public Realm Cabinet Report oct09	Henrietta Street
Lancashire County Council Public Realm Cabinet Appendix oct09	Henrietta Street
Lancashire County Council Highway Maintenance Plan 2009/10	Henrietta Street