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<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM: 7</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b>	<b>24<sup>th</sup> October 2012</b>	<b>CATEGORY: DELEGATED</b>
<b>REPORT FROM:</b>	<b>Steve Carter Steve Sheppard</b>	<b>OPEN</b>
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<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Service Review: Grounds Maintenance</b>	<b>REF:</b>
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>	<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE:</b>

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**1. Recommendations**

1.1 That Members note and comment on the actions that have been undertaken and proposed to ensure the operation of an effective and quality service.

**2. Purpose of Report**

2.1 To advise members of progress on actions identified in the report to the 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2012 committee meeting and to review and approve newly developed actions that seek to enable the grounds maintenance service to meet changing client demands and continue to improve service levels.

2.2 Each individual action agreed in May forms a section in the report below.

**3. Quality Control**

3.1 Quality Control. Action 7.1 of the May report found that of the three clients identified, County Council, the Housing Service and the Leisure Service (Parks/open spaces), only the latter were undertaking client inspections in a scheduled way. As an 'in house' service it is the role of the in-house contractor lead, i.e. the Grounds Maintenance Manager, to ensure quality across the board. He, and the Grounds Supervisor, at the time of the previous report had been undertaking a quality inspection process but it was agreed this would be reviewed and – “an amended Quality control system is to be in place by 1.10.12”. Closely linked to this was (Action 7.2 of May report) which was to clearly define 'who does what' so that any unproductive element of a hard client/contractor split could be eliminated.

3.2 The Grounds team quality monitoring schedule, at appendix A, and the amended weekly inspection sheet, at appendix B, are both in operation.

3.3 Over the intervening months further discussions have been held with all three clients to identify areas that they felt needed improvement in the quality regime. These are listed below:

- 3.3.1 The County Council felt that the service provided was good based on the low number of concerns raised by the public. They had no proposals to change the specification.
- 3.3.2 The Housing Service are also generally satisfied with the service provision but would like to have a monthly report updating the progress of work against schedule along with a commentary as to why certain work may be behind or ahead of that schedule. They would also like to see, in the same report, a summary of the quality inspections undertaken by the Grounds Maintenance Manager.
- 3.3.3 Discussions with the Leisure Service revealed the following concerns:
- That there was no gathering of complaints or concerns in a central location.
  - That the specification for the service needs to be more adaptable and where items are needed routinely that were not originally specified as such then separate orders and cost transfers have to be arranged wasting time and effort on both sides of the client contractor relationship.
- 3.3.4 The Grounds team are in the process of putting the proposals made by Housing and Leisure services into operation in full by 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012 including the second point made in 3.3.3. In relation to this an annual variation sheet is being developed that will list agreed changes to specification and the associated volume/cost. The costs will be mainstreamed into the budget from the Leisure or Housing (as appropriate) allocations currently available for one-off instructions. The unit prices for additional works are set in the base contract documentation i.e. the prices for additional works are set at the lowest 2011 tendered rates.
- 3.3.5 The discussions revealed there was no duplication of activities as a result of people performing client and contractor roles.

#### **4 Feedback**

- 4.1 As identified in the May report the customer feedback channels are limited to a formal customer complaint or an unlogged telephone call. The review wanted to do more about getting feedback from local recipients of the service. Actions proposed were a targeted questionnaire to 500 residents by 1.7.12 and a website feedback option to be developed by 1.7.12.
- 4.2 The original timescale for this was not achieved. It has been a very difficult summer operationally for the grounds staff being officially the wettest summer in 100 years. All possible resources have been directed at service delivery and staff on several occasions have volunteered for weekend working just to enable the service to stay broadly in line with schedule. Things have settled down in the last few weeks and a survey process is now underway utilising a Freepost response survey card that is delivered to targeted numbers of residents residing in properties adjacent to the location of each cutting activity. An example of this is shown as Appendix C. It is simple to deliver and administer and can be modified easily and aligned with prize draw options, if needed, to increase feedback.
- 4.3 The results of the survey will be incorporated in the overall quality monitoring process and reported to Head of Service level quarterly.
- 4.4 Arrangements are in place for a two month web-based survey advertised by a 'help us improve our service' banner on the front page of the South Derbyshire Website this will commence from the start of the 2013 grass cutting programme. Additionally

as part of the second phase of the customer access strategy, complaints received via the telephone will have a web access channel option.

## **5 County Funded Works**

- 5.1 The current agreement and funding with County is relatively loosely defined. Our assessment is that overall (including some highways work) the amount of work we do is broadly commensurate with the funding supplied but there does need to be more written down about what we are providing and what it costs us to do that. The County are currently looking to cut their level of funding. The action agreed at the May meeting was to agree a service level agreement with County by 1.12.12
- 5.2 Two meetings have been held with County. At the first in June they confirmed that the funding levels for this year would not be reduced but discussions needed to be held about restructuring service levels to find ways of reducing costs for 2013/14. At the second meeting in September it was confirmed that County plan to reduce funding for 2013/14 but do not wish to detail service levels precisely. There clearly needs to be more work done on this. The position taken by District Council officers is that any review of the services delivered by ourselves on behalf of County needs to be done jointly. It was agreed that the matter should also be brought to the attention of councillors in both organisations which has been done. The development of a service level agreement in relation to frequency and scope of works will come out of the further discussions about to happen relating to the budgetary position.

## **6 External accreditation.**

- 6.1 The general perception of the service reported in May and found by the subcommittee review was seen to be good and improving. It was suggested that there may be some benefit in seeking an external accreditation as verification of the improvements. It was recognised that such a commitment involves a significant additional work burden. The proposal was that this option was to be explored further and reported back to Committee on a cost benefit basis.
- 6.2 Quality Standards can be implemented for any business process, typically ISO 9001 is the quality standard of choice. There are a number of related ISO standards that cover specific Grounds maintenance activities and include a variety of schedules around health and safety, and environmental standards as well as the process standard. The environmental standards relate to individual operations around grass, pesticides, weed spraying, and tree work.
- 6.3 Full implementation of a comprehensive set of standards is estimated at 1.5 to 2 years the cost of which will be in the order of £15K plus annual costs of around £5K for audit cost to the Standard. In addition there would need to be a dedicated administrative resource equating to 15-20 hours per week, the cost of which would be around £12,000 per annum. The justification for this expenditure would be a firm focus being given to quality improvement. The context though of a proposal to increase expenditure has to be considered against the background of the 28% cut in government grant implemented in 2011-13 and the likelihood of a further reduction in subsequent years.
- 6.4 It is therefore recommended that we don't follow a formal accreditation route but officers develop further in-house quality monitoring processes and produce an annual report detailing priorities for future action. The first such report to be produced before the main cutting season commences in April 2013.

## **7 Corporate Implications**

- 7.1 The Council's reputation is assessed by many on the standard of such generic services as grounds maintenance i.e. its key that this service be of a good quality. The outcome of the review was that this is generally the case. The actions above, already in place and those that will come from the investigations will provide opportunities for improvements to be identified and will help to improve our position and the value we provide.