

Key Decision Required:	No	In the Forward Plan:	No
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CABINET

17 SEPTEMBER 2021

REFERENCE FROM COUNCIL

A.1 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE
(Report prepared by Ian Ford and Ian Taylor)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To report to Cabinet a motion submitted at the meeting of the Council held on 13 July 2021.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report sets out a motion submitted by Councillor I J Henderson to the meeting of the Council held on 13 July 2021 relating to the Council's grounds maintenance service and which was referred to the Cabinet by the Chairman of the Council for further consideration, in accordance with the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 12.4.

The motion expresses concern about the performance of the Council's open space and horticultural functions. A fuller outline of the extent of these functions is set out in the Service Information section of this report including:

- Maintenance to: over 800 different sites in the District, including, open spaces, parks, recreation grounds which include significant numbers of sports pitches, seafront gardens, highway verges, cemeteries and crematorium grounds.
- Floral bedding of over 250,000 plants each year.
- Arboriculture inspections and works to over 5,500 trees and woodland management of ancient woodlands and other woodland areas.
- The management of a diverse range of dynamic natural environment including the management of Hamford Water and Walton Backwaters and country parks
- The grass verge, highway tree maintenance and highway weed spraying on behalf Essex County Council including as many as eight additional cuts over the two cuts per year funded by ECC
- The service has received awards for excellence across many of its service areas including sports pitch maintenance, garden shows, nature conservation, parks, seafront gardens and crematorium grounds.
- The summer, or growing, season 2021 has been a particularly challenging year due to unusually wet and warm weather giving rise to growing conditions way above normal.
- Despite this, the public have been understanding and in many areas such as cemeteries, complaints are down on previous years.
- The open space / grounds maintenance service in Tendring has also continued to

initiate new projects to improve public realm areas in Tendring, many of them in the Harwich and Dovercourt area, as well as developing new initiatives such as the expansion of the volunteer gardener team across Tendring.

- The service has also received many compliments from visitors and local residents on the quality of visitor areas.

RECOMMENDATION

That, following the explanation of the motion, the Cabinet decides whether to recommend, or not, that the Council should support the motion in its original format.

If the Cabinet decides to advise the Council that in its opinion the motion should not be supported in its original format it may, in addition, suggest to Council that an amended motion be proposed.

PART 2 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

At a meeting of the Council held on 13 July 2021 (Minute 50 refers), the following motion was moved by Councillor I J Henderson and seconded by Councillor Allen and, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12.4, stood referred to the Cabinet for further consideration:

“That this Council accepts that its ground maintenance service is failing the tourist economy of the Tendring District as the lack of regular grass cutting and weed clearance is resulting in a negative visual impact for those seeking to enjoy Tendring’s Sunshine Coast.

It is further proposed that the necessary resources are immediately made available to ensure that Tendring’s coastal resorts present a positive visual impact throughout the 2021 summer season and that a review of the grounds maintenance policy then takes place to ensure that this issue does not reoccur in future years.”

CURRENT POSITION

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12.6 (Referred Motions – Right of Mover to Attend Meeting), Councillor I J Henderson has been notified to attend the meeting to answer any questions and/or points of clarification, if requested.

FURTHER INFORMATION BY WAY OF BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

LEGAL

The Council’s Grounds Maintenance Service is an executive function in accordance with The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 (as amended), as set out in Part 3 (Responsibility of Functions - Scheme of Delegated Powers) of the Council’s Constitution.

Council Procedure Rule 12.5 (Referral of Motions) states that:-

“Where a motion has been referred in accordance with Rule 12.4 the Cabinet or any relevant Committee shall (subject to the provisions of Rule 12.6) be required to consider such motion and to advise the Council (by no later than the second Ordinary Meeting of the Council held following the date of Council’s referral) of their opinion and reason as to whether such motion should be supported in its original format.*

Prior to making its decision Cabinet or the relevant Committee may following consultation with Officers, require further information to be presented to them for consideration on the implications of the proposed motion. Such a report must be considered in a timely manner.

If the Cabinet or relevant Committee decides to advise the Council of its opinion that such motion in its original format should not be not supported, the Cabinet or relevant Committee may, in addition, suggest to the Council that an amended motion be proposed.

Once Cabinet or any relevant Committee has considered the motion it will be referred back to Council with the recommendation. If an amended motion is proposed by Cabinet, or relevant Committee, when presented back to Council, the amended motion will be debated first, in accordance with Rule 16.5 and Rule 16.10 (b).”

* In this instance the relevant Full Council meeting is on 30 November 2021.

FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.

Crime and Disorder

There are none.

Equality and Diversity

There are none.

Health Inequalities

There are none.

Consultation and Public Engagement

Not applicable.

Carbon Neutrality

No adverse impact overall.

Area or Ward Affected

All Wards are potentially affected.

Service Matters

The Open Space, Nature and Arboriculture service within Public Realm provides maintenance to:

- Over 800 different sites in the District, including, open spaces, parks, recreation grounds which include significant numbers of sports pitches, seafront gardens, highway verges, cemeteries and crematorium grounds.
- Floral bedding of over 250,000 plants each year in various locations.
- Arboriculture inspections and works to over 5,500 trees and woodland management of ancient woodlands and other woodland areas.
- The management of a diverse range of dynamic natural environment including the management of Hamford Water and Walton Backwaters as well as the provision of a seasonal water based warden's service.
- Brook Country Park, Clacton, Holland Haven Country Park, Holland on Sea, and The Naze, Walton.

The grass verge, highway tree maintenance and highway weed spraying is delivered on behalf of the Highways Authority, Essex County Council by means of a grant agreement.

The agreement provides payment to Tendring District Council for one full cut to all the highway verges in the District during the growing season between early May and late September plus a further second cut of all the highway verges in the autumn between 1st October and the end of November.

All other cuts of grass verges, (which can be as many as eight further cuts) are carried out and paid for by the District Council.

The weed spraying of all roads and verges is conducted twice annually, once in June and another in late August / September.

The service has received awards for excellence across many of its service areas including sports pitch maintenance, garden shows, nature conservation, parks, seafront gardens and crematorium grounds.

The summer, or growing, season 2021 has been a particularly challenging year due to the combination of cold early spring temperatures holding back growth, a very wet May followed by a rapid warming in June during the month of longest daylight hours.

This gave rise to growing conditions way above normal or average and the season has continued in the wet, warm growing cycle throughout August.

This combined along with the challenges presented by various lockdowns and the requirement for staff to isolate on occasions as well as to adapt to single occupancy of vehicles for a period has meant that grounds maintenance services in most local authorities have reported difficulties this year.

Despite this, the public have been understanding and in many areas such as cemeteries, complaints are down on previous years.

The open space / grounds maintenance service in Tendring has also continued to initiate new projects to improve public realm areas in Tendring, many of them in the Harwich and Dovercourt area, as well as developing new initiatives such as the expansion of the volunteer gardener team across Tendring.

This volunteer team has provided many more people with the opportunity to meet other like-minded people, to undertake physical exercise and to help improve the area they live in as well as in many cases their general wellbeing.

The volunteer team has expanded the number of workers available to help.

The service has also received many compliments from visitors and local residents on the quality of visitor areas.

It is also important to highlight that when we do experience such weather conditions mentioned above, consideration is given to the potential additional resources required to respond. With this in mind, the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Finance and Governance set aside £163k as part of agreeing the outturn position for 2020/21 to respond to a number of seasonal issues such as cleaning and cutting, especially in light of the expected increase in 'staycations' this year.

BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION

Published Minutes of the meeting of the Full Council held on 13 July 2021.

Photographs of Tendring Visitor Areas 2021.

APPENDICES

None