

# Cherwell District Council

## Overview & Scrutiny Committee

22 November 2016

### Area Amenity Maintenance Report

#### Report of Head of Environmental Services

This report is public

#### Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to consider the proposed response to the Council motion regarding grass cutting

#### 1.0 Recommendations

The committee is recommended:

- 1.1 To note the co-ordinated activities which currently take place
- 1.2 To note the high levels of customer satisfaction with Parks and Open spaces
- 1.3 To support the proposed actions to improve co-ordinated activity.

#### 2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 In July, Council agreed the following

The Council notes associated land title issues which complicate matters, when attending to open spaces, tree, grass, shrub, and verge maintenance and safety matters within the District.

Further the Council resolves to explore all statutory remedies to ensure, in liaison with Oxfordshire County Council, Town Councils and other Parishes within the District, that maintenance of these areas is up to the standard residents expect.

- 2.2 The maintenance of open spaces can be complex with a variety of land owners and hence responsibilities for maintenance. It is not unusual for open spaces owned by the County Council, the Town Council, a Housing Association and this Council to be in close proximity to one another. In addition some open space land areas are not adopted or in private ownership which further complicates matters.
- 2.3 This Council possesses detailed maps showing ownership and responsibility for maintenance. Consequently when residents complain about open spaces the Landscape Management team can identify responsibility and make contact with the owner and update the resident on whom to speak to regarding their concerns.

- 2.4 The Council manages a Landscape & Arboriculture contract, with the contractor being Quadron. This contract not only covers this Council's responsibilities but also carries out work on behalf of Bicester Town Council and Kidlington Parish Council.
- 2.5 Formal inspections relating to the contract are carried out by Landscape officers ensuring good standards are maintained. The Landscape Management team have good contacts and are in regular communication with other agencies including County, Town & Parish Councils as well as Registered Social Landlords such as Sanctuary Housing. The good contacts are not only useful for day to day concerns but also ensure that landscape maintenance specifications between the organisations are consistent wherever possible.
- 2.6 The Council carries out an annual customer satisfaction survey including covering parks, open spaces & play areas even though most of these sites are owned by town and parish councils. Overall satisfaction has been high. In the last customer satisfaction survey 66% were satisfied with the maintenance of grass and meadow areas. 17% of residents were dissatisfied.
- 2.7 If one organisation was to be responsible for all landscape maintenance standards would be very consistent and overall costs should be lower. However, this would be difficult to achieve in all areas since it would require the agreement of a significant number of organisations. In Kidlington and Bicester the standards are more consistent with one contractor maintaining most of the Town Council, District Council and County Council sites.
- 2.8 Greater co-ordination between the organisations would help and it is proposed that besides the day to day contact this Council hosts a six monthly meeting with all the organisations to ensure consistent standards, areas for further co-operation and possible efficiencies.

### **3.0 Report Details**

- 3.1 The responsibilities for looking after open spaces can be fairly complex. With ownership of open spaces varying between the County Council, District Council, Town or Parish Council, Housing associations and private ownership.
- 3.2 This Council has a Landscape Management team of professional officers which aims to ensure the open spaces which are the responsibility of this Council are maintained to a good standard.
- 3.3 Besides looking after areas which are the responsibility of this Council the team also delivers work for Bicester Town Council and Kidlington Parish Council. This brings in some efficiencies for the three councils involved, since one contractor can deliver better value by the aggregation of the work and also reducing lost travel time since often open spaces with different owners can be adjacent to one another.
- 3.4 The satisfaction of residents with all aspects of local parks and open spaces is measured during the annual customer satisfaction. The survey not only asks about overall satisfaction with these areas but also asks about a range of key elements such as cleanliness, maintenance of grass & meadow areas and the maintenance of trees, shrubs and bedding plants.

- 3.5 In the most recent survey carried out this summer the key satisfaction scores for Parks & Open Spaces were as follows
- 71% of residents were satisfied with the cleanliness
  - 66% of residents were satisfied with the maintenance of grass & meadow areas
  - 70% of residents were satisfied with the maintenance of trees, shrubs and bedding plants
- 3.6 Hence satisfaction levels are good but there is further scope to improve satisfaction levels as measured in future satisfaction surveys. There are a number of actions due to take place which will help improve matters.
- 3.7 In Banbury, the Town Council carries out its grass cutting using the contractor The Landscape Group. Cherwell District Council's contractor for grounds maintenance is Quadron. Recent corporate changes since these contracts were let mean that both contractors are owned by the same group of companies. This recent change should mean that the communication between these two contractors will improve in 2017.
- 3.8 The Landscape Management Team will host a meeting in March 2017 to which other organisations and stakeholders will be invited to ensure co-ordinated activities take place and communication links remain good.
- 3.9 A further meeting will be hosted in October to review activities in the Summer 2017 to learn from any problems and to implement into 2018 any learning points.
- 3.10 Co-ordination and communication between different stakeholders is good but by holding six monthly meetings these links can be further enhanced.

## **4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1 There are a number of organisations and their contractors which can impact upon the overall landscape appearance. Overall satisfaction levels are good but there is always scope for further improvements. The Council motion wants consistent standards for all residents.
- 4.2 The Landscape Management team work hard for residents responding to any complaints and/or directing them to the relevant responsible organisation.
- 4.3 The proposed actions aim to further improve co-ordinated grounds maintenance activities and also ensure that residents receive a good standard of service.

## **5.0 Consultation**

None

## **6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified
- Option 1 : To support the proposed changes

Option 2: To reject the proposed changes

Option 3: To ask officers to consider alternative improvements

## **7.0 Implications**

### **Financial and Resource Implications**

7.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report

Comments checked by Denise Taylor Group Accountant, 01295 221982,  
[denise.taylor@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:denise.taylor@cherwellandsouthnorthants.gov.uk)

### **Legal Implications**

7.2 There are no legal implications associated with this report. Statutory remedies to address badly maintained or unsafe open land are potentially available to both this Council and the County Council but the thresholds for taking action against any third party owners are generally high.

Comments checked by: Kevin Lane, Head of Law and Governance  
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### **Risk**

7.3 The overall appearance of the district is important to residents and residents' views are monitored through a series of questions in the annual customer satisfaction survey.

Comments checked by Ed Bailey, Corporate Performance Manager, 01295 221605,  
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## **8.0 Decision Information**

### **Key Decision**

No

### **Wards Affected**

All

### **Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework**

Cherwell: Safe, Clean and Green

### **Lead Councillor**

Councillor Debbie Pickford, Lead Member for Clean and Green

## Document Information

<b>Appendix No</b>	<b>Title</b>
None	
<b>Background Papers</b>	
None	
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