

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 16 January 2018
Report Subject	Grass Cutting Policy Review
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Streetscene & Countryside
Report Author	Chief Officer – Streetscene and Transportation
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council's Grass Cutting Policy has previously been reviewed in 2012, at the formation of the Streetscene service and again in 2015, following adoption of the Portfolio's Business Planning proposals.

The Council provides a grass cutting service in a number locations and at key facilities around the County and the report provides Scrutiny with details of the standards followed at each location and the preferred service delivery option in each case.

The report specifically details the highway grass cutting standards and demonstrates the Council's compliance with the latest Highway Code of Practice, which was released in March 2017

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Scrutiny recommends Cabinet approve the Councils revised Grass Cutting Policy.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	BACKGROUND FOR THE NEW GRASS CUTTING POLICY
1.01	The County has a legal responsibility for managing the Highway Network in terms of keeping the routes available and safe for the passage of the highway user. It undertakes this duty in its role as the Highway Authority.

1.02	The “Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice (March 2017)”, sets out recommendations and good practice for the cutting of grassed areas that adjoin the highway for grassed verges and soft estate areas (amenity grass).
1.03	The Code of Practice recommends that Authorities should develop local standards based on fitness for purpose to provide the level of service required and maintain an assessment of the risk of this being compromised by failure.
1.04	The Code of Practice also recommends that Authorities should consider whether grassed and planted areas are of a size and position that can be effectively maintained, and that these areas should be redesigned or removed where necessary to avoid future poor appearance and safety concerns, it also endorses flexibility in applying judgement in urban and rural areas, and these should take account of the character of the area rather than be determined solely by speed limit considerations.
1.05	The revised Grass Cutting Policy is attached (Appendix 1) with the amendments from the existing policy highlighted.
1.06	<p>Main Changes to the Existing Policy</p> <p>The new Policy recommends a new classification for some sections of grass on the highway – highway verges within 30 mph areas. These are areas of grass that border the highway and do not have any amenity value. The new policy states that these verges should be cut 4 times per year to coincide with the visibility cuts on the highway network outside of 30mph areas. Under the previous policy these areas were defined as amenity areas and would have therefore been cut up to 13 times per year, but this has not been achievable due to the type of equipment needed to undertake this work and the location of the sites.</p>
1.06	The starting date for amenity areas and tenants gardens within the Assisted Gardening Scheme is now flexible and dependant on weather conditions. The number of cuts over the year remains unchanged however the frequency will change throughout the year as growth levels fluctuate.
1.07	Additional verge cutting will also take place at bus stop locations (where situated on highway verges) and on village / town gateways. The grass in these areas will be cut 4 times per year in line with the visibility splay frequency.
1.08	Grass cutting will be picked up in exceptional circumstances only – particularly on the first cut in tenant gardens and amenity areas directly fronting sheltered properties.
1.09	The new standards are cost neutral and within existing budgets.
1.10	<p>The delivery mechanisms for grass cutting is as follows:</p> <p>Rural Highway Verges – Contracted Urban Verges – Contracted Amenity Areas – Part contracted / part in-house</p>

	<p>Cemeteries – In-house Tenants Gardens – Contracted Hedges – Contracted School Playing fields – Contracted Rights of Way – Contracted (Managed by Countryside services)</p>
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2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	It is the intention of the service to maintain budgets and deliver the service with cost neutral implications.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	<p>Consultation took place with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational departments and stakeholders • With Cabinet Member • Neighbouring Local Authorities

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	The Streetscene service has undertaken risk assessments on the provision of the standard and frequency of all grass cutting services which are outlined within the policy.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Grass Cutting Policy (January 2018)

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Highways Act 1980.
6.02	Code of Practice for Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure (2016)
6.03	<p>Contact Officer: Stephen O Jones – Chief Officer – Streetscene & Transportation Telephone: 01352 704700 E-mail: Stephen.o.jones@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	None