

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: **THURSDAY, 19 MARCH 2015**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF OFFICER (STREETSCENE AND TRANSPORTATION)**

SUBJECT: **GRASS CUTTING POLICY**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To seek a recommendation from Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet to approve the County's revised Grass Cutting Policy.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 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.

2.02 "The Well Maintained Highway" - A Code of Practice for highway maintenance and management dated July 2005, sets out recommendations and good practice for the cutting of grassed verges that adjoin the highway and for the maintenance of soft estate areas owned by the Authority (Amenity Grass).

2.03 This 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.

2.04 In December 2012 Cabinet agreed the current Council's Grass Cutting Policy and this revision includes the changes made necessary as a result of the 2015-16 Business Planning proposals.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

Summary of changes to the current Policy are as follows:

Frequency of Cuts on Rural Highway Verges

3.01 The number of cuts on rural verges at non visibility locations will be reduced from 2 cuts per year to one. The timing of this one cut is variable depending upon weather conditions during the year but the

target date for the cut is June. The number of cuts at junctions and visibility splays remains at 4 per year.

- 3.02** The current Policy requires a full boundary to boundary cut to be undertaken once every three years to remove sapling growth etc. The new Policy reduces this standard to one cut every six years.

The full Policy for grass cutting on rural verges is as follows:

- Visibility splays at junctions 4 cuts per year
- 2 swathe widths on all principal roads 1 cut per year
- 1 swathe width on all non principal roads 1 cut per year
- Full width verge cutting for weed and self sown sapling control on all classifications of rural roads once every 6 years

Operational Arrangements

- 3.03** Currently the majority of grass cutting operations are carried out by in-house Council teams, although some rural verges are cut by contractors. This requires expensive plant and equipment to be hired each year to enable the work to be carried out. In future all service provisions will be market tested and procured from the most cost effective source.

- 3.04** All current standards for urban verges will remain as the existing Policy.

- 3.05** Two full Member Workshops have been held in March 2015 to provide feedback to Scrutiny on the new Policy. The Workshop will particularly consider the following

- The timing of the single full cut on rural verges
- Timing of the commencement of all grass cutting operations

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01** That Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommend approval of the County's revised Grass Cutting Policy to Cabinet.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01** The reduction in service standard will deliver the financial savings detailed in the service Business Planning proposals.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- 6.01** No impact from this report.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 No impact from this report, although further work will be done to assess if any areas of verge can be left to naturally grow to provide habitat for wild flowers etc..

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 No impact from this report.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 None, although it is hoped to reduce the reliance on seasonal Agency staff by extending the use of selected specialist and local sub-contractors, some of whom are already being used on rural verge grass cutting maintenance works.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 With Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 With Cabinet Member.

11.02 With Members through Workshops –Verbal feedback to be provided.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Appendix 1 – The Councils Revised Grass Cutting Policy.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

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