

**Environment  
Scrutiny and Performance Panel**

**Agenda  
Item No.**

**5 October 2009**

**10**

**Grounds Maintenance Service**

**Ward(s)** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr B Sanders – Leisure and Culture  
Cllr M Flower - Environment

**Summary of report:**

This report reviews the changes made during the early part of 2009 to the Council's Grounds Maintenance service with particular reference to the transfer of the Parks' Maintenance team from Green Spaces to Street Pride.

**Background papers:**

None

**Reason for scrutiny:**

The Scrutiny Panel has requested, as part of the 2009/10 work programme, a review of the Grounds Maintenance service, taking account of the transfer of the Parks Maintenance responsibility from Green Spaces to Street Pride. The Panel was particularly interested in the impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the enlarged council-wide grounds maintenance service and on public perceptions.

## **Resource and legal considerations:**

The cost of delivering the grounds maintenance service this financial year is broken down into the following :

• Arboriculture	£321K
• Cemetery burial	£568K
• Parks maintenance	£697K
• <u>General grounds maintenance</u>	<u>£2633K</u>
• Total	£4219

These costs include all elements of the budget together with income targets from external works.

Street Pride's grounds maintenance service has the following full time employees:

• Arboriculture	10 employees
• Cemetery Burial	14 employees
• Parks Maintenance	20 employees
• <u>Area Teams</u>	<u>53 employees</u>
• Total	97 employees

Over and above these, there are 11 operational support staff and managers together with a number of agency staff employed during the Summer months to carry out seasonal work.

Following transfer, there have been a number of changes in the management of grounds maintenance activities and there are now five grounds maintenance managers, one for each of the four geographical areas with the other having responsibility for the premier parks.

## **Citizen impact:**

Grounds maintenance is a priority service which impacts on the whole community, from an aesthetic, environmental, sports or informal play perspective.

In conjunction with partners, the service works closely with local communities in relation to a range of community events and improvements.

## **Environmental impact:**

The service has a major impact on the environment across all communities within the borough through the maintenance of extensive areas of open space, amenity areas, sports pitches, school playing fields, highway verges, cemeteries and the crematorium.

**Performance management:**

The main indicator of service effectiveness is public opinion as reflected in, for example, questions in the Place Survey concerning resident satisfaction with their neighbourhood as a place to live. The Service seeks to improve resident satisfaction by being clear about what it is trying to achieve, through a range of service standards and, crucially, through liaison with residents and representative groups such as the various Friends groups.

**Equality Implications:**

The grounds maintenance service offers benefits for residents and visitors to the borough alike. Ongoing monitoring has allowed it to develop and improve wherever possible in line with feedback and so help to move towards a cleaner and greener environment as advocated in Council and Walsall Partnership strategy.

**Consultation:**

Walsall residents play a vital role in helping to develop the service. The First Stop Shop and Contact Centre have allowed them to make service requests more effectively than in the past and handle 3000 calls a year.

Service Standards for the service have been introduced and have been used to inform residents of what to expect and how to contact us.

Local Neighbourhood Partnership meetings have allowed residents to raise enquiries / queries within the service and receive feedback.

Friends of the Parks Groups take an active part in how individual parks are used and maintained. Regular meetings take place with these groups involving staff from Green Spaces supported, as necessary, by Street Pride. There are no significant issues at the present time and these groups appear to be satisfied that the support they receive from the Council has not diminished in any way.

**Report:**

Historically, grounds maintenance was carried out by both Green Spaces and Street Pride. Green Spaces had responsibility for grounds maintenance and arboricultural work in the following premier parks:

- Walsall Arboretum
- Palfrey Park
- Pleck Park
- Reedswood Park
- George Rose Park
- Willenhall Memorial Park
- King George V playing fields
- Leamore playing fields

- Holland Park
- Aldridge Airport
- Blackwood Park

Street Pride was responsible for maintaining all of the other sites with maintenance operations being divided into the following four areas:

- Willenhall and Darlaston
- Bloxwich, Blakenall and Leamore
- Pelsall, Walsall Wood, Brownhills, Aldridge, Streetly and Pheasey
- Walsall, Palfrey, Pleck and Caldmore.

This involved maintenance of soft landscaping on the public highway and in schools, parks, open spaces, retained housing land, Social Care sites, trees, grassed areas, shrub beds, hedges and sports pitches.

The change that was made earlier this year saw operational responsibility for grounds maintenance concentrated entirely within Street Pride. Green Spaces retained the policy role and have responsibility for leading on the definition of service standards.

In respect of arboriculture services, Green Spaces manage the Authority's tree stock and are responsible for surveying trees, identifying work and subsequently passing work instructions to the Grounds Maintenance arboriculture team. The Grounds Maintenance arboriculture team carries out maintenance to all of the Council's owned tree stock including routine maintenance, tree removals, tree planting and insurance work.

The Cemetery Burial team within Street Pride carries out grounds maintenance work within the authority's cemeteries as well as burial work and works closely with Bereavement Services on all of this work.

#### Impact of transfer

Since responsibility for grounds maintenance transferred, there have been a number of notable benefits and successes including:

- It enabled the sharing of resources (employees, machinery and materials) to help maintain and, where possible, improve standards across the board;
- It provided a fresh opportunity to exploit economies of scale, standardise equipment and enable the procurement of better equipment.
- Funding has been sourced to recruit an apprentice to work across all of the horticultural services in both Street Pride and Green Spaces so helping to strengthen the new working arrangements.
- A Service Level Agreement between Green Spaces and Street Pride has been developed detailing the type of work that is carried out and the required maintenance standards within our parks. This has helped

to clarify and consolidate the working relationship between the respective Services so ensuring delivery of a seamless service. The Service Level Agreement aims to define the relationship, role and responsibilities between the two service areas in the delivery of the grounds maintenance service and includes a number of key areas including:

- Baseline standards
- Monitoring and non-performance
- Communications, correspondence and customer liaison
- Meetings and stakeholder engagement
- Amendments and variations
- Events
- Arboricultural maintenance
- Childrens' play areas
- Call outs
- Health and safety
- Green Flag parks
- Walsall Arboretum
- Supporting the park ranger service

In addition, previous good practice has been continued including:

- Ongoing support for the Arboretum Friends Group which has led to an award winning garden at this year's Royal Horticultural Society Gardeners' World Show in Birmingham;
- Retention of the Green Flag awards in two of the Premier Parks, Willenhall Memorial Park and Palfrey Park. This award is judged on eight stringent criteria which makes this achievement particularly noteworthy:
  - A welcoming place
  - Healthy safe and secure
  - Clean and well maintained
  - Sustainability
  - Conservation and heritage
  - Community involvement
  - Marketing
  - Management

Regular meetings are taking place between key officers within the two Services to ensure priority works are undertaken and appropriate liaison is arranged between Friends of the Park groups and other users. Although some Friends groups initially voiced concern over the transfer of maintenance responsibilities, this concern appears to have been allayed.


#### Future arrangements

Work is in progress to refine these arrangements and create three geographical areas and one borough wide task team based on the emerging Neighbourhood Management Model. It is anticipated that this will generate efficiency savings for the

financial year 2010/11 and further consolidate the 'One Service' approach to the delivery of grounds maintenance services across the borough.


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