

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S
REPORT TO CABINET**

16 January 2024

Report Title: Staffordshire County Council Urban Grass Cutting Contract Delivery

Submitted by: Service Director – Sustainable Environment

Portfolios: Sustainable Environment

Ward(s) affected: All

<u>Purpose of the Report</u>	<u>Key Decision</u>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>To update Cabinet on the progress made in relation to negotiating the delivery of Staffordshire County Council Highways Urban Verge Grass Maintenance programme to form a contract to deliver an enhanced standard to SCC verges throughout the urban areas of Newcastle Borough.</p>			
<p><u>Recommendation</u></p> <p>That Cabinet:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Authorise the delivery of Staffordshire County Council's highways urban verge grass maintenance programme by the Sustainable Environment Directorate; 2. To enable the above delivery, to authorise the employment of additional staffing resources and plant acquisition; 			
<p><u>Reasons</u></p> <p>Newcastle Borough Council aims to secure an enhanced frequency and quality of grass cutting urban highway verges following complaints and perceived poor quality of operations currently carried out. this will ensure improved environmental quality is provided to residents of urban areas of the Borough.</p>			

1. Background

- 1.1 Newcastle Borough Council's Streetscene team provided a grass maintenance service to Staffordshire County Council's Highways for many years. In 2020 the service was 'handed back' to SCC Highways due to concerns relating to the costs of providing the service and SCC Highways being unable to fund the service on a full cost recharge basis. The reduction in service standards anticipated to meet the SCC budget were unacceptable to the Council.
- 1.2 The Borough Council continued however to cut and maintain the highway roundabouts on the main roads in and out of Newcastle and on the ring road, at no cost to the County Council, in order to maintain a high well maintained visual statement for the residents and visitors to the borough.

2. Issues

- 2.1 Since 2020 canvassing has taken place from political representatives to County Council in relation to the reduced service standards and the poor visual environmental impact this had on neighbourhoods throughout the borough, applying pressure to increase the cutting frequency to highways grass verges.
- 2.2 Recent partnership conversations and meetings between your and SCC officers have taken place, aiming to improve the frequency of grass cutting to highways verges to a level that is likely to be acceptable to local residents and can be afforded by SCC Highways budget constraints. Weed control will however be retained by the County Council and delivered via their existing contractor.
- 2.3 Added value opportunities have been offered in the service delivery being transferred to Newcastle Borough Council including:
 - Align litter picking to locations of need to avoid substantial litter / material shredding
 - Align grass cutting to NBC locations to provide a co-ordinated visual environmental quality to neighbourhoods
 - Removal of branch falls (where reasonable) to verge locations
 - Strimming / herbicidal treatment around street furniture where required
 - Joint communications opportunities linking into our respective sustainability and biodiversity agendas
 - Share intelligence in relation to land holdings to ensure efficiency and targeting resources at owned resources
- 2.4 Staffordshire County Council have agreed to transfer the highways urban grass-cutting contract to the Council for Newcastle Borough at short notice, with operational delivery to commence in early March 2024. A fee has been agreed, which is to be paid by the County Council per annum to enable delivery to an enhanced specification in comparison to the current delivery model deployed by the County Council.
- 2.5 To enable maximum efficiency in operating this contract, the Borough Council will operate it alongside the delivery of our existing ride on mowing operations maintained across the Borough.

- 2.6** To enable contractual delivery of the service additional staffing resources are required, within the budget allocation, to ensure enhanced environmental standards are delivered on behalf of SCC to the benefit of residents of the Borough.
- 2.7** SCC have indicated that there could be potential TUPE implications in relation to existing staffing, and this requires further information (Employer Liability Information (ELI)) to confirm the exact position which has been requested. Should TUPE be deemed to apply; current assigned staff would transfer on existing terms and conditions which are likely to be less favourable (and therefore less costly) than NUBLIC terms. Full structures would need further consideration with potential need for additional supervisory staff and seasonal flex.
- 2.8** In addition to the staffing requirements above additional plant and vehicles will be required to service the contract fulfilment. £37,445 depreciation, fuel and maintenance costs have been project planned to ensure the efficient delivery of the service.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1** Authorise the delivery of Staffordshire County Council's highways urban verge grass maintenance programme by the Sustainable Environment Directorate;
- 3.2** To enable the above delivery, authorise the employment of additional staffing resources and plant acquisition;

4. Reasons

- 4.1** Delivery of this contract will enable an acceptable standard of urban grass verge maintenance throughout the borough, improving environmental standards and resident satisfaction with the standard of their neighbourhoods

5. Options Considered

- 5.1** The delivery of the contract to remain with the existing contract provider and to be managed by SCC Highways but this likely will continue to result in a less than satisfactory output.

6. Legal and Statutory Implications

- 6.1** Contract and service delivery requirements, no financial penalties identified

7. Equality Impact Assessment

7.1 There are no equality impact issues arising from this report.

8. Financial and Resource Implications

- 8.1 Appropriate full cost recharge funding is required, as outlined above, to ensure compliance with the service delivery standards requirements.
- 8.2 Agreement has been reached with Staffordshire County Council to undertake the highway urban verge grass cutting for £220,000 per annum. To be reviewed on an annual basis.
- 8.3 To be able to deliver the service staffing resource costs have been estimated at £182,555.

9. Major Risks & Mitigation

- 9.1 Notification of the award of this contract has been made at short notice requiring an urgent need to mobilise in relation to employing additional staff and procuring suitable plant and vehicles.
- 9.2 Confirmation is required on the term these arrangements will be in place in order that the Council can be sure in recovery of the costs of purchasing additional plant, equipment and resources. A formal signed agreement will need to be in place prior to works commencing.
- 9.3 Until further information regarding current staffing and ELI is known; workforce costs are only estimated.

10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)

- 10.1 Use of electric equipment where possible and efficient transport reduction journeys compared to existing two organisation delivery model



11. Key Decision Information

11.1 The report is a key decision due to the financial implications of undertaking these operations on behalf of the County Council/

12. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

12.1 None

13. List of Appendices

13.1 None

14. Background Papers

14.1 None