

**The Highland Council**  
**Skye, Ross & Cromarty Area Committee**  
**5 February 2014**

Agenda Item	5
Report No	SRC 2/14

**Grounds Maintenance Programme**

**Report by Director of Transport, Environmental and Community Services**

**Summary**

This report details the arrangements for delivering Grounds Maintenance Services and the resources available.

Members are invited to approve the levels of grounds maintenance service and to note the on-going arrangements for managing the service for the Skye, Ross & Cromarty Area and for Members to review required service standards at Ward Business Meetings.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Council's Scheme of Delegation to City/Area Committees gives the Skye, Ross & Cromarty Area Committee the new power:  
"to approve local levels of service for grounds maintenance within the strategy and budget allocated by TECS Committee."
- 1.2 Transport, Environmental and Community Services (TECS) are responsible for a wide range of horticultural related activities, including the maintenance of grass in public open spaces, designing and planting of flower and shrub beds, pruning vegetation and trees, also the inspection and maintenance of play areas.
- 1.3 This report details the arrangements for delivering Grounds Maintenance and the resources and budgets available.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 At its meeting on 18 November 2010 the TECS Committee considered a report for the tender of the Grass Cutting across the Highlands in nine areas (Lots) for 2011/12 to 2013/14 and agreed the award of grass cutting in Skye, Ross & Cromarty Area to an external contractor with the exception of Easter Ross which retained the grass cutting in house. It should be noted that the grass cutting in Skye & Lochalsh was already carried out by an external contractor. The grass cutting contract has been extended to October 2014, however the Skye & Lochalsh element is being re – tendered for the 2014 season.

2.2 The contracting out of routine grass cutting has delivered a saving in the annual revenue budget both within Skye, Ross & Cromarty and for the Highlands as a whole. The information on individual lots is commercially sensitive and cannot be published, however the total saving across the highlands is £603k per annum.

### 3. Activities

3.1. Grounds Maintenance activities include:

- Grass cutting to low, medium and high amenity standards;
- Grass Area maintenance out with the growing season;
- Grounds around War Memorials;
- Arboriculture - the cultivation and management of individual trees, shrubs and other perennial woody plants;
- Path maintenance including weed control;
- In cemeteries the lifting of grave surfaces as they settle;
- Tending high amenity locations such as burial grounds, war memorials and football pitches;
- Floral displays;
- Support for Special Events;
- Burial Grounds and Interments;
- Play Area inspection and maintenance.

In addition the workforce supports the roads winter maintenance activities.

3.2. Across the six Skye, Ross & Cromarty wards there are 3,414,317 square metres of public open and amenity space spread over 1,718 locations, with an average size of half an acre, each requiring some form of grounds maintenance and regular cleansing of litter, broken glass and other debris.

3.3. These spaces are spread over the Skye, Ross & Cromarty communities and they include some 45,131 items of work as summarised in **Appendix A**.

3.4. Activities are carried out to standards specified in the Grounds Maintenance Service Level Agreement (SLA) and the Grass Cutting contract specification which was based on the SLA. The requirements of these are, to all intents and purposes, the same. **Appendix B** provides details of the Grass Cutting Amenity Standards which are framed in terms of output requirements rather than frequencies of cut.

3.5. The contractor and the in-house operation are required to maintain grass areas within the set parameters irrespective of the rate of growth.

3.6. A copy of the SLA and a printed list of plots is available to Members on request.

- 3.7. The SLA and specification apply Highland wide and provide a consistent set of standards including methods for measuring compliance across the region. The introduction of a specified height of grass has permitted a uniform delivery. The grass cutting contract was designed to harmonise service delivery across Highland.

#### **4. Asset Management**

- 4.1. There is an on-going programme of refinement and improvement of the data required to manage the assets involved in Grounds Maintenance.
- 4.2. We have a large electronic database defining all the plots and relevant tasks and the plots are marked on some 735 or so paper maps and plans. These two elements will be brought together under one system to improve access to the information. Unfortunately it is not practical to provide Members with a copy of all the maps, however example maps to show some of the detail held are included in **Appendix C**.
- 4.3. A mapping exercise has been undertaken to provide electronic maps of all the grass cutting areas. The Skye, Ross & Cromarty plots have been surveyed and the final schedules should be completed by the end of March 2014. The maps will be produced in "pdf" format and could very easily be placed on either the Council intranet or the website.

#### **5. In-house Resources**

- 5.1. Resources are deployed on a routine cyclical basis throughout the year, Monday to Friday with a 37 hour week generally and in overtime for burials and additional activities associated with special and sports events.
- 5.2. They are managed by 3 Community Works Managers (one of these also covers Sutherland) and 5 Community Works Officers who also supervise operatives working on road maintenance. They are supported by four Operational Support Officers. The organisation chart provided in **Appendix D** describes the supervision arrangements.

##### **5.3. Depots**

The main bases for Grounds operations are the depots at Portree, Greenhill, Alness and Tain. Smaller depots include Gairloch and Ullapool.

##### **5.4. Labour**

There are 20 full time employees and 12 seasonal employees across the area.

## 5.5. Plant and equipment

Item	Grounds Maintenance		
	SL	MWR	ER
Pick-ups	1	4	3
Excavator	1	2	
Tractor Loader with various attachments		1	1
Ride-on mower		3	6
Walk behind mowers	1	4	
Wood chipper		1	
Strimmers	1	12	8
Blowers		3	4
Chainsaws	2	3	

## 6. **Grass Cutting**

### 6.1. Contract

In 2010 the Council awarded a contract for the cutting of grass in public open spaces and cemeteries. The contractor is ISS and they are responsible for maintaining an overall 40% of the area of grass within the 6 Skye, Ross & Cromarty Wards.

The contractor percentage for the sub areas is:

Skye & Lochalsh 100%  
Mid & West Ross 65%  
Easter Ross 0%

### 6.2. ISS Resources

During 2013 the following labour and plant was deployed:

ISS Contract	Mid Ross		Skye		Raasay	
	Average	Peak	Average	Peak	Average	Peak
Employees	9	11	7	8	1	
Ride on mowers	1		2			
5 gang mower	3		0			
Pedestrian mowers	7		10			
Trailer mower	1		0			

ISS employed sub-contractor for Raasay. They also employed a supervisor for Skye.

### 6.3. In-House

Council staff deal with the remaining grass cutting areas and other grounds tasks. The grass areas are a mixture of amenity levels including sports surfaces (for High Life Highland) and cemeteries.

### 6.4. Contract Supervision

Overall contract supervision of the Contractor and In-House operations is handled by a pan-Highland team. This ensures that the Contractor and In-house delivery are treated equally across the Highland region. The team also supervises the public convenience cleaning contract and monitors the non-grass cutting activities as part of their daily work.

6.5. Contract supervision and monitoring for Skye, Ross & Cromarty grounds maintenance is provided with the equivalent of 1 Contract Supervisor and 1 seasonal inspector who also monitor Garden Aid, Weed Control and Arboriculture contract works on behalf of Housing and Property Services.

## 7. **Monitoring and Escalation Process**

7.1. The basis for all SLA or contract inspections is to determine if the site management, including sub-contracted services, is sufficient to maintain the service standard of the Service Level Agreement (SLA).

7.2. The first level of inspection is carried out as self-assessment by in-house or sub-contracted service delivery teams and Managers. This first stage assessment is independently validated by Contract Supervisors.

7.3. SLA inspection levels by Contract Supervisors are set at minimum of 10% of the maintained area each quarter. The period of inspection is quarterly, unless there are valid reasons for increasing inspections such as; repeated customer complaints, sites not meeting SLA standards or re-inspection following issue of a Breached Standard notice.

7.4. When a location is inspected on more than one occasion, the lowest grade is recorded in all cases; this includes follow up inspections where a Breached Standard Notice is issued.

7.5. Inspections are graded;

- 0 - Very Poor
- 1 – Poor
- 2 – Unsatisfactory
- 3 – Satisfactory
- 4 - Good

7.6. An improvement request or informal notice is issued to the internal (DLO) or external (ISS) contractor respectfully where a grade of 0, 1 or 2 is given.

- 7.7. Failure to return the site to the SLA standard within 48 hours results in an escalation and issue of a remedial notice.
- 7.8. A follow up inspection will be made on or after the agreed date; if satisfactory no further action, if no improvement a Nonconforming Service Report is issued to the Community Works Manager. For Sub-contracted grass cutting A Default Notice applies.
- 7.9. The Authority is entitled to recover its costs in respect of the issuing of a Default Notice and all losses which arise as a result of the deficient Services. Recovery of such costs for 2013 is subject to contractual negotiations with the contractor, these are scheduled to be completed for the end of January 2014.

## 8. Performance

- 8.1. For the grass cutting activity the number of breached standards issued to the contractor and in-house operation during 2013 are shown below:

<b>Skye, Ross &amp; Cromarty Breached Standards (Contracted and In-house combined)</b>			
<b>Month Issued</b>	<b>Issued</b>	<b>Remedied</b>	<b>Percentile Remedied</b>
April	2	2	<b>100%</b>
May	35	30	<b>86%</b>
June	31	24	<b>77%</b>
July	39	26	<b>67%</b>
August	21	5	<b>24%</b>
September	17	7	<b>41%</b>
October	30	13	<b>43%</b>
November	4	1	<b>25%</b>
December	1	0	<b>0%</b>
<b>Overall Totals</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>60%</b>

- 8.2. Overall 60% of all breached standards were rectified. Compared with the maintained area of 3.414 million square metres and the 41,249 annual tasks undertaken, the number of breached standards is low.

## **9. Required Standards and Consultation with Ward Members**

- 9.1. Last summer Members were consulted at Ward Business Meetings when standards, resources, and processes were discussed.
- 9.2. Future engagement at Ward level is required to identify the appropriate standards at specific sites. Changes can be made that alter the designations between low/general/high amenity with the proviso that overall the change must be cost neutral. If one site goes up, another has to come down or a site be reduced in area. These are changes “within the budget and strategy allocated”.
- 9.3. Meetings will be arranged as more accessible and up to date maps are available to discuss required standards. Changes will be implemented as soon as is practical thereafter.

## **10. Other Work**

- 10.1. We assist, where possible, with additional works to coincide with Galas, Fairs and the like.
- 10.2. We often get compliments relating to our burials service.

## **11. Implications**

- 11.1. There are no Resource, Legal, Equalities, Climate Change and Risk implications arising from this report.

## **12. Recommendations**

- 12.1. Members are invited to approve the grounds maintenance service for 2014/15, as set out in this report.
- 12.2. Members are invited to note the on-going arrangements for managing the grounds maintenance service for the Skye Ross & Cromarty Area and future engagement with Ward Members in relation to identifying the appropriate standards at specific sites.

Designation: Area Roads and Community Works Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochalsh)

Date: 24 January 2014

Author: Cameron Kemp, Area Roads and Community Works Manager,  
Ross, Skye & Lochaber

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## Appendix A - Grass Cutting Maintained Areas and Annual Tasks

<b>Skye, Ross &amp; Cromarty</b>						
<b>Area Maintained</b>		<b>Square Metres</b>	<b>Contracted</b>		<b>In House</b>	
	Grass	3,014,641	1,216,485	<b>40%</b>	1,798,156	<b>60%</b>
	Planted	65,128	0	0	65,128	100%
	Hard landscape	334,548	0	0	334,548	100%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,414,317</b>	<b>1,216,485</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>2,197,832</b>	<b>64%</b>
<b>Forecast Tasks Annually</b>						
<b>Caveat:</b> Shows only forecast tasks, not completed. For a true measure of performance, both must be shown.		<b>Number</b>	<b>Contracted</b>		<b>In House</b>	
Grass	Growing Season	16,191	7573	47%	8,618	53%
	Dormant Season	5,789	0	0%	5,789	100%
Planted	Growing Season	3,055	0	0%	3,055	100%
	Dormant Season	1,433	0	0%	1,433	100%
Hard landscape	Growing Season	11,064	1958	17%	9,179	83%
	Dormant Season	7,599	0	0%	7,599	100%
<b>Total</b>		<b>45,131</b>	<b>9541</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>35590</b>	<b>79%</b>



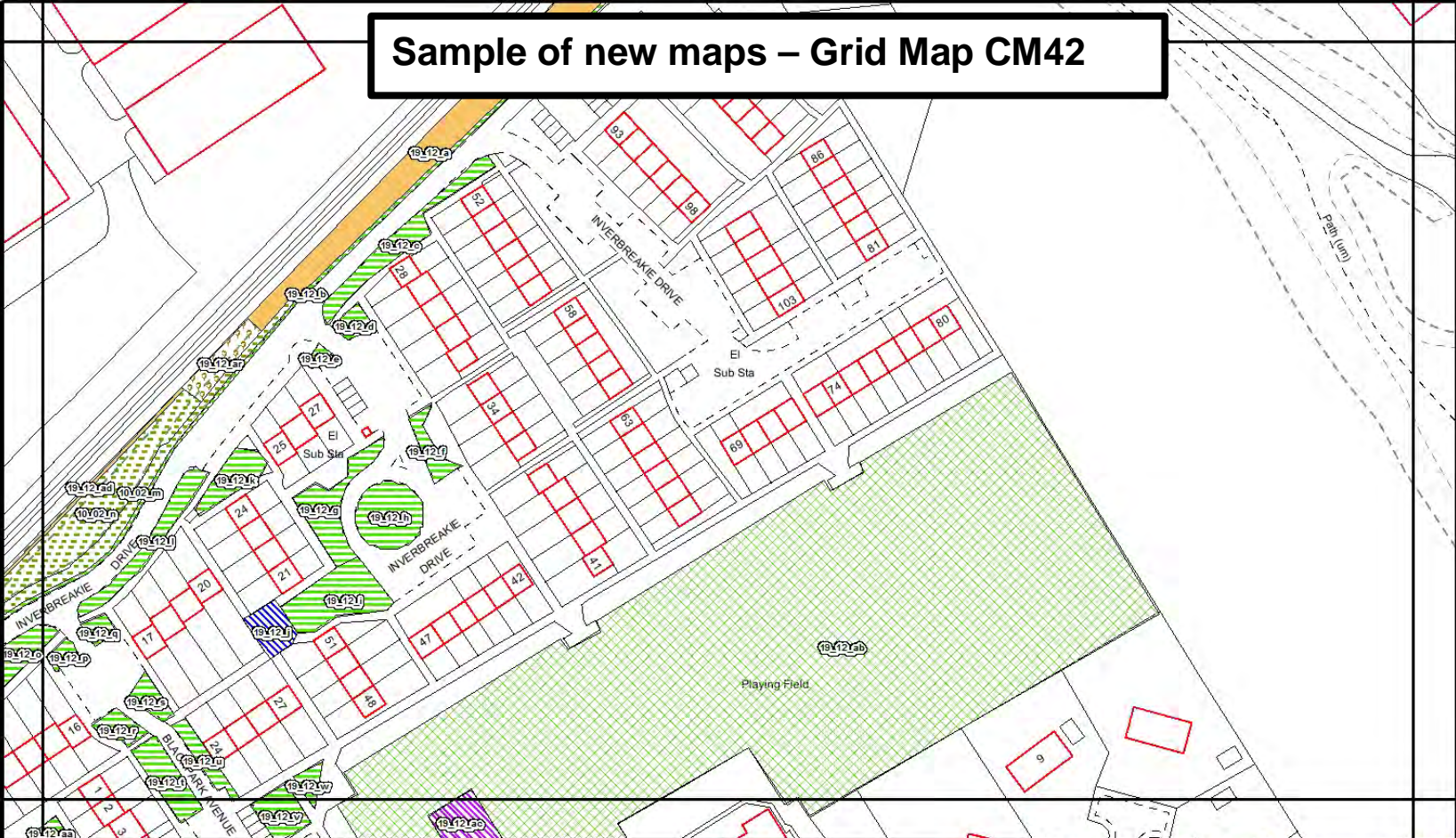
## Appendix B - Grass Cutting Amenity Standards

<b>Grass Type</b>	<b>BS 7370 Equivalent</b>	<b>Minimum Height of Grass (after cutting)</b>	<b>Maximum Height of Grass (prior to cutting)</b>	<b>Evident Clippings Acceptable</b>	<b>Action if Excessive Clippings</b>
<b>Lawn</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>15mm</b>	<b>25mm</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>N/A - Collected at Each Cut</b>
<b>High Amenity</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>25mm</b>	<b>60mm</b>	<b>Minimal</b>	<b>Remove</b>
<b>General Amenity</b>	<b>D/E</b>	<b>35mm</b>	<b>100mm</b>	<b>Some, Evenly Dispersed</b>	<b>Spread thinly or Remove</b>
<b>Low Amenity</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>75mm</b>	<b>150mm</b>	<b>Moderate, Dispersed</b>	<b>Spread</b>
<b>Rough or Verge</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>100mm</b>	<b>250mm</b>	<b>Significant, Scattered</b>	<b>N/A – Not an Amenity Grade</b>

Appendix C - Examples of old and new grounds maintenance maps

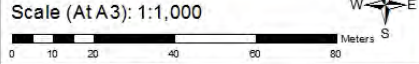


# Sample of new maps – Grid Map CM42



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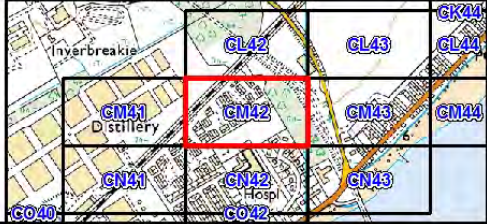
**The Highland Council**  
**Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd**  
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**Map Ref: CM42**  
**Title: Easter Ross Grounds Maintained Areas**  
 Issue: 1 Rev: 0 Date: 21/01/2014  
 DRAFT  
 Print Date: 21/01/2014

**Legend**

High Amenity Grass	Trees
General Amenity Grass	Hard Surface
Low Amenity Grass	Play Area
Sports Area (Grass)	Private
Hedge	Unknown
Shrubs	



Appendix D - In House Supervision of Grounds Resources in Skye, Ross & Cromarty

