

The Highland Council
Lochaber Area Committee
27 February 2014

Agenda Item	14
Report No	LA/11/14

Grounds Maintenance Programme

Report by Director of Community Services

Summary

This report details the arrangements for delivering Grounds Maintenance Services and the resources and budgets 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 Lochaber 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 Lochaber 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, and 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 to award the majority of grass cutting to an external contractor. It should be noted that the grass cutting in Lochaber was already carried out by an external contractor, with sports pitches retained in house. The grass cutting contract has been extended to October 2014.

2.2 The contracting out of routine grass cutting has delivered a saving in the annual revenue budget both within Lochaber 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. Budget

- 3.1. The annual gross Grounds Maintenance expenditure budget in Lochaber is £257,100

4. Activities

- 4.1. 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 sports 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.

- 4.2. Across the two Lochaber wards there are 972,493 square metres of public open and amenity space spread over 859 locations, with an average size of quarter of an acre, each requiring some form of grounds maintenance and regular cleansing of litter, broken glass and other debris.
- 4.3. These spaces are spread over the Lochaber communities and they include some 12,176 items of work as summarised in **Appendix A**.
- 4.4. 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.
- 4.5. The contractor and the in-house operation are required to maintain grass areas within the set parameters irrespective of the rate of growth.
- 4.6. A copy of the SLA and a printed list of plots is available to Members on request.

- 4.7. 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.

5. Asset Management

- 5.1. There is an on-going programme of refinement and improvement of the data required to manage the assets involved in Grounds Maintenance.
- 5.2. We have a large electronic database defining all the plots and relevant tasks and the plots are marked on some 234 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**.
- 5.3. A mapping exercise has been undertaken to provide electronic maps of all the grass cutting areas. The Lochaber 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 easily be placed on either the Council intranet or the website.

6. In-house Resources

- 6.1. 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.
- 6.2. They are managed by a Community Works Manager and 2 Community Works Officers who also supervise operatives working on road maintenance. The organisation chart provided in **Appendix D** describes the supervision arrangements.

6.3. Depots

The main base for Grounds operations is at the Carr's Corner depot, Fort William.

6.4. Labour

There are 7 full time employees across the area.

6.5. Plant and equipment

Item	Number
Pick-ups	1
Excavator	1
Tractor Loader with various attachments	1 (shared with winter)
Wood chipper	1
Strimmers	2
Blowers	2
Chainsaws	2

7. **Grass Cutting**

7.1. 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 86% of the area of grass within the 2 Lochaber Wards.

7.2. ISS Resources

During 2013 the following labour and plant was deployed:

	Average	Peak
Employees	8	10
Ride on mowers	4	4
5 gang mower	1	1
Pedestrian mowers	11	11
Cylinder mower (1 ride on + 1 pedestrian)	2	1
Hand tools (blowers etc)	20	20

7.3. In-House

Council staff deal with the grass cutting of 8 sports pitches in the area.

7.4. 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.

- 7.5. Contract supervision and monitoring for Lochaber grounds maintenance is provided with the equivalent of 1 seasonal inspector who also monitors Garden Aid, Weed Control and Arboriculture contract works on behalf of Housing and Property Services.

8. Monitoring and Escalation Process

- 8.1. 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).
- 8.2. 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.
- 8.3. SLA inspection levels by Contract Supervisors are set at minimum of 5% 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.
- 8.4. 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.
- 8.5. Inspections are graded;
- 0 - Very Poor
 - 1 – Poor
 - 2 – Unsatisfactory
 - 3 – Satisfactory
 - 4 - Good
- 8.6. An improvement request or remedial notice is issued to the internal (DLO) or external (ISS) contractor respectfully where a grade of 0, 1 or 2 is given.
- 8.7. Failure to return the site to the SLA standard within 48 hours results in an escalation and issue of a remedial notice.

- 8.8. 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.
- 8.9. 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 February 2014.

9. Performance

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

Lochaber Breached Standards (Contracted and In-house combined)			
Month Issued	Issued	Remedied	Percentile Remedied
April	0	0	n/a
May	12	6	50%
June	15	11	73%
July	37	6	16%
August	10	3	30%
September	16	11	69%
October	0	0	0%
November	1	0	0%
December	1	0	0%
Overall Totals	92	37	40%

- 9.2. Overall 40% of all breached standards were rectified within the timescale. Compared with the maintained area of 972,493 square metres and the 12,176 annual tasks undertaken, the number of breached standards is low.

10. Required Standards and Consultation with Ward Members

- 10.1. Last summer Members were consulted at Ward Business Meetings when standards, resources and processes were discussed.
- 10.2. 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” as per the Scheme of Delegation to Area Committees.
- 10.3. 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.

11. Other Work

- 11.1. We assist, where possible, with additional works to coincide with Galas, Fairs and the like.

12. Implications

- 12.1. There are no Resource, Legal, Equalities, Climate Change, Carbon Clever or Risk implications arising from this report.

Recommendations

The Committee is invited to:

- i. approve the grounds maintenance service for 2014/15, as set out in this report; and
- ii. note the on-going arrangements for managing the grounds maintenance service for the Lochaber Area and future engagement with Ward Members in relation to identifying the appropriate standards at specific sites.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 30 January 2014

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Ross, Skye & Lochaber

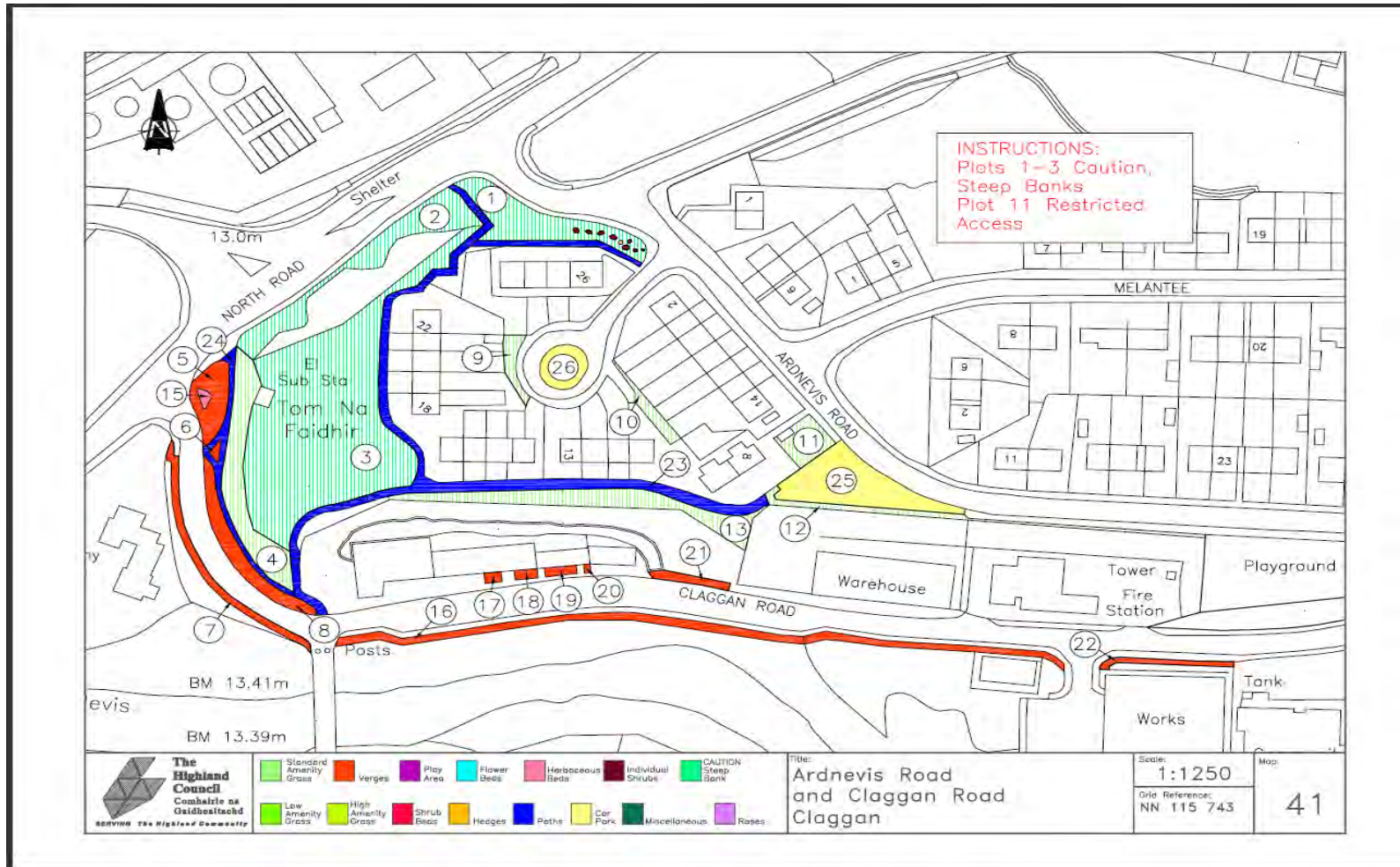
Appendix A - Grass Cutting Maintained Areas and Annual Tasks

Lochaber						
Area Maintained		Square Metres	Contracted		In House	
	Grass	896,554	773,934	86%	122,620	14%
	Planted	7,980	0	0%	7,980	100%
	Hard landscape	67,959	59567	88%	8,392	12%
	Total	972,493	833,501	86%	138,992	14%
Forecast Tasks Annually						
Caveat: Shows only forecast tasks, not completed. For a true measure of performance, both must be shown.		Number	Contracted		In House	
Grass	Growing Season	7,107	6250	88%	857	12%
	Dormant Season	239	0	0%	239	100%
Planted	Growing Season	653	0	0%	653	100%
	Dormant Season	228	0	0%	228	100%
Hard landscape	Growing Season	3,096	1986	64%	1,110	36%
	Dormant Season	853	445	52%	408	48%
Total		12,176	8,681	71%	3,495	29%

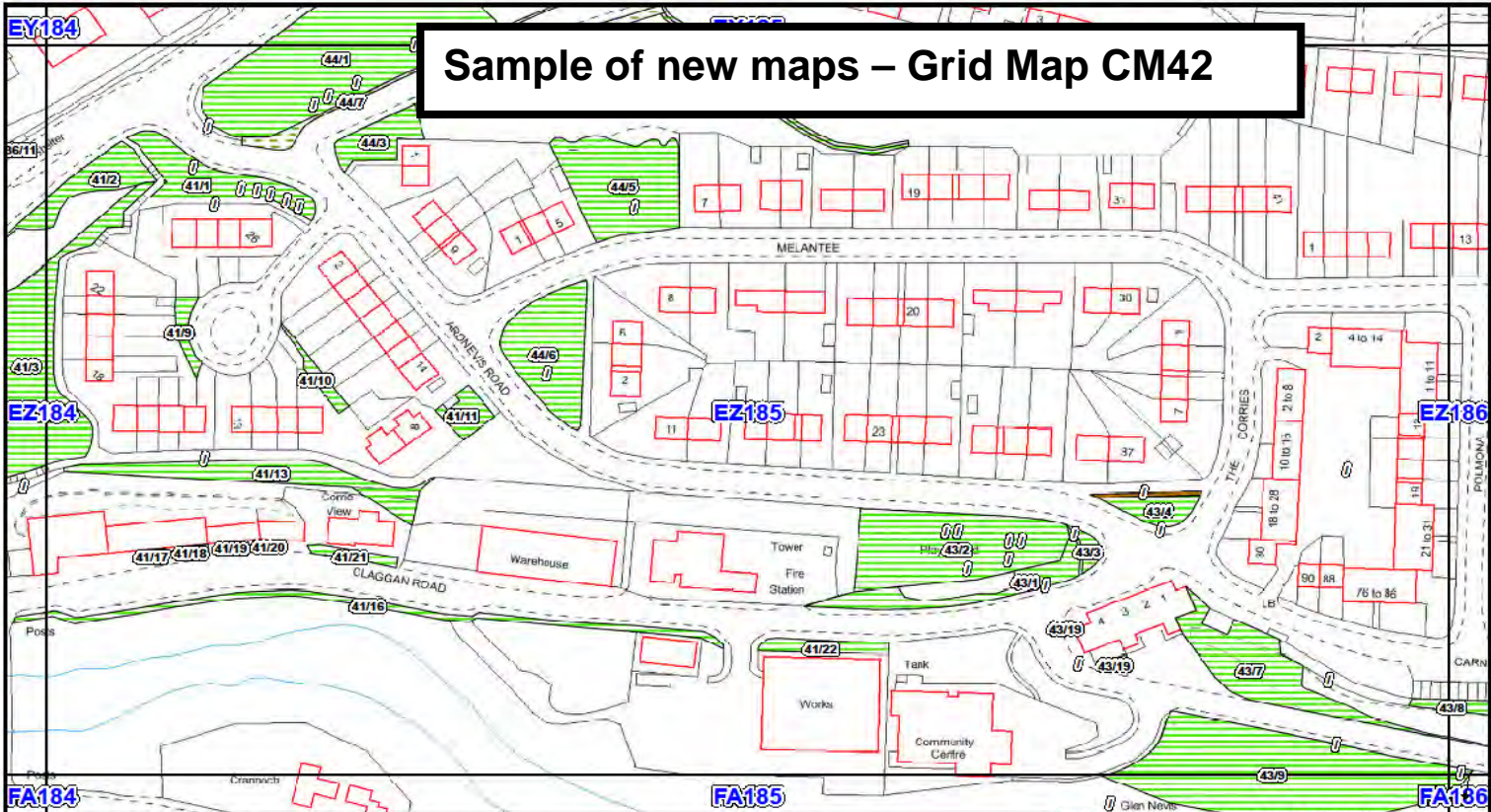
Appendix B - Grass Cutting Amenity Standards

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

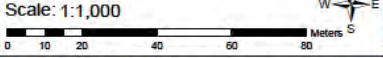
Appendix C - Examples of old and new grounds maintenance maps



Sample of new maps – Grid Map CM42



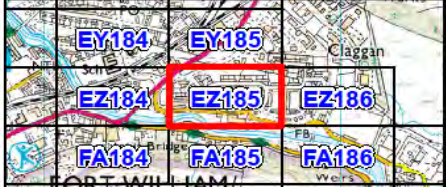
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Legend			
[Green hatched]	High Amenity Grass	[Brown hatched]	Hedge
[Light green hatched]	Lawn	[Orange hatched]	Shrubs
[Green with dots]	Sports Turf	[Green with vertical lines]	Trees
[Green with diagonal lines]	General Amenity Grass	[Blue hatched]	Hard Surface
[Light green with diagonal lines]	Low Amenity Grass	[Blue with diagonal lines]	Play Area
[Green with horizontal lines]	Rough Grass	[Blue with cross-hatch]	Sports Area (Hard)
[Green with vertical lines]	Annual Bedding	[Red hatched]	Street Furniture

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Appendix D – In House Supervision of Grounds Resources in Lochaber

