

The Highland Council
Skye, Ross & Cromarty Area Committee
6 August 2014

Agenda Item	11
Report No	SRC 28/14

Grounds Maintenance Performance Monitoring Report – mid season update

Report by Director of Community Services

Summary

This report details performance management information of the Grounds Maintenance Services from April to June 2014.

Members are invited to note the management action taken to address performance issues identified and agree to review required service standards at future 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 power:

“to approve local levels of service for grounds maintenance within the strategy and budget allocated by Community Services Committee.”

1.2 Community Services is 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 recorded performance from April to June 2014 and the arrangements for monitoring performance of the Grounds Maintenance Services. It also provides feedback of actions taken to manage the service during the period.

2. Background

2.1 Report SRC/2/14 'Grounds Maintenance Programme' was presented to the Skye, Ross & Cromarty Committee on 5th February 2014. The report detailed arrangements for the delivery of the Grounds Maintenance Service and the resources available.

2.2 In February 2014 the grass cutting contract for Skye & Lochalsh (LOT 5) was awarded to Golders Landscape Maintenance Ltd. The contract has a duration of 2 years from April 2014 to March 2016, with an optional annual extension for the 2016 season.

- 2.3 In Mid & West Ross (LOT 4) externalised grass cutting is delivered by ISS; the contract was extended by one year in 2014. There is an option to award a further extension for 2015. The grass cutting of Burial Grounds is undertaken by in-house DLO, but some sites are being maintained by external contractors on a pilot basis.
- 2.4 In Easter Ross the in-house DLO retain all grass cutting work.
- 2.5 These details are summarised in the table in para 3.1.
- 2.6 The Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 19th June 2014 received summary report HH02/002 dated 10th June 2014 entitled 'Community Services – Outsourced Grass Cutting Contract – Monitoring and Payment arrangements' which presented summary of findings of an audit of monitoring during the 2012 season; the report includes an audit report action plan. An update report on delivery of the action plan will be presented to the Community Services Committee on 21st August 2014.

3. Activities

- 3.1. Across the six Skye, Ross & Cromarty wards there are 3,413,501 square metres of public open and amenity space spread over 1,716 locations, with an average size of 2,000m². Table 1 shows the respective quantities and service provider. Over the course of a year approximately 39,000 maintenance tasks or activities are carried out as summarised in **Appendix A**.

Table 1		Maintained area (m ²)			
Location	Grass Area Contracted	Grass Area DLO	Planted Area	Hard Landscaped	Total Area (m ²)
Skye	393,332	0	4,709	71,102	469,143
Mid & West Ross	823,279	437,170	37,911	119,498	1,417,858
East Ross	0	1,360,387	22,337	143,776	1,526,500
Grass totals	1,216,611	1,797,557			
SRC Totals	3,014,168		64,957	334,376	3,413,501

- 3.2. Activities are carried out to the standard specified in the Grounds Maintenance Service Level Agreement (SLA). **Appendix B** provides details of the Grass Cutting Amenity Standards. The SLA and specification apply Highland wide and provide a consistent set of standards including methods for measuring compliance across the Highland.
- 3.3. A copy of the SLA and a list of plots are available to Members on request.

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. We have a large electronic database defining all the plots and relevant tasks.

- 4.2. A mapping exercise has been undertaken to provide a database of all the grass cutting areas. Maps for Skye were completed in March 2014. Final maps for Ross & Cromarty are programmed for completion during 2014. Maps are being produced in “pdf” format for issue to Ward Members and Community Councils. Subject to ICT agreement it is intended to make the maps available in electronic format via the Council’s website during 2014/15.

5. Contract Supervision & Performance

- 5.1. The basis for all SLA or contract inspections is to determine if the site management, including contracted services, is sufficient to maintain the service standard of the Service Level Agreement (SLA).
- 5.2. The first level of inspection is carried out as self-assessment by in-house or contracted service delivery teams and Managers. This was contractually included in the Skye amenity Grass Cutting contract. with the contractor providing self-certification information. This first stage assessment is independently validated by Contract Supervisors.
- 5.3. Monitoring of all works Highland-wide is currently carried out by a section of 1 Contract Performance and Inspection Coordinator with 3 Contract Supervisors, one of whom is responsible for monitoring Skye, Ross & Cromarty. They are part of the Roads & Community Works HQ team in Inverness who are also responsible for management and supervision of the Public Convenience cleaning contract and monitoring the Garden Aid contract.
- 5.4. In the summer months, monitoring is supported by seasonal Inspector(s) employed to undertake the monitoring of the Garden Aid contract.
- 5.5. The section handles approximately 100 complaints and enquiries per month.
- 5.6. Planned and reactionary validation inspections are undertaken with the objective of covering all grounds maintenance disciplines. Focused inspections are carried out in known problem areas or as a result of reported complaints. Re-inspections are often undertaken following the issue of a Breached Standard notice.
- 5.7. Where failure is recorded, an improvement request or informal notice is issued to the service provider, whether internal (DLO) or external contractor.
- 5.8. Failure to return the site to the required standard within 48 hours results in an escalation and issue of a remedial notice.
- 5.9. A follow up inspection will be made on or after the completion date and if there has been no improvement then either a Nonconforming Service Report or a Default Notice will be issued to the DLO manager or the contractor respectively.

- 5.10 For the grass cutting activities and other grounds work the number of inspections and resulting breached standards issued to the contractor and in-house operation during April to June 2014 are shown below:

Grounds Maintenance Performance (All tasks and all service providers)					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Inspections	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	123	85%	18	9	50%
May	85	64%	25	14	56%
June	130	57%	44	22	50%
Totals	338	67%	87	45	52%

- 5.11 Overall 52% of all breached standards were rectified within 7 days. Compared with the maintained area of 3.414 million square metres and the 38,782 annual tasks undertaken, the number of breached standards is low. The level of performance differs across the three sub-areas and between service providers, as presented in **Appendix C**.
- 5.12 Performance figures for July are expected to be available prior to 6th August; it is intended to provide an update at the meeting.

6. Management Actions

- 6.1 The 2014 grass growing season has seen exceptional grass growth in April, May and June across the Highlands. Operations are normally programmed for a traditional slow growth rate in April with seasonal staff recruited for successive starts until full establishment is reached in May. The rapid grass growth has seen all service providers struggling to reach full manning levels whilst delivering the required service. In general this has been achieved in Skye where a new contractor commenced in April.
- 6.2 Members will be aware of the high profile publicity surrounding reduced performance across a range of activities and the commitment to improve grass cutting service in Highland.
- 6.3 Following these performance issues, a senior management meeting was held with ISS and the Director of Community Services on 30th June 2014. ISS committed to a recovery action with the deployment of further resources including a dedicated team for dealing with hotspots and remedial actions. Early indications show that this is working; however, the situation is being closely monitored. It is expected the July performance figures will reflect the actions taken. A management review meeting is scheduled for early August to assess the effect on performance in July.

- 6.4 The delivery of grass cutting, especially in Mid & West Ross, was affected by delays in recruiting seasonal staff. To ensure the area team can successfully deliver the majority of their works it was agreed, subject to resolution of the ISS performance issues (para 7.3), to transfer the grass cutting of 12 burial grounds, representing a third of the retained grass, into the external contract and we are seeing evidence of completion rates improving.
- 6.5 When a Breached standard is issued and a contractor fails to complete acceptable remedial action, the Authority is entitled to recover its inspection costs and all losses which arise as a result of the deficient Services. There is no recovery of costs from in-house service delivery.
- 6.7 Recovery of inspection costs for 2014 for the months of April to June have been agreed with both ISS and Golder Landscape Services.

7. Consultation with Ward Members on Standards

- 7.1 Engagement at Ward level is required to review and agree 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”.
- 7.3 Some meetings have already taken place but further 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.

8 Recommendations

- 8.1 Members are invited to scrutinise the performance management and remedial action information provided on the grounds maintenance service set out in this report.
- 8.2 Members are invited to note the management action taken to address the performance issues identified and agree to review required service standards at future Ward Business meetings.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 24 July 2014

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Appendix A - Grass Cutting Maintained Areas and Annual Tasks

Skye, Ross & Cromarty						
Area Maintained		Square Metres	Contracted		In House	
	Grass	3,014,168	1,216,611	40%	1,797,557	60%
	Planted	64,957	0	0	64,957	100%
	Hard landscape	334,376	0	0	334,376	100%
	Total	3,413,501	1,216,611	36%	2,196,890	64%
Forecast Tasks Annually		Number	Contracted		In House	
Grass	Growing Season	14,661	7,008	48%	7,653	52%
	Dormant Season	4,130	0	0%	4,130	100%
Planted	Growing Season	2,367	0	0%	2,367	100%
	Dormant Season	1,280	0	0%	1,280	100%
Hard landscape	Growing Season	9,904	184	19%	9,720	81%
	Dormant Season	6,440	55	1%	6,385	99%
Total		38,782	7,247	19%	31,535	81%

Appendix B - Grass Cutting Amenity Standards

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

Appendix C – Performance Analysis

- The following tables show the individual area performances for contractor and DLO for amenity grass cutting.

Amenity Grass Contract - East Ross (LOT 3) – DLO					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Inspections	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	10	60%	4	0	0%
May	7	14%	9	4	44%
June	No Insp.	No Insp.	2	2	100%
Totals	17	41%	15	6	40%

There were no inspections during June due to the deployment of all inspection staff onto the external contracts, especially in Inverness and Lochaber; a full round of site inspections is programmed for July and August.

Amenity Grass Contract - Mid & West Ross (Lot 4) ISS					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Inspections	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	38	87%	6	6	100%
May	10	50%	7	4	57%
June	33	52%	14	8	57%
Totals	81	68%	27	18	67%

Amenity Grass Contract – SKYE (Lot 5) Golders Landscape Maintenance Ltd					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Inspections	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	2	100%	0	0	NA
May	27	81%	5	4	80%
June	34	71%	10	9	90%
Totals	63	76%	15	13	87%

2. The following tables show the individual area performances for the in-house DLO for retained areas of amenity grass excluded from the contracts:

Grounds Maintenance Performance – Skye, Ross & Cromarty Amenity Grass retained and excluded from contract DLO					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Inspections	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	21	76%	7	3	43%
May	7	0%	3	2	67%
June	5	20%	13	2	15%
Totals	33	41%	23	7	30%

The table summarises the results for East Ross and Mid & West Ross. There is no excluded grass in Skye & Lochalsh, where all areas of grass have for 10 years been included in the tendered contract.

Grounds Maintenance Performance Amenity Grass - Retained East Ross DLO					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Inspections	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	No Insp.	NA	0	0	NA
May	5	100%	0	0	NA
June	No Insp.	NA	0	0	NA
Totals	5	100%	0	0	NA

Grounds Maintenance Performance Amenity Grass Retained - Mid & West Ross DLO					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Inspections	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	16	69%	7	3	43%
May	7	0%	3	2	67%
June	16	6%	13	2	15%
Totals	39	41%	23	7	30%

3. The following tables show the individual area performances for the main non-grass areas of planting and hard landscape:

Grounds Maintenance Performance – Skye, Ross & Cromarty (DLO SLA Work excluding grass cutting)					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Inspections	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	52	90%	1	0	0%
May	34	76%	1	0	0%
June	47	55%	5	1	20%
Totals	133	74%	7	1	14%

Skye & Lochalsh DLO SLA Work excluding grass cutting					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Inspections	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	3	100%	1	0	0%
May	19	89%	0	0	NA
June	22	68%	1	0	0%
Totals	44	80%	2	0	0%

East Ross DLO SLA Work excluding grass cutting					
April	11	100%	0	0	NA
May	4	50%	0	0	NA
June	0	NA	0	0	NA
Totals	15	87%	0	0	NA

Mid & West Ross DLO SLA Work excluding grass cutting					
April	38	87%	0	0	NA
May	11	64%	1	0	0%
June	25	44%	4	1	25%
Totals	74	69%	5	1	20%