

The Highland Council
Caithness & Sutherland Area Committee
23 September 2014

Agenda Item	13
Report No	CS/ 32/14

Grounds Maintenance Performance Monitoring Report – mid season update

Report by Director of Community Services

Summary

This report details performance management information for the Grounds Maintenance Services from April to August 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 Area Committees gives the Caithness and Sutherland 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 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 recorded performance from April to August 2014 and the arrangements for monitoring performance of the Grounds Maintenance Services. It also provides feedback on actions taken to manage the service during the period.

2. Background

2.1. Report CS/19/14 'Grounds Maintenance Programme' was presented to the Caithness and Sutherland Committee on 27th May 2014. The report detailed arrangements for the delivery of the Grounds Maintenance Service and the resources available

2.2. In Caithness and Sutherland the in-house DLO retain all grass cutting work.

- 2.3. Report COM/21/14 'Grounds Maintenance Service Delivery' was presented to the Community Services Committee on 21st August 2014. The Committee agreed to extend the existing contractual arrangements for delivery of amenity grass cutting for the 2015 season. For Caithness & Sutherland, the in-house DLO will cut all grass during the 2015 season.
- 2.4. These details are summarised in the table in para 3.1.
- 2.5. 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 was presented to the Community Services Committee on 21st August 2014.

3. Activities

Across the five Caithness and Sutherland wards there are 1,845,928 square metres of public open and amenity space spread over 580 locations, with an average size of 3,000m². Table 1 shows the respective quantities and service provider. Over the course of a year approximately 33,000 maintenance tasks or activities are carried out as summarised in **Appendix A**.

3.1.

Location	Maintained area (m ²)				Total Area (m ²)
	Grass Area Contracted	Grass Area DLO	Planted Area	Hard Landscape	
Caithness	0	902,806	13,100	94,681	1,010,587
Sutherland	0	784,017	11,206	40,118	835,341
C & S Totals	1,686,823		24,306	134,799	1,845,928

- 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. Final maps for Caithness & Sutherland 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.
- 4.3. The contractor (other Areas of Highland) and the in-house operation (Caithness and Sutherland) are required to maintain grass areas within the set parameters irrespective of the rate of growth.
- 4.4. 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 permitted areas to more accurately meet SLA standards and harmonise service delivery.

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 service delivery teams and Managers. This assessment is independently validated by Contract Supervisors.
- 5.3. Monitoring of all works Highland-wide is currently carried out by a team of 1 Contract Performance and Inspection Coordinator with 3 Contract Supervisors. 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 of 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 team 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 a Nonconforming Service Report will be issued to the DLO manager.

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

Grounds Maintenance Performance All tasks and all Service Providers					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Number	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	28	100%	4	0	0%
May	38	53%	13	4	31%
June	59	42%	7	7	100%
July	39	97%	10	9	90%
August	54	85%	7	5	71%
Totals	218	72%	41	25	61%

- 5.11 Overall 61% of all breached standards were rectified within 7 days. Compared with the maintained area of 1.845 million square metres and the 38,782 annual tasks undertaken, the number of breached standards is low. The level of performance across the two sub-areas is presented in **Appendix C**.

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 Caithness & Sutherland except during the month of May which was primarily due to delays in utilising the existing workforce to assist in grass cutting.
- 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 The delivery of grass cutting was affected by delays in resolving replacement for seasonal staff.
- 6.4 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.

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”.
- 7.2 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. Other Work

- 8.1. The following are examples of the high profile work and support for communities that are regularly delivered by the in-house team.
- 8.2. Special Events Preparation - examples
Entertainment events such as local Galas and Harbour Days
Armistice Day
- 8.3. Flower and Motif Beds
Motif beds situated on the Riverside and Kirkhill, Wick and The Toll, Thurso are provided using the skills of staff at the Nurseries in propagating the individual plants.
- 8.4. War Memorials and Communities
Supporting communities to tend war memorials with regular successes in national competitions run by The Royal British Legion Scotland.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

- (i) scrutinise the performance management and remedial action information provided on the grounds maintenance service set out in this report;
- (ii) to note the management action taken to address the performance issues identified and
- (iii) agree to review required service standards at future Ward Business meetings.

Designation: Director of Community Services

Date: 9 September 2014

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Appendix A - Grass Cutting Maintained Areas and Annual Tasks.

Caithness/Sutherland Grounds						
Area Maintained		Square Metres	Contracted		In House	
Grass		1,686,823	0	0%	1,688,302	100%
Planted		24,306	0	0%	24,306	100%
Hard landscape		134,799	0	0%	134,799	100%
Total		1,845,928	0	0%	1,847,407	100%
Forecast Tasks Annually		Number	Contracted		In House	
Grass	Growing Season	10,611	0	0%	10,611	100%
	Dormant Season	2,821	0	0%	2,821	100%
Planted	Growing Season	1,746	0	0%	1,746	100%
	Dormant Season	799	0	0%	799	100%
Hard landscape	Growing Season	10,322	0	0%	10,322	100%
	Dormant Season	6,418	0	0%	6,418	100%
Total		32,717	0	0%	32,717	100%

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 – Caithness LOT 1 – DLO					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Number	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	0	NA	0	0	0%
May	8	50%	13	4	31%
June	41	39%	7	7	100%
July	6	100%	9	9	100%
August	9	100%	0	0	N/A
Totals	64	55%	29	20	69%

Amenity Grass Contract - Sutherland Lot 2 - DLO					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Number	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	13	100%	0	0	N/A
May	0	NA	0	0	N/A
June	0	NA	0	0	N/A
July	8	100%	0	0	N/A
August	0	0%	0	0	N/A
Totals	21	100%	0	0	N/A

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 – Caithness & Sutherland Amenity Grass retained and excluded from contract DLO					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Number	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	7	100%	0	0	NA
May	10	40%	0	0	NA
June	0	NA	0	0	NA
July	10	90%	1	0	0%
August	19	74%	4	4	100%
Totals	46	74%	5	4	80%

Grounds Maintenance Performance Amenity Grass – Retained Caithness - DLO					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Number	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	0	NA	0	0	N/A
May	6	0%	0	0	N/A
June	0	NA	0	0	N/A
July	8	88%	0	0	N/A
August	1	100%	0	0	N/A
Totals	15	53%	0	0	N/A

Grounds Maintenance Performance Amenity Grass – Retained Sutherland - DLO					
April	7	100%	0	0	N/A
May	4	100%	0	0	N/A
June	0	NA	0	0	N/A
July	2	100%	0	0	N/A
August	18	72%	4	4	100%
Totals	31	84%	4	4	100%

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

Grounds Maintenance Performance – Caithness & Sutherland DLO SLA Work excluding grass cutting					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Number	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	8	100%	0	0	NA
May	20	60%	0	0	NA
June	18	50%	0	0	NA
July	15	100%	0	0	NA
August	26	85%	3	1	33%
Totals	85	75%	3	1	33%

Grounds Maintenance Performance – Caithness DLO SLA Work excluding grass cutting					
Contract Monitoring			Breached Standards		
Month	Number	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	0	NA	0	0	NA
May	18	56%	0	0	NA
June	18	50%	0	0	NA
July	8	100%	0	0	NA
August	11	82%	2	0	NA
Totals	55	65%	0	0	NA

Grounds Maintenance Performance – Sutherland DLO SLA Work excluding grass cutting					
April	8	100%	0	0	N/A
May	2	100%	0	0	N/A
June	0	NA	0	0	N/A
July	7	100%	0	0	N/A
August	15	87%	1	1	100%
Totals	32	94%	1	1	100%