

Agenda Item	10
Report No	CIA/40/19

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: **City of Inverness Area Committee**

Date: **29 August 2019**

Report Title: **Remote Mower Options**

Report By: **Interim Chief Officer Resources (Community Services)**

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report details a review of grass cutting operations on steep banks in the City of Inverness area, especially the Inverness Castle bank and the River Ness banks. The maintenance of these areas contributes significantly to the visitor experience, although the safe maintenance of these banks has presented significant challenges over the last 3 years
- 1.2 In order to address these challenges, specialist machinery has been brought in to safely maintain these areas. Proposals for 2020 season are presented with the options of:-
- a. an annual arrangement with a contractor;
 - b. a three year arrangement with a contractor; or
 - c. direct purchase of the machinery, which would also allow enhanced maintenance of similar locations throughout the City of Inverness area

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-
- i. Note the health and safety concerns associated with the cutting of steep banks including the Castle and River banks;
 - ii. Approve the funding from the Common Good Fund for the 2019 season contractor costs of £14,430; and
 - iii. Agree to Option 3 as detailed below, being the recommendation to part fund the purchase of a remote mower for the ongoing cutting of the Castle and River banks as well as other areas of steep banks and a contribution cost from the Common Good Fund of £20,000.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Legal – The establishment of longer-term arrangements for the maintenance of the areas identified will allow the Council to meet its responsibilities in terms of Health and Safety legislation
- 3.2 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – No implications.
- 3.3 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – No implications.
- 3.4 Risk – High quality maintenance of the areas identified will mitigate reputational risk to the Council
- 3.5 Gaelic – No implications.

4. Background

4.1 Grass cutting on the:-

- a. north side of the Castle Banks; and
- b. the banks of the River Ness

has been under continuous review since the grass cutting service was insourced in early 2017.

4.2 This review process has been undertaken to ensure that these high profile areas continue to be maintained to a high standard whilst addressing constraints such as:-

- a. the steepness of the banks limiting the use of conventional maintenance activities such as pedestrian mowers or strimming;
- b. uneven surfaces; and
- c. the proximity of fast flowing water.

4.3 Over the last 3 years, these challenges have been addressed by engaging a contractor to cut these areas 2 or 3 times per summer using a remote-controlled mower. Whilst this has resulted in a high standard of maintenance of these areas, better value for money for the Council could be achieved through the outright purchase of this type of machine. The benefits of this approach would be to:-

- a. Improve value for money for the Council over the longer term; and
- b. Expand this approach to similar locations throughout the City of Inverness area for minimal increased revenue expenditure

5. Options for future service delivery

5.1 Options for future service delivery currently under consideration for cutting of the Castle and River banks, are outlined below:-

- a. Option 1 – Cutting the Castle and River banks for 2020 season with a contractor, quoted price of £4800;
- b. Option 2 – enter into a three-year arrangement with a contractor at an annual cost

- of £4952 per year; and
- c. Option 3 – Direct purchase of the machinery at a cost of £40,000 with a contribution from the Common Good Fund of £20,000. The remaining capital cost of £20,000 plus the annual maintenance and operational running costs of the machine would be met by the Service.

5.2 If the option to purchase a remote mower was approved then the added value this could facilitate would be cutting at numerous locations throughout the City including the following:-

- a. General Booth Road
- b. Suilven Way
- c. Leachkin Road
- d. Scorguie Drive
- e. Overton Avenue
- f. Balnafettack Road

5.3 In addition to this, numerous other steep bank locations could be identified which have not previously been considered as safe to cut. Furthermore, outright ownership of this machinery would give the Council greater control over the timing of the operation to ensure that it takes place at the most appropriate time rather than depending on the availability of the contractor.

Designation: Interim Chief Officer Resources (Community Services)

Date: 17 July 2019

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