



REVIEW OF HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL ARRANGEMENTS FOR GRASS AND SHRUB MAINTENANCE

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Cabinet to enter into a revised agency agreement with Hampshire County Council.
- 1.2 Discussions that have been held between Hampshire County Council's Chief Engineer (Highway Maintenance) and New Forest District Council's Assistant Director, Commercial Services (Operational Services) and Grounds Maintenance Manager, which has resulted in this revised proposal being submitted by the County Council.
- 1.3 This report has been presented to the Economy & Planning Review Panel as the Economy and Planning Portfolio Holder holds the budget for the maintenance of the highway verges. The Portfolio Holder for Environment in addition holds a budget for topping up the grass cutting frequency by 4 cuts to 10, and for this reason, Environment Review Panel Members were invited to attend the meeting held on 17th March 2004 for this item.
- 1.4 With the current agency arrangements for grass cutting and shrub bed maintenance due to terminate on 31st March 2004, representatives from Hampshire County Council have been in discussion with all of Hampshire's District Councils to review the general principles of the agency arrangements.
- 1.5 The review focused on
 - The responsibilities of each Local Authority
 - The frequency and standards expected
 - The District Council's ability to demonstrate that Best Value principles are being followed in terms of justifying payments for completed works
 - That each Local Authority agree a funding formula for grass and shrub bed maintenance

2. GRASS CUTTING

- 2.1 The existing frequency for grass cutting on Hampshire County Council Agency areas within the New Forest District is 10 cuts with HCC funding 6 and New Forest District Council enhancing the service with a further 4 cuts up to a total of 10 in urban areas. This approach is not consistent countywide.
- 2.2 The new funding formula proposed would see Hampshire County Council continuing to pay for the first 6 cuts, but due to the way in which the funding formula works this revised formula indicates that HCC would pick up 75% of the total benchmarked grass cutting costs.

- 2.3 The reason for the 75% apportionment is that County have recognised that the benchmarked price per m² to cut grass 6 times a year is more expensive than the first 6 cuts in a 10 cut frequency

3. SHRUB BEDS

- 3.1 The current frequency of shrub bed maintenance is inconsistent across the District with some HCC shrub beds being visited every 3 years and others annually. This has led to confusion with concerns being expressed by local residents about the level of maintenance carried out.
- 3.2 The new proposals for shrub bed maintenance, which is based on a benchmarked costing will allow at least one visit a year to all HCC shrub borders
- 3.3 It is the intention therefore to visit each shrub bed annually, but we have also identified the need that where funds allow we would carry out an additional pruning visit during the summer months on areas of rapid growth, especially sight lines, road junctions, footways and cycleways
- 3.4 In addition to previous years HCC have also agreed to fund up to £1,000 worth of works per annum to remove and replant or turf over shrub beds situated in inappropriate areas

4. MANAGEMENT COSTS

- 4.1 Previously management fees were calculated at 6% of the grass and shrub maintenance value.

This disadvantaged authorities such as ourselves who had to manage these activities over a wide geographical area. The new proposal is based on the scale of the works to be undertaken.

5. FUNDING

- 5.1 The table below identifies the estimated allocation for 2003/04 and the proposed allocation for 2005/06.

	2003/04	2005/06
Urban Grass Cutting	Apportionment not available	£226,155
Shrub Bed Maintenance	Apportionment not available	£11,721
Shrub Removal	0	£1,000
TOTAL	£214,000	£238,876
Management Fees	£12,840	£14,759
TOTAL	£226,840	£253,635

5.2 Agreement has been reached between HCC and the other District Councils that as there are some Districts who will have their budget allocation reduced and due to the lateness of this review, this revised apportionment would be phased in over two financial years.

5.3 The New Forest apportionment has been identified as an increase of £17,863 for 2004/05 and £26,795 for 2005/06, which will contribute towards the improved maintenance of the shrub beds.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 To contribute towards the clean and well cared for environment through maintaining and improving the horticultural features associated with County Council Highway verges

7. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 To maintain shrub beds to a sufficient height away from streetlights and footpaths, which contributes towards the provision of a safe environment.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 That New Forest District Council would like to continue with the agency arrangements for the grass cutting and shrub bed maintenance on highway verges.

This arrangement is now more beneficial to the District Council as additional funding has been made available to maintain the shrub beds to an acceptable standard.

9. REVIEW PANEL COMMENTS

9.1 The Economy & Planning review panel at their meeting on 17th March 2004 supported the recommendation identified in 11.1 below.

10. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS COMMENTS

Both the Economy and Planning and the Environment Portfolio Holders support the recommendations contained in this report.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 That, subject to the legal agreement meeting the approval of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, New Forest District Council enter into a renewed agency agreement with Hampshire County Council to maintain the urban grassed areas and shrub beds on Highway land from 1st April 2004.

For further Information:

Colin Read
Assistant Director
Commercial Services
Tel: (01264) 357321
E-mail: cread@testvalley.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Letter to NFDC
dated 22/01/04