

Officer Decision Record – 6 May 2026

Review of Grounds Maintenance Service

Classification	Public
Decision taken	To approve £120,000 of funding drawdown from the £2 million Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Reserve in order to carry out a review of the Grounds Maintenance Service
Reasons for the decision	<p>Background</p> <p>New Forest District Council operates a Grounds Maintenance Team undertaking hard and soft landscaping activities to look after a range of open spaces, natural habitats and assets across the district. These services had a net budget on 26/27 of £1.1m, and the service employs 22 frontline staff with additional staff in supervisory and business support teams. The team are mostly based at Hardley depot.</p> <p>Land ownership of maintained sites is varied – some areas are owned by the council, others we have adopted responsibility for maintenance only, and some are in private ownership where the council acts as a contractor for the customer. Key activities include grass cutting and verge mowing, hedge trimming, landscaping, weed control, and fixed asset maintenance (paths, bridge etc).</p> <p>The current Grounds Maintenance procedures, resourcing and pricing have been in place for many years with very few changes made to reflect the up-to-date scale, standard and cost of activities. This introduces financial, operational and reputational risk, and means that it is difficult to demonstrate clear value for money or service quality, for services delivered to both internal and external customers.</p> <p>The introduction of the Bartec ICT system to the area of Grounds Maintenance is an important first step to modernisation – however, if it is not supported by a more fundamental review, the Bartec system will only lead to small gains.</p> <p>The need to update systems, processes, policies, and Service Level Agreements means that this service area is not in strong position when it comes to preparation for LGR and future integration of services with others. As these discussions commence, we may be hampered by poor data, and a loose</p>

service structure, making work on LGR preparations difficult, which leaves the service in a less strong position.

This project will align with, and where appropriate directly support, the council's Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP). Asset-related insights from the review will inform and strengthen the SAMP by ensuring consistency in asset categorisation, lifecycle planning, long-term investment requirements, and the recording of data on open spaces, grounds maintenance assets, and maintenance liabilities across the organisation.

Opportunity to improve NFDC Grounds Maintenance Services

A review of all aspects of service delivery would ensure that costs are recovered, standards of service are met and value for money is consistent and transparent to NFDC customers. The scope of works will identify opportunities for increasing income, reducing expenditure and running the service more efficiently, providing greater assurance to customers that they are receiving best value for money. This will also allow more informed choices to be made about future service priorities. This will ensure that as LGR progresses, these services will be well placed and with good supporting data and policies, to enable full participation in LGR discussions with future partner councils.

Scope of improvement works

Activities to be undertaken in the review:

- New and reviewed Site Management Plans inc. environmental, biodiversity improvements for current and new sites
- Area based risk assessments
- Review of Grounds Maintenance operating model to ensure optimum efficiency and value for money
- Review of staff resources to deliver revised work plans and schedules of maintenance
- Review of equipment assignment, storage and repair arrangements
- Bartec integration into any new processes
- Drafting of new SLAs for internal and external customers
- Review of pricing model and integration into SLAs
- Review of funding gap analysis – current funding vs future needs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy review <p>Delivery of review</p> <p>A procurement exercise will be undertaken to appoint a suitable consultant to deliver the scope of works. Technical expertise will be required from our own Grounds Maintenance Management Team, with programme management support provided by the Place Operations Strategy and Performance Team, and the Project Management Office. The Assistant Director for Place Operations will act as the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO). The project would commence in May 2026 and be completed in time for the 27/28 budget setting process in November 2026.</p> <p>Conclusion</p> <p>This project will ensure this important service area is ready for LGR. It will also identify additional income opportunities and efficiencies to reduce cost. It supports all three of our Place Priorities from the Corporate Plan – Shaping our place now and for future generations; protecting our climate, coast and natural world; and caring for our facilities, neighbourhoods and open spaces in a modern and responsive way.</p>
Consultations undertaken	The LGR Steering Group has been fully briefed on the project, and the LGR Board endorsed this approach.
Finance and Resourcing implications	The estimated cost for the review is £120,000, funded via a drawdown from the £2 million Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Reserve.
Legal implications	No legal implications of carrying out the review. Any potential implications during the review itself will be considered with the legal team.
Risk assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk 1 – delay in completion of the project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mitigation – project management resource designed to monitor and keep project on track • Risk 2 – overspend on budget <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mitigation - procurement has not yet been completed, so the £120,000 stated is an estimate at this stage. Through a successful and well-managed specification and procurement any risk of overspend will be minimised
Impact assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental / Climate and Nature impact

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One of the considerations in the review will be how site management plans can positively impact on nature recovery, so this will have a positive impact • Equalities, crime and disorder, Data protection / Information Governance / ICT impacts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There are none • New Forest National Park impact and Cranbourne Chase National Landscape impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No impacts of completing the review itself. Any outcomes of the review will consider any impacts on the Park and National Landscape.
Any conflict of interest by officer taking the decision	No
Decision taken by	Kate Ryan, Chief Executive Date of Decision 06/05/2026
Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Geoffrey Blunden – Environment and Sustainability
Strategic Director(s)	Tracey Coleman – Place, Operations and Sustainability
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Appendices

None

Background Papers:

None