

The Highland Council
Lochaber Area Committee
26 August 2014

Agenda Item	12
Report No	LA/29/14

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.

The Committee is 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 Lochaber 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 July 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 LA-11-14 'Grounds Maintenance Programme' was presented to the Lochaber Area Committee on 27th February 2014. The report detailed arrangements for the delivery of the Grounds Maintenance Service and the resources available.

2.2 In Lochaber (LOT 6) 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 Sports Grounds is undertaken by in-house DLO.

- 2.3 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 is being presented to the Community Services Committee on 21st August 2014.

3. Activities

- 3.1. Across the two Lochaber Wards there are 1,207,959 square metres of public open and amenity space spread over 859 locations, with an average size of quarter of an acre. Details of the maintained areas and numbers of annual tasks are contained in **Appendix A**.
- 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 Lochaber 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 first stage assessment is independently validated by Contract Supervisors.
- 5.3. Monitoring of all works Highland-wide is currently carried out by a Contract Performance and Inspection Coordinator with 3 Contract Supervisors, one of whom is responsible for monitoring Lochaber. 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 July 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	24	83%	4	1	25%
May	35	57%	13	13	100%
June	69	54%	40	39	98%
July	11	82%	2	2	100%
Totals	139	62%	59	55	93%

- 5.11 Overall 93% of all breached standards were rectified within 7 days. Compared with the maintained area of 1,207,959 square metres and the 12,176 annual tasks undertaken, the number of breached standards is low. The level of performance differs between service providers, as 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.
- 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 plan with the deployment of further resources including a dedicated team for dealing with hotspots and remedial actions
- 6.4 A review meeting attended by the Chair of Community Services Committee and the Director of Community Services was held with ISS on 7th August 2014.
- 6.5 On 21st August, an update report on Grounds Maintenance to Community Services Committee will recommend that the existing contractual arrangements for delivery of amenity grass cutting are extended for the 2015 season so that all contracts terminate at the same time.
- 6.6 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 ISS.

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 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: 12 August 2014

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Appendix A - Grass Cutting Maintained Areas and Annual Tasks

Lochaber						
Area Maintained		Square Metres	Contracted		In House	
	Grass	940,553	817,933	86%	122,620	14%
	Planted	23,843	0	0%	23,843	100%
	Hard landscape	243,563	0	0%	243,563	100%
	Total	1,207,959	817,933	86%	390,026	14%
Forecast Tasks Annually						
Caveat: Shows only forecast tasks, not completed. For a true measure of performance, both must be shown.		Number	Contracted		In House	
Grass	Growing Season	7,107	6250	88%	857	12%
	Dormant Season	239	0	0%	239	100%
Planted	Growing Season	653	0	0%	653	100%
	Dormant Season	228	0	0%	228	100%
Hard landscape	Growing Season	3,096	1986	64%	1,110	36%
	Dormant Season	853	445	52%	408	48%
Total		12,176	8,681	71%	3,495	29%

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 - Lochaber Lot 6 ISS					
Month	Contract Monitoring		Breached Standards		
	Inspections	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	10	100%	0	0	0%
May	17	29%	13	13	100%
June	37	41%	40	39	98%
July	6	67%	2	2	100%
Totals	70	49%	55	54	98%

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 August.

Amenity Grass - Lochaber Retained DLO					
Month	Contract Monitoring		Breached Standards		
	Inspections	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	0	0	0	0	NA
May	1	100%	0	0	NA
June	0	0	0	0	NA
July	0	0	0	0	NA
Totals	1	100%	0	0	NA

2. The following table shows the performance for the main non-grass areas of planting and hard landscape:

SLA Work excluding grass cutting - Lochaber - DLO					
Month	Contract Monitoring		Breached Standards		
	Inspections	Pass Rate	Issued	Completed within 7 days	Percentage
April	14	71%	4	1	25%
May	17	82%	0	0	0
June	32	69%	0	0	0
July	5	100%	0	0	0
Totals	68	75%	4	1	25%