

Grass Cutting in Urban and Rural Areas

Report of the Head of Highways, Capital Development and Waste

Please note that the following recommendation is subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the position in respect of highway grass cutting within North Devon is noted.

1. Summary

The report advises of the action being taken by the County to manage grass cutting in Urban and Rural Areas within North Devon.

2. Background/Introduction

At the July North Devon HATOC, report HCW/14/63 was presented regarding the performance of the Urban Grass cutting contractor. It was resolved that a report of the performance of both urban and rural grass cutting operations over the summer of 2014 be presented to the next meeting.

A joint procurement was undertaken for grounds maintenance by Devon County Council, Torridge District Council, North Devon District Council, Barnstaple Town Council and North Devon Homes Ltd in 2013. ISS Facility Services Ltd was awarded the contract via competitive tender. This tender incorporates the cutting of County maintained urban area verges.

County maintained rural verges are undertaken by South West Highways (SWH) as part of the wider Term Maintenance Contract for highway works.

3. Level of Service

All urban highway verges are cut four times between April and September each year.

Rural grass cutting is dependent on the location (visibility splay, inside of bend, verge) and whether a priority or non-priority route.

Full details of urban and grass cutting policies can be found at:

<https://drive.google.com/uc?export=download&id=0BwtqG9WaqiG2R0tGUDB1OFZiWUk>
and is attached at Appendix I.

4. Contractor Performance

In the 2013 season only three urban grass cuts were made by ISS, this was primarily due to the mobilisation of the joint contract being delayed. The start of the 2014 season was inadequately resourced for completion within the specified contract period; this was the catalyst for the July HATOC report. Since this time, appropriate resources have been delivered by ISS to fulfil the required number of cuts within the cutting season.

Rural grass cutting by SWH has been delivered on programme with a relatively small number of issues reported. On the whole, these issues were as a result of specific problems with traffic management needs, resulting in delays to some works.

5. Management Action

ISS had been advised of underperformance earlier in 2014 and have responded by increasing the resources to meet the requirements of the highway element of the urban grass contract. Detailed reporting of resource allocation and activity has been presented to Devon County Council weekly; close monitoring of the contractor has addressed the underperformance.

Monitoring of the rural grass cutting undertaken by SWH has continued through regular meetings with the contractor, where issues have been discussed as and when they arise. No specific actions have been required.

6. Sustainability Considerations

The cutting of highway verges is essential for the safety of the highway user and contributes to Devon's environmental, social and economic well being.

7. Carbon Impact Considerations

None.

8. Equality Considerations

None.

9. Legal Considerations

The performance of the contractor is defined by terms of contract and due sanction within the terms will be made.

10. Risk Management Considerations

Underperformance of the contractor may present a hazard to the highway user due to reduced visibility at certain location. This could leave the County open to claims from third parties should a collision occur.

11. Options/Alternatives

Grass cutting may be undertaken by the County's term maintenance contractor or be retendered if the performance of the current contractor does not improve.

12. Reason for Recommendation/Conclusion

This report advises of the actions that have been undertaken to address the underperformance of the grass cutting contractor.

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Head of Highways, Capital Development and Waste

Electoral Divisions: All in North Devon

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
Nil		

aj231014ndh
sc/cr/grass cutting in urban rural areas
02 071114

Devon Highways

Our strategy is to

- ♦ drive efficiencies when planning and delivering highway maintenance works
- ♦ mobilise community support for highway maintenance
- ♦ manage demand for highway services.

Devon Highways

Members Information Pack

Grass cutting

Our grass cutting policy was amended at Cabinet on 12 March 2014

Roads within urban areas

Cutting on urban verges is done a maximum of four times a year for highway purposes to a residual height of 40mm, over the full width of verge.

Within urban areas there may be a wildlife or amenity reasons for reducing the frequency of cutting, or for avoiding certain sensitive periods. The grass cutting policy on housing estate roads adopted by DCC is the same. However, behind footways the verges will be regarded generally as the responsibility of the city or district council.

Partnership arrangements for commissioning the highway and amenity work are encouraged where appropriate.

Roads in rural areas

Cutting on visibility areas (junctions, lay-bys and the inside of bends) is done as needed. In the past a frequency of two, or occasionally three, times a year on the Priority Network (Primary and Secondary pre-salt routes) and once on other roads has been adequate.

Verges on the Priority Network are cut to a width of one metre from the road side channel twice a year, with an intermediate cut only if shown to be absolutely necessary.

A full width cut in the autumn is done every third year on all roads down to Maintenance Category 8 to control the excessive growth of brushwood, scrub and harmful weeds.

Cutting is done to a residual height of 100mm.

Operatives are encouraged to use their initiative in avoiding the destruction of fine stands of wild flowers. The need for delay after flowering until seeds are set is impressed upon supervisors and operatives.

Partnership arrangements with Parish Town or District councils for commissioning grass cutting are encouraged where appropriate

Circumstances when grass cutting standards can be modified

- Visibility areas where more frequent cutting may be necessary for road safety.
- Where it is necessary to cut verges and slopes to lessen fire risk.
- Additional cutting where infestations of harmful weeds occur.
- Where it is necessary to gain access for maintenance, to structures or to services needed for the proper functioning of the highway.
- Where rare species which require special protection occur.
- In exceptional circumstances for people to walk or ride horses a width of two metres will be cut.
- No early cut is to be carried out where cut bracken may harm animals.

