

AGENDA ITEM No. 3

Cabinet
2 May 2017

Head of Community and Environmental Services
Report No COMM1711

Street Cleansing and weed control – staffing

Summary and Recommendations

The new Waste, Recycling, Street Cleansing, Public Conveniences and Grounds Maintenance Contract to achieve higher environmental standards has seen a change in street cleansing from a frequency to a performance specification and now includes the treatment of weeds on the public highway.

The performance specification and addition of weed control will both require increased levels of monitoring which can be covered by increasing one of the Contracts Technical Officer posts from three days a week to full time.

Cabinet is recommended to approve a supplementary estimate of £12k pa which for a part year (9 months) in 2017/18 will be £9k

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This paper seeks a supplementary estimate of £12k pa to cover additional staff costs in monitoring the new performance specification for street cleansing and the weed control provided as an additional service by Serco in the new contract.
- 1.2 To improve the overall standards of street cleansing, the new contract with Serco will be outcome focussed to ensure streets are maintained to an acceptable level as set by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This will help ensure that streets are not cleansed when already acceptably clean, enabling resources to be directed towards more problematic and high profile areas. This approach will ensure a higher standard of overall cleansing but will require more visual inspections. Pictorial standards are available to indicate acceptable and unacceptable levels of cleanliness.
- 1.3 Weed control on public Highways is the responsibility of Hampshire County Council. Following the banning of 'residual' herbicides and the prohibitive costs of manual weed control, their only option has been to use 'contact' herbicides, which are significantly less effective.
- 1.4 For many years, the County have only provided two weed sprays per year (spring and late summer), which require ideal conditions to be effective and have no lasting effect, therefore will not treat new weeds that grow between the sprays. The increased weed growth has resulted in increased complaints from both our members and residents.

- 1.5 Cabinet are aware that due to the County requiring significant savings, the number of weed sprays from this year has been reduced to only once a year and this may be reduced further when they review the service in two years.
- 1.6 Cabinet were keen not to see any further deterioration and requested officers investigate options. This included the council taking on the weed spray from the County and providing a second spray at additional cost and to raise the issue at dialogue during the retendering of the street cleansing element of our new environmental services contract.
- 1.7 Following dialogue and within the price of the new contract, Serco has committed to provide two weed control applications per year. One to be sub-contracted to a specialist contractor, the other delivered by them directly using equipment mounted on street sweepers and followed up by operatives using backpack-mounted applicators.
- 1.8 The council has discussed taking on the weed spraying for Rushmoor with the County. This would require the council, through an agency agreement, taking responsibility for weed control on the highway including high speed roads, invasive weeds (such as Japanese knot weed) and managing all complaints within a budget of £14k pa, which may be further reduced in a couple of years.
- 1.9 Given the additional responsibility, reputational risk and limited funds it is proposed we do not consider taking on the above weed spraying from the County, but that we seek to co-ordinate the work of the County's contractor with Serco, to provide an improved service equivalent to 3 treatments pa.
- 1.10 In order to carry out weed control activities using herbicides on the public highway, the council will need to secure permission from the County.

2.0 Monitoring street cleansing and weed control

- 2.1 Cabinet have stressed the importance of monitoring the new contract to ensure high standards are delivered. The performance specification for street cleansing will require more visual inspections of around 300 miles of public highway. The additional weed control elements of the Serco contract will also need to be separately monitored by staff trained in the safe use of pesticides to ensure the work is carried out, that it is effectively co-ordinated with the County's contractor and any complaints related to the service provided by Serco are investigated and resolved.
- 2.2 The estimated two days a week required to carry out this combined role cannot be absorbed by the current staff resource. With the retirement of one of the Contracts Technical Officers at the end of May this year, who currently works a three-day week, there is an opportunity to recruit a full time replacement to provide additional street cleansing inspections and the additional monitoring associated with the new weed control service.

2.3 The Contracts Technical Officers current role includes monitoring the refuse and recycling contract for half the Borough covering 20,000 homes. This includes visiting residents to encourage them to reduce contamination in their recycling bins and supporting events in order to improve recycling rates. Managing clinical waste referrals and dealing with any issues when reduced sized waste bins are provided as replacements. The postholder also deals with street cleansing complaints and some inspections, compiles fly tipping information and inspects toilets.

3.0 Financial implications

3.1 The current postholder is on G4 SCP 35 working 22 hours a week (£24k including on costs). A full time replacement at mid-point SCP31 (£36k) will require a pro rata variation of £12k pa depending on when they are appointed.

3.2 The additional cost of £12k in a full year is equivalent to an increase of £0.39p on the Council Tax. Equivalent to an increase of 0.2% on the Council Tax Rate.

4.0 Conclusions

4.1 The performance specification for street cleansing along with the offer from Serco to carry out weed control on the public highway will improve the visual appearance of the borough.

4.2 It is important to monitor a significant service of this nature to ensure street cleansing is carried out where and when required and that weed control applications only take place in the right conditions and are co-ordinated with the County`s contractor.

4.3 The retirement of the Contracts Technical Officer provides an opportunity to supplement the work of this post to carry out the additional street cleansing and weed monitoring, with a full time post likely to attract higher quality applications.

5.0 Recommendation

5.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve a variation of £12k pa (pro rata subject to date appointed) to recruit a full-time replacement for the Contracts Technical Officer, to enable the increased monitoring of both the street cleansing and weed control.

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