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| Report to         | <b>Scrutiny Committee for Economy, Transport and Environment</b>  |
| Date              | <b>20 November 2013</b>   |
| Report By         | <b>Director of Communities, Economy and Transport</b>   |
| Title of Report   | <b>Highways Verge Cutting and Weed Spraying</b>   |
| Purpose of Report | <b>To advise Scrutiny Committee on the County Council's current grass cutting and weed spraying policies.</b> |

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**RECOMMENDATIONS: The Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider how the current County Council Grass Cutting and Weed Spraying policies operate and to consider areas for Scrutiny review.**

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## **1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 The current County Council budget for cutting 'Highway' grass is £944,741. Of this, £707,788 provides for five cuts to grass verges in urban areas, two cuts in rural areas, as well as two applications of weed spray and ancillary green maintenance works carried out by the County Council's highway maintenance contractor outside Eastbourne and Hastings Boroughs.

1.2 The grass cutting budget also includes a sum of £170,789 which is paid to Eastbourne and Hastings Borough Councils for grass and weed maintenance within the two Boroughs. That is carried out by their respective grounds maintenance contractors. A further sum of £66,164 is paid to nine Parish Councils who undertake grass cutting on behalf of the County Council.

1.3 The budget for highway grass cutting is based on tendered rates under the County Council's highway maintenance contract with Kier Services, formerly May Gurney.

## **2. Supporting Information**

2.1 There is no legal obligation on the County Council as Highway Authority to cut grass within the highway boundary, i.e. grass verges. However, it does have a responsibility to keep the highway in a safe and serviceable condition, and as a minimum this is taken to include cutting grass to maintain good visibility at junctions, roundabouts and around dangerous bends in the road.

2.2 There are however significant maintenance benefits to keeping grass and weed growth under control within the highway boundary. Grass and weeds left unattended cause damage to footpaths, drainage ditches, gullies/grips and kerb-line channels.

2.3 It is also worth noting that seasonal variations in weather can significantly impact on our grass cutting budget. Members will remember the particularly dry spring in 2012 followed by the long wet summer which led to greater grass growth and a large number of public complaints.

3.

4. **Comments/Appraisal**

4.1 It should be noted that whilst our current policy, attached at Appendix 1, prescribes the number of cuts per year, we endeavour to retain some flexibility to accommodate seasonal variations and reduce the burden of maintenance that might otherwise arise.

4.2 The management of grass attracts a large volume of correspondence and differing opinions from members of the public. Whilst this service is not a mandatory one, and there may be scope to reduce the service provided, it is one that the public expect to be carried out and to a high standard.

RUPERT CLUBB

Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

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Local Member: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

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| <b>GRASS CUTTING</b>  | <b>PS 7/2</b>  |
| <p><u>Purpose of Policy</u></p> <p>To determine the standards for grass cutting on Highways</p>   |  |
| <p><u>Specific Policy</u></p> <p>1. The standards adopted for grass cutting throughout the County will be dependent upon the funds available in the maintenance budget.</p> <p>Those sought are:</p> <p>[a] In Rural Areas, twice per annum for visibility at junctions and for safety on the inside of bends where sight lines between road users may be obscured by vegetation.</p> <p>[b] In Urban Areas five cuts per season.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">/Continued overleaf</p>   |  |
| <p><u>Supporting Statement</u></p> <p>In common with other forms of amenity, maintenance funds for grass cutting have been restricted in the budget. Therefore, whilst standards for the frequency of cutting are stated as an objective they have been based upon reduced areas of cutting. The effects of the application of this policy vary in different parts of the county due to the different conditions encountered.</p>   |  |
| <p><u>References - Further Information</u></p> <p>H&amp;T Committee - 22 March 1974 Item - Agenda Item</p> <p>H&amp;T Committee - 22 October 1980 - Agenda Item 5.23</p> <p>H&amp;T Committee - 16 December 1980 - Agenda Item 6.2</p> <p>H&amp;T Committee - 11 December 1984 - Agenda Item 7</p> <p>H&amp;T Committee - 31 May 1989 - Agenda Item 18.1</p> <p>H&amp;T Committee - 25 March 1975 - Agenda Item 8</p> <p>H&amp;T Committee - 16 September 1992 - Agenda Item 9.4</p> <p>H&amp;T Committee - 19 October 1994 - Agenda Item 19</p> <p>T&amp;E Committee - 10 March 1998 - Agenda Item 6</p> | <p><u>Date of Approval</u></p> <p>22.03.1974</p> <p>28.10.1975</p> <p>16.12.1980</p> <p>11.12.1984</p> <p>31.05.1989</p> <p>25.03.1975</p> <p>16.09.1992</p> <p>19.10.1994</p> <p>10.03.1998</p> |

## Specific Policies (continued)

2. Although the frequency of grass cutting in urban areas is standardised throughout the County for highway purposes, local councils may carry out more cuts during the course of the season at their own expense to achieve a higher standard of amenity.
3. The Highway Authority may issue an appropriate licence specifying standard highway safety conditions to farmers in the county wishing to use suitable verges for haymaking.
4. Areas of verge defined and marked as containing items of botanical interest will be specifically maintained.
5. Any areas planted by commercial concerns acting under licence will be maintained by the licensee (refer to PS/8/6).