

Report to: Place Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 15 November 2018

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: The County Council's Grass Cutting Service and Management of Roadside Vegetation

Purpose: To update the Scrutiny Committee on the County Council's delivery of the grass cutting service following the change to policy in May 2018.

RECOMMENDATION: Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Note the service options offered and the outcomes of the changes to the urban grass cutting following a budget change from 2018/2019 onwards**
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1 Background Information

1.1. A decision was made at the Full Council meeting on 6 February 2018 to reduce the grass verge cutting budget by £400,000 with the number of cuts of urban grass verges being reduced from the required five cuts per year to two cuts per year. The amended policy, incorporating this change was then approved by Lead Member on 21 May 2018 (Appendix 1).

1.2. The cutting of rural verges has remained unchanged at two cuts per season.

1.3. Urban grass is generally defined as those verges in built up areas on roads with a speed limit of 40mph or under. Rural grass is generally defined as those verges on roads with a speed limit greater than 40mph.

1.4. This report provides an update on the application of the change to policy and reduction in verge services since the start of 2018/19.

2. Supporting Information

2.1. Following the decision taken at the Full Council meeting on 6 February 2018, a total of 106 local councils were contacted to provide a comprehensive update of the changes to the service. Of these 106 Parish, Town and Borough councils, 19 have rural grass only in their area, however they were also included in the consultation to ensure a clear message was provided to all authorities.

2.2. The 87 local councils which have urban grass verges were additionally offered the following options:

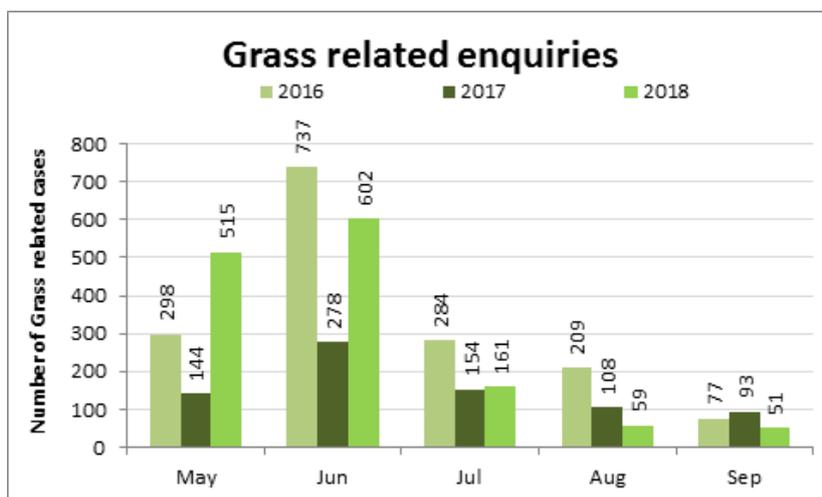
- To receive the equivalent monetary value of the standard two cuts per season provided by the County Council and to undertake their own urban grass cutting service i.e. self-deliver the service; or
- To 'purchase' back four cuts to 'top up' the two cuts to be provided as standard bringing the total number of cuts to be received per season back to the previous level of six; or
- To receive the two cuts only per season to be provided by the County Council;

2.3. The results of the consultation are shown in the table below. (A detailed breakdown is provided in Appendix 2 of this report.)

Grass Cutting Service Option	Number of Parish, District, Borough or Town Council responses
Receive a contribution from ESCC and manage the grass cutting service in their area directly	16 (including the 8 historical agreements with Parishes and Eastbourne Borough Council).
Agreed to pay ESCC for an additional four cuts in 18/19	42 (of which 24 are parishes/towns in Rother District area with the District Council funding the additional four cuts on behalf of the local councils for one year). Hailsham Town Council and Long Man Parish Council paid for one additional cut rather than four. (This option will not be available for 2019/2020) Lewes Town Council paid for two additional cuts. (This option will not be available for 2019/2020)
Opted for 2 ESCC cuts only	26

3 Grass Cutting Delivery in 2018

3.1. The below table demonstrates the significant decrease over the year in the amount of queries received relating to the grass cutting service. It also demonstrates that as of September 2018 the amount of queries received is relatively comparable to previous service years 2016 and 2017. The higher level of queries in June 2018 were likely caused by the delay of the first cut as well as residents wanting to clarify the service they should expect to receive in their local community.



3.2. Whilst it should be acknowledged there were unforeseen additional breakages of the grass cutting machinery caused due to the length of the grass in those areas only receiving two cuts, the overall impact of these are considered minimal, with the additional cost being negligible and little to no impact on the grass cutting schedule.

3.3 There have been consistently higher temperatures in 2018 which have impacted on the growth rates of verges, so this service year cannot be used as a base on which to compare future service years.

3.4 There was significant feedback received from the Local Authorities consulted with, around the timing of the change to the grass cutting service being made after their precepts and budgets had been set. This feedback has been taken on board, and this has influenced the timeline for the 2019 service year. Consultation in regards to next year's grass cutting has already commenced and we anticipate to have received all responses by the end of November 2019.

4 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 The service has been delivered on time with minimal impact or disruption to residents, with a noted decrease in the amount of customer enquiries received over the year.

4.2 It is necessary to maintain the service changes to ensure the budget remains at it's current level. Therefore the 87 affected Parish, Town, Borough and District Councils have been offered the same options as the previous consultation to;

- To receive the equivalent monetary value of the standard two cuts per season provided by the County Council and to undertake their own urban grass cutting service i.e. self-deliver the service; or
- To 'purchase' back four cuts to 'top up' the two cuts to be provided as standard bringing the total number of cuts to be received per season back to the previous level of six; or
- To receive the two cuts only per season to be provided by the County Council;

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LOCAL MEMBERS

ALL

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None