

LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE TASK & FINISH GROUP SCOPING DOCUMENT

Review Topic	
Landscaping / Landscape Maintenance	
Origins of Review Group	Review Group Membership
Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee	2:2:2 Cllr Ric Brackenbury (LD) Cllr Vanessa McPake (LD) Cllr Peter Geary (Con) Cllr Maggie Geaney (Con) Cllr Lewis (Labour) Cllr Alan Webb (Labour)
Overview & Scrutiny Officer	Initial Scoping of Review
Lesley Sung (until end of August 2015) Elizabeth Richardson	24 February 2015 Approved by Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee Planning Group on 10 March 2015
1. Purpose	
<p>To scrutinise the following aspects of the Council's current Landscape Maintenance Service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current approach by the Council to Landscaping / Landscape maintenance; • Performance of the Landscaping contract: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is it value for money? 2. How are issues reported to the Council and how is the contract enforced? 3. How can it be improved? 4. How are low priority issues progressed e.g. tree thinning? • Seasonal maintenance issues; • Policy on maintaining small areas of amenity land and whether it is cost effective; • Current and future policy / practice on design / management / retention and maintenance of small areas of amenity land and whether it is cost effective; • Landscaping of future planned development / tying in with planning policy; and • Sustainable landscape management, including encouraging wildlife habitats. 	

2. Rationale

- **What does the Review hope to achieve?**
An understanding of the Council's approach to landscaping and landscape maintenance and whether this approach has long term sustainability.
- **Why is the Review taking place?**
The Council has recently begun a new way of managing its open spaces by the commencement of a series of smaller landscape maintenance contracts, rather than one large one.
- **What is the community importance and benefit?**
Residents of Milton Keynes value green and open spaces, which currently intersperse both residential and commercial developments in the borough as a vital public amenity. This needs to be offset against the current financial situation and landscape maintenance needs to be sustainable and affordable.
- **How does it fit in with the Council's corporate priorities / scrutiny priorities?**
 - **Living in MK:**
Ensuring people are satisfied with Milton Keynes as a place to live, and to support them effectively through the provision of high quality and efficient public services.
 - **World Class MK:**
The Council's ambition is to increase the international and national standing of Milton Keynes in several areas including our economic success, thriving communities and a high quality environment.
- **What are the opportunities to make a distinctive impact?**
This is an opportunity to ensure that management of the Council's landscape maintenance strategy is both sustainable and affordable into the future.
- **How will the review influence what the Council does?**
The findings of the review may affect the way in which the Council manages its landscape strategy in the future.

3. Proposed Outcomes

1. An assessment of the future sustainability and affordability of the Council's landscape maintenance strategy; and
2. Whether the current landscape maintenance contract is delivering the expectations above.

4. Background

The Council's approach to landscape maintenance was considered a priority at the Overview & Scrutiny Priorities Setting Workshop held in May 2014.

The Council has recently changed the way it in which landscape maintenance is carried out, with some responsibility for local maintenance

being devolved to a number of Town and Parish Councils. At the same time the Council's new landscaping contract started with Serco in November 2014 and this is an opportunity to review how these arrangements are working and whether the benefits promised are being delivered.

The review should provide an assessment of the effectiveness the Council's current policy and consider the Council's existing approach to landscaping and landscape maintenance.

The review group will consider the results of previous consultations and feedback from the Parish and Town Councils that have taken on the works themselves.

The review will also look at any gaps between provision and need.

5. Timetable

The Task and Finish Group will commence September 2015 and aim to finish the review by mid-March 2016. It is likely that the Group will meet approximately every 2 weeks in October and November. Further meetings to be arranged later in the year, as appropriate.

Prior to its first meeting, the Group will have received a copy of the Landscape Maintenance Contract (hard copies on request) at a time that will allow sufficient opportunity for the Group to gain a full understanding of the current contract. At the first meeting, the Group will receive a brief presentation about the contract, current policy and approach.

6. Methodology / Approach

- Desk-based review of papers e.g. Current Landscape Maintenance Contract; Results of Consultations etc;
- Site visits / observations;
- Comparisons with other authorities, where appropriate – possibly looking at Peterborough Council and some County Councils;
- Interview officer colleagues;
- Calling witnesses to give evidence.

7. Evidence Sources

- Government guidance / legislation
- Service plans
- Performance Indicators?
- Evidence from other reviews e.g. result of consultations
- Feedback from the Parishes – possible questionnaire

8. Witnesses

The Task and Finish Group would like to hear from:

- Stakeholders / Interest Groups e.g. SERCO / Parks Trust / MK Dev Partnership;
- Officers – Head of Environment and Waste, Landscape Contracts Manager, Landscape Service officers;

- Cabinet Member – Community Services;
- Frontline staff;
- External partners;
- Parish Councils that have taken on local landscaping contractors.

9. Site Visits / Observations

There is a potential for a site visit.

10. Public Meetings

Wherever possible it is Council policy to hold Task and Finish Group meetings in public.

11. Officer Support

Overview & Scrutiny Officer is Lesley Sung (until end of August), then Elizabeth Richardson.

12. Resource Requirements

Councillor availability during the day as there may be a requirement to carry out site visits.

Officer overtime for evening meetings.

13. Risk Assessment

Potential obstacles to an effective review could include:

- Limited councillor availability due to already busy workload;
- Lack of co-operation / availability of witnesses;
- Poor weather affecting outdoor site visits.

14. Proposed Terms of Reference

1. To scrutinise the Council's current approach to landscaping and landscape maintenance.
2. To scrutinise the performance of the Landscaping Maintenance Contract based on value for money; reporting issues and enforcement, progress of low priority issues and any improvements that can be made to the contract as part of any future review.
3. To investigate complaints and comments from the public about the Council's current landscape maintenance service.
4. To consider the Council's policy of maintaining small areas of amenity land and the cost effectiveness of that policy.
5. To make recommendations in relation to any future landscape management policy with regard to amenity land, including design, planning and development issues.

6. To ensure future landscape management delivers a high quality environment for the people of Milton Keynes, is cost effective, sustainable and is part of thriving local communities.

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