

Minutes of the Landscaping Task and Finish Group (TFG) meeting held on Tuesday 29 September 2015 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillors Brackenbury, P Geary (Chair), Geaney, Lewis, McPake and Webb

Officers: A Hudson (Head of Environment and Waste), J Price (Landscape Contracts Manager), E Richardson (Overview & Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present: Councillor L Gifford

Scoping

The TFG agreed that this was the ideal time to review how well the new Landscaping Contract was working, as it had now been in place for nearly a year and both a winter season and summer season of works had been completed.

The TFG reviewed the scoping document and made some minor amendments. The revised document (with amendments in green) is included as an annex to these notes.

Methodology

TFG would gather information on the way landscape maintenance had been carried out in the past, how it was now being done, what the improvements and advantages were of the new contract and consider what further improvements could be recommended in order to ensure the long term sustainability of the green spaces in Milton Keynes.

Agreed that an intensive period of work was needed in order to gather evidence by the end of the year. The Chair, with a representative of each political group, would then start drafting a report in January for review by the full TFG in early February in order to make any final amendments before presenting the report to Cabinet on 14 March 2016.

The evidence gathering would include day-time site visits to see work being done on site; a possible visit to another local authority to see how they managed landscape maintenance; possible questionnaires (particularly to parishes); comparisons with other organisations, such as The Parks Trust, and witness attendance at meetings.

The Landscape Contracts Manager also offered to do a video capture of a random site inspection by his staff which could be viewed at a future meeting.

The MKC Approach to Landscape Maintenance

The TFG then received a presentation from the Head of Environment and Waste and the Landscape Contracts Manager on the Council's current approach to landscape maintenance, during which it was noted that:

- Humans had been managing their local landscapes for thousands of years and that good landscape management was important as people felt better about their lives when they had access to a green environment;
- The current contract had been subject to an extensive tendering process. The final decision had been based on the quality of the bid as tenderers had been asked to include innovative suggestions for the future maintenance of local landscapes and not just price;
- The changes had also provided an opportunity for Parish and Town Councils to take on responsibility for landscape maintenance in their local areas. Six Parishes so far had opted to do this: West Bletchley, Olney, Weston

Underwood, Stony Stratford and Woughton;

- Two further parishes, Shenley Brook End and Loughton were working in partnership with the Council as “eyes and ears” for landscape maintenance in their area;
- The option to take devolved responsibility for local landscape maintenance was open to all parishes and they could express an interest to do this in the future at any time during the current contract;
- The contract specification was based on 4 basic types of measured works: Performance (P), Frequency (F), Schedule of Rates (S) and Day Work (DW);
- Performance and Frequency works were regular tasks based on either an agreed standard of work or the number of operations per year;
- Schedule of Rates work covered ad hoc but predicted tasks and Day Works covered additional work which could not be predicted;
- The contract was a “cap and collar” contract where regular works could be banked or borrowed across the duration of the contract. For example, in a very dry summer the frequency of grass cutting could be reduced and the unused cuts ‘banked’ for use later in the contract;
- There were a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) associated with the contract, including Customer Responses, both Operational and Non-Operational Complaints, Site Inspections, Inspection Audits and Grave and Funeral works, which were reported either monthly or quarterly;
- The Contractor was required to submit a report on each site when work was completed and using a scientific methodology originally developed by the Tidy Britain organisation, the Council generated a list of 80 random sites for checking each month.

Following the presentation the TFG requested that the Landscape Contracts Manager supply them with details of how much of the contract was spent on the predicted works and how much on unpredicted works, both financially and the number of hours.

Future Meetings

Agreed that the next 3 meetings would be held on 27 October, 10 November and 17 November, all with a 6.30 pm start. Daytime site visits would be programmed in as the work progressed.

The Chair and Scrutiny Officer would prepare and circulate a draft scheme of work for the above meetings.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 7.45 PM