

REPORT TO:	Streets, Environment & Homes Sub-Committee 1 st February 2022
SUBJECT:	Housing and Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery Budget Scrutiny Challenge – Grounds Maintenance Growth Bid
LEAD OFFICER:	Steve Iles <i>Director of Sustainable Communities</i>
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Muhammad Ali <i>Cabinet Member Sustainable Croydon</i>
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	<i>James Perkins; Head of Environment Services and Sustainable Neighbourhoods</i> <i>Owen Giddings; Grounds Maintenance Manager</i>
PUBLIC/EXEMPT:	Public

COUNCIL PRIORITIES 2020-2024

Include here a brief statement on how the recommendations address one or more of the Council's priorities:

- We will live within our means, balance the books and provide value for money for our residents.*
- We will focus on tackling ingrained inequality and poverty in the borough. We will follow the evidence to tackle the underlying causes of inequality and hardship, like structural racism, environmental injustice and economic injustice.*
- We will focus on providing the best quality core service we can afford. First and foremost, providing social care services that keep our most vulnerable residents safe and healthy. And to keep our streets clean and safe. To ensure we get full benefit from every pound we spend, other services in these areas will only be provided where they can be shown to have a direct benefit in keeping people safe and reducing demand.*

[Council's priorities](#)

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	As part of its assurance process on the 2022-23 Council Budget, the Scrutiny & Overview Committee has asked its three Sub-Committee to identify and scrutinise specific budget proposals to deliverable, sustainable and do not create undue risk.
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	The purpose of this Budget Challenge report is to provide the Streets, Environment & Homes Sub-Committee with sufficient information to reach a view on the 2022/23 budget proposals outlined below and to understand how this growth bid will be used to deliver improvement within the Grounds Maintenance service.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report provides the committee and the wider council with further detail on the 2022/23 growth bid for grounds maintenance services with sufficient information to understand how this growth bid for the reinstatement of additional resources on a seasonal basis will be used to deliver improvement within the Grounds Maintenance (GM) service. The report covers a background to the service; issues arising from reductions in budget for 21/22 and the maintenance frequencies from 4-6 weeks to a 8 – 10 weeks; use of growth bid budget (if approved); impact onto other council departments and services; the risks associated with approving/not approving this growth bid and how the efficiencies and improvements associated with the growth bid shall be delivered, managed and measured.

2. BACKGROUND.

- 2.1 Previously a 'contracted out' service the Grounds Maintenance (GM) service was taken back 'in-house' in February 2019 with a view and aspiration to find budget savings over the next few years, determine the future services cost and to identify opportunities for improved service delivery. Service areas included;
- Parks and open spaces
 - Shrub and flower bed maintenance (arboriculture service is out of scope)
 - Sport pitch maintenance including fine turf (cricket and bowls)
 - Highway verges
 - Play areas
 - Housing (HRA) estates and land via a Service Level Agreement (SLA)
 - Closed churchyard maintenance only
- 2.2 In addition to the above, in November 2019 Cemetery GM team of 6 was also insourced from external contractors with all resources placed within GM remit to deliver a Grounds maintenance SLA for 3 cemetery sites. This fully insourced service operated with an establishment of 69 members of staff, the use of 30 seasonal operational staff to support the service during the growing and cutting periods of Spring and Summer each year and allowed for a grass cutting frequency of 4 – 6 week for all grassed areas across all service areas.
- 2.3 As part of the MTFs savings identified in 2020/21, a sum in the region of £1m was identified and taken from the Grounds Maintenance 2021/22 budget. This sum comprised of savings generated from service efficiencies, a reduction in the level of services provided, a reduction in establishment headcount and the removal of the use of all seasonal workers usually engaged in Spring and Summer each year. The reduction in resource and operations led the service

to carry out many of its actions on a wholly reactive basis based on priority with Health & Safety issues taking precedence and reduced the total service budget from £3.5m in 2020/21 to £2.55m in 2021/22

- 2.4 Service reductions also led to high levels of public, media, corporate and political dissatisfaction and significant reputational damage to the council and this proposal asks that a proportion of this saving to be reinstated for 2022/23.

3. RECOVERY OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 In Autumn 2021, the Grounds Maintenance service managers were asked to propose options to ensure that GM services could return grass cutting to a 4 – 6 week frequency, to enhance other GM services, to mitigate and minimise some of the risks and issues stated above and to consider what resources would be required to achieve these improvements going forward.

Option A – To reinstate the use of additional seasonal Grounds maintenance operatives for a 26 week period throughout Spring and Summer each year and achieve a 4-6 week cut cycle.

Option B – To rebase and redraw the service level agreements in place with the HRA and Bereavement Services to ensure that service expectations can be better known and managed and that value for money for these service areas can be evidenced. Once determined, any increase in the costs of these services would be borne by the respective departments. The HRA and Bereavement Services currently contribute to receive GM services. The GM team are currently working closely with these service areas to agree service levels and associated recharges in readiness for 2022/23

Option C – To continue with operations similar to 2021 and move the service to a wholly reactive one deploying the whole resource onto parks, cemeteries, HRA and highways operations on a rotation basis.

Option D – Use of 3rd party contractors to carry out certain aspects of the service, allowing the remaining GM resource to concentrate on 1 or 2 aspects of the service and its delivery. (grass cutting only; HRA services only etc).

- 3.2 These options were considered during the budget challenge process and it was agreed to put forward both Options A and B should be taken forward together as the preferred options to deliver the service improvements required whilst providing value for money and surety of service to HRA and Bereavement Services. With Option C not delivering the service improvements required and Option D being cost prohibitive, after consideration and discussion with the relevant departments it was decided that

- 3.3 Work was undertaken to cost the reinstatement of up to 24 seasonal workers for a 26 week period and the current SLA's that exist between GM and HRA; and GM and Bereavement Services are currently being redrawn to meet the current funding available from these 2 service areas.

3.4 It should be noted that Options A and B are co-dependant and Option B cannot be delivered without the approval of Option A.

3.5 As a result of the above and to bring services back to an acceptable and safe level for borough residents and users, a growth bid was prepared to cover the additional staffing and equipment costs requesting that **£360,000** be reinstated to this budget area to allow the service to;

- Increase grass cutting frequencies from the current 8-10 week cycle to an acceptable 4-6 week cutting cycle across all service areas of Parks and Open Spaces, Cemeteries, HRA estates and sites and Highways during the cutting season (typically between March and August each year depending on weather conditions).
- Reinstatement of seasonal workers (x25) for the Spring and Summer period (March - August) in 2022.
- Reinstatement of other horticultural services (hedge cutting, wilding and meadowing project maintenance on a scheduled and proactive basis).

4. Measuring Increases In Service Performance And Value For Money

4.1 The growth bid associated with the reinstatement of the use of seasonal grounds maintenance operatives in order to increase the frequency of grass cutting to 4 – 6 weeks and other GM services is for **£360,000** it is intended that the service improvements shall be measured by

- The creation and reinstatement of a known and agreed grass cutting schedule for all service areas in the borough with a reporting mechanism to ensure adherence to this schedule.
 - The creation and reinstatement of a known and agreed horticultural works schedule for all service areas in the borough with a reporting mechanism to ensure adherence to this schedule.
 - Review and updating of the councils website to provide maintenance arrangements
 - A measureable increase in public and resident satisfaction in the scope and scale of services being delivered.
 - A measureable decrease in the level and number of complaints about service levels and quality.
 - A mechanism to feedback these indicators to corporate and political leaders at agreed periods throughout the year.
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APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT

None

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None