
Meeting: Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 22 January 2014
Subject: Street scene and environmental service issues
Report of: Cllr Brian Spurr, Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Services
Summary: On request from a member of this Committee a report on a range of street scene and environmental services provided by Waste and Highways Services.

Advising Officer: Marcel Coiffait, Director of Community Services
Contact Officer: Tracey Harris, Head of Waste Services
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

1. The areas covered within this report support the following Council priorities;
 - Enhancing Central Bedfordshire –protecting our countryside
 - Great universal services – bins, leisure and libraries.

Financial:

2. There are no financial implications associated with this report

Legal:

3. There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Risk Management:

4. Not applicable

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. Not applicable

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. Public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics: age disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
7. The services referred to in the report are universal environmental services that are provided across Central Bedfordshire that support the elimination of discrimination and promote equality of opportunity.

Public Health

8. The environmental services referred to in the report support the public health of Central Bedfordshire residents through maintaining sustainable transport infrastructure, improving the natural and built environments to encourage physical activity and reducing the potential for falls and accidents outside the home. The environmental services referred to in the report help maintain, improve and protect public health.

Community Safety:

9. Under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act the Council has a statutory duty to do all that is reasonable to prevent crime and disorder within its area. The quality of the local environment can contribute to the fear of crime and levels of anti social behaviour in communities.

Sustainability:

10. The services referred to in the report help maintain, improve and protect the natural environment and highways infrastructure.

Procurement:

11. Not applicable

RECOMMENDATION:

The Committee is asked to consider the contents of the report.

Purpose of Report

12. This report provides an overview of various activities carried out by Waste, Highways and Countryside Access and covers aspects of mechanical road sweeping, cycleway maintenance, gully clearance, grass cutting, tree maintenance, weed spraying and rights of way following a request from a member of this Committee. It also contains information about issues in Sandy that have been requested.

Road sweeping frequency and managing obstructions

13. Mechanical road sweeping is carried out on all kerbed roads, according to a schedule which is determined by the classification of road by type and usage and the resource available. Urban centres and high priority areas, such as larger town centres and sections of priority routes are swept mechanically on a maximum weekly frequency and minimum of fortnightly. Residential and main roads are typically swept every 6-12 weeks. This service is undertaken alongside regular mobile and static litter picking and sweeping by manual operatives.
14. Mechanical road sweeping is generally carried out between 07.00 hrs and 16.00 hrs. In order to minimise noise disturbance in residential areas cleansing is not undertaken in the early morning. The schedule also takes into account rush hour traffic on main roads, activities in town centres and areas with schools or other safety issues/obstacles at particular times.
15. The standard of the street cleansing is monitored routinely through scheduled and ad hoc inspections. Where scheduled inspections are undertaken the cleanliness of roads is graded and issues are addressed with the contractor as necessary.

16. Where obstructions arise, such as parked cars, operations may be carried out during office hours when it is likely that fewer cars will be present. In areas with a particular litter/leaf fall problem, mobile units manually cleanse (where appropriate) between the cars and along the road channel, which is more resource intensive. In areas where this has been a particular problem, local residents have been requested via direct mailing and doorstep visits to move cars from roads scheduled to be swept. However, this has had limited success due to cars belonging to visitors/others who do not live locally but use the road for parking. For this reason and the associated resource required, this practice is not widespread but can be applied in specific areas where it is felt that it is absolutely necessary and would have the desired outcome.
17. On average the service receives less than ten complaints per month from across the area relating to mechanical sweeping of roads and pavements.

Route 51 cleansing

18. Route 51 is a cycle route that passes through Sandy ; as with other cycle routes where there is appropriate access to publically adopted, hard paved sections in urban/residential areas, these are litter picked and can be swept under the street cleansing contract . Rural sections, such as that between Georgetown and Blunham are not included in the cleansing regime as standard. Route 51 is legally designated as highway but has no associated cleansing budget where it passes through rural areas (such as the dismantled railway section mentioned). Where specific areas of need are identified these can be reviewed as ad hoc works.

Gulley Clearing

19. Central Bedfordshire has around 38,000 individual gullies, with associated pipe work, connections, discharges and outfalls. Naturally the asset changes over time, and more gullies are added with new adoptions.
20. The regime for gulley clearance utilises an evidenced and risk based approach. All gullies are categorised as 'vulnerable' or 'not vulnerable'; the former are those which are regularly reported as full, and where there is demonstrable risk of flooding; for example a gulley at the bottom of a dip, or below significant tree cover. All vulnerable gullies are visited and emptied around three times a year; those classified as non-vulnerable are visited once every three years.
21. In addition to the above regime, any reports received are assessed and responded to appropriately and the gulley categorised and cleared as appropriate.

Grass cutting frequency and quality

22. Grass cutting is undertaken by Waste and Highways Services; it is also undertaken by a number of Town & Parish Councils who have opted out of the council's service. The service responsibility depends on the area and type of land; Waste services carry out the majority of urban grass cutting of highways and amenity land within urban and residential areas at a frequency of up to 15 cuts per season. Highways services cover 'rural' highways verges, vision splays, and junctions, for example: the A507 and A505. Highways services also undertake cutting of a number of Parish areas that are still opted into the old County Council cutting regime. The Highways Agency is responsible for the main trunk roads.
23. The weather is an influencing factor on this service and poor weather conditions (significantly wet or dry) can interrupt the grass cutting schedule. Allowances are made for disruptions due to rainfall and the contractor continues with the cutting schedule once weather permits.

24. Specific issues have been raised about grass cutting and associated activities including the spraying/trimming around obstacles in Sandy. Officers met with Sandy Town Council and the contractor to discuss and problem solve these issues and further meetings will be scheduled as required in 2014 to ensure a continued proactive approach. This approach has also been adopted with other Town & Parish Councils where particular issues are experienced.

Tree maintenance and management

25. Tree maintenance is generally reactive, and In August 2013 the responsibility for trees inspections transferred to Highways Services on the basis that the service will be more effective and efficient along with the introduction of a new survey regime and the development of a tree strategy.
26. There is also a programme of tree replacement the aim being to replace two highway trees for each tree removed. Practically, this is not always possible in the same place or even in the same street as the tree removed. Underground services and rooting space are the key factors that prevent trees being replanted when removed.

Urban weed spraying

27. All hard-surfaced, adopted urban footpaths and road channels maintainable by the Council at public expense are sprayed with a systemic herbicide twice to three times a year depending on the area. An enhanced regime in the north was introduced following investment in the 2013/14 programme to facilitate additional sprays.
28. Direct spraying of systemic herbicides is carried out by knapsack or quad application. Different options are being investigated for the 2014/15 season to deal with weeds in channels; this will include review of the regime and equipment used.
29. The weather impacts both on the speed of weed growth and the length of growing season so additional weed growth is experienced during warm wet weather. Weed spraying is avoided if rain is imminent. However, no areas are missed due to inclement weather; the schedule is adapted and continues over as many days/weeks as is required to complete the full spray.

Rights of Way – footpaths, walkways and cycle ways

30. There is a programme, 'Seasonal Vegetation Clearance' cutting around 200 kilometres (15%) of our footpath, bridleway and byway network that has been built up over a number of years. The bulk of this work is completed by our main contractors but a small proportion is covered by local farmers (for a nominal payment) or volunteers.
31. Most of the paths are cut twice in the growing season – in mid May and again in early September; the later cut includes some hedge/side growth cutting as required. Tarmac (or similar) surface paths are sprayed or trimmed rather than cut, the majority of these being in urban locations.

Conclusion

32. The report sets out information requested relating to a range of street scene and environmental services undertaken primarily by Community Services and addresses specific issues raised.

Appendices:

None

Background papers and their location: (open to public inspection)

None