



Housing Scrutiny
13 September 2018

**Report from the Strategic Director
of Community and Wellbeing**

Ground Maintenance Contract Management

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non-key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
No. of Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Troy Francis Head of Housing Management Troy.Francis@brent.gov.uk Tel. 020 8937 2794

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the grounds maintenance arrangement across the HRA land. It provides an outline of the contract management arrangement, our approach to tree management and how the ground maintenance service complements the wider approach to housing and neighbourhood management.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To note the content of the report as outline above

3.0 Contract overview

- 3.1 The Grounds maintenance arrangements for HRA land is currently delivered by Veolia as part of the wider Council public realm contract. The core of the contract includes maintaining the grass, trees and shrubs across Council estates all year round with the focus of improving neighborhoods.

This is achieved by the delivery of the following tasks:

- Grass cutting
- Hedge Maintenance
- Carrying out our seasonal work such as clearing away leaves
- Weeding

3.2 During the 2017/18 season, the grass cutting of open spaces and land within the Housing (HRA) portfolio began in March and continued into December to keep pace with the growth of the grass. There has been an average of 442 cuts across all open spaces and Housing areas during this period. The length of the grass cutting season, from late March to December (estimated – depending on weather / season) has allowed the grounds teams to keep pace with the grass growth across the Borough.

3.3 Appendix 1 and 2 respectively provides an extract from the Councils contract with Veolia which is also extended to HRA land.

4.0 Contract management overview

4.1 Our Housing Officers carry out monthly or bi-monthly inspections to ensure ground maintenance works are up to standard. The monthly inspections are carried out in conjunction with the high rise estate inspections and the bi-monthly inspections as done with the low rise estate inspections.

4.2 All of the Council's estates have been awarded a Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) rating. An LEQ is awarded by officers or residents online after an estate inspection has taken place in good lighting; fair weather; and not on a refuse collection day.

4.3 The council monitors the Veolia contract by holding regular weekly update meetings, monthly formal minuted meetings to discuss performance, work scheduling and issues associated with the service. Joint performance monitoring inspections are carried out at randomly selected sites each month as and when required. Our new estate inspection IT system enables local Housing Officers to record and raise any quality standards issues associated with the grounds maintenance service in real time. It also enables the tracking of trends, hotspots and reoccurring service issues.

5.0 Payment mechanism

5.1 The HRA's contribution to the grounds maintenance service is processed through a 'ring fenced' payment mechanism. This payment arrangement also includes any ad-hoc works commissioned by BHM. 100% cost of the grounds maintenance service is recharged to tenants and leaseholders through the service charge structure.

6.0 Overview of tree maintenance and management arrangements

6.1 The responsibility for management of trees in the Council's ownership is managed through a responsive arrangement with tree surgeon contractor called Gristwood and Toms. We are working with them to clear a backlog of

responsive tree works, pending a wider review of how this service is delivered, including developing a more integrated and planned approach to deliver greater value.

- 6.2 We are currently developing a Tree Management Policy to give guidance to frontline teams on the Council's policy position on tree management, including what is responsible and what falls within the responsibility of residents. It will also establish a more planned approach to tree management, and prevent requests for trees works being managed on an ad-hoc basis. The draft policy will also set out a commitment from BHM to implement a survey / inspection and associated works programme to ensure tree works are being managed in a proactive way, with all priority works being identified and targeted for action. The new policy is scheduled to be in place by January 2019.

7.0 Grounds maintenance and its impact on the wider housing management service

- 7.1 Grounds maintenance contributes towards how communities feel. Residents notice when standards slip and feel it contributes towards anti-social behaviour and residents feeling less safe. We recognise this impact and ensure that the maintenance and monitoring of the ground maintenance contract is an integral part of our neighbourhood services priority.

- 7.2 Recent changes to the delivery model employed by Veolia has led to some quality standards associated with the grounds maintenance service to be compromised. There has been recognition on both sides that this needed to be addressed quickly and a number of remedial arrangements have been put in place. These include:

- Additional resources being deployed on sites with the most impact
- Changes to the cut and collection regime to bring it in line with service delivery improvement demands.
- Reviewing the amount of cuts per year to keep pace with the growth of the grass
- Improving the performance monitoring regime to ensure earlier identification of quality standard issues

- 7.3 Managing the operational interface between Veolia and Wettons (estate cleaning contractor) sometimes creates cleaning challenges. Particularly, management of litter around the refuse collection area on bin collection days. There is a willingness from both contractors to work together to address this issue and a workshop is being arranged to take this forward.

- 7.4 BHM has identified an increasing need for an Assisted Garden Scheme. This will involve cutting the grass and hedges for a number of residents who are unable to do so due to severe vulnerabilities. BHM will explore the feasibility of running a Garden Assisted Scheme through collaboration with the current contractor and via alternative arrangements through the voluntary sector. We hope to conclude this exploration work by the end of March 2019.

8.0 Communication with tenants/leaseholders on grounds maintenance

- 8.1 Tenants and leaseholders are particularly demanding in respect of the delivery of the grounds maintenance for reasons as set out under paragraph 9.1. BHM provides opportunities for residents to rate the service as part of our neighbourhood inspection regime and through our online [Rate an Estate](#) Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) rating system. In addition, we work very closely with our Block Champions to identify and address any local quality standard issues.
- 8.2 Our Promise to Residents - Our monitoring and inspection regime is based on our promise which is to ensure that:
- 8.2.1 All grass areas listed in the Housing site plans are to be maintained between 25mm and 50mm at all times.
- 8.2.2 The Contractor will undertake regular leaf collection and removal to maintain grass areas free of accumulations of deciduous and evergreen leaf arising's during periods of leaf fall and at all other times.
- 8.2.3 All areas where bulbs are present should remain uncut from time of bulb emergence until 1st June or as otherwise directed by the Authorized Officer.
- 8.3 We recognise that more should be done to ensure all residents receiving grounds maintenance services understand the standards that should be expected and how Veolia is performing against these same standards. We will work with Veolia to look at ways of promoting our quality standards. In addition, we will ensure our Local Environmental Quality results are shared with residents through our online platform or through local notice boards.

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 The introduction of a planned maintenance programme for trees will potentially lead to an increase in revenue spend. Consideration will be given to whether a procurement process will be required. Similarly, we will explore the cost implications involved in introducing an assisted garden scheme as part of the viability assessment.
- 9.2 The HRA currently contributes £0.41m towards the Councils Veolia contract.

10.0 Legal Implications

- 10.1 There are no legal implication with the content of this report.

11.0 Equality Implications

- 11.1 There are no equality implications with the content of this report.

12.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

12.1 None.

13.0 Human Resources/Property Implications

13.1 None.

Report sign off:

PHIL PORTER

Strategic Director of Community and Wellbeing