

1 March 2023

Report of	Strategic Director	Author	Rosa Tanfield
Title	Grounds maintenance transition		☎ 0330 0538 047
Wards affected	'Not applicable'		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a summary on the activities undertaken since the meeting of the Policy Panel on the 12 January 2022, where recommendations were made to Cabinet to extend the current grounds maintenance contract and for officers to continue with plans for an inhouse delivery model.
- 1.2 Arrangements are in place to develop service improvements with the existing contractor.
- 1.3 A reorganisation of the inhouse team has prepared itself for the future and enabled further opportunities for job creation and focus on such things as commercial opportunities and active community engagement.

2. Action Required

- 2.1 For information only.

3. Reason for Review

- 3.1 To provide an update to the Policy Panel, as agreed by Cabinet on 9 March 2022, which resolved that:
 - a) authority be delegated to the Assistant Director of Environment to extend the contract with the existing contractor for three years in accordance with the existing terms.
 - b) the recommendations by the Policy Panel at its meeting on 12 January 2022 referred to in section 3 of the Assistant Directors report, be approved.
- 3.2 At its meeting of Policy Panel on 12 January 2022, the following recommendations were made:
 - a) the contract with the current contractor Idverde be extended on the same terms. There is provision within the current contract for an extension of three years [only] if the Council decides up to 72 months from the commencement date. The last date for extension notice is 1 April 2022.
 - b) Officers should continue with plans for an inhouse service, meeting the objectives agreed for commencement at the end of the contract extension
 - c) an annual update be provided to the Policy Panel on progress of plans towards bringing the grounds maintenance service inhouse, with

confidential sections to allow discussion of commercially sensitive matters where necessary.

- 3.3 Whilst the Council has a clear ambition for an inhouse model, the decision to extend the current contract does not preclude the option or ability for the Council to continue to develop the proposal during the extension period via a twin track approach, which could provide an opportunity for the planning and strategy to take place ahead of a transition. Making updates to the Policy Panel will ensure good and robust progress is made.

4. Background Information

- 4.1 The grounds maintenance contract with Idverde has been extended through to 31 October 2026, as recommended by Policy Panel at its meeting on 12 January 2022 and agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 March 2022.
- 4.2 The officers and contractor have set out a commitment to develop service improvements. This includes such things as:
- Delivering a carbon neutral service.
 - Continuing to invest in new, cleaner, and more efficient fleet, be that electric or zero emission alternatives.
 - Investment in technology.
 - Using technology to improve communications through a service management system, which will be introduced more comprehensively within Colchester. It is designed to enhance supervision, digitise monitoring, and make communication and reporting more transparent.
 - Sustainability and biodiversity.
 - Support the delivery of Colchester's biodiversity strategy.
 - Increase community activities.
- 4.3 Beyond the discussions in relation to the contract extension, the programme of transition to an in-house model is still very early. Officers have been therefore considering the activities that can be undertaken now to prepare for the future. This has included a reorganisation of the Parks, Countryside and Greening team ('Greening team'), to create the foundation to develop a more comprehensive team in the future.
- 4.4 The core objectives of the team reorganisation were:
- Greater focus, ownership, and accountability for performance of the Service
 - Developing resilience and future proofing the service
 - Focus on Strategic Priorities
 - Sustainable services
 - Green, biodiverse Colchester
 - Safe, well, enabled residents and communities.
 - Supporting economic development
- 4.5 The Greening Team have set out a commitment to work with all teams, partners and colleagues across the Council to:
- support the growth of Colchester's identity as a green place.
 - lead on enabling access to blue (rivers, coast lines and lakes) and green (Country Parks and open space) places.
 - lead on ecological and biodiversity conservation.
 - drive commercial and income generation from our blue and green infrastructure.
- 4.6 The Greening team aims are:
- **For the environment** - assets will be well managed and sustainable
 - **For health and wellbeing** - infrastructure and assets support and encourage greater wellbeing and leisure access for all residents and visitors
 - **For investment** - unlock commercial opportunities
- 4.7 Supporting the Council's commitment to a greener Colchester, the Greening team is responsible for the onward development of a greener Colchester, unlocking the opportunity of our green assets, and embedding the principles of

biodiversity and supporting ecology throughout the organisation, standardising, managing, monitoring and planning across the Borough.

- 4.8 The reorganisation has now created focus and accountability on four main areas:

Grounds maintenance and Operations

This team are involved in the day-to-day operational management of the grounds maintenance contract and other key assets such as Castle Park, the allotments, beach huts, amongst others.

Projects and strategy

This team is involved in delivering improvement schemes (including S106 funded schemes), green infrastructure enhancements, landscape planning and development, playgrounds maintenance, and refurbishment, as well as the delivery of the Greening Colchester policy. A review of spend has also enabled the creation a new role, Maintenance Technician. This has produced some cost savings whilst also enabling greater responsiveness to key or urgent issues. The Maintenance Technician is responsible for undertaking general repairs and maintenance of a skilled and routine nature within all Council parks and open spaces, perfectly complimenting the new role created three years ago of Play Park Inspector, creating greater resilience to ensure continuity of service.

People – to lead, nurture and enable our communities to enjoy our environment

Whilst this team will be concerned about the running of the High Woods Visitor Centre, a new role has been created for a Senior Ranger focusing on ‘people’. The purpose of this role is to ensure that we are engaging and activating people in our green spaces, be that through outreach programmes, events, activities, school programmes, partnership working or developing our volunteer base.

Place – to manage, maintain and keep safe our sites and environment.

Combining the arboriculture work of the Council with the Countryside team, greater synergy has been created through the development of a Tree and Country Park Manager. A Tree team has been developed over the last 2 years, removing the need for extensive contracted works (apart from some specialist work) enabling the Council to create some cost savings, whilst improving responsiveness and flexibility to the management of its tree stock. The finalisation of this change now enables the Council to develop a commercial offer for its tree services which will be launched imminently.

5. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 5.1 There is no impact on the promotion of equality or discrimination in relation to gender, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, and race/ethnicity, nor any breach of human rights.

6. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The work being undertaken by the team actively works towards the [Strategic Plan 2020-23](#); in particular ‘tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability’, and ‘Creating safe, healthy and active communities.’

7. Consultation

7.1 No consultation is required at this time.

8. Publicity Considerations

8.1 No publicity is required at this time.

9. Financial implications

9.1 The changes set out have already been met through the existing base budget and future. Base budget predictions.

10. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

11.1 The Council must do all it reasonably can to promote positive health benefits to our residents whilst reducing, removing or minimising any unintended consequences to health that may arise from services or decisions. the introduction of the senior Ranger for people will enable us to have greater focus on this area of our work.

10.2 The introduction of greening officers enables us to have more. Officers within our green public open spaces, which we hope will help to improve and prevent crime and disorder and reduce the fear of crime in certain areas.

11. Health and Safety Implications

11.1 There will be no harm to the health and safety of the general public.

12. Risk Management Implications

12.1 There are no risk management implications.

13. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

13.1 As set out within the report due consideration is being given to sustainability and carbon implications; From the suggested improvements to the contract extension to the activities of officers of the Council. The aims of the team set out clear ambitions for the environment, ensuring that all of its assets are well maintained, managed and sustainable.

13.2 It is recognised how important green spaces, as well as coastlines and waterways are to both communities, biodiversity and the environment:

- Those living closer to greener space in urban areas have been found to experience lower rates of anxiety - [Imperial College London \(2019\)](#)
- Increasing access/proportion of green space in local areas can help develop more active lives, promote communication and socialising with others, as well as helping to capture carbon and improve air quality ([Public Health England, 2020](#))
- [Around 9 in 10 people surveyed by Natural England](#) in May 2020 agreed that natural spaces are good for mental health and wellbeing. More than 40% noticed that nature, wildlife, and visiting local green and natural spaces have been even more important to their wellbeing since the coronavirus restrictions began
- The NEF analysis that highlighted concerns about overcrowding found that around one in eight people (12.5%) don't believe that their local green space is of a high

enough standard to want to spend time in. People on lower incomes report greater dissatisfaction with the quality of their green space than those on higher incomes ([ONS](#), 2021)