

13 January 2021

Report of	Assistant Director Environment and Assistant Director Corporate & Improvement Services	Author	Rosa Tanfield Group Manager, Neighbourhood Services
Title	Grounds Maintenance Contract Options		☎ 03300538047
Wards affected	All Wards		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Leadership Board agreed at its meeting on 8 December to request that the Policy Panel participate in the review of future options for delivery of the grounds maintenance services across the Borough and make recommendations to Cabinet.
- 1.2 It is essential to agree a clearly defined scope, as set out in this document, and to be collectively accountable for providing recommendations to Cabinet on 10 March 2021.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To agree to the scope and aims set out in the report.
- 2.2 To agree the Terms of Reference for Policy Panel in undertaking this review as set out in Appendix A.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The Council has the opportunity to undertake a considered review of the options available for grounds maintenance in the future. Clearly defined aims will assist in setting out option recommendations.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 No review is undertaken and as such the existing contract is extended, or the previous specification could be retendered.
- 4.2 The current specification will need major revision to be brought up to date to include the policy changes to meet the Council's strategic priorities.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 The grounds maintenance service is one of the Council's major externalised service areas. The current contractor is Idverde who commenced in April 2016 and the contract is due to expire in October 2023. The contract is worth approximately £10.4 million over the seven years and seven months. The annual value of the contract for 2021/22 is £1.7million. Currently any savings are based on a reduction in service rather than the contractor delivering greater efficiencies.
- 5.2 In ensuring that the Council is prepared for an effective transition at the end of the contract, officers have engaged the Solutions Team at the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) to assist the Council in undertaking a review of the options available. Drawing on many years' experience of assisting local government to establish and implement excellence in public services, the Solutions Team will facilitate the process and guide Council officers through the review.
- 5.3 The table below is an outline initial project plan illustrating how it is proposed to deliver each stage of the project. No timeframe is provided as this will be largely dependent on the time required to plan meetings and collect and collate data.

Stage	Objective	Input	Days needed
Current state assessment	Establish strategic objectives	Document review desktop Workshop to include appropriate elected members – virtual	3 days 1 day
	Evaluate current cost and performance against service objectives	Desktop evaluation	2 days
	Benchmark against PN data	Service to join PN Analysis of PN output	2 days
	Prepare report	Desktop	3 days
Options identification	Prepare options presentation	Desktop	4 days
	Workshop with key stakeholders	Virtual	1 day
Options appraisal		Appraisal workshop virtual	2 days
Prepare recommendations	Report preparation	Desktop work	4 days
Present findings and recommendations for next steps	Initial action planning for next stage – service design and/or	Virtual	1 day

- 5.4 The table refers to Performance Networks (PN). This is APSE's performance benchmarking arm and will be used as the best way to ensure that data used in the assessment stage is accurate and contextualised (i.e. by reference to the cost and performance of other similar authorities).

6. Review Aims

- 6.1 The activities outlined above directly impact on the Council's parks, green spaces and coastline which are a vital contributor to supporting wellbeing, connecting people with nature, providing space for biodiversity, and attracting visitors to Colchester. It is

therefore proposed, that in considering these outcomes, the review should have the following aims:

Community asset based

Creating an environment and the conditions to support community led action

Demonstrates exemplary management of the environment

Sustainability, biodiversity and ecology at the heart

Ensure budget control

Robust and demonstrable savings, with cost certainty that considers the future

Transformative

Match the Council's ambition in how the service can be delivered going forward; providing a service fit for the 21st Century

- 6.3 Whilst the review will focus on the works carried out under contract by IDVerde, the scope of the review will also include works currently undertaken by the Neighbourhood Services team, aligned to the above and include Castle Parks, Countryside, tree maintenance, river, lake and coastal maintenance.
- 6.4 It will also consider future implications and opportunities on service delivery, such as legislative changes, significant changes to assets and public sector reform.
- 6.5 At this stage no options are ruled out, but the following may be considered:
- Retendering the Contract - If the above aims and objectives are to be achieved, the current specification may need significant updating
 - Extending the current Contract – There is provision within the current contract for an extension of 3 years if the Council decides up to 72 months from the commencement date. It is unlikely that the above aims and objectives could be achieved through the extension of the current contract.
 - Bringing the service in-house
 - Setting up a separate Trading Company
 - Developing Co-operatives/Mutual options with local communities

7. Review progress

- 7.1 The review has commenced with an evidence-based assessment of current state. This has included benchmarking the service against other Councils across the UK.
- 7.2 Vital to this review is the consultation of stakeholders. These will be undertaken through two workshops in January 2021. It is proposed that workshops are carried out with:
- Council Officers across the organisation that already work with or will be impacted in some way by the ground maintenance contract and works, either currently or with any potential changes to operating model in the future.
 - Organisations that may be impacted by change, such as Parish Councils.
- 7.3 In addition, it is proposed that the Policy Panel takes an active role in the review process. A Terms of Reference, scope and timeline is proposed in Appendix A. This sets out three

meetings following the presentation of this report, whereby the Policy Panel will be briefed on the analysis of the review and participate in a workshop (see further detail below), options will then be explored in further detail, before concluded recommendations for Cabinet in March 2021.

7.4 A key outcome for the workshops outlined above is to get participants to focus on what sort of service they want to see in the future. One aspect of this is to focus on the service wanted rather than who carries it out. Additionally, the workshops should:

- Reaffirm what the objectives of the options appraisal are
- consider the service delivery options
- consider the delivery vehicle options
- establish pre business case preferences

7.5 The workshops will also review the benchmarking data to give an understanding of CBC performance in relation to other local authorities across the UK.

7.6 A timeline representing the key dates for this review are attached in Appendix B

8. Strategic Plan References

8.1 This project work is directly aligned to the Council's strategic priorities of *Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability* (in particular, conserving and enhancing biodiversity), and all priorities in *Creating safe, health and active communities*.

9. Financial implications

9.1 Funding is currently provided for the consultancy costs £17,500. This is being met through the Transformation budget.

9.2 APSE can provide further support for the implementation stage of the project which, depending on the preferred option, is likely to commence with a business case, followed by either specification development or internal service design. Costing for this has not been provided and will be dependent on the preferred option.

9.3 It is proposed that the recommendations will demonstrate annual savings of at least £100,000 per annum against the current contracted value.

10. Publicity Considerations

10.1 No publicity will be required at this stage but will be built into any plans with recommended options.

11. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

11.1 This report set out proposals for an options appraisal for a future operating model for grounds maintenance. It does not propose or set out to make any service changes and to that extent does not impact on the promotion of equality and overcome discrimination in relation to gender, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, religion or

belief, age and race/ethnicity. However, any options recommended will give proper consideration to equality, diversity and human right implications.

12. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

12.1 There are no implications at this stage.

13. Health and Safety Implications

13.1 There are no implications at this stage.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

14.1 It is clearly set out in the aims of the review, that there should be outcomes with environmental and sustainability within the recommendations.

15. Risk Management Implications

15.1 There are no implications at this stage