

## **LANDSCAPES CONTRACT – ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2018-19**

REPORT OF: Divisional Leader – Commercial Services and Contracts  
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Wards Affected: All  
Key Decision: No  
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Community, Customer Services and Service Delivery  
18 September 2019

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### **Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an annual review (for the period April 2018 - March 2019) of the
  - (a) Grounds Maintenance Contract operated by idVerde and;
  - (b) The Arboriculture Contract operated by County Tree Surgeons

### **Recommendation**

2. The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.
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### **Background**

3. The Grounds Maintenance Contract was awarded to idVerde on 1 January 2015 for a period of seven years (31 December 2021). An extension of a further seven years is available if the contract continues in its current form and both parties agree.
4. The Arboriculture Contract was awarded to County Tree Surgeons (CTS) on 1 April 2012 and runs for 10 years (until 31 March 2022). A break clause was incorporated at the fifth year (2017) to enable either party to review the contract or terminate the agreement.

### **Scope of Service**

5. **Grounds Maintenance Contract:** This contract covers all aspects of routine grounds maintenance across the Council's parks, open spaces and sports grounds. This includes:
  - (a) Grass cutting and vegetation trimming;
  - (b) Outdoor sports facility maintenance;
  - (c) Litter bin collections and clearance;
  - (d) Border maintenance and hedge cutting;
  - (e) Cleansing of hard surfaces;
  - (f) Clearance of watercourse screens.
6. The grounds maintenance contract does not include:
  - (a) Maintenance and inspection of playgrounds
  - (b) Maintenance of hard infrastructure such as street furniture and footpaths
  - (c) Emptying of dog waste bins
  - (d) Maintenance and cleaning of park buildings
  - (e) Tree maintenance

7. **Arboriculture Contract:** This contract covers all aspects of tree maintenance across the Council's parks, open spaces and countryside portfolio.
8. In line with the significant majority of local authorities across the country, the primary focus of this work is the management of tree safety; with works being identified and carried out only to manage the safety of dead, diseased, dying or dangerous trees identified and prioritised through an annual programme of risk-based tree inspections.
9. A secondary function of this contract is the implementation and aftercare of an annual tree-planting programme.

### **Contract governance and performance management**

10. **Grounds Maintenance Contract:** The governance arrangements for the contract are as follows:

- (a) fortnightly operational meeting;
- (b) monthly strategic meeting;
- (c) quarterly Partnership Board meeting which includes the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Service Delivery

11. During the first five years of the contract a predominantly reactive approach was taken to the management of contractor performance against the contract specification. This enabled the Council to achieve a broad understanding of whether idVerde were completing the tasks set out within the contract to schedule. The contract is now being managed and monitored on a more proactive basis, with a programme of site inspections taking place on a daily basis to monitor performance against the contract specification.

12. IdVerde undertake a minimum of 400 satisfaction surveys of park users per year. This gives the Council a good understanding of how well the contract is performing. Customer satisfaction for 2018/19 was at 96.58%, compared with 97% in 2017/18.

13. The Council has worked closely with idVerde to introduce a set of comprehensive KPIs from 2019/20 onwards.

14. Any issues that are noted by the Landscapes Contract Monitoring Officers on their routine inspections are resolved through operational and contract meetings. The contract allows for financial penalties to be imposed should the contractor fail to achieve the specified standard. No fines were issued during 2018/19.

15. Quarterly meetings are an opportunity for the Council and idVerde to review the overall performance of idVerde during the previous three months and agree the general direction of travel for the next three months. .

16. **Arboriculture Contract:** The governance arrangements for the contract are as follows:

- (a) Six-weekly joint contract and operational meeting.

17. Alongside the day-to-day management of the grounds maintenance and arboriculture contracts the following projects have been progressed.

- (a) The Council has increased the number of Green Flags held in the District from one to two (Beech Hurst in Haywards Heath and St Johns Park in Burgess Hill). Green Flag awards recognise and rewards well managed parks and open spaces, setting the benchmark for the standard for the management of recreational spaces across the UK.

- (b) The Council part funds idVerde operatives through a comprehensive training programme at Plumpton College. In 2018/19 six operatives were put through this programme and covered the following subjects:
- Football pitch maintenance and line marking;
  - Plant bedding renovation and shrub planting;
  - Fine turf weed, moss and pest control;
  - Cricket pitch maintenance;
  - Pruning techniques.
18. The Council and CTS have significantly progressed the installation of an electronic database which enables a digital log to be kept of each tree for which it is responsible. This greatly assists with the management of the Council's tree stock and enables enhanced contract monitoring.
- Service priorities and contract development**
19. Building on the work undertaken during 2018/19 and reflecting the new Commercial Services and Contracts Division there have been several service priorities and contract developments identified for 2019/20.
20. The Council is preparing a number of strategies: The Play and Amenity Green Space Strategy; Playing Pitch Strategy and Local Football Facility Plan, which will be adopted during 2019/20. These will enable a more strategic, evidence-based approach to support investment in our parks. In order to support the transition of these strategies from adoption to delivery, a two-year investment plan for selected parks and play areas has been developed. Parks earmarked for improvements in 2019/20 are:
- (a) Mount Noddy (East Grinstead);
  - (b) Finches Fields (Pease Pottage);
  - (c) St Johns Park (Burgess Hill).
21. As part of this programme, play areas at Twineham Recreation Ground, Bolney Recreation Ground and John Pears Recreation Ground will also be improved during 2019/20.
22. The Council spends significant sums on planting traditional annual bedding displays in its high-profile parks (£14,000 was spent on plants and maintenance in 2018/19). A project to replace these with more sustainable planting schemes is currently underway, with a view to reducing the environmental impact of the Council's grounds maintenance operations. In addition, this will deliver some cost savings as there will no longer be a need to replace plants each spring and autumn).
23. The Council has a target to increase the number of Green Flags held in the District from two to three in 2019/20. East Court and Ashplats (East Grinstead) was selected as the next suitable application and was successful in achieving a Green Flag in June this year. It is proposed that a fourth Green Flag will also be sought, and an application submitted for Victoria Park (Haywards Heath) in early 2020.

**Health and safety**

24. During the 2018/19 period IdVerde recorded 61 near misses and 7 accidents. One of these accidents was RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) reportable as the member of staff had more than seven days off work for recovery. The nature of the incident did not necessitate any further investigation by the Health and Safety Executive.
25. County Tree Surgeons record the overall number of near misses, hazards and accidents across all their local authority contracts as a whole and to date, have not collected or recorded the data for Mid Sussex separately. In future reports, Mid Sussex specific data will be presented.

## **Finance**

26. The annual value of the grounds maintenance contract in 2018/19 was £677,123. Inflationary uplifts are based on CPI and capped at 2.5%.
27. The annual value of the arboriculture contract is £110,000. Inflation is not applied to this contract.

## **Legislative and policy context**

28. There is no legislative or policy context for the provision of parks and open spaces. These are provided entirely at the Council's discretion.
29. The Council has responsibility for the management of five Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). LNRs are a statutory designation (Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949). These designations are made by principal local authorities on their own land. The five LNRs in Mid Sussex are:
  - a. Ashenground and Bolnore Woods
  - b. Bedelands Farm Nature Reserve
  - c. Blunts Wood and Paiges Meadow
  - d. Eastern Road Nature Reserve
  - e. The Scrase Valley
30. Designating an LNR ensures protection of the site for several years; allowing the biodiversity of the location to be preserved.
31. The Council has a Duty of Care to ensure its tree stock are managed safely to reduce risk of damage to property or persons. The Council fulfils this Duty of Care by regularly inspecting its tree stock and recommending works to ensure the continued health of a tree and/or ensure the safety of those who might be living, working or using facilities within the vicinity of the tree.

## **Risk management**

32. The grounds maintenance specification is frequency (input) based- meaning idVerde carry out a certain number of maintenance activities during set points throughout the year.

33. In line with its 2019/20 Service Plan, the Landscapes Team plans to review the specification with a view to moving from a frequency based contract, to a performance (output) specification. This would enable the Council and its contractor to better adapt to changing weather patterns (which has resulted in a change in the growing season) and the increasing and differing demands on our parks and open spaces.
34. As set out in Paragraph 3, the Grounds Maintenance Contract was awarded on 1 January 2015 for a period of seven years (31 December 2021); and an extension of a further seven years is available if the contract continues in its current form and both parties agree. In line with good contract management practice, in 2019/20 Officers propose to carry out an options appraisal to inform the decision as to whether to further extend the contract or carry out a competitive procurement for the provision of the service beyond the end of the first term.
35. As noted in paragraph 24, the Council has a Duty of Care to manage its tree stock to minimise the likelihood of damage to property or persons. This means the only works recommended through the Council's contract with CTS are for trees that are considered dead, dying or dangerous. Works should ensure the continued health of the tree and/or ensure the risk of damage to third party property is reduced. Felling of trees is only considered where the tree is at risk of failure and a suitable maintenance regime cannot be established.

#### **Background papers**

36. None.