

DECISION ITEM



REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
RESOURCES DIRECTORATE	FINANCE AND DEMOCRACY COMMITTEE	20 JUNE 2016	6
PROPOSAL TO CONSIDER BOROUGH WIDE WEED TREATMENT USING MECHANICAL REMOVAL			

PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

SUMMARY

This report details a proposal to consider the introduction of an in-house borough wide weed treatment process using mechanical removal as an alternative to chemical spraying. This is in response to LCC's reduction in public realm payments and challenges in maintaining the current standards of service delivery.

RECOMMENDATION

The Finance and Democracy Committee is requested to consider the recommendations of the Operational Management Committee and to:

1. Approve capital budget increases for vehicle purchases of £56k in 2016/17, £76k in 2019/20, and a reduction of £16k in 2020/21, whilst noting that the additional financing costs will be met in full from the revenue budget for weed spraying from 2016/17 and future years;
2. Authorise the expenditure for the purchase of two Nilfisk City Ranger ride on sweepers with weed ripper attachments, to carry out the removal of weeds across Fylde.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS

In 2014 the County Council informed Fylde Council that payments made in respect of public realm functions would be reduced over a 3 year period by a total of 25%, with 2016/17 being the final reduction in payment. The reduced payments have been reflected in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy with a total budget for these activities in 2016/17 of £69,875. County Council officers informed Fylde of a further 10% reduction in payment for the 2016/17 financial year to £63,000 without any prior notice, consultation or consideration of the impact on service delivery.

The Chairman of the Operational Management Committee, Councillor David Eaves, wrote to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, County Councillor John Fillis, requesting that LCC reconsider their plans for a further reduction to the public realm payments however the response was unfavourable. At the Operational Management Committee meeting on the 8th March 2016 officers were tasked with considering the detailed implications of the budget reductions and investigating alternative means of service delivery to include environmentally friendly, non-chemical options.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES	
Spending your money in the most efficient way to achieve excellent services (Value for Money)	√
Delivering the services that customers expect of an excellent council (Clean and Green)	√
Working with all partners (Vibrant Economy)	
To make sure Fylde continues to be one of the most desirable places to live (A Great Place to Live)	√
Promoting Fylde as a great destination to visit (A Great Place to Visit)	√

REPORT

1. By virtue of Section 1(2) of the Highways Act 1980 the County Council are the Highway Authority for highways other than trunk roads in the County of Lancashire. Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 and Section 19 of the Local Government Act 2000 enable a local authority to arrange for the discharge of their functions by any other local authority.
2. The County Council and the Borough Council (the Council) have historically agreed to make arrangements for the undertaking of certain highway authority functions by the Council, which includes weed spraying, and have reached an understanding on various highway related matters on the terms and conditions of this agreement. In return the County Council has agreed to reimburse the Council for carrying out these duties by means of an annual payment to be made no later than 30th April for each year of the agreement. The County Council makes this annual payment to the Council in respect of the following public realm activities: verge maintenance, leaf clearance, weed control and windblown sand clearance.
3. In response to the current financial challenges facing local authorities it has been necessary for the County Council to review all service provision to meet required target reductions in spending. In 2014, the County Council advised the Council that payments made in respect of public realm activities would be reduced over a 3 year period by a total of 25%, with 2016/17 being the final reduction in payment. There was no flexibility in this proposal and there was an expectation that service standards would be maintained despite the reduced budget.
4. The agreed three year reduced public realm payments have been profiled in Fylde's Medium Term Financial Strategy with the figure of £69,875 being included in the budget for 2016/17. County Council officers informed Fylde on February 16th that a further reduction of 10% will be made for the 2016/17 financial year, to £63,000 without any prior notice, consultation or consideration of the impact on service delivery.
5. The delegated services delivered on behalf of the County Council are part of the cleansing and grounds maintenance services carried out directly by the Council and the reduction will have a corresponding adverse effect upon the Council's own service provision and resource requirements. These are high profile services maintaining the cleanliness and amenity of the borough that deliver the 'clean and green' priority. In order to sustain service standards and meet the expectation of Fylde customers unfunded revenue budget increases were included in budget proposals for weed control and verge maintenance to cover the shortfall in recent years. Even with budget increases, rising labour cost, and chemicals and equipment prices

have resulted in the need to consider changes in service delivery i.e. a reduction in weed spraying from 3 sprays to 2 sprays per annum.

6. The additional budget cut of 10% will make it impossible to continue with even 2 sprays without requesting Members to approve an unfunded budget increase. If the payment is further reduced in future the Council could be in a position where it is taking on County Council responsibilities without the corresponding resources.
7. The County Council has asked the Council to confirm the intention to continue delivering the services at the revised rate for 2016-17 whilst maintaining the standards in the County Council Highways Maintenance Plan and associated Codes of Practice that have not been revised in line with reduced budgets despite the County Council acknowledging that variations to frequency, content or work activities may be required. There has been no indication from the County Council whether further reductions to Public Realm payments will be made in future years but this remains a strong possibility. If the payment is further reduced the Council could be in a position where it is taking on County Council responsibilities without the corresponding resources.
8. The Chairman of the Operational Management Committee, Councillor David Eaves, wrote to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, County Councillor John Fillis, requesting that LCC reconsider their plans for a further reduction to the public realm payments however the response was unfavourable. At the Operational Management Committee meeting on the 8th March 2016 officers were tasked with considering the detailed implications of the budget reductions and investigating alternative means of service delivery to include environmentally friendly, non-chemical options.
9. As part of the approved capital fleet replacement programme, the handheld pavement sweepers (Green Machines) are scheduled for replacement. Fylde officers have investigated and experimented with different types of equipment and machinery over recent months to find a solution that will meet the cleansing requirements while providing options for weed control.
10. The Nilfisk City Ranger is a compact ride on sweeping machine with a wide range of versatile attachments including a weed ripping brush. The weed brush efficiently removes weeds from streets and paved areas and prevents new seedlings from germinating. It is extremely manoeuvrable and hydraulically adjustable in all directions, allows the driver to vary the brush ground pressure and target specific areas. Working repeatedly with the weed brush will prevent the establishment of seedlings without using pesticides.
11. Rochdale Council are using a fleet of 4 Nilfisk City Rangers for non-chemical weed removal with excellent results. The staff are reportedly very happy with the operation of the unit which receives positive comments from local residents. Before and after photos of weed clearances in Rochdale are included as an appendix to this report together with a Rochdale case study.
12. The purchasing of 2 handheld pavement sweepers and two City Ranger weep rippers was recommended to the Operational Management Committee on the 31st May as a method for addressing town centre street cleansing issues and weed removal as an environmentally friendly alternative to chemical control.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

13. The financing option associated with this proposal essentially involves using existing revenue budgets that are allocated for weed spraying costs to meet the annual financing charges associated with the purchase of additional vehicles.

14. The Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) is a measure of the Council's 'underlying need to borrow' to provide for the capital expenditure that it incurs. The effect of the proposal to purchase the weed-removal equipment as described in this report is to increase the 2016/17 CFR by £56k, to increase the 2019/20 CFR by £76k, and to reduce the 2020/21 CFR by £16k; giving a total net increase in the CFR of £116k over the 5 year period. However given the level of cash that the Council currently holds in the form of reserves, balances and general cash-flow, in recent years these resources have been used to fund capital expenditure needs rather than the incurring of additional external debt (this is known as 'internal borrowing').
15. The appendix to this report shows the relevant capital and revenue budgets for the current position and for the proposed option, showing the full financing costs of the proposal. This solution has been worked through to support the public realm cuts in relation to Sand, Leaf and Weed clearance and no additional revenue budget has been requested for this as it is being contained within existing budgets and resources.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	The Finance & Democracy Committee is requested to consider the recommendations of the Operational Management Committee and to approve capital budget increases for vehicle purchases of £56k in 2016/17, £76k in 2019/20, and a reduction of £16k in 2020/21, whilst noting that the additional financing costs will be met in full from the revenue budget for weed spraying from 2016/17 and future years; and to authorise the expenditure. The proposal in the report essentially involves using existing revenue budgets allocated for weed spraying costs to meet the financing costs relating to the purchase of additional vehicles for non-chemical weed removal. Paragraph 14 of the report sets out the impact on the Council's Capital Financing Requirement.
Legal	There are no direct legal implications arising from the report
Community Safety	There are no direct community safety implications arising from the report
Human Rights and Equalities	There are no direct human rights and equalities implications arising from the report
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	There are no direct sustainability and environmental impact implications arising from the report
Health & Safety and Risk Management	There are no direct health and safety and risk management implications arising from the report

LEAD AUTHOR	TEL	DATE	DOC ID
Kathy Winstanley	01253 658634	3 rd June 2016	

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Name of document	Date	Where available for inspection
none		

Attached document(s)

1. Before and after photographs showing weed treatment in Rochdale
2. Rochdale Nifisk case study
3. Financing proposal