

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Reasons for Recommendation</b>	<b>Progress</b>
1.	Establish a 'charter' for grass cutting.	From the evidence considered by the Commission it seems that the public do not currently know what standard of grass cutting to expect, or why that standard is being provided. The Commission considers that if this information were provided, the public, would be less likely to complain unnecessarily about the grass-cutting service.	<b><i>Grass cutting service explanatory leaflet (Appendix 1) produced and available since April 2004 from Council buildings.</i></b>
2.	Set up a procedure to log and follow up complaints about the grass cutting service.	Commission members considered that unless complaints were recorded and followed up, the public would consider that their views were being ignored. It was also thought that a record of complaints would provide the Grounds Maintenance section with a valuable management tool and would provide an indicator against which future performance could be assessed.	<b><i>Grass cutting hotline set up in April 2004 and publicised in above leaflet. Calls logged. Currently a paper exercise. Analysis carried out and attached (Appendix 2). Current staffing review in Parks Section will result in a general parks and grounds maintenance hotline. Training in the use of complaint monitoring computer software will then take place and all complaints, including grass cutting, will be recorded on computer and statistical information provided.</i></b>

3.	Increase the level of inspection carried out by Grounds Maintenance personnel.	Commission members recognised the constraints under which the Grounds Maintenance service operates but considered that it would be easier to ensure quality of service if inspections of the work were carried out more frequently and if those inspections were undertaken by employees who were not directly involved in providing the grass cutting service. It was thought that inspections could also be linked to the complaints procedure described in (2) above.	<b><i>All complaints resulting from hotline discussed in (2) above, are investigated. Grounds Maintenance Officers also carry out informal inspections in the course of their normal duties. The new computer software will further improve the management and monitoring of complaints and will enable random inspections to take place. Resources for inspections by staff not directly involved in the grass cutting service are not currently available.</i></b>
4.	Make arrangements for better co-ordination of 'back-up' work such as strimming round obstacles.	The evidence considered by the Commission included a number of comments about the failure to complete back-up work such as strimming round obstacles and sweeping paths. Commission members considered that there should be better co-ordination of this work. If possible it should be completed on the same day as the grass was cut and ideally the process should include litter collection, cutting, strimming and sweeping.	<b><i>Current specification provides for twice yearly spraying around trees and obstacles with an approved herbicide. Unfortunately the herbicides that are approved for this work do not control the growth for a long enough period. A degree of back-up strimming takes place when resources are available.</i></b> <b><i>Clearance of cut grass from footpaths is also not included in the specification (apart from selected Derby Homes sites). On highways and other sites, some clearing is done when the problem is at it's worst, in response to complaints, resources permitting.</i></b> <b><i>The estimated additional budget required to undertake footpath clearance and back up mowing on every grass cutting occasion is £152,000 for highway verges only or £240,000 for all sites..</i></b> <b><i>A submission for budget provision is not considered worthwhile given the Council's other priorities.</i></b>

5.	Investigate the practicability and cost of collecting grass cuttings during or soon after the grass has been cut and the practicability and cost of disposing of collected grass cuttings.	The Commission are aware of the potential problems associated with collecting the grass cuttings and with their subsequent disposal. Nevertheless the practicability of doing this should be fully explored by the Commercial Services Department.	<p><b><i>Discussions have taken place with a number of other authorities.</i></b></p> <p><b><i><u>Solihull Borough</u> - whilst reluctant to supply precise rates for the work, they explained that the cost of cutting grass on a weekly basis, then collecting and disposing of the grass was 3 to 4 times that of cutting without collection. During trials, they discovered that mowing machines with collection facilities could not cope with a fortnightly cutting frequency, especially in the early part of the growing season. The amount of grass being collected was blocking up the machines and downtime was unacceptable. They therefore moved to a weekly mowing cycle and introduced a system whereby a normal non-collecting machine cuts the grass and is followed by a second machine to remove the cuttings.</i></b></p> <p><b><i><u>Chesterfield Borough</u> – using collection machines on certain housing areas on a fortnightly frequency. Costs did not seem to be of major concern and when calculated from figures supplied, were ludicrously high.</i></b></p> <p><b><i><u>Mansfield District</u> – had experimented with collection machines but costs proved prohibitive.</i></b></p> <p><b><i><u>Ashfield District</u> – same response as Mansfield.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Based on the Solihull model, the additional budget required to provide this service in Derby is estimated at £1.5 to £2.25 million.</i></b></p>
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6.	Investigate the practicability and cost of co-ordinating litter collection with grass cutting. For trunk road grass, investigate how litter collection might be co-ordinated with grass cutting carried out by the Highways Agency's contractors.	The Commission consider that the public have a valid complaint about the practice of mowing grass before any litter has been collected. Commission members recognise that there would be difficulties in co-ordinating litter collection with grass cutting, but it feels that the public are unlikely to see the current practice of mowing the litter together with the grass as acceptable. It therefore recommends that the Commercial Services Department investigate ways of resolving this problem.	<p><b><i>Some discussion has taken place with D&amp;CS regarding this issue. Street cleaning service currently carried out by private contractor and is based on meeting EPA standards. There is therefore no prescribed frequency to the work and co-ordination with grass cutting is therefore problematic. D&amp;CS understood to be compiling a report and considering a pilot scheme.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>No complaints relating to the lack of litter clearance before grass cutting have been received by the Parks Section this year.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>The issue may be linked to the outcome of the re-tendering of the street cleansing contract.</i></b></p>
7.	Investigate the cost and practicability of taking on responsibility for trunk road grass cutting in Derby.	If the City Council were responsible for cutting trunk road grass in Derby it might be possible to resolve the current problems associated with the different standards of grass cutting on trunk and non-trunk roads in the City.	<p><b><i>In discussions with Amscott, they appear unable to provide costings or site data for the trunk road work in Derby. It forms part of a much larger contract that includes services other than grass cutting. We do not have the necessary traffic management equipment for the high speed roads. Amscott carry out this work throughout the Midlands. Economies of scale therefore apply.</i></b></p>

**PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION**  
**Thursday 2 September 2004**

**GRASS CUTTING**

**UPDATE ON REPORT OF OCTOBER 2003**