



**NORTHAMPTON**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

## AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT

<b>Report Title</b>	Tree and Shrub maintenance
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**AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC**

<b>Audit Committee Meeting Date:</b>	<b>Monday 29 July 2013</b>
<b>Policy Document:</b>	
<b>Directorate:</b>	<b>Customers and Community</b>
<b>Accountable Cabinet Member:</b>	<b>Cllr Mike Hallam</b>

### 1. Purpose

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- 1.1 To confirm that the Environmental Services contract with Enterprise will deliver the standard of tree maintenance required by the authority.

### 2. Recommendations

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- 2.1 That the committee note the report.

### 3. Issues and Choices

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#### 3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 The request for this report came when the Audit Committee was discussing the Environmental Services Review on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2013. The following is the minute of the Audit Committee that asked for the report:
- 3.1.2 "A Member expressed concern regarding how tree pruning and cutting work was being undertaken. It was noted that this did not fall within the risks relating to the delivery of service but Members expressed the view that there was a risk to the Council's reputation with regard to work undertaken on behalf of the local authority. As such, it was agreed that a monitoring report on tree pruning and cutting be made to a future meeting of the Committee.

## 3.2 Issues

### 3.2.1 Tree and Shrub Maintenance

3.2.2 The maintenance of the majority of trees and shrubs that are in the ownership of NBC, are maintained by Enterprise. Enterprise also maintains Highways trees and shrubs, as part of the agency agreement we have with NCC.

Enterprise is not responsible for tree or shrub maintenance in certain Housing areas e.g. residents gardens, communal areas within the curtilage of flats, although they are prepared to offer advice on maintenance in these areas if asked.

3.2.3 All trees, irrespective of whether their maintenance is funded from the General fund or the HRA, are maintained to the same standards. The standards/policies and inspection regimes relating to the trees are those which were in place prior to Enterprise taking over the services. Continuity is also achieved by the two officers at Enterprise who manage the trees, being the same people that previously managed the trees on behalf of NBC.

Enterprise has internally allocated the same level of budgets to tree maintenance as those allocated when NBC managed the trees.

3.2.4 The contract deals with the general maintenance of the existing trees and shrubs and hedge lines, which are the responsibility of NBC or maintained on behalf of NCC, apart from those Housing areas mentioned above. Any maintenance requested to be carried out that would not be deemed to be general maintenance would be outside the scope of the contract. For example, if NBC requested the removal of a tree that was not causing an obstruction to a public footpath, was not dead or dying and causing a health and safety issue or was not causing structural damage to nearby buildings, then the removal would be outside of the scope of the contract and an additional payment would be required. Any work that was requested for purely cosmetic reasons would also be outside of the contract.

3.2.5 I have not seen any reduction in the standard of tree maintenance since the contract with Enterprise commenced, and I still work directly with the tree department at Enterprise to ensure that these standards are maintained. I believe that the provisions of the contract with Enterprise will continue to deliver the standards we expect.

### 3.3 Tree maintenance - NBC trees

3.3.1 All arboriculture works is carried out in accordance with recognised good arboriculture practice including BS 3998: Recommendations for Tree Work. Tree maintenance will only be undertaken where there is a requirement to do so.

3.3.2 A programme of inspections and surveys is in place to identify any maintenance issues with trees and develop work programmes.

- 3.3.3 An Enterprise tree officer is on call 24 hours to deal with emergencies such as trees brought down during high winds.
- 3.3.4 There are some time restrictions on when maintenance work can be carried out, due to nesting birds and protected species.
- 3.3.5 Any complaints from residents about individual trees will be investigated by the tree officers and the resident informed of their findings.
- 3.3.6 Customers will be contacted within 5 working days of their initial enquiry to arrange a site visit. Customers will then be informed within 2 working days of the site visit if any work will/can be carried out on the tree. In most cases the work will be carried out within 28 days of the agreement to carry out the work. Exceptions may be due to weather, emergencies or large/difficult jobs, and trees with tree preservation orders or those in conservation areas.
- 3.3.7 A list of “frequently asked questions” is available.

#### 3.4 **Tree maintenance - NCC trees (Highways)**

- 3.4.1 Highways trees on strategic and main distributor roads, are inspected and work undertaken on safety grounds and to ensure visibility and prevent obstruction.
- 3.4.2 Only reactive and emergency work will be carried out on trees on other roads.

#### 3.5 **Shrubs and shrub bed maintenance – (NBC and NCC Highways)**

- 3.5.1 NBC and NCC shrubs are maintained to the same specification.
- 3.5.2 Highway and Amenity shrub beds are visited on an annual basis as part of the winter works programme and receive full containment pruning operations
- 3.5.3 The main period of shrub and shrub bed maintenance takes place between Oct/Nov until the end of March/April.
- 3.5.4 Shrub bed maintenance will include the removal of litter and weeds. Weed control will include a combination of chemical treatment and manual removal.
- 3.5.5 Shrub maintenance will also include the removal of self-set trees and shrubs from grassed areas and around the curtilage of NBC owned properties.
- 3.5.6 During the growing season, shrubs will be maintained to ensure that they do not cause obstruction or damage, or present health and safety implications.

#### 3.6 **Budgets**

- 3.6.1 Northampton Borough Council received an allocation of £186,500 for the financial year 2012/13, from Northamptonshire County Council, for the Cyclic Highway maintenance agreement. This funding covers not only highways tree

and shrub maintenance, but also grass cutting and weed control on adopted highways.

3.6.2 NBC have allocated £331,157 from the general Fund as expenditure on trees within the contract payment to Enterprise.

3.6.3 Unfortunately, the element of the HRA budget that contributes to the contract payment in relation to trees is not shown as a separate item. The HRA contributes a total of £796,891 to the contract payment, but this includes all aspects of grounds maintenance and cleansing on Housing land.

### **3.7 Choices (Options)**

3.7.1 That the Performance Unit continue to monitor the contract with Enterprise, to ensure that the requirements of the contract are met.

## **4. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **4.1 Policy**

None

### **4.2 Resources and Risk**

None

### **4.3 Legal**

4.3.1 None

### **4.4 Equality**

4.4.1 None

### **4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)**

4.5.1 None

### **4.6 Other Implications**

4.6.1 None

## **5. Background Papers**

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5.1 None

**Mick Tyrrell, Contract Manager Ext. 8437**