

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 14 SEPTEMBER 2010

REPORT BY THE HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

9. AUTUMN LEAF FALL CLEARANCE: IMPLICATIONS OF ACHIEVING
MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN SAVINGS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To advise on the implications of ceasing the autumn leaf clearance programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	
(A)	The option for ceasing provision of leaf clearance be considered; and
(B)	The Executive be advised of any recommendations.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Leaf clearance is a non statutory service provided seasonally through the Councils street cleansing contractor. Typically operations take place between November and early January, the periods of heaviest leaf fall. The exact timing varies according to weather conditions.
- 1.2 The Council's street cleansing service is designed to remove litter and detritus from streets according to need. The frequencies are set to remove the detritus in accordance with the Environmental Protection Act (1990) - Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse, which governs how long an authority has to clean a road once its cleanliness has fallen below standard.
- 1.3 The County Council, as the Highways Authority, has the statutory responsibility to maintain the highway in a safe condition. This could include the removal of leaves from footpaths and roads if they represented a safety hazard. If the leaves are not removed they will gradually decompose and form detritus, usually found in road channels and against 'back lines' on footpaths, i.e. against walls, fences and under hedges. Leaves are not litter and there is

no legal requirement to remove them until they lose their form and become detritus.

- 1.4 In addition to regular street cleansing operations, additional autumn leaf fall clearance is undertaken. This is known as the 'leafing schedule'. This lists those roads that historically have experienced heavy leaf fall. Some roads require leaf removal once but some locations require several visits. The schedule is neither exclusive nor exhaustive and other locations will be cleared as required.
- 2.0 Report
- 2.1 The cost of additional cleansing resources to tackle leafing was £53,750 in 2009/10 which covered a period of 10 weeks (2 vehicles and 6 operatives). This sum is contained within the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2011/12.
- 2.2 The current contractor employs additional resources to undertake leaf clearance. Leaf clearance has been included as an option in the new Refuse, Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract currently out to tender. This will enable the council to choose whether or not to include this activity in the contract, dependant upon price. The future cost (and therefore the potential savings of ceasing this activity) will be known in November.
- 2.3 The leaf clearance schedule currently comprises of 215 roads that are cleared of leaves. Of these 34 are currently cleansed on a regular basis of at least once a fortnight, so could be cleared of leaves on a regular basis during the heavy leaf fall period.
- 2.4 However, the majority of roads (117), have a channel cleanse on a 5 weekly rotation, so will have leaves removed twice during the leafing period, but only from the channels in the road and the leaves on the footpaths and verges will not be removed. Of these roads it is considered that some 52 (44%) represent a high risk of complaints if leaves are not cleared. A further 8 roads have a full cleanse of road, footpaths and verge on a five weekly frequency. It is considered that one of these represents a high risk of complaint generation if not cleared of leaves, other than at the scheduled cleansing frequency.
- 2.5 27 of the roads, are in rural locations which are cleansed on a 13 weekly rotation, so may be cleaned only once during the season or possibly if scheduled to be cleaned in late October will not be cleaned during leaf fall, not being due again until late January. 13

(48%) of these are considered a high risk in terms of complaint generation.

- 2.6 The remaining roads do not have a scheduled cleanse and it is believed that 2 of these are a high risk for complaints.
- 2.7 The Council will be unable to respond to ad hoc requests to clear leaves and would refer complaints to the County Council (Herts Highways). Discussions between senior officers indicate that the County Council may choose not to clear leaves and may cone off footways where wet leaves represent a slip hazard.
- 2.8 Residents have become used to this service and in roads affected expect that the Council will remove the leaves. Ceasing this service will doubtless generate dissatisfaction. It is unlikely that many residents will appreciate the division of responsibility between this Council and Herts Highways and therefore their dissatisfaction will be directed at East Herts, who have been providing the service, rather than Herts Highways.
- 2.9 Of the roads on the leafing schedule, 19 are also listed as at risk of flooding. There will be an increased risk of flooding, with a potential for a rise in damage to land and property, if leaves are not cleared from these roads as they may block drainage gullies. Complaints or concerns about these roads flooding may increase although the actual risk is dependent on weather conditions and is difficult to predict.
- 2.10 East Herts Council has a statutory function to investigate causes of flooding and may issue a legal notice to require a land owner to take action to mitigate a flood risk.
- 2.11 Ceasing provision of this service is likely to generate a high level of complaints. In 2008/09 requests for service/complaints totalled 128 and in 2009/10 140. It is expected that these numbers would increase significantly if the service were withdrawn. In residents surveys street scene services rank among the highest in importance and any perceived reduction in provision may impact upon public satisfaction with the Council as a whole.
- 2.12 Should Members decide not to withdraw the leaf clearance programme then the savings allowed for in the MTFP will have to be found elsewhere.

3.0 Consultation

- 3.1 The other nine district/borough Councils in Hertfordshire were consulted regarding their practice on leaf clearance. One authority, with an urban area, maintain a four weekly sweep mechanical sweeping schedule all year round and will respond to ad hoc requests, but this is only for cleansing road channels.
- 3.2 Two authorities have the leaf clearance service imbedded as part of the cleansing tasks in their contract. Whilst no separate payment is made or identifiable, doubtless the contractor will have included the cost of leaf clearance in their prices.
- 3.3 Another authority, which has a DSO (in-house staff), employs additional resources during the autumn, of one additional vehicle and three operatives.
- 3.4 One other authority arranges clearance of priority roads, i.e. those most prone to flooding, at weekends.
- 3.5 It should be noted that East Herts is much larger in geographical area and less dense than other Hertfordshire district councils and comparison of resource levels employed are not meaningful.

Background Papers

None.

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ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

<p>Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives <i>(delete as appropriate):</i></p>	<p>Promoting prosperity and well-being; providing access and opportunities <i>Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.</i></p> <p>Fit for purpose, services fit for you <i>Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.</i></p> <p>Pride in East Herts <i>Improve standards of the neighbourhood and environmental management in our towns and villages.</i></p> <p>Leading the way, working together <i>Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.</i></p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>East Herts Engineering Team, all Borough & District Councils in Hertfordshire.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Financial:</p>	<p>£53,750 shortfall in MTFP if leaf clearance not discontinued, subject to new contract prices.</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>There are no direct Human Resources implications. However, there may be a seasonal additional workload associated with complaint handling.</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>Increased risk of flooding, road traffic and pedestrian accidents if Herts Highways do not respond to requests to make highway safe. Public dissatisfaction.</p>

Community and Cultural Services
Medium Term Financial Plan 2011/12
Leaf Clearance

<p>Budget line description of activities/service :</p>	<p>Service activity: Provision of an autumn leaf clearance service. This activity is provided in addition to normal street cleansing operations.</p> <p>Option: To cease provision of autumn leaf clearance.</p> <p>Cost Saving: c. £54,000 per annum.</p> <p>This sum is based on the 2009/10 contract prices. The Refuse, Recycling and Street Cleansing contract is currently out to tender. This activity is 'optional' in the new contract, i.e. the Council can choose whether or not to take up this element. The ongoing cost will be known once tenders have been evaluated in November.</p> <p>The task involves collecting leaves from roads that have a history of high levels of leaf fall. The contractor brings in additional staff and vehicles to undertake this work so that normal street cleansing operations are not disrupted.</p> <p>Environmental Services has developed a list of 215 roads that require this service.</p> <p>Hertfordshire County Council, (Herts Highways) is the body responsible for Highway safety / obstructions and this includes safety issues arising from wet leaves. East Herts Council has no obligation to remove leaves (they are not litter), until they eventually degrade to become detritus.</p>
<p>Impact of reduction:</p>	<p>Significant increase in complaints and possibly public dissatisfaction with the Council as a service provider. This would be limited to the autumn months and the extent dependant upon weather conditions.</p> <p>Complaints/requests for service to be referred to Herts Highways. It is unlikely that the County Council will provide or fund this service.</p>

	There is a possibility of a negative impact on measured street cleansing performance (National Indicator NI195)
Risk management issues:	Increased risk of flooding if Herts Highways do not remove leaves that are or could cause a blockage to gully's and drainage systems. There is a risk that road traffic accidents and pedestrian slips and falls could increase if leaves are not cleared.
Human Resource issues:	No quantifiable immediate HR issues. However, it is likely that there would be an increase in complaints and enquiries during the Autumn.
Sensitivity: (high, medium, low)	High. This is a highly visible and valued service to some sectors of the District.
Options/ alternatives:	<p>a) Continue with provision but this will result in shortfall in MTFP.</p> <p>b) Focus only on those roads where officers believe that there are higher risks of complaints / flooding. However, this approach would be inequitable and as indicated, the Council would not be in a position to respond to complaints at other locations.</p> <p>c) Focus only on those roads where there is a higher risk of flooding.</p>