



GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICES

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

REPORT 54/14

14 JULY 2014

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with the latest information from the Isle of Wight Council on the current extent and costs of their Grounds Maintenance services in Ventnor as the basis for responding to the planned closure of these services at 31 March 2015.

No. DETAIL

1) BACKGROUND

- a) As Members are aware, the Isle of Wight Council's need to achieve a Budget reduction of £28M by the financial year 2016/7 has prompted a decision to withdraw funding from a range of their current discretionary services of which Grounds Maintenance is one.
- b) Councillor Steve Stubbings, the Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk met with Head of Service Alex Minns, Commercial Manager Sean Newton and Recreation & Public Spaces Manager Lee Matthews at Enterprise House on Thursday 20 February for an initial discussion of the consequences for the town of that decision, as reported to the Town Council meeting of 10 March 2014.
- c) It is now clear that the provision of the Ground Maintenance services will cease on 31 March 2015 and the Town Council needs to take a view on how it will respond to that reality.
- d) The issues were discussed at a meeting arranged by the County Training Partnership on 23 May for Clerks and Councillors that I attended along with County Councillor Steve Stubbings following which a meeting focusing on Grounds Maintenance services has now been arranged by the Partnership for 23 July at County Hall and I have booked in to attend that.

2) SERVICES AND COSTS

- a) The list of the areas currently serviced by the existing arrangements the Isle of Wight Council has in place for the Grounds Maintenance service in Ventnor is attached to this report.
- b) The 27 areas listed for Grounds Maintenance activity carry a current annual total cost of £89,519 and, along with other Town and Parish Councils that include Principal Parks in their area of responsibility, it has been made clear in the initial discussions that managing them is not only beyond our budget but given their importance to the Island's tourist offer, there is no case for the cost being borne solely by the residents of the towns in which they sit.
- c) The list contains two Principal Parks: Ventnor Park at a cost of £38,160 and the Cascades at £10,587. Removing their costs from the total reduces the funding requirement to £40,772.
- d) There are five other areas on the list – coloured in red – where for one reason or another the costs will no longer apply. They total £10,636 and their removal reduces the funding requirement for the remainder to £30,136.

3) OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- a) There may well be other areas on the list where developments other than continuing with Council funding can be assessed.
- b) It has been suggested, for example, that the National Trust, whose lands surround the Nansen Mill LNR, may be interested in taking over responsibility for it.
- c) Another suggestion has been that a more detailed assessment of each of the other areas may reveal some where maintenance is either no longer necessary or at least not to the current specification.

4) DEVOLUTION?

- a) Although these discussions take place within a context usually described as 'devolution of services' this obscures the fact that the essential element of devolution – local control – is likely

to be absent from the arrangements currently under discussion.

- b) While this Report isn't recommending a Boston Tea Party style rebellion, their message of 'no taxation without representation' is one both the Town Council and the town's residents might want to discuss before agreeing to simply take on the costs of service provision by signing up to pay a share of existing contracts without any further influence on delivery.
- c) The Clerks of larger town and parish councils present at the meeting in London I attended on Friday 11 July that already run genuinely devolved services were very clear indeed that the value of the change was the ability to decide when action to solve problems reported to them could be taken rather than simply passing on the concerns or complaints to the principal authority as had been the case prior to devolution.

5) RECOMMENDATION

Members are recommended to:

- i) inform the Isle of Wight Council that the Town Council is committed to funding the continuation of the existing contractual arrangements for Grounds Maintenance subject to agreement on a list of areas that exclude those identified in red on the attached list and the removal or re-arrangement for others to be identified by 30 September 2015;
 - ii) ask the Public Buildings Working Group and the Clerks to make all necessary arrangements to assess the situation and needs of the remaining sites and report back to the Town Council meeting of 8 September 2015;
 - iii) authorise expenditure up to £250 for any related expenditure, including publicity, from the Green Ventnor budget line.
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