

**DUBLIN CITY COUNCIL**  
**NORTH CENTRAL AREA COMMITTEE**  
**15<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

**Area Matters B: Grass Maintenance Contract**

A number of areas of complaint of poor grass maintenance were identified at last month's Area Committee meeting. It was assumed that these areas were under contract and that the contractor was not meeting the requirements of the Maintenance Contract 2016-2020. Upon investigation it was found that the areas in question are maintained by direct labour and are not under contract.

Due in part to some staff self-isolating, but mainly the need to achieve social distancing, reduced man hours and resources have been available to the Parks Service as with every other service during the covid event. Because covid signage and emergency response has been prioritised over routine maintenance it has taken longer to get around to all grass maintenance areas, however as restrictions relax all areas will begin to return to normal as resources allow.

Grass maintenance at this time of year whether by contract or by direct labour is a challenge as the spring growth surge can result in 4 inches of growth in a week leading to complaints even when the grass had been cut within the last 7 days. In a couple of weeks the growth rate will subside and so will the number of complaints.

Furthermore a number of the complaints referred to longer grass at the edges of open spaces, under railings and around trees as being unsightly. This is a consequence of the cessation of spraying of herbicides in the public realm, a policy change adopted and supported by the full council. While there are many benefits to this policy change in terms of pollinators, biodiversity, public health and quality of the water entering Dublin Bay it does mean that longer grass and opportunist native flowers and plants will be more evident in the public realm. This policy is being reflected in the next contract documents to be put out to tender later this year. Prices are being sought to have these areas which cannot be mown conventionally strimmed once or twice during the growing season which will keep the growth at these boundaries somewhat in check but the scorched earth approach that pertained in the past will no longer be the norm.

The Council is also committed to the National Pollinator Plan and has been carrying out wilding initiatives, planting of wildflowers, implementing differential mowing regimes and identifying areas that do not need to be cut. These initiatives have been promoted in the media but do not suit everybody's personal aesthetic and can be seen by some as not being neat and tidy but the positive feedback has far outweighed the negative.

The advice remains that complaints about grass cutting should be forwarded to [parks@dublincity.ie](mailto:parks@dublincity.ie) with details and precise location where they can be logged in the Customer Response Management system and forwarded to the Parks District Supervisor in the first instance (as is required by the terms of the contract) and if appropriate the Parks Contracts Manager.

The level of complaints about grass cutting is actually quite low; 6 complaints were received directly by email (3 referred to the same estate came in one representation) re grass cutting in the North Central Area; 5 of which referred to areas cut by direct labour and 1 that claimed that the contractor had shredded litter when maintaining verges which was investigated but no shredded litter could be found at the reported locus. 8 complaints re grass cutting have been received in the last 4 weeks at the on the [parks@dublincity.ie](mailto:parks@dublincity.ie) email 6 of which referred to areas maintained by direct labour and 2 referred to the verge cutting contract.

It has been the experience of the Parks Service that the contractors are quite anxious to rectify problems as soon as they arise as the contract does specify quite punitive penalties if such disputes are not resolved. The main issue that arises is the level of dumping on open

space in some locations that can prevent areas being cut. As such excessive dumping is not part of the maintenance contract the contracts manager works quite closely with the contractor and local management to have areas cleared in advance of scheduled maintenance visits. Some areas of public open space under grass have been maintained under contract since 2008. As this is the 4<sup>th</sup> and final year of this contract everyone involved is more than familiar with their areas and the requirements of the contract.

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As you have referred to below I have only been in my current role in DCC since 2017 and have worked with 3 different contract managers whose role has in this time been always much wider than just the grass cutting contract and included the management of the invasive species control contract. My experience has been that the contractors are quite anxious to rectify problems as soon as they arise as the contract does specify quite punitive penalties if such disputes are not resolved. I have been advised by colleagues with more experience of this issue that the role of Contracts Manager predates this phase of the grass maintenance contract by many years and has always included the management of other contracts and some other city-wide corporate matter. Also it seems from earlier Contract Documents available on the server that some areas of public open space under grass have been maintained under contract since 2008. I believe the phrase 'Newly Appointed Contracts Manager' in the notes of the meeting referred to a newly appointed individual rather than a newly created role. The Contracts Manager's salary is not part of the tender price. The notes do not seem suggest that the Contracts Manager would exclusively work on the grass maintenance contract but would supervise same adequately and deal with all complaints in a timely manner. As this is the 4<sup>th</sup> and final year of this contract everyone involved is more than familiar with their areas and the requirements of the contract.