

**The Chairman and Members of
North West Area Committee.**

Meeting: 20th September 2022

Item No: 11

**Report to the North West Area Committee on the new Grass Maintenance Contract
September 2022**

The new Landscape Maintenance contract 2022-2025 commenced the 1st May 2022. Objectives of the new contract include the introduction of a performance standard approach to grass maintenance, a better verification methodology, more robust dispute resolution mechanism with defined penalties for non-performance and provide for a more environmentally friendly and sustainable approach with regard to grass maintenance. The new contract also includes measures that will continue to support the Council's commitment to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan including; the replacement of chemical weed control with physical removal of overgrowth at the edges of paths and strimming along walls and under railings twice a season; differential and reduced mowing regimes particularly in environmentally sensitive areas along rivers and native hedgerows etc.; and flexibilities to allow for the establishment of wildflower rich swards and spring bulb planting areas where appropriate.

As has been widely discussed the contract to maintain verges outside residents' homes in the City has not been renewed as this work was neither quantifiable nor verifiable and often these areas were inaccessible to the contractors due to parked cars. Rather it is expected that residents would now adopt the public face of their properties and maintain these verges as they best see fit as is the case in all other Dublin Authority areas. Many residents, residents' associations and tidy towns groups already undertook this work maintaining the verges outside homes and at entrances to estates to a very high standard and further enhancing these spaces with planting around trees, signs and name stones. It is appreciated that this change may present a challenge for some older or infirm residents but it anticipated that neighbours and residents' association would be most aware of where such residents live in their community and might provide assistance in this regard, again as is the case in our sister Dublin authority areas. It is however recognized that delays in the start of the new contract this year mainly due to the sheer scale of the exercise and the mapping process and the acknowledged failings around communicating the message did mean that grass in these verges had become quite long before residents had been fully informed. Verges not outside residences such as those at the entrances to estates and contiguous with open spaces will continue to be maintained by contract and have been included on the maintenance maps provided to the contractors.

As can be expected with new contracts of such a scale, “teething problems” were experienced during the initial stages of roll out. A significant issue, which affected service levels, was linked to contractor awaiting new machinery to fulfil demands of the new contract, with specific machinery required to cut certain areas throughout the district. This issue was directly linked to supply chain issues experienced in all sectors currently. Once required machinery was attained, it improved service significantly. The roll out was further compounded by the start date of the contract in May so that the grass was quite long when maintenance commenced, this significantly slowed progress and meant the contractors were trying to catch up from day 1. The complaints received in these early weeks mostly related to areas of open space or verges that were missed. Each complaint was investigated and brought to the contractor’s attention and was usually addressed quite quickly.

In recent weeks it is evident that a significant majority of residents and/or their neighbours are maintaining the grass margins outside their homes, with estimates of 10 percent or less of the verges yet to be adopted by the householder. It is intended to carry out a more detailed review of this change later in the autumn.

Les Moore
City Parks Superintendent