

Date: 7th September 2022

**To: The chairperson and members of
North Central Area Committee**

Meeting: 19th September, 2022.

Item No.

**REPORT ON THE NEW GRASS CUTTING CONTRACT FOR THE
SEPTEMBER MEETING OF THE NORTH CENTRAL AREA COMMITTEE**

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, a more robust dispute resolution mechanism with defined penalties for non-performance and to 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. 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 which has 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. The main reasons for this areas being missed in the early weeks was either the area was mapped and was included under new contract but missed by new contractor staff still familiarising themselves with areas to be cut, or the missed areas including areas of verge which are quite small on the scale of these maps were omitted in the original mapping process. These areas are now recorded and mapped and updated maps have been supplied to the contractors.

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.

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