

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	12 March 2018
Report of the	-	Executive Director of Business Operations
Subject	-	East Sussex County Council: grass verge cutting

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**Recommendation:** It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the actions proposed by East Sussex County Council in relation to changes to the countywide grass verge cutting schedule in Bexhill are noted; and
  - 2) the practical concerns at the proposals are passed to East Sussex County Council.
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**Service Manager: Brenda Mason**  
**Lead Cabinet Members: Councillor Hollidge**

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## Introduction

1. At its 2018/19 budget setting meeting on 6 February 2018 East Sussex County Council (ESCC) approved a motion to reduce expenditure on grass cutting in urban areas in order to offset increasing costs in meeting its social care duties. The report and minutes can be found on the ESCC website at: <https://democracy.eastsussex.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MId=2974&Ver=4>
2. This report advises Members on the implications of these savings requirement for Rother communities.

## Impact of cuts

3. The reduction in budget reduces the number of grass cuts that ESCC will now undertake with immediate effect. Urban grass cuts will be reduced from the current six per season to two per season from 1 April 2018. Rural grass cutting will remain as currently with two 1m swathe plus visibility splay cuts per season.
4. The ESCC Director for Communities, Economy & Transport has written to Rother District Council (RDC) as follows:  
  
*"I appreciate that this is disappointing news for local communities. However, we need to continue to provide services within very challenging financial constraints whilst at the same time managing an increasing demand for important services including schools and social care."*
5. The impact of the reduction in service will be most noticeable in the urban areas, especially Bexhill. In reducing the urban grass cutting service from six to

two cuts per season, ESCC will effectively be managing urban grass for safety reasons only, with the consequential amenity and visual impact.

### **Proposal from ESCC to mitigate the impact of cuts**

6. Recognising that grass verges in urban centres have an important aesthetic and amenity function for the community, ESCC is offering the following options for consideration:
  - a. RDC to take over the grass cutting service currently provided by ESCC, with a financial contribution from ESCC equivalent to the value of two urban grass cuts based on current ESCC contract rates; for the urban area of Bexhill, this contribution will be in the region of £7,054 per annum.
  - b. RDC to pay for additional urban grass cuts on top of the two cuts per season provided by ESCC. To maintain the current standard of six cuts this would cost RDC in the region of £14,109 per annum for the urban area of Bexhill.

### **Way Forward**

7. It is disappointing to hear of this proposal from ESCC with only two weeks before implementation, particularly as RDC has just set its budget for 2018/19. There is therefore no opportunity for the Council to consider funding options for 2018/19.
8. We know that the appearance of the residential verges, not only in Bexhill but also in the rural towns, villages and areas, is important to residents and assists in the overall care and maintenance of the public domain. Furthermore, once verges start looking uncared for then other nuisances such as fly-tipping and litter may follow.
9. It should also be noted there are consequential impacts for weed growth and street sweeping that are already impacting on our street cleansing and litter collection operations. Waste and recycling bin collection is to some extent adversely impacted by long grass verges. Further, the build-up of grass and weeds contributes to the blockage of drains and gullies which are then not able to cope with storm and surface water flooding, leading to difficult driving conditions and risk to property.
10. If Members are minded to take over verge cutting in Bexhill, using the contribution from ESCC, then consideration also needs to be given to how the rural towns, villages and areas are dealt with.
11. Whilst RDC could ask its current grounds maintenance contractor if they are willing to carry out the grass cutting, a contract procurement exercise would still need to be undertaken. There is no guarantee that this would be at the price currently charged by the ESCC contractor. This would have to be built into staff work programmes and in terms of specification, procurement and on-going monitoring, would demand a fairly considerable resource. Insurance and liability consideration of the Council's contractor working on the highway would also need to be investigated and considered.

12. With option b, although paying the additional £14,000 directly to ESCC in order to preserve the maintenance, amenity and safety features of verges cut six times per season, will deal with the Bexhill urban area, this sum will not cover the rural towns, villages and areas and, given that RDC has already set its budget for 2018/19, additional equivalent savings will need to be identified.

## **Conclusion**

13. Given the discussion above, it is recommended that the actions of ESCC are noted and that ESCC are advised of RDC's practical concerns at the cutbacks to the countywide grass verge cutting schedule in Bexhill.

Dr Anthony Leonard  
Executive Director of Business Operations

## **Risk Assessment Statement**

The consequence of a reduced level of grass cutting will be an increase in weeds and detritus build up. This may have implications on the street cleansing contract that may lead to challenges by the contractor and additional costs to the Council.

A further risk is that the number of complaints directed at RDC over grass cutting will increase despite this not being our responsibility.