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# CONTENTS

	<b>Page Number</b>
Chair's Foreword	1
Summary of Recommendations	2
Introduction/Background Information	6
Chapter 1: Communications with elected Members	13
Chapter 2: Members influencing the delivery of landscaping services in their wards	18
Chapter 3: Revenue opportunities	22
Conclusion	27
<b>Appendix 1</b> - Terms of Reference	28
<b>Appendix 2</b> - Witnesses	32
<b>Appendix 3</b> - Timeline of Activities	33
<b>Appendix 4</b> – Landscaping data: 1st – January – 31st December 2013	35

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## **Completed**

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## **FOREWORD**

The reason we, as a group, decided to scrutinise landscaping was because Redditch is a very green Borough with a great number of trees, a lot of open spaces and abundant areas with grass and hedges. In short, a beautiful place to live. We, as Councillors, probably get more queries about this subject than any other. I realised what a huge job it is to keep Redditch “well groomed” and attractive and was keen to see how this was achieved by our operatives and the mindset behind their work. We wanted to be able to inform other Councillors and the public how landscaping operatives delivered their service and what their remit was.

Our Task Group review was very timely as the whole process was undergoing transformation and at present we have the “new approach” and the traditional service both ongoing and starting to merge together. A new holistic idea was being delivered in Winyates called “place” which we found very exciting.

The subject we tried to cover was immense and we underwent field trips to see the operatives at work. We interviewed the place team and managers. We looked at the way data is logged and used by Environmental Services and even looked at what approaches could be adopted to create revenue for landscaping.

I should like to thank Jess Bayley for her invaluable help, advice and hard work. Guy Revans, Emma Aldrick, Carl Walker, Chris Franklin, Sue Horrobin, Dave Kesterton and Neil Partridge were very open and honest with us, answering our questions totally and providing all the information we needed.

All the Task Group, myself, Councillor Mike Braley, Councillor Mike Chalk, Councillor Joe Baker and Councillor Yvonne Smith, were very keen, interested and worked hard to come to our recommendations. We have put forward seven recommendations which we hope will be adopted and prove useful.



**Councillor Gay Hopkins**  
**Chair of the Landscaping Task Group**

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Chapter 1: Communications with elected Members**

#### **Recommendation 1**

**New Members should be invited to visit teams responsible for tree maintenance, landscaping and cleansing services as part of the Member Induction process to provide them with an opportunity to learn about the work of these teams.**

- a) A short briefing outlining the work of the place intervention, tree intervention and landscaping teams should be provided prior to a Council meeting early in the municipal year to provide those Members who are unable to participate in the member induction visit with an opportunity to learn about the work of these teams.**

**Financial Implications:** There are no direct financial implications arising from this recommendation except in terms of the Officer time required to organise and facilitate the visit.

**Legal implications:** There are no legal implications for the Council.

#### **Recommendation 2**

**A contact list of key senior and operational Officers, containing the telephone and email details together with basic information about the Officers' responsibilities, should be provided for the consideration of Members.**

**Financial Implications:** There are no direct financial implications arising from this recommendation except in relation to the Officer time required to clarify the contact details and the key areas of responsibility for the Officers recorded on the list.

**Legal implications:** There are no legal implications for the Council.

### **Recommendation 3**

**Members should be provided with updates on progress made addressing landscaping issues that they have referred to Officers at the request of residents including at the point of resolution.**

**Financial Implications:** As landscaping and cleansing operatives are already encouraged to update both residents and Councillors who report landscaping issues to the Council there are no direct financial implications arising from this recommendation.

**Legal implications:** There are no legal implications for the Council.

### **Chapter 2: Members influencing the delivery of landscaping services in their wards**

### **Recommendation 4**

**Data relating to landscaping cases reported for each area be provided for Members' consideration on an annual basis. Every Member should receive data for the areas they cover.**

**Financial Implications:** There are no direct financial implications arising from this report except with respect to the time required from Officers to produce this data. The information is stored on the Environmental Services 'M3' system, an electronic database. Officers have provided this data for the areas within the five wards covered by Members of the group and Members were assured that it did not take much time to provide this data. Members do not feel it would be an onerous task to provide this data for every Councillor, covering the twelve wards within the Borough, if it was only required on an annual basis.

**Legal implications:** There are no legal implications for the Council.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**One of the Environmental Services teams' performance measures should be to monitor the number of landscape cases that take longer than six months to resolve. The information obtained through this monitoring process should be reported in the strategic measures for the consideration of Senior Officers and elected Members.**

**Financial Implications:** There are no direct financial implications arising from this recommendation except in relation to the Officer time required to obtain and monitor the information.

**Legal implications:** There are no legal implications for the Council.

### **Chapter 3: Revenue Opportunities**

#### **Recommendation 6**

**Officers should undertake a feasibility study, risk assessment and cost benefit analysis to assess the potential for the Council to bulk plant trees in Council open spaces and other appropriate locations. This feasibility study should take into account the following matters:**

- a) **The legal implications, if any, of this action.**
- b) **The financial costs involved in planting and maintaining these plants.**
- c) **The availability of grants from the government and other sources to help pay for bulk planting in the Borough.**
- d) **Demand within the market.**
- e) **Where bulk planting would take place in the Borough.**
- f) **The size of the plots available for bulk planting.**
- g) **The implications for the Council's Planning Department in relation to the Local Plan.**
- h) **The potential revenue that could be accrued by the Council.**

**Financial Implications:** At this stage the group is simply proposing that Officers investigate this idea further through completing a feasibility study. There are no financial implications arising from this proposal, except with regard to the Officer time that would be required to conduct this study.

The group is keen to ensure that this option is investigated further as Members believe that bulk planting could potentially yield revenue for the Council in the future.

**Legal Implications:** Legally local authorities are not permitted to make a profit or to compete with the private sector. These legal requirements would need to be taken into account as part of any feasibility study. The Council would also need to ensure that if bulk planting does take place at a future date any revenue accrued from this action would be reinvested in service delivery.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**Officers should investigate how to dispose of logs in a way that would maximise income for the Council. Part of this investigation should involve a risk assessment. Any revenue from these sales should be reinvested in landscaping services.**

**Financial Implications:** At this stage the group is simply proposing that Officers investigate this idea further through completing a feasibility study. There are no financial implications arising from this proposal, except with regard to the Officer time that would be required to conduct this study.

The group is keen to ensure that this option is investigated further as they feel that the Council could derive more revenue from log sales. Officers have confirmed that there may be opportunities available to enable the Council to increase revenue in this area.

**Legal implications:** Legally local authorities are not permitted to make a profit or to compete with the private sector. These legal requirements would need to be taken into account as part of any feasibility study. The Council would also need to ensure that if bulk planting does take place at a future date any revenue accrued from this action would be reinvested in service delivery.

## **INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The subject of landscaping was initially raised as a topic that would potentially be suitable for further scrutiny during an Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Event in June 2013. During this event a number of elected Members identified landscaping issues as a subject that was frequently raised by residents for their consideration. Due to the interest of the local community in the subject the Overview and Scrutiny Committee concluded that it would be appropriate to launch a review of landscaping services in the Borough.

The group was commissioned to address two key objectives:

- To identify actions that could be taken to enable Environmental Services Officers to more effectively communicate with elected Members about their work.
- To get involved with and influence delivery of the Environmental Services interventions in their wards.

Members were also required to obtain further information about the Council's current approach to delivering landscaping services within the Borough and to clarify the powers of local government in relation to tree roots impacting on pavements and landscaping issues involving private properties.

The review took place at a time of significant change within Environmental Services at the Council. The ultimate objective of these changes was to enable Officers to adapt services in order to meet the Council's Strategic Purposes, a set of principles designed to focus service delivery on the needs of the customer rather than on simply implementing services in line with established practice. The key strategic purpose influencing changes to Environmental Services was the aim to 'Keep Our Place Safe and Looking Good'.

In this context the group found that their review coincided with a transitional phase in service delivery. They encountered three approaches to delivering landscaping services, including two methods which were being delivered as part of extended trials:

### 1) The Trees Intervention

A new approach to managing and maintaining trees across the Borough was launched in early 2013. The aim of this intervention was to reduce the amount of time spent on actions which did not lead to any discernible positive outcomes for the customer. Officers chose to focus on trees during this trial rather than hedges or grass cutting because of the high volume of trees in the Borough and the significant amount of enquiries received from residents about trees on an annual basis.

Prior to the introduction of the trees intervention the process for managing trees within the Borough had been more time consuming and resource



intensive. In the first instance an inspector had responded to an enquiry received from a customer and had assessed the need for action. Tree surgeons had then visited the tree and had been required to undertake maintenance works in line with written instructions provided by the inspector. Any additional landscaping issues observed by the surgeons could not be addressed at that stage but needed to be reported back to senior Officers and further inspections would then take place. Feedback to the customers, when available, would also be provided by senior Officers rather than the tree surgeons.

During the trial intervention the tree surgeons have been empowered to respond to customer enquiries directly. Where necessary the tree surgeons can still interact with senior Officers to obtain advice about more complicated cases using portable electronic devices. However, the surgeons have been provided with greater discretion to assess each case and to determine what action, if any, needs to be taken to address the resident's concerns. The tree surgeons can also resolve any other problems involving a tree or trees in that area which they might observe whilst on site, without having to refer back to an inspector.

The tree surgeons are also required to interact directly with the customer about each tree case. Wherever possible this should include face to face consultations about the work that can be undertaken to address a problem. Tree surgeons are also encouraged to explain the reasons why it may not be possible to undertake the work requested by a customer.

The group was advised at the start of the review that during the trial a backlog had developed in the number of tree cases that needed to be resolved within the Borough. The causes of these delays were numerous and included:

- Staff vacancies arising during the period which reduced the resources available to the Council.
- The significant level of demand during the growing season in the spring and summer months.
- The tree surgeons taking on cases that previously might not have been addressed by the Council in order to meet the needs of the Customer (for example cases involving overgrown trees that were impacting on TV reception in local properties).
- The legal requirement not to undertake work on trees where birds are observed to be roosting during the nesting season.

By the end of the review Members were advised that this backlog had reduced significantly. The group is confident that as time progresses the lessons learned during the trees intervention will lead to a further reduction in this backlog.

The group met with a number of tree surgeons during a field trip to Woodrow in October 2013. The tree surgeons were very enthusiastic about the work

they were doing. In particular, unsolicited positive feedback received from customers, both face to face and in writing, has had a beneficial impact on the tree surgeons' job satisfaction.



The trees intervention team has to work on a range of cases. This includes resolving emergency cases such as this tree which fell on a property located on Bromfield Road in December 2013.

## 2) The Place Intervention

The place intervention was launched in July 2013. The purpose of this intervention was to trial a different approach to delivering Environmental Services in a specific location. Winyates was selected as the initial location for this intervention partly because Winyates was the focus for the Borough's Area of Highest Need project and also because Environmental Services operatives could learn from the Council's Housing Locality team which had a base in Winyates and had already trialed a different approach to delivering housing services in a specific location.

The group discovered during the review that the title 'place' encapsulated the focus of the team on improving the total environment in a given area. As part of the place trial operatives who had previously been employed to deliver distinct services, such as landscaping and cleansing services, have been required to work together in a unified Environmental Services team. Staff are

encouraged to learn from each other and to develop new skills so that in future they will become multi-functional operatives delivering an holistic service.

During the review Members learned that, as with the trees intervention, operatives involved in the place intervention have been provided with discretion to respond to customers' enquiries directly, rather than required to follow written instructions from an inspector. Staff work in zones within the locality where they are expected to take action in response to issues raised by residents as well as to identify other landscaping problems which may impact on the local community but which might not have been reported to the Council. In this context operatives involved in the place team should become increasingly familiar with the particular needs of their community and any landscaping issues which might recur in future years.

The Task Group visited the place team on two occasions; in November 2013 and January 2014. During these visits the group was advised about a number of actions that the operatives were taking which they felt were making a positive contribution to the local environment. This included:

- Operatives co-ordinating work so that landscaping and cleansing tasks took place at the same time thereby minimising disruption to the customer.
- Clearing drains and replacing drain covers.
- Emptying waste collection bins as and when required rather than in line with an established routine.
- Adopting a flexible approach to encourage residents to remove items disposed of through fly tipping in a more appropriate manner.
- Clearing Council house gardens prior to a tenant moving into the premises to enable the resident to have a manageable environment from the start of their tenancy.
- Interacting on a regular basis with local residents and businesses on a face to face basis thereby helping to develop good community relationships.
- Regular interaction with customers to ensure that they understood what action was being taken in response to their enquiries and received an explanation for any delays if these occurred.
- Removing shrubs and hedges impacting on the light in properties within the centre, thereby enabling residents to reduce electricity bills.
- Maintaining shrubs and plants beside footpaths to improve sightlines and feelings of safety within the community.
- Replacing bins in Winyates centre with new bins that have ashtrays attached to them.
- Removing or cleaning old and redundant signs.
- Clearing moss and grass from pathways to improve the appearance and safety of these paths for residents.

- Offering to provide assistance to residents and / or businesses in cases where, though the issue might not have been reported, the operatives had observed that these matters might have a negative impact on the local community.

Members have been advised that the Council is in the first phase of delivering the place intervention trial. During this first phase Officers are intending to clarify the varying requirements of Environmental Services in different geographical and topographical locations and to resolve long-standing and large scale problems within the environment so that they reach a standard where in future landscaping and cleansing services can be maintained at a manageable level.

The second phase of the intervention trial is not due to start until these initial lessons have been learned. During this second phase senior Officers will determine the size of geographical areas that operatives will be required to cover when delivering an holistic Environmental Service and the number of multi-skilled operatives required to work in each of these locations.

During the review Members concluded that the place approach to service delivery was positive for both staff, the wider community and the Council. In particular the opportunities provided for employees to learn new skills and to gain different experiences is considered likely to help motivate staff. In addition, Members recognise that the focus on the needs of the environment in a local area and on addressing problems observed by operatives familiar with that environment has the potential to benefit the community.



The place team undertook landscaping works in Sutton Close, Winyates, in October 2013 to improve the appearance of the local environment. These works may have also helped to reassure residents using the footpath in the background of this picture because as a consequence pedestrians now have a clear view of the surrounding area.

At the end of their review Members were advised that the place intervention was being expanded to take place outside Winyates. The first stage of this expansion has already started in Matchborough, though the place intervention approach to service delivery is also due to take place in Wythall in Bromsgrove district to enable Officers to identify service requirements in rural locations. In the long-term Officers have advised the group that they are intending to extend the place approach to service delivery across the whole of the Borough.

### 3) 'Traditional' Landscaping Services

A significant proportion of landscaping operatives employed by the Council continue to deliver their services in a more traditional manner. In line with this approach operatives continue to receive written instructions from inspectors about the landscaping work that needs to be undertaken. Tasks are not necessarily co-ordinated with the cleansing team, which remains separate. The landscaping operatives in this team operate throughout the Borough, though not within the locations covered by the place intervention team.

A number of modifications have, however, been made to the working practices of the traditional landscaping team within the last 18 months. This has included groups of landscaping operatives working in particular locations on specific dates to undertake extensive landscaping works. These projects should enable operatives to resolve landscaping problems and to ensure that in future minimal maintenance works are required at these locations.



The traditional Landscaping Team delivers a variety of services. For example, in 2013 landscaping operatives cleared this pathway in Woodrow to improve residents' access to residential buildings.

The traditional landscaping team, working with the trees intervention and place intervention teams where appropriate, has also increasingly been working in partnership with Worcestershire County Council. In particular Landscaping Officers and Highways Officers have co-operated over road closures on the main highways within the Borough and have undertaken works at the same time. As a consequence of this co-operation it has been possible for Officers to minimise the level of disruption experienced by local residents and businesses. At the same time the financial costs for the Council has reduced from £15,000 to £8,000 per road closure.

The Task Group were impressed by the work of all of the teams and the dedication of all staff. Members did recognise that the interventions will lead to improvements to service delivery as well as provide opportunities in the long-term for all operatives to learn new skills and to gain new experiences. However, they did identify a small number of additional actions that could be taken, as detailed in their recommendations, which are designed to help facilitate further improvements.

## **CHAPTER 1: COMMUNICATIONS WITH ELECTED MEMBERS**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee originally launched this review because Members reported that they consistently received enquiries from residents about landscaping services and it was felt that there was a need for Members to clarify how these services were delivered. The following three recommendations detail some of the actions that the group believes could be taken to improve the ways in which Environmental Services Officers communicate with as well as provide information about their services to elected Members.

<b>Recommendation 1</b>	<b>New Members should be invited to visit teams responsible for tree maintenance, landscaping and cleansing services as part of the Member Induction process to provide them with an opportunity to learn about the work of these teams.</b>  <b>a) A short briefing outlining the work of the place intervention, tree intervention and landscaping teams should be provided prior to a Council meeting early in the municipal year to provide those Members who are unable to participate in the member induction visit with an opportunity to learn about the work of these teams.</b>
<b>Financial Implications</b>	There are no direct financial implications arising from this recommendation except in terms of the Officer time required to organise and facilitate the visit.
<b>Legal Implications</b>	There are no legal implications for the Council.

During the review the group obtained a lot of information about the changing approach within the Council to delivering all Environmental Services. This information was obtained from a variety of sources, including formal interviews, written evidence and practical visits to observe staff working in the tree and place interventions.

The group concluded that the field trips in particular were a useful source of information for elected Members. These visits provided Members with an opportunity to observe staff in action and were considered to be more demonstrative of working practices than written reports and presentations. These visits also provided Members with an opportunity to further clarify the role of the trees intervention and place intervention teams and the benefits of the changes that they were pioneering both for the customer and for staff.

At the forthcoming elections in May 2014 there is the possibility that a number of new Members will be elected to serve on the Council. These new Members will not necessarily have the same background information about Council services that is available to more experienced elected Members. In a context where services are being transformed the group believes that new Members would particularly benefit from having an opportunity to participate in fieldtrips to observe staff in the trees and place interventions. This will ensure that new Members are able both to learn about service delivery through practical observation and to meet with useful contacts at the Council.

Concerns have been expressed by Officers about whether this proposal will represent value for money. This is because Officers would need to commit time to organising this type of field trip and the participation of sufficient number of Members would need to be secured to justify the expenditure on this process. The group is keen to address these concerns. For this reason Members are suggesting that it may be appropriate for the opportunity to visit the trees intervention and place intervention teams to be offered on a trial basis in 2014/15. Based on feedback received from new Members regarding the value of this experience and an analysis of the number of eligible Members who have participated a decision could be taken by the Member Development Steering Group as to whether to continue to offer this opportunity to new Members as part of the Member induction process in future years.

The group recognises that some new Members, particularly those with work commitments, may struggle to participate in a visit that would need to take place during daylight hours. In these circumstances the group concluded that it would be useful for this information to also be made available through alternative means. Members believe that a short briefing, delivered prior to a meeting of Council, would be the best way to achieve this objective.

Briefings on the subject of the place and tree interventions have in the past and continue to be provided at meetings of the Shared Services Board. However, the group is concerned that these meetings are not always well attended. By contrast, a meeting of Council, which all Members are scheduled to attend, is more likely to attract a greater audience of elected Members. A briefing before a Council meeting, therefore, is more likely to reach a larger audience of elected Members.



<b>Recommendation 2</b>	<b>A contact list of key senior and operational Officers, containing the telephone and email details together with basic information about the Officers' responsibilities, should be provided for the consideration of Members.</b>
<b>Financial Implications</b>	There are no direct financial implications arising from this recommendation except in relation to the Officer time required to clarify the contact details and the key areas of responsibility for the Officers recorded on the list.
<b>Legal Implications</b>	There are no legal implications for the Council.

Members of the group have commented during the course of the review that it is often helpful for Councillors to know which Officers to contact to discuss issues relating to particular services. Circulation of a list of contact details for relevant lead Officers representing each service area would therefore be useful for Members.

In previous years contact lists, containing basic contact details for senior Officers, has been provided for the consideration of Members. However, members of the group suggested that the content of these lists in the past had not always been easy to use; whilst job titles and contact details had been provided clarification had not always been available about the roles and responsibilities of those Officers. Where a description had been provided local government terminology had sometimes been used and this could be confusing for new Members in particular.

Consequently the group is proposing that a new contact list should be provided for the consideration of elected Members. As elections are due to take place in May 2014, and it is possible that a number of new Members who have no previous experience in local government will be elected to the Council, the group is suggesting that it would be useful for this contact list to be made available to Members in the new municipal year. Furthermore, wherever possible, the group is suggesting that updated versions of this list should be reissued to Members during the year, such as when there has been significant staff turnover or service restructuring, to ensure that Members retain access to relevant information.

<b>Recommendation 3</b>	<b>Members should be provided with updates on progress made addressing landscaping issues that they have referred to Officers at the request of residents including at the point of resolution.</b>
<b>Financial Implications</b>	As landscaping and cleansing operatives are already encouraged to update both residents and Councillors who report landscaping issues to the Council there are no direct financial implications arising from this recommendation.
<b>Legal Implications</b>	There are no legal implications for the Council.

During the review Members discussed their own experiences of receiving enquiries from residents about landscaping problems that had been observed in the local community. In many cases Members refer the issues reported by the resident to relevant Officers in the Environmental Services team and request that action be taken to resolve the issue. All environmental tasks, regardless of whether they are referred by a resident, Officer or Councillor are recorded on the services' central M3 database for future action.

In previous years regular updates were not always provided by Officers to residents or Councillors who had reported a landscaping problem to the Council. Early in the place and trees intervention process Officers learned that this lack of communication often caused frustration for both residents and Councillors. By contrast even brief communications explaining progress with a particular case and / or the reasons for any delays were generally appreciated by the customer.

Consequently, as part of the place intervention operatives are required to keep the individual(s) (including Councillors) who have reported an issue to the Council informed about any progress made with resolving the problem. This approach appears to be welcomed by residents and may have helped to contribute to reportedly good relationships between the operatives and the local community, particularly in Winyates where the place intervention trial has been taking place for some time.

The group has been advised that the place approach to service delivery is due to be extended across the Borough by approximately the start of winter 2014. As such these enhanced communications should become standard practice within the next 12 months, though senior Officers have advised the group that all Environmental Services operatives are being encouraged to encompass improved communications into their working practices with immediate effect.

Despite this the group concurs that it is important to reiterate the need for elected Members to be kept informed about progress with issues that they have raised on behalf of local residents. This is particularly useful for elected Members as it ensures that they can keep concerned residents updated and answer any further enquiries that may be received from the local community on the subject.

## **CHAPTER 2: MEMBERS INFLUENCING THE DELIVERY OF LANDSCAPING SERVICES IN THEIR WARDS**

Another key objective of the review was for Members to influence the delivery of landscaping services in their wards. Elected Members have knowledge about issues impacting on their wards which may not be available to Officers. This knowledge may have developed over time as a result of frequent interaction with constituents both in person and in writing. In some cases Members will be in a position to provide a solution to a problem impacting on a resident without the matter needing to be referred on to Officers.

The knowledge that elected Members have about the areas within their wards and the particular needs of local communities can be invaluable to Council services. In particular, the place intervention approach to service delivery, which involves a holistic approach to delivering services that meet the needs of the local community and the environment in which they live, could benefit from the local knowledge of elected Members.

The group recognises that elected Members can make positive contributions to services based on their local knowledge. The following two recommendations are designed to enable Members to contribute in this positive manner whilst minimising involvement in operational delivery which the group appreciates is the responsibility of Officers.

<b>Recommendation 4</b>	<b>Data relating to landscaping cases reported for each area be provided for Members' consideration on an annual basis. Every Member should receive data for the areas they cover.</b>
<b>Financial Implications</b>	There are no direct financial implications arising from this report except with respect to the time required from Officers to produce this data. The information is stored on the Environmental Services 'M3' system, an electronic database. Officers have provided this data for the areas within the five wards covered by Members of the group and Members were assured that it did not take much time to provide this data. Members do not feel it would be an onerous task to provide this data for every Councillor, covering the twelve wards within the Borough, if it was only required on an annual basis.
<b>Legal Implications</b>	There are no legal implications for the Council.

All enquiries received from residents and Councillors are recorded by Officers on the Council's M3 Environmental Services database. The information is logged by area rather than ward on the database as this reflects the current geographical remit of different teams operating in the Borough.

During the review Members received data relating to the landscaping issues that had been reported by residents for the geographical areas within their wards. The information provided in this feedback was collated and presented for Members' consideration in the form of a series of graphs (attached at Appendix 4).

There were a number of key themes that stood out to Members from this feedback. In the majority of locations problems involving trees were more frequently reported than other issues (such as hedges or overgrown grass). However, the data provided for Astwood Bank and Feckenham was different; problems with hedges were more frequently reported than trees. Woodrow was also different because whilst the majority of problems reported involved hedges the Council received more enquiries from residents (including multiple enquiries) about trees in this area.

A large number of cases had been reported for some streets more frequently than for others. In some cases this reflected the fact that a road covered a particularly large geographical area. In other cases, however, multiple reports had been received for smaller roads. Often in these instances Members were able to identify reasons for the frequency of enquiries based on their knowledge of the local topography and of the needs of the local community. The group is suggesting that if similar data for all areas was shared with all Members they would be in a position to use their local knowledge to help Officers clarify potential causes of landscaping problems as well as to identify where preventive action might be useful.

Concerns have been expressed that provision of this data on an area basis for each of the twelve wards may not represent best use of resources and could require a significant amount of Officer time. However, the group was assured when they were provided with the data for the areas within their wards that it had taken very little time to gather this information.

The group are aware that there will be issues reported for some areas that fall within a different ward; for example some properties in the geographical area of Headless Cross are located in West ward. However, the group is suggesting that Members are familiar with the boundaries of their own wards and will be able to identify relevant data in the feedback without difficulty. For this reason they are not suggesting that Officers should undertake additional work to separate data to reflect patterns on a ward basis.

<b>Recommendation 5</b>	<b>One of the Environmental Services teams' performance measures should be to monitor the number of landscape cases that take longer than six months to resolve. The information obtained through this monitoring process should be reported in the strategic measures for the consideration of Senior Officers and elected Members.</b>
<b>Financial Implications</b>	There are no direct financial implications arising from this recommendation except in relation to the Officer time required to obtain and monitor the information.
<b>Legal Implications</b>	There are no legal implications for the Council.

The group has learned during the review that wherever possible operatives will resolve a landscaping problem as quickly as possible. Members understand that delays can occur where cases are complex or as a result of a backlog developing in particular seasons. Active communication with concerned residents can provide some reassurance. However, the group concluded that where a case has been delayed for a significant amount of time there may be additional problems that need to be addressed within the wider service. The group is therefore proposing that Officers should monitor all cases that take longer than six months to resolve to ensure that any such problems can be identified and resolved as soon as possible.

The Environmental Services team is currently in the process of reviewing their service measures. Teams are encouraged to regularly review performance measures to ensure that they focus on measuring activities that will make a useful contribution to improvements in service delivery and remain relevant to current circumstances. For Environmental Services the measures should also, wherever possible, relate to one of the Council's key strategic purposes: To Keep our Place Safe and Looking Good. The group therefore believes that this recommendation is timely.

Members have also concluded that whilst Officers would need to spend some time monitoring data relating to this measure implementing this recommendation would not require any significant additional investment of resources. Indeed, Officers are already committed to investing time in monitoring the performance measures for their services. Senior Officers have also confirmed that they feel this measure could make a useful contribution to improvements in the quality of services received by the customer.

The group is aware that elected Members should in future have access to the Council's performance dashboard, a central database which monitors performance measures. This should include information about progress in relation to the performance measure that is being proposed by the group. Whilst the dashboard remains unavailable for elected Members to access the group feels that progress in relation to this measure should be reported to Members separately. This will ensure that Members can advise Officers of any local problems that may be contributing to delays whilst these issues are still relevant.

### **CHAPTER 3: REVENUE OPPORTUNITIES**

Budget considerations have also directly informed Members' proposals in relation to two of the group's recommendations. At meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9th January and 4th February 2014 Officers advised Members that they would be looking at alternative ways to deliver savings whilst improving services to the community. The group agrees that in this context opportunities to generate further income from sales of landscaping materials should be investigated further.

The group is aware that there is the potential for local authorities to generate revenue from sales of logs, wood chips and other materials generated through landscaping services. Whilst researching this subject the group learned that a number of Councils already offer these types of materials for sale. This includes Warwickshire County Council, which promotes firewood and kindling sales, and Rochford District Council, which advertises sales of materials produced through woodland management.

Redditch Borough Council already sells some landscaping materials through the Council's Woodland Management Scheme to a private sector firm. This includes sales of wood chip and "waste" wood, which is wood that has not been treated in order to make it suitable for use as firewood in an open fire. In 2012, the last year for which figures were available for the group's consideration, the net revenue generated from these sales varied from £13.80 to £188.88 per month. All revenue generated through this process is reallocated to the operation of the Woodland Management Scheme.

The group has been informed that some of the materials generated through landscaping services are reused by the Council in order to maintain Council land and open green spaces. For example, wood chips can be used in flower beds or for woodland management purposes. This use of landscaping materials, whilst not generating an income, does help to save expenditure for the Council as otherwise these materials would need to be purchased from an external source.

However, Officers have advised the group that it may be possible to generate further income from both the Woodland Management Scheme and through sales of materials generated by landscaping services across the Borough. Members concur that the ideas they are proposing in the following two recommendations would enable the Council to achieve any such increase in income whilst also potentially improving services available to the customer. They recognise that in both cases the feasibility of the action proposed, together with the financial and legal implications, needs to be investigated in further detail by Officers.

Indeed during the review Members learned that local authorities are not legally permitted to generate a profit from service delivery and may not compete with the private sector. These legal constraints would need to be taken into account as part of both of the feasibility studies proposed in these two recommendations.



<p><b>Recommendation 6</b></p>	<p>Officers should undertake a feasibility study, risk assessment and cost benefit analysis to assess the potential for the Council to bulk plant trees in Council open spaces and other appropriate locations. This feasibility study should take into account the following matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The legal implications, if any, of this action.</li> <li>b) The financial costs involved in planting and maintaining these plants.</li> <li>c) The availability of grants from the government and other sources to help pay for bulk planting in the Borough.</li> <li>d) Demand within the market.</li> <li>e) Where bulk planting would take place in the Borough.</li> <li>f) The size of the plots available for bulk planting.</li> <li>g) The implications for the Council’s Planning Department in relation to the Local Plan.</li> <li>h) The potential revenue that could be accrued by the Council.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Financial Implications</b></p> <p><b>Legal Implications</b></p>	<p>At this stage the group is simply proposing that Officers investigate this idea further through completing a feasibility study. There are no financial implications arising from this proposal, except with regard to the Officer time that would be required to conduct this study.</p> <p>The group is keen to ensure that this option is investigated further as Members believe that bulk planting could potentially yield revenue for the Council in the future.</p> <p>Legally local authorities are not permitted to make a profit or to compete with the private sector. These legal requirements would need to be taken into account as part of any feasibility study. The Council</p>

	would also need to ensure that if bulk planting does take place at a future date any revenue accrued from this action would be reinvested in service delivery.
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During the review Members did discuss potential options to generate further income from sales of landscaping materials with relevant Officers. Following an interview in January 2014 Officers suggested that bulk planting of trees could be considered as an option to generate revenue for the Council in future years. A mixture of softwood and hardwood trees could be planted on open spaces of land owned by the Council. The timber could start to be harvested approximately five years after planting, for softwood such as Willow trees, and 15 – 20 years after planting for hardwood trees.

The potential revenue that could be generated from harvesting trees planted in this manner would vary according to; the amount of space allocated to bulk planting, the species of trees planted, and the type of planting required, such as sustainable forestry or short term crops that could yield maximum returns. The potential revenue would need to be offset against the initial costs involved in planting the trees, which could include ground preparation works and installing stakes, as well as the financial costs involved in maintaining the trees during the growing period.

The group has been advised that there may be the potential for the Council to apply for external grant funding to help finance bulk planting of trees within the Borough. It is also possible that the Council could obtain advice from a woodland consultant about forms of grant funding available to local authorities. However, Officers have suggested that further time is required to clarify exactly which sources of grant funding are available and the eligibility criteria.

In addition, consideration would also need to be given to suitable locations for bulk planting to take place. Officers have advised that an appropriate amount of land would need to be made available to make this option financially viable. However, current uses of any land and any requirements for public access would need to be taken into account. In addition, Officers would need to consider any implications for the planning process, particularly with regard to designated use of current open spaces for future housing development in the Council's Local Plan.

Market research has not, to date, been undertaken to assess the level of demand for landscaping materials within the Borough. There is therefore no way of knowing at this stage whether local residents and businesses would be interested in purchasing extra timber from the Council. The group recognises that market research is required before any action is taken to implement bulk planting in order to assess the potential demand for timber.

For all of these reasons the Task Group has concluded that it would not be appropriate at this stage to propose that bulk planting should definitely take



discourage theft of the timber. At present the Council does not have access to any suitable storage facilities of this nature. Investment might also need to be made to provide transport suitable for moving timber between growing sites and timber yards as well as potentially to customers. In total, Officers have estimated that the Council would need to invest between £50,000 and £100,000 to offer high quality processed timber.

The group recognises that the Council would struggle to meet these capital costs at present and this may limit the extent to which the Council can progress to providing processed logs to potential customers. However, Officers have advised the group that there is still the potential for the Council to make improvements in this area. As part of this process Members have been advised that there are three options available to the Council in relation to selling logs:

- a) The Council could sell logs directly to the customer. This could include selling unprocessed logs. The capital investment outlined in the paragraphs above is more likely to be required for this model if Members wish to make processed timber available for sale.
- b) The Council could work in partnership with a private firm. Under this model the Council would take a share of the revenue from sales. One of Redditch Borough Council's current customers has already offered to split the logs on the Council's behalf, subject to payment of a charge for the service. This would involve splitting 35 logs over the course of three days.
- c) The Council could sell logs to a private sector firm. This is the model that Redditch Borough Council currently follows.

It was not possible during the review for Officers to confirm the exact comparative costs and potential revenue that each option could generate for the Council. Further investigation therefore would be required to clarify these details. However, as there is the potential that changes to the ways in which the Council sells landscaping materials could generate an increase in revenue the group feels that these options should be assessed by Officers as part of a further feasibility study.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Landscaping Task Group has completed a thorough review of landscaping services in Redditch. Members recognise that to some extent it is likely that the current situation with regard to service delivery in this area will change further as transition within Environmental Services continues to progress. However, the group has concluded that this was a timely review as it has enabled Members to clarify the extent of changes that are taking place and the implications for local residents.

Evidence was gathered by the group in a variety of ways. However, a key feature of this review was the group's field trips to visit the place and trees intervention teams. Through interacting with staff and observing them in action Members obtained a practical understanding of the challenges faced by Environmental Services operatives and the benefits of the new practices pioneered through the interventions.

All of the proposals contained within the report are informed by the evidence that was gathered by the group. Members anticipate that if their recommendations are approved and implemented they will have a beneficial impact on Environmental Services in Redditch.

**APPENDIX 1**  
**Scrutiny Proposal Form**

(This form should be completed by sponsoring Member(s), Officers and / or members of the public when proposing an item for Scrutiny).

**Note: The matters detailed below have not yet received any detailed consideration. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reserves the right to reject suggestions for scrutiny that fall outside the Borough Council's remit.**

Proposer's name and designation	Councillor Gay Hopkins	Date of referral	13/08/13
Proposed topic title	Landscaping Task Group		
Link to national, regional and local priorities and targets	Redditch Borough Council Strategic Purpose – Keep my place safe and looking good.		
Background to the issue	<p>There are a significant number of trees and green spaces in the Borough of Redditch. Trees and hedgerows were planted during the development of the new town and form a distinctive feature of the Borough. This greenery also creates an aesthetically pleasing view for both residents and visitors. However, many of these plants have now reached a mature stage and need to be managed carefully.</p> <p>Many elected Members will have experience of being contacted by local residents to discuss landscaping issues in their wards. In particular, tree maintenance, grass cutting, hedgerow management and the impact of tree roots on pavements are frequently raised by local residents. The fact that tree maintenance and landscaping were identified as being suitable for further scrutiny by three of the four elected Member groups that participated in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Event in June 2013 indicates that this remains a common area of interest for local residents.</p> <p>I am aware that the landscaping team at Redditch Borough Council works very hard and delivers an</p>		

	<p>excellent service to customers. Indeed, this service appears to be improving further as a result of the efforts of the transformation work on trees and the 'place' team which has recently started work in Winyates. However, Councillors are not always familiar with the team's work and therefore sometimes struggle to respond to residents' queries about this subject or to identify genuine issues that may need to be addressed through further work.</p> <p>I believe that a review of this subject would be timely. In recent weeks a number of letters and articles focusing on this subject have featured in the local press including: a letter in The Redditch Advertiser on the subject of grass cutting (26th June 2013); an article in The Redditch Standard on the subject of grass cutting (28th June 2013); and a letter to The Redditch Standard on the subject of hedge maintenance (5th July 2013). There is therefore clearly public interest in this subject at the time of writing.</p> <p>This Task Group exercise will also give Members an opportunity to learn more about the transformation work that is being carried out and to get involved and influence the process.</p>
<p>Key Objectives Please keep to SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely)</p>	<p>1) To investigate the Council's basic approach to maintaining trees, hedges, grass cutting and tree roots impacting on pavements.</p> <p>This could be achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) an initial presentation to Members by managers and staff about the old and new ways of working;</li> <li>b) visiting the teams working on landscaping and those involved with the transformation of trees, place; and</li> <li>c) considering the content of relevant Council policies which can be provided to Members via a brief information sheet.</li> </ul> <p>2) For Members to get involved and influence the environmental services interventions in their own wards as transformation proceeds and to explore actions that could be taken to improve communications between the landscaping teams and elected Members and residents.</p>

	<p>This could be achieved by: interviewing the Head of Environmental Services, other officers and the relevant Portfolio Holder as needed.</p> <p>3) To clarify the types of enquiries received by Councillors in relation to landscaping issues and to report the group's findings for consideration as part of the trees and place transformation interventions.</p> <p>This could be achieved by: circulating a survey amongst all elected Members for comment.</p> <p>4) To scrutinise the impact of tree roots on pavements and action that could be taken to address this.</p> <p>This could involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) reviewing information provided by officers through a brief information sheet</li> <li>b) consulting representatives of Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department.</li> </ul> <p>5) To investigate the legislative position for local authorities responding to complaints from residents about landscaping problems involving private properties and the approaches available to the Council to resolve these issues including informal arbitration and enforcement action.</p> <p>This could involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) reviewing information provided by officers regarding the legal position on both hedges and trees on private property through a brief information sheet; and</li> <li>b) interviewing an Environmental Services Manager, a Planning Enforcement Officer and a representative of Legal Services.</li> </ul> <p>6) To clarify the financial implications of any actions proposed by the group.</p> <p>This could involve: interviewing the Council's Director of Finance and Corporate Resources.</p>
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<p>How long do you think is needed to complete this exercise? (Where possible please estimate the number of weeks, months and meetings required)</p>	<p>This review should take a maximum of six months to complete.</p>

**Please return this form to: Jess Bayley or Amanda Scarce, Democratic Services Officers, Redditch Borough Council, Town Hall, Walter Stranz Square, Redditch, B98 8AH**

**Email: [jess.bayley@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk](mailto:jess.bayley@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk) / [A.scarce@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk](mailto:A.scarce@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk)**

**APPENDIX 2**  
**Witnesses**

The Landscaping Task Group would like to thank the following Officers for their assistance with this review.

Emma Alldrick (Environmental Services Improvement Officer)  
Wayne Beard (Senior Landscape and Grounds Maintenance Officer)  
Tarek Bell (Tree Surgeon)  
Gavin Boyes (Senior Arboricultural Officer)  
Clare Flanagan (Legal Services Manager)  
Chris Franklin (Landscape and Ground Maintenance Officer)  
Sue Horrobin (Environmental Services Manager until February 2014)  
Sheena Jones (Democratic Services Manager)  
Elliott Kessey (Tree Surgeon)  
Dave Kesterton (Environmental Senior Improvements Officer)  
Neil Partridge (Environmental Operations Supervisor)  
Colin Pitts (Landscape and Grounds Maintenance Officer)  
Guy Revans (Head of Environmental Services)  
Ailith Rutt (Development Management Manager)  
Jason Simon (Arboriculture Officer)  
Daniel Wagstaff (Place Operative)  
Andy Walker (Environmental Operations Supervisor)  
Carl Walker (Environmental Services Manager)  
Andy White (Tree Surgeon)

The group would also like to thank the five elected Members who responded to their request for information about the landscaping issues that have impacted in their wards.

**APPENDIX 3**  
**Timeline of Activities**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Task Group Activity</b>
14th October 2013	Scoping discussion.
25th October	Interview with Officers to discuss the place and trees interventions.
6th November	Interview with an Arboriculture Officer to discuss the trees intervention in more detail and a visit to Woodrow North, Greenlands, to observe Tree Surgeons in action.
15th November	Visit to Crossgates Depot to discuss the traditional approach to delivering landscaping services with Officers.
18th November	Visit to Winyates to discuss the place intervention approach to delivering Environmental Services with Officers.
26th November	Meeting to reflect on progress with the review, the initial lessons that had been learned and the next steps in the investigation.
4th December	Meeting to discuss the place intervention approach to delivering Environmental Services with Officers in more detail.
11th December	Interview with the Head of Environmental Services.
7th January 2014	Meeting to reflect on progress with the review. During this meeting Members identified an initial list of draft recommendations.
15th January	Interview with Officers to discuss potential opportunities for the Council to generate further income from sales of logs and other landscaping offshoots. Members also received a demonstration on use of the M3 system, the Council's electronic database for logging Environmental Services enquiries.

23rd January	Visit to Winyates to observe the place team in action.
28th January	Interview with Officers to discuss the legal position with regard to landscaping problems involving plants growing on private property and action that can be taken to address tree roots impacting on the condition of pavements.
11th February	Consideration of landscaping data for areas within the Members' wards for the period of 1st January – 31st December 2013. Discussion of the group's draft recommendations.
25th February	Consideration of feedback received from Officers regarding the financial and legal implications of the group's proposed recommendations.
20th March	Finalisation of the group's report.