



REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO AREA: INFRASTRUCTURE, ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT

Date of Meeting: 8th NOVEMBER 2004

Public

Key Decision: Yes

Recorded in Forward Plan: Yes

Inside Policy Framework

Title: GRASS CUTTING REVIEW
Report of: HEAD OF COMMERCIAL & TECHNICAL SERVICES
 HEAD OF CULTURE, LEISURE & SPORT
Report reference: CTS 16/04

Summary: A number of operational problems have been encountered in recent years, particularly in 2004, where the current grass cutting and weed control service has not met desired standards. This report reviews the background, identifies the problem areas and presents a several options for 2005 and beyond, to improve the service.

Recommendations: It is RECOMMENDED that:

1. The preferred option for the future grass cutting and weed control service in Carlisle be identified and where appropriate considered in the budget process for 2005/6.
2. The report be referred to Infrastructure Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

- 1.1 The Council's current grass cutting specification was established over 15 years ago when the contract documentation was updated as part of the Compulsory Competitive Tendering process. Since that time standards change, public expectation has increased and climatic/weather conditions have changed which has extended the growing period and increased the level of grass growth. In view of this a review has been undertaken of the service, using Best Value principles.
- 1.2 The scope of the review has focussed primarily on the grass cutting element of the grounds maintenance operations. It became apparent that weed control should be included as part of the review due to the link with grass cutting and the general perception of tidiness.
- 1.3 The review team comprised of relevant Council Officers in Commercial & Technical Services and Culture Leisure and Sport. Other facets of the review process included:-
- Benchmarking and a survey of other Local Authorities through the Association of Public Service Excellence.
 - The input from facilitated focus groups from representatives of the Citizens Panel.
 - Initial feedback from elected Members of the Council all of whom were invited to provide input into the review.
 - Product advice from equipment suppliers/manufacturers

2. EXISTING SERVICES

Grass Cutting

- 2.1 The existing grass cutting specification defines various categories of grass and the associated standard of cutting, details are included in Appendix 1. The greatest areas of grass are within the general amenity area. The specification is a hybrid in respect of being based on performance but for all intents and purposes it is a cyclical frequency based standard. In practice this is based on grass in amenity areas being cut every 18/19 days during the summer months. Only high amenity areas have the grass cuttings "boxed off" (collected and removed). Edge trimming and half-mooning is undertaken over the winter months on all grassed areas except highway verges which have a 2 year cycle.

- 2.2 The current cost of the service is approximately £260,000, which is predominantly funded by the City Council, with the County providing approximately £14,000 to fund their standard of 2 cuts per year on highway verges on a 1 metre wide strip adjacent to the carriageway/footway.
- 2.3 In the summer months 15 employees are engaged full time in the grass cutting teams working a 37 hour week. Peaks in workload are met by overtime working and the use of agency employees (approximately £50,000 to date in 2004/5). A range of different types of rotary cylinder and gang mowers are used for the operations currently acquired through the repairs and renewal fund.
- 2.4 The Council also undertakes grounds maintenance work, including grass cutting on behalf of Carlisle Housing Association, on general amenity areas in residential areas. This is done to the same specification as adopted currently the Council. The overall value of grounds maintenance works undertaken on behalf of Carlisle Housing Association is £300,000 in 2004/5 and the current agreement expires on 31st March 2005.
- 2.5 The grass cuttings collected together with all other green waste materials in the grounds maintenance operation are collected at Willowholme. Some preliminary processing is undertaken there and then all the material is taken to the composting facility at Hespin Wood. Unfortunately this material does not meet the designation for domestic waste and as a result does not attract any recycling credit funding.

Weed Control

- 2.6 The Council sprays weeds on highways and footways twice a year.
- The first spray is in April/May with a semi-residual weedkiller (Glyphosate/Diuron mix).
 - The second spray is in late August/early September with a contact weedkiller (Glyphosate).

The spraying process is weather dependant and re-spraying needs to be undertaken in some areas. In some locations teams are sent in to hand pick problem areas but this is only a temporary solution as the weeds re-grow within 2-3 weeks.

- 2.7 The Council budget is £26,000 per year and the spraying works are tendered to a specialist contractor every year. Any hand picking is met from the existing street

cleaning budget. (As an indicative guide the cost of hand pulling weeds is approximately 6 times the cost of spraying).

- 2.8 The County Council spray the weeds on main roads and other 'non-claimed' highways. Their current standard is to spray once a year in September.

Problem Areas

- 2.9 From an operational perspective and varied feedback from the public, problem areas with the existing services were considered to be as follows:-

- (i) Standards are generally being achieved in all categories other than the general amenity areas. The grass cutting season has been considerably extended in recent years. The first cut is now undertaken in early/mid March and the final cut in November.
- (ii) The rate of grass growth in May/June and in September has been higher in recent years.

(The outcome of (i) and (ii) is that machinery is used longer and requires more maintenance/repairs, the grass cutting takes longer and therefore disrupts the cutting cycle and requires additional resources due to the resultant overlap with other seasonal peaks in other grounds maintenance areas i.e. Spring Bedding)

- (iii) Wet weather in July and August has prevented access for cutting in some areas, which also disrupts the cutting cycle.
- (iv) As a result of (ii) and (iii) the volume of cut grass left on the areas is noticeable and unsightly and is transported onto footways and into properties.
- (v) Long grass needs to be more effectively controlled around signposts, lamp columns and other obstructions.
- (vi) The re-direction of existing budgets to meet the cost of grass cutting is beginning to have a noticeable impact in other grounds areas.
- (vii) Weeds, particularly on the main highways, have a detrimental impact on the overall impression residents and visitors have of the City.

This appraisal should be kept in context with the high standards, which have been achieved in Carlisle and in many areas are still achieved for the majority of the time. The bulk of the challenges are dictated by weather conditions and should be taken

as an early indication of issues which need to be addressed to respond to these changes to maintain and improve performance.

Comparison with Other Authorities

2.10 As part of the review process 16 other Authorities responded to a questionnaire circulated to assess standards and associated issues. Details are included in Appendix 2. The key findings from this are:-

- Only one Authority claims to be operating fully to a performance specification.
- Over half the Authorities consider that grass is growing quicker and over a longer period in their area.
- Approximately 40% of respondents are reviewing or have plans to review their existing specification in light of changes to the grass growth.
- The average number of cuts in general amenity areas/housing estates is 17/18 per year, with Carlisle and 2 other Authorities lowest with 12 cuts/year.
- The type of machines used in Carlisle appears to be the most common method of cutting.
- The average number of cuts in high amenity/ornamental areas is 29 cuts/year, which is slightly higher than Carlisle.
- Not many of the Authorities "box-off" grass in general amenity areas.

Citizens Panel

2.11 An important aspect of the review has been to try and assess the residents opinions of the service and to achieve this two independently facilitated focus groups were arranged comprising of representatives from the Citizens Panel. A summary of the outcomes is included as Appendix 3, and a brief interpretation of this is as follows:-

- The community considers that grass cutting and weed control is a high priority and created a good impression of the area.
- The management and standards within the Parks and gardens are to a high quality and have a very positive impact.
- Standards in residential areas should be improved with a greater frequency of cutting.
- The removal of grass cuttings in residential areas is an important consideration.
- Again weed control appears to be an important issue in residential area.

Elected Members

- 2.12 Every elected Member of the Council has been invited to provide input into problems experienced within their Wards. In the main the feedback reflects the issues raised earlier in this report.

3. POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

Climatic Conditions

- 3.1 A judgement needs to be made on the potential trends in climatic conditions, which are a major influence on this service. Included in Appendix 4 are details showing the changes in weather conditions. These show an increase in the mean annual temperature with 2002 and 2003 particularly high together with an increasing trend in annual rainfall. Both these factors stimulate more grass growth. Indeed the rainfall in August 2004 is the highest ever recorded locally which has caused a major disruption to the cutting cycles with mowers often unable to get onto the grassed areas. Other factors, which should be recognised, are the response of other Authorities, which would suggest a clear trend emerging for longer periods of growth and greater growth. Indeed this is mirrored in the Council's garden waste collection service where tonnages have greatly exceeded projections, which in part is due to weather conditions.

Grass Cutting Specification

- 3.2 Indicators show that the maximum and minimum specified lengths of grass remain valid. Should these be lowered then scarring of the areas could occur and this also would restrict the capacity to mulch the cut grass.

It is considered that the frequency of cutting should be increased to 18 cuts per year and within this a much shorter frequency – 10 day cycle – in the peak growing season in May/June. A suggested programme for 2005 is included in Appendix 5. It should be emphasised however that inclement weather may still disrupt the cutting programme.

Removal of Cut Grass

- 3.3 In the general amenity areas and highway verges the grass cuttings are not currently removed. This appears to be the common practice in other Authorities although in Carlisle it is an important issue in some locations and for some sections of the community.

It is considered that an increased frequency of cutting should ensure that the cut grass is shorter. Other issues to consider are:-

- The cost of removing cut grass is up to 3-4 times more due to the need for different types of mowers, collection and transport costs and handling costs at the composting centre.
- Mowers can undertake a degree of on-site mulching/composting provided the residual grass is not shorter than 25mm.

On balance it is suggested that the removal of cuttings is not undertaken but improvements could be made as follows:-

- Cut grass could be removed in the areas around Aged Person Dwellings and PDU's. This is an issue, which would need to be considered by Carlisle Housing Association.
- Greater emphasis could be placed on removing grass cuttings from pavements immediately after mowing.
- Further work could be undertaken by the Parks & Countryside team as part of an ongoing review to identify localised areas where collection is feasible.

Edge Trimming

- 3.4 This issue raises an interesting challenge in the options which are available to improving edge cutting and trimming around posts and obstacles.

The selection of mower is also an important factor addressed elsewhere in this report. The options are either:-

- More selective weed killing in these areas to restrict weed/grass growth would provide a better visual appearance
- or
- Inclusion of this work as a back up within the integrated area teams which will be subject of a further report to Members. This would involve the strimming/cutting of the edges and provide the more environmentally friendly solution.

Working Practices

- 3.5 At the moment the Grounds employees work a 37 hour week, 7.30am – 3.30pm Monday to Thursday and 7.30am – 3.00pm on Fridays. It is considered that much greater flexibility could be achieved and efficiency improved in these seasonal areas of work if annualised hours could be introduced. This would entail say a 44 hour week in the summer period and a 30 hour week in the winter with perhaps transitional hours in Spring/Autumn. In addition there would be the potential to reduce dependence on casual/Agency employees and overtime working. This proposal would need to be discussed with the workforce through their Trade Unions.

Machinery/Mowers

- 3.6 The mowers have been traditionally acquired through the repairs and renewals fund. Replacement of some machines last year and in 2004/05 has been deferred due to uncertainty of ongoing work for Carlisle Housing Association and pending the outcome of this review. There is provision in the Repairs and Renewals fund of approx £360,000 including 2006/7.

Following an **assessment** of various options there is a preference to move towards more use of ride on front mounted rotary/flail mowers. The conventional means of procuring these would be through the R & R fund, which may take several years to fully implement the change. Alternatives currently being assessed are to hire the equipment from a major supplier, which would provide much greater flexibility, or to utilise operational lease and these are currently being explored.

Weed Control

- 3.7 The type of weedspray used is rigorously controlled by legislation and the relative costs and effectiveness are such that spraying should continue to be the preferred option. Improvements to the current service could be:-
- Introduction of an additional spray in highway/footpath areas in July, which could also target moss growth between paving flags and granite setts.
 - Localised use of selective weedkiller to control weeds in grassed areas
 - Seek the County Council to review their specification and ensure more effective co-ordination

4. VALUE FOR MONEY

- 4.1 A precise comparison/benchmarking with other service providers is extremely difficult due to differing specifications, different balance of areas and the size of areas. A benchmarking exercise has been undertaken through the Association of Public Service Excellence's Performance Network. This includes feedback from a family group of 18 Authorities. An indicative comparison for 2002/3 is as follows:-

| Indicator | Carlisle | Lowest | Highest | Mean | Family * Position |
|---|----------|---------|---------|---------|-------------------|
| Cost/hectare of maintained Local Authority Land | £4965 | £1980 | £10,964 | £5,435 | 7/17 |
| Cost/1000 head of population of maintained Local Authority land | £14,646 | £10,515 | £32,485 | £20,372 | 14/18 |
| Hectares maintained per FTE employee | 7.82 | 2.29 | 13.65 | 6.72 | 7/18 |
| Staff absences | 2.8% | 1.36% | 10.8% | 5.02% | 14/18 |
| Cost/Household | £35.06 | £26.52 | £84.68 | £50.54 | 15/18 |

* Note that 1/18 is worst performing, 18/18 best performing

- 4.2 It should be emphasised that these provide an indicative comparison. The conclusions from these however suggest:-

- The cost of maintenance/1000 head of population is at the lower end of the group, significantly below the mean
- Productivity levels are around the mean
- Absence levels are below the mean

5. OPTIONS FOR THE SERVICE

- 5.1 There are a range of options which members may wish to consider:-

- 5.2 Option 1 – Do Nothing

The past two years may have produced unique weather conditions, which may not arise in 2005. The situation could be monitored through 2005 to a further assessment of the need for change:-

- | | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| Advantages | - | avoids increased expenditure in 2005/06 |
| Disadvantages | - | quality of grass cutting may not meet public expectations |
| | - | ongoing pressure on resources and impacts on other areas of grounds work |

5.3 Option 2 – Amend the service to respond to weather conditions/service pressures

An action plan to address the areas of improvement has been prepared and is included in Appendix 5.

- | | | |
|---------------|---|---|
| Advantages | - | service improved, maintain and develop standards |
| Disadvantages | - | weather conditions may still have negative impact |
| | - | financial implications which would increase the budget requirements |

5.4 Option 3 – Limited Improvements

Members may choose to progress some of the items set out in the improvement plan with the advantages/disadvantages assessed for each.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- Staffing/Resources – There are a number of potential staffing issues:-
 1. Dependant upon the outcome of the existing CHA work there may be a requirement for a transfer of existing employees.
 2. Should the Council support Option 1 it is likely that up to 4 employees would need to be made redundant.
 3. There are no staffing implications with Option 2.

- Financial – The financial implications of the preferred option would need to be considered as part of the 2005/6 budget process.
- Legal –
- Corporate – This report reflects the views of those Council officers who are involved in the operation of the service.
- Risk Management –
 - Should the Council prefer Option 1 then there is a high risk that the standards of grass cutting and weed control can not be fully achieved.
 - Option 2 should enable significant improvements but in a service of this nature the weather conditions in 2005 may restrict this improvement.
 - Should CHA terminate the current agreement then the Council would need to pursue TUPE issues and be left with residual overhead costs.
 - The workforce have not supported proposals to change current working practices and improve efficiencies to date. Whilst the Council has powers to implement amended terms and conditions of employment this may have a negative impact on employee relationships.
 - Disparate standards may arise should CHA employ a different contractor or specification.
- Equality Issues – Grass cutting/weed control are important factors in defining the quality of an environment, particularly in socially deprived areas.
- Environmental – Wherever possible the grass cutting operation will adopt insitu mulching as a means of direct composting. A clear choice is provided regarding weed control using chemical treatment or hand picking on grassed areas.
- Crime and Disorder – N/A.
- Impact on Customers – Improved standards of performance will have a positive impact on what is considered to be a high profile service area.

EXISTING GRASS CUTTING SPECIFICATION

| TYPE OF SITE/LOCATION | AREAS TO BE BOXED | MAX. HEIGHT OF GRASS | MINIMUM HEIGHT OF GRASS | APPROX. NO. OF CUTS |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| High amenity areas (Victoria Monument area of Bitts Park, Hardwicke Circus) | Yes | 30mm | 15mm | 25 |
| Ornamental Parks/Gardens (e.g. Cathedral Grounds) | No | 30mm | 15mm | 25 |
| General amenity areas, highway verges, APD's (majority of grassed areas) | No | 75mm | 25mm | 12 |
| Rough Grass Areas | No | 300mm/500mm | 30mm | 2/1 |
| Bankings | No | As Surrounding Area | | |

Grass Cutting Specification Questionnaire Analysis

| Type of Site | Area Boxed Off | | | Selective Herbicide Used | | | Average Max Height of Grass | Average Min Height of Grass | Average no. Of Cuts |
|--------------------------|----------------|----|-----|--------------------------|-----|----|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| | Yes | No | N/A | Some | Yes | No | | | |
| High Amenity | 9 | 6 | 1 | | 9 | 6 | 24.7 | 14.8 | 27.3 |
| Ornamental Parks/Gardens | 4 | 9 | 2 | | 4 | 9 | 24.4 | 17.54 | 28.2 |
| General Amenity Areas | 0 | 14 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 13 | 23.4 | 21.1 | 17.1 |
| Housing Estates | 0 | 12 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 13 | 40 | 24.5 | 18 |
| Disabled Gardens | 4 | 8 | 4 | | 2 | 10 | 60 | 23.82 | 15.7 |
| Highway Verges | 0 | 14 | 2 | | 1 | 14 | 168.9 | 41.54 | 12.25 |

| Current Specification | Performance Based | Frequency based | Performance Freq Based | None | No Answer |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------|------|-----------|
| | | | | | |
| | 1 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 4 |

| | Yes | No | Ongoing | N/A |
|-------------------------------|-----|----|---------|-----|
| Plans to Change Specification | 6 | 8 | 1 | 1 |
| Grass Grown Quicker | 9 | 6 | | 1 |
| More Complaints Received | 2 | 13 | | 1 |

TABLE OF GRASS CUTTING REGIME

General Amenity Areas

| | Argyll | Broxtowe | Carlisle | Dumgal | East Leigh | Leicester | N. Lincs | Merton | Mid-lothian | Milton Keynes | Northumberland | Rugby | Wolver-hampton | Wakefield | D | Average |
|----------------------|--------|----------|----------|--------|------------|-----------|----------|--------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------|----------------|-----------|----|---------|
| No. of cuts per year | 24 | 18 | 12 | 20 | 14 | 16 | 14 | 15 | 18 | 12 | 22 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 17 | 17 |

No. of cuts per year

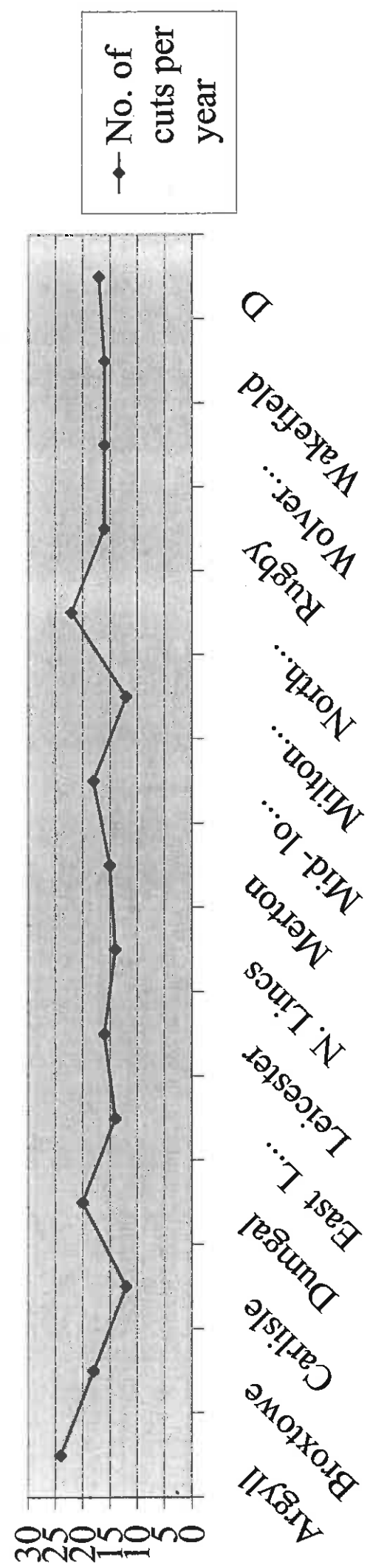


TABLE OF GRASS CUTTING REGIME

High Amentity and Ornamental

| | Argyll | Broxtowe | Carlisle | Dungal | East Leigh | Leicester | N. Lincs | Mid-lothian | Milton Keynes | Northumberland | Rugby | Wolver-hampton | Wakefield | D | Average |
|-----------------------|--------|----------|----------|--------|------------|-----------|----------|-------------|---------------|----------------|-------|----------------|-----------|----|---------|
| Maximum ht. of cut mm | 30 | 30 | 30 | 25 | 25 | 15 | 20 | 10 | 25 | 30 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 10 | 22 |
| Minimum ht of cut mm | 12 | 15 | 15 | 12 | 10 | 10 | 12 | 4 | 18 | 20 | 12 | 10 | 15 | 15 | 13 |
| No. of cuts per year | 32 | 30 | 25 | 26 | 30 | 35 | 28 | 26 | 20 | 22 | 32 | 32 | 32 | 32 | 29 |

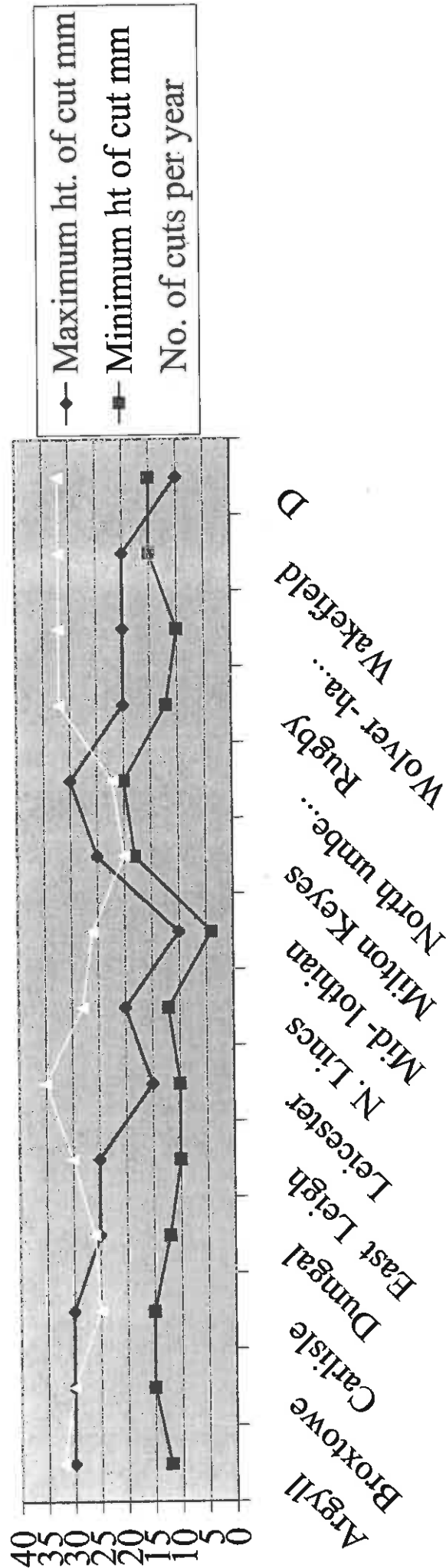
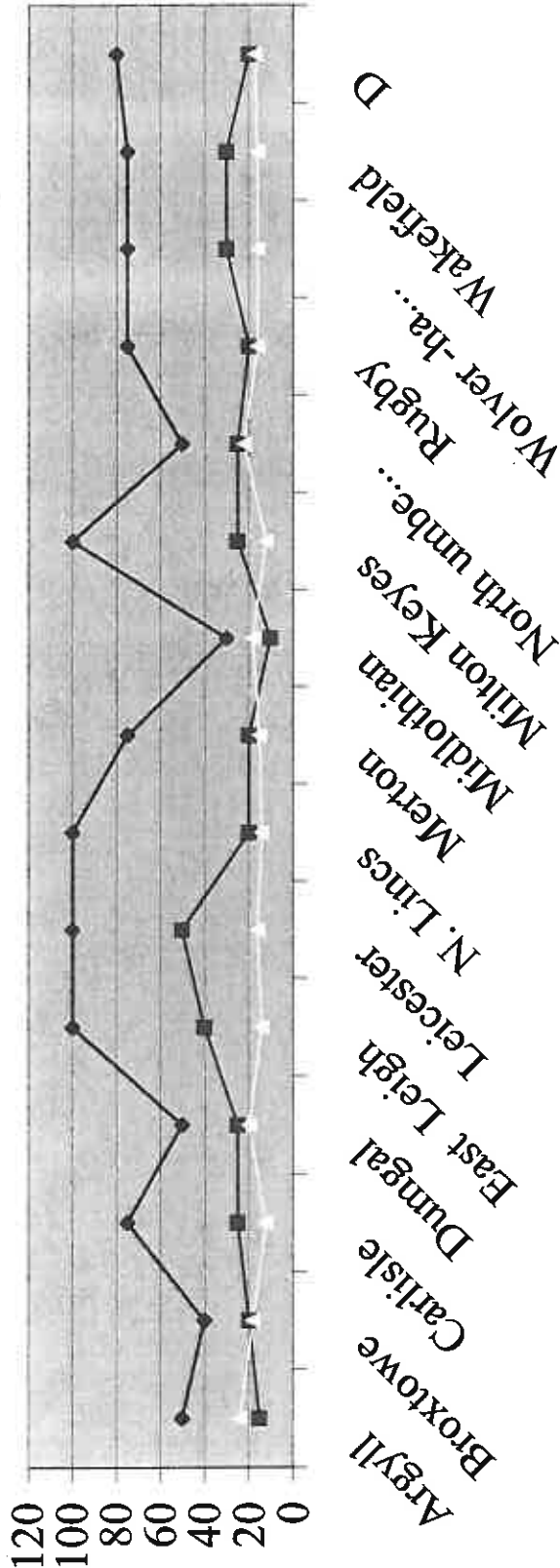


TABLE OF GRASS CUTTING REGIME

General Amenity Areas

| | Argyll | Broxtowe | Carlisle | Dumgal | East Leigh | Leicester | N. Lincs | Merton | Midlothian | Milton Keynes | Northumberland | Rugby | Wolver-hampton | Wakefield | D | Average |
|-----------------------|--------|----------|----------|--------|------------|-----------|----------|--------|------------|---------------|----------------|-------|----------------|-----------|----|---------|
| Maximum ht. of cut mm | 50 | 40 | 75 | 50 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 75 | 30 | 100 | 50 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 80 | 72 |
| Minimum ht of cut mm | 15 | 20 | 25 | 25 | 40 | 50 | 20 | 20 | 10 | 25 | 25 | 20 | 30 | 30 | 20 | 25 |
| No. of cuts per year | 24 | 18 | 12 | 20 | 14 | 16 | 14 | 15 | 18 | 12 | 22 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 17 | 17 |



◆ Maximum ht. of cut
mm
■ Minimum ht of cut
mm
▲ No. of cuts per year

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TABLE OF GRASS CUTTING REGIME

Type of Machines

| | | Cuts per yr | Type of Area | Cuts per yr | | Cuts per yr |
|-------------|---------------------------------|----------------|---|----------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Authority | High intensity and irregularity | | | | Highways | |
| Area | Cylinder. | 32 | Rotary | | Rotary/Flail mix | 2 |
| Brookdown | Cylinder. Min. 6 blades | 30 | Cylinder. Min. 4 blades. Smaller areas rotary | | Rotary Ride on | 12 |
| Cullin | Cylinder. | 25 | Cylinder and rotary | | Rotary Ride on | 12 |
| Harrogate | Cylinder. | 26 | Cylinder and rotary | | Flail | 3 |
| West Jangle | Rotary | 30 | Rotary | | Rotary | 14 |
| Lincombe | Cylinder and rotary | 35 | Rotary/Flail mix | | Rotary/Flail mix | 16 |
| Clun | Cylinder. | 28 | Cylinder. | | Cylinder. | 3 |
| Marble | n/a | n/a | Hayter Rotary (cut & Collect) | | n/a | n/a |
| Middle Hill | Cylinder. | 26 | Rotary | | ? | 3 |
| Middle Hill | Cylinder and rotary | 20 | Cylinder and rotary | | Cylinder and rotary | 12 |
| North Hill | Cylinder. | 22 | Cylinder. | | Flail | 2 |
| Walsby | Cylinder. | 32 | Cylinder and rotary | | Cylinder and rotary | 14 |
| Walsby | Cylinder. | 32 | Cylinder and rotary | | Cylinder and rotary | 16 |
| Walsby | Cylinder. 10 blades | 32 | Cylinder. | | Cylinder and rotary | 16 |
| Walsby | Cylinder. | 32 | Rotary | | Flail | 5 |

| Type of Machines used | No. | No. | No. |
|-----------------------|-----|-----|---------------------|
| Cylinder. | 11 | 3 | Cylinder. |
| Cylinder and rotary | 2 | 6 | Cylinder and rotary |
| Rotary | 1 | 5 | Rotary |
| | | 1 | Rotary/Flail mix |
| | | | Fail |

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CARLISLE CITY COUNCIL

GRASS CUTTING REVIEW

SUMMARY

CN Research carried out two Focus Groups for Carlisle City Council on the subject of Grass Cutting to elicit the views of the respondents about the standards of maintenance and whether they could be improved.

Focus Group One Quotes In Red – There were 15 people at the first focus group 6 male and 9 female from various backgrounds and age groups, however mainly from the 50+ age range.

Focus Group Two Quotes In Green – There were 12 people at the second Focus Group 9 males and 3 females. This group were of a younger age group.

The first question outlined the standards the Council used to cut the grass in three different areas

- High Amenity Areas – 30mm – 25 cuts per annum
- Ornamental Parks & Gardens – 30mm – 25 cuts per annum
- General Amenity Areas – 75mm – 12 cuts per annum

Do you consider that these standards are right?

The first group thought that the standards were reasonably acceptable with a number of exceptions mentioned. Most of the group agreed that it was important for the grass cutting schedule to respond to weather conditions for example dry patches and periods of prolonged rain.

One point that many people disliked was that the grass clippings weren't removed when cutting had taken place and this made the area look untidy and caused a nuisance when the clippings stuck to shoes.

A majority of people in the group were critical of the standards of maintenance on residential housing estates, feeling that grass wasn't cut regularly enough or ever cleared away.

The second group came up with a number of criticisms. Many people felt that the length of grass on estates was too long i.e. being cut to 75mm.

It was also pointed out that problems with dog fouling were made worse when the grass was cut.

The final criticism that many people felt strongly about, like group one, was that grass cuttings were not removed, causing the area to look unsightly and being a nuisance on shoes.

"With all the rain that we have had recently, things have been growing more quickly. The frequency of the cut should respond to this."

"Can I make a point about the lengths of the grass? I think that 75mm is too long on estates, even freshly cut it looks unsightly. It is certainly left much longer than it was several years ago. Why isn't it cut as frequently as it used to be?"

"The general level of grass cutting on estates wasn't good. People feel disgruntled as the grass isn't cut as frequently on estates"

"They leave the grass lying and then come with a blower and blow any grass on the path back onto the grass."

"The children come out of school or go for a walk and go on the verges or such as Upparby Park and it sticks to them. If they live nearby they end up walking it the grass into their houses. It should be lifted, it shouldn't be left there."

"There are quite a lot of elderly ladies living alone and they find that the amount of grass left lying around their driveways is offensive. It gets trodden into the house on shoes." – A lot of agreement.

What are your thoughts with regards to areas such as High Amenity areas and Ornamental Parks and Gardens?

The groups agreed that the High Amenity Areas were maintained to a higher standard than other areas, particularly in residential areas. Although it was acknowledged that it was probably done for the benefit of tourists, all agreed that residential estates should be treated as a higher priority.

"There is a bias. The residential areas are treated differently. There is not enough attention paid to the estates."

"The areas near the city centre have more attention paid to them. I think that this has happened for some time, but it is becoming more obvious now."

The group agreed that other than residential areas, there was general satisfaction with the specified areas.

The Groups were then moved onto the subject of Weeds and the how the Council controls them.

Do you think that weeds are a problem at the moment?

Most agreed that weeds caused an unsightly problem in many areas.

"To clear them away- they need to come and get down on their hands and knees."

"In our estate there are weeds everywhere- on the pavement. I've seen them come around to spray them, but they don't spray them at all, they miss them. I think that they should be spraying the weeds, rather than the concrete."

"I haven't seen them come around our area for at least a year. We have to go out and clear them ourselves, right along the wall. We haven't seen anybody at all."

What order of priority should be adopted for the treatment of weeds?

"Poisonous ones should be pulled out."

"At Priory Road in Morton they came along and sprayed weed killer, but never came to clear it away, so there are big clumps of dead leaves. It looks totally neglected."

The moderator then gave more detail about the general context. The increased costs for grass cutting and weed control were outlined.

Do you consider grass cutting and weed control to be a high priority service?

All agreed that it was a high priority for a number of reasons, including appearance, allergies and litter problems. Some were keen to stress that the £180,000 did not seem to be expensive in the scheme of things, while others would not like to see the budget increased too much as that money is better spent elsewhere.

There was some discussion about what the City and County Councils were responsible for.

"At some times of the year grass cutting does become a big issue for people as they perhaps want a nice grassed area at the front of their house."

"I think that it is very important. Carlisle is supposed to be a tourist area. Roadside verges full of weeds and the grass growing so high gives a detrimental view for tourists. Even in the city. If you see a verge and the grass is a foot long then it is going to put you off."

"You have to get the balance between all of the different services. I personally wouldn't like to see a decline in this service. How do you prioritise the services?"

"£180,000 is a drop in the ocean compared to the amounts that the Council has. I don't think that there should be a problem with increasing this figure, without putting it onto the Council Tax. They had an £11M overspend."

"Departments need to talk to each other and discuss issues such as dog fouling and litter. With the climate warming perhaps they will need to spend less on road gritting in the future."

"The Council have been keen for us to recycle our own waste. They should be setting an example by recycling their own grass clippings. By taking the grass cuttings away and making compost with them, instead of buying compost in for the beautiful flower beds that they have."

Consider parks and gardens within the city. What effect do they have with regards to civic pride and how important do you think they are? Think particularly about Britain in Bloom.

There was general agreement that the flower displays and garden maintenance did engender a feeling of civic pride. To keep the displays and parks to a high standard as this would be beneficial to the City in terms of tourism.

"The beautiful displays around the Town Hall are wonderful."

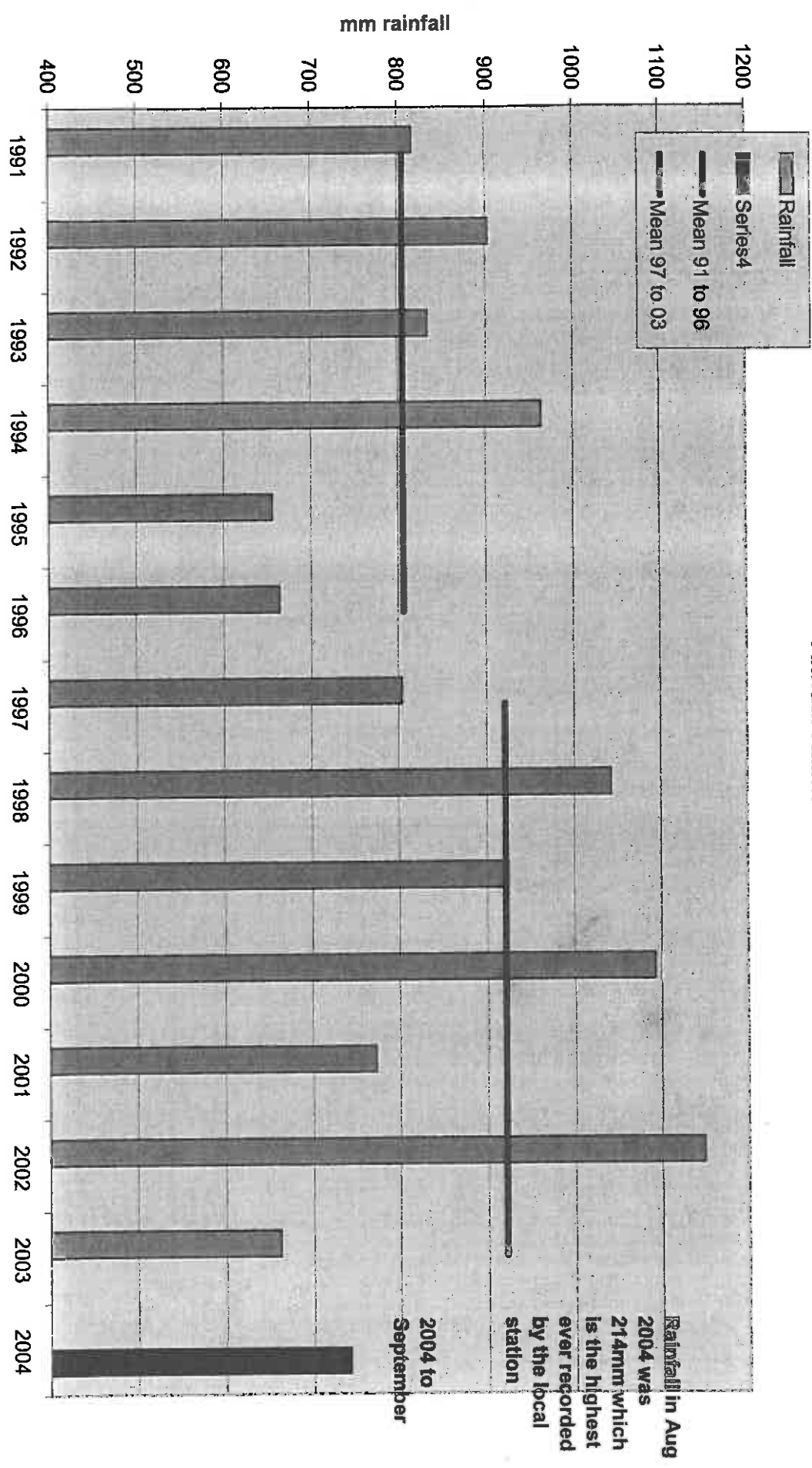
"Bitts Park is a very good example. People who don't know the city comment on it. The nature walks are good as well."

"I think that our Gardens Department does a brilliant job. You go anywhere around this town and the parks and gardens are brilliant." - Everybody agreed.

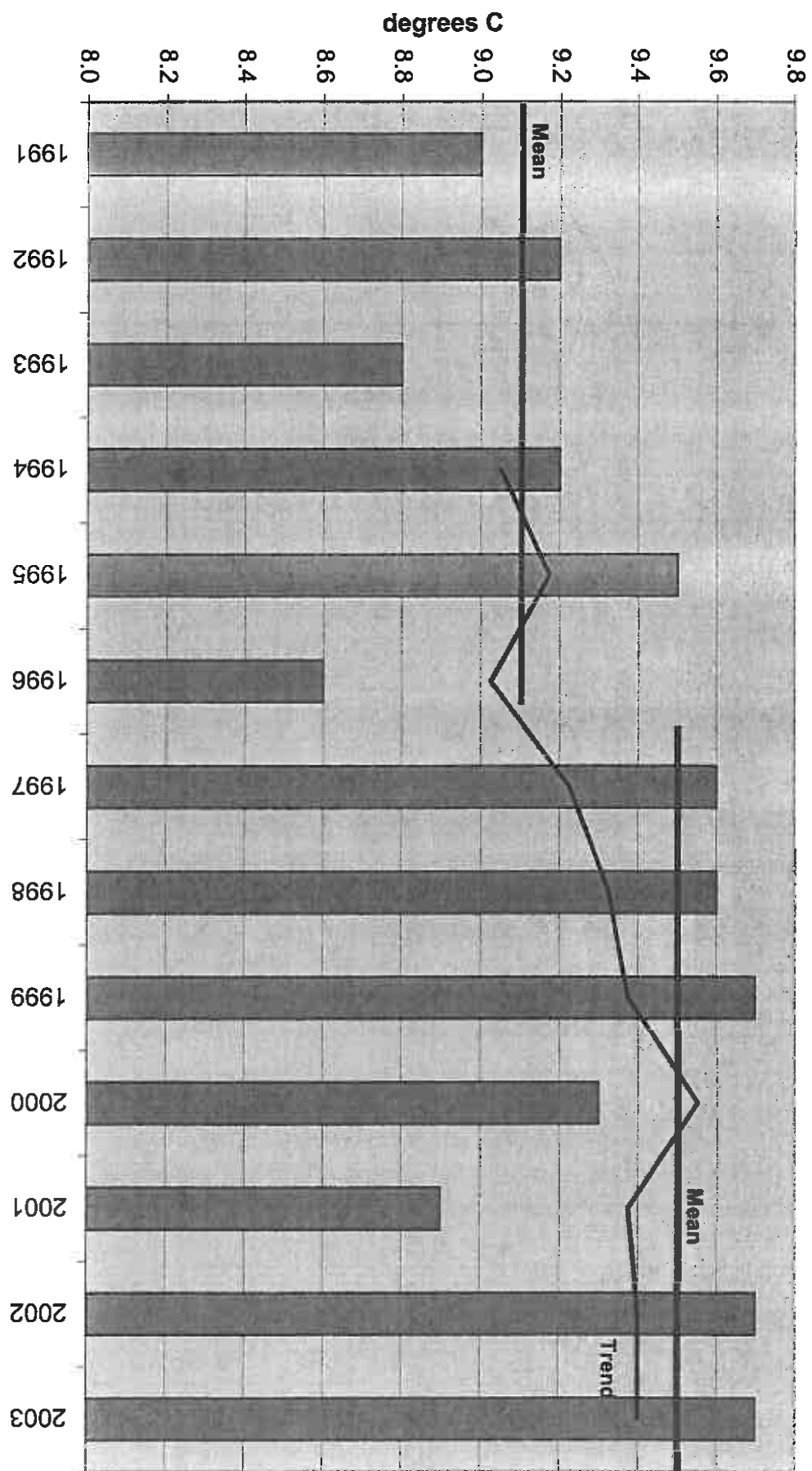
"I would like to see school children involved in Britain in Bloom, growing plants. It would give them some pride in their areas."

"Areas could be left for wild flowers in some areas of the parks, would this help to cut down on the costs?"

Annual Rainfall



Mean temperature for each year



GRASS CUTTING / WEED CONTROL SERVICE REVIEW – ACTION PLAN

| Proposed Action | Financial Implication | Timescale | Partner / Consultation | Lead Officer |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Increase the frequency of grass cutting on general amenity areas and verges to 18 per year as defined in Appendix 5 and establish resources to achieve this programme. | £125,000/year | March 2005 | -- | Grounds Services Manager |
| 2. Greater emphasis in removing cut grass from footpaths by the mowing teams with a follow up by Area Teams to include edge trimming and around obstacles. | £10,000/year | March 2005 | -- | Grounds Services Manager Area Maintenance Manager |
| 3. Promote the collection of grass cuttings on grassed areas around Aged Persons Dwellings and PDU's. | -- | January 2005 | Carlisle Housing Association | Streetscene Manager |
| 4. Liase with other relevant organisations to seek their review of the service to be compatible with the Council's revised service. | N/A | Completed by Christmas 2004 | Carlisle Housing Assoc. Cumbria County Council Parish Council's | |

| Proposed Action | Financial Implication | Timescale | Partner / Consultation | Lead Officer |
|---|--|---|----------------------------|--|
| 5. Pursue the introduction of annualised working hours by Grounds employees. | £30,000/year efficiency saving | To be in place for April 2005 | Trade Union Representative | Head of CTS Streetscene Manager Personnel Manager |
| 6. Investigate replacement options for mowers either through the repairs and renewals fund or equipment hire. | None anticipated at this stage | Ideally mower fleet to be upgraded for mowing season March 2005 | Suppliers | Grounds Services Manager Support Services Manager and Head of Finance |
| 7. Seek resolution of future service provision for Carlisle Housing Assoc. post 31/3/05. | To be confirmed approx £42,500/year residual costs to Council if service terminated. | March 2005 | Carlisle Housing Assoc. | Head of Commercial & Technical Services |

| Proposed Action | Financial Implication | Timescale | Partner / Consultation | Lead Officer |
|---|-----------------------|------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 8. Introduce an additional weedspray in July. (Hand picking in key areas undertaken by Areas Teams, see Action 2). | £15,000/year | March 2005 | | Area Maintenance Manager |
| 9. Liase with County Council to review their weed spraying specification and try to improve co-ordination of weed control operations. | N/A | March 2005 | Cumbria County Council | Streetscene Manager |
| 10. Undertake an ongoing review of grounds maintenance service on an area basis to address community priorities and be more environmentally friendly. | None | Ongoing | To be defined | Parks & Countryside Manager |

GRASS CUTTING SPECIFICATION 2005

| Grass cutting Targett date | Grass Cutting Frequency | Bank Holidays | Other Tasks to Complete |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Monday 07.03.05 | First Cut | | |
| | | Good Friday 25.03.05 Easter Monday 28.03.05 | |
| Monday 04.04.05 Monday 18.04.05 | Grass cut every 14 days in April | | |
| | Grass cut every 10 days | May Day 02.05.05 | |
| Tuesday 03.05.05 | | | Football Season Ends in May Goal Posts Removed and Goal Mouths Seeded |
| Thursday 12.05.05 Monday 23.05.05 | days May to June | | In the Next 4 weeks Spring Bedding Plants Removed |
| | | Whit 30.05.05 | |
| Thursday 02.06.05 | | | Planting of Summer Bedding Plants |
| Monday 13.06.05 | | | |
| Thursday 23.06.05 | | | |
| Thursday 07.07.05 | Grass cut every 14 - 16 days | | 14 June - 14 July Hedge Cutting |
| Monday 25.07.05 | | | |
| Monday 08.08.05 | From | | |
| Monday 22.08.05 | 14 - 16 days | August BH 29.08.05 | |
| | July to October | | |
| Monday 05.09.05 | | | 5 September - 14 October Hedge Cutting |
| Monday 19.09.05 | | | Summer Bedding Plants Removed |
| Monday 03.10.05 | | | Planting of Spring Bedding Plants |
| Monday 17.10.05 | | | |
| Monday 07.11.05 | Final Cut | | |
| Total No. of Cuts | | 18 | |