

Background

A cross party Member Working Group was established in September 2022 meeting on a fortnightly basis until December 2022. The role of the group was for officers to better understand the issues and concerns relating to the public realm services delivered by the contractor since 2013, and to ensure the form of any new arrangements improved and enhanced the public realm services where possible.

Requirements for Future Arrangements:

For the future arrangements for delivery of the Public Realm services the Member Working Group considers the following requirements are important:

- 1.1 A clear distinguishment of council staff and the contractor, delivering a more traditional client and contractor relationship.
- 1.2 The council to deliver its core technical services with a greater degree of assurance and control where the council commission all works and own the development on the annual plan and work programmes, with expertise being provided from the contractor.
- 1.3 The council provide robust challenge and scrutiny of services delivered by the contractor, including commercial assurance ensuring value for money and ensuring a high quality of works completed on the ground.
- 1.4 Locality Stewards services are enhanced and delivered by the council, where they deliver some front line services such as responding to an urgent situation.
- 1.5 Introduction of fleet, plant and materials aligned with best practice in environmental standards, and aligned with the council's net zero carbon ambition.
- 1.6 Improvements in customer service and resident satisfaction, where the key drivers are responsiveness, speed and quality of works.
- 1.7 Greater engagement and involvement with ward Members, parish councils & community groups relating to the delivery of services, where engagement provides awareness and support from other groups.
- 1.8 Opportunities for delivering services shared with other council's should be investigated where it can lead to learning and efficiencies.
- 1.9 The council should work with the contractor to reduce management costs across the contract, and prioritise works on the ground to support efficient service delivery and value for money.
- 1.10 The council and contractor should work together to review and revise performance measures aligned to new priorities, as well as the business as usual operational standards.
- 1.11 The service should be rebranded and launched as a new service for the residents of Herefordshire where the council are seen to be taking a more leading role.

Key Objectives

From this and wider engagement, the following eight council “Key Objectives” were derived which would be given high priority for the selection of any future operating model.

Assurance- The council seeks a level of assurance regarding the operation of the service, where technical staff are directed by council employed staff who commission the services, manage the network, develop the annual plans, provide technical expertise and provide adequate levels of scrutiny, challenge and assurance to services being delivered by the contractors.

Flexibility- The new arrangements need to be able to flex to deliver seasonal workload fluctuations, changes to budgets (up and down) and resilience to deliver the council’s annual works programme, infrastructure projects and support with civil emergencies.

Environment- The future arrangements must be aligned with the council’s commitments to carbon net zero and wider environmental requirements.

Customer The services must be focussed on delivering excellent customer services where the quality of service, digital reporting and access to information (CRM) and speed of response are key factors.

Expertise- To deliver the broad range of public realm services, the council will require access to industry expertise, best practice (what is working well in other areas) and innovation to develop and improve services continually.

VFM- Any contracted services resulting from the model selected must be attractive to the market to ensure interest and competition. The model selected must promote continual improvement, innovation and efficiencies and evolve during its term.

Risk- The future arrangements and any supporting contracts must place an appropriate balance of risk between the council and any providers, in the knowledge the council will ultimately pay for risk held by the provider.

Social Value- Social Value refers to the wider financial and nonfinancial value created by an organisation through its day to day activities in terms of the wellbeing of individuals and communities, social capital created and the environment.

Note: Members were informed of the opportunities and risks of bringing some services back in-house for self delivery, procuring new services elsewhere and the constraints regarding adaption and retention of the current contractor.

Members Views

Member initial views and perception on the current arrangements were sought, and summarised below.

- 1.1 The historic arrangement formed over time between the council and contractor appears too friendly with lack of contractual control.
- 1.2 The current arrangements do not provide the council with adequate levels of assurance and control for the services that are delivered on the ground.
- 1.3 Members would like to see more of the works checked by the council to ensure appropriate response times, and to ensure the works delivered are of suitable quality.
- 1.4 Concerns were raised over the quantum of management and support services, in relation to the quantum of works being delivered on the ground.
- 1.5 Project work and design matters appear over engineered and overly complicated in some instances, with a lack of council direction and input through the design stages. This leads to concern over the cost of some project work and concerns regarding value for money.
- 1.6 The contractor is considered to deliver project work well, however on more complex projects there are instances where the project is considered overly complicated and takes too long to complete.
- 1.7 There are some service areas, for example litter bin emptying, where the services should be reviewed and re-designed.
- 1.8 Concerns widely raised regarding value for money of some services.
- 1.9 The current customer reporting system has some limitations.
- 1.10 There is a lack of engagement with parish councils and other partners who could potentially contribute to the delivery of services by topping up services delivered by the council.
- 1.11 Concerns regarding contractor led communications, which in some cases are unaware of local issues and sensitivities wider than the public realm services.
- 1.12 The current public realm services and contractor are generally not well thought of within Herefordshire.