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| **MINUTES** | **MEETING:** | RMBC and Local Councils Joint Working Group |
| **DATE:** | 8th November 2023  |
| **VENUE:** | The Lyric, Dinnington  |
| **CHAIR:** | Cllr Clive Jepson |
| **MINUTE TAKER:** | Catherine Oxtoby |
| **In Attendance**  |
| Clive Jepson | Anston PC |
| Martin Hughes | RMBC, Head of Neighbourhoods |
| Catherine Oxtoby | RMBC, Parish Council Liaison Officer |
| Lauren Roe | RMBC, Senior Comms Officer |
| Mick Elliott | Aston PC |
| Malcolm Brown | Bramley PC |
| Rebecca Thompson | Hellaby PC |
| Peter Blanksby | Wales PC |
| Kate Butler | Aston cum Aughton PC |
| Richard Swann | Woodsetts PC |
| Dave Smith | Dinnington Town Council |
| Barry Connolly | RMBC, Head of Environmental Services |
| Andy Roddis | RMBC, Street Scene South Operations Manager |
| Jayne Wright | RMBC, Contracts and Technical Officer |
| **Apologies**  |
| Cllr Sarah Allen | RMBC, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods |
| Rebecca Jupp | Ravenfield Parish Council |
| **Item** | **Subject / Discussion**  | **Action**  |
| **1.** | **Welcome** CJ opened the meeting and welcomed all in attendance. Guest speakers were introduced from Environmental Services. |  |
| **2.** | **Grass and Verge Cutting – Barry Connolly**Barry Connolly was invited to the Joint Working Group Meeting as concerns have been raised by several Parish Councils regarding grass and verge cutting not being as frequent as expected.Barry explained that most areas have not been cut as scheduled due to a number of reasons, these include:-* Grass cuts being on the weather and this year we have had 52 plus days of rain.
* Bank holidays and shifts being diverted to support Catcliffe during recent flooding.
* Break in at depots where equipment is held, some has been stolen and equipment left has been moved to more secure depots so travel time is often more.
* Machinery breakdown
* Staffing levels fluctuating
* A full week was also spent in the summer cutting precautionary fire breaks.

Barry also highlighted there have not been any Time and Motion Studies done for several years so although a quality service is being delivered the service may not be as efficient or effective as it could be. Measures are now being put in place to look at this going forward.Barry then asked for any questions.Kate Butler – Communication is an issue. In Summer we kept getting phone calls from residents asking why the grass wasn’t being cut, it would have been useful to have had an update from the Council that we can then pass on. This would have been an easy way to reduce complaints.Barry – That is useful to know, we will work on how we share that information and improve.Richard Swann – Were landowners supporting when the fire breaks were being cut? Is there a legal responsibility for the Council to cut them?Barry – The Council doesn’t have to cut them but if we didn’t and there was a fire then this would have caused issues for residents. Highways Inspectors contact landowners. Some landowners do respond in a timely fashion but others either need chasing several times or do not respond at all. Kate Butler – I am aware that quite a few members of staff have left. Has this caused a loss of a skill set as we receive regular calls from the Bowling Group about the cut of the bowling group. Clive Jepson – Conversely Anston’s Bowling Ground is the best it has ever been.Andy Roddis – No skill set has been lost from that Team, please forward the information you have and it will be investigated.Barry – We have a regular meeting where we look at skill sets to review and ensure we have enough skilled people to run all equipment and carry out maintenance. Apprenticeships will also be shortly introduced into the service, 3 or 4 are planned to start in April.Mick Elliott - Is there an option to offer apprenticeships to older looked after children?Barry – That is something we can look at. Mick Elliott – Who is responsible for removing overgrown foliage from street signs.Barry – If it is Rotherham Council land then the council is responsible, if private land then the land owner is responsible. Highways Inspectors will carry out a survey to determine how urgent the problem is. Sometimes the work does crossover teams i.e. if it is a tree that is covering then we need to involved the tree department.Clive – In some areas bollards and other road signage is covered in dirt and moss. Who is responsible for cleaning them?Barry – Cleaning the signs so they are visible comes under Highways, there is an online form for this. The conversation then transitioned to moving forwards.Operatives will shortly be provided with handheld devices that will allow them to see their schedules and mark jobs as complete. This new system will also allow schedules to be altered more effectively thereby making the team mor efficient. Over the next 12 months all of this information is going to be vital in showing if we can do what we need to do with the staff we have. If the system shows we cannot then it will provide us with the data to prove this and then we can request additional funding. A plant refresh programme worth £1.2 million will also begin shortly. There have been lots of breakdowns of machinery this year which is not unexpected as most machines are between 5 and 6 years old. Tenders will be going out soon and machinery will be replaced over the next 2 years. Any equipment or vehicles that have a moving part and goes on the highway will also be tracked in future. The system used will allow the machine to communicate via the tracking and will tell us if blades need replacing, how long it has been used for etc.Improved monitoring of frontline staff will also be introduced. It is important that staff are tracked for safety reasons but this will also allow us to ensure that staff are working efficiently and that they are adhering to health and safety. Many Councils do not participate in no mow May. Instead they reduce mowing in some areas and we are considering doing the same. An example of this would be if we have a verge, nothing roadside will be used as this would reduce sightlines, we will mow a meter in and litter pick to make it look nice. A sign will then be put up explaining that mowing has been reduced in that area to improve biodiversity. The area will then be cut 3 times maximum. This will save us around 30-40 minutes per day of grass cutting. This time saving will help us to catch up quicker in cases of bad weather. Finally we are hoping to get additional investment. Requests have been submitted for:-* An expansion of 1 worker per zone on the weekend working team. This will mean we can cover more areas at the weekend and not have to leave jobs until Monday.
* An additional road sweep and driver.

Clive Clive – thank you that has been most informative. Glad that the trend for cutting grounds maintenance funding is being reversed. Roundabouts at Laughton, not been cut for months. Ended up with somebody going straight over it. The roundabout has now been cut but the sign saying it isn’t being cut was left behind. Barry – Grass cutting started earlier this year, in March rather than April. Unfortunately then the rain and bank holidays arrived and we fell behind.The ground is too soft at the moment for machinery to go on so each zone will have a small team going around trimming, litter picking and sorting out areas that need it. We will then restart grass cutting in March 24. Winter work will be starting soon, this includes grubbing and weeding, hedges, shrubs and leaf clearance need to begin. Peter – On main roads grates are all bunged up, grass growing out of them. Barry to take back to drainage.Dave – are the smart bins working yet?Barry – yes and no. We get text messages when they are around 70% full but having technical issues with some of them. Have an appointment next week with the supplier to work through some of the issues we have been having. Richard – We all appreciate you getting all the digital info to improve the service. Have you had any adverse reactions from staff or other sources thinking this is overload or cutting jobs?Barry – I think we are underfunded so this is not about cutting jobs for me at all. To introduce digital services we have had to go through the unions and HR etc. Many members of staff have required training, some do feel it’s a bit big brother but we have explained why it is needed. Malcolm – wildflowers in central reservation in Bramley, what is the plan for them when they stop flowering?Barry – This year we have had a delay in blooming. This is because we couldn’t plant due to work being carried out. Planting was therefore done over a number of weeks. This is the highest I have ever seen the wildflowers this year. Areas identified will have work started soon. We will be chopping them down when we do the sight lines, we are also going to trial a plant that suppresses grass growth to hopefully alleviate this. Rebecca – One of the views from the parish council is that they spend £9,000 on flowers to go on central reservation but then the grass and wildflower covers them. I have complained several times and was told they would be cut but they weren’t until the flowers were ready for replacing with winter flowers.Kate – Do the zones all share the same equipment? South is a larger area and most of the PC’s are there so are we losing out if equipment breaks down?Barry – Areas are based on square meterage not whether they are parished so are all covered. We will however be adjusting schedules going forward.Clive – thanked Barry and his team and invited to a future meeting, potentially May time next year. |  |
| **3.** | **Notes from last meeting**Childrens Capital of CultureE-mail received from Sarah Christie asking me to arrange meetings. These meetings will be arranged for the New Year. **ACTION: CO to arrange meetings with Parish Council and Sarah Christie.**Police UdateCJ queried the Police update. MH clarified that this referred to a session with SYP and a variety of council services about the functionality of CAPs and tasking. There were a number of improvement proposals put forward and these are being worked on. Standards and EthicsA meeting has been held with Cllr McNeely and some actions have been agreed. Cllr McNeely will be invited to a future meeting when appropriate. | **CO** |
| **4.** | **Future Meetings**This year meetings have been held on different days at a variety of times. It was agreed by those present that afternoon meetings work best for the current group so the meetings due to be held in February and May next year will be held in the afternoon. No other meetings will be planned until after the Joint Working Group elections.  |  |
| **5.** | **AOB**There was no other business. |  |