

<b>Environmental Services &amp; Climate Change Committee</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	10 July 2025
<b>Report Title</b>	Grounds Maintenance Contract Savings
<b>EMT Lead</b>	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
<b>Head of Service</b>	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment and Leisure
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Rob Lucas, Greenspace Technical Officer
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. That the Committee approves the proposed savings and extension of the current Grounds Maintenance Contract between 14 January 2027 and 14 January 2029.

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 As part of the Council's medium term financial planning, the Grounds Maintenance Contract (GMC) was identified for sustained reduction to annual costs over the remaining contract period.
- 1.2 To achieve the proposals outlined below, the incumbent Contractor (Contractor) was involved in regular meetings where the costs savings and subsequent service implications were discussed and agreed.
- 1.3 Whilst undertaking the negotiations it became clear that to achieve the targets within the proposal, the Council needs to activate the contract extension allowing the GMC to run until 14<sup>th</sup> January 2029.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 The GMC was previously tendered in 2021, covering the period January 2022 to January 2027. It provides for the maintenance of public open space including grass, facilities, hard landscape maintenance, litter/fly tip clearance, leaf clearance, shrub/herbaceous/rose bed and hedge maintenance, football/rugby pitch/tennis court and cemetery maintenance and management and play area maintenance. The 2025/26 value of the GMC is £1,768,443.13.
- 2.2 A reduction in cost is only possible by varying the GMC and, ultimately, by reducing the specification of works that are required. Discussions with the Contractor have produced a set of options for Members to consider which would deliver some of the targeted savings. These include;
- 2.3 Reduce the 'amenity grass cutting' specification from a 'performance' based criteria (removing the height tolerances outlined in clause 1.3.3 of the current contract specification) of approximately fifteen to sixteen times per year, to a 'frequency' based criteria with the contract crews visiting each site eight times per

year. There are some amenity grass areas currently within the bill of quantities that are either high profile and/or service dependent (play areas as an example) which will need to continue on a 'performance' basis – these will be added to the 'general amenity' route and round list. As with all the proposed changes, a schedule will be agreed between the principal client officer and the GMC manager.

- 2.4 Reduce the 'leaf collection' specification from a 'performance' based criteria (removing the time frames outlined in clause 5.2 of the current contract specification) of approximately five to six times per year, to a 'frequency' based criteria with the contract crews visiting all currently listed areas three times per year.
- 2.5 Amend the current 'shrub/herbaceous/rose bed" maintenance specification from categorised zones with varying visit schedules to one list with a frequency visit rate of six times per year.
- 2.6 Remove all 'annual bedding' (including planted graves) from the GMC. This would mean that these areas reverted to either amenity grass and/or shrub bed at a cost to the Council. Most planted grave agreements are historical, with most plots no longer visited or supported by family members. They hold minimal financial value, so any claim against the change in management is unlikely to adversely affect existing budgets.
- 2.7 Together, these changes will deliver an annual £75,000 saving against the existing budget (the value reducing to £1,693,443.13 based on the 25/26 value). Whilst a reduced level of service will undoubtedly change the aesthetic of the Borough, the reductions are considered to be feasible when weighed against the financial challenges facing the Council.
- 2.7 In order to realise the savings, there needs to be restructuring of the workforce and greater payback periods on the equipment, therefore, it is proposed that the Council extend the GMC by the 2 years identified within it, meaning that the expiry date will be moved to from 14<sup>th</sup> January 2027 to 14<sup>th</sup> January 2029. Technically this request can only be made in the final year of the contract. However, agreement would allow the savings to continue and safeguard the Council against current market financial pressures.

### **3 Proposals**

- 3.1 That the Committee approves the proposed savings and extension of the current GMC between 14 January 2027 and 14 January 2029.

## 4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 To not extend the GMC or agree to the reduction in specification. This would mean that the savings would not be possible, and alternative savings would be needed to meet the medium-term financial plan.
- 4.2 An alternative option of extending the GMC for a further period of 5 years was investigated along with additional cuts to service but this is not considered to be possible due the timeframes for local government reorganisation, legal/procurement implications (that length of extension was not within the original tender) and would result in larger service reductions that would be detrimental to the Borough.

## 5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 The proposal, and others considered at the time but subsequently deemed not possible, were fully discussed and implications explained to our term contractor.
- 5.2 The proposal has been reviewed at EMT and informal administration meetings.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The current contractor has a proven track record of meeting good quality standards and provides good value for money contributing towards all the corporate priorities as it ensures that the grounds maintenance activities are completed to the agreed specification with consideration to the environmental impacts.
Financial, Resource and Property	Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 outlines categories of information that can be considered exempt from public access during local authority meetings. These exemptions are in place to protect sensitive information, including details about individuals, financial affairs, legal proceedings, and ongoing investigations. The breakdown of the figures mentioned in this open report can be found in the exempt Appendix I for this report.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	As the GMC has already been awarded it meets the Council/Mid Kent Legal Services and Finance current standard Terms and Conditions. Both Mid Kent Legal Services and the Council's procurement leads were consulted and have confirmed the proposals sit within the current standard Terms and Conditions.

	<p>There are no TUPE implications within the proposal, although there would be some redundancy costs which will be borne by the contractor within the financial confines of the proposal.</p> <p>Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 – the social values will remain the same as per the contractor's initial tender submission.</p> <p>The National Procurement Policy Statement considerations will remain the same as per the contractor's initial tender submission.</p>
Crime and Disorder	There are no crime and disorder implications within this proposal.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	The use of approved and certificated chemical controls will be increased but will be capped to no more than one hundred litres (approximately eighty litres used in 2024 for all contract related works) per annum. Most certificated chemical control products have recently received renewed licenses for production and use with many recent studies showing their use safer than other control methods such as steam and foam applications (destroys all living organisms, including beneficial bacteria, insects and weed seeds) and cultural controls (recorded loss of time for injury and long-standing physical damage to operatives involved within the horticultural industry).
Health and Wellbeing	The proposal would not incur any additional health and wellbeing implications. All current Contractor health and wellbeing is monitored via their policies and procedures which are audited annually by both Council Officers and external awarding bodies.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	The proposal would not alter the safeguarding protocols undertaken by the Contractor which are audited annually by both Council Officers and external awarding bodies.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	The proposal would not alter the risk management and H&S protocols undertaken by the Contractor which are audited annually by both Council Officers and external awarding bodies.
Equality and Diversity	The proposal would not alter the equality and diversity protocols undertaken by the Contractor which are audited annually by both Council Officers and external awarding bodies.
Privacy and Data Protection	The proposal would not alter the privacy and data protection protocols undertaken by the Contractor which are audited annually by both Council Officers and external awarding bodies.

## **7 Appendices**

7.1 Exempt Appendix 1 Implications - Financial, Resources and Property.

## **8 Background Documents**

8.1 Not applicable