

CITY SERVICES

Open Spaces

Service Commitments

2019



	Reviewed by	Review Date
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Housing	Steve Smith	4 th December 2018

Contents

Monitoring our Performance	4
Keeping your Neighbourhood Clean	5
Weed Control	5
Grass Cutting	6
Shrub Beds and Borders	7
Hedge Cutting	9
Seasonal Flower Beds	10
Tree Care and Maintenance	11
Play Areas	12
Working with Local Communities	13
Help Agreements	13
Caring for your Local Streetscene	14
Leaves and Moss	14
Japanese Knotweed	14

City Services - Service Commitments

City Services

Helping make your neighbourhood a Greener,
Cleaner, and Safer place to live.

We know that having a clean and attractive neighbourhood is important to you. That is why we are working hard to give you a quality service, and to ensure that we keep your local green spaces looking cared for, clean and tidy.

The City Services teams work directly with the local community to enable local people to actively participate in the development and maintenance of their own living environment, and this guide provides information on how you and your neighbours can get involved.

If you want to report a problem with any aspect of green space maintenance in your neighbourhood, including grass cutting, shrub bed maintenance, hedge cutting or litter, then please let us know by visiting the [Report an issue](#) page of Southampton City Council's website. Response times for reports are within one working day if public or community safety is at issue, or within 5 working days in normal circumstances.

Monitoring our Performance

These Service Commitments have been developed to let you know the range of services that we provide and the standards of work expected. City Services performance in delivering fully and consistently on these Commitments will be reviewed on an annual basis by the housing team and City Services in conjunction with the Tenant Scrutiny Panel. Evidence considered in the annual review process will include verbal feedback from monthly meetings between the Local Housing Officer and the City Services District Operations Managers, as well as results from Green Space Monitor (GSM) forms i.e. local residents who volunteer their own time to assess performance standards in their localities on a monthly basis, the park's teams will also carry out their own randomly sampled quality assurance site checks.

Feedback provided by the GSM will be reviewed monthly by the City Services Operations Managers for the East, Central and West of the city, who will promptly address points of concern, and in particular any service failure. The Operations Managers or their representatives will also be available to attend meetings of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel or GSM to answer queries in respect of the grounds maintenance service. Questions about specific site issues will not be answered at these meetings but can be picked up through the GSM feedback. All compliments and complaints should also go through the local GSM so that they can be effectively dealt with.

Regular meetings and estate walkabouts will be attended by representatives of City Services along with your local Housing Officers. These will be advertised before they are undertaken and will be open for you to attend to express any compliments or complaints you may have.

Grass and shrubs are natural, living organisms and they respond to the environmental conditions they grow in. Their growth therefore is governed by the weather each year and in warm, wet years grass, for example, will grow much more than in hot, dry years. The work programme within the housing areas has been set up based on an average year of plant growth, taking into consideration, normal sickness, annual leave and machinery breakdown levels. Successive years of

budget reductions in the rest of the service (not the Housing element) has now meant that where there used to be back up staff or machinery for abnormal years this is no longer available.

Operations Managers will keep LHO's informed when they consider that they are not able to meet these promises and will provide an action plan to rectify the situation as soon as is possible.

Keeping your Neighbourhood Clean

We keep the green spaces in your neighbourhood clear of fly-tipping, graffiti, and obvious levels of litter. Where this standard is not achieved, the District Team will respond to rectify the situation. We attend cases of hazardous fly-tipping and 'hate-crime' graffiti within one working day of report, and other environmental problems within five working days.

Weed Control

We keep shrub beds, car parks, and designated areas of housing hard standing, including drying areas and block paving at least 95% free of unsightly weed growth through control programmes of spraying, scheduled in spring, early and late summer. Under normal weather conditions the first treatment should be completed by the end of May, the second treatment by the end of July and the third treatment by the end of September. The current range of environmentally friendly weed treatments currently available to us are only effective when applied to active green growth – some evidence of weeds in these areas is therefore unavoidable, particularly just prior to our scheduled treatments. We do not remove dead weeds as these are left to naturally disintegrate, unless they are particularly large and unsightly.

Due to seasonal factors the start and end dates of the weed control programme will vary slightly from year to year, but the City Services team will provide Local Housing Office's (LHO) with the programme of works at least two weeks before the start date for each maintenance cycle. Any subsequent 'in programme' variations due to adverse weather conditions will be notified to the relevant LHO.

Three weed treatments per year should be enough to control the weed growth, however, if you feel that an area would benefit from a further treatment then please contact your Local Housing Office and they will arrange to inspect the site.

Grass Cutting

We cut the grass within your local neighbourhood at a regular 21 working day frequency. This should, under normal conditions, ensure that the grass appears maintained and managed with few or no seed heads visible (Please refer to appendix A). The City Council's website now includes a [Grass-cutting Map](#) on which residents can check when the grass in their area was last cut and when the grass cutting team is next scheduled to visit.

Our target for keeping within our online grass cutting schedule is 95% of the days of the grass cutting season (late March to mid-October, dependent on weather conditions).

A limited number of grass areas are maintained to promote a more natural wildlife habitat. These plots are clearly identified on the Council's online [Grass-cutting Map](#) and marked on-site with appropriate signage. We will continue to work with residents to develop new sites to encourage biodiversity within the urban landscape.



We provide clean and tidy green spaces, and to achieve this we litter pick the site before cutting. The initial cut will be by tractor or ride on mower and after each grass cutting visit we will leave the area:-

- With **all** grass cut to an even length (though bulb plantings need to be left for around 6 weeks before cutting to ensure future flowering).
- Free of shredded litter

A 'follow up' grass cutting team will then visit the area within one working day of the initial cut and leave the area:-

- With paths and surrounding areas generally free of cuttings.
- With grass around trees, poles and other obstructions evenly strimmed

Most grassed areas within the city's Supported Housing sites have an enhanced level of service in which the grass cuttings are collected and removed from site. Due to the specialist equipment used for this operation, these sites are mown on a separate programme to the main area grass cutting schedules.

Note: to ensure safety of operators and passers-by and avoid damage to machinery, vehicles and property, grassed areas will not be cut if:

- *they have been excavated then poorly reinstated by utility companies or others,*
- *are covered by scaffolding,*
- *have vehicles parked upon them,*
- *have been heavily rutted by vehicle movements*
- *have garden ornaments or furniture placed upon them*
- *ground conditions are too soft to support mowing machinery*

In order to keep on programme, the teams cannot later return to an area to cut an isolated grass plot once a parked vehicle, ornament or furniture has been moved.

Shrub Beds & Borders

We keep all of the shrub beds within your neighbourhood looking attractive and tidy with weed growth under control (see standards below) and litter free. The major prune back will generally be scheduled between the months of October and March, outside of the main flowering season. This also makes the best use of resources as staff are not generally grass cutting during this time, and avoids disturbing nesting birds.

However shrubs in some locations do also need to be pruned in mid-summer to prevent obstruction to paths, roads, signs and windows.

Shrub beds are inspected at every grass cutting visit during the summer and litter is removed. Weeds are checked and if becoming overgrown they are noted down to be sprayed. It is not practical to control weed growth through manual methods

due to the size and nature of many of the shrub beds, weeds are therefore controlled through the application of herbicides. Weed spraying of shrub beds will be undertaken twice a year as, given its adhoc nature, it is undertaken by the Grounds Maintenance Teams. Other general weed spraying is undertaken 3 times per year, by an external contractor, as per section above.

Shrub beds should meet the following standards following a visit from our team:-

- 95% of bed area has weeds under control (i.e either free of weed, weeds only newly emergent or weeds browning off after spraying)
- No vegetation causing an obstruction,
- Free of accumulation of litter.
- Grass edges trimmed



We will work with the Police and the local community to ensure shrub beds are maintained in such a way that they contribute to people's feelings of security in their neighbourhood, and do not provide a shelter for criminal or anti-social behaviour.

Shrubs and hedges also provide a valuable 'breathing space' for nature in the urban landscape. Our work is therefore carried out with care and consideration for the welfare of the wildlife these features might support, for instance by pruning to maximise attractive and nutritious seasonal flowers and berries, and taking care not to disturb nesting birds. Leaves and leaf mould provide a valuable habitat for insect life, and will only be removed if contaminated with litter. Where possible, chipped shrub prunings or bark mulch are used to top the shrub bed surface to control weed growth, retain moisture, and enrich the soil.

Hedge Cutting

We keep all of the formal hedges within the local neighbourhood area tidily trimmed. Formal hedges are those that are regularly clipped into a box or “A” shape and are usually not allowed to grow to their natural shape, as does a hedgerow. We need to plan our work to make sure that we cause the minimum disturbance to nesting birds and other wildlife. This means that most of our hedge work will take place at the end of the growing season, during September and October. However some hedges will need an additional mid-summer cut if they might cause a safety problem by obstructing foot-paths or traffic sight-lines.

Following visits formal hedges should meet the following standards:-

- Weeds under control (i.e. either free of weed, weeds only newly emergent or weeds browning off after spraying) and litter free at the base of the hedge.
- The sides and top of the hedge tidily trimmed to prevent obstruction
- All trimmings removed from the area, or chipped back onto hedge base to suppress weeds, retain moisture, and enrich the soil.



Hedges serve a number of very useful purposes within the local landscape. For example, they can provide natural boundaries or barriers, attractive visual screens to unsightly features, acoustic blocks to traffic noise, and valuable refuges and food sources for wildlife. We will work with the local community to ensure hedges are maintained at a height and size appropriate to their primary purpose within their particular location.

Informal hedges and hedgerows are maintained on an adhoc basis, often using a tractor mounted flail, to trim their sides to ensure they do not encroach onto Highways. The height of informal hedges is only trimmed in exceptional circumstances for health and safety reasons.

Note: where hedges form part of a Council tenant's boundary, or purchased property that once formed part of the Council's Housing stock, these perimeter hedges should not exceed 1.8m (6') in height, and it is the responsibility of the tenant or house-owner to ensure the inside face of the hedge is regularly trimmed. Failure to do this will mean that over time the top of the hedge becomes too wide for the District Team to safely cut.

Seasonal Flower Beds

We ensure that the flower beds and containers displayed in your local green spaces provide vibrant and colourful features through all the seasons of the year.



Bedding features will be well designed and evenly planted, and use only healthy plant stock that is true to type.

Seasonal flower beds will be maintained as required. Following visits beds should meet the following standards:

- 100% free of weeds, litter and other debris
- Dead and diseased material removed
- Irrigated when necessary to ensure strong and healthy plant growth
- Bed edges cleanly formed and defined

Note: Any additional landscaping / plant schemes undertaken by residents and / or housing operatives are outside of the scope of the SLA, and is understood that any maintenance will be taken by the installer, unless prior agreement is made with City Services.

Tree Care and Maintenance

Trees are a valued aspect of the Southampton's streetscene and need to be protected and preserved. They are important for the quality of the urban landscape, nature conservation, and protecting against the effects of climate change. The City Services team sustains the city's urban tree canopy through an annual programme of new and replacement plantings.



Southampton's Tree Operational Risk Management System, or STORMS, is the City Council's proactive system for inspecting and managing the risk of trees causing injury or damage as a result of their failure. Under STORMS the City Council's Tree Team will regularly inspect trees on publicly accessible housing land and remedial health & safety works will be prioritised and acted upon.

All tree inspections & works will be carried out in line with current arboricultural best practice, standards and guidelines.

Trees in areas without general public access, for instance in tenants' gardens, are not on a regular survey programme but can be inspected at a Housing Officer's request should a problem be reported.

Requests for work on trees on Housing land that are NOT directly related to health and safety, all inspections and work on trees in tenants' gardens, and any maintenance of Housing woodland areas are funded by a limited and separate budget within the SLA, and need to be specifically agreed and ordered as additional items. Council tenants should inform their LHO if they consider a tree in their own garden or on neighbouring land is dead, dying or dangerous, or adversely affecting the well-being of themselves or their property. A technical inspection and recommendations by a Tree Inspector can then be arranged.

In situations where trees are located on non-Council land they are the responsibility of the landowner/householder. When, as a result of our safety

inspections or following public complaints the landowner's tree is identified as placing the safety of the public in jeopardy, the City Council will request that the necessary work is carried out to remove the danger.

Play Areas

The District Maintenance Teams will regularly visit all Housing play areas and games areas to inspect surfaces and equipment, and ensure they are safe, hygienic and fit for use.

As part of the inspection visit any litter present will be removed and litter bins emptied. However, the team prioritises work with safety implications, for instance removing broken glass, clearing dog fouling, and ensuring the safety of damaged equipment. Undesirable graffiti will be removed at the site visit if possible, or reported for specialist treatment, with offensive or 'hate-crime' graffiti removed within one working day of report.



In addition play areas are on a regular technical inspection regime by qualified Play Rangers, who also carry out repairs to equipment and fixtures, and minor installations.

To further ensure the safety of children, all play areas are furnished with signs giving contact details for the public to report a newly observed defect or safety hazard, and make clear dogs should not be brought into the play environment. Parents are also asked to refrain from smoking in play areas.

Note: recent estate improvement and regeneration schemes have seen the introduction of items of 'incidental play' into the general landscape, outside of formal play areas. These new items are outside of the scope of the SLA, and it is understood that safety checks are routinely carried out by Neighbourhood Wardens, and any necessary repairs or replacements organised and funded by Housing.

Working with Local Communities

The City Services team is committed to developing the interest and abilities of local people to enable them to become involved in the management and maintenance of their own living environment.

This local involvement can mean anything from putting forward ideas for action by the district team, to spending a little time working alongside us in carrying out the work on the ground. Partners can benefit from their work with us by inputting directly into the condition of their local environment, enjoying the benefits of working as part of a committed team, and receiving useful vocational experience and training.



The City Services Engagement team (contact telephone number 02380 671 921), will also support local Garden Clubs with advice, tools and materials.

Help Agreements

City Services will work with Housing colleagues in developing new Housing Environment Licence Partnership (HELP) agreements with residents who wish to adopt a plot of their local open space and maintain it individually or with a group of neighbours. These will be reviewed through Local Housing Officer Estate walkabouts, with a member of the City Services team on a periodic basis. Any areas which look like they are no longer being attended will be reviewed with the agreement holder.

The City Services team are always ready to hear from local residents with ideas on improving their local environment, and from people who want to find out more about how they can gain by working with us 'on the ground.'

Please suggest any projects or ideas you have to your Local Housing Officer or Tenant Engagement Officer who will be able to raise these with the City Services Teams

Added value at no extra cost:

Caring for your local Streetscene

In the course of their routine maintenance operations, our District Teams routinely look out for the condition of the street furniture, fences, gates, and other fixtures within your neighbourhood. Damage or defects are reported to the team leader, who will organise the necessary repairs, cleaning or renovation where the installation is owned or maintained by the City Services team. Where the installation is the property and responsibility of another team, such as Housing or Highways, full details of the defect will be provided so the appropriate remedial action can be undertaken.



Leaves and Moss

The collection and removal of leaves and moss from Housing paths and green spaces is not included within the SLA, but if a problem arises with wet leaf detritus making a path slippery in an area where vulnerable people may be at risk, e.g. a Sheltered Housing Development, then the District Team should be able to help.

Similarly the District Team can help if moss on a path or area of hard standing is presenting a risk to vulnerable individuals, on the basis that Housing fund the materials to be used and the City Services team will supply the labour.

Japanese Knotweed

The City Services team has a register of known Japanese Knotweed sites on Council land including Housing green spaces, and these sites are under a systematic treatment programme. If these treatments are to be completely successful in controlling and eventually eradicating this invasive weed, owners of adjacent land on which Knotweed may also be a problem must also take appropriate control measures. The City Services team can advise on the most effective action in any given situation and can also provide a chargeable control service to private landlords.

Housing tenants that spot early signs of knotweed in their garden should take quick steps to eradicate the problem and prevent it spreading to neighbouring properties. In cases of severe infestation, Housing Services may instruct the control of Japanese Knotweed in tenant gardens as additional chargeable works.

The City Services Team is committed to providing the best quality local open spaces possible with the resources available and we need your help to achieve this. We look forward to working with you to help make your local neighbourhood a cleaner, safer and more attractive place to enjoy living in.



The City Services Team hope that you have found these Service Commitments helpful and informative. If you have any comments, queries or suggestions about this document, then please do not hesitate to contact us.

Appendix A – Example of managed grass





Shredded Litter after Mowing ☹️



Litter thrown on site after Mowing (not shredded)



Vehicle Damage to Verge unable to Mow ☹️



Car in the way of Follow up ☹️

