

# Equality Impact Assessment: Changes to the service delivery of Neighbourhood Services

<b>Officer responsible for completing EIA: Head of Environmental Services</b>	<b>Manager responsible for EIA: Mark Tabner, Head of Environmental Services</b>
<b>Strategic Director responsible for EIA: Beverley Kuchar</b>	<b>Date last updated: 8 January 2024</b>

## 1. Introduction

This Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) seeks to identify impacts and effect of this proposal with the aim of assessing whether it would have a disparate impact on persons with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. As part of this assessment, consideration will be given to ways in which any such impact can be avoided or mitigated, any negative impacts arising from this proposal will be assessed and where this could be reduced in their impact this will be noted in the attached action plan. The Council also recognises that it may not completely remove all negative impacts.

The purpose is to provide impartial information to assist in the decision-making process and inform rather than determine policy. The objective is not to make the decision but to assist decision makers through the provision of relevant information.

The Council faces a critical financial shortfall owing to its historic investment strategy which has resulted in unaffordable borrowing, inadequate steps to repay that borrowing and high values of irrecoverable loans.

To address these severe financial challenges the Council must make significant saving alongside taking steps to ‘live within its means’ in the future.

Widespread reductions and changes to public-facing services, alongside reducing management and internal costs, have been set out in the [Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy](#).

The EIA will assess the impact of the cost reduction proposal for the contracted grounds maintenance and street cleaning services.

## 2. Impact on services

The Council's current contract to provide grounds maintenance and street cleaning services was awarded to Serco in 2003 and will end on 31 March 2025. The scope of the contract broadly comprises; grounds maintenance, arboriculture and street cleaning operations to highways, parks, open spaces, playing areas, sports grounds, housing areas, closed burial grounds and other Council interest land. The contract specification was constructed to set high quality standards for each of these component parts and has an annual cost of circa £4m. A re-tender exercise has commenced to procure the service from 1 April 2025, and will continue through 2024.

In the interim, a 20% cost reduction proposal has been developed with Serco for 2024/25 – the final year of the contract. This proposal adjusts the contract resource, which reduces the current high-quality service standards to statutory levels.

Whilst some aspects of the service need to be maintained, for example, safety critical works such as playground inspections, tree works (dead, diseased, dying, encroaching vegetation on footpaths), ditching, special works and litter bin emptying. Other aspects will be reduced or removed, for example:

- Street cleaning will become more of a reactive service.
- The enhanced town centre cleaning will be reduced to COPLAR (statutory) standards.
- Daily jet-washing of the town centre will cease.
- Mechanical sweeping will be reduced from 4/8 weeks to a 12-week cycle.
- Sports pitch maintenance will be reduced but set to achieve the 'Basic' standard as set by the Grounds Management Association.
- Grass cutting frequencies will reduce across all areas (apart from sports pitches) with no box mowing (currently undertaken at some housing sites).
- Shrub bed maintenance would be reduced from an 8-week cycle to a 12-week cycle with only basic maintenance and the removal of large weeds undertaken (shrub beds would not be left completely weed free). The option to remove some shrub beds and replace with grass will be explored.
- Areas of open space suitable for meadow will be explored – these areas will be cut once per year.

Access to parks and open spaces (1<sup>st</sup>) and keeping the street clean (3<sup>rd</sup>) are the most valued services identified in the resident engagement which took place in the summer of 2023. It is therefore anticipated that the proposals above will impact the look and feel of the borough and lower residents' satisfaction levels with the Council's services and performance.

The current contract is predominantly an output-based specification (defining what is to be delivered, but not how it will be delivered). These changes move the methodology of service delivery to a more traditional prescriptive input/ frequency-based approach. As part of the change, Serco will implement a form of task tracking, this will allow officers to monitor progress and service delivery.

### 3. Engagement and consultation

The Council has conducted engagement on all proposed savings to ensure a balanced budget for the 2024/25 financial year.

The first phase of the engagement took place in summer 2023. Residents and businesses had the opportunity to have their say on how to tackle the budget shortfall. In response to [Phase 1 of the Public Consultation](#).

**Phase Two consultation started on 2 October until 12 November.** Residents and businesses had another opportunity to scrutinise the proposed savings and have their say. This included a range of options for finding further budget savings, including increasing council tax, making changes to the way services are delivered, which may mean reducing or withdrawing services, or indeed making revised charges or collaborate with partner organisations. The outcome of this consultation will be reported to Council in January 2024 with full Council decision on the 8 February 2024. [Read the full report](#).

		Positive impact?			Negative impact?	No specific impact	<b>What will the impact be? If the impact is negative, how can it be mitigated? (action)</b>  This section needs to be completed as evidence of what the positive impact is or what actions are being taken to mitigate any negative impacts
		Eliminate discrimination	Advance equality	Good relations			
<b>Gender</b>	Men					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
	Women					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
<b>Gender reassignment</b>						X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
<b>Race</b>	White					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
	Asian/Asian British					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
	Gypsies / travellers					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
	Another ethnic group					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
<b>Disability</b>	Physical					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
	Sensory					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
	Learning difficulties					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
	Mental health					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Lesbian, gay men, bisexual					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
<b>Age</b>	Older people (50+)					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.

	Younger people					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
<b>Religion or belief</b>	Faith groups					X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>						X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
<b>Marriage and civil partnership</b>						X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
<b>Socio-economic background</b>						X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
<b>Carers</b>						X	Reduced service standard will have no specific impact on this group.
<b>Other identified groups</b>	Organised sports groups				X		The standard of pitch maintenance will be reduced to achieve the Grounds Maintenance Associations 'Basic' pitch standard levels.

## Action plan

<b>Actions identified from EIA</b>	<b>Target completion date</b>	<b>Responsible officer</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Formalise the arrangement with Serco via a Change Control Notice.	9 February 2024	M Tabner	Subject to Council approval on 8 February.
Develop a robust communication plan to inform the public about the changes and potential impact on the look and feel of the borough. This will be added to the Council's webpages.	31 March 2024	M Tabner	Requires input from Neighbourhood Officers and Serco.
Work with Serco to develop and implement a form of tracking work to work alongside the change to a frequency-based service. This will	31 March 2024	M Tabner	Requires input from Neighbourhood Officers and Serco

allow the contract to have assurance of completed works as per the schedule.			
Work with community/voluntary groups/ resident groups to explore how they want to contribute.	TBC	M Tabner	Requires input from Neighbourhood Officers, Councillors and community groups.

### Sign off

<b>LEGAL SERVICES:</b> Completed	<b>DATE: 8 January 2024</b>
<b>STRATEGIC DIRECTOR:</b> Completed	<b>DATE: 22 January 2024</b>
<b>REVIEW PANEL MEMBER:</b> Not reviewed	<b>DATE:</b>