

LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
HIGHWAYS FORUM FOR CHARNWOOD

10TH JANUARY 2017

CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE -
GRASS CUTTING

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT

Purpose of Report

1. To provide a 2016 end of season update for the cutting of highway grass across the County.

Background

2. County highway grass was previously cut by Lafarge Tarmac under the Highway Works Alliance. That partnership ceased at the end of the 2014 season
3. Subsequently the County Council undertook the grass cutting service via its own direct labour for the 2015 season.
4. Owing to the need to make operational savings for the authority's Medium Term Financial Strategy, and with a positive indication of support from the public consultation "*Leicestershire's Future*", the frequency of urban cuts was reduced from 6 cuts to 5 cuts over the season.
5. Consequently there was a perceived reduction in public satisfaction with the service. The number of customer contacts recorded in relation to highway grass increased by 31% in the 2015 season from those recorded in the 2014 season.
6. In view of the above, a review was undertaken of the management and the delivery of the service.
7. The County Council's Cabinet, at its meeting on 7th October 2015, resolved to support officers recommendations to adopt a series of proposals for the improvement of the grass cutting service ahead of the 2016 season, as outlined below:
 - a) It was proposed to introduce additional resource to deal with the peak growing season between mid-May and the end of June and introduce a variable cutting frequency to deal with the seasonal peaks in grass growth.
 - b) The reduction to 5 urban cuts per annum was considered to have delivered diminishing returns in terms of savings and therefore it was proposed to return to 6 urban cuts per annum for 2016.

- c) A more proactive approach to performance management was to be introduced; including a live 'dashboard' to monitor enquiries and service delivery, with improved management information.
 - d) Further investigation work would be undertaken to utilise technology to minimise missed cuts and provide better management information and maximise efficiency of the service.
 - e) Consideration of the use of small and medium businesses (SMEs) for an additional summer resource.
 - f) Response to customer reported safety concerns (visibility splays) would be directed to a dedicated team so that appropriate resources could be allocated to address the issue.
8. That decision was further considered and supported at the Environment & Transport Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 5th November 2015.

2016 Improvements

- 9. The improvements made including reinstating a 6th urban cut, operating a variable cutting frequency, improved in season performance monitoring and a renewed proactive approach to customer care, each contributed to a significant reduction in the number of customer contacts recorded during the 2016 season.
- 10. The number of customer contacts recorded over the 2016 season was down 40% from 2015; 22% from 2014 and a modest 1% reduction from 2013 when the number of cuts was actually even greater; being 7 cuts over the season.
- 11. Appendix A graphically illustrates the number of customer enquiries recorded over the cutting season each year.

2017 Season

- 12. Notwithstanding the positive improvements made in the management and delivery of the grass cutting operation for the 2016 season, it is the intention of the County Council to continue to refine and embed those improvements, as well as seeking out further opportunities to improve the efficiency of and level of public satisfaction with the service. This is likely to include the increased use of technology enabling more "real time" information on productivity as well as the ability to respond more quickly and with greater accuracy to the customer.

Recommendation

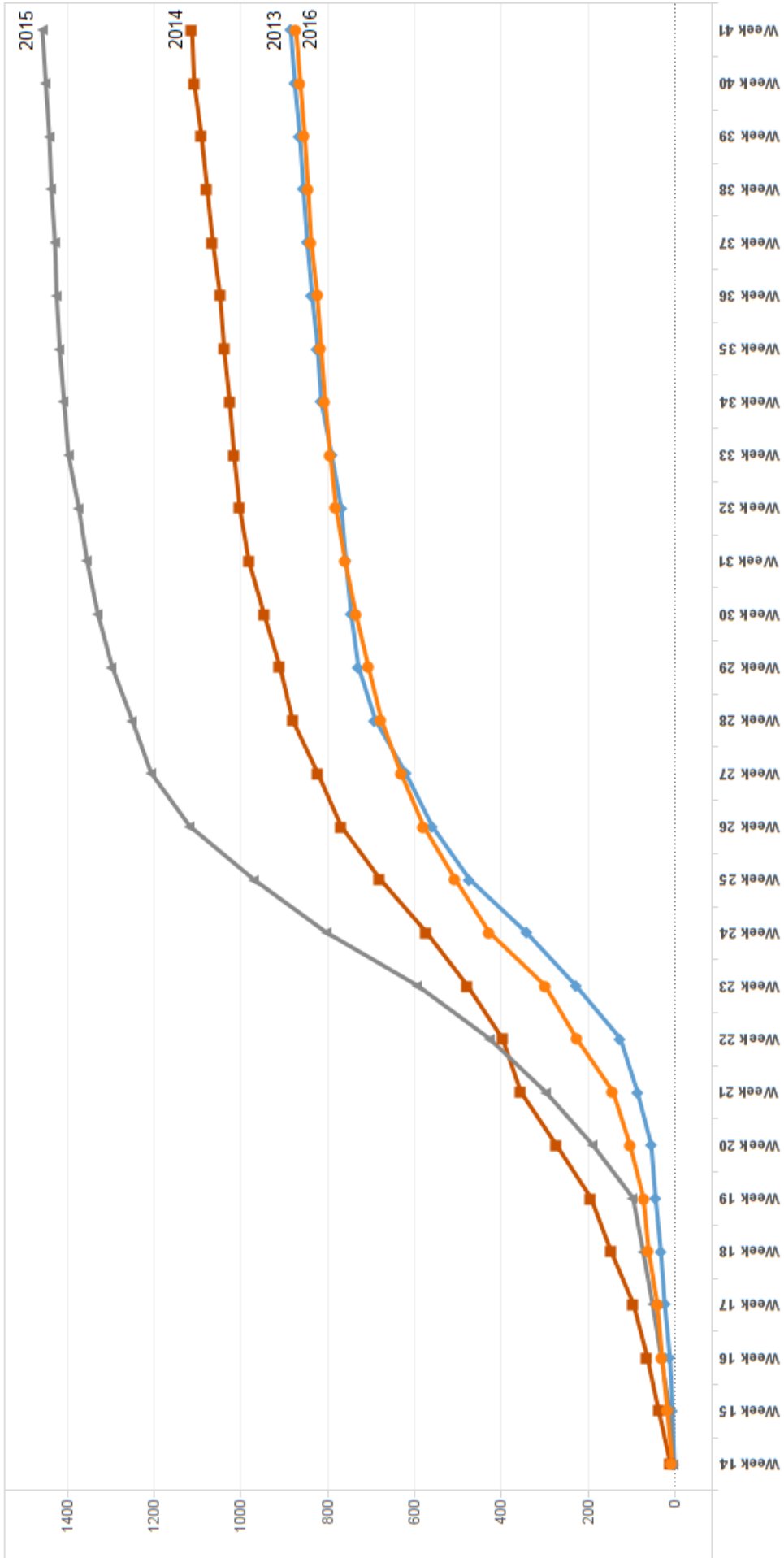
- 13. It is recommended that the contents of this report be noted.

Officer to contact

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Cumulative Number of Enquiries & IPs

by Year & Week for the grass cutting season



Grass Cutting Updates - Week Ending: 29/10/16

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