



CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE - 21ST NOVEMBER 2016

SUBJECT: TREE SURVEYS WITHIN SCHOOLS

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR: COMMUNITIES

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members, Management and Trade Union Safety Representatives of the status, outcomes, and procedures involved with recent surveys of trees at schools across the county borough.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report is provided as information for members of the Committee, to ensure they are kept informed of latest developments regarding the recent county borough wide tree survey at school sites, the processes that are involved in completing the survey, and the implications for tree management at school sites in the foreseeable future.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The report is provided as information to Members of the Health and Safety Committee in line with the Council's Health and Safety Policy, and draft Tree Strategy.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 In November of 2015 a circular communication was sent to all heads of CCB schools concerning the importance of regular cyclical inspections of tree stock by suitably qualified arboricultural personnel. Schools were further advised that there is a legal duty of care, and that the Council's records showed that surveys were now due in most of our schools as a period of several years had elapsed since the last recorded surveys were conducted.
- 4.2 To this end a tree surveyors' framework agreement was established that would allow the Council and/or schools to appoint a reputable and suitably qualified tree consultant (or "arboriculturist") to carry out the survey on their behalf. Interested consultants were invited to submit details of their professional insurance coverage, arboricultural expertise and qualifications, familiarity with the Council's proprietary tree database ("Arbortrack"), and their normal working procedures (including health & safety policies).
- 4.3 Survey inspections commenced early in 2016, and have now been completed at all schools across CCB. As surveyors carried out their inspections, any emergency or highly urgent works of a health & safety nature were brought to the attention of schools' management, and the necessary maintenance coordinated with either the Council's own in-house tree works team (Parks & Bereavement Services) or with the school's own chosen reputable contractor.

Fortunately there were not too many sites with necessary tree works of an emergency or extremely urgent health & safety natures.

- 4.4 School-appointed surveyors, of which the vast majority were selected from the approved surveyor framework – as was intended, inspected all trees within a given site. Surveyors also included any off-site trees from adjoining properties where the tree(s) may have been causing an issue with the school site, or presenting a reasonably foreseeable hazard that warranted abating by maintenance. As with any land owner or occupier there is a common law right to remove or cut back vegetation from neighbouring properties that may be overhanging the school.
- 4.5 Trees' conditions and any significant defects present, their general details (such as age, height or spread), and any necessary recommended maintenance, were all recorded (using mobile tablet computers) onto the Council's Arbortrack system. Any necessary non-emergency maintenance was given an appropriate target completion date so as to prioritise works of a health and safety nature, or routine maintenance accordingly.
- 4.6 In the period following the completion of any school's survey, the Council's Senior Arboricultural Officer prepared a report from the Arbortrack data, and forwarded each report on to that school's management. Together with each report (which is of a fixed proprietary format) each school received an accompanying tree location plan and list of recommended and necessary works. The latter two items may subsequently then be issued to the school's appointed arboricultural contractor with a view to pricing works and providing quotes for completing those works, or part of those works.
- 4.7 The processing of the survey data into reports, tree location plans, and the lists of recommended necessary maintenance for each of CCB's 90-plus schools is quite a time-consuming one, and owing to the demands placed on the Council's Arboricultural Officer, has unfortunately resulted in it taking longer than was envisaged to complete this process. As the Arbortrack system is a specialised database, it is not a straightforward administrative procedure. To this end, one of the surveyors from the approved surveyor framework (and therefore familiar with Arbortrack) has been engaged on a temporary basis to assist with expediting the completion of the preparation of those schools' reports which remain outstanding.
- 4.8 It is each school management's own responsibility to ensure that tree maintenance recommendations are followed up on within the recommended target completion dates. On larger sites, or schools with a larger than average quantity of tree works, it is reasonable for those schools to stagger works according to the constraints of their available resources. To this end, it is hoped that the differing target completion dates within any given site might assist in the process of prioritisation.
- 4.9 During each survey, trees were assessed with a view to a forthcoming three to five year management cycle. It is therefore anticipated that the Council shall require that schools repeat this process of planned tree inspections, by suitably qualified arboricultural professionals within the next three to five years. Any schools with trees, or groups of trees, warranting more frequent inspections, or specific monitoring regimes (e.g. to re-inspect in autumn with regard to a possible seasonal fungal [decay pathogen] fruiting body), will have been advised of any such circumstances within the body of their site's report.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no equalities implications.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 A report will be considered by the Regeneration and Environment Scrutiny Committee in December regarding the management of the Council's tree stock moving forward. The report sets out details of both current and future financial implications.
- 6.2 In relation to schools, following the surveys Education have been provided with estimates to undertake remedial works on identified high risks.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 All comments from consultees have been included in the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That the contents of the report be noted.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 For information only.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Occupiers' Liability Acts (1957 & 1984); Highways Act (1980); Health & Safety at Work etc. Act (1974).

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