

County Council Meeting – 20 July 2023**Question to Councillor David Williams
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport****By Councillor Arshad Afsar**

Question

Is the cabinet member aware of the widespread dissatisfaction of residents with the urban grass verge cuts being reduced from ten to six and often these schedules not being met, resulting in rat infestations and other unpleasant circumstances in several parts of the county? Will he revisit the 10-times approach in collaboration with the district and borough?

Reply

To start with a correction, the change in the number of grass cuts was from 8 to 6 cuts per season, which was introduced in 2020 to help support the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

A wide range of different highway grass cutting delivery arrangements exist across the County, including the use of private local contractors, 4 Borough and District councils and 17 Parish and Town Councils. One of the big benefits of local councils delivering highway grass cutting is that they have the flexibility to choose to provide additional cuts at their own cost at any time throughout the year.

All of the county council's delivery arrangements are closely monitored to ensure that the county council's highway grass cutting specification and minimum number of cuts is delivered and there have been no occasions when scheduled cuts have not been provided.

However, following changes to some historic delivery arrangements there has been a relatively small number of cases where grass that was previously cut by one of the local Borough or District Councils was not cut at the start of this season because it wasn't clear if it was part of the highway verge, an area of privately owned land or public open space that continues to be managed by the respective local Borough or District Council. We believe that all of these areas have now all been identified and interim mowing arrangements are in place whilst ongoing responsibility is resolved.

With regards to future grass cutting frequency and delivery arrangements, I'm pleased to confirm that a business case is currently being developed to allocate the resources needed to carry out a widescale review of highway verge management specifications. Starting later this year with digitisation and Quality Assurance of over 4.5 million sq.m of highway verge, the aim of this review is to enable more flexibility over local grass cutting specifications and delivery arrangements – meaning that they can be adapted to best meet the needs of local residents, maximise potential biodiversity, reduce CO2 emissions and improve their contribution to flood risk management.

