

Internal Audit Report Grounds and Parks Maintenance (inc. Trees) 2022/23

Draft report: 13 September 2023

Final report: 24 October 2023

Last audited: January 2018 (grounds maintenance, full assurance) and December 2018 (tree management and inspections, satisfactory assurance)

Audit Objective	To review the operational activities of parks, tree management, and grounds maintenance (the first audit following its transition in-house in November 2020)
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	Assurance Opinion	Number of Actions					Key Risks Reviewed
		Priority	All	GM	Parks	Trees	Reference
Limited	Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.	Priority 1	2	2	-	-	1, 2, 3, 14
		Priority 2	4	5	1	-	4-6, 9-13, 15-16
		Priority 3	1	1	-	2	7, 8, 17, 18
		Total	7	8	1	2	Appendix 1
							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor management of services may result in an increased exposure to enforcement, prosecution and fines, and reputational damage. Inadequate H&S practices and failures to action inspection findings and recommendations timely may increase the risk of harm and/or injury and unnecessary liabilities. Without suitable controls, fuel cards, vehicles, store and equipment purchases may be used for personal benefit resulting in financial loss.

The audit scope included:

Audit Scope

1	Policies, procedures, and training	Policies and procedures are in place and reviewed regularly and appropriate training is in place and conducted by officers.
2	Roles, responsibilities, and employee management	Roles and responsibilities are established and clearly defined following the onboarding of grounds maintenance service employees.
3	Scheduling and monitoring of works and registers	Work schedules are adhered to, regularly monitored, and system records are adequately maintained. Inspections are conducted in line with legislative requirements (inc. RoSPA requirements and tree inspection routines)
4	Risk management and H&S (including RoSPA inspections)	Risk assessments are in place and regularly reviewed covering operational activities. Equipment maintenance and safety checks are in place and recorded. Recommended actions following RoSPA inspections have been acknowledged and appropriately addressed in a timely manner.
5	Contractor management and procurement	Contractor appointments are conducted in line with procurement requirements and cost and budget monitoring is in place.
6	Warehouse and vehicle management	Processes are in place for store purchases and inventory control, and vehicle leasing agreements are providing the best value/cost option available.
7	Climate and environmental considerations	Climate and environmental initiatives have been implemented.

Agenda Item 6

Key Findings					
Objective	Observations	GM	Parks	Trees	
1	Policies, procedures, and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies, SOPs, and guidance are not in place for GM operatives. Training on day-to-day operations is delivered verbally and via demonstrations by the experienced Operations Manager, which includes the high-risk tasks of operating machinery, maintenance checks, fuel management, chemical handling, security practices, and PPE. A formal training programme, including training materials and manuals has not been developed following the return of the service in-house. Sodexo training cards have been adapted, which refer to materials and processes that are no longer used or performed. A number of supporting training certificates and training records could not be located. Personally identifiable information was not physically secured during a site visit to Unit C (i.e., training records, return to work notes, and driving licences). 	✓	×	×
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory LEAH training modules and polices were not always completed within the required timescales (e.g., H&S, manual handling, fire safety, COSHH). 	✓	✓	✓
2	Roles, responsibilities, and employee management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised job descriptions for the GM team were created in April 2022 and await implementation following consultation with officers and Unison. 	✓	×	×
3	Scheduling and monitoring of works and registers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The GM works schedule is now managed on the council’s property asset management system, Concerto, and uses the property land database to identify and label areas of land. As such, one area of land may have multiple asset IDs, which requires operatives to manually assign and close numerous tasks. Updating GM workflow tasks in real time is proving difficult and the team have reverted to paper-based ‘tick sheets’. The parks and property teams are looking into options to simplify processes within Concerto. The GM annual work schedule is monitored monthly and is running behind schedule due to two vacant seasonal posts. 	✓	×	×
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly internal visual inspections (condition checks) were successfully completed and recorded on the parks asset management system (PSS) for all 41 (5 South and 36 Vale) play areas in 2022/23. Due to challenges in procuring play equipment maintenance contractors, major reactive works on play equipment was paused in May 2022, until a suitable supplier was acquired in February 2023. This impacted on the Parks team’s ability to remediate findings from internal (monthly) and RoSPA (annual) inspections of play areas within the recommended timescales. In this period, minor repairs were facilitated by the Parks and GM team where necessary. 	×	✓	×
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UK government standards require a Visual Tree Condition survey (VTA) to be undertaken on an annual, three-yearly, and (maximum) five-yearly basis. All trees sampled in testing had been inspected within their assigned cycle and findings recorded within the tree management database system, Arbotrack. The remote handheld device used to record inspections experiences connectivity issues when in the field, resulting in process inefficiencies. The team are in the process of procuring a system upgrade to resolve this issue. Areas of trees and land no longer managed by the councils (due to site development etc) were still active within Arbotrack and it is unclear whether the councils still hold any liability. 	×	×	✓
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KPIs are not used by the GM, Parks, and Trees teams to assist with monitoring of planned and reactive tasks. 	✓	✓	✓

4	Risk management and H&S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GM operatives working at the Crowmarsh depot and Unit C site have no shared IT to access operational risk assessments and safe systems of work (SSW) guidance stored on the service shared drive. Hardcopy documents are not provided. Onsite records are also not available for chemical handling and or COSHH requirements for stored chemicals. Specialist site risk assessments were conducted at Crowmarsh and Unit C depots in 2021 and 2022 to assess fire safety, security, and water (legionella). Although no high-risk recommendations were reported, it's unclear if the 37 recommendations have been actioned. GM operatives mostly work in pairs; however, lone working does occasionally take place. The council's lone working monitoring system, LoneAlert, is not used by the GM team, who 'check in' through mobile phone messaging with the Operations Manager. There is no formal process in place in the event of absence. Equipment, plant, and machinery was purchased new in 2021. Most items remain under the manufacturer warranty, with service and maintenance to be undertaken at the recommended intervals. However, formal PPM, servicing and safety checks are not established. 	✓	×	×
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The parks team risk assessments are retained on the service shared drive; however, there is limited version control and historic records were not archived. Tree and park officers' routinely conduct lone working and can access LoneAlert, however, usage is not consistent and remains relatively low across the team. 	×	✓	✓
5	Contractor management and procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information to support procurement activities across all teams is not always complete, and one contract was not added to the contracts register, despite being over the £5k disclosure threshold. Some suppliers/contractors fall below the £5k disclosure threshold; however, as purchase orders are regularly raised, we recommend a review of procurement methods across all teams to ensure best value is achieved. 	✓	✓	✓
6	Warehouse and vehicle management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From our site visits to Crowmarsh and Unit C depots, we identified several observations relating to health and safety, site security, and waste management that need resolving. The annual inventory declaration provided to Finance and Insurance teams excludes equipment purchases (manual tools and mechanical parts), sundry items and consumables, and regular counts of these items is not performed. From our own inspection of 36 inventory items (floor to sheet and sheet to floor), we found two high value items in the depot that were not listed on the GM stock inventory (although items were accounted for within Financial records). GM lease 10 vehicles via a recurring agreement with Northgate. Procurement of a new fleet vehicle contract under the Pretium framework was completed in July 2023, with combined savings of £12,000 per annum. The availability of suitable commercial electric vehicles, (capable of providing appropriate towing and charge capacities to assist GM operations), remains under review. 10 corporate fuel cards are used to refuel the GM service fleet vehicles, with spend in 2022/23 valued at £47k (£37k Vale and £10k South). Corporate fuel cards and vehicle management procedures are not published. Fuel card guidance was drafted in September 2020 and awaits approval and issuance by Finance. The 'Safe Driving at Work' policy is outdated and does not reflect current GM operations, or wider organisational activities. There is no designated location to securely store fleet service vehicles during non-operational hours, with some GM operatives taking vehicles home during non-working hours. This is under review as part of wider service projects. 	✓	×	×
7	Climate & environmental considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several environmental and climate initiatives are in place to support South and Vale climate action targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work is underway to identify future planting areas in respect of trees - 40 trees identified for planting in 2023. A joint tree planting policy has been developed and is published in the South and Vale Climate Action Plans. Wilding activities continue across both districts with the 'Let it Bee' scheme in 2023. An anti-idling policy has not progressed but may be included in the review of the 'Safe Driving at Work' policy. 	✓	✓	✓

Appendix 1 - Detailed Findings and Management Actions

Obj1: Policies, procedures, and training			Priority 1
1. Policies, procedures, and guidance (all teams)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>Grounds Maintenance Policies, procedures, and guidance has not been formally developed following the service coming back in-house in November 2020. Information and best practice is relayed to operatives verbally and through demonstrations by the experienced GM Operations Manager. This includes high risk tasks such as operating machinery, maintenance checks and parts replenishment, handling, transporting, and storing fuel and refuelling machinery, chemical handling, security practices, PPE requirements and welfare responsibilities.</p> <p>Parks There are 163 documents consisting of a mixture of guidance notes and procedures. There is no consistent format, version control, or evidence of regular review.</p> <p>Trees There are no formal procedural documents in place in respect of tree management and inspections, which may present a risk to continuity of service should there be changes of personnel or prolonged absence.</p> <p>Risk Service Risk: Failure to have a succession plan in place and failure to share knowledge across the team could result in reduction in service provision to residents during holidays, staff moving on and sickness (Risk ref: TS9). Corporate Risk: Failing to have an effective health and safety management system in place and lack of resource to support, may result in a fatality, illness or injury to staff or anyone else affected by our business; damage to property; legal action by HSE; civil claims and increased costs (South & Vale Risk ref: 9).</p>	<p>a) Develop, document, and publish in-house policies, procedures, and guidance to support employees conduct operational duties effectively and safely to ensure continuity of service.</p> <p>b) Implement document version control and regular review periods to maintain relevance in operational procedures.</p>	31 March 2024	Technical Services Manager and H&S Team and new recruit (Parks Support Officer)
<p>Management Response Management actions are Agreed: H&S to work alongside team to review and update Risk Assessments, Policies and Procedures and Safe Operating Practices relating to the three areas. Any training requirements to be identified and discussed with People & Culture team. Any health surveillance requirements to be set up as required. Management response: People & Culture Manager</p> <p>Management actions are Agreed: This requires a lot of work that cannot be carried out within existing resources. There is a vacant post on the establishment list for a Parks Support post. Technical Services manager to submit request to recruit and SMT to agree request to G6 vacant post (Parks Support) to cover the above action on Policies and Procedures (plus training Transformation, Concerto, transition to EV, procurement of consumables etc). Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			

Obj1: Policies, procedures, and training			Priority 1
2. Employee training (all teams)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>Grounds Maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training has been adapted using Sodexo training materials; however, training records reference materials and processes that are no longer in place (induction materials, COSHH sheets, and preventative maintenance checks). • There are no supporting training materials or manuals to ensure the standard of training delivered is consistent and adheres to legislative standards and the councils' safe working practices. • Training records were not found for two operatives from the seven sampled (subsequently left the councils). Operatives have been conducting operational duties without required training being recorded/evidenced. • Physical certificates and training records available on the service team drive were incomplete for all seven (100%) individuals reviewed and did not accurately support the training recorded as completed on the service training matrix. • Training documentation was found unsecured in an unlocked filing cabinet within the employee break room. Further review of folders identified documentation containing personal information for employees, including return to work notes (fit notes) and copies of driving licences, and does not comply with data protection requirements. <p>Grounds Maintenance, Parks, and Trees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory training modules and polices on LEAH were not consistently completed by GM operatives and parks officers sampled. This includes the health and safety policy, manual handling, fire safety, lone working and COSHH awareness training. 	<p>a) Develop and implement a suitable grounds maintenance operative induction programme and ongoing refresher training to ensure both legislative and corporate health and safety requirements are met in relation to general duties.</p> <p>b) Liaise with HR and Health and Safety to establish the requirements for specialist training in relation to grounds maintenance operations.</p> <p>c) Ensure the council's corporate training programme, including mandatory training modules and review of policies, is completed by all employees on LEAH.</p> <p>d) Ensure suitable retention of personnel records, in line with data protection requirements.</p>	<p>31 December 2023</p>	<p>Technical Services Line Managers, H&S Team and People & Culture Team</p>
<p>Risk</p> <p>Service Risk: Failure to have a succession plan in place and failure to share knowledge across the team could result in reduction in service provision to residents during holidays, staff moving on and sickness (Risk ref: TS9).</p> <p>Corporate Risk: Failing to have an effective health and safety management system in place and lack of resource to support, may result in a fatality, illness or injury to staff or anyone else affected by our business; damage to property; legal action by HSE; civil claims and increased costs (South & Vale Risk ref: 9).</p> <p>Failure to fulfil the Data Protection legislative requirements may result in fines, insurance claims and reputational damage if data is breached or a challenge is made (South and Vale Risk ref: 11)</p>			
<p>Management Response</p> <p>Management actions are Agreed: Support can be provided to staff so they know how to access mandatory training. Managers can be provided with reports of training completions to assist with monitoring completions. People & Culture team can store training documentation on personnel files in a secure area. Additional job specific training materials will need to be created by the teams and guidance provided by H&S team. Management response: People & Culture Manager</p> <p>Management actions are Agreed: This requires a lot of work that cannot be carried out within existing resources. Technical Services Manager to submit request to recruit as per Obj 1 for extra resource to work with other teams and implement this action. Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			

Obj2: Roles, responsibilities, and employee management			Priority 1
3. Job descriptions (grounds maintenance)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
Job descriptions for the Grounds Maintenance team have been developed (April 2022), however, had not been implemented at the time of review (August 2023). The contents of which remain confidential, awaiting consultation with team operatives and Unison.	Implement job descriptions for all roles to document and inform all parties of the expectations, responsibilities, and requirements of their position.	31 December 2023	Technical Services Manager and People & Culture Team
Risk			
Service Risk: Roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined detailing expectations, responsibilities, and requirements of the position.			
Management Response			
Management actions are Agreed: Aware that JDs were created and evaluated and unclear why these have not been implemented. The JDs will need further review to confirm no additional changes and if necessary, evaluated. There will be a financial implication for the team in backdating to the original evaluation date as per the policy.			
Management response: People & Culture Manager			
Management actions are Agreed: Technical Services Manager drafting DA to agree formal consultation with GM staff on change of contract terms and conditions (as this issue not covered under transformation as expected).			
Management response: Technical Services Manager			

Obj3: Scheduling and monitoring of works and registers			Priority 2
4. Concerto workflow programming (grounds maintenance)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>The works schedule for the GM team is maintained within the property asset management system, Concerto. As the basis of the system is using the facilities/property land database, the identification and labelling of land does not align to that used historically by the grounds maintenance team.</p> <p>One piece of land may have multiple asset IDs within the same area of parkland that requires PPM tasks to be assigned individually to each ID. This impacts the team's ability to ensure that records are updated onto Concerto in real time, where multiple areas of land require a manual update of tasks completed against the programmed workflow.</p> <p>Review showed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46 seasonal tasks may be assigned by individual PPM code; • up to 30 tasks may be required in a given month during the height of the grass cutting and clearance season (September); • Multiple tasks may be assigned across multiple pieces of individual parkland, which takes a significant amount of time to, firstly programme, and then assign to the relevant technician (GM operative). <p>As Concerto labels land differently to that of the Sodexo PPM system, Confirm, operatives find it difficult to identify areas of land. As a result, operatives have reverted to the paper-based 'tick sheets' previously used, duplicating administration efforts.</p>	<p>Consult with the property team to establish a suitable solution to the workflow programming issues noted within the Concerto PPM system.</p>	<p>1 March 2024</p>	<p>Technical Services Manager</p>
Risk			
<p>Service Risk: Insufficient labour to carry out GM operations schedule of works resulting in council parks and open spaces not being maintained in a safe manner (Risk ref: TS12). Inefficiencies in programming, assigning, and monitoring the GM work schedule.</p>			
Management Response			
<p>Management actions are Agreed: This action is part of the ongoing testing and improvements to the Concerto system. The Parks team is working with the Concerto Project Manager to find solutions and do user testing.</p> <p>Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			

Obj3: Scheduling and monitoring of works and registers			Priority 2
5. Procurement of play equipment maintenance contractors (parks)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>Review of the RoSPA findings reports (action plans) for the 2022/23 annual reviews showed the following:</p> <p>Vale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> April 2022 – 36 findings, of which ten findings had not been completed/required further work. Of these ten findings, all ten were assigned a three-month priority rating (not met due to maintenance contractor procurement issues). May 2022 – 82 findings, of which 29 findings had not been completed/required further work. Of these 29 findings, 23 were assigned a three-month priority rating (not met due to maintenance contractor procurement issues). Additionally, 15 findings relate to one play area (Smiths Wharf, Wantage) that is recorded as being closed for extensive repairs (equipment and surfacing will be checked and serviced prior to opening). June 2022 - 52 findings, of which 20 findings had not been completed/required further work. Of these 20 findings, 14 were assigned a three-month and three one-week priority ratings (not met due to maintenance contractor procurement issues). July 2022 - 37 findings, of which 24 findings had not been completed/required further work. Of these 24 findings, 19 were assigned a three-month and three one-week priority ratings (not met due to maintenance contractor procurement issues). <p>South</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> July 2022 - Four findings, of which all four findings had not been completed/required further work. All four were assigned a three-month priority rating (not met due to maintenance contractor procurement issues). 	<p>Pursue procurement of suitable maintenance contractors to ensure remedial works are completed in line with RoSPA recommended priority timescales.</p>	<p>29 February 2024</p>	<p>Technical Services Manager</p>
<p>Risk</p> <p>Service Risk: Contractual risk - contractor competence: Reputational damage to council and litigation (Risk ref: TS8). Lack of regular inspections of council owned play areas resulting in unsafe equipment and unacceptably high risk of injury to the public (Risk ref: TS11).</p> <p>Corporate Risk: Failing to have an effective health and safety management system in place and lack of resource to support, may result in a fatality, illness or injury to staff or anyone else affected by our business; damage to property; legal action by HSE; civil claims and increased costs (South & Vale Risk ref: 9).</p>			
<p>Management Response</p> <p>Management actions are Agreed: Working with Procurement officers on a procurement exercise. Already started soft market testing and research of framework. Technical Project Manager is doing a PMP and Parks Team Leader providing spec.</p> <p>Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			

Obj3: Scheduling and monitoring of works and registers			Priority 2
6. KPIs for completion of works (all teams)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>There are no formal KPIs in place in relation to operational tasks and the management of reactive works for GM, Parks, and Trees teams.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of the Concerto system PPM for June was provided for the GM team. Review showed (as at 5 June 2023): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a total of 11,162 planned tasks had uploaded to the workflow for June; 1,570 were new tasks applied to the system; a total of 281 reactive tasks are noted. Review of the Parks team PSS system showed 589 (South 26 and Vale 563) unresolved inspection findings, of which 73 (two South and 71 Vale) were past the resolve by date. Review of the RoSPA findings reports (action plans) for the 2022/23 annual reviews showed that findings had not been consistently actioned/resolved within the RoSPA priority rating timescale. This, in part, is due to the ongoing procurement challenges in findings suitable play equipment maintenance contractors. 	<p>Develop and implement formal KPIs for the completion of general operational tasks and response to reactive works (action within x number of days etc).</p>	<p>1 March 2024</p>	<p>Business Support Supervisor</p>
Risk			
<p>Service Risk: Lack of regular inspections of corporate tree stock resulting in unacceptably high risk of accident or injury from falling trees or branches in the council owned public open spaces (Risk ref: TS10). Lack of regular inspections of council owned play areas resulting in unsafe equipment and unacceptably high risk of injury to the public (Risk ref: TS11).</p> <p>Corporate Risk: Failing to have an effective health and safety management system in place and lack of resource to support, may result in a fatality, illness or injury to staff or anyone else affected by our business; damage to property; legal action by HSE; civil claims and increased costs (South & Vale Risk ref: 9).</p>			
Management Response			
<p>Management actions are Agreed: We should be able to get report data from PSS live and Concerto. Business Support Supervisor working with Property to get data and put together KPIs to show response to reactive works and reviewed at each monthly GM team meeting.</p> <p>Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			

Obj3: Scheduling and monitoring of works and registers			Priority 3
7. Arbortrack – live inspection reporting (trees)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>All trees managed by the councils are recorded on a tree management database system, called Arbortrack. The system is used to schedule works, record inspections and any remedial works completed, and maintains the condition status for each tree.</p> <p>Internal audit established that completed visual tree inspections (VTAs) are updated onto the Arbortrack system manually once the officer returns to the office/home. This is due to connectivity issues with the handheld tablet provided, following a system upgrade. The remote handheld device is now not used, resulting in inefficiencies in the inspection reporting process.</p>	Address connectivity issues with handheld devices and the Arbortrack system to improve efficiency in the inspection reporting process.	1 December 2023	Parks Team Leader
Risk			
<p>Service Risk: Lack of regular inspections of corporate tree stock resulting in unacceptably high risk of accident or injury from falling trees or branches in the council owned public open spaces (Risk ref: TS10). Inefficiencies in programming, assigning and monitoring the tree work schedule.</p>			
Management Response			
<p>Management actions are Agreed: This issue relies on Capita IT input to provide the base map data and historical data. Awaiting timescales from IT Manager. Management response: Parks Team Leader</p>			

Obj3: Scheduling and monitoring of works and registers			Priority 3
8. Arbortrack – non-liaible land/trees (trees)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>Review and testing of the Arbortrack system identified several trees (22) in an area of land (South) no longer owned by the councils (now managed by the respective town council due to the development of site). In our view, it was not clear within the system that the councils no longer held liability for this area (and the trees contained within). There was no segregation/identification filters applied within the Arbortrack system to demonstrate this was the case.</p> <p>Internal audit was advised that officers were awaiting confirmation that the trees will not return to council ownership. At the last recorded inspection (Sep 2014) the trees posed no threat and are not considered high risk.</p>	Clearly identify trees that are no longer under the councils' management and responsibility within the Arbortrack system for ease of reference.	31 December 2023	Parks Team Leader
Risk			
<p>Service Risk: Lack of regular inspections of corporate tree stock resulting in unacceptably high risk of accident or injury from falling trees or branches in the council owned public open spaces (Risk ref: TS10).</p> <p>Inefficiencies in programming, assigning and monitoring the tree work schedule.</p>			
Management Response			
<p>Management actions are Agreed: Work is underway as part of '250 pieces of land' and agreeing how we manage land we maintain but do not own. The Arbortrack system will be updated with this info once we move to the new system (contract completion estimated October 2023).</p> <p>Management response: Parks Team Leader</p>			

Obj4: Risk management and H&S			Priority 2
9. Risk assessments (all teams)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>Grounds maintenance During our site visit to the Crowmarsh depot and Unit C warehouse, it was identified that grounds maintenance operatives do not have direct access to operational risk assessments and safe systems of work. Risk assessments are currently retained on the service team's shared drive and can only be accessed by individuals with approved access and suitable IT equipment. There is no shared IT access onsite, or paper copies printed and made available.</p> <p>Additionally, there was no onsite records available for chemical handing guidance and or Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) requirements for stored chemicals.</p> <p>Internal audit reviewed the Grounds Maintenance risk assessment folder via the service shared drive. Review identified numerous folders containing risk assessments and safe system of working (SSW), including legacy records created by the previous supplier (Sodexo). It was not clear what folders contained current up-to-date records.</p> <p>Parks and Trees Our review of the parks team risk assessments retained on the teams shared drive identified 78 documents on file, however, duplication of numerous records are noted where updates to risk assessments had been completed and historic records had not been archived. The risk assessment folders for all service areas (grounds maintenance and parks and trees) would benefit from a control log to ensure officers are reviewing the most up to date assessments and SSW for operational activities.</p>	<p>a) Operational health and safety documentation (including risk assessments, SSW and COSHH guidance) to be made available to all grounds maintenance operatives at all warehouse/store locations.</p> <p>b) Version control to be applied across risk assessments to ensure ease of access and document review in line with advised periods (historic records archived).</p>	31 March 2024	Technical Services Manager and H&S Team and Parks Team Leader
<p>Risk</p> <p>Service Risk: Risk of harm to personnel. Corporate Risk: Failing to have an effective health and safety management system in place and lack of resource to support, may result in a fatality, illness or injury to staff or anyone else affected by our business; damage to property; legal action by HSE; civil claims and increased costs (South & Vale Risk ref: 9).</p>			
<p>Management Response</p> <p>Management actions are Agreed: H&S to work alongside team to review and update Risk Assessments. Management response: People & Culture Manager</p> <p>Management actions are Agreed: This requires a lot of work that cannot be carried out within existing resources. Technical Services Manager to submit request to recruit and SMT to agree G6 vacant post (Parks Support) to cover the help make sure the H&S documentation is available to the GM operations and check on version control on the risk assessments (plus training Transformation, Concerto, transition to EV) and work alongside the H&S team. Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			

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Obj4: Risk management and H&S			Priority 2
10. Specialist site assessments (grounds maintenance)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>Evidence was presented of independent risk assessments conducted at the two grounds maintenance site depots (Crowmarsh and Unit C) by external specialist contractors. A number of recommendations are made across all documents; however, it is not clear that all recommendations had been appropriately actioned and resolved at the time of review (January 2023). It is noted that there are no high-risk recommendations documented. The following points are noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNIT C – Fire Risk assessment – Nine actions remain outstanding. • UNIT C – Water Risk Assessment – Actions state ‘To be removed’, with no further updates recorded. • Crowmarsh Store Depot – Fire Risk Assessment – Three actions remain outstanding; and • Crowmarsh Store Depot - Site Security Assessment – 11 actions are noted without comment/action. 	<p>Review and update specialist risk assessments to ensure all recommendations have been acknowledged and appropriate actions implemented.</p>	<p>31 March 2024</p>	<p>Technical Services Manager and H&S Team and Parks Team Leader</p>
Risk			
<p>Corporate Risk: Failing to have an effective health and safety management system in place and lack of resource to support, may result in a fatality, illness or injury to staff or anyone else affected by our business; damage to property; legal action by HSE; civil claims and increased costs (South & Vale Risk ref: 9).</p>			
Management Response			
<p>Management actions are Agreed: H&S to work alongside team to review and update Risk Assessments. Management response: People & Culture Manager</p>			
<p>Management actions are Agreed: Parks Team Leader to check actions completed. Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			

Obj4: Risk management and H&S			Priority 2
11. Lone working system (LoneAlert) (all teams)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>Grounds Maintenance Internal audit was advised that, generally, grounds and parks operatives work in pairs, so the risk associated to lone working is minimal, however, there is opportunity for individuals to lone work on occasions and this should be identified through the risk assessment associated to the individual operational task. Currently, grounds maintenance operatives operate a 'check in' system through mobile phone messaging with the Ground Maintenance Operations Manager, however, there is no formal process in place to cover periods of leave and/or unexpected attendance issues. The councils operate a lone working monitoring system, LoneAlert, however, grounds maintenance operatives do not have access, or have been trained in its use. The health and safety advisor confirms that grounds maintenance operatives should be given access to the system to ensure safety and consistency in respect of lone working arrangements.</p> <p>Parks and Trees The parks and tree officers do have access to the council's LoneAlert system and the ability to make mobile phone calls to line managers, if required, in the field. Internal audit conducted a review of LoneAlert system usage data for the period 1 January 2022 to 1 January 2023 (one calendar year). Usage data showed that although system access is available, usage among parks and tree officers is not consistent, and remains relatively low across the team.</p> <p>Risk Service Risk: Operational risk - council employees lone working: Officers at risk of harm or injury (Risk ref: TS7). Corporate Risk: Failing to have an effective health and safety management system in place and lack of resource to support, may result in a fatality, illness or injury to staff or anyone else affected by our business; damage to property; legal action by HSE; civil claims and increased costs (South & Vale Risk ref: 9).</p>	<p>a) Grounds maintenance operatives to be trained and given access to the lone working monitoring system (LoneAlert) to ensure safety and consistency in lone working arrangements.</p> <p>b) Remind all officers to utilise the LoneAlert system to ensure the safety of officers undertaking lone working duties, in line with the policy.</p>	1 April 2024	Technical Services Manager and H&S Team
Management Response			
<p>Management actions are Agreed: H&S to work alongside team to ensure all staff are aware of LoneAlert, the training available and are registered on the portal. Management response: People & Culture Manager</p> <p>Management actions are Agreed: Technical Services Manager and the Parks Team Leader to review the risk assessment for lone working for all the GM operatives in consultation with the H&S Officer and ensure the appropriate actions are taken to mitigate any risks raised in the assessment by 31 December 2023. Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			

Obj4: Risk management and H&S			Priority 2
12. Equipment maintenance and checks (grounds maintenance)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>Grounds maintenance Equipment and machinery used by the grounds maintenance team was purchased by the councils following the service returning in house. Internal audit was advised that all equipment and plant has been purchased new in 2021 and is still under manufacturers purchase warranty. At the time of review, (August 2023), the grounds maintenance team were following manufacturer and supplier guidance for servicing and maintenance intervals, and formal PPM/servicing and safety check routines had not been established.</p> <p>Parks and Trees Visual checks are conducted on saws and drills. These checks are not formally recorded.</p>	<p>a) Implement a formal process to record safety checks of plant, equipment, machinery and vehicles (ride on mowers, diggers etc).</p> <p>b) Establish an agreed schedule for PPM/servicing of plant, equipment and machinery.</p>	31 March 2024	Technical Services Manager and H&S Team
<p>Risk</p> <p>Service Risk: Risk of harm to personnel. Failure of equipment and machinery due to poor care and maintenance routines.</p> <p>Corporate Risk: Failing to have an effective health and safety management system in place and lack of resource to support, may result in a fatality, illness or injury to staff or anyone else affected by our business; damage to property; legal action by HSE; civil claims and increased costs (South & Vale Risk ref: 9).</p>			
<p>Management Response</p> <p>Management actions are Agreed: H&S to work alongside team to ensure standard operating procedures are in place and appropriate.</p> <p>Management response: People & Culture Manager</p> <p>Management actions are Agreed: Facilities support (PPM and project lead) has been assigned a task to look at having a system on Concerto to have PPMs for servicing. This requires a lot of work that cannot be carried out within existing resources. SMT to agree request to recruit to G6 vacant post (Parks Support) to cover the above workload on a) safety records and b) schedule for PPM servicing (plus training Transformation, Concerto, transition to EV, procurement of consumables etc.) and this new G6 post to liaise with Facilities to ensure captured and saved on Concerto.</p> <p>Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			

Obj5: Contractor management and procurement			Priority 2
13. Contractor management and procurement (all teams)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>Review of ten suppliers and contractors identified that three are entered onto the contracts register (contracts valued at £5k and above).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of these three entries, all contain omissions in required supporting procurement documentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ARB UK Ltd (entry 1578, three-year contract for tree surgery) – No supporting documentation published – (Contract now ended, no insurance documents or RAMS to support safe methods of working); Playsource Limited (entry 1710, six-month contract for playground repair works) – Contract ends Sep 2023 – (No RAMS provided to support safe methods of working); and Sutcliffe Play (South West) Limited (entry 1672, three-year contract for the supply of new playground equipment) – Contract ends January 2026 – (No contract published, submitted public liability half of advised minimum value (£5m), no RAMS provided to support safe methods of working). One supplier, PSS Software (Public Sector Software Ltd) – provision of play area management software, was identified with a recurring annual licence renewal of £6k for Vale but had not been recorded within the contracts register. The remaining six suppliers/contractors fall below the minimum threshold for the contracts register entry (£5k), with items purchased by individual purchase order when required, however, the frequency and regularity of purchase orders would suggest a review of contract procurement across the service is now required. This includes but is not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speedy Fuel LTD – Provision of red diesel and fuel oil for ground maintenance vehicles and machinery; Tudor Environmental LTD – Provision of sundry items for grounds maintenance team; Lister Wilder – Provision of mowing equipment and spares, no contract in place for servicing following end of warranty period. Additionally, the grounds maintenance team purchase items through Screwfix and Jewson’s on an ad-hoc basis to assist maintenance routines, however, there is no contract agreement/trade account in place. 	<p>a) Review, update, and publish required supporting documentation onto the contracts register for all awarded contracts.</p> <p>b) Liaise with the procurement team to review and establish best value procurement for regular suppliers/contractors where possible.</p>	31 December 2023	<p>a) Parks and Technical Support Supervisor</p> <p>b) Parks Team Leader</p>
Risk			
Service Risk: Contractual risk - contractor competence: Reputational damage to council. Litigation (Risk ref: TS8).			
Management Response			
<p>Management actions are Agreed: This requires a lot of work that cannot be carried out within existing resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Can be carried out within existing resources = Business Support Supervisor to update contract register b) SMT to agree request to recruit to G6 vacant post (Parks Support) to cover the above workload on procurement of consumables (plus training Transformation, Concerto, transition to EV etc.) and this new G6 post to liaise with Facilities and report to Parks Team Leader who will oversee the action. <p>Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			

Obj6: Warehouse and vehicle management			Priority 1
14. Site observations (grounds maintenance)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>Key observations identified from the site walk rounds include:</p> <p>Crowmarsh Site:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to the site entrance height restriction bar was unlocked on arrival (the main gates, however, were secured by padlock). • Significant smell of fuel within storage containers housing mowers and handheld tools. Risk of combustion and health (inhalation) due to fumes within poorly ventilated storage containers. The risk of combustion warning signage is displayed on entrance doors to containers. • Moisture and condensation within poorly ventilated storage containers housing mowers, which may impact the upkeep of machinery maintenance schedules and longevity of equipment. • No provision of PPE (fuel and chemical handling onsite). • No fuel management procedures and spill kits (fuel tanks and fuel storage located onsite). • Open waste containers onsite (unable to be secured to deter pests and/or risk of arson). • External perimeter fencing is not secure around full site and does not deter access to the public (damage to fencing panels). <p>Unit C – Hithercroft Industrial Estate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makeshift office space and storage on mezzanine above staff facilities (risk of load/weight restrictions). • Asbestos warning signs in staff facilities entrance, however, no onsite asbestos assessment or procedures. • Storage racks not organised with clear chemical separation. • Storage racks do not provide suitable organisation to support manual handling (heavy mower blades stored on floor under racking). • Unsecured items stored/leaned against walls (risk to fall/impact injury). • Chemical container presence with no clear directions/handling warnings displayed (COSHH). 	<p>Liaise with supporting services (waste/property/H &S) to implement reasonable and practical solutions to resolve the observations identified during the site visits.</p>	<p>31 March 2024</p>	<p>Parks Team Leader and H&S Team</p>
Risk			
<p>Service Risk: Unable to find new depot for GM operations when lease ends so no home for plant, equipment and staff (Risk ref TS13). Corporate Risk: Failing to have an effective health and safety management system in place and lack of resource to support, may result in a fatality, illness or injury to staff or anyone else affected by our business; damage to property; legal action by HSE; civil claims and increased costs (South & Vale Risk ref: 9). Failure to manage the security of all council owned assets including council offices may result in an incident or intruder entering the building putting our staff and visitors at risk or potential injury claims (South & Vale Risk ref: 4).</p>			
Management Response			
<p>Management actions are Agreed: H&S to work alongside team to ensure standard operating procedures are in place and appropriate. Any requirements for PPE can be discussed with the H&S team. Support can be provided to staff so they know how to access Mandatory Training. Managers can be provided with reports of training completions to assist with monitoring completions. Management response: People & Culture Manager</p>			
<p>Management actions are Agreed: Parks Team Leader to liaise with H&S team and the GM Manager and GM supervisors on site to implement solutions to resolve issues observed. Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			

Obj6: Warehouse and vehicle management			Priority 2
15. Corporate fuel cards (grounds maintenance)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>The Grounds Maintenance team hold corporate fuel cards to refuel the ten service vehicles under lease from Northgate.</p> <p>Internal audit established that there are no procedural records or policies published in relation to corporate fuel cards/vehicle management.</p> <p>A historical procedural document is held by the property (Facilities) team; however, review of the procedures has not been undertaken since the GM service transitioned inhouse. Review of the procedures identified the process reflected that of the facilities team and not from a wider corporate perspective.</p> <p>A draft guidance document titled 'Use of Corporate Fuel Cards' was developed in September 2020, however, has not progressed and been approved for final publication to officers.</p> <p>Review of the GM vehicle logs identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vehicle log records had not been updated/collated on a monthly basis for reconciliation (the oldest dated March 2023). Receipts to support fuel purchases have not been retained/unable to view within the vehicle logs to support purchases. Formal reconciliation of fuel cards records (Vehicle logs) against the fuel card management system is not routinely conducted to ensure accuracy in payments and usage. <p>It is noted that a review of fuel expenditure as part of the budget monitoring process. The value of corporate fuel card expenditure for the GM team for 2022/23 equates to £47,539 (£37,081 Vale and £10,458 South (including recharges)).</p>	<p>a) Review, finalise and recirculate centralised guidance on the use of Corporate Fuel Cards, including responsibilities surrounding the reconciliation process across supporting records and systems.</p> <p>b) Conduct regular checks against supporting records and the fuel card management system to validate appropriate use and accuracy in payment values.</p>	<p>a)31 December 2023</p> <p>b)1 December 2023</p>	<p>a) People and Culture Manager</p> <p>b) Business Support Supervisor</p>
<p>Risk</p> <p>Service Risk: Risk of financial loss through misuse and lack of accountability.</p>			
<p>Management Response</p> <p>Management actions are Agreed:</p> <p>a) The central corporate policy and guidance to be led by the People and Culture Manager.</p> <p>b) Business Support Supervisor to liaise with GM Operations Manager to reconcile receipts against invoices.</p> <p>Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			
<p>It is noted that the finance document 'Use of Corporate Fuel Cards ' has now been approved for publication to officers.</p>			

Obj6: Warehouse and vehicle management			Priority 2
16. Driving at work policy (grounds maintenance)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
The councils have a joint Safe Driving at Work Policy, that was issued in November 2017. Review is overdue. The policy is outdated and refers to operations under the environmental protection manager, rather than a wider corporate policy, and does not reflect the current operational requirements for the grounds maintenance team.	Develop a revised Safe Driving at Work Policy to include wider organisational service practices, safety protocols and operational management requirements.	31 December 2023	H&S Team and People & Culture Team
Risk			
Corporate Risk: Failing to have an effective health and safety management system in place and lack of resource to support, may result in a fatality, illness or injury to staff or anyone else affected by our business; damage to property; legal action by HSE; civil claims and increased costs (South & Vale Risk ref: 9).			
Management Response			
Management actions are Agreed: The policy is in the process of being reviewed. Before finalising H&S team will liaise with the team to ensure the policy reflects the current operational requirements and addresses the issue of speeding fines being reimbursed by the council.			
Management response: People & Culture Manager			

Obj6: Warehouse and vehicle management			Priority 3
17. Stock control management (grounds maintenance)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>There are currently no regular stock control routines (stock counts) in place, although, an annual inventory declaration is submitted to both finance and the insurance team. This annual inventory declaration (excel spreadsheet), however, does not include all equipment purchases (manual tools and mechanical parts), sundry items and consumables.</p> <p>Items purchased to support operational maintenance routines and general service practices are not recorded or monitored.</p> <p>Internal audit identified two high-value items (one ride on mower £51,768 and one trailer £4,850), that were not listed on the inventory list, however, were present on site. Through further enquiry, we established that the two items had been included appropriately within financial records (accountancy), however, the original inventory list had not been maintained on site.</p>	<p>a) Implement a formal process to reconcile and validate grounds maintenance inventory on an agreed schedule to maintain accuracy across inventory and financial reporting.</p> <p>b) Explore whether inventory can be maintained within the Concerto software system to centralise records.</p>	31 December 2023	Parks Team Leader and Business Support Supervisor.
Risk			
<p>Service Risk: Inaccuracies between financial records and physical inventory resulting in anomalies within assets valuations.</p> <p>Poor stock management controls resulting in unnecessary purchases and expenditure.</p>			
Management Response			
<p>Management actions are Agreed: There is a vacant post on the establishment list for a Parks Support post. Technical Services Manager to submit request to recruit and SMT to agree request to G6 vacant post (Parks Support) to cover the above action on a formal process (plus training Transformation, Concerto, transition to EV, procurement of consumables etc) then this post to work and report to Parks Team Leader and agree with GM Manager and validate a GM inventory a) and b) Business Support Supervisor to see if Concerto can hold inventory and process for maintaining.</p> <p>Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			

Obj7: Climate action and environmental considerations			Priority 3
18. Project analysis reports (all teams)			
Findings	Management Actions	Due Date	Action Owner
<p>The initial wilding scheme ‘No Mow May’ was extended from seven sites in 2022 (two South and five Vale) to 17 sites (eight South and nine Vale) across the districts in 2023. The scheme is renamed ‘Let It Bee’ and total acreage now covers 15.5 acres, or 62,700m². (12.6 acres (51,000m²) for Vale and 2.9 acres (11,700m²) in South).</p> <p>Analysis and calculations in relation to the scheme costs/benefit for the councils have not been undertaken at the time of review (August 2023).</p>	<p>Develop project reports to analyse the operational impact of future wilding schemes (pros, cons, cost vs benefit, public engagement/opinion etc).</p>	<p>31 March 2024</p>	<p>Technical Services Manager</p>
Risk			
Service Risk: Failure to act upon the joint councils climate action plan commitments.			
Management Response			
<p>Management actions are Agreed: This is an on-going project in the early stages. We are gauging resident comments by writing to all residents in the vicinity of the Let it Bee sites. The climate and biodiversity team leader is looking to appoint a Nature Recovery Officer, and one of their key tasks will be to survey the land that the GM team manage and put forward proposals for how we can change our land management practices to deliver nature’s recovery. The proposals would need to be drawn up by working with the GM team so that we can fully understand the practical implications of the proposals, the costs and benefits. Ultimately, it is likely that any new proposals would need some form of approval and, possibly funding if we are looking at new equipment to undertake the management.</p> <p>Management response: Technical Services Manager</p>			