



IDVERDE PERFORMANCE
Statement by Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum to Merton Council
Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel
1 November 2018

I am Tony Burton, a convener of the Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum. We provide a network and collective voice for Friends and like-minded community groups for parks and green spaces across Merton. We set up in 2016 in response to the handling of the outsourcing of the contract which you are reviewing tonight.

We have worked hard to establish relationships with idverde and convene meetings with them for Friends and like-minded groups several times a year. These are very constructive. We have supported efforts to include a community perspective in monitoring idverde's performance and some of the results are in your papers. And it was through our efforts that details of the contract specification were eventually released through a Freedom of Information request.

We ask you to consider three issues this evening:

First, idverde needs to get the basics right and is falling short. We were promised an award winning, multinational company with vast experience. The daily delivery isn't matching up to this:

- Basic horticultural skills are lacking – hedges are trimmed but invasive species are not removed as one example
- Grass mowing is leaving a bad legacy – we now see green space users endangered by thousands of shards created as glass bottles and cans which should have been cleared beforehand are shattered by mowers
- Pointless delays are caused by idverde and Merton Council squabbling over whether a seat or a gate or a fence needs to be replaced or repaired because the choice determines who pays
- With a large staff turnover even the most basic knowledge about individual parks and green spaces is often lacking – such as when gates are unlocked or which parts are left wild. We've asked for a basic guide to be prepared for each green space to help induct new staff

- There are contradictory messages about funding – with fears of commercialisation sitting alongside private and public schools making heavy use of green spaces without being charged
- The speed and quality of responding to local groups is too variable and too many emails lack replies and requests go unanswered.

Second, Merton Council needs to be much more active in managing performance and enforcing delivery of the contract. We welcome the regular monitoring that shows idverde's performance has fallen short during most of the contract so far. When we add in the feedback from local volunteers the situation is even worse. We are told Merton Council has docked idverde £38,000 but this seems scant compensation for such persistent failures in performance. We ask Merton Council to enforce the contract more vigorously and publish performance results and penalties more regularly.

Which brings us to our third and final point – there are simply too many excuses getting in the way of action. We don't want to hear that the contract needs a long honeymoon period – idverde has vast experience of new contracts and this is its core competency. We don't want any more excuses about staff being spread too thinly or lacking the training they need. Idverde should simply employ the staff it needs to do the job. And we really need to do better than blame the weather for disrupting the work programme – if the grass can't be cut then there is plenty of other work for idverde to prioritise.

Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum is here this evening because we really care. Idverde is Europe's largest grounds maintenance firm yet is still failing on the basics. Merton Council needs to do much more to challenge performance, penalise failure and expect idverde to achieve the high standards we all deserve.