

Subject: Grounds Maintenance Review. Progress Update
Date of Meeting: 14 June 2010
Report of: Director of Housing, Culture and Enterprise
Contact Officer: Name: Graham Page Tel: 29-3354
E-mail: Graham.Page@brighton-hove.gov.uk
Key Decision: No
Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE/ EXEMPTIONS

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 Provide a progress report on the review of grounds maintenance service on housing management owned land.
- 1.2 The scope of the review is large and complex so the aim is to have the revised service in place by April 2011
- 1.3 A revised service specification for the grounds maintenance service will be developed with City parks using pilot locations to test and cost out the service improvements.
- 1.4 The revised service will be benchmarked with other local authorities in order to demonstrate the new service delivers value for money.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) That members of HMCC note the contents of the report.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The project officer has been working alongside the Estates Service Monitoring Group which consists of two representatives from each of the four area panels, a leaseholder, sheltered housing action group and high rise action group member.
- 3.2 The group also includes the Operational Managers for City parks and Estate Services. Collectively we have explored with residents their concerns and identified what are the core issues with the current service.
- 3.3 We aim to become a 3 star service and to achieve this we need to meet the National Standards set by the Tenant Service Authority. The project officer

has adopted those guidelines as a framework for the review. These guidelines are comprehensive and focus on;

- Emphasis on outcomes-what are residents priorities for the service
- Initial assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the service
- Develop resident involvement impact assessments to demonstrate the outcome and influence of residents in shaping and changing the service.
- Involve residents in making assessments through visits , mystery shopping, learning from complaints
- Focus on access and customer care ,diversity and value for money
- Assess prospects for improvement- track record performance management and capacity
- Score the service and identify parts of the service and geographical areas that should be prioritised for improvement. Identify what difference the service makes to residents
- Devise communication plan – regular briefings to staff and councillors, key residents/contractors on service performance and improvement planning
- Devise programme of testing

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The Estates Service Monitoring Group has met monthly since November 2009.
- 4.2 In January 2010 the group engaged in a 'pin point board' activity and residents wrote down what they thought of the current service listing, good and bad practice and scoring them 1-10, 10 being excellent , 1 very poor. There were 38 individual 'Post it's' with comments on the board which were grouped into themes, namely; trees, grass, shrubs, litter, weeds, wildlife and communication. The scores for each theme ranged from 1-8, with most scores being in the lower to middle range.
- 4.3 The group have produced a Grounds Maintenance Action Plan which set out what residents would like to be achieved under each of the headings.
- 4.4 On 10 May 2010 representatives from the group were taken on an estate tour of housing sites. The purpose of this tour was to show residents how varied our estates are and familiarise themselves with the range of grounds maintenance standards across parts of the city.
- 4.5 The group are keen to explore and demonstrate what can be achieved by operating local standards agreed with residents in particular pilot areas. The

estate tour visited diverse locations so that the full range of services could be explored, including some natural sites where wildlife occurs naturally – rare butterflies in chalky banks and conservation areas.

- 4.6 The project is entering an exciting phase with pilot locations to be decided at the next Estates Service Monitoring Group meeting in June. This will afford the project the opportunity to explore with residents the local service standards they would like to see, cost out any changes to service charges and monitor resident satisfaction with the service
- 4.7 Once the group has decided on the locations to be piloted the project will engage the services of Brighton University Volunteering group of students. They will survey residents in the pilot areas to seek their views on what level of grounds maintenance service they would like to see where they live. The volunteers will also survey resident satisfaction before/after the pilot.
- 4.8 Members of the Estates Service Monitoring Group attend the Housing and Estate Forum in Moulsecoomb and are working with the forum to develop the 'rate your estate' initiative. Some Estates Service Monitoring Group resident members have undertaken training to become 'resident assessors' who will monitor the standards of cleaning and grounds maintenance by scoring the service.
- 4.9 On 14 May 2010 a group of residents from Crawley visited Brighton to see the scheme in operation and this visit will be reciprocated later in the year. This will prove useful when we benchmarking and compare our services with other social landlords
- 4.10 The Project Officer has had met with Highways to explore the use of a mechanical ride on vehicle with telescopic arms which sprays weeds on the highway which could easily divert into housing owned parking spaces and garage areas. We are waiting on costs, but this could provide significant savings as we currently use City parks who use an operative on foot to spray these areas.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report. As the review of grounds maintenance on housing land progresses, the financial implications for the HRA Budget and tenants will be assessed and reported back to this committee.

Finance Officer Consulted: Susie Allen Date: 27th May 2010

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 As the report is for noting only, there are no direct legal or Human Rights Act implications

Lawyer Consulted: Liz Woodley

Date: 28th May 2010

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 Research suggests that there is a strong correlation between economic and environmental deprivation and poorer communities tend to live in more polluted and less green locations. Residents of social housing are therefore more likely to live in areas of poor environmental quality (Neighbourhoods Green (2004) Decent Homes Decent spaces). In order to minimise any negative impacts throughout the city an impact assessment will be undertaken during this review.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 This project supports the council's sustainability strategy and clear environmental benefits could be gained from the development of a new specification including reducing the cities carbon footprint and protecting and enhancing nature conservation interest within the city.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 Through the development of a new specification there is an opportunity to ensure that issues of community safety are considered in the design and maintenance of green spaces and communal areas

Risk & Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 None

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 The development of a new specification for the delivery of our grounds maintenance service will have citywide implications for council tenants and leaseholders

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

None

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None