

REPORT TO: BEST VALUE SUB COMMITTEE – 26 APRIL 2001

REPORT ON: BEST VALUE REVIEW OF THE GARDEN MAINTENANCE SCHEME

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 251-2001

1. PURPOSE

This report is the result of a Best Value Review of the Council's Garden Maintenance Scheme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Sub-Committee approve the Best Value Review of the Garden Maintenance Scheme and remit consideration of the undernoted proposals to the Leisure Services Committee:

- (i) the eligibility criteria for the scheme should remain largely unchanged except that, for new applicants, the qualifying age should be raised from 60 to 65. Similarly, the condition that the applicant does not live with another able-bodied adult under the age of 60 should be amended, so that this also increases to 65.
- (ii) the proposals for continuous improvement detailed in paragraph 13 of this report be agreed i.e.
 - grass clippings to be uplifted as part of the scheme
 - administration to be taken over centrally by the Leisure and Parks Department

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 This review accounts for £384,000 (2.96%) of the Leisure and Parks Department's Revenue Budget and represents 6.92% of the expenditure planned for review in that department in 2000/2001.
- 3.2 The proposals in this report will not result in any additional costs or immediate savings. Changing the age qualification is not likely to reduce the number of people on the scheme in the short term, but will reduce the waiting time for new applicants. The additional cost of uplifting grass clippings will be absorbed into the existing budget by including this in the bonus time for the employees who work on the scheme.

4. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

This report impacts on a key Local Agenda 21 theme – resources are used efficiently and waste is minimised. All vegetative material such as prunings and grass clippings will be composted and used as mulching either by the Leisure and Parks Department or through the Environmental and Consumer Protection Department's recycling programmes.

5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

The scheme provides a service to residents who are unable to maintain their gardens due to age or disability.

6. DEFINITION OF SERVICE REVIEWED

6.1 The service reviewed is the Garden Maintenance Scheme, organised by the Council's Leisure and Parks Department. The work is actually carried out by the Grounds Maintenance DSO which is currently the subject of a separate Best Value Review. This review focuses, therefore, on issues relating to eligibility, administration and specifications for the scheme, rather than the contractual arrangements.

6.2 Under the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982, Councils may provide gardening assistance to those requiring help through old age or disability. At a meeting of the General Purposes Sub-Committee of the Parks Committee on 26 April 1983 it was agreed that the following criteria would apply:

- a) First priority would be given to persons who are both aged and disabled, and second priority to disabled persons.

'Aged' was defined as over the age of 60 and 'disabled' was defined as having a chronic medical condition certified by a Doctor or Social Worker or being in receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Mobility Allowance.

- b) Any person in the above category in receipt of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit or Income Support would receive the service free of charge.

- c) Persons who marginally fail to qualify may be considered as a special case at the insistence of individual elected members with the Lord Provost's Committee (now Policy and Resources Committee) acting as arbiter. (This procedure has not been required in the last 7-8 years).

- d) Persons not meeting any of the above criteria should pay an hourly charge for the services received.

- e) Applicants must live within the Council's boundaries, and not reside at the same address with another able bodied adult under the age of 60.

6.3 The scheme is administered at present by the Housing Department, decentralised to all Area Offices, who instruct the Leisure and Parks Department Grounds Maintenance DSO to carry out the work. The specification for the service is detailed in Appendix II and primarily consists of an initial "one off" clean up or landscaping to bring the garden areas up to scratch, costing £120 per applicant, followed by regular cycles of grass cutting and edging of grass areas through the summer, weeding of borders, rose and hedge pruning, charged in accordance with a formula taking into account the work involved and the size of the garden (see Appendix III). These figures are used in the calculation of recoverable costs from those who pay for the service.

6.4 The scheme is now costing the Council £384,000 per year to maintain 2450 gardens, at an average cost of £157 per garden per year (exclusive of VAT). The vast majority of applications receive the service free because they qualify for benefit. In fact only 20 (0.8%) of recipients pay for the service. Most of those requiring to pay for the service can presumably obtain the service in the private sector at a more competitive cost.

7. JUSTIFICATION FOR REVIEWING THE SERVICE

This service was selected for review on the grounds of its cost to the Council and its importance to those who benefit from the scheme or are applying to join.

8. REVIEW METHODOLOGY

8.1 The review team consisted of the Review Team Leader (from Corporate Planning), the Lead Officer (Parks Manager) and officers from the Leisure and Parks Department.

8.2 The review methodology involved defining the service, identifying critical success factors, benchmarking and option appraisal.

9. CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

9.1 Stakeholders

The main stakeholders were identified as the members of the public who benefit from the Garden Maintenance Scheme and the Council Tax payers who fund the service.

9.2 Critical Success Factors

The critical success factors were identified as

- | | | |
|----------|---|---|
| Cost | - | to the Council and to those members of the public who pay for the service |
| Quality | - | of the service given to recipients of the scheme |
| Fairness | - | ensuring that the appropriate eligibility criteria apply, and that those most in need get the service as quickly as possible. |

10. PERFORMANCE REVIEW

In order to address the issues of cost quality and fairness, the review considered the eligibility criteria for receipt of the service, the administration of the scheme and the specification of the grounds maintenance work to be carried out. The review took particular account of feedback from recipients of the service (e.g. through analysis of complaints) and comparisons with the service provided by other local authorities.

11. RESULTS OF COMPARISONS

A survey was carried out of all Scottish Local Authorities, the replies from which are detailed in Appendix 1. There are wide variations in the service provided, but the general consistent points are the regular maintenance of these gardens, including grass cutting with the lifting of grass clippings, maintenance of edges and hedges and with little or no charge to the customer. In addition, the age for receipt of the service is generally 65 years and above and, in two authorities, the recipients have to be 75 years of age. The non-uptaking of grass clippings is the most common cause of complaint from recipients of the scheme in Dundee.

12. OPTION APPRAISAL

Following the performance review and the comparisons made, it was identified that improvements could be made in the following key areas:

- eligibility criteria for receipt of the service
- administration of the scheme
- specification of work

These issues are addressed in the proposals for continuous improvement set out below.

13. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROPOSALS

- 13.1 The age qualification for new applicants to the scheme should be raised to 65, bringing this into line with other authorities and reducing waiting time for new applicants. Similarly, the condition relating to another able-bodied person living with the applicant should be changed so that the relevant age is also 65.
- 13.2 To address the main public complaint of grass cuttings not being uplifted, a study was carried out of various grass cutting methods. The study showed that grass clippings can be uplifted (boxed or raked) in about the same time for grass cutting only and therefore uplifting of the grass can be incorporated into the scheme at no additional cost, subject to agreement with the Trade Unions on revised bonus times. This would obviously improve the service to customers who are elderly and/or disabled.
- 13.3 The decentralising of the administration of the scheme in the Housing Department has not been as successful as when the scheme was centrally administered by a single person. In addition, a third of the recipients of the scheme are no longer Council tenants and therefore not on the Housing Department's database. The key information for the service is produced by the Council Revenues Section through the Director of Finance i.e. to check whether a person is entitled to benefits in order for them to receive the garden maintenance service free of charge.

It is therefore considered that, to improve efficiency, the preferred option is to re-centralise the administration of the scheme in the Leisure and Parks Department. This will allow more stringent financial and performance monitoring under the control of one Department. Transferring the administration back to the Leisure and Parks Department will have staffing implications.

14. CONSULTATION

The Directors of Leisure and Parks, Housing and Corporate Planning have been consulted on this report.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Best Value Submission to the Secretary of State for Scotland: Policy and Resources Committee – 11 December 1997

Chief Executive Date

Appendices

- I Comparisons with other Local Authorities' Garden Maintenance Scheme
- II Service Specification
- III Charging Formulae

APPENDIX I

Authority – Identity No.	No. grass cuts/yr	No. grass edge cuts/yr	Clips lifted		No. hedge/yr	Borders weeded			Roses pruned		Other works
			Yes	No		Yes	N	No.	Spring	Autumn	
1	16	Edges sprayed	Pilot only	√	1		√	Sprayed	No	No	None
2	12/13	6	√		2		√		√	√	Paths sprayed x 2 + any extras
3	6	6	√		3	√		6	No	No	Path edges/gravel sprayed
4	14	14	√		2		√		No	No	None
5 Dundee	11	6		√	2	√		6	√	No	One off initial clean up. Other one/offers for tree work etc.
6	8	8	√		2		√		No	No	None
7	15 – 17	-		√	2		√		No	No	
8	13	7	√		2		√		No	No	-
9	12	1	√		2		√		No	No	
10	12	12	√		0		√		No	No	
11	7	7	√		2		√				None
12	10	0		√	0		√		No	No	-
13	6	6	√		1		√		No	No	None
14	8	8	√		2	√		2	No	No	Border weeding/digging, includes for application of weedkiller
15	Performance spec – cut height 20mm max growth height 80mm (equates to around 14/15 cuts)	Monthly approx – performance no more than 40mm max growth	√		2		√		No	No	Non cyclic paid on order direct from Housing
16	8	8	√		2		√		No	No	-
17	7	7	√		2		√		No	No	-
18	14	7	√		2		√		No	No	None
19	10	10 strims edges every cut	√		1		√		No	No	None

Authority – Identity No.	No. grass cuts/yr	No. grass edge cuts/yr	Clips lifted		No. hedge/yr	Borders weeded			Roses pruned		Other works
20	4/5 week cycle	4/5 week cycle	√		Every 2nd cycle		√		No	No	In non grass season Nov – April another 1000 gardens on reserve list given a tidy
21	11 – 13	11 – 13	√		1		√		No	No	Strim perimeter -

APPENDIX I (CONTD.)

Authority – Identity No.	Income from client/tenant	Criteria for receipt of scheme	No. maintained				Who Administers	Who carry's out work	Additional information
			No.	0/0	Pr.	Co.			
1	£10 admin fee	75 or over, medical unfit and approved by Community Medical Specialist	3082	0	526	2556	Arts & Rec	Contracting Services	
2	Free if in receipt of Income Support. Others full rate	Council tenants only. Aged or Disability as long as no one else in house able.	1200	-	-	1200	Housing/Social Work/Transport & Info	Transport & Info 20%. Private contractor 80% (Fountain Forestry)	
3	No charge	Over 65 years old and no other dependants in house, disabled and receiving benefits	850-900			√	Housing	Land Contracts	
4	Grass £67 or £14 per year. Hedges £24 or £6 per year	Senior Citizens and disabled residents provided no other adult in house over 16 able to maintain. Scheme available to Council/Private tenants and private house owners. Those in receipt of Council Housing benefit or council tax benefit (excl. single person living allowance, eligible for lower discounted rates)	1891				Env. & Infrastructure	Commercial Services Group and private contractor	
5 Dundee	None	Over 60 years chronic medical conditions or registered disabled. No one over 16 years in house	2408	689	20	1699	Housing	Leisure & Parks	
6	Free/£30	Pension age or registered disabled	3400	√	√	√	Homes & Tech	Community Serv.	People that do not receive benefits e.g. Council Tax rebate pay £30 for the scheme. Remainder get service f.o.c.
7	Free	Aged 60 or over or have a disability and in receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Rebate. No other person living in house who can maintain garden.	3300	93	9	2361	Recreation Department	Private Contractor	Cost/garden £90.49
8	Free	Incapable of maintaining garden due to disability, age or infirmity. If age alone must be 60 or older	7000	√	√	√	Housing Services	?	
9	£15/annum	Over 60 or in receipt of disability allowance and a council tenant	5400			5400	Housing Services	Grounds Maintenance	
10		Council tenant or 60 years or on Disabled Living All. and in receipt of Housing benefit and no able bodied person in house.	1875			1875	Protective Services		

Authority – Identity No.	Income from client/tenant	Criteria for receipt of scheme	No. maintained				Who Administers	Who carry's out work	Additional information
			No.	O/O	Pr.	Co.			
11		Everyone in house must be at least 70 or in receipt of DLA at highest rate or attendance allowance	1650 max	95 9		633			
12		OAP or medical condition	400			400	Community Services (Housing)	Env. Services	
13	No charge at present	In receipt of benefits i.e. old age pension, disability allowance, incapacity allowance etc.	2800	√	√	√	Property Services	Property Services G/Maint If there is able person in house residents will not be placed on scheme	
14	Nil	Over 65 or have a physical disability. Also no relation staying in nearby area	6850	√	√	√			
15	No charge	Over 60 or registered disabled	1960			√	Housing Services	Env. Services	
16	£98/garden for Housing £142/garden for owners		3441	61		3380	Housing & Env. Services	Env. Services	
17	£13.90	Retired. No able person in house. Under 65 years on disability living allowance	1817	86		1731	Social Work	Commercial Operations	
18	Nil	Senior citizens and physically disabled and no one else over 16 years resident or medical confirmation	9600	3600		5400			
19	£10.20 inc VAT per cut	Home owners must receive homehelp from Stirling Council. In receipt of attendance allowance or disability living allowance 75 years or over chronically sick	670	70	100	500	Tech Service Grounds Maintenance	Tech Service Grnds Maintenance 70 tenants pay for service out of the 670	
20	Nil	Disabled or infirm with no able bodied person living in house	1000 – 1000 on reserve list				Greenlight Env. (Comm. Based Org)	Greenlight Env. Council are main funders of the scheme. New Deal Env./Task force/Env. Care in the Community	
21	None – 50% charge made to Housing Assoc's.	70 years of age, claiming disability, housing allowance, registered blind. 65-70 years with Dr.'s medical cert and no one else in house over 16 yrs	5000				Ext Env unit in Env. Serv.	Grnds Maint section in Env. Services	

Four Councils do not provide a Garden Maintenance Service

25 Councils have replied and 7 have not returned the questionnaires (78%). Survey sent out to 32 Local Authorities.

GARDEN MAINTENANCE SCHEME

General

Main purpose of scheme is to maintain as many gardens as finance allows. Therefore, the quality is not as high as private landscaping practices. Each garden should be cleared in such a way as to reduce maintenance costs.

See programme for planned works.

New Gardens - (see programme for scheduled dates).

Explain scheme to new customers to avoid confusion.

New Garden work includes:-

Cut grass.

Edge grass.

Tidy planted areas.

Tidy perimeter borders.

Cut hedge (as instructed on pink form).

Roses pruned.

Paths weedkilled.

Extra works which can be ordered if instructed by Housing Officer at new garden phase:-

Any shrub and tree pruning/removal.

removal and grass over any area of shrubs etc.

Removal of rockeries.

Removal of sheds/glasshouses.

Removal of rubbish heaps etc.

All this work is included within the price for a new garden.

Full Maintenance

Planned - one visit every three work period (see programme).

Grass cut - not uplifted.

Grass edge.

Tidy planted areas (hoe and rake).

No other works included.

APPENDIX III

GARDENING CHARGES FORMULAE

Request that the Housing Officer measures all areas requiring attention.

Item	Area	Multiply By	
Grass Area	Xm2	0.0020	=
Flower/Shrub Beds	Xm2	0.015	=
Edging (Linear)	Xm	0.0065	=
Perimeter Border	Xm2	0.0118	=
Path Edge	Xm2	0.0065	=
TOTAL (FOR FULL MAINTENANCE CHARGE)			=
Hedge (Surface Area)	Xm2	0.0040	=

New garden charge for 2000 season £120.19 plus vat

Full maintenance = total of all calculations except hedging.

**NEW GARDEN CHARGE
+ FULL MAINTENANCE X 6
+ GRASS ONLY X 6
+ HEDGE**

X HOURLY RATE

+ V.A.T.at 17.5%