

REPORT TO: LEISURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 18th FEBRUARY 2002 & DSO COMMITTEE 11th MARCH, 2002

REPORT ON: GARDEN MAINTENANCE SCHEME – REVIEW

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF LEISURE AND ARTS/DIRECTOR OF DUNDEE CONTRACT SERVICES

REPORT NO: 97-2002

1 **Purpose of Report**

To review the operation of the Council's Garden Maintenance Scheme and to consider revised criteria.

2 **Recommendations**

It is recommended that members:-

2.1 Approve the operational changes detailed at Section 6.4 as follows:-

- The use of large ride on mowers where appropriate
- increase the number of teams from 9 to 10
- delivery of the service will be carried out by Dundee Contract Services from 1 April 2002

Approve the amendments to eligibility criteria detailed at Section 6.5 as follows:-

- 2.2
- The minimum age requirement for new applicants be raised to 70. Current recipients aged 65 to 70 will continue to receive the scheme.
 - New recipients under the age of 70 will require to provide evidence that they are unable to maintain their gardens on a permanent basis.
 - Applicants will not be entitled to the scheme where anyone living in the home is 16 years or over and is capable of maintaining the garden.

3 **Financial Implications**

3.1 The Leisure & Parks Revenue Budget for 2001/2002 includes provision of £393,600 in respect of the annual maintenance and "one off" initial costs for approximately 2,500 gardens on the Garden Maintenance Scheme, equating to an average cost per garden of £157.

3.2 In 2002/2003 Dundee Contract Services – Grounds Maintenance client will provide and administer the whole scheme and a sum of £406,000 has been included in the Provisional Revenue Budget Volume for 2002/03 equating to approximately £162 per garden for 2,500 gardens.

4 **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 by the Dundee Contract Services and Leisure & Arts Departments 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 **Review of Current Scheme**

6.1 Reference is made to Article I of the Best Value Sub Committee of the Policy & Resources Committee of 26 April 2001 when a review of the Garden Maintenance Scheme was approved. The scheme was administered by the Leisure & Parks Department and the work carried out by that department's DSO with the agreed changes.

6.2 On average 2500 gardens a year are maintained under the Garden Maintenance Scheme with the build up of a waiting list of up to 100 by the end of the summer. This had led to a rationing of the scheme by waiting time rather than by a truer assessment of need. A review of all current recipients and areas is now underway to ensure genuine requirement for the Garden Maintenance Scheme prior to the start of the 2002/03 season.

6.3 The improvement in the service by the uplifting of grass clippings for areas cut by hand machines has caused problems due to the poor weather during the summer and the long mild autumn. The problems have included; delays in completing cycles on time; the excessive amount of grass growth to be uplifted and disposed of, and the difficulty of keeping within budget. This has necessitated cut backs in expenditure towards the end of the season and prevented new applicants being taken on during the latter part of the season. There has also been an increasing number of complaints not only from garden maintenance recipients but also from those living in Council sheltered housing complexes, for the grass clippings also to be uplifted.

Officers in the Leisure & Arts Department have therefore reviewed the scheme over the winter period in order to highlight problems and ways of addressing these issues.

6.4 **Operational Changes**

6.4.1 Where possible, larger grass areas currently cut with hand machines under the garden maintenance scheme will be cut using larger ride-on grass cutting machines.

- 6.4.2 It should be noted that it will not be possible to uplift grass clippings in areas cut by these larger ride-on machines but with more frequent cutting (up to 14 times per year) the grass should be more under control. The alternatives are small ride-on mowers with grass boxes, which will be at least three times more expensive than the large machines, as well as the added cost of removing, transporting and disposal of the grass clippings.
- 6.4.3 Residents of Council Sheltered Housing developments will continue to receive the service but, where possible, have their gardens maintained using the method outlined above, except where individuals request to maintain their own garden areas.
- 6.4.4 Examination of funding from the Better Neighbourhood Fund for expenditure incurred in these areas will be investigated.
- 6.4.5 In order to ensure the scheme is delivered in an efficient manner it is proposed to increase the number of teams from 9 to 10 with each unit maintaining an average 250 gardens during the season. This should allow for a better delivery of service.
- 6.4.6 With the re-organisation of the Arts & Heritage, Leisure & Parks and Dundee Contract Service Departments from the 1 April 2002 the service will be administered and delivered by Dundee Contract Services.

6.5 **Revised Garden Maintenance Scheme Criteria**

The following changes to the criteria for the scheme are proposed in order that both age **and** disability indicates that a person is eligible for the scheme. This would also enable people who require the scheme, be taken on immediately when they genuinely require the service:-

- 6.5.1 In order to ensure that only applicants who actually require the service apply, the age limit for receipt of the scheme to be raised to 70 years of age or above for new applicants and a statement as to why they are no longer able to maintain their garden be a requirement. Existing recipients aged 65 to 70 will continue to receive the service.
- 6.5.2 Those under 70 years of age will require to show they have a severe disability and are in receipt of a severe disability living allowance, mobility allowance or attendance allowance and provide a letter from their doctor or social worker indicating they are no longer able to maintain their garden on a permanent basis.
- 6.5.3 Applicants will not be entitled to the scheme where anyone living at the applicant's address is 16 years or over and is capable of maintaining the garden. It should be noted that this review will ensure consistency with other Council scheme criteria including those operated by the Environmental and Consumer Protection Department.

7 **Consultation**

The Chief Executive, Directors of Support Services, Finance, Housing, Social Work, Information Technology and Corporate Planning have been consulted on this report.

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Background Papers

“Best Value Review of the Garden Maintenance Scheme”

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Signatures

Director of Leisure & Arts.....Date.....

Director of Dundee Contract Services.....Date.....