

HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

24 JANUARY 2022

HRA GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE UPDATE

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To update Homes and Communities Committee on the performance of the Grounds Maintenance Service for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) land and council owned homes provided by StreetScene.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 The Grounds Maintenance Service was brought back in house from April 2021 from an external contractor and has been running for nine months, with the Council employing an additional seven staff to facilitate the contract.

2.2 There four aspects to the HRA Grounds Maintenance contract of HRA land:

- Programmed grounds maintenance such as grass cutting, shrub/ hedge maintenance, and weed treatment of HRA green spaces and hard surfaces (such as parking and pathways).
- Programmed tree works budget for arboriculture maintenance of trees on HRA land.
- Fly tipping on HRA land, including green spaces, playgrounds and other areas.

This service is funded through tenants' rents and not as a separate charge (with exception of Gladstone Housing and The Broadleaves – both housing with care schemes)

2.3 StreetScene completed extra preparatory work ahead of handover to ensure the grass cutting season could commence as planned. Alongside delivering the contract, StreetScene have been working to review the schedule and refine the data to ensure all areas we are responsible for are in scope of the contract and are being charged correctly.

2.4 StreetScene are working on a pricing schedule to enable transparent charging for new developments and any future additions/removals from the schedule. The teams are also exploring other initiatives that will benefit tenants and communities as part of reinvestment of efficiency savings for 2022/23.

2.5 The following additional activities have been completed:

- Within the Safer Streets Project, working with "Newark in Bloom" volunteers on building raised flower beds for the Community Gardening Group at Chatham Court.
- Working alongside a Ministry of Justice Community Payback Group, provided improvements at Beaumont Walk Community Centre at Yorke Drive including new flower beds and painted fence panels, reset ground paving and removing historic dumped hard core.

- Worked alongside “Newark in Bloom” Volunteers and Community Payback Teams on Communal Garden Improvements at Carswell Close Complex and Howes Court Newark. These Partnerships have enabled NSDC Street Scene to provide enhanced improvements to areas over and above the SLA specification whilst also engaging local community groups.

2.6 The grass cutting programme for the season has now finished and with the onset of cold weather we move all resources onto Winter Pruning and Hedge Cutting. We update our service status on our website to show progress through the year against the contract with narrative to explain why it is ahead or behind schedule.

3.0 Performance

3.1 Tenant Satisfaction

Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR) 2019-20 provided our baseline performance benchmark of 82% and the survey is due to be completed again in March 2022. To complement the annual figure, the Council have now commenced collecting monthly feedback from customers and it is showing an improving picture of satisfaction with the service.

August	63%		
September	70%		
October	71%	Year To Date	69%
November	72%		

3.2 In terms of wider satisfaction with the service, there were 17 complaints between 1 April and 30 November 2020 specifically relating to grounds maintenance / street scene. There were eleven directly related to the quality of the public areas. Themes are overgrown weeds, shrubs and grass, overflowing litter bins, lack of dog bins and dog fouling. Five complaints were not NSDC land/responsibility and were not upheld. 5 were partially upheld and 1 was upheld. The 1 upheld was related to Bishop’s Drive cemetery in Southwell and is an ongoing operation between CPO’s and Police. Actions have been taken to address other issues, for instance reviewing bin emptying schedules and meeting residents for a walkabout.

3.3 We have received very positive feedback from tenants about the quality of the service and are looking for further community engagement opportunities including communal gardening days, wildlife workshops, gardening workshops and diversionary activities to help with tackle anti-social behaviour.

3.4 So far this year, our indoor projects have been on hold due to Covid restrictions however our participation with the projects at Chatham Court/Yorke Drive/Howes Court and Carswell Close has made the Street Scene service be very visible within these communities.

3.5 In addition in 2022-23, NSDC Street Scene are looking to offer ‘Job roadshows’ in the community showing careers within the service, as well as providing employment, apprenticeship and work experience opportunities for residents. In the meantime, all vacancies have been promoted on all of our social media channels.

- 3.6 We are exploring how we can bring added value to the service for our tenants over the coming years and have begun involving our tenants to feed back on the quality of the service and how the contract operates e.g. the number of cuts and the specification for garage sites and paths.
- 3.7 Tenants have been involved through the “walkabout” system and raised queries directly with the Street Scene and Tenant Engagement Officers. Separate projects have been established with the support of Street Scene Team at Chatham Court, where a number of raised beds have been provided, some of which have been turned into mini vegetable patches. In Ollerton and Boughton, a Garden Competition is being established to give tenants and residents the opportunity to personally contribute to improving the look of the area to increase pride, quality of life and outlook for all residents - particularly those previously susceptible to fly tipping and generally untidiness.
- 3.8 Due to Covid, tenants have not been as widely active as we would have normally expected but in the next year a regular spot check system will be underway to ‘dip test’ sites throughout the district with results fed back into the service improvement group. There are planned meet and greet sessions due in the Spring and this will also give us an opportunity to hear from tenants about how they feel the grounds maintenance team have performed and what, if anything can be improved.

3.9 **Contract Performance**

Street Scene and Housing colleagues meet bi-monthly to review performance against the contract schedule. Performance is measured from 1 (excellent) to 5 (referral). Below is the Average Total for 180 Site Inspections.

November 2021 figures		December 2021 figures	
Grass	1.29	Grass	1.00
Litter & Bins	1.10	Litter and Bins	1.07
Garage Site	1.67	Garage Site	1.00
Shrubs	1.48	Shrubs	1.40
Spraying	1.56	Spraying	1.47
Hedge Cutting	1.50	Hedge Cutting	1.38

4.0 **Equalities Implications**

- 4.1 The aim of bringing grounds maintenance in house was to improve the service for all residents and in doing so, those with protected characteristics. Some of the future improvements/possibilities may positively impacted residents with additional needs.

5.0 Digital Implications

- 5.1 Now the improved website is up and running, we will be more regularly updating our performance against the schedule and our service status so residents can see how the weather and other elements impact our performance. We will also provide a feedback button to encourage residents to let us know if they are satisfied with the quality of the service being provided.

6.0 Financial Implications (FIN21-22/1559)

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
- 6.2 Now that the council delivers in-house grounds maintenance services to the HRA, all HRA-related costs are initially borne by the Street Scene Grounds Maintenance service within the council's General Fund (GF), then transferred from the GF to the HRA as appropriate. Further information regarding the 2021/22 performance and 2022/23 draft budgets for the Street Scene Grounds Maintenance service can therefore be found within the budget monitoring and budget setting reports to be presented respectively to the Leisure & Environment Committee on 25/01/2022.
- 6.3 Further information regarding the allocation of efficiency savings, 2021/22 performance and 2022/23 draft budgets for the HRA can be found within the respective reports of this Committee's agenda.

7.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

- 7.1 This links to a number of objectives: Creating vibrant and self-sufficient local communities where residents look out for each other and actively contribute to the local area and creating more and better quality homes through our roles as landlord, developer and planning authority.

8.0 Comments of Director(s)

- 8.1 The Housing Advisory Group reviewed the update at their meeting on 6th January 2022 and endorse the findings with first hand experience of the improved level of service quality and responsiveness.

9.0 RECOMMENDATION

That the Homes and Community Committee note the positive progress of the service.

Reason for Recommendation(s)

To provide reassurance on the benefits of an in-house grounds maintenance service and the additional value for money it provides.

Background Papers

The details of any background papers you have used in writing the report (note these would then become public documents available for inspection) or if none used write "Nil".

For further information please contact (report author)

Suzanne Shead
Director – Housing, Health and Wellbeing