

Report to: Portfolio Holder - Housing

Decision Date: 24 September 2024

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Lee Brazier

Director Lead: Suzanne Shead, Director - Housing, Health & Wellbeing

Lead Officer: Julie Davidson, Business Manager - Housing Services

Report Summary	
Type of Report	Open Report / Non-Key Decision
Report Title	Assisted Garden Scheme for Tenants - Ground Breaker
Purpose of Report	This report sets out the assistance available for tenants who need additional support to bring their garden/s to an acceptable standard.
Recommendations	<p>This report records the following recommendations made to the Portfolio Holder for Housing as a record of the decision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the Portfolio Holder approves the commencement of this ground-breaking scheme; b) the Portfolio Holder agrees to a budget of £50,000 to support this scheme, which will be funded from the efficiency savings. c) Annual update reports to the Portfolio Holder - Housing d) on the take-up of the scheme and spend against budget.
Alternative Options Considered	To continue to enforce the tenancy agreement on households unable to address the tenancy breach with the acknowledgement the instigation of legal action is unlikely.
Reason for Recommendation	The recommendations enable the Council, as a responsible landlord to provide a one - off gardening service to tenants unable to do so themselves and then work with the tenants in keeping their garden/s in an acceptable condition and their tenancy breach-free.
Decision Taken	24 September 2024

1.0 Background

1.1 The Garden Scheme is a framework for identifying tenants in Newark & Sherwood District Council properties who require assistance in bringing their garden to an acceptable standard.

- 1.2 The scheme aims to provide a one-off gardening service to tenants most in need, prevent breaches of tenancy for garden conditions; prevent enforcement action being taken by the Council for the condition of the garden; foster a relationship between the tenant and contractor; and support local businesses by employing local gardening contractors.
- 1.3 Tenants will be referred into the scheme if their garden is overgrown with tall grass, weeds or brambles, hedges are overgrown and exceed 6ft to the rear and 4ft to the front and side and where trees are too tall and unmanageable. The gardens may also contain rubbish and items of bulky waste.
- 1.4 There is an expectation that tenants will engage fully with their tenancy officer to maintain the condition going forward. For tenants who do this and either wish to continue employing the services of the Contractor at their own cost or agree to maintain their garden themselves going forward, the Council will consider the gifting of a one-year subscription of a Brown Bin and the collection service (currently £35 per annum) in appropriate cases where progress has been made.
- 1.5 Where tenants do not fully engage and maintain their gardens going forward there is an option for recharges to be raised, and when/if paid this will be paid back into the relevant cost centre and appropriate enforcement action will be considered.

2.0 Alternative Considerations

- 2.1 To continue to enforce the tenancy agreement on households unable to address the tenancy breach with the acknowledgement the instigation of legal action is unlikely.
- 2.2 Do nothing, which impacts on wider community pride in their locality when gardens are untidy and unkempt.

3.0 Implications

In writing this report and in putting forward the recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection, Digital and Cyber Security, Equality and Diversity, Financial, Human Resources, Human Rights, Legal, Safeguarding and Sustainability, and where appropriate they have referred to these implications and added suitable expert comment.

Financial Implications FIN24-25/2476

- 3.1 There are currently funds available within the HRA reserves to meet the full cost of £50,000 for a one year trial for the Assisted Garden Scheme. At the conclusion of the one year trial, revenue budget would need to be identified, as and when a future paper is submitted for approval to continue the scheme on a more permanent basis.

Tenant Feedback

- 3.2 At a meeting of the Local Influence Network Chairs on 19 September it was felt that the new proposed garden improvement scheme was important for people who struggle with their gardens, either through mental health wellbeing issues, physical disabilities or simply lack of resources should be supported by the Council with their gardens. The “engagement before enforcement” ethos was also applauded by them as some tenants simply cannot do the work required. This was felt to be an excellent project which supported tenants but also local small businesses in our communities. In short, those present fully supported the project and asked to be kept informed about progress.