

Executive Member Response to
Maintenance of Trees, Hedges & Shrub Beds Scrutiny Review

Date Recommendations agreed by Scrutiny Select Committee:

Environment & Economy Select Committee, Tuesday 24 February 2015,
amended and circulated final recommendations and report on Friday 27 February 2015

**Date responses should be made by
(Executive responses should legally be received within two months of publishing):**

An Executive response on behalf of the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration should be
received by Monday 27 April 2015

**All actions have been allocated to Lee Myers who will delegate internal responsibility regarding responses
on behalf of the Executive Portfolio Holder for Environment & Regeneration.**

Recommendations:

Executive Response:

<p>1. That Officers from Environmental Services and Housing be requested to reconsider the current service level agreements between the two services (that were drawn up for the former ALMO, Stevenage Homes), whilst still complying with the rules governing separate funding arrangements for the Housing Revenue Account, in order that a one Council, uniform service approach to the maintenance of trees, hedges and shrub beds on Council land in the town be achieved. Members requested that officers ensure that in delivering a 'one Council' approach there be no drop in service of frequency or standard of maintenance currently provided within the HRA and General Fund, as it is hoped that some efficiencies would be achieved by adopting this approach.</p>	<p>After a series of meetings with the Housing Tenancy team, we have now managed to extend the council's tree routine maintenance to communal areas. In April, we started this project and we are working together with Tenancy on implementing an uniform approach to trees across the borough and Housing. It is expected that, due to the fact that housing trees have not been routinely maintained for a long time by Environmental Services, it could take us possibly upwards of two to three years, initially, to bring all the trees to the desired standards. However, afterwards it would be a case of maintaining the achieved standards across the whole tree stock. With regard to the shrub beds, we are currently investigating the one Council approach to all; as part of the overall project on the shrub beds going forward, whilst trying to ensure that there would not be a drop in both the frequency and standards.</p>
<p>2. That Officers be requested to undertake a full survey of the shrub beds on Council land to provide a cost benefit analysis to see which sites would be suitable and cost effective to be grassed over.</p>	<p>New homes bonus budget has been allocated for works to be carried out on approx a 30% of shrub beds for their removal to grass or for replenishment and replacement works. A survey of all shrubs has been completed to determine their current condition. In addition, a note has been sent out to ask Members for their input on particular priority shrub beds to help us identify any that could either be removed and reverted to grass or repopulated with new shrubs. Following this, we plan to consult over the Summer months with residents in the vicinity of the identified shrub beds. With the intention that works to the beds will begin during October 2015 be completed by March 2016.</p>
<p>3. That Officers be requested to consider ways that the service could further promote gardening services to those residents that who are unable</p>	<p>Officers will work with the Council's Comms Team this year and investigate ways in which to be able to sign post gardening services as suggested to those residents that who are unable to maintain their own garden.</p>

<p>to maintain their own gardens, be this through directing residents who require help with maintaining their gardens to a list of trustworthy and affordable local gardeners, to promoting Groundwork Hertfordshire's 'Green Aiders' scheme or North Herts CVS 'Time Bank' volunteer garden service.</p>	
<p>4. That regarding volunteering: (i) Officers be requested to negotiate with the Council's insurers, ensuring that sufficient safeguards are in place, so that suitable volunteers can be trained to lead future volunteer activity, which would extend the opportunities currently available to volunteers; (ii) That the Campaigns Officer be requested to work on linking up with a local secondary school to become an Eco School so that in time the Officer could promote the opportunity of become involved in volunteering for those interested in working in Environment based jobs which they could use in their CVs; and (iii) That Officers be requested to take every opportunity to publicise the great work that the Green Space Volunteers are doing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) In November 2014, a detailed proposal was sent to the council's liability insurers to request cover for Lead Volunteers. They responded, later that month, to advise that they had no issue with the documents provided and liability cover will be provided in the circumstances set out. (ii) Officers will seek to explore opportunities with secondary schools, as resources allow. (iii) Promotion of the Green Space Volunteers activity to date has been achieved through Chronicle, local paper, banners when out working on site, uniform worn by the volunteers, Community events, and nomination for So Stevenage Pride Awards. It is the intention that this will continue going forward.
<p>5. That Officers be requested to access any external funding linked to biodiversity work that the Green Space Volunteers are undertaking</p>	<p>Officers will continue to seek and identify opportunities of external funding to support green space improvements including those involving volunteers where available.</p>

<p>6. That when designing new planting schemes or developments to the town's green spaces that Officers be requested to give consideration to and make adequate provision for making those spaces accessible to all people with disabilities in line with the Council's commitments to Equalities and Diversity.</p>	<p>Officers will give consideration to and make adequate provision for accessibility purposes when designing future schemes in green spaces, so that the town's open spaces are accessible to all in line with Council's commitments to Equalities and Diversity.</p>
<p>7. That notwithstanding the complications of entering into Licences to Cultivate and Licences Occupy, Members are keen to promote these as an option for residents but the current system appeared to have a number of disincentives including entering into a legal agreements with the Council (for licences to cultivate) and the fee (for HCC licences to occupy). Members suggested that perhaps with better publicity using the Council's resident magazine, Chronicle, it might encourage more residents to take on areas adjacent to their property to smarten its appearance. Officers are also requested to consider the current issuing of licences to see if it is possible to simplify the process in any way and take away some of the perceived bureaucracies that may put off potential take up from residents.</p>	<p>Officers are looking to work with the Council's Comms, Housing and Estates Teams to publicise and promote the Licences in Chronicle. Furthermore, we are reviewing the processes involved, to ascertain, if it is possible to simplify or remove any barriers going forward and this review will be completed by December 2015.</p>
<p>8. That with regard to the way Officers select the planting of trees and shrub beds as detailed in the report at paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7, it be recorded that the Committee supported Officers'</p>	<p>It is the intentions of Officers to continue with the approach as detailed in the report in 3.6, focusing on the diversity of the tree stock, which in time will offer better protection from disease than just a monoculture. That replacement trees are thoughtfully considered to ensure the right tree is in the right location. Over</p>

<p>approach regarding the careful selection of species, keeping up to date with research on the implications of climate change and disease to safeguard the long term viability of the Borough's tree and shrub stocks.</p>	<p>the long term assessing the impact of climate change on the tree stock.</p> <p>In regard, to shrub bed species, Officers will continue with the approach as detailed 3.7, where shrubs are determined by location and how hardy the plant is to disease, again to deter a monoculture. Species will be chosen depending on what purpose they are serving and beyond the primary reason of providing an improved visual amenity. Therefore, in some locations shrubs maybe selected to offer added security to a site or to offer a screen from ball games and for low maintenance.</p>
<p>9. That the Scrutiny Officer be requested to investigate and report back to Members on a mechanism for diarising automatic review dates to avoid the chance of recommendations and agreed actions being lost.</p>	<p>The Scrutiny Officer has advised that a further row has been added to the template scoping documents that incorporates an agreed deadline to include expected response date from the Executive (2 months following the review) and 1 year following the review for final review recommendations sign off.</p>