

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE UPDATE

Report of the Head of Capital Works

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Operational Board Meeting held on 12 December 2019 considered a report which outlined the arrangements for the delivery of the maintenance of Derby Homes managed land through an agreement with Derby City Council Streetpride Department.
- 1.2 The Operational Board approved a series of recommendations: with the purpose of improving performance in 2020/21.
- 1.3 The Operational Board called for the receipt of regular updates on the performance of the Grounds Maintenance Service during 2020/21. The purpose of this Report is to provide that update.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note this update on the delivery of the Grounds Maintenance Service in 2020.

3. REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 To ensure the Operational Board is informed on the status of the Grounds Maintenance Service and the initial progress made in improving levels of performance during 2020.

4. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Background

The Operational Board Meeting held on 12 December 2019 considered a report which outlined the arrangements for the delivery of the maintenance of Derby Homes managed land through an agreement with Derby City Council Streetpride Department. The arrangement started in March 2015 and there had been a number of concerns raised at the Operational Board with regard to the standard of delivery during this period.

The report advised that Derby Homes continued working closely with Streetpride to bring forward initiatives to improve performance. However, there were concerns that there were no real signs of improvement, with customer complaints remaining high, especially in relation to the duration between visits. The time between cuts was getting longer and this resulted in each cutting cycle becoming more difficult as a result of the length of grass. The report put forward an action plan and number of options to improve the service.

The Operational Board approved recommendations:

1. An acknowledgement of an Action Plan with the purpose of improving performance in 2020/21, which included:
 - Completion of the recruitment of five full time staff, replacing the currently untrained agency staff, increasing the use of machinery on the ground.
 - Maintain the cutting cycle of 2-3 weeks on a permanent basis during the cutting season.
 - Continue to work closely with HR to manage attendance within the team.
2. Agreed to recommend to the Board to increase the staffing levels from 16 to 20 in 2020/21. The 4 new staff to provide a Grounds Maintenance shrub & hedge team – who will also provide cover within the core cutting team.
3. Garden Maintenance Scheme - Agreed to recommend to main Board for Derby Homes to fund the £57,000 additional cost to increase the number of employees working on the GMS from 8 to 10 from April 2020.
4. Receipt of regular updates on the performance of the Grounds Maintenance Service during 2020/21.
5. In addition to the recruitment recommended in Item 2 above, a further staged increase of a further 4 staff in 2021/22, subject to a marked improvement in the service delivered during 2020/21.

4.2 Reporting to Operational Board

An update was not provided in February 2020 (The Winter Season and close timing to the earlier meeting meant that there was very little to report) nor in June 2020 (Update written in early May), the Service had only started slowly to restart post the first Covid-19 lockdown.

An update on the performance of the Grounds Maintenance Service was included in the Head of Capital Works – Head of Service Update in September 2020. Consequently, the Operational Board requested a further update on the Grounds Maintenance Scheme at the December meeting.

Based on a comment included in the Head of Service Update, it was agreed “that a decision on staffing for the Service would not be made until 2021–22 due to the impact coronavirus has had on the delivery of the service”.

4.3 Service Delivery during Spring / Summer 2020

The Streetpride Team after an initial loss of workforce, either through illness, shielding or secondment to other Derby City Council services during the first few weeks of the first Covid 19 Lockdown, recovered its numbers to support core cleaning service to communal areas and to make progress in delivering the Grounds Maintenance and Gardening Services.

The Team establishment should number 32 FTE staff. To illustrate the difficulties encountered, just 16 staff were available on 15th April 2020 compared with 27 on 12th October 2020.

A breakdown of the staffing availability at this date is detailed below.

FTE Target	32	Absent Staff	
Vacancies	5	Annual Leave	2
Absent Staff	6	Sickness Absence	1
Total	21	Covid Isolation	2
		Temporary Transfer to Refuse	1
			6
Additional Support			
Agency	4		
ERO's	2		
Total Staff on Site	27		

In addition, the delivery of the five new ride-on mowers was delayed at the suppliers, due to the first Lockdown, until late May 2020.

Despite the above set-backs performance has been encouraging.

At the time of writing this report all communal areas have had a minimum of 10 grass cutting visits (against an average of 9 over the past three years) and the Domestic Gardens, 8 visits.

Throughout the year staffing issues have improved significantly, in the following areas:

- **Operational Management** - The appointment of Charles Edwards as the new Grounds / Arboriculture Manager, who started in August 2020, provides operational leadership on the ground and significantly improved levels of communication with Derby Homes.
- **Sickness Levels** - The levels of sick leave absenteeism have reduced noticeably and save for Covid 19 related absences, would have been much lower. At the end of October all staff had returned from Covid isolation.
- **Recruitment** – Interviews held during October 2020 successfully filled the five vacant posts such that the Team now has a full establishment. This is the best position the service has been in during 2020.

As referred to earlier in this report the December 2019 report did include proposals for additional staffing requested by Streetpride that was to be considered as a budget pressure for 2021/22. This situation coupled with the disruption to the service consequent to Covid19 Lockdown means that we are not able to substantiate any requirement for additional staffing.

As discussed at the Operational Board in September 2020 any further recruitments should be postponed **until 2022/23**, awaiting the productivity output of a full staffing establishment and understanding the benefits gained from the improved equipment. This will be assessed during the 2021 season and reported to the Operational Board in Autumn 2021. Any additional resources required would be subject to the budgetary implications being approved by the Board (in January 2022) and an appreciation that service charges to tenants would likely increase accordingly.

The new equipment is visibly delivering additional productivity and with the range of equipment now available to the team, areas are now being moved with more appropriate equipment.

4.4 Service Delivery during Autumn / Winter 2020

As at Monday 2nd November 2020, the Service has switched to Autumn / Winter Work

Grounds Maintenance

- Grass cutting – has now stopped.
- Shrubs & hedges – a small team has now started on sites already identified with hedge / shrub issues.
- Leaves – 1 team has started the first leaf clearance.

Garden Maintenance Scheme

- All 10 GMS operatives have moved across to help the Grounds Maintenance Team with the Winter tasks.

5. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 None

IMPLICATIONS

The areas listed below have no implications directly arising from this report:

Consultation
Financial and Business Plan
Legal and Confidentiality
Council
Personnel
Environmental
Equalities Impact Assessment
Health & Safety
Risk
Policy Review

If Board Members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact:

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Background Information: None

Supporting Information: None

This report has been approved by the following officers:

Head of Finance & Income	Michael Kirk	10/11/20
Head of Service	Ian Yeomans	02/11/20
Managing Director	Maria Murphy	11/11/20