

Appendix 1

TENANT PANEL REPORT



2015

ABOUT THE PANEL

The panel was brought together in April 2012 by inviting people from tenant involvement groups already in existence. The following are the current members:

Shirley Green	Chair
Lyn Gadsby	Vice Chair
Win Buchan	
George Holroyd	
Heather White	

Review of Garden Maintenance Scheme

Purpose of review

This report is to show the findings of the Tenant Panel's review of the service provided in relation to the Garden Maintenance Scheme. It also presents the panel's recommendations for improvement.

What we did

The review was carried out over a 3 month period September 2015 – December 2015. The purpose of this review was to look at and understand how the Garden Maintenance Scheme currently works and to see if improvements could be made in any areas to help both Tenants and Staff.

We carried out the following:

- Met with Managers of the scheme
- Met with Operatives
- Carried out a phone survey with customers who are currently on the Garden Maintenance Scheme
- Visited Streetpride Depot on Stores Road
- Took sample photographs of gardens on the scheme
- Looked at current letters related to the administration of the scheme.

Whilst talking to the above groups, we made it clear that the objective was to understand how the scheme works and to make recommendations for improvement, in no way to criticise the work ethic or employees.

Criteria/Outline of Scheme:

Criteria:

1. Have reached state retirement age
2. Are disabled and
3. There are no able bodied people over 18 living in the property.

The cost of the scheme is currently £4.60 per week.

Currently the service provides:

1. Grass cutting
2. Border maintenance
3. Hedge cutting
4. Rose pruning
5. Weed killing

Most people on the scheme are on benefits.

Met with Managers of the scheme

There are approximately 430 people on scheme, with 15-20 people waiting to join.

3 teams carry out the work across the City. The number of gardens managed are divided into areas, to give the teams an equivalent number of gardens.

The cutting season currently runs March to October each year, dependent on weather conditions. This year the team encountered adverse weather in the first part of the season, meaning that many of the scheduled cuts could not take place. This has resulted in playing catch up achieving 10 cuts instead of the expected 15.

DEFRA issued new guidelines, which changed the cutting dates of hedges from 2014. It was introduced in 2015 under new EU Regulations requiring the protection of birds during both the breeding and rearing season.

There was confusion when these guidelines were introduced as many thought they covered all hedges, it has since been clarified that the rules apply only to agricultural hedging.

As a result of this many hedges have grown out of control on our estates. The team are working hard to rectify this and have offered one off cuts where necessary. The aim is to carry out 2 cuts per year, one early in the season and the other nearing the end.

We asked if height adjustments could be made to individual hedges at the request of individual tenants and were advised this could be possible dependent on circumstances.

We also asked what recorded satisfaction levels currently stand at and were told the following:

We don't currently record satisfaction, unlike the communal cleaning audits – which are captured by the traffic light system and the local housing officer. The housing officer will on their estate inspection also draw items to our attention, supported by our customer service team. We receive weekly updates from DCC Streetpride and at that point carry out audits around the city on both GM & GMS sites, by our dedicated staff.

Classification: OFFICIAL

Working closely with our new partner, we are currently being reactive rather than proactive.

Operatives

The operatives were very candid with us but very positive. They explained that they have targets of 15 visits per day and get 30mins per garden. Whilst not complaining, the operatives said they would prefer to have an additional 10 mins per garden, especially if they have hedges to be trimmed to make the best job possible for Tenants and themselves.

We asked if there were any particular problems that made their job more difficult. They said people making changes such as:

- installing benches
- putting their own shrubs in but not looking after them
- people don't clear up after dogs – grass will not be cut if dog poo is present
- overgrown ivy

We asked what could help them:

- Would like to be able to cut back ivy when carrying out simple weeding
- Would like to be able to return everything to grass if tenant is too old to maintain borders.
- Weedkiller is applied once a year, would be better if applied twice yearly.

The operatives did say that the new hand mowers are a vast improvement on the previous ones but they do find them too heavy to be lifting off and on the wagon 15 times a day, even with 2 people.

They ended by saying they really enjoy their job, have a good rapport with customers and feel their supervisors are very supportive.

Phone Survey

We contacted 49 tenants who are currently on the scheme, the general consensus of opinion was that the scheme runs well and that is backed up by the satisfaction figures gathered.

Questions asked were:

Are you happy with the fortnightly visits?	84% were satisfied.
Are you happy with the quality of the work?	86% were satisfied.
Do you think it's value for money?	86% said yes.
Are you happy with the attitude of the workers?	96% said yes.

From comments made by tenants, it appears the main problem lies with hedges. Many have been allowed to double in width which causes issues with light to windows. We acknowledge there has been a valid problem with the cutting of hedges this year, but many are now of such a height they really need attention.

Classification: OFFICIAL

Full details can be found in appendix 2.

Visited Streetpride Depot on Store Road

Whilst there, we learned about the benefits of the new equipment which has been purchased. We feel that this is far superior to that used by the previous contractor, resulting in a better quality of service due to a lot less downtime caused through malfunctions.

All equipment is now maintained in house and fully serviced in the winter months, with detailed maintenance schedules in place. Repairs can be carried out quickly and with little disruption to the service.

Photographs of gardens on the scheme

We visited a number of gardens to see for ourselves their condition. We were satisfied that gardens we saw are being maintained to a reasonable standard, but did notice there was a problem with a number of hedges being either too high, too wide or both.

This shows a hedge covering a window, causing poor light in property.



A well maintained garden



Letters

Looked at current letters and felt that they could be written in a clearer manner, for suggested changes see appendix 3.

Recommendations

1. Gardeners to be able to report back on any gardens which would benefit from having borders removed to enable maintenance to be easier for both tenant and staff.
2. Investigate the possibility of providing some sort of ramp or lifting gear to vans for heavy equipment.
3. Introduce a method of collecting satisfaction information from tenants which will be assessed and acted upon.
4. If a tenant has a particular problem with their garden, (not covered by the scheme), operative to report issues to their manager. Suggest these are then passed to LHO for investigation and resolution.

Managers Comments

1. Gardeners to be able to report back on any gardens which would benefit from having borders removed, to enable maintenance to be easier for both tenant and staff.

Once we start in the cutting season, it can be difficult, often unproductive to deviate from the run lists to carry out additional works. At the moment we will put additional works on a winter list, or if they are urgent use the voids team or offer overtime. This would be a nice to have but would incur additional resources and costs.

2. Investigate the possibility of providing some sort of ramp or lifting gear to vans for heavy equipment.

Streetpride staff are supported with training on how to handle items. We will always look to make any task easier and will pass on the request.

3. Introduce a method of collecting satisfaction information from tenants which will be assessed and acted upon.

We are looking to introduce a text survey similar to that used by Day to Day repairs to record satisfaction, this would be carried out once a year at the end of the scheme.

4. If a tenant has a particular problem with their garden, (not covered by the scheme), operative to report issues to their manager. Suggest these are then passed to LHO for investigation and resolution.

We have close contact with all the local housing offices, and talk on a number of issues around the city. If an issue is reported, it is looked at and a decision made on urgency/need. We do not receive many requests for additional work, but where we do, we will try to accommodate at the end of the season, however, we must always bear in mind any additional costs.