

GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT STANDARDS

Report of the Director of Investment & Regeneration

1. SUMMARY

To update the City Board on the target standards from the grounds maintenance contract, as requested at a previous meeting.

2. RECOMMENDATION

To note the report.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

Grass cutting

- 3.1 Our target is to cut 14 times, between mid/late March and the end of October or early November.
- 3.2 This means cutting twice a month, not quite a cut every fortnight. In reality grass cutting is completely dependent on the weather. In bad weather the cuts will be less frequent and the grass will grow longer and at other times the grass is cut more often. This just cannot be avoided, but overall the grass cutting should be at a reasonable frequency except in long periods of bad weather (such as the near constant rain from April to September last year!). But if we have good weather, we are actually going to try and do more cuts.
- 3.3 Special ‘mulching decks’ have been fitted to mowers to chop up the grass cuttings into small pieces that are not very noticeable and quickly break down. This avoids having to cart thousands of tons of grass across the city and into landfill sites, so it’s far more environmentally friendly. The results have been generally good, without a major noticeable difference from collecting grass. We believe the service is now less vulnerable to wet weather, so while rain will slow down grass cutting, it should not be as disastrous as when we were trying to collect all the cuttings.

Shrub pruning

- 3.4 We do a hard pruning back over the non-growing months between November and March, which gets shrubs back into a reasonable shape and size.
- 3.5 We have now added a 2nd ‘nuisance prune’ during the summer months, which is a lighter prune only as required, aimed at stopping shrubs from growing across paths or windows or become extremely ragged and out of shape. The aim is to avoid cutting off summer flowering colour, so we keep the shrubs looking attractive.

Hedge cutting

- 3.6 We do this twice a year. The first cut is late summer but not until after the bird nesting season is over, so it can't usually start until August. The second cut is sometime over the winter months.

Weed control

- 3.7 Shrub beds are to be kept free of large, obvious weeds and build ups of litter. Being realistic, we can't expect every weed and small piece of litter to be removed from every shrub bed every visit, but they should be kept under reasonable control. Weeds ideally are left to grow to a certain size so they can be sprayed with weed killer that can get down into their roots.
- 3.8 We really struggle with weed killer these days because many traditional products have been banned in the last few years. What we have left is far less powerful and long-lasting. Also wet weather often makes the weed killer ineffective. Weed control is probably our biggest problem area.

Tenant's gardening scheme

- 3.9 This is a fairly basic garden maintenance service, with the aim of keeping gardens under control and more manageable by the tenant. It is restricted to elderly or disabled tenants. We have to be sensible with how much we can spend. It has to be what we can afford within a reasonable service charge that will be supported by Housing Benefit.
- 3.10 The specification is very similar to the general grounds maintenance service, but a little more flexible to suit individual gardens. So it is a case of doing what needs to be done and what can be done within the allotted time on each visit.

4. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

The assessment panel that evaluated tenders for this contract included two tenants and two leaseholders. This is double the typical resident involvement but it reflects the high level of interest in such a local, estate-based service. What has been great is that the panel has stayed together as a really active team overseeing the development and performance of the service, including specifications. The panel regularly attend site visits and demonstrations as well as meeting with Sodexo staff, including operatives who actually do the work.

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