

## **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. The Operational Board approved a series of recommendations with the purpose of improving performance in 2020/21. The Operational Board called for the receipt of regular updates on the performance of the Grounds Maintenance Service during 2020/21.
- 1.2 Updates on the performance of the Grounds Maintenance Service was included in the Head of Capital Works – Head of Service Update in September 2020, with a specific report to the Operational Board in December 2020. It was agreed that judgements on the performance of the Service was difficult, consequent to the impact of Covid19 pandemic. As such the performance of Streetpride in delivering the service was to be further assessed during the 2021 season and reported to the Operational Board at its meeting on 9 December 2021.
- 1.3 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 2021 and agree to the receipt of a further update report at the meeting in December 2022. Further, that any further recruitment to the Service Team should be postponed until 2023/24 (at the earliest), awaiting the productivity output of a full staffing establishment and understanding the benefits gained from the improved equipment, during 2022.

### **3. REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 To ensure the Operational Board is informed on the status of the Grounds Maintenance Service and the further progress being made in improving levels of performance during 2021.

### **4. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION**

#### **4.1 Background – Previous Reports to Operational Board**

December 2019

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 about 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 because of the length of grass. The report put forward an action plan and number of options to improve the service.

The Operational Board approved the following 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.

#### December 2020

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 2020 meeting.

As discussed at the Operational Board in September 2020 it was agreed that any further recruitments should be postponed until 2022/23 (at the earliest), awaiting the productivity output of a full staffing establishment and understanding the benefits gained from the improved equipment. This was to be assessed during the

2021 season and reported to the Operational Board at the meeting on 9 December 2021.

Note - 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.

## 4.2 Service Delivery during Spring / Summer / Ealy Autumn 2021

### 4.2.1 Performance

Communal areas - All 324 sites, have had a minimum of 10 grass cutting visits (against an average of 9 over the past four years). The average duration between cuts 9 and 10 was between 2.5 to 3 working weeks.

Individual Garden Maintenance visits to 486 locations, has seen an improvement in achieving 9 complete visits, compared to 8 in 2021. The table below shows the average duration between visits, delivered by the five GMS Teams throughout 2021. Encouraging early season performance was impacted by staff shortages and address groupings, during the middle of the year. Consequent to the recruitment of new staff and a restructure of the rotas, the frequency between visits improved significantly and consistently. The performance achieved between the last three visits is at a level that we would aim to achieve across the entire growing season in 2022/23.

Property Re-visit time, in Weeks						
	Overall	GMS1	GMS2	GMS3	GMS4	GMS5
Run 1 - 2	2.96	1.89	4.31	2.54	3.05	3.16
Run 2 - 3	3.97	3.94	2.99	5.70	3.96	3.16
Run 3 - 4	4.28	4.81	5.29	2.82	4.32	4.20
Run 4 - 5	4.27	4.83	3.61	4.03	3.96	4.86
Run 5 - 6	3.78	2.86	4.33	4.07	4.17	3.55
Run 6 - 7	2.88	3.41	2.65	2.25	2.62	3.41
Run 7 - 8	2.71	2.60	2.47	3.27	2.94	2.27
Run 8 - 9	2.79	2.89	2.97	3.85	3.29	2.52

The Streetpride Team establishment should number 32 FTE staff. When the Team is at full strength, the service delivered has been on, or around the expected levels of service. The level of service has dropped when staffing levels have dropped. Maintaining Team strength has been the biggest challenge, during the past two years, for both Derby Homes and the Streetpride the Management Team.

### 4.2.2 Staffing / Attendance Issues

During 2020, the Team lost workforce either through; Covid 19 illness, shielding or secondment to other Derby City Council services, such as the refuse collection service. To illustrate the difficulties encountered, just 16 staff were available on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020 compared with 27 on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Interviews held during October 2020 successfully filled the five vacant posts such that the Team had a full establishment at the start of 2021.

During 2021, the Team lost workforce either through; Covid 19 illness, isolation, sickness (non-Covid related illnesses became more prevalent) and 5 staff leaving (including recruits from the previous intake). At certain times the Team lost almost one-third of the staffing establishment.

Losing staff through the Summer, meant the Team prioritised grass cutting resulting in many shrubbed areas have not had the attention required.

A fresh recruitment drive during September 2021 has successfully filled four of the five vacant posts such that the Team is one short of full establishment.

The key to improving performance further in 2022/23 is for Streetpride Operational Management to manage staffing issues proactively in the areas of; staff retention and sickness, including all Covid related and non-covid related absences.

As referred to earlier in this report the December 2019 report did include proposals for additional staffing requested by Streetpride. As discussed at the Operational Board in September 2020 and in this Report, it is recommended that any further recruitments should be postponed until 2023/24, awaiting sustained productivity output improvements from a full staffing establishment and understanding the full benefits gained from the improved equipment.

#### 4.2.3 Operational Management

In August 2021, Charles Edwards, the Grounds / Arboriculture Manager, left the role for another position with Derby City Council. Charles, who started in August 2020, provided operational leadership on the ground and significantly improved levels of communication with Derby Homes during his tenure. His replacement, Lee Wheatley, who is a former Derby Homes employee and understands the needs of its customers, has started well during his first three months in the role. Such changes in operational management are never ideal but Lee has been engaging proactively with our contract management team, trying to innovate in the way the service is delivered. Encouraging signs for 2022

#### 4.2.4 Equipment

Investment in new machinery during 2020 has been received well, in that it matches the sites and have also included a robotic mower, which removes the need to drive/hold machinery on steeper banks. The current Capitalised stock, not including hand machinery is:

- Bobcat Procat 52 (zero turn mower) – 5No.
- Roberine F3 Triple Mower – 2No.
- John Deere X950 Mower – 3No.
- Raymo Hybrid (robotic mower) -1No.

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

#### 4.2.5 Customer Enquires

A further indicator of improvement in the quality of the Service is the number of customer queries received. In 2019 the Service received 486 queries, up until 14 November, 2021 had seen 324 received. The key themes are generally repeated; when are you attending next, hedge /shrub overgrown etc. We clearly get reports of damage etc, which is always a hazard, but frequency of attendance is by far the largest query.

### 4.3 Service Delivery during Winter 2021

As at Monday 15th November 2021, the Service has switched to Winter Work Grounds Maintenance

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

Shrubs and hedges over the winter months will receive a comprehensive visit, to prepare the Sites for the next season.

## 5. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 None

## IMPLICATIONS

## 6. FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PLAN

6.1 Tenants are charged a grounds maintenance service charge, and this partially recovers the costs incurred in delivering a grounds maintenance service. These service charges have been increasing by 10% each year to smooth out the transition towards matching the service charge income with operational costs incurred.

Costs for 2021/22 included within the Grounds Maintenance service charge currently include:

Description of service	Annual cost £'000
Core grounds maintenance service provided by Streetpride (excludes £80k towards maintaining HRA land outside the curtilage of flats)	1,107
Depreciation costs incurred on DH owned grounds plant	54
Tree maintenance costs (trees within curtilage only, 80% of full cost)	180
Path Inspections & remedial repairs within the curtilage of flats	50
Caretaking service (share of overall costs for works relating to flats)	100
	<b>1,491</b>
Add Derby Homes staffing costs managing contracts	50
	<b>1,541</b>

The annual income collected from the service charge for 2021/22 is estimated at £1.2m.

It is clear that under the annual 10% increase will need to continue for another 3 to 4 years to balance income with existing costs.

- 6.2 Under both Housing Benefit and Universal Credit, support is provided for “maintenance of communal grounds” and the costs identified above fall within this definition.
- 6.3 The final decision on the annual service charge increase is a decision made by Derby City Council Cabinet, likely to be in January 2022. The current recommendation to Cabinet is for the 2022/23 increase to be 10% and this has been included within the budget consultation meetings with the Customer Voice on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2021 and DACP on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

## **7. COUNCIL**

- 7.1 The service is provided by the Council's Streetpride Team. The service is recharged on an open book basis plus an allowance of 20% for overheads. The overhead allowance has been factored into assumed income levels and savings targets at the Council.

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

Consultation  
Legal and Confidentiality  
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:**

<b>Managing Director</b>	Maria Murphy	23.11.21
<b>Interim Finance Director</b>	Michael Kirk	18.11.21
<b>Company Solicitor</b>	Taranjit Laria	17.11.21
<b>Head of Service</b> (Operational Board reports)	Ian Yeomans	14.11.21