

Committee: Cabinet

Agenda Item

Date: 18 February 2014

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Title: Welfare Garden and Redecoration Policy

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Summary

1. This report proposes changes to the council's welfare garden and redecoration policy to ensure that welfare services provided are targeted to those households in the greatest need.

Recommendations

2. That the Cabinet approves the revised Welfare Garden and Redecoration Policy attached to this report.

Financial Implications

3. The proposed new policy would reduce the number of households who are eligible to receive the services and it is expected that this will result in some budget savings to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), however this is not the main driver for updating the policy.
4. If the new policy is implemented the impact of the changes will be monitored annually to ensure the scheme is financially viable and meets customer needs.

Impact

5.

Communication/Consultation	Tenants newsletter and council website
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	The proposed changes take into account the needs of vulnerable tenants It is considered that the proposed policy would assist disabled households who are unable and have no alternative means of cutting their grass or internally decorate their home and therefore has a positive impact for equality and diversity

	EIA has been carried out
Health and Safety	N/A
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	All wards
Workforce/Workplace	Housing staff

Situation

6. The Housing Department has a current Welfare Garden and Redecoration policy that allows any tenant over state retirement age and on housing benefit, if they have no one living with them, or family living nearby willing or able to do the work for them, to apply to have the council cut their grass and/or hedge and to have one room decorated a year. This is regardless of the type of property they occupy.
7. It is a service very much valued by our older and more vulnerable tenants and officers are keen to maintain it in a sustainable form.
8. The council is one of the few remaining landlords to provide this type of welfare service free of charge.
9. Under the current terms of the policy there are 1074 tenants over state retirement age and on housing benefit that could be entitled to the service. The council currently cuts the grass for 164 tenants a year and cuts the hedges twice a year for 154 tenants (some of these will be the same tenants).
10. The programme of decoration works is running behind schedule, due to the number of people currently registered for the scheme and the cost of carrying out the works. Some people are experiencing a delay of between 12 and 18 months. This carries a reputational risk for the Council.
11. Both the gardening and decorating services are increasingly being used by households who have the capability to cut their grass or decorate their homes but choose not to do so, as the service is provided free of charge.
12. Proposals include the introduction of a subsidised charge for the gardening service. Officers consider that the Council's Pricing & Concessions Policy is not applicable or appropriate for these charges which are already heavily subsidised by the HRA.

13. Offering a subsidised service to the most vulnerable will ensure that homes are kept in good condition and that less work is needed to homes as they become empty.
14. Proposed changes may slightly reduce the costs to the HRA however this is not the main driver for updating the policy. It is felt by officers and the Tenant's Forum that the current scheme is not always equitable and with the large number of tenants entitled to use service it cannot remain viable in its current form.
15. The new amended policy is designed to encourage tenants who are not suitably housed to consider moving to more appropriate accommodation whilst still helping vulnerable tenants who are not in a position to move and who still require some assistance to maintain their properties.
16. This policy has been considered and approved by the Tenants Forum and the Housing Board, with a view to implementing the new policy from 1st April 2014 if approved by Cabinet. It is proposed that any tenants on the current garden welfare scheme would remain under this scheme until April 2015 when they would then have to meet the eligibility criteria of the new policy.

Risk Analysis

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Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Scheme becomes unviable due to ever increasing demand for this service	3 – under the current terms of the scheme over 1000 tenants could be entitled to the service	3 – reputational risk as tenants have to wait longer for service due to increasing demand	The proposed changes will make the scheme more equitable and will mitigate the current risk of the scheme ceasing to be viable
Dissatisfaction amongst tenants who currently receive the service and do not meet the revised eligibility criteria	3 – tenants will need to consider alternative arrangements	1 – will not affect vulnerable tenants or those in sheltered housing	Publicity regarding the reasons for amending the existing schemes in the tenant's newsletter

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.