

Select Committee on the Environment – 16th September 2009

Report of the Director of Adult, Community & Housing Services

Gardening Initiative

Purpose of Report

1. To advise members of the full evaluation of the North Dudley pilot.
2. To set out proposals for making the scheme borough-wide and widening its remit.

Background

3. The North Dudley pilot ran from July 2008 to March 2009. It was undertaken in partnership with Age Concern who already had in place an arrangement with the Adult Care Division in DACHS. The existing scheme covered some 80 households across the Borough.
4. The pilot, in effect, offered two levels of service:
 - a) A garden clearance, if required, prior to commencement of the ongoing maintenance. If a garden was cleared there was an undertaking from the tenant to have the ongoing garden maintenance service. This was completed at no cost to the tenant.
 - b) A basic garden maintenance service of 15 hours during the growing season (March to October), the cost to the tenant being £5.50 per hour - £82.50 for the year. The charging was administered directly by Age Concern who, in turn, paid the gardeners and associated staff.

During the pilot, 42 tenants received a garden maintenance service. The service is continuing for these customers.

5. A satisfaction survey completed in October 2008 demonstrated (from a 62% return rate) that:
 - a) 92.3% were very satisfied/satisfied with the standard of work.
 - b) 96.2% felt the charge of £5.50 per hour represented value for money.
6. The cost of the pilot was £17,423, £13,523 spent on clearing 14 gardens and £3,900 for maintenance.

The pilot also indicated that based on the tenant using the service for a full year, maintenance only, the subsidy from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) would be around £300.

7. Issues arising:

- a) It was always intended that gardening maintenance would benefit vulnerable groups including the elderly and people with physical, mental or sensory disabilities. This supports the Directorate's aim of helping sustain people in their tenancies. Due to the charitable status conditions of Age Concern, they are unable to assist other groups of people.
- b) The subsidy per customer, based on a full year service of approximately £300 does not represent value for money for the HRA.

Proposals

8. An annual budget of £100k has been established for garden maintenance (including clearance). Although it is accepted that voluntary agencies operate gardening projects these are supplementary to the main provision as the agencies often operate on grants that are not guaranteed year on year. The core service must be based on the mainstream budget.
9. Due to the potential value of this service provision it must be subjected to a procurement process to ensure value for money. It is intended that the tendered service should be in place for 2010/11. The drawing up of the specification and the tendering process will be done in partnership with Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents Association (DFTRA) and other partnership agencies. It has to be recognised that it is a limited budget which will be split 50/50, North/South and that prioritisation will have to be agreed.
10. A report will be presented to Area Housing Panels for comment on the proposals for the borough-wide scheme.
11. Until the service is procured urgent referrals can be considered against the existing Age Concern criteria for inclusion onto the scheme.

Finance

12. An annual budget of £100k has been allocated for garden maintenance for Council tenants funded from the HRA.

Law

13. There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Equality Impact

14. During the pilot it was only necessary to complete a level one equality impact assessment.

The proposed borough-wide scheme is intended to widen the customer base to include, in addition to the elderly, people with physical, mental or sensory disabilities. The limitations of the budget will necessitate prioritisation of the resources and the gardening scheme will be subject to an equality impact assessment.

Recommendation

15. Members are asked to note and comment on the contents of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda Sanders". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'L'.

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Linda Sanders
Director of Adult, Community & Housing Services

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