



Agenda Item No. 8

Select Committee on Environment – Monday 26th January 2009

Report of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services

Interim Evaluation of the North Dudley Gardening Initiative

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an interim evaluation of the North Dudley gardening initiative, which was established as a pilot on 1st July 2008.

Background

2. Members requested a report on the Gardening Initiative and it was accordingly built into this Select Committee's work plan. Members are asked to note that this report acts as an interim evaluation. Full evaluation will be completed at the end of the financial year.
3. As Members are aware Cabinet on 12th September 2007 took the decision to close the remaining local housing offices and in addition to the reinvestment proposals suggested by the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services asked that consideration be given to helping the elderly and disabled maintain their gardens.
4. To consider the viability of a gardening initiative it was decided, in the first instance, to undertake a pilot in North Dudley. North Dudley was chosen as the pilot area because Age Concern was well established in the area and our information on potential customers meant that the initiative could be introduced quickly. The pilot was launched on 1st July 2008 in North Dudley and will be concluded on 31st March 2009.
5. The pilot is being undertaken in partnership with Age Concern, who already carries out garden maintenance to 80 properties across the borough under an existing Service level Agreement between the Council and Age Concern.

6. There are 42 tenants receiving regular maintenance to their gardens. A further 17 tenants are undergoing garden clearances after which they will be added to maintenance programme from April 09 if the future of this initiative is secured. Referral for the majority of cases has been from Housing Managers following a home check or local knowledge of their patch. Further referrals have been received from family and friends and also through the promotion of the scheme through Home Affairs and the Councils website.
7. An initial assessment of the garden is undertaken by an Age Concern representative where a decision is taken to determine if an initial clearance is required prior to the commencement of a programme of regular maintenance. Once the works have commenced Age Concern undertake regular visits to monitor the quality of work carried out by the gardeners. This and other issues are then discussed at the monthly review meetings held between Age Concern and housing management staff.
8. A customer satisfaction survey of all participants within the scheme was undertaken during October 2008. Of the 42 surveys sent out 26 were returned, which represented 62% return rate. The analysis of the responses showed the following results: -
 - Overall satisfaction with the scheme was 96.2%
 - 92.3% were very satisfied / satisfied with the standard of work.
 - 96.2% felt that that the charge of £5.50 per hour represented Value for Money.
9. Furthermore, the survey showed clear evidence that the introduction of the scheme has proved invaluable to those tenants who are no longer able to maintain their gardens due to their age or disability. The survey also clearly demonstrated that the initiative has made a real difference to the quality of life to those tenants able to participate in the initiative.

Finance

10. As part of the scheme and in line with Age Concern's existing arrangements the tenant is charged £5.50 per hour for basic garden maintenance with a maximum of 15 hours per season (March to October). It is estimated that the service is 2 hours per month covering the growing season. This charge is administered by Age Concern.
11. The actual cost to Age Concern is approximately £317 for each property per year, which includes all gardening maintenance work and administration charges. (excludes any initial clearance costs)
12. To date a total of £17,143 has been spent with initial clearance costs to clear 15 gardens.

13. To date £9,886.76 has been spent on maintaining the 42 gardens in the pilot i.e. the difference between the charge to the customer and the actual cost to Age Concern.
14. The total cost to date to the Housing Revenue Account is £27,029.76.

Law

15. There are no legal implications arising out of this report

Equality Impact

16. This scheme has been introduced as a means of responding to the increasing difficulties the elderly and the disabled experience maintaining their gardens. The scheme is available to tenants aged over 60 or registered disabled or in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

Recommendation

17. It is recommended that the Select Committee note the content of the report and receive a final valuation report in due course.



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List of Background Papers