
Report of the Director of Environments and Neighbourhoods Directorate

To the Inner South Area Committee

Date: Tuesday 8th April 2008

Subject: Gardening service

Electoral Wards Affected:

Beeston & Holbeck
City & Hunslet
Middleton Park

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Council
Function

Delegated Executive
Function available
for Call In

Delegated Executive
Function not available for
Call In Details set out in the
report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides options for the Area Committee to determine the development of gardening services for elderly people and people with disabilities.

1.0 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to assist the Area Committee in determining the way forward for supporting existing gardening services and for developing a new service where needed.

2.0 BACKGROUND

At the February Area Committee there was a discussion on a preliminary report on a gardening service for Inner South Leeds and Ward Members agreed in principle to support a new gardening service. That report raised various matters for consideration and since then further work has been carried out to overcome/tackle such matters.

3.0 MODELS FOR GARDENING SERVICE

3.1 Following the last Area Committee meeting, three schemes have been visited (those run by Belle Isle Elderly Winter Aid, Middleton Elderly Aid and the Outer East Area Committee) and this has led to three distinct models being identified for providing a gardening service. All the models involve subsidy because the charges made to residents do not cover the total costs of providing the service. In outline:

- Model A** - A voluntary organization or other agency employs a gardener directly. Charges are made to residents. Subsidy needed to meet gap between costs and income.
- Model B** - The voluntary organization manages the garden service and engages freelance gardeners to do the work. Subsidy needed to meet gap between costs and income.
- Model C** - A voluntary environmental organization is paid by the relevant Area Committee to provide the garden service to residents. Service is free to residents; the service is totally subsidised

The gardening services are predominantly for elderly people, with some of them also providing services for people with disabilities. Residents' benefit from the security of having a service organized for them at rates that have been negotiated by the organization and some degree of quality control; in some cases the service is subsidized or free or at the bottom end of the commercial rate. The three models are compared in more detail at Appendix 1

4.0 Current position in Inner South

- 4.1 The current position in the Inner South is that the whole of Middleton Park Ward is covered by two voluntary organizations providing gardening services – Middleton Elderly Aid and Belle Isle Elderly Winter Aid. They each have their own particular neighbourhoods they cover within the ward. They are examples of Model B as outlined above and set out in more detail in Appendix 1 (although there are some differences in approach between the two organizations.)
- 4.2 Aire Valley Homes Leeds does offer its tenants who are elderly people and people with disabilities who have no family to help them a minimal service which is a free annual cut back of shrubs, hedge trimming and strimming to bring the garden up to maintenance standard; residents are then expected to maintain their gardens themselves. There can be a wait of some months from the time residents have asked for the gardening visit until the visit is carried out. In addition Aire Valley Homes Leeds is providing subsidy for a service to be delivered by Care and Repair which will provide a basic gardening service e.g. cutting back shrubs, trimming hedges etc; the service can either be a one-off or continuing maintenance service. The service will be for elderly people and for those with disabilities who are Aire Valley Homes Leeds' tenants. The cost of the service is £10 per hour for each gardener.

5.0 OPTIONS

- 5.1 Given these three models for providing a gardening service, and their funding requirements and the current services in Inner South, there are at least two main

options for funding a gardening service. The Area Committee is asked to determine in relation to funding which of the two Options below it wishes to pursue:

Option A – provide a free service to part of the Inner South area: this would provide the most benefit to the greatest number of residents. However, it is the most costly option for the Area Committee. If the service was provided for the whole of the Inner South it would potentially mean the end of the two existing voluntary sector schemes (i.e. Middleton Elderly Aid and Belle Isle Elderly Winter Aid) and may lead to problems with some existing gardeners who could not compete with a free service.

Option B – support the existing services in Middleton Park Ward and seek to develop a service covering Beeston & Holbeck and City & Hunslet. This option would be less costly for the Area Committee than Option A, would maintain existing strengths and avoid any problems/complaints about the provision of a free service. The two existing services cannot expand their area of operations to include the other two wards because the areas they operate in are tightly defined in their constitutional documents.

- 5.2 **Recommendation:** Should Option B be approved as the way forward for providing a gardening service in Inner South Leeds, then the following actions would be undertaken (subject to further approval by the Area Committee of specific schemes and costs):
- 5.2.1 The Area Committee is **recommended** to approve the Area Management Team inviting Belle Isle Elderly Winter Aid and Middleton Elderly Aid to submit project proposals to the Area Committee for some well-being funding to help meet their central management and administrative costs which would help support their current levels of service and/or expand the service they currently provide. Project proposals would be subject to Committee approval but an indicative amount of a total of up to £12,000 in revenue funding could be the level of funding that would support the two organizations for a year (one of the organizations has applied to another source for grant funding which would cover a substantial part of their central costs but would still leave a shortfall.)
- 5.2.2 The Area Committee is **recommended** to approve the Area Management Team developing a separate service to cover Beeston & Holbeck and City Hunslet for owner-occupiers and private rented sector tenants (as AVHL is to subsidize a service for its elderly and disabled tenants as noted in paragraph 4.2 above). It is suggested that this initially would be for one year to begin with would allow practical/funding issues to be sorted out and would also allow for other approaches to be developed. There are two options for doing this by tendering the service or by inviting an organization to submit a project proposal; we are likely to need to tender the service. A project proposal would be subject to Committee approval but an indicative amount of up to £15,000 in revenue funding might be needed to meet the central management and administration overheads of running a service in Beeston & Holbeck and City & Hunslet. Alternatively it might be possible to develop a link for these two wards with the service being provided by AVHL for its tenants.
- 5.2.3 The tendering process to establish a new service to cover Beeston & Holbeck and City & Hunslet Wards would need to cover a number of operational matters which are set out in outline in Appendix 2.
- 5.3 **Risks:** It is proposed that any contracted organization would take into account some of the risks of providing a garden service in the way proposed, in particular if the target number of paying customers (50 is suggested in the first year) is not reached.

Obviously if the assumption about numbers were to prove optimistic and not realized in practice, there would be an adverse impact on viability of the service. The Area Committee would need to be mindful that this might result in the need for additional funding from the Area Committee.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The Area Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and to decide in principle on the options outlined in section 5 above.
- 6.2 The Area Committee is asked to request Officers to establish the new scheme on the basis of Member recommendations on options at this meeting.
- 6.3 The Area Committee is asked to receive a further report on progress.

	Model A	Model B	Model C
Management of scheme	A voluntary organization or other agency manages scheme.	A voluntary organization manages scheme.	Area Committee pays a voluntary environmental organization to provide the garden service (including management of the scheme)
Who scheme for	For elderly people	Over 60s/over 65s (particularly those without family able to do the gardening) and in one case also for people with disabilities	Pensioners and disabled people without support of family or friends that can maintain the garden.
What service is provided	Basic maintenance e.g. cutting back, hedge trimming, grass cutting, strimming general tidying, garden rubbish taken away	Basic maintenance e.g. cutting back, hedge trimming, grass cutting, strimming general tidying, garden rubbish taken away	Basic maintenance e.g. cutting back, hedge trimming, grass cutting, strimming general tidying, garden rubbish taken away
Who employs gardeners	The voluntary sector organization employs the gardener directly just for this scheme.	The voluntary organization engages freelance gardeners to do the work.	The voluntary sector organization employs the gardener(s) directly as part of a range of other environmental work/projects.
What risks?	There are significant risks if e.g. the gardener becomes ill for a long time, has accident etc; prolonged periods of bad weather. These risks will adversely affect provision of gardening service. There may be little work to do at various times e.g. November to February.	Ensuring that there are freelance gardeners willing to do the work at the agreed rates. This could adversely affect the provision of the gardening service.	Similar to Model A but normally risks are spread among a number of gardeners/variety of projects so total impact of risk is reduced.
Who shoulders risks	Initially the organization (but may come to Area Committee for additional funding)	Risks borne by the freelance gardeners	The organization providing the service
Funding/subsidy	Grant received from	Grant received in	Fully subsidized by

	Greenfingers and from Area Committee	past from Greenfingers and 'subsidises' from own general resources	Area Committee
Charges	Variable charges to resident depending on size of job	Two approaches: (a) Each element in a menu of services has a set price or (b) work based on hourly charge. The voluntary organization agrees rates for jobs/hourly rates for the gardeners	No charge – free to residents
Examples of Model	This is the model used in part of the Outer South Area	This is the approach used by Belle Isle Elderly Winter Aid and Middleton Elderly Aid.	This is the model used in the Outer East Area

Operational matters to be considered as part of any tender	
Type of service	As noted in the report to the February Area Committee, the proposed service would be a basic maintenance/keeping tidy service e.g. hedge trimming, cutting back of shrubs, grass cutting, tidying up and taking away of garden rubbish. There may be a need for one-off initial major cutting/clearing of overgrown vegetation and hedges before a garden could be brought into regular maintenance.
Number of people who the service would be for	The initial target is to provide the gardening service to 50 people in the first year
Number of visits	The number of visits to be carried out and the part of the year during which the service would be provided would need to be determined. (Likely to be 2/3 visits). The timetable for the first visit would need to be determined.
Who the service would be for	The proposed service would be for elderly people and people with disabilities (particularly those who do not have any relatives or other people who could help them) should be the main groups of people who would be eligible for the service.
Financial eligibility	There would need to be a way of distinguishing those who could pay for a gardener direct and those who could not: for example, elderly and disabled people on housing benefit would be eligible for the service.
Referrals	The proposed service would need to develop its customers by publicity and ensuring referrals from not only Elected Members but also other organizations e.g. Social Services, Neighbourhood Wardens, Voluntary and Community Organisations, Aire Valley Homes, Leeds Federated Housing Association etc. A suggested target for the first year would be to have 50 regular customers.
Funding	Providing a gardening service of the type envisaged by the Area Committee involves subsidy because of the difference between what residents are charged and the true costs of running/providing the service. Subsidy for a gardening service is therefore needed and is likely to be needed for the long term.
Charges	The charges made to residents would need to be determined but it is hoped that they would be roughly similar to those charged by Belle Isle Elderly Winter Aid and Middleton Elderly Aid.
Customer service	The successful tenderer would need to provide assurances about customer service; consideration needed about carrying out CRB checks.
Health and Safety	The successful tenderer would need to follow all health and safety requirements including training for staff and protective clothing and equipment.
Risks of e.g. poor weather, sickness/accident of gardeners.	Risks to be borne by the tenderer