



Report of the Director of Environments & Neighbourhoods Directorate

South Leeds (Outer) Area Committee

Date: Monday 9th February 2009

Subject: Garden Maintenance Service Report

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ardsley and Robin Hood
Morley North
Morley South
Rothwell

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

The Outer South Area Committee agreed to commission the Care and Repair Garden Maintenance Service in 2006 covering parts of the Outer South Area and has received detailed reports in 2007 and 2008 on the progress the scheme has made which have included issues of cost, staffing, disposal of waste, number of referrals and percentage of satisfied customers. In addition to this in February 2008, the Area Committee agreed to commission Morley Elderly Action (MEA) to operate a gardening scheme in the rest of the Outer South Area covering mainly the electoral Wards of Morley and parts of Ardsley Robin Hood. This report reviews both schemes and provides Members with options for the future delivery of garden maintenance in the Outer South.

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The Care & Repair Garden Maintenance Service started in July 2006, covering the Rothwell, Robin Hood, Woodlesford and Lofthouse areas of Leeds. It is targeted at those aged 60 and over and disabled people. The service was carried out by a full-time gardener employed by Care & Repair, assisted by a volunteer. By February 2008 Care & Repair had employed a part time gardener and requested extra funding from the Area Committee to maintain the service. The service offers basic garden maintenance, including hedge and lawn cutting, weeding and general tidying. A charge of £10 per hour is made.

1.2 The MEA scheme started in 2001 and covers Morley and parts of Ardsley and Robin Hood. It is mainly targeted at those aged 60 and over and disabled people. Having previously employed gardeners, MEA now deliver the service through existing self employed gardeners, who are CRB checked. This releases MEA from all employment regulations and administration as well as the responsibility of collecting the service charge and finding work for staff during severe inclement weather. The service charge is £10 per hour and the gardeners then invoice MEA for the difference between the £10 and their hourly rate. The service offers basic garden maintenance, including hedge and lawn cutting, weeding and general tidying.

2.0 Care & Repair Scheme

2.1 The garden maintenance service started in July 2006, covering the Rothwell, Robin Hood, Woodlesford and Lofthouse areas of Leeds. It is targeted at people aged 60 and over and disabled people. The service is carried out by a full-time gardener employed by Care & Repair and assisted by a part-time, temporary gardener. A charge is made to each customer. Initially this was based on a charge of £10 per hour, but this was changed to a charge per job because of the variety of sizes of gardens and amount of work needed.

2.2 Referrals have exceeded expectations and have recently broken through the 100 barrier reaching 104. This is indicative of the demand and hard work of the gardening team.

2.3 All of the clients receive information on the wide range of services offered by Care & Repair, which aim to promote independent living. These include Home Maintenance, Disabled Adaptations, Falls Prevention, Housing Options, Delivery Service, and Advice and Support. Where necessary Care and Repair will refer onto other statutory and voluntary organisations.

2.4 All of the customers have been very pleased with the service and wish to be included in a Garden Maintenance scheme next year.

3.0 Funding

3.1 Funding for the service has been provided by the Outer South Area Committee of Leeds City Council and Greenfingers Leeds (run through Leeds Social Services), and by charges to customers.

3.2 The Area Committee agreed to support the Garden Maintenance Scheme with the following breakdown over three years:

Year	Amount Commissioned
2006/2007	£15,850
2007/2008	£14,050
2008/2009	£16,031
TOTAL	£45,931

3.3 April 2008 to March 2009:

Income:	Area Committee	16,031
	Greenfingers Leeds	1,000
	Client Charges	8,800
	Grant for Van	7,000
	Misc income	235
	TOTAL	33,066
Expenditure:	Staff Costs	19,956
	Equipment/Van Costs/ Depreciation	5,188
	Insurances	1,268
	Premises/telephone/ Printing/Recruitment/ Office overheads	5,885
	TOTAL	32,297

The service should just about break even by the end of March 2009.

Estimates for 2009/10

Estimated costs of running service for 2009/10:		
	Staff Costs	21,000
	Equipment/Van Costs/ Depreciation	5,200
	Insurances	1,300
	Premises/telephone/ Printing/Recruitment/ Office overheads	6,000
	TOTAL	33,500
	Estimated Income for 2009/10 Client charges	10,500

The Gardening Service will require £23,000 to break even by April 2010.

4.0 Issues

4.1 Garden waste

As with previous seasons there is still the issue of gardening waste and the commercial cost which is charged at the Council recycling centres. We were able to continue with the temporary agreement with the local site in Rothwell but a more permanent agreement or solution needs to be achieved for future services.

4.2 Staffing

This season we have taken the decision to employ two gardeners (one on a seasonal basis) for Health & Safety reasons and to help protect our gardeners when collecting and carrying cash, which is always a concern.

4.3 Vehicle

We have been successful in securing funding for a second van, which was purchased at the beginning of the gardening season.

4.4 Weather
Once again the extended period of very wet weather made it extremely difficult to carry out the work, and the staff often worked in very difficult circumstances. However, we have learnt from the previous seasons and were able to be flexible on working patterns ensuring that clients received the first class service they have come to expect.

4.5 Costs
Financial stability over the longer term is still proving to be difficult for the service. This is still an ongoing problem for other gardening services that are providing a much-needed service for older people across the city. The income generated from the clients is not sufficient to cover the service costs and in view of the economic climate and the pressure put on people by the rising costs of food and utilities it is unlikely the charge to clients for the gardening service will be increased.

5.0 Morley Elderly Action Scheme

5.1 In February 2008 the Area Committee commissioned Morley Elderly Action (MEA) to deliver a garden maintenance in Morley and parts of Ardsley Robin Hood. The MEA scheme has operated for nearly 8 years and is carried out by local self employed gardeners. The service charge is £10 per hour and the gardeners then invoice MEA for the difference between the £10 and their hourly rate.

5.2 Referrals are made by way of MEA receiving approaches from residents, housing staff, appropriate agencies and local Councillors. The scheme currently has about 120 customers, based on an average of 10 hours worked per service user over the summer months on either a monthly or fortnightly rota. A small number of service users within that average only wanted one or two visits per year.

5.3 Gardeners act as eyes and ears in the community and report back any concerns about service users. MEA is a member of the Leeds Neighbourhood Network and as such provides within Greater Morley a full range of services and activities including Advocacy, Access to free legal advice, Access to money advice, Help accessing benefits, General Advice, Signposting, Delivering Meals on Wheels, Community Transport, Lunch Clubs, Social Activities. As a member of the Neighbourhood Network MEA make referrals to sister organisations, so through our scheme gardening service users outside Greater Morley would have a link to their own local 'Elderly Action' group. MEA also make referrals to City wide organisations and other bodies (e.g. Disability Service Team)

5.4 Satisfaction levels are high and MEA is in the process of carrying out the annual customer satisfaction survey that details customer feedback to ensure appropriate standards of service delivery are in place and understood. The survey also gathers statistical ethnicity, religion and disability data required by funders. All current clients want to access the service this coming year.

5.5 Outcomes from the scheme align with the broad strategic outcomes compiled by Older Better, ASC, PCT and Supporting People, and the annual survey includes questions relating to Well Being, Preventing Trips and Falls, and Feeling Safer in their own homes (preventing distraction burglary, and elimination rogue traders).

6.0 Funding

- 6.1 Funding for the MEA scheme comes from Area Committee Wellbeing Budget and customer charges.
- 6.2 At its meeting of February 2008 the Area Committee agreed to commission MEA to deliver a garden maintenance scheme for £7,500
- 6.3 April 2008 to March 2009 (Greater Morley only).

For three years running MEA received Greenfingers money and a grant from Morley Town Council. For the 2008 season both funding streams ceased and a slim-line service was produced in order to continue the work. The Administration costs of MEA were in no way covered by the available funding.

Working to a rigid predetermined budget, 120 clients received a total of 1200 hours gardening service where MEA subsidised £3 per hour.

Income	Area Committee	£7,500
	(Service charges go direct to Gardeners)	
		£7,500
Expenditure	Paid to gardeners	£3,600
	Admin contribution	£3,900

Estimates for 2009/10

Estimated costs of running the current service for 2009/10 across the Greater Morley area: 120 service users receiving 1500 hours of attendance

Service charge to user £10 (Service charge paid to and collected by gardeners)
Gardeners' Hourly rate £14 (Difference invoiced to, and subsidised by MEA)

Subsidy £4 per hour x 1500 hours Paid to gardeners £6,000

Admin worker @ 10 hrs per week £18k pro rata	Admin worker	£5,000
	Employment on-costs	£500
	Cost of supervision	£1,500
Overheads associated with Employment based on cost of organisation divided by staff hours expended		£ 4,000
		TOTAL £17,000

7.0 Issues

- 7.1 Garden Waste
Disposal of gardening waste is the responsibility of the self employed gardeners.
- 7.2 Staffing

No direct staffing implications apart monitoring CRB checks for the self employed staff. Gardeners are not employed without evidencing a CRB check to MEA. A complaints procedure is in place operated by MEA.

7.3 Vehicle

The provision of transport is the responsibility of the self employed gardener.

7.4 Weather

Once again the extended period of very wet weather made it extremely difficult to carry out work. However, this does not cause any direct cost to the MEA scheme and the self employed staff are able to be flexible in their working patterns.

7.5 Costs

As with other schemes the customer charge does not cover the real cost, which is the reason for the Area Committee funding. Previously MEA made no charge for administering their scheme but this is not sustainable.

8.0 A Single Service for Outer South

8.1 During the course of recent months officers have been reviewing the operation of both schemes. This work arose from issues highlighted in the reports provided by Care & Repair among them, the rising costs of the service, the number of issues to be resolved and the doubts about boundaries and areas of operation.

8.2 During the course of discussions with MEA an opportunity to develop a single service across the Outer Area was identified. Officers invited MEA to scope a single proposal for Outer Area Committee consideration. The main drivers for this were to find a more cost efficient service, so making better use of the Wellbeing Budget and increased confidence that the whole Outer Area was being covered.

8.3 The opportunity to develop a single scheme has not been offered to Care & Repair. This is because a cursory look at the costings shows that it would not be as cost effective as a MEA led scheme. Officers were also under the impression that Care & Repair would not want to extend the current scheme.

8.4 Development of a single scheme has required MEA to consider organisational and governance changes to enable them to operate outside the old Morley Borough area. These changes are now in place and agreed by MEA Management Committee.

8.5 The single scheme can easily absorb the existing Rothwell and surrounding areas service users as it is anticipated that approx 120 clients out of the proposed 240 would come from that area of operation.

Funding

- 9.1 Across the full Area Management Committee area: 240 service users receiving 3000 hours of attendance

Service charge to user £10 (Service charge paid to and collected by gardeners)
Gardeners' Hourly rate £14 (Difference invoiced to, and subsidized by MEA)

Subsidy £4 per hour x 3000 hours Paid to gardeners £12,000

Admin worker @ 20 hrs per week
£18k pro rata

Admin worker £10,000

Employment on-costs £ 1,000

Cost of supervision £ 3,000

Overheads associated with
Employment based on cost

£ 8,000

of organisation divided by
staff hours expended

TOTAL £34,000

10.0 Issues

- 10.1 The only additional issue will be the need for MEA to employ a part time gardening co-coordinator.

11.1 Conclusion

- 11.1 The garden maintenance schemes continue to be popular with older people and is clearly satisfying a need for a gardening service in the area. The service itself helps to promote independent living; increases the benefits of health and well being; provides the opportunity for residents to get out in the fresh air and sit in their garden; removes untidy gardens which can reduce the risk of criminals identifying older and vulnerable residents; and decreases the likelihood of accidents through trips and slips in the garden.

- 11.2 It is recommended that the Area Committee consider the options presented and agree to allocate funding to meet the costs of delivering that option.

Option 1 outlined in 3.3 costs £23,000

Option 2 outlined in 6.3 costs £17,000

Option 3 detailed in 8 costs £34,000.

Members should note that Options 1 and 2 provides the status quo at a cost of £40,000 compared to Option 3 a single scheme with one delivery agent at a cost of £34,000.

12.0 Implications For Council Policy and Governance

- 12.1 There are no direct implications for the above as a result of this report.

13.0 Legal and Resource Implications

13.1 There are no legal implications from this report.

13.2 The Well being Budget will be reduced by £40,000 if Options 1 and 2 is agreed, by or £34,000 if Option 3 is agreed to support the future costs of a garden maintenance scheme.

14.0 Recommendations

Members of the Outer South Area Committee are requested to:

(a). Note the contents of this report

(b). Consider the Options 1, 2 and 3, outlined above and agree to a preferred option, or options, for the delivery a Garden Maintenance Service scheme.

Background Papers

Garden Maintenance Schemes, 25th February 2008

Rothwell Gardening Scheme – Care & Repair, 20th February 2006