

23 March 2011		ITEM 6
<b>Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>HOUSING ESTATES GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT</b>		
Report of: Les Clark, Landlord Service Strategic Commissioning Manager		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b>	<b>Key Decision:</b>	
N/A	N/A	
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Chris Stratford, Head of Housing		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Lorna Payne. Corporate Director of Community Well-being.		
<b>This report is</b> Public		
<b>Purpose of Report:</b> This report informs Members about the new service level agreement and other services between the Head of Housing and the Head of Environmental Services in respect of grounds maintenance works to Council-owned housing estates.		

Comment [s]: PLEASE CLICK THIS BOX ONCE and enter the date of the meeting (in font 16, not capitals)

Comment [s]: Please leave this for completion by Democratic Services

Comment [s]: PLEASE CLICK THIS BOX ONCE and enter the name of the Committee you are reporting to (in font 16, not capitals)

Comment [a j]: Please enter the name and job title of the person who will be presenting the report

Comment [s]: Please enter details of any Wards and Communities affected by the report. If this section is not applicable, you should enter "none".

Comment [s]: Yes/No/Not Applicable – a 'Key Decision' is generally one affecting more than 2 wards or above £50,000 expenditure – see Guideline 2.7

Comment [sj]: Please state the Head of Service's name and job title

Comment [sj]: Please state Director's name and job title

Comment [sj]: State whether your report is Public or Exempt. If Exempt (i.e. not to be given to the public or discussed in

Comment [sj]: Briefly set out the purpose of your report

Comment [sj]: Please provide a summary of the key points in your report

Comment [s]: The recommendations should be set out in bold in the form of the decision that the decision-

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. This service level agreement has been agreed between both Housing and Environmental Services in order to provide an improved grounds maintenance service to Council tenants and leaseholders.
2. The Grounds Maintenance Service Level Agreement (GMSLA) is founded on a cost base which has been completely revised and more accurately reflects the true costs of the service. This will ensure that the expected quality outcomes, in terms of frequencies of grass-cutting and tidiness of shrub-beds, are achieved. It will also ensure greater customer satisfaction and fewer complaints.
3. A review of other grounds maintenance services not included within the SLA has also taken place and an agreement reached about future improvements.

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1.1 **That the Service Level Agreement in appendix (1) is endorsed and that the improved service benefits for residents are noted as a result of the joint working between Community Well-being and Sustainable Communities.**

**2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:**

Comment [s]: You should briefly explain why the report is on the agenda - See para. 5.3 and 5.4 of the report writing guidelines.

- 2.1 The grounds maintenance service for Council-owned Housing estates is provided by the Council's DSO, managed by the Head of Environmental Services. Quality standards are set and monitored by the Housing Landlord Service Team within Housing.
- 2.2 In recent years, it has become apparent that there is a miss-match between the cost of provision and the expectations of the Housing Service, tenants and local members. This has led to a poor service for tenants and has generated many complaints locally, particularly during the growing season. Local Housing Managers have attempted to resolve problems as they have occurred, but without an agreed schedule and frequency of tasks in place, it has been difficult to reach satisfactory outcomes at the point of service delivery.
- 3.3 The quality of the grounds maintenance service was found to be poor during the self-assessment exercise for the Tenants Annual Report in October 2010. The service improvement plan, arising from the Tenants' Report, recognised the need to "ensure a higher level of service more consistently and regularly in the delivery of the grounds maintenance service to Council estates". It was agreed with the statutory Tenants Panel that an improved service would be provided to ensure that communal areas of grass and shrubs are maintained to an agreed standard by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.
- 3.4 The current strategy within Housing is two-fold:
- A short-term action to provide an urgent solution to the poor service provision by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. The solution proposed here is an internal SLA that more accurately reflects the service needs and the necessary costs, and an improvement in how other estate services are delivered.
  - A longer-term action to monitor the service level agreement during 2011/12 in terms of both quality and value for money in conjunction with similar services provided by our neighbouring Councils and Housing Associations. The results of such monitoring and benchmarking will be reported to the Tenants Panel at quarterly intervals.
- 3.5 The proposed SLA will cover the following core tasks (details in appendix 1):
- Grass cutting and shrub –bed maintenance 16 times a year; more frequently during the growing season (March – October).
  - Weed control within alleyways between houses and blocks of flats 3 times a year.
  - Dog-bin emptying.
  - Tree safety inspections.
  - Playground inspections in accordance with the Royal Society for Protection against Accidents (ROSPA).

3.6 Other grounds maintenance services, not specifically included within the SLA itself, but, nonetheless integral to the good maintenance of housing estates are:

- Estate Action Squad for hitting hot-spots on an urgent response basis.
- Assisted Gardening Service for vulnerable tenants (currently those of pensionable age and/or with a registered disability).
- Reactive grounds maintenance jobs, such as additional tree and shrub pruning, removal of old bushes and planting schemes.
- An upgraded weed control service for hard-surface areas on council estates, such as car parks and footpaths.

3.7 The overall budget provision for the Housing grounds maintenance service is shown in table (1) below:

Grounds Maintenance Service	Budget Provision £
<b>SLA Items:</b>	
1. Grass cutting, shrubs, hedges – 16 times pa	671,232
2. Weed Control (alleyways) – 3 treatments pa	24,240
3. Dog litter bin emptying – Borough-wide plan	11,000
4. Tree Inspections	41,345
5. Playground inspections and remedial work	64,807
<b><u>Total SLA:</u></b>	<b><u>£812,624</u></b>
<b>Other Service Items:</b>	
6. Estate Action Squad	100,500
7. Assisted Gardening Service	195,000
8. Reactive Service	104,300
9. Estate Weeding	75,000
<b><u>Total Non-SLA:</u></b>	<b><u>£474,800</u></b>
<b><u>Total of All Grounds Services:</u></b>	<b><u>£1,287,424</u></b>

Comment [s]: Other headings may be appropriate. The report should outline the reasoning that leads to its recommendations and **must** include:

1. a brief summary of options considered;
2. consultation outcomes
3. a risk assessment.
4. Whether the responsible cabinet members have been consulted/contributed to the report (NB professional and political advice must be clearly distinguished)

- See para.5.5 of the report writing guidelines.

3. **ISSUES AND/OR OPTIONS:**

3.1 The main issues with this service and the current proposals for improvement are to ensure a demonstrable improvement in service quality to Council tenants and leaseholders, whilst at the same time achieving value for money.

3.2 This is a highly visible service, inasmuch as residents and local members will notice themselves if there is evidence that service quality improves. It will also become quickly clear to housing officers from their own regular estate inspections and any complaints where there are problems. This self-evidence will be a first test of whether the service has demonstrably improved.

- 3.3 However, housing officers will also be conducting a programme of estate inspections throughout the year (in many cases jointly with Environmental Services) to assess the quality of the service. These inspections will also be joined by local residents and members where this is wanted.
- 3.4 Where there are problems with service quality which are not rectified, these will be escalated through various stages to the Tenants Panel, who provide a service scrutiny role, and eventually to both Heads of Service and the Director of Community Well-being.
- 3.5 Satisfaction surveys of the assisted gardening service currently take place, and these are usually of a very high satisfaction (95%); additional satisfaction surveys will be introduced for the 2011/12 year for the estate grounds maintenance service. This will provide further information, along with the monitoring of complaints, about resident views of the service.
- 3.6 Performance monitoring of the service will be reported to the Tenants Panel on a quarterly basis together with comparative data from neighbouring Councils and Housing Associations. This will enable the Panel and officers to scrutinise the costs of the service to ensure that residents are receiving value for money.
- 3.7 Options as to how this service may be provided in the future will continue to be kept under review in the light of performance levels during the course of this year, residents' satisfaction ratings and the views of the statutory Tenants Panel.

**4. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 4.1 Consultation about the grounds maintenance service took place with tenants during the Council's preparations for the publication of the statutory Tenants Annual Report in October 2010.
- 4.2 Performance will continue to be scrutinised by the statutory Tenants Panel on a quarterly basis.

**5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 5.1 The outcomes of this service and the Service Level Agreement clearly match in with the Council's priority "To ensure a safe, clean and green environment".

**Comment [j]:** This should include any consultation with Ward Members and Shadow Portfolio Holders, as well as any public or statutory consultation

**Comment [a]:** Please refer to Section 5.7 of the Report Writing Guidelines

6. **IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 **Financial**

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**  
 Telephone and email: **01375 652772**  
**mjones@thurrock.gov.uk**

The required budget increase has been factored into the Housing growth and rent-setting report to Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> February.

An additional sum of £479, 724 has been included as part of the 2011/12 base budget setting process in order to meet the cost of the proposed SLA and other service increases. The total HRA budget for all grounds maintenance operations in 2011/12 is £1,287,424.

6.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Sabrina Sangha**  
 Telephone and email: **01375 65 2938**  
[ssangha@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:ssangha@thurrock.gov.uk)

There are no specific legal implications directly arising from the proposed Housing Estates Grounds Maintenance Service Level Agreement (SLA).

The Public Contracts Regulations 2006 do not apply as this report sets out arrangements to increase the provision of an existing internal service.

However the Council has a duty to ensure that appropriate and effective consultation has been undertaken to manage and monitor housing services. Additionally, the Council must ensure compliance with the best value duty contained in section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999. This duty requires local authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way functions are exercised taking into account considerations of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The SLA will have to be agreed and completed in accordance with the Council's Constitution and kept in accordance with the Council's documentation retention policy.

**Comment [sj]:** This section should always be completed – if they are dealt with fully in another part of the report, they also need a brief cross reference here. The names and job titles of the officers providing the implications should be provided in full – see Guideline 6.1 and please note Democratic Services Deadlines and ensure that officers providing implications are given 5 clear working days to work on the report. Authors can write implications but they must be signed off by the appropriate officers

**Comment [sj]:** See Guideline 6.2

**Comment [sj]:** See Guideline 6.3

6.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**  
 Telephone and email: **01375652472**  
**Sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk**

The mainstream estate grounds maintenance service has a universal impact on all residents living on Council estates. However, the particular requirements of people who are vulnerable either due to age and frailty or due to disability have been recognised with the provision of an assisted gardening service.

6.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

None

7. **CONCLUSION**

7.1 The main benefit of agreeing the proposed SLA is that it will allow the service to continue at a level which more reasonably matches costs against service demand during the new financial year. This should ensure a more consistent and reliable service for tenants, whilst at the same time reducing complaints. The more detailed unit costs and frequencies contained in the SLA will also enable the Housing Service to benchmark costs and outputs to determine value for money.

7.2 This Service Level Agreement is a positive result arising from close joint working between officers in both Housing and Environmental Services, taking into account the views of residents and local members. These proposal are expected to raise service standards for residents in future.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:**

- Report to Directors Board: 2 February 2011.

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:**

- Grounds Maintenance Service Level Agreement (GMSLA). Appendix (1).

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Comment [sj]: See Guideline 6.4

Comment [sj]: This should inform the recommendations in the report

Comment [sj]: See Guideline 8. If any Papers are to be placed in the Members room that relate to this report, you should also list them here

Comment [sj]: List the Appendices referred to in the Report

Comment [sj]: Insert the full contact details of the author of the report

