

Date of Meeting 29 April 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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### **Request for 2 Grounds Maintenance Seasonal Staff for the 2021 season**

#### **Report summary:**

The budget for grounds maintenance seasonal staff was removed last year - £71k – impacting on the delivery of Grounds Maintenance throughout the district including the maintenance on our Housing sites (Individual Garden Maintenance and Communal Areas).

StreetScene have started to undertake a review of the Housing Contract and rough calculations indicate we are about £250k below market value.

Whilst we are not seeking to bridge this gap to the full extent, we do know that we need additional resource to service the Housing Contract and this request is an interim one until the full review is completed in the coming months.

If the HRB support this request, then StreetScene will be able to continue to provide a service on the current terms minimising complaints from Housing residents whilst the review of the contract is completed.

#### **Is the proposed decision in accordance with:**

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

#### **Recommendation:**

**Acknowledging that StreetScene are undertaking a larger review of the Housing Contract, the request would be for the Housing Review Board to approve, recommend to cabinet and then on to council for resolution, the interim funding of 2 Grounds Maintenance Seasonal staff at a cost of c£30k to help see us through this coming season**

#### **Reason for recommendation:**

The Housing Contract equates to 25% of the overall work that StreetScene carries out across the district. Any reduction in seasonal staff will impact the whole district including Housing sites and recognising that StreetScene is in the middle of a contract review, an interim increase in funding will go a long way to ensure that StreetScene can still fulfil the Housing Contract for 2021.

Despite budgetary savings there is still an expectation from Housing residents that the service they will get will remain the same – if StreetScene keep this the same and the reduction in service solely comes from the general classification areas (public gardens and open spaces) this will create an imbalance of service across the district.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergencies
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Culture, Tourism, Leisure and Sport
- Democracy and Transparency
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

**Climate change** Low Impact

**Risk:** Medium Risk; Without the additional resource to service the housing sites, we run the risk of

**Links to background information**

**n Link to Council Plan:**

Priorities (check which apply)

- Outstanding Place and Environment
- Outstanding Homes and Communities
- Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
- Outstanding Council and Council Services

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**Report in full**

1. The budget for the grounds maintenance seasonals has been removed - £71k. This presents us with challenges and although our rewilding and nature recovery will help with bridging the gap, the reality is that the impact this year will be very minimal if at all. The main issue is focused around the work we do in Exmouth (where 90% of the seasonals are placed) and the Housing Contract that StreetScene deliver.
2. We have started to undertake a review of the Housing Contract to ensure that the teams are staffed accordingly as rough calculations indicate we are about £250k below market value – we are not looking to recover true market value when reviewing our internal contracts and all pricing will be looked at with EDDCs best interest in mind, as it is right that StreetScene deliver these contracts where possible.
3. Under the current contract which was drawn up over fifteen years ago, StreetScene are subsidising the works that Housing residents pay and this will be exacerbated with the removal of the Grounds Maintenance Seasonals – staff who bolster the team during the cutting season enabling the teams to provide a good reliable service.
4. There does need to be awareness though that by removing the grounds seasonals from StreetScene there is still an expectation for us to deliver on the Housing Contract ‘as is’ as well as all the other general classification grass cutting areas across the district and the risk is without intervention, we will have an imbalance on the standard of service both areas receive.

5. With regards to Housing sites, we are unable to re-wild back gardens meaning we need to maintain the frequency on less resource. The Housing Contract equates to 25% of the overall work that StreetScene carries out yet we are not going to see a reduction against this for the reasons set out above. At the end of this document I have included the breakdown of StreetScene cutting by area as well as percentage against housing work and you will see that Exmouth equates to 41% of the total cutting that takes place across the district hence the seasonal staff working out of this team.
6. The current cycle of cutting is 3-4 weeks. If we are to enter the season as we are in Exmouth then we are looking at 5 -6 week cycle across all sites which is just untenable in terms of managing the grass sites, managing public expectations, managing complaints and staff morale. There is no slack across StreetScene to move staff around without impact and although we are committed to re-looking at the teams, the 'suffering' will take place across the district with each area having an impact to try to maintain a balance within the teams.
7. We knew that this would cause operational issues and stressed from the outset the impact it would have on the service, the impact in communities of longer cutting frequencies and the need to purchase additional equipment to cope with longer grass, however the budget was still put forward for removal.
8. As we carry out detailed work which ordinarily would've been done sooner had we not been in Covid recovery mode (the teams have also been operating throughout the winter with a 20% reduction in staff during periods of self-isolation) and needing to adapt our processes to ensure the front line teams are safe, this paper is now being brought forward to raise awareness of the real impact the full reduction of seasonal staff would bring to EDDC.
9. Acknowledging that we are undertaking a larger review of the Housing Contract, my request would be for Housing to interim fund 2 seasonal staff at a cost of c£30k to help see us through this coming season where people will be expecting and valuing the outdoor green space due to the situation the world is in – (£532.03 per seasonal per week for 29 weeks). This will still return a saving of c£41k however it will allow us to try to maintain service as normal for this year whilst we readjust, purchase other bits of kit and work up revised schedules to try to sustain the level of service for 2022. This funding will need to be subject to approval by the Housing Review Board.
10. StreetScene will also undertake a review of its placement of operational staff in order to try to level the impact across the whole district – so that not 1 single area suffers more than others. This will undoubtedly cause disruption to all rounds in every areas as the teams are operating on the line, and the public impact of StreetScene not maintaining minimal standards during the early days of the pandemic generated a significant public response.
11. If the Housing Review Board are able to consider the need to 'interim fund £30k to have 2 grounds seasonals for this year then I believe we can just about manage and will give us time to fully complete the Housing contract review, consider what future years could look like by undertaking a full review of StreetScene service including purchasing different equipment, reorganising teams where possible and ensuring we are compensated accordingly for the contract work StreetScene carries out for all partners. For info, below is a breakdown of our main team areas and the grass cutting rounds they have.

**Total Grass cut in the District - 1,424,896 m2**

**Total StreetScene managed grass cutting (general grass cutting) - 1,067,764m2:**

Budleigh - 100,541 m2

Exmouth - 457,441 m2

Sidmouth - 199,053 m2

Honiton & Ottery - 228,346 m2

Seaton & Axminster - 82,383 m2

**Total Grass cutting m2 and percentage of cutting in area associated with the Housing Contract- 357,132 m2 - 23% of total grass cutting in the district**

Budleigh - 61,417m2 - 38%

Exmouth -120,706m2 - 20%

Sidmouth - 45,049m2 - 23%

Honiton & Ottery - 82,210m2 - 26%

Seaton & Axminster - 47,750m2 - 37%

**Total breakdown percentage per area of Grass cutting that StreetScene manage including Housing Sites:**

Budleigh - 11%

Exmouth - 41%

Sidmouth - 17%

Honiton & Ottery - 22%

Seaton & Axminster - 9%

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**Financial implications:**

As this is a request for £30k of additional budget the recommendation will need to ultimately be resolved by council.

**Legal implications:**

The legal implications are contained within the report.