

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	13 June 2018
Subject:	Local Delivery of Grass Cutting in Podsmead		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Communities & Neighbourhoods and Cabinet Member for Environment		
Wards Affected:	Podsmead		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	None		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report updates Cabinet on the implementation of a local grass cutting trial being undertaken in Podsmead via a Social Enterprise Model and the positive impacts it aims to deliver.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 **CABINET** is asked to **RESOLVE** that:

- (1) To note the implementation of the trial scheme for the 2018 grass cutting season and its potential positive impacts as set out within this report;
- (2) To provide delegation to the Head of Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities & Neighbourhoods and the Cabinet Member for Environment to formally implement such an arrangement in 2019, subject to a review of the trial period, which will be undertaken following the close of the 2018 grass cutting season, and
- (3) To endorse the approach of devolving the delivery of public open space management for the benefit of our communities (as set out within this report) and actively engage our communities through conversations to explore potential interest.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 District Councils are legally responsible for the maintenance of public open space they own within their geographical boundaries. Furthermore many District Councils (including Gloucester City Council), through local agency agreements, also maintain highway verges on behalf of County Councils where there is a two tier system of

local government in place. Delivery of grounds maintenance work in Gloucester has since 2007 been undertaken by Amey Plc (or predecessors) through a streetscene contract.

- 3.2 During Spring 2017 we commenced conversations with Gloucestershire County Council about localising delivery of services such as grass cutting in order to provide additional opportunities for our communities. The opportunities for delivery of services at a local level are increasing with the ongoing budget pressures that councils continue to work towards. It was agreed that both organisations would benefit from commissioning advice & expertise in this area with Gloucester City Council taking the lead.
- 3.3 Stewkley Enterprise Agency (SEA) were commissioned in Spring 2017 to explore the potential across Gloucester for the implementation of a community led grounds maintenance project with the Council acting as an enabler. SEA had successfully delivered a similar project in Buckinghamshire on behalf of a number of Parish Councils and the company had led discussions with both communities and various tiers of local government to bring the scheme to fruition. The council wished to understand how SEA delivered the scheme and what their learning was from the Buckinghamshire project so that a conversation could be held with our communities.
- 3.4 Once commissioned, David Lett of SEA, Cabinet Members, officers and key partners such as Amey and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust met for an initial discussion regarding the model and it was decided there was merit in having a series of conversations with some of our communities to enquire whether this is something they would be interested becoming involved with.
- 3.5 Several community conversations were held in Quedgeley, Podsmead and Matson & Robinswood. Potential for such a scheme was identified in each of these areas, Quedgeley with its Town Council which could potentially act as service provider, and Podsmead and Matson & Robinswood due to the existing community capacity within those wards such as community organisations and community builders. In addition the project was also discussed at Overview & Scrutiny Committee in Autumn 2018 where it received broad cross party support.
- 3.6 The model proposed was not that of a traditional simple commercial contract, but instead it would work so that several local residents would be trained and provided with equipment so that they could then take on the work as self-employed contractors. These residents would learn new skills, including business management, and the scheme would help to tackle the issue of unemployment. Also, there would be benefits for the wider community, as those involved would be required to discuss their service each month with local residents, which would build relationships within the community. It is also a model that if successful has potential for growth areas such as garden maintenance, highway furniture cleaning (road signs etc) and pathway maintenance (edging and weeding etc).
- 3.7 The conversations resulted in a range of feedback all of which was welcomed and valued so that resources and effort could be prioritised accordingly into enabling a scheme to be trialled. It was critical that there was widespread support for the scheme and local capacity to deliver such a scheme.

- 3.8 Following these conversations it was agreed that a trial arrangement covering 42,000m² of public open space in Podsmead would be implemented in time for the 2018 grass cutting season, and SEA were contracted to administer and manage the project.
- 3.9 As a ward Podsmead offered manageable portions of public open space upon which to base a trial, it benefitted from an existing community interest group in the shape of The Podsmead Big Local Panel and importantly there was widespread interest, initiative and leadership shown by those we consulted with.
- 3.10 Recruitment of staff and volunteers was undertaken during March and The Hub at Scott Avenue provided the base for such activity. The scheme employs a local project coordinator who lives within the ward of Podsmead and similarly 6 out of the 10 part time employment opportunities have been recruited to with young people living within or in close proximity to Podsmead all earning the living wage of £7.83/hr. It is important to point out however that the scheme is not targeted at young people but any resident who would benefit from such a part time employment opportunity.
- 3.11 Once recruited SEA delivered training on the practical use of equipment, health & safety to those who would be undertaking the cutting, and in addition provided clear instruction to all involved on how the scheme would be administered. SEA continue to support the project coordinator in his role.
- 3.12 Grass cutting commenced during late April 2018 and consideration is already being given to introducing Milton Avenue POS into the scheme at the request of the local community. Furthermore there has been interaction between those undertaking the cutting and local residents who have wanted to find out more about the project and who have also offered up ideas of how it could develop.
- 3.13 As per recommendation 2 of this report it is intended to review the outcome of the trial period following the cutting season in consultation with relevant Cabinet Members, with a view to formalising the arrangement from 2019 onwards with ownership of the scheme being passed into the hands of a local community interest company.
- 3.14 Conversations have been held with a number of community interest companies with a view to them administering the scheme from 2019 onwards should the trial prove successful. These conversations have been positive and will be progressed as part of the review referred to in para 3.14.

4.0 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Considerations

- 4.1 This project provides a real opportunity for the community to utilise its strengths and capacity and take ownership of a highly valued function that traditionally has been delivered by local councils but has been impacted by decreasing budgets.
- 4.2 Although in its infancy the pilot has already provided several examples of local involvement including employment opportunities being taken up by local residents, Gloucester City Homes supporting the project through provision of a storage area for equipment, a local resident assisting with clearance of the storage area and key

members of the Podsmead Big Local panel assisting the project coordinator with recruitment and general organisation.

5.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 5.1 Continuing to provide grass cutting in a traditional manner through our streetscene contractor would be a satisfactory alternative option should cutting schedules be complied with. Over the last 2 cutting seasons however there have been issues with schedules not being complied with by our contractor which has led to a flurry of complaints over a number of weeks.
- 5.2 Officers discussed the potential of letting a trial period contract with a number of local community interest companies and this resulted in some positive conversations with a view to the 2019 cutting season. It was felt however that letting the contract for the trial period to SEA would ensure that there was a consistency in approach that linked the preparatory work for the project to the delivery and implementation, and that we would also benefit from the skills and experience of a company that had successfully delivered this model elsewhere across the Country.

6.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 As a Council enabling opportunities such as this will provide far more social opportunities for our communities and its residents than a traditional outsourced contract model would. It will allow the council to get more return on what it puts in.
- 6.2 Local ownership of grass cutting has proven to raise standards of service as those carrying out the work generally have a connection to the ward or area in which they are carrying out the work
- 6.3 The ongoing financial constraints faced by local government provides opportunities for traditional services to be delivered locally where the capacity, skills and enthusiasm exists which is the case in respect of this scheme.

7.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 7.1 Officers within the City Centre & Environment Team will monitor the quality of grass cutting undertaken and will issue a service change notice to formalise the cessation of grass cutting by Amey.
- 7.2 Both Gloucester City Homes and the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust are seen as key partners in this project and have a role to play in supporting how the scheme operates and to provide opportunities for its growth. Areas that will be explored moving forward will be ecological best practice in maintaining public open space and areas of growth potential such as garden maintenance.
- 7.2 As set out within the report a review of the trial period will be undertaken at the end of the cutting season and reported to relevant Cabinet Members for their consideration. This review will cover amongst other things the quality of work delivered, the effectiveness of management arrangements, the social benefits delivered and the cost of the scheme.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 Initial assistance was provided to the project by the Council through the purchasing of grass cutting equipment and accessories to the value of £3,500. This was met within existing budgets.
- 8.2 In Year 1 it was identified that this project would need to be fully funded by the Council and a services contract has been let to the value of £10,500 for the 2018 cutting season. The cost of this will be met through a reduction in the Amey contract value given they have ceased grass cutting in these locations.
- 8.3 As referred to within this report the social benefits associated with this project will result in whole system financial benefits to a range of our public service partners, but that are inherently difficult to quantify.

(Financial Services have been consulted in respect of this Report)

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 A contract for services was awarded to SEA following a waiver of the contract rules, covering the period 1st April 2018 – 31st October 2018 for the provision of grass cutting of identified areas within the Podsmead Ward.
- 9.2 The arrangement will require a cessation of the grass cutting services provided by Amey PLC in Podsmead which will be formalised by a Service Change Notice provided for within the streetscene contract.
- 9.3 The Council's Contract Rules contained in the Constitution sets out when services to be provided to the council must be the subject of a procurement process to choose the service provider. The value of the contract will determine the required procurement procedure. Waivers of the procurement rules for contracts with a value under the current EU threshold (currently £181,302 for goods and services) can be given if the reasons fall within those set out in Rule 6 of the Contract Rules or as otherwise agreed by Cabinet.

(One Legal have been consulted in respect of this Report)

10.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 10.1 There are several very exciting opportunities relating to this project that through enabling local service delivery can bring about a range of social benefits which a tradition outsourced contract could not. The main risk associated with the project was if the trial was to fail, but this has been mitigated by the ability we have at our disposal to request Amey to recommence maintenance of these locations.

11.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

The PIA screening stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, therefore a full PIA was not required.

12.0 Other Corporate Implications

12.1 Sustainability

There are no sustainability implications associated with this report

12.2 Staffing & Trade Union

There are no staffing and trade union implications associated with this report

12.3 Safeguarding

There are no safeguarding issues associated with this report

Background Documents: None