

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet	Date:	4 December 2019
Subject:	Social Enterprise Activity		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities, Cabinet Member for Environment		
Wards Affected:	Podsmead and Matson and Robinswood		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	Yes
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Appendices:	None		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on the trial devolution of part of the grass cutting contract in Podsmead ward to the Stewkley Enterprise Agency and request approval for continuation of the current contractual arrangements and extension of the trial to other wards.

2.0 Recommendations

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

- (1) the review of the grass cutting trial in Podsmead ward as delivered by the Stewkley Enterprise Agency be noted
- (2) it be approved that the continuation of grass cutting in Podsmead ward and note that the Head of Communities will, following the grant of a waiver of the Council's Contract Rules, in consultation with the Council's Solicitor, enter into a new services contract with by the Stewkley Enterprise Agency following engagement with stakeholders to confirm contract scope
- (3) plans to explore a further trial of the scheme in Matson & Robinswood ward and any other community which comes forward be approved
- (4) it be noted that if the Podsmead Clearance Team and Podsmead Big Local become a legal entity, the Head of Communities will consider whether to terminate the contract with Stewkley Enterprise Agency and enter into a new arrangement with the new entity (subject to the grant of waiver).

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 As part of the city council's plan to build strong and resilient communities, Officers have been working with communities to consider how residents can become more involved in shaping services.
- 3.2 Transferring part of the grass cutting contract from Amey to a community group was trialled following the success of a similar project in a local district.
- 3.3 The Stewkley Enterprise Agency (SEA) in Buckinghamshire was created in 2012 by local resident and parent following the lack of part time employment in the area. Buckinghamshire County Council were exploring the option of devolving low level maintenance activities to communities with a particular focus on verge mowing and a proposition was made by the resident to Stewkley Parish Council to bid for the contract. SEA would deliver the work and manage the project by employing part-time workers aged 16-19 years. It took 18 months of discussions but the grass verges in the village of Stewkley are now maintained by the SEA. Following this initial change, 10 other neighbouring villages have followed suit and SEA now employs up to 30 part time workers.
- 3.4 In summer 2017, Gloucester City Council explored the idea of devolving part of the grass cutting service to community groups. The previous Head of Communities researched wards in the city where this would be viable and discovered that Matson & Robinswood, Podsmead and Quedgeley would be most suitable.
- 3.5 Meetings were organised with key community representatives from each of these wards to discuss the proposal and how it could work successfully. Matson & Robinswood and Quedgeley wards decided not to proceed at the time but Podsmead were keen to take part.
- 3.6 Gloucester City Council commissioned SEA to work with Podsmead Big Local (PBL) to set up the scheme which included; promotion to the local community, recruitment of the grass cutters and scheme coordinator, as well as full training for staff once they were recruited.
- 3.7 The Podsmead Clearance Team was established in March 2018 and are employed by Stewkely Enterprise Agency.
- 3.8 The team employs up to 12 local people to maintain the grass verges in the area. They are paid the living wage and provided with full training and safety equipment. On average there are 7 workers and one volunteer but currently there are 4 workers, 2 work experience students and 3 volunteers. Current staff members are aged 16-19 however the work is not exclusive to young people and would also suit the long term unemployed or older people looking to semi-retire.
- 3.9 We have been approached by Together in Matson who are keen to explore a trial in Matson and Robinswood in 2020. They have been talking with PCT to understand what the delivery requirements are and how they could tailor a scheme to work for their area. We are not proposing that this will form part of the contract with SEA at this stage and decisions about this will be made once a proposal has been developed for Matson and Robinswood.

4.0 Social Value Considerations

- 4.1 ABCD and strengths-based working is at the core of this approach. The council was bold in handing over responsibility to a local community group, but the risks have been outweighed by the significance of the social value for the community in Podsmead. The pilot has provided several local people with meaningful work. Most of the PCT staff have not worked before due to a lack of employment opportunities for young people in the ward and manage to fit their grass cutting around studying and volunteering commitments. As a result, they have developed the following skills;
- organisation
 - communication
 - planning
 - time management
 - team working
 - customer care
 - receiving and giving constructive feedback
 - operating equipment
 - looking after tools and machinery.
- 4.2 One of the PCT team has a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and has previously struggled to find work because of his additional needs. He is now able to maintain his own patch of grass verges because of the patience and support he receives from his colleagues which has increased his confidence and self-esteem as well as provide him with reliable references which will be vital for his future career prospects.
- 4.3 As previously mentioned, PCT take on work experience students. Some of these individuals use the experience as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award and for others it provides them with valuable skills development as well as the offer of part time paid work with PCT once they are fully trained. 2 of the current team members came through this route
- 4.4 Two PCT staff members volunteer an additional 8 hours per week each; completing additional grounds maintenance work, litter picking and keeping the neighbourhood tidy. They do this because they feel privileged to be in paid employment and fortunate to be able to shape the condition of their local environment. They say there is less anti-social behaviour in the area because other teenagers in the ward admire their hard work and therefore have more respect for the streets, parks and open spaces.
- 4.5 Expanding the scheme into Matson and Robinswood proliferates the social value wider than just one ward of the City.

5.0 Environmental Implications

- 5.1 The grass cutting scheme has contributed to making Podsmead a healthier and more connected neighbourhood with residents more engaged with where they live and therefore more protective of their local environment. It is important to note that the majority of PCT volunteer on other environmental projects in the area, including Milton Avenue Open Space where they organise and run conservation volunteer days during the school holidays. 10 volunteer days have taken place so far.

- 5.2 These volunteering days are run by PCT every half term and during the school holidays in partnership with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and Gloucestershire Gateway Trust. On average, 10 additional residents will join in and volunteer, taking pride in their local park and learning valuable skills in wildlife conservation. To date, in addition to the 8 volunteering hours per week from the 2 staff members, 10 hours per week from the 3 volunteers and the contribution of all of the other local residents on the volunteering days which has amounted to the equivalent of £99,600. (source – Heritage Lottery Fund Volunteer Calculator – Volunteers x Volunteer Hours x £50)
- 5.3 Once a year, PCT also receive volunteering help from the Leyhill Prison Team. This scheme enables a group of prisoners who, nearing the end of their release and following good behaviour, are provided with valuable volunteering opportunities to increase their employability on release. The team of 15 help with shrub clearance and tree pruning on the large nature reserve site at Milton Avenue, enabling this project to progress significantly.
- 5.4 The grass cutting scheme has brought other residents together through the process of monitoring quality and responding to feedback. It is part of the coordinator's role to handle complaints and he does this successfully through face-to-face conversations. Residents are pleased when they discover that young people are responsible for the maintenance of the local environment. They appreciate that the scheme is providing much needed jobs and that there is a more personal approach when it comes to improving the service. Residents are also happy with the freedom they have to influence the look of the green and open spaces. For example, in Spring 2019, residents enjoyed the multiple daffodils that had been planted in the Milton Avenue nature reserve by PCT the previous winter.

6.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 6.1 This part of the grass cutting contract could be handed back to Amey but in doing so the social impact would be lost. It would also cause further confusion for residents who have engaged with the local team and see the value of this approach.

7.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1 This trial has created employment and training opportunities for young people, engaged residents in taking care of their own place and created a sense of ownership for residents of Podsmead; a range of social impacts which are hard to achieve. Although there have been some challenges for the team, there is more benefit for the City in continuing the trial and seeing how it would work elsewhere, than there would be in Amey taking the work back.
- 7.2 Due to the gift of a ride on mower, PCT are better placed to continue maintaining the grass verges in Podsmead ward and to expand their responsibility to include larger areas of land such as Scott Avenue Open Space and Tuffley Park once they have been trained to use the machinery.
- 7.3 The next stage of testing the benefits of such a project is to trial it in a different area. Matson & Robinswood residents have expressed an interest in beginning a trial in March 2020 so allowing that is a sensible next step.

8.0 Future Work and Conclusions

8.1 PCT applied to Podsmead Big Local for a grant to purchase a ride-on mower and this was agreed through the online voting system for projects with over 70 residents voting yes. <https://www.podsmeadbiglocal.org.uk/projects/approved-projects/podsmead-clearance-team>

This is to enable the team to cut the grass shorter and to a higher standard. This is following feedback from several residents who prefer their grass to be cut shorter than the hand-held mowers allow. Using a ride-on mower will also enable the team to take on larger areas of land. Residents that use Tuffley Park field as well as the owners of 'The Club at Tuffley Park' have asked if it is possible for the work to be completed by PCT instead of Amey so that areas that have previously been uncared for can be better maintained.

8.2 Since PCT received approval for purchasing their ride-on mower through Podsmead Big Local, Amey have kindly gifted a decommissioned ride-on mower to the team. This is being serviced and will be available for PCT to collect in the coming weeks. The agreed funding from Podsmead Big Local will go back to another local public vote with the request to spend the allocated amount on training, fuel and insurance.

8.3 Through the help of their volunteers and some support from the City Council's Community Wellbeing team, PCT have applied for Bright Ideas Funding and if successful this will be invested in;

- specialist training in tree surgery, sports pitch ground maintenance and ranger safety
- topping up their salaries as they build up more of a customer base from garden maintenance work
- business mentoring and support

8.4 PCT have recently taken on the overgrown gardens service for Gloucester City Homes in the Podsmead area. Gloucester City Homes are also keen for PCT to maintain the grass verges on the land they own in Podsmead which surrounds the blocks of flats.

8.5 Following the positive social impact of the Podsmead trial, representatives from the Matson and Robinswood community are keen to pilot this approach in their own area.

9.0 Financial Implications

9.1 The total cost of supporting the scheme including; staffing, equipment, maintenance and insurance is £12,653 for the duration of the grass-cutting season each year. In addition, a Community Wellbeing Officer has supported the team with regular progress meetings and bid writing totalling (on average) 2 hours per month. Another Community Wellbeing Officer and the Parks and Open Spaces Officer have also helped by responding to occasional queries from the community.

9.2 It has not been possible at this stage to indicate the social return on investment for this work. However, SEA will be working with the team over the coming season to better demonstrate the impact of their work.

10.0 Legal Implications

- 10.1 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. Where repeat contracts awarded (as in this case) the value of each contract is taken into account for the purposes of the EU threshold.
- 10.2 The Council has previously awarded contracts for grass cutting services in Podsmead to Stewkley Enterprise Agency, a company limited by guarantee, in 2018 and 2019 pursuant to a waiver of the contract procedure rules.
- 10.3 The Head of Communities has the delegated authority to let a new contract to Stewkley Enterprise Agency and a Corporate Director or the Managing Director has delegated authority to award the waiver to the contract rules, as the value is less than £100,000.
- 10.4 If there are to be changes to the services provided by Amey, a Service Change Notice will be required.
- 10.5 The contract with Stewkley Enterprise Agency will need to include provisions to vary the contract to include the addition of Matson and Robinswood areas. It will also need to contain a provision to enable the council to terminate the contract on notice so enable the Council to enter into a new contract with any new legal entity formed by the PCT and PBL.

(One Legal have been consulted in respect of this report.)

11.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 11.1 There will be similar risks involved with expanding into another Ward as there were when the process began in Podsmead but the potential benefits and social return far outweigh any potential issues.
- 11.2 We have learnt from the pilot in Podsmead and know what is needed to ensure a successful delivery in another area.
- 11.3 There is also greater risk in preventing another community from the opportunity as they would feel they were not being awarded the same chances as Podsmead.

12.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:

- 12.1 An Equality Impact Assessment screening was completed and a full assessment is not required.
- 12.2 Considerations are given when undertaking all community engagement to ensure that we do not adversely impact on any group and that we are fostering good relations and promoting advancement of opportunities within the community.

13.0 Community Safety Implications

13.1 Research has suggested that residents feel safer in their communities when they are well connected and do things together. The sense of ownership of their outside space in Podsmead has reduced ASB as young people in the area respect the work of the team. Since the team took on their responsibilities there has been less fly tipping and vandalism in the parks and open spaces, especially Milton Avenue Open Space which used to be a hot-spot for discarding rubbish, furniture and other house hold items.

14.0 Staffing & Trade Union Implications

14.1 None