



AGENDA ITEM: 7(e)

CABINET: 14 June 2016

Report of: Director of Housing and Inclusion

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor J. Patterson

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SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT BUDGETS

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To obtain direction on the priority for investment of the Environmental Improvement Budget and Visual Appearance of Render Budget.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That a pilot scheme to improve the visual appearance of areas be deferred until after the negotiations with Energy Providers have been concluded.

2.2 That the Environmental Improvement budget and Visual Appearance of Render Budget not be committed at this time and the position be reviewed by the Director of Housing and Inclusion following negotiations with Energy Providers.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 At the Council meeting on 25th February 2015, the HRA budget was approved which included £100,000 for Environmental Improvements.

3.2 The detail of how this budget was to be invested was not determined by Council and therefore a report seeking direction was considered by Cabinet in September 2015.

3.3 Cabinet referred the matter to Council in February 2016 to decide whether to invest the £100,000 in the context of the budgetary pressure on the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan (HRA).

- 3.4 In February 2016, Council approved the budget of £100,000 be invested in Environmental Improvements during 2016/17.
- 3.5 This report sought guidance on what work and where to invest this funding.
- 3.6 Additionally, Council approved £15,000 to carry out a pilot project to improve the visual appearance of render on properties. The purpose of this is to brighten up areas where the current render looks drab. The original plan was to carry out a pilot to either paint or re-render properties to achieve this. Further work has been undertaken and a further option would be to clean the existing render to brighten it up.
- 3.7 The Tenant Scrutiny Group have considered this matter as part of the budget setting process prior to Council in February and their preferred approach would be to improve the thermal quality of homes by installing external wall insulation and re-rendering properties.

4.0 OPTIONS/DEFINITIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT WORKS

4.1 Environmental Improvements can be categorised as follows:

- a) Works to improve the appearance of properties and give a more pleasant visual appearance of the area. These works would include:
- Cleaning of brickwork and render
 - Painting of render
 - Insulating and re-rendering of property
- b) Works to improve the fencing of the property
- c) Works to improve the paths and footways
- d) Works to increase car parking
- e) Works to reduce landscaping requirements
- f) Works to enhance landscaping
- g) Works to improve communal areas within estates, often squares and courtyards
- h) Works to create defensible space for existing tenants

4.2 The financial scale of this investment has not been quantified exactly but a desk top exercise has been undertaken and estimated costs, which need an element of caution, identified the following total:

- a) Cleaning
- Painting
 - Insulate and re-render
- b) Fencing
- c) Paths and footways
- d) Parking
- e) Rationalise landscape
- f) Enhance landscape
- g) Communal spaces
- h) Defensible space

Total

£41M

5.0 APPROACH

- 5.1 As can be seen from the list in 4.2 above, there are a number of options and the available budget will only make a very limited impact on the substantial investment needed in many of the areas that the Council still have a substantial interest in.
- 5.2 I am currently in discussions with energy providers and there is an Energy Efficiency Scheme which will be launched in April 2017 where it *may* be possible to attract grant support to apply external wall insulation, not only to Council owned properties but also to home owners' properties. This would be a real benefit to improving the thermal quality of homes and also improving the visual appearance of areas.
- 5.3 Whilst Members may decide to invest monies into environmental improvements now, I feel it would be more prudent to reserve the funds currently available to support a more comprehensive approach to tackling energy efficiency of homes and at the same time, improve the appearance of the areas.

6.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 6.1 In designing any environmental improvements, a key consideration will be to ensure the works can be maintained within future budget streams.
- 6.2 Improving the environment is in accordance with the Community Strategy.

7.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are currently agreed budgets of £100,000 and £15,000 respectively for both Environmental Improvements and to conduct a pilot scheme to improve the visual appearance of areas.
- 7.2 The total scale of investment necessary for environmental improvements is outlined in paragraph 4.

8.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 If Members accept my recommendation, there are no risks associated with this proposal.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 In light of the good news highlighted at paragraph 5.2 of this report, there may be a need to make a contribution to the work referred to and because of the pressure on the HRA, I recommend that the Environmental Improvement budget be held in reserve to meet any costs that we may contribute to maximise the scope and value of the work.

9.2 In addition, I would suggest that the pilot scheme to improve the visual appearance be deferred whilst negotiations and the full details of the energy efficiency grant scheme are explored.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

The decision does not have any direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Appendix

Minute of Landlord Services Committee (Cabinet Working Group) held on 8 June 2016 –
to follow