

## Decision by Portfolio Holder



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Report reference: HSG-016-2018/19**

**Date of report: 18 October 2018**

**Portfolio: Housing – Councillor S Stavrou**

**Author: Roger Wilson**

**Democratic Services: J Leither**

**Subject: Garden Maintenance Scheme for Older and Disabled Tenants**

### **Decision:**

**1. That Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding of £40,000 continues to be utilised to fund the VAEF gardening scheme for older and disabled Council tenants for one further year in 2019/2020; and**

**2. That the Service Director (Housing & Property) be authorised to extend the Scheme in the future on the same terms on an annual basis, in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder.**

#### **ADVISORY NOTICE:**

*A Portfolio Holder may not take a decision on a matter on which he/she has declared a Pecuniary interest.  
A Portfolio Holder with a non-pecuniary interest must declare that interest when exercising delegated powers.*

I have read and approve/~~do not approve~~ (delete as appropriate) the above decision:

Comments/further action required:

Signed: Cllr Stavrou

Date: 18.10.18

*Non-pecuniary interest declared by Portfolio Holder/ conflict of non-pecuniary interest declared by any other consulted Cabinet Member:*

*Dispensation granted by Standards Committee:  
Yes/No or n/a*

#### **Office use only:**

Call-in period begins: 19.10.18

Expiry of Call-in period: 25.10.18

***After completion, one copy of this pro forma should be returned to  
Democratic Services IMMEDIATELY***

### **Reason for decision:**

The Gardening Scheme provided by Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) has delivered an important service to older and disabled Council tenants over the last 10 years. When bearing in mind that each garden visit is undertaken by one paid member of staff and generally one or more volunteer, the project clearly represents good value for money. In addition, regular feedback indicates the service is very well received by clients. It is therefore considered that the scheme should be continued for a further year at the same funding level as the previous three years. It is further recommended that the Service Director (Housing & Property) be authorised to extend the Scheme in the future on the same terms on an

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Holder:

annual basis, in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder.

### **Options considered and rejected:**

1. Not to continue to fund the VAEF Gardening Scheme for older and disabled tenants.
2. To agree a different level of funding for the VAEF Gardening Scheme.
3. Not to authorise the Service Director (Housing & Property) to extend the Scheme in the future on the same terms on an annual basis, in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder.

### **Background Report:**

1. The Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) Gardening Scheme for older and vulnerable tenants has been in operation since 2003. Until 2011/2012, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding of £20,000 per annum was provided to VAEF for the service.

2. From 2012/2013, this was increased to £40,000 per annum to fund VAEF's part-time Garden Maintenance Co-ordinator Post, a number of paid gardeners, the purchase of some necessary equipment, and the general administration of the scheme. VAEF oversee voluntary garden maintenance work to older and disabled Council tenants' properties and undertakes some work for private sector residents, which is funded separately.

3. Tenants are only included on the scheme if there is no one physically able to carry out the work under the age of 70 years living at the property, with the service being provided regardless of whether they have younger relatives living in the District. Tenants in arrears of rent are ineligible to receive the service. Disabled tenants (regardless of their age) are included on the scheme, provided they meet the agreed criteria. No reference is made to housing benefit in terms of eligibility. All those applying are assessed by VAEF and are only included on the scheme if they genuinely cannot cope with their gardens and have no other means of maintaining them.

4. The service includes clearing and maintaining overgrown gardens, including lighter tasks such as lawn cutting, hedge trimming and light weeding, with priority being given to dealing with gardens that are unsafe and/or unusable and therefore hinder the tenant to enjoy the facility.

### **Review of the Scheme**

5. VAEF has provided a report on its activity for the periods April to September 2018 which is set out in the following table. Activity for the same period in the previous two years is included for comparative purposes:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>April to September 2016</b>	<b>April to September 2017</b>	<b>April to September 2018</b>
Number of tenants' gardens maintained	138	125	108
Total number of garden maintenance visits	350	362	266
Average number of garden maintenance visits per tenant	2.5	3	2.5

Average cost of each garden maintenance visit	£57	£55	£75
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Activity	April to September 2016	April to September 2017	April to September 2018
Hours worked by Project Gardeners	1,215	1,316	921
Hours worked by Project Administrator	550	550	425
Number of tenants on the waiting list	17	27	34

6. As can be seen, there has been a slight downturn in the work undertaken in 2018. This is due to have one less paid gardener (who left the service) throughout July and August 2018. A new gardener has been recruited who is undergoing training. In addition, there as there was an overspend in the previous periods there have been reduced funds available in 2018 which has resulted in the Project Administrator's and gardening hours reducing.

7. When the work has been completed, VAEF invite tenants to complete a questionnaire asking the two questions set out in the table below. As can be seen all of those who responded in the period April to September 2018 considered the service to be excellent.

Question	Excellent	Good	OK
How would you rate the professionalism of the gardeners?	100%		
How would you rate the quality of the work carried out?	100%		

8. The Housing Portfolio Holder is asked to agree that Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding of £40,000 continues to be utilised to fund the VAEF gardening scheme for older and disabled Council tenants in 2019/2020. It is also recommended that the Service Director (Housing & Property) be authorised to extend the Scheme in the future on the same terms on an annual basis, in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder.

#### Resource Implications:

£40,000 in 2019/2020 to fund the continuation of the VEAF Garden Maintenance Scheme for older and vulnerable tenants

**Legal and Governance Implications:**

Housing Act 1985

**Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

The VAEF Garden Maintenance Scheme ensures that older and vulnerable tenants' gardens are maintained which generally improves the environment for local residents.

**Consultation Undertaken:**

Those who use the service have been consulted on the standard of the work. The results are set out at the table in Paragraph 7 of the report.

**Background Papers:**

None

**Equality Analysis**

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. This means that the equality information provided to accompany this report is essential reading for all members involved in the consideration of this report.

**Key Decision Reference (Y/N):**

No

# Equality Impact Assessment

1. Under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010, when making decisions, Epping District Council must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, i.e. have due regard to:
  - eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
  - advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
  - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
2. The characteristics protected by the Equality Act are:
  - age
  - disability
  - gender
  - gender reassignment
  - marriage/civil partnership
  - pregnancy/maternity
  - race
  - religion/belief
  - sexual orientation.
3. In addition to the above protected characteristics you should consider the cross-cutting elements of the proposed policy, namely the social, economic and environmental impact (including rurality) as part of this assessment. These cross-cutting elements are not a characteristic protected by law but are regarded as good practice to include.
4. The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) document should be used as a tool to test and analyse the nature and impact of either what we do or are planning to do in the future. It can be used flexibly for reviewing existing arrangements but in particular should enable identification where further consultation, engagement and data are required.
5. Use the questions in this document to record your findings. This should include the nature and extent of the impact on those likely to be affected by the proposed policy or change.
6. Where this EqIA relates to a continuing project, it must be reviewed and updated at each stage of the decision.
7. All **Cabinet, Council, and Portfolio Holder reports must be accompanied by an EqIA**. An EqIA should also be completed/reviewed at key stages of projects.
8. To assist you in completing this report, please ensure you read the guidance notes in the Equality Analysis Toolkit and refer to the following Factsheets:
  - Factsheet 1: Equality Profile of the Epping Forest District
  - Factsheet 2: Sources of information about equality protected characteristics
  - Factsheet 3: Glossary of equality related terms
  - Factsheet 4: Common misunderstandings about the Equality Duty
  - Factsheet 5: Frequently asked questions
  - Factsheet 6: Reporting equality analysis to a committee or other decision making body

## Section 1: Identifying details

Your function, service area and team: Housing Management working in partnership with Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF)

If you are submitting this EqlA on behalf of another function, service area or team, specify the originating function, service area or team: As above

Title of policy or decision: Garden Maintenance Scheme for Older and Disabled Tenants

Officer completing the EqlA: Roger Wilson Tel:01992 564419 Email: [rwilson@eppingforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:rwilson@eppingforestdc.gov.uk)

Date of completing the assessment: 1 October 2018

## Section 2: Policy to be analysed

2.1	Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project? No
2.2	Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision): To provide a gardening service at competitive rates to older and vulnerable Council tenants  What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve (i.e. decommissioning or commissioning a service)? As above
2.3	Does or will the policy or decision affect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• service users</li> <li>• employees</li> <li>• the wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities?</li> </ul> The policy will result in continuing to offer older and vulnerable Council tenants a gardening service. As it will ensure gardens are maintained it will assist employees (i.e. housing management staff) to ensure their estates are well kept and reduce complaints from neighbouring properties about overgrown gardens.  Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate? The policy will result in VAEF being more sustainable.
2.4	Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources? No, as the Council has been providing the same level of funding for a number of years
2.5	Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies and how, if applicable, does the proposed policy support corporate outcomes? The Project is associated with a range of Council's estate management policies

## Section 3: Evidence/data about the user population and consultation<sup>1</sup>

As a minimum you must consider what is known about the population likely to be affected which will support your understanding of the impact of the policy, e.g. service uptake/usage, customer satisfaction surveys, staffing data, performance data, research information (national, regional and local data sources).

3.1	<p>What does the information tell you about those groups identified?</p> <p>Paragraph 5 in the report sets out the activity and shows that the service is being used to the maximum with a waiting list of 27 tenants. The “population” in terms of the service is all older and vulnerable tenants. It is considered that the service is reaching all those in this group who want the service apart from those on the waiting list. VAEF have been asked to explore whether the number of visits to tenants could be reduced from 4 to 3 in order for those on the waiting list to receive the service.</p>
3.2	<p>Have you consulted or involved those groups that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision you want to implement? If so, what were their views and how have their views influenced your decision?</p> <p>The views of service users are set out at Paragraph 7 in the report which indicates that the service is well received.</p>
3.3	<p>If you have not consulted or engaged with communities that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision, give details about when you intend to carry out consultation or provide reasons for why you feel this is not necessary:</p> <p>N/A</p>

## Section 4: Impact of policy or decision

Use this section to assess any potential impact on equality groups based on what you now know.

Description of impact	Nature of impact Positive, neutral, adverse (explain why)	Extent of impact Low, medium, high (use L, M or H)
Age	<p>Positive impact – those who responded to the questionnaire stated:</p> <p>Under 65 years - 11 65-74 years – 18 75-84 years – 21 Over 85 years – 10</p> <p>In addition, 76% felt that they were less likely to have a fall as a result of the service. Furthermore, 77% felt that they felt safer and less vulnerable now their garden is maintained (21% did not respond to the question).</p>	L
Disability	Of those who responded 80% said they have a disability 7% said they did not. This shows a positive impact of the service in terms of supporting disabled tenants.	L
Gender	<p>20% Male 80% Female 0% No response to question</p>	L
Gender reassignment	100% have not had gender reassignment	L
Marriage/civil partnership	<p>7% Married 10% Divorced 11% Single 22% Widowed 50% Undisclosed</p>	L
Pregnancy/maternity	100% Not pregnant or on maternity leave	L
Race	<p>English 96% Scottish 1% Welsh 0% Mixed Ethnicity 1% Irish 0% Undisclosed 2%</p>	L

Religion/belief	Christian 70% Jewish 0% Other 0% None 10% Undisclosed 20%	L
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual 75% Undisclosed 25%	L

## Section 5: Conclusion

		Tick Yes/No as appropriate	
5.1	Does the EqlA in Section 4 indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?	No x	
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	If ' <b>YES</b> ', use the action plan at <b>Section 6</b> to describe the adverse impacts and what mitigating actions you could put in place.

## Section 6: Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

What are the potential adverse impacts?	What are the mitigating actions?	Date they will be achieved.
None	None	N/A

## Section 7: Sign off

**I confirm that this initial analysis has been completed appropriately.  
(A typed signature is sufficient.)**

Signature of Service Director (Housing & Property): Paul Pledger	Date: 5 October 2018
Signature of person completing the EqlA: Roger Wilson	Date: 1 October 2018

### Advice

Keep your director informed of all equality & diversity issues. We recommend that you forward a copy of every EqlA you undertake to the director responsible for the service area. Retain a copy of this EqlA for your records. If this EqlA relates to a continuing project, ensure this document is kept under review and updated, e.g. after a consultation has been undertaken.