

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO THE
ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date 14TH March 2019

1. REPORT TITLE Progress Report on Tree Management Operations

Submitted by: Head of Operations – Roger Tait

Portfolio: Environment and Recycling

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To update the committee on progress with the Council's tree work programme

Recommendations

- *That the report be received and progress noted*
- *That it be confirmed that provision of £30,000 has been made in the general fund revenue budget for 2019/20 to continue with the tree work contract*
- *That the current contract will be extended for a further 12 months to allow further progress to be made*
- *That the contract will be reviewed in February 2020 to determine whether work needs to continue to redress the backlog*

Reasons

To make progress with the current backlog of required tree work in relation to the Council's tree stock

1. Background

At the meeting of 4th July 2018, the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee received a report on the Council's tree management operations which reviewed the workload and resource available in this area, and discussed plans for additional support.

2. Issues

At the July 2018 meeting, it was reported that a review of the Streetscene service had generated significant savings which allowed the provision of an additional £30,000 to be made in the general fund revenue budget for 2018/19 for tree work to assist in addressing the backlog.

This funding was used to compile a tender package, and following a competitive tendering exercise, a contract was awarded to Glendale Managed Services in December 2018. The contract was on a 1+1+1 basis, to allow it to continue into future financial years if resources were available and the need for additional tree work continued.

The contractor is now nearing completion of the first year of the contract and progress has been good.

This, coupled with continuing work by the Council's in-house tree team in the Streetscene service, has resulted in 469 trees being addressed this financial year, these works include a variety of urgent interventions including tree fells, crown lifts, crown reductions, limb removals etc. This compares to an average of 130 tasks per year in the previous 3 years.

At the start of the 2018 season there were 1,145 trees identified as in need of urgent or emergency intervention. Due to ongoing surveys of our largely mature tree stock and responsive requests from residents there are now an estimated 2,000 trees identified as requiring urgent attention. We have approximately 55,000 trees in our ownership that have been surveyed and around 75% of these require varying levels of attention, in addition to which there are 200 outstanding requests for service which are yet to be surveyed.

At the meeting of full Council on 20th February 2019, the general fund revenue budget for 2019/20 was approved, including £30,000 for additional tree work. This will allow the contract to be extended for a further 12 months, and it is intended to programme in the following works for winter 209/20:

The value of works will remain the same as the 2018/19 season with approximately 650 trees receiving essential work, 195 of these being on the Glendale contract utilising the £30,000 contract sum. At the end of February 2019 £26,500 had been expended, this has enabled 63 trees to be felled and 96 tree pruning operations. A further £3,500 is committed for further works during March utilising the full budget allocation.

Furthermore, approval has been granted to purchase a Mobile Elevated Work Platform (MEWP) to assist the in-house tree team in progressing scheduled work and to mitigate the risk of time consuming, inefficient climbing operations for operatives. This funding has been achieved by a rationalisation of the operational fleet, and has not resulted in any additional pressure on the capital programme. The number of trees receiving attention this financial year has increased from previous years due to a MEWP being on hire for approximately 10 weeks.

The in-house tree team capacity is also being reviewed, with a view to improve succession planning.

Also, provision of £20,000 has been made in the capital programme for 2019/20 to assist in updating the Tree Management System (TMS) to ensure that the Council's tree stock is correctly plotted, surveyed and updated to mitigate the risk of claims for injury or damage relating to the tree stock, and to identify and prioritise the appropriate tree work programme. An updated system will also allow a more efficient and reliable interrogation of data for accurate numbers of trees pruned etc.

To assist in progressing service requests from residents for low priority tasks, the Council has also now adopted a procedure where residents can opt to pay for work, to enable it to be carried out more quickly. This work will be undertaken by the Council's appointed contractors to ensure competence and safety.

3. **Options Considered**

Option 1

Continue with the additional resource to assist in addressing the backlog in required tree work and updating the TMS

Option 2

Do not continue to address the backlog in tree work nor update the TMS

4. **Proposal**

- *It is proposed to continue to address the backlog of required tree work in 2019/20 using the financial resource provided and extending the current contract by one year. It is also proposed to continue to update the TMS using the financial resource provided*
- *A report will be provided on outputs in spring 2020. The intended outcome is that the Council's tree stock will be safely managed.*
- *The tree work programme will take place over winter 2019/20 with survey work on the TMS running concurrently.*

5. **Reasons for Preferred Solution**

To make progress with the current backlog of required tree work in relation to the Council's tree stock

6. **Outcomes Linked to Corporate Priorities**

- *Local services that work for local people*
- *A healthy, active and safe Borough*

7. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure public safety in relation to managing its tree stock.

8. **Equality Impact Assessment**

- *No adverse impact has been identified in relation to the Council's equality duties*

9. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- *The revenue cost of the additional tree work contract is £30,000 for 2019/20 and this has been included in the approved general fund revenue budget*
- *The capital cost of the updating of the Tree Management System is £20,000 for 2019/20 and this has been included in the approved general fund capital programme*
- *The cost of the purchase of a Mobile Elevated Work Platform (MEWP) is estimated to be £77,000 and this has been included in the approved general fund capital programme for 2018/19 by rationalising fleet replacement to ensure that no additional financial pressure results*
- *The cost of the in-house tree team is included in the approved general fund revenue budget for 2019/20 as part of the Streetscene staffing and equipment budgets*

10. **Major Risks**

There are a number of major and minor risks relating to managing the Council's tree stock, ranging from the risk of fatalities or serious injury should a tree fail, to damage to property from tree encroachment, to minor nuisance/casual annoyance such as shading and leaf drop. It is therefore critical that the Council's tree stock is managed safely through an up to date Tree Management System including an appropriate inspection regime and a scheduled programme of prioritised works.

11. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

The Council's tree stock makes a positive impact on mitigating the effects of climate change.

12. **Key Decision Information**

This report is not a key decision as defined in the Council's Constitution and therefore is not included in the Forward Plan.

13. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee – 4 July 2018

14. **List of Appendices**

None

15. **Background Papers**

None