



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL CABINET

14 June 2005

ITEM 10

Report of the Director of Commercial Services

RESPONSE TO OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY REPORT ON TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY

RECOMMENDATION

- 1 To approve the response to be sent to Overview & Scrutiny.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 The budget allocation for 2005/06 has enabled the Council to implement the inspection programme proposed by the Commission.
- 2.2 A pilot scheme for the management of cosmetic work to trees operated by an Area Panel will provide a means of appealing the decision of an Arboricultural Officer.

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Background papers: Recommendations Tree Management Policy
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Appendix 1

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

1. If the pilot scheme for the management of cosmetic work to trees is approved, a virement of £5000 will be made from the grounds maintenance budget for 2005/06. If the scheme continues or is extended, it will form a budget pressure for 2006/07.

Legal

2. None arising.

Personnel

3. None arising.

Equalities impact

4. Cosmetic work to trees may be of most benefit to housebound people and those with failing eyesight.

Corporate objectives

5. The proposal would promote the objectives of providing
 - a diverse, attractive and healthy environment and the Council value of:-
 - being open, transparent and honest in everything we do.

Planning & Environment Commission – Review of Tree Management Policy

Recommendation 1

The Commission recommends that the Council take action to put in place a programme for the systematic, cyclical, inspection of the trees for which it is responsible. The Commission considers that the inspection programme should include the following key features.

- a) The inspection programme should be prioritised according to the perceived risk. This will depend upon factors including the age, species and location of a tree.
- b) The initial aim should be to inspect all the Council's street trees within three years.
- c) Once the street tree inspection is completed, a similar inspection procedure should be adopted for the Council's trees on Derby Homes land and on parks and open spaces.
- d) The inspections should be carried out either by qualified Arboricultural Officers or by appropriately qualified consultants.

The tree inspection programme should be commenced as soon as is possible.

Response

A systematic, cyclical inspection of trees by Arboricultural Officers is considered the best course of action. The limited financial resources for tree work had prevented this from taking place. In the budget for 2005/06 resources allowed an inspection programme to be commenced. In the first year, approximately 3,000 of the 11,000+ street trees will be inspected and 2,000 trees on other Council land, works that constitute health and safety risks will be undertaken. The work will be prioritised by starting with the principal traffic routes.

It is estimated that the inspection of 5,000 trees will take an Arboricultural Officer 6 months. If undertaken by external consultants this will cost £25,000. It would be more cost effective to directly employ an additional Arboricultural Officer but we would need to generate additional income to cover the remainder of salary and to fully utilise the time of the officer. This is being considered amongst the new trading powers available to Councils.

The estimated cost of the works arising from 5,000 inspections is £83,000. This is a speculative estimate and close budget monitoring will be undertaken in the first year. This will enable us to review the estimate and to consider extending the inspection programme into future years.

Works to trees on housing land is funded by the Housing Revenue Account. Discussions have been held regarding the implementation of an inspection regime and a decision is awaited about how to proceed. A report is being brought to Cabinet as implementation is estimated to exceed £100,000.

£106,000 is available from the Public Priorities Fund.

Recommendation 2

The Council should make funds available:

- a) Either for the employment of the additional Arboricultural Officer who would be needed in order for the Arboricultural Section to conduct a programme for the systematic inspection of the Council's trees, or for the employment of consultants to carry out the tree inspection programme.
- b) To carry out any necessary work that is identified by the tree inspection programme.
- c) For more frequent minor tree pruning to ensure that pavements and footways do not become obstructed by new tree growth.
- d) To enable more cosmetic work to be carried out on the Council's trees.

Response

Recommendation a and b are addressed in response to recommendation one.

Recommendation c. It is proposed that we continue to use the Highway Inspectors to report on street trees as part of their routine highway inspections. If the Highway Inspectors identify new tree growth that needs pruning then we should be able to respond to this.

Recommendation d. The allocation of proposed additional funding will enable us to deal with works to trees that constitute health and safety risks. To allocate additional funds to undertake cosmetic works to trees would not be appropriate when considered against other budget pressures.

Recommendation 3

The Council's Tree Management Policy leaflet should be redrafted to clearly explain the Council's responsibilities for its trees and the actions it will, and will not, take in response to requests for cosmetic tree work.

Response

We will redraft the Tree Management Policy leaflet to try and be clearer about work that we will not undertake. We will consult the Commission about the changes.

Recommendation 4

The responsibility for prioritising and approving cosmetic tree work and for allocating the financial resources available for it should be transferred from the Arboricultural Section to the Area Panels.

Response

The current annual expenditure on trees is £278,000 and is fully committed to health and safety works on trees.

There are approximately 5,000 requests made annually for work to be undertaken on Council owned trees. 40% of these requests are declined and relate to loss of daylight.

The existing budget for tree maintenance enables health and safety work to be undertaken. There is no provision for cosmetic work such as works to reduce the loss of daylight.

Proposal to Prioritise and Approve Tree Work

A pilot scheme is proposed in Area Panel 5 where a ring fenced budget managed by Commercial Services is made available to Area Panel 5 to commission cosmetic tree work in cases where the Arboricultural Officer has not been prepared to commission work requested by a constituent.

The constituent would be advised by the Arboricultural Officer that if the constituent wished to pursue the request for work further that the Area Panel had limited funds to undertake cosmetic tree work. The constituent could make a request to the Area Panel or could request a ward councillor to act on their behalf.

If the ward councillor thought that there was merit in the request, the Area Panel Manager would be asked to include this on the agenda.

The Area Panel Manager would get an estimate of the work requested from the Arboricultural Team and this would be made available to the Area Panel.

The constituent or the ward councillor could present the case to the Area Panel. The councillors would vote upon approving or declining the request.

It is proposed that in the pilot year that £5,000 is ring fenced to Area Panel 5. On average, the cost of pruning a tree is £100 to £150 so approximately 35 to 50 requests could be approved each year by the Area Panel. All work requested would have to comply with the conditions stated in the Tree Management Policy.

The pilot scheme would be reviewed after one year.

The money for the pilot will be a virement from the grounds maintenance budget for one year. If the scheme is extended, it will form a budget pressure in 2006/07.

Recommendation 5

The Council should put in place a strategy that will cover all aspects of tree management in Derby.

Response

Apart from the existing Tree Management Policy, there is a Woodlands Strategy which was developed in 1995 and there are policy aspects in the Parks Strategy and the Local Plan relating to trees. The development of a strategy for comprehensive tree management is not considered a high priority for the service. There are higher priorities on the time of the Arboricultural Manager but we will schedule this into the future workload.