

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Proposal for Environmental Improvement Budget</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>16 January 2018</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Director for Neighbourhoods, Communities &amp; Housing</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Ododo Dafe</b>	<b>Tel: 01273 293201</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>(All Wards);</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 This report provides further detail on the Housing Revenue Account Environmental Improvement Budget proposed in a report to Housing & New Homes Committee on 14 November 2018.
- 1.2 The suggested environmental improvement budget will enable the council to respond in an effective and speedy manner to aspects within communal areas. This will positively influence residents' satisfaction with their neighbourhood as a place to live.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the Committee agrees that the sum of £0.500m is proposed as part of the HRA Budget and Capital Investment Programme 2019/20 to be approved by Policy, Resources & Growth Committee (PR&G) for improvements to communal areas.
- 2.2 That the Committee agrees that the budget allocated in paragraph 2.1 is committed for a minimum period of three years, subject to the relevant approval by PR&G.
- 2.3 That the Committee agrees that the fair geographical distribution of the budget is best considered in the context of needs arising on estates, as is the case with other repairs budgets.

**3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 It is the aim of the city council to provide excellent homes and landlord services that residents can be proud of. While overall tenant satisfaction levels compare well with other landlords, for the first time since the national surveys began in 2008, satisfaction with their area as a place to live went down in tenants estimation. This placed the city council within the second 25%, or the second

quartile, of local authorities rather than the top 25% as had previously been the case. In addition, residents and councillors in a number of areas have expressed a desire for the council to have a speedy and effective response to addressing some communal area issues that require attention.

3.2 One of the five aims of the government’s social housing green paper is to tackle stigma – making sure that social housing residents feel at home in their neighbourhoods, and that they do not see their home simply as a place to live. While there are a range of factors that relate to stigma, some residents have reported that their communal areas can feel neglected and that they would like to have an enhanced sense of pride of their shared spaces.

**3.3 Types of activities for potential spend**

Through a range of fora, residents have expressed a desire for enhanced work to communal areas. The types of work that has been mentioned to date are shown in the box below. Some work may already be on a programme, for example internal way decorations, and some require a dedicated programme if the spread were to be comprehensive - eg requests for CCTV on certain parts of the estates.

<b>Tenants’ suggestions for potential activity areas for estates</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Accessibility around our blocks – eg ramps, handrails, level access entrances</li> <li>2. Benches and places for people to come together</li> <li>3. Car parking areas - eg resurfacing</li> <li>4. CCTV – eg for dustbin areas</li> <li>5. Coal bunkers/outside storage – change use of redundant stores</li> <li>6. Community rooms and community buildings</li> <li>7. Cycle parking and/or storage</li> <li>8. Drying rooms within blocks</li> <li>9. Drying areas and lines - outside</li> <li>10. Estate cleaning - eg litter on paths; window cleaning in blocks, carpet cleaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16. Graffiti</li> <li>17. Grounds maintenance – ie grass verges, grass cutting, hedges, planting (contract review)</li> <li>18. Grounds maintenance – grey areas ie weeding alleyways, pavement on roads, hedges on roads</li> <li>19. Internal block decorations</li> <li>20. Internal block flooring surfaces</li> <li>21. Laundry facilities, laundry rooms</li> <li>22. Planting - eg boxed flower beds to prevent parking on grass verges; wild flower planting on sloping verges</li> <li>23. Play areas</li> <li>24. Rubbish - bulk items</li> <li>25. Rubbish disposal - storage areas for general household</li> </ul>

11. Fencing - houses, roads	waste
12. Fencing – communal areas	26. Recycling - better facilities, larger bins, covered storage areas
13. Flytipping	27. Removing old trailing cables from blocks – eg Rediffusion cables
14. Garage sites	28. Scooter stores
15. Gardening – eg getting a professional experienced gardener to help tenants work on one house together to motivate community action on a few gardens in a street	29. Seniors housing communal rooms
	30. Trees - especially in tenants gardens

### 3.4 Decision-making and consultation

There is considerable information already known about some of the issues residents are wanting to see action on. In such cases the council would seek to remove obstacles preventing progress, and proceed with matters. There will also be cases where effective initial or follow-up consultation will need to be carried out. This might be in relation to play areas, as an example, to ascertain whether there is still a demographic need for the facility and whether it is positioned in the most appropriate place to minimise potential antisocial behaviour. A balance will sought to be struck here between being responsive and agile, while making sure that residents are involved in the delivery of improvements they would like to see.

### 3.5 Fair distribution of spend

A scientific approach to ensure an even distribution across all housing estates will prove very difficult to do, and has the potential for being equitable, but not being strategic or responsive. A more pragmatic approach discussed with some residents is one that takes into account any criteria for spend and, importantly, is decided upon against a known and clearly visible need for that particular estate. An example might be where councillors and staff are very much aware of a seniors housing scheme with no association, where perhaps the communal chairs are past their best, or where residents would benefit from soft furnishings.

### 3.6 Distinction between the budget proposed in this report and the Estate Development Budget (EDB)

The environmental improvements or communal area budget can be seen as being distinct from EDB because it will be spent on areas the council, as a good landlord, needs to take action on or progress on estates – ie in order to demonstrate landlord responsibility and attention. EDB will continue to be spent on tenant's wishes.

### **3.7 Ensuring tenants are the main beneficiaries of the budget spend**

Oversight of individual requests for spend will be in line with government financial guidance on the use of the Housing Revenue Account.

### **3.8 Lifeline of the budget**

It is anticipated that a minimum period of three years will enable some main areas of activity to have a reach across the city. Within this time, it is possible that a collaborative approach with residents to develop a strategy for estates that dovetails with or stands separately from an asset management strategy could be developed.

### **3.9 Monitoring and reporting**

Residents groups, and residents generally will be kept up to date with progress on activities on their estates in the moment, and more widely through social media and through each edition of Homing In carrying updated information on a 'You said, we did' sort of basis. Ward councillors and committee members will also receive updates, transparently showing where tenants across the city have been delighted with the changes made.

## **4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

### **4.1 Some of the considerations that support the recommendation for a dedicated budget to address communal area concerns are:-**

- To increase tenant satisfaction with 'neighbourhood as a place to live'
- Resident feedback from recent survey on the future of repairs service expressed a desire to have more focus on communal areas of estates
- Tenant concern that areas without resident associations have high levels of communal area need yet receive less landlord attention
- The awareness that while the Estate Development Budget has met some particular need in some areas, it is not the most suitable vehicle for achieving strategic improvements, especially where they are most needed
- Increasingly tenants' groups are wishing to be informal, if they desire forming a group at all, and are therefore unable to vote on the estate development budget, even though they can bid.
- Feeling among tenants that despite EDB changes, funds are distributed inequitably
- Resident, councillor and officer desire to improve the appearance of several estates

### **4.2 Queries or concerns that have been expressed at, for example, Area Panels and at the Home Service Improvement Group have included whether the budget lifeline will endure over years; how decisions for spend will be made; how distinction will be drawn between the budget proposed in this report and EDB; and how it will be ensured that council tenants are the main beneficiaries of any spend. These matters are addressed under subheadings in Section 3 above.**

- 4.3 An option of not introducing any change, and instead seeking to find monies from small underspent budgets as situations arose was considered. However, this option would not suitably address tenant frustration with limited actions arising from estate inspections, would not provide residents with the proactive and speedy landlord service they desire, would lead to reputational damage from some unkempt estates, and could lead to feelings of stigma attached to council housing in the city.

## **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 The winter edition of Homing In carries a question for residents, seeking feedback on action they would like to see taken in their communal area. This method will enable all residents including those in areas with no resident association to be involved, responding by phone or email. Residents will also be asked if they would like to participate in a focus group.
- 5.2 The 'Home' Service Improvement Group has expressed some interest in consideration being given to window cleaning, and communal area carpet cleaning - where they exist. It was also minded that depending on the extent of resident needs and desires, it was likely that some work might need to be considered as part of a contract.
- 5.3 Consultation with new tenants found that the main communal area or neighbourhood improvements they would like to see are waste and recycling, flooring and decorating of shared areas, fencing, car parking and garages, landscaping and play areas.
- 5.4 Recent consultation with over 1,000 residents on the new arrangements for the repairs and maintenance service from 2020, showed that many residents are concerned with the condition of estates, as opposed to individual properties, and would like to see the delivery of improved communal area programmes.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The key reason for the proposal for a dedicated budget for environmental or communal area improvements is because there is a need to demonstrate care for and to lift the public areas of the city's council estates. It would further increase resident pride, and would potentially increase voluntary and collaborative activity on estates which can help to reduce social isolation

## **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The draft Housing Revenue Account Budget report elsewhere on this agenda includes proposals of £0.500m for environmental improvements. £0.100m is included as a new revenue budget and £0.400m in the capital programme,

funded by a revenue contribution to the capital programme. This reflects the current assessment of the mix of spend required but funding of budgets can be moved in-year should the mix of spend change.

This investment still enables the HRA to achieve a balanced budget meaning that HRA income meets expenditure and that the HRA is consequently viable.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Monica Brooks*

*Date: 10/12/18*

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 Expenditure in respect of the repair and maintenance of houses and other accommodation accounted for in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is properly chargeable to that account. Most of the tenants' suggestions in paragraph 3.3 of the report clearly fall within the heading of repair or maintenance. Department of Environment Circular 8/95 gives advice about the operation of the HRA in relation to other items which are not so clearly linked to the council's housing function. These include play and other recreational areas, grassed areas and gardens and community centres. The Circular advises that in such cases, "it is for the authority to form their own judgement about whether provision is proper under Part II of the Housing Act 1985 and the extent to which the costs should be charged to the HRA. Much will depend upon local circumstances. Among the issues to be considered are the purpose of provision and the use made of the facilities by tenants and other people. There can only be a charge to the HRA where the amenities are provided and maintained in connection with Part II housing accommodation. Where an amenity is shared by the community as a whole, the authority must have regard to paragraph 3 of Part III of Schedule 4 to the 1989 Act. This requires a contribution to be made from the General Fund to the HRA reflecting the general community's share of the amenity." As mentioned in paragraph 3.7 of the report, officers will have regard to government guidance, including this Circular, in processing requests for spend.

*Lawyer Consulted:*

*Liz Woodley*

*Date: 24/12/18*

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 The investment proposed within this report will enable the council to ensure equitable access for all residents to communal area improvements, irrespective of whether residents form part of a tenant or resident association.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 There are no sustainability implications arising directly from this report.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 7.5 The council's duty to prevent crime and disorder is supported by this proposal. Well-kept areas are less likely to suffer the effects of anti-social behaviour, and an increase in resident pride is potentially followed by an increase in neighbourliness.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 7.6 The potential risks of not progressing with the proposal of this report is that some estates continue to receive patchy attention and that residents, councillors and officers continue to experience some frustration. However this would be mitigated by looking to use potential budget underspends effectively.

The potential risk of upsetting people because an immediate initial impact is not seen on their estate will be mitigated through regular updates to residents through Homing In and the council's website about what work is happening in the various locations and what future work or projects are planned.

Public Health Implications:

- 7.7 None arising directly from this report.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 7.8 None arising directly from this report.

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.9 None arising directly from this report.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices: None**

**Documents in Members' Rooms: None**

**Background Documents**

1. Housing & New Homes Committee report 'Proposal for environmental improvement budget - Housing Revenue Account' 14 November 2018

