

Planning Policy and Open Spaces

S4543 – Transfer ‘Green Fingers’ domestic gardening service to the Housing Revenue Account

Q: This should explain the qualifications and procedure by which people would be able to receive the continued council-funded service and the rationale to cease it for the residents who are not also council tenants.

Introduction

1. ‘Green Fingers’ is a General Fund domestic gardening service, which is available at no cost to Cambridge residents, who are disabled or long-term sick and do not have the support of friends, or relatives, who can help and assist with their gardening needs. The service runs, annually, April to October and involves grass cutting (fortnightly frequency) and reactive weeding and pruning. Access to the service is via GP referral using eligibility criteria focused on evidence of registered disability/ receipt of social service benefit. There is no means testing eligibility criterion.
2. The ‘Green Fingers’ service was originally launched in 1996 and delivered through a City Council partnership scheme with the Employment Foundation, which provided practical gardening experience/ training to support people into employment. At its peak, the service employed 10 and serviced 200 properties. With the demise of the partnership scheme in 2011, the full cost of continuing to administer and deliver the free service fell to the Council’s Grounds Maintenance service. Over time, the number of properties registered on the scheme declined and demands on the Grounds Maintenance increased, reaching a point, where it was no longer financially viable to continue to provide the service in house. Since 2013, the service has been provided under an annual rolling agreement by Winter Comfort. The Green Fingers scheme currently serves only 49 properties and costs £15,750 (excluding VAT); £321(excluding VAT) per property; or £54 per cut (based on 6 cuts per property per year).

Rationale

3. The ‘Green Finger’s service has been reviewed and is not considered to be financially sustainable, in its current free of

charge access form; and, based on its current eligibility criteria, is difficult to administer/ manage and open to abuse. Of the 49 current customers, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some do not genuinely meet the eligibility criteria, ie. live in large private addresses or fulfil their gardening needs themselves (through friends/ family or commercial gardening service). Of the 49 current customers, c34 are City Homes' tenants and c15 are private householders.

4. The proposal is to end the service availability to private householders and support the c15 customers to access alternative gardening service providers, such as Age UK and Papworth Trust. The Council's housing service will take over the funding, via the HRA, and management of the service for qualifying City Homes' tenants.
5. The Council's Housing service intends to conduct an early review of the 'Green Fingers' service, consulting with the incumbent service provider, tenant representatives and resident groups. The review will look at service qualification criteria, targeting direct service provision on the most vulnerable, but also exploring possibilities to support groups of tenants to establish gardening clubs; and to investigate whether improvements can be made, in terms of the service's ability to signpost tenants to other agencies/ community groups, who may be able to provide similar support.

Further information

6. For further information on the current 'Green Fingers' service, please contact Wendy Johnston, Community Engagement and Enforcement Manager at wendy.johnston@cambridge.gov.uk or tel. 01223 458578
7. For further information on the proposed City Homes managed 'Green Fingers' service, please contact David Greening, Head of Housing, at david.greening@cambridge.gov.uk or tel. 01223 457997