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REPORT TO:	HOUSING & COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 9
DATE OF MEETING:	12 <sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2006	CATEGORY: DELEGATED
REPORT FROM:	DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	CHRIS MASON 5794	DOC:
SUBJECT:	TREE INSPECTIONS – PROGRESS REPORT	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:HCS10

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## 1.0 Recommendations

1.1 That Members note the contents of the report and the actions proposed

## 2.0 Purpose of Report

2.1 To outline the approach used in the undertaking of the survey and the short and long-term issues that have arisen to date.

## 3.0 Detail

### Introduction

3.1 During last year's budget round Members approved the allocation of £10,000 to undertake an initial audit of the tree stock on recreation land (i.e. open space, recreation grounds, woodlands etc) owned by the Council. £5,000 was also allocated in each of the following two years to undertake any work that may arise from the initial audit and inspections of the trees

3.2 In submitting the service development proposal it was made clear that our approach to tree maintenance had been reactive and piecemeal rather than proactive and structured and that to date we had no clear understanding of the number of trees we had responsibility for. The importance of the project was also made more pressing following a number of fatalities, serious injury and damage to property from falling trees that resulted in guidance from the HSE to a major city council on the need for regular, recorded inspections.

### Methodology

3.3 Originally it was anticipated that consultants would be utilised to undertake the initial audit. However, a member of our existing staff had obtained the necessary qualifications and it was decided, for development as well as practical reasons, to second this member of staff, for a six-month period, to undertake the tree work inspections.

- 3.4 The member of staff has worked closely with the Council's IT Department in accessing hand held electronic equipment that has made the collection and storing of data as efficient as it can be.
- 3.5 The secondment commenced in July 2006 and areas were prioritised on the basis of level of public use and known risk. Annexe A identifies the areas inspected to date together with a summary of the findings. The Annexe also identifies areas it is intended to audit before the end of the scheduled secondment.

### **Short Term Actions / Issues**

- 3.6 To date the audit has collected data on 563 trees. Of these 296 are classified as mature and 118 are identified as over mature with 173 identified as requiring immediate work (this winter). While a proportion of this work involves the felling of over mature trees the remainder involves work, which can be described as preventative or cosmetic. If undertaken during this year this work will prevent more extensive work being undertaken in future years and probably just as importantly impact on the number of complaints received from members of the public.
- 3.7 While some of this work can be undertaken by our own in-house team a significant amount of the work, particularly the felling of the over mature trees, needs to be procured from an external contractor. While some money is available in existing budgets this is unlikely to be sufficient to cover all of the work identified as 'immediate'.
- 3.8 At the present rate of progress it is estimated that only approximately 50% of the trees on recreation land will be surveyed by completion of the secondment. Of the trees inspected some have been identified as requiring further monitoring and as Members will be aware an inspection is only really valid for the time the inspection is undertaken.

### **Longer Term Issues**

- Regular, recorded inspections are critical to the management of the Council's tree stock from both an environmental and health and safety perspective
  - From a corporate perspective we need to include within our audit all of the trees for which the Council has responsibility.
  - With Members, there is a clear need to further develop the Council's policy for dealing with trees. At present the absence of refined policy makes it difficult to be consistent about what we will and will not do.
  - There is a major problem with inappropriate species being planted particularly in areas such as Stenson Fields
  - Regular proactive work will have significant cost saving benefits as opposed to the current reactive approach
- 3.9 Suggestions for addressing the immediate short-term issues are discussed in greater detail under 'financial implications'. Longer term, as part of the Council's upcoming budget setting process, it is intended to submit a service development proposal that sets out the case for the Council to employ its own dedicated Tree Officer. At this stage, corporately, other units also deal with tree related matters,

particularly Development Control. In making the case it may be possible to incorporate some of these responsibilities into a new post and preliminary discussions have been undertaken on these lines

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

4.1 In order to progress further with the audit and to undertake all of the immediate tree work identified to date the Head of Finance has been approached and agreed to bring forward the £10k allocated in future years to be spent this year. In addition to allowing more progress to be made it will also allow more time to undertake the necessary feasibility work for resolving some of the longer term issues which are likely to involve further service development proposals in future years

#### **5.0 Corporate Implications**

5.1 The audit, to date, has concentrated on trees that are the responsibility of leisure services. Clearly other departments, particularly Housing, have responsibility for assets that contain trees with the same issues applying. The longer term solution, identified in 3.9 above will offer the capacity to address this issue

#### **6.0 Community Implications**

6.1 While not all residents regard trees as an asset from an environmental and an amenity value perspective they are essential community facilities that should be managed on a structured basis

#### **7.0 Conclusions**

7.1 Money was allocated in this year's budget to undertake an initial audit of the tree stock on recreation-managed land. Part of the reason for undertaking the audit was that we had no clear understanding of the number of trees we had responsibility for nor their immediate condition. The initial audit has identified a number of issues both short and long term that need to be considered and these are identified in the report. Long term, permanent resources need to be in place if we want to move away from a purely reactive approach to tree management.

#### **8.0 Background Papers**

8.1 None

