

AGENDA ITEM NO.

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL	
Report to	Executive Committee
Date	February 2014
Subject	Service Charges for 2014 – 2015
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Kenneth P Hughes
Lead Officer(s)	Shan LI Williams, Head of Housing Services
Contact Officer	Darren Gerrard, Financial Systems Manager
Nature and reason for reporting	
Elected Members are requested to approve the service charges costs for ground maintenance for 2014 - 2015	

A – Introduction / Background / Issues

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This interim report follows from the report for the Executive Committee on November 2013 and the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on October 2013. This report looks at the proposed costs of the grounds maintenance service for domestic and sheltered housing tenants.

Until March 2012, by corporate agreement and managed by the Housing Services, grass cutting for all Council Tenants aged over 60 years and those registered as disabled was funded from a particular grant, which has now come to an end. This meant that Housing Services paid for grass cutting during 2013 - 2014, from its rental income. Continuing this in future is clearly not sustainable. To this end, the Service is looking to limit the free grass cutting service to those over 70 years of age and those registered as disabled.

2.0 Domestic Properties

The total cost of the domestic contract (including management fee) is approx. £60k and covers ten cuts a year to 700 private gardens of tenants who are over

60 years of age. The service is provided to Council tenants only and does not extend to any leaseholders.

Based on a proposed 700 properties where private gardens will be cut, the cost per property will be £1.67 per week, on a 51 week year.

This would recoup the total cost, including management fees, for this contract.

If tenants over 70 years of age and disabled tenants were excluded from the charges, i.e. these groups of tenants would receive the service free of charge, there would be a cost to the Council of £15,500 , based on 102 households where the tenant is over 70 years of age, and 80 households where the tenant is disabled.

Alternatively the cost of the contract could be shared amongst tenants who are not excluded from charging, allowing the full cost to be recovered. Under this approach the cost per property per week would be £2.26.

3.0 Sheltered Properties

The contract to provide thirteen cuts to communal grassed areas in sheltered schemes costs approx. £37k per annum. This covers 818 properties in 28 Schemes, if the 102 properties sold under the Right to Buy are included. The cost per week ranges from 0.13 pence per week and £2.25 per week, based on a 51 week year. The average cost per week is £1.01. Including sold properties will enable the Housing Services to recover the full cost of the contract.

If sold properties are excluded from charging, the cost would be spread over 716 properties in 28 schemes. The cost per week ranges from 0.13 pence per week and £2.25 per week, based on a 51 week year. The average cost per week is £1.11.

Alternatively the cost of the contract could be apportioned across all properties, but only charged to those that are still Council owned. In this situation the Council would charge tenants at the lower rate but would result in costing the Housing Services approx. £3,500 per annum.

If tenants over 70 years of age and disabled tenants were excluded from the charges, i.e. these groups of tenants would receive the service free of charge, there would be a cost to the Council of approx. £2,700 , based on 21 households where the tenant is over 70 years of age, and 31 households where the tenant is disabled.

The tenants on the sheltered contract are eligible to claim housing benefit to cover the cost of the service. Currently, there are 56% of the tenants in receipt of housing benefit.

4.0 Properties sold under the RTB

The ability to recover grounds maintenance and grass cutting charges from leaseholders and freeholders of properties purchased from the Council under the Right to Buy depends on the lease or conveyancing agreements.

An analysis of the various lease or conveyancing agreements has been provided by the HQN Consultant recruited to work with the 4 stock retaining Authorities in North Wales. However, since some of the agreements are not sufficiently clearly defined, it has been decided to seek legal opinion on the matter from the Council's Legal Services . When this clarification has been provided, it is proposed that the matter is dealt with under the delegated powers requested under Recommendation 3.

B - Considerations

The tenants who are on the 'Domestic' contract and receive the private cut have the option to "opt out" but they do have an obligation to make sure that their private garden is properly maintained. This is why they are encouraged to remain part of the Council managed Assisted Gardening Service. However, if they prefer to opt out of this arrangement, then they would assume personal responsibility for cutting the grass and generally keeping the garden area neat and tidy.

Before any service charges are introduced, there will be a formal consultation period of 10 days with our Tenants and with Leaseholders as advised by the Consultant, HQN Ltd.

C – Implications and Impacts

1	Finance / Section 151	Awaiting response
2	Legal / Monitoring Officer	Awaiting response
3	Human Resources	No comments
4	Property Services (see notes – separate document)	

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5	Information and Communications Technology (ICT)	
6	Equality (see notes – separate document)	
7	Anti-poverty and Social (see notes – separate document)	
8	Communication (see notes – separate document)	
9	Consultation (see notes – separate document)	
10	Economic	No comments
11	Environmental (see notes – separate document)	
12	Crime and Disorder (see notes – separate document)	
13	Outcome Agreements	

CH - Summary

D - Recommendation
<p>R1 That the Executive Committee gives approval to change the threshold to receive the ground maintenance service for free from 60 to 70 years old.</p> <p>R2 That the Executive Committee delegate power to the Head of Housing Services, to act, on the advice given by the Council's Legal Services in relation to Right to buy service charges.</p> <p>R3 Subject to R1 being approved, that the Executive Committee approves the costs to be charged for tenants of Domestic properties, excluding RTB's, of £2.26 per week.</p>

R4 That the Executive Committee approves the costs to be charged for Tenants of Sheltered properties excluding RTB's ranging from 13 pence to £2.25 per week, depending on the size of the communal grassed area.

R5 That the Executive Committee approves for the charges to be on a weekly basis for Council tenants and yearly for the leaseholders.

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Date: 31/01/14

Appendices:

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Background papers

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