Report of the Corporate Director of Housing

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to give an update on the Garden Maintenance Scheme for elderly and disabled tenants.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 A Garden Maintenance Scheme was introduced in 1993 to help elderly and disabled tenants to maintain their gardens.

2.2 There are currently 3 options available for tenants joining the scheme. These are:

- Garden Maintenance – grass cutting, maintaining path and border edges, removing weeds from borders and pruning plants.
- Full slabbing of gardens – for tenants who live in bungalows.
- Part slabbing and garden maintenance – for tenants living in family type accommodation

2.3 There are currently 148 tenants on the Garden Maintenance Scheme waiting list.

2.4 The Service Improvement Unit, who administers the scheme, will undertake a review of the Garden Maintenance Scheme during 2006/07.

3. Recommendations
3.1 Members are asked to note that all those currently waiting to join the scheme will be assessed and offered a place, if appropriate, during the current financial year. Members are also asked to note that a further report will be presented to Scrutiny exploring improvements to the Garden Maintenance Scheme during 2006/07.

4. **Headline Financial and Legal Implications**

4.1 The 2006/07 Housing Revenue Account budget contains provision of £137,900 for the net cost of subsidising the Garden Maintenance Scheme

Rod Pearson Ext. 7108

5. **Legal Implications**

5.1 It is a term of tenancies of Council houses that gardens are to be maintained in a clean and tidy condition. This scheme will provide an additional service for tenants in question, but will not form part of the tenancy agreement. In the event that the tenant exercises their “Right to Buy” under the Housing Act 1985 (as amended), then the service will be withdrawn.

Joanna Bunting Ext. 6450

6. **Report Author/Officer to contact:**

6.1 Helen McGarry (Ext 5227)
Service Improvement Manager, Housing Management and Hostels
SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. Background

1.1 The Conditions of Tenancy states tenants “are responsible for keeping any garden, tree, hedge, garage or outbuilding which forms part of your accommodation in a cultivated and tidy condition.”

1.2 However, some tenants, due to their personal circumstances, find it difficult to maintain their gardens.

1.3 As a result a Garden Maintenance Scheme was introduced in August 1993 to provide support for elderly and disabled tenants who were finding it difficult to maintain their gardens.

1.4 The Service Improvement Unit within the Housing Management Section administers the scheme and the Parks and Open Spaces Section within the Regeneration and Culture Department provides the service.

2. The Current Scheme

2.1 The Garden Maintenance Scheme is open to tenants over the age of 60 or to tenants who have a long term immobilising disability. In addition the tenant: -

- Must have a clear rent account
- Have no-one else to maintain the garden
- Have no Right to Buy application submitted
2.2 For Tenants joining the scheme there are 3 Garden Maintenance Options to choose from: -

**Option A  Garden Maintenance**

As a standard the Council will: -

- Maintain the grass to between 25mm and 75mm in height at all times of the year. Grass cuttings are not removed.
- Ensure grass edges to paths and borders do not encroach by more than 50mm.
- Maintain borders to ensure weeds do not cover more than 15% of the border and do not exceed 75mm in height at all times of the year.
- Clip or prune plants to maximise the potential growth of each species.

**Option B  Full slabbing of the garden**

This only applies to tenants who live in bungalows.

**Option C  Part slabbing and Garden Maintenance**

Where a tenant lives in family type accommodation they can have up to 25% of their garden slabbed. A tenant can only take up the part slabbing option if they sign up for Garden Maintenance for the remainder of the garden.

2.3 The cost of the Garden Maintenance Scheme to tenants depends on the option they choose and the size of their garden. For new applicants Garden Maintenance is charged at £1.45 per square metre per annum and slabbing is charged at 20p per square metre per week. The charge is not covered by Housing Benefit.

2.4 The Garden Maintenance charge applies for the life of the tenancy or until the tenant withdraws from the scheme.

2.5 The slabbing charge applies for the life of the tenancy, even if the tenant withdraws from the scheme, as slabbing is considered to be a permanent improvement to the property. When the Tenant ends their tenancy the slabbing cost becomes a service charge but becomes Housing Benefit eligible for subsequent tenants.

2.6 When a tenant is at the top of the waiting list and there are spaces available the Housing office will undertake checks to ensure the applicant is eligible to take part in the scheme. An Officer from the Parks and Open Spaces Section will then visit the tenant to assess the work required. Following this we will advise the tenant of the weekly charge and they can then decide whether they want to join the scheme.
3. Tenants currently on the scheme

3.1 There are currently 148 tenants waiting to join the Garden Maintenance Scheme.

3.2 It is anticipated the majority of the tenants on the waiting list will be assessed for work this year and have the opportunity to join the scheme.

3.3 Since April 43 new applications have been assessed by the Parks and Open Spaces section and a further 46 applicants are in the process of being assessed.

3.4 In order to effectively monitor budgets and prevent any budget overspend, new applications are usually sent for assessment in batches of 30. Each year a number of tenants decide not to join the scheme when they receive the quote for work. As an indication, 58% of tenants did not want to proceed when they received the quote in 2005/06. The majority of tenants not wishing to proceed are those who have requested slabbing work, and state the reason for not proceeding is the cost.

4. The Garden Maintenance Budget

4.1 The HRA provided a 77% subsidy for the cost of the scheme last financial year.

5. Improving the Garden Maintenance Scheme

5.1 During 2006/07 the Service Improvement Unit will undertake a review of the Garden Maintenance Scheme to ensure it is meeting the needs of elderly and disabled tenants and providing value for money.

5.2 This review will involve researching best practice amongst other local authorities, satisfaction surveys of existing tenants on the scheme, assessing our administration processes and liaison with the Parks and Open Spaces Section.

5.3 The results of this review and recommendations for improvement will be presented to the Housing Scrutiny Committee.

6. Financial Implications – Rod Pearson Ext. 7108

6.1 The 2006/07 Housing Revenue Account budget contains provision of £137,900 for the net cost of subsidising the Garden Maintenance Scheme.

7. Legal Implications – Joanna Bunting Ext. 6450

7.1 It is a term of tenancies of Council houses that gardens are to be maintained in a clean and tidy condition. This scheme will provide an additional service for tenants in question, but will not form part of the tenancy agreement. In the event that the tenant exercises their “Right to Buy” under the Housing Act 1985 (as amended), then the service will be withdrawn.
8. Crime and Disorder Implications.

8.1 There are no Crime and Disorder Implications associated with this report.

9. Policy Implications

9.1 There are no policy implications arising directly from this report.

10. Equal Opportunities

10.1 The Garden Maintenance Scheme was established to meet the needs of elderly and disabled tenants who are unable to maintain their gardens.

11. Other Implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OTHER IMPLICATIONS</th>
<th>YES/NO</th>
<th>Paragraph References Within Supporting information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal Opportunities</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable and Environmental</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime and Disorder</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Act</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly/People on Low Income</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


12.1 Garden Maintenance Scheme – Housing Scrutiny Report, October 2002

13. Consultations

13.1 No consultation has taken place for this report. However, Tenants currently part of the Garden Maintenance Scheme will be consulted as part of the planned review.

14. Aims and Objectives

14.1 The corporate aim of the council is to ‘Make Leicester more attractive for our diverse communities to live, work and invest in’ with a strategic objective to ‘Improve our environment to make local neighbourhoods and the city centre places for people to be proud of’

The aim of the Housing Service is ‘a decent home within the reach of every citizen in Leicester’
The aim of the Housing Management Service is to ‘provide decent homes to council tenants, and to contribute towards the creation and support of neighbourhoods where people choose to live’. The Housing Management service objectives are:

a) Developing and supporting customer involvement by listening to our tenants and the wider community.

b) Working towards Community Cohesion by empowering and investing in communities through community partnerships and regeneration activities.

c) For the housing we directly manage, our objectives are:

- To ensure equality in accessing Housing Management Services that acknowledges the diversity and expectations of local communities across the City.
- To provide customer focused services that meet needs and expectations.
- To create safe and pleasant environments on our estates, making them places where people want to live.
- To ensure homes meet a decent standard and are maintained properly.
- To promote community cohesion by tackling unacceptable behaviour and all forms of harassment.
- To ensure tenants and residents have an opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their homes and environment.
- To increase the % of rent collected through the effective implementation of rent arrears polices, and become a top quartile performing unitary authority.
- To increase occupancy levels within the housing stock by reducing the time taken to re-let void properties and making best use of the stock.
- To let individual tenancies and offer advice and options to tenants and customers to increase housing choices.

d) Investing in our staff to ensure that they provide a comprehensive, customer focused Housing Management Service.

e) Exploring a number of alternative service options, in order to ensure value for money.

15. Report Author / Officers to contact:

15.1 Helen McGarry (Ext 5227)
Service Improvement Manager, Housing Management and Hostels