

16 April 2018**Agenda Item: 8****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, NORTH NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND
DIRECT SERVICES****ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT – OUTCOME OF
CONSULTATION****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is:
 - a) to provide a summary of the outcome of formal consultation with staff, service users and carers on a proposal to reduce the annual running costs of the County Horticulture and Work Training Service;
 - b) to seek approval to proceed with the proposed business case to reduce the annual running costs of the County Horticulture and Work Training Service, as developed with the Council's Commercial Development Unit.

Information

2. On 5 February 2018, a report was presented to Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee setting out a proposal to reduce the annual running costs of the County Horticulture and Work Training Service by implementing a number of changes to the current running of the service over a four year period. This would support the Council to maintain the County Horticulture and Work Training Service but at a reduced and more sustainable cost.
3. The three key elements of the proposal are:
 - a. to undertake improvements to the Brooke Farm, Linby, site to increase customer numbers and average spend
 - b. to reduce operating costs by vacating the site at Skegby and supporting work trainees to transfer to the Linby or Balderton site
 - c. to cease all Grounds Maintenance and Golden Gardens activity.
4. It is anticipated that the proposal, after four years, would reduce the annual running costs of the service by at least £110,000, with the potential for greater savings up to a total of £249,000, during and beyond this period.

5. Committee gave approval for officers to consult with staff, service users and carers on this proposal and a summary of the consultation process, views and feedback is set out in **paragraphs 7 to 36**.
6. The consultation period ran from 5th February to 16th March 2018. Throughout this period, a number of presentations and meetings were held with staff, unions, service users and families. Managers were also available for individual sessions with those affected. Anyone not able to attend a consultation meeting in person had an overview of the proposal sent to them by post with information about how to give feedback.
7. The main views and feedback arising from the consultation are as follows:

Service User Groups

8. Group meetings were held with service users at all three County Horticulture sites.
9. Service users at Brooke Farm liked the proposed changes to the site and could see that it was a good way to make/ save money, but had questions about what would happen to plant growing and equipment if Skegby closed. There were some concerns about safety due to increased traffic.
10. Balderton service users were happy that there are no proposed changes to the Balderton site.
11. Skegby service users, as the most affected group, had more concerns. Some stated that they did not want the Skegby site to close and were worried about transport if they moved to Brooke Farm. However, some stated that they would like to go to Brooke Farm as they had worked there before.

Carers and Families

12. 23 carers attended four meetings across the three County Horticulture sites (two meetings held at Skegby).
13. Brooke Farm carers were generally supportive of the proposal to make improvements at the Brooke Farm site and accepted the need for change.
14. There was a lot of discussion about the need for greater advertising to raise the profile of Brooke Farm and several ideas for income generation were put forward as well as a suggestion to set up a "Friends of Brooke Farm" group to support the service.
15. One concern raised is whether the service can continue to run normally whilst building and improvement works take place at Brooke Farm.
16. Balderton carers were generally pleased that the Balderton site would remain unchanged, but very interested in Brooke Farm developments and some discussion about what could potentially be done at Balderton in the future to generate more income.
17. The majority of carers of people accessing the Skegby site were unhappy and opposed to the proposed closure of the Skegby site.

18. The main concerns focused on the perceived loss of the service, concerns about consistency of environment and support and whether service users will cope with the change.
19. There was discussion about the need to carefully plan how individuals would be supported with any changes.
20. Questions were asked about timescales for the implementation of changes and, if approved, the closure of the Skegby site.
21. Transport was also raised as a key issue in relation to how people would get to Brooke Farm or an alternative service.
22. A view was expressed that customers should be charged more as opposed to making savings through service change.
23. Questions were raised about the potential future use of the Skegby site for housing development.
24. Some carers were concerned about what would happen to staff.
25. Concerns were raised about the timing and clarity of communications in relation to the Committee process and some scepticism about the usefulness of the consultation process.
26. However, there were some families who considered that a move to Brooke Farm could work for their relative, with a well thought through transition. One family raised whether a referral to day services could be made as an alternative move as this might be a preferable option.

Golden Gardens Customers

27. 32 customers responded to the consultation via letter and email.
28. Feedback was very complimentary about the service in terms of it being reliable, trustworthy, efficient and value for money. The Golden Gardens service is very much valued and customers would like it to continue.
29. Many customers are elderly and are concerned about not being able to maintain their gardens.
30. Supporting opportunities for disabled workers is important to some customers.
31. The majority of customers would consider an increase to the charge rate to maintain it, although many stated that a “slight” or “modest” increase would be acceptable.
32. Ideas were also put forward as to how the service could bring in additional income, i.e. through providing a handyman service.

Staff

33. Staff meetings and presentations were held for all County Horticulture staff. Staff were also able to discuss specific or individual issues with managers.
34. The key concerns and questions focused on the following areas:
 - Any changes to terms and conditions, i.e. changes to opening hours
 - Timescale for implementation
 - The loss of two Employment Support Worker posts and the impact of this on service user to staff ratio and whether the loss of these posts can be avoided
 - Justification for the addition of the proposed Commercial/ Retail Manager post
 - Supernumerary staffing numbers in addition to those remaining from Sherwood Industries
 - How the cost of transport for work trainees transferring from Skegby to a different site will be met
 - Whether the proposal to generate further income through developments at Brooke Farm will be successful.

Trade Unions

35. A Trade Union sub-group has been established as a forum to discuss the proposals and, if approved, to engage trade unions on an ongoing basis.
36. The key concerns and questions from union representatives were as follows:
 - Any changes to staff ratios given the reduction in staff numbers
 - The issue of voluntary redundancy for supported employees and the fact that this could look different in four years' time
 - Concerns that service users from the Skegby site would not be able to cope at Brooke Farm and whether there was enough meaningful work for all at the Linby site
 - The impact of possible additional travel for service users
 - Whether the iWork supported employment team has sufficient capacity to support additional people
 - Issue raised in relation to the primary focus of the service which should not solely be about income generation
 - The need for sufficient time to prepare staff and service users before any changes are implemented.
37. In answer to the feedback received and the issues and concerns raised, mitigating actions and responses are set out in **paragraphs 38 to 65**.

Developing Brooke Farm

38. Broadly, the proposed changes to the Brooke Farm site were seen as a positive by service users, carers and staff.

- 39. If the proposal is approved, a detailed plan will need to be developed as to how and when building and improvement works take place at the Brooke Farm site, taking account of service continuity and safety issues.
- 40. The concerns about future income generation and justification of the proposed Commercial/Retail Manager post are noted, but following the detailed work undertaken through the Commercial Development Unit, there is confidence that the proposal can be successful.
- 41. The expansion and development of the Brooke Farm site will likely generate a greater range and number of employment and training opportunities for employees and service users and should address the concerns as to whether there will be enough meaningful work for all.

Vacating the Skegby site

- 42. The feedback received indicates a mixed view in response to the proposal to vacate the Skegby site.
- 43. Some service users were against moving off the Skegby site, however, some were happy to go to Brooke Farm as they had worked there before.
- 44. The majority of carers of people accessing the Skegby site were opposed to the proposed change and perceived it as a loss of service for their family member, whereas others considered that a move to Brooke Farm or an alternative service could be positive.
- 45. The proposal to vacate the Skegby site is not a service closure, as Skegby is part of the wider County Horticulture offer. Rather it is a proposal to operate the service from two sites instead of three and all service users will continue to receive a comparable service, albeit from a different location.
- 46. It is recognised that many service users find change difficult to understand and cope with and if the proposal is given approval to proceed, individual plans would be developed with service users and their families to consider the implications of a move to Brooke Farm, or to an alternative service if this is preferable.
- 47. This would be led by individual needs and circumstances and would take account of appropriate transition planning, transport needs, continuity of service and consistency of support.
- 48. For the majority of people, existing transport arrangements would need to be re-routed to take people to Brooke Farm.
- 49. Further information about the potential future use of the Skegby site for housing development is not known, other than an awareness that it has been identified in the Ashfield District Plan for this purpose.

Ceasing the Grounds Maintenance and Golden Gardens activity

- 50. The service is aware of how much customers value the Golden Gardens service and the complimentary feedback received through the consultation is testament to this.

51. Some customers have indicated that they would be prepared to pay more for the service and consideration has been given to increasing the charge rate in order to reach a breakeven position as an alternative to ceasing the activity.
52. However, the financial analysis shows that the Grounds Maintenance and Golden Gardens service costs up to 57% more to deliver than the income it generates and the reality of what would be required as an hourly rate would be unaffordable for most.
53. The current charge rate per worker per hour for Golden Gardens is between £14.50 and £17.50. In order to reach full cost recovery, the charge rate would need to increase to £33.55 per worker per hour.
54. The impact of this on an average customer would be as follows:

1 hour grass cut and general clearance, lawn edging –

Current charge	£17.50 per hour x 2 workers = £35.00
Revised charge	£33.55 per hour x 2 workers = £67.10
55. Not only would this be unaffordable, it would likely have a detrimental impact on customer numbers, reducing them to the point where reaching a breakeven position is unachievable and the service would become even more unsustainable as unit costs would increase further as customer numbers reduce.
56. The service is not able to compete with other contractors in the market and it is difficult to justify the continued use of Council funds to subsidise the cost of private gardening services to local residents.
57. Any expansion of the service into other areas, e.g. handyman services, would still encounter the same issue regarding the charge rate and the Council already provides the Handy Person Adaptation Service to people living in Nottinghamshire who are either aged 60 or over or are disabled.
58. The service is aware that many customers are elderly and are concerned about not being able to maintain their gardens if the service ceases. Support will be offered to customers to find new gardening services in their area if the proposal progresses.

Staffing issues

59. Any changes to staff terms and conditions, e.g. changes to working patterns as a result of extended opening hours at Brooke Farm or need to develop a wider range of skills, would be subject to consultation with affected staff, supported by HR colleagues and Trade Unions.
60. Two full-time equivalent Employment Support Workers (Grade 5) currently employed at the Skegby site may be at risk of redundancy because of the proposal to vacate the Skegby site. Any individuals who are subsequently identified as being at risk of redundancy will be offered the opportunity to seek voluntary redundancy if this is their wish or support to identify a suitable redeployment opportunity, in line with Council policy. A vacant part time (0.5 FTE) Caretaker post (Grade 1) at the Skegby site will be deleted from the staffing structure.

61. A vacant 1.0 FTE Supervisor post (Grade 4) and 1.95 FTE vacant Horticulture Operative posts (Grade 1) linked to the Grounds Maintenance and Golden Gardens services will also be deleted from the staffing structure.
62. Concerns raised about the impact on service user to staff ratios as a result of the loss of these posts and the issue of having sufficient iWork capacity to support people would need to be considered through detailed planning of service delivery and analysis of service user attendance times and levels of need.
63. Of the eight Horticultural Operatives (7.7 FTE at Grade 1) who are disabled workers, four are supported through a Department for Work and Pensions specialist disability employment programme and are employed in the delivery of the Grounds Maintenance and Golden Gardens services. If it is agreed that these services should cease, it is proposed that the Horticultural Operatives are offered the opportunity to take voluntary redundancy or to be retained in a supernumerary position at the Brooke Farm site for up to a maximum period of four years, during which time they will be provided with support by the Council's iWork supported employment service to undertake additional work skills training to find alternative permanent job roles.
64. If after the four year period any of the Horticulture Operatives have been unable to find an alternative post it is recommended that consideration should be given as to whether redundancy should be offered again. There is however a good degree of confidence that this will not be necessary, as given the proposed improvements to the Brooke Farm, Linby, site it is anticipated that over time additional employment opportunities will arise.
65. This is considered to be a fair alternative offer, although concerns about the increase in the number of supernumerary posts within the service is noted.

General points

66. If approval is granted by the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee to proceed with the proposal, a detailed project plan will need to be developed which sets out the key stages of delivery and timescales for implementation.
67. The concerns raised about the timing and clarity of communications are noted. Alongside the project plan, a communication and engagement plan would be developed to ensure that service users, families and staff are informed and supported through the proposed changes.
68. The point raised that the focus of the service should not solely be about income generation is noted. The Council would seek to give reassurance on this point that all income generating options considered through the Commercial Development process were tested against the main service objective, which is primarily to provide employment and training opportunities to disabled people. A number of more financially lucrative options were discounted as they did not meet this criteria.
69. Taking the consultation responses into consideration alongside the mitigating actions described in response, it is considered that the proposed business case remains the best possible prospect for securing a long term sustainable future for the County Horticulture service.

Other Options Considered

- 70. The work to develop the business case through the Commercial Development process considered a range of other options in terms of reducing operating costs and increasing income.
- 71. As stated in **paragraph 68**, a range of income generating options were considered and a number of more financially lucrative options were discounted as they did not meet the service objectives.
- 72. An alternative to ceasing the grounds maintenance and Golden Gardens services would be to increase the fees charged to customers in order to reach full cost recovery for these services. As set out in **paragraphs 51 to 57** of the report, the level of increase required would be unaffordable to most, uncompetitive in the market and unsustainable.

Reason for Recommendations

- 73. The proposal to reduce the annual running costs of the County Horticulture and Work Training Service will support the Council to maintain the service but at a reduced and more sustainable cost.

Statutory and Policy Implications

- 74. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

- 75. The proposal to reduce the annual running costs of the County Horticulture and Work Training Service will allow the Council to reduce the subsidy required to maintain the service by between £110,000 and £249,000 a year (after four years) depending on the number of Horticultural Operatives (Grade 1 mid-point £15,115 per annum) that continue to be supported in supernumerary posts over that period.
- 76. A one-off capital investment of £353,000 has been approved as part of the Capital Programme for 2018/19 to support the proposed improvements at Brooke Farm.

Human Resources Implications

- 77. Human resource implications are set out in the Staffing Issues section at **paragraphs 59 to 65**.

Public Sector Equality Duty Implications

78. An equality impact assessment has been undertaken for the proposal to reduce the annual running costs of the County Horticulture and Work Training Service and is available as a background paper to this report. The equality impact assessment will need to be reviewed in response to the consultation on the proposal with staff, service users and carers.

Implications for Service Users

79. The development of an improved shop, café and plant sales area at the Brooke Farm site will increase the range and capacity of work training activities available to service users.
80. Work trainees who currently access a service at the Skegby site would be supported to transfer to one of the remaining County Horticulture and Work Training sites at Linby or Balderton. If, on an individual basis, this was not an appropriate option, alternative service provision may need to be identified.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

81. Based on the results of a customer survey within Linby village, it is considered that the proposed developments at Brooke Farm would have a positive impact on the local community in terms of the improved facilities and products that customers would be able to take advantage of.
82. The site at Skegby has been proposed for potential housing development as part of the Ashfield District Neighbourhood Plan and it is possible that the service will need to vacate this site in the coming years to accommodate this.
83. Private customers and organisations, including the Council, who are customers of the Grounds Maintenance and Golden Gardens services will need to find alternative suppliers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That Committee approves the proposals set out at **paragraph 3** which aim to reduce the annual running costs of the County Horticulture and Work Training Service and proceed with the improvements to the Brooke Farm site, vacate the site at Skegby and cease all Grounds Maintenance and Golden Gardens activity.

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Constitutional Comments (LM 20/03/18)

84. The Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of the report. If Committee resolves that any actions are required it must be satisfied that such actions are within the Committee's terms of reference.

Financial Comments (DLP1 21/03/18)

85. The financial implications are contained within **paragraphs 75 and 76** of the report.

HR Comments (SJJ 28/03/18)

86. Any HR implications are contained within the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Equality Impact Assessment for the proposal to reduce the running costs of the County Horticulture and Work Training Service

Adult Social Care and Commercial Development – report to Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee on 5 February 2018.

Electoral Divisions and Members Affected

All.

ASCPH545 final