

REPORT TO:	Homes & Environment Scrutiny Committee
REPORT NO:	COHE/32/19
DATE:	18 September 2019
LEAD MEMBER:	Councillor David Griffiths (Place - Housing)
CONTACT OFFICER:	Lee Roberts (Tel: 315357)
SUBJECT:	Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Environmental Improvements
WARD:	All

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To provide Members with an update on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Environmental Improvements budget, including the previous 5 years expenditure. Also, to consider progress since the last report in March 2019 in terms of surveys and schemes delivered during the last 6 months.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Homes & Environment Scrutiny Committee received a report on Environmental Improvements in March 2019 (HHE/04/19), and it was agreed that this committee receive an update on individual schemes, any delays, and the relevant reasons.
- 2.2 Members will be aware that there has previously been a backlog of environmental improvement schemes, which has led to a number of frustrations, in particular, the timescales to deliver the schemes on site.
- 2.3 A dedicated team was set up in June 2018 to focus on this programme, and the three members of staff are part of a larger, external works team as there is synergy with the two different funding streams.
- 2.4 An 'All Member' workshop was held in November 2017, to provide Members with a full understanding of how the Environmental Improvements Scheme works and to enable Members to understand the link between the Environmental Improvement Scheme and the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) external works programme. It also provided an opportunity for Members to question and understand the procurement process which the department is required to follow to deliver the individual projects.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 That Members of the Committee formulate their conclusions on the progress and changes that have been implemented for the delivery of Environmental Improvement schemes and any recommendations are based on the information in the report and the discussion at the meeting.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

To enable Members to ensure that the Environmental Improvement Scheme is delivering the right outcomes for tenants and that the management changes are enabling the schemes to be delivered in an improved timely manner.

4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 4.1 The HRA Business Plan allocates funding to enable the Council to deliver an Environmental Improvement Scheme. Funding is allocated equally across the County Borough at a standard amount for every Council House in each ward. There are 45 wards that can benefit from this scheme with an allocation of £66.39 per property for each year for the five years from May 2017 to March 2022. This funding was agreed by the Executive Board in March 2017 (HHE/17/17). Each of the Members in the 45 eligible wards is responsible for submitting schemes and managing the budget allocated to their ward.
- 4.2 When the Executive Board approved the new scheme, it was aware of the inadequate design and supervision capacity within the department to enable it to deliver the programme. The capacity issue has now been addressed.
- 4.3 There has been a substantial backlog of projects that require a design and delivery service and these are currently being progressed in a priority date order received within the department. The schemes are being progressed according to the financial year that they were received. Schemes have been categorised into two groups, 'on plot' parking or 'fencing' schemes, which, some schemes include for both elements of work. Requests are now progressed according to the date they were received, (i.e. the scheme that has been awaiting a survey and assessment, the longest, being the priority).
- 4.4 In the last five years, there have been 632 schemes received. Some of these schemes have multiple addresses within the one scheme, therefore, there are a lot more individual addresses that require action. The schemes are wide ranging and include some small value works and some large, detailed and complex parking schemes. They range from £47.80 to £77,862.56.
- 4.5 Members have received updates on their ward budget either through an electronic update, or through requests and meetings with Officers to discuss possible schemes. Officers have met with 29 Members to discuss progress with their schemes and the budget for their ward.
- 4.6 The average number of on plot parking schemes received each year, for the last 5 years has been 40 schemes (some of which include multiple addresses). The average number of completed on plot parking schemes for the last 5 years has been 16 schemes. Again, some schemes have multiple addresses, and there have

been some large, more complex parking schemes completed. In 2019/20, 59 schemes have been submitted and 6 schemes completed (covering 26 individual properties). These schemes are from previous year's backlog. This demonstrates an improvement in terms of the schemes being delivered and completed.

- 4.7 The approach for the installation and construction of on plot parking schemes is to complete the schemes in a priority order, starting with the first received. If the Local Member then decides to add an additional address, it is more cost effective when the contractor is in the area to complete the additional address rather than add the address to the back of the queue. This is a common sense approach and assists the contractor with its approach for welfare provision.
- 4.8 Since March 2019, the team has completed estimates for 43 schemes following site surveys, assessments and providing estimates to the Housing Offices and Local Members. This work is following the priority date order. The team is also monitoring and supervising the works on site.
- 4.9 The reason for the delays in schemes completed include, external contractor capacity, weather conditions, procurement timeframes, addresses that require planning permission, site investigation and trial holes prior to schemes progressing, location of utility services, as well as some large, more complex schemes taking longer to deliver. Information can be provided to members on individual schemes as required.
- 4.10 The internal resource issue has been addressed, with two additional Engineering Technicians being appointed and starting their roles in June 2018. The first 12 months in their roles has been a learning curve, which, has resulted in the transition period taking longer than previously anticipated. It has also been agreed to recruit an additional Engineer on a temporary contract to assist with the larger, more complex schemes.
- 4.11 A new framework has been procured and set up for the installation of metal fencing and fencing in general. This has been set up solely for the delivery of the Environmental Improvement Scheme and will improve on the delivery and timescales when requests are received for metal fencing. This framework is in its infancy, and will continue for the next four years. In addition to this framework, a new and separate framework has also been set up for a wide range of external works, which is for the general external works programme to all Council properties. If and where required, this second framework can be utilised for environmental improvements, so, there are more options and flexibility going forward.
- 4.12 The approach to fencing is similar to the on plot parking schemes. They have been placed in a priority date order, and will be delivered using the new framework and other contractors if required. The plan is to remove the backlog and then, to deliver as quickly as possible when schemes are agreed with the team.
- 4.13 When the external works are being carried out in an area, meetings have been held with the Local Member to discuss the external works programme in general and to discuss a combined approach to assisting with the environmental schemes. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss the scope of the external works programme, and to utilise the contractor that is working in the area. Some Members have utilised the area contractor to deliver projects funded by the Environmental Improvement Scheme. These meetings and approach will continue when the external works programme is moving into a new area.

- 4.14 For a number of years, the department has used the corporate engineering framework, which is more suited to delivering highway improvement works. In order to better define the works, improve timescales and boost capacity, the department is procuring its own framework for contractors to carry out minor engineering works such as on plot parking, and general minor civil works. The new tender documentation makes reference to the access and delivery problems associated with working very close to tenants and residents properties.
- 4.15 Some schemes do require planning permission and further site investigation works, which impact on the timescales. This is also the case for any of the larger and more complex schemes.
- 4.16 One scheme in particular that has lengthy delays has Virgin Media fibre as well as other utility services within the area where construction works are planned. These types of challenges do cause delays, as the team is reliant on the individual companies to react in a timely manner. Where services require moving or altering, this also increases the cost of the scheme, as well as causing delays.
- 4.17 There are currently two Civil Engineering gangs working on schemes. In the current programme there are 6 schemes scheduled to be completed by the end of November at an approximate cost of £100,000 with a number of further projects with an estimated value of £80-£100,000 to be completed by the end of March 2020. As at 27 August 2019 the total budget still to be committed is £3,506,715.
- 4.18 At the last committee meeting in March (HHE/04/19), members requested that estate staff consult with local members regarding schemes. This is an ongoing process, which is being monitored. Members also requested that assurance be provided where there is ambiguity concerning the guidance on schemes. If a scheme is submitted and there is concern regarding the guidance, the advice and decision will be made by the lead Officers managing the Environmental Improvements schemes.

Appendices

- 4.19 **Appendix 1** shows the financial position on a ward by ward basis for the three years 2014/15 to 2016/17 prior to the new approved 5 year programme.
- 4.20 **Appendix 2** shows the current financial position as at 27 August 2019 and the remaining budget until May 2022.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 **Policy Framework** - the HRA Environmental Improvement scheme supports the Council Plan – PL1 “Promoting good quality homes and regeneration”.
- 5.2 **Budget** - The financial position as at 27 August 2019 is detailed in appendix 2.
- 5.3 **Legal** – Legal advice has been sought on the use of HRA funding for environmental improvements, this was included in the last Environmental Improvement scheme report in March 2019 (HHE/04/19)

- 5.4 **Staffing** - Resources have been recruited to meet the demand for scheme design, procurement and delivery. The recruitment process for an additional Engineer is underway. These will be charged to the Environmental Improvements Scheme.
- 5.5 **Equality/Human Rights** – Members are advised of their duty to consider the full Equality Impact Assessment (HE/EIA00067/2017) which is available at <http://vmwinsqld/equalityisalive/Menu.aspx> report number. Members of the public can request a copy of the full Equality Impact Assessment from the Contact Officer named in the header box of this report.
- 5.6 **Risks** – There is a comprehensive Welsh Housing Quality Standard risk register that considers and analyses all of the risks that are associated with the overall Welsh Housing Quality Standard programme.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Consultation has taken place with the Wrexham Tenant and Member Partnership previously on the full Welsh Housing Quality Standard programme, which Environmental Improvement Schemes contribute toward the achievement of the standard by December 2020.

BACKGROUND PAPERS	LOCATION	WEBSITE INFO
Environmental Improvements (HHE/04/19)	WCBC Website	http://vmmoderngo/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=173&MIId=4308&Ver=4