

Report to Leader of the Council

Subject: Council Service Changes Due to COVID-19 – Suspension of Tree works

Date: 31 March 2020

Author: Acting Chief Executive

Wards Affected

All

Purpose

For the Leader of the Council to authorise, during the Covid-19 pandemic:

The temporary suspension of all Gedling Borough Council Commercial Tree Services to domestic households.

A delegation to the Director responsible for Parks and Street Care to authorise any further reduction in Tree Service provision to businesses and the Council, in line with this report, save for emergency tree works which will continue as normal.

Key Decision

This is not a key decision

Recommendations

That the Leader of the Council, during the Covid-19 pandemic:

- 1) Authorises the suspension of all Gedling Borough Council Commercial Tree Services to domestic households.
- 2) Delegates authority to the Director responsible for Parks and Street Care to approve any further restrictions to Tree Services necessary, in line with this report, excluding emergency tree works as detailed in the report.

2 Background

- 1.1 The Covid-19 pandemic and associated isolation measures have had an impact on Council resources as staffing levels have reduced. Whilst the Council has tried to maintain services as far as possible, depleting resource has meant that some difficult decisions have had to be made. Now consideration needs to be given to the ability of the Council to continue to deliver commercial tree services to the public and the level of tree services that can be maintained for the Council.
- 1.2 As residents continue in lockdown, the requests for tree works from domestic premises has decreased, this is to be expected given the social isolation measures the government introduced on 23rd March 2020. Previously, requests from householders for tree works numbered 3-4 per day, since isolation measures were introduced, there have been no enquiries or requests for tree works at residential premises. Alongside this, resource available for the provision of tree services has also reduced and in some instances been re-deployed to deliver critical Council Services. In response to this drop in demand and resource, and in order to deliver essential tree services, where emergency works are required to trees for safety reasons, it is necessary to consider suspending commercial tree works to domestic households.
- 1.3 In addition to commercial works for domestic households, the Council's tree teams also undertake work under contract for businesses and other authorities, for example maintenance work for Calverton Parish Council. Whilst at present, these works are continuing wherever possible, it is likely that as resource depletes, these services will also have to be suspended.
- 1.4 In terms of tree service provided for the Council, again, at present this continues and has taken priority over domestic commercial services. The Council needs to ensure resource is available to deal with emergency situations where tree work is essential to protect the public and needs to ensure adequate resource is available to undertake these essential works.
- 1.5 With current staffing levels, and an anticipated further decrease, it will not be possible to continue to provide the current level of service from tree teams whilst maintaining emergency cover, as such some decisions in respect of services will be required.

2 Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed that with immediate effect, all Gedling Borough Council commercial tree services to domestic households be suspended. As indicated, demand for these services is currently low. There are however 13 appointments for work that have already been booked. Payment for the works is not taken until completion, as such there are no refund issues in

respect of the services to domestic households and the customers can be contacted to re-arrange appointments where necessary.

- 2.3 As indicated, currently some commercial tree services to organisations and businesses are continuing, and will continue, provided there is resource available and these can be delivered with appropriate distancing and safety measures. It is therefore proposed that authority be given to the Director responsible for Parks and Street care to authorise any further restrictions to tree services necessary as and when it is no longer feasible to deliver services in the same way.
- 2.4 It is proposed that any emergency tree works necessary for the Council continue.

3 Alternative Options

- 3.1 An alternative option is for operations to continue as at present, however, as the pandemic continues, the current service will not be sustainable. Taking these measures now will enable tree teams to continue to provide some level of service and deliver some income from work for businesses and organisations until further restrictions are necessary. It will also enable emergency tree works to continue.
- 3.2 The Leader could decide not to delegate future decision about service restrictions to Director level, however given the rapidly moving picture in terms of resources, this will enable operational and resource decisions to be taken without overburdening the executive.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 Income in 2020/21 for commercial Tree Team work is budgeted at an average of £11,500 per month. As the tree team is a commercial service the income is set to cover all costs associated with delivery of the service including the team's salaries. There is a risk that a prolonged delay would result in the service not covering its costs.

5 Equality Impact

- 5.1 The equality impacts of these measures are neutral. No further actions are recommended as a result of this equality impact review.

6 Appendices

- 6.1 None

6 Background Papers

- 6.1 No specific background papers have been identified but government guidance and regulations have been relied upon.

7 Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1 To ensure resource can be focused on maintaining priority tree works during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 7.2 To enable future decisions in respect of service provision to be made swiftly when necessary as resource level changes, so that emergency services can be maintained, without overburdening the executive.