

Task and Finish Project – Tree Management

Project Leads

Schedule:

1st Meeting -26th September 2018

2nd Meeting-1st October 2018

Finalised report – 8th October

Background

The issue of overgrown trees blocking light was raised by a member of the Collective Panel as an area of concern on Trakside Close, Loughborough. A number of other concerns were also registered from other tenants about NCHA not addressing general tree issues and a lack of clarity over ownership and responsibility where there are other owners, including local authorities.

This area was chosen as a pilot project for investigation using the Task and Finish approach.

Supporting information and evidence

Rent and Service charge Budget Spreadsheet (Trees)

Tree Works application form

Estate Officer Feedback

CAP member feedback

Community Voice feedback

Discussions with Northampton Borough Council, as a LA example

Findings

Service Charges and Rents Service Manager advised Estates in September 2017, that a tree budget to fund works on trees in communal areas and individual gardens would take effect from April 2018. Further, an application form for works and spreadsheet to record expenditure was created to be completed by them as part of the process and procedure when requesting works.

At the commencement of the investigation, although much of the works logged, the spreadsheet was not up to date and did not reflect the progress of the works.

The application form does not appear to have been used in 2018/2019. No completed forms could be found dated after Feb 2018.

Attempting to discuss trees with Northampton Borough Council was difficult and time consuming and highlighted the difficulties staff and tenants have trying to contact the relevant person from the LA departments.

When the group did make contact with NBC, they advised that they are currently developing a tree policy which means surveying and assessing all trees on communal land. They will use guidelines set by the Forestry Commission to put together a rolling programme of maintenance and essential works.

Works have since been done on Trackside Close. Positive feedback was received from resident who emphasised the difference trimming the trees has made in allowing light into the bungalows on the estate. The tree expert sent to the estate to assess works, advised that the species planted near her property were planted too close to the property and too close together as they spread as they grow and mature.

There are concerns where NCHA are not responsible for tree handling when managed by the LA. The group received feedback from a Community Voice, living in a 3rd Floor flat who has been trying to resolve issues with the LA over an overgrown tree which is completely blocking the light through his window. The CV has to leave his lights on during the day to get light into his flat, is not cost effective and has, he feels, had a profound effect on his sense of well being.

Conclusion

Findings agree with NCHA that tree issues vary between individuals, properties and estates and are and should be addressed case by case.

The Tree application form is adequate but lacks factors such as how the issue affects the individuals well being.

The Estate officers seem to be dealing with enquiries as per the process but the spreadsheet does not reflect this, nor is the Application form being used consistently. The does not lend to tenants being well informed about their enquiries.

Recommendations

1. Service charge and Rents Manager and Estates Manager reinforce process and procedure for tree management application and logging of works.
2. Tree works spreadsheet to be monitored and updated by Estates Asst on weekly basis.
3. Application for works to include section on affects on individual/s well being
4. Amend the application form to include the effect on tenant wellbeing and 'right to light'.
5. Staff should contact the LA on behalf of tenants when a complaint is received about trees which are not NCHA's responsibility.
6. Tenants should be copied into all correspondence from NCHA to LA's should this be required for appeal purposes.
7. More discussion to take place between Development and the LA to ensure the proposed planting scheme and species is appropriate for future estate management and long term effects.
8. Development to record which species of trees and shrubs are planted and who is responsible (NCHA or LA) to assist estate officers with complaints.
9. Service Charge and Rents Manager to review project and report to New Group January 2019.
10. The report is revisited by the 'New Group' in June 2019 to review actions.