



**Havering**  
LONDON BOROUGH

## PLACES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

**Subject Heading:**

Update of Tree Services in Havering

**SLT Lead:**

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**Policy context:**

Havering's Climate Change Action Plan aims to ensure plans are in place to address the added impact of climate change on issues of disease, food safety, waste and climate-enhanced pandemics. The Council will play a key role in supporting this through maintaining and enhancing its tree stock, helping to mitigate pollution and localised heating of the microclimate.

**Financial summary:**

The current tree budget sits at £0.486m, with further grant funding regularly applied for annually.

**The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives**

Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy

**SUMMARY**

This report outlines the key activities, statistics, challenges and aspirations of the Havering Council's Tree Services, following a request to bring a report to

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee. The report will be accompanied by a brief presentation on the day.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is requested to note the contents of the report, and decide on appropriate subject matter to be considered and taken on by a Task and Finish Group.

## REPORT DETAIL

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. Havering is currently home to an estimated 20,000 street trees, 250,000 trees in its parks and open spaces, and 4,000 trees on Council housing sites. The trees play an integral part in both managing the ecological footprint of Havering, as well as the Borough's aesthetics.
- 1.2. The Tree Team has a number of key responsibilities:
  - 1.2.1. Cyclical inspections of trees on the highway to maintain existing tree stock
  - 1.2.2. Reactive inspections as a result of customer enquiries
  - 1.2.3. Planting of trees, which may involve grant funding applications
  - 1.2.4. Other miscellaneous projects / reactive works on behalf of internal customers and partners

### **2. Contract**

- 2.1. The tree maintenance contract with City Suburban expired in March 2022, following a 2-year extension. Officers originally started engaging with the procurement team in May of 2021 with a view to carrying out a full tendering exercise, however due to resourcing issues, this was delayed for some months. Furthermore, despite a waiver being issued to allow for a further extension to the contract with City Suburban, the company was sold and Havering and the buyer were unable to agree to their suggested terms and conditions due to procurement rules.
- 2.2. The procurement exercise is now complete, with a preferred bidder chosen. The appropriate governance is being progressed before the bidder can be announced. In the interim, Havering officers have been putting works out to quote and have engaged with a number of smaller local firms to ensure tree maintenance continues whilst the procurement exercise progresses. The borough also entered into a low value Service Level Agreement with a local

firm, Keith Archers, in order to ensure emergency tree works were still covered.

- 2.3. Typically there will be 2-3 teams of 3 (sometimes 2) operating in the borough at any one time. The number of teams varies depending on the needs of the service, and there have been up to 8 operating at times. Once the new contract is issued it will likely be 1 to 2 teams operating.
- 2.4. Officers are generally very happy with the quality of the work being undertaken, however where issues are found, the contractors are sent back to rectify the work prior to payment being issued. Where quality is an ongoing issue, contractors will not be invited to quote again.

### **3. Staffing**

- 3.1. There has been a challenge in recruiting to the Tree Team, and as with other services, the advertised salaries against the market rate has been a factor. The wider Environment Service will shortly undergo a restructure and job evaluations, and this will be addressed accordingly to make roles more attractive to professionals within the industry.
- 3.2. Despite the above, Havering recruited one new tree officer in December 2021, and another in January 2023. Both are qualified and capable, and in the first instance, a large backlog of CRM enquiries and complaints was cleared, and a new IT system implemented for customers to report issues. Dealing with these items has been time consuming, but essential. This has led to a delay in cyclical 3- and 5- year inspections, and the team is approximately 6 months behind on these but working to bring them up to date.

### **4. Inspections and pruning**

- 4.1. In their natural state trees do not require pruning and are very successful at managing themselves. It is important to note that any pruning operation involves a financial cost to the Council, and a health cost to the tree, as all pruning is wounding, and all wounding is damaging to the tree. However, in the urban environment it is important to be pragmatic and as such, it is recognised that trees need to be pruned for a variety of reasons such as;
  - 4.1.1. To facilitate access, removing lower branches that are interfering with roads and footways, or removal of basal growth through the annual feathering programme to facilitate pedestrian access.
  - 4.1.2. To contain at a size to allow them to fit into their environment, whether physically or perceived. Havering is host to a number of mature trees, and crown reduction works may be issued for no other reason than to stop them being perceived as too large or oppressive. There is a common impression that to keep a tree healthy we must keep a tree pruned – this is not the case.
  - 4.1.3. Where a tree may be diseased, but pruning may retain it by increasing its safe usual life expectancy.

- 4.1.4. In instances of property damage, once sufficient evidence has been submitted, root pruning and crown pruning may again allow the tree to be retained while mitigating future damage.
- 4.1.5. Essentially, through education and experience, the team is able to read the body language of trees to determine their health and whether there is a need to interfere. The team's general ethos is 'to help people and trees live together in harmony', and to do this sometimes the team will elect to prune some trees and not others.

## **5. Planting**

- 5.1. Havering's plans for future tree planting are uncertain. Due to recent changes in budgetary pressures caused by an increase in the contract pricing, the team is reliant on grant funding for tree planting at the present time. It is hoped that this is only a temporary measure but the team recognises the financial pressures Havering is under as an organisation.
- 5.2. Despite this, the team has had recent success in securing grant funding, and last year secured £0.230m through the Forestry Commission. The team undertakes a lot of research to plant trees with 'right tree, right place' in mind. Therefore, where the public highway is concerned, the team is now planting smaller trees, as they are generally more likely to establish, and less likely to become a financial burden to the Council as they mature, whilst maintaining an attractive street scene.
- 5.3. The team keeps in regular contact with suppliers, who offer a range of cultivars, or hybrids of trees that will have a more desirable shape. Tall and narrower trees are currently popular as they generally fit in to the environment more seamlessly.
- 5.4. Havering's last grant fund was solely to replace lost highways trees, in order to begin filling historic empty tree pits. As such, trees have recently only been planted in as close proximity to a removed tree as possible. Officers are applying for funding to continue this work, and are also looking into funding to increase tree stock in areas of canopy deprivation. Confirmation of this funding will not be known for some weeks.
- 5.5. In terms of tree types, again the team uses a 'right tree, right place' principal, generally preferring native trees, as they are more likely to establish and provide more benefits to local flora and fauna. However, officers will also endeavour to introduce new and different species as a varied tree stock is a resilient tree stock.
- 5.6. In light of climate change, the industry is having to quickly adapt its approach. Silver Birch, for example are a particular favourite due to being native and fast growing, however they seem to have taken a particularly high toll in the heat of previous summers and such are dying at a disproportionate rate. As such, whilst native trees remain the preferred option, officers are also looking into more Mediterranean species which are considered to be more drought

tolerant, although this is considered as sensitively as possible towards the local ecology.

- 5.7. Notable examples are the planting of *Nothofagus antarctica* in the north of the borough, as this species has never been implicated in subsidence and so Havering can be seen to be doing everything it can to introduce trees safely that won't risk damage to property. American Ash, is another recent introduction. This is similar to the now banned Common Ash due to pest and disease restrictions, and has been introduced in the hope this will germinate and maintain ash trees in the borough.
- 5.8. Regarding size, there are two points to note, the size at which they are planted and the full growth potential of the tree. The smaller the tree, the cheaper the unit cost, the easier and cheaper it is to plant, and the higher probability it has to establish. However, on the public highway, trees that are too small will be more susceptible to damage from cars and pedestrians.
- 5.9. Havering generally plants mid-range standard trees, with a diameter of 10-14cm. An example of growth potential would be a 3m oak, will grow in to a 30m tree potentially, but a 3m amelanchier, will only reach a height of 5m at maturity. Officers need to account for the demands to prune the larger oak in the coming years as those costs could be better spent on additional tree planting.
- 5.10. Notwithstanding the above, the bigger the tree, the more environmental benefits it offers – but again, this goes back to the “right tree, right place” principal. The team is regularly monitoring the data from recent tree planting to pick up on any patterns, i.e. the silver birch high failure rate, to inform future decisions.
- 5.11. In the last decade Havering has experienced a nett gain of over 12,000 trees. In the last 2 years, the majority of these have been whips, which experience a higher failure rate (often 20-50%), but will still serve to substantially increase the borough's tree stock in a cost-effective manner. On top of this, officers continue to fill vacant tree pits on the highway with heavy standard trees, which provide a higher success rate.

5.12. Nett change in borough tree stock, 2013 to 2023:

	Removed	Planted	Nett change
2013-14	244	356	112
2014-15	311	260	-51
2015-16	257	250	-7
2016-17	212	248	36
2017-18	322	304	-18
2018-19	329	176	-153
2019-20	303	305	2
2020-21	213	359	146
2021-22	212	4735	4523
2022-23	356	8484	8128
	2759	15477	12718

**6. Key statistics**

6.1. Complaints and member enquiries received by calendar year

	Member enquiries (total)	Member enquiries (to May)	Customer complaints (total)	Customer complaints (to May)
2022	373	171	102	38
2023	52	40	48	36

6.2. The reduction in member enquiries is likely due to the local elections, as well as the tree officers clearing a considerable backlog of general enquiries that had built up prior to the first officer joining in December 2021. Prior to that time, the borough had no tree officers in post for 5 months despite efforts to recruit, and it took some time to get on top of enquiries, leading to an increase in member chasers.

6.3. The current contractors have not been challenged with specific KPIs to adhere to, however they are all observed for quality of work as well as the safety of the operations. Once the new contract commences (November, but the team is hoping to bring this forward), KPIs will be recorded, with the officers expected to undertake inspections of at least 10% of the works orders issued. The following specific performance indicators will be in operation for the new contract, and on top of this, there is an indicator around trees to be planted, pruned, staked and removed in accordance with the specification, with a rectification timescale of 7 days and default notices for failure to rectify within these timescales.

#### 6.4. New Key Performance Indicators:

Completion of orders	95% of orders to be completed within timescales prescribed by Authorised Officer.
Requests for estimates	To be provided within 7 days of request.
Works programmes	To be provided within 7 days of request.
Notification of completed works	Notification of works completed to be provided within 7 days of completion.

### 7. Tree Policy and Tree Strategy

7.1. Havering has never formally adopted a specific tree policy. As such, a brand new policy and accompanying strategy has been drafted, and is currently under review by business partners. This will then be subject to the appropriate internal governance processes. The Strategy's vision is:

*To preserve, improve and secure a nett gain of the Council's tree stock for current and future generations, adhering to the "right tree, right place" principal.*

7.2. The aims, objectives and outcomes of the draft Tree Policy are subject to change, and the team is considering looking to include reference to climate change mitigation. The draft policy currently reads as follows:

- To manage the Council's tree stock in accordance with good arboriculture and streetscape practice to BS standard 3998.
- To maintain the Council's tree stock on a regular cyclical basis.
- To increase the stock of trees in an appropriate manner by seeking both grant funding and private sponsorship.
- To inform and educate residents and businesses about the value of trees, and explore ways for greater involvement, consultation and protection from residents and businesses.
- To promote and secure high quality tree planting and landscaping within new developments in order to maintain and enhance the Borough's local landscapes.

### 8. Key risks

8.1. **Age:** Havering has an impressive and mature tree stock which is a valuable natural asset for its residents. However, these trees are aging and declining, and historically there has been no legacy planning for this. As such, there is a considerable difference in the range of the tree stock, causing visual inconsistencies.

8.2. **Deer:** Havering has experienced exceptionally high tree losses in the north due to the lack of effective deer management. This is both an issue for trees

and an animal welfare issue, and there is a separate piece of work being carried out by the Parks Development Team to address this.

- 8.3. **Driveways:** The conversion of front gardens in to driveways is both an issue for pressure on street trees as well as for SUDS and rainwater run-off issues.
- 8.4. **Value for money:** While the team is currently arguably achieving well above its capacity, especially in terms of tree planting, should Havering strive to achieve a nett gain in its tree stock, a strong financial commitment is needed to secure its future prosperity, particularly once newly planted trees start to require maintenance further down the line.

## **9. Strengths**

- 9.1. Havering has a small but highly passionate team of relatively 'new school' tree officers who are on the forefront of industry developments, regularly attending training and employing innovative techniques to enhance the borough's tree stock in imaginative ways.
- 9.2. Along with this, the team is forging relationships with other internal partners, such as the Parks Development Team, as well as external community groups and organisations who can offer free trees and voluntary labour to carry out planting where appropriate.
- 9.3. In the last year the team has been able to secure £0.230m of grant funding, as well as additional donations of trees. The team is applying for more funding this year, as well as continuing to work with local organisations to source more trees for planting. Havering's new waste and street cleansing contractor, Urbaser, has also committed to donating trees as part of the added value it is providing to the contract.

## **10. What's next?**

- 10.1. June 2023: submit funding application
- 10.2. August 2023: assuming funding is granted, purchase new tree stock
- 10.3. November 2023 – Feb 2024: Next round of tree planting (dependent on the above)
- 10.4. November 2023: Commencement of new tree maintenance contract
- 10.5. Future plans include:
- 10.6. School programme: The team would like to become more involved in community engagement and education of youngsters in the borough to fuel their enthusiasm for the natural environment.



- 10.7. Sponsorship scheme: Officers hope to relaunch this scheme in the next 12-18 months, as a way to encourage more tree planting on the public highway and enable residents to take more ownership of their surroundings.
- 10.8. The Team will continue to explore further opportunities across the service.

## IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

### **Financial implications and risks:**

The current tree budget sits at £0.486m, with further grant funding regularly applied for annually. The new contract commencing in November 2023 will be subject to annual inflationary reviews linked to indexation.

### **Legal implications and risks:**

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

### **Human Resources implications and risks:**

There are no specific implications for staff as a result of this report.

### **Equalities implications and risks:**

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to:

- (i) The need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) The need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) Foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Note: 'Protected characteristics' are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex/gender, sexual orientation.

The Council is committed to all of the above in the provision, procurement and commissioning of its services, and the employment of its workforce. In addition, the Council is also committed to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all Havering residents in respect of socio-economics and health determinants.

Due to the nature of this service, it will have a potential to impact all residents living in the Borough. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the separate contract procurement exercise, and will be kept under review. This EQHIA is not relevant for this particular report, which merely serves to update on existing services.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

Tree maintenance contributes to the environment by assisting to impact on reduction of carbon emissions. Healthy tree stock in the borough aids preparing for the impacts of climate change.