



Brixham Town Council

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Town Clerk: Mrs Tracy Hallett

Report Number	59-2021	Date	22 nd November 2021
Report Type	Public	Meeting	Community & Environment
Contact Officer	Linda McGuirk	Job Title	Deputy Town Clerk
Report Title	Garden Assistance Scheme review		

Summary

In September 2019 the Town Council resolved, minute number 19095, to:

- Implement a 'trial' subsidised garden assistance scheme, from April 2020, for residents over 70 years of age or disabled residents of Brixham Parish who do not have an able-bodied person living at their premises.
- Assisted garden service will be charged on an hourly rate of £10 for the first hour and £5 for additional hours. Minimum of one hour and a maximum of 10 hours per household per year.
- Carries out a review of the project in April 2021, after 12 months of service.
- Purchases a chipper / shredder from the Community Led Project Fund.
- Promotes the scheme through advertising and social media sites.

Demand for the service is higher than can be met by the existing team, evidence of demand is shown in the main body of this report. It is clear residents value the telephone communication with the office team as much as the help they receive with their gardens, often stating they "haven't spoken to anybody for days" and "the service is a lifeline", this should not be undervalued when considering the future of the service.

Pros and cons

- Administrative staff that left in April 2021 have not been replaced, resulting in a reactive service which is detrimental to the work of the remaining team.
- Service is oversubscribed with a waiting list, the Lengthsmen currently dedicate one day a week (5 one hour appointments) to the service. There is a back log of residents waiting for appointments (evidence shown below).

In summary, BTC has identified a vital service, with clear demand, which benefits the residents of Brixham. However, the Council is failing to meet the demands of the service due to a lack of resources.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Town Council:

1. Continues to operate a Garden Assistance Scheme.
2. Introduces a new pricing structure, £15 hour with no reduction for additional hours.
3. Removes the limit of ten appointments per household per year.
4. Offers a Chargeable garden clearance service, currently valued at £350 per day/ hourly rate pro rata.

- The Finance & General Purposes committee considers employing an additional Lengthsmen who could be responsible for the Garden Assistance Scheme appointments and additional garden clearance jobs.

Operational timeline

The project was halted by the pandemic, the timeline below demonstrates how the service was impacted by the pandemic:



The scheme has run continually from April 2021 which has provided a sufficient operational period to carry out a review of the service.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the Town Council assisted gardening service you must be:

- A Brixham resident.
 - 70 years of age or over and not living with able bodied person.
- or
- registered disabled and not living with an able-bodied person.

Admin time

The Council has not replaced office staff who left in April, causing a detrimental effect on the administration of the scheme. The workload has been picked up by the Administration Assistant and includes invoicing, banking, correspondence, telephone calls to make appointments, managing the appointments spreadsheet and liaising with the Lengthsmen. Approximately four hours a week are allocated to administering the garden assistance scheme. An important aspect of the scheme is the communication the residents receive from the Administration Assistant who has gone out of his way to build relationships with the residents, many who say the service has been a life line for them.

Operational capacity

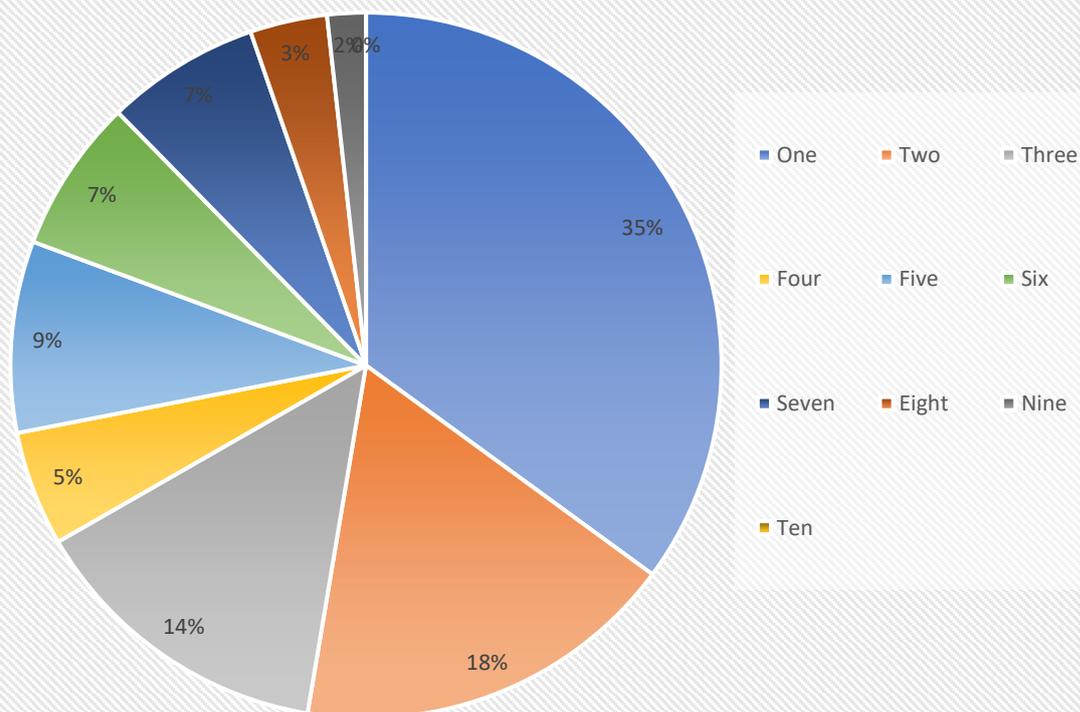
At the start of the scheme the office actively contacted registered applicants following an appointment to schedule another visit. Due to current staff shortages the onus is now on the resident to contact the office and request an appointment. Some residents have only had one appointment, it is believed if the Council offered a more proactive service these residents would continue to book appointments.

Registered applicants	57
Serviced applicants	57
*Waiting list	11

**The scheme is not being actively promoted. When advertised in the Signal it generates enquiries.*

The Chart on page 3 outlines the frequency of appointments e.g. 35% of people registered for Garden Assistance have received one appointment.

Frequency of appointments



Income & expenditure

Review is based on 193 hours of gardening over 33 weeks. Projected figures are based on the same period. The service was implemented as a subsidised service for residents and is supplemented by the Precept.

Income

Income from garden assistance appointments	
15 th October 2020 to 21 st December 2020	£190.00
30 th April to 4 th November 2021	£1,590.00
Total	1,780.00

*Expenditure

**Lengthsmen time – approximately 193 hours	£2,316.00
**Administration time - making appointments & invoicing – approx. 4 hours a week.	£1,716.00
Total	£4,032.00

* calculations do not include equipment depreciation, fuel costs, trips to the recycle centre.

** staff time based on cost of employment.

Balance

Current	
Income	£1,780.00
Expenditure	£4,032.00
Balance	-£2,252.00

Projected Income (£15 per hour, 5 days a week)	
£15 hour x 5 hours = £75 per day	£12,375.00
£75 per day x 5 days = £375.00 per week	
£375 per week x 33 weeks = £12,375.00	
Projected Expenditure (£15 per hour, 5 days a week)	
Lengthsmen time	£9,900.00
Number of hours	
25 hours per week x 33 weeks = 825 hours	
Administration time - making appointments & invoicing – approx. 20 hours a week.	£8,580.00
20 hours per week x 33 weeks = 660 hours	
Total	£18,480.00

Projected	
Income	£12,375.00
Expenditure	£18,480.00
Balance	-£6,105.00

The Garden Assistance Scheme has positively raised the profile of the Council and enabled BTC to engage with part of the community who can be hard to reach. It has also provided an opportunity to sign post residents to other services e.g. Brixham Does Care.

The reputation of the Lengthsmen's work is generating enquiries for larger scale clearances, predominantly from older residents in desperate need of help. These are requests which do not meet the criteria of the Garden Assistance Scheme but provide an opportunity to increase income. The Lengthsmen have carried out three garden clearances (income shown in the table below). Due to current resources the Lengthsmen have not been able to meet the demand for garden clearances, ensuring they are prioritising their duties in the community.

Income from garden clearance jobs (jobs too big to meet criteria of garden assistance)	
11 th October 2021	£216.00
18 th October 2021	£200.00
2 nd November 2021	£300.00
Total	£716.00

Based on the current cost of employment it is suggested charging a daily rate of £350 for both lengthsmen. This can then be calculated at a pro rata hourly rate. Requests will only be considered when day to day operational duties permit.

