

East Renfrewshire's maintenance 'hit squad' to continue

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Courtesy The Extra

A 'hit squad' tackling fly-tipping and carrying out maintenance in East Renfrewshire is set to continue its work until the end of March despite the contract expiring due to a council oversight.

By Drew Sandelands, Local Democracy Reporter

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VERG, a third-party contractor, has been managing a scheme in mixed tenure properties "with council houses and private homes" for the council since December 2015.

It oversees close cleaning and painting, garden maintenance and minor repairs.

The contract for the work expired in November 2019 and re-tendering was not started on time. The process did begin in March last year but was further delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Since 2019, the contractor has been allowed to continue running on a monthly basis on the same terms as the expired deal.

Council officers says the contract has provided a "much-needed very high-quality service".

Councillors will be asked to approve continuing the monthly payments until the end of March when they meet next week. Continuing the contract between December 2019 and March this year will cost Â£375,000.

"Unfortunately, due to an oversight the re-tendering process was not started on time," a council report states.

“When this was recognised and the re-tendering process recommenced just prior to March 2020 it was then further delayed due to staff having to deal with emerging Covid-related issues.”

The “Hit Squad”™ has been the main element of the contract, with around 10 staff dealing with problems.

However, the contractor also manages services through other private contractors, including garden maintenance, close cleaning, fence painting and replacement and footpath improvements.

During the pandemic, the “Hit Squad”™ has helped the council deliver food parcels for vulnerable residents, providing bank holiday cover for the environment department, sanitised handrails and door handles at Montgomery Court sheltered housing complex and removed increased fly-tipping.

“To have suspended this service due to the tendering/contract issue would have create health and safety risks for residents,” the council believes.

A re-tendering exercise for a new contract, which will begin in March this year, has started.

An online contracts register is being developed to ensure “a single source of accurate information” following the oversight.

“The system will include alert functionality for contract end dates ensuring sufficient time for officers to prepare for retendering activity,” the council report states.

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