



Local Garden Aid Service Changes

Exploratory discussion on the role of
community-led support in this space.



Background: What the Service Provided Previously

- Garden Aid – delivered by Falkirk Council - has long supported residents receiving Community Care Support by providing essential garden maintenance.
- Historically, this included regular grass cutting, hedge trimming, and other light outdoor tasks for people who were unable to manage these activities independently.
- Community Care Support means social-work-assessed support provided or arranged by Falkirk Council to help a person with daily living, care needs, or independent living.



What Changed in April 2025

- As of 1 April 2025, the eligibility criteria for Garden Aid were revised.
- To receive the service now, households must:
 1. Be in receipt of Community Care Support, and
 2. Either:
 - I. receive a Council Tax Reduction due to low income, or
 - II. be exempt from Council Tax because of Severe Mental Impairment (SMI).
- A new element was introduced for eligible council tenants whose gardens were refurbished with decorative stones. These tenants now receive three weed-control sprays per year.



Rationale for the Change

- September 2024 Falkirk IJB Papers highlight the rationale for updating the eligibility criteria was to ensure the service is targeted at households with the greatest financial need.
- The previous model provided the service to all Community Care Support recipients, regardless of income, which placed sustained financial pressure on both Falkirk Council and Falkirk HSCP.
- Aligning the Garden Aid scheme with Falkirk Council's broader Corporate Charging and Concessions Policy was intended to focus resources on low-income households and ensure the service remained deliverable within available budgets.



Local Figures

- Before the change, **2,881 households** across Falkirk received Garden Aid.
- After the new criteria were applied, **approximately 1,417 households** remained **eligible**.
- This means around **1,464 households** no longer receive the service.
- Among those who continue to qualify:
 - 1,284 receive Council Tax Reduction
 - 133 are exempt due to Severe Mental Impairment.

The change affected households across all tenure types, including council tenants, private tenants, and owner-occupiers.



Local Figures and Implementation

- The annual cost of delivering the Garden Aid Service was **£489,000**.
- By narrowing eligibility, the projected savings were **£248,000**, with:
 - £217,000 relating to Falkirk HSCP, and
 - £31,000 relating to the Housing Revenue Account, which is now reinvested into the additional weed-control service for eligible tenants with stone-covered gardens.
- In the months leading up to April 2025, Falkirk Council notified all households receiving Garden Aid about the changes.
- Letters outlined the new eligibility criteria, provided information on applying for Council Tax Reduction, and directed households no longer eligible to alternative support options - (unsure what these other options where).
- Full information on this can be found within [September IJB papers.](#)



So What?



So What?

- First major review of this service since 1996: No financial test had ever been applied before.
- Understand Falkirk HSCP's rationale for implementing service changes with the intention of protecting the service for those struggling the most financially amidst severe financial pressures for local authority and wider.
- **Emerging community need?**
 - Roughly since these changes were implemented, we at CVS Falkirk have received several points of contact from staff from third sector organisations and local authority enquiring if we know of a local third sector service in Falkirk providing gardening maintenance support as their clients did not qualify to receive the new service.
 - Anecdotally, people shared with us that their client either a) was waiting for their Community Care Support Plan to be implemented or b) did not qualify for new financial eligibility/had not applied for these benefits.



So What? (Cont'd)

- **Discussion questions:**
 - Have you noticed an increase in people asking your organisation for low-level practical help, like garden maintenance, over the last few months?
 - What pressures or impacts is this causing?
 - If so or have an example, would you be happy to share your experience?



Example – CRE Scotland



- **CRE Scotland (Community Renewal East)** is a helpful example of how community-led, hyper-local support can complement formal services - especially where low-level, practical help is needed.
- They are based in Edinburgh and for over 20-years, they have aimed to:
 - *“In each our three neighbourhoods we deeply listen, connect people to the support they need, build on strengths and stick with them as long as it takes. We are sharing learning which will rethink how Scotland can end persistent poverty and inequity.”*



Example – CRE Scotland

- Their activities include:
 - ✓ Mobilising local volunteers who can help with small, one-off tasks (e.g., tidying a garden, clearing paths).
 - ✓ Creating peer support networks, where neighbours support each other with seasonal tasks.
 - ✓ Reducing isolation by linking people into local social groups and activities at the same time as offering practical help.
 - ✓ Maintaining maintained outdoor spaces, which supports safety, pride in place, and overall wellbeing.



Example – CRE Scotland

- ✓ It demonstrates what is possible locally when communities are empowered.
- ✓ It shows a model that is not reliant on statutory services, but still supports independence.
- ✓ It highlights how early, light-touch interventions (like garden tidying) prevent more serious issues later.
- ✓ It reflects the type of preventative, person-centred work that many third sector organisations already deliver in Falkirk.



Discussion Questions

- There are many fantastic examples of community-led support in Falkirk - but very few, if any, that provide practical gardening maintenance.
 - From your perspective, is this true?
 - Based on what you're experiencing with clients, do you think we need one?
- What would help a community-led gardening support model succeed in Falkirk - and what barriers would need to be considered?
- Would the OPN play a role in this and what potentially could it be?