



Question Time:
Thrive Homes' Cleaning & Grounds
Maintenance Service

Wednesday 14th October 2020

We're pleased to share with you the full Questions and Answers from our recent Question Time event about our cleaning and grounds maintenance services.

All answers provided in this Q&A are provided in a general context for the benefit for all customers. Where questions have been submitted regarding a specific matter or property, we have responded directly.

If you have any further questions, feedback or would like to suggest another topic for a future event – please just email: getinvolved@thrivehomes.org.uk

Independently hosted by:

Andy Sage, Customer Experience Panel Chair

Thrive Expert Panel:

Anne Bijum - Assistant Director – Customer

Rebecca Handley - Relationship Management Lead

Natalie Clark - Customer Relations Team Leader

Cleaning service

Q1: Excluding financial information, what does the contract for cleaning stipulate?

Thrive works with two cleaning contractors - Pinnacle who provide services under Thrive's main contract and the majority of our housing stock, and Cleanscapes who provide services for our properties acquired from Moat.

Thrive has summarised what customers can expect from the cleaning service as part of our 'Offer and Ask'. This was posted to all tenants in June 2019 and can be found on our website by visiting: thrivehomes.org.uk/thrivedeal/

Most of our general needs blocks receive a fortnightly clean, whereas our sheltered schemes receive a weekly visit. The cleaning specification details the core tasks and frequency which remain the same all year round. The only exception is to stop mopping floors when temperatures are very low and floors could become icy.

Q2: What do you mean by stock?

We refer to all our properties as 'stock'.

Q3: Why are residents not automatically given copies of the contract's specification? There seems to be no control or monitoring by Thrive officers and there appears to be no monitoring by the contractor's line managers. Work is slipshod and careless if done at all.

The contract specifications are large documents that aren't easy to read at a glance which is why we took the decision to consolidate the key points into our [Offer and Ask](#) document. This makes it easy for our customers to have a quick look at what is expected without having to read through 12 pages of information for the cleaning specification and 43 pages of information for grounds maintenance.

The offer and ask information is readily available on our website so you can clearly see what the contractor is expected to do. You can view and download a copy by visiting: <https://thrivehomes.org.uk/thrivedeal/>

For those without internet access, a copy of our Offer and Ask pack was posted to all tenants in June 2019 and further hardcopies are available upon request. If customers would like a copy of the full specification, we are happy to provide this electronically. As a not-for-profit organisation we prefer to reserve funds to maintain existing and build more new homes and therefore - in line with our environmental initiatives and digital offer - this isn't automatically sent to everyone.

Q4: As we are charged a management fee, shouldn't Thrive be taking more responsibility and seeking credits for not up to standard cleans? Why is this being pushed to the residents?

During the last tender process, feedback from involved customers revealed that they wanted one place to report issues with the cleaning as they felt that they would get a quicker response if this was directly with the contractor.

When an issue is reported, the contractor sends a supervisor to check the standard of work. Thrive is provided with a monthly report of the number of complaints and can discuss these in the quarterly meeting we have with the contractor.

Thrive also carry out quarterly inspections of all communal areas and as part of this we inspect the standard of cleaning.

Where we are aware of an issue with the standard of cleaning in a flat block, we would ask the contractor to revisit to rectify rather than automatically ask for a credit.

If you continue to experience issues with the standard of cleaning, you can contact Pinnacle on 020 7017 2000 or Cleanscapes on 01306 711720.

Q5: Could there be a copy of the cleaning rota available on the website?

The new [myThrive hub](#) – an improved way for customers to manage their Thrive account online – is now live and you can register by [clicking here](#). We are looking to publish the rotas on the myThrive hub so customers can access this information on demand.

Q6: Why can't a simple contract be done?

Our cleaning and grounds maintenance documents are a lot more in depth and includes details about each site/block and their needs. Due to the value of the contract, we must follow a specific set of procurement rules which also includes health and safety information and environmental strategies.

A simple contract/document would not cover all this information. However, this information is consolidated in the Offer and Ask which is available on our [website](#).

Q7: Don't you think everyone should have an electronic copy of everything that affects us?

We always aim to be transparent with our customers. One of the benefits of the new [myThrive hub](#) is that we are able to provide documents to customers in one central place and customers will also be able to request further documents.

Q8: The cleaning standards are awful and do not justify the cost we pay.

As a not-for-profit organisation we are committed to providing good value for money. The cleaning contract has been through a competitive procurement and tender process, so we are confident the prices we are paying are in line with what the industry charges.

We are aware that the cleaning may have not been up to its usual standard over the past few months - this was as a result of some staffing issues during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. No cleans were missed but the contractors were rushing through all the sites to ensure everywhere was cleaned. We understand that the contractor is now fully staffed again and should be delivering usual services. If you continue to experience issues with the standard of the cleaning, you can contact Pinnacle on 020 7017 2000 or Cleanscapes on 01306 711720.

During the last tender process, the feedback we got from the involved customers was that they wanted one place to report issues with the cleaning. As such, we agreed that they would get a quicker response if this was directly with the contractor.

When an issue is reported, the contractor sends a supervisor to check the standard of work. Thrive is provided with a monthly report of the number of complaints and can discuss these our quarterly meetings with the contractor.

This process has slipped over the last year with issues being reported directly to Thrive but we are going to be reminding all customers of this process and hopefully this will decrease the time it takes to get issues resolved and customers will receive

a better service. You can refer to the [Offer and Ask](#) document on our website if you need clarification on what we expect from our contractors. Thrive also carry out their own quarterly inspections to monitor the standard of work.

Q9: What do the service charges relate to, is it just a surface clean or thorough service? The contractor is only there for 15 minutes, why is this?

Service charges relate to the cost of the service from the contractor. The service that is provided is detailed in the [Offer and Ask](#) which can be found on our website.

The contractor will be in the block for the length of time it takes to complete the tasks required on that visit. This may vary depending on the time of year and size of the communal area.

Q10: During COVID, should Thrive have provided a more intense clean? Where I live, it's basically every 2 weeks.

We did investigate the possibility of increasing cleans during lockdown. Unfortunately, our contractors were not able to accommodate this as they had to change working practices to adhere to health and safety guidelines.

The cleaners did concentrate on high contact points such as door plates, however - unless Thrive cleaned after each person came into the communal areas - the risk from COVID-19 wouldn't be reduced. It is the responsibility of customers to keep themselves and others safe by washing or sanitising their hands before and after going through the communal areas.

Q11: Can Thrive not provide sanitiser in each block like most business providers have done in other areas?

In order to provide sanitiser, we would have to charge this back to customers which we would be unable to do without a full consultation. There are also practicalities around this - for example there are not representatives from Thrive in blocks daily to check when refills would be required. This is not something Thrive is currently considering however we would review this if it became a statutory requirement to provide hand sanitiser in all communal areas.

Q12: The internal cleaners do not have a set time or day and the cleaning roster has been taken down from our communal hallway.

Pinnacle follow a rota and advise Thrive what dates they are scheduled to visit a block and although they follow a similar pattern when visiting blocks each fortnight, the time that they attend a block does vary.

Signing-in sheets were removed from flat blocks when Pinnacle moved to a digital system. There is a barcode within each entrance that the team are required to log into when arriving and this brings up a checklist to complete – e.g. skirting boards, floors, windows etc. The team can attach photos and make notes within the app. They are also required to sign-out when leaving the block.

Our other contractor Cleanscapes still use a signing in sheet (this is in our ex-moat flat blocks). Thrive is looking into a solution to publicise the cleaning schedules online either on our website or the [myThrive hub](#).

Q13: Why have the sheets been taken away? Tenants can't see what cleaners have done now it has been taken away.

Signing-in sheets were removed from flat blocks when Pinnacle moved to a digital system, however, these are still being used by our other contractor Cleanscapes.

There is a barcode within each entrance that the team are required to log into when arriving and this brings up a checklist to complete – e.g. skirting boards, floors, windows etc. The team can attach photos and make notes within the app. They are also required to sign-out when leaving the block.

This information is something that Thrive is looking to publish on [myThrive hub](#). This will mean customers can check the work that the contractors have completed in the block.

Q14: Who monitors when Pinnacle have cleaned and checks on them?

Our sheltered schemes are inspected monthly by our contractor Pinnacle and a copy of the inspection report is provided to Thrive to follow up on any actions. All other flat blocks in our general needs blocks are inspected once a quarter by Thrive. These inspections look at any communal repairs, health and safety, tenancy issues and monitoring of the grounds maintenance and cleaning. We give each aspect such as cleaning, grounds maintenance and estate management a score of good enough or not good enough. Our colleagues also pick up on any issues when they are out and about on the estates and feed these back to the contractor. The contractor carries out their own audits and provides us with a monthly report. We also use customer feedback we receive to help us monitor the work.

Any issues picked up and escalated to our contractors are logged on a spreadsheet and we use this spreadsheet as a basis for discussion during our quarterly meetings with each contractor. Follow up actions are carried out as necessary.

Q15: I'm not sure who is responsible for the bins etc. However, at my property for example they are located so close to the back windows that in hot weather if you open them you can have anything up to 15/20 flies trying to come in particularly into the kitchen. Is there some way to move them further away possibly near the garages?

Thrive is responsible for communal bin areas and we ask customers to dispose of waste in the correct bin and clean their individual wheelie bins.

It is common for the wheelie bins in Thrive flat blocks to be located by the rear communal door as this is easily accessible by all customers. We would encourage

customers to speak to their neighbours about cleaning their bin if it is becoming an issue and ensure that bin lids are always closed.

At this block in particular, Thrive has visited to check if the bins could be relocated. Upon assessment at Grove Crescent, we discovered it would be possible to move only four out of the six bins for this block, and in doing so there would be no space for the bins for surrounding flat blocks. This would result in other entrances having to keep their bins by the back door.

If we were to move a bin area, we would consult with customers first and speak to the local authority before making a decision. There would be costs associated with moving the bin area and there is currently no budget for this.

Q16: Who is responsible for the council bins to prevent infestations and unsanitary conditions building up? Tenants don't own bins as they are communal and should not have to pay for this (I am talking of communal recycle bins)

Thrive is responsible for cleaning all communal bin areas. If there is an infestation within a communal bin, Thrive would raise a job separately to resolve this and any additional costs would be re-charged to all customers.

Q17: Why has no water supply been allocated to communal areas so windows in communal areas cannot be cleaned? Why can they not be provided with glass wipes if this is the case?

Very few of our flat blocks have communal water supplies. Therefore, it is for the cleaning contractor to provide all appropriate equipment, products and water if required. External communal windows should be cleaned quarterly and internal communal windows and doors should be cleaned on each visit.

Q18: The cleaning in my block is not good, this week was ok but for past few weeks they haven't washed our block or swept it and the bushes outside our windows need cutting down again and rubbish which people dump out there cars is always there and cans of beer

We are aware that the cleaning may have not been up to its usual standard over the past few months - this was as a result of some staffing issues due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. However, full service has resumed now.

If you continue to experience issues with the standard of cleaning, you can contact Pinnacle on 020 7017 2000 or Cleanscapes on 01306 711720.

One of our colleagues will be in touch with the questioner regarding the issues highlighted with the grounds maintenance.

Q19: Why after six months are there still bird droppings in the entry, stairs and landing areas?

Thanks for bringing this to our attention. We have now inspected this block and escalated the issues to our contractor.

Q20: Why does the stairs and landing not get cleaned?

The landing should be cleaned on each visit. We have inspected this block and escalated any issues we identified to the contractor.

If you continue to experience issues with the standard of the cleaning, you can contact Pinnacle on 020 7017 2000 or Cleanscapes on 01306 711720.

Q21: How logistically close/sync'd is the cleaning schedule is with regards to bin men attending? As there is always debris left which is now often quite unpleasant now that there are several children living in the blocks around the green.

Thrive is not responsible for the refuse service, this is carried out by your local authority. The bin areas are swept, litter picked fortnightly and jet washed quarterly. Unfortunately, we are unable to synchronise our contractors with the bin men.

Q22: Is external window cleaning included in the service?

External window cleaning for communal area windows is done once a quarter. Customers are responsible for cleaning their own windows.

Q23: Have the cleaners been told they have a certain amount of time to clean various properties?

The time allocated for each block is set by our contractor who manages their workforce. The cleaning specification has not changed since the contract started in 2016, and you can find out what is covered in our Offer and Ask on our website or by [clicking here](#).

Q24: Are there going to be any delays in cleaning or ground maintenance works due to current COVID-19 restrictions?

Our grounds maintenance contractor suspended works as a result of COVID-19 in April 2020, however, works resumed in May 2020. Our cleaning contractor has worked throughout this period and we are aware that at times there has been an impact on staffing levels due to them working in bubbles. This means that staff were not able to attend to so many sites.

Q25: Could you please advise why the maintenance and cleaning policy does not build in a window cleaning program? Repair of windows falls under Thrive responsibility but cleaning apparently not. Could this be included in future particularly in multi storey blocks?

External window cleaning for communal area windows is included in the contract and should be done once a quarter and internal communal windows and doors should be cleaned on each visit. Customers own external windows are their responsibility as per their tenancy agreement.

Q26: Please explain how two flights of stairs in the communal areas can be swept cleaned and washed by one operative in five minutes without hardly ever touching the floors? When questioned about masks and gloves due to COVID-19, I was given the answer “we have to supply our own equipment”. The outcome was that from March - Aug no cleaning was carried out.

Our records show that the contractor attended this block twice a month, each month between April and August. We have carried out an inspection of this block and could not identify any current concerns. We have also been in touch with the contractor who has assured us that all operatives are provided with appropriate PPE for use within the communal areas.

If you continue to experience issues with the standard of cleaning you can contact Pinnacle on 020 7017 2000 or Cleanscapes on 01306 711720.

Q27: Cleaner does not come often. Only seen a cleaner three times since August.

We promise to only charge customers for the services that they receive.

This is a new build flat block and unfortunately the cleaning contract was not set up prior to customers moving in. Our cleaning contractor was provided with keys around the end of July and visits should now be carried out each fortnight. We have contacted Pinnacle to confirm the dates attended and apologise for the delay in arranging this.

Q28: Why are customers expected to pay for removal of abandoned goods (for weeks on end) that are not reported to yourselves by Pinnacle?

Where Thrive is unable to identify who the item belongs to, the cost of removal is re-charged to the block via the service charges. This sometimes includes bulk waste left by the bin area and inside communal areas.

Within the specification with Pinnacle, items left in the communal area that are causing an obstruction should be reported to Thrive Homes. This is also enforced by our Field team on estate inspections. If you are of someone in your block who is leaving abandoned goods, please let us know.

Q29: Are entrance doors and door keypads cleaned according to COVID standards?

We've asked the cleaners to pay attention to any touch points within the block since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Q30: The decoration around the buildings is also poor. The paint is peeling off everywhere. The garden maintenance is a lot better. The road should be kept clean and swept but it isn't

Internal decoration of communal areas is part of our planned works programme and is carried out every 8 years. In the future we intend to make information about planned maintenance available on the [myThrive hub](#). Any health and safety works will be picked up on our estate inspections and followed up separately.

Clearance of moss, debris and weeds on hard surfaces or parking areas within Thrive's ownership should be picked up as part of our grounds maintenance contract. We are aware that the standards of grounds maintenance have fallen short of the required contract standard. This has been escalated several times by Thrive to the contractor but there has been little improvement. We have now taken the decision to end the contract early and will be procuring a new contractor.

Grounds Maintenance (GM)

Q1: Excluding financial information what does the contract for grounds maintenance stipulate?

Similar to our cleaning service, Thrive has a detailed grounds maintenance (GM) specification which sets out all core tasks. Some GM tasks are weather dependent, such as grass cutting and moss/leaf clearance, and other tasks are scheduled for certain times of the year.

The specification does not detail how many times a year the contractor is required to visit because the contract is an output-based contract rather than frequency, i.e. the contractor must meet the standards set out in the contract. However, they tend to set schedules for a fortnightly visit.

Thrive has produced a snapshot of what customers can expect from the grounds maintenance service as part of the Offer and Ask which can be found on our website or by [clicking here](#).

Q2: Why is our ground maintenance so bad and after endless phone calls and emails nothing is done about it. We pay for this service, why is a new contractor not being used to deliver a better service?

We have recognised the increasing number of complaints regarding GM and our inspections have identified that grounds maintenance has not been as good as it should be. This worsened during the coronavirus lockdown when our main grounds maintenance contractor stopped work for six weeks and furloughed all their staff. This meant that everything grew much more than it would normally, and we've been trying to work with them ever since to get the estates back to an acceptable standard.

A lot of issues raised in your questions have been escalated several times by Thrive to the contractor but there has been little improvement and it's for this reason we are now taking action to terminate the contract.

Our contracts require a minimum period of six months' notice and during this time we will be procuring for a new contractor. The new contract will be for three years initially with an option to extend for a further two years. This way, if we have future issues, we aren't tied into such a long contract. It should also be noted that a sufficient body of evidence needs to be built up if terminating a contract before the end date.

If customers are interested in helping us with the new specification for the contract or being involved in the tender process, we'd very much like to hear from you. You can express interest by emailing: neighbourhood@thrivehomes.org.uk

Q3: Why do the grounds contractors not clean up leaves and cut back trees and bushes obstructing pathways? The last two years I have done it myself for the safety of the residents of my block.

The contract specifies where leaves should be cleared, and bushes cut. Thrive is in the process of procuring a new contractor to deal with these problems. It's important that customers are involved in the tender to be able to voice their concerns – you can express interest by emailing neighbourhood@thrivehomes.org.uk. We will also send information to customers to give them the opportunity to be part of this process.

Q4: When there is a changeover of contractors there is ALWAYS an unclear direction of what the gardeners are supposed to be cutting and strimming. By the time they have come to grips with gardens and the area, Thrive change the contractors.

Thrive work with three contractors for the grounds maintenance and have had the current contract in place with our main provider for the past 4.5 years. The other contractors cover mainly our new build homes and those purchased from other landlords.

We are aware of changes with our main contractor being bought out by another company during the term of their contract with Thrive, and this may account for the changeover of teams.

We have maps which were drawn up by the current and previous contractors that show Thrive's boundaries and areas that require maintenance – e.g. grass areas, shrubs and hard surfaces and these will be updated during the new tender process. We will also be working closely with the new contractor to ensure they are clear on their responsibilities. This will include familiarisation visits where the contractor visits each site to establish responsibilities.

Q5: Why is a grass box not used?

Before we awarded the existing grounds maintenance contract, we held a workshop with customers to talk about the level of service customers wanted and this was one of the discussions that the group held. As it costs more to collect the grass cuttings and dispose of them on every visit, it was decided by the involved customers that in order to keep the costs down the contract should specify that grass should be collected on the first cut of the season only. All other visits in the year receive a cut and drop service. This can be discussed again as part of the consultation with customers when the new contract is re-tendered.

Q6: What's happened to the tree cutting taking place twice a year? Oct & March the trees around our building are all overgrown or dead. I had to cut some branches away this spring so that we could use the pathway. I did report it to the office but had no response.

We carried out a tree survey on all trees in our communal areas in 2016 and we separated the work to Priority 1 and 2. Health and Safety works were done the first year and other works over the following two years. We'll be carrying out a tree survey

as part of the re-tendering of the contract and work will be scheduled in on a risk-based approach over the coming years.

There has never been any commitment to carrying out tree maintenance twice yearly. The GM contractor inspects all trees annually and is responsible for cutting back any branches at head height and removing any shoots starting to grow at the bottom of the trees.

We apologise that a response was not provided regarding this enquiry. We have now investigated this specific enquiry and can confirm that the trees you're referring to are the responsibility of the local authority.

We are working to provide information and maps on the [myThrive hub](#) so that customers can see who is responsible for the tree in question. This will hopefully make it more clear as to who is responsible and who needs to be contacted, whether this is Thrive or the local authority.

Q7: How are contractors dealing with existing failings and this is reflected in their invoicing to Thrive?

Thrive is requiring contractors to revisit sites where we are aware of an issue and it is their responsibility to rectify. These revisits are not charged to Thrive as an additional cost. Where Thrive receive a credit as a result of any missed visit this value will be passed onto customers and reflected in their service charges (please see more details in Q8 about charges).

Q8: Why were we charged during lock down when we were doing it ourselves?

We promise to only charge customers for the services that they receive.

Each year we calculate estimates based on the previous year's charges and use this to set your service charge amount that comes into effect on 1st April. We wrote to all customers in February 2020 confirming their estimated service charge amount for 2020-2021. Of course, at that point we didn't expect services to cease or change.

If your contractor was furloughed and we then had to make additional visits to help get the GM back to standards - although you won't be charged for when the contractor didn't visit - you will be charged for additional visits (outside the scope of the contract).

In September 2021 you will be sent a statement which will explain what we spent on services (including GM) during the period of April 2020-March 2021. Leaseholder adjustments will be made in September 2021. Adjustments for tenants' service charges for 2020-21 are made in 2022/23 (April).

We have put together an example 'case study' of when a customer receives estimated costs of services and when they receive the actual costs. This process varies for tenants as it does for leaseholders and shared owners, so we have develop two versions accordingly:

- To access the tenant version, [click here](#)
- To access the leaseholder and shared owner version, [click here.](#)

Where our contractor did not provide the service we expected, we were able to use our in-house property maintenance team, Thrive Homes Services, to attend some blocks. Where these were attended the service charge will remain the same. Some contractors continued throughout, so charges will be dependent on each individual block.

Q9: What can Thrive do about the repeated fly tipping on my estate?

Thrive can only take formal action where we can identify the offenders. This is usually as a result of name/address on items/packaging or customers providing Thrive with a statement if they witnessed it.

We understand that it is frustrating for customers to see repeat fly-tipping within their neighbourhood and we look to resolve issues on a case by case basis. We adopt a number of strategies as shown by the example below.

One example of where Thrive has tried a number of actions is a communal bin area used by several customers where we have seen bulk waste being left as well as bins contaminated, and black bags left on the floor rather than in the bin.

Customers were initially spoken to at sign-up and provided with recycling information for the local area. When the issues started, letters were sent to all block customers and recycling information fixed to the bin area. However, issues continued and often our cleaning team were having to pick up excess waste and remove bulk waste.

We arranged for cameras to be installed however these were vandalised as well as the signs removed. Thrive spoke with the local authority and arranged for the bin area to have gates and a lock fitted –sadly the lock has since been cut and issues are on-going.

Whilst it is proving challenging, we will continue to work with customers to try and gather information about the person(s) responsible.

Where Thrive is unable to identify who has carried out the fly-tipping, we have to recharge all customers for the additional service. If there are issues within your neighbourhood and you are aware of who is responsible, please report this to us.

Q10: Would tenants be prepared to pay for CCTV?

We would need to consult with customers to find out if they would be willing to pay for this additional service before putting forward a case to install CCTV at any location. This would only be considered where we have a very serious problem area.

Q11: Why are all tenants charged for one person's fly tipping? You are asking neighbours to grass out other neighbours placing them at risk of confrontation

Where Thrive is unable to identify who the item belongs to, the cost of removal is re-charged to the block via the service charges. This is an additional service to the

block, which is not included within your existing service charges and so the cost has to be recovered as an extra charge. If we know who dumped the item, we can charge it to them but if we don't then the cost is split between the whole block. This sometimes includes bulk waste left by the bin area and inside communal areas.

If you do have information about who is responsible for fly-tipping within your area, please let us know. Your details will remain confidential.

Q12: Can Thrive put notices on things to say it is in hand?

If customers put out their own bulk waste for collection by the local authority which they would be responsible for arranging, we encourage them to please label it to say it is going to be picked up and when so both Thrive and their neighbours know. It must be placed out of the way so it doesn't cause an obstruction and should never be left in internal communal areas. We know that bulk removals are done very frequently so things shouldn't be left out longer than necessary.

Q13: How does Thrive plan to assist tenants who are not physically or financially able to maintain their gardens as required by their leases?

All customers are made aware of their contractual obligations with regards to their gardens when they sign their tenancy or lease. It remains their responsibility for the lifetime of their tenancy or lease and they need to make alternative arrangements if they become unable to maintain their gardens themselves. Thrive can assist by signposting to other organisations who may be able to help such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau or Herts Help for accessing useful services. Local authorities often have up to date details for local services which can assist and are best placed to help.

Q14: Before moving in why is the garden left in a bad state?

Before a customer moves in Thrive will cut back any allocated garden for the new customer to maintain going forward. Although we try to complete this work before a customer signs-up, this may not be done until a few weeks after they move in however, they will be kept informed.

Q15: Can a support network with tenants be set up to offer their services?

Unfortunately, this isn't something we are currently able to facilitate. We would recommend that you check with local services to see if there is something similar already available in your area to sign up to or speak to your local authority who may be able to put you in touch with relevant services.

Q16: If residents planted our own plants in areas where there is currently bare ground, would Thrive cut them down or remove them?

We don't give permission for customers to plant their own plants in what is communal land, however we are aware that some customers have done this without

permission and there may be sections of the communal area not maintained by the contractor for this reason.

Anything planted without permission wouldn't be maintained by the contractor as this is not something covered under the contract. We've had issues in the past where someone has been given permission and done a lovely job maintaining an area but then moved out and the next tenant isn't as green fingered and so that area gets overgrown and we get complaints. They may also cause issues for the contractor as most bare patches are left this way so the contractor can weed spray to maintain them cheaply and easily, keeping costs to a minimum for our customers. If customers start planting their own plants, they won't be able to do this and costs will increase.

Q17: Are tenants not allowed to put playing equipment in the garden?

It is a requirement of Thrive's tenancy agreement to keep the internal communal areas clear. However, items in the communal garden are looked at on a case by case basis. For example, toys or a paddling pool would be permitted to be used in the communal garden providing they are not left unattended and are taken away at the end of each use.

Q18: Grounds maintenance is a waste of space, never looks like it has been done. I've always said to Thrive why don't you let the ground floor in the flats fence there bit off as then we can look after the grass, but Thrive keep refusing even though I said it would be cheaper for them even if Thrive fenced each section. It's got to be cheaper. As for when they cut the grass they never unblock the drains so it ends up with blocked drains and blocked sinks.

We are aware that the standards of grounds maintenance have fallen short of the required contract standard. This has been escalated several times by Thrive to the contractor but there has been little improvement. We have now taken the decision to end the contract early and will be procuring a new contractor.

We have not granted permission for customers to take ownership and have an allocated space within the communal garden previously. This is because the maintenance is covered by all customers within the block who have equal use of the space. In some areas, not all customers on the ground floor have the desire to have an allocated garden and it would need to be consistent throughout the block(s) should we look to explore this option further.

We appreciate that some customers are keen gardeners, and should they wish to carry out additional works between visits Thrive would welcome this. However, there is no obligation to do so and this would not result in a reduction of service charges.

Q19: Have you considered asking MK Council whether they would take on the grounds maintenance and cleaning for Old Groveway?

Our grounds maintenance and cleaning is covered within Thrive's overall contract/tender process. Therefore, we are would not look to sub-contract individual sites to different providers, including the local authority.

By having a single contractor Thrive is able to receive better value for money and supports the provision of consistent standards.

Q20: What could I do about the repeated fly tipping on my estate?

If you are aware of who is causing the fly-tipping, and it is safe to do so, please speak to the person(s) responsible. Alternatively, please report this to Thrive Homes so we can follow up. It is useful to provide as much information as possible when reporting, including: item(s) fly-tipped, location, if you know who is responsible and any other evidence.

Q21: Why are some areas of my estate looked after but not others?

The area referred to by this questioner was missed off the previous contract. We apologise for this and we have now made arrangements to clear this area and will ensure it will be included in the new contract.

Q22: Why are communal gardens left to get to ridiculous lengths prior to being mown? Why is weeding not completed around the communal areas of flats preventing access to gas boxes etc?

This is not the standard we expect across our properties. We are aware of some issues at Kentish Street which have been raised with the contractor. Thrive will continue to monitor the standard of work during our quarterly estate inspections.

As part of the re-procurement for our grounds maintenance contractors, this location will be picked up by new provider once in post and therefore we would expect the standard of work to improve.

Q23: The wall outside 20&21 is actually moving due to the roots of the trees, when is that being sorted?

Thank you for bringing this to our attention. We have asked a surveyor to come and inspect the wall and carry out any necessary work. If you identify any other issues, please report these to us as soon as you can.

Q24: Why are unauthorised objects left in garden when this is against our tenancy agreement? No one does anything.

It is a requirement of Thrive's tenancy agreement to keep the internal communal areas clear. However, items in the communal garden are looked at on a case by case basis. For example, toys or a paddling pool would be permitted to be used in the communal garden providing they are not left unattended and taken away at the end of each use.

Q25: Why do tenants have to pay ground maintenance when they are prevented from using a commercial garden?

The communal gardens are there for all customers to use. If you experience an issue where another customer is preventing you from using a communal space, please contact us so we can look into this. All customers in a block share the costs of the maintenance of the communal garden whether they choose to use it or not.

Q26: How often should communal garden grass be cut? It has been cut twice in 6 months and was left overgrown the whole of summer.

Our Offer and Ask documents set out the standards which customers can expect to receive – this can be found on our [website](#).

The grass should be between 20mm and 50mm in height. There are no set number of visits specified but it shouldn't grow more than this. As mentioned, we are aware of these issues and have taken the decision to end the grounds maintenance contract early and will be procuring a new contractor.

Q27: Are they [the contractor] responsible for deweeding? (We are unable to access our gas meters to collect readings due to over grown weeds surrounding the building, I also was unable to open all my windows for ventilation in the heatwave due to the weeds being tall enough to come in the window of my ground floor flat.

Yes, the contractor should be de-weeding as part of their service. We have looked into this matter and understand this issue has now been rectified.

Q28: Why is edging, weeding and trimming not done on each visit?

Edging is a task which is completed once a year usually over the winter months. Trimming hedges is done as required not on every visit. Weeding should be completed every visit.

Q29: Why do we pay weekly, but the grass is flattened once a month?

The full cost for the year is divided equally and collected in line with your rent frequency as set out in your tenancy agreement/lease.

Q30: I've noticed during the lockdown (with children and those working from home more) the bins often end up with extra bags sitting outside for days because they only come every two weeks. I would welcome any thoughts on this. In particular if worst case scenario and there is another lockdown will this be taking into account this time.

The frequency of bin collections is set by the local authority and Thrive has no input on this. Some families may be able to request a larger bin should they meet the criteria and should contact their local authority for further information. Any excess or bulk waste is the responsibility of the customer to dispose of correctly – e.g. using a local tidy tip.

Q31: I've come down when there was a short heavy downpour. A neighbour must have put a bag with food in the normal dustbin. The whole area including

the three bins was literally covered in crawling maggots. These bins are directly under the kitchen windows so on the next day when it was over 30°, I had to keep the windows closed the whole day. It was almost suffocating.

It is the responsibility of customers to keep their own bins clean and we encourage customers to discuss any issues with their neighbours. The bin areas are swept and litter picked fortnightly and jet washed quarterly as part of the cleaning contract.

If additional services are needed because customers are not using the bins correctly, this is something Thrive would carry out however there would be an additional charge.

Q32: If you have to leave large items outside such as Christmas trees or white goods etc as you're waiting for a collection. Is there some way to get this information known. So that you don't receive letters regarding it, but also for people who have just dumped stuff so we are able to tell the difference.

If customers put out their own bulk waste for collection by the local authority which they would be responsible for arranging, we encourage them to please label it to say it is going to be picked up and when so both Thrive and their neighbours know. It must be placed out of the way so it doesn't cause an obstruction and should never be left in internal communal areas. We know that bulk removals are done very frequently so things shouldn't be left out longer than necessary.

Q33: Several people have created a garden type space on the ground floor in front of the patio doors. In some cases putting up some type of fencing. The downside of this is that the front lawn areas can now become very messy with debris such as nappies, babies cups, children's toys et cetera et cetera. Who is responsible for cleaning this up and how frequently?

The gardens around this block (Grove Crescent) are communal and therefore Thrive's responsibility to maintain. A litter pick should be carried out by our grounds maintenance contractor before works commence on a fortnightly basis.

We will carry out an estate inspection and follow any issues with the relevant customers.

Q34: Why do they cut the grass on a Saturday morning when I have been on call and working all night?

Although the general rota is scheduled for Monday to Friday, the contractor is permitted to make ad hoc visits on a Saturday morning between 8am and 12noon. They may do this when they have been delayed by the weather or got behind due to staff absence.

Q35: Could you explain why we pay for the maintenance of boundary trees to the car park outside our homes in Talbot Road. If the cost of this car parking area is our responsibility, why do we have to pay Three Rivers to park there? This area is not just for the use of those living in the flats opposite. It has a public pathway running through it.

Thrive own the parking area at the front of Talbot Road and therefore we are responsible for the maintenance of this area and the boundary hedges. The parking restrictions were in place prior to this land being transferred to Thrive Homes in 2008 by Three Rivers District Council.

Thrive is currently working with TRDC to better understand the parking arrangements in place and will provide the questioner with a full response directly.

Q36: Also other Three Rivers area C customers can also park in 'our' area, Three Rivers also intend to issue parking permits to local businesses to park there. Surely we shouldn't be subsidising local businesses?

Thrive is currently working with TRDC to better understand the parking arrangements in place and will provide you with a full response directly.

Q37: Pollinators and insects are under extreme pressure which also has a knock on effect on birds and bats. During lockdown the grass at Barn Lea was un-mowed and this led to some beautiful wild flowers springing up. They looked lovely in the grass and were a feast for bees and other insects. Disappointing then that mowing started again and they were all lost. What is your biodiversity policy and approach?

Unfortunately, not all customers share your view and whilst you enjoy these wilder areas other customers complain about the lack of maintenance. We are unable to satisfy everyone, and our standards mean the grass should be kept between 20mm and 50mm high.

Q38: Will there be a rebate in our maintenance bill as the gardeners have been here for a total of less than 10 hours at a cost to the customers since NOVEMBER19 of £2.500appx,that's before Covid19,and have only cut the grass!! My solicitor wants to become a Thrive gardener so that he can earn more money!! and probably do a better job.

Any adjustments for the period the contractors were not attending will be reflected in next years' service charges. You will not be charged for the period they didn't attend.

Q39: Grounds maintenance is quite frankly embarrassing. The boundary fence is in quite a shocking condition and upon complaint a small section was fixed and most likely only because it affected a non-customer {neighbour}. The gardening team have been non-existent in the year I've been here and the one occasion we had a team here they did an appalling job and id be surprised if they had a proper Gardner on the team. We have a large fir tree which is half dead and losing large branches regularly which is quite dangerous and

another reason no customers use that part of the garden but I imagine it will be left until it actually hurts someone.

As previously mentioned, we are aware that the standards of grounds maintenance have fallen short of the required contract standard. This has been escalated several times by Thrive to the contractor but there has been little improvement. We have taken the decision to end the contract early and will be procuring a new contractor. Our Field team will visit to inspect the current condition of the garden, including the tree you are referring to and provide you with some feedback directly.

If customers are concerned about the safety of a falling or fallen tree, we encourage them to get in touch with us as soon as possible and can do so by calling 0800 917 6077.

Q40: Why has the noticeboard been removed in this block?

The noticeboard did not have a fire-proof cover and therefore was removed in line with our Fire Risk Assessment.

Q41: Why has the rear of my block not been 'maintained' in over 2 years?

Following a recent inspection, this area has been maintained over the past two years however it has been highlighted that a small unused pathway has been missed which we have picked up with our grounds maintenance contractor.

Q42: On behalf of the customers , we would like to know how often our grass at both back and front of the block should be getting cut? as it's not being cut on a regular basis, and when they do turn up they cut the front and not the back, if we're lucky they may do both!! very very lazy!! and this is not the service that we, the customers are paying for, do you agree. We do use the communal gardens at the back especially during these difficult times with covid 19

Our Offer and Ask documents set out the standards which customers can expect to receive – this can be found on our [website](#).

The grass should be between 20mm and 50mm in height. There are no set number of visits specified but it shouldn't grow more than this. As mentioned, we are aware of these issues and have taken the decision to end the grounds maintenance contract early and will be procuring a new contractor.

Q43: Why are the customers being told to remove their tables/chairs, flower pots from outside their patio doors. They are being asked to put them inside at night but the grounds maintenance people do not attend at night.

It is a requirement of Thrive's tenancy agreement to keep the communal areas clear, however items in the communal garden are looked at on a case by case basis.

We ask all customer to take in personal belongings when they are not using them to ensure the communal areas are always kept clear .

Q44: Why are people being denied the option of sitting in their gardens. Would it not be possible for customers to look after their own grass outside their doors?

The communal gardens are there for all customers to use, if you are having an issue where another customer is preventing you from using a communal space, please contact us so we can investigate this

We do not grant permission for customers to take ownership and have an allocated space within the communal garden. This is because the grounds maintenance is paid for by all customers within the block who have equal use of the space.

In some areas not all customers on the ground floor have the desire to have an allocated garden and it would need to be consistent throughout the block(s) should we look to explore this option further. We appreciate that some customers are keen gardeners, and should they wish to carry out additional works between visits Thrive would welcome this, however there is no obligation to do so and this would not result in a reduction of service charges.