

# Public Document Pack

**Date of meeting**      Tuesday, 25th February, 2014  
**Time**                      7.00 pm  
**Venue**                      Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, Merrial Street,  
Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, ST5 2AG  
**Contact**                      Julia Cleary 742227

## **Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

### **AGENDA**

#### **PART 1 – OPEN AGENDA**

- 1**      **Declarations of Interest**
- 2**      **Apologies**
- 3**      **Minutes from the Previous Meeting**                      **(Pages 1 - 4)**
- 4**      **Public Sector Commissioning in Partnership, Briefing Paper**                      **(Pages 5 - 8)**
- 5**      **ALLOTMENTS REVIEW WORKING GROUP**                      **(Pages 9 - 16)**  
The Policy will be sent to follow.
- 6**      **Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Update Report and Action Plan**                      **(Pages 17 - 20)**
- 7**      **PORTFOLIO HOLDER QUESTION TIME**  
Cllr Elizabeth Shenton and Cllr Gareth Snell will be in attendance.
- 8**      **WORK PLAN**                      **(Pages 21 - 24)**  
To discuss and update the work plans to reflect current scrutiny topics
- 9**      **URGENT BUSINESS**  
To consider any business which is urgent within the meaning of Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

**Members:**      Councillors Bailey (Vice-Chair), Cairns (Chair), Miss Cooper, Mrs Cornes, Mrs Heesom, Miss Olszewski, Plant, Mrs Rout, Taylor.M, Miss Walklate and Mrs Winfield

**PLEASE NOTE:** The Council Chamber and Committee Room 1 are fitted with a loop system. In addition, there is a volume button on the base of the microphones. A portable loop system is available for all other rooms upon request.

**Members of the Council: If you identify any personal training/development requirements from any of the items included in this agenda or through issues raised during the meeting, please bring them to the attention of the Democratic Services Officer at the close of the meeting.**

**Meeting Quorums :- 16+= 5 Members; 10-15=4 Members; 5-9=3 Members; 5 or less = 2 Members.**

Officers will be in attendance prior to the meeting for informal discussions on agenda items.

## ACTIVE AND COHESIVE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 3rd October, 2013

- Present:** Councillor Reginald Bailey – in the Chair
- Councillors:** Councillor Reginald Bailey, Councillor Mrs Dylis Cornes, Councillor Mrs Gillian Heesom, Councillor Miss Sophie Olszewski, Councillor Glyn Plant, Councillor Miss June Walklate and Councillor Mrs Joan Winfield
- Portfolio Holder(s):** Cllr Mrs Elsie Bates – Leisure and Culture
- Officers:** Dave Adams – Executive Director, Operational Services  
Robert Foster – Head of Leisure and Cultural Services  
Martin Stevens – Scrutiny Officer  
Louise Stevenson – Scrutiny Officer  
Roger Tait – Head of Operations

### 1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Cairns and Cllr Mrs Rout.

### 2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

### 3. **KEELE GOLF COURSE**

The Executive Director, Operational Services introduced the report for Keele Golf Course and gave an overview of the process to procure a new tenant to manage, develop and maintain the facility. It had been an important priority that the company who took on the lease developed the course and rebuilt the strong reputation it had previously enjoyed.

The Head of Cultural and Leisure Services explained the golf management aspects of the process and the evaluation process. The invitation to bid stage had included the Heads of Terms, in order to inform the prospective bidders of the Councils principle requirements for the lease. There were time pressures to let the lease, and early agreement of the Heads of Terms from the two invited bidders was an important element to ensuring an expedient start to the new management arrangements.

Following a condition assessment by officers, a Schedule of Works detailed the work that was required to the buildings and illustrated that they had fallen into disrepair in a number of areas. The Schedule of Works would also bring the course back up to a good standard and also ensured that the bidders were clear as to the works and standards the Council expected. It was necessary to ensure that the facilities were brought back up to a minimum standard in a reasonable timescale to prevent any further deterioration.

With regard to operational management, in particular the grounds maintenance and golf management aspects, the focus was to ensure the course could become a place where golf was developing and growing. Golf Association members had reduced in recent years, having decreased at its lowest point to around forty members, although it was noted it had now increased to fifty members. Officers emphasised the importance of the Golf Association and including them in the journey to improve the course. It was also important to keep the Association informed of developments and the Head of Operations had met with them to this end. Another priority was that the course should be maintained as a pay and play course and younger players encouraged to take up the sport. The Operational Management Schedule asked the interested parties to address these issues and include in their bids how they would develop, teach, and encourage more people to take up of golf, and to also link in with education in schools.

In developing golf at the course it was important to ensure the course itself was at a high standard, as more people would play if it was in good condition. Both of the submissions received had addressed these important issues. The Head of Operations explained the elements of the process which focused on the improvement of the course. The course had required attention and a report from the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) had been commissioned to provide a condition assessment for the course. This was a detailed report by an expert in the field of sports surfaces. Whilst there was no quick fix to bring the course up to standard, a programme of work and investment would be undertaken over three years to bring the course up to a minimum standard. The STRI report had been provided to the bidders and they were informed that they would be required to illustrate how they would deliver the recommendations in the report. It was noted that there was the potential for the winning bid to go over and above what was recommended in the report to improve the course.

The previous tenant had held the lease at the golf course for approximately ten to twelve years, and Members questioned the state of the properties and the greens. They considered that the course must have deteriorated quite soon after the previous tenants took over the lease. They felt the work required was considerable and questioned whether what was being offered was a viable proposition. There had been concerns about the condition of the course and the buildings for some time and discussions had taken place with the previous operator with a view to improving them. These discussions reached a point where it became evident that the former operator was not going to deliver what the Council was asking them to complete and the management of the course was changed when the opportunity arose. Detailed surveys were then undertaken and the extent of the deterioration at the course was understood. Moving forward, however, the picture was positive. Both bids were sound; the companies had good reputations and knew the golf industry well. Furthermore, the fact that they had submitted sound bids illustrated that in their view the course was viable.

Members questioned whether the lease contained provisions to check that the work the winning bidder undertook was completed to the required standard. It was important that other areas did not deteriorate whilst the identified areas for improvement were addressed. The STRI report and the Schedule of Improvements would form part of the monitoring process. It was acknowledged that the monitoring process with the previous operator had not been robust enough, but this would be addressed with the new lease.

Members further questioned what the timescales were for the essential works detailed on the Schedule of Works. There was a clear timeframe the works to be

completed between three and five years and also within ten years, but no time frame for the essential works. The Executive Director, Operational Services would take this point back to officers from the Property Section and communicate the answer to the Committee.

The Executive Director, Operational Services reassured the Committee that whoever the preferred bidder was, their plans would meet the Council's requirements, as they had already agreed to the Heads of Terms, Schedule of Works etc. as a bare minimum. Although they could carry out the work earlier than they had agreed to or perform more work if they wished. Added value had been one of the evaluation criteria when the bids had been scored.

The vice-Chair expressed a concern about the renewal of the gas boiler within three to five years, and whether it should be moved to essential work. The Executive Director, Operational Services undertook to discuss the boiler with the Facilities Manager, with the intention of seeking reassurance that the boiler was not hazardous. It was noted that one of the two bidders had indicated that they would refurbish the club at an early stage and Cabinet would be aware of this when they were deliberating over their decision.

Cabinet would make their decision on 16 October 2013. Once the winning bid had been decided upon, the Executive Director, Operational Services agreed that their business plan could be shared with the Committee in order for them to see what the Council would be monitoring against.

**RESOLVED:** (a) That the Committee are satisfied with the golf development and course grounds maintenance aspects of the tender process that has been undertaken.

(b) That clarification be sought of the timeframe for 'essential works' as contained in the Condition Schedule.

(c) That the Executive Director, Operational Services ascertain from the Facilities Manager the condition of the boiler and seek an assurance that it is not hazardous.

#### 4. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business within the meaning of Section 100 B (4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

**COUNCILLOR REGINALD BAILEY**  
Chair

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**Report to Active and Cohesive Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
25 February 2014  
Public Sector Commissioning in Partnership (PSCiP)**

**1. Background:**

- 1.1 The initial concept of the PSCiP programme at the outset was aimed at recognising the potential of significant savings for all countywide partners involved in the collaboration process when commissioning from the voluntary/third sector across Staffordshire.
- 1.2 At this time, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council (NuLBC), had already launched and was successfully working within its own protocols and procedures linked to its 'third sector commissioning framework' a framework that was shared and adopted by a number of public sector organisations.
- 1.3 NuLBC in collaborating with the County Council and PCTs as part of the PSCiP programme have been the only district to identify the benefits of such work, with a number of similar authorities monitoring outcomes as the work develops and contracts are let.
- 1.4 As part of the work, NuLBC retain the responsibility for needs analysis, priority setting, determining the service they want and will be involved in shaping the service specifications/outlines to make sure they meet their needs.
- 1.5 NuLBC officers are an integral part of the PSCiP commissioning/tender process, they will also have a voice as part of the ongoing monitoring process following mobilisation of new contracts ensuring any issues linked to performance with the successful service provider are reviewed and appropriately responded to.
- 1.6 Officers at NuLBC continue to contribute, support and maintain a profile as part of the work of PSCiP programme, albeit the focus for Newcastle has been linked to two specific service areas: Infrastructure Support & Volunteering Service and Debt, Benefits and Consumer Advice.
- 1.6 A contract for Infrastructure Support & Volunteering Service was awarded to Voluntary Action Stoke-on-Trent (VAST) in April 2013 as a result of the PSCiP programme.

**2. Benefits from the programme:**

- 2.1 It is believed that shared commissioning will create efficiencies for public sector organisations through back office rationalisation including finance, legal, admin, commissioning, procurement and performance management. Whilst these efficiencies would be significant for larger public sector organisations, in terms of staff resource district borough councils - with smaller investment levels - should also see a reduction in staff time currently committed to all elements of the commissioning/grant process although on a smaller scale. There may also be possibilities to deliver additional services in some areas of the service outlines.

- 2.2 The economies of scale and collective bargaining power of a shared approach should also improve value for money e.g. same level of service at a reduced contract value or increased service levels for the same contract value. This will be particularly important in the current climate of budget reductions.
- 2.3 Robust performance management will improve accountability ensuring services are delivered that meet organisational priorities and community need and this will also provide evidence to support future strategic planning e.g. identifying groups/areas for differential targeted delivery.
- 2.4 The commitment to a partnership approach has brought significant benefits including removing duplication of services and sharing expertise and best practice. More than that it defines the commitment to transparency and equity in commissioning and shows a readiness to adapt in a changing environment in order to continue to secure essential services.
- 2.5 Shared commissioning also creates opportunities for back office efficiencies for third sector organisations particularly the larger organisations. Shared processes will make it easier and less resource intensive to identify opportunities, complete the application process and the performance management returns required. It could also offer real opportunities to work collaboratively.

### **3. Commissioned Services Outline:**

- 3.1 As indicated in para 1.5 (above) NuLBC's focus as part of the ongoing engagement process has been linked to two specific service areas:

- **Infrastructure Support and Volunteering Service**
- **Debt, Benefits and Consumer Information and Advice Services**

- 3.2 ***Infrastructure Support and Volunteering Service:***

NuLBC has, over the past five years, funded infrastructure service support at an amount of £12,000 per annum and agreed as part of the PSCiP programme to transfer such funds as part of the collaborative delivery of the service.

- 3.2.1 This contract was awarded to VAST and delivery commenced April 2013.

- 3.2.2 During 2013-14, the project has delivered events and given support to organisations as planned, and has undergone reviews with the county monitoring group (including the involvement of an officer from Newcastle). Also, there have been meetings held at the Civic offices with officers of VAST to look at ongoing support and delivery in the borough.

- 3.3 ***Debt, Benefits and Consumer Information and Advice Services***

NuLBC has, over the past 5 years, funded debt, benefits and consumer advice and the amount for 2013-14 is £149,999 per annum. The service previously delivered under separate contracts by Age UK and CAB has been delivered collaboratively by the two organisations since 2012 with CAB acting as the lead organisation (until the re-commissioning of the service is completed as part of the PSCiP programme).



- 3.3.1 Officers of the Council have, again at the outset of the collaborative process, worked with commissioning colleagues as part of needs analysis, priority setting and determining service outcomes, developing the service specification/outline before this went out to market.
- 3.3.2 The opportunity advertised through the County Council's electronic procurement platform generated considerable interest with a number of organisations viewing the specification/service outline, albeit on the closing date for completed submissions, only two responses were received.
- 3.3.3 The two submissions were evaluated by a panel of five officers, (including an officer from NuLBC) who were supported by a representative from the County procurement department (who also facilitated moderation with the group on completion of the initial evaluation).
- 3.3.4 As part of the evaluation process one tenderer was invited and delivered a presentation on their proposal to the evaluation team.
- 3.3.5 On announcement of the result, the unsuccessful provider (as part of a standstill period) was offered a full debrief of their submission.
- 3.3.6 The successful provider - Staffordshire South West Citizens Advice Bureau - will commence delivery of the contract on the 3 March 2014 at a total budget of £675,815. Officers from the county and the borough have worked closely with the successful provider as part of the action planning process to address areas of clarification/concern during January and February 2014 to provide reassurances of the ability to deliver the service from March.
- 3.3.7 The service contains several elements:
- Telephone contact centre -operating on three sites in the county, one of them being in Newcastle (Wells Street), from the Staffordshire North and Stoke Bureau
  - Face to face delivery will be funded to all 8 district bureaux, including the Wells Street bureau - this will mean a total of 150 of the most vulnerable service users are provided with generalist and special casework by referral from the contact centre annually
  - Provision of a generalist advice service delivery within the Newcastle-under-Lyme District providing a minimum of 45 hours per week (including 20 hours of advice for older persons delivered by AgeUK) that includes outreach sessions at Kidsgrove and Madeley, and an additional telephone advice service of 16 hours per week.
- 3.3.8 For the borough the funded provision of £131,386 from Newcastle Borough Council ensures delivery and access of a service to local residents as in previous years.
- 3.3.9 The successful provider has accepted an invite from officers to attend this scrutiny meeting, on 25 March 2014, and to give a presentation to Members linked to delivery of the service in the borough.

#### **4. Issues**

- 4.1 At the end of March 2014 the funding from Public Health to deliver 'Advice in Healthcare Settings' will cease for the Staffordshire North and Stoke Bureau, as it will in the Staffordshire Moorlands area. The result for Newcastle residents will be no outreach advice sessions delivered from various places, such as GP surgeries within the borough. The outcome of this decision may impact on the demand for the advice from this service during 2014-15.
- 4.2 The service provider will continue to respond to requests from residents of the borough linked to 'Debt, Benefits and Consumer' information advice and it is anticipated that faced with current economic conditions, demand for the service will remain high. The new telephone service, which is intended to deliver advice on a triage basis, will be able to deal with many enquiries at first point of contact. NuLBC propose to continue local monitoring of demand and review the contract delivery with the successful service provider.

**Mark Bailey**

Head of Business Improvement, Central Services & Partnerships  
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council  
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## NEWCASTLE – UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report To: Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**TITLE: Review of Allotment Service**

**Submitted by: Head of Operations – Roger Tait**

**Portfolio: Environment and Recycling**

**Wards Affected: All**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

To report the outcome of the work of the Allotments Review Task and Finish Group to the Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

To present the draft Allotments Policy to the Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

#### **Recommendations**

That the report is received.

That the Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the findings of the Allotments Review Task and Finish Group and officer recommendations. and that the draft Allotments Policy is approved for consultation.

That a report is brought to a future meeting of Cabinet, recommending that the findings of the Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are accepted and that the draft Allotments Policy is approved for consultation.

#### **Reasons**

To update the Allotments Policy and improve the management of the Allotment Service provided by the council.

### **1. Background**

**1.1** The Borough Council's Allotment Policy was last reviewed in 1989/90. There have been significant changes in a number of factors affecting the demand for allotments and the way allotments are provided and managed since this time, meaning that the policy is now no longer fit for purpose.

**1.2** A report regarding a proposed review of the allotments service was considered by Cabinet at the meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2012. It was resolved :

- a) That the Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertake a review of the issues identified with particular reference to local management, meeting future demand and reducing the current cost.
- b) That a report on the outcome of the scrutiny and consultation process be brought to a future meeting of the cabinet, in conjunction with a draft reviewed Allotments Policy.

**1.3** The Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee subsequently set up the Allotments Review Task and Finish Group, comprising 6 members, chaired by the Chair of the Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and supported by officers. Five key issues from the cabinet report were highlighted which were to be investigated by the Task and Finish Group. These were broken down into the following issue and sub headings :

**a) Provision:**

- Needs assessment
- Local standards
- Current provision and providers
- Demand / waiting lists
- Future provision and providers

**b) Management:**

- Administration
- Waiting Lists
- Plot sizes
- Tenancy agreements
- Enforcement
- Community Management
- Stewardship

**c) Resources:**

- Cost to the Council
- Charging policy (subsidy v cost recovery)
- Collection of rent
- Capacity
- Funding

**d) Sustainability**

- Waste management
- Water
- Toilets
- Biodiversity

**e) Marketing**

- Benefits
- Health and Well –being
- Barriers
- Consultation
- Partnership

**2. Issues**

**2.1** A work programme and timetable was prepared for the Task and Finish Group covering a list of topics for the group to discuss and a series of presentations by officers. These covered the following dates and subjects :

- January 2013 - Planning meetings (agree work plan and time scale)
- February 2013 - Legal framework and Implications (presentation from legal officer)
- March 2013 - Current cost and charging options (presentation by Community Manager).
- April 2013 - Demands and provision options (presentation by Community manager)
- May 2013 - Consultation (Representatives from other allotment groups and societies)

- June 2013 - Site visits (visit cross section of allotment sites and plots)
- July 2013 - Local Management (Discussions on Options)
- September 2013 - Meeting future demand (discussions on options)
- October 2013 - Reducing current costs (Discussions on options)
- November 2013 - Review and analysis (agree direction of policy)
- December 2013 - Draft report (presentation of draft policy)

The work was completed in December 2013 and officers drafted the proposed policy which is attached to this report at Appendix 1. The following sections provide a summary of the debate and conclusions on each topic.

## 2.2 Provision:

Needs assessment/local standards/current provision and providers/demand and waiting list/future provision and providers.

- The waiting list was thoroughly reviewed and those on the waiting list were contacted in writing and asked if they wished to remain on the list and to name the site that they wanted to be placed upon. The waiting list had 420 multiple entries and after the review it reduced from 283 to 133 people. The task and finish group recommended that the waiting list should be reviewed every year. This will speed up the process of letting plots and give a realistic waiting list figure. Applicants from outside the borough can be considered for plots but priority is to be given to borough residents.
- Geographical maps were prepared to show the task and finish group the position of the allotment sites, the location of the tenants in relationship to the position of the allotment sites and the position of the residents on the waiting list for that particular site. This exercise showed that there is good local take up from residents who live close to the allotment sites, along with a waiting list of local residents. There were few examples of residents living a great distance from the allotment sites.
- It was recommended by the task and finish group that a basic needs assessment be carried out and local standards for allotment provision be set for Newcastle based on current provision and demand levels shown on the waiting list. The national standard was not considered to be appropriate for Newcastle. Measures are to be put in place to speed up the process of letting and eviction. It was also recommended to engage with other providers to explore shared service potential and to consider additional provision if demand arises and external funding is available. A register of land that is council owned and would be suitable for future allotment sites should be prepared.

## 2.3 Management:

Administration/waiting list/plot sizes/tenancy agreements/enforcement/community management/stewardship.

- The task and finish group recommended that varying plot sizes and tenancies be offered.  
It was recommended that all allotment plots be measured and charged per m<sup>2</sup> according to the size of the plot, to ensure fairness and consistency.
- The current methods of administering allotment services were examined by the task and finish group. Officers highlighted areas where delays occur with the current process of administration and enforcement and the present tenancy agreements. Changes were proposed in the method of administration by improving systems to make them more efficient. The new proposed tenancy agreement was designed to streamline processes and more robustly manage tenants who do not pay, which

should ultimately reduce overhead costs. Eviction powers could be delegated to allotment associations where they exist and where they are able to manage this process. Assistance from the council can be made available if necessary.

The proposed Tenancy Agreement and Operating Procedure are attached to the draft Allotments Policy as Appendix A and B respectively.

- The task and finish group also recommended that as part of the management of sites, differing community management models are to be considered and progressed where appropriate. Efforts should be made to set up “Allotment Tenants Association Committees” on each of the larger sites and a combined committee for the 3 smaller sites. These committees would be encouraged to affiliate to the National Allotment Society, and to become self sufficient. They would also be encouraged to nominate stewards for each site. This would also allow the allotment site committees to access and apply for local and national funding streams.

## 2.4 Resources:

Cost to the council/charging policy (subsidy v cost recovery)/collection of rents/capacity/funding

- The task and finish group looked at the cost of the service in detail. It was clear that the overall annual cost of £57,860 for the service balanced against £10,500 income was an area which needed addressing. The cost was broken down into the following areas of expenditure:

- **Premises charges = £31,270**

These cover building repairs, water charges and grounds maintenance works carried out by Streetscene. The group proposed that water charges of £4,500 are to be charged to the allotment tenants as a proportion of the individual allotment site bill. Building repairs charges are reduced from £6,500 - £4,000 Streetscene charges of £18,870 to be reduced by approximately £6000 when two sites are transferred to Silverdale Parish Council. This sum will be reapportioned to another area of work where the capacity is redeployed, so there will be no net saving to the council.

- **Supplies and services charges = £1,550**

These charges cover removal of waste, print room charges, material general, and contribution to unrecovered debts

Within this section of cost, the recommendation from the task and finish group was to cease providing skips for allotment sites ensuring that rubbish was either composted or taken home for disposal by tenants.

- **Support service / capital financing = £25,044**

These charges cover £204 of capital financing, and the remainder of recharges are made by the following teams for officer time spent on allotment related work:

|      |                                      |          |
|------|--------------------------------------|----------|
| A101 | Accountancy                          | 1,000.00 |
| A107 | Sundry Debtors                       | 2,540.00 |
| A112 | Creditors Section                    | 330.00   |
| A141 | Agresso Financial Information System | 270.00   |
| A302 | Legal Services                       | 1,540.00 |
| A401 | Operational Services Admin           | 910.00   |
| A402 | Engineers                            | 1,940.00 |
| A404 | Public Buildings                     | 7,080.00 |
| A406 | Community Team                       | 9,230.00 |

|  |              |                  |
|--|--------------|------------------|
|  | <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>24,840.00</b> |
|--|--------------|------------------|

The group expressed concern that the support charges were close to 50% of the total allotment service cost. Officers were asked to contact the respective Heads of Service to ask for recharges to be reviewed and to see if these charges could be reduced in the light of the proposed changes to the management of the allotment sites and the transfer of two of the allotment sites to Silverdale Parish Council. However, for the purpose of estimating future costs, these charges have been retained at current levels for the time being.

- **Rents - general rents income = £10,500.**

There were two elements to this area which needed to be reviewed, the first being the cost of an allotment plot (current rent for a plot after April 2014 will be £59.00) The group proposed a rise of 20% commencing April 2015 (allowing 12 months notice). This will bring the cost of a full plot to £70.80 and thereafter annual incremental rises are to be implemented to move towards a reduction in subsidy and higher proportion of cost recovery. The second issue related to the income is the level of concessionary rate offered to tenants over 60 years of age and unemployed. The group proposed that the concessionary rate be reduced from 50% to 20% with effect from April 2015.

At current levels of occupation, and taking out the income from the two Silverdale sites which will transfer to the parish council, the increase in rent and reduction in concessions would mean that estimated income for 2015 would increase to approximately £7,300 from £4,900.

- **Collection of rent**

The group considered that it would be operationally effective to improve the system for sending out the annual rent invoices and monitoring payments. The billing period should change from January to April each year with a view that those who have not paid their rent within 28 days will be sent eviction notices in accordance with the revised tenancy agreement. This will streamline the administration process and assist in managing vacant and non-cultivated plots more effectively.

- **Capacity**

The task and finish group decided to recommend that the development of any further allotment sites should be explored if demand arises and if external funding is available. It was suggested that enquires from residents living within parished wards are directed to the respective Parish Councils and that a list of potential future sites within council ownership is prepared so that future demand could be serviced dependent on funding being secured from appropriate sources. It was proposed to monitor the waiting list by reviewing it annually and seeking to relet any plots vacated as quickly as possible.

- **Funding**

The task and finish group proposed the setting up of allotment associations groups for each of the large sites and a combined group for the small sites. The groups will be encouraged to apply for funding for local and national funding sources. Officers will continue to seek to identify potential sources of funding to improve allotment sites or create new sites if demand arises. Engagement with

other potential providers will also take place to explore the possibility of shared services.

## 2.5 Sustainability:

Waste management/water/toilets/biodiversity

- **Waste management**

To ensure all tenants are held responsible for the amount of rubbish left on the allotment plot when vacating the site, the group decided to include within the tenancy agreement the requirement for tenants to dispose of their own waste and to return a plot in clean order, or the cost will be recharged to the ex-tenant to clear the rubbish left behind. It was also agreed to recommend that all allotment sites had re-cycling bins located if possible to assist with the removal of surplus green waste. All skips for general waste are to be removed from sites as general waste should be disposed of responsibly by the tenant.

- **Water**

The task and finish group looked at the cost of mains water for allotment sites, and decided to follow the route which many other authorities have adopted in that water costs are charged directly to the plot holder as a proportion of the overall site usage. The longer term view of the group is to reduce the provision of water, allowing the respective allotment association committee to determine whether or not their site wants a mains water supply or not, and if so, to be paid for by the tenants. The use of water butts is to be encouraged for plot holders.

- **Toilets**

The task and finish group looked at the cost of the provision of toilets on allotment sites (only two sites have a toilet), and decided that allotment associations should either manage and pay for the cleaning of their toilets if the site has one, or if the allotment association decide that they need to develop a toilet on their site that the allotment association committee fund this and maintain it from their own funds.

- **Biodiversity**

The task and finish group looked at this issue and decided that if individual sites wished to actively encourage biodiversity (such as allotments at Lyme Valley) then this would be supported with the individual allotment association committees.

## 2.6 Marketing:

Benefits/health and well – being/barriers/consultation/partnership.

- **Benefits / Health and Well-Being**

The task and finish group felt that as there were a number of people on the waiting list, there was not a need to either market the sites or develop additional plans with partners such as the NHS at this moment, although the NHS was considered to be a potential source of future funding if a project was to be developed similar to the Lyme Valley Allotment project. The benefits of allotment gardening should be recognised and included in the Health and Well-being Strategy.



- **Consultation**

The task and finish group met representatives from:

- Parish Council sites at Audley
- National Allotment Association
- The Acre allotment site
- Lyme Valley allotment site
- Dimsdale allotment site

Discussions with the representatives explored areas such as forming allotment associations, issues with the current system of management, rent payment and how this is managed (by Parish tenants), what the tenants hopes for the future are. Many of the areas discussed have been addressed with the new draft policy, tenancy agreement and method of operation.

- **Barriers/ Partnership**

The task and finish group discussed the potential involvement of partners in providing allotment services. While the group considered that there was limited potential at present, the option of developing partnerships in the future should be incorporated into the policy and that opportunities should be explored if and when they arise.

**2.7** The above issues have been incorporated into the draft Allotments Policy which is attached to this report at Appendix 1. The policy sets out how allotments will be managed over the next 5 years in line with the findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, including additional officer recommendations relating to technical or operational issues. It includes an action plan setting out specific tasks and timescales to assist in delivering the aims of the policy. The policy will be reviewed annually and a progress report will be brought to appropriate meetings of the cabinet.

**2.8** It is proposed that the draft policy be approved for consultation and that a consultation plan be prepared by the Task and Finish Group for recommendation to Cabinet.

### **3. Proposal**

**3.1** That the Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the findings of the Allotments Review Task and Finish Group and approve the draft Allotments Policy for consultation.

**3.2** That a report is brought to a future meeting of the Cabinet, recommending that the findings of the Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are accepted and that the draft Allotments Policy is approved for consultation.

### **4. Reasons for proposed solutions**

**4.1** To update the Allotments Policy and improve the Allotment Service provided by the council.

### **5. Outcomes linked to Council Plan and Corporate Priorities**

5.1 Creating a cleaner, safer and sustainable Borough.

5.2 Creating a healthy and active community

## 6. Legal and Statutory Implications

6.1 There are a number of legal and statutory implications relating to the provision, maintenance and charging of allotments which were considered during the scrutiny process and policy review.

## 7. Equality Impact Assessment

7.1 An assessment has been undertaken as part of the review process and this is included at Appendix C

## 8. Financial and resource implications

8.1 The current net annual cost of the allotment services provided by the council is £47,360. Financial implications have been considered as part of the review process and the Task and Finish Group have made the following recommendations to seek to reduce costs and increase income with a view to closing the gap between service cost and income incrementally each year over the life of the policy:

1. Review support service recharges and request that recharges are reduced/minimised wherever possible
2. Reduce annual spend on repairs, waste removal and phase out subsidised provision of mains water to sites (tenants to pay for mains water as a surcharge on rent)
3. Rationalise and improve systems for administration work, billing etc for allotments.
4. Reduce concession rates from 50% to 20%
5. Increase rents by 20% initially in 2015 and by an agreed percentage each year thereafter for an initial 5 year period.
6. Transfer the two allotment sites in Silverdale to Silverdale Parish Council

8.2 If the above recommendations are approved and adopted as part of the proposed Allotments Policy, it is estimated that the net annual cost of the Allotments Service will reduce to approximately £34,000 in 2015, subject to current occupancy levels being maintained when the higher rents/reduced concessions are implemented. Any subsequent reductions in cost would be subject to further rent increases and minimising internal recharges.

## 9. Major Risk

9.1 The risk associated with each option has been considered as part of the review process. A full risk assessment has been prepared and is attached at Appendix 2.

## 10. Key Decision Information

10.1 This initiative impacts on more than 2 wards and has been included in the forward plan.

## 11. Earlier Cabinet Reports

11.1 Cabinet 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011  
Cabinet 14<sup>th</sup> November 2012

## Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

### Active and Cohesive Scrutiny Committee – Update Report – February 2014

#### Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy

- The Children Act 2004 requires each local authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) made up of representatives from the agencies and bodies which have regular contact with children or have responsibility for services to them (or their families) in the local area.
- As a statutory authority, providing services in the community to children and their families, the Borough Council is required to co-operate in the establishment and operation of the LCSB and is a member of the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (SSCB), which became operational in April 2006. The Council also has a legal responsibility to safeguard, promote wellbeing and protect children and vulnerable adults.
- The Borough Council participates in the District Safeguarding Sub Group (for Children and Vulnerable Adults) and has co-ordinated the creation of a District Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy.
- The District Policy seeks to help protect all children and vulnerable adults living in our communities and to protect the Borough Council, its staff, elected members and volunteers.
- The Council's revised Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy 2014 was approved by Cabinet on the 5<sup>th</sup> February (please see attached for your information).
- The Council needs to ensure that it has robust mechanisms in place in order to appropriately co-ordinate Safeguarding activity in the Borough and an Action Plan has been created (please see attached) to introduce and embed the Policy and to disseminate information to staff, elected members and volunteers.
- In line with the legal responsibilities from Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, the Council has undertaken an audit to ensure that in discharging our functions we have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The audit assessment gave the Council the opportunity to highlight areas of strength and to identify areas for further development.
- The following individuals have been identified to champion Safeguarding within our organisation;
  - Portfolio Holder - Cllr Tony Kearon
  - Executive Manager - John Sellgren (Chief Executive)
  - Head of Service - Mark Bailey (Business Improvements and Partnerships)
  - Designated Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection Officer - Sarah Moore (Partnerships Manager).
- As proposed in the Policy the Council are now seeking to identify volunteers to become 'Safeguarding Champions' in each service area (although we appreciate that in some services covering more than one location e.g. Leisure and Cultural, it may be appropriate to have more than one volunteer). They will assist the Designated and Deputy Designated Officers to ensure that all staff, elected

members and volunteers are trained appropriately to recognise safeguarding issues and know where to refer any concerns that may arise in relation to children and vulnerable adults in our communities.

**Recommendation**

It is recommended and requested that A&C Scrutiny Committee take on responsibility for monitoring delivery of the Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy Action Plan 2014 and support Officers to disseminate the importance of the Policy throughout the Council for the benefit of our communities.

**Sarah Moore**  
**Partnerships Manager**  
**February 2014**

## Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy Action Plan – 2014

|     | Action   | Who?  | Due Date | Progress   |
|-----|--|-------|----------|--|
| 1.  | Finalise Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy and submit to EMT for approval  | SM    | Jan 2014 | <b>Complete</b> - EMT approval granted subject to minor amendments.  |
| 2.  | Finalise Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Protection Policy and submit to Cabinet for approval  | SM    | Jan 2014 | <b>Complete</b> - Awaiting Cabinet decision.   |
| 3.  | Develop a Draft Action Plan for the introduction of the new Policy and accompanying Procedure.   | SM    | Feb 2014 | Complete - Draft Action Plan created to be shared with A&CSC.  |
| 4.  | Share Draft Action Plan with Active and Cohesive Overview and Scrutiny for input and approval.   | SM    | Feb 2014 | Policy, Action Plan and covering report shared with A&CSC for February meeting.  |
| 5.  | Identification of Safeguarding Champions within each service.  | SM    | Feb 2014 | Email sent to all Heads of Service requesting volunteers to be trained as 'Safeguarding Champions' within the authority. Currently awaiting responses. |
| 6.  | Ensure that Safeguarding Champions complete Level 1 Safeguarding Children E-learning module.   | SM/CF | Mar 2014 |  |
| 7.  | Ensure that Safeguarding Champions complete Multi Agency Level 2 – Working Together Training from Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (SSCB).                    | SM/CF | May 2014 |  |
| 8.  | Ensure that all staff and elected members complete the Level 1 Safeguarding Children E-learning module (or equivalent).  | SM/CF | Jun 2014 |  |
| 9.  | Devise Safeguarding training materials for appropriate staff (who may be expected to have contact with members of the public/community) and elected members.             | CF    | Apr 2014 |  |
| 10. | Ensure that Safeguarding Policy and accompanying Procedure is on the Intranet for all staff and elected members to access.   | CF    | Mar 2014 |  |
| 11. | Ensure that Safeguarding information is up to date and link to Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board website is included on the Council's website.                 | CF    | Mar 2014 |  |
| 12. | Liaise with HR to add Safeguarding Policy information into induction process for new staff and elected members and the process for undertaking DBS checks is up to date. | CF    | Apr 2014 |  |
| 13. | Identify (with Safeguarding Champions) appropriate staff, who may be expected to have contact with members of the public/community, requiring additional training.       | CF    | Apr 2014 |  |
| 14. | Coordinate delivery of Safeguarding training to appropriate staff and elected members (both in house and through the subscription to the SSCB).                          | CF    | Jun 2014 |  |
| 15. | Identify and develop an evaluation framework for the planned training sessions.  | CF    | Apr 2014 |  |

|     |  |       |          |   |
|-----|--|-------|----------|---|
| 16. | Devise Safeguarding promotional materials to raise awareness with staff and elected members e.g. posters, coasters, memory cards etc.        | CF    | Mar 2014 |   |
| 17. | Coordinate distribution of promotional/awareness materials across the Council and to staff and elected members.                              | CF    | Apr 2014 |   |
| 18. | Establish filing system for Safeguarding queries/reports and concerns in Partnerships electronic work area.                                  | SSh   | Mar 2014 |   |
| 19. | Embed Safeguarding principles into Procurement and tendering process at the Council to ensure that all contractors are Section 11 compliant. | SM/SS | Mar 2014 | Discussions are underway with Legal and Business Improvement to ensure that contracts include a requirement for contractors to be Section 11 compliant. |

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN



|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Committee Name:</b>                                     | Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee   |
| <b>Chair:</b>  | Cllr George Cairns  |
| <b>Vice-Chair:</b>   | Cllr Reginald Bailey  |
| <b>Portfolio Holder(s) Covering the Committee's Remit:</b> | Cllr Elizabeth Shenton – leisure, Culture and Localism<br>Cllr Gareth Snell – Communications, Policy and Partnerships<br>Cllr Terry Turner – Economic Regeneration, Business & Town Centres<br>Cllr John Williams – Planning and Assets |
| <b>Work Plan Correct As At:</b>                            | 5 December 2013   |

| Date of Meeting  | Item                              | Reason for Undertaking  |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>25 February 2014<br/>(Agenda dispatch<br/>14 February 2014)</b> | Allotments Review                 | To consider the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group in respect of the reviewed allotments policy, prior to Cabinet receiving the Committee's recommendations.  |
|  | Portfolio Holder(s) Question Time | An opportunity for the Committee to question the Portfolio Holder on their priorities and work objectives for the next six months and an opportunity to address any issues or concerns that they may currently be facing. It's also an opportunity for the Portfolio Holder to flag up areas within their remit that may benefit from scrutiny in the future i.e. policy development. |
|  |                                   | To review the Sport and Active Lifestyles Strategy.   |

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|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
|  | Community Interest Company as Leisure Management Option | Action from 29.08.2013 meeting for the Committee to consider the completed report of the officer working group. |
|  |   |   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Task and Finish Groups:</b>                 | Allotments Review (Expected to complete December 2013)   |
| <b>Future Task and Finish Groups:</b>          |  |
| <b>Suggestions for Potential Future Items:</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Sector Commissioning in Partnership</li> <li>• Kidsgrove Sports Centre</li> <li>• Ryecroft</li> <li>• Annual Review of the Scrutiny Committee's Work</li> <li>• Sport and Active Lifestyles Strategy – keep on agenda and work with Health Scrutiny when appropriate.</li> <li>• The future development of the Borough Museum and Art Gallery</li> </ul> |

**REMIT**

**Active and Cohesive Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for:**

- Arts development
- Britain in Bloom
- Cemeteries and Crematorium
- Children and young people
- Safeguarding Board, Children's Centre District Management Board/ community and learning partnerships
- Community recreation
- Cultural development
- Health improvement
- Leisure facilities
- Museum

Classification: NULBC UNCLASSIFIED



- Sports development.

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