

DRAFT VERSION 3 – 14th OCTOBER 2014

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO CABINET 12TH NOVEMBER 2014

TITLE: Review of Allotments 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 consultation on the draft Allotments Strategy and to request that Cabinet formally adopts the Strategy.

Recommendations

- That the responses received during the consultation are noted
- That the minor changes to the Allotments Strategy, arising from the consultation, as detailed in this report, are approved.
- That the Allotments Strategy 2014-2020 is formally adopted and Officers are authorised to implement the actions set out in the Action Plan.

Reasons

- To update the Allotments Strategy and improve the management of the allotment service provided by the Council.

1. Background

- 1.1** At the meeting of the Cabinet of the 2nd April 2014, a report was considered on the work of the Active and Cohesive Communities Scrutiny Committee, with regard to the Allotments Strategy.

It was resolved:-

- (i) That the report be received.
- (ii) That the findings of the Active and Cohesive Communities Scrutiny Committee be endorsed by the Cabinet and that the draft Allotments Strategy be approved for consultation.
- (iii) That a report be brought to a future meeting of the Cabinet, detailing the outcome of the consultation on the draft Allotments Strategy and recommending that the Strategy is formally adopted, subject to any changes arising from the consultation responses.

- 1.2** Subsequently, your Officers prepared a consultation plan for approval by the Allotments Review Task and Finish Group.

- 1.3** The consultation period ran from 16th June 2014 to 31st August 2014 and copies of the responses are available to view in the Community Team files.

2. Issues

- 2.1 20 responses were received in relation to the draft Allotments Strategy. The following summary outlines the issues which were raised by consultees:-

Concerns seemed to mainly relate to rental charge increases, water charges for tenants and the intention to encourage self-management of sites by tenants.

- 2.2 Your Officers response to the issues raised is as follows:-

Rental charge increases – it is considered that even with the proposed increase, the overall charge for an allotment will still represent good value for money when compared to many other leisure activities. The intention of proposed rent increases is to close the gap between the cost to council taxpayers of providing the service and the income which is collected from tenants.

Water charges – it is accepted that it will be difficult to create a fair method of charging for mains water to individual tenants, as water use will vary between tenants at each site. It would not be practically possible to account for an individual's exact water usage. Therefore it is proposed to continue to provide mains water for the time being, but to review this element of site facilities and charging if sites move into community management models. Tenants are to be encouraged to collect and use rainwater wherever possible.

Self-management of sites – it is accepted that some tenants and associations have concerns regarding their capacity to be able to form committees and self-manage sites. However, there are successful examples in operation in the borough and the benefits to tenants include control over rent setting and collection, access to funding to improve sites and control over lettings and site management issues. Therefore, it is proposed to continue to encourage individual tenants to work in partnership with their fellow plot holders, supported by the Council where necessary, to achieve an appropriate level of self-management as a long term goal.

- 2.3 Having fully considered the issues raised during the consultation process, it is considered appropriate to make the following amendment to the draft Allotments Strategy:-

It is proposed to continue to provide mains water for the time being, but to review this element of site facilities and charging if sites move into community management models. Tenants are to be encouraged to collect and use rainwater wherever possible.

- 2.4 With the above amendments made, your Officers consider it appropriate to recommend that the Allotments Strategy 2014-2020 is formally adopted and that the actions in the Action Plan are progressed in accordance with the specified timescales.

3. Options Considered

- 3.1 Do not adopt the Allotments Strategy – not recommended as the future management of the service will not improve.
- 3.2 Adopt the Allotments Strategy without amendment – not recommended as this would not take into account the views submitted during the consultation process.
- 3.3 Adopt the Allotments Strategy, with the amendments detailed in Section 2 of this report – recommended.

4. Proposal

- 4.1 That the responses received during the consultation are noted.
- 4.2 That the minor changes to the Allotments Strategy, arising from the consultation, as detailed in this report, are approved.
- 4.3 That the Allotments Strategy 2014-2020 is formally adopted and Officers are authorised to implement the actions set out in the Action Plan.

5. Reasons for Proposed Solutions

- 5.1 To update the Allotments Strategy and improve the management of the allotments service provided by the Council.

6. Outcomes Linked to Council Plan and Corporate Priorities

- 6.1 Creating a cleaner, safer and sustainable Borough.
- 6.2 Creating a healthy and active community.
- 6.3 Becoming a Co-operative Council.

7. Legal and Statutory Implications

- 7.1 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.

8. Equality Impact Assessment

- 8.1 It is considered that a positive equality impact will result from adoption of the reviewed Strategy.

9. Financial and resource implications

- 9.1 The current net annual cost of the allotment service, provided by the Council, is £28,290.00. Financial implications have been considered as part of the review process and efficiencies have already been achieved in relation to processes and expenditure. The following recommendations are incorporated into the Allotments Strategy to seek to reduce costs further and increase income with a view to closing the gap between service cost and income incrementally each year over the life of the policy.

- (i) Review support service recharges and request that recharges are reduced/minimised wherever possible.
- (ii) Reduce annual spend on repairs and waste removal.
- (iii) Rationalise and improve systems for administration work, billing etc., for allotments.
- (iv) Reduce concession rates from 50% to 20%.
- (v) Increase rents by £11.80 for a full plot (equating to an additional 23 pence per week) in 2015/16 and by an agreed percentage each year thereafter for an initial five year period. It is proposed that the second annual increase should be a further £7.08 for a full plot.

- 9.2 If the above recommendations are approved and adopted, as part of the Allotments Strategy, it is estimated that the net annual cost of the allotments service will reduce by approximately £5000 in 2015/2016 subject to current occupancy levels being maintained

when the higher rents/reduced concessions are implemented. Any subsequent reductions in cost would be subject to future rent increases and minimising internal recharges.

10. Major Risk

10.1 The risks associated with each option have been considered as part of the review process. The main risks are considered to be as follows:-

- (i) Public dissatisfaction.
- (ii) Reputational damage.
- (iii) Failure to close the gap between cost and income.
- (iv) Failure to implement rent review.
- (v) Inability to meet demand.
- (vi) Failure to transfer remaining site in Silverdale to the Parish Council.

11. Key Decision Information

11.1 This initiative impacts on more than two Wards and has been included on the Forward Plan.

12. Earlier Cabinet Reports

12.1 Cabinet 30th November 2011.
 Cabinet 14th November 2012.
 Active and Cohesive Communities Scrutiny Committee 25th February 2014
 Cabinet 2nd April 2014.

13. Background Information

13.1 Allotments Strategy 2014-2020 (final amended version) Hard Copies will be available at the meeting and electronic version can be viewed on ModernGov.

13.2 Action Plan

The following action plan sets out the specific tasks and timescales which will be undertaken over the 5 year life of the Strategy to deliver the aims:

Year 0 (2014/15)	ID Number	Task	Timescale	Lead Officer	Commentary
	A001	Report to Cabinet	April 2014	RT	Draft strategy approved for consultation
	A002	Consultation with stakeholders	July/August 2014	SM	Consider responses and amend draft strategy
	A003	Report to Cabinet	November 2014	RT	Approve and adopt strategy
	A004	Complete transfer of Park Road Allotments to Silverdale Parish Council	April 2014	SM	Transfer agreement completed
	A005	Complete transfer of Acre	December 2014	SM	Rationalise plots and sign transfer agreement

	Allotments to Silverdale Parish Council			
A006	Give notice to plotholders of new tenancy agreements and rents	April 2014	SL	Issue letters and update web pages
A007	Set up new billing arrangements	September 2014	SL	Create database and plot measurements to determine rent
A008	Measure all plots	September 2014	SL	Determine charge based on m2
Year 1 (2015/16)				
ID Number	Task	Timescale	Lead Officer	Commentary
A009	Set up Allotment Associations for all sites	April 2015	SL/BS	Complete constitutions
A010	Affiliate Allotment Associations to NAO	September 2015	SL/BS	Complete registration/membership
A011	Issue rent bills and review rent for following year	April 2015	SL/BS	Single annual bill in advance, including supplement for water charges. Determine rent increase for following year
A012	Review waiting list	April 2015	SL/BS	Rationalise list
A013	Set local standard	April 2015	SM	Needs assessment and plans showing demand and provision
A014	Identify sites for future provision	September 2015	SM	Plans showing potential sites and capacity
A015	Promote allotment gardening	April 2015	SL	Organise local competitions, open days, projects

Year 2 (2016/17)				
ID Number	Task	Timescale	Lead Officer	Commentary
A016	Issue rent bills and review rent for following year	April 2016	SL/BS	Determine rent increase for following year
A017	Review waiting list	April 2016	SL/BS	Rationalise list
A018	Update webpage	April 2016	SL/BS	Provide up to date information
A019	Hold stakeholder meeting	September 2016	SL/BS	Annual meeting to discuss issues and opportunities
A020	Promote allotment gardening	April 2015	SL	Organise local competitions, open days, projects
Year 3 (2017/18)				
ID Number	Task	Timescale	Lead Officer	Commentary
A021	Issue rent bills and review rent for following year	April 2017	SL/BS	Determine rent increase for following year
A022	Review waiting list	April 2017	SL/BS	Rationalise list
A023	Hold stakeholder meeting	September 2017	SL/BS	Annual meeting to discuss issues and opportunities
A024	Promote allotment gardening	April 2015	SL	Organise local competitions, open days, projects
Year 4 (2018/19)				
ID Number	Task	Timescale	Lead Officer	Commentary
A025	Issue rent bills and review rent for following year	April 2018	SL/BS	Determine rent increase for following year
A026	Review waiting list	April 2018	SL/BS	Rationalise list
A027	Hold stakeholder meeting	September 2018	SL/BS	Annual meeting to discuss issues and opportunities
A028	Promote allotment gardening	April 2015	SL	Organise local competitions, open days, projects

Year 5 (2019/20)				
ID Number	Task	Timescale	Lead Officer	Commentary
A029	Issue rent bills and review rent for following year	April 2019	SL/BS	Determine rent increase for following year
A030	Review waiting list	April 2019	SL/BS	Rationalise list
A031	Hold stakeholder meeting	September 2019	SL/BS	Annual meeting to discuss issues and opportunities
A032	Review Strategy	September 2019	SM	Report to Cabinet
A033	Promote allotment gardening	April 2015	SL	Organise local competitions, open days, projects