

ALLOTMENTS SERVICE – REVIEW OF POLICY

Submitted by: Dave Adams/Roger Tait

Portfolio: Culture and Active Communities

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

To agree to undertake review of the current the Allotments Policy including consideration of options to reduce the current level of subsidy and overall cost of the allotment service provided by the Council.

Recommendations

(a) That a review of the Councils Allotments Policy is carried out, including the consideration of options to reduce the cost of the service and progress local management of allotment sites.

(b) That a report on the outcome of the review, including consultation work and a proposed revised charging structure, is brought to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

Reasons

To update the Allotments Policy and achieve efficiency savings in relation to the cost of providing an allotment service.

1. Background

1.1 The Councils Allotment Policy was last reviewed in 1990 and it is recognised that the use of and demand for allotments has changed in that time.

1.2 The Council is seeking to reduce its annual revenue budget to meet public spending restrictions set by the government.

1.3 An ongoing budget review process is being undertaken to identify potential cost savings across all service areas within the organisation.

1.4 The Council currently provides a total of 254 allotment plots spread between the following 7 sites:

- (i) Jason Street, Cross Heath
- (ii) Dimsdale, Wolstanton
- (iii) Park Road, Knutton and Silverdale
- (iv) The Acre, Knutton and Silverdale
- (v) Thistleberry, Thistleberry
- (vi) Basford, May Bank
- (vii) Black Bank, Knutton and Silverdale

1.5 A further 50 plots are provided at Lyme valley Parkway. This particular site is managed by the Friends of Lyme Valley and the income and costs related to this site are not included in the Council's budget for the allotment service.

Further plots are also provided by Kidsgrove Town Council and Audley Parish Council where again, the income and costs are not included in the Borough Council's budget.

- 1.6 Tasks relating to the allotments service is mainly carried out by the Operations Service and consists of 2 main areas, backed up by support services for billing, repairs, legal and property advice:

Administration (Community Business Unit)

- ❖ Compilation and management of the waiting lists
- ❖ Letting of plots when available
- ❖ Provision of billing information to the Revenues and Benefits team
- ❖ Site inspections and preparation of notices to cultivate and/or quit

Maintenance and Repairs (Streetscene Business Unit)

- ❖ Repairs to gates and fencing
- ❖ Repairs to roadways and paths
- ❖ Plot clearance and rubbish removal
- ❖ Hedge cutting and weed killing of roadways and paths
- ❖ Provision of skips for site clearance
- ❖ Tree felling and pruning

- 1.7 The estimated net cost (2011/12) relating to the allotment service provided by the Borough Council is £38,190.

- 1.8 242 of the 254 available plots are currently let, representing 95% occupancy rate. Of the 12 currently vacant plots, 10 are at the Acre and 1 is at Park Road, both of which sites are in the Knutton and Silverdale ward. There is 1 vacant plot at Basford in May Bank.

There are 295 people currently on the waiting list for an allotment plot and work is in progress to attempt to let the vacant plots to those people at the top of the waiting list. At the time the 2011/12 budget was set the annual fee for a full plot was £53.10, with half plots or concessions (unemployed and OAP's) costing £25.25 per year. 30.5% of current plot holders pay the concessionary rate. This represents a subsidy of 75% of the actual cost of providing the service.

- 1.9 The Council has a statutory duty under the Smallholdings and Allotments Act 1908 to "provide a sufficient number of allotments" and to "let these to folk who wish to take them".

Allotments are also afforded other statutory protection and the consent of the Secretary of State is required for disposal of statutory allotment land under the 1925 Allotments Act. All of the Council's 7 allotment sites are considered to be statutory allotment land.

Therefore, it does not appear to be a feasible option for the Council to consider not providing an allotment service.

Indeed, the current national trend appears to show a resurgence in the popularity of allotment gardening and a rising demand for allotment plots.

This appears to be reflected locally in the Borough judging by the comparatively large number of people on the current waiting list and by the full occupancy of the most recently provided new allotment site at Lyme Valley in Clayton.

The benefits of allotments have been recognised in terms of the healthy and active lifestyles agenda, sustainability and in helping people cope with economic recession by having the ability to grow their own food.

2. **Issues**

- 2.1 The Councils allotment policy is in need of revision to ensure it properly reflects the needs of the community and the Councils ability to provide and subsidise the service into the future.
- 2.2 Similarly, to ensure the most appropriate management model is in place, opportunities for the local management of sites, including management committees and where relevant, parish councils, should be explored further.

3. **Proposal**

- 3.1 In order to fully consider the issue of provision and other relevant factors your officers propose to undertake a full review of the Council's Allotments Policy including a review of the cost of the allotment service to determine whether the cost can be reduced significantly or fully recovered, and a review of opportunities to secure local management of sites.

The review will consider a number of factors, including current and future provision, comparisons with other providers, tenancy agreements, concessions and eligibility, management options, community stewardship, plot size and pro-rata fees.

- 3.2 It is proposed that this process will involve consultation with current plot holders, residents on the waiting lists, relevant community groups and organisations.

A full report on the outcome of the review will be brought to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

4. **Reason for Recommendation**

- 4.1 To provide an up to date policy framework for the future provision and management of allotments in the Borough.
- 4.2 To reduce the current level of subsidy and achieve efficiency savings in relation to the cost of providing an Allotment Service.
- 4.3 To explore the benefits and opportunities of securing local management of allotment sites.

5. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 5.1 The financial implications relating the current provision of allotments are detailed in the main body of this report.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 6.1 There are a number of legal and statutory implications relating to the provision, maintenance and charging for allotments. These will be reviewed and included within the subsequent report to Cabinet upon completion of the review.

7. **Major Risks**

- 7.1 There are no major risks associated with implementing a review of the Councils Allotments Policy.