

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Adoption of Brighton &amp; Hove City Council Allotment Strategy</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>4 March 2014</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Director of Environment, Development &amp; Housing</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Jan Jonker</b>	<b>Tel: 29-4722</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 There are over 3,100 allotments in Brighton & Hove with over 6,000 residents regularly participating in allotment gardening. Allotments play an important role in food growing but also have significant social, health and environmental benefits.
- 1.2 An Allotment Strategy and Action Plan has been produced in partnership with the Allotment Federation and facilitated by the Food Partnership. The 10 year strategy sets out the priorities for the future to maintain and further improve the service and maximise the benefits for the community generated by allotments within the constraints of the current budget situation. The Action Plan will be a live document delivered with the council's partners and reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the Committee formally adopts the draft Allotment Strategy

**3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 In Brighton & Hove there are over 3,100 allotments across 37 sites with more than 6,000 people regularly taking part in allotment gardening in the city.
- 3.2 Allotments play an important role in sustainable food production and are an important part of the city's green network. Plot holders report a wide range of benefits from having allotment aside from food growing which include being more environmentally aware, providing opportunities to socialise, a means of being physically active and improving physical health, mental health and stress relief.
- 3.3 The Allotment Strategy has been produced in partnership with the Allotment Federation with the Food Partnership contracted to lead on the strategy process. It has been informed by a thorough consultation process which included surveys

of plot holders and people on the waiting list for an allotment. In total over 1,800 responses were received to these surveys. The strategy was overseen by a steering group consisting of council officers, staff from Public Health, members of the Allotment Federation and the Food Partnership. A number of working groups were established to look at specific issues.

- 3.4 Two detailed surveys took place of plot holders and people on the waiting list which gathered over 1,800 responses and generated robust information on which to base the strategy. A focus group was held with 12 'Site Reps' and a consultation event was held which was attended by more than 50 people.
- 3.5 A copy of the proposed strategy is attached as Appendix 1. It covers three main areas land, resources and governance. The objectives of the strategy are set out below:
- Provide an economic way for people to produce good quantities of high quality, locally grown food
  - Increase the number of people participating in food growing on allotments and ensure that all sections of the community can enjoy the benefits / participate.
  - Ensure availability of good quality, accessible land for allotments
  - Work towards a self-sustaining and efficiently run service that keeps down costs for both tenants and the Council.
  - Encourage on site participation to ensure the protection and promotion of allotments for-food growing.
  - Support the very best practice in growing, so that allotments are a source of education and inspiration for the whole city in good food and healthy living.
  - Ensure that the allotment sites, alongside the main role of food growing, play a role in conserving the biodiversity of the city contributing to a healthy living environment
  - To take a co-operative and participative approach to running the service and developing allotment policies and practices
  - To ensure that learning and evidence gathered from the development of this strategy is shared within the city and used to inform other policy work.
- 3.6 The development of the strategy identified priorities which are addressed through policies and the Action Plan. Full details are set out in the draft document with some key areas highlighted in the table below.
- 3.7 It is recognised that the resources in the Allotment Service are limited and that the strategy should aim to improve efficiency and minimise costs. The Action Plan will be delivered from within existing resources of the service and through

partnership working with the Allotment Federation, the Food Partnership and other partners.

3.8

<b>Key Issues</b>	<b>Recommendations/ Actions</b>
<p><b>Management of Waiting List</b></p> <p>The survey of people on the waiting list showed it was artificially inflated by people applying for an allotment and then moving away or losing interest.</p> <p>As part of the survey people were asked to reconfirm whether they still wanted a plot and this resulted in the waiting list declining from approximately 2200 to 1000 meaning there is less pressure on allotments than initially thought. People wait 2 to 4 years for a plot depending on which site they choose.</p> <p>Demand has varied over time, and may increase again eg when people realise they can get a plot more quickly than anticipated.</p>	<p>Management of the waiting list needs to be improved to ensure as far as possible it reflects real demand.</p> <p>Opportunities to engage with people waiting (eg providing information on alternative sites with shorter lists, providing information on co working, training and site open days) should be maximised. Better information will be provided to help people make informed choices about plot size to minimise people taking on a large plot if they are unable to cultivate it properly.</p> <p>Waiting lists for individual sites will be published so people can make informed choices about which location they apply for (they may choose a less popular location if the waiting list is shorter).</p> <p>Use of ICT will be reviewed to help deliver these improvements.</p>
<p><b>Choice of Plot Size</b></p> <p>In recent years the council has split all full plots in half when they have become available to increase capacity and reduce the waiting list. This approach was contested by the Allotment Federation. The survey has shown that the majority of people favour a half plot with only one in five preferring a full plot. The current % of full and half plots closely matches the results of the survey and the reduced waiting list means there is reduced demand for new plots. 22% of people would like a small 'micro plot'. Micro plots take up very little space compared to full or even half plots and would be a supportive environment for people new to growing.</p>	<p>Based on the evidence and through joint working a process has been agreed with the Allotment Federation which gives people a choice of plot size.</p> <p>It is proposed that micro-plots will be piloted by the Food Partnership and or Allotment Societies. If successful this will further reduce the waiting list.</p>
<p><b>Community Plots</b></p> <p>There are 30 community plots run independently by volunteers or larger charities working with specific client needs groups eg adults with learning disabilities,</p>	<p>The strategy sets out proposals to improve the management of community plots and seeks to increase the number of community plots in areas where there is a shortfall.</p>

<p>people who have experienced homelessness or addiction. They are essential to ensuring allotments are accessible to more vulnerable residents</p>	
<p><b>Accessibility</b> The allotment service needs to be accessible to all parts of the community. The research has shown that disabled people saw allotments as a means to contributing to their overall health and happiness to an even greater extent than those without disability.</p>	<p>The strategy has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment and further work will be done as part of the delivery of the strategy to engage with minority groups, and improve access through community plots and promotion of more accessible plots. Concessions will be maintained to reduce the financial barrier for people accessing the service.</p>
<p><b>Empty Plots</b> The service relies heavily on 'Site Reps' to keep sites working effectively. One of the roles of the reps is to let new sites. Letting sites can involve a lot of work for these volunteers, particularly on larger sites. There will always be a number of un-let plots due turnover but opportunities to streamline the process will reviewed to minimise un-let plots</p>	<p>The letting process will be reviewed including support for Site Reps and improvements to the management of the waiting list.</p>
<p><b>New Allotment Sites</b> The review of the waiting list has identified there is less need for new allotment sites at the present time.</p>	<p>Given the reduced pressure on the waiting list the focus of the strategy is on maintaining and improving the current offer of allotment sites. The need for additional sites should demand increase will be kept under review.</p>
<p><b>Conservation &amp; Biodiversity</b> The strategy process found evidence of good practice in terms of sustainability around composting, minimising use of chemicals and planting schemes that benefit pollinators.</p> <p>More work can be done in all these areas and in particular around management of water usage and water harvesting.</p> <p>The strategy seeks to build on this good practice to strengthen the contribution of allotments to conservation and biodiversity whilst recognising that their primary use is for food production.</p>	<p>Proposals to include sustainability such promotion of organic practices and minimisation of chemical use (eg through Brighton Organic Gardening Group), increasing composting and reducing water usage will be worked up as part of the Action Plan.</p> <p>The role of allotments in green networks and helping meet Biosphere Objectives will also be explored.</p>
<p><b>Volunteers</b> The service and delivery of the Action Plan relies on a significant amount of volunteer time to help run allotments including the</p>	<p>Revised governance arrangements have been developed which include a plan to clarify roles and better support volunteers.</p>

<p>Allotment Federation, Allotment Association and in particular Site Reps who help with the day to day running of the sites.</p> <p>Implementation of the Action Plan depends on effective joint working between the council and these volunteers and considerable thought has been given to how the partnerships can be improved.</p>	<p>A lot of the additional support will be provided by the Allotment Federation and existing volunteers.</p>
<p><b>Resources</b></p> <p>The strategy was produced at a time of significant budget cuts and has been developed with a view to improving efficiency and aiming for self sufficiency of the service.</p>	<p>Self management of sites will be piloted as a means of reducing the cost to the service.</p> <p>It is proposed that new plot holders will be asked to forgo their concession if they feel they do not need it and people will be asked to contribute more if they wish to do so.</p> <p>To help improve management of the waiting list strategy proposes the introduction of a small non-refundable fee to join the waiting list (£15) which would be ring fenced to the service and help fund support for people on the waiting list. It would encourage people to think more carefully about joining the list. People on concessions would be exempt.</p>

3.9 The strategy covers a ten year period and will be reviewed after five years. It provides a framework with detail of implementation of many recommendations to be worked out as part of the Action Plan. The Allotment Federation and Food Partnership are key delivery partners for the strategy. The Action Plan will be a live document which is monitored and updated annually.

#### **4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

4.1 As part of the strategy development options on specific issues were considered in depth by the steering group. Proposals were tested at a public engagement event for members of the Allotment Federation.

#### **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

5.1 The model of co-producing the strategy with the Allotment Federation and the Food Partnership has resulted in key partners engaging and co-owning the process. Response to the consultation was very high, with 900 plot holders responding. People on the waiting list were recognised as being part of the allotment community and they were also consulted with a further 900 responses.

- 5.2 The main themes coming out of the strategy were further tested at an engagement event. Workshops were held with smaller groups on particular issues including a workshop with Site Reps.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 Allotments in Brighton & Hove have a wide range of benefits which are much wider than food growing and include social, environmental and health benefits. Over 6,000 people take part in allotment gardening.
- 6.2 The success of allotments relies on many volunteers who are passionate about the service. The strategy recommended for adoption has been co-produced with key partners and sets out framework to improve and strengthen the service. It is supported by an Action Plan which we will be delivered with key partners.

## **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The budgeted net cost of providing the allotment service in 2013/14 is £50,000, including the cost of support service provision. The strategy will explore ways to improve the efficiency of the service and trial new models of working including self management on a pilot scale, and therefore improving value for money.
- 7.2 The strategy sets out proposals to increase income through a one off fee to join the waiting list which is expected to raise around £7,500 per year in extra revenue which will help fund some of the Action Plan particularly in relation to people on the waiting list. People will also be asked to forgo their concessions if they feel able to with the extra revenue supporting improving access to the service. The fees proposed in this report will be subject to the council's fees and charges policy and therefore reviewed annually considering the councils priorities.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Steven Bedford*

*Date: 03/02/14*

### Legal Implications:

- 7.3 The proposed strategy will assist the Council in meetings its duties in relation to managing allotments and demand for them under the Allotments and Smallholdings Act 1908.

*Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert*

*Date: 05/02/2014*

### Equalities Implications:

- 7.4 The allotment service has a positive impact on physical and mental health and disabled people rate the benefits of allotments higher than people without. The service already engages with a range of vulnerable people and people who may be less able to access services, for example through community plots. The strategy seeks to build on this good work and improve the access to the service. The strategy has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.5 Evidence from the consultation shows many plot holders already adopt sustainable practices. Allotments cover a significant area of land and are an important component of the city's green infrastructure. As part of the strategy further work will be done to encourage minimum use of chemicals, minimise water wastage and encourage biodiversity.

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.6 None

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices:**

1. Allotment Strategy Summary
2. Draft Allotment Strategy
3. Action Plan