



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Meeting: Monday, 21st July 2014 at 18.30 hours
in Civic Suite, North Warehouse, The Docks, Gloucester, GL1 2EP**

ADDENDUM

This pack contains agenda item 6 Allotments Strategy which was not available at the time of dispatch and revised recommendations for agenda item 7 2013/14 Financial Outturn.

6.	ALLOTMENTS STRATEGY (PAGES 3 - 40) To receive the report of the Cabinet Member for the Environment which seeks adoption, for the purposes of consultation, an Allotment Strategy for Gloucester City detailing how the City Council intends to manage its allotment holding over coming years.
7.	2013/14 FINANCIAL OUTTURN (PAGES 41 - 42) Revised recommendations herewith.

Yours sincerely

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Martin Shields,
Corporate Director of Services and Neighbourhoods

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Meeting:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Date:	21st July 2014
	Cabinet		30th July 2014
Subject:	Allotment Strategy		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Environment		
Wards Affected:	All		
Key Decision:	No	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
Contact Officer:	Meyrick Brentnall, Environmental Planning Manager		
	Email: meyrick.brentnall@gloucester.gov.uk Tel: 396829		
Appendices:	1) Allotment Strategy 2) Task and Finish Report 2007		

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To adopt for the purposes of consultation a draft Allotment Strategy for Gloucester City detailing how the City Council intends to manage its allotment holding over coming years.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** is asked, subject to any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet, to note the contents of the report.
- 2.2 **Cabinet** is asked to **RESOLVE** that:
 - (a) The Allotment Strategy attached at Appendix 1 be adopted as a draft for the purpose of public consultation.
 - (b) The outcome of the public consultation on the draft Allotment Strategy be reported back to Cabinet in due course.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 The City Council owns, and is ultimately responsible for, 12 allotment sites varying in size from 2 plots (Hempsted) to 146 (Saintbridge). The City Council has a statutory responsibility to provide allotments to meet demand, and given the numerous benefits that allotments bring, has been supportive of them over the years.
- 3.2 A number of years ago it was recognised that allotment holders were not receiving the service that they should and a Task and Finish Group was set up to look into the issue. This reported in 2007 and put forward a number of recommendations.

- 3.3 Many of these recommendations were taken on board and importantly, an allotment officer was appointed. There is still some work to do, however, especially with regard self management. The draft strategy provides a context for this, and also suggests a number of other actions.
- 3.4 The draft strategy is a high level document and covers issues such as how new sites can come forward and charging strategies to be pursued. It does not contain the detail of how each site should be managed. For this purpose more detailed proposals will be rolled out over the coming months in the format of a series of site plans, produced in partnership with the relevant association (if there is one). This will cover the specifics for that particular site such as security, water use etc.
- 3.5 Self management gives allotment holders more control as to how their allotments are run and is generally promoted throughout the document. When more self management is adopted it is generally done through associations. Importantly, the draft Strategy does not seek to impose self management on associations, and is clear that if self management is to happen, then it has to be with the support of allotment holders generally and not just the associations (not all allotment holders will be members of an association).
- 3.6 The strategy does address the issue of pricing structure and makes a commitment to retain elements of the current system. Allotment holders will be asked for their views as part of the consultation process.

4.0 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The authority does not have to produce a strategy. It could carry on as it is but this could mean that allotment associations who did want to take a more proactive stance would remain frustrated.
- 4.2 Self management could be imposed upon allotment associations or other groups of allotment holders – it is likely that this would result in friction between the associations/groups and the City Council. Some would inevitably refuse to take it up.

5.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 Across local government there generally is a move towards devolving decisions down to the most appropriate level. Across the country self management by allotment associations is on the increase. The strategy will provide a framework to allow this to happen and will support other developments that should make allotments more sustainable and ensure their continued success.

6.0 Future Work and Conclusions

- 6.1 If the draft strategy is adopted, it will be consulted upon for at least 6 weeks primarily with allotment holders and their associations. Following any representations, a further report will be taken to Cabinet to consider those recommendations and any revisions to the document to be adopted as the Allotment Strategy for Gloucester City Council. When the formal Strategy has been agreed, work with associations on site plans and increased responsibility, for those that wish to take it.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no immediate financial implications of this report other than the maintenance of the status quo. However, if a significant number of Allotment Associations opt out of City Council Control then this may change especially if they go for total self management as income will inevitably drop. This in reality will not happen for a number of years though will be explored further in any subsequent report.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

8.0 Legal Implications

- 8.1 Under Section 23 of the Smallholdings and Allotments Act 1908, a district council is under a general duty to provide a sufficient number of allotments, where it is of the opinion that there is a demand for allotments in its area, and to let them to persons resident there and desiring to take the same. Where the population is 10,000 or higher, the council's obligation is limited to the provision of allotment gardens not exceeding one-eighth of an acre.

(Legal Services have been consulted in the preparation this report.)

9.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 9.1 Only low risk has been identified as result of this report..

10.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):

- 10.1 Allotments are available to all and do attract a broad cross section of the community. The screening stage did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, therefore a full PIA was not required.

11.0 Other Corporate Implications

Community Safety

- 11.1 There may be some positive impacts with regard to community safety. If through the production of allotment plans security can be improved at sites

Sustainability

- 11.2 The strategy should ensure allotments are more sustainable

Staffing & Trade Union

- 11.3 In the short to medium term there will be little impact on staffing. However, long term if a large number of allotment associations do go for full self management, then there may be an impact on viability of the current allotment officer post.

Background Documents: Task and Finish Report 2007

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The Allotment Strategy



**A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT
(DRAFT)**

Allotment Strategy

Introduction

Allotments have a long and honourable history. Their popularity has come and gone depending on need and fashion. In the last few years they have enjoyed what appears to be a sustained revival as people realise the benefits of home grown food, as well as the feel good factor of open air activity.

Certainly allotments fulfil many of the objectives of the healthy living agenda and, as such, the City Council is keen to support them, and engender an environment where they can thrive and add to the well being of the city.

Allotments are also social outlets and provide a vehicle for people from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures to come together in pursuit of a common goal - that of growing fruit, vegetables and flowers.

Allotments are open un-developed spaces in what are often dense urban areas. They provide open space, a valuable green lung and a refuge for a surprising amount of wildlife.

Understanding that the allotment service was not as good as it could be, the City Council set up an Allotment Task and Finish Group. Reporting in 2007, the Group recognized the importance of allotments and made a number of recommendations. Many of these recommendations have been implemented and significant progress has been achieved over the past few years. Much of this has been in partnership with Allotment Associations and other volunteer organisations without which so much progress would not have been possible. The purpose of this document is to build on this

work and ensure any relevant outstanding tasks are implemented.

What is an allotment?

There are two types of allotment provision: Allotments and Allotment Gardens.

An 'allotment' is a parcel of land not more than 5 acres in extent, cultivated as a garden or farm. An 'allotment garden' is a parcel of land not exceeding 40 poles, (1,012m²), cultivated by the occupier for the provision of vegetables and fruit crops for himself and his family. By definitions outlined in the Allotment Act of 1922, an allotment garden is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of fruit or vegetables for consumption by himself and his family. The definition gives allotment authorities some flexibility to determine what is grown, but care should be taken when relaxing restrictions so that the character of the site is maintained.

All allotment sites provided by Gloucester City Council are allotment gardens.

Allotment provision is a statutory function and whilst an authority *may* provide allotments, there is a statutory obligation for Gloucester City to provide allotment gardens sufficient to meet the demand.

There are statutory and non-statutory allotments. The former were acquired or appropriated by the City Council for use as allotments. These cannot be sold or used for other purposes without the consent of the Secretary of State. Non-statutory allotments are on land allocated for other uses but leased or rented for use as allotments (not necessarily in City Council ownership).

Purpose of this strategy

As the population in Gloucester grows, as gardens get smaller and as concerns about food and its provenance increase, then we expect demand for allotments to grow. The purpose of the strategy is to; ensure that allotments space is used as efficiently as possible, to provide a structure for the provision of new allotments and to ensure that the service is as good as it can be within quite strict financial constraints.

The last point is particularly important given the pressure on local authority budgets. The general tenor of this document therefore, will be trying to do more with less.

Self management is a means of achieving this and for many allotment communities outside of Gloucester this is how allotments are run.

This document therefore will actively encourage associations and other groupings to consider more self management as a means of improving the way in which allotments are run within Gloucester City.

This document is a high level strategy essentially providing the general overview of where we, as an organisation should be going with regard to allotments. Detailed issues about each site and what needs to be done will be dealt with through separate site plans. These will be drawn up with the relevant association or whatever group comes forward representing the site.

The strategy takes forward the work undertaken by the Task and Finish Group in 2007 indeed many of the recommendations of

the Group are included in the action plan at the end of the document.

There are also links to the Public Open Space Strategy which promotes the use of some areas of open space as allotments and a context for negotiating new allotments as part of development

Current provision

In Gloucester, there are 12 allotment sites providing 846 allotments varying in size from 12m² up to 370m². The most common being the old 5 perch (half 10 perch) or 126m².

The following table is a brief resume of each of the separate sites detailing how many there are, their status etc.

Location	Size - Ha	Current No of Plots	Vacant	Waiting List	Statutory/ Non-statutory	Ward
Cotteswold Road	0.10	6	0	11	Non-statutory	Matson & Robinswood
Deans Way	0.15	6	0	10	Non-statutory	Kingsholm & Wotton
Estcourt Close	3.99	195	4	26	Statutory	Longlevens
Estcourt Park	1.68	84	4	13	Statutory	Longlevens
Hawthorn	1.21	61	8	55	Statutory	Moreland
Hempsted	0.05	2	0	10	Non-statutory	Westgate
Innsworth	0.23	131	8	4	Statutory	Longlevens
Robert Raikes	0.83	62	1	69	Statutory	Tuffley
Saintbridge	4.19	224	27	72	Statutory	Barnwood
Tredworth Fields	0.62	36	16	45	Statutory	Moreland
White City	0.63	29	10	36	Statutory	Matson & Robinswood
Willow Way		10	1	1	Non Statutory	Barnwood
New site Podsmead						Podsmead
New site – Kingsway				196		Quedgeley Fieldcourt
Totals	15.68	846	83	519		

Demand

As previously mentioned, there appears to be a revival in demand for allotments, as evidenced by the length of the waiting lists for all of the sites. These have been growing over the past few years and currently stand at 519. While the new facility at Kingsway should make inroads, there is still a very real need for more allotments.

Presently when people ask for an allotment they are added to the list for the nearest site,

unless special circumstances dictate otherwise. Plots are then allocated on a first come, first served basis.

In trying to provide for that demand, we need to make the most efficient use of the available plots and, where possible, identify new sites.

There are a number of ways of doing this:

Subdividing plots: There are still a lot of 10 perch (253m²) and even larger plots. As a matter of course, unless there is no waiting list

and a new plot holder requires a large plot, then each large plot will be subdivided, typically into two.

Allotment Squatting: For all sorts of reasons, at some point in their lives, people will have to give up their allotment. This can be straightforward, with the authority being informed and the allotment being allocated to another individual. Sometimes, however, it is not straightforward and months can pass before the allotment is re-allocated. This is a difficult area as there may be very legitimate reasons why an individual cannot tend their plot. It may be, for example, that they have an illness and once better they may well be able to tend their allotment again. This is not always the case and sometimes holders 'sit' on their allotment when really they have little intention of using it productively again. In these instances we need to be sympathetic but firm, especially when there are long waiting lists. Self managed allotments tend to police this issue better.

New allotments: As part of large scale developments the City Council, as planning authority, will look to negotiate new allotment sites. This is all the more important given the size of gardens in new developments. Kingsway was the first such provision for a number of years and, when complete, will provide 22 half plots (126m²), over 50 quarter-sized plots (64m²) plus a number of raised beds for those with mobility impairment. The forthcoming City Plan (the Spatial Planning document for Gloucester) will include policies encouraging new provision in large development sites.

Re-use of other open space: The Public Open Space Strategy identifies a number of open spaces within the City that do not really function as amenity land. There may be an

opportunity to use some of these in a more productive manner and convert them to allotments or some other growing space.

Finally, there are areas within the City that are have poor provision, in particular Hucclecote, Quedgeley and Hempsted. These tend to be on the periphery of the City and the City Council will work with Parish Councils, community groups and others to increase provision either within or, potentially, outside the administrative boundary of Gloucester to increase provision.

Under-utilized sites and disposals

Allotments are currently popular and there are waiting lists for all sites. However, this may not always be the case. While we should not dispose of allotments due to a short drop in demand, if over a long period of time, allotments do remain vacant, then the authority should not shy away from finding alternative uses. There may indeed be small areas on larger sites that are unpopular, even though as a whole, the site is well cultivated. Any change from allotments needs to be thought through very carefully as inevitably it will be permanent. If money is raised as part of this process then it should be ring fenced to be used on allotments elsewhere. If it is part of a larger site that is lost, then a proportion of any money raised should be spent on that particular site. There may of course be covenants and other restrictions on some sites preventing alternative uses.

Self-management and processes towards it

There are many different models of allotment management and these will vary across the country. In some areas the Local Authority is very much the lead partner. In others they have

very little involvement other than as a planning authority, i.e. protecting sites from development. Between these two extremes there are many combinations.

In Gloucester City, the lead role leans towards the local authority and while there are certain benefits to this, it can be frustrating for Allotment Associations who perhaps want to have a little more control in how their allotments are run.

There are also potential financial benefits to the Associations from community-based control as funders are always happier supporting local groups rather than local authorities.

The City Council therefore, will be supportive of any requests by Allotment Associations either individually or collectively to pursue greater self management. At one extreme this could mean total control being invested in the association, allowing them to set a charge, collect rents and do the things that the City Council does (or would like to do) now. At the other extreme, the City Council would still maintain overall responsibility and control, but certain aspects of allotment management, such as allocating plots, could be carried out by the association.

The process by which associations would move towards more self management is contained at appendix 1 towards the end of this document. Also included is a 'pick and mix' list of the sort of tasks/responsibilities that could be passed over from the City to an Association.

It is assumed that associations will want a level of self management somewhere between the two extremes and we will actively engage with associations and other stakeholders to help

them achieve what they think is best for their particular site.

What must be clear, however, is that before any significant control of any site can be handed over to an Association then some sort of mandate must be gained, not just from association members, but from allotment holders on the site as a whole.

The City will assist any allotment association in this process to allow an appropriate vote to take place. More modest transfers of authority will not need vote.

Tenancy agreement/finances

There are a number of charging methods used by local authorities and allotment associations across the UK and they all have their supporters and detractors. At one level it would seem fair to charge by the square metre but the administration cost for a large plot is exactly the same as a small one. Alternatively if there are charge thresholds then someone will always sit the wrong side of the threshold and feel hard done by.

Following a review of its fees, the Council planned to follow the lead of some other authorities and to charge by threshold. Plots were to be designated as being small (<99m²), medium (100-149m²) or large (>150m²) with a corresponding charge. While there are some administrative benefits to this system, when it was announced, a number of representations were received supporting the status quo i.e. charging by the metre square.

At the same time it was planned to remove age related concessions, though those in receipt of Housing and/or Council Tax support could claim a 50% reduction. The loss of age related

concessions again was subject to a number of representations.

Following discussions it was decided to maintain the current system at least for the year 2014 – 2015. Following on from then it is proposed to continue charging by the square metre.

Concessions will include those in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support, it is also proposed to continue with the age related benefit, however, this will be standardised for male and females at 65. Those females currently receiving age related benefit will continue to do so. New female allotment holders and those who are not 60 as of December 31 2014 will not.

From then on the price will increase by inflation on an annual basis. This is standard practice and the indices used throughout the Council will be utilized.

As mentioned later in this strategy we will investigate the possibility of charging a different rate for water used at each site. A site which is a heavy user of water will not be subsidized by one that is a light user.

We will also look into changing the 'allotment year'. Currently this starts in January, if it began in November it would be more in line with the seasonal requirements associated with the service.

Sustainability

Allotments are inherently sustainable. They provide a means of local food production that is inevitably less intensively produced than commercially produced fruit, vegetables and flowers. Allotments also contribute to community well being, healthy active lifestyles

and many other uncosted benefits to society as a whole.

They are also open spaces in their own right providing relief from urban form and attract a surprising diversity of wildlife.

Of course sustainability is a relative concept and some allotments will be more sustainable than others. While we would not wish to get into too much detail as what is and is not acceptable practice, there are issues around water consumption and being a good neighbour that do need addressing.

Water use

Water is a precious resource and while often there is far too much we have had a number of summers where there has been too little. Plants need water to grow and for some fruit and veg irrigation is often essential. However, water from standpipes costs money and this has to come out of allotment rents. There is a financial as well sustainability argument as to why we should all be careful with water use.

If self management becomes more widespread this is something that associations may wish to address themselves – however, in the interim, the City Council will investigate how to reduce piped water use on allotment sites. As a starting point we will look into charging each site for the water it uses - a site therefore with high water usage may have to pay more than one with low usage. We will also investigate restrictions on the use of unattended sprinklers for example.

Green waste

Good soil-husbandry depends on organic matter. Compost is a simple means of providing this. All allotment holders will be encouraged to compost all their green waste, although it is accepted that some waste may be diseased and, along with pernicious weeds cannot be composted in a normal heap. Burning (though only occasional burning of dry, diseased waste) is an option but is generally unsociable and in some instances removal from site may be the only alternative. To assist we will look into the feasibility of community composting, perhaps in association with the Council's waste contractor where larger, hotter heaps can be constructed. We will also continue the occasional deliveries of soil conditioner organised with help from the Council's waste contractor dependant on demand and cost.

Occasional skips for one-off clearances when asked for by Associations will be favourably looked upon.

Other issues

What can and cannot be grown

The initial allotment acts required a plot to be cleared at the end of each season. Technically, growing rhubarb was not allowed as it was a permanent perennial. Yet perennials are a sustainable and often a low maintenance means of extracting productivity from an allotment.

While the City Council is largely responsible for allotments, it will not be too involved in what can and cannot be grown on an allotment. Whilst not wishing to be too prescriptive, we will look to update our guide, detailing what is appropriate to grow on an allotment. This and the guidelines on sheds/structures and the role of animals (bees and chickens) may be

something that Allotment Associations decide they want to control. We will support this.

Selling of produce

Allotment legislation requires that an allotment garden is 'wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of fruit or vegetables for consumption by himself and his family'. Selling on a commercial basis is therefore considered unacceptable; however, small scale sales of excess produce, for example, through associations, would be appropriate.

Vandalism and theft

For some allotment holders this can be a real problem. To have carefully tended produce pointlessly trashed or stolen is heart breaking and may even cause some holders to give up. We will encourage individuals to report all incidents of theft and vandalism and will do what we can within the tight financial constraints to make allotments as secure as possible, without making them look like a fortress. We will work with allotment holders and associations to make them more secure and, where appropriate, seek external funding and make the most of opportunistic works to improve security.

We also need to work with local communities, the police and other stakeholders to try and address the problem at source. Certainly we will be aiming to bring our Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) expertise to play in engaging with local people.

The role of our grounds maintenance contractor

The role of Amey will vary from site to site. Their detailed role therefore will be covered in the Site Plans. However, they tend to look after the large paths and open spaces within allotments and the boundary fences. As with previous issues, associations may wish to have more control over this aspect of maintenance.

Education

While we do give new plot holders a welcome pack to help them, too many still give up after the first season. Often it is just that they needed more information/training about what to grow and how to grow it.

We will work therefore with providers such as The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) to set up training projects/workshops where new plot holders can learn about good husbandry and issues such as wise water use, etc.

Gloucester City Council policies

The City Council already has a number of policies that are generally supportive of allotments and their continued use. The most relevant are:

Sustainable Development Strategy for Gloucester 2000: This broadly supports the non commercial sale of allotment produce

Local Plan Second Stage Deposit 2002 contains two policies relevant to allotments:

Policy A1 New housing and allotments: This proposes a standard of 0.2 acres per 1000 residents. Off-site provision may be acceptable (page 131).

Policy A.2 Protection of Allotments: Broadly planning permission involving loss of allotments will not be permitted unless the requirements

around unmet demand, replacement provision and enhancement of asset are met (Page 132).

Open Space Strategy 2014: This requires the preparation and publication of an Allotment strategy. The potential for new allotment sites on Public Open Space and the negotiation of new allotments as part of new development.

Conclusions

Local Government is going through an era of unprecedented reform. Local communities are increasingly taking control of their neighbourhoods and it is the expectation that the decision making process and funding will be moved further down to users.

Allotments are no different, and Gloucester City Council will pursue an allotment structure where more control sits with associations and plot holders than is the case now.

Where there is a desire therefore, from associations and plot holders for a more active role then we will do our best to facilitate their needs.

As mentioned at the beginning of this strategy allotments have a long and honourable history. Gloucester City Council wishes to build on this and ensure that allotments are as fit for purpose in the 21st century as they were when first appeared in the 19th.

Delivery Plan

The following delivery plan will seek to ensure that the proposals set out in the strategy are implemented. The actions are based on the recommendations made by the Task and Finish group in 2007, supplemented by other more recent developments.

With limited funding some of the proposals will take time. Actions have been given a timeframe of short, medium and long term, corresponding to approximately less than 1 year, 1 to 5 years and more than 5 years, respectively.

Task	Funding	How	Comment	Timescale
Pursue self management where there is support from the association	Officer time. Association resource.	Work with Associations and other groups to facilitate a higher degree of self management.	Any significant degree of self management will have to be with consent of allotment holders.	Short to long.
Role of the allotment officer to be clarified and put in place.	Rental income.	Current income can continue to fund a part time officer.	Situation to be reviewed if significant number of associations opt for self management.	Short to long.
Planning Policy is incorporated into the new City Plan protecting allotments and requiring new ones as part of large scale development.	Part of City Plan process. Officer time.	Incorporate allotment policies into City Plan.	City Plan is currently on hold pending work on the Joint Core Strategy. Stage 3 to be published Winter 2014/15.	Short.
Increase provision of raised allotment beds.	External.	Through section 106 on new developments and through bidding process.	Kingsway will provide some raised allotments. Success will need to be monitored before further funding sought.	Medium to long.
Address areas of poor provision through alternative uses for council and privately owned land.	Officer time.	Work with parish councils and other bodies to identify potential allotment sites. Negotiate provision on large development sites (see above).	POS strategy contains proposals for finding alternative uses (inc allotments) for POS. Private land can become allotments with willing land owner.	Short to long.

Increase provision through subdivision and stricter requirements on abandoned allotments.	Officer time. Association resource.	Continue policy of large plot subdivision. With associations pursue firm action on uncultivated plots. Ensure plots are held by City residents of within half a mile of City boundary.	It is assumed that, if Allotment Associations pursue a more active role, they will want to manage their areas in a rigorous manner to ensure that allotments tenancies are not abused.	Short to long.
Encourage more sustainable use of water.	Officer time. Association resource.	Unattended sprinklers to be banned. All buildings to be fitted with a water butt. Water charges to be linked to site.	It is expected that water provision will increasingly be an issue. The modest measures suggested will be reviewed. More stringent controls may be introduced.	Short to long.
Allow a more proactive policy on what can and cannot be grown/done on an allotment.	Officer time. Association resource.	Adopt policy that allows certain produce to be grown such as top fruit. Allow Associations to rule on issues such as bee hives and chickens.	Top fruit can be a low maintenance means of having a productive Allotment. Associations can deal with the more local issues of bees, etc if they wish.	Short.
Increases security across sites.	External funding.	Submit funding and use other opportunities to better fencing and other security measures.	Some sites such as Saintbridge are large and difficult to fence. However, all opportunities need to be explored such as section 106 agreements and external funding.	Medium to long.
Keep allotment holders updated as to current developments.	Officer time.	Publish an annual newsletter updating allotment holders. Host a web page. Hold an	Simple, short and low cost publication along with a web page.	Short to medium.

		annual meeting of Allotment Associations.		
Change the allotment year to run from November	Officer time	Work with Associations and Civica to change billing timetable	This will allow a full winter to sort out problems of re-letting	Short to medium

Appendix 1. Moving towards Self Management

Process involved in moving towards self management followed by 'Pick and Mix' of services and functions currently undertaken, either in whole or in part by the City Council that could be carried out by an Association.

- City Council to talk to allotment association about the possibility of more self management. Where none exists City will talk to individual plot holders to gauge their interest.
- Associations who express an interest discuss at committee level what they would like to do.
- Associations discuss with City Council as to whether their aspirations need formal vote or can be carried out with informal agreement.
- Associations enter dialogue with their members.
- If can be carried out without vote then implement changes, if not carry on process
- If still interested Associations to hold EGM/ AGM to formally discuss matters with their members.
- Associations to submit business case (on 1-2 sides of A4) detailing what they would like to do, their capacity as an Association/group, and how they intend to do it. Associations to be properly constituted
- If business case broadly in line with Allotment Strategy and legislation then City to instigate vote. If possible honest broker employed to answer questions (this may be a FAQs compiled with help from The National Allotment Society or other honest broker.
- City Council writes to plot holders and initiates vote, again with assistance (if appropriate) from an honest broker. Simple majority vote on yes or no motion. Only one vote per year per association
- Depending on vote, begin handing over powers to associations.
- Depending on level of engagement City Council to negotiate with associations on the nature of the relationship. This may or may not need some sort of legal agreement.
- Handover responsibility.

The following is a list of functions/services that Associations can, if they wish take over. It is not exhaustive and is not a hierarchy. Some of these functions can be carried out without recourse to the above process.

- Sharing of information (will need consent of plot holders).
- Become principle key holder
- Plot Checking
- Site management (monitoring)
- Site management (implementation)
- Drawing up of site management plans
- Site upgrading and security
- Drawing up of additional allotment rules and guidelines
- Enforcement of allotment rules
- Formal leasehold arrangement
- Billing /invoicing, chasing bad debts.

Gloucester City Council Allotment Review

Report of the Allotment Task & Finish Group October 2007

1. Introduction

At its meeting on 18 January 2007 Council resolved to set up a Task and Finish Group to review the Council's allotments.

The Task and Finish Group has comprised:

- Councillor Gillespie (Chair)
- Councillor Tracey
- Councillor Witts

The group has been assisted by its Lead Officer, Frances Mangan, Streetcare Manager and supported by Beverly Barber, Senior Democratic Services Officer . At its first meeting the terms of reference for the Task and Finish Group were agreed as follows:

1. To address the strategic issues relating to allotments in the City, in particular future management of allotments, demand and provision of sites in the City.
2. To examine the operational issues relating to allotments in the City, including maintenance, conditions of use and levels of investment.

The Allotments Task and Finish Group has undertaken numerous meetings since its first meeting on 11 April 2007. Its activities have included the following:

- site visit of all the City Council's allotments (9 May 2007)
- attendance at the Annual Allotments Consultation Meeting (25 June 2007)
- open discussion with Allotment representatives on Allotment Policy and Tenancy Conditions (9 July 2007)
- discussion with the Assistant Director (Finance and Asset Management) (6 August 2007)
- site visit to Cheltenham Borough Council's allotments (30 August 2007)

The Task & Finish Group would also like to acknowledge input from the following people who assisted with the review.

- Enterprise (Accord), Carol Dovey, Denise Bullock
- City Council, Nigel Kennedy, Assistant Director (Finance and Asset Management)
- Cheltenham Borough Council Allotments Officer , Fiona Warin
- Allotment representatives
- Planning, Chris Hargraves
- Policy Design & Conservation, Jane Cox

This report sets out the findings of the Task & Finish Group along with their recommendation on the future management of Gloucester City Council's Allotments.

2. Background

2.1 Why have allotments?

Allotments provide a useful additional recreational resource for some residents, and are especially helpful to residents whose houses have small gardens or no gardens at all; particularly if the allotments are utilised as a source of good quality, cheap food. In this respect allotments have a role to play in helping to:

- tackle poverty in the city
- contribute toward sustainability
- encourage healthy eating and healthier life styles
- provide an excellent means of exercise
- encouraging social cohesion and celebrating diversity
- benefit to wildlife habitats

2.2 What is an allotment?

There are two types of allotment provision, Allotments and Allotment Gardens.

- An '**allotment**' is a parcel of land not more than 5 acres in extent, cultivated as a garden or farm.
- An '**allotment garden**' is a parcel of land not exceeding 40 poles, (1,012 square metres), cultivated by the occupier for the provision of vegetables and fruit crops for himself and his family. By definitions outlined in the Allotment Act of 1922, an allotment garden is wholly or mainly cultivated by the occupier for the production of fruit or vegetables for consumption by himself and his family. The definition gives allotment authorities some flexibility to determine what is grown, but care should be taken when relaxing restrictions so that the character of the site is maintained.

All of the allotment sites provided by Gloucester City Council are allotment gardens.

2.3 Is there a legal requirement for the council to provide allotments?

Allotment provision is a statutory function and whilst an authority *may* provide allotments, **there is a statutory obligation** except in the case of inner London boroughs **to provide allotment gardens sufficient to meet the demand** (Cross, The Recreational Services 8th Edition).

2.4 What is the difference between a Statutory and Temporary Allotment Gardens?

The Allotments Act of 1925 stipulated that land purchased or appropriated by a local authority for the purpose of creating allotments would be known as 'statutory' allotment sites and must not be disposed of or used for other purposes without central government consent. 'Temporary' allotment sites are those where a local authority allowed land that has a different long term usage or purpose, to be used, on a temporary basis, as allotment land. There is no time limit as to how long a site can remain a temporary allotment site. They do not automatically change to statutory allotment sites after 30 or 50 years. Temporary sites only change to statutory sites when the local authority decides that that area is not needed for any purpose other than allotments and officially gives the site statutory designation.

2.5 Is there any guidance on what is “sufficient to meet the demand”?

Central Government guidance to local authorities on the provision and protection of sport, recreational facilities and open space is contained within Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 17 'Sport, Open Space and Recreation' (2002).

PPG17 recognises allotments, community gardens and city farms in its typology of open spaces and sets out that Local Authorities should undertake robust assessments of the needs of their local community for open space.

A separate 'companion guide' to PPG17 recognises that the need for allotments, community gardens and urban farms is likely to rise with the growth of interest in organic farming and as a result of rising housing densities and the consequential reduction in the size of many gardens. It recommends a demand-led approach to the assessment of need for allotments and suggests that a population-based standard of provision is likely to be appropriate in most instances, coupled with an accessibility standard or distance threshold.

Planning Policy Statement 3 'Housing' reflects the Government's desire to ensure the availability of, and adequate protection for, good quality open spaces within urban areas, including allotments emphasising that housing density policies should have regard to the current and future level and capacity of infrastructure, services and facilities, in particular green and open space.

In terms of local policy, the adopted 1983 City of Gloucester Local Plan includes Core Policy L.1, which states that the Council will ensure the provision of an adequate level of public open space in the City through the retention of existing areas, and the inclusion of public open space within new areas of development. More specifically, in relation to allotments Core Policy

L.5 states that 'the City Council will seek to meet the demand for allotments subject to the availability of suitable land'.

In June 2001, Gloucester City Council produced the First Stage Deposit of its new Local Plan and a further Revised Deposit Draft Local Plan was then published in August 2002. The revised deposit draft plan includes two policies on allotments, one requiring the provision of an allotment site in new housing schemes of more than 30 dwellings (to a standard of 0.2 hectares per 1,000 population) the other seeking to protect existing allotments unless certain criteria can be met including; the loss of the allotment would not result in unmet demand within a reasonable walking distance, replacement provision is made in a convenient, accessible location, or other allotments in the locality would be enhanced by the development or by compensatory measures secured by a planning obligation.

The policies of the revised draft Local Plan relating to allotment provision are being carried forward into the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) - the replacement to the Local Plan.

There are no formal national standard for the provision of allotments. Each local authority is duty-bound by legislation to provide enough allotments to meet the demand by their residents.

However, in 1969, the Thorpe Report (government commissioned report on allotment provision) recommended a minimum standard of ½ acre (0.2 hectares) per 1,000 population.

3. Gloucester City Council Allotments

3.1 Current capacity and demand for allotments in Gloucester.

There are 11 allotment sites providing a total of 587 allotment plots, currently a combination of allotments of 253 square metres and 126 square metres, in the city.

The sizes of each allotment site vary considerably with Saintbridge having 146 plots and Hempsted with just 2. The table in Appendix 1 shows the list of sites along with the number of plots per site. (The number of plots per site is variable depending on the number of plots in each size)

There is a further new allotment site, 1 hectare (2.47 acres) planned for Kingsway which is due to come on stream in the near future for which there is already a waiting list. This will provide in the region of 79 allotments of 126sq mtrs or 39 allotments of 253 sq mtrs. This will be a statutory allotment site.

Of the 11 allotment sites in the city sites 8 are "statutory" and 3 are "temporary" allotment sites. The status of each site is listed in Appendix 1.

Using the recommended minimum standard of ½ acre (0.2 hectares) per 1,000 population and including the new Kingsway allotments this will provide 15.68 hectares of allotments resulting in 0.14 hectares per 1000 population. Compared with the recommended standard there is a shortfall of 6.58 hectares.

In September 2007 there were 587 available allotment plots (a combination of 253 square metres and 126 square metres). Of which 504 are let leaving 83 plots vacant. At the same time there is a waiting list of 149 plus a further 20 on the waiting list for the new Kingsway allotments.

Whilst there are some allotments that are not currently being used to capacity there is now a waiting list that exceeds the number of plots available. Therefore there is an under rather than an over provision of allotments. With the more proactive approach now being taken to letting the allotments it is anticipated that all allotments will be let within the next 18 months, once the plots in a poor condition have been made usable.

Recommendation:

- ***That the minimum standard of 0.2 hectares per 1,000 population included in the draft local plan continue to be used as a standard for allotment provision in the city.***
- ***That whilst there is more demand than supply the City Council should continue to seek to protect the current allotment provision and acquire new allotment sites as part of new developments using the section 106 process.***

3.2 Who uses allotments?

In October 2007 the allotment records show there are 504 allotments let of which 247 (approx 49%) of total users were on concessions thus being retirement age or over.

To date records have not been kept of the age, sex, race and disability profile of allotment users. However, from observation it is known that residents from diverse ethnic backgrounds use allotments. This provides an opportunity to share different methods of cultivation and to learn from each other.

In 2007 the Cabinet Member for Environment extended the concessionary rate to include people in receipt of disability benefit. There are no allotments specifically designed to encourage use by people with disabilities.

Recommendation:

- ***That raised bed allotments be permitted on the allotment sites on condition they are temporary by nature and can revert back to a standard allotment.***
- ***That the benefit of allotments be actively promoted to encourage younger people to take up allotments and a healthier lifestyle.***

3.3 How far do people travel to allotments?

The 11 city council allotment sites are concentrated in certain areas of Gloucester, meaning that there are no allotment sites in Abbey, Elmbridge, grange, Hucclecote, Podsmead, Quedgeley Severndale, Quedgeley Fieldcourt . The lack of provision in Quedgeley will be addressed by the new provision due in Kingsway. In an allotment survey carried out by Gloucester City Council in 1999, 49% of allotment holders travelled to their sites on foot or cycle with the remainder travelling by car.

The current uneven distribution of sites across the city means that there will continue to be a significant number of allotment holders travelling by car. As and when the opportunity arises the Task & Finish Group would like to see the majority of allotment holders travelling on foot or by bike and a more even distribution of allotments across the city. A travelling distance of 1 mile is considered reasonable for walking to an allotment. With the inclusion of the new Kingsway allotments the majority of residents are within 1 mile of an allotment see appendix 2. Areas falling outside a mile are Hucclecote , part of Quedgeley and it should be noted that the Westgate Ward is serviced by Hempsted allotments which is a very small site and there will be an increase of housing in this area over the next few years.

Recommendation

- ***That a travelling distance of 1mile to an allotment site for any resident be adopted as a standard when planning for future allotment provision.***
- ***That priority be given to identifying allotment provision to service areas of the city that are not currently within a mile of an allotment site, or a reasonably sized site : Hucclecote, part of Quedgeley and Westgate.***

3.4 How are the allotments managed?

The city council is responsible for the overall management of the allotments including the development of the strategy, policies and standards relating to allotments in the city.

Enterprise undertakes the administration of the allotments on behalf of the council along with basic maintenance.

The Task and Finish Group has learnt that whilst the City Council has responsibility for strategy and policy there is no specific staff time allocated for this purpose and it would appear that over recent years allotments have been

a very low priority. In fact, up until the commencement of the new Streetcare Contract they were to all intent and purposes forgotten about.

The lack of profile for the allotments has manifested in their being no communication with allotment holders, low levels of maintenance, a large number of un-let and uncultivated allotments. Yet nationally there has been an increase in demand for allotments. Another consequence is that the conditions relating to allotments have not been reviewed for a considerable number of years. Lastly, but not least, the City Council has had a poor understanding of the performance of the allotments.

Since the commencement of the new Streetcare contract and the introduction of the new Streetcare Team and the setting up of the Task & Finish group steps have been taken to redress this situation by the Cabinet Member for Environment, officers and Enterprise.

At the allotment holders meeting in June 2007 the view of participants was sought on whether or not there was an appetite from the allotment holders to move to community management of the allotments. The consensus at the meeting was that, at this point in time, community management was not an option, as most of the sites do not have an association in place. Furthermore they would only consider community management if and when the allotments are put in good order with adequate security and water facilities.

In the visit undertaken by the Task and Finish Group to Cheltenham it was observed that Cheltenham Borough Council has a full time allotment officer who undertakes the following roles:

- Administration of the letting of the allotments
- Manages maintenance and site inspections
- Organising and co-ordination of maintenance work including development of an allotment warden scheme.
- Production of an annual allotment newsletter
- Promoting and allotments including raising awareness of the benefits of allotments.
- Advice to new allotment holders on start up
- Maintaining and analysing of allotment data
- Liaison with and support for the allotment association.
- Identifying and applying for funding for allotments.

The Task & Finish Group considered there are a number of benefits of having one person in sole charge of allotments as this improves the communication with allotment holders and allows for a better link between policy, strategy and operation of the allotments. To that end the Task and Finish Group would like to see the introduction of an allotment officer explored in more detail. A part time allotment officer, say for 3 days a week, would cost in the region of £17,000 per annum including on costs. A full time allotment officer would cost in the region of £28,000

Recommendation

- ***That the Cabinet note the improvements that have been made to the City's allotments over the last six months***
- ***That the cabinet ask officers to explore in detail the benefits and disadvantages of creating an allotment officer post and funding for this position.. This post would work directly to the council with maintenance only being retained within the Streetcare Contract.***
- ***That the possibility of community management be revisited as and when the allotment infrastructure has been improved and an allotment association(s) has been developed.***

3.5 How can the existing use of allotment be maximised?

In September 2007 there were 587 available allotment plots. Of which 504 are let leaving 83 plots vacant. At the same time there is a waiting list of 149 plus a further 20 on the waiting list for the new Kingsway allotments.

Enterprise is currently preparing plots and is actively working through the waiting list. It can be seen that, with the size of the waiting list, in the very near future all workable plots will be let leaving a residual waiting list in the region of 66. If this is the case there will be no surplus demand. However this may take some 18 months to achieve as the process includes the re-measuring and remarking out of allotments that have not been in use for a while.

There are a number of ways allotment provision can be increased without having to acquire new sites.

The first of these is to review the size of the allotments. A standard size allotment is 253 square metres. An allotment of this size should be able to provide sufficient vegetables (with the exception of potatoes) to feed a family of four for a year.

In reality a plot of this size is, in this day and age with modern day pressures, too large for many people to cultivate effectively. This is why in recent years when plots have become vacant it has become practice to re-let them as two 126 square metre plots, which are more manageable.

In Cheltenham they have begun to set aside some plots half this size again which are proving popular with some individuals who have limited time.

What has been identified since Enterprise took over the administration of the allotments is that there are a number of people with more than one allotment and some with multiple allotments. There is currently no clear policy governing the number of allotments one person can have.

At the allotment holders' meeting in June it was proposed that a policy be introduced limiting any one person to a maximum 253 square metres (or equivalent plot).

This proposal caused concern should such a policy be introduced immediately. It may be more acceptable for the above policy to be introduced

over a period of time, i.e. as and when plots become vacant, except where it can be proven that a plot holder is growing crops on the allotment for personal commercial gain, which is prohibited.

There is no existing policy on the letting of allotments to organised groups. Schools could be encouraged to use allotments as an educational tool introducing young people to healthy living lifestyles, likewise youth groups. Also in other districts the health service use council allotments as part of their physio and occupational therapy programmes. These are just two examples but there are others.

The Task & Finish Group also discussed whether or not non- residents can be allotment holders. The majority of allotment holders are residents of Gloucester but there are some who work in Gloucester but live elsewhere and there are some who live close to the city boundary but not within the city. The view of the group was that priority should be given to residents including people living within half a mile of the city boundary where there is no allotment provision.

Recommendation:

- ***That a maximum of 253 square metres allotment plot (or equivalent) per person be introduced as and when allotment holders terminate their agreements.***
- ***That firm action is taken if any allotment holder is found to be using their allotment for personal commercial gain.***
- ***That officers' consult with allotment holders on the introduction of a new minimum allotment size that can be effectively cultivated.***
- ***That community and group lettings be encouraged where they raise awareness and encourage people to adopt healthier and more sustainable lifestyles.***
- ***That allotment holders must either live or work in the city or live within a half mile of the City boundary with priority being given to city residents.***

3.6 Process of renting an allotment within Gloucester City?

If a resident wishes to rent an allotment they need to contact the Council's Contact Centre through Enviro or by telephoning 396396 and then

- They will be put through to Enterprise who will take their details and find out if they have a preference for any site
- The person will then be put on the waiting list. They will be informed what number they are on the list
- When they get to the top of the waiting list they will be contacted and a viewing of the plot will be arranged
- If they are happy with the plot being offered they will be sent a tenancy agreement to complete and an invoice.

- Once the tenancy agreement has been signed and the invoice paid they can start working their allotment.

3.7 What can allotment plots be used for?

The allotment tenancy agreement sets out the conditions setting out what can and what cannot be grown on an allotment as well as other rules relating to the use of the allotment plot and site.

The Task & Finish Group has reviewed the existing conditions in consultation with allotment holders and has reached the conclusion that they need amending and updating. The particular changes the Task & Finish Group would like to see are set out below subject to final consultation with allotment holders :

Recommendation

- ***Sheds, greenhouses or polytunnels to be permitted on site on condition***
 - ***No one structure is more than 6ftx8ft x8ft high***
 - ***No more than 25% of a plot being used for structures***
 - ***The structure must be sound and safe but must not be of a permanent nature***
 - ***The position of the structure on the plot must not cause overshadowing of neighbouring plots.***
 - ***Any shed or greenhouse must include a rain water collection system feeding a water butt on the plot.***
 - ***Written approval is required in advance***
- ***Trees, fruit trees and hedges will not be permitted on site excepting where they are already in situ.***
- ***The growing of fruit bushes, strawberry plants, asparagus and rhubarb to be permitted***
- ***Allotment plots can be used for the growing of crops or flowers or a combination of both.***
- ***The keeping of livestock or fowl will not be permitted***
- ***Bonfires will continue to not be permitted***

3.8 What is the maintenance regime for allotments in the City?

The Task & Finish Group visited all the allotment sites as part of this review and was concerned about the low level of maintenance and the overall state of most of the allotment sites. This is a consequence of there being minimum maintenance and investment in allotments over the years.

The Task and Finish Group learned that there is no planned maintenance or investment programme for the allotments.

Prior to the Streetcare Partnering Contract the previous contractor was required to undertake grass cutting to the access paths and cutting of hedges. On top of this the city council instructed them annually, usually, in the

summer, to flail the uncultivated plots. The only other works undertaken was any essential health and safety works –this has been minimal.

Enterprise as part of the Streetcare Partnering Contract Enterprise is required to continue with the same level of maintenance.

Enterprise is also working with council, over the next two years to re-measure and mark out each of the allotment sites. The aim of this being to:

- Clearly delineate each plot as there has been encroachment over the years
- To bring uncultivated areas, where possible, back into use thereby increasing the number of plots available.

The target is to have this completed by December 2009.

This was welcomed and supported by the allotment holders at the June allotment holders meeting.

At the same meeting allotment representatives expressed a willingness to work with the council and Enterprise to make sure this exercise is successful. However, it will not be possible to harness this support without the council allocating staff time (an allotment officer) for this purpose.

At the visit to Cheltenham the Task & Finish Group were impressed with the Allotment Warden scheme that Cheltenham (and a number of other authorities across the country have introduced). In essence, this works as follows

Each allotment site has a warden or 2-3 wardens on larger sites. The warden is an allotment holder and agrees to

- Show new allotment holders around
- Undertakes quality inspections to ensure allotment holders are not encroaching on footpaths
- Regularly walks the site to identify if any of the plots are not being cultivated
- Checks to make sure allotment holders are adhering to the conditions of use
- Keeps notice boards up to date
- Nominates allotment holders for annual allotment awards

They act as a liaison person between the site and the council allotment officer. In Cheltenham they have a formal meeting with the allotment officer and representatives from the allotment association 4 times a year at which they discuss ongoing issues, consider each wardens quarterly report and receive a quality report for each site.

Each of the wardens receives a small remuneration for this work (75p per plot per year).

The feeling in Cheltenham was that since the introduction of the warden scheme the management of the sites has improved by working with wardens

and it has enabled the Council to be more proactive in ensuring plot holders cultivate their plots.

The allotment officer was seen in Cheltenham as being pivotal to the success of the scheme.

The conclusion of the Task & Finish group is that if an investment is made in the allotments to bring them up to standard and steps are taken to improve communication and involvement of allotment holders through the introduction of a warden scheme, along the lines set out above, then the level of ongoing maintenance would be minimal.

Recommendation

- ***That an allotment warden scheme similar to that developed in Cheltenham be explored***

3.9 What improvement need to be made to the allotments ?

In May this year the Task & Finish Group accompanied by the Cabinet Member for Environment and the Streetcare Manager visited the majority of allotment sites in the City to see them first hand.

The feeling of the Task & Finish group were echoed by the allotment holders at the meeting in June at which there was a very strong view that there was a need for investment in the allotments.

The Task & Finish Group was particularly struck by the difference good security can make to a site. Robert Raikes, which has good security, has the highest occupancy rate and is well cared for. Other sites such as Innsworth and Saintbridge and White City have very poor security and this impacts on the overall feel of the site.

Again in their visit to Cheltenham the Task & Finish Group noted the benefit of good security.

The highest priorities for improvements identified by the identified by the Task & Finish Group and the allotment holders are:

- **Security:**
The majority of the allotment sites have very poor perimeter fencing that makes them very vulnerable to vandalism. This is seen as the highest priority
- **Water**
The second highest priority is the provision of water on all sites.
- **The reduction in the number of uncultivated allotments**
- **Lockable notice boards on each site**

The Task & Finish group has asked officers to undertake a survey of each site and identify the cost of improving security, providing water at standpipes across the sites to avoid the necessity to use hoses and to provide a notice and information board at each site.

This work is underway and costs will be available shortly.

The Task & Finish Group is aware that the level of investment could be significant and there is currently no provision for these improvements.

As part of the review the group considered how the identified improvements could be funded. One suggestion was that an allotment site be disposed of to raise the capital required. This is how some other local authorities have funded improvements. This has happened where there has been surplus allotment provision. This is not the case in Gloucester.

The Task & Finish Group also recognises that it may not be possible to identify funding from the council's capital programme to fund the improvements over a 1 to 2 year period, though this would be ideal. If this is not possible they would support a 5 year rolling programme of improvements through the council's capital programme.

Recommendation

- ***That the cabinet support the introduction of an improvement and investment programme for the allotments and ask officers to prepare a capital proposal for consideration.***

3.9 Sustainability

Allotments are seen as being environmentally friendly and sustainable but they could be more sustainable.

One of the major costs incurred is the cost of water and if there is improved water provision at each site this could well result in an increased use of water as it is more accessible. Whilst supporting the need for improved water provision the Task & Finish Group would also like to see a hose pipe and sprinkler ban introduced and allotment holders encouraged to harvest water through the use of water butts.

Allotments also generate a considerable amount of green waste. Some of which is compostable on site but not all. The Task & Finish group would like to see individual allotment holders encouraged to compost on site. Where possible the Council should provide compost in bays at allotment sites along with bays for recycled material being brought to the sites for reuse on the allotments, such as manure from the Countryside Park, wood chippings from the arboriculture works undertaken by Enterprise. At the same time, to prevent the need for bonfires, an annual skip or similar should be provided by Enterprise to remove larger green non compostable material from each site in autumn would be welcomed.

Recommendation

- ***A hose pipe and sprinkler ban is introduced as and when water facilities are improved at each site***
- ***An annual autumn skip or similar be provided for each site to remove larger non compostable green waste .***

3.10 External sources of funding

There are various sources of external funding that could be attracted to invest in allotments. In most instances grant aid and external funding is not available for infrastructure works. Instead it tends to be available for education and awareness programmes, increasing community engagement and encouraging more sustainable means of cultivating plots.

To date funding raised from external for allotments has been negligible as there is no one to identify the funding source, make applications or to support a advise allotment associations with their applications.

3.11 What is the annual rental cost of an allotment ?

The fees and charges for allotments in Gloucester are comparable with other neighbouring authorities.

This year the cost of a 126 square metre plot is £15.86p (£1.32p per month) charged at the full rate and for a concession it is £9.24 (0.77p per month). The view of most of the allotment holders at the meeting in June was that this is good value for money.

Cheltenham Borough Council would consider increasing the charges as they implement improvements to their allotments. The view of the Task & Finish Group is that there is potential to increase charges for allotments but only if the security and facilities are improved.

In 2005/06 the previous contractor reported an income of £5,000 from allotment charges. Enterprise is estimating an income of £11,800 in 2007/08. The explanation for the difference is that in 2007/08 correct charges have been levied and Enterprise has undertaken a rigorous audit and has implemented systems to ensure all the charges are being collected. This is welcomed.

At the June 2007 allotment holders' meeting it was proposed that allotment charges

- Increase in 2008 by 5% and by a further 5% in 2009 in line with the council overall policy for fees and charges.
- That in future charges be levied on a cost per square metre basis to reflect variations to allotment plot sizes.

- That the concession rate be 50% of the full price this would be a reduction in real terms for those on a concession.

Since the meeting a further question has been raised about what is the purpose of the concessionary rate.

The proposed fees and charges for 2008 and 2009 are set out below based on the concessionary rate at 50%.

	2007/2008	Prop 2008	Prop 2009
	Charge £	Charge £	Charge £
126sq m			
OAP's / disabled	£9.24	(£9.99)£8.32	£10.48)£8.74
Ordinary	£15.86	£16.65	£17.48
253 sq m			
OAP's/disabled	£18.27	(£19.98)£16.64	(£20.97)£17.48
Ordinary	£31.71	£33.30	£34.96
Per sq metre			
OAP's/ disabled		(£0.079)£0.066	(0.82)£0.069
Ordinary		£0.132	£0.138

The proposed charges based on a 50% concession and the same level of lettings as per Sept 2007 would generate an income for 2008 (full year equiv) of £10,7365 and 2009 of £11,016 which in real terms would be below the 2007/08 estimate income for the year. The alternative is to set the concessionary rate at 60%, which is shown in brackets in the above table.

A further recommendation made at the allotment holders meeting, supported by all those present, was that the letting year be changed to coincide with the growing year. Thus the new year will run from 1st January to 31st December each year with invoices being sent to allotment holders in the October preceding the start of the year.

It is proposed that this new arrangement be fully implemented by January 2009 with 2008 being a transition year. This will mean there will be a 9 month year for 2008 running from April to December 2008 for which plot holders will be charged for a 9 month period then they will be required to make full year payment for 2009 by December 2008.

Recommendation:

- ***That the proposals taken to the June 2007 allotment holders meeting and set out above be endorsed by the Cabinet***
- ***That until such time as investment is made to the allotments infra structure the annual increase in charges should be in line with Council's overall policy. However, if and when, there are***

improvements to the allotments it may then be pertinent for the Cabinet to undertake a review of allotment charges.

3.12 What do the allotments cost to run?

In the past the cost of operating the allotments was included in the grounds maintenance contract cost and was not separately identified .

The key areas of expenditure are

- The administration of the letting of allotments
- Water rates
- Core maintenance costs (Based on the existing maintenance regime)

Within the new Streetcare Partnering Contract the outgoing expenditure is met by Enterprise and they also retain the income generated.

The City Council Streetcare Team does not have any specific staff or resources allotted to allotments.

The water rates for the calendar year 2006 were £3,513 but Enterprise has informed the council that there has been a significant increase in 2007/08. Enterprise are investigating the increase to ascertain the reason and whether or not the bills received need to be challenged.

An estimate for core maintenance, work that does not include the costs of any improvements, is in the region of £5,000 to £6,000 depending on the level of work.

Enterprise has allocated 3 days a week staff time plus on cost and overheads to the administration of the allotments.

Thus on the above basis the current net cost to the council after taking income into account is in the region of £9,000 to £11,000 per year but this could go up if the water rates increase significantly. At the higher figure this equates to a cost per head of population of 0.098p a year

Recommendation:

- ***That officers work with Enterprise to confirm the annual cost of operating the allotments***
- ***That the Streetcare Partnering Board receives an annual breakdown of the income and expenditure for allotments along with usage figures.***

3.13 Who is responsible for insuring allotments?

The City Council is responsible for keeping safe common areas within each allotment site and un let allotments and this is covered by the City Council's public liability insurance. This does not extend to individual allotments. The

individual allotment holder is responsible for his or her insurance covering theft, vandalism and public liability.

There is insurance available that allotment associations can take out on behalf of their members. One allotment association in the city is currently exploring this in more detail.

3.14 Marketing and promotion of allotments in the City

There has been no marketing of allotments over the years. Nor has there been any promotion of the benefits of allotments.

At the June 2007 Allotment Holders Meeting it was suggested that more use be made of the Council web site to promote allotments and that an annual news letter would greatly improve communication with allotment holders as well as being a very useful vehicle for promoting a more sustainable approach to the cultivation of allotments. This has worked very well for Cheltenham.

The Task & Finish Group would like to see increased marketing and promotion particularly encouraging low income groups, young people, schools and community groups to get more involved. However they recognise that this cannot be delivered within existing resources and would strongly recommend that if funding is identified for an allotment officer that this be a key part of their role.

3.15 Consultation with allotment holders and allotment associations.

In June this year an allotment holders meeting was arranged which was the first of its kind. It was well attended and welcomed by the allotment holders and it opened up an important means of communication between the Council and the allotment holders. It provided the opportunity for the Council to consult on the proposed fees and charges and other changes and to gain the views of the allotment holders. The meeting was very positive.

When officers organised the allotment holders meeting an invitation went to every allotment holder, as officers were unaware of any allotment association in existence with whom they could consult.

The disadvantages of there being no formal groups representing each allotment site is that holders attending meetings can only represent themselves and there is no easy way to obtain a broad range of views or know whether or not an individual is representing the views of the majority of allotment holders.

It also makes it difficult if either the Council or Enterprise want to work with allotment holders to help improve the site as there is no formal link.

Further benefits of an allotment association is the possibility of bulk purchasing of seeds etc at discounted rates, taking out insurance cover for allotment holders and generally sharing knowledge and information and lastly but not least access to other external funding.

Estcourt Close and Estcourt Park appear to have the most established allotment associations in the City and there are embryonic associations at Tredworth, Robert Raikes and Innsworth.

Recommendation

- ***That an Allotment Forum be established that meets twice a year and that the Cabinet Member for Environment and one member from each of the other parties plus representatives from each of the allotment sites be invited to attend.***
- ***That the Council work with allotment holders to seek to create an allotment association, or similar for each site which may or may not become part of an umbrella allotment association for the City.***
- ***That the next meeting with allotment holders be arranged for the end of January 2008 at which the outcome of this review will be reported.***

4. CONCLUSION

The Task and Finish group has identified that the allotments have been moored in a backwater. They have operated with a low level of maintenance, no promotion or liaison with allotment holders, policies not being reviewed regularly to make sure they are still relevant and in the last contract there was effectively no monitoring. This has resulted in a significant number of uncultivated allotments, encroachment onto paths and other plots, charges not being properly levied and the Council having a poor understanding of what is happening on the allotments.

Since April this year with the commencement of the new Streetcare Partnering Contract Enterprise have reviewed the administration of the allotments. They now have a good record of all the allotment holders who are being levied the correct charge for their plot(s). This means they are now in a position to start letting the uncultivated plots. Enterprise is now providing the council with information on a regular basis. However there is still some work to do before an accurate cost of running the allotment can be confirmed.

At the same time even though there has been no promotion there is a keen interest in allotments with the waiting list currently being more than the plots available. Using the Thorpe Standard of 0.2 hectares per 1000 population there is currently a deficit of 6.58 hectares in the city. However, the majority of residents will be within 1 mile of an allotment site once the Kingsway allotment gardens are provided

The allotment users see improved security and getting uncultivated plots back into use as the highest priorities.

Allotments have a key role to play in the City Council's healthy lifestyle and sustainability agendas. The Task and Finish Group feel there should be greater promotion to of allotments to young people and families to encourage them to use allotments especially as more recent residential developments tend to have smaller garden areas.

Lastly the Task and Finish Group have identified the top priorities being

- Improving security and bringing uncultivated plots back into use
- The creation of an allotment officer post responsible for administering and managing the allotments to include promotion, supporting the allotment associations, education and awareness and development of a warden scheme.

and are seeking cabinet approval for the recommendations as set out in the body of the report .

Lastly but not least I would like to thank my colleagues Chis Witts and Pam Tracey for the time and energy they have put into this review and to the officer who have supported us and everyone else who has contributed. It has been a lot of work but at the same time we have learnt a lot and it has been enjoyable even getting soaked to the skin on the allotment site visit..

Chair of the Allotment Task & Finish Group

Cllr Geraldine Gillespie

Background information

- The draft Allotment Strategy, For the City of Gloucester April 2002
- Allotment tenancy agreement
- Notes of the Allotments Holders meeting 25th June 2007
- Notes of the allotment Task & Finish Group meetings
- Allotment law



AGENDA ITEM 7 – 2013-14 FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT

REVISED RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is asked to RESOLVE that:

- (1) The year end position for 13/14 is an overspend against budgets of £297k be noted.
- (2) The balance on the General Fund therefore reduces to £1.869m be noted.
- (3) The implementation of the majority of the savings in 2013/14 following previous financial year's savings targets is an excellent achievement. This forms part of the £7.5m of savings that the Council has achieved in the last four years.

2.2 Cabinet is asked to RESOLVE:

- (1) A transfer into an earmarked reserve of £17,000 representing the unspent portion of the £19,000 added by Cabinet to the City Centre Historic Area Grant Fund in June 2013.

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