

Gloucester City Council

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
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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