

**Executive****on 21 March 2006****Title: Executive Response to the Scrutiny Review of Haringey's Allotment Service Delivery**Report of: **Director of Environmental Services****Ward(s) affected:** All**Report for:** Non Key Decision**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 To provide the Executive's response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of Haringey's allotment service delivery.

**2. Introduction by Executive Member**

- 2.1 This report sets out the response of the Executive to the Scrutiny Review of Haringey's Allotment services. Members are asked to note the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel and to approve the responses to these recommendations.

**3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 That the Executive approves the response to the 6 recommendations of the Scrutiny Review, as set out in section 7 of this report.

**Report authorised by: Director of Environmental Services****Signed: Anne Fisher** \_\_\_\_\_**Contact officer:** Paul Ely, Policy & Development Manager, Recreation Services**Telephone:** 020 8489 5690 **email:** paul.ely@haringey.gov.uk**4. Executive Summary**

- 4.1 On 31<sup>st</sup> January 2006, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the recommendations of the scrutiny panel review of allotment service delivery.
- 4.2 The Panel's aim was to review the current arrangements by the Council for the management of the Allotments service and, in particular, to consider issues relating to the meeting of local needs, value for money and funding sources and to make recommendations on possible improvements to the service.
- 4.3 The Executive's response to the detailed recommendations of the review are set out in this report.

## **5. Reasons for any change in policy or for new policy development (if applicable)**

N/A

## **6. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 Background Papers**

- 6.1 The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
- London Borough of Haringey Open Space Strategy "A space for everyone".

## **7. Background**

- 7.1 The Scrutiny Panel review of Allotment Service Delivery was undertaken between August 2005 and December 2005. The aim of the review was:  
*"To examine in broad detail the current arrangements by the Council for the management of the allotment service".*

- 7.2 The terms of reference agreed for the review set out the following objectives:

To examine the overall legislative context for the provision of allotments.

- To identify current levels of demand for allotments within the overall needs and demands for Open Space provision.
- To review existing management, policy, and letting of allotments.
- To develop more effective measures to manage underused plots.
- To examine the health and safety, security and vandalism associated with allotments.
- To examine the role of allotments in the context of sustainable development, healthy living and education objectives.

- 7.3 The Review identified 6 recommendations which are as follows:

- That a dedicated officer for Allotments be appointed.
- That options for the development of future sites, either temporary or permanent, be explored, to include; a survey of land for potential new sites and underused land, consideration to the securing of additional land through the use of S106, and possible diversification of existing open spaces, and use of S106 also to be considered to improve the quality and therefore use of existing allotments.
- That following consultation with the proposed Allotment Forum the tenancy agreement be updated and simplified to include an examination of; the procedures for removal of plot holders, the size of permitted shed and other developments, a system for temporary sub letting, and the permitted uses of sites.
- That further consideration be given to the allocation of capital funding to enable underused allotments to be brought back into use at the earliest opportunity in the most cost effective manner possible, e.g. use of community services.
- That there be a review of rent charges to ensure that they are comparable with other Authorities. The Panel agreed that non Haringey residents should be charged a significantly higher levy than Borough residents. Any increase in income from the review must be used to make improvements to the Allotments service.
- That an Allotments Forum be established. The Forum to consider the publicity given to Allotments to be achieved through promoting the use of the internet, Council's website, Newsletters, Events etc. Site Secretaries to be given support to translate site specific documentation into different languages for ploholders.

- 7.4 Recreation Services are responsible for the management of Haringey's allotments, along with public open space in the borough. Priority is currently given to Parks and

Open Spaces as they are used by more people. Haringey has 4 Green Flag parks which is the second highest in London. However, net expenditure per head of population has previously been recorded in the bottom quartile. There has been considerable capital expenditure in both open space and allotments in recent years. In the current financial year, £5 million is being spent on open space improvements and £100,000 on allotments (£55,000 from the NRF and £45,000 capital contribution). Last year, the net cost to the Council for the allotment operation was £13,200, and the service is largely operated on a cost recovery basis.

7.5 Over recent years interest in allotments has increased due to public awareness of 'green' issues and concerns over links between food and health. Modern housing developments are also being developed with smaller garden sizes which may stimulate demand for community gardens and allotments. Demographic changes including a larger number of older, but relatively healthy individuals could also stimulate demand for allotment plots, as allotment participation is highest amongst the over 50s. The Open Space Study identified that there are 42 hectares of allotment land in Haringey and that an additional 32 hectares would need to be brought into use by 2016, to meet both existing demand and anticipated demand that generated by future population growth.

7.6 The following table details the benchmarking information that was gathered as part of the Scrutiny Review process.

London Borough	Number of sites	Number of plots	Charges (annual)	Staffing
Haringey	26	1691	£33.25 average charge	Customer Care Officer and Neighbourhood Managers
Barnet	48	3000	£50 for borough residents and £100 for non – borough residents	Greenspace Officer
Waltham Forest	32	1800	£35 for class A plot £30 for class B plot £23 for a class C plot 15% more for non – borough resident	Allotment Officer
Enfield	36	2229	Grade A plot - £55 for borough resident and £65 for non – borough resident Grade B plot - £36 for borough resident and £41 for non – borough resident	Allotment Officer

7.7 16% of ploholders come from outside the borough.

7.8 As part of the service improvement plan for next year, information on expenditure and charges from ploholders will be made available on an individual site basis.

7.9 The Review Panel recognised the sensitivities of the some of the issues raised, and recommended that they be considered in setting the priorities for the Recreation Service Business Plans in 2006/07 and 2007/08. Where relevant, reference is made to the Haringey Open Space Strategy to identify the approach the Council proposes to take in addressing the recommendation.

## 8 Description

### 8.1 Response to the recommendations:

In total 6 recommendations were made. The majority of the recommendations are agreed in full. Only one could not be agreed at this time – recommendation 1; which calls for the appointment of a full time Allotment Officer.

## 9 Consultation

9.1 Core membership of the Scrutiny Panel was from Councillors Santry and Davies. Information was provided to the Panel by officers from Environmental Services. Public attendance was from ploholders and site secretaries representing Haringey's allotment associations. The total number of meetings held was 4, a schedule of the meetings was as follows:

Site visit to allotments	26/08/05
Public meeting	04/10/05
Public meeting with allotment holders	07/11/05
Panel meeting	08/12/05

For the public meeting in November, notification and invitations were sent to site secretaries.

## 10 Summary and Conclusions

10.1 The Scrutiny Review involved the examination of allotment service delivery in Haringey.

Of the 6 recommendations;

- 5 are agreed in full
- 1 is not agreed for the reasons given

## 11 Recommendations

11.1 The Executive is asked to consider and endorse the response to the Scrutiny Review.

11.2 The Executive requires progress against all of the agreed actions to be reported back to the Allotment Scrutiny Panel at agreed intervals.

## 12 Comments of the Head of Legal Services

12.1 The Head of Legal Services has been consulted and comments that the legal duty on the Council is to provide a sufficient number of allotments and to let such allotments to persons resident in the Borough. The duty does not apply to Inner London Boroughs, and this is reflected in the low number of allotments in Islington. Accordingly the issue of differential charging should be considered in the light of the priority nature of the duty to let to residents of the Borough. In a case in 1982, a steep increase in allotment rents in Reigate and Banstead was quashed in the High Court as unreasonable and unjustifiable on the ground that it was out of line with the general rise in charges for other recreational activities.

12.2 Allotment authorities may acquire land by agreement or compulsorily inside or outside its area for the purpose of providing allotments. Given that Enfield and Barnet have vacancies, some consideration should be given to liaising with those Boroughs and ascertaining which tenants in Haringey reside in those Boroughs and do not reside in Haringey. It may be that negotiation could take place on securing use of some plots in those Boroughs for a period, given the perceived demand in Haringey in the next 10 years.

- 12.3 An analysis of the land holding powers of Haringey's allotment is highly desirable for the Strategy Action Plan for the next year. Some allotments are on land held under housing powers, and do not have the statutory protection of allotments held under the Allotments Act. Where a local authority holds land under the Allotments Act 1922 for use as allotments, it may not sell, appropriate, use or dispose of it for any other purpose without the consent of the Secretary of State.
- 12.4 The Assistant Director Planning Environmental Policy and Performance should advise on the policy justification for any proposed use of Section 106 powers. The Companion Guide to PPG 17 suggests that a policy for allotments provision should be based on population standards and accessibility standards.

### **13 Comments of the Director of Finance**

- 13.1 The financial implications arising from the Executive's response to the Scrutiny recommendations must be managed within the Recreation Services approved capital and revenue budgets for the remainder of 2005/06 and the next financial year. Any unmet resource implications for 2007/08 onwards will need to be considered by members as part of the Council's budget setting process for that year.

### **14 Equality Implications**

- 14.1 The Scrutiny Panel Review of Allotment Service Delivery sought to examine the issue of access to allotment gardening and how this might be improved. However, the key issues to emerge during the course of the Review were more concerned with the overall quantity of allotments available in the Borough and the need for a dedicated Allotment Officer to be recruited to support the allotment holders.

Equalities information is currently collected from new tenants only. Since 1996, information has been collated on ethnicity, age and gender. It is proposed for next year that a ploholders satisfaction survey be introduced, and that greater information about the service will be made available to ploholders via on site notice boards.

**Appendix 1**  
**To Executive Response to the Scrutiny Review of Haringey's Allotment Service**  
**Delivery**

<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>RESPONSE</b>	<b>COMMENTARY</b>
<p>1. That a dedicated officer for Allotments be appointed.</p>	<p>Not agreed</p>	<p>In order for Recreation Services to be able to appoint an Allotments Officer, the investment need would have to be included in the pre-business plan review and budget planning. Currently, there is an officer who spends half her time on allotment support, and the Parks Neighbourhood Managers deal with the day to day running of the allotments and any maintenance required. There is also a Project Officer with a wider assets and contracts brief who assists with the delivery of the service. The salary is not in the business plan for 2006/07, but should be considered in the pre-business plan review for 2007/08 where it would be considered alongside other service needs. The employment of an officer would assist in generating external funding, promoting self management, and promoting and developing inter-agency interest and involvement in the service.</p>
<p>2. That options for the development of future sites, either temporary or permanent, be explored, to include:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a survey of land for potential new sites and underused land,</li> <li>• consideration to the securing of additional land through the use of S106, and possible diversification of existing open spaces,</li> <li>• use of S106 also to be considered to improve the quality and therefore use of existing allotments.</li> </ul>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>Further exploration of the potential to develop new sites could be done through the inter-departmental forum, established through the Open Space Strategy. This would also apply with the allocation of S106 monies to allotments. The same group could consider the potential use of S106 monies for use on allotments, alongside the need for other investment priorities. Any S106 monies obtained could be spent on developing new sites or improving access to existing sites.</p>
<p>3. That following consultation with the proposed Allotment Forum the tenancy agreement be updated and simplified to include an examination of:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the procedures for removal of plot holders</li> </ul>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>A review of Tenancy Agreements is included in Recreation Services' work programme for 2006/07 and these issues will be considered as part of that review by the Parks Management Project Officer.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the size of permitted shed and other developments</li> <li>• a system for temporary sub letting</li> <li>• the permitted uses of sites</li> </ul>		
<p>4. That further consideration be given to the allocation of capital funding to enable underused allotments to be brought back into use at the earliest opportunity in the most cost effective manner possible, e.g. use of community services.</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>£300,000 capital expenditure has been allocated next year to make improvements to open space assets managed by Recreation Services. This was awarded on the basis of priority for expenditure being given to parks and public open space. The potential will be explored through the Better Places Partnership for obtaining NRF and SSCF funding. Links will also be explored for improvements works such as Community Payback.</p>
<p>5. That there be a review of rent charges to ensure that they are comparable with other Authorities. The Panel agreed that non Haringey residents should be charged a significantly higher levy than Borough residents. Any increase in income from the review must be used to make improvements to the Allotments service.</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>The Council has already approved increases over the next 2 years in the budget setting process for 2006/07. Although it has not yet been approved, the Council will implement a higher charge for non – borough residents for the financial year 2006/07, which will bring the average increase for resident ploholders below the £8 average. A precedent for differential pricing has already been established for borough and non-borough residents in other areas within Recreation Services, for example, sports pitch hire and bereavement.</p>
<p>6 - That an Allotments Forum be established. The Forum to consider the publicity given to Allotments to be achieved through promoting the use of the internet, Council's website, Newsletters, Events etc. Site Secretaries to be given support to translate site specific documentation.</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>The Allotments Forum has already been established with support from Recreation Services. An officer will be available to support the Forum, in a similar way to the Parks Forum meetings as required. Assistance will also be offered for services such as producing promotional materials. Financial support may also be sought for the new Forum through the NRF and SSCF.</p>