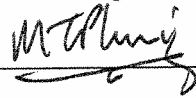


Haringey Council

[No.]

Agenda item:

Overview & Scrutiny On 14th September 2009

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| Report Title: Allotments Scrutiny Review Update –Report | |
| Report of: Mun Thong Phung, Director of Adult, Culture & Community Services. | |
| Signed :  | |
| Contact Officer: Alex Fraser, Arboricultural and Allotments Manager. Tel: 020 8489 5657 email: alex.fraser@haringey.gov.uk | |
| Wards(s) affected: All | Report for: Non Key |
| <p>1. Purpose of the report</p> <p>1.1 To provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an implementation update on Executive recommendations resulting from the 2005/6 Scrutiny Review on Allotments.</p> | |
| <p>2. Introduction by Cabinet Member (if necessary)</p> <p>2.1 Allotments are being increasingly recognised for the part they play in urban regeneration, sustainable development and improving people’s well being. They provide a wide range of benefits in allowing people to grow fresh fruit and vegetables, to partake in physical exercise and engage in social activity. Allotments encourage localised food production which reduces energy consumption and waste. They also provide an important habitat for wildlife. It is essential that existing allotment provision is protected and enhanced where possible.</p> | |
| <p>3. State link(s) with Council Plan Priorities and actions and /or other Strategies:</p> <p>3.1 The Haringey UDP (2006) includes several policies relating to the protection and improvement of open space, sport and recreation provision in the borough. The relevant policy is OS 12: Allotments, which states:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council seeks to protect allotments. Where allotments are surplus to demand other open space uses will be considered first before alternative land uses are considered. | |

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 To continue to deliver on Executive Recommendations.
- 4.2 To continue to work and engage with the Allotments Forum.
- 4.3 To seek capital funding for infrastructure improvements across all sites.

5. Reason for recommendation(s)

- 5.1 To continue with improvements made to date in respect of service provision and the overall condition of allotment sites.

6. Other options considered

- 6.1 N/A

7. Summary

- 7.1 The Scrutiny Review was carried out in the latter half of 2005 and completed in early 2006. The majority of recommendations were endorsed by the Executive with the exception of the recruitment of a dedicated Allotments Officer. The recommendations are attached at appendix 1.

8. Chief Financial Officer Comments

- 8.1 Since the 2005/06 Scrutiny Review and subsequent Allotment Asset Survey (AAS) in 2007, a total of £100k has been spent on improvements to allotments in the Borough. This includes £50k earmarked during the current financial year.
- 8.2 Capital bids of £450k have been submitted during the Pre-Business Planning Review (PBPR) process for each of the financial years since 2005/06. These bids have not been successful.
- 8.3 A further bid will be submitted by Recreation Services during the forthcoming PBPR round. Whilst the investment in 8.1 above has made some improvements there will no doubt be further improvements required since the 2007 AAS report. This capital funding would also support bringing 3 former sites back into use to increase provision (paragraph 14.5) along with revenue funding from rent receipts and Neighbourhood Support funding.
- 8.4 However, due to the economic downturn in recent months the level of capital receipts from disposal of assets has reduced significantly. Any bid for capital funding will be considered alongside all other capital bids and will be reliant on available resources. An alternative method of financing the improvements would be through increased rent charges. However, as in previous years, it is unlikely that a rent increase will be considered an agreeable option.

9. Head of Legal Services Comments

- 9.1 14.3 of the report states that legal services are advising in respect of allotment agreements. This service ought to continue where necessary to ensure appropriate and up to date documentation is in place.

10. Equalities and Community Cohesion Comments

- 10.1 The Scrutiny Review of Allotment Service Delivery initially 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 Officer to support the management of allotments.

Equalities information (ethnicity, age and gender) continues to be collected from new tenants, which has been the case since 1996. Data collected shows an even spread across males and females that have taken up the opportunity to have an allotment at 50%. Data on ethnicity shows a higher percentage of residents from white backgrounds. Data on age shows the take up of allotments plots is higher for the age groups 35-49 and 50-64.

11. Consultation

11.1 The formation of the Allotments Forum has enabled clearer lines of communication and the ability for Recreation Services to consult with Allotment site secretaries.

12. Service Financial Comments

12.1 An Allotment Asset Survey (AAS) was conducted in 2007 across all 26 allotment sites. The AAS provides a summary of the works required to improve the condition of allotment sites. This exercise produced projected costs, priorities, volumes and the level of condition on each site. The total identified improvement cost estimate is £450k. This formed the basis of Capital Bids in 2007, 2008 and 2009 as part of the Pre-Business Plan Review (PBPR). However, the Capital Bids were not successful thus Recreation Services was only able to allocate £25k in 2007 and 2008 for improvements via existing mainstream revenue/capital maintenance budgets. For 2009, this figure was increased to £50k as a result of a higher amount of capital being allocated for open space

13. Progress

13.1 The Allotments Forum was established in April 2006 along the same lines as the Haringey Friends of Parks Forum. Meetings are held every two months with Senior Council Officers in attendance. A progress report is produced in advance of the meeting and distributed to the Forum's Chair and all site secretaries. A number of actions highlighted both by the Forum and Council Officers are agreed and responded to at the meetings. As a result of these meetings, there is now a more positive perception of the delivery of Allotment services.

13.2 In response to the continued desire by the Forum for a dedicated Allotments Officer, the existing Arboricultural Service is being enhanced to include the management of Allotments. These changes will take place within the current Parks Service re-structure. From October 2009, Arboricultural Officers will be responsible for allotment site inspections and the day to day management of sites.

13.3 To date, there have been no section 106 agreements considered to improve the quality and therefore use of existing allotments, however, this source of potential funding will be further explored in the future:

13.4 A review of rent charges was undertaken and showed the Borough was fairly comparable with neighbouring local authorities. Proposals have been made through the Council business planning process to link rent increases to investment funding, but these have not been taken forward.

13.5 Performance information is now produced which reports on site management administrative requirements. The turnover of plots and number of new tenants registered has increased due to more effective site management. The following data is for 2008.

- 176 Notice to Quit letters were issued.
- 98 Terminations letters were issued.
- 237 New tenants were registered.

13.6 In 2008, the Mannock Road Community Allotment project was set up and was awarded a Green Pennant in recognition of the efforts made by the local community in returning a disused part of the site to use. This year the 'Under One Sun' project at East Hale allotments was also awarded a Green Pennant for its excellent work in creating the new community allotment.

14. Current Action

14.1 The Service, in conjunction with site secretaries annually reviews the Allotment Asset survey and updates/re-prioritise those features that require urgent action. This informs the future works programme and Capital Bids.

14.2 The Service has proposed a £50k infrastructure improvement works programme this year, funded through a combination of revenue and Parks capital programme resources.

14.3 The Service has completed a detailed review of the existing Tenancy Agreement and related processes and procedures, in conjunction with the Allotment Forum and Legal Services. A new Tenancy Agreement will be introduced in January 2010.

14.4 The Allotment Forum is also currently working with officers on the preparation of a Service Level Agreement between the Council and Site Associations. The SLA will provide clear guidance on Site Secretary/Association and Council responsibilities, standards and compliance monitoring / intervention.

14.5 Three former disused sites are being brought back into use to increase provision.

- Risle Avenue, N17. This site will be ready to let plots in September 09.
- Gospatrick Road, N17. Part of this site is to be used by the Council's Disability Day Care team for a horticulture training scheme, the remainder is to be marked up for individual plots. Clearance works will take place during winter 2009 and be ready for use in Spring 2010.
- Salisbury Road, N22. Groundwork, in conjunction with the Salisbury Road Allotment Group (SRAG) have bid for Lottery funding to re-develop this site. If successful, it is hoped to start works on the site next year. However, parts of the site have been colonised by Japanese Knotweed, which we are trying to control through a two year programme of herbicide application which began in 2008.

14.6 The Council's new draft Biodiversity Action Plan contains a Habitat Action Plan for Allotments. Its vision statement is :

- To increase the value of Haringey's allotment sites for the benefit of biodiversity, and
- To increase public and allotment plot holders' awareness of the benefits of biodiversity to allotments, and the benefit of allotments for biodiversity.

Each site is to be audited for wildlife habitats. Wildlife friendly management plans will be produced and implemented for each allotment designated a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (13 sites - 3 per annum). It is also proposed to include allotments as a category in the Haringey in Bloom competition.

14.7 The Service is currently compiling a record of all LBH allotment sites waiting lists. We have received data from 21 of the 25 sites to date. There are more than 800 people on those waiting lists, the longest being Alexandra Palace (189). It is not the intention to manage the lists - that is the responsibility of the site secretary. The Allotments Forum agreed at the May meeting that all waiting lists should be open because it would provide a clearer picture of the overall demand for plots, and having some lists closed because of excessive demand placed increased pressure on other sites. Although the majority of sites support this proposal, a small number have yet to agree to it.

15. Use of appendices /Tables and photographs

15.1 Appendix 1 Recommendations of the Scrutiny Report

15.2 Appendix 2 Proposed asset improvement works for 2009/10

16. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

16.1 Overview and Scrutiny Report, January 2006

16.2 Executive Report March 2006

Appendix 1. Recommendations of the Scrutiny Report

1. That a dedicated officer for Allotments be appointed.
2. 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,
 - use of S106 also to be considered to improve the quality and therefore use of existing allotments.
3. 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
 - The permitted uses of sites.
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.
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.
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.

Appendix 2 Proposed asset improvement works for 2009/10

| No | Site | Description | Condition Class | Priority | Estimate / Actual Cost | Works Completed |
|----|------------------------|--|-----------------|----------|------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Alexandra Palace | Replace existing fence with Weldmesh (Adj to Buckingham Lodge) | A | 1 | 2,600 | |
| 2 | Alexandra Palace | Repairs to wood panel fence along boundary with Springfield Ave | A | 1 | 1,154 | |
| 3 | Shepherds Hill Railway | Install new pipe and new tap | A | 1 | 100 | |
| 4 | Highgate | Replacement Water Tanks (2), New Hosepipe Connections (2) | C | 1 | 340 | |
| 5 | Wolves Lane | Complete Palisade fencing at Norfolk Ave entrance | A | 1 | 1,000 | |
| 6 | Golf Course | Install new gate - Bidwell Gdns entrance | B | 1 | 3,557 | |
| 7 | Creighton Road | Install new standpipes adj to low numbered plots | B | 2 | 650 | |
| 8 | Creighton Road | Repairs to water mains | A | 1 | 2,720 | |
| 9 | De Quincey Road | Replacement of 4 stand pipes | C | 3 | 1,250 | |
| 10 | Elmar Road | Increase height of concrete wall along eastern boundary | A | 1 | 580 | |
| 11 | Elmar Road | Repairs to Water supply - level one tank and repair leak in other | A | 1 | 412 | Yes |
| 12 | Mannock Road | New sign required (w/ notice board) | C | 1 | 1,250 | Yes |
| 13 | Shepherds Hill | Replace damaged fence with palisade along northern boundary from Montenoitte Rd entrance | C | 1 | 6,958 | |
| 14 | White Hart Lane | Repairs to water mains | A | 1 | 5,356 | Yes |
| 15 | White Hart Lane | Increase height of concrete wall along boundary with f'ball club | C | 1 | 10,000 | |
| 16 | Rectory Farm | Repair road surfacing - additional 156m | C | 2 | 3,424.59 | Yes |
| 17 | Risley Avenue | Install new footpath - 90m2 in length | C | 2 | 4,378.80 | Yes |
| 18 | Risley Avenue | Connect water supply to mains | A | 1 | 2,828.50 | |
| 19 | Salisbury Road | Infrastructure works | | | 4,000 | |
| 20 | Various Sites | Removal of Asbestos | A | 1 | 5,720 | |
| | | | | Total: | 58,279 | |

NB. Items highlighted in bold are actual costs/quotes