

MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF ALLOTMENTS 7TH NOVEMBER 2005

MEMBERS: Cllr Matt Davies* (Chair), and Cllr Liz Santry*,

(*Members present).

*Recomm'd
to / Action
Required
By: **

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None.

2. **URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

3. **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS, IF ANY, IN RESPECT OF
ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

None received.

4. **PRESENTATION FROM LOCAL RESIDENT**

A member of the public spoke about the current consultation proposals on the future use of St Ann's Hospital and he referred to a strip of land of around 500 metres in length at the back of St Ann's hospital which could be utilised for allotments and a City Farm. The location of the hospital was pertinent because it was located close to three wards (St Ann's, Harringay and Seven Sisters) which had been recognised as being deficient in allotments. He urged the Review Panel to support this proposal.

5. **EVIDENCE TO THE REVIEW**

The Panel heard from Allotment Site Secretaries regarding current allotment provision and how improvements could be made.

The Panel noted that £100,000 had been allocated to improving allotments as part of the Parks Improvement Programme for 2005/6 which was welcomed. There had been discussions between Allotment Committees and Parks managers on this expenditure, however many wished Site Secretaries to be involved and any funds available for the next year should be the subject of detailed consultation. It was felt that there should be more transparency in the budget process and the needs and priorities of particular sites should be clearly identified. Also it was felt that more information posted on the Council's Website, such as details on Waiting Lists, the tenancy Agreement and general advice would be advantageous.

Maintenance was raised as an area of concern. Overgrown trees

either on sites or on private land hanging over allotments was seen as a particular issue for Allotment holders. However it was noted that there was a limited budget for dealing with the aging tree population. Issues were raised regarding Rectory Farm Allotments around site inspections, no water and skip removal. Officers agreed to investigate. Allotment sites which were semi self-managed with their own grants were expected to hire their own skips, whereas those sites without grants were able to hire skips through Council offices. A view was expressed that the same policy should apply to all sites. It was officers responsibility it was to ensure that any works carried out commissioned by the Council were of a sufficient standard and that value for money was being obtained.

The representatives considered that communication between the Council and Allotment Associations would be improved by the introduction of a Newsletter. The meeting was informed that a yahoo e-mail allotments group had been set up and the possibility of tapping into the Parks Forum Friends Group should be explored. It was agreed that publicity should be given to the next Parks Forum on 7 January 2006. There was support for the establishment of an Allotments Forum. It was also suggested that allotment events should be organised across the Borough. Site Secretaries requested that information on the ethnic make up of their plot holders be shared with them so that they could give out information in the various community languages and to assist them with applying for external funding. It was agreed that the current pack given to new tenants be sent to Site Secretaries to ensure that they had the most up to date information.

A key issue for Site Secretaries was the lack of sufficient plots with most sites having long or even closed waiting lists. They felt the procedure for dealing with neglected plots should be simplified. However the meeting noted plot holders subjected to dirty plot letters could invoke the Council's complaints procedure and this was a lengthy process. The meeting acknowledged that there could be circumstances which temporarily prevented plot holders from maintaining their plots and therefore there should be a system in place for temporarily sub letting. The meeting noted that at some sites plot holders could come off their sites for a period and when they returned they would go to the top of the Waiting List. There was general agreement to the Tenancy Agreement being reviewed. There was a discussion on how details of waiting lists were made available and whether residents on waiting lists were regularly contacted. One site had the waiting list posted on a notice board and another invited those on the Waiting list to open days.

It was noted that work had been carried out by BCTV clearing a number of overgrown plots in order to bring them back into use.

*Recomm'd
to / Action
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By: **

*Parks to
investiga
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*Allotment
letting
officer to
provide.*

It was suggested that self management should be explored and a process be established for this. However other representatives considered that the management should remain with the Council.

There was universal support for the establishment of a dedicated Council employee to whom Site Secretaries could contact with particular issues. The post holder would be responsible for site management. Additionally the post holder would be involved in site inspections. There was the view that site inspections was an area that needed to be strengthened. The current position is that officers cover Parks and Allotment work.

The meeting was advised of the Scrutiny process and that the evidence received at this meeting would contribute to the report prepared on the current Allotments provision. It was intended that the report would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2006. Following this the Executive would be asked to respond to the recommendations contained in the report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the views of the Allotment site Secretaries be welcomed.
2. That details of the ethnic breakdown of sites be shared with Site secretaries.
3. That Site Secretaries be sent a copy of the pack given to new Allotment tenants.
4. That a copy of the final Scrutiny report be circulated to Site Secretaries.

COUNCILLOR MATT DAVIES

Chair – Scrutiny Review of Allotments

** The "Action Required By:" column is for officer use only and does not form a part of the formal record.*