

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 7 DECEMBER 2021

TITLE: REVIEW OF ALLOTMENTS – INITIAL REPORT

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RECOMMENDED that:

- A** A Councillor Task and Finish working group, supported by officers from appropriate Council services and HTS (P&E), be established to review existing allotment provision.
- B** Subject to A above the working group consider the issues set out at Proposals below and report to a future meeting of the Committee.

BACKGROUND

1. Allotment law is set out in various statutes that were made between 1819 to 1950, and makes local authorities responsible for the provision of allotments. The law does not set out duties in detail, however the key functions that a local authority must perform are to:
 - a) Consider the demand for allotments;
 - b) Provide sufficient number of allotments to meet demand;
 - c) Keep and manage waiting lists for the allotments they provide; and
 - d) Provide a tenancy agreement.
2. Local authorities have powers to acquire land for the provision of allotments. However, they are subject to no time limits to meet any perceived shortfall in demand and there are no specific standards, such as provision of water, minimum size of allotment, etc. that must be met.
3. In Harlow there is significant existing provision for allotments. Many sites are self-managed by Harlow Allotment Association. Where management agreements are not in place sites are directly managed by the Council. Direct site management was carried out by Kier Harlow on the establishment of a Joint Venture Company with the Council in 2007 and this responsibility has since been transferred to HTS (Property and Environment).

4. Future requirements for allotment capacity are considered within the Council's Local Development Plan adopted in December 2020. However the arrangements for management of existing sites have not been substantially revised since that time and it therefore appears appropriate to undertake a review.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

5. Given the potential range of evidence and issues to be considered, it is proposed that a Councillor Task and Finish working group, supported by officers from appropriate Council services and HTS(P&E), be established to review issues around existing provision, and report to a future meeting of Scrutiny Committee.
6. It is proposed that the working group consider:
 - a) Liaison with Harlow Allotment Association;
 - b) Wider stakeholder identification and liaison;
 - c) Self-management arrangements;
 - d) The extent of provision;
 - e) Standards of provision;
 - f) Equalities issues including provision for residents with disabilities;
 - g) Vacancy rate/waiting lists;
 - h) Costs of provision;
 - i) Available resources;
 - j) Approach to charging;
 - k) Tenancy agreement;
 - l) Ensuring compliance with tenancy conditions;
 - m) Alternative approaches to provision: e.g. community gardening/allotment opportunities.

IMPLICATIONS

Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)

As contained in the report.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Director of Strategic Growth and Regeneration

Finance (Includes ICT, and Property and Facilities)

None specific.

Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance

Housing

None specific.

Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing

Community Wellbeing

None specific.

Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment

Governance (Includes HR)

None specific.

Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Support

Appendices

None.

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

HTS (P&E) – Harlow Trading Services (Property and Environment) Ltd