

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 15 MARCH 2022

TITLE: REVIEW OF ALLOTMENTS

LEAD OFFICER: MICHAEL PITT, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
ENVIRONMENT (01279) 446114

RECOMMENDED that:

- A** Further meetings of the Councillor Task and Finish Group be arranged and a further report be received by the Committee in the following municipal year

BACKGROUND

1. Further to the Committee's resolution at its meeting of 7 December 2021 a meeting of the Task and Finish working group was arranged in February 2022 to consider the issues that had been identified.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

2. It was noted that the continued operation of self- managed allotments through the Allotment Association relied on the voluntary work of a relatively small number of individuals, and that in some case those individuals had been carrying out this work since self-management was established. There was some concern that with increasing age the work involved might become increasingly burdensome.
3. While there is the possibility of individual sites self managing, there would be some risk for the management committee, as they would have to take responsibility for and effectively underwrite utility bills and other outgoings, in the hope of sufficient income from plot rental. Allotment sites varied in their popularity and the less successful sites were often not fully occupied, tending to reinforce the issues that made them less popular. This risk may act as a disincentive to this approach to self-management.
4. It was therefore considered important to fully explore these issues with the Association, to review what practicable support might be available, including support with seeking external funding opportunities where appropriate.
5. It was considered that much had changed socially since allotment letting conditions had been developed, and while the Council had revised letting conditions to accommodate the keeping of bees, chickens and rabbits, they were otherwise largely unchanged. Uses that might be considered reasonable, such as collective use by charity groups supporting people with disabilities, or use for mixed production and amenity, particularly for people who had no gardens, are perhaps difficult to accommodate within the rules, suggesting a careful review of allotment conditions might be constructive.

6. Provision for people with disabilities was considered to be modest on most sites; it was considered that comparing Harlow with other similar areas in this regard would be constructive.
7. It was proposed that further meetings of the Task and Finish working group be arranged during the forthcoming year and that a further report be presented to the Committee thereafter.

IMPLICATIONS

Environment and Planning (Includes Sustainability)

None specific.

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

As outlined in the report.

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

None