

Subject:	Allotments: response to Notice of Motion		
Date of Meeting:	16 November 2021		
Report of:	Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Robert Walker	Tel: 01273 294349
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 At its meeting on 21 September 2021, the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee agreed to receive a report on allotments in response to a Notice of Motion. This report provides the response.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Environment, Transport & Sustainability note the response to the Notice of Motion.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Notice of Motion requested a report on options for improvement and which provided some specific information.

- 3.2 Breakdown by site of the different sizes of plot (i.e. full/half/third)
Please see Appendix 1 – *total half lots* and *total whole plots* columns.

Whole Plot Total	1,376
Half Plot Total	1,439
Quarter Plot Total	44

Plot figures correct as of 08/12/2021, please note that plot total includes lettable plots, both tenanted and vacant. It also includes limited mobility beds as whole plots.

- 3.3 Breakdown by site and plot type of rent that was paid during the last accounting period
Please see Appendix 1 – *site rent total invoiced amount* column.

- 3.4 Breakdown by site and plot type of plots that are currently unlettable
Please see Appendix 1 – *total unlettable* columns

Unlettable plots can include plots removed from the allotment database due to re-mapping/numbering of sites or plots. It can also include plots removed from the database to be allocated to site huts and parking areas.

A smaller number of unlettable plots are caused by excessive shade or other mitigating environmental factors, these are managed for wildlife, used as storage for materials or planted as orchards.

3.5 Breakdown by year of the number of people who have joined the allotment waiting list and paid the £17 charge, and how the funds have subsequently been spent

Financial year	Administration fee	Number of allotment applicants paid	Total amount paid
2017/18	£16	144	£2,304
2018/19	£16	393	£6,288
2019/20	£16/£16.90	466	£7,692.80
2020/21	£16.90/£17.20	853	£14,461.50

The spend of this money is not separately accounted for

3.6 Breakdown of the resources that are allocated to the Allotment Service

The budget for the Allotment Service within Cityparks is -£20,800. This budget covers an Allotment Officer, and an Administrator, two maintenance posts, one van, a range of power tools and materials. This excludes water supply and any other central costs such as billing. Water costs are typically between £30 and £40 thousand but for reasons which are expanded upon in 3.10 no up to date figures are available. Additional funding also comes from planning gain for site improvements and Property Services Planned Maintenance Budget for water infrastructure projects. The detail of Cityparks budget is shown below.

Budget area	Budget (£)
Direct Employees	94,610
Indirect Employees	390
Premises Related	3,470
Supplies and Services	17,080
Third Party Payments	3,650
Other Grants Reimbursements	-6,000
Customer and Client Receipts	-134,000
Allotments Total	-20,800

3.7 Breakdown of annual expenditure by site

Expenditure by site is not recorded.

3.8 Description of the role of Allotments Officer

The Allotment Officer is one role within the Allotment Service. The role of the Officer and the wider team is to:

1. Oversee the maintenance, lettings, waiting lists and rule enforcement (including termination of tenancies) across the city's 37 allotment sites.
2. Programme and deliver allotment maintenance requirements.
3. Maintain and update the Allotment Service database of 8000 tenants and applicants' personal details and ensure this information is stored and handled in compliance with GDPR legislation, accurately recorded and shared with the council's finance team to ensure tenants' invoices are correctly issued.

4. Develop, support and manage the Volunteer Site Representative network, which is essential for the allocation of plots and reporting any site or tenancy issues.
5. Develop strategy, policy and procedures for the Brighton & Hove Allotments Service through delivery of the Allotments Strategy 2014-2024).
6. Oversee, monitor and report on delivery of projects that contribute towards delivering the Allotments Service and Allotment Strategy (including collaborations with other teams in the council and external partners & funding applications).
7. Work within the Allotments Service budget and budgets provided by Section 106 contributions and the Community Infrastructure Levy, for the delivery of the allotment site improvements.
8. Instruct contractors in respect of allotment site works, arrange invoicing and approve completed works within constraints of the Allotments Service budget.
9. Respond to and investigate complaints and enquiries from members of the public, landowners, other departments, alongside providing professional advice and guidance.
10. Ensure complaints, enquiries, appeals, FOIs, SARs, police requests, and councillor enquiries etc are responded to.
11. Inspect every plot in the city at least three times throughout the growing season and issue notices regarding any breaches of tenancy agreements and subsequently follow these up to either ensure compliance with current allotment rules, resolve any appeals, or enact terminations of tenancies that may result from this process.
12. Maintain the Allotments Service web pages and ensure that all information provided, and the online application processes and forms, are kept up to date.
13. Maintain up-to-date knowledge of legal aspects and best practice in delivery of allotment provision through professional membership of the National Allotment Society. As the only Allotments Officer in the council, the post holder will be called on to give specialist technical advice and guidance on allotments and service policy issues to senior managers and councillors.

3.9 *Detail on which recommendations in the Allotment Strategy have been implemented and which remaining outstanding*

Please see Appendix 2 – Allotment Strategy Action Plan Update.

Please note, there were 82 actions in the original strategy action plan. These have subsequently been refined which involved amalgamating some actions and removing repetition. Presently, there are 25 actions outstanding, which are detailed first in Appendix 2. Those completed appear later in the document.

3.10 *Estimate by site of annual cost of water leaks*

Data and costs pertaining to water leaks are not available. Appendix 1 – *water usage* column – provides the direct reading water usage from January 2018 for 12 months. Further water readings are to be taken at the end of October.

We were able to monitor water consumption approximately through automatic meter readers many of these have now failed and not been replaced. The billing

information coming from the supplier does not accurately reflect a year's use. When we are able to appoint to the vacant posts we will return to the previously used method of working consumption ourselves from manual meter readings.

The next major water infrastructure replacement is planned for Weald Allotments partially funded by a £25K allocation from planned maintenance budget. Larkhill and Racehill Allotments have water improvement requirements identified.

3.11 Detail on when and why regular joint liaison meetings between Allotments Service staff, BHAF and other key stakeholders stopped

Meetings between allotment staff the Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation (BHAF) have not been consistent. The Allotment Project Officer now has regular meetings with the Committee, but prior to this, meetings with the Allotment Federation Committee were not regular. More recently this has been partially down to time pressures caused by low levels of staffing during the pandemic but as officers have found these meetings unproductive they have only happened when requested by BHAF. The last meeting between the allotment officer and BHAF was on the 13-3-19.

There are three different types of meeting attended by council staff and BHAF members, listed below, as well as allotment association meetings and AGMs. Liaison and Forum meetings happened regularly up until COVID, Strategy meetings have recently restarted in preparation for the strategy review:

- Liaison Group meetings between the BHAF Committee and council Allotments Service to discuss what is happening within the Allotments Service and raise issues of importance to allotment tenants. The last liaison meeting with BHAF members was 13/03/19.
- Allotment Forum Meetings, which have replaced the previous Site Rep meetings, are held three times a year. They provide a platform for Site Reps to engage with each other and the council. The meetings seek to engage with plot holders and gather the views of other stakeholders, voluntary and community groups and people on the waiting list. Any issues arising from Forum discussions lead to future liaison meetings to address these issues.
- Strategy Meetings take place amongst council staff to undertake regular discussions and analysis of the data gathered from plot holder consultation, as part of the delivery of the Allotment Strategy.

3.12 Total amount that has been raised by voluntary donations from plot holders.

As at 12/07/2021, the following donations have been made:

Year	Donation Amounts
2020/21	£6507.35
2019/20	£4829.48
2018/19	£6245

4. Options for improvement

- 4.1 Appointing to the current vacant posts within the service will improve the service to plot holders.

4.2 The strategy review also has the potential to improve the service as will setting out clearly defined roles and the relationship between BHAF and the council

4.3 Providing office accommodation for Cityparks also has the potential to improve the service.

5. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- Options for running the service in a different manner were considered as part of the creation of the allotment strategy this is scheduled to be reviewed in 2024

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

6.1 There has been no community engagement and consultation on this Notice of Motion however there was extensive consultation on the Allotment Strategy and Open Spaces Strategy.

6.2 The Allotment Strategy 2014-2024 was built with a commitment to being led by the allotment community, with significant consultation and engagement built into the process. This included:

- Two very detailed surveys – of plot holders (808), community lots (9) and of people on the waiting list at the time (901) – which between them gathered over 1700 responses and generated an enormous wealth of information and opinion
- A consultation event with over 50 attendees
- A facilitated focus group with 12 site representatives
- Interviews with key council staff

6.3 Allotments are a key feature within the Open Spaces Strategy. This Strategy was subject to significant consultation as part of the Big Conversation, which had 3542 responses to the questionnaire. This engagement included:

- Working with Community Works to reach out to their membership of 450 third sector groups including: disability, special needs, the elderly and those less able to access the internet
- Visiting Whitehawk Library and health hub to speak to a disability / specialist group to complete a response with their service users
- Sending flyers to every school in the city
- Distributing 6000 leaflets via the Friends of Parks groups and community groups
- Displaying posters in the city's main parks
- Publishing tweets and Facebook posts
- Advertising in community newsletters

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 This report provides Members with a response to a Notice of Motion.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

Finance Officer Consulted: John Lack

Date: 27/10/2021

Legal Implications:

7.2 There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.

Lawyer Consulted: Hilary Woodward

Date: 22/10/21

Equalities Implications:

7.3 Allotments have a positive impact on physical and mental health. Disabled people rate the benefits of allotments higher than people without, the Allotment Service engages with a range of vulnerable people and people who may be less able to access services, for example through community plots. The Allotment Strategy builds on this good work and improve access to the service.

Sustainability Implications:

7.4 Evidence from the consultation completed to develop the Allotment Strategy shows many plot holders adopt sustainable practices. Allotments cover a significant area of land and are an important component of the city's green infrastructure. Through delivery of the Strategy, work is being done to encourage minimum use of chemicals, minimise water wastage and encourage biodiversity.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Allotment Summary
2. Allotment Strategy Action Plan Update

Background Documents

1. [Allotment Strategy](#)
2. [Open Spaces Strategy](#)