

Report

Report subject: Allotments Action Plan

Report to: City Area Committee (Community)

Date: Tuesday 16th December 2008

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1. Introduction:

- 1.1. The Committee adopted the Allotments management plan at the meeting on 25th March (minute 68 (2)).
- 1.2. At the meeting on 2nd September, the Committee considered an extensive report outlining ways forward on many of the outcomes arising from the management plan.
- 1.3. A number of the actions were approved, with funding, but a small number of issues were deferred for more detail (minute 109 refers).
- 1.4. This report deals with those outstanding issues as follows:

2. Bonfires

- 2.1. At the meeting on 2nd September the Committee agreed to continue with the current practice of allowing bonfires on allotment sites on all days except Mondays and Fridays.
- 2.2. However, it was suggested that if a mechanism could be identified to remove from site any non-compostable material then there would be no need for any tenant to have a bonfire at all.
- 2.3. On any given plot, the amount of non-compostable material produced in a given year should be very small.
- 2.4. For any tenant currently signed up to the Council's green waste collection service at home, taking the allotment waste home in a bag and disposing of it that way is an option available.
- 2.5. For any tenant not signed up to the Council's green waste collection service, or who do not want, or cannot go down this route, disposal must be via some kind of site based mechanism.
- 2.6. Realistically this means either a bonfire or the Council providing a receptacle to collect such waste in.
- 2.7. In terms of some form of receptacle, skips are extremely expensive to provide and if contaminated with non-green waste will create significant problems (and yet more costs) when emptying.
- 2.8. Smaller green waste receptacles as delivered to properties around the SDC area are a possibility provided they can be secured down and not contaminated with non-green waste. In theory the amount of green waste which is not compostable should not be great and a small number of bins per site ought to be adequate.
- 2.9. In respect of this, Environmental Services were asked to consider this option from an operational perspective and they do have some reservations. These are primarily linked to the logistics of driving large vehicles around the sites for very small collections but mainly around the likelihood of non green waste entering the waste stream. If this were to happen then Environmental Services could face a number of consequences which would reflect corporately onto SDC.



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- 2.10. In light of the relatively small number of bonfires which occur, and the potential risks (and costs) associated with trying to collect and dispose of such small amounts of waste, it is suggested that the current arrangement be continued with at this time.
- 2.11. It is also suggested that the wardens on each site monitor the situation and report any abuse or inconsiderate actions by tenants in having bonfires

3. Financial Issues

There are a number of issues which are all inter-linked within the financial situation and which need to be considered accordingly. These are:

- the 50% subsidy policy
- current practice to issuing keys
- current practice to rotovating plots

3.1. 50% Subsidy

- 3.1.1 It is the current policy of the Committee that income from the allotment service meets at least 50% of expenditure. Over the years this has consistently been met.
- 3.1.2 However the income figures have been somewhat artificially bolstered by grazing income which has a higher yield than current allotment rentals. Neither do these figures include any allowance for management / administrative costs.
- 3.1.3 It is not known exactly when this policy was introduced, or why, and in many ways it doesn't necessarily make economic sense to subsidise so heavily at a time of high demand.
- 3.1.4 As outlined in the management plan itself, it is estimated that the true cost of an allotment currently is around £7-45 per rod as against the £3-35 charged (2007/08 base). On this basis, and based upon the current policy, the fee for 2007/08 should have been £3-72 per rod
- 3.1.5 It is now known that the allotment service will transfer to the new Salisbury City Council in April 2009.
- 3.1.6 Once this happens, it is highly likely that the current economies of scale enjoyed by the service being within SDC will diminish considerably. The ability of the new City Council to subsidise to this degree will be seriously compromised if it is not to have an adverse impact on another service transferring at that time. It will be essential, for instance, that the true management / administrative costs are charged to the service, as they will have to be for all services being provided.
- 3.1.7 The charge for 2009/10 has already been set at £3-80 per rod, so any different charging policy introduced will not commence until 2010/11 in any case. The fee for that year under the current policy, and including the management / administrative charges ought to be around £4-30 per rod. This still represents a fee of under 90p per week for a large 10 rod plot of land (about 200 sq metres), inclusive of water charges, fences etc - by any standards this does not seem excessive.
- 3.1.8 Thereafter the fee could still be linked to a percentage subsidy but based around the whole cost of the service. As a guide the various fees for 2010/11 based upon differing percentage subsidies would be:

Subsidy Level (%)	50	40	30	20	10	0
Cost per Rod (£)	4-30	5-15	6-05	6-90	7-75	8-60

- 3.1.9 No other service transferring to the new City Council will be receiving a subsidy anywhere close to this level (sports pitches etc). It is suggested therefore that the subsidy level be reduced to 40% from 2010/11 on.

3.2. Keys

- 3.2.1 At the moment, all new tenants get a key to access their respective site as part of their rental fee.
- 3.2.2 Due to the need for these keys to be part of a large scale security locking system across a wide range of parks facilities they are expensive, costing around £7-90 each.
- 3.2.3 The main problem with these keys is getting them back when tenants give plots up for whatever reason as there is no incentive to return them. The Parks section then have to purchase further keys, eating into budgets etc. Equally it is not an efficient use of Officer time to pursue ex-tenants. Retrospective charging isn't viable due to the small sum involved. Using the various site wardens to retrieve keys is a possibility being explored but does rely totally on the goodwill of both the ex-tenant and the warden, and with a tenant turnover annually of around 10% this is not an inconsiderable undertaking.
- 3.2.4 One way forward would be to charge a fee for the key of say £20, refundable upon return of the key when the tenant gives their plot up. Lost or additional keys should be charged at the purchase cost plus an administrative element, say £10 at current rates but still have a

refundable deposit linked to it.

3.3. Rotovating

- 3.3.1 At the moment new tenants can, if they so wish, have their plot rotovated as a one-off as part of their initial rental fee.
- 3.3.2 This work tends to be done at the beginning of each month when there is a group of plots to do. Even so, each plot costs around £25 to have done on average.
- 3.3.3 Where tenants are taking on overgrown plots it does seem a little unfair to expect them to take them on without a degree of assistance. Allotments require a high level of commitment to manage successfully and it would be all too easy to de-motivate somebody before they have really got going due to the problems an overgrown plot brings.
- 3.3.4 At this time it may be best to continue offering this service when required. It is also arguable that tighter monitoring by Officers / wardens will lead to less plots getting overgrown to begin with, thereby reducing the need to rotovate etc.

4. Operational Issues

4.1. Additional Water Troughs

- 4.1.1 A survey has been commissioned involving the Wardens and Officers to identify any shortcomings in provision. Any additional funding required will be subject to a report at the January meeting of the Committee

4.2. Pest Control

- 4.2.1 Will be discussed with Wardens at the Allotment Liaison Group to seek possible solutions. A report will be submitted to the Committee if and when viable options are identified.

4.3. Paperwork

- 4.3.1 There is a general acceptance by everybody that the current paperwork is cumbersome, time consuming and very beaucroatic. However, this is all currently driven by the requirement to adhere to the Allotments Acts of 1908 and 1922 respectively.
- 4.3.2 Advice has been sought from the Legal section regarding the necessity to adhere so strictly and whether there is any scope to be more flexible in both interpreting and implementing the Acts.
- 4.3.3 It is quite clear that whilst Salisbury DC, as the allotments authority, manages the statutory sites within Salisbury, any variation away from adhering to the Acts regulations would run the risk that the Council was acting in an ultra-vires manner and therefore open to all sorts of legal challenges. This will not change when the transfer of the allotment function to the new Salisbury City Council occurs.
- 4.3.4 In effect therefore, issues such as amount of notice given to enable re-entry due to overgrown plots, periods for payment of rents etc are all fixed and non-negotiable.
- 4.3.5 That said, the agreements ought to be re-written to be more succinct, to the point and in clearer language, highlighting more definitely the consequences of not complying with the various terms of the agreement.
- 4.3.6 It is suggested that this exercise is undertaken in time for the invoicing round in January with the detailed content drawn up in conjunction with the Salisbury Allotment Association and the Allotments Liaison Panel

5. Recommendations:

It is recommended that

- 5.1. The fee for 2010/11 and on be set at such a level to cover the whole service cost
- 5.2. The subsidy level from 2010/11 onwards be reduced to 40%, with a fee set of £5-15 per rod for that year
- 5.3. That from January 2009, a £20 deposit be taken for all keys given out to new tenants, refundable when returned
- 5.4. That from January 2009, all additional keys provided be charged at £10 per key plus a £20 refundable deposit.
- 5.5. That the rotovating service for new tenants be continued with
- 5.6. That the allotment tenancy rules and regulations be re-written to be more succinct but remaining compliant to the requirements of the various allotment legislation

6. Implications:

- 6.1. Financial: As outlined in the report
- 6.2. Legal: None at this stage though further advice may be required regarding the various allotment legislation in due course
- 6.3. Personnel: None at this stage
- 6.4. Community Safety: None at this stage

- 6.5. Environmental: None at this stage
- 6.6. Human Rights: None at this stage
- 6.7. Ward(s) Affected: Virtually all within the City