

Subject: Allotment and Garden Lets Policy **Status:** For Publication

Report to: Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date:** 6th October 2009

Report of: Head of People and Policy

Portfolio Holder: Portfolio Holder For Finance and Resources

Key Decision: No

Forward Plan General Exception Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consult with Members on the proposed Allotments and Garden Lets Policy for the Borough. The proposed policy confirms areas of responsibility in relation to the administration and management of allotments and revises the charges associated with Allotments.
- 1.2 To consult with Members on the development of a strategy with a view to increasing the number of Allotments and Garden Lets.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:-
- Delivering quality Services to our customers
 - Encouraging healthy and respectful communities

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There is a legal duty in relation to the provision of allotments and currently a waiting list in relation to allotments.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 4.1 Rossendale Borough Council has a statutory duty to provide allotments. There is a complex network of legislation relating to allotment administration, which is

governed by statute and law. The legislation is known collectively as the Allotment Acts.

- 4.2 The Council administers three none statutory allotment sites and sixty eight Garden Lets. Allotment sites are usually larger pieces of land split into individually measured plots. Garden Lets tend to be smaller pieces of Council land and may comprise just one garden.
- 4.3 The three none statutory sites contain a total of seventy one plots. The allotments reside on Council owned land and are used for the purpose of allotments rather than land purchased under the Allotment Acts legislation. Their locations are as follows:
Free Lane, Haslingden – 52 plots
Kirk Hill, Haslingden – 11 plots
Prinny Hill, Haslingden – 8 plots
There is a waiting list at the following sites: Free Lane 62, Kirk Hill 36, and Prinny Hill 36. However, it is recognized that some individuals are on the same lists.
- 4.4 The responsibility for the allotment sites largely resides with the allotment tenants. However, the collection of rents and the responsibility for dealing with customers resides with the Administration Officer based within the Communities Team at Stubbylee. The responsibility for administration of Garden Lets resides with the Property Team based at Futures Park. In addition, responsibility for dealing with queries from members of the public in relation to the use of Council Land for the development of additional allotments or garden lets resides with the Property Team.
- 4.5 In order to ensure that members of the public can be properly signposted and that relevant Teams have their responsibilities clearly defined, an Allotments and Garden Lets Policy has been developed which confirms and updates the administration and management arrangements of Allotment s and Garden Lets within the Council.
- 4.6 Further, the proposed Policy would establish the Council's position in relation to the following:
- (i) The Council's commitment to the provision of land for the use of gardening and the growing of vegetables:
The last few years have seen a revival in “growing your own”, in line with current thinking on healthy eating, organic food and exercise. The Department for Communities and Local Government is responsible for national policy on allotments, and recognizes the unique role of allotments as places which bring together all sections of the community together and provide opportunities for people to grow their own produce and promote health and well being.
 - (ii) The process whereby Community Groups identify potential land which could be used for allotment purposes:
A number of requests have been submitted to the Council and there is a need for clarity in relation to the process to be followed where Community Groups wish to utilize Council land for allotment purposes.

- (iii) The Council's support for the devolved management of allotment sites:
Currently allotment tenancies are provided for a period of twelve months. Such short-term tenancies prohibit allotment associations, communities and the Council from applying for funding to invest in allotment sites. Adoption of the policy would enable associations to apply for longer term tenancies subject to Council approval. This would prohibit the land from being used for alternative purposes for the period of the lease.
- (iv) Revision of some of the associated Allotment Charges:
Allotment tenants pay an annual rental of 0.25p per square metre which is comparable to other local authorities. In addition, Rossendale charges £150 per tenancy for the completion of the tenancy agreement. It is proposed that with the implementation of the new policy, £40.00 would be a more appropriate charge to cover the administrative costs and the £150 would no longer apply. The final rent/license fee for a Garden Let is based on the rental value for the land.
- (v) Clear responsibility for liaison with customers, updating the website and dealing with enquiries.

4.7 It is proposed that following the adoption of the Policy, Cabinet will be asked to consider the further development of Allotments by the further development of a Strategy for the Borough which would include:

- Identification of the customers who are in receipt of the allotment service and an evaluation of that service.
- Exploration of external funding streams with a view to increasing the number of allotments within the Borough.
- Exploration of further possible sites to increase the number of allotments.

4.8 There are some key challenges associated with the provision of allotments:

- Only one site has an available water supply.
- There is no specific budget allocated for the maintenance of allotments.
- Minimal allotment maintenance is provided.
- The supply of allotments cannot meet current demand.
- Allotments are currently not risk assessed from a Health and Safety perspective.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 5.1 The reduction in administration fees proposed at paragraph 4.6(iv) above will not have a significant impact upon the overall income of the legal department due to the low turnover rates of these tenancies.
- 5.2 Should a further Allotment Development Strategy (4.7) be considered, then the ongoing net costs/revenues for the associated options must be weighed against the community benefits and any one-off set-up grants available.

6. MONITORING OFFICER

6.1 No further comments

7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

7.1 There are no Human Resources implications arising from the report. There are equality issues arising from the report. A Community Impact Assessment has been drafted this will be completed following the receipt of customer satisfaction and monitoring data.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 Allotment gardens provide multiple benefits, both to gardeners and to the wider Community. Our customers are the public, plot holders – present and future, and they deserve a quality service. The adoption of the policy will ensure that there is clear accountability for the provision of allotments.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

9.1 To contribute to the development of the Allotments and Garden Lets Policy by providing comments on the proposed Policy with regard to Allotments and Garden Lets.

9.2 Recommend to Cabinet the development of an Allotments Strategy for the Borough which will include exploring the opportunities for increasing the number of allotments and an exploration of external funding opportunities.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

10.1 Free Lane Allotment Association
Property Team
Communities Team
Planning Team
Legal Team
National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardens

10.2 Further consultation would be carried out with allotment holders as part for the development of the new strategy.

11. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The Allotment and Garden Lets Policy confirms existing arrangements a Community Impact Assessment will be developed once monitoring and further consultation has taken place with the allotment holders.

Is a Community Impact Assessment attached No

12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The Allotment and Garden Lets Policy confirms existing arrangements, a BioDiversity Impact Assessment would be required if the provision of Allotments was to be extended as part of the development of a new strategy.

Is a Community Impact Assessment attached No

Contact Officer	
Name	Liz Murphy
Position	Head of People and Policy
Service / Team	People and Policy
Telephone	01706 252452
Email address	lizmurphy@rossendalebc.gov.uk

Either

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Growing in the Community: Local Government Association	Stubbylee