

DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each ordinary meeting of the Council for the hearing of deputations from members of the public. Each deputation may be heard for a maximum of five minutes.

Deputations received:

(i) Deputation: Allotments- Jim Mayor

For context, Rob Walker asked for help in identifying ways to make the allotment service cost neutral. The operating deficit of the allotment service in 2015/16 was £37K. This deputation summarises BHAF's response to that request, made on behalf of our members - allotment holders across the city. Our full response has been circulated to Committee members & can be viewed on our website.

We recognise the council's budget pressures, and generally support the view that allotments should be as self-sufficient as possible. However, we have practical reservations about whether allotments should or could be made self-funding by raising rents. For example, historically demand for allotments has seen peaks and troughs. If demand reduced by 50% next year, would rents for remaining allotment holders be doubled until demand rose again?

We need to protect access to allotments for all residents now & into the future. Our rents are already amongst the most expensive in the country. We note Cllr Theobald's recent Independent article which observed that the saving achievable through a suggested 32% rent rise to cover the operating deficit is a false economy when such a rise could price residents out of accessing the physical, mental, health and environmental benefits allotments bring.

We do not feel continued salami slicing of small budgets such as ours provides significant impact on the council's current, or sustainable solutions to the council's long term, funding challenges.

Finally, our members have complained that presentation of costs allocated against allotments is unclear, making it difficult to be confident that the service currently achieves best value for money. This is clearly an issue if they are being asked to pay substantially more to cover those costs.

For all these reasons, we cannot support a rent rise above inflation. However, we have already supported the introduction of a charge to join the waiting list and will support bringing retirement concessions in line with retirement age. These measures are forecast to reduce the operating deficit by £7K. We also feel eligible plot-holders should be able to opt into concessions rather than receiving them directly. Some (not all) of our members in receipt of age related concessions, for example, have stated that they don't need them.

We do feel more could & should be done to make the service more efficient. Our biggest expense – over £30K last year - is water. Allotment sites have meters, so it should be easy for the council to identify & remedy the leaks we all know contribute to this cost. At the same time we will work with our members to reduce wastage. We feel there are ample opportunities for allotments to generate more income if the allotment service is proactive and imaginative in seeking them. If Committee genuinely commit the council to pursuing such opportunities, we will commit our help.

And we urge the council to introduce efficient administration systems, designed in full collaboration with the site representatives who could then use them to manage sites more efficiently.

On a related note, we remind Committee that the current allotment service is only able to operate within existing budgets because of the efforts of an army of volunteers, most notably site representatives. For some time we have had serious concerns about the professionalism with which the council sometimes treats these volunteers. We ask Committee to commit to working with us to improve this partnership over coming months. Doing so will increase the likelihood of the council being able to continue to rely on this goodwill funded resource into the future.

Our final request is that from next year, a new, income related concession is offered to ensure the low wage workers that allotments were originally meant to cater for are not priced out of allotments in future. This supports the council's commitment to tackle in work poverty, which we welcome.

To close, it would be remiss not to record our appreciation for Rob's efforts over the past year. And whilst BHAF is strictly apolitical, and press articles aside, we have also appreciated Cllr Theobald's support over the years. We hope to be able to work with Rob and members of all parties in future to secure the strongest future for our city, our open spaces and our allotments.

Jim Mayor (Lead Spokesperson)

Allan Brown

Giuesppina Salamone

Maureen Winder

Richard Howard

Jane Griffin

Alan Langridge

Hannes Froehlich

Mark Carroll

(ii) Deputation: Communal Bin refuse- Ian Chaplin

We would like to raise the issue of the Council's treatment of residents and the Friends of Brunswick Square & Terrace (FBST) before, during and after the August consultation. The council has been at best opaque, and at worst Machiavellian in its methods.

We would like to make the following points:

1. In March, this Committee decided to go to consultation without seeing the basement collections risk assessment (the apparent basis for the withdrawal), nor did they compare it with the risk assessment for communal bins.
2. The Council agreed to share the consultation document with FBST (and this Committee) prior to publication. This did not happen.
3. The consultation paper was delivered in August with a short response period, when a large proportion of residents were on holiday. The response time was extended after concerns were aired but the notification of this to residents was delayed. The consultation document was biased, influencing the outcome.
4. FBST made many requests to try and understand the style and type of build out proposed by the council if bins are placed by the railings, where there is no pavement. Although a picture was afforded eventually to the FBST, this was not fully explained and the detail was vague. Indeed the style was described as the closest the council had, as there are no similar build outs in the city.
5. The council failed to respond in a timely fashion to the FBST's FOI requests and in particular has been unable or unwilling to provide basic useable accident information to inform decisions.
6. We feel that the Council and Cityclean consider residents an irritation, whereas residents are the reason that the Council exists.

Further to the above:

1. We ask that the Committee read the risk assessments on which the decision to consult was founded and explain why communal bins are safer than basement collections for CityClean staff and residents.
2. If, despite our concerns, the committee continues with a change in the way rubbish is collected in BST, we ask that Cityclean be required to consult with and inform FBST in respect of:
 1. If black bag collections:
 1. type of bag, particularly whether seagull-proof bags can be arranged or at least trialed
 2. pavement cleaning details, as rubbish would be strewn across the pavements.
 2. If communal bins:
 1. placement, in particular with regard to the conservation panorama from Western Road to the seafront
 2. car parking and a review of any options for further parking in the Square, Terrace and Seafront;

3. camouflage painting, if feasible;
4. details for collection and road cleaning, given the likelihood of fly tipping and overflow.

Ian Chaplin (Lead Spokesperson)

Sue Cartwright

Lynne Frances Moore

Peter Sofroniou

Fiona Bower