

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY SAFETY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 63

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Allotments Service Review
Date of Meeting:	23 March 2009
Report of:	Director of Environment
Contact Officer:	Tim Read, Projects Officer Tel: 290393 tim.read@brighton-hove.gov.uk
Wards Affected:	All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 At the 10 November 2008 Environment and Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, Councillor Geoffrey Theobald set out his Environment portfolio and discussed joint working between Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive.
- 1.2 It was suggested then that allotments could be a potential area for scrutiny. This report provides an update on the allotments service review that began in April 2008.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Members note the report.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 In January 2007, a management review of Cityparks commenced to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. This included a review of management and administrative functions and customer contact.
- 3.2 The review had an impact on the Allotment Service and allowed more time to be allocated to developing the service with the Brighton and Hove Allotment Federation.
- 3.3 Issues which required addressing included long waiting lists, plots which were not being cultivated, lack of enforcement and communication problems.

3.4 Improvements have been implemented in the following areas:

- 3.4.1 Increasing capacity - all full size plots becoming vacant are automatically split to standard half size plots and encouragement is given to existing tenants to split their plot if they appear unable to utilise their existing plot.
- 3.4.2 Communications – general enquiries regarding applications and waiting lists have been transferred to the Customer Service Call Centre so residents are able to contact the service and this has freed up much officer time.
- 3.4.3 Site representatives – this role has been broadened to include their need for greater responsibility which has freed up further officer time (the final necessary survey before eviction is carried out by a council officer).
- 3.4.4 Enforcement – a review of the allotment rules is under way which, together with the improved role of Site representatives and the implementation of a “three strikes and you are out” policy, is ensuring plots are cultivated and dealing promptly and fairly with non-cultivation.
- 3.4.5 Administration – applications, tenancies and notices are now dealt with by a team of five Cityparks officers ensuring that vacant plots are filled as quickly as possible and paperwork is dealt with promptly. In addition the waiting lists for individual sites have been grouped geographically so residents waiting for a long time are offered a plot on a nearby site if they so wish.
- 3.4.6 Liaison – regular meetings are held with the Federation and Cllr Smart (lead member for allotments), as well as the Federation committee meetings.

3.5 As well as completing the review of the allotment rules there are further improvements planned:

- 3.5.1 Develop a strategic perspective with the Federation and other interested groups such as the Food Partnership to promote citywide food projects.
- 3.5.2 Review unused allotment land and bring back in to use where appropriate.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation approved the project plan for the allotments service review in June 2008 and the Federation and Cllr. David Smart attending monthly meetings with the Projects Officer.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 There are no additional financial demands on the council following the review, as improved management, administrative and customer processes have allowed a more effective use of existing resources to improve the service.

Finance Officer Consulted: Chris Rhodes Date: Sep 08

- 5.2 Brighton & Hove Allotment Rules will be reviewed in April 2009. Upon completion, they will be forwarded to the relevant Council Lawyer. Also, the council has begun legal action against illegal occupation of Whitehawk Hill allotments site.

Lawyer Consulted: Simon Court Date: Mar 09

- 5.3 Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) is being undertaken on the Allotments Service team plan 2008-09 and subsequent actions will be included in wider Cityparks team plan to ensure carried out, as well as being signed off by Head of Equalities & Inclusion and being made available to the Chief Executive. Comprehensive equalities information is now requested on all new allotment application forms.
- 5.4 The review is focusing on reopening the allotments waiting lists on 1 March 2009 and bringing back out of use allotment plots/land. This will provide more opportunity for residents to grow food locally and more economically. However, by halving all available plots thus potentially increasing the total number of plots and thus in turn the administrative work.
- 5.5 The review has led to the council establishing "Allotment Watch" schemes at sites with higher levels of anti-social behaviour.
- 5.6 Unlikely risk that if interest in allotments decreased, then the time taken on this project may not have been best used. However, the opportunity is that by fixing the operational and administrative side of the service, more focus can be paid to developmental work.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. None

Documents In Members' Rooms

1. None

Background Documents

1. None

