

Minutes of the Meeting of the **ALLOTMENTS AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE** held in the Four Clocks Centre, Bishop Auckland on **TUESDAY, 24TH FEBRUARY 2015 AT 5.30 P.M.**

Present: Councillor Anderson, (in the Chair) and Councillors Fleming and S. Zair.

Also Present: Councillor Brownson, David Anderson (Town Clerk) and Sheila Horner (Assistant Town Clerk).

A&E.15/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Blackburn.

A&E.16/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were submitted.

A&E.17/14 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public in attendance.

A&E.18/14 SITE MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Members considered a report regarding current arrangements for the management of allotment sites.

Management of Town Council allotment sites had been delegated to allotment associations to various degrees by the former Wear Valley District Council on the basis of their ability and willingness to undertake the role. These management arrangements had continued to the present day.

Consideration was given to the possibility of developing a devolved management scheme which sought to improve the quality for allotments by allowing allotment holders greater responsibilities for management of sites. Allotment associations would be able to retain an increasing percentage of rent based on the level of devolved management to help deliver their responsibilities. Plot holders would need to meet a certain standard to be granted devolved responsibility.

It was explained that devolved management schemes could benefit both the Council and allotment gardeners. For the Council it could reduce the burden of administration and maintenance responsibilities. It also served as a means to engage with local communities in the management and regeneration of important environmental assets, which could initiate the process of improving under-utilised sites. For plotholders, devolution could bring more responsive management on a day-to-day basis, a sense of pride in any improvements to the site, and opportunities for volunteers to bring their skills and expertise to a new challenge.

National research indicated that successfully implemented self management schemes raised that standard of allotments and worked to the benefit of sites. There was a direct correlation between the quality of allotments sites in the town and the extent of devolved management.

It was therefore suggested that devolved management arrangements be pursued where possible and practicable as a means of providing a quality allotment service.

Criteria should be drafted which would need to be satisfied for plotholders to achieve various levels of devolved management. Plotholders would not be compelled to seek devolved status. Conversely, the Council would not be obliged to grant devolved status unless it was confident that the necessary criteria had been met and the plotholders or association were capable of taking on additional responsibilities.

Signed:
Chair

It was noted that the allotment service was based on a self financing model with income from rents being used to cover running costs, e.g. water bills, contribution to administration with the remainder being used to fund maintenance and improvements.

Financial arrangements would need to be reviewed to ensure that the overall service remained viable and that allotment associations taking on additional management roles were adequately supported.

It was noted that South Church Allotment site operated under self management arrangements. The leasing agreement would expire on 31st March 2015. It was suggested that the current arrangements be extended for an additional 12 months. This would allow time to develop a new scheme of delegation to encourage all sites to take on additional responsibilities pursue self management and to consult on possible changes to current arrangements.

- RECOMMENDED:**
1. That a devolved management structure be developed as a means of improving the quality of the allotment offer with a view to introduce new arrangements from 1st April 2016.
 2. That current self management arrangements at South Church Allotments be extended until 31st March 2016.
 3. That ploholders and associations be consulted on proposed changes.

A&E.19/14 RENT REVIEW 2016/17

Consideration was given to allotment rents for 2016/17. In accordance with allotment regulations tenants must be given 12 months notice of an increase in rent. Tenants would be informed of the outcome of the review when the invoices were issued for 2015/16.

- RECOMMENDED:** That no change be made to allotment rent for 2016/17.

A&E.20/14 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

In accordance with the provisions of Section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, as amended by Section 100 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council do now exclude the press and public for the remaining item on the agenda by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted since publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest.

A&E.21/14 REVIEW OF TENANCY

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk regarding a tenant who had received a conviction under the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

- RECOMMENDED:**
1. That the information be noted
 2. That legal advice and support be sought.