

Report of the Corporate Director of Economy and Place

## **Future Management of Allotments**

### **Summary**

1. This report seeks approval for the development of an alternative management arrangement for the allotment service.

### **Recommendations**

2. The Executive Member is asked to approve the development of alternative management arrangements for the allotments service, and once these have been developed, to receive a further report.

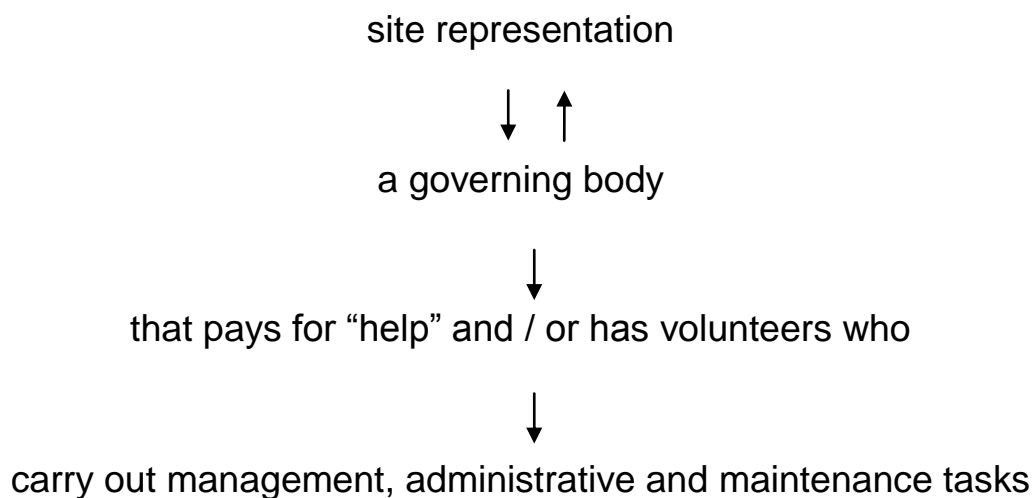
Reason: To harness the talents and energies of the community and to move the service onto more sustainable management arrangement.

### **Background**

3. The Council has some 1,250 allotment plots spread over 18 sites. The sites are: Bootham, Carr, Field View, Fulford Cross, Hospital Fields, Glen (in Scrope), Green Lane, Hob Moor, Holgate, Hospital Field, Hempland Lane, Howe Hill, New Lane, Low Moor, Scarcroft, Strensall, Wigginton Road and Wigginton Terrace. Background information on the sites is provided as Annex 1.
4. Management of the service is through one full-time officer with limited part time assistance from the Council's Business Support service. Most sites have a voluntary site secretary who, on behalf of the Council, shows prospective tenants around the site, lets plots and deals with simple day to day enquires. A limited number of sites have voluntary tenants associations who run site shops and offer gardening advice and support to tenants.
5. This initiative is being developed as part of the council-wide programme of exploring new ways of delivering services, including community-led management. As part of this exercise there are no proposals to either close allotments or sell off any land.

6. A number of councils around the country have allotment sites which are run independently from the council; this includes both single sites and larger groupings of sites. The arrangements take on a variety of forms such a federation of tenants, a charity, Industrial and Provident Society, a not for profit company or another similar body. In all cases the council continues to own the land and protects its use through a lease. A list of councils where some or all of the management is undertaken by a community organisation is provided in annex 2.

7. All arrangements have a common structure:



8. An initial examination of these alternative arrangements has indicated that such an arrangement could work in York. Already at the local level Bustardthorpe allotments have been self managed for several years. In other areas of leisure provision the community has recently taken on management of tennis courts, bowling greens and fishing ponds.

9. The benefits of placing the allotments under community management fall into three broad categories:

- a. It will fully utilise the knowledge and experience that exists within the allotment community, for example, in the areas of project and financial management, funding opportunities and best horticultural practice.
- b. It will increase local decision-making. Tenants would be members of the new body and have a direct say in how it is run, and where and how their rent is spent.
- c. Longer term it will deliver cost savings to the authority and tax payer.

As well as the current day to day budget deficient there are additional service costs such as management support and accommodation.

10. The key to developing such arrangements is to find suitably motivated and experienced volunteers who are willing to take on leadership and administration roles. Preliminary soundings through the tenant consultation workshops (see below for more details) are that there are people interested and experienced in developing a new community management organisation. (Additional volunteers may be required later to become trustees or directors).

### **Proposal**

11. If approval is given to this approach, it is proposed to set up a task and finish group drawn from tenants, with the remit to define what a community management body for York allotments should look like and what it needs to get it up and running. The tasks would include:
  - A detailed assessment of best governance arrangements
  - Initial feasibility assessment including a high level business plan and financial viability
  - Consideration of / proposed basis on which the assets will be held; and,
  - An assessment of any transitional requirements, further advice required and implementation costs
12. The group would meet w/c 23<sup>rd</sup> January through until the end of February. The work of the group will reported be back to the Members in April. This would allow for the possible launch of a new organisation in the late spring / early summer.
13. So that all tenants are aware of the proposal, and the opportunity to be part of the task and finish group, a letter was been sent all tenants over the New Year period. The letter also responded to the issues raised during earlier consultation process.

### **Consultation**

14. Initial discussions on the idea of community management started in March this year at a joint meeting of the site secretaries and association representatives. This was followed up at attendance by at association meetings including, for example, the Scarcroft and District AGM 20<sup>th</sup> April, and Low Moor association open meeting 18<sup>th</sup> October.

15. In early October all tenants received a letter and Frequently Asked Questions sheet explaining why this exercise was taking place, the letter invited tenants to take part in a series of workshops and to provide comments.
16. The first group of workshops were held on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> November. This was followed up a meeting of the site secretaries and association representatives on 29<sup>th</sup> November. Finally, three follow-up workshops were then held over the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> December. Each meeting had an attendance of between 12 and 15; with over 60 different individuals attending, offering guidance and option or asking to be kept informed of future developments. In addition some 30 other tenants responded to the October letter.
17. During the consultation process a number of representations were received saying that the management of service should stay with the council and fees should be increased to cover the shortfall income over expenditure. In recognition of this and as an alternative option, fee increases have been proposed as part the current budget process.
18. In addition the suggestion was also made that individual sites may wish to either become self-managed or partner up with a local community organisation such a community centre. For now these options are not being recommended because a) of the complexities of trying to establish up to 17 individual agreements and b) it would substantially increase the number of volunteers required to run the service if each sites needed both Trustees and a management committee.
19. The allotment officer has been heavily involved in the process and depending on the future direction of the service, has expressed an interest in supporting any new organisation.

### **Options and Analysis**

20. Two options are available:
  - a. To develop community management options for York allotments.
  - b. Not to pursue this idea further.
21. Option a) would establish if such an approach is viable. If it is, subject to further Executive Member approval of the details, then it

would place the asset in community control and support the principle of volunteers assisting with the care of the city's open spaces. This is the recommended option.

22. Option b) the management of service would be retained by the Council without further consideration of alternative options.

### **Council Plan**

23. Both options in this report are in line with the Council Plan priorities that ensure valued community facilities are protected and the Council works with other organisations to deliver the best services for residents.

### **Implications**

#### **Financial**

24. The service currently runs at a loss of £17k per annum. For 2016/17 direct expenditure is £80k with income expected to be £63k. The proposal being put forward to the Executive Member would address this issue. As a contingency, a fee increase of 27% was approved by the Executive 7<sup>th</sup> December 2016. The new fees would come into effect in January 2018 which, assuming no price resistance, would balance income and direct expenditure.

#### **Human Resources (HR)**

25. The City of York Council employ one member of staff directly linked to these proposals, namely the Allotments Officer. This post is therefore in scope of the review and is subject to the Council's management of change policies and procedures. The individual has been fully involved in the development of the proposals and has been formally consulted on the implications for their employment. As the proposal is to end any management provision from the Council to the Allotments, this post is formally at risk of redundancy.
26. There are clearly a number of external service delivery models being considered and once a decision has been reached on the preferred model, we will consider whether there are any TUPE implications.

#### **Equalities**

27. There are no equalities issue as this stage. Should the project proceed then an equalities impact assessment will be undertaken.

## **Legal**

28. There are no legal implications as this stage.

## **Crime and Disorder**

29. There are no crime and disorder implications.

## **Information Technology (IT)**

30. Allotment administration is supported through the *Colony Enterprise* IT package which holds data on such things as vacancies and waiting lists, lettings and terminations, and invoicing and payments. Use of the system would be offered to the new body.

## **Property**

31. A lease will be required with any new management body. The lease is likely to be similar to those already in place or being developed for tennis court, bowling greens and fishery management. Depending on the length of the lease this may require the approval of the Executive.

## **Other**

32. There are no other implications arising from this report.

## **Risk Management**

33. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified with the proposals contained in this report are that the task group fails to establish a new management model for the service. This may damage the Council's reputation. Level of risk is assessed as "Very Low". This means that periodic monitoring is required of the operation of the new arrangements.

**Annex 1:** Background information

**Annex 2:** Examples of community management of council allotments

**Background Papers:** Consultation papers (file held by the author)

**Contact Details**

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Wards Affected:			All	✓