



AGENDA ITEM 5

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL 1ST DECEMBER 2006

2004/05 SCRUTINY REVIEW - INVESTIGATION INTO THE COUNCIL'S ALLOTMENT SERVICE PROVISION: UPDATE

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To update the position, at the request of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the scrutiny panel, in respect of the 2004/05 scrutiny investigation into allotment provision in Middlesbrough and the subsequent development of an Allotments Strategy.

BACKGROUND

2. Following a detailed scrutiny investigation into local allotment provision in 2004/05, the Environment Scrutiny Panel made a number of recommendations in its final report. These primarily focussed on the need for the Council to set a longer term strategy for the Allotment Service (including the level of demand for allotment provision in the future); the need to reconsider the management of the service; and the need to review the funding of the service. The recommendations were as follows:
 1. *That a Strategy for all of the Allotment Sites within Middlesbrough be developed to cover the next 5 years*
 2. *That Members are involved in creating the proposed Allotment Strategy.*
 3. *That within the proposed Middlesbrough Allotment Strategy, an Improvement Plan be compiled to include:-*
 - (a) *The improvement of allotment administration ie enforcement, site inspections, terminations and appeals procedures;*
 - (b) *Review of security on sites;*
 - (c) *Ground maintenance requirements of each individual site;*
 - (d) *Rationalisation of under-utilisation of sites/provision of smaller sites; and*

(e) Review of livestock/non-livestock sites.

4. *That an Allotment Steering Group that represents stakeholder interests be established and accept responsibility for taking forward the proposed Allotment Strategy;*
 5. *That the possibility of establishing a dedicated 'Allotment Officer' post and appropriate sources of funding be explored ;*
 6. *That the possibility of developing self-managed sites at Beechwood, Berwick Hills, Letitia Street and Whitehouse Farm be explored;*
 7. *That appropriate support, assistance and financial resources be provided to those sites that wish to move towards self-managed sites;*
 8. *That to assist in raising the profile of Allotments within Middlesbrough, publicity be undertaken on a regular basis;*
 9. *That the revenue budget provision for the Authority's Allotment Service be reviewed during the 2005/06 budget setting process; and*
 10. *That consideration be given to re-establishing a forum where key Officers, Members and Allotment holders can effectively communicate with each other on a regular basis.*
3. The above recommendations were approved by the Executive on 8th February 2005, together with an additional recommendation that "The Executive receives a report within six months outlining a 5 year strategy for the allotment service."
 4. In the service response submitted to the Executive at that time, the Executive Director of Environment confirmed that the department would wish to continue to engage with Scrutiny on the development of the strategy, which was seen as an important piece of work to move the Allotment Service forward. The strategy was to cover the following range of issues:
 - Level of demand for allotments in Middlesbrough
 - Infrastructure condition of allotment sites
 - Security of the allotment service
 - Staff Functions and allotment administration
 - Management of the allotment sites
 - Ground maintenance requirements of each individual site
 - Funding of the Allotment Service
 5. The Executive Director also indicated that the complexity of the review meant that the consultation process that was fundamental to a successful review would take time to complete. This would impact on funding in that the strategy was unlikely to be completed in time to influence the 2005/06 budget process.

6. Given that fact, the longer-term revenue implications were to form part of the 2006-07 budget considerations. However, in order to make some progress on implementing the recommendations in 2005/06, an additional sum of £50k was to be considered as part of that year's budget process alongside other growth bids. This bid, and also a bid for funding of £50k as part of the 2006/07 budget, was unsuccessful.
7. A draft Allotment Strategy was submitted to the Environment Scrutiny Panel on 26th September 2005 and was noted.
8. The Chair and Vice-Chair have requested that an update be provided by the Environment Department on the further development and implementation of the allotment strategy and on the funding position. Accordingly, relevant officers from Environment will attend the meeting and update members on progress made to date; the current budget position; links with the Green Spaces Strategy; and the implications of service configuration on the action plan which was produced as part of the service response to the scrutiny panel's recommendations.

**COUNCILLOR JOHN COLE
CHAIR OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL**

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: -

- Final Report of Environment Scrutiny Panel - "Investigation Into Middlesbrough's Allotment Service Provision" - Overview and Scrutiny Board 14th December 2004.
- Executive response to the above report - 8th February 2005.
- Minutes of Executive meeting - 8th February 2005.
- Draft Allotment Strategy - Environment Scrutiny Panel - 26th September 2005.
- Minutes of Environment Scrutiny Panel meeting - 26th September 2005.

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