



AGENDA ITEM 6

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

16 NOVEMBER 2010

**ALLOTMENTS STRATEGY -
REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY
PANEL**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1. To make recommendations following the Environment Scrutiny Panel's consideration of the Council's updated Allotments Strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) That the Overview and Scrutiny Board considers the recommendations made by the Environment Scrutiny Panel in respect of the Council's Allotments Strategy.
- b) That the scrutiny panel's recommendations are referred to The Executive for consideration.

BACKGROUND

- 2. The Environment Scrutiny Panel undertook a review of 'Countryside Matters' during the 2008-09 municipal year. That review, which was wide ranging and covered issues such as tree management, beck valleys and the Council's Leisure Farm, also included a term of reference in respect of allotments, namely:

"To update the position on allotments following earlier scrutiny panel recommendations on the subject and to examine the Council's legal responsibilities and schemes to encourage allotment usage."

- 2. As a result of its investigations concerning allotments, the scrutiny panel's final report concluded that:

"Current waiting lists demonstrate public demand for, and interest in, allotments. The Allotments Strategy approved by the Executive Member for Environment in February 2007 has not been implemented due to a lack of resources/budget provision and remains an aspirational document. The scrutiny panel is of the view that some aspects of the strategy could have been actioned at minimal cost, such as the introduction of smaller plot sizes, improved administration and better enforcement. The panel heard that since it began its investigations, improvements have now been made in some of these areas."

3. The scrutiny panel's report went on to recommend to The Executive:

“That the Allotments Strategy is revisited and re-drafted as an achievable and deliverable document and that a timescale is identified for implementation.”

4. The panel's report, including the recommendation above, was approved by the Executive on 28 April 2009. The Head of Streetscene's Action Plan, which indicated how the scrutiny panel's recommendation would be actioned, included the following:

“The Allotments Strategy will be redrafted and achievable and deliverable objectives with relevant timescales within the revised document.”

5. At its 17 September 2010 meeting, the Environment Scrutiny Panel considered and approved the Council's revised and updated Allotments Strategy. During consideration of the minutes of that meeting, on 11 October 2010, the scrutiny panel made reference to its previous discussions at the 17 September meeting and indicated that:

- Further action is needed to ensure that vacant allotment plots are made ready as soon as possible. This would help to reduce the waiting list for allotments.
- The issue of mis-managed allotments should be further addressed, with enforcement action taken where appropriate.
- Moving towards self-managed allotments would encourage holders to take greater ownership of their plots, improve the condition of some allotments and possibly reduce management costs for the Council.
- While the introduction of half-sized plots is welcomed as a way of encouraging allotment take up, these may still be too large for some prospective allotment holders.

6. In order to address the issues outlined above, the panel agreed to make four recommendations regarding allotments, for consideration by OSB and The Executive, as follows:

1. That it is ensured that the time for clearing and re-allocating vacant plots is kept to a minimum - the introduction of a target timescale would be welcomed.
2. That stringent action is taken against allotment holders who mis-manage their plots.
3. That steps are taken to support allotment holders in moving towards self-management.
4. That the creation of half-size plots is continued and that even smaller plots are introduced to encourage allotment usage and reduce waiting times further.

7. The Overview and Scrutiny Board is requested to consider the recommendations made by the Environment Scrutiny Panel and determine whether these are forwarded to The Executive.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- Report to Environment Scrutiny Panel - 17 September 2010 - 'Allotments Strategy.'
- Minutes of Environment Scrutiny Panel - 17 September 2010.

COUNCILLOR BOB KERR

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