

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda  
Item No.

Report of Corporate Director for Department for  
Place

to

Cabinet

on

11<sup>th</sup> November 2014

Report prepared by: Paul Jenkinson, Parks Technical Officer

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## Allotments: Future Self-Management

Executive Councillor: Councillor Graham Longley

### A Part 1 Public Agenda Item

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#### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To make Members aware of the opportunities for self-management of allotment sites and to seek Members' approval to develop a structure for self-management and the leasing of allotment sites.

#### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **Approve the principle of introducing total self-management agreements and the leasing of allotment sites in the Borough to interested constituted allotment societies.**
- 2.2 **Delegate responsibility for undertaking consultation, agreeing the details and terms of self-management agreements and leases to the Corporate Director for Place in association with the Council's Asset Management section and Portfolio Holder for Enterprise, Tourism and Economic Development.**

#### 3 Background

- 3.1 The provision of statutory allotments are subject to some protection under the Allotments Act 1925. However, statute does not specify any particular model for management of allotment sites.
- 3.2 Southend-on-Sea Borough Council has fourteen allotment sites of various sizes within the borough. (Appendix 1).
- 3.3 Leigh Town Council is responsible for three sites following the creation of the Town Council - Manchester Drive, Marshal Close and Leigh Allotments.

- 3.4** Allotments managed by Southend Council are operated directly by the Council, (nine sites) or with the assistance of allotment societies (five sites).
- 3.5** At all allotment sites the Council undertakes maintenance of communal areas, buildings, water points and enquiries.
- 3.6** At the five allotment sites managed with the assistance of societies, they maintain the waiting lists, let plots, address issues with people not cultivating plots and monitor the site for problems. In return they receive 15% off the rent for the site they manage. The Council retains overall responsibility for the sites.
- 3.7** The Parks Technical Team has recently received two enquiries from allotment holders wishing to set up a system of self-management for allotment sites at Norwich Avenue and Delaware allotment sites.
- 3.8** In recent years, there has been a notable upsurge in interest in allotment gardening. This increase in interest has also resulted in higher demand for allotment plots and as a consequence sites now have a waiting list (Appendix 2).

### **3.9 Introduction to Self-Management**

- 3.9.1** Self-management takes place when an allotment site(s) is run by a committee of tenants from the allotment, which collects rent, administers the site, lets plots and maintains the site.
- 3.9.2** Allotment holders on site are the first to be aware of vacancies, un-kept plots, essential site repairs and maintenance and if it is within their responsibility they can respond quickly to deal with most situations whilst the Council, by its nature and procedures, will take longer to take action. Therefore the principles of self-management can be beneficial to both allotment tenants and the Council.
- 3.9.3** There are many variations on the self-management model, all designed to give greater responsibility to societies and reduce the involvement and expense for the Council which allows enhanced site management to be undertaken.
- 3.9.4** The basic form of self-management means organised societies (with a proper constitutional set of rules and an elected committee) collect rent from plot holders and make an agreed payment to the Council. Normally these societies maintain waiting lists, let plots, monitor the cultivation of plots and terminate tenancies when required. This is the method currently operated with the societies within Southend-on-Sea.
- 3.9.5** More progressive systems of self-management give more responsibilities to societies either on an individual site basis or to a collective group of societies.
- 3.9.6** A total self-management scheme occurs when sites are leased to a single organisation which then determines the rent level to be paid by individuals or sites. The collective rent is then used by the allotment organisation to carry out maintenance and development of the sites.

**3.9.7** Under a total self-management scheme the society would take on full responsibility for all aspects of the site including buildings, water and maintenance.

### **3.10 Proposal**

**3.10.1** It is proposed that when requests are received for self-management of allotment sites that the opportunity is given to pursue the introduction of total self-management with interested individual allotment holders/societies. Consultation with all plot holders on the site will be undertaken, to agree the self-management agreement and negotiate the terms of a lease.

**3.10.2** The consultation will be undertaken in line with Southend Together's tool kit for engaging communities and the 'Success Through Partnership' compact code of practice. The compact is a framework for partnership working between statutory organisations and the voluntary and community sector. A minimum three month period of consultation with plot holders, allotment societies and stakeholders will be undertaken. If the outcome of the consultation results in the decision to adopt self-management arrangements the necessary agreement and lease terms will be negotiated in detail.

**3.10.3** A total self-management model could save the Council administration costs and could also result in a higher quality of allotment gardening across the town.

## **4 Other Options**

**4.1** Continue with the current management arrangements with the Council managing the allotment sites with some assistance from allotment societies.

## **5 Reasons for Recommendation**

**5.1** The introduction of total self-management agreements proposed would create a much greater sense of ownership and stronger community spirit.

**5.2** Societies undertaking total self-management will have committee members who are plot holders and are likely to be more in touch with tenants.

**5.3** The regular presence of society members on allotment sites means issues can be quickly identified and addressed.

**5.4** The sense of ownership that can be created by total self-management means that society members are better placed to keep vacant plots tidy and re-let quickly.

**5.5** The introduction of total self-management offers tenants the opportunity for greater involvement and interaction in the running of the allotment site.

**5.6** Total self-management limits the involvement of the Council in the day to day running of the allotment and will help reduce administration costs.

**5.7** Societies may have the opportunity to apply for grants unavailable to the Council.

## **6 Corporate Implications**

### **6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities**

- 6.1.1 Healthier Southend:** Providing well managed allotments within the town helps to encourage participation in healthy outdoor activity.
- 6.1.2 Safe Southend:** Community involvement in the allotments will help increase local involvement and natural surveillance helping to reduce crime.
- 6.1.3 Clean Southend:** Well-maintained allotments give a better image of the town.
- 6.1.4 Prosperous Southend:** Well managed allotments and a greater sense of community can assist in encouraging investment within the town.
- 6.1.5 Excellent:** Well-maintained allotments assist the Council to enter regional and national awards.
- 6.1.6 Minimising our environmental impact:** Well managed allotments are a benefit to the local environment.

### **6.2 Financial Implications**

- 6.2.1** Sites under total self-management will result in reduced spend on repairs and maintenance. All the allotment sites involve differing levels of management and maintenance and the associated costs and savings will depend on the size of the allotment site, number of facilities and the number of plot holders.
- 6.2.2** Sites under total self-management will result in a reduction in allotment income to the Council. The reduction in income will depend of the size of the site and the number of plot holders.
- 6.2.3** The financial impact of total self-management will be minimal.

### **6.3 Legal Implications**

- 6.3.1** Leases and self-management agreements will need to be in line with the Allotment Act, which will safeguard the future use of the sites by the authority.

### **6.4 People Implications**

- 6.4.1** None

### **6.5 Property Implications**

- 6.5.1** Self-management agreements will require the leasing of allotment sites and associated buildings to community groups. The Council's interests will be protected within the lease agreements, see 6.3.1.

## 6.6 Consultation

6.6.1 Consultation will be undertaken on a site by site basis with plot holders when a request for self-management is received.

## 6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

6.7.1 The Parks and Open Spaces have an Equality Analysis.

6.7.2 Self-management agreements will include the requirement to address issues relating to equalities and diversity.

## 6.8 Risk Assessment

Risk	Mitigation
Not all plot holders on the site wish to be part of a self-management agreement.	Consult with all plot holders prior to entering into agreement.  Do not enter in to self-management agreements on sites without a majority of plot holders wishing to do so.
Society entering in to self-management agreement no longer able to operate.	Societies entering in to the agreement would need to be constituted organisations.  Societies entering in to the agreement should be a company limited by guarantee or similar.  Lease to include mechanism to pay allotment rents to the Council if a society is unable to continue to operate and hands the site back to the council.
Society entering in to self-management agreement does not manage the allotment correctly.	Lease to contain option to take back responsibility for allotment from the society if it is not being managed correctly.

## 6.9 Value for Money

6.9.1 Self-management offers opportunities to work with the community to deliver allotment services efficiently and without increase in cost to the Council.

## 6.10 Community Safety Implications

6.10.1 Allotment societies entering in to self-management agreements will be required to have appropriate policies in place relating to community safety.

## 6.11 Environmental Impact

6.11.1 Allotments are a benefit to the local environment.

## **7 Background Papers**

**7.1** The National Allotment Society Website [www.nsalg.org.uk](http://www.nsalg.org.uk)

## **8 Appendices**

**8.1** Appendix 1 - Location Plan of Allotments.

**8.2** Appendix 2 - Waiting List numbers at Southend-on-Sea Borough Council managed allotment sites.