

**CARDIFF ALLOTMENT STRATEGY 2022-2027: PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide background information to Members to aid their scrutiny of the draft report to Cabinet regarding the Cardiff Allotment Strategy 2022-2027, which is due to be considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 10 March 2022.

**Scope of Scrutiny**

2. During this scrutiny, Members can explore:
  - The consultation process to inform the draft Strategy
  - The proposed draft Strategy, including its vision, aims and objectives
  - The delivery plan, monitoring and review processes
  - The partnership working required to deliver the Strategy
  - The financial implications of the draft Strategy
  - The timeline and next steps for delivering the Strategy
  - Whether there are any risks to the Council, and
  - The recommendations to Cabinet.

**Background**

3. The provision of allotments is a statutory function of the Council. Cardiff Council owns and manages 28 statutory allotment sites, across Cardiff, providing 3,461 lettable plots. There are 2,398 individual plot holders, as some hold more than one plot.<sup>1</sup>
4. Allotment tenancies are obtained through a waiting list procedure. As at January 2022, there are 1,292 individuals on the waiting list, an increase from 793 in

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<sup>1</sup> Figures as at 1 February 2022, cited in draft Allotment Strategy attached as Appendix A

January 2020 due to the pandemic both restricting lettings (due to lockdown and social distancing requirements) and increasing interest. The draft Strategy highlights, at point 2.2 Appendix A, that a waiting list cleansing exercise will be undertaken in late 2022/23 to ensure that, as lives begin to return to 'normal', all those on the waiting list still wish to have an allotment.

5. The revenue generated from letting allotments is ringfenced for the Allotments Service. There is currently no specific annual capital allocation for Allotment improvement work, although historically allocations have been made via the overall parks' asset allocations within the capital programme.
6. Cardiff's Allotment Strategy was first adopted in 2004 and reviewed in 2010 and 2014, with Allotment Site Representatives involved in its development, monitoring and ongoing review. For this review, a Strategy Review Group was established to inform its development, led by Councillor Jane Henshaw, Assistant Cabinet Member for Local Environment, and supported by site representatives and officers.
7. In March 2016, the Welsh Government published Guidance for Traditional Allotments and Community Led Garden Projects, setting out the requirement for Local Authorities to develop and make available on their website an Allotment Strategy that covers the following issues:
  - Encourage access and the benefits from engaging with allotments and alternatives available in the region
  - Include a clear and simple procedure for obtaining an allotment
  - Include tenancy rules
  - Link up relevant policies and simply explain the rights and laws around allotments and any policies needed to be highlighted
  - Map and describe all local provision including on site facilities
  - Include costs and justification, relative costs to UK average
  - Include a clear strategy for communication, allotment provision, waiting lists, activity, feedback, and reports
  - Link to local and national support organisations
  - Include a chapter explaining and sharing links to alternatives to allotments style growing. (i.e., community growing projects, land share schemes etc)
  - Include the agreed collective plans for developing allotment provision across the authority
  - Explain simply the management process, data recording and reports
  - Share the action points and time frames.

8. The draft report to Cabinet entitled 'Cardiff Allotment Strategy 2022-2027' is attached at **Appendix 1** and has **two** appendices:

- **Appendix A** – Cardiff Allotment Strategy 2022-2027 (draft)
- **Appendix B** – Equalities Impact Assessment

### **Issues identified in the Cabinet Report**

9. **Point 8** of the report to Cabinet highlights that the Strategy addresses the key issues raised by the Strategy Review Group and the outcomes from consultation with allotment tenants and site representatives, including:

- Lack of site representation on some sites
- Lack of investment in allotment infrastructure, leading to a backlog of repairs
- Allotment notices and procedures (which impact on turnover of tenancies)
- Use of scarce resources (water/soil/peat)
- Satisfying demand for plots, particularly owing to post pandemic interest in allotment gardening
- Improving accessibility of allotments in terms of proximity and suitability

10. **Section 3.1** of the Draft Strategy sets out the vision for the Allotment Services, which is:

*'Cardiff will have a well-managed allotment service that provides an affordable and sustainable way for individuals and community groups to access opportunities to grow food for themselves and their families.'*

11. **Section 3.2** of the Draft Strategy sets out the aims and objectives of the Strategy, as follows:

#### ***Aim 1: We will make the best use of resources available***

##### ***Objectives***

*1. To ensure that all allotment sites have effective Site Representation including an increased proportion of sites under local management*

*2. To continue to make progress in addressing the level of repairs and maintenance required on allotment sites throughout the lifetime of the strategy and seek further resources to address ailing allotment infrastructure.*

*3. To improve processes and communications between the Council, sites,*

*and individual plot holders, through the use of new technology, virtual meetings, and electronic communications wherever possible.*

***Aim 2: We will demonstrate principles of economic, environmental, and social sustainability in the way that the service is run***

***Objectives***

- 4. To reduce the consumption of and reliance on mains water supplies and other scarce resources*
- 5. To continue to work with local sites to satisfy demand for allotments, support the allotment community and protect allotment revenue*
- 6. To monitor the impact of our changing climate on allotment growing and develop initiatives that encourage growers to address the consequences for site management, growing methods and resource use.*

***Aim 3: We will continue to develop Allotment provision in Cardiff to serve the needs of everyone***

***Objectives***

- 7. To improve access to allotments for disadvantaged groups*
- 8. To ensure that Allotment tenancy agreements and procedures are fit for purpose and updated in line with Allotment legislation and local needs*
- 9. To continue to seek to secure and improve allotment provision in Cardiff as the city expands and develops.*

12. **Point 1.3** of the draft Strategy highlights that the Allotment Strategy focuses on the statutory provision for which the Council is responsible but does not focus on community growing beyond statutory allotments, albeit that this is acknowledged.

13. **Point 11** of the report to Cabinet sets out that the draft Strategy highlights areas which require further consideration, including:

- Reviewing allotment charging mechanisms
- Reviewing the supply and use of treated water for irrigation to reduce the cost of wastage and increase the use of collected rainwater
- Addressing the use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers by plot holders, with a view to reducing and eventually eliminating their use
- Improving cultivation methods to enhance the conservation of soil and improve the growing medium
- Encouraging the intergenerational transfer of skills
- Improving support for site-based volunteers, including Site Representatives.

14. The draft Strategy includes a Delivery Plan, at **Appendix 4**, that contains 34 actions, categorised as short, medium, or long term and grouped under the

appropriate aim and objective of the Strategy. At **point 13**, the report to Cabinet stresses that the success of the Strategy depends on the continued engagement of the allotment community. Delivery progress will be monitored through a review forum of nominated Site Representatives, who will make up the Strategy Review Group.

15. **Section 4.1** of the draft Strategy highlights that *‘there are some actions that will require particular consideration because additional financial or people resources may be required to resolve them.’*

16. In terms of financing the Allotment Strategy, the Strategy highlights that:

- there is a backlog of capital improvement work that cannot be funded from revenue and that requires a significant financial allocation. Many of the shortcomings of the previous strategies are linked to lack of resource and this strategy sets mechanisms for considering how these issues can be resolved.
- A full review of allotment infrastructure is needed to properly allocate funding and seek additional funding support.
- In 2021/22, an Allotment Support Grant of £59,395 has been offered by Welsh Government to enhance allotment provision in Cardiff after the Covid-19 pandemic. From this, £58,000 has been allocated to replacement fencing at Pontcanna A and Ely Great Farm Allotment sites, with the balance used to purchase water butts for distribution to sites. Further grant funding may be available in future years, but this is not guaranteed.
- A more structured and informed approach in identifying capital requirements over time will be required
- Local management has allowed sites to apply for external funding to make improvements, but sources of funding are also limited for the types of infrastructure improvements required. Several sites have applied for external funding for a variety of improvements such as wildlife ponds, orchard planting and communal polytunnels.

## **Proposed Recommendations to Cabinet**

17. The report to Cabinet contains the following recommendation:

*Cabinet is recommended to approve the Cardiff Allotment Strategy 2022-2027*

## **Consultation Undertaken**

18. At **point 6**, the report to Cabinet sets out that engagement with the allotment community has been a key feature of, and integral to, the review. A Strategy Review Group, led by Councillor Jane Henshaw, Assistant Cabinet Member for Local Environment, supported by site representatives and officers, was established to inform its development.

19. At **point 7**, the report to Cabinet sets out that a comprehensive consultation exercise with allotment tenants was undertaken in the autumn of 2021. This exercise generated 499 responses, a 20% response rate. The outcomes from the consultation exercise saw an overall increase in satisfaction when compared with the 2018 exercise; further details are set out in Appendix 3 of the draft strategy document, at Appendix A.

## **Previous Scrutiny**

20. This Committee has undertaken scrutiny of previous iterations of the Allotment Strategy. The Chair's letter following the Committee meeting of 25 November 2010 raised several issues with the Executive Member for Sport, Leisure & Culture. These were:

- Members were happy with the progress made to date and the engagement with stakeholders and wished to congratulate all concerned on this progress.
- Members wished to encourage the use of Housing Revenue Account and private sector land, and to continue the rigorous pursuit for funding to improve facilities at allotment sites.
- Members encouraged officers to use the opportunity of the LDP and Section 106 where possible.
- Members commended the use of Community Service in allotments.

21. Following consideration of the 2015/16 Budget Savings Proposal *“Reduced subsidy for allotments - through increased fees and charges and increased occupancy as part of the ongoing Council strategy to make the allotment service self-sufficient - £8,000”*, the Chair’s letter to the Cabinet Member for Environment, dated 6 February 2015, stated that:

*“the Committee was given assurances that the increased fees and charges for allotments are in line with the ongoing Allotment Strategy being developed by the Council, and we are not minded to oppose this proposal. We would however request that this Strategy comes through the Committee at a later date, enabling us to review this service in more detail.”*

22. In July 2015, Committee considered the Allotment Strategy Interim Review 2014-2017. The Chair’s letter to the Cabinet Member for Environment, dated 16 July 2015, stated that:

- At the meeting members tested a number of areas, such as the accessibility of allotments, waiting lists and plot sizes, and we were pleased that all these issues have been considered and that the Council is working with the Cardiff Allotment Holders Association to find appropriate solutions.
- The Committee welcomes the close working relationship that has been developed with the Member Champion for Community Food Growing, and were pleased to hear that many of the historic barriers to working with allotment holders have been broken down as a result of Councillor Holden’s involvement. We feel confident there is now a focus and direction set for further improvements to be made in Cardiff’s allotments.
- The Committee expects further progress to be made as outlined in the Allotment Strategy Interim Plan 2014-2017 Action Plan, helping to develop a well-managed, sustainable, and accessible allotment service for Cardiff.
- We anticipate scrutinising this issue again when a new Allotment Strategy is developed in 2017.

## **Way Forward**

23. Councillor Peter Bradbury (Cabinet Member – Culture and Leisure) will be invited to make a statement. Jon Maidment (Operational Manager – Parks and Cardiff Harbour Authority) and Rosie James (Strategy and Development Manager, Parks) will attend, as will Judith Hill (Site Representative for Lady Mary Allotments and Regional Representative for the National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners) and Alan McCoy (Site Representative for South Rise Allotments). The whole panel will be available to answer Members' questions.

## **Legal Implications**

24. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review, and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters, there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

## **Financial Implications**

25. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review, and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters, there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations

for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is recommended to:

- i) Consider the information in this report, its appendices and the information presented at the meeting
- ii) Determine whether they would like to make any comments, observations, or recommendations to the Cabinet on this matter in time for its meeting on 10 March 2022, and
- iii) Discuss the way forward for any future scrutiny of the issues discussed.

**DAVINA FIORE**

**Director of Governance & Legal Services**

**4 March 2022**