

Culture and Communities Committee

10am, Tuesday, 11 September 2018

Allotment and Food Growing Provision

Item number	9.3
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	All
Council Commitments	44

Executive Summary

This Report summarises the current level of food growing provision supported by the Council; the existing legislation, policy and strategy in place to increase this provision; and related barriers to further expansion.

Allotment and Food Growing Provision

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Committee notes the current scale and range of allotment and food growing provision across the city supported by the Council.
- 1.2 Committee notes the measures in place seeking to increase allotment provision and support and expand the network, and the number of community gardens and food growing initiatives.
- 1.3 Committee refers this report to the Transport and Environment Committee for information.

2. Background

- 2.1 Council commitment 44 is “to increase allotment provision and support and expand the network and the number of community gardens and food growing initiatives”.
- 2.2 In March 2017 the City of Edinburgh Council approved its third [Allotment Strategy](#), “Cultivating Communities - A Growing Success”. This strategy was written following consultation with the public and allotment plot holders in the Autumn of 2016, and establishes a ten-year plan for allotment development in Edinburgh. Its core objectives are to:
 - 2.2.1 ensure adequate provision of allotments;
 - 2.2.2 introduce a robust management system;
 - 2.2.3 improve the customer experience; and
 - 2.2.4 adopt the revised allotment regulations.
- 2.3 In 2011, the City of Edinburgh Council published a framework for a ‘Sustainable Edinburgh 2020’ and consulted on priority issues for action. Food issues came high on the list of what people felt was important, so a cross sector steering group was established and Edible Edinburgh was formed. The group produced the [Edible Edinburgh Sustainable Food City Plan](#) in 2013. One of its aims is to grow, produce and distribute food more locally.
- 2.4 There are over 65 community garden projects across the city known to the Council, most of which include food growing as a core purpose. A significant number of these take place on Council-owned land, often through a peppercorn lease arrangement.

- 2.5 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act came into force on 17 June 2015 and section 9 of the act looks to simplify the law regarding allotments. Local authorities are obliged to manage waiting lists for allotments and take reasonable steps to address high levels of demand. Councils also have to seek permission from Scottish Ministers before they sell off land used for allotments or use it for something else. Finally, local authorities have to report on their allotment provision every year and have to enforce active regulations relating to allotment plot holders.
- 2.6 The provisions of the 2015 Act relating to allotments seek to:
- 2.6.1 Increase the number of allotments;
 - 2.6.2 Increase the amount of land made available to communities to grow their own food;
 - 2.6.3 Make it easier for communities to take over land for allotments and other “Grow Your Own” purposes; and
 - 2.6.4 Update and simplify existing allotments legislation.
- 2.7 The main areas of new policy include:
- 2.7.1 A duty on local authorities to hold and maintain allotment waiting lists;
 - 2.7.2 A duty on local authorities to provide allotments and to keep waiting lists below a set target;
 - 2.7.3 A duty for local authorities to publish an annual report and produce a food growing strategy;
 - 2.7.4 A duty for local authorities to produce new allotment regulations; and
 - 2.7.5 Protection of allotment sites from closure.
- 2.8 The Act places a duty on local authorities to provide allotment sites. These allotments will be provided principally to people on the allotments waiting list. Allotment provision is demand led and the waiting list will record all those who want to let an allotment plot. The Act replaces the provisions within the Allotments (Scotland) Acts 1892, 1922 and 1950, which are repealed in their entirety.
- 2.9 The [Open Space Strategy](#) (2016) supports the expansion of the city’s allotment supply and encourages future development to include provision for allotments and community growing as part of placemaking. This statutory document includes reference to the Allotment Strategy and the Council’s obligations to support food growing under the provisions of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act.
- 2.10 There has been one Stage 1 Expression of Interest form received from Transition Edinburgh South for the walled garden at Gracemount Mansion. Under the Council’s Community Asset Transfer Policy, a Stage 1 Panel meeting is being convened to consider their request.

3. Main report

- 3.1 There are many food-growing activities across the city, including 44 allotment sites. Of these:
 - 3.1.1 30 are owned or leased by the City of Edinburgh Council and managed by Parks, Greenspace and Cemeteries;
 - 3.1.2 three are owned by the City of Edinburgh Council and managed by Housing;
 - 3.1.3 five are owned by the City of Edinburgh Council but have a devolved management system; and
 - 3.1.4 six are privately owned and managed.
- 3.2 An additional 65 community garden projects are known to the Council, most of which are on Council-owned land and include food growing as a core purpose. Over two-thirds have been supported by the Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust, including 19 new sites over the last 12 months.
- 3.3 There are 23 community gardens across the city on land owned by the Housing Service, providing a range of gardening facilities for tenants. One of the main objectives of the Housing Budget Strategy is to invest in services aimed at reducing tenants living costs. During the 2016/17 Housing Budget Consultation, Council tenants were asked what they felt would have the greatest impact on reducing their day to day costs. One in two of the tenants who responded said that they wanted to see more community gardens and green spaces so they could grow their own food and reduce their food bills. Tenants also recognised the wider benefits of delivering more gardens, including bringing local residents together, communities taking ownership of unused land, being active outdoors, and getting the opportunity to grow healthy food.
- 3.4 Further community gardens are already in the process of being delivered through the Neighbourhood Environment Programme (NEPs) and in new council housing developments.
- 3.5 Over the next 10 years the Council will deliver 20,000 new affordable homes across Edinburgh in partnership with housing associations. Gardens and green spaces will be integral to the development of new homes and in the regeneration of the wider communities. Two gardens are currently under construction as part of new developments at Crewe Road Gardens and Greendykes. Six more are at design stage. Future developments are being evaluated to maximise the delivery of green spaces to support local tenants and residents.

- 3.6 There are 2,697 customers on the Council's allotment waiting list. The first allotment strategy for the City of Edinburgh "Cultivating Communities" was widely acclaimed for improving the standard of allotments in Edinburgh. However, the waiting list continued to grow. The second strategy "Cultivating Communities - A Growing Challenge" went some way to tackle this by providing an additional 344 plots of all sizes for rent. The present Allotments Strategy "Cultivating Communities – A Growing Success" was drafted in response to the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.
- 3.7 Section 112(1) of the Act imposes a duty on local authorities to take reasonable steps to provide sufficient allotments to keep the allotment waiting list at no more than half the authority's current number of allotments, and to ensure that a person entered on the list does not remain on it for a continuous period of more than five years. To meet these duties the Council needs to create some additional 1,300 allotment plots, almost double its current provision of 1,552 plots.
- 3.8 Recognising the prevailing budgetary constraints, the current Allotment Strategy seeks to establish additional allotment plots through two main mechanisms:
- 3.8.1 sub-dividing large plots where there is demand for smaller plots; and
 - 3.8.2 supporting communities to fundraise for and create allotments or community food growing gardens.
- 3.9 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act encourages people who are on the allotments waiting list in a given area to come together and "take on" a piece of local Council ground (assuming that such ground exists). The City of Edinburgh Council will therefore support communities to fundraise to transform ground into an allotment site and thereafter manage the site. Management could be independent of the Council but there would be an expectation that any independent allotment site would abide by the Council's allotment regulations.
- 3.10 Although the third allotments strategy was only recently approved, the early signs are that implementation of this approach alone is unlikely to meet the current and expected future demand for an allotment plot. A short-list of potential allotment sites has been collated, and those on the waiting list in proximity to some of the more realisable ones are being contacted to ascertain levels of interest in community-led site construction and management.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 Sufficient allotment, community garden and food growing provision to meet demand.

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 The leasing of land for community-led allotment or growing space construction involves officer time and incurs administrative costs. These can normally be captured within existing revenue budgets.
- 5.2 Although presently unbudgeted, an alternative approach would be to directly construct new allotment sites using capital funds and rent these out to recover costs. A new full-size allotment plot with suitable security and access to water and central tool storage normally costs between £1500-£2500 to construct. 2018/19 plot rentals vary from £28 (half-sized plot with concession for the elderly, students and unemployed) to £114 (full-sized plot).
- 5.3 An estimated £2m would be required to construct sufficient plots to meet the Council's duty to keep the allotment waiting list at no more than half the authority's current number of allotments, and to ensure that a person entered on the list does not remain on it for a continuous period of more than five years. However, this sum is highly dependent on the size of plots and scale/number of allotment sites.
- 5.4 Creating new allotments on existing Council green space may reduce annual grounds maintenance costs.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 Given current levels of investment, it is likely that the Council will fail to meet its statutory duty under Section 112(1) of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 to take reasonable steps to provide sufficient allotments to keep the allotment waiting list at no more than half the authority's current number of allotments, and to ensure that a person entered on the list does not remain on it for a continuous period of more than five years.

7. Equalities impact

- 7.1 Allotments and community growing spaces are available to all and are particularly attractive for those who do not have their own garden. Edinburgh offers allotments on a first come basis and rental discounts are available to those citizens who are unemployed, students or who are over state retirement age.
- 7.2 Reducing inequalities in health is critical to achieving the Scottish Government's aim of making Scotland a better, healthier place for everyone, no matter where they live. Health inequalities can be a matter of personal lifestyles such as lack of physical activity. Allotment gardening is a low-cost activity that encourages physical exertion and the production of healthy produce for consumption.
- 7.3 The 2015 allotments survey shows that 53% of plot-holders are female and 47% are male. 53% are over the age of 55.

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 The Sustainable Cities Index ranks cities on 20 indicators in five key areas: the economy, business, risk, infrastructure and finance. It also breaks the results down into three sub-indices; social, environmental and economic which combine to provide a ranking of each city's overall sustainability. Allotment gardening contributes to the ranking process through delivering beneficial effects on many of the assessment indices, including the percentage greenspace area, life expectancy, obesity rates and greenhouse gas emissions.
- 8.2 Sustainable Edinburgh 2020 (SE2020) is the Council's Framework for the sustainable development of the city until 2020. Its vision is that "Edinburgh in 2020 will be a low carbon, resource efficient city, delivering a resilient local economy and vibrant flourishing communities in a rich natural setting". Allotment gardening supports sustainable food at a low carbon cost.

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 There has been no public consultation pertaining to this report. However, development of both the Council's allotment strategy and the Edible Edinburgh initiative involved extensive consultation. Similarly, the creation of growing spaces in existing and future Housing involves a consultation process.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust – Community Gardening (<http://www.elgt.org.uk/projects/community-gardening>)

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11. Appendices

None.