

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 26 March 2019

Allotment and Food Growing Provision Update

Item number	9.3
Executive/routine	
Wards	All
Council Commitments	44

1. Recommendations

1.1 Committee is asked to:

- 1.1.1 note the measures undertaken to date to increase allotment provision and support the number of community gardens and food growing initiatives;
- 1.1.2 note the intention to consult on amending the allotment discount criteria and the fee for half-plot rental; and
- 1.1.3 note that further investigation will be undertaken to determine the feasibility of giving priority to those applicants referred for horticultural therapy by medical professionals.

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Report

Allotment and Food Growing Provision Update

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides an update on the current level of allotment and food growing provision supported by the Council. It also indicates the intention to carry out a review of the allotment waiting list, to consult on amending the allotment allocation and discount criteria, increasing fees for half-plot rental, and considering prioritising allotment plot lets for those referred for horticultural therapy by medical professionals.

3. Background

- 3.1 Council commitment 44 is to increase allotment provision and support, and expand the network and the number of community gardens and food growing initiatives.
- 3.2 At its meeting of [11 September 2018](#) the Culture and Communities Committee requested that an update report on allotment and food growing provision be provided in six months.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 places a duty on local authorities to provide allotment sites, to take reasonable step to ensure that individuals do not remain on a waiting list for over five years, and to ensure that the waiting list does not exceed half the number of plots available.
- 4.2 There are currently 1,833 allotment plots within Edinburgh, of which 1,567 are managed by the Council. Over the last two years the number of plots has increased by 109 (19 plots were established within a new site at Lochend and 90 plots created by sub-dividing larger plots no longer manageable by their plot holders).
- 4.3 Supported by an on-line application process, the demand for an allotment continues to grow. The current applicant waiting list for an allotment stands at 2,965; of which 1,535 applicants have been on the list for over five years. Over the last six months alone the waiting list has increased by 268. During this period 16 new plots were created and allocated, and tenancy-turnover removed a further 24 people from the waiting list.

- 4.4 37 sites have been identified as having the potential to be developed as allotments and are currently being assessed to determine any development or title restrictions.
- 4.5 To meet the Council's statutory duty, a £4m business case to construct new allotments was made to the Capital Investment Programme, and this was considered by the Finance and Resources Committee at its meeting of [1 February 2019](#). However, due to other budget priorities, this remains an unfunded pressure.
- 4.6 Supported by neighbourhood improvement funding, a new allotment is to be created at Piershill Square, with 12 plots likely to be available in the coming year. A small number of allotments are also scheduled to be funded by property developers, including 20 half-sized plots due to open at Newcraighall in 2019/20, and six half-sized plots at Leith Links due to open in 2022/23.
- 4.7 The number of private allotments plots within Edinburgh has remained static. Support to develop Lethem Park as a private allotment site is ongoing and has the potential to provide 50 new plots.
- 4.8 To improve the accuracy of the allotment waiting list a validation exercise has been launched, and over the next three months a new waiting list will be established. The validation exercise will also improve communication with customers and will provide the necessary authority to enable the Council to engage with applicants who are interested in developing allotments through community asset transfer.
- 4.9 Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust has developed a further four community gardens at Garvald, Firrhill, St Stephens Court and Haymarket - working with people with physical and mental health issues. These will be the last of the 69 community gardens developed by the Trust as they were unsuccessful in obtaining funding from the Edinburgh Integrated Joint Board to continue their community gardening development role.
- 4.10 It is proposed to consult on proposals to:
- 4.10.1 increase the charge for half-plots from 50% of the charge for a full plot to 60% (this would increase the charge from £56.30 to £67.80 per year);
 - 4.10.2 amend the criteria for discounted allotments to individuals of pensionable age, students and people who are unemployed.
 - 4.10.3 investigate opportunities for prioritising and discounting plots for those "referred" for gardening activities by GPs and other medical professionals; recognising the physical and mental health benefits that accrue from food growing and the Council's desire to support horticultural therapy.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Completion of the allotment waiting list validation exercise will determine the gap in allotment provision across Edinburgh.
- 5.2 Community groups will be encouraged to come together to fundraise for and develop new allotments, possibly via community asset transfer.

- 5.3 Undertake a consultation exercise on changing the criteria for a discounted allotment rental and increasing the fee for a halved-plot.
- 5.4 Investigate opportunities for prioritising and discounting plots for those “referred” for gardening activities by GPs and other medical professionals.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 A full allotment plot is currently charged at £113/year, with a 50% discount applying to individuals of pensionable age, students or the unemployed. Amending the discount rate to individuals: in receipt of a pension credit; students; or unemployed could raise an extra £15,000 - £25,000 per year to support allotment provision.
- 6.2 Raising the rental fee for half plots from 50% to 60% of the full allotment plot fee can generate a further £5,000 income per year to support allotment provision.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 Consultation undertaken with the Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotment Gardens Associations on the waiting list validation exercise.
- 7.2 Consultation to be undertaken for proposed amendments to rental fees and prioritisation for those with medical professional “referrals”.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust - <http://www.elgt.org.uk/projects/community-gardening>
- 8.2 [Open Space Strategy](#)
- 8.3 [Allotments in Edinburgh](#)
- 8.4 [Minutes from Culture and Communities Committee, Tuesday 11 September 2018](#)

9. Appendices

None.