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| Subject: | Allotments Overview Report - Belfast City Council |
| Date: | 4th March 2025 |
| Reporting Officer: | Stephen Leonard, Operational Director CNS |
| Contact Officer: | Maria McAleer, Performance and Improvement Officer CNS |

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| Restricted Reports | |
| Is this report restricted? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted. | |
| Insert number <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime | |
| If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? | |
| After Committee Decision After Council Decision Sometime in the future Never | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Call-in | |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-in? | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

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| 1.0 | Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues |
| 1.1 | Purpose of Report Members will recall discussions on allotments, allotment provision and the management of them at meetings of the People & Communities committee meetings in March 2024 and in |

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| | September 2022. This report provides an update on the issues and concerns raised by members. |
| 2.0 | Recommendation |
| 2.1 | Members are asked to note the content of this report. |
| 3.0 | Main Report |
| 3.1 | <p>Background</p> <p>In September 2022 the Committee agreed that a review be undertaken of all Council managed allotment facilities, including investigating the levels of upkeep of individual plots, the ongoing management and maintenance of the sites and length of waiting lists at the various sites with a comprehensive report to be submitted to a future meeting.</p> |
| 3.2 | At its March 2024 meeting this committee approved the implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Probation Board of Northern Ireland (PBNI) to provide a maintenance support service for allotment users at the Annadale Allotments and agreed to see if it would be possible to extend this arrangement with the PBNI to other Council Allotments subject to the success of the PBNI MOU At Annadale Allotments. |
| 3.3 | Further discussion ensued regarding the number of abandoned allotments at Annadale and the long waiting list of people looking for allotments. Several of the Members highlighted the need for the Council to have better control and management of plots that were not being maintained or had been abandoned. The Committee requested that a comprehensive report be submitted to a future meeting of this committee |
| | <p>Relevant Legislation and Alignment to Council Strategies</p> |
| 3.4 | Belfast City Council has a long history of allotment provision dating back to 1916. The Allotments Act (Northern Ireland) in 1932 supported communities and local authorities at that time. The National Allotment Association UK https://www.thenas.org.uk/ advises that historically allotments are seen as simply spaces for individuals to enjoy, studies increasingly show the green value of allotment sites. Allotments are rich in biodiversity, creating greenspaces for wildlife and pollinators. Allotments have community, health and wellbeing and environmental benefits. These individual and community benefits of allotments provision align to The Belfast Agenda, The Belfast Open Spaces Strategy and Belfast Resilience Strategy. |
| 3.5 | Allotments provided by Belfast City Council are subject to Allotments Act (Northern Ireland) 1932 further details available via weblink below www.legislation.gov.uk/apni/1932/17/contents |
| | <p>Council Allotment Provision – Citywide</p> |
| 3.6 | Currently Council provides a total of 281 allotment plots at the following 7 locations detailed at Appendix A of this report: |

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| Albert Drive , Albert Drive, Castlereagh, BT6 | 8 Plots |
| Ballysillan , Deerpark Road, BT14 | 57 Plots |
| Annadale , Annadale Embankment, BT9 | 87 Plots |
| Belmont Cairnburn Road, BT4 | 60 Plots |
| Blythefield , Blythe Street, BT12 | 22 Plots |
| Musgrave , Stockmans Lane, BT9 | 25 Plots |
| White Rock , Whiterock Road BT12 | 22 Plots |

3.7

Allotment waiting list

With regards to the **281 plots**, Council offer in the city it currently has **964 people** on the waiting list for allotments in total which breaks down per site as follows:

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| Albert Drive , Albert Drive, Castlereagh, BT6 | 125 People |
| Ballysillan , Deerpark Road, BT14 | 65 People |
| Annadale , Annadale Embankment, BT9 | 353 People |
| Belmont Cairnburn Road, BT4 | 205 People |
| Blythefield , Blythe Street, BT12 | 22 People |
| Musgrave , Stockmans Lane, BT9 | 165 People |
| White Rock , Whiterock Road BT12 | 29 People |

3.7

The Association for Public Services Excellence APSE Local Authority State of the Market Survey 2024 advised that 29% of respondents had waiting lists of more than 1,000 people. With 73% of respondents having reduced the size of standard plots to create smaller plots. Only 26% of respondents provided up to 500 a total number of plots with the remainder exceeding this level of provision. 53% of respondents plan to increase the number of allotments.

Waiting List Management Options

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The current Belfast City Council waiting list is evidence of a high demand for allotments. It is anticipated that if remains open and the current allocation arrangements remain in place the waiting list will continue to grow. Officers have considered several potential options to improve management of the waiting list, and these are set out at as an Action Plan in Appendix B of this report. In summary they include the following:

- Confirmation that those on waiting list still require an allotment.
- Advising them of the opportunities to use access other growing opportunities E.G Council and other Community Gardens.
- Asking allotments plot holders to confirm they wish to retain the allotment tenancy agreement.
- Asking those holding an allotment under tenancy agreement do they wish to reduce the size of allotment in the interests of reducing waiting list and increasing participation in growing.
- A survey of plot holders every two years

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| | <p>- Consideration and review of the criterion used to determine eligibility for and allocation of allotment spaces</p> <p>Members should note that these measures are being considered by legal services.</p> <p>Review allotment provision</p> <p>3.9 Belfast City Council has allocated an average of 22 plots per year since 2014 based on current provision and availability of vacant plots. However, results and actions from the most recent OSS allotment sites visit reveal that 40 plots are vacant currently and will be allocated to those on the waiting lists. Currently no available budget within CNS for increasing the number of allotments operated by council. CNS is currently preparing a bid into the Council's Capital Budget for a feasibility study to be completed into the possibility of increasing allotments provision and other community growing opportunities. It would also consider the existing infrastructure at each site.</p> <p>Allotments Allocation Process by Belfast City Council</p> <p>3.10 The process of awarding plots to members of the public is done through completing an application form. A customer's position is dictated by when they submitted their application meaning it is a first come first serve basis. Furthermore, when a plot becomes available, Outdoor Leisure OSS allocate this to the next person on the waiting list.</p> <p>Allotments Management – Abandoned/Unmanaged Plots</p> <p>3.11 At a site review meeting the level of warning that is issued to the plot holders is laid out as follows. A Stage 1 warning is issued to a plot holder the first time their plot is deemed not up to standards. The plot holder is then given 14 days to inform council of the reason the plot is at this standard. If we do not hear from them in 14 days, we then issue a Stage 2 warning and after a further 14 days of no communication a Termination letter is issued. A Stage 2 warning will also be issued to a plot holder if in a future review their plot is still deemed poor standard, and they have already received a stage 1 warning we then escalate this to a Stage 2 and after 14 days of no communication a termination letter is issued. The termination stage of the process can be issued after inspecting a plot for a third time and it still not being deemed up to standard. We will then issue the plot holder a termination letter and give them a period of 14 days to remove any belongings on the plot.</p> <p>Engagement with allotment committees and facilitation of access to council community gardens</p> <p>3.12 Not every council allotment has a committee. However, some do, and Council Officers from OSS, CNS engage with both plot holders and allotment committees and through annual inspections and meetings as required. OSS management advise that usage of council community gardens is varied managed with programming and growing opportunities at directly managed council community gardens supported based on demand via the Outreach team within OSS, CNS. Like allotments community gardens have the potential to foster social connections and support environmental sustainability.</p> |
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Facilitation of Access to Community Growing Opportunities

3.13 Council with support from external funders over the last 20 years supported several community gardens and more recently key projects such as the Upsurge project in Botanic. A map detailing these can be found attached to this report. Furthermore, Council recently granted permission for community growing opportunities or upgrades to existing provision at the following locations.

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| St Johns Church, Ormeau Road | New polytunnel on existing allotments |
| Glenriver Lands, Cloona Park | Allotments and associated adult support building. |
| Ballysillan Playing Fields | Environmental improvements to allotments |
| Highfield Community Centre | (Gardens and poly tunnels etc) |
| Botanic Gardens | (Upsurge Research project) |
| The Lockhouse, River Terrace | (Men’s shed and planters etc) |

3.14 Other similar planning applications have been submitted to council and are under consideration at present. The Belfast Agenda Action Plan 2024-2028 includes an ambitious stretch goal to work towards achieving a standard of 1250 square metres of community growing space per 1,000 households by 2035.

3.15 In addition, following presentation of a Notice of Motion to Strategic Policy and Resources on 28 November 2023 Council notes the pressures upon food security caused by many issues, including the cost-of-living crisis, the impact of the pandemic and climate change. It is, therefore, vital that the Council plays its part to ensure that our citizens have access to enough fresh food for day-to-day living. The Council, therefore, agreed to adopt a right to grow on Council-owned land which is suitable for cultivation. This would probably involve licensing cultivation of suitable land via community groups.” Proposer: Councillor Bell Seconder: Councillor Flynn.

3.16 The Council adopted the proposal and work is underway as part of an update on the Belfast Sustainable Food Strategy, with a view to bring a report back to Climate & Resilience Committee in late Spring . Any future feasibility study of allotment provision will link in with this work.

Financial and Resource Implications

3.17 Allotments prices are reviewed annually in line with council scale of charges. The potential allotment income for 2024/25 is £7,815. Any unpaid fee’s owing and debit is managed in line with relevant council procedures. Please note that a full plot per year is currently £50 and a half plot is £26 as per this year’s scale of charges. This is subject to change in the next financial year.

3.18 Operational Asset Management and Maintenance costs are included within existing revenue budgets. There is no provision in the capital budget to increase Council’s allotment provision.

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| | <u>Human Resources</u> |
| 3.19 | None. |
| | <u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> |
| 3.20 | There are no known equality or good relations / rural needs assessment associated with this report at this time. However, any proposed changes will be screened in accordance with councils' equality scheme. |
| | Appendices - Documents Attached |
| | Appendix A - Overview Map of Belfast City Council Allotments and Community Appendix B - Outline Action Plan for Allotments Provision |