



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Growing Communities - next steps
Date:	10 May 2012
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officers:	Emer Boyle, Policy and Business Development Manager

1.	Relevant Background Information
	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) update Members on the development of the Public Health Agency (PHA) funded allotments and community gardens at Musgrave Park;(ii) present a draft “Growing Communities” strategy for information and review, which will be tabled for agreement at next month’s Committee meeting;(iii) seek Member attendance at an event to mark the opening of the PHA funded demonstration project and launch of the project under the Active Belfast - Active Living theme, at Musgrave Park in June. <p>Following a seminar held in March 2011, the Council took the lead on the development of a strategic citywide approach to growing activities – including allotments, community gardens, and Grow-It-Yourself initiatives.</p> <p>The wider health and wellbeing benefits of ‘growing your own’ are well documented. The ‘Growing Communities’ strategy is one of a number of projects from across Northern Ireland being used to demonstrate how Health Equity in All Policy (HEIAP) works in practice by using it to help align the strategy with the Council’s wider remit to improve the quality of life for all its citizens.</p> <p>In February 2012 Committee received an update report on the developing Growing Communities Strategy, the proposed sites for new community gardens and a process for the allocation of allotments. Since February</p>

	<p>with assistance from our partner organisations, the Public Health Agency, Belfast Healthy Cities and the Belfast Health Development Unit, work has continued to complete a draft strategy and action plan for the city.</p> <p>The current draft of the strategy is attached as Appendix I for your information and review and it is hoped that we can bring this back to Committee in June for final Committee approval and endorsement. Officers would welcome feedback or input from Members on the draft strategy prior to the June meeting and are happy to make themselves available to meet with groups or individual members should that be required.</p>
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2.	Key Issues
	<p>On 21 June this year, there will be an event at Musgrave Park to open a new community garden and allotment section funded through PHA's investment under Active Belfast (Active Living sub- theme). The event will also provide an opportunity to launch the final draft strategy for public consultation, which will run over the following 12 weeks.</p> <p>The draft Growing Communities Strategy has the following vision:</p> <p><i>All people in Belfast will have the opportunity for improved health and wellbeing through involvement in growing activities throughout their lifetimes and within their local neighbourhoods</i></p> <p>The objectives of the strategy are :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To support healthier lifestyles by providing growing opportunities to people of all ages; – To support and develop communities by building and encouraging ownership of and pride in the cities growing spaces; – To work to support environmental sustainability by ensuring that growing spaces and activities contribute positively to the local environment and support the attainment of sustainable development targets set for local government; – To improve communication and models of management by providing growing communities and allotment holders with timely advice and guidance including site management protocols; – To engage the wider community through inclusiveness in the development of shared growing spaces; and – To encourage the development of the social economy in local neighbourhoods and suitable training and skills development for employability. <p>Based on key priorities identified in the strategy, a full action plan has been developed for the coming ten years which sets out to; -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop information and facilitate communication on growing – Link with existing, related programmes

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide financial and other resources as well as practical support for growing - Identify and support development of sustainable sites for growing - Support new models of delivery and management of community growing - Promote the benefits of growing to all sections of the community. <p>The effectiveness of the strategy in meeting its aims and objectives will be monitored and reviewed through a range of performance indicators which we hope over time will address both provision of opportunity and impact on participants in growing.</p> <p><u>Operational Change and Modernisation</u></p> <p>Following on from the February Committee report which outlined a proposed procedure for the allocation of new allotments, the development of the draft strategy has highlighted the fact that there are a number of operational practices which would merit re-examination and modernisation.</p> <p>In line with the strategy, the following are additional areas of work which the department will undertake in the next year which should complement the strategy implementation and improve the service provided to Belfast citizens interested in getting involved in growing activities and allotments, namely;-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a revision of the existing allotment handbook / regulations, bringing them up to date and written in “plain English” - a review of charges for allotments - a review of sizes of allotment “plots” and whether this should be linked to charges - central management of all requests for allotments and management of the waiting list (site specific and city-wide)
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3.	<p>Resource Implications</p> <p><u>Financial</u> The ongoing development of the community gardens as agreed by committee in February is funded from the corporate monies. However the ongoing maintenance needs of these sites once developed will need to be factored into the 2013-14 as an area of growth for the department. Work is underway to identify what these are and this will be reported back through the estimate setting process.</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u> It is our ambition that existing gardeners will be involved in the planned facilitation work in the gardens over the next number of months, with a view to expanding departmental expertise in this area.</p>
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	<p>Asset and other Implications This draft strategy and approach will enhance existing council assets and will inevitably require ongoing input, oversight and maintenance by the council.</p>
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4.	Equality and good relations implications
	<p>There are no implications at this stage. However, Equality and Good Relations factors will be taken into account in any activities being delivered in line with the strategy. The draft strategy will be equality screened in line with the council's existing equality screening process.</p>

5.	Recommendations
	<p>The Committee is asked to;-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) note the update on the development of the PHA funded allotments and community gardens at Musgrave Park and the request to attend the opening event in June under the Active Belfast - Active Living theme on Thursday 21 June; and (ii) note the draft "Growing Communities" strategy for information and review, which will be tabled for agreement at next month's Committee meeting subject to any feedback or comments Members may wish to make in the interim.

6.	Decision Tracking
	<p>Final draft strategy to be returned to Committee in June 2012- Policy & Business Development Manager.</p>

7.	Key to Abbreviations
	<p>HEIAP – Health equity in all policies PHA – Public Health Agency</p>

8.	Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Draft "Growing Communities" strategy</p>