

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ALLOTMENTS (WATER CHARGES) TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Thursday, 20 July 2006

#### PRESENT:

Councillor Marion Allen	Chair
Councillor Trini Crake	
Councillor Michelle Hoare	
Councillor Les Patterson	
Mr Barry Oliver	Co Optee, Northampton Allotment Network
Mr Tony Care	Co-Optee, Northampton Allotment Network
Councillor Phil Larratt	Portfolio Holder
Carl Grimmer	- Corporate Manager, Streetscene
Tony Spiezick	
Margaret Martin	Consortium
Tracy Tiff	Scrutiny Officer

#### 1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Glynane and Paul Chambers.

#### 2 ELECTION OF CHAIR

It was proposed by Councillor Crake, seconded by Councillor M Hoare that Councillor M Allen be elected Chair of the Allotments (Water Charges) Task and Finish Group.

Upon a vote it was:-

**AGREED:- That Councillor M Allen be elected Chair of the Allotments (Water Charges) Task and Finish Group.**

#### 3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

#### 4 INTRODUCTIONS AND PROTOCOLS FOR THE MEETING

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Allotments (Water Charges) Task and Finish Group and invited attendees to introduce themselves.

The Task and Finish Group was referred to the notice of motion that was carried at Full Council on 22 May 2006:-

Councillor Patterson proposed Councillor McCutcheon seconded: -

"We call on the Council to discontinue the 5% above inflation annual uplift in allotment rents.

We call on the Council to introduce a fair system of charges for water usage on allotments in place of the proposed flawed system.

That a time limited scrutiny investigation is undertaken for the proposed water charges."

The motion was carried.

The focus of this Task and Finish Group was noted as investigating the proposed water charges.

## **5 SCOPING EXERCISE**

The Task and Finish Group scoped its review (Copy attached to the minutes).

C Grimmer, Corporate Manager, confirmed that originally the possibility of investigating a flat rate water charge to all allotment holders of approximately £6.50 had been investigated. This had been based upon the cost to the Council of water usage over the year. The water charges were per plot irrespective of size and had been scheduled for introduction in October 2006. C Grimmer emphasised that the introduction of water charges to allotment holders had been suspended until this Overview and Scrutiny review was complete.

The schedule of site visits was agreed: -

- Thurs 10 August 6.30pm - Kettering Road Allotment Site -
- Friday 11 August 6.30pm - Mereway Allotment Site
- Monday 14 August 6.30pm - Eastern Avenue (North) Allotment
- W/C 14 August - Mr Oliver to set the date – Ecton Brook Allotment Site

Councillor Patterson agreed to produce a checklist for the site visits and undertook to circulate the draft to the Task and Finish Group by 28 July 2006 for comment. The final version of the checklist would then be dispatched on 1 August.

It was suggested that desktop research be carried out on Local Authorities of a similar size to Northampton. Milton Keynes and Southampton was suggested. It was further suggested that desktop research be carried out on a Local Authority within the area of Severn Trent Water. Mr Oliver had obtained some information from Southampton City Council and this would be distributed to the Task and Finish Group, such as Southampton City Council Allotments Charter and Allotment Information Sheets.

It was agreed that the Northampton Allotment Network be invited to nominate a member to become a member of this Task and Finish Group

It was agreed that a letter be sent from the Chair of the Task and Finish Group to Anglian Water regarding the position of grey water on allotment sites within the

borough and whether the water company could amend its charges for water usage as allotment holders only used water six months a year.

## **6 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS**

The schedule of meetings was agreed as:-

### **21 August at 6pm (Jeffery Room)**

Agenda will include:-

- Site Visit Evidence
- Officer's Report:-
  - Details of allotments within the borough
  - Actual cost of water to the Council
  - Costs of allotment sites in the borough with comparable allotment sites
- Define questions for witness evidence (Portfolio Holder)

### **7 September at 6pm (Jeffery Room)**

Agenda will include:-

- Desktop research - data from other Local Authorities
- Witness evidence – Portfolio Holder

### **22 September at 2pm (Holding Room)**

Agenda will include:-

- Finalise the Chair's report

It will be aimed to limit the meetings to a maximum of two hours

The meeting concluded at 7:15 pm

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

### ALLOTMENTS (WATER CHARGES) TASK AND FINISH GROUP

#### REVIEW SCOPE

#### 1 PURPOSE/OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW

##### Purpose

To investigate the proposed water charges for allotment holders within the borough and to link the review to the Council's corporate priorities.

##### Objectives

- Fairness in cost in relation to the size of the allotment
- Leakage issues
- Conservation of water issues
- Whether water charges were included previously in allotment rent.

#### 2 POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

- A fair, comparable and acceptable charge for water usage.
- Possible recommendations for further work regarding the Council's overall Allotment Strategy

#### 3 INFORMATION REQUIRED

- Northampton Borough Council's water charges and those of comparable Local Authorities
- Calculations regarding allotment and water charges (provided by the Northampton Allotment Network)
- Details of allotment sites and allotment sizes within the borough
- Details of allotment rental charges and comparable data from other Local Authorities
- How Northampton Borough Council is billed for water usage by Anglian Water
- Identify the water charge as either business or domestic
- Water usage for individual allotment sites in the borough

#### 4 FORMAT OF INFORMATION

- Baseline Data
- Officer reports/presentations: -  
Details of allotment sites within the borough

- Cost of allotment sites with comparable allotment sites
- Benchmark charges with other Local Authorities)
- Witness Interview with the Portfolio Holder
- Details of allotment sites within the borough

## **5 METHODS USED**

- Minutes of the meetings
- Checklist for site visits
- Views of allotment holders
- Desktop research/ web based
- Alternative(s) to water on allotment sites
- Details from privately owned allotment sites regarding water usage

## **6 CO-OPTION TO THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

### **Suggestions:**

- Mr Barry Oliver - Northampton Allotment Network
- Mr Tony Care - Northampton Allotment Network
- Northampton Allotment Council to be asked to nominate a member to be a co-optee of this Task and Finish Group

## **7 EVIDENCE GATHERING TIMETABLE**

July to September 2006

20 July	Scope the review
mid August	Site visits
21 August	Evidence gathering
7 September	Evidence gathering
22 September	Finalise Chair's final report

## **8 RESPONSIBLE OFFICERS**

Lead Officer	Carl Grimmer
Co-Ordinator	Tracy Tiff

## **9 RESOURCES AND BUDGET**

Possible expert evidence to the meeting scheduled for 7 September 2006

## **10 FINAL REPORT**

Completed by September 2006. Presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then to Cabinet.

## **11 MONITORING PROCESS**