

Minutes of the Meeting of the ALLOTMENTS
BEST VALUE WORKING GROUP held at the
Town Hall on Wednesday, 6th August 2003 at
2.30pm.

Present:-

Councillor A.H. Miller – Chairman
Councillor C. Bright
Councillor Mrs C. Bartlett
Councillor Mrs J. Farrow
Councillor Mrs C. Gainsborough J.P.

Also in attendance:-

A.J. Leeson Town Clerk
R. Legg Allotment Society

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies for inability to attend were received.

2. SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Chairman gave a brief outline of the Council's strategic objectives as outlined in the 2003/04 Best Value Performance Plan, which were to provide under statute allotment spaces to meet the demand of local residents.

Councillor Mrs Gainsborough suggested that the key objective be expanded to include the words "and to maximise use".

It was AGREED to adopt this proposal.

3. REVIEW FRAMEWORK

The Clerk provided the Working Group with copies of the Council's adopted Review Framework documentation. After a brief discussion it was decided that the Working Group use the framework to ensure that the review will cover all aspects required under best value legislation.

4. CURRENT POSITION

The links to the Council's corporate objectives were noted as those including references a) to seek social inclusion for the minority groups within the community i.e. disabled organisations and b) to enable residents to enjoy quality social, recreational and sporting facilities within the Town.

It was established that the Council has a legal obligation to provide allotment services and if providing services for the first time, need not necessarily provide the services itself. It was noted that the legislation makes provisions for the allotments to be provided by a private operator on land not necessarily within the parish of Swanage.

The systems in use were noted as being the application and allocation process. It was not possible to establish the scope of any system audit review but it was established that the systems were not duplicated elsewhere within the service or organisation.

Action: The Clerk will obtain details of the system audit review for presentation at the next meeting of the Working Group and arrange for Operations staff to be invited to attend.
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It was noted that a formal complaints procedure did not currently exist but that this was being reviewed.

Action: The Clerk will present Complaints Procedure proposals for consideration at future meeting of Policy & Resources.
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The budget for the service had been detailed with costs controlled and contained in order to break even.

It was noted that no objectives had been set.

5. **COMPARE**

Consideration was given to the use of performance indicators and trends in order to compare performance with other town and parish Councils.

It was agreed that, for comparison purposes, to seek information from only other best value town councils.

Action: The Clerk will arrange for comparison information to be obtained from other future meetings of the Working Group.

6. **CONSULT**

It was generally agreed that consultation should include the community as a whole as well as service users. Councillors are to be consulted within the scope of the review and staff representatives views would be sought through direct involvement in the review.

Service users were defined as being allotment holders. How users and potential users obtain detail of the service was discussed.

It was agreed that details could be provided on a notice board at the allotment site and also through the Council's newsletter.

7. **CHALLENGE**

The Working Group considered that the provision of allotments served the town in terms of; education, social, recreational and healthy living. The service itself was considered as being sustainable.

The fundamental issues were challenged and the following were determined:-

The allotment service was provided due to a statutory requirement.

It was designed to benefit any parishioner

The service was provided because it was needed.

Users and the wider community benefit from the service.

If allotments were not provided they would be demanded under statute.

It was determined that the service is actually achieving healthy living for its users.

What local residents think of the service is yet to be determined.

The provision of water was determined as discretionary.

Comparison with other authorities is yet to be determined.

No alternative service delivery methods exist.

Users of the service have been identified.

Non-users of the service will be targeted via a questionnaire.

8. **SITE VISIT**

The Working Group, with the exception of Councillor Mrs Gainsborough, assembled at the Allotments for a site investigation.

A number of management issues were identified and discussed. These are summarised below as follows:-

1. Plots vary in size and consideration was given to splitting larger plots into smaller manageable sizes.

2. It was agreed that the smaller sized plots would be allocated to those currently on the waiting list.

3. In allocating a small plot to a new tenant, it would serve as a probationary period after which, consideration could be given to allocating a larger plot.

4. Concern was expressed at the number of sheds situated on individual plots.

Action: The Clerk to serve notice to the tenant for the removal of 11 of his 14 sheds, each of the 7 trailers, 3 cement mixers and other items of debris stored upon the three plots occupied.
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Problems with the water supply were identified for users at the top of the site during periods of peak demand.

Action: The Operations Manager to investigate the costs of installing a secondary water supply for further consideration and consultation with users.

6. The erection of new speed limit signs by the Allotment Society was endorsed and the
7. offer by its representative to encourage policing and enforcement was acknowledged.
8. An illegal act of fly-tipping was observed. Whilst it was noted that the material would
de-compose it highlighted the need to devise a policy on composting and the
importing of foreign material and the dumping of waste onto the site.
The use of fold carpet as a method of weed control was also observed.

Action: The Clerk to draft a policy, restricting the importing of materials, for further consideration and consultation with users.

9. The Clerk detailed an incident involving the Environment Agency following the burning
of waste in an open area on the site. This highlighted the need to introduce a policy
for other users.

Action: The Clerk to draft a policy, restricting the incinerating of waste materials, for further consideration and consultation with users.

10. The parking of vehicles was highlighted as an issue, and the permitting of hard standings
was discussed.

Action: The Clerk and Operations Manager to draft recommendations with regard to the provision of car parking spaces, for consideration and consultation with users.

11. The state and condition of the road was considered. It was recognised that the potholes
served to restrict the speed of vehicles, but that the use of crushed lime-stone was
not durable and an alternative material should be considered.

Action: The Operation Manager investigate and consider the use of an alternative, more durable in-fill material.

12. The Clerk reported that a large tree had recently been removed from the site. It was
generally agreed that only small fruit trees would be permitted in future.
13. Obligations for tenants to keep plots maintained were discussed at length. It was agreed
that tenancy agreements would be terminated if, after being issued with a notice, a
tenant failed to properly maintain their plot. There-charges site clearance would
become the liability of the tenant, in breach of their tenancy agreement. The
Allotment Society representative offered the services of his group to assist in the
monitoring of plots. The offer was accepted together a request that meetings be held
at six-monthly intervals between the Allotment Society and Council representatives.
14. The treatment of controllable plant species e.g. ragwort and matters of general health and
safety were also identified and discussed.

The meeting was concluded at 4.20pm
