

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 7 November 2013
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Communities
PORTFOLIO: Physical Environment
SUBJECT: Change of Allotment Charging Method
WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to change the allotment pricing structure from a full plot/half plot cost to one utilising a rate/cost per square metre whilst at the same time maintaining the same level of income.
- 1.2 To gain approval to introduce an initial start-up fee to cover associated costs incurred during the start of a new allotment tenancy.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board agrees

- 1) in the interest of fairness to all allotment holders, a new rate is introduced based upon a cost per square metre of 0.412p per annum so that the allotment holder pay only for the area of land they cultivate;**
- 2) that a one off `start-up' charge of £40 is applied to new tenants for administration purposes, which includes a refundable deposit of £20 for issued keys; and**
- 3) that water use conservation measures be taken at allotment sites in order to reduce costs.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The provision of allotments is a statutory function for the Council and up until the 2012 rent increase, the service was heavily subsidised.
- 3.2 Although the annual management costs fluctuate each year, the new charges introduced in 2012 reflect a reasonably balanced budget for the provision of allotments. The current charge for an allotment is £80 for a full plot and £40 for a half plot, however allotments in Halton all differ in size.

- 3.3 The National Society for Allotment and Leisure Gardens recognise a full size plot to measure 250m² however, given that allotments in Halton differ in size, a half plot category was introduced based upon the current allotment legislation. The half plot measure was deemed to be 125m² or less. Any plot sized above 125m² would be classed as a full plot and charged at the higher rate.
- 3.4 Following the introduction of the new pricing structure, many allotment holders have complained about the half plot/full plot pricing structure which they consider to be unfair. The matter has been raised at the Allotment Representatives Meeting which is a local forum at which allotment holders views can be shared with officers. Officers have considered the complaints and as the mean average size of an allotment in Halton is 155m² there is some justification in the tenants' argument. Many allotment holders are paying an extra £40 for an extra 20m² of land.
- 3.5 Since January 2013 Open Space Services has issued 36 new allotment tenancies, which incur approximately 2½ hours of staff time in administration and site viewings for each tenancy.
- 3.6 The costs incurred at the start of a tenancy include; administration of the waiting list; the subsequent costs to administer allotment fees and the finance billing system; postage for sending offer letters, tenancy agreements and invoices; travel and staff costs incurred for site viewings and the supply of keys to the allotment holder (which remains the property of the Council).
- 3.7 The proposed fee will be a one off charge at the start of a new tenancy and does not affect any existing tenants.
- 3.8 The Council spends approximately £6,000.00 per year on water supplies at allotment sites and in 2014 we intend reviewing whether there are more efficient ways of providing water.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Council would be moving from a half plot/full plot charging policy to a metre square charging policy for allotment plots. An initial 'start up' cost of £40.00 would also be a new charge.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Halton currently provide 306 full plots and 50 half plots and should full occupancy occur would provide an annual income of £26,480.
- 5.2 The total area of allotment land available for rent is 64,344m².
- 5.3 Under the proposed system, the Council would need to charge a

new rent of 0.412p per metre which would provide income of £26,509.73.

5.4 Based on the pence per metre rate, a standard allotment of 250m² would be charged at £103.00.

5.5 The Councils cheapest allotment would be £18.13.

5.6 The Councils most expensive allotment would be £174.69.

5.7 A total of 115 allotment tenants would be charged more than the £80 they currently pay now. 241 tenants would pay the same or less.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

None identified.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None identified.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Allotments are a major contributor to health. The proposal will make the charges made for allotments more fair and equitable. Tenants would be paying for the actual size of allotment cultivated.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 As there are 115 tenants who would pay more under the proposal there could be complaints however the majority would not be affected and some would see a reduction in costs. The proposed system is more equitable and has been suggested by tenants through the Allotment Representatives Meeting which is attended by a council officer and which meets four times per year.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 There are no equality or diversity issues.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None.