

## **CABINET- 12 MARCH 2013**

### **AGENDA ITEM – REPORT OF THE ALLOTMENTS SCRUTINY TASK GROUP**

#### **EXCERPT FROM DRAFT MINUTES OF COUNCIL HELD ON 22/02/13**

This item was considered after Agenda Item 12 (Council Tax Resolution 2013-14).

Councillor Smith, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, invited Councillor Stewart as Vice-Chair of the scrutiny task group to introduce the report. Councillor Stewart highlighted the importance of the council fulfilling its statutory duty to provide allotments. The waiting list currently stood at 700. The task group had undertaken a series of visits to allotment sites and held in depth discussions with officers and others involved. He wished to thank all those officers who had supported the group in its work.

It was suggested that rather than reconvening the task group in 12 months time to review the implementation of the recommendations, this could be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In response to a question raised regarding the allocation of £600 000 of capital receipts from the sale of land at Midwinter to fund provision of potential new allotments in Cheltenham, the Cabinet Member Finance, referred to the Council's commitment to invest part of the receipt from the Midwinter sale in allotment provision. £600 000 was a recent estimate from property services to provide for the current level of demand. Further work was ongoing to assess demand in terms of duplication with parish council waiting lists. Reference had been made in the report to land at Priors Farm and work was ongoing to ascertain whether this was the right land in the right location. He highlighted that the allotment reserve would form part of the supplementary capital programme which would be brought to Cabinet and Council later in the year.

The Chair of Overview & Scrutiny reminded members that it was scrutiny's intention to bring each piece of work before as many members as possible to raise awareness and enable members to contribute. He thanked the working group for its constructive report which would certainly add value. He welcomed the fact that the legal position had now been resolved. Where there is a Parish Council in a District Council area, then the powers, duties and responsibilities of the Allotment Authority for allotments within the boundaries of that parish lie with them. In addition the Chair of Scrutiny expressed the Task Group's concern about the ability of officers to support allotment holders in the light of budgetary changes. A further key issue was the recommendation to work with others to identify plots of land which could be used for allotments and the council was urged to work in partnership with organisations to facilitate a scheme to distribute surplus produce to those in most need in the town.

The Cabinet Member Sustainability congratulated the task group on its extensive work and thanked all officers involved. He expressed caution with regard to recommendation 6 which requested additional support for allotments as resources were limited but Cabinet would take seriously the recommendation to work with the voluntary sector to take things forward.

In terms of the £600 000 to fund future provision he explained that this was a political commitment which was not set in stone. He reiterated the fact that Allotment Law requires that where allotments are sold, there is an obligation to replace the lost allotments if there is a demand for them. £600 000 therefore represented the

Council's best estimate of meeting current demand. He also highlighted that whilst allotment provision in parished areas clearly lay with Parish Councils, the council would still take an interest in those areas particularly when looking for availability of sites around the town and especially in the south of the town where there was currently the most demand.

The Leader of the Council welcomed the report and said that setting aside £600 000 was justified under the Allotments Act.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

**RESOLVED that**

- 1. The work of the Scrutiny Task Group and asks Cabinet to consider the recommendations contained within the report be commended.**
- 2. The setting aside of up to £600,000 of capital receipts from the sale of land at Midwinter to fund provision of potential new allotments in Cheltenham be approved.**