

## The Highland Council

### Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee

14 May 2014

#### Annual Report on Allotment Policy

#### Report by Head of Policy and Reform

Agenda Item	21
Report No	PDI 18/14

#### SUMMARY

This paper presents an annual report of the Council's Allotment Policy and proposes our approach to delivering the Programme commitment to encourage community growing.

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 The Council's Programme includes a commitment (4.18) to "*ensure the provision of allotments and the maintenance of green spaces and public parks across the Highlands and encourage various schemes such as community growing*". This paper provides an annual up-date of progress towards the provision of allotments and proposes our approach to encouraging community growing schemes.
- 1.2 The Council's powers and obligations regarding the provision of allotments are defined in the Allotments (Scotland) Acts of 1892, 1922 and 1950 and the Land Settlement (Scotland) Act 1919. Included in these acts is a requirement on the Council to:
  - consider any representations made by local residents regarding the provision of allotments; and
  - acquire any suitable land that may be available to be let as allotments where the Council concludes there is a demand for allotments.
- 1.3 The Scottish Government's consultation on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill included a section on allotments legislation which may lead to the final bill replacing all existing legislation. The Council's response to this consultation was discussed at the Finance, Housing and Resources Committee in January 2014. The supporting paper can be found here: <http://www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/33483029-2D9A-4E01-B9EB-BC8CFE33F0B1/0/Item16FHR1314.pdf>
- 1.4 The Council's Allotment Policy, established in 2009 and revised in 2012, can be accessed here: <http://www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C71A8822-7DAC-4588-A749-2483EFBFEB70/0/AllotmentPolicyv2.pdf> . In total, 9 allotment sites

have been supported by the Council, providing 314 new allotment plots. Appendix 1 lists all existing and new allotment sites in Highland and the allotment associations involved.

- 1.5 In 2013, the Citizens Panel survey included questions on food growing and community growing. The responses show that 59% of respondents have an interest in growing their own food and that of these all but 1% have access either to their own garden or someone else's for food growing. However, 25% of those interested in food growing said they would benefit from access to an allotment site and 32% from access to a community garden project. Those expressing interest are present at similar levels across all Council Wards which reinforces our recommendation in response to the Community Empowerment Bill consultation that provision of allotments to satisfy demand should be viewed on a local community basis, rather than in setting targets for the Council area, as proposed in the Bill consultation.

## **2. Policy Approach**

- 2.1 The Council's Allotment Policy takes an asset-based approach to increasing allotment provision, which means by working with and supporting community groups to establish and run allotment sites, instead of the Council doing so. This approach to allotment provision has since been adopted by a number of other Scottish Local Authorities.
- 2.2 The policy commits the Council to supporting the formation of Allotment Associations where there is sufficient demand for allotments and enabling them to identify land and establish self-managed allotment sites. It includes minimum standards for allotment sites on Council land and recommended good practice guidance. The lead officers for implementation of the Policy are Ward Managers, who liaise with Legal Services, Housing & Property, the Contaminated Land team and Planning officers.

## **3. Progress Towards Policy Aims**

- 3.1 The Allotment Policy aims were agreed as part of the review presented to Members in March 2012. These aims fall into the four areas of:
- provision of new allotments;
  - mental health benefits;
  - biodiversity benefits; and
  - effective management of sites.
- 3.2 From that review, we aimed for four new sites to be established by April 2014 and to have identified suitable land for a further four. Four new sites have been established, at Ullapool, Nairn, Cromarty and Kingussie. Suitable land has been identified for a further five new sites, at Wick, Thurso, Inverness, Portree and Kinlochleven.
- 3.3 The policy includes establishment of new hedgerows as a proxy measure for biodiversity improvements as a consequence of new sites. Whilst it is

generally accepted that allotment sites provide a rich diversity of habitats, this gives us a tangible measure. New hedgerows have been planted at three sites: Ullapool, Inverness and Nairn.

- 3.4 Measurement of the mental wellbeing effects of allotment gardening is taking place using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, developed for NHS Health Scotland by Warwick and Edinburgh Universities. New allotment holders are asked to participate in 2 surveys to measure wellbeing before and after taking up their allotments. To date, 43 survey responses have been recorded, which are not yet sufficient in scale for results to be representative of all those we have supported to be involved in allotment gardening. We will continue to ask new allotment-holders to complete the survey until we have at least 200 responses to analyse.
- 3.5 Effective management of sites can be inferred from there having been no requirement for the Council to intervene to date because of poor management, and from occupancy rates of 100% on sites using Council-owned land.

#### **4. Policy Review**

- 4.1 The last review of the Allotments Policy was conducted in 2012, and a further review is now due. However, with the likelihood that the existing allotments legislation will be significantly changed or replaced in the Community Empowerment legislation, it is proposed to delay the review and the setting of new targets until the legislation is passed and this is expected before the autumn this year. In the meantime we will continue to support allotment associations to develop sites where suitable land has been identified and to support the formation of associations and the search for land where demand has been identified.

#### **5. Community Growing**

- 5.1 Members have agreed the following definition of Community Growing (Planning, Environment and Development Committee, March 2013):

***Community groups which use gardening to promote one or more of the following benefits for the community:***

- ***Reducing health inequalities***
- ***Promoting health, wellbeing and recovery from illness***
- ***Sustainability***
- ***Community development***
- ***Economic wellbeing***

- 5.2 Community growing is already well established in Highland, with the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG) listing 27 Highland projects in their membership, covering all parts of Highland from Ardnamurchan to Wick and Assynt to Newtonmore. Additionally, the Council is aware of a further six projects. These projects are listed in Appendix 2. This paints a healthy picture of community growing across Highland.

- 5.3 In June 2013, in collaboration with the FCFCG, the Council held a community growing conference “Grow the Future”. Feedback from this event was positive with many participants asking for it to be repeated. The event gathered feedback from participants on how we could best support community growing, the key points raised being:
- More help is needed for groups in areas of high unemployment and low incomes, where it has proven more difficult to establish community growing schemes
  - Support for knowledge and skills development
  - Providing networking opportunities
  - Maintaining a strong link between community growing, wellbeing and social benefits
  - Encourage volunteers to join community growing schemes
  - Help with finding suitable land
  - Support to source funding
- 5.4 In areas of concentrated multiple deprivation, where the Council’s preventive spend to tackle deprivation is targeted (Fort William, Wick, parts of Inverness, and Alness), it is proposed to support the establishment of community growing schemes in these areas by setting aside £7.5k from the Health Improvement budget (Chief Executive’s Office) each year from 2014/15 for a three year period, beyond which support will be widened to other areas. This would be used to support start-up costs and enable practical support from third sector groups. Support would be provided from the Council’s Policy Team to source additional funding and in developing plans for the schemes. Development of these schemes would use a community development approach, linking with the Community Health Coordinators and Community Healthy Weight Dieticians employed by NHS Highland and funded through the Council’s prevention approach to ensure they form an integral part of the health inequalities work in these areas.
- 5.5 It is proposed that the Council takes the same approach to leasing land for community growing projects as it does for allotments, under section 3.1 of the Allotments Policy. This provides for an economic rent to be agreed between the Council (owning service) and the community group, at a level which covers the Council’s costs in providing the land without yielding income from it. This can be coordinated through the Ward Manager, as it is at present for allotments, and promoted through Community Councils, Ward Forums, existing allotment and community growing associations and the Highland Environmental Network as appropriate.
- 5.6 To support community growing further, it is also proposed that the Council extends our information provision to allotment groups, to additionally include community growing groups. This would enable us to provide information on knowledge and skills development opportunities, funding sources, support in finding land. To support further networking and knowledge-sharing between community growing projects, the Council will work with the FCFCG to support its networking events, including the Council hosting annual events in Inverness

or supporting events hosted by the FCFCG in Highland. These events would be used to promote the wellbeing and social benefits of community gardening.

- 5.7 The final proposal is that a community growing page is established on the Council's web site, encouraging participation in existing schemes. Enquiries received from this page would be referred to the nearest existing community growing scheme.

## 6. Implications

- 6.1 £7.5k from the existing Health Improvement budget can be set aside annually to support community growing schemes. There are no additional **resource** requirements associated with these proposals.
- 6.2 There are no new **legal** implications arising from these proposals. Any legal implications arising from new allotments legislation will be presented to members in a subsequent paper.
- 6.3 Allotments and community growing enable people and communities to reduce their carbon footprint by reducing food transport requirements and so impact positively on climate change. There are no new negative **carbon clever** implications arising from these proposals.
- 6.4 By including tackling health inequalities as one of the reasons for supporting community growing, the Council is demonstrating its commitment to equalities duties as people with protected characteristics are more likely to suffer poorer health. Otherwise, there are no new **equality** implications arising from these proposals.
- 6.5 For those community gardening and allotment schemes supported by the Council, associated **Risks** will be managed with reference to the FCFCG's Community Garden Starter Pack and the Scottish Allotments & Gardens Society's Allotment Site Design Guide, both of which contain relevant guidance.
- 6.6 When the allotments policy review takes place, following the Community Empowerment legislation, a new clause will be added requiring new allotment and community garden signage on land owned by the Council to adhere to the Council's **Gaelic Signage Policy**.

## **Recommendation**

Members are asked to:

- note the allotments policy annual report and that the Council Programme target of four new sites by 2014 has been met;
- note that the forthcoming Community Empowerment legislation is expected to replace existing allotments legislation and that the Council's Allotments Policy and targets can be reviewed to reflect new legislative requirements; and
- agree the proposed approach to supporting and encouraging community growing in Highland through land availability where the Council has suitable land, targeted support initially for three years in areas of deprivation and facilitating networking & skills sharing.

Designation: Head of Policy and Reform

Date: 23rd April 2014

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# Appendix 1 – Allotment Associations

## New allotment sites since 2009 (those established since the 2012 review in *italics*):

Hawthorn Allotments, Inverness

Fort William

Thurso (Key Housing)

Lybster

Nairn (Mill Road site)

*Ullapool*

*Nairn (extension to Sandown site)*

*Cromarty*

*Kingussie*

## Allotment Associations which have identified suitable land:

Wick

Thurso

Portree Area Community Trust

Kinlochleven

Inverness (Blackthorn Allotments Association)

## Allotment sites established prior to 2009:

Nairn

Morvern

Alness

Dalnain Bridge

Beauly

Transition Black Isle (two sites)

Armadale

The Real Food Project, Inverness

Poolewe

Springfield Gardens, Inverness

Allotment associations and community groups seeking land:

Kilmuir & Easter Logie

Arisaig Community Trust

Inver Community Council

Sleat Community Council

Merkinch

Ardersier



## **Appendix 2.**

### **List of existing community gardening projects in Highland**

The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens is aware of these 27 community gardening projects in Highland:

A Brighter Brora  
Ardvasar Community Permaculture Project, Sleat, Isle of Skye  
Armada Community Garden, Isle of Skye  
Assynt Foundation Sutherland,  
Cerebral Palsy Action, Invergordon  
Hawthorn Allotments, Inverness  
Cromarty Allotments & Gardens Society  
Food for Thought Caithness  
Glachbeg Croft Education Centre, North Kessock  
Golspie Recycling and Environmental Action Network (GREAN)  
Good for Ewe, Poolewe  
Inverness High School, Inverness  
Kirkhill Community Garden, Inverness  
L'Arche Inverness  
Loch Na Mhoid Community Garden, Muir of Ord  
Lochaber Rural Education Trust, Fort William  
Luggs Composting (Riverside Gardens), Ullapool  
Portree Home Farm Allotments  
REAL Food Project, Inverness  
Rubha Phoil Forest Garden, Isle of Skye  
Seaforth House Garden Project, Golspie  
Sunny Lochaber United Gardeners (SLUG), Spean Bridge  
St Vincent's Therapy Garden, Newtonmore  
Timespan Community Garden, Sutherland  
Viewfield Garden Collective, Portree  
West Ardnamurchan Community Garden  
Wick Youth Club

In addition to these, Highland Council is aware of a further five projects:

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) Green Gym, Merkinch

TCV Mental Health Green Gym, New Craigs

Inverness Floral Hall

Key Housing, Thurso

Lawson Memorial Hospital, Golspie

Ardersier Community Garden

Where allotment sites appear in this list of community growing projects, they include community growing alongside allotment gardening on the same site.