

Tuesday 9th July

Trinity Centre

10:00am

Present

Cllrs Briggs, Cooper, Griffin and Wood.

In Attendance

Olive O'Sullivan—Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Jessica Johnson – Project Manager Communities.

There were no members of the public or press present.

1 Election of Chairman

Resolved that Cllr Wood be elected as Chairman of the Allotments Sub-Committee.

2 Election of Vice Chairman

Resolved that Cllr Cooper be elected as Vice Chairman on the Allotments Sub – Committee.

3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies received from Cllr Hatton and Cllr K Ward.

Resolved to accept the apologies.

4 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Wood declared a non-pecuniary interest as a plot holder at The Boulevard allotments.

5 Minutes of the Meeting 10th January 2024

Resolved that the minutes of the Allotments Sub-Committee meeting held on 10th January 2024 be signed as a true record.

6 Matters Arising

No matters arising were reported.

7 Questions from Members

8 Minutes of the Sutton Coldfield Allotment Consultative Forum

Cllr Wood asked if a training session for Allotment Associations on the Management Agreement and rules had been organised?

The CEO replied that the Town Council Management Agreement is largely based on that provided by Birmingham City Council (BCC). So far, four Allotment Sites have transferred to the Town Council. Once the remaining six have been transferred the Town Council could organise a training session through the Sutton Coldfield Allotment Consultative Forum for all sites.

Cllr Briggs asked if the matter around bonfires had been resolved?

The CEO replied that the Town Council rules state that bonfires are allowed in March and November. It was agreed that Allotment Sites still under the remit of BCC should ensure they follow the rules as set by BCC as their landlord.

Resolved to note the minutes from the Sutton Coldfield Allotment Consultative Forum.

9 Legal Transfer of the Sutton Coldfield Allotments from Birmingham City Council

The CEO reported that a 'Mutual Instruction Meeting' was held at the Trinity Centre on 28th June. This meeting was attended by the CEO, an Assistant Director of Property at BCC, BCC solicitors and the Town Council's solicitors. The meeting was arranged to address BCC delays in responding to queries raised by the Town Council's solicitors during the process of the transfers.

The CEO added that it was a constructive meeting, and provided the opportunity to go through outstanding matters. It was agreed at the meeting that the transfer of Falcon Lodge would be completed in two stages. The first to transfer the allotment land and the second, which may take longer, the Housing land, including the access roads, parking areas and the community space. This will enable the Falcon Lodge sites to transfer more quickly.

The CEO added that the Town Council solicitors are drafting the transfer documents for the remaining six sites.

10 Allotment Rent and Fees 2024 and 2025-2026

The CEO reported that the Town Council had agreed to transfer allotment sites based on the same terms and conditions plot holders have with BCC. This approach was agreed with the Allotment Associations at the Sutton Coldfield Allotments Consultative Forum in September 2021.

Birmingham City Council historically have increased allotment rents yearly based on the RPI as of 1st August of the previous allotment year. The allotment years runs from 1st October – 30th September and tenants must be notified 12 months in advance of any rent or fee increases.

Birmingham City Council have notified tenants of the rent charges for the allotment year 2024/2025 and it is proposed that the Town Council maintain these rates. It is also proposed that the Town Council follows the same process as BCC for setting the rates for the allotment year 2025/2026. This is to ensure that that the Town Council follow the rates as set by BCC to ensure the rent is equitable across all sites.

The CEO added that once all sites had been transferred, members could look to review allotment rents and fees.

Cllr Cooper asked if rents would increase as the Town Council conduct more works at the site?

The CEO replied that members could reviews the rent charges when all sites had been transferred and that, as per the management agreement, allotment associations received a financial remuneration of 50% of the rents for site management, maintenance and minor repairs.

Resolved to note the Allotment Rent and Fee Charges from 1st October 2024 for the Allotment Year 2024/2025.

Resolved to recommend to Amenities, Leisure and Community Services Committee and Strategy and Resources Committee the process for setting the Allotment Rent and Fee charges from 1st October 2025 for the Allotment Year 2025/2026.

11 Allotment Works to Date and Planned Maintenance

The CEO reported that there had been a number of requests for works from Allotment Associations for additional works which officers were working through .

As well as regular maintenance, several ad hoc requests had been received. These included:

- Clearance of plots where the plot had become overgrown and was due to be let out to a new tenant
- Installation of a Polytunnel at Newhall Allotments
- Trimming and/or removal of overhanging trees at Whitehall and Newhall Allotments
- Erection of a temporary fence at Falcon Lodge Allotments
- Filling in of potholes at Hill and New Hall Allotments

12 Allotment Eviction Policy

The Project Manager Communities presented the revised allotment eviction policy. The policy had been updated to include late or no payment of rent as it previously only referred to lack of cultivation.

Resolved to recommend to Amenities, Leisure and Community Services Committee approval of the revised Allotment Eviction Policy.

13 Health and Safety Site Visits

The CEO presented the Health and Safety report and noted that individual actions will be shared with each allotment site that was visited. The CEO added that it was positive that Forge Farm Allotments had improved significantly since the previous Health and Safety visit in November 2023.

Resolved to note the Health and Safety note of visit, recommendations and actions for the Town Council and Allotment Associations.

14 Allotment Signage

Members reviewed and gave feedback on the allotment signage designs, agreeing that all sites should have the same design.

Cllr Briggs asked if all Sutton Coldfield allotment sites would have a new Town Council sign?

The CEO replied that sites would have a new sign as they are transferred from BCC.

15 Allotment Digital Management Platform

The Project Manager Communities reported that officers had been in contact with a company regarding a digital platform to help support in the management of allotments helping to improve administrative processes. A secure customer 'allotment' portal could be created and embedded into the Town Council website. It would have multiple capabilities including having a resource and document hub as well as a list of web forms. An app could also sit alongside the desktop version, meaning that it could be accessed easily when out on allotment sites.

The cost of the platform would be £7,195 per year which includes build, branding, set up and training. The annual cost for year two and three would be £3,000 which covers access to the portal for each of the ten sites. There may also be an additional cost of £300 a year for URL masking license and any additional training days.

Officers are looking to work with the committee at Walmley Ash Allotments to trial the platform over the summer and to review in September. Further conversations will also need to be had with the Town Council's IT provider to ensure integration.

The Chair commented that the platform would be a good idea to help manage the allotments, particularly as more are transferred to the Town Council.

The CEO added that officers will continue to progress with the providers of the platform and report back to Sub-Committee.

The meeting ended at 11:30am.

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Signed

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Date

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