



Briefing 08/20

March 2008

## Local Authority Allotment Provision

This briefing provides a summary of responses to APSE queries issued regarding allotment provision by local authorities. It is provided to local authority chief executives, council leaders, and all APSE Parks and Grounds Maintenance contacts.

### Key Issues

- High demand for allotment plots and low turnover on sites
- Local authority flexible response to demand
- Improved facilities
- Financial support

### 1. Introduction

In December 2007, a member authority issued 3 queries to all contacts in the Grounds Maintenance Group network regarding allotment sites. There was an overwhelming response to the queries indicating a large amount of interest in allotment sites throughout the UK. The responses are summarised below.

### 2. Waiting lists

The responses highlight a high demand for allotments in most areas. Waiting lists are high and quite static with one local authority stating that the average length of time applicants are on the waiting list was hard to say – a case of waiting for “Dead Mans Shoes”.

One authority reported that demand for allotments is rising, particularly in areas where there was an increase in the number of apartments being built.

80% of respondents have a policy of only allowing local residents to have an allotment and the remaining authorities have very low numbers of people from outside the local authorities on their waiting lists.

### **3. Size of allotment plots**

The size of plots varies even within an individual authority. However, the average size is between 150 – 200 square metres, or between 5 and 10 rods. Many authorities offer full or half plots and some even offer quarter plots., indicating extreme flexibility to meet customers needs and maximise availability.

One authority commented that if allotment sizes are too large they can be difficult to manage and neglect can occur. Many councils are now splitting larger plots as they become available.

### **4. On site facilities**

Facilities are improving at allotment sites in most local authority areas. Only 2 authorities from the 33 responses do not provide any water facilities at their sites and the majority do provide some storage facilities and car parking. However, toilet provision is limited with only one authority having facilities at all of their sites.

Some respondents also provide skips at allotment sites.

### **5. Budgets**

24 Authorities have a dedicated maintenance budget allocated to allotment sites, ranging from £1,000 to £30,000 per annum. One authority allocates a budget of £25 per allotment.

Although the remaining authorities do not have a dedicated budget they do maintain allotment sites through the overall grounds maintenance budget.

### **6. Staffing**

Only 5 authorities do not have a dedicated allotment officer, with 1 authority having a team of 4 staff (including administrative support) managing the allotment sites. Of the 5 authorities without dedicated staffing, most have a member of staff within the grounds maintenance team who has responsibility for allotments as part of their overall duties.

### **7. Maintenance**

Maintenance services to allotment sites are generally provided as part of the grounds maintenance service. However, 3 authorities do have a dedicated service but provide it in very different ways:-

- Dedicated maintenance team undertaking works on allotment sites every 3<sup>rd</sup> week
- Plot clearance provided by Social Services Community Work Team
- An allotment handyman carrying out maintenance tasks and a rotovation service

### **8. Concessions**

There are a range of concessions available to allotment holders. 65% of respondents offer some form of concession, either discount rent or free use, mainly to senior citizens,

people with disabilities or those on low incomes. However, some authorities have extended this to students and to anyone who is in receipt of any kind of benefit. People who are willing to accept overgrown or neglected sites are offered a reduced rent for a limited period or even a rent free period. A few authorities also offer reduced/free rent to the secretary of the site Allotment Association.

## **9. Self managed sites**

60% of the authorities do have self-managed sites (managed by an allotment association) and there is a wide range of support offered. Most authorities retain responsibility for perimeter fencing/walls and major repairs to sites, with some extending their support to include reduced rents, payment of water bills, collection of rents and, in some cases, financial support in the form of grants.

## **10. APSE comment**

APSE welcomes the popularity of allotments demonstrated by the demand for plots and the lack of turnover on allotment sites.

Rental concessions for certain groups including older people, people with disabilities and those in receipt of benefits provides motivation for those on low incomes to eat healthily by growing fruits and vegetables, and to take up a hobby. It is encouraging that so many people are keen to grow their own produce despite the poor rewards that were reaped as a result of the unexpected weather during the 2007 growing season.

The overall investment in allotment sites by local authorities in terms of improving facilities, maintenance, flexible allocations, security, budgets and staffing shows that local authorities are able to recognise increased demand and dovetail resources to meet that demand, despite conflicting financial pressures.

Most areas will see an increase in numbers of properties being built, and many of these properties will be apartments and therefore not have gardens, it is likely that demand for allotments will increase in the future and it is encouraging that at least one of the responding authorities is already reviewing policy and planning to increase provision.

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