



## Mayor and Cabinet

### **Response from the Executive Director for Community Services to the report of the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group**

**Date:** 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023

**Key decision:** No

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Contributors:** Tom Brown, Executive Director for Community Services

### **Outline and recommendations**

In July 2023 the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group published its report and recommendations.

This report provides a response to those recommendations from the Executive Director of Community Services.

It is recommended that Mayor and Cabinet agrees that the response to the recommendations of the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group, as set out in this report, is approved.

### **Timeline of engagement and decision-making**

The outline proposal for the Community Food Growing Task and Finish group and its membership was put forward and agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in September 2022.

Evidence gathering and engagement sessions were held between October 2022 and June 2023.

The final report of the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group was published in July 2023.

## 1. Summary

1.1 The outline proposal for the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group and its membership was agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in September 2022.

Engagement and evidence gathering took place between October 2022 and June 2023.

The final report of the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group was published on 4th July 2023.

This report sets out the response to the recommendations made in that report.

## 2. Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that Mayor and Cabinet agrees that:

The response to the recommendations of the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group, as set out in this report, is approved.

## 3. Policy Context

3.1 This report aligns with Lewisham's Corporate Priorities, as set out in the Council's [Corporate Strategy \(2022-2026\)](#):

- Cleaner and Greener
- A Strong Local Economy
- Quality Housing
- Children and Young People
- Safer Communities
- Open Lewisham
- Health and Wellbeing

The work of the task and finish group related most closely to the priority for a 'cleaner and greener' Lewisham, which proposes that 'by 2026 we will have planted more street trees, tiny forests and community orchards across our borough'.

### 3.2 Lewisham's new Local Plan

Lewisham is currently developing a new Local Plan The plan is still in draft form but it is intended that the final plan be adopted in the coming year.

Policy GR6 of the plan (see page8 349) emphasises the importance of community food growing:

'Allotments and community gardens will be protected in order to support sustainable food growing locally and to enhance opportunities for leisure, social interaction and education.'

'Major development proposals for housing and proposals for community facilities are encouraged to include provision of space for community gardening and food growing. Where such existing provision exists and a site is to be redeveloped, this should be retained or re-provided.'

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3.3 This report also aligns with proposals within the Food Justice Action Plan 2023 related to community food growing:

- Map existing growing spaces, community food growing projects and foraging spaces and identify suitable, unused public spaces that could be utilised for food growing e.g. parks, green spaces, school gardens.
- Ensure food growing activities provide opportunities for people of all ages to become involved.
- Provide support and advice on what and how to grow food at home and in the community.
- Increase the support available for existing community allotments (e.g. admin tasks, maintenance etc.).
- Further decrease the waiting time for Council owned allotments’.

## **4. Recommendations of the Final report of the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group**

4.1 In reviewing the recommendations from the Task and Finish Group Report it appears that work to implement them could broadly be divided into two areas:

- Work relating to the management and development of council owned allotments, recommendations; 1, 2, 7, 8, 11.
- Work on improving, creating and promoting community growing opportunities, recommendations; 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15.

This work sits between the Parks, Sports & Leisure Team and the Public Health Team. There are currently insufficient staff resources within either of these teams to lead the implementation of the recommendations within this report.

It is proposed therefore that a new “Community Food Growing Officer” post be created by re-purposing recurrent funding from the Public Health Grant. Further details about this post can be found in the response to recommendation 14 in the table below.

4.2 The table below sets out the report recommendations and the response from the Executive Director for Community Services.

Officers are happy to meet with the TFG to discuss these responses further.

Plans to implement the responses set out will take place as part of the implementation of the Lewisham Food Justice Action Plan and establishment of the Food Justice Alliance. This will include detailed action planning and monitoring of impact.

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Recommendation	Response
<p>1. Conduct an annual survey of people on the allotments waiting list. This should ensure that those who no longer wish to be on the waiting list (or who wish to update their preferences for allotment sites) are removed or reallocated accordingly.</p>	<p>A new “Community Food Growing Officer” could develop and implement this survey.</p> <p><i>See the response to recommendation 14 for further details.</i></p> <p>Officers recommend that this survey should be carried out at a time of year when allotment activity is relatively low.</p> <p>The Allotments Team can support the annual survey by distributing it to waiting list applicants via the allotment management software.</p> <p>When designing the survey consideration should be given as to how the council could maximise the benefits of collecting this information e.g. to provide intelligence for other council activities or provide an opportunity to consult on issues that this cohort may also have views on.</p> <p>Officers also note that the current policy is that; if allotment applicants wish to change their allotment site preferences this constitutes a new application with a new date, this is to prevent ‘queue-jumping’ ahead of other applicants. Therefore, information on allotment site preferences should not be part of the survey.</p> <p><i>See also the response to recommendation 9.</i></p>
<p>2. Use the demographic information from the annual survey to identify underrepresented groups and consider what options there are for engaging with community groups from those populations.</p>	<p>The Public Health Analytics team can support the analysis of the annual survey results to identify underrepresented groups.</p> <p>The new “Community Food Growing Officer” could use this insight to identify options to engage with community groups from within those underrepresented populations.</p> <p><i>See the response to recommendation 14 for further details.</i></p> <p>Subjective observation suggests Lewisham’s broad range of social groups is represented in</p>

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	<p>allotments but officers recommend key areas for investigation would be:</p> <p>1) Young People</p> <p>2) Accessibility (range of and requirements of disabilities and the potential benefits for access for residents with disabilities)</p> <p>Acceptance of this recommendation should come with the caveat that it relies on the implementation of recommendation 1 and that the data collected via that annual survey includes the information that we need to identify underrepresented groups i.e. a sufficient number of people respond to the survey and provide the demographic information that we ask for.</p> <p><i>See also the response to recommendation 9.</i></p>
<p>3. Create opportunities for residents to become involved in all of the excellent work that is already taking place in the borough: information about allotment open days and community gardening projects looking for volunteers should be provided to those on the waiting list. This could also include links to the work of Lewisham Local and the Good Food Lewisham Network.</p>	<p>Lewisham Local are adding the details of existing community gardenening projects to their new online Lewisham Exchange Directory which will also be linked to the Good Food Lewisham website. A printable version of this directory will also be made available.</p> <p>Residents currently on the allotments waiting list can be signposted to this new web resource to enable them to find opportunities for community gardening in their area.</p> <p>The self-managed allotment sites were recently canvassed for interest in holding open days. Only one of the 27 expressed interest. Concerns centred on health and safety and the limited value of showing people allotments when there is a long waiting list. Public access to allotments will require specific event applications to be processed.</p>
<p>4. Explore the options for updating the website with the latest information about community gardening. This might include an easy-to-view map of the existing</p>	<p>See response to recommendation 3 re: the ongoing work to promote community gardening projects on the new Lewisham Exchange Directory. A link to this new directory can be placed on the <i>Community Gardens</i> page of the Council's website.</p>

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<p>community gardens, allotments, and accessible green spaces in the borough. This should be done in collaboration with Lewisham Local.</p>	<p>The Lewisham Exchange Directory doesn't currently include details of allotments and accessible green spaces. The mapping of these assets can be included in the job description for the new "Community Food Growing Officer" – see recommendation <b>14</b> for further details.</p>
<p>5. Review and refresh the guide to community gardening – which links with the objectives in the food justice action plan and builds on the Council's corporate priority to enhance and enlarge green spaces, orchards, and gardens across Lewisham.</p>	<p>Rather than update the current guide to community gardening it may be more prudent to signpost residents to existing external resources that are kept up to date, e.g. <a href="http://farmgarden.org.uk">Social Farms &amp; Gardens   (farmgarden.org.uk)</a>. This was formerly the Federation of City Farms and Gardens and was the primary reference source for the Lewisham Guide.</p> <p>The Allotments Team can put a link to this website on the on the <i>Community Gardens</i> page of the Council's website.</p>
<p>6. Start a community garden waiting list. This should run in parallel to the allotments waiting list and would hold a list of spaces on Council land that are available for community gardening. The offer could also be made to housing and other public sector partners to add available spaces to the list. The waiting list could also hold a register of groups that are interested in setting up their own community gardens – so that they can be matched with suitable plots when they become available.</p>	<p>The new "Community Food Growing Officer" should liaise with colleagues at Lewisham Local to ascertain the best method for implementing this recommendation, based on evidence of unmet demand for community gardening opportunities.</p> <p>In terms of opportunities for community gardening space on the 10 direct-managed council allotments; 3 are not suitable due to size, 4 already have established community gardening projects which leaves 3 which could potentially host new community gardening projects.</p> <p>The management agreement between the Council and Self-managed allotment sites was updated some years ago to allow for the encouragement of community groups onto allotment sites. Officers will gauge current usage and interest in further development of this, with existing resources.</p> <p>For other open spaces e.g. verges it is demand-led by residents identifying plots of</p>

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	<p>land of interest which officers then assess for suitability. This method works for the current demand which is approximately two enquiries per year.</p> <p>The Allotment team can share any information on new Community Gardening Projects on council-owned land with the Good Food Lewisham Team at Lewisham Local who could add the details to the new Lewisham Exchange Directory and promote them to their network of Community Food Growers and via their WhatsApp group and newsletters.</p> <p>Work to collate a list of community gardening or food growing opportunities on social housing land and on spaces owned by wider partners, could be undertaken by the new “Community Food Growing Officer”.</p> <p>See the response to recommendations <b>13 &amp; 14</b> for further details.</p>
<p>7. Consider the options for resourcing a community gardens management association. This would draw on the example of the successful self-managed allotment association and be tasked with coordination and problem solving in and between community gardening sites. It should also seek to ensure that growing spaces are open to as wide a group of residents as possible, for as much of the year as possible.</p>	<p>The new “Community Food Growing Officer” can scope the options for implementing this recommendation once in post.</p> <p>See the response to recommendation <b>14</b> for further details.</p>
<p>8. Continue to split larger allotment plots as they become available – and offer those on larger plots the opportunity to split their plot, rather than relinquish their tenancy if they are finding it difficult to</p>	<p>The policy of splitting allotment plots will continue to be implemented where appropriate and feasible.</p>

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maintain.	
<p>9. Improve data to back-up policy decisions – this should include the annual survey of the waiting list as well as considering the resource implications for surveying existing plot holders in order to identify common issues as well as any gaps in representation from sections of Lewisham’s different communities. Further work should also be done to ascertain the demand for community gardening and growing amongst housing tenants both with and without external/council support.</p>	<p>This recommendation will be partially implemented via the survey of people on the allotments waiting list (see response to recommendation 1).</p> <p>There is already a process for allotment holders to identify and raise issues. This function is served by the Lewisham Self-managed Allotments Association (LSMAA). The LSMAA represents the self-managed sites and provides the forum for sharing views amongst the self-managed sites. Issues are discussed in their meetings and motions can be carried for the LSMAA committee to raise matters with the council.</p> <p>On direct-managed sites plot-holders have direct point of contact with the Green Space Contract Officer.</p> <p>A survey of existing plot holders, to identify gaps in representation can be undertaken in parallel to the survey of people on the allotments waiting list.</p> <p>Work to identify demand for community gardening and growing amongst housing tenants can be undertaken by the new “Community Food Growing Officer”, in collaboration with the Registered Social Landlords in the borough.</p> <p><i>See also the response to recommendation 14.</i></p>

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<p>10. Seek to better understand any barriers identified through our improved data gathering – specifically by engaging with groups that are already working with marginalised communities. This work should seek to engage with residents in Lewisham’s social housing – particularly those at risk of isolation.</p>	<p>This recommendation could be implemented by a new “Community Food Growing Officer”.</p>
<p>11. Establish a list of key tasks that need to be done on allotment land. Where there are tasks that could be carried out by volunteers or groups looking for ad-hoc opportunities to support community initiatives, the list could be used to offer opportunities and free up allotment land for use.</p>	<p>This process is currently managed at the site level by Self-managed committees, and by the Green Space Contract Officer on direct sites with regular site-inspections. Long-term overgrown plots are a relatively small scale issue.</p> <p>Health and Safety implications mean that any such task would need to follow an application process.</p> <p>Officers recommend that further scoping work is undertaken to determine the feasibility of implementing this proposal before progressing this initiative.</p>

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<p>12. Assess the options for funding. Lewisham offers some funding for permanent improvements to allotment and community garden sites through the greening fund. Thought should be given to providing funding to support community gardening in social housing developments, especially the most-deprived ones, even if on a one-off basis to meet start-up costs.</p>	<p>See response to recommendation <b>14</b>.</p>
<p>13. Review the options for proactively delivering and supporting community gardening in social housing developments where there is interest, especially in more-deprived estates. This should involve consideration of how large community gardens consisting of multiple growing beds could reduce maintenance costs to offset costs to the council; the wellbeing and community benefits of community gardening; and, if pursued, whether the council, local voluntary group or an external organisation would be the best delivery vehicle.</p>	<p>Work to scope the options for delivering support for community gardening in social housing developments could be undertaken by the new “Community Food Growing Officer” in partnership with Lewisham’s Registered Social Landlords.</p> <p>See the response to recommendation <b>14</b> for further details.</p>

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<p>14. Decide whether the implementation of these recommendations requires additional officer resources and/or time to deliver. The potential for a new 'community gardening' post should be explored. This role would co-produce the revised community gardening guidance in collaboration with Lewisham Local and other community and voluntary organisations. This post might also provide administrative assistance for established projects, to give time and space for volunteers and part-time coordinators to dig, plant and grow. This could be in exchange for supporting the Council's corporate priorities, equality, and food justice objectives.</p>	<p>There are insufficient resources within the existing Allotments and Parks Team or Public Health Team to lead the implementation of the recommendations within this report.</p> <p>A new fixed term "Community Food Growing Officer" post can be created by using one-off funding from the Public Health Grant. The job description and employment arrangements for this post should be co-developed by the Public Health Team, Allotments and Parks Team and the Good Food Lewisham Team from Lewisham Local.</p> <p>A key focus of the role would be to support the implementation of recommendations; <b>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15</b> of the report.</p> <p>The post holder may also be asked, subject to capacity, to support other activity relating to the implementation of the Food Justice Action Plan such as mapping and promoting community cookery projects.</p>
<p>15. Further explore options with schools to support their work. A 'growing network' for schools could help to share ideas, plants and best practice. This might be linked to the role recommended above – depending on priorities, workload and additional resources being available.</p>	<p>This recommendation can be implemented by the Good Food Lewisham Team by building on the connections made at the recent meeting of the Good Food Lewisham Network which focussed on gardening and food growing opportunities taking place in Lewisham Schools.</p> <p>In addition the Public Health Team are also currently co-ordinating an ongoing programme of engagement with specific schools using funding from the London School Superzones programme. One of the local aims of this programme is to improve access to green space for the children, families and staff at the selected schools with the objective to develop food growing space within the school grounds.</p> <p>The Public Health Team are currently working on this objective with Kender Primary School</p>

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	<p>(SE14 5JA) and Edmund Waller Primary School (SE14 5LY) as well as continuing to support the previous Lewisham School Superzone project in partnership with Haseltine School.</p> <p>These schools can be asked to share their knowledge and experience with other schools via the new “Growing Network for Schools”.</p>
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## 6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The use of one-off public health funding for a fixed term post has been agreed with the Director of Public Health.

## 7. Legal implications

- 7.1 There are no significant legal implications of this report.

## 8. Equalities implications

- 8.1 The Equality Act 2010 brought together all previous equality legislation in England, Scotland and Wales. The Act included a new public sector equality duty, replacing the separate duties relating to race, disability and gender equality. The duty came into force on 6 April 2011. It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 8.2 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 8.3 There are a number of recommendations (2 and 10) within the final report of the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group that look to reduce inequality around community food growing. The report recommends the council should; identify groups that are underrepresented in current community food growing activities in Lewisham, learn more about the barriers these groups face to participating in community food growing and consider what options there are for engaging with community groups from those populations.

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## **9. Climate change and environmental implications**

- 9.1 The report acknowledges that increasing access to community gardening within the borough could, in some small ways, support Lewisham's response to the climate emergency. Growing fresh food that is unprocessed – which will travel a minimal distance from harvest to plate will help reduce the carbon footprint of the food consumed by Lewisham's residents.

## **10. Crime and disorder implications**

- 10.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

## **11. Health and wellbeing implications**

- 11.1 There are numerous health and wellbeing benefits associated with the recommendations of this report. Increasing opportunities for community gardening would provide more access to green open spaces which can improve mental health, the activity of gardening has cardiovascular and musculo-skeletal health benefits and improved access to fresh and nutritious food can also increase mental and physical health and wellbeing.

## **12. Background papers**

- 12.1 *Final report of the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group, July 2023*

## **14. Report author(s) and contact**

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