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**MINUTES OF THE BHAF FORUM HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2017**

1. **Chair’s welcome and update**

Allan Brown welcomed everyone to the meeting. David Cooper and Rob Walker were in attendance to provide Council advice and input to the meeting.

1. **Allotment Web pages**

The Council’s web pages had been updated as part of the process to allow people to sign in and check the waiting list to see what position they had reached and get an idea of how long they might have to wait. This was all part of the Council’s plan to allow each individual resident to sign in and access information about services applicable to them. As part of future developments, there would be a sign-up fee of £15 applied to anyone adding their name to the Allotment Waiting List. This was to reduce the number of people who might apply for an allotment in a burst of enthusiasm but later find they are no longer interested and fail to inform the Allotment Office. In the past, this had led to huge waiting lists which meant many people were waiting for years to get a plot.

Mark Carroll pointed out that Site Reps should be able to access the waiting lists for the sites they were responsible for, so that they could contact people more quickly and efficiently. This was something BHAF had been requesting for some time, and a meeting to discuss this had been proposed several months ago. He asked if a meeting was likely to be arranged in the near future. Site reps in attendance supported the need for appropriate access to such information.

1. **Cost savings and rent rises**

Allan Brown reported that BHAF had been working with the Allotment Office to explore ideas on how to reduce the subsidy to the Allotment Service at the same time as resisting rent rises for the time being. BHAF’s view was that there were several other measures which could be explored in detail first. Mark Carroll and Jim Mayor were taking a lead on writing a submission to the Council to this effect.

Rob Walker provided an update on the Council’s financial position. The reduction in subsidy would now be applied over two years instead of immediately in the coming financial year. This would give more time to put other cost saving measures in place. Immediate cost savings would be fairly painless, but the impact on the service would be felt in the following year, when there would be a need to make greater savings. Savings could be made by cutting the subsidy and the service would absorb the losses in various ways, but in the end, it was likely that income would have to be increased through rent rises.

The meeting accepted that cuts to council budgets would have an impact, but everyone agreed that with food prices likely to start rising, there was a duty to protect the poorest to allow them access to allotments and the possibility of growing good quality fresh food for their families. This had an impact on health and wellbeing. Affordability was a crucial issue.

1. **Site rep roles**

It was reported that the Site Rep role description had now been finalised and agreed. This would set standards for Site Reps, clarify their responsibilities, and recognise the professional responsibility they took on. Members of the meeting were keen to see the role document and to know what Site Reps were expected to do. Every site should expect the same standards and be able to rely on their Site Rep for support and advice.

1. **Development Fund**

Allan Brown reported that the Development Fund was provided to enable sites to develop ideas and projects which would benefit the whole site, and enhance the sense of community. Only one third of the 2016/17 fund had been spent so far, and there was around £4000 yet to be allocated. Site reps were encouraged to consider ideas and proposals which could benefit their site, and prepare an application as soon as possible. It was suggested that sites with shops could get together to explore ideas for involving smaller sites in sharing access to products and bulk purchasing schemes, which would offer savings to plot holders across the City. A meeting to discuss site shops was something BHAF could arrange in the coming year.

1. **Water savings**

Water was one of the most expensive services provided to allotments, and the Council was exploring ways of reducing water wastage. It was pointed out that Site reps could assist in checking water meters for unusual water loss overnight, and there should be a fast response to any substantial water leaks. Could Site Reps be advised of a protocol for out of hours emergencies involving water leaks? If David Cooper could advise all Site Reps where the Site stop-cock was located, they could at least turn off the water for a period when repairs were unavailable. The meeting agreed this would be a helpful approach.

1. **AOB**

Spike Ekipse reported that he had bulk supplies of manure and wood chippings to his site, and he could be contacted if anyone wanted more information about sources of free wood chippings, or if they would like to visit his site at Coldean Lane.

The meeting was reminded of Seedy Sunday on 5 February.

Mark informed the meeting that the BHAF AGM would be held on 29 March and ideas for speakers were welcome.

**Close of meeting**