**ALLOTMENT SITE REPS FOCUS GROUP WORKSHOP 3**

**1st December 2015**

**Problem solving and sharing good practice**

***“As a site rep I want plot holders to love their plot”***

North Neville site rep

****

***“(We need to) draw the allotments back together ...***

***... to see the allotments as a strong community.”***

Workshop participant

1. **Overview**

**1.1 Introduction and background**

**Date** Tuesday 1st December 2015

**Time** 7.00 to 8.30 pm

**Venue** B & H Food Partnership meeting room at the Brighthelm Centre, Brighton

**Participants:**

* Jude Stevens North Neville
* Tom North Neville
* Maureen Winder Moulsecoomb Estate
* Richard Howard Moulescoomb Estate
* Amos Roedale Valley
* Jane Child Roedale Valley
* Alan Brown Allotment Federation Committee
* Spike Coldene
* Ben Messer Facilitator – Food Matters

**Workshop focus:**

**Workshop 3** responded to a key outcome from Workshop 2 (held on 8th September 2015):

‘(The workshop) highlighted the need for regular facilitated workshops to discuss specific issues and allow an opportunity for practical problem solving.

... participants felt that facilitation resulted in clearer outcomes and more productive meetings**.**

**It was strongly suggested that the site reps would benefit greatly from regular facilitated workshops of this sort either for problem-solving generally or focused on specific issues and concerns.**‘

From conclusions in the report of **Workshop 2**

The workshop was facilitated by Ben Messer from Food Matters using an approach based on participatory appraisal which aimed to establish an inclusive, mutually respectful, engaging environment where the individual opinions and suggestions of each participant were equally valued and participants were able to build on each others’ thinking**.**

This report presents the key outcomes from the workshop and follows the same structure as the workshop itself.

**1.2 The aims of Workshop 3 were:**

* facilitate better sharing of site reps’ experience
* explore how site reps can learn from each other
* address specific issues associated with the site rep role

including:

* **Site rep meetings** - how many per year and what approach?
* **The inspection process** – what could be done to make it more streamlined?
* **The letting process** – what are the frustrations affecting it and what changes would improve this?
* **Cross-site initiatives** – how can site reps best engage/communicate with each other to get reviews of procedures underway?
1. **Key outputs**

The key outputs of the workshop are presented as a summary of the comments that were made as written comments on post-it notes, flip-charts and as recorded by the facilitator during group discussion. These have been divided into two sections:

* Key **issues** that need to be addressed
* Suggested **actions** to address the issues

**2.1 Key issues that need to be addressed**

As participants arrived they were asked to consider and respond to the following question using post-it notes. This became the basis for introductions and initial discussion on what site reps see as the most important issues associated with their role.

**BEING A SITE REP**

**What are the BURNING ISSUES that need to be addressed?**

**THEME A. COMMUNICATION**

**Meetings:**

* Group meetings - exchanging ideas
* Clarifying expectations and responsibilities

**Allotments community:**

* Site reps not always working together
* Developing a whole city allotment community with site reps as the community’s representatives
* Gives the allotment community a stronger voice
* Developing a sense that sites are treated equally by the Council
* Communication with plot holders

**Standardising approach vs. recognising differences:**

* Environmental issues – agreeing similar standards in allotments
* Standards for ‘Community plots’ – how they are integrated and their engagement with the site as a whole
* Recognising differences between sites BUT also identifying overarching ethos, policy, principles
* Clarity would lead to easier recruitment of site reps and improve engagement of plot holders

**THEME B. PROCEDURES**

**Inspection process:**

* Timetables
* Systems
* In-house approach vs. Council-led
* Exploring possibility of an ‘in-house’ inspection process – i.e. carried out by site reps
* Could possibly ensure objectivity by including a rep from another site

**Letting process:**

* Avoiding gaps between tenancies
* Needs to be smooth to avoid ‘look of decline’

**Safety and security:**

* Especially for disabled tenants but important for all
* Level pathways

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| **THEME** | **ISSUE****Question to consider** | **ACTION****Suggestions on how to address the issue** |
| **A. COMMUNICATION** | **How should we organise regular site rep meetings?** | * Provide a calendar/schedule of meetings on the website
* Regular structure – quarterly (3 monthly)
* Time site rep meetings to happen 1 month before plot-holder forum meetings (staggered) so that outputs can be presented to the forum
* Give advance notification of which issues will be addressed
* Meetings should be for reps without the council officers
* Meeting outputs should be communicated to the council by the Allotment Federation
* Distribute outputs to reps and/or post on the website
* Open to any/all site reps – numbers will fluctuate naturally
* No-one should be excluded
* Sites that currently don’t attend/engage should be encouraged
* Continue with an externally/objectively facilitated approach until this is no longer necessary
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| **B. PROCEDURES** | **How can we improve/streamline the site inspection process?** | * Now that site reps are elected the council are allowing them to take greater responsibility over inspections
* Important to try and avoid any conflict of interest/personal issues
* Do this by involving reps from other sites in site inspections
* Will also lead to better connection and sharing of practice
* Recognise the value of allotment site ‘shops’ as an open surgery for plot holders
* Open 5 hours on Saturdays – depends on capacity – generates a sense of site community
* Encourage some appropriate site autonomy on the process facilitated by the council
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| **How can we improve/streamline the plot-letting process?** | * Pilot different procedures at different sites
* Encourage the Council to develop a degree of trust in sites and site reps
* Site reps need to understand the implications
* e.g. site reps could take responsibility for data entry of new tenant form data
* explore other elements of administration that could be done ‘in-house’/’on-site’
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**2.2 Suggested actions to address the issues**

**3. Conclusions**

Participants acknowledged that it would be inappropriate to consider implementing actions suggested by a workshop attended by 8 participants. However, the suggested actions represent the first step towards a review of structures and procedures that many allotment site reps, plot holders and the Allotment Federation have previously recognised as necessary.

It is suggested that the workshop outputs – in particular the actions grid – should be used as the basis for consultation on the three issues that were addressed. Other site reps should be given an opportunity to comment on and add to the suggestions that were made. This could also provide an opportunity to encourage the engagement of other reps and hopefully led to greater participation in any future site rep workshops.

**Ben Messer**

**Food Matters**

**5th January 2016**