**ALLOTMENT SITE REPS FOCUS GROUP WORKSHOP 5**

**29th November 2016**

**Site Reps Practice**

***“We want to help people to make a success of their plots – not to take on a punitive role but to encourage and model good plot management”***

Workshop participant

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1. **Overview**

**Introduction and background**

**Date** Tuesday 29th November 2016

**Time** 7.00 to 9.00 pm

**Venue** Roof terrace room at the Brighthelm Centre, Brighton

**Participants:**

* Jane Griffen Whitehawk Hill
* Kay Armstrong St. Marks
* Andrew Amos Roedale Valley
* Jane Child Roedale Valley
* Alan Marshall Roedale Valley
* Alan Langridge Mile Oak
* Allan Brown Allotment Federation Committee
* Ted Chapman St. Louis
* Maureen Winder Moulsecoomb
* Richard Howard Moulsecoomb
* Ben Messer Facilitator – Food Matters

**Workshop focus:**

* Verifying and agreeing Site Rep Role description
* Considering Site Rep practice and what’s expected of volunteers
* Deciding on the future of Site Rep meetings and strategy meetings with the Allotment Service
* Key focus remains:

**How to make the role of site rep something that people want to take on?**

Workshop 1: address issues for site reps included in Allotment Strategy

Workshop 2: focus on site reps role, function and procedures

Workshop 3: addressing specific issues – communication and procedures

Workshop 4: consolidating progress and looking to the future

**Workshop 5: site rep practice**

1. **Key outputs**

This report presents the key outputs from the four planned workshop sessions:

**INTRODUCTION confidence in the site rep. role**

**A. SITE REP. JOB DESCRIPTION clarification and verification**

**B. SITE REP PRACTICE scenarios and expectations**

**C. FUTURE SITE REP MEETINGS timing and content**

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.

**INTRODUCTION expectations of site reps.**

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 different perspectives on what is expected of site reps.

**BEING A SITE REP**

**Are you being asked to take on too much?**

**Lack of support from the Council Allotment Service**

* Lack of access to the database makes it difficult to contact plot-holders
* Site Reps and associations able and willing to take on more responsibility for managing sites but need support and agreement from Allotment Service to do this

**Council’s expectations increasing**

* As the Council’s resources shrink site reps are expected to take on more responsibility
* Responsibilities are now at the maximum level
* Concerns that site reps may be required to take on too much – volunteers should not be overburdened

**Tenants’ expectations increasing**

* Tenants expecting more from site reps as the council resources and support is reduced

**Council not responding to change**

* Council suffers from inertia – allotment sites and allotment use has changed and continues to change but the Allotment Service has failed to respond to this
* Site Reps are in the middle trying to deal with changing allotments and a static Allotment Service

**Depends on the size of the allotment site and the number of site reps**

* Small sites are easy to deal with
* Larger sites require more than one site rep to share the workload

**Commitment to do our job well**

* Take on more than expected so that the site is run as well as possible
* Uncertainty over the future of the site (Craven Vale)
* Uncertainty about site reps. relationship with the Council
* Uncertainty over future resources
* Greater expectations and responsibility being placed on shoulders of

volunteer site reps

**A. SITE REP. JOB DESCRIPTION clarification and verification**

The final draft of the Site Rep. role description was displayed for participants to read and agreed by all participants

**SITE REPS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR:**

* Organising the letting of vacant plots to those residents who have registered their interest on the Council waiting list, ensuring this process is carried out fairly and with regard to the needs and preferences of all.
* Following the standards and systems agreed for the service, managing confidential information with integrity, and using effective record-keeping and communication with all parties involved.
* Providing advice, support and encouragement to tenants, and participating in the annual inspection process, ensuring tenants are aware of their responsibilities, and supporting those tenants where illness or personal circumstances have affected their capacity to fulfil their contractual commitments.
* Playing a positive role in resolving disputes and avoiding conflict wherever possible, participating in training and refresher workshop when offered, to ensure that all tenants are supported and advised with equal, sensitive and consistent respect.
* Engaging in the implementation of the agreed Allotment Service strategy, and communicating regularly and effectively with the Allotment Officer and with the Brighton and Hove Allotment Federation to maintain positive and effective relationships which work for everyone.
* Monitoring the need for repairs and rubbish collections and representing the site to ensure it is maintained to an appropriate standard, safe for tenants and visitors, while minimising waste and over-use of resources.
* Promoting the importance of allotments through building a sense of community and empowerment for all tenants, and developing shared initiatives such as social events, open days, and projects on site or jointly with other sites, or with local interest groups and wildlife organisations.
* Maintaining awareness of proposals and plans which may impact on allotments and their immediate environment, and encouraging effective management of wildlife and biodiversity, including avoiding inappropriate use of chemicals, and discouraging excessive clearance of trees and habitats.
* Attending BHAF Forum, Site Rep Workshops, and other meetings, providing input to consultations and debates, and supporting and participating in the work of the BHAF Committee as part of a City wide network providing and sharing information, expertise and knowledge across all allotment sites.

Site Representatives provide a key communication link between tenants, co-workers and the Allotment Officer, ensuring that a helpful, fair and consistent service can be maintained on all sites across the City.

September 2016

**B. SITE REP PRACTICE scenarios and expectations**

Participants were asked to consider three scenarios as the basis for discussion of the issues raised, their approach to addressing the issues and how this demonstrated aspects of site rep practice.

**How can Site Reps deal with certain situations that arise?**

**What should or shouldn’t be expected from site reps. considering that they are volunteers?**

**For each scenario participants considered:**

* What would you do?
* What would you need to consider?
* Is this appropriate for a volunteer site rep to take on?
* Is this an approach specific to your site or could it be adopted city-wide?

**A. Conflicts of interest**

* At your site an allotment plot is poorly maintained and is likely to fail an up-coming site inspection.
* The plot-holder manages the plot alone and it has previously been well-managed.
* However – you know the plot-holder well and know that she has been undergoing treatment for a potentially serious medical condition. She is desperate to continue renting the plot but is currently unable to manage it effectively.

The Allotment Office is emailed but fails to respond.

Other plot-holders are not happy that the plot-holder is receiving preferential treatment and want to know why.

A friend of the plot-holder takes over management and maintenance of the plot on a short-term basis but this arrangement continues for 2 years and is not adhering to site rules on allowed structures.

**Comments:**

* Site rep either already knows the situation or should be informed
* Leave them alone – ignore it
* Communicate the situation to the Allotment Officer and explain at inspections
* Communicate the basic situation to the site association (if one exists) to back up decisions by site rep.
* Establish a record of who has been informed and is aware of the situation – an evidence trail to back up decisions
* Co-workers need to be officially registered
* Tenant takes responsibility for behaviour of the co-worker
* We want people to make a success of their plot – not punitive – scare tactics – better to demonstrate and model good plot use
* Usually plot-holders hold up their hands and agree to evictions if they cant keep on top of the work

**B. Allotment site development**

* At your site a small group of plot-holders (including you) have got together to manage a ‘communal plot’.
* The plot is used to demonstrate growing techniques and approaches as well as for meetings, site-related social gatherings and events.
* The plot is recognised at your site as a valuable resource acting as a hub for the site and offering opportunities to take the weight for training, induction off the shoulders of the Allotment Officer.

The Allotment Office is emailed but fails to respond.

Whilst some plot-holders regard the communal plot as an extremely valuable asset others say that use of a plot in this way is unfair on people on the waiting list.

**Comments:**

* Allotment sites already cater for ‘communal’ or ‘community’ plots (in the regulations and rules)
* Must adhere to the rules
* Can’t just take a plot – must be based on a named tenant and adhere to the waiting list
* If rent is paid there’s no issue
* Site rep must be happy with the situation
* Grey areas:
	+ - * Are there separate lists for individuals and for community groups?
			* Do some community groups get precedence if they are suggested to the Council by the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership?
* Tenant name for the community plot must take responsibility for the behaviour of the people who use the plot

**C. Problem resolution**

* At your site a plot-holder has undertaken significant plot maintenance including removing trees and a shed generating a large amount of waste.
* The plot-holder has neither a driving licence nor access to a vehicle and has asked for your assistance.
* You are also unable to drive due to an injury.

The Allotment Office is emailed but fails to respond.

A plot-holder who owns a car and trailer offers to remove the rubbish from the site but asks for payment to remove the rubbish – or a reduction in their plot rent.

Another plot-holder suggests setting up a ‘waste removal kitty’ collecting a small payment from plot-holders without transport.

**Comments:**

* The role of the site rep only goes so far as facilitating agreements between plot-holders for arrangements like this.
* The plot-holder needs to take responsibility for costs of the service.

**C. FUTURE SITE REP MEETINGS timing and content**

The following decisions were made:

**Site Rep meetings**

* + 2 meetings per year
	+ Held in the autumn and spring
	+ A way to bring together and represent the collective voice of Site Reps.
	+ Focused on identifying issues at a strategic level based on experiences at allotment sites
	+ Avoiding discussion of site-specific issues
	+ Out puts from the meetings to feed into the quarterly Allotment Federation Strategy Meetings held with the Council Allotment Service

Key issues to address:

**Site Rep role description**

Agree that the role description developed through the preceding site rep meetings should be adopted by the Allotment Federation and the Allotment Service

**Effective communication**

Agree to the proposed regular meeting structure and procedure explained above

**Information sharing**

Discuss shared access to the allotment database or parts of it and the development of allotment site-based data gathering and storage

**Developing a consistent relationship**

Discuss a more standardised relationship between site reps and the Allotment Service with a special focus on information sharing and agreements on developing greater site autonomy

**Overcoming inertia**

Acknowledging and exploring ways in which the Allotment Service can respond more effectively and practically to the changes at allotment sites and as experienced by site reps and the plot-holders they represent

**Ben Messer**

**Food Matters**

**30th Nov. 2016**