

Statement: PS16.01

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Sarah Freeman

The Council is looking at staggering a 100% increase over two years. That is unacceptable, this is still a 50% increase each year. An increase well above the rate of inflation. The Council keeps stating there has been no rise in rents since 2018, that is their fault not allotment holders, who appear to be having to bear the brunt of the Councils failings. Even so a 5% inflation rise since 2018 doesn't equate to a 50% rise in FY 25/26.

The 1950 Allotment Act Section 10(1) states:

“An allotment shall be let as such rent as a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay for the land”.

What the Council are proposing is not reasonable. The allotment rent increase could be considered unlawful. See below

(Reference: Case: R (Wood and Turley) v Leeds City Council)

The Council mentions “it needs to bring more overgrown plots into cultivation. I hope they do not expect allotment holders to do this for them? (as this is what happening currently)

If allotment rents rise by 50% the Council cannot expect allotment holders to clear plots for them anymore. You risk the goodwill from allotment holders that currently exists.

You should be asking yourselves what the consequences will be of above inflation rent increases e.g. plot take up.

Conclusion

I urge the Council to rethink their proposed changes to the Bristol Allotment Rent and Tenancy Agreement.

Statement: PS16.02

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Debbie Wyatt

I am writing to ask you to challenge the proposed increases in allotment rents , which I believe are scheduled for Cabinet approval on March 5th.

I believe the proposed increases are too large and will have a seriously damaging impact particularly on low income households and Community Groups.

The consultation reported in the documents for the meeting was flawed, notice of the consultation was not even received by many Allotment holders that I know personally. The proposed rent increases are illogical, the percentage increase bears no relation to any inflation figures, and I do not believe the additional income would be spent on Allotment sites.

Statement: PS16.03

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Holly Wyatt

'Alongside the Council's online consultation process, I began an online petition via change.org which has been submitted to Democratic Services. At the time of submission, this petition had reached 6,414 signatures of support; with 3,965 verified as being from Bristol residents. As such, this petition will be going to the next Full Council meeting for debate; but I felt it was important to highlight at this Cabinet meeting the volume of support this petition has received. One of the core demands in this petition was that 'access to space to grow your own food should be for everyone and not the reserve of more affluent households'. Over 6,000 people agreed with this statement, and I would strongly urge the Council not to ignore the voices of those they have been elected to represent. These rent increases will absolutely make allotments unaffordable for some of those who could most benefit from access to space to grow their own food, and the impact of these proposals will disproportionately affect the poorest residents of our city.'

Please do let me know if these is anything further I need to do.

Statement: PS16.04

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Tom Bosanquet

Some themes from the Rees administration have been an unwillingness to collaborate, lack of clarity, opaque presentation of data, and a mean & controlling spirit.

These have all been on show throughout the Allotment rules & rates consultation, just as we've seen them as the planning system is gamed (Castle Park, Broadwalk), tower block residents herded (Barton House), ecological richness destroyed (Yew Tree Farm), and residents awaiting safe road crossing points ignored again & again (CIL funded project blockages, esp St.Luke's Rd). There's been spin & there's been blame.

So I've lost almost all faith in Bristol Labour – a crying shame, as your party should be a vital voice for many people. But you've lost your way & I can't wait for the Rees clique to be moved on in May. Sad to say, though, your negative legacies are going to keep on biting Bristol for years to come.

Statement: PS16.05

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Sue Allen

Unfortunately I am unable to attend the meeting and would like to complain about the very large increase in allotment rent and water charges.

I know the council are looking to make savings but the large increase in rent is causing a lot of stress and worry to allotment holders. We know there has to be an increase but surely not this big. There are a lot of low paid workers and pensioners who do not qualify for any discount and may have to give up their allotments as they cannot afford the increase. This will lead to mental health problems and social isolation. Please reconsider such a big increase.

Statement: PS16.06

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Ruch Hecht

In your Food Growing and Allotments Strategy you say that you want ‘A fairer approach to tenancy fees’, yet clearly the proposed rental increases are anything but fair.

The percentage increases which tenants will have to pay range from 7% to 492%. People on sites *without* water will be paying a far greater increase than those *with* water. Band D has been used as a comparator in your report – the majority of those on benefits in Band D are on sites with water, and they will pay *more than double* what they are currently paying – and if they’re on a *smaller plot* they will pay a *larger* increase. None of this is fair. It’s completely illogical, and at no time during the consultation process has any explanation been given as to how these random increases were arrived at.

79% of Disabled people who took part in your consultation disagreed or disagreed strongly with the proposed rent increases, yet in the Equalities Impact Assessment you said there would be no disproportionate impact on Disabled people. The Council’s own mapping data shows that most of the allotment sites in the City are in the areas of greatest food poverty and social deprivation – yet this doesn’t form part of your report. People who are on low income, but not on benefits, have responded to a survey which the campaign has done to say that if the rents go up as proposed they will no longer be able to afford their plot and that it no longer makes financial sense for them to grow their own food. Community groups which are tenants on the largest plots will see their rents rise by up to 200%, which may force some to close.

There is no doubt that your proposed increases will impact most on those who can least afford it, and thus are completely at odds with your strategy which puts allotment sites at the heart of a network of green spaces across the whole City where people can grow their own food.

One of the key principles in your Parks and Green Spaces Strategy is collaboration; another is creativity. You say you want ‘an open dialogue with stakeholders and communities’ and ‘will seek to adapt to new ideas and new ways of thinking.’ Since the beginning of February I have emailed both Cllr. King and Jonathan James more than once on behalf of Bristol Allotmenters Resist requesting a meeting to discuss solutions to the problems presented by your proposed rent increases. I haven’t even had a response to my emails, let alone an agreement to meet. This doesn’t feel very collaborative or very creative. I and others are fully supportive of rents being increased, because it’s clear that the Allotment Service is under-staffed and under-resourced. However, the current proposals are not the way to do it. Given we weren’t able to talk to members or officers about solutions prior to this meeting, let me put some to you now.

Instead of increasing the rents by the proposed amounts - which look as if they’ve been arrived at by a cat walking over the keyboard - you could:

1. Raise rents by inflation. This was agreed by Council in 2022, but never implemented. Raising rents by inflation is something which tenants can understand; it’s fair and logical. This is what most Local Authorities do.
2. Charge per square meter. At the moment people with different sized plots pay the same because of the banding system; a much fairer way to charge would be for people to pay for

the actual size of their plot. Many Local Authorities do this, so why not Bristol? The rents could then rise each year by inflation.

3. Charge people in line with the Council Tax band where they live (not where their plot is). This means that you could charge people more if they live in affluent areas of the City and less if they live in the more deprived areas. This is far more equitable than the current system whereby someone who lives in Redland is paying the same rent as someone who lives in Hartcliffe.

Once a method has been chosen, you could put a clause into the Tenancy Agreement about the rents rising annually by inflation. That way you wouldn't have to go through this, frankly, farcical process every time you wanted to raise the rents.

Please could you tell me if you considered any of these alternative options to increasing the rents – or indeed any others - before you made the current arbitrary proposals?

Statement: PS16.07

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Christopher Faulkner Gibson

Statement relating to Agenda Item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges.

I fully understand that allotment rents need to increase. The fact that previous agreed increases were not implemented is the fault of Bristol City Council, not the allotment tenants who are now facing punitive increases to compensate for this failure.

However, we want to work constructively with the Council, and we all agree that improvements are needed and must be paid for: the current staff levels are totally insufficient. We do not disagree with you on the principles but on the detail and the means of implementation.

Your decision to phase in the increases over two years is welcome, as is making monthly Direct Debit payments available but this does not go far enough.

79% of respondents to your consultation (many of whom live in the two most deprived deciles of the city) said that they either disagreed or disagreed strongly with the rent rises. This is not reflected in your EIA, and I cannot see how you can justify the rent increases given this level of opposition.

Whilst I was pleased to see the new rules and additional fees postponed for further review and consultation, I do not believe that the responses to the consultation on rents have been properly considered.

Various suggestions have been put forward as to how the allotment charging regime can become fairer, but this is not reflected in your consultation report – you seem determined to go ahead regardless, ignoring both the level of opposition and the constructive suggestions that have been put forward.

In common with many other tenants, I believe your proposals will, if implemented as they are, be vulnerable to Judicial Review. The Bristol Allotmenters Resist group is actively investigating this, and it is believed that the costs could be met through a Crowdfunder appeal with little difficulty.

I also find it astonishing that so much anger is being stoked up across the entire city so close to an election. I am aware of several people who are vowing that if these increases go ahead they will no longer vote Labour, saying they feel betrayed that a Labour Council is penalising working people in this way.

Please, step back from this and take an altogether more imaginative and collaborative approach.

Statement: PS16.08

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Jo Pengilley

To Councillor King,

I have found the whole process of the 'consultation' deeply unsatisfactory. Whilst I am glad that the ludicrous rules have been parked, I am left with a project to create a community pollinator garden in limbo, with no real way of knowing what will be implemented in the future, or when. We had been granted £8.5k for the project from WECA. Volunteers worked hard for 9 months to clear the plot and now the plot is covered up awaiting further news.

I am a community worker on a low wage so the proposed huge rental hikes have been stressful too. I love my plot and know every inch of the soil there so I will have to try and find the money to continue, but I had wanted to grow vegetables to support my low income. The huge proposed increase of **109%** will make this economically unviable. I understand the need for a rent increase - I live in rented accommodation that goes up each year. Spreading this over 2 years won't help if the figure remains at the same rate. The whole process from the 11th December to today has been disastrous. I have lost faith in the councils process. All we want is fair rent for a fair service.

Statement: PS16.09

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Mara

Dear Bristol city council,

I'm 21 years old and am a student studying at the university of the west of England . When I was a child growing up in a low income household my local allotment down in west Bristol was my haven. The sense of a caring community full of a mosaic of different people from all walks of life that allotments bring was something I never experienced at home . My aunt would grow potatoes, leeks , cabbage and tomatoes on her large plot that would keep us fed for months which would mean that we would save loads of money !!! Allotments aren't just a hobby for a lot of people it's also a way of saving money in the living crisis. If my aunts allotments was treated the same way you plan to treat these people down in Bristol with the insane increase in rent prices we would of been beyond skint and would of never experienced the beauty of low income people all working together side by side on our plots.! I of course understand the inflation rates and the need for a rent rise as everything else goes up too . We all understand and are thankful the council has kept it down for so long but the proposed rent increases are insane !! With plots going up by triple or quadruple it's like your trying to make up for it all in one go but not putting into account that people can't actually afford for it to go up insanely . Even by paying the rent monthly instead of all in one go won't help much it will need to be payed . If these proposed prices go ahead it would be only the well off and the comfortable middle class would be able to enjoy the beauty of an allotment something I know the council is against ! The council is for us all and for the forgotten lower class ignored by the government.

I expect you to take our responses seriously and will see you all on Monday

Thank you

Statement: PS16.10

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Noreen Ratcliff

I have a plot at Hope Allotment.

I am unable to attend the meeting

> As a pensioner allotment holder myself for 8 years, I have never seen or heard from anyone at the council so am mystified by these rising costs claims. What does the council actually do for allotment holders.

> Furthermore I am concerned that many allotment holders are pensioners who will not be able to afford these price increases and for many this is their main form of exercise and social interaction. Being priced out will only increase pressure on adult social care budgets.

> With prices going up within BCC it is getting difficult to manage.

Please do think wisely

thank you

Statement: PS16.11

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Elise Unger

Whilst it is understandable that allotment rents need to increase in line with inflation, the increase should be exactly that, **in line with inflation**. The price rises you are proposing for 2025/26 are completely outrageous, for example, a small plot which presently costs £50 per annum would rise to £89 by 2026. This is an almost 80% increase. Prices have not gone up by 80% since 2018, if I went to a council run gym in the city for a swim in 2018 it would have cost £4.50, now in 2024 it costs £5.80. That's a 28% increase in price. Why then the 80% price hike on my allotment rent? For some other plot holders, the increases are far greater, up to 400% increases for some community plots; volunteers who give up their time for free to help educate, physically and emotionally nurture others within their community and grow food to distribute to local food banks, groups such as the various community orchards around the city and the volunteers who help run PROPS. However, you wish to financially punish these groups the most! Your rationale is that allotment rents haven't gone up since 2018. That is **not** the fault of the allotment holders and they should not be punished for it. It is Bristol City Council's inability to manage its budget and implement a rent increase that is at fault, for example, the agreed 25% price rise issued by the Allotments office in 2022 that should have come into effect by September 2023. Councillor Ellie King even took an action at the forum meeting of 27/07/22 to "Clarify the rent increases" and the timetable so that notice of the increase could be issued to plot holders by autumn of the same year, yet this somehow all disappeared into the ether. What is the reason for this, or have none of you noticed? Please show some integrity, compassion and wisdom; seek to apply a **reasonable** rent rise for all plot holders, in line with inflation, to come into force in the coming year.

Statement: PS16.12

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Tina Holmes

Staggering the proposed rent increases over a couple of years, doesn't make it any more affordable - we will still end up paying an excessive increase.
Introducing monthly payments is great, but not when the total is still the same.

SI don't understand how Cllr King doesn't understand this?

Statement: PS16.13

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Iain McCaig

1. I am an allotment tenant at Metford Road Allotments (Plot 29B)
2. I accept that rent rises are necessary and inevitable in the present financial climate. But the increases proposed are significantly higher than the cumulative rate of inflation since 2018, when rents were last increased. The Council' has not demonstrated clearly how increases on this scale are justified. Moreover, the increases proposed are illogical and inherently unfair: They will lead to tenants paying significantly more per square meter for smaller plots than larger ones. For instance, under the current pricing system the rent for a plot at the top of a band is the same as a plot half the size at the bottom of the band. In addition, the percentage increases in rent (for sites with water) vary significantly from band to band: A 140%;, B 78%; C 123%; D 109%; E 66%; F 88%, G 136%; H 220%. How are these variations justified?
3. Kicking the can down the road by deferring these increases and introducing them over two years does not make them any less illogical or unfair.
4. A better approach would be to arrive at a fair and reasonable rent per square meter (with a lower rate or discount for sites without water and facilities) in consultation with the Allotment Forum, and charge tenants according to the actual area of their plot. Subsequent annual increases could simply be tied to the rate of inflation.
5. It is hard to see how the Council's stated objectives of promoting greater accessibility and diversity will be furthered by these unfair increases, even with the proposed extended discounts.
6. Allotment tenants and their site representatives comprise a significant body of knowledge and experience. They understand the particular character and significance of their individual sites and will know how best to manage them. The Council should see them as a resource and trust them to deal with the local, day-to-day management of sites. This would free-up Allotment Office resources to deal with high level issues.

Statement: PS16.14

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Ana Sánchez

The amount of people opposing the rent increase in your consultation was 78%. Despite this, you continue to go ahead with the same rent increase originally proposed - only that your new proposal is to stagger it over 2 years. This rent increase you're proposing is still higher than national inflation, this is totally illogical and unjust.

You have not been clear and open when sharing allotments outgoings and income and seem to have added to your budget extra expenditure out of nowhere. This way of trying to justify your proposed rent increases lacks transparency and seems once more illogical.

It's fair to say that most (if not all) sites need better management of the empty plots (and therefore better management of the long waiting lists). This seems to be the major problem for people in the waiting list waiting to grow their own food and for people who are handed overgrown plots who have to work hard and take a good 2 to 3 years to properly clear the land so they can start growing food. Also the empty overgrown plots are not generating income for BCC. How can you justify the rent increases to pay for this better management when the site reps (volunteers) are the ones dealing with the plots that need allocating and the waiting list? once more this is not clear how you are going to achieve this key issue with your rent increase proposal.

One last point regarding the Community Groups & Collectives - I really don't think you are even remotely aware of the benefits that these group bring to the community, all the activities, learning, hands on experience, safe natural spaces and connection to nature that they offer to many of us... all run by volunteers giving their free time to the community! Perhaps you could focus on a way of estimating the value they add and be supported to continue with their mission instead of having them pay double their current rent.

Many thanks.

Statement: PS16.15

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Joanna Mellors

I would like to thank Cllr King and the Allotment Office for their February decision to remove the proposed new rules and charges from today's Cabinet considerations.

I am looking forward to the Allotment Service being able to put the last three turbulent months behind them and returning to providing the day-to-day service that Bristol Allotments need.

To that end, please could Cabinet give serious thought to my proposal at the end of this statement.

You will have heard repeatedly that the Consultation process was seriously flawed. The requisite valuation/benchmarking appears – to this retired Chartered Surveyor – to have the air of a 'back of envelope' exercise. The budgets show projected infrastructure expenditure of £301Kpa over 15 years – more than £4.5M; and yet, when asked, the Parks Officer – at a Scrutiny Commission meeting and following receipt of a written question – was unable to come up with a single project that was in the pipeline. I would suggest that the Budget in the Brief before you is another 'back of the envelope' exercise.

Research of the law makes me believe that it will be legally unsound for Cabinet to approve, at the very least, the rent increases for the larger Banded plots (E, F, G &H). Such plots are predominantly occupied by the Community Groups: there is no evidence that the members of these Groups (not local authority tenants) were properly consulted; the Equalities Impact Assessment does not consider the impact on them; and the Benchmarking exercise is silent with regard to comparable evidence. I have written to Cllr King about this.

In 2022 there was Cabinet approval (supported by an Equalities Impact Assessment) for a 25% increase; all existing discounts etc to remain in place.

Cllr King, in her letter of 2nd February, proposes a more collaborative approach to working with Allotmenters. I welcome this and suggest that such discussions should include devising a new approach to future rent increases.

In the meantime, **I urge Cabinet to reject these rent proposals and advise the Service instead to instigate the 25% increase for which they already have authority.** This would ensure an increase in revenue flow from March 2025 and would not cause anything like the distress and ongoing turbulence that will come from the current proposals.

Statement: PS16.16

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Caroline Dalcq

The covering report for agenda item 16. 'Allotments Rents and Water Charges' states you 'need to implement a **fairer and more sustainable approach to tenancy fees**' with which I would completely agree with.

The rent increases you propose, though, are **completely inconsistent across the bands**. The current banding system means that someone with a plot at the top of a band pays the same as someone with a plot at the bottom of the band.

For example, a 75m² plot costs the same as a plot of double the size at 149m² – in effect the smaller plot is twice the cost per square metre of the larger plot. Moreover, the percentage increases (given for sites with water,) are, ranging in turn from the smallest plot to the largest: 140%, 78%, 123%, 109%, 66%, 88%, 136%, 220%.

This is unfair.

And no explanation has been given for this variation.

As an alternative, the first increase for 2025/26 could be implemented as planned but the second halted. In the meantime, **in collaboration with tenants, work out the cost per square metre** needed to fund a level of service that satisfies both parties, to be formally agreed with the Allotment Forum. This could be introduced in 2026/27. Thereafter, a simple annual inflationary rise, using the same % increase for all, should suffice.

This will be simple, fair, and reduce administration. Details of the size of all plots by square metre is already held by the Allotments Office, so no further surveying work is needed.

Please let our voices be heard. Please let us, as the main stakeholders, have a (real) say in this.

Many thanks,

Statement: PS16.17

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Kirsty Forman

I am making this statement in objection to the current budget proposals for increases in rents and water charges for allotment plot holders.

I do not object to rent increases in principle, or altogether, but I do vigorously object to the proposals currently under consideration.

Some councillors who have been lobbied on this subject appear not to be fully informed on this and/or to understand that a large proportion of those who are actively campaigning against the increases proposed actually think that there should be some increases, but not these as proposed.

The 25% inflationary increase in allotment rents agreed in 2022 has not been implemented or effectively managed. It is not fair or reasonable to impose a punitive level of illogical rent increases which do not take account of plot sizes or water or service provision, to increase the income of the allotment service to make good the deficit in income as a result of this mis management.

The figures published by Bristol City Council in support of these proposals are extraordinary in claiming a proposed figure of £300,000 for building and maintenance expenditure without any details to justify or explain this if this is intended to relate to a 15-year programme of work, how can it be justifiable to claim this for one year?

It would be considerably fairer and more reasonable to conduct an effective and proper consultation with allotment tenants and site reps to achieve an agreed rate of annual rent increase based on actual plot sizes and services provided and build in annual increases. This would be far cheaper to implement in the long term and allow for greater certainty for budgeting for the Council and tenants alike.

Statement: PS16.18

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Vanessa Harvey- Samuel

To members of the Cabinet

I am a tenant at Speedwell A allotment site and have held my plot for 6 years. I believe the right decision has been made in withdrawing, as an outcome of consultation, the proposals regarding fees, charges and Rules so that further consultation and consideration can be given to these contentious matters.

I urge you to do the same with the proposed Rent increase resulting in doubling rental income. This is a political decision which only you can make. Just as it was a political decision to forgo rent increases over the past 5 years including the 25 % agreed by Full Council in 2022 to take effect in the coming financial year.

Like many others I support the case for a rent increase but not by such a significant amount with no information as to how the money is to be spent. Your legal advice on consultation underlines the requirement to provide sufficient reasons for any proposals to permit intelligent consideration.

Allotment holders have been requesting details of current and past expenditure and plans for the proposed new expenditure throughout the consultation period and beyond to no avail. Even last week in response to an FOI seeking the breakdown of expenditure for 2022/23 the Council replied saying these figures were unavailable. How has the Allotment Service been able to claim that the budget is dramatically over spent when it has no record of what was spent not in this financial year but last year? In the period 2017/22 the average overspend from figures that have in the past been presented to the Allotment Forum was in the region of £26K - this could easily have been accommodated by the 25% rise in rents.

In the report presented to you today Buildings and Infrastructure is represented as costing £301K. In 2020/21 this figure was £37,660, in 2021/22 this figure was £33,881 and as I say we're told the figure for 2022/23 is not yet available.

As a consultee I certainly do not feel I have sufficient information to permit intelligent consideration of these proposals but more to the point does the Cabinet?

What is this money to be used for? How is to be spent in a year? Where is it coming from ? How sustainable is the service's plan? It was readily acknowledged at the Allotment Forum meeting on 24 January that the money raised would not be ring fenced.

The strategy is full of laudable aspirations but no evidence of ground work in terms of surveying sites, prioritising work, costing work. The impression from officers at the recent Communities Scrutiny meeting was that desktop exercises had been

undertaken. However, they appeared unconfident that the work was fully scoped and costed. Shouldn't this be done before embarking on consultation?

Allotments are so important to many people. To expand the opportunities available across the City must be right. But to do so in such an apparently cavalier manner causing financial hardship and real anxiety to perhaps the very people who benefit the most cannot be right.

Statement: PS16.19

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Harriet Buckland

Dear Cabinet,

please see my statement below in relation to the increased allotment rents and water charges to be discussed by the cabinet tomorrow afternoon:

I agree there is a need to increase rents but strongly disagree with the method and magnitude of increases. I would support rent increases that take the following points into consideration, along side a much more collaborative approach with the allotmenting community.

- Raise rents by inflation. This was agreed by Council in 2022, but never implemented. Raising rents by inflation is something which tenants can understand; it's fair and logical. This is what most Local Authorities do.
- 2. Charge per square meter. At the moment people with different sized plots pay the same because of the banding system; a much fairer way to charge would be for people to pay for the actual size of their plot. Many Local Authorities do this, so why not Bristol? The rents could then rise each year by inflation.
- 3. Charge people in line with the Council Tax band where they live (not where their plot is). This means that you could charge people more if they live in affluent areas of the City and less if they live in the more deprived areas. This is far more equitable than the current system whereby someone who lives in Redland is paying the same rent as someone who lives in Hartcliffe.

In addition to the above, the rent should take account of **any/all** limiting factors associated with any given plot. Charging the same rent for a plot with good aspect, good site facilities, water as one that may have multiple disadvantages eg shade, no water, steep, poor access is clearly unfair. Multiple discounts to account for multiple constraints to growing must be facilitated.

To support inclusivity, shared plot tenancy must be supported and encouraged.

The same goes for community allotments. The current proposals will be a significant barrier for these groups - many existing community growing groups will likely discontinue as a result of these and they will discourage/prevent the development of new ones. This is extremely short sighted since again, these groups have immense value to the community, well being, food growing, skill shares, and often by their very nature provide support to the rest of the allotment site on which they exist. The range and reach of their value is significantly under appreciated.

Allotment plots are more than growing spaces they are an incredible boost to mental health which in turn lessens the impact of mental health costs on our strained NHS and should be available to those who need it most, often those that are under the most financial strain.

The allotmenting community forms a significant part of the electorate **and** the negative impact of these proposals is also clearly appreciated and understood much more

widely/outside the allotment community. Pushing this forward in the manner proposed will have a significant impact on election results with much of the community swayed to support a party which better understands the value and supports the development of the allotment community.

I trust you will will take these points into consideration and reconsider the proposed rent increases.

Statement: PS16.20

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Lorna Lindfield

I have cancer and chronic fatigue. I am a part-time NHS employee and am currently unable to work.

I am managing alone, living in a flat. I already fund my allotment rent out of household food and fuel budgets.

Cancer has had a huge impact on my mental health. The allotment is the only thing in life that I positively want to get out of the flat for.

The allotment means I can,

- eat a wider range of fresh vegetables than I could buy,
- get out in the sun and fresh air,
- do an activity without spending money,
- meet like-minded people.

I have already adapted my methods to my disability and low income by,

- building irrigation channels,
- using no-dig methods,
- accepting help from friends to do the heavy work,
- growing lower effort produce,
- rainwater harvesting.

Statement: PS16.21

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Sally Wyatt

I object to the rent increases for the allotments. Both me and my partner work full time but are still a low income household but aren't eligible for any benefits. When we took our allotment on it was £25 a year it's £85 now. We have both never gardened before and just thought we would give it ago as it wasn't expensive. We really got into it and grow all our own food we make jams and wine. It's brilliant. I've been through a lot with my plot and it's kept me going. We don't have holidays or luxuries. If you go ahead with these rises we would of never of tried it and we are wondering how we can afford it now. I pay a subscription which goes towards me getting new glasses every month I've got a high prescription and my glasses are loads of money. I will probably have to choose between that and my plot. It's all wrong and you need to sort it out.

Statement: PS16.22

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Tess Price

This is a collective statement from a number of allotment site-based community groups and projects, who have come together to state our concerns about the impact on our groups of the Council's proposed rent rises.

Bristol has a fantastic range of motivated and committed community groups/projects on allotment sites, and collectively we bring huge benefits to the city including on access to healthy food, physical and mental health, reducing isolation, building community and opportunities to connect with nature and land.

The Council acknowledges this in its PGSS Food Growing and Allotments strategy, and claims to want to encourage and support us: Page 44 states: *“Collective growing plots are a great way to enjoy the benefits of an allotment plot without having to commit to an individual allotment tenancy or join the waiting list for a plot. These have been established by a group or organisation to satisfy a particular community need and interest in food growing, providing social interaction and community cohesion.*

There is great opportunity for these initiatives to encourage the participation of under-represented groups, and to be a stepping- stone for everyone to progress from an interest in food growing to taking on their own allotment plot. Increasing opportunities for collective food growing will require a collaborative and creative approach, but it has the potential to reduce pressure on our allotment waiting list and ensure the benefits of food growing are accessible.”

But in fact these Allotments Rents proposals will be really damaging to us and they risk closing many of us down.

- The rent rises are huge, ranging from around twice as much to almost 6 times as much as current rents. The rises are higher on larger plots, disproportionately affecting our projects.
- Your proposed 50% discount won't work to make the rent rises manageable for us. Some of us are already receiving discounts of 50% or even 100%, so for those groups rents will still rise massively.
- The discount scheme itself will involve a large extra administrative burden on groups and potentially large extra costs. In order to receive the discounts, groups may have to keep records of all participants/visitors including date/time of visits, equalities monitoring data, records of food yields and maintenance activities. GDPR law is likely to apply to these records. Groups may also have to set up Public Liability Insurance if they don't already have it.

The potential impacts on us are as follows:

- Some of us will be forced to close our projects, or parts of our projects, because they are no longer financially viable. Many of us provide free hands-on food and fruit growing learning opportunities; we give away surplus produce to our local communities, and to local Food Banks; and we provide outdoor healthy spaces and community to people who may otherwise be unable to access such things. **Does Council really want us to charge for such services?** If so you will make these services unaffordable and inaccessible to many of these people.

- Some of us who raise funds through member subs will have to increase those subs to cover our costs, effectively closing our groups to those on a low income.
- Some of us will be forced to seek new or additional grant funding to cover our costs. This will increase our workload, make the future of our groups vulnerable to cuts in grant funding, and prevent us from planning for the longer term.
- We all rely largely or entirely on volunteer labour to keep our projects running. The extra administrative burden is likely to be impossible to sustain for many of us, already struggling to balance this work with paid employment, family and caring commitments. As a result some of us may have to close because key organisers and volunteers won't be able to continue to run and manage the projects.
- Potential new groups/projects will be disincentivised by the new rents and the need to meet stringent requirements to obtain the 50% discount. New groups of this kind never start out fully formed with lists of volunteers, and are rarely able to obtain grant funding in their early stages. They are nearly always the result of the hard work of a few committed individuals, often for years, in order to get the group up and running and get plots safe and ready for the intended use. Your rent and discount scheme proposals will act as a very high barrier for any new groups of this kind.

We are asking you as a Cabinet to help safeguard the future of our groups/projects by voting against these destructive proposals.

We are asking that the Council works together with us and other community groups/projects to develop new rent proposals that can support a viable allotments service and enable us to flourish as well.

Furthermore the Council needs to back up their stated encouragement for community groups by looking to work with us and support us. The community groups/projects can help support the allotments with support and training, resources and organisation, but we can only do this if we are supported to develop. From this could come the innovation which is more important than rent rises to tackle the service reform.

Groups who have co-written and signed up to this statement:

Alive Dementia-friendly
 Allotment Beaufort Road Community Growing Collective
 The Birch Collective
 Easton Community Garden
 Edible Bristol
 Fishponds Community Orchard
 The Haven Project
 Herbalists Without Borders Bristol (Herb Allotment)
 Metford Road Community Orchard
 Redland Green Community Orchard
 Royate Hill Community Orchard
 Street Goat
 Thingwall Park Community Chickens
 Woodcroft Community Orchard

Statement: PS16.23

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Sue Edgerley

I think the rent increases are too high with no apparent measure of how they were decided. Appreciating that rents have not increased since 2018 it would seem more reasonable to increase rents in line with inflation over that period.

The proposed new rents are too high even considering discounts for those who qualify based on low incomes. It will be turning allotments into a middle income hobby rather than providing all with the option of growing their own food.

I can't see how the high water charges can be justified without making water more accessible on allotments. Watering can be difficult for a majority of allotment holders who have to carry heavy cans over a distant for repeated watering trips through the summer.

Statement: PS16.24

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Elizabeth Gold, Metford Road Community Orchard (MRCO).

MRCO was established 25 years ago on five allotment plots that sloped too steeply for conventional vegetable growing. It is managed as an organic permaculture 'forest garden' with mature heritage fruit trees including plums, apples (with at least one variety found nowhere else), cherry, mulberry and medlar. Vines, figs and soft fruits are also grown. Produce in season is shared among the members and donated to local food banks.

MRCO is a paid-for membership group of around 40 people. It doesn't have a waiting list and is always open to new members who can then reap the physical and mental health benefits of exercise, fresh air and food, closeness to nature and being part of a community working together.

In addition to a healthy community of people, MRCO provides a diverse wildlife habitat for slow worms, newts, frogs, butterflies, bees, birds and small mammals. At a time when so many front gardens in Bristol are becoming car parks the existence of diverse and interconnected green spaces is increasingly important.

Since its establishment, MRCO has been self-managing and financially self sufficient. All maintenance (including to shelter, shed and composting loo) has been carried out by members with only minimal support, financial or otherwise, from BCC. Under the current proposals our rent will double. We aim to keep our membership fees low to remain as affordable and inclusive as possible. But if our rent doubles we will be forced to raise the price of membership. This will jeopardise the aims of social diversity and inclusivity.

Community Orchards benefit everyone, not solely their members, (think about that when you're eating local honey). They should be encouraged and supported by the Council.

Statement: PS16.25

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Harry Mac

We are using this final opportunity to try to be listened to by the cabinet before they introduce punitive rent increases. For example, on our plot, which has no water, you are going to force an increase of cost to 4 times as much over the next two years. Keep the 50% concession for sites with no water in recognition of the difficulty this causes.

You did a consultation and 6 times as many people said they did not want these huge rent increases as said they did want them. Are you actually listening to what allotment holders have said? Note that again and again, allotment holders understand the need for an inflation-related increase in rent- as was supposed to be implemented by the council a couple of years ago then suddenly withdrawn. We just do not accept this attempt to grab money from people who are trying to be sustainable and grow their own food. The latest figures produced for allotment expenditure look invented and seem to bear no relationship to previous allotment expenditure. This provokes deep suspicion, as does this fact your proposed charges are a good deal higher than the other core cities that Bristol compares itself with, but you have tried to obscure this fact.

Allotment holders are united as never before- If allotments become simply unaffordable for some of us, then the rest of us feel angry about that. You do realise there are thousands of us spread over 100 sites and 34 wards across the city, plus our friends and families? Listen to us now, be reasonable, or you will definitely lose our votes.

Statement: PS16.26

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Dr Stephen Pill

It is not an exaggeration to say that Site Representatives are vital for the Allotments Service in Bristol: without our substantial and voluntary efforts, a service already in crisis would collapse.

There has been general concern among Site Reps that the consultations on Allotment rents and on rules has not been handled well, and that the rushed circulation of immature and ill-thought out proposals with no prior engagement has - and predictably - provoked widespread and needless anxiety and anger in the Allotment community across the city.

Among the consequences of this mishandling will be a scar on relationships between tenants and Council that will persist long after the current Mayor has left office. This will inject unwarranted heat into future discussions that will make reaching agreement less easy for all parties.

In addition, Cabinet members who ordinarily spend no time thinking about Allotments have been drawn into the furore, and are now forced by an arbitrarily-imposed timetable to make an invidious decision: either to starve the Allotments Service of additional funding by rejecting the proposals before them, OR, by agreeing them:

- To condemn many allotment tenants on low incomes to swingeing rent rises that 78% of consultation respondents have clearly said are too steep
- To impose on community growing groups on larger plots rises that will pose an existential threat for many - despite declaring such groups as priorities for support.
- To leave behind a complicated mess for others to sort out, and for which there will surely be a political cost.

There has been insufficient time for Bristol's Site Representatives to arrive at a consensus on final financial proposals unveiled only a few days ago - which is in itself symptomatic of the problems I am pointing out.

Nevertheless, it is clear that many believe (including an informal group of 35 with whom I am in contact) that:

- An inflationary rent rise is fully-justified
- Further increase beyond this is also warranted but ONLY with clear linkage between additional money and agreed improvements to service
- The many who are on low incomes but not on benefits need help by a gradual escalation of fees over several years
- Community groups need special consideration - and a consultation not undertaken in this exercise.

Therefore I urge Cabinet when faced with the binary decision of approval or rejection to instead choose a third way: to reject the proposals in their current form, to approve and implement the 25% increase already agreed by Full Council in March 2022, and to require a renewed engagement with Site Reps and tenants in the coming months to settle the terms of a rent escalator for the coming few years.

This approach, if taken, will create more goodwill than you might imagine, and it will have benefits beyond setting those future discussions onto a promising footing.

Statement: PS16.26

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Neil Bennetta

I currently have half an allotment plot in Lynmouth Road.

There is no running water there, so in summer months when the water collection from my shed roof runs out, I have to carry the water from my home to the allotment to water the plants.

Will the increase in rent change this?

I currently can only see that my annual charge covers the rent on the land, plus an occasional visit from an allotment officer.

The perimeter hedge (which is alive with birds during spring and summer) secures the site and is maintained by the allotment holders along with our access gate. The lock for the gate is provided by the allotment holders kitty. We have a partially sighted member who needs a key to access, with the other members using a coded lock, so this is also provided by the kitty.

We currently work together to keep the area tidy for local residents and see no input from BCC.

The unrealistic increase in cost for us at Lynmouth Road, as you are abolishing the no water discoun, is unfair and not inline with inflation or any other reasonable benchmark. It does appear that the system is broken and just putting more money into it will not fix the fundamental issue.

It is also worrying that the older people who have worked some of the plots for a very long time and rely on their plots to bolster their diet and provide an economical way of obtaining healthy good quality fruit and vegetables will be forced off due to the significant increases you are proposing.

Please explain how you have reached out to these people and engaged with them, as some do not have access to modern communication technologies.

Statement: PS16.28

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Charlotte Eddisford

As as a Labour party member, and supporter, I urge today's cabinet members to delay the current proposals on allotment rent increases, to ensure that we achieve an equitable and effective solution to the current issues.

I am grateful of Cllr King and the Allotment Office's February decision to remove the proposed new rules, which were flawed. However, I remain very concerned that these rent increases were separated from these rules, to be pushed through cabinet with little consultation with those most affected by the proposed changes.

The cabinet needs to understand that allotment holders are not against rent increases in some format. Raising rents by inflation, by the square meter, was agreed by the Council in 2022, yet not implemented. We understand the need to address inflationary increases.

The cabinet also needs to understand that I, for example, am not protesting and fighting these rent increases for my own benefit, but on behalf of the voices which are not being heard through this process, who were not able to engage in the online forum or submit letters to this cabinet hearing. These voices are best represented collectively through the allotments forum, and I strongly suggest that these rent increases as tabled are delayed, to enable a proper consultation with the allotment forum, in order to avoid negative unintended consequences which will result from the current proposal.

My main concerns involve:

- 79% of people with additional needs who took part in your consultation disagreed or disagreed strongly with the proposed rent increases, yet in the Equalities Impact Assessment you said there would be no disproportionate impact on Disabled people.
- 23% of people on low incomes with low or no savings are not receiving means tested benefits (Joseph Rowntree foundation, 2023). Your response to this issues being raise in the consultation: "The rent uplift will impact on people with low income who are not eligible for a discount." Was to repeat the Universal/ Pension credit discount: "We have extended the reach of the 50% discount to include those that are in receipt of Universal or Pension Credit. This is expected to benefit one in five of all our tenants." This does not address the very live issues, a stong theme in the consultation, that the discount will not go far enough to support those on low incomes but not in receipt of universal credit.
- The Council's indices of deprivation mapping data shows that most

of the allotment sites in the City are in the areas of greatest food poverty and social deprivation – yet this doesn't form part of your report.

- Community groups, carrying out activities for the social good, are amongst the tenants on the largest plots, who will see their rents rise by up to 200%. Many are running on a shoestring, on lower budgets, and some will be forced to close.
- The percentage increases range from 7% to 492%. People on sites without water face a far greater increase than those with water. Band D has been used as a comparator in your report – the majority of those on benefits in Band D are on sites with water, who will pay more than double – and those on a smaller plot will pay a larger increase. The amendments are not equitable, or logical, and need further consideration.
- The transparency of the budgeting process- Budgets/ Profit and losses have been tabled through the allotments forum vary wildly from the large budgets shown in the briefing documents.

I attach the Bristol indices of deprivation mapped against allotment wards, and the table of % increases, which show the significant ranges of the increases.

A new plot holder myself, I have already spoken personally with two long standing plot holders (15 years plus) living on low incomes, who were visibly upset and worried that they would not be able to accommodate these rises. While the amounts tabled may not seem a lot to you, I implore you to consider those most affected by these rises when you consider this agenda item.

The best way forward is to progress swift consultation with the allotments forum to agree an equitable rent increase.

Statement: PS16.29

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Tamara Evans Braun

Section 10 of the Allotments Act 1950 provides the power for the Council to charge “such rent as a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay for the land if let for such use on the terms on which it is in fact let.” The definition of reasonable is determined by case law.

The National Allotment Society (NAS) gives a number of guidelines for setting reasonable rents. One of which is comparing to leisure facilities. It also suggests that the “present level of rent and its historic tradition” should be taken into account and also the “likely effects of rent levels on plot take-up”.

The rents are due to rise between 7 and 492% depending on the plot. This rise is not on line with leisure facilities, nor does it have any historical precedent.

The consultation results show that 78% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposed rent increase. It is very clear that the tenants do not think the rent rises are reasonable.

The councils EIA confirms that people may be priced out of the allotments and your risk assessment in the report discussed today says one consequence may be that “tenants feel they don't want to afford an allotment plot following the rent increase.” (the wording on this is awful by the way! I am really disappointed that a labour lead report could imply people in any way choose not to be able to afford something.)

As far as I can see the only argument the council has that their new rents are reasonable is by comparing the rent rises to a few other local authorities. I'd like to note that in policy 103, the NAS specifically says it “does not endorse the use of benchmarking against other allotment providers in the determination of rents, as this fails to take account of differences between localities in present and future costs and the resources available to meet them.

Looking at your own risk assessment as well as admitting that these price rises will push people off their plots and you anticipate a legal challenge. Personally, my family's rent is going up from £70 to £156. That's more than double, I am not on benefits but I am a self employed parent and times are tight. I appreciate that you as a council are also struggling financially but this is not where to try and balance the books. Please help us in our efforts to eat locally, stay fit and healthy, reduce our carbon footprint and save money on food! Do not vote through these rent rises.

Statement: CS16.01

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Councillor Mark Weston

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the agreement brokered with the Mayor over the deferral of these rent increases for one year. This move seems particularly sensible given the controversy that was generated by the original, accompanying rule changes, and lack of proper consultation with all stakeholders.

The subsequent withdrawal of the tenancy rules, administrative fees, and charges by the Cabinet Member in February was equally wise and sensitive to the concerns and reasonable objections of allotmenters. Some of the proposed restrictions around trees, hedgerows, ponds, and wildflowers seemed - even to me - to be overzealous and excessively bureaucratic.

My meeting with the various allotment groups (held in January) to discuss these issues was also very instructive and positive. Much more of this kind of collaborative engagement with those most affected by any new Allotments Strategy needs to be maintained.

I accept that rents will have to increase. As the consultation outlined, these have not been reviewed since 2018, the costs of maintaining the service are growing, there is an understandable desire to improve site facilities, as well as try to increase the number and availability of plots across the city. More people and community groups getting involved in the growing of food should be encouraged.

So, I agree with the action that has been taken since the public consultation closed and the promise made that allotment holders will have a greater role in helping to shape how this land-use is managed.

The only criticism I wish to raise with the Mayor and Cabinet today is a concern that the planned rent increases to be phased in over two years are still too steep. Perhaps this is a battle which will have to be fought with the next Administration. However, whilst an attempt has been made to reduce the impact of such a big rise (178%) in a combined rent and water charge for a Band B allotment plot, I suggest that more gradual increments (over four years) would be less of a shock to those on low incomes, are costs more easily absorbed by all plot holders over a longer transition period, and represents a fairer settlement when such rent hikes are sadly inevitable.

Statement: CS16.02

Cabinet – 5 MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Statement submitted by: Councillor Martin Fodor

We need an allotments service that can provide a reasonable level of service. The current arrangement sees a mix of associations and council-managed sites. The latter need site reps to operate well.

The budget for the service has now been revealed to lose a substantial sum after years of austerity and is subsidised by the income earned in parks. But little of this was made clear during the recent consultation.

As the paper acknowledges, there has been a substantial response from tenants, now over 3500 responses. Due to this outcry, the rent and water fees are now being put forward, but new charges and rules have been left half 'pending' by the Labour administration.

As chair of the Communities Scrutiny Commission, I was contacted by dozens of residents from across the city during the consultation. The proposals appeared without any cross-party councillor scrutiny.

New rules fees and charges were proposed, extra work for site reps, and extra fees and responsibilities for people who'd used plots for many years. Extra charges for larger community gardens and orchards were worrying growing groups, who said some could never have got going with the extra costs.

It was only after much pressure I secured the cross party, backbench scrutiny we should have been invited to undertake. I secured a discussion for our commission members about the proposed rents and water charges. I also secured information for the first time including the proposed future annual service budget, including a sum for investment we were told would last for 15 years.

But there's no sight of any real 15-year capital programme, and without other income [e.g. proposed new levies on various things with extra charges for sheds, etc] this can't happen. With extra charges postponed there isn't extra money going into the service for this.

The current notional budget we received in our scrutiny papers is well short of spending on the service. It also lacks money for a sum called 'corporate income target'. This is really a cut to the service - a £55,000 kickback /budget cut 'returned' to the corporate centre that was written into most departments to shrink spending under austerity.

The reaction against massive rent increases then spilled over into budget day, as some years ago a cost-of-living rise was approved by the Labour Cabinet. Inflationary increases haven't been implemented since 2018.

The Mayor's budget deal with Tories that 'saved' allotments from an annual inflation increase was illusory; these smaller rises have not actually been levied since at least 2018 - even though Cabinet actually agreed such rises should be made. The lack of smaller, staged inflation rises has under the guise of keeping allotments affordable has directly led to the decline of the service offered as running costs have risen year by year.

So barring an unprecedented change of heart – none of your Cabinet papers have ever been rejected as far as I know - we expect Cabinet to nod through the proposed increases phased in two stages, half being levied in April 25 and the other half of the rises for plot and water rents in April 26.

Yet the response to the consultation has mobilised many issues and ideas. The way plot rents are calculated and charged is now highly contested due to inequalities in the bills for different plot sizes, the unequal scale increases for smaller and larger plots, and the impact on big areas used by community growing projects. Alternative ways to levy charges, better ways to pay in stages, and the benchmarks used to compare Bristol fees to other authorities have all been challenged and alternatives have been suggested e.g. square meter charges rather than bands. The Cabinet papers do have a summary of consultation responses around the plot charges and a very mixed set of responses and strong reactions are clear, plus some useful suggestions that would have been better worked through in a more collaborative way with stakeholders before the proposals came out.

Most people accept that standstill prices aren't an option. And a service without a capital fund to invest is one in decline as everything from water pipes to fencing could and does need repairs and investment.

Since allotments really lose money, even after the full proposed Labour Cabinet rises in 2025 & 2026, the capital programme seems to be an illusion and the kickback of £55k is too. Being subsidised by the wider parks budget which earns money from events and concessions isn't a long-term solution.

There's now a very highly mobilised group of service users whose trust in the council has been eroded and who experience a very weak service. One extra member of staff being promised won't change that, even if some capital gets found.

The relationship with service users and stakeholders needs to be rebuilt - there are worried tenants, their helpers, community growing groups fearing new plot and water fees, and site reps [where they exist] who've been led to believe they shall have lots more rules to manage. Disadvantaged areas of the city seem to be taking a greater burden in future. The various rule changes and extra fees are left to the new committee system to rethink. The relationships will need to be rebuilt to produce collaborative, constructive solutions to a better funded service. A polarised debate with broken trust is not a happy situation to pass on to the next council.

I welcome the heightened awareness of this important service, but we are rightly worried at the crop of problems being left behind by the Mayor.

Question: PQ16.01

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Harry Mac

Question 1: Why are you proposing to nearly quadruple our allotment rent for a standard sized 250m² plot at Lynmouth Rd allotments from £42.50 per@ to £158 per@?

We are a site without a water supply. For no reason you are removing the long-standing 50% discount for this huge inconvenience (and, yes, we capture rainwater where we can using sustainable methods).

You are asking us to pay premium prices, higher than all the comparable core cities for a site with no water supply.

Question: PQ16.02 & PQ16.03

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Kirsty Forman

I am an allotment tenant of Bristol City Council . Over the past 29 years my allotment has allowed me to grow clean, fresh and healthy food for my family, enabled my children to grow up understanding about the source of that food and to be nourished by it. They have an appreciation of the importance of the natural world and how we interact with it. Allotment gardening has been a cornerstone of my wellbeing and ability to cope with life's challenges, providing me with purposeful activity, exercise, food, and fresh air and a connection to nature whilst living in a city.

Question 1: Proposed rent increases. Although the proposed rule changes have been withdrawn at present, the flawed consultation which included the rent increase proposals which are going ahead to BCC Cabinet on 6.3.24, must also be defeated by the improper consultation, and should not be presented to the Cabinet as they stand for this reason. How will BCC rectify this and put forward rent increase proposals which are properly consulted upon by the Allotments Forum, tenants, and community groups?

Question 2: Budget data. What does the figure of £233,196 quoted in relation to 'Buildings & Infrastructure – annualised cyclical replacement/maintenance over 15yrs', and £31k for 'waste clearance and pest control' relate to?

Question: PQ16.04 & PQ16.05

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Dr Tamara Evans Braun

On page 6 of the 92 page report, the council's own legal advice states that “ The consultation responses must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising the decision.” and “There must be clear evidence that the decision maker has considered the consultation responses, or a summary of them, before taking its decision.”

As acknowledged in your report, Section 10 of the Allotments Act 1950 provides the power for the Council to charge such rent as a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay for the land if let for such use on the terms on which it is in fact let.

On page 37, the consultation results show that 78% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposed rent increase. Out of these 49% strongly disagreed. Only 13% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed rent increase, with only 3% strongly agreeing. That is a tiny number. This surely demonstrates that an overwhelming majority of respondents, do not think the rent rises are ‘reasonable’.

According to the council's own risk assessment on page 69, a legal challenge is anticipated and the risk of this exceeds the council's cautious risk appetite suggesting the council also acknowledges that tenants do not find the rents reasonable.

Question 1: As only 13% of people responding to the consultation agreed with the proposals, how can the council consider the levels of increase in rent and water charges be regarded as what allotment tenants can reasonably be expected to pay?

Question 2: Wouldn't it be more appropriate and reasonable to consider the levels of increases with the tenants and stakeholders as part of the process that you have proposed for the rules and fees on page 3, paragraph 7?

Question: PQ16.06 & PQ16.07

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Ruth Hecht

In your revised Parks and Green Spaces strategy you state you want to 'Implement a fairer and more sustainable approach to tenancy fees' and that your 'proposed new fees approach' will take into consideration 'the variation in size of plots' and 'the variation in on-site facilities (e.g. toilets, car parking)'. However your new fee structure uses the same banding as before in relation to the size of plots (with two additional bands), and there is **no** consideration of on-site facilities other than in relation to water and flooding - discounts which already exist.

Question 1: How can you explain the anomaly between what you say in your Strategy about the rent increases and your proposals?

In your covering report you say that there 'is a need to implement a fairer and more sustainable approach to tenancy fees.' The rents you've proposed are *totally* illogical and unfair. The percentage increases are completely random, and not connected to the size of the plot *in any way*. For example the % increases for tenants on sites with water, from the smallest plot to the largest, are in order of size: 140%, 78%, 123%, 109%, 66%, 88%, 136%, 220%. For no apparent reason, some people's rent will double, some triple, some quadruple, and for a few people it will sextuple.

Question 2: Please explain how these random and illogical increases can be described as 'fair'?

Question: PQ16.08 & PQ16.09

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Gillian Skinner

The 25% increase that didn't happen

Using Minutes from Forum meetings:

January 2022: rent increase of 25% proposed, to come into effect in September 2023.

July 2022: No increase in September 2023 because Notices had not been served. The Increase of 25% was a full Cabinet decision (made in March 2022) with an agreed Equalities Impact Assessment. It was linked to the need to make a £55K saving in 2023/24. Implementation had 'yet to be clarified....'

October 2022, the 'timeline for the proposed 25% rent increase' was not yet available. The 25% increase was mentioned again in January 2023 and again in July 2023 ('the expected increase is 25%').

October 2023: the original 25% proposed rent increase dropped. No reason was recorded.

Question 1: Why was the 25% increase never carried out, with notices served in either March 2022 or March 2023 or indeed today?

Calculation of the increases (method chosen)

At the Communities Scrutiny Commission on 27/2/24 Officers were asked how they had selected the method of calculating the increases. The percentage increases range from 66% (Plot E, with water) to 492% (Plot H, no water) with the most common plot size seeing an increase of 78%. Officers indicated that they had sought comparables from other local authorities and 'had held a series of workshops'.

Question 2: Please could officers supply details of those workshops (dates and organisations represented).

Question: PQ16.10 & PQ16.11

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Lauren Mason

Question 1: According to budgets circulated publicly to members by the Allotments Forum for years 2017-2022: average Allotments Service yearly income has been £257K, expenditure £283K, deficit £26K. How therefore can an estimated budget be presented to Cabinet which shows an expenditure of £688K (2.5x higher than previous years) and a deficit of £299K (12 x higher than previous years)?

Question 2: Aside from employing one additional Allotments Officer to improve administrative capacity, how is raising rents anticipated to reduce the allotments waiting list?

Question: PQ16.12

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Elise Unger

Question 1: Please would Bristol city council consider taking all proposed price rises in 2025/26 for allotments including the new additional water charges off the agenda until after the May elections when the new council will be able to take time to respond to the recent consultation in a proper and legal manner, and address necessary rent increases in a fairer and more inclusive way, eg, through engaging with site reps, community groups and representatives from the BAR (Bristol Allotmenters Resist)?

Question: PQ16.13

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Troy Tanska

'With regard to the proposed Allotment rent increases, and with reference to BCCs recently released Equalities Impact Assessment which should look at how the proposed increased allotment rents of between 7-496% may impact on Bristol residents including those living with intersectional disadvantages such as poor health, isolation in outlying areas, low income, poor local access to facilities and amenities.

We need to know more about how these allotment rent increase proposals may negatively impact on take-up of allotments in the city's areas of greatest deprivation in the future - particularly on those residents with low incomes, for example with minimum wage / low paid jobs such as nurses, care and teaching assistants, cleaners etc. who do not receive UC /PC and will not benefit from proposed mitigating rent relief measures, and how this in turn could have a major effect on food poverty in these areas where fresh fruit and veg is often of poor quality, more expensive, or not available locally.'

Question 1: Bristol City Council's own mapping shows that most allotment sites are in the wards with the greatest food poverty and greatest social deprivation. Why has this information not been included in the Equalities Impact Assessment?

Question: PQ16.14 & PQ16.15

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Dominic Francis

Question 1: In the consultation about the allotment rent increases, you only provided respondents with one option, without any information about how the proposed increases had been arrived at, nor budgets to support them. The percentage increases look as if a cat walked over somebody's keyboard, because the increases are so completely illogical. Did officers consider other options, such as raising the rents with inflation, or charging per square meter, or a standard water charge - all three of which are used by other Local Authorities?

Question 2: Why are the "predicted, annualised infrastructure repair and maintenance costs" so high - £301,000 - and which expenditure line did these come under in previous budgets?

Question: PQ16.16 & PQ16.17

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Alice Hastie

Community Groups and large sites

At the Communities Scrutiny Commission on 27/2/24, Officer Jon James indicated that there were very few large sites (the newly created Bands G&H) - mostly let to groups such as 'Food Growing organisations and CICs etc.'

Rents, for sites with water, will rise from £165pa (current rent) to £389pa and £528pa respectively in 2026. Members of Community Groups are not direct tenants. It is noted that there are no benchmarking figures from the Cities quoted in the Benchmarking Table/Comparison Summary. It is also noted that the Equalities Impact Assessment para.2.4 (page 82) makes no reference to consultation with the Community Groups and their members.

Question 1: What specifically was done to consult the Community Groups and their members and to assess the impact on them of the increases?

Budget announcements 28/2/24

The Council's Budget has been agreed with claims that agreement was reached not to increase 'the allotment fees'; figures of 6.7% have been mentioned. The new fees (proposed during the Consultation) had already been postponed (Cllr King's letter of 2/2/24). I have found no reference to this increase in either the Report or the original consultation papers.

Question 2: What is/was this fee increase, please?

Question: PQ16.18

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Christopher Faulkner Gibson

The covering report for agenda item 16. 'Allotments Rents and Water Charges' states you 'need to implement a fairer and more sustainable approach to tenancy fees' with which I would wholeheartedly agree but the rent increases you propose are completely and ludicrously inconsistent across the bands.

The current banding system means that someone with a plot at the top of a band pays the same as someone with a plot at the bottom of the band. For example, a 75m² plot costs the same as a plot of double the size at 149m² – in effect the smaller plot is twice the cost per square metre of the larger plot.

Moreover, the percentage increases (given for sites with water,) are, ranging in turn from the smallest plot to the largest: 140%, 78%, 123%, 109%, 66%, 88%, 136%, 220%.

This is unfair. And no explanation has been given for this variation.

As an alternative, the first increase for 2025/26 could be implemented as planned but the second halted.

In the meantime, in collaboration with tenants, work out the cost per square metre needed to fund a level of service that satisfies both parties, to be formally agreed with the Allotment Forum.

This could be introduced in 2026/27. Thereafter, a simple annual inflationary rise, using the same % increase for all, should suffice.

This will be simple, fair, and reduce administration. Details of the size of all plots by square metre is already held by the Allotments Office, so no further surveying work is needed.

Question 1: So why are Bristol City Council persisting with an antiquated and unfair system of setting allotment rents instead of updating it along the lines suggested above?

Question: PQ16.19 & PQ16.20

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: James Martin

Question 1: What is the purpose of the 15 year projected building maintenance cost to be paid in one financial year (2025/26) if not to inflate the expenditure figure? If indeed the council has incorrectly accounted for long term building maintenance this is no justification to make allotment holders pay for their mistake.

Question 2: If the £300,000+ building maintenance expenditure was due to incorrect accounting in previous years. Where is the apology, statement, and full cost accounting for these projected figures?

Question: PQ16.21 & PQ16.22

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Katy Ladbrook

Question 1: Explanation of financial projections

The *Allotment Rents and Water Rates* proposal includes a huge unexplained increase in buildings and infrastructure expenditure from £33k to £301k per year. The CSC meeting last week heard from Jon James that this is due to a new 15-year program of works which is going to cost allotment tenants and the Parks Service at least £4.5m. How does this Cabinet feel able to approve this increased expenditure with no further explanation of the 15-year program of works, which will create a huge financial deficit for the Allotment Service (and therefore the Parks Service), when the financial accounts this is based on are patchy and do not at all indicate that the Parks service is currently “significantly subsidising” the Allotment Service?

Question 2: Use of a flawed consultation to evidence this financial proposal

The *Allotment Rent and Water Rates* report does not include summary of any engagement with scrutiny (appendix c = "no"), however it was subject to scrutiny by the CSC on 27th Feb. There are unresolved level-two complaints of maladministration of the consultation process, including over missing financial information. How does the Cabinet feel able to make a decision on increased rents and rates based on results of a flawed consultation and incomplete financial information?

Question: PQ16.23 & PQ16.24

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Tom Bonasquet

Cherry Picking – a beautiful & seasonal activity gathering some of the most wonderful fruits (as long as you don't have too many trees on your plot of course!), or selective and biased extraction of data or information for analysis.

When the consultation first came out, I was immediately drawn to the part about aligning rents with similar sized local authorities. Using a regular internet search I easily found some comparisons & tabulated them to compare cost per square meter. For my Band A plot, I calculated that my current rate was £0.41/m² and this would rise to £0.97/m² (inc Water). This was higher than all the other 13 authorities I compared.

In your comparison summary you cite Bath, Plymouth & Birmingham – on all of these I found the comparison cost per square meter to be below the proposed new rates and out of kilter with what you'd put in your table.

Question 1: So, have you been cherry picking to try to support your comparisons?

A paltry 13% of respondents to the consultation agreed with your proposed rent rises. You finally seem to have heard some of the disquiet and agreed to drop the proposed rule changes (good!), but for the rent increases you're holding firm. Old budgets generally balanced, so it seems you've massaged the proposed figures, including a £300k Buildings & Infrastructure fund with scant detail, alongside a mysterious Corporate Income Target. It is murky to say the least and it certainly doesn't feel like you've been trying to bring people with you – in fact, it feels like you've prodded a hornet's nest! Such a shame, because the energy & spirit of Bristol Allotmenters is a force of wonder, with so much collaborative potential. But you've apparently heard nothing new and have tried to rush changes through before the reins of power are taken from your hands in May!

Question 2: Have you learnt anything from the Allotment consultation process?

Question: PQ16.25 & PQ16.26

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Tess Price

These questions have been put together in discussion with a number of representatives of community growing/food producing groups in Bristol, who are all concerned their projects will not be sustainable under the new rent proposals.

Your Equalities Impact assessment states that the Council intends to encourage community food groups because they provide a low cost way for people to engage with food growing. Your risk analysis identifies access to community plots as a key mitigation for the future unaffordability of individual allotments to those on a low income. These suggest you are relying heavily on community growing projects to offset the negative impact of the rent rises on access to food growing.

Question 1: Do you have any reliable information about how many collective food producing groups there are on allotment sites, how they are currently paying the rents and what impact these huge rises will have on them?

Question 2: If you don't have this information, how can you be sure that you won't be closing many of them down, instead of 'encouraging' them?

Question: PQ16.27 & PQ16.28

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Joanna Mellors

Budget for Buildings and Infrastructure - Ringfencing.

The Rent Increase is in part being justified by the need to spend more money on the Allotments Buildings and Infrastructure. Historically, surplus allotment funds have been passed to BCC Central funds (Allotment Forum Minutes 27/4/22). At the Forum Meeting of 27/4/22, during a discussion about income and expenditure Cllr King undertook to investigate 'safe-guarding' the service to the Allotments.

The Budget just for Buildings and infrastructure (Note: grounds maintenance and tree works are itemised separately) for 2025/26 is £301K. This is a huge increase and, if spent on the Allotment infrastructure should make a major difference to the service provided.

Question1: What guarantees can the Council provide that this substantial sum (£301K every year; almost 8 times the average of previous expenditure and a total of £4.5Million over the projected 15 years) will be ringfenced and actually spent on Works for the benefit of Allotment users?

Water charges - request to consider reinstating the 50% discount

Historically, sites with no water have received a 50% rent discount. Under the new rules, this discount has been abolished and replaced with a 'reduction ' to reflect the 'cost' of a water charge. The cost to a tenant of having no water on site is NOT the cost of the water itself – it is the cost of transporting water from the nearest source to the plot simply to keep the growing plants alive. The reduction is only eg £10 (Band B); £20 (Band D); £40 (Band H) - this simply does not reflect the hard work involved in taking water to a site.

The reality is that tenants of sites without water will see charges rise by percentages ranging from 113% to 492%.

Few sites have no water; reinstating the 50% discount would have minimal impact on the overall budget. The new charges will have a disproportionately large impact on a small minority of tenants. They are carrying by far the biggest individual burden within the tenant community. As there are not many of them, their voice will be 'small' when looking at the statistics of the Survey.

Question 2: Please will the Cabinet member for Public Health & Community and the Allotment Service reconsider these charges, and restore the 50% discount for tenants on sites with no water instead of offering a reduction that bears no relation to the actual task of keeping a plot sufficiently watered?

Question: PQ16.29 & PQ16.30

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Roger Mellors

Allotment Office have provided comparable figures from other Local Authorities as evidence for the new charges - page 10 of the Report. These show maximum rentals in the range £126 to £212.

These figures are the basis £178pa proposed for Bristol Band D sites.

Traditionally, Bristol has had two additional Bands - E&F; the new rents are £249 and £311 - considerably higher than the comparable evidence. Even more troubling is the creation of two further Bands - G&H - with new rents of £389 & £582 - nearly 3 times the highest comparable.

No comparable evidence has been provided in relation to these large sites. Additionally, the Report gives no rationale behind the creation of the two new Bands - G & H.

Page 6 of the Report sets out the legal test: rents must be what it would be reasonable for a tenant to pay. Judicial decisions indicate that a valuation exercise should be carried out, looking at rents charged for similar facilities etc..

The Allotment Office have done this for Bands A to D, but their comparison chart shows no evidence for the rentals proposed for Bands E to H.

Question 2: On what basis can Cabinet be sure that the law has been complied with in respect of the proposed charges for Bands E&F and for the new Bands G&H?

In your Decision Pathway report about the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy you say that you will 'implement a fairer and more realistic approach to tenancy fees.'

Question 2: Please can you explain how the current proposals which mean that some people will have their rents increased by 7% and some by 492%, and people who **don't** have water on site will have their rents increased by far more than people who **do** have water on site is 'fair'?

Question: PQ16.31

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Debbie Wyatt

Question 1: You say that the proposed increase will bring Bristol allotment rents in line with rents of other local authorities with a similar sized allotment portfolio. This approach is not consistent with the National Allotment Society's rent policy (NAS Policy Document 103) which does not endorse this form of benchmarking, as it fails to consider differences in local authorities' costs and resourcing. What is your response to that?

Question: PQ16.32

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Alex Mason

Question 1: In your revised Parks and Green Spaces strategy you rightly say that 'Collective growing plots are a great way to enjoy the benefits of an allotment plot without having to commit to an individual allotment tenancy or join the waiting list for a plot.' You then go on to say that in the short term you will 'Carry out an audit into who uses existing BCC allotment spaces and engage with stakeholders to understand the barriers that underrepresented groups'. Given you haven't yet carried out that audit, how do you know that the proposed rent rises will not adversely affect community groups, particularly as the rent rises are biggest on the larger plots used by community groups?

Question: PQ16.33

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Christopher Faulkner Gibson

You say that the proposed increase will bring Bristol allotment rents in line with rents of other local authorities with a similar sized allotment portfolio.

However, this approach is not consistent with the National Allotment Society's rent policy (NAS Policy Document 103) which does not endorse this form of benchmarking, as it fails to consider differences in local authorities' costs and resourcing.

Furthermore, no details of comparable services supplied to allotment holders in those other authorities have been provided, nor has any information on costs and resourcing, so that we are not in a position to judge the validity of the benchmarking – a serious flaw in terms of the consultation exercise, as was the omission of the rents charged by the other authorities from the consultation documents: we had to resort to Fol requests to get it .

The NAS recognises that rents must be set in accordance with the legal requirement that they be reasonable and that the definition of reasonable is determined by case law.

At present the key test established in case law for rent increases is comparability with charges for other leisure services.

Question 2: Given that no other leisure services in Bristol are subject to the same percentage increases as allotments, the proposals appear incompatible with the law and, together with the flawed consultation process, this makes Bristol City Council vulnerable to judicial review. What is your response to that?

Question: PQ16.34

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Luke Matthews

Question 1: In 3.2 of your Equality Impact Assessment you say that 'The increase in rent will make the Allotment Service more financially sustainable to provide services to our tenants, some of which are currently receiving applicable benefits to obtain the discounts, this is assisting will relieving poverty.' [sic] How will raising rents relieve poverty?

Question: PQ16.35 & PQ16.36

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Lorna Lindfield

Question 1: In your Equality Impact Assessment produced in 2022 about a 25% allotment rent rise, you said that there would be a negative impact on Disabled people, older people and Black and Asian people. However, in your current EIA you have said there will be 'no disproportionate impact' on those groups, even though in your new proposals, the average rent for someone on benefit will rise by 95%. How can you explain this?

Question 1: I have cancer, chronic fatigue, and am currently on a low income, and your proposed new rents will have a direct impact on me. To pay my allotment fees I already have to find it from my household food and fuel budget. In your Equality Impact Assessment, how have you taken into account how people like me, who are on a low income, but not on benefits, will be affected by the rent rises?

Question: PQ16.37 & PQ16.38

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Caroline Dalcq

Legal advice (Page 6 of the Allotment Rent and Water Charges Report) states:

“The consultation responses must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising the decision.

The leading cases on consultation provide that consultation should occur when proposals are at a formative stage, should give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit intelligent consideration and should allow adequate time for consideration and response.

There must be clear evidence that the decision maker has considered the consultation responses, or a summary of them, before taking its decision.

However, on page 37 (Survey results, 4.1) it is stated that 78% of respondents (or 2337 people) disagreed with the proposed rent increase; this proportion is even higher amongst respondents from the most deprived decile (79%) and those with a disability (79%). Propositions have been made for fairer alternatives (including aligning the rise on inflation and charging plots per m²).

Furthermore, an estimated breakdown of allotment service costs has only been made publicly available at the end of February. Apart from the fact that the consultation was badly timed (launched in the busy end-of-year period) and badly advertised (direct communication about the consultation was poor and missed a lot of tenants/stakeholders), people consulted didn't have all the information needed for an informed opinion; e.g. the key information of what would be done with the extra money raised from the rents. Indeed, on 14th January the Allotment Forum voted by a vast majority (48 votes to 3) to declare the public consultation on rents a failed process that needed to be re-run, not extended.

So, in the view of these points, here is my question:

Question 1: Apart from staggering the original increase over two years, how can you justify the process of determining the new rent and water charge levels to be legal; i.e. how can you say that "the responses have been conscientiously taken into account", that there is "clear evidence that the decision maker has considered the responses", that "sufficient reason was given to permit intelligent consultation" and that "adequate time was allowed for consideration and response"?

The Council's food growing and allotments strategy is seeking to widen access to food growing, and mentions rent discounts for those on means tested benefits.

However, even for people who pay discounted rates, the rent rises average +117%: more than double the existing rents. For a standard full plot, the discounted rent will rise from £42.50 to £89.

These rent levels are likely to be a barrier that excludes people receiving benefits from renting an allotment, which is the exact opposite of the Council's stated aim. As the Council's own mapping shows, most sites are in areas of greatest food poverty and social deprivation.

Community growing projects are very likely to be affected by the rises, as the largest plots are suffering some of the biggest rises (large plots with water on site will rise from £165 to £528/yr). This will further reduce access to food growing for many of the people that need it most.

Question 2: How will the rent rises increase access to food growing opportunities while making allotment plots unaffordable for tenants and community groups?

Question: PQ16.39 & PQ16.40

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Tim Beasley

You refer to a 50% rent discount scheme for community growing groups. Your report makes no mention of existing discounts offered to community groups – some already receive a 100% discount, some 50%, some 25% and some no discount at all. In order to apply for the discounts, it appears that groups will have to keep records of all participants/visitors including date/time of visits, equalities monitoring data, records of food yields and maintenance activities. GDPR law is likely to apply to these records. Groups may also have to set up Public Liability Insurance if they don't already have it, in order to receive discounts. In addition, the proposed rent rises are highest on larger plots, in some cases rising to 4, 5 or 6 times as much as current rates, hugely outweighing any discounts. These larger plots are likely to be the ones rented by community groups.

Question 1: How do you expect community groups to fund higher rents while still providing a resource free to those who use it?

Question 2: How do you imagine groups will meet the large extra administrative burden to receive the rent discount, when most of these groups run entirely on volunteer labour and often struggle to find people who can offer the time and effort needed to keep the groups running?

Question: PQ16.41 & PQ16.42

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Stephen Pill

Full Council, after proper process, agreed a 25% inflationary rent increase in March 2022 - 2yr ago. Four months later, on 27th July 2022 Cllr King took an action to clarify the Allotment rent increase and timescale. Had she completed that action and implemented the increase, the Council's coffers would have been receiving the benefit since last year.

Question 1: Would she agree that had she done this, and had she kept separate the calamitous consultation on Allotment rules from the consideration of rents, it would have lessened the heat of public anger she has provoked, and might have allowed a negotiated settlement acceptable to all, rather than an imposed one which will stir long-lasting resentment?

The Allotments Forum is the mechanism chosen by Bristol City Council to bring Council and tenants together. On 14th January the Forum voted - by 48 votes to 3 to declare the public consultation on rents a FAILED process that needed to be re-run, not extended.

Furthermore, it can be demonstrated that this consultation has failed ALL FOUR of Lord Justice Woolf's tests of a proper consultation.

Question 2: Why has Cllr King taken so little regard of the Forum's opinion that she has failed to inform her fellow Cabinet members - now also drawn into this furore to take a collective decision - of the opinion of the Allotment Forum?

Question: PQ16.43 & PQ16.44

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Julie Parker

Question 1: One of the themes to emerge from the public consultation process, reported in the document entitled "Cabinet Supplementary Information" (page 83) was "There are alternatives to increasing rent: such as (for example) bringing more overgrown plots into use." The council's response to this is to say "We will continue to clear overgrown plots". Exactly how many overgrown plots have been cleared by BCC's direct effort in the last 3 years?

Question 2: 79% of respondents to your consultation who live in the two most deprived deciles of the City said that they either disagreed or disagreed strongly with the rent rises. Why isn't this reflected in your EIA, and how can you justify the rent increases given this level of disquiet?

Question: CQ16.01

Cabinet – 5th MARCH 2024

Re: Agenda item 16 – Allotment Rents and Water Charges

Question submitted by: Councillor Chris Jackson

Question 1: I'm glad that allotment rent rises are being staggered over two years, to give people time adapt to the change. I also get that, in the age of the Tories continuing to cut our budget, why we need rents to rise - after they had been frozen for a significant amount of time. Could Cllr King please outline what rents will be spent on?