

Accountability

Site Management is a major commitment, being democratic and transparent is crucial for maintaining support from the plottolders and the local authority. It is important that as a devolved managed group that robust procedures are in place, both in terms of Tenancy Agreements, site rules and policies. Ensuring that decisions made relating to decision made involving plottolders are clear and consistent.

Communicating with the membership is vital, ensure that dates of meetings, minutes and accounts are available to all. Many sites produce their own quarterly newsletters and this is an excellent way of creating interest and more support. It is the Committee who run the site and the jobs may include:

- Maintenance of site, boundary, roads and grass
- Provision of services e.g. water
- Payment of water bill, rent to the Council
- Keeping tenants updated
- Applications for sheds, greenhouses in line with Council guidelines
- Removal of difficult tenants
- Tidying skips, vacant gardens
- Applying for external funding
- Arranging the AGM with audited accounts.
- Organising celebratory events



It's all about teamwork and mutual benefit. Some self-help schemes have produced a wonderful social attitude amongst Members and recreated a spirit of belonging to a community.

If your Association is considering Devolved / Self-Management and requires further assistance then the National Allotment Society can help you, with draft agreements, advice on the options available to groups taking on new leases, devolved management or the ownership of land. For further assistance please call 01536 266576.

Become a member of The National Allotment Society

Membership of The National Allotment Society comes with a raft of benefits, from discounts on horticultural products through to initial legal advice and horticultural expertise. To become a member visit www.nsalg.org.uk or call **01536 266576**.

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Devolved Management what does it mean?



You will often hear reference to 'Self Administration' or 'Self Management' which are lumped together under the heading of 'Devolved Management', in this leaflet we explain what this means. There are three key elements needed to ensure that Devolved Management works, commitment, capacity and accountability

The basic form of Self Administration or Management is where a properly constituted society collects rent from each plot holder and makes an agreed payment to the local authority. Normally, these societies maintain waiting lists, let plots and in most cases monitor the cultivation of plots and terminate tenancies if necessary. They may also undertake minor maintenance.

More progressive systems are tailored to give societies more responsibility, either on an individual site basis or to a district group or Federation. In these cases, the society usually has a longer-term lease or tenancy agreement and takes on various maintenance work such as grass and hedge cutting, minor repairs, painting etc.

Some schemes work on a system whereby the local authority allow the allotment society to retain all or part of the rent. Others charge a reduced rent to enable the society to charge individual plotholders an amount sufficient to cover the cost of the work.

There are many local authorities providing materials for improvement and maintenance to sites where the members carry out the work. Others agree a total self-management system whereby sites within a district are leased long term to a single organisation, which then determines the rent level to be paid by individuals or sites. The collective rent is then used by the allotment organisation to carry out development and maintenance of sites. Overall local authorities offer an agreed additional sum of money or a substantial amount of materials to assist the scheme.

The more progressive systems of self-management usually evolve from a lesser responsibility system after a period of 'ability to manage' has been shown.

Commitment

There are several essentials to be aware of, and others that are a must.

Clearly all societies will be dependant on voluntary work by members and the degree to which an association accepts responsibility will depend on the level of available volunteers. It will also depend on how much responsibility the council is prepared to hand over.

Whichever level is chosen it must be seen as a partnership between the council as providers of a community service and the allotment holders/ association as users. No self-help scheme can work if a 'them and us' attitude exists. Any progress or agreement needs complete trust and confidence between the parties involved. It should be remembered that the council have the ultimate responsibility for the provision of allotments. It should not therefore be seen as a way for the council to absolve itself of responsibility or for the society to feel it can do what it likes in future.

Progressively fewer local authorities (particularly town and parish councils) have a dedicated allotment officer and therefore the allotment management is often just one part of the person's duties. Self-management would enable the society to take over some of the administrative work.

It is obvious that the people on site are instantly aware of vacancies, unkempt plots, site repairs and maintenance needs and, if it is within their responsibility, respond almost instantly to deal with most situations, whereas a local authority, by its very nature and chain of procedure, is bound to involve cost and take considerably longer to respond.

As councils strive to deliver allotment services without the subsidies of previous years devolved management helps to ensure that the available finance is used directly for the benefit of the allotments at no extra cost to the council.



Capacity

From the society's point of view, devolved management encourages plot-holders to feel part of the whole group rather than a lone gardener and will help to instil a community spirit and greater co-operation, as they now have a vested interest in management of the site.

For devolved management to succeed there is a need for continuity of Officers with sufficient competence and commitment to carry out the administration, however it is no good depending on one or 2 persons to do everything indefinitely. If those officers have the ability to organise and motivate a team of similar dedicated members then there will be a group of people willing to take on greater responsibility, avoiding a too frequent change of Officers. It is essential that all Officers are elected and answerable to the Members.

Before proceeding, a survey of the site or sites should be carried out to determine the condition of fences/ boundaries, gates, etc. to assess potential future expenditure and make some agreement with the local authority regarding the provision of materials, and/or capital to enable repairs and maintenance to be undertaken.

Remember safety at all times. Ensure that the group has access to proper equipment and materials plus safety clothing and other protection. Most paramount is full proper insurance cover, which must include personal injury and public liability in addition to cover for actual machinery and equipment.

There are some tasks that site members should not undertake unless it is their trade or profession outside the allotments. For example, the felling of diseased trees, pest control procedures or the erection of sectional concrete buildings.

'...devolved management encourages plot-holders to feel part of the whole group rather than a lone gardener...'



Photograph by: www.karenparkphotography.co.uk

Member's problems can be resolved without recourse to the council and any matters, which do need to be raised, can be presented on behalf of the whole site rather than the council officer having to deal with numerous individual plotholders. The Council should of course be willing to act as arbitrator in the event of unresolved disputes.

When negotiating agreements, conditions, responsibilities, etc. be mindful of various pitfalls. For example - a total area charge is fine if all plots are let, but it can be negative if, due to unlet plots or unusable plots, the vacancies are paid for by the actual members on site which not only means high rents and low income to the society but gives more maintenance with less available help. Additionally, will you be able to still offer reduced rent for pensioners and others on reduced income, disadvantaged, disabled, etc?

Long term leases with medium term break clauses are essential safety nets.

Many societies and members are content to leave everything to their local authority, others are not. Similarly many local authorities are keen to transfer some responsibility, some are not. The thing to consider is what do your Members wish?