



Final report of the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group



July 2023

Overview and Scrutiny



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Membership of the Task and Finish Group



Councillor Coral Howard (Chair of the Task and Finish Group)



Councillor Natasha Burgess



Councillor Will Cooper



Councillor Laura Cunningham



Councillor Sian Eiles

1. Chair's introduction

A plate of good food is one of life's great pleasures. If we can add to that the satisfaction of planting, tending, watering and continuing to care for our vegetables and fruits as they grow until harvest time, then I think we experience something very special. As a half-plot allotment-holder myself, I have experienced the great joy of harvesting and preparing such foods, fresh from the earth. We know the benefits of food growing are huge, the pleasure of working within a community of growers, sharing skills, knowledge, celebrations, and at times, the abundance of eating and sharing produce. Being outside in sunshine and rain, enjoying the fresh air in a growing environment, active through the seasons, we know that this is a boost to ours and others wellbeing.

We set out on this Task and Finish project on Community Growing, with ideas of trying to identify good practice, and the desire to find more plots of land, to support widening opportunities for more groups to plant and have access to grow their own food. We found that it is a complex task. Understanding the availability of land, with the aim of broadening participation and bring people together required us to explore the context we are currently working in. The Council already has considerable allotment land, some of it managed by Council employees, and some run by committees of active and enthusiastic holder members and volunteers but at present, there are not enough plots to meet the huge demand.

In gathering evidence for this review, we spoke to both Council employees, managing sites and land, those activists and volunteers working in the burgeoning community gardens, and allotment members, discovering that there is a lot of good work going on already. And it is 'work', as those who grow their own food know - with the cycle of planting, tending, harvesting, and planning ahead, alongside the relentless cycle of the seasons. Some will be seeking gentle access to the wellbeing of the natural environment, to be in a safe community, others will want to participate actively, to learn and grow a range of produce.

To recognise the commitment and better understand the work involved, we recommend that the Council explores how we may support more volunteers to build on the opportunities that exist in established projects, where organisers with great ideas would welcome more participants, working to achieve positive benefit for their community.

Potentially, the allotments waiting list could help identify those interested in gardening, to be involved in some of the more informal projects while waiting for their own plot. The list itself could be surveyed, to find out more about those who are waiting, it would be useful to know whether opportunities for gardening and growing are available to all parts of our community? Then, how can the Council be proactive in determining how to support widening access. Co-ordination and 'seed' funding would make a big difference, notwithstanding the reality of year on year cuts that have been made in Council funding.

We applaud the really important role of Lewisham Local in a time of austerity, which with limited resources, already co-ordinates and publicises gardening, foraging and training events and, communicates information on access to small funds, it also informs organisations on wider public funding like the Lottery, and crucially is listing and intends to map the wide range of more informal community garden initiatives.

There is also the expanding appetite for and active gardening and growing projects in schools in Lewisham, and we know that this is happening apace. Large institutions like the Royal Horticultural Society is particularly emphasising gardening with younger people this year, and is involved in a positive way with schools across the country. There are many active London organisations supporting this desire to include growing, gaining knowledge, and developing skills,

'from seed to plate' within schools, which promises wider and more egalitarian involvement for the longer term.

There is also the potential opportunity to support growing projects on Lewisham's housing land, with social housing groups supported to grow on their green space areas, and in projects between residents agreed and supported by the Housing Associations giving small scale funding. Some of this work has been done already and is worthy of wider support and expansion. There are varied and interesting examples all over London and as the demand for growing space and supported coordination continues, we expect that Lewisham will continue to develop and increase its own community growing provision.

I would like to thank everyone who took part in - and provided evidence for this review: my fellow councillors for their research, visits and insights, the really positive committed work of the officers of the Council in a time of limited resources, and most importantly, all the volunteer gardeners, growers and organisers, who are tending and developing areas of Lewisham green space for growing, and caring for a real variety of gardens with enthusiasm, patience and diligence.

Councillor Coral Howard

Chair of the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group

2. The role of the Task and Finish Group

- 2.1. The purpose of the Community Food Growing Task and Finish Group (TFG) was: ...to consider current allotment and food growing practice in Lewisham and opportunities for expansion/adaptation - to increase community participation, taking into account good practice and the role of other linked organisations and schemes, including: allotment associations, community growing and mental health projects, community gardens, housing associations, schools, available/under-used land on the Council's asset register, and projects in other urban areas/parks/London Boroughs and cities¹.
- 2.2. The outline proposal for this task and finish group and its membership was put forward by Councillor Howard – and agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in September 2022².
- 2.3. The Group had its first meeting in November 2022³ – at which it considered a scoping report. This established the context and background for this piece of work - as well as further defining its purpose. Members agreed the following key lines of enquiry:
- 2.4. Key line of enquiry 1: What can we learn from **good practice**? What existing examples are there of innovation in allotment management and community growing in Lewisham and beyond?
- 2.5. Key line of enquiry 2: What can we do to encourage **wide-ranging participation**? How can community gardening groups benefit the greatest number of people from different backgrounds?
- 2.6. Key line of enquiry 3: Where is there **land** and which **groups** might benefit? What could the Council and its partners do to increase the availability of spaces for community growing and how should the Council use its ability to call people together to connect groups with places and spaces?
- 2.7. Key line of enquiry 4: Is there any **funding** for this work? In the context of financial uncertainty – how might groups seek to ensure their sustainability and longevity for the benefit of local communities? What resources does the Council have that it could use for this work?



¹ [Link to the Community Gardening TFG proforma submitted by Councillors to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#)

² [Link to the agenda of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee September 2022](#)

³ [Link to the agenda for the Community Gardening Task and Finish Group November 2022](#)

3. Draft recommendations

- 3.1. The Task and Finish Group recognises the scope and quality of the work taking place in the borough on community food growing projects both large and small. In order to support and grow this work, the Task and Finish Group recommends that the Council should:
1. Conduct an **annual survey of people on the allotments waiting list**. This should ensure that those who no longer wish to be on the waiting list (or who wish to update their preferences for allotment sites) are removed or reallocated accordingly.
 2. Use the demographic information from the annual survey to **identify underrepresented groups** and consider what options there are for engaging with community groups from those populations.
 3. Create opportunities for residents to become involved in all of the excellent work that is already taking place in the borough: **information about allotment open days and community gardening projects looking for volunteers should be provided to those on the waiting list**. This could also include links to the work of Lewisham Local and the Good Food Lewisham Network.
 4. Explore the options for **updating the website with the latest information** about community gardening. This might include an easy-to-view map of the existing community gardens, allotments, and accessible green spaces in the borough. This should be done in collaboration with Lewisham Local.
 5. Review and **refresh the guide to community gardening** – which links with the objectives in the food justice action plan and builds on the Council’s corporate priority to enhance and enlarge green spaces, orchards, and gardens across Lewisham.
 6. Start a **community garden waiting list**. This should run in parallel to the allotments waiting list and would hold a list of spaces on Council land that are available for community gardening. The offer could also be made to housing and other public sector partners to add available spaces to the list. The waiting list could also hold a register of groups that are interested in setting up their own community gardens – so that they can be matched with suitable plots when they become available.
 7. Consider the options for **resourcing a community gardens management association**. This would draw on the example of the successful self-managed allotment association and be tasked with coordination and problem solving in and between community gardening sites. It should also seek to ensure that growing spaces are open to as wide a group of residents as possible, for as much of the year as possible.
 8. Continue to **split larger allotment plots as they become available** – and offer those on larger plots the opportunity to split their plot, rather than relinquish their tenancy if they are finding it difficult to maintain.
 9. Improve **data to back-up policy decisions** – this should include the annual survey of the waiting list (as recommended under 3.2) as well as considering the resource implications for surveying existing plot holders in order to identify common issues as well as any gaps in representation from sections of Lewisham’s different communities. Further work should also be done to ascertain the demand for community gardening and growing amongst housing tenants both with and without external/council support.
 10. Seek to **better understand any barriers identified through our improved data gathering** – specifically by engaging with groups that are already working with marginalised communities. This work should seek to engage with residents in Lewisham’s social housing – particularly those at risk of isolation.

11. Establish a **list of key tasks that need to be done on allotment land**. Where there are tasks that could be carried out by volunteers or groups looking for ad-hoc opportunities to support community initiatives, the list could be used to offer opportunities and free up allotment land for use.
12. Assess the **options for funding**. Lewisham offers some funding for permanent improvements to allotment and community garden sites through the greening fund. Thought should be given to providing funding to support community gardening in social housing developments, especially the most-deprived ones, even if on a one-off basis to meet start-up costs.
13. Review the **options for proactively delivering and supporting community gardening in social housing developments** where there is interest, especially in more-deprived estates. This should involve consideration of how large community gardens consisting of multiple growing beds could reduce maintenance costs to offset costs to the council; the wellbeing and community benefits of community gardening; and, if pursued, whether the council, local voluntary group or an external organisation would be the best delivery vehicle.
14. Decide whether the implementation of these recommendations requires additional officer resources and/or time to deliver. **The potential for a new 'community gardening' post should be explored**. This role would co-produce the revised community gardening guidance in collaboration with Lewisham Local and other community and voluntary organisations. This post might also provide administrative assistance for established projects, to give time and space for volunteers and part-time coordinators to dig, plant and grow. This could be in exchange for supporting the Council's corporate priorities, equality, and food justice objectives.
15. Further explore options with schools to support their work. **A 'growing network' for schools** could help to share ideas, plants and best practice. This might be linked to the role recommended above – depending on priorities, workload and additional resources being available.

4. Context

Gardens for health and wellbeing

- 4.1. There are many benefits to gardening. At its simplest, the act of growing food reconnects people with one of life's most basic priorities - that of sustenance. Moreover, the knowledge and skills to cultivate the earth and to grow healthy foods can contribute to the welfare and wellbeing of those involved. Working to maintain a garden may bring people in a community together to achieve that shared goal also whilst bolstering participants happiness and health.
- 4.2. It is recommended that adults try to achieve 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity a week⁴ – digging, moving, planting, and watering a garden might be one way to achieve this. There are many growing tasks that can be adapted for people with different abilities, levels of energy, access requirements and ages. The added benefit of growing fresh food that is whole and unprocessed – which will travel a minimal distance from harvest to plate links with not only the Council's ambitions for food justice – but may also, in some small ways, support communities' adaptation to the climate emergency.
- 4.3. There is evidence from a variety of sources that access to open space can help people to improve their mental health. The benefits of spending time growing and caring for plants is also well established. It is in this spirit that this task and finish group set out to explore how best the Council might support existing community gardens and encourage new opportunities for communities to participate in food growing.



⁴ <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-guidelines/physical-activity-guidelines-for-adults-aged-19-to-64/>

The cost of living

- 4.4. The Council and its partners have developed a food justice action plan⁵ because... ‘food injustice is one of the biggest problems facing Lewisham’ The lingering cost of living crisis has combined with underlying problems of deprivation and inequality in access to services - resulting in a substantial and sustained increase in use of emergency provision, including food banks.
- 4.5. Food Justice is defined in the plan as: ‘reliable and fair access to food that is sufficiently nutritious, sustainable, culturally appropriate and affordable’. The issues contributing to, and exacerbating, food injustice are examined in the plan. These take account of the problem of marginalisation for groups who are already experiencing injustice or inequality in access to services. Worryingly, this includes households with children, which are more likely to be experiencing food injustice.
- 4.6. As the plan was being developed, councillors were invited to be part of the process of engagement. The Healthier Communities Select Committee also carried out scrutiny of the draft plan. The final plan included food growing as part of its vision for Lewisham:

‘Our vision for Lewisham is that:

- ALL Lewisham residents can enjoy reliable and fair access to food that is sufficiently nutritious, sustainable, culturally appropriate, and affordable.
- ALL Lewisham residents have the knowledge, skills, resources, and opportunity to grow, prepare, cook, eat, and share food with their families and communities.
- ALL Lewisham stakeholders support collective action to end chronic hunger, promote food resilience and reduce the need for emergency food aid.
- ALL members of the Lewisham Food Justice Alliance and other key stakeholders have access to data to monitor the scale of the issue of food injustice and to determine whether the actions taken are having a positive impact on lived experience, health, and wellbeing.’ (Lewisham’s Food Justice Action Plan 2023, p6)

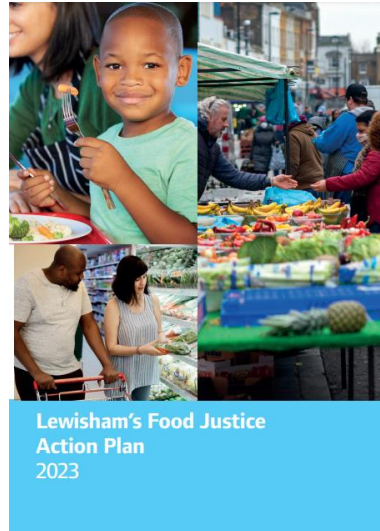
- 4.7. The Food Justice Action plan includes proposals related to community food growing:
- ‘Map existing growing spaces, community food growing projects and foraging spaces and identify suitable, unused public spaces that could be utilised for food growing e.g. parks, green spaces, school gardens.
 - Ensure food growing activities provide opportunities for people of all ages to become involved.
 - Provide support and advice on what and how to grow food at home and in the community.
 - Increase the support available for existing community allotments (e.g. admin tasks, maintenance etc.)
 - Further decrease the waiting time for Council owned allotments’

(Lewisham Food Justice Action Plan, AIM: Promote and develop opportunities for community food growing, p24)

- 4.8. Community food growing is one way to develop residents’ knowledge and skills to grow, prepare, and share food with their families and communities. Providing the opportunities and resources to make this possible has been a key focus of the Task and Finish Group and as such, the Group’s work helps to build on the vision and ambition of the Food Justice Action Plan.

⁵ [Link to the Food Justice Action Plan 2023 on the Council website](#)

- 4.9. Lewisham Local has been commissioned by the Council to co-ordinate the Good Food Lewisham programme, which includes action to ensure that individuals, community groups and local businesses are able to access information and share resources about food growing. They have also established the Lewisham Food Growing Network to further develop the links between community growers and green spaces.



The budget challenge

- 4.10. Public services face significant and unrelenting budget challenges. Government reductions in funding over the decade of austerity are combining with increasing demand, a cost-of-living crisis, and high levels of economic uncertainty from national and international factors.
- 4.11. In December 2022, Mayor and Cabinet agreed to on the budget reductions required to balance the 2022-23 budget. The report to this meeting noted that:
- 'Over the previous twelve years (2010-22) a net £137m has been taken out of the Council's annual spending, whilst the population has grown by over 27,000 (an increase of over 9%) leading to increased demand for services. In turn this has led to reduced service provision, leaner practices in terms of support, and more risk for the Council as it seeks to maintain good customer service and deliver quality services.'
 - Over this period the Council's spending choices focused on protecting the front-line services on which the most vulnerable in our communities are dependent. In 2010/11, 52% of the Council's general fund service spend was spent on social care (adult and children). By 2020/21, that had increased to over 70% across adult and children social care services and public health services returned to local government in 2013.
- 4.12. The Medium Term Financial Strategy, agreed by Mayor and Cabinet in July 2022 identified an anticipated funding gap over the next three years of £36m with £9.961m for 2023/24, in addition to the £3.611m of budget reductions for 2023/24 already agreed in 2021 and 2022.
- 4.13. In this context – the Council has reduced its work force and embarked on a series of service changes and transformations. Across a range of services, work that the Council once supported is now no longer viable. Fees and charges for paid for services are also being reviewed. This includes the allotment service, which is due to refine its cost modelling as it seeks to move to full cost recovery².
- 4.14. With fewer officers, less money and mounting future challenges, the Council cannot do all that it once did, so the Task and Finish Group set out to better understand where the Council might best use its influence and current resources to build on existing successes and good practice.

Lewisham's corporate strategy

4.15. A new corporate strategy has been developed⁶ – which sets out the Council's values, priorities and focus for the next four years (2022-2026):

- Cleaner and Greener
- Strong Local Economy
- Quality Housing
- Children and Young People
- Safer Communities
- Open Lewisham
- Health and Wellbeing

4.16. The work of the task and finish group related most closely to the priority for a 'cleaner and greener' Lewisham, which proposes that 'by 2026 we will have planted more street trees, tiny forests and community orchards across our borough'.



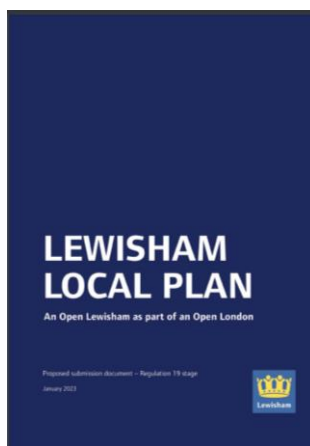
⁶ [Corporate Strategy for 2022-2026](#)

Lewisham's new local plan

- 4.17. Lewisham is currently developing a new local plan⁷ – which will shape the fabric and the character the borough for decades to come. The plan has been through multiple rounds of drafting and consultation – and it is intended that the final plan be adopted in the coming year.
- 4.18. Policy GR6 of the plan (see page⁸ 349) emphasises the importance of community food growing:

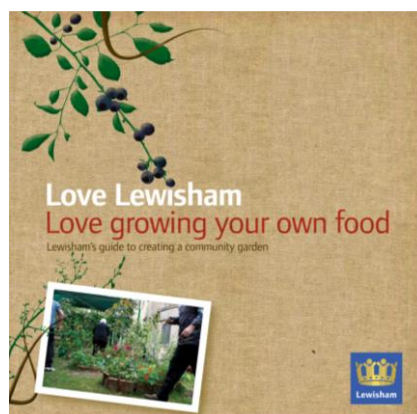
‘Allotments and community gardens will be protected in order to support sustainable food growing locally and to enhance opportunities for leisure, social interaction and education.’

‘Major development proposals for housing and proposals for community facilities are encouraged to include provision of space for community gardening and food growing. Where such existing provision exists and a site is to be redeveloped, this should be retained or re-provided.’



The Council's existing community gardening guidance

- 4.19. Lewisham has a guide to creating a community garden. It is now a decade old, but it emphasises the importance of community growing for strengthening community connections and helping the environment - as well as the benefits it provides in terms of exercise and nutrition.



- 4.20. The guide includes practical advice for: choosing a site, planning, and managing a garden as well as assessing soil quality, fundraising, and engaging volunteers.

⁷ Information about the new local plan on the Council's website:

<https://lewisham.gov.uk/myserVICES/planning/policy/planning/about-the-lewisham-local-plan>

⁸ [Draft regulation nineteen local plan](#) (PDF opens automatically)

5. Key findings

The availability of allotment plots

- 5.1. Allotments and community gardens are often talked about in the same terms, but they have different set-ups. Allotments are resourced by the Council – ten are directly managed and 27 are run by volunteer committees under a management agreement (there are other private allotment sites in the borough on land not owned by the Council⁹). The uses of dedicated allotment land and tenancy agreements are governed by legislation – based on the individual use of a specified area for defined growing purposes.

Key finding 1: The Council is splitting formal allotment plots as they become available to increase availability.

- 5.2. Across the 37 Council owned sites there are just over 1150 individual allotment plots. These vary in size, but a full plot is 250 square metres, and a half plot is 125 square metres (this is the average plot size in Lewisham). There are sites which also have quarter plots. The annual cost for a plot is determined by its size but the average cost is £48 a year. The number of plots available has increased by ten percent over the past ten years due to the splitting of larger plots into halves and quarters – meaning that there are now 200 more allotment plots available.
- 5.3. The Association for Public Excellence’s 2022 survey¹⁰ of local authority allotment services reported that nine out of ten councils across the county had noticed a significant increase in demand for allotments in the previous year.
- 5.4. It is worth noting that – to meet demand, the number of plots had increased – but the size of those plots had decreased. This indicates that other councils are also subdividing existing plots to accommodate a greater number of people.
- 5.5. None of the councils surveyed gained any financial surplus from the delivery of their services, in fact almost seven out of ten councils were providing a subsidy for the service to operate – with the remaining authorities simply covering their costs.
- 5.6. A consistent theme from discussions with community groups and stakeholders for this review has been the perception that current allotment land is not being fully utilised. This is acknowledged in the Food Justice Action Plan – which includes an action (see above) to ‘further decrease the waiting time for Council owned allotments’
- 5.7. The Task and Finish Group has not seen information relating to the number of vacant plots – nor any indication about long those plots have been empty. The Council’s Parks and Open Spaces strategy¹¹ notes that:

‘We have... centralised the allotment waiting list system, ensuring the process is clear and accountable. As a result, in the year 2018-19, we reduced the average waiting time by four years.’

Furthermore, it states that: ‘The key to managing waiting lists lies in supporting local allotment committees to manage their sites effectively, ensuring regular maintenance of plots and promoting those allotments in areas of less demand.’

⁹ An open spaces assessment as part of the evidence base for Lewisham’s new local plan identified 50 allotment and community garden sites in the borough: [Lewisham Open Spaces Assessment 2022](https://www.goodfoodlewisham.org/post/at-least-46-community-gardens-and-orchards-in-lewisham)

¹⁰ <https://www.goodfoodlewisham.org/post/at-least-46-community-gardens-and-orchards-in-lewisham>
[Association of Public Service Excellence report on demand for allotments \(2022\)](https://www.goodfoodlewisham.org/post/at-least-46-community-gardens-and-orchards-in-lewisham)

¹¹ [Lewisham’s Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2020-25](https://www.goodfoodlewisham.org/post/at-least-46-community-gardens-and-orchards-in-lewisham)

- 5.8. In addition, applicants are directed towards the community gardening guidance, hosted on the Council's website:

Community gardens

Get advice on setting up your own community garden.

What is a community garden?

Community gardens are unique, locally managed pieces of land developed in response to the needs of the communities in which they are based.

Setting up a community garden

All you need to set up a community garden are:

- a derelict or unused piece of land
- some dedication, commitment and green fingers!

Further advice

Our [guide to community gardens](#) provides general advice about starting, developing and running a community garden, as well as outlining some of the key issues involved.



- 5.9. No officer time nor any additional resources are currently available to support the setting up of new community gardening spaces – although members of the Task and Finish Group heard that, where possible, officers from the parks, sport and leisure team would provide advice to prospective community gardeners. There is limited small grant funding and information on funding support within the voluntary sector to support this =, in line with the Council's commitments to Food Justice.

The demand for growing space

- 5.10. Appendix 2 provides an overview of the allotment sites, plot numbers and waiting times in the borough. This information is some years old and is due to be updated, although it is recognised that this requires time and resources which might otherwise be utilised on managing and maintaining allotment sites. Officers reported to the task and finish group that the waiting list for allotment plots is now approaching 3500 households with the average wait time for a plot nearing seven years. It should be noted that the number of individual allotment plots is less than 1% of the number of households¹² in the borough.
- 5.11. It is also worth noting that information available from the census shows that the number of detached and semi-detached properties (which are more likely to have access to outside/garden space) is lower in Lewisham than the London average- whilst the number of households living in part of a converted or shared house is higher than the London and England average¹³.

Key finding 2: There is significant demand for allotment plots – with every available site in the borough oversubscribed and, Lewisham has many households that do not have access to their own outdoor growing space.

¹² There are more than 130,400 households in Lewisham (ONS data) [link to population data on the Council's website](#)

¹³ [Link to Housing Data in the data observatory on the Council's website](#)

Who is waiting?

- 5.12. No data is currently collected about the people who are on the allotments waiting list. We do not know whether applicants represent a cross section of our communities – and the only way to know if those waiting have moved on – or have decided they no longer need an allotment plot is when they reach the top of the list and are due to be offered a growing space.
- 5.13. Brighton and Hove's 2014-24 allotments strategy¹⁴ is comprehensive and community focused. As part of its development, the Council carried out a consultation with people on the allotments waiting list – asking them whether they still required growing space and seeking to understand their motivations for applying for growing space. This was combined with a review of existing plot holders – by way of comparison. The demographic information provided enabled the authority to consider where there might be gaps in the provision of services and to potentially target efforts towards groups that were underrepresented among applicants.

Key finding 3: We do not have data about the people on Lewisham's allotments waiting list, so we do not know if there are groups that are underrepresented.

- 5.14. Enthusiasm for growing, and an awareness of the potential benefits for physical and mental health are potential reasons for people to join the allotments waiting list – in addition to the desire to grow food and to engage in activity in their local communities.
- 5.15. Opportunities for volunteering and engagement could be made available to people on the allotments waiting list. This might provide benefits for applicants, in terms of the development of their knowledge and skills. It might also provide a consistent source of volunteers for Lewisham's existing community projects. As set out below – the Task and Finish Group found that there are gardening groups that are finding it challenging to recruit volunteers on a consistent basis.
- 5.16. This precisely the approach taken as part of the delivery of Brighton and Hove's allotments strategy:
- 'People on the waiting list should be considered part of the allotment community. There should be great involvement of and opportunities for people on waiting lists (training, information about site open days and volunteering opportunities, and in particular co-working opportunities which has been identified as a 'win-win' option for people on the waiting list). In particular people near the top of the list should be targeted as this has been identified as an optimum moment (once people have a plot they are often too busy working on it). Brighton and Hove 2014-24 allotment strategy, p57
- 5.17. It is clear from Task and Finish Group discussions with Council officers that any involvement of people from the allotments waiting list on allotment sites would have to be carefully managed to avoid any appearance of 'queue jumping' or of favouritism.

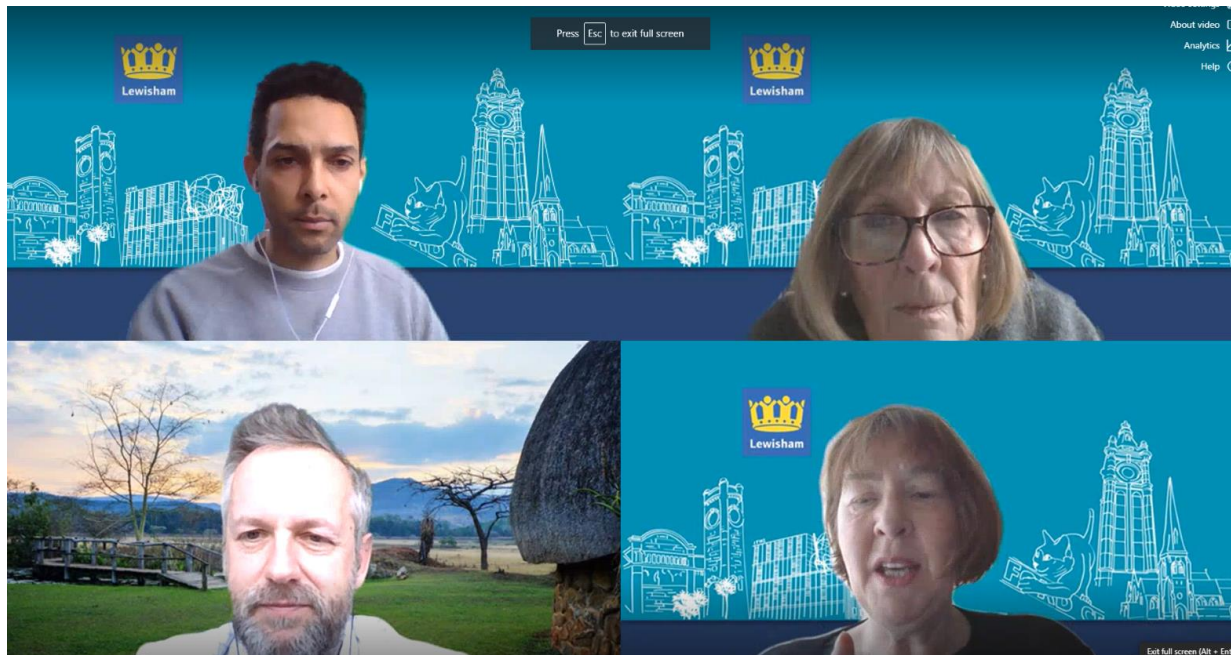
Developing good practice

- 5.18. Seeking to understand how best the Council might make use of its existing growing space, the Task and Finish Group spoke with the Council officers responsible for managing and maintaining allotments. Members were also accompanied on a visit to the Weavers Estate Allotment site in Catford.
- 5.19. It was reported that more people are being added to the allotments waiting list each year.

¹⁴ [link to Brighton and Hove's allotment strategy](#)

And, that there are more applicants each year than there are vacancies (approximately seven times as many applicants as vacancies), which means the list continues to grow.

- 5.20. Due to increased demands for growing space (particularly following the pandemic) many councils have closed their lists to new applicants.



Clockwise from the top right: Cllr Coral Howard (Chair of the Task and Finish Group), Cllr Laura Cunningham, Peter Maynard (Contract Officer, Green Scene), Timothy Andrew (Scrutiny Manager)

- 5.21. In Lewisham, officers have improved the process for allocating plots to people from the waiting list – and recovering underutilised space on allotment land. This has happened principally through improved arrangements with the self-managed allotment association. A centralised process – including a new user portal on the Council’s website has standardised activity between allotment sites – and created a mechanism for engaging with all the 27 self-managed sites together.
- 5.22. Workshops have also been set up to train stakeholders from the Association (this had been recognised for its quality by the national allotment association) and each year, the self-managed sites provide annual documentation to the Council out their activities. An annual meeting was also held to update sites on activity by the Council and to discuss shared issues
- 5.23. The Task and Finish Group heard that during the pandemic, the difficult decision had been taken to freeze all plot allocations and inspections, which may have slowed the process for offers and allocations.
- 5.24. Towards the end of the work of the Task and Finish Group, it was reported that additional officer resources had been made available to support with inspections and administration on the Council’s ten directly managed sites.

The self-managed allotment association

- 5.25. Group members also met with representatives of the self-managed allotment association. A range of issues were discussed. Members heard that the association was set up to: promote good management; help deal with disputes; ensure long-term sustainability; to ensure that grants from the Council were available to all sites; ensure consistency of tenancy agreements across sites and to support the grow to give initiative (which provides food for Lewisham Food cycle). It was reported that one allotment in Lewisham has a

specific plot set aside for growing food for donation and that those with orchards might also supply surplus fruit to local food banks. In the discussion with representatives of the Association, members also heard that:

- The association runs an awards event for the best plots on each site – as well as the best site in the borough and best plot in the borough
- The greening fund had been used to deliver improvements on a number of sites
- Training had been provided by the Council for core responsibilities for site committees, which was welcome.
- At the Association's annual general meeting there was also sharing of information about: repairs and maintenance issues; sources of funding and the implementation of the rules around tenancy agreements.
- The system worked quite well because it did not try to impose too much on site committees and there was minimal interference from the Council if things were going smoothly
- The association was run by volunteers – so there was a requirement to balance activity with time spent growing and working on site.
- There was only one recent example of a community group on one of the self-managed sites – which had caused a dispute with the site committee due to the irregular presence of volunteers and the lack of consistent cultivation.
- There was some informal community group work on allotment sites
- There would be concern if site committees had to maintain community plots via direct management due to their other commitments and responsibilities. If community plots were established on self-managed sites then there would need to be some support from the Council for the coordinators of community plots.
- The Association would welcome more information about community groups and other growing activities across the borough
- Tenancies on allotment sites were only terminated for poor behaviour or failure to cultivate; committees were required to follow a formal process and issue notices in writing
- Some sites had low levels of turnover and some plot holders had been on sites for many years, but this fluctuated over time.
- Half plots and quarter plots worked well for beginners.
- The Council encouraged sites to split plots to enable more people to have allotments.
- Anecdotally, there appeared to be underrepresentation from some groups on allotment sites and good representation of others.
- Open days were carried out (mostly in August) and this was encouraged by the Council
- To join the waiting list – residents had to access the Council's website – which might prevent those who were digitally excluded from accessing allotment sites.
- It was possible that members of some communities were concerned about being welcome on established allotment sites.
- Money from the greening fund had been used to create accessible plots for people with mobility needs.

- The age profile of people on plots tended towards older people – due to the time commitment required to maintain an allotment.
- It appeared that there were more women plot holders than men on some sites (which was a change from years previously – and had occurred ‘naturally’ rather than as the result of specific interventions.
- Lewisham and London had transitory populations – which meant it was difficult for people to maintain their place on waiting lists as they moved about.
- The involvement of schools and community groups in community gardening initiatives helped to improve the diversity of participants.
- Where people end up with an allotment that is not close to where they live then they tend to struggle to maintain it.

Key finding 4: The regularisation of processes and the support for the self-managed allotment association appear to be working successfully.

Key finding 5: Site committees have a number of commitments and responsibilities in addition to each committee members’ requirement to tend their own allotment plot. The creation of new community plots which required direct management - or the addition of new responsibilities for volunteers would add an unwelcome burden.

Visit to the Weavers Estate

- 5.26. Officers recommended a visit to a site which had recently benefitted from improvements to its paths, water supply and its general environment. The paths at this allotment site were in the process of being levelled, with delineated borders, sufficient water access points had been installed across the site and a substantial amount of waste had been removed from the site entrance.
- 5.27. Many of the plots at this site had been split – in order to increase supply with the potential to nearly double the number of available plots on the site from 35 to 60. Vacant plots had been identified and a section at the front of the site that was previously overgrown had been cleared in preparation for cultivation by a group of 30 volunteers.



A new path at the Weavers Estate allotments

Key finding 6: Where there is a community plot on an established allotment site, there is the potential for many people to be involved and challenging allotment plots might best be tackled through collective effort.



A previously overgrown area cleared for planting by volunteers



Peter Maynard in discussion with Councillor Howard

Communities of gardeners, growers, and organisers

5.28. Organisers from the same group of volunteers gardening on the Weavers Estate Allotments are also working on a site in Bellingham, on Firhill Road. The 'Coco Collective' has set up a community allotment plot called the 'Ital Community Garden'. The Collective is focused on encouraging people from Black African and African Caribbean backgrounds to participate in community food growing – with a specific focus on growing culturally diverse foods. The Task and Finish Group visited the Ital Community Garden and heard that¹⁵:

- The site used for the garden was previously untended
- The community garden sits alongside plots tended by individual plot holders.
- The Council enabled the group to access the site during the pandemic – when it was recognised that there was an opportunity for a community group to run on the site – and a need in the local community for community food growing space.
- The work is led by a key volunteer – who works on the project full time.
- Information about the garden is spread through the promotion of events and open days on the site – some of this work is funded by a public health grant.
- Volunteers from different generations work together on the site to share knowledge and ideas.
- Some members said they are keen to access their own growing space – and to utilise the skills and knowledge they have gained from working on the community site.
- There are some concerns about access to opportunities for growing space – as well as the potential for discrimination and unfair allocation of resources that are distributed through the usual funding channels.
- Volunteers on the site talked about the positive benefits the project had on their health and wellbeing – as well as their sense of community.
- One member talked about their past experiences of racism at a previous allotment site.
- Members talked about the importance of engaging in organisations and activities run by 'people of colour'.



Dasheen and tiger nuts growing in a poly tunnel at the Ital Garden

¹⁵ <https://coco-collective-community-hub.business.site/>

“We can’t talk about access to land until we deal with the inequalities that are prevalent in society in general” (Volunteer at the Ital Community Garden)



An unused section of the site at Firhill Road

Key finding 7: Volunteer groups on community gardening sites may be able to engage in a focused way with sections of the community that are underrepresented or marginalised.

5.29. In anticipation of the increased interest in community gardens, Council officers have updated the tenancy agreement for allotment sites – the agreement means that community sites can occupy space on allotment land – under defined circumstances:

‘Community plots are solely for growing produce and providing not-for-profit education and training opportunities about food-growing.

Community groups must have:

- A nominated responsible person who signs the tenancy agreement.
- A constitution, a copy of which has to be submitted to the Council for approval before the tenancy commences and following any subsequent amendments to the constitution.

5.30. In addition:

- The group cannot use the plot, nor permit the plot or the site to be used by others and or any other party, for any events or activities, signage or other promotional materials that are of a political, religious, or social activist nature.
- The group must confine its activities to the community plot. (Any activities on the wider site must have prior permission from the Council. All open-to-public events and activities must be approved by the council following a written application made at least 4 weeks in advance)

Key finding 8: Officers recognise that there are rules required for the creation of community gardens on allotment land. Presently, the Council is the sole arbiter of these rules.

5.31. The Task and Finish Group spent time exploring other gardens and groups in the borough. Members heard what could be achieved through the collaboration of housing providers, the Council's parks team and local schools at Friendsbury Gardens:

- Friendsbury Gardens provides a tranquil space for people to relax and appreciate nature – it balances gardens/growing space/play space and park features in a small area.
- The change of a previous fly-tipping site into a thriving garden, community space and haven for wildlife is a model for success.
- The community aspect of growing is an important part of the makeup of the gardens.
- Work with local schools and inter-generational learning are also key
- There is an important aspect of community gardening in helping people to better understand food - where it grows and where it comes from.
- There are some concerns about anti-social behaviour and stealing.
- The work of individuals/key organisers is often key. There are sources of funding, but these tend to be limited to time-limited initiatives/projects

Key finding 9: Community growing spaces can be set up on small plots. The dedication and commitment of volunteers is key to making these gardens thrive. This activity can amplify (or multiply) any support from the Council's 'green scene' team or Glendale.



Play space under willow at Friendsbury Gardens

Growing volunteers

5.32. Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL) has established an 'allotment of refuge'¹⁶ on the border of Lewisham, in Honor Oak Park. The Task and Finish Group visited the allotment and heard that:

- The allotment provides a place for people to garden together in the tranquillity of a green hillside overlooking the neighbourhood of Honor Oak Park. It is part of the One Tree Hill Allotment Society site and is governed by its rules (it was noted that the allotment society has acted with generosity and kindness in supporting AFRIL's values and ambitions)
- The allotment of refuge comprises a piece of land equivalent to three plots with additional space for a wooden shelter and polytunnel.
- The project is particularly focused on supporting AFRIL members and others who have experienced forced migration and in providing a community of welcome through growing food together which contributes to the AFRIL Helping Hands food bank.
- Volunteer recruitment with this group brings particular challenges, some based on their previous trauma, others on their current experiences of the UK hostile environment, delays in Home Office decisions and living in destitution in cramped temporary housing or hotels.
- Solutions to volunteer engagement AFRIL has found to work include - translations of leaflets into home languages, developing community ambassadors from within the existing AFRIL volunteers to engage in outreach, providing escorts to the site and providing bus fare travel costs for adults with no recourse to public funds and people experiencing destitution.
- Despite the various challenges, the AFRIL allotment currently has 23 registered volunteers half of whom are people who have sought sanctuary. More volunteers would be welcome on the site.
- There was an ongoing challenge in ensuring that the call out for volunteers reached the sections of the community that most needed access to the space.



A green haven amongst the crops at the Allotment of Refuge

¹⁶ Links to a video about the allotment and its benefits: <https://www.afril.org.uk/2022/03/17/afrils-allotment-of-refuge/>

5.33. The Group also visited the Wildcat Wilderness in Catford, and heard of similar challenges in juggling support for volunteers, managing the requirements of groups using the space and applying for funding and grants:

- The number of volunteers varied from season to season.
- Organisers made use of many different sources of volunteers and workers – including group activities for corporate groups; schools, and local community groups - as well as young people in the youth justice system through ‘community payback’. There were also open days for the community.
- Volunteers worked on a range of different planning, planting, clearing, and food growing activities. Local councillors were also involved in the scheme (including Cllr John Muldoon). There is a core team of volunteers but organisers welcome people to join.
- There was a balance between providing mental and physical health benefits to the local community and growing food. Local schools and local groups successfully used the garden to produce crops. There were also sections for growing herbs and plants for dying fabric.
- The Wilderness had recently lost one of its principal sources of funding – so additional organisational time was required to apply for grants and funding. Work was also taking place to create income from plant sales as well as open days, and (minimal) charges for groups using the site.
- Vandalism was a significant problem – there had been repeated break-ins and criminal damage at the site, which had resulted in the destruction of community spaces including: the loss of the community kitchen clay ovens and the community classroom space.
- Work to engage with local young people had not been successful in limiting damage at the site. CCTV monitoring equipment had also been destroyed.
- Local schools were proactive users of the site – which enabled children and young people to experience wilderness and open space in the midst of the urban environment
- There were plans to create new fencing and expand the site to the south (dependent on agreement from landowners and funding)



Cllr Cunningham looking at the orchard planting in the Wildcat Wilderness

Key finding 10: Organisers and co-ordinators may have to spend time applying for funding, responding to requests for information and carrying out administrative tasks in the limited time they have available. This can take them away from the core work of gardening and food growing.

- 5.34. Task and Finish Group members were interested to visit more examples of good practice where the community was working in partnership to sustain a food growing project. Members visited the Abbots Hall healthy lifestyles centre and heard how the café, playing pitches on site and the lifestyle centre maintained a garden with the help of volunteers – with the produce being used in the café.
- 5.35. Another successful scheme in Lewisham is the Sydenham Garden, which provides a therapeutic space for people referred by local health providers:
- The garden was started by volunteers – including a doctor from Sydenham Green (who was Chair until 2019).
 - The current project runs on two sites – including: the resource centre on Wynnell Road and De Frene Road (which was previously an allotment site). The sites cater to different groups
 - Referrals for projects are made by Lewisham community wellbeing and mental health professionals can refer directly
 - Waiting lists are maintained on a project by project basis
 - Projects are access by referral only – local people can apply to be volunteers
 - The garden has many links with other wellbeing projects - including other community gardens and it is able to direct people to other groups (that people do not have to be referred to (Members heard that there were volunteers directed to the Wildcat Wilderness on the visit there.))
 - The project raises additional funds (and engages with the local community) through festivals, open days, and plant sales
 - The Garden also hosts community workdays for local people – particularly those who do not have access to gardens
 - The growing and management plan for both sites is developed with co-workers and service users, it is planned to meet the needs of service users with different levels of ability and is reprioritised on a seasonal basis
 - Throughout the spring and summer – workers at the gardens enjoyed community meals together
 - People who visit the site – and see the work being carried out recognise the benefits of gardening on service users' health and wellbeing.
 - There is an onward referral processes for people who have finished their therapeutic support and still want to be involved in gardening.
 - The garden is more about the people than the plants



Flowers growing at De Frene Road (a former allotment site)

Key finding 11: Lewisham has examples of outstanding practice. There is a network of gardens and green spaces that share ideas, redirect volunteers and opportunities for development.

- 5.36. Good Food Lewisham is compiling a list of community gardens and allotments, it has identified 53 growing spaces in the borough. It holds regular network meetings for volunteers and organisers working in Lewisham’s green spaces, growing projects and gardens:
- Lewisham Local set up a network for food banks during the pandemic – which was now supported by a dedicated member of staff. There were regular online sessions for groups to support one another and to develop collective solutions.
 - The general sense is that there is “not enough funding, not enough volunteers, and not enough food, and it is getting worse” for food growing and gardening projects.
 - Lewisham Local also had also worked with Council officers and local groups on the development of the food justice action plan to share groups’ on the ground experiences.
 - Sustainable food places had provided additional funding to support Lewisham’s food growing work. This was funded for a year. However, the funding was only for a day a week (split across two roles).
 - Initially, a list of community gardens had been created – and work was taking place to develop the next level of projects such as: tool banks; enabling groups to visit one another and sharing best practice.
 - There was a balance on most sites between the community and health benefits of growing food and the output of crops. Most sites wanted to maximise both (community benefits and crops) but did not have the capacity to grow sufficient terms of food in terms of space, volunteers, or consistent skills.

- There was dissatisfaction with the availability of allotments in the borough. Feedback from local groups was that there was concern about the volume of un-used and under-utilised allotment space in the borough. Good Food Lewisham held regular network meetings – at which vacant allotment land was discussed. Members of the network might be willing to help with tasks to free up allotment land.
- Members of Lewisham Local’s food growing network would welcome updated information about sources of funding from the Council (such as the next round of neighbourhood community infrastructure levy funding)
- There were a lot of community gardens in Lewisham – but many of them did not have enough volunteers.
- Lewisham’s community gardens would benefit from increased co-ordination and knowledge sharing between them. The setup of the self-managed allotment association might serve as a model.
- The community gardening pages on the Council’s website had very little information on them. Consideration could be given to the content and links available from these pages.
- Small actions from community groups could create momentum and activity that would be beneficial in the medium to longer term.
- Volunteering that was carried out through the Rushey Green timebank previously benefitted some gardeners and growers – consideration could be given to how this could be revived.
- A physical map of growing spaces in the borough could be produced – with contact details. A map of people involved in community food growing and food justice would also be helpful.

Key finding 12: Lewisham Local is bringing together growers and gardeners in the borough to help deliver the food justice action plan and to tackle some of the challenges facing projects with volunteers. However, resources are tight, and funding is temporary.

Community growing in social housing developments

- 5.37. Lewisham Homes, the council’s social housing management company, is responsible for managing over 19,000 homes and over 676,250 square metres of green spaces. The management of those green spaces costs Lewisham Homes, and thus its tenants, almost £1,165,000 per year.
- 5.38. Historically, social housing residents would manage plots outside their homes without any formal agreement from Lewisham Homes. However, plots became overgrown and unmanageable when residents no longer undertook the necessary maintenance.
- 5.39. Lewisham Homes now encourages tenants to adopt communal plots as community gardens – for either individual or group management – and has a formal procedure under which residents may apply to do so. When residents apply to manage a plot, other residents in the area are consulted for a period of two weeks before the application is determined. Should an application be approved, the applicants agree with Lewisham Homes that they are responsible for maintaining the plot and meeting all the associated costs of doing so, that access to the garden must remain open to other residents, that the garden must remain free of hazards and livestock and that the garden must not attract pests or vermin.
- 5.40. Lewisham Homes regularly inspects community gardens. Should a garden not be properly

maintained, the responsible tenants have four weeks to remediate the issues, after which Lewisham Homes has the right to reclaim management of the plot.

- 5.41. There are six community gardens on Lewisham Homes land, in three of which produce is grown. There is one dedicated community growing site – on Achilles Street in New Cross. There is also an orchard in one development, with another in the process of being introduced.
- 5.42. The Task and Finish Group welcomes Lewisham Homes' openness to, and encouragement of, community gardening and growing in its developments. However, as set out below at 5.56., the need for social housing tenants to initiate community gardening and growing in their developments may be excluding those who would benefit the most from it.

Community growing in Edinburgh's social housing developments

- 5.43. At quarter 1 of 2023, there were 54 community gardens in and around Edinburgh's council estates:
- Twelve were commissioned by the council and installed by contractors
 - Two were installed as part of new housing developments
 - Thirty-two were built by the community/third sector
 - Eight are run by the City Council's allotments service
- 5.44. Only 16 Edinburgh council estates had limited or no community gardening provision.

Council policy

- 5.45. Edinburgh City Council (ECC) found via successive surveys that its tenants desired quality community gardening and growing opportunities. ECC views the availability of such opportunities to be a valuable component of 20-minute neighbourhoods and has included in its [Food Growing Strategy](#) an action to *support and promote food growing initiatives on Council housing land and in [its] schools, ensuring these initiatives also provide health, well-being and environmental benefits to communities.*
- 5.46. Lewisham Council recently consulted on a new Local Plan. Its spatial strategy supports the 15-minute neighbourhood concept in as far as town centres being able to meet most of residents' need within a short active journey from home.¹⁷

Edible Estates

- 5.47. To deliver its above policy, ECC contracts a local community interest company, Edible Estates, which has over ten years of experience of providing community growing opportunities in Edinburgh, to deliver and support the majority of community growing sites in council-owned social housing developments. The contract is worth £500,000 split equally over four years – although, it is likely that costs would be higher if a similar scheme was introduced in Lewisham, due to comparatively higher salary and other costs in London.¹⁸
- 5.48. Edible Estates is to deliver two new gardens per year in Edinburgh council estates. The two gardens being built in 2023/24 were to cost £30,000 to £40,000 each. Edible Estates has successfully secured funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, further to that provided

¹⁷ [Lewisham Local Plan: Proposed Submission Document \(January 2023\)](#), para 3.12

¹⁸ https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/compare_cities.jsp?country1=United+Kingdom&city1=Edinburgh&country2=United+Kingdom&city2=London; and <https://livingcost.org/cost/edinburgh/london>

by ECC.

- 5.49. Edible Estates' community gardens are of significantly varying scale: from 4 to 70 beds of up to 4' by 12'. Each garden contains a bespoke shed housing tools and cooking facilities, serving as form of community hub or centre.
- 5.50. Community gardens in Edinburgh are intended to have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of residents and increase social capital and community resilience in estates. Such impacts are not limited to those who participated in community gardening; the Task and Finish Group heard community gardens foster a sense of community by showing that people in an estate care about it and its residents.

Key finding 13: There are examples of councils that have committed substantial funding to deliver this work – which had resulted in increased participation. Costs in Lewisham would be higher due to costs in London.

- 5.51. Edible Estates primarily supports two community gardening models:

The Neighbourhood Garden model

- Gardens comprised of growing beds serve a particular estate, with individual households or groups assuming responsibility for individual beds, with some peripheral shared elements such as orchards.
- This model is as much about enhancing community wellbeing as providing sustenance for participants – this is particularly important as many homes in Edinburgh council estates are apartments without gardens, as is the case in Lewisham.
- The large number of growers involved in Neighbourhood Gardens has proven conducive to gardens becoming self-sufficient and no longer requiring support from Edible Estates.

The Community Market Garden model

- Sites comprising multiple growing beds which are collectively managed by residents with the support of a gardener.
- Some produce is kept by growers and some is provided to community cafés and food banks, including two food banks established by Edible Estates.

- 5.52. Edible Estates also directly manages five gardens and there are further community gardens in Edinburgh council estates which are managed by charities or target specific groups, such as people with mental health and wellbeing needs, without support from Edible Estates.
- 5.53. Gardens which represent best practice include [Magdelene Community Garden](#), [Lochend Secret Garden](#), and [Murrayburn Community Garden](#) – all readers are encouraged to watch the videos at the first two links.
- 5.54. Edible Estates most often approaches residents regarding the introduction of a community garden rather than the other way around. Usually, a small number of residents are opposed to introducing gardens due to concerns regarding them attracting antisocial behaviour; however, such concerns have not manifested once gardens have been built. In one case, a patch of tarmac where stolen cars used to be left and set alight had been converted into a community garden, removing or at the very least displacing that antisocial behaviour in addition to the more usual benefits of community gardens. It is pertinent to note, however, that community gardens in Edinburgh are usually secured by way of external fencing, in contrast to Lewisham Homes' policy.
- 5.55. The Task and Finish Group heard that a small core of committed residents can sustain a

community garden. When groups are ready manage a garden, Edible Estates supports it develop the necessary infrastructure to do so – e.g. formal constitution, bank account, etc. – and doesn't impress self-sufficiency on gardens which are not ready to be self-sufficient.

- 5.56. The Managing Director of Edible Estates told the Task and Finish Group that the more deprived an area is, the more support is usually required to sustain community growing in it. It was noted in this context that grant funders often ask about the extent to which a project is community-led.
- 5.57. Edible Estates is additionally seeking to develop a community factoring model under which residents can be paid to manage green space (not including gardens) in council estates in a manner which maximises their community benefits. It also provides social enterprise services to help sustain gardens – e.g. by providing opportunities for disadvantaged young people to gain work experience in its gardens.
- 5.58. The Task and Finish Group was told by Edible Estates that benefits of ECC using it as the council's delivery vehicle/partner included:
 - Its ability to raise further external funding
 - Its pre-existing expertise in delivering and supporting community gardens filling gaps within the council
 - Its network of gardens providing mutual support, sustaining struggling ones.

Green shoots: schools growing food

- 5.59. Task and Finish Group members attended a network event for local schools, arranged by Lewisham Local. Members heard that there is increasing interest in use of outside space and gardening in schools and that more and more primary schools are looking to start community gardens and/or forest schools in their grounds. Some are more advanced than others, such as St Mary's primary school in Ladywell and Rushey Green primary school. St Winifred's primary (in Lee) has just started growing in raised beds and will sell produce in Borough market when its ready. And, Torridon Primary School has removed 15 parking spaces for teachers to develop a forest school area. Others are struggling with lack of gardening knowledge, not knowing how to access funding, or not knowing how to get things off the ground. There was less representation at the meeting from secondary schools.

Key finding 14: There is the potential for the Council to lead the way on work with schools through increased coordination. Representatives from each school could be invited to share ideas, form a network and support each other.

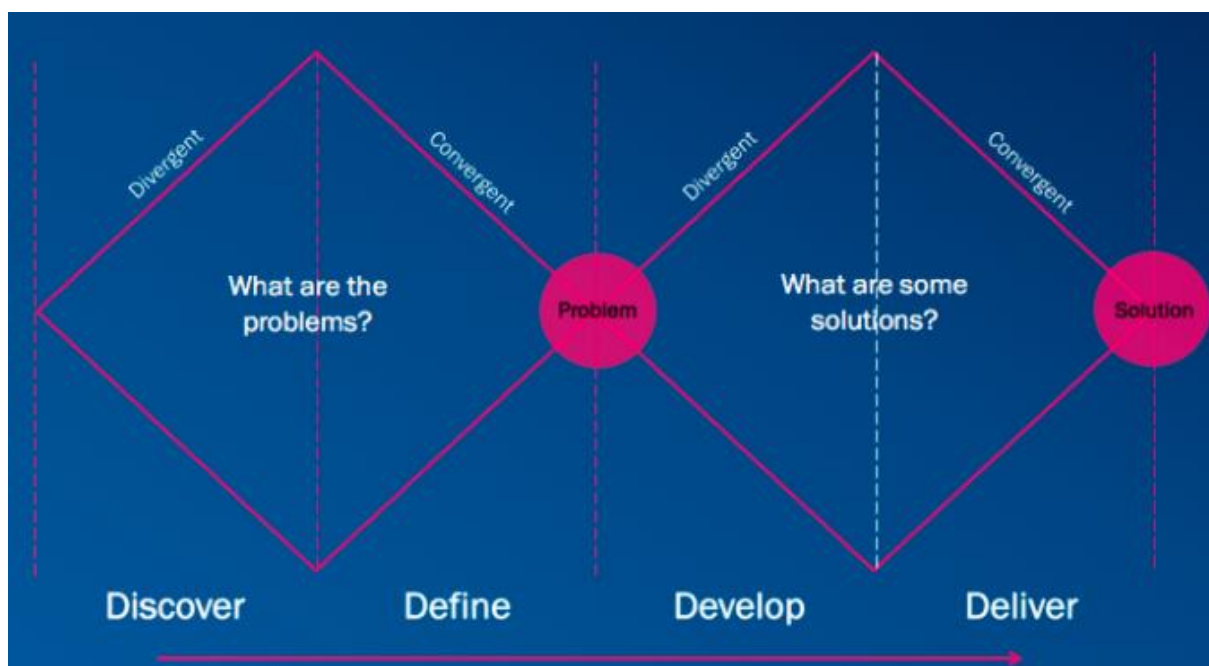
- 5.60. It is usual practice for schools to incorporate different projects into their overall curriculum. This means that the use of outside space may support other areas of the delivery of the curriculum. Members at the event heard that schools are teaching children about cooking as well as growing, learning about nature, sustainability and moving to net zero and, using it to support healthy living, well-being, and more vulnerable pupils, amongst other positive developments. Members saw this first hand at the Wildcat Wilderness garden, which has around 350 children and young people visit weekly. This might provide an example of good practice for 'growing young gardeners' and providing access to green space for those schools who might not have space of sufficient staffing to develop something on site.
- 5.61. Very few schools appear to have dedicated staff resources to enhance their gardening and food growing activities. Members heard that it usually falls to a teacher, passionate about supporting children's learning of gardening in addition to their day job.
- 5.62. Further information could be sought about how different schools are currently financing this work. It is clear that there are some who have attracted significant levels of donations and external support. Nonetheless, one off donations of time and money are unlikely to be able to sustain the good work that is taking place. What may be required is funding for an experienced organiser who could co-ordinate and support schools for the benefit of young gardeners.

6. How the Task and Finish Group was run

6.1. The Task and Finish Group was run as a project, with the intention of being:

- Collaborative – scrutiny officers, directorate officers and councillors working together to address a topical issue of concern
- Time limited – to suggest solutions in a timely manner, with allocated tasks, progress checks and deadlines
- Flexible – with a mixture of formal and informal meetings, visits, research, user engagement etc.
- Focussed on solutions – the aim was to take evidence from a wide range of sources and good practice to develop affordable, practical solutions that are evidence based and implementable and that will have a positive impact on the lives of residents.

6.2. A 'double diamond' approach was taken which split the project into two parts (diamonds). The first part was the 'discovery' stage. The issue (the topic of the task and finish group) was the starting point and then research and evidence collection was carried out to understand the issue and define it more clearly. Once the issue was well understood and well defined, the second stage began. Further research and evidence collection was carried out, seeking inspiration from elsewhere and working with a range of different stakeholders and experts to investigate potential solutions. This led to the Group's clear set of carefully considered recommendations.



Intended outcomes

6.3. The work of the task and finish group was intended to support work to improve the following outcomes:

- Improved access to opportunities for community gardening across the borough
- Ensuring that access to opportunities is equitable
- Increased awareness and sharing of best practice.

Monitoring and ongoing scrutiny

- 6.4. Responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Group's recommendations will be led by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 6.5. Additionally, there are options for all the Council's scrutiny committees to continue this work:
- Children and Young People Select Committee could further consider the potential for growing spaces and gardens to establish links with schools and providers of youth services.
 - Healthier Communities Select Committee has responsibility for overseeing the Council's response to the cost-of-living crisis and the implementation of the Food Justice Action Plan. The Committee might consider how the Task and Finish Group's recommendations can be achieved in combination with the objectives in the Action Plan.
 - Housing Select Committee might further consider the potential for community growing on housing land.
 - Public Accounts Select Committee has previously reviewed the potential for income generation and commercialisation of Council services. Members of this committee could be invited to consider whether there are opportunities to better utilise Council land by small scale commercial or charitable organisations (as is the case in Hackney).
 - Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee is responsible for overseeing the Council's equalities objectives. Members of this Committee may wish to further consider whether the collection of additional data on the allotment waiting list and on plot holders could be utilised to meet those objectives.
 - Sustainable Development Select Committee has responsibility for the scrutiny of the Parks and Open Spaces strategy – as well as the oversight of the Council's asset register. If/when there is demand for additional community gardening space, the Committee might make suggestions based on its scrutiny of the Council's approach to its assets.
- 6.6. Committee work programmes are a matter for the committee members and are based on the scrutiny prioritisation process.

7. List of terms

7.1. This list of terms incorporates the standard usage that was applied throughout the work of the group:

Term	Definition
Task and Finish Group (TFG)	As a result of Lewisham's Local Democracy Review, the Local Democracy Working Group recommended some changes to the Council's practice and approach to scrutiny, including the introduction of time limited Task and Finish Groups (TFGs) to look at topical issues of importance or concern. TFGs are established by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, comprised of five councillors, and must conclude their work within 12 months.

8. Report authors and contact

8.1. If you have any questions about this report, please contact Lewisham Scrutiny Managers:

- Timothy Andrew (timothy.andrew@lewisham.gov.uk) or -
- Ben Awkal (benjamin.awkal@lewisham.gov.uk)

Appendices:

Appendix 1: list of engagement and evidence gathering

Appendix 2: allotments information 2018

Appendix 1: List of engagement and evidence gathering

Session	Date
ITAL community garden	19 October 22
Brockley: Coulgate Street and Friendsbury Gardens	26 October 22
Abbotshall healthy lifestyles centre	5 November 22
Mayow Park community orchard	15 November 22
Sydenham garden resource centre and De Frene Road	16 November 22
Trewsbury Road allotment interview with chair of the association	November 22
First formal meeting of the Task and Finish Group	30 November 22
Downham Matters discussion with the Chair	1 December 22
Officers from the Council's Sports, Parks, and Leisure Team	27 January 23
Good Food Lewisham quarterly network meeting	31 January 23
Visit to Grow Lewisham and The Plot	5 March 23
Lewisham self-managed allotment association	6 March 23
Task and Finish Group review meeting	14 March 23
Site visit with officers to Weavers Estate allotment	15 March 23

Visit to Grow Lewisham: open day	7 May 23
Edinburgh Growing Together	23 May 2023
Discussion with Growing Communities (Hackney)	23 May 2023
Lewisham Local: Good Food Lewisham	24 May 2023
Wildcat Wilderness volunteer afternoon	25 May 2023
St Mary's therapeutic garden	06 June 2023
AFRIL allotment of refuge	13 June 2023
Discussion with the Cabinet Members for Culture, Leisure and Communication/Communities, Refugees and Wellbeing	13 June 2023
Good Food Lewisham quarterly network meeting	15 June 2023
Task and Finish Group final report and recommendations	4 July 2023
Submission to Mayor and Cabinet	19 July 2023

Appendix 2: allotments information 2018

Name of Site	Approximate waiting time * (Aug 2018)	No. of plots on site	No. waiting Aug 2018
Ballamore Road	7	5	36
Barmeston Road	3	26	45
Blackhorse Road	7	26	88
Blythe Hill	9	18	207
Broadmead	5	26	22
Castillon Road	9	92	88
Chinbrook Meadows	10	68	88
Clarendon Rise	10	7	137
Dacre Park	10	45	232
Deloraine Street	9	27	214
Edward Street	8	4	128
Exford Road	3	51	60
Firhill Road North	3	29	52
Firhill Road South	4	21	44
Hazelbank Road	8	65	144
Hurstbourne Road	10	22	90
Jim Hurren	2	10	2
Kendale Road	5	48	29
Knapmill Way	5	27	33
Lee and District Land Club	9	56	62
Leslie Silk	4	9	10

Longton Nursery	4	58	27
Meadow Close	4	28	32
Oldstead Road	4	14	19
Priestfield Road	7	32	85
Romborough Gardens	10	21	72
Royal Naval Place Stage I	8	20	162
Royal Naval Place Stage II	8	12	121
St Mildreds Road	9	17	80
Sedgehill Road	5	19	27
Slaithwaite Road	13	11	106
Stanley Street	7	7	118
Sydenham Park	8	30	167
Taylor's Lane	5	42	58
Trewsbury Road	4	58	96
Weavers Estate	3	35	74
Windlass Place	8	31	57
	Average 6.675675676	Total plots 1117	Total waiting 3112

Additional sources and background reading

Association of Public Service Excellence: state of the market 2022 review

<https://apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/members-area/briefings/2022/22-33-state-of-the-market-allotments/>

Brighton and Hove allotment strategy: <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/OD49%20Allotment%20strategy%202014-2024.pdf>

Capital growth (supporting food growing in London): <https://www.capitalgrowth.org/>

Case studies of London community gardens and city farms:
<https://londonharvestfestival.org.uk/community-gardens-and-growing/>

Coco Collective <https://coco-collective-community-hub.business.site/>

Edible Estates (food growing in social housing): <http://www.edibleestates.co.uk/benefits-of-community-growing/>

Federation of city farms and community gardens (information about how to make a community site work): https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/system/files/project_allotment.pdf

Good food Lewisham (part of Lewisham Local): <https://www.goodfoodlewisham.org/>

Grow Lewisham (community food growing project) <https://www.growlewisham.com/sites>

Growing in the community https://www.nsalg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/growing-in-the-community_bookletA4.pdf

Herbal Hackney (social enterprise offering training * workshops from a Hackney garden):
<https://www.hackneyherbal.com/>

Lewisham Food Justice Action Plan: <https://lewisham.gov.uk/-/media/0-social-care/food-justice-report.ashx>

Lewisham Parks and Open Spaces strategy:

<https://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s73570/Parks%20and%20Open%20Space%20Strategy%202020.pdf>

Lewisham Local: community food growing projects

<https://www.lewishamlocal.com/community-gardens-food-growing-projects-in-lewisham/>

Local Government Association (2009) overview:
<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/place-grow-supplementary--736.pdf>

MIND: nature and mental health

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/ideas-to-try-in-nature/>

MIND: research into the benefits of spending time outdoors

<https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/over-7-million-have-taken-up-gardening-since-the-pandemic-new-research-shows-spending-more-time-in-nature-has-boosted-nation-s-wellbeing/>

National Allotment Society: donating fresh food to food banks

<https://www.nsalg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/donations-to-food-banks.pdf>

National Allotment Society guidance for Councils and Landlords

<https://www.nsalg.org.uk/resources-and-downloads/landlords-and-councils/>

Public Health England: local action on health inequalities improving access to green spaces

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/355792/Briefing8_Green_spaces_health_inequalities.pdf

Social Farms and Gardens: support/workshops for community gardens in London

<https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/your-area/london>

Social Farms and Gardens: rules surrounding the individual use of allotment plots:

<https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/system/files/allotlawandcommgrowing.pdf>

Southwark Allotment Expansion guarantee (food growing on housing land):

<https://allotmentexpansionguarantee.commonplace.is/about>

SLAM (Grounding project supporting refugees & asylum seekers)

<https://maudsleycharity.org/case-studies/grounding-project-grows-hope-in-the-garden/>

Small holdings and allotments act 1908: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Edw7/8/36>

Sustain: <https://www.sustainweb.org/resources/files/reports/Sustain-Briefing-Councils-and-Food-Growing.pdf>

Thrive: using gardening to change lives

<https://www.thrive.org.uk/get-gardening>