Item 7

OTLEY TOWN COUNCIL

ASSET MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: 15th June 2026

PREPARED BY: Senior Admin Officer

REPORT TITLE: General Update on the Management of the Council Allotments

1. Purpose of the Report

This report provides an overview of the current position of the Council's allotment service, including occupancy, demand, compliance, maintenance, administration, and financial performance. It also outlines key issues for consideration, including a fencing quote for Cross Green and options for the 2027 rent review, in the context of maintaining a sustainable and self-financing service.

2. General Position of Allotments

There are currently 285 allotment plots, with 9 vacancies. Officers and inspectors are actively working to reduce these through an improved tenant onboarding process. New tenants are now required to attend a pre-tenancy viewing and sign a Plot Viewing & Acceptance Agreement to ensure expectations are clear from the outset.

Vacancies are spread across six sites, with two at Cross Green currently condemned. Full inspections were completed in April 2026, confirming current site conditions. Demand continues to increase significantly, with 164 applicants currently on the waiting list. This has risen steadily from 5 applications in 2022 to 15 in 2023, 48 in 2024, 55 in 2025, and 35 applications already received in 2026 to date. This consistent upward trend demonstrates sustained and growing demand, placing increasing pressure on availability and reinforcing the need for efficient plot turnover and proactive management.

3. Fencing Quote – Cross Green

A quote of £1,600 has been received from Chevin Fencing to replace deteriorating fencing at a livestock plot on the Cross Green site. The contractor has advised that the fence is "tired" and noted that current shed positioning may require some replacement posts to be installed trackside, which could create potential access or operational issues. They indicated that replacing the fence along its existing alignment would avoid this, although this would represent an additional cost.

Consideration must be given to the Council's move away from livestock plots, the expectation created by previous Council-funded fencing works, and the likelihood of tenant dissatisfaction if repairs are not undertaken. The decision should balance cost, future site use, and tenant impact.

4. Livestock Compliance – Cross Green

Following concerns raised in 2025 regarding livestock plot management, including a complaint to Leeds City Council Environmental Health, a more structured approach to compliance has been introduced. Previous reporting highlighted the need for improved oversight, clearer tenant guidance, and stronger partnership working due to the additional regulatory requirements associated with livestock keeping.

A joint approach is now in place, with Leeds City Council leading on inspections, tenant engagement, and compliance monitoring, and contacting plot holders directly to ensure requirements are understood. Otley Town Council will support this by maintaining records and carrying out annual documentation checks, liaising with Leeds City Council where needed. This arrangement strengthens oversight and supports improved compliance with current regulations.

5. Maintenance Priorities (2026)

Maintenance work identified for 2026 includes minor repairs such as a noticeboard bracket and padlock at Gallows Hill, a tap repair at Whitebridge, fascia replacement at Ings Lane plot 6, and general noticeboard repairs. Quotes are being sought for the Whitebridge gate, while tree works identified in recent surveys are ongoing. These works will be prioritised based on safety and available resources.

6. Asbestos Removal Update

An asbestos survey was commissioned in July 2024 to assess the presence of asbestos across all ten allotment sites. Asbestos was identified on seven sites, with most classified as low-risk material. Following this, the Council approved removal works at six sites at a cost of £2,241.78, which were completed in March 2025.

The remaining asbestos at Cross Green is a more complex issue, involving areas of 'medium risk' material within building structures, requiring specialist removal. Indicative costs include approximately £5,413.10 for external wall materials and £4,143.76 for cladding, contributing to a total estimated cost of around £15,000 for full removal.

The Council has a responsibility to manage asbestos risks in a reasonably practicable way, considering both safety and financial implications. Previous decisions recognised that this work may need to be phased or incorporated into future budgets. Although it was agreed in July 2025 to seek quotes and progress this work from the allotment budget, there has been no further progress to date.

7. Administration

Administrative support remains under pressure, with the Allotment Inspector assisting in managing emails, data entry, warnings, and outstanding actions due to limited capacity within the office. As a result, current service delivery is heavily reliant on inspector support, without which progress would be significantly reduced.

8. Tenancy Agreement Update

The agreed revised tenancy agreement will be issued to all tenants in late November to early December 2026 and become affective from 1st January 2027. This will ensure updated terms are in place for the new tenancy year and support improved clarity, consistency, and compliance across the service.

9. Allotment Rent Review

As agreed by the Asset Committee in July 2025, allotment rents are to be reviewed annually, with incremental increases considered in line with inflation and to support the long-term objective of operating the service on a self-financing basis.

The financial position for the 2025–2026 financial year shows a continued imbalance between income and expenditure. Total income amounted to £27,919.39 against expenditure of £35,812.81, resulting in a net deficit of £7,893.42. These figures represent the most accurate position available at the time of writing and demonstrate that, despite fluctuations in income across the year, overall annual income does not fully cover the cost of operating and maintaining the service.

Expenditure is driven by essential service requirements, including inspections, maintenance, tree works, water provision, and contractor costs. While there is a balance held within Council reserves, the exact figure remains unconfirmed, and reliance on this balance is not sustainable in the longer term. There are also significant future financial pressures, most notably the anticipated asbestos removal works at Cross Green, estimated in the region of £15,000–£20,000, alongside ongoing maintenance and operational demands.

With inflation currently at approximately 2.8%, a 1p increase equates to a 2.22% uplift, broadly in line with inflation, while a 2p increase equates to 4.44%, exceeding inflation. Members are therefore asked to consider three options for implementation from 1 January 2027:

- **Option A**, no increase, which would maintain current rent levels but represent a real-terms reduction in income and increase reliance on reserves
- **Option B**, a 1p increase, generating approximately £411 per annum and broadly aligned with inflation
- **Option C**, a 2p increase, generating approximately £822 per annum and providing a greater contribution toward reducing the current deficit and supporting future expenditure.

The impact on tenants remains minimal. Based on an average plot size of approximately 145 square metres (derived from total site area across all plots), and a previous average annual bill of £80.72, a 1p increase would raise the average cost to approximately £82.56, an increase of around £1.84 per plot per annum, while a 2p increase would result in an average cost of approximately £84.39, an increase of around £3.67 per plot per annum. Allotment rents therefore remain comparatively affordable, even with an increase.

In accordance with tenancy agreements, the Council is required to provide a minimum of three months' notice of any rent increase, meaning any approved change must be communicated to tenants by **September 2026** to take effect from **January 2027**. Overall, the allotment service continues to operate at a deficit, and any adjustment to rent levels should be considered in the context of balancing affordability with the long-term financial sustainability of the service.

10. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

1. Note the contents of this report
2. Consider the Cross Green fencing quotation
3. Approve a rent increase option for 2027:
    A. Option A – No increase
    B. Option B – 1p increase
    C. Option C – 2p increase