

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 17 November 2020

Allotment and Food Growing Provision Update

Executive/routine	
Wards	All
Council Commitments	44

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee:
- 1.1.1 notes the measures undertaken to date to increase allotment provision and to support and expand the network and the number of community gardens and food growing initiatives; and
 - 1.1.2 approves the process for applicants referred to the service by medical professionals for horticultural therapy.

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Executive Director of Place

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Report

Allotment and Food Growing Provision Update

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides an update on the allotment and food growing provision supported by the Council and considers whether priority should be given to those applicants referred for horticultural therapy by medical professionals.

3. Background

- 3.1 Council commitment 44 is to increase allotment provision and support and expand the network and the number of community gardens and food growing initiatives.
- 3.2 At its meeting of [26 March 2019](#) the Culture and Communities Committee considered a report on allotment and food growing provision and requested that further investigation be undertaken to determine the feasibility of giving priority to those applicants referred for horticultural therapy by medical professionals.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (the Act) places a duty on local authorities to provide allotment sites, to take reasonable steps to ensure that individuals do not remain on a waiting list for more than five years and to ensure that a waiting list does not exceed half the number of allotment plots provided. To meet its legislative duty the Council needs to create approximately an additional 1,500 allotment plots, doubling the current Council provision.
- 4.2 There are an estimated 69 community gardens focusing on food growing across the city. The Council supported their creation and development through the provision of land, as well as funding from the Edinburgh Integrated Joint Board.
- 4.3 Edinburgh's allotment strategy focuses on four objectives: ensure adequate provision of allotments, develop a robust management system for allotments, improve the customer experience and adopt revised regulations.

Objective 1: Ensure adequate provision of allotments

- 4.4 There are currently 1,913 allotment plots within Edinburgh, of which 1,586 are managed directly by the Council. Over the last year the number of allotment plots in the city increased by 80, the majority of which were created, with support from Council officers, at a privately-run allotment within Lethem Park, Ferry Road; a park owned by the Boys Brigade.
- 4.5 The Council's waiting list for an allotment is currently 3,292. During the Covid-19 lockdown (April-July 2020) there was a threefold increase in the number of plot applications received, with a total of 1,095 applications received during this period. 615 applicants have now been on the service waiting list for more than five years.
- 4.6 Small increases in the city's allotment plot stock continues. Supported by neighbourhood improvement funding, a new site at Piershill Square is approaching completion - adding 10-12 plots. A 24-plot site funded by the Barratt Housing development within the Newcraighall area (near Whitehall Street) is scheduled to open later this year and an additional six plots are to be added to the Leith Links allotment in 2022.
- 4.7 A report on capital funding for new allotments was considered by the Finance and Resources Committee on [1 February 2019](#). However, resourcing new allotments continues to remain an unfunded capital pressure.
- 4.8 37 sites identified as having the potential for development as allotments or community gardens were considered by the Council's Property Asset Transfer Group in October 2019. However, it was noted that many sites are recognised as being in "common good" and so for them to be developed as allotments a change of use known as appropriation is required. The process for appropriation requires court consent and this cost needs to be balanced against the benefit of creating the allotment. Other sites are located on Housing land that must be purchased at market value.
- 4.9 From the list of sites, and in partnership with the Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust, six locations at the former Lismore playing fields, Clerwood walled garden, Little France Park, Gypsy Brae, the former Leith Links bowling greens, and Fernieside Recreation Ground have been identified as having greatest suitability for development as allotments and/or community gardens. Subject to consultation, it is anticipated that the sites have the potential to add an extra 200 allotment plots to the Council provision. In each case, given the absence of internal capital funding local people interested in a plot will be encouraged to form an allotment group to support raising funds for the development and management of these sites.
- 4.10 In addition to the allotment plots, there are more than 20 community gardens on Council land associated with the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and therefore primarily for the use of Council tenants. The design, facilities and use of these gardens is varied.

4.11 There is support from Council tenants for further investment in community gardens on HRA land. The use of a partner organisation to support the delivery and management of community gardens is being explored and a pilot project in the Hutchison area is currently underway. The scope of the Tenant Group Grants system has also been expanded to support community garden projects.

Objective 2: Develop a robust management system for allotments

4.12 The regular inspection of allotment plots ensures cultivation standards are maintained and uncultivated plots re-let to waiting list applicants. Inspections are undertaken on a two-week cycle during spring / summer and a three-week cycle during autumn / winter. In 2019/20, seven allotment tenants had their tenancy terminated, 80 formal warnings on cultivation standards were issued, and over 500 communications were made encouraging individuals to improve their allotment plot.

4.13 Close partnership working with the Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations (FEDAGA) continues. After the completion of a tenant contact permissions exercise, the Council was able to share some tenant contact details with the Federation - greatly improving their ability to engage with Edinburgh's allotmenters directly.

4.14 Allotment rentals fees are set annually as part of the Council budget process. Fees for 2020/21 are:

Full Plot	per Year	£126.00
Half Plot	per Year	£63.00
Full Plot - discount	per Year	£63.00
Half Plot - discount	per Year	£31.50

4.15 A 50% discount is available to individuals who are of State pensionable age, unemployed or registered student. Proof of age is used as evidence of an individual's pensionable status and eligibility for a discount. Currently this is set at 65 years of age, but in line with pension changes will increase to 66 years in October 2020.

4.16 A planned consultation on amending the allotment rental discount criteria and the fee for half plots was postponed as a consequence of Covid-19 measures. It is now proposed to complete a consultation exercise on fees, in partnership with FEDAGA, in the coming months; the outcome of which will influence the Council's 2021-22 budget setting process.

Objective 3: Improve the customer experience

4.17 An on-line allotment application process was introduced last year which has improved customer access and ensure that the administration of the waiting list remained manageable within existing resources.

4.18 Investigations are underway to develop an online payment system to replace current paper billing and improve record management.

Objective 4: Adopt revised regulations

- 4.19 At its meeting of [28 January 2020](#), the Culture and Communities Committee approved draft allotment regulations for public consultation. Statutory requirements in relation to consultation must be fulfilled prior to the regulations being made final.
- 4.20 Allotment tenants and the wider public were given an opportunity, through the Council's consultation hub, to make representations in relation to the proposed regulations. An analysis of the 224 individual responses received to the consultation is detailed within Appendix 1 and shows wide-spread agreement with the new regulations. A consultation review meeting with Council officers and FEDAGA representatives took place in August 2020 and collaboration is currently on-going to agree formal changes to the regulations that best reflects the many positive comments and suggestions received.

Priority for horticultural therapy referrals

- 4.21 Within Edinburgh, horticultural therapy programmes are arranged by several organisations, including Thrive Edinburgh, Trellis, Bridgend Growing Community, SAMH (Redhall Walled Garden), Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society (Bridgend Allotment and Saughton Park), Cyrenians, and many of the city's community garden initiatives.
- 4.22 However, consultation with FEDAGA for allotment plot prioritisation for horticultural therapy referrals raised several concerns. It was felt that prioritisation would be unfair on existing waiting list customers; could be used to bypass the long waiting list; would be expensive to manage (given the temporary nature of most referrals); and the physical demands associated with the maintenance of an allotment plot could have a negative effect on an individual's health.
- 4.23 It is therefore recommended that horticultural therapy referrals received by the Allotment service be guided towards existing voluntary organisations, and that, subject to rental/access agreements being established, small growing spaces be created within allotment sites for allocation to individuals referred to the service for horticultural therapy.
- 4.24 Help, support and mentoring on maintaining small growing spaces will be organised by FEDAGA and local site committees. It is anticipated that the ground area tended would be similar to the 'apprentice beds' set up at Inverleith Allotment that give waiting list customers an opportunity to trial allotmenting on a small scale.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 In partnership with FEDAGA and the Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust, communities of interest will be encouraged to form groups to fundraise for and develop new allotments at locations that the Council is able to accommodate these.
- 5.2 Small beds established with support from FEDAGA within existing allotment sites will be made available, for short-term lease, to individuals referred to the service for horticultural therapy.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The leasing of land for horticultural therapy and community-led allotment / growing space construction involves officer time and incurs administrative costs. These can be captured within the existing revenue budget.
- 6.2 Funding to develop new sites will be led by newly established community groups and supported by Council officer time.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 Consultation undertaken with FEDAGA and allotment tenants on proposed amendments to allotment rental fees.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [City of Edinburgh Council Website – Allotment information](#)

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1: New Allotment Regulations: Summary Consultation Report.
- 9.2 Appendix 2: Location of Council Managed Allotments.

New Allotment Regulations: Summary Consultation Report

APPENDIX 1

This report was created on Friday 28 August 2020 at 15:51.

The consultation ran from 18/02/2020 to 27/03/2020.

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Any further comments	5

Question 1: What is your email address?

Email

There were 208 responses to this part of the question.

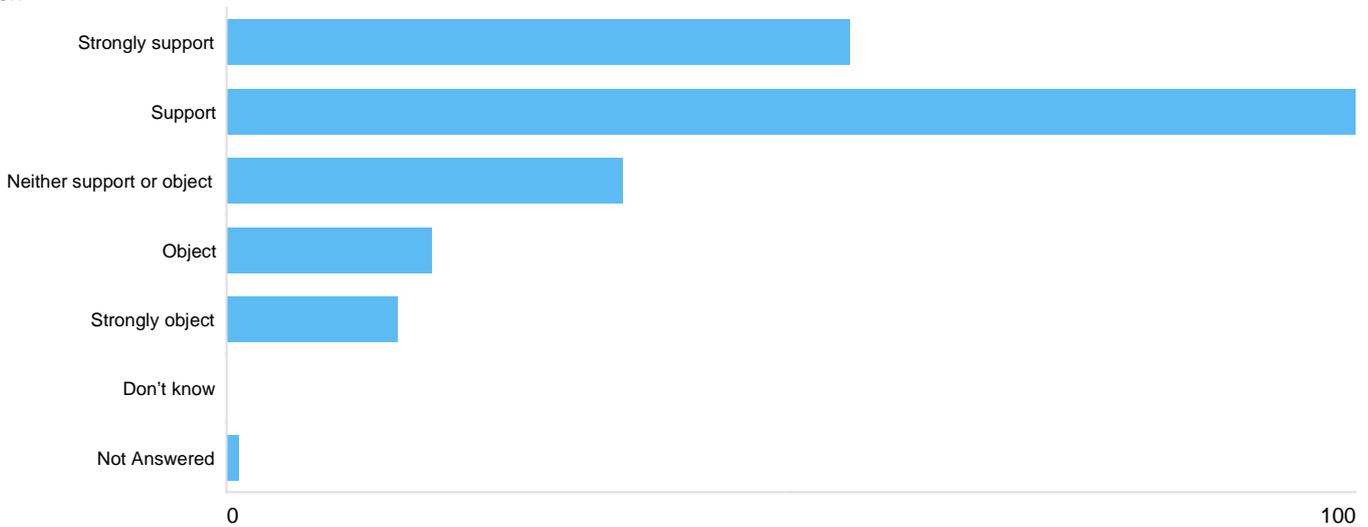
Question 2: Do you have any concerns over the definitions presented? For example an 'Allotment Plot' shall mean any single area of land designated as an allotment plot by the Council within an Allotment Site.

Definition Comments

There were 173 responses to this part of the question.

Question 3: To what extent do you support or oppose the allotment allocation method for new sites; plots are to be allocated on a first come basis and when practical at least 50% are offered to person living within 1km of the site?

Allocation



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly support	55	24.55%
Support	100	44.64%
Neither support or object	35	15.62%
Object	18	8.04%
Strongly object	15	6.70%
Don't know	0	0%
Not Answered	1	0.45%

Question 4: Are you happy to pay allotment plot rental in advance?

Rent



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	214	95.54%

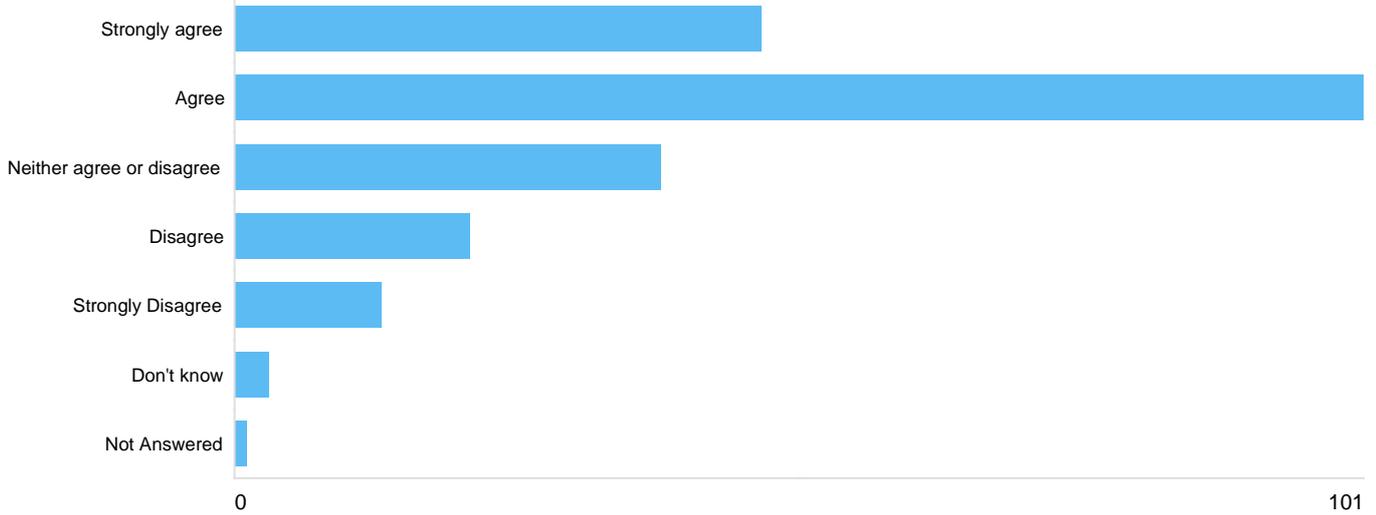
No	9	4.02%
Not Answered	1	0.45%

Rent Comments

There were **39** responses to this part of the question.

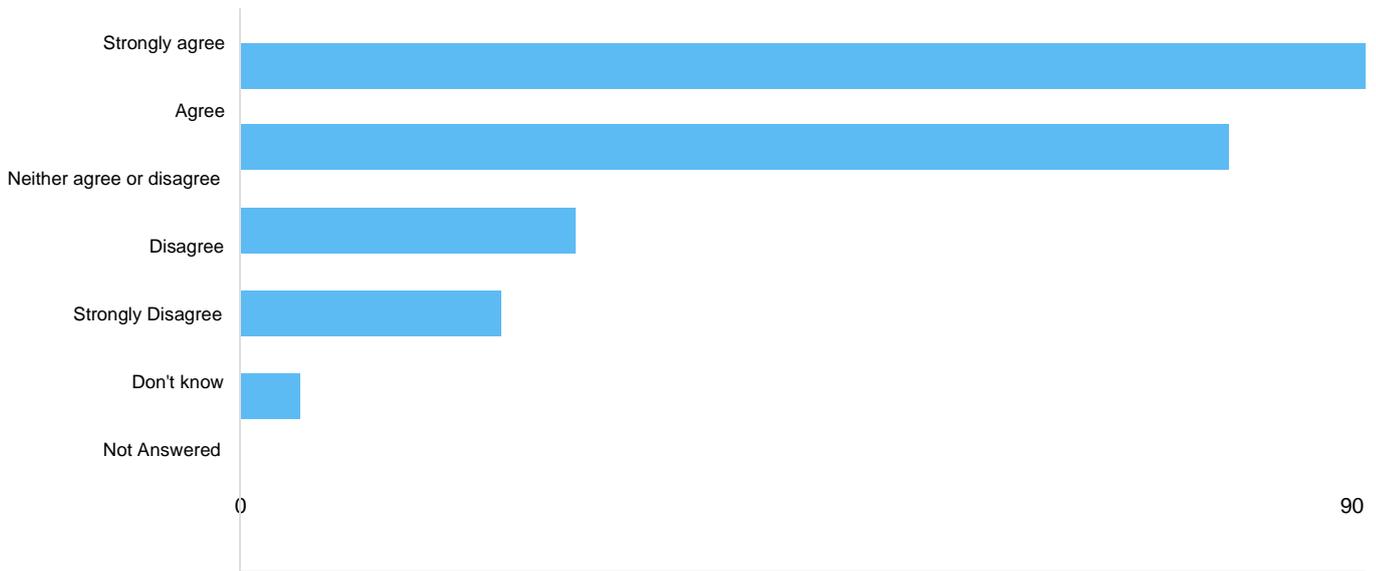
Question 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:

Matrix - The restrictions on the size of new sheds, greenhouses and polytunnels?



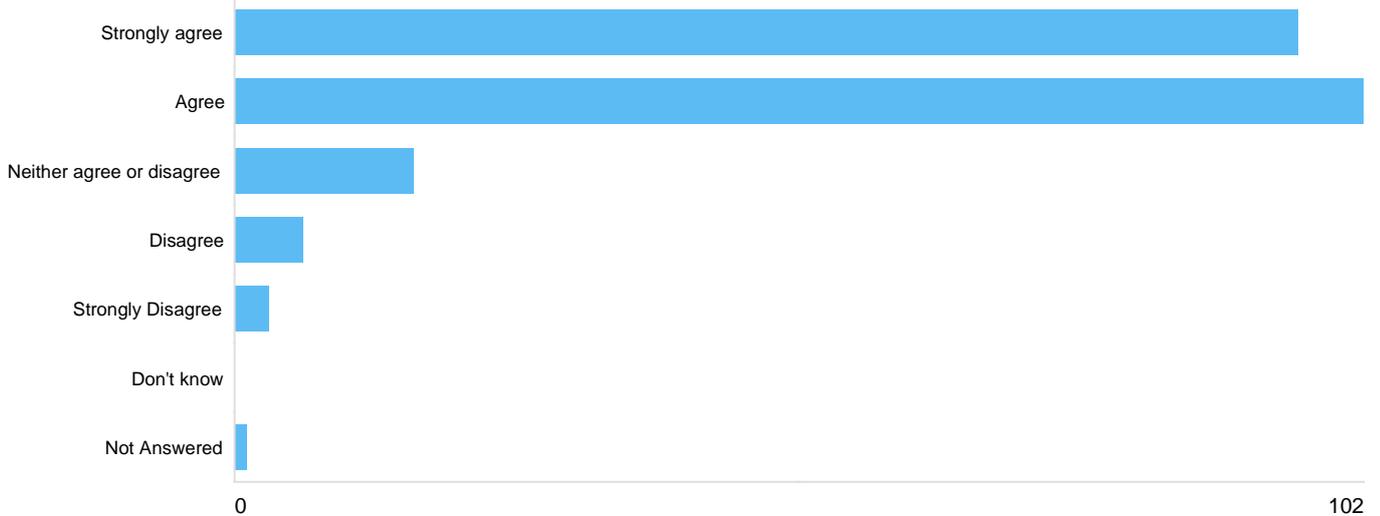
Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	47	20.98%
Agree	101	45.09%
Neither agree or disagree	38	16.96%
Disagree	21	9.38%
Strongly Disagree	13	5.80%
Don't know	3	1.34%
Not Answered	1	0.45%

Matrix - Livestock should not be allowed on allotments.



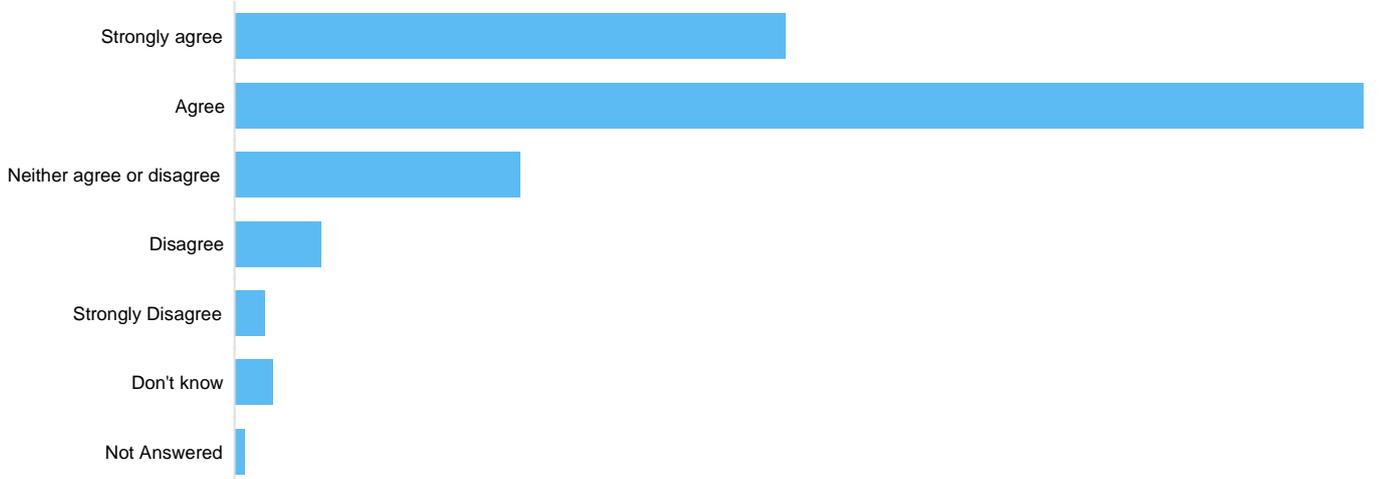
Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	90	40.18%
Agree	79	35.27%
Neither agree or disagree	27	12.05%
Disagree	21	9.38%
Strongly Disagree	5	2.23%
Don't know	1	0.45%
Not Answered	1	0.45%

Matrix - The Council should be allowed to enter and inspect an allotment at any time.



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	96	42.86%
Agree	102	45.54%
Neither agree or disagree	16	7.14%
Disagree	6	2.68%
Strongly Disagree	3	1.34%
Don't know	0	0%
Not Answered	1	0.45%

Matrix - The allotment enforcement and termination procedures



0

119

Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	58	25.89%
Agree	119	53.12%
Neither agree or disagree	30	13.39%
Disagree	9	4.02%
Strongly Disagree	3	1.34%
Don't know	4	1.79%
Not Answered	1	0.45%

Question 6: Are you happy for the Council to be the final arbitrator for allotment disputes?

Arbitrator



199

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	199	88.84%
No	23	10.27%
Not Answered	2	0.89%

Question 7: Do you agree that an allotment should be at least 75% cultivated?

cultivation



197

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	197	87.95%
No	25	11.16%
Not Answered	2	0.89%

Percentage

There were 36 responses to this part of the question.

Question 8: Do you have any concerns on the Acceptable Use Restrictions?

Acceptable Use Restrictions

There were 148 responses to this part of the question.

Question 9: Please write any further comments in the box below.

Any further comments

There were **108** responses to this part of the question.

Appendix 2 - Location of Council Managed Allotments

