

## Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2007: Increase allotment provision for all and entitle Universal Credit claimants to a free plot, lodged by Carol Ann Weston

### Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

#### Allotment policy, legislation and parliamentary activity

Legislation on allotments is contained in Part 9 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. [Guidance](#) to local authorities was issued in 2019. The legislation includes duties on local authorities to take reasonable steps to:

- Provide sufficient allotments to keep waiting lists at no more than half the number of allotments, and
- Ensure that someone doesn't wait more than five years for an allotment (the guidance notes that this comes into effect 8 years after local authorities first make regulations under s.115 of the Act)

The Act is [currently being reviewed](#) by the Scottish Government, although the focus is mainly on community ownership and may not include too much consideration of allotments.

Part 9 of the Act was considered [by the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee](#) in 2022 as part of its' post-legislative scrutiny of the 2015 Act. The Committee found considerable unmet demand for allotments and made a number of [recommendations](#). The report noted that;

“The Committee appreciates that local authorities do not have enough resources to simply create large numbers of new allotments to meet all demand.” (para 79)

The [Minister responded in January 2023](#) and the Committee [took evidence from the Minister](#) later that month. The Minister said that although the Scottish Government had a clear role:

“The vast majority of the responsibilities lie with local authorities, which are best placed to make decisions based on their local demography, geography and resource. I want the Scottish Government to be a helpful broker of progress on that, but I do not want to impinge on local decision making.”

While emphasising that the situation differs between different local authorities, she acknowledged that:

“Waiting lists are long and growing; as you have identified, the availability of land remains a problem.”

### **A raised bed rather than a tennis court sized allotment?**

During its inquiry, the Committee heard about the health and social benefits of community growing; but also heard from a number of witnesses that a full-size, traditional allotment plot (up to 250 sq meters, or the size of a doubles tennis court) is not for everyone. In reality, one or two raised beds in a community garden could be sufficient for many part-time or beginner growers:

“Community gardens take many different forms, ranging from small raised beds on available land through to community gardens and orchards. For some people they provide an introduction to growing, helping to build their confidence and perhaps move on to seek their own allotment space. For communities they bring people together, reducing isolation and and strengthening ties. Sometimes they are an additional source of food for people most in need.”

Lou Evans from the [Community Growing Forum](#) told the Committee about the importance of this broad approach to community growing:

“We need a whole load of different models... Although allotments are one form... and are a brilliant model, they are not the only model. We need a whole load of diverse models and they need to be highly visible in a way that many allotment sites simply are not.”

The availability of land is a major barrier to increased allotment/community garden provision in many areas (for example East Lothian, Edinburgh and Aberdeen). However, the Committee visited some innovative community projects in Glasgow and Edinburgh where brownfield sites and other urban spaces are being successfully utilised (see for example the work of [Urban Roots](#)). There are [hundreds of community gardens](#) across Scotland, often run and organised by community and third sector organisations.

Community gardens are not covered by the requirements of the Community Empowerment Act, except the need for Food Growing Strategies to identify and increase the availability of land suitable for community growing.

### **Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022**

This broad ranging Act requires local authorities, the Scottish Government and others to produce plans and establish a “Food Commission”. These are yet to be produced.

### **Universal Credit**

The petitioner asks for all those on Universal Credit to be given an allotment, referring to the “harsh and brutal” benefit regime. In January 2023 there were

478,766 people in Scotland in receipt of Universal Credit. Universal Credit is gradually replacing six 'legacy' benefits. In the three years 2017-20, there were, on average around one million people in Scotland getting Universal Credit or an equivalent benefit ([HBAI on StatXplore](#))

Universal Credit is for people of working age who are unemployed, in low-paid work or unable to work due to ill-health or caring responsibilities.

It does not include people of pension age. The main benefit for low income pensioners is Pension Credit, with 127,080 people in receipt in Scotland in August 2022.

Research published in 2021 ([Understanding Society](#)) estimated that 63,674 people experienced psychological distress between 2013 and 2016 due to the introduction of Universal Credit. A [large scale study](#) of the mental health impact of Universal Credit is currently ongoing, led by Glasgow and Newcastle Universities, and due to complete in 2025.

### **Food Banks**

The petitioner refers to “the undignified food bank mentality.” The Scottish Government consulted on a draft plan to end the need for food banks. The [consultation analysis](#) was published in October 2022, noting that “a few respondents” suggested increased resourcing for community gardens and allotments. Similar issues arose in the 2022 [consultation on Local Food for Everyone](#), - the ‘local food strategy’.

### **Camilla Kidner and Greig Liddell**

#### **Senior Researchers**

March 2023

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

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