

# **THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HOUSING AND PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT 'ALLOTMENTS AND COMMUNITY GROWING: THE IMPACT OF PART 9 OF THE COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT ACT'.**

## **Introduction**

The Scottish Government thanks the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee (the 'Committee') for their report and welcomes their findings following the inquiry of Part 9 of the Community Empowerment Act 2015 (the 'Act'). I note the acknowledgement of the many positive developments made since the Act came into force and welcome the Committee's recommendations for where further improvements could be made. We would like to thank the local authorities, community councils, individuals, allotment associations and other third sector organisations for sharing their extensive experience and knowledge with the Committee.

When the Act was passed in 2015, few could have foreseen the global events which would follow in the coming years. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted to many the importance of access to green space and ignited a passion for gardening and 'grow your own' food across wider society. As well as the disruption and ongoing repercussions of Brexit forced upon Scotland, we now find ourselves in the midst of a global cost of living crisis exacerbated by the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine. These events have further demonstrated the importance that sustainable, locally grown food has to individuals, families and communities across Scotland. As the Committee's report rightly sets out, growing our own food, whether that be on an allotment, in a small community garden or back gardens, has wide reaching benefits. Our local authority partners, who were required to meet their obligations under the Act alongside managing their local Covid-19 response and recovery plans, have directly witnessed the effect the renewed interest in community growing has had on already lengthy allotment waiting lists. We wish to thank them for their continued hard work meeting their duties laid out by the Community Empowerment Act, specifically Part 9.

In the response below the Scottish Government addresses the issues raised in the Committee's report where either a response was sought or otherwise where a response is considered helpful.

## Coordination, collaboration and leadership

55. The Committee considers that increased leadership and oversight at a national level of the implementation of the Act could help drive improvement and consistency, and increase access to allotments and growing spaces. This should include the collection of data from across local authorities to improve transparency and enable benchmarking. The preparation of annual allotment reports by local authorities would be explored as a mechanism for data collection.

56. The Committee also recommends that the Scottish Government could benefit from liaising with the Welsh Government about the progress being made there to improve access to allotments and could explore supporting local authorities through making grants available.

### The Scottish Government response

Part 9 of the Act consolidates, updates and simplifies the previous statutory regime regarding allotments by bringing it together in a single piece of legislation. The 2015 Act places a number of duties on local authorities and it is ultimately up to the local authorities themselves to decide how best to carry out the duties placed on them by Part 9.

The Scottish Government has provided the leadership and oversight of implementation required of it by Part 9 of the Act. The Scottish Government has also published guidance and established a tripartite group, consisting of representatives from Scottish Government, local authorities and the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society, to help with this task. The aim of the Tripartite Group was to develop constructive dialogue around Part 9 during the passage of the Bill and to monitor the early stages of Part 9 implementation.

The work of the Tripartite Group has continued, albeit at a reduced level as officials in the Good Food Nation Team initially prioritised work on the Good Food Nation Bill, and then turned their focus to the development of the national good food nation plan required by the legislation. We are currently reviewing the structure and terms of reference for the Tripartite Group to ensure its aims remain relevant or whether there needs to be a change of focus. We will take the Committee's recommendations with regards to increased leadership and oversight on board when completing this evaluation but note that given the current budgetary constraints there may be limited capacity to take this work forward in the immediate future.

We support the Committees' call for the Scottish Government to support relevant parties to collaborate and share practice at a strategic level however, as the Committee are aware, this will need to be balanced against the budgetary and resourcing constraints facing the Scottish Government at this time.

The Act places a legislative requirement on the local authorities to publish an annual allotment report. The legislation clearly defines the mandatory information to be

included in the annual allotment reports including, but not limited to, the location and size of allotment sites and the number of plots on each site. A number of local authorities have met this requirement as detailed in Annex A of the Committee's report and we wish to thank those local authorities for doing so.

It is important for the Scottish Government to understand what has prevented some local authorities from preparing annual allotment reports. To date, the Scottish Government has not collated the data contained from the published reports as there is no statutory obligation for local authorities to update Scottish Ministers on the publication of their annual allotment reports, nor is the Scottish Government required by the Act to collect these data.

Detailed guidance to support local authorities through the process of drafting, consulting and publishing their food growing strategies, which we will discuss in further detail later in this response, is available on the Scottish Government website.

We recognise that equivalent guidance to support the creation of annual reports is not available and acknowledge this may be a factor in the low number of published reports. Through the Tripartite Group, we will work with local authorities to consider how best to encourage and support the publication of these reports.

We commend the work that has been undertaken by the Welsh Government since 2020 as part of the Wales Allotment Regeneration Project and the subsequent Resilient Green Spaces project. Since publication of the Committee's report, Scottish Government officials have contacted counterparts in Welsh Government. An initial meeting has taken place to discuss the work underway in Wales to improve access to allotments and how this is being progressed. We will review whether there are any aspects of the approach taken by the Welsh Government that could be replicated in Scotland.

64. The Committee recommends the creation of a national partnership forum which could foster cross-sectoral collaboration, mutual support, and enable local authorities to share expertise and good practice.

65. Whilst the Committee recognises the financial challenges facing both national and local government, it believes a forum would not require significant resources and would harness much of the existing dedication and energy of partners from across authorities, allotment associations, community groups and the third sector.

66. With resources from the Scottish Government this could be led by an external partner such as the Community Food Growing Forum, building on its existing collaborative work with local authorities and the third sector.

## The Scottish Government response

The Scottish Government notes the Committee's recommendation in relation to the creation of a national partner forum. We acknowledge the importance of knowledge transfer and collaboration between all parties involved in community growing including third sector organisations, local authorities and the Scottish Government. That is why, since 2012, we have supported the work of the Community Growing Forum Scotland (previously known as Grow Your Own Forum Scotland), most recently through funding awarded to GrowGreen Scotland to co-ordinate this work. The forum is a voluntary collaboration of partners that support and practice growing in our communities and we would encourage anyone with an interest to join the network to benefit from the opportunity to collaborate and share good practice with counterparts nationwide.

Careful consideration will be given to the need for, and remit of, a national partner forum to ensure it provides the appropriate mechanism to achieve the outcomes as set out in the Committee's recommendation. Whilst we acknowledge and appreciate the dedication and energy of stakeholders across the community growing community, there will be costs associated with establishing and ongoing facilitation of such a forum. Given the current economic and financial constraints felt across all areas of government, both national and local, providing ring-fenced funding will be challenging. In order to provide value for money, the proposed forum would require very clear aims and expectations and a way of measuring whether the desired outcomes were being met. We will give further consideration to establishing a forum and will explore what would be the most appropriate, transparent and value for money mechanism of facilitating such a group, by either the Scottish Government or a trusted external partner.

## Integration with wider priorities and legislation

71. It's clear that the cross-cutting importance of allotments and food growing should be reflected in wider strategies. The benefits would be two-fold, providing opportunities to support food growing, and also ensuring that allotments and other sites in turn contribute to wider priorities. The Committee hopes that this report helps reiterate their value and asks the Scottish Government to proactively ensure those connections are made and acted upon.

72. There is immediate opportunity for the Scottish Government to do this while completing its work on the National Planning Framework, developing proposals for a new Biodiversity Strategy, and when it implements the new Good Food Nation Bill. Similarly, it is currently consulting on a Land Reform Bill and an Agriculture Bill, both of which may have implications and opportunities for community food growing. Again, the Committee asks the Scottish Government to take this into consideration during the development of the new legislation.

73. The new Good Food Nation Act requires good food nation strategies to be produced by local authorities, health boards and the government. There is clearly a potential overlap with the existing requirement for local authorities to prepare Food Growing Strategies which may cause confusion; the Scottish Government should ensure it provides clarity about the different objectives of both and how they intersect.

### The Scottish Government response

The Scottish Government acknowledges the Committee's comments with regards to the importance of allotments and community food growing. It has real benefits for our health, both mental and physical, our society and our environment. It also contributes to our goal of Scotland becoming a Good Food Nation by enabling people from all walks of life to enjoy and learn about nutritious and healthy food. We are committed to ensuring cross policy connections continue to be strengthened between allotment and community food growing policy and wider Scottish Government strategies.

The Committee also noted ongoing work to complete National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and this will be addressed later in the response.

Food growing strategies are intended to help local authorities explain how they will meet their legislative requirements under Part 9 of the Act. They are intended to empower local authorities to explain how they are going to promote and encourage their citizens to participate in all the different forms of community growing and to outline their vision of how they will support the expansion of community growing, supporting the delivery of the Scottish Government's aim of increasing the availability of grow-your-own land.

The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022 requires Scottish Ministers to produce a national good food nation plan. The national plan, which is currently in the very early

stages of development, will set out the main outcomes for Scotland in relation to food-related issues, as well as indicators and measures to track progress and policies that contribute to achieving the outcomes. Local authorities and health boards are in turn required to produce local good food nation plans that have to set out key outcomes that are appropriate for the local level while also having regard to the overarching outcomes set out in the national good food nation plan. We committed during the passage of the Good Food Nation Bill through Parliament that we would provide appropriate support to local authorities and health boards to help develop their good food nation plans, which is a route we could use to ensure there is clarity about the different purposes of good food nation plans and food growing strategies.

The local good food nation plans provide the overarching framework, and key objectives to be achieved within a local area in relation to the food system. While food growing may play an important role in achieving outcomes of local good food nation plans it may not be the key focus, which may vary by local authority. Local authorities may, therefore, decide to reference their local food growing strategies within their local good food nation plans but the way in which the links between the local good food nation plans and the food growing strategies is made within each of these documents is, rightly, left to each local authority to decide.

## Allotment waiting lists

88. The Committee recognises the numerous demands on local authorities to improve services, but considers there are some relatively simple measures which could deliver benefits at scale and reduce waiting lists. These include:

- Regularly reviewing allotment waiting lists to establish if other growing opportunities would meet people's needs, such as community gardens
- Monitoring the location of people on waiting lists and identifying opportunities to link people together so they can best use their rights under the Act, as has been trialled in Glasgow
- Where no sites are operated by a local authority (such as East Ayrshire), it could establish a means by which people can note their interest in being provided with a growing space, such as a register
- Taking opportunities to increase awareness of allotments and growing spaces.

### The Scottish Government response

The Scottish Government recognises the ongoing challenges faced by local governments in relation to allotment waiting lists. We recognise that these recommendations relate directly to local authority actions and we encourage local authorities to look at innovative ways to reduce allotment waiting lists, for example, by using their local food growing strategies as a mechanism to investigate and promote alternative growing models such as community garden projects. Highlighting alternatives available may encourage local residents to grow in sites out with the traditional setting of allotments.

Through the Tripartite Group, we will work to establish what challenges local authorities face in meeting their statutory duties relating to waiting lists and will work together to share good practice and identify possible mechanisms by which waiting lists could be reduced.

The Act does require local authorities to maintain a list of persons who have made a request to the local authority to lease or sub-lease an allotment, which applies even where a local authority doesn't own or lease any allotment sites.

## Access to land

96. The Committee agrees that any future revisions of the Place Standard Tool should consider how food growing could better be incorporated.

101. The Scottish Government has been carrying out a review of Permitted Development Rights. The Committee recommends that the review includes consideration of whether land for growing could be a category of permitted development, which would simplify the planning landscape. The Committee believes that as a result Planning departments would benefit from a reduction in caseload, and communities would face fewer hurdles to obtaining land.

103. The Committee agrees that food growing needs to be a category of land use included within frameworks such as local place planning. Land is clearly in demand to meet housing needs, but it's important that housing developments take into account the importance of access to green and growing spaces.

104. The Committee considers that closer working between local authority planning departments and council officers responsible for allotments and green spaces would lead to better integration of growing opportunities into new developments. Local Development Plans prepared by local authorities should also include access to green and growing spaces.

### The Scottish Government response

The Place Standard tool contains 14 themes, each supported by a set of prompts to enable and support community discussion about a place. The latest revised Place Standard released in Autumn 2022 includes local food growing as part of the prompt in considering the use of natural space, to clearly include the matter in community thinking about the strengths and weaknesses of their places.

The Place Standard with a Climate Lens, launched in September 2022 and designed to be used alongside the revised Place Standard, also includes specific prompt references to local food growing to generate more discussion under the 'Big Challenge Prompts' (net zero and climate resilience). Furthermore, it also introduces this topic for more in-depth discussion under the 'Streets and Spaces' and 'Facilities and Services' themes.

The Place Standard tool Design Version which was released earlier in 2022 has included community growing in considering a potential design intervention under three themes, namely streets and spaces, natural spaces and housing & community, to clearly highlight the matter in design thinking of new or existing places.



As the Committee notes, the Scottish Government is carrying out a review of permitted development rights (PDR). The review is being taken forward in phases, with each phase focussing on specific development types. We have committed to consider new and extended PDR for allotments and community growing schemes as part of the overall review programme. The phasing of the review is kept under review to ensure it reflects wider Scottish Government priorities – for example, the recent letter issued by the Planning Minister and Chief Planner confirmed that in light of the current cost and climate crises, Phase 3 will focus on domestic and non-domestic renewable energy equipment. More information about the review programme can be found on Scottish Government’s Transforming Planning website.

The Committee also noted ongoing work to complete National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). The Revised Draft NPF4 was laid in the Scottish Parliament on 8 November 2022 for approval. It has clear support for opportunities for green infrastructure and local food growing, with revisions clarifying the role of local development plans in addition to the role of decision making in supporting community food growing and allotments. NPF4 also supports production and processing facilities to support local food production in rural areas. The Central Scotland Green Network national development identified in NPF4 includes land for allotments or community food growing.

NPF4 will form part of the statutory development plan once approved by the Scottish Parliament and adopted by Scottish Ministers. This means it can be used in day-to-day decision making by planning authorities.

The consultation on ‘Local Development Planning’ (November 2021 to March 2022), included draft guidance which, once finalised, will be used to inform the preparation of local development plans (LDPs). The draft guidance is clear that the preparation of an LDP should be collaborative, bringing different interests together. The LDP is intended to be a corporate document achieved through steps such as preparation of the Evidence Report and approval of the proposed LDP by the full Council. Land available for local or community food growing was referenced in the guidance as a matter that can be included in the Evidence Report, and that the Evidence Report itself is a means of engaging relevant local authority departments early in the LDP process. The draft guidance also indicates that plans should identify land that could be used for community food production, including community growing spaces, especially in urban areas. We will be finalising the LDP Regulations and Guidance taking account of the views expressed in the consultation responses.

108. The intention of the community asset transfer rights in the Act was to empower communities through easing access to land and property. However, feedback from people trying to use these rights makes it clear that the process is hugely complex, lengthy and can be a deterrent.

109. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government considers how it could best address this through simplifying the transfer process and, ensure that the Act meets its policy intention.

111. The difficulty that communities experience in accessing land for growing is clearly an enormous barrier. In any future reviews of the Act the Committee asks that the Scottish Government explores whether the provisions of Part 9 could be extended beyond local authority owned allotments to other sites, such as those offered by other bodies (for example NHS) or to private allotment sites.

### The Scottish Government response

We acknowledge the Committee's findings and concerns of some community groups who have found the Community Asset Transfer process difficult.

Asset Transfer legislation is designed to encourage and support ownership and control of assets by communities and should be considered by community organisations and authorities in situations that recognise the public benefits that community use will bring.

To support the process, we have published statutory guidance on asset transfer for community transfer bodies; statutory guidance for the relevant authorities concerned with asset transfers; and guidance on considering social value in the asset transfer context. We also provide core funding to the Community Ownership Support Service, which enables a free to access, adviser led service for community transfer bodies and relevant authorities engaging in the asset transfer process.

We acknowledge that challenges remain and that is why we established our new National Asset Transfer Action Group. One remit of the group is to consider what actions need to be taken more broadly, and by whom, to ensure that asset transfer is achieving its goal to drive change and empower communities.

In June 2020 we introduced enhanced annual reporting templates for the relevant authorities to complete which asks them to document their asset transfer activity and to outline what actions they are taking to publicise and promote requests they receive. We are keeping these under review and are working with our stakeholders, including the National Asset Transfer Action Group, to make sure these templates gather the necessary information. We will continue to work with the relevant authorities to ensure all relevant information is made publicly available and

bureaucracy is minimised wherever possible. Learning and good practice will continue to be shared to encourage compliance and a consistent level of service.

An example of good practice we promote is the use of a single point of contact at each relevant authority, who understands asset transfers and can guide community groups through the process, link them up to available support channels and minimise bureaucracy. This is helping simplify the asset transfer process and minimise unnecessary delays.

Forestry and Land Scotland are one example of a relevant authority who have embraced community asset transfers, and have a dedicated resource to support community groups exploring the option of acquiring land through their Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS). Transfers over the past 15 years through CATS and its predecessor have included a walled garden, a composting site, grazing land and leases for allotments.

There is acknowledgment that the Community Asset Transfer process can seem cumbersome for community groups and Forestry and Land Scotland aims to improve the process wherever possible, including sharing best practice through the National Asset Transfer Action Group. Nonetheless, legal aspects of ownership can be challenging for any landowner and ownership comes with associated land management liabilities and obligations such as third party access rights, boundary agreements, environmental designations, planning regulations, and community involvement in land use decisions. In addition, relevant authorities are accountable for the management of public assets, which can present challenges in assessing best value and use of land.

Ownership or lease through CATS may not be the only option and Forestry and Land Scotland works with communities to find the best solution to meet their requirements. For example, the Dervaig Community Orchard is managed under an agreement between the Dervaig Community Orchard Management Group and Forestry and Land Scotland, with the involvement of the local primary school.

In July 2022, the Scottish Government launched a review of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, and the consideration of Part 5 (asset transfers) will have a significant role to play. As part of this ongoing review, we are gathering views from community groups, relevant authorities, partners and stakeholders all involved with asset transfers. We will make any necessary changes on completion of the review, due to conclude in late 2023.

With regards to extending Part 9, there is currently no need to extend the legislation to include privately owned sites and other public bodies as there are already several rights to buy that can perform the same function. These rights to buy are not limited to public bodies, but can be used for land owned by anyone. Rights to buy are in terms of a community, which can be defined by the community themselves, following the legislative requirements.

## Sustaining allotments

115. It is important that existing established allotment sites are adequately supported by local authorities and their maintenance needs are addressed as a minimum.

116. The Act requires annual allotment plans to be prepared by local authorities. These could be used as a reporting mechanism by local authorities on each allotment site's maintenance needs and how these will be addressed.

117. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to investigate further what Scottish Water's position is in respect of enabling mains supply to allotment sites and community growing sites.

### The Scottish Government response

We expect local authorities to meet their legal obligations with regards to the maintenance of their allotment sites. We will continue to reiterate the importance of this when meeting with local authority partners.

The Act clearly defines what information local authorities are required to include in their annual allotment plans. Extending the information to include maintenance needs would require legislative change to Part 9. We suggest local authorities, alongside relevant stakeholders, undertake an annual review of maintenance needs across their allotment sites and include this information within published allotment reports, to promote transparency and build trust with allotment tenants and delegated management organisations.

Scottish Government officials have contacted Scottish Water to confirm their position in respect of enabling mains supply to allotment sites and community growing sites.

Under the Water Scotland Act 1980 it is Scottish Water's duty to service new connections up to a reasonable cost for domestic purposes. Scottish Water are keen to support a 'Flourishing Scotland' and would look to support new connections for community growing sites where practical and within legislative arrangements. Under these legislative arrangements, new connections for allotment and community growing sites would be a chargeable service as these sites are not dwellings and would therefore be treated as non-domestic connections.

Scottish Water encourage allotment and community growing sites to also support their vision for a Flourishing Scotland by promoting efficient use of water as much as possible. This includes rainwater reuse, one of the best ways of keeping costs down whilst helping with rainwater management and reducing potable water demand, which a lot of allotment and community growing sites already utilise.

## Support for community growing

126. The difficulties that short-term funding presents to the voluntary and community sector are well known, and the Scottish Government has previously made assurances it will address these. The Committee considers it is important to balance the need to fund innovation with sustaining existing community projects that have already demonstrated their value, and would welcome the Scottish Government's assurances that it is taking steps to ensure this is the case.

127. The Committee recognises the importance of community growing and the need for the sector to be better supported. The Committee recommends that any future reviews by the Scottish Government of the Act should consider whether the definition of allotments should be widened to include other community food growing spaces.

### The Scottish Government response

We recognise the Committee's concerns about the difficulties faced by the provision of short-term funding and would like to re-iterate that the Scottish Government is listening to the concerns of the voluntary and community sector. The Scottish Government values the important role of Scotland's third sector working to support communities across the country. We recognise that the third sector needs stability of funding and the opportunity for longer term planning and development and we are committed to increasing multi-year arrangements where appropriate. It will allow us to work in partnership to design and deliver the kind of transformation our communities need to be fit for the future, whilst ensuring public services are sustainable.

We must acknowledge that in the current volatile economic circumstances, the coming year will be challenging. However, with a commitment to more stable funding over multiple years and increased funding in future years, this can provide greater stability for the third sector. We will therefore adopt Fairer Funding practice as far as is practicably possible now whilst broadening engagement to determine what "fair funding" means to the sector beyond immediate practical measures like multi-year funding. In so doing we will work with the sector and public sector partners to broaden the applicability of Fairer Funding principles recognising the sector's wide impact across public policy.

We provide various grant funding each year to support and expand allotments and community growing groups in Scotland. While allotments and their provision are the responsibility of local authorities, since 2012 we have allocated nearly £1.6 million to directly support and increase the land that is available for community growing. This includes around £1.04 million in funding to the Green Action Trust (previously Central Scotland Green Network) to allocate grants to projects that aim to increase the amount of land for community growing and in the financial year 2022/2023, we

have allocated nearly £90,000 to the continued funding of three community growing organisations: Social Farms and Gardens, GrowGreen Scotland and Trellis.

The Scottish Government has provided funding for community growing projects for several years but would caution that, as already mentioned, there are currently restraints on funding across all areas of government and funding such as this will be subject to careful review when decisions on future spending budget are being made.

We note the Committee's recommendation that any future reviews of the Act should consider whether the definition of allotments should be widened to include other community food growing spaces and will give this further consideration.

## Food Growing Strategies

132. Food Growing Strategies are an important means by which local authorities can improve access to food growing opportunities. Given the increasing insecurity which many people are experiencing, this is more important now than ever.

133. However many local authorities have not prepared Strategies, and the Committee heard that those that have are of variable quality. This is clearly an area of implementation that needs addressing by the Scottish Government, and the Committee therefore asks it to set out in response to this report what measures it will take in both the short and long-term.

134. Reflecting the positive examples contained in this report, guidance for local authorities on preparing their Strategies could highlight the importance of collaborative work with stakeholders, and future iterations of the Strategies (which are due to be revised every five years) could include action plans, clear outcomes and measurements.

### The Scottish Government response

We agree with the Committee's observation on the important role food growing strategies can play a role in helping local authorities improve access to food growing opportunities.

Under the Act, a local authority must publish their food growing strategy before the expiry of two years after section 119 came into force (which was on 1 April 2018). Strategies should therefore have been published any time between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2020. Part 9 of the Act does not require local authorities to update Scottish Ministers on the publication of their food-growing strategies. We are aware that, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit related local disruption, some local authorities were continuing to carry out their public engagement and consultation activities on their draft food-growing strategies. Brexit, the pandemic and subsequent cost crisis

management will, quite understandably, have impacted on some authorities' plans for public engagement of their food-growing strategy proposals.

The Tripartite Group, along with wider stakeholders, helped to develop two pieces of statutory guidance published by the Scottish Government: guidance with the purpose of assisting local authorities in the carrying out of their functions under Part 9 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, and guidance to support local authorities in developing their food growing strategies under Section 119 of the Act. This second guidance document was published in November 2018.

Section 2 of the guidance document clearly details the expectation of the Scottish Government that stakeholder participation, engagement and consultation is essential and maintained throughout the process of developing an authority's food-growing strategy. This includes both internal and external stakeholders.

“A partnership approach is crucial and so local authority officers responsible for allotments provision or drafting the authority's food-growing strategy are encouraged to work with their planning colleagues and other relevant internal and external stakeholders.”

Food growing strategies must be reviewed every five years from the initial date of publication and may be reviewed at any time within those five years.

Earlier this year, the Tripartite Group started preparing workshops to investigate the difficulties faced by local authority officers whilst preparing their strategies and to share examples of good practice. This was paused as officials in the Good Food Nation Team needed to prioritise work on the Good Food Nation Bill. Officials are now in a position to re-start the work of the Tripartite Group and will work with the local authorities to understand what support can be put in place to help those who have yet to publish, or are due to review, their strategies to do so.

The findings of these conversations will advise longer term plans to address the implementation of section 119 of the Act and further consideration will be given to updating the relevant guidance to provide additional support.

## Conclusion

135. The Committee's inquiry has highlighted many of the positive developments made since the Community Empowerment Act came into force, but the overwhelming message from witnesses and the evidence received is that there are nonetheless significant and growing waiting lists for accessing allotments and challenges to accessing land for growing. Many local authorities have not met the Act's requirements to prepare a Food Growing Strategy and don't have staff leading on allotments and growing.

136. The importance of access to green space and the benefits of growing is clear. It can quite literally empower communities and improve people's health and quality of life. But when resources are limited it is perhaps easy for local authorities' responsibilities under the Act to become a low priority.

137. The Committee believes though that it is more important now than ever that there is renewed effort to deliver on the intentions of the Act, led by the Scottish Government supporting local authorities. It would therefore welcome the Scottish Government's response to its recommendations made throughout this report

### The Scottish Government response

We would once again like to recognise the ongoing hard work and resilience of our local authorities throughout the turbulent times we have found ourselves in over the last few years. They demonstrated how quickly they can mobilise to support communities up and down the country during the uncertainty caused by Brexit, an unprecedented global pandemic and ongoing challenges, including supporting those displaced by the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The coming financial years are going to be challenging, as recently highlighted by the Deputy First Minister in the Scottish Budget 2023/24 announcement. Given the economic and financial constraints currently faced by local, national and international governments alike, the actions outlined in this response may take more time to enact than perhaps wished by the Committee, stakeholders and the Scottish Government. However, we can assure the Committee, and everyone else impacted by the findings of this report, that we have listened to all the recommendations made. We take them seriously and will do our utmost to provide support for the improvements suggested to allow Part 9 of the Community Empowerment Act to support allotments and community growing initiatives to reach their full potential across the wide range of policy areas we have discussed.