Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

18th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6)

Tuesday 7 June 2022

Allotments and Part 9 of the Community Empowerment Act 2015

Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide information for the Committee's second evidence session on its inquiry into allotments and Part 9 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 ('the Act').

2. At this meeting, the Committee will take evidence from two panels of stakeholder witnesses as follows**:**

Panel 1

- Paul O'Brien, Chief Executive, Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE)
- Wayne Priestley, Principal Adviser, APSE
- Peter Duncan, Allotments Officer, Fife Council
- Ian Woolard, Allotments Officer, Edinburgh Council
- Sandy Paterson, Assistant Manager (Food Growing), Glasgow City Council

Panel 2

- Sinclair Laing, Policy and Strategy Manager, Aberdeen City Council
- Marina Curran-Colthart, Local Biodiversity Officer, Argyll & Bute Council

3. It is expected that the Committee's consideration will focus on the following key themes**:**

- Whether Part 9 of the Act is achieving its aim of improving the availability of allotments, and reducing waiting times;

- Whether local authorities are meeting the requirements of the Act;

- What the challenges are to providing allotments and food growing space;

- The impact of the Act's requirement for local authorities to prepare a food-growing strategy;

- How communities are establishing allotments and food growing spaces themselves, and the benefits these bring.

Background

4. At its work programme discussion on 5 October 2021, the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee agreed to hold an inquiry to scrutinise delivery of Part 9 of the Community Empowerment Act 2015.

5. Part 9 of the Act:

- Requires local authorities to keep waiting lists and take steps to provide allotments if waiting lists are long.
- Strengthens the protection for allotments and clarifies the rights of local authorities and plot holders.
- Explains that the number of people on allotment waiting lists should be no more than 50% of the total number of allotments owned and leased by the authority.
- States that no one should be on an allotment waiting list for more than 5 years.
- Requires every local authority to prepare a food-growing strategy and review it every 5 years.
- Sets out that the food-growing strategy should identify land that may be used as allotment sites and identify other areas that could be used by a community for the growing of vegetables, fruit, herbs or flowers.

7. The main objectives of the inquiry are to explore:

- Whether the Act has improved the availability of allotments and reduced the barriers to accessing allotments.
- How communities are establishing allotments themselves, and the community, health, educational and environmental benefits of allotments and community gardens.

8. The Committee issued a call for evidence on 4 May 2021 which sought views on whether local authorities are meeting the requirements of the Act, namely:

- Are they taking 'reasonable steps' as required by the Act to ensure that the number of people on waiting lists is no more than half of the total number of allotments owned by the authority?
- Are they meeting their duties to maintain waiting lists and publish annual reports on allotment provision?

9. The call for evidence also asked for views on:

- The benefits to individuals and communities of having adequate allotment provision
- The application process and communication with local authorities regarding allotments.
- The provision of allotments across the country, and the impact of the Act.
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the demand and supply of allotments.
- The Act's assumption of a standard allotment plot of 25 square metres.
- Other providers of allotments (other than local authorities).
- If allotments sites are located in areas which are convenient and accessible to all people and communities represented by the local authority.
- Familiarity with local authorities' food-growing strategies, and the impact they have had.
- Views on other forms of community food growing beyond the traditional allotment model.
- What more local authorities can do to ensure adequate provision of allotments, and the barriers to that.

Conclusion

10. The Committee is invited to consider the above information in its evidence session with stakeholders.

Committee Clerks,
June 2022