

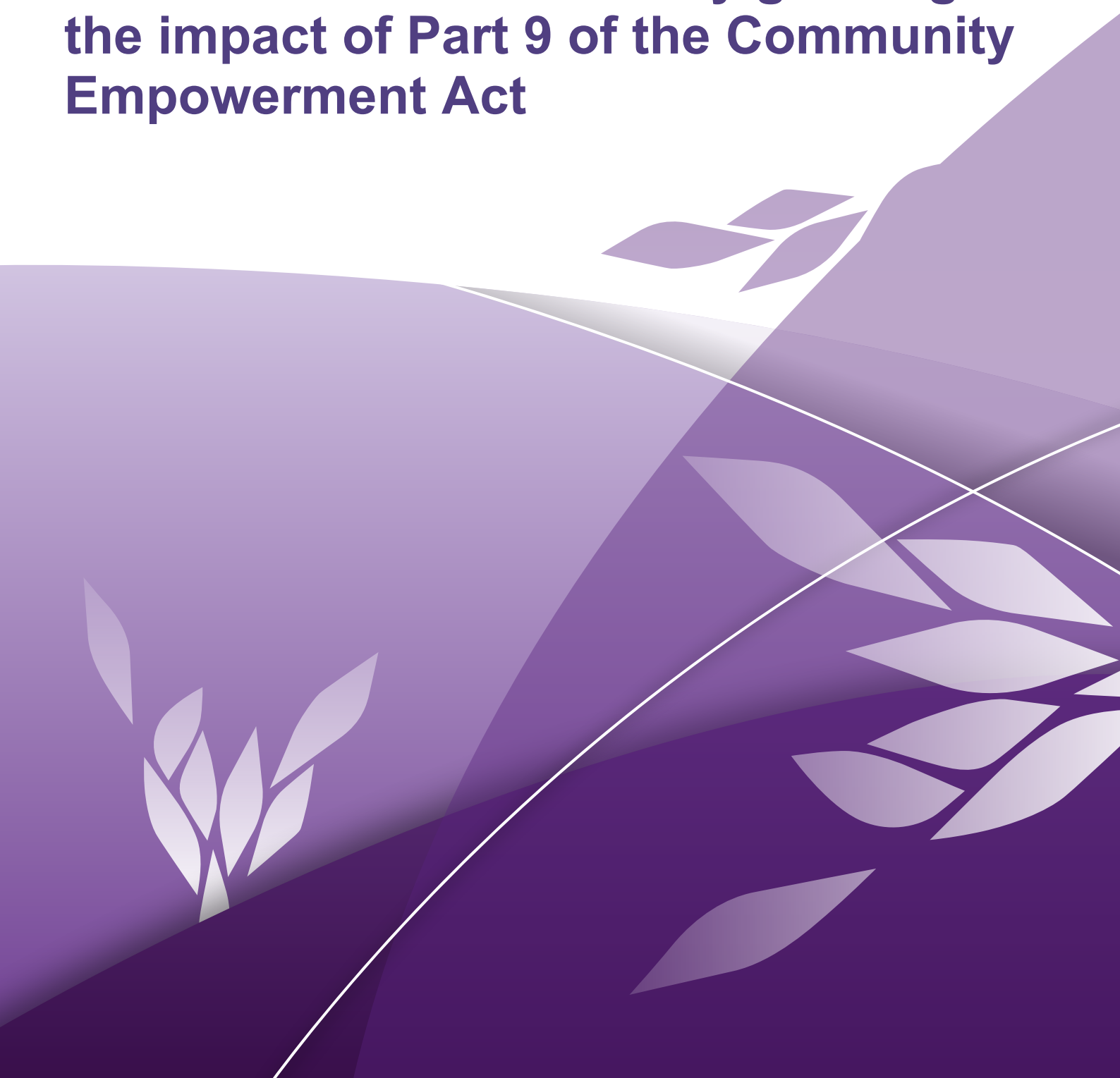


The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Published 6 October 2022
SP Paper 236
10th Report, 2022 (Session 6)

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Allotments and community growing: the impact of Part 9 of the Community Empowerment Act



Published in Scotland by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body.

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:
<http://www.parliament.scot/abouttheparliament/91279.aspx>

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact Public Information on:
Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@parliament.scot

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	3
Background	5
Defining allotments and community gardens	6
The benefits of allotments and food growing	7
Coordination, collaboration and leadership	9
Integration with wider priorities and legislation	14
Allotment waiting lists	16
Access to land	20
Sustaining allotments	25
Support for community growing	27
Food Growing Strategies	30
Conclusion	32
Annex A	33
Bibliography	34

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

To consider and report on matters relating to local government, housing and planning falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, and matters relating to the Local Government Boundary Commission and local governance review and democratic renewal within the responsibility of the Deputy First Minister.



localgov.committee@parliament.scot

Committee Membership



Convener
Ariane Burgess
Scottish Green Party



Deputy Convener
Willie Coffey
Scottish National Party



Miles Briggs
Scottish Conservative
and Unionist Party



Mark Griffin
Scottish Labour



Paul McLennan
Scottish National Party



Marie McNair
Scottish National Party



Annie Wells
Scottish Conservative
and Unionist Party

Executive Summary

1. Although there have been many positive developments made since the Community Empowerment Act came into force, seven years on there is a significant demand for allotments and growing spaces which is not being met, and access to land remains a challenge. This report sets out a number of recommendations by the Committee (summarised below) which it invites the Scottish Government to respond to. It also includes proposed actions for local authorities.
2. Increased leadership and oversight by the Scottish Government 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.
3. 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.
4. 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, supporting the growth of allotment provision.
5. The cross-cutting importance of allotments and food growing should be reflected in wider strategies such as the National Planning Framework, the forthcoming Biodiversity Strategy, and implementation of the new Good Food Nation Bill. It should also be taken into account during the development of new legislation such as the Land Reform Bill and the Agriculture Bill.
6. Clarity is needed from the Scottish Government about how the requirement for local authorities to publish Food Growing Strategies intersects with the new requirement to produce Good Food Nation strategies.
7. There are some measures which local authorities could take to improve access to allotments and growing spaces. 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.
 - Where no sites are operated by a local authority 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.
8. Any future revisions of the Place Standard Tool should consider how food growing could better be incorporated.

9. The Scottish Government's review of Permitted Development Rights should include consideration of whether land for growing could be a category of permitted development, which would help simplify the planning landscape.
10. Food growing needs to be a category of land use included within frameworks such as local place planning.
11. 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 could also include access to green and growing spaces.
12. The Scottish Government should consider how it could address the complexity of the community asset transfer process which is currently a barrier to communities accessing land.
13. In any future reviews of the Act the Scottish Government should explore whether the provisions of Part 9 could be extended beyond local authority owned allotments to other sites, such as those offered by other bodies or to private allotment sites. Similarly it could explore whether the definition of allotments should be widened to include other community food growing spaces.
14. Funding grants need to balance the need to fund innovation with the importance of sustaining existing community projects that have already demonstrated their value.
15. Food Growing Strategies are an aspect of the Act which need addressing, with many authorities having not yet produced their Strategies. Given the increasing food insecurity which many people are experiencing, this is more important now than ever.

Introduction

16. 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 (the 'Act'). The inquiry is one of several by the Committee and its predecessor to examine different elements of the Act - parts 3 and 5 by the Local Government and Communities Committee, and a forthcoming inquiry on part 2 of the Act by this Committee.

Members of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee visiting Leith Community Croft.



Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

17. Part 9 of the Act requires local authorities to take reasonable steps to provide allotments, to manage waiting lists, and it creates a number of duties around the wider management of allotment sites. In addition, local authorities must each develop a food growing strategy which identifies land suitable for community food growing or allotments, and which sets out how it will increase their provision.
18. It was agreed that the main objectives of the inquiry were 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 health, educational, community and environmental benefits of allotments and community gardens.
19. The Committee issued a call for evidence on 4 May 2022 seeking views on:
- Whether local authorities are meeting their duties under the Act.
 - 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 250 square metres.
 - The provision of allotments by other organisations.
 - 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.
20. The Committee held three formal evidence sessions with 16 witnesses from across Scotland who represented local authorities and the wider public sector, allotment owners and associations, and community food growing organisations.
21. A call for views received 171 written responses from local authorities, community councils, individuals, allotment associations, third sector organisations providing food growing, and other community groups. ¹
22. Committee members also visited allotments and community food growing projects in Edinburgh and Glasgow to hear directly from people about their concerns and their ideas for improvement. The Committee would like to thank the following for welcoming them: Leith Community Croft, Inverleith allotments, Pilton Community Health Project, Lauriston Farm, Springburn allotments, Urban Roots, and Budhill & Springboig allotments.
23. The Committee would like to extend its thanks also to all those who engaged with the inquiry and provided their experience and expertise.
24. The Official Reports providing transcripts of the evidence sessions which the Committee held can be viewed at <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report>.
25. The Committee is yet to take evidence from the Scottish Government on the inquiry, and would welcome the opportunity to meet with the relevant Minister to discuss the recommendations made in this report and the Government's response to those.

Background

26. Allotments have long been an important resource across many communities, providing people with access to growing opportunities and to green space that they may not otherwise have had. In recent years there's been a revival in their popularity, with gardening and food growing increasingly in the media and public eye.

27. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated this trend, in particular highlighting the importance to people of being able to access gardens and outdoor spaces, and there is a growing body of evidence about the wide range of social and environmental benefits they bring. Both during and since the peak of the pandemic it has been common to witness an enormous increase in demand for outdoor activities, and stories in the press and media have highlighted lengthy waiting lists (sometimes of many years) for allotments. The Glasgow Community Food Network described the impact of the pandemic in its written submission to the inquiry.

” The pandemic was a motivation for many people... to look for growing and green space opportunities so that they could get more access to outside space, to feel more control or sense of stability over the food they can eat, and to try to increase mental wellbeing and combat stress and anxiety triggered by the pandemic or otherwise.”¹

28. The inclusion of allotments within the Community Empowerment Act highlighted their importance as a community asset, and simplified and updated legislation dating back to 1892. In particular the Act now:

- 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.

29. The availability of allotments varies significantly between local authorities. Allotment sites may be directly run by the council or their management delegated to an association run by volunteers. Some authorities offer few or even no sites, and so people rely instead on privately owned allotment sites operating independently. Similarly, demand varies across authorities but is particularly high in urban areas, with lengthy waiting lists in both Glasgow and Edinburgh where a significant proportion of the population live in flats without easy access to outdoor space.

30. Set against the backdrop of the pandemic, the current cost of living crisis and the Scottish Government's ambition to tackle climate change and diminishing biodiversity, the Committee's scrutiny of Part 9 of the Act has proved to be particularly timely. There have also been wider developments since the Act came into force that are relevant to land use and food growing such as the Good Food Nation Bill and the new National Planning Framework. Many witnesses raised the links between these and allotments and community food growing.
31. By examining what the impact of the Act has been on the provision of allotments in communities, the Committee's inquiry shines a light on an area which is often overlooked, but nonetheless is an issue that can contribute to a number of the Scottish Government's priorities and which makes a real difference to the quality of people's lives.

Defining allotments and community gardens

32. The requirements of Part 9 of the Act apply only to local authorities, with the legislation describing an allotment as local authority land that is leased for the cultivation of vegetables, fruit, herbs or flowers. Taking into account though that they are just one model of providing land for food growing, the Committee widened the scope of its inquiry to community growing more broadly, providing an opportunity to consider a more joined-up approach to food growing. Lou Evans from the Community Growing Forum described the importance of this broad approach in her evidence to the Committee.

” 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.”²

33. Sometimes the distinction between allotments and community gardens is blurred, with some allotment sites making plots available to community groups, charities and schools to use. Tranent Allotment Association for example has six community plots used by a range of organisations including a local food bank, Home-Start East Lothian, East Lothian Roots and Fruits, and Ormiston Grows.³
34. For the purpose of this report, the term 'allotment' is used to cover what is seen as the more traditional growing model, where land is divided into plots that are then made available to individuals (or sometimes groups) for their sole use. There are a number of different forms that allotments take; they may be owned and managed by a local authority, the authority may lease the land with the management of the site and the waiting list being devolved to an allotment association run by volunteers, or allotments may be provided by private owners (often for a higher fee).
35. 'Community garden' is used in this report to describe the wide range of other forms of food growing opportunities, which are often organised by third sector organisations or by communities themselves. Reliant on volunteers, typically they see people sharing the space available and the food that is grown, and take different forms such as raised beds on urban wasteland, end-of-terrace shared gardens, and use of 'common ground' land. Urban 'crofts' or farms which produce food on a larger scale and organise its distribution (or sale) are also included for the purpose of this report within the broad term 'community garden'.

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

The benefits of allotments and food growing

37. Witnesses, the organisations visited, and the written submissions received during the inquiry all highlighted the benefits provided by access to allotments and green spaces for food growing. These were evidenced by both research and by personal experience on a range of different aspects, including:

- Improved physical and mental health
- Educational and skills opportunities
- Environmental benefits and improved biodiversity
- Reduced carbon footprint
- Opportunities to tackle the cost of living crisis and increase food security
- Social interaction, tackling loneliness and isolation and providing inter-generational contact
- Community cohesion, strengthening community action and wealth building
- Improved physical environment
- Addressing inequalities
- Healthy ageing.

End-of-terrace community growing, Pilton



Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

38. For example, Felicitas Macfie in her written submission to the Inquiry said that:

” The benefits of allotment provision are so numerous and far reaching that it is difficult to list them all... It allows people to have access to fresh air and exercise which they may otherwise not have. It allows young families to teach the next generation where food comes from... Food grown locally reduces the carbon footprint and make you more aware of food miles. For working people it allows them a welcome respite from the office environment... For the older generation there is social interaction, a sense of purpose, the health benefits of gentle exercise. For everyone the benefits on mental health cannot be underestimated.”⁴

39. And in its submission the Highland Council noted that:

” The benefits of Community Food Growing are endless, from improved mental health to reduced carbon footprints and saving money, to meeting new friends. Food is one thing that unites us all and improving our relationship with food can be transformative.”⁵

40. In 2011, research funded by the Scottish Government and coordinated by Greenspace Scotland looked at the social return on investment (SROI) of projects across the country, among them a community growing project, the Gorbals Healthy Living Network. This calculated that every £1 invested in the project would generate around £16 of benefits.² More recent research carried out in Brighton and Hove quantified the benefits that allotments bring to the council and its residents, finding that each plot benefits the city by at least £166.84 per annum and that they collectively produce food to the value of £1.12m, reduce the city's carbon footprint by 1050 tonnes, and support both the city's environment and the health of its inhabitants by reducing stress, loneliness, depression, obesity and health inequalities.³

41. Recognition of the wide benefits of allotments was highlighted too by Wayne Priestley from the Association for Public Service Excellence in his evidence to the Committee.

” It is interesting that a lot of local authorities now include the provision of allotments in local plans, health and wellbeing strategies and...biodiversity and climate change strategies.... Allotments bring in a multiplicity of benefits.”⁶

42. A further example of the recognition of the benefits of growing is the new Growchapel Community Growing Space project in Glasgow which Sandy Paterson Glasgow city council brought to the Committee's attention.⁷ The project has seen the creation of a new allotment site in Drumchapel. Involving over 30 community organisations, the site provides 'Gardening Therapy', with local GP surgeries referring people to the project through their community links practitioners - an example of 'social prescribing' for people's health.

Coordination, collaboration and leadership

43. Whilst the provisions in the Act were broadly welcomed, a range of witnesses argued that increased leadership and coordination is required both nationally and locally in order to see the full benefits of the Act. In addition, collaboration is seen as being key to improving access to growing spaces.

44. The Committee heard that the current provision of allotments and growing spaces does not meet the scale of demand, and that they do not meet their potential in driving change. Some witnesses highlighted that in their view the Act had unfortunately not brought about tangible improvements on the ground, including Richard Crawford from the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society:

” I would say emphatically that, at the moment, there is very slow take-up in adhering to part 9 of the 2015 Act.”⁸

45. Others, particularly those representing councils such as Sandy Paterson from Glasgow City Council, believed that the Act had created opportunities to drive improvement.

” The biggest impact that we noticed with the 2015 Act was the opportunity for collaboration. Previously, it was almost a case of them and us. We understand that it will be very challenging to us to deliver our statutory obligations under the act as a stand-alone authority. The strength of our neighbours comes into it.”⁹

46. Amy Alcorn from Scottish Borders Council described how the legislation had helped ensure they better manage their waiting lists and map community gardens across the region. Sinclair Laing from Aberdeen City Council described how they had now recruited a full time allotments officer, and the wider benefits of the Act:

” It has forced local authorities to think again about how to approach this issue. If there was not a duty on local authorities to act, we would probably just sit on the waiting list for a period of time... It has forced us to get around the table with our partners and look at what we can do to provide more access to allotments and community food growing spaces.”¹⁰

47. There are very wide variations across local authorities in their provision of allotments and food growing spaces. Some run a number of allotment sites directly and might maintain a central waiting list, whilst others delegate management to allotment associations to which they may lease the land, or have no allotments sites at all. Very few have full-time allotment officers in place, and those that do find their expertise is often sought by other local authorities.

48. Allotment officers from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Fife gave evidence to the Committee, and agreed that there needs to be a means by which allotment officers could be better supported with guidance and authorities brought together to share good practice and avoid duplication or reinventing the wheel. Peter Duncan from Fife Council said that:

- ” We have a lot of officers being put into positions without experience behind them, and there is a lack of support... It would be good if the Government could facilitate some support for the local authority officers... A one-stop shop for that support would be good.”¹¹
49. Similarly, the Community Growing Forum, represented by Lou Evans, stressed how better collaboration and partnership work is needed across sectors. The Forum is a voluntary collaboration of partners which includes allotment associations, local authorities, the Scottish Government, the Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations, Greenspace Scotland and the Highland Good Food Partnership. It in turn coordinates the GetGrowing Scotland network which receives some funding from the Scottish Government. Lou Evans said that:
- ” We have amazing policy, but what we need is action.... We need to collaborate, plan and think about the opportunities and the risks of not taking action now...it needs to be done in partnership. A lot of it needs to come from the top, but we need to have conversations, to work collaboratively and to take the politics out of it.”¹²
50. The Committee heard from Lou Evans that when the Part 9 provisions were being developed and first implemented after the Act was passed by the Scottish Parliament in 2015, the Scottish Government worked closely with local authorities and the third sector.
- ” ...in the build-up to the introduction of the legislation, there was a huge amount of civil servant involvement and lots of voluntary contributions from various organisations, largely represented through the Community Growing Forum. There was quite a lot of energy, and local authority officers, through the central person in Government, were supported to share best practice and to talk about what was working... Sadly that resource has fallen away.”¹³
51. Since then it appears to the Committee that that collaboration has diminished, and although the hard work of developing legislation is complete, arguably the Government needed to continue to resource the implementation of the Act in order to avoid a gap between policy ambition and reality. Given the relevance of allotments and growing spaces to other Government priorities, without that resource it is possible that opportunities have been missed to make connections across Government departments which could support wider policy delivery.
52. The Community Growing Forum highlighted developments in Wales as an example of successful collaboration between central government, local authorities and the community sector. Resilient Green Spaces is a £1.27m partnership project funded by the Welsh Government which includes a national allotment development team creating new plots and regenerating existing ones, support for landowners to meet growing demand, and providing local authorities grants of £25,000 for 3 years to invest in allotment sites.
53. The need for increased funding was raised with the Committee, including by Peter Duncan from Fife Council.

” A seedcorn grant would not be a bad thing. The Scottish Government could bring to the table funding that local authorities could have control over... That would allow different approaches to be taken and would allow groups to take things forward at their speed.”¹⁴

54. Without central coordination by the Scottish Government there is also currently no means by which data can be collected at a national level about whether local authorities are meeting the Act's requirements, about how and where allotments are provided, and the numbers of people on waiting lists. Witnesses including council allotment officer Ian Woolard from Edinburgh City Council told the Committee about the need for better monitoring which would increase transparency and could support delivery of the Act through benchmarking across local authorities.¹⁵ Local authorities are required under the Act to create annual allotment reports, and Sinclair Laing from Aberdeen City Council suggested these could be standardised and aggregated at a national level to provide updates on progress.

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.

57. Turning to the role of local authorities, this was raised many times during the course of the inquiry. There was often frustration expressed about the difficulties people experience in accessing allotments, although this was tempered with a recognition that local authorities are under enormous pressures and have limited financial resources. Some organisations who contributed to the inquiry, such as the Tranent Allotment Association valued their independence from local authorities and recognised that their own expertise meant they are best placed to meet local need. Rosanne Woods from the Association said that:

” We are not keeping the council out of it; we just realise that it has better things to do. We can do it, and we are actually doing it.”¹⁶

58. But witnesses such as Marie de la Torree from Knocknagael also saw a need for local authorities to play a supporting and enabling role to help communities manage allotments and food growing projects, and also to help navigate the challenges of acquiring land for growing:

” Local authorities are under a lot of pressure now, and it is difficult for them to run allotment sites, but they can play a key role in facilitating the process by which groups are able to acquire land, and in particular, in brokering relationships with other public organisations.”¹⁷

59. The Committee heard too about the importance of council departments and organisations working together, and was presented with some examples of where this has been successful;
- In Argyll the local development trusts are helping small groups develop food growing projects by supporting planning applications, funding, and community engagement. ¹⁸
 - In the Borders, the Green Space Community Coordinator has worked closely with local housing associations, and has made the case to the community planning partnership and strategic board to explore using partners' spaces for community growing. ¹⁹
 - In Aberdeen City, there has been a shift to a more community-engagement approach, including Environmental Services changing their structure to provide more community support and access to land. ²⁰
60. Aberdeen City Council has also used its local outcomes improvement plan to promote and develop growing, encouraging schools, communities and workplaces to grow together. Sinclair Laing from the council explained that:
- ” There is a vast range of opportunities available to people. It is a question of making them aware of those opportunities and facilitating their access to them. That involves partnership working and funding, and encouraging the NHS and our sports facilities to make their land available...” ²¹
61. These are examples of successful ways of working which other local authorities could learn from if there was a mechanism by which to bring them together.
62. Perhaps more challengingly, local authorities also have an important role in enabling the culture of participation which underpins community empowerment, which Jenny Reeves from the Glasgow Allotment Forum described:
- ” Moving from a representative form of democracy to a participative model is difficult because it requires a change in culture and practices on the part of both local authority personnel and citizens...
- People within local authorities need to be developing new skills in order to be able to use the new decision-making process envisaged by the CEA [Community Empowerment Act]... We need more action and willingness to learn from action and less devotion to documentation.” ²²
63. Looking beyond allotments to wider food growing in communities, the participation which Jenny describes is perhaps more developed in the work which community groups carry out. The inquiry heard from and Members visited a range of successful projects which demonstrated the different ways that community gardens are provided (described in more detail below in 'Support for community growing'). These projects (and there will be many others across Scotland) provide case studies of good practice and sources of expertise that could be drawn on to help expand the community growing sector. Again though, that requires coordination and sufficient resourcing.

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.

Integration with wider priorities and legislation

67. Reflecting the Committee's interest in community growing, a theme running through the evidence sessions and written submissions was the importance of not looking at allotment provision in isolation. Given the numerous and recognised benefits of food growing to health, communities and the environment, it's clear that there are potential connections between the Act and other legislation or Government priorities.
68. In particular, the latest iteration of a National Planning Framework ('NPF4') was mentioned by witnesses, as was the importance of Local Development Plans, and the creation of '20 minute neighbourhoods'. Similarly the new Good Food Nation Act, and the Scottish Government's ambitions for Scotland to reach a target of net zero emissions by 2045 were mentioned as being key areas which allotment provision can contribute to.

69. Sandy Paterson from Glasgow City Council highlighted that:

” The recognition of food growing as an individual theme in the place-making standard would be of benefit and would remove many of the barriers. That would put food growing on the same level”²³

And Jenny Reeves from the Glasgow Allotments Forum noted in her evidence that:

” As planning frameworks stand, in local place planning, 20-minute neighbourhood planning and planning generally, there is no category for land for growing. If becoming a Good Food Nation and localising food are important, we need to change planning frameworks”²⁴

70. NPF4 does reference allotments and other forms of food growing; Policy 14 (Health and Wellbeing) states that development proposals which include community food growing or allotments should be supported. The actions identified in the Framework to support change in the North East mention that "Access to good-quality open space and opportunities for local food growing, including allotments and community orchards, can benefit health and wellbeing and tackle inequalities as an integral part of placemaking." However these were not seen as going far enough by Lou Evans from the Community Growing Forum in her evidence to the Committee:

” We have an urgent issue with land, and we need to tie it into national planning framework 4... We will have a serious problem if we do not safeguard land for all forms of food growing, including allotments, community growing, market gardens and farming. Adequate and appropriate land is being lost at a rate of knots...”²⁵

” The current NPF4 whilst commendable in an attempt to highlight climate issues fails to include or address food growing models in any form thus essentially disregarding existing CEA [Community Empowerment Act] legislation.”²⁶

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.

Allotment waiting lists

74. A recurring theme throughout the inquiry was the long waiting lists for many allotments, particularly in our cities. The Covid-19 pandemic in particular led to an enormous increase in demand, with people looking for opportunities to spend time outside in green spaces. Edinburgh's allotment officer for example advised the Committee that there are now around 5,600 people on their waiting list, up from 3,000 in 2019²⁷. Aberdeen had just 150 people waiting five years ago, but over 1,000 people now.²⁸
75. The current cost of living crisis and the corresponding rise in food insecurity were also seen as being likely to increase demand for food growing opportunities in both the short and long-term. The impact was described in this anonymous response to the written call for views:
- ” We are finding it increasingly difficult to feed ourselves and would appreciate a chance to grow food as our garden is not big enough.”²⁹
76. During the inquiry the Committee considered the specified size of allotment plots, which the Act identifies as being 250 square metres as an ideal size. This has traditionally been regarded as the size of land required to feed a family. The allotment associations and local authorities who provided evidence to the inquiry though explained that they are usually flexible in the size of plot that they offer, recognising that a full plot would be challenging for someone new to growing, and that having a greater number of smaller plots enables more people to access an allotment. Many sites also have charities or organisations like schools using plots, in recognition of the benefits to health, educating people about food growing, or increasing access to food.
77. The Act requires waiting lists to be kept to a minimum of 50% of the number of allotments in a local authority, and for the wait itself to be less than 5 years (although that provision is not yet in force). But witnesses representing local authorities and some individuals and organisations said the requirement will be impossible to deliver without significant additional resources, which they recognised as being very scarce. Wayne Priestley, representing the Association for Public Service Excellence explained that:
- ” Many councils now cannot afford new sites, so they are looking at the size of their existing plots and considering halving or quartering them... There are all sorts of ways that councils are looking to keep down the cost of providing more allotments by utilising what they currently have.”³⁰
78. There was also broad consensus that waiting lists are not necessarily the most accurate reflection of the scale of demand. People might join multiple waiting lists, move away from an area, or decide they no longer need an allotment, yet remain a number on a list.
79. The Committee appreciates that local authorities do not have enough resources to simply create large numbers of new allotments to meet all demand. There are substantial costs involved in creating allotment sites because they need infrastructure such as fencing, water mains connection, pathways, sheds and

ideally accessible toilets too. Peter Duncan from Fife Council estimated that those costs had risen from around £1,000 per plot to £2,000 since the pandemic. In Edinburgh a planned extension to an existing site at Victoria Park may cost significantly more at around £3,000 per plot.³¹

Members of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee visiting Inverleith Allotments



Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

80. Witnesses described though the opportunity to instead take more creative approaches to finding solutions to meeting the huge demand for allotments. Lou Evans from the Community Growing Forum said that:

” There is an opportunity to work more proactively, collaboratively and creatively with local authorities and to have a go at shortening waiting times and loosening some of the blockages.”³²

81. Karen Birch from Abundant Borders described opportunities to mix the use of growing spaces within allotment sites:

” We need to be more creative in the way in which we look at food growing and how we actually involve people. For example, the first community food growing site that we established in Eyemouth is a half plot on the allotment, and we now have five people growing food on that small plot. That has helped not only those who are on the waiting list but those who might be unsure about taking on an allotment space, because we have been able to give them the skills and help them to build their confidence before they take on a larger space.”³³

82. Some local authorities take steps to regularly review their waiting lists. Aberdeen City Council reviews its waiting list twice a year by contacting people to check they still want an allotment, as well as auditing the sites themselves three times a year. Fife Council requires a quarterly report on waiting lists and plot allocations, which has shown that demand can be influenced by factors such as employment issues; where large employers have closed they have seen an impact on their waiting list. In Glasgow there is no central waiting list but allotment associations maintain their own individual lists.

83. It is difficult to establish at a local authority level if there is demand for allotments where no waiting list exists for people to register their interest, as is the case in East Ayrshire where there are no local authority-run allotment sites. The point was also made to the Committee by Jenny Reeves from the Glasgow Allotments Forum that there will be people who might benefit from an allotment but are unaware how to access one and so don't appear on waiting lists.
- ” In large tracts of Glasgow, particularly in the more socially deprived areas, people have lost their connection with growing. They have high-rise flats and are deprived in that there are not as many parks in those areas. Therefore, to say that nobody is asking for a plot from a certain ward is a bit of a mistake, because those people do not know that it is a possibility or how to set about it.”
34
84. Some people who remain on a waiting list for an allotment may be new to gardening and growing, unaware of the challenges of maintaining an allotment site, and might be satisfied instead with accessing more informal opportunities such as a community garden where they can also build their skills. Karen Birch from Abundant Borders said:
- ” We need to be more creative in finding other ways of enabling people to grow... because not everybody's motivation for having an allotment-sized plot is to grow food for a family of four.”³⁵
85. To address this, Scottish Borders Council send people an interactive map showing the location of community gardens and allotment sites, so that they are made aware of all their options, and Argyll & Bute Council does similar. Fife council is planning to survey people on its waiting list to find out more about their needs so that they can be redirected to community gardening instead if that's suitable.
86. The Act makes provision for groups of people to request that a local authority provides them with allotments - but in order for that provision to be realised people need to be enabled to come together. At present they usually sit in isolation on a waiting list, unaware of each other's existence. Stuart McKenzie from the Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations said:
- ” The problem is that people go on to a waiting list... And they wait and wait and wait. Nothing active is being done with the people on the waiting list. There is no communication and no education takes place.”³⁶
87. The Glasgow Allotment Forum have tried to address this issue by supporting people on a waiting list to come together and form a group to exercise their rights under the Act. As a result 'The People's Plot' was formed in order to establish more allotments in Glasgow, but Jenny Reeves from the Forum estimated that the process the new group is going through is so lengthy it was likely to be another five years before they actually get plots. After becoming incorporated, the group of volunteers has to find a piece of land, then survey the local community and research local services, establish if the land is uncontaminated, and also look at finding funding through applying for grants.

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.

Access to land

89. A common theme in the evidence the Committee received was how difficult it is to gain access to land for growing. There is frustration about seeing vacant land lying unused, about the limitations of the planning system, the challenges of using the powers of community asset transfer, and the failure of new building developments to make provision for growing or green space. The importance of having good quality land for growing was highlighted; in cities it can often be contaminated from previous industrial use. Also, land needs to be accessible, in locations that contribute to a '20-minute neighbourhood'.

90. Kelvinside Allotment Association's written submission to the Committee highlighted that:

” In my view, the issue of under-provision is not the fault of local authorities. A big problem is that land is too often owned by developers who hold on to it without using it, preventing use as allotments. Local authorities have neither the power nor the resources to take over these areas (and, in some cases, to decontaminate old industrial lands).³⁷

91. But of course there are often competing pressures in our towns and cities on how land is used, with a huge demand for more housing to be built. Where there have been successes in incorporating allotments into new housing developments, a key factor seems to be collaboration between planning departments and the officials responsible for allotments. Edinburgh's allotment officer for example highlighted a housing development at Newcraighall in the city which has incorporated 26 new allotments.³⁸ More common though in the evidence submitted to the inquiry were comments like this from South Ayrshire Council that describe what could be done, rather than what does happen in practice:

” In regard to new Planning Applications received by Local Authorities they could potentially consider the provision of allotments as part of the conditions that developers require to meet along with the associated requirement for open space provision within large new residential dwelling developments, industrial estates, etc.”³⁹

92. However the Committee heard repeatedly about the limited resources of planning departments within local authorities meaning that there are too few staff to do anything other than manage the busy workload of planning applications. This is an issue the Committee is already familiar with from its inquiry into the draft NPF4. Witnesses such as Sinclair Laing from Aberdeen City Council suggested that planners need to push developers and others to incorporate green spaces and growing sites within developments, but there are complex challenges:

” we need to put more pressure on developers to deliver sites through master planning and site delivery... There are issues of money, council resources, communities, developers, planners and so on. There are multiple and complex problems.”⁴⁰

93. Peter Duncan from Fife Council described the challenges he's experienced:

” We have ongoing discussions with planning colleagues all the time.... My personal experience is that it depends, first, on the mood of the planning officer on the day and, secondly, on who you get, because there is no continuity across the planning staff.”⁴¹

94. The Committee also heard about the limitations of the planning framework itself in enabling the use of land for growing. Planning provisions on open space as a whole are stronger than those on growing food.

” As planning frameworks stand, in local place planning, 20-minute neighbourhood planning and planning generally, there is no category for land for growing. If becoming a good food nation and localising food are important, we need to change planning frameworks so that they encourage people to think that such land should be available.”⁴²

95. Similarly, the Place Standard Tool⁴³ was highlighted by the Glasgow Allotments Forum as being too restrictive. The Forum worked with Public Health Scotland to explore how the Tool could be used to identify food growing opportunities within communities. It enables communities to assess their local environment to improve people's health, wellbeing and quality of life, and can be used by local authorities to inform their local development plans. The Tool currently focuses on the built environment and so allotments and food growing sit only within a generic theme about 'Natural Space'. The Forum convened a workshop to provide a practical experience of using the Tool, and concluded that the current themes within the Tool are too restrictive. They recommend that food growing should figure as an important element of the 'Natural Space' theme in order to support the inclusion of land for growing in local place planning processes.

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

97. The Committee heard too how some local authorities are proactively tackling the issue of improving access to land.

- Glasgow and Aberdeen councils have taken steps to 'map' the vacant land which is available in order to try and tackle some of those difficulties.
- Argyll & Bute Council also carry out land searches to look at growing opportunities to meet the needs of applicants on waiting lists.
- Fife Council are taking action to 'repurpose' some of their sites and they are able to balance the cost of creating new allotments against the savings made by no longer having to maintain the land.

98. Similarly, the importance of local authorities gathering data about land availability was highlighted by Abundant Borders in its written submission to the inquiry.

” Local authorities need to know what green space they own, which spaces are currently underused or neglected and, therefore, which spaces could be made available for community food growing. They also need to understand the needs of the local communities.”⁴⁴

99. Some land-owning bodies other than public authorities are already involved in supporting food growing on a non-statutory basis. NHS Lothian's charity for example works with third sector organisations to use land for community gardens and growing spaces at sites including the Royal Edinburgh Hospital, and the Midlothian Community Hospital. During the inquiry the suggestion was made by Maria de la Torre from Knocknagael that the Act's requirements should be extended to other bodies such as the NHS, and Universities and Colleges.

” One of the gaps in the legislation is that it covers only local authorities and does not extend to other public organisations that might hold land that could be provided for food growing.”⁴⁵

100. Elsewhere there are barriers to making land available for growing. Some witnesses including Peter Duncan from Fife Council noted the limitations of existing Permitted Development Rights, which currently do not include allotments and other growing spaces.⁴⁶ These Rights are a form of development already allowed by legislation, meaning that planning permission isn't required for a change of use. Where they can be applied, the burden on Planning departments is therefore reduced.

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.

102. There are some existing statutory means by which allotments and community growing can be supported. Local authorities are required under planning legislation to develop Local Development Plans, and in some areas these have included food growing, such as in Aberdeen City Council's plan. In a written submission to the inquiry, the Community Growing Forum suggested that community groups need to be trained in how to influence Local Place Plans and Local Development Plans. Richard Crawford from the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society noted their importance:

” Local development plans are key to all of this. They should allocate land for community growing spaces.”⁴⁷

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.

105. The Community Empowerment Act includes the right for people to seek a 'community asset transfer' of property or land owned by a public body. The Act sets out how a community group can ask to buy, lease, manage or occupy land or buildings owned by public sector bodies. Some groups have sought to use this right in order to access land for growing, but throughout the inquiry the Committee heard how difficult and time consuming that process is. Richard Crawford said that:

” Community asset transfer is a long and difficult process, and formal structures need to be created to take over land. ”⁴⁸

106. Karen Birch from Borders Council also highlighted the need to simplify the procedure for community asset transfers.

” We are supporting a group that has just created an allotment and community garden blended space. It took many years to get that asset transferred from Transport Scotland, seemingly because there was a mismatch between what was in the 2015 act with regard to ensuring that the land could be transferred to the community at a reasonable price and a separate requirement for Transport Scotland to get maximum value from that piece of land.”⁴⁹

107. The Knocknagael Community Growing Project in Inverness is experiencing similar frustrations, saying in its written submission that "despite the passing of the Community Empowerment Act there has been no effort by public bodies to fulfil this target." Having initially requested to lease land from the Scottish Government in 2017 under the Act, but receiving no response, the Project is seeking to buy the land instead. With the support of the Highland Council, the Project wants to use land in Inverness owned by the Scottish Government Bull Farm to provide allotments, communal food growing areas, a larger commercial growing area, areas for recreation and an orchard. Knocknagael are currently trying to raise money to purchase the site, having been through the process of carrying out a feasibility study and design work. In her evidence to the Committee, Maria de la Torre from Knocknagael Ltd said:

” Although there is an intention... when it comes to reality it is still a challenge to get decisions made in the right way... There is not yet a culture in the planning system of allowing those decisions to be made in the right way.”⁵⁰

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.
110. Another source of land can be 'common good land' which is already owned by local authorities for community use, such as parks, bowling greens and golf courses. Edinburgh council is actively looking at unused bowling greens as possible allotment sites. Leith Community Croft, which Committee members visited at the start of the inquiry, is situated on part of Leith Links in Edinburgh which is common good land. One witness though (Stuart McKenzie from the Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations) noted that planners do not like common good land being fenced, which can be a barrier to using it for allotment sites unless it is already contained (as with bowling greens).
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.

Sustaining allotments

112. Many allotment sites are managed by volunteers forming an association. They organise waiting lists, oversee the maintenance of the site, organise collective resources such as compost heaps and deal with issues that come up with plot owners. This can be time consuming and dependent on people's goodwill to take on the responsibility. The Committee heard from Peter Duncan from Fife Council that the council's support is sometimes needed;

” Groups can become very disheartened with the red tape and being just left and expected to get on with it.... Groups very much need an umbilical cord from the local authority to continue the support. Equally, that support needs to come from the Scottish Government down the way.”⁵¹

Members of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee visiting Inverleith Allotments



Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

113. The Committee's fact-finding visit to Budhill & Springboig allotments in Glasgow demonstrated the importance of this. Whilst the site is run by an association, it has sought help from the council with issues such as repairing the access road, and the installation of toilets. Unfortunately the issues remain unresolved after some years, meaning that people with mobility issues or prams have difficulty entering the site safely. The association members felt that council resources were being prioritised towards the creation of new sites in order to meet targets rather than maintaining and supporting established sites.

114. The Committee heard about other challenges with getting infrastructure in place for allotment sites, in particular getting mains water connected, or having to pay commercial rates to Scottish Water. Peter Duncan from Fife Council gave an example of Scottish Water recently refusing to connect water to a growing site, which is a fundamental problem.

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.

Support for community growing

118. Throughout the inquiry the Committee repeatedly heard about the value of community growing spaces and how they are a vital part of the system alongside allotments. Often coordinated by third sector organisations and led by key individuals, these are usually less formal than allotments, and are organised by community members and volunteers coming together. The Community Growing Forum suggested in a written submission to the inquiry that the Act should be expanded to include wider models of growing than just allotments such as community gardens and market gardens.

Members of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee visiting Leith Community Croft



Source:

119. 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 described the impact that they can have.

” The committee has visited a couple of funded projects that are specifically in areas that are defined by economic disadvantage but that do food provision with dignity. They are talking about active citizenship and are really doing their bit. The work that they do has status rather than a label attached to asking for food... They are social working, but they are doing it in the evenings and at weekends with no referral, no stigma and nobody attending with labels. These are the unsung heroes, and there is tons of potential for more of these ways of working not just in communities of economic disadvantage, but Scotland-wide.”
52

120. Sandy Paterson from Glasgow City Council highlighted the positive impact the Act has had on widening the scope of growing in Glasgow, saying that it has:

” "opened up the discussion beyond allotments to the point that we perceive growing to be a mosaic of a variety of streams and themes from community gardens through to window boxes and urban farms. Is there any reason why we cannot grow in church grounds? Is there any reason why we cannot grow in school grounds? Could universities and other landowners in the city contribute more?" ⁵³ .

121. The Committee heard many inspiring examples of the enormous difference that community gardens are making to people's lives, particularly in areas where there is most need. Some of the initiatives which members visited are described below.

- Granton Community Gardeners in Edinburgh provide community growing spaces, host community meals and events, and support people to grow and cook food. They offer a gardening club, a cooking club, a free shop, a bakery using local ingredients, and even a chicken cooperative. They are seeking to take ownership of the site they use from the council using a community asset transfer.
- Leith Community Croft manages 2 acres of common good land on the edge of Leith Links in Edinburgh. In addition to growing spaces they provide a cafe, kitchen and farmshop, programmes for children and young people, workshops on wellbeing and on gardening, a market garden, and undertake outreach and campaigning work. They have pioneered the concept of 'urban crofting' and during the pandemic provided a Community Feeding Scheme which saw 70 volunteers grow, prepare and deliver healthy food to people in need
- Urban Roots is a community led environmental charity working in the south side of Glasgow which has created community gardens on unused or derelict pieces of land. They support volunteers to work on a range of projects which have transformed green spaces, and offer individuals raised garden beds to use to grow food.
- Lauriston Farm is a new project coordinated by the Edinburgh Agro-ecology Cooperative to transform an existing sheep-grazing farm of 100 acres into a large scale urban food project. The project aims to benefit local communities, and the wider city. The project began in 2021 with planting over 10,000 trees, and is establishing community allotments and a market garden.

122. Community gardens are often reliant on key individuals for their existence, and they face numerous challenges to first become established and then to remain sustainable. Lou Evans from the Community Growing Forum said:

” Community growing spaces are led by aspirational visionary people - you have met some of them - and they need to be cloned urgently." ⁵⁴

123. Long-term funding is perhaps the most pressing issue for community gardens, with the majority of the grants available being for short-term projects. Applying and competing with other organisations for small pockets of funding is time consuming and resource intensive, particularly for small organisations with limited staff or volunteer time.

124. The Committee heard how community growing groups are constantly bidding for

small amounts of money from a wide range of funding streams rather than receiving the resources that are needed to allow their projects to be sustained. They often rely on annual grants, meaning that organisations have to survive on short-term funding cycles that create uncertainty and mean limited resources are taken up with securing next year's funding. Karen Birch from Abundant Borders explained that most of their activities are funded through the Robertson Trust and the National Lottery Community Fund (to help tackle social isolation), but that it is difficult to attract funding for anything other than new projects, particularly with Scottish Government funding. Karen Birch from Abundant Borders explained that:

” The constant drive to come up with new things create a real administrative burden for small organisations such as ours.... We are constantly looking for small amounts of money to fund small things, rather than receiving the overall funding that would allow our project to deliver across the whole region.”⁵⁵

125. The funding 'pots' available also have different requirements, meaning that one grant application may have to demonstrate how an organisation contributes to tackling isolation, whereas another might cover biodiversity, cooking skills, mental health, or link to a particular event.

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.⁴ 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.

Food Growing Strategies

128. The Act requires local authorities to prepare a food growing strategy, which should identify land that could be used for allotment sites or by the community for growing vegetables, fruit, herbs or flowers. The strategies must also set out how the local authority intends to increase its provision of growing opportunities and allotments if there's demand. The strategies should be reviewed every five years.
129. However there are issues with the delivery of food growing strategies by local authorities. The Committee heard from the Community Growing Forum that only 18 out of 32 local authorities have published food growing strategies.⁵⁶ Members also heard concerns from Peter Duncan (allotment officer for Fife Council) about there being scope for confusion with how the strategies align with the requirement for annual allotment reports.⁵⁷ Witnesses also described how there is sometimes a disconnect between their development and the work of allotment officers, as described by Ian Woolard from Edinburgh City Council.⁵⁸
130. Aberdeen City Council however, in its evidence to the Committee, stressed that the Act's requirements had had a positive impact in encouraging more partnership work in the city. They worked with a range of organisations to develop their food growing strategy, including allotment and community growing groups, Greenspace Scotland, and Community Food Initiatives North East.⁵⁹ Examples from other local authorities include:
- In Glasgow there is a community food growers forum which monitors and helps deliver their food growing strategy.⁶⁰
 - Argyll & Bute Council brought together a development policy team including legal and community services with a group of stakeholders including community councils, development trusts, allotment associations and community gardens.⁶¹
 - Highland Council has allocated an officer for its Food Growing Strategy.⁶²
131. There has clearly been some successful collaboration and partnership work in local authorities around the delivery of Food Growing Strategies which provide examples of good practice. The Committee heard though from the Community Growing Forum about how much the strategies vary in quality:
- ” The strategies with action plans are good, as we are able to see who is working, how, with what and where, and then we are able to connect with them... [but] Quite a few of them seem to have been written in isolation... Possibly more about people coming to the table late and having written something because of the statutory requirement, whereas we have other local authorities that have been at this for quite a while.”⁶³

132. Food Growing Strategies are an important means by which local authorities can improve access to food growing opportunities. Given the increasing food

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.

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.

Ariane Burgess, Convener of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee at Lauriston Farm.



Source: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Annex A

138. Summary of Local Authority provision

Council	Food growing strategy?	Annual Allotment report?	Council provides allotments?
Aberdeen City	Yes	Yes	544 council plots
Aberdeenshire	Yes	Cannot locate	83 council plots
Angus	Yes	Cannot locate	Yes, but not much information on numbers or availability
Argyll & Bute	Yes	Cannot locate	3 sites owned by council but managed by associations
Clackmannanshire	No, but in development	Cannot locate	No, but 4 allotments associations
Dumfries & Galloway	No	Cannot locate	Unsure
Dundee City	Yes	Cannot locate	78 directly managed plots, several associations
East Ayrshire	No	Cannot locate	No
East Dunbartonshire	No	Cannot locate	Unclear
East Lothian	No (but has a draft)	Cannot locate	Yes, but not much information on numbers or availability
East Renfrewshire	No	No	No, although committed to work with communities
Edinburgh, City of	Yes	Cannot locate, but there is an allotment strategy	1,609 plots spread over 32 sites across the city
Eilean Siar	No, but seems to have been discussed by council	No	No
Falkirk	Yes	Cannot locate	No, refers to Falkirk Allotment Society
Fife	No, but there is an allotments strategy	Cannot locate	Manages 33 allotment sites
Glasgow City	Yes	Cannot locate	Half of 32 allotment sites managed by council
Highland	Yes	Cannot locate	No, provided by local Allotments Associations
Inverclyde	No (developing draft)	Cannot locate	No, provided by local Allotments Associations
Midlothian	Yes	Cannot locate	One council run site and some association sites
Moray	Yes	Cannot locate	No information
North Ayrshire	Yes	Cannot locate	No, provided by local Allotments Associations
North Lanarkshire	Yes	Cannot locate	No, provided by local Allotments Associations
Orkney	No	Cannot locate	3 sites, 58 plots
Perth & Kinross	Yes	Cannot locate	Owns 6 sites but managed by associations
Renfrewshire	Yes	Yes	There are 6 allotment associations who lease and occupy Council land.
Scottish Borders	Yes	Cannot locate	Owns and manage 82 plots across six sites
Shetland	Yes	No	Not clear
South Ayrshire	Yes	Yes	6 Council-owned allotment sites
South Lanarkshire	Yes	Yes	Manages 4 sites with 258 plots
Stirling	Yes	Cannot locate	4 allotment sites on Council land but only 1 maintained by Council
West Dunbartonshire	Apparently , but can't find	Cannot locate	Manages 2 sites with 38 plots
West Lothian	Yes	Cannot local	2 sites owned but leased to groups, 5 are privately owned

This is based on the [GetGrowing website](#) and a search of 32 local authority websites. It may be the case that documents are on council websites but are simply difficult to find, for example included as attachments to committee meeting papers, etc.

- [1] Scottish Parliament. (2022). Published responses, Allotments Inquiry. Retrieved from https://yourviews.parliament.scot/lghp/allotments-and-the-community-empowerment-act/consultation/published_select_respondent
- [2] Greenspace Scotland. (2013). Capturing the changes that count - a review of greenspace scotland's SROI programmes and projects, November 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/FAQs/sroi> [accessed 26 August 2022]
- [3] Value of Benefits Allotments bring to Brighton and Hove City. (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.bhaf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Value-of-Benefits-Allotments-bring-to-Brighton-and-Hove-City-Council-March2022.pdf>
- [4] Scottish Government. (2021). Programme for Government 2021-2022. Retrieved from <file:///C:/Users/s910027/Downloads/fairer-greener-scotland-programme-government-2021-22.pdf> [accessed 19 August 2022]

- 1 Glasgow Community Food Network (2022) Written evidence to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from https://yourviews.parliament.scot/lghp/allotments-and-the-community-empowerment-act/consultation/published_select_respondent
- 2 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31st) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 3 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 14) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13825>
- 4 Felicitas Macfie (2022). Written evidence to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from https://yourviews.parliament.scot/lghp/allotments-and-the-community-empowerment-act/consultation/published_select_respondent
- 5 Highland Council (2022). Written evidence to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from https://yourviews.parliament.scot/lghp/allotments-and-the-community-empowerment-act/consultation/published_select_respondent
- 6 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 7 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 8 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 9 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 10 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 11 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from Scottish Parliament <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 12 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>

- 13 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 14 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 15 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 16 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 14) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13825>
- 17 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 14) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13825>
- 18 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 19 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 20 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 21 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 22 Glasgow Allotment Forum (2022). Written evidence to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from https://yourviews.parliament.scot/lghp/allotments-and-the-community-empowerment-act/consultation/published_select_respondent
- 23 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 24 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 25 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>

- 26 Community Growing Forum (2022). Written evidence to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from https://yourviews.parliament.scot/lghp/allotments-and-the-community-empowerment-act/consultation/published_select_respondent
- 27 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 28 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 29 Anonymous (2022). Written evidence to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from https://yourviews.parliament.scot/lghp/allotments-and-the-community-empowerment-act/consultation/published_select_respondent
- 30 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 31
- 32 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 33 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 14) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13825>
- 34 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 35 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 14) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13825>
- 36 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 37 Kelvinside Allotment Association (2022). Written evidence to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from https://yourviews.parliament.scot/lghp/allotments-and-the-community-empowerment-act/consultation/published_select_respondent
- 38 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>

- 39 South Ayrshire Council (2022). Written evidence to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from https://yourviews.parliament.scot/lghp/allotments-and-the-community-empowerment-act/consultation/published_select_respondent
- 40 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 41 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 42 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 43 <https://www.placestandard.scot/>
- 44 Abundant Borders (2022). Written evidence to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from https://yourviews.parliament.scot/lghp/allotments-and-the-community-empowerment-act/consultation/published_select_respondent
- 45 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 14) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13825>
- 46 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 47 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 48 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 49 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 14) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13825>
- 50 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 14) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13825>
- 51 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>

- 52 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 53 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 54 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 55 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 14) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13825>
- 56 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 57 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 58 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 59 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 60 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 61 Scottish Parliament (2022, June 7) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13815>
- 62 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>
- 63 Scottish Parliament (2022, May 31) Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Retrieved from <https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13801>

