

Good Governance

'The Key to Successful Allotments'

GALVANISING GRASSROOTS

A Series of Guides for the Allotment Community



CONTENTS

The Benefits of Well Governed Allotments

p3

Good Practice in Governance

Nuts and Bolts

Paperwork Essentials

p6

p6

p9

Preventing, Resolving and Learning from Conflict

Types of Conflict on Allotments

p14

p14

Practical Ideas for Good Governance

Revitalising an Allotment Committee

Getting Started with Allotment Meetings

Welcoming the Next Generation of Allotment

Gardeners Respecting Our Community's Elders

p18

p18

p19

p21

p24

Appendix

Good Governance Health Checks

p26

p26

Further Reading and Information

p30

Contributors: Members of the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS)

Consultant: Dr Deborah Burn

Design and Illustration: Emily Chappell

Photo credits: Allotments' own



THE BENEFITS OF WELL GOVERNED ALLOTMENTS

Well governed allotments produce happy gardeners who help to grow sustainable allotment communities well into the future. Scotland has an active and healthy community of allotment gardeners not only growing things, but also socialising with one another and enjoying the therapeutic benefits of being outdoors. Allotments are embedded in their locality and provide places where people can catch up with old friends and enjoy meeting newcomers keen to learn about growing your own fruit and vegetables. These are the places where children and adults can learn about growing food and fostering wildlife in the midst of a caring local community of gardeners of all ages and social backgrounds.

Allotments across Scotland are organised and managed in many different ways. Approaches vary depending both on the local community and the provider of the land. The provider can be a public land owner such as a local authority, or a private land-owner prepared to lease land to an individual or an association. The land for some allotment sites in Scotland is owned directly by an Allotment Association whose membership usually consists of the allotment gardeners.

Some sites are owned and managed by the local authority, with plot holders leasing their plots directly from the local authority and the local authority retaining total responsibility for the running and maintenance of the site. In this case there is no need for the plot holders to form an association. Other sites (which may be on either public or private land) have allotment associations which undertake some or all of the management functions. The allotment association may also lease the allotment site from the landowner or they may not. Depending on specific circumstances, the association will have varying degrees of control over how a site is run. The greatest level of control occurs where the site is owned by the allotment association itself. Therefore, a variety of models exist ranging from those where the allotment holders have limited control through to models where the allotment holders have most control.





The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, due to come into force during 2018, gives associations on sites currently local authority owned and managed new rights. This includes the right to ask to undertake a limited number of management functions under the heading 'Delegated Management'. 'Devolved Management' with *additional* responsibilities is available if the association negotiates a lease from the local authority. The Act also enables eligible community bodies, including allotment associations, to request an asset transfer of publicly owned land, either through leasing it or by taking on ownership.

Allotments are important community assets for Scotland and the way that allotment sites are managed now (and into the future) is important for everyone in Scotland, as well as for our local gardeners growing food and caring for the immediate environment. Put simply, well governed allotments benefit everyone and good governance ensures our allotments are cared for and this asset will be protected for all.

"Who is this guide for?"

This guide is for everyone in the Scottish allotment community.

For example:

- gardeners thinking about the best interests of their allotment site, or considering standing for election to the committee`
- gardeners who have just started a brand new allotment site
- committees on long-established sites checking they are acting democratically and in the best interests of their allotment community.



"What is governance at the allotment?"

Governance is about the way organisations are overseen and directed. An allotment community or association can govern its allotment site with the permission of their allotment provider (local council or private landowner). This form of governance is undertaken by a committee of allotment gardeners, normally elected by members of that allotment site's community. This is called "delegated management" in Scotland, although the term "self management" is often used too.

SAGS, along with the Scottish Government, expect the governance of allotment sites to be fair, transparent, democratic, and encouraging (rather than excluding). Everyone who is a plot holder should be able to take part in the decisions and management of their site. How allotments are governed is not the decision of one lone allotment gardener armed with a clipboard. Allotment committees should govern democratically and in the best interests of everyone who gardens in their allotment community. There are other considerations too, e.g. site neighbours, the wider local community, the allotment provider and anyone interested in renting a plot. A clear and open process of two-way communication is part and parcel of being democratic, open and welcoming.

GOOD PRACTICE IN GOVERNANCE

Nuts and Bolts

Allotments host a rich seam of local gardening skills, practices, traditions and people exploring different ways of gardening. This variety sometimes brings challenges in governance overall and on a daily basis. Governance of allotments should be customised to fit the site and its gardeners. There is no “one size fits all” approach to governance which will serve the diverse practices and aspirations within the Scottish allotment community as a whole.

Ethos

This is the shared vision your allotment community has for now and into the future. It is the plot holders’ aspirations *and* ideas for the site and for everyday life there. Having a clear ethos is equally important for new and existing allotment sites. A good way to start is everyone meeting up to work out their community’s vision for the future. The ethos will be written into the community’s legal documentation – more about this later – so take time and take all views into account.

An ethos essential for an allotment community is to provide the opportunity for people to cultivate vegetables, fruit and flowers on allotment gardens for non-commercial purposes and to enjoy the accompanying leisure, social, health and environmental benefits of allotment gardening.

Many allotment communities wish to go further. Think about:

- their community’s relationship with the wider community beyond the allotment gate.
- how gardeners can hand down their allotment skills to the next generation, ensuring the place of allotments in Scotland’s future.

Engaging with the wider **community** could include annual open days, organised site tours, school visits or, gardening activities for organised groups. All good allotment communities need to be neighbourly and maintain cordial relations with people beyond the allotment gate. A good ethos also recognises that whilst some allotment gardeners want to actively engage in the community others want privacy and solitude.

An allotment community can change quickly as people leave and newcomers arrive and forms of gardening come in and out of fashion. People bring with them a variety of beliefs, practices and commitment levels to the allotment. An ethos should be sufficiently broad to accommodate different approaches and changes over time.

To summarise, these points should be taken into account:

1. A wide variety of people from different backgrounds and life experiences are allotment gardeners.
2. People have different reasons for being on site such as gardening for solitude/privacy, for the show bench or dinner table, for health, or to teach children.
3. Many plot holders involve their family and friends. Community groups also participate on allotments.

It is crucial all gardeners on the site have an opportunity to participate in discussions about an ethos. All have ideas and skills to share.

Be prepared for some surprises! There may be distinct groups of gardeners with completely different ideas and aspirations. Agreeing on an ethos can be tricky to pull off instantly. Everyone must be prepared to listen and compromise. A reminder that everyone is there because they love allotment gardening can contribute.



You may find the Good Governance Health Checks in the Appendix will be an essential tool. It is designed to help groups know when they are getting things right.

Organisational Status

Allotment associations on directly managed Local Authority sites may not need to worry about this. However, any site association committee with Delegated or Devolved management responsibilities should think about their status in the light of their financial responsibilities.

To carry out effective governance duties, an allotment association or group should form itself into a democratic and appropriate legally recognised organisation. This applies to all voluntary organisations and is called “organisational status”. It is vital to get this right from the very start in order to reflect the group ethos and avoid financial risks.

Different types of organisational status are available [see below] - what’s important is to choose one that is best for the community. Choose one that permits the community freedom to act in its best interests *and* which limits financial risk to the organisation, the committee, individual committee members, and members of the association.

What are examples of Organisational Status/Legal Structures?

Several types of legal organisational structures are available in Scotland. Examples include:



Most structures will be volunteer led. The key difference between structures is whether they are incorporated (and therefore have a separate legal personality) or are not incorporated (and therefore do not have a separate legal personality). This is a key aspect for allotment groups and associations to consider when deciding what legal structure to adopt. Specialised legal advice *must* be sought.

There is a separate question of whether to also seek charitable status, if eligible to do so. Each legal structure has pros and cons. Some (e.g. Registered Charity) are only available to organisations that meet particular criteria. Particular legal structures are essential for some activities, e.g. if you want to run a community (not for profit) allotment shop. Seek specialist advice before deciding.

Paperwork essentials

Good governance requires a robust legal structure to function well. The reward is freedom to implement the ethos. Associations undertaking delegated or devolved management on Local Authority provided sites may not need all the documents listed below as the provider will take on a lot of the responsibility. The basic minimum for any independent activity should be a Constitution and Rules.

Seek to strike a balance with rules. Their aim is to set a minimal framework to ensure everyone can enjoy their allotment, express themselves, and engage with their fellow gardeners. If a community has too many rules it can tie itself up in knots but too few rules can hamper good governance. Committee members should also remember they are subject to the rules of their own devising. It is highly desirable to keep the bureaucracy of allotment governance to low levels and maintain a happy and productive community.



The minimum paperwork for a self-governing allotment site are the following legal documents:

Constitution

This explains what the organisation is about, who can join, how it operates, and how it can be wound up (closed down). The wording of the Constitution should be collectively agreed by all the members of the association. It will contain the objects or aims of the association which have been agreed as part of the ethos conversations. It should also describe what activities the association should undertake and it should identify to others what the organisation does. The Constitution should also reflect current equalities and health and safety legislation.

Rules and regulations

These are supplementary to the Constitution and govern activity on the site.

Usually people comply with the Rules and are happy to work with a committee. Involving plot holders in developing and agreeing these rules creates a sense of ownership - these are their rules. Ensuring that rules are easy to understand and are fair with transparent procedures of enforcement can go a long way to help. It is good practice in governance for an allotment community to challenge itself occasionally and ask why certain items are included in its rules, E.g. *"Why do we have a rule that all sheds must be brown and is this creating conflict?"* Everyone gardening on the site should receive a copy of the Constitution and Rules.

Use plain language for the Rules and Constitution to avoid writing in conflict. Some language used by the allotment community can be interpreted as archaic and difficult to understand, e.g. the words "husbandry" and "dirty plot". There are times when these terms have been applied to question a gardener's style of gardening rather than whether a garden is being cultivated or not. Avoid them!

Under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, each local authority must consult about and make regulations for

the allotment sites it provides. This is described in Part 9 and should cover: 'allocation of allotments, rent, cultivation of allotments, maintenance of allotments, maintenance of allotment sites, buildings or other structures that may be erected on allotments, the modifications that may be made to such structures and the materials that may or may not be used in connection with such structures, the keeping of livestock (including poultry), and landlord inspections.' Allotment associations on Local Authority provided sites undertaking devolved or delegated management must take these regulations into account in their Constitution and Rules.

Legal Agreement with the Allotment Provider

This is a written agreement between the allotment site provider and an allotment association which sets out the terms on which the association can manage the site, and how long for. This may be called a lease. Other terms may also be used, such as missive or licence. Seek clarification and specialised legal advice.

The legal agreement document must be signed by both parties before they can start governance on the site. As soon as signatures are on the paper the constituted organisation assumes all the legal liabilities specified (or implied) in the wording of the agreement. There is a lot of information to understand and take into account for any allotment association considering a legal agreement with their allotment provider. For instance, there are specific legal and financial liabilities depending on the wording of the document. It is also important to take into account the length of time of the agreement and to negotiate the very best possible deal for the allotment community.



Agreement between constituted organisation and plot holder

When a plot holder signs this agreement they are accepting the Constitution and Rules and risk eviction if they do not follow them. Plot holders should be given a copy of their signed agreement.

Optional Policy documents

Some sites have a variety of policy documents covering specific aspects, for example: cultivation; health and safety; recycling; structures; and/or dignity and respect. Other sites have none of these.

Insurance

Whatever else is required, all allotment sites should be covered by Public Liability Insurance (PLI). This policy should be chosen to financially cover the constituted organisation if a claim is made against it by a member of the public for damage, loss, or injury. Whether or not a constituted organisation is required to purchase Public Liability Insurance (PLI) should be stated in its legal agreement with the allotment provider. Sometimes, allotment providers will retain liability for PLI, even when a constituted organisation is responsible for governance of the site. If you are uncertain it is important to ask the allotment provider for clarification in writing.

Who can give advice on insurance (and sell it) is governed by law. It is therefore beyond the scope of this guide to provide advice on this matter.

**"Relationship between documents"**

The community's ethos, constitution and the terms of the agreement with the provider must be reflected similarly across all governance documents and these should not contradict one another. E.g. if the Legal Agreement with the Allotment Provider states "bonfires may only be lit between November and March" then this should be written into the agreement with the plot holder too.

Keeping organised and legal

Governance documents need to be kept safe and secure and at least one copy should be made of each document and kept in a separate location. Committee changes happen, so ensure copies of documents are well circulated amongst committee members to reduce the risk of loss or delays. Archive documents when finished with them. When an organisation gathers and stores personal information (e.g. plot holder contact details) on paper/computer, the Data Protection Act (1998) must be complied with and from the 25th May 2018 the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) must also be complied with. It is important to be aware of occasional changes in legislation, so keep up to date. If closed circuit television (CCTV) is installed on site, there is also a requirement to register with the Information Commissioner's Office.



PREVENTING, RESOLVING AND LEARNING FROM CONFLICT

Common links in types of conflict

Conflict on allotment sites has different faces. There can be disagreements between gardeners or within a committee, or between a committee and gardeners. There can also be disagreements with site neighbours and allotment providers. Allotments are embedded in local communities so conflict can start beyond the allotment gates, drift in and disrupt harmony on the site.

Conflict should not be left to fester. A conflict that is identified, acknowledged, resolved promptly (and reviewed) will make for stronger social relations on site.

"Is conflict always a bad thing?"

Conflict is not always negative. It can help people and organisations to reflect on why something might have gone wrong and to learn new ways of working together. Good governance is about listening as well as telling. Sometimes if everyone is aware there is a plan for working through conflict effectively then this can prevent conflict occurring in the first place.

Types of conflict at the allotment

Very generally speaking, two forms of conflict can happen in allotment gardening.

- **Latent Conflict:** A conflict is common knowledge but a complaint has not been made to the committee. The conflict affects social interactions on the allotment site or in the local neighbourhood but it is not officially recognised.
- **Actual conflict:** A conflict has been officially raised in meetings or a complaint has been made to the committee. In other words, the committee has received a complaint and needs to resolve it.

There is no single method to resolve conflict on allotment sites. Each and every conflict will be different with a variety of personalities involved, different demands made, individual and local circumstances to take into account, and each conflict will have a mixture of potential options for moving towards resolution.

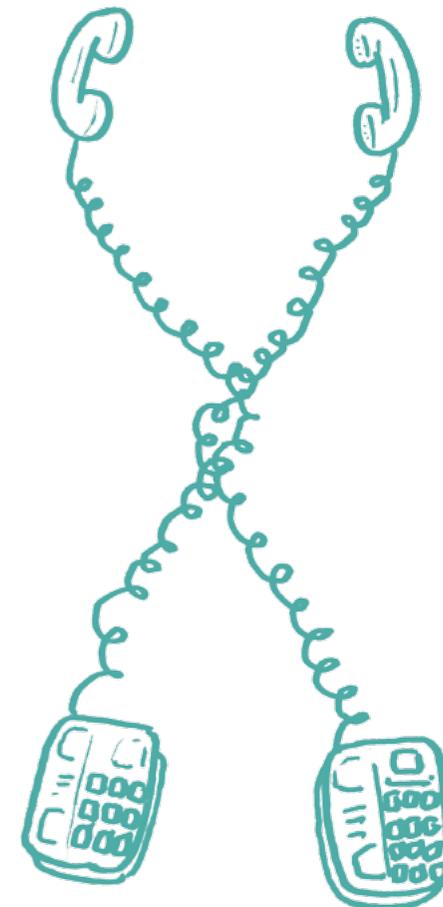
Ideally, the Constitution will do the work of resolving conflict. Constitutions can do this via the inclusion of a robust Complaints Policy. This way everyone knows that the community's governance includes effective and practical conflict resolution.

Dignity, respect and familiarity

Committee members are themselves allotment gardeners, having a dual role.

This situation can sometimes bring discomfort and stress to committee members.

A conflict at the allotment may involve gardeners who have close ties to a committee member, e.g. family, friends, neighbours, colleagues. When this happens a committee member should *not* take part in resolving the conflict. Complaint Policy wording should state this. When the majority of a committee has close ties to a person involved in a conflict, resolution by the committee is unworkable. The allotment provider should be approached in the first instance for advice, with external mediation a final resort.



Resolving conflict within a committee

It is part and parcel of everyday life for people to disagree! Sometimes people cannot “agree to disagree” and conflict arises in the committee. There might be factions, inner circles, someone who is volatile, or someone who is unable to share power. This can seriously affect the running of any organisation and requires specific action. Detailed advice is available, see Further Reading.



How to prevent conflict

Prevent conflict by keeping conversations going, e.g.

- Regular information provided to members
- Meetings open to all members, with minutes circulated promptly
- Site neighbours informed of large deliveries and infrastructure work etc.
- Regularly updating the allotment provider - even to simply say all is well and to provide detail of forthcoming plans.

Good governance in allotment gardening is a two-way process. It is about *listening* as well as providing information and issuing decisions.



In a worst case scenario it can be helpful to ask an independent party (unconnected to the allotment site and the allotment provider) to participate in assessing an appeal to ensure fairness and transparency. Local Authorities and other organisations offer independent mediation processes. However, both sides need to agree to participate and abide by the recommendations. If mediation as a resolution for disputes is agreed at the ethos discussions, then peer pressure can help to bring both sides to the table.

A complaints management checklist for when conflict happens is available in the Good Governance Health Checks Appendix.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Revitalising an allotment committee

After several years of service, committee members would like newcomers on-board to reflect the social make-up of the allotment community. Many gardeners of all ages say "I'm too busy".

Ideas and suggestions:

Enabling every gardener to do a little bit for their community is better than placing all the responsibility on the shoulders of one or two people. Give credit for every task undertaken, no matter how small or insignificant it might seem to the bigger picture. This approach is good practice in governance because it widens opportunities to participate and it values everyone.

Consider the time taken, and involvement required, for each committee position:

- Does one position have a bigger work load than others? Spreading workloads equally amongst committee members creates less onerous committee positions. So, if the Secretary is managing the waiting list, letting plots, *and* doing plot inspections then consider advertising the role as three smaller and more manageable positions. E.g. Waiting List Manager, Plot Lettings Officer, Plot Inspection Team.



- Ensure committee meetings are held at suitable intervals, times and locations for people with a lot of commitments. Often, it can be very small things such as workload and timing of meetings that actually puts people off from volunteering, rather than more complex governance issues.
- Set a time limit for committee positions. This is called "succession". People are more attracted to volunteering when time limits are set.
- Being on a committee can be daunting for people with no prior experience. 'Old Hands' should see it as an important part of their role to be welcoming and kind, as well as offering training and support to newcomers. Knowing that there is support, or just someone to chat with, can encourage people to join a committee.

Getting started with allotment meetings / Governance issue

A local landowner has created a new allotment site and expects the allotment gardeners to form an allotment association to govern and maintain the site via a written agreement. The new gardeners need to meet and agree on getting started with governance but most are inexperienced with meetings.

Ideas and suggestions:

Even the most experienced chair can find it challenging to get a new group started and moving forward. Ground Rules are a useful way of ensuring your meetings flow and have pace, with everyone sticking to the task at hand.

Some examples of Ground Rules are:

- everyone agreeing not to dominate
- everyone promised time to speak
- less relevant issues raised during a meeting will always be noted and dealt with in due course.

When an association is forming there will probably be no committee, and everyone involved will be attending the meetings. Giving everyone time to speak can lead to long unproductive meetings. The following strategy can help overcome this problem, while leaving everyone feeling listened to:

- Ask people to split into small randomly-formed groups during a meeting.
- Invite each group to devise a wish list of half a dozen items they believe most important. Focus collectively on these when everyone comes back together as one large group.



If problems are anticipated – perhaps one person tends to dominate or another might not always keep their cool – then consider inviting the landowner, a council officer, or a well-respected member of the local community to initial meetings. This helps keep everyone focussed.

Keep clear 15 minutes at the end of each meeting for a summary of what has been achieved and to compile a list of what everyone *agrees* needs to be done next. Always remember to leave time for a collective “pat on the back” for everyone’s hard work. Asking two people to record salient points and agreements throughout the meeting ensures greater accuracy, rather than one person trying to write down every single word spoken.

Welcoming the next generation of allotment gardeners

*A person with no previous experience of allotment gardening rented a plot eight months ago. The new gardener is **very** keen but has had few gardening successes so far. Their garden is not yet fully cultivated and weeds are beginning to show. Some members of the community think the newcomer should be told to leave and are discussing this around the site, the newcomer is unhappy about this. The allotment site has 20+ people on the waiting list.*

Ideas and suggestions:

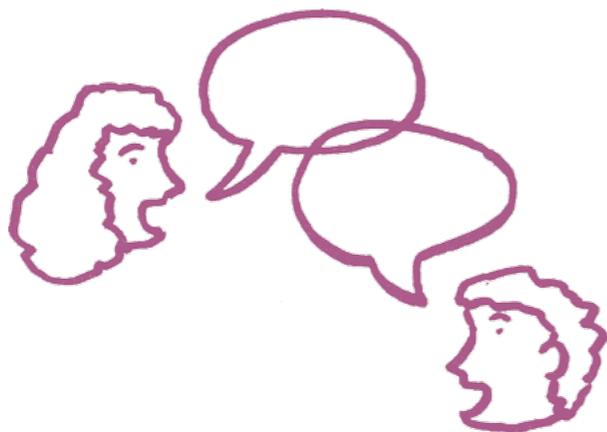
The site with a kind, supportive association will be a friendly place where new plot holders can find their role and place. Allotment communities play an important role in ensuring future generations in Scotland have food growing skills (Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society, 2007). Much of this is indirectly learned from established plot holders. Fewer people now grow up with gardening parents and relatives, consequently many newcomers to allotment gardening have absolutely no experience of gardening at all.

- Gently remind those who complain that even they were once beginners.
- Talk privately with the newcomer, explain what you have told people (above). Ask how the community can help!
- Explain that in the long run downsizing or eviction could be enforced, but the community’s ethos is to give newcomers the opportunity to grow their gardening skills.
- Ask a skilled gardener to mentor or ‘buddy-up’ with the newcomer. Regular contact with an experienced gardener(s) helps with learning and settling in.
- Recommend the newcomer checks out the internet, there is a wealth of allotment gardening groups sharing tips and ideas on social media, and there are allotment garden bloggers too.

- Newcomers to allotment gardening often say the first few months are lonely. Try and find ways of linking people up without being overbearing, e.g. regular work parties, or barbeques.
- The fact that there is a waiting list should not affect a committee's decision about giving a new and inexperienced gardener time to develop their skill in allotment gardening. When the newcomer has developed their skill in allotment gardening the community will be rewarded.

Preventing this conflict:

- Offering smaller plots or 'starter plots' to newcomers - not just those who are unskilled – can prevent these situations. This is better than a newcomer downsizing to a smaller plot later. Nobody likes to look like a failure.
- A tour of the site for newly arrived newcomers is kindly and welcoming, and helps break down feelings of isolation in the early days.
- Ask for feedback! Ask newcomers what has worked and what hasn't. You can then share this with future new arrivals to help and support them.



Respecting Our Community's Elders

A skilled allotment gardener who has had an allotment for decades is now experiencing ill-health in later life. Consequently, their plot is becoming less cultivated than previously. Some gardeners believe the ageing gardener should be told to leave, whilst some think this is unfair given how long the gardener has been a member of the community. Latent conflict has arisen – it's the talk of the site but no formal complaint has been made. The committee are due to carry out plot checks (inspections) in a few weeks.

Ideas and suggestions:

Social isolation can kill older people yet the allotment hosts the types of sociability, gentle exercise, and routines that can enable people to live happily into older age. All communities thrive when older members are respected for their knowledge and skills. Accommodating the needs of ageing allotment gardeners is good governance. Encouraging older gardeners to continue gardening also helps retain valuable local gardening skill and experience in an allotment community which can be handed-down to future generations.

Informal help and support

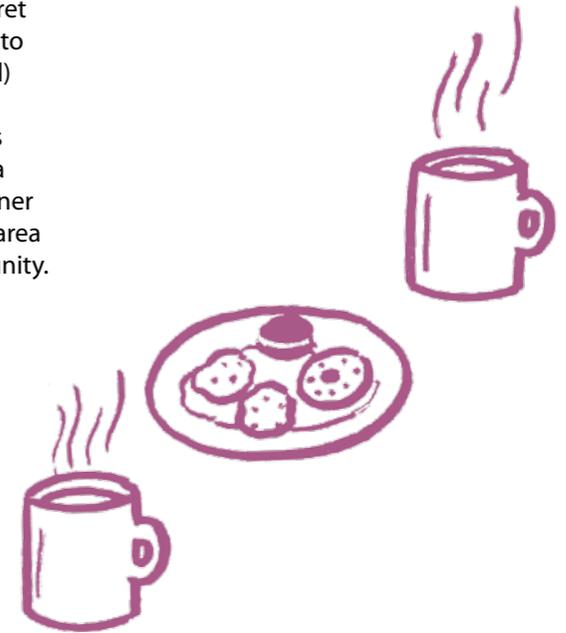
Allotment communities thrive on the power of informal social cooperation, e.g. watering for a gardener on holiday, doing a bit of lifting for someone who has hurt their back, sharing a manure delivery, or playing with a gardener's children while parents weed. This often goes unnoticed, yet is a central part of all allotment communities. Sometimes cooperation starts on its own – gardeners might notice another gardener's struggles, turn up and give a hand. If this hasn't happened, try a friendly reminder that it is our seasoned gardeners who have kept allotments going through thick and thin.



Offering to downsize

A reduction in garden size can mean the difference between an ageing gardener remaining in the community where many of their friends are based or eviction. Downsizing after many years is challenging therefore this option should be approached with kindness and sensitivity. Allotment gardeners develop long and meaningful attachments to their plot, especially after cultivating it for years, so losing a precious rose bush planted by a relative, giving up some valued fruit bushes, or access to a greenhouse can be hurtful.

Downsizing may well be a solution, but some gardeners may interpret this offer as an offence to their pride. Committees may find it useful to ask another mature gardener (or a friend of the gardener concerned) to initially raise the topic, or to help out with informal discussions. Sometimes indicating that the reason downsizing is being offered is because the community respects the gardener can help and act as a reminder about why downsizing can be positive. If an ageing gardener does decide to leave, permitting visits to the site or to a communal area after they have left can help retain their social links with the community.



APPENDIX GOOD GOVERNANCE HEALTH CHECKS

Why do a Health Check?

Thinking about governance as something to keep alive and in good health prevents practices from becoming stale and stagnant. An annual Good Governance Health Check reveals where an allotment community is at present, where it's heading, and enables planning for a sustainable future. Regular maintenance stops conflict in its tracks and allows allotment communities to thrive.

The answers to all of the questions in both check lists are either in this guide, or can be found in the Further Reading list.

Health Check Questions for a new allotment site

- Has everyone in our allotment community had the opportunity to meet and democratically agree to an ethos?
- Where can we get help and training on committee roles and holding meetings?
- Has a suitable Organisational Status been chosen and adopted?
- Do we have a Constitution yet? Who can give us advice on drafting this?
- Have we tested our organisation's ability to take on various levels of delegated management of an allotment site? How will we go about doing this?
- Have we negotiated the terms of a Legal Agreement with the Allotment Provider?
- Do we need Public Liability Insurance, and other insurance?
- Have agreements been signed by people renting allotment gardens from our constituted organisation? Where are our organisation's copies?
- Who is responsible for keeping our copy of the Legal Agreement with the Allotment Provider? Where is our copy right now?
- Have we made backups (copies) of our organisation's documents? Who has these?
- How can people contact us if they are interested in getting an allotment? Who will keep and maintain our waiting list? Are our waiting list procedures auditable?

- Do our community's neighbours and the wider community know how to contact us?
- What information do our plot holders have about when and how to pay their rent?
- Have we drafted a Complaints Policy? Where can we go for help?
- What's the first thing we do if we learn about conflict in our community?
- What's the first thing we do if there is conflict amongst committee members?
- Is there a local allotment Federation our organisation can join for help and support, and to share our successes with?
- Have we joined the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society?
- Do we have a diary/planner for our allotment organisation? Have we added "Good Governance Health Check" for one year's time?

Health Check Questions for existing allotment sites

- Does our Ethos reflect the hopes and aspirations of our allotment community? How can the committee find out and start reviewing our ethos if needs be?
- Is there a type of conflict in our community that never goes away? How can our community start work on it's resolution and future prevention?
- Has every plot holder on the allotment site signed an agreement?
- Where are our Paperwork Essentials and who has copies?
- What further information can we read if we think we do not currently have the capacity (knowledge and skills) to govern?
- When did we last have a conversation with our allotment provider?
- How can the committee train and support new committee members? Does our committee itself need training?
- Is our Constitution fit for purpose? Where can we go for help and support with this?

- Have we promoted and held our AGM (and circulated minutes) in accordance with our organisation's Constitution?
- Do we have a plan for dealing with non-cultivation by new and inexperienced gardeners, and ageing gardeners? What steps can our community take to welcome and respect them?
- Is there a local allotment Federation our organisation can join for help and support, and to share our successes with?
- Have we joined the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society?
- Do we have a diary/planner for our allotment organisation? Have we added "Governance Health Check" for one year's time?

When conflict happens

Committees that listen, research, and discuss options before deciding upon a resolution are those that govern well. Consider these questions before issuing a full response:

- Acknowledge complaints in writing, providing a date for a reply or an update.
- Check the Constitution Rules and Complaints Policy. What do they permit to resolve this particular conflict? Is the process transparent and robust?
- Do some research. Is this the first time this conflict has occurred? Is there some detailed history? Has the conflict begun "off site"? The conflict might not actually be about allotment gardening at all.
- The allotment provider may have encountered this issue previously and have ideas, help and guidance to offer. Never hide problems from the allotment provider.
- Decisions should be democratically agreed by the committee and subject to a transparent and robust appeals system. Asking an independent party (unconnected to the allotment site and the allotment provider) to participate in assessing an appeal ensures fairness and transparency and can diffuse tensions. Appeals can also prevent resorting to an external mediation process.
- Always provide a written response to a complaint and/or appeal.



FURTHER READING + INFORMATION

- The Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society
www.sags.org.uk / secretary@sags.org.uk
- Dundee Federation of Allotments and Gardens Holders
www.dundeeallotments.btck.co.uk/AllotmentsitesinDundee
- Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments
www.fedaga.org.uk / committee@fedaga.org.uk
- Glasgow Allotments Forum
www.glasgowallotmentsforum.org.uk / admin@glasgowallotmentsforum.org.uk

ALLOTMENT-SPECIFIC GOVERNANCE

Allotment-specific governance

- Allotments Regeneration Initiative (2002 to 2012). Gardeners in Charge - A Guide to Devolved Management. Available at: www.sags.org.uk *

* Provides information on stages of governance, how to check overall capacity to accept governance, and accountability. Please note this publication was written prior to the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, so be aware of and research any changes affecting you as a result of the Act.

Allotment Communities

- Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (2007) Growing Scotland: Gardening Contributes to the Scottish Executive Agenda to Improve the Nation's Wellbeing. Available from: www.sags.org.uk/docs/GardenScotland/GrowingScotlandDocument.pdf

OTHER USEFUL ORGANISATION'S WEB SITES

- The Community Land Advisory Service
www.communitylandadvice.org.uk
- Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector
www.governancepages.org.uk
- Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)
www.scvo.org.uk

ORGANISATIONAL STATUS & INSURANCE

- Community Land Advisory Service (2014) Leases Overview: Start Here! Available at: <https://sc.communitylandadvice.org.uk>
- Community Land Advisory Service (2013) Overview: Insurance Available at: <https://sc.communitylandadvice.org.uk/>
- Co-operatives UK (2017) Simply Legal. Available at: www.uk.coop/the-hive/simply-legal

GENERIC GOVERNANCE INFORMATION

- Association for Research in the Voluntary and Community Sector (2010) The Quick Guide to Finding New Committee Members. Available at: www.governancepages.org.uk
- Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (2018) Good Governance Jargon Buster. Available at: www.scvo.org.uk/running-your-organisation/governance/jargon-buster
- Co-operatives UK (2014) Simply Governance. Available at: www.uk.coop/resources/simply-governance-guide

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- The Good Governance Group (2017) Revised Code of Good Governance Health check. Available at: www.diycommitteeguide.org/download/governance-health-check
- The Good Governance Group (various) Dealing with Conflict Toolkit, Conflict Within Management Committees, DIY Committee Guide Available at: www.diycommitteeguide.org

DATA PROTECTION

- Information Commissioner's Office (2018) Guide to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Available at: www.ico.org.uk



Celebrate all the facets of your allotment and make sure that everyone from your MSPs to your local school children realise what a joy being a plot-holder brings.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot



Scottish Allotments
& Gardens Society