



Consultation regarding the 10-year agreement rule in the Allotment Policy

August 2020

Background

In 2010 when the Council reviewed its allotment policy it put in place an innovative new policy to try and increase the opportunities for people to have access to an allotment plot. This included reducing the size of plots and to limit new plots to a maximum of 10 year agreements. Policy 3 of the of the Islington Council's Allotment Policy currently states, "New allotment holders will be told that their annual agreements will not be extended past ten years."

This policy has been in place since 2010 and only applies to new allotment holders who received their allotments after 2010. However, as the time approaches for the first ten year leases to come to an end we have received a number of concerns about the impact of losing the plots on those that have invested 10 years in cultivating the plots and on the sites themselves as the allotment groups lose established members of their allotment community. As a result of concerns raised the Council consulted with all existing plot holders and everyone on the allotment waiting list to seek their views on the policy and how we might look to address this challenge.

The analysis of the results and the pros and cons of the 10-year rule must be viewed against the particular circumstances in Islington. Islington has the fewest number of allotments of any London borough and the demand, given that so few people have their own outdoor space, is considerable.

In 2010, there were 270 people on the waiting list. There are currently 115 still on the list and the people most recently given a plot had been on the waiting list for 14 years. Given that the last person on the waiting list went on in 2008 and we are currently only able to offer about 14 plots a year due to natural movement, it could be another 8 years before we reach the end of the list.

The Parks Service receives requests for allotments most weeks and when the time comes to re-open the waiting list, demand will be strong

Results

The survey (attached) was sent to 187 people and there were 57 responses so a 30% response rate. Of those, 43 (75% of responses) were existing plot holders and 14 (25% of responses) were on the waiting list.

16 of the responders (28%) supported the 10-year rule and 41 (72%) did not.

8 of the plot holders (19% of those that responded) supported the 10-year rule and 35 (81%) did not.

Of the 43 plot holders that responded, 31 are currently affected by the 10-year rule. Of those, 7 (23%) supported the 10-year rule and 24 (77%) did not.

8 of the people on the waiting list (57% of those that responded) supported the 10-year rule and 6 (43%) did not.

Analysis

The analysis of the survey can easily be broken down into the number crunching element and the qualitative element.

Two free text boxes were included in the survey. One asked the main reasons people gave for supporting, or not the 10-year rule and the other asked people to list the main benefits derived from having their plot.

An analysis of the free text was undertaken and the main points listed. Some responders made more than one point.

Below are the main reasons people gave for NOT supporting the 10 year policy	
Not fair, especially if maintaining the plot	26
The time to get the plot to a good productive stage	12
Loss of community & advice	10
Inability to grow long term crops	5
There should be other ways to manage the issue	3
All plot holders should have the same length of agreement	1

Below are the main reasons people gave for supporting the 10 year policy	
Length of time on waiting list	6
Fairer to all	3
There are so few allotments	1

Below are the main benefits derived from having their plot	
Growing good food	30
Mental well being	27
Feeling of community	24
Physical well being	21
Access to an outdoor space	19

Along with the completed surveys, a detailed response was submitted by the Chair of the Quill Street Allotment Society. There had been a meeting where all allotment holders in the borough were invited and it is believed that the response from the Chair was a good representation of the views of those present. The response indicates that the Allotment Society is against the 10-year rule.

Officer recommendation:

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Based on the feedback received as part of the consultation, there is clear opposition to the 10-year rule (72% of responses against it). What was interesting was that of those that responded from the waiting list, 43% were against it too.

While we still believe that the initial aim of the 10 year rule, which was to allow more people the opportunity to access an allotment (which are a valuable community assets), there are some unintended consequences in terms of impact on existing plot holders on the 10 year rule and wider allotment community.

As a result, the Parks Service recommend withdrawing the 10-year rule and converting all existing licences to lifetime licences. The licences will still be subject to the annual renewal and the allotment holders will need to ensure that can maintain the plots to the standards required in the licence or risk having the licence cancelled.

To ensure we can continue to provide more food growing opportunities within the borough the parks service will focus on developing a food growing strategy for the borough with the aim of increasing opportunities for the community to grow food in parks, housing estates and public realm land around the borough.

We will also continue to actively seek additional opportunities to create new allotments through re-sizing of existing allotment plots when tenancies are ended and through identifying new land that could be converted to allotments.

Finding new land for allotments will be a challenge in Islington due to the lack of space and demand for new housing. Despite this challenge the Council is committed to looking at creative new ways to cover come this challenge where possible as the provision of allotment plots and foodgrowing plays a key part in the Council's agenda to build healthier communities and promote healthy living and to become a Zero Carbon Borough by 2030.

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