ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL ALLOTMENT REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS POLICY

1. Purpose

Ashington Town Council wants everyone to enjoy the benefits of allotment gardening for as long as they are able. We recognise that health conditions and disabilities can make it harder to keep a plot to the standard the tenancy agreement requires, and that many of our tenants are getting older. This policy explains what we will do to support tenants who are struggling for reasons covered by the Equality Act 2010, what we ask of tenants in return, and where the limits of that support lie. It applies alongside the tenancy agreement; it does not replace it.

2. When this policy applies

This policy applies when a tenant tells us — or we become aware — that a disability or long-term health condition is affecting their ability to maintain their plot. Tenants do not need to provide medical evidence; we will take what they tell us in good faith. The earlier a tenant tells us, the more we can do. We encourage tenants to speak to the Allotment Officer as soon as they are struggling, and not to wait until an inspection or improvement letter. Plot inspection letters will invite tenants to tell us about any health condition or disability affecting their plot, so that support can be put in place early.

This policy applies solely to the standard of plot cultivation and the Council's approach to inspections, timelines, and enforcement decisions where a plot holder has a disability or health condition. It does not apply to breaches of the tenancy agreement that are unrelated to cultivation standards, including but not limited to: fires, waste, animals. Such breaches are governed by the tenancy agreement and the Council's allotment rules and will be addressed through the standard process regardless of any reasonable adjustments in place under this policy.

3. What we will do

Where this policy applies, the Allotment Officer may put in place one or more of the following adjustments, recorded on the allotment database and confirmed to the tenant:

More frequent check-ins. The Allotment Officer will keep in touch more regularly — normally by phone or email, and by site visit where helpful — to see how the tenant is managing, before problems become formal ones.

More time. Deadlines for improvements will be extended to reflect the tenant’s circumstances. Any extension will have a date attached, so both sides know where they stand.

An adjusted standard. The standard expected during the adjustment period will be adapted. Rather than requiring the plot to be fully compliant, we will look for clear, visible signs that the plot is being actively worked and is not deteriorating. The adjusted standard will be described in plain terms so the tenant knows what “good enough for now” looks like.

A designated helper. Tenants will be encouraged to name a family member, friend, or fellow plot holder as a designated helper who may work the plot with or for them. The helper’s details will be noted so they can access the site and speak to the Allotment Officer on the tenant’s behalf if the tenant wishes.

Practical help, within limits. The Allotment Officer may offer practical support such as meeting the tenant on the plot, advising on the easiest order to tackle work, or connecting the tenant with other plot holders or community projects who may help. The Council cannot undertake the cultivation or clearance of a tenant's plot, and the Allotment Officer's time must be shared fairly across all sites and several hundred plots.

4. What we ask of tenants

Adjustments are a partnership. In return, we ask tenants to keep in touch, to be realistic with us about what they can manage, to make use of the help of others where they can, and to tell us if their circumstances change — in either direction.

5. Alternatives to a full plot

Where a full plot has become too much, we will discuss alternatives, including moving to a half plot when one is available, adding a named helper to share the work, or an introduction to community growing schemes such as the Full Circle Food Project's Community Allotment, where raised beds are shared and no one person carries a whole plot. Choosing a smaller or shared space is not a failure; it is a way to keep growing.

6. Review and limits

We will review adjustments with the tenant at agreed points, normally every three months. Adjustments are there to help someone through a difficult period — they are not permanent. The aim is that the tenant either finds a way of keeping their plot that works for them, or that together we find a better option. Adjustments cannot extend to leaving a plot uncultivated indefinitely, to conditions that create a hazard, nuisance, or vermin risk to neighbouring plots, or to the waiver of rent. Where, after adjustments have been made and reviewed, there is no realistic prospect of the plot being maintained, the Council will follow its normal improvement and notice procedure — carried out with the same care and compassion, and with the alternatives in section 5 offered alongside it.

7. Confidentiality

Health information shared with us will be treated confidentially, recorded on the allotment database only as far as needed to support the tenant, and handled in line with the Council's data protection policies.

8. Monitoring and Review of this policy

The Executive Officer shall be responsible for reviewing this policy annually to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice.

Any proposed amendments to this policy shall be reported to and approved by the Council.