



Allotment Inspections and Notice Procedures

The inspection procedure

Inspections are undertaken at quarterly intervals.

What the inspecting officer will be looking for:

Cultivation

The officer will initially look at the entire plot to see that the majority of it is being cultivated and cropped. If it isn't, or if large areas towards the front or rear of the plot have been left unworked, this will likely lead to the tenant receiving a cultivation improvement notice.

The tenant shall have at least 25% of the plot under cultivation of crops, after 3 months at least 50% of the plot under cultivation, after 12 months after which the plot should be at least 75% if there is a structure on the plot such as shed. Green houses, polytunnels and fruit cages are included in the 75% cultivated area

Weed growth

Particular attention will be paid to seeding weed plants within beds. Where there are large areas of weeds, a weed notice will be issued. They will also look at uncontrolled areas of perennial weeds such as brambles, nettles and rank unmanaged grass. Beds with established and seeding weeds alongside crops will also be liable to a weed improvement notice.

Seasonality will be taken into account when the officer inspects. At mid-summer, most of the plot should be used for growing crops. Plots mostly covered in plastic mulch will be liable for notice, as may a plot given over mainly to cut grass, without permission.

During the autumn and winter months, they will be looking to see that plots which have become weedy in the late summer are being cleared and improved, however this does not mean you need to be sowing crops. Generally, if you are using the winter months to improve your plot by clearing waste and increasing cultivation, then this will be taken into account. However, if a plot has been let go in the summer, a winter improvement notice may be issued.

Waste and rubbish

The level of waste will be assessed on the plot, in particular if new waste materials have been brought onto the site. The tenant is expected to keep the materials they bring onto their plot to a minimum. Items such as double glazing, timber, doors, tyres and building or landscaping materials are of particular concern.

Any items of household furniture, as well as material that may break down and pollute the soil or pose a health and safety hazard may also lead to an improvement notice being issued. Any indication that a tenant has burnt inorganic waste on their plot will lead to a notice and serious cases of burning polluting materials, such as plastic and carpet, may lead to us taking further legal action or reporting the matter to Environmental Health.

Other rule breaches

This may include potential hazards such as overly deep ponds or the use of glass bottles for bed construction; leaning or dangerous structures or structures without permission. Checks that trees are being kept under control and are not causing excessive shading and vegetation is not overhanging other plots and tracks will also be made.

The officer will also look at hen houses and rabbit hutches to ensure that animal welfare is being taken care of and that no cockerels are on the plot.

Improvement Notices

I have received a notice – why and what action should I take?

If your plot is not clearly numbered, then you might have received a neighbour's notice in error. Your plot must be clearly numbered – as per the Tenancy Agreement and Allotment Guidelines – and you must contact us well in advance of the reinspection date.

Most notices are issued for poor cultivation or weed-infested beds, but they can also be issued for overgrown boundaries, plots infested with brambles and long grass, dangerous structures, as well as tenants having illegal/excessive waste on their plot. You need to deal with the issues identified before the earliest reinspection date on the notice to pass it.

What is the difference between a weed and a cultivation notice?

A weed notice can relate to weed infestation on existing beds and will state in the notice reasons or large areas of weed infestation that you are failing to control weeds on your plot, this might include areas at the back of plots, behind structures and between trees. Usually a weed notice is best responded to by simply tidying your plot and ensuring all bed areas are dug over before the reinspection.

A cultivation notice relates to the percentage of the plot you are cultivating. The reasons in your notice will state that you are not cultivating your plot in line with allotment rules. Cultivation notices can be issued due to excessive areas of lawn (without prior permission) or grass pathways and overgrown and non-cropped bed areas – including overgrown hedging and bramble-infested areas.

To avoid a cultivation notice, you need to be cultivating at least 75 per cent of your allotment area. However just cutting back weeds or covering beds with weed-suppressing material is not enough to pass inspection. Of the two, the cultivation notice will tend to require more work to put right. However, both notices can lead to the termination of your tenancy if problems persist.

Allotment waste notice

Tenants sometimes bring building materials or green waste from their home or work onto the allotment. Often this is in breach of rules and results in a waste notice. Any amount of non-allotment green waste could result in a waste notice and any materials brought onto the allotment that is not being used to cultivate crops could also be liable to a waste notice. If you have a notice, then we will expect you to remove all the materials that are not being used for cultivation from the plot. Materials include broken glass or glass windows or frames, unused plastic materials (including play equipment), furniture, metal waste, or any painted wood or MDF. Any organic material that is causing a health risk could result in a waste notice.

When will I be re-inspected and how does this process work?

Re-inspections are undertaken no earlier than 28 days from the date printed on the letter, but at any time up to three calendar months after the notice date if the issues raised relate to cultivation or weed infestation.

If you have a notice relating to any other miss-use of plot, say for waste materials, or having over-sized structures or oversized or poorly maintained flock of hens or rabbits, then that notice remains active until the issue is resolved.

Normally the officer making the re-inspection will expect to see a considerable improvement. If this is the case but you are still not in line with allotment rules then you may receive a second notice; however, if your initial rule breach was serious and on re-inspection you have taken no noticeable action then your tenancy may be ended at the first re-inspection.

Ideally a tenant will respond swiftly to a notice, as the longer an issue like weed infestation or poor cultivation is left, the harder it gets to put it right. Strimming and tidying the plot to reduce overgrown vegetation will not be sufficient to be viewed as the required 'considerable improvement' and could result in a second notice being issued, although not termination, on re-inspection.

If a tenant is exploring methods for killing weeds over time, the use of quality black plastic or woven weed mat is recommended, rather than carpet, which will be forbidden in the next set of rules.

I have received a Notice, but I am struggling to keep up with the work and I'm afraid I might lose my plot, what action should I take?

If you have a large plot, then you should consider having your plot split. A smaller plot is ample for growing crops and is often more manageable if you are experiencing problems.

We have also found that tenants who take on smaller plots are far less likely to receive future notices. If you wish to split your plot, then you should contact us to arrange it.

I received a Notice, but I am unable to take action because, I have been ill or have other mitigating personal reasons. What can I do to avoid failing my follow-up inspection and having my tenancy terminated?

First, you need to inform us of your situation, preferably by email or by using the contact us form on the website, well in advance of the expiry date on the notice. In exceptional circumstances, such as a medical condition or family bereavement, then the tenant may be allowed extra time to resolve the issues. If you need more time to move large quantities of materials, such as those identified in a rubbish notice, then extra time can be arranged to allow you to remove waste, but this must be by agreement with us.