

Policy for keeping hens on allotments

Introduction

Allotment holders have a statutory right to keep hens, (but not cockerels) on allotments under the Allotments Act 1950. The Council supports allotment holders in exercising this right. This policy describes the conditions that will apply when hens are kept on an allotment to protect the welfare of the animals, the rights of other allotment holders, to prevent nuisance to other plot holders and to ensure that any costs relating to the keeping of hens is borne by the allotment holder.

The tenants' allotment tenancy agreement will be terminated in the instance of failure to adhere to these guidelines and thus in breaching their tenancy agreement.

1. Application

The registered allotment tenant must notify the Council in writing of their intention to keep hens. The notification must be made on the Council's application form and state the maximum number of hens to be kept, which must not exceed 8.

The number of hens to be kept on any allotment per Allotment tenant shall be between 3 (the minimum number) and 8 (the maximum number). Hens need companionship.

The Allotment holder will ensure that the Council has a telephone number that can be used to contact any person responsible for the hens at all times.

The granting of permission is dependent on the Council's conditions being met and guidelines followed.

2. Registering bird-keeping on allotments:

Previously, only people that had 50 or more birds were legally required to register their bird-keeping with the Department for Environment, Food, & Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Anyone with fewer birds was previously able to voluntarily register but were not required to do so. The registration of keeping fewer than 50 birds has stopped being optional and is now required. Anyone that keeps even a single bird is now required to register the bird/s with DEFRA.

This change is to help manage disease outbreaks and help lift disease control zones sooner with better monitoring. For further information or to complete the registration, please visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/register-as-a-keeper-of-less-than-50-poultry-or-other-captive-birds>

The allotment holder is responsible for complying with any legal or administrative requirements relating to the keeping hens e.g. vaccination, registration of holdings etc.

3. Housing

3.1 Housing is important in ensuring the welfare of hens and should allow expression of natural behaviours.

3.2 Both the hen house and outdoor run must be regularly maintained to a good, tidy standard and free from obvious faults that may cause injury.

3.3 The fully enclosed shelter must provide the following:

- Protection from predators
- Clean, dry bedding material to absorb moisture and odour
- Warmth during colder months or shade during the summer.
- Be draught free but have adequate ventilation
- Perches for sleeping
- Nest boxes for laying eggs

4. Health and Welfare

If Allotment Tenants to choose to keep Hens on their allotment plot they must check on them daily, provide competent care and management; and have the knowledge and skills to ensure the wellbeing of the Hens.

The allotment holder will be responsible for meeting the welfare requirements of the “laying hens code of recommendations for the welfare of livestock” or any successor document published by DEFRA or responsible Ministry. The Council if unable to contact the owner of the hens for a period of longer than 48 hours reserves the right to take possession of the hens to prevent suffering and may re-home, sell or humanely destroy the hens.

The welfare of laying hens and pullets is considered within a framework that was developed by the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) and known as the ‘Five Freedoms’. The allotment tenant is responsible for ensuring that the five freedoms are met for their hens.

The Five Freedoms are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour
2. Freedom from discomfort by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment;
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals’ own kind
5. Freedom from fear and distress by ensuring conditions and treatment to avoid mental suffering

4.1 Food stuffs must be stored so they are kept clean, tidy and properly protected from rodents and other pests.

4.2 The allotment holder is responsible for any pest control measures required to keep an allotment with hens free of rodent infestation.

4.3 Must comply with any national/area bird flu restrictions in place at any time.

5. General

5.1 The allotment holder will be responsible for any damage caused by the hens to any other allotment or produce on another allotment and must provide recompense for damage.

5.2 Hen litter must not be burnt on the allotment. Hen litter and droppings if not removed from the site must be fully dug into the ground. Notwithstanding these conditions, the allotment holder is responsible for ensuring that the allotment containing the hens does not cause any annoyance from odour.

5.3 Hens may not be bred or slaughtered on the allotment. Carcasses of deceased hens must be removed from site immediately. Eggs must be kept for the personal use of the allotment holder and family and may not be sold.

5.4 The Council reserves the right to withdraw the permission to keep hens if it receives justifiable complaints from other allotment holders or householders and businesses of any nuisance or annoyance arising from the keeping of hens.

5.5 Tenants are responsible for their hens' welfare and must ensure they do not cause a nuisance.

6. Inspections and Improvement Notice

6.1 Representatives of the Council have the right to inspect the hens at any time. If the Council has cause to investigate complaints of maltreatment any costs incurred will be passed to the tenant for payment.

6.2 Where it is deemed necessary by the Council, in the interest of the welfare of any Hen kept, to effect improvements to the accommodation or overall keeping of a Hen on any allotment plot then reasonable notice in writing will be given by the Council to the Allotment Tenant accordingly (In the case of urgency immediate rectification may be required). Such notice will specify the nature of the improvements required and give a reasonable time scale for the improvements to be made by the Allotment Tenant. Failure to comply with such notice will be considered a breach of this agreement and may result in the termination of an allotment tenancy.

Failure to comply with the terms and conditions of this policy can lead to the tenancy of the allotment plot being terminated.

Date Reviewed: March 2026

Date Approved: March 2026