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| Black_RBC_Logo  \* | Frances Martin Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services Civic Offices, Bridge Street  Reading, RG1 2LU  🕿 0118 937 3787  Our Ref: \*  Your Ref: \*  Direct: 🕿 \*  e-mail: allotments.reading@reading.gov.uk  \*date |

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| Your contact is: | Andy Gillespie, Environmental & Commercial Services |

Dear Allotment Tenant

We are writing to all plotholders to consult you about how to reduce the costs of allotments administration and maintenance.

You may be aware that the Council had proposed a significant increase to the rental charge to reduce the amount by which allotments are subsidised. As an alternative, we are considering again how best to reduce the net cost of providing allotments as we are conscious that the proposed increases may impact badly on some tenants who rely on the food that they grow on their plots. Also, we know that maintaining an allotment has significant health benefits such as physical exercise and being outdoors. Since the review of charges, the Council has also declared a climate emergency and recognises that we need to support the use of allotments as a local, sustainable food source.

We are therefore consulting with tenants about a number of alternatives to scale back the proposed increases and would be interested to know your views about the following options:

* Self-management of sites: Many other Councils now have agreements with allotment groups to provide management of their own sites, which reduces the cost of administration, increases the sense of community, and often means that tasks are done more efficiently, particularly reallocating plots to new tenants and following up on unmanaged plots. We would like to speak to anyone who would be interested in becoming involved in the management of their site.
* Tenant maintenance of sites: In some areas, allotment holders also carry out grounds maintenance of communal areas on their sites instead of the Council, such as grass cutting of footpaths and cutting of boundary hedges.
* Rubbish removal: The cost of waste removal and disposal is considerable, and a significant saving will be made by removing the rubbish bay facilities from each site. The rubbish in the shared bays is often contaminated and therefore no use for composting, and tippage costs are high. We would like to encourage tenants to compost their green waste on their own plots instead and take other rubbish home. To reduce the impact in the first year, we could consider providing skips on two occasions, at the beginning and end of the growing season, for tenants to clear waste from their plots, with a view to phasing this out in Year 2.

The Council is moving towards electronic payments and communication for all hired services, including Council housing and green waste bins. From January 2021, the following will also apply to allotment-holders:

* Electronic invoicing and communication: This reduces postage costs as well as manual handing of thousands of invoices, and speeds up both invoicing and re-letting of vacant plots.
* Online payment of the annual invoice: Tenants are currently able to pay rent for their plots by a number of methods including manual payment. As most people now have access to computers or smartphones, it would be more cost effective to move away from manual payment options which can be time consuming and costly. Of course, we recognise that some tenants may not have online access so we would also provide a back-up telephone service for taking payments.

In addition to the above, we would be interested to hear from tenants if they have other ideas to reduce costs. There are a number of ways you can contact us to let us know your views or find out more about setting up a group to help manage your site:

1. By email to the address at the top of this letter (allotments.reading@reading.gov.uk)
2. By using the following link to the consultation page on our website <https://consult.reading.gov.uk/dens/94486ef4>

Please return any responses before 17 September 2020. We will let you know the outcome of this consultation in October 2020.

Yours faithfully

**Andy Gillespie**

**Parks and Open Spaces Manager**