

BRITISH WEIGHTS AND MEASURES ASSOCIATION

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To: Allotments Officers
Town, District, Borough,
City and Metropolitan Councils,
United Kingdom

20 January 2015

Dear Sirs

26 JAN 2015

Units of measurement – gardening allotments

Our Association campaigns for the retention of imperial weights and measures, such as feet and inches, pounds and ounces, and the mile. We include in this traditional units used for the measurement of allotments, such as rods and poles.

It has come to our notice that a Mr David Johnson is emailing local councils across the country, stating that they are “breaking the law” by using rods and poles and other non-metric units to describe gardening allotments. Mr Johnson starts his emails under the Freedom of Information Act, asking for allotment prices, then switches context and uses the deadlines under the FOI Act to pursue a change to metric.

Mr Johnson’s correspondence, which is available to view online,¹ does not disclose that he is not a local resident, or that he is an activist who has written to over 150 councils. Some councils have removed rods and poles to meet the Freedom of Information Act deadlines which, of course, have no bearing on the matter.

We are writing to point out that no UK legislation has been passed to prohibit the rod or pole or any other traditional unit in relation to allotments. When drafting metric regulations in the mid-1990s, the government specifically exempted “transactions by specification”, of which allotment contracts are an example.

The metric regulations to which David Johnson refers are the Units of Measurement Regulations 1994, aimed at sellers of “loose goods” such as greengrocers and confectioners. Loose goods are goods that have no pre-set quantity, but are weighed out or measured at the point-of-sale.

The renting of allotments does not fall into the category of loose goods. An allotment holder does not say, for example, “Can I have an extra half-metre, please”, and for the council to roll out a little more allotment. Allotments are let as *plots*, to which metric regulations do not apply.

¹ https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/user/david_johnson_4

Rods and poles and perches have been used in Britain for hundreds of years. Many people enjoy these historic measurements and cannot be compelled to abandon them without an Act of Parliament.

At the current time, no such Act exists, and the government has no intention of proposing one. According to the Department for Communities and Local Government (letter, 15 May 2014):

“As responsibility for the provision and management of allotments rests with the local council, it is entirely a matter for them should they choose to change how their sites are measured”

Consequently, metric regulations do not apply to allotments, and councils are under no obligation to remove or replace traditional or imperial measurements.

Yours faithfully



John Gardner
Director

(An electronic copy of this letter can be requested from bwma@email.com)