

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET16 June 2022Report by Director of EnvironmentALLOCATIONS POLICY EMERGENCY CHANGES**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To advise the Cabinet of the emergency changes required to East Renfrewshire Council's Lettings Policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Cabinet is asked to note;
- a) the current demand for Council housing in East Renfrewshire Council, in particular the increase in homelessness;
 - b) the emergency decision to increase the percentage of lets to homeless households from April 2022 until October 2022; and
 - c) the proposal to report back to the Cabinet later in 2022 with a comprehensive review of the Council's Allocation Policy.

BACKGROUND AND REPORT

3. The existing Lettings Policy was approved by the Cabinet in June 2018 in preparation for the launch of the Choice Based Lettings service in February 2019. The existing policy included a lettings target to determine what percentage of empty homes should be allocated to each priority group. The lettings targets can be found in appendix 1 of this report and the full lettings policy at:

https://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/media/2591/Cabinet-Item-08-21-June-2018/pdf/Cabinet_Item_08_-_21_June_2018.pdf?m=637357810219800000

4. The policy requires to be reviewed regularly but due to additional demand placed on the Housing Service as a result of COVID 19 this has not been progressed as quickly as had been hoped (however, a full review is currently underway and a report will be submitted to the Cabinet later in 2022 following a consultation process).

5. In March 2020 national lockdown restrictions put in place by the Scottish Government due to the COVID 19 pandemic resulted in significant disruption to all services provided by the Council. For the allocation of council homes in particular this meant:

- Homeless households were unable to move on from their temporary accommodation into their new permanent homes from March 2020 until July 2020.
- During this time repair work for empty homes was only permitted for emergency homeless accommodation.

6. The resulted in a considerable backlog of homeless applicants waiting for housing. This was exacerbated as social distancing rules reduced the productivity of the workforce once repair work was permitted.

7. In order to address the backlog, using delegated emergency powers, the percentage of lets to homeless households was increased during 2020/21 (and reported to Cabinet in June 2021) as follows:

Priority Group	Target % Lets (excludes new build housing)	April 2020 to March 2021 no of lets	April 2020 to March 2021 % of lets
Priority A	55%	155	67%
Priority B	28%	34	15%
Priority C	8%	12	5%
Priority D	8%	21	9%
Priority E	1%	10	4%

8. However, whilst these actions addressed the immediate issue at that time, the demand on housing has remained consistently high.

WIDER CONTEXT: HOUSING DEMAND

9. The demand for council housing has increased steadily over the past few years and in particular from homeless households. The table below details the increase in recent years.

Year	No of homeless presentations	No of households who had the right to an offer permanent accommodation
2018/19	308	251
2019/20	340	287
2020/21	372	301
2021/22	378	309

10. The demand from homeless households is in addition to the general waiting list. On the general waiting list there are households with various needs including medical needs, overcrowding and having lodgers. The demand from the general waiting list has increased from approximately 2800 in 2018/19 to over 4000 at the end of 2021/22.

11. To address this the Council has around 250 – 300 empty council homes each year that are available to let. Local Housing Associations operate their own waiting lists and also have a legal duty to assist with the housing of homeless households. However many in the area are specialist providers and are rarely able to assist the needs of homeless households. However as a mainstream landlord, Barrhead Housing Association (BHA) assist by allocating up to 40% of all their empty properties to homeless households.

12. East Renfrewshire Council has a healthy new build programme being delivered by the Council and other Housing Associations. The Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) ensures that 25% of all new build social housing in the area is allocated to homeless households.

13. The impact of the increase in both homeless households and the general waiting list along with the impact of the initial COVID restrictions has created a large backlog of homeless

households. Over the past two years, the number of homeless households waiting for an offer of accommodation has remained steadily above 100 households at any one time.

14. This demand also places significant pressure of our supply of temporary accommodation. Pre 2020 Housing Services required around 60 properties to use as temporary accommodation consisting of mainly council owned properties but also using some properties from the private sector and BHA. This supply was supplemented with the small use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation as and when required. The Council now has a supply of over 100 properties and is using a significant amount of Bed & Breakfast accommodation because of the current challenges. Significant use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation is contrary to best practice.

LETTINGS POLICY TEMPORARY AMENDMENT

15. In view of the emerging situation and in order to address and ease the backlog, in April 2022 Cllrs Tony Buchanan and Cllr Danny Devlin approved under emergency powers a 6 month change to the Lettings Policy for a period of 6 months. This

- Increased the % of new build council homes allocated to homeless households from the existing target of 25% "to up to 40%".
- Increased the % of existing council homes allocated to homeless households from the existing target of 55% "to up to 70%".

16. These changes will be in effect from 5th April until 5th October 2022. It is hope these changes will help ease the backlog of homeless applications and the associated issues which the Council is currently experiencing.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

17. The impact of these changes will result in a lower demand for temporary accommodation which should in due course provide a financial saving.

CONSULTATION

18. When setting/changing allocation polices, social landlords are required to undertake a full consultation exercise. However, given the emergency nature of this issue, this was not possible in April 2022.

19. Before returning to Cabinet with any permanent proposed changes to the Allocations Policy, Housing Services will consult with the following groups:

- existing ERC tenants;
- those on our housing waiting list;
- registered tenants' organisations in East Renfrewshire
- East Renfrewshire Health & Social Care Partnership
- relevant organisations, including other housing providers and voluntary agencies operating in the area, e.g. Shelter Scotland.

20. The consultation will be undertaken in summer 2022 with a policy review being presented to Cabinet later in 2022.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

21. It is vital that all social landlords in East Renfrewshire contribute towards addressing housing need and homelessness. Housing Services will therefore engage with local Registered Social Landlords to review referral and nomination agreements for the allocation of new and existing social housing.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

22. There are no implications with these proposals in terms of staffing, legal, property or sustainability.

23. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be required for any new policy changes

CONCLUSIONS

24. Over the past few years, the need for housing from homeless households has increased year on year. In addition, the restrictions and challenges from COVID 19 caused a backlog of homeless households awaiting permanent accommodation. Emergency changes were required to address this housing need.

25. A review of the existing policy is underway to ensure it addresses the housing concerns of those most in need. A full consultation exercise will be undertaken and the policy presented to Cabinet for their approval.

RECOMMENDATIONS

26. The Cabinet is asked to note;

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- b) the emergency decision to increase the percentage of lets to homeless households from April 2022 until October 2022; and
- c) the proposal to report back to the Cabinet later in 2022 with a comprehensive review of the Council's Allocation Policy.

Director of Environment

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June 2022

Appendix 1

Priority Pass A

- Unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness
- Moving from ERC young person's supported housing
- Special cases not covered by the allocation policy

Priority Pass B

- Intentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness
- Living in East Renfrewshire or with a local connection and:
 - living in unsatisfactory housing or cannot meet housing needs
 - a social housing tenant with 2 or more bedrooms than you need
 - existing home unsuitable and delaying discharge from hospital
 - overcrowded - 2 or more bedrooms less than you need
 - has a medical need for more suitable housing
 - living in one of our adapted homes and no longer need adaptations
 - leaving the Armed Forces

Priority Pass C

- Need to move to give or get support
- Live in East Renfrewshire or with local connection and:
 - sharing facilities and don't have own bed space
 - overcrowded - 1 bedroom less than you need
 - a social housing tenant with one more bedroom than you need
 - experiencing harassment in current home but safe to stay for a time
- 2 ERC tenants combining to make 1 household

Priority Pass D

- Live in East Renfrewshire or with local connection and:
 - sharing facilities and have own bed space
 - has a current home unsuitable for children who sometimes stay overnight but live somewhere else
 - lives in a private rented house
- Don't live in East Renfrewshire but want to move here because you:
 - work here
 - have been offered a job here
 - are looking for work here and have proof
 - want to be near a relative or carer
 - have a social or medical need to live in the area

Priority Pass E

- No circumstances in A to D apply. Order of priority:
 - Lives in East Renfrewshire or with a local connection to area and no housing need
 - No local connection and has a medical need for more suitable housing
- No local connection and no medical need for more suitable housing