

**PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL****Housing and Health Committee****2 November 2016****Progress Report - Revised Common Allocations Policy****Report by Director (Housing and Social Work)****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report updates Committee on the implementation of the revised Common Allocation Policy, demonstrating its effectiveness and positive impact on addressing housing need across Perth and Kinross.

**1. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES**

- 1.1 A revised policy on allocating social housing was developed with partners in the Perth and Kinross Common Housing Register (Caledonia and Hillcrest Housing Associations) to reflect changes in legislation, the Scottish Social Housing Charter, the impact of Welfare Reform and local housing need. This was approved by Housing and Health Committee in January 2016 (Report 16/27).
- 1.2 The Common Allocations Policy is the mechanism through which people access social-rented housing. The revised policy, implemented from April 2016, is designed to address a number of issues, including the mismatch between housing demand and supply and the length of time homeless people and other households in urgent housing need, have to wait to be allocated a secure tenancy.
- 1.3 Although the new policy has only been in place for six months, the outcomes are already significant, demonstrating a positive impact on those in housing need, including those in acute housing need. The challenge continues to be increasing the level of housing stock available for rent, which we will continue to do through the new-build programme, buy back scheme and renovation of empty properties.
- 1.4 However, the continued roll out of the Council's buy back scheme and the creative use of vacancy chains has enabled several applicants' housing need to be met from one initial vacancy. This approach has minimised the number of applications from Council tenants living in overcrowded and under occupied accommodation and maximising the housing opportunities for those in urgent housing need.

## 2. IMPACT OF THE REVISED POLICY

- 2.1 A key element of managing the housing waiting list and people's expectations about being allocated social housing is 'Housing Options'. This is a process which starts with housing advice when someone approaches the Council with a housing problem. Staff talk through the person's situation and needs, enabling them to make a realistic assessment of the housing options available to them. This approach supports early intervention and explores all possible tenancy options, including with the Council and Housing Associations, as well as the private rented sector. The impact of this approach included a reduction in the waiting list from almost 5,000 people in March 2013 to 3,000 in 2016.
- 2.2 The introduction of the new allocations' policy has already had some positive results. Applicants for social housing are assigned to one of four Allocation Priority Groups and then prioritised within the group according to their level of housing need. Since its implementation in April 2016, the policy has met its key aims as detailed below:

### 2.3 Aim: Responding quickly to people in acute and urgent housing need

Waiting-list and lettings (excluding supported housing)

Priority Group	No. Applications	Allocation 'Priority'	No. Lets Apr-Sept 2016
Strategic Need	65	10%	40 (8%)
Homelessness	310	50%	333 (67%)
Transfer Applicants	770	24%	72 (15%)
Waiting-List Applicants	1896	16%	49 (10%)
Total	3,041	100%	494

- 2.3.1 The 'Strategic Need' group was introduced as a fast-track route to securing suitable housing for people at risk in their current accommodation or who urgently require rehousing. This approach has ensured that those in urgent housing need are targeted in a fairer and consistent way avoiding homelessness or an ongoing risk situation.
- 2.3.2 Allocation priorities were introduced to target housing need effectively. Although the policy has only been operating for 6 months, good progress has been made to meet these priorities. The priority set for homelessness has been exceeded (67%) due to a commitment to reduce the backlog of homeless people waiting for settled accommodation.
- 2.3.3 Work to increase the priority level for transfer applicants continues, but this is often limited by the applicant's preferences and the types of housing that become available for let.

**2.4 Aim: Preventing and responding to homelessness by being proactive providing advice and assistance or suitable housing within a reasonable timescale**

<b>Homeless Presentations</b>	<b>Apr-Sept 2015</b>	<b>Apr-Sept 2016</b>	<b>Change</b>	
Total homeless presentations	453	439	-14	✓
Homeless presentations from young people	107	87	-20	✓
Homeless presentations from families	173	128	-50	✓

2.4.1 The policy has been successful in meeting its key aim to reduce homelessness, including a 19% reduction in the number of young people presenting as homeless. This is significant and can be attributed in part to homeless prevention activity, including conflict resolution, mediation and ongoing engagement with secondary school pupils through the delivery of housing education and advice in other youth settings.

2.4.2 The number of families presenting as homeless has also reduced (by 29%) which can be attributed to early intervention strategies, homeless prevention activity and the targeted approach to deliver housing options.

**2.5 Aim: Providing a housing options approach to meet a person's needs and taking early action if their home is at risk; encouraging applicants to make informed and realistic decisions on their options**

<b>Housing options interviews</b>	<b>Apr-Sept 2015</b>	<b>Apr-Sept 2016</b>	<b>Change</b>	
No. housing options interviews	1,017	1,191	+174 (15%)	✓
No. housing options interviews resulting in a homeless presentation	362 (35.5%)	339 (28%)	-23 (7%)	✓

2.5.1 A focused approach in terms of housing options has resulted in a significant increase in the number of people receiving comprehensive advice and assistance through housing options interviews compared to the same period last year. This strong emphasis on the provision of high quality accessible advice on a wider range of options is evidence of the policy's success in intervening early to improve people's housing situations and avoiding acute housing need or homelessness.

2.5.2 The 7% reduction in the number of people going on to present as homeless following a housing options interview, alongside a reduction in homeless presentations, demonstrates the positive and proactive approach taken by housing services to responding to and addressing housing need.

**2.6 Aim:** Making best use of the housing that becomes available for rent and supporting settled communities.

	<b>Apr-Sept 2015</b>	<b>Apr-Sept 2016</b>	<b>Change</b>	
Demand for 1 bedroom accommodation	2,180	1,666	-514 (24%)	✓

2.6.1 To address the mismatch between demand and supply, the policy has the flexibility to allow single people and couples to join the waiting-list for two bedroom accommodation. This approach has already had positive results, in that it has helped reduce the number of applicants waiting for one bedroom accommodation and reduced the length of time single homeless people are waiting for permanent accommodation.

2.6.2 To enable people to make informed and realistic decisions about their housing situation, detailed stock profile and turnover information is now available for applicants. Alongside this and widening the areas of choice that applicants can select, their housing prospects are now maximised, thereby increasing the likelihood of them being offered housing.

### **3. APPLICANT AND STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK**

3.1 Feedback from applicants and stakeholders has been very positive, with applicants saying that they find the policy easier to understand. In addition, the information on the demand and supply of housing has enabled them to make realistic decisions on their housing situation. Some comments and feedback are included below:-

- “The groups and points make sense. I worked it out for myself what group I would be in and the points that I would get.”
- “Having looked at what properties became available last year, I was able to use this information to select areas, close to my child’s school and my work, to help speed up the time an offer was made.
- “The policy is easier to understand and it’s not just written for staff who work with it every day”.
- “I feel more confident in providing housing advice and assistance to my clients as I understand the policy and what it could mean for them”.

### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

4.1 In the six months since its introduction the new housing allocations policy has had a positive impact in addressing housing need in the Perth and Kinross area.

4.2 With the introduction of a Strategic Need group, a continued strong emphasis on housing options and the introduction of flexibility, the revised policy has met its broad aims and positively supported people in housing need to access more suitable housing and avoid homelessness.

4.3 Committee is asked to note the very positive impact of the revised allocations policy after six months implementation.

**Author**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Contact Details</b>
Elaine Ritchie	Service Manager Housing	<a href="mailto:HCCCommitteeReports@pkc.gov.uk">HCCCommitteeReports@pkc.gov.uk</a> 01738 475000

**Approved**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Date</b>
Bill Atkinson	Director (Housing and Social Work)	19 October 2016

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## 1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

<b>Strategic Implications</b>	<b>Yes / None</b>
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	<b>Yes</b>
Corporate Plan	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Resource Implications</b>	
Financial	<b>None</b>
Workforce	<b>None</b>
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	<b>None</b>
<b>Assessments</b>	
Equality Impact Assessment	<b>Yes</b>
Strategic Environmental Assessment	<b>None</b>
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	<b>None</b>
Legal and Governance	<b>None</b>
Risk	<b>None</b>
<b>Consultation</b>	
Internal	<b>Yes</b>
External	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Communication</b>	
Communications Plan	<b>None</b>

### 1. Strategic Implications

#### Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement

1.1 The Single Outcome Agreement for Perth and Kinross has five outcomes which provide a clear strategic direction, inform decisions at a corporate and service level and shape the allocation of resources. The following are relevant to this report:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations

#### Corporate Plan

1.2 As above.

### 2. Resource Implications

#### Financial

2.1 None

## Workforce

2.2 None

## Asset Management (land, property, IT)

2.3 There are no asset management implications arising from this report.

## **3. Assessments**

### Equality Impact Assessment

3.1 Assessed as relevant and actions taken to reduce or remove the following negative impacts;

- Quality Assurance Framework which includes audits of allocations and the delivery of housing advice and assistance.
- The formation of both strategic and operational working groups involving all of the main Common Housing Register Partners. These groups meet on a monthly basis.
- Applicant and stakeholder feedback.
- Appropriate training for staff.

### Strategic Environmental Assessment

3.2 None

### Sustainability

3.3 No further action is required.

### Legal and Governance

3.4 The Head of Legal Services was consulted on the revised Policy.

### Risk

3.5 None arising from this report.

## **4. Consultation**

### Internal

4.1

### External

The Tenant Committee Report Panel was consulted on this report. They commented that they were “pleased to see the policy is easier to understand by prospective applicants. There is improved monitoring of applicants and interviews to prevent problems is to be commended”.

**5. Communication**

5.1 None

**2. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

**3. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 is attached. This provides an overview and analysis of key areas of performance.



## Appendix 1 – Key Performance Areas – Overview and Analysis

### 1. Waiting-List Analysis

There are currently 3,041 applications on the Common Housing Register. The table below shows the placement of these applications within the four Allocation Priority Groups and a breakdown of these groups by property size.

Table 1 – Priority groups by property size requirements for current applicants

<b>Priority Group</b>	<b>2 Apt</b>	<b>3 Apt</b>	<b>4 Apt</b>	<b>5 Apt</b>	<b>6 Apt</b>	<b>Total</b>
Strategic Need	21	25	17	1	1	<b>65</b>
Homelessness	197	78	29	6	0	<b>310</b>
Transfer Applicants	289	303	161	14	3	<b>770</b>
Waiting-List Applicants	1,159	545	172	18	2	<b>1,896</b>
<b>Total at Sep 2016</b>	<b>1,666</b>	<b>951</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3,041</b>
<i>Total at Sep 2015</i>	<i>2,180</i>	<i>850</i>	<i>397</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3,464</i>

Table 2 – Overcrowding and under occupation for current applicants (who are current Council tenants)

<b>Year</b>	<b>2014 / 2015</b>	<b>2015 / 2016</b>	<b>Apr-Sept16</b>
Overcrowding households	141	127	130
Under-occupying households	128	106	97

#### Key points

- Due to an increase in lets to homeless people, the backlog of homeless people waiting to be offered secure housing reduced to 310 from more than 500 households in April 2016.
- The Strategic Need group has been managed effectively and has provided a fast-track route for people with an urgent housing need including those affected by domestic abuse, with complex medical needs or waiting to be discharged from hospital. On average, applicants in this group have had to wait 104 days to be housed.
- The slight increase in the number of overcrowded families is due to an overall reduction in the number of larger properties becoming available. However, through the Council's buy back scheme and changes to our mutual exchange processes, work is progressing to reduce both overcrowding and under occupancy within Council properties.

### 2. Preventing and responding to homelessness

Through Housing Options, the focus has been on supporting people in housing need to find solutions to address their housing and support needs by providing information and advice to enable them to make informed decisions and choices.

## **Key points**

- There has been a significant increase in the number of housing options interviews completed, from 1,017 to 1,191, with a 7% reduction in interviews proceeding to a homeless assessment.
- There has also been a reduction in homeless presentations, particularly from families and young people, with 173 young people presenting in Apr-Sep 2015 compared to only 83 in Apr-Sep 2016 and 173 families presenting in Apr-Sep 2015 to only 123 in the same period in 2016.
- Between Apr-Sept 2016, 96 households were helped to access accommodation in the private-rented sector through the Rent Bond Guarantee Scheme<sup>1</sup> compared to 65 in the same period in 2015.
- Early intervention and prevention initiatives remain a key part of our approach. The schools' education programme, conflict resolution mediation and our participation in the Violence Against Women Partnership are examples of these initiatives.
- We continue to work in partnership with a wide range of services and agencies, including social work, education, NHS, Citizen's Advice, welfare rights, Shelter, Police Scotland and the Fire Service to intervene early and prevent homelessness where possible.
- The demand for temporary accommodation reduced to 253 placements between Apr-Sept 2016, compared to 280 placements in the same period in 2015. This is due to the continued focus on early intervention, the implementation of the early stages of Home First implementation and the effective use of the Strategic Need group to assist people to move straight into secure accommodation.

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<sup>1</sup> This scheme helps homeless people access affordable private rented accommodation. Landlords are encouraged to participate in the scheme with guidance and information on landlord's rights and responsibilities and support to resolve any difficulties. The Bond is a legal guarantee to the landlord if there are any repairs/damages to the property during the initial 12 months of the tenancy. The amount of repairs up to the value of the Bond will be paid to the landlord if a claim is substantiated. It doesn't cover unpaid household bills or fair wear and tear.