



East Renfrewshire Council

Report on Housing Services' Allocations Policy Review Consultation

June 2018

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of responses to our consultation on changing the way we let our homes and what we are doing as a result of the feedback received.

2 Background

- 2.1 Over the past year, Housing Services has been looking at the potential to make a big change to the way we let our council homes. We are a small council with a very limited supply of homes for rent, so we want to improve choice within our supply. We aim to let our homes in a fair and easy to understand way and help find suitable housing options for those in need of housing.
- 2.2 The main change we are proposing is moving from a traditional housing list to one that offers more choice for those waiting for housing. The term used for this is “choice based letting”, or CBL for short. We are calling our CBL “Homeseeker”. CBL is more transparent than our current system because all of the homes that are about to become empty (and new council homes when they are available) would be advertised on our website.

3 The Consultation

- 3.1 We held a public consultation about our proposal from 4th September until 16th October 2017.
- 3.2 We consulted with the following groups about the proposed changes to the way our homes are let:
- existing ERC tenants;
 - those on our housing waiting list;
 - registered tenants’ organisations in East Renfrewshire
 - relevant organisations, e.g. other housing providers and voluntary agencies operating in the area, Shelter Scotland.
- 3.3 We used a range of consultation channels, including a Citizen Space East Renfrewshire online survey, a Summary of our Proposed Allocations Policy and a Consultation Briefing available on our website and within the online survey. We sent letters to all current tenants and applicants. We also made printed copies of the Summary, Briefing and Survey (with prepaid return envelope) available by telephone or email request.
- 3.4 We also held 8 “drop-in” events across the area, plus consultative discussions with the Registered Tenants’ Organisations Forum, the Tenants’ New Build Steering Group and a “drop-in” discussion at the Connor Road Young Persons’ Supported Accommodation.
- 3.5 A total of 93 responses were received, 87 from individuals and 6 on behalf of organisations.

Table 1: Number of responses

On behalf of an organisation	6
From individuals	87
Total	93

- 3.6 The majority of individual respondents (73.6%) live in East Renfrewshire currently, in a range of different housing circumstances.

Table 2: Current location of individual respondents

Living in ER	64	73.6%
Living outside ER	22	25.3%
Not answered	1	1.1%
Total	87	100%

Table 3: Housing circumstances of individual respondents currently living in East Renfrewshire

Existing ERC tenant	18	28.1%
Housing association tenant in ER	3	4.7%
Private tenant in ER	16	25%
Owner occupier in ER	14	21.9%
Living with family and friends in ER	12	18.7%
Tied housing in ER	1	1.6%
Total	64	100%

- 3.7 Of the remaining respondents, 1 did not answer the questions about location and current housing circumstances and 22 (25.3%) are currently living outside East Renfrewshire.

Table 4: Housing circumstances of individual respondents currently living outside East Renfrewshire:

Council tenant outwith ER	3	14.3%
Housing association tenant outwith ER	4	19%
Private tenant outwith ER	4	19%
Owner occupier outwith ER	9	38.1%
Living with friends or family outwith ER	2	9.6%
Total	22	100%

4 Consultation Themes

Choice Based Letting (CBL)

- 4.1 Of the 89 respondents who answered the question, just over half had not heard of the CBL approach to letting homes compared to the 44% who had.
- 4.2 When we asked who would be using Homeseeker, once it is available, nearly 80% of those who answered said that they would.

Table 5: Will you be using our choice based letting system, which we are calling HomeSeeker, once it is available?

Yes, as an ERC tenant wishing to move	12	12.9%
Yes and I am currently on your housing list	47	50.5%
Yes and I will want to apply to join your housing list at some point in the future	4	4.3%
Yes, to help a family member/friend	6	6.4%
Yes, as an organisation providing support to individuals	5	5.4%
Subtotal for yes	74	80%
No	13	14%
Not Answered	6	6.5%
Total	93	100%

- 4.3 Given that our CBL system will be on our website, we asked people to tell us whether they had access to the internet at home or in a nearby community facility, e.g. local library. 85% of those who answered this question have internet access at home, compared to 6.4% who do not have access to the internet at home nor nearby.

Table 6: Do you have access to the internet?

Yes, in my home	79	85%
Yes, in a community facility nearby	4	4.3%
No	6	6.4%
Not answered	4	4.3%
Total	93	100%

- 4.4 We also asked people if they were familiar with using the internet. Around 80% of those who answered this question said yes, while just over 6% said no.

Table 7: Are you familiar with using the internet?

Yes	75	80.6%
No	13	14%
Not answered	5	5.4%
	93	100%

- 4.5 When we asked if people would need help to use a new choice based letting system, 9% of those who answered said that they would and just under 27% said that they were not sure. Almost 64% of those who answered said that they would not need any help.
- 4.6 We asked people to tell us why they thought they may or would need help to use choice based letting and what kind of help they thought they would need. We then grouped the answers into three categories, with the majority requesting initial support to learn to use the CBL system on the internet.

Table 8: Please tell us why you may or would need help to use choice based letting and what kind of help you think you would need.

Answered	23
Need support to learn to use CBL on internet	13
Need support to use CBL via non-internet channels, e.g. telephone, face to face with friend/family member/support agency	5
Need help to consider housing options	5

- 4.7 We also asked which of the sources of help we listed they thought they would use, choosing as many options as appropriate. 23 respondents chose one or more of the options.

Table 9: Please tell us which of these sources of help you think you would use (you may tick more than one option)

Internet access available in each of our two offices for our customers to use for choice based lettings	6	
Internet access available in all of our libraries	6	
Information about available homes and assistance to bid available from our staff by telephone if you have difficulty leaving home due to illness or disability	13	
If we have assessed you as unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness, our homeless and allocations staff will be in regular contact with you and will help you make bids	4	
If you receive support from a statutory or voluntary agency, you can ask them to help make your bid (we will be providing local agencies with information on this at a later date)	2	
You can tell us that you have given permission to a specific friend or family member to bid on your behalf	6	
All respondents	93	
Answered this question	23	
Not Answered	70	

Prioritising Housing Need

- 4.8 Of the 93 respondents to the survey, the majority (71%) are current housing applicants, including existing tenants waiting for a move.

Table 10: Are you currently on our housing list?

Yes	66	71%
No and I'm not considering joining the list at the moment	15	16.1%
No but I am considering joining the list	8	8.6%
Not answered	4	4.3%
Total	93	100%

- 4.9 We asked respondents to express a view about the way we proposed to group different types of housing need (i.e. Priority Passes A-E). A significant majority (64%) said that they either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal.

Table 11: What is your view of the way we propose to group different types of housing need? (Priority Passes A-E)

Strongly agree	20	21.5%
Agree	40	43%
Neither agree nor disagree	13	14%
Disagree	10	10.8%
Strongly disagree	2	2.1%
Not answered	8	8.6%
Total	93	100%

- 4.10 Within the consultation briefing and the summary of the proposed allocations policy, we explained that we were proposing to publish an annual lettings plan outlining the percentage targets (or “quotas”) of available homes that will be allocated to each of the five priority pass groups. We explained that we would have two sets of percentage targets, one for existing council homes becoming available for re-let and one for our new council homes. We asked for views about each set of targets. A significant majority said that they either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal.

Table 12: Do you agree with our proposed target quotas for letting our homes that become available after the existing tenant moves out?

Strongly agree	12	12.9%
Agree	42	45.2%
Neither agree nor disagree	18	19.4%
Disagree	7	7.5%
Strongly disagree	7	7.5%
Not answered	7	7.5%
Total	93	100%

Table 13: Do you agree with our proposed target quotas for letting our new Council homes?

Strongly agree	11	11.4%
Agree	51	54.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	11	12.5%
Disagree	11	12.5%
Strongly disagree	2	2.3%
Not answered	7	6.8%
Total	93	100%

- 4.11 We also outlined within the consultation that we were proposing the following policy for our new council homes:
- advertise them through the choice based letting system alongside other available homes;
 - seek two references from each successful bidder
 - in line with our existing policy for new council homes, with the exception of the homeless households needs group, we are proposing to continue to give first priority to existing council tenants within each of the remaining four housing need groups.
- 4.12 We asked respondents if they agreed with our proposed policy for letting our new council homes and a significant majority (72%) said that they either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal.

Table 14: Do you agree with our proposed policy for letting our new council homes?

Strongly agree	32	34.4%
Agree	35	37.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	9	9.7%
Disagree	9	9.7%
Strongly disagree	1	1.1%
Not answered	7	7.5%
Total	93	100%

- 4.13 One of the categories of housing need in our proposed Allocations Policy is “unsatisfactory housing”. We asked for views about our proposed definition of “unsatisfactory housing” and 90% of those who answered this question either strongly agree or agreed with the definition.

Table 15: What is your view on our proposed definition of one of the categories of housing need, "unsatisfactory housing"?

Strongly agree	20	21.5%
Agree	30	32.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	0	0
Disagree	5	5.4%
Strongly disagree	0	0
Not answered	38	40.8%
Total	93	100%

- 4.14 We explained that, in certain circumstances, we may depart from the routine letting process by either directly matching someone to a home rather than seeking bids or by bypassing someone where we need to exercise discretion about the suitability of the home and/or its location. We asked for views on these approaches. 80% of those who responded to the question about direct matching either strongly agree or agreed with the proposed approach, whilst 82% of those who responded to the question about exercising discretion either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposed approach.

Table 16: Do you agree with our proposals about the very specific situations where we would directly match someone to a property rather than inviting them to bid within the choice based letting system?

Strongly agree	25	26.9%
Agree	43	46.2%
Neither agree nor disagree	12	12.9%
Disagree	3	3.2%
Strongly disagree	2	2.2%
Not answered	8	8.6%
Total	93	100%

Table 17: What is your view of our proposed approach to "sensitive" letting of some homes?

Strongly agree	10	10.8%
Agree	35	37.6%
Neither agree nor disagree	7	7.5%
Disagree	2	2.1%
Strongly disagree	1	1.1%
Not answered	38	40.9%
Total	93	100%

- 4.15 We outlined our proposed approach where a successful bidder subsequently refuses the offer of the home and sought views on this. 78% of those who answered this question either strongly agreed or agreed with the approach outlined.

Table 18: What is your view of our proposed approach to refusal of offers by successful bidders?

Strongly agree	15	16.1%
Agree	28	30.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	10	10.8%
Disagree	2	2.1%
Strongly disagree	0	0
Not answered	38	40.9%
Total	93	100%

- 4.16 We explained that we will have a two stage appeals process and outlined the circumstances where a housing applicant may wish to appeal a decision we have made. 78% of those who answered this question either strongly agreed or agreed with our proposal.

Table 19: What is your view of our proposed appeals process?

Strongly agree	7	7.5%
Agree	37	39.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	11	11.8%
Disagree	1	1.1%
Strongly disagree	0	0
Not answered	37	39.8%
Total	93	100%

- 4.17 We explained that, as is the case currently, every applicant is responsible for contacting us immediately if anything stated in their registration form changes. We also explained that we would be in contact with every applicant once each year to check that circumstances remain as stated and that the applicant wished to remain on the register. We then listed the circumstances where we would cancel applications, e.g. if there is no response to the review letter. We sought views on this proposed approach to reviewing the housing register and 87% of those who answered this question either strongly agreed or agreed.

Table 20: What is your view of our proposed approach to reviewing our housing register?

Strongly agree	16	17.2%
Agree	32	34.4%
Neither agree nor disagree	5	5.4%
Disagree	2	2.1%
Strongly disagree	0	0
Not answered	38	40.9%
Total	93	100%

- 4.18 We explained that we were proposing to review our current medical assessment process to include considering mental health issues that would be improved by moving to a different home. 77% of those who answered this question either strongly agreed or agreed with our proposal.

Table 21: Do you agree that we should review our current medical assessment process to include a consideration of mental health issues that would be improved by moving to a different home?

Strongly agree	35	37.6%
Agree	31	33.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	14	15.1%
Disagree	5	5.4%
Strongly disagree	0	0
Not answered	8	8.6%
Total	93	100%

5 Conclusion and Next Steps

- 5.1 We also asked a general question about whether respondents agreed with our proposal to change the way we let our homes. 84% of those who responded to this question either strongly agree or agreed with our overall proposal.

Table 22: Do you agree with our proposal to change the way we let our homes?

Strongly agree	38	40.9%
Agree	38	40.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	5	5.4%
Disagree	4	4.3%
Strongly disagree	5	5.4%
Not answered	3	3.1%
Total	93	100%

- 5.2 Informed by the detailed comments received, we have:
- reviewed and clarified the housing need groupings in the Priority Passes;
 - clarified one of the circumstances where an applicant can appeal a decision;
 - expanded eligibility for one of the sources of assistance for bidding for homes.
- 5.3 Council approval is now being sought for our proposal. The report to the Council's Cabinet includes a summary of the consultation feedback.