

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET5 September 2024Report by Director of EnvironmentLETTINGS POLICY EMERGENCY CHANGES**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To advise the Cabinet of the emergency changes required to lettings targets within the East Renfrewshire Council's Lettings Policy and ask Cabinet to homologate this decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Cabinet are asked to
- Note the current demand for Council housing in East Renfrewshire Council, in particular the increase in homelessness; and
 - Homologate the decision to amend the lets allocation to key groups.

BACKGROUND

3. The existing Lettings Policy was approved by Cabinet in September 2023. The existing policy provided a lettings target to determine what percentage of empty homes should be allocated to each priority group. The lettings targets can be found in the full lettings policy at: https://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/media/9457/Cabinet-item-08-7-September-2023/pdf/Cabinet_item_08_-_7_September_2023.pdf?m=1692879511317

4. The policy requires to be reviewed regularly and Housing Services will shortly commence a full consultation for a new Lettings Policy. A paper will be submitted to Cabinet in 2025 for approval. However, due to the unprecedented demand on Council homes, an emergency amendment to the existing lettings targets within the policy is required.

5. The existing policy has set lettings targets which will maximise, as much as possible, the percentage of available homes allocated to homeless households:

- The % of new build council homes allocated to homeless households is to up to 40%.
- The % of existing council homes allocated to homeless households is up to 70%.

REPORT

6. 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 of permanent accommodation
2018/19	308	251
2019/20	340	287
2020/21	372	301
2021/22	378	309
2022/23	445	392
2023/24	484	354

7. 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 lodgers. The demand from the general waiting list has increased from approximately 2800 in 2018/19 to over 6700 at the end of 2023/24.

8. To address this the Council has around 250 – 300 empty council homes each year. However, in recent years, turnover has begun to drop, reducing the number of available properties. Local Housing Associations operate their own waiting lists and also have a legal duty to assist with the housing of homeless households. 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.

9. 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 a minimum 25% of all new build social housing in the area is allocated to homeless households.

10. Whilst the policy has been set to deliver a high proportion of lets to homeless households, demand and the backlog of households waiting for housing remains very high. In addition, there are existing tenants who are seeking to move and cannot secure new accommodation. When an existing council tenant is rehoused, the let not only meets their housing need but also allows the Council to allocate their former tenancy to another household in need.

11. The policy that will shortly be issued for consultation will seek to make best use of the existing stock, including maximising the number of tenants re-housed to increase turnover.

12. However, in the meantime Housing Services are in the process of allocating 105 new build homes at Maidenhill, Newton Mearns. Bids were sought from the waiting list in May 2024. As per the current policy, the homes would be allocated in the following manner:

- 40% to homeless households – 42 households.
- 30% to existing tenants – 32 households.
- 30% to waiting list applicants – 31 Households.

13. In addition, the 32 properties vacated by successful tenants will be relet, with approximately 22 being allocated to homeless households. As a result, this development would permit Housing Services to re-house 64 homeless families (42 at Maidenhill, 22 from existing stock vacated by tenants re-housed at Maidenhill).

14. To date Housing Services have allocated 52 of the 105 units with 53 still to be allocated. It is proposed that an emergency change is approved to amend how the remaining 53 properties are allocated. The proposal prioritises the bids from existing council tenants with

the aim to meet the housing need of existing council tenants and increase turnover to meet the need of homeless households. The approach to let existing stock remains unchanged at this stage (i.e. the proposed change relates only to the 53 remaining Maidenhill houses.)

15. It is proposed that the remaining 53 properties be allocated as follows:

- All eligible tenants who bid and passed the required tenancy check will be offered a tenancy – 30 properties.
- The remaining 23 properties will be split 70% to homeless households (16 properties) and 30% to waiting list applicants (7 properties).

16. If approved the full allocation of the site will be as follows:

- 38 (36%) allocated to homeless households.
- 45 (43%) allocated to council tenants (all tenants who bid, were eligible and passed tenancy checks will be successful.
- 22 (21%) waiting list applicants re-housed.

17. Whilst the initial lets of new build homes at Maidenhill to homeless households is reducing, by prioritising lets to existing tenants, the project will release 70 properties for homeless households (38 at Maidenhill, 32 from existing stock vacated by tenants re-housed at Maidenhill). This is 6 more than the current policy would permit.

18. The proposal was approved by Councillor O'Donnell & Councillor Devlin on 20 August 2024.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

19. Whilst the approach proposed aims to meet the housing need of homeless households and existing council tenants, the increased turnover will increase the void rent loss. This increase is manageable within the existing budget.

CONSULTATION

20. When setting allocation policies, social landlords are legally required to undertake a full consultation exercise. However given the emergency nature of this issue, this was not possible at this time.

21. As noted in paragraph 4, a full policy review will be submitted to Cabinet in early 2025 and 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; and
- relevant organisations, including other housing providers and voluntary agencies operating in the area, e.g. Shelter Scotland.

22. The consultation will be undertaken from October 2024 with a policy review being presented to Cabinet in early 2025.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

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

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

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

25. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken.

CONCLUSIONS

26. Over the past few years, the need for housing from homeless households has increased year on year. However, despite the provision of new council housing, demand continues to significantly out strip demand.

27. 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 in connection with that review and the policy presented to Cabinet for approval in due course.

RECOMMENDATIONS

28. Cabinet are asked to

- Note the current demand for Council housing in East Renfrewshire Council, in particular the increase in homelessness; and
- Homologate the decision to amend the lets allocation to key groups.

Director of Environment

Further information can be obtained from: Mark Rodgers, Head of Housing & Property
mark.rodgers@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

Convener contact details

Councillor Danny Devlin
(Convener for Housing and Maintenance Services)

Home: 0141 580 0288
Office: 0141 577 3107/8

August 2024