

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET23 March 2017Report by the Director of EnvironmentEAST RENFREWSHIRE HOUSING REGISTER**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to terminate the current East Renfrewshire Housing Register and review the approach to joint working between the Council and local housing associations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Cabinet is asked to approve the termination of the current East Renfrewshire Housing Register with a view to implementing alternative arrangements for those making applications to be included on local housing lists.

BACKGROUND

3. In June 2008, the Cabinet agreed to enter into a formal partnership with Arklet and Barrhead Housing Associations to develop a common housing register.

4. Common housing registers were developed and designed to create a single application route for households looking for socially rented accommodation. These registers can be designed in different ways and the level of commonality between landlords can vary. For example, some models have only a common application form where others have completely common processes including allocation policies and administration arrangements.

5. The common housing register in East Renfrewshire was developed between East Renfrewshire Council, Arklet and Barrhead Housing Associations and this partnership covered over 90% of socially rented housing stock in the area. This became known as the East Renfrewshire Housing Register (ERHR).

6. The ERHR in East Renfrewshire operates as follows:

- Common application form that can be submitted by applicants to any one of the partners
- Common IT system, hosted by ERC
- Each landlord retains their own allocation policy
- Each landlord undertakes their own administration of housing applications.

REPORT

7. The main purpose of any common housing register is to ensure that applicants can have a single method of application for social housing. This is particularly effective in areas with a high level of social landlords and multiple social housing providers.

8. In East Renfrewshire, whilst there are a number of regional and national social housing providers in the area. East Renfrewshire Council and Barrhead Housing Association are the only landlords based entirely within the area. East Renfrewshire Council is the only landlord with significant levels of housing stock across the local authority area. Barrhead Housing Association's housing stock is located mainly in Levern Valley with a small number of properties in the Eastwood area. Arklet Housing Association operates in 2 other Council areas outwith East Renfrewshire and, within East Renfrewshire, its housing numbers are small.

9. In January 2017, there were just over 2200 applicants on the ERHR. Whilst a number of applicants have opted to be on more than one waiting list, this usually occurs between the Council and one of the housing associations. The table below shows the percentage of the waiting list that has opted to be on each landlord's waiting list:

Landlord	% of applicants on the waiting list queuing for each landlord.	Landlord Housing numbers as at 31 March 2016	Properties let from the general waiting list 2015/16	Properties let from the homeless waiting list 2015/16
Arklet Housing Association	60.9%	206	5	1
Barrhead Housing Association	61.2%	902	62	23
East Renfrewshire Council	95.4%	2993	115	139

10. Whilst Arklet Housing Association has over 200 properties in East Renfrewshire, only 96 are general needs housing and the remaining housing is for specialist needs and rarely let through the ERHR. The housing allocations made by Arklet in the last financial year evidences that the ERHR arrangement provides limited benefit to the Association or their applicants.

11. The current model allows each landlord to operate its own allocation policy. During the development of the ERHR and thereafter issues have arisen which risk the viability of the register moving forward:

- The IT systems have been developed to allow each landlord to operate individual allocation policies. However there are instances where the current IT systems have limited the ability of a landlord to amend its allocations policy. For example, all 3 ERHR landlords must apply the same rules regarding the number of bedrooms a household is entitled to;
- Full staff training has been delivered throughout. However, officers across all partners find the variations in policies difficult to manage and this presents a significant risk that applicants might be assessed incorrectly

12. During 2017/18, East Renfrewshire Council will review its own current allocation policy and this is likely to make significant changes to the way Council properties are allocated. This new approach is being developed to provide customers with greater choice and ensure that the allocations process is more customer focused. The limitations of the existing ERHR arrangements would present significant barriers to the success of this project.

13. Discussions have taken place with both Arklet and Barrhead Housing Associations and both have similar concerns regarding the success and continuing viability of the ERHR. Agreement has been reached therefore in principle to seek approval to end the ERHR in its current form.

14. Whilst the current model is not fit for purpose, there is a desire amongst all 3 partners to ensure that any benefits to applicants are retained. A working group will therefore be established to manage the transition of this project and will seek to address the following areas:

- Information and advice – this will ensure that applicants can still receive effective advice from all landlords to ensure their rehousing options are maximised. A common application form might still be retained.
- Homeless Households – progress has been made to ensure all landlords contribute towards addressing homelessness in the area. The group will ensure this progress continues.
- Nomination agreements – the group will ensure that effective nomination agreements are in place to ensure applicants have full access to all socially rented stock within East Renfrewshire, and;
- Vulnerable Groups – all landlords have a duty to ensure all groups have adequate access to housing so the group will ensure that moving forward this is addressed in partnership, including refugees families and formerly looked after and accommodated children

15. The process to terminate the ERHR will take several months. The Council will work closely with both Arklet & Barrhead Housing Associations to ensure a smooth transition.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

16. The proposals contained within this report do not present any significant financial concerns at this time. There will be small administration costs for all partners to ensure applicants are fully aware of the changes and this will be met from within existing resources. The proposals will assist all partner landlords to allocate housing in a more efficient manner and contribute towards lower empty property void rent loss.

CONSULTATION

17. Consultations will be undertaken with registered tenant organisations, tenants and waiting list applicants in relation to the proposed changes.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

18. Discussions have taken place with Arklet and Barrhead Housing Associations and agreement had been reached with all parties in principle to terminate the East Renfrewshire Housing Register. The Housing Associations are currently seeking approval through their own governance arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

19. There are no staffing, property, legal, equalities or sustainability implications associated with this report. As ERC are the hosts of the current ERHR system any changes

present no current concerns. The Housing Associations both have existing IT systems which can be used for their own housing allocations.

20. The proposals will ensure that all landlords can have flexible allocation processes with improved IT systems and greater transparency.

21. For East Renfrewshire's Housing Service, the termination of the ERHR will be undertaken in conjunction with a full review of the allocation policy and procedures to ensure a smooth transition. A full equality impact assessment will be undertaken before any revised policy is submitted to Cabinet for approval.

CONCLUSIONS

22. The ERHR was developed in 2008 to ensure that socially rented housing applicants have full access to socially rented housing in East Renfrewshire. However, the low number of Housing Associations operating in East Renfrewshire and their low housing stock numbers has meant that many of the potential benefits have not fully materialised and the current ERHR model causes some issues for all partners.

23. A new approach to joint working is being developed to ensure that access to socially rented housing across the Council area is easily available but that landlords have flexibility to allocate their own housing stock based on their own particular requirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

24. The Cabinet is asked to approve the termination of the current East Renfrewshire Housing Register with a view to implementing alternative arrangements for those making applications to be included on local housing lists.

Director of Environment

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