

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET7 September 2023Report by Director of EnvironmentLETTINGS POLICY REVIEW**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of the report is to seek approval of updated letting targets for existing and new build council housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Cabinet are asked to
- a) Note the ongoing and unprecedented demand for council housing in East Renfrewshire Council, in particular the increase in homelessness; and
 - b) Approve the proposed letting targets for existing and new build council housing.

BACKGROUND

3. The existing Lettings Policy was reviewed and approved by the Cabinet in January 2023. The policy can be found in Appendix 1 of the report and can be found through the following link https://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/media/8625/Cabinet-item-09-26-January-2023/pdf/Cabinet_item_09_-_26_January_2023.pdf?m=638092075798570000

4. Members will note that proposals were approved until the end of Q1 2023/24 for the following allocation of accommodation for homeless households. This paper seeks approval to keep these targets in place:

- Increase the percentage of new build council homes allocated to homeless households from the existing target of 25% and change to "to up to 40%"; and
- Increase the percentage of existing council homes allocated to homeless households from the existing target of 55% and change to "to up to 70%"

5. The paper also noted the increase in homeless presentations that emerged during the COVID 19 pandemic had been sustained. Members will note from the table below that demand continues to exceed supply.

Year	No of homeless presentations	No of households who had the right to an offer permanent accommodation	No of empty homes becoming available for rent	No of new council homes available for rent
2018/19	308	251	264	19
2019/20	340	287	259	40
2020/21	372	301	222	0
2021/22	378	309	265	39
2022/23	446	392	215	94

6. The demand from homeless households is in addition to the general waiting list. On the general waiting list are households with various needs including medical needs, overcrowding and lodgers. The size of the general waiting list has increased from approximately 2800 in 2018/19 to over 6000 at the end of 2022/23.

7. Local Housing Associations operate their own waiting lists and also have a legal duty to assist with the housing of homeless households. However many are specialist providers and are rarely able to assist the needs of homeless households. As a mainstream landlord, Barrhead Housing Association (BHA) assist by allocating up to 40% of all their empty properties to homeless households.

REPORT

Choice Based Lettings

8. East Renfrewshire Council operate a Choice Based Lettings approach which is designed to allow the applicant to have an element of choice in where they would like to live. Applicants who are interested in a property can bid for it (similar to how an estate agent may currently work), provided it is open to their Priority Pass. The applicant with the earliest application date is then formally offered the property. A target is set for the percentage of empty properties that are allocated to each Priority Pass group and full details can be found in pages 8 & 28 of Appendix 1. A summary of the priority passes are as follows:

- Priority Pass A - Homeless or threatened with homelessness & Young Care Leavers
- Priority Pass B - Unsatisfactory housing, overcrowded, medical priority
- Priority Pass C - Need to give or receive support, downsizing, harassment, “sofa surfing”
- Priority Pass D - Private let, sharing amenities, relocating to ERC for work etc.
- Priority Pass E – If none of the above apply.

9. The lettings targets in place have been set to ensure that households with lower priority housing need are able to access council housing. Properties are open for bidding and can be either restricted to a set priority pass or to more than one priority pass. The successful applicant is the household in the highest priority group with the earliest application date. Therefore it can be hard to meet the exact target levels. For example, some of the council’s lower demand stock will be offered to all priority groups. This is in order to reduce void rent loss. In addition, due to the increasing demand from homeless households, almost all properties are targeted towards the priority A group to address this pressure and ensure targets are met. The tables below detail the performance against these targets for 2022/23 & quarter 1 of 2023/24.

- **2022/23**

	Existing ERC Homes		New Build homes	
	2022/23 Target	2022/23 Actual	2022/23 Target	2022/23 Actual
Priority A	70%	63%	40%	56%
Priority B	20%	20%	35%	24%
Priority C	5%	4%	20%	16%
Priority D	4%	4%	4%	0%
Priority E	1%	9%	1%	4%

- **2023/24 – Quarter 1**

	Existing ERC Homes		New Build homes	
	2023/24 Q1 Target	2023/24 Q1 Actual	2023/24 Q1 Target	2023/24 Q1 Actual
Priority A	70%	79%	40%	50%
Priority B	20%	6%	35%	33%
Priority C	5%	6%	20%	17%
Priority D	4%	6%	4%	0%
Priority E	1%	3%	1%	0%

10. Cabinet should note significant effort has been made to meet the 70% target in quarter 1 of 2023/24 in relation to existing council stock. The potential availability of attractive new council homes has meant that many priority A and B applicants were not bidding for mainstream housing. Housing Services have been actively working with homeless households encouraging them to bid on all available council accommodation. Members should note that the service adopts a person centred approach to homelessness in order to ensure that households' needs are sensitively addressed.

11. Members will note from the Cabinet paper of January 2023 that a review of homeless services was underway. During the first 6 months of 2023 this review has involved a full review of homeless procedures, documentation and updated staffing training. New processes have been put in place to focus on improved housing options to assist with homeless prevention. However as homeless numbers continue to increase more work is required to support homeless prevention, housing support services and increase the provision of temporary accommodation. This work is expected to be undertaken throughout the remainder of 2023/24.

12. It is proposed that the existing lettings targets remain in place but under regular review. Any future required changes to the Lettings Policy will be submitted to Cabinet for approval.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

13. The introduction of Choice Based Lettings have helped to reduce areas of low demand for social housing and improve void rent loss targets. When Choice Based Letting was introduced, void rent loss was at 1.78% for the year 2019/20. For the year 2022/23, void rent loss is 0.95%.

14. Due to outdated ICT systems, the process of letting council homes can be extremely resource intensive. The Choice Based Letting system is substantially better for applicants but this has increased the administrative workload for the service. Housing Services have introduced a new ICT software system in May 2023. Ongoing development work is underway which should provide significant efficiencies and permit officers to allocate greater time to advice, information and homeless prevention services. This is estimated to be complete by the end of 2023.

CONSULTATION

15. Before seeking approval for the existing Lettings Policy in January 2023 Housing Services undertook a consultation process by writing directly to all applicants on the waiting list and this was promoted on the Council's social media platforms. This consultation included the lettings targets proposed in this paper. There were 191 survey responses, overall supportive of the suggested changes. However most respondents demonstrated frustration at the lack of social housing in East Renfrewshire.

16. A further consultation process will be undertaken before a new lettings policy is presented to Cabinet.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

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

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

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

19. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on the policy.

CONCLUSIONS

20. Demand for social housing, whilst always high in East Renfrewshire, has grown significantly in the past 3 years and is showing no signs of reducing.

21. Further demand is expected as a result of the cost of living crisis and ongoing UK and Scottish Government resettlement programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

22. Cabinet are asked to

- a) Note the ongoing and sustained demand for Council housing in East Renfrewshire Council, in particular the increase in homelessness; and
- b) Approve the proposed letting targets for existing and new build council housing.

Director of Environment

Further information can be obtained from: Phil Daws, Head of Environment (Housing, Property & Climate Change) phil.daws@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

August 2023

Appendix 1

**HOUSING
ALLOCATION POLICY**

September 2023

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1 Why we are changing the policy on letting our homes

- 1.1 East Renfrewshire has faced a shortage of affordable housing over a number of years. The local housing needs assessment shows that there are not enough homes available to rent and to buy locally.
- 1.2 As background, our current Local Housing Strategy has identified that we need more social rented homes of every size and type in Eastwood, with homes of certain types and sizes required in Levern Valley. There is a particular shortage of:
- one bedroom homes;
 - ground floor, accessible and adapted homes;
 - family sized homes to replace those sold through the Right to Buy;
 - temporary and permanent homes for homeless households;
 - mid-market rented homes and opportunities for low cost home ownership.
- 1.3 In addition, the proposed policy:
- Provides our customers with more choice from among our available homes;
 - Ensures that customers are aware of what homes are available across our area at any point in time;
 - Assists our customers in considering all suitable housing options in the area;
 - Is written in a way that makes our letting of our available homes easier for our customers to understand;
 - Simplifies the way we let our homes, making it more efficient and providing better value for money for our customers;
 - Helps us to make best use of our limited supply of homes by taking account of what types of housing need each home is most suitable for;
 - Assists in supporting successful tenancies;
 - Ensures that we are able to respond quickly to those in urgent housing need, e.g. by assisting people to keep their existing homes;
 - Makes the letting of our homes more transparent, reducing customer frustration.

2 Aim of this policy

- 2.1 We aim to let our homes in a fair, easy-to-understand way and help find suitable housing options for those in housing need.
- 2.2 We will do this by:
- Giving highest priority to those in greatest housing need;
 - Our priorities include those we have a legal duty to give “reasonable preference” to:
 - Those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and who have housing needs that cannot be met through other housing options;
 - Those living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have housing needs that cannot be met through other housing options (see Annex C for a definition of this) ;
 - Existing social housing tenants who have more bedrooms than their household needs.

- Introducing a new way of letting our homes which allows you to see all of the homes that are available and to show an interest in those that meet your housing need;
- Providing personalised advice on housing options so that you can make informed decisions about which are right for you. This includes;
 - helping you to keep your existing home if you are at risk of losing it
 - if you need support to continue to live independently in your home, we will put you in touch with organisations who can provide the type of support you need, e.g. health and social care, welfare rights, debt and budgeting advice
- Providing support and advice to potential and new Council tenants.

2.3 We are committed to:

- Providing you with clear, open and honest information and advice about what we can and cannot do for you;
- Ensuring that you will not be treated unfairly because of age, physical ability or mental health, gender, marital status, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, language, religion, belief, sexual orientation, family circumstances, or employment status;
- Keeping your personal information safe and secure;
- Meeting all of the legal requirements in letting our homes and in assisting those who are homeless or about to be homeless;
- Meeting all of the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter;
- Following Scottish Government guidance and good practice in letting our homes, providing advice and information and assisting those who are homeless or about to be homeless;
- Ensuring the promotion of equal opportunities by publishing information and documentation in different languages and other formats such as large print, tape, and braille, as required.

3 Service Standards

- 3.1 We aim to write to you confirming your registration and level of priority within twenty one days of receiving your completed registration, providing that we receive all of the information that we need in order to complete the process.
- 3.2 We aim to write to you within five days of the Assessment Panel making a decision about your medical/disability priority or considering your appeal about medical/disability priority.
- 3.3 We aim to contact you within two working days of the closing date if your bid for a home has been successful.
- 3.4 We will arrange for one of our Housing Officers to visit you within a month of your tenancy start date.

4 Information and advice

- 4.1 Before you register for housing with us, we will encourage you to read the Housing Options information on our website. We can provide assistance with this if you require it.
- 4.2 To book a housing options discussion with us, either in our offices or on the telephone, whichever you prefer. During the discussion, we will give you full information and advice on the practical housing options that are available to you, including your prospects of being offered a council house. We will also offer personalised advice on any support available that may enable you either to remain in your current home or to move on to a different home. We will make referrals on your behalf to agencies providing support that you tell us would be helpful to you. This information will help you to make decisions about which option(s) are most practical for you.
- 4.3 If you are about to lose your current home, we will assist you where possible to stay or delay leaving, e.g. by negotiating with your landlord or lender on your behalf and in getting specialist advice if you need it. If we are unable to help you to keep your existing home, we will assist you in making a homeless application and provide you with temporary accommodation if you have nowhere to stay whilst we are processing this.
- 4.4 If you are already homeless or under immediate threat of homelessness, please contact us without delay on 0141 577 3001 (during office hours) or 0800 052 0180 (evenings, weekends and public holidays).
- 4.5 If your current home is unsuitable for you due to illness and/or disability, or mobility issues, we will help you to organise an assessment to find out if it can be adapted to suit your needs or to find suitable alternative housing.
- 4.6 We will also assist you in getting support to allow you to continue to live in your current home, e.g. housing support, welfare benefits, budgeting and debt advice.
- 4.7 Our aim in a housing options discussion is to provide you with all of the advice and information you need to help you make an informed choice about the option or options that are right for you. Some of these options might include:
 - Mutual exchanges

If you are an existing tenant of either a Council or a housing association and want to swap homes with another council or housing association tenant in East Renfrewshire, or anywhere in the country, you should contact your landlord to discuss this. Both tenants must have permission from their landlord before actually swapping homes. East Renfrewshire Council holds a Mutual Exchange Register, so if you want to appear on the register or find out about suitable swaps, please call 0141 577 3001 and ask for a mutual exchange report. You may also wish to consider the Homeswapper scheme, which is run by a private company offering mutual exchange opportunities. You pay a small fee to register. You and your proposed swap will still need permission from your landlord before the swap can happen. More details are available here: www.homeswapper.co.uk
 - Nomination to a housing association

The Council has agreements with housing associations that have stock in East Renfrewshire that we can nominate people on our housing list for some of their properties, usually in new housing developments or in homes recently purchased but also some existing homes that have become available. Where we have the agreement of the housing association, we will include new homes available for nomination in our advertising of vacant homes and you will be able to bid for those that meet your need. We will nominate the bidders with the highest priority for each of the new homes available for nomination. Where we do not have the agreement of a housing association to advertise the homes available for nomination, we will make nominations directly to the housing association, taking account of the needs of those who have registered for housing and their relative priority on our register.

- Homeless Referrals

We can also refer to housing associations a proportion of homeless applicants to whom we have a legal duty to provide permanent accommodation. Where we have the agreement of the housing association, we will advertise the housing association homes that are available for homeless referrals so that those with Priority Pass A can make bids. Where we do not have the agreement of a housing association to advertise the homes available for homeless referral, we will make referrals directly to the housing association, taking account of homelessness dates and, where possible, area preferences

- Referrals to other agencies for support

We can also make referrals for you to seek advice and/or support from other agencies, e.g. with financial, health, employability issues.

4.8 After considering all of the advice and information we have provided, if you want to apply for one of our homes, then you will need to register with us.

5 Who can apply for our homes

5.1 Anyone can register for housing with us if you are aged 16 years or over, providing that you are not prevented from doing so by immigration or other relevant legislation.

5.2 East Renfrewshire Council may assist with re-housing households who have permanent leave to remain via government re-settlement programmes.

6 Registering for housing

6.1 The registration form should be completed on our website but our customer service and allocations staff can provide assistance if you ask for it.

6.2 We can provide an interpretation service if English is not your first language or assistance if you have a hearing or visual impairment.

Please ask a relative, friend or someone who is providing you with support to contact 0141 577 3001 to request assistance.

6.3 If you receive housing support or support from a statutory or voluntary agency, they will also be able to assist you and can contact us if they have any queries.

- 6.4 The form asks you for personal details about you and your housing circumstances, including about anyone you are currently living with and those you wish to be housed with you. However, you cannot include two or more people who are not relatives to be housed with you. If we rented a home to three or more unrelated persons, we would be creating a House of Multiple Occupation, which has to meet different legal rules.
- 6.5 Depending on the information provided by you, we may request further information whilst we are processing your registration. This may include either a character reference or a reference from a previous or current landlord, either during the registration process or when we are making you an offer of housing.

7 Assessing your need for housing

- 7.1 We will assess your need for housing and will let you know the level of priority pass that we have awarded. We will need to carry out a further assessment for some categories of housing need, e.g. those related to medical, disability or mental health need, or where you wish to move on from supported accommodation or are leaving care, or where you are subject to the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). We are reviewing our approach to medical and disability assessment to include consideration of mental health issues that could be improved by re-housing.
- 7.2 In the assessment of your need for housing, we will take account of:
- If you are being harassed or abused where you currently stay;
 - If you are homeless or about to be homeless;
 - If you currently live, or have recently lived, in East Renfrewshire, or
 - If you have a social or medical/disability need to move to East Renfrewshire;
 - If you are employed, or have been offered employment, in the area;
 - If you can show us that you are looking for employment in this area;
 - If you want to move into the area to avoid harassment or domestic abuse
 - If you want to move into the area to be near a relative or carer
 - If you or anyone who will be living with you own any property;
 - Age, if you need sheltered housing;
 - If you owe a landlord more than one-twelfth of your annual rent, have not made a repayment arrangement or have not made three monthly payments in line with any repayment arrangement;

- 7.3 In the assessment of your need for housing, by law we must ignore:
- The length of time you have lived in East Renfrewshire;
 - Any outstanding tenancy-related debt at a house where you were not a tenant;
 - Any tenancy-related debt that you have repaid;
 - Any tenancy-related debt that is less than one twelfth of the annual amount, or where you have an agreed repayment arrangement, have made at least three months' payments under the arrangement and are still keeping to the arrangement;
 - Any non-housing debt, e.g. Council Tax, owed by you or someone moving with you;
 - Your household income, including any welfare benefits;
 - Whether you are legally separated or divorced;
 - Who you are living with when you register for housing, e.g. you may still be living in the same house as an ex-partner.
- 7.4 We aim to write to you confirming your registration and level of priority within twenty one days of receiving your completed registration. This will be dependent upon us receiving all of the information that we need in order to complete the registration process.

8 Priority passes

8.1 There are five levels of priority passes, in recognition of the range of housing and other needs that exist in East Renfrewshire:

Priority Pass A (time limited to six months)

- You have been assessed as unintentionally homeless, including if you are at risk of harassment and abuse ;
- You have been assessed as unintentionally threatened with homelessness within two months and our intervention has failed to prevent imminent homelessness (including those at risk of harassment and abuse);
- You are living in our Connor Road Young Persons' Supported Accommodation or are a Care Experienced Young Person and have been assessed as ready to move on;

Priority Pass B

- You are homeless or about to be homeless and have been assessed as intentionally homeless [this priority level will be time limited to three months with a review after that];
- You have been assessed as unintentionally homeless but following the three month review, we have made you a direct offer which you have refused (this priority level will be time limited to three months with a review after that);
- You are currently living in East Renfrewshire or have a local connection ¹ and:
 - You are living in unsatisfactory housing (defined in Annex C) and have housing needs which are not capable of being met by the other housing options which are available; or
 - You are a social housing tenant and you have two or more bedrooms than you need in terms of our house size rules (see Annex A of this policy); or

¹ Definition of local connection:

- You are not currently living in East Renfrewshire but want to move to East Renfrewshire because:
 - You are working in East Renfrewshire;
 - You have been offered employment in East Renfrewshire;
 - You are looking for work in the area and can provide evidence of this;
 - You want to be near a relative or carer;
 - You have social or medical/disability/mental health reasons for requiring to be housed in the area;
 - You have a relative living in the area (blood relatives and relations through marriage/civil partnership, including parent, grandparent, child, adopted child, stepchild, grandchild, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew and any of those of your spouse);

- You are leaving the Armed Forces and have been issued with a cessation of entitlement to occupy Armed Forces accommodation; or
- Your existing home is unsuitable and is delaying your discharge from hospital; or
- Your existing home is significantly overcrowded and you need two or more additional bedrooms in line with our house size rules;
- You have been assessed by our assessment panel as:
 - having a severe or debilitating illness or disability and you require urgent rehousing as your home cannot be adapted;
 - having a medical/disability need and requiring to be re-housed quickly but not urgently;
 - having a non-serious medical/disability condition which may benefit from alternative suitable accommodation;
- You are living in one of our adapted homes and no longer require the adaptations.

Priority Pass C

- You need to move to provide or receive support and can provide sufficient confirmation to support this;
- You are living in East Renfrewshire or have a local connection and
 - You are currently sharing amenities with people who are not members of your household and do not have your own bed space, i.e. you are sleeping on a sofa or similar;
 - Your existing home is overcrowded and your household requires one more bedroom than you have in terms of our house size rules, excluding any lodgers;
 - You are a social housing tenant, you have one bedroom more than you need and you would like to move to a smaller home;
 - You are experiencing harassment in your current home but are safe to remain in your current home for a period, subject to regular review
- You are an existing ERC tenant and wish to combine households with another existing ERC tenant;

Priority Pass D

- You are currently living in East Renfrewshire or have a local connection and
 - You are currently sharing amenities with people who are not members of your household but you have your own bed space, i.e. you are not sleeping on a sofa or similar (an example of this would be where you and your children are living with your parent(s)); or
 - You have regular overnight access to children whose family home is elsewhere and do not have suitable accommodation, e.g. are sharing facilities or have insufficient bedrooms; or

- You are living in a private let and have a private residential tenancy agreement;
- You are not currently living in East Renfrewshire but want to move to East Renfrewshire because:
 - You are working in East Renfrewshire;
 - You have been offered employment in East Renfrewshire;
 - You are looking for work in the area and can provide evidence of this;
 - You want to be near a relative or carer;
 - You have social or medical/disability/mental health reasons for requiring to be housed in the area;
 - You have a relative living in the area (blood relatives and relations through marriage/civil partnership, including parent, grandparent, child, adopted child, stepchild, grandchild, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew and any of those of your spouse);

Priority Pass E

You will be awarded this if none of the circumstances in A-D above apply. Priority will be given to bidders who are already living in the area.

- 8.2 If your housing needs fall into more than one priority pass grouping, you will be awarded the highest priority that your needs fall into.
- 8.3 We will use percentage targets (or “quotas”) for each priority pass to ensure that we give relative priority both to the sets of circumstances that the law requires us to prioritise balanced with a percentage of lets to other priority passes. We will use a separate set of percentage targets for our new council properties. Both sets of percentage targets or “quotas” will be reviewed annually and published in an annual lettings plan.
- 8.4 The reason for the two sets of targets is to ensure that we recognise the diverse range of needs of existing tenants alongside the housing needs of others on the housing register. We will monitor the impact of the targets closely, reviewing the outcomes of both choice based lettings and direct matches

9 How we let our homes

- 9.1 .Each week, we will advertise on our website (and in local facilities, e.g. community facilities, libraries) the homes that are available to let, with a photograph of the outside of the building and a description of the key features, e.g. number and size of bedrooms, electric or gas heating and cooking, double glazing etc. Each available home will be labelled as to which priority pass (es) can “bid” for it. This will reflect the percentage targets that we have agreed and published in our annual lettings plan.
- 9.2 We use percentage targets (or “quotas”) for each priority pass to ensure that we give relative priority both to the sets of circumstances that the law requires us to prioritise balanced with a percentage of lets to other circumstances. We have two sets of percentage targets (or “quotas”) in our annual lettings plan. One set is used for homes being advertised for re-let following the departure of the current tenant. The other set is used for new East Renfrewshire Council homes being let for the first time, where, with the exception of the quota for homeless households, we will give first priority for 50% of the new homes to existing tenants. This does not mean that other applicants in the groups will be excluded from bidding for new council homes. We will ask for up to two references from all successful bidders for new council homes. The new Council homes will be advertised alongside all of the other available homes, including those from other social landlords with whom we have agreements to advertise a proportion of their new housing.
- 9.3 We will advertise vacant homes on a specified day each week with a closing date of one week later. If you have not heard from us within three days of the closing date, then you have been unsuccessful and should continue to bid for other homes.

- 9.4 The bidder with the highest priority and which will make best use of the home will be offered it. Where there are bidders of equal priority and who would all make best use of the home, the one with the earliest registration date will be offered it. The term “best use” means the match between your housing needs and the suitability of the home you are bidding for, e.g. ground floor homes are most needed by people with mobility or accessibility needs, the best use for an adapted home is for it to continue to be occupied by someone with similar needs, letting a smaller home to a household who have more bedrooms than they need frees up a larger home for a household in need of it.
- 9.5 We aim to contact you within two working days of the closing date if your bid for a home has been successful. If you have bid and do not hear from us, your bid has been unsuccessful and you should continue to make further bids.
- 9.6 We will publish the results on our website on a weekly basis so that it is easy for you see which priority groups the successful bidders were in and how many bids there were per available home. This will help your understanding of your likelihood of success in further bids and in time will give you information about which types of properties in which areas become available most often.
- 9.7 Circumstances where direct matches may be made, rather than bidding:
- Where the MAPPA have made a recommendation about accommodation and the Responsible Authorities have recommended a restriction of choice;
 - Where a Priority Pass A’s time limit has expired and we consider that poor use was made of the priority through the bidding process. Where this is the case, we will have a discussion with you about your bidding pattern prior to deciding whether or not to make a direct match. We will try to ensure that any direct match in these circumstances will be in the nearest geographical area to your preferred area, dependent upon availability;
 - Where you require a very specifically adapted property, we will work with the support you receive from Health and Social Care Teams to identify an appropriate match.
 - Where we require to use a property to temporarily house an existing tenant whose home is in need of major repair.

Sensitive lets

- 9.8 There are other circumstances (in addition to direct matching) where we may depart from the routine letting process. In some situations, instead of making an offer to the bidder at the top of the list, we may give consideration to the suitability of that bidder for a specific home, using documented information we have available about the bidder and our knowledge about the home, its location or neighbours. It is good practice for us to consider whether a particular home/location will be a stable and long term solution for the household. In some cases this may result in us by-passing the bidder at the top of the list. We may also ask for references stating your suitability as a tenant. We can give assurance that any such decisions will be based upon clear and accountable processes and their use will be carefully monitored.

Tenancy related debt

- 9.10 Where you have made a bid but have an outstanding tenancy related debt of more than one-twelfth of your annual rent which you have not agreed an arrangement to repay or have not maintained an arrangement for at least three months (this includes situations where your landlord has written off the debt so that it is no longer outstanding), we will not consider your bid. However, we will take into account the reason the debt has arisen and refer you to local advice services who can work with you to manage repayments. Your bids will be considered once you have maintained a repayment arrangement for at least three months.

10 Types and sizes of homes

- 10.1 You should be aware that, given the limited supply of social housing in East Renfrewshire, and particularly in the Eastwood area, you should try to be as realistic as possible in making your bids. The information we publish each week about available vacancies and about which priority passes were successful in bidding for each vacancy will assist you in developing an understanding of which types of home are vacant most often and in which areas.
- 10.2 If you have been assessed as unintentionally homeless or unintentionally about to be homeless within two months, then we would expect you to consider all property types and areas. However, you will be able to specify your preferred area choice for the first three months after you have been registered on the list. In very specific situations, we may agree to extending this period. .
- 10.3 Due to the limited supply of ERC homes available and the need for us to make best use of it, we cannot offer you any choice about the size of home you can bid for. Our rules about house sizes are summarised in Annex A of this policy. We may make exceptions to this e.g.
- Where there is limited demand for particular properties
 - Couples and single people may be able to bid on 2 bedroom properties where there is no demand
 - Where you have access to children who do not live with you on a full time basis,
 - Where you are a foster carer or have been approved to adopt,
 - where you need an extra bedroom due to a medical condition or disability,
 - Where you are pregnant and your midwife or doctor can confirm this,
 - Where there is low demand for the property
 - Exceptional circumstances e.g. you are in a witness protection programme.

11 Adapted homes

- 11.1 Adapted homes will be advertised alongside all other vacant homes and will be clearly labelled as suitable for those on the register awaiting the specified adaptations.

12 Sheltered homes

- 12.1 Sheltered homes will be advertised alongside all other empty homes and will be clearly labelled as suitable for those meeting the specific criteria for sheltered housing, e.g. that you are aged 60 years or over.
- 12.2 Where there is no demand for this accommodation these properties will be considered for applicants over 50 years. However all lets will be considered sensitive lets.

13 Urgent Re-Housing

- 13.1 In cases where there the applicants circumstances are such that they have an urgent and immediate need for re-housing and the Allocation Policy does not reflect this, the Senior Housing Manager may consider awarding a Priority A status for a time limited single offer of accommodation. Urgent re-housing status will only be considered where there is strong evidence is provided. Only 10 will be awarded each year.

14 Support for bidding

- 14.1 Support is available if you need help to make regular bids for vacant homes. A list of available sources of support is outlined in Annex D of this policy.

15 Offering you a home

- 15.1 If you have been successful in your bid for a home, we will be in contact with you shortly after the closing date to discuss your offer. Please be aware that, as we seek to advertise homes as soon as we know that they are going to be available, the existing tenant may not have moved out yet. Where this is the case, we will put the viewing on hold until the tenant has moved and until our staff inspect the home to see if any repairs are required. We will maintain contact with you so that you are updated on progress.
- 15.2 When viewing the property, you will be accompanied by a Housing Officer who will be able to answer any questions you may have. If you have a support worker, they will be invited to the viewing too. The Housing Officer will be able to provide you with details of local schools, transport availability and will also want to discuss with you the affordability of the home, i.e. not only the rent but also heating costs, travel costs etc. With your permission, the Housing Officer will arrange for an estimate to be made of the likelihood of you being entitled to help with your rent.
- 15.3 East Renfrewshire Council tenants who are re-housed because they have at least two bedrooms more than they need will be offered a £1000 disturbance allowance. However, if you have rent arrears or owe any other debt to Housing Services, the amount of the debt will be deducted from the disturbance payment. We would expect that, as you had a choice about which homes to bid for, that you will accept the offer following the viewing.

- 15.4 Following acceptance of the offer, you will be invited to a pre-sign up discussion (which may take place on the telephone). This will confirm that you have all of the information that you require and that you are clear about any actions that you need to take, e.g. redirecting your mail, contacting utility companies, applying for benefit etc. You will also be advised of any repairs that are still to be carried out.
- 15.5 When the home is ready for you to move in, you will be contacted to arrange to sign your tenancy agreement. At the sign up meeting, you will be advised which Housing Officer will be your main point of contact for all issues in the first month of your tenancy. Following this, the Housing Officer will be your main contact for issues such as estate management and neighbour disputes.
- 15.6 In the majority of cases, you will be offered a Scottish Secure Tenancy agreement. However, in the following circumstances, you may be offered a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST) agreement:
- In the last three years you have been evicted from a previous tenancy because of anti-social behaviour or you or anyone who member of your household has been served an anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) – including where we have a legal duty to house you because you are unintentionally homeless;
 - You are taking up employment in the area;
 - You need to move out of your current home temporarily and are unable to access other sources of temporary housing, e.g. while repairs are carried out to make your home safe or adaptations so that you can continue to live in your home independently;
 - You need extensive support to make a success of your tenancy (e.g. counselling, support from a statutory or voluntary agency, or debt and financial advice), which we want to monitor for a six month period before considering converting your tenancy to a Scottish Secure Tenancy; (In all of the above cases, you have a right of appeal to the Sheriff Court if you don't think you should have been offered an SSST).

16 Home visits

- 16.1 In some circumstances, a Housing Officer may visit you in your current home to verify details prior to you signing the tenancy for your new home.
- 16.2 Once you have moved in to your new home, a Housing Officer will visit you during the first month to find out if there are any issues you want to discuss. You will be able to arrange a suitable date for this when you are signing the tenancy agreement.

17 Refusal of offers

- 17.1 If you refuse an offer following a successful bid and have been assessed as unintentionally homeless or about to be homeless, we will want to discuss with you the reason(s) for your refusal and if we deem the reason(s) to be not valid, we may remove your priority pass from you and make you an offer of re-housing separate from the bidding system. If you refuse this offer, we will consider that we have met our legal obligations and you will be re-assessed as a Priority Pass B. If you refuse a property, you may appeal using our Complaints and Appeals procedure (see section 21 of this policy). If you are living in our temporary accommodation and we remove your Priority Pass, you will be given notice to leave.
- 17.2 If you have a non-time limited pass and have refused more than two offers, we will remove your pass and suspend you from making bids for a six month period. You may ask to be re-assessed at the end of the six month period.

18 Suspensions from bidding

- 18.1 In certain circumstances, which we have listed below, we may suspend you from being able to bid for homes once you have registered:
- Where we have evidence that, within the previous three years (or longer in exceptional circumstances), you or anyone who will be living with you has been evicted for antisocial behaviour or is currently, or has been, subject to an Antisocial Behaviour Order;
 - Where you have outstanding rent arrears for a previous tenancy than is more than one month's rent or there is no appropriate repayment arrangement in place which has been paid for at least the previous three months
 - Where you have knowingly or recklessly made a false statement on your registration form - we will take into account the extent to which you have misled in considering whether to impose a suspension and for how long
 - Where you have a non-time-limited pass and have unreasonably refused two previous offers of housing
- 18.2 We will not impose a suspension from bidding where we have assessed you as unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness, but we will offer you support to make suitable bids. If you continue to make poor use of your time limited Priority A Pass, we will make you one direct offer of housing, after which we will consider that we have discharged our duty to house you. If you refuse the direct offer unreasonably, you will lose your priority pass and we will re-assess you as Priority Pass B.
- 18.3 We will not suspend you from bidding if we have previously used the same evidence to suspend you or anyone who will be living with you.
- 18.4 In considering whether to suspend your ability to bid on the basis of antisocial behaviour, we will consider:
- The nature frequency and length of the conduct
 - The extent to which the conduct arises because of acts or omissions of people other than the tenant
 - The effect the conduct is having on other people
 - Any other action taken, or capable of being taken, by your existing landlord to address the conduct

- Whether there are any alternatives to imposing a suspension, e.g. by agreeing a support package and offering a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy for a minimum period of twelve months when you make a successful bid.

18.5 Where we have decided to suspend you from bidding for vacant homes, we will explain to you clearly in writing:

- why we are suspending you from bidding;
- what this means, e.g. you will not receive offers of housing;
- how long your suspension will last;
- what you have to do to have the suspension lifted; and
- your right to appeal.

18.6 We will monitor all suspensions on a regular basis to ensure that we are applying the policy fairly. We will contact you to confirm when your suspension has been lifted.

19 Reviewing the register

19.1 Please contact us immediately if anything you have stated on your registration form changes.

19.2 We will contact you once each year to check if your circumstances remain as stated and whether you wish to remain on the Register. If you do not respond by the deadline stated in your review letter, we will assume that you no longer wish to remain on the Register and we will cancel your application.

20 Cancelled Registrations

20.1 Your registration will also be cancelled when:

- You ask us in writing to do so because you no longer wish to remain on the Register;
- We receive notification from your next of kin that you are deceased;
- You fail to respond to a request from us for further information that we need to process your registration, assess your housing need or review your registration;
- We receive returned correspondence from your address stating that you no longer live there;
- You are rehoused by us, although you will be offered a new application form to complete during your tenancy sign –up. It is your choice about whether to complete a new application – if you do not, you will be asked to sign confirming that you were offered the opportunity to do so.

20.2 Where you contact us following your registration being cancelled, you will be able to re-register without completing a new form, providing that your circumstances are broadly the same. Your registration date will be from the date of the new registration being made.

20.3 Where your registration has been cancelled because you failed to respond to several requests from us for further information or to review your registration, we will give consideration to the reason for the failures and may agree to reinstate your original registration.

21 Complaints and appeals

- 21.1 East Renfrewshire Council is committed to providing high-quality customer services. However, we do understand that sometimes things can go wrong. We value complaints and use the information from them to help us improve our services. In 2013 we changed how we handled customer complaints. All Scottish councils now follow the same procedure to ensure that complaints are dealt with consistently.
- 21.2 We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.
- 21.3 You can complain in person at any of our offices, by phone, in writing, email or via our online complaints form at www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/complaints , where you can also download a helpful leaflet to assist you in making your complaint, which includes information about where you can get assistance in making your complaint. Copies of the leaflet are also available in any of our offices.
- 21.4 There are some things we can't deal with through our complaints handling procedure. This includes things that are covered by a right of appeal, e.g. if you are dissatisfied with the level of priority you have been given when registering for housing, you have the right to appeal against the decision.
- 21.5 We have an appeals process for you to use if you think that:
- the Priority Pass we have given you does not reflect the needs that you have described to us;
 - your Priority Pass has been removed and replaced with a lower one unfairly;
 - your registration has been suspended or cancelled unfairly;
 - the home you made a successful bid for is in an unacceptable letting condition;
 - where we have directly matched you to a property for any of the reasons covered by this policy, we have done so unfairly and without taking account of any specific valid location needs.
- 21.6 You should outline in writing the reason you want to appeal and send it to Housing Services at East Renfrewshire Council Offices, 211 Main St., Barrhead, G78 1SY within twenty one days of:
- Your priority pass being removed and replaced with a lower one;
 - Your registration having been suspended or cancelled;
 - Your viewing of the home that you have made a successful bid for;
 - Our notification to you that we have directly matched you to a home.
- 21.7 If you need help with preparing your appeal, support is available from the East Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau, 216 Main Street, Barrhead, G78 1SN. Please telephone 0141 881 2032 to book an appointment.
- 21.8 If we cannot make a full response to you within five working days, we will send an acknowledgement of your appeal. You will receive a detailed response within fifteen working days of us receiving your appeal, outlining whether your appeal has been successful and, if not, the reasons why it has been unsuccessful.
- 21.9 If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your appeal, you can request that the Senior Officer within Housing Services reviews your case. This is the second and final stage in the appeals process. You must notify us within seven working days of receiving the appeal decision that you wish a second stage review.

22 Monitoring arrangements

- 22.1 We will use a quarterly monitoring framework to track whether the new approach to lettings is delivering the expected outcomes for both you as the customer and for us in terms of increased efficiency and transparency in our lettings process. The information will inform future reviews of this policy.
- 22.2 The monitoring framework will include:
- Customer satisfaction
 - of successful bidders
 - of those who haven't been successful yet (ease of understanding, usefulness of published results)
 - of those who haven't submitted any bids yet (ease of understanding, any support needed)
 - Housing management performance;
 - Profile of those registering for housing;
 - Effectiveness of the support arrangements for bidding;
 - Patterns of bidding – including those not bidding and reasons for not doing so;
 - Proportion of lets going to each Priority Pass grouping;
 - Tenancy sustainment rates, i.e. is the new approach offering more choice resulting in improved tenancy sustainment.

23 Review of this policy

- 23.1 This policy will be reviewed regularly in consultation with those who have registered for housing, our tenants, registered tenants' organisations in the area, other housing providers and voluntary organisations operating in East Renfrewshire.

24 Contact information

- 24.1 For further advice, assistance or general information, please contact Customer First on 0141 577 3001 who can assist with
- General enquiries
 - Questions regarding this policy
 - Arrange an appointment to discuss your housing options

East Renfrewshire Council Website: www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

24.2 If you require independent advice or assistance, you may wish to contact:

Citizen's Advice Bureau
216 Main Street
Barrhead
East Renfrewshire
Tel: 0141 881 2032

24.3 If you have exhausted our appeals process, you may wish to get advice from:

Scottish Public Service Ombudsman
4 Melville Street
Edinburgh
EH3 7NS
Tel: 0800 377 7330

Annex A: Number of bedrooms you will be considered for

Household Size	Number of bedrooms the household will be considered for					
	0 (bedsit)	1	2	3	4	5
Single Person	*	*	*			
Couple		*	*			
Two adults (not couple)			*			
Couple or single adult with one child			*			
Couple or single adult with two additional adults or dependant children						
Both under 10 (different gender)			*			
Both under 16 (same gender)			*			
Different gender, one child 10 or over				*		
Same gender, one child 16 or over				*		
Couple or single adult with three additional adults or dependent children						
All same gender and under 16				*		

All same gender and one 16 or over				*		
All same gender and two 16 or over					*	
All same gender and all 16 or over				*		
One gender over 10 and two remaining same gender and under 16					*	
Two same gender but one over 16, remaining child under 10					*	
Two same gender but one over 16 and remaining child 10 or over						

<p>Couple or single adult with three additional adults or dependent children</p> <p>All same gender and under 16</p> <p>All same gender but one 16 or over</p> <p>All same gender but two or more 16 or over</p> <p>Different genders but all under 10</p> <p>Different genders but one or more 10 or over</p>				<p>*</p> <p></p> <p></p> <p>*</p> <p></p>	<p></p> <p>*</p> <p>*</p> <p></p> <p>*</p>	<p></p> <p></p> <p>*</p> <p></p> <p>*</p>
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Annex B: Legal, regulatory and good practice requirements

Legal

This policy meets the requirements of the following legislation:

- Housing (Scotland) Act 1987
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
- Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2006
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2010
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2014

In using this policy to let our homes, we will also take account of the following legislation:

- Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act 1981
- Children Scotland Act 1995
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Civil Partnership Act 2004
- Management of Offenders etc. (Scotland) Act 2005
- Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007
- Equality Act 2010

Regulatory

The Scottish Housing Regulator checks the performance of social landlords against the standards and outcomes outlined in the Scottish Government's Scottish Social Housing Charter. The outcomes that this policy must meet are:

Outcome 1

Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

Outcome 2

Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

Outcome 7

People looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices

Outcome 8

Tenants and people on the housing list can review their housing options

Outcome 9

People at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness

Outcome 10

People looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and their prospects of being housed.

Outcome 11

Tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.

Outcome 12

Homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice; are provided with suitable, good-quality temporary or emergency accommodation when this is needed; and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to.

Good Practice

Scottish Government

Guidance on the social housing provisions of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 (final drafts of various chapters published in November 2016 and November 2017)

*Housing Options Protocols for Care Leavers (October 2013)*²

Social Housing Allocations: A Practice Guide (March 2011)

COSLA/Scottish Government

Housing Options Guidance (March 2016)

² East Renfrewshire Council and Health and Social Care Partnership are signatories of the Scottish Care Leavers Covenant. This policy is informed by the Covenant and by these Protocols.

ANNEX C: Definition of unsatisfactory housing

Circumstances where we would view your home as being unsatisfactory include:

- Living in a home in poor physical condition e.g. if one or more of the following applies:
 - Is structurally unstable
 - Has rising or penetrating damp
 - Unsatisfactory provision of natural and artificial lighting, or for ventilation, or for heating
 - Inadequate piped supply of wholesome water available in the house
 - Unsatisfactory supply of both hot and cold water in the house
 - Lacks a WC for exclusive use of the household or is unsuitable located in the house
 - Lacks an effective system for drainage and disposal of foul and surface water
 - Unsatisfactory facilities for cooking
 - Unsatisfactory access to all external doors and outbuildings
 - Lack of a fixed bath or shower and wash basin, each provided with a satisfactory supply of both hot and cold water and suitably located in the house
 - Lacks satisfactory thermal insulation
 - Does not comply with relevant requirements for installation of electricity supply and is inadequate and unsafe to use
- Unsuitable due to a medical condition or disability in the household
- Unsatisfactory living arrangements, e.g. significant overcrowding and needing two or more additional bedrooms
- Significant problems with neighbours where intervention has failed

Annex D: Sources of support for bidding

1. If you do not have internet access at home, you can use a computer terminal in either our Barrhead or Eastwood Customer First offices:

Eastwood Park
Rouken Glen Road
Glasgow G46 6UG

211 Main Street
Barrhead
G78 1FY

2. Hard copies of the adverts for each week's vacant homes will be available in each of the above offices.
3. You can also access the internet in any of our libraries.
4. If you are living in our Connor Road supported accommodation, your support worker will have weekly conversations with you about the vacant homes available and will help you to make your bids.
5. If we have assessed you as unintentionally homeless or threatened with homelessness, our housing services staff will be in regular contact with you and will help you make bids.
6. If you are receiving support from a statutory or voluntary agency, you can ask them to help you with your weekly bids. We would be happy to talk them through the process, either on the telephone or online. We are alerting them in advance to our new approach and how it will work.
7. You can tell us that you have given permission to a specific friend or family member to bid on your behalf.
8. Information about available homes and assistance to bid will be available from our staff by telephone if you are experiencing difficulty using the online bidding system or if you have notified us that you have difficulty leaving home due to illness or disability and do not have a family member or friend whom you could nominate to bid on your behalf.

Annex E: Quotas to be applied to Priority Passes

Each year, Housing Services will publish a lettings plan outlining the percentage targets (or “quotas”) of available homes that will be allocated to each priority group. This will ensure that a variety of people are rehoused and a range of local needs met. There will be two sets of percentage targets, one for existing council homes becoming available for re-let and one for our new council homes. These will be reviewed annually and the outcomes monitored closely. The proposed lettings plan for the first year of the new allocations policy is:

New council homes	
Priority Pass	Proportion of annual lets
A	40%
B	35%
C	20%
D	4%
E	1%

The policy proposes to award 40% priority to Priority Pass A. Lets in the remaining priority pass will be split 50/50 between existing council tenants and non-council tenants.

If there are no bidders in the target priority pass groups who can provide up to two references, we will move on to the bidders from the next priority group.

Existing council homes	
Priority Pass	Proportion of lets
A	70%
B	20%
C	5%
D	4%
E	1%

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