

Tenants' Incentive Scheme

Draft Policy

Proposal for 12 month Pilot Scheme from April 2013

1. Background

- 1.1 Evidence shows that some Council tenants are occupying family sized homes larger than they need, whilst at the same time other families are living in overcrowded circumstances waiting for larger homes to become available.
- 1.2 This policy is not intended to force under-occupying tenants to downsize, but to remove some of the barriers for those who wish to do so, if they are occupying larger homes.

2. Policy aims

- 2.1 The 'Tenants' Incentive Scheme offers grants and practical help to Falkirk Council tenants who wish to move to a smaller property owned by Falkirk.
- 2.2 The aims of this policy are to:
 - help under-occupying households move to properties more suited to their needs
 - free up family sized Council homes for overcrowded families

3. Eligibility criteria

- 3.1 The downsizing grant can only be paid to an outgoing tenant of Falkirk Council.
- 3.2 The outgoing tenant must move to a smaller house (including Housing with Care or Amenity Housing) located in the Falkirk Council area and from a Falkirk Council property which the tenant under occupies by 2 or more bedrooms
- 3.3 The transfer must not lead to overcrowding and must be consistent with Homespots, the Council's Allocations policy, except:
- 3.4 Where the outgoing tenant has rent or Council Tax arrears, the downsizing grant will be paid directly to clear the arrears and the remainder will be paid to the tenant.
- 3.5 There must be sufficient budget available at the time of the application to downsize for it to be successful. An initial budget of £250,000 will be set for the scheme which will be monitored and reviewed regularly.

- 3.6 Applications for downsizing grant will be approved or rejected by the Allocations Coordinator or their deputy, with clear reasons given for any refusal. Appeals can be made to the Service Manager or Head of Service if the applicant is unhappy with their decision. Following this, the applicant can follow the corporate complaints process and ultimately complain to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman if they are still unhappy with the decision.

4. Payment amounts

- 4.1 The amount of grant payable to outgoing tenants that meet the eligibility criteria are:
- £2,000 payment per eligible move for 2 bedrooms
 - An additional £1,000 for each bedroom downsized thereafter
- 4.2 The eligibility criteria and grant amounts are shown in Tables 1 and 2 below:

Table 1: Downsizing grants for single applicants or couples requiring 1 bedroom:

		Moving to	
		2 bedrooms	1 bedroom/ bedsit
Moving from	3 bedrooms	-	£3000
	4 bedrooms	£2000	£3000
	5 bedrooms	£3000	£4000

Table 2: Downsizing grants for families requiring 2 bedrooms:

Moving from	Moving to 2 bedrooms
3 bedrooms	-
4 bedrooms	£2000
5 bedrooms	£3000

5. Assistance to bid

- 5.1 Falkirk Council operates a choice based lettings policy called 'Homespot'. All properties, except Housing with Care, are advertised in a regular newsletter and applicants must 'bid' for them. Applicants are then prioritised according to their need. Additional priority is given to applicants who are under-occupying. More details about the allocations policy are available from One Stop Shops.
- 5.2 Applicants can ask for help to bid for a smaller property by telephone, in writing or on the internet, by contacting their local One Stop Shop.

6. Assistance to move

- 6.1 Falkirk Council recognises that moving can be a big change and some tenants may feel overwhelmed by the prospect of making all the necessary arrangements (e.g. to re-direct mail, re-connect utilities, and to arrange for packaging and disposals, etc).
- 6.2 To make it easier for tenants eligible for the scheme to move, support from a dedicated officer (in most circumstances this will be the local Neighbourhood Officer) will be available, to help the tenant make all the necessary arrangements.

7. Consultation

- 7.1 This is a draft policy devised on the basis of a recommendation by the Allocations Consultation Panel in 2012. This panel includes Council tenants, housing applicants and other residents from across the Council area. The panel considered a range of policy options and recommended wider consultation on the basis of a specific proposal.
- 7.2 It is proposed that this policy will be implemented as a pilot scheme from April 2013 for a 12 month period. A 6 monthly update will be presented to members and thereafter the Tenants Forum on progress. An analysis of the outcome will be reported to Housing & Social Work Committee following the 12 month pilot period and during this period further consultation will be carried out.

8. Equalities and Poverty Impact Assessment

- 8.1 An equalities impact assessment has been carried out on this policy which found that older single women will be the main beneficiaries of the policy, as well as overcrowded families. No specific groups are considered to be disadvantaged by the policy. Copies of this assessment have been considered by the Allocations Consultation Panel and are available on request.
- 8.2 Monitoring information is currently collected in respect of allocations outcomes. Information will also be collected about beneficiaries of the policy for the purposes of monitoring its effectiveness, including any impact on particular groups of housing applicants.

9. Review Date

- 9.1 This policy will be reviewed in April 2014 following the 12 month pilot, or earlier if required by related legal or policy changes. The outcome will be reported to Housing & Social Care Committee thereafter.