

Agenda Item 7

Housing Allocations Review Public Consultation

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Falkirk Council

Title: Housing Allocations Review Public Consultation
Meeting: Emergency Executive
Date: 11 June 2020
Submitted By: Director of Corporate & Housing Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the outcome of a public consultation on proposed changes to the Housing Allocations Policy. There is a requirement for Falkirk Council to amend its allocations policy to allow us to realise the objectives required by the Scottish Government to move our rapid rehousing plans forward within the specified timescales. The report is accordingly time critical.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Council/ the Executive is asked to agree:-

The following proposals for changes to Allocations Policy should be approved in light of public consultation:-

- (1) Local Letting Initiative High Flats - that we reduce the age restriction to 50 years old.**
- (2) Local Letting Initiative New Builds - all categories can apply in line with the quota systems.**
- (3) Under Occupancy - we align the application of Band 1 priority for under-occupation with overcrowding**

In addition once an applicant has been allocated a house they cannot apply for a move within 12 months unless there is a significant change of circumstance

- (4) Time limiting Priority (Band 1 Applicants) - to limit applicants with Band 1 and 2 priorities in Home Mover and Home Starter categories to 3 months of non-bidding and reduce to a Band 4**

Furthermore that people who are on Band 3 or 4 will have their application cancelled after 12 months of no bidding activity.

- (5) Home Seeker Category Offers - to reduce the number of offers to Home Seekers from two to one.**

(6) Housing Debt and Allocations – to continue with a three month payment plan for a suspension to be uplifted as per the consultation response (42%) wanted three month to remain.

(7) Letting Quotas – to increase the quota to Home Seekers from 33% to 45% analysis of current homeless data has indicated this figure will allow us to realise Rapid Re-housing. This figure has been amended from 50% as per the consultation response.

A simplified chart showing the consultation results is included below as Appendix 1.

3. Background

3.1 The Executive on 14 November 2019 agreed to consult on proposed changes to the Housing Allocations Policy and to undertake a public consultation exercise.

Members will be aware that due to the COVID-19 situation on the 23rd March we took the decision to temporarily suspend Housing Allocations and Housing Options services until further notice.

In mid-May we advised Members of the need to commence housing allocations for those most in need and to enable us to continue to meet our statutory requirements. These allocations to temporary accommodation included those who were hospital discharges, early prison releases, had No Recourse to Public Funds' applicants and were victims of Domestic Abuse

Our next step in restoring the allocations scheme is, in the next few weeks, to allocate existing offers currently in the system. Thereafter we are seeking to make arrangements to have our full allocation scheme in place in time for allocations returning to normal.

Members will recall the proposals outlined within this report will be required in order to achieve a number of key strategic objectives set by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Housing Regulator. These include the recommendations from HARSAG, SHORE Standards, Housing First and Rapid Rehousing Models which are necessary to fulfil our statutory duty to support our most vulnerable.

Members will also recall that prior to Christmas Committee they agreed to a consultation exercise being undertaken and when our full allocations scheme is back up and running it would make sense to have incorporated any changes from that consultation exercise into our new arrangements.

3.2 The proposed changes , which had been agreed by the Executive were: –

3.2.1. **Local Letting Initiative High Flats** - To bring this policy more into line with legislation it is proposed we consult on reducing the age restriction to 50. This would assist with equality issues and enhance provision for the aging population.

3.2.2. **Local Letting Initiative New Builds** - In order to maximise the opportunity for meeting housing needs, it is proposed to consult on removing the restrictions applied to new houses. This would mean all categories could apply in line with the quota systems. This should assist with our Rapid Re-housing Transitional Plan and moving applicants on from temporary accommodation.

3.2.3. **Under Occupancy** - It is proposed that consultation is undertaken on aligning the application of Band 1 priority for under-occupation with overcrowding, i.e. Band 1 priority applied in cases of under-occupation by 2 or more bedrooms.

It is further proposed to consult on changes to when an applicant can make an application to move when first allocated a house. It is proposed that once an applicant has been allocated a house they cannot apply for a move within 12 months unless there is a significant change of circumstance that changes their housing need. This means if an applicant accepts a house that is too large for their current needs, they cannot immediately then apply for a move and be prioritised due to under occupancy.

3.2.4. **Time limiting Priority (Band 1 Applicants)** - It is proposed to consult on limiting the time applicants with Band 1 and 2 priorities in Home Mover and Home Starter categories to 3 months of non-bidding. This would be from the date of them being awarded the priority banding. Once an applicant had been determined as at risk of having priority removed, a housing interview will take place to review the circumstances including the availability of appropriate housing, etc. Once it has been determined that priority will be removed the applicant would be moved to Band 4 in line with other Home Seekers.

It is further proposed that we consult on removing those people who are on Band 3 or 4 and who have not bid within 12 months applications. Their application would be cancelled after 12 months of no bidding activity and removed from the housing list. Their removal does not mean they will not be able to reapply but does mean that any advantage accrued due to the time they have been on the list, will be lost. It should be noted that the length of time a person has been on the list would only matter if two applicants of equal housing need apply for the same house.

3.2.5. **Home Seeker Category Offers** - In order to minimise the time spent in temporary accommodation and the emotional impact that living in temporary accommodation has on people, we will consult on the number of offers Home Seekers are awarded before priority is removed. We propose consulting on reducing the number of offers to Home Seekers from two to one offer of housing. This can be achieved in one of two ways:

- (1) An applicant who is actively bidding being offered a house through the choice based lettings system.
- (2) An applicant being offered a direct match after 3 months of no bidding activity.

There will however be a review meeting to determine the reasons for non bidding, .e.g. lack of appropriate housing, etc.

3.2.6. **Housing Debt and Allocations** - It is proposed to amend the policy to make it clear to tenants of their obligation to address and repay their current housing debt before being made an offer of housing.

This is to ensure that those who are able to pay but refuse to pay are addressed. Applicants who are suspended from the housing list for housing debt will require to be on a payment plan to address their housing debt for a 3, 6 or 9 months period, depending on the outcome of the public consultation, before being considered for re-housing.

3.2.7. **Letting Quotas** - In order to fulfil obligations under the Rapid Rehousing plans, it is proposed to consult on amending the letting quotas to 50% Seeker, 25% Mover and 25% Starter. In addition any property normally considered for All Groups should be utilised for Homeless applicants as a direct match offer. The quotas will then be reviewed 24 months after amendment to ensure that it is meeting the needs of our applicants.

3.3 A full public consultation, informed by national guidance and in line with Falkirk Council's consultation strategy was carried out. This embeds the principles of inclusion and support to ensure that we consult with as many people as possible, current and future applicants and that their views are considered when developing or amending policy.

3.4 The Consultation was built around a six week, online, plain English questionnaire (Appendix 2) on Falkirk Council's Citizen Space Consultation Hub. We also provided paper versions of the Online Survey to ensure that as many people could participate as possible and made available. We also developed a programme of focus groups targeting specific areas, accessible road shows for members of the public in each of the localities to discuss current and future issues and contacted people occupying temporary homeless accommodation to seek their views.

3.5 The online questionnaire was advertised through the Council's website, Facebook and Twitter platforms and via digital and print versions of Homespot property vacancies as well as the Tenant Talk newsletter which is distributed to all Falkirk Council tenants every 3 months

4. Considerations

4.1 315 Consultation questionnaires were completed. 1,769 individual comments were made to both individual questions and as general additional comments.

4.2 As detailed above full details of the consultation can be found within Appendix 1. However the first four questions outlined the underlying principles of the consultation and are as follows:

- (1) 72% of respondents agreed that housing need should be prioritised over aspiration.
- (2) 82% believed that the policy should be flexible to allow the Council to meet unforeseeable needs.
- (3) 58% of respondents did not think that the current Allocations policy was equal and fair.
- (4) 34% did not believe the Policy is easy to understand, 31% did and 35% were neutral.

- 4.3 Robust improvements to Housing Advice and Homelessness Prevention will be planned to allay expressed fears that people will misrepresent their circumstances to seek to take advantage of the increased quota.
- 4.4 Feedback at the Focus Groups and from comments online advised that practical help to pack, declutter, organise removals would be more valuable to (mostly) elderly tenants than straightforward cash incentives.
- 4.5 74% agreed that Urgent Priority on housing influenced mental health problems and their potential resolution, should be backed by evidence. Respondents urged in their comments that mental health evidence was not always easy to come by and that even the request for evidence could, in some cases, have a detrimental effect on individual's health.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 An account of the consultation undertaken is detailed above and the consultation programme is detailed in Appendix 3. A full record of the feedback received has been compiled. Proposals have been amended in light of feedback received.

6. Implications

Financial

- 6.1 There are no financial implications.

Resources

- 6.2 There are no resource implications.

Legal

- 6.3 The changes to the policy are in-line with current Scottish Housing legislation. There are no legal implications.

Risk

- 6.4 There are no risk implications.

Equalities

- 6.5 An EPIA for the proposed amendments was completed. The outcome of the EPIA illustrated that where the policy will refocus priorities to homeless applicants this does not discriminate against any one group as the ratio of homeless applicants is proportionate to those on the wider housing register.

Making the best use of housing stock to meet statutory requirements meets the Council's Public Equality Duty. In reducing overall numbers of Applicants on the Register after periods of non-bidding, it will be possible to better and meaningfully advise all applicants, including those with protected characteristics, exactly what their Housing Options are.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

6.6 A sustainability assessment was not required as there are no proposals to alter physical assets.

7. Conclusions

7.1 There was sufficient consultation carried out to provide a robust foundation for the amended proposals to be agreed by the Executive.

7.2 The amended proposals constitute a balanced approach between the proposals originally put forward by the Scrutiny Committee and feedback obtained from the public through the Consultation process

Director of Corporate & Housing Services

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Date: 4 June 2020

Appendices

Appendix 1: Simplified chart showing extent of agreement to Consultation Questions

Appendix 2: Consultation Questionnaire

Appendix 3: Consultation Programme

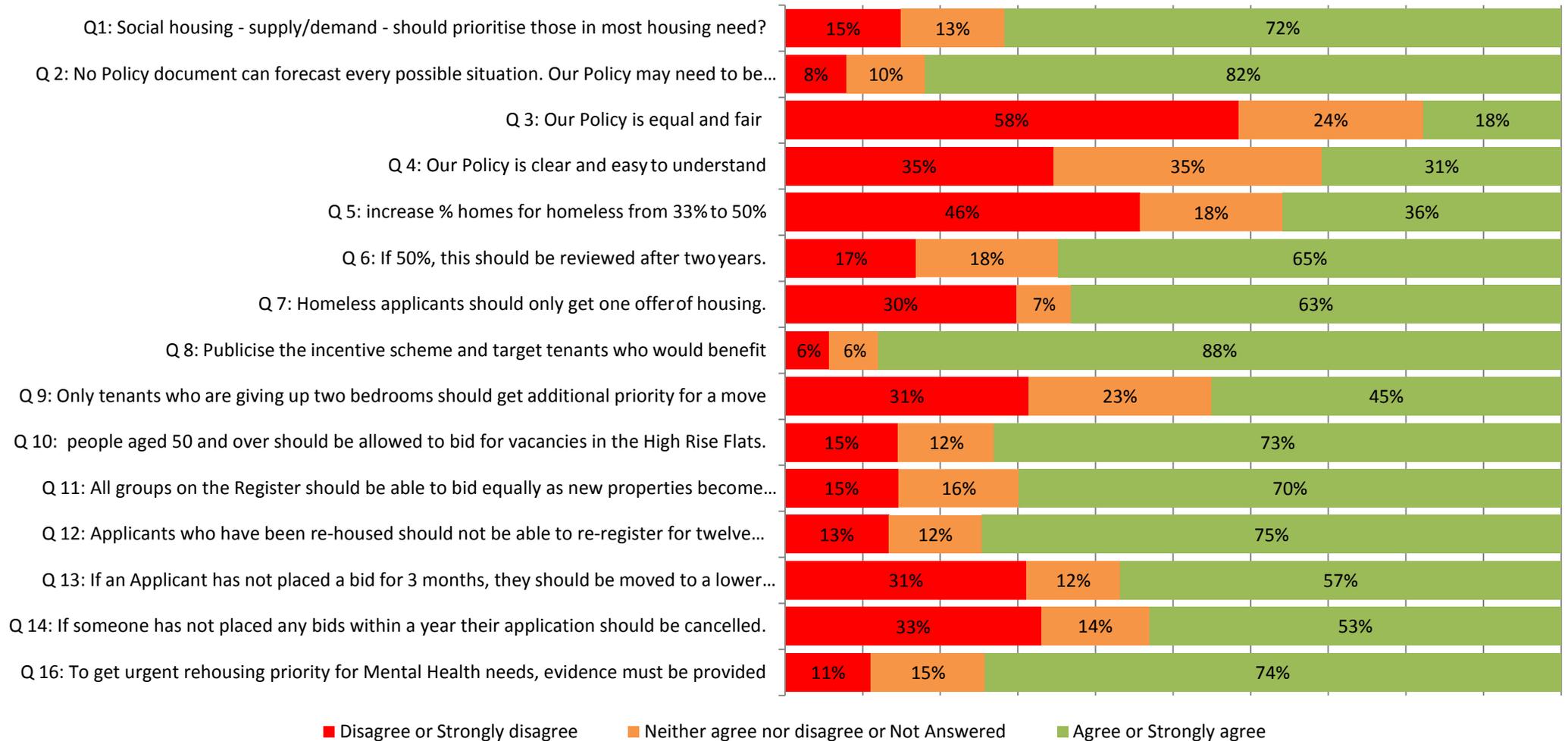
Appendix 4: Glossary of Terms

List of Background Papers:

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

- None

2020 Allocations Review Consultations Results



Have your say on how we allocate homes

Do you think...

We should help those who need a home most?

We make best use of our homes?

We could be fairer in the way we allocate homes?

To take part, please visit :
[//say.falkirk.gov.uk/](http://say.falkirk.gov.uk/)



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INTRODUCTION

We want your views on the following possible changes to the Housing Allocations Policy.

All social landlords must comply with the law, including the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, when allocating their housing stock (properties) and managing their Registers (housing lists).

This has meant that since the 2014 Act was introduced, we have been working alongside our Tenants & Residents Panel, and other stakeholders, to review our current Housing Allocations Policy. Ideas include: reviewing current letting initiatives, considering matching priority for overcrowding with under occupancy and the way we manage applications from those who find themselves homeless.

As a Council, we want to be as effective as possible in how we meet our communities' housing needs. Our Allocations Policy needs to meet current and future legislation and the values set out by Scottish Government's Rapid Rehousing Plans . We need to think about our Allocations policy in terms of the next five years but tackling homelessness now.

"Everyone needs a safe, warm place they can call home. Home is more than a physical place to live. It's where we feel secure, have roots and a sense of belonging. Home supports our physical and emotional health and wellbeing and to be without one seems unthinkable. Yet for too many people this is their reality as they face the blight of homelessness." (Ending Homelessness Together, Scottish Government/COSLA Action Plan, 2018.)

If you require any help to complete the questions, please contact Stephen Convill

01324 501790

Stephen.Convill@Falkirk.gov.uk

The consultation period will run from 17th February 2020 to 27th March 2020. Contributions will be analysed, collated and reported to Falkirk Council's Executive Board.

If you have any further questions or if you would like this information in large print, braille, audio tape or a language other than English please contact Housing on 01324 503200

1. Social housing is in short supply and great demand. We should prioritise those in most housing need.

Strongly
Disagree?

Disagree?

Neither agree
nor disagree?

Agree?

Strongly
Agree?

Please tell us why

2. No Policy document can forecast every possible situation. We are committed to making the best use of our stock by managing our homes imaginatively to meet the needs of current and future tenants. Our Policy may need to be flexible to meet very special needs.

We should meet the needs of some individual applicants' special circumstances.

Strongly
Disagree?

Disagree?

Neither agree
nor disagree?

Agree?

Strongly
Agree?

Please tell us why

3. Our Allocations Policy is equal and fair when allocating properties.

Strongly
Disagree?

Disagree?

Neither agree
nor disagree?

Agree?

Strongly
Agree?

Please tell us why

4. Our allocations policy is clear and easy to understand?

Strongly
Disagree?

Disagree?

Neither agree
nor disagree?

Agree?

Strongly
Agree?

Please tell us why

5. The Scottish Government is tackling homelessness through an 'Ending Homelessness' policy. This wants to go beyond supporting those who are in crisis and sleeping rough on the streets. To end homelessness every Council in Scotland, has adopted a Rapid Rehousing Plan. If someone is homeless it can have a long lasting impact on them, particularly any children. We currently have a list of homeless households that have been waiting for a home for some time. People who are homeless should move to a settled home as quickly as possible.

We should increase its percentage of homes for homeless households from 33% to 50% to help tackle homelessness in the area.

Strongly
Disagree?

Disagree?

Neither agree
nor disagree?

Agree?

Strongly
Agree?

Please tell us why

6. If 50% of Allocations go to homeless households this should be reviewed after 2 years.

Strongly Disagree? Disagree? Neither agree nor disagree? Agree? Strongly Agree?

Please tell us why

7. If a household is homeless they are entitled to the legal minimum of one reasonable offer of housing (either through a bid or a match). They have a legal right to review the 'reasonableness' of their offer. We want to ensure we meet the urgent needs of those who are homeless. To rehouse them in the quickest time possible we want to reduce the number of housing offers that they get from two to one.

Our Homeless applicants should only get one offer of housing.

Strongly Disagree? Disagree? Neither agree nor disagree? Agree? Strongly Agree?

Please tell us why

8. There is a high demand for larger properties from people with larger families. Potentially 600 tenants are living in Council properties that are much bigger than they need. A pilot project has been in place to help people to downsize to a property that meets their needs through a financial incentive.

We should publicise the incentive scheme that helps tenants downsize their properties and target tenants who would benefit.

Strongly Disagree? **Disagree?** **Neither agree nor disagree?** **Agree?** **Strongly Agree?**

Please tell us why

9. Under the policy at the moment, people who are overcrowded get less priority for a move than people who have a spare room and want to move. We want to increase fairness.

Only tenants who are giving up 2 bedrooms should get additional priority for a move.

Strongly Disagree? Disagree? Neither agree nor disagree? Agree? Strongly Agree?

Please tell us why

10. Fair and sustainable communities with people living in suitable homes will improve wellbeing and save money for health services. With warm, appropriate homes, people live longer, can remain active and, both maintain their own independence, as well as lend a hand to their less active neighbours.

At the moment we have a local initiative where our High Rise Flats are let to applicants over the age of 60. To make better use of Council stock and to be fairer, people aged 50 and over should be allowed to bid for vacancies in the High Rise Flats.

Strongly Disagree? Disagree? Neither agree nor disagree? Agree? Strongly Agree?

Please tell us why

11. To increase fairness, all groups on the Register, Movers (Tenants), Seekers (People who are Homeless) and Starters (anyone else) should be able to bid equally as new properties become available.

Strongly Disagree? **Disagree?** **Neither agree nor disagree?** **Agree?** **Strongly Agree?**

Please tell us why

12. We want to make the best use of stock as well as encourage sustainable communities. Those Applicants who have been re-housed or matched to a property should not be able to re-register for 12 months unless there has been a significant change in their circumstances.

Strongly Disagree? **Disagree?** **Neither agree nor disagree?** **Agree?** **Strongly Agree?**

Please tell us why

13. If an Applicant has been assessed as having an urgent housing need and has not placed a bid for three months, they should be moved to a lower priority.

**Strongly
Disagree?**

Disagree?

**Neither agree
nor disagree?**

Agree?

**Strongly
Agree?**

Please tell us why

14. To make best use of our properties we want to ensure that we allow people in need to find a home as quickly as possible. Those on our list for housing can sometimes be on our Register for a long period of time but not place any bids. This means that locally the need for housing looks larger than it is. We want to know that we have a realistic view of how many people are looking for a home.

If someone on the Register has not placed any bids within a year their application should be cancelled.

**Strongly
Disagree?**

Disagree?

**Neither agree
nor disagree?**

Agree?

**Strongly
Agree?**

Please tell us why

15. Our current policy states that if applicant wants to move into one of our homes they must not have more than one month's rent arrears/housing debt. They can have made, and kept to, an arrangement to pay off their arrears for a three month period. Tenants in arrears have their applications suspended and cannot bid on properties.

What do you think is fairer? To pay off debt for:

a) 9 months.

Strongly Disagree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Agree?	<input type="checkbox"/>
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b) 6 months.

Strongly Disagree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Agree?	<input type="checkbox"/>
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c) 3 months.

Strongly Disagree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Agree?	<input type="checkbox"/>
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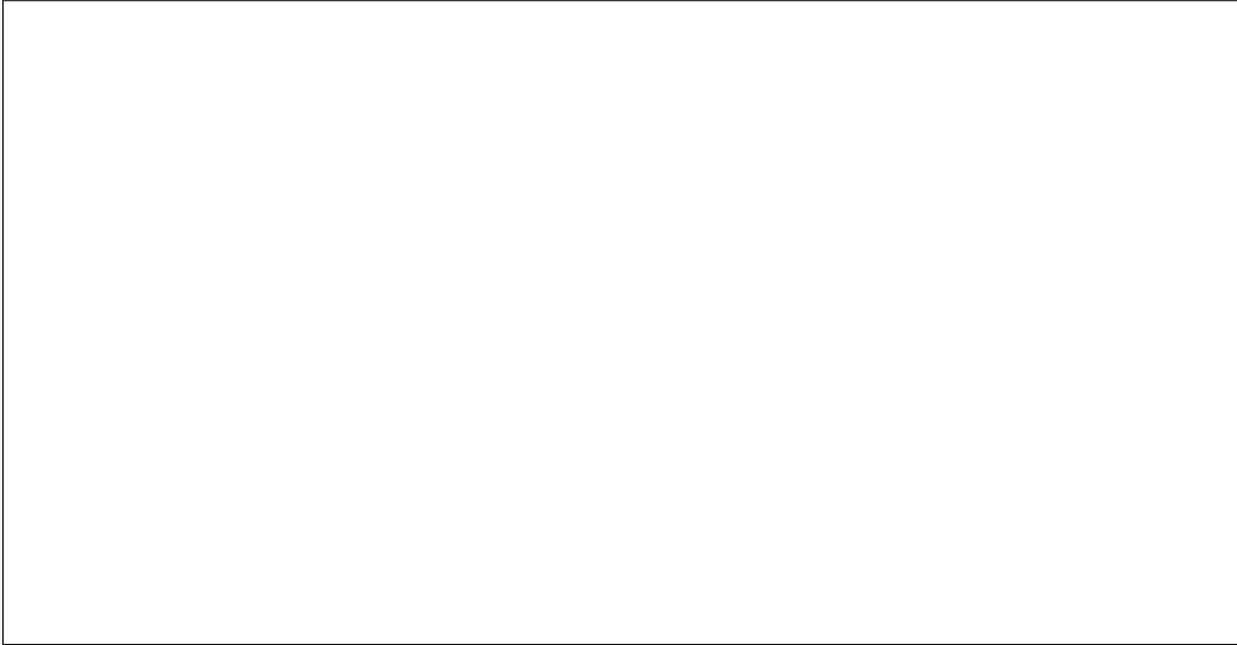
16. There is more general awareness of Mental Health issues. The right home can be part of the solution, in the right circumstances. It seems only fair that the Allocations Policy would assess people with Mental Health problems in exactly the same as Physical Health problems.

To get urgent rehousing priority for Mental Health needs, evidence must be provided to confirm their current housing situation is making their health problems significantly worse.

Strongly Disagree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agree?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly Agree?	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Please tell us why

17. Do you have any other comments you would like to make

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to provide additional comments or feedback.

FINALLY

Could you please help us further by telling us something about yourself? Are you:

Currently on the Housing Register (waiting list)?

Yes/No

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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How long have you been or were you on the Housing Register (waiting list)?

Yes/No

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Are you currently homeless?

Yes/No

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Have you previously been on the Housing Register (waiting list)?

Yes/No

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If so, how long ago?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

Are you a current tenant?

Yes/No

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If so, how long have you been a tenant?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

Were you satisfied with how your application was dealt with and how you were kept informed of its progress?

Yes/No

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Are you from another organisation?
If so which?

<input type="text"/>

Thank you for your time in completing this survey. Your input is very helpful and very much appreciated.

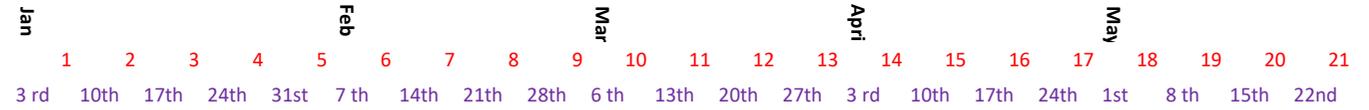
You do not have to provide your email address to submit your response. If you do, you will receive a copy of your response. Your email address will not be stored or used for any other purpose. **If you provide an email address you will be sent a receipt and a link to a PDF copy of your response.**

Email address

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2020 Allocations Consult' MILESTONE TASKS

completed by end of week
date



- Agree Scoping Document
- Write/agree Consultation briefing document
- Finalise briefing letter for RTO's
- Finalise relevant background statistics
- Create link to Online Survey - begin publicity
- Issue invitation letter to Focus Group Sessions - to mailing list and to
- Issue pre-Forum Briefing
- Briefing to Tenants and Residents Forum 12th Feb - invitation to Focus
- Focus Group Sessions (morning, afternoon, evening) 18th Feb
- Finalise design of online survey
- Make announcement on Citizen Space and invite participation in the online
- Draw attention of Voluntary sector to the On line Survey
- Publish online survey
- Run online survey
- Hub Roadshows
- 3 afternoons/evenings G'mouth, Denny, Falkirk
- Face to face Consultation Disability Community
- Face to face Consultation Young People
- Reach out to Citizens currently in Temporary Accommodation via leaflets
invite to online survey or request paper document
- Reach out to Citizens registering on Waiting List within 4 week period
invite to online survey or request paper document
- Deadline for public responses
- Collate Consultation results, Report production incorporate corrections
- Equality Impact Assessment Report
- Consideration (revisions) by Director/Management Team
- Consideration by Executive Director
- Consideration by Chief Executive
- Pre - Agenda Inclusion in Democratic Process
- Consideration/Approval by Executive Committee
- Publish new policy
- Implement Changes over 3 month period



Key: Scheduled
Key: Completed
Key: Delayed
Key: Behind Schedule

Glossary of Terms

HARSAG

Homeless and Rough Sleepers Action Group

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) was set up to recommend to Scottish Government Ministers the actions and solutions needed to eradicate rough sleeping and transform the use of temporary accommodation in Scotland. HARSAG also advised Ministers on how to ensure the recommendations are successfully implemented to secure rapid change and improvement towards the Government's goals.

SHORE-

Sustainable Housing On Release for Everyone

These standards have been published to ensure that the housing needs of individuals in prison are handled at an early stage, in a consistent way across Scotland, regardless of where they come from, their housing status and how long they have been in prison or young offenders' institution. The standards are designed to ensure that people leaving prison can access services and accommodation in the same way as people living in the community. Partners are committed to ensuring that people are treated fairly, with dignity, and with respect for their human rights

RAPID REHOUSING

A settled, mainstream housing outcome as quickly as possible;

Time spent in any form of temporary accommodation is reduced to a minimum, with the fewer transitions the better. When temporary accommodation is needed, the optimum type is mainstream, furnished and within a local community.

HOUSING FIRST

Housing First uses ordinary permanent housing as a first, rather than last, response for people with complex needs. Whether that be socially rented or private sector housing to rehouse homeless people with complex needs in their own, settled home as quickly as possible with the support to sustain their home. This is a base for recovery and offers personalised, open-ended, flexible support for people to end their experience of homelessness and address wider needs by wrapping services around their needs.