

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**Subject: ALLOCATION POLICY REVIEW**  
**Meeting: EXECUTIVE**  
**Date: 13 January 2015**  
**Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek members' approval to amend the current allocation policy. The Council is obliged to review its allocation policy on a regular basis to ensure that it complies with legislative requirements, follows good practice as set by the Scottish Government and continues to meet local housing need and priorities.
- 1.2. Allocations Outcomes have been reported to committee annually since the introduction of the current allocations policy in January 2010. In response to the outcome findings and feedback from service users; officers and Elected Members, a number of minor amendments have been made to the allocations policy in 2010, 2011 and 2012. However, as the policy is now 4 years old, and there have been changes in legislation as outlined in section 2 of this report, it was considered that a more comprehensive review and consultation to seek service users' views was required.
- 1.3. The Council has a legal obligation under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to consult both tenants groups and individual tenants over policy matters likely to significantly affect them. The recommendations made within this report to change the allocation policy have taken cognise of the consultation outcomes and feedback received from all stakeholders.

**2. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT**

**2.1. Legislation & Good Practice**

Social Landlords are able to set their own allocation policies to ensure that it meets local needs. However, the policy must comply with a number of statutory responsibilities as set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and more recently the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 which received Royal Assent on 1 August 2014. The undernoted sections which relate to Allocations have not yet come into force and no date has been set so far for their implementation.

The key changes of the 2014 Act in relation to allocation of social housing are:

- **Reasonable preference in allocation of social housing:** The Act replaces the previous reasonable preference categories, as set out in Paragraph 2.3 of the Policy which were applicants living in housing below tolerable standard; living in overcrowded houses or in large families; living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.

Landlords can continue to prioritise allocations to reflect local housing needs or circumstances as long as “reasonable preference” is given to the revised three statutory groups.

- 1) Homeless or threatened with homelessness who have unmet housing needs :
- 2) Social tenants who are under-occupying their property: and
- 3) Persons living in “unsatisfactory housing conditions” who have unmet housing needs

Falkirk Council’s Housing Allocation Policy already meets the requirements of the new legislation in this respect and no further changes are required to take account of these.

- **Rules on priority of allocation of housing – consultation:** Social Landlords are required to consult, prepare and publish a report on the consultation before determining the priority of allocation of houses.

Although not yet in force, we have completed a consultation as part of the review and this is attached as Appendix 2.

- **Ownership of Property:** Landlords will now be able to take into account whether an applicant owns their own home. This has been introduced to ensure that only those with real housing need are allocated properties. However, there are exceptions, for example, where a property has not been let and the owner cannot secure entry, or where it is probable that occupation of the property could lead to abuse from specified persons or otherwise endanger health.

Landlords will also have the option of granting Short Scottish Secure Tenancies (SSST) to owners who require housing to enable them to meet their own needs. For example, whilst bringing a property they own back into use as their home.

Falkirk Council’s policy does not currently take home ownership into account. Once this comes into force, we will carry out a further review of the Allocation Policy.

- 2.2. The policy must also follow any Scottish Government guidance. Their document *Good Practice Guide for Social Housing Allocations* sets out what landlords should include in their policy. Our policy reflects this guidance.

- 2.3. In addition to compliance with the legal framework, the Council's Allocations Policy is also expected to meet the outcomes of the Scottish Social Housing Charter, but in particular these are Equalities; Housing Options; Access to Housing; Tenancy Sustainment.
- 2.4. The policy must also take account of the Local Housing Strategy and local needs and circumstances.

### **3. SCOPE OF ALLOCATION POLICY REVIEW**

- 3.1. In carrying out the Allocations Policy Review, the service identified a number of issues for consultation based on the findings from the analysis of Allocation Outcome Reports; feedback from service users, tenant representatives and elected members – including complaints information; a review of legislation including the most recent Housing (Scotland) Act 2014; and benchmarking across other social landlords to ensure good practice.

As a result of data analysis and feedback, the Allocations Policy Review focussed on the undernoted topics:

- Letting Quotas for Home Seekers, Home Movers and Home Starters
- Low Demand Properties
- Allocation of New Build Council Houses
- Local lettings Initiative for High Rise Flats
- Exceptional Circumstances
- Appeals
- Welfare Reform/Spare Room Subsidy
- Housing with Care

The consultation findings and recommendations on each of these topics are detailed in Section 4 of this report.

#### **3.2. Allocations Outcome Report 2013/14**

Detailed information about the current housing list and allocations outcomes during 2013/14 is set out in Appendix 1.

The key points to note are:

- 1468 properties were let during 2013/14
  - 58% of lets were flats
  - 59% of lets were 2 bedroom properties
  - 18% of lets were in Grangemouth

- 9971 housing applicants (including 209 Housing with Care) on our housing list
  - 32% of applicants are aged 26 – 40 years
  - 29% of applicants are aged 40 – 60 years
  - 23% of applicants are aged over 60 years
  - 16% of applicants are aged under 25 years
  - Breakdown by Applicant Group:
 

Home Mover	27%	(2689 applicants)
Home Starter	68.5%	(6828 applicants)
Home Seeker	2.5%	( 245 applicants)
- Lets to Applicant Groups:
 

Home Mover	25%
Home Starter	35%
Home Seeker	34%
Housing with Care	6%
- Sequencing to Applicant Groups:
 

Home Seeker	49%
Home Mover	26%
Home Starter	25%

Whilst, sequencing has continued to be carried out as per the policy, analysis has shown a differential between this and the outcomes (i.e. lets). There has been a reduction in the number of lets to Home Seekers which is due to a reduction in the number of applicants in the Home Seeker category. Properties are automatically sequenced to each group and in some instances there have been no eligible bids from the sequenced category and we have had to re-advertise for all groups. This is further discussed later in the report.

### 3.3. Consultation Process

A presentation was given to the Tenants Forum in April 2014 and feedback was sought on the Allocations Outcomes and the proposals for the consultation exercise. The consultation exercise was carried out over a 10 week period during the summer months. A questionnaire was developed to address the key issues from the Allocation Outcome Report 2013/14 as well as feedback previously received from service users, elected members and other stakeholders. The questionnaire was available on the Council's website via Survey Monkey as well as paper copies being available in all One Stop Shops. In order to reach as large an audience as possible the questionnaire was sent to a range of stake holders including Registered Tenants & Residents Organisations; Community Councils; Elected Members; Voluntary Organisations and approximately 300 individuals on the Consultation Register. This was promoted through our Tenants Newsletter, Twitter and other media. Thereafter a series of Focus Groups were held with members of the Tenants Forum and volunteers who completed the questionnaire in order to discuss in more details the proposed changes.

### 3.4. Consultation Response

279 questionnaires were completed. The demographics of those who participated were as follows:

- Less than half respondents provided their age or sex, however of those that did:
- 68% were aged 25-59; 27% were aged over 60.
- 71% were female and 29% were male.
- The majority of respondents were council tenants (62%). 14% were owner occupiers. 274 respondents provided details of their tenancy type.
- 68 respondents indicated they would like to attend focus groups, however only 14 individuals engaged in the process.

3.5. Further details on the level of participation and the consultation findings can be found in Appendix 2.

3.6. In addition to the consultation findings attached at Appendix 2, we also received feedback on other issues such as suspending applicants from receiving offers, particularly where the condition of the property and/or garden is not up to standard. The current policy allows for suspension of applicants until their house/garden is in an acceptable standard. Member feedback indicated it was considered that there was a requirement for a period of 6 months before the applicant would be able to demonstrate that they were able to sustain the acceptable condition of their property and/or garden.

3.7. Scottish Governments guidance highlights that it is good practice to monitor applications which have been suspended and do as much as you can to minimise the time they are suspended. In addition, the guidance highlights that the Council should avoid having a blanket approach to the suspension of applicants and should consider the following before suspending an applicant.

- Is there robust evidence for making this decision?
- Is it a proportionate decision?
- Has the Council considered the consequences for the applicant?
- Have the Council considered other options to suspensions, such as taking a proactive approach to managing the problem rather than excluding?

In addition, the Council have to also ensure that they are contributing to the aim of minimising or preventing homelessness and be providing services that are inclusive and accessible to people who are poor or vulnerable.

3.8 In taking the above issues into consideration, it is considered that the current policy gives the flexibility to deal with each case individually. If the Executive's view is that there would be merit in applying a fixed period to demonstrate a willingness on the part of a tenant to sustain the acceptable condition of the property or garden, in order to address the issues set out at 3.7 above, it would be better to define more closely the circumstances where the suspension would be applied.

This could for instance involve circumstances where the Council has had to issue more than one warning requiring the tenant to bring the property or garden to an acceptable standard or where it has had to do the work itself to achieve this end.

- 3.9 A change of this nature would require to be subject to consultation. If such a proposal is pursued, a further report would be brought back to the Executive after the consultation process is concluded.

#### **4. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

- 4.1. The consultation focussed on the key issues as noted in paragraph 3.1. Taking account of this feedback, members' feedback and legislative requirements, this section details the changes being recommended to the current allocation policy. It is proposed that the current Allocation Policy be revised and amended to reflect these recommendations with an implementation date of 1 April, 2015.

##### **4.2. Letting Quotas**

- 4.2.1 The current letting quotas are that 50% of properties to let are advertised for Home Seekers (applicants that are homeless in terms of homeless legislation), 25% are advertised for Home Movers (tenants of Falkirk Council or a tenant of a Housing Association or a Registered Social Landlord living in the Council area.) and 25% are advertised for Home Starters (all other applicants).

However, the housing register has changed since HomeSpot was introduced in 2010. There are now fewer Home Seeker applicants and more Home Starter applicants while the number of Home Mover applicants has remained fairly stable. As noted in Section 3.2, the current breakdown is:

Home Mover	27%	(2689)
Home Starter	68.5%	(6828)
Home Seeker	2.5%	( 245)

The increase in the overall number of Home Starter applicants and the reduction in Home Seeker applicants is due mainly to the Housing Options approach which has been operating since April 2011 and is helping those applicants at an earlier stage who may otherwise have presented as homeless.

Although Home Starters are the largest group of applicants, 84% of Home Starters have a low level of housing need; 66% have Band 3 priority and 18% have Band 4 which means they have no housing need.

- 4.2.2. Given the change in the composition of the housing register we consulted on whether the letting quotas should be changed. A clear majority of respondents (65%) agreed that the quotas should be changed and only 16% disagreed.

Where respondents said they agreed that the letting quotas should be reviewed they were asked if they agreed that properties should be let to each group on an equal basis. The majority agreed with this (59%), 15% disagreed and 25% had no opinion.

- 4.2.3. It is recommended that letting quotas be changed to reflect the reduction in the number of Home Seekers over recent years. The recommendation is that general needs properties are sequenced equally between Home Seekers, Home Movers and Home Starters applicants with each applicant group receiving a third of lets. Whilst it will be equal sequencing, it is acknowledged that the size of groups are not equal, with Home Seekers being the smallest. However, this will ensure that homeless applicants continue to be prioritised for rehousing in order to discharge the Council's statutory duty.
- 4.2.4 Adapted properties will continue to be advertised for all groups.

#### 4.3. **Local Letting Initiatives**

A Local Letting Initiative (LLI) is a change to a main allocations policy in a geographically defined area to meet specific local aims. Any LLI must comply with legislation and be explained in the allocations policy and the rules made clear to the public. A LLI must have clear aims and this must be based on evidence and data analysis; consultation with tenants must be carried out and they have agreed to the initiative; and it must be regularly reviewed to ensure it is meeting its original aims.

A LLI can form a range of options – for example to stimulate demand in areas where properties are difficult to let; to prioritise access for particular groups in areas of high demand (e.g. rural communities where local people have problems accessing housing); to try to reverse increasing incidence of anti social behaviour; areas with high proportion of unemployed tenants or where skills are in short supply.

Within Falkirk, we currently operate LLIs for the allocation of the high flats and new build council properties.

#### **Low Demand Properties**

- 4.3.1 On the whole, the Council's housing stock is desirable and properties are let at the first time of advertising. However, some properties such as larger tenement flats with three bedrooms and some properties in outlying areas are not so popular. If applicants do not bid for these properties they can lie empty for some time resulting in a loss of revenue. In an attempt to stimulate demand for these properties it is proposed to develop Local Lettings Initiatives (LLI) in specific areas.
- 4.3.2. In addition to the use of LLIs for low demand properties where we can let properties differently from the main allocation policy, it is also proposed to introduce an incentive scheme to stimulate demand for properties.

A range of incentives and marketing options will be considered including offering a decoration allowance, white goods/furniture package, rent incentives; advertising in the press/estate agents; holding Open Days etc. However, we require to carry out further research and consultation before determining the most appropriate incentives to ensure that they result in the tenancy being sustained.

- 4.3.3. A LLI will be required to be developed for each specific area that is experiencing low demand. It will be developed in consultation with the local community involving both the local Neighbourhood Office and the Allocations Team to ensure that it is designed to meet the specific issues within that community and ensure that the outcomes are achieved. For example, in an area where there is an excess of 3 bedroom flats with no demand, the LLI may stipulate that these types of properties can be advertised for All Groups without being sequenced first. It could also advertise that the household size criteria will be flexible (eg we will consider a single person for a 3 bedroom flat), and we could add additional incentives e.g. decorate the properties at the void stage or give decoration vouchers/decoration pack so that new tenants can choose their own décor. By providing incentives like decoration vouchers, white goods, carpets and other goods, this will encourage new tenants who do not have the finance, to move and settle into their houses more quickly and sustain their tenancies. The flexible approach to the allocations system will make these properties available to a wider range of applicants.
- 4.3.4. The majority of respondents (60%) agreed and 16% disagreed with the proposal to let low demand properties outwith the current Homespot process.
- 4.3.5. Taking account of the housing demand in Falkirk and taking into consideration the regulations and guidance, it is anticipated that LLIs will be restricted to areas where there are low demand properties (e.g. 3 bedroom flats in less popular streets across the Falkirk areas and outlying rural areas).
- 4.3.6. It is recommended that Local Letting Initiatives and an incentive scheme are introduced where appropriate to address low demand letting issues. As detailed in 4.3.3., these will be consulted upon prior to implementation and publication.
- 4.3.7. As part of our Housing Asset Management Plan we will also be considering options for investment in low demand properties/areas.

#### **4.4. Allocation of New Build Council Houses**

- 4.4.1. Since the Council started building new houses in 2010, the policy has been to give priority to existing tenants for general needs properties. However, ground floor properties have been designed to be barrier free and all applicants that have been assessed as needing this type of property are eligible to bid. This was agreed by the Housing and Social Care Committee on 25 May 2010.
- 4.4.2. All adapted properties are advertised as “All Groups” which ensures that the property is let to the applicant with the highest priority of need. General Needs properties are advertised in the first instance for Home Movers and all eligible bids are considered.



Offers will be made to Home Movers until the list is exhausted. This has meant that 41 (18%) Home Movers with Band 4 (no housing need) have been allocated properties. Thereafter if there are no further eligible bids then the properties will be advertised again this time as “All Groups” where the properties are allocated on the basis of highest priority. As can be seen from the table below – 3 Home Starters and 7 Home Seekers have been allocated General Needs new build properties (12% of the 120 General Needs lets).

- 4.4.3. Since 2010, 226 new build properties have been let with a further 67 properties due for completion and letting soon. An overall total of 173 lets have been made to Home Movers, 44 to Home Starters and 9 to Home Seekers. The lets are broken down as:

	<b>General Needs</b>	<b>Adapted</b>
<b>Home Mover</b>	110	63
<b>Home Starter</b>	3	41
<b>Home Seeker</b>	7	2

- 4.4.4. In the questionnaire, we asked if the Council should change the policy to allow all applicants to bid for new Council houses. A slight majority of respondents (56%) were in agreement with this proposal.

Where respondents indicated that existing tenants should still get priority for new build properties they were asked for their opinion on subsequent vacancies. A slight majority of respondents (55%) agreed that if a property becomes vacant again all applicants should be allowed to bid for it.

- 4.4.5. The original policy decision made in 2010 was based on an increased turnover of properties within the letting pool (ie. 2 lets for 1). Mainstream lets for new builds have been made to Home Movers and created an additional turnover of 110 properties.
- 4.4.6. Feedback on this issue has been mixed and there is no clear consensus from the consultation on the way forward. Less than 100 new build properties are planned over the next 3 years. Therefore, it is recommended that we continue with the Local Letting Initiative as it currently stands.

#### **4.5. Local Lettings Initiative for High Flats**

- 4.5.1. Traditionally the High Flats in Falkirk and Camelon have tended to be let to applicants over the age of 60 years. These properties are very popular and create very little of the housing management issues that most multi storey flats face. 814 properties are still owned by the Council comprising 507 properties with 2 bedrooms and 307 properties with 1 bedroom which represents 6% of our overall stock.
- 4.5.2. The average age of tenants in the high flats is 73 years old which has brought with it a number of challenges in relation to the mobility of residents and support needs. Over the years, a high number of disabled adaptations have been carried out in the blocks – for example during 2013/14 - ninety adaptations were carried out.

A recent refurbishment in Callender Square blocks created adapted flats in the ground floor foyers.

- 4.5.3. The exception to Local Letting Initiative is the two Housing with Care 2 blocks at Glenfuir and Glenbrae Court. A review of the lettings of these blocks will be included in the Older Person's Strategy that is currently ongoing.
- 4.5.4. In response to feedback from applicants that would like to live in the high flats and the fact that the legislation states the age of applicants should not be taken into consideration when allocating properties, we sought opinion on whether this Local Lettings Initiative should be reviewed so that these flats are allocated based on housing need.

A slight majority of respondents disagreed with this proposal (47%). However, there was some support for this with 38% agreeing to this proposal while 15% were undecided.

- 4.5.5. Applicants under the age of 60 are still able to bid on HomeSpot for these properties. In 2013/14, a total of 1148 bids were received from 419 applicants. 285 applicants under the age of 60 placed 672 bids and 134 applicants over the age of 60 placed 476 bids. This indicates that there is a demand from younger people to move into the high flats. The average age of applicants who bid for these properties is 48 years, who tend to be single people or a couple. There is no indication that there is a demand from families with young children.
- 4.5.6. As noted above, the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 and Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 state that age should not be a consideration when allocating properties. Therefore, the High Flats Local Letting Initiative cannot place a "blanket" policy to prohibit lets to applicants under the age of 60. The purpose of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 is to increase flexibility in the allocation and management of social housing to allow landlords to make better use of their stock.
- 4.5.7. It is recommended that the Council should review the current Local Letting Initiative to ensure that it meets legislation and good practice guidance, seeking to promote suitable, sustainable and sensitive lets, while striving to sustain this settled community and minimise any housing management issues. We will use the flexibility afforded to us when setting our allocation policy and Local Letting Initiative. In taking this forward, the Service is required to carry out further consultation with the residents of the high flats to specifically discuss the proposals.

#### 4.6. **Exceptional Circumstances**

- 4.6.1. The allocations policy covers the majority of housing situations that an applicant may experience. However it is recognised that there will be some situations not covered by the policy. Examples where this may apply are:
- Traumatic life event making it intolerable to continue living in current property
  - Extreme neighbour problems where the only solution is to move one party due to risk
  - Serious harassment not covered under the current policy

- Extreme situation where the current property is not suitable or adaptable
- Witness Protection

Good practice guidance clearly states that this policy cannot be used to appease applicants who are dissatisfied with the level of priority they have been awarded. These applicants will be directed to the appeals and complaints procedure.

- 4.6.2 Under the current Allocation Policy, Band 1 priority can be awarded to assist the applicant to move quickly. However, the applicant still needs to bid for properties along with all other applicants which can mean they will have to wait a considerable time before they are able to make a suitable bid.
- 4.6.3 In response to trying to manage these rare number of cases, it has been recognised that this could be done more effectively if applicants were directly matched to suitable properties as Exceptional Circumstances Lets. These would only be applicable where there is an urgent need to move and there is no other priority within the Allocation Policy that covers these circumstances. These lets would require to be authorised by the Head of Service through delegated powers to ensure transparency and governance. Only one reasonable offer will be made and if this is refused then the application will no longer be treated as urgent and will revert back to the normal allocation policy. All direct lets will be closely scrutinised, monitored and reported via the Allocations Outcome Report to members.
- 4.6.4 A clear majority of respondents (75%) agreed that applicants that have been awarded priority because of exceptional circumstances should be directly matched to a suitable property.
- 4.6.5 It is recommended that a procedure be developed to enable the direct matches to be made in exceptional circumstances where it is deemed necessary to deviate from the Allocation Policy. The process will be developed to ensure that all decisions regarding exceptional circumstances lets are accountable, transparent. This will be monitored and reported to members.

#### 4.7. **Appeals Process**

- 4.7.1 All applicants have the right to appeal a decision about their application. The appeals process has three stages which can mean a lengthy wait before the applicant has a final outcome. The vast majority of appeals are concluded at Stage 1 with only a small number progressing to Stage 2 and Stage 3.
- 4.7.2 The vast majority of respondents (82%) agreed that the appeal process should be made simpler.
- 4.7.3 It is recommended that the appeals process be reduced to 2 stages which will bring the process in line with the Council's Complaints procedure.

#### **4.8. Welfare Reform**

- 4.8.1. In April 2013 the Government changed the welfare benefits system throughout the UK. The new rules restrict the size of home a tenant can receive Housing Benefit for. This is called the Size Criteria (or Bedroom Tax). Housing benefit is now calculated based on the number of bedrooms in the house and the number of people living there. Since its introduction, arrears have risen sharply across the whole of the country and Falkirk is no exception. Arrears in Falkirk have risen to 9.45% and almost £0.5m of the total arrears can specifically be attributed to non-payment of “bedroom tax” (as at 31.08.14). This level of arrears is not sustainable in the longer term and Neighbourhood and Finance Services are working jointly together to mitigate the impact. Numerous social landlords have amended their allocation policies to reflect the Size Criteria regulations.
- 4.8.2. The allocation policy differs from the new regulations in the following ways:-
- A single person or couple can be allocated a 2 bedroom property
  - Children over the age of 8 years can have their own bedroom
  - Band 1 Priority for overcrowding is awarded where 2 teenage children of mixed sex share a bedroom
- 4.8.3. The Council has 2618 x 1 bedroom properties which make up 16% of the overall stock. In 2013/14, there were 315 one bedroom lets (21.5%). Therefore, if we were to restrict allocating to single people and couples solely on the Size Criteria regulations, this would result in applicants having to wait longer for offers of housing.
- 4.8.4. In response to the question “Should the allocation policy change to be the same as the welfare reform rules in relation to under occupancy?” the majority of respondents (43%) disagreed. 31% agreed and 25% were undecided.
- 4.8.5. It is recommended not to make changes to the Allocations Policy at this time and continue to monitor the situation until the position is clearer with regard to devolved powers on Housing Benefit issues and analysis of the impact of Universal Credit is known following its introduction next financial year. As it stands, applicants have more flexibility and their housing choices would be reduced if the policy was changed to match with the Size Criteria. Due to the lack of one bedroom properties, couples and single people would have to wait longer to be rehoused. However, it is important that applicants make informed choices with regards to Size Criteria regulations and we will continue our current practice of making applicants aware of this at every opportunity during the allocation process.

#### **4.9. Housing with Care**

Within the Allocations question, we asked 2 questions which will form part of our consultation for the Older Persons Strategy. Respondents were asked:

- (1) whether all Housing with Care Properties should be let through Homespot;

(2) should Housing with Care Lets be made to applicants with the highest need following an assessment.

46% agreed/strongly agreed with question 1; 82% agreed/strongly agreed with question 2.

This feedback will be further reported within the Older Persons Housing Strategy.

## **5. TENANTS' INCENTIVE SCHEME**

- 5.1. In August 2012, the Housing and Social Care Committee agreed to introduce a Tenants' Incentive Scheme for a 12 month pilot period, effective from 1 April 2013. The aim of the scheme was to try and encourage tenants living in larger, family sized properties that are too big for them to move to smaller properties. A budget of £250,000 was made available and as this budget was not used up during the 12 month pilot period the scheme has continued to operate.

- 5.2. An evaluation of the scheme has been carried out and the main findings are listed below:

29 tenants have applied for a grant through the Tenants' Incentive Scheme from April 2013 to July 2014. 20 grants were paid in 2013/14 and 9 grants have been paid in 2014/15.

All tenants have been over the age of 40 years with 59% of grants paid to tenants in the age group 41-59 years and 41% of grants being paid to tenants over the age of 60 years.

The majority of grants (63%) were paid to single tenants; couples accounted for 24% of grants payable.

£43,624.01 has been paid directly to tenants from April 2013 – July 2014. However, if a tenant has rent or council tax arrears or rechargeable repairs from their previous tenancy this will be deducted from the grant and used to offset any housing debt. Approx £18,000 has been paid towards housing debt. The total amount paid through the Tenants' Incentive Scheme is £62,000.00.

- 5.3. One of the objectives of the Tenants' Incentive Scheme was to encourage tenants to downsize where they previously would not have considered this due to financial barriers. Analysis of the outcomes is inconclusive whether this objective has been achieved. However, it is recognised that to mitigate the effects of the Size Criteria, this type of scheme is a very valuable tool enabling applicants to move on and reduce the outgoings of managing a larger property.
- 5.4. It is recommended that the Tenants Incentive Scheme be reviewed and redesigned to cover both downsizing and low demand properties (as outlined in paragraph 4.3.2.).

It is proposed to split the current budget between a Downsize Tenant Incentive Scheme and a Low Demand Incentive Scheme (see section 4.3). The tenant scheme will include contacting all current tenants living in larger properties to make them aware of the scheme's benefits. However, the correspondence will clearly state that no-one is under any pressure to move.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1. The Allocations Outcome Statement provides a comprehensive update on lettings activity during 2013/14. The report evaluates the effectiveness of the Allocations Policy with regard to meeting housing needs, making better use of the housing stock and providing housing applicants with more choice. The report has detailed a number of positive outcomes. Customer feedback has shown that the majority of applicants approve of Choice Based Letting System (Home Spot).
- 6.2. Following a comprehensive consultation process, a review of the Allocation Policy has been carried out to ensure that the policy continues to meet legislative requirements, follows good practice and meets local housing need. A revised Allocation Policy has been drafted based on these recommendations.
- 6.3. The Tenant's Incentive Scheme Pilot has been reviewed and further developments have been identified to improve outcomes.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Members are invited to:**

- **Approve the contents of this report;**
- **Determine whether a fixed period for suspensions should be considered and agree for officers to define more closely the circumstances where the suspension would be applied; carry out further consultation and report back to the Executive;**
- **Agree a review of High Flat Local Letting Initiative;**
- **Agree the development of the Tenants Incentive Scheme; and**
- **Agree to revise the current Allocation Policy to reflect the changes approved within this report to be effective from 1 April 2015.**

.....  
**DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

Date: 6 November 2014

Ref: AAP 150113 Allocations Policy Review Report

Contact Officers: Jennifer Litts, Head of Housing Services, ext 0789  
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### **APPENDICES**

1. Allocation Outcome Report 2013/14
2. Consultation Report
3. Equality & Poverty Impact Assessment

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

1. Falkirk Council – Housing Allocation Policy

**Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should contact the officers listed above.**

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# **HOUSING ALLOCATIONS OUTCOMES DURING 2013 - 2014**



## **CONTENTS**

	<b><u>Page No.</u></b>
<b>Section 1: Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Section 2: Current Housing List – Applicant Groups &amp; Band of Priority</b>	<b>4-7</b>
<b>Section 3: Properties Let</b>	<b>8-10</b>
<b>Section 4: Sequencing of Properties</b>	<b>11-13</b>
<b>Section 5: Bidding Activity</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Section 6: Applicants housed during 2013</b>	<b>15-16</b>
<b>Section 7: Time applicants spend in housing need</b>	<b>17-18</b>
<b>Section 8: Lets of local applicants</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Section 9: Equalities and applicants housed</b>	<b>20-21</b>

## **Section 1**

### **Introduction**

- 1.1** This report provides comprehensive information about the housing list as at 31 March 2014 and allocation outcomes during 2013 - 2014. The report seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the Allocations Policy with regard to meeting housing needs, making better use of the housing stock and providing housing applicants with more choice.

## Section 2

### Current Housing List – Applicant Groups and Band of Priority

- 2.1** The total number of applicants on the housing list as at 31 March 2014 was 9971 which included 209 applicants for Housing with Care. The Table below compares the number of applicants on the housing at 31 March 2014 with the total number of applicants on the housing list as at 1 April 2013 broken down by applicant group and Band of priority.

**Table 1**

Number of Applicants by Band of Priority as at 31 March 2014 and 01 April 2013.

	Home Seeker		Home Mover		Home Starter		Total	
	Mar 14	Apr 13	Mar 14	Apr 13	Mar 14	Apr 13	Mar 14	Apr 13
<b>Band 1</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>817</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>1271</b>	<b>1321</b>
<b>Band 2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>884</b>	<b>844</b>	<b>1306</b>	<b>1437</b>
<b>Band 3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>4493</b>	<b>4041</b>	<b>4823</b>	<b>4399</b>
<b>Band 4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1120</b>	<b>1053</b>	<b>1242</b>	<b>1244</b>	<b>2362</b>	<b>2299</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>2689</b>	<b>2510</b>	<b>6828</b>	<b>6341</b>	<b>9762</b>	<b>9456</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>68.5%</b>	<b>66%</b>		

#### Main Points to note:

There has been little change in the total number of applicants on the housing list from April 13 to March 2014.

The main change to the make up of the housing list since April 2013 is the reduction in Home Seeker applicants which fell from 6% of all applicants to 2.5%. Home Movers have remained similar, making up 27% of the housing list and the largest proportion of applicants are Home Starters who represent 68.5% of the housing list.

The proportion of applicants with Band 1 priority for housing has reduced from 14% in April 2013 to 13% in March 2014.

The majority of applicants with Band 1 priority are Home Movers and has increased to 64% of Band 1 applicants from 52% in 2013.

The proportion of Home Starter applicants with Band 1 has remained the same 16% in April 2013 and 16% in March 2014.

There has been an increase in the number of Home Starters with Band 3 from 46.5% in April 2013 to 49% in March 2014.

24% of applicants on the list have Band 4 priority as they do not fall into any of the statutory reasonable preference groups or have any other priority under the allocation policy and therefore have no housing need. This has remained similar to the figure in April 2013.

There are 103 applicants on the housing list who are seeking Housing with Care Levels 1 & 2. 106 applicants are seeking Housing with Care Level 3. Housing with Care applicants make up 2% of all applicants.

## **2.2. Home Seeker Applicants**

2.5% of applicants are Home Seekers (this has reduced from 6% in 2012/13). All Home Seekers are awarded Band 1 priority. As at April 2014, there were 245 applicants with Home Seeker priority who are entitled to an offer of permanent housing.

The continued reduction in the overall number of Home Seeker applicants is encouraging and is due mainly to the Housing Options approach which has been operating since April 2011.

All applicants presenting at the Accommodation Resource Centre receive a housing options interview at which time they are provided with detailed information about the full range of housing options available locally, across all sectors in order to assist them to make informed choices. As a result many applicants that may have gone down the route of a homeless assessment decide to take another course of action. For example, they may decide their prospects of getting an offer of housing are better if they stay where they are and their housing need is assessed as a Home Starter or they may secure a let in the private rented sector and stay on the housing list as a Home Starter.

However, given the current limited supply of housing in the social rented sector, fulfilling our statutory duty towards homeless applicants continues to be a challenge.

## **2.3 Home Mover Applicants**

The percentage of Home Mover applicants with Band 1 priority has increased from 27% of all Home Movers in April 2013 to 30% of all Home Movers in March 2014.

22% of Home Mover applicants have Band 1 priority for under occupying their property.

16% of Home Mover applicants are overcrowded; 3% who are lacking 2 bedrooms (Band 1) and 13% who are lacking 1 bedroom (Band 2).

17% of Home Mover applicants are living in a tenancy which is unsuitable due to a medical condition.

42% of all Home Mover applicants have been awarded a Band 4 priority as they do not fall into any of the statutory reasonable preference groups or have any other priority under the allocation policy and therefore have no housing need.

## **2.4 Home Starters Applicants**

Home Starter applicants make up 68.5% of the housing list and this is an increase of 2.5% from April 2013.

The increase in the overall number of Home Starter applicants is due mainly to the Housing Options approach which has been operating since April 2011.

Although Home Starters are the largest group of applicants, 84% of Home Starters have a low level of housing need 66% have Band 3 priority and 18% have Band 4 priority as they do not fall into any of the statutory reasonable preference groups or have any other priority under the allocation policy and therefore have no housing need.

13.6% of Home Starter applicants are overcrowded; 1.2% who are lacking 2 bedrooms (Band 1) and 12.4% who are lacking 1 bedroom (Band 2).

18% of Home Starters are living in Private Tenancies and have no other housing need.

6% of Home Starter applicants are living in a property which is unsuitable due to a medical condition.

## **2.5 Equalities Analysis**

Information is provided below on the profile of applicants as at 31 March 2014. The information is very similar to that provided in previous years.

### **Gender**

- 57% of applicants are female,
- 43% of applicants are male,

### **Age**

- 15.4% of applicants are age 25 years or less,
- 32% of applicants are between 26 and 40 years,
- 29.3% of applicants are between 41 and 60 years
- the remaining 23.3% of applicants are over sixty, over third of whom are over 75.

### **Disability**

- 23% of applicants on the housing list have indicated that they consider that they have a disability.
- Over half of these applicants indicate this is in relation to a physical disability or mobility problems.

### **Ethnicity**

- 86% of applicants are White Scottish
- the next most numerous ethnic groups are 4.8% Other British; 2.5% Other White Ethnic Group and 1.1% African Scottish/British
- 3.4% of applicants have not provided information about their ethnicity.

#### Religion

- information is not available for 22% of applicants
- 27.9% of applicants have no religion
- 22% of applicant indicated that they are Church of Scotland
- 8.4% of applicants are Roman Catholic

#### Sexual Orientation

- 36% of applicants did not respond or indicated that they did not wish to respond.
- Of the applicants who did respond, 86% indicated that they were heterosexual.

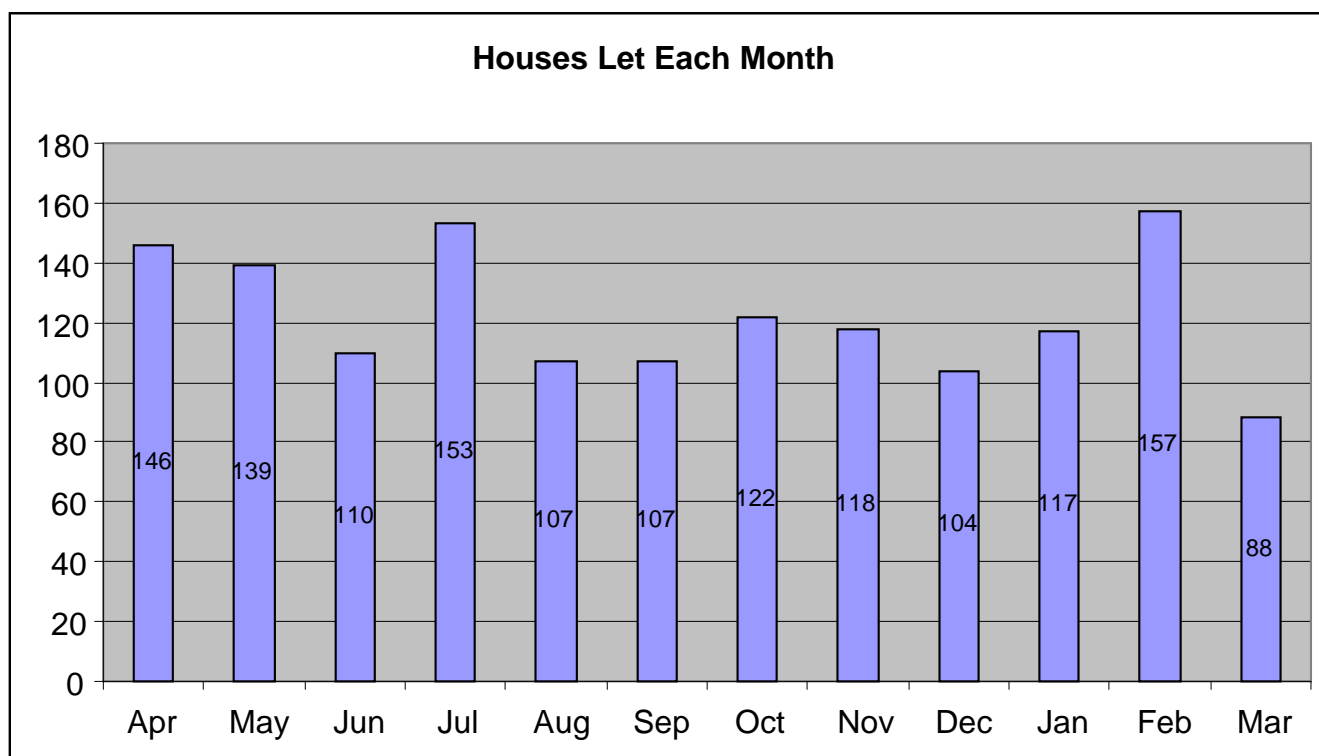
## Section 3

### Properties Let

#### Number of Properties Let Each Month

**3.1** From 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014, 1468 properties were let across the Council. The number of properties let per month is set out in the table below.

**Table 2**



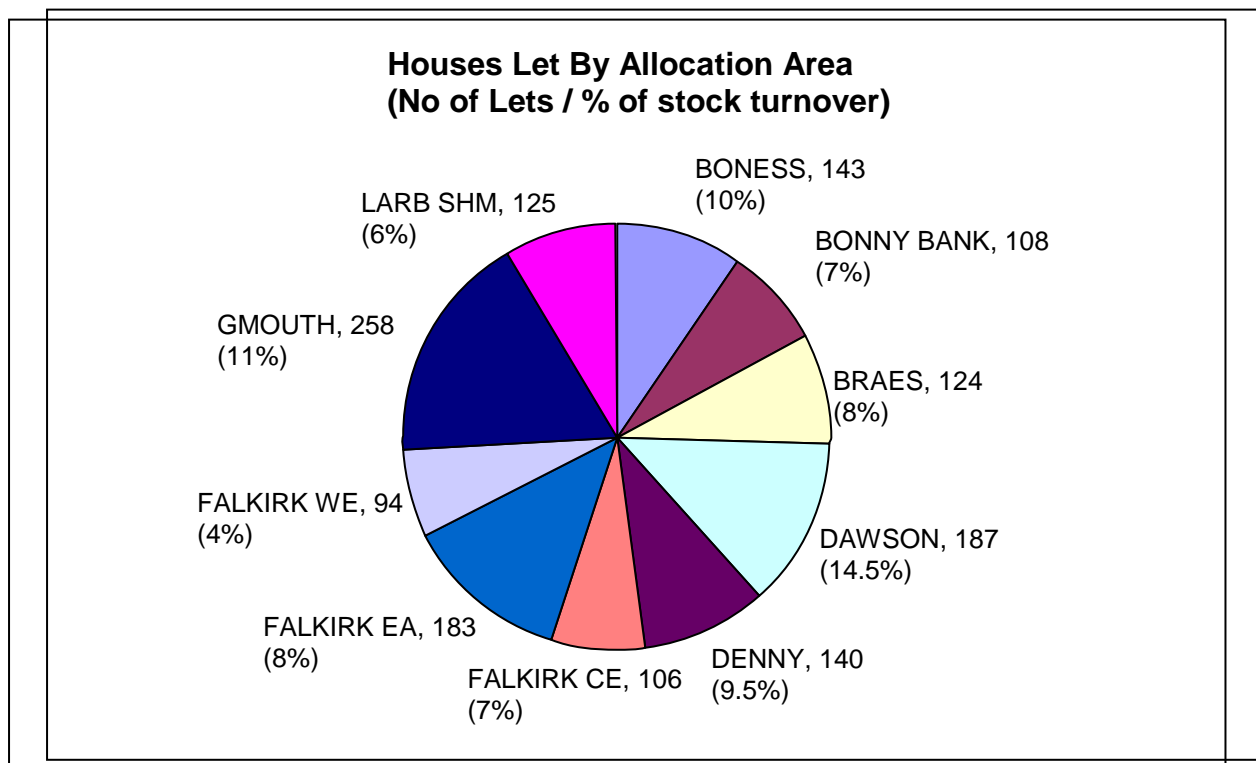
#### **3.2 Number of Properties let in Allocations Areas**

The chart below shows the breakdown of properties let by allocations area which shows a relatively even spread of lets. The allocations area with the most lets was Grangemouth with 258 properties let during the year, followed by Dawson with 187 properties and Falkirk East with 183 lets. The Falkirk West area had the fewest lets with 94 properties being let.

In terms of turnover (ie the number of lets compared to the total number of houses in an area) Dawson has the highest turnover (14.5%), then Grangemouth (11%), followed by Bo'ness (10%). The lowest turnover of properties was Falkirk West (4%), followed by Larbert/Stenhousemuir (6%). The remaining allocation areas average between 7% - 9%.

The Council's programme of new build properties resulted in 16 new properties being let in Dawson during 2013 - 2014.

**Table 3**



### **Size of Properties Let**

**21.5% (315 properties) let had 1 bedroom.**

**58.9% (865) properties let had 2 bedrooms**

**18.1% (266 properties) had 3 bedrooms**

**Only 22 properties (1.5%) of lets had 4 or more bedrooms.**

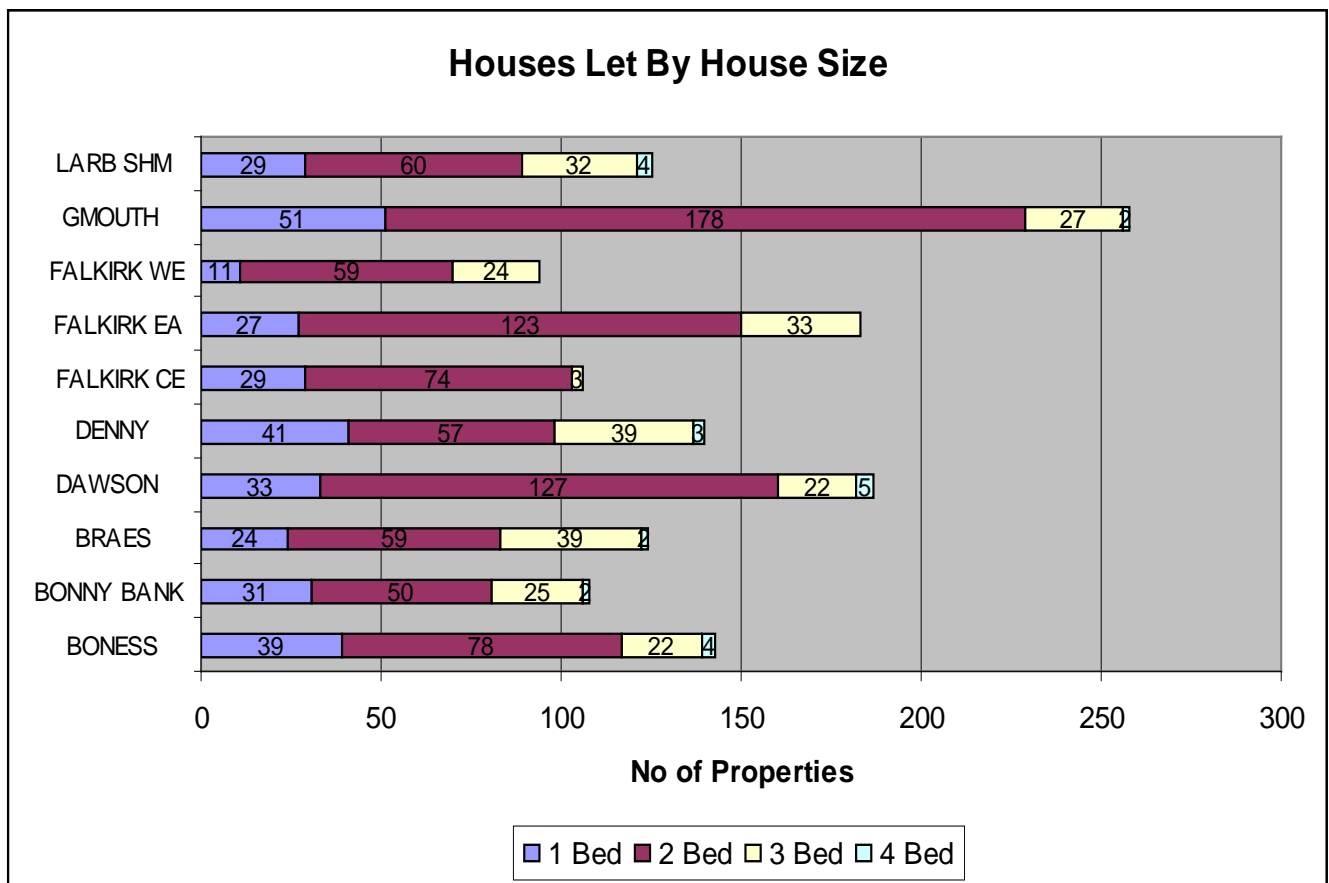
These figures clearly demonstrate that the number of larger properties available for let is small and opportunities for larger families who are overcrowded to move to more suitable accommodation are limited.



Increasing the supply of larger properties is a challenge and realistically, the Council is unlikely to be able to meet the needs and aspirations of all applicants on the housing list. The household size criteria included in the allocations policy aim to ensure that larger properties are allocated to those with the greatest and longest needs and to manage applicants' expectations and aspirations. Increasingly, it is the case that applicants will require to consider options other than Council housing to meet their needs and aspirations.

Equally, the number of 1 bedroom properties is limited and demand for this size of property has increased with the introduction of Welfare Reform where tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit will lose some of their Benefit entitlement if they are under occupying a property.

**Table 4**



## Section 4

### Sequencing of Properties

- 4.1** In order to achieve the Council's target of 50% of mainstream allocations being made to Home Seekers, 25% to Home Movers and 25% to Home Starters, a sequencing process is used to assign properties for allocation to each group. The process aims to ensure, over time, that the targets for lets to each applicant group are met in each of the allocation areas and that as even as possible a distribution of properties in terms of size is achieved within these targets. This is in recognition of the fact that within each of the applicant groups (Home Seeker, Movers and Starters) there is a range of household types who need accommodation of varying sizes. The sequencing process is complex and takes account of both, the location, type and size of each property, and the date the property became vacant.

Following a report to Housing and Social Care Committee on 29 March 2011 property type was taken into consideration in the sequencing process and the number of allocation areas increased from seven to ten from 13 April 2011.

The location of the property is considered in terms of the allocations areas, with each allocation area having its own discrete sequence. Within each discrete area sequence, properties are further sequenced according to type of property being separated into the following categories of flats, four-in-a-blocks and houses and finally by size with properties being separated into the following categories - 1 & 2 bedroom properties; 3 bedroom properties; and 4 or more bedroom properties.

Thereafter properties are ordered by the date they became vacant and assigned for allocation to the three applicant groups in the following order:

Void 1 - Home Seeker  
Void 2 - Home Mover  
Void 3 - Home Seeker  
Void 4 - Home Starter

The process of sequencing voids is continuous and sequencing for each new edition of the Homespot Newsletter starts from point where it left off from the previous list.

Adapted properties and Housing with Care Level 3 properties are advertised in HomeSpot and let in accordance with agreed procedures however, they are not included in the sequencing process. Housing with Care Level 1 and 2 properties are not advertised and are directly matched to applicants that have been assessed as needing this type of supported housing.

The table below shows the sequencing of general needs properties by Allocation Area and applicant group for all advertising cycles during 2013 - 2014. The table shows that 1261 general needs properties were advertised during 2013. This figure is not the same as the total lets during 2013 - 2014 (1468) as the figure for total lets will include properties that were advertised near the end of the financial year 2012 - 2013 where the tenancy did not start until after 1 April 2013. Also properties that were advertised at the end of financial year 2013 2014- will be included in the lets for 2014 - 2014 as the tenancy will not have started until some time after 1 April 2014.

**Table 5**

Allocation area	Home Seekers	Home Movers	Home Starters	Total
Bo'ness	59	29	29	117
Bonnybridge/Banknock	47	24	23	94
Braes	54	28	26	108
Dawson	72	44	33	149
Denny	65	33	35	133
Falkirk Central	35	18	17	70
Falkirk East	75	42	35	152
Falkirk West	42	22	22	86
Grangemouth	120	61	61	242
Stenhousemuir/Larbert	55	27	28	110
Total No.	624	328	309	1261
Total %	49%	26%	25%	100%

As noted in Table 5, most areas achieved their target quotas with the exception of Dawson where 30% of advertised were sequenced for Home Movers and 22% for Home Starters. This is due to the New Build LLI where all new properties are advertised for Home Movers.

In addition to the 1261 properties above, a further 153 properties were advertised for "Adapted".

Since 10 October 2012, applicants are only bid on properties that have been advertised for the applicant group that they are in. For example a Home Seeker is only able to bid on Home Seeker advertised properties. 588 properties were re advertised for "All Groups" as the initial advert did not result in any suitable bids.

66 Housing with Care Level 3 properties have also been advertised during the year with applicants over 60 years of age being eligible to bid for these properties.

## 4.2 Properties Advertised by House Type

The table below shows properties advertised by house type.

**Table 6**

Allocation area	4-in-a-block	Flat	House	Total
Bo'ness	65	106	43	214
Bonny Bank	18	43	70	131
Braes	47	42	116	205
Dawson	61	150	21	232
Denny	20	182	42	244
Falkirk Central	3	93	12	108
Falkirk East	64	115	49	228
Falkirk West	39	92	17	148
Grangemouth	32	347	29	408
Stenhousemuir	30	27	93	150
Total No.	379	1197	492	2068
Total %	18%	58%	24%	100%

Over half of the properties advertised (58%) were tenement flats and high rise flats with the remainder of properties being evenly split between houses and 4-in-a-blocks.

However these proportions vary with allocations area, for example, in Grangemouth nearly 85% of available properties were flats with only 7% of available properties being houses. This can create problems where applicants are trying to meet their housing aspirations as well as their housing needs.

## Section 5

### Bidding Activity

- 5.1 Properties are advertised weekly and on average 41 properties are advertised each week. In October 2012, a change to the bidding process was introduced. Prior to October 2012, applicants could bid for any property that was advertised. However, following a report to the Housing and Social care Committee on 28 August 2012 it was agreed that applicants should only be able to bid for properties that are advertised for the applicant group they are in. Table 7 below shows the average number of bids per week by applicant group from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.

**Table 7**

Period	2013 - 2014	2013	10 October 2012 To 31 December 2012	Up to 10 October 2012
Average No of Properties Advertised per Week	41	40	34	26
Average No of Bids From Home Seekers per Week	72	111	129	360
Average No of Bids From Home Movers per Week	109	100	130	239
Average No of Bids From Home Starters per Week	481	460	364	1294

Table 8 below shows the Average Bids by Property Type

**Table 8**

Average bids	2013 - 2014	2013	10 October 2012 To 31 December 2012	Up to 10 October 2012
4 In A Block	22	24	24	108
Flats	11	12	12	43
Houses	22	22	23	93

33% (4341) of all applicants bid for properties during 2013/14. This equates to 26% Home Movers, 14% Home Seekers and 58% for Home Starters.

The low level of Home Seekers that are bidding continues to be a concern and indicates a significant number of Home Seeker applicants are not bidding regularly. Bids from Home Seekers are monitored and those applicants who are not actively seeking housing are asked to attend Housing Options interviews. If Home Seekers still do not bid despite advice and encouragement to do so. They will

then subsequently be direct matched to a property. This approach is being taken to assist the Council meet its statutory obligations and if appropriate discharge its duty to accommodate. During 2013/14, 199 direct match offers were made to Home Seekers. Only 18 direct match bids were accepted and 79 were refused. This low acceptance level is expected as applicants are advised to bid for properties of their choice and those actively seeking permanent accommodation tend to do so. Of the remaining offers made, the applicants did not contact and we subsequently discharged our duty.

## **5.2. Refusals**

In 2013/14, 904 offers made were refused by applicants. 54% of refusals were made by applicants as their “preferences had not be met”. Whilst, the Council has a low refusal rate to compared to other local authorities and performs well in this Charter Indicator, it is still a cause for concern that such a high number of offers have been refused given Falkirk operates a Choice Based Letting system and all of these applicants (except Home Seekers who have been received Direct Match Offers and Housing with Care applicants level 1 &2) have all voluntarily bid for these properties.

Further monitoring of offer refusals will be carried out during 2014/15.

## Section 6

### Applicants housed during 2013 - 2014

6.1 The table below shows the number of lets by applicant group and allocation areas during 2013 - 2014.

**Table 9**

Applicants Housed	Bo'ness	Bonny Bank	Braes	Dawson	Denny	Falkirk Central	Falkirk East	Falkirk West	G'mouth	Larbert Shm	Total
Home Seeker	43	33	36	65	42	26	68	38	99	42	492
Home Mover	37	29	31	59	35	20	50	19	54	34	368
Home Starter	54	36	50	61	55	39	55	33	102	35	520
HwC	9	10	7	2	8	21	10	4	3	14	88
Total	143	108	124	187	140	106	183	94	258	125	1468

The outcome of all lets during the period, including Housing with Care properties, is as follows:-

- 34% of lets were to Home Seeker applicants,
- 25% of lets to Home Mover applicants
- 35% of lets were to Home Starter applicants
- 6% of lets were made to applicants needing Housing with Care

Lets to Home Mover are on target at 25%. However, lets to Home Seekers are below target despite the fact that 49% of mainstream properties were sequenced for Home Seekers. The drop in lets to Home Seekers has been attributed to the reduction in applicants presenting as homeless over recent years. All applicants receive a Housing Options Interview at an early stage and fewer applicants proceed to making a homeless presentation. Lets to Home Starters are above the target at 35%. One explanation for this is that some properties that are advertised for Home Seekers either receive no bids or the bids are from applicants that are not eligible e.g. single applicants with access to children bidding for 3 bedroom properties. Where it is possible to direct match the property to a Home Seeker that has not been bidding this will be done however, if there are no Home Seekers that match the property size the property will be advertised for "All" groups which gives Home Starters the opportunity to bid for the property.

### 6.2 Meeting Housing Needs

Lets have also been analysed based on the Band of priority of the successful applicant:-

- 55% of lets were to applicants with Band 1 priority
- 23% of lets were to applicants with Band 2 priority
- 12% of lets were to applicants with Band 3 priority.
- 4% of lets were to applicants with Band 4 priority
- 6% of lets were to Housing with Care applicants

77% of applicants has either Band 1 or Band 2 priority which indicates that the policy is effective in meeting housing needs and that lets are routinely made to those applicants in the greatest housing need.

**Table 10**

Applicants Housed	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	HwC	Total
Home Seeker	486	6	0	0	0	492
Home Mover	203	68	43	54	0	368
Home Starter	110	264	135	11	0	520
HwC	0	0	0	0	88	88
Total	799	338	178	65	88	1468



## Section 7

### Time Applicants Spend in Housing Need

- 7.1 The tables below show the length of time that applicants spent in housing need (by applicant group) before accepting an offer of housing. As the Council operates a Choice Based Letting system this gives applicants the option of choosing when they wish to bid for housing. Therefore, there is no obligation for Home Movers or Home Starters to bid for properties and they can stay be on the housing list for many years without making a bid (although they are required to re-register their application annually). The exception to this is Home Seekers who are required to bid as often as possible for suitable properties as the Council has a statutory duty to provide them with permanent accommodation.

**Table 11**

Applicant Group	Priority	<6mths	6-12 mths	1-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years	>10years	Total
Home Seeker	B1	344	90	43	14	1	0	492
	%	70%	18%	9%	3%	0	0	100%

88% of Home Seekers were in housing need less than a year 1 when they accepted an offer of housing. This is an increase in the figure for 2013 when 85% of Home seeker applicants were housed within a year.

**Table 12**

Applicant Group	Priority	<6mths	6-12 mths	1-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years -	>10years	Total
Home Mover	B1	84	60	32	17	8	2	203
	B2	21	10	13	19	4	1	68
	B3	16	7	9	9	2	0	43
	B4	19	9	8	12	5	1	54
	%	38%	23%	17%	15%	5%	1%	368

A significant number of Home Movers (38%) were housed in less than 6 months of being awarded their priority and 61 % of Home Movers were housed within one year of being awarded their priority.

**Table 13**

Applicant Group	Priority	<6mths	6-12 mths	1-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years -	>10years	Total
Home Starter	B1	83	15	11	0	1	0	110
	B2	153	47	42	19	2	1	264
	B3	32	17	34	48	3	1	135
	B4	3	4	1	3	0	0	11
	%	52%	16%	17%	13%	1.2%	0.4%	520

A significant number of Home Starters (52%) were housed in less than 6 months of being awarded their priority and 68% of Home Starters were housed within one year of being awarded their priority.

**Table 14**

Applicant Group	<6mths	6-12 mths	1-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years	>10years	Total
HwC	73	9	6	0	0	0	88

83% of Housing with Care applicants were housed in less than 6 months of their Housing with Care assessment. Applicants moving into Housing with Care are able to move more quickly than applicants moving into general needs housing.

Excluding the 88 applicants that were housed in Housing with Care 88% of all applicants were housed within 2 years of applying for housing. This is broken down further as follows:-

- 55% of all applicants were housed in less than 6 months of applying for housing.
- 19% of all applicants were housed between 6 months to 1 year of applying for housing. .
- 14% of all applicants were housed between 1 – 2 year of applying for housing.
- 10% of all applicants were housed between 2-5 years of applying for housing. .
- 2% of applicants were housed between 5-10 years of applying for a house
- Less than 0.4 % of applicants waited more than 10 years to be offered a house.

## Section 8

### Lets to Local Applicants

8.1 An analysis has been carried out to assess the percentage of applicants who were housed in the same allocations area as they were already living.

The results show that on average 46% of applicants are housed in the same allocations area as they were already living.

The table shows that in all areas, the majority of lets in the area were to applicants already living in the area. The exception to this is Falkirk Central, where the majority of lets were made to applicants who lived in Falkirk East.

**Table 15**

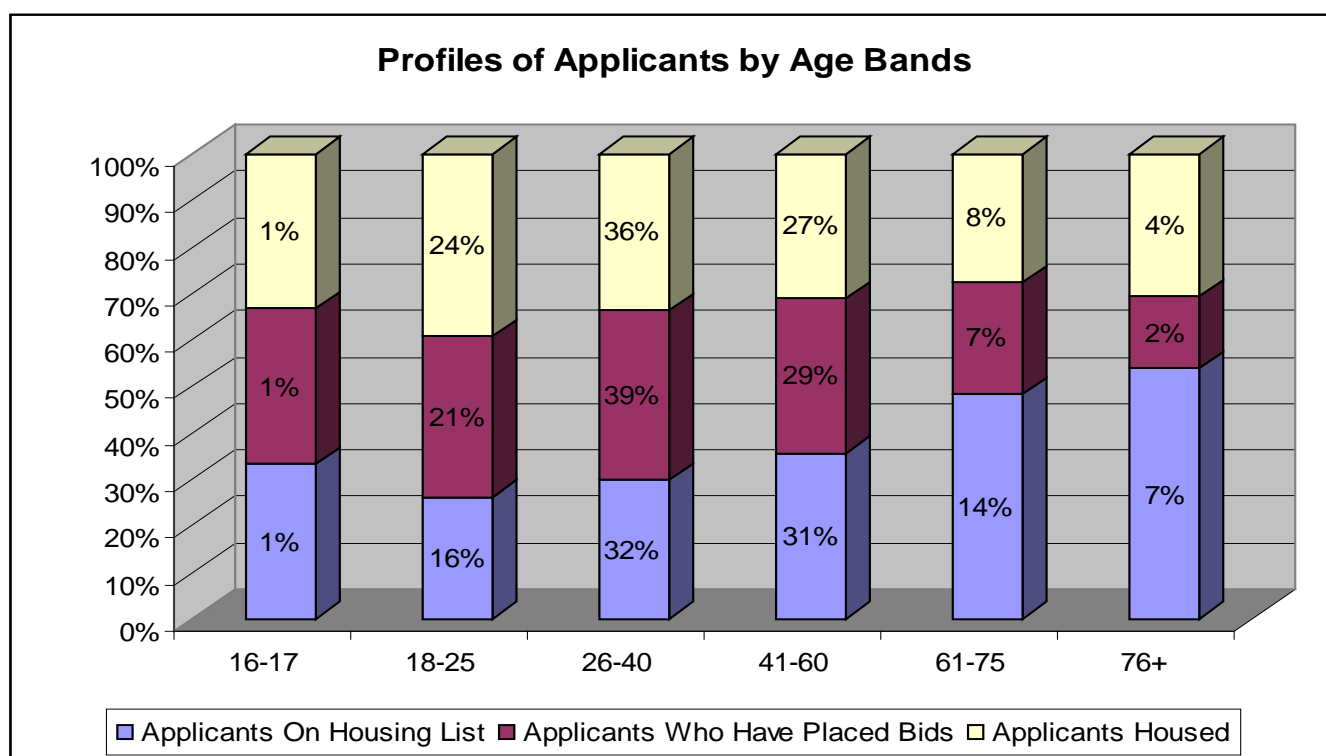
<b>Allocations Area</b>	From Bo'ness	From Bonny Bank	From Braes	From Dawson	From Denny	From Falkirk Central	From Falkirk East	From Falkirk West	From G'mouth	From Larbert/S'muir	Outwith	Total
To Bo'ness	<b>107</b> <b>75%</b>	0 0%	2 1%	5 3%	5 3%	1 1%	3 2%	3 2%	11 8%	1 1%	5 3%	143 100%
To Bonny Bank	4 4%	<b>48</b> <b>44%</b>	2 2%	2 2%	22 20%	3 3%	7 6%	7 6%	3 3%	5 5%	5 5%	108 100%
To Braes	3 2%	2 2%	<b>38</b> <b>31%</b>	7 6%	3 2%	0 0%	26 21%	4 3%	18 15%	4 3%	19 15%	124 100%
To Dawson	4 2%	4 2%	7 4%	<b>77</b> <b>41%</b>	7 4%	6 3%	36 19%	8 4%	14 7%	21 11%	3 2%	187 100%
To Denny	1 1%	12 9%	3 2%	10 7%	<b>78</b> <b>56%</b>	1 1%	5 4%	3 2%	12 9%	6 4%	9 6%	140 100%
To Falkirk Central	5 5%	5 5%	6 6%	9 8%	1 1%	<b>12</b> <b>11%</b>	30 28%	13 12%	11 10%	10 9%	4 4%	106 100%
To Falkirk East	5 3%	4 2%	11 6%	18 10%	9 5%	6 3%	<b>71</b> <b>39%</b>	12 7%	32 17%	11 6%	4 2%	183 100%
To Falkirk West	1 1%	5 5%	2 2%	9 10%	0 0%	7 7%	8 9%	<b>42</b> <b>45%</b>	11 12%	7 7%	2 2%	94 100%
To Grangemouth	26 10%	7 3%	14 5%	11 4%	10 4%	4 2%	26 10%	9 3%	<b>133</b> <b>52%</b>	12 5%	6 2%	258 100%
To Larbert S'muir	1 1%	6 5%	3 2%	10 8%	8 6%	4 3%	10 8%	6 5%	11 9%	<b>62</b> <b>47%</b>	4 3%	125 100%

## Section 9

### Equalities and Applicants Housed

9.1 A breakdown of equalities information available regarding applicants housed is set out below, the main points to note as follows:

**Table 16**



#### Age

Young people aged 18 - 25 make up 16% of applicants on the housing register however, 24% of properties are being let to this group of applicants. Many of the young people have complex housing needs and have high priority to reflect this.

A smaller percentage of elderly applicants are being housed than are represented on the housing list. Applicants aged over 60 years old make up 21% of the housing register yet they account for only 12% of lets. However a number of those applicants do not have any housing need.

### Gender Profile

57% of the applicants housed were female, 43% of applicants housed were male which is representative of the housing list.

### Disability

19% of applicants housed provided information that they considered that they have a disability; whilst over half of these applicants indicated this in relation to a physical disability or mobility problems.

### Ethnicity

The allocations made is broadly representative of the waiting list and as such 87% of applicants housed were White Scottish, 5% of applicants housed were Other British, 0.1% of applicants housed were Black Scottish British African. 3 % of applicants housed did not provide this information.

### Religion

71% of applicants housed either did not provide any information about their religion or said they had "no religion". Of the remaining applicants that were housed 11% were Church of Scotland; 7% were Roman Catholic and 2% of applicants housed were Other Christian

### Sexual Orientation

About 43% of applicants housed did not provide information about sexual orientation and 55% of applicants housed were heterosexual.

**ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW  
CONSULTATION ANALYSIS REPORT**

**BACKGROUND**

Falkirk Council is required to carry regular reviews of its Allocations Policy to ensure that it complies with legislative requirements, follows good practice and continues to meet local housing needs and priorities.

As part of the allocations policy review, and our statutory duty for Local Authorities under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, a consultation exercise was completed over a period of 10 weeks. The issues highlighted for consultation were in response to findings from the Allocation Outcome Reports; feedback from service users, tenants representatives and elected members – including complaints information; review of legislation to take account of the new requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 which received Royal Assent on 1 August 2014; and benchmarking across other social landlords to ensure good practice.

**CONSULTATION PROCESS**

**Tenants Forum**

The first stage in the consultation process was to meet with the Tenants Forum and agree with them the consultation process and the content of the questionnaire. This meeting was held in April 2014.

**Questionnaire**

In order to reach as large an audience as possible, a questionnaire was prepared outlining the changes that were being considered and asking for feedback. The questionnaire was available on the Council's website and paper copies in our local Neighbourhood Offices/One Stop Shops. The questionnaire was also sent to a range of stakeholders including, Registered Tenants and Residents Associations, Community Councils, Elected Members, Voluntary Organisations and approximately 300 individuals on the Consultation Register.

The questionnaire initially asked for feedback on Home Spot to analyse how service users find the system. Thereafter the questionnaire was split into the undernoted topics:

- Letting Quotas for Home Seekers, Home Movers and Home Starters
- Low Demand Properties
- Allocation of new Build Council Houses
- Local lettings Initiative for High Rise Flats
- Housing With Care
- Welfare Reform

## **Focus Groups**

At the end of the questionnaire, all respondents were given the opportunity to become further involved by attending a series of Focus Groups. 68 individuals indicated interest in attending. The Focus Groups were held during June and July with the option of afternoon or evening sessions. The format of the Focus Group was to split the 6 topics into two separate sessions. A presentation providing detailed information was given, thereafter a debate to discuss each topic was facilitated, and then the attendees got the opportunity to complete that section of the questionnaire again. This feedback was used as further analysis.

We contacted each of the 68 respondents to invite them to the sessions. However, only 15 individuals attended. Representatives from the Tenants Forum were also invited to attend the Focus Groups.

One of the reasons cited for the lower than expected attendance was the time of year. June/July/August is traditionally the holiday period. Furthermore, the sessions were held on hot summer days/evenings making the venue very uncomfortable. Whilst, we did receive valuable and qualitative feedback from the Focus Group sessions, it has been agreed that this format will be reviewed for future consultations.

## **Elected Members**

Elected Members were also asked to comment on the proposed changes and this has been reported separately within this report. Two political groups submitted written responses to the consultation and a response addressing each issue was been returned.

# **RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

## **Who took part?**

279 questionnaires were completed. The demographics of those who participated were as follows:

- 68% were aged 25-59. 27% were aged over 60. However, only 127 participants provided their age.
- 71% were female and 29% were male. However, just 150 participants supplied this information.
- The most common economic status of those that responded included: Full time employment (27%); retired (25%); unemployed (18%); long term sick/disabled (12. %)
- 59% of respondents claimed that they had at least one disability, while 41% did not. However, only 98 of those surveyed provided a response to this question.
- The majority of respondents were council tenants (62%). 14% were owner occupiers. 274 respondents provided details of their tenancy type.

## Key Findings

### HOMESPOT

The allocations system was changed to a choice based letting system in 2010. Applicants now bid for properties that they are interested in. We wanted to find out how our applicants found the new system.

We asked whether “It is good to be able to see all the houses that are available to let in HomeSpot”

- The vast majority of respondents (87.1%) agreed with that statement. Only 6.2% disagreed.

We asked: “Do you find the HomeSpot bidding process easy to use?”

- Most participants agreed (64.1%) that it was. However, 12% disagreed.

We asked: “Do you find information on the recent lets easy to understand?”

- 57.8% agreed and only 11.7% disagreed.

We asked: “Please give any other comments which you have about HomeSpot”. From 50 responses, the two main themes that emerged were that

- the “system works well” (12%) and
- that the information on Allocation Outcome could be improved (12%). Service users would also like to see some improvements to the system for example, an improved search facility (8%)

It is clear from the results above that the system is working well for applicants however there are some online improvements that we can make to improve the delivery of the service.

### LETTING QUOTAS

With fewer homeless priority (Home Seeker) applicants on the waiting list than there were when the new policy was launched in 2010 it was proposed that there is less of a need to allocate the highest percentage of properties to this category applicants. We wanted to find out what others thought about this by proposing a change to the letting quotas.

We asked: “Do you think we should change the Letting Quotas?”

- Most respondents agreed (64.6%). Only 15.9% disagreed.

We asked: “If you agree with the above, should properties be let to each group on an equal basis?”

- The majority agreed with this (59.4%). 15.5% disagreed and 25.1% had no opinion.
- Of those who indicated that the letting quotas should be amended, the majority (59.4%) agreed that they should be let to each group on an equal basis.
- Of those who indicated that the letting quotas should not be amended, 50% disagreed that properties should be let to each group on an equal basis. 40.9% had no opinion.



We asked: “Please give any other comments about letting quotas”

- From 52 responses, the most dominant theme was that the authority should “let properties to groups on an equal basis” (19.2%). Other recurrent themes included: “Increase Home Starter quota” (11.5%); and “Local residents should get higher priority in their local area” (7.7%).

All of our focus group participants agreed that we should amend the current quota system and 88% agreed that properties should be let on an equal basis.

### ***Benchmarking Research – Letting Quotas***

<b>Local authority or Housing Association</b>	<b>Policy</b>
Midlothian Council	45% to Homeless group 40% to General Needs group 15% to Choice group (no housing need but applicants want to move to another area/or house type)
North Lanarkshire Council	37% to Homeless group 38% to General Needs group 20% to Transfer group 5% to Aspirational Transfer (no housing need but applicants want to move to another area/or house type)
Dundee City Council	45% to Homeless group 25% to General Needs group 25% to Redevelopment group 5% to Choice group (no housing need but applicants want to move to another area/or house type)
Edinburgh City Council	33.3% to Homeless and new households (Starters) 33.3% to those with accommodation (Movers) 33.3% to Starters and Movers.

From the feedback from applicants and benchmarking exercise it is clear that opinion and common practice would be allocating properties equally between homeless, transfer and waiting list applicants.

### **LOW DEMAND PROPERTIES**

In recent years we have experienced difficulty in letting particular properties leaving properties lying empty for some time. We asked our applicants if they thought we should introduce a local lettings initiative to assist us in letting these houses quicker.

We asked: “Should the council introduce a system to let low demand properties outwith the HomeSpot process?”

- A majority agreed with this question (59.8%). However, 16.1% disagreed.

We asked: “Please give any other comments which you have about low demand properties”

- From 32 responses, the main trend was to suggest that the authority should “Allocate to Home Seekers” (28.1%). This was followed by: “Offer to tenants on the waiting list” (9.4%); and “Should be flexible letting low demand properties” (6.3%).

Our focus group attendees all agreed that we should introduce a system to let our low demand properties.

### ***Benchmarking Research - Low Demand Properties:***

<b>Local authority or Housing Association</b>	<b>Policy</b>
Dundee City Council	Local Lettings Initiative (reactive)
Aberdeen City Council	Allocated out with common priority rules
North Lanarkshire Council	Local Lettings Initiative (dependent upon a wide variety of factors including consultation with the public and elected members).
Midlothian Council	Local Lettings Initiative (dependent upon a wide variety of factors including consultation with the public and elected members).
Edinburgh City Council	Local Lettings Initiative (gives those in priority need precedence)
Orkney Islands Council	Local Lettings Initiative (gives those in priority need precedence, especially those seeking a similar house size/type)

The results from our consultation feedback suggest that the majority are in favour of introducing a local lettings initiative but have firm views on how this should look. Other local authorities use flexible local letting initiatives with some giving initial priority to those in the greatest housing need.

### **ALLOCATION OF NEW BUILD COUNCIL HOUSES**

Falkirk Council recently started to build its own new council houses. These properties are allocated to our own tenants on the transfer waiting list who have the greatest need. We asked our questionnaire participants what they thought about how we allocate our new build properties.

We asked: “Should the council change the policy to allow all applicants to bid for new council houses?”

- The majority of participants expressed agreement (55.8%).  
 \*\*\*Please note that due to a technical error, the option “strongly agree” was included twice in questionnaire for this particular question. It is not possible to infer the precise extent of those who ‘disagreed’ on this question. However, this does not affect the main finding that a majority (at least 55.8%) did still agree.

We asked: “If you agree that new council houses should be let to existing tenants in the first place, then if the property becomes vacant again, should Home Seekers and Home Starters be allowed to bid for them?”

- Most respondents agreed that they should (54.8%).

*\*\*\*As above, please note that due to a technical error, the option “strongly agree” was included twice in the questionnaire for this particular question. It is not possible to infer the precise extent of those who ‘disagreed’ on this question. However, this does not affect the main findings that a majority (at least 54.8%) did still agree.*

We asked: “Please give any other comments you have about New Builds”

- From 43 responses, the most frequent suggestion was to “Give Falkirk Council tenants’ priority” (34.9%). This was followed by: “Allow all groups to bid” (33.3)

Our focus group participants had mixed views about the allocation of our new build properties. There was criticism in general about the way the properties were advertised and the general consensus was that all applicants should have the opportunity to be allocated a new build house.

### ***Benchmarking Research – Allocation of New Build Houses***

<b>Local authority or Housing Association</b>	<b>Policy</b>
West Lothian Council	Priority for current West Lothian Council tenants on the transfer register
Stirling Council	Housing priority based on applicant(s) need e.g. medical, homelessness.
Midlothian Council	Priority for current Midlothian Council tenants on the transfer register and meet the appropriate criteria
Moray Council	Local Lettings Initiative (based on housing need and demand)
Fife Council	Priority for current Fife Council and local RSL tenants on the transfer register
Link Housing Association	The council has 50% nomination rights to new build properties. These are advertised through HomeSpot and sequenced for Home Seekers. Home Movers and Home Starters.

In general, our consultation participants had mixed views as to whether we should change our current policy to open up the allocation of new build properties to all applicants. Around half of other local authorities operate a similar allocations system to Falkirk Council. The results for this question were therefore inconclusive.

### **LOCAL LETTING INITIATIVE FOR THE HIGH FLATS**

Falkirk Council has over 800 multi storey flats that are allocated to waiting list applicants over the age of 60 under a local lettings initiative. We asked our consultation participants if we should review this currently policy with a possibility of withdrawing this local lettings initiative to allow all applicants to access these properties.

We asked: “Should the council review this local letting initiative so that our high flats are let based on housing need?”

- The most common response was to disagree (47.2%). However, 38.2% did agree and 14.6% were undecided.

We asked: “Please give any other comments you have about the high flats”

- From 65 responses, the dominant theme was that the authority should “Retain the current policy” (56.9%). This was followed by: “Allow disabled/medical needs applicants in (age regardless)” (18.5%).

The participants in our focus group were split in their opinion of whether we should review our letting initiative for the High Flats with one comment suggesting that if it works currently then we should not change it.

### ***Benchmarking Research - Local Letting Initiative for the High Flats***

<b>Local authority or Housing Association</b>	<b>Policy</b>
Glasgow City Council	No local lettings initiative
Edinburgh City Council	Households with children under 16 years old not eligible
Dundee City Council	No local lettings initiative
Aberdeen City Council	No local lettings initiative
South Lanarkshire Council	Households with children under 16 years old not eligible
North Lanarkshire Council	Letting initiative for two multi storey flats for those over the age of 60

Again the results from this consultation question were inconclusive. Although the majority of respondents were in favour of keeping the current local lettings initiative there was a significant minority who were in favour of amending the policy. There are few local authorities who a similar lettings initiative.

### **EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

Falkirk Council does not currently have a policy to re house applicants who have exceptional needs and currently they have to bid along side all applicants. As these applicants have an urgent need to be re housed being placed within the current bidding system means that they may have to wait some time for re housing. We asked our consultation participants if we should identify suitable properties for these applicants and match them to the property out with the choice based lettings scheme.

We asked: “Should the council be able to identify a suitable property and match this to an applicant where there the applicant has been awarded priority because of an exceptional housing need?”

- A clear majority agreed that they should (75.5%).

We asked: “Please give any other comments which you have about Exceptional Circumstances”

- From 31 responses, the most common opinion was that the authority should “Match property to those with exceptional needs” (19.4%). This was closely followed by: “Exceptional needs applicants should have a choice” (16.3%); “Take applicants local connections into consideration” (9.7%).

Our focus group participants were of the opinion that we should be able to match suitable properties to applicants who are considered to be in exceptional need.

### ***Benchmarking Research – Exceptional Circumstances***

<b>Local authority or Housing Association</b>	<b>Policy</b>
Edinburgh City Council	Officer Panel considers requests for exceptional need
Link Housing Association	Direct match properties for transfer applicants therefore still putting a property back into the lettings pool

Our consultation participants are in agreement that we should be able to direct match exceptional needs applicants.

### **APPEALS PROCESS**

All our applicants have the right to appeal a decision about their application. We asked our consultation participants if our appeals process should be simpler than the current 3 stage policy.

We asked: “Should the appeals process be made simpler i.e. have fewer stages?”

- The vast majority agreed (82.5%).

We asked: “Please give any other comments which you have about the Appeals Process”

- From 21 comments, the most common response was to “Make the appeals process simpler” (38.1%). This was followed by: No other trends were discernable.

71% focus groups participants all agreed that the process should be made simpler. Those who did not feel it should change commented that most appeals are resolved at stage 2 so simplifying the process didn’t seem important.

### ***Benchmarking Research – Appeals Process***

<b>Local authority or Housing Association</b>	<b>Number of Stages on Appeals Process</b>
Midlothian Council	<b>One</b>
Dundee City Council	<b>One</b>
East Dunbartonshire Council	<b>One</b>
East Ayrshire Council	<b>Two</b>
North Lanarkshire Council	<b>Two</b>
South Lanarkshire Council	<b>Two</b>
Stirling Council	<b>Two</b>
Moray Council	<b>Three</b>

Perth & Kinross Council	<b>Three</b>
Renfrewshire Council	<b>Three</b>
Edinburgh City Council	<b>Three</b>

It is clear from the consultation exercise that we should consider simplifying our appeals process. Benchmarking from other local authorities shows that there are varying approaches to how appeals processes are undertaken.

### **WELFARE REFORM REGULATIONS**

We asked our consultation participants whether we should revise our allocations policy to reflect the changes in the welfare benefits for under occupancy.

We asked: “Should the allocation policy change to be the same as the welfare reform rules in relation to under occupancy?”

- The most common response was to disagree (43.1%). However, 31.5% agreed and 25.4% were undecided.

We asked: “Please give any other comments which you have about Welfare Reform regulations”

- From 42 responses, the most recurrent suggestion was to “Allow applicants to bid for their choice of home” (19.1%). This was followed by: “Lack of suitably sized houses available” (14.3%); “Should permit spare rooms if medical needs require one” (11.9%); and “Allocations policy should not reflect under occupancy rules” (9.5%).

Our focus group participants agreed (75%) that the allocation policy should remain the same in relation to under occupancy.

### ***Benchmarking Research – Welfare Reform Regulations***

<b>Local authority or Housing Association</b>	<b>Policy</b>
Dundee City Council	One bedroom for: Single person or a couple; Two children of either sex who are younger than 8. An additional double bedroom for: Any other child (after the second).
Edinburgh City Council	Single person and couples eligible for 1 and 2 bedrooms. 2 children under 14 of the same sex can share a bedroom 2 children under 7 of different sexes can share a bedroom
North Lanarkshire Council	Single person and couples eligible for 1 and 2 bedrooms. 2 children under 16 of the same sex can share a bedroom 2 children under 8 of different sexes can share a bedroom

West Lothian Council	Single person and couples eligible for 1 bed properties 2 children under 8 can share a bedroom Applicants can apply for an additional room allocation if they wish
South Ayrshire Council	Single person and couples - eligible for 2 bed properties 2 children under 16 of the same sex can share a bedroom 2 children under 10 of different sexes can share a bedroom
Midlothian Council	Single person and couples - eligible for 1 bed properties 2 children under 16 of the same sex can share a bedroom 2 children under 10 of different sexes can share a bedroom

The results from our consultation exercise show that the majority of participants were in favour of keeping our current policy arrangements for children over the age of 8. Other local authorities seem to have varying policies which, like Falkirk Council, do not fall in line with the stipulations of the welfare benefits system.

## **ELECTED MEMBER'S CONSULTATION**

In addition to our consultation questionnaire, elected members were asked to provide their own views and views of their constituents on the consultation topics highlighted above.

The following issues/comments were highlighted:-

- Applicants who are affected by mental health conditions are not included within the current medial priority banding. Suggested that they should be considered for future procedures/policies
- At present only the number, age and sex of children are taken into consideration for the size of property that the household are entitled to and does not take account of any future or expected children which leads to imminent overcrowding, this should be considered of any policy changes
- Members noted that exceptional needs should be considered within the policy
- The generational and lifestyle make up of block properties and our high rise properties should be considered when allocating properties and therefore the current policy for the high flats should remain the same however consideration should be given to medical needs as well outwith the current over 60's policy.
- Members felt that consideration should be given to the possibility of a local lettings initiative for hard to let properties and should consider local applicants as a priority

- Members agreed that the letting quotas should be revised to give an equal ratio of properties to mainstream groups but flexibility should be considered to address future need
- There was a difference in opinion in regards to the letting of new build properties where one party wishes to maintain the current policy whilst another wishes to open it up to all applicants



## Falkirk Council

### Guidance on completing the equality and poverty impact assessment (EPIA)

#### Why do you need to do an EPIA?

The Equality Act 2010 sets out the process of equality impact assessment as being an appropriate method through which the public sector is able to show that it has given 'due regard' to the needs of people who may experience discrimination from unequal treatment and prejudice. If we fail to consider equality we risk making poor and unfair decisions which may discriminate and worsen inequality resulting in decisions being open to challenge which can be costly, time consuming and damaging to reputation.

#### Who might the strategy / policy affect?

The purpose of the EPIA is to test if the proposal is likely to negatively impact on equality protected groups see section **3.0**. This has been defined through the Equality Act 2010 and includes the following characteristics: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation. Everyone has the right to be treated fairly and to have the opportunity to fulfill their potential however, sometimes a person's ability to be independent, to feel safe, to be able to stay well fed, to have a house; to keep warm; to be employed; to access education and to be able to get other basic services to enhance health and well-being can all be compounded by discrimination based on any of the equality protected characteristics. For example cause and effect between homelessness and mental health; gender identity and feeling safe; employment with age and gender.

#### When should you carry out an EPIA?

An EPIA will be required if you are considering making a change to a service which is likely to impact on people. This will cover any new or revisions to strategies, policies, strategic plans, major programmes, projects, budget and service decisions which are likely to impact on staff and /or service users.

#### How do you gauge or describe the impact?

What will help you is if you are able to access and assess information and data. Section **3.3** is where you will record the data / information used. Remember an explicit aim of the EPIA is to reduce inequalities wherever possible.

As far as possible your assessment should be supported by available evidence. However where there is no evidence e.g. quantitative / qualitative data, you may have to use your 'best judgement' and support this with recommendation / action to improve the evidence available.

Not having or using available information / data is likely to mean that it is difficult to gauge the level of impact your proposal is likely to have. In the absence of information / data your EPIA risk rating has the potential to be higher than it need be.

What you are looking for in terms of impact is whether as a result of your proposal / policy / project people with protected characteristics are affected differently and whether that difference is unlawful, legitimate or dis-proportionate **See 5.0**. The outcomes you will be looking for from the EPIA are described in section **5.0**.

## Suggested impact descriptors:

LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
<p>No or low level of impact on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any of the protected equality groups;</li> <li>Quality of life for vulnerable groups;</li> <li>Access to services;</li> <li>Income</li> <li>Workforce and employment opportunities</li> </ul> <p>Mitigating actions / minimal adjustments required</p>	<p>Medium level impact on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some of the protected equality groups;</li> <li>Quality of life for vulnerable groups;</li> <li>Access to services</li> <li>Income</li> <li>Workforce and employment opportunities</li> </ul> <p>Mitigating actions / adjustments have been identified and these will further inform the proposal with the purpose of reducing the level of impact.</p> <p>Consultation could further inform / amend this potential impact rating.</p>	<p>High level impact on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some / all of the protected equality groups</li> <li>Creating a disproportionate impact for some / all of the protected equality groups</li> <li>Quality of life for vulnerable groups is restricted;</li> <li>Access to services is restricted</li> <li>Income</li> <li>Workforce and employment opportunities</li> </ul> <p>Some mitigating actions / adjustments have been identified however the removal of all potential impact may not be possible.</p> <p>Consultation could further inform / amend this potential impact rating.</p> <p>Unable to identify mitigating actions.</p>

**What do you do if you have identified negative impact?**

You should aim to identify what you can do to lessen the impact on the different equality protected characteristics. Mitigating actions can reduce your impact rating. These actions should be transferred to your service plan so that there is a 'checking mechanism' to make sure that the actions are delivered.

If you are unable to identify any mitigation you must explain your reasons for continuing without making any changes. See 5.3.

## Equality & Poverty Impact Assessment (EPIA)

To be completed by Division / Department / Service / Team Lead

### Information

<b>Name of EPIA: Allocations Policy Review</b>	<b>EPIA Reference No. (if applicable):</b>
<b>Division / Department / Service / Team Lead: Access to Housing</b>	<b>Contact details: Elizabeth Hood, Access to Housing Manager</b>
<b>1.0 Identify the main aims and projected outcomes of the proposal / policy / project outline:</b>	
<p>Falkirk Council has committed to reviewing its choice based allocations policy three years after its initial launch. During 2014 the Access to Housing Service completed a comprehensive review and consultation process on aspects of Falkirk Council's allocations policy to determine required amendments.</p> <p><b>Proposals</b></p> <p><b>Letting quotas</b></p> <p>Our allocations policy currently aims to let 50% of its homes to those who we have a statutory duty to re house through our homeless obligation, 25% is allocated to those who are currently tenants within the social rented sector (Falkirk Council or Local Housing Associations) and 25% to all other applicants. We have experienced a substantial drop in the number of homeless applicants on our waiting list and therefore the requirement to allocated 50% of our stock is no longer required. Through the allocations consultation period we asked if we should change the letting quotas and also should they be let on an equal ratio. <b>It is proposed that we amend out lettings quotas to equally distribute between the three main groups.</b></p> <p><b>Low demand properties</b></p> <p>Over the last two years we have experienced difficulties in letting larger flats in particular areas. This means that we have some properties that sit empty for a considerable amount of time. <b>It is proposed that we develop a system outwith our current allocations policy which will allow us more flexibility to let these properties in a different way. This would be under a local lettings initiative. A local lettings initiative will set up different but fair rules that will all us to let these properties fairly either considering the property type or the area.</b></p>	

### Letting initiative for new builds

Over the last two years Falkirk Council has been building its own new build properties for let under our HomeSpot allocations policy. Under the HomeSpot policy our current tenants (Home Movers) are given priority. The purpose of this policy was to free up other council housing properties therefore increase the volume of lets that we have. However this policy means that HomeSeekers (Homeless Applicants) and homestarters (waiting list applicants) do not have access to these properties. **It is proposed that we open up the option of new build properties to all groups (subject to committee approval).**

### Letting initiative for high flats

Falkirk Council has over 806 multi storey flats. A Local Lettings initiative was put in place to give preference to applicants over the age of 60. This means that we exclude 7% of our stock to applicants under the age of 60. **It is proposed that we introduce a sensitive lettings initiative to sustain the stable community but ensure that access is fair and equitable.**

### Advertising properties for housing with care

Housing with Care is housing for older people who are physically frail and need care and support services at home. Many of the housing have been designed or adapted to make living easier for older people. Current Housing with Care properties are not advertised within our HomeSpot bulletin. Instead we hold a list of all applicants who have been assessed with a requirement for housing with care and then match available properties to applicants with the highest level of need. **It is proposed that we complete further consultation on this area through the Older Persons Strategy. Results from this consultation will be incorporated into the review of older persons housing.**

### Address households with exceptional circumstances

Within our allocations policy that are a few exceptions where we will not advertise housing e.g. Housing with Care Level 1 and 2. However, we sometimes have the situation where an applicant is awarded Band 1 as they have an exceptional and extreme housing need and they have to bid alongside other applicants. **It is proposed that the policy be changed to allow the Council in exceptional circumstances to identify and match applicants to suitable properties.**

### Amending the Appeals process

All applicants on the waiting list have the right to appeal a decision about their application. The current appeals process has three stages which means a lengthy wait before the applicant has a final outcome. **It is proposed that this process is simplified and reduced to only two stages.**

### Under occupancy and welfare reform

In April 2013 the Government changed the welfare benefits system throughout the UK. The new rules restrict the size of home a tenancy in the social rented sector can receive Housing Benefit for. This is called the size criteria. This policy brings social housing in line with the current policy for those claiming housing benefit or Local Housing Allowance in the Private Rented Sector.

Housing benefit is now calculated based on the number of bedrooms in the house and then number of

people living there.

One bedroom is needed for :-

- A single adult or adult couple (married or not)
- Any other adult aged 16 or over
- Any two children of the same sex – aged 10- 15
- Any two children aged under 10 years – mixed or same sex
- Any other child (other than a foster child whose main home is elsewhere)
- A carer (or team of carers) who does not live with you but provides you or your partner with overnight care

Our allocation policy is different from the new regulations in the following ways:-

- A single person or couple can be allocated a 2 bedroom property
- Children over the age of 8 years can have their own bedroom
- Band 1 priority for overcrowding is awarded where 2 teenage children of mixed sex shared a bedroom.

**It is proposed that we maintain our current policy meantime allowing applicants to make the decision in regards to payment of the shortfall in rent.**

## Finance

2. 0 For budget changes <b>ONLY</b> please include information below:		Total	Benchmark e.g. Scottish Average
Current spend on this service – (£,000's)	Total		
Reduction / increases to this service budget (£,000's)	Per annum		
Is this a change e.g. to introduce a new Charge or Concession	Expected annual income total		
	Current cost per person		
When will the saving be achieved	Start date for savings		
	End date – if any		

## Equality Protected Characteristics

3.0 Which individuals / staff are likely to be affected by the proposal / policy / project? (please score)									
Equality protected characteristics	Age (A)	Disability (D)	Gender (G)	Ethnicity (E)	Religion (R)	Sexual orientation (SO)	Transgender (TG)	Pregnancy & Maternity (P&M)	Marriage & Civil Partnership (M&CP)
Insert X where appropriate	x	x							
Please summarise the <b>POSITIVE</b> impact for each <u>affected</u> protected characteristic using appropriate initial:	Please summarise the <b>NEGATIVE</b> impact for each <u>affected</u> protected characteristic using appropriate Initial			Please summarise the <b>NEUTRAL</b> impact for each <u>affected</u> protected characteristic using appropriate Initial					
<p><b>(A)</b> We are able to meet the social and housing needs of our applicants who are over the age of 60</p> <p><b>(D)</b> We are able to ensure that the correct housing is allocated to those with the appropriate needs that that housing offers</p>	<p><b>(A)</b> We are discriminating those under the age of 60 by restricting properties that they can bid for.</p>			<p><b>(A)</b></p> <p><b>(D)</b></p>					

## Wider inequality issues / cross cutting themes

3.1 Are there any cross cutting themes or poverty indicators which when combined with equality protected characteristics could increase the level of inequality for individuals / groups with protected characteristics.	
<b>Poverty / Inequality indicator</b>  <b>This list is not exclusive. Please add in categories or delete as necessary</b>	<b>Description of impact - will the proposal / policy / project have an impact on e.g. standard of living covering a person's ability to be independent, to feel safe, to be able to stay well fed, to have a house, to keep warm, to gain skills; to have a job and have access to other basic services to enhance well-being and reduce inequality.</b>

Wealth, income, poverty and welfare reform	<p>It is proposed to retain our current policy to re house families with children over the age of eight to larger properties in contrary to the housing benefit award which considers the payment of rent for an additional room for children over the age of ten. By maintaining the current policy Falkirk Council tenants with children between the age of 8-10 and in receipt of housing benefit are required to fulfil the shortfall in rent. This may result in households accruing rent arrears if they are unable to meet the shortfall from other income which could potentially mean that they cut back on other household necessities such as heat, food and power. However this policy also offers greater choice and flexibility for families, allowing them to consider and prepare for their future housing needs.</p>
Health inequalities; physical / emotional / behavioural	<p>As part of our consultation exercise we asked the public their views on the lettings initiative for our multi storey flats in the Callander Park area. At present we give preference to applicants over the age of 60. This stock amounts to around 7% of Falkirk Council's housing stock. By restricting the allocation of properties to over 60's we are limiting the volume of stock that is available to all applicants to rent.</p> <p>It is also proposed to introduce a policy to allow us greater flexibility to direct match properties to those with exceptional circumstances. Introducing this policy will have a positive impact on those households where we find it difficult to re house however there could be bad feeling from members of the community where a vacant property is directly matched through this policy.</p>

Physical security; homelessness; criminal justice;	<p>By reducing the quota of properties that are allocated to homeless applicants it may result in them waiting for longer for properties however it will also increase the number of properties available to our other groups and therefore reduce their waiting time. It is important to note however that we have a statutory duty to re house homeless applicants and guidance advises that we should be re housing homeless applicants in the shortest time possible.</p> <p>We give preference to applicants over the age of 60 to our multi storey properties. From a housing management perspective the current situation means that there are very low instances of anti-social behaviour and there is a community that has developed within the high flats. Changing the policy may have a detrimental affect on the emotional wellbeing of current residents as well as a potential increase in behavioural issues if younger residents have access to these homes.</p> <p>We consulted with the public on our current policy for the allocation of new builds properties which are allocated in the first instance to Home Movers. Members are to decide whether to continue with this policy decision or review it give all applicants an opportunity for bidding for new build properties. The current policy helps increase the turnover of properties i.e. we receive another property back for every new build let. However, we have received criticism from other applicants that they are not being treated fairly as they are not able to bid on new properties.</p>
Social responsibility / caring	<p>As part of the process for the allocation of properties we occasionally come across cases that may not fit within our policies current needs criteria but still have significant housing needs, albeit adhoc, that need to be addressed. In order to assist us with meeting these needs we are proposing that within our policy we can offer housing to those with exceptional circumstances.</p>
Influencing ability and participation; literacy / numeracy / language / rural	<p>Our current appeals process has a three stage process which can result in a length process and not meeting our targets to complete appeals with our allocated timescale of 28 days. Our consultation asked participants if they wished to see the number of stages reduce to assist in speedier responses. By reducing the number of steps this will be an easier process for applicants to follow and potentially encourage more applicants to exercise their right to appeal their decision however if we see an increase in the number of appeals the length of time to wait for a decision may increase.</p>



## Partners / other Stakeholders

3.2 Which sectors are likely to have an interest in or be affected by the proposal / policy / project?							
Partners / Stakeholders	Business	Councils	Education Sector	FIRE	NHS	Police	Third Sector
Insert X where appropriate:		X		X	X	X	x
Describe the interest / affect:							

<b>Other interested parties (please list):</b>	<b>Describe the nature of the relationship / impact:</b> <p>Other Local Authorities many have similar policies to Falkirk Council and will be looking at the changes we make to influence their own policies.</p> <p>Our Health partners will have an interest in how we allocate our housing with care properties as they will have clients that this may affect. We work closely with the health service to ensure that the individual needs of clients are met through our allocations policy. By changing the criteria for properties that are directly matched to housing with care applicants to a bidding process we may find that some applicants bid for properties that are inappropriate to their needs. Health professionals will be keen to ensure that the allocation of our properties meets their client's needs.</p> <p>Our Social work colleagues will be concerned about the access to accommodation for older people and the financial impact on families who decide to take on properties that are bigger than the housing benefit they may receive.</p> <p>Our Scottish Fire and Rescue Colleagues will have concerns about vacant properties that we find difficult to let as they are a focus for antisocial behaviour e.g. fire raising and squatters. This will also be a concern for colleagues in our environmental health section and Police Scotland.</p> <p>Our third sector partners often provide support to our most vulnerable clients. They will welcome the potential increase in the number of properties available to let by changing some of our letting criteria. They will also be concerned if we are unable to change some of our criteria. They will also be interested in the impact of how restrictions on welfare reform affect our tenants.</p>
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### Quantitative and / or qualitative evidence

<b>3.3 Please include any evidence or relevant information that has influenced the decisions contained in this SEIA (this could include demographic profiles; audits; research; health needs assessments; national guidance or legislative requirements)</b>	
<b>Quantitative evidence:</b>	<b>Describe type; where accessible and key findings</b>
<b>Social data:</b> Service and workforce equality profile; Census information, Customer / staff survey etc.	As part of the Local Housing Strategy a Housing need and demand assessment was completed. This set out the future housing needs for the area. <a href="http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/homes-property/policies-strategies/docs/local-housing-">http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/homes-property/policies-strategies/docs/local-housing-</a>

	<p><a href="http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/homes-property/policies-strategies/docs/local-housing-strategy/0%20Local%20Housing%20Strategy.pdf?v=201406020913">strategy/4%20Appendix%204%20-%20Community%20Care%20Housing%20Needs%20Assessment.pdf?v=201406020913</a></p> <p>The LHS <a href="http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/homes-property/policies-strategies/docs/local-housing-strategy/0%20Local%20Housing%20Strategy.pdf?v=201406020913">http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/homes-property/policies-strategies/docs/local-housing-strategy/0%20Local%20Housing%20Strategy.pdf?v=201406020913</a> provides an overview of the conclusions of this data. This notes that we will be facing an aging population which we will need to re house.</p> <p>A questionnaire and follow up focus groups were conducted during June and July 2014 to consult on the policy recommendations. A final conclusion report is available and attached to committee report that puts forward the policy change proposals.</p> <p>An analysis of those allocated housing with care properties shows that 27% of Housing with Care Applicants refused offers of properties that are directly matched to them. The refusal reasons cited are mainly that preferences were not met.</p>
<b>Environmental data:</b> Research; Geographic / location information; crime rates; crime types;	<p>Noting that the population of the multi storey properties has an average age of 73 we need to consider the impact of removing the age barrier for access to this housing may have. By reducing the age access to these properties we may see a significant increase in the number of ASB complaints due to potential lifestyle clashes. The age of applicants on our waiting list is as follows</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15.4% of applicants are age 25 years or less,</li> <li>• 32% of applicants are between 26 and 40 years,</li> <li>• 29.3% of applicants are between 41 and 60 years</li> <li>• the remaining 23.3% of applicants are over sixty, over third of whom are over 75.</li> </ul> <p>Only 0.5% of the overall Antisocial behaviour cases were recorded for the 806 multi story properties compared to the whole of Falkirk Council's stock where 11.7% of tenancies have antisocial behaviour cases raised. Therefore the multi storey properties have a very low instance of antisocial behaviour which is mostly likely accounted for by the average age of the tenants in the properties.</p>
<b>Financial data:</b> Procurement / budget; welfare benefits; welfare reform	<p>2659 tenancies were affected by the changes in welfare reform in regards to the bedroom tax where they would need to pay the under occupancy tax.</p>

	At 31/3/14 there were 2948 Falkirk Council tenancies that had children under the age of 10. Of these 1254 were between the age of 8 to 10. These households will be affected by the under occupancy charge until the child reaches the age of 10.
<b>Health data:</b> ageing; well-being;	The average age profile of those in the high flats is 73.
<b>Qualitative evidence:</b>	Consultation questionnaire and follow up focus groups conducted during June and July 2014. Find conclusion report is available and attached to committee report that puts forward the proposed policy changes.
<b>Social</b> - case studies; personal /group feedback / other:	Consultation questionnaire and follow up focus groups conducted during June and July 2014. A final report is available and attached to committee report that puts forward the policy change proposals.

#### Best judgement over hard evidence

3.4 (a) Has 'best judgement' been used in place of data/research/evidence?  YES / NO	3.3(b) Who provided the 'best judgement'	3.3cWhat gaps in data/information were identified?
		We are unable to adequately profile the impact that reducing the quota of properties to homeless applicants.
<b>3.4(d) Is further research necessary? YES / NO</b>		
If NO – please say why: Unable to conduct conclusive research to influence some of the policy changes. Close monitoring of any changes over a set period will be required to ensure that an adverse impact does not occur.		

#### Consultation

<b>4.0 Has the proposal / policy / project been subject to involvement/consultation? If YES - state which individuals and organisations were involved / consulted; what</b>
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form the involvement / consultation took and outcome.						
<b>Who was involved/consulted:</b>  <b>Please indicate if it was active involvement or consultation</b>	<b>List:</b>  Tenants and Residents Groups  Housing applicants / general public  Consultation Panel  Community Councils  Elected Members  Anyone in the area that has completed a survey on the topic we consulted on. The survey was advertised on our website, in one stop shops and via twitter. Over 270 responses were received.					
<b>How was the involvement/consultation carried out?</b>  <b>For other – describe:</b>	<b>Focus group</b>  x	<b>Survey</b>  x	<b>Display / exhibitions</b>  x	<b>Users panels</b>  x	<b>Public event</b>  x	<b>Other</b>  x
<b>What were the results from consultation?</b>	<b>List:</b>  Survey – over a period of ten weeks an online and paper survey was available to comment on the areas of the policy that we wanted to consult on. We received 279 surveys in total.  Focus Groups – in addition to our survey we held a series of focus groups for individuals who had noted an interest within our survey. These groups discussed the same themes as the survey.					
<b>4.1 Has the proposal / policy / project been reviewed / changed as a result of consultation?</b>	<b>4.2 Have the results of the consultation been fed back to the consultees?</b>					<b>YES</b>
<b>4.3 Is further consultation recommended</b>						<b>YES</b>  <b>NO</b>
<b>4.4 If <u>no</u> consultation has taken place. Please say why:</b>						

**Assessment outcome**

<b>5.0 Which of the following outcomes best matches your assessment of this proposal / policy / project?</b>
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No major change required	Adjust the proposal	Continue with the proposal	Stop and remove the proposal
The EPIA demonstrates that the proposal is robust; there is no potential for discrimination and opportunities to promote equality have been taken.	The EPIA identifies some potential impact or missed opportunities. Adjustments can be made to remove barriers / promote opportunities.	The EPIA identifies adverse impact / missed opportunities. Adjustments cannot be identified. <b>You must set out reasons for continuing with this proposal:</b>	The proposal demonstrates actual / potential unlawful discrimination.  Stop; remove and / or make changes.
The quantitative and qualitative data gathered supports the changes proposed.			

### Mitigating actions to minimise any negative impact

5.1 Have mitigating actions been identified? YES / NO. If YES outline below:				
Issue	Action	Lead officer	Evaluation and Review date:	Strategic reference to Corporate Plan / Service Plan / Equality Outcomes
Amending quota allocations for mainstream lettings groups	Proposed that the policy is amended as suggested however the impact be closely monitored and reviewed after 12 months	Elizabeth Hood	12 months from date of implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our citizens will be supported to make positive health choices and lifestyles in order that they can live longer</li> <li>Our citizens continue to access critical services that meet their needs</li> <li>Our housing continues to meet the needs of people who live and may wish to live in our area</li> </ul>
Amend our appeals process to	Proposed that the time taken to complete	Elizabeth Hood	Monitored monthly. Comparison between policy changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our citizens continue to access critical</li> </ul>

make it simpler and quicker	allocations appeals is monitored monthly through Local Performance Indicators		completed after 12 months from implementation	services that meet their needs •Our housing continues to meet the needs of people who live and may wish to live in our area
Introduce an exceptional needs policy	With the introduction of this policy, clear monitoring, quality control and staff guidance will need to be introduced	Elizabeth Hood	12 Months from date of implementation	•Our citizens continue to access critical services that meet their needs •Our housing continues to meet the needs of people who live and may wish to live in our area

### No mitigating actions

**5.2 Where a negative impact on diverse communities has been identified and no mitigation actions have been put forward; what is the justification for continuing with the proposal / policy / project?**

**Please outline:**

There are no negative impacts.

**EPIA Equality commentary**

<b>5.3 Equality commentary</b>		
Comments:  There are several changes that are being considered within this policy review.  These proposals seek to increase the housing options for applicants and improve the service delivery of the allocations policy.  Any mitigating impacts to equality groups are superseded by the increased options and service delivery to all applicants.	Signature:	
	Date:	

**Sign off**

<b>5.4 Sign off by Division / Department / Service / Team EPIA assessment officer</b>			
Date of sign off:		Signature:	

<b>5.5 Sign off by Head of Service / Service Director</b>			
Date of sign off:		Signature:	

<b>COMMITTEE / BOARD REPORT IMPLICATIONS SUMMARY</b>
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Information from the EPIA must inform any Board / Executive report.



## Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment

### To be completed by Equality Task Group - Internal Equality Check

<b>Name of EPIA:</b>	<b>EPIA Reference No. (if applicable):</b>		
<b>Date - EPIA received by Corporate Policy:</b>			
<b>Division and Service Contact details:</b>			
<b>Date - EPIA returned to Division and Service:</b>			

### EPIA INFORMATION

<b>Proposal / Policy / Project outline:</b>	
<b>Service- Project Manager:</b>	<b>Contact details:</b>
<b>Corporate Policy – Equality Check:</b>	<b>Contact details:</b>

Is the EPIA complete?	Is there a review date for the proposal / EPIA?	Have mitigating actions been identified where adverse impact known?	Have the actions been added to the relevant service plan?
YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO	YES / NO

OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF EPIA:	ASSESSMENT FINDINGS
The EPIA has used data; appropriate consultation; identified mitigating actions as well as ownership and review of actions to demonstrate compliance with the general and public sector equality duties.	
OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF EPIA:	ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS
The EPIA has not demonstrated use of data; appropriate consultation; identification of mitigating actions to confidently demonstrate compliance with the general and public sector equality duties.	

Where adverse impact on diverse communities has been identified and it is intended to continue with the proposal / policy / project; has justification for continuing without making changes been made.

YES / NO

If YES – describe:

EPIA - Publication checklist Corporate Policy Team	Passed to Web Team	Estimated date of publication
EPIA publication summary produced		
EPIA published on the website		
Signature on behalf of EPIA equality task group:		
Date:		