

The background of the slide features the Falkirk Council Coat of Arms. It is a shield divided into four quarters. The top-left quarter shows a saltire (X-shaped cross) on a blue field. The top-right quarter shows a stag's head facing left on a red field. The bottom-left quarter shows a three-masted sailing ship on a blue field. The bottom-right quarter shows a crowned eagle with wings spread on a red field. Above the shield is a crown with four fleurs-de-lis. Below the shield is a ribbon with the motto 'A'NE FOR A' in white capital letters.

Agenda Item 7

**Update on Changes to Falkirk Council's
Allocations Policy from October 2021**

Falkirk Council

Title: Update on changes to Falkirk Council's Allocations Policy from October 2021
Meeting: Executive
Date: 15 March 2022
Submitted By: Acting Director of Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update Members on progress of the interim special lettings initiative to Falkirk Council's allocations policy, to relieve pressures on the homeless service following the impact of the pandemic.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. **The Executive is asked to agree: -**

(1) Extend the period of the special lettings' initiative for a further three months to allow the finality of the impact to be realised.

3. Climate Change Implications

- 3.1. The recommended decision does not give rise to any material implications for the Council's climate change targets and obligations. Officers' assessment is that the policies and procedures and the proposed changes to them will not lead to changes in service provision or the deployment of resources that would increase or decrease the emission of carbon

4. Background

- 4.1. At the Executive on 19 October 2021, Members were asked to approve a lettings initiative to increase the percentage of properties allocated to Home Seekers from 45% to 70% for a period of six months. Members requested that this would be for a period of three months and Officers were asked to report back with the findings by February 2022.
- 4.2. The proposed special lettings initiative sought to achieve the following objectives
- meet the ongoing needs of those experiencing the greatest housing need in the Falkirk Council area
 - significantly reduce the backlog of homeless households still awaiting offers of settled accommodation. This ensures the trauma caused by

periods of homelessness are kept to a minimum and the local authority is not forced to breach the Unsuitable Accommodation Order or convert further properties from mainstream stock to meet ongoing temporary accommodation demand

- ensure we fulfil the aims of our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, in line with Scottish Government homelessness strategy objectives, as well as the local authority's ongoing statutory obligations
- allow us to return properties (including desirable family homes) currently used for temporary accommodation back for mainstream let
- Prevent the use of B&B at an average cost of £137 per person, per night from the General Fund budget

5. Considerations

Current Homelessness/housing supply problem

- 5.1. Our homeless applicants who we have a duty to rehouse have, over the last 12 months, presented to us with increasing vulnerabilities. Over 44% of them were fleeing domestic abuse, and many (32%) have been asked to leave due to the stresses of the pandemic. Over 50% cite they have a mental health condition and 39% with a physical, or other, disability.
- 5.2. There is still an unprecedented number of applicants in temporary accommodation with an average of 349 households between October to December 2021, although this reduced to 329 in December. Time spent in temporary accommodation is currently averaging around 144 days, pre-pandemic this was 107 days.
- 5.3. There has been a 28% reduction in the number of properties available to rent since 2020
- 5.4. Prior to the pandemic there were, on average, 308 Home Seekers on the housing register. Since the pandemic this figure more than doubled to 627, and now we currently sit with 758 Home Seekers on the housing register.

Impact of the interim changes

- 5.5. On 27 October 2021, the percentage of sequencing changed for mainstream properties, with 70% of these being sequenced for Home Seekers, 15% for Home Movers and 15% for Home Starters. From 27 October 2021 to 26 January 2022, there have been six issues of Homespot with a total of 287 properties advertised.
- 5.6. The following table illustrates each group that properties were advertised for during this period:

Group	Number of properties advertised	Further information
Home Seekers	149	Statutory homeless applicants
Home Starters	11	
Home Movers	31	
Housing with Care Level 3	18	
Adapted	43	
All Groups	35	Properties that have been previously advertised under a specific group, but no interest received from applicants

- 5.7. During the three-month period, the number of homeless offers increased by 62 properties compared to the previous system.

Group	%	Current	%	Previous	Difference
Home Mover	15	31	27.5	55	-24
Home Seeker	70	149	45	87	62
Home Starter	15	11	27.5	49	-38

- 5.8. There are currently 754 Home Seeker applicants, with 131 currently on offer within the Council area, 105 for Falkirk Council properties and 26 for Registered Social Landlord (RSL) properties.
- 5.9. The time taken for homeless applicants to be rehoused has not changed dramatically during the three-month period, with households waiting an average of 343 days between April to December 2021 to be rehoused. In 2020, over the same time period, the average was 314 days.
- 5.10. At the current rate of available properties, as mentioned in 5.8, if we use a 45% sequencing then 381 properties would be available for Home Seekers in a year, whilst at 70%, 593 properties would be available. If we solely look at making an offer of housing to current Home Seekers this would take 2 years to do at 45%, whilst at 70% this would be reduced to 16 months.

6. Consultation

- 6.1. As this initiative is to assist the Council in meeting a statute obligation no consultation has been done

7. Implications

Financial

- 7.1. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Resources

- 7.2. There are no resource implications arising from this report.

Legal

- 7.3. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Risk

- 7.4. There is a risk of further scrutiny from Scottish Government and the Scottish Housing Regulator if the current levels of Home Seekers still awaiting permanent accommodation remain the same. There is also a risk of further costs to the General Fund should we have to revert to B&B usage if we cannot move applicants on from temporary accommodation.

Equalities

- 7.5. No equality and poverty impact assessment was required.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- 7.6. There are no sustainability or environmental impacts.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1. This report presents updates on recent special letting initiative, and recommendations to ensure the Council's continues to meet the needs of its most vulnerable housing applicants and the objectives of Rapid Re-housing.

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Appendices

None

List of Background Papers:

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

- Report to Executive Committee 19 October 2022: Local Housing Strategy 2017-2022 Annual Review