Tenant Consultation Report: Draft Allocation Policy

1. Introduction and Background

The purpose of this report is to provide information on the staff and customer consultation and review process for the new draft Allocation Policy.

Due to the changes made by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 and following Customer Services Team review meeting 18th January 2019, it was decided that a rewrite of the allocation policy was required to allow for efficiencies and improvements to be made to the process for letting houses.

2. Background

To comply with the provisions of the new Housing Act and make further improvements to the current Allocation Policy and Procedure, the decision was taken to introduce a new Allocation Policy. The policy review consultation process is discussed in the following report.

2.1 Changes to categories of reasonable preference

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 introduced a number of changes to the allocation of housing including changes in reasonable preference groups, property ownership, suspensions, short SSTs, appeals and consultation.

Under the 2014 Act there are very few significant changes to the existing and amended categories of “reasonable preference”. The 2014 Act has amended section 20 of the 1987 Act to give the following categories of applicants’ reasonable preference. These groups are:

- People who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and who have unmet housing needs
- People who live in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs
• Social housing tenants who are under-occupying their home

It has been left up to landlords to decide how much weight to give to each reasonable preference group.

Under the existing and new reasonable preference categories the definition of homeless or threatened with homelessness remains the same as prescribed by the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 which is “Someone who has no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere or who has such accommodation, but it is not reasonable for him or her to occupy it”.

Currently, we give priority to applicants who are threatened with homelessness in a LHA Homelessness category. This is in addition to our section 5 homeless protocol with Glasgow City Council where currently we aim for 35% of our total lets go to homeless referrals.

The term “unsatisfactory housing conditions” can cover a wide range of circumstances from the physical condition of the property, its suitability for medical needs, overcrowding and other unsatisfactory living conditions of the applicant such as domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour or harassment from neighbours. Our current allocations policy awards points for medical, overcrowding, harassment and so forth.

Under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 both those who are homeless / threatened with homelessness and those living in unsatisfactory housing conditions must also have unmet housing needs. By unmet housing needs the Act states,

“…. where the social landlord considers the persons to have housing needs which are not capable of being met by housing options which are available”.

Consequently, the definition of unmet housing needs can encompass a variety of circumstances. Our existing allocations policy already mirrors many aspects of unmet housing need such as overcrowding, below tolerable standard, harassment and so forth.

The third new reasonable preference category introduced by the 2014 Act is those social housing tenants who are under-occupying their home. It is likely that this was introduced to give those applicants affected by the under-occupancy charge priority to downsize under allocations policies.

3. Consultation and Review

Under Section 4 of the 2014 Act, we are required to include and consult with the following groups when reviewing our policy:
• applicants on the housing list:
• tenants;
• registered tenant organisations; and
• such other persons as landlords see fit.

To fulfil this requirement a number of staff and customer consultation exercises have been carried out to date. The following is a summary of the consultation:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tr>
<td>Articles in the tenants newsletter advising a review of the allocation policy planned and seeking interest for consultation and review</td>
<td>Dec. 2018 &amp; May 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customer Service Team consultation and review of the current Allocation Policy</td>
<td>8.01.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter to LHA consultation register for customers interested in allocations</td>
<td>26.03.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter to customers who expressed interest from LHA consultation register and the Residents Panel inviting to first consultation event to be held 8.04.19</td>
<td>2.04.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>First customer consultation focus group event to discuss current policy and arrange feedback for new policy</td>
<td>8.04.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter 2 to focus group arranging next meeting to be held 17.04.19</td>
<td>17.04.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customer Service Team consultation and review of the proposed draft Allocation Policy</td>
<td>18.04.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second customer consultation focus group event to provide feedback on draft allocation policy</td>
<td>17.04.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy Woking Group feedback on 1st draft of Allocation Policy</td>
<td>16.4.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resident Panel feedback on the proposed draft Allocation Policy</td>
<td>3.06.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consultation event at the Preshal Trust to capture other customer feedback on draft policy</td>
<td>10.06.19</td>
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The customer consultation focus group was comprised of five members, two of which were tenants and three owner occupiers, all of which live locally. To gain feedback from a wider audience, a consultation event was carried out in the Preshal Trust. This is a local facility providing support services and a range of activities to local, often more vulnerable people. At this event nine people provided input into the consultation and review process, including two with experience of homelessness and one private rented tenant.
3.1 **Future consultation**

A consultation event has been arranged for Tuesday 18th June in the local, Little Branches nursery.

4. **Policy Change: Summary**

Following feedback from staff and customers, some of the key proposed changes made to the policy include the following:

- Introduction of a Local Lettings Plan to allow for a better degree of flexibility during, for example, during a new build programme, or response to a fall in demand for housing. The proposal is for a Local Letting Plan to include annual letting quotas which would then not have to be fixed for the duration of the policy.
- Introduction of ‘exceptional circumstances’ to provide a degree of flexibility to senior staff to make allocations of housing out-with the standard approach set out in the policy
- Widening of medical priorities to include points for medical conditions other than mobility
- Widening of the ‘harassment or abuse’ categories to include a category for LHA tenants suffering harassment or abuse over a period of time, which action taken by the association has failed to find a resolution.
- Higher points awarded for under-occupation as per the legislation
- Mutual exchange extended to private sector tenancies
- Reduction of the number of housing lists we operate at present from five (general, transfer, priority 1, bedroom tax, LHA homeless); to two (general, transfer) for a more efficient and effective process. This will be in addition to the homeless section five referral protocol in place with Glasgow City Council.

The current occupancy standards/room size will not be changed. The changes to the suspensions are in line with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014.

5. **Conclusion**

This report has outlined the consultation and review process required prior to the introduction of the proposed new Allocation Policy.