
HOMEARGYLL COMMON ALLOCATION POLICY – PROPOSED CHANGES

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Argyll and Bute Council is no longer a social landlord. The Council housing stock was transferred to Argyll Community Housing Association in 2006. The Council retains the Strategic Housing Role within the local authority. One of the key functions the Council continues to have legal responsibility for is taking and assessing homeless applications. The Council is a partner in the HOMEArgyll common housing register and relies on the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in HOMEArgyll to provide permanent accommodation for households assessed as homeless by the Council. Currently all applicants are entitled to two offers of housing.
- 1.2 The HOMEArgyll partnership consists of Argyll and Bute Council, Argyll Community Housing Association (ACHA), Dunbritton Housing Association, Fyne Homes and West Highland Housing Association (WHHA).
- 1.3 As members are aware, we are currently experiencing high numbers of homelessness, high numbers of people accommodated in unsuitable temporary accommodation, and excessively long waiting lists for housing, which have in part contributed to the Council declaring a Housing Emergency. Reacting to these issues, the HOMEArgyll partnership have reviewed their lettings policy in order to establish if changes can be made which will help to assist the situation by allowing a more focused and flexible policy in terms of prioritising homeless households.
- 1.4 The paper outlines changes recommended by the HOMEARGYLL partnership which must be approved by all individual member bodies before it can be implemented. Consequently, the paper requests the Council to approve the proposed letting policy changes.
- 1.5 In addition, the Council's Housing Service recommends the Council formally requests HOMEARGYLL RSL partners to increase the number of allocations it awards to statutory homeless households.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council consider and approve:-

Firstly, the following HOMEArgyll proposed policy changes:-

- Reduce the number of permanent offers of housing from two to one for households who have the maximum 200 point urgent housing need award.
- If the HOMEArgyll partners identify a particular pressure in the housing market the policy will address this by creating flexibility in the allocations process to assist to alleviate the identified pressure. This will only apply if the identified pressure in the housing market affects households with the maximum 200-point award under the policy.

Secondly, that a formal Council request be put to the HOMEArgyll Registered Social Landlords to increase the percentage of allocations to statutory homeless households from 50% to 60% while there are households in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

HOMEARGYLL COMMON ALLOCATION POLICY – PROPOSED CHANGES

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The main purpose of this report is to provide detail to Members on the proposed changes to the HOMEArgyll lettings policy which will assist with a more streamlined approach to providing permanent accommodation for homeless households.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council consider and approve:-

Firstly, the following HOMEArgyll proposed policy changes:-

- Reduce the number of permanent offers of housing from two to one for households who have the maximum 200 point urgent housing need award.
- If the HOMEArgyll partners identify a particular pressure in the housing market the policy will address this by creating flexibility in the allocations process to assist to alleviate the identified pressure. This will only apply if the identified pressure in the housing market affects households with the maximum 200-point award under the policy.

Secondly, that a formal Council request be put to the HOMEArgyll Registered Social Landlords to increase the percentage of allocations to statutory homeless households from 50% to 60% while there are households in unsuitable temporary accommodation.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 The Council declared a Housing Emergency in June 2023 and one of the reasons for this decision was the pressure facing the Council in terms of discharging statutory duties in relation to homeless legislation.

4.2 Since the pandemic, the number of HOMEArgyll allocations has reduced significantly and has still not recovered. At the same time the percentage of total allocations going to homeless households has increased slightly, indicating the increased demand from that sector.

- 4.3 At 1st August 2023 there were 3,166 households on the HOMEArgyll waiting list. 388 had the 200 maximum urgent housing needs points as follows:
- 254 households had 200 homeless points;
 - 30 households had 200 urgent medical need points;
 - 92 households had 200 domestic abuse points;
 - 3 households had 200 leaving care points;
 - 9 households had 200 management transfer points
- 4.4 At the same time the number of offers of accommodation made to homeless households that were refused has increased. In 2022/23 there were 126 refusals of permanent accommodation offers by statutory homeless households. Only 36 of these were appealed and only 15 of those appeals were upheld. This means there are significant unnecessary delays being created in the process of finding permanent accommodation for homeless households because so many households are selecting to wait for a second offer.
- 4.5 These delays are occurring at the current time of increased housing pressure and in order to reduce this problem the HOMEArgyll proposal is to reduce the number of permanent offers of housing from two to one for households who have the maximum 200 point urgent housing need award. It is anticipated this will help speed up the process of finding people permanent accommodation.
- 4.6 Although there has been an increase in demand for housing across Argyll and Bute in recent years there is significant pressure in certain areas of the local authority area for one bedroom properties. As an example:
- 64% of statutory homeless households are waiting for a **one bedroom** property.
 - 62% of statutory homeless households waiting for a one bedroom property are waiting for a 1 bedroom property in either **Lomond or Lorn**.
 - **70% of homeless households** waiting for over 26 weeks for permanent housing are waiting for a **one bedroom property**.
 - **51% of homeless households waiting over 26 weeks** for an offer of housing are waiting for a **one bedroom in the Lorn or Lomond areas**.
- 4.7 Clearly, the availability of one bedroom accommodation does not match up with the demand. In reaction to this imbalance in the type and location of properties and demand, the second HOMEArgyll proposal is to create flexibility in the allocations process to assist in alleviating where there is an identified pressure. This flexibility in the allocation policy will only apply if the identified pressure in the housing market affects households with the maximum 200-point award under the policy. In effect this would allow for two bedroom properties to be offered to homeless households only requiring one bedroom properties.

4.8 The HOMEArgyll partners consulted on these two proposed changes to the policy in April 2023. Over 2000 households were issued consultation documents and the consultation was also placed on the HOMEArgyll website to give all stakeholders an opportunity to give their views. There were 431 responses in total.

- In terms of offers to priority groups changing from two to one, 210 were in favour and 221 were against. Despite the fact that a narrow majority of respondents wished to retain the two offers the evidence in this paper demonstrates that only 15 of 126 offers to statutory homeless households which were refused were deemed unreasonable. HOMEArgyll partners agreed while the consultation feedback was valid there was a need to prioritise this change to assist the overall objective of tackling the housing emergency.
- In relation to the proposal to introduce flexibility with bedroom size for pressure areas 382 were in favour and 49 were against.

4.9 The second recommendation in this paper is not a specific HOMEArgyll recommendation but a direct Council request to the Registered Social Landlords and as such it was not part of the consultation process. The Scottish Government Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group published a report in July 2023. This report recommended that local authorities should look to increase the percentage of lets to homeless households for a fixed period to address the backlog of households in temporary accommodation waiting for a permanent homes. This should include an increased and significant contribution from Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) where appropriate. As Argyll and Bute Council is a stock transfer authority the Council relies on RSLs to provide permanent accommodation for homeless households. It is proposed that a request be made to the RSLs to increase the quota of allocations from 50% to 60% while there are homeless households in unsuitable temporary accommodation as this will assist the Council in delivering its statutory obligations to homeless households.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 This report provides the detail which supports the proposed changes to the HOMEArgyll policy which will help to address the increasing pressures on social housing from households in urgent housing need. In addition it proposes the Council request HOMEArgyll RSL partners to allocate more housing to homeless households. It is considered these changes will play some part in tackling the current Housing Emergency

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Policy – reduces offers to 200 point cases from two to one.

- 6.2 Financial - none arising from this report.
- 6.3 Legal – The Council has a statutory duty to take and assess homeless applications.
- 6.4 HR – none.
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: positive in terms of addressing areas of high pressure in the housing system.
 - 6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics – none.
 - 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty - positive in terms of addressing identified housing pressures
 - 6.5.3 Islands – positive in giving HOMEArgyll partners the ability to address identified housing pressures on the islands
- 6.6 Climate Change – the allocation of social housing delivers positive impacts for energy efficiency for households and also for climate change as the properties are legally required to meet current Greener Standards.
- 6.7 Risk – none.
- 6.8 Customer Service – none.

Kirsty Flanagan, Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth

Councillor Robin Currie, Policy Lead for Strategic Development

August 2023

For further information contact:

Douglas Whyte
Team Lead – Housing Strategy

E-mail: douglas.whyte@argyll-bute.gov.uk
Tel: 01546 604 785