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Introduction

The Association has recently reviewed its Letting Policy and Housing Application Suspension and Cancellation Policy. As part of the review process the Association had a duty to consult with tenants, housing applicants, Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) and any other persons the Association considers appropriate.

The Association also has a duty in accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 to prepare and publish a report on the consultation on the review of these policies. This report provides details of the consultation process and the outcome to the review process.

The report will cover the following:

- The scope of the consultation.
- The methods of consultation adopted.
- The outcomes to the consultation.
- How the consultation influenced the review process.

The Scope of the Consultation

The primary scope of the consultation was to seek feedback and opinion from stakeholders with regards to new provisions introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 in relation to the allocation of houses. The consultation process focused around the newly defined reasonable preference groups, the new provisions surrounding owner occupation and new provisions surrounding the suspension of new applicants to the waiting list.

Stakeholders were asked to provide feedback and opinion in relation to the following issues:

- What factors should be considered as unsatisfactory housing conditions?
- What level of priority should be attached to households who under-occupy their property?
- Whether or not the Association should take into account home ownership.
- The circumstances in which home owners should be awarded priority.
- The grounds in which the Association should consider suspending a new application for housing.

Methods of Consultation

The formal consultation process took place between February and March 2019. The Association highlighted in its December 2018 newsletter that the Letting Policy and Housing Application Suspension and Cancellation Policy would be reviewed during 2019.

During February and March 2019 the Association consulted with both tenants and housing applicants. The Association consulted with 636 tenants and 366 housing applicants. The Association does not have any Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs).

The formal consultation process involved the Association writing to all tenants and housing applicants on an individual basis. As part of the consultation process tenants and housing applicants were issued with a comprehensive information booklet that details the legislative changes introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, details of the Association's current practice with regards to the allocation of housing and details of how the new provisions could impact these practices. Those consulted were also asked to provide their feedback and opinions by completing and returning a questionnaire based on the information provided in the consultation booklet. Those consulted were given the opportunity to request the consultation documentation in alternative languages and formats.

The Association published details of the consultation, along with the Association's current Letting Policy and Housing Application Suspension and Cancellation Policy on its website. This allowed the consultation to be opened up to the wider public.

Consultation Questions & Outcome

During the consultation process tenants and housing applicants were asked to answer a series of questions. Of the 636 tenants consulted, 27 responses were received representing a response rate of 4.2%. Of the 366 housing Applicant consulted, 20 responses were received representing a response rate of 5.5%.

The questions and responses, which are divided between tenants and housing applicants and are detailed below:

1. Do you think the issues listed below constitute unsatisfactory housing conditions?

	<u>Tenants</u>		<u>Housing Applicants</u>	
Overcrowding	23	(85.2%)	14	(70.0%)
Temporary / Care-of Accommodation	12	(44.4%)	7	(35.0%)
Medical Conditions	20	(74.1%)	15	(75.0%)
Relationship / Marital Breakdown	17	(63.0%)	6	(30.0%)
Property Defect / Lack of Facilities	15	(55.6%)	11	(55.0%)
Support Requirements	8	(29.6%)	5	(25.0%)
Harassment or Abuse	20	(74.1%)	8	(40.0%)
Under-occupancy	9	(33.3%)	7	(35.0%)

2. What factors do you think constitute unsatisfactory housing conditions?

No factors other than those listed above were suggested by either tenants or housing applicants.

3. Do you think that someone who is under-occupying their house should be given more, less or the same priority as someone who is overcrowded?

	<u>Tenants</u>		<u>Housing Applicants</u>	
More	5	(18.5%)	1	(5.0%)
Same	18	(66.7%)	11	(55.0%)
Less	4	(14.8%)	8	(40.0%)

4. Should owner-occupiers who can access their home safely be given points for any other priority need / housing conditions?

	<u>Tenants</u>		<u>Housing Applicants</u>	
Yes	1	(3.7%)	3	(15.0%)
No	11	(40.7%)	9	(45.0%)
Unsure	15	(55.6%)	8	(40.0%)

5. If answered yes to question 4, please state what housing need factors you think owner occupiers should be awarded points for.

The four respondents who answered yes to question 4 of the survey all provided feedback in relation to this question. The following were suggested as factors that owner occupiers should be awarded points for:

- Medical Needs.
- Owners facing safety concerns within their home.
- Owners living within the vicinity of anti-social neighbours.
- Owners suffering from abuse within their home.
- Owner occupiers facing homelessness.

6. Should the Association suspend housing applications for the reasons below?

	<u>Tenants</u>		<u>Housing Applicants</u>	
Anti-social Behaviour	24	(88.9%)	17	(85.0%)
Previous Conviction	10	(37.0%)	9	(45.0%)
Recovery of Possession Order	10	(37.0%)	8	(40.0%)
Abandonment of a Tenancy	14	(51.6%)	9	(45.0%)
Rent Arrears or Tenancy Related Debts	9	(33.3%)	10	(50.0%)
False Information	20	(74.0%)	16	(80.0%)
Refusing Offers of Accommodation	7	(26.0%)	6	(30.0%)

Conclusions

Despite a low response rate, a number of trends were identified and taken into consideration when reviewing the Letting Policy and Housing Application Suspension and Cancellation Policy.

Overcrowding, medical needs and harassment were factors that the highest number of respondents considered to reflect unsatisfactory housing conditions. These factors were considered when reviewing the Letting Policy with the three levels of medical priority being retained within the policy. The harassment sections of the policy have been reviewed and the policy has been revised to reflect two levels of harassment priority. The first tier relates to those applying for re-housing on the grounds of domestic abuse, severe harassment and imminent risk. The second tier of harassment priority relates to those who are applying for housing because their quality of life is being adversely affected by social / environmental issues within the vicinity of their home. The Association will continue to award priority for those applicants experiencing overcrowding.

The majority of respondents were of the opinion that overcrowding and under-occupancy should be awarded the same levels of priority. However, for respondents who stated that those experiencing overcrowding and under-occupancy should be awarded different levels of priority, the majority were of the opinion that overcrowding should carry a higher level of priority. This is reflected in the policy with overcrowding being awarded a higher level of priority. Under-occupancy has been expanded to cover all tenants who rent from a local authority or housing association.

Relationship breakdown was a factor that a relatively low number of respondents considered as an unsatisfactory housing condition. A specific points award for applicant's subject to a relationship breakdown has been removed from the policy. However, other sections of the policy including the sections relating to overcrowding and sharing amenities make provision for people subject to a relationship breakdown.

With respect to home owners, the majority of respondents were unsure of whether or not home ownership should be taken into consideration. Of those who held a specific view, most were of the opinion that home owners should not be awarded priority on the waiting list. However, those who did think that home owners should receive some priority were of the opinion that priority should be given to homeowners suffering from medical conditions, those subject to anti-social behaviour by neighbours, those facing risk in their own home and those facing homelessness.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 prevents the Association from taking home ownership into account in cases where the applicant is exposed to risk of safety concerns. The revised policy therefore contains these grounds and also includes an additional ground where home owners, who are subject to repossession, are awarded potential homelessness priority. The introduction of this additional ground will therefore assist some home owners who face homelessness.

With regards to the statutory grounds for suspending a new housing application, the option of imposing a suspension on the basis that an applicant has refused an offer received the least support from respondents. To reflect this the Association has therefore included all statutory grounds for suspension with the revised policies. With regards to the imposing a suspension on the basis that an applicant has refused previous offers of accommodation, it was decided to retain the existing policy of suspending an application after they have refused two reasonable offers and not reducing this to a one refusal policy.

Further information about the review process can be obtain by contacting Housing Management on 0141 950 9052 or by emailing housing@yokerha.org.uk. A copy of this report is also available to download at www.yokerha.org.uk.