

# HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY



A joint approach to housing in Argyll involving:



**This policy is available in a range of languages and formats. Please contact any of the partner housing associations and we will be happy to assist.**

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Ma tha sibh ag iarraidh an sgrìobhainn seo ann an cànan no riochd eile, no ma tha sibh a' feumachdainn seirbheis eadar, feuch gun leig sibh fios thugainn.

यह दस्तावेज़ यदि आपको किसी अन्य भाषा या अन्य रूप में चाहिये, या आपको आनुवाद-सेवाओं की आवश्यकता हो तो हमसे संपर्क करें

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یہ دستاویز اگر آپ کو کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہو، یا اگر آپ کو ترجمان کی خدمات چاہئیں تو براۓ مہربانی ہم سے رابطہ کیجئے۔

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## Section One - Introduction

### 1.1 What is HOME Argyll?

HOME (Housing Options Made easy) Argyll is a partnership:

- Argyll Community Housing Association
- Dunbritton Housing Association
- Fyne Homes
- West Highland Housing Association
- Argyll and Bute Council

It is a way of making it easier for people to find housing in Argyll and Bute and focuses on providing better housing information and advice to all. Applicants seeking social rented housing in Argyll and Bute can apply to the four housing stock holding associations using a single application form, and will be prioritised according to our shared allocation policy. Co-ordinated information and advice about housing options is available from each partner and on our website [www.homeargyll.co.uk](http://www.homeargyll.co.uk)

The central aim of each housing association is to provide and maintain affordable rented and low cost ownership housing options for people in housing need.

### 1.2 About the HOME Argyll partners

All landlords participating in HOME Argyll operate in Argyll and Bute.

**Argyll Community Housing Association:** is the largest Housing Association in Argyll and Bute and has accommodation across the whole local authority area. Most properties are general needs homes, but the Association also has sheltered and amenity houses for older people.

**Dunbritton Housing Association:** has properties in the Helensburgh and Lomond area. Again most are general needs homes, but there are also a small number of amenity and wheelchair accessible properties in the Helensburgh area. The Association has one office, located in Dumbarton. Dunbritton HA also has properties available in West Dunbartonshire. Please contact the association directly for more information on these properties.

**Fyne Homes:** is the second largest Housing Association in Argyll and Bute. It has properties in mid Argyll, the Cowal and Kintyre Peninsulas and on the Isle of Bute, The Association has four offices located in Rothesay, Lochgilphead, Dunoon and Campbeltown.

**West Highland Housing Association:** the Association has properties in the northern areas of Argyll and Bute and many in the Argyllshire islands. The majority of properties are in Oban and the Isle of Mull. A small number of properties are located in rural settlements in Lorn, Islay, Jura and Colonsay. Most of the stock is for general needs with only a very small number of amenity properties.

For detailed information on the type and location of housing which we have please refer to the 'Applicant Information Booklet' which is available from any of our offices. Information is also available online on our website: [www.homeargyll.co.uk](http://www.homeargyll.co.uk)

**Argyll and Bute Council:** the Council no longer holds housing stock for rent, but retains the responsibility to assess applications from households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. PLEASE NOTE that the current legislation relating to homelessness differs from that relating to mainstream housing applications.

Argyll and Bute Council continue to exercise the power to investigate local connection to this area and have a duty to secure permanent accommodation for those households who are assessed as unintentionally homeless, in priority need and with a relevant local connection to this area.

Area Homeless Teams in Bute, Cowal, Kintyre, Mid Argyll, Lomond and Lorn are able to provide information and advice on all housing options

### **1.3 Compliance with legislative and regulatory framework**

The four landlord partners are all registered as Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) with Communities Scotland, which regulates and monitors the activities of all RSLs. This policy complies with best practice information produced by Communities Scotland, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Chartered Institute of Housing.

This policy also adheres to the legal requirements contained within:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, including the National Standards for Information and Advice
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987
- The Homelessness (Scotland) Act 2003
- The Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act 1981
- The Race Relations Act 1976
- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- The Data Protection Act 1998
- The Access to Personal Information (Housing) (Scotland) Regulations 1993
- The Human Rights Act 1998

## **1.4 Key principles**

### **Partnership and maximising access to housing**

This policy has been developed by the five partner RSLs with the central aim of working together to simplify and maximise access to our housing in Argyll and Bute. Through the introduction of a shared allocation policy – coupled with a single application form for mainstream applications and co-ordinated housing information and advice provision - we believe that the process of applying for housing becomes easier and more understandable and transparent for those seeking housing.

### **Meeting housing need**

Our shared overarching aim is to provide affordable, quality housing for people in housing need, and to assist with the creation of sustainable communities throughout Argyll. The allocations policy therefore focuses on prioritising allocations to people with high levels of housing need; giving reasonable preference to people who have been assessed as homeless or potentially homeless and who also have an established local connection to Argyll and Bute; those in properties below the tolerable standard or living in unsuitable properties; and those who are living in overcrowded properties or have large families.

### **Sustainable communities and best use of stock**

We aim to meet housing need in a way which makes best use of our stock, and creates and maintains sustainable communities where people want to live. We aim to promote stable communities and will

work in partnership with appropriate organisations to ensure that vulnerable applicants are supported in their tenancies. We will ensure that where properties have been adapted they are allocated appropriately to best match applicants and property characteristics.

This policy also aims to help to improve mobility within local communities, maintain and strengthen the economic base of the area, promote stable and balanced communities and support and sustain fragile rural communities.

### **Choice**

We aim to provide co-ordinated information and advice to enable applicants to make informed housing choices about the range of options available to them in Argyll and Bute. We are committed to the Housing Information and Advice Strategy for Argyll and Bute, and will work in partnership with other information and advice agencies to ensure that a comprehensive service is available to all.

As RSLs, we provide information on social rented options – including transfers, mutual exchanges and MoveUK - as well as those in the private sector, including Homestake and shared ownership options. We offer flexibility in type and location of property offered to ensure that people obtain accommodation, which effectively meets their needs. Some partner associations operate Local Lettings Initiatives or have Lettings Plans in place. Further information is available from our website: [www.homeargyll.org](http://www.homeargyll.org)

### **Fairness and equality**

This policy has been designed to ensure fairness and consistency in allocating housing, through setting out a clear framework for assessing housing need and allocating properties accordingly.

We are committed to equality of opportunity, and all applicants will receive the same high quality of service irrespective of race, gender, sex, marital status, sexual or political orientation, religious belief, language, social origin, disability, age or other personal attribute. Services will be provided in the way which best meets the individual needs of the applicant, for example through the provision of interpretation or signing services, availability of large print information, and information in ethnic minority languages. These services will be provided on request.

In addition, services will be promoted actively and appropriately to ensure that no individual or group is excluded from accessing our services due to lack of relevant information. In order to ensure that the services provided offer equality of opportunity, service provision and satisfaction will be monitored by gender, disability and ethnic origin, in accordance with current legislative requirements. Applicants will be invited, but not obliged, to provide this information. Applicants should be assured that if they choose not to provide this information then it will have no impact on their chances of being offered a property with HOME Argyll.

Every area of this policy will be undertaken with regard to equality of opportunity, and will comply with each RSLs Equal Opportunities Policy.

### **Accountability and customer service**

We aim to ensure that this policy is clear and transparent to all applicants and staff, and this policy will be publicised and made available to all applicants. Where necessary, this policy will be provided on request in alternative languages or formats, such as community languages, large print or Braille.

In order to ensure transparency, we will offer applicants the opportunity to discuss outcomes of their application and allocations process where necessary. Applicants will also be informed of the opportunities for appealing against allocations decisions within RSLs individual complaints and appeals policies.

We will maintain audit trails which enable us to demonstrate how and why any given let was made to a particular household, with due regard to data protection legislation. We will ensure that this process is transparent to applicants and outside agencies.

### **Flexibility and responsiveness**

We aim to be responsive to the wide range of individual needs and circumstances, and will review this policy on an annual basis to ensure that the policy continues to be responsive to local needs, examples of good practice and legislative changes. The policy will also be reviewed and adapted accordingly upon the introduction of any new relevant legislation and best practice guidance.

### **Consideration of people as individuals**

In the operation of this policy, which involves the categorisation of people and their housing needs, we will always be mindful of the complexity of individual needs and circumstances and will respond with empathy to all applicants as individuals.

## Section Two – Applying for housing

### 2.1 Who can apply for housing?

We accept applications from anyone aged 16 or over. There are a number of different routes through which applicants can apply for housing:

- **Direct applications** – applicants aged 16 or over can apply directly to any of the partner landlords for accommodation. The common application form means that applicants only need to complete one form to apply to any or all of the four partner landlords.
- **Internal transfer applications** – tenants already living in social rented accommodation in Argyll and Bute can apply to transfer to another property which better meets their needs. Tenants can transfer to a property owned by their existing landlord or they can request a move to another property owned by one of the partner landlords. Transfer applicants also complete the common application form.
- **Mutual exchanges** – all partners accept applications for mutual exchanges between tenants, either within Argyll and Bute or who live elsewhere in the UK. Applicants should complete the common application form as the first step in the mutual exchange process. In addition, we promote the Move UK mobility scheme to applicants, which facilitates moves across the UK.
- **Internal management transfers** – in some cases, tenants will require to move home as a matter of urgency. This will be initiated at the discretion of each landlord, and will be approved by the relevant association's Committee. In some cases, partners will work together to ensure that the most suitable accommodation is made available. In cases where a large number of management transfers are required – for example due to demolition – we will clearly set out in writing our procedures for undertaking these transfers.
- **Homelessness referrals** – Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places a legal duty on RSLs to comply with requests from the local authority to offer accommodation to homeless households. Our joint approach within the HOME Argyll aims to prioritise homeless applicants within our normal procedures for assessing

housing need, meaning that we can reduce the number of Section 5 homeless referrals required. As homeless applicants who have been assessed as entitled to permanent accommodation within Argyll and Bute receive category 1 points within this policy and as at least 50% of all HOME Argyll's lets must be to homeless applicants, then Argyll & Bute Council should only have to make a Section 5 homeless referral where it is not being able to discharge its duty in terms of the Homelessness (Scotland) Act 2003.

This approach means that homeless applicants use the same route to apply for housing and make their application in the same way as all other applicants, following assessment as unintentionally homeless, in priority need and with a relevant local connection. However, the legislation gives Argyll and Bute Council the power to make Section 5 homeless referrals and RSL partners continue to have a duty to comply with these referrals where they are made. A protocol has been established for dealing with Section 5 homeless referrals.

- **Referrals** – in some cases, partner landlords have arrangements with other local organisations to take referrals. These can apply to a particular development designed for people with support needs, or to the allocation of mainstream housing. Further information is available on our website: [www.homeargyll.org](http://www.homeargyll.org)

## 2.2 Employees and committee members

We do not exclude any employee, former employee, committee member, close relatives of employees or committee members or former staff or committee members from applying for a tenancy, transfer of tenancy or mutual exchange. These individuals must apply through the normal application process, will be subject to the same assessment procedure and will be allocated housing based on their housing need as assessed through the allocation policy. The individual concerned will have no involvement in or influence over the process by which the association concerned allocates the tenancy, transfer or exchange. The allocation of a tenancy must be approved by the relevant association's Committee in accordance with Schedule 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and would require two Committee signatories in all cases.

## **2.3 Right to assessment of housing needs**

In accepting all applications for housing from those aged 16 and over, we are complying with the right for all people over this age to have their housing circumstances properly assessed. However, this is only the beginning of the process of allocating properties. All applications go through an assessment procedure which allocates priority to applicants based on housing need.

As demand exceeds supply in most areas, not all applicants will have realistic chances of being housed, with only those demonstrating the highest degree of housing need likely to achieve accommodation. As detailed in Section Four, applicants will all be informed of the outcome of their assessment and offered information and advice about their chances of receiving an offer of accommodation, as well as advice about other housing options.

## **2.4 How do you apply?**

All applicants should complete the common application form, which can be obtained from any of the partner associations' offices. This application form gathers information on personal and housing circumstances, as well as preferences for area and type of accommodation required by the applicant. Where required, RSL staff will assist applicants in completing the application form. Forms can be provided on request in different languages and formats to meet individual needs.

Following completion of the form, this application is then assessed as detailed in Section Four.

## **2.5 Housing information and advice**

We aim to ensure that all applicants receive high quality information and advice which enables them to make informed choices about their housing. All partners will provide information and advice on:

- how to apply for housing and how the application will be dealt with
- timescales for processing and assessing applications
- the role of applicant and what information they are expected to provide
- applicants' realistic chances of obtaining a tenancy from their chosen RSL(s)

- each partner's housing stock
- Other housing options

All potential applicants will be informed of their right to be admitted to the housing list of all partner RSLs, and have their housing needs fully assessed as a result of this application. No applicant will be discouraged from making an application to any RSL.

We will also provide information and advice on other housing options in Argyll and Bute, and where to access further housing information and advice. This approach is in line with Argyll and Bute Council's Housing Information and Advice Strategy.

Housing information and advice will be provided not only to applicants at the application and allocation stages, but also to each partner's existing tenants. All partner landlords' tenants will be informed of the mobility options available to them, including internal transfers, mutual exchanges and the Move UK scheme.

All information and advice will be provided in an accessible format which meets the needs of individual applicants. All written information will be simple, easily understood and in plain English. Information and advice will also be available on request in a range of other languages and formats to meet the needs of individuals.

## **2.6 Provision of information by Applicant**

The provision of accurate, up to date information on the applicant's circumstances is vital to the assessment and allocation procedure. As outlined in Section Five, where applicants fail to provide this information they may be suspended or removed from the common housing list. We will not ask an applicant to provide information to us, which has significant financial implications for the applicant. See Section 4.2.1 for details of information, which an applicant is expected to provide.

Applicants must advise one of the partner RSLs of any change in circumstances relating to a housing application, or if they wish to change their areas or house type previously selected. Changes in circumstances may have an impact on the number of points received, and any change in points awarded will take effect from the date that we are informed of these changes. This will ensure the applicants are appropriately placed on the waiting list.

If we believe that an applicant has intentionally changed their circumstances in order to secure a higher position on the housing list, we may assess this application as if this change in circumstances had not occurred.

## **2.7 Regular review of housing list**

The common housing list will be reviewed on an annual rolling basis, with all applicants asked to confirm that the information held on HOME Argyll is up to date and accurate.

The aim of this review is to ensure a response from as many applicants as possible, and as such applicants will be offered a range of ways in which to provide up to date information. The review will also be used as an opportunity to update applicants on their current position regarding housing allocation, and to inform them of their housing prospects with each partner RSL.

Where applicants fail to respond to this review, they will be removed from the common housing list. All applicants will be informed of the implications of failing to respond to the review, and will receive confirmation of their removal from the list in writing. This is set out in more detail in Section Four.

Circumstances in which an application can be removed from Home Argyll are discussed in Section 4.5.1.

## **Section Three – Creating sustainable communities**

### **3.1 Sustainability and applicant choice**

One of the main aims of introducing the Argyll and Bute Common Housing Register was to offer increased choice and accessibility to applicants, resulting in more sustainable communities. Together, we aim to ensure that the accommodation we provide meets the needs of the applicant and their household as far as is possible.

Through offering maximum choice to applicants with regard to type of property and location of property the partner associations believe that the sustainability of tenancies will be increased, with tenants ultimately being more content with the accommodation which they are offered therefore assisting to sustain communities as well as tenancies.

#### **3.1.1 Location and types of housing**

Normally, there is no restriction on the location or type of accommodation for which an applicant may apply. However, some types of housing are designed for a particular client group – for example sheltered housing for older people, area or for a particular house type. For example, if a 'health and housing need assessment' determines that the applicant's circumstances would be improved by moving to a particular type or location of property, health priority will only be allocated to that type and location. The applicant could still apply for other areas and types of property, but would not receive health priority.

Certain types of property or areas are available more readily than others, and applicants will receive information and advice when making choices relating to housing type and location.

In some cases, applicants may seek housing in an area where there is currently no social rented housing. We would encourage individuals to make an application specifying this in order to help with future planning of new developments. All partners aim to build new housing which is appropriate to the needs expressed by applicants, as well as being developed in consultation with local communities.

### 3.1.2 House size eligibility

We aim to make best use of our housing stock, and applicants will be eligible for a particular size of house based on the size of their household. The guiding framework for house size eligibility is set out below:

- One bedroom for each single parent or couple
- One bedroom for each further adult aged 16 or over
- One bedroom for every two children of the same sex aged under 16
- One bedroom for every two children of different sex aged over 8

Children of the same sex aged under 16 but with more than six years age difference will not be expected to share a room.

An example of the house size for which applicants would be considered is set out below:

Household size	Accommodation size
<b>Single person</b>	Bedsit or 1 bedroom property
<b>Couple</b>	1 or 2 bedroom property
<b>Single parent or couple with one child</b>	2 bedroom property
<b>Single parent or couple with two children of the same sex</b>	
- both aged under 16	2 bedroom property
- both aged under 16, but more than 6 years age difference	3 bedroom property
- one or both aged 16 or over	3 bedroom property
<b>Single parent or couple with two children of opposite sex</b>	
- both aged under 8	2 bedroom property
- one or both aged 8 or over	3 bedroom property
<b>Single parent or couple with three children</b>	
- if two able to share a room (under 16 and same sex/ under 8 and opposite sex)	3 bedroom property
- none able to share a room	4 bedroom property
<b>Single parent or couple with four children</b>	
- if all children able to share rooms	3 bedroom property
- if two children able to share a room	4 bedroom property
- if none able to share a room	5 bedroom property

Expectant mothers will be treated as two or more people dependent on the number of unborn children the mother is expecting.

Where a member of the household is temporarily living away from home – for example in further education or in the armed forces – they will be included as part of the household only if the individual confirms in writing that they wish to be considered as part of the household. Until such a time as this letter is provided, the application will be prioritised on the basis of this individual not being part of the household.

We recognise that the needs of applicants vary and will consider each household's eligibility on an individual basis. In order to allow maximum choice and flexibility within the allocation of the housing stock there are circumstances where a larger house size to which an applicant is entitled to may be awarded. For example:

- **Where there is a medical reason for requiring a separate or additional bedroom** – this will be considered on an individual basis through our joint health and housing need assessment procedures.
- **Where a separated spouse has access rights to a child/ children** – then we would normally allow the applicant one additional bedroom to be used by the child/children during access. Individual circumstances can be taken into account. Any specific requirements should be discussed with one of the partner RSLs.
- **Where children are close to the age threshold for requiring their own bedroom** – to ensure sustainability of tenancies, we will be sensitive in allocating properties to households with children who would soon be eligible for a larger house size as their children get older.
- **Where there is no stock of a suitable size** – in some areas, where landlords do not own properties of a smaller size, smaller households may be entitled to be considered for the next suitable size.
- **Where applicants request an extra bedroom** – applicants may request a property one size larger than they are eligible for. This will result in lower priority for this house size, with those who *need* this size of property being considered before those who *choose* to request an extra bedroom. Applicants will be advised that they are less likely to be offered accommodation if they request a larger size than they are entitled to under our policy.

### **3.1.3 Choice and offers of accommodation**

Generally, we do not place any restriction on the number of offers which can be made to an applicant, and applicants are not penalised for refusing offers of accommodation. We believe that this approach will mean that applicants are housed where they wish to live, resulting in more stable and sustainable communities.

However, we believe that the refusal of more than one offer indicates that more detailed information and advice should be provided about housing options and prospects. As a result, if an applicant refuses an offer of accommodation, they will be invited to attend a meeting with one of the partner organisations.

For homeless applicants, this would be a meeting with the Homelessness Service. For others, this would be a meeting with one of the partner landlords and would involve refining applicant choices and providing information and advice about housing options.

## **3.2 Mobility**

This policy is intended to ensure that tenants already in social rented accommodation – either in Argyll and Bute or elsewhere – are assisted to move home as their household needs change.

### **3.2.1 Transfers**

Every attempt is made to ensure that the accommodation provided by Argyll Community Housing Association, Fyne Homes, Dunbritton Housing Association and West Highland Housing Association is suited to the applicant's needs. However, we recognise that over time circumstances can change resulting in different size, type or location of property being required for a range of reasons.

Each association accepts requests from tenants already living in one of the partner landlords' properties to transfer to a different property which would meet their needs more effectively. Where tenants wish to transfer to another property, they will be asked to complete the common application form. This form will be assessed according to this allocation policy and entered onto the Common Housing Register database.

In order to ensure mobility and best use of housing stock, each association has a method for ensuring that transfer applicants are considered for rehousing. The quotas on transfers for each association are set out below:

<b>Association</b>	<b>Policy</b>
Argyll Community Housing Association	Up to 25 per cent of vacancies are offered to internal transfer applicants
Dunbritton Housing Association	Up to 20 per cent of vacancies are offered to internal transfer applicants
Fyne Homes	Up to 25 per cent of vacancies are offered to internal transfer applicants
West Highland Housing Association	Up to 20 per cent of vacancies are offered to internal transfer applicants

\*These quotas exclude management transfers.

Tenants can apply for a transfer at any point, and do not require to have held their tenancy for any particular period of time prior to making a transfer application. Tenants will not be considered for transfer to a property which would conflict with this policy.

### **3.2.2 Mutual exchanges**

All partners welcome requests for Mutual Exchanges of tenancy, whereby tenants can exchange with other tenants of their landlord, other RSLs both locally and nationally, and local authority tenants throughout the UK. All partner associations will seek to facilitate exchanges unless reasonable grounds for refusing consent are established, as detailed in the Housing (Scotland) 2001 Act.

Reasonable grounds for refusing consent include:

- the property is subject to proceedings for recovery of possession
- the exchange would mean that a property designed or adapted for occupation by someone with special needs was no longer occupied by a person with these needs
- the exchange would lead to either overcrowding or one household living in a property substantially larger than required
- the exchange would result in tenants being accommodated in a property which is not suitable to their needs

### 3.2.3 Move UK

Move UK is a new housing and employment mobility service jointly developed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Jobcentre Plus, the Treasury, the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly. It aims to improve housing and employment mobility throughout the UK.

Move UK is due to launch in 2006 and will include web-based information on local housing opportunities, and a service for social landlords, tenants and applicants to help people find new homes. All partners will promote this service to applicants and tenants and provide advice on participating in this service.

## 3.3 Supporting independent living

### 3.3.1 Applicants with support needs

We are committed to providing accommodation which enables independent living and the integration of people with support needs into the community. This could include people with learning difficulties, physical disabilities, mental health issues, dependency (i.e. drug and or alcohol) issues and vulnerable young or older people.

In all cases we will work jointly with appropriate agencies and organisations to ensure that applicants receive appropriate support to sustain their tenancy. We will aim to ensure that applicants are not offered inappropriate tenancies without support which may result in failed tenancies.

- **Gathering information on support needs** – our joint ‘Health and Housing Need’ assessment form gathers information on the health and support needs of applicants. The information provided by the applicant will act as a trigger for determining whether accommodation with support is required and whether support needs should be explored further.
- **Working with the applicant and other agencies** – if the applicant indicates that accommodation with support is required, we will work with each individual to determine the availability of this support. This may also involve liaison with other agencies as appropriate. In particular, close working with the Argyll and Bute

Council's Social Work Service will be critical to establishing need for and availability of support.

All applicants will also be advised of their right to receive a Single Shared Assessment free of charge from Argyll and Bute Council Social Work Teams.

- **Receiving referrals from other agencies** – all partners also work with a number of public and voluntary agencies to provide accommodation to households in need of support. The Homelessness Service is committed to ensuring that applicants with support needs are not referred to partner RSLs until a support package is in place.

In all cases, accommodation will only be offered where it is clear that support needs will be met – through confirmation in writing from a relevant organisation such as Social Work, the Homelessness Service or the support provider. Although every effort will be made to work with other agencies to ensure that support is in place, applicants assessed as in need of support but without a support package may be suspended until such a time as the support is available. This will be used as a last resort, with all efforts made to work with the applicant to ensure that adequate support is available.

### **Recording decisions about housing support**

The separation between housing and support provision can cause difficulties, and in some cases it may be difficult for us to be confident that adequate support is available to create a sustainable tenancy. In many cases, decisions about whether to allocate properties without support being available will be based on judgements made by staff about apparent support needs, and efforts made to ascertain whether that support can be provided locally. As a result, we will ensure that all decisions which are taken regarding allocation of property to applicants with support needs are approved by senior staff and clearly recorded.

### **3.3.2 Properties designed for people with particular needs**

All landlords have a range of properties designed for people with particular needs. This includes:

- Amenity housing
- Sheltered housing

Approved by The Board –

- Housing for people with physical disabilities
- Housing with aids or adaptations
- Designated special needs housing

Applicants apply for all types of housing using the common application form and are prioritised according to this allocation policy.

The allocation of properties designed for people with particular needs will be underpinned by two key principles:

- **Supporting people to remain in their own homes** – we are committed to ensuring that people are supported to stay in their own homes if they so wish and as long as this is possible to achieve. At the point of application, we will therefore ask applicants completing the 'Health and Housing Need' form whether they would prefer to stay in their existing accommodation if it was suitably adapted to meet their needs. Those who wish to remain will be supported to do so through support from their landlord (in the social rented sector) or referral to Argyll and Bute Care and Repair (in the private sector). If it is not possible to adapt a property to meet an applicant's needs then the applicant may feel that a move to another property is the best option for them.
- **Making best use of stock** - all partners have a range of properties which have been adapted for people with particular needs. We will ensure that properties with adaptations are clearly identifiable so that best use of these properties can be made as they become available. In allocating these properties, applicants requiring an adapted property will be given priority over those who do not.

### 3.4 Supporting households in urgent need of accommodation

#### 3.4.1 Homeless applicants, choice and equality

All partners are committed to ensuring that homeless applicants receive fair and open access to our housing and we will work together to ensure that the needs of homeless people are met quickly and appropriately.

Homeless households who have been assessed as unintentionally homeless, in priority need and with a relevant local connection will access housing through our general application route, ensuring the

same level of choice, access and high quality service as all other applicants.

Homeless households who have been assessed by other local authorities as unintentionally homeless, in priority need and with a relevant local connection to Argyll and Bute will be added to the HOMEArgyll list and will access housing through our general application route

Homeless households who are assessed as

- not being in priority need OR
- are assessed as intentionally homeless OR
- are assessed as having no relevant local connection to Argyll and Bute

will still access housing through our general application route, and will be awarded the appropriate points.

We will work closely with Argyll and Bute Council to ensure that homeless households receive appropriate support in applying for housing.

All households identified as homeless or potentially homeless can apply to the partner landlords using the common application form. The circumstances of homeless or potentially homeless applicants will be assessed externally by Argyll and Bute Council, on behalf of the partner landlords. Argyll and Bute Council will determine whether the applicant/household is homeless, non-priority homeless or not homeless and inform the partner RSLs of the outcome of the assessment, including the decision reached on intentionality and local connection. Priority will be awarded accordingly. Applications from homeless households who meet the criteria which entitles them to permanent accommodation within Argyll and Bute will be pointed according to this allocations policy, which offers the highest level of priority for unintentionally homeless applicants in priority need and with local connection and a lower level of priority for applicants assessed as homeless.

In certain circumstances – for example where an applicant is experiencing domestic abuse – priority is offered within our allocation policy without requiring the applicant to undergo an external assessment.

All applicants assessed as homeless and who meet the unintentionality, priority need and local connection criteria, will be held on a separate housing list, and 50 per cent of all HOME Argyll allocations will go to homeless households. This quota has been agreed based on assessment of the historical number of homeless households requiring permanent accommodation, and has been agreed jointly between the RSLs and Argyll and Bute Council Homelessness Service.

This approach means that homeless applicants who are entitled to permanent accommodation in Argyll and Bute are given reasonable preference within this allocations policy, and the use of Section 5 homeless referrals will be greatly reduced. This will ensure that entitled homeless applicants are not discriminated against in terms of the level of service received. However, the legislative framework does enable Argyll and Bute Council to make Section 5 homeless referrals as appropriate, meaning that Section 5 homeless referrals can act as a last resort to ensure that statutorily homeless applicants do receive at least one reasonable offer of accommodation. We recognise that Section 5 homeless referrals can be used even if we have met our quota of 50 per cent of allocations going to statutorily homeless households.

If a homeless or potentially homeless applicant refuses a reasonable offer of accommodation, they will be asked to meet with the Homelessness Service to discuss their housing options. This discussion could act as a trigger for a Section 5 homeless referral if appropriate. If the applicant then refuses their offer of accommodation through the Section 5 homeless process, they will be re-assessed by the partner landlords according to this allocations policy, but without homeless priority.

### **Homeless applicants with support needs**

All partners will work jointly with Argyll and Bute Council to ensure that the support needs of homeless or potentially homeless applicants are identified and provided for. Part of the local authority homelessness assessment procedure involves the consideration of support requirements, and making arrangements for the necessary support to be put in place. We will work with the Council to ensure that accommodation provided fits appropriately with the support needs of the applicant. The Homelessness Service is committed to ensuring that homeless applicants are not referred to landlords unless adequate support is available.

### 3.4.2 Harassment and abuse

We believe that all individuals have a right to a life free from harassment, violence and abuse, and are committed to enabling those experiencing this type of difficulty to address this through suitable housing. Harassment and abuse can take many forms, and we aim to deal with each case sensitively and on an individual basis. In all cases, we will approach each situation from a position of belief, and will adopt sensitivity in dealing with applicants.

In recognition that the victim of abuse should not be penalised because of harassment, all applicants experiencing harassment, violence or abuse are made aware of their right to either stay in their own home safely or to seek alternative accommodation. Where applicants elect to stay in their own homes, they will be referred (with consent) to the relevant organisation for assistance and support.

**Domestic violence** – where people are experiencing violence (whether they are female or male) within the home we recognise that this presents an immediate housing need and as such will award all applicants who are victims of domestic violence the same level of priority as that of homeless applicants. Applicants affected by domestic violence will be referred to Argyll & Bute Council's Homelessness Service. The safety of the applicant will be the first priority, with confidentiality of information provided being particularly important in these cases.

Applicants who are victims of domestic violence will in no way be penalised for any repeat applications for housing, as we recognise the difficulty involved in leaving the home in many cases. Applicants will be signposted to other sources of support such as Women's Aid and other relevant organisations which are able to provide assistance and support.

**Harassment** – harassment at or near the home is a serious problem and includes not only physical attacks and damage to property, but also verbal abuse and other behaviour which deprives people of the enjoyment of their homes on the grounds of a personal attribute such as gender, racial origin, sexuality, age, disability or other factor. We aim to counter all such harassment, and in addition to attempting to rehouse victims where this is their wish, victims of harassment will also be signposted to other relevant sources of support and advice who

may be able to assist, such as the local authority, the police and voluntary and community organisations.

All applicants who are victims of harassment will be assessed on an individual basis, and every attempt will be made to take effective action to prevent any harm occurring to the applicant and his or her household. Victims of harassment are offered a significant degree of priority within our allocations policy.

**Homeless status** - All applicants experiencing harassment, violence or abuse will be informed of the opportunity to meet with local authority homelessness staff for a homelessness assessment. Applicants will not, however, be required to undergo an assessment in order to receive priority for re-housing.

### **3.4.3 Relationship breakdown**

If a relationship breakdown has occurred in a tenancy, we would firstly advise both parties to seek legal advice on the entitlement to the tenancy. Either partner would then be able to apply separately and be considered as a waiting list applicant.

## **3.5 Sustainable communities and local connection**

### For general applications:

All landlord partner associations welcome applications from any individual aged 16 or over, and do not require applicants to demonstrate any connection with the Argyll area in order to apply and have their housing needs assessed.

Applications from those living outwith the Argyll area will be assessed using the normal assessment procedure set out in this policy, and points allocated accordingly.

Connection with the local area (as defined in the Housing [Scotland] Act 2001) will, however, only be a factor in assessing priority for housing where applicants have equal priority for housing. In determining local connection, no account will be taken of whether an applicant is resident in the area.

### For Homelessness Applications

Please note that the local connection criteria for Homeless applications is defined by legislation. Local authorities have a power, but not a

duty, to investigate local connection. Due to the high demand for social housing in this area, Argyll and Bute Council continues to exercise the power to investigate local connection and will consider this in their assessment of homeless applications.

## Section Four – Procedures for assessment and allocation

### 4.1 Assessment of housing need

Following the submission of an application and the gathering of all relevant supporting documentation and evidence, each application is assessed according to this allocations policy. We operate a system whereby each application is assessed and allocated a number of points according to our 'Points Schedule', which aims to give highest priority to those applicants in the greatest housing need. The Points Schedule is detailed in Section Six of this policy.

#### 4.1.1 Reasonable preference

In the allocation of properties, reasonable preference is given to people who:

- **are unintentionally homeless or potentially homeless (and have been assessed as having priority need and with a relevant local connection)** – we give priority to those who are defined as homeless or threatened with homelessness, as per the Housing (Scotland) Acts 1987 and 2001 and Homelessness (Scotland) Act 2003. Arrangements are in place to ensure that we identify individuals or households who may be threatened with homelessness at the application stage, and the needs of these applicants are assessed by Argyll and Bute Council on behalf of the partner landlords. If the individual/ household is identified as statutorily homeless and eligible for permanent accommodation in Argyll and Bute, we recognise the housing need which this creates and as such allocate highest priority to finding suitable accommodation for these households. Fifty per cent of all our allocations will be made to eligible homeless households, as agreed with Argyll and Bute Council Homelessness Service. Applicants defined as non priority homeless receive a lower level of priority.
- **are occupying houses which do not meet the tolerable standard** – the tolerable standard for housing is defined by the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended by the 2001 Act. The tolerable standard requires that houses meet certain standards in terms of physical condition and availability of facilities, for example properties must be structurally stable, free of rising damp and have an indoor toilet and supply of hot and cold water. These criteria,

among others defined in the tolerable standard, are taken into account when assessing housing need.

- **are living under unsatisfactory housing conditions** – properties which meet the tolerable standard can often be unsuitable for a number of other reasons, for example the applicant may have health reasons for requiring certain types of housing and/or support, may need to move for social or economic reasons such as providing or receiving care, or may be unsafe in their property due to harassment or violence. These criteria are taken into account when assessing housing need.
- **are occupying overcrowded houses or have large families** – where families are occupying properties which are smaller than the smallest size that they would be entitled to under this allocation policy, this is classified for the purposes of this policy as overcrowding. This will be taken into account when assessing housing need.

#### **4.1.2 Factors not taken into account**

The following factors **will not** be taken into account in the allocation of housing:

- whether the applicant resides in the area/ the length of time which the applicant has resided in the area (unless applying under the terms of the current Homelessness legislation)
- any non tenancy related debts
- tenancy related debts – rent or service arrears, rechargeable repairs – which are less than 1/12<sup>th</sup> of annual amount payable, or which are no longer outstanding, or where a repayment plan has been arranged and kept by the applicant for at least three months
- the income of the applicant and their family (including benefits). The only exception to this is where we receive an application for a shared ownership or a Homestake property
- the value of any property or properties owned by the applicant or applicant's family. Again, the exception being an application for a Homestake property
- the age of the applicant, provided the applicant is aged 16 or over, except in the allocation of houses which have been designed or substantially adapted for occupation by persons of a particular age group, or the allocation of houses to people who are in receipt of housing support services for persons of a particular age group

## 4.2 Gathering further information

The common application form provides a basis for assessing housing need. However, in some cases further investigation of the applicants circumstances will be required. In many cases this will involve the provision of evidence or supporting documentation, for example where applicants state the move is due to employment, evidence of offer of employment may be required.

In other cases, this may involve a more detailed assessment by the partner associations or other agency in relation to housing needs.

### 4.2.1 Verifying applicant circumstances

To ensure that we accurately assess the housing needs of applicants, we generally need applicants in the following circumstances to provide some verification, as outlined below:

<b>Circumstance</b>	<b>Proof Required</b>
<b>All applicants</b>	<i>Proof of identity</i>
<b>Homeless or threatened with homelessness</b>	<i>Assessment undertaken by homelessness advisor (Argyll and Bute Council)</i>
<b>Asked to leave current accommodation</b>	<i>Copy of valid Notice to Quit</i>
<b>Moving to be near essential education</b>	<i>Letter from educational establishment</i>
<b>Moving to be near employment/ incoming worker</b>	<i>Letter from employer/ future employer</i>
<b>Moving to provide/ receive support</b>	<i>Letter from person receiving/ providing support</i>
<b>In need of rehousing as health affected by current housing circumstances</b>	<i>Health and housing assessment undertaken</i>
<b>Access arrangements</b>	<i>Letter from child's other parent, or Letter from a lawyer</i>
<b>Household member temporarily living away from home</b>	<i>Letter from this individual confirming they wish to be considered part of the household</i>
<b>Experiencing violence or harassment</b>	<i>Position of belief</i>

We recognise that in some cases the information required may be sensitive and of a personal nature. In such circumstances, we will adopt a position of belief and trust. With regard to general proof required it may be sufficient for the applicant to give one of the partner landlords sight of an appropriate document without the partners keeping an original or copy.

All applicants will also be asked to provide their National Insurance number. This will be used as a unique identifier for each applicant – enabling us to identify any duplicate applications and quickly identify individual applications. Applicants will be asked to provide their NI number when contacting any of the associations for information about their application by phone, to ensure security of individual information. As not everyone will have an NI number, providing this information will not be a requirement of making an application, and another identifier will be used for these applicants.

#### **4.2.2 Health and housing need assessment**

In cases where an applicant's health is affected by their current housing circumstances, they will be asked to complete a 'Health and Housing Need' form. Applicants will receive information and advice regarding whether they should complete this form. This form will be assessed by one of the partner landlords and a decision made regarding whether the applicant should receive priority for rehousing due to their current housing affecting their health. Health and Housing Need assessments will be carried out within 28 days. We will not ask an applicant to provide additional information from a medical specialist if any charges apply, which will have a significant financial implication for the applicant.

It is important to note that priority will not be given based on the medical condition of the applicant and their household, but based on whether a move could alleviate the health problems experienced.

#### **4.2.3 Homelessness assessment**

As highlighted in Section Three of this policy, all applicants identified as homeless or potentially homeless will have a homelessness assessment undertaken as part of their application process. This assessment will be undertaken by Argyll and Bute Council on behalf of the partner landlords. The assessment will not be required for those

experiencing domestic abuse or harassment due to the sensitive nature of these circumstances.

#### **4.2.4 Tenancy references**

We will require contact details for previous landlords (if appropriate) in the past five years. Landlords will be contacted and asked to complete a tenancy reference form. If this reference identifies rent arrears, anti-social behaviour or breach of tenancy agreement, applicants may be suspended according to this policy.

#### **4.2.5 Discretionary priority**

This policy has been developed with the aim of enabling accurate assessment of the housing needs of the vast majority of applicants. However, we recognise that there may be specific, individual circumstances where applicants have a clear housing need but this is not accounted for within the usual assessment of need as set out in this policy. As such, there is provision within this policy for 'discretionary priority' to be given to such applicants.

Cases of discretionary priority will be initially approved by a senior member of staff within the partner association concerned, and then by the association's Committee or a relevant sub Committee (retrospective approval). Decisions on discretionary allocations will be fully recorded and monitored. Where more than one similar circumstance arises which requires discretionary priority to apply, we will review the allocation policy and adapt the points system accordingly.

### **4.3 Notification**

Every application form received will be acknowledged within three working days. On completion of the assessment process, a letter will be issued which advises the applicant of the priority which they have received from all partner landlords to which they applied. This letter will also confirm their requested preferences for area(s) and house type(s) and outline the next stages of their application. This letter will be issued within 28 days of application. At this stage, the applicant will be reminded of their right to appeal this decision.

## 4.4 Housing lists

All applications received will be entered onto the HOME Argyll database. All applicants to Argyll Community Housing Association, Dunbritton Housing Association, Fyne Homes and West Highland Housing Association will be held in this common database.

## 4.5 Removal and suspension of applications from the housing list

We aim to minimise suspension and removal of applications from the housing list. However, there are some circumstances where it is necessary to remove applications from the list, either temporarily or permanently.

### 4.5.1 Removal

There are only three ways in which an application can be removed from the Association's housing list:

- **where the applicant has died**
- **where the applicant has requested removal from the list** – we would ask that this request is made in writing in order to ensure that all parties are clear of the applicants desire to be removed from the list.
- **where the applicant fails to respond to a periodic review of the housing list** - if applicants fail to respond to a request for information as part of the annual review of the housing list, they will be removed from the housing list. Applicants will be clearly informed of the implications of not responding to the review, and following removal will be informed of this in writing. In these cases, applications will be reinstated by Home Argyll on request by the applicant once the applicant has provided the information required.

### 4.5.2 Suspension

Suspension from the common housing list can only occur in certain circumstances, and means that the applicant will not be offered accommodation while suspended, even if they demonstrate housing need. The circumstances, which can result in an application being suspended, are:

- **significant, outstanding and unresolved rent arrears** - while rent arrears which have been repaid will not be taken into account, we are keen to ensure that those with significant outstanding rent arrears are committed to repaying these prior to offering the applicant accommodation.

If the applicant has rent, service charges or rechargeable repairs which they incurred while a tenant, then their application will be suspended from the housing list unless:

- The debt has been repaid in full or
- The debt is less than or equal to 1/12 of their annual rent or
- An arrangement has been made to repay the debt and that arrangement has been kept to for a minimum period of the previous three months

The application will be suspended until such a time as they meet the above conditions.

- **anti social behaviour** – applications may be suspended from the housing list where:
  - The applicant or anyone being rehoused has been evicted for antisocial behaviour in the last five years, or
  - The applicant has an ASBO granted against them relating to their conduct in a previous home, or
  - The applicant has been evicted for causing substantial damage to the landlords property within the last five years, or
  - Where a relevant authority has taken legal action on the grounds of conduct in a previous home within the past five years, and where there is reason to believe that the behaviour will recur

Each case will be considered on an individual basis and the partners will use sensitivity and judgement in implementing this suspension.

- **provision of false or misleading information** – applications will be suspended from the housing list if the applicant deliberately provided misleading information relating to the material facts of their housing application. Applications will normally be suspended for a period of six months, but each case will be considered on an individual basis.

- **lack of information** – Applications will be suspended from the housing list if the applicant does not respond to requests for information from the partner landlords. The implications of not responding to these requests will be clearly explained to applicants. Where applicants fail to respond to requests to provide vital information to assist in assessing their housing need, their application will be suspended until such a time as the relevant information is provided.
- **asylum seekers** – asylum seekers cannot be offered permanent housing while they are still subject to immigration control. Any requests to house asylum seekers on a temporary or permanent basis whilst an application for residency is still pending will only be considered as a nomination from the National Asylum Seekers consortium and in liaison with the local authority.

Applications from asylum seekers will therefore be suspended until a household has been granted leave to remain in the UK.

- **violence or aggression towards staff** - all applicants will be informed that acting in a violent or aggressive manner towards staff will result in suspension from the housing list for a period of six months. This will be clearly stated in the application form for housing.
- **deliberately worsening housing conditions** – if we believe that an applicant has intentionally changed their circumstances in order to secure a higher position on the housing list, we may assess this application as if the change in circumstances has not occurred. In extreme cases, we may suspend the application for a period of six months.
- **support not in place** – where we identify that an applicant has support requirements which are unmet, the application may – as a last resort - be suspended until it can be demonstrated that these needs can be met. However, in all cases we will work with the applicant and other agencies and organisations to attempt to ensure that support can be put in place.
- **property condition breaching tenancy agreement** – if the condition of the applicant's current property is such that it breaches their tenancy agreement, we will suspend such applications until such a time as their property is brought up to standard.

- **change in circumstances** – in situations where the partner associations are aware that the applicant’s circumstances have changed and that they have not been notified, a letter will be sent to the applicant asking for updated information (for example where applicants exercise their Right to Buy or are offered a tenancy by one of the HOME Argyll partners). If applicants fail to respond to this request for information, their application would be suspended until information is provided.
- **High Risk Offenders** - if an applicant or a member of the applicant’s household is required to register with the Police then the applicant must inform the police that they are considering moving. In Argyll and Bute, there is a joint procedure for housing high risk offenders. Applications may be suspended if the partner RSL being asked to re-house a High Risk Offender feels that there is a threat to community safety by housing the applicant. Any suspension will be reviewed if there is a material change in the applicant’s circumstances.

Applications may also be suspended from the list voluntarily, if they wish to defer their application until such a time as they require rehousing. This will be particularly relevant for those living in tied accommodation and in the HM Forces. This will generally need to be expressed in writing to clarify the intentions of the applicant.

Suspended applicants will receive a letter setting out the reason for their suspension, action they can take to resolve this and their right to appeal. Suspensions will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Each partner association will monitor the number of suspensions made from the housing list, and the impact of these, on an ongoing basis. This information will be used to assess the effectiveness of this aspect of the allocation policy.

#### **4.6 Matching applicants and properties**

When a property becomes available for allocation, the partner association concerned will produce a shortlist of the applicants whose needs and preferences most closely match this property, in order of their placing on the housing list.

## 4.7 Accountable discretion and sensitive lettings

In the interest of achieving balanced and sustainable communities and making most effective use of housing stock, the process of matching applicants to properties will require a level of discretion in order to:

- **match people with appropriate properties** – for example to ensure that physical mobility needs are met and adapted properties allocated appropriately
- **house people in appropriate locations** - for example to ensure that older people or households with young children are close to transport links and/or schools
- **avoid potential clashes of lifestyle** - based on analysis of the circumstances of individual applicants rather than generalisations
- **avoiding over concentrations of household type** – for example avoiding high levels of child density or unduly high proportion of vulnerable people in one area, estate, street or close
- **Ensure the quotas are being achieved between the three lists** – for example, discretion has to be exercised in deciding which list to allocate a vacancy from.

To ensure a clear and accountable audit trail in allocations each partner association must ensure that every provisional offer and allocation made is countersigned by two members of staff.

## 4.8 Sustainable communities and use of a quota system

We wish our approach to balanced and sustainable communities to be underpinned by a broad framework setting out our priorities for allocating housing. As such, we will allocate our properties based on three broad groupings of applicant, with a quota assigned for each grouping. The three applicant groups are:

- Statutorily homeless applicants (priority)
- General waiting list applicants
- Transfer applicants

In order to develop balanced and sustainable communities, we aim to allocate according to the following quotas:

Grouping	Quota
Homeless applicants (eligible for permanent housing)	50 per cent of all allocations
Transfer applicants	Up to 20 per cent of all allocations
General waiting list applicants	Approximately 30 per cent of all allocations

Fyne Homes and Argyll Community Housing Association will allocate up to 25 per cent of allocations to transfer applicants, and approximately 25 per cent to general waiting list applicants.

These quotas have been introduced to ensure that the needs of statutorily homeless applicants are met, and have been developed in conjunction with Argyll and Bute Council Homelessness Service. The quotas will be monitored on a regular basis and reviewed accordingly.

#### 4.9 Equal points

Where applicants have equal points, priority will firstly be determined based on accountable discretion and sensitive lettings – according to the criteria set out above.

Where applicants continue to demonstrate equal priority, priority will be given to any applicant demonstrating that they require to live in the area because they, or a household member:

- is employed or has been offered employment in the area
- wishes to live in the area to seek employment
- wishes to live in the area to be near a relative or carer
- has special social or medical reasons for needing to be housed within the area
- wishes to move to the area because of harassment
- wishes to move to the area because of domestic violence

No account will be taken of whether an applicant is resident in the area.

Where applicants continue to demonstrate equal priority, a decision will be made based on time in housing need.

#### **4.10 Home visits**

A home visit will be carried out at the point of allocation in order to validate information submitted on the application form and provide housing information and advice. This visit will be undertaken by the partner landlord, which is making an offer to the applicant. If this offer is not accepted, the information gathered as part of the home visit will be shared with the other partner landlords participating in HOME Argyll in order that more than one home visit does not require to be undertaken.

In certain cases, we may visit applicants when assessing their application.

#### **4.11 Offer of accommodation**

When an appropriate match between applicant and property has been made, an official offer of allocation will be made at the earliest opportunity. This letter will set out clear, practical and reasonable arrangements for the applicant to view the property, and will also set out information regarding rent and Housing Benefit.

If a response is not received in three working days, this offer will be withdrawn.

#### **4.12 Accepting an offer of accommodation**

Following viewing of the property, the applicant will be asked to make a decision on whether to accept the offer within 24 hours.

On acceptance of an offer, the applicant will be officially signed up as a tenant. If a joint application has been made, this will result in a joint tenancy and all parties must be present at tenancy sign on.

At all stages of the process, association staff will provide advice, information and support as required. The applicant's rights and responsibilities under the tenancy agreement will be explained clearly.

At the point of acceptance, applicants who applied to more than one partner association will be asked whether they wish to retain their application to the other partner association(s). Applicants wishing to retain their application will be reassessed according to their new

housing circumstances. Applicants not wishing to retain their application will be removed from HOME Argyll's register.

#### **4.13 Refusals**

We aim to offer applicants maximum choice in the accommodation they receive, and none of the partner landlords place any limit on the number of offers made to applicants.

If an applicant refuses an offer from one of the partner landlords, this partner will meet with the applicant to discuss expectations and review the application. In the case of homeless applicants, a meeting will be held with the Homelessness Service. If a second offer is made and is refused, the applicant will be re-pointed according to this policy, but without homeless priority.

This approach will ensure that applicants are offered accommodation which is suitable for their needs.

#### **4.14 The role of committees**

On a day to day basis, the application, assessment and allocations process will be managed by housing staff at each of the partner associations. Committees will therefore only be involved in the process in the case of:

- as part of the complaints and appeals process, after this has been considered informally (if the individual so wishes) and by senior staff members
- discretionary priority being awarded to an applicant, which requires the Committee's approval in all cases
- an allocation being made to a current or former employee, committee member or close family member, which requires the Committee's approval in all case

## **Section Five – Customer service**

### **5.1 Statement on customer service**

We aim to offer the highest quality service to our customers, and to ensure that each applicant and potential applicant is given support, information and advice to ensure that they are assisted to access housing which effectively meets their needs. In order to ensure that customers are content with the quality of service they receive, each association has robust procedures in place for monitoring performance and customer satisfaction, and clear complaints and appeals procedures are in place for when customers feel the service received has not been satisfactory.

### **5.2 Complaints and appeals procedures**

While we aim to provide the best possible service to our tenants and all other individuals or organisations that come into contact with the partner associations, we recognise that there will be occasions when we fall short of the standards we have set ourselves, and that improvements come from recognising and addressing these.

As such, we have developed a joint complaints and appeals procedure which means that you can complain about any element of our service during the application or allocation process to any of the partner landlords. For example, applicants may wish to appeal about the way in which priority for housing was assessed or their suspension or removal from the housing list.

A full copy of the joint complaints procedure is available on request from all of the partner associations.

Applicants will be reminded of the opportunity to complain or appeal at key stages in the application and assessment process. We aim to ensure that complaints and appeals are minimised through the provision of high quality information and advice throughout the application and assessment process.

### **5.3 Monitoring performance and customer satisfaction**

We aim to ensure that the allocations policy meets the needs of those seeking housing, and that customers are satisfied with the quality of service they receive throughout the application and allocation process.

In order to ensure this, each association has in place robust monitoring and evaluation systems which assess performance and satisfaction with the service provided.

The aim of this analysis will be to ensure that the allocation policy is operating effectively in meeting the requirements of those in most housing need. Regular reports on performance are provided to each partner RSL's Committee.

On an annual basis, the partner landlords will jointly assess the monitoring information gathered. Where particular issues are identified through this analysis, the associations will undertake further consultation with applicants and tenants regarding the allocation policy and how this could be adapted to meet the needs of applicants more effectively.

This consultation would aim to ensure that tenants and applicants with a variety of personal circumstances and backgrounds were able to participate, for example through targeting groups which may not become involved in mainstream consultation, such as minority ethnic communities or young people, to ensure that their views are represented.

Consultation would also be undertaken with partner organisations such as Argyll and Bute Council, to gather their views on the operation of the allocation policy.

Consultation with tenants and applicants will be undertaken prior to adapting the allocation policy in any way. Any changes made to the policy as a result of tenant and applicant consultation would be publicised to all applicants.

Resident satisfaction surveys are also undertaken regularly and help us to improve our service to tenants and applicants.

#### **5.4 Confidentiality and use of information**

The confidentiality of information gathered as part of the allocations process is recognised, and all applicants will be informed clearly of the way in which the information provided will be used. Applicant information will be shared between HOME Argyll partner organisations and other agencies (such as the police or social work service) and all

applicants will be made aware of this at the point of application and asked to sign their consent to this.

All HOME Argyll partners have specified the personal data held, how the data will be used and the organisations with which this information can be shared through registration on the Public Register of Data Controllers, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and associated legislation. All information will be used in accordance with registration on this Register and in accordance with our legal obligations.

Data will be held by HOME Argyll during the course of the application and allocation process in accordance with our legal obligations.

Applicants will be informed of their right to inspect any record kept by the HOME Argyll partners which contains information provided by the applicant in connection with his or her housing application and will be advised how to obtain access to these records. All requests for personal information will be dealt with within 40 days. Applicants will be entitled to have incorrect or inaccurate personal data corrected or erased. There may be a nominal charge for this service to cover administrative costs.

## **5.5 Promotion and publicity**

We will ensure that this allocation policy is promoted effectively to communities in which we operate through a number of mechanisms. A summary of the policy will be made available to all applicants at the point of application, and applicants will be informed of how to access a full copy. Both the summary and full copy will be made available online as part of the new 'Housing Information and Advice' website ([www.homeargyll.co.uk](http://www.homeargyll.co.uk)) created to provide comprehensive advice on housing options in Argyll and Bute.

We will work with other agencies operating in Argyll and Bute – particularly housing information and advice providers – to raise awareness of HOME Argyll as a whole. Promotion of HOME Argyll and this allocation policy will be primarily undertaken through the Housing Information and Advice Group which was established as part of the Argyll Advice Network to take forward the Housing Information and Advice Strategy.

We will make this policy available in other formats on request, and advise applicants of this service. We will ensure that promotion of the HOME Argyll and the allocation policy involves awareness raising with vulnerable and minority groups, such as minority ethnic communities, people with disabilities, young people and older people.

## Section Six – The Points System

<b>Category 1</b>	<b>Points</b>
Eligible priority homeless	200*
Experiencing domestic abuse/ severe harassment	200
Management needs (RSL demolition area)	200
Health & Housing Need – Danger to occupy home	200
<b>Category 2</b>	<b>Points</b>
Health & Housing Need – urgent	50
Lacking amenities/ poor property condition - severe	50
Issued Notice to Quit	50
<b>Category 3</b>	<b>Points</b>
Overcrowding	30 if lacking one room (20 points for each additional bedroom required)
Health & Housing Need – serious	30
<b>Category 4</b>	<b>Points</b>
Tenant without lease	25
Living in temporary accommodation/ hotel/ B&B	25
Significant harassment	25
Incoming worker	25
<b>Category 5</b>	<b>Points</b>
Sharing facilities (with children/ access to children)	20
<b>Category 6</b>	<b>Points</b>
Lacking amenities/ poor property condition – significant	15
Short assured tenancy	15
<b>Category 7</b>	<b>Points</b>
Health & Housing Need - significant	10
Sharing facilities – adults no children	10
Under occupancy	10
Assured tenancy	10
Non priority homeless	10

\* Applicants receiving priority as statutorily homeless will be allocated 200 points only. Homeless applicants will be entered onto a separate list, and 50 per cent of all allocations made will go to this group.

## Argyll and Bute – Common Assessment of Need

### CATEGORY ONE

Housing Need	Assessment Criteria	Verification Criteria
Eligible homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment by ABC Homelessness Service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determination letter provided by ABC Homelessness Service (not from applicant)</li> </ul>
Experiencing domestic abuse or severe harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreed common definition of violence/ harassment – general guidelines preventing from living in home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As appropriate and sensitive to case – make use of Homelessness procedures</li> <li>Refer to homelessness as appropriate following initial RSL assessment of need</li> </ul>
Management needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Property in RSL demolition area</li> <li>Property no longer available for occupation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confirmation from RSL</li> <li>Points only awarded to relevant RSL</li> </ul>
Health & housing need – danger to occupy home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unable to return home and/or environment, or</li> <li>Unable to continue living in own home</li> <li>Not practical to adapt current home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and housing need assessment</li> <li>Award checked by partner RSL</li> </ul>

### CATEGORY TWO

Housing Need	Assessment Criteria	Verification Criteria
Household in urgent need of re-housing due to health & housing need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unable to access to essential facilities unaided and/or,</li> <li>Would be housebound without support, or</li> <li>Condition restricts ability to live in home and/or environment</li> <li>Not practical to adapt current home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and housing need assessment</li> </ul>
Lacking amenities/ poor property condition – severe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No fixed bath, shower or wash hand basin</li> <li>No inside WC</li> <li>No piped water</li> <li>No mains electricity</li> <li>Structural instability</li> <li>Dampness or water penetration - severe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self assessment – verification at allocation</li> </ul>
Issued a valid Notice to Quit (including leaving tied accomm/ HM Forces/ asked to leave family home/ leaving prison/ leaving care/ closing order...)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Valid NtQ</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess validity of NtQ according to tenancy type</li> <li>Provide advice/ refer to advice agencies if NtQ not valid</li> </ul>

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### CATEGORY THREE

Housing Need	Assessment Criteria	Verification Criteria
Overcrowding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Common definition of overcrowding</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Self assessment – verification at home visit</li></ul>
Household in serious need of re-housing due to health & housing need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Becoming less able to access essential facilities unaided and/or</li><li>o Less able to get out of house unaided, or</li><li>o Becoming less able to cope in current house/environment</li><li>o Not practical to adapt current house</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Health and housing need assessment</li></ul>

### CATEGORY FOUR

Housing Need	Assessment Criteria	Verification Criteria
Tenant without lease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Adopt position of belief</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Discuss with applicant</li><li>o Tenancy reference if available</li><li>o Links to Homelessness Service as appropriate</li></ul>
Living in temporary accommodation (hostel, B&B, hotel, etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Adopt position of belief</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Discuss with applicant</li><li>o Tenancy reference if available</li><li>o Links to Homelessness Service as appropriate</li></ul>
Experiencing significant harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Agreed common definition of significant harassment – general guidelines nuisance behaviour</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o As appropriate to case</li><li>o Generally police report/ neighbour evidence/ Social Work report</li></ul>
Incoming worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Assessed on individual circumstances based on need to move to area</li><li>o Guidance issued to staff on assessing status</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Confirmation from employer</li></ul>

### CATEGORY FIVE

Housing Need	Assessment Criteria	Verification Criteria
Sharing facilities (family with children)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o With dependent children/ access to children and sharing kitchen, bathroom and/ or living room with anyone other than household</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Self assessment – verification at allocation</li></ul>

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**CATEGORY SIX**

<b>Housing Need</b>	<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Verification Criteria</b>
Lacking amenities/ poor property condition – significant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o No hot water</li> <li>o No proper cooking facilities</li> <li>o No central heating</li> <li>o Poor ventilation</li> <li>o Dampness or water penetration - moderate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Self assessment – verification at allocation</li> </ul>
Short assured tenancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Has short assured tenancy agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Sight of tenancy agreement</li> </ul>

**CATEGORY SEVEN**

<b>Housing Need</b>	<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Verification Criteria</b>
Household in significant need of re-housing due to health & housing need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Living at home and facilities do not meet current health needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Health and housing need assessment</li> </ul>
Sharing facilities (adults with no children)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Adult(s) sharing kitchen, bathroom and/or living room with anyone other than household</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Self assessment – verification at allocation</li> </ul>
Underoccupancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Common definition of Underoccupancy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Self assessment – verification at home visit</li> </ul>
Assured tenancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Has assured tenancy agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Sight of tenancy agreement</li> </ul>
Non priority homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Assessment by ABC Homelessness Service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Determination letter provided by ABC Homelessness Service (not from applicant)</li> </ul>

Approved by The Board –