

Housing Allocations Policy Outcomes

Report by Eibhlin McHugh, Joint Director, Health and Social Care

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the lettings outcomes from the revised Housing Allocation Policy agreed at Council on 8 January, 2013, which was implemented in April, 2013. The new policy states that Council will review this Housing Allocation Policy every 2 years together with tenant representatives in accordance with the Tenant Participation Strategy. It will also be monitored regularly to ensure that equality requirements are met in terms of access to and allocation of housing.

2. Background

- 2.1** In April 2013 Midlothian Council adopted a new allocation policy. Prior to this the Council's Allocation Policy was Transfer led meaning that current tenants were given first option to new lets.
- 2.2** The 2013 policy adopted a group and points model in which three waiting lists were created to reflect applicant circumstances with yearly letting targets set. The new waiting lists are:
- Choice List (Target 15%) – list for those applicants with no identifiable need.
 - Homeless List (Target 45%) – list for those applicants who have presented and been accepted as being homeless.
 - General Needs (Target 40%) – list for those applicants with a specific need. For instance those with medical need or who are living in overcrowded conditions.
- 2.3** It is important that we make best use of our housing stock, which includes how these are allocated. Scottish Government guidance requires that houses are let in a way that gives reasonable preference to those in greatest housing need, which makes best use of the available stock and helps to sustain communities.
- 2.4** It is necessary to give a degree of priority in allocation to these groups but other factors can be added to respond to particular needs and demands in the local area.

- 2.5** As demand for social housing continues to outstrip supply it is necessary to assess each housing applicant's housing need according to their circumstances and then prioritise them according to the Allocation Policy.
- 2.6** Allocation outcomes have matched the current policy intentions as detailed in the Lettings Analysis in Appendix 1. Responses to the Allocation Policy Review are listed in Appendix 2.

3 Report Implications

3.1 Resource

There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

3.2 Risk

The principal risks are around the issue of compliance with legislative requirements in the allocation of council housing, and equality of access to the Common Housing Register. These risks are addressed in the Housing Allocation Policy.

3.3 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Midlothian Council and its Community Planning Partners have made a commitment to treat the following areas as key priorities under the Single Midlothian Plan:

- ☐ Early years and reducing child poverty
- ☐ Economic Growth and Business Support
- ☐ Positive destinations for young people.

The themes addressed in this report impact on the delivery of the Single Midlothian Plan outcome measures in homelessness and stable and balanced communities. Early intervention and tackling inequalities are key priorities for Midlothian Council and the Community Planning Partnership and these proposals meet those objectives.

- ☐ Community safety
 - x Adult health, care and housing
 - x Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

3.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The core aim in the revised Allocation Policy is to offer applicants to Midlothian Council flexibility in the type and location of housing they wish to apply for. The application process includes advice about housing prospects so that applicants can make realistic choices.

3.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

The policy is based on a clear framework for prioritising applicants based on housing need and the reasonable preference criteria set out in legislation and aims to provide affordable, quality housing for people in need. The Council's Allocation Policy was reviewed in order to better reflect the needs and demands in Midlothian, and also take account of the Welfare Reforms introduced in April, 2013.

3.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

In developing the Housing Allocation Policy consultation was carried out with service stakeholders, including Social Work Adult Care, Children & Families and Legal and Audit services in relation to this report. External consultation had also been carried out with the Registered Tenant Groups and Registered Social Landlords in Midlothian, the Housing Association Forum, tenancy support agencies, Midlothian Disability Access Panel, Shelter and the Armed Forces Covenant Liaison Officer.

3.7 Ensuring Equalities

The revised Housing Allocation Policy was subject to a full Equality Impact Assessment in accordance with the Council's Equalities Schemes to ensure equality of opportunity.

The policy ensures that discriminatory practices and procedures are eliminated and that the needs of women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and other target groups are assessed. The duties required of local authorities when letting their houses are set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

3.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Not Applicable

3.9 IT Issues

Not Applicable

4 Recommendation

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a) Note the positive lettings outcomes following the review of the Housing Allocation Policy.
- b) Note that a review of the Housing Allocation Policy will be scheduled in 2015.
- c) Refer the report to the Performance, Review and Scrutiny Committee.

Date: 13 October 2014

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Appendix 1.

Midlothian Council Lettings Analysis 2013/14

Midlothian Council Allocation Policy 2013

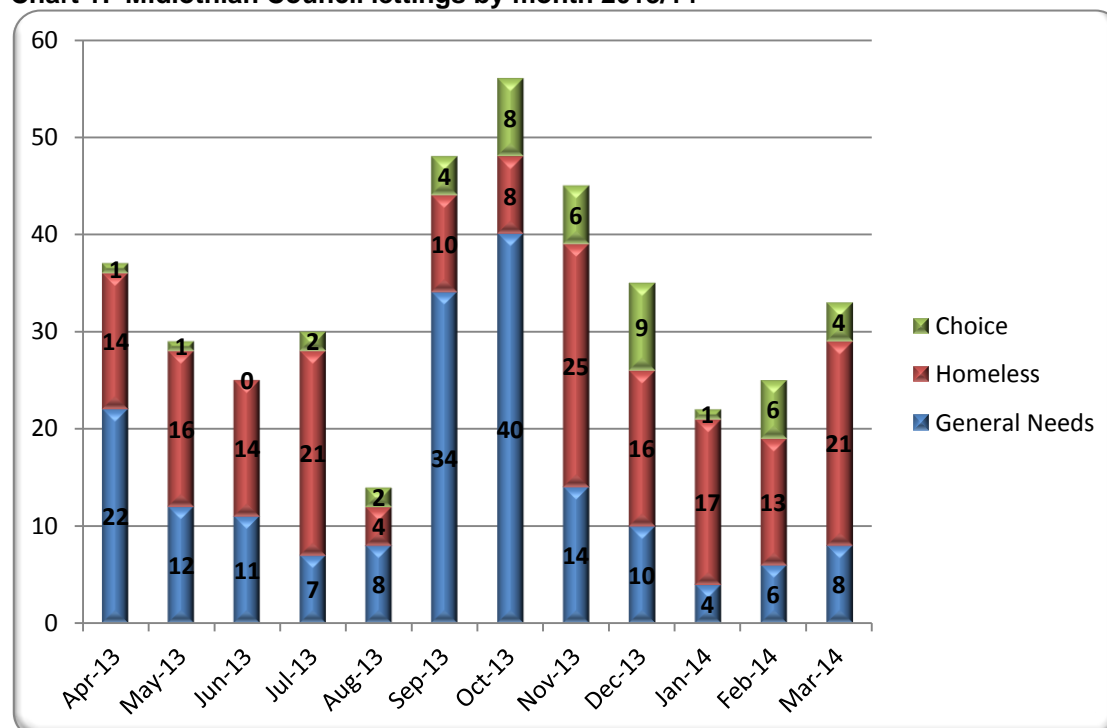
In April 2013 Midlothian Council adopted a new allocation policy. Prior to this the Council's Allocation Policy was Transfer led meaning that current tenants were given first option to new lets. The 2013 policy adopted a group and points model in which three waiting lists were created to reflect applicant circumstances with yearly letting targets set. The new waiting lists were to be:

- Choice List (Target 15%) – list for those applicants with no identifiable need.
- Homeless List (Target 45%) – list for those applicants who have presented and been accepted as being homeless.
- General Needs (Target 40%) – list for those applicants with a specific need. For instance those with medical need or who are living in overcrowded conditions.

Letting Outcomes

During 2013/14 399 council house properties were let by Midlothian Council. The number of properties let by month, broken down by waiting list category can be seen in chart 1 below.

Chart 1: Midlothian Council lettings by month 2013/14



It can be seen from the chart that there was a peak in letting, in particular to the General Needs List, between September and November. It was between these times that a tranche of new-build properties were let; this included Cowan Court, a 32 room extra care facility specialising in care for those with dementia. Lettings to Cowan Court, by the nature of the facility, would be from the General Needs List. Following the Cowan Court lettings extra priority was given to the Homeless and Choice waiting lists in an attempt to meet the lettings targets. Letting outcomes to each list against the target for 2013/14 can be seen in table 1 below.

Table 1: 2013/14 Lets against target.

Waiting List	Number Let	% Let	% Target
General Needs List	176	44.1%	40.0%
Homeless List	179	44.9%	45.0%
Choice List	44	11.0%	15.0%
Total	399	100.0%	100.0%

The failure to achieve the Choice List target was caused by a combination of the lets at Cowan Court and many of the properties becoming available at the time an increase in lettings was required not meeting the applicants requirements.

Lettings to the different areas of Midlothian can be seen in chart 2 below

Chart 2: Lettings to each main area of Midlothian, 2013/14.

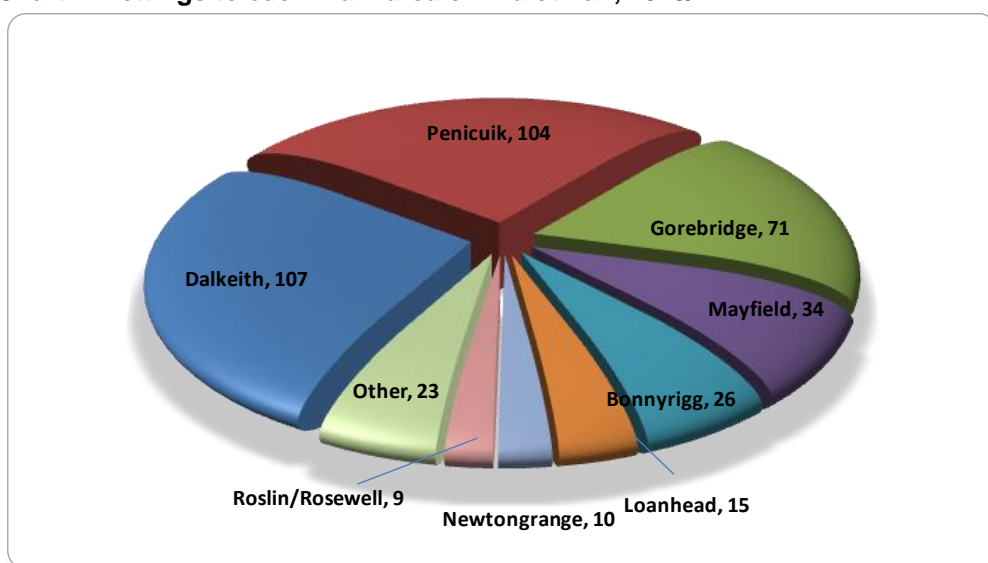


Table 2 below compares the number and proportion of lets by area between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Table 2: Numbers and proportion of lets by area.

Area	2012/13		2013/14	
	No.	%	No.	%
Auchendinny	3	0.5%	0	0.0%
Bilston	4	0.7%	5	1.4%
Bonnyrigg	102	18.1%	26	7.3%
Carrington	0	0.0%	1	0.3%
Cousland	1	0.2%	0	0.0%
Dalkeith	170	30.2%	107	29.1%
Danderhall	15	2.7%	7	2.0%
Gorebridge	129	23.0%	71	18.2%
Loanhead	20	3.6%	15	4.2%
Mayfield	56	10.0%	34	9.5%
Newtongrange	11	2.0%	10	2.8%
Pathhead	2	0.4%	5	1.4%
Penicuik	30	5.3%	104	19.9%
Poltonhall	11	2.0%	5	1.4%
Rosewell	4	0.7%	7	2.0%
Roslin	4	0.7%	2	0.6%
Total	562	100.0%	399	100.0%

The major difference between 2012/13 and 2013/14 is the increase in proportion of lets to Penicuik and the decrease to Bonnyrigg; this was principally caused by new-build letting activity. During 2012/13 there were 32 new-build properties let in Bonnyrigg with none in Penicuik. During 2013/14 there were 64 new build properties let in Penicuik with none in Bonnyrigg. There was also a higher number of lets in Gorebridge in 2012/13 compared to 2013/14 due to new builds in this area in 2012/13.

Allocations by list to settlement

Table 3 shows the lets during 2013/14 from the different waiting lists. It shows that the largest number of lets to homeless households was in Dalkeith (57 lets), followed by Gorebridge (37 lets). The highest number of general needs lets were in Penicuik (61), followed by Dalkeith (33). In terms of the Choice list, the highest number of lets was 14 in Dalkeith and Penicuik. Table 3 also indicates that a mixture of lets is being made across Midlothian, ensuring that communities are sustainable and is not housing greater numbers of potentially vulnerable households in certain settlements.

Table 3: Lets to settlement by waiting list

Area	Choice		Homeless		General Needs	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Bilston	0	0.0%	3	1.7%	2	1.1%
Bonnyrigg	3	6.8%	10	5.6%	14	8.0%
Carrington	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.6%
Cousland	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Dalkeith	14	31.8%	57	31.8%	36	20.5%
Danderhall	0	0.0%	4	2.2%	3	1.7%
Gorebridge	4	9.1%	37	20.7%	30	17.0%
Loanhead	1	2.3%	9	5.0%	5	2.8%
Mayfield	5	11.4%	20	11.2%	8	4.5%
Newtongrange	1	2.3%	4	2.2%	5	2.8%
Pathhead	2	4.5%	0	0.0%	3	1.7%
Penicuik	14	31.8%	29	16.2%	61	34.7%
Poltonhall	0	0.0%	3	1.7%	2	1.1%
Rosewell	0	0.0%	3	1.7%	4	2.3%
Roslin	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	1.1%
Total	44	100.0%	179	100.0%	176	100.0%

Allocation by need

Following the change in allocation policy it was envisaged there would be a change in type of need that would be met between 2012/13 and 2013/14. Table 4 shows the outcomes for both years.

Table 4

	2012/13		2013/14	
	Number	%	Number	%
No Identified Need	63	11.2%	47	11.8%
Insecure Accommodation	1	0.2%	10	2.5%
Management Transfer	13	2.3%	10	2.5%
Overcrowding	126	22.4%	44	11.0%
Underoccupying	14	2.5%	2	0.5%
Contrived Overcrowding	31	5.5%	2	0.5%
Homeless A Medical	4	0.7%	3	0.8%
A Medical	32	5.7%	49	12.3%
B Medical	34	6.0%	54	13.5%
Homeless	244	43.4%	178	44.6%
Total	562	100.0%	399	100.0%

The effect of the change in allocation policy can be seen most notably in the increase in allocations to those with medical need and the decrease of allocations to overcrowded and under-occupying households.

Allocations by Property Size

Tables 5 and 6 below show the lets to each allocation group by property size.

Table 5: Allocations by property size and waiting list 2012/13

Bedroom Size	Waiting List						Total	
	Priority Need		Direct List		Transfer List			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	29	12.1%	28	19.3%	18	10.1%	75	13.3%
2	167	69.9%	93	64.1%	66	37.1%	326	58.0%
3	36	15.1%	13	9.0%	79	44.4%	128	22.8%
4+	7	2.9%	11	7.6%	15	8.4%	33	5.9%
Total	239	42.5%	145	25.8%	178	31.7%	562	100.0%

Table 6: Allocations by property size and waiting list 2013/14

Bedroom Size	Waiting List						Total	
	Homeless List		Needs list		Choice List			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	24	13.4%	59	33.5%	4	9.1%	87	21.8%
2	118	65.9%	64	36.4%	28	63.6%	210	52.6%
3	33	18.4%	42	23.9%	11	25.0%	86	21.6%
4+	4	2.2%	11	6.3%	1	2.3%	16	4.0%
Total	179	44.9%	176	44.1%	44	11.0%	399	100.0%

The most notable difference between 2012/13 and 2013/14 is the reduction in proportion of lets to needs list applicants of 2 bedroom properties. The most probable cause of this drop is welfare reform which guided the new allocation policy to only allow applicants to apply for property sizes for which they would receive full housing benefit. Previously, single applicants could apply for both 1 and 2 bedroom properties; from April 1st 2013 this was reduced to 1 bedroom properties only.

Allocation to Minority Ethnic Groups

Table 7 below shows the number and proportion of lets to minority applicants and compares the results to the proportion of the same minorities on the waiting list.

Table 7: Minority Ethnic data for allocations and waiting lists

	2012/13		2013/14	
	No	%	No	%
Applicants on waiting list who are Gypsy/Travellers*	10	0.2%	9	0.2%
Allocations to Gypsy/Travellers	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Applicants on waiting list who are non-white Scottish*	400	7.5%	318	7.7%
Allocations to Non-white Scottish	30	5.3%	32	8.0%
Applicants on waiting list who are BME*	101	1.9%	91	2.2%
Allocations to BME applicants	8	1.4%	6	1.5%

**figures correct @ 31st March 2013 and 31st March 2014*

Time Spent on Waiting Lists for Applicants

It is known that the length of time to get housed varies depending on area choices made at the application stage. Tables 8 and 9 show the average length of time applicants had been on the waiting list at the time of allocation.

Table 8: Average time on waiting list for those housed in 2012/13

Area	Time taken to house applicants by waiting list			
	Homeless	Direct List	Transfer List	All Lists
Auchendinny	2.8		2.6	2.8
Bilston	2.8	2.9	1.7	2.6
Bonnyrigg	3.8	3.5	1.1	2.4
Cousland			0.1	0.1
Dalkeith	2.7	2.6	2.9	2.7
Danderhall	3.2	4.8	1.1	2.3
Gorebridge	2.2	2.3	1.3	1.9
Loanhead	3.9	2.5	1.4	2.6
Mayfield	2.1	2.4	1.6	2.1
Newtongrange	3.0	0.5	1.3	1.9
Pathhead	1.7			1.7
Penicuik	3.2	3.3	0.9	2.6
Poltonhall	6.3	4.0	0.3	4.3
Rosewell	2.7	2.3	1.7	2.4
Roslin		4.5	5.1	4.8

Table 9: Average time on waiting list for those housed in 2013/14

Area	Time taken to house applicants by waiting list			
	Homeless	General Needs	Choice List	All Lists
Auchendinny				
Bilston	3.6	1.4		2.7
Bonnyrigg	3.7	3.0	7.0	3.7
Cousland				
Dalkeith	2.3	2.5	4.0	2.6
Danderhall	2.5	1.0		1.8
Gorebridge	1.8	2.5	2.0	2.1
Loanhead	4.3	4.5	14.6	5.1
Mayfield	2.5	1.5	4.2	2.5
Newtongrange	3.1	1.1	9.0	2.7
Pathhead		3.8	2.7	3.4
Penicuik	3.4	3.5	4.6	3.7
Poltonhall	3.0	0.9		2.2
Rosewell	3.0	2.0		2.4
Roslin		0.6		0.6

The type of property can also affect the length of time to allocation as there is a far higher demand for houses than for flats or 4 in a block properties. Tables 10 and 11 show the average time applicants had been on the waiting list at time of allocation for different property types.

Table 10: Average length of time on waiting list by property type 2012/13

Area	Time taken to house applicants by property type		
	House	4 in a Block	Flat
Auchendinny	2.6	2.8	
Bilston	2.8	2.3	
Bonnyrigg	2.1	3.2	2.7
Cousland	0.1		
Dalkeith	3.2	2.3	2.8
Danderhall	2.4	1.8	2.0
Gorebridge	1.6	2.2	2.3
Loanhead	1.7	2.9	3.1
Mayfield	2.0	4.4	1.9
Newtongrange	0.8	2.6	
Pathhead		1.7	
Penicuik	2.0	2.4	4.0
Poltonhall	5.1	2.4	4.3
Rosewell	2.4		
Roslin	4.8		
All Areas	2.3	2.4	2.7

Table 11: Average length of time on waiting list by property type 2013/14

Area	Time taken to house applicants by property type		
	House	4 in a Block	Flat
Auchendinny			
Bilston	2.0	3.8	
Bonnyrigg	3.7	4.1	2.4
Cousland			
Dalkeith	3.0	1.7	2.8
Danderhall	1.9	1.2	
Gorebridge	2.4	2.0	1.9
Loanhead	7.7	4.5	3.8
Mayfield	2.8	1.2	2.3
Newtongrange	2.9	2.6	2.1
Pathhead	4.3	2.0	
Penicuik	3.7	3.9	2.8
Poltonhall	1.5	2.7	2.3
Rosewell	2.4		
Roslin	0.6		
All Areas	3.1	2.7	2.6

Surprisingly table 10 shows that average time on the waiting list for applicants being allocated houses during 2012/13 was less than for other property types. This can however be explained by the allocation policy in that year which was the final year of the transfer led policy. Transfer applicants had in general both a lower time spent on the waiting list and a tendency to want housed in only houses.

A reflection of the time spent on the waiting list before getting allocated a property can be seen in the number of points people had on their application at time of allocation. Tables 12 and 13 show the average points obtained by applicants at time of allocation.

Table 12: Average number of points at allocation 2012/13

Area	Homeless	Direct List	Transfer List	All Lists
Auchendinny	116		111	114
Bilston	115	116	31	94
Bonnyrigg	129	142	63	100
Cousland			251	251
Dalkeith	115	119	91	110
Danderhall	135	145	60	94
Gorebridge	113	114	68	100
Loanhead	135	127	75	109
Mayfield	113	119	84	107
Newtongrange	122	154	57	93
Pathhead	108			108
Penicuik	123	126	107	120
Poltonhall	122	129	143	128
Rosewell	115	110	31	93
Roslin		137	91	114

Table 13: Average number of points at allocation 2012/13

Area	Homeless List	General Needs List	Choice List	All Lists
Bilston	120	69		100
Bonnyrigg	120	132	58	119
Carrington	114			114
Dalkeith	116	108	46	104
Danderhall	118	106		114
Gorebridge	111	131	33	114
Loanhead	134	110	112	125
Mayfield	113	106	43	101
Newtongrange	116	114	75	110
Pathhead		145	43	104
Penicuik	135	134	49	117
Poltonhall	116	189		145
Rosewell	116	125		121
Roslin		155		155

Mutual Exchanges

It was recognised that a potentially negative effect of Midlothian Council's change in allocation policy would be a failure to meet demand for transfers. Also, demand was potentially going to increase due to welfare reform, in particular the introduction of the under occupancy charge in April 2013.

However, there was a greater potential for mutual exchanges to meet this demand; however the system used by Midlothian Council to manage Mutual Exchanges was inefficient and time consuming, relying on tenants looking in the window or reading through a folder at reception to see available properties. To improve the efficiency of the process, with the increase in demand in mind, Midlothian Council signed up to Homeswapper. Homeswapper is a web-based system enabling tenants to self register, search for suitable exchange properties and arrange exchanges themselves, minimising the workload of Housing Officers, who now only have the job of ensuring swap suitability of tenants and administering tenancy agreements.

The increase in demand that resulted from the change in allocation policy can be seen in charts 3 and 4 below showing the increase in mutual exchanges and the decrease in transfer allocations.

Chart 3: Monthly Mutual Exchanges

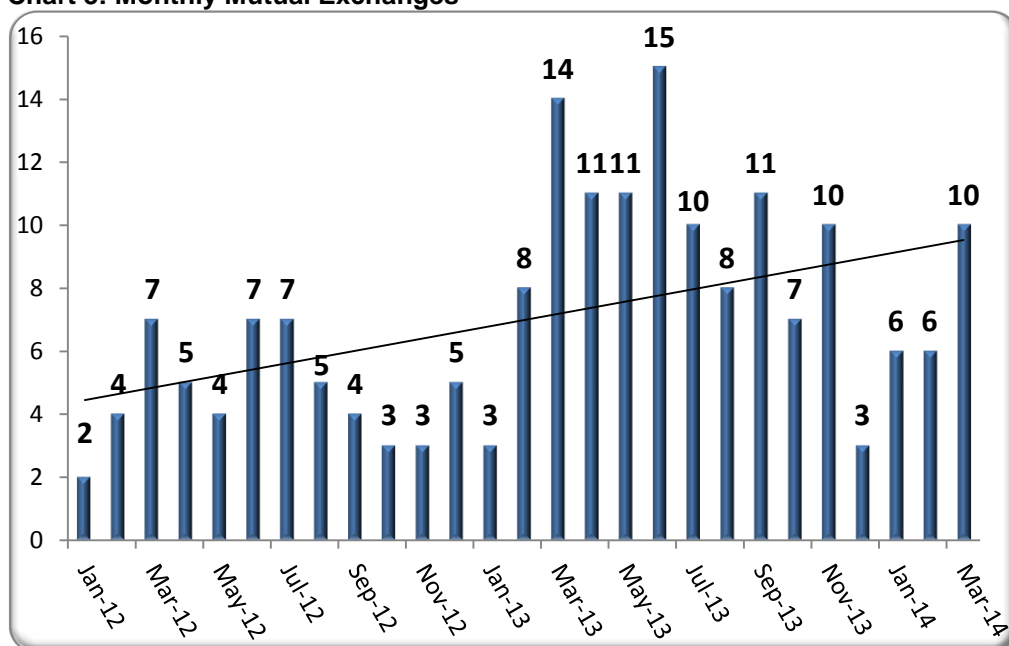
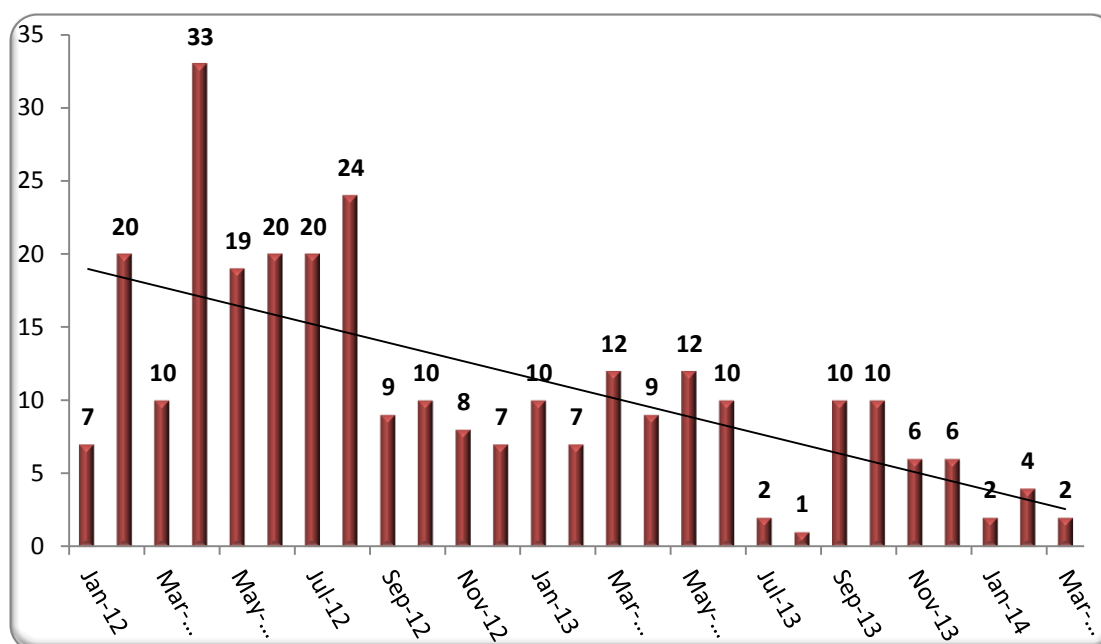


Chart 4: Monthly Transfer Allocations



Changes in numbers and proportion of Mutual Exchanges by area and property type can be seen in Tables 14 and 15. It shows that the most common swaps are for houses rather than flats or four in a blocks, with more than 50% of exchanges being for houses.

Table 14: Mutual Exchange Activity 2012/13

Area	Flat		4 in a Block		House		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Bilston	0	0.0%	1	4.0%	2	3.2%	3	4.5%
Bonnyrigg	2	9.1%	4	16.0%	9	14.3%	15	22.7%
Dalkeith	3	13.6%	7	28.0%	8	12.7%	18	27.3%
Danderhall	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	6.3%	4	6.1%
Gorebridge	1	4.5%	3	12.0%	1	1.6%	5	7.6%
Loanhead	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Mayfield	1	4.5%	1	4.0%	5	7.9%	7	10.6%
Newtongrange	0	0.0%	1	4.0%	1	1.6%	2	3.0%
Penicuik	0	0.0%	2	8.0%	4	6.3%	6	9.1%
Poltonhall	3	13.6%	0	0.0%	1	1.6%	4	6.1%
Rosewell	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	3.2%	2	3.0%
Total	10	15.2%	19	28.8%	37	56.1%	66	100.0%

Table 15: Mutual Exchange Activity 2013/14

Area	Flat		4 in a Block		House		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Bilston	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Bonnyrigg	0	0.0%	2	8.0%	9	14.3%	11	10.0%
Dalkeith	4	18.2%	5	20.0%	12	19.0%	21	19.1%
Danderhall	0	0.0%	1	4.0%	2	3.2%	3	2.7%
Gorebridge	5	22.7%	7	28.0%	9	14.3%	21	19.1%
Loanhead	6	27.3%	1	4.0%	3	4.8%	10	9.1%
Mayfield	2	9.1%	4	16.0%	13	20.6%	19	17.3%
Newtongrange	2	9.1%	2	8.0%	3	4.8%	7	6.4%
Penicuik	1	4.5%	3	12.0%	8	12.7%	12	10.9%
Poltonhall	2	9.1%	0	0.0%	1	1.6%	3	2.7%
Rosewell	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	4.8%	3	2.7%
Total	22	20.0%	25	22.7%	63	57.3%	110	100.0%

Ready to Rent

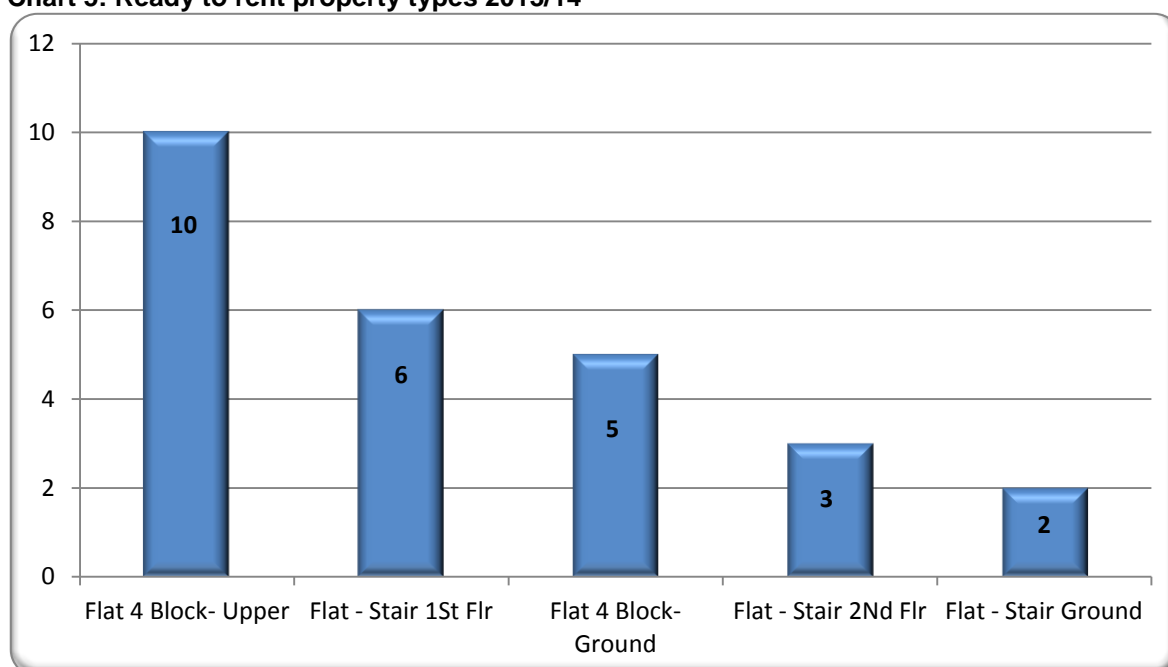
As part of the Allocation Policy being revised in 2013, the process of letting properties in streets with higher rates of refusal in Midlothian was reviewed. These areas included Braeside Road North (Gorebridge), Woodburn Drive (Dalkeith) and Hillside Crescent North (Gorebridge). Previously the procedure would be that on properties becoming available in these areas applicants would be written to in batches of 10 to those highest on the waiting list to inform them that the property had become available and asking if they would like to be considered for it. This was an inherently inefficient method of allocation and in 2012/13 the average re-let time for such properties was 78 days against an average 48 days for standard properties.

The new allocation policy allowed for these properties to be allocated using a choice based method. The property would be advertised on the web and in the housing office with a deadline date inviting applicants to bid for the property; these properties would be referred to as Ready to Rent properties. The Ready to Rent process would also be used for properties that had more than 2 refusals and not been let; during 2013/14 there were only 2 of these properties. The new letting procedure became live in September 2013 and between 1st September 2013 and 31st March 2014 the average re-let time for this type of property reduced to 58 days and is continuing to improve. The turnover of properties in the ready to rent areas has been historically higher than the average for Midlothian Council properties as can be seen in Table 16 below.

Table 16: Turnover of difficult to let area properties.

Road	Stock Number	2011/12		2012/13		2013/14	
		No. Void	% Turnover	No. Void	% Turnover	No. Void	% Turnover
Braeside Road North	17	5	29.4%	5	29.4%	3	17.6%
Hillside Crescent North	19	5	26.3%	5	26.3%	5	26.3%
Woodburn Drive	97	14	14.4%	14	14.4%	16	16.5%
Total	133	24	18.0%	24	18.0%	24	18.0%

Remarkably, the total number of lets for these areas in all the last three years has been constant at 24. Property types becoming available as ready to rent can be seen in chart 5 below. This shows that the highest turnover has been for upper four in a block properties.

Chart 5: Ready to rent property types 2013/14

*Includes two non low demand area lets.

Refusals

It was intended that the new allocation policy would reduce the number of offer refusals, as applicants were now able to choose property type at application. Previously this was not the case and applicants would be penalised for refusing property types that were not suitable. Table 17 below shows the variance in refusals between 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Table 17: Reason for Refusals in 2012/13 and 2013/14

Reason for Refusal	2012/13	2013/14	% Variance
No Response	45	25	-44.4%
Area Reasons	60	43	-28.3%
Change in Circs	114	59	-48.2%
Medical Reasons	37	25	-32.4%
Property Reasons	54	42	-22.2%
Wants to Cancel Application	11	9	-18.2%
Personal Reasons	23	8	-65.2%
Rent Level	1	1	0.0%
Total	345	212	-38.6%

The overall decrease in refusals of 38.6% does show a degree of success. However, the figure must be set against the reduction in lets between the two years of 29.8%. Some reasons for refusals have reduced significantly, such as for personal reasons (-65%) or that the applicants circumstances have changed (-48%). The full effect of the new allocation policy on the number of refusals is unlikely to have been fully felt in 2013/14 as the administrative job of reviewing all applications took 12 months to complete. As a result, applicants were still refusing offers for property type throughout the year; it is envisaged that a further reduction in refusals will occur in 2014/15.

Appendix 2.

Allocation Policy Review 2013 – Applicant Written Responses

As part of the 2013 Midlothian Council Allocation Policy Review, applicants were canvassed for their opinions on the changes being made.

In total 222 responses were received to the consultation.

- 67 Responses were positive.
- 57 Responses were negative.
- 98 Responses were neutral. These responses included many in which applicants were using the opportunity to discuss their personal circumstances or to raise issues that were in no way related to the issue of an Allocation policy.

All positive and negative responses were categorised by subject with the volumes for each category shown in tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1: Overview of Positive and Negative Responses

Positive Comments		Negative Comments	
Happy with the new policy in general. Will help applicant in their circumstances.	31	Not happy with the new policy in general. Will not help applicant in their circumstances.	16
Feels the Common Housing Register is a good thing.	17	More help for working families should be given.	12
The new Allocation Policy seems fairer.	9	Unhappy at the categories of people the Council appear to be housing.	10
The ability to choose property type is a good idea.	4	Not happy with bedroom policy for children sharing bedrooms.	8
The new Allocation Policy is easier to understand.	4	Unhappy at the effect on single parents with access to children.	5
Ready to rent is a good idea.	2	Preferred the original lists.	3
		There is insufficient consideration to ex-servicemen in the policy.	3
Total	67	Total	57

This report will review and provide a response to a selection of the comments received in each category; a full list of all comments received can be provided on request.

Response Category	Individual Response	Council Response/Recommendation
1: Happy with the new policy in general. Will help applicant in their circumstances.	This seems like a good change and should make applications easier, thanks MC for being supportive.	Noted.
	I am pleased that there is no limit on points; I've been on the list for 8 yrs living at my parent's home.	Noted.
	The changes seem to be for the better and hopefully will give young working families like mine more chance of getting housing.	Noted.
	The change will simplify access & make best use of available housing, hope housing problems of many will be solved.	Noted.
	I appreciate new system using choice, being allocated 15%, hope it will give people like us a fair chance.	Noted.

Response Category	Individual Response	Council Response/Recommendation
2: Feels the Common Housing Register is a good thing.	It's a good idea combining council with Melville HA. It means more houses and less waiting time.	Noted.
	I think this is great; it gives people a better chance. I've heard good things about Melville - houses & kitchens are nice	Noted.
	It's a good idea to combine lists and simplify the application process. It's a pity you are not merging with others e.g. Castlerock Edinvar.	Midlothian Council is working with other Registered Social Landlords to potentially increase the number of organisations included in the Common Housing Register (CHR).

3: The New Allocations Policy seems fairer.	This seems a lot fairer. I hope I have a fairer chance of getting my own home as under the old system I had no chance.	Noted.
	I think this is a very fair and reasonable way of housing people. Definitely a thumbs up.	Noted.

Response Category	Individual Response	Council Response/Recommendation
4: The ability to choose property type is good.	I'm in a private let – this will give homeless applicants a better chance and I like that you can choose property type.	Noted.
	I think it sounds like a great idea and I really like that you can choose house type.	Noted.
5: The new Allocation Policy is easier to understand	This is a better option so that people understand how the allocation process works and where they stand on the waiting list.	Noted.
	These changes can only be for the better and make it easier for people to understand.	Noted.
6: Ready-to-Rent is a good idea.	I like how the new policy gives the choice of housing and that it has made me aware of 'ready to rent' housing.	Between April 2013 and November 2013, 13 properties were let through the Ready-to-Rent process.

Response Category	Individual Response	Council Response/Recommendation
7: Not happy with the new policy in general. Will not help applicant in their circumstances.	I feel the changes will make it impossible for me to ever get a house with council or HA.	The impact of the new Allocation Policy will be reviewed 12 months after implementation with outcomes reviewed at this point. It is acknowledged that the level of need for housing exceeds available supply, but the new Allocation Policy is compliant with legislation in relation to prioritising the allocation of housing to those with housing need.
	I am living in a private let which is damp and I have a child with asthma. I Was first on MC list, now with the new points system, I may never get council house.	Noted. However, since receiving feedback the applicant was offered a council property which demonstrates that this household still has a high housing need under the new Policy.
	The new policy doesn't make any difference. There is still going to be a long waiting list as there is a shortage of council & HA houses, with not enough houses being built.	Since 2006, Midlothian Council, together with Housing Associations has completed 1,327 new affordable homes in Midlothian. The Council is also developing a second phase of council housing.
	I am unhappy that there is no longer a transfer list. I was top of this list for 7 mths, urgently need ground floor for family reasons, now it's going to take a lot longer to be re-housed.	Since receiving reply applicant has successfully completed Mutual Exchange and been able to cancel application demonstrating that there are other options available to applicants.
	I am currently homeless with a 16 year old son I'm living with father in a one bed property, this isn't helping me or my son.	Noted. A target of 45% of lets being allocated to homeless households will ensure a higher number of homeless households than previous years will be provided with a council house as a result of the new Policy.

Response Category	Individual Response	Council Response/Recommendation
8: More help for working families should be given.	The policy is still unfair for people struggling to pay private let rent but could afford council rent. It still seems to victimise people who work.	Legislation states that Councils are legally not allowed to prioritise on the basis of income.
	The policy is very unfair, now not being entitled to a 2 bedroom property but I work full time and can afford it- I should be able to choose.	As above.

	I feel victimised for working and being in a private let I've been on list for years and see outsiders being housed before us.	As above.
9: Unhappy at the categories of people the Council appear to be housing.	It's about time the system didn't show preference to people unwilling to contribute.	As above.
	There are lovely new build schemes now full of the dregs of society and are mini ghettos full of dog s**t and ripped up plants.	Prior to 2013, build tenancies were transfer-led under the previous Allocations Policy. As part of the New Policy all new housing will be allocated from all 3 needs categories. Estate walkabouts with Housing Officers regularly visit recently completed sites to ensure standards are maintained and issues are reported.

Response Category	Individual Response	Council Response/Recommendation
10: Not happy with bedroom policy for children sharing bedrooms.	I think for a boy and a girl to be sharing up to 10 yrs is still a little old, when my son is 10 my daughter will be 4.	Bedroom entitlement for families with children is in line with government regulations for Housing Benefit Entitlements. (<i>Housing Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 2012</i>)
	Children of the same sex under 16 sharing is appalling. I would like an explanation how this will affect my position.	Bedroom entitlement for families with children is in line with government regulations for Housing Benefit Entitlements. (<i>Housing Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 2012</i>)
11: Unhappy at the effect on single parents with access to children.	Being a single dad with access to kids 3/4 days a week and only eligible for 1 bedroom. This is shocking treatment to someone who wants to PAY rent.	Midlothian Council Cabinet decided on 27 th August 2013 that the element of the new Allocation Policy, that prevented a single parent from applying for a two bedroom property unless the applicant was the "primary carer" of children, be reviewed with a view to allowing such applications.
12: Preferred the original lists.	I am surprised to see the homeless target is 45% of all lets. I'd like to see those with medical needs at that figure. I have silver with a HA, is this the same with you?	Homeless letting targets for Midlothian Council are in line with the average across all councils in Scotland and meet the legislative requirement to let to homeless households. Use of "Silver" access does not apply to Midlothian Council's Policy but households who receive a Category A medical will be prioritised through the Housing Needs list with 100 points which is at a similar level to homeless households.

Response Category	Individual Response	Council Response/Recommendation
13: There is insufficient consideration to ex-servicemen in the policy.	I am disappointed not to receive extra points for medical discharge from forces.	The new Allocation Policy assigns maximum points to those leaving the forces and allows backdating of waiting time points to the time of enlistment.