

A meeting of the Management Committee will take place on  
**Thursday 25 February 2021 at 7.00pm by Teams.**

Please advise staff if you are unable to attend.

**Joyce Bolan**  
**Secretary**

## **B U S I N E S S**

### **1.0 GENERAL**

- 1.1 Apologies
- 1.2 Declaration of Interest by Management Committee Members
- 1.3 Minutes of 26 November 2020 – **for approval**
- 1.4 Action List – for information
- 1.5 Matters Arising

### **2.0 GOVERNANCE**

- 2.1 Secretary's Report – **for homologation**
- 2.2 Key Performance Indicators 2020/21 – for information
- 2.3 Use of the Association's Contractors and Suppliers Procedure – **for approval**

### **3.0 PRIORITY ITEMS**

- 3.1 Care & Repair Budget 2021/22 – **for approval**

### **4.0 POLICIES**

- 4.1 These Homes Policy – **for approval**
- 4.2 Comments and Complaints Policy Review – **for approval**
- 4.3 Communication Strategy – **for approval**

### **5.0 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

### **6.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **DATE OF NEXT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Thursday 25 March 2021** at ELHA Head Office, Haddington, at 7.00pm

## Action List

### Report by Martin Pollhammer, Chief Executive – for information

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The table below sets out the required actions agreed at the last meeting of the Management Committee on 26 November 2020, and confirms the actions taken as a result.

Minute Ref	Action Required	Action By	Action Taken
2.3	Circulate Christmas automated e-mail to tenants sent on rent payment	MP	Complete
4.1	Make the approved changes to the Financial Regulations as noted in the minutes	PO	Complete
4.3	Make the approved changes to the Payroll Policy as noted in the minutes	PO	Complete
4.5	Present a final copy of the Allocations Policy to the February 2021 Management Committee meeting	KB	See <b>Agenda Item 4.1</b>

## Secretary's Report – for homologation

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### 1.0 Membership

No new applications for membership have been received.

### 2.0 Use of Seal for Homologation

Disposition by East Lothian Housing Association (75% sharing owner) and [REDACTED] (the sharing owner of 25% of the property) in favour of [REDACTED], dated 28 January 2021.

#### **Recommendation**

The Management Committee is asked to Homologate the use of the Seal.

Key Performance Indicators 2020/21

Appendix 1

Performance Indicator	Quarterly Target	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2020/21 Target	2019/20Actual	Year to Date	Status
<b>Rental Income</b>									
Non-technical arrears as % of rental income	3.0%	3.17%	3.20%	2.87%		3.0%	2.77%	2.87%	😊
Bad debts written off as % rental income	1.75%	1.45%	0.76%	-1.71%		1.75%	0.30%	0.16%	😊
Voids as % of rental income	0.75%	0.45%	0.46%	0.27%		0.75%	0.38%	0.39%	😊
<b>Finance</b>									
Interest cover (loan covenants)	110%	461%	262%	240%		110%	280%	322%	😊
Gearing (loan covenants FRS102 definition)	<37%	24%	25%	25%		<37%	26%	25%	😊
Current assets as a % of current liabilities	100%	144%	151%	152%		100%	119%	152%	😊
Unit management costs	£1,663	£1,362	£1,456	£1,510		£1,663	£1,573	£1,435	😊
Unit reactive maintenance costs	£689	£646	£875	£867		£689	£906	£793	😞
<b>Asset Management</b>									
Stock condition inspections completed	cumulative	0%	0%	0%		20%	20%	0%	😞
Gas services completed within timescale	cumulative	97%	100%	100%		100%	100%	99%	😊
Planned maintenance contracts with >5% overspend	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	😊
Average time taken to complete emergency repairs	< 2 hours	01:24	01:37	01:29		< 2 hours	01:21	01:31	😊
Average time taken to complete non-emergency repairs	< 6 days	2.8	5.0	7.0		< 6 days	5.38	4.9	😊
Repairs completed right first time	85%	96%	96%	92%		85%	96%	96%	😊
Repair appointments kept	93%	97%	95%	99%		93%	97%	96%	😊
<b>Housing Management</b>									
Properties allocated after 3 or more refusals	0	0	0	0		0	2	0	😊
Number of evictions carried out	no target	0	0	1		no target	3	0	
Number of ASBO's in force against tenants	no target	2	2	2		no target	2	2	
Gold Key Tenants	35.0%	12.3%	12.1%	12.7%		35%	12.4%	12.3%	😞
Platinum Key Tenants	25.0%	16.9%	18.9%	20.6%		25%	16.4%	16.9%	😞
<b>Corporate</b>									
Number of accidents reportable to HSE	0	1	0	0		0	0	1	😊
% working days lost through long term sick leave	5%	0.2%	0.00%	0.00%		5%	1.26%	0.1%	😊
% working days lost through short term sick leave	2%	0.37%	0.10%	0.51%		2%	1.31%	0.33%	😊
Management Committee Attendance	75%	100%	77%	100%		75%	76%	87%	😊
Audit & Assurance Committee Attendance	75%	83%	83%	78%		75%	76%	83%	😊
% of Tenants using their My Home Account	80%	76%	76%	78%		80%	74%	76%	😞
% of Tenants Paper Free	70%	71%	73%	74%		70%	70%	71%	😊

😊 Performance Excellent    😞 Performance Satisfactory    😡 Performance Poor

## Key Performance Indicators 2020/21

### Report by Martin Pollhammer, Chief Executive – for Information

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#### 1.0 Introduction

The Association's Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) for the third quarter of 2020/21 are attached as **Appendix 1** to this report.

#### 2.0 ELHA Performance

The Association has missed the following targets:

##### 2.1 Unit Reactive Maintenance Costs

Unit Reactive Maintenance Costs are £793 compared to the target of £689. The unit cost includes an R3 Profitability Adjustment to date of £79k and Lockdown Support Fees of £102k. If the profitability adjustment is excluded, costs are £714 per unit and £614 per unit if the Lockdown Fee is also excluded.

##### 2.2 Stock Condition Inspections Completed

The 20% sample stock condition survey would, in normal circumstances, have been completed in early Autumn 2020. As this survey involves extensive access being required to the homes of tenants, this was delayed as a result of the pandemic restrictions. It had been hoped that this could be carried out in Quarter 4 of this financial year, however, as restrictions continue, this will not be possible.

ELHA has a comprehensive 100% stock condition survey of its properties, with the most recent 20% sample having been completed in June 2019. The 20% planned for this year was to maintain and update the relevance of the information held. As it has not been possible to conduct the survey this financial year due to the concerns around the pandemic, the properties that would have been included this year will be added to the 20% sample survey planned for the 2021/22 financial year.

##### 2.3 Gold and Platinum Key Tenants

Platinum Key Tenant figures have increased again this quarter but both Gold and Platinum remain under target. Emphasis had been placed on identifying tenants who already qualify for Gold level but who are not claiming the discounts during the last quarter. Going forward a new focus will be placed on contacting those tenants that are not paper-free to ensure they qualify for the new Bronze discount from April 2021.

**2.4 Percentage of tenants using their My Home Account**

The number of tenants using their My Home account has risen again this Quarter to 78%, falling just short of the 80% target, providing confidence that this target will be achieved by year end.

**2.5 Notifiable Incident**

As previously reported, a Notifiable Incident occurred at 16 Quality Street, Dunbar on 19 November 2020. The incident involved a scissor lift which was being used by private painting contractors engaged by ELHA, damaging the external walling of the building. This was reported to both the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) who carried out an investigation, and the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR), who asked to be kept updated on the position. At this time, no further contact has been received from the HSE, and the SHR is aware of this.

**Use of R3 Direct Declaration Form – Small Jobs**

Name.....

Position.....

Date.....

*I confirm that I require / or have already used\*, the services R3 Direct who have provided or will be providing me with the following work:*

Type of Work or Service	Date work to be/or has been carried out	Estimated value of work ( as on confirmation order)	Amount paid for work

Does Executive Support have a copy of the order confirmation: Yes/No \*  
(\*delete as appropriate)

Does Executive Support have a copy of the invoice: Yes/No \*

Does Executive Support have a copy of the receipt: Yes/No \*

If any of the above are not attached, please explain why?:

Is there any variation between the order confirmation and amount invoiced for works and if so why?:

**Declaration**

I confirm that I have not received any advantage or preferential treatment (financial or otherwise) from R3 Direct arising out of their connection to the Association

Signature.....

Date.....

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**For Executive Support Officer’s use only**

Date added to Register of Payment and Benefits.....

**Use of R3 Direct Approval Form – Large Jobs**

Name.....

Position.....

Date.....

*I confirm that I wish to contract with R3 Direct for Services as described below:*

Type of Work or Service	Date work to be/or has been carried out	Value/ estimated Value

*Name of Director / Chair notified about the use of the contractor / supplier:*

.....

*Advice given by the Director/Chair .....*

**Will a Profitability Check be required on completion of the work? Yes / No**

**Signature of Director / Chair..... Date of Approval.....**

**Declaration**

I confirm that I have not received any advantage or preferential treatment (financial or otherwise) from R3 Direct arising out of their connection to the Association

**Signature.....**

**Date.....**

*To be passed to Executive Support Officer.*

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**For Executive Support Officer’s use only**

Date added to Register of Payment and Benefits.....



**Use of R3 Direct Large Job Completion Declaration Form**

Name.....

Position.....

Date.....

Description of the work approved:

Type of Work or Service	Date work to be/or has been carried out	Value/ estimated Value

Date that the work was approved by Director/Chair: .....

Does Executive Support have a copy of the quote: Yes/No \* (\*delete as appropriate)

Does Executive Support have a copy of the invoice: Yes/No \*

Does Executive Support have a copy of the receipt: Yes/No \*

If any of the above are not attached, please explain why?:

Is there any variation between the quote and amount invoiced for works and if so why?:

**Declaration**

I confirm that I have not received any advantage or preferential treatment (financial or otherwise) from R3 Direct arising out of their connection to the Association

Signature.....

Date.....

**For Executive Support Officer's use only**

Date added to Register of Payment and Benefits.....

**Profitability Check (if required)**

**Was the required profitability level achieved? Yes / No**

**If No, please attach details.**

**Use of a Non-R3 Contractor / Supplier Declaration Form**

Name.....

Position.....

Date.....

Name of Director / Chair notified about the use of the contractor / supplier:

.....

Advice given by the Director/Chair .....

I confirm that **I require/or have already used\***, the services of the following contractor who is on the Associations Contractor List:

Contractor Name	Address	Type of Work or Service	Date work to be/or has been carried out	Value/ estimated Value

Does Executive Support have a copy of the quote: Yes/No \* (\*delete as appropriate)

Does Executive Support have a copy of the invoice: Yes/No \*

Does Executive Support have a copy of the receipt: Yes/No \*

If any of the above are not attached, please explain why?:

Is there any variation between the quote and amount invoiced for works and if so why?:

**Declaration**

I confirm that I have not received any advantage or preferential treatment (financial or otherwise) from the contractor or supplier arising out of their connection to the Association

Signature.....

Date.....

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**For Executive Support Officer's use only**

Date added to Register of Payment and Benefits.....

**Use of an ELHA Contractor / Supplier by a Connected Person  
Declaration Form**

Your Name.....

Your Position.....

Date.....

Name of the Connected Person .....

How they are Connected to You .....

Category of Connected Person (Group B or Group C) .....

(Remember that you should not use this form if this use of a Contractor or Supplier is by a Connected Person from Group A, if this applies, refer to the Procedure)

Name of Director / Chair notified about the use of the contractor / supplier:

.....

Advice given by the Director/Chair .....

I confirm that the Connected Person above **requires/or has already used\***, the services of the following contractor who is on the Associations Contractor List:

Contractor Name	Address	Type of Work or Service	Date work to be/or has been carried out	Value/ estimated Value

Does Executive Support have a copy of the quote: Yes/No \* (\*delete as appropriate)

Does Executive Support have a copy of the invoice: Yes/No \*

Does Executive Support have a copy of the receipt: Yes/No \*

If any of the above are not attached, please explain why?:

Is there any variation between the quote and amount invoiced for works and if so why?:

**Declaration**

I confirm that neither I nor the Connected Person have not received any advantage or preferential treatment (financial or otherwise) from the contractor or supplier arising out of their connection to the Association

**Signature**.....

**Date**.....

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**For Executive Support Officer's use only**

Date added to Register of Payment and Benefits.....

# Use of the Association's Contractors and Suppliers Procedure Review

## Report by Martin Pollhammer, Chief Executive – for Approval

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### 1.0 Introduction

Procedures are not normally presented to the Management Committee for approval, but this procedure relates to the Code of Conduct for both Management Committee members and staff, and is key to appropriately declaring and managing interests in relation to the use of the Association's Contractors and Suppliers.

The original procedure was drafted by the Association's solicitors, Anderson Strathern. However, in practice, it became confusing about what was simply an interest that should be declared, and what required approval. Some slight changes have been made to try and help to clarify how and when staff and Management Committee members need to make a Declaration, along with a revised process for using R3 Direct for Larger Jobs, which does require approval.

### 2.0 Making Declarations

All staff and Management Committee members are asked to review and confirm their Declarations of Interest on an annual basis. This is a useful check to make sure all interests are recorded, but staff and Management Committee members should update their Declarations as and when required.

Use of one of the Association's Suppliers and Contractors is something that needs to be Declared. This means no approval is required (with the exception of R3 Direct Large Jobs, see Section 2.1 below), but the use of the Contractor or Supplier should be recorded and kept with the staff member's or Management Committee member's Declaration of Interests.

The Form at Appendix C in the Procedure should be used to declare any use of a Contractor or Supplier by anyone in the staff member's or Management Committee member's immediate household (Group A in the Entitlements, Payments and Benefits Policy).

### 2.1 Use of R3 Direct

The use of R3 Direct is more tightly controlled than use of all other Suppliers and Contractors. However, Small Jobs (i.e. those booked online at a fixed price) only need to be Declared, in a process similar to that for other Suppliers and Contractors. The Form at appendix A in the Procedure should be used for these Declarations.

For R3 Direct Large Jobs (i.e. those that require a written quote), approval must be sought before ordering the works. Appendix B1 is an initial Approval Form which must be completed and approval given before a quote can be accepted, and Appendix B2 is a Declaration Form to confirm the works are complete.

However, the existing forms were confusing and Appendix B1 did not have an area for signature to sign off an approval. In practical use, as R3 reviews the profitability of each job (and as R3's software and systems have now been developed to the point where this is a reliable review), an additional check has been added to review the profitability of all Large Jobs with a value of £500 (excluding VAT) as part of this process. Whether or not a Profitability Check will be required will be recorded on the Appendix B1 Form.

Where required, this Profitability Check will be undertaken by the R3 Contracts Manager responsible for signing off the job for invoicing. If an appropriate level of profit has been made, this will be confirmed to the Executive Support Officer, and recorded on the Appendix B2 Form. If not, the reasons why the expected profitability was not achieved will be recorded on the Appendix B2 Form.

This does not change the price that the staff or Management Committee member will pay for the job – this has already been agreed and it is up to R3 to ensure it makes the required profit, but it is an extra control to ensure any possible fraud or attempted fraud is detected. The staff or Management Committee member using R3 will not be informed of the outcome of the Profitability Check.

Additions to the Procedure and Appendix B1 and B2 Forms are highlighted in the attached **Procedure Document**.

## **2.2 Use of Contractors / Suppliers by a Connected Person**

The Entitlements, Payments and Benefits Policy sets out what is meant by a Connected Person. This includes family members and close friends of staff and Management Committee members.

If a staff or Management Committee member becomes aware of a relevant activity by a Connected Person that involves the Association, this needs to be declared. This includes use of any of the Association's Contractors or Suppliers, including R3.

However, where the Connected Person is in Group B or Group C in the Entitlements, Payments and Benefits Policy, this activity simply needs to be declared, including any use of R3, whether for a Large Job or Small Job, and this Declaration should be held with any other Declarations of Interest.

An Appendix D has therefore been added to the Procedure to allow a simple way to manage and make these kind of Declarations.

### **Recommendation**

The Management Committee is asked to approve the amendments to the Use of the Association's Contractors / Suppliers Procedure.

Group Procedure

<b>Date Issued</b>	August 2017
<b>Last Reviewed</b>	February 2021
<b>Department</b>	Corporate
<b>Title</b>	<b>Use of Association Contractors / Suppliers Declaration</b>
<b>Objective</b>	To describe how to declare and register the use of the Group's contractors and suppliers (including R3 Direct) as per Appendix B of the Entitlements, Payment and Benefits Policy
<b>Responsible</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Next Review Date</b>	February 2026

## 1. Procedure

*This Procedure must be read in conjunction with the Entitlements, Payments and Benefits Policy.*

You or anyone who normally lives as part of your household, whether they are related to you or not, including spouses / partners who work away from home and sons and daughters who are studying away from home, can only utilise the services of one of the Association's contractors or suppliers (see Contractor List, Appendix B of the Entitlements, Payments and Benefits Policy) for your own personal needs if:

- The normal commercial rates are paid for this service and no preferential treatment, financial or otherwise, is received
- There is no reference to the member of staff or governing body member's role / position in the Association during any private negotiations with a contractor, and there is no response to any attempt by a contractor to engage in the subject
- There is no approach to contractors through the Association, which includes the use of work email accounts
- There is no use, or attempt to take advantage, of any preferential rates agreed by the Association and there is no drawing on the Association's contracts or framework agreements
- In emergency situations you should comply with this policy retrospectively as soon as is practicable

- You make a written declaration that you have not received any advantage or preferential treatment (financial or otherwise) from the contractor or supplier arising out of their connection with the Association; written quotes should be provided where these would normally be sought for the type of work in question, and in ALL cases receipts should be provided
- You record the transaction or agreement in the Register of Interests and keep the entry up to date

## 2. Making a Declaration / Applying for Approval

Before using a contractor or supplier you should:

- 1) Check contractor / supplier list, Appendix B of the Entitlement, Payments and Benefits Policy
- 2) If the contractor / supplier is not on the list, you do not need to take any action.
- 3) If the contractor / supplier is on the list, you must contact your Director (or if absent another Director or the Chief Executive) or Chair (as appropriate) for advice and/or approval.

If the contractor is R3 Direct, no advice or approval is required for small jobs. However, for large jobs advice and approval is required.

- 4) If you are able to proceed, you must complete one of the following declaration forms:
  - If the contractor is R3 Direct and it relates to “Small Jobs”, you must complete “**Use of R3 Direct Declaration Form – Small Jobs**” (Appendix A)
  - If the contractor is R3 Direct and it relates to “Large Jobs”, you must complete “**Use of R3 Direct Approval Form – Large Jobs**” (Appendix B1). Once the Job is completed you must complete “**R3 Direct Declaration Form – Completed Large Jobs**” (Appendix B2)
  - If you use any other contractor / supplier you must complete the form “**Use of Contractor / Supplier Declaration Form**” (Appendix C)
  - If you become aware of any Connected Persons in Group B or C (as defined in the Entitlements, Payments and Benefits Policy) using any of the Association’s Contractors or Suppliers (including R3), you should complete the form at **Appendix D**



- 5) You must complete all parts of the appropriate forms and include written quotes if applicable (e.g. for large works) and order confirmations if applicable (e.g. for smaller works)
- 6) You must supply copies of all invoices and receipts once works are completed or goods purchased
- 7) Once the appropriate form is fully completed it should be passed to the Executive Support Officer along with copies of quotes, invoices and receipts once they are available.
- 8) If a Profitability Check is required, Executive Support will ensure this is undertaken.

If your declaration is retrospective, you must follow steps 4 to 7. If the services provided were large jobs, you should also notify your Director or Chair.

### **2.1 Profitability Check**

A Profitability Check is undertaken where any member of staff or the Management Committee orders works with a value (excluding VAT) of £500 or more. Form B1 is used to identify any jobs where a Profitability Check is required.

When Form B2 is completed and returned to Executive Support, if a Profitability Check is required, Executive Support will contact the person who authorised the works in Form B1.

The Authoriser then contacts the officer in R3 that approved the invoice to confirm whether or not the expected level of profit has been made on the job. If it has, this should be recorded on Form B2, and no further action is required. If not, reasons for the poor level of profitability should be recorded and filed with Form B2.

### **3. Registering a Declaration**

The Executive Support Officer will update the Entitlements, Payments and Benefits Register. Any commercially sensitive information provided such as detailed price breakdown will be updated in a “closed” section of the register which will not be available for public inspection.

The contents of the Entitlements, Payments and Benefits Register will be reported to the Management Committee on a yearly basis

### **4. Review**

This procedure will be updated in line with changes to the Entitlements, Payments and Benefits Policy.

## Care & Repair Business Plan 2021/22

### Report by Gary Fortune, Finance Manager – for Information

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The table below is an extract from the current Care & Repair Business Plan, showing the projected income and expenditure for the service for the remaining year of the five-year plan (1 April 2017 to 31 March 2022). The figures for 2021/22 comprise the proposed Budget for the year.

During 2017/18 the service received a five-year funding agreement from East Lothian Council, which is fixed at £329,891 per year until 2021/22. The deficits in the later years are partly funded from surpluses carried forward from earlier years. The service is projected to generate a cumulative deficit of £25,545 at the end of 2021/22 with all prior years' surpluses being utilised.

The 2021/22 figures, which show a net deficit of £35,734, have been included within the overall ELHA budget for 2021/22.

ELHA have applied to East Lothian Council for additional funds to meet the anticipated cumulative deficit and an update will be provided at the meeting.

CARE AND REPAIR SERVICE BUSINESS PLAN INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT	BUDGETED 2020/21	PROJECTED 2021/22
Inflation rate assumed- general	2.20%	1.20%
Inflation rate assumed- salaries	1.60%	0.80%
	£	£
<b>INCOME:-</b>		
ELC	329,891	329,891
Medical Adaptations Administration Fees	3,168	3,168
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>333,059</b>	<b>333,059</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE:-</b>		
<b>DIRECT COSTS:-</b>		
Salaries	146,374	146,485
Employers NI	12,716	12,629
Employers Pension Contributions	41,979	41,543
Employers Pension Deficit Payment	30,133	29,800
Training/Conferences	1,464	1,465
Electrical Safety Service	13,639	13,803
<b>TOTAL DIRECT STAFF</b>	<b>246,305</b>	<b>245,724</b>
<b>INDIRECT COSTS:-</b>		
<b>ADMIN &amp; MGMT SERVICES</b>	<b>19,731</b>	<b>19,888</b>
<b>TRAVEL/SUBSISTENCE</b>		
Essntial Car User Allow.	2,823	2,840
Vehicle Leasing, Fuel and Maintenance	10,577	10,429
Vehicle Insurance	1,622	1,700
Travel/Subsistence	1,974	2,363
<b>TOTAL TRAVEL/SUBSIST</b>	<b>16,996</b>	<b>17,331</b>
<b>OFFICE OVERHEADS</b>		
<b>DIRECT COSTS</b>		
IT Systems	25,204	35,565
Materials, Tools & Equipment	1,000	1,000
Telephone & Fax	819	1,003
Print/Publicity/Adverts	1,169	1,416
Postage	697	639
Office Equipment	256	250
SHQM Accreditation	1,800	0
Professional Indemnity	644	657
<b>TOTAL DIRECT O/HEADS</b>	<b>31,589</b>	<b>40,530</b>
<b>INDIRECT COSTS</b>		
General Overheads	37,701	36,786
Stationery/Office Materials	7,298	7,395
Audit	1,124	1,138
<b>TOTAL INDIRECT O/HEADS</b>	<b>46,123</b>	<b>45,319</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>360,744</b>	<b>368,793</b>
<b>SURPLUS/DEFICIT</b>	<b>(27,685)</b>	<b>(35,734)</b>

**Surplus/Deficit**

Brought forward at 01/04/21 (projected) 10,189  
 2021/22 (35,734)

**Cumulative at 31 March 2022** (25,545)

**Date Issued** 22 April 2004

**Department** Housing Management

**Title** ~~Allocations~~ These Homes Policy

**Responsible** Director of Housing

**Last Review Date** February 2021

**Next Review Date** May 2021

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 East Lothian Housing Association is a Housing Association registered with the Scottish Housing Regulator and with Charitable Status. We provide quality, affordable and sustainable housing and associated services for people in East Lothian.

1.2 Most of our properties are allocated through our digital lettings service, These Homes. Some are not and include:

- Workshop homes
- Houses for sale, whether shared ownership or low cost home ownership
- Properties where allocations have been delegated under a lease or other agreement

More information about these properties can be found at section 1.5 and Appendix 1.

### 1.21 Aims of Policy

Our ~~allocations~~ These Homes -policy aims to ensure that:

- People have fair and open access to our housing register
- Reasonable pPreference is given to those in housing need
- Our properties are allocated in a fair, transparent and consistent manner that does not discriminate or exclude people
- We recognise the needs of the communities we work in
- We make the best use of our housing stock

- The policy is clear and easily understood
- Applicants are given choice and allocations result in sustainable tenancies

### **1.32 Legislative/Regulatory Framework**

This policy and the procedures, publications and websites that support it are based upon the principles set out in the Scottish Government's [Social Housing Allocations in Scotland: Practice Guide](#)~~Practice Guide to Social Housing Allocations~~ published in 2019<sup>14</sup> and aim to fully comply with the Scottish Housing Regulator's Social Housing Charter Indicators which support the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter and in particular the following outcomes:

#### **Equalities**

Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that:

- Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

#### **Communication**

- Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

#### **Participation**

- Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

#### **Housing options**

Social landlords work together to ensure that:

- People looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them
- Tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options
- People at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness.

#### **Access to social housing**

- People looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and their prospects of being housed

### Tenancy sustainment

Social landlords ensure that tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.

### Homeless people

Homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice; are provided with suitable, good-quality temporary accommodation when this is needed and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to.

At a minimum, we will comply with all relevant legislation including:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended)
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
- The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014
- The Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Equalities Act 2010
- The Data Protection Act ~~1998~~2018

### 1.43 Context

East Lothian is an area of exceptional housing pressure. Situated to the east of Edinburgh, the area is predominately rural with a coastline characterised by beaches, seaside towns and golf courses.

As well as being a significant destination for tourists and day trippers, East Lothian has good road and rail links to Edinburgh, and therefore attracts large numbers of (predominantly higher income) commuters and is also an area to which many people will choose to move to when they retire.

Locally, the economy is dependent on service industries, tourism and farming, and wages are low. This means that many low and middle-income households in the area are priced out of the local housing market. The area has a significant homelessness problem.

Land supply is severely constrained, both by the local environment, but also as there is usually opposition to new developments in most towns and villages, even where that development is affordable rented housing. As a result land prices are often exceptionally high.

Our problems are therefore quite different to many other areas. It is unlikely that on any scale East Lothian will suffer from low demand issues in the foreseeable future, any such issues are likely only to relate to specific properties and in exceptional circumstances.

Our stock includes:

- General needs housing: 1 to 6 bedroom flats and houses
- Care/Supported housing with access to support for vulnerable individuals
- Amenity and sheltered housing for older people
- Housing for wheelchair users: designed to meet the needs of people who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids

In addition, we own a number of workshop homes, shared ownership properties, garages, garage sites, and other non-residential properties. Some of these may be advertised on These Homes from time to time but are not allocated in accordance with this Policy.

Our area of operation is from Musselburgh to Innerwick across the local authority district of East Lothian. Since we were founded in 1988, we have built around 70% of our homes, and we acquired the remaining 30% from Scottish Homes in 1996 through a large-scale voluntary stock transfer. This means that the age profile of our stock varies significantly.

There are not enough houses for all who need them and the situation is particularly acute in East Lothian. This Policy is therefore designed to make best use of the very limited housing supply by giving preference to applicants in housing need and prioritising transfers for our own tenants so that each vacancy may address the needs of more than one applicant.

We also know there is a high demand for one-bedroom properties in East Lothian. We prefer to build homes with a minimum of two bedrooms, though there will be exceptions where we cannot do this, for example, in a restricted town centre or a conversion of an existing property. If we build two-bedroom properties in a new development, we will agree to under-occupy a proportion of these taking account of the demand and property type.

### ~~1.3 Context~~

~~East Lothian continues to be an area with extremely high levels of housing need. The population has been, and is projected to continue growing at a much higher rate than the rest of Scotland. More relevant to this policy perhaps is that the growth in number of households is projected to be the second highest in Scotland. In 2010 East Lothian was the fourth most expensive place in Scotland to buy a home and yet incomes were not significantly higher than the Scottish Average. Despite this around 64% of households in East Lothian live in the owner occupied sector.~~

~~Between them, East Lothian Council and the Housing Associations operating in East Lothian own around 10,600 homes. East Lothian Housing Association is the largest Housing Association with around 1,300 homes. At 31 March 2013, we had 3,333 live registrations on our register and the Council's waiting list stood at 4,657 applicants (3,890 excluding transfer applications).~~

~~In 2012/13 the Council had only 422 properties available for let and we had only 67, representing a turnover of only 5% compared with a national average of around 9%. By actively encouraging transfers of existing tenants so that wherever possible available vacancies addressed the housing need of more than one person, turnover was increased to 7%.~~

~~Between 2007/08 and 2010/11 the number of people seeking assistance under the homelessness legislation fell nationally but continued to increase in East Lothian. A housing options approach was adopted by the Council during 2011/12 resulting in a very similar number of people (1,600) approaching the Homelessness Service but far fewer (774) going on to become assessed as statutorily homeless. The figures remained very similar during 2012/13. Although it is too early to know the impact of the abolition of priority need on 31 December 2012 on the first full year's figures for 2013/14 early indications are that they remain stable.~~

~~It is however clear that there are more people presenting and being assessed as homeless in East Lothian each year than there are social tenancies available and because of this we have committed to allocating 50% of our available properties to people that the Council has accepted a duty to house in terms of the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003. This presents obvious difficulties in meeting other types of housing need.~~

~~We own and manage a variety of housing, all within the boundaries of East Lothian. The stock includes:~~

- ~~• General needs housing: 1 to 6 bedroom flats and houses~~
- ~~• Care/Supported housing with access to support for vulnerable individuals~~
- ~~• Amenity and sheltered housing for older people~~
- ~~• Shared ownership and low cost home ownership housing~~



- ~~• Workshop homes, for the promotion of small businesses in village communities~~

~~There are not enough houses for all who need them and the situation is particularly acute in East Lothian. This Policy is therefore designed to make best use of the very limited housing supply by giving preference to applicants in housing need and prioritising transfers for our own tenants so that each vacancy may address the needs of more than one applicant.~~

~~In addition, for the first time we will, if practicable, prioritise people who live in East Lothian or those with a connection to the area as defined at sections 20(2)(aa) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended) over those with no connection to the area.~~

## 1.54 General Principles

### Choice and empowerment

We want to maximise opportunities for access to housing and allow applicants to make informed choices. We operate ~~homehunt~~These Homes, a form of choice based lettings, where vacant properties are advertised and applicants apply for the ones they want.

We aim to keep the service as straightforward and easy to understand as possible and to provide good information and advice so that applicants can make informed choices.

### Housing Need

We recognise housing need through a system of Priority Passes which is fully explained in Section 3 below.

### Ensuring Probity Lettings to Staff and Management Committee Members

Our ~~Allocations~~These Homes policy must operate fairly for all and in particular Management Committee members, staff or people close to them must not be given any preferential treatment in the allocations process, neither should they be disadvantaged. We have Codes of Conduct in place for both Management Committee and Staff and an Entitlements, Payments and Benefits policy all of which are there to ensure that Management Committee and Staff members do not gain any unfair advantage through their connection to ELHA. If a Management Committee or staff member or someone close to them is allocated a tenancy, we will ensure that;

- The allocation is in accordance with this policy **and**
- Neither the applicant nor anyone connected to the applicant is involved in any way or in any part of the allocation process **and**
- The offer is approved by the Management Committee in advance **and**

- The tenancy is recorded as an interest in our Register of Payments and Benefits within five days of the tenancy commencing

### Sustainable Communities

We want to create and maintain communities that people want to move into and stay in. To achieve this aim we will avoid over concentrating any particular group in any particular area. Wherever possible, we will identify any imbalance, and the action required to address it, before the property is advertised and will include information about any criteria to be applied in the property advert.

Where an applicant is by-passed in the interests of maintaining a sustainable community we will always try to balance the interests of the individual with the interests of the community and will bear in mind the requirement to give reasonable preference to certain categories of applicant. We will record the reasons for the decision and report such allocations to our ~~Housing & Property Services Sub-Audit & Assurance~~ Committee.

### Lettings Plans

Lettings plans are used to create or promote sustainable communities and are usually time limited. Properties subject to a lettings plan may be advertised for a specific client group or household type, and when allocating them consideration will be given to the requirements of the lettings plan. As a result, some applicants may not be made an offer, even if they have more priority than another applicant. See Appendix 5 for more information.

### Sustainable Tenancies

We have a Tenancy Sustainment policy that seeks to identify and address potential problems at the point of allocation and ensure that appropriate support is provided to enable the applicant to successfully remain in the tenancy. We will carry out an affordability assessment prior to any new tenancy starting and will address any affordability issues by referring new tenants to our Independent Money Advisor for income maximisation, debt and budgeting advice.

### Partnership Working

We work in partnership with East Lothian Council in the following circumstances to ensure that:

- ~~We have a Nomination/Section 5 protocol in place with East Lothian Council that ensures~~ 50% of our available properties are allocated to statutorily homeless households. We have a Nomination/Section 5 protocol in place for this purpose

- ~~• We also work in partnership with East Lothian Council to ensure that~~ access to our joint mutual exchange list is available to anyone seeking a mutual exchange.
- ~~• We will work with the Council, other Housing Associations and organisations wherever this will help in addressing housing need in East Lothian for example by leasing accommodation to enable particular needs to be met.~~
- ~~We will work with East Lothian Council to ensure that~~ the National Accommodation Strategy for Sex Offenders (NASSO) operates effectively in East Lothian.
- We meet our obligations under the East Lothian Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan which sets out how The Council and its key partners anticipate making the transition from the current position in respect of homelessness to a rapid rehousing approach over a five year period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024

We will work with the Council, other Housing Associations and organisations wherever this will help in addressing housing need in East Lothian for example by leasing accommodation to enable particular needs to be met.

We are currently one of ~~seventy nine~~ social landlords working throughout Scotland that use ~~Homehunt~~ These Homes web. By completing one registration form applicants can choose to be registered with one or all of the landlords offering homes for rent in the areas they wish to be housed in.

We will encourage feedback from tenants and applicants and use this to improve our service.

## Mobility

We aim to help people who want to move around the country, and we will consider applicants who need to move to East Lothian for work, family or medical reasons or to escape harassment or abuse. We do not subscribe to any of the mobility schemes that require us to pay to participate but we will pay for individual ELHA tenants who wish to join such schemes.

We administer an ~~web based~~ online exchange register open to anyone seeking a mutual exchange. We will support individuals who want to move, by providing details of landlords in their areas of choice. We will actively consider requests from other landlords throughout the UK to house applicants with high levels of housing need.

## Connection to East Lothian

We will assess the needs of everyone who applies to us for Priority in the same way, however, when allocating properties applicants with a connection to East Lothian (as defined in section 20(2)(aa) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987) will be prioritised over those with no connection to the area.

### Home Ownership

We have the right to take account whether an applicant owns or has owned property before deciding to allocate them a home unless it is unsafe for them to occupy their property ( i.e. a threat of abuse or it is structurally unsafe) or it doesn't meet their needs (i.e. they have a disability and cannot access facilities).

When offering a tenancy to a person who is a homeowner, we will consider whether the housing needs of that applicant can be met through the temporary allocation of property by a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST), which will be for an initial period of six months, which may be extended.

If we propose to offer a SSST we will advise the applicant of this, and the reasons for our decision at the time of offer. The applicant may appeal this decision.

### Temporary Tenancies

Most of the tenancies that we offer will be Scottish Secure Tenancies that provide long term security of tenure, however in some limited circumstances, we may offer a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST) instead. The circumstances where we may offer a SSST are:

- Where an applicant is a homeowner who cannot live in their property because repairs are required to make their home safe or adaptations are necessary to meet the needs of the applicant or a member of their household, or the property is being sold to enable the purchase of an alternative, more suitable property
- Where an applicant who is a homeowner has been given short notice that their tenancy agreement is being ended
- Where an available property has been purpose designed to wheelchair standard and there are no applicants with an identified need for this property type
- Where an applicant or a member of their household has acted in an antisocial manner within the last three years
- to persons requiring or receiving housing support services as defined in section 91(8) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001

If we grant a SSST which we decide not to either extend or convert to a Scottish Secure Tenancy, we will notify the tenant of the reasons for our decision and the tenant has the right to review this.

If we grant a SSST for a wheelchair designed property for which there is a subsequent need from one of our own tenants, we will not normally extend it for a further period or convert it to a SST. We will work with the tenant to secure suitable alternative accommodation.

If we grant a SSST to a homeowner because of the need for adaptation or essential repairs, or whilst possession of the property is being recovered, we will not normally extend the tenancy or convert it to a SST.

### **Transfers**

We recognise the importance of making best use of our stock for our tenants and we aim to maximise the options available to release stock so that it can be used to meet applicants needs from the reasonable preference groups or other urgent housing need categories.

### **Joint Tenancies**

We advise all applicants of their right to apply for a joint tenancy with a person who is either staying with them or intending to reside with them. From 1 November 2019 a request from a tenant to add a joint tenant will only be allowed once the proposed tenant has been living in the house for twelve months and we have been made aware that they were living there at the outset of the twelve month period.

### **Kinship Carers, Foster Carers & Those Adopting**

A level of priority will be considered for those applicants who have been approved for adoption or are approved for fostering or kinship carers. Though Housing Need is always based upon current circumstances we will consider giving priority where supporting evidence can be provided. We may work with the Children's and Young Peoples Services to decide at what stage it is appropriate to give priority.

### **Pets**

We do not limit the number of domestic pets in our properties but there are exceptions to this rule:

- We do not allow dogs in flats within a communal stair with the exception of assistance dogs. When we advertise flats to which this ban applies, this will be clearly stated in the advert to ensure that applicants are aware of the ban.

- In some new developments the Deed of Conditions, a legal document which sets out a structure to make sure that the development is maintained in the future for the benefit of all residents, may restrict the number and type of pets allowed. The rules in a Deed of Conditions takes precedent over the clauses in a tenancy agreement.

## Equal Opportunities

We will not unfairly discriminate against anyone. We will make information available in different formats as required and will provide free access to translation services in our office. We will monitor our allocations to ensure that nothing in this policy leads to unfair discrimination.

## Confidentiality

We will treat all personal information as completely confidential and use it only for the purpose of operating our ~~allocations~~ These Homes policy. We will obtain or pass on information only in accordance with the declaration signed by applicants as part of the registration process or with the applicant's consent, or if we are required to do so by law or by our regulators.

## Appeals

Applicants have the right to appeal any decision made in accordance with this policy. Our appeals procedure is described at section 6.

## 1.65 Allocations Not Covered by this Policy

There are occasions when we will not advertise properties and allocate them differently. We will do this in various circumstances including:

- Where we cannot identify suitable applicants for a specially adapted property through advertising.
- Where we are seeking to accommodate people coming to the UK under an official Resettlement Program. Such allocations will be reported to our Audit and Assurance Committee.
- Where we have referral arrangements in place with specialist agencies or organisations providing support to people with particular needs. Such allocations will be reported to our Audit & Assurance Committee.

- Where tenants choose to exchange properties with another landlord or ELHA tenant. These are known as mutual exchanges and are covered in our Tenancy Management policy
- Where a person succeeds to, or is assigned a tenancy, also covered by our Tenancy Management Policy

~~The allocation of workshop homes is led by the business needs of the applicant and is carried out in partnership with the Economic Development Unit at East Lothian Council.~~

- ~~•~~
- ~~• We have a separate policy setting out our approach to mutual exchanges.~~
- ~~• We allocate Low Cost Home Ownership properties in East Saltoun and Ormiston on behalf of East Lothian Council. These allocations are governed by a separate agreement between us and East Lothian Council.~~
- We may lease properties to other organisations or enter into nominations agreements with agencies providing support to people with particular needs. All such allocations will be reported to our Housing & Property Services SubAudit & Assurance -Committee.

### 1.7 Management Allocations ~~5.3 Management Allocations and Local Lettings Initiatives~~

In exceptional circumstances, we may allocate properties on management grounds (i.e. we will not normally advertise the property but will allocate it direct to one applicant), for example:

- High level support needs, severe harassment or domestic abuse
- Applicants with exceptional circumstances not otherwise covered by this policy
- Where an individual needs a particular type of property that may not come up for allocation very often so that their health or support needs can be addressed
- Where a series of moves can meet the housing needs of several applicants and the first suitable property to facilitate this is available
- Where we require someone to move from an adapted or wheelchair property because the family member who needs the facilities provided dies or is permanently hospitalised
- Where we urgently need to move a tenant to address issues such as antisocial behaviour, harassment or abuse.

We will avoid re-housing vulnerable applicants in properties where we are aware of an issue that we feel may that would make it more difficult for them to sustain a tenancy (for example we would not house a drug user next to a known dealer in a property where we are already aware of drug misuse). This sort of situation happens rarely and any such



~~decision will be fully explained in a report which will be retained with the allocations paperwork.~~

~~We may also exclude a property from the allocation process outlined in this policy if the property is to be leased to another agency or used for supported accommodation (See paragraph 1.5).~~

~~Such allocations will be kept to a minimum, will be fully explained in a report that will be retained with the allocation paperwork and will be reported to our Housing & Property Services Sub-Audit & Assurance Committee.~~

~~We will consider using Local Lettings Initiatives to address serious management issues or imbalances within a particular area. Such initiatives may include management moves; will receive the prior approval of the Housing & Property Services Sub-Committee and will be carefully monitored to ensure that the desired objectives are achieved.~~

## 2.0 ADMISSION TO THE HOUSING LIST

All applicants aged 16 or over will be accepted onto the housing list. Any priority awarded will be dependent upon their housing and housing related social need as defined by our priority system which is explained in section 3. Applicants living out-with East Lothian will be granted priority if they need to move to East Lothian for work, family or medical reasons or to escape harassment or abuse. We will assess the housing needs of applicants with no connection to East Lothian but will prioritise applicants with a connection when allocating properties.

### 2.1 Registration Process

~~An overview of the registration process is attached at **Appendix 1**~~

To register with ~~homehunt~~These Homes, applicants must complete a registration form. This should be done online ~~and assistance is available at our office or over the telephone for anyone who needs support doing this. A but paper form is available for download from the These Homes website however it should be noted that this is a substantial form.s are also available at our office, by phone request, on our website and the homehunt website or from other organisations such as East Lothian Council, Shelter and local Citizens Advice Bureaux or from any of the other Homehuntweb landlords operating throughout Scotland~~

An applicant can register online or in person at our office and apply for a property on the same day.

Our registration form is kept as simple as possible and collects only information essential to our allocation process and equalities monitoring.



At the point of registration, applicants are asked to tell us if they are homeless, overcrowded, have health problems or are living in accommodation suffering from disrepair. ~~If they do, they will be asked to provide further information during registration to allow us to assess if they qualify for priority. This information is recorded and followed up to encourage applicants to apply for priority.~~

Applications on the housing register are issued with a unique registration number on the day their registration is entered into ~~the Homehunt~~ These Homes ~~web~~ database (whether by them or by us). ~~As soon as we have~~ Unless we have to -verify ~~ied~~ any information provided in the registration, the applicant can begin applying for advertised properties as soon as they are registered, except in the following circumstances:

- Applications may be placed on hold (suspended from receiving offers of housing) if the applicant has debt relating to a previous or current tenancy and no repayment arrangement is in place, or they have an arrangement but have not maintained it for 3 months or 13 consecutive weeks; if they declare or we become aware of a history of antisocial behaviour or a criminal conviction relating to, or involvement in, the supply and use of illegal drugs; or if the applicant requires support to maintain a tenancy
- Applicants whose housing need will not emerge until a later date (e.g. where the applicant is in hospital or prison and not due to get out within a month), will be placed on the housing register but will remain on hold until the applicant contacts us to confirm that they are in a position to accept a tenancy
- Applicants leaving the armed forces can choose to have their circumstances assessed up to 6 months before their date of discharge then have their registration put on hold so that they can benefit from an earlier date of registration or Priority Pass Award. ~~but are not subject to penalties for not applying for suitable properties~~ They will remain on hold until the applicant contacts us to confirm that they are in a position to accept a tenancy.

In all cases where an application is put on hold, the held status will last only for as long as it takes to obtain full information or rectify the situation. Further information about held applications is provided at Section 4.1 and Appendix 4.

We may ask for supporting documentation of relevant personal circumstances, e.g. proof of residence or evidence of harassment, at any time during the registration / allocation process. We may also make relevant enquires to confirm information given by the applicant.

We will make it clear to applicants who own their own home that it is a legal requirement that they must occupy a tenancy as their only or principal home. We will assess the priority of home-owners in exactly the same way as others.

### 3.0 ASSESSMENT OF HOUSING NEED

#### 3.1 Priority Pass System

Priority is awarded through a system of Priority Passes. All applicants will be encouraged to apply for priority to reflect their housing need.

There are five levels of Priority Pass; Platinum, Gold Plus, Gold, Silver and Bronze.

Applicants can apply for as many Priority Passes as they feel they may be entitled to. Priority can be awarded from one or more of the categories listed in **Appendix 2**. A Priority Pass will only be awarded once in each category and will be the highest level of pass that the applicants' circumstances merit.

#### 3.2 Homelessness

We recognise housing need due to homelessness by the award of Platinum Priority Passes.

Applicants for whom East Lothian Council has accepted a duty to house in terms of the homelessness legislation are awarded a Platinum Priority Pass, our highest level of Priority Pass.

We recognise our responsibility towards homelessness or threatened homelessness amongst our own tenants. Applications for re-housing from tenants will be considered under the same priority system as other applicants.

The majority of our allocations to homeless households are made through ~~homehunt~~ [These Homes](#) as described at section 5. We also have a Nomination/Section 5 protocol in place with East Lothian Council to ensure that our agreed quota for allocations to statutorily homeless households is met.

#### 3.3 Harassment and Abuse

We recognise housing need due to harassment or abuse by the award of Silver and Bronze Priority Passes.

Harassment can be on the grounds of race, sex or sexual orientation, disability (including mental health problems), colour, religion or belief.

We have a separate policy on harassment which is relevant to our own tenants.

Applicants suffering from harassment to the extent that they cannot occupy or have to leave their home will be encouraged to apply to East Lothian Council for assessment

under the homelessness legislation which could result in the award of a Platinum Priority Pass.

### 3.4 Domestic Abuse

We recognise housing need due to domestic abuse by the award of a Gold Priority Passes.

We also recognise that not all applicants will want to approach their local authority as homeless but know that victims and children are potentially at severe risk and continue to remain in that position whilst they remain in their home.

We have a separate policy on domestic abuse which is relevant to our tenants and will seek to support victims who want to remain in their home but may need to move temporarily.

### 3.5 Health

We recognise housing need due to health problems by the award of Gold and Silver Priority Passes.

We will consider awarding priority for re-housing on health grounds only where a move will result in a significant improvement in the applicants' health or make their health problem much easier to cope with. We do not assess the severity of the medical condition, only look at the impact of their current accommodation on their health.

In assessing applications on health grounds, we will always consider whether or not the applicant's current accommodation could be adapted to meet their housing needs.

Medical Priority Passes are awarded based upon the information provided in the medical Priority Pass application registration form and we provide guidance to staff to assist them in making these assessments. We will seek further information about the applicant's condition, the impact of re-housing and the type of property required from a health professional at the point of allocation, if this has not already been provided.

Minor ailments or conditions that will not be improved by re-housing will not attract priority on health grounds.

We may place restrictions on the type of property to be offered to an applicant who has been awarded priority on health grounds. For example, someone awarded priority due to difficulties managing stairs in their current accommodation will normally only be able to apply for properties on the ground floor.

We will not normally allocate a property that would require significant adaptations in order to meet an applicant's needs unless we have no properties available that would meet the

applicant's needs without adaptation. In these circumstances we will consider each case on an individual basis, in partnership with East Lothian Council's Social Work Department.

### **3.6 Overcrowding**

We recognise housing need due to overcrowding by the award of Gold, Silver and Bronze Priority Passes. This section also covers the priority given to large families (who need 4 or more bedrooms) whose principal Housing Need is likely to arise from overcrowding.

We only assess overcrowding for households that have outgrown their accommodation. If an applicant is living with family or a guardian we will not take account of overcrowding that may already exist within the family but will only consider the needs of the applicant.

The following occupancy levels are used to assess overcrowding and to allocate housing of an appropriate size:

- All adults (over the age of 16 years) are entitled to a bedroom of their own unless living with a partner when they will be expected to share a double bedroom
- Two children of the same sex can share a double bedroom until one of them reaches the age of 16
- Children of the opposite sex can share a double bedroom until one of them reaches the age of 8
- In some cases, an adult/child's medical condition may mean that they need sole use of a bedroom. We will normally ask for proof of this requirement
- An extra bedroom will be allowed if a carer needs to stay with the applicant for at least 3 nights per week. We will normally ask for proof of this requirement
- If an applicant has residential access to a child/children for at least 3 nights per week the applicant will be allocated one extra bedroom, if required, to accommodate the child/children. We will normally ask for proof of this requirement
- If an applicant has access to a child/children for 4 nights a week or more, the child/children will be treated as permanent members of the household and we will allocate a property of the appropriate size to accommodate them
- In recognition of the fact that overcrowding resulting from access to children is only for part of the week and is therefore not as bad as overcrowding due to children there full time, access overcrowding will attract lesser priority
- A living room should not have to be used as a bedroom unless it is to accommodate a child or children on residential access of less than 3 nights per week
- No more than two people should share a bedroom unless the applicant chooses to share a room with a child or children on residential access of less than 3 nights per week
- A box room or a room without natural light is not counted as a bedroom available to the household

### **3.7 Under-Occupation**

We recognise housing need due to changing family circumstances resulting in an applicant now requiring a smaller home by the award of Gold and Silver Priority Passes. Since in addition to recognising the needs of the applicant the added benefit of this is to free up larger homes for those who need them this priority is only awarded to tenants of East Lothian Housing Association.

### **3.8 Unsuitable Housing**

We recognise housing need resulting from living in property that is below tolerable standard (BTS), suffering from dis-repair or lacking amenities by the award of Gold and Bronze Priority Passes.

### **3.9 Social/Family Support and Employment (Need to be in a Community and Need to be in a Rural Community)**

We recognise housing need due to the need to be in a particular community within East Lothian by the award of Silver and Bronze Priority Passes.

Priority may be awarded where an applicant needs to move to:

- Take up or keep a permanent job. Priority will normally only be awarded where the applicant is the main earner and the job is more than one hour's travel from his/her current home
- Be nearer amenities or services. We will consider the reasons why the applicant finds it difficult to access amenities or services, including availability of public transport
- Maintain contact with children
- Give or receive support – we will consider the nature and frequency of the support provided or received

### **3.10 First Affordable Home**

People are often forced to continue living in the family home due to a lack of affordable housing options. We recognise housing need for this reason by the award of a Bronze Priority Pass.

Priority is awarded to anyone living in the family home who has a total income of less than £30,000 a year and who have never held a social housing tenancy.

### **3.11 Living in Flats**

We recognise housing need due to living in a flat for more than 2 years and the applicant wants to move to a house, by the award of a Bronze Priority Pass. This particularly benefits families with young children who would otherwise have no housing

need, where there is no suitable play or storage facilities. The added benefit of this is to free up homes for those who need them, therefore this priority is only awarded to tenants of East Lothian Housing Association.

### **3.12 Transfers**

Our tenants are subject to the same conditions of access, assessment and acceptance as external applicants (including the requirement to have kept a repayment agreement for any arrears or debts amounting to more than one month's rent for at least 3 months), with the following exceptions:

- We will inspect our tenant's home before a Priority Pass is awarded and will tell our tenant about any work they need to complete to bring the condition of the property up to a satisfactory standard, acceptable to us
- If our tenant needs to complete any work to fulfil the obligations of the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement, then their application will be placed on hold until they notify us that the work is complete and we have inspected it
- If a transfer applicant has not applied for a Priority Pass then we will carry out a pre-inspection of their property before any conditional offer of housing is confirmed
- Transfers will not be approved unless the property to be vacated is in a condition where it can be immediately re-let
- Transfer applicants may be awarded priority for under-occupying their existing home
- Transfer applicants may be awarded priority for living in a flat for more than 2 years
- If a transfer applicant and another applicant have the same level of Priority Pass, the transfer applicant will be allocated the property, regardless of the date of registration or date of award of Pass
- Transfer applicants who have a clear rent account; maintain their property to an acceptable standard and have no history of neighbour problems or anti-social behaviour will be eligible for a Gold Plus Pass giving them priority over all but Homeless applicants, and where the property has been medically adapted and our tenant does not need these adaptations and there are other applicants that do.

### **3.13 Limitation of Passes**

We are committed to offering applicants as much choice as possible, however, in some circumstances awarding priority will result in restrictions on the type of property or area for which the applicant will receive priority.

We will limit Priority Passes awarded for social / family support or employment to a specific area.

We may also limit a Priority Pass to a particular type of property, e.g. to ground floor accommodation where a pass has been awarded for health related mobility problems, or to wheelchair accommodation where this is required by the applicant.

Applicants who have had their pass limited, by us can still apply for properties that fall out-with the pass limitations, but their Priority Pass will not be recognised.

### 3.13 Suspension of Priority Passes

Where we consider that an applicant has knowingly or carelessly worsened their housing circumstances (for example, by moving from a house that was large enough for their household to one that is too small, causing overcrowding), their entitlement to a Priority Pass will be placed on hold for an initial period of twelve months with discretion to extend this suspension period to a maximum of two years.

The twelve months ~~two year~~ on hold period will begin on the date the applicant worsened his/her circumstances. The applicant will still be able to apply for properties but will have to re-apply for a Priority Pass at the end of the on hold period.

If an applicant has used a Priority Pass, other than one issued for homelessness, to apply for a property and they refuse a reasonable offer, their Priority Pass will be withdrawn for a period of ~~two year~~twelve months. It is the applicant's responsibility to re-apply for priority at the end of this period.

If a homeless applicant refuses an offer of a property we will follow the procedure set out in the Nomination / Section 5 protocol and inform East Lothian Council. The application will be put on hold until the Council has completed its investigation

## 4.0 ADMINISTRATION OF THE HOUSING LIST

### 4.1 Held Applications (Suspensions)

We aim to keep held applications to a minimum and be clear about when they will apply and for how long. We may put applications on hold for an initial twelve months with the discretion to extend the suspension for further periods of six months up to two years the following circumstances:

If an applicant has:

- provided false or misleading information in connection with an application

- carelessly or intentionally worsened their current housing circumstances to gain greater priority
- acted in an antisocial manner in the locality of their house
- acted in an antisocial manner towards a member of our staff or Management Committee member during the application process
- had an ASBO issued to them or a member of their household within the last two years
- been convicted of an offence that was committed in, or in the vicinity of their house
- been evicted from a previous tenancy
- turned down one reasonable offer of housing
- deliberately given us false information or omitting relevant information with the intention of being assessed with greater housing need than is the case

We may also put an application on hold if:

- the applicant has housing debt of more than one month and has not arranged to pay off their debt or has not kept to an agreed arrangement for at least 3 months or 13 consecutive weeks. (Debts older than 5 years, which have not previously been pursued by the former landlord will be disregarded)
- The applicant has a change in circumstances
- We are waiting further information
- There are support issues
- The applicant is unable to take up a tenancy
- The condition of the property is not acceptable (ELHA transfers only)

We will regularly review held registrations in order to minimise the time any applicant is unable to apply for available properties.

Appendix 4 provides more detailed information in relation to suspensions.

~~When we put an application on hold we will tell the applicant that they have been put on hold and explain why. We will also tell the applicant what, if anything, they need to do to have the hold status removed.~~

~~Where we need to take action, such as make further enquiries, we will make sure that this is done as quickly as possible and that, if required, follow up action is taken immediately.~~



~~We will regularly review hold registrations in order to minimise the time any applicant is unable to apply for available properties.~~

~~We may put applications on hold in the following circumstances:~~

### ~~Change of Circumstances~~

~~If the applicant buys a property or moves to a secure tenancy we will put the application on hold until we establish whether or not they wish to remain on the Housing Register.~~

### ~~Awaiting Information~~

~~If we need more information to assess an application, we will put the application on hold until we receive the information. We will make sure that requests for information are regularly followed up so that the time on hold is kept to a minimum.~~

### ~~Rental, service charge or rechargeable repairs debts~~

~~Where the applicant has current or previous rental, service charge, chargeable repairs, legal expenses or any other tenancy debt amounting to more than one month's rent, they must have made an arrangement for re-payment and maintained payments for at least three months.~~

~~If no arrangement has been made we will tell the applicant that their registration will remain on hold until this requirement has been met.~~

~~It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the re-payment arrangement is kept, to inform us when the arrangement has been kept for three months and to let us know if the arrangement is broken. We will check that any re-payment arrangement continues to be maintained before confirming any offer of housing.~~

~~Debts older than five years, which have not previously been pursued by the former landlord, or where the debt was not the responsibility of the applicant as a tenant, will be disregarded.~~

### ~~Anti-social behaviour~~

~~Where there is clear evidence of anti-social behaviour in a current or previous tenancy, we will put the application on hold until we have fully investigated the circumstances. If we are satisfied that an applicant's circumstances or conduct has significantly changed, the hold status will be lifted.~~

~~In considering whether to put an application on hold for antisocial behaviour, we will take account of the nature of the behaviour (e.g. threats or harassment, fire raising, relevant criminal convictions) and:~~

- ~~• The nature, frequency and duration of the behaviour~~
- ~~• The extent to which the behaviour was the responsibility of people other than the applicant~~
- ~~• The effect the conduct had/is having on other people~~
- ~~• What the applicant has done to address the situation~~
- ~~• The applicant's ability to maintain a tenancy, either with or without support~~

### ~~Providing false information or omitting relevant information~~

~~Where we consider that an applicant has knowingly or carelessly given false information or withheld information that would have a bearing on their application, we will put the application on hold for a period of two years.~~

### ~~Support Issues~~

~~If an applicant states that they need support to maintain a tenancy or appears unlikely to be able to maintain an independent tenancy without support, the application will be put on hold. The on hold status will last as long as it takes us to confirm that an appropriate support package has been identified and confirmed to be available to the applicant.~~

### ~~Applicant not able to take up a tenancy~~

~~For example, because they are in hospital, prison or haven't yet left the armed forces and would be unable to move into a tenancy.~~

### ~~Aggressive or threatening behaviour~~

~~If an applicant is aggressive or threatening towards a member of our staff or Management Committee, we will put their application on hold for two years. In all such cases we will work with the applicant, by letter if necessary, towards a mutual understanding of their expected behaviour and attitude.~~

### ~~Condition of Property (Transfers only)~~

~~Where a transfer applicant must bring the condition of the property up to a satisfactory standard (where it relates to a breach of their tenancy agreement) they will be put on hold until the work has been completed to our satisfaction (see section 3.11).~~

## 4.2 Withdrawal of Registrations

We will withdraw applications only under the following circumstances:

- At the applicants' request
- Where the applicant does not respond to an annual review and reminder letter

- If mail is returned marked “gone away” or not known at this address
- If the applicant does not respond to requests for information
- If the applicant dies

Applicants can be re-registered on request, taking into account any changes in their circumstances. Their date of registration will normally be the date they re-apply, but applicants can ask to have their registration re-instated with their original registration date and can appeal if this is refused.

### 4.3 Review of Register

All applicants will have their registration reviewed annually on the anniversary of their date of registration.

The review form will be short and only ask the applicant if they want to remain on the register and to report any changes in their circumstances. Applicants will be given 28 days to respond.

If an applicant doesn't respond to an annual review ~~form~~ we will send a reminder, giving the applicant a further 14 days to respond. If the applicant does not respond to the reminder, we will withdraw their registration.

## 5.0 THE ALLOCATION PROCESS

### 5.1 Advertising and Applying for a Property

In line with our commitment to help alleviate homelessness, normally every second property will be advertised stating that Platinum Priority Passes are valid for the property. Priority homeless applicants can apply for other properties, but their Priority Pass will not be recognised.

Once we have been notified of a tenancy termination, we will decide whether the property is to be allocated in line with this section or if it is to be removed from the normal allocation process as outlined in sections 5-31.6 (allocations not covered by this policy) and 1.7 (management allocations) ~~or 1.5 (leased or Supported Accommodation)~~

Available properties will be advertised weekly on the ~~homehunt~~ These Homes website and elha.com, ~~in our Head Office window-websites,~~ and on Facebook. We will also provide copies of our adverts to ~~in~~ local Council housing offices, ~~in~~ libraries and the Citizen's Advice Bureaux ~~for display, as well as in our office~~. A dedicated phone line is also available giving details of available properties and allowing applicants to apply by phone.

We will assess properties individually and decide what constitutes “Best Use”. For example:

- Adverts will include the number of bedrooms. A household makes “Best Use” of a property if it needs all of the bedrooms
- We may take into consideration the mix of family sizes within the building or immediate area to maintain a balanced and sustainable community
- An advert for sheltered housing will specify that normally only applicants over 60 will be considered
- An advert for amenity housing will state that normally only applicants aged over 50 will be considered
- An advert for a property with significant adaptations will specify that we will give priority to applicants whose medical needs mean that they need the adaptations regardless of whether or not they need all of the bedrooms

We will specify any best use criteria and a closing date for applications in the advert.

We will maintain a ~~database~~ list of support providers and others such as Social Workers and Occupational Therapists who may be helping clients to seek re-housing and will send weekly lists of available properties to them by e-mail. Unfortunately, due to the potential volume, weekly lists will not be sent to individual applicants.

Registered applicants may apply for as many advertised properties as they wish at any one time. They will be able to note their interest on the ~~homehunt~~ These Homes website by telephone, letter, or in person at our office.

When a registered applicant applies for more than one advertised property, ~~they will be asked to state which property they want to be considered for first, second etc. we will assume that the order in which they apply is their order of preference.~~

No applications will be accepted after the advertised closing date and time.

## 5.2 How Properties are Allocated

An overview of the allocation process is attached at Appendix 3. Applicants with a connection to East Lothian will be prioritised over those with no connection. We will allocate advertised properties after the closing date for applications using our selection criteria as follows:

### Best use

The applicants who will make best use of the property by using all of the bedrooms or by using other features of the property (such as adaptations) and who meet any age limitations.

### Priority Homeless

If the property has been advertised stating that Platinum Priority Passes are valid, only applicants with Priority Passes at that level will be considered in the first instance. If there are no applicants with a Platinum Priority Pass, we will revert to the procedure outlined in the Nomination / Section 5 Protocol with East Lothian Council. Only if no applicants are identified through this route, will we continue to work through the applications list.

### Priority Pass Level

Where there is more than one applicant who would make best use of an advertised property, applicants are then placed in order according to the level of Priority Pass that they hold. If more than one applicant has the same highest level of Priority Pass we will consider the applicant who has held this highest level of Priority Pass the longest, unless one of these applicants is an ELHA transfer applicant, in which case the property will be allocated to the transfer applicant first, regardless of the date of Priority Pass award

### Date Priority Pass Awarded

Where there is more than one applicant with the same level of Priority Pass the property will be allocated to the applicant whose Priority Pass was awarded earliest.

### Date of Registration

The date of registration is the date the applicant was accepted onto ~~homehunt~~These Homesweb. We consider the date of registration only if there are no applicants with a Priority Pass. The property is allocated to the applicant with the earliest date of registration unless one of the applicants is a transfer applicant, in which case the property will be allocated to the transfer applicant first.

### Same Date of Registration/Priority Pass Award

If the date of registration/award of Priority Pass is the same for two or more applicants, we will allocate the property to the applicant with the lower registration / Pass number, since this means that they applied before the other applicant, but on the same day.

### Shared Ownership Allocations

~~We will also take into account the person's ability to pay for the share available for purchase in accordance with our Shared Ownership Policy.~~

Our Management Committee delegates responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the allocations policy to staff. Staff will check the accuracy of the list produced by the ~~homehunt~~These Homes software and confirm the allocation. All allocations will involve two members of staff.

### ~~5.3 Management Allocations and Local Lettings Initiatives~~

~~In exceptional circumstances, we may allocate properties on management grounds (i.e. we will not normally advertise the property but will allocate it direct to one applicant), for example:~~

- ~~• High level support needs, severe harassment or domestic abuse~~
- ~~• Applicants with exceptional circumstances not otherwise covered by this policy~~
- ~~• Where an individual needs a particular type of property that may not come up for allocation very often so that their health or support needs can be addressed~~
- ~~• Where a series of moves can meet the housing needs of several applicants and the first suitable property to facilitate this is available~~
- ~~• Where we require someone to move from an adapted or wheelchair property because the family member who needs the facilities provided dies or is permanently hospitalised~~
- ~~• Where we urgently need to move a tenant to address issues such as antisocial behaviour, harassment or abuse.~~

~~We will avoid re-housing vulnerable applicants in properties that would make it more difficult for them to sustain a tenancy (for example we would not house a drug user next to a known dealer).~~

~~We may also exclude a property from the allocation process outlined in this policy if the property is to be leased to another agency or used for supported accommodation (See paragraph 1.5).~~

~~Such allocations will be kept to a minimum, will be fully explained in a report that will be retained with the allocation paperwork and will be reported to our Housing & Property Services Sub Committee.~~

~~We will consider using Local Lettings Initiatives to address serious management issues or imbalances within a particular area. Such initiatives may include management moves; will receive the prior approval of the Housing & Property Services Sub Committee and will be carefully monitored to ensure that the desired objectives are achieved.~~

### 5.4 Offers and Refusals

Wherever possible we will contact the successful applicant by telephone on the closing date for applications. Applicants who applied for properties on the ~~Homehunt~~[These Homes](#) website will receive an email informing them that they were unsuccessful. Applicants applying by other means are advised that if they have not been contacted within two days of the closing date then they should assume that they have been unsuccessful.

Any offer we make will be conditional upon the applicant's housing circumstances being confirmed, the applicant providing proof of residency, any evidence relating to the award of a Priority Pass being provided and, if appropriate, previous tenancy references being received. We will enclose a copy of our Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement with the letter confirming that the applicant ~~has bid successfully~~ is being considered for the property.

We will give the successful applicant three working days from the date of the successful bid being confirmed to confirm the date and time for a home visit or office interview, if one is to be carried out (see home visits below). If the applicant does not contact us within three working days, and they have not previously indicated that they would not be available e.g. on holiday or in hospital, then we will move on to the next applicant.

### Home Visits

We will normally carry out home visits to all successful applicants living within a reasonable distance at which they will be asked to provide proof of residency and their housing history (so that we can take up references) or we will move on to the next applicant.

For those who have used a Priority Pass, we will also check the information provided with-in the ~~homehunt~~ These Homes registration ~~and Priority Pass application~~ form(s). If the applicant has declared tenancy debt equivalent to more than one month's rent charge we will also check that the re-payment arrangement is still being maintained.

If the applicant lives too far away for a home visit, we will telephone them to check the details provided in their application or ask a housing provider in their area to carry out the home visit on our behalf. If a telephone interview is carried out the form will be sent out to check and agree before an offer is made.

### Offer

An offer is sent only after required checks such as residency and, if appropriate, Priority Pass information and tenancy references are completed. If the property is ready to let the offer will suggest dates for the applicant to view the property and to sign their tenancy agreement. If the property is not ready these dates will be arranged over the phone when it is. The letter will also provide information and advice about rent and Housing Benefit / Universal Credit and inform the applicant what will happen if they refuse the offer. Again, the applicant must respond within three working days or the offer will normally be withdrawn.

If we withdraw an offer or if the successful applicant refuses the offer, then we will contact the second qualifying applicant and follow the steps outlined above until the property is successfully allocated.



Where a successful applicant has used a Platinum Priority Pass and refuses an offer, we will notify East Lothian Council's Homeless Department and follow the process set out in the Nomination/Section 5 Protocol.

If an applicant has used a Priority Pass to apply for a property and they refuse an offer, then unless there are exceptional circumstances, the Priority Pass will normally be withdrawn for a period as detailed in section 3.1<sup>32</sup> above. If a Priority Pass has not been used, there is no penalty for refusing an offer.

## 6.0 APPEAL AND COMPLAINT PROCESS

All applicants have the right to appeal against any decision made concerning their registration, the assessment of their housing need, the decision to place an application or Priority Pass on hold, the withdrawal of a Priority Pass or the withdrawal of their registration or an offer of housing. Appeals and Complaints will be dealt with by staff at an appropriate level. Staff members who made the original decision or were involved at a previous stage of the process will not be involved in appeals and complaints.

### Stage 1

Appeals should be made in the first instance within two weeks of the disputed decision. We aim to acknowledge receipt of the appeal within 2 working days and to provide a full response within 10 working days.

### Stage 2

If the applicant is not satisfied with the stage 1 decision or has additional information, they wish to be considered they can appeal again. Stage 2 appeals should be submitted within two weeks of the stage 1 decision. We will acknowledge receipt of the appeal within 3 working days and aim to provide a full response within 20 working days.

### Stage 3

If the applicant is not satisfied with the stage 2 decision, their final appeal will be dealt with at stage 2 of our Complaints Handling Procedure.

If the appeal or complaint is against a decision not to make an offer of housing, the property will **not** be held until the conclusion of the appeal and/or Complaints process. If the appeal or complaint is successful and the decision not to make the offer was due to an error or misunderstanding by ELHAus, the applicant will be offered the first available suitable property, and the allocation will be treated as a management allocation (see Section 5.0<sup>3</sup>). If the appeal or complaint is successful because the applicant has provided information not previously available to us, this will be explained, and any penalties applied will be withdrawn.



We will tell applicants about their right to appeal or the next stage in the process in all decision letters.

## 7.0 INFORMATION AND ADVICE

We have achieved the Scottish National Standards for Housing Information and Advice, developed by the Scottish Government. We will make sure that all ~~homehunt-These Homes~~ information is written in Plain English. We have a procedure for providing information in alternative formats for those who need it and this is provided to all applicants.

All of the information about how ~~Homehunt-These Homes~~ works available on both the ~~Homehunt and ELHA elha.com and the These Homes~~ websites will also be made available to applicants applying by other means. If requested, we will provide tailored advice to an applicant about their housing prospects and other housing options. Where appropriate, we will seek and make referrals to other sources of housing support and advice.

~~Whilst the numbers of people applying for each property advertised on These Homes, will be available to applicants more detailed information about our allocations will be available on elha.com.~~

~~Details of all our allocations are available to view on the homehunt website. Information is updated as soon as an allocation is completed. The following information is available:~~

- ~~• Address of the property~~
- ~~• Number of applicants applying for a specific property~~
- ~~• Whether or not the successful applicant fulfilled best use criteria~~
- ~~• Whether the applicant used a priority pass~~
- ~~• If a Priority Pass was used, the date the Pass was issued~~
- ~~• If no Priority Pass was used, the Registration date of the successful applicant.~~

## ~~8.0 ALLOCATION OF GARAGES~~

~~We have a small number of garages available for rent close to our housing in various locations throughout East Lothian. When a garage becomes available, we will advertise it in the local press. Applications will be accepted on our website, in writing or by phone.~~

~~Applications will be prioritised using the following criteria:~~

- ~~• First priority will be given to our tenants~~

- ~~• If no tenants apply, priority will be given to applicants living close to the garage~~
- ~~• Disabled applicants will be prioritised within the above two groups~~
- ~~• If there is more than one applicant with equal priority, the garage will be allocated to the person who applied first~~

~~Before confirming the offer of a garage, we will ask for appropriate information from the applicant to confirm their ability to pay.~~

## 9.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW

Our ~~Housing & Property Services Sub-Audit & Assurance~~ -Committee is responsible for monitoring the operation of the Allocations policy and for bringing any concerns to the attention of our Management Committee.

Quarterly ~~and annual performance~~ reports will be considered by the ~~Housing & Property Services Sub-Audit & Assurance~~ Committee ~~as well as reports on any allocations made in accordance with section 1.6 or 1.7 of this policy. Our performance is also published on our P365 microsite on elha.com, detailing:~~

- ~~• The number of applicants added to the register~~
- ~~• The number of applicants put on hold and the reasons for this~~
- ~~• The number of applicants withdrawn and the reasons for this~~
- ~~• The number of Priority Passes assessed, the outcome of assessments and the time taken to complete assessments~~
- ~~• The number and outcome of appeals against decisions made in line with the Allocations policy~~
- ~~• The average waiting time for successful applicants~~
- ~~• Equality monitoring statistics~~
- ~~• Allocations made during the quarter~~
- ~~• The number of offers refused with reasons~~
- ~~• Tenancy Sustainment rates~~
- ~~• Any allocations made in accordance with paragraphs 1.5 or 5.3 of this policy~~
- ~~• In addition an annual report will be submitted examining the composition of our Housing register; applicants' requirements and allocations made over the year seeking to identify trends or particular issues arising.~~

The Director of Housing will ensure that this policy is reviewed by the Management Committee at least every five years.

## Appendix 1

### ALLOCATIONS OF PROPERTY OUT WITH THE THESE HOMES POLICY

We own a number of shared ownership, workshop homes, garages, garage sites and other non-residential properties which are not allocated through These Homes. We also allocate some low cost home ownership properties on behalf of East Lothian Council:

#### Shared Ownership

We have a small stock (less than 50) Shared Ownership properties developed between 1990 and 1997.

If a sharing owner decided they wants to sell their share in a property, they are responsible for ensuring the property is marketed, Unless we agree to join with the sharing owner in a sale on the open market, we will offer to advertise the property on These Homes but will simply provide a Shared Ownership application form to any applicants and refer them direct to the Sharing Owner to arrange viewing. See our Shared Ownership Policy for more information.

#### Workshop Homes

We own 3 workshop homes in Athelstaneford and Stenton. The allocation of these workshop homes is led by the business needs of the applicant and is carried out in partnership with the Economic Development Unit at East Lothian Council.

### 8.0 — ALLOCATION OF GARAGES Garages & Garage Sites

We have a small number of garages and garage sites available for rent close to our housing in various locations throughout East Lothian.

When a garage becomes available, we will advertise it in the local press on [elha.com](http://elha.com), Facebook and in our Head Office window. Applications will be accepted on our website [elha.com](http://elha.com), in writing or by phone.

Applications will be prioritised using the following criteria:

- First priority will be given to our tenants
- If no tenants apply, priority will be given to applicants living close to the garage
- Disabled applicants will be prioritised within the above two groups

- If there is more than one applicant with equal priority, the garage will be allocated to the person who applied first

Before confirming the offer of a garage, we will ask for appropriate information from the applicant to confirm their ability to pay.

Garage Sites will also be advertised and allocated in a similar way.

### **Low Cost Home Ownership**

We allocate Low Cost Home Ownership properties in East Saltoun and Ormiston on behalf of East Lothian Council. These allocations are governed by a separate agreement between us and East Lothian Council.

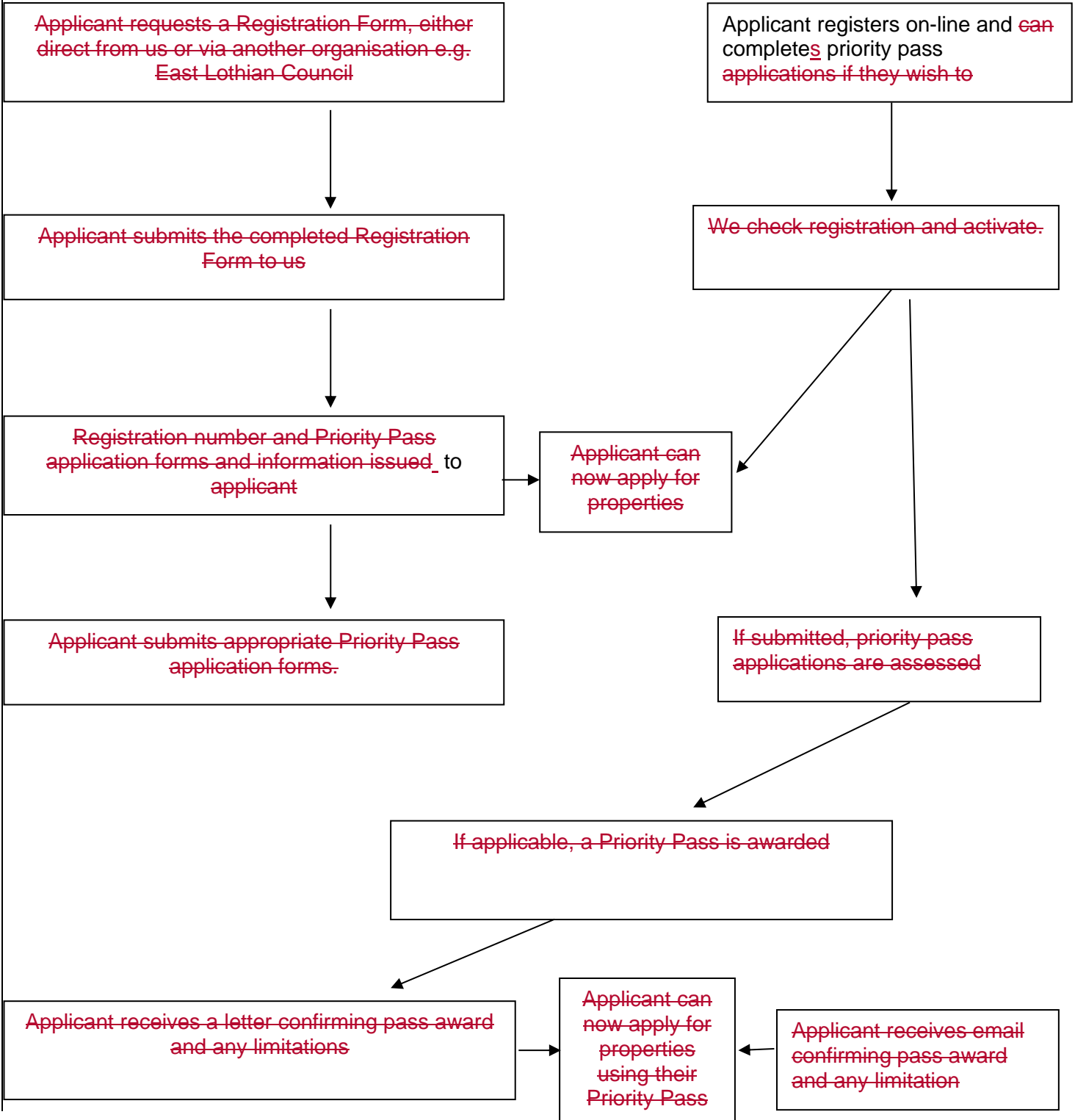
Our responsibility is to advertise a property that an owner wishes to sell and find an eligible purchaser according to the set criteria and will normally advertise properties for sale in the local press.

Appendix 1

OVERVIEW REGISTRATION PROCESS

~~POSTAL~~

~~ONLINE~~



Appendix 2

DEFINITION OF PRIORITY PASSES

Need	Priority Level	You qualify if:
Homelessness and Harassment	Platinum	East Lothian Council have accepted a duty to rehouse you under homeless legislation
	Silver	You need to leave your home due to persistent serious harassment*
	Bronze	You are suffering from intermittent harassment, but do not need to leave your home*
Domestic Abuse	Gold	You or a family member are a victim of domestic abuse and have you leave your home but do not wish to approach the local authority as homeless
Need to be in a Community	Bronze	<p>You need to move to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take up or sustain permanent employment in East Lothian and your accommodation is more than 1 hour travel from your place of work</li> <li>• To be closer to your children in East Lothian who you have access arrangements for but access is very difficult or impossible due to location</li> <li>• To be closer to shops and amenities which you currently have difficulty accessing</li> <li>• Provide or receive support to/from a family member living in East Lothian</li> </ul>
	Silver	As above, but with the added requirement of moving to a rural location only**
Overcrowding / Under-Occupancy	Gold	<p>You need two or more extra bedrooms (overcrowding within the host family is disregarded), or</p> <p>You are an ELHA tenant and your home has two or more spare bedrooms</p>
	Silver	<p>You need one extra bedroom or you are a couple or have two children and sharing a single sized room (overcrowding within the host family is disregarded), or</p> <p>You are an ELHA tenant and your home has one spare bedroom</p>

	Bronze	You need an extra bedroom to allow residential access to children for at least 3 nights a week*
Unsuitable Housing	Gold	<p>Your current accommodation has severe disrepair or defects, e.g. severe dampness, rainwater penetration or structural defects*** or it lacks one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A flushing toilet</li> <li>• An adequate water supply</li> <li>• A fixed bath or shower</li> </ul> <p>If you live in a caravan we will take into consideration how you came to be there (i.e. have you intentionally worsened your circumstances - see section 3.13) and where the caravan is situated</p>
	Bronze	<p>Your current accommodation lacks one of more of the following basic amenities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A hot water supply</li> <li>• A whole house heating system</li> <li>• A kitchen area</li> </ul>
Medical	Gold	<p>You (or household member) have a severe medical condition which is made worse by your current accommodation and would be markedly improved by re-housing, or</p> <p>Re-housing is essential to allow discharge from hospital or to prevent admission to a nursing or residential home, and it is not practical to adapt your home to meet your needs, or</p> <p>Without re-housing the essential activities of daily life such as bathing, cooking and going out etc. are not possible, or</p> <p>You are an ELHA tenant (or household member) who requires a medical adaptation and we have not agreed to this work</p>
	Silver	<p>You (or household member) have a medical condition which would be markedly improved by re-housing, or</p> <p>Re-housing would substantially reduce the risk of physical injury, or</p>

		<p>Your present home makes essential activities of daily living difficult, and it is not practical to adapt your home ****</p> <p>Limits may be set by us for these Priority Passes, e.g. if a Pass awarded due to difficulty managing stairs the Pass will be limited to ground floor accommodation</p>
First Affordable Home	Bronze	You (and your partner) have a total annual income of under £30,000 and have little or no access to the local housing market. You have not held a social housing tenancy before and you are living with your parents
Transfer	Gold Plus	<p>You are an ELHA tenant, you qualify for any form of Priority Pass and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a clear rent account</li> <li>• Maintain your home to a good standard</li> <li>• Have no history of neighbour problems or antisocial behaviour</li> </ul>
	Bronze	You are an ELHA tenant and have been living in a flat for more than 2 years

\* The level of pass awarded to applicants depends on the evidence provided during the pass application process.

\*\* Rural locations: Athelstaneford, Dirleton, East Linton, East Saltoun, Elphinstone, Garvald, Gifford, Innerwick, Ormiston, Pencaitland and Stenton

\*\*\*We may contact the landlord or carry out a house inspection

\*\*\*\* Verification form a health professional will be required

**Group 1: Homelessness/Harassment**

**1.1 Platinum Priority Homeless**

~~East Lothian Council has accepted a duty to house the applicant under the homelessness legislation. Applicants who are in the process of being assessed for homelessness by East Lothian Council will not receive a priority pass until the outcome of their homeless assessment has been confirmed by East Lothian Council.~~



~~1.2 — Silver — Harassment~~

~~The applicant has to leave his/her current accommodation due to persistent serious harassment of any type.\*~~

~~1.3 — Bronze — Harassment~~

~~The applicant is suffering from intermittent harassment of any type but does not have to leave their home.\*~~

~~**Group 2: — Domestic Abuse**~~

~~2.1 — Gold — Domestic Abuse~~

~~The applicant/family member is a victim of domestic abuse and has to leave their home but does not wish to approach the local authority as homeless.~~

~~**Group 3: — Need to be in a Community**~~

~~3.1 — Bronze — Employment~~

~~The applicant needs to move to take up employment in East Lothian or to sustain employment where current accommodation is more than 1 hours travel from place of work (Priority is only given to the main earner).\*~~

~~3.2 — Bronze — Nearer Amenities/Services~~

~~The applicant needs to move nearer to amenities such as shops and services, which are not readily accessible.~~

~~3.3 — Bronze — Access to Children~~

~~The applicant needs to move because their children live in East Lothian and access is currently very difficult or impossible due to location.\*~~

~~3.4 — Bronze — To provide or Receive Support~~

~~The applicant needs to move to offer care or support to someone who lives in East Lothian or the applicant needs to move to receive care or support from someone who lives in East Lothian.~~

~~3.5 — Silver — Need to be in a Rural Community~~

~~If the applicant needs to move to any one or any combination of rural villages the Priority Pass level will be increased to Silver. If the applicant chooses to be considered for the nearest larger town, the pass level will remain as Bronze.~~

~~Rural communities (where we have properties available) are defined as: Athelstaneford, Dirleton, East Linton, East Saltoun, Elphinstone, Garvald, Gifford, , Innerwick, , Ormiston, Pencaitland and Stenton.~~

~~Limits will be set by us for all of the Priority Passes in this group—see Section 3.12 for more details.\*~~

#### ~~Group 4: Overcrowding/Under occupation~~

##### ~~4.1—Gold—Significant Overcrowding~~

~~Where two or more extra bedrooms are required by applicant and family this will be regarded as significant overcrowding. Overcrowding within the host family will be disregarded.~~

##### ~~4.2—Silver—Minor Overcrowding~~

~~Where one extra bedroom is required by applicant and family or where a couple or two children are sharing a single-sized bedroom Overcrowding within host family will be disregarded.~~

##### ~~4.3—Bronze—Access Overcrowding~~

~~Where one extra bedroom is required to allow an applicant residential access to children for at least 3 nights of the week. Overcrowding within host family will be disregarded.~~

##### ~~4.4—Gold—Significant Under-occupation~~

~~If the applicant is one of our tenants and wishes to move to a smaller property and currently has two or more unoccupied bedrooms.~~

##### ~~4.5—Silver—Under-occupation~~

~~If the applicant is one of our tenants and wishes to move to a smaller property and currently has one unoccupied bedroom.~~

#### ~~Group 5: Unsuitable Housing~~

##### ~~5.1—Gold—Significant Defects~~

~~Where the applicant's current accommodation has severe disrepair or defects which substantially affect the habitation of the property, e.g. severe dampness, rainwater penetration or structural defects.\*\*~~

~~Where the applicant is lacking one or more of the following basic amenities:~~

- ~~● A flushing toilet~~
- ~~● An adequate water supply~~
- ~~● A fixed bath or shower~~

~~If the applicant is living in a caravan, we will consider how they came to be there (i.e. have they intentionally worsened their circumstances, see section 3.13) and where the caravan is situated before awarding unsuitable housing priority.~~

#### ~~5.2 — Bronze — Lacking Amenities~~

~~Where the applicant's current accommodation lacks one or more of the following basic amenities:~~

- ~~• A hot water supply~~
- ~~• A whole house heating system~~
- ~~• A kitchen area~~

#### ~~Group 6: Medical~~

##### ~~6.1 — Gold — Medical~~

~~The applicant (or household member) has a **severe** medical condition which is **made worse** by current accommodation and would be **markedly improved** by re-housing or where re-housing is essential to allow discharge from hospital or to prevent admission to a nursing or residential home, and it is not practical to adapt the applicant's home to meet their needs.<sup>\*\*\*</sup>~~

~~Where an ELHA tenant (or household member) requires a medical adaptation and we have not agreed to this work.~~

##### ~~6.2 — Silver — Medical~~

~~The applicant (or household member) has a medical condition which would be **markedly improved** by re-housing, or where re-housing would substantially reduce the risk of physical injury. Also, where the applicant's present home makes essential activities of daily living difficult, and it is not practical to adapt their home to meet their needs.<sup>\*\*\*</sup>~~

~~Limits may be set by us for these passes, for example if the pass is awarded due to difficulties managing stairs the pass will be limited to ground floor accommodation.~~

#### ~~Group 7: First Affordable Home~~

~~Priority Passes in this group are only given to individuals or couples with a total annual income of under £30,000, since the purpose of this Priority Pass is to offer priority to people with little or no access to the local housing market and has never held a social tenancy.~~

~~7.1 — Bronze — Leaving the Family Home~~

~~The applicant lives in the parental home and, due to lack of income, is unable to move out.~~

~~8.0 — Transfers~~

~~ELHA tenants will be assessed on exactly the same criteria as everyone else and awarded passes as noted above with two exceptions:~~

~~8.1 — Gold Plus Transfer~~

~~An ELHA tenant qualifies for any form of pass, has a clear rent account, maintains his/her home to a good standard and has no history of neighbour problems or antisocial behaviour.~~

~~8.2 — Bronze – Transfer~~

~~An ELHA tenant qualifies for a Bronze level of priority if they have been living in a flat for 2 or more years.~~

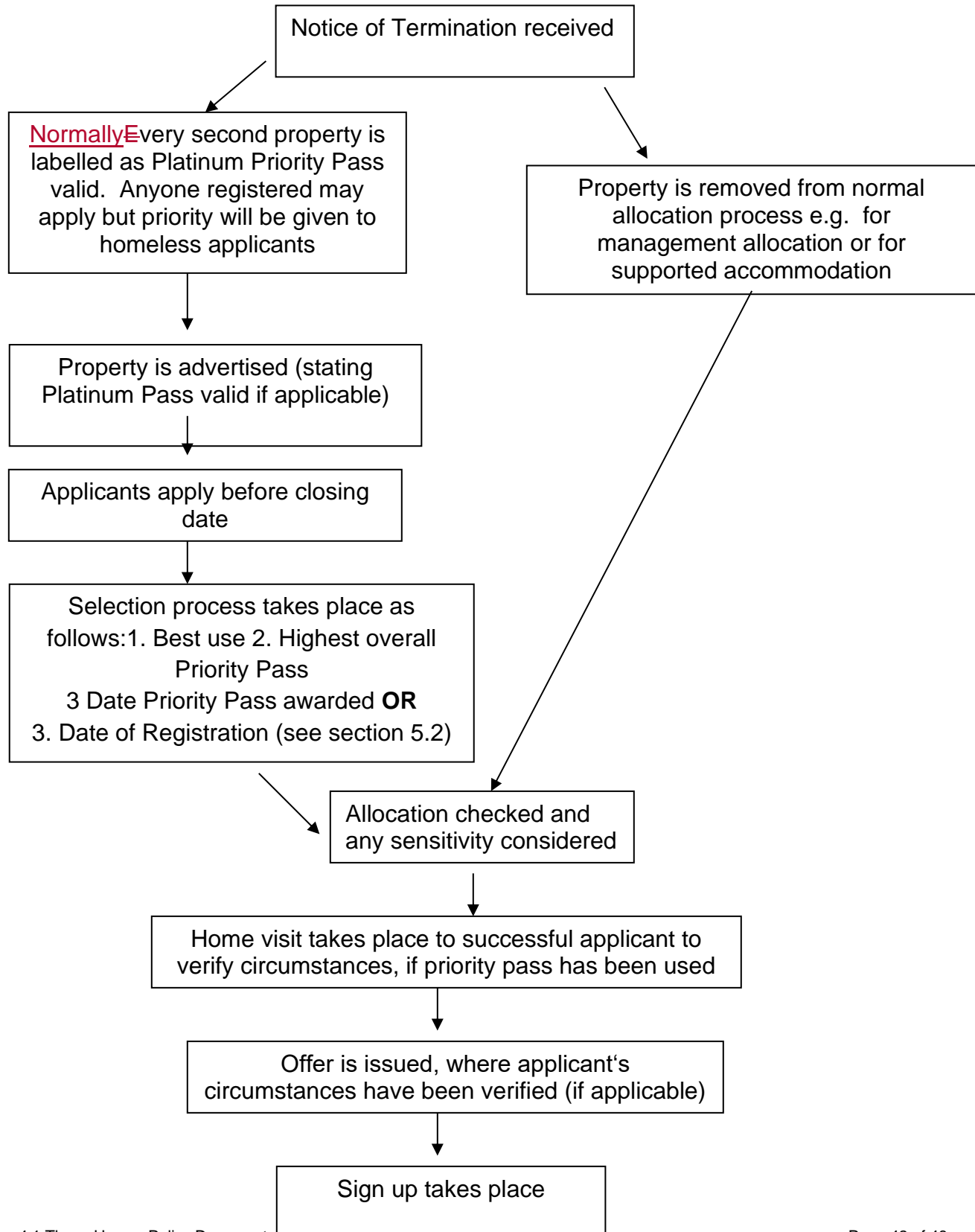
~~\* Supporting documentation may be required~~

~~\*\* We may contact the landlord or carry out a house inspection~~

~~\*\*\* Verification from a health professional will be required~~

Appendix 3

**OVERVIEW OF THE ALLOCATION PROCESS**



## Appendix 4

### HELD APPLICATIONS (SUSPENSIONS)

When we put an application on hold, we will tell the applicant that they have been put on hold and explain why. We will also tell the applicant what, if anything, they need to do to have the hold status removed.

Where we need to take action, such as make further enquiries, we will make sure that this is done as quickly as possible and that, if required, follow up action is taken immediately.

We will regularly review held registrations in order to minimise the time any applicant is unable to apply for available properties.

We may put applications on hold in the following circumstances:

#### Change of Circumstances

If the applicant buys a property or moves to a secure tenancy, we will put the application on hold until we establish whether or not they wish to remain on the Housing Register.

#### Awaiting Information

If we need more information to assess an application, we will put the application on hold until we receive the information. We will make sure that requests for information are regularly followed up so that the time on hold is kept to a minimum.

#### Rental, service charge or rechargeable repairs debts

Where the applicant has current or previous rental, service charge, chargeable repairs, legal expenses or any other tenancy debt amounting to more than one month's rent, they must have made an arrangement for re-payment and maintained payments for at least three months.

If no arrangement has been made we will tell the applicant that their registration will remain on hold until this requirement has been met.

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the re-payment arrangement is kept, to inform us when the arrangement has been kept for three months and to let us know if the arrangement is broken. We will check that any re-payment arrangement continues to be maintained before confirming any offer of housing.

Debts older than five years, which have not previously been pursued by the former landlord, or where the debt was not the responsibility of the applicant as a tenant, will be disregarded.

### Anti-social behaviour

Where there is clear evidence of anti-social behaviour in a current or previous tenancy, we will put the application on hold until we have fully investigated the circumstances. If we are satisfied that an applicant's circumstances or conduct has significantly changed, the hold status will be lifted.

In considering whether to put an application on hold for antisocial behaviour, we will take account of the nature of the behaviour (e.g. threats or harassment, fire raising, relevant criminal convictions) and:

- The nature, frequency and duration of the behaviour
- The extent to which the behaviour was the responsibility of people other than the applicant
- The effect the conduct had/is having on other people
- What the applicant has done to address the situation
- The applicant's ability to maintain a tenancy, either with or without support

### Providing false information or omitting relevant information

Where we consider that an applicant has knowingly or carelessly given false information or withheld information that would have a bearing on their application, we will put the application on hold for a period of ~~two years~~ twelve months.

### Support Issues

If an applicant states that they need support to maintain a tenancy or appears unlikely to be able to maintain an independent tenancy without support, the application will be put on hold. The on hold status will last as long as it takes us to confirm that an appropriate support package has been identified and confirmed to be available to the applicant.

### Applicant not able to take up a tenancy

For example, because they are in hospital, prison or haven't yet left the armed forces and would be unable to move into a tenancy.

### Aggressive or threatening behaviour

If an applicant is aggressive or threatening towards a member of our staff or Management Committee, we will put their application on hold for two years. In all such cases we will work with the applicant, by letter if necessary, towards a mutual understanding of their expected behaviour and attitude.

### Condition of Property (Transfers only)

Where a transfer applicant must bring the condition of the property up to a satisfactory standard (where it relates to a breach of their tenancy agreement) they will be put on hold until the work has been completed to our satisfaction (see section 3.11).



## Appendix 4

### ~~SERVICE DELIVERY TARGETS~~

~~Service delivery will vary dependent upon how the applicant chooses to manage their registration, reflecting the fact that responding to online registrations is less bureaucratic since the applicant does a lot of the work. Our targets have been set to acknowledge that our responses to online applications will generally be quicker but also to try to ensure that the disadvantage of using the manual system are kept to a minimum.~~

~~Apart from those submitted over the weekend or on public holidays:~~

- ~~• Postal applications will be placed on the housing register and issued with a registration number, along with information on applying for priority passes and details of how to apply for advertised properties **on the day of receipt**. On-line applications will be responded to within the same timeframe.~~
- ~~• Postal applicants who have applied for priority will have an assessment of their needs carried out within **14 days**. On-line priority pass applications will be responded to within **7 days**. Appeals against any decision made in terms of the Allocations policy will be responded to within **14 days**.~~

~~Properties will be allocated and the successful applicant contacted within **1 day** of the closing date.~~

Appendix 5LETTINGS PLANS

We assess all applications in accordance with this policy but, sometimes, we will adopt a lettings plan for a specific geographical area or neighbourhood or type of property. Where we do this, this will be clearly stated in the advert. Lettings plans will always be intended to create or promote sustainable, stable and balanced communities. We may adopt a lettings plan in situations such as:

- Where we need to prioritise applications for an area that is in high demand
- Where we are trying to promote demand in an area where there are empty properties
- Where we are seeking to stabilise a community that has been affected by incidents of antisocial behaviour
- Where we are trying to promote local employment by providing accommodation for incoming or key workers
- Where we want to ensure a mix of family size, e.g. in new developments or areas with limited children's play areas
- In accordance with East Lothian Councils Housing Strategy

All lettings plans will be time limited, and their effectiveness will be regularly monitored. However, given the nature and location of a number of our developments, the Management Committee approved the decision to make the following lettings plans permanent:

- Sheltered Housing - Osborne Court, Cockenzie

Osborne Court is a sheltered housing scheme with 16 properties, including 8 upper flats. Given the age of the tenants who are housed in this development (over 60s) their needs can change, and some find it increasingly difficult to climb the stairs. This generally means that an upper flat can become unsuitable and the tenant needs a transfer to ground floor accommodation.

If a ground floor property in this development becomes available, we will offer it to any first-floor residents at Osborne Court who require ground floor accommodation, without advertising the actual vacancy. If such a transfer is accepted, the resulting first floor vacancy is advertised as normal. It is possible that the need for such a transfer is not known about before a ground floor flat is advertised and that this only comes to light once the property has been made available through These Homes. If this happens then we will offer the ground floor flat to our tenant and the resulting vacant upper flat to the first suitable applicant on the list. Managing stock this way ultimately meets the needs of two applicants and potentially reduces the needs for medical adaptations

- The Granary & Hardgate Court – Haddington,

These flats are situated adjacent to a main road and a communal car park. Given the number of health and safety concerns arising from a lack of storage space, children playing in the carpark and the location of the main road it was agreed that a sensitive approach to allocations should be taken to letting all future vacancies in these blocks with priority being given to families with children aged 12 years or older.

## These Homes Policy

### Report by Karen Barry, Director of Housing for Approval

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#### 1.0 Background

The full review of the Allocations Policy was postponed to February 2020 pending the release of Scottish Government Guidance 'Social Housing Allocations in Scotland: A Practice Guide'. It was further delayed when the decision was taken to develop a new digital lettings service, These Homes, which is expected to go live on 1 April 2021.

Part of the Allocations Policy review was carried out last year when a number of changes relating to the Priority Pass system were approved at the Management Committee on 26 November 2020 to allow for the development of These Homes. Further significant changes are now required, which are tracked on the attached **Policy Document**.

Given the overall number of changes and the fact that this is a key policy, it is proposed that following approval, the policy is re-written to ensure it is clear and in plain English for applicants and tenants. Further to this, it is also proposed that another review of the policy is carried out in a years' time to allow These Homes to bed in, and to assess how well changes are working in practice.

In line with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 any changes to the rules on allocations must be subject to consultation with applicants, tenants, Registered Tenant Organisations and 'other specified bodies' and a report on the consultation must be published. Two consultation exercises have been carried out; one in November 2019 and the other in September 2020. A full report combining both consultations was submitted to the Audit & Assurance Committee on 24 November 2020. At the time of writing this report, the Tenant Involvement Group is being consulted on how the information should it be published and in what format.

An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out by the SFHA, at the start of this review in 2019 which did not highlight any concerns.

#### 2.0 Proposed Changes

Many of the proposed changes are self-explanatory and are as a result of changes to practice with the introduction of These Homes. Some sections have been moved within the document as well as some re-wording of sentences for further clarity. The key changes to this policy are set out in the table overleaf.

#### Recommendation

The Management Committee is asked to approve the proposed changes to the Allocations Policy, and the adoption of the new title "These Homes Policy".

Title	Section	Pages	Comments
Introduction	1.1	1	Highlights that this is a These Homes Policy and stock allocated out with this policy are described at section 5.1 and Appendix 1.
Aims of Policy	1.3	1-3	This section has been updated to take account of the revised Practice Guidance published in 2019, Charter outcomes and new legislation.
	1.4	3-4	The context has been completely re-written with applicants in mind. Statistical information removed as this can become outdated quite quickly. It also recognises the Association's commitment to under-occupying a proportion of two bedroom properties in new developments, to meet the demand for one bedroom properties.
General Principles	1.5	7-12	<p><u>Lettings Plans</u></p> <p>A paragraph explaining the purpose of Lettings Plan has been added; originally included in section 5.3 (local lettings initiatives).</p> <p><u>Sustainable Tenancies</u></p> <p>A sentence has been added to explain that affordability assessments are undertaken at the point of allocation to help ensure a new tenant can sustain their new tenancy.</p> <p><u>Partnership Working</u></p> <p>In November 2018, the Scottish Government published an 'Ending Homelessness Together' Action Plan committing to rapid rehousing for the homelessness, i.e. people who find themselves homeless are rapidly rehoused and not put through the experiences of staying in unsuitable accommodation such as B&amp;B's. Each local authority had to produce a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan by Spring 2019 to say how they planned to move away from the existing system to one with rapid rehousing at its centre.</p> <p><u>Home Ownership</u></p> <p>The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 gave the right to take account of whether an applicant owns or has owned property when allocating property except in some situations.</p>

		<p>Income cannot be taken into account. The Association has always assessed the needs of homeowners in the same way as all other applicants and should continue to do so, however whether the needs can be addressed through the provision of a Short Scottish Secure tenancy will be considered.</p> <p><u>Temporary Tenancies</u></p> <p>This paragraph has been added to set out when the Association will grant a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST). The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, amended by the 2014 Act sets out the grounds when a SSST can be granted. The minimum period for a SSST is six months which can be extended or converted to a full tenancy, the exception being if that if it is being given because of antisocial behaviour in which case the minimum period is twelve months.</p> <p><u>Transfers</u></p> <p>This paragraph has been added to clarify the Associations commitment to making best use of the housing stock available.</p> <p><u>Joint Tenancies</u></p> <p>A statement has been added to clarify when a joint tenancy request from an applicant will be approved. In accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, from November 2019 all tenants are required to inform their landlord of the people living with them and any joint tenancy request will only be approved if the person being added to the tenancy has lived in the property for twelve months.</p> <p><u>Kinship Carers, Foster Carers &amp; Those Adopting</u></p> <p>The Guidance states that a level of priority should be considered for those who have been approved for adoption or are approved for fostering or for kinship carers who will be in need if a child/ren came to live with them.</p>
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		<p>Housing need is always based upon current circumstances however we will consider providing overcrowding priority where applicants can provide the appropriate evidence and we may work with the Children’s and Young Peoples Services to decide at what stage it is appropriate give priority.</p> <p><u>Pets</u></p> <p>The policy to ban dogs from communal flats or properties with no private garden space was introduced in April 2017 and saw a significant reduction in complaints and management issues. However, it was recognised that this ban restricted access to a lot of the Associations housing stock, particularly for responsible dog owners.</p> <p>Following the results of the Allocations policy consultation, it was felt a compromise should be considered by lifting restrictions slightly to only ban dogs in communal stairs where noise can easily transfer and fouling within the stair could occur. It is recommended that this is monitored closely over the year to see if complaints start to escalate again.</p> <p><u>Allocations not covered by this Policy</u></p> <p>This section has been expanded to be more explicit about when we will not allocate a property through the These Homes Policy.</p> <p><u>Management Allocations</u></p> <p>Reference to management allocations have been moved to this section from 5.3.</p>
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Administration of the Housing List	4.1	20-23	<p>The reasons for suspensions have been summarised in bullet points with most of the text previously at this section being moved to Appendix 4, to make the policy easier to read.</p> <p>The Law gives housing providers the statutory right to suspend applicants from receiving an offer of housing for up to three years. A suspension is when a landlord decides that it will not make an offer of housing until certain circumstances have changed, conditions are met, or a set period has passed. The applicant remains on the list while suspended.</p> <p>The policy currently states that applicants will be suspended for two years in cases such as for providing false or misleading information or for being aggressive or threatening to staff. Applicants will also be suspended where there is tenancy debt of more than one month until they have maintained a repayment arrangement for a minimum of three months. Timescales for suspending applicants for issues such as anti-social behaviour are discretionary based upon the circumstances.</p> <p>In line with the new Guidance, suspensions should be kept to a minimum and clear explanations given about when they will apply and for how long. To do this, it is recommended that most suspensions are for an initial twelve months with the discretion to extend the suspension for further periods of six months to a maximum of two years. However, the suspension may be ended at any time where the issue that gave rise to the suspension has been resolved.</p>
Appeals and Complaints Process	6.0	29	Timescales for responding to appeals has been added.
Information and Advice	7.0	30	Details in relation to the information that applicants can access in Homehunt has been removed. This level of detail will not be available in These Homes as advice suggests that being so specific about individual allocations could breach GDPR. However more general reports will be provided for applicants and will include much of the information contained in the list that has been removed.
Allocations of Garages	8.0	30	This section has been moved to Appendix 1.
Monitoring & Review	9.0	30-31	Reporting requirements in These Homes are currently in development at the time of the review. Quarterly and annual reports will continue to be provided to the Audit & Assurance Committee and some performance will be semi-automated and displayed on the Association's P365 microsite.



Appendix 1		32-34	Describes the arrangements for allocating Shared Ownership, Workshop Homes, Garages and Garage Sites and Low Cost Home Ownership and replaces the Appendix 1 on page 34 which is out of date and no longer necessary.
Appendix 2		35-41	The information at this appendix has been placed in a table to make it easier to read.
Appendix 4		43-45	This Appendix contains the information that was originally at section 4.1 and provides more detailed information relating to suspensions.
Appendix 4 (old)		46	<p>At this time is not clear how long it will take to assess registrations given Priority Passes have now been included into the registration form rather than being dealt with separately. It is expected that this change could increase the number of Passes applied as more information will be captured. It is also expected that the number of postal applications will be so insignificant that targets will be similar for both online and paper.</p> <p>Until such time as These Homes has been bedded in, provisional performance indicators will be set and reported to the Audit &amp; Assurance Committee during 2021/22, and it is recommended that this section is removed as it could otherwise open the Association up to complaints.</p>
Appendix 5		47-48	Sets out clear guidance on the use of lettings plans, that these will be time limited except in the circumstances where Management Committee have already given approval for permanent plans.



# East Lothian Housing Association Complaints Handling Procedure

Contents

What is a complaint? .....	3
What can I complain about? .....	3
What can't I complain about?.....	3
Who can complain? .....	4
How do I complain? .....	4
Our contact details.....	5
How long do I have to make a complaint? .....	5
What happens when I have complained? .....	5
Stage 1: Frontline response.....	5
Stage 2: Investigation.....	6
What if I'm still dissatisfied?.....	6
Care complaints.....	7
Reporting a significant performance failure to the Scottish Housing Regulator .....	7
Getting help to make your complaint .....	8
Our contact details .....	9

East Lothian Housing Association (ELHA) is committed to providing high-quality customer services.

**We value complaints and use information from them to help us improve our services.**

1. If something goes wrong or you are dissatisfied with our services, please tell us. This leaflet describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about how we will handle your complaint and what you can expect from us.

**What is a complaint?**

2. We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.

**What can I complain about?**

3. You can complain about things like:
  - failure or refusal to provide a service
  - inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service
  - delays in responding to enquiries or requests
  - unfairness, bias or prejudice in service delivery
  - lack of provision, or the provision of misleading, unsuitable or incorrect advice or information
  - a repair that has not been carried out properly or in an agreed timeframe
  - dissatisfaction with one of our policies or its impact on the individual
  - failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services
  - failure to follow the appropriate administrative process
  - conduct, treatment by or attitude of a member of staff or contractor (**except** where there are arrangements in place for the contractor to handle the complaint themselves); or
  - disagreement with a decision, (**except** where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector).
4. Your complaint may involve more than one ELHA service or be about someone working on our behalf.

**What can't I complain about?**

5. There are some things we can't deal with through our complaints handling procedure. These include:
  - a routine first-time request for a service

- a request for compensation only
  - issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal (if you decide to take legal action, you should let us know as the complaint cannot then be considered under this process)
  - disagreement with a decision where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision (such as for freedom of information and subject access requests), or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector
  - a request for information under the Data Protection or Freedom of Information (Scotland) Acts
  - a grievance by a staff member or a grievance relating to employment or staff recruitment
  - a concern raised internally by a member of staff (which was not about a service they received, such as a whistleblowing concern)
  - a concern about a child or an adult's safety
  - an attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision
  - abuse or unsubstantiated allegations about our organisation or staff where such actions would be covered by our Unacceptable Behaviour Policy; or
  - a concern about the actions or service of a different organisation, where we have no involvement in the issue (**except** where the other organisation is delivering services on our behalf).
6. If other procedures or rights of appeal can help you resolve your concerns, we will give information and advice to help you.

### Who can complain?

7. Anyone who receives, requests or is directly affected by our services can make a complaint to us. This includes the representative of someone who is dissatisfied with our service (for example, a relative, friend, advocate or adviser). If you are making a complaint on someone else's behalf, you will normally need their written consent. Please also read the section on **Getting help to make your complaint** below.

### How do I complain?

8. You can complain in person at our office, by phone, in writing, by email or via the My Home complaints form: <https://myhome.elha.com/complaints>.
9. It is easier for us to address complaints if you make them quickly and directly to the service concerned. So please talk to a member of our staff at the service you are complaining about. Then they can try to resolve the issue.
10. When complaining, please tell us:
- your full name and contact details

- as much as you can about the complaint
- what has gone wrong; and
- what outcome you are seeking.

**Our contact details**

Visit our website: elha.com

E-mail us: enquiries@elha.com

Visit us at: 18-20 Market Street, Haddington, EH41 3JL

Call us on: 01620 825032

Write to us at: 18-20 Market Street, Haddington, EH41 3JL

**How long do I have to make a complaint?**

11. Normally, you must make your complaint within six months of:

- the event you want to complain about; or
- finding out that you have a reason to complain.

12. In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

**What happens when I have complained?**

13. We will always tell you who is dealing with your complaint. Our complaints procedure has two stages.

**Stage 1: Frontline response**

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14. We aim to respond to complaints quickly (where possible, when you first tell us about the issue). This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong, or immediate action to resolve the problem.

15. We will give you our decision at stage 1 in five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

16. If you are not satisfied with the response we give at this stage, we will tell you what you can do next. If you choose to, you can take your complaint to stage 2. You must normally ask us to consider your complaint at stage 2 either:

- within six months of the event you want to complain about or finding out that you have a reason to complain; or
- within two months of receiving your stage 1 response (if this is later).

17. In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a stage 2 complaint after the time limit. If you feel that the time limit should not apply to your complaint, please tell us why.

## **Stage 2: Investigation**

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18. Stage 2 deals with two types of complaint: where the customer remains dissatisfied after stage 1 and those that clearly require investigation, and so are handled directly at this stage. If you do not wish your complaint to be handled at stage 1, you can ask us to handle it at stage 2 instead.

19. When using stage 2:

- we will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days
- we will confirm our understanding of the complaint we will investigate and what outcome you are looking for
- we will try to resolve your complaint where we can (in some cases we may suggest using an alternative complaint resolution approach, such as mediation); and
- where we cannot resolve your complaint, we will give you a full response as soon as possible, normally within 20 working days.

20. If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we will tell you. We will tell you our revised time limits and keep you updated on progress.

## **What if I'm still dissatisfied?**

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21. After we have given you our final decision, if you are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with your complaint, you can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to look at it.

The SPSO are an independent organisation that investigates complaints. They are not an advocacy or support service (but there are other organisations who can help you with advocacy or support).

You can ask the SPSO to look at your complaint if:

- you have gone all the way through ELHA's complaints handling procedure
- it is less than 12 months after you became aware of the matter you want to complain about; and
- the matter has not been (and is not being) considered in court.

The SPSO will ask you to complete a complaint form and provide a copy of our final response to your complaint. You can do this online at [www.spsos.org.uk/complain/form](http://www.spsos.org.uk/complain/form) or call them on Freephone 0800 377 7330.

You may wish to get independent support or advocacy to help you progress your complaint. See the section on **Getting help to make your complaint** below.

The SPSO's contact details are:

SPSO  
Bridgeside House  
99 McDonald Road  
Edinburgh  
EH7 4NS  
(if you would like to visit in person, you must make an appointment first)

Their freepost address is:

FREEPOST SPSO

Freephone: 0800 377 7330  
Online contact [www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us](http://www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us)  
Website: [www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk)

22. There are some complaints about housing that have an alternative route for independent review. We will tell you how to seek independent review when we give you our final response on your complaint.

## Care complaints

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23. ELHA do not provide any care services which would fall under the Care Inspectorate.

The Care Inspectorate has several offices around Scotland. Please refer to: <http://www.scswis.com/>

## Reporting a significant performance failure to the Scottish Housing Regulator

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24. The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) can consider issues raised with them about 'significant performance failures'. A significant performance failure is defined by the SHR as something that a landlord does or fails to do that puts the interests of its tenants at risk, and which the landlord has not resolved. This is something that is a systemic problem that does, or could, affect all of a landlord's tenants. If you are affected by a problem like this, you should first report it to us. If you have told us about it but we have not resolved it, you can report it directly to the SHR.
25. A complaint between an individual tenant and a landlord is not a significant performance failure. Significant performance failures are not, therefore, dealt with



through this complaints handling procedure. You can ask us for more information about significant performance failures. The SHR also has more information on their website: [www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/](http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/)

## Getting help to make your complaint

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26. We understand that you may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint yourself. We accept complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service. We can take complaints from a friend, relative, or an advocate, if you have given them your consent to complain for you.

27. You can find out about advocates in your area by contacting the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance:

**Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance**

Tel: 0131 510 9410 Website: [www.siaa.org.uk](http://www.siaa.org.uk)

28. You can find out about advisers in your area through Citizens Advice Scotland:

**Citizens Advice Scotland**

Website: [www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk) or check your phone book for your local citizens advice bureau.

Additional relevant support agencies may be found in **elha.com's** Tenancy Support section, which can be found under Services.

29. We are committed to making our service easy to use for all members of the community. In line with our statutory equalities duties, we will always ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to help you access and use our services. If you have trouble putting your complaint in writing, or want this information in another language or format, such as large font, or Braille, please tell us in person, contact us on 01620825032, email us at [enquiries@elha.com](mailto:enquiries@elha.com) or text us at 88222 (elha then your message).

**Our contact details**

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30. Please contact us by the following means:

Visit our website: [elha.com](http://elha.com)

E-mail us: [enquiries@elha.com](mailto:enquiries@elha.com)

Visit us at: 18-20 Market Street, Haddington, EH41 3JL

Call us on: 01620 825032

Write to us at: 18-20 Market Street, Haddington, EH41 3JL

We can also give you this leaflet in other languages and formats (such as large print, audio and Braille).

## Quick guide to our complaints procedure

### Complaints procedure

You can make your complaint in person, by phone, by email or in writing.

We have a **two-stage complaints procedure**. We will always try to deal with your complaint quickly. But if it is clear that the matter will need investigation, we will tell you and keep you updated on our progress.



### Stage 1: Frontline response

We will always try to resolve your complaint quickly, within **five working days** if we can.

If you are dissatisfied with our response, you can ask us to consider your complaint at stage 2.



### Stage 2: Investigation

We will look at your complaint at this stage if you are dissatisfied with our response at stage 1. We also look at some complaints immediately at this stage, if it is clear that they need investigation.

We will acknowledge your complaint within **three working days**.

We will confirm the points of complaint to be investigated and what you want to achieve.

We will investigate the complaint and give you our decision as soon as possible. This will be after no more than **20 working days** *unless* there is clearly a good reason for needing more time.



### Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

If, after receiving our final decision on your complaint, you remain dissatisfied with our decision or the way we have handled your complaint, you can ask the SPSO to consider it.

There are some complaints about housing that have an alternative route for independent review. We will tell you how to seek independent review when we give you our final response on your complaint.

# Comments and Complaints Policy Review

## Report by Karen Barry, Director of Housing – for Approval

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### 1.0 Introduction

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) has revised the Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) which organisations must comply with by April 2021 and which has prompted an early review of the Comments and Complaints Policy. Recommended changes are tracked on the **Policy Document** attached.

### 2.0 Key Changes to the MCHP

Though the changes to the policy are minimal, a number of changes have been made to the MCHP. Following its review during 2018/19, the SPSO has streamlined and standardised the MCHP across Scotland's public sector service to remove minor inconsistencies, whilst retaining individualised sector-specific content in each version of the Procedure.

Though all core text must be adopted, there is some flexibility to making changes to the Procedure where highlighted in the model, to allow for local circumstances to be reflected. This is currently in development and will be in operation by 1 April 2021. A customer-facing CHP must also be adopted, a draft which can be found at **Appendix 1**.

Key changes include:

- Organisations may now 'resolve' a complaint by agreeing the action to be taken with the customer rather than have to make a decision whether to uphold, partially uphold or not uphold a complaint
- Organisations must agree the points of a complaint and the outcome sought with the complainant at the start of a Stage Two complaint. If the points are clear upon receipt, this can be done by setting these out in the complaint acknowledgement letter
- The six month timeframe to make a complaint now applies where the customer wants to escalate to Stage Two because they are unhappy with the response at Stage One of the Procedure
- Organisations must support staff by sharing relevant parts of the complaint and the response with the staff member being complained about, at Stage Two, staff members must be given information about the complaint process and support available and kept updated on any timeframe extensions

- Organisations should set out what kind of actions staff may take to support equal access to the complaints process
- At a minimum, organisations must respond to complaints on their social media channels (e.g. Facebook) by signposting to the complaint process and support available
- Where a complaint is brought by an MP/MSP, the organisation must handle it in line with the CHP and ensure they do not operate a two-tier system
- Organisations must report and publish complaint statistics in line with new performance indicators published by the SPSO

### **3.0 Consultation**

The SPSO consulted widely with tenants in the development of the original RSL model CHP and these further changes have been driven by a focus on the needs of customers. The Tenant Involvement Group was consulted on the changes to the MCHP at its meeting on 18 January 2020 and all tenants who received the e-news in January 2021 were invited to take part in the development of the Procedure. No feedback or response was received.

#### **Recommendation**

The Management Committee is asked to approve the amendments to the Comments and Complaints Policy.

## ELHA POLICY

<b>Date Issued</b>	March 2013
<b>Department</b>	Corporate
<b>Title</b>	<b>Comments and Complaints Policy</b>
<b>Objective</b>	To ensure that comments and complaints are used to drive service improvements; that we deal with all complaints appropriately within our timescales and that we resolve complaints wherever possible
<b>Responsible</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Last Review Date</b>	February 2021
<b>Next Review Date</b>	February 2026

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## 1.0 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 Our Vision is to provide “Healthy Happy Homes”. We recognise that we will not always get things right and we value feedback from customers. Effective handling of comments and complaints can improve the quality of services we deliver to our customers and help foster a culture of continuous improvement throughout the Association.
- 1.2 Anyone who receives, requests or is affected by our services can make a comment or complaint.
- 1.3 We will make it easy for customers to make a comment or complaint and ensure that effective records enable accurate and meaningful monitoring and reporting of outcomes, particularly where a comment or complaint has led to a change in a process or policy.
- 1.4 We will respond to a complaint on our Facebook page by signposting the customer to our Complaints Handling Procedure.
- 1.54 We will investigate complaints and resolve them as closely -as possible to the point of frontline service delivery. We will ensure that the person making the complaint is kept fully informed throughout the complaint handling process.
- 1.65 Where complaints are raised about more than one service area we will ensure a single co-ordinated response is made.

- 1.76 If a customer expresses dissatisfaction but does not want to complain, they will be encouraged to submit their complaint in line with the Complaints Handling Procedure. This will ensure feedback on the outcome of the complaint is communicated to the customer.
- 1.87 If a customer insists they do not wish to complain the issue will be recorded as an anonymous complaint to ensure completeness of our complaints data and allow us to fully consider the matter. This will also provide us with an accurate position regarding complaints for analysis and learning purposes.
- 1.98 If a customer is unable or reluctant to make a complaint, we will accept complaints brought by third parties as long as the customer has given their personal consent.
- 1.109 We will only normally consider complaints that are raised within six months of when the customer first became aware of the issue about which they are making a complaint. This timeframe also applies where a customer wishes to escalate their complaint because they are unhappy with the response to their initial complaint.
- 1.110 This Policy reflects the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) Model Complaint Handling Procedure for Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) which we have fully adopted.

## 2.0 DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 Our definition of a complaint is: *‘Any expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of us’.*
- 2.2 A comment may be positive or negative and will often be expressed as an opinion or suggestion, for example “That should not have happened” or “You need to improve...” or “All of your tenants should be told about this excellent service”
- 2.3 A “Significant Performance Failure” is defined by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) as something that a landlord does or fails to do that puts the interests of its tenants at risk, and which the landlord has not resolved. The issue may be raised with us in the first instance and referred to the SHR only if we fail to deal with the matter effectively.

## 3.0 LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 places a statutory duty on Registered Social Landlords to comply with the SPSO Model Complaint Handling Procedure published for the housing sector.
- 3.2 The Scottish Housing Regulator will monitor compliance with the model Complaint Handling Procedure.
- 3.3 The Scottish Social Housing Charter came into effect on 1st April 2012 and places a duty upon RSLs to make it easy for tenants and other customers to make complaints and provide feedback on services, using that information to improve services and performance, and letting people know what they have done in response to complaints and feedback.
- 3.4 This policy complies with the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010 and seeks not to consciously or unconsciously discriminate or to have an adverse effect upon any of the nine protected characteristic groups outlined in the Act.
- 3.5 This Policy also complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018.

#### 4.0 COMMENTS

- 4.1 Negative comments will usually be recorded as complaints and dealt with through our Complaints Handling Process.
- 4.2 Positive comments and suggestions from tenants, applicants and other service users are also welcomed, as they can provide informal feedback on the standards we achieve, provide opportunities to improve existing services, and may also provide 'early warning' of issues that could evolve into complaints, allowing us to take early action.
- 4.3 We will record positive comments in the same way as negative comments and complaints and include them in our monitoring and reporting systems to ensure that all customer feedback is considered and acted upon where appropriate.

#### 5.0 MONITORING AND REPORTING

- 5.1 We will monitor how comments and complaints are handled, how well we meet our target timescales and what changes we have made in response to complaints. Regular reports will be considered by our Business Management Team and Management Audit & Assurance Committee.
- 5.2 We will publish the outcome of complaints and the actions we have taken in response, on our website [elha.com](http://elha.com) every quarter and annually in our



performance report to tenants. The number of complaints and praise received is also reported on our P365 microsite on elha.com.

- 5.3 We will also collate responses received from the surveys or comments cards ~~we receive that~~ we send out with ~~each our~~ E-news or newsletters, and provide feedback to tenants on these comments where appropriate.

## 6.0 POLICY REVIEW

- 6.1 The Chief Executive will ensure that this policy is reviewed by the Management Committee every five years or following a review and amendments by SPSO to the model Complaint Handling Procedure.



# Communication Strategy

## 2021 to 2024

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 This document is our first three year Communication Strategy. It sets out our plans for effective communications both internally and externally; underpinning our commitment to achieving our vision of Healthy Happy Homes, our values, key priorities set out in our Business Plan as well as the communication outcomes and standards contained within the Scottish Social Housing Charter.
- 1.2 This Communications Strategy, supported by the Tenant Participation Strategy, assists the Group to become a highly effective organisation by ensuring that information is presented in a manner that is appropriate, clear and concise.
- 1.3 While we refer to ‘digital by default’, and aim to provide 100% of services online, traditional methods are always available for anyone unable or unwilling to use digital communication. This means we operate a “digital first” approach in practice, which ensures all our core services continue to be delivered in ways that all our tenants can access.
- 1.4 At the time of writing this Strategy, only around a quarter of our tenants still required printed information. We will therefore design and develop general communication materials for a mobile phone screen first, since this is the format most of our tenants use to read the information we send and which will also work on all other devices. We will only print the information when required to do so, for example where a tenant does not have access to a mobile phone or other device.

## **2.0 Objectives**

- 2.1 The key objectives of our Communication Strategy are to:
  - Positively raise the profile of ELHA through effective communication
  - Ensure all communication is instantly recognisable and corporately branded
  - Provide a framework that provides clear, informative guidance to ensure high quality communication is produced that meets the needs of the target audience
  - Reduce costs by ensuring the most efficient and appropriate communication method is used.

### **3.0 Key Principles**

3.1 The key principles underpinning our Strategy are to:

- Ensure that all communication is in plain English, easy to understand and reflects the values of ELHA
- Ensure that written messages are not 'hidden' by using detailed pictures as a background
- Provide a range of options to choose when communicating
- On request, provide alternative communication methods where reasonable to do so, such as arranging interpreting and translation services (we are members of Happy to Translate), information on CD, in larger print, and in languages other than English, where this is required

### **4.0 Legal & Regulatory Framework**

#### **4.1 Scottish Social Housing Charter**

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 sets out the foundations for the regulatory system that formally takes account of tenant's views, and in April 2012 the Scottish Social Housing Charter (the Charter) was launched; revised in 2017.

The purpose of the Charter is to help improve the quality and value of the services that social landlords in Scotland provide and to set out who is responsible for meeting the 16 Charter Standards and Outcomes. There are two outcomes and standards applicable to this Strategy:

##### **4.1.1 Outcome 1 Equalities**

'Social Landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that every tenant and other customer had their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect and receives fair access to housing and housing services.'

##### **4.1.2 Outcome 2 Communication**

'Social landlords manage their business so that tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides'

4.2 This Strategy takes account of the following legislation and good practice:

- Data Protection Act 2018
- Freedom of Information Act 2019
- Equality Act 2010

4.3 The Strategy also takes account of the following:

- Tenant Participation Strategy
- Comments & Complaints Policy
- Information and Advice Policy
- Customer Care Policy
- Customer Service Charter
- Openness & Confidentiality Policy
- ICT Strategy
- IT Policy

## **5.0 Target Audiences**

5.1 Our audiences are all of the people we come into contact within the course of our work and include:

- Tenants
- Sharing Owners
- Owners
- These Homes applicants
- Members of the public
- Local Authorities
- Contractors and Consultants
- Other organisations that we work with

- 5.2 Although this Strategy is mainly aimed at external audiences, the standards set will also be applied to dealings between staff within the Group, our Tenant Involvement Group and Management Committee members.

## **6.0 Communication Methods**

- 6.1 We use a variety of communication methods to ensure a style and format that promotes accessibility for all and aims to identify and agree the preferred method of communication with our individual audiences in advance depending on the communication type.
- 6.2 Clear guidance in the form of a Corporate Style Guidance Note, procedures and training is provided to those staff preparing and distributing communication on behalf of the Association. This will make sure that the most appropriate methods are used and that all communication is easily understood and achieves its objective.
- 6.3 We will take into account any preferred communication methods and offer a range of ways in which we can be both contacted by and make contact with our audience.
- 6.4 There are many ways in which we can communicate with our audiences either individually or in groups; online, in writing or face to face and through publications such as e-newsletters, leaflets and press releases. The following is a list of our key communication methods:

### **6.4.1 elha.com & My Home**

All of our housing services are accessible via elha.com and My Home (the only exception being where we need a person's signature). Tenants can manage their tenancies, read our policies or information leaflets, obtain energy advice and make complaints online. Every page on elha.com (My Home too?) has a praise or grumble feature which allows tenants to provide us with feedback, good or bad

Tenants who have registered with My Home are automatically signed up for our paper-free service, which they can opt-out of by contacting our Head Office.

elha.com and My Home are designed to be highly accessible, easily navigated by tenants using screen readers or tabbed browsing and are Browsealoud enabled. Every page of elha.com includes the option to translate the page into over 100 languages.

The Live Help service is the equivalent of a telephone call for people who cannot, or prefer not to, use the telephone. The service is open Monday to Friday and provides tenants and other customers with instant access to an online advisor who can provide them with a range of information and advice.

For people who may not be able to manage their tenancy or communicate effectively on-line, we offer a Friends & Family Service, which can be enabled by default where a Power of Attorney is in place, or on request from a tenant. This enables a friend or family member to manage the tenant's My Home account on their behalf. We maintain a robust audit trail of all changes made through this service.

#### 6.4.2 My New Home

Applicants choosing to manage their future tenancy online can access their My New Home account before signing their tenancy, this gives them access to a range of information. It allows applicants to make decisions on how they would like us to communicate with them once they become a tenant

#### 6.4.3 These Homes

We use our new digital lettings service, "These Homes", to communicate with prospective tenants online, advertising and allocating available properties for let, and linking the These Homes website to our Facebook page and elha.com.

#### 6.4.4 E-Talk & Talkback Newsletters

We aim to issue an E-Talk newsletter at least once a month, consisting of four to seven article summaries which link through to the full articles on our News page at elha.com.

Newsflash e-mails are also be sent when required, for example as part of a social media campaign, or if there is time-sensitive or important news which we need to get out to tenants as quickly as possible.

Once 15 to 25 E-Talk and newsflash articles have been published, we will produce a printed Talkback newsletter which is sent to all tenants who have not signed up to paper-free services.

#### 6.4.5 Performance 365

Following feedback from tenants about our annual report, we replaced it with the introduction of our Performance 365 microsite on elha.com, which communicates up to date performance information for tenants and other interested parties.

#### 6.4.6 Social Media

We know through our Large Tenant Satisfaction Survey that most of our tenants who use social media platforms, use Facebook. We have an active Facebook page which we use to promote our services and have over 1,000 followers.

We know that other platforms exist and intend to explore these options further. We will use social media to engage with service users, to channel them towards our various websites through the use of links. Cross-platform hashtags will be used, and the effectiveness of various social media platforms can be analysed using \ Google Analytics.

Appendix 1 sets out our Social Media Strategy.

#### 6.4.7 Consultations & Surveys

We have set a minimum standard for all consultations and each year we advise our tenants through our E-news and our newsletters about the topics we propose to consult them on, or surveys we intend to carry out for the following year.

All consultations start with a micro-site and are designed for use on mobile phone screens first, and then for use on all other devices. The information from the micro-site is printed for those who require this.

Our micro-site, [elha.com/consultations/](http://elha.com/consultations/) (name of consultation) is where all consultations are held and the design of this site is similar for every consultation – a landing / orientation page (Consultation Home page), a Summary page, a More Information page and a Feedback form. Tenant feedback is received through a tenant's My Home account, with staff inputting any paper forms received into My Home using My Home Help.

#### 6.4.8 Direct written communication (letters, email and text)

All letters and e-mails sent to customers will be clear, easy to understand and to read and will be written in Plain English. Where we are unable to respond fully within the target response time, we will write explaining the reason for the delay and say when we expect to make a full response.

All letters will be sent in the name of the person dealing with the matter and will contain clear and accurate explanations about decisions that have been made. E-mails and SMS text messages will be sent from a central mailbox but will contain clear contact information.



#### 6.4.9 Telephone Calls

We operate an automated telephone system which provides a range of options customers can select to get through to the department they want to speak to. All calls will be answered as quickly as possible and staff will greet callers in a polite and courteous manner, stating their name.

During opening hours, we will only use Voicemail when staff are unavailable. Recorded messages will be audible and accurate, and callers will be offered the option of leaving a voicemail message or being called back when the staff member is available. We also use answer phones when the office is closed. Recorded messages will be clear, audible and accurate and will always give the caller the option of leaving a message. Messages will also inform callers of who they should contact in case of an emergency.

We will respond to answer phone messages at the earliest possible opportunity.

#### 6.4.10 Home Visits

Where required, we will arrange appointments to visit customers at home during office hours. The customer will always be offered the option to change the appointment to a time more suited to them.

If we are unable to keep an appointment, for example due to staff absence, we will notify the customer as soon as possible, explain why we cannot keep the appointment and arrange another appointment at a mutually convenient time.

All staff will carry identification and will show it to customers before entering their homes. We will explain the reason for visiting and what, if any, action will be taken following the home visit.

If the customer is not at home, staff will leave a calling card detailing who visited and why, with contact information. Sensitive information will not be noted on calling cards.

We usually make an appointment before visiting customers. However, there are occasions when staff may visit without prior notice, for example if they notice an issue with a property whilst passing by, or if they have had difficulty contacting a customer.

## **7.0 Corporate Branding**

7.1 To ensure that all communication is instantly recognisable and corporately branded, all forms of communication will include the appropriate logo(s), colours, contact details, registration number and web / social media information. See Appendix 2 for the corporate style guide.

## **8.0 Digital Inclusion**

8.1 We will take advantage of new technologies and maximise digital opportunities to:

- Provide customers with greater accessibility to information and self service via My Home and elha.com
- Provide educational opportunities for customers who do not have digital skills
- Provide a website which ensures staff can access key corporate documents secure in the knowledge that they are the most up to date
- Increase our social media presence as a communication medium

## **9.0 Equality & Diversity**

9.1 We will not discriminate in the operation of this policy on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. We aim to promote equal opportunities and comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

9.2 When we are communicating with or about someone whose gender is unknown, we will not use gendered language, e.g. we will use 'they', rather than 's/he'.

## **10.0 Complaints**

10.1 Although we will always strive to deliver excellent service, we acknowledge that we will sometimes make mistakes and will not always get things right first time.

10.2 We will make it easy for customers to complain, formally or informally, by publicising our Comments and Complaints Policy and making it readily available to anyone who wants to use it.

- 10.3 Our website includes various ways for customers to give feedback, such as contact forms, “praise or grumble” and the Live Help service, as well as giving on-line access to, and information about, our comments and complaints service.
- 10.4 if a customer complains on any of our social media platforms, we will always signpost them to our Complaints Handling Procedure and to support available.
- 10.4 We will investigate complaints and resolve them as closely as possible to the point of frontline service delivery. We will ensure that the person making the complaint is kept fully informed throughout the complaint handling process and if a complaint is about more than one service area, we will ensure a single co-ordinated response is made.
- 10.5 If a customer is unable or reluctant to make a complaint, we will accept complaints brought by third parties as long as the customer has given their personal consent.
- 10.6 When we make mistakes we will apologise, put things right as quickly as possible and use the experience to improve our service in the future.

### **11.0 Performance Monitoring**

11.1 Our standards and targets for communication are set out in our Customer Service Charter. Performance is reported on our Performance 365 microsite and monitored through the submission of a number of quarterly reports to our Audit & Assurance Committee. For example (the list is not exhaustive):

- Complaints & praise quarterly analysis
- Consultations
- Satisfaction survey results
- Tenant participation reports
- Web use, Facebook and E-Talk statistics

An Annual Report will also be provided to our Audit & Assurance Committee measuring and evaluating the success of this Strategy.

### **12.0 Strategy Review**

12.1 The Director of Housing will ensure that this Strategy is reviewed every three years, and any amendments required will be submitted to the Management Committee for approval.

**Appendix 1**

**Social Media Strategy**

**Introduction**

This Social Media Strategy supports the Communications Strategy; its purpose is to inform staff on the use and maintenance of any social media platforms in use by the Association and any subsidiary companies. This is to ensure that all social media use associated with the ELHA Group is in line with the corporate vision.

This strategy is a living document and may be updated at any time, but campaign calendars will be reviewed annually with the Tenant Involvement Group and the full document will be reviewed every three years.

All staff should make themselves aware of the content of this strategy before engaging in any use of social media in ELHA's name or while publicly associated with ELHA or subsidiaries.

**Reasons for using social media**

**Community engagement**

The primary reason for using social media is to interact with tenants, applicants and other service users. Social media is a very useful Tenant Participation (TP) tool and should be used in conjunction with traditional TP methods to ensure that any tenant who wishes to participate can.

**Information sharing**

Social media is an invaluable tool for informing service users of available services and activities, both internal and external. For example, announcing in advance on Facebook and in e-News that property upgrades are a legal requirement may reduce the number of abortive visits or access refusals that operatives experience.

**Service promotion**

Related to the above, the use of campaigns can be used to bring service users to new services which they would benefit from. Rather than just informing the public that a service exists, they can be guided to application forms or sign up options (a 'conversion').

Public relations

As a sector leader in digital services, we should be present on social media on a corporate level. Staff may engage with professional social media services such as LinkedIn.

**Performance Monitoring**

Performance indicators will be unique to the platform used, but broadly:

- Followers/Friends – the number of people following us on a social media platform
- Number of posts
- Engagement – the percentage of followers who have engaged with our output (e.g. liked, commented or shared a post)
- Conversions – where a service user has clicked through from a social media post to one of the Group’s websites

**Social Media Platforms**

Facebook (in use)

<https://www.facebook.com/eastlothianhousingassociation>

Facebook has been in use since 2012. Facebook posts are made in a friendly informal style and should always contain at least one hashtag and one of the following:

- An image
- A link
- A video

All campaigns and regularly scheduled posts should have a campaign-specific hashtag, e.g. #ELHAEnergy2020 (the 2020 energy advice campaign), #ELHAHomes (the weekly available property update).

Twitter (dormant)

@HousingEast

We do not currently use Twitter, although a placeholder account is available. Proposed uses for Twitter are:

- Public Relations
- Service announcements
- Social media campaigns

As with Facebook, Twitter posts should have at least one relevant hashtag.

YouTube (dormant)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCezwmwgWzOwkGJACj19gfxQ>

There is a placeholder channel (associated with our Corporate Google account), but it is not currently in use. Proposed uses for the channel are:

- Publication of My Home instructional videos
- 'How to' tutorials for new services, e.g. These Homes
- 'How to' do minor repairs around your home (R3 – potential for PR and marketing)
- Third party videos, e.g. the 'what to expect when we visit you' video provided by the CIH
- Community engagement and public interest, e.g. walkthroughs of new builds, updates on estate management projects, etc.

LinkedIn (partially dormant)

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/east-lothian-housing-association>

Again, there is a placeholder account with branding, but it is not currently active. As of 1 Dec 2020, 11 employees name ELHA as their employer, and the account is followed by 119 professionals.

As Housing sector professionals are already trying to engage with the corporate LinkedIn account, it is proposed that it is managed by Executive Support for sector-specific content, e.g. press releases, articles about new services, accreditations and awards, etc.

### Instagram (no account)

While there is no account set up yet, there are plans to use this platform for engaging with tenants via estate management. For example:

- ELHA's Garden of the week
- Community engagement, e.g. The Hedges Project

As Instagram is owned by Facebook, linking the two accounts gives the opportunity to cross-post popular content.

Use of hashtags is a requirement, and should be consistent with Facebook, e.g. #ELHAGardens.

### Hashtags

Hashtags should be used on social media for several reasons:

- To make relevant or related posts easier for service users to find
- To measure the engagement levels during social media campaigns
- To raise awareness of our social media presence outside our current follower group, and increase followers with an interest in engaging with us

### Advertising

There is the opportunity to use social media for targeted advertising. Should a budget for this be put in place, the following should be taken into consideration:

- Advertising posts should remain in the same informal style as organic posts
- Targeted advertising should match the appropriate platform. For example, we receive high engagement on property advertising on Facebook, therefore this would be the appropriate platform to publish paid posts targeted at These Homes users.

**Staff use of social media**

Staff should not display that they work for ELHA on social media. Exceptions may be made for professional social media, e.g. LinkedIn, and all public posts must conform to the Code of Conduct. Staff may be asked to remove or restrict access to any public post which does not align with the corporate vision.

Updates to the corporate Facebook account must be made through a personal Facebook account with Administrator access (this does not publicly link the two accounts). As many staff will prefer not to have their personal Facebook account linked to the corporate account, and ELHA cannot compel staff to link their personal accounts to the corporate account, this should be taken into consideration when assigning staff social media roles.



Appendix 2

**Corporate Style Guide**

All publications, including digital publications and letters must meet the Corporate Style Guide.

**Letters**

Unless the recipient of a letter has requested that letters are sent in large print, all letters must be in 12pt Arial.

Letters must contain

- A header, consisting of the Healthy Happy Homes Logo and the elha.com logo
- A footer containing our registered office, charity number, contact details and other relevant information

A letter template can be found here: <M:\SDM\SDMLetters\Template.docx>

Logos and footers can be found here: <J:\Corporate\Key Information\Logos\ELHA Logo 2008>

**Leaflets & Newsletters**

All new leaflets and newsletters should have the following:

- All relevant logos & accreditations
  - Healthy Happy Homes
  - Happy to Translate
  - Cyber Essentials
  - TPAS Gold Accreditation
  - Disability Confident Employer
- A QR code to elha.com



- Our contact details (back page for leaflets, strapline footer for newsletters)

Before reprints of leaflets are ordered, the back page is checked in case any amendments are required, such as a new accreditation logo to be added, the fax number to be removed, etc.

### **Webpages**

Unless otherwise arranged, all web pages will correspond to the relevant website template.

Any additional images embedded in webpages must:

- Be less than 400 pixels wide
- Have 5 pixels of horizontal and vertical spacing
- Not have visible borders

Any embedded tables should be left aligned and set to 100% of the available space. Borders should not be used unless the table is difficult to read without them.

Embedded video should be centre aligned (this is the default for iframe data).

Links to downloads (excepting listed links like the policy downloads) and external resources should be displayed as a button by using the 'download button' option from the WYSIWYG style drop-down.

### **E-mail**

See the Use of Information Technology procedure for e-mail configuration.

**Press Releases**

All press releases should include a copy of the elha.com logo

**Use of Sprites**

There is a bank of sprites available for staff use on letters or other publications. Before permanently changing a letter template to include a sprite, this should be discussed with the relevant manager.

Sprite Bank: <J:\Corporate\Publications\Sprite Themes>

**General**

- Text should not be put on top of images
- Text should be black on a pale background (white on a dark background should only be used for emphasis, and should be no more than a paragraph or two)
- The most recent versions of letter templates must be used, as new accreditations may have been added to the footer
- Do not type in all caps unless it is required for emphasis, e.g. FINAL WARNING

## Communication Strategy

### Report by Karen Barry, Director of Housing – for approval

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A Communication Strategy has been developed. The Strategy Document is attached to this report.

Communication Strategies ensure that high quality information is produced and relayed to the right people, through internal and external communication, and designed to help organisations meet their core objectives. Putting a strategy in place also allows staff to refer to a standardised plan for interacting with customers in the most efficient and appropriate method that suits the customer.

This strategy is supported by the Tenant Participation Strategy which is overseen by the Tenant Involvement Group (TIG). Working with the TIG, staff will seek to build upon existing communications structures developing an action plan to address any issues that may be identified through Scrutiny Exercises or other feedback.

In addition, there are a number of key Business Plan tasks planned for 2021/22 to further develop or review existing communication methods:

- A full review of content and purpose of elha.com
- Consider expanding the use of social media such as the use of Twitter or Instagram
- Develop 'My Area' providing tenants information about their area through My Home
- Develop an online policy template so that information can be easily read on a mobile phone or other digital devices

An annual report will be provided to the Audit & Assurance Committee measuring and evaluating the success of this Strategy.

#### **Recommendation**

The Management Committee is asked to approve the Communication Strategy.

Year

## Declaration of Interests Form

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**Name:**

You are asked to check your List of Interests and other Declaration at least once a year. However, can update your annual declaration at any time.

### 1. List of Personal Interests:

**Please refer to section 2 of the Entitlement Payments and Benefits Policy**

<J:\Corporate\Policies and Procedures\Policies\Current\Corporate\Entitlement Payment and Benefits Policy\Entitlements Payments and Benefits Policy Document.docx>

Interest	Why Declared	Date	Action (if any)

### 2. Use of Contractors

**If you, or any member of your household, wish to use any of the Association's suppliers or contractors (including R3), you must follow the Use of the Association's Contractors and Suppliers procedure.**

If anyone else you are connected to (i.e. anyone within Group 2 or Group 3 in Table A of Section 3 of the Entitlements, Payments and Benefits Policy) uses any of the Association's suppliers or contractors (including R3), then you should declare this interest as soon as you become aware of it.

Date	Name of Connected Person	Relationship to You	Details of Contractor or Supplier Used	Action Required (if any)

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_