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| <b>COMMITTEE:</b>     | Cabinet   |
| <b>MEETING DATE:</b>  | 10 March 2026                                     |
| <b>BY:</b>            | Depute Chief Executive – Children and Communities |
| <b>REPORT TITLE:</b>  | Council House Allocation Targets for 2026/27      |
| <b>REPORT STATUS:</b> | Public  |

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## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval for council house allocations targets for 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027.
- 1.2 To note the context, legal position and rationale for proposed targets.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Cabinet is asked:

- 2.1 To approve the recommended targets detailed in section 3.29.
- 2.2 To note that the performance against these targets is reviewed regularly and that this forms part of the analysis in setting future allocations targets.
- 2.3 To note that a full review of the Housing Allocation Policy is planned to take place in 2026/27

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Council operates a Group and Points Allocation policy which has been operational since its introduction in July 2007. A review of the policy took place in 2018/19 with full implementation on 1 May 2019.
- 3.2 The main objective of the Allocations Policy is to meet the Council's legal obligations specified in the Allocations and Homelessness legislation. The policy assists the Council to make best use of Council housing stock and achieve balanced and sustainable communities via local lettings plans.

- 3.3 The current Allocations Policy continues to deliver positive outcomes for many households on the housing list, provides choice to applicants, supports high tenancy sustainment levels and at the same time has reduced refusal rates, in turn assisting with the quicker turnaround of empty houses.
- 3.4 Scottish Parliament declared a national housing emergency on 15 May 2024 following a number of local authorities declaring housing emergencies. East Lothian Council subsequently declared an affordable housing emergency in November 2024, as a result of growing homelessness, breaches to the Unsuitable Accommodation Order and the risks around lack of funds to deliver its affordable housing targets.
- 3.5 On 10 September 2024 Cabinet agreed to implement a Homelessness Action Plan 2024-26, which includes interim changes in the allocations policy to allow single person homeless applicants, who meet certain criteria, to access two-bedroomed properties as well as ensuring that selected areas and house types are as wide as possible for all homeless households. These changes have resulted in quicker and improved housing outcomes for applicants and the Council in meeting its statutory duties.

### **Legal Obligation**

- 3.6 The Council must make best use of its housing stock, which includes how these are allocated. The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended) requires that social landlords let properties in a way that gives reasonable preference to those in greatest housing need, makes best use of the available stock, maximises choice and helps to sustain communities.
- 3.7 In setting any targets against each group the Council must give reasonable preference to certain statutory groups when allocating council houses. These include applicants living in unsatisfactory housing conditions, tenants in social housing who are under occupying their property and who have unmet housing needs, and those applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.
- 3.8 Most statutory applicants are placed in the General Needs Group. However, some may be allocated to the Transfer Group instead – for example, households requiring a move due to overcrowding or because their current home is having a negative impact on their health.
- 3.9 Local authorities have a legal duty to provide settled accommodation to all applicants assessed as unintentionally homeless. This places a clear obligation on councils to secure a permanent housing solution for every household meeting this criterion.
- 3.10 The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014 (amended) stipulated that no household comprising children, or a pregnant person be accommodated in 'unsuitable accommodation for more than seven days'. The Order has since been extended and from 1

October 2021 no homeless households are permitted to remain in 'unsuitable accommodation' for more than seven days, or this will constitute a breach of duties under the extended Order. All homeless households require to be accommodated in 'suitable accommodation', in accordance with Guidance, after seven days.

- 3.11 The Homeless Persons (Suspension of Referrals between Local Authorities) (Scotland) Order 2022, which came into effect from 29 November 2022, suspends all Scottish local authorities' powers to refer a person/household who is homeless or threatened with homelessness to another local authority in Scotland on the grounds of their local connection.
- 3.12 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 specifically impacts the provision of accommodation to young people leaving the care system. The Council's 'Starter Flat' approach, is also making positive contributions to the Council delivering its corporate parenting objectives.

### **Target Principles**

- 3.13 The Scottish Government's Legal Framework for Allocations (2019) states that all targets should contain sufficient flexibilities to allow the landlord to continue to meet significant need when a target has been reached. The functionality to review targets against changing housing demand forms part of a responsive allocations policy.
- 3.14 With this in mind, the allocations targets will be reviewed within six months to ensure that they continue to reflect the greatest housing demand. If, after analysis, a change to the targets is deemed necessary, a paper outlining the change will be submitted to Cabinet for approval.
- 3.15 A full review of the Allocations Policy will also take place in parallel to ensure it is fit for purpose and continues to meet the greatest housing need.

### **Making Best Use of Stock**

- 3.16 Housing Services continue to make significant efforts to maximise the use of existing housing stock by encouraging transfer activity, helping to create vacancy chains that release additional homes beyond those initially allocated to transfer applicants.
- 3.17 To support this approach, the Council offers financial incentives to tenants in larger family to downsize into more suitable accommodation.
- 3.18 On 10 September 2024 Cabinet agreed to implement a Homelessness Action Plan 2024-26 which includes interim changes in the allocations policy to allow single person homeless applicants, who meet certain criteria, to access two-bedroomed properties as well as ensuring that selected areas and house types are as wide as possible for all homeless households. These changes have been successful in promoting quicker and improved housing outcomes and enable the Council to meet its statutory duties

## Sustainable Communities

- 3.19 Good practice states that landlords should not exclude any prospective tenants from accessing housing.
- 3.20 Good practice dictates that Local Lettings Plans can be used where there is demonstrably good reason to do so, e.g. high turnover, anti-social behaviour etc., and to promote and enable balanced and sustainable communities.
- 3.21 Local Lettings Plans provide an open and transparent framework which set out any variation to the Allocations Policy needed to take account of and address local need and circumstances. The plan must operate within all the relevant legislation governing the allocation of houses as detailed in the Allocations Policy.
- 3.22 The Council must set appropriate targets for those with low housing need at such a level that make sufficient material and positive impact to Local Lettings Plans, but at the same time continue to allow the Council to meet its overriding legal obligations to the reasonable preference groups as defined in housing legislation. As such, this flexibility within the lettings targets to positively and materially impact on housing allocations should be retained.
- 3.23 Each local housing team has brought forward local lettings plans, with support from their respective Local Housing Partnerships, to help achieve balanced and sustainable communities. Currently, we have four local lettings plans in operation within the Musselburgh, Prestonpans, North Berwick, and Tranent areas; all of which are being kept under continuous review. A formal review of these plans will be conducted alongside the allocation review in 2026/27 and submitted to the Members' Library.

## 2025/26 Allocations Performance

- 3.24 There was a total of 502 allocations from 1 April 2025 to 31 Jan 2026.
- 3.25 This number is less than last year but consistent with figures presented for 2024/25. Table 1 below shows the numbers and percentages of allocations for the following groups for this period:

**Table 1:**

|                         | Year Actual | Year Actual %  | Target % |
|-------------------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
| General Needs           | 325         | 64.74%         | 70%      |
| Transfer                | 156         | 31.08%         | 25%      |
| Sustainable Communities | 21          | 4.18%          | 5%       |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>502</b>  | <b>100.00%</b> |          |

- 3.26 It should be noted that the Council has not met its general needs target and has exceeded our transfer target this year. To maximise housing resource and reduce void turnaround times, on occasions targets will be

exceeded due to the suitability of tenants and houses that are available for re-letting. However, through greater transfer applications being allocated, this has created movement throughout the wider housing stock.

3.27 Table 2 below show the number of applications in 2025/26 up to 31 January 2026 who had medical points, either through the Health and Housing Panel, or those that were deemed as urgent cases, which were let in each year.

3.28 Table 3 shows the total number of allocations and just those with children (anyone rehoused under the age of 18) and the average length of time applications are open from when they apply, This does not capture the date that the medical points were added.

**Table 2:**

| Medical Points | Count      | Average App Length | Count with Children | Average App Length |
|----------------|------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 80             | 31         | 758.68             | 5                   | 1062.2             |
| 50             | 33         | 649.24             | 15                  | 766.67             |
| 6              | 39         | 914.54             | 13                  | 1171.31            |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>103</b> | <b>782.63</b>      | <b>33</b>           | <b>970.85</b>      |

**Table 3:**

| Medical Points | Count     | Average App Length | Count with Children | Average App Length |
|----------------|-----------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 80             | 15        | 857.53             | 2                   | 923                |
| 50             | 32        | 1362.22            | 8                   | 886                |
| 6              | 36        | 975.86             | 7                   | 567                |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>83</b> | <b>1103.43</b>     | <b>17</b>           | <b>759</b>         |

3.29 Taking account of this data, legal obligations and local housing pressures, in order to ensure optimum stock utilisation and reduce stays in temporary accommodation, senior management within Housing propose the allocations targets remain the same with the following percentage targets for 2026/27:

| Group                   | Target |
|-------------------------|--------|
| General Needs           | 70%    |
| Transfer                | 25%    |
| Sustainable communities | 5%     |

3.30 A full review of the Council's Housing Allocations Policy is scheduled to take place in 2026/27. The last comprehensive review was undertaken in 2019. This review will provide an opportunity to ensure the policy

remains aligned with current legislation, local priorities, and best practice.

#### 4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The proposed allocations targets will assist the Council to meet its legal obligations under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order 2014 (as amended) and the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003.

#### 5 RESOURCE AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Finance: Continuing to set targets at this level will help reduce the overall financial strains on the provision of temporary accommodation by assisting throughput of all forms of temporary accommodation to settled accommodation.
- 5.2 Human Resources: None
- 5.3 Other (e.g. Legal/IT): None
- 5.4 Risk: None

#### 6 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 **Select the statement that is appropriate to your report by placing an 'X' in the relevant box.**

An Integrated Impact Assessment screening process has been undertaken and the subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on: equality and human rights; tackling socio-economic disadvantages and poverty; climate change, the environment and sustainability; the Council's role as a corporate parent; or the storage/collection of personal data.

**or**

The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and impacts have been identified as follows:

| Subject                   | Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A) |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Equality and human rights |                                     |

| Subject   | Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A) |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Socio-economic disadvantage/poverty                   |                                     |
| Climate change, the environment and sustainability    |                                     |
| Corporate parenting and care-experienced young people |                                     |
| Storage/collection of personal data                   |                                     |
| Other   |                                     |

*[Enter information on impacts that have been identified]*

The Integrated Impact Assessment relating to this report has been published and can be accessed via the Council's website:

[https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210602/equality\\_and\\_diversity/12014/integrated\\_impact\\_assessments](https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/info/210602/equality_and_diversity/12014/integrated_impact_assessments)

## 7 APPENDICES

7.1 None

## 8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 Council House Allocations Targets for 2025/26

## 9 AUTHOR AND APPROVAL DETAILS

### Report Author(s)

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### Head of Service Approval

|   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| <b>Name</b>   | Wendy McGuire    |
| <b>Designation</b>  | Head of Service  |
| <b>Confirmation that IIA and other relevant checks (e.g. finance/legal) have been completed</b> | Yes              |
| <b>Approval Date</b>  | 23 February 2026 |