



## **Lettings Policy**

**May 2019**  
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## This policy applies to

- Link Group       Link Housing       Link Living       Link Property  
 Horizon       Larkfield       West Highland       Lintel Trust

## Policy Summary

Link Group and its subsidiary companies are committed to providing good quality, affordable rented accommodation for people in housing need. We want to maximise opportunities for access to housing and allow applicants to make informed choices.

The principal aim of this lettings policy is to comply with housing law and good practice and ensure the allocation of satisfactory housing to those with a clear and identifiable need at affordable rents.

## Equalities

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out as age and disability groups could be impacted by this policy. We wrote to Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living, Housing Options Scotland, Stonewall and Happy to Translate

## Privacy

The letting of properties requires the collection of personal data and at times communicating with applicants and third parties regarding personal information.

Data sharing agreements and protocols with third parties will be strictly adhered to e.g. Local Authorities, voluntary agencies, GP etc.

**Policy Owner**  
Director of Housing

**Review Manager**  
Head of Housing Services

**Approved By**  
Subsidiary Boards

Revision History		
Date	Version Number	Comments
30/5/2019	1	

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Link Group Ltd (Link) and its subsidiary landlords are committed to providing good quality, affordable rented accommodation for people in housing need, but who are, for economic, social or physical reasons least able to access other housing tenures. We want to maximise opportunities for access to housing and allow people who apply to us for housing to make informed choices. Throughout this policy, we refer to 'Link' to include all landlords within the group.

We operate a choice-based lettings system in all our areas of operation, except Highland, Argyle and Bute, Fife and Midlothian areas. In these areas, we allocate via either a common housing register or nominations agreement with the local authority. Choice based letting is where we advertise vacant properties and applicants, who are registered with us, apply for the ones they want. We keep the process as straightforward and as easy to understand as possible and provide information and advice so that applicants can make informed choices.

The responsibility for managing the lettings process lies with the subsidiary landlords ie Link Housing Association, Horizon Housing Association, Larkfield Housing Association and West Highland Housing Association. Collectively the Group landlords have properties in 26 local authorities. Due to this wide geographic area, properties are let through six methods:

- Homehunt – choice based lettings
- EdIndex – common housing register and choice based letting system for properties in Edinburgh
- Home Argyll Housing Register – for the Argyle and Bute area\*
- Highland Housing Register – for the Highland area
- Inverclyde Common Housing Register – for the Inverclyde area\*
- Via local authority waiting lists – for Midlothian and Fife
- Through agreed nomination or referral arrangements with local authorities

Operation of the Homehunt system is detailed in Appendix 3

This policy does not stand in isolation and draws on and complements the following policies and strategies, some of which are group wide and some specific to each landlord:

- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Rent Setting Policy
- Welfare Reform Strategy
- Anti-social Behaviour Policy
- Financial Inclusion Strategy
- Link Group Sustainability Strategy
- Prevention of Arrears and Debt Management Policy
- Voids and Re-let policy

This policy is concerned with the letting of social rented properties. Link and its landlord subsidiaries also have access to other affordable housing tenures – shared ownership, shared equity and mid-market rent. These alternative tenures are publicised and made available to those who meet their specific letting criteria.

\*Currently properties in these areas are let via a common allocations policy

A list of all the appendices that accompany this policy is provided in the contents section at the start of the document and a list of definitions and explanations of terms is given in Appendix 1.

Link and its subsidiary landlords will generally be referred to as “we” throughout this document.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The principal aim of this lettings policy is to comply with housing law and good practice and ensure the allocation of satisfactory housing to those with clear and identifiable needs at rents they can afford. In formulating this policy, we have considered guidelines issued by the Scottish Housing Regulator and the Scottish Government.

- Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended)
- Scotland Act 1998
- General Data Protection Legislation (GDPR)
- Equality Act 2010
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2014

The Scottish Social Housing Charter specifies four Outcomes relating to how we allocate our houses: these Outcomes are listed at Appendix 2

## 3. PRINCIPLES

This policy seeks to ensure that all allocations result in:

- The housing needs of applicants being met and
- The best use being made of the housing stock that is available

We want to ensure that, wherever possible, we can match the needs of people who are in housing need with suitable properties that are available. In addition to considering an applicant’s housing needs, we take account of factors such as the composition of the household group (e.g. number and ages of children); the location of available properties (e.g. closeness to local facilities or family support) and property suitability (e.g. stairs, number of bedrooms, wheelchair accessibility).

We will ensure that how we allocate our properties is:

- **Legally Compliant** – we will meet all legal requirements (in many areas, we will do more than we are required to by following good practice advice)
- **Fair** – all applicants’ housing needs will be assessed in accordance with the law and our policy
- **Equitable** – all assessments will be objective and based on housing need
- **Clear** – the criteria which we use for assessing applications will be clearly explained

We will fulfil our legal obligations and:

- Ensure that all applicants are treated as individuals whose specific circumstances are assessed
- Identify housing needs accurately and meet them effectively
- Create and maintain balanced and sustainable communities where people feel secure
- Provide choice to applicants wherever possible

- Ensure that our properties are affordable to the people who want to live in our communities
- Help to prevent homelessness and meet the needs of homeless people
- Provide good quality information and advice to help inform applicants about their housing options and choices

#### **4. APPROACH AND METHOD**

Link and its subsidiary landlords in its formal approval of the policy, acknowledges that it accepts full responsibility for its implementation. Day-to-day responsibility for the operation of this policy lies with the appropriate directors and managers of the subsidiaries. All relevant employees have a responsibility to ensure that this policy is applied as instructed.

#### **5. ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATION**

We will accept applications from anyone who is aged 16 or over. We will accept referrals from local authorities where we have nominations arrangements in place and to fulfil our statutory duty to help meet the needs of people who are homeless. We may also accept referrals from partners & voluntary agencies where we have local agreements to meet specific housing needs.

When we receive an application, we will assess it against the criteria set out in this policy. In assessing housing applications, we will take account of current housing needs and circumstances as well as any anticipated housing needs or changes in circumstances. Once we have done this we will inform the applicant of the outcome of our assessment.

We will allocate our properties to applicants in the most housing need, as defined by our policy, and whose needs can be best met from the available properties.

We will provide advice on alternative housing options; normally our advice will be provided via an on-line service or by referring applicants to other sources of help and information

We recognise that some applicants may require support, either temporary or longer term, to take on and sustain a tenancy. Where appropriate, we will work with the applicant and support providers both to identify requirements and support.

##### **5.1. What we will consider when assessing applications**

In accordance with Section 20 (2) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended) and Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 we will not take into account the following factors in our assessments:

###### **(i) Residency**

We will not take into account an applicant's length of residence in an area.

###### **(ii) Age**

We will consider any applicant who is 16 years or over and will not take account of an applicant's age in the allocation of housing. Exceptions apply, however, where a property has been designed or substantially adapted for occupation by persons of particular age group.

### **(iii) Outstanding Liabilities / Debts**

We will not take account of outstanding liabilities where the

- a. Debt (including council tax arrears) does not relate to the tenancy of a house
- b. Debt is attributable to the tenancy of a house of which the applicant was not the tenant
- c. Debt is no longer outstanding.
- d. Outstanding amount is no more than one month's charges.
- e. Applicant has come to a reasonable arrangement for paying arrears, has kept to the arrangement for at least 3 months and is continuing to make the payments.

### **(iv) Income**

We will not take into account an applicant's income or source of income.

### **(v) Property Ownership**

We have the right to take into account whether an applicant owns or has owned their own property, before deciding to allocate them a property unless;

- It is unsafe for them to occupy the property (i.e. a threat of abuse or it is structurally unsafe)
- It doesn't meet their needs (i.e. if they have a disability and can't access facilities)

If we believe that the owner is likely to be able to live in their current home (eg if repairs are carried out or adaptations are made) a short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST) will be granted.

There may be exceptional circumstances when a full Scottish Secure Tenancy will be given, eg when requested by a local authority and will use our discretion in these circumstances.

We will ask applicants to confirm if they own property and if proven that they have given false information legal action may be taken to end the tenancy.

## **6. OUR HOUSING LIST**

We maintain a list of all the applicants who complete our application process. We review this list annually and we will contact applicants who have not made a bid or accessed our lettings system within the previous 12 months, to review the details we hold about them each time we do this. If there is no response, we will remove their name from our list and cancel the application: we will tell applicants before we do that so that they have the final opportunity to provide the information we need to maintain the list.

We make it clear to applicants that being included on our housing list does not mean that that they will be offered a property. We will provide information to help applicants assess how likely it is that we will be able to offer them a suitable property. We will also direct them to sources of information and advice about their other housing options.

## 7. ALLOCATION OF PROPERTIES

Link and its subsidiary landlords are Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). The law requires us to give 'reasonable preference' to specific needs when we are allocating properties. The law also gives landlords some discretion. We want to be consistent about how we interpret the law and exercise discretion. This policy sets out our approach.

We will take the following factors into account when deciding who a property should be allocated to:

- Whether applicants make 'best use' of the property.
- Whether an applicant has a housing need as defined in this policy
- How long an applicant has had a housing need.
- How long an applicant has been registered.

When assessing housing need, as required by law we will give 'reasonable preference' to applicants who are:

- Living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs
- Homeless, or threatened with homelessness, and who have unmet housing needs
- Social Housing Tenants whose property is too large for their current needs

'Reasonable preference' means that we will give priority to applicants whose needs are identified in the law. This means that most of our available properties will be allocated to applicants whose needs are described in the table below.

Table 1 describes the factors that we will consider when assessing the housing needs that we will give 'reasonable preference' to:

**Table 1**

<b>Applicants who are living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs</b>
<p>Link will regard your current housing as being unsatisfactory if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is evidence of, or risk of abuse or violence which affects your well-being or that of a member of your household</li><li>• It is too small for your household (in terms of the number of bedrooms or bedspaces that our policy assesses you need)</li><li>• It is unsuitable for your needs e.g. because essential facilities cannot be accessed because you or a member of your household has an impairment, or it is accessible by stairs which cannot be managed easily, or it lacks suitable facilities (such as a level access shower)</li><li>• It is structurally unsafe or lacks basic amenities which your household has exclusive access to or is in poor repair e.g. would be classed as Below Tolerable Standard (see appendix 2) e.g. no running water.</li><li>• It is located too far away from support either that you (or a member of your household) needs to receive or is too far away from someone who depends on you or a member of your household for support</li><li>• Your relationship has broken down, but you are still living within the same household as your former partner.</li><li>• There is evidence of serious anti-social behaviour that affects your well-being or that of a member of your household</li></ul>

- You are living in a property which has been designed to be fully accessible for a wheelchair user, but you do not need a property of this type.

**Applicants who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, and who have unmet housing needs**

We will regard you as being homeless if:

- You have been accepted onto the homeless persons' register by a /the local authority
- You are referred to us by the council in accordance with the provisions of Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001

We will regard you as being threatened with homelessness if:

- You are living in temporary accommodation
- You are living 'care of' someone else who is not part of your household
- You are a young person who has been looked after by a local authority and who is nearing the age when you can no longer live in residential accommodation
- You are living in a residential school or college and are within three months of the usual leaving date and do not have suitable permanent accommodation to return to
- You are in hospital, residential or nursing care when you have, or within three months, will have no need to be there but are unable to return to your previous home as it is no longer suitable
- You have been informed that your current landlord intends to sell the property that you are occupying or otherwise recover possession
- You are a member of the armed forces who is leaving the service and does not have suitable accommodation
- You are an owner occupier and your mortgage provider is acting to recover your property because you have defaulted on your payments
- You are nearing the end of a prison sentence and do not have permanent accommodation that you can return to when discharged
- You have come to Scotland as an asylum seeker and have been granted permission to remain
- People who are leaving accommodation that is linked to their contract of employment, which is coming to an end in three months.

**Tenants of social landlords whose property is too large for their current needs**

We will regard you as living in a property that is too large if your current landlord confirms that it is bigger than you need, **and** it is bigger than our policy assesses you require (see table 3 for details)

Most of the houses that we allocate will be let to people whose housing needs fall into one of the categories in Table 1. We may also offer our properties to applicants with different needs. This policy explains how we will allocate our available properties to those applicants too.

We may also consider housing needs that fall into the categories described in Table 2, but we will always allocate more of our houses to people with housing needs that are described in Table 1 than to those whose needs are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People who want to move to a community because of family or other social connections</li><li>• Your current home is located so far away from your place of work (or that of a member of your household) that it is not reasonable or feasible to travel there long term</li><li>• You wish to leave your family home to establish and sustain your own independent household</li></ul>
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We will encourage support providers to make the necessary arrangements to ensure a tenancy can be sustained when the next suitable property becomes available. If we have evidence that an applicant will not accept support that has been identified as being needed to help sustain their tenancy, we may decide not to offer an available property which would, otherwise, be suitable. We will always explain our decisions clearly and provide advice to applicants about other options that may be available.

## **7.1 HOW WE DECIDE WHICH GROUP TO ALLOCATE TO**

The groups highlighted above represent a great deal of people with a need to be rehoused - many more than we can help. The law does not lay out which priority we give to each group and allows us to decide based on the profile of the properties we have available to let and who is applying to us for housing.

We reflect our relative weighting given to each category of housing need in the 'pass' we award and if an applicant falls within more than one category, they may receive a higher level of pass to reflect this. This is explained more in appendix 3

We work closely with our Local Authorities and each Local Authority in our areas of operation has produced a Rapid Rehousing Transitions Plan and stipulates the percentage of allocations to homeless household that they expect Link to make. We shall endeavor to achieved this.

Furthermore, each subsidiary may choose to develop a lettings plan based on levels of housing need within their area which will determine the % of lets, or quotas, given to each category on a yearly basis. This allows us to address a range of housing needs as defined by legislation, as well as assisting in achieving balanced and sustainable communities.

## **7.2 HOW WE DETERMINE THE SIZE OF THE PROPERTY THAT IS ALLOCATED**

We will consider the needs of the household in accordance with the requirements which are shown in Table 3 below. We regard anyone over the age of 16 as an adult when assessing the household's needs; we do not expect people aged 16 or over to share unless they are a couple. We do not expect a child to share a bedroom with an adult and we do not expect more than two children to share a bedroom, regardless of their age or gender.

In exceptional circumstances, we may consider making an offer of housing that is smaller than the applicant requires, as assessed by our criteria, but only where our offer will improve

the applicant's current housing conditions. E.g. where we do not have properties on the required size in the applicants chosen locations

In the case of wheelchair standard properties 'making best use of stock' may mean that priority is given simply to the applicant with greatest need of the amenities in the property rather than the size plus housing need .

If an applicant has specific needs that may affect the size of the house that they require (e.g. a medical condition that requires the use of equipment or means that a couple need separate bedrooms), this information must be provided at the time the application is made.

**Table 3**

<b>Household Composition</b>	<b>Bedrooms Required</b>
Single applicant	1
Couple	1
Other adults in the household	1
Overnight carer (when required at least 3 nights per week or equivalent)	1
Baby due (medical evidence is required)	2
<b>Children who are permanent members of the household</b>	
Children of any age who are (or will become) wheelchair users	1 for each child
Children aged 12 and over	1
Children aged between 8-11 who are the same gender	1 for each 2 children of the same gender
Children aged under 8	1 bedroom for each 2 children
Children with an age difference of 5 year or more	1 bedroom

Children who are regular members of the household because of an access arrangement (spending the equivalent of at least three nights per week) will be assessed as if they are permanent members of the household. Where the applicant has been given a priority pass because they are accepted as homeless by the local authority we will match the property size and type required by the applicant to that as assessed by the local authority. Formal proof of will be required to evidence when children reside with the applicant.

Where an applicant is a regular foster carer or kinship carer, we will take account of their responsibilities when assessing their requirements. Formal proof will be required in these circumstances.

We will assess whether an applicant is either under-occupying or over-crowded in their current accommodation in accordance with Table 3.

### **7.3 WHERE WE DON'T ALLOCATE TO THE HIGHEST PRIORITY**

To ensure that we can make the best use of the available housing stock and, at the same time, promote and sustain stable and settled communities, we may, from time to time, not offer an available property to the applicant who has the highest priority. eg Following confirmation of housing circumstances during the house visit, the property that is available is a better 'match' for an applicant who is not at the top of the list because, for example, of its location or the facilities that it offers, e.g. wheelchair accessible properties.

In addition, we reserve the right to not offer a property to an applicant who will not accept support that it has been agreed is essential to help to sustain their tenancy or where that support is not available. Decisions to not offer the property to the applicant with the highest priority will always be authorised by a senior member of staff.

We may bypass an applicant who does not respond to contact from us and we will make this clear in our communications.

## **8. UNMET HOUSING NEEDS AND HOUSING OPTIONS**

The law requires us to consider whether an applicant's housing needs can be met by other options before we can consider whether we can offer a suitable property. We do this by providing information and advice to applicants on the housing options that are available. This will include considering whether an applicant is likely to be able to meet their housing needs via another landlord or in the private sector or by considering a different tenure such as shared equity or home ownership. We refer to this as a housing options review. In addition, we will ask all applicants, where possible, at initial assessment stage to confirm that they have considered other housing options to meet their unmet housing needs.

## **9. LETTINGS PLANS**

We assess all applications in accordance with this policy but, sometimes, we will adopt a Lettings Plan for a specific geographic area or neighbourhood or type of property. Where we do this, this will be clearly stated on 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 these:

- 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 anti-social 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 a Local Authority's housing strategy
- To make best use of the housing stock

All Lettings Plans will be time-limited, and their effectiveness will be regularly monitored.

## **10. SENSITIVE LETS**

Although we will assess all applications in accordance with this policy, we will sometimes decide that it is necessary to allocate a property to someone who may not be in the greatest need as defined by the policy. In some cases, these will be described as 'sensitive lets' and will be made where we have to take account of the needs of both the applicant and the community in which the available property is situated. This might be, for example, where a community has been experiencing anti-social behaviour and we need to take account of what we know about the applicant and their prospective neighbours, to ensure the stability and

well-being of the community. In these circumstances a property may be withheld from advertising or withdrawn from an advert

Sensitive lets will apply in only a minority of cases and will always be approved by a senior member of staff who is responsible for monitoring and reporting on their frequency and use.

## **11. EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

Additionally, there may be exceptional circumstances which may include:

- Where an existing tenant has an urgent need to move because of a medical condition, an impairment or family commitment
- Where an existing tenant needs to move urgently to escape from a difficult or dangerous situation, eg domestic violence or harassment
- Where an existing tenant has housing needs which can be met by a specific property
- Where an existing tenant requires to be temporarily re-housed because major works are required to their permanent home or are affected by major re-development works

These will be classed as management transfers and require approval from a senior member of staff. In these circumstances a property may be withheld from advertising or withdrawn from an advert.

Exceptional circumstances will apply in only a minority of cases and will always be approved by a senior member of staff who is responsible for monitoring and reporting on their frequency and use.

## **12. ENSURING A SUSTAINABLE TENANCY**

We want all our allocations to result in people having their identified housing needs met in a house that they like, which is in a stable and attractive community. Before we make an offer of housing, we consider the needs of applicants and the properties that are available, and we will take account of factors which can contribute to sustainability as well as factors that might make a tenancy unsustainable. These factors include:

- Affordability – we will discuss the rent with an applicant and the financial resources which they have access to, including entitlement to welfare benefits. If an applicant's financial resources are less than their housing costs, we will explore other housing options with them
- Support – we will consider whether an applicant needs support to sustain their tenancy and live independently in their community and whether appropriate support is available. We will also consider whether an applicant's housing needs are influenced by their role as a support provider or carer for a relative of someone they are close to (e.g. they need to move to an area to offer support)

## **13. APPLICANTS WHO ARE REGISTERED SEX OFFENDERS**

Where a Managing Agents Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA Protocol) is in place that Link subsidiaries have agreed to, we will follow the terms of that protocol.

We will collaborate with the designated Local Authority Serious Offender Liaison Officers on any risk assessment for known sex offenders looking for accommodation. We will only make an offer where the assessment team agrees that both the property and its location are suitable.

#### **14. PROPERTIES LET OUTWITH CHOICE BASED LETTINGS APPROACH**

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

- Where we have nomination or referral arrangements with local authorities (LA). In some areas we may allocate up to 50% of properties to people who have been nominated or referred to us by their LA (for new build properties this may be up to 100%). We advise applicants to maximise their chance of being rehoused by making an application to their LA.
- Where we cannot identify suitable applicants for specially adapted properties through advertising
- Where we are seeking to accommodate people coming to the UK under an official Resettlement Program
- Where we have referral arrangements in place with specialist agencies or organisations
- Where tenants choose to exchange properties with another social landlord. These are known as mutual exchanges and are covered in a separate policy (see appendix 5)
- Where a person succeeds to or is assigned a tenancy (see appendix 5)

#### **15. SHELTERED/RETIREMENT HOUSING**

We will consider whether an applicant needs sheltered or retirement housing and is able to live independently in their community with appropriate support from community care services such as home care, where this type of support is required. We will also consider whether the applicant's housing needs are influenced by their need for suitable accommodation to support a hospital discharge, where their current home is no longer suitable for their needs.

Properties will be advertised with a minimum age criteria applied depending on the accommodation being advertised.

#### **16. 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 that can be used to meet applicants' needs from the reasonable preference groups or other urgent housing needs categories.

We also aim to be as flexible as possible to meet our current tenants' needs. We will encourage our tenants to apply for transfers or mutual exchanges where this would benefit their living conditions eg alleviate under-occupancy or overcrowding, promote mobility and social inclusion and make best use of our housing stock. Priority may be given over other applicants' dependent on reason for requiring a move. (see appendix 6).

Current tenants who wish to transfer must have lived in their property for 12 months or more and have a clear rent account, unless in exceptional circumstances.

## **17. 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. A SSST must be for a minimum period of twelve months and can be extended for further periods of six months or converted into a permanent tenancy. The circumstances where we may offer a SSST are:

- Where an applicant is a home owner 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 home owner but cannot occupy their house because it is being occupied by a tenant who has been given notice that their tenancy agreement is being ended
- Where an available property has been purpose designed to wheelchair standard and there are no applicants, within 2 weeks, with an identified need for this property type.
- Where an applicant or a member of their household has acted in an anti-social manner within the last three years

If we grant a SSST which we decide not to either extend or convert into 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, after 12 months, 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 an SST. We will work with the tenant to ensure an offer of suitable alternative accommodation.

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

## **18. INFORMATION REQUIRED**

All applicants must complete an application form, either in paper format or on line and prior to receiving an offer will be expected to provide all necessary supporting information (including photo ID) such as a passport or driver's license. They will also be asked to provide evidence of any special requirements that will affect either the type of property required or the priority that we can give to the application. Before we make an offer of housing, we will always require proof of an applicant's nationality or immigration status.

We do not expect tenants to leave important documents with us; instead they will be asked to either send these to us or bring these along in person when the home visit is undertaken to verify current housing circumstances. Our housing staff will be pleased to answer any questions and provide guidance about the information that we need.

We may request references from the applicant's current landlord and any other landlord that they have been with during the last five years. If we do, we will ask them to provide information about the dates of the tenancy and how it was conducted, including whether any arrears are outstanding, any instances of anti-social behaviour and the condition of the property when the applicants vacated.

## **19. HOME VISIT**

Due to the limited amount of information we request at applications stage, we will visit all applicants in their home when they are being considered for a vacancy, to verify their circumstances to review their priority against that of the others on the shortlist. (Where an applicant has a disability we will encourage them to discuss their housing needs earlier in the process to ensure where possible we have all the information required before a vacancy arises)

We will ask for information about the applicants current housing circumstances, including tenure, to help us determine the level of housing need and the priority that we can give to the application.

We will ask for information about financial circumstances to help us determine whether they can afford the property and to check whether they should be referred for welfare benefits advice. This information will not influence our decision about the priority of the applicants housing needs.

If during the home visit we find out that the applicant's circumstances have changed since the original application or they cannot verify their original circumstances, we will withdraw any provisional offer and remove any priority or waiting time allocated during the original assessment.

## **20. ENDING A TENANCY DUE TO FALSE INFORMATION**

If an applicant is allocated a property, then it is subsequently discovered that the applicant gave false information during the application process, or withheld information, we may take steps to recover the property and end the tenancy.

## **21. SUSPENSIONS AND CANCELLATIONS**

### **Suspensions**

We will not suspend an application from our list, but we may, in certain circumstances, suspend an applicant from making a bid or receiving an offer. We will tell the applicant if we are going to suspend them from receiving offers and we will also tell them, at the same time, how long the suspension will last for and what they can do to end it sooner. The circumstances which may lead to us suspending an applicant from being considered for an offer are:

- False or misleading information has been provided in connection with an application
- An applicant acts intentionally to worsen their current housing circumstances to gain greater priority from us
- An applicant has acted in an anti-social manner in the locality of their house
- An applicant has acted in an anti-social manner towards a member of our staff during the application process
- An applicant has been convicted of an offence that was committed in, or in the vicinity of, their house
- An ASBO has been issued to the applicant or a member of their household within the last two years
- An applicant has housing debt of more than one month and has not arranged to pay off the debt, or has not kept to an agreed arrangement for at least thirteen consecutive weeks.
- An applicant has outstanding rent arrears of more than one month which were accrued during the past three years, and does not have a repayment agreement in place or has not kept to an agreed arrangement for at least thirteen consecutive weeks.
- An applicant has been evicted from a previous tenancy
- An applicant has turned down two reasonable offers of housing
- An applicant who has deliberately given us false information with the intention of being assessed with greater housing need than is the case.

We will initially suspend an applicant from being considered for an offer of housing for twelve months. We may extend the suspension for further periods of six months, to a maximum of two years. We may end the suspension at any time, where we are satisfied that the situation that gave rise to the suspension has been resolved. All decisions to suspend will be taken in consultation with a senior member of staff who will be responsible for monitoring all review decisions.

### **Cancellations**

We will contact applicants who have been registered with Link for more than a year, and who have not been actively bidding for properties, to ask them if they still wish to remain registered. We will withdraw applications from our system if one of the following applies:

- An applicant has not responded to an email or letter asking if they wish to remain registered.
- We have received returned mail indicating that the applicant no longer lives at the address on their application.
- The applicant has requested that their application is withdrawn.
- We have been advised by a partner landlord or local authority that they have housed the applicant.
- We have been notified of the death of the applicant.

## **22. MONITORING OF THE POLICY**

Any matter which demonstrates a serious failure of internal controls should be reported immediately to the Chief Executive.

## **23. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS**

Link Group and its subsidiaries welcomes complaints and positive feedback, both of which provide information which helps us to improve our services. If an applicant is unhappy with the way in which we have dealt with their application e.g. our communication is poor or if we have failed to meet timescales, Link's complaints process should be followed.

If the applicant wants to formally appeal against how their needs were assessed, they can appeal as outlined below.

Applicants require to submit an appeal, in writing to the Housing Manager (or equivalent) within 2 weeks of our decision.

The Housing Manager will:

- acknowledge receipt of the appeal within 3 working days
- reply within 20 working days at the latest, or, if more time is required,
- Send an interim reply within 20 days giving the reason(s) why more time is needed and an estimate of when a reply may be sent.
- Advise the complainant that the Housing Services Manager's decision is final.

## **24. POLICY AVAILABILITY**

A summary of this policy can be made available in several other languages and other formats on request.

## **25. POLICY REVIEW**

This policy will be reviewed at least every three years, with regard to:

- Applicable legislation, rules, regulations and guidance
- Changes in the organisation
- Continued best practice

## **26. MONITORING, PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING**

The following areas will be subject to monitoring on a continuing basis:

- Quarterly monitoring of lets including percentage with a priority pass, percentage of lets to applicants who are statutorily homeless, percentage transfers and percentage of refusals.
- Annual monitoring to include the above and further information on equalities, suspensions, applicant bids, and tenancy sustainment
- Number of complaints and outcomes

An audit of policy compliance will be conducted as part of the internal audit programme. The results of the audit will be reported to the Audit Committee.

## APPENDIX 1 – DEFINITIONS AND JARGON BUSTER

### Best Use

Best Use means that in line with our occupancy standards, a household makes use of all the bedrooms or features in a property, e.g. a couple with one child will make best use of a two bedroom property, but not a three bedroom property.

We will normally prioritise an applicant who makes Best Use of a feature or adaptation of a property over someone who does not.

### BTS – Below tolerable standard.

This is a legal definition. If a property fails any one of these standards it will be BTS:

- is structurally stable;
- is substantially free from rising or penetrating damp;
- has satisfactory provision for natural and artificial lighting, for ventilation and for heating;
- has satisfactory thermal insulation;
- has an adequate piped supply of wholesome water available within the house;
- has a sink provided with a satisfactory supply of both hot and cold water within the house;
- has a water closet or waterless closet available for the exclusive use of the occupants of the house and suitably located within the house;
- has a fixed bath or shower and a wash-hand basin, each provided with a satisfactory supply of both hot and cold water and suitably located within the house;
- has an effective system for the drainage and disposal of foul and surface water;
- in the case of a house having a supply of electricity, complies with the relevant requirements in relation to the electrical installations for the purposes of that supply;
- "the electrical installation" is the electrical wiring and associated components and fittings, but excludes equipment and appliances;
- "the relevant requirements" are that the electrical installation is adequate and safe to use
- has satisfactory facilities for the cooking of food within the house; and
- has satisfactory access to all external doors and outbuildings.

### Repairing Standard

The Repairing Standard, contained in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006, covers the legal and contractual obligations of private landlords to ensure that a property meets a minimum physical standard.

A privately rented property must meet the Repairing Standard as follows:

- the property must be wind and water tight and in all other respects reasonably fit for people to live in.
- the structure and exterior (including drains, gutters and external pipes) must be in a reasonable state of repair and in proper working order.
- installations for supplying water, gas and electricity and for sanitation, space heating and heating water must be in a reasonable state of repair and in proper working order.
- any fixtures, fittings and appliances that the landlord provides under the tenancy must be in a reasonable state of repair and in proper working order.

- any furnishings that the landlord provides under the tenancy must be capable of being used safely for the purpose for which they are designed.
- the property must have a satisfactory way of detecting fires and for giving warning in the event of a fire or suspected fire.
- the property must have satisfactory provision for giving warning if carbon monoxide is present in a concentration that is hazardous to health.

### **CBL – Choice based letting.**

Choice Based Letting is a system used by some local authorities and housing associations to allocate their properties. Landlords advertise vacant properties and applicants bid for those that they think will meet their needs and preference.

Homehunt which Link uses to allocate the majority of its properties, is an example of a CBL system.

### **CHR – Common Housing Register**

A CHR or Common Housing Register is a housing register which is used by more than one housing provider. Applicants complete one application form and can be considered for housing by all the landlords who participate in the CHR.

Edindex is an example of a CHR and is administered by City of Edinburgh Council. Applicants submit a form direct to the Edindex team within the council. All participating landlords, advertise their vacant properties in the same place and applicants can apply for any of these properties.

The Link Group of companies are currently members of four CHRs.

- Edindex
- Inverclyde Common Housing Register (ICHR)
- Highland Housing Register
- Home Argyll

### **Mid market rent**

These are properties for rent to households on low to middle incomes with rents set somewhere between social and full private market rates. They are generally for working people/households who do not qualify or are not a priority for social rented accommodation but cannot afford to buy their own property or rent on the open market.

### **RSL – Registered Social Landlord**

RSLs are landlords which have registered with the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR). They are independent, not-for-profit organisations that provide homes for people in **housing** need. All Housing Associations are RSLs.

Within the Link Group of companies Link Group Ltd, Horizon Housing Association, Larkfield Housing Association and West Highland Housing Association are all RSLs.

### **SHR – Scottish Housing Regulator**

The SHR monitors the performance of RSLs and sets standards. It acts to protect tenants' interests and will ensure that RSLs meet the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. The SHR also monitors local authority housing departments to these standards.

### **Shared Equity**

Shared equity helps people on low to moderate incomes who want to buy a home but are unable to meet the full price. The purchaser pays between 60% and 90% of the value, with the Scottish Government paying for the rest. The Scottish Government will not own part of the property, but it will be entitled to whatever percentage it put in to the property if it is sold.

### **Shared Ownership**

A scheme where the sharing owner buys a share of a property and pays an occupancy charge for the remaining share still owned by the RSL. The occupancy charge is calculated to be similar to social rent levels. A sharing owner may buy additional shares, usually in multiples of 25%, and may eventually own the property outright.

### **SHQS – Scottish Housing Quality Standard**

This is the standard which all properties let by local authorities and RSLs must meet, and has been in place since April 2015. Properties must meet the Tolerable Standard (see BTS above) and additionally:

- Must be free from serious disrepair
- Must be energy efficient
- Must have modern facilities and services
- Must be healthy, safe and secure.

### **SPSO - Scottish Public Services Ombudsman**

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is the final stage for complaints about councils, the National Health Service, housing associations, colleges and universities, prisons, most water providers, the Scottish Government and its agencies and departments and most Scottish authorities.

## APPENDIX 2 – SCOTTISH SOCIAL HOUSING CHARTER

The [Scottish Social Housing Charter](#) came into force in April 2012 and was reviewed and updated in 2017. The Charter sets out the standards and outcomes that tenants can expect from social landlords, in terms of the quality and value for money of the services they receive, the standard of their homes, and opportunities for communication and participation in the decisions that affect them.

The four outcomes that relate to allocations are:

### **Outcomes 7, 8 & 9: 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

### **Outcome 10: 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 on their prospects of being housed.

Each year Link sends the SHR information that shows how we have performed against the standards and outcomes of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. The SHR uses this information to produce reports, for tenants, about our performance. Copies of these reports and more information about the charter can be found on the SHR website at [www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk](http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk).

## APPENDIX 3 – HOMEHUNT

### General

Homehunt is the choice based lettings (CBL) system Link Housing and Horizon use to let the majority of its properties. Homehunt operates across 24 local authorities and is used by a number of different RSLs to advertise vacant properties. Any person aged 16 or over can apply to become a tenant of Link or Horizon in one of these areas by registering with Homehunt. Applicants who register with Homehunt are automatically registered with all the landlords using Homehunt who have properties in their chosen areas. Although the system is used by a number of different landlords, and there is just one online application form, it is not a Common Housing Register: an applicant's registration with each RSL is managed separately.

Link Housing Association and Horizon Housing Association advertise the majority of vacant properties online at [www.homehunt.info](http://www.homehunt.info). Usually properties are advertised weekly, with a closing date for applications. Anyone who is registered with Link Housing on Homehunt can apply for any Link Housing or Horizon property, as long as they meet the minimum criteria for the property.

An applicant who has registered with Homehunt can apply for a priority pass, which gives an applicant priority if their current home is not suitable for their needs (see Appendix 4 – Priority Passes for more information).

After we have advertised a vacant property and reached the closing date, we choose the new tenant from the shortlist of applicants who have applied or 'bid' for the property. The successful applicant will be the one whose household makes best use of the property and who has the highest level of priority. If there are a number of people with similar priority who all make best use of the property, we will base the offer on the length of time the applicant has had priority or may make further enquiries to identify the applicant with the greatest housing need.

### Restricted lettings

Some properties may be specifically designed for a certain client group, and restrictions may apply to who can bid for one of these properties. For example, sheltered properties may be advertised with an age restriction, which means only applicants above a certain age can apply for them.

We will normally state in the details of the advertised property what restrictions, if any, are in place.

### Lettings plans

Some properties are of a type or in a locality where an approved lettings plan is in operation. When this is the case, properties subject to the lettings plan may be advertised for a specific client group or household type. When allocating these properties, 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 section 9 of this policy for more information.

### Properties not let using Homehunt

In most cases, we will let our properties using the Homehunt CBL system. There are some cases where we will not advertise a vacant property on Homehunt. See section 14 for more information about when this may happen.

### **Letting to employees or board members**

Employees or board members of the Link Group of companies, or their close relatives, can apply for a home through Homehunt like any other person, but must declare their connection to Link Group when they apply.

Link Housing Association will ensure that the employee or board member in question has no involvement in the processing of their, or their relatives, application for housing. If an employee or board member, or their close relative, is being considered for an offer, this must be approved by the chair of the Link Group board before any allocation can be made.

## APPENDIX 4 – PRIORITY PASSES

### 4.1 – General Information

Link is obliged by legislation to ensure reasonable preference is given to people in specific circumstances. In addition, it may also give priority to applicants in other situations (see section 7). Different housing systems have different systems of prioritising people. For Homehunt applicants, we award a 'priority pass' to any applicant who is considered to be in a reasonable preference category or in another category which we deem to be a priority category. These priority passes are recognised automatically when an applicant applies for a suitable property, and affects their position in the shortlist as a result.

The names we give our priority passes do not always match the name of the relevant reasonable preference category. We have named our priority passes to make it easier for applicants to understand why they have been awarded a specific priority, or to identify the correct priority pass for them.

Priority passes are awarded at the following levels:

- Gold+
- Gold
- Silver+
- Silver
- Bronze+
- Bronze

Gold+ is the highest level of priority we award, and bronze is the lowest level of priority given to applicants who are in a reasonable preference category. This is to reflect the fact that some applicants are deemed to have a more urgent need than others.

### 4.2 – Priority Pass List

The table below lists all the priority pass categories, what situations they cover and what level of priority each situation is entitled to. It also shows what reasonable preference category the priority pass covers, if appropriate.

Priority Pass Name	Priority Level	Situations covered by priority pass	Reasonable preference category (if applicable)
Homeless or at risk of becoming homeless	Gold+	You have been assessed as 'unintentionally homeless' by their local authority.  You have been given refugee status following an asylum application, and you are currently staying in temporary accommodation* provided by your local authority.	Applicants who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, and who have unmet housing needs
Homeless or at risk of becoming homeless	Silver	You are living in temporary accommodation.*  You are living 'care of' someone else who is not part of your	Applicants who are homeless, or threatened with homelessness, and

		<p>household, and they have asked you to leave by a specific date.</p> <p>Your relationship has broken down, and you are still living in the same home as your former partner.</p> <p>You are a young 'looked after' person who is seeking own accommodation</p> <p>You are a student in student accommodation and must leave the student accommodation within 3 months, and you are unable to return to the accommodation you had prior to becoming a student (e.g. family home).</p> <p>You have received a notice to quit (NTQ) from your private landlord. This pass will be awarded where this is not the fault of the applicant – if a NTQ is served due to non-payment of rent or anti social behaviour, no priority would be awarded.</p> <p>You are a member or former member of the armed forces who has to leave service accommodation within 3 months.</p> <p>You are an owner occupier who has received confirmation of mortgage provider's intention to repossess property within 3 months.</p> <p>You are nearing the end of a prison sentence, expected to be released within 3 months, and have no accommodation to which you can return</p> <p>You are a in accommodation provided through your employer (tied tenancy) and will be losing your job within 3 months.</p>	who have unmet housing needs
Domestic Abuse	Gold	You need to move to prevent domestic abuse within your current home.	Applicants who are living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and

		You are currently accommodated in temporary refuge accommodation (e.g. with Womens' Aid) and need your own home.	who have unmet housing needs
Overcrowding and Underoccupancy	Silver	<p>You are two or more bedrooms short of the number required to accommodate your family according to Link's policy.</p> <p>You are a social tenant and have two or more additional bedrooms that you do not need according to Link's policy.</p>	<p>Applicants who are living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs</p> <p>Tenants of social landlords whose property is too large for their current needs</p>
Overcrowding and Underoccupancy	Bronze	<p>You are one bedroom short of the number required to accommodate your family according to Link's policy.</p> <p>You are a social tenant and have one additional bedroom that you do not need according to Link's policy.</p>	<p>Applicants who are living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs</p> <p>Tenants of social landlords whose property is too large for their current needs</p>
Harrasment or Anti-social behaviour	Gold	There is evidence of behaviour deliberately intended to intimidate, dominate or harm you or a member of your household, and there is a risk of further harm if you remain in your property. Police involvement will be required in order to award priority at this level.	Applicants who are living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs
Harrasment or Anti-social behaviour	Silver	You have experienced persistent antisocial behaviour over the previous 12 months, which your landlord has been unable to resolve. This antisocial behaviour must be serious enough to have been reported to the police, and confirmation from your landlord or the local authority will be required.	Applicants who are living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs
Condition of property	Silver	Your property is 'Below the Tolerable Standard' (BTS) according to a property inspection report by Environmental Health, or similar agency, and it is not possible for you to resolve the issues with the property on your own.	Applicants who are living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs

Condition of property	Bronze	Your property meets the Tolerable Standard but is below the Repairing Standard, and it is not possible for you to resolve the issues with the property on your own.	Applicants who are living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs
Health & Housing (see appendix 4.3)	Gold	It is not practical to adapt your home to meet your needs and therefore: a) Rehousing is essential to enable you to live independently, or b) Urgent rehousing is required to allow discharge from hospital, or to prevent admission to a nursing or residential home. or c) You are living in a property which has been designed to be fully accessible for a wheelchair user, but you do not need a property of this type.  See Appendix 4.3 for more information.	Applicants who are living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs
Health & Housing (see appendix 4.3)	Silver	It is not practical to adapt your home to meet your needs and a) Rehousing would produce a great improvement to your quality of life and/or substantially reduce the risk of physical injury or b) Your present home makes essential activities of daily living difficult.  See Appendix 4.3 for more information.	Applicants who are living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs
Health & Housing(see appendix 4.3)	Bronze	Due to a medical condition, a) your current property does not adequately meet your housing needs, or b) you require essential support which cannot be provided in your current home.	Applicants who are living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs

		See Appendix 4.3 for more information.	
Need to be in a community	Silver	<p>It is not possible to access your children on a regular basis due to how far away you live from them.</p> <p>It is not possible to access your place of work in time for the start of your shift due to transport being unavailable.</p>	N/A
Need to be in a Community	Bronze	<p>Travelling to access your children is currently difficult due to living more than 1 hour travelling distance from where they live.</p> <p>Travelling to your place of employment is currently difficult due to living more than one hour travelling distance from your place of work.</p> <p>You are unable to access shops and other services due to the location of your home and lack of available transport.</p>	N/A
Insecure housing	Bronze	<p>You are the tenant of a private landlord, and therefore do not have a secure tenancy.</p> <p>You are seeking to leave the family home and establish and sustain your own independent household.</p>	N/A
Transfer	All pass levels depending on priority category.	Transfer passes are awarded to any Link Group tenant who falls into one of the categories specified above. See Appendix 6 - Transfers for more information.	

\* For the purposes of assessing priority need, temporary accommodation is defined as accommodation which has been provided by the local authority, or another supporting agency (e.g. shelter) for the specific purpose of housing a person until suitable permanent accommodation can be found.

### 4.3 – Health and Housing Priority Pass

A Health and Housing Priority can be awarded where there is clear evidence that living in the current property has a detrimental impact on the applicant's medical condition or their health and wellbeing.

A Health and Housing priority can be awarded where there is evidence that there would be a significant benefit to the applicant (by improving their health and wellbeing or preventing the deterioration of their health and wellbeing) through rehousing which cannot reasonably be achieved through other means such as using equipment or adapting the property.

To ensure the appropriate priority is awarded, supporting evidence should be provided by any health care professional that is or has been involved with the applicant. This may include professionals such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists, health visitors, district nurses, nurse specialists, community psychiatric nurses, social workers and consultants who are able to confirm the applicants' health needs in terms of their mobility and function.

If an applicant does not have a health professional involved and they have mobility or functional difficulties due to their condition, then they may be signposted to obtain a Community Care Assessment which may provide both short term alternatives and solutions as well as support for their housing needs in the long term.

## Health & Housing Gold Priority Pass

Gold Passes can be awarded where it is not practical to adapt your home to meet your needs and therefore:

- a) Rehousing is essential to enable you to live independently,  
or
- b) Urgent rehousing is required to allow discharge from hospital, or to prevent admission to a nursing or residential home,  
or
- c) You are living in a property which has been designed to be fully accessible for a wheelchair user, but you do not need a property of this type.

### Case Examples

- **Wheelchair access required**

The applicant is completely wheelchair dependent, but their current property is not and cannot be adapted to be wheelchair accessible

- **Ambulant access required**

The applicant is dependent on a walking frame (bi-lateral walking aid or similar) but their current property is not accessible with walking equipment and cannot be adapted.

- **External access**

The applicant lives in an upper floor property and cannot manage external stairs so is housebound or the applicant stays in a ground floor property but cannot negotiate steps and is housebound as it is not possible or practical to provide a ramp or alter external steps.

- **Internal access**

The applicant is unable to access essential areas within the home such as bedroom and bathroom to maintain their personal care and independence. e.g. bathroom or bedroom are upstairs, and applicant is unable to negotiate the stairs (even with equipment or where equipment cannot be installed).

- **Access to facilities**

The applicant is completely unable to use existing standard facilities (or is dependent on assistance from others) which has a detrimental effect on their health and wellbeing and it is not possible or practical to adapt the current property to provide the type of facilities required.

- **Freeing up an accessible property**

The applicant is currently living in a property which was adapted to accommodate a family member who was a full time wheelchair user, but these adaptations are no longer needed. The applicant now wishes to move to a mainstream property so that a wheelchair user can make use of the property.

## Health & Housing Silver Priority Pass

Silver Passes can be awarded where it is not practical to adapt your home to meet your needs and

a) Rehousing would produce a great improvement to your quality of life and/or substantially reduce the risk of physical injury

or

b) Your present home makes essential activities of daily living difficult.

### Case Examples

#### ▪ External access

The applicant lives in an upper floor property and has great difficulty negotiating the stairs or the applicant lives in a ground floor property and has great difficulty negotiating the external steps (becomes extremely breathless or arrested by pain) and is at risk of injury when attempting to do so and/or must limit the number of times they attempt the task in order to do so safely (and it is not possible or practical to provide a ramp or alter the external steps).

#### ▪ Internal access

The applicant has great difficulty accessing essential areas within the home such as bedroom and bathroom to maintain their personal care and independence and is at risk of injury to themselves or carers in attempting to do so. e.g. bathroom or bedroom is upstairs and applicant has great difficulty negotiating the stairs (becomes extremely breathless or arrested by pain) and is at risk of injury when attempting to do so (and equipment cannot be installed).

#### ▪ Access to facilities

The applicant has great difficulty or is at risk of injury when using existing standard facilities and it is not possible or practical to adapt the current property to provide the type of facility required. e.g. applicant cannot get in and out of the bath/shower and neither equipment nor a bathroom adaptation is suitable, so the applicant has to strip wash at the sink.

#### ▪ Mental illness

The applicant has a significant mental illness which causes substantial risk of harm or danger to themselves or others and there is evidence that their current housing exacerbates or has a detrimental impact on their condition which would be alleviated by re-housing. Evidence from a health care professional will be required to support the need and confirm rehousing requirements.

#### ▪ Autism and other learning disabilities

The applicant has a learning disability and their particular needs mean there is a significant risk of harm to themselves or others and their current housing exacerbates or has a detrimental impact on the management of their condition or their functional ability which would be alleviated by re-housing. Evidence from a health care professional will be required to support the need and confirm rehousing requirements.

#### ▪ Medical conditions requiring treatment

The applicant has a medical condition requiring ongoing treatment and their current housing restricts or jeopardises access to treatment resulting in a substantial risk of harm or danger to the applicant or others which would be alleviated by re-housing. Evidence from a health care professional can help support the need and confirm rehousing requirements.

## Health & Housing Bronze Priority Pass

Bronze Passes can be awarded where it is not practical to adapt your home to meet your needs and where, due to a medical condition:

- a) Your current property does not adequately meet your housing needs,
- Or
- b) You require essential support which cannot be provided in your current home.

### Case Examples

#### ▪ External access

The applicant lives in an upper floor property and has some difficulty negotiating the stairs so try to limit the number of times they attempt this task, e.g. the applicant stays in a ground floor property and has some difficulty negotiating the steps or requires assistance so tries to limit the number of times they attempt this task.

#### ▪ Internal access

The applicant and has some difficulty accessing standard facilities so tries to limit the number of times they attempt this task e.g. lives in a double storey property and only attempts the stairs in the morning and evening and remains downstairs during the day.

#### ▪ Access to facilities

The applicant has some difficulty using existing standard facilities and it is not possible or practical to adapt the current property to provide the type of facility, e.g. applicant finds it difficult to get in and out of the bath/shower and neither equipment or a bathroom adaptation are suitable.

#### ▪ Access to support or amenities

The applicant would retain a level of independence if they were able to receive support or improved access to amenities, e.g. the applicant currently lacks access to local amenities such as shops, health care or family support which has a detrimental effect on their health condition.

#### ▪ Mental Health

The applicant has mental health problems which causes some distress or risks to their independence and their current housing exacerbates or has a detrimental impact on their condition which would be alleviated by re-housing. Evidence from a health care professional will be required to support the need and confirm rehousing requirements.

#### ▪ Autism and other learning disabilities

The applicant has a learning disability and their current housing restricts or jeopardises the management of their condition or their functional ability which would be alleviated by re-housing. Evidence from a health care professional will be required to support the need and confirm rehousing requirements.

#### ▪ Medical conditions requiring treatment

The applicant has a medical condition requiring ongoing treatment and their current housing restricts or jeopardises access to treatment and therefore exacerbates or has a detrimental impact on their condition which would be alleviated by re-housing. Evidence from a health care professional can help support the need and confirm rehousing requirements.

#### 4.4 – Cumulative Priority (effective 1<sup>st</sup> June 2019)

Link recognises that some applicants may be experiencing multiple issues with their current property, and will award additional priority as follows:

- An applicant who meets the criteria for two different bronze passes will be awarded a bronze+ priority pass
- An applicant who meets the criteria for three bronze passes will be awarded a silver priority pass
- An applicant who meets the criteria for two silver passes will be awarded a silver+ priority pass
- An applicant who meets the criteria for three silver passes will be awarded a gold priority pass
- An applicant who meets the criteria for two gold passes will be awarded a gold+ priority pass

e.g. if an applicant meets the criteria for a silver health and housing priority pass, and also meets the criteria for a silver overcrowding priority pass, they will be awarded a silver+ priority pass.

**NB All priority passes assessed prior to 1 June 2019 will be assessed under the previous Lettings Policy's criteria.**

## **APPENDIX 5 – TRANSFERS**

There are many reasons why a tenant may need to move to another home. For example, the property may be too big or too small as the family circumstances change, or it may not be suitable because of health changes. If a Link tenant wishes to move to another property, they must have been a tenant in their current home for at least 12 months and conducted their tenancy in a satisfactory manner.

Tenants will normally only be offered a property if their rent accounts are clear and if their home is of a standard that Link considers to be satisfactory. Details of this standard can be obtained by tenants on request.

### **Applying for a transfer**

Link does not operate a separate transfer list. If an existing tenant wishes or needs to move they can apply to the relevant housing register in the area they wish to stay in. This might be Edindex if they are looking for a home in Edinburgh, ICHR if they are looking for a home in Port Glasgow, or Homehunt where we advertise the majority of our properties.

When a tenant applies for a transfer through the Homehunt system they will be identified as a transfer applicant on the system to ensure they are given the specific transfer priority pass. Transfer priority passes are awarded at a slightly higher level than that of non-link tenants. For example, tenants assessed as being in a bronze priority category will be awarded a bronze+ transfer pass; tenants assessed as being in a silver+ priority category will be awarded a gold priority pass, and so on. See Appendices 4 and 5 for more information about the specific priority passes categories.

If offered a property, a Link tenant will not have to give the normal 28 days notice to leave their existing property. A tenant will only be able to keep the keys to their own property for a specified period after they sign the tenancy agreement for their new home. If a tenant does not return the keys to their previous property within this time, a lock change will be carried out and the tenant will be recharged for this. The tenant will be charged rent for their previous property on a daily rate for as long as it takes to return their keys.

Link may adopt a quota system to ensure a certain percentage of available properties are allocated to Link tenants who are in housing need. If this is the case, details will be published and advertised properties will clearly indicate if preference will be given to Link tenants.

In certain exceptional circumstances, Link may offer a property to an existing tenant without advertising it. This is called a management transfer and would occur where we know there is a tenant who has an urgent need for re-housing, and a property becomes available which suits their needs. Management transfers are authorised by a Housing Services Co-ordinator.

## APPENDIX 6 – MUTUAL EXCHANGES

Tenants are able to apply for a mutual exchange. This is when a tenant of Link agrees to swap their home with another tenant, either of Link or of another RSL or local authority.

Link operates two mutual exchange websites:

- House Exchange ([www.houseexchange.org.uk](http://www.houseexchange.org.uk)) for the Edinburgh area only.
- Homeswapper ([www.homeswapper.co.uk](http://www.homeswapper.co.uk)) for all areas.

Both of these sites allow tenants to register free of charge and search for other tenants who may wish to swap with them. When a tenant finds someone they want to swap with, they must advise Link and they will be sent the forms to complete and return to us for a decision.

A mutual exchange cannot proceed without written approval from Link.

Link will confirm a decision in writing within 28 days of receiving the completed mutual exchange request form. If Link fails to respond within 28 days of receiving the request, this will result in an automatic approval having been given.

Link will check the following before approving a mutual exchange:

- Does either party involved in the exchange have rent arrears or other housing debt (eg for repairs)?
- Will the exchange result in the overcrowding or underoccupancy of the property?
- Has either party been involved in anti-social behaviour?
- Is there an order for recovery of possession for one of the properties?
- Is the property designed or adapted for a person with a specific need and if so, will this be required by the incoming tenant?

If any of these are found to be the case, approval will not be given unless in exceptional circumstances. Where a housing officer feels there are exceptional grounds for approving a mutual exchange, they will discuss this with a Housing Services Co-ordinator.

If the mutual exchange is approved, arrangements are then made to visit the tenants to inspect the properties, carry out gas safety checks and agree the date for the mutual exchange to happen and the relevant tenancy agreements to be signed.

## **APPENDIX 7 – RAPID REHOUSING**

Rapid Rehousing is a policy direction adopted by the Scottish Government, following recommendations by the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG). Rapid Rehousing describes a change in approach to how people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness will access settled accommodation and support services.

As part of the transition towards a Rapid Rehousing approach across Scotland, local authorities and RSLs are in the process of planning how they will adopt this approach. Transitioning to a Rapid Rehousing approach is expected to happen over a 5-year period, commencing in 2018. As this is still in the early stages of development, we do not yet know how RSLs will be expected to contribute to this new way of working.

Link will work with local authorities to meet our obligations under this new approach. It is anticipated that Link will need to increase the number of allocations to homeless households as part of the Rapid Rehousing approach. This is likely to be done through a quota system, which has been recommended following consultation with tenants and applicants (see Appendix 10).

## **APPENDIX 8 - QUOTAS**

After consultation with tenants and applicants, it was agreed that Link should adopt a quota system for allocating properties. A quota system works by specifying how what percentage of properties should be allocated to specific groups of people. For example, it may be that a certain percentage of properties will be allocated to existing tenants (see Appendix 5 – Transfers).

It is anticipated that Link will be required to allocate a specific percentage of properties to homeless households under the new Rapid Rehousing approach, however we do not yet know what this will be (see Appendix 7 – Rapid Rehousing). Link will therefore adopt a quota system as soon as the information on Rapid Rehousing allows us to do so. Details of this will be published in this policy and on our website.