

Housing Allocation Policy Equality Impact Assessment

1	Executive Summary
1.1	<p>The Highland Council's Race Equalities Scheme sets out which of the Highland Council's current and proposed policies and functions are relevant to the general duty. The general duty tasks councils with aiming to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eliminate discrimination • promote equality of opportunity • foster good race relations – even in areas where minority ethnic populations are small
1.2	<p>In the initial assessment, the Allocation Policy was shown to have a high degree of relevance to the general duty as it relates to two of the requirements: eliminating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities. The policy was therefore assessed to have an impact with regard to race equality and there were concerns that it could have a negative impact on some racial groups i.e. those with a historically low presence on our housing list.</p>
1.3	<p>It was also noted that we do not consult on the policy with any particular racial group or organisation or other body representing women or disabled people, or people of different ages or sexuality. The policy is monitored with regard to race – but the information is requested on a voluntary basis from applicants and is therefore, inevitably, incomplete.</p>
1.4	<p>The assessment looked at whether we or the public had concerns that the policy was having an adverse affect on any particular group. There was insufficient information to establish whether or not the policy was impacting adversely on any particular group, but it was noted that no concerns had been expressed.</p>
1.5	<p>The experience of carrying out this assessment will also inform the development of a Highland Council toolkit to assist all Services in carrying out similar assessments on their relevant policies and functions.</p>
2	Background
2.1	<p><i>The first step in the process is to be clear on the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What it is our policy is trying to achieve • What our responsibilities are in relation to the Allocation Policy • Who is responsible for the policy and its administration • What the desired outcomes of the policy are • How the Allocation Policy fits in with other policies • Which individuals and organisations are likely to have an interest in the Allocation Policy and which racial groups are represented among them • What relationships we need to have with these stakeholders • If our policy achieves equal opportunities and good relations between racial groups
2.2	<p><i>The objectives of the Allocation Policy are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To address housing needs in the area and where possible, to take into account applicants' housing aspirations. • To assess applicants for housing in an objective, consistent and fair manner, complying with the relevant legislation and best practice.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To sustain and promote local communities as far as is possible. • To monitor performance and respond to changing patterns of needs as they may arise by reviewing the Allocations Policy of the Council on a regular basis. • To inform the Council's strategic planning processes. • To be as straightforward as possible and to be written and explained without the use of jargon.
2.3	Our Allocations Policy ensures that we comply with the relevant legislation regarding the allocation of houses and that we use the limited stock we have to best meet housing need. In doing this, we must balance a number of competing needs and work with other registered social landlords to ensure the best use of the stock overall.
2.4	<p>What are our responsibilities in relation to the Allocation Policy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To comply with legislation governing allocations as outlined in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 • To operate an 'open' waiting list and applications will be accepted onto the waiting list provided the applicant(s) are aged 16 years or over; • To ensure the accurate registration of all interested applicants onto the Housing List (either as a waiting list or transfer list applicant); • To monitor the target ratio of allocations to waiting list and transfer list applicants and ensure that the agreed performance monitoring is carried out and reported to the appropriate Area Committees and the Housing and Social Work Committee of The Highland Council at appropriate points but at least annually; • To ensure accurate assessment of all applicants for housing on a fair and consistent basis as per the allocation policy; • To consider, if the need and community backing is identified, the use of Local Lettings Initiatives for specific Lettings Areas under the terms of the Allocation Policy; • To ensure that we provide applicants with information and advice regarding their housing application and to ensure that we treat all applicants for housing with courtesy, sensitivity and in complete confidence.
2.5	<i>Who is responsible for the policy and its administration?</i>
2.6	The responsibility for the Allocation Policy rests finally with the Director of Housing reporting to Highland Council members, specifically those sitting on the Housing and Social Work Committee.
2.7	The Allocation Policy is administered on a day to day basis by the Area Housing Teams, reporting to the Area Housing Managers.. All allocations are the responsibility of the Area Housing Manager of the Area in which the vacancy is situated.
2.8	The Areas have full decentralised authority and budget to provide the complete range of housing services available to customers in the Highlands, including allocations. The Area Housing Managers report to the Area Committees.
2.9	The day to day work involved in the registration of housing applicants is carried out by various Service Point Officers, Clerical and Admin Officers and allocations are carried out by generic Housing Management Officers or specialised Accommodation Officers.

2.10	<i>What are the desired outcomes of the policy?</i>
2.11	Allocations of empty properties being made to those applicants in the greatest housing need as defined by the policy and with regard to current legislation and good practice.
2.12	<i>How does the Allocation Policy fit in with other policies?</i>
2.13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Housing Strategy - The Highland Housing Strategy 2003-2008 identifies the high and increasing demand for housing in Highland and growing levels of homelessness - a robust and responsive allocation policy which addresses all equalities issues is essential to allow us to allocate our properties fairly.
2.14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Housing and Property Service Plan 2007-2011 - The Housing and Property Service Plan 2007-2011 ensures the Housing Service achieves the corporate aims of openness, fairness and accountability and equality of access and opportunity.
2.15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highland Council's Equal Opportunities Policy - The Allocation Policy has been identified as relevant to the promotion of equal opportunities and tackling discrimination.
2.16	<i>Which individuals and organisations are likely to have an interest in the Allocation Policy and which racial groups are represented among them?</i>
2.17	Anyone seeking to be housed by the Council in Highland will have an interest in the policy. Interested groups would include housing applicants, all tenants, tenant groups, councillors, local employers, community councils, support and advocacy groups for the disabled and elderly, groups supporting people with addictions, homeless support groups such as the Inverness Council for Single Homeless and Shelter, BME groups such as BEMIS (the Black and Ethnic Minorities Infrastructure in Scotland), immigrant workers, Gypsy/Travellers.
2.18	We have incomplete information on which racial groups are represented on any of the above groups, with the exception of Gypsy/Travellers. BEMIS is an umbrella organisation for black and minority ethnic organisations in the area and may allow us to link to a range of such groups in Highland.
2.19	<i>Does the policy achieve equal opportunities and good relations between racial groups?</i>
2.20	At this point, this is hard to establish definitely to what extent the Allocation Policy achieves equal opportunities and good relations between different racial groups. We cannot fully assess its impact on different racial groups until we better understand the racial demographics of the area, put in place changes to improve monitoring of registration and allocation by race and consult with relevant groups.
3	Data
3.1	<p><i>Housing Needs Survey</i></p> <p>The Housing Needs Survey of December 2003 does not address the issue of race. It does mention the possible need for housing from in-migrants to Highland (Section 7.63) but this is not broken down into any racial element.</p>
3.2	<p><i>Gypsy/Travellers</i></p> <p>Gypsy/Travellers are not asked to identify themselves separately in the Census returns or in the Highland Council ethnic monitoring form. Some information can be</p>

gathered from the Scottish Executive twice yearly count. These figures are not technically robust but attempt to give a “snapshot” of the Gypsy/Traveller population in Highland. They have been criticised as being incomplete and the count itself is seen by some as discriminatory
The following table shows the results of the January 2003-5 counts in Highland area:

Count Date	Number of Households *	Count Date	Number of Households *
Jan 2002		July 2002	40
Jan 2003	33	July 2003	51
Jan 2004	22	July 2004	61
Jan 2005	19	July 2005	Not available at Nov 2005

* these include households on authorised, private and unauthorised sites.

3.3	<p><i>Complaints</i> The Highland Council complaints procedure does not currently monitor complaints by ethnicity at Stage 2 and above. Stage One complaints which are handled at area level are monitored where the complaint is of a racial nature. However, a survey of such complaints since 2002 showed that there had been no such complaints recorded in any of the areas.</p>
3.4	<p><i>What further data do we need?</i> The 2001 Census return does give a breakdown of the population by ethnicity etc. by area within Highland, but it is not sufficiently detailed to allow us to ensure the allocation policy is meeting the needs of all groups who live in Highland. More information on the numbers of White English people in the area and the numbers of Gypsy/Travellers would allow us to fully asses if the policy was disadvantaging them in any way.</p>
3.5	<p>While 55% of applicants complete the voluntary ethnic monitoring form on the application, this gives us incomplete data on applications by ethnic group and also allocations by ethnic group. As giving this information is not mandatory, we need to use the data we have and try and encourage more people to complete this section of our application form. This lack of data also means we cannot accurately guage the requirements and aspirations of BME applicants with regard to house type, size and location for strategic and development planning purposes or assess if they are disadvantaged by the lack of certain types, sizes and location of our stock.</p>
3.6	<p>We have fuller data regarding race etc with regard to homelessness, as this information is completed for all homeless applicants in Highland and reported to the Scottish Executive. However, only a proportion of applicants who qualify for permanent housing were identified as being homeless and in priority need under the</p>

	legislation, so the picture remains incomplete.
3.7	We need to analyse data on levels of refusals of offers under the Allocation Policy by race etc to look at the reasons for the refusal of offers and to assess if any groups are being offered unsuitable housing.
3.8	Knowledge of levels of access to Service Points and Housing Offices by BME groups would allow us to assess if they experience difficulties in accessing these offices which play a crucial role in the advice and information given to those seeking housing in Highland. Service Points do not currently monitor by ethnic group - this has been discussed on a number of occasions and monitoring ethnicity for general enquiries would be difficult to introduce. However the CRM system does have ethnicity categories build in so it may be possible in the future.
3.9	We do not know the levels of English literacy in BME groups in Highland, or the levels of literacy in their 1 st languages. How can we judge if people are able to read the information available on their housing options (eg the Housing Options Manual) and complete application forms appropriately? We need to consult with different groups to find out more about this.
3.10	Is the information we have on applying for housing available in places used by BME groups (such as community meeting places). Again, we need to consult with different groups to find out more about this.
3.11	We have no information on the current level of occupation of council tenancies by ethnic origin.
3.12	<i>What impact does the Policy have</i>
3.13	The census return shows that all minority ethnic populations account for 0.8% of the total Highland population – this is lower than the 2.01% for Scotland as a whole. However, this does not mean that we should not measure the impact of our policies on this small percentage of our community.
3.14	While there appears to be a close correlation between the percentage of the BME population in Highland (0.8%) and their representation on the Housing List (0.7%), the actual numbers of individual groups represented are so low, that it is difficult to say if any group is being disadvantaged when applying for housing. It is also difficult to say if race etc is the only explanation of any adverse impact for the same reason. On comparison of the % figures for applicants against lets which we do have, the figures again do not show any major discrepancies - 0.7% of our Housing List is BME, and 0.6% of lets in 2004/5 went to BME applicants.
3.15	It is tempting to look in more depth at individual communities – for instance, there appear to be low levels of application from the Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Chinese communities. This could, in theory, result from all of these communities being already housed in council accommodation, or adequately housed elsewhere, but as the numbers involved are so low, no firm conclusions can be drawn without further investigation.
3.16	As there is a more or less identical % of lets to White British applicants as % of representation on the housing list, race could be a factor for the discrepancies (albeit small) in the other groups.

3.17	We need more information from Gypsy/Travellers regarding their access to the advice and information they would require to, allow them to complete application forms effectively to meet their needs. There may also be issues around travelling families being able to demonstrate a need to reside in a particular community – again, we have no data on why/where travelling families seek settled accommodation in Highland – if it is for reasons of work, support from other family members etc, the policy should not disadvantage them more than any other applicant.
3.18	We operate an open housing list – anyone over the age of 16 can apply to come onto the list – this means no group is disadvantaged in actually applying for housing in Highland under the terms of the policy or suffers direct discrimination when applying. However, some groups may not have access to suitable information and advice on applying for housing in Highland, or access to locations where this can be got. Also, they may not have the information presented in a format they can use – and could be suffering indirect discrimination - again, we do not have sufficient data to confirm this.
4	Consultation
	Very extensive consultation has already been done on the Allocation Policy but we need to establish wider communication with those stakeholder groups who may be adversely affected in order to be aware of any issues in the operation of the policy which affect them.
4.1	There is also a need to consult formally with appropriate groups representing different BME groups in Highland and with those housed applicants who come from an ethnic minority.
4.2	Monitoring Implementation
4.3	We want to ensure our Allocation Policy is not disadvantaging any particular BME group in applying for housing in Highland. There is no current evidence that any BME group is being adversely affected by the policy
4.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are some gaps in the information we need to allow us to assess this accurately. • A high number of our housing applicants (55%) do complete the voluntary ethnic monitoring form on the housing application. If we can encourage more applicants to do so, we can build up a more complete picture of BME applicants in Highland and assess with greater accuracy whether any group is being disadvantaged by our allocation policy. • We can also monitor more closely applicants who are suffering racial harassment, or are subject to immigration control by amending our application form and extracting this information from the Housing information System for analysis. • The attached action plan aims to address these issues.
4.5	<p>There are other areas of information gathering which will be looked at on a corporate level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lack of information about the ethnicity of complainants needs to be addressed through ethnic monitoring of complaints – this will have to be looked at corporately by reviewing the monitoring of the Complaints Procedure. • The Council will be working with its partners in the Highland Wellbeing

	<p>Alliance to develop stronger ethnic minority community organisations and to consult directly with ethnic minorities about how their needs can best be identified and met by public agencies.</p>
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Appendix 1. Summary of Actions What do we do next?

The Objective	What we are going to do to achieve the objective (action)	What resources will we need	How will we know we have achieved it (output)	When we aim to achieve it	Current Position
<p>1. Look at our current ethnic monitoring of housing applications and find ways of encouraging more applicants to complete this section of the form, to allow us to more fully monitor applications and allocations by race.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-position the page with the ethnic monitoring questions within the form to encourage completion. • Investigate the possibility of amending and expanding on the categories to mirror the Census return to allow more meaningful comparison of data. • Amend the wording on the form to explain more clearly why we need this information and what it is used for. • Remind Service Point and front line housing staff who assist applicants in completing application forms to encourage applicants to complete this section. 	<p>Housing Policy Officer</p>	<p>We will see an increase on the 55% of current applicants completing this section of the form, allowing us to monitor/report even more effectively how our policy affects those in different groups.</p>	<p>April 2006</p>	<p>Completed - Ethnic monitoring page re-positioned within the Application form and wording amended. Categories amended to mirror census returns. All staff assisting applicants to complete forms reminded regularly to encourage applicants to complete ethnic monitoring information. No increase in completion recorded for year 2005/6 despite the above - completion rate 56%</p>

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2. Amend the current application form to encourage applicants to identify if they are seeking to move because of racial harassment.	Insert a further question in section 8 of the application form.	Housing Policy Officer	We will have better information on those housing applicants who are experiencing racial harassment and be able to ensure they are not disadvantaged by the policy.	April 2006	This action not completed due to Community Ownership priorities and CHR issues- will be progressed in next revision of the application form, or through CHR.
3. Monitor housing applications from applicants subject to immigration control and those with leave to remain in the UK.	We will develop reports to give us better information from our Housing Information System about applicants who are subject to immigration control and applicants who have leave to remain in the UK, and their current status.	Housing Policy Officer/Business Support	We will have better information on those housing applicants who are in these groups and be able to ensure they are not disadvantaged by the policy.	March 2006	Completed - Report developed - questions not mandatory and no applicant had given this information as at October 2006 – to be monitored regularly.
4. Monitor the use of exceptional circumstances points by ethnicity.	We will develop a report to give us better information from our Housing Information System about the ethnicity of applicants in receipt of exceptional circumstances points.	Housing Policy Officer/Business Support	We will have better information on those housing applicants in receipt of these points to ensure they are not disadvantaged by the policy.	March 2006	Completed - Reports developed but data incomplete – only 55% of applicants giving ethnic monitoring information and notes for all cases where Exceptional Circs points awarded not always on system. Further work required.

The Objective	What we are going to do to achieve the objective (action)	What resources will we need	How will we know we have achieved it (output)	When we aim to achieve it	Current Position
5. Analyse data on levels of refusals of offers under the Allocation Policy by race to establish the reasons for refusals and to see if any groups are being offered unsuitable housing.	We will develop a report to give us better information from our Housing Information System on the reasons applicants refuse offers of housing and the ethnicity of applicants who refuse offers.	Housing Policy Officer/Business Support	We will have better information on why applicants from BEM backgrounds refuse offers of housing and can ensure they are not disadvantaged by the policy.	March 2006	Completed - Reports developed but data incomplete – only 55% of applicants giving ethnic monitoring information and reason for refusal not a mandatory question – further work required
6. Ensure that a separate impact assessment is carried out on any local lettings initiative introduced under the terms of the Allocation Policy to ensure there is no potential conflict with the Act.	Build this in to the Allocation Policy at the next review	Housing Policy Officer	Any Local Lettings Initiative will have been assessed to ensure it did not impact adversely on any group.	At next Review (P)	
7. Build a commitment to regularly monitor and report on applications and allocations by race.	The Allocations Monitoring report will include information on race monitoring.	Housing Policy Officer	Information on the racial monitoring of our Allocation Policy will be publicly available.	Immediate (P)	Completed - Annual report on allocations includes ethnic monitoring information from 2006

The Objective	What we are going to do to achieve the objective (action)	What resources will we need	How will we know we have achieved it (output)	When we aim to achieve it	Current Position
<p>8. Consult with appropriate organisations representing different BME groups in Highland to gather information on :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Their experience of applying and being allocated housing. ▪ Their housing needs and aspirations ▪ The need to translate housing advice and information into community languages. 	<p>Consult with, for example :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Black and Ethnic Minorities Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS) • The Scottish Highlands and Islands, and Morayshire, Chinese Association (SHIMCA) • Highland Gypsy/Traveller Partnership • Consult with migrant workers through the Lochaber CAB Migrant Workers Advice Project 	<p>Housing Policy Officer</p>	<p>We will have better information about the housing needs and aspirations of these groups, their experience of applying for housing which will identify if they are being disadvantaged by the policy. We will also have better information on any need for information and advice to be presented in different formats or languages.</p>	<p>May 2006 (P)</p>	<p>Still to be progressed – awaiting further guidance on methods of consultation around REIA's from the Equalities Officer/Well-Being Alliance</p>

Appendix 2

2001 Census Data on Population:

2001	Highland Population by Ethnic Group			Scotland Figures for Comparison		
	% of Total Population	% of Minority Ethnic Population	Base	% of Total Population	% of Minority Ethnic Population	Base
White Scottish	84.54	n/a	176,611	88.09	n/a	4,459,071
Other white British	12.67	n/a	26,477	7.38	n/a	373,685
White Irish	0.56	n/a	1,176	0.98	n/a	49,428
Other White	1.43	n/a	2,979	1.54	n/a	78,150
Indian	0.08	9.87	165	0.30	14.79	15,037
Pakistani	0.06	7.96	133	0.63	31.27	31,793
Bangladeshi	0.06	7.66	128	0.04	1.95	1,981
Other South Asian	0.06	7.60	127	0.12	6.09	6,196
Chinese	0.13	16.22	271	0.32	16.04	16,310
Caribbean	0.04	5.39	90	0.04	1.75	1,778
African	0.04	4.79	80	0.10	5.03	5,118
Black Scottish or other Black	0.02	1.97	33	0.02	1.11	1,129
Any Mixed Background	0.21	25.85	432	0.25	12.55	12,764
Other Ethnic Group	0.10	12.69	212	0.19	9.41	9,571
All Minority Ethnic Population	0.80	100	1,671	2.01	100	101,677
Whole Population	100	n/a	208,914	100	n/a	5,062,011

Source: General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) - 2001 Census

2001 Census Data on Religion:

Population by Religion	Numbers	%
Church of Scotland	100585	48.10%
Roman Catholic	14113	6.80%
Other Christian	25127	12.00%
Buddhist	262	0.10%
Hindu	63	0.03%
Jewish	81	0.04%
Muslim	392	0.18%
Sikh	37	0.10%
Another Religion	1159	0.55%
No Religion	56841	27.20%
Not Answered	10254	4.90%
(Highland Pop	208914	100.00%

Highland Council Ethnic Monitoring Stats 2004/5

As at 1st April 2005 Highland Council had 9068 applicants registered on its housing list – of these, 4975 (55%) had completed the voluntary ethnic monitoring form in the housing application.

Number of applicants in each ethnic group by area 2004/5 (% figures in brackets)		
		Total Highland
		4848 (97.45)
White British		13 (0.26)
White Irish		63 (1.27)
White Other European		18 (0.36)
White Other		*
Black Caribbean		5 (0.10)
Black African		7 (0.14)
Black Other		5 (0.10)
Indian		0
Pakistani		0
Bangladeshi		*
Chinese		14 (0.28)
Other		4975
Total		

Number of lets in each ethnic group by area 2004/5 (% figures in brackets)		
		Total Highland
White British		595 (97.8)
White Irish		*
White Other European		5 (0.8)
White Other		*
Black Caribbean		0
Black African		0
Black Other		*
Indian		*
Pakistani		0
Bangladeshi		0
Chinese		0
Other		*
Total		608

* Data below 5 persons will not be published in order to ensure confidentiality

Key points to note here are:

- The applicants and lets analysed are only those where the ethnic monitoring information was available

- The proportions of lets to applications is consistent – 97.8% of lets went to the White British applicants, and this group makes up 97.45% of our Housing List, and 97.21% of the Highland population.
- The numbers involved are very low and make it difficult to do meaningful comparisons or analysis

Homeless Statistics Report 2003/4

Information is collected on the ethnic origin of applicants. The findings show that a small but significant number of homeless applicants classed themselves as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) households – 90 households, 4% of homeless applicants (this includes ‘white other’). A small number of households described themselves as black, 9 as Asian, 41 were ‘white-other’ (i.e. not Scottish, British, Irish) and 22 were ‘other – non-specified’ ethnic origin. The data isn’t able to tell us more about the ethnic origin of some groups e.g. whether “white-other” are increasingly from the new EU countries. This could be important in monitoring / forecasting trends.

Most BME households applying as homeless were single men and 36 BME households (38% of those BME households who presented as homeless) were assessed as homeless non-priority. This is less than the average but without further analysis it is not possible to know the extent this is due to household circumstances.

These figures illustrate the need to make sure services and officers are sensitive to the particular needs of different types of BME households.

In common with homeless applications overall, most BME households presented as homeless in Inverness.

Number of Homeless Applicants in each Ethnic Group (2004 - 2005)

	White	Black	Asian	White other	Mixed couples	Other	Refused	Total
Highland	2198	*	9	41	15	22	5	2293