

Support for Service Leavers and Veterans in Scottish Housing Allocations Policies



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ABOUT



Managed by Scottish housing charity Housing Options Scotland, Military Matters has been delivering specialist housing support to members of the Armed Forces Community using our expert knowledge and contacts in the sector since 2013.

THE AUTHOR



Written and researched by Gina Wilson.

Gina is a REME veteran and a previous client of Housing Options Scotland (HOS). Gina has worked for HOS as the Military Matters Volunteer Co-ordinator, supporting the Veteran Volunteer programme.

Gina returned from abroad with her two young children and was faced with homelessness. After reaching out to multiple organisations and losing hope, she found HOS. They helped Gina to find her forever home.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Housing Options Scotland elected to carry out this research to find out what local authorities and social housing providers offer ex-service personnel.

We looked at the allocations policies of all the Scottish local authorities who have their own housing stock and Scottish housing associations.

Information was taken directly from the annual reports and allocations policies of the housing providers mentioned in this research.

INTRODUCTION

Housing Options Scotland helps disabled people, older adults and members of the Armed Forces community with their housing needs. We offer information, advice and support to help people find the right home, in the right place.

Our dedicated Military Matters service is here to support the Armed Forces community to understand more about the housing options out there, and to help them find a housing solution that works for them and their specific needs.

For members of the Armed Forces community, whether veterans or still serving, finding a suitable home on civvy street can be one of the hardest challenges to overcome.

Housing Options Scotland decided to carry out this research to find out what local authorities and social housing providers offer ex-service personnel.

We looked at the allocations policies of all the Scottish local authorities who have their own housing stock and Scottish housing associations.

We examined the following:

- The allocations systems offered to service leavers
 - The allocations systems offered to veterans
 - Other housing advice offered to service leavers/veterans
 - Good practice examples
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CONTEXT

The term 'Service Leaver' offers a broader description of someone in transition from the Armed Forces, or whose service has already ended. These terms are used interchangeably, but individuals may have a personal preference, (UCAS, 2023)

Veterans are defined as anyone who has served for at least one day in HM's Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve) or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations, (Office for Veteran's Affairs, 2020)

The best estimate of the size of the ex-Service community in Scotland, from the Royal British Legion's survey in 2014, is 530,000 people, roughly 10% of Scotland's population. (Veterans' Homelessness Prevention Pathway)

FINDINGS

ALLOCATIONS SYSTEMS WITHIN LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Our findings for the local authorities covering Scotland that provide housing were positive for service leavers. All local authorities had processes in place to support them. This is encouraging.

However, our findings for veterans were less positive. We found that only five of the 30 local authorities were able to specifically take into account the service of veterans. This ranged from one local authority offering consideration to those within 6 months of leaving, two offering within a year and only one offering within 3 years of leaving the forces.

- City of Edinburgh Council – Personnel who have left the Forces within the last three years may have their application backdated to the date they entered the Armed Forces.
 - East Lothian Council – It is the intention of East Lothian Council to work towards providing dedicated housing for ex-service personnel in East Lothian.
 - Scottish Borders Council – Applicants serving in the Armed Forces can only apply one year before their date of discharge and one year after.
 - South Ayrshire Council – Waiting time points will be awarded back to the date they entered H.M. Forces. This request must be made within 12 months of the date the applicant left H.M. Forces.
 - South Lanarkshire Council – Priority awarded up to 6 months prior to, and up to 6 months following, the date of discharge from the service.
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FINDINGS

ALLOCATIONS SYSTEMS WITHIN HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

Our findings for the 156 housing associations covering Scotland are that the majority offer consideration to service leavers. However, there are 11 who have nothing in place.

The range of time for eligibility is three months to a year of discharge.

- One housing association welcomes applications for three months after discharge.
- Five housing associations welcome applications for 6 months after discharge.
- Six housing associations welcome applications for one year after discharge.
- Orkney Housing Association welcomes applications for up to two years of leaving the service.
- Hebridean Housing Partnership (Previously Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) give all applications from ex-service personnel fair and sympathetic consideration and will ensure service leavers are not disadvantaged compared to other applicants.

Unfortunately, findings for veterans were less favourable. Only 13 housing associations provide consideration to veterans and this is restricted to those who have left within two years of applying.

FINDINGS

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

- Aberdeen City Council provide priority status to ex-service personnel for new social developments only. Also, placed on the Urgent List and awarded medium priority 56 days before they are due to leave the forces.
 - Argyll and Bute Council provide an information guide for serving personnel and veterans. This includes information on housing.
 - East Lothian Council's intention is to work towards providing dedicated housing for ex-Service personnel in East Lothian.
 - Fife Housing Group offer points allocated for service leavers until they have found settled accommodation - which could be years after discharge. An access to housing protocol for people leaving HM Forces has been agreed by the FHR Executive as part of a Fife-wide commitment to support former HM Forces personnel to ensure settled accommodation.
 - Fife Council has made a specific Covenant Commitment to provide up to 40 Housing allocations per year to veterans, although they are experiencing some difficulty due to limited demand on the housing access system.
 - Fife Housing Register: An access to housing protocol for people leaving HM Forces has been agreed by the FHR Executive as part of a Fife-wide commitment to support former HM Forces personnel to ensure settled accommodation.
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FINDINGS

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

- Moray Council have an Armed Forces Housing Referral Protocol in place. This has been written in conjunction with the Joint Services Housing Advice Office.
 - Ore Valley group allow a minimum of two property allocations per year made available for applicants who have been awarded HM Forces only status.
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FINDINGS

EXAMPLES OF CRITERIA

The criteria specified for application eligibility across housing associations and local authorities are for applicants to have one of the following to apply:

- At least three years of continuous service with HM Forces with "honourable discharge"
- One full tour of duty
- Discharged on medical grounds

The below data compares the practice of a large urban housing association with a smaller rural housing association.

- The Wheatley Group own and manage over 93,600 homes covering 19 local authorities in Scotland. Serving 210,000 customers. Serving personnel can apply one year prior to, and 6 months after, honourable discharge. They must have completed either three years of service or one full tour of duty.
 - Orkney Housing Association own and manage 952 homes and are situated on 11 separate islands. They welcome applications for up to two years after leaving the service. The Head of Housing & Customer Services has delegated authority to exercise discretion in relation to the above criteria in exceptional circumstances. The criteria do not mention length of service requirements for eligibility.
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SUMMARY

Our findings are that allocations processes vary in scope and practice throughout Scotland. Allocations policies range from a few pages, to in excess of 60 pages, with a range of qualifying criteria for veterans and service leavers.

While all local authorities have specific processes in place for service leavers, most do not have similar processes in place for veterans.

While there are several examples of good practice within housing providers across Scotland, this is not uniform.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Shared learning of examples of best practice.

Consistency in practice for Service Leavers and Veterans across all housing providers.

More accessible information around housing allocation policies aimed at Service Leavers and Veterans with key details that can be understood and explained easily.

Further research to be carried out amongst the Veterans community to find out their lived experience accessing social housing.



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