

ALLOCATIONS POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The aim of our Allocations Policy is:

- to provide a fair and accessible system of allocating good quality rented housing for people in housing need, including West Lothian families and future generations of West Lothian residents;
- at the same time, to contribute to providing balanced and sustainable communities.

1.2 This policy sets out the standards and general guidance we will follow to ensure that:

- our properties are allocated in a fair and reasonable way to those most in need of them;
- at the same time we make the best use of our housing stock.

1.3 This policy is supported by a range of detailed procedures covering the initial assessment and lettings process and subsequent activities such as assignation, succession, exchanges and transfers etc. For a list of the supporting procedures see Appendix 1.

1.4 This policy complies with Performance Standards AS1.1 and AS1.2, with Chapter 1 in the SFHA publication Raising Standards entitled 'Allocations' (March 2004), and with the relevant sections of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and other legislation as listed in Appendix 2.

2.0 PROMOTING EQUALITY

2.1 We will accept applications from anyone over the age of 16 years regardless of gender, marital status, age, ethnic origin, nationality, colour, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability or health problem, financial circumstances or any local connections.

2.2 We will assess applications and allocate our houses according to the systems that we have adopted to measure housing need (see sections 4 – 9 below). These systems are designed to eliminate any potential discrimination on any of the grounds listed in para. 2.1 above.

2.3 At all stages in the application and allocation process we will ensure that we comply with our Equal Opportunities Policy, which meets all current statutory requirements.

2.4 We will monitor the implementation of our assessment and allocation procedures to ensure that each application is treated equally and fairly (see also section 15).

2.5 As required, we will provide versions of this policy in other languages, large print, Braille or in audio format, and will also arrange for interpretation services when necessary.

2.6 We will record the ethnic origin, gender and disability of applicants to assist in monitoring equality of opportunity under these categories, using the Scottish Federation of Housing Association's 'SCORE' (Scottish Continuous Recording System) criteria.

3.0 INFORMATION AND ADVICE

- 3.1 A summary of this policy will be given to all applicants and will also be available to members of the public who call into our office or who request a copy by 'phone, letter or e-mail. Copies will also be provided to relevant agencies and authorities involved in our allocations process, e.g. West Lothian Council. A copy of the full policy will be available to anyone who asks for it.
- 3.2 We will seek to ensure that all the information, advice and communications about our application and lettings arrangements, whether given verbally or in writing, is in plain, easily understood language.
- 3.3 We will provide information on the numbers, types and general locations of allocations over the previous year to give applicants the opportunity of assessing the likelihood of being allocated the type of property they are looking for.
- 3.4 We will provide information on alternative sources of housing or advice including West Lothian Council, other housing associations, Citizens Advice Bureau etc.

Application Form

- 3.5 We will seek to make our application form as clear, 'jargon free' and straightforward to complete as possible, and will aim to ask only for the information that we require in order to assess the need for housing.
- 3.6 We will provide clear advice on:
 - how to complete the application form;
 - any additional information applicants are expected to provide;
 - what will happen following receipt of the application;
 - how and when we will respond to an application.

Common Housing Register

- 3.7 We are working with West Lothian Council and other local housing providers in the development and implementation of a Common Housing Register to simplify the application process for those wishing to access all available social housing in West Lothian.

4.0 ADMISSION TO THE HOUSING LIST

- 4.1 We will operate an open housing list and will accept applications at any time.
- 4.2 We will actively promote access to application forms:
- by distributing them to relevant West Lothian Council offices and other appropriate voluntary agencies and advice centres;
 - through publicity in our Newsletter Almond View;
 - on our website as this is developed.
- 4.3 We will accept requests for application forms by telephone, e-mail, letter or personal visit to our office. Applicants will also be able to obtain an application form from our website, when this has been developed.

Nominations

- 4.4 We will accept nominations from West Lothian Council and from other local organisations, in accordance with the agreements we have entered into with each organisation.

Homeless persons

- 4.5 We will accept referrals of homeless persons in accordance with the protocol agreed with West Lothian Council under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

Care in the Community & Supported Housing

- 4.6 We will assist West Lothian Council to achieve their Care in the Community objectives by entering into arrangements or agreements with voluntary or statutory organisations, through which we will provide housing, and the organisations will provide a variety of support arrangements to meet the particular needs of tenants, including support for young people who may be taking up a tenancy for the first time.

We will where possible provide specially designed housing for applicants with special physical needs.

Transfers & Exchanges

- 4.7 We will accept applications from our own tenants who wish to transfer to another of our properties, and from tenants who wish to exchange their home either with another of our tenants or a tenant of another landlord (see also section 11 below). For full details see our procedures entitled 'Transfers' and 'Mutual Exchanges'.

Management Committee & staff

- 4.8 Current or former members of our Management Committee and current or former members of staff, or their close relatives, may apply for housing. Apart from the requirement to include information on their link to Almond on the form, the application will be assessed in exactly the same way as all other applications. We will comply with the requirements to record any resulting allocation of housing to someone in these categories according to Schedule 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and current Communities Scotland guidance. For further details see the policy entitled 'Payments, Benefits & Corporate Accountability'.

5.0 CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

- 5.1 Applicants will be advised that they are required to let us know of any changes to their circumstances that may affect the assessment of their application and their priority, and that failure to do so could affect their opportunity to be housed by us.

6.0 REVIEW OF THE HOUSING LIST

Annual review

- 6.1 Once each year, around the date of their original application, each applicant will be sent a questionnaire asking if their circumstances are the same as stated on their application, and if they wish to remain on our list.
- 6.2 If the applicant does not return the questionnaire within the specified time-scale we will advise them in writing that they have been excluded from our list.
- 6.3 If an applicant who has been excluded applies for re-instatement within 3 months of our notification, they will normally be added back into the list without any further action being taken. If an applicant applies for re-instatement after 3 months we will re-assess their housing needs and only re-instate them if the reason for non-response was clearly outwith their control.

Other reviews

- 6.4 We will carry out other reviews from time to time, for example when an applicant does not respond to a letter regarding a pre-allocation visit or interview, or does not attend a pre-arranged visit or interview.

7.0 EXCLUSION FROM THE HOUSING LIST

- 7.1 In accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 we will only exclude or remove applicants from our housing list in the following circumstances:
- a) where the applicant has requested in writing that they be removed;
 - b) following the death of the applicant;
 - c) where the applicant fails to respond to a review of the list (see section 6 above).

[NOTE: We will not automatically remove from our list an applicant who has been housed by another housing provider. They will only be removed if a) or c) above applies.]

8.0 SUSPENSION ON THE HOUSING LIST

8.1 We may in certain circumstances suspend applicants on the housing list for specified periods of time. Suspension will mean that they do not receive an offer of housing during that time. The main reasons for suspension will be:

- where the applicant has debts relating to a current or previous tenancy which are greater than one month's rent and/or service charges, and where any arrangement to clear the debt that may be in place has not been kept to for at least 3 months;
- where false or misleading information has been provided in support of the application;
- where there is clear evidence of serious anti-social behaviour relating to a current or former tenancy which has taken place within the two years before the date of the application.

8.2 Full details are in our policy entitled 'Suspending Applicants on the Housing List'.

9.0 ASSESSING THE APPLICATION

9.1 We will aim to assess every application within the current target timescale.

9.2 We will assess every application from the information provided using a 'group plus points system'. Full details of the current groups and the points available under the various headings are given in Appendix 3.

9.3 The number and type of groups, and the points system, will be reviewed annually by the Allocations Sub-Committee and any amendments required will be submitted to the Management Committee for approval.

9.4 The points system will be publicised in the information available to all applicants and details will also be available in our office.

9.5 Each applicant will be allocated to the group that represents their greatest housing need, according to the information that they have supplied. Their placing (or priority) in that group will depend on the total number of points they are entitled to (see Appendix 3).

9.6 In accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 our groups and points system have been designed to give reasonable preference to applicants who:

- are homeless, or are threatened with homelessness, or
- are living in overcrowded conditions (including large families), or
- are occupying a property that does not meet the tolerable standard, or
- are living under unsatisfactory housing conditions (including suffering from serious harassment or abuse), or
- have a medical condition that would benefit from re-housing.

9.7 Where required we will seek references or obtain verification of the applicant's circumstances.

- 9.8 Following the initial assessment we will write to the applicant to confirm that their application has been added to our list. The letter will include a summary of their details and advise them which group they have been placed in.
- 9.9 Full details of the assessment process are contained in the procedure entitled 'Assessing Applications'.

Applicants with a low points total (low priority)

- 9.10 While every application will be assessed and added to our housing list, we recognise that where there is high demand for a type of property or for a particular area, applicants with a low points total will have a low priority for an offer of housing. We will seek to give such applicants appropriate information from time to time to enable them to consider their situation and, for example, to decide if they wish to remain on our list, and/or apply to other local housing providers etc.

10.0 ALLOCATING HOUSING

- 10.1 A vacant property will normally be offered to the applicant who has the highest priority in a particular group.
- 10.2 To determine from which group the next allocation should be made we will refer to the current quotas allocated to each of the groups (see Appendix 3). The quotas will be reviewed annually by the Allocations Sub-Committee and any amendments required submitted to the Management Committee for approval.

Maintaining a Balanced Community

- 10.3 We will also take into account the need to maintain balanced communities, which we have defined as:

"A mix of individuals and family groups of all ages with a range of different life experiences including employment, unemployment, good health or disability, who will together form a wide and balanced community living in properties of different types and tenure, and representative of society in general."

Lettings initiatives/lettings plans

- 10.4 We will consider special lettings initiatives, or local lettings plans, where we consider this will help to:
- achieve a balanced community;
 - achieve a sustainable community, i.e. "one where people want to continue to live in the same community, in sufficient numbers that the housing is effectively fully occupied" [Derek Long, European Institute for Urban Affairs, August 2000];
 - achieve the occupancy of properties that have become difficult to let.

10.5 A lettings initiative or lettings plan:

- will normally be for a specified period, or
- will be used in cases of particular low demand (difficult to let) properties, and
- where specific funding will be needed, will have to be approved by our Management Committee.

10.6 Where an individual property has been refused on several occasions, the Head of Housing Management will have delegated authority to initiate alternative letting arrangements and will report to the Allocations Sub-Committee on the action taken.

Making an offer

10.7 We will make two offers to an applicant. Should both offers be refused we will not make a further offer until we have discussed and where necessary clarified the applicant's housing aspirations with them.

Use of properties

10.8 To make the best use of our stock allocations will take account of the following guidelines:

Flats

Flats will be offered to those who wish this type of accommodation. Single persons will normally be offered flats unless there is a medical reason not to do so.

In cases where an applicant has children, or they have informed us they are expecting a child, the applicant may be offered a flat, but only if it has its own direct entrance and an exclusive garden area – i.e. either a 'main door' ground floor flat or an upper villa flat.

Houses

Houses will be offered to applicants according to their housing need and the availability of housing stock.

Bungalows

Due to the small number of this property type and in particular one-bedroom bungalows, they will normally be allocated only to applicants whose medical condition requires this type of accommodation.

Specially Adapted Properties

Specially adapted properties, such as wheelchair bungalows, will only be offered to applicants where either the applicant or a member of the household is a wheelchair user.

Applicants offered this type of accommodation will have to accept that should the wheelchair user no longer reside at the property the remaining members of the household will have to vacate the property. However they will be offered alternative accommodation to meet their needs according to this policy.

Occupancy levels

10.9 To maximise the occupancy level of our properties, and due to the high number of 2 and 3 bedroom flats in our housing stock, space standards will be relaxed for 1 and 2 person households.

10.10 In Craigshill there is only a small number of 2 bedroom houses and applicants will be listed for both 2 bedroom and 3 bedroom houses.

10.11 The type and sizes of properties that will be offered, subject to availability, are as follows:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ➤ 1 and 2 person households | - | 1 or 2 bedroom property |
| ➤ Households with 1 child | - | 2 bedroom properties |
| ➤ Households with 2 children | - | 3 bedroom property |
| ➤ Households with more than 3 children | - | 3 or 4 bedroom property, subject to availability |

In establishing housing need points, a family with 1 child will require 2 bedrooms, a family with 2 children will require 3 bedrooms, and a family with 3 children or more will be given points on the basis of requiring 4 bedrooms.

11.0 TENANT MOBILITY

11.1 We will seek to assist tenants who wish to move home in the following ways:

- by accepting applications for transfers or mutual exchanges within our own housing stock;
- by accepting applications for direct mutual exchanges between our tenants and tenants of another registered social landlord;
- by providing information and advice on the UK wide Housing and Employment Mobility Service (HEMS) and HOMESWAP, both of which help tenants to exchange with tenants of other landlords throughout the UK;
- by providing information on Available HOMES – a free internet service including a facility to search for properties available for let, exchange or shared ownership.

12.0 CONFIDENTIALITY

12.1 We will ensure that all information provided by an applicant is treated confidentially and in accordance with our current procedures relating to the processing of personal and sensitive data under the Data Protection Act.

12.2 We will ensure that we have obtained the applicant's permission in writing (normally as part of their signing the application form) to our obtaining any information about them from third parties, e.g. references from current or former landlords.

13.0 EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- 13.1 We recognise that there will be situations that because of exceptional circumstances may not be covered by this policy and the supporting procedures. This may be to allow good management of our housing stock or where necessary to alleviate severe exceptional difficulties within a household.
- 13.2 The Head of Housing Management will have delegated authority to deal initially with such cases. The prior approval of the Allocations Sub-Committee (or the Sub-Committee Chairperson under delegated authority) will be required before an allocation is made that does not follow this policy.

A register of any allocations made under this section will be maintained by the Head of Housing Management.

14.0 APPEALS

- 14.1 An applicant who is dissatisfied with the way their application has been assessed, reviewed or suspended, or with any other decision taken in relation to their application, may appeal in writing to the Head of Housing Management.
- 14.2 The Head of Housing Management will ensure that the appeal is acknowledged within 3 working days and that a formal written reply is given within 21 days of receipt, providing that all the information required to reach a decision is available within that time.
- 14.3 Should the applicant remain dissatisfied with the response they will be advised that they may appeal to the Allocations Sub-Committee, in accordance with our Comments & Complaints policy and procedures.
- 14.4 Should the applicant still be dissatisfied they will be advised that they may contact the Commissioner for Local Administration (Ombudsman) and will be provided with the required contact details.

15.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 15.1 The Head of Housing Management is responsible for ensuring that this policy and the supporting procedures are implemented by all relevant staff and Committee Members.
- 15.2 The Head of Housing Management will ensure that quarterly reports on the allocations made are submitted to the Management Committee.
- 15.3 The Head of Policy & Development will ensure that the results of the equal opportunities monitoring of allocations is included in the annual report to the Management Committee on the operation of the Equal Opportunities policy.
- 15.4 The Head of Housing Management will ensure that this policy is reviewed by the Management Committee at least every 4 years.

FIRST APPROVED	JANUARY 1998
VERSION 4.1	MARCH 2007
NEXT REVIEW	AUGUST 2009
COMPLIES WITH	Performance Standards AS1.1, AS1.2, Raising Standards Chapter 1

PROCEDURES SUPPORTING THE ALLOCATIONS POLICY

TITLE	REFERENCE
Assignment	HSG/96/14
Checking Rent Points at Termination	HSG/03/50
Decoration Allowance	HSG/03/49
Mutual Exchange	HSG/97/16
Nominations	HSG/97/17
Pre-allocation Visit	HSG/05/54
Signing Up a New Tenant	HSG/95/19
Sub-letting	HSG/03/48
Succession	HSG/98/20
Letting a Vacant Property	HSG/97/21
Voids	HSG/95/24

LEGISLATION AFFECTING ALLOCATIONS BY HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

- Data Protection Act 1998
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Freedom of Information Act 2004
- Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003
- Housing (Scotland) Act 1987
- Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Industrial & Provident Societies Act 1965
- Matrimonial Homes (Family Protection) (Scotland) Act 1981
- Race Relations Act 1976 as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975

GROUP QUOTA SYSTEM

In order to achieve and maintain a well-balanced community we will operate a group quota system and allocate properties to applicants from within each of the groups, according to their priority listing in that group.

The groups and quotas are as follows:

Group	Quota (% of annual lets)
1. Homeless or threatened with homelessness	15%
2. Medical (anyone with an urgent or high priority)	5%
3. Social or Harassment	2%
4. Independent living	10%
5. General	8%
6. Local Authority Nominations	50%
7. Existing tenants	10%

An applicant will be placed in the most appropriate group according to their greatest housing need.

The quotas will be reviewed annually by the Allocations Sub-Committee and any changes approved by the Management Committee.

POINTS SYSTEM

The points system has been developed to ensure that properties are allocated in a fair and reasonable manner to those in housing need, while making best use of our stock.

Placing an applicant in any of the first four groups will entitle them to a basic points total. Additional points may then be awarded for any other housing need the applicant has at the time of applying.

The breakdown of points for each category is as follows:

Group 1 - Homelessness - 250 points

We will aim to address the need of all applicants who find themselves homeless, as defined below:

- a) Applicants who have been classed as being 'statutorily homeless' by West Lothian Council or any other Local Authority (Section 5 referrals).
- b) Applicants who have no fixed address (sleeping rough) or who are at present living in accommodation lacking amenities i.e. non-static caravan, tent or car.

- c) Applicants who are threatened with homelessness, defined as:
 Notice served on another tenancy or a lease not being renewed
 House sale pending (with date known)
 Property being repossessed (with date known)
- d) Applicants made homeless because of a relationship breakdown.
- e) Applicants living in temporary accommodation, e.g. accommodation for homeless persons, Women's Aid Refuge, bed & breakfast.
- f) Applicants living with relatives, friends or lodgings with no tenancy agreement.

Proof of the applicant's circumstances will be required, where relevant.

Applicants may also be awarded points under one or more of the remaining groups.

Group 2 - Medical

Following assessment of the information provided, points will be allocated as follows:

Urgent	-	250 points
High	-	150 points
Standard	-	100 points
No priority	-	0 points

Applicants may also be awarded points under one or more of the remaining groups.

Group 3 - Social or Harassment

Under this heading, points will be allocated as follows:

Violence	-	Life threatening - to escape a violent partner	250 points
	-	Life threatening - to escape actual assaults by a neighbour, or threats of violence	150 points
Harassment	-	all types of direct harassment	150 points

Apart from the first category, proof will be required.

Applicants may also be awarded points under one or more of the remaining groups.

Group 4 - Independent Living - **250 points**

As part of seeking to maintain a well-balanced community, we recognise the need of second-generation West Lothian applicants. To meet their needs we will allocate 10% of vacant properties to this group. This will encourage young applicants to stay in the area, within the family network.

This group is defined as sons or daughters who have continuously been part of their parents' household and are currently resident in West Lothian.

Applicants may also be awarded points under one or more of the remaining groups.

Group 5 - General

All applicants who are not in any other group will be placed in this group. Points will be awarded under the following headings;

<u>Overcrowding</u>	Lack of bed space - for every bed space lacking	50 points
	The living room will not be counted as a bedroom. Points will be given for household members who have to live apart due to overcrowding.	
<u>Self-contained Bed-sit</u>	Applicants living in a bed sit for more than one year	150 points
<u>Under occupation</u>	Where tenants who are single or a couple live in a four or more bed roomed house	200 points
	Where tenants who are single or a couple live in a three bed roomed house	150 points
<u>Inappropriate Property</u>	We recognise that common entrance flats are not the best type of property for applicants with children and therefore the following points will be awarded:	
	Ground floor flats without direct, exclusive access to a private garden:	50 points
	First floor flats:	75 points
	Other levels:	100 points
	Senior Citizens over the age of 70 who reside in a block of flats will be awarded the following points:	
	First floor flat:	75 points
	Second floor flat:	100 points
<u>Disturbances</u>	Annoyance, intimidation, noise	50 points

Family Support

In cases where an applicant requires the support of, or gives support to, family members the following points will be awarded:

Applicants living outwith West Lothian District **100 points**

Applicants living within West Lothian District but not within a two mile radius of the person seeking support **50 points**

Lack of or Shared Amenities

Where an applicant's present accommodation lacks amenities or they have to share with someone who is not a member of their household, the following points will be awarded:

Lack of/ shared inside toilet **50 points**

Lack of/shared bath or shower **50 points**

Lack of adequate hot water supply **50 points**

Lack of/shared kitchen/cooking facilities **50 points**

Lack of adequate heating system (heating in no more than one room) **50 points**

Household Condition/ Property Defects

Should an applicant's present accommodation suffer from a severe level of dampness, condensation or water penetration, or it can be demonstrated that there is a risk to their household because of poor sanitation, structural problems or dangerous appliances (heating systems condemned or electric wiring faulty) the following points will be awarded:

Dampness/condensation or water penetration **50 points**

Sanitation/structural or dangerous appliance e.g. condemned heating system (Verification will be required in these instances) **50 points**