



ALLOCATIONS POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The aim of this 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;
- to contribute to providing balanced and sustainable communities.

1.2 This policy sets out the standards and general guidance Almond Housing Association Limited (AHA Ltd.) will follow to ensure that:

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

1.3 This policy complies with current legislation and 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. (see Appendix 1).

Common Housing Register

1.4 In partnership with Link Group Association and West Lothian Council, AHA Ltd. operates a common register of applicants, the West Lothian Housing Register (WLHR). This simplifies the application process for those seeking social housing in West Lothian.

2.0 PROMOTING EQUALITY

2.1 AHA Ltd. will ensure that we comply with our Equality and Diversity Policy, which meets all current statutory requirements. 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 AHA Ltd. will assess applications and allocate our houses according to the systems that we have adopted to measure housing need. These systems are designed to eliminate any potential discrimination on any of the grounds listed above.

2.3 AHA Ltd. will monitor the implementation of our assessment and allocation procedures to ensure that each application is treated equally and fairly.

2.4 As required, AHA Ltd. 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.

3.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Board of Management

- To ensure that there is in place an Allocations policy which complies with current regulations, guidance and good practice.
- To monitor compliance with the policy.

3.2 Management

- Director of Housing Management: To manage the implementation of the policy and procedures on a day-to-day basis, advising the Board, other Directors of Section and all employees as required on specific matters.

3.3 Employees

- To ensure they have read and understood the policy and procedures, and to implement them as required in the course of their work.

4.0 INFORMATION AND ADVICE

- 4.1 AHA Ltd. 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.

A copy of the full policy will be made available to anyone who asks for it.

- 4.2 AHA Ltd. will provide information on alternative sources of housing or housing advice, normally via the 'Housing Options' facility on the West Lothian Council website.

Application Form

- 4.3 With our partners, AHA Ltd. will seek to make the 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.

- 4.4 AHA Ltd. 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.

5.0 ADMISSION TO THE HOUSING REGISTER

- 5.1 AHA Ltd. will operate an open housing register, will accept applications at any time and will actively promote access to application forms:
- by distributing them to relevant West Lothian Council offices and other appropriate voluntary agencies and advice centres;
 - by publicising the housing register via the *Almond View*, our website and social media.

Care in the Community & Supported Housing

- 5.2 AHA Ltd. 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.

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

Transfers & Exchanges

- 5.3 AHA Ltd. 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.

Board of Management & employees

- 5.4 Current or former members of AHA Ltd.'s Board of Management and current or former employees, 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.

AHA Ltd. will comply with the requirements to record any resulting allocation of housing to someone in these categories according to current legislation and guidance from the Scottish Housing Regulator. For further details see the Payments, Entitlements & Benefits policy.

6.0 CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

- 6.1 Applicants must let us know of any changes to their circumstances that may affect the assessment of their application and their priority. Failure to do so could affect their opportunity to be housed by AHA Ltd. Changes of circumstances may be advised at the offices of any of the partners to the West Lothian Housing Register.

7.0 REVIEW OF THE HOUSING REGISTER

Annual review

- 7.1 Each year, around the date of their original application, the WLHR Central Administration Team (CAT) will send each applicant a questionnaire asking if their circumstances are the same as stated on their application, and if they wish to remain on the register.
- 7.2 If the applicant does not return the questionnaire within the specified time-scale the CAT will advise them in writing that they have been excluded from the register.
- 7.3 If an excluded applicant applies for re-instatement within 3 months of the notification, they will normally be added back onto the register without any further action. If an applicant applies for re-instatement after 3 months the CAT will re-assess their housing needs and only re-instate them if the reason for non-response was clearly outwith their control.

Exclusion from the housing register

- 7.4 In accordance with the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 AHA Ltd. will only exclude or remove applicants from the housing register 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 register (see above).

Suspension on the register

- 7.5 As required, AHA Ltd. will suspend an applicant from receiving offers of housing, in accordance with the Suspending Applicants on the Housing Register policy.

8.0 ASSESSING THE APPLICATION

- 8.1 The CAT will assess every application from the information provided using a 'group plus points system' (see Appendix 2). The points system will be publicised in the information available to all applicants and details are also available in the AHA Ltd. office.
- 8.2 The number and type of groups, and the points system, will be reviewed annually by the Director of Housing Management, and any amendments will be submitted to the Board of Management for approval.
- 8.3 Each applicant will be allocated to the group that represents their greatest housing need. Their placing in that group will depend on the total points they are entitled to.
- 8.4 The groups and points systems have been designed to comply with the current Housing the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014¹ (with effect to ensure that we give 'reasonable preference' to the specified categories of applicants, as follows:

2014 Act: 'Reasonable preference' to be given to applicants who are:

- homeless or threatened with homelessness, and who have unmet housing needs, or
- living in unsatisfactory housing conditions and who have unmet housing needs, or
- existing tenants, who are considered to be under-occupying their property.

9.0 ALLOCATING HOUSING

- 9.1 A vacant property will normally be offered to the applicant who has the highest priority in a particular group.

To determine the group from which the next allocation should be made AHA Ltd. will refer to the current quotas allocated to each group (see Appendix 2). The quotas will be reviewed annually by the Director of Housing Management, and any amendments will be submitted to the Board for approval.

New build properties

- 9.2 New build properties will initially be offered to existing AHA Ltd. tenants who are on our transfer list for the type/size of property available.

Maintaining a Balanced Community

- 9.3 AHA Ltd. will take into account the need to maintain balanced communities, 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

- 9.4 AHA Ltd. will consider special lettings initiatives, or local lettings plans, where 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.

- 9.5 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 is needed, will have to be approved by the Board of Management.
- 9.6 Where an individual property has been refused on several occasions, the Director of Housing Management will have delegated authority to initiate alternative letting arrangements and thereafter report to the Board on the action taken (see Appendix 3).

Use of properties

- 9.7 To make the best use of AHA Ltd.'s stock, allocations will take account of the following:

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.

Where an applicant has one or more children under 12 years old, or they have informed us they are expecting a child, the applicant may be offered a flat. Normally this will be a flat with its own direct entrance and an exclusive garden area - i.e. either a 'main door' ground floor flat or an upper villa flat. However to ensure that we are giving applicants the maximum choice to enable them to meet their housing needs, we may also offer a ground floor flat with indirect access to an exclusive garden, i.e. via the common passageway within the common entrance area.

[Note: Refusal of an offer of a ground floor flat with indirect access **will not** be counted as a refusal under our Suspensions of Applicants policy.]

Where all children are at least 12 years old a flat without direct access to a garden may be offered.

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, 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, e.g. 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

- 9.8 To maximise the occupancy level of AHA Ltd.'s 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.
- 9.9 In Craigshill there are only a small number of 2-bedroom houses and applicants will be listed for both 2-bedroom and 3-bedroom houses. In Howden where we only have 3-bedroom flats, none with direct access to a garden, single applicants will be considered for any vacancies that occur.
- 9.10 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 property |
| ▪ Households with 2 children | - 2 or 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 2 or 3 bedrooms, and a family with 3 children or more will be given points on the basis of requiring 3 or 4 bedrooms*.

[* In the case of applicants in receipt of housing benefit or Universal Credit, subject to the applicant's circumstances and views on whether they are willing to pay the additional rent for any bedroom they are deemed to be 'under-occupying']

10.0 TENANT MOBILITY

- 10.1 AHA Ltd. 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 AHA Ltd. tenants and tenants of another registered social landlord and local authorities.

11.0 CONFIDENTIALITY

- 11.1 AHA Ltd. will ensure that we comply with the Data Protection Act, subsequent Regulations and guidance issued by the Information Commissioner's office, so that all personal and sensitive information provided by an applicant is treated confidentially and in accordance with current law.
- 11.2 AHA Ltd. 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.

12.0 EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- 12.1 AHA Ltd. recognises that there will be situations that because of exceptional circumstances may not be covered by this policy. This may be to allow good management of our housing stock or to alleviate severe exceptional difficulties within a household. This can include adjusting quotas in response to unusual circumstances, such as presented by the covid-19 pandemic, and the board would be advised of any adjustments.
- 12.2 The Director of Housing Management will have delegated authority to deal initially with such cases. Where required, an Allocations Panel of at least 3 Board Members will be formed to consider such cases. A register of any allocations made under this section will be maintained by the Director of Housing Management.

13.0 APPEALS

- 13.1 The nature of any appeal will determine who it should be addressed to. General complaints about the way in which the application has been assessed should be directed to the Manager of the CAT. If the applicant is dissatisfied with their application as it relates to one of the partners the appeal should be addressed to that landlord.
- 13.2 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 as it relates to AHA Ltd., may appeal in writing to the Director of Housing Management
- 13.3 The Director of Housing Management will ensure that the appeal is acknowledged within 3 working days and that a formal written reply is given within 20 working days of receipt, providing that all the information required to reach a decision is available within that time.
- 13.4 Should the applicant still be dissatisfied about the way we have handled their appeal they will be advised that they may contact the Commissioner for Local Administration (Ombudsman) and will be provided with the required contact details.

14.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

- 14.1 The Director of Housing Management is responsible for ensuring that this policy and the supporting procedures are implemented by all relevant employees and Board Members.
- 14.2 The Director of Housing Management will ensure that quarterly reports on the allocations made are submitted to the Board of Management as part of the Scorecard report.
- 14.3 The Director of Corporate Services will ensure that the results of the equal opportunities monitoring of allocations is included in the annual report to the Board of Management on the operation of the Equality and Diversity policy.
- 14.4 The Director of Housing Management will ensure that this policy is reviewed by the Board of Management every 3 years.

FIRST APPROVED IN	JANUARY 1998
CURRENT VERSION 9.0 APPROVED IN	June 2021
NEXT REVIEW DUE BY	June 2024

APPENDIX 1

PROCEDURES SUPPORTING THE ALLOCATIONS POLICY

TITLE

Assignment

Checking Rent Points at Termination

Decoration Allowance

Mutual Exchange

Pre-allocation Visit

Sub-letting

Succession

Suspension of Applicants

Voids

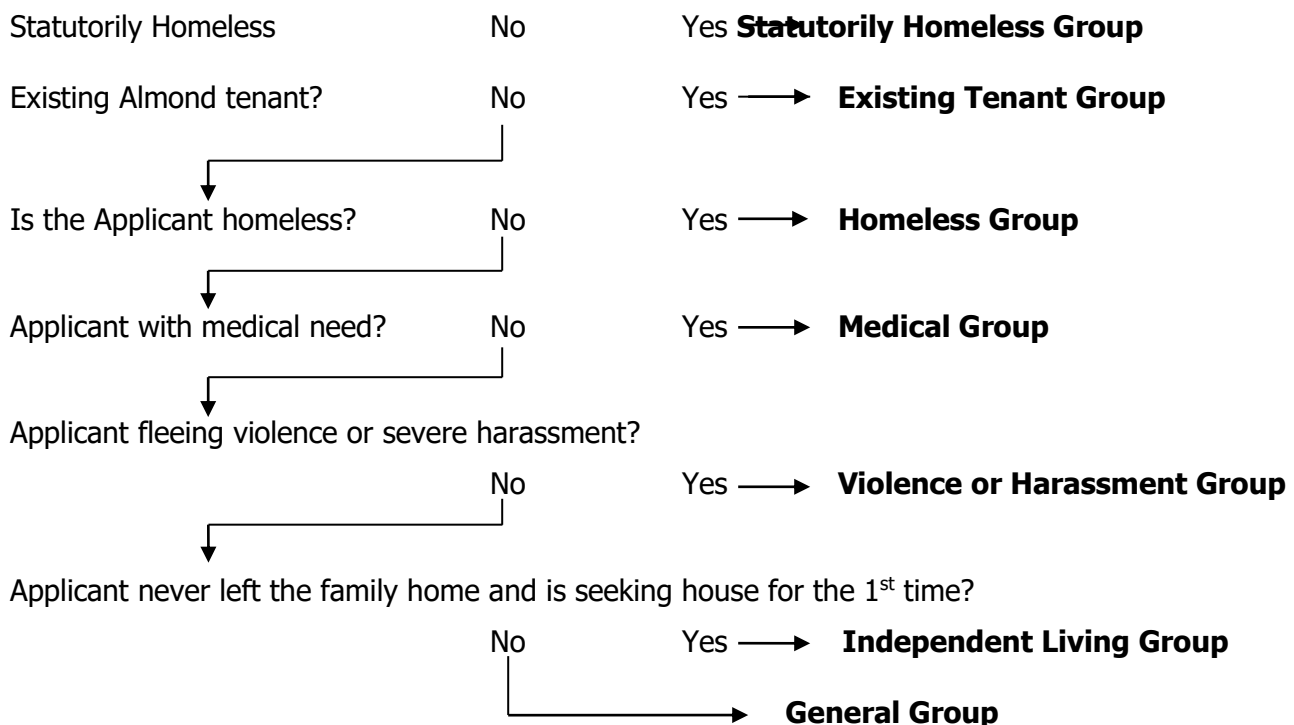
APPENDIX 2**GROUP QUOTA SYSTEM**

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 percentage of quota assigned will take into account local agreements as required by the rapid re-housing transition plan (RRTP).

The groups and quotas are as follows:

Group	Quota (% of annual lets)
1. Statutorily homeless	30-40%
2. Insecure tenancy	15-25%
3. Existing tenants	12-20% (new build impact)
4. Independent living	5-9%
5. Assisted referrals	5-8%
6. General	5-7%
7. Medical	5%
8. Violence or harassment	2-4%

An applicant will be placed in the most appropriate group according to the following flowchart.



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 AHA Ltd.'s 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 - Statutorily homeless **250 points**

Applicants who have been classed as being 'statutorily homeless' by West Lothian Council or any other Local Authority (Section 5 referrals).

Group 2 - Insecure tenancy **250 points**

- a) Applicants with no fixed abode or sleeping rough but who are not statutorily homeless in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.
- b) 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).
- c) Applicants made homeless because of a relationship breakdown.
- d) Applicants living in temporary accommodation, e.g. accommodation for homeless persons, bed & breakfast, who are not statutorily homeless.
- e) 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 3 - Existing tenants

These are existing Almond tenants who have applied for an internal transfer. Their points total will depend on their individual circumstances and housing need. Any tenants with '0' points will be prioritised according to the length of their tenancy.

Group 4 - Independent Living **250 points**

This group is defined as sons and daughters who have continuously been part of their parents' household and are currently resident in West Lothian. To meet their needs AHA Ltd. will allocate this group a set percentage of vacant properties, aiming to encourage young applicants to stay in the area, within the family network.

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

Group 5 - Assisted referrals**250 points**

This covers applicants supported by other agencies that meet our operational aims, e.g. Women's Aid. Applicants may also be awarded points under one or more of the remaining groups.

Group 6 - General

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

<u>Overcrowding</u>	Lack of bed space - for every bed space lacking	50 points
	Applicants who occupy a bedsit or one bedroom flat but have a child who lives permanently with them.	150 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>	Points will be awarded to Almond tenants who apply for housing and under occupying the property, as follows:	
	Three or more bedrooms not used	200 points
	Two bedrooms not used	150 points
	One bedroom not used	150 points
	To meet Dept. of Work & Pensions size criteria	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	100 points
	Other levels	150 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
<u>Family Support</u>	In cases where an applicant requires the support of, or gives support to, family members without which the individual would be unable to sustain their tenancy (normally, but not exclusively, a medical need, proof will be required) 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
<u>Lack of or Shared</u>	Where an applicant's present accommodation lacks amenities or they share facilities with anyone other than those included in their application form 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
<u>Household Condition/ Property Defects</u>	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	50 points
	(Verification will be required in these instances)	

Group 7 - Medical

This group covers applicants with a physical or mental illness or disability. Should an applicant have both a physical or mental condition, only one set of points will be awarded, e.g. if the physical need is 'urgent' and the mental need is 'high', the applicant will be awarded the 250 points for the 'urgent' need. If both needs are assessed at the same level, one set of points only will be awarded.

However if medical points are awarded for a mental health condition that is deemed to be covered by other categories in this policy, then only one set of points will be awarded, e.g. if the applicant is assessed to have an 'urgent' mental condition due to anxiety caused by overcrowding, then they will receive the 250 points for the 'urgent' condition and not the 150 points for overcrowding. If both sets of points are the same, only one set of points will be awarded.

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

Urgent	250 points
High	150 points
No priority	0 points

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

Group 8 - Violence or Harassment

Under this Directoring, points will be allocated as follows:

<u>Violence 1</u>	Life threatening - to escape a violent partner or family member, where they currently live with the applicant.	250 Points
<i>OR</i>		
<u>Violence 2</u>	Where they claim they have been forced to leave the family home because of violence from a partner or family member.	150 Points
	Life threatening - to escape actual assaults by a neighbour, or threats of violence	150 points
<u>Harassment</u>	all types of direct harassment	150 points

Apart from Violence 1 & 2, proof will be required, for example Police incident numbers, lawyers' letters detailing action taken, reports from the Safer Neighbourhood Team.

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

APPENDIX 3**LETTINGS INITIATIVE**

In line with section 9 of the policy this initiative describes AHA Ltd.'s arrangements for addressing the issue of having properties lying void for long periods of time while we try and reach a successful match.

While in general AHA Ltd. does not have any difficulty to let areas, from time to time there are properties which we struggle to match, as follows:

- **Ladywell flats:** We own individual flats within blocks which are owned by West Lothian Council. These blocks are of mixed tenure and we have limited scope in influencing the upkeep of the common areas. Whenever we have a vacancy in one of the Ladywell flats there are difficulties in finding an applicant who is willing to accept the property.

To achieve the occupancy of these flats in the minimum time AHA Ltd. will make a multiple offer to the first 5 applicants in either the Insecure Tenancy or Independent Living Group who have the basic points (*see below), offering the property to the first applicant who replies (subject to verification of their circumstances).

- **Split level properties:** These properties have rooms spread over five levels. AHA Ltd. will only let this type of property to either a couple with at least one child or a single parent with at least two children.

There are other properties where from time to time we have problems finding a suitable applicant, either due to its size or having to match more than one property of the same type in the same street.

- **Offer refused 3 times:** When we have a property which has been refused by 3 applicants AHA Ltd. will make a multiple offer to the first 5 applicants who have the basic points* and who are from the same group as those previously offered the property. The property will be offered to the first applicant who replies (subject to verification of their circumstances).

When any of the above approaches are adopted the Housing Manager (failing whom the Director of Housing Management) will be required to sign off the match before an offer of housing is made.

[*Basic points: To be placed in either the Insecure Tenancy Group or Independent Living Group an applicant has to meet the criteria and is given 250 points. Applicants with basic points do not have additional points for other factors such as overcrowding. Applicants in other groups may have a lower threshold. These applicants have been on the list for a number of years with little chance of receiving an offer of housing normally, due to the accumulation of points awarded under AHA Ltd.'s policy.]