

ALLOCATION POLICY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Background to the Co-operative*

Blochairn Housing Co-operative is a non-fully mutual Housing Co-operative in the Royston area to the North East of Glasgow City Centre.

Between 1991 and 1993, the Co-operative bought 231 houses from Glasgow City Council. These houses have been improved to a high standard using Housing Association Grant and private finance. The Co-operative's original development programme was completed in 2002.

The Co-operative is controlled by a Management Committee of local residents who are unpaid volunteers.

1.2 *General Aims of the Policy*

As a community owned organisation, created to save and rebuild a tenement community, which needs and receives substantial and prolonged voluntary effort from local residents, the Co-operative has a legitimate and necessary interest in having policies that foster community links and social networks. It must also have policies which are fair and make sure that applicants who are allocated a house have a real need for that house.

The aims of the Co-operative's Allocation Policy are:

- To allocate housing fairly and objectively, with no discrimination on any grounds, such as, marital status, race, religion, disability, sex or sexual orientation.
- To achieve a balance between promoting community and family support, and allocation priorities based on housing need, for example, medical problems, overcrowding, lacking or sharing basic amenities and poor environment.

The Co-operative recognises its limitations. With so few houses it cannot be all things to all people. It cannot meet all the needs of the wider community. If it can meet the needs and aspirations of the immediate community this will be a significant achievement. It is also the best way to ensure the long-term viability of the area and the only way to protect and sustain the substantial investment of public funds in the area.

1.3 *Social Exclusion*

Social exclusion is now a widely used term. It could be defined as "the combination of poverty and institutional discrimination, both of which help

to create unfavourable life chances and chronic exclusion from normal citizenship" (1).

Social exclusion starts with people feeling that they have no stake in their community, no influence over what happens and no ownership of any decisions. They have an acute and pervasive sense of powerlessness.

The residualisation of social rented housing over the past 20 odd years has played a significant part in the effective exclusion of the residents of many estates from the rest of society. Poor housing management, particularly of the allocation process and the insistence on allocations based purely on housing need, has led to the creation of sink estates.

The Co-operative hopes to deal with this issue through a number of initiatives including its allocation policy. It hopes to create and develop a sense of place and to enable the community to take pride in the area.

1.4 *Allocation According to Need*

Research suggests that ". . . . allocation according to need is always likely to be a slogan rather than actuality because, in practice, it is tempered by the requirements of political compromise and administrative efficiency" (2). This is perhaps why almost all housing associations give some degree of priority to local people/transfer applicants. Many also camouflage this in some way and, if called to 'defend' it, state that they are making best use of limited housing stock.

In a purely needs based system, tenants, by definition adequately housed, would not figure highly, whilst other groups, e.g. homeless applicants, who are more in need, would get the best houses. "This is intellectually as well as politically problematic unless it can be successfully argued that those living in the very worst circumstances should be compensated by being awarded the best (council) houses" (2).

It is also unlikely that housing applicants would understand a system that did not take account of existing tenants.

1.5 *Customer Surveys*

The Co-operative carried out a Tenant Satisfaction Survey in January 1999 and again in November 2004. These included questions on *community* and on *allocation priorities*. In 1999 a majority (58%) of Blochairn residents felt a sense of community in the Blochairn area. In 2004 this had increased to 82%.

Views on allocation priorities were particularly striking. In 1999, 91% of residents felt that priority should be given to existing residents and in 2004 this had risen to 94%. A large majority (93%) felt that length of residence was an important consideration in 1999 and this was also the case in 2004.

In November 1999, a survey of Housing List applicants established a similar pattern. A large majority of applicants (79%) believed that length of tenancy was an important consideration whilst only 5% disagreed. In December 2003 a further survey showed that 67% thought that length of tenancy should be taken into account. Again, only 5% disagreed.

When asked if the Co-operative's own tenants applying for a transfer should have priority over Housing List applicants, in 1999, 66% said they should, with only 17% disagreeing. In 2003, there was still a slight majority (51%) who thought that tenants should get priority, whilst 32% disagreed.

The results of these surveys have helped shape the current policy.

1.6 *Raising Standards in Housing*

The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) *Raising Standards in Housing* document has helped the Co-operative to develop its allocation policy. The Co-operative welcomes the recognition that both the needs of individual applicant and the needs of the community are important. The Co-operative seeks to achieve and maintain a balanced, stable community by

- providing a degree of choice and taking account of the aspirations of housing applicants
- addressing a range of levels of need rather than an over concentration of households with high levels of vulnerability or dependency
- addressing a range of life and employment experiences rather than an excessive over concentration of households wholly dependent on benefit
- creating and sustaining social, community and family networks.

In trying to create and sustain social, community and family networks the Co-operative will adopt a broad interpretation of social support and will not ask for documentary evidence unless the applicant wishes to be

considered specifically on medical grounds in the *Relative in Need* category.

Many so called "aspirational" factors involve clear housing need elements, e.g. central heating, more cupboard space, larger kitchen, etc. However, the Co-operative does not wish to add every possibility to its points system. This would unnecessarily complicate the allocation process.

In view of the low numbers of houses owned by the Co-operative and the low numbers becoming available for relet priority must be given to transfer applicants to make sure that the best possible benefit can be gained from any vacancy, using the "vacancy chain reaction" from following vacancies. This is the only way to provide any degree of mobility for existing tenants whose needs change over time.

The Co-operative's approach to allocations is in keeping with the views expressed by both tenants and waiting list applicants in customer surveys.

The Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland (3) recognised that:

"The range, complexity and severity of needs now displayed by many applicants for housing in the social rented sector means that much greater attention must be paid to community stability".

Community stability is vital to the long-term future of the Blochairn area.

Substantial public investment has been made in the Blochairn area. The Co-operative recognises that the allocation policy can help to protect and sustain that investment. To achieve this, the community must be empowered and have a real say in the decisions that affect their lives.

1.7 *Registered Sex Offenders*

The Cosgrove Report 2001 (4) highlighted serious failings in the management of Registered Sex Offenders both within prisons and within the community. Cosgrove recommended that there should be a national accommodation strategy and an education and training programme for housing providers and their management bodies.

The National Accommodation Strategy for Sex Offenders (NASSO) was introduced as part of the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in March 2007. However, there is no education and training programme and there has been no consultation with housing associations.

MAPPA, NASSO and other publications by the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland (5) and the University of Glasgow (6) highlight the role of housing organisations in maximising community safety and minimising the risk from Registered Sex Offenders.

The Co-operative does not have the capacity to perform that role. It cannot reasonably claim to be able to maximise community safety and minimise risk from Registered Sex Offenders.

Cosgrove highlighted the danger of locating groups of sex offenders near to each other. However, it is clear that current procedures result in sex offenders being housed disproportionately in poorer communities. The Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland (5) recommends that sex offenders should not be housed near to victims or potential victims. Yet poorer communities have significantly higher numbers of young children and single parent households.

The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (7) stated that housing associations are best placed to identify the risks they face and that outside advisors should not assess risk on their behalf. The Co-operative will assess the risk to Blochairn if a sex offender applies for housing or is referred by another agency. This is an assessment of the consequences to the Co-operative if it provides housing and the sex offender reoffends. This is not an assessment of whether the sex offender is likely to reoffend. That will be decided by the Responsible Authorities.

Where a housing applicant or any member of the applicant's household has to register with the Police under the Sex Offenders Act 1997, the Co-operative will work with the Responsible Authorities to establish whether there is a threat to community safety. Where a threat exists the application will be suspended.

The position will be reviewed if there is a material change in the circumstances. The applicant will have the right of appeal against the decision. See section 4.8 below.

1.8 *Review*

The Allocation Policy will be reviewed every two years. The current policy is the result of a review completed in November 2007. Every effort has been made to comply with legislation and guidance whilst meeting the specific needs of the Co-operative and its customers. The outcomes of

the current policy will be monitored and amendments may be made as appropriate.

In particular, the ongoing debates on social exclusion; housing need .v. choice/aspiration and housing issues relating to Registered Sex Offenders will be followed and any significant developments may be incorporated into the policy.

References:

1. Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, *Newsletter Issue 16*, Feb 1998.
2. Clapham D. and Kintrea K. (1992). *Housing Allocations (in the Housing Service of the Future)*. Edited by Donnison D. and MacLennan D. Longmans.
3. Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland (1997). *Housing Allocations in Scotland - A Practice Note*. By Brittain A. and Yanetta A.
4. Scottish Executive (2001). *Reducing the Risk: Improving the Response to Sex Offending*. Report to the Expert Panel on Sex Offending chaired by Lady Cosgrove.
5. Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland (1999). *Housing and sex offenders in Scotland*. Andrea Moore, Policy Officer.
6. University of Glasgow (2004). *Towards a national accommodation strategy for sex offenders*. A report for the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland by Atkinson R., Flint J. and Blandy S.
7. Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (2002). *Raising Standards in Housing*.

2. ACCESS TO THE CO-OPERATIVE'S HOUSING STOCK

General

The Co-operative will have an open housing list. Applicants can apply and be assessed at any time.

A points threshold system will not be used as applicants would prefer to be placed on a housing list with little chance of being housed rather than not be placed on the housing list at all. This view was confirmed in a customer survey by 63% of respondents. It is also considered that this will give the Co-operative a clearer indication of demand for its houses.

Housing List

Transfer Applicants

Applicants will be assessed and included in the housing list subject to a residency qualification.

Transfer applicants will be considered for a Transfer after 2 years in their 1st tenancy. They will be considered for further transfers after 3 years in a 2nd tenancy and after 5 years in any other tenancy.

Applicants may be considered earlier if there are medical reasons or where there is a change in family composition.

Structure and Size of List

Applicants will be placed on the housing list and offers of accommodation made based on the number of people in the household and the number of bed spaces within the accommodation.

Housing Lists will be held for 2, 3, and 4 apartment houses only.

Housing Lists will not be kept for the Co-operative's only 5 apartment house or for wheelchair adapted houses. If any of these houses become available for let appropriate arrangements will be made at that time.

Points System

Priority will be determined by the Points System (See Appendix 1). Applicants will normally be advised in writing of their waiting list position and points total within 20 working days of receipt of their application.

Referrals

Under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 housing associations and co-operatives must assist Local Authorities to deal with homelessness. Referrals can be made under Section 5 of the Act.

Mutual Exchanges

Tenants may arrange mutual exchanges with tenants of any other housing association, co-operative or local authority with the prior written consent of the Co-operative. An exchange will not be allowed if overcrowding will happen. Under occupation by one apartment may be allowed.

Mutual exchanges will not normally be considered within the first year of the applicant's tenancy unless there has been a change in their circumstances, e.g. family composition or medical circumstances.

2.5 Sensitive Lets

The Co-operative may allocate a house outwith the normal operation of the policy if there are circumstances relating to an available house, for example, a history of anti social behaviour or neighbour disputes, a high number of children in a property, etc. The 'sensitive' allocation will be reported at the next Committee meeting.

2.6 *Rent Arrears/Other Debts*

If an applicant has rent arrears or an outstanding debt to the Co-operative, or has rent arrears due to another landlord, the Co-operative may suspend the application. Each case will be considered on its own merits and consideration will be given to circumstances, such as, difficulties with Housing Benefit administration. Applicants have a right of appeal. See section 4.8 below.

2.7 *Home Visits*

Applicants will normally be visited to discuss the application, choice of accommodation, etc and to verify the information provided. Only in extreme circumstances will the condition of the applicant's house affect their application, for example, where there has been wilful neglect or damage. The applicant has the right of appeal. See section 4.8 below.

2.8 *Tenancy Reports*

A tenancy report will be obtained from the applicant's present landlord. Only in extreme circumstances will the tenancy report affect the applicant's position, for example, where there is evidence of anti social behaviour or wilful neglect or damage. The applicant has the right of appeal. See section 4.8 below.

2.9 *Abusive and Threatening Behaviour*

If an applicant uses threatening or violent behaviour towards any staff or committee member of the Co-operative or towards any member of the local community the application may be suspended. The applicant will have the right of appeal. See section 4.8 below.

2.10 *Owner Occupiers*

If they achieve a position which allows an offer to be made, applicants who own another house will be offered a tenancy if they conclude missives in the sale of their existing home within an agreed period of time.

3.0 RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN

3.1 *General*

In a relationship breakdown the partner making the application will be considered to be a separate household living within the house.

3.2 *Co-operative Tenants*

In Co-operative tenancies, the Co-operative would prefer the existing tenancy to be taken by the partner that dependent children would normally live with. The tenant who does not have full custody of dependent children may be considered for a small 2 bedroomed house.

Applicants who move outwith the Blochairn area may be considered as still resident if they apply within 6 months of moving, and they have not obtained a permanent secure tenancy from another landlord and they do not own their own house.

3.3 *Children*

In considering the size of house that an applicant should be offered, account will be taken of where dependent children normally live. Account will not normally be taken of children staying with the applicant temporarily or occasionally.

Children under 16 years of age will normally be considered to be members of their parent's household.

4.0 GENERAL

4.1 *Offers of Accommodation*

Offers of accommodation will be made using the information given on the application form. In particular, the size of house offered will be determined by the number of persons in the household, taking account of their age and sex.

Priority for ground floor accommodation will be given to applicants who are over 60 years of age or who have mobility difficulties.

4.2 *Joint Tenancies*

Where an application is made by a couple a joint tenancy will be offered.

4.3 *False or Misleading Information*

Any applicant, who knowingly or recklessly makes a false or misleading statement in their application or withholds relevant information, may have their application suspended. Where a tenancy has been granted, the Co-operative may begin proceedings in the Sheriff Court to recover

possession of the house allocated. The applicant/tenant will have the right of appeal. See 4.9 below.

4.4 *Change of Circumstances*

Applicants must inform the Co-operative of any change in their circumstances that would affect their application, particularly a change of address or in the number of people living in the accommodation.

4.5 *Inspection of Records*

Applicants can see the records about their housing application. Arrangements can be discussed with the Co-operative's staff.

4.6 *The Role of the Management Committee*

The Co-operative's Management Committee is responsible for the allocation policy. Staff will then carry out the policy. The Management Committee will monitor the policy and Housing List administration through regular statistical reports. The Management Committee will not have access to details of individual applications. Special Cases referred to the Management Committee will not include details which could identify the individual applicant.

4.7 *Conflict of Interest*

Allocations made to a member of staff or Committee or to a close relative of a staff or Committee member must be notified to the Management Committee and to Communities Scotland (Registration and Inspection). Under Schedule 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, all applicants have a duty to declare whether, to the best of their knowledge, they are related to any staff or Committee member.

4.8 *Complaints Procedure*

An applicant who has a complaint about this policy should discuss this with the relevant staff member. If the applicant is not satisfied the complaint should be made in writing to the Director. If still not resolved, a formal complaint can be made using the Co-operative's Complaints Procedure.

If the applicant is not satisfied with the Co-operative's decision or handling of the complaint, the matter can be referred to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4 Melville Street, EDINBURGH EH3 7NS.
Tel: 0800 011 5378. Email: enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk
Website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk.

A copy of the Complaints Procedure is available from the office.

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Appendix 1

ALLOCATION POLICY - POINTS SYSTEM

Allocation Priorities

The Co-operative will give priority to applicants in the following order:

1. ***Transfer Applicants:*** Transfer applicants must have a need for alternative accommodation and must meet the appropriate residency qualification.
2. ***Housing List***

Points System

Applicants will be assessed using the following points system.

1. Medical Priority (Essential - 50 points; Advisable - 20 points)

Points may be awarded if the applicant's accommodation is having an adverse affect on his/her, or a member of his/her household's health and other accommodation would help.

Medical evidence may be required which shows clearly how the current accommodation is unsuitable and how other accommodation would help. An assessment will be made about whether other accommodation is "essential" or "advisable".

Medical circumstances can be considered for each household member.

Points will be awarded to an applicant suffering from anxiety, depression, etc only if he/she is receiving medical treatment on a regular basis.

Points will not be awarded to applicants with a disability or disabling illness that affects their mobility if they will not consider a ground floor house.

2. Relative in Need (80 points)

This category is intended to deal with exceptional circumstances where the relative providing support has to travel a significant distance. This could be support to a Blochairn tenant or to an applicant who needs to move to the area to receive support from a Blochairn tenant. Account will be taken of other relatives already living nearby who could provide care and support. Relative in Need applicants will be considered only where the Blochairn tenant has been a tenant for at least 2 years. This category will normally only apply if there is a parent/child relationship.

3. Overcrowding/Under occupation (10 points per apt)

	Required			
	2apt	3apt	4apt	5apt
Present				
1apt	15	30	45	60
2apt	0	10	30	45
3apt	15	0	15	30
4apt	30	15	0	15
5apt	45	30	15	0

"Apartments in present accommodation" = living room and bedrooms only.

"Apartments required" = 1 Living room

1 Double Bedroom for applicant or applicant and partner

1 Double Bedroom for each 2 persons of the same sex under 16 years age

1 Double Bedroom for each 2 persons of different sex under 10 years

1 Single Bedroom for each remaining member of the household.

4. Lacking Amenities (90 points)/Sharing Amenities (50 points)

"Amenities" are kitchen, bathroom and inside toilet and hot water supply.

"Sharing Amenities" will be awarded when two or more households share the same accommodation. Single applicants will be assessed as a separate household, even if sharing accommodation with their immediate family.

5. Harassment (50 points)

Points may be awarded where an applicant is being harassed because of race, religion, disability, sex or sexual orientation or is being harassed by a former partner. This does not apply to a dispute between tenants. If harassment is being caused by a tenant of the Co-operative action against that tenant would be considered.

6. Lack of Security of Tenure (20 Points)

Points may be awarded where the applicant has an insecure tenancy. Relevant documentation will be required.

7. Property Condition (20 Points)

Where an applicant has a tenancy of a property that is in an unimproved condition (e.g. requiring new windows, central heating, etc) consideration will be given to awarding points in this category.

8. Multi Storey Housing (20 Points)

Points will be awarded where an applicant has a need to be rehoused from a multi storey property.

9. Travel to Work/Place of Study (30 Points)

Applicants will be awarded points if they need to live in the Blochairn area to be near to their place of work or study to a maximum of 30 points per household.

10. Blochairn Housing Co-operative Tenant (5 points per year)

Transfer applicants will be awarded 5 points per year of residence.

11. C/o a Blochairn Housing Co-operative Tenant (2 points per year)

Applicants living care of a Blochairn tenant will be awarded 5 points per year of residence. Applicants must have lived in their current house for at least 3 years with the knowledge and written consent of the Cooperative.

12. Previous Residence (1 point per year)

Applicants will be awarded 2 point per year of Previous Residence in a Blochairn house.

13. Special Cases (Up to 50 Points)

The points system takes account of the most common circumstances of housing applicants. Where the circumstances of an application are so unusual that the normal operation of the points system cannot take these into account the Committee may consider the award of special case points. It is at the discretion of the Director whether a case is referred to Committee.

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